

BYZANTIVM

THE EMPIRE OF NEW ROME



CYRIL MANGO

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In A.D. 324 the city of Constantinople was founded as the new Rome. In the powerful, vast, heterogeneous Byzantine world, it became the center of a rich and diverse culture, at one time extending from Gibraltar to the Euphrates.

During its first three centuries, the Byzantine world integrated Christianity fully within the Greco-Roman tradition; and yet the Christian Empire contemplated by Constantine, Theodosius and Justinian remained an elusive ideal—to be striven for but never attained. Through eleven centuries this fabulous civilization underwent profound transformations; a catastrophic break in Byzantine history occurred, for example, in the seventh century when the Persian invasion and Arab expansion initiated a process of disintegration, leading ultimately to the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

In this authoritative survey, Professor Mango exposes the shortcomings of the surviving historical records of Byzantine civilization on which previous studies have too frequently depended. Adopting an original approach, he rectifies the bias of such accounts by concentrating especially on the point of view of the "average" Byzantine rather than the intellectual. He considers Byzantine life from a thematic perspective, covering such fundamental aspects as people and languages, society and economy, the disappearance and revival of cities, dissidents, monasticism, education, accepted ideas about good and evil, the physical universe, history and the ideal life and the Byzantine cultural legacy—literature, art, and architecture.

(continued on back flap)

HISTORY OF CIVILISATION

Byzantium

Byzantium

The Empire of New Rome

CYRIL MANGO

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Modern Greek Language and Literature in the University of Oxford*

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
List of Illustrations	vii
List of Maps	xi
Preface	xiii
Introduction	i
PART ONE: Aspects of Byzantine Life	11
1 Peoples and Languages	13
2 Society and Economy	32
3 The Disappearance and Revival of Cities	60
4 Dissenters	88
5 Monasticism	105
6 Education	125
PART TWO: The Conceptual World of Byzantium	149
7 The Invisible World of Good and Evil	151
8 The Physical Universe	166
9 The Inhabitants of the Earth	177
10 The Past of Mankind	189
11 The Future of Mankind	201
12 The Ideal Life	218
PART THREE: The Legacy	231
13 Literature	233
14 Art and Architecture	256
Appendix. Chronological List of Byzantine Emperors	282
Abbreviations in the Notes	284
Notes	285
Bibliography	303
Index	325

ILLUSTRATIONS

Between pages 274 and 275

Church of St John, Istanbul (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C.)

Church of Qalb-Loseh, Syria

Dome mosaic of the Rotunda, Thessalonica (by permission of Einaudi Publishers, Turin)

Mosaics, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna (Mansell Collection)

Studius Basilica, Istanbul, capital of porch (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C.)

St Sophia, Istanbul, capital of gallery (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C.)

San Marco, Venice, capital from St Polyeuctus, Constantinople

Piazza San Marco, Venice, one of the two 'Pilastrì Acritani'

St Sophia, Istanbul, interior (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C.)

Transfiguration mosaic, Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai

Abraham's Hospitality and the Sacrifice of Isaac, San Vitale, Ravenna (C. M. Dixon)

Icon of the Virgin and Saints, Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai (by permission of Einaudi Publishers, Turin)

Mosaic of St Demetrius and Donors, St Demetrius, Thessalonica (by permission of Einaudi Publishers, Turin)

Great Palace pavement, Istanbul (Phaidon Press Ltd)

Plate with maenad (by permission of the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad)

Mosaic in courtyard, the Great Mosque, Damascus (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C.)

Mosaics, south-west room of gallery, St Sophia, Istanbul (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C.)

Mosaic cross in apse, St Irene, Istanbul

Mosaic in apse, Church of the Dormition, Iznik

Mosaic of the Virgin, St Sophia, Istanbul (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C.)

Church of the Myrelaion, Istanbul (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C.)

Church of St Panteleimon, Nerezi

Mosaic of the Anastasis, Hosios Loukas, Phocis (by permission of Einaudi Publishers, Turin)

Mosaic of the Washing of the Feet, Hosios Loukas (by permission of Einaudi Publishers, Turin)

Mosaic of the Nativity, Daphni (by permission of Einaudi Publishers, Turin)

The Anointing of David, Leo Bible (Vatican Library, photo by Phaidon Press Ltd)

Ivory of St John and St Paul (Museo Archaeologico, Venice, photo by Phaidon Press Ltd)

Ivory of the Forty Martyrs (Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin)

The Veroli casket (Crown Copyright, Victoria and Albert Museum)

The Apostles of the Ascension, St Sophia, Ohrid (by permission of Einaudi Publishers, Turin)

The Deposition from the Cross, St Panteleimon, Nerezi (by permission of Einaudi Publishers, Turin)

Angel of Annunciation, Kurbinovo, Yugoslavia (by permission of Einaudi Publishers, Turin)

Angel of Annunciation, Panagia tou Arakos, Cyprus (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C.)

Annunciation icon, Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai (reproduced through the courtesy of the Michigan–Princeton–Alexandria Expedition to Mount Sinai)

The Dormition of the Virgin, Sopoćani, Yugoslavia (D. Tasić, Belgrade)

The Virgin entrusted to Joseph, Christ of the Chora, Istanbul (courtesy of Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington, D.C.)

The Entry into Jerusalem, Peribleptos, Mistra (Photographic Archives, Museum Benaki, Athens)

Church of St Catherine, Thessalonica

Detail of east side, Church of Pantanassa, Mistra

Palace of the Porphyrogenitus, Istanbul

Palace of the Despots, Mistra

MAPS

Justinian I's Empire <i>c.</i> 560	2
Linguistic Map of Justinian I's Empire <i>c.</i> 560	14
The Empire, <i>c.</i> 1140	84

PREFACE

The volume dedicated to the Byzantine Empire in the History of Civilization series (not to be confused with *The Byzantine Commonwealth* by Dimitri Obolensky) was originally entrusted to Romilly Jenkins (d. 1969). Had he lived to write it, he would have produced a more elegant and, I am sure, a better book than the one I am now offering to the public.

I shall refrain from mentioning the names of all the friends and colleagues, both living and dead, who have contributed so much to deepening my understanding of Byzantine civilization. I have tried to repay my debt by not asking any of them to read my typescript.

A word of explanation is perhaps required concerning the transliteration of Greek names and words. There are at least three possible systems, namely the latinized (*c* for *k*, *-us* for *-os*, *oe* for *oi*, etc.); the one that may be called the standard Greek system; and, most troublesome of all, the phonetic Modern Greek (favoured, amongst others, by the late Arnold Toynbee). I have generally followed the first in the case of proper names for the simple reason that it is the one most commonly used in the English-speaking world, but in transliterating Greek words and phrases I have adopted the second system with the addition of the circumflex accent to distinguish *eta* from *epsilon* and *omega* from *omicron*. If this leads to some confusion, I can only say that complete consistency would have produced many bizarre forms. The reader who is familiar with Procopius and St John Climacus might have had some trouble in identifying Prokopios and Ioannes ho tês klimakos.

Finally, I should like to extend my thanks to Messrs Weidenfeld and Nicolson as well as to my wife for their exemplary patience.

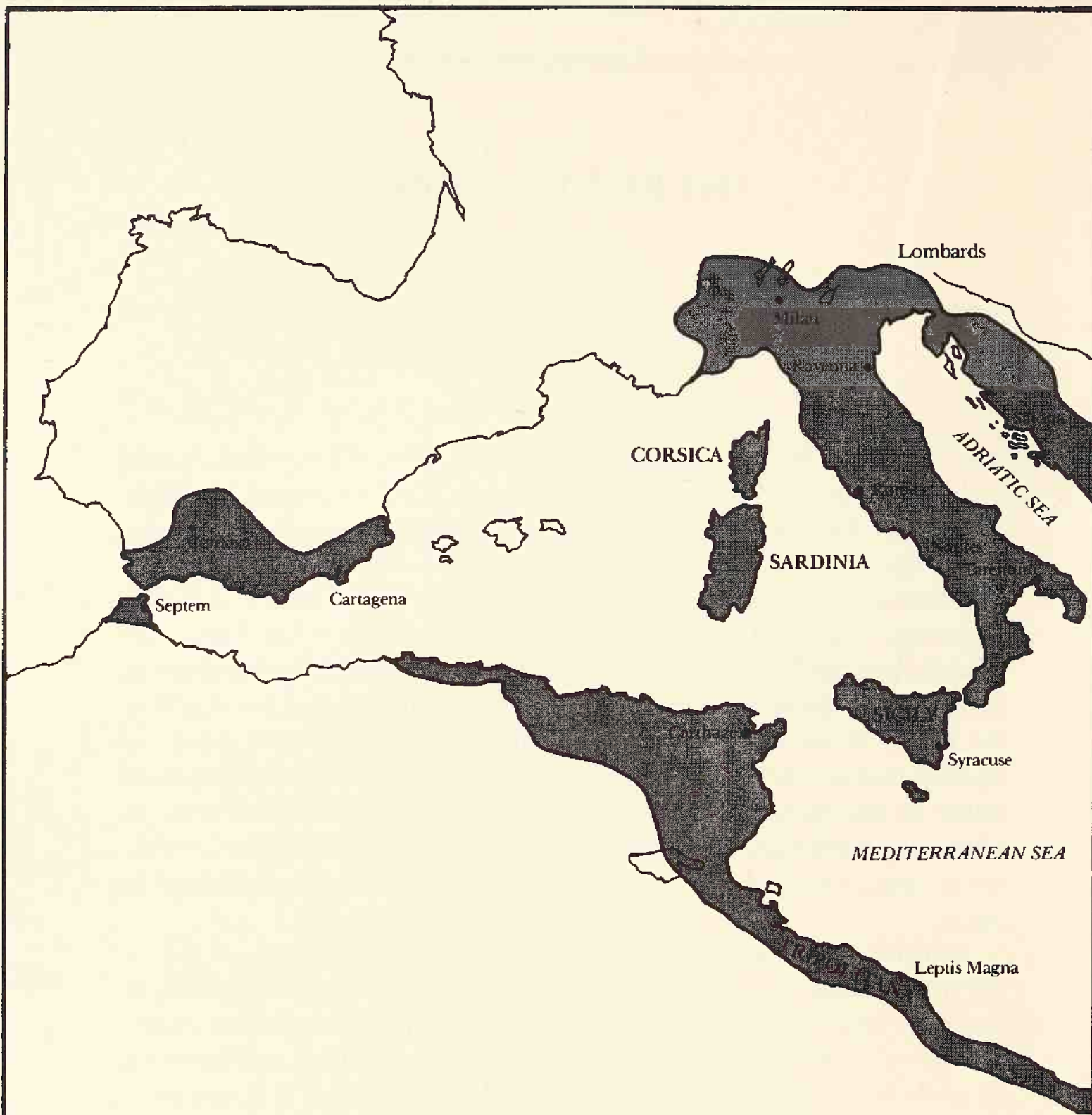
Oxford, November 1979


C. M.


INTRODUCTION

The Byzantine Empire, as defined by the majority of historians, is said to have come into being when the city of Constantinople, the New Rome, was founded in 324 AD, and to have ended when that same city fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. During these eleven centuries it underwent profound transformations; hence it is customary to divide Byzantine history into at least three major periods – the Early, the Middle and the Late. The Early Byzantine period may be regarded as extending to about the middle of the seventh century, in other words to the rise of Islam and the definitive installation of the Arabs along the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean; the Middle period either to the occupation of Asia Minor by the Turks in the 1070s or, with less justification, to the capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204; and the Late period from either one of these two termini to 1453.

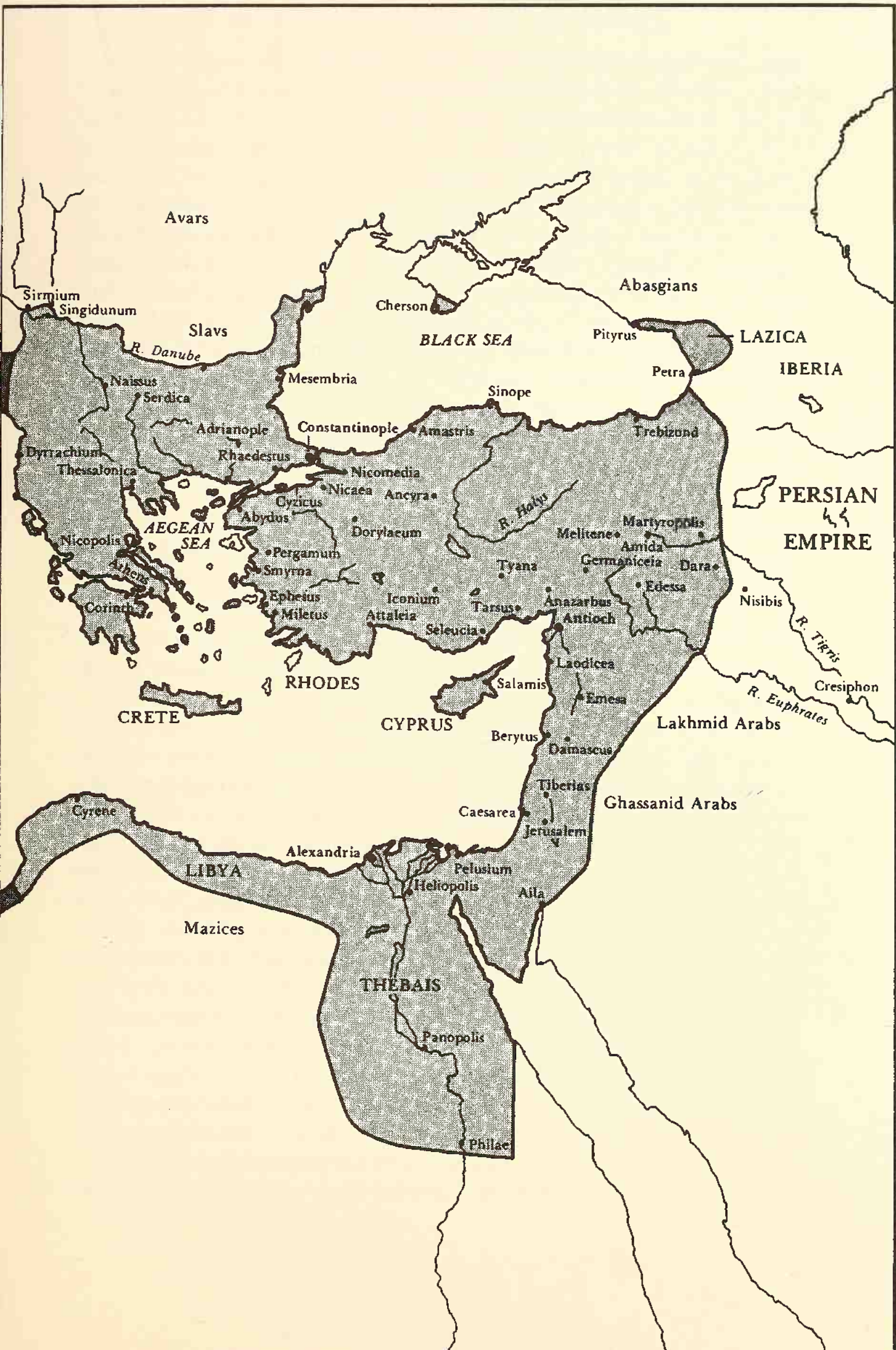
Arbitrary as the above definition may appear, there are good reasons for maintaining it. As for the epithet 'Byzantine', serious objections could be and have often been raised concerning its appropriateness. For better or for worse, this term has, however, prevailed, and it would be pedantic to reject it as long as we understand that it is merely a convenient label. In reality, of course, there never existed such an entity as the Byzantine Empire. There did exist a Roman State centred on Constantinople. Its inhabitants called themselves *Romaioi* or simply Christians; and they called their country *Romania*. A man could describe himself as *Byzantios* if he was a native of Constantinople, not if he hailed from another part of the Empire. To western Europeans, for whom the word 'Roman' had an entirely different connotation, the 'Byzantines' were usually known as *Graeci*, and to the Slavs as *Greki*, but to the Arabs and Turks as *Rum*, that is, Romans. The term *Byzantinus* as a designation of the Empire and its inhabitants did not gain currency



 Extent at Justinian I's accession

 Justinian's conquest

Justinian I's Empire c. 560



until the Renaissance. Attempts to supplant it by means of more cumbersome equivalents, such as East Roman or East Christian, have not met with general acceptance.

If we take a very summary and distant view of Byzantine history (which is as much as we can do here), we may say that of the three periods we have indicated, the Early one is by far the most important. It is a period that belongs to Antiquity, whose termination it forms as regards the Mediterranean basin. The Roman Empire may have gradually shed its northern provinces, but it still extended from Gibraltar to the Euphrates, beyond whose waters it faced the traditional enemy, the Persia of the Sassanids. The confrontation and equilibrium of these two great powers was the political basis that underlay the period in question. Outside Rome and Persia, and a few minor states lying on their respective peripheries, there was nothing but a fluctuating sea of barbarism.

It is not only in terms of geographical extension and political power that the Early Byzantine State was incomparably greater than the Middle or the Late. The same applies to its cultural achievement. It integrated Christianity within the Graeco-Roman tradition; it defined Christian dogma and set up the structures of Christian life; it created a Christian literature and a Christian art. There is barely an institution or idea in the entire Byzantine panoply that did not originate in the Early period.

One can hardly overestimate the catastrophic break that occurred in the seventh century. Anyone who reads the narrative of events will not fail to be struck by the calamities that befell the Empire, starting with the Persian invasion at the very beginning of the century and going on to the Arab expansion some thirty years later – a series of reverses that deprived the Empire of some of its most prosperous provinces, namely Syria, Palestine, Egypt and, later, North Africa – and so reduced it to less than half its former size both in area and in population. But a reading of the narrative sources gives only a faint idea of the profound transformation that accompanied these events. One has to consider the archaeological evidence from a great number of sites, to understand the magnitude of the collapse. It marked for the Byzantine lands the end of a way of life – the urban civilization of Antiquity – and the beginning of a very different and distinctly medieval world. And so, in a sense, the catastrophe of the seventh century is the central event of Byzantine history. Just as the west of Europe was dominated throughout the Middle Ages by the shadow of Imperial Rome, so the mirage of the

Christian Empire of Constantine, Theodosius and Justinian remained for Byzantium an ideal to be striven for but never attained. The backward-looking nature of Byzantine civilization is largely due to these circumstances.

If the Early Byzantine period may be seen in terms of an equilibrium between two great powers, the Middle period may be likened to a triangle having one long side (Islam) and two short sides (Byzantium and western Europe respectively). The world of Islam absorbed the heritage of both Rome and Persia and, by uniting in one vast 'common market' an area extending from Spain to the confines of India, produced an urban civilization of unusual vitality. Cut off from the major routes of international commerce, constantly harassed by its enemies, the Byzantine State was nevertheless able to display great activity and recover some of the lost ground. But now it had to look in a different direction – not so much towards the 'classical lands' as towards the barbarous north and west: the Balkans, now settled by Slavs and other newcomers, the Chazar State on the north shore of the Black Sea and, beyond it, to what in the ninth century became the Russian State. New vistas were thus opened up, and Byzantine influence, spearheaded by missionary activity, radiated as far as Moravia and the Baltic. Herein lies, in the wider historical perspective, the chief contribution of the Middle Byzantine period.

The Late period may also be viewed as a triangle, but one having a different configuration. Both the Byzantine and the Arab worlds were now in disarray, while western Europe was in the ascendant. The chief developments that ushered in this last phase were the loss of the greater part of Asia Minor to the Seljuk Turks and the simultaneous cession of maritime traffic to the Italian city states. For the next hundred years Byzantium still managed to retain its unity and something of its prestige; but from about 1180 onwards the edifice began to crumble on all sides. The ensuing fragmentation – the capture of Constantinople by the knights of the Fourth Crusade, the setting up of Latin principalities in the Levant, the formation of Greek splinter states at Trebizond, Nicaea and in the Epirus, the reconstitution of a pale semblance of the Empire of Constantinople in 1261 – makes an exceedingly complex and curious story. Yet it cannot be said that this period of Byzantine history is one of universal significance; the main centres of power and civilization had moved elsewhere.

Such, in briefest outline, were the principal phases of Byzantine history. The subject of our enquiry, therefore, has both a very long

extent in time and an ever-shifting geographical context. In the Early period we are concerned with almost the entire Mediterranean basin; in the Middle period the West recedes from our purview except for southern Italy and Sicily, while the focus of interest lies in Asia Minor and the Balkans; finally, we are left with Constantinople and a discontinuous scattering of lands in Asia Minor and in Greece. The diversity of locale also implies a diversity of population. It must be strongly emphasized that there never existed a Byzantine 'nation'. This topic will be more fully explored in Chapter 1, but it is worth pointing out at the very outset that any attempt to impose contemporary national categories on the Byzantine world can only lead to a misinterpretation of the facts.

One more reservation has to be made at this point. Our knowledge of any past civilization is based on records, be they written or monumental. Where written evidence is abundant, monuments assume an ancillary position: we can study the Victorian age without ever looking at the Albert Memorial, though by not doing so we may be missing some interesting insights. To the extent that written records become inadequate, monumental or archaeological evidence gains in importance. In this scheme of things the position of the Byzantine Empire is rather peculiar. At first glance, the volume of written material it has bequeathed to us appears very considerable. But then, what is the nature of this material?

The first fact that strikes the observer is the dearth of documentary or archival records. The only part of the Empire for which such evidence exists in any quantity is Egypt up to the Arab conquest, but we are often told that Egypt was by no means a representative province, and what may be deduced concerning its life thanks to the discovery of papyri does not apply to other regions. We also possess a small quantity of papyri relating to Ravenna, which was an even more marginal part of the Empire. For the rest, we are reduced to a few monastic archives, mostly pertaining to Mount Athos and southern Italy, plus two or three from Asia Minor. The archives in question are limited to land tenure and do not contain any material older than the tenth century. And that, by and large, is all. The records of the central government (and it should be remembered that the Byzantine Empire was a bureaucratic state *par excellence*), of the provincial administration, of the Church, of secular landlords, tenants, merchants and shopkeepers have all disappeared. As a result, we have no reliable population figures, no registers of births, marriages and deaths, no trade figures, no taxation

figures – practically nothing, in short, that can be counted and used for statistical purposes. This means that an economic history of the Empire cannot be written in any meaningful sense. To be sure, historians, yielding to the current passion for economics and statistics, have tried to apply to the Byzantine Empire the same methods that have been so successfully used for other periods, only to founder on the same rock – the lack of evidence.

The written material at our disposal may loosely be called literary in the sense that it has been preserved in manuscript books. Counting only those in Greek, about fifty thousand manuscripts survive in various libraries, about half that number being of medieval date. Even if a large proportion of this material is liturgical, theological, devotional, and so on, the historian of the Byzantine Empire cannot complain that he does not have enough texts to read; on the contrary, he has far too many.

And yet, these texts have a strangely opaque quality; and the more elegant their diction, the more opaque they become. That is not to say that they misinform us: on the contrary, Byzantine historians and chroniclers have a reasonably good record for veracity. They give us the external husk of public events; we look in vain for the underlying realities of life. If we turn to epistolography, a genre that was assiduously cultivated throughout the existence of the Empire, we are even more disappointed: instead of personal observations, we are offered erudite clichés. Only on rare occasions is the curtain raised, and this by relatively uncultivated authors. Some Lives of saints that escaped the stylistic ‘face-lift’ carried out by Symeon Metaphrastes in the tenth century fall into this category; so do some *paterica*, which are collections of anecdotes about monks, and a few heterogeneous texts like the so-called *Strategicon* of Cecaumenus (eleventh century). For a brief moment we are brought face to face with the actual life in a Galatian village, in the Egyptian desert or on a gentleman’s estate in central Greece. But in the great bulk of Byzantine literature reality has been strained out. I shall have more to say about this in Chapter 13.

For the historian of Byzantine civilization the limitations of his written material have serious implications. The only means of overcoming them lies, I believe, in the study of material remains, in other words in archaeology. Alas, very little has yet been done in this respect. It is true that a great number of classical cities have been excavated in the eastern provinces, and many of them exhibit a continuous pattern of occupation until the early seventh century. We are, therefore, fairly

well informed concerning the material setting of urban life during the Early Byzantine period, even if a great deal still remains to be learnt. The sites in question usually reveal a dramatic rupture in the seventh century, sometimes in the form of a drastic reduction, sometimes virtual abandonment. But what came next? For the Middle and Late Byzantine periods our knowledge is still very sparse. The only type of monument that has survived in considerable numbers and has been the object of systematic study is the church. It has, however, been studied by art historians whose method of approach (though, no doubt, of interest to other art historians) is seldom relevant to the historian of civilization. We may draw some interesting deductions even from churches, but what we need – and this can hardly be achieved in the immediate future – is a systematic investigation of Byzantine cities and villages, of castles and farms, of water-works, roads and industrial installations in different provinces of the Empire. Only when this has been done shall we be in a position to speak with any assurance of the level and scale of the Byzantine civilization.

This grave lacuna has not always been perceived and has certainly not deterred a number of specialists from writing books on the civilization of Byzantium. At least a dozen such works deserve honourable mention (see the Bibliography, p. 303). Inevitably, I have had to cover much of the same ground as my predecessors, but I have adopted an arrangement that differs somewhat from the traditional one. My book has been conceived as a triptych. In its first 'leaf' I have sketched some aspects of Byzantine life – not by any means all its significant aspects, but only those which, in my opinion, have exerted a notable influence on the Byzantine cultural 'product'. In view of the enormous extent of the subject I have had to omit much that is of importance. For example, I have said little about military life, in spite of the fact that the entire course of Byzantine history was dominated by warfare. Nor have I said much about the Byzantine economy and about communications by land and sea, two interlocked topics that remain as yet very imperfectly known. In chronological terms I have laid most stress on the Early and Middle periods, often to the exclusion of the Late period. Critical readers will doubtless find other lacunae.

The second leaf of the triptych is devoted to what Norman Baynes once called 'The Thought-World of East Rome'. Here I have attempted to describe that compact and relatively stable body of belief that may properly be called Byzantinism. In so doing I have deliberately chosen the conceptual level of the 'average' Byzantine: his position, as he saw

INTRODUCTION

it, with regard to the supernatural powers of good and evil, his place in nature, his place in history (both past and future), his attitude to other peoples, finally his notion of the good life and of the ideal man. These were not necessarily the views held by all Byzantine intellectuals, but, as will be explained more fully later, the intellectuals – at any rate after the seventh century – constituted a very small clique and exerted no appreciable influence on the thinking of the public at large.

In the last leaf of the triptych I have tried to describe what Byzantium has bequeathed to us. Setting aside, because of their highly technical nature, the subjects of Byzantine law and theology, I have limited myself to literature and art. Whatever Byzantine civilization may have been in its own day, it is on its literary and artistic expression that our appreciation of it must ultimately depend.

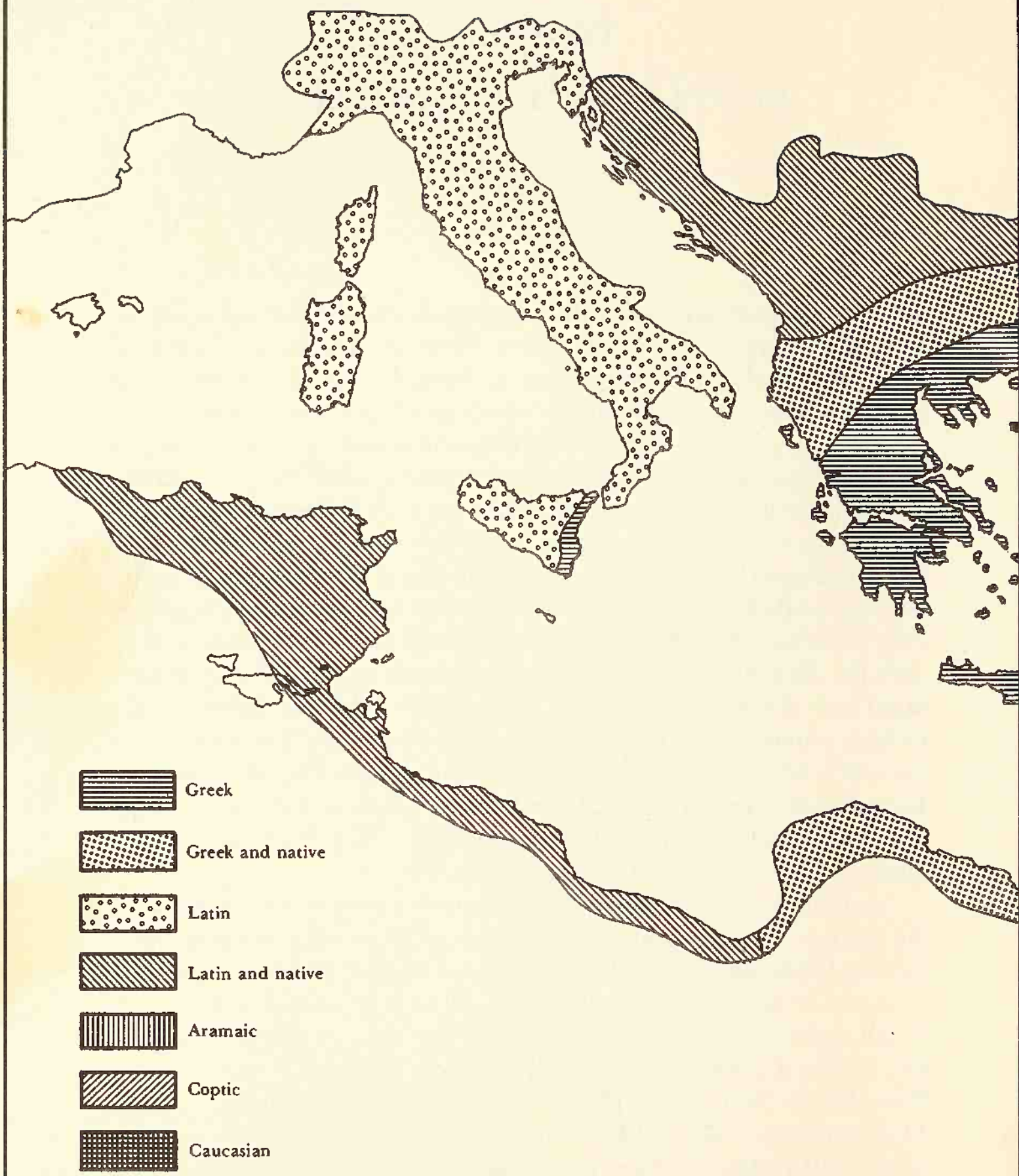
PART ONE
ASPECTS OF BYZANTINE LIFE

CHAPTER I

PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES

All empires have ruled over a diversity of peoples and in this respect the Byzantine Empire was no exception. Had its constituent population been reasonably well fused, had it been united in accepting the Empire's dominant civilization, it would hardly have been necessary to devote a chapter to this topic. It so happens, however, that even before the beginning of the Byzantine period – indeed, when the grand edifice of Rome started to show its first cracks towards the end of the second century AD – the various nations under Roman sway tended to move apart and assert their individuality. The rise of the Christian religion, far from healing this rift by the introduction of a universal allegiance, only accentuated it. We must, therefore, begin with the question: Who were the 'Byzantines'? In an attempt to answer it we shall undertake a rapid tour of the Empire, noting as we proceed the populations of the various provinces and the languages spoken by them. The time I have chosen is about 560 AD, shortly after the recovery by the Emperor Justinian of large parts of Italy and North Africa and several decades before the major ethnographic changes that were to accompany the disintegration of the Early Byzantine State.

It will have been sufficient for our imaginary traveller, provided he did not intend to stray far from the cities, to know only two languages, namely Greek and Latin. The boundaries of their respective diffusion were not in all places sharply drawn. It may be said, however, as a rough approximation that the linguistic frontier ran through the Balkan peninsula along an east-west line from Odessos (Varna) on the Black Sea to Dyrrachium (Dürres) on the Adriatic; while south of the Mediterranean it divided Libya from Tripolitania. With the exception of the Balkan lands, where there was a fair amount of mingling, the western half of the Empire was solidly Latin and the eastern half solidly Greek in the sense that those were the languages of administration and



Linguistic Map of
Justinian I's Empire c. 560



culture. Nearly all educated persons in the East could speak Greek, just as all educated persons in the West spoke Latin, but a great proportion of ordinary people spoke neither.

Our traveller would have had considerable difficulty in supplying himself with an up-to-date guidebook. He could have laid his hands on a bare enumeration of provinces and cities called the *Synecdemus* of Hierocles¹ as well as on a few itineraries of earlier date that gave distances between staging posts along the main roads. He might have drawn some useful but antiquated information from a little book known to us as the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*² which was composed in the middle of the fourth century; but if he wanted a systematic treatise combining geography with ethnography, he would have had to pack a copy of Strabo in his luggage. If he had been able to find the geographical treatise (now lost) by the Alexandrian merchant Cosmas Indicopleustes,³ he would probably have derived little practical benefit from it. Let us imagine that our traveller was content with such imperfect documentation and that, starting from Constantinople, he intended to travel clockwise round the Empire.

Constantinople, like all great capitals, was a melting-pot of heterogeneous elements: all seventy-two tongues known to man were represented in it, according to a contemporary source.⁴ Provincials of all kinds had either settled there or would drift in and out on commercial or official business. The servile class included many barbarians. Another foreign element was provided by military units which in the sixth century consisted either of barbarians (Germans, Huns, and others) or some of the sturdier provincials like Isaurians, Illyrians and Thracians. It is said that seventy thousand soldiers were billeted on the householders of Constantinople in Justinian's reign.⁵ Syrian, Mesopotamian and Egyptian monks, who spoke little or no Greek, thronged to the capital to enjoy the protection of the Empress Theodora and impress the natives with their bizarre feats of asceticism. The ubiquitous Jew earned his living as a craftsman or a merchant. Constantinople had been founded as a centre of latinity in the east and still numbered among its residents many Illyrians, Italians and Africans whose native tongue was Latin as was that of the Emperor Justinian himself. Furthermore, several works of Latin literature were produced at Constantinople, like Priscian's famous Grammar, the Chronicle of Marcellinus and the panegyric of Justin II by the African Corippus. Necessary as Latin still was for the legal profession and certain branches of the administration, the balance was inexorably tilting in

favour of Greek. By the end of the sixth century, as Pope Gregory the Great avers, it was no easy matter to find a competent translator from Latin into Greek in the imperial capital.⁶

Facing Constantinople lies the huge land mass of Asia Minor which has been compared to a jetty attached to Asia and pointing towards Europe. Its most developed parts have always been the coastal edges, especially the gently shelving west face, favoured by a temperate climate and studded with famous cities. The Black Sea coastal strip is much narrower and discontinuous, while the southern shore has, with the exception of the Pamphylian plain, no low-lying edge at all. The coastal areas, save for the mountainous part of Cilicia (Isauria), where the Taurus range advances to the very edge of the sea, had been hellenized for a good thousand years and more before Justinian's reign. Along the Black Sea the limit of Greek speech corresponded to the present frontier between Turkey and the Soviet Union. To the east of Trebizond and Rizaion (Rize) dwelt various Caucasian peoples, such as the Iberians (Georgians) as well as the Laz and the Abasgians (Abkhazians), the latter two barely touched by Christian missions. The Empire also possessed a Hellenized foothold on the southern shore of the Crimea, while the high tableland of the Crimean peninsula was inhabited by Goths.

Quite different from the coastal areas of Asia Minor is the high inland plateau, where the climate is rough and much of the land unfit for agriculture. In antiquity as in the Middle Ages the plateau was sparsely populated and urban life was relatively undeveloped there. The more important cities were situated along the major highways, such as the so-called Royal Road that ran from Smyrna and Sardis, by way of Ancyra and Caesarea, to Melitene; the road connecting Constantinople to Ancyra by way of Dorylaeum; and the southern road that extended from Ephesus to Laodicea, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Tyana and, through the Cilician Gates, to Tarsus and Antioch in Syria. The ethnic composition of the plateau had not undergone any notable change for some seven hundred years before Justinian's reign. It was a bewildering mosaic of native peoples as well as immigrant enclaves of long standing, such as the Celts of Galatia, the Jews who had been planted in Phrygia and elsewhere during the Hellenistic period and Persian groups of even more ancient origin. It appears that many of the indigenous languages were still spoken in the Early Byzantine period: Phrygian was probably still extant, since it appears in inscriptions as late as the third century AD, Celtic in Galatia, Cappadocian farther east. The unruly Isaurians,

who had to be pacified by force of arms in about 500 AD and many of whom drifted all over the Empire as professional soldiers and itinerant masons, were a distinct people speaking their own dialect, often to the exclusion of Greek.⁷ Next to them, however, in the Cilician plain, Greek had solidly taken root, except, perhaps, among the tribes of the interior.

Lying to the east of Cappadocia and straddling a series of high mountain chains were a number of Armenian provinces that had been annexed to the Empire as late as 387 AD when the Armenian kingdom was partitioned between Persia and Rome. These were strategically very important, but practically untouched by Graeco-Roman civilization, and they continued to be ruled by native satraps until Justinian imposed on them a new form of military administration. In the fifth century the Armenians acquired their own alphabet and began building up a literature of translations from the Greek and the Syriac which strengthened their feelings of national identity. Indeed, the Armenians, who were to play a crucial role in later Byzantine history, proved very resistant to assimilation as did the other Caucasian peoples.

The boundary between Armenia and Mesopotamia corresponded approximately to the river Tigris. Three centuries of Parthian occupation (from the middle of the second century BC until the Roman conquest in about 165 AD) had obliterated in Mesopotamia practically all traces of the Hellenization which the Macedonian kings had tried so hard to impose. In the period that concerns us Mesopotamia spoke and wrote Syriac. The literary form of Syriac represented the dialect of Edessa (Urfa), and it was in that 'blessed city' as well as at Amida (Diyarbakir), Nisibis (Nusaybin) and in the Tur 'Abdin that a vigorous monastic movement of Monophysite persuasion fuelled the cultivation of that language. Mesopotamia was a frontier district: the boundary between Rome and Persia lay a short distance south-east of the garrison town of Dara, while Nisibis had been ingloriously ceded to the Persians by the Emperor Jovian in 363. The cultural apartness of Mesopotamia was certainly no help to the imperial government in so sensitive an area.

The dominance of Aramaic dialects, of which Syriac is a member, extended throughout Syria and Palestine to the confines of Egypt. Here we witness a phenomenon of considerable interest. When the Hellenistic kingdoms were established following the death of Alexander the Great, Syria was divided between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. The Ptolemies, who obtained the southern half of the country, did rather little to plant Greek colonies there. The Seleucids, on the other hand, for whom northern Syria was of crucial importance, carried out inten-

sive colonization. They established a number of new cities, such as Antioch on the Orontes, Apamea, Seleucia and Laodicea, and injected a Greek element into existing cities, such as Aleppo. From that time onward all of Syria remained continuously under a Greek-speaking administration. Yet, some nine centuries later, we find Greek speech confined not only to cities, but largely to those very cities that had been founded by the Hellenistic kings. The countryside generally and the towns of non-Greek origin, like Emesa (Homs), clung to their native Aramaic.

It is unlikely that the use of Greek should have been more widespread in Palestine than it was in northern Syria, except for an artificial phenomenon, namely the development of the 'holy places'. Starting in the reign of Constantine the Great, practically every site of biblical fame became, as we would say today, a tourist attraction. From every corner of the Christian world people poured into Palestine: some as transient pilgrims, others on a longer-term basis. Monasteries of every nationality sprang up like mushrooms in the desert next to the Dead Sea. Palestine was thus a babel of tongues, but the native population – and we must remember that it included two distinct ethnic groups, namely the Jews and the Samaritans – spoke Aramaic as it had always done. The pilgrim Egeria, who witnessed the Easter services at Jerusalem about the year 400, has this to say:

Seeing that in that country part of the people know both Greek and Syriac, another part only Greek and yet another part only Syriac, given also that the bishop, although he knows Syriac, always speaks in Greek and never in Syriac, there is always by his side a priest who, while the bishop is speaking in Greek, translates his comments into Syriac so that everyone may understand them. Similarly for the lections that are read in church: since these must be read in Greek, there is always somebody there to translate them into Syriac for the benefit of the people, that they may receive instruction. As for the Latins who are there, i.e. those who know neither Syriac nor Greek, to them also is an interpretation given lest they be displeased; for there are some brethren and sisters, proficient in both Greek and Latin, who give explanations in Latin.⁸

Another element of the population of both Syria and Palestine consisted of Arabs who had spread as far north as Mesopotamia. Some of them, like the Nabataeans of Petra and the Palmyrenes, had become sedentary and lost their native language. Others roamed the deserts either as brigands or as vassals of the Empire whose duty it was to protect the settled areas and oversee the transhumance of the nomads. We should not, in any case, imagine that the Arab conquest of the

seventh century introduced a foreign element into those provinces: the Arabs had been there all along, their numbers were increasing and, in Justinian's reign, they assumed more and more the role of keepers of the emperor's peace. When, for example, the Samaritans staged a bloody revolt in 529, it was an Arab chieftain, Abukarib, who put them down.

Closely linked with Syria by virtue of its situation was the island of Cyprus. Here Greek had been spoken since prehistoric times, but there was also a sizeable colony of Syrians as may be deduced from the prevalence of the Monophysite heresy (see Chapter 4). St Epiphanius, the most famous bishop of Salamis (d. 403), was a Palestinian and is said to have known five languages – Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, Egyptian and Latin.⁹ An exaggeration perhaps, but even so an indication of the multilingualism that characterized, as it still does, the more enterprising among the Levantines.

Separated from Palestine by an area of desert lay the rich and ancient land of Egypt. Here, too, the distribution of Greek was a direct legacy of the Hellenistic age. The capital, Alexandria, was a predominantly Greek city, but it was officially described as being *ad Aegyptum*, not *in Aegypto*, an intrusion into an alien country; and the farther one travelled from Alexandria, the less Greek was spoken. Apart from the capital, only two cities had been founded by the Greeks, Naukratis in the Delta and Ptolemais in the Thebaid; nor did Hellenization make much progress under Roman administration. Setting aside the Jewish colony, which in the first century AD is said to have numbered about one million, the bulk of the population, even though they were administered in Greek, continued to speak Egyptian (Coptic), and there are signs that in the Early Byzantine period Coptic was gaining ground so that, by the sixth century, even some official acts were published in the native tongue. Above all, Coptic was the language of Egyptian Christianity, while Greek was identified with the alien hierarchy that was imposed by the imperial government.

The settled part of Egypt, which was practically limited to the Nile valley and the Delta, was threatened on all sides by barbarian tribes. From the east came raiding Saracens; in the south the black Nobadae and Blemmyes were particularly troublesome, while the west was open to Berber incursions, as was also Libya, a province that was administratively joined to Egypt. St Daniel, who was a monk at Scetis, no great distance from Alexandria, was three times kidnapped by barbarians and managed to escape only by killing his captor – a sin for which he did penance for the rest of his life.¹⁰ When, in the second half of the sixth

century, the itinerant monk John Moschus visited the Egyptian monasteries, he picked up many tales of depredations both by barbarians and by native brigands. Some monasteries had become practically deserted.¹¹

With Libya we come to the limit of the Greek-speaking provinces. Farther west lay Tripolitania, a narrow coastal strip, then the important regions of Byzacena, Proconsularis and Numidia, and finally the two Mauretaniae extending as far as the straits of Gibraltar. These had all been extensively romanized, and the richer areas, corresponding to modern Tunisia, had counted in better days among the most developed and prosperous parts of the Empire. How far the native population had been assimilated is a matter of uncertainty; nor it is entirely clear whether the vernacular language of the cities, which St Augustine calls Punic, was a legacy from ancient Phoenician (as appears more probable) or whether it was Berber. Our traveller in 560 would have found in any case a situation somewhat different from that which the Bishop of Hippo had known a century and a half earlier: for Africa had barely been recovered from the Vandals (in 533) who had held it for a century as an independent power. The Vandals had not been sufficiently numerous to have made a significant impact on the ethnography of the population, but their intrusion had led to the upsurge of the various Berber tribes who now seriously threatened the settled areas.

We need not concern ourselves with Spain, although part of its southern coast was recovered by Justinian from the Visigoths and remained in Byzantine hands for about seventy years. And so we may lead our traveller to Italy, where Justinian's rule had just been established on a somewhat shaky basis after a great deal of bloodshed. The whole country was then in a dreadful state. Continuous warfare between Byzantium and the Ostrogoths, lasting from 535 until 562, resulted in the destruction of Milan with a reputed loss of three hundred thousand males,¹² the virtual depopulation of Rome which suffered three sieges, and widespread starvation in the countryside. 'Italy has become everywhere even more destitute of men than Libya,' wrote Procopius,¹³ perhaps without great exaggeration. As to the composition of the population, there can be little doubt that the *Italiôtai*, as Procopius called them, were basically Latin; even in the imperial capital of Ravenna, which had close ties with the East and numerous oriental settlers, Latin was the normal medium of communication. Some tiny pockets of Greek may have survived in the southern part of the peninsula and Greek certainly continued to be spoken on the east coast of

Sicily. There were other minority groups, such as the Jews and the recently arrived Ostrogoths, but the latter could hardly have numbered more than a hundred thousand. Many more waves of invaders and settlers were to come, without, however, altering the fundamentally Latin character of the population.

Crossing the Adriatic, our traveller may have disembarked at Dyrrachium and followed the Via Egnatia all the way back to Constantinople. The regions he would have to traverse were then about as desolate as Italy. To quote Procopius once again,

Illyricum and all of Thrace, i.e. the whole country from the Ionian Gulf [the Adriatic] to the outskirts of Byzantium, including Greece and the Chersonese, was overrun almost every year by Huns, Slavs and Antae, from the time when Justinian became Roman emperor, and they wrought untold damage among the inhabitants of those parts. For I believe that in each invasion more than two hundred thousand Romans were killed or captured, so that a veritable 'Scythian wilderness' came to exist everywhere in this land.¹⁴

Procopius omits to mention here that some of the most destructive invasions of the Balkan peninsula had occurred before Justinian's time, in particular by the Goths in 378, by the Huns in 441-7, by the Ostrogoths in 479-82, by the Bulgars starting in 493. There can be little doubt concerning the immense amount of havoc caused by these and later incursions, but their effect on the ethnography of the regions in question is difficult to assess. The native populations were the Illyrians to the west, the Thracians and Daco-Mysians to the east and, of course, the Greeks to the south, but it would take a brave historian to state who was living where and in what numbers in the middle of the sixth century. The Slavs had already begun to settle, especially in the area between Niš and Sofia, as proved by the place names listed by Procopius,¹⁵ and we may imagine that the prolonged presence of Gothic and other barbarian troops had left some trace. As to languages, we have already commented on the boundary between Latin and Greek. Of Illyrian (whose relation to modern Albanian is disputed) very little is known, but Thracian, in particular Bessic, was still very much alive in the sixth century.

Such, in brief outline, were the peoples and languages of Justinian's Empire; and if I have laid any stress on the native elements, it was in order to correct the bias of our literary and narrative sources. To take but one instance, the fourth-century rhetorician Libanius, who was born at Antioch and lived most of his life in that city, whose writings fill

eleven printed volumes and are a mine of useful information, mentions only once the existence of the Syriac language. Yet it is an indisputable fact that Greek-speaking Antioch was an island in a sea of Syriac. Cultivated authors simply took no notice of such 'uncivilized' phenomena. Nor are inscriptions much more illuminating. Whoever set up an inscription, be it even on a tombstone, naturally used the 'prestige' language of the area. Besides, many of the vernacular dialects were not written. It is largely in the milieu of monks that we are occasionally brought face to face with ordinary illiterate folk and gain some inkling of what they spoke. Predictably, it was their native patois. Hence the custom of setting up 'national' monasteries. Others, however, were multinational: that of the Sleepless Ones (Akoimetoï) was divided by language into four groups – Latin, Greek, Syriac and Coptic.¹⁶ The monastery founded by St Theodosius the Coenobiarch in Palestine catered for Greek, Bessic and Armenian.¹⁷ On Mount Sinai in the sixth century one could hear Latin, Greek, Syriac, Coptic and Bessic.¹⁸ In 518 the abbot of a monastery at Constantinople could not sign his name to a petition because he did not know Greek.¹⁹ Similar examples could easily be multiplied.

Our survey would have been much more instructive had we been able to express in figures the relative importance of the various ethnic groups. Unfortunately, we have no reliable figures at our disposal, as has already been indicated in the Introduction. One eminent scholar has nevertheless ventured the view that Justinian's Empire, including the reconquered western provinces, had no more than 30 million inhabitants.²⁰ Not taking into account the losses caused by the great plague of 542, this appears to be too low an estimate: we may be nearer the truth in postulating 30 million for the eastern half of the Empire. In very approximate terms, the distribution would have been the following: 8 million in Egypt, 9 million in Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia combined, 10 million in Asia Minor, and 3 to 4 million in the Balkans. If these figures are anywhere near the truth, it would follow that the native Greek speakers represented less than a third of the total population, say 8 million, making allowance for the unassimilated peoples of Asia Minor and for the Latin and Thracian speakers of the Balkans. The Greek, Coptic and Aramaic elements would thus have been on a footing of near parity. Compared to the spread of Latin in Gaul and Spain, it must be admitted that the Greek language had made very limited progress between the third century BC and the sixth century AD. This was no doubt due to the fact that Hellenization was largely centred

on cities. About a century after the Arab conquest Greek had become practically extinct in both Syria and Egypt, which can only mean that it had not grown deep roots.

One further observation may be made on the basis of our survey, namely that in spite of mounting insecurity in nearly all parts of the Empire, most of Justinian's subjects still lived in their traditional homelands. The diaspora of the Greeks, of the Jews and, to a lesser extent, of the Syrians had occurred several centuries earlier. From the viewpoint of ethnography, as in so many other respects, Justinian's age represents, therefore, the tail end of Antiquity.

It would be wearisome to describe here all the ethnographic changes that the Empire witnessed after the sixth century, but we must say a few words about the greatest mutation of all, which started happening a few decades after Justinian's death. Its first sign was the massive installation of the Slavs in the Balkan peninsula. The Slavs came in several waves and, unlike earlier invaders, they came to stay. In an oft-quoted passage John of Amida (also known as John of Ephesus) records that in 581

an accursed people, called Slavonians, overran the whole of Greece, and the country of the Thessalonians, and all Thrace, and captured the cities, and took numerous forts, and devastated and burnt, and reduced the people to slavery, and made themselves masters of the whole country, and settled in it by main force, and dwelt in it as though it had been their own. . . . And even to this day [584 AD], they still encamp and dwell there, and live in peace in the Roman territories, free from anxiety and fear, and lead captive and slay and burn.²¹

Another source, the so-called Chronicle of Monembasia, states that in the year 587–8 the Turkic Avars (with whom the Slavs were usually allied)

captured all of Thessaly and all of Greece, Old Epirus, Attica and Euboea. Indeed, they attacked the Peloponnese and took it by war; and after expelling and destroying the native Hellenic peoples, they dwelt there. Those who were able to escape their murderous hands were scattered here and there. Thus, the citizens of Patras moved to the district of Reggio in Calabria, the Argives to the island called Orobe, the Corinthians to the island of Aegina. . . . Only the eastern part of the Peloponnese, from Corinth to Cape Maleas, was untouched by the Slavonians because of the rough and inaccessible nature of the country.²²

There is some doubt concerning the exact date of these events, but it is undeniable that at the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the

seventh, when the Danubian frontier completely collapsed, practically the entire Balkan peninsula passed out of imperial control. Only a few coastal outposts, such as Mesembria on the Black Sea, Thessalonica, Athens and Corinth, held out. Elsewhere the old population sought refuge on off-shore islands, as it did on Monembasia, or emigrated to Italy. The domain of barbarism extended as far as the outer defences of Constantinople – the so-called Anastasian Long Walls which described a wide arc from the Black Sea to Selymbria (Silivri) on the Sea of Marmora – but even these had soon to be abandoned.

The last important Slavonic settlement was that of the Serbs and Croats who in the reign of Heraclius occupied the lands where they still dwell. Then, in 680, came the Turkic Bulgars and conquered the country that bears their name, where they were eventually assimilated by the sitting Slavonic population. The barbarization of the Balkans began to be reversed only towards the end of the eighth century, but by that time its effects had become permanent.

Simultaneously with the loss of the Balkans the Empire suffered a more serious amputation by being deprived of its eastern and southern provinces. This happened in two stages. First, between the years 609 and 619, the Persians conquered all of Syria, Palestine and Egypt. They were then defeated by the emperor Heraclius and withdrew to their own country; but a few years later the same provinces were overrun by the Arabs and, this time, lost for good. The whole of the north African coast also succumbed to the invader. The Mediterranean empire of Rome simply ceased to exist, while the Byzantine State found itself limited to Asia Minor, the Aegean islands, a bit of the Crimea and Sicily.

The Persians also initiated another development that was to have important demographic consequences by striking at Constantinople through Asia Minor. In so doing they caused immense havoc. When the Arabs had succeeded to the Persians and made themselves masters of all the territories up to the Taurus mountains, they, too, struck into Asia Minor – not once or twice, but practically every year – and this went on for nearly two centuries. Many of the raids did not penetrate far from the frontier, but several of them extended as far as the Black Sea and the Aegean, and a few reached Constantinople itself. As it turned out, the Arabs never managed to gain a foothold on the Anatolian plateau. What happened instead was that every time they marched in the local population would take refuge in the inaccessible forts with which Asia Minor is so liberally provided. The Arabs would pass

between the forts, taking prisoners and booty, while the Byzantines would burn the crops to deprive the enemy of supplies and keep him on the move. The consequences of this prolonged process are easy to imagine: much of Asia Minor was devastated and depopulated almost beyond repair.

In this way an enormous demographic gap was created. The Empire urgently needed farmers as it also needed soldiers. To achieve this end it had to resort to massive transfers of population. The Emperor Justinian II, in particular, applied this policy on a wide scale. He moved a good part of the population of Cyprus to the region of Cyzicus on the southern shore of the Sea of Marmora. It was, apparently, a failure: many of the immigrants perished *en route*, and those who reached their destination later asked to be repatriated.²³ Justinian II also moved 'a great multitude' of Slavs to Bithynia. Once again, he had little luck: the thirty thousand soldiers he raised from among this group to fight against the Arabs defected to the enemy, whereupon the emperor inflicted cruel reprisals on their families.²⁴ In the 760s, however, we are told that 208,000 Slavs came to live in Bithynia of their own accord.²⁵ In the eighth century we repeatedly hear of the organized settlement of Syrians in Thrace.²⁶

Among the new immigrants the most prominent, however, were the Armenians, many of whom arrived without being forced to do so. The Armenians were excellent soldiers, and the Empire, deprived of its Illyrian recruiting ground, needed them badly. In fact, the immigration of Armenians had started in the sixth century, and from the reign of Maurice onwards they formed the backbone of the Byzantine army. The trickle of Armenians into the Empire was spread over many centuries. Many settled in Cappadocia and other parts of eastern Asia Minor close to their original homeland, others in Thrace, others in the region of Pergamon. It is impossible to give even a rough approximation of their numbers. Unlike the Slavs, however, the Armenians quickly rose to prominent positions, even to the imperial throne, and dominated the military establishment throughout the Middle Byzantine period.

Thus, if we place ourselves at about the time when the Empire started on the slow course of its recovery, say towards the end of the eighth century, we find a population that had been so thoroughly churned up that it is difficult to tell what ethnic groups were living where and in what numbers. It is often stated that by shedding, however painfully, its principal non-Greek-speaking elements, such as

the Syrians, the Egyptians and the Illyrians, the Empire had become more homogeneous. It is also asserted that the non-Greeks were gradually assimilated or Hellenized through the agency of the Church and the army, and that this happened in particular to the indigenous populations of Asia Minor as well as to the Slavs in the Peloponnese and elsewhere in Greece. The critical reader may be advised to treat such generalizations with a measure of caution. It is true, of course, that following the eclipse of Latin, Greek became the only official language of the Empire, so that a knowledge of it was mandatory for pursuing a career or transacting business. Neither Armenian nor Slavonic ever supplanted it as a general medium of communication. It is also true that in the long run Slavonic died out in Greece and in Bithynia, and if any Armenian has been spoken in Thrace within living memory, it was not on the part of descendants of the colonists planted there in the eighth century. But then it is also known that Greek survived in Asia Minor on a continuous basis only in Pontus and a small part of Cappadocia, whereas it had become practically extinct in the western part of the subcontinent until its reintroduction there by immigrants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We would not argue from the last observation that western Asia Minor was not predominantly Greek-speaking in the Middle Ages. However illuminating it may be in some respects, the long view does not help the historian of Byzantium to solve the specific problems that confront him. Was Hellenization, for example, a conscious aim of the imperial government, and if so, how was it implemented and with what success? And if it succeeded in the Middle Ages, why had it not done so in Antiquity under conditions of a more settled life and a higher civilization?

When we look at our scanty sources, we realize that the formulation of the above questions does not correspond to the Byzantine way of thinking. First of all, the very designation 'Greek', which we use so freely today to describe those Byzantines who did not belong to any alien group, is entirely absent from the literature of the period. An inhabitant of Greece south of Thessaly would have referred to himself as a *Helladikos* (a name already current in the sixth century AD), but he could have been a Slav as well as a 'Greek'. The same holds true of other regions whose dwellers called themselves by the names of their respective provinces, for example Paphlagonians or Thrakêsians (after the Thrakêsian 'theme' in western Asia Minor). Since, therefore, there was no notion of 'Greekness', it is hard to see how there could have been one of 'hellenization'. The only passage, to my knowledge, that may

imply something of the kind says that the Emperor Basil I converted the Slavonic tribes from their old religion and, 'having grecized them (*graikôsas*), subjected them to governors according to Roman custom, honoured them with baptism, and delivered them from the oppression of their own rulers'.²⁷ It has long been, however, a matter of dispute what the term 'grecized' may mean in the present context. What we do hear about, again and again, is the conversion of various peoples to Orthodox Christianity, be they pagan Slavs or Muslim Cretans, and the setting up of an ecclesiastical organization. Here is how the Chronicle of Monembasia describes the activity of the Emperor Nicephorus I in the Peloponnese: 'He built *de novo* the town of Lacedaemon and settled in it a mixed population, namely Kafirs, Thrakêsians, Armenians and others, gathered from different places and towns, and made it into a bishopric.'²⁸ Surely, neither the Kafirs (possibly a generic term for converts from Islam) nor the Armenians would have contributed to the hellenization of Laconia. The emperor's purpose was simply to implant a Christian population and set up a bishopric.

There can be little doubt that the evangelization of non-Christian peoples settled in the Empire was carried out in Greek. This may cause some surprise in the case of the Slavs since the Slavonic alphabet was itself devised by a Byzantine, St Cyril, presumably in the 860s. Its invention, however, and the consequent translation of the essential Christian texts were intended for a far-away Slavonic country, Moravia; and it was entirely a matter of chance that the Cyrillo-Methodian mission, after its initial failure, should have found a fertile soil in a country for which it was not intended, namely the Bulgarian kingdom. As far as our knowledge goes, no attempt was ever made to evangelize the Slavs in Greece in their own language, just as the liturgical use of Greek was imposed on conquered Bulgaria after 1018. Clearly, this must have contributed to the spread of Greek. But was it due to deliberate policy? Is it not more likely that the absence of a linguistically qualified clergy, the relative inaccessibility of the Slavonic Scriptures, and the mixed nature of the population should have combined to make the use of Greek the easier option?

However efficacious the liturgical imposition of Greek may have proved, it has to be admitted that the assimilation of barbarian enclaves was a very slow process. In the Peloponnese the presence of pagan Slavs a short distance south of Sparta is attested in the latter part of the tenth century,²⁹ that is nearly two hundred years after the first attempts to bring about their conversion. Equally telling is the case of the Slavs in

Bithynia. We have seen that these were transplanted in very considerable numbers at the end of the seventh century and towards the middle of the eighth. Some two hundred years later, the Byzantine armament assembled in an effort to conquer Crete in 949 included a contingent of 'Slavonians who are established in Opsikion' (this being the administrative name of a part of Bithynia) placed under their own commanders.³⁰ Clearly, these Slavonians still formed a distinct group. In the next century Anna Comnena refers to a village in Bithynia 'locally called Sagoudaous',³¹ presumably after the tribe of the Sagoudatai, attested in Macedonia in the seventh century. A little later the Slavonic element in Bithynia was augmented by the Emperor John II Comnenus who settled near Nicomedia a throng of Serbian captives.³² Serbian villages are still mentioned in those parts in the thirteenth century. In other words, it is quite possible that the Slavs of Bithynia, or at any rate part of them, were assimilated by the Ottoman Turks without having ever become 'Greek'.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from these and many other cases is that the Middle Byzantine Empire was by no means a solidly Greek state. In addition to the Armenians and the Slavs, there were many other foreign elements, such as the Georgians and the Balkan Vlachs. A massive influx of Syrians and other Christian orientals followed the eastward expansion of the Empire at the end of the tenth century; and when, in 1018, the imperial frontier was once more extended to the Danube, it comprised vast areas where Greek had never been spoken or had been extinguished a long time previously. Whether Greek speakers formed at the time the majority or a minority of the inhabitants of the Empire is a guess I should not like to hazard.

It is not altogether easy to define the feelings of solidarity, if any, that bound together the multinational inhabitants of the Empire. In the sixth century the slogan *Gloria Romanorum* still appeared from time to time on the imperial coinage, but it is not likely that there was much devotion in the eastern provinces to the idea of *Romanitas*. Besides, loyalty to Rome and admiration for her ancient greatness had been a regular theme of pagan polemic, whereas the Church maintained the position that Christians were, above all, citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem and in so doing probably weakened the cohesion of the Empire. That is not to say that instances of loyalty to the State are absent from Byzantine history: quite the reverse is true. It is enough to recall the despair of the population of Nisibis when their city had been ceded to the Persians in 363, the demonstrations of pro-Roman

sentiments at Edessa in 449 in the context of sectarian strife, and a multitude of similar cases. But then we must remember that at the time the only alternative to living under Roman rule was living under Persian rule (which was usually worse). People crushed by the burden of taxation were often tempted to desert to the enemy, even to join some barbarian tribe that levied no taxes, but that was not an option for those who enjoyed a reasonable standard of living. A feeling of *Romanitas* was hardly the determining factor.

As far as we can judge, the main links of solidarity were two: regional and religious. People identified themselves with their village, their city or their province much more than they did with the Empire. When a person was away from home he was a stranger and was often treated with suspicion. A monk from western Asia Minor who joined a monastery in Pontus was 'disparaged and mistreated by everyone as a stranger'.³³ The corollary to regional solidarity was regional hostility. We encounter many derogatory statements concerning 'the cunning Syrian' who spoke with a thick accent, the uncouth Paphlagonian, the mendacious Cretan. Alexandrians excited ridicule at Constantinople. Armenians were nearly always described in terms of abuse. Even demons, as we shall see in Chapter 7, had strong feelings of local affiliation and did not want to consort with their fellows from the next province.

Religious identity was often more strongly felt than regional identity. Had the Church been less intolerant, it may well be that different religious groups could have lived peaceably side by side, but there was usually some zealous bishop or monk who incited a pogrom, and then the fight was on. It is not surprising that Jews and the few remaining pagans should have proved the most consistently disloyal elements in the Empire. Within the Church, however, religion and regionalism overlapped to a considerable extent. And herein, perhaps, lies the key to the 'heretical' groupings that will be more fully described in Chapter 4. For what seems to have motivated the Syrian or the Egyptian Monophysite was not so much his belief in some abstruse point of doctrine as his loyalty to his own Church, his own bishop and the holy men of his neighbourhood. Whenever a Christian splinter group had a solidly established territorial base, all attempts to impose on it a uniform, imperial orthodoxy ended in failure.

If in the Early Byzantine period the idea of *Romanitas* held little potency, the same was even truer of the Middle period when the old imperial capital had receded into some 'Scythian wilderness' and the

Latin tongue had been forgotten. Even in contexts of international confrontation the emotive concept became that of Christian rather than that of Roman identity. When, in 922, Romanus I Lecapenus urged his army officers to put up a spirited defence against Symeon of Bulgaria, they vowed to die on behalf of the Christians, and this although the Bulgarians were by this time, at any rate nominally, Christian themselves.³⁴ Significantly, however, no new term emerged to describe the identity of the Empire as a whole. Nor was it much needed on the level of everyday life. When, in the early ninth century, St Gregory the Decapolite, a native of southern Asia Minor, landed at the port of Ainos in Thrace, he was promptly arrested by the imperial police and subjected to a bastinado. We are not told why; perhaps he looked like an Arab. He was then asked: 'Who are you, and what is your religion?' His answer was: 'I am a Christian, my parents are such and such, and I am of the Orthodox persuasion.'³⁵ Religion and local origin constituted his passport. It did not occur to him to describe himself as a Roman.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

A sixth-century abbot is reported to have addressed these words to a novice:

If the earthly emperor intended to appoint you a patrician or a chamberlain, to give you a dignity in his palace (that palace which will vanish like a shadow or a dream), would you not scorn all your possessions and rush to him with all haste? Would you not be willing to undergo every kind of pain and toil, even to risk death for the sake of witnessing that day when the emperor, in the presence of his senate, will receive you and take you into his service?¹

Few Byzantines, we may imagine, would have behaved differently, since the most obvious characteristic of the Byzantine polity was the overwhelming power of the central government. Short of rebellion, there was no effective counterweight to this power except in delay, inefficiency, corruption or simply distance. This remained true until the gradual disintegration of central governance which we may place approximately in the eleventh century.

In theory the emperor's authority knew no limits save those imposed by divine laws. In Chapter 12 we shall consider the ideal definition of the Byzantine emperor. Here, however, we are concerned with practice, and in practice the emperor was a man who dwelt in the imperial palace of Constantinople, far removed from the public gaze, surrounded by his court. More often than not, he owed his position to an unformulated, but generally respected, principle of heredity; alternatively, he may have been co-opted by his predecessor, chosen by an influential group or he may have owed his throne to a successful rebellion. Strangely enough, the Byzantine State never evolved a theory of imperial succession. A man became emperor by the will of God, his election was signalled by acclamation on the part of the army and the senate, and confirmed, from the fifth century onwards, by a religious

coronation performed by the patriarch of Constantinople. To outside observers this system looked curiously unstable and ill-defined: some Arab authors believed that the Roman emperor owed his position to victory and was dismissed if he was unsuccessful.² But whatever the circumstances of the emperor's accession, he could not govern single-handed. His principal ministers were chosen at his pleasure and the effective power they wielded was not expressed by their titles. Some emperors – the more forceful ones – assumed a preponderant role in the conduct of affairs, while others were content to leave it to a relative or to one or more officials. While it was generally believed that the emperor had a duty to lead his armies in the field,³ many emperors did not do so, either through incapacity or because they feared a rebellion during their absence from the capital. There was so much variation in practice that it may be more accurate to speak of government by the imperial palace rather than by the emperor.

The society over which the emperor presided was meant to be governed by the notion of order. Its constituent parts are variously described in our sources. We sometimes find a three-fold division into army, clergy and farmers.⁴ We are further told that the army formed the head of the body politic,⁵ or that the most essential occupations were farming and military service in that farmers fed the soldiers, while soldiers protected the farmers.⁶ We have from the sixth century a much more elaborate classification of the civilian part of society into ten groups, namely: 1. The clergy; 2. The judiciary; 3. Counsellors (senators?); 4. Those concerned with finance; 5. Professional and technical; 6. Commercial; 7. Those concerned with the provision of raw materials; 8. Subordinates and servants; 9. The useless (in other words, the old, the infirm and the insane); 10. Entertainers (charioteers, musicians, actors).⁷ Interesting as such textbook classifications may be, they do not reveal to us the functioning of Byzantine society. Before we can construct a more realistic model of it, we ought to begin with the Early period and consider briefly the State services, the municipal government, the Church, the urban trades and professions and, finally, the farmers.

All imperial service, whether military or civil, was designated by the term *militia* (*strateia* in Greek). Within it, the army formed the largest group: its total strength for both east and west towards the end of the fourth century was about 650,000. This may not strike us as an unduly big number out of a total population of probably more than 40 million, but in view of the low yield of the Late Roman economy it constituted a

considerable burden. Following Constantine's reforms, the army was composed of two main bodies: a mobile force of *comitatenses* and a frontier militia of *limitanei*. Their respective numbers for the eastern Empire were about 100,000 and 250,000. The *comitatenses* had no permanent camps, being usually billeted in cities, where they might also be called upon to perform police duties (the Empire had no regular police force). Some complained that as a result of this arrangement soldiers grew soft and imposed unbearable hardship on cities that had no need of protection.⁸ The *limitanei*, on the other hand, were locally recruited farmers who manned the frontier forts while not busy tilling their fields. They were not regarded as being particularly effective. The historian Agathias points out that Justinian, the greatest of Byzantine conquerors, had in the latter part of his reign no more than 150,000 men under arms, scattered in various provinces, whereas the defence of the Empire required four times that many.⁹ This figure, however, does not appear to include the *limitanei*, and so may represent an augmentation rather than a diminution. At the same time we have to remember that an expeditionary force was usually in the 10,000–25,000 range, and that an army of some 50,000, such as might occasionally be thrown against Persia, was considered unusually big.

Service in the army was a lifelong occupation and was meant to be well rewarded. Even so, there was little enthusiasm for it in the more civilized parts of the Empire and evasion was widespread. By Justinian's time recruitment had become voluntary and depended very largely on some of the ruder provinces, like Illyricum, Thrace and Isauria, where a military life was traditional. Much use was also made of barbarians, such as Goths, Huns and Scythians, who were either 'home grown' or taken from border tribes allied to the Empire (*foederati*). The loyalty of the latter could not always be taken for granted.

In the Early Byzantine Empire military and civil commands were generally separate, although by the second half of the sixth century they began to coalesce in some insecure provinces (notably Africa and Italy). There was thus a hierarchy of army command culminating in several *magistri militum*, and a civil hierarchy concerned with justice, finance and the running of various services, such as the public post (*cursus publicus*), the State police cum secret service (*magistriani* or *agentes in rebus*), and so on. Provincial administration was in the hands of Praetorian Prefects, now shorn of the military authority they had held earlier, and descended to the *vicarii* of dioceses and the governors of

provinces. Constantinople, like Rome, had a separate administration under an urban prefect. It should be pointed out that while the middle and lower echelons of the civil service enjoyed security of tenure to the point of virtual irremovability, the higher offices were conferred for a short time only.

Some historians have spoken of a bureaucratic strangulation of the Later Roman Empire, yet by modern standards the number of civil servants was minimal: it has been calculated that in all there were no more than 30 to 40,000 of them in both east and west (c. 400 AD). The reason for this is that the cities ran their own affairs through municipal councils (*curiae*) composed of the more substantial local landowners. The latter, usually called decurions, formed a fairly numerous class. If we assume about 200 per city, their total number in the east would have been close to 200,000. Their importance for the history of civilization far outweighs, however, their numerical strength, since the intellectual élite of the Empire, the liberal professions, the higher echelons of the Church and a great many civil service posts, were filled by members of the decurion class. We must look at them more closely.

It is a commonplace of Late Roman history that the municipal gentry was in a state of decline. However much allowance we make for the self-interested complaints of members of their own class (Libanius being the most frequently quoted example), the fact remains that from Constantine to Justinian decurions made increasing efforts to avoid their responsibilities which were openly regarded as a servitude. From the standpoint of the law, all landowners who attained a stated property qualification were obligated to serve on councils, and their heirs after them. They were collectively responsible for all municipal works, for the repair of public buildings, aqueducts and fortifications, for keeping streets and drains clean, for providing spectacles, overseeing the market, maintaining the post, and for all extraordinary duties imposed by the State, such as billeting soldiers, making compulsory purchases of provisions, recruiting levies for the army (when conscription was in force), and so on. The cities possessed certain resources in land and market dues to cover the necessary expenditure; even so, decurions had usually to dip into their own pockets. No wonder that they exploited every loophole to avoid such onerous, if respectable, offices. The normal way of gaining exemption was to join the civil service or the senate of Constantinople (in spite of various laws that forbade this), to enter the Church or become a public teacher. Some never married so as not to leave a legitimate heir. Some simply ran

away. The result of continuing pressure was that the curial class exploded: the poorer members melted away, while the rich ones grew richer at the expense of their neighbours. They became magnates who bullied their fellow-citizens and usually had enough leverage at court to win for themselves posts in the imperial administration that exempted them from municipal duties. By the middle of the sixth century councils had become practically extinct. John Lydus, born at Philadelphia in 490, could still remember the days when they administered the cities and when their members wore the toga.¹⁰

The gap created at provincial level was filled partly by the governors, partly (and increasingly so) by the bishops. It has been rightly pointed out that the Byzantine Church did not constitute an organization *sui juris*; in modern terms it may be described as a Department of Social Welfare. The task of providing for the indigent, for strangers, for widows and orphans was an evangelical obligation which the Church took upon itself in the fourth century. As municipal councils declined, bishops assumed, more and more, a variety of extra-religious functions. We find them dispensing justice, overseeing the market, regulating weights and measures, repairing bridges, building granaries. Where a provincial governor was in residence the bishop was his equal, while in other cities he became the top man, equivalent to a governor. The bishop was thus an administrator, and he was normally selected from the gentry because he had to be presentable and possess managerial experience. It was perfectly normal for a layman, even if he was not particularly religious, to be directly ordained bishop. Examples abound; one will have to suffice. In the early sixth century we hear of a certain Harfat who came from a family of rich landowners. When his parents died, he and a kinsman inherited the estate plus some five thousand gold pieces. Thereupon Harfat was offered the bishopric of Arsamosata in Armenia, which he declined. The offer was repeated to his kinsman 'under inducement of riches and high position', and this man, who is described as being of dishonest character, accepted it.¹¹ There are also many instances of laymen who made excellent bishops, like Synesius of Cyrene in the fourth century or St John the Almsgiver, patriarch of Alexandria in the early seventh.

In the early Byzantine period the Church grew extremely rich, or, to put it in another way, huge resources were channelled through it. In addition to receiving a subsidy from the State, it possessed a permanent endowment in the form of land as well as commercial property in the cities. It was constantly on the lookout for donations from the wealthy

and paid particular attention to heiresses whom, if they were widows, it urged not to remarry, and if unmarried, to espouse the holy estate of virginity to the glory of God and the benefit of ecclesiastical coffers. But if receipts were large, so also were expenditures. The Church of Antioch at the end of the fourth century provided for three thousand widows and virgins in addition to invalids, strangers, prisoners and beggars. What is more, it did so without expending its capital.¹² The emoluments of the clergy and the upkeep of buildings were further charges on the ecclesiastical budget.

The Church of Alexandria, as seen through the Life of St John the Almsgiver, provides a concrete example.¹³ St John was a Cypriot, a widowed layman belonging to a prominent family, and he was appointed patriarch by the emperor Heraclius in 610 to deal with a particularly troublesome situation: the Egyptian Church, in addition to its endemic upheavals, had passed almost entirely into the hands of the Monophysite party. It seems that St John proved a great success. He had a *grand seigneur's* liberality and self-assurance; he was also, if we may believe his biographer, a man of perfect humility. Humble or not, St John found himself at the head of a vast bureaucracy. Setting aside the provincial clergy, the establishment at Alexandria numbered many hundreds of employees. There were several financial administrators (*oikonomoi*), a treasurer, a chancellor, a distributor of alms, notaries, secretaries and legal advisers. There were disciplinary officers who were empowered to inflict bodily punishment and imprisonment on clerics whose conduct was unsuitable, for example a monk who turned up in the company of a young woman. The overseers of markets and taverns were under the bishop's authority. There was an army of messengers and ushers – on one occasion twenty are mentioned – as well as gentlemen of the patriarch's bedchamber (*cubicularii*). Finally, there was the clergy proper, headed by the protopresbyter and the archdeacon and descending to the lower grades whose incumbents often practised another profession, such as that of cobbler. The patriarch held a court of justice at which he heard all kinds of grievances, by no means confined to ecclesiastical affairs. Generally, he dealt on a footing of equality with the governor of Egypt (*dux augustalis*) who happened to be the emperor's cousin.

Our document is silent about any landed property the Church might have possessed (Alexandria had no rural territory), but mentions a number of taverns from which it collected rent and other dues. Furthermore, the Church had a fleet of some fifteen large cargo vessels

that carried on trade with western Europe. On one occasion, we are told, they were overtaken by a storm in the Adriatic and had to jettison their entire cargo to the value of 3,400 lb of gold. Pious donations poured in: a woman bequeathed 500 lb of gold to the Church, a twice-married layman offered during a time of famine 200,000 bushels of wheat and 180 lb of gold on condition of being made a deacon, but was turned down. In all, St John is said to have collected during his eight years in office 10,000 lb of gold from donations in addition to the 8,000 he had found in the treasury of the Church. No wonder that the Church of Alexandria acted as banker to the business community. At the same time the patriarch is said to have had 7,500 beggars in his care. He built hospices for them – elongated vaulted buildings provided with wooden benches, mats and blankets. He also built hostelries for visiting monks, and, when Jerusalem fell to the Persians in 614, he sent vast sums of money to rebuild its churches and ransom prisoners.

The three other eastern patriarchates, those of Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem, enjoyed resources comparable to those of Alexandria. Jerusalem, in particular, made a killing from the real estate boom in the Holy City and was, exceptionally, given leave to sell at a huge profit some of its urban holdings.¹⁴ Provincial bishoprics were, of course, poorer, but usually did quite well. We hear, for example, of an Egyptian bishop who could afford to spend 30 lb of gold for a dinner service of tooled silver for his personal use.¹⁵ The bishop of Anasioupolis in Galatia, a very small town, had in about the year 600 an allowance of 365 *solidi* per year for his table, of which he spent only 40.¹⁶

Archaeological evidence offers striking confirmation of the wealth of the Church from the fourth to the sixth centuries. All round the Mediterranean, basilicas have been found by the score. While architecturally standardized, these were quite large buildings, often a hundred feet or more in length, and were lavishly decorated with imported marble columns, carving and mosaic. In every town more and more churches were built until about the middle of the sixth century, when this activity slackened and then ceased entirely. Was there really need for so much capacity? From the pastoral point of view the answer is surely negative. Since, however, the erection of churches was regarded as a praiseworthy act and satisfied the vanity of donors while providing additional posts for the clergy, it probably continued for a time even when it had ceased to serve any real need.

It is clear that the Church performed an important social function. It acted as a redistributor by taking from the rich and providing shelter,

food and medical care to the needy. It cannot be doubted that the Church conducted these activities more efficaciously than either the State or the municipal government could have done, since it was able to appeal to the emotions of donors, to tempt them with Paradise and threaten them with Hell. Rich widows would hardly have gone with tears in their eyes to offer their gold to the *dux augustalis* or the *comes Orientis*. But as money flowed down the social scale, a good part of it (such as was not channelled into building activities) was diverted to provide for the ecclesiastical establishment. Since a career in the Church could be very comfortable in addition to the social prestige it provided, the clergy expanded in numbers. In the early seventh century, for example, the cathedral of Constantinople had an administrative staff of 88, a clergy of 525 plus 75 janitors,¹⁷ and this after Justinian had frozen ordinations at a considerably lower level.¹⁸ A century earlier the Church of Antioch found itself in financial straits because of the mounting number of clergy.¹⁹

Before we proceed to give some account of urban and rural populations, it may be helpful to consider the monetary system of the Empire and the pattern of earnings and expenditures. The basis of the coinage was the gold *solidus* (*nomisma* in Greek) which was struck at 72 to the pound. Smaller gold coins of half (*semissis*) and one third (*tremissis*) of a *solidus* also circulated, but no silver was issued until the seventh century. Small change was copper and, after the reform of the emperor Anastasius in 498, normally came in denominations of 5, 10, 20 and 40 *nummi*, the last being known as the *folles*. The relation of gold to copper tended to fluctuate, but in theory 1 *solidus* was equivalent to 180 *folles* or 7,200 *nummi*. The lack of denominations intermediate between the *folles* and the *tremissis* may strike the modern observer as inconvenient. Since the coinage was pegged to the gold standard, prices and wages remained remarkably stable, except in times of shortage caused by droughts, enemy attacks and other calamities – indeed, they did so from the fourth to the eleventh century, when the *solidus* began to be adulterated.

The information we possess on the size of personal fortunes, on incomes, on the cost of essential commodities and luxuries, on the prices paid for farm animals and slaves leads to some obvious conclusions. Firstly, there was a staggering disparity between the rich and the poor. Secondly, government service normally led to considerable riches. Thirdly, there must have been a very large number of people living on the subsistence level, since unskilled and semi-skilled workers

were very poorly remunerated. Fourthly, the price of manufactured articles, especially clothing, was comparatively very high. If we may start at the bottom of the social scale, there is reasonably concordant evidence that the earnings of a labourer or semi-skilled worker were in the range of 10 to 20 *solidi* a year given steady employment. At the end of the fourth century St Gregory of Nyssa, who wished to build a church, was offered a team of workers at one thirtieth of a *solidus* per day plus food, a rate he considered exorbitant.²⁰ At Jerusalem in the sixth century a building worker received one twentieth of a *solidus* per day, that is 9 *folles*.²¹ Roughly the same wage, namely one twenty-fourth of a *solidus*, was earned by a casual labourer at Alexandria in the early seventh century.²² When the Emperor Anastasius was building the city of Dara in Mesopotamia as a strategic base against the Persians (505–7), he offered exceptionally high wages to the masons, namely one sixth of a *solidus* per day or one third for a workman with his own ass, with the result that ‘many grew rich and wealthy’.²³ The price for an unqualified slave (about 20 *solidi*) was in line with average earnings. Now consider the price of essential commodities. A family’s vegetable allowance for one day cost 5 *folles*,²⁴ which works out at a little over 10 *solidi* a year; a pound of fish 6 *folles*,²⁵ a loaf of bread as much as 3 *folles*, admittedly at a time of shortage.²⁶ The cheapest blanket cost one quarter of a *solidus*,²⁷ a second-hand cloak 1 *solidus*,²⁸ and a donkey roughly 3 to 4 *solidi*. It is obvious that a labourer or a mason, even if fully employed, lived just above the starvation line, unless he happened to be an ascetic who could survive on one portion of lupins per day (price 1 *follis*).

At the other end of the social scale, we find that bishop Porphyry of Gaza (late fourth century), who came of a noble family of Thessalonica, inherited on the death of his parents 3,000 *solidi*, plus another 1,400 of unspecified provenance as well as garments and silver vessels. This was only part of the estate, since Porphyry had a number of younger brothers.²⁹ We have already mentioned the Armenian Harfat whose parental estate amounted to 5,000 *solidi* plus land. These, it should be pointed out, were by no means exceptional fortunes, but such as might have been owned by fairly substantial decurions. An imperial magnate had immeasurably more. When Justinian’s general Belisarius fell from favour, the confiscated part of his property (he was allowed to keep the remainder) amounted to 216,000 *solidi*.³⁰

Let us now look at an imperial official of medium grade. John the Lydian, to whom we owe the treatise on *The Magistracies of the Roman*

State and other antiquarian works, arrived at Constantinople in 511 with a view to pursuing higher studies and then entering the administration. Luckily, a compatriot of his named Zoticus was at that very time appointed Praetorian Prefect. With the great man's help John received a post in the chancellery of the Prefecture, where a cousin of his was already employed, and in the course of one year he earned 'honestly' (as he himself says) 1,000 *solidi* by way of commissions. Delighted with such good fortune, he wrote a short panegyric of his patron and was rewarded with 1 *solidus* for each verse, naturally drawn from the public treasury. What is more, Zoticus also found a bride for his protégé, a woman of unsurpassed chastity who brought him a dowry of 100 lb of gold (7,200 *solidi*).³¹ It is true that after Zoticus had been destituted, John's career suffered a setback. Nevertheless, he remained another forty years in the office of the Prefecture, worked his way to the top of his grade and retired with the title of Count, First Class. An interesting case not only of an official's earnings, but also of the importance of patronage and of geographical ties.

Unfortunately, we know next to nothing about the income of the urban middle class. Speaking at Antioch, St John Chrysostom says that one tenth of the population was rich and another tenth completely indigent.³² We should not take these figures at face value, since the orator himself contradicts them in the next sentence. The number of the destitute, those entirely dependent on charity, was probably below 10 per cent if there is any truth in the statement quoted above that there were 7,500 beggars in the care of the Church of Alexandria, well below 5 per cent of that city's population. Nor can we conclude, I think, that 80 per cent of the inhabitants of Antioch were well-to-do. We have already seen that manual workers were extremely poor, and the same was no doubt true of other lowly occupations, such as hawkers and retailers. Craftsmen, normally organized in guilds, rated higher than retailers, and some trades, like those of the jeweller and the money-changer (*argyropratês*), could lead to substantial profits; but although we possess long lists of urban occupations, it is not possible to arrange them in ascending order. The general impression one gains is that tradesmen and craftsmen were not in a position to earn very much money. A man of this class might aspire to own his home, to buy a slave, to have a properly covered bed and a number of bronze vessels. These items established status (*schêma*) and were often acquired at the cost of stringent economies on essentials.³³

Among occupations that could lead to a measure of wealth, that of

merchant immediately comes to mind. The fourth-century *Expositio totius mundi* presents a fairly rosy picture of commercial activity. In Mesopotamia, it says, Nisibis and Edessa were very rich because the Persian trade was channelled through them. In Syria the ports of Tyre and Laodicea were particularly prosperous. Ascalon and Gaza in Palestine exported wine to Syria and Egypt. Scythopolis, Laodicea, Byblos, Tyre and Berytus were famous for their textiles. All those cities, our text says, depended on trade, and their inhabitants were rich, eloquent and virtuous. Another important centre, because of its proximity to the Persians and the Arabs, was Bostra. Egypt, of course, was renowned for its fertility. It produced everything except oil (and, we may add, wine of good quality) and Alexandria was the greatest port of the Empire. Of other parts our author seems to be informed by hearsay rather than by personal experience. He singles out the province of Asia (western Asia Minor) as a producer of wine, oil, rice, purple and spelt; other coastal regions of Asia Minor likewise for agricultural produce, while the districts of the interior contributed little more than textiles and animal skins. Concerning the Balkans he is less enthusiastic: Thrace was merely fertile; Macedonia had iron, embroideries, bacon and cheese; Greece could not even provide for its own needs, and Laconia produced only marble. Even so, Corinth had an active port.

Of course, there was a good deal of long-distance trade in the Later Roman Empire: trade in wine and oil, in salted fish and roe, in slaves, eastern spices, textiles and ready-made garments, in pottery and precious metals. Nevertheless, it did not result in the formation of great fortunes. The business tycoon was at no time a feature of Byzantine society, and perhaps the only merchant in the annals of Byzantine literature is the sixth-century Alexandrian Cosmas Indicopleustes: he certainly travelled far and wide, but we do not know whether he earned much money. The relatively low profitability of commerce was due to many interconnected causes: the weak purchasing power of the public, the self-sufficiency of most districts as regards essentials, the risks of long-distance travel. Shipwrecks were frequent and the winter months considered unfit for navigation, so that a good part of the year was dead for business. Interest rates on commercial loans were also very high. Another important factor was that the State (potentially the biggest customer) did not have recourse to private intermediaries. The provisioning of the capital cities as well as of the army was, as we would say, nationalized. The products (Egyptian corn, flax, wool, etc.) were levied directly in kind and transported by a State guild of shippers

(*navicularii*) who were attached to this service on a hereditary basis. Furthermore, the State maintained factories of arms and weaving mills to produce uniforms, and held a monopoly of mining. The role of the private merchant was correspondingly diminished. In the seventh century a long-distance commercial agent, the Jew Jacob, who was entrusted with a consignment of garments worth 144 *solidi* (hardly a big sum) to sell in Africa and Gaul, received 15 *solidi* a year as commission: no wonder he defrauded his employer.³⁴

The main source of wealth as well as of taxation was agriculture. There is a widely held view that the early Byzantine system was founded on large estates worked by slaves, but, strictly speaking, this is untrue. Servile labour was not much used on the land, being largely confined to domestic service. Even St John Chrysostom, who disapproved of the ostentatious accumulation of slaves, admitted that a freeborn man could not cook for himself.³⁵ The majority of slaves – and we have no idea what percentage they formed of the total population – consequently lived in cities. As for large estates, these certainly existed, though we should visualize them not so much as huge unbroken tracts, but rather as a great number of dispersed plots held by a single owner. In general, there was much fragmentation of land, and it was quite common for a landlord, whether an individual, the Church or the Crown, to hold estates in several provinces. Some well-known examples of very rich landowners, like the Apion family in Egypt, should not blind us to the presence of medium and small freeholders often grouped in autonomous communes. The archaeological exploration of the Limestone Massif in north Syria, a region that attained great prosperity thanks to the cultivation of the olive tree, has shown not only the co-existence of large and small holdings, but also a general trend, in the period extending from the fourth to the sixth century, towards the break-up of the bigger estates and the growth of villages composed of relatively well-to-do, independent farmers.³⁶ While conditions in the Limestone Massif were probably untypical of the rest of Syria, not to speak of other parts of the Empire, they serve to emphasize the danger of drawing general conclusions from literary and legislative texts.

If the slave was generally absent from the rural landscape, the tenant farmer (*colonus*) was an important feature of it. A man of degraded and anomalous status, the *colonus* was theoretically free, but in practice tied to his plot. He was, as a law of 393 puts it, ‘a slave of the land’.³⁷ His condition was hereditary, his freedom to marry restricted, and he could not even join the army. The master of his land collected his taxes and

was empowered to put him in chains if he tried to run away. It was openly admitted by the government that there was little difference between the status of a slave and that of a *colonus*.³⁸ The authorities, of course, were not animated by pure sadism in curbing the liberties of the tenant farmer; their primary concern was the collection of tax in accordance with the established registers. For if there was one institution that left an indelible mark on the Late Roman and Byzantine way of life, that was surely taxation. The imposition of regular and extraordinary levies – in kind upon the farmer and in money upon the merchant and artisan – was meant to be equitable; in fact, it hit the agricultural population harder than the urban, and the poor much more than the rich. The unfortunate *colonus* was deprived of about a third of his yield in tax, on top of which he had to pay rent to his landlord. It was exorbitant taxation that drove many Romans to desert to the enemy, no less so in the eleventh century³⁹ than in the fourth and fifth, that obliged farmers to abandon their fields, that filled the monasteries and impoverished decurions. The *indictio* or imposition of tax on a fifteen-year cycle became the most widespread form of counting years in the Byzantine Empire.

As we survey, however briefly, the social and economic history of the Early Byzantine State, we see an ever-tightening ring of interlocking constraints. The introduction of a planned economy by the Emperor Diocletian in the last decade of the third century was probably a necessary step: the State might not have survived without it. A planned economy made possible something that had not existed earlier, namely a State budget. How else could one meet the vastly increased, yet variable, cost of the army? A budget meant a rationalized system of taxation, which meant a census, which meant an expanded bureaucracy. As a result of Diocletian's reforms, the Roman world was filled with officialdom, and it could already be said in the fourth century (no doubt with considerable exaggeration) that the number of beneficiaries exceeded that of taxpayers.⁴⁰ As we all know, however, a bureaucracy generates its own momentum, and taxes have a tendency of going up rather than coming down. It is an undeniable fact that from the fourth century onwards more and more land was going out of cultivation, and it is highly likely that the main cause of this was taxation. As the tax yield diminished, the officials, armed with their registers, had no choice but to apply more repressive measures: everyone, from the lowly *colonus* to the decurion, had to be kept in his place. But the wheels of government ground slowly, distances were great, and there was plenty of scope

for fraud and evasion. The figure of the patron, the 'fixer', the man of influence thus came to stand at the centre of the stage, so much so that even the cult of Christian saints was visualized in terms of patronage, as we shall see in a later chapter. We have mentioned the case of Jacob, the Jewish travelling salesman. There is a sequel to his story. When Jacob's employer at Constantinople learned that he had been defrauded, what did he do? Did he have recourse to the law? Not at all. He went to see his patron, a chamberlain in the imperial palace, and the chamberlain sent 'his own man' to Carthage to apprehend Jacob who, in the meantime, had embraced Christianity.⁴¹

The rigidity of the Early Byzantine social and economic structure could always be circumvented by devious means. Whatever the laws prescribed (and there is no reason to think that they were systematically applied), a resourceful man usually found a way of getting on in life. There were, of course, recognized means of social ascension, notably the army and the civil service. There are many instances of simple soldiers rising to important commands, even to the imperial throne, and of sausage-makers' sons becoming great ministers of State. And once a fortune had been made, it tended to remain in the same family for several generations, unless it was confiscated. While there was no hereditary aristocracy as an institution, officialdom brought money and money secured government posts. But then there were other ways of social mobility. The fourth-century heretic Aetius is said to have started life as a *colonus* on a vineyard. He then managed to become a smith, was apprehended for fraud, apprenticed himself to a quack doctor, emerged as a physician in his own right, came to the attention of the Caesar Gallus (Julian's brother) and ended up as a famous theologian.⁴² The story may well be malicious, but it shows that this kind of career was possible. Rigidity tempered by evasion may thus be a suitable description of the Early Byzantine social structure. Perhaps it applies to other planned economies as well.

The collapse of the Early Byzantine State at the very time when the unfortunate Jacob was being bundled off from Carthage to Constantinople must have caused profound social readjustments. Unfortunately, we do not have the documentation to follow these in any detail. When the curtain of darkness begins to lift in the ninth century, we perceive that rather a different world has come into being, but we know very little about the intermediary process.

What we can see most clearly is that the entire machinery of the

imperial government was put on a different footing. The great ministries of State, like the praetorian prefectures, and the great military commands of the Masters of Soldiers were abolished. In their place we find a greatly increased number of officials, all of them responsible directly to the emperor and not arranged in a hierarchical pyramid. The nature of the change, as J. B. Bury defined it,⁴³ was 'to substitute the principle of co-ordination for that of subordination, and to multiply supreme offices instead of placing immense powers in the hands of a few'. Most striking of all was the restructuring of the provincial administration which was initiated, it seems, by the Emperor Heraclius. The old provinces grouped into dioceses were replaced by a number of large units called *themata* or 'themes', each governed by a *stratêgos* (general) whose competence included both military and civil affairs. This reform was first applied to Asia Minor and subsequently extended to European provinces as the latter were gradually liberated from the barbarians; simultaneously, the large 'themes', as originally constituted, were split up into smaller ones. The term *thema*, whose exact derivation still remains unclear, denoted in the first instance a corps of soldiers and, by extension, the district in which it was stationed. Following the first implantation of soldiers, after whom the 'theme' often received its name, recruitment seems to have been carried on locally, so that a permanent, indigenous army came into being. The resemblance to the old system of the *limitanei* is obvious, but now the whole territory of the Empire became, so to speak, a frontier zone. Some scholars believe that the salvation of the Empire during its long struggle with the Arabs was achieved by this radical reform. They also hold that the soldiers (*stratiôtai*) of the 'themes' received from the very beginning grants of land on condition of hereditary military service, and that they tilled this land while not serving on campaign. This picture of vigorous soldier-farmers defending their hearths against the invader is contrasted with the 'effete' society of the previous age which spent its time at the theatre and paid barbarian mercenaries to do the fighting.

There can be no doubt that the institution of the 'themes' involved a thorough militarization of the Empire corresponding to the harsh realities of contemporary life, but it is not at all clear how the system worked in the first two or three centuries of its existence or what social conditions it overlay. The accepted view is that the 'thematic' reform was accompanied by a general fragmentation of the large estates characteristic (or so it is claimed) of the Early Byzantine period, and that the rural society of the Dark Ages was one in which free com-

munities of medium and smallholders predominated. To the extent that considerable numbers of immigrants were settled within the Empire at this time, as we already saw in Chapter 1, it follows that lands must have been found for them, but whether these were Crown lands or those of earlier magnates is not recorded. Nor is there any mention, as far as I know, of landowners being dispossessed in favour of immigrants or of the soldiers of the 'themes'. In any case, if there was really a trend from large to small holdings, it must have been a relative one, since, on the one hand, it is by no means certain that *latifundia* had previously been the norm in the eastern provinces, and, on the other, large estates are well attested in the eighth and ninth centuries, as will appear shortly. We may see here a change of degree rather than a revolution.

A piece of evidence that is often introduced into this context is the so-called Farmer's Law.⁴⁴ This picturesque document, which is said to date from the late seventh or the early eighth century, regulates in simple terms disputes arising in a village community. The farmers, some of whom own slaves or hire herdsmen, are represented as owners of their own fields and cattle and are free to come and go as they please. There are impoverished farmers who abandon their land, in which case the tax due on it falls on the community, but sometimes an absent farmer continues to meet his obligations *vis-à-vis* the Treasury and retains full ownership of his property, whether it is cultivated or not. There are communal lands which are divided from time to time as well as woodland within reach of the village. Orchards and vineyards are protected by ditches or fences, but fields are not, and cattle often stray into them. Herds are attacked by wolves, dogs fight and are occasionally put down, farmers pinch one another's implements. Harsh and often barbarous penalties are imposed on offenders – amputation of hands or tongue, blinding, impalement, death by fire. Despite its brevity, the Farmer's Law presents a vivid picture of village life. Can we be sure, however, that it describes a situation that was then typical of the Byzantine countryside? Can we infer from its silence on the subject of *coloni* that the latter no longer existed or were exceptional, even though they reappear under the name of *paroikoi* by the beginning of the ninth century at the latest? Or does the Farmer's Law apply to a particular kind of community whose commonness or rarity we are unable to establish? Finally, how does the Farmer's Law relate to the system of the 'themes'? It makes no mention of military service or of landholding conditional on service.

The continued existence of large estates is proved by a number of concrete cases. I shall not insist on one that has been often quoted, that of the Paphlagonian St Philaretos (d. 792), who is said to have possessed 48 domains, 12,000 sheep, 600 oxen, and more, all of which he distributed to the needy.⁴⁵ A more credible example is provided by St Theophanes Confessor, author of a famous chronicle, who was born in 760, the son of the governor of the 'theme' of the Aegean Sea. Left an orphan at the age of three, he grew up as a very rich young man and married a woman of equal wealth. He possessed extensive estates in Bithynia and many slaves, both male and female, including his private goldsmith. Entering imperial service with the rank of *strator* (groom), he was appointed to supervise the reconstruction of the fort of Cyzicus and acquitted himself of this task at his own expense. He would have climbed much higher in the imperial hierarchy had he not decided to become a monk and given away his property; even then he was able to raise sufficient capital for the construction of a very substantial monastery.⁴⁶ An even more extreme case is that of the widow Danelis of Patras who befriended Basil the Macedonian (the future Emperor Basil I) when the latter was as yet an obscure young man. She is described as owning 'no small part of the Peloponnese'. On her two subsequent visits to Constantinople she was carried overland in a litter by 300 vigorous young slaves who worked in relays. Her estate, which she eventually bequeathed to the Emperor Leo VI, an estate 'exceeding any private fortune and barely inferior to that of a ruler', included 80 domains and over 3,000 slaves whom the emperor sent as colonists to southern Italy.⁴⁷ It may be recalled that the Peloponnese was made into a 'theme' in about 810 following its recovery from independent Slavonic tribes. In the light of accepted theory it ought to have been settled by soldier-farmers. Yet the vast estates of Danelis were built up at this very time, since she was already a grandmother and a plutocrat when she first met Basil in the 850s.

The truth of the matter, it seems to me, is that historians have been looking in the wrong direction. Assuming a continuity of urban life in the Dark Ages, they have sought to discover an agrarian revolution. In fact, it was urban life that collapsed, as we shall see in the next chapter, whereas conditions in the countryside may not have undergone a structural change. Quite simply, the Empire was ruralized. The absence, on the one hand, of big urban populations that had to be fed, the infusion of fresh manpower into the countryside, on the other, brought about the plenty and cheapness of foodstuffs that are attested

in the eighth century. At the same time the cost of maintaining the army was greatly diminished when barbarian mercenaries ceased to be recruited on a big scale. As a result of these developments, which we can discern only in the broadest outline, the complex constraints of the Early Byzantine period could be eased. If peasants regained a measure of freedom, that was probably because there were enough of them in relation to the needs of the Treasury.

The Church, too, was greatly affected by the collapse of the cities. The provincial bishop of the Middle Byzantine period was but a pale shadow of his predecessors. The Council of 869 sought to re-establish his dignity and in so doing has given us a glimpse of his social status. It ruled that a bishop ought not to go a long distance from his church to meet a *stratêgos* or any other lay dignitary; he ought not to dismount hastily from his horse or his mule and approach the said dignitary with fear and trembling; he ought not even to dine in the company of a dignitary lest he was obliged to show him undue deference.⁴⁸ If bishops were so terrified of their local governors, it is not surprising that they showed complete subservience to the emperor's wishes, even when the emperor happened to be a heretic. A hundred years later the Lombard ambassador Liudprand remarked that Byzantine bishops had few servants and lowly furnishings, that they bought and sold, and acted as their own janitors.⁴⁹ Appointment to a bishopric could be bought for a modest amount: that of Sebaste (Sivas) in eastern Asia Minor was worth 100 *solidi* in the early tenth century.⁵⁰ By way of comparison, the court title of *protospatharios*, which carried an annuity at 2½ per cent, could be secured at the same time for a payment of 40 lb of gold, that is, close to 3,000 *solidi*. The decline in the fortunes of the Church was not due entirely to the eclipse of urban life: another contributing factor was that donations were directed more and more to monasteries, which tended to acquire an independent status, as we shall see in Chapter 5. The bishoprics were thus left with their landed properties on which they paid the basic tax, and whatever small fees they could exact from monasteries as well as for ordinations, weddings, baptisms and the like. In other words, they were on a par with private landowners and usually acted as such, abandoning the sphere of 'social welfare'. Furthermore, life in a provincial episcopal seat was extremely dreary: for an educated man who was used to the amenities of Constantinople it was equivalent to a sentence of banishment. No wonder that bishops tarried as long as possible in the capital on various excuses and often had to be pressured to return to their rustic flocks.

The development of Byzantine society during the Middle period is marked by two contradictory trends: on the one hand, a steady movement towards a kind of feudalism, on the other, a tenuous growth of an urban bourgeoisie. The former has received much more attention from historians than the latter.

The troubles of the seventh and eighth centuries appear to have pretty much obliterated the leading families of the previous period. Their ruination was probably due, above all, to economic reasons. Furthermore, a number of emperors, namely Phocas, Justinian II and Leo III, are said to have deliberately persecuted the upper classes. Whatever truth there may be in such allegations, the prominent people we meet from the eighth century onwards seem to be relative newcomers, many of them being clearly of foreign extraction. Although the prosopographic evidence at our disposal is extremely meagre, we can nevertheless quote a few cases of important families that emerged in the eighth or ninth century and survived a long time thereafter. We have said that St Theophanes Confessor (born in 760) was the son of a *stratêgos*; the latter, who was called by the name of Isaac (uncommon among Greeks), must, therefore, have been born in *c.* 720–30. Theophanes himself had no children, but a branch of his family must have lived on, since the Emperor Constantine VII (913–59) claimed him as a relative on the side of his mother, the Empress Zoe;⁵¹ and we further happen to know that Zoe's great-grandfather, active in the 820s, was a *stratêgos* of the Anatolic 'theme'.⁵² Another example is provided by the house of Rentakios or Rendakis. We first meet the patrician Sisinios Rendakis in 719 somewhere in Macedonia.⁵³ In 867 a Rentakios was chamberlain at the imperial palace,⁵⁴ and another Rentakios, described as an uncultivated 'Helladikos', i.e. a native of Greece, was put to death for intriguing with the Bulgarians in 920.⁵⁵ The latter, incidentally, was related to the patrician Nicetas, satirized for his 'sly Slavonic face', whose daughter Sophia married Christopher Lecapenus (d. 931), son of the Emperor Romanus I.⁵⁶ In the tenth century the Rentakioi were established landowners in Boeotia.⁵⁷

More important, however, were the great families that sprang up in eastern Asia Minor in the ninth and tenth centuries, such as the Phokades (sing. Phokas), the Sklêroi, the Maleinoi, the Doukai, and others. Partly or largely of Armenian descent and much intermarried among themselves, they held a near monopoly of high military commands. The Cappadocian Phokades, whose first known member was an obscure officer of the mid-ninth century, reached the imperial throne

in the person of Nicephorus Phokas; the next emperor, the Armenian John Tzimiskes, belonged to the Kourkouas clan which had given the Empire a series of brilliant generals; the Sklêroi, enemies of the Phokades, barely missed the throne as did also the Doukai in the person of Constantine Doukas (in 913), whose relationship to the imperial Doukas family of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is unclear. These and other great clans brought to Byzantium a new aristocratic ideal. Ancient lineage was much prized among them, and fictitious genealogies were fabricated: the Phokades claimed descent from the Roman Fabii,⁵⁸ the Doukai from a non-existent cousin of Constantine the Great,⁵⁹ and even the Emperor Basil I, who came of an obscure Armenian background, was ingeniously linked with the kingly house of the Arsacids. 'We come from the Anatolic theme, from among noble Romans. Our father is descended from the Kinnamoi, our mother is a Doukas of Constantine's family. There are twelve generals (*stratêgoi*) among our cousins and uncles': thus speak the uncles of the epic hero Digenes Akrites whose exploits epitomize the ideals of valour and chivalry of the eastern aristocracy.⁶⁰

The material enlargement of the great landowners is most fully documented in a collection of imperial enactments spanning the period from about 927 until 996.⁶¹ Their immediate cause was the severe famine of 927-8 which forced many farmers to sell their lands at absurdly low prices. The plight of the 'poor' was exploited by the 'powerful' (*dynatoi*) who were thus able to absorb the holdings of peasants and soldiers and to infiltrate independent village communities. This was the trend that the emperors of the tenth century tried to curb; and the frequency of their enactments proves the lack of their success. But who exactly were the 'powerful'? Interestingly enough, they are defined not in economic terms, but in terms of influence and rank. The 'powerful' were those who either by themselves or through intermediaries were able to terrorize the vendors or to bribe them by promises of protection. More precisely, they were *magistri* and patricians, holders of other civil and military dignities, members of the imperial senate, provincial magistrates, bishops, abbots, other ecclesiastical officials, the heads of charitable institutions and imperial domains. Minor civil servants (*sekretikoi*) and guardsmen (*scholarii*) provided the upper limit of the 'poor' class. Guardsmen, however, were regarded as being more influential than soldiers (*stratiôtai*) and civil servants superior to those not holding any government position. There existed, therefore, in the Byzantine countryside a complex social

hierarchy; and while it was possible for an ordinary person to work his way up the ladder, such ascension was viewed with disapproval. The emperors ordered that any humble people who 'in some mysterious way' had risen to a higher position would be reduced forthwith to their former estate. A particular example was made of a certain Philokales who, starting as a villager, rose to the rank of *prôtovestiarîos* and in so doing had acquired all the lands of the community in which he lived. Not only was he destituted, but the splendid dwellings he had built for himself were razed to the ground. The artful Philokales may have recovered from the blow since his name was borne by a very prominent family of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The concern of the imperial government in repressing 'the insatiable greed' of the powerful was partly military, partly fiscal. Service in the army was at that time (we do not know exactly since when) dependent on ownership of land worth a minimum of 4 lb of gold and remained at that level until the reign of Nicephorus II Phokas who raised it to 12 lb because of the introduction of heavier armour.⁶² Clearly, the army would have been depleted if soldier-farmers were forced to sell their holdings. The fiscal considerations are not quite so obvious, since lands entered in the tax registers would presumably have kept the same status whether their owners were poor or powerful. The unstated assumption, it seems, is that whereas the poor paid their taxes, the powerful had ways of evading them. Grants of immunity (*exkousseia*), which are known to have existed before the tenth century and which grew increasingly frequent in the eleventh and twelfth, were probably among the loopholes available to influential persons. Immunity from some or all taxes, applicable to land as well as to resident tenant farmers, was often awarded to monasteries and charitable establishments, but also to individuals in return for services rendered to the State and, possibly, on the strength of personal connections. Besides, Treasury inspectors were open to bribery and even provincial judges, 'out of necessity rather than inclination', could be prevailed upon to display the typically Byzantine expedient of *oikonomia*, or compromise.⁶³

The consolidation of a landed aristocracy which acquired titles in the imperial hierarchy and a natural claim to great military commands, the gradual withdrawal of their vast estates from direct control by the government, the ineluctable regression of petty landholders – such appear to be the characteristics of Byzantine society in the tenth century. We are still a long way from anything that may legitimately be called feudalism, even if we interpret feudalism not in its precise

institutional meaning which is only applicable to western Europe and, in particular, to the states descended from the Carolingian Empire, but in a broader sense involving a structure of personal dependence, rights over property corresponding to such dependence, and a fragmentation of political authority. Yet a trend towards 'feudalization' is unmistakably apparent in Byzantine society. We have witnessed its beginnings; its further development lies in the period of the Comneni and extends over that of the Palaeologi.

Two institutions in particular have attracted attention in this context. The first is the *pronoia* which roughly corresponds to the western benefice or tenement. First attested in the reign of Alexius I, this was the grant of an estate and resident serfs (*paroikoi*) to a knight on condition of military service. The *pronoia* was not heritable and its beneficiary was called simply a soldier (*stratiôtês*), just as in the west a vassal was sometimes designated as a *miles*. Speaking of the reign of Manuel I, and using, unfortunately, very florid language, the historian Nicetas Choniates reports that that emperor withheld the pay of soldiers and rewarded them instead 'with the so-called grants of *paroikoi*, abusing a system that had been instituted by previous emperors'. As a result, there was a great influx of applicants to the army, one man contributing a horse, another a sum of gold, and receiving in return 'imperial diplomas awarding to them acres of shady land, corn-bearing fields and Roman tributaries, the latter to serve them in the guise of slaves, so that occasionally a Roman of venerable aspect and well versed in the art of war would be paying taxes to some half-barbarian *parvenu* who did not even know the nature of a military formation'.⁶⁴ Evidently, such grants were made on a wide scale, and their consequence in the eyes of Choniates was that Byzantine lands were pillaged and appropriated by foreigners – indeed, some of the knights in question were Latins and Cumans.

The second noticeable development concerns the growth of private retinues. It may be argued that this was nothing new in Byzantium, that already in the Later Roman Empire there were private bands of soldiers called *buccellarii*, and that in the Middle Byzantine period there are scattered references to noblemen being surrounded by a circle of retainers; yet it is surely no accident that from the eleventh century onwards we hear more and more about such suites consisting not only of slaves and relatives, but also of armed guards, often in considerable numbers. It also appears that there were ties of dependence between greater and lesser nobility. Cecaumenus, in addressing advice to his

son, envisages the possibility of his serving a lord (*archôn*), this being clearly distinguished from imperial service: 'If you are serving a lord, serve him not as a lord and as a man, but as an emperor and a god. Even if he is ignorant and incapable, while you have an abundance of knowledge, wisdom and skill, do not scorn him lest he ruin you.' Cecaumenus also counsels extreme reserve with regard to one's 'lady' – 'if she is playful with you, withdraw and keep your distance' – and kindness towards one's 'men', meaning retainers.⁶⁵ At about the same time the minor nobleman Eustathios Boilas speaks of serving for a period of fifteen years the Armenian Michael Apokapes (Aboukab), Duke of Edessa, from whom he received many benefits; and even if this service was in the context of the imperial government, it should be noticed that Boilas regarded Michael's two sons as his 'lords'.⁶⁶

Our difficulty in describing the growth of Byzantine 'feudalism' stems from the fact that it never became formalized in law and did not acquire a technical vocabulary. The Byzantines were, of course, aware of the institutions of western feudalism, and in dealing with Frankish knights and princes the emperor would often extract from them an oath of fealty. The term *lizios* (liegeman) thus found its way into the Greek language, but it remained reserved to foreigners. Its Byzantine equivalent, we are told, was 'servant and subject' (*oiketês kai hypocheirios*),⁶⁷ and it may well be that these and similar Greek words, which occur very frequently in our sources, do sometimes refer to vassalage, but the context is seldom sufficiently clear to establish the distinction. While we may grant, therefore, that a coherent structure of feudal relations never developed in Byzantium, we must also admit that there did grow up a largely unformulated system that resembled feudalism in many respects. A dispersal of central authority was both its cause and its effect.

Side by side with the establishment of quasi-feudal relations, a contrary trend was occurring in the Byzantine world. As we shall explain more fully in the next chapter, urban life, which had been practically extinguished by the calamities of the seventh and eighth centuries, began picking up again. Among the possible causes of this phenomenon, one may point to increasing security and the opening of new trade routes. The Muslim threat was receding. In Asia Minor Byzantine armies were taking the offensive, an offensive that was eventually to carry them beyond the Taurus mountains into Cilicia and Syria. In the Black Sea region the newly arrived Russians, soon to be

converted to Orthodox Christianity, created possibilities for long-distance trade channelled directly through Constantinople. Bulgaria adopted more peaceful ways after the death of the terrible Tsar Symeon (927) and was totally subdued by 1018. Navigation in the Aegean, still very dangerous in the first half of the tenth century, was made safe after the reduction of the Arab base on Crete (961). Little by little conditions were improving for the rebirth of an urban economy.

It cannot be said that the imperial government showed undue haste in taking advantage of the new opportunities. We possess two important documents from about the year 900 relating to economic activity, and both of them show a spirit of distrust and conservatism. The first is the text of two treaties concluded between the Byzantines and the Viking Russians.⁶⁸ We learn from them that a Russian commercial colony was established at Constantinople or, to be more exact, some distance up the Bosphorus in the suburb of St Mamas (modern Beşiktaş). The concern of the imperial authorities was mainly to keep the Russians under close surveillance rather than to derive maximum profit from the contact. The names of the Russian merchants were recorded, and they were allowed to enter the city through one gate only, in groups of fifty, escorted by a government agent. On the other hand, they received free allowances of food and wine for a period of up to six months, and were permitted to conduct their business without payment of duty. The treaties do make provision for Byzantine ships coming to grief somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Russians, in other words along the Black Sea coast, but we do not hear of any activity of Byzantine merchants at Kiev or farther north. In short, the Byzantines were content to sit at home and wait for foreign traders to come to them.

The other document we have to consider is the *Book of the Prefect* which dates from the reign of Leo VI (886–912).⁶⁹ The text we possess, which may be incomplete as it stands, regulates the activities of twenty-two professional corporations that were controlled by the prefect of Constantinople. The lawgiver's main intentions were to keep each profession within the strict bounds of its competence, concentrated in one locality where it could be easily supervised; to prohibit undue profits; and to prevent the export of certain luxury goods. Depressing as the perusal of the *Book of the Prefect* must be to anyone who believes in free enterprise, it does provide an interesting picture of the commercial life of the capital. Imported goods included raw materials such as wax for candles, but also finished products, such as unguents

that came by way of Trebizond, linen cloth from the region of the Strymon and from Pontus, and Syrian silks that were brought by Syrian merchants. The latter were confined to their *mitata* (something like the Italian *fondaco* or the Turkish *han*) and could not remain longer than three months in the capital. Particular attention was devoted to the textile trade which comprised six different occupations, namely the *vestiopratai* who dealt in precious stuffs, the *prandiopratai* who specialized in Syrian imports, the *metaxopratai* who traded in raw silk, the *katartarioi* who worked the silk, the *sêrikarioi* who sewed the stuff they bought from the *metaxopratai*, and finally the *othoniopratai* or traders in linen. Each occupation was strictly confined to its own line of business; all purchases worth more than ten *solidi* had to be declared to the Prefect; and particular attention was paid so that 'prohibited goods', i.e. mainly purple cloth, should not leave the capital and find its way to the barbarian nations. It is interesting to note that the *metaxopratai* were forbidden to buy their goods outside the city, just as they were not allowed to sell them to Jewish merchants for resale abroad. Similar restrictions applied to other professions: butchers (who were limited to sheep and goats) and pork butchers had to buy live animals at designated locations in the city, slaughter and sell them on the spot. They could not go outside the city and buy the livestock directly from the herdsmen. During Lent all traffic in meat was forbidden. Fishmongers could not leave the city to buy fish from fishermen, but had to meet the latter at the city wharfs. Anyone who contravened these and a multitude of other regulations was liable to expulsion from his guild, to flogging, tonsure and banishment.

The system was clearly designed to discourage initiative and enrichment and was justified by reference to the orderly nature of the universe as established by God. It must also have resulted in a negative balance of trade. We may imagine, however, as with all other Byzantine legislation, that the provisions of the *Book of the Prefect* were flouted more than they were observed. We also find that members of the aristocracy, who were forbidden to engage in business, began investing some of their assets in buying shops from which they could expect a yield of about 5 per cent in rent. A curious document of the same period records a number of such purchases: a linen shop at the Forum, occupying the space between two columns of the portico, cost 720 *solidi* and produced a rent of 38, part of a shop selling Syrian stuffs went for 432 *solidi* and rented for 15, and so on.⁷⁰

The opening of Byzantine society to the opportunities of trade and

the parallel growth of a professional class are especially noticeable in the eleventh century. At the death of the Emperor Basil II (1025) the Empire had expanded once again to its 'ideal' boundaries, namely the Danube on one side and the Euphrates on the other; and while it was still to make some small gains (the Armenian kingdom of Ani, Edessa, the east coast of Sicily), further aggrandizement was seen to be neither necessary nor practicable. For a time no major threat appeared along the frontiers and so, at long last, society could convert from a footing of permanent military preparedness to one of peace. On the institutional level the change was reflected in the gradual dismantling of the 'themes' and, with them, of the 'thematic' armies, in the growing importance of civil magistrates in the provinces and in the centralization of army command in the hands of two Domestics of the Schools, one for the east, the other for the west, in other words more or less, in a return to the system of the Early Byzantine period. Landholding tied to military service was phased out and the obligation to serve in the army was commuted to a tax which, again as in the Early period, was used to enlist foreign mercenaries, who were now Scandinavians, Russians, Franks, Arabs, Cumans, and others. On the monetary side one notices a very slight adulteration of the gold in the reign of Constantine IX (1042-55) and an increased circulation of silver and copper, a clear sign of greater economic activity and the growth of an urban economy. On the demographic side one can probably postulate a shift of population from the country to the towns, which was not without its dangers. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the class of traders and artisans broke out of the straitjacket of earlier restrictive regulation and assumed a role of political significance. New men, who hailed not from the entrenched families of central and eastern Asia Minor, but from the capital and the towns of the Aegean seacoast, rose to the top. Of this trend we have many indications. When, for example, the Emperor Michael V tried to rid himself of the ageing Empress Zoe (1042), he showered honours on 'the rabble of the marketplace and the practitioners of manual crafts', but in vain: the professional people were so loyal to the legitimate dynasty that they laid siege to the imperial palace and Michael was forced off the throne after 3,000 people had been killed in the fray.⁷¹ The next emperor, Constantine IX, 'admitted to the senate practically the entire throng of the marketplace', as Psellus notes with chagrin, although he himself belonged to the class of the 'new men'.⁷² Isaac Comnenus (1057) and Nicephorus Botaniates (1078) acceded to power with the help of tradesmen and professional corporations, while

Constantine X (1059–67) went so far as to abolish all distinctions between senators and ordinary citizens, and raised ‘artisans’ to high honours.⁷³ It is not for nothing that Cecaumenus delivered this piece of advice: ‘Pay the closest attention to events in the capital that nothing may escape you. Have spies in all the guilds and everywhere else so you may learn anything that is being plotted.’⁷⁴

It is one of the major tragedies of Byzantine history that the economic and social upsurge of the eleventh century was cut short before it had achieved any durable results, except perhaps in the realm of literature and the arts. The immediate cause was certainly military and political: the invasion of the Balkans by the Pechenegs, the sudden loss of most of Asia Minor to the Seljuk Turks, the war with the Normans, the negative effect of the Crusades. Would these reverses have been avoided if the Empire had retained its former, ‘healthy’ structure based on the ‘themes’ and a native army? It is easy to blame the ‘civil’ emperors of the eleventh century for their lack of forethought, and most historians have done so; it is more difficult to discern the deeper causes of the collapse of the 1070s. Demilitarization may have been one of them; another was surely the previously won expansion of the Empire – not to its ‘national boundaries’ as some scholars have put it, but well beyond any reasonable boundaries, over countries and peoples that had neither kinship nor sympathy with the government at Constantinople.

The ‘saviour’ who was called upon to pick up the pieces of the crumbling State, Alexius I Comnenus, faced an extremely hard task and probably did his best within his lights. Unfortunately, his vision was narrow and reactionary. Himself a member of a minor landholding family of Asia Minor, he had no sympathy with the new commercial class, and his greatest blunder was to concede to Venice (in 1082 or 1092) trading facilities at Constantinople and thirty-two other towns, from the Adriatic to the Syrian coast, with complete immunity from the payment of any duties. By this act the economic future of the Empire was sabotaged once and for all. The presence of Venetian and other Italian traders meant, of course, that Byzantine towns retained an appearance of animation, except that the major profits were siphoned off to the West. And so the centre of gravity of the Comnenian State shifted back to the land, of which there was now much less and which was to a considerable extent in the hands of big landowners. The political crisis was accompanied by a monetary collapse: the value of the Byzantine currency sank in the 1070s by more than half and never recovered again. The continued need to pay foreign mercenaries when

the State coffers were empty forced Alexius I to confiscate the treasures of the churches, a temporary expedient that aroused much censure. A longer-term solution was found in the *pronoia* system of which we have spoken, but at the price of further diminishing the yield of taxes.

The partition of the Empire was becoming a distinct possibility. It was suggested to Alexius before he had become emperor by his brother-in-law Nicephorus Melissenus; it was contemplated by John II with regard to his south-eastern provinces; and it actually came to pass in the 1180s and later, when Cyprus, parts of western Asia Minor and, finally, Trebizond seceded. It is perhaps a wonder that the Comnenian State managed to survive for a century and even nourish dreams of glory, and it did so by becoming largely a family concern. Alexius I and his successors purged the old aristocracy and surrounded themselves with their relatives by birth and marriage whose pompous and newly invented titles reflected the degree of their kinship with the reigning emperor, and all of whom received ample grants of land and exemption from taxes. The Comnenian reform marks the last significant transformation of Byzantine society: what the Comnenes had done the Palaeologi continued on a smaller scale.

CHAPTER 3

THE DISAPPEARANCE AND REVIVAL OF CITIES

In the sixth century the Empire saw itself as an aggregate of cities. The handbook of Hierocles enumerates – or rather enumerated when it was complete – 935 cities. Since, however, it does not include either Italy or the reconquered provinces of North Africa, the total for Justinian's reign would have been in excess of 1,500. We must remember that in antiquity the term 'city' (*polis* or *civitas*) was not, strictly speaking, the equivalent of a town: it designated a self-administering unit, and there was all the difference in the world between a 'city' like Alexandria or Ephesus, on the one hand, and some obscure hole like Zeldepa in Scythia, on the other. Normally, however, a 'city' meant a real town provided with a rural territory and we shall so take it in the following discussion.

The cities of the sixth century were, for the most part, of ancient origin. In the East a few had been founded in the Roman period, a greater number by the Hellenistic kings, while many others had had a continuous history stretching back to remotest antiquity. While it is true to say that the area in which the urban model prevailed increased in the Early Byzantine period, the number of cities founded by Christian emperors was relatively small and none of them developed into a centre of major importance. We must not imagine that the year 324 (or whatever other date we may choose for the beginning of the Byzantine period) marked any dramatic change for the inhabitants of the cities or, for that matter, of the countryside. Life went on pretty much as before. Some gradual transformations were taking place, but they were not sufficiently sudden for anyone to think that a new era was dawning.

The physical aspect of the cities of the Early Byzantine period may readily be visualized thanks to their remains that are still dotted round the Mediterranean. Normally, they were walled: some had been

fortified at a very early date, others at the time of the barbarian threat in the third century AD, others in the fourth. Inside the walls the layout of the streets was as regular as the terrain permitted. Often there were two main avenues, the Roman *cardo* and *decumanus*, meeting at right angles and terminating at the city gates. These avenues were quite wide (hence the Greek term *plateia* that was applied to them) and were bordered with covered colonnades that sheltered shops. At the junction of the main thoroughfares or elsewhere was a forum round which were grouped various public buildings: a religious centre, baths, a council chamber, a basilica used for judicial and other purposes, etc. There was normally a theatre dating from an earlier period, less often an amphitheatre (a Roman invention that did not spread very widely in the eastern provinces) and, in larger cities, a hippodrome. More basic needs were served by granaries, aqueducts and cisterns. Public buildings and places were decorated, as lavishly as circumstances permitted, with statues, paintings and fountains. Indeed, cities took great pride in their monuments: Caesarea in Palestine had a famous *tetrapylon*, as did also Bostra in Arabia; Alexandria boasted its Pharos, its Serapeum and its Caesareum; Nicaea in Bithynia was noted for the regularity of its buildings.¹

The transition from paganism to Christianity was everywhere slow. Many pagan temples were closed at the end of the fourth and in the early fifth centuries, but elsewhere they continued to function. Their transformation into churches, whenever it occurred, was by no means immediate, the more so as the Christians regarded them as being haunted by maleficent demons. In Athens, for example (admittedly, a city of strong pagan proclivities), the temples appear to have been deconsecrated towards the end of the fifth century, and it was only in the seventh that the Parthenon, the Erechtheion and the Hephaisteion became churches. The main Christian church was usually built on a site unsullied by the old religions, often at some distance from the city centre, and was surrounded by a complex of residential and administrative buildings used by the bishop. As Christianity struck deeper roots, more and more churches were constructed to honour various martyrs or simply as a pious gesture. To take once again the case of Athens, fourteen churches of the fifth and sixth centuries are documented, and there were doubtless many more. By Justinian's time there was everywhere a glut of churches whose upkeep, as we have seen, was becoming a serious burden. Urban monasteries were exceptional, but were beginning to creep in from the surrounding countryside.

Other trends in late antique urbanism, such as the abandonment of gymnasia, were unconnected with the advent of Christianity. Outside the walls lay extensive cemeteries (since it was strictly forbidden to bury the dead *intra muros*), orchards and villas, and, sometimes, a Jewish suburb with its synagogue.

By our standards, Early Byzantine cities were quite small. Antioch, which, after Constantinople and Alexandria, was the third biggest city of the Eastern Empire, had in the sixth century an area of about 650 hectares within the walls. Laodicea in Syria, with 220 hectares, was large compared to other provincial cities. Perhaps a more typical example is provided by Nicaea whose third-century walls are still standing: the enclosed area has a maximum extent of 1,450 metres from north to south and east to west. Dara in Mesopotamia, founded by the Emperor Anastasius in 505–7 and regarded as one of the most important strongholds on the eastern frontier, measured about 1,000 by 750 metres. There is, unfortunately, no formula for converting area measurements into population figures: the amount of space covered by public buildings, streets, squares and orchards, the type of dwelling (single-storey or multi-storey), the extent of suburbs, are among the many imponderables. Nor do ancient sources yield any reliable figures. Quite exceptionally, we are given a detailed enumeration of dead bodies picked up in Jerusalem after the capture of the city by the Persians in 614: the total is 66,509.² We do not know, however, what relation this figure bore to the total population of Jerusalem, not to mention the fact that in times of crisis people from the surrounding countryside tended to seek the protection of a walled city. In any case, we shall not be too far from the truth in supposing that a large provincial city like Laodicea may have had a population of about 50,000, while an average provincial city may have been in the 5,000–20,000 range. Antioch, it has been surmised, had about 200,000 inhabitants and Constantinople in the fifth century probably more than 300,000.

To the ancient mind there was a fundamental distinction between urban and rural life. Procopius, writing in his most traditional manner, puts it like this with reference to the city of Caputvada founded in Africa by Justinian: 'A wall has been fashioned and a city, too, and the condition of farmland has been suddenly changed. The rustics have discarded the plough and are living in an urban fashion. Here they spend the day in the market place, they assemble to discuss the matters that are necessary to them, they traffic with one another and do

all the other things that are commensurate with the dignity of a city.’³ We may wonder how many of the new citizens of Caputvada spent their time in the assembly chamber deliberating on questions of public concern. Of one thing, however, there can be no doubt: the city and the city alone provided certain amenities that were considered an essential part of civilized life. Men, women and children (including the clergy) went regularly to public baths and spent a good deal of time on the ritual of bathing. This was normally done during working hours, for we are told that the baths were emptiest at noon and in the evening.⁴ The theatre and the hippodrome were immensely popular and also occupied a good part of the day: theatrical performances started at noon and lasted until evening. For the more cultivated there were the displays put on by rhetoricians: we could call them public lectures, except that the emphasis was on literary skill rather than on information imparted. Finally, there was the pleasure of meeting friends, of chatting in the shade of colonnades or sitting in taverns. City life was very public.

The theatre, the wild beast fights and the hippodrome were the main targets of ecclesiastical invective. ‘The theatre is filled,’ cries John Chrysostom, ‘and the entire people is seated in the upper rows. Often the roof itself is covered with men so you can see neither tiles nor stone slabs – nothing but human heads and bodies.’⁵ We know very little about the content of the performances for, if any new plays were written at the time, none has survived. We are, however, told that some were of the traditional type: they were played in masks and introduced imaginary characters, such as kings, generals, physicians and sophists. In order to make his moral point, John Chrysostom emphasizes the fact that the actors were vulgar folk – rope-twisters, perchance, or vegetable vendors or even slaves.⁶ Then there was the pantomime which involved dancing and music and occasionally, it seems, a certain amount of nudity: ‘When you seat yourself in a theatre and feast your eyes on the naked limbs of women, you are pleased for a time, but then, what a violent fever have you generated! Once your head is filled with such sights and the songs that go with them, you think about them even in your dreams.’⁷ If only, sighs our preacher, it were possible to abolish the theatre! It was the source of civil disorder, of adultery, sorcery, contempt for women; but since the theatre could not be abolished, it was, at least, possible to avoid it.⁸ Manifestly, it was the devil who had built theatres in cities. People even abandoned their trades and shops to go to the theatre, and when the actors said something indecent, the

senseless audience laughed instead of stoning them. 'You would not choose to see a naked woman in the marketplace, nor indeed in your own house, yet you eagerly attend the theatre. What difference does it make if the stripper is a whore? She has the same body as a free woman. Why are such things permitted when we are gathered together and shameful when we are by ourselves? Indeed, it would be better to smear our faces with mud than to behold such spectacles.'⁹

Historians have blindly followed the Church Fathers in denouncing the shameful licentiousness of the Late Antique theatre. No matter how indecent the performances were (and, perhaps, by modern standards they were fairly innocuous), the important point is that the Fathers saw in the theatre a dangerous competitor: it drew their clientele away from church and siphoned off money that might have found its way into ecclesiastical coffers. The charge of indecency was, in any case, not applicable to the hippodrome which attracted even bigger crowds and was regularly attended by the emperor. One could argue only that it led to disorders and occasioned magical practices. Besides, was it not a scandal that people should know the pedigree, the herd, the age, the names of their favourite horses, or which charioteer starting from which gate and driving which horse would win the race, when these same people were unable to name St Paul's Epistles?¹⁰ It seems that a good part of the urban population paid little heed to such denunciations. The historian Menander Protector, in speaking of his mis-spent youth in the reign of Justin II (565–78), says that he laid aside his legal studies in favour of hippodrome races, pantomime dancing and wrestling.¹¹

From the great capitals of Antioch and Constantinople, as portrayed by John Chrysostom, we may move to a provincial and barely hellenized town, namely Emesa in Syria (Homs). A glimpse of it in the middle of the sixth century is provided by the Life of St Symeon the Fool.¹² Since Symeon was a dropout, his dealings were mostly with the lower strata of society, but he did have some contacts among more respectable people: indeed, his closest friend and protector was a certain deacon John who was a man of substance. We also meet a rich man who flogged his slaves and who, on one occasion, was robbed of five hundred gold pieces by his cup-bearer, and a merchant who went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Manufacture is represented solely by a Jewish glass-blower round whose oven beggars would gather to keep warm. Taverns were numerous and somehow differentiated so that a publican (*kapêlos*) was not quite the same as a *phouskarios* who sold a mixture of cheap wine and water (Latin *posca*) along with lupins and chick peas by way of

snacks. We also encounter a confectioner whose shop remained open even during holy week, and vendors of pastry whose platters were set up outside the main church. There were physicians in the city, but also sorceresses who made amulets. Supplies came from the surrounding countryside: we meet a muleteer who, every morning, went out of the town to buy wine directly from the farmers and who, in due course, opened a tavern of his own. People also went out of town to wash their clothes in the river Orontes which flowed about a mile to the west.

The lower strata of society included mimes and jugglers who performed in the theatre, and a great throng of prostitutes, dancing girls and beggars. The standard of morals appears to have been fairly lax: the son of the deacon John fornicated with a married woman, a rich man was unfaithful to his wife, and the saint could foretell that a group of little girls who sang songs in the street would grow up to become as licentious as any women in Syria. Standards of cleanliness were equally low: outside the city gate was a heap of refuse on which lay a dead dog, and the saint did not hesitate to ease his stomach in the middle of the marketplace. There were, however, public baths, one for men and another for women, as well as schools for boys. No establishment of higher education is mentioned.

While respectable women stayed at home, men led their lives in public. In one's neighbourhood everybody knew everybody else, but when a man moved to a different neighbourhood, he was no longer recognized. Young men would loiter in public places, dance, drink in taverns and consort with prostitutes. They also played some sort of game in an open field outside the city walls, a game that involved two opposing teams as well as 'gates', or goals. Since Emesa had no hippodrome, there is no mention of charioteers nor of the usual rivalry between the supporters of the Greens and those of the Blues. Sectarian strife also appears to have been dormant, although the population included Jacobites, orthodox Christians and Jews. We may remember that the greatest Byzantine hymnographer, Romanus the Melode, is said to have been a converted Jew of Emesa.

By and large, the kind of urban life we have been describing went on in the eastern provinces until the middle of the sixth century and, in a diminished way, until the middle of the seventh. Naturally, there were regional variations. In the Balkans urban conditions were seriously disrupted by Attila's Huns in 441-7 and again by Theodoric's Ostrogoths in 479. The biggest cities of the interior fell: Singidunum (Belgrade), Naissus (Niš), Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica),

Marcianopolis, Serdica (Sofia). In 449 Naissus was uninhabited¹³ and was still in ruins a hundred years later when Justinian re-fortified it.¹⁴ Stobi and Heraclea Lyncestis succumbed to the Ostrogoths. To be sure, some of the damage was made good thereafter, but it was at best a partial restoration and it did not last long since everything was swept away by the Avar and Slav invasions. Elsewhere, however, no such dramatic change occurred in the fifth century. Some cities expanded while others dwindled. We know, for example, that Scythopolis in Palestine was declining, as was Pergamum in Asia Minor. So was Cyrrhus in northern Syria, where the municipal *curia* had melted away and there was not even a decent baker to be found.¹⁵ The causes of such decline were doubtless complex. There is considerable evidence from Syria of a shift of artisanal activity to villages, so that peasants no longer needed to sell their produce and buy necessary supplies in towns. The flight of guildsmen to the countryside is well attested in imperial legislation. The growth of monasteries, which absorbed craftsmen as well as farmers, may also have contributed to this process. It is, however, premature to assert that all small cities were dwindling and all big ones becoming inflated between the fourth and the sixth centuries. We need more information before we can discern such general trends.

As we approach the year 500 certain disturbing signs begin to appear. The first was purely fortuitous: the period in question witnessed a remarkable succession of droughts, plagues of locusts, earthquakes and other calamities. Now it has to be understood that the provisioning of an ancient city was pretty finely balanced. A city normally fed on the agricultural produce of its territory. The denser the network of cities, the smaller their respective territories. Egypt was almost unique in the East in having a vast agricultural surplus which, however, was fully committed to provisioning Constantinople and the imperial armies. Furthermore, transport by road was enormously slow and expensive. A coastal town could solve a temporary shortfall in supplies, but when calamity struck an inland town and accumulated stocks became exhausted, the people had to go hungry. What this meant in practice is vividly illustrated in the case of Edessa (Urfa). After several earthquakes and the outbreak of an infectious disease, there occurred in the year 500 a plague of locusts which attacked crops in a vast area stretching from the Mediterranean, across northern Mesopotamia, to the borders of Armenia. Reduced to misery, peasants had to sell their fields and their livestock for a pittance and flocked to

the cities in order to live by begging. The price of wheat rose from 30 to 4 bushels to the *solidus*, and that of barley from 50 to 6. All winter people were dying of hunger in the streets of Edessa, as many as 130 a day, so that all the available graves were soon filled up. Owing to the unsanitary conditions, a pestilence broke out and extended from Nisibis to Antioch. The harvest of 501 was poor, so that the inflated price of wheat remained almost stationary. It was only in 502 that it dropped to 12 bushels to the *solidus*, still more than double the normal rate. The catalogue of disasters recorded by the chronicler of Edessa includes the collapse by earthquake of Nicopolis (Emmaus), Ptolemais (Acre), half of Tyre and Sidon, and the capture by the Persians of Amida, where eighty thousand dead were carried out of the gates.¹⁶ It would have taken many years, indeed several generations, to recover fully from such a combination of calamities. This respite was not granted to many eastern provinces.

Another symptom of disintegration was urban violence. It may be argued, of course, that riots were nothing new and that in the previous two centuries there had been no lack of food riots, religious riots and theatre riots. There was, however, from the reign of Anastasius onwards an escalation of violence which centred more and more on the hippodrome. The two main factions, the Blues and the Greens, regularly came to blows and then went on to commit arson. The list of these disturbances is very long and some of them resulted in enormous damage, like the great pogrom at Antioch in 507 and the famous Nika riot at Constantinople (532) which is said to have left thirty thousand corpses and reduced the centre of the city to ashes. When Antioch had been almost completely destroyed by an earthquake in 526 with an alleged death-toll of 250,000, the warring factions became reconciled, but only for a short time.¹⁷ Especially chilling (if, doubtless, somewhat exaggerated) is the account given by Procopius of the hippodrome thugs who, he alleges, were given complete licence by the Emperor Justinian to rob and kill, rape women and extort money, with the result that respectable citizens no longer dared to go out after dark.¹⁸ In the light of our own experience we have no trouble in visualizing those bands of youths with long beards and moustaches, with dangling hair, dressed in deliberately barbaric fashion, who engaged in gang warfare when they were not waylaying innocent people. We also have no difficulty in believing what all the Byzantine sources tell us, namely that this was mindless hooliganism and nothing more. As has recently been demonstrated,¹⁹ the Blues and the Greens had no political objectives, no explicit class grievances or

religious identification. But while hooliganism has no philosophy, no one will deny that it is a symptom – be it of urban decay or a loss of values or an overly dull and regimented society.

While Byzantine cities were suffering from the combined effects of food shortages, natural calamities and factional violence, a completely unexpected blow fell on them. The bubonic plague of 541–2, the first of its kind attested in history, was by all accounts a disaster of unprecedented magnitude. Originating in Ethiopia, it spread from Egypt along the lines of maritime communication to all parts of the Mediterranean world as far as Spain in the west and Persia in the east. At Constantinople the plague broke out in the spring of 542 and raged for four months. According to Procopius, who was an eyewitness, the number of casualties rose to five thousand and then to over ten thousand each day.²⁰ As existing tombs became filled and there was no time to dig new ones, corpses were piled on the seashore or else flung into the towers of Sycae (Galata), whence an evil stench wafted over the city. Furthermore, the initial outbreak was followed by several others: epidemics of the plague or of other unspecified diseases are recorded in 555, 558, 561, 573–74, 591, 599 and in the early seventh century. Antioch was visited four times by the bubonic plague, roughly at fifteen-year intervals. The historian Evagrius himself caught it as a child; he later lost his wife, several children, a great number of slaves and tenant farmers and, during the fourth visitation, his daughter and grandchild.²¹

It is impossible to calculate the number of victims. When Procopius tells us that ‘nearly the whole human race was annihilated’,²² or that half of those who had survived previous natural calamities were carried off by the plague,²³ he is doubtless engaging in rhetorical exaggeration. Even so, it is possible that one third to half the population of Constantinople perished in 542, and we are told that some cities became practically deserted, while others were less affected. The attested fact that young adults were particularly susceptible to the disease, coupled with the fifteen-year cycles of recrudescence, must have produced extremely damaging demographic consequences. No less serious were the economic effects: all normal occupations were interrupted, prices of goods trebled and quadrupled, starvation set in, fields were deserted and the remaining farmers were burdened with additional taxes on the non-productive land of their deceased neighbours.²⁴

There can be little doubt that the plagues of the sixth century combined with an unprecedented sequence of natural disasters were a

factor, perhaps the determining factor, in the collapse of urban life. For it is a fact (though some historians still refuse to recognize it) that all round the Mediterranean the cities, as they had existed in Antiquity, contracted and then practically disappeared. This happened at different times in different provinces, and the immediate cause was usually foreign invasion. The ease with which walled cities fell to an enemy who was often neither very numerous nor skilled in siege warfare, and the absence of any urban resurgence after the enemy had withdrawn show, however, that military hostilities were merely the last shock that brought down a tottering edifice. As our historical sources dwindle after the reign of Justinian and are reduced to the merest trickle after 602, it is difficult to document this process on the basis of the written word. We are reduced to laconic reports of various calamities and vague echoes of a general breakdown of law and order. After the death of the emperor Maurice (602), civil strife sprang up 'in the whole East, in Cilicia, Asia, Palestine and even Constantinople'. People killed one another in the marketplace, broke into houses, threw women, children and old men out of windows, robbed and burnt. The wave of unrest spread to the Balkan provinces and it was only thanks to the miraculous intervention of St Demetrius that Thessalonica was spared.²⁵ It is amidst such scenes of disorder that the curtain falls.

The evidence for the collapse of the cities is largely archaeological. It should be stressed here that although many excavations have been conducted in different parts of the Empire, relatively few have been carried out in a sufficiently methodical manner. The superimposition of modern towns on ancient sites has also hampered investigation in some centres that would be of the greatest importance to us, notably Constantinople and Thessalonica. The available information is thus still rather patchy, but it is sufficient to draw certain conclusions from it. Here are a few examples taken from different provinces.

In the Balkans, as we have already said, urban life was seriously disrupted in the middle of the fifth century. The reconstruction that took place in the first half of the sixth was not very extensive and was not destined to survive for more than a few decades. Sirmium, once an imperial capital, never recovered after the Hunnic sack and became completely deserted after its surrender to the Avars in 582. If we move south to Stobi, a provincial capital, we find considerable evidence of building in the first half of the fifth century and again after the Ostrogothic sack of 479, but no building activity whatever after the

sixth century and no coins later than the seventh. At Heraclea Lyncestis, only partially excavated, the picture is about the same: the episcopal church was rebuilt in the early sixth century and the latest published coin is of Justin II. The small town of Bargala in Macedonia II (near modern Štip) was apparently relocated to a more defensible position in the fifth century and ceased to exist shortly after 585. If we move east to modern Bulgaria, we find that Serdica started as a small fortified town in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, was greatly expanded in the early fourth century, perhaps under Constantine, and shrank to its old nucleus (area fifteen hectares) in the sixth century, after which time we hear no more of it. Nicopolis-ad-Istrum, founded by Trajan, was apparently abandoned in the sixth century: some of its inhabitants may have moved south to a hilltop at Veliko Turnovo. At Philippopolis (Plovdiv) the urban area was cut in half in the sixth century and the city thereafter destroyed. We hear of it again in the early twelfth century when a population of Armenians and Bogomil heretics was dwelling there in the midst of ancient ruins.²⁶

The same panorama of abandonment is visible in Greece. At Athens the Agora excavations have established that there was widespread devastation in the 580s, followed by a period of makeshift existence lasting into the second half of the seventh century. Thereafter the area of the Agora was completely abandoned and the settlement retreated to the Acropolis and a small fortified enclosure immediately to the north of it. At Corinth many of the inhabitants fled in about 580 to the island of Aegina, while Byzantine presence was maintained in the inaccessible fortress of Acrocorinth. In the rest of the Peloponnese all cities were wiped out. For continental Greece our evidence is very sparse. In Boeotian Thebes there is no sign of any urban life between the sixth century and the second half of the ninth. Phthiotid Thebes (Nea Anchialos) on the coast of Thessaly was destroyed in the late sixth or seventh century and probably occupied by Slav squatters: it never revived. We may add that, with the exception of Thessalonica and the island of Paros, not a single Early Christian church remained standing in all of Greece, and that there is no evidence of any building activity between about 600 and the early years of the ninth century.

Thessalonica, the seat of the prefect of Illyricum, remained in Byzantine hands throughout the dark centuries. Its walls, which may have been built in about 450, enclosed a considerable area: roughly 1,750 metres from east to west and 2,100 metres from north to south. A mass of Roman refugees 'from the area of the Danube, from Pannonia, Dacia,

Dardania and the other provinces',²⁷ sought the protection of these walls and of the city's celestial patron, St Demetrius. Besieged five times by Slavs and Avars, repeatedly visited by plague and famine, Thessalonica managed to survive as a tiny Byzantine enclave surrounded by an alien and often hostile population. Overland communication with the capital was cut off: in 698 the Emperor Justinian II had to fight his way to Thessalonica.²⁸ We have, unfortunately, no archaeological information on the condition of the city at this time. To judge by the few available texts, the inhabitants were reduced to a semi-rural existence, since we are told that on one occasion the advancing Avars and Slavs surprised many of them while they were tilling their fields outside the walls.²⁹ In the early ninth century the clergyman who was entrusted with charitable distributions to the poor received for this purpose the gift of three pigs – hardly the sign of a developed urban economy.³⁰ East of Thessalonica the city of Philippi appears to have been abandoned: there is, at any rate, no evidence of any activity there until the second half of the tenth century.

Of particular importance for our enquiry is the fate of the cities of Asia Minor. Incredulity has been expressed at the statement by the Arab geographer Ibn-Khordâdhbeh (*c.* 840) that in his time there were only five cities in Asia Minor, to wit Ephesus, Nicaea, Amorium, Ancyra and Samala (?), in addition to a considerable number of fortresses,³¹ yet we can now see that he was probably not far from the truth. Let us take a few examples. In Bithynia, the Asiatic province closest to Constantinople, only Nicaea appears to have survived. Nicomedia, once a great imperial capital, lay in ruins in the ninth century. Cyzicus, the capital of the province of Hellespontus and a major city in the imperial Roman period, was half destroyed by earthquake in 543 and ceased to exist some time in the seventh century. Its imposing ruins were used as a quarry throughout the Middle Ages, while a small settlement sprang up at Artakê (Erdek) on the west side of the Cyzicene peninsula.

For western Asia Minor the archaeological evidence is fairly abundant. Ephesus, duly mentioned by Ibn-Khordâdhbeh, did survive, though greatly reduced in size. The ancient urban centre was abandoned, perhaps at the time of the Persian invasion in the early seventh century, and a new city wall was constructed enclosing an area of about nine hundred metres square between the harbour and the peak of Panayırdağ. Some distance to the east there arose a separate fortress centred on the basilica of St John the Divine (Ayasoluk). We are told

that in the late eighth century the fair of Ephesus produced a tax revenue of a hundred pounds of gold,³² which, if true, indicates a considerable commercial turnover; yet the excavators have found little evidence of any building activity, save for a small church replacing the earlier and much larger basilica of St Mary. At Sardis, the capital of Lydia, the change was even more dramatic. Probably because of the Persian invasion the lower town was practically abandoned and only the hilltop fortress continued to function into the Middle Ages. At Miletus the medieval town was less than a quarter of the ancient one. At Pergamum disaster struck in the seventh century and, as at Sardis, only the acropolis remained as a fortified place. Of the fate of Smyrna nothing definite is known, but at Magnesia in the Maeander Valley the medieval town covered only a tiny fraction of the ancient one, an area of about 300 by 250 metres. Other sites that have been investigated, like Nysa and Laodicea, tell essentially the same story, while Colossae was abandoned and moved to the fortress of Chonae, famous for its shrine of St Michael.

Of the interior of Asia Minor much less is known. Amorium in Phrygia was considered in the eighth and ninth centuries as a centre of major importance, and there was widespread consternation when it was captured by the Arabs in 838 with an alleged loss of thirty thousand dead and many thousands of captives. Unfortunately, Amorium has never been investigated, but its ruins are still visible and show that it was quite a small place. At Ancyra the lower town seems to have been abandoned after it had been sacked by the Persians in about 622 and only the hilltop fortress survived. The latter was heavily fortified and consisted of a double enclosure, the inner one measuring barely 350 by 150 metres and the outer one some 500 by 300 metres. That this was considered to be the 'city' of Ancyra is suggested by the inscription set up by the emperor Michael III in about 859 over the fortress gate: 'Those who enter this gate and the city. . . .'³³

One more fact ought to be mentioned in this context, since it offered to some historians the initial clue to the dramatic decline of Byzantine cities, namely the sharp drop in the number of bronze coins in circulation. In sites that have been systematically excavated, such as Athens, Corinth, Sardis and others, it has been ascertained that bronze coinage, the small change used for everyday transactions, was plentiful throughout the sixth century and (depending on local circumstances) until some time in the seventh, after which it almost disappeared, then showed a slight increase in the ninth, and did not become abundant

again until the latter part of the tenth. At Sardis, for example, the century and a quarter from 491 to 616 AD is represented by 1,011 bronze coins, the rest of the seventh century by about 90, and the eighth and ninth centuries combined by no more than 9.³⁴ *Mutatis mutandis*, similar results have been obtained from nearly all provincial Byzantine cities. It seems that only at Constantinople the decline in the volume of bronze coinage was not quite so catastrophic. It is also known that in such areas as remained under Byzantine control provincial mints ceased to function: Nicomedia after 627, Cyzicus and Thessalonica after 629. At Cherson no coins appear to have been struck between the early seventh century and the second half of the ninth.

Now it is true that the imperial government never ceased issuing coinage, in gold, silver and bronze, and we happen to know that during the dark centuries the army continued to be paid in gold, each soldier receiving twelve to eighteen *solidi* per year. The significant fact, however, is that the army was usually paid only once every three years, and occasionally every four, five or six.³⁵ It is difficult to see, therefore, how soldiers could meet their everyday expenses in monetary terms. More generally, the existence of an urban economy is inconceivable without an adequate supply of small change and, in view of the above considerations, one can only conclude that monetary transactions were reduced to a minimum and probably replaced by some form of barter.

If the Early Byzantine Empire was an aggregate of cities, the Middle Byzantine Empire may be described as an aggregate of *kastra* (fortresses). Even in everyday speech the term *polis* became confined more and more to Constantinople, while a place like Ancyra or Ephesus would be designated as a *kastron*. It so happens that most ancient cities in Asia Minor and Greece were built round a citadel situated on a hill. In such cases, as we have seen time and time again, the settlement could contract to the *kastron* which became the seat of whatever administrative and ecclesiastical authority may have been present. The *kastron* served as a place of temporary refuge at times of enemy invasion, but it was too cramped and often too inaccessible to provide a setting for urban life. Cities situated on flat ground were often abandoned, one of the few exceptions being Nicaea which was sufficiently far removed from the enemy. Elsewhere, as at Thessalonica, there was no physical possibility of retreating to the citadel without, at the same time, losing contact with the harbour, so that the old line of walls had to be maintained even if it was far too extensive for existing needs.

If urban life continued anywhere in the Empire, it did so at Constantinople. 'Oh, to be in the City!' was the cry of all cultivated Byzantines who for one reason or another found themselves in the provinces. Nicephorus Ouranos, governor of Antioch in about the year 1000, would gladly have exchanged life with Calypso for a whiff of the smoke of Constantinople.³⁶ 'Oh, land of Byzantium, Oh, thrice-happy City, eye of the universe, ornament of the world, star shining afar, beacon of this lower world, would that I were within you, enjoying you to the full! Do not part me from your maternal bosom.' So sighed in the twelfth century a Byzantine author forced to absent himself on a diplomatic mission.³⁷

We must now turn our attention to the capital and trace briefly its development. Unfortunately, archaeological information is as yet rather scanty, but we do have a great mass of literary material on the basis of which a 'profile' of the city can be constructed.

The physiognomy of Constantinople was determined by the act of its foundation. In this respect it resembled other capitals that have been created by the exercise of arbitrary authority, like St Petersburg, Ankara or Brasilia; but it was not built entirely *de novo*. When, after considering other possible sites, Constantine chose to fix his residence at Byzantium (324), he had before him a sizeable town occupying the Seraglio point roughly as far as the present-day Galata bridge. Byzantium had existed a thousand years before Constantine, but its Greek past was soon forgotten, except for vague myths of the eponymous hero Byzas and his wife Phidaleia, of Io transformed into a cow and swimming across the Bosphorus to escape the gadfly that pursued her. The aspect of the town in 324 appears to have owed less to the ancient Megarians and more to the munificence of the Emperors Septimus Severus and Caracalla. Its civic centre was clustered round an agora that is represented today by the open space in front of St Sophia. Here the Romans built a hippodrome and the public baths of Zeuxippus, while a broad colonnaded street extended from the agora in a westerly direction to the city gates. The town also possessed two fortified harbours on the side of the Golden Horn, a theatre, an amphitheatre and several temples. Constantine's architects grafted the new city on to the old. The urban area was extended to about seven hundred hectares (roughly equivalent to the area of Antioch) and enclosed on the landward side by a wall. The old civic centre was retained, the hippodrome enlarged and, next to it, on a site sloping down to the Propontis, was built a vast imperial palace in which the Byzantine emperors were to

reside for the next eight centuries. The old colonnaded street was extended farther west to become the main artery of the city (the Mesê) and punctuated at intervals with public places. The most important of the latter was a curved forum at whose centre was set up a column of porphyry surmounted by a statue of Constantine in the guise of the solar god Apollo Helios. Here, too, were a senate house, two arches and a monumental fountain. A quantity of antique statues, plundered from the cities of the eastern provinces, provided further adornment for the streets and squares. Contrary to common belief, Constantine laid little emphasis in his urban programme on his recently adopted Christian religion. Of the many churches that later tradition attributed to him, very few can claim to this honour: possibly the Church of Peace (St Eirene, still standing as rebuilt in the sixth and eighth centuries) and that of the local martyr Acacius, fairly certainly that of the Holy Apostles which was to serve as Constantine's mausoleum and that of his successors. In its public monuments Constantinople probably resembled other imperial capitals of the Tetrarchic period, such as Trier, Sirmium, Thessalonica or Nicomedia.

In the decades following its inauguration (330) Constantinople experienced a remarkable expansion. Attracted by free distributions of bread, by prospects of employment and the proximity of the imperial court, settlers poured in. By 359 the city was sufficiently developed to merit, like Rome, an urban prefect. The supply of drinking water had to be increased. In his new Cathedral of Holy Wisdom (completed in 360) the bishop of Constantinople was beginning to outstrip in influence and wealth the incumbents of the more ancient apostolic sees. Theodosius I and his successors undertook a further programme of urban construction: a great new harbour which must have considerably increased the commercial capacity of the city, new warehouses, the Theodosian and Arcadian fora and pompous monuments. The ladies of the reigning dynasty vied with one another in acquiring the most desirable real estate and building town mansions. In 413 the fortified circuit was again enlarged by the construction of the double land walls which made Constantinople a bastion of unparalleled strength. The potential urban space had grown to about 1,400 hectares and the population probably to 300,000 – 400,000. Constantinople was now bigger than declining Rome, bigger than either Alexandria or Antioch.

A statistical account of the city in the second quarter of the fifth century is provided by a brief document in Latin, known as the *Notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae*,³⁸ which tabulates the fourteen regions into

which, like Rome, it had been divided. Here are some of the totals: 5 imperial and 9 princely palaces; 8 public and 153 private baths; 4 fora; 5 granaries, 2 theatres in addition to the hippodrome; 322 streets; 4,388 *domus* (substantial houses); 52 porticoes; 20 public and 120 private bakeries; 14 churches. The administration and policing of the city were carried out, under the prefect's direction, by 13 *curatores* (one for each region), 65 night-watchmen, 560 firemen, and others. In all, the prefect's bureau must have numbered about a thousand employees. Although the *Notitia* was drawn up after the construction of the Theodosian land walls, it is concerned only with the Constantinian city, plus two suburbs, namely Sycae (Galata) and the Fourteenth Region farther up the Golden Horn (probably near modern Eyüp). The vast belt between the Constantinian enceinte, which was not dismantled, and the Theodosian was evidently not considered urban and remained sparsely populated throughout the Middle Ages. Here lay extensive cemeteries; here, too, some of the earlier monasteries were set up. Indeed, one may suspect that the construction of the Theodosian walls was dictated not so much by an increased population as by considerations of defence and the need to enclose vast reservoirs of water within the fortified area.

The rapid growth of the capital in the fourth and fifth centuries must have created acute problems of supply. As we have already noted, the agriculture of the ancient world was not normally geared to producing a sufficient surplus to satisfy so voracious a consumer as a new city of some three hundred thousand mouths. Neighbouring Thrace did grow a fair amount of corn and vegetables, but that was only a drop in the bucket. Besides, Thrace was chronically subject to barbarian attack, a danger which the government tried to obviate by the construction, some time in the fifth century, of the Long Walls which described a huge arc from near Selymbria (Silivri) on the Propontis to the Black Sea at a distance of about sixty-five kilometres from the capital. The west coast of Asia Minor had to feed its own, very populous cities. The only country capable of supplying Constantinople with bread was Egypt. Already under Constantine the Egyptian production was deflected from Rome to the new capital so as to form the basis of the *annona*, the free distribution of bread. The quantity in question was at first eighty thousand daily rations, which suggests a planned population of about double that number. By the time of Justinian the Egyptian contribution had grown to eight million *artabae* (a measure corresponding to three *modii* or bushels), enough to feed a population of half a million. This is

not the place to discuss the many problems that are posed by these figures, but it is important to point out the complexity and potential precariousness of the system. The Egyptian crop depended, first of all, on the annual flooding of the Nile. The produce had to be collected, measured by government inspectors and conveyed to the granaries of Alexandria not later than 10 September of each year. From Alexandria the 'felicitous transport', as it was called, set sail for Constantinople. The hazards of navigation had to be taken into account, in particular the passage of the Dardanelles should a contrary wind be blowing. In order to guard against this eventuality vast granaries were constructed on the island of Tenedos, where the corn was unloaded and stockpiled, as it was at Ostia for the supply of Rome. If the Egyptian crop was inadequate or any other part of the mechanism failed to function properly, the populace of Constantinople was in danger of starving and emergency measures had to be implemented. We hear of a famine in 409 which led to a bloody uprising and a reorganization of the shipments. On another occasion a forced requisition at artificially low prices had to be made in Thrace, Bithynia and Phrygia, and, since there was no established system of transport from those regions, the producers themselves had the added burden of conveying their grain to the capital.³⁹ Considering how many things could go wrong, the supply of Constantinople functioned, on the whole, with commendable efficiency while receiving top government priority. It is clear, however, that the very existence of Constantinople as a big city depended on a smoothly running network of maritime supply.

It is difficult to determine the approximate date when the population of Constantinople reached its peak. This may have happened by about 500. From that time onwards we hear less and less of the construction of great public works, and more and more of the erection of churches. Justinian, of course, was a great builder, but his main effort went into the ecclesiastical and imperial sectors. Conditions in the capital may already have been declining when the plague of 542 caused the population to plummet. There is no reason to suppose that the losses were made good. The pestilence, as we have seen, kept returning at intervals for the remainder of the century and further calamities were on their way. In 619, following the conquest of Alexandria by the Persians, the importation of Egyptian corn ceased. If Constantinople was able to find other sources of supply, this was surely because there were far fewer mouths to feed. At the same time a plague is recorded. In 626 the city was besieged (and very nearly captured) by the Avars who thoroughly

devastated Thrace, thus further depleting the available sources of food. In 674–8 Constantinople was blockaded by the Arabs. In 698 there was another plague. In 714–5, in expectation of another Arab attack, the then Emperor Anastasius II expelled from the city everyone who could not lay up for himself a supply of provisions to last three years – and, we may imagine, the majority could not. In 717–18 occurred the second Arab siege and another devastation of Thrace. In 747 there was a plague of extraordinary severity so that the city became, as one source puts it, ‘almost uninhabited’.⁴⁰ ‘Because of extreme necessity,’ writes a chronicler,

a way was devised of placing planks upon saddled animals in the form of square paniers and so removing the dead, or piling them one upon the other in carts. When all the urban and suburban cemeteries had been filled as well as empty cisterns and ditches, and many vineyards had been dug up and even the orchards within the old walls [i.e. the Constantinian walls], then only was the need satisfied.⁴¹

The year 747 probably represents the lowest point in the medieval history of Constantinople.

We are not in a position to document in detail the impact of this steep decline on the everyday life of the capital, but it may be true to say that throughout the seventh century some semblance of urban conditions was maintained. A curious text, entitled *The Miracles of St Artemius* (compiled shortly after 659), provides us with a vivid if partial insight into the realities of life during the first half of the century.⁴² Artemius was a healer saint of dubious pedigree (he had been governor of Egypt in 360) who specialized in tumours, particularly those affecting the genitals. His church was situated in a predominantly working-class area, roughly where the Grand Bazaar stands today, and his clientele was composed of ordinary people. Healing was obtained by a process of incubation, which is to say that patients slept in the church and its dependencies, sometimes for a period of several months, in the hope of being visited by the Saint in a dream or a vision. There was also an association of lay members who took part in all-night vigils and provided funds for candles, the dues being collected by a treasurer. Among the persons whose miraculous cure is recorded, several came from distant parts: we meet an African, several Alexandrians, a couple of Rhodians and a merchant from Chios. One of the Alexandrians was the guard of a granary, and we learn that he had to remain day and night on the premises, as a result of which he was unable to sleep in the church of St Artemius. ‘I am an old man,’ he said to the saint, ‘and I cannot leave

the granary and stay with you. For if I leave it, they will put another man in my place, and I shall be deprived both of my lodging and my sustenance.' Another Alexandrian – this happened in the reign of Heraclius – was a professional jester or buffoon employed in the household of a patrician, for, we are told, 'dignitaries take pleasure in exhibitions of acting'. His qualifications were a ready wit and a funny accent, like that of all Alexandrians. Other non-Constantinopolitans included a man from Amastris, a Phrygian, and a Cilician coppersmith who plied his trade near the church and had, like all his compatriots, an irascible temper. The most distant place mentioned in the text is Gaul, whither a carpenter travelled in the capacity of a repairman on a ship. Among the professions mentioned in *The Miracles of St Artemius* we find sailors, a candlemaker who kept his stall open until late at night, a bow-maker, a tanner, a wine-merchant, a female bath-keeper and several moneychangers or bankers whose trade is declared to have been dishonest. Physicians, being in competition with St Artemius, also come in for some criticism, and we are told that they charged eight to ten *solidi* to treat the child of a poor woman – a sum equivalent to the annual earnings of an unskilled worker. Public baths were very much part of daily life and were patronized, amongst others, by a deacon of St Sophia. This man, who was of some social standing (he was reluctant to sleep in the Church of St Artemius), was also the accredited poet of the Blue faction; in other words, he must have composed songs and acclamations. Interestingly enough, nothing else is said of the factions. Their role in the daily life of the citizens appears to have declined; we are even told that a stable in which the race horses had previously been kept was at the time disused. Theatres are not mentioned at all.

The impression we gain from reading *The Miracles of St Artemius* is that Constantinople remained a centre of commercial and artisanal activity (though, perhaps, on a diminished scale) at a time when urban life was, as we have seen, ceasing to exist in Asia Minor and the Balkans. The great crisis in the history of the capital occurred, I believe, in the first half of the eighth century. Of this we have several indirect indications. When, in 740, the land walls of the city were severely damaged by an earthquake, the local population was unable to rebuild them and the emperor had to impose a special tax, presumably to hire an outside labour force.⁴³ After the plague of 747, the Emperor Constantine v had actually to re-people the city by bringing in settlers from Greece and the Aegean islands, in other words from areas that were themselves

seriously underpopulated.⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that the aqueduct of Valens, which was the principal aqueduct of the city, fell out of use in 626, when it was destroyed by the Avars, and was not repaired until 766, eleven years after the repopulation, and this only on account of a particularly severe drought. Once again, the labour force needed for this work had to be imported: 1,000 masons and 200 plasterers from Pontus, 500 pottery workers (for making clay pipes?) from Greece and the islands, 5,000 labourers and 200 brickmakers from Thrace.⁴⁵ What is striking about these figures is that even the unskilled labourers could not be found on the spot. In view of the fact that Constantinople is very deficient in nearby sources of drinking water, one can only conclude that the population must have contracted dramatically if it could live without the main aqueduct for a space of 140 years. It probably declined to well below the 50,000 mark, perhaps as little as half that number.

A dim light on the appearance of the city in about 760 is cast by a particularly muddled text entitled *Brief Historical Notes (Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai)*.⁴⁶ The work of an ignorant and pretentious author, it purports to be a kind of guidebook to the memorable sights of the capital. The picture it evokes is one of abandonment and ruination. Time and again we are told that various monuments – statues, palaces, baths – had once existed, but were destroyed. What is more, the remaining monuments, many of which must have dated from the fourth and fifth centuries, were no longer understood for what they were. They had acquired a magical and generally ominous connotation. The disasters that were still in store for the city were foretold in the various reliefs and inscriptions that were to be seen on all sides. The ‘philosophers’ who were skilled in expounding them were dismayed. ‘It would be a good thing’, said one of them, ‘if we do not live to see what is destined to happen. As for me, I would have been happier if I had not read that inscription.’

In spite of such gloomy prognostications, Constantinople started in 755 on a process of very gradual recovery that was to continue until the age of the Crusades. In the eighth century there was no building activity except for works of fortification and the repair of damage caused by earthquakes. In the ninth new buildings were undertaken, but they differed in character from those of the Early Byzantine period: civic amenities were no longer required, and the new constructions were mostly concentrated inside the imperial palace which acquired an air of the Arabian Nights. A spirit of ‘renovation’ – meaning the repair

of what was ruined rather than the creation of something new – was cultivated by the propagandists at the courts of Michael III and Basil I. The list of the latter emperor's buildings is particularly instructive. It shows that practically all the major churches of the capital had fallen into decay, some of them to the point of 'near extinction'. So Basil proceeded to renovate over twenty-five churches in the city and another six in the suburbs. All his new buildings were in the imperial palace.⁴⁷

In short, if one were able to draw a graph of the fortunes of Constantinople, one would find that it showed a very sharp dip at the same time when provincial cities came practically to the zero line. Nor was the pattern of recovery dissimilar in the capital and in the provinces. In the early ninth century some life returned to Corinth; Patras and Lacedaemon in the Peloponnese were resettled.⁴⁸ A little later Selymbria and Ancyra were refortified. The movement gathered momentum in the tenth century and reached a peak in the eleventh and twelfth. Archaeologically, the recovery is well documented at Corinth and Athens, less so in Asia Minor. It is important to observe, however, that the new settlements had none of the monumental character of Late Antiquity. Houses and shops were poorly built and huddled together along tortuous streets. Whenever possible standing ruins were incorporated into the new buildings, but otherwise there was no continuity of layout, which presupposes an intervening layer of total abandonment. There is little evidence as yet of urban centres such as we know them in medieval Italy, of a *piazza* bordered by a cathedral and the imposing, if castellated, palace of the local lord. Indeed, there is hardly any trace of cathedrals. Here and there a ruined Early Christian church was revamped in the eleventh century, as happened at Serres, Verria, Kalambaka and, possibly, at Ohrid. In most cases, it seems, urban life was fragmented into neighbourhoods, each one with its own tiny church. Urban monasteries sheltering behind their own enclosures were frequent and appear to have attracted more ample sources of finance than did the episcopal organization. At Athens, for example, the biggest medieval church that has survived, the Panagia Lykodê mou (the present Russian church), was monastic. The poor quality of domestic construction explains its subsequent disappearance; but where medieval Byzantine houses have been excavated and studied, it has been found that they contained capacious storage jars for agricultural produce, a sign of a life closely linked to the countryside.

The evidence of archaeology is supplemented by the written record. Perhaps the most striking feature of Middle Byzantine life in contrast to the earlier period was its privacy. Gone were the theatres, the assembly halls, the civil basilicas, the porticoes where people congregated. The hippodrome survived only at Constantinople, but functioned only a few days a year, a minutely orchestrated display of imperial ceremonial. The Life of St Basil the Younger, which gives us some idea of conditions at Constantinople in the tenth century, is remarkable in that all the action takes place indoors. Apart from the occasional fair, the only place of public assembly was now the church. Noticing that the various vendors who plied their trade at Constantine's forum had nowhere to go in times of bad weather, the Emperor Basil I built a church for them.⁴⁹ Even the church, it seems, was considered too public a place by many persons. The rich and even the not very rich built private chapels for themselves and, if they could afford it, maintained household priests – a practice that was specifically permitted by the Emperor Leo VI on the grounds that people would otherwise remain deprived of the holy mysteries and the chapels would fall into disuse. By the same token, baptism of infants in private chapels, which had been prohibited by earlier canon law, was also allowed.⁵⁰ Distrust and privacy find their most eloquent expression in the so-called *Strategicon* of the eleventh-century general Cecaumenus. Never put up a friend in your house, he advises, since the friend may seduce your wife. Let him lodge elsewhere and send him the necessary food. Lock up your daughters as if they were criminals. Avoid all parties. If you are not on the emperor's business, stay at home with your trusted servants, stockpile supplies and look after the interests of your family.⁵¹

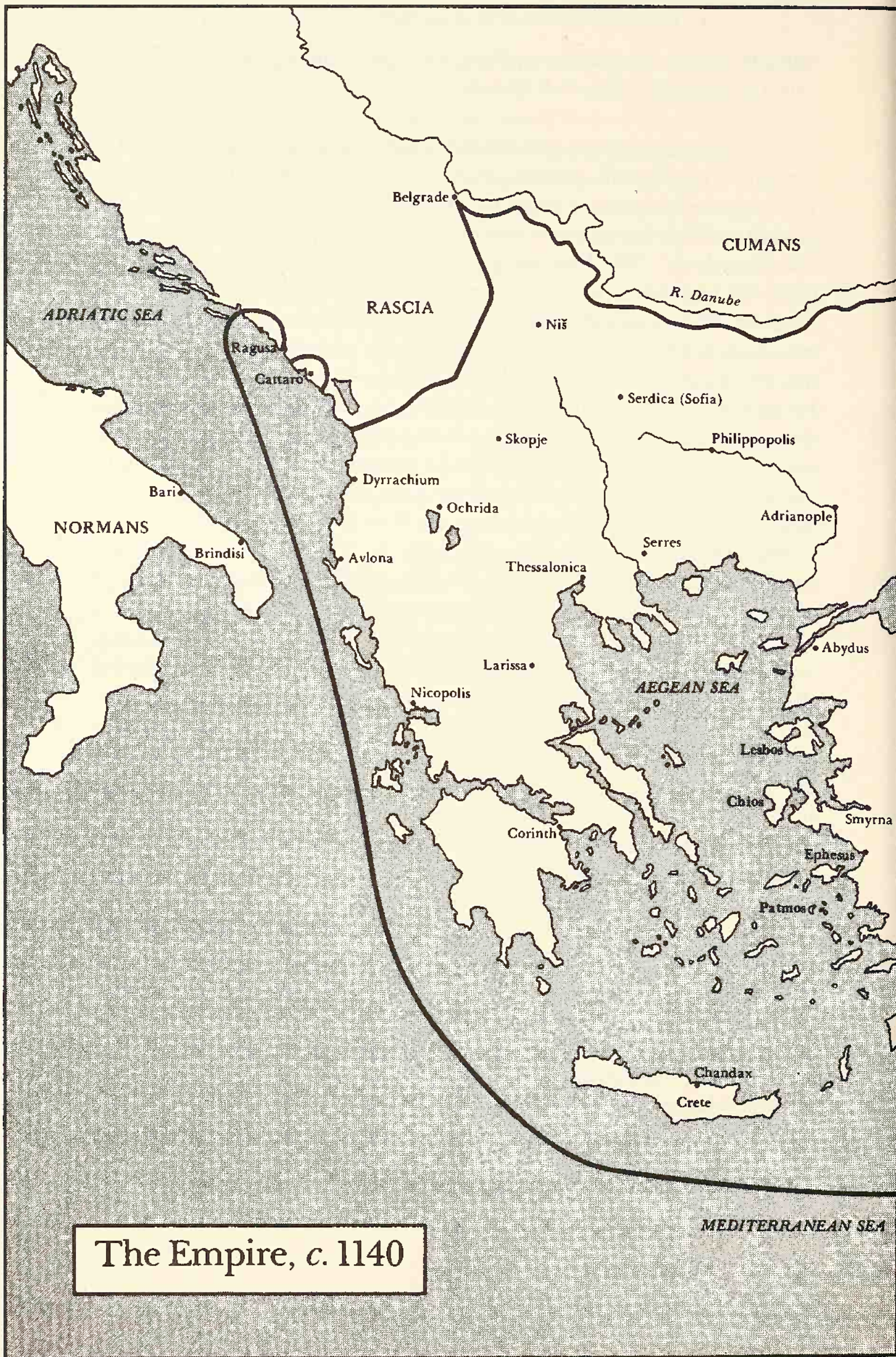
As we saw in the last chapter, the upsurge of towns was accompanied by the growth of a petty bourgeoisie. For a vivid picture of the ease in which the professional classes of Constantinople lived under the Comneni we may turn to a satirical poem attributed to one Theodoros Ptochoprodromos. The author, who represents himself as an impoverished clergyman, had been urged by his father to acquire an education. 'My child,' said his father to him,

learn your letters as much as you are able. See that man over there, my child: he used to walk on foot, and now he has a fat mule with a fine harness. This one, when he was a student, used to go barefoot, and see him now in his pointed boots! This other one, when he was a student, never combed his hair, and now he is well combed and proud of his locks. That one in his student days never saw a bath door from afar, and now he bathes three times a week. That one was

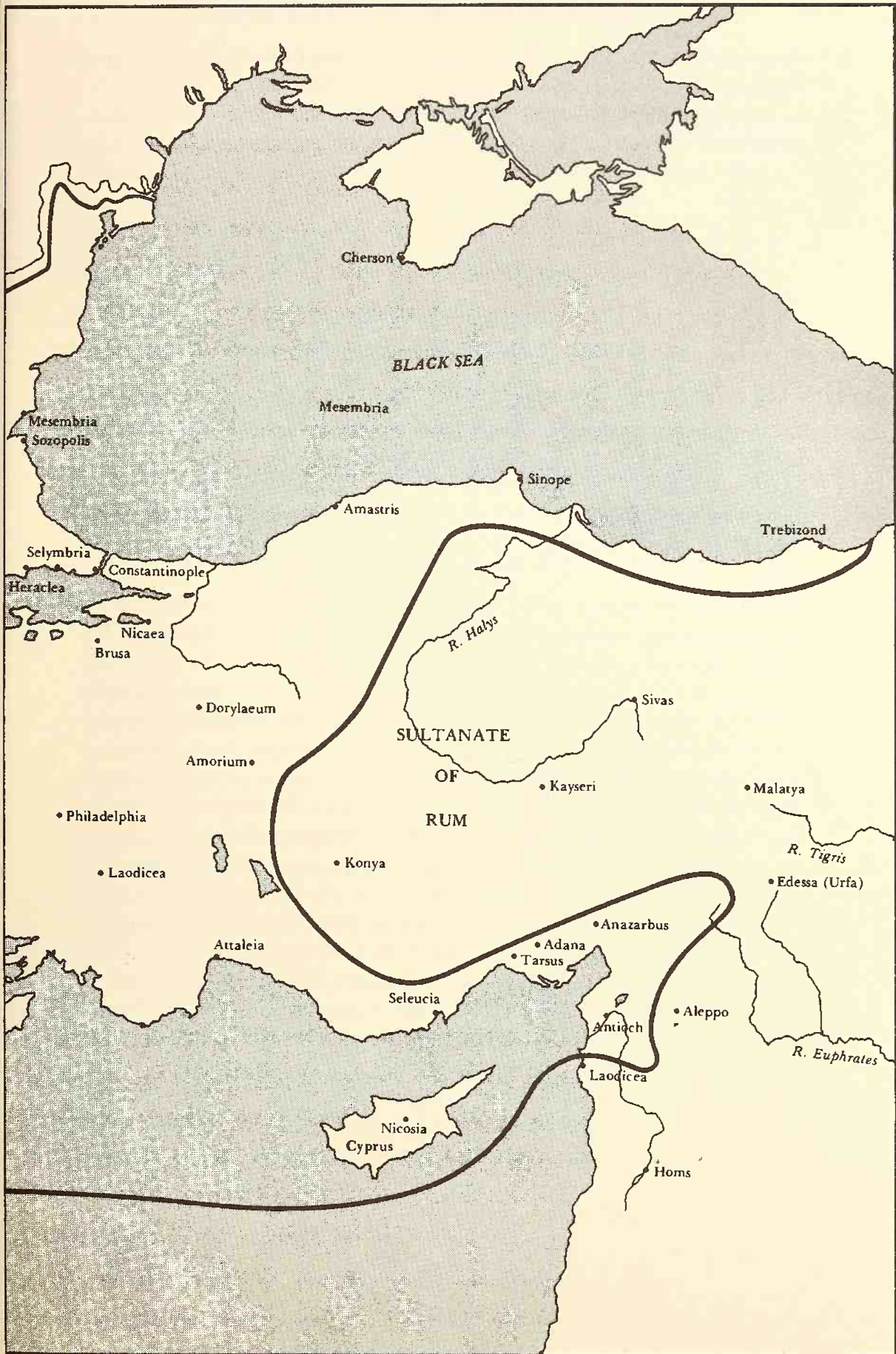
full of lice as big as almonds, and now his purse is full of gold pieces with the emperor Manuel's effigy.

So Ptochoprodromos learnt his letters, but to what avail? His cupboard contained nothing but piles of paper and he had nothing to eat. And so he compares his poverty to the plenty of his neighbours. The worker in gold thread has his larder full of bread and wine, of cooked tunny and dried mackerel. The shoemaker, when he wakes up in the morning, sends his boy to purchase tripe and Vlach cheese, and only after he has breakfasted on these delicacies does he start work. At dinner-time he lays aside his last and his tools and bids his wife serve a meal of three dainty courses. With obsessional attention to what everyone has to eat, Ptochoprodromos compares himself to the practitioners of other professions, even the lowliest – the tailor who happens to be a houseowner, the bakery assistant, the yogurt vendor, the itinerant seller of clothes and pepper-grinders, the butcher. All of them have a full stomach. What then is the use of Homer and Oppian?⁵²

We are so accustomed to regarding the Greeks as a commercial nation that we find it hard to imagine that the Byzantines were the very opposite – people of the land, distrustful and unenterprising. And so it was not the Byzantines but foreigners who reaped the benefit of the urban development. We have already mentioned the presence of Russian and Italian merchants at Constantinople in the tenth century and the decisive importance of the granting of commercial privileges to Venice by the Emperor Alexius I. Within a short period the *basileus* discovered that he was no longer master in his own house. When, in 1126, John II Comnenus tried to suspend the privileges of the Venetians, he was constrained by force of arms to abandon his attempt. In 1148 the Venetian quarter, which lay between the two modern bridges that span the Golden Horn, was enlarged. The number of Venetians resident at Constantinople appears to have grown to about twenty thousand and their riches were immense. Being theoretically subjects of the Empire, they were at first placed under the jurisdiction of imperial officials, but, little by little, they made themselves virtually self-governing. This is not the place to recount the tortuous tale of the dealings between the Empire and Venice, the rivalries between various groups of Italians, and the vain attempts made by the emperors to play them off one against the other. It is sufficient to note that the various 'Latin' concessions occupied the best commercial real estate of the city along the Golden Horn shore and that the number of western residents



The Empire, c. 1140



may have been as much as one fifth of the total population, assuming the latter to have grown to about 200,000–250,000.

A babel of foreign tongues resounded in the streets of Constantinople. Of this an amusing if, in places, obscure illustration is given by the poet John Tzetzes who wrote towards the middle of the twelfth century:

‘Among Scythians,’ he says, ‘you will find me a Scythian [referring to one of the Turkic tribes who dwelt north of the Black Sea], a Latin among Latins, and among all other nations as if I was one of their race. When I greet a Scythian, thus do I address him: *Salamalek alti . . . salamalek altuğep*. The Persians [i.e. Seljuks], too, I address in Persian: *Asan hais kourouparza hantazar harantasi*. To the Latins I speak in the Latin tongue: *Bene venesti, domine, bene venesti, frater. Unde es et de quale provincia venesti? Quomodo, frater, venesti in istan civitatem? Pedone, cavallarius, per mare, vis morari?* The Alans I address in their language: *Tapanhas mesfli hsina korthin*. . . . To the Arabs I say in Arabic: ‘*Ala aina tamurr min, ên ente sittî maulaje sabâh*. The Russians, too, I address according to their custom: *Sdra, brate, sestrica, and dobra deni*. As for the Jews, I say to them fittingly in Hebrew: *Memakomene vithfaği Beelzebul timée*. . . . Thus do I address proper and suitable words to everyone, knowing that this is a sign of the best conduct.⁵³

Like a true Levantine, Tzetzes was able to speak a few words in several languages and, though a Ciceronian might have disapproved of his Latin, this was probably the foreign tongue he knew best.

In short, Constantinople under the Comneni was not unlike Istanbul before the First World War, when most of the economic life of the city was in the hands of foreigners as well as local Greeks, Armenians and Jews, while the Ottoman majority felt themselves to have been reduced to the status of second-class citizens. There was also a close correspondence between the privileges of the Italian colonies and the régime of ‘capitulations’ as it prevailed in the Ottoman Empire. In both cases the situation led to explosive tensions. But while modern Turkey has been able to eject or neutralize the alien elements of Istanbul, Byzantium proved powerless before her Italian exploiters. The arrest of all Venetian residents of the Empire and the confiscation of their property in 1171, the massacre of other Latins at Constantinople (mostly Pisans and Genoese) in 1182 served only to hasten the terrible retribution that was exacted by the West.

When the army of the Fourth Crusade stood before Constantinople in June 1203, they could hardly believe their eyes, for they had never seen a city so big and powerful, so rich, so full of palaces and churches.⁵⁴ Little did they know that their arrival would spell the ruin of the great

capital. The terrible fire that broke out in August of the same year and, after raging eight days, devastated a good half of the city, was a presage of things to come. Captured by the Crusaders, systematically pillaged during a period of nearly sixty years, depleted of its inhabitants, Constantinople became but a shadow of its former self. We shall not attempt here to trace its melancholy history over the next two centuries since it repeats the colonial conditions already prevalent under the Comneni. The Spanish ambassador Clavijo, who saw Constantinople in 1403, says that the space within the walls consisted of a number of hamlets separated by cornfields and orchards. Everywhere one could see ruins of palaces and churches. Only the coastal areas had a fairly dense population, especially the trading area of the Golden Horn. By contrast, the Genoese colony of Galata, though small in area, was very populous and filled with excellent houses.⁵⁵ When it fell to the Turks in 1453, Constantinople had a population of well under fifty thousand.

Today we look in vain for traces of Byzantine houses in Istanbul. Even the layout of the city has been altered beyond all recognition. Part of the Mesê still survives as the Divanyolu, the hippodrome, the Augusteion and the forum of Theodosius are still open spaces, but the other Byzantine squares have been built over. Above all, there is no indication of any regular street grid, such as Constantine's architects would surely have traced. It is possible that the expansion of the city in Ottoman times, the frequent fires, earthquakes and rebuildings were responsible for creating that maze of tortuous streets that appear on the relatively accurate maps made in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet it may be that the urban transformation occurred much earlier, and that Comnenian Constantinople bore the same relation to Justinian's as Comnenian Corinth did to the Corinth of the Early Byzantine period.

For a glimpse of a Late Byzantine town we have to go to Mistra in the Peloponnese. Though often called 'the Byzantine Pompeii', Mistra is actually a Frankish foundation. Its Despots' Palace is purely western, its houses closed to the outside world and often provided with crenellated towers. Even in some of the churches there are traces of Gothic influence. How much Mistra resembled other Byzantine towns of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is a matter of conjecture. One thing, however, is certain: it is in no way descended from a *polis* of Late Antiquity.

CHAPTER 4

DISSENTERS

‘It is Our will’, proclaims an imperial enactment of the year 380 that was later placed at the head of Justinian’s Code,

that all the peoples who are ruled by the administration of Our Clemency shall practise that religion which the divine Peter the apostle transmitted to the Romans. . . . We shall believe in the single Deity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit under the guise of equal majesty and of the Holy Trinity. We command that those persons who follow this law shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom we adjudge demented and insane [*dementes vesanosque*], shall sustain the infamy attached to heretical dogmas. Their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of Our own initiative which we shall dispense in accordance with the divine judgment.¹

One God, one Empire, one religion – these were the cornerstones of Byzantine political thinking. Religion was defined by ecumenical councils of the Church on the basis of Holy Scripture and the exegesis of the Fathers, but it was the emperor’s duty – in fact, his highest duty – to enforce its universal observance. For, to quote another imperial law, ‘We are aware that Our State is sustained more by religion than by official duties and physical toil and sweat.’² ‘If we strive by all means’, wrote the Emperor Justinian, ‘to enforce the civil laws, whose power God in His goodness has entrusted to Us for the security of Our subjects, how much more keenly should We endeavour to enforce the holy canons and the divine laws which have been framed for the salvation of our souls!’³

The literal meaning of orthodoxy was not so much the right faith as the right doctrine, and it consisted, above all, in ‘confessing and glorifying aright the Father, Christ the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit.’⁴ In other words, all subjects of the Empire were most emphatically urged

not only to be Christians, but also to subscribe to a single and highly abstruse doctrine defining the nature and relationship of the three persons of the Trinity, for even the slightest deviation therefrom was considered to be heresy.⁵ We need not, of course, imagine that the particular body of dogma that eventually became Orthodoxy with a capital O was destined from the very start to assume that position. There were times when different interpretations of Christianity enjoyed the active support of the temporal power. The Emperors Constantius II and Valens, for example, championed the cause of Arianism, Anastasius I was on the side of the Monophysites, Heraclius tried hard to impose the Monothelete compromise, and a succession of emperors in the eighth and ninth centuries were Iconoclasts. Even the great Justinian himself, the staunchest enforcer of religious uniformity, ended his life under the cloud of the Julianist heresy. It is conceivable that any one of these alternative doctrines might have triumphed. Of one thing, however, we may be sure, namely that whichever sect proved victorious, it would have been as intolerant of its rivals as was Orthodoxy. Instances of declared religious toleration during the Byzantine period may be counted on the fingers of one hand.

The fact remains, however, that by no means all subjects of the Empire were Catholic Christians. The number of those whom the government considered 'demented and insane' was extremely high in the Early Byzantine age, to the point, perhaps, of constituting the majority of the population. It was lower in the Middle period and, probably, quite small in the Late period. This chapter will be concerned with the dissenters, with those groups which for one reason or another did not accept the prevailing orthodoxy.

There were, in the first instance, the ancient pagans of whatever complexion. The disappearance of paganism was a slow process that extended from the fourth century until, in places, the end of the sixth. With the exception of a few cities like Gaza, which is said to have been predominantly pagan in about 400 AD,⁶ and Carrhae (Harran), where paganism survived until well after the Arab conquest,⁷ most urban centres had accepted Christianity by the fourth century. By a curious paradox the old religion maintained itself at the two opposite ends of the social scale: on the one hand among the municipal aristocracy to whom it was a matter of tradition and even loyalty to the Roman State, on the other among peasants. The teaching profession, as we shall see in Chapter 6, also offered a refuge to paganism. We shall not repeat here the oft-told story of the protracted oppression and persecution of

pagans by the imperial government, by local bishops and monks, from the savage, but largely ineffectual, measures of the 340s and 350s down to the last inquisitions under Justinian. It is a melancholy story punctuated by the suppression of the temples in 391, the sacking of the Serapeum at Alexandria, the lynching of Hypatia, the closure of the philosophical schools, not to mention the destruction of countless treasures of ancient art. Yet pagans maintained themselves for a long time not only on local councils and in schools, but even in the upper echelons of the imperial administration. They did not flaunt their religion, worshipped in private (sometimes behind a false wall) and hoped no one would denounce them to the authorities.

While we know a great deal about prominent pagans, we are much less informed about rural populations. A doubtless typical case concerns the missionary activities of the Monophysite John of Amida who was made titular bishop of Ephesus in the reign of Justinian. This zealous Christian in the course of thirty-five years (542–76) converted some eighty thousand persons in the mountainous districts of Asia, Phrygia, Caria and Lydia, and destroyed their temples, in whose stead he built ninety-nine churches and twelve monasteries. The new converts were simply baptized *en masse* and each was given one third of a *solidus* from imperial funds.⁸ One may well wonder what efficacy such conversions possessed. A story told by the same John may shed some light on this question. It concerns a remote mountainous area near Melitene, east of the Euphrates, whose inhabitants called themselves Christians, but used their village church to store wood, had no priests and had never heard of the Scriptures. A zealous monk called Symeon the Mountaineer (who was also a Monophysite) happened to stray into that area and was shocked by the apathy of the local population. His missionary efforts met with considerable opposition, but he established his credence by performing a miracle and then set up a school for boys and girls whom he forced to learn the Bible. He laboured at this task for twenty-six years until his disciples had become ‘readers and daughters of the Covenant’.⁹ Such assiduity was no doubt exceptional. It was generally recognized that rural clergy was lax and given to drunkenness. A pious boy often had to leave his native district in order to find suitable mentors.¹⁰

It was once fashionable to affirm that paganism was absorbed into Christianity and that the old gods re-emerged in the guise of saints, that Helios was turned into Elias (the prophet Elijah), Demeter into St Demetrius, Bacchus into St Tychon, etc.¹¹ While such simplistic con-

nections no longer convince us today, it can hardly be denied that the perfunctory conversion of large segments of the population could not have changed overnight their age-old attitudes and beliefs. At the end of the seventh century men and women still danced in honour of the false gods, the name of Dionysus was still invoked at vintage time, people lit fires outside their homes at the new moon and jumped over them, and every kind of sorcery was rife.¹² One does not have to read far in the Lives of saints to discover that popular Christianity inherited and partly rationalized a vast body of pagan superstition.

Next to the pagans came the Jews. We have noted in Chapter 1 their continued presence in Palestine in the Early Byzantine period, but the majority of them were scattered throughout the Empire, largely in cities. By virtue of a long tradition in Roman law, Jews enjoyed a peculiar status: they were a licit sect, their synagogues were protected from seizure, they appointed their own clergy and had recourse in civil cases to their own courts of law. At the same time they were forbidden to proselytize, to own Christian slaves or to build new synagogues. In other words, there was a policy of containing the Jews and it was made quite plain to them that they were, of their own free choice, second-class citizens. Honours they had none: progressively barred from service in the State police, among the palatines, in the army, they were, on the other hand, bound to perform, if liable, the onerous duties of curials, but without enjoying any of the resulting privileges. 'Let them be', says a law of Justinian, 'in the same turpitude as regards their fortune as that which they have chosen for their souls' (*sint in turpitudine fortunae, in qua et animam volunt esse*).¹³ The phraseology is typical and deliberate: again and again official documents refer to Jews in terms of denigration and contempt.

Why were the Jews so obdurate, why did they refuse to see the superior truths of Christianity, when these very truths were announced in their own sacred books? Justinian, who wanted to legislate on every topic, tried in this matter also to get to the heart of the problem. The Jews, he decided, should be made to read the Old Testament in such a way that they paid attention to the prophecies contained therein instead of quibbling about words. To facilitate this more fruitful approach, they were specifically allowed by the emperor to use in their synagogues the Septuagint or any other suitable translation in place of the Hebrew, while being denied the Mishna which obscured the meaning of the sacred text.¹⁴ It was hoped by this measure to protect the Jewish congregations from the deceit of their own rabbis who, under the

cloak of a hieratic and largely incomprehensible language, introduced misleading interpretations. We may suspect that Justinian had as little success in his intervention as did the Christian polemicists who produced a succession of anti-Jewish treatises always revolving round the same Old Testament passages. Some conversions may have occurred, but the bulk of the Jews remained obdurate.

The change from a policy of grudging toleration to one of forced conversion and persecution seems to have been brought about by political events. The Jews proved disloyal to the Empire. One instance of their subversion concerned developments in a distant country, namely the kingdom of the Himyarites (corresponding to present-day Yemen). The Empire had important interests in the south of the Arabian peninsula and tried, as usual, to promote them with the help of Christian missions. The Jews were also proselytizing in those parts and with greater success in that, for a time, the rulers of the Himyarites were won over to the Jewish religion. The last of these rulers, Dû-Nuwâs by name, imposed an embargo on imperial trade. The Empire intervened militarily; Dû-Nuwâs responded by ordering a massacre of Christians in the Yemen (*c.* 520). Two years later he was crushed and his country passed under the control of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. What concerns us here is the involvement of Byzantine Jewry in these events: Dû-Nuwâs applied his repressive measures on the grounds that 'the Christian Romans mistreat the Jews in their own country and every year kill many of them'.¹⁵ There was also a plan of bringing pressure on him by imprisoning the rabbis of Tiberias.¹⁶

Then there were the Samaritan revolts starting in 484 and culminating in the terrible one of 555. It was realized, of course, that there existed a distinction between Samaritans and Jews, yet the latter did take part in the uprising of 555 whose aim was the creation of an independent state. Finally and most importantly, the Jews took the side of the enemy when Asia Minor and Palestine were invaded by the Persians. In 609–10 the Jews of Caesarea in Cappadocia submitted to the invader whereas the Christian inhabitants left the city.¹⁷ In Jerusalem, which fell in 614, the Jews bought Christian captives and put them to death, and they burnt Christian churches.¹⁸ Elsewhere in Palestine they joined forces with the local Saracens in looting monasteries and killing monks.¹⁹

When Byzantine rule had been restored, the Jews were made to pay dearly for their collaboration with the enemy. Not only were they banished from a three-mile radius of Jerusalem; in about 634 the

Emperor Heraclius is said to have ordered all the Jews in his Empire to be baptized.²⁰ This was the first general measure of its kind against the Jews, although it may have been preceded by others of regional applicability. It came, however, at a time when the Jewish problem was about to be solved by other means. As a result of the Arab conquests the vast majority of the Jews found themselves outside the Empire.

We do not know how many remained. The example of Heraclius was imitated by subsequent zealous emperors. Leo III ordered once again the baptism of Jews and those who complied were given the title of 'new citizens', but they did so in bad faith, while others, it seems, fled to the Arabs.²¹ The failure of this measure was acknowledged by the Council of 787 which decreed that insincere converts should not be accepted; it was preferable to let them live according to their customs while remaining subject to the old disabilities.²² A fresh attempt was made by Basil I: Jews were summoned to disputations and if they were unable to demonstrate the truth of their religion, they were to be baptized. Remission of taxes and the grant of dignities were offered as rewards; even so, after the emperor's death, most of the converts 'returned like dogs to their own vomit'.²³ The last recorded case of forced conversion was under Romanus I, but it only resulted in driving many Jews to the land of Khazaria north of the Black Sea. From then on such Jews as remained were left to live in relative peace; there was even a reverse migration of them from Egypt into the Empire in the late tenth and eleventh centuries.

The upsurge of urban life gave an impetus to Jewish communities. By 1168, when Benjamin of Tudela embarked on his long journey, he was able to make contact with groups of his correligionists at every port of call from Corfu to Cyprus and Antioch. At Thebes he found 2,000 Jewish families, 'most skilled artificers in silk and purple cloth throughout Greece', at Thessalonica 500, also silk-workers, at Constantinople 2,500, among them many rich merchants. In the capital, however, they lived in a ghetto across the Golden Horn, were often beaten up by the Christians and were not allowed to ride on horseback, except for the emperor's physician who was a Jew. While the figures given by Benjamin testify to a certain expansion of Byzantine Jewry, it must be pointed out that he quotes much higher numbers for Muslim cities like Aleppo (5,000) and Mosul (7,000).²⁴ Nor can it be said that Byzantine Jews, whatever their contribution to the economic life of the Empire, were ever allowed to develop a penchant for literature and scholarship.

While the Jews accounted for only a small part of the emperor's subjects, Christian heretics were extremely numerous. These are sometimes divided into two groups, on the one hand the 'sects', mostly of pre-Byzantine origin, on the other hand the followers of the 'noble' heresies, such as Arianism, who differed from Catholics only on points of definition concerning the nature of the Trinity. Such a distinction was not, however, made by the Byzantines themselves, who tended to lump together under the name of heresy all 'false' doctrines, past and present, of whatever origin. The number of these doctrines was prodigious: Epiphanius in his *Panarion* (composed in 377–80) described eighty, while St John Damascene in the eighth century went above a hundred and was at pains to show that they were all descended from four archetypal aberrations, namely Barbarism, Scythism, Hellenism and Judaism.²⁵ While churchmen catalogued and described, the imperial government fulminated in all directions. The Theodosian Code contains no fewer than sixty-six laws directed against heretics and prescribes various penalties: denial of the right of assembly, confiscation of their meeting houses, prohibition to appoint priests, burning of books, fines. Some heretics were to be expelled from towns and punished with *infamia*, whereby they lost the right of bequeathing property or making wills. The death penalty was reserved for Manichees alone.²⁶ It is true that no heretic was specifically obliged to become a Catholic, but the incentives were so powerful that it came nearly to the same thing. And even if imperial legislation was applied haphazardly (as it certainly was), it could not fail to generate an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust. Informants were encouraged, guilds were held responsible for the beliefs of their members, and masters for those of their slaves. Householders ran the risk of being heavily punished for the use to which their premises were put.

Among the sects the one that inspired the greatest fear was that of the Manichees, on the mistaken assumption that they were, in addition to their dangerous doctrines, agents of the enemy. It is true that Mani (d. 277) lived in Persian Mesopotamia, but he considered himself a Christian apostle, not to say the Paraclete in person, and was put to death at the behest of the Zoroastrian clergy. His followers were persecuted in Persia no less than in the Roman Empire. Mani's theology, with its transmigration of souls, its innumerable 'aeons', its five 'sojourns' of God and five 'archons' of Darkness, may have appeared ridiculous to some people, but it evidently exercised a wide appeal. His doctrine of the antithetical and self-subsisting principles of good and

evil, his conviction that all matter was evil, that man sinned out of necessity, that salvation lay in asceticism, in abstinence from meat, wine and sexual relations – these were ideas that struck many familiar chords and seemed to find confirmation in the realities of everyday life. More radical than Christianity, untainted by the uneasy compromise which Christians had had to make with the Jewish scriptures, Manichaeism was moreover extremely vigorous in its missionary activities. By the fourth century it had already spread to practically all the Roman provinces: the first imperial measure against it dates from 297.²⁷ Why it subsequently lost momentum is difficult to explain, but it was still alive in the days of Justinian and it was said that the Praetorian Prefect Peter Barsymes openly supported the Manichees.²⁸ The area of their greatest success was, however, to be in central Asia, from Samarkand to China.

The fate of all outlawed sects was retreat to the countryside where they were not subject to the same coercion as in the towns. Some, of course, originated in the country and always remained associated with a particular geographical area. Such was Phrygian Montanism which is last recorded in the eighth century: the Emperor Leo III ordered the conversion of all remaining Montanists, but they chose to incinerate themselves in their churches, as they had previously done in the days of Justinian.²⁹ It is only from casual references that we are often reminded of the continued existence of this or that ancient sect. Thus the Quartodecimans (Tessareskaidekatitai), whose main fault lay in their 'Jewish' calculation of the date of Easter and who had been prominent before the First Nicene Council (325), unexpectedly reappear in 867, when the patriarch Photius rounded up a number of them and won their re-admission into the Church.³⁰ Given the obscurity that surrounds the Byzantine countryside, it is almost impossible to determine the prevalence of various heretical sects beyond the presumption that some areas, like Phrygia and Galatia, were particularly prone to them.

The greatest challenge to State Christianity came, however, not from the sects, but from one of the 'noble' heresies, namely Monophysitism. Some scholars even hesitate to call it a heresy, preferring the designation of schism. The Monophysites, who had overwhelming support in Egypt and Syria, opposed the Council of Chalcedon (451) for dividing, as they saw it, the person of Christ into two natures and believed in the unity of the incarnate Christ, a unity that derived from (*ek*) the two natures, human and divine. *Ek* for the Monophysites, *en* (in) for the Catholics – the difference amounted to one letter. The historian

Evagrius, who was a contemporary of the controversy, rightly remarks that the former position implied the other. Yet, he adds, people considered the issue so divisive 'out of some attachment to their notion of God' that they chose to die rather than come to an agreement.³¹ If there was some deeper reason for the dispute, Evagrius was not aware of it, and he, surely, ought to have known.

The imperial government, be it said to its credit, tried several times to mediate. In 482 the Emperor Zeno issued his Edict of Union (*Henotikon*) addressed to the clergy and people of Egypt in which he appealed to the loyalty of his subjects and reminded them that victory over the foe, the blessings of peace, clement weather and abundance of produce were dependent on a concordant worship of the Godhead. He then rejected the extremists on both sides, upheld the first three ecumenical councils, barely mentioned Chalcedon and affirmed his faith in the oneness of Christ.³² The appeal fell on deaf ears. Subsequent emperors tried different approaches: Anastasius openly favoured the Monophysites, whereas Justin I persecuted them. Justinian parleyed and persecuted by turns while his wife Theodora gave active help to the obdurate easterners. Justin II attempted a fresh compromise as did Heraclius. The net result was nil, except the creation of a new heresy, Monothelitism, born out of Heraclius' formula of conciliation.

It was not at first the intention of the Monophysites to set up a separate Church. Their first hierarchy, dating from the time of Severus, Monophysite patriarch of Antioch (512-18), consisted of regularly appointed bishops. While it was strongest in the diocese of Antioch, it also extended to eastern and southern Asia Minor. But after these bishops had been deposed and banished (519), and especially after the death of the Empress Theodora (548), there appeared no other solution but to create a distinct Church made up of titular bishops who, for the most part, were never allowed to visit their sees. This became known as the Jacobite Church after Jacob Baradaeus (d. 578), who made most of the ordinations. It is interesting to observe that Jacob's 'ghost' bishoprics were not confined to those provinces where Monophysitism was strongest, but extended to such Greek centres as Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and the island of Chios, from which it may be deduced that his aim was in no sense national.

There can be little doubt that the Monophysite controversy facilitated the conquest of the eastern provinces first by the Persians and then by the Arabs. The experience of persecution, of bishops driven into exile, congregations denied their churches and monasteries broken up

by armed force placed the central government in the role of an alien bully. In the words of one Syrian historian:

Heraclius did not allow the orthodox [i.e. the Monophysites] to appear in his presence and did not receive their complaints concerning the churches of which they had been robbed. That was why the God of vengeance, who alone is all-powerful . . . seeing the wickedness of the Romans who, throughout their dominions cruelly pillaged our churches and our monasteries and condemned us without pity, did bring from the south the sons of Ishmael in order to deliver us from the hands of the Romans. And if, in truth, we suffered some harm in that the parish churches which had been taken from us and given to the Chalcedonians [i.e. the Catholics] remained in their possession, seeing that when the cities submitted to the Arabs, the latter granted to each confession the temples they held at the time, . . . yet it was no small advantage to us to be delivered of the cruelty of the Romans, of their wickedness, their wrath, their harsh zeal with regard to us, and to find ourselves in peace.³³

That is not to say that the Monophysites represented nationalistic tendencies or that they welcomed foreign occupation. But they could hardly be expected to fight enthusiastically on behalf of a hated and distant emperor. In Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia the Orthodox Church was, to a large extent, imposed from the outside and when the imperial presence was removed, it either shrank or disappeared.

The débâcle of the seventh century changed drastically the configuration of dissenters in the Empire. The old pagans had become extinct except for some tiny pockets in backward areas, such as the inhabitants of Mani in the Peloponnese who were christianized as late as the reign of Basil I.³⁴ The great majority of Jews and Monophysites found themselves under Arab rule. There were still some communities of Jacobite Syrians along the eastern border, and some of them were settled in Thrace in the eighth century, but we do not hear much of them thereafter.³⁵ A more important Monophysite element consisted of the Armenians whose crucial role in the Middle Byzantine period we have already noted. Various sects continued to vegetate obscurely in Asia Minor and Muslims began to appear as prisoners of war and were even allowed to have a mosque at Constantinople. There was, however, a very large element of new pagans, namely the Slavs and Avars who had overrun practically the whole Balkan peninsula. Strangely enough, Byzantine sources tell us practically nothing about their religion, yet the presumption remains that for about two centuries and in places as long as three, vast territories that were nominally imperial reverted to paganism, and that Perun, the god of lightning, was worshipped there

in the place of Jesus Christ. A Sicilian text of dubious historicity (eighth century?) tells of a body of Avars, 'a foul nation completely unconvertant with the Greek tongue', who dwelt in the regions of Dyrrachium and Athens, and who worshipped images of reptiles and four-legged beasts as well as fire, water and their own swords.³⁶ The first Byzantine expedition to penetrate continental Greece and the Peloponnese took place in 783, and those parts were treated as enemy territory.³⁷ Thereafter the Slavs were gradually evangelized, but it was a slow process that continued for a century and more. Nor should it be forgotten that to the north of Thrace and Macedonia lay the newly established kingdom of Bulgaria that was pagan, and even militantly pagan, until its nominal conversion to Christianity in 864. Thus, on the European side, Byzantium was faced by an expanse of primitive paganism stretching as far as the eye could see.

While these barbarians were still wallowing in their native superstitions, Byzantium was shaken by another religious storm. There may be some exaggeration in treating Iconoclasm as a heresy, but it does provide an interesting example of the emperor's decisive role in the religious sphere. It also led to the curious situation where the majority of the Empire's inhabitants found themselves to be dissenters. The issue concerned religious observance rather than dogma: Was it proper to offer veneration to images (icons) of Christ and the saints? No matter what the theologians argued, it is clear that icons had acquired a very important place in popular piety and that they were considered as numinous. The ordinary Byzantine might have had some trouble in explaining his intellectual position on this topic, but he certainly believed that an icon provided, so to speak, a locus for the saint represented. If the saint resided in his icon, he could speak through it and work miracles by its agency. The difference between an icon and a pagan idol was that the former depicted a genuine saint, an active member of God's heavenly court, whereas the latter represented not so much a non-existent entity as a demon.

It seems that the military disasters of the seventh century led many people to believe that they were being deliberately punished by God for some serious defect in their worship. What part, if any, was played in this by heretical groups is unclear. We do know, however, that there was some popular agitation before the Emperor Leo III, a Syrian from Germanicea (Marash), decreed in 730 that icons were to be removed. He wished to have the patriarch on his side, but since the patriarch refused to comply, another was appointed in his place. Those few who

actively resisted the emperor were punished. No immediate need was felt of obtaining the assent of the entire Church. The emperor was within his rights in purifying the faith of his subjects, and events on the battlefield proved his orthodoxy. It was only in 754 that Leo's successor Constantine v summoned a council of 338 bishops, the entire episcopate of the Empire, and whatever they felt in their hearts, they all signed on the dotted line.

As far as we can judge, Iconoclasm never commanded much popular support. The only group that openly espoused it was the mobile army that was indoctrinated by Constantine v and bound by oath to observe it. When, in 786, the Empress Irene attempted to convene a council at Constantinople in order to reintroduce icon-worship, her plans were frustrated by the soldiers. It should also be said that the populace of the capital in the 760s joined eagerly in the persecution of iconophile monks, dragging them through the streets and spitting on them in the hippodrome; but then, Constantine v was a very popular emperor and we may imagine that the recalcitrant monks were represented as his enemies. Otherwise, we cannot point to any mass demonstrations either *pro* or *contra*. The will of the government dictated the suppression of Iconoclasm in 787, its reintroduction in 814 and its final liquidation in 843. Admittedly, there never took place any persecution of the public at large. The regular clergy generally toed the line, and it was only a number of monks (not all monks by any means) who stood up for icons and suffered the consequences. The persecution under the Emperor Theophilus in the 830s was of very limited scope.

The patriarch Photius, who presided over the liquidation of the last traces of Iconoclasm, loudly proclaimed the idea that all heresies had been defeated once and for all. The council he convened in 867 was supposed to mark 'the triumph over all the heresies', and the patriarch confidently asserted that 'no manner of impiety shall henceforth speak freely'.³⁸ There was no doubt in his mind – and this view came to prevail in the Orthodox Church – that religious doctrine had been defined with complete finality. Nothing could be added to it, nothing taken away, as the Photian Council of 879–80 stated at its sixth session. The Emperor Leo vi was likewise convinced that all heresies had been abolished. In olden days, he said, the celebration of baptism in private chapels was forbidden because of the fear of a heretical ritual, but no such danger existed any more.³⁹ It is true that no major heresy was to arise again in the Eastern Church, but sects continued to flourish at the very time when Photius and Leo vi were expressing their optimistic views.

Among these sects the one most subversive of the established order was Paulicianism whose possible links with Manichaeism have not been entirely elucidated. Its centre lay in Armenia on both sides of the Byzantine border and it appears to have sprung up in the seventh century. The Paulician doctrine, in so far as we know it, was founded on the opposition of the triune God and the evil Demiurge who created the material world. The Paulicians accepted the New Testament (except for the book of Revelation and the two epistles of Peter) and had a particular devotion to St Paul, but, like true Manichees, they rejected the Old Testament. They thought that Christ acquired his body in Heaven, so that he neither was truly born of the Virgin Mary nor died on the cross. They consequently offered no honour to the cross, just as they spurned icons and the worship of saints. Again like Manichees, they seem to have had a class of initiates, but no regular clergy or liturgy. Their indifference to the sacraments made them, however, willing to undergo baptism and other rites of outward conformity. In this way they escaped easy detection.

Although their first two leaders are said to have been killed by the emperor's order, the Paulicians do not appear to have been severely repressed until the saintly patriarch Nicephorus prevailed on the Emperor Michael I (811–13) to decree the death penalty against them. The result of this thoughtless move was that the Paulicians went over the border and sought the protection of the Arab emir of Melitene (Malatya), who granted them an operational base from which they could raid Byzantine territory. This open hostility to the Byzantine State distinguishes the Paulicians from other heretical sects, though it should be noted that their leader Sergius (renamed Tychikos), himself a Byzantine of good family, did not approve of such action.⁴⁰ After Sergius, the next two leaders of the Paulicians were simply military men: Karbeas, an ex-Byzantine officer, established his followers in the stronghold of Tephrike (Divriği), thus setting up what amounted to an independent state, while his successor Chrysocheir carried out daring raids as far as Ephesus, Nicaea and Nicomedia and proudly demanded the cession to him of all of Asia Minor. It required several difficult campaigns for the heretics to be subdued and Tephrike destroyed (878?). Much later Karbeas and Chrysocheir, their Paulician background forgotten, appear in the epic of *Digenes Akrites* as the gallant Muslim captains Karoes and Chrysocherpes (or Chrysoberges), the latter being even represented as the grandfather of Digenes himself.

The fall of Tephrike did not entail the disappearance of Paulicians in

Asia Minor. In the tenth century they were still numerous in the region of Pontus⁴¹ and we meet them at the same time in the west of the subcontinent. Their main centre of action was, however, shifted to the Balkans where a body of them had already been settled in the eighth century. The heterogeneous and as yet incompletely evangelized population of Thrace, Macedonia and Bulgaria offered to the heresy an ideal breeding ground. It now emerged under the name of Bogomilism, so called after the priest Bogomil, of whom all we know is that he lived in Bulgaria under the Tsar Peter (927–69). The movement enjoyed a rapid success. By the middle of the tenth century the ecclesiastical authorities were worried; by the next century, if not earlier, Bogomilism was re-exported to Asia Minor, where its followers acquired the bizarre name of Phoundagiagitai. An important group was also formed at Constantinople. Some clues to the success of Bogomilism are provided by the Treatise (*Slovo*) of the priest Cosmas, believed to have been composed in about 972. It represents the sectaries as outward conformists whose most obvious distinction from the Orthodox lay in their purer and stricter life. That, however, in the eyes of Cosmas was sheer dissimulation. In addition to their gross dogmatic errors, their aversion to marriage and children, they also opposed manual labour. 'They teach their adherents not to submit to the authorities, they denigrate the rich, they hate the emperors, they rail at superiors, they insult the lords, they hold that God abhors those who work for the emperor, and they urge every servant not to labour for his master.'⁴² Here, at last, we have a 'social' motive that the modern mind can understand. For Cosmas, the Bogomils were peaceful hippies who undermined the established order, and he lays the blame squarely in the court of the Orthodox. It was the Orthodox themselves who disregarded the duties of marriage, who abandoned their wives and children and drifted in and out of monasteries, alleging the difficulty of looking after a family while serving a landowner and submitting to the violence of their lords.⁴³ It was Orthodox monks who lived in idleness while meddling in the affairs of the laity. It was Orthodox priests and bishops who neglected their pastoral duties. Few ecclesiastics of the time paint such a vivid picture of the apathy and laxity of Christian life.

It has been noticed that Cosmas does not prescribe any violent measures against the Bogomils. Indeed, the period 950–1050 was marked by a general relaxation of persecution. But times were changing and the official attitude began to harden, especially after the installation of the Comnenian dynasty. This shift is noticeable in the history of

the so-called Synodicon of Orthodoxy. The original Synodicon, which was intended to be read in all churches on the first Sunday of Lent, was composed soon after 843 and was a condemnation of Iconoclasm. For the next two centuries no additions were made to it, but from about 1050 onwards new condemnations and anathemas began to be appended. The first victim was a certain Gerontius of Lampe (otherwise unknown) who called himself the Anointed and 'vomited forth in Crete the poison of his detestable heresy'. Then it was the turn of the philosopher Italus of whom more will be said in Chapter 6. Next came the Calabrian monk Nilus who had some odd views about the divinization of Christ's human nature, then Eustratius, an ex-professor and metropolitan of Nicaea, who erred on roughly the same topic, and, in the middle of the twelfth century, the patriarch elect of Antioch, Soterichus Panteugenēs, who came to grief on the question of whether the eucharistic sacrifice was offered to the Father alone or to the Trinity.⁴⁴ It is true that most of these 'errors' were of a purely academic nature and could hardly have been understood by many people; even so, the Church was eager to assert its authority and to be seen to be so doing. The emperor, too, was lending his power to this laudable end. In 1114 Alexius I came in contact with Bogomils and Paulicians at Philippopolis (Plovdiv), a town that was almost entirely 'Manichaean', and he is said to have himself disputed with the heretics for days on end, with the result that many thousands were converted to Orthodoxy.⁴⁵ The evil, however, had reached Constantinople, where a multitude of people succumbed to it, even in the best houses. Alexius apprehended the leader of the sect, a certain monk Basil, and tricked him into confessing his errors. Basil, who refused to renounce them, was condemned to be burnt, while his disciples ended their days in a dungeon. A great pyre was lit in the hippodrome and when the executioners had tossed the heretic into it, there was neither smell of burning flesh nor smoke – nothing but a thin line of vapour, for even the elements rose up to confound the impious. That was the last public act of the admirable emperor who died soon thereafter. Bogomilism, however, continued to prosper. It expanded into Serbia and Bosnia, into Italy and southern France. It even breached the defences of Mount Athos and, in the Balkans, survived the Byzantine Empire.

Nearly all Byzantine dissent assumed the form of religious heresy. Historians have searched high and low for national and social causes – the 'real' causes of which heresy was only the mask – but, on the whole, their efforts have not been rewarded. Among the examples we have

reviewed, very few can be associated with break-away national tendencies: the Samaritans in the fifth and sixth centuries and the Monophysite Armenians may come under this heading. The Paulicians, too, had an independent state for the span of about twenty years, but that was the result of very particular circumstances that had nothing to do with dualism *per se*. As we have seen, the Bogomils were quite pacific in their behaviour and had no political aspirations that we know about. While the majority of them were doubtless Slavs, they attracted a following among many other nationalities.

The quest for social causes has proved equally inconclusive. In no case can we establish a clear connection between a heresy and a social class. The Manichaeans are known to have numbered many merchants, but also intellectuals, aristocrats and ordinary people. The Paulicians attracted a considerable number of soldiers. The Bogomils appear to have been largely of the peasant class, but also included minor clergy and, if Anna Comnena is to be trusted, members of some of the better families of Constantinople. Of course, it may be argued that some heresies, and the dualist ones in particular, had a social implication insofar as they discouraged marriage and procreation. Given the chronic manpower shortage of the Empire, the government might have been concerned about such doctrines, but if it was concerned for that reason, it never said so. Besides, Christian monasticism, which normally enjoyed the highest esteem, produced the same demographic effect.

The truth of the matter is that the term 'heresy' covers a diversity of phenomena that would not have been considered under the same heading were it not for the fact that State Orthodoxy lumped them all together. There were sects of a judaizing character, such as the Quartodecimans and the Athingani, whose origin went back to the earliest days of Christianity and which were content to vegetate in rural districts of Asia Minor. Their 'deviation' was largely due to questions of ritual. Then there were the 'noble' heresies which resulted from more advanced theological speculation and some of which differed from Orthodoxy only in matters of terminology. If we make allowance for the fact that certain key words such as 'nature', 'essence', 'person' were not always understood in the same sense, it is difficult to find anything that is fundamentally wrong in the doctrine of a Nestorius or a Severus of Antioch, not to mention such an eminent theologian as Theodore of Mopsuestia who was unjustly and needlessly condemned at the Fifth Council. The story of the 'noble' heresies may be full of political

intrigue, but in themselves they were not intended to be subversive. And once a separate Church had been formed, attachment to it became a matter of inherited allegiance. A man who was born a Monophysite remained a Monophysite except under duress; and I know of no instance of a Catholic converting to Monophysitism as a gesture of hostility to the State.

Only in the case of the dualist heresies are we on somewhat different ground. Procopius, in describing events he knew very well, since they concerned his native city of Caesarea in Palestine, has this to say of the Samaritans who were forced by Justinian to embrace Christianity: 'Most of them, resentful of the fact that they were made to change their ancestral beliefs by law rather than of their own free will, immediately inclined to the Manichaeans and the so-called Polytheists.'⁴⁶ A later attestation concerns the soldiers who were disbanded in 786 by the empress Irene because of their support of Iconoclasm: they, too, joined the Manichaeans, or Paulicians.⁴⁷ It is not surprising that dualism should have attracted disgruntled elements since it represented itself as a movement of radical reform to regain those truths of Christianity that had been deliberately obscured by the State-sponsored clergy.⁴⁸ The appeal of such an attitude may be gauged from the fact that dualism was the only form of Byzantine heresy that spread widely across ethnic and geographical boundaries.

The real villain of the story is, of course, State Orthodoxy. 'We know', wrote Justinian, 'that nothing pleases merciful God so much as unanimity of belief on the part of all Christians in the matter of the true and stainless faith.'⁴⁹ Nor was unanimity of belief sufficient; as time went on, uniformity of liturgical practice, of feast and fast days, of dress and hair style became equally if not more important. If complete tolerance was impossible to achieve, persecution, at least, could have been avoided. Even so strict a cleric as Theodore the Studite proclaimed that the role of the Church was to instruct heretics, not to kill them.⁵⁰ The State, identified with the Orthodox Church, often thought otherwise. It was a direct result of its intolerance that millions of potentially loyal subjects of the emperor were turned into heretics and hence into enemies.

CHAPTER 5

MONASTICISM

No other aspect of Byzantine life is as amply documented as monasticism. We possess hundreds of biographies of holy monks, countless meditations, epistles, sermons, exhortations and justifications dealing with the monastic condition. We have, in addition, a number of rules, disciplinary canons, imperial edicts, even a considerable body of archival material. Yet, in spite of this overabundant harvest of literature, it is no easy matter to give an account of Byzantine monasticism in terms that would be understandable to us today.

One point has to be made at the outset: monasticism was a lay movement. It was akin to, and may have developed from, certain groupings of Christians who led a particularly austere and dedicated life, without, however, withdrawing from the world. Such men were known as *spoudaioi* (the zealous or earnest ones) or *philoponoï* (the industrious ones), while in the Syriac-speaking provinces they were called 'the sons of the Covenant'; and they possessed some form of organization of which, unfortunately, very little is known. If we consult the Life of St Antony, who is regarded as the father of monasticism, we find that he began his spiritual endeavours (in about 270 AD) by following the precepts of whatever *spoudaioi* he happened to meet and learning from them 'the advantages of zeal [*spoudê*] and training [*askêsis*]'. In those days, we are told, regular monasteries did not yet exist in Egypt, nor did solitaries live in the desert, 'but every man who wished to attend to himself would practise solitary training not far from his own village'.¹ The decisive step that Antony took – and he may not have been the first to take it – was to remove himself, initially to an empty tomb and then to the desert. Withdrawal or flight from one's village (*anachôrêsis*) had been since the first century AD a common phenomenon in Egypt in the case of impoverished people who found themselves unable to pay their taxes.² No such motives may be imputed to Antony who was a rich farmer and

who voluntarily gave away his possessions, but it is quite possible that the rapid diffusion of the monastic movement was not unconnected with the prevalence of *anachôrêsis* as an escape from the burdens of everyday life.

Indeed, monasticism proved an immediate success. Precisely how this came about we do not know because we are very poorly informed about the first eighty or hundred years of the movement. Our earliest reliable sources date from about the middle of the fourth century, by which time it had spread to many parts of the Roman world and claimed tens of thousands of adherents. If it is true, as is generally believed, that monasticism started in Egypt, it must have reached Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia within a very short period. We find it established in northern Asia Minor before 340 and by about 350 there were already some monks in western Europe.

At an early stage of its development in Egypt monasticism assumed the two forms that were to become classical and persist throughout the Byzantine period, namely the solitary and the communal. St Antony was the model of the former. His *askêsis* consisted essentially in isolation, prayer and fasting. While he often went without sleep, never washed and never anointed his body with oil, he did not impose on himself any of the bizarre penances that we find in later periods. His adversaries were the demons who tempted him, first with thoughts of his former comforts and family, then with lascivious desires, finally with terrifying visions of wild beasts: we must remember that to Egyptians the desert was a frightening zone peopled by monsters. When, at the age of fifty-five (c. 306 AD), Antony emerged victorious from his seclusion, he appeared, as it were, transfigured: he had not aged physically, while he had acquired a spiritual firmness, the gift of teaching and the ability of healing the sick. Then it was that he persuaded many persons to adopt the solitary life, 'and thus monasteries were set up in the mountains and the desert was settled by monks who had gone forth from their homes'.³ The next fifty years of his life – he died in 356 at the age of 105 – were spent more in public. Distinguished persons came to seek his healing powers, pagan philosophers disputed with him, even the Emperor Constantine wrote him a letter which he did not wish to receive until he had been assured that the emperor was a Christian – something Antony did not seem to know. All in all, a remarkable career for an Egyptian peasant who never learnt any Greek and remained illiterate to the end of his life.

The communal (coenobitic) form of monasticism was set up in

Upper Egypt by Antony's younger contemporary Pachomius (d. 346). After serving in the imperial army and apprenticing himself to a hermit, Pachomius decided that the military model was best suited for monastic life. The establishment he set up at Tabennêsi, on the right bank of the Nile, was envisaged as a walled camp neatly divided into 'houses', each under a commanding officer. Monks were grouped in houses according to their occupation or craft and spent much of their time pursuing manual labour; they worked together, worshipped together and ate together. Particular emphasis was laid on obedience: ordinary monks were subject to the chief of their house who, in turn, reported to the abbot. By the time he died, Pachomius had become the leader of a chain of about a dozen men's monasteries and three nunneries, numbering in all several thousand inmates.

It was said that an angel of the Lord revealed to Pachomius a rule, or a set of detailed regulations, inscribed on a bronze tablet. We need not enquire whether Pachomius himself or one of his immediate successors was the author of this document which was translated from Coptic into Greek and from Greek into Latin. The fullest text that has come down to us is Jerome's Latin version made in 404.⁴ It pictures a monastery surrounded by a wall and enclosing a chapel, a refectory, a room for the sick and a hostel for strangers. Monks slept in individual cells which had no locks, and were not allowed any property except a mat, two sleeveless garments, one cape and a few other essentials. Neither fasting (twice a week) nor prayer was excessive. Some knowledge of the Scriptures and a minimum of literacy were required (*etiam nolens legere compelletur*), but no need was felt for further education. Whatever they were doing, monks were required to keep a distance of one cubit from one another; they could not speak to anyone in the dark, could not leave the compound without permission (and then only in pairs) and on their return could not narrate anything they had heard outside. What, we may well wonder, was the attraction of this regimented life to which thousands of men and women flocked? Clearly, Pachomius did not impose excessive demands on entrants, and seemed to be intent on drawing as large a following as possible of ordinary people to whom he offered comradeship and a minimum standard of material security. The Rule shows awareness of the danger of admitting criminals and runaway slaves,⁵ but the screening process was rudimentary and there can be little doubt that considerable numbers of robbers, debtors and misfits of every description sought anonymity behind the conventual walls.

Both in its solitary and its coenobitic form monasticism posed a threat to the established Church. The monk, it should be repeated, was a Christian layman who followed literally Christ's injunction, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven' (Mt. 19. 21). He sought to be the perfect Christian, to return to the simplicity of apostolic times when 'all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men' (Acts 2. 44-5). He held that there was only one morality, one *askêsis*, namely that of the Gospel, and that, ideally speaking, all Christians would become monks. Significantly, however, he sought perfection not through the Church, but outside it. Even St Antony attained sanctity without any recourse to the clergy and felt no need during his twenty years of reclusion to take communion. His whole way of life was an implicit condemnation of the Church 'in the world'. Whereas Origen had counselled a moral rather than a physical segregation from everything that was unholy, the monk was proclaiming the virtual impossibility of winning salvation without physical withdrawal. The ministry of the Church, its liturgy, its predication appeared to be almost irrelevant.

The alarm felt by some members of the episcopacy is apparent in the Canons of the Council of Gangra (c. 341 AD) which constitute, incidentally, one of our earliest documents concerning monasticism. The trouble was caused by a certain Eustathius who had acquired a considerable following in the province of Pontus. The practices he encouraged, if we may believe the bishops gathered at Gangra, were the following: he broke up marriages by teaching that married persons had no hope of salvation; he held churches in contempt and organized his own services; he and his followers wore strange clothes and caused women to put on men's garments and cut off their hair (the very hair that God had given them as a reminder of their submission to men); he diverted to his own uses the offerings made by the faithful; he encouraged slaves to abandon their masters; he urged the rich to give up all their possessions; he did not recognize married priests; he disregarded the fasts of the Church and abominated the eating of flesh.⁶ Clearly, Eustathius was subverting that very social order on which both the moral authority and the material livelihood of the Church depended; yet he was not branded as a heretic, was later made bishop and exerted considerable influence on St Basil who is universally regarded as a pillar of the Church.

The prestige of St Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, contributed to

gloss over the opposition between Church and monasticism. Whether from personal conviction or a shrewd calculation, he stood up as a public champion of the monastic movement.⁷ His *Life of Antony* was a manifesto in which he laid great stress on the hermit's respect (supposed or real) for the secular clergy. He certainly used Antony as a tool in his doctrinal disputes with heretics. Many other bishops acted in the same spirit with the result that a compromise was adopted. Whereas a Eustathius would have argued that Christian perfection was unattainable in the world and even St Basil thought it was difficult to achieve,⁸ there developed an acceptance of the 'two ways': monasticism was the high road to Heaven, but life in the world, if properly regulated by the Church, offered a possibility of reaching the same destination, though in a less direct fashion. Not the same *askêsis* for all Christians, but a harsher one for monks and a laxer one for laymen. Besides, it was argued, the existence of monks was highly beneficial for the public at large, even for the welfare and security of the State. For the monk by dint of self-abnegation and mourning attained a state of freedom from the passions (*apatheia*) akin to that of the angels which won for him familiarity (*parrhêsia*) with God. His prayers, therefore, were particularly efficacious. And if the Lord had been prepared to spare Sodom for the sake of ten righteous men, would he not show favour to a State that contained several thousands of holy monks?

The story of eastern monasticism after Antony and Pachomius is one of geographical expansion, local adaptation and unconscious evolution rather than one of planned reform. The solitary and coenobitic models were combined in a variety of ways. In Palestine, where monasticism is said to have been introduced at the very beginning of the fourth century by St Hilarion, a disciple of St Antony, there developed a special type of monastery known as the *lavra* grouping a number of individual cells or caves round a communal house. The cells were inhabited by semi-solitaries who gathered together for worship on Saturdays and Sundays. The prestige of the Holy Land served as a stimulus to monastic growth that assumed an international form: among the great names associated with Palestine, St Gerasimus (famous for his tame lion) was a Lycian, while both St Theodosius the Coenobiarch and St Sabas were Cappadocians. Of whatever national origin, scores of monasteries sprang up all round Jerusalem and Bethlehem, by the Jordan and the Dead Sea – at least 140 are known from textual evidence. No less successful was monasticism in Syria and Mesopotamia where, as far as we know, it first appeared in the reign of Constantine, predominantly in

its anachoretic form, and was soon swept to extraordinary excesses of self-mortification. Some solitaries chose to live like wild beasts, eschewing the use of fire and feeding on whatever grew spontaneously – they were known as ‘grazers’ (*boskoi*). Others loaded themselves with chains or shut themselves up in cages, while St Symeon Stylites (d. 459) won international renown by standing upright on a pillar whose height was gradually raised to forty cubits, thus marking his ascension to God. The only ‘dendrite’ among Byzantine saints was the Mesopotamian David who betook himself to Thessalonica, to perch there on a tree like a bird.

In 357 the youthful St Basil, who was drawn to the monastic life by the example of his devout mother and sister, undertook a journey to Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt to observe various kinds of *askêsis* and choose the one that was most suitable. He came to the conclusion that Antonian anachoretism, while admirable in some respects, had the grave disadvantage of offering no scope for fraternal charity and no opportunity of observing all the Lord’s commandments; besides, every man stood in need of correction by example or advice – something that could not be achieved in isolation. Basil decided, therefore, in favour of coenobitism, but he rightly judged the Pachomian houses to be too big for proper supervision. The community he set up at Annesi in Pontus after he had returned from his travels was a coenobium of more modest size, and that became the norm throughout the Byzantine period. As has often been observed, there never existed in the Greek Church a ‘Basilian Order’ or, for that matter, any other monastic ‘order’; but Basil’s status as one of the major Church Fathers did lead to a widespread acceptance of his monastic ideal which he set down in considerable detail in two works known as *The Longer* and *The Shorter Rules*.⁹

It was, however, from Syria that monasticism reached Constantinople. It seems to have been introduced by the Syrian Isaac who won a measure of fame by predicting to the heretical Emperor Valens his defeat at the hands of the Goths (378). The monastery he founded in *c.* 382 came to be known by the name of his successor Dalmatos, also an oriental and a former officer of the imperial guard. What appears to have been the second oldest monastery was set up by the Syrian Dios. Possibly third in seniority was that of Rufiniana, founded by the praetorian prefect Rufinus (392–5) near his suburban villa, where he established a group of Egyptian monks who, however, soon departed. The more famous monastery of the

'Sleepless Ones' (Akoimêtoi), who kept up an unceasing doxology by means of three teams that officiated in turn, was established in c 420, also by Syrians.

The attraction that the capital exercised on oriental monks may be perceived in an eminently curious document, the Life of St Daniel the Stylite (d. 493).¹⁰ Daniel was born in the region of Samosata, entered a monastery near his native village at the age of twelve and eventually became its abbot. At that time Symeon the Stylite was at the height of his fame and Daniel evidently saw all the advantages he could gain by adopting this novel and spectacular type of *askêsis*. For maximum publicity there was no place like Constantinople. The idea struck Daniel while he was on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Callously abandoning the community he had been chosen to direct, he betook himself to 'the second Jerusalem', even though he could speak no Greek. Arriving there, he selected a suitable spot on the European side of the Bosphorus, at a village called Anaplous, close enough to the capital to attract attention. At first he had some trouble with the locals, but he established his reputation by taking on the demons in a disused pagan temple and curing the patriarch Anatolius of a disease. Then came a stroke of luck: on the death of Symeon the Stylite a Syrian monk named Sergius arrived at the capital to present to the Emperor Leo I the great ascetic's leather cowl. Unable to gain an audience, Sergius took up residence with Daniel, his fellow-countryman. The time had come to try the column trick. With the help of a palace official, a fairly low column (twice a man's height) was set up next to a vineyard belonging to another Syrian who happened to be attached to the emperor's table. In this way Daniel came to the notice of high dignitaries and the imperial family. Everyone tramped out to see the new attraction: the empress offered to set up Daniel on her own property if he agreed to move (he refused); the ex-prefect Cyrus celebrated the Syrian wonder in an elegiac inscription. Daniel, following Symeon's example, ascended a second column that was taller than the first; then a third, whose foundations were laid by the emperor himself to whom Daniel had foretold the birth of a son. A monastic complex was built with the column as a focus and a martyrion was dedicated to St Symeon whose relics were brought from Antioch and deposited with great pomp. Admittedly, Daniel's life was not a bed of roses, and in transplanting 'stylitism' from the warmer climate of Syria to the shores of the Bosphorus, he had to reckon with the winter snow: on one occasion he nearly froze to death. That, however, was a professional

hazard. In his lifetime Daniel proved an enormous success and Constantinople was only too happy to have a stylite of its own.

The early monasteries were established not in the city proper, but outside the Constantinian walls, and the same was generally the case elsewhere. The presence of monks in cities was actually prohibited by a law of no less pious an emperor than Theodosius I who ordered them to inhabit 'desert places and desolate solitudes'. This law proved to be counter-productive and was repealed two years later.¹¹ Even so, there was a general feeling that monks had no place among the temptations and bustle of a city: at Antioch they were jeered at and dragged through the streets – and this by Christians.¹² In the countryside, on the other hand, the monk was a familiar figure and, if he happened to be a noted ascetic, he fulfilled a real social purpose: he healed diseases in people and cattle, cast out demons and disinfected, if one may say so, places made dangerous by pagan association. In short, he was a kind of witch doctor. How important he was in his rural district, how much deference he enjoyed from the local population, may vividly be seen in the Life of St Theodore of Sykeon¹³ and many other texts. Was the monk, then, to be denied the same role in cities? By the sixth century it came to be accepted that a trained ascetic who was proof against all temptations of the flesh could properly undertake an urban ministry if he concealed his true identity. And so there came into being a curious category of saints, that of the 'holy fools'. The idea of simulating madness was not in itself new, but when it first appeared in the fourth century, it was in a coenobitic context, and the purpose of the exercise was to add to one's humiliations on earth so as to reap a greater reward in Heaven. A different motivation seems to have inspired the most famous 'holy fool' who acted in an urban context, St Symeon of Emesa (mid-sixth century):¹⁴ he was bent on reforming the most despised elements of society, such as prostitutes and actors, and on converting Jews and heretics. To do so inconspicuously and, as it were, playfully, he pretended to be a harmless lunatic: he did odd jobs in taverns, consorted with loose women, misbehaved in church, deliberately violated Christian fasts, while practising in secret the strictest *askêsis*. Had not St Paul said, 'If any man seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise' (I Cor. 3. 18)? For obvious reasons St Symeon did not find many imitators, but the tradition of 'folly for the sake of Christ' never died out in the Byzantine world and eventually passed to Russia.

The fifth and sixth centuries marked the peak of the monastic

movement in the East. Courted by the aristocracy and by emperors, encouraged by bishops, the new Christian 'philosophers' basked in the notoriety they were meant to avoid. Anecdotes about the exploits, miracles, predictions and memorable dicta of monks were collected and avidly read. For Egypt we have the *Historia monachorum* (c. 400) and the *Lausiaca History* by Palladius (419–20), for Syria the *Historia religiosa* by Theodoret (c. 444). In addition to these famous works as well as individual Lives of prominent monastic saints, there circulated in all the languages of the Near East countless stories, often stereotyped and interchangeable, that eventually found their way into the collections called *paterica* (books of the Fathers). Yet, the most eloquent memorial to the prestige of monasticism is surely the huge complex of Qal'at Sim'an built by imperial initiative as the pilgrimage centre of Symeon the Stylite. What greater tribute could have been paid by civilization to bigotry?

From being willing outcasts from society the monks became, therefore, popular heroes and members of the establishment. The price they were asked to pay was regulation by and subjection to the ecclesiastical authorities. Already in the fifth century we find the monks of a diocese being controlled by a 'village bishop' (*chôrepiskopos*) or a visitor (*periodeutês*) or else placed under the authority of an exarch. Justinian tried to go even further: while recognizing the exceptional sanctity of the monastic life, he ruled that no monastery could be founded without the bishop's consent, and that the bishop, too, would appoint the abbot. He also decreed that all postulants should undergo a three-year probation, that all the monks of a given monastery, except for anchorites, should sleep in the same building so as to observe one another more closely, and that they should be severely discouraged from changing their place of residence.¹⁵ One need not suppose that this ordinance was fully observed. Monasticism was too fluid, too dispersed and too influential to submit to such regulations. It was also beginning to acquire considerable economic wealth. Later Byzantine history proves that it retained its independence *vis-à-vis* the established Church.

As the Early Byzantine Empire was crumbling to pieces, a Cilician monk called John Moschus, who died as a refugee in Rome (634), painted a memorable picture of eastern monasticism as he had known it. He called it *The Meadow*.¹⁶ In the tradition of earlier *paterica* it is a series of edifying anecdotes that Moschus had picked up in the course of his travels. The world he was familiar with, that of Orthodox monasticism, had already shrunk as a result of the Monophysite

schism: it was centred on Palestine, extended to the south to Mount Sinai and Alexandria, but not far into Egypt, to the north and west to Cilicia, Cyprus and some of the Greek islands. A constellation of ascetics, whose fame spread by word of mouth, illuminated this world. They cultivated continence, poverty, silence, charity. Among them were a few stylites and 'grazers', but the more extreme forms of mortification were generally avoided. There was a keen spirit of competition in achieving virtue, but also a feeling that the heroic age of monasticism had passed. If Moschus shows himself intolerant, it is towards the Monophysites, but his good-natured narrative hardly allows us to suspect that next to his world, the 'internationale' of Orthodox monks, there existed a parallel world, that of the Monophysite monks who, under persecution, cultivated, perhaps with occasional excesses, much of the same virtues, who worked the same miracles and obtained the same signs from heaven. To penetrate this other world the reader may be referred to *The Lives of the Eastern Saints* by John of Ephesus.¹⁷

Of all social classes the monks were perhaps the least vulnerable to the catastrophe of the seventh century. Some, it is true, were massacred, while others fled to the West – to Carthage, Sicily and Rome, where we already find them well represented at the Lateran Council of 649. But even under Arab rule Orthodox monks were able to retain their principal establishments in Palestine (these were suppressed in the early ninth century) as well as Mount Sinai. St John Damascene was the most famous, but not the last representative of Orthodox monasticism in Palestine.

Unexpectedly, it was in the Byzantine Empire rather than under the infidel that monasticism was dealt its severest blow. When the Isaurian emperors made Iconoclasm the official doctrine of the realm, the secular clergy did not put up much of a fight, as we have already noted; it was the monks who organized a resistance movement. That they did so does not mean that they had a particular, 'monkish' interest in defending 'superstition' or that they derived a material benefit from the worship of icons, as some historians have suggested. It was simply that their unique authority *vis-à-vis* the people made them the natural champions of traditional religious observance. Besides, they were not quite as susceptible to government pressure as were the bishops. When driven away from one place they could go to another, even beyond the frontiers of the Empire, since the network of their connections extended both to Palestine and to Italy. However that may be, when the persecution of

the iconophiles broke out in earnest in the 760s, monks were the chief victims. The Emperor Constantine v had a particular aversion to them and called them 'unmentionables'. He forced them to marry, subjected them to public derision and secularized some of the most famous monasteries of Constantinople. The persecution in western Asia Minor was, we are told, even more severe because of the zeal of the local governor, Michael Lachanodrakon. He rounded up at Ephesus all the monks and nuns in his province and said to them: 'Whoever wishes to obey the emperor and myself, let him put on a white garment and take a wife forthwith. Those who refuse to do so will be blinded and banished to Cyprus.' The order was immediately carried out and many proved to be martyrs that day, while others, our chronicler adds sadly, broke their vows and lost their souls.¹⁸

It was a great day for the monks when the last of the Isaurians, Leo iv, died (784) and an even greater day when Iconoclasm was officially condemned by the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787) in which they were well represented – emissaries from 132 monasteries, mostly in Constantinople and Bithynia, attended the sessions. For some thirty years thereafter there was a great surge of monastic construction, followed by a second period of tribulation when Iconoclasm was re-introduced (815–43). Once again, monks led the resistance. This time they were better organized, thanks especially to the unflagging activity of St Theodore the Studite. Descended from a prominent family of civil servants, well educated and well connected, Theodore was, above all, a practical man and a strict disciplinarian. He wished to reform monasticism by infusing it with the spirit of the early Fathers. He was interested not in mystical contemplation, but in hard work, poverty and obedience. He insisted that monks should not own slaves or any female animals (an abuse he particularly deplored); that they should not go out needlessly, should not contract any family links (such as that of godfather) with laymen, should hold everything in common and distribute to the poor any income that exceeded their needs.¹⁹ Theodore's ideal was rather akin to that of Pachomius whom he also resembled in that he headed a confederation of monasteries numbering in all about a thousand monks. In order to achieve his aims he had to set up a hierarchy of command (assistant abbot, administrator, assistant administrator, store-keeper, disciplinary officers, and so on) and even institute a kind of gaol in which disobedient and careless monks were subjected to a diet of bread and water since correction by scourging was suitable only for laymen.²⁰ We may be grateful to Theodore that he laid

emphasis, among other manual occupations, on the copying of books and thus helped to create a famous scriptorium at the Studius monastery.

Monasticism emerged greatly strengthened from the iconoclastic troubles. It had added a new series of martyrs and confessors to the calendar of the Eastern Church; it had also established itself as the voice of religious conscience whenever bishops were forced to compromise on matters of doctrine or discipline. The first patriarch of Constantinople after the 'triumph of Orthodoxy', Methodius (843-7), was an ex-monk; so was his successor Ignatius (847-58). There is ample evidence that the founding of new monasteries and the extension of existing ones went on apace in the ninth, tenth and following centuries, so much so that after a time the imperial government grew alarmed. In 935 Romanus I Lecapenus decreed that monasteries would be barred from acquiring the lands of peasants even by way of donation,²¹ and the same prohibition was repeated by Constantine VII in 947. Nicephorus Phocas went further in 964. In a well-known constitution of that year²² he roundly castigated the monastic establishment for their insatiable greed, for the acquisition of vast tracts of land, superb buildings and innumerable heads of cattle. This was not, he reminded them, the way in which the desert Fathers had lived. He then went on to decree that no new monasteries were to be founded. He suggested instead that old ones that had fallen into decay might be rehabilitated, but not through the donation of lands. Even ruined monasteries owned sufficient fields: what they lacked was the manpower and the animals to make the land productive. The only loopholes that Nicephorus allowed concerned monasteries which through mismanagement had lost their lands (such cases were to be investigated by government agents) and the founding of cells and *lavrai* provided these did not acquire any real estate. Now Nicephorus was a fervent admirer of the monastic life and cannot be charged with anti-clerical feelings. The main thrust of his law was to make monastic lands productive while stemming the constant erosion of peasants' holdings.

Further regulations, introduced by Basil II in 996, reveal the workings of monasticism at village level. A peasant, he says, would become a monk, build a chapel and assign his land to it. He might be joined by a couple of others. On their death the local bishop would seize the property on the pretext it was a monastery, and either keep it himself or attribute it to a lay potentate. The emperor ruled that such chapels did not have the status of monasteries and ought to revert to the village

commune; the bishop's role was to be limited to supervising the conduct of the resident monks and he was forbidden to collect any dues from them. The name of monastery was to be reserved to establishments numbering a minimum of eight to ten monks. These would fall under the jurisdiction of the bishop who would be free to assign them at will, provided they did not acquire any more land.²³

To grasp the complexity of the situation, we must bear in mind several facts. First, a Byzantine monastery was normally an agricultural concern which, if properly managed, produced a profit in addition to the contributions levied on new entrants and other donations. Secondly, a monastery's estates were, by imperial and canon law, inalienable, which meant that they could either remain static or grow. Thirdly, the ownership of monasteries was vested in a variety of bodies: some were imperial, others patriarchal or episcopal; some were privately owned through descent from the founder or some other reason; some were entirely independent. We may assume that in each case the owner drew whatever surplus the monastery produced and was in a position to exert considerable influence on the internal affairs of the establishment. The play of interests was thus extremely complex. Unless a monastery happened to be independent (*autodespoton* or *autexousion*), the monks themselves were not the main beneficiaries. Of course, they obtained a living which may have been fairly comfortable; basically, however, they were the overseers who stood between the owner and the agricultural labourers.

Towards the latter part of the tenth century we find yet another form of monastic administration. As already indicated by Basil II, a convent would be assigned to a lay patron (known as *charistikarios*) who gained complete control of its estates and revenues for the duration of his lifetime and could occasionally pass it on to his heir, but not beyond the third generation. The abuses which this system could engender were obvious: a patron could, and often did, completely despoil a monastery. Besides, monasteries became little more than assets that were exchanged and traded. The philosopher Michael Psellus, who was no less shrewd than Voltaire in his financial dealings, acquired rights over more than a dozen monasteries. And what if the patron was a man of low morals or, worse still, a foreigner? Some indignant voices rose in protest.²⁴ Yet the Church itself took no steps to abolish the system which, after reaching a peak in the eleventh century, appears to have declined somewhat, but remained in force until the end of the Empire. The reason may have been that the Church simply could not manage

the enormous number of monasteries under its nominal jurisdiction and reckoned that, whatever abuses were perpetrated, it was better to have them administered by influential laymen than not at all.

We know a great deal about monastic properties from the eleventh century onwards and we shall know even more when the archives of Mount Athos are published in their entirety.²⁵ There is also the testimony of architectural monuments. It is surely no coincidence that the most splendid religious buildings of the Middle Byzantine period happen to be monastic. If we may limit ourselves to Greece, all the major surviving churches from about the year 850 onwards belonged to monasteries: Skripou, Hosios Loukas, Nea Moni on Chios, Daphni and so until the end of the Empire. No such splendour and ostentation is found in any episcopal or parish church.

Had John Moschus been allowed to rise from the dead and make a tour of Byzantine monasteries in the eleventh or twelfth century, he would surely have been surprised and not a little saddened. Yet, on the face of it, nothing had changed: the same ideals were ostensibly pursued, the same disciplinary canons were applied (or, more probably, not applied), the same definition of monastic life continued to be held up by preachers. There were, as before, solitaries, stylites, coenobia and even *lavrai* on the Palestinian model. The geography of monasticism had, of course, greatly changed. While monasteries were dotted in all Byzantine lands, including, by now, the cities, there arose a number of important centres. The most notable, from the eighth century onwards, was the Bithynian Olympus (modern Uludağ) with much of the surrounding countryside. Here lived St Platon, the uncle of Theodore the Studite, Theodore himself, St Methodius, the future patriarch, St Theophanes Confessor, St Ionnicius the Great, St Methodius, the future apostle of the Slavs, and a host of lesser saints whose hour of glory coincided with the second Iconoclastic persecution. The second great centre, from the late tenth century onwards, was Mount Athos which eventually eclipsed all other holy mountains. Mount Latmos (Latros) near Miletus rose to prominence before the tenth century and Mount Galesion near Ephesus in the eleventh. Among lesser centres we may mention Mount Kyminas, somewhere on the borders of Bithynia, and Mount Ganos in Thrace. What is rather remarkable is that central and eastern Asia Minor (except for Pontus) figure very little in the annals of Byzantine monasticism. Many monasteries doubtless existed in Capadocia, but they have left practically no written record.

There was certainly scope for a reform of eastern monasticism,

particularly in the eleventh century when the structure of society was undergoing important changes. Some ferment in monastic circles did occur and one figure, that of Symeon the New Theologian, stands out. Symeon (c. 949–1022) was a mystic, not a reformer, but he exerted considerable influence in two respects. Probably reacting against the dull materialism of contemporary monasteries, he proclaimed the purpose of spiritual life to be an inner transformation which led to a direct vision of God manifested in the guise of an ineffable light. He also insisted on the importance of total obedience to a spiritual mentor whose God-given authority of ‘binding and loosing’ exceeded that of any priest appointed by men. Of course, Symeon belonged to a mystical current that had distant antecedents in the Eastern Church, a current that can be traced back through St Maximus Confessor to Origen; what is, however, remarkable in the present context is the outspokenness with which he assailed the established clergy. He argued that bishops and priests had altogether lost by their unworthy conduct the gift of grace they had received from the apostles and become no better than laymen. Only the pretence and the outer garb of priesthood remained, while the spiritual gift had passed to monks – not to all monks by any means, but to those whose virtue was made visible by signs. They were the only true Christians, the successors of the apostles.²⁶

Understandably, Symeon caused considerable irritation to the ecclesiastical authorities and was even banished from the capital. He had, however, the good fortune of belonging to a prominent family and living in a fairly tolerant period, otherwise he would have suffered a harsher fate, especially since his doctrine smacked of Messalianism. Had he also been less of an enthusiast, he might have realized that monasticism had become practically as inert as the secular clergy. Indeed, far from acting as the voice of Orthodox conscience, it was itself coming under the attack of bishops. We may pause to examine the case against the monks as stated by Eustathius of Thessalonica in the late twelfth century.²⁷

Eustathius was no ascetic and he conceded that monks had a right to live well, provided they did so tastefully. He quotes a story concerning the Emperor Manuel I Comnenus who one night decided to prepare a banquet for a nobleman’s wedding. The necessary foodstuffs being unavailable in the palace at such a late hour, an emissary was sent to the nearby monastery of St John in Petra. Although it was Tyrophagy week (the week before Lent), the good monks had no trouble in

providing different kinds of bread, dry and sweet wine, fruit, olives, cheese, fresh and pickled fish as well as red and black caviar, the latter imported from the river Don. This, in the eyes of Eustathius, was a laudable example of monastic surplus. The trouble with the monks he had to deal with, possibly those of Mount Athos, was that they were both greedy and boorish. They were recruited from the lowest strata of society, among weavers, tailors, coppersmiths, leather-workers, beggars and thieves. As a result they were nearly illiterate, never read any books (indeed, they sold books from monastic libraries) and were unwilling to admit any educated postulants. Instead of 'philosophizing' in their monasteries, they spent most of their time in the market place and had a great expertise in buying cheaply and selling dearly. They drew exorbitant rents from their tenants, deliberately defrauded rich donors, faked property deeds, went hunting, carried arms. Many of them kept their personal estates and even added to them; some engaged in trade and usury. To cap it all, monks held the clergy in contempt. They continually harassed bishops and caused calculated damage to episcopal lands by closing off roads and diverting water.

While bishops and monks hurled accusations at one another, life in monasteries went on as before. To illustrate its course I have chosen two examples, very nearly contemporary and both belonging to the same province, namely Cyprus. The first, that of the monastery of Machairas, is surely the more typical of the two. The second, that of St Neophytus, reveals a remarkable personality and the fate of his endeavours.

The story of Machairas is known from the *typikon* of the monastery.²⁸ About the middle of the twelfth century a Palestinian hermit, Neophytus (not to be confused with his more famous namesake just mentioned), left the desert near the Jordan river and came to Cyprus where he set up a hut on a steep mountain and was fed by the peasants. He was accompanied by one disciple, Ignatius. Neophytus died and Ignatius took on another companion. The two of them began having more ambitious ideas and so they went to Constantinople to present a petition to the emperor. Manuel I granted them the mountain and its surroundings free of charge and a yearly income of fifty gold pieces. He also decreed that the monastery should be entirely independent. This enabled Ignatius to put up a chapel and a few cells and to organize a community of five or six monks. So far, a normal story.

In the year 1172 the energetic Nilus, who appears to have been also a Palestinian, joined the brotherhood. He made himself useful by fetch-

ing food supplies from Cilicia at a time of famine and eventually was made abbot. His next step was to solicit donations from the faithful in the form of real estate and farm animals. In this he was quite successful and was able to build a church, a refectory and a residential wing, the whole complex surrounded by a ditch. The monastery was consecrated by the local bishop who was made to understand that his only right was to rubber-stamp the election of the abbot. A second delegation was sent to Constantinople and received from the Emperor Isaac II (1185–95) the grant of an orchard from the Crown domains at Nicosia and a tax exemption of twelve gold pieces. This was followed by a chrysobull of the Emperor Alexius II (1195–1203) giving the monastery complete exemption from tax on its lands and on twenty-four tenant farmers (*paroikoi*) in perpetuity. Both emperors could afford to be generous since neither of them held sway in Cyprus which became an independent principality in 1185 and was conquered by Richard Lionheart in 1191. But even if Nilus drew no advantage from these privileges, the properties he had accumulated were amply sufficient. By 1210, when the final version of the *typikon* was drawn up, Nilus had also founded a nunnery in the nearby town of Tamasos which was to receive 8 per cent of the net income of the monastery. Out of these 8 per cent the priests officiating in the said nunnery were to be paid twenty-four gold pieces per annum. Supposing that the priests' salary amounted to a quarter of the endowment of the nunnery (and it was probably less than that), the total yearly income would have been 1,200 gold pieces, a pretty tidy sum in those days and a far cry from the fifty gold pieces of a few decades earlier.

The provisions of the *typikon* are particularly detailed in matters of administration. The community envisaged was a large one and was not to be increased, yet special incentives were offered for the admission of distinguished persons (*periphaneis*) who could be tonsured after a probation of six months, whereas ordinary people, in accordance with Justinianic legislation, had to wait three years while performing menial tasks. In principle, admission was free, but donations were not discouraged; once made they could not be refunded. Next to the abbot, the staff included a first and a second *oikonomos*, a sacristan, two wardrobe masters (*docheiarioi*), two or more keepers of stores, a disciplinary officer, and so on. All produce was to be carefully measured in the presence of witnesses, regular accounts were to be kept, inventories checked, new clothing issued to the monks only upon receipt of the old. It may be doubted if there existed in Cyprus at the time a more

efficiently organized agricultural enterprise than the monastery of Machairas. The one topic on which Nilus has very little to say is, however, education. He specifically forbids the admittance within the enclosure of lay children for schooling. Only boys who intended to become monks were to be let in to learn the Psalter and the church service in a special cell. Clearly, the monastery of Machairas was no centre of culture.

A few decades earlier another Cypriot, named Neophytus, was inspired by stricter ideals. He came from a farmer's family and when, at the age of eighteen, he entered the monastery of St Chrysostomos near Nicosia (in 1152), he could not read or write. So for five years he was made to tend the vineyards of the community, during which time he acquired the first rudiments of literacy and learnt the Psalter by heart. Consumed by a desire for the eremitic life, he was allowed to go to Palestine with a view to finding there a suitable mentor, but he was disappointed in his quest. Back in Cyprus, he decided to proceed to Mount Latmos near Miletus. He accordingly made for Paphos in the hope of boarding a ship, but was arrested on suspicion of being a fugitive and robbed of all his money, namely two gold pieces. Being now entirely penniless, he wandered off into the hinterland and found the cave in which he was to spend the remainder of his long life (he died after 1214).

His subsequent rise to fame was largely due to the bishop of Paphos, Basil Kinnamos, who, to judge by his family name, was an aristocrat from Asia Minor or Constantinople. It was he who ordained Neophytus presbyter and persuaded him to found a community. The hermit, however, was quite unlike the astute Nilus. He endeavoured to keep his monastery small and resisted the acquisition of landed property. Only after the Latin conquest (1191), when there was scarcity of food and the brotherhood was swelled by the influx of strangers, did he consent to acquire some arable land, a vineyard and a few head of cattle, but he regarded these as necessary evils.

Sitting alone in his cave (*enkleistra*), Neophytus devoted himself to literary endeavours. His learning, of course, was not very deep: it was limited to the Bible, a few Fathers of the Church and Lives of saints. Yet, for a man of his background, he read widely and, what is more, he acquired a remarkable command of ecclesiastical Greek, if not of correct spelling. He also collected books. In one passage he tells us how for thirty-seven years he had sought throughout western Cyprus a copy of St Basil's *Hexaëmeron*, but all in vain – an interesting admission, since the

Hexaëmeron was an extremely common book. Even so, Neophytus was able to assemble a library of some fifty volumes, a respectable number for a provincial monastery. As an author, Neophytus composed sixteen works of religious content which he proudly enumerates in his *typikon*. At times he also wrote verse. Yet most of his literary production, edifying and accessible as it was to a public of moderate culture, remained unread. Several of his compositions have survived in unique copies, the very same ones that the saint deposited in the library of his monastery. There they remained gathering dust until they were bought in the seventeenth century by agents of the French government.²⁹

The monastery of St Neophytus has had a continuous existence until today and it cannot be said that it suffered any hardship as a result of the Latin occupation. On the contrary, there is evidence of reasonable prosperity: at the end of the fifteenth century it had a yearly income of two hundred Venetian ducats, and new buildings, including an ambitious church, were put up. Even so, the monastery did not produce a single spiritual or literary figure. The founder's express wish that the abbot should be, like himself, a solitary was soon disregarded. Far from becoming a centre of ascetic virtue, the Enkleistra was turned into an ordinary *koinobion*, an agricultural enterprise like all the other monasteries of Cyprus.

Throughout its long existence Byzantine monasticism never broke out of its original mould. The only possibility of reform lay in a return to a stricter interpretation of the desert Fathers or else in a turning inwards, towards a mysticism that could be shared only by a few. And so the heritage of Symeon the New Theologian was picked up in the fourteenth century by the hesychasts of Mount Athos. The controversy concerning the 'uncreated light' of Mount Tabor and the method of attaining the beatific vision by holding one's breath while reciting the 'prayer of Jesus' belongs to the history of spirituality rather than to that of monasticism as an institution. We may note, however, that the manifesto of Gregory Palamas (1340) which won the formal approval of the Greek Church explicitly identified the monks as those persons of spiritual vision to whom the mysteries of the future dispensation were revealed just as the truths of Christianity had been vouchsafed to the Old Testament prophets.³⁰ It is hard to imagine that the good monks of Vatopedi who fought their neighbours of Esphigmenou with clubs over the possession of some fields and set fire to one another's trees³¹ were the same monks who claimed for themselves such a lofty position in God's grand design.

With their long tradition of hard-headedness and financial expertise Byzantine monasteries were well prepared to survive under foreign domination. Those of Mount Athos enjoyed considerable benefits when they passed under the rule of the Serbian King Stephen Dušan. When, a few decades later, the Ottoman Turks made their first appearance in Europe, the Athonite monasteries did not even wait for Turkish domination to be established. They went straight to the Sultan, offered their submission and obtained a confirmation of the titles to their landed estates (*c.* 1372).³² In the confusion that followed they were even able to extend their holdings and engage in other profitable ventures. The same cannot be said, of course, of all monasteries, but those that did survive the conquest did pretty well during the five centuries of Turkish rule. Byzantine monasticism thus outlived the Byzantine Empire.

CHAPTER 6

EDUCATION

When, in the fourth century, Christianity triumphed over paganism there existed throughout the Empire a pattern of liberal education that had undergone no fundamental change since the Hellenistic period, over a span of some five hundred years. We must begin by describing its main features.

The education of boys comprised, as it still does today, three stages: primary, secondary and higher. Starting at about the age of seven, boys (and occasionally girls, too) would be sent to an elementary teacher (*grammatistês*) who inculcated in them a knowledge of the alphabet, of reading aloud, writing and counting. It was pretty basic stuff, and the *grammatistês*, who was usually self-employed and possessed no formal qualifications, held a fairly lowly station in society – hardly better than that of an artisan. For a considerable proportion of the public education stopped at the elementary level, leaving indelible memories of the master's rod, of endless repetition and memorization. The next or secondary stage was supervised by a different (and considerably better paid) teacher, the *grammatikos*, who expounded not so much grammar in our sense of the word (he did that too) as a selected number of 'classical' authors, mostly poets and, above all, Homer. The method followed by the *grammatikos* is known to us in considerable detail for the Late Antique period and comprised for each text studied four operations, namely correction (*diorthôsis*), reading aloud (*anagnôsis*), explanation (*exêgêsis*) and criticism (*krisis*). This sounds very formal and, in fact, it was. By 'correction' was meant the confrontation of the texts held by master and students to make sure that they were identical, something that could not be taken for granted. The text was then recited with the proper intonation. This had to be done because in antiquity words were written without any separation and without punctuation. When the text had been read aloud it had to be explained, first linguistically

(since the language of Homer and the other ancient poets was not generally understood), then historically, meaning that the names of various mythological personages as well as geographical names had to be identified and learnt by heart. Finally, *krisis* referred not so much to literary criticism as to pointing out the moral lessons that could be extracted from the ancient texts.

The study of the poets was supplemented by that of grammar, usually in the handbook of Dionysius the Thracian (first century BC) which retained its enormous prestige throughout the Byzantine period. This was little more than a classification of language: vowels and consonants, the quantity of vowels (in other words whether they were short, long or indifferent), diphthongs, the eight parts of speech, number, declension, conjugation, and so on. Thus equipped, the student had to tackle a number of exercises (*progymnasmata*), carefully graduated and defined, of which the first four or five kinds were done in secondary school, while the rest were reserved for the higher stage of education. In the influential handbook of Hermogenes (second century AD) the following twelve exercises are listed:

- 1 The fable (usually about animals).
- 2 The tale (*diêgêma*), defined as 'the exposition of something that happened or might have happened'.
- 3 The pregnant maxim (*chreia*).
- 4 The gnomic saying (*gnômê*) which differed from the *chreia* in that the latter could contain some action (i.e. a little anecdote), whereas the *gnômê* was limited to a general statement of a deterring or encouraging nature.
- 5 The confutation (*anaskeuê*) or confirmation (*kataskeuê*) of a given proposition.
- 6 The common-place (*koinos topos*), that is, the elaboration of a general case, for example for or against a class of people (champions of valour, criminals) whose excellence or guilt was not in question.
- 7 The laudation (*enkômion*) of a given person, an animal, an abstract quality, a city, and so on, or its opposite, namely the invective (*psogos*).
- 8 The comparison (*synkrisis*).
- 9 The character sketch (*êthopoia*), normally in the form of a little speech that some well-known figure might have spoken on a given occasion, the purpose being to convey the mood (happiness/distress) and nature (man/woman, young /old) of the speaker.

- 10 The description (*ekphrasis*) of an object, a place, etc.
 11 The discussion of a general issue (*thesis*), such as, 'Ought one to marry?' Scientific questions were to be avoided as falling within the competence of philosophers.
 12 The proposal of a law or measure (*nomou eisphora*).¹

The above exercises were minutely distinguished from one another and subdivided: for example a *thesis* was held to differ from a *koinos topos* in that it concerned a debatable point; furthermore, it could be simple ('Ought one to marry?'), simple with a particular application ('Ought a king to marry?'), double ('Should one contend in athletic games or till the earth?'), and so forth. For each exercise standard themes were set and an invariable structure laid down. In the case of the *chreia*, for example, the theme could be the saying of Isocrates, 'The root of education is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.' The pupil then had to compose his exercise in a tripartite form: 1. Praise Isocrates for his wisdom; 2. Paraphrase the maxim; 3. Justify it either positively ('The most worthwhile things can only be achieved through exertion, but once achieved bring pleasure') or negatively or by means of an illustration.

While literary studies held a preponderant place in secondary education, four scientific subjects (the medieval *quadrivium*), namely arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and musical theory were also included – or perhaps we should say that they were included in principle – making up what was called the *enkyklios paideia*, meaning general or rounded education. This term often occurs in Byzantine texts, but it is difficult to tell whether the beneficiaries of such 'rounded education' had actually studied all or any of the scientific subjects in question or whether they had merely been to a secondary school. The second alternative is the more likely, and it seems that well before the Byzantine period the sciences were relegated more and more to higher education and then only for those who wished to pursue them.

Higher education (of which we have already described in large part the curriculum) was dispensed by the rhetor or sophist and was available in the larger cities only. The rhetor/sophist, if he held an established chair, was appointed by the local council and received a salary as well as benefiting from certain exemptions. In practice he also received payments or gifts from his pupils. If, on the other hand, he was a free-lance (and many of them were), he depended entirely on fees. There was thus an in-built competition between teachers which occasionally erupted into fights and the kidnapping of students. Boys

normally took up higher education at the age of fifteen and pursued it as long as their circumstances or their desires dictated: a complete course took about five years, but many left after two or three. Naturally, most of the students came from well-to-do families of decurions, government officials and lawyers. There is no way of estimating student numbers, but we may be right in saying that in the major centres they were in the hundreds rather than in the thousands. Libanius, who was the foremost sophist of Antioch in the second half of the fourth century, normally had about fifty students in his establishment whom he instructed with the help of four assistant masters. Since his teaching activity at Antioch extended over forty years, we may calculate (allowing for an average course of three years) that some seven hundred students passed through his hands. He was not, however, the only sophist of the Syrian capital.²

In addition to rhetoric, which formed the standard content of higher education, a few more technical subjects were available. Philosophy (including in principle what we understand today by science) flourished at Athens and Alexandria; medicine also at Alexandria, at Pergamum and elsewhere; law at Beirut. There was nothing, however, in the ancient world that corresponded to a university in the sense of a consortium of accredited teachers of various disciplines offering a syllabus of studies that led to a degree. The School of Alexandria and that of Constantinople (of which more will be said later) came closest to our concept of a university, but even there, as we shall see, the range of subjects taught was very limited. The budding scholar was, therefore, obliged to move about a great deal. After completing his secondary schooling in his local town, he would go to a larger centre, say Antioch or Smyrna or Gaza, to study with a prominent rhetor; but if he was attracted to philosophy, he would have to transfer to Alexandria or Athens. The quest for learning was synonymous with travel. It was also expensive since the young man had to maintain himself for several years in strange cities as well as paying his teachers. The mobility of students was paralleled by that of professors: Libanius, for example, had taught at Nicomedia, Nicaea and Constantinople before he settled down in his native Antioch.

Such, in brief, was the structure of education that was available in the eastern half of the Empire during the early centuries; nor was it different in the western half, except that Latin was used in the place of Greek. Setting aside for the moment the attitude of the Church, one cannot help wondering how relevant such a system was to the require-

ments of contemporary life. It is surely a paradox that an education largely oriented towards the art of public speaking in an assembly of citizens (and it may have been noticed that the most advanced exercise prescribed by Hermogenes was the proposal of a legal measure) should have prevailed at a time when democracy had become extinct. One can hardly imagine that the trivial issues that came up in municipal councils, such as the cleaning of sewers or the provision of public spectacles, called for flights of rhetoric as sublime as those of Demosthenes or Isocrates. Furthermore, rhetoric was taught in Attic Greek which was, to all intents and purposes, a dead language. Now it has been calculated that of the numerous identifiable students of Libanius roughly 40 per cent entered government service, 30 per cent took up liberal professions (largely court pleading which at that time did not require a legal training), 20 per cent returned to their inherited duties as decurions, and 10 per cent became teachers.³ Only this last and smallest group can be said to have applied their education to a practical purpose; for the rest it was a training of the mind, an ability to pen an elegant epistle when circumstances demanded it, and, above all, a common stock of clichés that constituted culture.

It is not entirely anachronistic to speak of relevance, since we happen to know that the bureaucratic government as instituted by Diocletian and elaborated by his successors did create a demand for certain qualifications that liberal education was unable to supply. These concerned the study of Latin in the eastern provinces and the acquisition of notarial skills, namely stenography and accounting. The violent opposition of Libanius to these illiberal studies proves that he felt his own profession to be threatened. When he saw the throng of students making their way to the Law School of Beirut, he reacted in the same manner as would a modern professor of Classics whose students deserted him in favour of Business Administration. Latin, that barbarous tongue, was not only becoming a precondition for legal studies; its administrative use was on the increase in the fourth century (temporarily as it proved). As for notarial training, that was, in the eyes of Libanius, appropriate to slaves, not to gentlemen. Yet 'technocrats' were rising to the highest posts in the administration.

What the government desired in the field of education may be discerned in the organization of the 'University' of Constantinople in 425. Certainly, higher education had been available at Constantinople, if not from the reign of Constantine, at any rate from that of Constantius II onwards. The rewards that could be expected to result from proximity

to the court naturally attracted to the new capital a number of distinguished rhetors, including, as we have seen, Libanius, who did not remain there very long, and Themistius (d. 388), who made for himself a brilliant career and rose to the rank of senator, even to the post of prefect of the city in spite of the fact that he was a pagan. The emperor valued him because he elevated the cultural level of the capital which became, thanks to him, 'a common lodging-house of culture'.⁴ In other words, Constantinople, in spite of its recent origins, was on its way to becoming a 'university town'. It seems, however, that after a time the government felt dissatisfied with the traditional pattern of education – hence the creation of a State University. One of several constitutions issued in 425⁵ begins by regulating the status of free-lance teachers: they may continue their courses provided they do so privately, but may not use public auditoria. Conversely, public teachers may not give private lessons. The composition of the State faculty is then laid down: for Latin three *oratores* and ten *grammatici*; for Greek five sophists and ten *grammatici*, while 'profounder studies' were represented by one professor of philosophy and two of law. Further constitutions concerned the quarters assigned to the University (it was housed in the Capitol) and the rank to which professors might aspire: after twenty years of satisfactory service and blameless life they would be rewarded with the title of *comes* of the first class, as would also a middle-grade civil servant.⁶

Evidently, the University was set up not out of a disinterested wish to foster the muses, but specifically to train State functionaries. This is shown by the near parity of Greek and Latin, by the provision of legal teaching and also by the fact that professors were appointed by the city prefect acting in the emperor's name. What is, however, even more remarkable is that the majority of the faculty (twenty out of thirty-one) consisted of *grammatici*, or secondary-school teachers. In other words we are dealing with an institution that combined the functions of high school and college under direct State supervision. How well it succeeded it is difficult to say. We happen to know the names of some of its professors: in the 470s the Egyptian Pamprepisus who was a pagan and something of a magician, in the sixth century the archetypal civil servant John Lydus who taught Latin, a language he may not have known very well. We cannot, however, point to any intellectual ferment, to any advance in scholarship or even to any body of learned writing that originated in the University of Constantinople: were it not for the ordinances of 425, we would hardly have known of its existence.

And although some historians have stated that Constantinople became, since the reign of Constantius II, the intellectual capital of the Empire, it is difficult to name in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries any scholar or writer of note who was a native Constantinopolitan or a product of its educational establishment.

If the State made some attempt to infuse relevance into the educational system, what of the Church? That ancient education was in an ultimate sense pagan in its outlook and in a more immediate sense based on the study of pagan authors no one will deny; though it is perhaps an exaggeration to say that the heathen myths of Homer and Hesiod, worn down as they were by centuries of classroom boredom, still retained much of a 'charge'. Even so, the stricter Christians found here a source for scandal. The *Apostolic Constitutions* (fourth century) are quite uncompromising in this respect:

Avoid all gentile books. For what need have you of alien writings, laws and false prophets which lead the frivolous away from the faith? What do you find lacking in God's Law that you should seek those gentile fables? If you wish to read histories, you have the books of Kings; if rhetorical and poetic writings, you have the Prophets, you have Job, you have the Proverbs, wherein you will find a sagacity that is greater than that of all poetry and sophistry since those are the words of our Lord who alone is wise. If you have a desire for songs, you have the Psalms, if for ancient genealogies, you have Genesis; if for legal books and precepts, you have the Lord's glorious Law. So avoid strenuously all alien, and diabolical books.⁷

Similar voices were raised all through the Byzantine period. What need was there for the Christian to soil his mind with the disgusting tales of the gods who were really demons, even with the vanities of profane wisdom, when his only legitimate concern lay in salvation? Pagans leave their country and cross the sea in order to learn letters, but we do not have to go abroad to win the Kingdom of Heaven: so spoke St Antony. Besides, what came first, the mind or letters? Since the mind clearly came first, anyone who has a healthy mind has no need of letters.⁸ The abolition of pagan learning by Christ, the confutation of philosophers by uneducated Christian saints are commonplaces of Byzantine literature. Take, as one example in a thousand, the Acatlist Hymn which is still recited in the Orthodox Church:

We see copious orators mute as fish before thee, O Mother of God, since they are at a loss to explain how thou remainest a virgin, yet wast able to give birth. But we, marvelling at the mystery, with faith cry out:

Hail, vessel of God's wisdom!
 Hail, treasury of His providence!
 Hail, thou who showest the wise ignorant!
 Hail, thou who provest the sophists speechless!
 Hail, for the skilled disputers are become foolish!
 Hail, for the poets of fables are withered!
 Hail, thou who rendest asunder the word-webs of Athens!
 Hail, thou who fillest the nets of the fishers!
 Hail, thou who drawest us from the depth of ignorance!
 Hail, thou who illuminest many with knowledge!⁹

The rejection of all education was not, however, a viable option even with such illumination as the Theotokos provided. Theoretically there existed a less drastic possibility, namely the institution of specifically Christian schools, just as the Jews of the diaspora had set up rabbinical schools whose curriculum was based on the Hebrew Bible and the commentaries thereon. One might even have envisaged retaining the traditional framework of education while substituting Christian texts for pagan ones. It was not an easy solution since the Bible was widely regarded, even among Christians, to be couched in particularly inelegant Greek, while there did not exist, at any rate in the fourth century, a body of Christian literature suitable to be placed before the young for their grammatical and rhetorical training. The idea of providing such material was, however, considered. In 362, when the pagan Emperor Julian forbade Christians to hold teaching appointments in secondary and higher education on the grounds that they ought not to profess things contrary to their own beliefs, the Christian *grammatikos* Apollinarius and his son, who bore the same name, transposed the Old Testament into verse using all the classical forms of metre, while they turned the New Testament into Platonic dialogues. This worthy effort came to nothing, and it is interesting to observe that its very failure was ascribed to divine Providence by a Christian historian.¹⁰ Why so? Because, he explains, Hellenic culture had been neither condemned nor approved by Christ and the apostles. The Holy Scriptures did not teach one the art of reasoning so indispensable for defending the true faith; hence it was perfectly legitimate, even necessary, to study pagan texts in order to defeat the enemy with his own weapons, to exercise the mind and to acquire eloquence. Even so strict a moralist as St John Chrysostom does not condemn attendance at normal schools; on the contrary, he takes it for granted. He urges Christian parents to tell their children, when they are resting from their lessons, simple biblical stories, such as

that of Cain and Abel; and if, he continues, a child is prepared to accept a mythical statement like 'She was made a demigod' without knowing the meaning of 'demigod', he will be equally ready to believe in the resurrection. What is more, John Chrysostom recommends that the Christian doctrine of punishment, including the story of the Flood, Sodom, the exile to Egypt, as well as all of the New Testament, should be imparted to the Christian boy only after the age of fifteen, preferably at about eighteen, in other words when he had already completed his secular studies.¹¹

The best-known statement on this topic is, however, by St Basil.¹² It takes the form of a short address to his nephews who appear to have completed their secondary education at the time of writing. We may imagine that they were about to embark on their rhetoric. To safeguard their immortal souls, their uncle poses the question: How can one profit from Hellenic literature? The question is a loaded one and the argument pretty trite: One should cull from ancient literature everything that is conducive to virtue, while rejecting all examples of licentiousness and, in particular, all the tales concerning the discord and amatory adventures of the gods. The example of Moses who learnt the wisdom of the Egyptians before approaching the contemplation of the Truth provides a useful precedent. Christian youths should take advantage in the same manner of a culture that is not entirely alien. We may note the assumption that Christian writings are unsuitable for training the mind and that the deeper doctrines of Christianity are beyond the understanding of the young. More interesting than St Basil's argument is, however, the form of his address: it is a polished piece of Atticist prose sprinkled with explicit and tacit references to Plato and Plutarch, Homer and Hesiod, Solon, Theognis and several other classical authors. If he wrote in this style, it was because he loved 'fine' literature as much as any other educated man of the fourth century. The idea of rejecting the pagan heritage simply did not occur to the legislator of eastern monasticism.

Once the Cappadocian Fathers had lent their authority to the retention of classical education, the question was settled for good. The Church neither evinced pagan texts from the curriculum nor did it set up a parallel educational system. This was a development of the greatest importance. Christian boys continued to go to the same *grammatistes*, the same *grammatikos* and the same *rhêtôr* as pagan boys, studied Homer and were made familiar with the stories of the old mythology. Some of them became teachers and, we may imagine, relayed the same

lore to their pupils. For about two centuries Christians and pagans got on remarkably smoothly in the schools. It was no secret that the professorate was the last refuge of educated pagans, but they had a skill to impart which Christians were eager to learn. And here we may note another paradox: it was Christianity that gave rhetoric the application it lacked, namely the sermon. All the tricks of composition and persuasion learnt in the schools could now be used for a worthy purpose. There are no better examples of late antique eloquence than the sermons of the Cappadocians and St John Chrysostom.

A rare glimpse of student life in the Early Byzantine period – in the 480s to be exact – is provided by the Life of Severus, the Monophysite patriarch of Antioch, by his friend Zacharias the Rhetor.¹³ Severus was a Pisidian and came from a prominent Christian family, but at first he was not particularly religious and was content to remain a catechumen, since it was the custom in his country to defer baptism until a fairly advanced age. His father, who was a curial, sent him and his two elder brothers to study grammar and rhetoric, both Greek and Latin, at Alexandria: it was there that he met Zacharias who hailed from Gaza. At the time Alexandria was probably the biggest university centre of the Empire. Our text names nine professors (grammarians, sophists and philosophers) who were then active. They appear to have taught in the same building, but on Fridays it was customary for most professors to hold forth at home, except for the philosophers who continued their regular courses at the school. The faculty was largely pagan and remained unmolested, but there were signs of tension between Christian and pagan students. Among the Christians there were activists who joined associations of lay zealots (called *philoponoi* at Alexandria), had contacts in monasteries and were ever ready to denounce to the authorities blatant cases of pagan worship. One such activist, by the name of Paralius, was so offensive in railing at paganism (his own teacher was the pagan Horapollo) that he was beaten up by his fellow students. This incident was successfully exploited by the Christians with the result that Horapollo had to go into hiding, a large cache of idols was discovered with student help and burnt publicly, and even the prefect of Egypt was placed in an embarrassing position.

From Alexandria both Severus and Zacharias proceeded to Berytus where they read law. It was a long and laborious course of four or five years, but the average young gentleman had plenty of opportunity to relax from his daily grind: he went to the theatres and the circus, played dice in the evenings or drank with prostitutes. Freshmen (*dupendii*)

were, on arrival, teased by senior students. At Berytus, too, Christian activists were very much in evidence: they recruited students into religious fraternities, urged them to attend church every evening, to avoid spectacles and baths (the leader of the group washed only once a year). Several of them, including Severus (at length baptized), eventually became monks. Berytus, although traditionally pleasure-loving, was more thoroughly Christian than Alexandria, but since the students came from all parts of the Empire, there were pagans among them, and on one occasion there was a nasty scandal involving magic. Once again, the activists made the most of the incident: the chief culprit was subjected to a house search and had his grimoires confiscated, his accomplices were denounced to the bishop and there was a public burning of magical books. One of those implicated, a certain Chrysaorius of Tralles, tried to get away: he rented a ship, loaded on it his legal and magical books, his silver dinner service, his concubine and the children he had by her, but, of course, the ship sank and he perished. We do not know, incidentally, if all students were as well-heeled as Chrysaorius, but many of them were attended by slaves they had brought from their home town.

If university life at the end of the fifth century was beginning to resemble that of Nazi Germany, worse was to come. Justinian, in particular, was determined to impose uniformity of belief on all his subjects. His edict ordering the closure of the Academy of Athens (529) is widely remembered as a sign of his intolerance, though it should be pointed out that the Academy continued functioning in a diminished way for some decades after this date and that at Alexandria philosophy went on being taught by the pagan Olympiodorus until after 565, the year of Justinian's death. These, however, were surely exceptions. Even though the law of 529 forbidding pagans, heretics and Jews to teach¹⁴ may not have been universally applied, there can be no doubt concerning the systematic persecution of pagans in the same year; again in 546 when 'a crowd of grammarians, sophists, lawyers and physicians' were hauled up before the inquisitor, John of Ephesus (who happened to be a heretic), and punished with scourging and gaol sentences;¹⁵ and in 562 when pagan books were burnt.¹⁶ One may readily imagine the effect of such measures on academic morale which was further undermined by the withdrawal of State subsidies from teachers.¹⁷ We are hardly surprised to observe that by the end of the sixth century the tradition of higher education should have survived only at Constantinople, Alexandria and Berytus.

If Justinian bears a heavy responsibility for weakening the educational system, its subsequent collapse was undoubtedly due to the disappearance of the cities. All that remained in the provinces, as far as we can judge from our extremely meagre documentation, was some form of primary schooling. It seems it was during those dark centuries that the custom developed of using the Psalter as a child's first reader, a custom that remained firmly entrenched in the subsequent period. If it is true that Georgius Choeroboscus, the author of an extremely popular grammar book based on the Psalter,¹⁸ flourished after the middle of the eighth century,¹⁹ his effort would fit into such a development; and if it is true that he professed at Constantinople, one would have to conclude that a similar use of the Psalter had spread to the capital. Whatever remained of secondary and higher education (and it is a moot point whether they were still separate) was now concentrated at Constantinople, but it seems that the University faded out. The last attested professor is the Aristotelian commentator Stephen of Alexandria who was called to the capital by the Emperor Heraclius (hence after 610). Setting aside Choeroboscus, no further names are mentioned until the middle of the ninth century.

A little-noticed canon of the Trullan Council (692) proves that legal studies were still pursued at the time since it decrees that students of civil law ought not to follow pagan customs, frequent theatres, wear distinctive clothing or turn somersaults (if that is the meaning of the enigmatic word *kylistra*) either at the beginning or the end of term.²⁰ The fact that only law students are mentioned may show either that they were particularly rowdy or that no other students at university level were to be found. Yet, when the law code of the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V (the *Ecloga*) was issued, probably in 726, its composition was the work of the *quaestor sacri palatii*, two patricians and a number of State dignitaries to the exclusion of any professors; and the compilers frankly admitted that the meaning of previous legislation had become quite obscure, 'indeed, entirely incomprehensible to some, especially those outside our God-guarded Imperial City'.²¹ The chronicler Theophanes, admittedly a biased witness, may not be too far from the truth when he records under the year 726 'the extinction of the schools'.²²

An interesting insight into the decline of higher education in the seventh century is provided by the autobiography of Ananias of Shirak, the Armenian scholar who introduced into his native country the sciences of mathematics, chronological computation and

cosmography. Being unable to find anyone in Armenia who would teach him 'philosophy', he betook himself to 'the country of the Greeks' and was intending to proceed to Constantinople when he was informed that a very learned teacher named Tychikos was active at Trebizond and attracted students even from the capital. To Trebizond he accordingly went and studied with Tychikos for eight years. He learnt arithmetic and other sciences and was generally able to satisfy his thirst for knowledge since his master had a rich library of both Christian and pagan books. Now this Tychikos was a native of Trebizond and had started his career as a soldier; but after being wounded in battle, he decided to become a scholar. He went to Alexandria, where he studied three years, then to Rome for one year, finally to Constantinople where he became for some time the disciple of a famous Athenian philosopher (unnamed). Pressure was brought on him to remain in the capital, but he resolved to return to Trebizond. A few years later the Athenian died and none of his students was deemed worthy to succeed him. So the emperor (it must have been Heraclius) summoned Tychikos to Constantinople, but the latter declined the invitation, and from then on students would travel from Constantinople to Trebizond to acquire knowledge, presumably in the sciences.²³ Whatever truth there may be in this story, it shows graphically the growing scarcity of qualified professors, even in the capital.

While it would be an exaggeration to say that all polite learning was interrupted in the Byzantine Empire, it was certainly reduced to a very thin trickle after the reign of Heraclius. One may even suspect that a greater reservoir of Greek learning and Greek books remained in Arab-dominated Syria and Palestine than in Constantinople. The greatest Greek-speaking scholar of the eighth century was St John Damascene (died *c.* 750), and two generations later the most prominent historical specialist was the Palestinian monk George Syncellus (died *c.* 814).

The revival of literary studies in the capital began at a very slow pace in the latter part of the eighth century. All we can say with any assurance is that there appeared at that time a group of persons, nearly all of them connected with the upper echelons of the civil service, who, without being profound scholars, possessed nevertheless a conventional rhetorical training and some acquaintance with philosophy. Such were the future patriarchs Tarasius (d. 806) and Nicephorus (758–828) and St Theodore the Studite (759–826). They seem to have acquired their instruction privately and to have passed it on to the next

generation in an equally informal manner. Tarasius, for example, who was not a professional teacher, is said to have initiated his future biographer, the deacon Ignatius (d. after 843) in the rules of ancient prosody.²⁴ There was certainly at that time a small number of *grammatikoi* active at Constantinople, such as the future iconoclastic patriarch Antony I Kassimatas (821–?37)²⁵ and perhaps his successor John VII (?837–43) who was remembered by the sobriquet *Grammatikos* and who passed as a man of great learning, even as a magician. It was in this milieu that a momentous technical development took place: I refer to the introduction of the minuscule or cursive script in the place of the uncial (majuscule) for purposes of book production. What is perhaps most remarkable about this innovation is that it was so slow in coming – some fifty years later in Byzantium than in western Europe. The supply of Egyptian papyrus, on which books had been written in antiquity, must have been cut off or, at any rate, greatly reduced after the fall of Alexandria to the Arabs (642), and parchment, which took its place, was both scarce and expensive. The need for a more compact form of writing was, under the circumstances, obvious; besides, it did not even have to be invented since the minuscule was nothing but the notarial cursive previously used for business purposes. Yet it was only in about 790, as far as we can surmise, that minuscule books began to be produced in Byzantium and the earliest surviving example, the so-called Uspensky Gospel, dates from 834; from which we may deduce that a sufficient demand for books did not arise until the end of the eighth century.

The first real professor we meet at Constantinople as studies began to revive is Leo the Mathematician. The romantic tradition concerning this personage bears retelling because of the incidental light it sheds on the state of education at this juncture.²⁶ Leo received his secondary schooling (grammar and ‘poetics’) in the capital, but was unable to progress any further; so he moved to the island of Andros where a learned man instructed him in the rudiments of rhetoric, philosophy and arithmetic. But even this scholar was unable to satisfy Leo’s curiosity. The latter wandered off into the interior of the island, visited monasteries and studied the old manuscripts preserved in them. Having thus attained the summits of knowledge – ‘philosophy and her sisters, namely arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, yea even celebrated music’ – he returned to Constantinople and set up a school in a humble house where he taught whatever discipline each pupil chose. Several years passed and many of Leo’s students achieved success in

their respective callings. One of them, a geometrician, became secretary to a military governor and was captured by the Arabs. The Caliph Mamûn (813–33), who was passionately interested in 'Hellenic studies' and especially in geometry, happened to hear of the young prisoner and brought him into the presence of his own mathematicians. Predictably, the Byzantine amazed everyone by his knowledge. When the caliph had learnt that this paragon was merely a student, he immediately sent him back to Constantinople bearing the following missive to his master: 'We have recognized the tree by its fruit, the master by his pupil. Seeing that you, who are so eminent in the sciences, remain unknown among your compatriots and have received no reward for your wisdom and knowledge, deign to come to us and give us the benefit of your teaching. If this comes to pass, the whole Saracen nation will bow before you and you will receive greater riches than any other man has ever received.' A tempting offer for an impecunious academic. Leo, however, was afraid to accept a communication from the enemy and took it to the Foreign Minister. The Emperor Theophilus was also informed of the matter and in this way Leo achieved a measure of recognition. He was given a sum of money and was set up as a public teacher in the Church of the Forty Martyrs. The disappointed caliph renewed his offer – this time two thousand pounds of gold if Leo would come even for a short visit. The emperor refused the overture on the grounds that it was senseless to communicate to foreigners that science 'on account of which the Roman nation is admired and honoured by all'. Some time thereafter Leo was ordained metropolitan of Thessalonica, but he remained in this uncongenial post only three years (840–43). Deposed as an Iconoclastic appointee, he returned to Constantinople and, at the instigation of Bardas, uncle of the young Emperor Michael III, was made head of a newly created school: Leo himself held the chair of philosophy, his ex-student Theodore that of geometry, a certain Theodegios that of astronomy and one Kometas that of grammar. We do not know when Leo died, but it was after 869.

There are some details in this story that are difficult to believe (for example the presence of scientific manuscripts in the remoter monasteries of Andros) and its chronology is not entirely satisfactory. Assuming, however, that it is true at least in outline, we should note that a State-sponsored institution of higher learning was once again established at Constantinople. Its seat was the Magnaura which was a ceremonial hall of the Imperial Palace – indeed, the hall in which

emperors received foreign ambassadors. By comparison to the University of 425, its staff was smaller and the scope of its teaching heavily weighted in favour of science to the exclusion of law and, of course, Latin – hence a school for technicians rather than one for civil servants. Was this structure inspired by Leo himself or was it the government's response to the scientific progress of the Arabs? We do not know. Nor can we estimate the school's influence which could not have been insignificant since a hundred years later it was credited with having established a tradition of culture;²⁷ yet we cannot even be sure that it outlasted the lifetime of Bardas (d. 866) and the first generation of professors.

Among Leo's academic colleagues only Cometas is otherwise attested: we know that he prepared a new edition of Homer, probably one transliterated into the minuscule script.²⁸ Leo himself took some part in editing the text of Plato and possessed several scientific manuscripts including a Ptolemy and a Euclid. He appears to have dabbled in astrology and to have made predictions. One of his students, a certain Constantine the Sicilian, was so shocked by Leo's teaching that he consigned him posthumously to Hell, where he would burn for all eternity along with his fellow-pagans – Plato and Aristotle, Socrates, Epicurus, Homer, Hesiod, Aratus and the whole damned lot of them.²⁹

It is undeniable that the ninth century witnessed a dramatic upsurge in scholarship. Strangely enough, however, it is difficult to connect this upsurge with the Magnaura University or any other institution of higher learning. Photius, the greatest scholar of the age, pursued a career in the civil service before he was elevated to the patriarchate of Constantinople (in 858); he never held a teaching appointment. We do not know how he acquired his education. If he was born in about 810, as some historians today believe, or even in about 820, he would have been a grown man by the time the University was established. In the next generation the most learned figure was that of Arethas, archbishop of Caesarea, born in about 850. He was a collector of classical texts (several of his beautifully copied manuscripts are still extant) and himself wrote in so precious and convoluted a style as to be practically incomprehensible. He, too, had no demonstrable connection with any university or school. All we can say is that literary culture, which had been so markedly absent from the court of the Iconoclastic emperors, regained favour in the highest circles. Though Basil I was an illiterate Armenian peasant, his son Leo VI was privately tutored by Photius and

devoted himself to literary composition. He wrote a number of rather tedious homilies and tried his hand at religious hymns. It was, however, Leo's son, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, who embodied most fully the ideal of the scholar emperor. Of his literary activities we shall speak in Chapter 13; here we should note his intervention in the realm of higher education. We are told that, finding the liberal arts and sciences to have been neglected, he appointed a number of excellent professors: a certain Constantine, who was then *mystikos* (chief of the bureau that dealt with confidential business), was given the chair of philosophy, Alexander metropolitan of Nicaea that of rhetoric, the patrician Nicephorus that of geometry, and the imperial secretary Gregory that of astronomy. The emperor lavished attention on the students whom he often invited to share his table. When they had graduated (if we may use this term), he recruited among them judges, secretaries of the legal bureau (*antigraphais*) and metropolitans.³⁰ In other words, we are dealing here with a palace school whose programme was the same as that of the Bardas University and whose explicit purpose was to train personnel for the judiciary (yet without the benefit of a chair of Law!) and the Church. Of the four professors the only one who is independently known is Alexander of Nicaea who annotated Lucian and wrote a number of extant letters. The others were dignitaries who happened to possess some scholarly competence. None appears to have been a professional scholar.

We are a little better informed about the state of secondary education at Constantinople in the first half of the tenth century thanks to the correspondence of an anonymous schoolteacher.³¹ He appears to have been a somewhat cantankerous man who led a modest life, sometimes acting as scribe and editor, but who nevertheless had connections with the world of high officialdom. His pupils were all of ages and the more advanced among them tutored the beginners. The subject of instruction was ancient Greek (grammar, prosody, rhetoric), in other words the traditional repertory of the *grammatikos*, and its purpose the training of aspirants to bureaucratic and ecclesiastical posts. Fees were not fixed and were paid irregularly, if at all, to the distress of the schoolmaster who, furthermore, had to compete with rival establishments. It seems that his school, though independent, received a subsidy from the patriarchate and was subject to some sort of control by ecclesiastical and municipal authorities. At about the same time (c. 940) we hear of a 'president of the schools', a practising master who also supervised other teaching institutions, perhaps after the model of a trade guild.

Abraamius of Trebizond (who was to become St Athanasius the Athonite) attended at Constantinople the school directed by such a 'president' and showed so much aptitude that he was soon appointed assistant teacher and then full master in a different school.³² It may be that the office of president denoted some reform of secondary education, but our information is too sparse to yield any firm conclusion.

We know almost nothing about the fortunes of Byzantine education from Constantine Porphyrogenitus until Constantine IX Monomachus, that is, roughly from 940 to 1040. It is a surprising lacuna considering those vast encyclopaedic enterprises that the emperor born in the purple laboriously pursued and instigated. The epithet 'academic' inevitably comes to mind in describing the *Excerpta*, the *Geoponica*, the *Hippiatrica*, and especially that enormous encyclopaedia known by the cryptic name *Souda*, yet none of these can be connected with an educational institution. Nor can it be proved that the accumulation of so much miscellaneous lore served to nourish and inspire subsequent generations of scholars. After the death of Constantine VII imperial patronage of studies lapsed, to be resumed only by Constantine IX, and then in a very different spirit.

The eleventh century was marked by a more lively intellectual climate that may be connected with the intensification of urban life and the rise of a new bourgeoisie. It was dominated by the polymath Michael Psellus and the group of scholars with whom he was linked – John Mavropous (the eldest among them), John Xiphilinus, Constantine Leichoudes, Nicetas. Did these men represent a new departure or do they loom large on our horizon because Psellus wrote so voluminously on such a wide range of subjects? On the institutional side the only obvious novelty was the setting up in about 1047 of a State-sponsored Law School under the presidency of Xiphilinus, who was entrusted with the training of future judges, advocates and notaries.³³ It is a matter of dispute whether a 'Faculty of Philosophy' was simultaneously established under the guidance of Psellus who bore the pompous title 'Consul (*hypatos*) of the Philosophers', whatever exactly that may have meant. Even if it was established, it did not last very long; neither, it seems, did the Law School. On the secondary level, we hear of many more schools in the eleventh century than in the tenth – not simply private institutions, but permanent ones that were attached to churches, probably in the same manner that a *madrassa* is attached to a mosque. These (or, at any rate, some of them) were controlled by the patriarch, although they dispensed the traditional fare of the

grammatikos. It is difficult to tell whether this was a creation of the eleventh century. It is not, however, on the institutional level that we can discern the originality of the period, but rather in the appearance of intellectuals who were primarily teachers and who achieved great notoriety, even important positions at court and in the Church by virtue of their teaching and scholarship. We must not, of course, overstate the case. The connection between learning and public service was, as we have seen, traditional in Byzantium. Mavropous ended his life as metropolitan of Euchaita (near Amaseia), Xiphilinus became patriarch of Constantinople, and Psellus held a variety of administrative posts, including that of First Imperial Secretary (*prôtoasêkrêtis*). Yet it may be said that all three of them were teachers and intellectuals first and foremost; their scholarship was not merely a stepping stone to a career. We must also remember that the movement they represented lasted fifty years at the most. Had it been allowed to develop, Byzantium might have produced its Abelard, even a true university like those that were to spring up in the West in the following century.

As a thinker, Psellos was not a figure of great originality; indeed, it is hard to call him a philosopher in his own right. He was, however, a man of boundless curiosity who tried to embrace all the fields of knowledge. His teaching also covered a wide area, from elementary grammar and rhetoric to the natural sciences, philosophy and even law. There is no reason to think that any of this was subversive of the established order, although his researches did lead him into some grey areas. He was certainly attracted by the occult, by the so-called Chaldaean doctrines, astrology and demonology, and in philosophy his preferences went to Plato and the Neoplatonists. Let us hear him speak of his own studies:

Having found philosophy extinct in its practitioners, I revived it by my own efforts. I had not encountered any notable teachers, nor had I discovered, in spite of a thorough search, any germ of wisdom either in Greece or among barbarians. Since, however, I heard it said that Greece had achieved great things in philosophy, . . . I scorned those who split hairs in such matters and sought to find something better. After reading some commentators on this science, I learned from them the road to knowledge: one referred me to another, the inferior to the superior . . . and so, finally, to Aristotle and Plato. Taking them as a starting point, I made a kind of tour, going on to Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus, after whom I advanced to the admirable Proclus, where I paused as in a vast harbour and drew therefrom all science and the exact knowledge of notions. Being about, after this, to ascend to the superior philosophy and to be initiated in pure science, I started with the study of incorporeal things in what is called mathematics.

From arithmetic Psellus progressed to geometry, then to music and astronomy and all the sciences that derive from them, 'not neglecting a single one of them'. On learning that there existed a wisdom that was beyond demonstration, he immersed himself in certain mystical books and profited from them as much as he was able. 'For to know such things exactly,' he admits, 'I would not boast on my own account nor would I believe anyone else who made such claims.' After explaining that his love of philosophy did not entail the neglect of rhetoric, Psellus goes on:

Inasmuch as there exists another philosophy which is superior to that one, namely the one that consists in the mystery of our religion, . . . I studied it more thoroughly than the other, in part following the pronouncements of the great Fathers, in part making my own contribution. And if anyone (I am saying this frankly and without artfulness) wishes to praise me for my culture, let him not do so . . . because I have read many books (for I am not deceived by vanity) . . . but because whatever little wisdom I have collected I did not draw from a flowing spring; nay, I found the wells obstructed. I opened them, I cleansed them and, with great toil, extracted the water that lay at a great depth.³⁴

Psellus was not noted for his modesty and, in presenting this somewhat embellished picture of his intellectual development, he could not forbear mentioning his excursions into the potentially dangerous fields of Neoplatonism and the occult. Had he not, indeed, conquered *all* knowledge? Yet, he took good care to make the required genuflexion before the superior philosophy of the Christian Fathers just as the Soviet scholar today seeks to placate the censor by bowing, as often as possible, before the classics of Marxism–Leninism. Although he had made many enemies, Psellus was never arraigned for impiety or for corrupting the minds of his students. That experience was reserved for his successor.

John Italus was the son of a Norman mercenary and hailed from southern Italy. He came to Constantinople in about 1050, studied philosophy under Psellus, taught for a number of years and at length became 'Consul of the Philosophers' in succession to Psellus. Although his Greek was not very elegant, he appears to have had a large following among students and he enjoyed the protection of the powerful Doukas family. In 1076–7, under the Emperor Michael VII Doukas, he was accused of impiety, but the case against him was shelved. It was revived in 1082 soon after the accession of Alexius I. This time Italus was arraigned before a tribunal composed of both ecclesiastical and lay dignitaries; his confession of faith was judged to be unsatisfactory and

damaging evidence about the views he professed was provided by an informer. There was even a 'spontaneous' demonstration of popular anger against the philosopher, who barely escaped a violent death by climbing to the dome of St Sophia and hiding in a hole. He was anathematized, barred from further teaching and relegated to a monastery never to re-appear again.³⁵

There is good reason to believe that the trial of Italus was politically motivated and that the charges against him were, to some extent, trumped up. There appears to have been among the higher clergy considerable sympathy for Italus, but no one dared stand up for him. Five of his students, all of them deacons, were hauled up before an assembly of bishops: they dissociated themselves from their former master and were found to be innocent. The proceedings against Italus give, therefore, the impression of having been strictly *ad personam*; and, to lend greater solemnity to his condemnation, a special chapter was added to the so-called Synodicon of Orthodoxy, wherein he was anathematized for having applied dialectics to the ineffable mystery of Christ's incarnation, for having introduced the cosmological doctrines of the pagans and, in particular, that of the eternity of the world, for admitting the transmigration of human souls and the reality of Platonic ideas, for casting doubt on the miracles of Christ and the saints, and much else besides.³⁶

Not since the days of Justinian had a Byzantine academic (as distinct from a religious leader) been formally condemned and punished for the content of his teaching. In this respect the trial of Italus deserves a place in the annals of intolerance. It is still not very clear to what extent the charges against him (which are extremely incoherent) were based on opinions he actually propagated, but one thing we can say: this arrogant and contentious barbarian, as Anna Comnena describes him,³⁷ took his philosophy seriously. He was not, like Psellus, primarily a man of letters; he had not tasted 'the nectar of rhetoric'. He was, in short, a new phenomenon on the Byzantine intellectual scene. We can only speculate what course the educational establishment would have followed had it not been for the forceful intervention of Alexius I, but we may hazard the guess that the student body did not possess the seriousness of purpose to have made the new teaching fruitful. Italus was dismissed in student circles as an uncouth foreigner, neither a rhetorician nor a philosopher.³⁸

Perhaps as a result of the Italus affair, the Church, that is the patriarchate of Constantinople, took a momentous step: it assumed

direct control of education, at any rate that of prospective clergymen. There are some indications which we have noted that already in the tenth century and certainly in the eleventh the Church had some part in the running of secondary schools, but it is only from about 1100 onwards that we find an integrated system of secular and religious instruction. It consisted of a network of secondary schools at Constantinople – six, all of them attached to churches, are specifically mentioned – and culminated in a course of biblical exegesis conducted by three professors, that of the Psalter, that of the Epistles and that of the Gospel, the last bearing the title of ‘Universal Teacher’ (*oikoumenikos disaskalos*). The Church also maintained a ‘Master of Rhetoric’, first attested in the fateful year 1082. The higher teaching personnel, integrated into the patriarchal hierarchy,³⁹ usually ended their career as bishops of important sees. We happen to know the names of thirty-four teachers of the Patriarchal School in the twelfth century and many of their literary and pedagogic productions are preserved. One of them, the great Homeric commentator Eustathius who became archbishop of Thessalonica, stands apart. As for the rest, it is difficult to imagine a more dreary lot of pedants.

It seems that the Patriarchal School dominated the educational scene at Constantinople until 1204. Philosophy was not on its curriculum and it is not certain to what extent this discipline continued to be taught within a secular framework. We know that Italus had at least one successor, a certain Theodore of Smyrna who is chiefly remembered as a gourmet, but after him no further ‘Consuls of the Philosophers’ are recorded until about 1166, when Michael, nephew of the bishop of Anchialos and future patriarch (1169–77), assumed that post. Judging by his inaugural lecture,⁴⁰ he was not much of a philosopher.

In the realm of education the twelfth century represents the culmination of a conflict whose origins, as we have seen, go back to the beginning of the Christian Empire. It may be found surprising that the Church should not have asserted its authority at an earlier date. That it did not do so is perhaps due to the intermittent and generally innocuous nature of philosophical teaching. Only in the eleventh century, with the rise of a secular spirit, did the danger become acute and philosophical speculation in the schools, that ‘new quest’ (*nea zêtêsis*) which the Synodicon condemns, had to be stifled. We shall not follow here the later history of Byzantine education at Nicaea, Constantinople and Trebizond, a history not entirely lacking in distinction, yet confined to

the traditional pattern. Instead, we shall try to formulate some general remarks.

It may have become apparent to the reader that from the seventh century onwards the distinction between secondary and higher studies tended to disappear. We have noted some isolated attempts by the government to establish a kind of university, as was done by the Caesar Bardas, by Constantine Porphyrogenitus and Constantine Monomachus, but each time these well-intentioned projects came to very little. There was thus no continuous tradition of higher studies. The recurring motif of 'the rediscovery of learning', usually thanks to the enlightened patronage of a given emperor, has to be taken with a pinch of salt, yet it did bear some relation to reality. Successive scholars like Leo the Mathematician and Psellus had some justification in believing that they had rescued learning from deep oblivion. The only continuous traditions were the teaching of law within the guild of notaries and, especially, that of grammar cum rhetoric by the *grammatikos*. Both were to be found exclusively at Constantinople.

The most obvious feature of the grammarian's teaching was its extreme conservatism. When we find Nicephorus Basilaces, a teacher in the Patriarchal School, composing in the twelfth century 'character sketches' on subjects such as 'What a sailor might have said on seeing Icarus flying in the air and Daedalus grazing the surface of the sea with the tips of his wings', or 'What Pasiphae might have said on falling in love with a bull',⁴¹ we cannot avoid the illusion that time had stood still for a thousand years. Nor can we help asking the question: What use were Icarus and Pasiphae to the prospective civil servant, none of whose business would be conducted in Attic Greek? The most that can be said is that some acquaintance with grammar and rhetoric defined a certain professional class. Now, it has been calculated that in the tenth century the total number of boys and young men receiving grammatical training at Constantinople (hence in the whole Empire) was no more than two to three hundred.⁴² It follows from this that at any given time the total number of persons who had benefited from such training was hardly in excess of one thousand. Approximate as these figures are, they give us a sense of scale without which a discussion of Byzantine education becomes meaningless. Let us imagine, then, a group of about a thousand men of respectable family, often nephews of bishops or sons of civil servants, in short, men pursuing a career that required literacy. To be able on occasion to pen an elegant epistle or to deliver an after-dinner speech in the presence of the emperor was bound to attract

favourable attention. That is where Icarus and Pasiphae came in. And since the point of the exercise was to be appreciated by one's peers, what reason was there to change an educational system that marked one as a man of culture? The effects of this situation on Byzantine literature are obvious: they will be explored in a later chapter.

One final remark. Monastic education beyond the most basic level never existed in Byzantium. Since the time of Pachomius some of the larger monasteries made provision for the instruction of illiterate entrants who were often young boys. These were taught the church service, the Psalter and parts of the New Testament, preferably by an older monk who was required to use a separate room for this purpose so as to shield the brotherhood from sexual temptation. The Psalter and other essential biblical books were normally learnt by heart, thus reducing the need for literacy. The instruction of 'secular children' in monasteries, considered unsuitable by St Basil,⁴³ was discouraged throughout the Byzantine period.

PART TWO
THE CONCEPTUAL WORLD OF
BYZANTIUM

CHAPTER 7

THE INVISIBLE WORLD OF GOOD AND EVIL

To the Byzantine man, as indeed to all men of the Middle Ages, the supernatural existed in a very real and familiar sense. Not only did that other world continually impinge upon everyday life; it also constituted that higher and timeless reality to which earthly existence was but a brief prelude. Any account of the Byzantine 'world view' must necessarily begin with the supernatural.

Since the Byzantines were Christians, their conception of this higher world was one that is still familiar to us in broad outline; yet, on the popular level (as distinct from the level of theology) it had certain distinctive features that need to be explained. Most importantly and quite naturally, the Byzantines imagined God and the Heavenly Kingdom as a vastly enlarged replica of the imperial court at Constantinople. If questioned on this point, they would probably have expressed the relation in the reverse order by saying that the emperor's court was a diminished reflection of the heavenly court. Whichever of the two was the 'archetype' and whichever the copy, their mutual resemblance was taken for granted and it explains many manifestations of Byzantine religiosity.

Before developing the consequences of this postulate, it may be useful to give an illustration of just how the Heavenly Kingdom was visualized. A number of texts, which we would be inclined to call apocryphal, provide suitable descriptions, and while the details vary from one text to another, the basic ingredients remain the same. I have chosen, because of its relative brevity, the 'Awesome and Edifying Vision of the Monk Cosmas'. This man was a chamberlain of the Emperor Alexander (912-13), but he later retired from the world and, in or about the year 933, became the abbot of a monastery on the river Sangarius in north-west Asia Minor. After a time he fell seriously ill. Five months elapsed and then, one morning, he went into a trance: his eyes stared at the

ceiling of his cell, while his mouth whispered incomprehensible words. For six hours Cosmas remained in this condition; but the following day he was able to describe his vision to the brethren of his community (what follows is a paraphrase rather than a literal translation):

As I was sitting on my bed, methinks I saw on my left side a throng of little men with blackened faces [demons always appeared on the left side or in the direction of the west]. They were hideous in different ways: some had distorted countenances, others bloodshot eyes, others livid and swollen lips. The demons managed to drag me to a frightful cliff. Along its face, overhanging an abyss that reached down to Tartarus, ran a path so narrow that one could hardly gain a footing on it. The demons pushed me down this path until we came to a big gate. Here sat a frightful giant, his face all black, his nostrils emitting smoke, his tongue hanging out of his mouth to the length of one cubit. His right arm was paralysed, but with his left, which was as thick as the shaft of a column, he would seize his victims and throw them down the precipice. When the giant saw me, he cried out, 'This man is a friend of mine!' and he was about to grasp me when there appeared two old men of venerable aspect whom I recognized as the apostles Andrew and John for they resembled their representations on icons. The giant drew back in fear, and the apostles led me through the gate, past a city and into a lovely plain. In the middle of the plain was a grassy valley where an old man sat surrounded by a multitude of children. 'This,' my companions told me, 'is Abraham. You have heard of Abraham's bosom.' I did obeisance to him, and we went next to a vast olive grove. Under every tree was a tent, and in every tent a couch upon which a man rested. Among them I recognized many who had served in the palace, many from Constantinople, some peasants and some members of our monastery, all of them deceased. As I was wondering what this grove might be, the apostles reminded me of the 'many mansions' that were in the Lord's house.

We went on to a city of indescribable beauty. Its walls were built of twelve courses, each of a different precious stone, and its gates were of gold and silver. Within the gates we found a golden pavement, golden houses, golden seats. The city was filled with a strange light and a sweet smell, but as we traversed it, we did not encounter a single man or beast or bird. At the edge of the town we came to a wonderful palace, and we entered a hall as broad as a stone's throw. From one end of it to the other stretched a table of porphyry round which many guests were reclining. A spiral staircase, situated at one end of the hall, led to an internal balcony. Two eunuchs, resplendent as lightning, appeared on this balcony and they said to my companions, 'Let him also recline at the table.' I was shown a place, while the eunuchs departed to another chamber that appeared to be beyond the balcony, and they absented themselves for several hours, during which time I was able to recognize many of my fellow-guests:

some were monks of our monastery, others civil servants. At length, the eunuchs returned and they said to the two apostles: 'Take him back since his spiritual children are in great mourning for him. The Emperor has consented that he should return to the monastic life. So conduct him along a different path, and in his stead bring the monk Athanasius from Trajan's monastery.' The apostles led me away. We passed by seven lakes in which a multitude of sinners were being tormented: one was filled with darkness, another with fire, another with an evil-smelling mist, another with worms, and so forth. Soon we encountered Abraham once again who gave us a draught of sweet wine in a golden cup. Then we returned to the outer gate. The giant gnashed his teeth and said to me angrily: 'This time you have escaped me, but I shall not cease plotting against you and your monastery.' This much I remember, but I cannot explain how I regained consciousness.

When Cosmas had finished his story, a messenger was sent to the neighbouring monastery of Trajan: he found that the monk Athanasius had died at the very time when Cosmas was having his vision.¹

Cosmas' service as a chamberlain may account for the vividness of his vision of the heavenly palace. The great hall or *triclinium*, the *cubicula*, the spiral staircase (*kochlias*), the balcony (*hêliakon*), the table of porphyry, the attendant eunuchs – all these were familiar features of the imperial palace. The only difference was that in Heaven everything was much bigger and more splendid. The equivalence of the earthly and heavenly palaces is, indeed, a commonplace of Byzantine thought. Among the many texts that could be quoted in support of this statement, one will suffice. When the eleventh-century man of letters John Mavropous was first introduced at court in the reign of Michael IV (1034–41), he composed a complimentary poem in which he expressed the wish that he would continue to be received with favour. He feigned fear of being turned away at the gates of the palace by the emperor's 'winged angels'. But if he overcame this obstacle and was able to draw close to the throne, would not the Cherubim strike him with their flaming sword? John did not have the bad taste of comparing to Christ the uncouth Michael IV. He suggested, nevertheless, that Christ might be present in the palace: for just as he had joined the three Hebrews in the furnace, so now, too, he could add his presence to that of the imperial threesome – Michael, his wife Zoe, and the latter's sister Theodora.²

God's retinue consisted, in the first place, of the angelic host which was, in theory, rigorously stratified and differentiated. The angels, infinite in number, constituted God's army or regulars, officers and

generals; they also served as special emissaries, much as the *magistriani* did on earth, in addition to forming the heavenly *cubiculum* or body of chamberlains. On earth they performed various functions according to their rank: they guarded individuals, churches, altars, cities, even nations. It cannot be said, however, that the Byzantines ever worked out a consistent and generally accepted system of angelology. The teaching of the Bible on this score is notoriously confusing; as for the *Celestial Hierarchy* by pseudo-Dionysius (c. 500 AD), it was indeed considered an authoritative work because of its attribution to the apostolic age, but it was far too abstruse to be comprehended by the general public. The Byzantines were sufficiently familiar with the seraphim and the cherubim such as they are described in the visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel. They were often invoked in the liturgy and represented in church decorations, though it must be admitted that their distinctive features were often confused. Of the Thrones, Powers, Dominions and Principalities they had no clear conception. As for the archangels, only two, namely Michael and Gabriel, had a firm place in popular devotion; the others, including Raphael and Uriel, appear mostly in prayers and incantations of an occult character. St Michael was the commander-in-chief, the *archistratêgos*, of the celestial host, and had several cult centres in Asia Minor, the most famous being at Chonai (Colossai) in Phrygia, where he was believed to have split a rock and diverted the course of a torrent.

The early Church had resolutely opposed the cult of angels. Already St Paul, writing – significantly enough – to the Colossians, had issued this warning: ‘Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and the worshipping of angels’ (Coloss. 2. 18). The Council of Laodicea in Phrygia, which met some time in the fourth century, went even further: ‘Christians ought not to abandon the Church of God and go forth, and call upon the angels by name, and organize their worship, which is forbidden. Anyone who is apprehended devoting himself to this concealed idolatry, let him be anathema.’³ In the next century Theodoret of Cyrrhus noted that ‘this disease has remained for a long time in Phrygia and Pisidia’, and that ‘until this day one may see churches of St Michael among these peoples and their neighbours’.⁴ The condemnations proved of little avail: St Michael continued to be worshipped, not only in western Asia Minor, but throughout the Empire. At Constantinople he had no fewer than twenty-four churches.

Concerning the nature of the angels two slightly divergent views were held. The first, which appears to have been the earlier one, was that

they were not pure spirit, but consisted of a very fine matter that could be seen by men of particular sanctity, 'those whose eyes God has opened'.⁵ The more usual view, however, was that the angels were immaterial, but capable of assuming bodily form which, incidentally, rendered them fit subjects for representation. When they made themselves visible, it was usually in the guise of youthful eunuchs. One popular text describes the angel who remained as the permanent guardian of St Sophia as 'a eunuch clad in a white garment, beautiful of appearance, like one who had been sent from the palace'.⁶ In the *Life of St Andrew the Fool* an angel comes to cook a pot of beans for one Epiphanius, a young man of great sanctity. The celestial being is represented as 'a beautiful youth, wonderfully tall, his face shining brighter than the sun, clad in divine garments – white blended with gold from his neck down to his breast, and from his breast down to his hips and his knees shining like green grass and citron'.⁷ Elsewhere St Michael appears 'with a numerous retinue, himself clad in the garments of a *praepositus*'.⁸

All of this, of course, makes perfect sense. The angels, being sexless and acting as God's attendants, had their closest earthly analogy in the eunuchs of the imperial palace. The chief of the eunuchs was the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, whose position was, therefore, analagous to that of St Michael. Furthermore, the Byzantine mind saw no incongruity in a eunuch's occupying the position of a military commander: this was common practice. To cite but one example, Narses, one of Justinian's most successful generals, was a eunuch.

In addition to the angels, God's court also included the saints. An altogether outstanding place, comparable to that of the emperor's family, was held by the Mother of God – the *Theotokos*, as she was usually called – and John the Baptist. These two personages appear alongside Christ on one of the most widespread types of Byzantine icon which we refer to as the *Deësis*: Christ stands or sits enthroned in the middle, while his Mother and the Forerunner stand on either side, their heads slightly bowed, their hands extended in a gesture of intercession on behalf of the human race. In the same position they also appear at the Last Judgement.⁹

It would be superfluous to describe here the pre-eminence of the Virgin Mary in the Christian pantheon; to the Byzantines, moreover, she had the particularly important role of being the patron and protectress of Constantinople.¹⁰ She assumed this part by virtue of two highly venerated relics which found their way to the capital – the Girdle and

the Veil. The Girdle (*zônê*) was kept at the Basilica of St Mary of the Coppermarket (*Chalkoprateia*), said to have been built by the Empress Pulcheria in 450: its ruined apse is still preserved a short distance west of St Sophia. The relic itself, according to one tradition, was brought by Justinian from Zela, a place south of Amaseia in eastern Asia Minor; according to another, it was translated from Jerusalem by the Emperor Arcadius.¹¹

More famous than the Girdle was the Veil (*maphorion*) which was kept in a special chapel next to the Basilica of St Mary of Blachernae in the northern corner of the capital. It was said that this relic was discovered at Capernaum by the patricians Galbius and Candidus during the reign of Leo I (457–74). It belonged to a Jewish woman who kept it in a wooden chest. The patricians were able, however, to purloin it by substituting another chest of exactly the same size, and brought the Veil to Constantinople. Its miraculous powers were manifested at some of the gravest moments of the capital's history: it was the *maphorion* that saved Constantinople from the Avars and the Persians in 626 and from the Russians in 860.¹²

Apart from St John the Baptist who spans the transition from Law to Grace (and who, in Constantinople alone, had thirty-five churches dedicated to him), the prophets, priests and patriarchs of the Old Testament played a minor part in Byzantine piety. Among the saints of the New Dispensation, the Apostles were, if one may say so, at the hierarchical summit; they did enjoy a considerable cult, yet cannot be described as the most popular of saints. Those that were the most popular constitute at first sight a strange band: many, indeed most of them, were shadowy figures concerning whom nothing very definite was known; and if one searches into the reasons of their popularity, one discovers them not in any trait of each saint's historical character or activity, but rather in the existence of a local cult which achieved a measure of fame.

Take the case of St Nicholas of Myra.¹³ Nothing definite is known concerning this bishop who is supposed to have lived in the fourth century and to have taken part in the Council of Nicaea in 325 (the latter, however, being highly doubtful). By the sixth century some stories came to be associated with him: he had rescued from execution three citizens of Myra and then repeated the same feat by delivering three generals of the Emperor Constantine. A church in honour of St Nicholas was built at Constantinople by Justinian. Some time thereafter the bishop of Myra was confused with a local homonym, Nicholas

of Sion (a monastery in Lycia) who died in 564, and a number of miracles that were credited to the latter (including the stilling of storms) were transferred to the former. By the ninth century the 'conflated' St Nicholas emerges as a major doctor of the Orthodox Church, and his representation in mosaic is set up in St Sophia on a par with those of St John Chrysostom, St Basil and other great Fathers. It is difficult to tell why this elevation took place. In any case, Nicholas had the advantage of a well-established local cult and of a miraculous tomb which exuded a holy oil. It may be that his fame first spread among Byzantine seamen who put in at the port of Myra, and so was disseminated to other parts of the Empire, until the figure of this kindly old man with a short round beard became one of the most familiar in the iconographic repertory. The translation of his relics to Bari in 1087 contributed to an even wider diffusion of his cult throughout Christendom.

Or take the case of St Demetrius of Thessalonica.¹⁴ He, too, was a shadowy figure, supposedly a victim of the Diocletianic persecution. Moreover, he did not originally belong to Thessalonica, but to Sirmium. When, in 442-3, the capital of the prefecture of Illyricum was moved to Thessalonica so as to be protected from the attacks of the Huns, the cult of Demetrius also migrated. Shortly thereafter a magnificent basilica was built in his honour: it is still standing, though it was severely damaged by fire in 1917. The absence of relics – in the seventh century they still did not exist – was gradually forgotten or glossed over. Not only did a tomb appear, but it was made, by means of a fraudulent arrangement of concealed pipes, to emit a holy oil, so that Demetrius shared with Nicholas the enviable epithet of *myroblêtês*. Transformed into a military saint (he was originally a deacon), a youthful figure with curly hair, he repeatedly 'defended' his city against barbarian attack.

Much the same observations could be made concerning other popular saints, such as St Theodore, St George, St Mamas, St Spyridon. The medieval mind, unlike the modern mind, was not concerned with their historicity: what mattered was the existence of a local cult which provided the saint with a 'power base'. To a Thessalonican, St Demetrius was his countryman who stood in close proximity to the Almighty and who would pay particular attention to a petition coming from his own city; to have him in Heaven was rather better than to have a fellow Thessalonican occupying a high position in the imperial service. The saint's nebulous character was no obstacle to this role; indeed, it was an advantage: for thus he could become endowed with every conceivable

virtue, which would not have been possible had he possessed a well-defined historical personality.

The ordinary Byzantine regarded each saint as dwelling, in the first instance, in his principal church; to a lesser extent (or perhaps more intermittently) in other churches dedicated to him and, furthermore, in his relics and icons wherever these might be. Hence the desirability of pilgrimage. John Moschus (c. 600 AD) tells us of an anchorite who lived close to Jerusalem and who had such great affection for the martyrs that he would undertake long journeys to St John's at Ephesus, St Theodore's at Euchaita (in Pontus), St Thecla's at Seleucia (in Cilicia) and St Sergius's at Resafa (in Syria).¹⁵ In the words of our author, the anchorite did not visit the churches of these martyrs; he simply went to St John's, St Theodore's, and so on, as if for a personal meeting. An even more revealing example is provided by a certain Gregory, the biographer of St Basil the Younger (tenth century). This man owned a farm at Rhaedestus in Thrace (modern Tekirdağ) to which he used to go in the summer to collect the harvest. On one occasion, before setting out from Constantinople, where he normally resided, he repaired to the Church of St Stephen in his neighbourhood and prayed for a safe journey by sea and land. However, once he had reached Rhaedestus, he fell into the clutches of a young woman who happened to be a witch. He resisted her blandishments; she revenged herself by inflicting on him a fever. As Gregory lay in a coma, he remembered to call on St Stephen: 'Holy, first martyr Stephen, apostle of Christ, have I not implored you to help me as I was departing from the City? Behold, I am gone, and you will see me no longer; nor will I continue to serve you – this I know for sure, for I have come close to the gates of death.' – 'What is the trouble with you, my friend?' replied St Stephen. 'I have not been here. I have churches all over the world, and I have been visiting them as all saints do. Do not, therefore, blame me. I have just arrived.' St Stephen made Gregory recite a prayer – one of those old magical prayers containing invocations to the seraphim, the cherubim and all the heavenly host – and the witch's spell was broken.¹⁶

We have seen that Gregory performed 'services' that were agreeable to St Stephen and so made himself a *persona grata*. The institution of patronage provided the exact model for such practices and some texts are perfectly explicit on this point. In the seventh century an elderly man who had belonged all his life to the lay brotherhood of St Artemius (a healer saint) and who, nevertheless, developed an ulcer, bitterly remarked: 'If I had placed myself in the service of a man on earth, I

would have been deemed worthy of more support and solicitude.' Another disappointed customer of St Artemius cried out: 'What sort of patronage is this? The saint is an impostor!'¹⁷ For just as the human patron had influence among persons of authority, so the saint was supposed to have a direct pipeline to celestial power. The key word in this connection was *parrhêsia*. In ancient Greece this meant 'freedom of speech', the citizen's prerogative of frankly expressing his opinions. By the Byzantine period, however, *parrhêsia* had acquired a different spectrum of connotations: while occasionally retaining the meaning of 'free speech' or 'boldness' (usually in a bad sense), it came to stand more and more for the kind of familiarity or 'access' which the favourite courtier enjoyed with regard to his master.¹⁸ Similarly, the saint had *parrhêsia* in God's presence and, in this capacity, he could obtain favours for his clients. The same Gregory expresses it quite blatantly. 'We often observe this', he says, 'with respect to the earthly emperor as well, namely that through the mediation of his closest friends he forgives the penalty that is due to the gravest crimes and faults.' Salvation, of course, could be won the hard way, through fasting and deprivation, but not everyone was capable of this. Hence, continues our author, the importance of winning over several holy men, or, if not several, then a few, and if not a few, at least one. If the holy man is alive, use your resources to contribute to his needs and well-being; if you are indigent, propitiate him by means of physical service, obedience and humility. If he has died, make whatever contribution you can to his church in the way of oil, candles and incense or, if you are sufficiently rich, by feeding the poor and clothing the naked. In this manner, when you depart this life, the saint will receive you over there and intercede on your behalf at the Lord's judgement. For did not Christ himself say, 'He that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward' (Mt. 10. 41)?¹⁹

Locked in continuous, if unequal, combat with the forces of light were the forces of darkness, the innumerable host of the demons. It would be a mistake to dismiss these as a product of superstition, unworthy of the historian's consideration. To the Byzantine man demons were a reality, and he saw his whole life as a battleground between the battalions of good and evil; especially so the monk who became accustomed to using a military phraseology in this respect: the words *polemos* (war) and *polemeisthai* (to be under attack) constantly recur to denote the spiritual struggle against demons.

Under the category of demons the Byzantines included a wide

variety of spirits, each one of whom had a defined function or location. At the most primitive level we find the maleficent spirits of nature who hardly belong to the Christian view of things. A particularly detailed prayer of exorcism falsely attributed to St Basil gives the following enumeration of them:

Take fright, leave, flee, depart, O unclean demon . . . wherever you happen to be, . . . whether you have the form of a serpent or the face of a beast or are like a vapor or like a bird, . . . whether you appear in the morning or at noon or at midnight or at some other untimely hour or at dawn, . . . whether you are in the sea or in a river or under the earth or in a well or by a cliff or in a ditch or in a lake or in a bed of reeds or in a forest . . . or in a grove or in a thicket or in a tree or in a bird or in thunder or on the roof of a bath or in a pool of water, whether we know or do not know whence you have come . . . depart to a waterless, desert and untilled land where no man dwells.²⁰

The Lives of saints are full of references to demons that haunted the out-of-doors, as a few examples will show. In the sixth century St Nicholas of Sion, whom we have already mentioned, was called upon to deal with a huge cypress tree inhabited by a demon who terrified the surrounding region and killed anyone that drew near. The saint, before a large assembly, began chopping the tree down with an axe; it wavered and began falling into the crowd (naturally at the devil's instigation), but Nicholas caught it single-handed and made it fall in the opposite direction. Thereupon the demon admitted defeat and departed.²¹ Demons lurked in deserted places, kept watch at the crossing of rivers and torrents, and were particularly numerous underground. A man who walked abroad after dark ran the risk of becoming possessed. An injudicious excavation, especially of a spot marked by the remains of pagan antiquity, was apt to release a multitude of demons who would then take possession of human beings and farm animals.

The Life of St Theodore of Sykeon (in Galatia), who died in 613, offers a particularly varied assortment of demon tales. When the saint was still a boy, he would get up in the middle of the night and make his way to a Church of St George that stood on a hilltop near the village of Sykeon. As he was walking in the dark, he would be attacked by demons who took the shape of wolves and other wild beasts. A spot eight miles distant from Sykeon was haunted, especially at noon, by 'Artemis, as she is called, with a multitude of demons', so that no one could draw near. Another spot was so infested with unclean spirits that neither man nor animal could approach it, especially at noon and after sunset. The

saint had a cave dug there, and stayed in it from Christmas until Palm Sunday, fasting and praying. Visitors could hear sounds of lamentation as the spirits were being driven away by the holy man's presence. At length, not only was the spot cleansed, but it even acquired a peculiar sanctity so that a handful of earth picked from there and mixed into food and drink cured diseases in men and animals. In a village, situated in the territory of Gordiane, the inhabitants were building a bridge over a stream. The project was nearly complete when the workmen ran out of stones, and they proceeded to extract some slabs from a nearby hill. As they did so, there issued forth a throng of unclean spirits who entered the men and women of the village, while others occupied places along the public road and on the boundaries of the village territory where they molested the animals and passers-by. St Theodore was sent for, and as he approached, the demons began crying out: 'Why have you come from Galatia to Gordiane? You ought not to cross boundaries. We know why you have come, but we shall not obey you like the demons of Galatia, for we are hardier than they are.' It was to no avail: Theodore expelled the demons from the men and women they had possessed; he then rounded up the spirits lurking in the countryside and along the roads (they could be seen in the form of flies, hares and dormice), and drove them back into the excavation, which was then covered up.²²

On another occasion, a rich man at Heracleia Pontica (now Karadeniz Ereğlisi) dug a trench near his house; out of it came unclean spirits that attacked members of his household and other inhabitants of the city. In a village of the region of Lagantine stood a marble sarcophagus containing the remains of ancient pagans who were guarded by demons. The peasants removed the lid of the sarcophagus to use as a water-trough, thereby releasing the demons. A similar incident that took place at Germia in Galatia caused a considerable stir. The local bishop made a large excavation with a view to building a cistern. In so doing, he struck an ancient cemetery and the demons who were lurking in the tombs came out and possessed the inhabitants, both rich and poor. And whereas the rich, out of a sense of shame, shut up the affected members of their households, the poor flocked to the church. Theodore was fetched, and he began by interrogating the demons. The latter laid the blame on the bishop. They had been quite content to dwell in their tombs, but when the bishop, stirred on by ambition, drove them out of their humble quarters, they were filled with rage – something they would not normally have done in the days of such a renowned exorcist as St Theodore. In the presence of a great concourse of clergymen, even

of Jews and heretics, Theodore performed his ritual. The demons that had possessed the poor were herded together, but then they began protesting. 'There are many of our company', they cried, 'that are in bodies hidden in the houses of the rich and in hostels. Let them come, too, before you confine us.' Theodore did not consent. 'If respectable citizens have done this out of shame, why make a public spectacle of them? All the hidden spirits, be they in houses or hostels, will be driven out by the angelic host and brought here.' And so it came to pass. There were, however, two women who had been possessed from an earlier time, and whose demons complained with some reason: 'Do not shut us up here. . . . We are not of this company, but came from the region of Cappadocia before the excavation was made.' Theodore agreed to deal with them on another occasion. On the rest of the demons he enjoined, for the sake of decency, not to tear completely the clothes of their victims as they departed from their bodies, so that the men would be left in their drawers and the women in their tunics. And so the demons were driven back into their hole which was covered up with earth. As each victim recovered, he would relate his experiences: one had seen a snake coming out of his mouth, another a dormouse, another a lizard.²³

These naïvely reported incidents prompt a number of observations. We may note, first, the strong local feeling exhibited by the demons: those of Gordiane considered themselves tougher than those of Galatia; the demons that hailed from Cappadocia refused to let themselves be confined at Germia, and their plea was considered reasonable by St Theodore. Secondly, demons were associated with the memorials of ancient paganism. The identification of the pagan gods with demons is a commonplace of Early Christian thought; indeed, in the examples we have quoted Artemis does appear with an escort of demons. But the old gods were already dead; they had left only a vague memory, a maleficent aura. All the same, the countryside was still covered with remains of Graeco-Roman antiquity. The great marble sarcophagi carved with funerary banquets and other strange figures were too valuable not to be occasionally re-used as water-troughs and fountains, yet they also appeared ominous. Rather than release the demons that guarded them, it was often thought wiser not to touch them – a circumstance for which archaeologists may be grateful.

Demons were always ready to enter the bodies of humans and domesticated animals where, attracted by the warmth and moisture, they could dwell, like parasites, for long years. In so doing they caused various diseases and a derangement of the senses. Not all diseases, of

course, were due to demons, and some would respond to medical treatment or to curative waters; yet a great many were the result of possession and lay, therefore, beyond the physician's competence. Only an exorcist could help, and his methods were rough. He would often strike the patient in the chest or throw him to the ground and step upon his neck. The demon, always unwilling to depart, could cause levitation; when forced out, he convulsed the patient, made him tear his clothes, and then left him unconscious. But the cure, once effected, was complete.

In addition to 'rank and file' demons, there was also an officer class with specialized functions. We often hear of the demon of fornication and the demon of boredom or despondency (*akêdia*), to whose attacks monks were particularly vulnerable. The demon of somnolence and yawning busied himself with putting to sleep the faithful who were attending service in church.²⁴ Some of these demons held a military rank in the infernal hierarchy – captain of a hundred or captain of a thousand. The demon of the hippodrome belonged to the latter category and was still active in the tenth century when the hippodrome games had sunk to the level of an infrequent ritual.²⁵

Unlike Milton's Satan, the Byzantine devil was not a proud rebel; instead, he was rather seedy, as Dostoevsky, too, imagined him. He usually appeared as a Negro of small stature or as a serpent, a black dog, an ape, a crow or a mouse. He could, however, assume other disguises, for example, that of an Arab merchant or of an old woman. He was a coward and a liar and he emitted a bad smell. As every monk knew, his favourite tactic was to inspire dirty thoughts or feelings of boredom. When he failed in this approach, he terrified his victim by taking on the form of a wild beast or of a giant and he would occasionally inflict physical violence on him. Quite often he made predictions, not because he knew the future, but because he was able to move very fast (being a spirit) and so could either announce events that had taken place afar or draw from them a likely inference. For example, if it rained heavily near the source of the Nile, the devil was on pretty safe ground in foretelling a flood in Egypt. The holier a man was, the more the devil envied him and tried to entrap him. But the holy man usually possessed 'the gift of the discernment of spirits'. He could, so to speak, smell the devil out and could then put him to flight by the sign of the cross or by reciting Psalm 68: 'Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered; let them also that hate him flee before him.' For, at bottom, the demons were powerless: as St Antony pointed out, they even had to ask the Lord's

permission to enter the Gadarene swine. And for what other reason did they assume the form of lowly animals?²⁶

Life on earth was thus lived on two levels, the visible and the invisible, of which the latter was by far the more significant. Ordinary mortals were not aware of the contest that was continually taking place on account of their salvation, but men of holiness could actually see and smell the spiritual beings, both good and evil. The final act of the contest occurred at the time of a man's death and shortly thereafter. For when a human being was about to expire, a throng of demons would hasten to his deathbed in the expectation of gaining possession of his soul and would be opposed in so doing by the guardian angel. Once the soul had been parted from the body, it had to journey through the air and stop at a number of 'customs posts' or 'toll houses' (*telônia*) manned by demons who examined it on its deeds on earth and either let it proceed upon payment of the appropriate due, calculated in good works, or seized it there and then. This curious belief, probably of Egyptian origin, is already alluded to in the Life of St Antony.²⁷ Some two or three centuries later we read of St Symeon, the saintly fool of Emesa, praying in these words for the salvation of his recently deceased mother: 'Grant her, O Lord, an escort of angels to protect her soul from the evil spirits and pitiless beasts of the air who attempt to swallow all that go by.'²⁸

According to a tenth-century text,²⁹ there were twenty-one 'toll houses', each representing one of the following sins: slander, abuse, envy, falsehood, wrath, pride, inane speech (including laughter, jokes, obscenity, provocative gait and licentious song), usury coupled with deceit, despondency coupled with vanity, avarice (this one was covered by a particularly thick cloud of darkness), drunkenness, remembrance of evil, sorcery and magic, gluttony (including prohibited eating during fasts), idolatry and heresy, homosexuality male and female, adultery, murder, theft, fornication and, finally, hardness of heart. It is explained that the great majority of souls failed in the toll houses of adultery and fornication – an interesting commentary on Byzantine life. What is particularly remarkable, however, is that the presiding demons were in possession of detailed ledgers (*kôdikes*) in which every particular transgression was entered with its exact date and the names of witnesses. Only when a person had fully confessed a sin on earth and made expiation for it was the relevant entry erased from the ledger. The burden of the imperial bureaucracy and the fear of the tax-collector could not have been represented more graphically.

It is fair to say that the Orthodox Church never officially endorsed the bizarre notion of the *telônia*. The destiny of the departed soul prior to the Last Judgement was a question that remained in suspense. The custom of praying for the deceased and of making offerings in church on the third, ninth and fortieth day after death presupposed the possibility of changing or, at any rate, alleviating the verdict. In some quarters it was believed that for forty days after death the disembodied soul revisited the places of his earthly life, was shown the delights of paradise and the torments of hell and, after making obeisance to the Lord, was assigned a place of sojourn.³⁰ When Gennadius Scholarius, the first patriarch of Constantinople after the Turkish conquest, was consulted on this topic, he gave the following guarded answer. The souls of the righteous went straight up to Heaven after death just as the souls of unrepentant sinners went to Hell or to some other dark and unpleasant place. As for the middling, there were three possibilities: these 'average' souls were either temporarily relegated to the earthly paradise or, as the Latins thought, to a purgatory situated somewhere near the convex boundary of the air or, thirdly, were subjected to the *telônia*. Scholarius regarded the third alternative as the most likely, the more so as it was confirmed by a considerable body of tradition. It seems, however, that he had in mind not so much a direct passage of the souls through the toll houses as a lengthy sojourn or 'shunting up and down' which served to remind the soul of its misdeeds and so purified it.³¹

The role of the demons in each man's existence was concluded by the posthumous examination of the soul. As on earth so in the suprasensible sphere a man's fate was decided by the bureaucracy of angels and demons. Divided according to classes, the departed souls now awaited the Last Judgement, which was no judgement at all, but a kind of grand imperial pageant in the course of which the existing sentences were made permanent. Of this we shall speak in a later chapter.

CHAPTER 8

THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE

We must not be misled by the proposition, true though it may be to some extent, that the Byzantines inherited the scientific speculation of the ancient Greeks. It is a fact that in some periods more than in others a few members of the intellectual élite of Byzantium devoted themselves to the study of ancient cosmology and geography. Texts of Aristotle, of Ptolemy, of Strabo and other authors were copied and commented; and while we must be eternally grateful to the Byzantine scholars who have preserved this heritage for us, we would be wrong in supposing that their efforts had any appreciable impact on the general public. The ordinary Byzantine did not, of course, lack all interest in the world around him, but in his eyes problems of natural science were part of biblical exegesis and were solved in authoritative discussions of the Six Days of Creation (*hexaëmeron*). The key text was the first chapter of Genesis which, in spite of its brevity, contains a fair number of incongruities. A few other biblical passages, especially in the books of Psalms and Isaiah, had to be taken into account, but the chief task was the interpretation of Genesis which posed many difficulties both by its statements and its omissions. We must begin by gaining some understanding of these difficulties.

On the first day, we are told, God created the heaven and the earth, the latter being as yet invisible and without form. Darkness was upon the abyss, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water. God also created light which He divided from darkness, and He called the light 'day'. On the second day He created the firmament so as to separate the waters that were above it from those that were below it, and He called the firmament 'heaven'.

From the very start the candid reader is puzzled. Seeing that the sun and the moon were created on the fourth day, how is it that there had been three prior days, each with its morning and evening? Which was

this light that did not come from the sun, and which was the darkness that does not appear to have been created? Was the abyss the same thing as the water? Most important, what exactly was the firmament which was different from the heaven and yet was called 'heaven', and what were the waters above the firmament?

On the third day God said, 'Let the waters under the heaven be gathered in one place and let the dry land appear.' And He called the dry land 'earth', and the bodies of water He called 'seas'. Since water naturally flows downward, how is it that it did not behave in this manner on the first day, instead of awaiting God's command? Why does the Bible sometimes refer to one sea that occupies a single space, and at other times to several seas? Finally, why did God create grass and fruit trees on the third day when the sun did not yet exist?

The two great luminaries and the stars were created on the fourth day. The text says clearly that they were 'in the firmament' or 'in the firmament of the heaven'. It is not specified whether the moon was created full, but this minor point concerned chronology rather than the structure of the universe.

The creation of fishes, birds and terrestrial animals did not cause any particular difficulty. But how was one to interpret God's words when He was creating man? Why did He say, 'Let *us* make man in our image, after our likeness'? Whom was He addressing, and what is the meaning of 'in our image'?

Further puzzles, this time of a geographical nature, were posed by the description of Paradise in Chapter 2 of Genesis. Paradise was situated somewhere to the east and gave rise to four rivers, namely the Pison, 'which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold', the Gihon, which 'compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia', the Tigris (so in the Septuagint) which flows opposite Assyria, and the Euphrates. Even if the Byzantines had no clear notion concerning the Pison and the land of Havilah, the three other rivers were well known: the Gihon could only be the Nile, while the Tigris and the Euphrates were called by their own names. It was also generally realized that the latter two arose in Persian Armenia, while the sources of the Nile lay very far from that country, somewhere in Ethiopia. How was it, then, that these three rivers, not to mention the enigmatic Pison, all started at the same spot, namely in Paradise?¹ Could one not reach Paradise by following these rivers upstream? And if the earthly Paradise still existed, as the Bible implies, where exactly was it, and why had it not been seen by anyone since the expulsion of Adam from it?

These were some of the principal difficulties connected with the text of Genesis. There was also one important omission: nothing is said about the creation of angels, whereas the book of Job (38. 7) affirms – and these are the very words of the Lord as He spoke out of the whirlwind – that ‘when the stars were born, all my angels praised me in a loud voice’. Hence the angels were already in existence on the fourth day. And if the serpent that tempted Eve was the devil, when had the fall of Satan occurred?

The almost impossible task of reconciling the biblical text with the notions of the world that were generally accepted in antiquity was undertaken before the beginning of the Byzantine period, and may be traced from Philo Judaeus in the first century AD to Theophilus of Antioch in the second, to Origen in the third and to St Basil in the fourth. We shall not follow it here in detail, except to note that the earliest exegetes provided certain answers that were to become definitive. Thus Philo solved the puzzle of the creation of grass and trees before that of the sun. This was done, he says, in order that men might not ascribe the growth of vegetation to the action of the sun, in other words as an argument against idolatry. Philo also interpreted ‘correctly’ the reference in Gen. 1. 14 to the heavenly bodies serving ‘for signs and for seasons’ by saying that they were meant to announce changes of weather and enable men to make certain necessary predictions, not to vindicate astrology. On the other hand, Philo’s most ingenious suggestion, that of interpreting the first day of Creation as referring to an ideal world illuminated by an intelligible light, did not win acceptance.²

The contribution of Theophilus of Antioch³ proved more durable because it was more down-to-earth. He explained that the heaven made on the first day was not the heaven visible to us, but another one higher up, and that it was fashioned like a roof or a vault – this with reference to Isaiah 40. 22, ‘It is God who made heaven as a vault and spread it out as a tent to dwell in’ (so in the Septuagint). The earth he explained as a base and foundation; the abyss as being the multitude of waters. One half of the waters, he says, was raised above the firmament to provide rain, showers and dew, the other half being left on the earth for rivers, springs and seas. Theophilus was rather silly in connecting rain with the waters above the firmament, and this part of his theory was later abandoned, but his explanation of dew, which occurs without the agency of clouds, was retained. Theophilus also introduced a number of symbolical comparisons that were to become standard: the moon that

waned and was reborn referred to man; great fishes and carnivorous birds to greedy men and transgressors; quadrupeds to men who were ignorant of God. More importantly, he explained the plural form of 'Let us make man' as being addressed to the Logos, that is, the Son.

Setting aside Origen, whose subtle interpretation fell by the wayside, we come to St Basil's homilies on the *hexaëmeron*, a text that was to prove extremely popular and influential throughout the Byzantine period.⁴ His position may be defined as follows:

1. He rejects all pagan theories of the universe on the grounds that one contradicts the other. There is no need, therefore, to disprove them: they suffice for their own refutation. What is the purpose of all this arithmetic and geometry, the study of solids, even renowned astronomy? It is all 'laborious vanity'. As St Paul says (a key text in this connection), 'They became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools' (Rom. 1. 21-2).

2. The certitude, so sadly lacking among the pagans, is provided by Moses (the reputed author of Genesis) whose academic qualifications were excellent, since he was educated by the Egyptian sages and spent forty years in contemplation. Thus equipped, he saw God face to face and was told the truth directly. What need, then, to listen to human arguments?

3. The Bible must be understood literally, not allegorically. If it is silent on certain matters it is because these matters do not concern us.

4. The universe has a moral purpose; it is a school wherein reasonable souls are instructed and guided upward to the contemplation of the invisible. Consequently, the study of the world ought to be conducted by a spirit cleansed of carnal passions, free from everyday cares and always questing after an adequate notion of God.

So much for principles; we now come down to particulars. First, Basil establishes that the world is not eternal: it had a beginning and it shall have an end, for 'heaven and earth shall pass away' (Mt. 24. 35). It seems that before the creation of the world there was an 'older condition', illuminated by a spiritual light and not contained in time, but Basil is not very specific about this. Temporal creation started with that of the upper heaven which is made of a light substance, something like smoke. This is stated by Isaiah (51. 6), and there is no need to enquire any further. The same prophet also explains, as we have seen, that heaven was set up like a vault. As for the earth, it is equally useless to

ask what it is that it rests on. If it rests on air, why is it that the air does not recede under the weight? If on water, why does not the earth sink? And furthermore, what does the water rest on? The argument becomes endless: the best answer is provided by the Psalmist – ‘In the hand of God are the ends of the earth’ (Ps. 94. 4 in the Septuagint). So far, Basil has been discussing a universe that has a top and a bottom. He adds, however, that some naturalists have a different theory: in their view the earth is immobile because it is in the exact centre of the universe. Basil himself is unwilling to take a position on this doctrine. If the reader finds it plausible, he should convey his admiration to God’s wisdom; if not, may the simplicity of his faith prevail over logical arguments.

The firmament, according to Basil, should be distinguished from the heaven that was created on the first day. As its name implies, it is composed of some fairly firm and resistant substance, but he refuses to specify whether this is like ice, rock crystal or mica. He is even willing to admit the existence of a third heaven, attested by St Paul (II Cor. 12. 2), or of several heavens (Ps. 148. 4). But what of the waters above the firmament? Some critics had objected that if the firmament had a domical shape, the waters would necessarily have flowed down its convex exterior. Not at all, replies St Basil; for if the interior is concave, it does not follow that the exterior is convex. The latter may well be flat, as it often happens in baths that have domical vaults on the inside and a flat roof on the outside. As for the waters, they are there, so to speak, as a cooling agent. For fire is a necessity of life, yet fire consumes water. In the end fire will prevail (as attested by Isaiah 44. 27), but God has wisely calculated the duration of the world and has provided a sufficiency of water to counteract the action of fire.

We have already mentioned the difficulties arising from the ‘gathering in’ of the waters on the third day. In answer to the first objection, namely why the water did not of its own accord flow down to its assigned place, Basil replies that we are acquainted with the properties of water as they are today; but how do we know that water had the same property, namely of flowing downward, prior to the third day of Creation? God’s order determined the nature or propensity of water which, presumably, it had previously lacked. As to the existence of one or several seas, Basil is prepared to admit that there are indeed many lakes, but for him there is only one sea. The Caspian, which some authorities believed to be land-locked, must, therefore, communicate with the ocean. Furthermore, the sea has its assigned place. No matter how agitated it becomes, it always breaks on the shore, and a substance

as soft as sand is sufficient to contain it. The Red Sea could easily have flooded Egypt which lies on a lower level,⁵ had it not been kept in check by the Creator.

These examples are sufficient to illustrate Basil's approach. In spite of his search for certitude, a certitude provided only by the Bible, he was content to bypass some of the great problems of cosmology. He was much more at ease when he described the moral lessons that might be drawn from the observation of animals – a topic to which we shall return in the next chapter. Perhaps he was too cultivated a man to adopt the simple-minded conclusions that followed inescapably from a literal interpretation of the biblical text, and so took refuge in a kind of indifferentism. Nor did St John Chrysostom, who followed an allegorical approach in this respect, entirely satisfy a public that wanted simple answers to fundamental questions. This public accordingly turned to another school of exegesis, usually called the School of Antioch, which had the courage to construct a system that was entirely biblical. Its masters, after Theophilus of Antioch, were Diodorus of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Severianus of Gabala and, finally, Cosmas Indicopleustes.

Diodorus was a contemporary of St Basil's. His work, entitled *Against Destiny*, is unfortunately lost, but we have a lengthy analysis of it by the patriarch Photius.⁶ It is evident from this résumé that Diodorus had a good reason for denying a spherical universe as it was conceived by naturalist philosophers; for if one admitted the celestial spheres composed of a fifth element and endowed with perpetual motion, one was half-way to astrology and paganism. It was with a view to subverting the very basis of astrology that Diodorus delineated the 'true' nature of the universe. According to him, 'there exist two heavens; one of them, higher than the visible sky, came into existence at the same time as the earth [in the sense that they were both created on the first day], while the other is the visible one. The first of the two fulfils the function of a roof; the second does the same with regard to the earth, while also serving as a foundation and a base for the one above. The earth is one. The heavenly space has been assigned to the superior powers and the space under the heaven to visible beings. The heaven is not spherical, but has the form of a tent or a vault. In support of this idea,' says Photius, 'he thinks he can present scriptural testimony, not only concerning the form of the universe, but also concerning the setting and the rising of the sun. He also explains the variable length of days and nights and inquires closely into other matters of the same kind which, in my

opinion, do not necessarily follow, even if they are in accord with Holy Writ.' We easily recognize here the system of Theophilus.

Some twenty years after Diodorus we meet Severianus of Gabala, a preacher greatly appreciated at the court of Constantinople in spite of his thick Syrian accent. In his homilies on the *hexaëmeron*⁷ the same Antiochene ideas are expounded with a number of slight variants. The universe is compared by Severianus to a two-storied house, the in-between floor being the visible sky or firmament. This is composed of ice and upholds one half of the waters so as to counteract the fire of the luminaries. So abundant is this water that part of it falls down to earth in the form of dew. On the Day of Judgement the upper water will be withdrawn, as a result of which the firmament will melt and the stars fall down. The same water serves the further purpose of reflecting downward the light of the sun and the moon which would otherwise have mounted up. The structure of the universe is repeated in that of the human body. The upper portion, above the firmament, is similar to the brain whose working is invisible and which is separated from the mouth by the palate (*ouraniskos*) whose name appropriately resembles that of the sky (*ouranos*).

The gathering of the waters is expounded by Severianus in a manner more ingenious than St Basil's. The earth, he says, was created flat on the first day and was, therefore, entirely covered with water. On the third day, however, the Lord fashioned the earth into mountains and depressions so that the water flowed down to form the sea. The observation of mountains and rocky islands proves that they were at one time joined together.

The luminaries were created independently of the sky and were then attached to it, much as an artist paints a picture and then hangs it on the wall. The sun was fixed to the east, the moon to the west. The pagan idea according to which the sun passes under the earth during the night is rejected. In fact, it traverses the northern regions, hidden by a kind of wall, and its course is obscured by the waters. This is confirmed by Ecclesiastes 1. 5-6: 'The sun rises and the sun sets, and hastens to his place. Rising there, he goes toward the south and turns to the north' (so in the Septuagint). The variable duration of the day depends on the length of the sun's journey, seeing that it does not always rise at the same spot. The moon which wanes, dies and is reborn is the symbol of human life and a guarantor of our resurrection.

Along the way Severianus explains various difficulties of the sacred text. The creation of angels is not mentioned in Genesis because this

book was composed by Moses after the exodus, at a time when the Jews were still accustomed to the idolatry they had learnt in Egypt: the legislator did not wish to give them an excuse for reverting to their errors. As for the silence of the Bible concerning the four elements, this is not surprising since the heaven and the earth imply the existence of water, fire and air. Furthermore, fire and air are closely linked. The superior powers are of fire – a heavenly and immaterial fire, yet related to ours as shown by the fact that we are able to ‘borrow’ the fire of the sun, something that would not have been possible if the two were of a different nature. Besides, if there had been no fire in the earth, how is it that we can obtain a spark from a stone or a piece of wood?

It seems that the audience of Severianus was rather bored by his lectures on natural science. ‘We wish to learn theology,’ they cried, ‘not physiology!’ The preacher retorted that this criticism was misguided, since, next to theology, it was the study of nature that provided the surest foundation for piety. If one were to banish ‘physiology’, one would have to banish the prophets and the apostles who spoke of it. St Paul, nay, the Saviour Himself pursued physiology.

The ideas of Severianus, along with a few of St Basil, Diodorus and others were picked up in the sixth century by an anonymous author whom we call pseudo-Caesarius.⁸ His work, entitled *Dialogues*, assumed the common form of questions and answers and constituted a little summa of useful knowledge, both theological and scientific. In spite of its difficult style, it enjoyed a wide popularity. Quoted in florilegia and in Byzantine chronicles, it was translated into Slavonic in the tenth century and into Arabic in the eleventh. By and large, pseudo-Caesarius reproduces the system of Severianus, but he introduces a number of reflections that may be his own. He accepts the form of the universe similar to a two-storied house and a firmament made of ice which supports one half of the waters. Here he adds an interesting illustration. The Pison, he says, one of the four rivers of Paradise, is the one called the Danube (elsewhere he affirms that the Danube and the Indus were one and the same!). In the winter this river is covered with a layer of ice so resistant that it can uphold tens of thousands of mounted barbarians who invade the Roman territory in the direction of Illyricum and Thrace. This layer is bathed by the water beneath it, and sometimes it rains upon the ice, yet the water that is above the ice is not mingled with the water that is below. The firmament does not melt from the heat of the sun, because the latter is very small in comparison, like a tiny lamp in a big house. If one takes a very large platter and

places a lamp beneath it, the platter is not going to melt. This, incidentally, is also the reason why the sun moves continually: had it remained stationary, it would have damaged the firmament. Pseudo-Caesarius disagrees with Severianus in affirming that the sun is not attached to the firmament; instead, it is suspended in mid-air thanks to the lightness of its substance. In that case, asks his interlocutor, why is it not tossed by the wind? Because, he replies, the wind blows farther down, near the surface of the earth. Besides, the wind is powerless to move a stone or a house; how could it shift a body as big as the sun? If the sun and the moon had been attached to the firmament, they would, furthermore, have scratched by their movement the surface of the celestial vault. As to the trajectory of the sun, the author specifies that during the night it is hidden by the rising ground of Cappadocia, or the Taurus range; which implies, incidentally, that he was writing south of Asia Minor. In that northern region beyond Cappadocia the rays of the sun are shaded by waters and vegetation and are reflected sideways under pressure of the firmament as it happens when a lamp is placed under a screen.

Pseudo-Caesarius must have lived at about the same time as the retired Alexandrian merchant whom we call Cosmas Indicopleustes, author of the *Christian Topography*.⁹ The main ideas that he expressed in this book with all the zeal of the autodidact were the ones we have been describing, but he had the merit of systematizing them, illustrating them with diagrams and enlivening them with his personal recollections. Although he does not appear to have gone as far as India, he certainly travelled down the Red Sea, visited Ethiopia and the island of Socotra as well as other countries. It is unfortunate that an earlier geographical work of Cosmas happens to be lost; for in it he 'described more fully the whole earth, both the one beyond the ocean, and this one, and all its countries, together with the southern parts from Alexandria to the Southern Ocean, namely the River Nile and the countries adjacent, and all the races of Egypt and Ethiopia; the Arabian Gulf besides, with the countries adjoining and their inhabitants as far as the same ocean, and likewise the middle country between the river and the gulf, with the cities, districts and tribes therein contained.'¹⁰ If I am not mistaken, this was the only work of geography based on personal experience that was produced during the Byzantine period.

The universe of Cosmas had the shape of a rectangular box with a vaulted lid and resembled, as one Victorian commentator put it, 'one of the huge receptacles in which female travellers of our day carry their

dresses'. The earth, likewise rectangular, formed the base of the box and was surrounded on all sides by the ocean which was not navigable. Beyond the ocean, however, was a narrow strip of land whose eastern portion contained the earthly paradise. It was to this strip that the four walls of the universe were welded. Half-way up, the walls supported a ceiling, namely the firmament with the waters above it. The walls then curved inward to enclose the Heavenly Kingdom. The surface of the earth was inclined from north to south with the result that one had to go uphill when travelling towards the north. Cosmas does not explain, however, why it was that the waters of the ocean did not all flow to the south. Somewhere in the north was also a huge mountain (the same we have encountered in pseudo-Caesarius) behind which the sun hid during the night. A fundamental postulate of Cosmas' system is that the universe was exactly reproduced by the Tabernacle of Moses, which was likewise divided into two spaces by means of the veil, while the table of shew-bread, which was twice as long as it was broad and was placed lengthwise from east to west, typified the earth. Ridiculous as this notion may appear to us, we must remember that the theory of a rectangular earth had antecedents in Greek science and tended to be confirmed by the experience of ancient travellers who knew that one could traverse a much longer distance from east to west than from north to south. Cosmas himself calculated the distance from China to Gibraltar as approximately twelve thousand miles, while the north-south dimension of the earth was only half that figure.

The system of Cosmas had some weaknesses even within his terms of reference. His notion, for example, that the luminaries of the sky were propelled by angels has no authority in the Bible. He was also unable to give a satisfactory account of the rivers of Paradise which he forced to somehow flow under the eastern arm of the ocean before they emerged out of the ground. In spite of such blemishes, we must grant that Cosmas managed to construct a remarkably coherent system which satisfied the requirements of the Bible, the claims of symbolism and the first-hand experience of the traveller. What is more, his ideas had a considerable diffusion in later centuries, in spite of the fact that the *Christian Topography*, containing as it did nearly a hundred illustrations that were necessary for the understanding of the text, could not have been copied very often. In the ninth century it was read by Photius (who, as an intellectual, found it ridiculous)¹¹ and reproduced in a splendid manuscript that still exists today (*Vaticanus graecus* 699). It was also translated into Slavonic, perhaps in the tenth century, and

continued to be read in Russia as an authoritative textbook down to the seventeenth century.¹²

There can be little doubt that the Antiochene conception of the universe, as exemplified by Cosmas, reflected the views of the average Byzantine on this subject. Whenever a Byzantine saint had a vision of the Heavenly Kingdom or of the Last Judgement, he thought in terms of a four-cornered universe covered by a ceiling, above which God held His court and where the elect would eventually enjoy everlasting bliss.¹³ The illustrations of Creation in manuscripts of the Old Testament followed, more or less, the same model; and to the extent that a Byzantine church was a symbolical copy of the *kosmos*, it, too, presupposed a world of box-like shape.¹⁴

It seems it was only in the eleventh century that an attempt was made to diffuse once again the cosmological doctrines of the ancients. In his encyclopaedic opusculum *De omnifaria doctrina*¹⁵ Michael Psellus dealt at some length with the structure of the universe. He made a few concessions to traditional Christianity by acknowledging that the world was not eternal (this was a very important point) and that earthquakes were caused by God as stated in Psalm 103. 32; for the rest, however, while denouncing 'the vain wisdom of the Hellenes', he simply returned to the spherical universe. The *De omnifaria doctrina* was dedicated first to the Emperor Constantine IX and, in a revised form, to Michael VII Doukas and, to judge by the number of extant manuscripts, enjoyed a fair amount of popularity in the later Byzantine centuries. It was not, however, a work that the ordinary person was capable of understanding and we may doubt that it had much of an impact on the consciousness of the public. The average Byzantine listened to his preachers and looked at the paintings that adorned the walls of his church. All the cosmology he needed had been set down by the greatest of all scientists, the prophet Moses.

CHAPTER 9

THE INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH

The earth is inhabited by animals and human beings. The difference between the two is that humans possess a rational soul, while animals do not. This is indicated by Leviticus 17. 11, 'The soul of all flesh is in the blood,' that is to say the vital principle of all animals is of a material nature. The same distinction is established in the book of Genesis, for in creating the animals of the sea and of the air God said, 'Let the waters bring forth the moving creatures that have life and fowl that fly' (Gen. 1. 20), which means that the life is contained in the animal, while in the case of man God first formed his body and then 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life' (Gen. 2. 7), thus indicating the difference between body and soul. The spirit of the animal dies with his body, while the human soul will live forever.

God first created aquatic animals to show that life begins with baptism. Birds are grouped with the fishes in Genesis because they swim in the air more than they walk.¹ There is also a slight distinction between God's command concerning fishes, namely, 'Let the waters bring forth the moving creatures that have life,' and His command concerning terrestrial animals, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind.' Aquatic animals have an imperfect existence: their sight and hearing are feeble, they have no memory or imagination, they do not recognize any familiar being, whereas terrestrial animals have keener senses.² The nature of each animal species has been established by God's command and no length of time will alter it. Each kind has his peculiar characteristic: the lion is proud, the ox is calm, the wolf is savage. The animals that are easiest to capture are also the most prolific (rabbits, wild goats, and so on).

Animals have been created to be subject to man. This is indicated by their name (*ktênos* = beast, fancifully derived from *ktêma* = possession)

and the fact that it was Adam who named them, thus establishing his authority over them, just as when one is enrolled in the imperial army one is marked by the imperial seal.³ The thousands of names that Adam was able to invent proves his great intelligence before the Fall. The purpose of animals was threefold. Some were created to be eaten, the same that are slaughtered today; others to transport burdens, like horses and camels. The third kind consists of 'imitative' animals that were made to amuse man who was alone in Paradise. Some of these, like apes, imitate gestures, others, like parrots, imitate sounds. Originally the serpent was very friendly to man, which is why the devil chose him as his instrument. At that time he walked upright thanks to a rapid whirling of his tail. Even today, when he is angered, he tries to lift up his head, but soon reverts to a crawling posture because he cannot resist the force of God's condemnation. One should not imagine, however, that the animals lived in Paradise any more than servants live in the imperial palace. They were summoned only when their lord had need of them.⁴

Another reason for the creation of animals was to teach us moral lessons and to provide theological symbols. Big fishes feed on little fishes: we do the same when we oppress the weak. The cunning crab waits for the oyster to open in the sun, then tosses in a pebble to prevent the valves from shutting and so devours his prey. We, too, act like the crab when we pounce on the goods of our neighbour. The dissimulation of polyyps which assume the colour of their surroundings is imitated by the hangers-on of the rich and powerful, for these men are temperate or libertine as circumstances require. We may also draw some admirable lessons by observing the denizens of the deep. They are not separated by any natural boundaries, yet each kind is content to dwell within its own territory. Thus, whales, which are as big as mountains, have been naturally assigned to the Atlantic Ocean which has no islands and is not bounded by any continent on the other side. Not so with us: we are constantly moving 'the ancient landmarks which our fathers have set' (Prov. 22. 28); we keep dividing land, we add house to house and field to field by defrauding our neighbours. The loathsome viper unites with the eel, and the latter submits, if not very willingly. In like manner wives should endure their husbands, even if the latter are violent, drunken and disagreeable. Husbands, too, should take this lesson to heart. The viper spits out his poison before entering on this union; the husband should likewise renounce his harsh ways. Or, to put it differently, the union of the viper and the eel is adulterous. Men who are

invading other people's marriages should recognize what kind of a reptile they are imitating.⁵

Animals also teach us more exalted lessons of governance and religion. Bees are ruled by a king (we would say a queen) who exercises a natural ascendancy and who, though armed with a sting, does not use this weapon. The king is not appointed by his subjects, he is not elected by lot, nor does he come to power by the rule of heredity – three principles that often lead to the worst results; his superiority is due to nature. The transformation which the silkworm undergoes from caterpillar to larva to butterfly teaches us to believe in the change which our own bodies will experience at the time of the Resurrection. So also the vulture, which reproduces without copulation, gives us reason to accept the virgin birth of Christ.⁶ It was especially a work called *Physiologus*, equally popular in the East and in the West, that served to disseminate the theological interpretation of alleged animal behaviour: the lion who sleeps with his eyes open typifies the crucified Christ whose divinity remains awake, the young pelican who is killed by his parents and returns to life on the third day is also a symbol of Christ, and so on.⁷

Like all medieval men, the Byzantines had a keen interest in exotic animals, both real and imaginary. The ecclesiastical historian Philostorgius,⁸ apropos of the earthly Paradise, affirms that the biggest animals were to be found in the eastern and southern regions of the earth in spite of the heat that prevailed there. He enumerates the elephant, the Indian buffalo which he had seen on Roman territory, dragons ninety feet long and as thick as a beam of which he had seen the skin, the giraffe, the zebra, the phoenix, the parrot and certain spotted birds called Garamantes. He had beheld at Constantinople the picture of a unicorn: it had the head of a dragon, a twisted horn, a beard, a long neck, a body like that of a deer and the feet of a lion. As for monkeys, there were thousands of different varieties, many of which were brought to the Roman Empire. One was called Pan: it had the head and legs of a goat, but for the rest was pure ape. A specimen was once sent to Constantine the Great by the King of India, but it died on the way and arrived at Constantinople in a mummified condition. Philostorgius thinks that this monkey was deified by the Hellenes, as were also the satyr and the sphinx. The latter he had seen himself: it had bare breasts like a woman's, a rounded face and a voice resembling the human, but inarticulate and peevish. This beast was very savage. One such must have been brought to Thebes in ancient times. Legend represented him

as winged because he jumped swiftly and as uttering enigmas because of his indistinct voice. Cosmas Indicopleustes, too, devotes an excursus to exotic animals.⁹ He describes quite soberly the rhinoceros, which he had seen in Ethiopia, the buffalo, the giraffe, the yak, the musk, the 'hog-deer' of which he had tasted the flesh and the hippopotamus whose teeth he had sold at Alexandria. He admits not having seen a unicorn, but he delineates it after four statues he had observed in Ethiopia. The unicorn, he explains, is difficult to catch. When pursued, it leaps from a rock, turns a somersault in the air and lands on its horn which acts as a shock-absorber. Its existence is, moreover, confirmed by Holy Scripture.

Since God created only two rational species, namely angels and men, one ought not to believe in dragons who assume human form and carry away women. Dragons do exist, but they are merely serpents. It is not true that they rise up in the air and are killed by thunder as some ignorant people say.¹⁰ The same argument is applied to satyrs by the eleventh-century general Cecaumenus.¹¹ If, he says, they existed, as stated in the Life of St Paul the Theban,¹² and were rational beings, how is it that Christ did not come to them? What prophet, what apostle was sent to instruct them? Why is there no gospel addressed to satyrs? The Fathers of the desert, he continues, did see various strange animals that live in those parts, such as dragons, asps, basilisks and unicorns, whose existence may be admitted, but not that of satyrs.

Indeed, holy monks stood in a special relation to the animal kingdom. Many of them showed particular kindness to animals. A monk of Alexandria, we are told,¹³ fed every day the dogs that were in his monastery, gave flour to the smallest ants, grain to the bigger ones, and biscuits soaked in water to the birds. St Stephen the Sabaite (d. 794) even fed the harmless black worms that lived in the desert.¹⁴ The most famous and instructive animal story, however, is that of the lion of St Gerasimus, later transferred to St Jerome. This lion, out of whose paw the saint had extracted a thorn, remained to serve him and even carried burdens for him in lieu of a donkey. When Gerasimus died, the lion, too, expired of grief. 'This came to pass,' says John Moschus, 'not because the lion had a rational soul, but because God wished to glorify those who glorify Him and demonstrate the obedience which animals had shown towards Adam.'¹⁵ The power over the animals which Adam had lost because of the Fall could thus be regained by the saint.

The idea that different animal species had their distinctive and

immutable characteristics – characteristics that were not only physical, but also moral, such as the pride of the lion and the equanimity of the ox – was also applied to human races and peoples. This formed part of an old argument against astrology that we find in Diodorus of Tarsus¹⁶ and later in pseudo-Caesarius.¹⁷ The point of the argument was to prove that peoples having very different customs and institutions lived in the same geographical areas, so that their peculiarities could not be ascribed to astral influence. Thus, the Brahmans and the Indians live in the same astral region, yet the Brahmans are the most virtuous of men, while the Indians live like pigs. The Chaldaeans and Babylonians practise incest and they do so not only in their own country, but also when they live abroad – which ‘they still do’ among the Medes, the Parthians, the Elamites, the Egyptians, the Phrygians and the Galatians, ‘living their foul life in certain villages’. Similar examples of sexual depravity may also be observed in other parts of the earth, such as Britain, where many men lie with one woman and many women with one man. The Slavs, who are also called Danubians, devour the breasts of nursing women and dash their infants against rocks, while other tribes living in the same region abstain from all meat. And while some of them are unruly, massacre their leaders, eat foxes, wild cats and boars, and call one another by howling like wolves, others are abstemious and docile. If our character was determined by the position of the stars at the moment of our birth, and if it were true that the conjunction of Mercury and Venus in the house of Mercury produced sculptors and painters, while the same conjunction in the house of Venus produced perfumers, actors and poets, why is it that these occupations are entirely absent among the Saracens, the Libyans, the Moors, the Germans, the Sarmatians, the Scythians and, in general, all those who live to the north of the Black Sea?

The diversity of the peoples was explained by the division of the earth among Noah’s sons and the subsequent multiplication of tongues during the building of the Tower of Babel; for, prior to that event, all humanity was one and spoke the same language, namely Hebrew. The basic list of peoples was provided by Chapter 10 of Genesis. In the Septuagint version this list contains a number of names that may be interpreted in an ethnic sense and others that are clearly ethnic. Thus, among the eight sons of Japheth we find Iouan, who makes one think of the Ionians, Tharsis who bears some resemblance to the Thracians as well as the Ketians (recalling Citium, a city of Cyprus) and the Rhodians. Among the four sons of Ham, Mizraim clearly refers to Egypt

(Misr), while Canaan begat Sidon, the Jebusite, the Amorite, Aradios (from Arados in Syria), the Samaritan and Amathi (from the city of Amathus in Cyprus), and so on.

The identification of these outlandish names was undertaken by Flavius Josephus¹⁸ who was concerned to show the priority of the Bible to the pagan traditions. Of the various peoples, he says, some have kept their original Hebrew names, while others lost them on account of the Greeks (the Macedonians). For when the latter rose to power, they gave to the nations names they could understand, thus creating the false impression that these nations were of Greek descent. Josephus is also responsible for a geographical division of the earth among Noah's sons, a division that was later adopted by the Christian tradition. The descendants of Japheth, he says, began by inhabiting the Taurus and the Amanus (the mountain range between Syria and Cilicia), then advanced into Asia up to the River Tanais (the Don) and in Europe all the way to the straits of Gibraltar, that whole country being then uninhabited. The sons of Ham held the coast of Phoenicia and Palestine down to Egypt and thence all of North Africa as far as the Atlantic Ocean. Finally, the sons of Shem received most of Asia as far as the Indian Ocean.

At some time after Josephus but before the fourth century was composed a more systematic list known as *The Division of the Earth*.¹⁹ This text, which has not come down to us in its original form, enjoyed a wide diffusion in the Middle Ages, not only in the Greek-speaking world (it appears in all Byzantine chronicles), but also in the West, in Syria, Armenia, and so on. It is a little treatise of geography and ethnography comprising seventy-two nations, this being the number of languages that came into being at the time of the construction of the Tower of Babel. The division of the earth among Noah's sons ran, more or less, in three parallel zones from east to west: the progeny of Japheth had all the north along a line running from Media to Gibraltar, that of Shem the middle zone, and that of Ham the south along a line running through the point of juncture between Palestine and Egypt. The anonymous author also added a list of peoples who possessed an alphabet, and of principal rivers, islands and big cities.

This, the fullest list of peoples known to the Byzantine tradition, did not extend any farther east than the Persian Empire. While the existence of India was generally known, the other countries of central and eastern Asia were shrouded in mystery. The ever-popular Alexander romance gave some wonderful details about the peoples and animals

that inhabited those exotic parts. Among the many texts connected with the Alexander legend there circulated an *Itinerary from Paradise to the Country of the Romans*.²⁰ This text informs us that next to the earthly Paradise lay the country of the Macarini or Camarini whence flows a mighty river that splits into four branches. The Macarini are good and pious. They have no fire and do not cook any food, but are sustained by manna that falls down from the sky, and they drink a mixture of wild honey and pepper. Their clothes are so pure that they are never stained. There is no illness among them and they live to an age of between 118 and 120 years. They know in advance the time of their death and prepare for it by lying down in a sarcophagus of aromatic wood. They also have no government since they live in perfect concord. All the precious stones come from their country. Next to the Macarini live the Brahmans who are also exceedingly virtuous, but as one moves farther west there is a gradual deterioration. The sowing of crops starts in the country of Nebus, the fifth from the east, which is also the first country that has a government of elders. Warriors are first encountered in Axoum, the tenth country, then comes India Minor which breeds a multitude of elephants, and finally Persia, which is prosperous but very wicked. Little attempt appears to have been made by the Byzantines to integrate these eastern peoples into a biblical framework, but it was claimed that the virtuous nations of the Far East were Christian.

The main problem that occurred to the Byzantine mind with regard to the peoples of the earth concerned their status in the plan of divine Providence. The equality of men is proclaimed in the Gospel, since God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us' (Acts 17. 26-7). Yet it seemed as if these various peoples had not been the object of equal solicitude on the Lord's part. There was no difficulty about the initial period, the 2,900 years or so that extended from Creation to the division of the tongues. But what of the following 2,600 years to the Incarnation? The prophets were sent only to the Israelites, whereas the other nations remained in ignorance of God. And what of the period after the Incarnation? No matter how far-flung was the predication of the Gospel, it did not extend to the whole earth. Finally, what was, in the scheme of divine Providence, the role of the pagan nations?

To these questions we find only sporadic and partial answers. Granted that all men were 'of one blood', Noah's ancient curse weighed upon the descendants of Canaan, son of Ham: 'Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant' (Gen. 9. 25-7). This curse, it was believed, was delivered not only because Ham had seen his father's nakedness, but also in anticipation of Canaan's cupidity in invading Palestine and Phoenicia, lands that belonged to Shem. While thus downgrading the Africans because of their ancestral sin, Noah also foretold the glorious destiny of Japheth's offspring, since it was among the latter that Christianity was to make the greatest progress.²¹

Another avenue of giving some satisfaction to the non-believers who had lived prior to Christ's advent was provided by St Peter's statement that the Lord 'also went and preached unto the spirits in prison which sometime were disobedient' (I Pet. 3. 19). It was even said that St John the Baptist, who had died before Christ, had begun to preach to the spirits in Hades and that this predication was completed at the time of the Lord's Descent. In confirmation of which it was related that a lawyer had once cursed Plato. The following night the philosopher appeared to him in a dream and said: 'Stop cursing me. I do not deny that I lived as a sinner, but when Christ came down to Hades, I was the first to believe in him.' It does not follow from this that the dead will have another chance to repent, for that was a unique occasion.²²

If a net could thus be cast round all those who had died before the Crucifixion, the next difficulty concerned the universality of the Christian preaching. This involved a point of considerable importance. When St Peter said that 'in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him' (Acts 10. 35), he was speaking at a time when the Gospel had not yet been disseminated everywhere, but this was no longer the case.²³ Had it been otherwise, the members of 'the nations' (*ethnikoi*), that is, non-Christians, could expect to be saved by good works alone. Hence the necessity of proving that the Good Tidings had, in fact, been carried to all countries – a myth that was bolstered up by the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. It was alleged that before setting out on their respective missions, the apostles gathered at Jerusalem and allotted to each other all the regions of the inhabited world. St Peter assumed responsibility for the circumcised Jews, James and John for the East, Philip for Samaria and Asia,

Matthew for Parthia, Thomas for Armenia and India, Andrew for Bithynia, Lacedaemonia and Achaëa, and so on. The geographical area of each apostle's activity shows great variation from one text to another. We even find Matthew in the land of the Man-Eaters, Philip and Bartholomew in 'the land of the Ophians and the desert of the she-dragons'.²⁴ Next to Thomas, who was active in faraway India, Andrew proved a great traveller, since he evangelized Scythia, founded churches along the south shore of the Black Sea (including that of Byzantium) and finally took in Achaëa as well, where he suffered martyrdom.²⁵

These legends conceal a reality that remains but dimly known, namely the progress of Christian missions. In the Early Byzantine period the domain of Christianity showed a notable expansion. The ecclesiastical historian Sozomenus, writing in the fifth century, noted the conversion of all the western peoples between the Rhine and the Atlantic Ocean, that of the Armenians and the Georgians, and described the progress of the true faith among the Persians.²⁶ A century later the continuator of Zachariah of Mitylene spoke of the mission that had been sent among the eastern Huns, beyond the Caspian Gates, and of the translation of the Scriptures into the local dialect.²⁷ Had not Christ said, 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world' (Jn 16. 33)? And again, 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against my church' (Mt. 16. 18). The fulfilment of these prophecies was clearly seen by Cosmas Indicopleustes. There were Christian churches, he writes, as far away as Ceylon, Malabar and the isle of Socotra.

'And so likewise among the Bactrians and Huns and Persians, and the rest of the Indians, Persarmenians, and Medes and Elamites, and throughout the whole land of Persia there is no limit to the number of churches with bishops and very large communities of Christian people, as well as many martyrs, and monks also living as hermits. So too in Ethiopia and Axôm, and in all the country about it; among the people of Happy Arabia – who are now called Homerites – through all Arabia and Palestine, Phoenicia, and all Syria and Antioch as far as Mesopotamia; among the Nubians and the Garamantes, in Egypt, Libya, Pentapolis, Africa and Mauretania, as far as southern Gadeira [Gades in Africa], there are everywhere churches of the Christians, and bishops, martyrs, monks and recluses, where the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed. So likewise again in Cilicia, Asia, Cappadocia, Lazica and Pontus, and in the northern countries occupied by the Scythians, Hyrcanians, Heruli, Bulgarians, Helladikoi [Greeks] and Illyrians, Dalmatians, Goths, Spaniards, Romans, Franks, and other nations, as far as Gadeira on the ocean towards the northern parts, there are believers and preachers of the Gospel confessing the

resurrection from the dead; and so we see the prophecies being fulfilled over the whole world.²⁸

Indeed, to an observer living in the sixth century, it might well have appeared that not much additional territory remained to be won. The only big obstacle was Persia, where Christianity had already made very notable progress. It was reported, however, that the king of Persia himself, under the influence of his Christian physician and the Nestorian Catholicos, had ceased eating the flesh of impure animals and had built a hospice for strangers, something that had been quite unheard of before.²⁹

The dream of an entirely Christian *oikoumenê* came close to being realized when Heraclius subdued the Persian Empire and may, indeed, have formed an important part of that emperor's policy. The catastrophic reverse that Christianity suffered immediately afterwards was totally unexpected, and it may be said that Byzantine thinking never adjusted to it. In the seventh century in particular the success of the *ethnikoi* posed an agonizing problem. Was it by God's will that the impious enemy was inflicting so much harm on the Christians? Churchmen could only reply that those calamities were indeed occurring by God's will so as to chastise the Christians for their sins. The good fortune of the godless was not, however, due to their virtue. 'The lawless and impious enemy, subservient as they are to their inherent wickedness, inflict upon us these calamities that are displeasing to God, in return for which they will certainly suffer eternal punishment.'³⁰ It even appeared to some observers that the *ethnikoi* were healthier, physically superior to the Christians, among whom there was a great deal of gout, leprosy, epilepsy and other diseases. The argument that God visited illness upon the Christians because He loved them carried little conviction. Accordingly, Anastasius of Sinai attempted a different explanation. Diseases, he says, occur *also* (that is in addition to God's will) for hereditary reasons, or because of the air, a variable and humid climate or excessive eating and drinking. That the quality of air possesses this effect is proved by the fact that the inhabitants of Aila (Aqaba) never suffer from gout. The importance of a proper diet is demonstrated by the Jews who originate in a dry, hence healthy region, but who are addicted to an excessive consumption of meat, wine and sauces and, consequently, have as many diseases as the Christians. The idea that epilepsy or demoniac possession could be due to physical causes was quite foreign to the Byzantine way of thinking, yet Christ Himself had said of the demon, 'This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer

and fasting' (Mk. 9. 29). If, then, the demon could be cast out by fasting, he might also – of course, by God's permission – enter a body on account of gluttony. Nor should one be surprised if godless foreigners appear on occasion to possess certain supernatural faculties, for example the Saracens, who are able to predict who is going to be killed on the field of battle. They do so by observing certain physical signs – a fact confirmed by experts in medicine who affirm that Providence has placed in the human body, especially in the eyes, some secret signals that announce the approach of death, and that these signals are observed by demons who then deceive people by making correct predictions. Besides, it is a known fact that pagans and heretics can perform miracles with the help of demons. For example, says Anastasius, there was once a heretical bishop of Cyzicus who, by reciting a prayer, was able to uproot an olive tree that obstructed the window of his church and, on another occasion, caused a corpse to speak. When he died various apparitions and hallucinations took place over his tomb – all through the agency of demons. The only means of distinguishing between a true and a false miracle, between the Christian and the godless, is by the results they achieve, for 'by their fruits ye shall know them'.³¹

The prevalence of apostasy after the Arab conquest was perhaps an indication that the arguments of the Church did not meet with general acceptance. Yet throughout the Byzantine period the success of the *ethnikoi* was explained in precisely the same way as it had been by Anastasius. This reasoning was applied to the Avars, to the Arabs, to the Bulgarians, to the Russians, to the Latins, finally to the Turks. In 860, during the siege of Constantinople by the Russians, the patriarch Photius publicly declared that 'While God's people waxes strong and triumphs over its enemies by His alliance, the rest of the nations, whose religion is at fault, are not increased in strength on account of their own good deeds, but on account of our bad ones'.³² In the fifteenth century, as many times before, the same question was asked: Why is it that the Turks are victorious, while we are in disarray? Is it perhaps because we have not accepted the superior revelation of Mohammed, just as the Jews have been punished for not accepting that of Christ? – No, replies the Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus. First, we cannot be compared to the Jews who, since the fall of Jerusalem, have had neither king nor city nor temple. Secondly, many empires have come and gone whose success cannot be attributed to their religious superiority – for example, that of the Assyrians, that of the Persians, or that of Alexander of

Macedon, who was manifestly impious since he sacrificed to demons. Furthermore – and here, at last, we encounter a new thought – there exist in the West several Christian states that are more powerful than that of the Turks. A little time still remains before the end of the world: who knows what changes may take place in it?³³

CHAPTER 10

THE PAST OF MANKIND

The average Byzantine, like all other simple folk, had but a limited awareness of the succession of years. When he thought about such matters at all, he reckoned by the system of indictions. An indiction was a fifteen-year cycle initially introduced for the purpose of tax assessments, but when one referred, for example, to the fifth indiction, one meant the fifth year (starting on 1 September) of any given cycle, not the fifth cycle. In his *Spiritual Meadow* John Moschus relates the following characteristic story. In Cilicia, in the foothills of the Amanus mountain range, he had met two elderly laymen. They told him that seven years earlier they had observed that a fire was lit at night on the mountain top. They went up in daytime to investigate, but found nothing. The fire continued to shine in the darkness for a period of three months. At length they decided to carry out the ascent at night. They located the light and remained at that spot until morning, when they discovered a cave containing a dead anchorite who was clutching a Gospel book. Next to him was a tablet inscribed with the following words: 'I, the humble John, died in the fifteenth indiction.' And then the two men started to compute the years, probably on their fingers, and realized with a shock that seven years had passed since the anchorite's demise, although he looked as if he had died that very day.¹

The record which the monk made of his own death was, in fact, typical of Byzantine epitaphs of the Early period. To us this may seem surprising, for we regard a tombstone as a memorial that is intended to survive for several centuries if not forever; but a Byzantine was usually content to engrave on the stone an inscription of this nature: 'The servant of God Theodore died on the 13th of the month of August, a Sunday, indiction 13.' It was as if the information conveyed by the epitaph would be of interest for only a few years, one or two indiction cycles at most.

The main reason for this disregard of absolute dates lay in the lack of a generally recognized form of chronology. At the time when Moschus was writing (about 600 AD) official documents were still dated, as in the Roman period, by consulship; but since this institution had become an empty formula and the consulship was assumed by the emperor at irregular intervals and at different times of the year, one had to be something of a specialist to make sense of the system.² The regnal year, with which the consulship was often identified, was less confusing, except that one had to know not only the year of an emperor's accession, but also the day and the month. Then there was a multitude of local eras, especially in the eastern provinces. Syrians usually reckoned by the Seleucid era (also known as the era of the Greeks) which started on 1 October 312 BC. At Antioch, however, there was an era starting in 49 BC, at Bostra another from 106 AD, while Gaza in Palestine counted from 61 BC. At Alexandria they used the era of Augustus from 30 August 30 BC, but also that of Diocletian (the era of the Martyrs) from 284 AD, and so on. The *annus mundi* was not yet used as an ordinary system of dating and there was, as we shall see, considerable disagreement concerning the method of its computation. It began to appear sporadically in the eighth century and slowly gained ground; but even in the Middle and Late Byzantine periods, when the *annus mundi* was solidly entrenched, the use of dates in inscriptions, manuscripts, buildings, and so on remained the exception rather than the rule.

The interest of the *annus mundi* for our purpose is that it reflected the entire conception of the human past that was held by Christians in the Late Antique and Byzantine periods, a conception that was both 'historical' and symbolic and also had to take account of certain astronomical factors. This system was enshrined in a type of book known as the 'universal chronicle' or, as the Byzantines usually called it, the 'chronicle from Adam'. When the average Byzantine wished to inform himself on the course of past history, it was to this type of book that he turned. As a result, the universal chronicle enjoyed a wide circulation, and since it was meant for the ordinary reader, it was couched in simple language. As time went on, chronicles were supplemented with an account of recent events. They were treated, in fact, not as literary works, but as handbooks or almanacs that called for periodic revision. This circumstance has caused much difficulty to scholars desirous of identifying the successive layers of such compilations. Here, however, we are concerned not with particular problems of attribution, but with the genre as a whole and the ideas it contains.

The first impression that Byzantine chronicles produce on the reader is one of naïveté, but the triviality of much of their content should not blind us to the extreme complexity of their conceptual framework. They are, in fact, the product of a long evolution and of much scholarly endeavour, and we must pause briefly to examine their ancestry. The story they tell is not that of one nation, but of the whole world as it was then known. The principal strand of that story is provided by the Bible, but several other threads – Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman – have been intertwined with it. The synchronization of these separate histories required an overall chronological framework. More importantly, the chronicles set out to explain the working of divine Providence and, since God acts in an orderly fashion, history, too, must express not only His moral purpose, but also the symmetry of His design. By what process, then, was this vast panorama built up?

To start with the chronological element, we may note that long before the birth of Christian historiography, the hellenized Jews were much preoccupied with demonstrating the antiquity, hence the respectability, of their religion as contrasted with the confused and unhistorical nature of the Greek and Roman traditions. Already in the first century AD Josephus wrote at length on this topic and demonstrated not only that Jewish historical records extended over a period of some five thousand years, but also that they were more reliable than the contradictory stories told by the Greek historians.³ The legacy of the Jewish apologists was eagerly seized by the Christians who had to face the same criticism from their pagan adversaries and who, a little later, had the added task of fighting the Jews with the latter's own weapons. As far as we know, the earliest Christian author to have made a detailed chronological computation on the basis of the Old Testament was Theophilus of Antioch (end of the second century AD). Using the Septuagint version (which differs markedly from the Hebrew with regard to chronology), he calculated that Creation took place in about 5515 BC.⁴ He himself admitted that his figures were approximate, within a maximum range of error of some two hundred years. What is rather more interesting for us, however, is that he was able to link biblical chronology to that of the Graeco-Roman world, for at II Chronicles 36. 21–2 it is stated that the end of the Babylonian captivity (4954 after Creation according to his reckoning) coincided with the first year of King Cyrus of Persia. From there it was plain sailing, for it was known that Cyrus reigned 28 years and that his death occurred contemporaneously with the accession in Rome of Tarquin the Proud, from

which time, according to chronological handbooks, 713 years elapsed until the death of Marcus Aurelius (180 AD). In this reckoning the Incarnation of Christ plays no part, nor was Theophilus concerned to establish a relative chronology of biblical and gentile history, a task that was left to later Christian scholars, especially Africanus (third century AD) and Eusebius of Caesarea.

To this 'historical' evidence was added a mystical consideration. The early Christians believed, on the analogy of the Six Days of Creation, that the world would last six thousand years, for it was written that a thousand years were like a day in the sight of God (Ps. 90. 4). If so, it would have been particularly satisfying if the Incarnation had taken place exactly in the year 5500, the mid-point of the sixth cosmic day, the more so as the combined dimensions of the Ark of the Covenant amounted to five and a half cubits (Exodus 25. 10). All the early Christian and Byzantine systems, except that of Eusebius, attempt to come as closely as possible to this figure.

The third aspect of the problem had to do with the adjustment of the solar and lunar calendars. Since Christ rose from the dead at about the time of Passover (the fourteenth day of the month Nisan), it was believed that the first day of Creation must have fallen close to the same date, also a Sunday, which, furthermore, ought to have been 25 March, the date of the spring equinox according to the Julian calendar. It was, in fact, the same kind of calculation as that involved in determining the date of Easter, a problem that greatly preoccupied the early Church. By that time the Jews had already abandoned a purely lunar calendar and had adopted a soli-lunar year of 354 days (12 months of $29\frac{1}{2}$ days), that is, 11 days shorter than the solar year, but every three years they inserted an additional (embolic) month. In this way the date of Passover, instead of travelling all through the solar year as do Mohammedan feasts, could remain in the spring. The Christians, for their part, who were on the Julian calendar, had by the third century chosen a cycle of 8 years for the purpose of computing the date of Easter. The reason for this was that 8 solar years (including 2 leap years) = 2,922 days, which is pretty close to 99 lunar months (5 years of 12 months plus 3 years of 13 months) = $2,923\frac{1}{2}$ days. This cycle gave eight possible dates for Passover, so that in the ninth year one returned to the same day of the month as in the first; but it did not yield the same days of the week. To take account of both factors, one had to multiply $8 \times 7 = 56$. After 56 years Passover would thus return to the same day of the month and the same day of the week. The earliest preserved Paschal table, that

of Hippolytus, actually uses a cycle of 112 years (56×2). There was still, of course, a gap of one and a half days every 8 years, a deficiency that was later remedied by more accurate cycles.

The table of Hippolytus is, however, sufficient to illustrate the principle involved. The first day of Creation fell, as we have said, on a Sunday 25 March. Seeing that the moon was created on the fourth day and was created full (all of God's works being perfect), the first 14 Nisan would have been on Wednesday, 28 March, if the moon was created in the morning, or Thursday, 29 March, if it was created in the evening. According to the canon of Hippolytus, the possible dates for 14 Nisan were: 18, 21, 25, 29 March; and 2, 5, 9, 13 April. The choice fell, therefore, on Thursday 29 March, a synchronism which, according to the same canon, occurred in 266 AD and 322. Counting back, the date of Creation plus the AD date minus 1 (since there is no year 0) had to be a multiple of 112. The result, if it was to fall as closely as possible to 5500 BC, was 5503 ($5,503 + 322 - 1 = 5,824 = 112 \times 52$).

The discrepancy in Hippolytus of one and a half days every 8 years between the solar and the soli-lunar calendars led, as we have said, to the invention of more accurate cycles. The one that prevailed in the East was a cycle of 19 years, and this necessitated a re-calculation of the date of Creation which was now thought to have occurred in 5492 BC. This is the so-called Alexandrian era which was still used by the chroniclers George Syncellus and Theophanes in the early ninth century. By that time, however, the normal Byzantine era of 5508 BC had already been introduced so as to take also account of the indiction cycle, and it was this Byzantine era that prevailed until the end of the Empire.⁵

The foregoing, somewhat arid, discussion was necessary to explain the chronological skeleton of the Byzantine view of history. The main structure of the universal chronicle was erected in the third century, perfected by Eusebius at the beginning of the fourth and further systematized in the fifth by the Alexandrians Panodorus and Annianus. The work of these pioneers has come down to us only in fragments. The earliest preserved Byzantine chronicle, that by the Antiochene John Malalas, dates from the sixth century, and is followed by the Paschal Chronicle in the seventh, George Syncellus and Theophanes at the beginning of the ninth, George the Monk towards the middle of the ninth, the several versions of Symeon Logothete in the tenth and so forth. The tradition of the universal chronicle was continued even after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks and supplied the historical reading matter of the Greek people until the revolution of 1821.

In broad outline the content of the world chronicle was the following.⁶ The account of the antediluvian age raised no particular difficulties since it was based on the Bible and Old Testament apocrypha. We may note, however, that this long period (2,362 years according to some reckonings) was marked by a process of nomenclature and practical invention, even if much of this knowledge was later lost as a result of the Flood. Adam gave names to all the animals; Cain invented the measurements of the earth, while Lamech's three sons discovered, respectively, cattle-breeding, musical instruments and the forging of brass and iron. The greatest sage of that remote period was, however, Seth, who devised the Hebrew alphabet, discovered the succession of years, months and weeks, and gave names to the stars and to the five planets. The names he bestowed on the planets (the sun and the moon having already received theirs from God) were, curiously enough, Kronos, Zeus, Ares, Aphrodite and Hermes, so it was not the planets that were named after the pagan gods, but the gods (who were really men) that were named, much later, after the planets. Seth, who had been divinely forewarned of the Flood, was thoughtful enough to write down the names of the stars on a stone slab which survived the catastrophe and enabled Canaan to compile an astronomy. It also seems that certain Chaldaean letters were contrived before the Flood by the so-called Wakeful Ones, the same as the mysterious sons of God who married the daughters of men in Genesis 6. 2, and that these letters were used to express some magical lore. They were later discovered by Salah who became versed in this dangerous knowledge and passed it on to others.

The Flood, which destroyed all humanity except for Noah and his family, played an important part in establishing a relative chronology of Jewish and gentile history. Among the various national traditions current in Late Antiquity, only the Assyrian (or so it was thought) mentioned a universal deluge. The Flood of Deucalion of Greek mythology was considered to have been local rather than universal; as for the Egyptians, they had never heard of a flood at all. It followed from this that only the Assyrians or Chaldaeans had a history stretching further back than the Flood. According to their records there had been ten antediluvian kings, the last of them, Xisuthrus, being saved from the Flood. It followed that Xisuthrus was the same as Noah and that Chaldaean and Jewish histories were one. As for the Egyptians, who had no recollection of a flood, yet claimed a history stretching back nearly thirty thousand years, one could only conclude that they did not

know how to count. Evidently, Egyptian history began after the Flood, and their first ruler was Mizraim, Noah's grandson.

The division of the earth among Noah's sons (of which we have already spoken) and the subsequent multiplication of the tongues provided the natural starting points for the history of various gentile peoples. Now one of Ham's descendants was Nimrod, the mighty hunter, who ruled something called the land of Shinar (Genesis 10. 10), evidently in Assyria or Persia, even though that part of the world appears to have been assigned to Shem. The Bible neglects to say that Nimrod also invented magic and astrology which he taught to the Persians, and that when he died he was deified and became a star in the sky, the same as Orion. Nimrod, therefore, was some sort of a giant, and it was not unnatural that he should have been succeeded by another giant named Kronos, the son of a certain Ouranos and Aphrodite. This Kronos subdued all of Syria and Persia and became the first ruler of men. He married Semiramis (whom the Assyrians called Rhea) and had two sons, Ninos and Zeus (also called Picos) and one daughter, Hera, whom Zeus married. To make matters worse, when Kronos died, he was succeeded by Ninos who married his own mother Semiramis, and so this foul custom of incest became implanted among the Persians. In spite of their sins, the progeny of Kronos were now launched on their historic course. Ninos, appropriately enough, built Nineveh. After him reigned a certain Thouras who was renamed Ares and was worshipped by the Assyrians under the Persian [*sic*] name of Baal. As for Picos Zeus, he somehow became King of Italy, a part of the world that had at that time neither cities nor government, being simply inhabited by the tribe of Japheth. This Zeus was an amorous fellow and begat a numerous progeny by his concubines. His successor, Faunus (renamed Hermes), had to contend with the plots of his seventy-odd half-brothers and, at length, fled to Egypt where he was received with great honour because he had brought with him a large quantity of gold and was also able to foretell the future. Eventually, Hermes became King of Egypt. He was succeeded by the lame Hephaistos who came to be remembered for two achievements: first, he introduced a law requiring the women of Egypt to practise monogamy and, second, he received, thanks to a mystical prayer, a pair of tongs from heaven and this enabled him to forge weapons of iron: for previously men had fought with clubs and stones. We may note in passing that while certain characteristics of the Olympian gods are still dimly discernible in this farrago of nonsense, their Greek origin has been forgotten. The progeny of Kronos is represented

as either Assyrian or Persian; Zeus ruled in Italy, while Hermes and Hephaistos are associated with Egypt.

The pagan gods and their descendants were thus inserted into the period of some five centuries that stretched from the construction of the Tower of Babel to Abraham, a period concerning which the Bible has nearly nothing to say save for a bare genealogy (Genesis 11). This was the time of the 'old idolatry', invented by one Seruch of the tribe of Japheth, and it lasted down to Terah, Abraham's father, who was a sculptor. Idolatry (*hellênismos*) derived from the custom of setting up statues of prominent men, became popular in Egypt, Babylonia and Phrygia and then spread to Greece, where it received its name after one Hellên, a son of Picos Zeus.

With Abraham we reach one of the nodal points that marked the course of universal history, for it was he who introduced the true knowledge of God and broke his father's idols. Himself a Chaldaean, he inaugurated the history of the Hebrew people. He was also an important figure in the history of science: being versed in astronomy by virtue of his Chaldaean background, he taught this discipline to the Egyptians. It was from the Chaldaeans, too, that he learnt the use of letters and passed it on to the Phoenicians from whom, at a later time, the Greeks derived their own alphabet. Moreover, he was contemporary with Melchizedek, the gentile priest-king who founded Jerusalem and was the prototype of Christ. The kingdom of Sicyon, the oldest in Greece, was set up at about the same time.

The next stage of the historical process was provided by Moses, the greatest of all prophets before John the Baptist and, incidentally, the first historian. The importance of Moses had to do not so much with the fact that he led his people out of captivity as with the superior revelation that was granted to him and the 'signs' that accompanied his entire career. Like Christ, the infant Moses was saved from being killed along with the other newly born males of his people; like Christ, too, he withdrew into the desert – not for forty days, but for forty years. When he parted the Red Sea, he struck it with a cruciform motion, and when he cast a tree into the bitter waters of Marah, that, too, pointed to the life-giving cross. The twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees at Elim stood for the twelve major and seventy minor apostles. The manna that was gathered on the sixth day of the week and remained uncorrupted on the sabbath prefigured Christ's body. Finally, though Moses died and was buried, no one was able to see his tomb. The religious code that Moses set down was, of course, a provisional one,

geared to the imperfect understanding and idolatrous customs of his people – a shadow of the reality that was to come. By comparison, however, with the gentile peoples of his time – he was generally thought to have been contemporary with Inachus, first King of the Argives – Moses was a figure of towering learning, an observation that served to prove once again that all pagan and especially Greek knowledge was a much later and derivative development.

The next great sage of the Israelites was King Solomon who, in spite of his regrettable weakness for women, acquired knowledge of all natural things and wrote books about plants and animals. He also set down various remedies and incantations against demons. These books, which were plagiarized by Greek ‘iatrosophists’, were later destroyed by order of Hezekiah who saw that people used them for medical purposes instead of praying to God for healing. Considerable interest also attached to Solomon’s Temple which was especially venerable because it was at the time the only temple of the true God. The carved figures of cherubim it contained were often cited as a justification of the use of icons. As for the ark of the covenant that was placed in the holy of holies, it not only denoted the form of the universe, but also imitated the shape of a mysterious temple that had been shown to Moses on the summit of Mount Sinai – a temple, we may imagine, that resembled the Christian church. Solomon lived a few years after the Trojan War whose story, as told in Byzantine chronicles, was derived not from Homer, but from the fables of Dictys.

After Solomon, the history of the Israelites was all downhill and merited little attention save for the prophets who strove in vain to correct the ways of the Chosen People. The focus of interest now shifts to the gentile kingdoms, first that of the Assyrians who captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple, then that of the Persians under whom the Jews were not allowed to return home. The tempo of universal history is now quickening and the exact time of the Incarnation is revealed by the prophet Daniel. The Persian kingdom is undone by Alexander who comes close to worshipping the true God and, after making offerings at Jerusalem, sets out on his eastward march. India appears on the distant horizon, with the ‘river Ocean’ that surrounds the whole earth and the virtuous Brahmans. Alexander’s Empire is divided; Antiochus Epiphanes profanes the restored Temple and sets up ‘the abomination of desolation’ in accordance with Daniel’s prophecy. The successor kingdoms make war on each other until they are conquered by Rome.

The Incarnation of Christ, which is the central event of the entire historical process, corresponds to the reign of Augustus, the first ruler to hold sway over the whole earth and bringer of universal peace. Moreover, since the Roman Empire is the fourth kingdom prophesied by Daniel, it fittingly ushers in the advent of the Creator of the four elements. The expiration of Daniel's seven 'weeks' is, furthermore, connected with the suppression of the anointed high priests of the Jews. The Roman emperors after Augustus are largely seen from the viewpoint of Christianity. Under Tiberius Christ is crucified. The Crucifixion falls on a Friday because man was created on the sixth day and Adam ate the fruit of the forbidden tree at the sixth hour of the day. The resurrection repeats the Creation. Christ's miracles are reported by Pilate to Tiberius who allows complete freedom to Christian predication so that the whole earth is filled with it. The reign of the wicked Caius witnesses the conversion of St Paul and the martyrdom of Stephen, that of Claudius the institution of monasticism by St Mark. Under Nero, the first persecutor of the Christians, Peter, Paul, James and Luke are put to death. Meanwhile, the Jews had been allowed forty years, counting from the Ascension, to repent. Their failure to do so results in the sack of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. This is the fourth captivity of the Jews and it shall have no end, nor will the Jews have any more prophets. Their subsequent attempts to rebuild the Temple are supernaturally frustrated.

As Christianity spreads, the first heresies begin to appear – those of Basilides, Valentinus, Tatian and Bardesanes. Even the learned and abstemious Origen falls into error – an error that is later to be revived by Arius. Then a false Christ appears in the person of Mani, a follower of a certain Buddha. He rejects the Old Testament and teaches that Jesus Christ was a ghost. His dreadful doctrine inspires a multitude of Christian heresies. By now we are towards the end of the third century AD, and a last stand against Christianity is made by the Emperors Diocletian and Maximian, but both meet a violent death [*sic*]. At last, Constantine becomes emperor. He falls ill, sees St Peter and St Paul in a dream, is cured by Pope Sylvester and accepts baptism along with his mother Helena. Christianity triumphs, the First Council is convened at Nicaea and the seat of Empire is moved to the New Rome which is also the New Jerusalem. The last stage of universal history is thus inaugurated. All that remains to be done before the Second Coming is to eliminate heresies and to carry the Christian message to the ends of the earth.

Such, in brief, is the view of the past that we find in Byzantine chronicles, a panorama both vast and obscure. We look in vain for any coherent development of the story or any sign of God's concern for the salvation of all mankind. The scope of providentially guided history is universal down to the Flood and the Tower of Babel, but is then reduced to the merest trickle down to Pentecost when, in theory, it becomes universal again. The intervening period of some 2,700 years, that is roughly half of history before the Incarnation, remains in the shade save for the fortunes of the Jews. But what of the other peoples whose succinct annals were given by Eusebius in parallel columns? They were, apparently, entrusted by God to 'the angels of the nations' who, because of their inefficiency rather than their wickedness (for they had to bear the brunt of furious attack on the part of the demons), could do no better than introduce astral worship; that, in turn, degenerated into crass idolatry.⁷

The working of divine Providence was manifested in the fulfilment of prophecies and, more mysteriously, in numerical correspondences like some abstract pattern in an oriental rug. More obscurely still, the doctrine of the Trinity and of the virgin birth was, it seems, proclaimed in riddles by the oracle of Apollo and by the Sibyls, and was written down, here and there, on stone slabs. When, for example, a very ancient pagan temple at Cyzicus was being converted into a Church of the Virgin Mary in the reign of Leo I (457-74), an oracle was found inscribed on the side of it and an identical one at Athens. Both were replies to the following question posed by the citizens: 'Prophecy to us, O prophet Phoebus Apollo, whose house this shall be.' The god answered: 'Whatever leads to virtue and order, that you may do. For my part, I proclaim one triune God ruling on high whose eternal Word will be conceived by a simple maiden. Like a fiery arrow he will traverse the whole world, capture it, and offer it as a gift to his Father. Her house this shall be, and Mary is her name.'⁸ While we may feel justifiable doubt concerning the authenticity of such inscriptions, the fact remains that some Byzantines tried, however clumsily, to show that the pagans, too, had been given in remote Antiquity a chance to hear the Christian message.

Degraded as it became in the process of constant retelling, the Byzantine outline of universal history never lost the characteristics that were built into it between the second and fifth centuries AD. The fabulousness and inaccuracy of the 'profane' content was due to the fact that the early compilers of Christian chronicles had perforce to rely on

whatever popular compendia they could lay their hands on, especially those which gave lists and dates of the rulers of various countries – Berossus for Assyria, Manetho for Egypt, Castor for Assyria, Greece and Rome, and so on. The serious historians of Antiquity did not lend themselves to such use. By modern standards, the historical research carried out by Africanus, Eusebius and their successors may indeed appear rather shoddy, but we cannot deny that it constituted a very considerable effort. Furthermore, it was an effort that could not be repeated in the later Byzantine period since much of the necessary documentation had in the meantime been lost. In historiography as in most other areas of knowledge the ordinary Byzantine remained limited to the legacy of the Early Christian period.

CHAPTER 11

THE FUTURE OF MANKIND

‘Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.’ So wrote the apostle John (I Jo. 2. 18) who himself half believed that he would live to see the Second Coming, for had not the Lord said of him to Peter, ‘If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?’ (Jo. 21. 22–3)

The belief in the impending end of the world was a cornerstone of Early Christianity and, though by the beginning of the Byzantine era three centuries had already elapsed since Christ’s Ascension to Heaven, it was not a belief that could be lightly discarded. For, without the Second Coming, the Christian view of history is reduced to nonsense. Furthermore – and this point needs stressing – there was no theological, symbolic or numerical reason why this event should have been postponed to some indefinitely distant future. Not only would such a delay have spoilt the balance and symmetry of the divine dispensation; there was also, to put it bluntly, insufficient ‘stuff’ to fill an unduly long waiting period.

The ‘stuff’ in question, the basic elements of the eschatological vision, was borrowed from the Bible and the apocrypha. Particularly authoritative, since it came from Christ’s own lips, was the ‘synoptic apocalypse’ (Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21). This foresaw, first, a period of warfare between kingdoms and nations, of ‘famines and pestilences and earthquakes in divers places’, which would announce ‘the beginning of sorrows’ (or, more literally, of the birth pains). All manner of iniquity would then be rife and many false prophets would arise; even so, ‘the gospel of the kingdom’ would be preached to the whole world, ‘and then shall the end come’. ‘The abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet’ would stand in the holy place and there

would be great distress and lamentation, but, for the sake of the elect, those days would be shortened. Then the sun and the moon would lose their light, the stars would fall from heaven, and the Son of Man would appear in the clouds with power and glory. The elect ought to watch for the appropriate signs; for, though the exact time of the Second Coming was not known even to angels, save to the Father alone, yet 'this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled'.

Christ's apocalypse was part and parcel of the great wave of eschatological speculation that swept over the Jewish world between the second century BC and the first AD. This is not the place to examine in detail the various ideas that were expressed at that time, but we may isolate a few of the motifs that were to play an important part in the Byzantine period. Particularly potent was the myth of the Antichrist mentioned in the Johannine passage we have quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Already adumbrated in the book of Daniel, 'the man of sin' or 'son of perdition' assumes a more concrete form in the teaching of St Paul. He is to appear during the time of 'falling away', shortly before the Second Coming, and would sit in the temple of God, posing as God and working miracles, but the true Lord would destroy him 'with the spirit of his mouth' (II Thess. 2). It was also believed that the Antichrist would belong to the tribe of Dan, that he would be resisted by Elijah (or Elijah and Enoch, these being presumably the two witnesses mentioned in the book of Revelation) whom he would kill, that his reign would last three and a half years, and so forth. Also from the book of Daniel came the notion of the four kingdoms or beasts, the last of which – the one with iron teeth and ten horns, the beast that 'shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces' – was generally identified with the Roman Empire in spite of the fact that in the author's mind it had clearly denoted that of the Seleucids. The reign of the fourth beast would be directly followed by the Last Judgement (Dan. 7). Of even earlier origin, namely the book of Ezekiel (ch. 38–9), was the notion of Gog and Magog (or, more correctly, Gog from the land of Magog), the northern nations that were to do battle with Israel in the last days. This was picked up in the book of Revelation and associated with the 'little season' when Satan would be 'loosed out of his prison' wherein he had been confined for a thousand years (Rev. 20. 8). For the later Byzantines there was an additional clue here, for Gog is described as being 'prince of Rosh', which in the Septuagint version is rendered by 'Rhos' – the same name as that borne by the Russians.

When the confused body of these and other biblical and para-biblical beliefs was passed on to the Byzantines, it had already undergone a significant transformation: instead of applying, as it had done at the beginning, to the future of the Jewish nation alone, its meaning was extended to embrace all men and, particularly, the Christians. The role of the Roman Empire in the pattern of 'the last things' was acknowledged, whether Rome was regarded as the enemy (as in the book of Revelation) or, on the contrary, as the power that staved off the advent of the Antichrist. Furthermore, the pagan belief in the eternity of Rome was confirmed by the identification of Rome with the Fourth Kingdom which was destined to last until the end of time. Even the conversion of the Empire to Christianity could be made to fit into the apocalyptic scheme since Christ himself had prophesied that the Gospel would be preached to all the world as a necessary prelude to the final catastrophe. One circumstance, however, that was not foreseen was the transfer of the capital to Constantinople. The Byzantine contribution was to adapt the scheme once again so as to place Constantinople at the centre of the universal stage.

Given the fragmentary nature of the evidence, it is difficult to determine the process of this adaptation. A Sibylline text of the late fourth century, whose contents may be reconstructed with some certainty, not only does not assign any particular importance to Constantinople, but even foretells that the new capital would not last sixty years. When the same text was revised in the very first years of the sixth century by an author writing in Syria, the figure 60 was altered to 180, but the sneering tone of the remark was retained: 'Do not be arrogant, city of Byzantium, for thou shalt not reign thrice sixty years!'¹ In another text of the same date (c. 500 AD), namely the Seventh Vision of Daniel, which survives only in an Armenian version, Constantinople plays a more crucial, yet distinctly maleficent, role. It is represented as 'the Babylon of seven hills' which has enriched itself at the expense of other lands and is filled with all manner of injustice. The author takes a positive pleasure in detailing the calamities that would shortly fall on the wicked capital: its walls would collapse, its inhabitants would slowly perish until, at the very end of time, no trace of it would be left. People would then point to its site and exclaim, 'Was that, indeed, a city?''²

The reign of the Emperor Anastasius, when these oracles were composed, appears to have been a time of intense eschatological speculation. The reason for this is easy to discern. Ever since the third

century, if not earlier, the view had prevailed that the world was destined to last six thousand years on the analogy of the Six Days of Creation. For had not the Psalmist expressly said that a thousand years were like a day in the sight of God (Ps. 90. 4)? Since, as we have seen, Creation was dated to approximately 5,500 BC, it followed that the incarnation of Christ occurred precisely in the middle of the last 'day', and the end would come in about 500 AD. The exact date depended, of course, on the system of computation that was adopted. Assuming the use of the so-called Alexandrian era (that of Annianus), the end of the world would have been expected in 508. When this did not occur, some leeway was left to fiddle with the figures. That this was done in some quarters is suggested by the following curious anecdote that gained a wide currency at the time. It was said that shortly before his death (518) Anastasius had a dream: an angel appeared before him holding a book and, after turning over five leaves, read out the emperor's name and said to him, 'Behold, because of your greed, I am erasing fourteen [years].' Terrified by this vision, Anastasius called in his diviner and was informed that he would soon die. Indeed, he fell ill shortly thereafter and expired in the midst of a terrible thunderstorm.³ Since Anastasius was either eighty-eight or ninety at the time of his death, it is hard to imagine that any rational observer expected him to live another fourteen years. The point of the story is probably that he would have survived, were it not for his fiscal exactions, until the end of the world in 532, but it is hard to explain how the latter figure was arrived at. It might, perhaps, have been reckoned from the time of Christ's passion.

In spite of the hardship he may have caused by his financial measures and the opposition he may have aroused by supporting the Monophysite cause, it was surely difficult to regard Anastasius, an extremely competent ruler, in the role of an apocalyptic king. It was different, however, with Justinian, whose limitless ambition resulted in so much human loss. This inscrutable man who, in his physical appearance, resembled the infamous Emperor Domitian, who was allegedly observed to turn late at night into a headless phantom, whose face was sometimes transformed into a mass of featureless flesh, could surely be regarded as the Prince of Demons or the Antichrist himself. Such, at any rate, was the inference that Procopius drew in his *Secret History*.⁴ Besides, Justinian's reign was filled with ceaseless wars, with earthquakes, pestilences and every other form of calamity. On one such occasion, when Constantinople was shaken by a terrible earthquake

in 557, the rumour that the world was coming to an end gained wide currency and was particularly fanned by the 'holy fools' who alleged that they had received supernatural intimation of the future. The population panicked: some fled to the mountains and became monks, others gave money to churches, the rich distributed alms to the poor, and even magistrates abandoned for a time their dishonest ways.⁵

The ever-deepening crisis of the late sixth and seventh centuries could not but have exerted a similar influence on people's minds. Tiberius II, a virtuous emperor, was assured by an angel of the Lord that the time of apocalyptic impiety would not occur during his reign. Thus comforted, he died in peace.⁶ The expectation of dreadful calamities was indeed fulfilled during the reign of the tyrant Phocas (602-10), followed by the desperate war between the Roman and Persian Empires and the siege of Constantinople by the Avars (626). All the signs were pointing to the final catastrophe. A prophecy attributed to the Persian King Chosroes II proclaimed that the 'Babylonian' supremacy over the Romans would last for three 'hebdomads' from the year 591 (in other words until 612), after which, in the fifth 'hebdomad' (619-26), the Romans would vanquish the Persians; 'and when these things have been accomplished, the day without evening will dawn upon men'.⁷ By a further coincidence, the campaigns of Heraclius against Persia lasted six years, like the Six Days of Creation. His triumphal return to the capital (628) corresponded to the divine sabbath⁸ and was followed by what can only be interpreted as a deliberately apocalyptic act: Heraclius journeyed to Jerusalem to give thanks to God and restored to Mount Golgotha the miraculously 'invented' relic of the True Cross. It was not to remain there for long.

Whoever circulated the prophecy of Chosroes II was unaware of the fact that his fifth 'hebdomad' did in fact correspond to an event of cosmic magnitude, the year of the Hegira. The victorious advent of the Arabs had not been explicitly foreseen in earlier apocalyptic literature, but when the Caliph 'Umar entered Jerusalem in his filthy cloak of camel hair and asked to be conducted to the site of Solomon's Temple that he might build upon it a prayer house of his own 'blasphemy', the patriarch Sophronius could not help exclaiming: 'Truly, this is the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place as affirmed by the prophet Daniel!'⁹ The Antichrist had appeared; and if he was not of the tribe of Dan, he was, at any rate, a descendant of Ishmael. The Arabs were a biblical people sent by God to enact the calamities of the 'last

days'. It is true that their dominion was seen to last longer than the expected three and a half years, but it could not be long-lasting. The only question was: How long?

Not very long, because the end is near 'and there does not remain a length of time'. So wrote in the third quarter of the seventh century a Mesopotamian monk, the author of the so-called *Revelation of Methodius of Patara*.¹⁰ This text, originally composed in Syriac, soon translated into Greek and into Latin, was destined to exert a profound influence on the eschatological thinking of the Middle Ages – indeed, its impact may be traced down to the nineteenth century; and this in spite of the fact that the *Revelation* was concocted in a remote part of the world in response to the plight of the Jacobite Church under Muslim domination. The author was scandalized by the attitude of many of his coreligionists who had sought an accommodation with the Arabs and had even denied their faith. Some of them, it seems, pinned their hopes on the King of Ethiopia who was, at the time, the only independent ruler of the Monophysite faith, and this with reference to Psalm 68. 31, 'Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.' The possibility of an Ethiopian intervention in Mesopotamia was, admittedly, very remote; rather than wait for this to happen, our author strove to show that salvation would come from Byzantium which was, so to speak, the same thing as Ethiopia. This surprising view he justified by the following considerations. Philip of Macedon had married Chuseth (alias Olympias), daughter of Phol, King of Ethiopia. After Philip's death, Chuseth returned home and was given in marriage to Byzas, King of Byzantium. They had one daughter, named Byzantia, who married Romulus Archelaos (or Armaleios), King of Rome, and received that city as a wedding gift. Romulus and Byzantia had three sons: Archelaos (or Armaleios) who reigned in Rome, Urbanus who reigned in Byzantium, and Claudius who reigned in Alexandria. Thus, the Empire of the Romans and the Greeks was proved to be of Ethiopian origin, and it was that Empire that would manifestly 'stretch out her hands unto God'.

After providing this demonstration and a few other facts of universal history, our author proceeds to describe the devastation caused by the Arab conquest and equates the miseries of his time with the 'falling away' that had been foretold by St Paul. But, after the Arab dominion had lasted 77 years (or is it 7 times 7?), there shall arise 'an emperor of the Greeks, that is of the Romans' who 'shall awake as one out of sleep and like a man who had drunk wine' (Ps. 78. 65), and he shall smite the

Arabs and impose on them a heavy yoke. Everyone will then return to his home, be it Cilicia, Isauria, Africa, Greece or Sicily; Arabia will be devastated and Egypt burnt. Then peace will reign: cities will be rebuilt; people will eat and drink, marry and give in marriage. But not for long: for now Gog and Magog will break out of the Caspian Gates and overrun the eastern lands all the way to Joppa, where the archangel of the Lord will smite them down. Then the Roman Emperor will proceed to Jerusalem and dwell there ten and a half years; and the Antichrist will appear, a man born at Chorazin and brought up at Bethsaida (cf. Mt. 11. 21). The emperor will ascend the rock of Golgotha and place his crown on the True Cross, and the Cross will rise to heaven. The Antichrist will be opposed by Enoch and Elijah whom he will kill, and will be himself destroyed by the Lord. Finally, the Son of Man will appear in judgement.

The hope that the Arab Empire would collapse in the seventh century appeared for a time to be nearing fulfilment. The Arab civil war (661–5), the unsuccessful attack on Constantinople (674–8) and the destructive incursions of the Mardaites into Syria and Palestine could be construed as confirming this view. The Arabs had to accept peace on unfavourable terms from the Emperor Constantine IV and, as one chronicler puts it, ‘there was great tranquillity in both East and West’.¹¹ Soon, however, the Arabs were again on the offensive. We do not know in detail how this new situation was made to fit the apocalyptic vision, except that the anticipated duration of the Arab Empire was gradually extended: in the late eighth century the period of its prosperity and power was assigned a total span of 152 years.¹² In about 820 a Sicilian prophet was content to adapt Pseudo-Methodius, but introduced a new touch, namely that the last emperor would be revealed in Syracuse. He would send his emissaries ‘to the inner regions of Rome and tame the fair-haired nations, and together they will pursue Ishmael’. In Rome the emperor would find buried treasure, enough to pay his troops, and then he would march by land to Constantinople. Then the Antichrist would appear, etc.¹³ An interesting feature of this prophecy is that it assigns to the Germanic peoples a role in the eschatological scheme. The ‘fair-haired nations’ were destined to play an important part in later Byzantine prophecy, sometimes identified with the westerners, at other times with the Russians.

The provincial apocalypses we have been discussing do not fully reflect the enhanced status of Constantinople on the mystical plane. This change in emphasis, confirmed by the transfer of the True Cross to

the capital, must have occurred during the dark centuries: Constantinople now appeared as the New Jerusalem, the repository of the most precious relics of Christendom. For an exposition of this altered view we must turn to the *Life of St Andrew the Fool* which I would be inclined to attribute to the early eighth century, although it is usually dated to the ninth or tenth. St Andrew, who belonged to the class of the saintly insane, is alleged to have lived in the fifth century, but it is highly unlikely that he ever existed; nor is it clear what intention inspired the composition of his lengthy *Life*. In any case, this text came to enjoy immense popularity, largely because of the eschatological section it contains. The latter is presented in the form of a conversation between Andrew and his disciple Epiphanius. Without giving a literal translation, we shall summarize its main points.¹⁴

The disciple opened the conversation by asking: 'Tell me, please, how will the end of this world come about? By what sign will men know that the consummation is at hand? How will this city, the New Jerusalem, pass away, and what will happen to the holy churches that are here, to the crosses and the venerable icons, the books and the relics of the saints?'

The Holy man replied:

Concerning our city you should know that until the end of time it shall not fear any enemy. No one shall capture it – far from it. For it has been entrusted to the Mother of God and no one shall snatch it away from her hands. Many nations shall smite its walls, but they shall break their horns and depart in shame, while we gain much wealth from them.

Hear now about 'the beginnings of the sorrows' and the end of the world. In the last days the Lord shall raise up an emperor from poverty and he shall walk in righteousness: he shall put an end to all wars, enrich the poor, and it shall be as in the days of Noah. For men shall be rich, living in peace, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Thereafter the emperor shall turn his face towards the East and shall humble the sons of Hagar [the Arabs], for the Lord shall be much angered by their blasphemy. The emperor shall annihilate them and consume their children with fire. And he shall regain Illyricum for the Roman Empire, and Egypt shall bring her tribute once more. And he shall set his right hand upon the sea and subdue the fair-haired nations and humble all his enemies. And his reign will last thirty-two years. In those days all the hidden gold will be revealed by God's wish and the emperor will scatter it among his subjects by the spadeful, and all his nobles will become like emperors in wealth, and the poor like the nobles. With great zeal he will persecute the Jews, and no Ishmaelite will be found in this city. No one will play the lyre or the cither or sing songs or commit any other shameful act; for

he will abominate all such men and will eradicate them from the City of the Lord. And there will be great rejoicing as in the days of Noah before the flood.

When his reign has ended, 'the beginnings of sorrows' will set in. Then the Son of Iniquity will arise and reign in this city three and a half years, and cause such wickedness to be done as has not been committed since the beginning of the world. He will decree that fathers should lie with their daughters and mothers with their sons and brothers with their sisters, and whoever refuses to do so will be punished with death. The stench and abomination will rise up before the Lord who will be bitterly angered, and He will command His thunder and lightning to smite the earth. Many cities will be burnt down and men will be paralysed with fear.

Thereafter another emperor will reign over this city and he will abjure Jesus Christ. He will read the writings of the pagans and will be converted to paganism. He will burn the churches and call the life-giving Cross a gallows. In those days there will be most fearful thunder in the heavens and violent earthquakes which will cause cities to fall down. Nation will rise up against nation, and kings against kings, and there will be tribulation and sorrow on earth.

When this impious reign has ended, an emperor will come from Ethiopia and rule twelve years in peace, and he will rebuild the ruined churches of the saints. And then another emperor will come from Arabia and rule one year. During his rule the fragments of the True Cross will be joined together and will be given to him. He will go to Jerusalem and deposit there the Cross and place his crown upon it, and then will surrender his soul.

Thereupon three foolish youths will arise in this city and they will rule in peace a hundred and fifty days, after which they will be angered at one another and make civil war. The first will go to Thessalonica and conscript its inhabitants from the age of seven upward, even priests and monks. He will build big ships and go to Rome, and he will enlist the fair-haired nations. The second youth will go to Mesopotamia and to the Cyclades and he, too, will conscript the priests and the monks. And then he will go to the navel of the earth or, as others say, to Alexandria, and there he will await his companions. The third will raise an army in Phrygia, Caria, Galatia, Asia, Armenia and Arabia, and he will enter the town of Sylaion [on the south coast of Asia Minor] which will not be captured by anyone until the end of time. When all three meet, they will fight a great battle against one another, and they will cut each other to pieces, like sheep in a butchery. All three kings will be killed, and the blood of the Romans will run in streams, and none of them shall survive. Now every woman will be a widow; seven women will seek one man and find him not. Blessed will be those serving the Lord on mountains and in caves who will not see these evils.

Since no man of the nobility will have remained, a base woman will arise in Pontus and rule this city. In those days there will be conspiracies and slaughter in every street and in every house: sons will murder their fathers and daughters

their mothers. In the churches there will be turpitude and bloodshed, music, dances and games, such as no man has seen before. This impure queen will make herself into a goddess and fight against the Lord. She will befoul the altars with dung, and gather together all the holy vessels and the icons of the saints and the crosses and the gospels and every written book, and will make a great heap and burn them. She will seek the relics of the saints so as to destroy them, but she will not find them; for the Lord will invisibly remove them from this city. She will destroy the altar table of St Sophia and, standing towards the east, she will address to the Most High words such as these: 'Have I been idle, O so-called God, in erasing Thy face from the earth? See what I have done to Thee, and Thou hast not been able to touch even one hair on my head. Wait a little, and I shall pull down the firmament and ascend up to Thee, and we shall see who is the stronger.'

Then the Lord in great anger will stretch out His hand. He will seize his strong scythe and cut the earth from under the city, and order the waters to swallow it up. With a great crash the waters will well forth and raise the city to a great height, spinning it like a millstone, and then they will cast it down and sink it in the abyss. In this way will our city come to an end.

Next, St Andrew considers the problem whether, upon the destruction of the kingdom of the gentiles, the Jews will be gathered in Jerusalem and allowed to rule until the end of the seventh millennium. He is inclined to believe that they will be gathered, but to be punished instead of being rewarded. Epiphanius, however, is not interested in the fate of the Jews. 'Leave these things aside', he says 'and tell me, O father, whether St Sophia will be swallowed up together with the city, or whether, as some people affirm, it will be suspended in the air by an invisible force.' 'What say you, child?' answers the saint. 'When the whole city sinks, how will St Sophia remain? Who will have need of it? Surely, God does not dwell in temples made by hand. The only thing that will remain will be the column in the Forum, since it contains the Holy Nails. The ships that sail by will be moored to this column. For forty days the city will be mourned, and then the Empire will be given to Rome, Sylaion and Thessalonica, but only for a short time, since the end will be in sight. That same year God will open the Caspian Gates, and the impure nations, seventy-two kingdoms of them, will pour over the whole earth. They will eat human flesh and drink human blood; even dogs, mice and frogs will they consume with pleasure. The sun will turn to blood and the moon will be darkened. The inhabitants of Asia will then flee to the Cyclades and there they will mourn for 660 days. Finally, the Antichrist will arise from the tribe of Dan. He will not be born naturally, but God will release him from Hell and fashion an

unclean body for him. His advent will be announced by Elijah, Enoch and St John the Evangelist. The Antichrist will kill them and make a terrible war on God. Blessed are those who will suffer for the faith in those days.' Naturally, the Antichrist will be defeated and dragged back to Hell. The trumpet will sound, God will appear on Sion and the Judgement will take place.

Such is the blood-curdling prospect described by St Andrew the Fool. It is a potpourri of elements which, by now, will have become familiar to the reader. Setting aside various touches that are typical of the Byzantine mentality (disapproval of music and games, a horror of sexual relations and incest in particular), we may note that the Arabs are regarded as the principal enemy without being, apparently, greatly feared. St Andrew does not foresee a period of Arab supremacy: on the contrary, they will be speedily defeated. Yet the subjugation of the foe does not open up a period of happiness and tranquillity. The sum total of prosperous years that may be expected on earth adds up to forty-five; the rest will be a tale of unrelieved carnage and destruction. We may also note the narrowness of Andrew's geographical outlook: he is aware of certain peripheral cities like Rome, Thessalonica and Syllaion whose inhabitants will escape the calamities taking place at the centre of history, but, essentially, he is concerned only with the fate of Constantinople. And in Constantinople it is the relics of the saints and of the Passion, rather than the churches or the icons, that constitute the principal object of God's concern.

We have been taught to regard the second half of the tenth century as marking the apogee of medieval Byzantium, yet even in those days of military success many people remained deeply pessimistic. The historian Leo the Deacon, who decided to chronicle for the sake of posterity all the terrible things that he had witnessed, was not even sure that there would be a posterity: God might decide to halt there and then the 'ship of life'.¹⁵ A little earlier Nicetas David the Paphlagonian had been able to show, by means of a somewhat obscure computation, that the world would end in 1028. From the 'cosmic week' only six hours and eight minutes were left: the proposition that the end of the days was at hand was so obvious that it needed no demonstration, and was confirmed by the foolishness of emperors, the corruption of magistrates, and the utter unworthiness of bishops and monks.¹⁶ Ordinary people, however, did not compute. They looked instead at the enigmatic monuments of their city, the statues, the triumphal arches and columns upon which were depicted scenes of warfare and captivity. These, they

were convinced, had been made by ancient 'philosophers' who foretold thereby the fall of Constantinople and the end of the world. They even thought for a time (presumably after Igor's raid of 941) that the city was destined to be captured by the Russians.¹⁷

We need not follow step by step the further development of Byzantine eschatological thinking. In the Comnenian period it was affirmed that Constantinople would not attain the age of a thousand years, so that it would fall before 1324, reckoning from the date of its foundation.¹⁸ The same period produced a set of dynastic prophecies which later circulated under the name of the Emperor Leo the Wise (886–912) and were to serve as the prototype of the Papal prophecies attributed to Joachim of Floris. These foretold a succession of five emperors, to be followed by a division of the Empire and then its resurgence.¹⁹ At the close of the twelfth century there appeared to be a growing preoccupation with the 'liberator king', the one we have already met in the Life of St Andrew the Fool – the king who was destined to reign thirty-two years and defeat the Ishmaelites: Isaac II Angelus (1185–95) fancifully identified himself with this figure.²⁰ Understandably, when Constantinople had fallen to the Crusaders and the Empire had been dismembered, the myth of the 'liberator king' assumed even greater relevance: it is a constant motif in the great efflorescence of oracular writing that occurred in the latter part of the thirteenth century, partly as a reaction to the betrayal of the Orthodox faith by the Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus at the Council of Lyon (1274). Here is a typical prophecy of this time which shows how, once again, traditional elements have been re-interpreted to fit a changing reality.

Thus saith the Lord Almighty: 'Woe to thee, City of seven hills, when the sceptre of the angels [meaning the dynasty of the Angeli] shall reign in thee! Constantinople will be surrounded by camps and will fall without resistance [in 1203]. An infant will now reign in the City [the young Alexius IV]. He will lay his hands on the holy sanctuaries and give the sacred vessels to the sons of perdition [Alexius was forced to confiscate church plate to repay the Crusaders and the Venetians]. Then the sleeping serpent will awake, smite the infant and take his crown. The fair-haired nation will rule in Constantinople sixty-five years [actually fifty-seven].

So far it has been past history; now prophecy begins. The northern nations will march down and fight a great war with the southern nations. The streets of Constantinople will be flooded with blood. This punishment being deemed sufficient, an old, shabbily dressed man will

be found in the right-hand side of Constantinople (possibly a reference to the imprisoned legitimate Emperor John IV Lascaris). The angels will crown him in St Sophia and give him a sword, saying, 'Take courage, John, and vanquish the enemy!' He will defeat the Ishmaelites and drive them to the 'lone tree' (i.e. to the end of the world). On his return the treasures of the earth will be revealed and all men will become rich. He will reign thirty-two (or, in some versions, twelve) years. He will foresee his own death, go to Jerusalem and hand his crown over to God. After him will reign his four sons, one in Rome, one in Alexandria, one in Constantinople, and one in Thessalonica. They will fight between themselves and will be destroyed. Then a foul woman will reign in Constantinople. She will profane the churches, in punishment for which the city will be flooded, and only the Dry Hill (the Xerolophos or seventh hill) will be left projecting from the water. Now Thessalonica will rule for a short time, but she, too, will be flooded as well as Smyrna and Cyprus. Then the Antichrist will reign three and a half years, and he will exalt the Jews and rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem. God will withhold the rain and burn the earth to a depth of thirteen cubits. The heavens will open up and Christ will come in his glory.²¹

One more date for the end of the world was left in reserve, namely the end of the seventh millennium which, by the Byzantine reckoning, corresponded to 1492 AD. As the inhabitants of Constantinople saw the steady advance of the Ottoman Turks, they could not help believing that this time all the signs were pointing unmistakably to the final catastrophe. This note was insistently sounded, amongst others, by the popular preacher Joseph Bryennius. The leader of the anti-Latin party at Constantinople, Gennadius Scholarius, was convinced that the world would end in 1493-4 (he counted from 5506 BC), and it was probably this belief that caused him to accept from Mehmed the Conqueror the task of leading the Orthodox community. For the earthly contest was nearly over and the heavenly rewards in sight. The only thing that mattered now was to keep one's faith untainted. Blessed are they that keep their faith during the last tribulations.²²

Why had the city fallen? This was the agonizing question that the Greek survivors kept asking themselves while desperately trying to ransom their relatives and establish working relations with their new masters. A clergyman, writing on 29 July 1453 – exactly two months after the disaster – pleads with a friend in the town of Ainos (modern Enez): 'I entreat you, my good Sir, to send me the book of St

Methodius of Patara, either an old copy or a newly written one, if you happen to have it. Please don't neglect to do so because I have great need of it. I also beg you to send me, if you can find it, some dried fish roe.'²³ The fateful year 1492 came and went. The world continued to exist.

The final drama of human history which God 'by His inscrutable judgement' kept on postponing was to be the Second Coming, and we may pause to enquire how this was expected to take place. We shall here follow the exact vision of this event contained in the Life of Basil the Younger (tenth century) whose disciple, by the name of Gregory, was transported to heaven and given, so to speak, a special 'preview'. From his elevated vantage point Gregory first saw a city built of gold and precious stones. It was as big as the circle of the firmament; its walls were three hundred cubits high and it had twelve gates, all securely closed. This was the New Zion which Christ had built after His incarnation as a resting place for His apostles and prophets. After certain preparations had been made by angels, an aperture opened in the heavens and a column of fire descended to earth. At the same time an angel was sent to Satan (the Antichrist) who had reigned three years on earth. The angel held a fiery scroll on which was inscribed a missive from the Lord ordering Satan to wipe clean all the evil and corruption he had caused and then depart to Hell. Then the archangel Michael and twelve other angels sounded their trumpets and the dead arose. They all looked alike, in other words there was no difference between men and women, no sign of age, and even infants were transformed into adults. Some, however, had resplendent faces and luminous inscriptions on their brows expressing their respective qualities, while the sinners were covered with filth and dung, with mud and ashes or with the scales of leprosy, each according to his sin. There were also some who resembled animals – those were the idolaters who had never heard of Christ or Moses. The sinners, like the just, were identified by inscription, and among them were the heretics – Arians, Manichees, Paulicians, Iconoclasts, Jacobites and many others. At that point the Lord's throne was prepared: it did not rest on earth, but floated in the air, and next to it was set up a cross at the sight of which the Jews and the Ishmaelites were seized with fear. Four contingents of angels took up their stand at the four cardinal points and another four contingents at the four corners of the earth. Then Christ appeared in a cloud and the righteous sprouted wings and met Him in the air. As Christ sat on His throne, the earth was rejuvenated and the firmament made new: the

stars vanished since their place was now taken by the saints, and the sun disappeared since Christ was the new sun. Instead of the ocean, a fiery river was made to flow all round. Then the angels stationed to the west rounded up all the idolaters and all those who had had no knowledge of God and cast them into the fiery flow. All that remained to be judged were the Israelites, the Christians and those members of 'the nations' who had not worshipped idols. The just were now placed to the right of Christ and the sinners, an overwhelmingly bigger group, to the left. From the time of Adam to that of Abraham only one in twenty thousand or one in forty thousand was saved; from Abraham to the Incarnation one in a thousand or even one in ten thousand; and from the time of Christ's predication onwards one in three or one in four.

Christ now led all the righteous in procession to the Heavenly City. The Virgin Mary came first, then John the Baptist, the apostles, the martyrs and confessors, the prophets and good kings of the Jews, and so forth. Among the larger groups of the just were the poor in spirit, the mourners, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who had been persecuted and those who had kept their virginity. The smallest groups included members of 'the nations' who had lived before Christ's advent, the holy fools, the righteous judges, and those who had kept their marriage unsullied.

It was now time to deal with the sinners. First, they were separated by periods (from Adam to the Flood, from Noah to Moses, and so on) and then by categories. Once again, each category is listed with an indication of its relative size – an interesting commentary on Byzantine life. The biggest group of all, made up of both clergy and laity, was that of the profligate (*asôtoi*): those were the persons who used to ride on horses and fat mules, who bought many garments, invested in luxurious houses and country estates, the drunkards, fornicators and adulterers. They were followed by many monks who had displayed indifference, laziness, avarice and disobedience – in fact, we are told that nearly the entire race of monks had sunk into a hopeless decline in the latter stages of human history. Other big groups were the magicians, the pederasts and sodomites, the thieves (almost infinite in number), the wrathful, the envious, the garrulous, and, of course, the heretics and the Jews (except those who had followed the law of Moses before the Incarnation). Thanks to the intervention of the Virgin Mary, two groups of medium size were, at the last moment, rescued from damnation and given abodes – not, indeed, in the heavenly Jerusalem,

but in its less desirable suburbs. Those were the unbaptized children of Christians and those who had been neither good nor bad.

The next step was the investiture of the righteous conducted by Christ in a huge church situated within the Heavenly City. Thrones, crowns and purple vestments were conferred on the saints in the same manner that the Byzantine emperor bestowed dignities on his officials. The investiture was followed by a liturgical service, and the service by a spiritual banquet. Finally, all the righteous settled down to their new and eternal routine. An 'upper kingdom' was established to the east of the City as a habitation for Christ, the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist and those saints who had sufficiently strong wings to travel thither; the rest remained in the City which was provided with houses, churches, chapels, gardens and other amenities. In short, not so much a New Jerusalem as a New Constantinople.²⁴

The outline we have given of Byzantine ideas about the future of mankind and the Second Coming shows, for all the gradual reinterpretations they underwent, a remarkably close adherence to their biblical origins. It would be a mistake to relegate such ideas to the realm of fantasy and old wives' tales: for, apart from Holy Scripture itself, hardly any other category of literature was as avidly read by the ordinary man as oracular texts. They provide a key to the understanding of the Byzantine mentality and, as such, are worthy of the historian's attention. They prove, in the first instance, that no lasting happiness or fulfilment was expected on earth. The purpose of 'the last days' was to subject the Christians to a series of cruel tests so as to separate the elect from the sinners. Since the Messiah had already come, there could be no messianic age in the future. St John's Revelation, the only biblical book that looks forward to a thousand years of happiness before the end of the world, did not enjoy canonical status in Byzantium and was not, therefore, taken into account in this respect. Another striking feature of Byzantine prophecy concerns the absence of any national spirit. Admittedly, the geographical scope of the oracles tended to shrink until it was practically limited to the destinies of Constantinople, but that was merely a sign of myopia. Preoccupied with their own troubles, the inhabitants of the diminished Byzantine State did not have the vision to embrace the whole of mankind. The fulfilment of their longings consisted in the simultaneous destruction of both the westerners and the Ishmaelites (now identified with the Turks). Even so, the 'liberator king' would not usher in a period of national revival; while avenging Byzantine grievances, he would introduce the end of the world. It was

only after the fall of Constantinople, indeed a long time after, that the liberator, the emperor 'who had been asleep' or 'turned to marble', assumed the role of a national hero who would drive the Turk out of Constantinople, replace the cross on the dome of St Sophia and establish a Greek state.

CHAPTER 12

THE IDEAL LIFE

How was life to be conducted on earth in view of the impending end of the world? Following Christ's advent mankind had reached its maturity, and that meant that stricter standards of behaviour were in force than had been acceptable under the previous dispensation. In the times of the Old Testament a measure of licence had been allowed. Noah may have been a just man and perfect in his own generation, but he would no longer be accounted perfect now. Then it was sufficient to observe the Law; now admittance to Heaven was barred unless one exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees (Mt. 5. 20). Not only murder, as had been the case earlier, but even wrath and abusive language were now cause for perdition; not only adultery, but even a lustful glance cast at a woman; not only perjury, but the swearing of all oaths.¹

To achieve perfection a man had to sell all his possessions, distribute the proceeds to the poor and renounce the world, materially as well as spiritually – in short, to become a monk. Since, however, the majority of people were too weak or too indolent to follow this difficult path, a method of living in society was laid down. Its basic principle was that of order (*kosmos, taxis, eutaxia*). God compacted the universe in an orderly manner and it was His wish that human life should be led in the same spirit.² By observing the principle of divinely appointed order both in social relations and in our private sphere we conform to the harmony of the universe: life on earth, with all of its inherent imperfections, assumes some resemblance to life in Heaven.

Just as the universe is ruled monarchically by God, so mankind is governed by the Roman emperor. The incarnation of Christ, as we have already pointed out, was providentially timed to coincide with the setting up of the Roman empire which put an end to the dissensions and wars, that is, the disorder caused by the sharing of power between

several autonomous states (*polyarchia*).³ Not only did God ordain the existence of the Empire, He also chose each individual emperor, which was why no human rules were formulated for his appointment. That did not mean that the emperor was always a good man: God in His wisdom might deliberately select a bad emperor so as to punish humanity for its sins.⁴ The alternatives to legitimate imperial governance were usurpation (*tyrannis*) and anarchy. A *tyrannos* was one who attempted to make himself emperor in opposition to God's will and consequently failed; for, if he succeeded, God must have been on his side, and he ceased to be a usurper. Absence of sole authority or mob rule (*dêmokratia*) was tantamount to confusion.

God rules mankind by inspiring fear of Hell and promising reward in Heaven,⁵ in other words with a stick and a carrot. Likewise, the emperor governs his subjects through fear: his enemies are thrown in prison, banished, disciplined by the whip, deprived of their eyesight or of their life. Even innocent people 'serve him in trembling': they may be sent into battle or given unpleasant tasks, but no one dares to disobey.⁶ It is preferable, of course, for the emperor to rule over willing subjects, and to do so he should manifest certain qualities that are also shared by God. Above all, he should be man-loving (*philanthrôpos*). While remaining awesome by reason of his authority, he should make himself loved by the exercise of beneficence. Generosity and leniency are especially appropriate to the emperor, but he must also insist on due observance of the law (*eunomia*). In his own person he must be self-restrained, circumspect, resolute in action and slow to anger. His unique position is, however, defined, first and foremost, by his relation to God, the only being of whom he stands in need. His greatest ornament is, therefore, piety (*eusebeia*).⁷ He is, by definition, faithful in Christ (*pistos en Christô*) and Christ-loving (*philochristos*), these attributes being expressed in his titlature, as was also that of being victorious (*nikêtês, kallinikos*), since victory was granted to him in return for his piety.

The emperor was holy (*hagios*) and in his portraits was usually represented wearing a nimbus. His palace was likewise sacred, a *domus divina*, surrounded by a protective zone of 'apartness' (*nam imperio magna ab universis secreta debentur*).⁸ When he appeared in public, this was done through the medium of ceremonial which was a reflection of the harmonious working of the universe and was itself synonymous with order (*taxis*).⁹ His subjects communicated with him by means of acclamations which were rhythmical and repetitive as in the divine liturgy, and when received in audience prostrated themselves on the ground. What the

emperor was to his subjects, God was to the emperor. We accordingly find, from about the seventh century onwards, representations of the earthly emperor performing the same act of *adoratio* or *proskynêsis* before the enthroned Christ.

Was the emperor also a priest, a second Melchisedek? It must be admitted that his position with regard to the Church was not clearly thought out at the time of Constantine's conversion and remained to the end somewhat ambiguous: a precise boundary between *imperium* and *sacerdotium* was not drawn, a fact that often led to a conflict of jurisdiction. It may be fair to say, however, that whereas the emperor never exercised the priestly function of offering the eucharistic sacrifice and did not, as a rule, define religious dogma, he was regarded as being ultimately responsible for maintaining the purity of the faith, convoking ecumenical councils of the Church and enforcing the conversion of heretics. Probably the most emphatic statement of episcopal versus imperial authority in an official Byzantine document is to be found in the law code of Basil I, believed to have been inspired by the patriarch Photius. The patriarch of Constantinople is described therein as 'the living image of Christ', and his purpose as the preservation of the Orthodox people, the conversion of heretics and even urging the infidel to become 'imitators' of the true faith.¹⁰ Yet Leo VI, Basil's successor, legislated on purely ecclesiastical matters and even chided his patriarch for not taking a more active role in affairs that concerned him.¹¹

In theory the emperor ruled all men or, at any rate, all Orthodox Christians. The existence of pagan rulers did not infringe this postulate for, as long as pagans remained unconverted, they were outside the main sphere of divine Providence, but if they embraced Orthodox Christianity, they acknowledged *ipso facto* the emperor's ultimate authority. This may have been a plausible approximation of the truth in the Early Byzantine period when the structure of imperial ideology was put together, but it became less and less tenable as other, independent Christian states came into being during the Middle Ages. The fiction of the 'family of princes' in which the Byzantine emperor occupied the position of seniority was accordingly put into circulation and carefully fostered by the prescriptions of court protocol. It is a curious commentary on Byzantine inability to rethink their principles that the imperial myth was still propounded in the late fourteenth century when the Empire was limited to the territory of Constantinople.

The emperor's authority was transmitted to the magistrates

(*archontes*) he appointed. It is worth observing that the term *archôn*, which has no precise English equivalent, denoted all persons invested with command – military, civil and, in some cases, even ecclesiastical. The duty of subjects to obey their *archontes* was explicitly stated in the Bible: ‘For there is no power, but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God’ (Rom. 13. 1–2). The necessity of such obedience for the sake of order (*eutaxia*) and in deference to him that appointed the magistrate, who was ultimately God acting through the emperor, was stressed by the Fathers of the Church.¹² Besides, everyone knew that powerful persons were like big fishes that swallowed little fishes: nothing was to be gained by opposing them.¹³

The position of the clergy and especially that of bishops in the scheme of ideal life was both honourable and onerous. Ordained, as had been Joshua, by the imposition of hands, the priest alone had the faculty of administering baptism, forgiving sins and performing the liturgical sacrifice. His task was to instruct his flock and to protect the poor, and to instruct not only by means of words, but also by example. Since he was everyone’s servant, he had to be humble; since his shortcomings were evident to all, he had to lead a blameless life. He needed to be experienced, patient and vigilant; to know whom to goad and whom to bridle, whom to praise and whom to reprimand. Although his dignity was exalted – indeed, as the spirit surpasses the body, so the priesthood is greater than earthly authority – he had to remember that in the end he would give accounts for his stewardship and, like all men, ran the risk of eternal damnation.¹⁴

Next to the clergy, judges, teachers and physicians occupied posts of peculiar responsibility. The judge was close to being an *archôn*, since he determined the fate of litigants in his court. He had need of prior training and great intelligence. Above all, he had to keep in his mind the image of true justice like a marksman who shoots an arrow at a target, and treat everyone equally, be he friend or stranger, rich or poor – something that, alas, did not often happen. Oblivious to appearances, he had to look into the secret places of the heart and was enjoined to display the princely virtue of mercy (*philanthrôpia*) and to temper fear with leniency.¹⁵ The teacher, like the bishop, was required to set a good example. Being in possession of a gift, he was obligated to give abundantly of it to those wishing to learn, but, in so doing, he often had to use the rod.¹⁶ Physicians appear to have been less highly regarded: the Lives of saints are full of references to their uselessness and cupidity,

and it was openly admitted that instead of healing the patient, they often made him worse. Even so, the experienced doctor played a necessary role which was both physical and moral: he knew how to apply a treatment gradually so as to produce the greatest good, how to administer a bitter medicine in a cup coated with honey, and how to instil hygienic habits into healthy persons by exhibiting to them the terrifying implements of his craft.¹⁷

Among ordinary members of society, soldiers and farmers were the most useful. The role of soldiers was to keep the peace, for which they were well rewarded by means of donatives. It was their duty, as stressed by St John the Baptist (Lk. 3. 14), to be content with their stipend and not to cause any trouble.¹⁸ The soldier's life was not as difficult as that of the farmer who had to toil constantly in heat and cold, to leave his bed at an early hour and to defend his isolated hut. The soil he tilled was often thin and stony, but if he succeeded in making it bear fruit, his joy was greater than if he had cultivated a fertile field.¹⁹ Merchants, on the other hand, pursued a profession that readily led to wrongdoing. There was much scope for dishonesty in buying and selling, while borrowing and lending at interest was an unmitigated evil. It was our duty not to turn away from anyone who wanted to borrow from us (Mt. 5. 42), but to exact interest was forbidden. A man burdened with a loan had no joy in life and no rest in sleep. He saw his creditor in his dreams, he hated the days and the months that brought him closer to the date of repayment. Loans were the cause of mendacity, ingratitude and perjury. It was infinitely better to be content with one's own means, no matter how paltry, than to have recourse to another man's money.²⁰ As for craftsmen, they practised certain useful techniques that had been invented once and for all, not so much by the human mind as by divine help. It was vain to trouble oneself with a view to their further perfection.²¹

Slaves, who formed the lowest element of society, had an absolute duty, repeatedly stressed in the Bible, of obeying their masters even if the latter were cruel. The institution of servitude was itself an evil, the consequence of Ham's sin (Gen. 9. 25), and it was praiseworthy to manumit one's inherited slaves, yet to live entirely without them was hardly practicable. A gentleman was well advised to wash his own feet and to be generally self-sufficient. He did not need a servant to hand him his clothes or to accompany him to the bath, but it was unthinkable for a free man to cook.²² On the other hand, it was unseemly for an ordinary fellow to buy a slave for the sake of display. In general, masters were urged to treat their slaves humanely and not to beat them.

It cannot be doubted that Christianity introduced a measure of clemency into social relations, especially with regard to slavery. The Lives of saints repeatedly stress the fact that all men were made of the same clay and castigate cruel masters. Occasionally a plea is also made for a redistribution of wealth. Thus, Agapetus in the sixth century remarks that the rich and the poor 'suffer similar harm from dissimilar circumstances; the former burst from excess, while the latter are destroyed by hunger'. He accordingly urges the emperor to take some of the surplus from the rich and give it to the poor so as to achieve greater equality.²³ By continually stressing the Christian's obligation to give alms the Church obtained the same result more efficaciously and on a wider scale than any government intervention might have done. At the same time it has to be admitted that no fundamental reform of society was advocated, the more so since merit resided in voluntary action. If wealth in itself had been an evil, we would not all wish to find repose in Abraham's bosom, seeing that Abraham had been a rich man, the master of three hundred and eighteen domestic servants.²⁴ Granted, the origin of unequal distribution lay in injustice: God gave equally to all men in the same manner that the emperor's public domain was available to all. No dispute or litigation occurred over the use of baths, streets or marketplaces, whereas people were constantly suing one another over private property. Since, however, wealth was inherited from father to son and it was impossible to trace it back to its original act of injustice, all that mattered was for its current holder to use it wisely and to share it among the needy.²⁵

Liberality was enjoined on all, but that did not mean that the order of society, in which everyone had his appointed place, needed changing. Two biblical texts were repeatedly quoted in this connection: 'Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called' (1 Cor. 7. 20) and 'Remove not the ancient landmark which thy fathers have set' (Prov. 22. 28). The revolutionary, the subverter of order (*neôteristês*) attracted universal condemnation. Besides, the powerful and the rich were sufficiently punished by changes of fortune to which the poor were immune, and ultimate equality was brought about by death. 'When we see an *archôn* dying, then we behold a great mystery. He whom all the condemned used to fear is now dragged away like a condemned man; he who used to chain prisoners is now tried like a prisoner.'²⁶

A special group within society, independent of all social classes, consisted of the monks. It is instructive in this connection to examine the choice of biblical quotations which St John Damascene considered

as applying to the monastic life:²⁷ all of them were addressed to the entire Christian community, for example: 'Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple' (Lk. 14. 33); 'You cannot serve God and mammon' (Lk. 16. 13); 'No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life' (II Tim. 2. 4); and so forth. As we have already stressed in Chapter 5, the monk was a layman. He was the perfect Christian, the true philosopher; which meant that, ideally speaking, all Christians should have become monks. Why, then, was it necessary for them to withdraw from the world? Because everyday life was full of distraction (*perispasmos*) and turmoil which clouded the mirror of the soul and made it incapable of reflecting the divine light; because the perturbed mind could not attain that release from care (*amerimnon*) that was the mark of perfection. It followed from this that the solitary life was preferable to the communal life. Quietude (*hêsychia*) was requisite for purging the soul; it served to assuage desire, anger, sorrow and fear, and render those 'wild beasts' more amenable to the power of reason. By a strange paradox, however, the monk made himself all the more vulnerable to attacks by the devil because he was the devil's chief foe. He was the one who 'put on the whole armour of God' and took up the struggle, 'not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places' (Eph. 6. 11-12). But if he had vanquished his own passions, he had the strength to withstand all demonic assaults.

We can now understand why the question of the monk's 'social usefulness' never arose in the Byzantine world. It was perfectly obvious that the man who had attained mastery over the powers of darkness and had won God's confidence was the most useful member of the community and guaranteed the wellbeing both of his own district and the Empire as a whole. His mission was primarily internal, not external; and only after he had won his own spiritual struggle was he in a position to fulfil his wider purpose. We may add that while the unworthy priest was nevertheless able to carry out his sacerdotal duties, the unworthy monk was absolutely useless.

The same code of morality applied to monks and laymen. While it may be an exaggeration to say that virtue was seen almost exclusively in negative terms, it is undeniably true that Late Antiquity and a good part of the Middle Ages were characterized by an obsessive revulsion from the material world, and this not only among Christians. How else can one explain the success of the Manichaeans? The human soul was

visualized as a citadel that had to be vigilantly guarded against external attack. Its weakest points were its gates which were five in number, corresponding to the five senses. The first gate, that of speech, needed to be fortified by the braces and cross-bars consisting in the constant recitation of Holy Scripture: in this way all undesirable entrants would be excluded. The second gate was that of hearing: it was essential not to admit through it any idle gossip or anything unseemly. The third gate, that of smell, had to be bolted in the face of all sweet scents which had the effect of slackening the 'tension' of the soul. The gate of sight was particularly exposed; hence it was important to see as few women as possible and avoid the theatre. The proper function of sight was to behold the beauties of nature. The fifth gate, that of touch, had to be guarded against soft clothing, comfortable beds and contact with other human bodies. It was not, however, sufficient to keep watch at the gates; the citizens living within the citadel of the soul had to observe 'stringent and fearsome laws' and to obey their own 'magistrates'.²⁸ Equally negative prescriptions applied to the morality of the body. A man had to abstain from fornication, drunkenness and gluttony, a woman from the use of perfume and artificial adornment. The body required only such care as was sufficient for the preservation of health.²⁹

Among the many vices and failings to which human beings are prone, some were viewed with a degree of reprobation that may appear to us rather bizarre. It is not perhaps surprising that in a period when foodstuffs were generally in short supply, gluttony should have been considered a grave sin, but it is not so evident to us that it leads to impure desires and licentiousness and is the gateway to all evil. Yet such was the prevalent opinion, and it was held that just as smoke drives away bees, so the glutton drives away from himself the grace of the Holy Spirit.³⁰ Outspokenness (*parrhêsia*) was also regarded as a great failing as was the sin to which monks were particularly subject, namely indifference or boredom (*akêdia*). On the other hand, mourning (*penthos*) was considered a virtue, especially necessary for monks, but commendable in everyone. Strangest of all is the condemnation of laughter: 'It is generally forbidden to Christians to laugh, and particularly to monks.'³¹ Christ, it seems, had never laughed. At the most, one could allow oneself to smile as did the Syrian saint Julian Sabas when he heard news of the death of Julian the Apostate.³²

Anti-feminism was a fundamental tenet of Byzantine thinking until the sporadic introduction of western ideas of romantic love in about the

twelfth century. The sight of a woman, we are told, is like a poisoned arrow: the longer the poison remains in the soul, the more corruption it produces.³³ There was, of course, such a thing as a virtuous woman: it was the one who never showed her face to a stranger.³⁴ Generally, however, she was a crawling worm, the daughter of mendacity, the enemy of peace. The catalogue of her vices and weaknesses is endless: she was frivolous, garrulous and licentious. Above all, she was addicted to luxury and expense. She loaded herself with jewellery, powdered her face, painted her cheeks with rouge, scented her garments and thus made herself into a deadly trap to seduce young men through all their senses. No amount of wealth was sufficient to satisfy a woman's desires. Day and night she thought of nothing but gold and precious stones, of purple cloth and embroidery, of ointments and perfumes. Were it not for sexual desire, no man in his right mind would wish to share his house with a woman and suffer the consequent injuries, in spite of the domestic services she performed. That is why God, knowing her contemptible nature, provided her from the beginning with the weapon of sexuality.³⁵

Oblivious to the sorrows that awaited them, Byzantine men continued to marry and, in so doing, they had the grudging support of St Paul. In the early days of human history, those described in the Old Testament, marriage had been directed to procreation so greatly esteemed by the Jews. Now, however, that 'things were waning and reaching their ultimate end', such considerations no longer applied.³⁶ Besides, the earth was sufficiently populated, and the idea that the human race would be extinguished by universal continence was quite unjustified. The multiplication of the species was due entirely to God and the one occasion when it had been almost totally obliterated, by the Flood, was brought about by licentiousness, the opposite of continence. Procreation being no longer essential, the main purpose of marriage was to protect men from promiscuity. Marriage was meant to be a 'harbour of chastity', a jetty that broke the waves of desire. It was necessary for the weak, but an obstacle to the strong who knew how to tame the fury of nature by means of fasting and vigils. If, however, matrimony was to achieve this laudable end, it was necessary for parents to have their boys married as early as possible and, in any case, before they had made a career for themselves or obtained posts in the emperor's service. For if marriage was delayed a young man would have recourse to prostitutes and develop a taste for laughter, flippant speech and indecorous behaviour. A woman of good family would

refuse to satisfy such yearnings with the result that the bridegroom would begin neglecting her after a couple of nights.³⁷

No matter what precautions were observed, marriage was a source of endless turmoil. It was a kind of mutual enslavement, made only worse if the spouses were of unequal fortune. It destroyed tranquillity by the presence of children and by financial worries. If a man sought an escape by involving himself in civic activity, he would inevitably be soiled by sin: he would get irritated at his fellow-citizens, endure insults, adopt insincere postures. The evils of a second marriage were correspondingly greater: unseemly in itself, it created discord in the family so that even the ashes of the departed spouse became a source of envy.

To make a bad situation more tolerable, stringent rules had to be applied to the conduct of a household. No sentimentality was to be lavished on children, who had to be purged from the start of the sin of vanity. It was bad enough for girls to wear jewellery, but quite abominable for little boys to have long hair and to be adorned with necklaces and ear-rings. The model boy, such as might one day become a saint, had the gravity of an old man (*puer senex*): he never played games and never consorted with his fellow schoolchildren for fear of being contaminated by their evil ways. The father's authority in the household was paramount, but he was urged not to enforce it by beating his children: harsh words and reproaches were more efficacious. The only valid reason for refusing obedience to one's father was a determination to respond to a higher call: a boy who decided to become a monk was justified in running away from a prearranged marriage. For as Heaven was to earth and angels were to men, so virginity was to marriage. Its superiority was proved by the fact that it was prized only by the Christian Church: Jews avoided it and pagans viewed it with puzzlement. Admittedly, virginity was also practised by certain heretics like the Manichaeans, but 'the chastity of heretics is worse than all debauchery'.³⁸ Like fasting, virginity was not an absolute good in itself but was made good by our intention. Frustrated by the presence of worldly cares, it required us to be pure both in body and in spirit. It was the surest means of rising above the mire of earthly life.

While the family was the basic cell of human existence, certain demands were also made by the community which often happened to be a city. We have already commented on the vitriolic attacks launched by churchmen on one of the main amenities of Late Antique urban life, namely the theatre, but their disapprobation was not limited to that institution: the city as a whole was evil. If we consult St John

Damascene once again, we discover that the relevant section in his anthology is entitled 'Concerning the city filled with impiety', and that it is made up in its entirety of critical passages, starting with Psalm 55. 9 ('I have seen violence and strife in the city') and going on to the castigations of Nahum, Zephaniah, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, St Basil and St Gregory of Nazianzus.³⁹ Not one kind word for the *polis*. The city was the setting of dances and jests, of taverns, baths and brothels. Women went about with uncovered heads. Everything about them was indecent: their speech, their gestures, their costume, their hair-style, the movement of their limbs and the sidelong glances they cast. Young men, too, such as were to be seen in the city, simulated effeminacy and let their hair grow long.⁴⁰ Indeed, people went so far as to decorate their boots. And what about the marketplace with its displays of gold and precious stuffs?⁴¹ Even Jerusalem, the Holy City, was no better than the others, for every kind of temptation was present in it: soldiers' barracks, prostitutes, mimes, buffoons and such a throng of both sexes 'that what you might wish to avoid in part elsewhere, here you are obliged to suffer in its entirety'.⁴² If virtue was scarce in the cities, it was more plentiful in the countryside. 'How often', remarks St Symeon the Fool, 'have I seen local peasants coming into the city to take communion! They were purer than gold in their kindness, their artlessness, and because they eat their own bread in the sweat of their brow.'⁴³

What then was a Christian to do in urban surroundings? If he needed recreation, he could take a walk in a garden, by a stream or a lake; he could listen to the song of cicadas or visit a suburban martyr's shrine where bodies were restored to health and souls edified. He could even try, in spite of everything that has been said above, to enjoy his family. Did not some barbarians once remark that Romans invented the pleasures of the theatre because they had neither wives nor children?⁴⁴ Above all, of course, a Christian was to go to church – not only on Sundays and other feast days, but as often as possible and at least two hours a day. What, indeed, could be pleasanter than attendance at church? Instead of diabolical songs and dancing whores, it provided the warbling of the Prophets, the chanting of the Seraphim, the words of the Gospel. Christ was there, lying on the altar table, the Holy Spirit was in attendance. The church was like a calm harbour in the midst of turmoil. Yet people had to be cajoled to go there. They found the service boring, and only the reputation of a famous preacher would draw them to church in their hundreds. But after applauding the sermon as in a theatre, they did not even bother to remain for the liturgy of the faithful.

Walking in gardens, listening to the song of cicadas and attending church – all of that could be done just as well in a village as in a city. In spite of the fact that the *ecclesia Christi* drew its resources, its leaders and its rhetoric from the cities, its message was fundamentally anti-urban. It abhorred not only the theatres and the baths, the music and the dances, the council chamber and the law court, but the very fact of people coming together in public, whereas they ought to have stayed at home. And so, when the cities collapsed, the dream of the Church must have come true. If St Basil had been able to come back to life and visit the *kastron* of Caesarea in the ninth or tenth century, he would have found no theatres, no mimes or buffoons and no women walking about with uncovered heads. He would have seen that everyone remained at home and assembled only to go to church. Not even a famous preacher was needed to draw them there; in all likelihood there was no preacher at all. St Basil ought to have been pleased; but then, perhaps, his discerning eye might have told him that the devil's work was still flourishing in spite of the changed circumstances.

We have been lectured so often about the penetration of Christianity by Hellenism that we tend to overlook a very basic fact: the scheme of Christian life, as propounded by the Fathers of the fourth century and maintained throughout the Byzantine period, was the antithesis of the Hellenic ideal of the *polis*. Deeply rooted as it was in the Bible, the Christian scheme was also a reflection of the authoritarian and regimented order of the Later Empire. It was founded on absolute monarchy, social rigidity and servility. It regarded the material world, the world of the flesh, with an almost Manichaeian horror. It also mirrored the instability of the times by likening the virtuous man to a fortified citadel. While we need not imagine that the average Byzantine lived in complete conformity with the propaganda of the Church, there is no mistaking the effect of a message that was repeated from century to century. A consideration of Byzantine literature will reveal its traces in more than one respect.

PART THREE
THE LEGACY

CHAPTER 13

LITERATURE

As we have indicated in Chapter 1, the multinational Empire of New Rome did not express itself only in Greek. Many of its inhabitants spoke and wrote in other languages. If, therefore, we define Byzantine literature as that of an Empire and a civilization, we ought to include under this heading, in addition to its principal Greek constituent, a considerable body of writing in Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Church Slavonic, even Armenian and Georgian. We shall not do so here, but it is useful to remember that in confining ourselves to Greek we shall be disregarding an intricate pattern of reciprocal influences that manifested itself not only in the migration of texts, but also in linguistic and mental habits.

Greek Byzantine literature, in other words everything that was written in Greek between the fourth and the fifteenth centuries, strikes us immediately by its sheer bulk. Exactly how extensive it is no one appears to have calculated. Let us say at a very rough guess that it would fill two to three thousand volumes of normal size. A part of it – though by now not a very big nor a very interesting part – still remains unpublished, which is to say that it is available only in manuscript; and a considerable portion of it is lost – quite high for the Early period, lower for the Middle period and altogether small for the Late period.

It would be interesting to know in terms of percentages the content of Byzantine literature, but again the calculation has not been made. That the overwhelming mass of it is of a religious nature is at once obvious: hagiography alone accounts for some 2,500 items.¹ Next to hagiography we may place sermons, liturgical books (including liturgical poetry), theology, devotional treatises, commentaries on the Bible and the Fathers and much else besides. By contrast, the secular element is very restricted: all the historians could be accommodated in about a

hundred volumes, and the same goes for epistolographers. Lexica and other compendia, commentaries on ancient authors, scientific and pseudo-scientific treatises might account between them for some two hundred volumes. As for secular poetry, it would probably fit into thirty volumes. Most discussions of Byzantine literature have been based on a very small sample of the total output.

It would be unfair to judge Byzantine literature by the criterion of the aesthetic pleasure it affords to the modern reader. If we fail to be captivated or moved by it, this is largely because our literary taste is diametrically opposed to that of educated Byzantines. We appreciate originality, while they prized the cliché; we are impatient of rhetoric, while they were passionately fond of it; we value concision, while they were naturally inclined to elaboration and verbiage. Let us, for the moment, suspend judgement and attempt to gain some understanding of Byzantine literature in its historical setting. To do so we must take several factors into account.

The first concerns the development of the Greek language. To the average classical scholar Greek appears frozen at two stages, the epic (Homer, Hesiod) and the literary Attic of the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Its subsequent evolution, including what is usually termed New Testament Greek, is considered a decadent phase. Like all living languages, however, Greek underwent a continuous development in phonology, morphology, syntax and vocabulary, the decisive shift occurring in the Hellenistic period when Greek became a medium of international communication. This is not the place to describe these changes in detail, but we must note one factor that was to have lasting consequences, namely the disappearance of the quantity of vowels (long and short by nature or by position) whose place was taken by the tonic accent. As a result, the prosodic patterns on which ancient Greek poetry had been based became unintelligible. At the same time or somewhat later many other changes took place: diphthongs ceased to be pronounced, the dual, the middle voice, the optative, the dative case all went out of normal use, etc. To the extent that we know it, ordinary spoken Greek of the Byzantine period was much closer to modern than to ancient Greek.

Notwithstanding the disapproval of classical scholars, there was nothing inherently bad about these changes. Though lacking many of the nuances of ancient Greek, the spoken language could have been raised to a literary level. Besides, many churchmen actively championed the use of lowly speech and rejected 'the fine style of the

Hellenes' which they compared to the proverbial honey that drips from the mouth of a whore. They argued that to cultivate the epic and iambic metres was not only childish; it was an insult to Christ and the apostles.² Such advice went unheeded. For better or for worse the tradition of the schools prevailed. And so there developed not so much a *diglossia*, a double language, as a whole tier of linguistic levels. Attic was reserved for belles-lettres. This was not the Attic of the fifth century BC, but that of the Atticists of the Roman imperial period, and the more *recherché* the better. Then there was the language of the Bible and the liturgy which corresponded to the *koinê* of the Hellenistic period. Finally, there was common speech which had already moved a considerable distance from the *koinê*. Between these three basic levels infinite gradations were possible. The sophisticated author, unless he was constantly on his guard, naturally slipped into unclassical usages. The 'middle-brow' author would often try, no matter how unsuccessfully, to raise his tone to that of his betters. The 'low-brow' author would strive to attain the idiom of the Church. The linguistic chaos was even worse than we imagine, since the editions we use have been subjected to a process of correction. It is only when we consult the manuscripts of works that were not considered as 'classics' that we realize how much variation was allowed.

It was generally admitted that a classical style was not conducive to clarity and had, perforce, to be abandoned in technical treatises, although an apology for so doing was usually called for. Thus, Constantine Porphyrogenitus, in introducing his *De administrando imperio*, finds it necessary to say: 'I have not been studious to make a display of fine writing or of an Atticizing style, swollen with the sublime and lofty, but rather have been eager by means of everyday and conversational narrative to teach you those things of which I think you should not be ignorant.'³ Likewise in the Preface to the *Book of Ceremonies*: 'With a view to making our text clear and intelligible, we have used a popular and simple style and those very words and names which in current speech have long been attached to each thing.'⁴ We need not look for a better illustration of the Byzantine attitude to language and style. To call a spade a spade was sometimes necessary, but was not elegant; calling it by its classical name yielded far greater pleasure. There was a place for 'display' literature and a place for ordinary writing. The sublime and the lofty belonged exclusively to the former.

Inasmuch as Attic was a dead language, the continued use of it had both a literary and a social dimension. On the literary side all that need

be said is that very few Byzantine authors succeeded in handling it creatively (Psellus is a notable exception). The rest who aspired to Attic struggled hard with their optatives and their pluperfects, never quite sure how to form the augment, what to do with the particle *an*, whether to use the double 's' or the double 't'. It is perhaps surprising that, on the whole, they managed as well as they did, but it is futile to look for literary merit in their stilted compositions. What is perhaps more significant in a historical perspective is that a knowledge of Attic was the badge of an élite – not necessarily that of the rich and the powerful, not always that of the imperial court, but of an élite nevertheless. As we explained in Chapter 6, access to the ancient language was conditional on a rhetorical education which, after the disaster of the seventh century, was limited to a small group of prospective civil servants and clergymen. The literature they produced was that of a coterie: no one else could understand it.

There can be no doubt that 'ecclesiastical' Greek was the main medium of Byzantine literature exclusive of belles-lettres and, in one form or another, may account for as much as 80 per cent of it. Since it was used in church, it must have been understandable to a considerable segment of the population, yet it was never forged into a sensitive tool of expression. There was something inherently flat and prosaic about it. 'Middle-brow' writers striving for a richer effect tended to pile adjective upon adjective, to line up a string of nearly synonymous phrases or else to entangle their constructions with such comical results as *hosoi . . . tèn apotagên tautên dia tês pros tous en tê kata Christon hêlikia proêkontas ebebaiôsan hypotagês* (literally, 'those who this renunciation through the towards those in the according to Christ stature pre-eminent have confirmed submission'), by which assemblage of words Gregory Palamas tried to describe those monks who confirmed their renunciation of the world by submitting to spiritual fathers.⁵ The high incidence of paratactic constructions, which Greek seems to have inherited from the Semitic world, produced a pervasive monotony, and considerable ambiguity was introduced by an indiscriminate use of the third person pronoun (or adjective). When Theophanes writes of the Emperor Nicephorus that, 'having mounted a most gentle and tame horse, by God's providence he threw him and broke his right foot',⁶ it is hard enough to understand who did what to whom. But what are we to make of this sentence in the *Life of St Pachomius*: 'taking bread from him, the janitor gave it to him so as to restore him according to his injunction that he might be healed'?⁷

As for the everyday speech of the people, it was not, unfortunately, deemed worthy of being written down. For the Early and Middle Byzantine periods we know it only from a few snippets of dialogue like that between the circus fans and Justinian's herald,⁸ from a few lines of popular verse and the evidence of papyri and inscriptions. As we shall see presently, the emergence of the demotic into literature had to wait until the twelfth century.

The second factor we have to consider is one to which we have already alluded, namely the existence of a literary public. In the Early Byzantine period the curial class of the provincial cities formed such a public, though it was doubtless diminishing: Procopius could still claim that he was read throughout the Empire.⁹ But as the cities declined, the reading public also vanished. It is certainly no accident that polite literature ceased to be produced. We are greatly indebted to the small band of educated civil servants and clergymen who presided over the transmission of the antique heritage in the ninth and tenth centuries, but we cannot describe them as constituting a sufficient forum for the production of a literature whose aim was to entertain and to please. Only when the cities revived in about the eleventh century were more favourable conditions once again introduced: this is fully confirmed by the writings that have come down to us. Take one example, that of the erotic novel, an antique genre that had died in the third century AD and suddenly re-appeared in the Comnenian period. It is true that the four specimens we possess¹⁰ are unbelievably tedious, but we are not now concerned with their slender literary merit. The important consideration is that such works, whose only purpose was to amuse and titillate, began to be composed once again, indeed by prominent poets. That they addressed themselves to an educated audience is obvious from the style they adopted and the great abundance of learned reminiscences they introduced, sometimes playfully; that they had some success is indicated by the number of manuscripts in which these novels are preserved. Perhaps they were meant in the first instance for oral recitation at the literary salons whose existence in Constantinople is attested in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In any case, the sphere of polite literature was expanding: no longer limited to a professional coterie, it now reached a segment of the aristocracy. The efforts of Michael Psellus to make learning available in a palatable form (often versified) for various noble personages may be seen in the same light. We should not imagine, of course, that this new public was either large or that it extended beyond the major centres of Constantinople and

Thessalonica. Once created, however, it did not cease to exist until the end of the Empire, and it formed the backdrop against which later Byzantine literature ought to be viewed.

The third factor we ought to take into account concerns the availability of books. In Chapter 6 we have already alluded to the high cost and scarcity of parchment, the material on which Byzantine books were normally written from the seventh century onwards when the supply of Egyptian papyrus was cut off. But even before the loss of Egypt to the Empire a book was by no means a cheap item. An anecdote told by John Moschus concerns a very poor monk in Palestine who was eager to own a New Testament. Although a colleague offered him a copy free of charge, he was unwilling to accept it as a gift and went to work as a labourer in Jerusalem. He was paid 9 *folles* a day, spent almost nothing on food, and after a time accumulated 3 *solidi*, which was the price of the New Testament.¹¹ Since 1 *solidus* was equivalent to 180 *folles*, our monk would have had to put in 60 working days, not taking into account his living expenses. In modern British terms the price of a New Testament would thus have been in excess of £300. For the same sum of money, as we have seen, one could buy a donkey, which was probably a poor man's major investment.

The production of a longer manuscript, especially one that had to be copied to order, was, of course, a much more expensive affair. To quote only one example, the famous *codex Clarkianus* of Plato, commissioned by Arethas of Caesarea, a good-quality manuscript of 424 folios, cost 13 *solidi* for transcription and 8 for parchment, the equivalent of two years' wages of a manual worker. In modern British terms that would be about £3,000. No matter how one translates these figures into modern equivalents, it is obvious that the possession of books was possible only for the rich and for endowed institutions. A gentleman of means might have owned, say, twenty volumes; somewhat more if he happened to inherit a family library that was added to from generation to generation. The monastery founded in the eleventh century by Michael Attaleiates, a rich and cultivated man, was originally given twenty-eight books, increased to seventy-nine after the founder's death.¹² The famous monastery of St John on Patmos at the time of its greatest prosperity (1201) owned 330 volumes; but that was the result of more than a century of book collecting by an establishment which numbered at the time 150 monks and which had benefited from repeated imperial benefactions.¹³

The cost of books was directly related to the use to which they were

put. A professional scholar, who often had recourse to borrowing, would need a number of school textbooks as well as exemplars of ancient prose and poetry into which he could dip to embellish his own writings. An average gentleman of means would have little use for pagan authors; he would prefer some patristic literature or perhaps some books that would satisfy his curiosity concerning the wondrous structure of Creation, such as the *Physiologus*, a chronicle or two, and, of course, an interpretation of dreams. Reading was a laborious business and was meant primarily for edification, not amusement. Here is the advice that Cecaumenus, a retired general, gives to a young man destined for a military career:

When you are free and not busy with a commander's duties, read books, both histories and Church writings. Do not say, 'What benefit is there for a soldier from ecclesiastical books?', for you will profit greatly from them. If you pay sufficient attention, you will reap from them not only doctrines and edifying stories, but also gnomic, moral and military precepts. Indeed, almost the entire Old Testament is concerned with strategy. From the New Testament, too, the assiduous reader will derive many precepts for the mind.

And again: 'Read a great deal and you will learn a great deal. Persevere, even if you do not understand, for after you have read a book several times, you will receive discernment from God and you will understand it.' And once more:

When you have taken a book, read it in private. After you have read a little, do not start counting pages or choosing passages you like best and reading only those. Nay, you should start from the cover where the text begins and read the book until not a single word is left, and in this way you will profit greatly. For it is the trait of a superficial person not to read a whole book twice or three times, but to pick some snippets out of it for the sake of chatter.¹⁴

It would probably be a mistake to think that the contents of a private library (except that of a professional scholar) differed very markedly from those of a monastic library. In confirmation of this we may glance at the testament of the Cappadocian nobleman Eustathius Boilas (1059) whom we have already had occasion to mention. Boilas built a private church somewhere in the region of Edessa and dedicated to it various items of plate as well as a surprisingly large collection of books, eighty in all.¹⁵ They may be analysed as in the following table.

It is an instructive list, especially as it refers to a fairly distant province. Unfortunately, we are not told how Boilas came to acquire these books. Since he was not himself a cultivated man, one may

Biblical	10
Liturgical	33
Patristic	12
Desert Fathers	3
Apocrypha (<i>Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs</i>)	1
Hagiography	4
Christian miscellanies (<i>Pandektês, Melissa</i>)	2
Canon law	3
Secular (1 lawbook; 1 dreambook; 1 Aesop; 1 Georgius Pisides; 2 chronicles; 1 Alexander romance; 1 Achilles Tattius; 1 grammar; 1 <i>Persica</i>)	10
Indeterminate	2

suspect that this was a family library, accumulated over a span of several generations and intended in large part to serve the needs of a private church. A former Boilas may have gone to school at Constantinople, hence the grammar, the Aesop and the Achilles Tattius. Two characteristics are especially worth noting. With the one exception of Pisides (probably the poem *De opificio mundi*), not a single 'high-brow' Byzantine author was represented. Secondly, there were practically no recent works, except for the *Melissa* (a miscellany of edifying passages said to date from the eleventh century) and the Life of St Michael Maleinus (d. 961). This disregard of contemporary or near-contemporary literature was typical of the Byzantine world.

What then was the purpose of literary composition? Certainly, no Byzantine author had the ambition or the pretension of equalling the classics – I mean not so much the classics of pagan Antiquity as the Christian classics – St John Chrysostom, the two Gregories, St Basil, Synesius. Those stood on a special podium and, judging by the number of preserved manuscripts, were read more than any other authors. The task of the epigones was to chronicle recent events lest those fell into oblivion (a preoccupation often expressed), to record the lives of contemporary saints, to digest the doctrine and moral teaching of the Fathers and to produce all kinds of useful handbooks. Not surprisingly, the Byzantines showed little interest in their own literature and none

whatever in the biography of their writers, which is why we know so little about them. It was deemed sufficient to say in the title that so-and-so had been deacon of St Sophia, or bishop of Synnada, or *protospatharios*, in other words to place him in the hierarchy.¹⁶ The part of 'fine' literature was limited, as our chapter on education might have suggested, to rhetorical display. It seems that much of this ornate production was meant for oral recitation, not only speeches and sermons, but also letters, Lives of saints written in the high style, even perhaps chapters of histories. After the recitation had taken place and the orator had received the applause of his friends, the text was apt to be forgotten, unless the author himself or a member of his coterie took the trouble to copy it as an exemplar worthy of imitation. But even if it was copied, it did not circulate widely. Most such texts have survived in a single manuscript. This accounts for the 'timelessness' of Byzantine literature, in the sense that each generation of writers did not build upon the experience and ideas of the previous generation, but rather stood in a constant relation to their distant models. The proof of the matter, as every student of Byzantine philology knows, is that a text not firmly attributed to an identifiable author and lacking any clear historical reference is almost impossible to date. Examples are plentiful and often embarrassing – and I am not speaking only of pastiches, such as the Pseudo-Lucianic dialogues or the Leptinean Orations, long considered to be by Aelius Aristides (second century AD), but now known as the work of Thomas Magister (fourteenth century).¹⁷ Letters by Isidore of Pelusium (fifth century) have been attributed by a reputable scholar to the patriarch Photius (ninth century), and it is still a matter of dispute whether the Greek version of *Barlaam and Joasaph* is by St John Damascene (eighth century) or, as appears more likely, a work of the eleventh century. It has even been argued that one historical text, namely *The Capture of Thessalonica* by John Caminiates, was composed not soon after 904, as has been assumed by everyone, but in the early fifteenth century.¹⁸ Such uncertainty would not have been possible had the style of Byzantine literature shown a consistent development.

After these preliminary observations, we shall consider three genres of writing, each relating to a different linguistic level. A word of apology is perhaps required for the omission from our survey of liturgical poetry. No one will deny that the hymns of Romanus the Melode, in particular, those of Cosmas of Maiuma, Andrew of Crete and John Damascene to a lesser extent, display a felicity of phrase and depth of feeling that are generally lacking in nearly all other works of Byzantine

poetry, yet it would be misleading to treat them simply in poetic terms. An understanding of hymnography requires some knowledge of its liturgical function, its musical structure and its Semitic background; above all, it calls for a mental attitude that the modern reader is not likely to possess.

Our first sample concerns historiography, undeniably one of the greatest achievements of Byzantine letters. We shall not be speaking here of the chronicle which we have already discussed in Chapter 10. A 'history' belonged to a different genre: it was written in ancient Greek, imitated ancient models and gave a connected rather than a purely chronological account of events. It sought to explain the why and the how, 'for the body of history is indeed mute and empty if it is deprived of the causes of actions'.¹⁹ It was also a branch of rhetoric, often shading into the laudation or the invective and normally including both the fictitious speech and the ethnographic excursus. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of Byzantine historiography is its continuity: though most of the histories of the fourth and fifth centuries have perished, we do have an almost uninterrupted sequence from the sixth century to the fifteenth. Procopius, who described the wars of the Emperor Justinian, was continued by Agathias for the years 552–9, Menander Protector (of whom only fragments survive) for the span 559–82 and Theophylact Simocatta for 582–602. The disastrous reign of Phocas marked an interruption, but the story was picked up at a later date by the patriarch Nicephorus who covered the period 602–769. For the following half century, down to 813, we are entirely dependent on the chronicler Theophanes, but history revives with Genesisius (813–86) and the Continuator of Theophanes (813–961), succeeded by Leo the Deacon (959–76) and Michael Psellus (976–1078), the last overlapping with Michael Attaleiates (1034–79) and Nicephorus Bryennius (1070–9). For the Comnenian period we have Anna Comnena's *Alexiad* (1069–1118), continued by John Cinnamus (1118–76) and Nicetas Choniates (1118–1206); for the Nicene exile George Acropolites (1203–61); for the age of the Palaeologi George Pachymeres (1261–1308), Nicephorus Gregoras (1204–1359) and the memoirs of the Emperor John Cantacuzenus (1320–56), finally Laonicus Chalcocondyles (1298–1463) and the eulogizer of the Turkish conqueror, Michael Critobolus (1451–67).

Naturally, not all of these historians were of equal merit, and some of them, like the patriarch Nicephorus, were little more than paraphrasers of chronicles into an archaic language. Yet a great many of them were

not only accomplished writers, but also men of affairs who had a first-hand knowledge of the events they were describing, and several were emperors or members of the imperial family. This circumstance lends to Byzantine historiography a measure of authority and immediacy it would not have possessed had it been delegated to professional men of letters.

In many respects the greatest of Byzantine historians and certainly the one best known today is Procopius of Caesarea, although we probably admire him more for the broad sweep of his narrative, his objectivity and accuracy than for the profundity of his views or his purely literary qualities. In style and approach he modelled himself on Thucydides without, however, imitating the Athenian's complexity. He was a fastidious author and at times – as in describing the last stages of Ostrogothic resistance in Italy – was able to convey a sense of tragic grandeur. In other respects he was less successful. His digressions are not always well timed, as when he interrupts an account of early Persian history with a ludicrous anecdote about a 'swimming' oyster that was pursued by a shark,²⁰ and his character sketches are not well drawn. Even in the case of the general Belisarius, whom he had served as assessor on several campaigns and must have known intimately, he does not manage to paint a lifelike portrait of the man.²¹ The lofty detachment Procopius assumes in his *History of the Wars* and his apparent scepticism with regard to Christianity are largely stylistic traits. Whether they are wholly stylistic may well be doubted. In a work intended for wide circulation under Justinian's autocratic rule detachment was the most prudent attitude to adopt for a man who, like Procopius, did hold strong political views that did not coincide with those of the emperor. But even in the *Wars* his disapproval of Justinian's policies may be read between the lines. As to his religious attitude, it is worth reflecting on the oft-quoted passage concerning the doctrinal dispute between Catholics and Monophysites:

I know well the matter of the controversy, but shall refrain from mentioning it; for I consider it a mark of insane folly to investigate the nature of God and of what kind it may be. Indeed, I believe that man has no exact comprehension even of human affairs, far less of anything that pertains to the nature of God. I shall, therefore, remain silent on these things without incurring any danger, with the sole object that matters held in reverence should not be disbelieved. For my part, I would not express any view about God except that He is altogether good and holds the world in His power. But let each man, whether

he is a priest or a layman, say whatever he thinks he knows concerning these matters.²²

Adherence to classical models is hardly a sufficient explanation of this carefully worded yet curiously ambiguous statement. Does Procopius mean to imply that an exposition of Catholic (or Monophysite) doctrine on the nature of God would result in discrediting it? And what sort of danger does he wish to avoid?

The perennial problem associated with Procopius is that a man of his undoubted gifts and seeming integrity should have composed within the span of about one decade three works of completely different spirit, to wit the objective and stately *Wars*, the scurrilous *Secret History* and the unashamedly encomiastic *Buildings*. It has been conjectured that the last, which describes in terms of superlative praise Justinian's vast programme of construction, was occasioned by some promotion or mark of favour that the author may have received from the emperor. But what of the *Secret History*? Since it was not meant for publication, the chances are that it expresses faithfully Procopius' personal views or, at any rate, the views he held at a particular stage of his career. Yet, of the three works, this is the one we have the greatest trouble in accepting. We are amused by the scabrous account of Theodora's youth, but wearied by the unremitting invective against all the acts of Justinian's policy. Even Belisarius, represented in the *Wars* as a courageous, resourceful yet modest man, is here portrayed as a pitiful weakling. Strangest of all is the author's apparent conviction, stated without any hint of irony, that the emperor was a demon in human form. It is unlikely that this was meant as a joke, and we are left wondering whether Procopius under his mask of cultivated scepticism was not as superstitious as most of his contemporaries.

After Procopius there was a marked decline in historical writing. His successor Agathias, who was a lawyer by profession and a poet by inclination, had no experience of public affairs and no commitment to the objectivity of history which he regarded as being akin to poetry and as serving mainly a moral purpose.²³ A further degradation is discernible in the sententious work of Theophylact, after whom there was a prolonged interruption in the practice of historiography. Its revival (setting aside the rather feeble effort of the patriarch Nicephorus) had to wait until the middle of the tenth century when the patronage of Constantine Porphyrogenitus resulted in two histories stretching back to 813, the point at which the chronicler Theophanes laid down his pen.

The anonymous Continuator of Theophanes are superficially indebted to both classical and Early Byzantine models and deserve some praise for delineating the Iconoclastic emperors in colours that are not exclusively black, but about nine parts black and one part grey. If some germs of humanism may be detected in this slight concession to objectivity, it must be pointed out that the Continuator were dominated by both theological and dynastic prejudice. They were court historians charged with perpetuating in acceptable prose the official version of events.

Skipping over another century and the sober History of Leo the Deacon, we find ourselves confronted by a masterpiece whose originality is all the more striking in as much as it is not explicable in terms of a prior development. The *Chronographia* of Michael Psellus cannot even be assigned to any established genre, for it is not so much a history as a private memoir. Traditionally, the historian's person was kept in the background: after introducing himself in the prologue (for example, 'My name is Agathias, my place of origin is Myrina, my father was Memnonius,' and so on), he could, if need be, make occasional appearances to say that he had seen this or that with his own eyes. Not so Psellus: he constantly prattles about himself, about his studies, his intellectual achievements, his retirement to a monastery, the spell he cast on successive emperors, and so forth. Warfare, the customary stuff of histories, does not especially interest him and he often bypasses it. He manages, for example, to tell the story of Basil II without once mentioning the subjugation of Bulgaria. What does interest him is court gossip and especially the description of human motives and human character. The *Chronographia* is a veritable portrait gallery. What is more, character is seen to change. Basil II (whom Psellus had not known) develops under the pressure of events from a voluptuary into a stern, suspicious and irascible man. We can readily visualize him dressed in modest clothes, speaking more like a peasant than a gentleman, twirling his thinning beard or else placing his hands on his hips. Romanus III, whom Psellus despised, changes as a result of illness. The handsome but uncultivated Michael IV, whom the ageing Empress Zoe took on as a lover, becomes a serious and conscientious ruler as soon as he mounts the throne. Every major character that is introduced is made memorable by both a moral and a physical description: the frivolous Constantine VIII (we learn with surprise that he was also an accomplished cook), Zoe and Theodora, the eunuch John who was more feared in his cups than when he was sober, the ruddy and jovial Constantine IX

Monomachus, and many more. And as for psychological observation, it is enough to read the one paragraph describing the guilty aversion with which Michael IV, now stricken with epilepsy, regarded his imperial spouse.²⁴

Of course, Psellus had classical models, and he facilitates our task by naming them himself (Demosthenes, Isocrates, Aelius Aristides, Plutarch, etc.).²⁵ But the same models had been available to Constantine Porphyrogenitus and the Continuator of Theophanes and they made what use of them they thought appropriate. The problem does not lie there, but rather in the fact that Psellus displays a sensibility and a keenness of observation that had been previously lacking. Unless we ascribe these traits solely to his personal genius, we have to look for a broader explanation which may perhaps be found in the rise of an urban bourgeoisie to which Psellus himself belonged. Indeed, he did not stand alone; and although none of his contemporaries left an oeuvre of equal variety, it is not difficult to detect in them glimmers of what can only be called a lay spirit. Witness the remarkable poem in which Christopher of Mitylene satirizes the collecting of dubious relics,²⁶ a poem, incidentally, that had once been ascribed to the iconoclastic period.

It is a sad commentary on the taste of the Byzantine public that the *Chronographia* of Psellus should have come down to us in a single manuscript. Yet it was certainly used, even plagiarized, by later historians, notably Bryennius, Anna Comnena and Zonaras. And it may be said that after Psellus the qualities of personal observation and a lifelike portrayal of character were not lost. They are very evident in the *Alexiad*, a work that is often disingenuous, but vivid and full of psychological insight in addition to being thoroughly researched. They are equally to the fore in the remarkable History of Nicetas Choniates. It is fitting that the end of the imperial epoch of Byzantium (for Nicetas witnessed the catastrophe of 1204) should have been recorded by an author who combined all the traditional tricks of artful rhetoric with a newly found humanity, open-mindedness and scepticism.²⁷

Our second sample will concern hagiography which, as we have already indicated, probably represents the largest single genre of Byzantine literature. Under this heading it is customary to group a wide range of texts whose common denominator is that they refer to personages who enjoyed a liturgical commemoration, both Christian saints and biblical figures: biographies of saints, shorter anecdotes, accounts of martyrdom, of posthumous miracles, of the invention and

translation of relics, stories about icons, apocalypses, etc. The form of presentation varies a great deal as does the linguistic level. The most interesting specimens are, however, written in standard, 'ecclesiastical' Greek.

The oldest form of Christian hagiography was the *passio* (the account of a martyr's trial and death), but this was already a thing of the past when the Byzantine period began. The two main forms that will concern us are the short anecdote and the full-dress Life. Both appeared almost simultaneously in the milieu of Egyptian monasticism, and this was no accident since the monk was the martyr's successor. Simple stories of how Father Paternuthius could sail through the air and go through closed doors, how Father Helles crossed a river on the back of a crocodile, how St Macarius healed the cubs of a hyena, circulated by word of mouth and were then collected in books that were called *paterica* or *gerontica*. We have already referred in Chapter 5 to some of the better known collections of this kind. Apart from relating the supernatural deeds wrought by monks, the anecdotes laid stress on moral precepts, memorable dicta and the particular discipline (*ergasia*) pursued by this or that ascete. Since we are dealing here with a literature that was oral in origin, it was naturally subject to fluctuation and repetition: the same or similar stories would become attached to different saints. The golden age of *paterica* extends from the late fourth to the seventh century. Always couched in a fairly popular idiom, they possess considerable charm, but also an unavoidable monotony.

The earliest extended Life is that of St Antony by Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 360 AD) to which ample reference has already been made. Since a saint's Life (*bios* or very often *bios kai politeia*, meaning life and conduct) was intended as a laudation rather than as a critical biography, it was natural that it should have become modelled on certain prescriptions that had been elaborated for this purpose in the schools of rhetoric. What these prescriptions were we can discover from the handbook of Menander who is here concerned with the laudation of a ruler (*basilikos logos*). You will start, he says, with a proem in which you will express your embarrassment at undertaking a task of such magnitude. After the proem you will mention the ruler's place of origin (*patris*). If he happens to have been born in a famous city, you will praise it; if not, you may be able to magnify the nation to which he belonged. You will go on to his family (*genos*): if it was glorious, you will elaborate on this topic, if not, you will omit it. Next will come the birth and any miraculous signs that may have accompanied it (if none occurred, you

should not hesitate to invent a few); physical appearance, upbringing, education with particular emphasis on the young paragon's learning ability (naturally, he surpassed all his school-fellows), endowments, and so on to his adult deeds, suitably subdivided by categories and virtues.²⁸

Mutatis mutandis these potted rules were applied to celebrating Christian saints. Certain headings, of course, were no longer relevant, such as physical beauty, deeds of war, naval battles, and so on, but the rest could be used to considerable advantage. There developed accordingly a hagiographic *schema* which, in the case of a monastic saint, ran more or less as follows. In the proem the author admitted his incompetence to celebrate the merits of Saint X. He had, however, been bidden to do so by his superior (abbot or bishop) and dared not disobey, in spite of the lowness of his mind and the rusticity (*agroikia*) of his diction. So he started with the saint's place of origin: the latter's true *patris* was, of course, the Heavenly Jerusalem, but he happened to have been born in city or village Y which, even if it had been quite obscure, acquired thereby immortal renown. The saint's parents were, almost invariably, rich and noble (*endoxoi*) and his birth was usually foretold in a dream or accompanied by other signs. When old enough to go to school, he avoided the company of other boys. He either completely spurned all classical learning or else imbibed only as much of it as he considered necessary, although his natural aptitude was extraordinary. Upon attaining adolescence, the saint refused the marriage that had been arranged for him by his loving parents and withdrew to a neighbouring monastery. For several years he executed with complete humility the most menial tasks and showed exemplary zeal in fasting and prayer. When he had attained the required fortitude and impassibility, he withdrew to an isolated cell or to the desert. His victories over the demons, acts of healing and prophecy filled the remainder of his life. At length, the priesthood would be bestowed on him, but he would normally refuse all offers of a bishopric. He would foresee his own death and expire peacefully at an advanced age. Lastly, his sanctity would be confirmed by posthumous miracles, a few of which were usually set down as were also the day and month of the saint's demise.

One of the advantages of such a *schema* was that it could be applied to any monastic saint concerning whom nothing definite was known save for his name, place of origin and date of his liturgical commemoration. A great many Lives (not only of monks, but also of martyrs, bishops, etc.) are thus nothing but a string of clichés; others are not only

fictitious in themselves, but also concern saints who probably never existed; and a few are fictitious though they refer to saints who happened to be quite well documented (such as St Epiphanius of Salamis). Setting aside such dubious products, there remains a considerable residue of Lives that are, in the main, reliable. Many of them were written by a saint's disciple or by a man of a later generation who was nevertheless able to tap sources of oral information. They abound in precise and picturesque detail which is all the more valuable to the historian since formal histories are deficient in this respect. Indeed, Lives of saints are often our best source for recreating the day-to-day ambiance of Byzantine villages and towns, and there is, fortunately, a long string of excellent texts starting with the Life of Porphyry, bishop of Gaza, by Mark the Deacon (fifth century), going on to that of St Hypatius by Callinicus, those of St Euthymius and St Sabas by Cyril of Scythopolis (an author noted for his accuracy), that of St Symeon the younger stylite, of St Theodore of Sykeon, St Symeon the Fool and St John the Almsgiver and a great many more. The Iconoclastic period produced a spate of interesting Lives (notably that of St Stephen the Younger), and hagiography continued to flourish until the eleventh century, when a decline may be observed.

Not only the authentic, but even some of the fictitious Lives may still be read with pleasure and amusement. Their main deficiency from our viewpoint, however, is that they never convey a sense of a saint's psychological development, even though they are explicitly concerned with his spiritual progress. Since the saint is a paragon of virtue from his earliest childhood and has no negative aspects, we know in advance that he will remain the same throughout his earthly existence. He will never succumb to temptation and never err, except from an excess of zeal or acting on a false report. This predictability was as much appreciated by the Byzantine public as is that of the Western movie by a modern cinema audience; for there can be no doubt that hagiography provided not only edification, but also wish-fulfilment. Medieval men, living in a real world of fear, uncertainty and disease, needed their heroes who routed demons, put physicians to shame and never wavered in their purpose.

The saints' Lives that we consider the most appealing were written in a simple language, sometimes verging on the vernacular, but more often reflecting the normal linguistic usage of the Church. The need of communicating to an uneducated audience was not always overlooked. Leontius of Neapolis (seventh century) makes this point in the Preface

to the Life of St John the Almsgiver: 'The consideration that especially roused me to this task was that I should tell the tale in the pedestrian, unadorned and lowly style that belongs to me so that the ordinary unlettered man might derive benefit from my words.'²⁹ This approach, however, was not destined to last. In the Middle Byzantine period it was felt that naïve hagiographers had not attained to the dignity of their subject: 'Some actions [of the saints] they distorted, while in other respects, being unable to set down what was appropriate, they described the saints' virtue in an inelegant manner. They did not lay down a good argument, nor did they adorn it with beautiful words.' As a result, the Lives of saints became an object of ridicule and the audience was repelled by their slovenly style.³⁰ The task of re-composing the hagiographic heritage of earlier centuries was first undertaken in about 900 AD by Nicetas the Paphlagonian who tackled about fifty Lives without, however, gaining much acclaim. A few decades later Symeon the Metaphrast, possibly at the instigation of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, carried out a more thorough revision. He paraphrased about 135 Lives, kept another dozen unchanged, and published the entire collection in ten volumes arranged in the order of the calendar. His effort won widespread acceptance and about seven hundred manuscripts of the Metaphrastic *menologium* have survived, which means that a great number of churches and monasteries adopted it for liturgical use.

The Metaphrast wrote in a 'proper' Greek, by no means as contorted as that of Nicetas the Paphlagonian. Some contemporary critics found him insufficiently sophisticated, but others praised him for having followed a middle course and succeeded in both pleasing the cultivated public by the variety and beauty of his style and making himself understood by the uneducated. In the eyes of Michael Psellus the Methaphrast's achievement was greater than 'all Hellenic scholarship'.³¹ This strange judgement brings us to the core of the Byzantine attitude to literature. Granted that the Metaphrast wrote acceptable Greek, what he did in effect was to take a corpus of texts that had all the liveliness and the particularity of a given milieu and reduce them to a set of clichés. He suppressed concrete detail and paraphrased inelegant terms. Were a martyr's answers to his torturers insufficiently resolute? He improved on them. Was a monk's discipline related in too naïve a manner? He elevated it to the required level. It may be an exaggeration to say that the Metaphrast spelled the death of Greek hagiography, but he certainly contributed to its emasculation while

also causing the disappearance of many earlier texts which he paraphrased. It is amusing to note that in the twelfth century the patriarch Nicholas Muzalon ordered the destruction of a *Life of St Paraskeve the Younger* on the grounds that it had been written 'by some peasant' in ordinary language.³²

We must resist the temptation of going to the opposite extreme and assuming that anything written in a popular language is *ipso facto* endowed with literary merit. The validity of this reservation is demonstrated by our third sample which concerns Byzantine literature in the vernacular. Ever since the Romantic movement the few works in question have attracted considerable attention and have earned a place in the normal curriculum of modern Greek studies. They are certainly of interest to the philologist as well as to the social historian, but it must be admitted that as literature they are pretty disappointing.

Probably the earliest literary works in the vernacular are the so-called Prodromic poems which seem to date from the first half of the twelfth century.³³ They are attributed to the court poet Theodore Prodromos, hence their traditional name. The attribution is disputed and it is not even certain whether we are dealing with the outpourings of several authors or of a single person who assumes different disguises. Written in popular fifteen-syllable verse (*stichos politikos*), the poems take the form of complaints addressed to the Emperors John II and Manuel I as well as to another member of the Comnenian family. In one case we are introduced to a henpecked husband, in another to the father of a large family who cannot make ends meet on his modest stipend, in the third to a poor monk who is treated harshly by his abbot, in the fourth to a starving intellectual (already quoted by us in Chapter 3). The milieu is that of the urban middle class and the author's main preoccupation is with his stomach. He tries to be funny by introducing scenes of slapstick comedy and by coining bizarre hybrid words (perhaps as a parody of archaizing poets), but the humour is spoiled by a tone of monotonous servility and by a tedious repetitiveness.

The growing ascendancy of western fashions over the aristocracy of the Late Byzantine period, if not over the public at large, is reflected in a number of romances of chivalry in the vernacular of which five are preserved, ranging in date from the twelfth or thirteenth century to the fifteenth. Only one of the five, namely *Callimachus and Chrysorrhoe*,³⁴ can be ascribed to a known author, who was Andronicus Palaeologus, cousin of the Emperor Andronicus II. The date of its composition is thus c. 1300 AD. Precise western models have been identified for two of the

five, namely *Phlorios and Platzia Phlore* (a version of the widely diffused *Floire et Blancheflor*) and *Imberios and Margarona* (from the French *Pierre de Provence et la belle Maguelonne* or a precursor of the same). That is practically all the factual information we have at our disposal concerning these curious poems.

Unlike the learned love romances of the twelfth century to which we have already alluded, the romances of chivalry do not have a bogus classical setting: here we are transported to a distinctly medieval world of brave knights, fair maidens, witches, dragons and impregnable castles. In the poem which is probably the earliest and also the most attractive, namely *Belthandros and Chrysantza*,³⁵ the geography is real enough. The hero, who is the younger son of the Byzantine emperor, quits his home, crosses Asia Minor which is in Turkish hands, is ambushed in a mountain pass in the Taurus range, reaches Tarsus and the borders of Cilician Armenia and then goes on to Antioch where he falls in love with the Latin King's daughter Chrysantza. All the indications are perfectly appropriate to the twelfth or the first half of the thirteenth century. The only element of fantasy is the Castle of Love situated ten days' journey from Tarsus, but there were several romantic castles in Cilicia that the author might have heard about. What interests us here, however, is not the geography, but the cultural climate of the poem. Belthandros is clearly Bertrand, while his father, the Emperor, is called Rodophilos, which sounds rather like Rudolf. The fair-haired hero has no hesitation in becoming the liegeman (*lizios*) of the King of Antioch. He is a great hunter and fighter and totally lacking in religious feeling. In fact, he does not scruple to go through a form of marriage with his beloved's maidservant, a marriage solemnized by the patriarch of Antioch. The Castle of Love with its allegorical statues is certainly alien to the Byzantine tradition, whatever its origin may be. Most remarkable, however, is the poet's attitude to love. Contrary to all Byzantine precedent, the young protagonists freely engage in premarital sex and, after crossing a swollen stream, are left to wander stark naked for several days. Only when a Byzantine ship chances to pick them up is the unclothed princess entrusted to the care of a eunuch. The same prurience pervades the more fantastic and rather more tedious poem of *Callimachus and Chrysorrhoe*. The heroine is first discovered hanging naked by her hair in the Dragon's Castle, and after she has been rescued, the Prince Charming loses little time in consummating his passion after a bath *à deux*. This mild form of pornography had, of course, nothing to do with the Greek 'folk': it

represented the daydreams of an aristocracy won over by western mores, but not sufficiently sensitive to the literary qualities of the western romances they were imitating from afar. *Belthandros* has a few good lines and relatively little padding; *Callimachus* is nearly all verbiage.

If we have not mentioned so far the much more meritorious epic or rather romance of *Digenes Akrites* (the Borderer of Double Stock), it is because of the difficulty of assigning it to a specific level of literary production.³⁶ It is based on heroic tales of the eastern border, the disputed land between Byzantium and the Arabs in the ninth and tenth centuries. By the time the poem was composed, the tales in question had become pretty blurred, but modern research has succeeded in identifying several historical personages and events, not all of the same period, but belonging to various layers, one of which was certainly associated with the Paulician wars and another with the Byzantine reconquest in the following century. If scholars have had less success in tracing the literary ancestry of the poem, it is certainly not for lack of trying. Numerous theories have been presented, none of them fully convincing. The main difficulty stems from the fact that we possess five divergent Greek versions as well as fragments of a Russian version. The reconstruction of the original *Digeneid* which, according to some scholars, dated, at least in part, from the years 934–44, involves, therefore, a considerable element of conjecture. Opinion is also divided as to whether the hypothetical *Digeneid* was written in a popular or, as seems more likely, in a literary language. The most satisfactory and consistent of the Greek versions, that of Grottaferrata (nearly four thousand lines long), cannot be earlier than the mid-eleventh century and is certainly the work of an author possessed of some education, for he knew not only the Bible and some patristic tags, but also the romances of Achilles Tatius and Heliodorus. The popularity of such ancient romances in the eleventh century is attested by Michael Psellus,³⁷ and we have seen that a copy of Achilles Tatius existed in the library of Eustathius Boilas located in Osrhoene, in other words in the very region where the *Digeneid* appears to have been composed.

The Grottaferrata *Digenes* is made up of two tales of different origin and date, that of the Arab emir who marries a Byzantine noblewoman and converts to Christianity, and that of his son Basil Digenes Akrites. Basil grows up to become a kind of border baron, carries off the lovely Eudocia Doukaina whom he weds, and spends his life fighting reivers (*apelatai*) and wild animals. He finally builds for himself a splendid

palace by the river Euphrates and dies there while still in the flower of his youth. Basil is not a Byzantine general, but an independent lord, a hero of superhuman strength and prowess who repeatedly routs whole armies single-handed. It is hazardous to pronounce on the literary qualities of a poem which we perceive rather dimly through its various redactions. In the Grottaferrata text the diction is often prosaic and there is rather too much moralizing. The action, too, tends to be obscure or inconsistent. For example, we are informed towards the end (vii, 201ff.) that Digenes had subjugated the Arabs and brought peace to Roman lands, whereas nothing of the kind had been mentioned before. In a story that is otherwise lacking in supernatural elements it is surprising to be suddenly confronted with a serpent that has assumed human form and then sprouts three heads. The warlike Maximô, descended from the Amazons whom Alexander the Great had brought from the land of the Brahmans, cuts a strange figure in a world that is, but for her, peopled by real men and women. And the hero's infidelities, though excused at some length, are poorly integrated into the plot. In spite of its many blemishes, *Digenes Akrites* does, however, give us a glimpse of a truly heroic milieu that contrasts strongly with the anaemic fantasies of the chivalry romances.

The few samples we have given do not form, of course, a sufficient basis for passing judgement on Byzantine literature as a whole, though it may be hoped that they convey something of its flavour. To a modern observer this literature appears deficient in many respects. It contains reams of verse, but almost no poetry and no dramatic works. It has irony, often heavy-handed, but practically no humour. With very few exceptions, it is not concerned with love, other than sacred or parental love. It has no ribaldry and no *joie de vivre*. Byzantine literature is solemn, even sombre, in tone and is probably at its best when describing death, disasters and the instability of human existence.

It is customary to argue that the greatest achievement of Byzantine men of letters lay not in the creation of original works, but in the preservation of the classical heritage. That the major proportion of ancient Greek literature that is still extant has come to us via Byzantium is an undeniable fact. It is also true to say that preservation was not a passive process: it implied the collecting of books, their copying and editing. It necessitated the writing of commentaries, the compilation of glossaries and encyclopaedias. The *Bibliotheca* of Photius, the Greek Anthology, the *Excerpta* of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the *Souda*, the Homeric commentaries of Eustathius represent great feats of

scholarship as do the endeavours of the Palaeologan philologists like Maximus Planudes and Demetrius Triclinius. Why is it, then, that the Byzantines, who lavished so much attention on the pagan classics, never comprehended their spirit? The blame has been laid on the Church, or monkishness, on autocracy. I do not believe that any of these factors is sufficient to explain the peculiar imperviousness of the medieval mind to a set of ideas and values it considered alien, wicked and obsolete. It may be more fruitful, therefore, to seek an answer in some of the considerations that have been offered at the beginning of this chapter. Fundamental shifts in mental attitudes seldom occur without corresponding changes in social structure. Byzantine society could have been transformed, and the generation of Psellus gives us some reason for supposing that its intellectual habits, including its relation to the classics, might have evolved in a new direction. Unfortunately, events decided otherwise.

CHAPTER 14

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

It is fair to say that art is the one portion of the Byzantine heritage that exerts upon us an immediate appeal. This statement would not have been true a hundred years ago, and if it is true today, this is because our own aesthetic taste has moved away from naturalism in the direction of partial or even total abstraction. As Robert Byron wrote in 1930, 'Of the numerous European cultures whose monuments our taste considers great, Byzantine representational art was the first to discover that principle of interpreting, instead of reproducing, perceived phenomena, which in our time has come to underlie all artistic expression.'¹ For entirely different reasons Byzantine artefacts were also greatly prized in the Middle Ages. The Arab scholar al-Djahiz (ninth century), while remarking that the Byzantines had neither science nor literature, is very appreciative of their woodwork, sculpture and textiles. 'The ancient Greeks', he concludes, 'were men of learning, while the Byzantines are artisans.'²

As distinct from its appreciation, which is now widespread, a proper understanding of Byzantine art in its development and in its connection with historical and social factors has not yet been fully achieved. For this there are many reasons. In the first place, Byzantine art, like Byzantine literature, was undeniably very conservative. Since it evolved at a slow pace, the dating of its *oeuvre* is seldom an easy matter, especially in view of the fact that the great majority of objects and buildings bear no dates. Secondly, Byzantine art was anonymous and impersonal. In the art of western Europe, at any rate since the late Middle Ages, individual personalities attract much of our attention, so that the history of European art does not concern itself merely with the evolution of forms: it is also the story of persons who lived known lives, who introduced innovations, who expressed their opinions on art, who exerted an influence on other known artists. Nothing of the kind applied

to Byzantine art. In Byzantium artists were regarded as craftsmen and no interest was felt in recording their names or their personalities. The first and the only Byzantine painter who is known to us as an individual is Theophanes the Greek, active in Russia in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. As to architects, none is mentioned by name after Anthemius and Isidore, the builders of Justinian's St Sophia. Our third difficulty derives from the virtual absence of Byzantine artistic criticism, the lack of a literature that might have discussed or evaluated works of art in terms that were not purely rhetorical. Our last and perhaps most serious difficulty stems from the fact that Byzantine art is preserved only in fragments. The devastation to which most Byzantine lands have been subjected over the centuries has not only swept away a major part of Byzantine artistic creation, but has also determined what one may call the pattern of preservation. The destruction of monuments has been more systematic in the centre of the Empire, in Constantinople, Asia Minor and Thrace than along the periphery as, for example, in Italy, Greece, Yugoslav Macedonia, parts of Syria and Cyprus. From this it follows that Byzantine art is better known in its provincial than in its metropolitan manifestations. Another aspect of the destruction is that it affected secular monuments more seriously than religious ones since, after the Ottoman conquest, churches had a chance of remaining in the hands of Christian communities or else were sometimes preserved by being converted into mosques. A further outcome of the destructive process is the relative importance of the minor arts in the remaining corpus of Byzantine artistic production. Whereas buildings and mural decorations were knocked down, portable objects of value, such as goldsmiths' work, enamels, ivory carvings and illuminated manuscripts, tended to migrate to western Europe where they have survived in cathedral treasuries and museums.

In addition to these objective difficulties, further obstacles have been erected by those very scholars who in the past hundred years have done so much to discover and record the *dissecta membra* of Byzantine art. I do not mean to belittle their achievement. Great strides have been made both in archaeological exploration and in the study of portable artefacts. In 1886-91 one of the creators of Byzantine art history, N. P. Kondakov, published in French translation his *Histoire de l'art byzantin considéré principalement dans les miniatures*. The limitation expressed in the title was due to the fact that at the time very little indeed was known of Byzantine monumental painting. Today this is no longer the case: extensive series of frescoes and mosaics have been found throughout the

Balkans, in Russia, in Cappadocia, Pontus, the Caucasus and Cyprus. Similar or even greater advances have been made in other fields. But while our knowledge has grown enormously, and continues to grow, it should be admitted that the interpretation of the accumulated data has not always proceeded in sensible directions. Too much effort has been spent on debating unreal issues: whether, for example, the origins of Byzantine art should be sought in the East or in the West, and if in the East, whether the decisive impulses came from Alexandria or Antioch or Mesopotamia or somewhere in central Asia. All kinds of 'schools' have been invented and various undocumented objects have been attributed now to one school, now to another. A succession of 'renaissances' has been postulated. What has not been sufficiently perceived is that Byzantine art followed very much the same line of development as Byzantine literature and, indeed, all other manifestations of Byzantine culture. In the following brief survey we shall attempt to present it, as much as possible, in a historical perspective.

In speaking of Early Byzantine or Early Christian art (which comes almost to the same thing) we must remember that we mean the art of the Later Roman Empire adapted to the needs of the Church. It may be that the opposition of the Early Christians to artistic representation has been unduly exaggerated by historians; even so, it cannot be said that they had an artistic programme. The teaching of Jesus, unlike that of Mani, was not conveyed with the help of pictures. The problem of a Christian art was first posed at the time of Constantine's conversion, when the emperor himself, his relatives and members of the higher clergy (who, as we have seen, suddenly found themselves very rich) began setting up splendid churches. For their architectural form a formula was quickly discovered (indeed, it may have pre-existed): this was the basilica, a rectangular colonnaded hall with an elevated dais or *bema* at one end. Adapted from a type of building that was widely used in the Roman world for a variety of judicial, commercial, military and ceremonial purposes, the Christian basilica was designed to satisfy the requirements of the *synaxis*: the spacious nave housed the congregation, while the raised *bema* was for the clergy, with the bishop's chair placed in the centre. A table was provided for the eucharistic sacrifice and another for the offerings of the faithful. While the architectural shell of the church did not create any inherent difficulty, the reverse was true of decoration.

To be sure, even before the reign of Constantine, Christians had

adopted certain pictorial formulas such as we see in the earliest catacomb decorations, on sarcophagi and in the Chapel of Dura-Europos on the Euphrates. Executed in the current style of Roman painting and sculpture, these were little vignettes illustrating with the utmost economy a number of key episodes of the Old and New Testaments that were connected with the themes of salvation and life after death. These vignettes, often cryptic as to their meaning, were not, however, suited to decorate the enormous expanses of wall that were offered by the lavish foundations of the Constantinian period. At first, no satisfactory solution appears to have been found. The abbreviated compositions of catacomb art were retained and enriched with elaborate framing motifs; for the rest, 'neutral' subjects were introduced from the secular repertory, such as scenes of hunting and fishing or simply great masses of vegetal scrolls. That is what we find in the very few surviving monuments of mid-fourth-century decoration, for example in the mausoleum of S. Costanza in Rome and the mausoleum, possibly of Constans I, at Centcelles near Tarragona. It was only, it seems, towards the end of the century that a more rational approach to church decoration was found in the use of biblical cycles, sequences of more or less elaborate illustrations which were justified as affording instruction to the illiterate. The changeover to a narrative Christian art is documented in a letter of St Nilus of *c.* 400 AD,³ but the earliest surviving monument incorporating the new approach is S. Maria Maggiore in Rome (*c.* 445 AD).

This brings us to the topic of Christian iconography which was to play such an important part in the history of Byzantine art. Already in the third to fourth centuries we find a fair degree of consistency in the representation of biblical scenes and this in monuments widely separated in space: the Fall of Man, the Sacrifice of Isaac, the Crossing of the Red Sea are rendered at Dura-Europos in a form recognizably similar to that in the catacombs of Rome. In the case of Old Testament pictures it is probable that their iconography was derived from Jewish sources, perhaps from illustrated biblical manuscripts. The situation was naturally different in the case of the New Testament which acquired its canonical form only towards 200 AD. Representations of Christ's miracles are already found in the third century, though in very schematic form, but a fuller elaboration of New Testament iconography appears to have been achieved only in the fourth and fifth centuries. The earliest surviving example of an extensive New Testament cycle in a monumental context is in the Church of S. Apollinare Nuovo

at Ravenna (c. 500 AD); the earliest extant illustrated manuscripts of the Gospels are of the sixth century: the codex Rossanensis, the Sinop fragment (now in Paris) and the Syriac Rabula codex (now in Florence). What is significant for the subsequent history of Byzantine art is that complete cycles of both Old Testament and New Testament illustration, whatever their precise origin and date, had been established in an authoritative form by about 500 AD at the latest. There is evidence to show that hagiographic cycles were also elaborated between the fourth and sixth centuries to decorate the walls of martyrs' shrines. This whole body of pictorial material, of which so little survives today, must have played the same part in the Middle Ages as did patristic literature with regard to later theologians and preachers. It provided a standard of reference and a set of clichés.

The artistic achievement of the fourth and fifth centuries lay in the creation of an art which was Christian in content and purpose. This period also coincided with a stylistic trend that was independent of Christianity and may best be described as a provincialization of Graeco-Roman art. The antecedents of this development may be found as far back as the first and second centuries AD, for example in Palmyrene funerary sculpture and in the pagan paintings and carvings of Dura-Europos. Predominance of ornament, increasing loss of the third dimension, frontality of human figures, disregard for scale – these are the traits that are particularly noticeable in much of the provincial work of the late imperial period. The maintenance of classical standards depended on enlightened patronage and a tradition of high-level craftsmanship: both were shattered by the civil wars and economic crisis of the third century. Fourth-century legislation attests to the scarcity of architects and skilled craftsmen whose recruitment had to be encouraged by means of state scholarships and the granting of various immunities.⁴ Such measures, even under the best conditions, require a period of time before they bear fruit, whereas the ambitious building programme of Constantine and his successors called for an immediate supply of all kinds of craftsmen in great numbers. The result was jerrybuilding and a kind of decoration that, for all its pretentiousness, revealed very clearly the provincialism and incompetence of its creators. The porphyry 'Tetrarchs' in Venice, which are now known to have been brought from Constantinople, offer a good illustration of what was considered appropriate by way of imperial portraiture in the Constantinian period.

Along with the decline of traditional craftsmanship went a mounting

demand for ostentation, pomp and glitter. Here the imperial court set the tone: the theatrical setting, the marble and mosaic, the purple hangings, the solemn ritual of audiences, entrances and exits, the extravagant richness of clothing. There was an art of imperial propaganda with its own iconography: the emperor always triumphant, bigger than life-size, frozen in an immobile pose, receiving tribute, distributing honours, trampling on the necks of the enemy, presiding over public games. What was appropriate to the earthly emperor was equally appropriate to Christ, and so the art of the Church did not hesitate to borrow from the pre-existing art of the court. The Good Shepherd in the mausoleum of Galla Placidia at Ravenna is no longer dressed as a shepherd: He wears a purple tunic with gold stripes. In the Church of S. Pudenziana in Rome (c. 400 AD) Christ, in splendid costume, is enthroned in a semicircular exedra and receives the acclamation of the apostles. Elsewhere He tramples on the asp and the basilisc as the emperor trampled on prostrate enemies, or He receives from His disciples and saints the offering of gold crowns. We notice in art a mounting use of glitter until the background of compositions becomes a solid mass of gold, as in the cupola mosaic of the rotunda at Thessalonica, possibly of the mid-fifth century.

If the art of the fourth and fifth centuries may be viewed in terms of a degradation of the classical style, such a standard is no longer adequate for judging the art of Justinian's epoch. At a date not far removed from 500 AD there occurred an aesthetic change. We are not yet in a position to explain how or why it came about, but there are indications that the new style was introduced deliberately and in the highest circles of society. The development of ornamental sculpture and of the capital in particular provides a good illustration of this phenomenon. It should be explained that the marble quarries of Proconnesus in the Sea of Marmora carried on at the time a brisk export business and that ready-made items, such as capitals, parapet slabs, pulpits and so on were shipped to all parts of the Empire, including the West. Whoever designed these pieces, they were regarded as high-quality stuff and certainly set the newest fashion in many distant lands. Until well into the fifth century the State ateliers of Proconnesus adhered to the traditional capital types, namely the Corinthian (or composite) and the Ionic. No matter how unclassical the acanthus leaves and the volutes became, the basic forms were kept. But from about 500 AD onwards we find an entirely new form, the impost capital, decorated with an over-all pattern, sometimes deeply undercut and looking like lace on a dark

background. A whole new vocabulary of ornament appears at this time and the best place to study it is in the recently excavated Church of St Polyeuctus at Istanbul (c 524–7).⁵ It was a very large church (about fifty metres square) and probably domed, but the superstructure has completely disappeared leaving only its foundations and a great number of carved elements in Proconnesian marble. The latter show the most bewildering variety of ornament: peacocks with outspread tail, stylized palm trees, palmettes of the Sassanian type, vine scrolls, basket-work, vases with strange vegetal forms growing out of them. The total effect must have been overwhelmingly opulent and probably not entirely harmonious; in any case, it represented a conscious break with the classical tradition. There are two important facts to remember about St Polyeuctus: it was commissioned by the Princess Anicia Juliana, one of the most aristocratic and possibly the richest woman then living at Constantinople; and it was built less than a decade before St Sophia.

The architects and decorators of St Sophia (532–7) could not but have been aware of St Polyeuctus, and they seem to have chosen a more restrained approach. There is no need to give an account of Justinian's mighty cathedral: it has been described and discussed often enough. Furthermore, the building has come down to us almost intact. The visitor need only remember that the original dome was lower than the present one by some twenty feet so that the curvature of the ceiling formed a more continuous canopy and produced a more daring effect; and that the interior illumination was stronger than today's since the side-walls (*tympana*) of the nave appear to have been pierced by huge windows. He should also make allowance for the vast expanse of gold mosaic (now preserved only in fragments) and the splendour of the furnishings, all reveted with sheets of silver – the chancel screen, the ciborium over the altar table, the curving seats for the clergy in the apse, the monumental pulpit in the middle of the nave. As we contemplate the empty shell today, we cannot help observing that St Sophia, too, is fundamentally an unclassical building. The faint suggestion of basilical form is the principal concession to tradition, but the interior vistas curve in strange ways; the columns are of different sizes and proportions; the upper order has consciously been made not to line up with the lower; the capitals are of the undercut impost type; and the original mosaic decoration, as far as we can tell, was entirely non-figural and imitated the effect of shimmering silks enlivened with abstract patterns. Eighteenth-cen-

ture observers were not entirely mistaken in describing St Sophia as 'Gothick'.

There are other signs of a deliberate break with the past in the Justinianic period. While the basilica still remained the commonest type of church in the provinces, prestige buildings tended more and more to be domed, like S. Vitale at Ravenna (c. 530-45) and St Sergius and St Bacchus at Constantinople (c. 531-36). The tessellated pavement, which had been practically *de rigueur* in Early Byzantine churches, was replaced in St Sophia by large marble slabs; it was not destined to be revived in later centuries. The horizontal entablature makes its last appearance in St Sergius and St Bacchus. As to monumental painting, it is difficult to discern a clear trend in such works as still exist. Perhaps the closest approximation to the art of the capital is provided by the apse mosaic of the Transfiguration on Mount Sinai which dates from the last years of Justinian's reign. With its solid gold background and angular figures suspended in space, it produces an effect of hypnotic abstraction.

It may be said, therefore, that a distinctly Byzantine style had come into being by the sixth century without, however, entirely displacing what was left of the classical tradition. If the Mount Sinai mosaic, with its complete elimination of landscape, was 'progressive', those of S. Vitale, Ravenna, were conservative: for, in the latter monument, the compositions in the presbytery still strive for naturalism. The figures are solid and they have a 'real' setting of sky, rocks and trees. Even the more formal portraits of Justinian and Theodora are meant to suggest an action that is occurring in three-dimensional space. We may not realize at first that Justinian and his entourage are represented walking rather than standing still, but we cannot help noticing that the procession is taking place indoors, under a coffered ceiling. The co-existence of the old and the new, of naturalism (no matter how clumsily rendered) and abstraction was the product of a society that itself showed similar contrasts. The historian Procopius, who was imbued with the ideals of Antiquity, and John of Amida, whose outlook was essentially medieval, lived in the same world.

The fusion of the two opposites does not appear to have been achieved in the century and a half that separates Justinian's death from the outbreak of Iconoclasm, though it must be pointed out that this long period is very poorly known in its artistic manifestations. It is the view of some scholars that the age in question was marked by the growing importance of icons, and in this they are supported by the evidence of

texts. It is tempting, therefore, to place in the late sixth and seventh centuries the small number of preserved icons in encaustic, especially the splendid specimens of Mount Sinai, which seem to express the same intensity of religious feeling that we find in contemporary stories of miracles worked by icons. Unfortunately, these remarkable paintings are undated and it is quite conceivable that some of them may go back to the time of Justinian. There is no reason, however, to doubt the seventh-century date of an oft-quoted example of the 'iconic' style, the mosaic of St Demetrius flanked by donors in the same saint's church at Thessalonica. The celestial patron who delivered his city from barbarian attack rises here in all his incorporeal and motionless majesty, suitably emphasized by the rigid geometry of his luminous ceremonial costume. However, were the Byzantines themselves sensitive to the distinction we draw between the naturalistic and the 'iconic' manners? A reading of the relevant texts suggests that they were not. In their eyes an icon was a real portrait which fully conveyed the physical aspect of the holy personage represented. We must quote in this connection Canon 82 of the Quinisext Council (692).⁶ In censuring the old custom of representing Christ in the guise of a lamb and recommending that He should be, instead, depicted in human form, it opposes the symbol (*typos*) to the image. The symbol, it argues, had been appropriate to the Old Dispensation when the Truth could be shown only through faint signs and shadows, whereas the New Dispensation needed no symbol: Truth and Grace were there for all to see in Christ's human form. The same idea was later repeated and elaborated in the Synodicon of Orthodoxy of 843. To regard, therefore, Byzantine religious art as symbolic reveals a grave misunderstanding: on the contrary, it sought to be explicit, literal, even realistic.

The simultaneous survival of the Hellenistic tradition of naturalism is documented by a number of examples belonging to the secular sphere. Here we should mention in the first place the pavement mosaic of the imperial palace of Constantinople which, if archaeological evidence is to be trusted, must be later than the time of Justinian. This pavement formed the border of a vast colonnaded courtyard and comprised a variety of vignettes disposed on a white background. The subject-matter is drawn from rural life: animal hunts, peasants tilling the earth, children's games, a mother giving suck, a fisherman, a bear killing a lamb, a monkey climbing a tree, etc. The rendering of human figures, animals and trees is so remarkably vivid, the colouristic effects so varied and subtle, that many scholars have insisted on ascribing the

mosaic to a much earlier period. The palace pavement is not, however, an isolated example of the survival of classicism: another is provided by a considerable number of silver plates that continued to be produced until about the middle of the seventh century and can be accurately dated thanks to the hallmarks they bear. Not only are these objects antique in style: many of them are decorated with subjects drawn from pagan mythology, such as Meleager and Atalanta, Poseidon, Silenus and maenads.

As the Early Byzantine Empire came to an end, it left, therefore, a complex and unassimilated legacy made up, on the one hand, of a somewhat degraded classicism and, on the other, of a more abstract and decorative style. It is important to understand that these did not correspond to the secular and religious spheres, respectively. On the contrary, a measure of classicism was permanently embedded in the corpus of biblical and hagiographic illustration that had reached, as we have seen, a canonical form by the beginning of the sixth century. This explains the fact, rather puzzling at first sight, that in the later Byzantine period the highest degree of classicism is associated with traditional religious subject matter.

The history of Byzantine art from about 650 until about 850 is pretty much of a blank. Some inferences concerning the art of Constantinople at the turn of the eighth century may perhaps be drawn from the mosaics and frescoes, now preserved only in fragments, executed in Rome by Pope John VII (705–07). The artistic standard of imperial gold coinage was actually improved, in direct imitation of fifth- and sixth-century types, under Constantine IV, especially in his last years (681–5), and maintained on a good level under Justinian II, the first emperor to have placed an image of Christ on his coins. These manifestations need not surprise us since they correspond to the brief period of euphoria and consolidation following the failure of the Arab attack on Constantinople.

The impact of Iconoclasm on art has to be gauged more on the basis of textual evidence than on that of extant monuments. There was certainly widespread destruction of earlier works bearing religious representations: portable icons were burnt, mural paintings and mosaics scraped off or whitewashed, liturgical plate melted down, illuminated manuscripts mutilated. We must not imagine, of course, that this destruction was carried out with the systematic ruthlessness of a modern police state. For example, we are surprised to hear that some mosaics and paintings in the patriarchal palace of Constantinople, the

very nerve-centre of Iconoclasm, were removed as late as 768, some forty years after the promulgation of the ban.⁷ At Thessalonica the mosaics of St Demetrius do not appear to have been disturbed, while the apse mosaic of the Monê Latomou (Hosios David) in the same city was concealed behind a protective covering. In general, it would seem that the destruction was most severe in Constantinople and Asia Minor, in other words in areas that were under effective government control, less so in outlying provinces. The Iconoclasts did not succeed in eradicating all trace of Early Christian religious art in the East, but they certainly diminished its volume.

In evolving a substitute form of church decoration, the Iconoclasts relied on 'neutral' motifs. In the famous Church of the Blachernae at Constantinople they put up pictures of trees and various animals, including cranes, crows and peacocks surrounded by scrolls of ivy leaves; in doing so they were accused by their opponents of turning God's house into a fruit shop and an aviary.⁸ Thus, consciously or unconsciously, they returned to the kind of decoration that had been applied to churches in the fourth century. The Iconoclasts also gave added emphasis to the symbol of the cross. In the Church of St Irene at Constantinople, rebuilt after the earthquake of 740, a plain cross on a stepped base occupies the semidome of the apse; it is the same device that Iconoclastic emperors used consistently on their coinage. Similar crosses also existed in the apses of St Sophia at Thessalonica and the Dormition church at Nicaea (destroyed in 1922); in both cases the cross was later replaced by a figure of the Virgin and Child. A number of rustic chapels in Cappadocia and elsewhere display a non-figural decoration consisting of crosses and a variety of ornamental motifs including animals and plants. These have often been attributed to the Iconoclastic period, although in most cases their dating is quite uncertain.

While objecting to the use of human figures in religious art, the Iconoclasts are known to have tolerated and even encouraged secular representations such as those of hunts and hippodrome scenes. An example of this was provided by a monument called the Milion, a monumental arch at Constantinople that marked the starting point of the great highway running across the Balkan peninsula. This monument had been decorated with pictures of the six ecumenical councils which were removed by Constantine v and replaced by a representation of his favourite charioteer.⁹ Secular subjects also figured prominently in the splendid buildings that were put up in the palace by the Emperor Theophilus: pictures of shields and other weapons, of

animals, trees and men picking fruit are specifically mentioned.¹⁰ A similar distinction between religious and secular art was maintained by the Umayyad caliphs of Damascus: while the representation of every living being, even animals, was excluded from mosques, the palaces of princes were freely decorated in painting, mosaic and sculpture with effigies of rulers and courtiers, pictures of hunts and banquets, of musicians and even of nude women. As long as the caliphate remained in Syria the art of the Arab court and that of the Iconoclastic emperors seem to have flowed in parallel channels.

The most significant contribution of the Iconoclastic period to the development of Byzantine art lay, however, in the formulation of an exact theory and justification of religious painting. For a whole century the best minds of Byzantium were bent on this problem; and while the writings of the Iconoclastic theoreticians have been destroyed, those of their Orthodox opponents – of the patriarchs Germanus and Nicephorus, of St John Damascene and St Theodore the Studite – fill many volumes. The debate was conducted on a theological and philosophical plane and centred on questions such as scriptural and patristic authority, the relation between image and archetype (the person represented on it), and, especially, the admissibility of representing Christ who was both God and man. The conclusion that was finally reached was that one was entitled to portray such holy personages as had actually appeared on earth in visible form: Christ since He was a complete man, the saints, and even angels since they manifested themselves in human shape on various occasions; but not God the Father or the Holy Trinity. It was also stated that the image differed from its archetype as to ‘essence’ or ‘substance’ (*ousia*), but was identical as to ‘person’ (*hypostasis*). It was like the impression of a signet ring or the reflection in a mirror. In other words, the icon was considered to be a true and exact portrait.

An inescapable consequence of this definition was the immutability of iconographic types: the artist was not at liberty to alter the accepted features of this or that saint. But the definition also implied something else, namely the validity of iconographic types. In the entire literature of the Iconoclastic period no one, if I am not mistaken, thought of posing the practical question: How do we know the icon is a likeness? What evidence, for example, do we have that St Peter had a hooked nose and curly grey hair? Even if he had, is it sufficient to depict a man with a hooked nose and curly grey hair to obtain the exact likeness of St Peter? The inability of the Byzantines to ask such questions and to see

the problem of the icon in terms other than theological ones reveals a general truth about their artistic intuition. Theirs was an art unconcerned with the individual and the particular. A few major differentiations, such as colour of hair, length and shape of beard, details of costume and authenticating inscription were considered sufficient to establish identity. No wonder, then, that Byzantine art never produced real portraiture.

The restoration of icon-worship between 780 and 814 was too transitory to leave any lasting results. It was only after the final liquidation of Iconoclasm in 843 that a major effort was made to recreate religious art. The task could not have been easy since the tradition of sacred painting had been disrupted. To be sure, the fairly tolerant régime of Michael II and Theophilus could not prevent a few determined men from surreptitiously painting icons or illustrating manuscripts, but even so, when the painter Lazarus (one of the very few we happen to know by name) was apprehended in this kind of activity, he was subjected to physical torture and imprisonment.¹¹ There was, however, a wide gulf between such small-scale work as could be carried out in secret and the formation of regular ateliers capable of redecorating the vast churches of Constantinople. The task was so great that its accomplishment had to be spread over about half a century: in St Sophia the first figural mosaic, that of the Virgin and Child in the apse which is still extant, was made in 867; the Church of St Sergius and St Bacchus was redecorated between 867 and 877, that of the Holy Apostles between 867 and 886, that of the Virgin Mary of the Source (outside the walls of Constantinople) some time before 879. Besides, a number of new churches were being built and these, too, required painted decoration. The second half of the ninth century must have been a time of intensive activity for Byzantine artists.

Many of the formulae adopted after 843 were destined to remain in use for the next three hundred years if not longer. In ecclesiastical architecture the domed building was now firmly established. As compared to the churches of Justinian's time, those of the ninth and later centuries were distinctly small. In fact, Byzantine architects were never to build again on a large scale – something worth pondering on. The double-shell design, like the one of St Sophia, was abandoned in favour of a more unified interior. Constantinople gave preference to the cross-in-square plan, where the central dome was carried on four free-standing columns, a form that we first encounter in Bithynian monasteries towards the end of the eighth century. There was a tendency to

multiply domes, as already in the Nea Ekklesia (New Church) dedicated by Basil I in 880, which had five, presumably one in the centre and one over each of the four corners of the square. The exterior remained at first rather stark, as in the Early Byzantine period, but progressively became enlivened with engaged pilasters and arcading, thus producing a more plastic effect. There also developed a preference for taller, less squat silhouettes. From about the eleventh century onwards brick began to be used to form ornamental patterns on the exterior, but this applied more to the provinces than to Constantinople.

The treatment of the interior remained, in principle, as it had been in the Early Byzantine period. The vertical surfaces of the walls were covered with marble slabs of different colours up to the springing of the arches and vaults, which was marked by a projecting cornice; the space above the cornice was decorated with mosaic. In more modest churches the same effect was imitated in paint. Shallow ornamental carving, usually heightened with paint and gilding, was applied to the cornice, to parapet slabs, door and window frames, and especially to the *templon*, the open marble screen separating the presbytery from the nave. It is difficult today to recapture the extraordinary, if rather excessive, richness of such interiors, since all surviving Byzantine churches of this period have suffered mutilation: Hosios Loukas in Greece and San Marco in Venice come perhaps closest to conveying the total effect that was intended.

It was in mosaic decoration that Byzantine artists achieved their greatest success. There is reason to believe that a formula for such decoration adapted to contemporary architecture was evolved in the ninth century, but no reasonably complete specimen of it is preserved that is earlier than the eleventh. In St Sophia, Constantinople, the figural mosaics executed from 867 onwards can only be described as inserts, splendid in themselves, but inevitably at odds with the immensity of their architectural setting. In St Sophia, Thessalonica, the mosaics of the ninth century are probably limited to the Ascension in the dome. To find a mosaic decoration embracing the whole interior of a church we have to go to Hosios Loukas (early eleventh century), to Nea Monê on Chios (1042–56) and Daphni near Eleusis (c. 1100). Earlier examples are known to us only through the evidence of texts.

Despite their differences, these decorations have many common features. Most importantly, the arrangement of subjects is hierarchical. A normal disposition of the Middle Byzantine period (we are not referring here to any specific monument) runs more or less as follows.

The highest part of the church, the centre of the dome, is reserved for the Divinity, usually in the form of Christ Pantocrator (the ruler of the universe): this is a bust of Christ enclosed in a circular medallion. Christ is sometimes surrounded by his angelic bodyguard of archangels, seraphim and cherubim. The second place of honour – the semidome of the apse – is reserved for the Virgin Mary who is usually flanked by the archangels Michael and Gabriel. Below Christ and His retinue come the apostles and prophets; below the Virgin is placed the Communion of the Apostles as well as figures of clerical saints, i.e. bishops (St John Chryostom, St Basil, St Athanasius, the two St Gregorys, etc.) and deacons (St Stephen, St Lawrence, etc.) who are thus made, as it were, to participate in the liturgy that was celebrated within the presbytery. The four pendentives supporting the dome were traditionally occupied by the four Evangelists. The zone of the barrel vaults above the cornice afforded space for a cycle of New Testament scenes. Any remaining wall surface in the nave was assigned to single figures of 'secular' saints, often grouped by categories, such as holy warriors (George, Demetrius, the two Theodores, and so on), physicians (Cosmas, Damian, Panteleemon), monks (Antony, Arsenius, Euthymius) or martyrs. The general principle of this arrangement remained in force until the end of the Byzantine Empire; indeed, it has been retained by the Orthodox Church to this very day.

To say that a decorative scheme such as we have described forms a *civitas Dei* would be a truism, since every Christian church strives, in one way or another, to represent God's Kingdom. What distinguishes the Byzantine system from, say, the Romanesque and the Gothic is that the *civitas Dei* has been restricted to one main idea: the New Dispensation. It is not a *speculum mundi*: we do not find in Byzantine church decoration any allegories of virtues and vices, any signs of the zodiac, any labours of the months, any liberal arts, any vignettes of trades and crafts. What the Byzantines called 'outside knowledge' has been kept out. Even the Old Testament has been excluded save for the figures of the prophets whose function it was to announce the Incarnation. Once again we are led back to the Quinisext Council and the Synodicon of Orthodoxy: the shadows and symbols of the old order have been made unnecessary by the one supreme reality, God's coming among men by the agency of the Virgin Mary. The Byzantine *civitas Dei* is the New Testament and the choir of Christian saints.

Another feature of Byzantine church decoration from the ninth to the twelfth century is the restriction of the narrative element. Instead of the

lengthy cycles of Early Christian art, the story of the New Testament has been condensed to a limited number of key episodes, a kind of liturgical calendar composed of the major feasts, beginning with the Annunciation (usually on the piers flanking the presbytery) and ending with the Dormition of the Virgin (on the west wall of the nave). Such selectivity was consonant with the architectural form of the Middle Byzantine church. As long as the vertical wall surfaces were covered with marble, there was hardly any room in the nave for more than a dozen figural compositions, provided these were represented on a reasonably large scale.

Considering Middle Byzantine church decoration from a formal point of view, we are struck first of all by the elimination of 'picture space'. Elements of landscape and architecture have been removed as much as possible and replaced by a uniform gold background. In some compositions such as the Nativity, the Baptism and the Entry into Jerusalem, the setting could not be entirely eliminated and was conveyed by a number of simple props as on the modern stage. One cross was all that was needed for the Crucifixion. In the Anastasis (Harrowing of Hell) the aspect of the underworld could be conveyed by a small dark chasm filled with miscellaneous hardware (the locks and bolts of Hell) and two sarcophagi from which the elect emerged. In the Annunciation the house of the Virgin could be omitted, leaving only the two protagonists. In the Washing of the Feet (as at Hosios Loukas) two stools and a washbasin were the only props required.

The absence of natural perspective, which is another feature of Byzantine art, is directly traceable to the Early Christian period. The size of figures in a composition depends more on their hierarchical importance than on their position in space. Consider, for example, the beautiful Nativity at Daphni: the Virgin Mary and Joseph are placed on the same plane, yet the Virgin is distinctly bigger than her husband. The angels are about the same size as Joseph, although they are standing at a considerable distance, behind a mountain; two of them even manage to stretch their arms over the mountain which consequently appears like a papiermâché object about three feet high. Reverse or merely inconsistent perspective is regularly applied to pieces of furniture such as thrones which appear narrower at the front than at the back and whose seat usually tilts forward at an inclined plane, a phenomenon that is already observable in the fifth-century mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore. Distance is no longer indicated by gradations of colour, nor is there a uniform source of illumination. Figures cast no

shadows. In spite of these anti-illusionistic devices, individual human figures remain at times surprisingly antique. The reason for this lies, we believe, in the extraordinary tenacity of the iconographic tradition of biblical illustration. The training of the Byzantine artist involved the faithful reproduction of formulas which, as we have seen, went back to the period of the Later Roman Empire. For the same reason all biblical figures retained their antique garb consisting of tunic and *chlamys*: contemporary Byzantine costume was not used. Here we are faced with a broader problem which has been the subject of prolonged discussion, namely the relation of Byzantine art to ancient art, and we must pause briefly to examine it.

In the opinion of many recent scholars, the history of Byzantine art was punctuated by a number of renaissance movements, of which the most important are acknowledged to have been the so-called Macedonian Renaissance and the Palaeologan Renaissance. The first of these takes its name from the Macedonian dynasty and is believed, on rather shaky evidence, to have reached its height in the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. It should be said at once that the Macedonian Renaissance is not reflected in any extant work of mural painting or mosaic; its imprint is felt only in the minor arts, especially in illuminated manuscripts and carved ivories.

In the field of manuscript illumination the most important 'renaissance works' are the Paris Psalter (Parisinus gr. 139), the Bible of the patrician Leo in the Vatican (Reginensis gr. 1), the Joshua rotulus, also in the Vatican (Palatinus gr. 431), and the Stavronikita Gospels (monastery of Stavronikita on Mount Athos, cod. 43). The Paris Psalter is probably the most striking of these manuscripts, so we may stop to consider the famous miniature representing Isaiah's prayer. Outwardly this is very antique. The prophet is flanked by two personifications, that of Dawn in the form of a putto, and that of Night, a svelte figure holding a billowing veil, who seems to be descended from some ancient Hecate or Selene. And yet the general effect is somehow unsatisfactory. The figures are lined up without any feeling for composition or scale, the drawing is false in places (especially in the case of Dawn), the strip of ground fails to recede, and its terminal line is awkwardly masked by flowering shrubs. Or consider the Anointing of David in the Reginensis gr. 1 (dating from about 940). Here again there is a superficial air of antiquity, but the architecture in the background makes little sense, the figure of Clemency has her left hand growing directly out of her elbow, and David's six brothers are provided with

only two pairs of legs. The Joshua rotulus, a unique example of continuous strip illustration, exhibits the same mixture of antique personifications, 'Pompeian' settings and partly misunderstood figural drawing. All three manuscripts reproduce traditional Old Testament iconography and are more or less faithful copies of originals of the Early Byzantine period. To what extent the copies departed from their lost originals it is now almost impossible to determine; but even if there has been some adaptation, this does not amount to a genuinely creative phenomenon. Pseudo-classical rather than classical, the illuminated manuscripts of the Macedonian Renaissance reflect the artificial and anaemic antiquarianism of court circles.

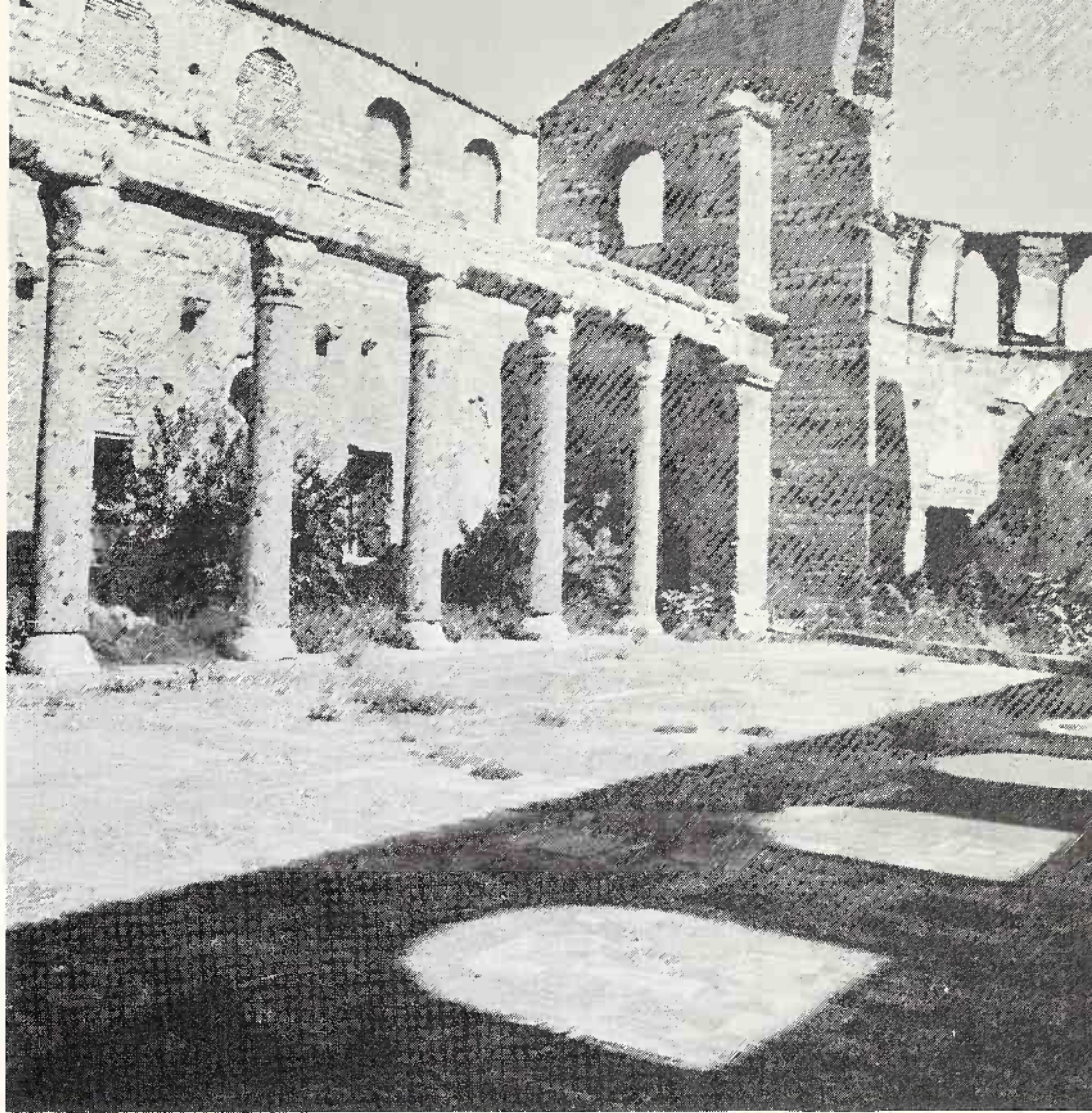
Very similar observations may be made regarding the ivory carvings of the Macedonian period. Single figures have occasionally something of the quality of ancient statuary, as in the panel representing the apostles John and Paul (now at Venice), the companion relief of Andrew and Peter at Vienna, the Harbaville triptych in the Louvre and so on. The classicism never extends, however, beyond individual figures. In the Romanus ivory of the Cabinet des Médailles, made in or about 945, Christ is in the antique manner, while the imperial pair are like stuffed dummies, and the furniture is rendered in reverse perspective. Narrative compositions may have offered recourse to 'pictorial relief' in the Hellenistic manner, but the opportunity was not seized. Consider, for example, the plaque of the Forty Martyrs in the Berlin Museum. The subject, which must have gone back to an Early Byzantine original, represents the saints freezing to death in a lake. By varying the height of the relief, the carver could have achieved an illusion of depth, yet he chose not to do so. The figural work is fine, but it is of uniform depth, with the result that the saints seem to be piled up in a heap. What is particularly instructive in the domain of Byzantine ivories is that we find the least classicism of style precisely where we might have expected to find the most, namely in the group of caskets decorated with mythological and other secular subjects, of which the Veroli casket in the Victoria and Albert Museum is an outstanding example. The figures on these objects always appear as obese, cavorting pygmies, completely lacking the elegance and repose which, in the realm of ivories, characterizes Christian saints, and those alone.

It is, therefore, quite misleading to call the Macedonian Renaissance a return to Antiquity. Had Byzantine artists been eager to imitate classical art, there would have been no shortage of models within their reach. Constantinople itself was a museum of ancient statuary

assembled for purposes of urban decoration between the fourth and the sixth centuries; the country, too, was full of classical remains. To take but a single instance, Hadrian's great temple at Cyzicus with its wealth of sculpture was still standing in the fifteenth century, when it was described by Cyriac of Ancona, yet no Byzantine seems to have paid the slightest attention to it. Indeed, the aim of the Macedonian Renaissance, in art as in literature, was a return not to pagan antiquity, but to the period when the Christian Empire had been great, just as the political aim of the Macedonian emperors was the restoration of Justinian's realm. Such bits and pieces of Early Christian art as had survived the Iconoclastic troubles were imitated for the benefit of emperors and courtiers, but there was no assimilation of classical values. The movement, as we have said, appears to have been restricted to the minor arts; significantly, no attempt was made to create major sculpture in stone or bronze, not even imperial statues. By the end of the tenth century the court renaissance had died out. It may have left some imprint on figure drawing in the succeeding period, but it did not deflect Byzantine art from its natural course.

What may be called the mature phase of Byzantine art falls roughly between the years 1000 and 1150, during the period of urban resurgence. This art had a wide radiation beyond the confines of the Empire: Byzantine craftsmen were called to Kiev and Novgorod, to Monte Cassino, Palermo and Cefalù. Byzantine influence was entering Italy through Venice, through Sicily and through the imperial territories situated in the south of the peninsula. Farther north, particularly in Germany, the diffusion of the Byzantine style was effected at a somewhat later date (from about the end of the twelfth century) and mostly by means of portable works such as illuminated manuscripts.

In the realm of architecture the eleventh century saw more activity than any previous period since the fall of the Early Byzantine Empire. It also showed some originality. Unfortunately, we know very little about the great imperial foundations at Constantinople whose extravagance is censured by Psellus, for example the monastery of the Virgin Peribleptos built by Romanus III and that of St George of Mangana commissioned by Constantine IX. It may be conjectured that they provided models for contemporary monuments in Greece, such as Hosios Loukas, Nea Monê and Daphni, all three of which share a new form, that of the octagonal interior space covered by a dome on squinches. Since this form almost certainly came from Armenia, Byzantine architects must have been willing to accept inspiration from

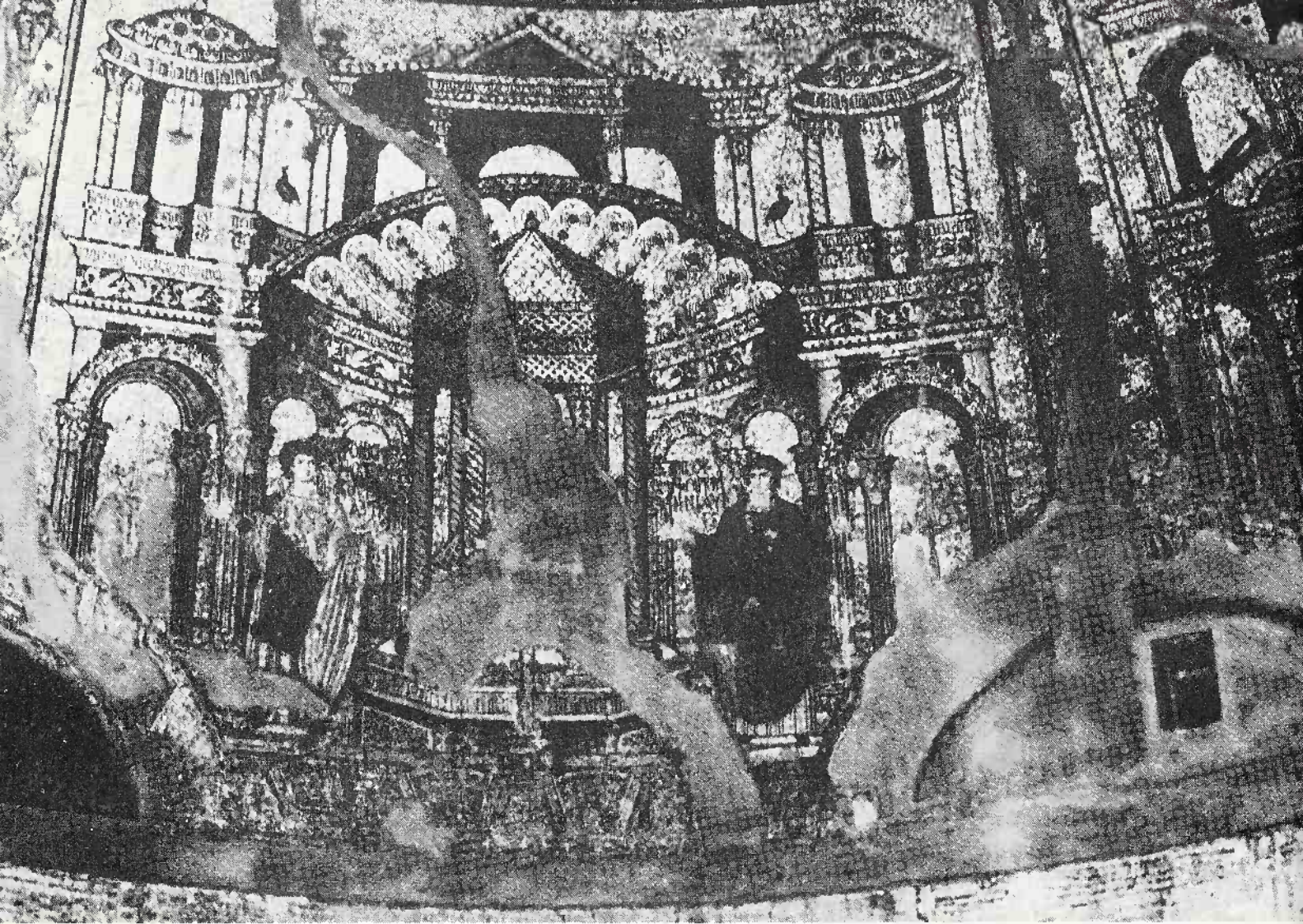


ABOVE Church of St John built by the patrician Studius, Istanbul, *c.* 453 AD.

BELOW Church of Qalb-Loseh, Syria, *c.* 460 AD.

The standard form of Early Byzantine churches is that of the basilica – an elongated, timber-roofed hall terminating in an apse. The nave is usually separated from the aisles by rows of marble columns, but in Syria these are often replaced by masonry piers.

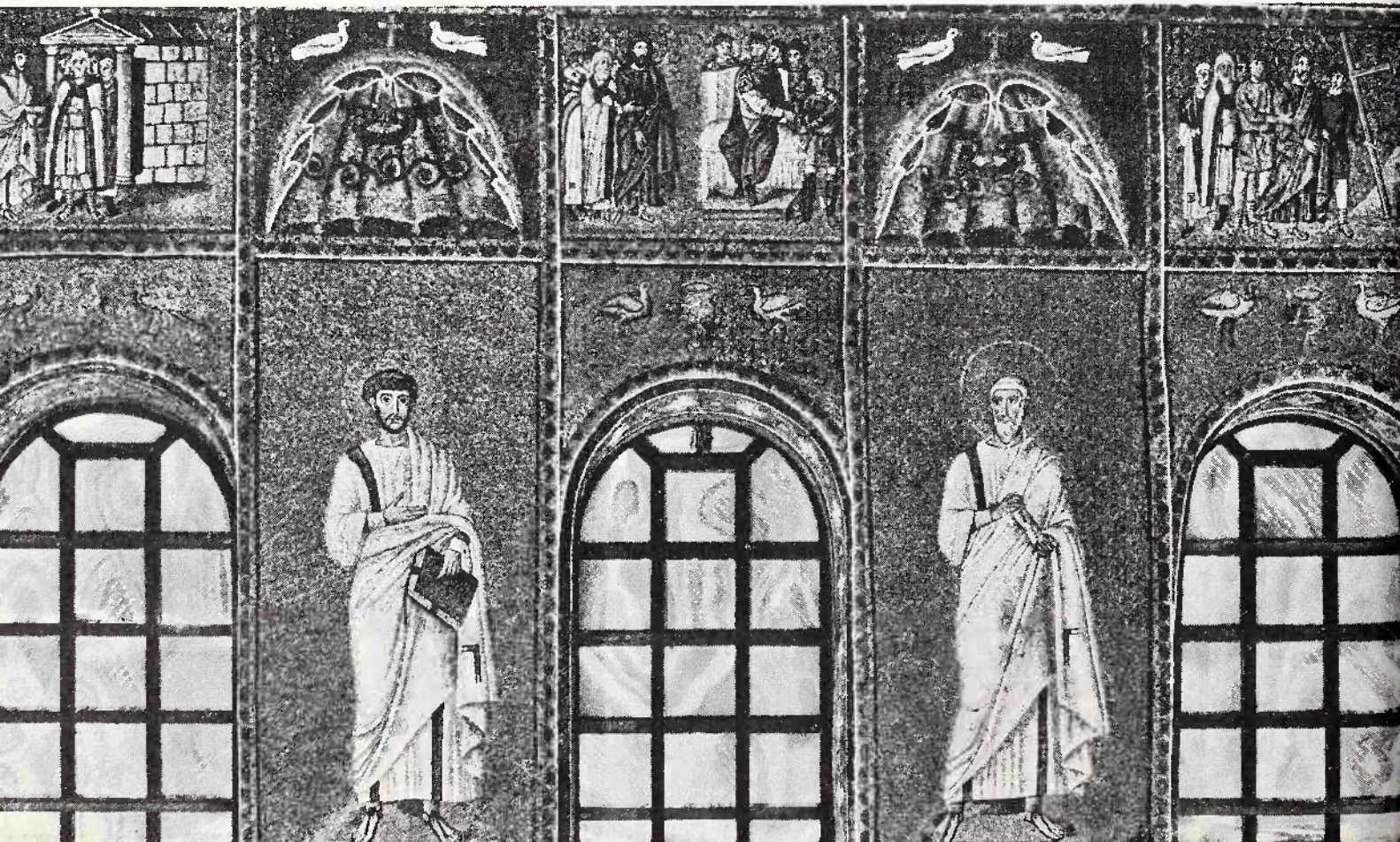




ABOVE Dome mosaic of the Rotunda, Thessalonica, probably mid-fifth century.

BELOW Mosaics of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, early sixth century.

The pictorial art of the Early Byzantine Church may be divided into the symbolic and the narrative. The former trend is represented in the Rotunda of Thessalonica, where a number of martyrs stand frontally before opulent architectural backdrops. Sant'Apollinare Nuovo has the earliest extant New Testament cycle in a monumental context.





ABOVE Studius Basilica, Istanbul, capital of porch, *c.* 453 AD.

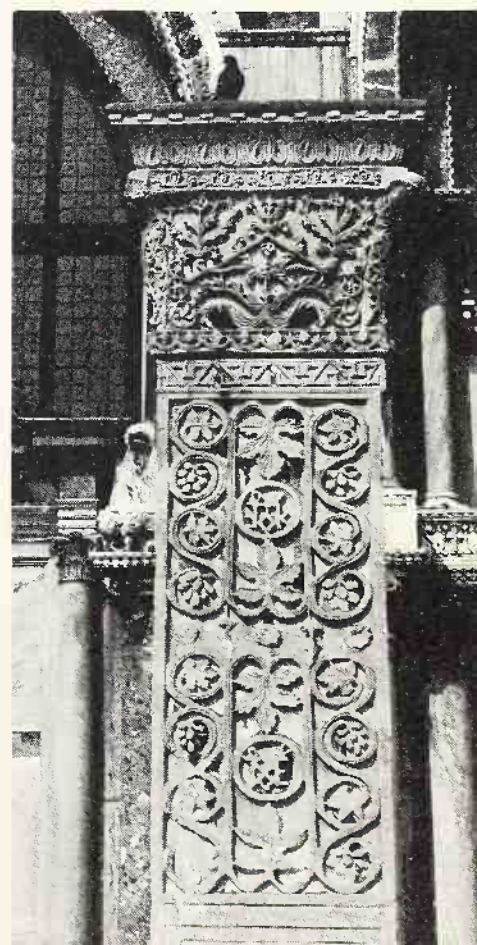


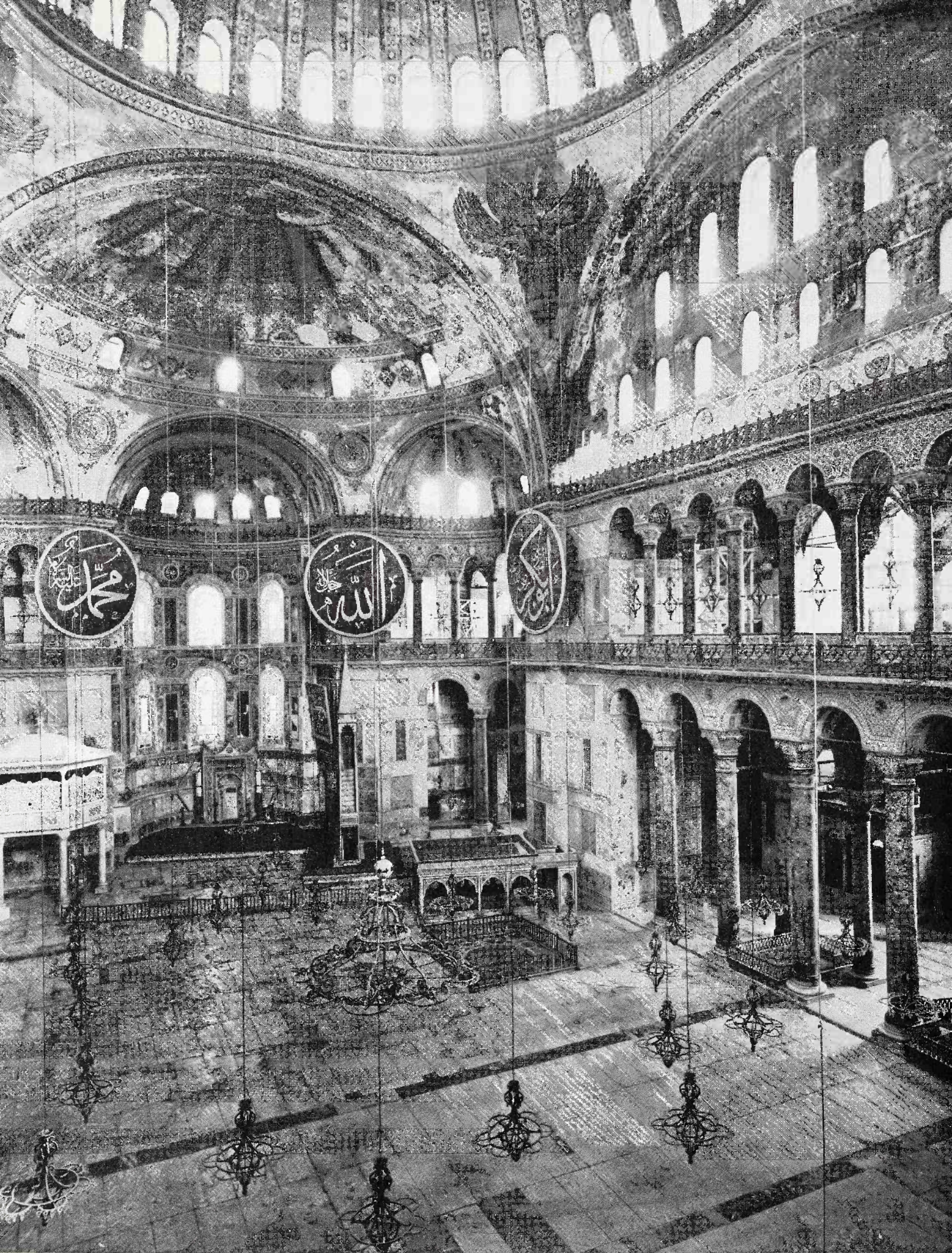
ABOVE RIGHT St Sophia, Istanbul, capital of gallery, *c.* 532 AD.

BELOW San Marco, Venice, capital from St Polyeuctus, Constantinople, *c.* 524-7 AD.

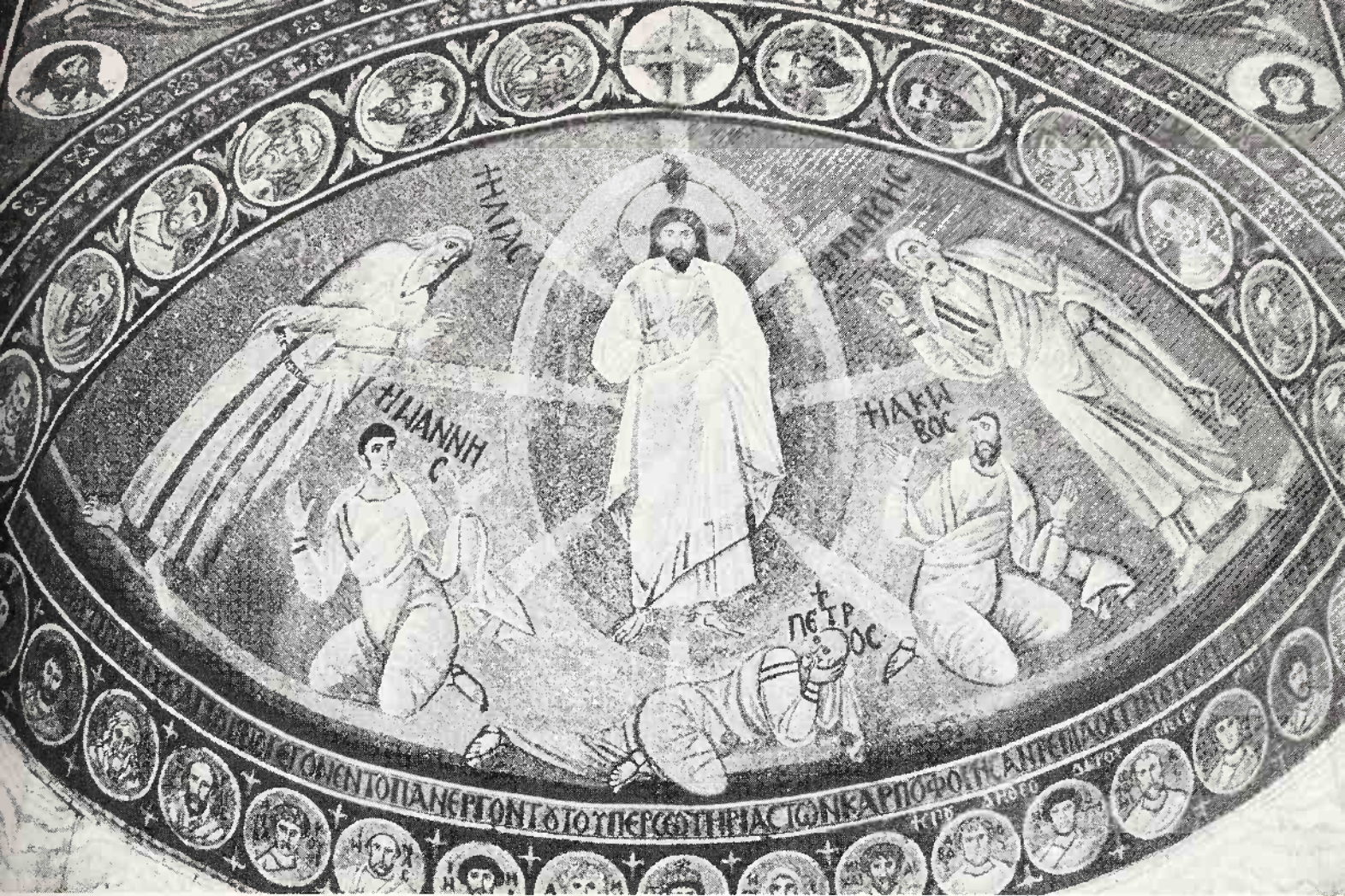
BELOW RIGHT Piazza San Marco, Venice, one of the two 'Pilastri Acritani' from St Polyeuctus, Constantinople, *c.* 524-7 AD.

The style of architectural sculpture underwent a radical change in the early years of the sixth century. The acanthus capital of Corinthian or composite form gave way to the impost capital with surface decoration of a highly fanciful character. This is one instance of a deliberate rejection of the classical tradition.





St Sophia, Istanbul, interior, 532–7 AD. The greatest of Byzantine churches, St Sophia combines elements of the basilica with those of 'centralized' planning, the latter clearly predominating. The mighty dome, rebuilt several times, produces an impression of overwhelming grandeur.



ABOVE Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai, Transfiguration mosaic, 550–1 or 565–6 AD.

BELOW San Vitale, Ravenna, Abraham's Hospitality and the Sacrifice of Isaac, 540–7 AD.

Both are narrative compositions, but whereas the artist of San Vitale clings to a tradition of naturalism, that of Mount Sinai has eliminated all traces of a natural setting in favour of an abstract effect.

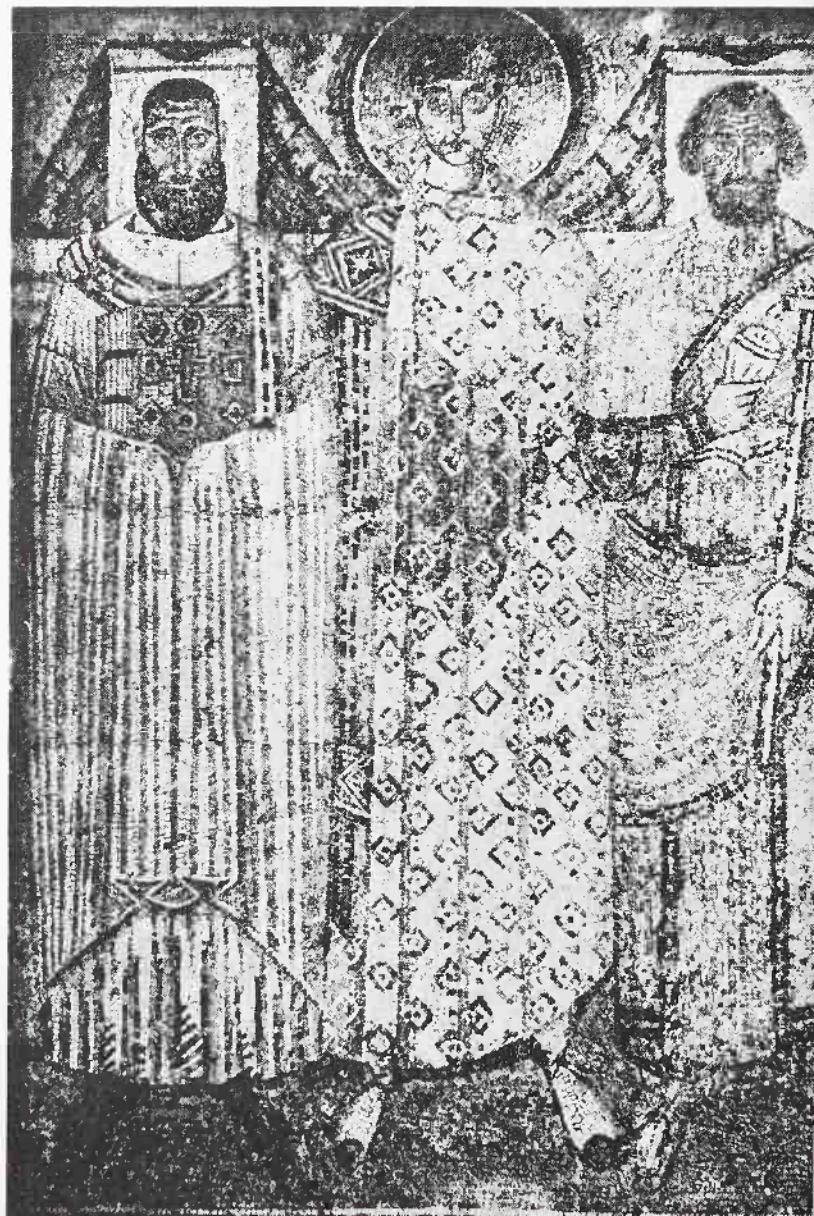




LEFT Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai, icon of the Virgin and Saints, sixth or seventh century.

The icon sought to bring the worshipper into immediate contact with the realm of the saints who were represented in a hieratic and immobile pose.

BELOW St Demetrius, Thessalonica, mosaic of St Demetrius and Donors, seventh century.



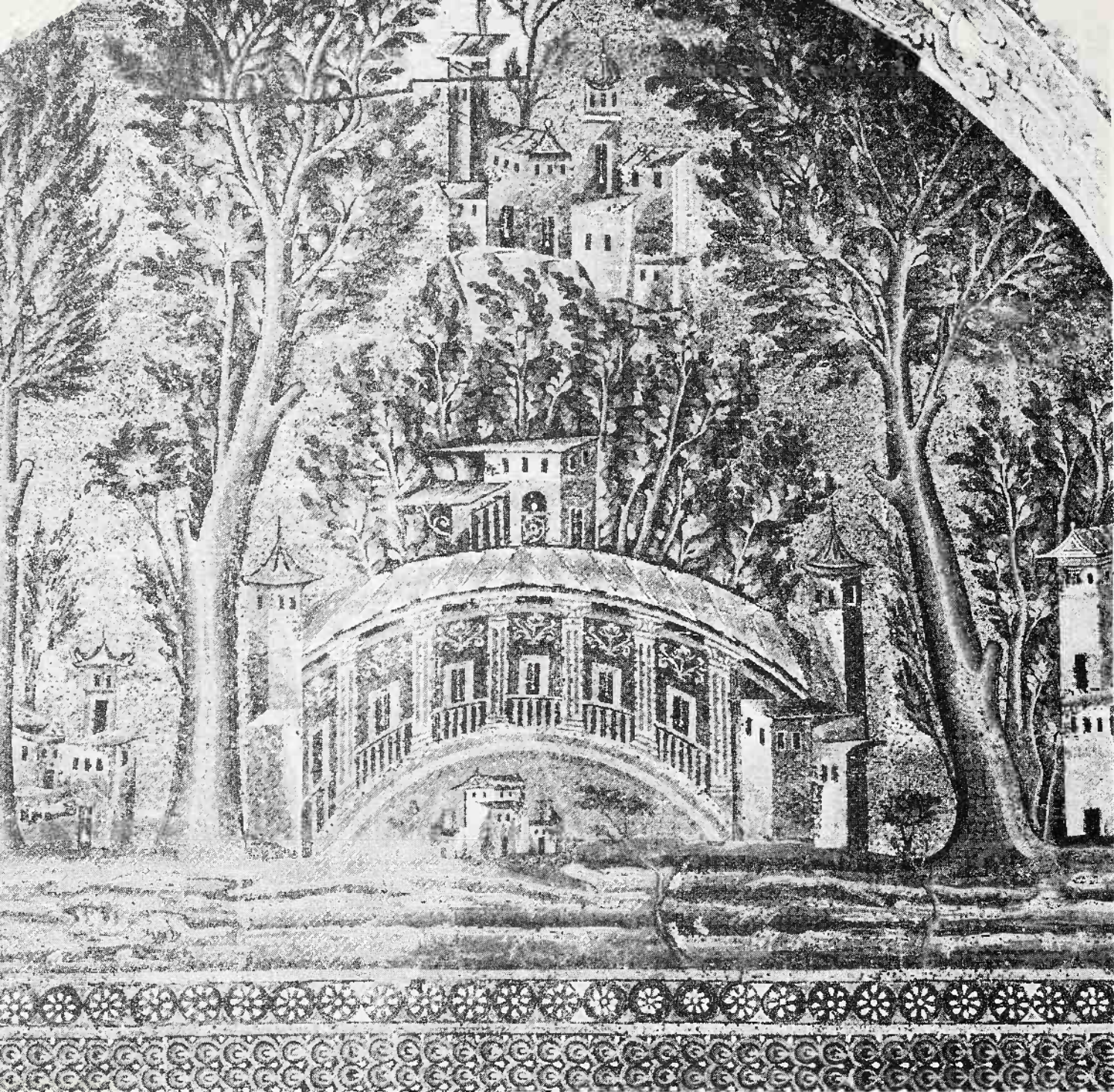


ABOVE Great Palace pavement, Istanbul, perhaps of the late sixth century.

BELOW Leningrad, Hermitage Museum, plate with maenad, 613–30 AD.

The survival, until the middle of the seventh century, of a repertory of classical, even pagan, subject-matter is apparent in luxury goods, especially silver vessels, many of which are dated by the hallmarks they bear.





ABOVE Great Mosque, Damascus, mosaic in courtyard, 705–12 AD.



LEFT St Sophia, Istanbul, mosaics of south-west room of gallery (*rinseau* of the late sixth century and cross of c. 769 AD).

The non-figural mosaics of the Damascus mosque give us some inkling of the art that was probably practised under the Iconoclastic emperors who banned religious representations.



ABOVE St Irene, Istanbul, mosaic cross in apse, after 740 AD.

RIGHT Church of the Dormition (destroyed) at Iznik (Nicaea), mosaic in apse (Virgin Mary of the ninth century replacing a cross of the Iconoclastic period).

The Iconoclasts laid emphasis on the cult of the cross which they substituted for images of saints. The cross in St Irene is one of the few remaining works of this period that survived the redecoration of churches after 843 AD.





OPPOSITE St Sophia,
Istanbul, mosaic of the
Virgin in apse, 867 AD.
This is the first major
figural mosaic to have
been put up in St Sophia
after the liquidation of
Iconoclasm.



ABOVE Church of the Myrelaion (Bodrum Camii),
Istanbul, exterior, c. 930 AD.

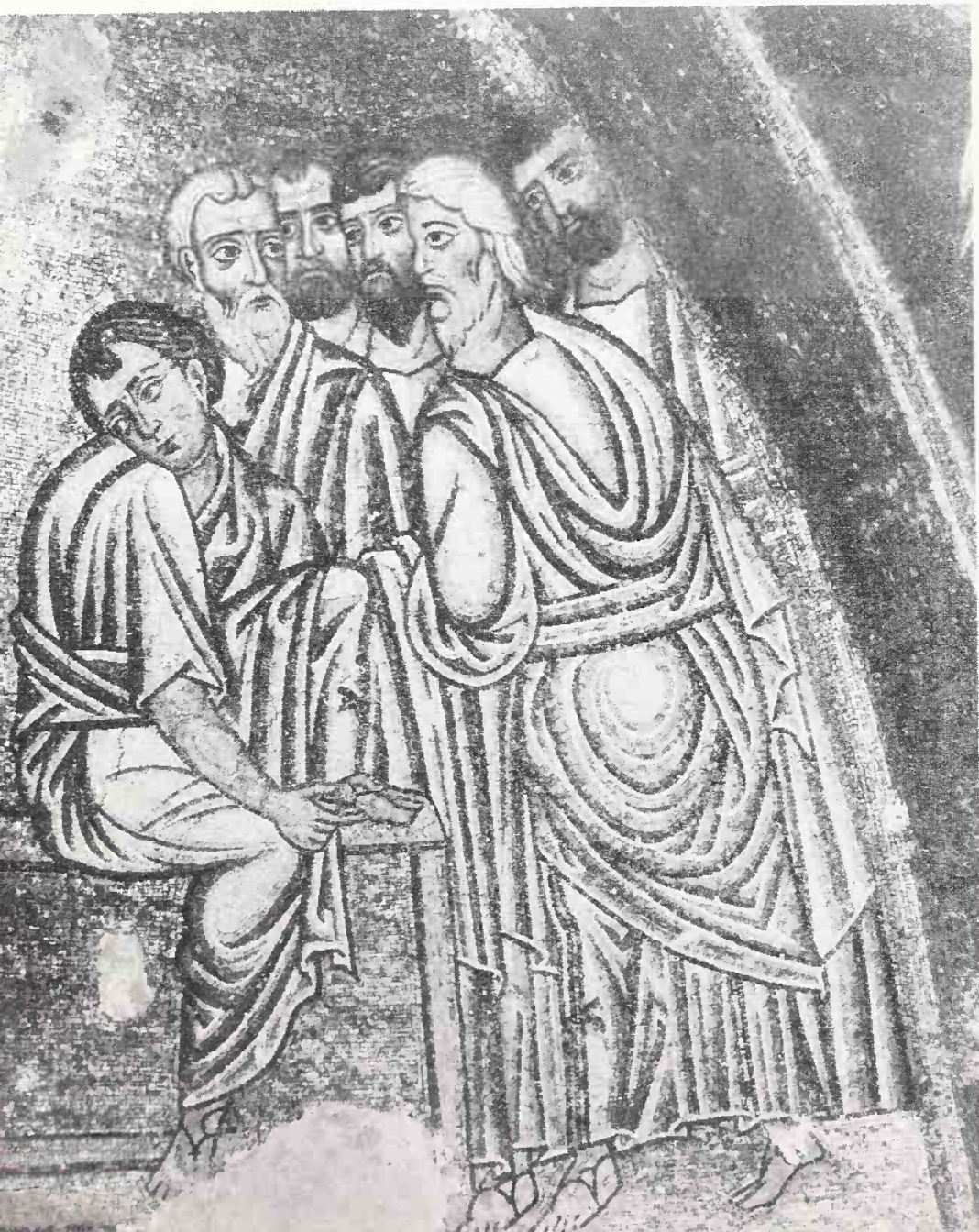
BELOW Church of St Panteleimon, Nerezi, near Skopje,
1164 AD.

Byzantine churches of
the Middle period were
of relatively small size
and elaborately
decorated inside, while
the exterior was left
fairly plain. A central
dome was almost *de
rigueur*, and often there
were as many as five.

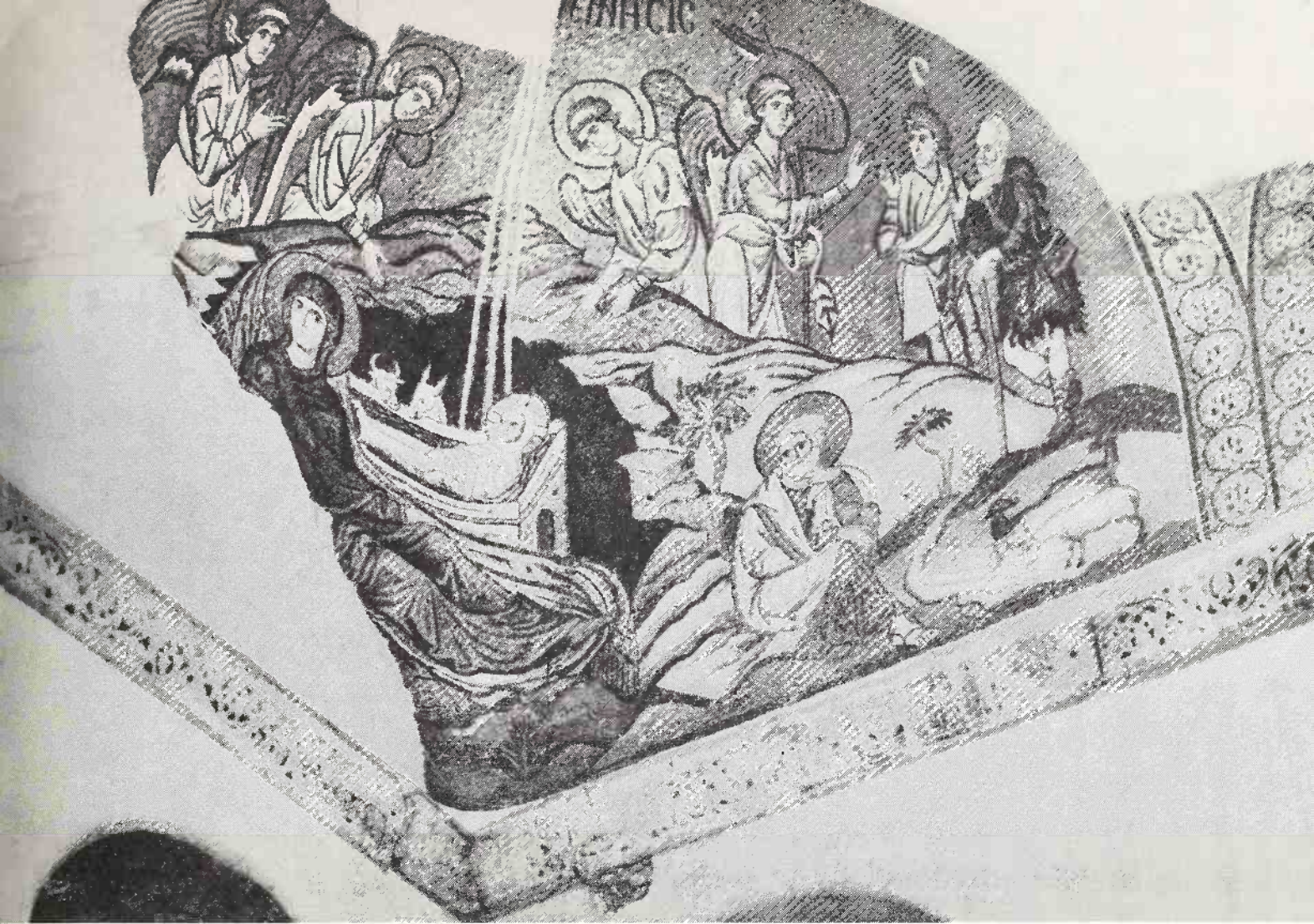




ABOVE Hosios Loukas, Phocis, Greece, mosaic of the Anastasis in narthex, first half of eleventh century.



LEFT Hosios Loukas, mosaic of the Washing of the Feet in narthex, first half of eleventh century.



ABOVE Daphni, near Eleusis, Greece, mosaic of the Nativity, end of eleventh century.

The artistic development of the eleventh century may be gauged from a comparison of these two famous monuments. The brutal schematism of Hosios Loukas yields to a more 'humanistic' style which, nevertheless, adheres to Byzantine conventions of perspective and relative scale.



Vatican Library, Cod. Reg. Gr. 1 (the Leo Bible), the Anointing of David, c. 945 AD. The artistic movement that has been called with some exaggeration the Macedonian Renaissance manifested itself in the reproduction of Late Antique or Early Byzantine models in luxury products.



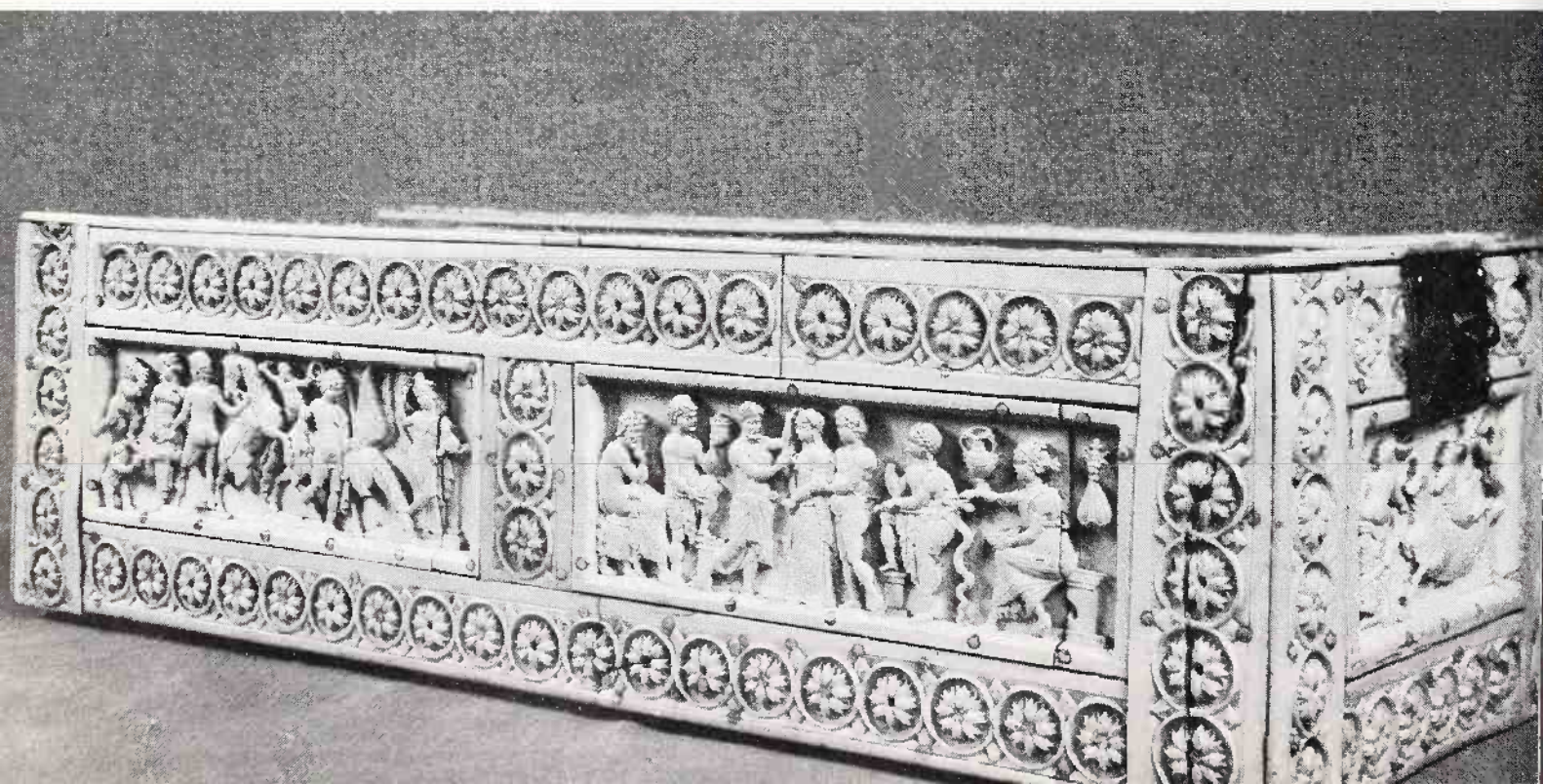
Museo Archeologico, Venice, ivory of St John and St Paul, tenth century.



As in the field of manuscript illumination, the impact of the Macedonian Renaissance on ivory carving is most noticeable in works of a religious nature. Despite its mythological subject-matter, the Veroli casket falls short of recapturing a classical style.

ABOVE Ehemals Staatliche Museen, Berlin-Dahlem, ivory of the Forty Martyrs, tenth century.

BELOW Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Veroli casket, tenth or early eleventh century.





ABOVE St Sophia, Ohrid, the Apostles of the Ascension, *c.* 1040 AD.

BELOW St Panteleimon, Nerezi, near Skopje, the Deposition from the Cross, 1164 AD.

Liberating itself from the imitation of earlier styles, Byzantine painting found its distinctive idiom in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.





LEFT Kurbinovo on Lake Prespa, Yugoslavia, Angel of Annunciation, 1191 AD.

BELOW Panagia tou Arakos, Lagoudera, Cyprus, Angel of Annunciation, 1192 AD.

The last phase of Byzantine painting before the conquest of Constantinople by the Crusaders was marked by an exaggerated mannerism which became almost grotesque in the hands of provincial artists.





ABOVE Monastery of St Catherine, Mount Sinai, Annunciation icon, late twelfth century.



Sopoćani, Yugoslavia, the Dormition of the Virgin, *c.* 1265 AD. The classical monumentality achieved in the best work of the mid-thirteenth century soon gave way to a more expressive, yet fussier and more crowded manner.



Kariye Camii (Christ of the Chora), Istanbul, the Virgin entrusted to Joseph, *c.* 1315–21 AD. By the first quarter of the fourteenth century Palaeologan painting had already passed its peak and was moving into a mannerist phase, seen at its most elegant in the mosaics and frescoes of the Kariye Camii.

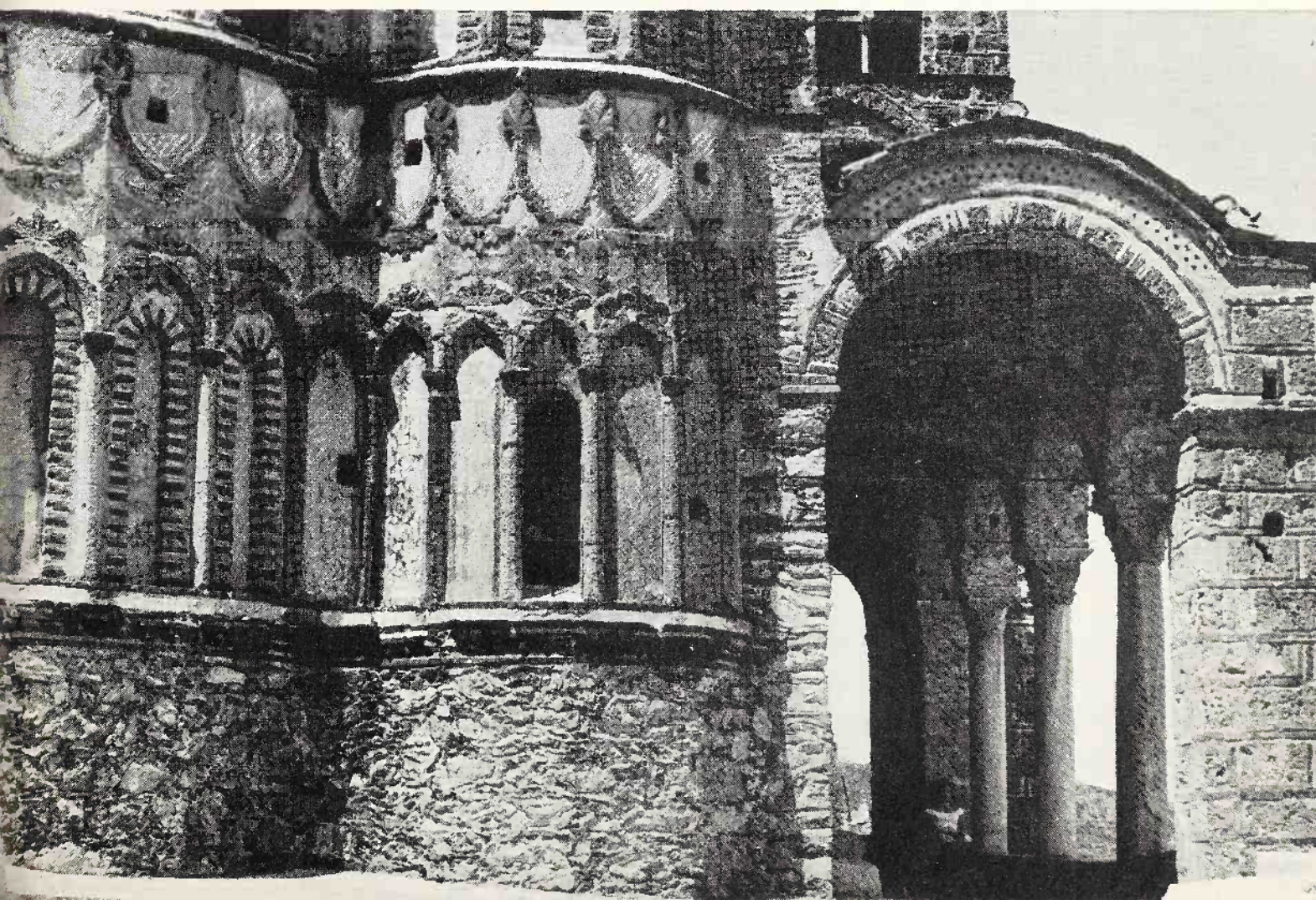


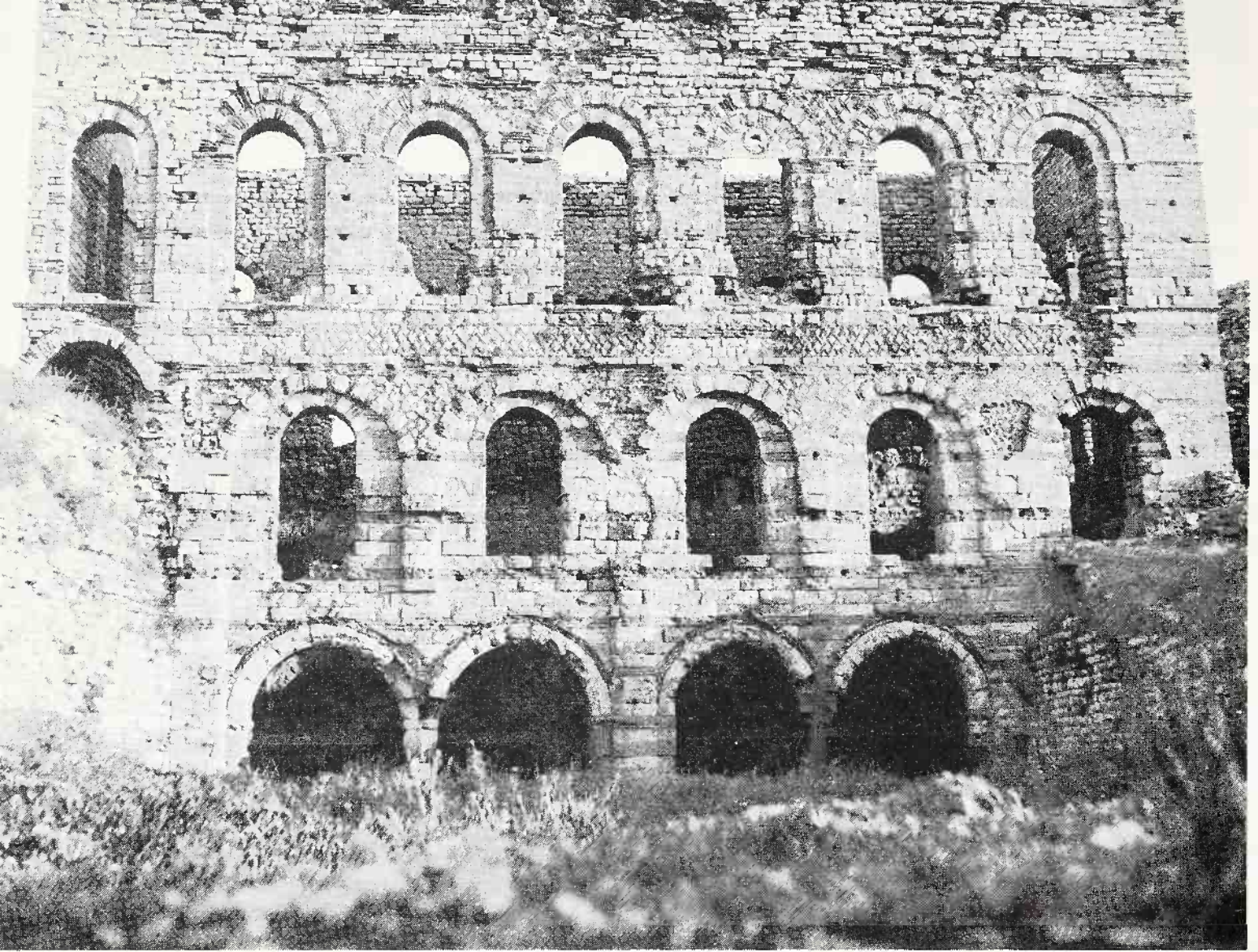
Peribleptos, Mistra, the Entry into Jerusalem, late fourteenth century. Byzantine painting of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries appears very backward by Italian standards. It was, nevertheless, developing towards a greater awareness of natural detail when it was interrupted by the Turkish conquest.

ABOVE OPPOSITE Church of St Catherine, Thessalonica, late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

BELOW OPPOSITE Church of Pantanassa, Mistra, detail of east side, 1428 AD.

The ecclesiastical architecture of the Palaeologan period strove, on a small scale, to achieve elegant and picturesque effects through extensive use of arcading, brickwork arranged in decorative patterns, and even carving of foreign inspiration.





ABOVE Tekfur Sarayı (Palace of the Porphyrogenitus), Istanbul, late thirteenth century.

BELOW Palace of the Despots, Mistra, thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.

The few remaining palace structures of the Palaeologan period show a clear debt to the West, especially to Italy.



distant lands. They also carried their own expertise abroad in undertaking such major projects as St Sophia at Kiev and the rebuilding of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem.

We have already indicated some of the salient features of the painting of this period without, perhaps, sufficiently stressing its stylistic originality. Work of the ninth and tenth centuries often looks as if it had been reproduced from much earlier models without any creative transformation, whereas that of the eleventh century has more of a distinctive stamp. It has moved away from classicism towards a calligraphic and two-dimensional approach that is sometimes decorative and elegant (as in many illuminated manuscripts), at other times forceful and severe. The line rather than modelling plays an increasingly important part. Drapery sometimes assumes a life of its own with a turbulence that is not justified by the motion of the figure. Eddies of concentric folds are applied to the chest and buttocks and the end of the *chlamys* often flutters as if it were swept by a strong wind. While it is not easy to arrange the surviving works in a strict evolutionary sequence, it may be said that a pictorial *koinê* was elaborated during this period, a kind of vernacular that Byzantine artists understood and used over a large geographical area.

The middle of the twelfth century marks another turning point and the beginning of a more rapid development of Byzantine painting. The new tendencies may be seen in the decoration of Nerezi, dated 1164, in Yugoslav Macedonia. This is work of the highest quality commissioned by a member of the imperial family – Alexius Comnenus, grandson of the Emperor Alexius I. The frescoes of Nerezi are highly stylized, yet charged with a dramatic intensity. We notice here certain phenomena that were to be continued and exaggerated in the next half-century: agitation of drapery that tends to form serpentine folds, composition of figures in terms of groups (as in the Deposition from the Cross, where the Virgin and John the Evangelist bend forward to uphold Christ's drooping body, thus forming a kind of arch), and a device whereby human figures are enclosed within the outline of hills which echo the shapes of the bodies (as in the Lamentation and the Transfiguration). The next stage of evolution, marked by a growing turbulence of movement and drapery, unification of compositions, and an increased emphasis on architectural backdrops, may be seen in the vast mosaic ensemble of Monreale, executed in the seventies and eighties of the twelfth century by an atelier that was in touch with the latest trends at Constantinople. And so we are brought to the last stage of Byzantine

painting before 1204, represented for us by a number of small provincial churches: Kurbinovo on Lake Prespa (1191), the Anargyroi at Kastoria (undated), and Lagoudera in Cyprus (1192). A beautiful icon of the Annunciation on Mount Sinai exemplifies the same style with greater elegance, and may, therefore, have been made at Constantinople. The style in question is truly *fin de siècle*: the figures, elongated and contorted, are covered with a welter of serpentine folds, and, at times, a web of gold striations. At Lagoudera, complex architectural forms are used for backdrops, although their rendering remains two-dimensional. The Sinai icon exhibits, rather surprisingly, a stream flowing in the foreground: its waters are inhabited by herons, ducks, fish and octopi, all drawn at an absurdly small scale as compared to the human figures, but showing nevertheless a new interest in picturesque detail.

The impression, suggested by the above monuments, of an artistic upheaval between about 1150 and 1200 is confirmed from other sources. 'Major' sculpture, which had been in abeyance for several centuries, appears to have been revived or, at any rate, some thought was given to reviving it: the Emperor Andronicus I, we are told, was about to set up his own statue in bronze when he was toppled from the throne.¹² The range of secular art was enlarged: the canonist Balsamon (died c. 1195) reports that rich men had in their houses pictures of erotic subjects and figural carvings in stucco.¹³ Most significant of all was the emergence of the artist as an individual. The foremost painter of this period was one Eulalios who took part in the redecoration of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople, and is said to have included his own portrait, dressed in his everyday costume, in a representation of the Women at the Sepulchre¹⁴ – an altogether amazing liberty by Byzantine standards. Two other painters named Chênaros and Chartoularis enjoyed favour at court.¹⁵ In 1200 the Russian pilgrim Antony of Novgorod mentions a contemporary painter of great talent, a certain Paul who was responsible for an elaborate rendering of Christ's Baptism in St Sophia.¹⁶ It is also in the same half-century that painters' 'signatures' (inscriptions in which the painter is named) begin to appear in monumental art. The earliest instance, if we are not mistaken, is in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem where in 1169 a new set of mosaics was made by the artists Ephraem and Basil. In 1183 one Theodore Apseudes signed the wall-paintings in the hermitage of St Neophytus in Cyprus. Though always exceptional, painters' signatures become relatively more frequent from this time onwards.

The history of Byzantine art in the thirteenth century and, more particularly, in the period 1204–61, has not yet been satisfactorily unravelled. We may suppose that a great number of artists fled from Constantinople and found employment at various Orthodox courts: in the first instance at the Greek courts of Nicaea, Trebizond and Arta, perhaps also at the Serbian and Bulgarian courts. It is a great pity that we should know nothing definite about the art of Nicaea which was the centre of the most dynamic of the three Greek principalities and has, therefore, a strong claim to have played a leading role in artistic development. Some light on this topic may possibly be cast if the blackened paintings in the ruined church of St Sophia at Nicaea are ever cleaned. All we can say at present is that the most remarkable monuments of thirteenth-century Byzantine painting are situated in Yugoslavia – we are referring in particular to Mileševo (*c.* 1230–6) and Sopoćani (*c.* 1265). Unfortunately, we know nothing of the truly great artists who decorated these two churches. In both cases an unusual attempt has been made to imitate mosaics in paint for, instead of the normal blue backgrounds, we find yellow backgrounds (originally gilded) covered with a fine grid of dark lines. The style of these two decorations, while showing some contact with Early Christian models, is particularly remarkable for its sense of volume. Human figures, especially at Sopoćani, are statuesque and are placed in front of architectural backgrounds seen in three-quarter view – houses, exedras, colonnades, with pieces of drapery looped round columns or extended from one structure to another, in other words forms traceable to the art of Late Antiquity. The same tendencies are also apparent in the recently cleaned frescoes of St Sophia at Trebizond (*c.* 1250), thus showing that we have before us a phenomenon not confined to Serbia, but common to the whole Byzantine world.

The last creative effort of Byzantine art is represented by Palaeologan painting which, foreshadowed as it is at Sopoćani, makes its appearance almost simultaneously with the recovery of Constantinople from the Latins (1261). The radiation of this style, though not as wide as that of the Comnenian, was nevertheless considerable: it is found throughout the Balkans, in parts of Asia Minor and, at a somewhat later date, in Russia. This is clear evidence of the cultural prestige enjoyed by Byzantium even at a time of profound political weakness.

The most famous example of the Palaeologan style is offered by the mosaics and frescoes of St Saviour in the Chora (Kariye Camii) at Constantinople, executed in *c.* 1315–21 at the behest of Theodore

Metochites, Finance Minister and later Prime Minister of the Emperor Andronicus II. This monument may serve, therefore, to define the characteristics of the new art. What strikes us first of all – and this applies to all Palaeologan churches – is the multiplication of pictures and their small scale. Compared to Byzantine art of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the narrative element has been greatly increased. At Kariye Camii we have in the two nartheces alone (the decoration of the nave has almost completely disappeared) a cycle devoted to the life of the Virgin which originally consisted of twenty episodes, a cycle of the infancy of Christ in fourteen episodes, and a cycle of the ministry of Christ which consisted of at least thirty-two scenes. Since we are dealing here with a fairly small space, the general effect is one of extreme pictorial overcrowding. In other Palaeologan decorations, such as that of Dečani (*c.* 1348) in Serbia, the number of scenes is even greater: one has the impression that all the walls are crawling with figures.

The effect of overcrowding is further increased by the fact that the backgrounds of all narrative compositions, instead of being left relatively plain, have been encumbered with a variety of architectural forms. This produces a certain illusion of depth, but the handling of the third dimension is always contradictory and, to our eyes, confusing. As a rule, the action takes place on a kind of narrow stage which is delimited at the back by a wall having a number of projecting wings or pavilions. Instead of there being a single point of vision, however, there are usually several: in the same picture one building may be seen from above and another from below, one from the right and another from the left. Nor is an attempt ever made to produce an illusion of interior space as Duccio and Giotto had done a few years before the execution of the Kariye Camii decoration: even when a scene is meant to take place indoors, the ceiling is always omitted.

The 'theatre sets' of Palaeologan painting are peopled with elongated figures that tend to have very small heads and feet (the latter are often badly connected at the ankle), thick middles and swollen calves. They are wrapped in ample garments that fall or flutter in a cascade of folds usually terminating in a sharp tongue. While their anatomical structure is uncertain, the figures have considerable relief owing to the use of bright highlights. The colour scheme is very rich and often exhibits bold juxtapositions, such as of blue and purple. The expression of the faces is pensive, sweet and almost sentimental: the sternness of earlier Byzantine painting has disappeared.

When the mosaics of the Kariye Camii first attracted the attention of specialists, about a hundred years ago, they could be compared only to the works of Cavallini, Giotto and Duccio. A little later the similar church decorations of Mistra came to be known, and so there arose the question of *Orient ou Occident?* – of the relative priority of the Italian and Byzantine Renaissances, a question on which a great deal of ink has been spilt. Today, the number of Palaeologan decorations available to study is very large indeed, and many of them are considerably earlier than the Kariye Camii, which is seen as representing a somewhat academic and decadent phase of the style. The relationship of Palaeologan painting, which we now recognize as being of indigenous growth, to that of Italy remains elusive, and while we can speak of a general parallelism between the two, the number of specific borrowings made by Byzantine painters from the West is remarkably small. This is not surprising when we remember that this period in Byzantium was dominated by hostility towards the Latins and Roman Catholicism. Instead of turning to the West, Byzantine painters went back to their own past and found models, largely, it would seem, among the classicizing manuscripts of the tenth century which were themselves copies of much earlier manuscripts of the fifth and sixth centuries. To speak, therefore, of a Palaeologan Renaissance is rather misleading in that the term ‘renaissance’ implies an enlargement of horizons and a liberation of the spirit, whereas Palaeologan art bespeaks an antiquarian involution.

The manner of the first half of the fourteenth century was capable of further development. It could move in the direction of a more intense spiritualization, as it did in the work of that supremely great master, Theophanes the Greek, who was active at Novgorod and Moscow between 1378 and 1405; or it could move towards greater ‘laicization’ by absorbing details of contemporary life and costume, by making compositions more picturesque, as in the charming frescoes of Ravanica (c. 1375–85) and Manasija (1406–18) in Serbia and those of the Peribleptos (late fourteenth-century) and Pantanassa (1428–45) at Mistra. The political collapse of Byzantium prevented, however, either of these promising trends from further development on home ground. It was now in Russia that the Byzantine artistic heritage, transformed by a different intuition, was to bear its richest fruit, while in Venetian-occupied Crete it was blended with the Italian Renaissance and Mannerism.

The architecture of the Palaeologan period, though not as significant

as the painting, has considerable charm of its own. Here the debt to the West is at times more noticeable. The Parigoritissa at Arta (c. 1290) has the appearance of an Italian palazzo and contains carved archivolt in a manner that is purely western. A number of secular buildings, such as the so-called Tekfur Saray at Istanbul (late thirteenth century), the palaces of Mistra and Trebizond, have the same cubic, multi-storeyed form, and the latter two have ogival windows. The majority of Palaeologan churches are, however, in a purely Byzantine tradition. They are distinguished by their tall silhouettes, by the breaking up of surface planes and by an extravagant use of exterior ornament: the Church of the Holy Apostles at Thessalonica (c. 1315) is a good example of this. In fact, the exteriors are rather more arresting than the interiors which, because of the added height, do not convey that impression of a unitary vaulted space – the celestial canopy of earlier Byzantine churches. Looking into the dome of a Palaeologan church is like looking into an inverted pit. And so the relation that had prevailed in earlier centuries between architecture and painted decoration has been finally disrupted: on the part of the architecture, because the ceiling and the upper parts of the walls are seen at too steep an angle; on the part of the painting, because each picture has become an entity in itself.

To conclude this rapid survey of Byzantine art, we may be allowed a few general reflections. Undoubtedly, our view of this art is very fragmentary and unbalanced. If more of its secular *oeuvre* had been preserved, we would surely have found greater variety and openness to influences from outside. We are told, for example, that the Emperor Theophilus was so enchanted with reports he had heard of the palaces of Baghdad that he strove to imitate them;¹⁷ and that a hall in the Seljuq style, complete with stalactites and glazed tiles, was erected in the imperial palace in the mid-twelfth century.¹⁸ And speaking of glazed tiles, it is only in the past forty or fifty years that their extensive use in Byzantine wall decoration has come to be acknowledged, though we still have some trouble in visualizing the intended effect. There was also much movement of imported objects, such as Islamic metalwork, silks and rock crystal, that certainly exerted some influence on Byzantine taste. In fact, in some of the minor arts, including textiles and pottery, it is often very difficult to distinguish Byzantine from other Near Eastern products.

Limited as we largely are to the conservative sphere of Byzantine religious art, and prejudiced as we are by our admiration for classical

Antiquity, we are apt to lay too much stress on the antique tradition. We have tried to suggest that just as Byzantine writers had no real comprehension of ancient Greek literature, so Byzantine artists had no interest in classical art of the pagan period, either Greek or Roman. What they knew of Antiquity filtered down to them through the canon of biblical and hagiographic illustration and they repeatedly reverted to early exemplars of it. In so doing, however, Byzantine artists of the Middle Ages could not help paraphrasing the models they imitated, and it is in this selective paraphrase that much of the beauty of Byzantine art resides. Whereas Early Christian art tended to be ostentatious and, if judged by classical standards, incompetent, Byzantine art infused into the old forms its distinctive spirituality and elegance. It forsook naturalism without falling into total abstraction and always retained a certain understanding of the draped human figure. It took over a tradition of bright polychromy and turned it into a palette of superb richness and harmony that was later inherited by the Venetians. To be sure, it was an art of clichés, but its primary function was to express a message that never varied: the timeless re-enactment of the Christian drama, the presence of the Heavenly Kingdom, the mediation of the saints. Within these limits it succeeded admirably.

APPENDIX. CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF BYZANTINE EMPERORS

Constantine I (sole rule)	324-37	Justinian II (again)	705-11
Constantius II	337-61	Philippicus	711-13
Julian	361-3	Anastasius II	713-15
Jovian	363-4	Theodosius III	715-16
Valens	364-78	Leo III	716-40
Theodosius I	379-95	Constantine V	740-75
Arcadius	395-408	Leo IV	775-80
Theodosius II	408-50	Constantine VI	780-90
Marcian	450-7	Irene	790
Leo I	457-74	Constantine VI (again)	790-7
Leo II	474	Irene (again)	797-802
Zeno	474-5	Nicephorus I	802-11
Basiliscus	475-6	Stauracius	811
Zeno (again)	476-91	Michael I Rhangabe	811-13
Anastasius I	491-518	Leo V	813-20
Justin I	518-27	Michael II	820-9
Justinian I	527-65	Theophilus	829-42
Justin II	565-78	Michael III	842-67
Tiberius I Constantine	578-82	Basil I	867-86
Maurice	582-602	Leo VI	886-912
Phocas	602-10	Alexander	912-13
Heraclius	610-41	Constantine VII	913-59
Constantine III and Heraclonas	641	Romanus I Lecapenus	920-44
Constans II	641-68	Romanus II	959-63
Constantine IV	668-85	Nicephorus II Phocas	963-9
Justinian II	685-95	John I Tzimiskes	969-76
Leontius	695-8	Basil II	976-1025
Tiberius II	698-705	Constantine VIII	1025-8
		Romanus III Argyrus	1028-34
		Michael IV	1034-41

APPENDIX

Michael v	1041-2	<i>At Nicaea</i>	
Zoe and Theodora	1042	Theodore I Lascaris	1204-22
Constantine ix		John III Ducas	
Monomachus	1042-55	Vatatzes	1222-54
Theodora (again)	1055-6	Theodore II Lascaris	1254-8
Michael vi	1056-7	John IV Lascaris	1258-61
Isaac I Comnenus	1057-9		
Constantine x Ducas	1059-67	Michael VIII	
Romanus IV Diogenes	1068-71	Palaeologus	1258-82
Michael VII Ducas	1071-8	Andronicus II	
Nicephorus III		Palaeologus	1282-1328
Botaneiates	1078-81	Andronicus III	
Alexius I Comnenus	1081-1118	Palaeologus	1328-41
John II Comnenus	1118-43	John V Palaeologus	1341-91
Manuel I Comnenus	1143-80	John VI Cantacuzenus	1347-55
Alexius II Comnenus	1180-3	Andronicus IV	
Andronicus I Comnenus	1183-5	Palaeologus	1376-9
Isaac II Angelus	1185-95	John VII Palaeologus	1390
Alexius III Angelus	1195-1203	Manuel II Palaeologus	1391-1425
Isaac II (again) and		John VIII Palaeologus	1425-48
Alexius IV Angelus	1203-04	Constantine XI	
Alexius V Murtzuphlus	1204	Palaeologus	1449-53

ABBREVIATIONS IN THE NOTES

<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>Cod. Just.</i>	<i>Codex Justinianus</i> , ed. P. Krueger = <i>Corpus iuris civilis</i> , ii (Berlin, 1929)
<i>Cod. Theod.</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i> , ed. Th. Mommsen (Berlin, 1905). English trans. by C. Pharr, <i>The Theodosian Code</i> (Princeton, 1952)
<i>CSHB</i>	<i>Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae</i> (Bonn, 1828-97)
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>Joannou, Discipline</i>	P.-P. Joannou, <i>Discipline générale antique (IV^e-IX^e s.)</i> , i/1, i/2 (Grottaferrata, 1962)
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>Just. Nov.</i>	<i>Justiniani Novellae</i> , ed. R. Schoell and W. Kroll = <i>Corpus iuris civilis</i> , iii (Berlin, 1928)
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia graeca</i> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1857-66)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia latina</i> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1844-80)
<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia orientalis</i> (Paris, 1907-)
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i>
<i>ROC</i>	<i>Revue de l'Orient chrétien</i>
<i>TM</i>	Centre de Recherche d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, <i>Travaux et mémoires</i>
<i>Zepos, Jus</i>	J. and P. Zepos, <i>Jus graeco-romanum</i> (Athens, 1931)

NOTES

CHAPTER I PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES

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- 24 *Ibid.*, A.M. 6180, 6184, pp. 364–6.
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CHAPTER 2 SOCIETY AND ECONOMY

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CHAPTER 4 DISSENTERS

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CHAPTER 5 MONASTICISM

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CHAPTER 7 THE INVISIBLE WORLD OF GOOD AND EVIL

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CHAPTER I PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES

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INDEX

- Abasgians, the, 17
Acathist Hymn, 131-2
actors, 63-4, 65
administration: civil, 34-5;
imperial, 36; military, 34;
municipal, 35; provincial, 34-46
Aetius, heretic, 45
Agathias, historian, 34, 244
agriculture, 43
Alexandria: Church of, 37-8;
School of, 128, 134
Alexius I Comnenus, Emperor, 53,
58, 59, 83, 102
Anastasian Long Walls, the, 25
Anastasius I, Emperor, 39, 40, 62,
89, 96, 203-4
Ancyra, 17, 72, 81
Andrew the Fool, St, 208-11
Andronicus I Comnenus, Emperor,
276
Andronicus II Palaeologus,
Emperor, 251
angels, 154-5
animals, 177-9
Anna Comnena, historian, 29, 242
Antioch in Syria, 17, 18, 38, 39, 62,
96, 128
Antioch in Pisidia, 17
Antony, St, 106-7, 108; Life of,
105, 164, 247-8; on demons,
163; on education, 131
Apocalypse, visions of, 204-11,
214-16
Arabs, the, 1, 4, 19-20, 78, 207
Aramaic (language), 18, 19
archaeology, 4, 6, 7, 38, 43, 69, 81,
257
architecture: ecclesiastical, 258-81;
monastic, 118; remaining
examples of, 257-8; *see also under*
churches
archives, 5-6
Arethas, bishop of Caesarea, 140
Argives, the, 24
Arianism, 89
aristocracy, the, 56, 237; rise to
power of, 51-2; retinues of, 53
arithmetic, 127
Armenian (language), 27
Armenians, the, 15, 26, 29
army, the Byzantine, 26, 27, 49,
52; Constantine's reforms of, 34;
in society, 33-4; hierarchy and
administration of, 34;
recruitment to, 34; reform of,
under Heraclius, 46; size of, 34
Artemius, St, 78, 79, 158-9
art, Byzantine: development of,
256-81; frescoes, 265;
iconography, 259-60, 267; icons,
belief in, 98, 264, 268; influence
of, 274; 'Macedonian

- art, Byzantine (*contd*)
 'Renaissance' in, 272; manuscript illumination, 272; mosaics, 263, 265, 269-72; painting, style in, 275, 277-8; painters, 276; 'Palaeologan Renaissance' in, 272; perspective in, 271-2; representation in, 264; *see also* Iconoclasm
 ascetics, *see* monks
 Asia Minor, 1, 5, 6, 25, 26, 42, 76, 81; languages, 17, 27; decline of cities in, 71-2; great families in, 50; reform of administration in, 46
 astrology, 143, 171
 astronomy, 127
 Athanasius, St, 108-9, 247
 Athens, 25, 70, 135
 Augustine, St, 21
 Avars, the, 24, 77, 97-8

 Balkans, the, 5, 6, 13, 24, 25, 42; heretics in, 97-8; invaded by Slavs, 24-5; population of, 23; urban life in, 65-6, 69-70
 Barsymes, Peter, 95
 Basil I, Emperor, 28, 48, 81, 82
 Basil II, Emperor, 57, 116, 245
 Basil, St, 109, 110, 240; and community in Pontus, 110; *Hexaëmeron*, 123, 169-71; *The Longer Rules*, 110; *The Shorter Rules*, 110
 beggars, 41, 64
 Benjamin of Tudela, 93
 Berbers, the, 20, 21
 Berytus, 42, 135
 Bessic (language), 21, 22, 23
 Bethlehem, 109
 bishops, 36; civil duties of, 36; hierarchical position of, 221; laymen appointed as, 36; provincial, 49; wealth of, 38; *see also* individual bishops
 Bithynia, 26, 27, 29, 48, 71, 118
 Black Sea, the, 5, 17
 Blemmyes, the, 20
 Bogomilism, 101, 102, 103
Book of the Prefect, The, 55-6
 books, 131, 238; *see also under* literature and individual titles
 budget, State, 44
 buildings, 74, 81, 260, 280; baths, 63; hippodromes, 64; houses, 81; later destruction of, 257; monuments, 60; public, 60, 62; religious, *see* churches; monasteries; and temples, pagan; theatres, 63-4; *see also* architecture; art
 Bulgaria, 28, 55, 98
 Bulgars, the, 22, 25
 bureaucracy, 44
 Byzacena, 21
 Byzantium, Empire of, defined, 13-31

 Caesarea in Cappadocia, 17
 Caesarius (pseudo-), *Dialogues*, 173-4
 Calabria, 24
 calendars, 192-3
 Cappadocia, 26, 27; language of, 17
 Caucasians, the, 17
 Cecaumenus, 53-4, 58; *Strategicon*, 7, 82
 celestial hierarchy, the, 154
 Christianity, 4, 13, 28, 29, 31; and angels, 154-5; and Divine Providence, 183-5, 199; and education, 131-4; and history, 195-200; and saints, 155-9; and theories of creation, 166-76; doctrine of, 88-9; Egyptian, 20;

- spread of, 185–7; Virgin Mary in, 155
- chronicles, Byzantine, 190–200; *see also* individual authors and titles
- chronology, 189–200; Christian, 191–200; classical, 191; Jewish, 191
- Chrysostom, St John, 41, 43, 240–3; on creation, 171; on education, 132–3; on the theatre, 63–4
- churches, 38, 59, 81, 82; Christian, from pagan temples, 61; decoration of, 259; design of, 259–79; in Constantinople, 75, 81; private chapels, 82; St Artemius, Constantinople, 78, 79; St Costanza, Rome, 259; Daphni near Eleusis, 269, 271, 274; Holy Apostles, Constantinople, 268, 276, 280; Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, 275; Hosios Loukas, Greece, 269, 274; St Irene, Constantinople, 266; Kurbinovo, 276; Lagoudera, Cyprus, 276; S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, 259, 271; Mileševo, 277; Mistra, 279; Nea Ekklesia, Constantinople, 269; Nea Moni, Chios, 269, 274; Nerezi, Macedonia, 275; St Polyeuctus, Constantinople, 262; S. Pudenziana, Rome, 261; St Sergius and St Bacchus, Constantinople, 263, 268; St Sophia, Constantinople, 79, 262, 268, 269; St Sophia, Kiev, 275; St Sophia, Nicaea, 277; St Sophia, Thessalonica, 261, 269; St Sophia, Trebizond, 277; at Sopoćani, 277; Virgin Mary of the Source, Constantinople, 268; mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna, 261
- Church, the (Orthodox), 8, 16, 27, 30, 35, 49; administration of, 39; and cult of angels, 154–5; and demons, 159–65; and heretics, 100–1; and the theatre, 63–4; decline in the fortunes of, 49; donations to, 39; function in society of, 33, 36–9, 223, 228–9; influence of, on Early Christian art, 258, 259–81; redistribution of wealth by, 38–9; wealth of, 36–8
- cities, 60–72, 73, 74–87; *see also* buildings; urban life; and individual cities
- civil service, the, 34, 35
- clergy, the, 33, 39, 221; *see also* bishops
- commerce, *see* trade
- coinage, 39, 58, 72–3
- Constantine I (the Great), 5, 19, 74, 106
- Constantine IV, Emperor, 265
- Constantine V, Emperor, 79, 99, 136
- Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, Emperor, 50, 114, 141; *De administrando imperio*, 235; *Book of Ceremonies*, 235, 244; *Excerpta*, 254
- Constantine VIII, Emperor, 245
- Constantine IX, Emperor, 57, 245
- Constantine X, Emperor, 58
- Constantine Leichoudes, scholar, 142
- Constantinople, 1, 5, 6, 16–17, 38, 68; as new Jerusalem, 208; attacked by Persia, 25; buildings in, 74, 76; captured by Crusaders, 86–7; cathedral of, 39; churches in, 75, 78, 79 (*see*

- Constantinople (*contd*)
also under churches); decline of, 78–81; drought in, 80; education in, 141, 146; fall of, 212–13; Great Palace pavement at, 264–5; heretics in, 102; history of, 74–81; in Christian myths, 203; Jews in, 93; language in, 16–17; literature, 237–8; massacre of Latins at, 86; monasticism, 111–12; plague in, 68, 77, 79; population of, 62, 77; transfer of the True Cross to, 207–8; University of, 128, 129–31
- Constantius II, Emperor, 89, 129
 copper, 39, 57
 Coptic (language), 22, 23
 Corinth, 24, 25, 42, 71, 81
 Corippus, poet, 16
 corn, 77–8
 Cosmas Indicopleustes, 16, 42, 171, 180; *Christian Topography*, 174–5, 185–6
 Cosmas, monk, 151–3
 Cosmas, priest, 101
 cosmology, *see* universe, the
 court of God, the, 151–5
 craftsmen, 13, 41, 66
 Creation, the: and contemporary thinking, 168–76; biblical explanation of, 166–8; in chronology, 191, 192, 193
 Croats, the, 25
 Crusades, 5, 80
 Cyprus, 20, 26, 120–3
 Cyril, St, 28
 Cyzicus, Temple of Hadrian at, 274
- Daco-Mysians, the, 22
 Danelis of Patras, 48
 Daniel the Stylite, St, Life of, 20, 111–12
- Dara, 18, 40, 62
 death: beliefs about, 164–5; life after, 183–5
 decurions, the: duties and qualifications of, 35–6; income of, 40; taxation of, 43
 Demetrius of Thessalonica, St, 69, 157
 Diodorus of Tarsus, 181; on creation, 171–2
Division of the Earth, The, 182
 demonology, 143, 159–65, 186–7
 demons, *see* demonology
 Diocletian, Emperor, 44
 dissenters, 89–104
 Domitian, Emperor, 204
 Doukai, family of, 50–1
 dualism, 104
- earnings, *see* income
 economy, the, 39–45, 59
 Edessa (Urfa), 18, 30, 42, 66–7
 education: classical, 125–6, 131, 133, 137–41; collapse of system, 136–7; Patriarchal School, Constantinople, 146; religious, 131–48 (*Apostolic Constitutions*, 131; St Basil on, 133; St John Chrysostom on, 133; monastic, 148); scholars, 140–1, 142 (persecution of, 144–5); State, 128–33; structure of (primary, 125; secondary, 125–7, 141–7; higher, 127, 128, 131–41, 147; in society, 128, 129); *see also under* individual subjects
 Egeria, pilgrim, 19
 Egypt, 6, 42, 76; Church in, 37; conquered by Arabs and Persians, 25; crops in, 76–7; language in, 18, 20, 24
 Egyptians, the, 27
 Emesa (Homs), 16, 64–5

- emperors: authority and succession, 32; definition of ideal, 219; election of, 32; hierarchical position, 220-1; role in the Church, 220; rule compared with God's, 219-20
- Ephesus, 17, 71-2
- Epiphanius, St, 20; *Panarion*, 94
- Erechtheion, the, 61
- eschatology, 201, 203-11, 214-16
- Ethiopia, 206
- ethnography, 21, 22, 24
- Eulalios, painter, 276
- Eustathios Boilas, 54, 239-40
- Eustathius of Nicaea, 102
- Eustathius of Thessalonica, 119
- Evagrius, historian, 95-6
- excavations, archaeological, *see* archaeology
- exorcism, 160, 161-2
- Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, 16, 42
- family, the, 226-7
- farmers, 33, 34, 43, 65, 222
- Farmer's Law, 47
- feudalism, 53, 54
- Flood, the, in chronology, 194
- food, 76-7
- Gallus, Caesar, 45
- Gaul, 23
- Gaza, 42, 89
- geometry, 127, 144
- George the monk, 193
- Georgians, the, 29
- Gerasimus, St, 109
- Gerontius of Lampe, heretic, 102
- gods, pagan, 90-1
- Goths, the, 14, 21, 22, 34
- government: imperial, 32-6; municipal, 33, 34-5
- Greece, 6, 22, 27, 42; captured by Avars, 24; decline of urban life in, 70
- Greek (language), 13-21, 22-4, 27, 28, 29; Attic, 235-6; in classical literature, 234-5
- Gregory I, Pope, 17
- Gregory the Decapolite, St, 31
- Gregory, biographer of St Basil, 158
- Hebrew (language), 20
- Heaven, Byzantine concept of, 151, 152-5
- Hell, Byzantine concept of, 165
- Helladikos*, 28
- Hellenization, 17, 23, 26, 27-9
- Hephaisteion, the, 61
- Heraclius, Emperor, 25, 37, 46, 89, 93, 205; and heretics, 96
- heresies, 89, 102, 198; 'noble', 94, 103; social causes of, 103-4; 'sects', 94-8; *see also* dualism; Iconoclasm; Manichaeism; Monophysite movement
- heretics: definition of, 94; in Balkans, 97-8; in Constantinople, 102; penalties against, 94-5; *see also* individual heresies
- Hermogenes, rhetorician, 126
- Hexaëmeron*, 123, 169, 172
- Hierocles, *Synecdemus*, 16, 60
- Hilarion, St, 109
- hippodromes, *see under* buildings
- Hippolytus, 192-3
- historiography, 191-200, 242-7
- history: Byzantine conception of, 189, 195-200; Christian, 201; Jewish, 191; writers of, 242-7
- 'holy places', 19, 38
- houses, *see under* buildings
- Huns, the, 22, 65, 34

- Iberians (Georgians), the, 14
 Iconoclasm, 98-9, 102, 265-8
 iconography, *see under art*,
 Byzantine
 icons, *see under art*, Byzantine
 ideal life, the, behaviour in, 225-9;
 hierarchy of rule in, 220-4;
 society in, 220-9
 Ignatius, patriarch, 116
 Illyria, 22, 34
 immigration, 46-7
 incomes, 39; of labourers, 40; of
 the wealthy, 40
 indictions, 189
 inscriptions, 23
 Irene, Empress, 99, 104
 Isaac I Comnenus, Emperor, 57
 Isaac II Angelus, Emperor, 212
 Isauria, 34
 Isaurians, the, 17
 Islam, 1, 5, 29
 Italy, 4, 13, 21
*Itinerary from Paradise to the Country
 of the Romans*, 183

 Jacob (the Jew), 43, 45
 Jerome, St, 107
 Jerusalem, 1, 19, 38, 62, 92, 109
 Jews, the, 16, 17, 19, 20, 24, 30;
 and education, 132; forced
 conversion of, 93; Justinian on,
 91-2; persecution of, 92-3;
 status of, 91-3
 John Damascene, St, 94, 137, 223,
 227-8, 267
 John II Comnenus, Emperor, 29,
 59, 83
 John VII, Pope, 265
 John the Almsgiver, St, 36, 37-8,
 249, 250
 John of Amida (or of Ephesus), 24,
 90, 135, 263
 John the Baptist, St, 156

 John Italus, philosopher, 102
 John the Lydian, 36; *Magistracies of
 the Roman State*, 40-1
 John Mavropous, scholar, 142, 143
 John Moschus, 21, 113, 190, 238;
 The Spiritual Meadow, 158, 159
 Josephus, historian, 191
 Joshua rotulus, the, 273
 Jovian, Emperor, 18
 judiciary, the, 33, 221; functions
 performed by bishops, 36
 Julian, Emperor, 132
 Justin I, Emperor, 96
 Justin II, Emperor, 13, 64, 96
 Justinian I, Emperor, 5, 13, 16, 21,
 22, 24, 89, 90, *passim*
 Justinian II, Emperor, 26, 50, 71,
 265

 Kafirs, the, 28
 Kondakov, N. P., 257

 labourers, 80; wages of, 40
 Lacedaemon, 29, 81
 Laconia, 29, 42
 landowners, 35, 43, 58
 language, 13-22; in Asia Minor,
 17, 27; in Constantinople,
 16-17, 86; in Egypt, 20, 24; in
 Mesopotamia, 18, 19; in
 Palestine, 18; in Syria, 18, 24; of
 education, 147; *see also*
 individual languages
 Laodicea, 19, 42, 62
 Latin, 13-21, 22, 23, 27
 law: teaching of, 128, 136, 142;
 Ecloga, the, 136
 Lecapenus, Christopher, 50
 Leo III, Emperor, 50, 93, 98-9, 136
 Leo VI, Emperor, 48, 55, 99, 140-1
 Leontius of Neapolis, 249
 Leo the Deacon, historian, 211,
 242

- Libanius, rhetorician, 22, 35
 libraries, 239-40
 Libya, 18, 20, 21
 literature, 233-55; Attic Greek in, 235-6; classical, 125, 131, 140; classical Greek in, 234-5; 'ecclesiastical' Greek in, 236; epic and romance, 253; erotic, 237; manuscripts, 6, 238; readers of, 237, 239; revival of, 137-41; *paterica*, 7, 113, 247-51; teaching of, 125-6; 'Awesome and Edifying Vision of the Monk Cosmas', 151; *Belthandros and Chrysantza*, 252; *Callimachus and Chrysorrhoe*, 251; *Capture of Thessalonica, The*, 241; *Digenes Akrites*, 253; *Excerpta, The*, 142, 254; *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, 16, 42; *Geoponica*, the, 142; *Hexaëmeron*, the, 122; *Hippiatrica*, the, 142; *Imberios and Margorona*, 252; *Phlorios and Patzia Phlore*, 252; *Souda*, the, 142, 254; verse, 251
 Liudprand of Cremona, 49
 Lydus, John, 36
- Macedonia, 42
 Maleinoi, family of, 50-1
 Manichaeism, 94-5, 100, 104, 224
 manuscripts, 6, 238; illumination of, *see under art*, Byzantine; iconography in, *see under art*, Byzantine
 Marcellinus, Chronicle of, 16
 marriage, in the ideal life, 226
 Maurice, Emperor, 26
 medicine, teaching of, 128
 Menander Protector, historian, 64
 mercenaries, 57
 merchants, 13, 43, 64, 222
 Mesopotamia, 18-19, 23, 42, 109
- Methodius, patriarch of Constantinople, 116, 118
 Methodius of Patara (pseudo-), *Revelations* of, 206
 Michael, St, 154-5
 Michael III, Emperor, 81
 Michael IV, Emperor, 245, 246
 Michael VIII Palaeologus, Emperor, 212
 middle classes, the, 41
 Miletus, 72
 Mistra, 87
 monasteries, 19, 21, 23, 48, 49, 66, 92, 105-24; administration of, 116-18, 120; buildings, 188 (St John on Patmos, 288; St George of Mangana, 274; Machairas, 120-2; St Neophytus, 122-3; monastery of the Virgin Peribleptos, 274; monastery of the Sleepless Ones, 22, 110); life in, 107, 120; rules in, 107, 113; urban, 61, 81; village, 116
 monasticism, 105-24, 224; anachoretism, 110; beliefs of, 108, 123; centres of, 118; communal, 106-7; defined, 105; and established Church, 108-9, 114, 119; in Egypt, 106, 113; in Mesopotamia, 109; in Palestine, 109; in Syria, 109, 113; spread of, 105-9, 114; under Turkish rule, 124
 Monembasia, Chronicle of, 24, 28
 monks, 16; beliefs of, 108; life of, 107; in society, 112-13, 116, 223-4
 Monophysite movement, 18, 20, 30, 89, 102, 206; conversion to, 90; doctrine of, 95-7; history of, 96-8
 Monotheletism, 84, 96
 Montanists, 95

- multilingualism, 18
 municipal works, 35
 musical theory, teaching of, 127,
 144
 mythology, 195; of Antichrist, 202,
 204, 205, 207; of four beasts, 202

 Nicephorus I, Emperor, 28, 100,
 114, 137, 242, 267
 Nicephorus II Botaniates,
 Emperor, 57
 Nicephorus Ouranus, 74
 Nicetas Choniates, historian, 50,
 53, 142, 242, 246
 Nicetas David the Paphlagonian,
 211
 Nicholas of Myra, St, 156-7
 Nicholas of Sion, 160
 Nilus, monk, 102
 Nisibis, 18, 29, 42
 Nobadae, the, 20
Notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae, 75

 occupations, 41
 Origen, 108
 Orthodoxy, State, 104; and
 education, 131; doctrine of,
 88-9, 99; Synodicon of, 131
 Ostrogoths, the, 20, 21, 22, 65, 66

 Pachomius, St, 107
 paganism, 89-91, 97
 Palestine, 4, 9, 19, 42, 66, 104
 Paris Psalter, the, 272
 Parthenon, the, 61
paterica, 8, 113, 247-50
 Patras, 24, 81
 Paulicianism, 102, 103; defined,
 100; clashes with Byzantine
 State, 100-1
 peoples, 180-8; origin of, 194-8
 Peloponnese, the, 24, 27, 28, 48, 81
 Pergamon, 26, 66

 Persia, 4, 17, 29, 30; conquers
 Syria, Palestine and Egypt, 25;
 conquered by Heraclius, 186
 Philaretos, St, 48
 Philo Judaeus, 168
 philosophy, 128, 142-3
 Philostorgius, historian, 179
 Phocas, Emperor, 50
 Phokades, family of, 50-1
 Photius, patriarch, 95, 99, 140;
 Bibliotheca, 254
 physicians, 221-2
 plague, 23, 68
 plays, theatrical, 63
 population, 23; Byzantine beliefs
 about, 180
 Porphyry, bishop of Gaza, 40
 poverty, 39
 prices, 39-40, 67, 78
 Priscian, grammarian, 16
 Procopius of Caesarea: quoted, 21,
 22, 62-3, 67, 68, 104, 242-4,
 263; *History of the Wars*, 243;
 Secret History, 244; *Buildings*, 244
 produce, 42
 professional classes, 57, 82-3
 Providence, Divine, 183-5
 Psellus, Michael, 57, 142, 143-4,
 237, 242; *De omnifaria doctrina*,
 176; *Chronographia*, 245-6
 Ptochoprodemos, Theodoros, 82

 Ravenna, 6, 21, 259-60, 261
 recruitment, army, 34
 regionalism, 30
 relics, religious, 155-6, 157
 religion, 30-1, 151-65; dissenters,
 89-104; orthodox, 88-9;
 supernatural in, 151-65; *see also*
 Church, the (Orthodox);
 bishops; heretics; heresies;
 paganism; and individual
 movements

- Rendakis family, 50
 rhetoric, 241; teaching of, 128, 143
 Romanus I Lecapenus, Emperor,
 31, 50, 116
 Rome, 4, 5, 18, 21, 25; fall of
 Empire of, 11, 25
 Roman Church, *see* Church, the
 (Orthodox)
 rural life, 62, 66-7
 Russia, 5, 55
- Sabas, St, 109
 saints: in religious belief, 155,
 156-9; Lives of the, *see paterica*
 Samaritans, the, 19, 20, 103, 104;
 revolt of, 92
 scholars, 140-1, 142-5
 Scythopolis, 42, 66
 Scythians, 34
 Second Coming, *see* eschatology
 sects, heretical, *see* heresies;
 dualism; Iconoclasm;
 Manichaeism; Monophysite
 movement
 Selymbria, 25, 81
 Severianus of Gabala, 171; on
 creation, 172-3
 Severus, Monophysite patriarch of
 Antioch, 96; Life of, 134-5
 Sklêroi, family of, 50-1
 slaves, 41, 43, 44, 222; wages of, 40
 Slavs, the, 1, 5, 22, 24, 27, 28;
 move to Bithynia, 27, 28, 29;
 heretics amongst, 97-8
 social comment: by Theodorus
 Ptochoprodomos, 82-3; by
 Cosmas, 101
 society: defined and classified,
 32-45; education in, 127; growth
 of feudalism, 53, 54; in the ideal
 life, 220-4; in the Middle
 period, 48-57, 82-3; in
 Constantinople, 74-81; religious
 heresies in, 103; social structure,
 45, 51-2; *see also* urban life; rural
 life; social comment
 soldiers, 35, 46; duties of, 34, 222;
see also army, Byzantine
 Soterichus Panteugenēs, patriarch
 elect of Antioch, 102
 State, the, 33, 36, 42-3; clashes
 with heretics, 100-1; collapse of
 Early Byzantine, 45-6
 Stephen, St, 158
 Stephen, St, the Younger, 249
 supernatural, the, 151-65
 Symeon, Tsar of Bulgaria, 31
 Symeon Logothete, 193
 Symeon the Fool, St, 64-5, 112,
 164, 249
 Symeon the Metaphrast, 7, 250-1
 Symeon the Stylite, St, 110, 111,
 113, 249
 Symeon the New Theologian, 119
 Syncellus, George, monk, 137, 193
 Synesius of Cyrene, 36
 Syria, 4, 19, 20, 23, 25, 42;
 excavations in, 42; language in,
 18, 24; monasticism in, 109, 110;
 population of, 23
 Syriac (language), 18, 19, 20, 23
 Syrians, the, 24, 26, 29
- Tarasius, patriarch, 137
 taverns, *see under* buildings
 taxation, 43, 44, 57
 teachers, 125, 127, 221; John
 Italus, 144-5; Psellus, 143-4;
 Themistius, 130; *see also* scholars
 teaching: exercises, 126-7;
 methods, 125, 126-8; of classical
 authors, 125, 131; of science,
 127, 143
 temples, pagan, 61
 tenant farmers, 43-4
 theatre, 63-4, 65

- Thebes, 93
 'themes', 46
 Theodora, Empress, 16
 Theodore of Mopsuestia, 171
 Theodore Prodromos, 251
 Theodore the Studite, St, 104, 118,
 137, 267
 Theodore of Sykeon, St, 112,
 160-1
 Theodosius I, Emperor, 5, 75
 Theodosius II, Emperor, Code of,
 94
 Theodosius the Coenobiarch, St,
 22, 109
 Theophanes Confessor, St, 48, 50,
 118, 136, 193, 236, 242
 Theophilus, Emperor, 99
 Theophilus of Antioch: on
 creation, 168-9, 171; on
 Christian chronology, 191-2
 Theophylact Simocatta, historian,
 243, 244
 Thessalonica, 24, 25, 70, 93, 238
 Thrace, 22, 26, 27, 42, 76, 78;
 recruitment in, 34
 Thracian (language), 22
 Tiberius II, Emperor, 205
 trade, 42, 54-6, 58, 76-7, 83
 tradesmen, 41-3, 56, 64-5
 True Cross, the, 205, 207-8
 Tzetzes, John, 86
 universe, the, 166-76; creation of,
 166-8; in contemporary
 thought, 166-76
 universities, 127, 128, 131-40
 urban life, 7, 60, 62, 64-5, 86;
 eclipse of, 48-9, 66-72; in
 Constantinople, 74-81; in
 Middle Period, 82; revival of, 54;
 violence in, 67-8; *see also* cities;
 society; and individual cities
 Valens, Emperor, 89, 110
 Vandals, the, 21
 Venice, 83, 86
 Via Egnatia, 22
 village life, 47; monasteries in,
 116-17
 violence, in cities, 67-8
 Visigoths, the, 21
 wealth, 39, 40, 43
 women, 65, 225-7
 writings, *see* literature and
 individual authors
 wages, *see* incomes
 Xiphilinus, John, scholar, 142, 143
 Zacharias the Rhetor, 134-5
 Zeno, Emperor, Edict of Union, 96
 Zoe, Empress, 50, 57
 Zoticus, praetorian prefect, 41



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CYRIL MANGO is a professor of Byzantine and modern Greek language and literature at Oxford University and a Fellow of Exeter College. His published works include *The Homilies of Photius* (1958), *The Brazen House* (1959), *The Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul* (1962), *The Art of the Byzantine Empire* (1972), *Byzantine Architecture* (1976), and numerous articles on Byzantine art, archaeology, history, and literature.

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CONTENTS

PART ONE:

Aspects of Byzantine Life

Peoples and Languages

Society and Economy

The Disappearance and Revival of Cities

Dissenters

Monasticism

Education

PART TWO:

The Conceptual World of Byzantium

The Invisible World of Good and Evil

The Physical Universe

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The Future of Mankind

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The Legacy

Literature

Art and Architecture

Appendix: Chronological List of Byzantine Emperors



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CYRIL MANGO

ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟ

Η ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΡΩΜΗΣ



ΣΤΗ ΘΕΣΗ ΤΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΑΣ ΠΟΛΗΣ ΤΟΥ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟΥ ιδρύθηκε το 324 μ.Χ. η Νέα Ρώμη, η Κωνσταντινούπολη, η οποία αποτέλεσε στο εξής το κέντρο ενός πανίσχυρου, άγαυούς και ετερογενούς κράτους, που κάποια στιγμή έκτεινόταν από το Γιβραλτάρ ως τον Εύφρατη. Το κράτος αυτό, η «Βυζαντινή Αυτοκρατορία», διατηρήθηκε έντεκα αιώνες, στη διάρκεια των οποίων διαμόρφωσε τον λαμπρό πολιτισμό που αποκαλούμε βυζαντινό.

Κατά τους τρεις πρώτους αιώνες από την ίδρυση της νέας πρωτεύουσας, ο χριστιανισμός αφομοιώθηκε στην έλληνορωμαϊκή παράδοση, διαμορφώθηκε το χριστιανικό δόγμα και δημιουργήθηκε χριστιανική φιλολογία και χριστιανική τέχνη. 'Αλλά η χριστιανική αυτοκρατορία που δραματίστηκαν ο Κωνσταντίνος, ο Θεοδόσιος και ο 'Ιουστινιανός παρέμεινε ένα ανέφικτο ιδεώδες. Το καταστροφικό ρήγμα που επήλθε τον 7ο αιώνα με την περσική εισβολή και την αραβική εξάπλωση άνοιξε το δρόμο στον κόσμο του 'Ισλάμ. Παρά τη δραστηριότητα που επέδειξε το βυζαντινό κράτος, παρά την εξάπλωση της βυζαντινής επιρροής, ο βυζαντινός κόσμος βαθμιαία διαλυόταν, ώσπου οδηγήθηκε, μετά το 1180, στην ολοκληρωτική κατάρρευση, με την κατάκτηση της Κωνσταντινούπολης από τους Σταυροφόρους το 1204 και την τελική άλωση από τους Τούρκους το 1453.

Μολονότι είναι ουσιαστικά αδύνατο να δώσει κανείς μέσα σε τριακόσιες σελίδες τον απολογισμό ενός πολιτισμού που καταύγασε την οικουμένη πάνω από χίλια χρόνια, ο συγγραφέας πετυχαίνει το σκοπό του με μια πρωτότυπη μέθοδο: αδέσμευτος ιδεολογικά από οποιαδήποτε συγκεκριμένη φιλοσοφία της ιστορίας, χωρίς να υπερτονίζει ορισμένους παράγοντες εις βάρος άλλων, εξετάζει τις βασικές πλευρές της βυζαντινής «πραγματικότητας» από το πρίσμα ενός Βυζαντινού, και μάλιστα μέσου ανθρώπου, όχι διανοούμενου. 'Η θεματική προοπτική του καλύπτει θεμελιώδεις τομείς: λαούς και γλώσσες, κοινωνία και οικονομία, την εξαφάνιση και αναβίωση των πόλεων, τους αίρετικούς, το μοναχισμό, την εκπαίδευση, τις πεποιθήσεις της εποχής για τον όρατο και άορατο κόσμο, για το καλό και το κακό, για την ανθρωπότητα, το παρελθόν και το μέλλον της, για την ιδανική ζωή –τέλος της βυζαντινής κληρονομιά (λογοτεχνία, τέχνη, αρχιτεκτονική). 'Ο πλούτος του υλικού και η γλαφυρότητα με την οποία το χειρίζεται ο μελετητής του μετατρέπουν αυτό το έμβριθές επιστημονικό έργο σε συναρπαστικό ανάγνωσμα.

'Ο CYRIL MANGO είναι καθηγητής της βυζαντινής και νεοελληνικής γλώσσας και λογοτεχνίας στην έδρα Bywater και Sotheby του Πανεπιστημίου της 'Οξφόρδης και Fellow στο Κολέγιο Exeter. Έχει γράψει σημαντικά βιβλία για θέματα βυζαντινής φιλολογίας, ιστορίας, τέχνης και αρχιτεκτονικής, καθώς και πολυάριθμα άρθρα.

Έξωφύλλο: 'Η 'Αγία Τριάδα με άγγελους. 'Ο Θεός και η σωματοφυλακή Του ως αντανάκλαση της βυζαντινής αύλης (Βιέννη, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek). Μακέτα Δημήτρης Καλοκύρης.

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ΜΟΡΦΩΤΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΘΝΙΚΗΣ ΤΡΑΠΕΖΗΣ

ΔΙΟΙΚΗΤΙΚΟ ΣΥΜΒΟΥΛΙΟ

ΜΟΡΦΩΤΙΚΟΥ ΙΔΡΥΜΑΤΟΣ ΕΘΝΙΚΗΣ ΤΡΑΠΕΖΗΣ

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ΛΟΥΚΑΣ ΠΑΠΑΔΗΜΟΣ, ΑΛΕΞΗΣ ΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ

Διευθνήτης τοῦ Ἰδρύματος ΔΙΟΝΤΣΗΣ ΚΑΨΑΛΗΣ

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Ὁ CYRIL MANGO (1928) εἶναι ὁμότιμος καθηγητῆς βυζαντινῆς καὶ νεοελληνικῆς γλώσσας καὶ φιλολογίας στὴν ἔδρα Bywater & Sotheby τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου τῆς Ὁξφόρδης καὶ Ἐταῖρος στὸ Κολέγιο Ἐξετερ. Ἐχει γράψει σημαντικὰ βιβλία γιὰ θέματα βυζαντινῆς φιλολογίας, ἱστορίας, τέχνης καὶ ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς, καθὼς καὶ πολυάριθμα ἄρθρα.

ΠΕΡΙΕΧΟΜΕΝΑ

ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ	7
ΣΗΜΕΙΩΜΑ ΤΟΥ ΜΕΤΑΦΡΑΣΤΗ	11
ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ	15

ΜΕΡΟΣ ΠΡΩΤΟ

ΑΠΟΨΕΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΗΣ ΖΩΗΣ

Α' Λαοὶ καὶ γλῶσσες	25
Β' Κοινωνία καὶ οἰκονομία	44
Γ' Ἡ ἐξαφάνιση καὶ ἡ ἀναβίωση τῶν πόλεων	77
Δ' Οἱ αἵρετικοὶ	108
Ε' Ὁ μοναχισμὸς	128
Ζ' Ἡ ἐκπαίδευση	151

ΜΕΡΟΣ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΟ

Ο ΙΔΕΑΤΟΣ ΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟΥ

Ζ' Ὁ ἀόρατος κόσμος τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ τοῦ κακοῦ	181
Η' Τὸ φυσικὸ σύμπαν	198
Θ' Οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς γῆς	211
Γ' Τὸ παρελθὸν τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος	224
ΙΑ' Τὸ μέλλον τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος	238
ΙΒ' Ἡ ἰδανικὴ ζωὴ	258

ΜΕΡΟΣ ΤΡΙΤΟ

Η ΚΛΗΡΟΝΟΜΙΑ

ΙΓ' Ἡ λογοτεχνία	275
ΙΔ' Τέχνη καὶ ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ	301

ΠΑΡΑΡΤΗΜΑ

ΚΑΤΑΛΟΓΟΣ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΩΝ — ΧΑΡΤΕΣ

Χρονολογικὸς κατάλογος τῶν βυζαντινῶν αὐτοκρατόρων.....	332
I. Ἡ αὐτοκρατορία τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ Α'	334
II. Οἱ γλῶσσες τῆς βυζαντινῆς αὐτοκρατορίας ἐπὶ Ἰουστινιανοῦ Α'	336
III. Ἡ αὐτοκρατορία γύρω στὸ 1140	338
ΣΗΜΕΙΩΣΕΙΣ	343
ΒΙΒΛΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ	361
ΕΥΡΕΤΗΡΙΟ	387

ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ

Σκοπὸς τοῦ βιβλίου αὐτοῦ (ποὺ γράφτηκε γιὰ μὴ ἑλληνικὸ κοινὸ) ἦταν νὰ περιγράψει τὸν βυζαντινὸ πολιτισμὸ καὶ νὰ προσπαθήσει νὰ ἐξηγήσει τὸ γιατί ἦταν ἔτσι.

Αὐτό, φυσικά, πὺ εὐκόλα λέγεται παρὰ γίνεται. Γιατὶ πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ δώσει κανεὶς μέσα σὲ 300 σελίδες ἕναν κατανοητὸ ἀπολογισμὸ ἑνὸς πολιτισμοῦ ποὺ διάρκεσε χίλια χρόνια κάτω ἀπὸ διαρκῶς μεταβαλλόμενες συνθῆκες, πόσο μᾶλλον νὰ διαγνώσει τίς αἰτίες ποὺ τὸν ἔκαναν ἔτσι καὶ ὄχι διαφορετικὸ;

Θεώρησα ὅτι ἡ πὺ ἀποτελεσματικὴ μέθοδος γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτύχω τὸ σκοπὸ μου ἦταν νὰ ἀφήσω τοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς νὰ μιλήσουν οἱ ἴδιοι καὶ νὰ περιγράψουν μὲ τὰ δικά τους λόγια τίς ἀπόψεις τους γιὰ τὸν κόσμον στὸν ὁποῖο ζοῦσαν. Ἡ κοσμοθεωρία τους (ἢ, ὅπως εἶναι τῆς μόδας νὰ λέμε σήμερα στὴ γλώσσα τῶν ἑπολογιστῶν, τὸ «programme de vérité» τους) σφυρηλατήθηκε στὴν Ὑστερὴ Ἀρχαιότητα στὸ σημεῖο συνάντησης τῆς χριστιανικῆς ἐξηγητικῆς καὶ τῆς παραδεκτικῆς σύγχρονης «ἐπιστήμης», καὶ δὲν ὑπέστη καμιά σημαντικὴ ἀναθεώρηση μέχρι τὸ τέλος τοῦ Μεσαίωνα. Μπορεῖ ἀκόμη νὰ ἰσχυριστεῖ κανεὶς ὅτι σὲ μερικὲς περιοχὲς τοῦ ὀρθόδοξου κόσμου ἐπιβίωσε μέχρι τὸν 18ο αἰῶνα, ὁπότε τελικὰ ὑπονομεύτηκε ἀπὸ τὸν εὐρωπαϊκὸ Διαφωτισμὸ. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἰδιαίτερη θεώρηση τοῦ κόσμου, ποὺ ἀποδείχτηκε ἀνθεκτικὴ καὶ συνεπῆς μὲ τὸν ἑαυτὸ της, ἀποτελεῖ γιὰ μένα τὴν οὐσία τοῦ Βυζαντίου. Αὐτὸ προσπάθησα νὰ τὸ περιγράψω στὸ δεῦτερο μέρος τοῦ βιβλίου μου.

Ἄν οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ εἶχαν αὐτὴ τὴν κοσμοθεωρία γιὰ ἕνα τόσο μακρὸ χρονικὸ διάστημα, αὐτὸ γινόταν μέσα σὲ ἕνα δεδομένο ἱστορικὸ πλαίσιο. Γιατὶ κάθε πολιτισμὸς εἶναι μιὰ ὀλοκληρωμένη ἐνότητα καὶ καθένα ἀπὸ τὰ συστατικά του στοιχεῖα ταιριάζει μὲ ὅλα τὰ ὑπόλοιπα. Καθὼς δὲν δεσμεύομαι ἰδεολογικὰ ἀπὸ κάποια συγκεκριμένη Φιλοσοφία τῆς Ἱστορίας, δὲν ὑπονοῶ ὅτι ὀρισμένοι παράγοντες (π.χ. οἰκονομικοὶ ἢ τεχνολογικοὶ)

έχουν υπεροχή απέναντι σε άλλους. Ἄρκοῦμαι νὰ σημειώσω ὅτι ὅλες οἱ ὀψεις ἐνὸς πολιτισμοῦ εἶναι κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο ἀλληλένδετες καὶ κανένας δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ὑψωθεῖ περισσότερο ἀπὸ μερικὰ ἑκατοστὰ πάνω ἀπὸ τοὺς περιορισμοὺς τῆς ἐποχῆς του. Γιὰ νὰ μπορέσω νὰ προβάλω αὐτὲς τὶς σχέσεις ἐπέλεξα νὰ ἐξετάσω μερικὲς πλευρὲς τῆς βυζαντινῆς «πραγματικότητας». Κάποιοι ἄλλοι συγγραφῆας, γράφοντας ἀπὸ διαφορετικὴ ὀπτικὴ γωνία, ἀναμφίβολα θὰ ἔκανε διαφορετικὴ ἐπιλογή.

Ἄναγνωρίζω ὅτι ὁ Ἕλληνας ἀναγνώστης, συνηθισμένος νὰ θεωρεῖ τὸ Βυζάντιο τμήμα τῆς ἐθνικῆς του κληρονομίας, μπορεῖ νὰ βρεῖ τὴν προσέγγισή μου κάπως ἀσυνήθιστη. Θὰ ἦταν ἀνόητο νὰ ἀρνηθεῖ κανεὶς ὅτι ἡ σύγχρονη Ἑλλάδα ὀφείλει ἕνα τεράστιο χρέος στὸ Βυζάντιο καὶ ὅτι ἡ γλωσσικὴ συνέχεια προσφέρει στὸν Ἕλληνα μεγαλύτερη εὐχέρεια (μολονότι μερικὲς φορὲς ἀπατηλὴ) νὰ διεισδύσει στὸν βυζαντινὸ κόσμον σὲ σχέση μὲ τοὺς ξένους, πὺν ἔχουν συνηθῶς ὡς ἀφετηρία τοὺς τὰ ἀρχαῖα ἑλληνικὰ πὺν ἔμαθαν μὲ κόπο στὸ σχολεῖο. Ἡ οἰκειότητα ὁμῶς συχνὰ στερεῖ τὸν ἱστορικὸ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀναγκαῖα ἀπόσταση. Στὸν Ἕλληνα ἀναγνώστη θὰ ἤθελα νὰ πῶ δύο πράγματα. Πρῶτα ὅτι κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου δὲν εἶναι πὺν ἀναγκαῖο νὰ ὑπερασπίζεται κανεὶς τὸ Βυζάντιο, ὅπως ἦταν ἀπαράιτητο πρὶν ἀπὸ ἑκατὸ ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ πρὶν ἀπὸ πενήντα χρόνια. Μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι οἱ βυζαντινὲς σπουδὲς δὲν ἔχουν ἀκόμη καταλάβει παντοῦ (τῆς Ὁξφόρδης συμπεριλαμβανομένης) τὴ θέση πὺν τοὺς ἀξίζει, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι ὁ ἱστορικὸς πρέπει νὰ νιοθετεῖ μιὰ ἀπολογητικὴ στάση καὶ νὰ συνεχίζει νὰ ἀναιρεῖ «τὰς πλάνας τοῦ Βολταίρου, τοῦ Γίββωνος καὶ τοῦ Λεκκίου». Ἡ σπουδαιότητα τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ ἐπιτεύγματος ἀναγνωρίζεται ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς ἐνημερωμένους ἱστορικούς. Καθῆκον μας συνεπῶς δὲν εἶναι νὰ ἐπαιέσουμε, ἀλλὰ νὰ δοῦμε αὐτὸν τὸν ἤδη μακρὸν πολιτισμὸ ὅσο πὺν ἀντικειμενικὰ μποροῦμε. Ἡ δεῦτερη παρατήρησή μου εἶναι ὅτι ἡ βυζαντινὴ αὐτοκρατορία τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς ἀκμῆς τῆς ἦταν μιὰ ἀπέραντη καὶ πολυποικίλη ὄντοτητα, πὺν δὲν εἶναι εὐκόλο νὰ τὴ θεωρήσουμε ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρὰ τῆς Ἀθῆνας ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης. Θὰ παρότρυνα κάθε βυζαντινολόγο νὰ ταξιδέψει ἀπὸ τὸ ἕνα ἄκρο τῶν κτήσεων τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ μέχρι τὸ ἄλλο, νὰ μὴν πάει μόνο στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη ἢ στὴ Ραβέννα, ἀλλὰ πέρα ἀπὸ τὸν Εὐφράτη, στὰ ερείπια τοῦ Δάρας, καὶ καθὼς θὰ βλέπει τὴν τεράστια ἔκταση τῆς πεδιάδας τῆς Μεσοποταμίας νὰ θυμηθεῖ ὅτι ἐδῶ ἦταν τὰ σύνορα πὺν ὑπερασπιζόταν ὁ Βελισάριος (πὺν ἦταν Ἰλλυριὸς) καὶ ὅτι τὸν συνόδευε ὁ ἱστορικὸς Προκόπιος, γεννημένος στὴν Παλαιστίνη, στὸν ὁποῖο χρωστάμε τὶς περισσότερες γνώσεις μας γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Ἄν περιορίσουμε τὸν

βυζαντινὸ κόσμον σ' αὐτὸ πὺν ἦταν τὶς μέρες τῶν Παλαιολόγων, ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ τῶν Κομνηνῶν, εἶναι σὰν νὰ τοῦ κλέβουμε τὸ πὺν μεγάλο μέρος τῆς ἱστορικῆς του σπουδαιότητας.

Τὸ βιβλίον αὐτὸ τελείωσε τὸ 1979. Καθὼς δὲν ἀποτελεῖ οὔτε βιβλιογραφικὸ βοήθημα οὔτε σχολικὸ ἔγχειριδιον, ἢ βιβλιογραφικὴ ἐνημέρωση εἶναι δευτερεύουσας σημασίας. Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ, ἄς μοῦ ἐπιτραπῆ νὰ ἀναφέρω μερικὰ ἔργα πὺν εἶδαν τὸ φῶς τῆς δημοσιότητας τὰ τελευταῖα ὀχτὼ χρόνια: τοῦ P. Lemerle, Les plus anciens recueils de miracles de Saint Démétrius, 2 τόμοι, Παρίσι 1979, 1981, πὺν ἀποτελεῖ κάτι πὺν περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἔκδοση ἐνὸς σημαντικοῦ κειμένου· τοῦ M. F. Hendy, Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, Cambridge 1985, πὺν ἐξετάζει ἕνα εὐρὸν φάσμα κοινωνικῶν καὶ οἰκονομικῶν θεμάτων, καθὼς καὶ τὴν ἱστορικὴ γεωγραφία τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας καὶ τῶν Βαλκανίων· τὸ μεταθανάτιον ἔργον τοῦ P. J. Alexander, The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition, Berkeley 1985, πὺν καλύπτει μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ θέματα τοῦ 11ου κεφαλαίου μου· τοῦ N. G. Wilson, Scholars of Byzantium, Λονδίνο 1983, χροσωρευχεῖο χρησίμων πληροφοριῶν· τὸ ἔργον τοῦ H.- G. Beck, Byzantinisches Erotikon, Μόναχο 1983, πὺν ἀποτελεῖ πραγματικὸ πνευματικὸ ἐρεθίσμα· τὸ βιβλίον τῶν A. P. Kazdan καὶ A. W. Epstein, Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, Berkeley 1985· τοῦ G. Dagron, Constantinople imaginaire, Παρίσι 1984, πὺν παρέχει πολλὰ ἐρεθίσματα, καὶ σὲ πὺν περὶ ἐπίπεδο τὸ δικό μου Le développement urbain de Constantinople, Παρίσι 1985.

Θὰ ἦταν κουραστικὸ νὰ ἀναφέρω ὅλους τοὺς μελετητῆς, ζωντανούς καὶ νεκρούς, πὺν μὲ βοήθησαν νὰ ἀποκτήσω μιὰ βαθύτερη κατανόηση τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ κόσμου. Χρωστῶ μεγάλο χρέος στὸν Μανουὴλ Νομίδη, πὺν πρῶτος μὲ μύησε στὰ μυστήρια τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης· στὸν Alexander Vasiliou, πὺν μοῦ ἔδειξε τὴν ἀνατολικὴ διάσταση τοῦ Βυζαντίου· στὸν Γεώργιον Ὁστρογκόρσκι, τὸν Romily Jenkins (ἂν καὶ δὲν συμμαρτίζομαι ὅλες τὶς ἀπόψεις του), τὸν André Guillou καί, ἰδιαίτερα, στὸ φίλον μου Ihor Ševčenko. Εἶμαι εὐγνωμων στὴ σύζυγό μου γιὰ τὴ συνεχῆ συμπαράσταση καὶ ὑπομονή τῆς. Τέλος, εὐχαριστῶ τὸν Δημήτριν Τσουγκαράκη γιὰ τὴ μετάφραση πὺν ἔκανε μὲ γνώση καὶ μεράκι.

Ὁξφόρδη, Μάιος 1987

CYRIL MANGO

ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ

Ἡ βυζαντινὴ αὐτοκρατορία, ἔτσι ὅπως τὴν ὀρίζουν οἱ περισσότεροι ἱστορικοί, θεωρεῖται ὅτι ξεκίνησε τὴν ὑπαρξή της ὅταν ἰδρύθηκε ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη, ἡ Νέα Ρώμη, τὸ 324 μ.Χ., καὶ ὅτι ἔπαψε νὰ ὑπάρχει ὅταν κατέλαβαν τὴν πόλη οἱ Ὀθωμανοὶ Τοῦρκοι τὸ 1453. Στὴ διάρκεια αὐτῶν τῶν ἑντεκα αἰώνων ὑπέστη βαθιὲς μεταβολές, γι' αὐτὸ συνηθίζουμε νὰ διαιροῦμε τὴ βυζαντινὴ ἱστορία σὲ τρεῖς τουλάχιστο μεγάλες περιόδους: τὴν Πρώιμη, τὴ Μέση καὶ τὴν Ὑστερη. Ἡ Πρώιμη βυζαντινὴ περίοδος θεωρεῖται ὅτι διαρκεῖ μέχρι τὰ μέσα περίπου τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα, δηλαδὴ μέχρι τὴν ἀνοδο τοῦ Ἰσλαμισμοῦ καὶ τὴν ὀριστικὴ ἐγκατάσταση τῶν Ἀράβων στὶς ἀνατολικὲς καὶ νότιες ἀκτὲς τῆς Μεσογείου· ἡ Μέση περίοδος, εἶτε μέχρι τὴν κατάκτηση τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας ἀπὸ τοὺς Τοῦρκους στὴ δεκαετία τοῦ 1070 εἶτε, λιγότερο σωστά, μέχρι τὴν ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης ἀπὸ τοὺς Σταυροφόρους τὸ 1204· καὶ ἡ Ὑστερη περίοδος, ἀπὸ τὸ ἕνα ἀπὸ τὰ δύο αὐτὰ ὅρια μέχρι τὸ 1453.

Αὐτὸς ὁ προσδιορισμὸς μπορεῖ νὰ φαίνεται ἀυθαίρετος, ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχουν σοβαροὶ λόγοι γιὰ τὴ διατήρησή του. Ὅσο γιὰ τὸ ἐπίθετο «βυζαντινός», μποροῦν νὰ διατυπωθοῦν (καὶ ἔχουν διατυπωθεῖ) σοβαρὲς ἀντιρρήσεις γιὰ τὴν καταλληλότητά του. Ἐπειδὴ ὅμως, ἔτσι κι ἄλλιως, ὁ ὅρος ἔχει ἐπικρατήσῃ, θὰ ἦταν ἔνδειξη σχολαστικισμοῦ νὰ τὸν ἀπορρίψουμε, ἐφόσον συμφωνοῦμε πῶς ἡ χρῆση του εἶναι ἀπλῶς συμβατικὴ. Στὴν πραγματικότητα φυσικὰ δὲν ὑπῆρξε ποτὲ μιὰ «βυζαντινὴ αὐτοκρατορία». Ὑπῆρξε ἕνα ρωμαϊκὸ κράτος μὲ κέντρο τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Οἱ κάτοικοί του ὀνόμαζαν τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς τους «Ρωμαίους», ἢ ἀπλῶς «χριστιανούς», καὶ τὴν πατρίδα τους «Ρωμανία». «Βυζάντιος» μποροῦσε νὰ χαρακτηριστεῖ κάποιος ἂν εἶχε γεννηθεῖ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ὄχι ὅμως ἂν προερχόταν ἀπὸ ἄλλο μέρος τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Στοὺς δυτικοευρωπαίους, γιὰ τοὺς ὁποίους ἡ λέξη «Ρωμαῖος» εἶχε τελείως διαφορετικὴ σημασία, οἱ «Βυζαντινοὶ» ἦταν συνήθως γνωστοὶ ὡς «Graeci», καὶ στοὺς Σλάβους ὡς

«Grekí», αλλά στους Άραβες και τους Τούρκους ως «Ρούμ», δηλαδή Ρωμαίοι. Ο όρος «byzantinus» στην ονομασία της αυτοκρατορίας και των κατοίκων της άρχισε να χρησιμοποιείται από την Αναγέννηση. Κάποιες προσπάθειες να αντικατασταθεί από άλλους πιδ δύσχρηστους όρους, όπως «ανατολική ρωμαϊκή» ή «ανατολική χριστιανική» αυτοκρατορία, δεν έγιναν γενικότερα αποδεκτές.

Αν εξετάσουμε τη βυζαντινή ιστορία από κάποια απόσταση και χωρίς να μπορούμε σε λεπτομέρειες (πράγμα που αναγκαστικά θα κάνουμε εδώ), μπορούμε να πούμε ότι από τις παραπάνω τρεις περιόδους η Πρώιμη είναι πολύ πιό σημαντική από τις άλλες. Είναι μια εποχή που κλείνει την περίοδο της Αρχαιότητας για την περιοχή της μεσογειακής λεκάνης. Η ρωμαϊκή αυτοκρατορία μπορεί να είχε χάσει σταδιακά τις βορειότερες επαρχίες της, ακόμη όμως έκτεινόταν από το Γιβραλτάρ μέχρι τον Εύφρατη, πέρα από τον οποίο βρισκόταν ο προαιώνιος έχθρος, ή Περσία των Σασσανιδών. Η αντιπαράθεση και η ισορροπία των δύο αυτών μεγάλων δυνάμεων αποτέλεσε την πολιτική βάση της εν λόγω περιόδου. Έξω από τη Ρώμη και την Περσία, καθώς και από λίγα μικρά κράτη που βρίσκονταν στην περιφέρεια καθεμιάς, δεν υπήρχε παρά μια ταραγμένη θάλασσα βαρβαρότητας.

Το Πρώιμο βυζαντινό κράτος ήταν ασύγκριτα μεγαλύτερο από το Μέσο και το Ύστερο, όχι μόνο σε γεωγραφική έκταση και πολιτική δύναμη, αλλά επίσης σε ό,τι αφορά τα πνευματικά του δημιουργήματα: ενσωμάτωσε το χριστιανισμό στην έλληνορωμαϊκή παράδοση, καθόρισε το χριστιανικό δόγμα και έθεσε τις βάσεις της χριστιανικής ζωής, δημιούργησε χριστιανική φιλολογία και χριστιανική τέχνη. Δύσκολα θα βρεθεί θεσμός ή ιδέα σε ολόκληρο το βυζαντινό οικοδόμημα που να μη γεννήθηκε στην Πρώιμη περίοδο.

Είναι σχεδόν αδύνατο να υπερτιμηθεί ή σπουδαιότητα του καταστροφικού ρήγματος που επήλθε τον 7ο αιώνα. Καθένας που διαβάσει τα γεγονότα στις πηγές θα μείνει κατάπληκτος από τις συμφορές που χτύπησαν την αυτοκρατορία, στην αρχή με την περσική εισβολή, στα πρώτα χρόνια του αιώνα, και κατόπιν με την αραβική εξάπλωση, κάπου τριάντα χρόνια αργότερα: ήταν μια σειρά ήττες που στέρησαν από την αυτοκρατορία μερικές από τις πλουσιότερες επαρχίες της, όπως τη Συρία, την Παλαιστίνη, την Αίγυπτο και, αργότερα, τη Βόρεια Αφρική, και έτσι την περιόρισαν σε λιγότερο από το μισό του προηγούμενου μεγέθους της, τόσο σε έκταση όσο και σε πληθυσμό. Αλλά η ανάγνωση των αφηγηματικών πηγών παρέχει άμυδρή μόνο εικόνα για τις βαθιές μεταλλαγές που

συνδέσαν αυτά τα γεγονότα. Πρέπει να εξετάσει κανείς τις αρχαιολογικές μαρτυρίες από πολλές περιοχές για να κατανοήσει το μέγεθος της κατάρρευσης. Ήταν για τις βυζαντινές επαρχίες το τέλος ενός τρόπου ζωής — του αστικού πολιτισμού της Αρχαιότητας — και το ξεκίνημα ενός πολύ διαφορετικού και σαφώς μεσαιωνικού κόσμου. Έτσι, από μια άποψη, ή καταστροφή του 7ου αιώνα αποτελεί το κεντρικό γεγονός της βυζαντινής ιστορίας. Όπως ακριβώς στη δυτική Ευρώπη κυριαρχούσε η σκιά της αυτοκρατορικής Ρώμης σε όλη τη διάρκεια του Μεσαίωνα, έτσι και το φάσμα της χριστιανικής αυτοκρατορίας του Κωνσταντίνου, του Θεοδοσίου και του Ίουστινιανού παρέμεινε για το Βυζάντιο ένα ιδεώδες που αγωνιζόταν να το φτάσει αλλά ποτέ δεν το κατέκτησε. Η συντηρητική φύση του βυζαντινού πολιτισμού οφείλεται κατά μεγάλο μέρος σε αυτές τις περιστάσεις.

Αν η Πρώιμη βυζαντινή περίοδος μπορεί να θεωρηθεί περίοδος ισορροπίας ανάμεσα σε δύο μεγάλες δυνάμεις, ή Μέση περίοδος μπορεί να παρομοιαστεί με ένα τρίγωνο που είχε μια μεγάλη πλευρά (Ίσλαμ) και δύο μικρότερες (Βυζάντιο και δυτική Ευρώπη). Ο κόσμος του Ίσλαμ άφομοίωσε την κληρονομιά τόσο της Ρώμης όσο και της Περσίας και, ενώνοντας σε μια τεράστια «κοινή αγορά» μια περιοχή που έκτεινόταν από την Ίσπανία μέχρι τα όρια της Ινδίας, δημιούργησε έναν αστικό πολιτισμό με ασυνήθιστη ζωτικότητα. Αποκομμένο από τις σημαντικότερες όδους του διεθνούς εμπορίου, συνεχώς απειλούμενο από τους έχθρους του, το βυζαντινό κράτος μπόρεσε παρ' όλα αυτά να επιδείξει μεγάλη δραστηριότητα και να ανακτήσει ένα μέρος από το χαμένο έδαφος. Αλλά τώρα έπρεπε να στραφεί προς διαφορετική κατεύθυνση — όχι τόσο προς τα «κλασικά έδάφη», όσο προς τον βαρβαρικό Βορρά και τη Δύση: στα Βαλκάνια, όπου τώρα είχαν εγκατασταθεί Σλάβοι και άλλοι νεοφερμένοι, στο κράτος των Χαζάρων στη βόρεια ακτή της Μαύρης Θάλασσας, και πιό πέρα, εκεί που τον 9ο αιώνα θα γινόταν το ρωσικό κράτος. Νέες προοπτικές ανοίγονταν λοιπόν, και η βυζαντινή επιρροή, προωθούμενη από την ιεραποστολική δραστηριότητα, έφτασε να ακτινοβολεί μέχρι τη Μοραβία και τη Βαλτική. Έδώ έγκειται, με την ευρύτερη ιστορική προοπτική, ή κύρια συνεισφορά της Μέσης βυζαντινής περιόδου.

Η Ύστερη περίοδος μπορεί επίσης να παρομοιαστεί με τρίγωνο, αλλά με διαφορετική μορφή. Ο βυζαντινός και ο αραβικός κόσμος βρίσκονταν τώρα σε διάλυση, ενώ ή δυτική Ευρώπη ήταν σε άνοδο. Οι βασικές εξελίξεις που οδήγησαν σε αυτή την τελευταία φάση ήταν ή κατάκτηση του μεγαλύτερου μέρους της Μικρής Ασίας από τους Σελτζούκους Τούρκους

και η ταυτόχρονη ανάληψη του θαλάσσιου εμπορίου από τις Ιταλικές δημοκρατίες. Τα επόμενα εκατό χρόνια το Βυζάντιο κατάφερε να διατηρήσει την ενότητά του και κάπως το κύρος του, αλλά από το 1180 και μετά το οικοδόμημα άρχισε να καταρρέει από όλες τις πλευρές. Η διάσπαση που ακολούθησε — η κατάκτηση της Κωνσταντινούπολης από τους ιππότες της τέταρτης Σταυροφορίας, ή δημιουργία λατινικών κρατών στην Ανατολή, ο σχηματισμός ανεξάρτητων ελληνικών κρατών στην Τραπεζούντα, τη Νίκαια και την Ήπειρο, ή ανασύσταση ενός ώχρου ειδώλου της αυτοκρατορίας της Κωνσταντινούπολης το 1261 — όλα αυτά αποτελούν μια εξαιρετικά πολύπλοκη και αξιοπερίεργη ιστορία. Ωστόσο δεν μπορούμε να πούμε ότι αυτή η περίοδος της βυζαντινής ιστορίας έχει παγκόσμια σημασία: τα κύρια κέντρα της δύναμης και του πολιτισμού είχαν μετατοπιστεί αλλού.

Αυτές ήταν, με μεγάλη συντομία, οι κύριες φάσεις της βυζαντινής ιστορίας. Το αντίκειμενο της έρευνάς μας, συνεπώς, έχει μεγάλη χρονική έκταση και ταυτόχρονα ένα συνεχώς μεταβαλλόμενο γεωγραφικό περιεχόμενο. Την Πρώιμη περίοδο έχουμε να κάνουμε σχεδόν με ολόκληρη τη μεσογειακή λεκάνη: κατά τη Μέση περίοδο ή Δύση υποχωρεί από το προσκήνιο, εκτός από την Ιταλία και τη Σικελία, ενώ το ενδιαφέρον επικεντρώνεται στη Μικρά Ασία και τα Βαλκάνια: τέλος, δεν απομένουν παρά η Κωνσταντινούπολη και μερικές σκόρπιες κτήσεις στη Μικρά Ασία και την Ελλάδα. Η διαφοροποίηση του γεωγραφικού χώρου συνεπάγεται επίσης και διαφοροποίηση του πληθυσμού. Πρέπει να τονιστεί με έμφαση ότι δεν υπήρξε ποτέ ένα βυζαντινό «έθνος». Το ζήτημα αυτό θα εξεταστεί πληρέστερα στο Κεφάλαιο Α', αλλά πρέπει να σημειωθεί από την αρχή ότι κάθε προσπάθεια να επιβληθούν σύγχρονες εθνικές έννοιες στον βυζαντινό κόσμο οδηγεί αναπόφευκτα σε παρερμηνεία των γεγονότων.

Στο σημείο αυτό πρέπει να διατυπώσουμε άλλη μια επιφύλαξη. Οι γνώσεις μας για κάθε πολιτισμό του παρελθόντος βασίζονται σε πηγές, είτε γραπτές είτε μνημειακές. Όπου οι γραπτές πηγές αφθονούν, εκεί τα μνημεία υποχωρούν σε δευτερεύουσα θέση: μπορούμε να μελετήσουμε τη βικτωριανή εποχή χωρίς ποτέ να δοῦμε το μνημείο του Άλβέρτου (Albert Memorial), αν και χωρίς αυτό ίσως χάνουμε κάποια ενδιαφέρονσα άποψή της. Όσο πιο ανεπαρκείς είναι οι γραπτές πηγές, τόσο οι μνημειακές και αρχαιολογικές μαρτυρίες κερδίζουν σε σημασία. Μέσα σε αυτό το σχήμα η περίπτωση της βυζαντινής αυτοκρατορίας είναι κάπως ιδιόμορφη. Με μια πρώτη ματιά ο όγκος του γραπτού υλικού που μᾶς έχει κληροδοτήσει φαίνεται σημαντικός. Αλλά ποιά είναι η φύση αυτού του υλικού;

Το πρώτο πράγμα που έντυπωσιάζει το μελετητή είναι η έλλειψη αρχαιολογικών πηγών. Η μόνη περιοχή της αυτοκρατορίας για την οποία υπάρχουν τέτοιες πηγές σε κάποια ποσότητα είναι η Αίγυπτος μέχρι την εποχή της αραβικής κατάκτησης, αλλά ακούμε συχνά πώς η Αίγυπτος δεν ήταν καθόλου αντιπροσωπευτική επαρχία, και πώς θα μπορούμε να συμπεράνουμε για τη ζωή της χάρη στην ανακάλυψη των παπύρων δεν ισχύουν για άλλες περιοχές. Υπάρχει επίσης ένας μικρός αριθμός παπύρων σχετικών με τη Ραβέννα, η οποία όμως ήταν μια ακόμη πιο περιθωριακή περιοχή της αυτοκρατορίας. Κατά τα άλλα, δεν υπάρχουν παρά μερικά μοναστηριακά αρχεία που αφορούν κυρίως το "Άγιο Όρος και τη Νότια Ιταλία, καθώς και δυο τρία από τη Μικρά Ασία. Τα αρχεία αυτά αφορούν μόνο γαιοκτητικές σχέσεις και δεν περιέχουν υλικό παλιότερο από τον 10ο αιώνα. Αυτά, πάνω κάτω, είναι όλα κι όλα. Τα αρχεία που τηρούσε η κεντρική κυβέρνηση (και δεν πρέπει να ξεχνάμε ότι η βυζαντινή αυτοκρατορία ήταν κατεξοχήν γραφειοκρατικό κράτος), ή επαρχιακή διοίκηση, ή Εκκλησία, οι γαιοκτήμονες, οι πάροικοι, οι έμποροι, οι μαγαζάτορες, όλα έχουν εξαφανιστεί. Κατά συνέπεια δεν διαθέτουμε αξιόπιστα στοιχεία για τον πληθυσμό, δεν έχουμε αρχεία γεννήσεων, γάμων και θανάτων, καθόλου ποσοτικά στοιχεία για το εμπόριο και για τη φορολογία — με λίγα λόγια τίποτε που να μπορεί να μετρηθεί και να χρησιμοποιηθεί για στατιστικούς σκοπούς. Αυτό σημαίνει πώς δεν μπορεί να επιχειρηθεί σοβαρά η συγγραφή της οικονομικής ιστορίας της αυτοκρατορίας. Βέβαια οι ιστορικοί, ενδίδοντας στο σύγχρονο πάθος για τα οικονομικά και τη στατιστική, προσπάθησαν να εφαρμόσουν στο Βυζάντιο τις ίδιες μεθόδους που με τόση επιτυχία έχουν εφαρμοστεί σε άλλες περιόδους, με αποτέλεσμα να σκοντάφτουν στο ίδιο εμπόδιο — την έλλειψη στοιχείων.

Το γραπτό υλικό που έχουμε στη διάθεσή μας μπορεί γενικά να ονομαστεί φιλολογικό, με την έννοια ότι έχει διατηρηθεί σε χειρόγραφα. Αν υπολογίσουμε μόνο αυτά που είναι στην ελληνική γλώσσα, έχουν διασωθεί σε διάφορες βιβλιοθήκες περίπου πενήντα χιλιάδες χειρόγραφα, από τα οποία τα μισά περίπου είναι μεσαιωνικής εποχής. Αν και μεγάλο μέρος αυτού του υλικού είναι λειτουργικό, θεολογικό, λατρευτικό και τα παρόμοια, ο ιστορικός του Βυζαντίου δεν μπορεί να παραπονεθεί ότι δεν έχει αρκετά κείμενα για μελέτη: αντίθετως, έχει και με το παραπάνω.

Εντούτοις, αυτά τα κείμενα έχουν μια παράξενη ασάφεια, και όσο μεγαλύτερη ή κομψότερη της γλώσσας τους, τόσο πιο άσπλη γίνονται. Αυτό δεν σημαίνει ότι μᾶς παρέχουν λανθασμένες πληροφορίες: απεναντίας, οι βυζαντινοί ιστορικοί και χρονογράφοι έχουν σχετικά καλή φήμη ως προς

τήν αντικειμενικότητα και τή φιλαλήθειά τους. Μᾶς δίνουν τὸ ἐξωτερικὸ κέλυφος τῶν γεγονότων, κι ἐμεῖς ψάχνουμε μάταια στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ γιὰ τὶς βαθύτερες ἀλήθειες τῆς ζωῆς. Ἄν στραφοῦμε στὴν ἐπιστολογραφία, ἓνα λογοτεχνικὸ εἶδος ποὺ καλλιεργήθηκε μὲ ἐπιμέλεια ὅσο ὑπῆρχε ἡ αὐτοκρατορία, θὰ ἀπογοητευτοῦμε ἀκόμη περισσότερο: ἀντὶ γιὰ προσωπικὲς παρατηρήσεις δὲν μᾶς προσφέρει παρὰ κοινοτοπίες ποὺ δείχνουν μόνο εὐρυμάθεια. Μόνο σὲ σπάνιες περιπτώσεις ἀνασηκώνεται λίγο τὸ παραπέτασμα, κυρίως ἀπὸ ὄχι καὶ πολὺ καλλιεργημένους συγγραφεῖς. Σ' αὐτὴ τὴν κατηγορία ἀνήκουν μερικοὶ Βίοι ἀγίων, ὅσοι ξέφυγαν ἀπὸ τὴν «ὠραιοποίηση» τοῦ ὕφους ποὺ τοὺς ἔκανε ὁ Συμεὼν ὁ Μεταφραστὴς τὸν 10ο αἰώνα, ὅπως καὶ μερικὰ πατερικά, δηλαδὴ συλλογὲς ἱστοριῶν σχετικὰ μὲ μοναχοὺς, καθὼς καὶ μερικὰ ἑτερόκλητα κείμενα ὅπως τὸ λεγόμενον *Στρατηγικὸν* τοῦ Κεκαυμένου (11ος αἰώνας). Γιὰ μιὰ στιγμή βλέπουμε μπροστά μας τὴν πραγματικὴ ζωὴ σὲ ἓνα χωριὸ τῆς Γαλατίας, στὴν αἰγυπτιακὴ ἔρημο ἢ στὸ κτῆμα ἐνὸς ἄρχοντα στὴν κεντρικὴ Ἑλλάδα. Ἄλλὰ ἀπὸ τὸν μεγάλο ὄγκο τῆς βυζαντινῆς λογοτεχνίας ἡ πραγματικότητα ἔχει ἀποστραγγιστεῖ ἐντελῶς. Θὰ μιλήσω περισσότερο γιὰ τὸ θέμα αὐτὸ στὸ Κεφάλαιο ΠΓ'.

Οἱ περιορισμοὶ ποὺ ἐπιβάλλουν οἱ γραπτὲς πηγὲς δημιουργοῦν στὸν ἱστορικὸ τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ πολιτισμοῦ σοβαρὰ ἐμπόδια. Ὁ μόνος τρόπος γιὰ τὴν ὑπερπήδησή τους πιστεύω ὅτι βρίσκεται στὴ μελέτη τῶν ὑλικῶν καταλοίπων, μὲ ἄλλα λόγια στὴν ἀρχαιολογία. Δυστυχῶς πολὺ λίγα ἔχουν γίνε μὲχρι τὴν ὥρα αὐτὸν τὸν τομέα. Εἶναι γεγονός ὅτι στὶς ἀνατολικὲς ἐπαρχίες ἔχουν ἀνασκαφῆ πολυάριθμες κλασικὲς πόλεις, καὶ πολλὲς ἀπὸ αὐτὲς δείχνουν ὅτι κατοικήθηκαν συνεχῶς μὲχρι τὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα. Εἴμαστε, συνεπῶς, ἀρκετὰ καλὰ πληροφορημένοι γιὰ τὸν ὑλικὸ περίγυρο τῆς ἀστικῆς ζωῆς κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς Πρώιμης βυζαντινῆς περιόδου, ἂν καὶ ἔχουμε νὰ μάθουμε ἀκόμη πολλὰ. Αὐτὲς οἱ πόλεις συνήθως ἀποκαλύπτουν ἓνα δραματικὸ ρῆγμα στὴ ζωὴ τους τὸν 7ο αἰώνα, ποὺ ἄλλοτε παίρνει τὴ μορφή δραστηκῆς μείωσης τῆς ἑκτασῆς τους καὶ ἄλλοτε ὀλοκληρωτικῆς ἐγκατάλειψης. Ἄλλὰ τί ἀκολούθησε μετὰ; Γιὰ τὴ Μέση καὶ τὴν Ὑστερὴ βυζαντινὴ περίοδο οἱ γνώσεις μας εἶναι ἀκόμη ἐντελῶς σποραδικές. Τὸ μόνο εἶδος μνημείου ποὺ ἔχει διασωθεῖ σὲ μεγάλους ἀριθμοὺς καὶ ἔχει γίνε ἀντικείμενο συστηματικῆς μελέτης εἶναι ἡ ἐκκλησία. Ἐχει ὅμως μελετηθεῖ ἀπὸ ἱστορικοὺς τῆς τέχνης, τῶν ὁποίων ἡ μέθοδος προσέγγισης (ἂν καὶ ἀναμφιβόλως ἐνδιαφέρουσα γιὰ τοὺς ἄλλους ἱστορικοὺς τῆς τέχνης) σπάνια ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὰ ἐνδιαφέροντα ἐνὸς ἱστορικοῦ τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ. Παρόλο ποὺ μποροῦμε νὰ βγάλουμε ἀξιόλογα συμ-

περάσματα ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπὸ τὶς ἐκκλησίες, ἐκεῖνο ποὺ χρειαζόμαστε —ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ ἐπιτευχθεῖ στὸ ἄμεσο μέλλον— εἶναι μιὰ συστηματικὴ ἔρευνα μὲ ἀντικείμενο τὶς βυζαντινὲς πόλεις καὶ τὰ χωριά, τὰ κάστρα καὶ τὰ ἀγροκτήματα, τὰ ὑδρευτικὰ καὶ ἀρδευτικὰ ἔργα, τοὺς δρόμους καὶ τὶς βιοτεχνικὲς ἐγκαταστάσεις σὲ διάφορες ἐπαρχίες τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Μόνο ὅταν γίνε αὐτὸ θὰ εἴμαστε σὲ θέση νὰ μιᾶμε μὲ κάποια βεβαιότητα γιὰ τὸ ἐπίπεδο καὶ τὸ βαθμὸ ἐξάπλωσης τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ πολιτισμοῦ.

Αὐτὸ τὸ σοβαρὸ κενὸ δὲν ἔχει πάντοτε ἀξιολογηθεῖ σωστά, καὶ βέβαια δὲν ἔχει ἀποτρέψει πολλοὺς εἰδικούς ἀπὸ τὴ συγγραφὴ βιβλίων γιὰ τὸν πολιτισμὸ τοῦ Βυζαντίου. Ὑπάρχουν πάνω ἀπὸ δέκα τέτοια σημαντικὰ ἔργα ποὺ ἀξίζει νὰ μνημονευτοῦν (βλ. Βιβλιογραφία, Εἰσαγωγή). Ἄναπόφευκτα χρειάστηκε νὰ καλύψω κι ἐγὼ λίγο πολὺ τὸν ἴδιο χῶρο μὲ τοὺς προηγούμενους ἀπὸ μένα, ἀλλὰ υἱοθέτησα μιὰ διάταξη τοῦ ὑλικοῦ ποὺ διαφέρει κάπως ἀπὸ τὴν παραδοσιακὴ. Τὸ βιβλίο μου τὸ εἶδα σὰν ἓνα τρίπτυχο. Στὸ πρῶτο τοῦ «φύλλο» σκιαγράφησα μερικὲς ἀπόψεις τῆς βυζαντινῆς ζωῆς —ὅπωςδήποτε ὄχι ὅλες τὶς σημαντικὲς ἀπόψεις, ἀλλὰ μόνο αὐτὲς ποὺ κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου ἄσκησαν ἀξιόλογη ἐπιρροὴ στὸ βυζαντινὸ πολιτιστικὸ «προϊόν». Ἐξαιτίας τῆς τεράστιας ἑκτασης τοῦ θέματος ἀναγκάστηκα νὰ παρασιωπήσω πολλὰ σημαντικὰ ζητήματα. Γιὰ παράδειγμα, ἀναφέρθηκα πολὺ λίγο στὴ στρατιωτικὴ ζωὴ, παρόλο ποὺ ὁ πόλεμος κυριάρχησε στὴ βυζαντινὴ ἱστορία σὲ ὅλη τῆς τὴ διαδρομῆ. Οὔτε ἀνέφερα πολλὰ γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ οἰκονομία καὶ τὶς συγκοινωνίες, χερσαῖες καὶ θαλάσσιες, δυὸ ἀλληλένδετα θέματα ποὺ παραμένουν ἀκόμη ἀτελῶς γνωστά. Ἀπὸ χρονολογικὴ ἄποψη ἔριξα τὸ βάρος πιὸ πολὺ στὴν Πρώιμη καὶ Μέση περίοδο, ἀποκλείοντας συχνὰ τὴν Ὑστερη. Οἱ ἀναγνώστες μὲ κριτικὸ πνεῦμα σίγουρα θὰ βροῦν καὶ ἄλλα κενά.

Τὸ δεύτερο φύλλο τοῦ τριπτύχου εἶναι ἀφιερωμένο σὲ αὐτὸ ποὺ ὁ Norman Baynes κάποτε ἀποκάλεσε «ἰδεατὸ κόσμος τοῦ ἀνατολικοῦ κράτους». Ἐδῶ ἐπιχείρησα νὰ περιγράψω ἐκεῖνο τὸ συμπαγὲς καὶ σχετικὰ σταθερὸ σύνολο πεποιθήσεων ποὺ θὰ μπορούσε νὰ ὀνομαστεῖ βυζαντινισμός. Γιὰ τὴν περιγραφή αὐτὴ διάλεξα σκόπιμα τὸ ἰδεολογικὸ ἐπίπεδο ἐνὸς «μέσου» Βυζαντινοῦ: τὴ θέση του, ὅπως τὴν ἔβλεπε, σὲ σχέση μὲ τὶς ὑπερφυσικὲς δυνάμεις τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ τοῦ κακοῦ, τὴ θέση του στὴ φύση, τὴ θέση του στὴν ἱστορία (τόσο τὴν περασμένη ὅσο καὶ τὴ μελλοντική), τὴ στάση του ἀπέναντι στοὺς ἄλλους λαοὺς, τέλος τὴν ἀντίληψή του γιὰ τὴν ἠθικὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὸν ἰδανικὸ ἄνθρωπο. Αὐτὲς δὲν ἦταν ἀναγκαστικά οἱ ἀπόψεις ὅλων τῶν βυζαντινῶν διανοουμένων ἀλλὰ, ὅπως θὰ ἐξηγήσουμε καλύτερα παρακάτω, οἱ διανοούμενοι —τουλάχιστο μετὰ τὸν 7ο αἰώ-

να— αποτελοῦσαν μιὰ πολὺ μικρὴ ομάδα καὶ ἀσκοῦσαν ἀσήμαντη ἐπιρροὴ στὴ σκέψη τοῦ κοινοῦ γενικότερα.

Στὸ τελευταῖο φύλλο τοῦ τριπτύχου προσπάθησα νὰ περιγράψω ὅσα μᾶς κληροδότησε τὸ Βυζάντιο. Ἀφήνοντας κατὰ μέρος, λόγῳ τοῦ πολὺ ἐξειδικευμένου χαρακτήρα τους, τοὺς τομεῖς τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ δικαίου καὶ τῆς θεολογίας, περιορίστηκα στὴ λογοτεχνία καὶ τὴν τέχνη. "Ὅ,τι κι ἂν ὑπῆρξε ὁ βυζαντινὸς πολιτισμὸς στὶς μέρες του, ἡ δική μας ἐκτίμηση γι' αὐτὸν πρέπει σὲ τελευταία ἀνάλυση νὰ βασιστεῖ στὴ λογοτεχνικὴ καὶ καλλιτεχνικὴ του ἔκφραση.

ΜΕΡΟΣ ΠΡΩΤΟ

ΑΠΟΨΕΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΗΣ ΖΩΗΣ

ΛΑΟΙ ΚΑΙ ΓΛΩΣΣΕΣ

“Όλες οί αυτοκρατορίες πάντοτε κυβέρνησαν μιὰ πληθώρα λαῶν, καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀποψη αὐτὴ ἡ βυζαντινὴ αυτοκρατορία δὲν ἀποτελέσῃ ἐξαιρέση. Ἄν οἱ πληθυσμοὶ τῆς ἦταν σὲ κάποιον βαθμὸ ἐνοποιημένοι, ἂν μεταξὺ τους ὑπῆρχε κοινὴ ἀποδοχὴ τοῦ κυρίαρχου πολιτισμοῦ τῆς αυτοκρατορίας, τότε βέβαια δὲν θὰ ἦταν ἀνάγκη νὰ ἀφιερωθεῖ ἓνα κεφάλαιο σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ζήτημα. Ὡστόσο, ἀκόμη καὶ πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς βυζαντινῆς περιόδου—ἤδη ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ τὸ μεγάλο οἰκοδόμημα τῆς Ρώμης ἄρχισε νὰ ἐμφανίζει τὶς πρῶτες του ρωγμὰς πρὸς τὸ τέλος τοῦ 2ου μ.Χ. αἰῶνα— τὰ διάφορα ἔθνη ὑπὸ τὴ ρωμαϊκὴ κυριαρχία ἐμφάνισαν τὴν τάση νὰ ἀκολουθήσουν διαφορετικοὺς δρόμους καὶ νὰ ἐπιβεβαιώσουν τὴν ἰδιαιτερότητά τους. Ἡ ἐξάπλωση τῆς χριστιανικῆς θρησκείας, ἀντὶ νὰ γεφυρώσει αὐτὸ τὸ ρῆγμα μὲ τὴν εἰσαγωγὴ μιᾶς παγκόσμιας θρησκευτικῆς πίστεως, ἀντίθετα τὸ ἔξυνε. Πρέπει συνεπῶς νὰ ἀρχίσουμε μὲ τὸ ἐρώτημα: ποιοὶ ἦταν οἱ «Βυζαντινοὶ»; Στὴν προσπάθεια νὰ δώσουμε ἀπάντησιν θὰ ἐπιχειρήσουμε μιὰ σύντομη περιήγησιν στὴν αυτοκρατορία, ἐξετάζοντας καθ' ὁδὸν τοὺς λαοὺς τῶν διάφορων ἐπαρχιῶν καὶ τὶς γλῶσσες ποὺ μιλοῦσαν. Ἡ ἐποχὴ ποὺ διάλεξα εἶναι περίπου τὸ 560 μ.Χ., ἀμέσως μετὰ τὴν ἀνακατάληψιν ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Ἰουστινιανὸν μεγάλου μέρους τῆς Ἰταλίας καὶ τῆς Βόρειας Ἀφρικῆς, καὶ ἀρκετὰς δεκαετίες πρὶν ἀπὸ τὶς μεγάλες ἐθνογραφικὰς ἀλλαγὰς ποὺ θὰ συνόδευαν τὴν κατάρρευσιν τοῦ Πρώτου βυζαντινοῦ κράτους.

Μὲ τὴν προϋπόθεσιν ὅτι δὲν θὰ ἀπομακρυνόταν πολὺ ἀπὸ τὶς πόλεις, θὰ ἦταν ἀρκετὸ ὁ φανταστικὸς μας ταξιδιώτης νὰ γνωρίζει δύο μόνο γλῶσσες: ἑλληνικὰ καὶ λατινικὰ. Τὰ ὅρια τῆς ἐξάπλωσιν τῆς καθεμιᾶς δὲν ἦταν παντοῦ ξεκάθαρα. Σὲ γενικὰς γραμμὰς πάντως θὰ μπορούσαμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι τὸ γλωσσικὸ σύνορον διέσχιζε τὴ βαλκανικὴ χερσόνησον ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνατολικὰ πρὸς τὰ δυτικὰ κατὰ μῆκος μιᾶς γραμμῆς ποὺ ξεκινοῦσε ἀπὸ τὴν Ὀδησσὸν (Βάρνα) στὸν Εὐξείνιον Πόντον καὶ κατέληγε στὸ Δυρρά-

χιο στην 'Αδριατική. Νότια τῆς Μεσογείου τὸ σύνορο χώριζε τὴ Λιβύη ἀπὸ τὴν Τριπολίτιδα. Μὲ ἐξάιρεση τὶς βαλκανικὲς χώρες, ὅπου ὑπῆρχε ἀρκετὴ γλωσσικὴ ἀνάμειξη, τὸ δυτικὸ τμήμα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας χρησιμοποιοῦσε ἀποκλειστικὰ τὰ λατινικὰ καὶ τὸ ἀνατολικὸ ἀποκλειστικὰ τὰ ἑλληνικὰ, μὲ τὴν ἔννοια ὅτι αὐτὲς ἦταν οἱ γλώσσες τῆς διοίκησης καὶ τῶν καλλιεργημένων ἀνθρώπων. Σχεδὸν ὅλοι οἱ μορφωμένοι στὴν 'Ανατολὴ ἤξεραν ἑλληνικὰ, ὅπως ὅλοι οἱ μορφωμένοι στὴ Δύση μιλοῦσαν λατινικὰ, ἀλλὰ ἓνα μεγάλο μέρος τῶν ἀπλῶν ἀνθρώπων δὲν μιλοῦσε οὔτε τὴ μιὰ οὔτε τὴν ἄλλη γλώσσα.

Θὰ ἦταν ἀρκετὰ δύσκολο γιὰ τὸν ταξιδιώτη μας νὰ προμηθευτεῖ ἕναν ἐνημερωμένο ὁδηγό. Θὰ μπορούσε νὰ βρεῖ μιὰ ἀπλὴ ἀπαρίθμηση τῶν ἐπαρχιῶν καὶ τῶν πόλεων, πού ὀνομαζόταν *Συνέκδημος* τοῦ 'Ιεροκλῆ,¹ καθὼς καὶ μερικὰ προγενέστερα δρομολόγια πού ἔδιναν τὶς ἀποστάσεις ἀνάμεσα στοὺς σταθμούς κατὰ μῆκος τῶν κύριων ἀρτηριῶν. Θὰ μπορούσε νὰ ἀντλήσει μερικὲς χρήσιμες ἀν καὶ πεπαλαιωμένες πληροφορίες ἀπὸ ἕνα βιβλιαράκι γνωστὸ ὡς *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*,² πού γράφτηκε στὰ μέσα τοῦ 4ου αἰώνα: ἀλλὰ ἀν χρειαζόταν μιὰ συστηματικὴ μελέτη πού νὰ συνδυάζει γεωγραφία καὶ ἐθνογραφία, θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ πάρει στὶς ἀποσκευές του ἕνα ἀντίτυπο τοῦ Στράβωνα. Ἄν μπορούσε νὰ βρεῖ τὴ γεωγραφικὴ μελέτη (πού τώρα ἔχει χαθεῖ) τοῦ ἀλεξανδρινοῦ ἐμπόρου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ 'Ινδικοπλευστή,³ θὰ ἀποκόμιζε ἴσως μικρὸ πρακτικὸ ὄφελος ἀπὸ αὐτήν. Ἄς ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι ὁ ταξιδιώτης μας ἔμεινε ἱκανοποιημένος μὲ τὰ ἀτελῆ του ἐφόδια καὶ ὅτι ἀποφάσισε νὰ περιηγηθεῖ τὴν αὐτοκρατορία κἀνοντας ἀρχὴ ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη καὶ συνεχίζοντας κυκλικὰ, ὅπως οἱ δεῖκτες τοῦ ρολογιοῦ.

Ὅπως ὅλες οἱ μεγάλες πρωτεύουσες, ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη ἦταν ἕνα χωνευτήρι ἐτερόκλητων στοιχείων: καὶ οἱ ἐβδομήντα δύο γνωστὲς ἀνθρώπινες γλώσσες ἀντιπροσωπεύονταν σ' αὐτήν, σύμφωνα μὲ μιὰ σύγχρονη πηγή.⁴ Ἐπαρχιώτες κάθε εἶδους εἶχαν ἐγκατασταθεῖ ἐκεῖ ἢ πηγαίνονταν γιὰ ἐμπορικὲς ἢ κυβερνητικὲς ὑποθέσεις. Ἀνάμεσα στοὺς δούλους ὑπῆρχαν πολλοὶ βάρβαροι. Πολλοὺς ξένους περιλάμβαναν καὶ οἱ στρατιωτικὲς μονάδες, πού τὸν 6ο αἰώνα ἀποτελοῦνταν εἴτε ἀπὸ βαρβάρους (Γερμανοὺς, Οὐνους καὶ ἄλλους) εἴτε ἀπὸ μερικοὺς ἀπὸ τοὺς πιὸ σκληροτράχηλους ἐπαρχιώτες, ὅπως ἦταν οἱ 'Ισαυροὶ, οἱ 'Ιλλυριοὶ καὶ οἱ Θράκες. Λέγεται ὅτι κατὰ τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ 'Ιουστινιανοῦ ἐβδομήντα χιλιάδες στρατιῶτες ἦταν στρατωνισμένοι στὰ σπίτια τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης.⁵ Σύροι, μεσοποτάμιοι καὶ αἰγύπτιοι μοναχοί, πού μιλοῦσαν λίγο ἢ καθόλου ἑλληνικὰ, συνέρρεαν στὴν πρωτεύουσα ὑπὸ τὴν προστασία τῆς αὐτοκράτει-

ρας Θεοδώρας, ἐντυπωσιάζοντας τοὺς ντόπιους μὲ παράξενα κατορθώματα ἀσκητισμοῦ. Οἱ πανταχοῦ παρόντες 'Εβραῖοι κέρδιζαν τὴ ζωὴ τους ὡς τεχνίτες ἢ ἔμποροι. Ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη εἶχε ἰδρυθεῖ ὡς κέντρο τοῦ λατινισμοῦ στὴν 'Ανατολή, καὶ ὑπῆρχαν ἀκόμη ἀνάμεσα στοὺς κατοίκους τῆς πολλοὶ 'Ιλλυριοί, 'Ιταλοὶ καὶ 'Αφρικανοί, τῶν ὁποίων ἡ μητρικὴ γλώσσα ἦταν τὰ λατινικὰ, ὅπως ἦταν καὶ τοῦ ἴδιου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα 'Ιουστινιανοῦ. Ἐπιπλέον, πολλὰ ἔργα λατινικῆς φιλολογίας εἶδαν τὸ φῶς στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ὅπως ἡ περίφημη Γραμματικὴ τοῦ Πρισκιανοῦ, τὸ Χρονικὸ τοῦ Μαρκελλίνου καὶ ὁ πανηγυρικὸς λόγος πού ἀπεύθυνε ὁ 'Αφρικανὸς Κόριππος στὸν 'Ιουστίνου Β'. Ἄν καὶ τὰ λατινικὰ ἦταν ἀκόμη ἀναγκαῖα στοὺς νομικοὺς καὶ σὲ ὀρισμένες διοικητικὲς ὑπηρεσίες, ἡ ζυγαριὰ ἔγερνε ἀναπόφευκτα πρὸς ὄφελος τῶν ἑλληνικῶν. Στὸ τέλος τοῦ 6ου αἰώνα, καθὼς βεβαιώνει ὁ πάπας Γρηγόριος ὁ Μέγας, δὲν ἦταν εὐκόλο νὰ βρεθεῖ στὴν αὐτοκρατορικὴ πρωτεύουσα κάποιος πού νὰ μεταφράζει ἱκανοποιητικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ λατινικὰ στὰ ἑλληνικὰ.⁶

Ἀπέναντι ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη βρίσκεται ὁ τεράστιος ὄγκος τῆς Μικρᾶς 'Ασίας, τὴν ὁποία ἔχουν παρομοιάσει μὲ λιμενοβραχίονα, κολλημένο στὴν 'Ασία, πού δείχνει πρὸς τὴν Εὐρώπη. Οἱ πιὸ ἀνεπτυγμένες περιοχὲς τῆς ἦταν πάντοτε οἱ παραλιακὲς, ἰδιαίτερα ἡ δυτικὴ πλευρὰ μὲ τὶς ὀμαλὲς πλαγιὲς καὶ τὸ εὐκρατο κλίμα, κατάστικτη ἀπὸ ξακουστὲς πόλεις. Ἡ ἀκτὴ κατὰ μῆκος τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου εἶναι πολὺ πιὸ στενὴ καὶ διακεκομμένη, ἐνῶ στὴ νότια παραλία δὲν ὑπάρχουν καθόλου ὀμαλὲς λωρίδες ἀκτῆς, μὲ ἐξάιρεση τὴν πεδιάδα τῆς Παμφυλίας. Οἱ παραλιακὲς περιοχὲς, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ ὄρεινὸ τμήμα τῆς Κιλικίας ('Ισαυρίας) ὅπου ἡ ὄροσειρὰ τοῦ Ταύρου φτάνει ἀκριβῶς μέχρι τὴ θάλασσα, ἦταν ἐξελληνισμένες γιὰ πάνω ἀπὸ χίλια χρόνια πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ 'Ιουστινιανοῦ. Στὸν Εὐξείνου Πόντο τὸ ὄριο διάδοσης τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσας ἀντιστοιχοῦσε μὲ τὰ σημερινὰ σύνορα ἀνάμεσα στὴν Τουρκία καὶ τὴ Σοβιετικὴ Ἐνωση. Ἀνατολικά τῆς Τραπεζοῦντας καὶ τοῦ Ριζαίου κατοικοῦσαν διάφοροι καυκασιανοὶ λαοί, ὅπως οἱ 'Ιβηρες (Γεωργιανοί), καθὼς καὶ οἱ Λαζοὶ καὶ οἱ 'Αβασγοί: τοὺς δύο τελευταίους μόλις τοὺς εἶχαν πλησιάσει οἱ χριστιανικὲς ἱεραποστολές. Ἡ αὐτοκρατορία ἐπίσης διέθετε ἕνα ἐξελληνισμένο προγεφύρωμα στὴ νότια ἀκτὴ τῆς Κριμαίας, ἐνῶ στὸ ὑψηλὸ ὄροπέδιο τῆς κριμαϊκῆς χερσονήσου κατοικοῦσαν Γότθοι.

Ἐντελῶς διαφορετικὸ ἀπὸ τὶς παραλιακὲς περιοχὲς τῆς Μικρᾶς 'Ασίας εἶναι τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ ὑπίπεδο, ὅπου τὸ κλίμα εἶναι τραχὺ καὶ μεγάλο μέρος τῆς γῆς δὲν προσφέρεται γιὰ καλλιέργεια. Στὴν Ἀρχαιότητα, ὅπως καὶ στὸ Μεσαίωνα, τὸ ὑπίπεδο ἦταν ἀραιοκατοικημένο καὶ ἡ ἀστικὴ ζωὴ

είχε σχετικά μικρή ανάπτυξη. Οί σπουδαιότερες πόλεις βρίσκονταν κατά μήκος των κυριότερων αρτηριών, όπως ήταν ή λεγόμενη Βασιλική Όδός, που ξεκινώντας από τη Σμύρνη και τις Σάρδεις, διαμέσου της Άγκυρας και της Καισάρειας, έφτανε στη Μελιτηνή· ή όδός που συνέδεε την Κωνσταντινούπολη με την Άγκυρα μέσω του Δορυλαίου· και ή νότια όδός, που έκτεινόταν από την Έφεσο προς τη Λαοδίκεια, την Αντιόχεια της Πισιδίας, τὸ Ίκόνιο, τὰ Τύανα και, διαμέσου των Κιλικίων Πυλών, ως την Ταρσό και την Αντιόχεια της Συρίας. Η έθνολογική σύνθεση του ύψιπέδου δὲν είχε υποστεί καμιά αξιόλογη μεταβολή για κάπου έπτακόσια χρόνια πριν από την έποχή του Ίουστινιανού. Ήταν ένα εκπληκτικό μωσαϊκό από γηγενείς λαούς και θύλακες εποίκων που υπήρχαν από παλιά, όπως ήταν οί Κέλτες στη Γαλατία, οί Έβραίοι που τους είχαν εγκαταστήσει στη Φρυγία και άλλου κατά την έλληνιστική έποχή, και ομάδες Περσών άκόμη άρχαιότερης καταγωγής. Φαίνεται ότι πολλές από τις ίθαγενείς γλώσσες ήταν άκόμη ζωντανές την Πρώιμη βυζαντινή περίοδο: τὰ φρυγικά πιθανόν τὰ μιλούσαν άκόμη, μιὰ και έμφανίζονται σε έπιγραφές μέχρι και τὸν 3ο αιώνα μ.Χ., τὰ κελτικά στη Γαλατία, τὰ καππαδοκικά ανατολικότερα. Οί αντίθασοι Ίσαυροι, που είχαν έξαναγκαστεί νὰ είρηνεύσουν με τὴ δύναμη των όπλων περί τὸ 500 μ.Χ. και πολλοί από τους όποιους περιπλανιόνταν σε όλόκληρη την αυτοκρατορία ως έπαγγελματίες στρατιώτες και περιοδεύοντες οίκοδόμοι, ήταν ένας λαός ξεχωριστός, και μιλούσαν τὴ δική τους διάλεκτο, συχνά χωρὶς νὰ γνωρίζουν έλληνικά.⁷ Δίπλα τους, ώστόσο, στην πεδιάδα τῆς Κιλικίας, τὰ έλληνικά είχαν αποκτήσει βαθιές ρίζες, με έξαίρεση ίσως τις φυλές τῆς ένδοχώρας.

Άνατολικά τῆς Καππαδοκίας, σε μιὰ περιοχή όρεινή, βρίσκονταν μερικὲς άρμενικὲς έπαρχίες που είχαν προσαρτηθεῖ στην αυτοκρατορία τὸ 387 μ.Χ., όταν ή Περσία και ή Ρώμη διαμοίρασαν μεταξύ τους τὸ βασίλειο τῆς Άρμενίας. Αὐτὲς οί έπαρχίες από στρατηγική άποψη ήταν πολὺ σημαντικὲς, αλλά παρέμεναν οὐσιαστικά ανεπηρέαστες από τὸν έλληνορωμαϊκό πολιτισμὸ και έξακολουθοῦσαν νὰ διοικούνται από ντόπιους σατράπες, μέχρις ότου ὁ Ίουστινιανὸς τους επέβαλε μιὰ καινούρια μορφή στρατιωτικῆς διακυβέρνησης. Τὸν 5ο αιώνα οί Άρμένιοι απέκτησαν δικὸ τους άλφάβητο και άρχισαν νὰ δημιουργοῦν φιλολογία μεταφράζοντας έργα από τὰ έλληνικά και τὰ συριακά, πράγμα που ενίσχυσε τὸ αἶσθημα τῆς έθνικῆς τους ταυτότητας. Έτσι οί Άρμένιοι, που έμελλε νὰ παίξουν άποφασιστικὸ ρόλο στη μετέπειτα βυζαντινή ιστορία, έδειξαν μεγάλη αντίσταση στην άφομοίωση, όπως και οί άλλοι λαοὶ τοῦ Καυκάσου.

Ό ποταμὸς Τίγρης άποτελοῦσε σε γενικὲς γραμμὲς τὸ σύνορο ανάμε-

σα στην Άρμενία και τὴ Μεσοποταμία. Τρεῖς αἰῶνες κατοχῆς από τους Πάρθους (από τὰ μέσα τοῦ 2ου π.Χ. αἰώνα ως τὴ ρωμαϊκή κατάκτηση περί τὸ 165 μ.Χ.) είχαν οὐσιαστικά έξαφανίσει από τὴ Μεσοποταμία κάθε ίχνος τοῦ έλληνικοῦ πολιτισμοῦ που οί Μακεδόνες βασιλεῖς είχαν τόσο σκληρὰ προσπαθήσει νὰ επιβάλουν. Τὴν περίοδο που μᾶς ενδιαφέρει στη Μεσοποταμία μιλοῦσαν κι έγραφαν συριακά. Τὴ φιλολογικὴ μορφή των συριακῶν αντιπροσώπευε ή διάλεκτος τῆς Έδεσσας (Urfa). Σε αὐτὴ τὴν «εὐλογημένη πόλη», όπως και στην Άμιδα (Diyarbakir), τὴ Νίσιβη (Nusaybin) και τὴν περιοχή τοῦ Tur 'Abdin, ένα ισχυρὸ μοναστικὸ κίνημα μονοφυσιτῶν ενίσχυε τὴν καλλιέργεια τῆς γλώσσας αὐτῆς. Η Μεσοποταμία ήταν μεθοριακὴ περιοχή: τὰ σύνορα ανάμεσα στην Περσία και τὴ Ρώμη βρίσκονταν σε μικρὴ απόσταση νοτιοανατολικά τῆς φρουριακῆς πόλης Δάρας, ἐνῶ ή Νίσιβη είχε παραχωρηθεῖ ἄδοξα στους Πέρσες από τὸν αυτοκράτορα Ίοβιανὸ τὸ 363. Η πολιτιστικὴ ιδιαιτερότητα τῆς Μεσοποταμίας σίγουρα δὲν βοήθησε τὴν αυτοκρατορικὴ διοίκηση σε μιὰ τόσο εὐαίσθητη περιοχή.

Η κυριαρχία των άραμαϊκῶν διαλέκτων, στὶς όποῖες ανήκουν και τὰ συριακά, έκτεινόταν σε όλόκληρη τὴ Συρία και τὴν Παλαιστίνη, μέχρι τὴν Αἴγυπτο. Έδῶ παρουσιάζεται ένα έξαιρετικὰ ενδιαφέρον φαινόμενο. Όταν ιδρύθηκαν τὰ έλληνιστικὰ βασίλεια μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ Μεγάλου Αλεξάνδρου, ή Συρία μοιράστηκε ανάμεσα στους Πτολεμαίους και τους Σελευκίδες. Οί Πτολεμαῖοι, που απέκτησαν τὸ νότιο τμήμα τῆς χώρας, δὲν φρόντισαν και πολὺ για τὴν εγκατάσταση έλληνικῶν ἀποικιῶν ἐκεῖ. Οί Σελευκίδες, αντίθετα, για τους όποιους ή βόρεια Συρία είχε άποφασιστικὴ σημασία, άκολούθησαν έντονα έποικιστικὴ πολιτική. Ίδρυσαν άρκετὲς καινούριες πόλεις, όπως τὴν Αντιόχεια στὸν Όρόντη, τὴν Απάμεια, τὴ Σελεύκεια και τὴ Λαοδίκεια, και εἰσήγαγαν τὸ έλληνικὸ στοιχεῖο σε ἤδη υπάρχουσες, όπως τὸ Χαλέπι. Από τότε και στὸ έξῆς ή Συρία βρισκόταν συνεχῶς ὑπὸ έλληνογλωσση διοίκηση. Ωστόσο, κάπου έννέα αἰῶνες άργότερα βλέπουμε ότι ή έλληνικὴ γλώσσα ὄχι μόνο ήταν περιορισμένη στὶς πόλεις, αλλά κυρίως σε αὐτὲς τις πόλεις που ἔδρυσαν οί βασιλεῖς τῆς έλληνιστικῆς έποχῆς. Η ὑπαιθρος γενικὰ και οί πόλεις που δὲν είχαν έλληνικὴ καταγωγή, όπως ή Έμεσα (Homs), έμεναν προσκολλημένες στα άραμαϊκά.

Δὲν φαίνεται πιθανὸ ή χρήση τῆς έλληνικῆς γλώσσας νὰ ήταν πιὸ διαδεδομένη στην Παλαιστίνη από ὅ,τι ήταν στη βόρεια Συρία, με τὴν έξαίρεση ἑνὸς τεχνητοῦ φαινομένου, δηλαδή τὴν ανάπτυξη των «Άγίων Τόπων». Από τὴν έποχή τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου και μετὰ, κάθε περιο-

χή γνωστή από τή Βίβλο είχε αποκτήσει, όπως θα λέγαμε σήμερα, τουριστική φήμη. "Ανθρωποι από κάθε γωνιά του χριστιανικού κόσμου συνέρρεαν στην Παλαιστίνη: μερικοί ως περαστικοί προσκυνητές, άλλοι για πύο μακροχρόνια διαμονή. Μοναστήρια κάθε εθνικότητας ξεφύτρωναν σαν μανιτάρια στην έρημο κοντά στη Νεκρά Θάλασσα. "Ετσι ή Παλαιστίνη ήταν μια γλωσσική Βαβέλ, αλλά ο γηγενής πληθυσμός — και πρέπει να θυμηθούμε ότι περιλάμβανε δυο ξεχωριστές εθνότητες, τους Έβραίους και τους Σαμαρείτες — μιλούσε άνεκαθεν άραμαϊκά. "Η προσκυνητρια Έγερία, πού παραβρέθηκε στη λειτουργία του Πάσχα στα Ίεροσόλυμα γύρω στο έτος 400, λέει τὰ εξής:

«Έπειδή στη χώρα αυτή ένα μέρος του πληθυσμού μιλά και έλληνικά και συριακά, ένα άλλο μέρος μόνο έλληνικά και ένα τρίτο μέρος μόνο συριακά, και επειδή ο επίσκοπος, αν και γνωρίζει συριακά, μιλά πάντοτε έλληνικά και ποτέ συριακά, γι' αυτό έχει συνεχώς δίπλα του έναν ιερέα ο οποίος, ένόσο ο επίσκοπος μιλά έλληνικά, μεταφράζει τὰ λόγια του στα συριακά, για να τὰ καταλαβαίνουν όλοι. Το ίδιο γίνεται και με τὰ εκκλησιαστικά άναγνώσματα: επειδή πρέπει να διαβάζονται στα έλληνικά, πάντα υπάρχει κάποιος πού τὰ μεταφράζει στα συριακά, για να τὰ καταλαβαίνει ο λαός και να μπορεί να κατηχηθεϊ. "Όσο για τους Λατίνους πού βρίσκονται εκεί, δηλαδή εκείνους πού δέν γνωρίζουν ούτε συριακά ούτε έλληνικά, έχουν και αυτοί στη διάθεσή τους ένα διερμηνέα για να μὴν αισθάνονται δυσχεστημένοι: γιατί υπάρχουν μερικοί άδελφοί και άδελφές πού γνωρίζουν καλά και τὰ έλληνικά και τὰ λατινικά, οί όποιοι κάνουν μετάφραση στα λατινικά».⁸

"Ένα άλλο στοιχείο του πληθυσμού τόσο τής Συρίας όσο και τής Παλαιστίνης ήταν οί "Αραβες πού είχαν εξαπλωθεϊ προς τὸ βορρά μέχρι τή Μεσοποταμία. Μερικοί από αυτούς, όπως οί Ναβαταϊοί τής Πέτρας και οί Παλμυραϊοί, είχαν αποκτήσει μόνιμη εγκατάσταση και είχαν χάσει τή μητρική τους γλώσσα. "Άλλοι περιπλανιόνταν στις έρήμους είτε ως ληστές είτε στην ύπηρεσία τής αυτοκρατορίας, με καθήκον να προστατεύουν τις κατοικημένες περιοχές και να επιβλέπουν τήν εποχιακή μετανάστευση τῶν νομάδων. "Έν πάση περιπτώσει, δέν πρέπει να φανταστούμε ότι οί άραβικές κατακτήσεις του 7ου αιώνα εισήγαγαν κάποιο ξένο στοιχείο στις έπαρχίες αυτές: οί "Αραβες ήταν εκεί από παλιά, ο αριθμός τους μεγάλωνε, και τήν εποχή τής βασιλείας του Ίουστινιανού ανάλαμβαναν όλο και περισσότερο τὸ ρόλο του φύλακα τής αυτοκρατορικής ειρήνης. Για παράδειγμα, τήν αίματηρή επανάσταση τῶν Σαμαρειτῶν τὸ 529 τήν κατέπνιξε ένας άραβας φύλαρχος, ο Abukarib.

"Η Κύπρος, εξαιτίας τής γεωγραφικής της θέσης, είχε στενούς δεσμούς με τή Συρία. Έδώ τὰ έλληνικά τὰ μιλούσαν από τὰ προϊστορικά χρόνια, αλλά υπήρχε και μια αξιόλογη παροικία Σύρων, όπως μπορούμε να συμπεράνουμε από τήν εξαπλωση τής μονοφυσιτικής αίρεσης (βλ. Κεφάλαιο Δ'). "Ο άγιος Έπιφάνιος, ο διάσημος επίσκοπος τής Σαλαμίνας (πέθανε τὸ 403), ήταν Παλαιστίνιος και λέγεται ότι γνώριζε πέντε γλώσσες: έλληνικά, συριακά, έβραϊκά, αίγυπτιακά και λατινικά.⁹ "Υπερβολή πιθανόν, αλλά πάντως ένδεικτική τής πολυγλωσσίας πού χαρακτηρίζει τότε, αλλά και τώρα ακόμη, τους πύο δραστήριους Λεβαντίνους.

Μια έρημος χωρίζει τήν Παλαιστίνη από τήν πλούσια και άρχαία χώρα τής Αιγύπτου. Κι εδώ ή διάδοση τής έλληνικής γλώσσας υπήρξε άπειθείας κληρονομιά τής ελληνιστικής εποχής. "Η πρωτεύουσα Άλεξάνδρεια ήταν πόλη κατά κύριο λόγο έλληνική, αλλά ή επίσημη όρολογία τήν τοποθετούσε ad Aegyptum κι όχι in Aegypto, σαν να ήταν παρείσακτη σὲ ξένη χώρα και όσο μακρύτερα από τήν Άλεξάνδρεια ταξίδευε κανείς, τόσο λιγότερο άκουγε τὰ έλληνικά. Έκτὸς από τήν πρωτεύουσα, μόνο άλλες δύο πόλεις είχαν ιδρυθεϊ από τους Έλληνες, ή Ναύκρατις στο Δέλτα και ή Πτολεμαίς στη Θηβαΐδα. "Ο έξελληνισμός δέν προχώρησε πολύ ούτε με τή ρωμαϊκή διοίκηση. "Αφήνοντας κατά μέρος τήν έβραϊκή παροικία, πού τὸν 1ο αιώνα μ.Χ. λέγεται ότι αριθμοῦσε ένα εκατομμύριο ψυχές, ο κύριος όγκος του πληθυσμού εξακολουθοῦσε να μιλά αίγυπτιακά (κοπτικά), μολονότι ή γλώσσα τής διοίκησης ήταν τὰ έλληνικά. "Υπάρχουν ένδείξεις ότι στην Πρώιμη βυζαντινή περίοδο τὰ κοπτικά κέρδιζαν έδαφος, ώστε τὸν 6ο αιώνα ακόμη και μερικά έπίσημα έγγραφα δημοσιεύονταν σὲ αυτή τή γλώσσα. Πάνω απ' όλα, τὰ κοπτικά ήταν ή γλώσσα του αίγυπτιακού χριστιανισμού, ένῶ τὰ έλληνικά είχαν ταυτιστεϊ με τήν ξένη διοικητική ιεραρχία πού επέβαλλε ή αυτοκρατορική κυβέρνηση.

Τις κατοικημένες περιοχές τής Αιγύπτου, πού ουσιαστικά περιορίζονταν στην κοιλάδα του Νείλου και τὸ Δέλτα, τις άπειλοῦσαν από παντού διάφορες βαρβαρικές φυλές. Από τὰ άνατολικά γίνονταν έπιδρομές Σαρακηνῶν στα νότια οί μαῦροι Νοβάδες και Βλέμμυες δημιουργοῦσαν συνεχώς προβλήματα: οί δυτικές περιοχές υφίσταντο τις επίθεσεις τῶν Βερβέρων, όπως και ή Λιβύη, μια έπαρχία πού ήταν διοικητικά ένωμένη με τήν Αίγυπτο. "Ο άγιος Δανιήλ, μοναχός στη Σκήτη κοντά στην Άλεξάνδρεια, αίχμαλωτίστηκε τρεις φορές από βαρβάρους και κατάφερε να δραπέτευσει μόνο αφού σκότωσε τὸν άπαγωγέα του — μια άμαρτία πού βάραινε τή συνείδησή του σὲ όλη του τή ζωή.¹⁰ "Όταν στο δεύτερο μισό του 6ου αιώνα ο περιπλανώμενος μοναχός Ίωάννης Μόσχος επισκέφθη-

και τα αιγυπτιακά μοναστήρια, άκουσε πολλές ιστορίες λεηλασιών που γίνονταν από βαρβάρους ή από ντόπιους ληστές. Μερικά μοναστήρια μάλιστα είχαν έρημωθεϊ.¹¹

Η Λιβύη αποτελούσε το όριο των ελληνόγλωσσων επαρχιών. Δυτικότερα βρισκόταν η Τριπολίτιδα, μια στενή παράκτια λωρίδα, έπειτα οι σημαντικές περιοχές της Βυζακηνής, της Proconsularis και της Νουμιδίας, και τέλος οι δύο Μαυριτανίες, που έφταναν μέχρι το στενό του Γιβραλτάρ. "Όλες αυτές είχαν εκρωμαϊστεί σε μεγάλο βαθμό, και οι πλουσιότερες περιοχές, που αντίστοιχοῦσαν στη σημερινή Τυνησία, σε καλύτερες εποχές ήταν από τις πιο ανεπτυγμένες και ακμάζουσες επαρχίες της αυτοκρατορίας. Υπάρχει άβεβαιότητα σχετικά με το βαθμό άφομοίωσης του γηγενούς πληθυσμού· είναι επίσης άσαφές κατά πόσο το γλωσσικό ιδίωμα των πόλεων, το οποίο ο άγιος Αύγουστίνος ονομάζει φοινικικά, καταγόταν από τα αρχαία φοινικικά (όπως φαίνεται πιθανότερο) ή ήταν βερβέρικα. Έν πάση περιπτώσει ο ταξιδιώτης μας του 560 θα έβρισκε μια κατάσταση κάπως διαφορετική από αυτήν που γνώριζε ο επίσκοπος της Ίππώνος ενάμιση αιώνα πριν: γιατί η Αφρική μόλις πρόσφατα (το 533) είχε ανακτηθεί από τους Βανδάλους, που την κατείχαν επί έναν αιώνα, ως ανεξάρτητη δύναμη. Οι Βάνδαλοι δεν ήταν τόσο πολυάριθμοι ώστε να επιφέρουν κάποια αξιόλογη μεταβολή στη σύνθεση του πληθυσμού, αλλά η διείσδυσή τους έδω προκάλεσε το ξεσήκωμα των βερβέρικων φυλών που αποτελούσαν τώρα σοβαρή απειλή για τις κατοικημένες περιοχές.

Δεν χρειάζεται να ασχοληθούμε με την Ίσπανία, μολονότι ο Ίουστινιανός ανέκτησε από τους Βησιγόθους ένα τμήμα της νότιας χώρας, το οποίο παρέμεινε σε βυζαντινά χέρια για εβδομήντα περίπου χρόνια. Και έτσι μπορούμε να οδηγήσουμε τον ταξιδιώτη μας στην Ίταλία, όπου μόλις είχε επιβάλει την κυριαρχία του ο Ίουστινιανός, αν και σε κάπως άβεβαιη βάση, μετά από μεγάλες αιματοχυσίες. Ολόκληρη ή χώρα βρισκόταν τότε σε φοβερή κατάσταση. Οι συνεχείς πόλεμοι ανάμεσα στους Βυζαντινούς και τους Οστρογόθους, που κράτησαν από το 535 ως το 562, είχαν προκαλέσει την καταστροφή του Μιλάνου με την απώλεια, όπως λέγεται, τριακοσίων χιλιάδων ανδρών,¹² την έξολόθρευση σχεδόν του πληθυσμού της Ρώμης, ή οποία είχε υποστεί τρεις πολιορκίες, και έκτεταμένο λιμό στην ύπαιθρο. «Η Ίταλία, αν και είναι τριπλάσια από τη Λιβύη, έχει γίνει παντού έρημη από ανθρώπους περισσότερο από εκείνη», γράφει ο Προκόπιος,¹³ ίσως χωρίς μεγάλη υπερβολή. "Όσο για τη σύνθεση του πληθυσμού, δεν υπάρχει άμφιβολία ότι οι Ίταλιώται, όπως τους

αποκαλεί ο Προκόπιος, ήταν βασικά Λατίνοι. Ακόμη και στην αυτοκρατορική πρωτεύουσα, τη Ραβέννα, που είχε στενούς δεσμούς με την Ανατολή και πολυάριθμους ανατολίτες έποίκους, τα λατινικά ήταν το βασικό μέσο επικοινωνίας. Μερικοί μικροί ελληνικοί θύλακες ίσως είχαν επιβιώσει στο νότιο τμήμα της χερσονήσου, και όπωσδήποτε στην ανατολική άκτῆ της Σικελίας εξακολουθούσαν να μιλούν ελληνικά. Υπήρχαν και μερικές άλλες μειονοτικές ομάδες, όπως οι Έβραίοι και οι νεοφερμένοι Οστρογόθοι, αλλά οι τελευταίοι μόλις και μετά βίας θα ξεπερνούσαν τις εκατό χιλιάδες. Πολλά άλλα κύματα εισβολέων και έποίκων επρόκειτο να έλθουν, χωρίς ωστόσο να αλλοιώσουν τον βασικά λατινικό χαρακτήρα των κατοίκων.

Διασχίζοντας την Αδριατική ο ταξιδιώτης μας θα μπορούσε να αποβιβαστεί στο Δυρράχιο και να ακολουθήσει την Έγνατία Όδὸ για να επιστρέψει στην Κωνσταντινούπολη. Οι περιοχές που θα περνούσε ήταν τότε σχεδόν τόσο έρημωμένες όσο και η Ίταλία. "Ας δώσουμε και πάλι το λόγο στον Προκόπιο:

«Στο Ίλλυρικό και σε όλη τη Θράκη, δηλαδή από τον κόλπο του Ίονίου [Αδριατική] μέχρι τα προάστια του Βυζαντίου, όπου είναι ή Έλλάδα και ή χώρα της Χερσονήσου, Οῦνοι και Σλάβοι και Άντες έκαναν επιδρομές σχεδόν κάθε χρόνο από τότε που ανέλαβε τη ρωμαϊκή εξουσία ο Ίουστινιανός, και προξένησαν ανείπωτα κακά στους κατοίκους τους. Γιατι πιστεύω ότι σε κάθε εισβολή πάνω από διακόσιες χιλιάδες Ρωμαίοι σκοτώνονταν ή αιχμαλωτιζόνταν, ώστε να υπάρχει στις χώρες αυτές αληθινή Σκοθῶν έρημία».¹⁴

Ο Προκόπιος παραλείπει να αναφέρει στο σημείο αυτό ότι μερικές από τις καταστρεπτικότερες εισβολές στη Βαλκανική είχαν γίνει πριν από την εποχή του Ίουστινιανού, ιδίως από τους Γότθους το 378, τους Οῦνους στα 441-7, τους Οστρογόθους στα 479-482, και τους Βουλγάρους αρχίζοντας από το 493. Δὸν υπάρχει άμφιβολία πως αυτές και άλλες μεταγενέστερες επιδρομές προκάλεσαν τεράστιες αναστατώσεις, αλλά είναι δύσκολο να αξιολογηθούν οι επιπτώσεις τους στην εθνογραφική σύνθεση της περιοχής. Οι γηγενείς πληθυσμοί ήταν οι Ίλλυριοί στα δυτικά, οι Θράκες και οι Δακο-Μυσοί στα ανατολικά και, φυσικά, οι Έλληνες στο νότο. "Όμως θα χρειαζόταν ένας θαρραλέος ιστορικός για να μπορέσει να πει ποιοι κατοικούσαν πού και σε ποιους αριθμούς στα μέσα του 6ου αιώνα. Οι Σλάβοι είχαν ήδη αρχίσει να εγκαθίστανται, ιδιαίτερα στην περιοχή ανάμεσα στη Ναισό και τη Σόφια, όπως αποδεικνύεται από τα τοπωνύμια που αναφέρει ο Προκόπιος,¹⁵ και είναι πιθανό ή μακροχρόνια παρουσία

γοθθικῶν καὶ ἄλλων βαρβαρικῶν στρατευμάτων νὰ εἶχε ἀφήσει κάποια ἴχνη. "Ὅσο γιὰ τὶς γλώσσες, ἔχουμε ἤδη μιλήσει γιὰ τὸ γεωγραφικὸ ὄριο ἀνάμεσα στὰ λατινικὰ καὶ τὰ ἑλληνικὰ. Γιὰ τὰ ἱλλυρικὰ (τῶν ὁποίων ἡ σχέση μετὰ τὰ σύγχρονα ἄλβανικὰ ἀμφισβητεῖται) λίγα πράγματα εἶναι γνωστά, ἀλλὰ τὰ θρακικὰ, καὶ μάλιστα τὰ βεσσικὰ, ἦταν ἀκόμη ζωντανὴ γλώσσα τὸν 6ο αἰώνα.

Αὐτοί, σὲ γενικὲς γραμμές, ἦταν οἱ λαοὶ καὶ οἱ γλώσσες τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Καὶ ἂν τόνισα κάπως τὰ τοπικὰ στοιχεῖα, τὸ ἔκανα γιὰ νὰ ἀντισταθμίσω τὴ μεροληψία τῶν φιλολογικῶν καὶ διηγηματικῶν μας πηγῶν. Γιὰ νὰ ἀναφέρω ἓνα μόνο παράδειγμα, ὁ ρήτορας τοῦ 4ου αἰώνα Λιβάνιος, ποὺ γεννήθηκε στὴν Ἀντιόχεια καὶ ἔζησε τὸ μεγαλύτερο μέρος τῆς ζωῆς του ἐκεῖ, καὶ τοῦ ὁποίου τὰ ἔργα καλύπτουν ἔντεκα τυπωμένους τόμους καὶ ἀποτελοῦν ἀληθινὸ χρυσορυχεῖο χρήσιμων πληροφοριῶν, ἀναφέρει τὴν ὑπαρξὴ τῆς συριακῆς γλώσσας μίᾳ καὶ μοναδικῇ φορᾷ. Ὡστόσο εἶναι ἀναμφισβήτητο γεγονός ὅτι ἡ ἑλληνόγλωσση Ἀντιόχεια ἦταν σὴν ἓνα νησί μέσα σὲ μιὰ θάλασσα συριακῶν. Οἱ καλλιεργημένοι συγγραφεῖς ἀπλῶς δὲν πρόσεχαν τέτοιες «ἀπολίτιστες» καταστάσεις. Ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἐπιγραφές δὲν μᾶς διαφωτίζουν περισσότερο. Ὅποιος ἔστηνε μιὰ ἐπιγραφή, ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ ἐπιτύμβια πλάκα, φυσικὰ χρησιμοποιοῦσε τὴν «ἐπίσημη» γλώσσα τῆς περιοχῆς. Ἐπιπλέον, πολλὲς ἀπὸ τὶς ὁμιλούμενες διαλέκτους δὲν εἶχαν γραπτὴ μορφή. Στὸ περιβάλλον τῶν μοναχῶν κυρίως συναντᾶμε καμιά φορὰ ἀπλοὺς ἀγράμματους ἀνθρώπους καὶ παίρνουμε μιὰ ἰδέα γιὰ τὴ γλώσσα ποὺ μιλοῦσαν: φυσικὰ, ἦταν τὰ ντόπια ἰδιώματα. Ἀπὸ ἐδῶ ξεκινᾶ καὶ ἡ συνήθεια νὰ ἰδρῶν «ἐθνικὰ» μοναστήρια. Ἀλλὰ, ὅμως, ἦταν πολυεθνικὰ: ἡ μονὴ τῶν Ἀκοιμήτων χωριζόταν σὲ τέσσερις γλωσσικὲς ομάδες —λατινικὴ, ἑλληνικὴ, συριακὴ καὶ κοπτικὴ.¹⁶ Στὸ μοναστήρι ποὺ ἴδρυσε ὁ ἅγιος Θεοδόσιος ὁ Κοινοβιάρχης στὴν Παλαιστίνη μιλοῦσαν ἑλληνικὰ, βεσσικὰ καὶ ἄρμενικὰ.¹⁷ Στὸ ὄρος Σινά, τὸν 6ο αἰώνα, ἄκουγε κανεὶς λατινικὰ, ἑλληνικὰ, συριακὰ, κοπτικὰ καὶ βεσσικὰ.¹⁸ Τὸ 518 ἓνας ἡγούμενος μιᾶς μονῆς στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ υπογράψει τὸ ὄνομά του σὲ μιὰ αἴτηση, ἐπειδὴ δὲν γνῶριζε ἑλληνικὰ.¹⁹ Μποροῦν νὰ ἀναφερθοῦν πολλὰ παρόμοια παραδείγματα.

Ἡ χωρογραφικὴ μας ἔρευνα θὰ ἦταν πιὸ διδακτικὴ ἂν ἤμασταν σὲ θέση νὰ ἐκφράσουμε ποσοτικὰ τὴ σχετικὴ σπουδαιότητα τῶν διάφορων ἐθνικῶν ομάδων. Δυστυχῶς δὲν διαθέτουμε ἀξιόπιστους ἀριθμούς, ὅπως ἤδη ἀναφέρθηκε στὴν Εἰσαγωγή. Ἐνας σπουδαῖος μελετητὴς ἐντούτοις διατύπωσε τὴν ἀποψὴ ὅτι ἡ αὐτοκρατορία τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ δὲν εἶχε παρα-

πάνω ἀπὸ 30 ἑκατομμύρια κατοίκους, συμπεριλαμβανομένων καὶ τῶν ἐπαρχιῶν ποὺ ἀνακτῆθηκαν στὴ Δύση.²⁰ Ἄν δὲν λάβουμε ὑπόψη μας τὶς ἀπώλειες ποὺ προκάλεσε ἡ μεγάλη πανώλη τοῦ 542, ὁ ὑπολογισμὸς αὐτὸς φαίνεται ὑπερβολικὰ χαμηλός: θὰ ἤμασταν πιὸ κοντὰ στὴν ἀλήθεια ἂν ὑπολογίζαμε 30 ἑκατομμύρια γιὰ τὸ ἀνατολικὸ τμήμα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Σὲ πολὺ γενικὲς γραμμές ἡ κατανομὴ τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ μπορεῖ νὰ ἦταν ἢ ἀκόλουθη: 8 ἑκατομμύρια στὴν Αἴγυπτο, 9 ἑκατομμύρια στὴ Συρία, Παλαιστίνη καὶ Μεσοποταμία, 10 ἑκατομμύρια στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία, καὶ 3 ὡς 4 ἑκατομμύρια στὰ Βαλκάνια. Ἄν οἱ ἀριθμοὶ αὐτοὶ πλησιάζουν κάπως τὴν πραγματικότητα, τότε πρέπει νὰ συμπεράνουμε ὅτι ὅσοι εἶχαν μητρικὴ τους γλώσσα τὰ ἑλληνικὰ ἦταν λιγότεροι ἀπὸ τὸ ἓνα τρίτο τοῦ συνολικοῦ πληθυσμοῦ, ἄς ποῦμε 8 ἑκατομμύρια, ἀφήνοντας κι ἓνα περιθώριο γιὰ τοὺς ἀναφομοίωτους λαοὺς τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας καὶ γιὰ ὅσους μιλοῦσαν λατινικὰ καὶ θρακικὰ στὰ Βαλκάνια. Συνεπῶς, αὐτοὶ ποὺ μιλοῦσαν ἑλληνικὰ, κοπτικὰ καὶ ἄραμαϊκὰ πρέπει νὰ ἦταν, ἀπὸ τὴν ἀποψη τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τους, σχεδὸν ἰσοδύναμοι. Σὲ σύγκριση μετὰ τὴ διάδοξη τῶν λατινικῶν στὴ Γαλατία καὶ τὴν Ἰσπανία, πρέπει νὰ ὁμολογηθεῖ ὅτι ἡ ἑλληνικὴ γλώσσα γνώρισε πολὺ περιορισμένη πρόοδο στὸ διάστημα ἀνάμεσα στὸν 3ο π.Χ. καὶ τὸν 6ο μ.Χ. αἰώνα. Αὐτὸ ὀφειλόταν ἀναμφίβολα στὸ γεγονός ὅτι ὁ ἐξελληνισμὸς εἶχε κέντρο κυρίως τὶς πόλεις. Ἐναν αἰώνα περίπου μετὰ τὴν ἀραβικὴ κατάκτηση, τὰ ἑλληνικὰ εἶχαν οὐσιαστικὰ ἐξαφανιστεῖ ἀπὸ τὴ Συρία καὶ τὴν Αἴγυπτο, πράγμα ποὺ σημαίνει ἀπλῶς ὅτι δὲν εἶχαν ἀποκτήσει βαθιὲς ρίζες.

Μποροῦμε νὰ κάνουμε ἀκόμη μιὰ παρατήρηση μετὰ τὴν ἔρευνά μας, ὅτι, δηλαδή, παρὰ τὴν αὐξανόμενη ἀνασφάλεια σὲ ὀλόκληρη σχεδὸν τὴν αὐτοκρατορία, οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ τοὺς ὑπηκόους τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ ἐξακολουθοῦσαν νὰ ζοῦν στὶς ἀρχικὲς τους κοιτίδες. Ἡ διασπορὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων, τῶν Ἑβραίων καὶ, σὲ μικρότερο βαθμὸ, τῶν Σύρων εἶχε πραγματοποιηθεῖ κάμποσους αἰῶνες νωρίτερα. Ἐτσι λοιπόν, ἀπὸ ἐθνογραφικὴ ἀποψη, ὅπως καὶ ἀπὸ τόσες ἄλλες ἀπόψεις, ἡ ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ ἀντιπροσωπεύει τὴν ὕστατη περίοδο τῆς Ἀρχαιότητος.

Ὅτι ἦταν κουραστικὸ νὰ περιγράψουμε ἐδῶ ὅλες τὶς ἐθνογραφικὲς μεταβολές ποὺ ὑπέστη ἡ αὐτοκρατορία μετὰ τὸν 6ο αἰώνα, ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ ποῦμε λίγα λόγια γιὰ τὴ μεγαλύτερη ἀλλαγὴ ἀπὸ ὅλες, ποὺ ἄρχισε λίγες δεκαετίες μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Πρῶτῃ τῆς ἐνδείξει ὑπῆρξε ἡ μαζικὴ ἐγκατάσταση τῶν Σλάβων στὴ βαλκανικὴ χερσόνησο. Οἱ Σλάβοι εἰσέβαλαν σὲ διαδοχικὰ κύματα καί, ἀντίθετα ἀπὸ προηγούμενους ἐπιδρομεῖς, ἐγκαταστάθηκαν μόνιμα. Ὁ Ἰωάννης τῆς Ἀμιδας (γνω-

στὸς ἐπίσης ὡς Ἰωάννης τῆς Ἐφέσου) σὲ ἓνα πασίγνωστο χωρίο του ἀναφέρει ὅτι τὸ 581

...«ἓνας καταραμένος λαός, πού ὀνομάζονται Σκλαβηνοί, εἰσέβαλε σὲ ὀλόκληρη τὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ στὴ χώρα τῶν Θεσσαλονικέων καὶ σὲ ὅλη τὴ Θράκη, καὶ κατέλαβε τὶς πόλεις, καὶ πῆρε πολυάριθμα φρούρια, καὶ λεηλάτησε, καὶ ἔκαψε, καὶ ὑποδούλωσε τὸ λαό, καὶ ἔγινε κύριος ὅλης τῆς χώρας, καὶ ἐγκαταστάθηκε ἐκεῖ διὰ τῆς βίας, καὶ ἔμεινε ἐκεῖ σὰν νὰ ἦταν δική του. [...] Καὶ ἀκόμη μέχρι σήμερα [584 μ.Χ.] βρίσκονται ἐκεῖ, καὶ ζοῦν ἀνενόχλητοι στὶς ρωμαϊκὲς χῶρες, χωρὶς ἀγωνία καὶ φόβο, καὶ αἰχμαλωτίζουν καὶ σφάζουν καὶ καῖνε».²¹

Μιὰ ἄλλη πηγή, τὸ λεγόμενο Χρονικὸ τῆς Μονεμβασιάς, ἀναφέρει ὅτι τὸ ἔτος 587-8 οἱ τουρκικῆς καταγωγῆς Ἀβαραί (μὲ τοὺς ὁποίους οἱ Σλάβοι συχνὰ συμμαχοῦσαν)

...«κατέλαβαν ὅλη τὴ Θεσσαλία καὶ ὅλη τὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ τὴν Παλαιὰ Ἠπειρο καὶ τὴν Ἀττικὴ καὶ τὴν Εὐβοία. Καὶ ἀφοῦ εἰσέβαλαν στὴν Πελοπόννησο τὴν κατέλαβαν μὲ πόλεμο, καὶ ἔδιωξαν καὶ κατέστρεψαν τὰ εὐγενῆ καὶ ἑλληνικὰ ἔθνη καὶ κατοίκησαν οἱ ἴδιοι ἐκεῖ. Αὐτοὶ πού μπόρεσαν νὰ ξεφύγουν ἀπὸ τὰ δολοφονικά τους χέρια διασκορπίστηκαν ἐδῶ κι ἐκεῖ. Καὶ οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς Πάτρας μετακόμισαν στὴν περιοχή τοῦ Ρηγίου τῆς Καλαβρίας, οἱ Ἀργεῖοι στὸ νησὶ Ὀρόβη, καὶ οἱ Κορίνθιοι στὸ νησὶ πού ὀνομάζεται Αἴγινα. [...] Καὶ μόνο τὸ ἀνατολικὸ μέρος τῆς Πελοποννήσου, ἀπὸ τὴν Κόρινθο μέχρι τὸν Μαλέα, ἔμεινε καθαρὸ ἀπὸ τοὺς Σλάβους, ἐπειδὴ ἡ περιοχή εἶναι τραχιὰ καὶ δύσβατη».²²

Ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκριβῆ χρονολόγηση αὐτῶν τῶν γεγονότων, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἀναμφισβήτητο ὅτι στὸ τέλος τοῦ 6ου καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴ τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα, ὅταν τὸ σύνορο τοῦ Δούναβη κατέρρευσε ἐντελῶς, ὀλόκληρη οὐσιαστικὰ ἡ βαλκανικὴ χερσόνησος ξέφυγε ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκρατορικὸ ἔλεγχο. Μόνο μερικὲς ὀχυρὲς παραλιακὲς πόλεις κατάφεραν νὰ ἀντέξουν, ὅπως ἡ Μεσημβρία στὸν Εὐξείνιο Πόντο, ἡ Θεσσαλονίκη, ἡ Ἀθήνα καὶ ἡ Κόρινθος. Ὁ πληθυσμὸς τῶν ἄλλων περιοχῶν κατέφυγε στὰ κοντινὰ νησιά, ὅπως ἔκαναν στὴ Μονεμβασιά, ἢ μετανάστευσε στὴν Ἰταλία. Ἡ βαρβαρότητα κυριάρχησε μέχρι τὰ ἔξωτερικὰ τεῖχη τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης — τὸ λεγόμενο Ἀναστασιανὸ Μακρὸ Τεῖχος πού διέγραφε ἓνα εὐρὸ τῶς ἀπὸ τὸν Εὐξείνιο Πόντο μέχρι τὴ Σηλυμβρία στὴ θάλασσα τοῦ Μαρμαρᾶ — ἀλλὰ σὲ λίγο κι αὐτὰ ἐγκαταλείφθηκαν.

Ἡ τελευταία σημαντικὴ σλαβικὴ ἐγκατάσταση πραγματοποιήθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς Σέρβους καὶ τοὺς Κροάτες, πού τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἡρακλείου κατέλαβαν τὶς περιοχὲς ὅπου κατοικοῦν μέχρι σήμερα. Ἐπειτα, τὸ 680, ἦλθαν

οἱ τουρκικῆς καταγωγῆς Βούλγαροι καὶ κατέλαβαν τὴ χώρα πού ἔχει τὸ ὄνομά τους, ὅπου μὲ τὴν πάροδο τοῦ χρόνου ἀπορροφήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν σλαβικὸ πληθυσμὸ πού κατοικοῦσε ἐκεῖ. Ὁ ἐκβαρβαρισμὸς τῶν Βαλκανίων ἄρχισε νὰ ὑποχωρεῖ μόνο πρὸς τὸ τέλος τοῦ 8ου αἰώνα, ἀλλὰ στὸ μεταξὺ εἶχε δημιουργήσει μόνιμα ἀποτελέσματα.

Ταυτόχρονα μὲ τὴν ἀπώλεια τῶν Βαλκανίων ἡ αὐτοκρατορία ὑπέστη σοβαρότερο ἀκρωτηριασμὸ χάνοντας τὶς ἀνατολικὲς καὶ νότιες ἐπαρχίες τῆς. Αὐτὸ ἔγινε σὲ δύο φάσεις. Πρῶτα, ἀνάμεσα στὸ 609 καὶ τὸ 619, οἱ Πέρσες κατέκτησαν ὀλόκληρη τὴ Συρία, τὴν Παλαιστίνη καὶ τὴν Αἴγυπτο. Στὴ συνέχεια ἠττήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Ἡράκλειο καὶ ὑποχώρησαν στὴ χώρα τους· ἀλλὰ λίγα χρόνια ἀργότερα οἱ ἴδιες ἐπαρχίες κατακτήθηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἀραβες, καὶ αὐτὴ τὴ φορὰ χάθηκαν γιὰ πάντα. Ὀλόκληρη ἡ βόρεια ἀκτὴ τῆς Ἀφρικῆς ἐπίσης ὑπέκυψε στοὺς εἰσβολεῖς. Ἡ μεσογειακὴ αὐτοκρατορία τῆς Ρώμης ἔπαψε νὰ ὑπάρχει, ἐνῶ τὸ βυζαντινὸ κράτος περιορίστηκε στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία, τὰ νησιά τοῦ Αἰγαίου, μέρος τῆς Κριμαίας καὶ τὴ Σικελία.

Οἱ Πέρσες ἐπίσης ἔκαναν τὴν ἀρχὴ γιὰ μιὰ ἄλλη ἐξέλιξη, πού ἐπρόκειτο νὰ ἔχει σπουδαῖες δημογραφικὲς συνέπειες, μὲ τὸ νὰ ἐπιτεθοῦν ἐναντίον τῆς ἴδιας τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης διαμέσου τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας. Αὐτὸ προκάλεσε τεράστιες ἀναστατώσεις. Ὅταν τοὺς διαδέχτηκαν οἱ Ἀραβες καὶ ἔγιναν κύριοι ὅλων τῶν περιοχῶν μέχρι τὴν ὄροσειρὰ τοῦ Ταύρου, εἰσέβαλαν κι αὐτοὶ μὲ τὴ σειρά τους στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία — ὄχι μιὰ καὶ δύο φορές, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν κάθε χρόνο — καὶ αὐτὸ συνεχίστηκε γιὰ δύο αἰῶνες περίπου. Πολλὲς ἐπιδρομὲς δὲν προχωροῦσαν πολὺ μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ σύνορα, ἀλλὰ ἀρκετὲς ἔφταναν ὡς τὸν Εὐξείνιο Πόντο καὶ τὸ Αἰγαῖο, καὶ λίγες ἔφτασαν ὡς τὴν ἴδια τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ὅπως ἀποδείχτηκε, οἱ Ἀραβες δὲν κατάφεραν ποτὲ νὰ ἀποκτήσουν μόνιμη βάση στὸ ὑψίπεδο τῆς Ἀνατολίας. Αὐτὸ πού συνέβαινε, ἀντίθετα, ἦταν ὅτι, κάθε φορὰ πού ἔκαναν εἰσβολή, ὁ τοπικὸς πληθυσμὸς κατέφυγε στὰ ἀπόκρημνα φρούρια πού ὑπάρχουν ἄφθονα στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία. Οἱ Ἀραβες περνοῦσαν ἀνάμεσα στὰ φρούρια, λεηλατοῦσαν καὶ ἔπαιρναν αἰχμαλώτους, ἐνῶ οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ ἔκαιγαν τὶς σοδειές, γιὰ νὰ στεροῦν τὸν ἐχθρὸ ἀπὸ ἐφόδια καὶ νὰ τὸν ἀναγκάζουν νὰ μετακινεῖται συνεχῶς. Δὲν εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ φανταστοῦμε τὶς συνέπειες αὐτῆς τῆς μακροχρόνιας διαδικασίας: μεγάλο μέρος τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας εἶχε καταστραφεῖ καὶ εἶχε μειωθεῖ ὁ πληθυσμὸς τῆς σχεδὸν ἀνεπανόρθωτα.

Μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸν εἶχε δημιουργηθεῖ ἓνα τεράστιο δημογραφικὸ κενό. Ἡ αὐτοκρατορία χρειαζόταν ἐπείγοντως γεωργοὺς καὶ στρατιῶτες.

Γιὰ νὰ πετύχει αὐτὸ τὸ σκοπὸ, ἀναγκάστηκε νὰ καταφύγει σὲ μαζικὲς μετακινήσεις πληθυσμῶν. Ἰδιαιτέρως ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Ἰουστινιανὸς Β' ἐφάρμοσε τὴν πολιτικὴ αὐτὴ σὲ εὐρεία κλίμακα. Μετακίνησε μεγάλο μέρος τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ τῆς Κύπρου στὴν περιοχὴ τῆς Κυζίκου, στὴ νότια παραλία τῆς θάλασσας τοῦ Μαρμαρᾶ. Τὸ μέτρο προφανῶς ἀπέτυχε: πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς μετανάστες πέθαναν καθ' ὁδόν, κι αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἔφτασαν στὸν προορισμὸ τους ἀργότερα ζήτησαν νὰ ἐπαναπατριστοῦν.²³ Ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς Β' ἐπίσης μετακίνησε «μεγάλου πλήθος» Σλάβων στὴ Βιθυνία. Καὶ πάλι ὁμοίως ὑπῆρξε ἄτυχος: οἱ τριάντα χιλιάδες πολεμιστὲς ποὺ στρατολόγησε ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴν ομάδα γιὰ νὰ πολεμήσουν τοὺς Ἀραβες λιποτάκτησαν πρὸς τὸν ἐχθρὸ, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα ὁ αὐτοκράτορας νὰ ἐπιβάλει σκληρὰ ἀντίποινα στὶς οἰκογένειές τους.²⁴ Παρ' ὅλα αὐτά, μαθαίνουμε ὅτι 208.000 Σλάβοι μετανάστευσαν στὴ Βιθυνία μὲ τὴ θέλησή τους στὴ δεκαετία τοῦ 760.²⁵ Τὸν 8ο αἰῶνα ἀκοῦμε ἐπανειλημμένα γιὰ ὀργανωμένες ἐγκαταστάσεις Σύρων στὴ Θράκη.²⁶

Ἀνάμεσα στοὺς νέους ἐποίκους, πάντως, οἱ πιὸ σημαντικοὶ ἦταν οἱ Ἀρμένιοι, πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ὁποίους ἦλθαν χωρὶς νὰ ἐξαναγκαστοῦν. Οἱ Ἀρμένιοι ἦταν ἐξαιρετικοὶ στρατιῶτες, καὶ ἡ αὐτοκρατορία τοὺς εἶχε ἄμεση ἀνάγκη καθὼς εἶχε χάσει τὴ δυνατότητα στρατολογίας ἀπὸ τὸ Ἰλλυρικό. Στὴν πραγματικότητα, ἡ μετανάστευση τῶν Ἀρμενίων εἶχε ἀρχίσει τὸν 6ο αἰῶνα, καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Μαυρικίου καὶ μετὰ ἀποτελέσαν τὴ ραχοκοκαλιὰ τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ στρατοῦ. Ἡ ροὴ τῶν Ἀρμενίων στὴν αὐτοκρατορία κράτησε πολλοὺς αἰῶνες. Πολλοὶ ἐγκαταστάθηκαν στὴν Καππαδοκία καὶ σὲ ἄλλες περιοχὲς τῆς ἀνατολικῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας, κοντὰ στὴν ἀρχικὴ τους κοιτίδα, ἄλλοι στὴ Θράκη, ἄλλοι στὴν περιοχὴ τῆς Περγάμου. Εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ ὑπολογίσει κανεὶς ἔστω καὶ χοντρικὰ τὸν ἀριθμὸ τους. Ὅμως, ἀντίθετα μὲ τοὺς Σλάβους, οἱ Ἀρμένιοι γρήγορα κατέκτησαν σημαντικὲς θέσεις, ἀκόμη καὶ τὸν αὐτοκρατορικὸ θρόνο, καὶ κυριάρχησαν στὸ στρατιωτικὸ κατεστημένο σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τῆς Μέσης βυζαντινῆς περιόδου.

Ἔτσι, ἂν τοποθετηθοῦμε περίπου στὴν ἐποχὴ ποὺ ἄρχισε γιὰ τὴν αὐτοκρατορία ἡ ἀργὴ πορεία πρὸς τὴν ἀνάκαμψη, ἄς ποῦμε πρὸς τὸ τέλος τοῦ 8ου αἰῶνα, διαπιστώνουμε πῶς ὁ πληθυσμὸς εἶχε ἀναμιχθεῖ τόσο πολὺ καὶ τόσο βίαια, ὥστε εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ ποῦμε ποιὲς ἐθνικὲς ομάδες κατοικοῦσαν σὲ ποιὲς περιοχὲς καὶ σὲ τί ἀριθμούς. Ἀναφέρεται συχνὰ ὅτι ἀποβάλλοντας, ἔστω καὶ ἐπῶδυνα, τὰ κύρια μὴ ἑλληνόγλωσσα στοιχεῖα τῆς, ὅπως τοὺς Σύρους, τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους καὶ τοὺς Ἰλλυριοὺς, ἡ αὐτοκρατορία ἐγίνε περισσότερο ὁμοιογενής. Ὑποστηρίζεται ἐπίσης ὅτι ὅσοι δὲν

ἦταν Ἕλληνες ἀφομοιώθηκαν σταδιακὰ καὶ ἐξελληνίστηκαν μέσω τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τοῦ στρατοῦ, καὶ πῶς κάτι τέτοιο συνέβη κυρίως στοὺς γηγενεῖς πληθυσμοὺς τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας καθὼς καὶ στοὺς Σλάβους στὴν Πελοπόννησο καὶ σὲ ἄλλες περιοχὲς τῆς Ἑλλάδας. Θὰ συμβούλευα τὸν κριτικὸ ἀναγνώστη νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζει παρόμοιες γενικεύσεις μὲ κάποια προσοχή. Εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι, ὅταν τὰ λατινικὰ ἔπαψαν νὰ μιλοῦνται, τὰ ἑλληνικὰ ἔγιναν ἡ μόνη ἐπίσημη γλῶσσα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, ὅποτε ἡ γνώση τους ἦταν ἀπαραίτητη γιὰ μιὰ σταδιοδρομία ἢ γιὰ τὴν ἐνασχόληση μὲ ἐπιχειρήσεις. Οὔτε τὰ ἀρμενικὰ οὔτε τὰ σλαβονικὰ ἀντικατέστησαν ποτὲ τὴν ἑλληνικὴ ὡς γενικὸ μέσο ἐπικοινωνίας. Εἶναι ἐπίσης ἀλήθεια ὅτι μὲ τὴν πάροδο τοῦ χρόνου τὰ σλαβονικὰ ἔσβησαν στὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ τὴ Βιθυνία, κι ἂν κάποιος σὲ μεταγενέστερη ἐποχὴ μιλοῦσαν ἀρμενικὰ στὴ Θράκη, αὐτοὶ δὲν ἦταν ἀπόγονοι τῶν ἐποίκων ποὺ ἐγκαταστάθηκαν ἐκεῖ τὸν 8ο αἰῶνα. Ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἐπίσης γνωστὸ ὅτι στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία τὰ ἑλληνικὰ ἐπέζησαν χωρὶς διακοπὴ μόνον στὸν Πόντο καὶ σὲ μικρὸ μέρος τῆς Καππαδοκίας, ἐνῶ οὐσιαστικὰ ἐξαφανίστηκαν ἀπὸ τὶς δυτικὲς τῆς περιοχὲς μέχρι τὴν ἐπαναφορὰ τους ἀπὸ μετανάστες τὸν 18ο καὶ 19ο αἰῶνα. Δὲν θὰ ὑποστηρίζουμε, μὲ βάση τὴν προηγούμενη παρατήρηση, ὅτι στὴ δυτικὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία δὲν κυριάρχησε ἡ ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα κατὰ τὸ Μεσαίωνα. Ὅσο διαφωτιστικὴ κι ἂν εἶναι ἀπὸ ὀρισμένες ἀπόψεις, ἡ ἐξέταση μακρῶν περιόδων δὲν βοηθᾷ τὸν ἱστορικὸ τοῦ Βυζαντίου νὰ λύσει τὰ συγκεκριμένα προβλήματα ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζει. Λόγου χάρι, ἦταν ὁ ἐξελληνισμὸς συνειδητὸς στόχος τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς κυβέρνησης, κι ἂν ἦταν, μὲ ποιά μέσα ἐφαρμοζόταν καὶ μὲ πόση ἐπιτυχία; Καὶ ἂν πέτυχε στὸ Μεσαίωνα, γιατί δὲν πέτυχε στὴν Ἀρχαιότητα, σὲ συνθήκες λιγότερο ταραγμένης ζωῆς καὶ ὑψηλότερου πολιτισμοῦ;

Ὅταν μελετᾶμε τὶς λιγοστὲς πηγές μας, ἀντιλαμβανόμαστε πῶς ἡ διατύπωση τέτοιων ἐρωτημάτων δὲν ἀνταποκρίνεται στὸν βυζαντινὸ τρόπο σκέψης. Πρῶτα ἀπ' ὅλα, ὁ ἴδιος ὁ χαρακτηρισμὸς «Ἕλληνες», ποὺ τόσο ἐλεύθερα χρησιμοποιοῦμε γιὰ ὅσους Βυζαντινοὺς δὲν ἀνήκαν σὲ κάποια ἐξένη ἐθνικὴ ομάδα, ἀπουσιάζει ἐντελῶς ἀπὸ τὶς πηγές τῆς ἐποχῆς. Ὁ κάτοικος τῆς Ἑλλάδας νότια τῆς Θεσσαλίας θὰ ὀνόμαζε τὸν ἑαυτό του Ἑλλαδικὸ (ὄνομα ποὺ χρησιμοποιεῖται ἤδη τὸν 6ο αἰῶνα), ἀλλὰ θὰ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι εἴτε Σλάβος εἴτε «Ἕλληνας». Τὸ ἴδιο ἰσχύει καὶ γιὰ κατοίκους ἄλλων περιοχῶν, τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν ὁποίων προέρχονταν ἀπὸ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς ἐπαρχίας τους, γιὰ παράδειγμα Παφλαγόνες ἢ Θρακῆσιοι (ἀπὸ τὸ Θρακῆσιον θέμα στὴ δυτικὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία). Ἀφοῦ συνεπῶς δὲν ὑπῆρχε ἡ ἔννοια τῆς «ἐλληνικότητος», εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ δοῦμε πῶς μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπῆρ-

χε ή έννοια του «έξελληνισμού». 'Απ' όσο γνωρίζω, τό μόνο χωρίο που μπορεί νά ύπνοεϊ κάτι παρόμοιο αναφέρει πώς ό αυτοκράτορας Βασίλειος Α' έπεισε τις σλαβικές φυλές νά εγκαταλείψουν τήν παλιά τους θρησκεία και γραικώσας (αυτούς) «τους ύπέταξε σέ άρχοντες σύμφωνα με τόν ρωμαϊκό τύπο, τους τίμησε με τό βάπτισμα και τους έλευθέρωσε από τό ζυγό τών δικών τους άρχόντων».²⁷ 'Υπάρχει, ώστόσο, μακροχρόνια διαφωνία για τήν έννοια του όρου γραικώσας στην περίπτωση αυτή. 'Εκεϊνο που έπανελλημμένα άκοϋμε είναι ό προσηλυτισμός στον όρθόδοξο χριστιανισμό διάφορων λαών —εΐτε ήταν ειδωλολάτρεις Σλάβοι εΐτε μουσουλμάνοι Κρήτες— και ή δημιουργία εκκλησιαστικής όργάνωσης. Νά πώς περιγράφει τό Χρονικό τής Μονεμβασίας τή δραστηριότητα του αυτοκράτορα Νικηφόρου Α' στην Πελοπόννησο: «Τή Λακεδαίμονα πόλη έκτισε εκ βάθρων και εγκατέστησε σ' αυτήν ανάμεικτο πληθυσμό, Καφήρους και Θρακησίους και 'Αρμενίους, και άλλους που συγκέντρωσε από διάφορους τόπους και πόλεις, και τήν έκανε και πάλι έπισκοπή».²⁸ Σίγουρα ούτε οί Κάφηροι (πιθανόν όρος που αναφέρεται σέ εκχριστιανισμένους μουσουλμάνους) ούτε οί 'Αρμένιοι μπορούσαν νά συμβάλουν στον έξελληνισμό τής Λακωνίας. 'Ο σκοπός του αυτοκράτορα ήταν απλώς νά εγκαταστήσει χριστιανικό πληθυσμό και νά ιδρύσει μιá έπισκοπή.

Δέν υπάρχει άμφιβολία ότι ό προσηλυτισμός τών μη χριστιανικών πληθυσμών που είχαν εγκατασταθεϊ στην αυτοκρατορία γινόταν στα έλληνικά. Για τήν περίπτωση τών Σλάβων αυτό είναι κάπως αναπάντεχο, μιá και τό ίδιο τό σλαβονικό αλφάβητο έπινοήθηκε από έναν Βυζαντινό, τόν άγιο Κύριλλο, κατά πάσα πιθανότητα στη δεκαετία του 860. 'Η έπινοήσή του όμως και στη συνέχεια ή μετάφραση τών βασικών χριστιανικών κειμένων προορίζονταν για μιá απομακρυσμένη σλαβική χώρα, τή Μοραβία. 'Ηταν έντελώς τυχαίο γεγονός ότι ή άποστολή του Κυρίλλου και του Μεθοδίου, μετά τήν άρχική της άποτυχία, βρήκε πρόσφορο έδαφος σέ μιá χώρα για τήν όποία δέν προοριζόταν, δηλαδή τό βουλγαρικό βασίλειο. 'Απ' όσο γνωρίζουμε δέν έγινε ποτέ προσπάθεια νά προσηλυτιστούν οί Σλάβοι τής 'Ελλάδας στη δική τους γλώσσα, όπως και στην κατακτημένη Βουλγαρία μετά τό 1018 έπιβλήθηκε ή εκκλησιαστική χρήση τών ελληνικών. Είναι φανερό πώς αυτό πρέπει νά συνέβαλε στην εξάπλωση τής ελληνικής γλώσσας. 'Ηταν όμως αποτέλεσμα συνειδητής πολιτικής; Δέν είναι πιό πιθανό ότι ή άπουσία γλωσσικά καταρτισμένου κλήρου, τό σχετικά δυσέυρετο τών Γραφών στη σλαβονική γλώσσα και ό ανάμεικτος πληθυσμός επέβαλλαν τή χρήση τών ελληνικών ως τήν εύκολότερη λύση;

«Όσο άποτελεσματική κι άν αποδείχτηκε ή εκκλησιαστική έπιβολή τών

έλληνικών, πρέπει νά όμολογηθεϊ ότι ή άφομοίωση τών βαρβαρικών ομάδων ύπήρξε μακροχρόνια διαδικασία. Στην Πελοπόννησο ή παρουσία ειδωλολατρών Σλάβων σέ μικρή άπόσταση νότια τής Σπάρτης μαρτυρεΐται πρós τό τέλος του 10ου αιώνα,²⁹ δηλαδή σχεδόν διακόσια χρόνια μετά τις πρώτες προσπάθειες εκχριστιανισμού τους. Τό ίδιο εύγλωττη είναι και ή περίπτωση τών Σλάβων τής Βιθυνίας. Εΐδαμε ότι τους εγκατέστησαν εκεί σέ μεγάλους άριθμούς στο τέλος του 7ου και πρós τά μέσα του 8ου αιώνα. Κάπου διακόσια χρόνια άργότερα, ή βυζαντινή άρμάδα που συγκεντρώθηκε τό 949, στην προσπάθεια νά κατακτηθεϊ ή Κρήτη, περιλάμβανε «Σκλαβηνούς εγκατεστημένους στο 'Οψίκιον» (αυτό ήταν τό διοικητικό όνομα μέρους τής Βιθυνίας), που είχαν τους δικούς τους άρχηγούς.³⁰ Είναι φανερό πώς αυτοί οί Σλάβοι άποτελοΐσαν άκόμη ξεχωριστή ομάδα. Τόν έπόμενο αιώνα ή "Αννα ή Κομνηνή αναφέρει μιá κωμόπολη στη Βιθυνία, Σαγουδάους έγχωρίως καλουμένην,³¹ προφανώς από τή φυλή τών Σαγουδατών, που μαρτυρούνται στη Μακεδονία τόν 7ο αιώνα. Λίγο άργότερα τό σλαβικό στοιχείο στη Βιθυνία ενισχύθηκε από τόν αυτοκράτορα 'Ιωάννη Β' Κομνηνό, που εγκατέστησε ομάδες σέρβων αιχμαλώτων κοντά στη Νικομήδεια.³² Σερβικά χωριά αναφέρονταν άκόμη στα μέρη αυτά τόν 13ο αιώνα. Με άλλα λόγια, είναι πολύ πιθανό οί Σλάβοι τής Βιθυνίας, ή ένα μέρος τους, νά άφομοιώθηκαν από τους 'Οθωμανούς Τούρκους χωρίς νά γίνουν ποτέ «'Ελληνες».

Τό προφανές συμπέρασμα που βγαίνει από αυτές και πολλές άλλες περιπτώσεις είναι ότι ή Μέση βυζαντινή αυτοκρατορία δέν ύπήρξε καθόλου ένα συμπαγές ελληνικό κράτος. 'Εκτός από τους 'Αρμενίους και τους Σλάβους ύπήρχαν πολλά άλλα ξένα στοιχεία, όπως οί Γεωργιανοί και οί Βλάχοι τής Βαλκανικής. Μαζική είσοδος Σύρων και άλλων χριστιανών τής 'Ανατολής άκολούθησε τήν εξάπλωση τής αυτοκρατορίας πρós τά άνατολικά, στο τέλος του 10ου αιώνα' και όταν τό 1018 τά αυτοκρατορικά σύνορα έπεκτάθηκαν και πάλι μέχρι τόν Δούναβη, περιέλαβαν τεράστιες εκτάσεις όπου τά ελληνικά δέν είχαν μιληθεϊ ποτέ, ή είχαν εξαφανιστεϊ πριν από πάρα πολλά χρόνια. Κατά πόσο οί ελληνόγλωσσοι άποτελοΐσαν εκείνη τήν έποχή τήν πλειονότητα ή τή μειονότητα άνάμεσα στους κατοίκους τής αυτοκρατορίας είναι μιá ύπόθεση που δέν θά ήθελα νά διακινδυνεύσω.

Δέν είναι και πολύ εύκολο νά προσδιορίσουμε τά αισθήματα άλληλεγύης, άν ύπήρχαν, που συνέδεαν τις διάφορες εθνότητες τής αυτοκρατορίας. Τόν 6ο αιώνα ή έπιγραφή Gloria Romanorum έμφανιζόταν άκόμη κατά καιρούς στο αυτοκρατορικό νόμισμα, αλλά στις άνατολικές έπαρ-

χίες δὲν φαίνεται πιθανὸν νὰ ὑπῆρχε καὶ μεγάλη ἀφοσίωση στὴν ἰδέα τῆς Romanitas. Ἐπιπλέον, ἡ νομιμοφροσύνη πρὸς τὴν Ρώμη καὶ ὁ θαυμασμὸς γιὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖο τῆς μεγαλειῶ ἦταν τακτικὸ θέμα τῆς εἰδωλοκρατικῆς πολεμικῆς, ἐνῶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὑποστήριζε τὴ θέση ὅτι οἱ χριστιανοὶ ἦταν πᾶν ἅπ' ὅλα πολῖτες τῆς Οὐράνιας Ἱερουσαλήμ, καὶ μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ κατὰ πάσα πιθανότητα ἐξασθένιζε τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι περιπτώσεις νομιμοφροσύνης πρὸς τὸ κράτος ἀπουσιάζουν ἀπὸ τὴ βυζαντινὴ ἱστορία: τὸ ἀκριβῶς ἀντίθετο συμβαίνει. Εἶναι ἀρκετὸ νὰ θυμηθοῦμε τὴν ἀπόγνωση τῶν κατοίκων τῆς Νίσιβης ὅταν ἡ πόλη τους παραχωρήθηκε στοὺς Πέρσες τὸ 363, τὶς φιλορωμαϊκὲς διαδηλώσεις στὴν Ἔδεσσα τὸ 449 μὲ ἀφορμὴ θρησκευτικὲς διαμάχες, καὶ πλῆθος παρόμοιες περιπτώσεις. Πρέπει ὅμως νὰ σκεφτοῦμε ὅτι ἐκείνη τὴν ἐποχὴ ἡ μόνη ἐναλλακτικὴ λύση στὴ ρωμαϊκὴ διοίκηση ἦταν νὰ ζεῖ κανεὶς ὑπὸ περσικὴ διακυβέρνηση (ποὺ ἦταν συνήθως χειρότερη). Ἄνθρωποι ποὺ συνθλίβονταν ἀπὸ τὸ βᾶρος τῆς φορολογίας ἐμπαιναν συχνὰ στὸν πειρασμὸ νὰ καταφύγουν στοὺς ἐχθρούς, ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ καμιὰ βαρβαρικὴ φυλὴ ποὺ δὲν ἐπέβαλλε φόρους, ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ δὲν ἦταν ἐπιλογὴ γιὰ ὅσους ἀπολάμβαναν ἕνα λογικὸ ἐπίπεδο ζωῆς. Ὁ καθοριστικὸς παράγοντας προφανῶς δὲν ἦταν τὸ αἶσθημα τῆς Romanitas.

Ἄπ' ὅσο μπορούμε νὰ κρίνουμε, οἱ συνεκτικοὶ δεσμοὶ ποὺ ὑπῆρχαν ἦταν δύο εἰδῶν: τοπικοὶ καὶ θρησκευτικοί. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ταυτίζονταν μὲ τὸ χωριὸ τους, τὴν πόλη τους ἢ τὴν ἐπαρχία τους πολὺ περισσότερο ἅπ' ὅσο μὲ τὴν αὐτοκρατορία. Ὅταν κάποιος βρισκόταν μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἰδιαιτέρη πατρίδα του ἦταν ξένος, καὶ συχνὰ τὸν ἀντιμετώπιζαν μὲ καχυποψία. Ἐναν μοναχὸ ἀπὸ τὴ δυτικὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία, ποὺ ἔγινε μέλος ἑνὸς μοναστηριοῦ στὸν Πόντο, «τὸν πρόσβαλλαν καὶ τὸν κακομεταχειρίζονταν ὅλοι σὰν ξένο». ³³ Ἡ τοπικὴ ἀλληλεγγύη ἔφερνε ἀναπόφευκτα καὶ τοπικὲς ἐχθρότητες. Συναντᾶμε πολλοὺς μειωτικὸς χαρακτηρισμοὺς γιὰ «τὸν παμπόνηρο Σύρο» ποὺ μιλοῦσε μὲ βαριὰ προφορά, τὸν ἄξεστο Παφλαγόνα, τὸν ψεύτη Κρητικὸ. Στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη κορόιδευαν τοὺς Ἀλεξανδρινούς. Οἱ Ἀρμένιοι σχεδὸν πάντοτε περιγράφονται μὲ ὑβριστικὸς χαρακτηρισμοὺς. Ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ δαίμονες, ὅπως θὰ δοῦμε στὸ Κεφάλαιο Ζ', εἶχαν ἔντονος τοπικὲς συμπάθειες καὶ δὲν τοὺς ἄρεσε νὰ συμφύρονται μὲ συναδέλφους τους ἀπὸ γειτονικὲς ἐπαρχίες.

Τὸ αἶσθημα τῆς θρησκευτικῆς ταύτισης ἦταν συχνὰ ἰσχυρότερο ἀπὸ τῆς τοπικῆς. Ἄν ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἦταν περισσότερο ἀνεκτικὴ, ἴσως οἱ διάφορες θρησκευτικὲς ομάδες θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ συνυπάρξουν εἰρηνικά, ἀλλὰ συνήθως βρισκόταν κάποιος μισαλλόδοξος ἐπίσκοπος ἢ μοναχὸς ποὺ ξε-

κινούσε τὶς διώξεις, καὶ ἔτσι ἀρχίζαν οἱ διαμάχες. Δὲν εἶναι παράξενο ποὺ οἱ Ἑβραῖοι καὶ οἱ λίγοι εἰδωλολάτρες ποὺ ἀπέμεναν ἦταν κατὰ κανόνα τὰ πιὸ ἀνυπότακτα στοιχεῖα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Μέσα στὴν ἴδια τὴν Ἐκκλησία, ὡστόσο, θρησκευτικὴ πίστη καὶ τοπικισμὸς ἐπικαλύπτονταν σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ. Καὶ ἴσως ἐδῶ βρίσκεται τὸ κλειδί γιὰ τὶς «αἰρετικὲς» ομάδες ποὺ θὰ περιγράψουμε πληρέστερα στὸ Κεφάλαιο Δ'. Φαίνεται δηλαδὴ ὅτι τὸ κίνητρο τοῦ σύρου ἢ τοῦ αἰγύπτου μονοφυσίτη δὲν ἦταν τόσο ἡ ἐμμονὴ του σὲ κάποιον σκοτεινὸ σημεῖο τοῦ δόγματος, ὅσο ὁ σεβασμὸς του στὴ δική του Ἐκκλησία, τὸν ἐπίσκοπό του καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους τῆς περιοχῆς του. Κάθε φορὰ ποὺ μιὰ σχισματικὴ χριστιανικὴ ομάδα κατόρθωνε νὰ ἐξασφαλίσει μόνιμη τοπικὴ βάση, ὅλες οἱ προσπάθειες νὰ τῆς ἐπιβληθεῖ μιὰ ὁμοιογενὴς αὐτοκρατορικὴ ὀρθοδοξία κατέληγαν σὲ ἀποτυχία.

Ἄν στὴν Πρώιμη βυζαντινὴ περίοδο ἡ ἰδέα τῆς Romanitas εἶχε περιορισμένη ἐπιρροή, αὐτὸ ἴσχυε ἀκόμη περισσότερο στὴ Μέση περίοδο, ὅταν ἡ παλιὰ αὐτοκρατορικὴ πρωτεύουσα περιβαλλόταν ἀπὸ «σκυθικὴ ἐρημία» καὶ ἡ λατινικὴ γλῶσσα εἶχε ξεχαστεῖ. Ἀκόμη καὶ στὴν περίπτωσή τῶν διεθνῶν συγκρούσεων, τὸ θέμα τὸ ἀντιλαμβάνονταν συγκινησιακὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀποψη τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ καὶ ὄχι τῆς Romanitas. Ὅταν τὸ 922 ὁ Ρωμανὸς Α' Λεκαπηνὸς παρότρυνε τοὺς ἀξιωματικούς του νὰ ἀντισταθοῦν σθεναρὰ στὸν Συμεὼν τῆς Βουλγαρίας, ἐκεῖνοι ὀρκίστηκαν νὰ πεθάνουν γιὰ τοὺς χριστιανούς, μολονότι καὶ οἱ Βούλγαροι τὴν ἐποχὴ ἐκείνη ἦταν, τουλάχιστον τυπικά, ἐπίσης χριστιανοί. ³⁴ Εἶναι ὅμως ἀξιοσημείωτο πὼς δὲν γεννήθηκε κάποιος καινούριος ὅρος ποὺ νὰ χαρακτηρίσει τὴν αὐτοκρατορία στὸ σύνολό της. Οὔτε καὶ χρειαζόταν, ἰδιαιτέρως στὸ ἐπίπεδο τῆς καθημερινῆς ζωῆς. Ὅταν, στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 9ου αἰώνα, ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Δεκαπολίτης, ποὺ καταγόταν ἀπὸ τὴ νότια Μικρὰ Ἀσία, ἀποβιβάστηκε στὸ λιμάνι τῆς Αἴνου στὴ Θράκη, ἡ αὐτοκρατορικὴ ἀστυνομία τὸν συνέλαβε ἀμέσως καὶ τὸν μαστίγωσε. Δὲν γνωρίζουμε γιὰ ποῖο λόγο ἴσως νὰ ἔμοιαζε μὲ Ἄραβα. Ἐπειτα τὸν ρώτησαν: «Ποῖος εἶσαι καὶ ποῖα εἶναι ἡ θρησκεία σου;» Ἡ ἀπάντησή του ἦταν: «Εἶμαι χριστιανός, τὸ ἴδιο καὶ οἱ γονεῖς μου, καὶ ἀκολουθῶ τὴν ὀρθόδοξον πίστην». ³⁵ Ἡ θρησκεία καὶ ἡ καταγωγὴ ἦταν τὸ διαβατήριό του. Δὲν τοῦ πέρασε ἀπὸ τὸ νοῦ νὰ πεῖ ὅτι ἦταν Ρωμαῖος.

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ Β'

ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΑ

Ένας ήγούμενος του 6ου αιώνα λέγεται ότι απεύθυνε τα παρακάτω λόγια σε έναν δόκιμο μοναχό:

«Αν ο κοσμικός αυτοκράτορας σκόπευε να σε διορίσει πατρίκιο ή κουβικουλάριο, να σου δώσει κάποιο αξίωμα στο παλάτι του (αυτό το παλάτι που θα εξαφανιστεί σαν σκιά ή σαν όνειρο), δεν θα εγκατέλειπες, τι έχεις και δεν θα έτρεχες σ' αυτόν όσο πιο γρήγορα μπορούσες; Δεν θα ήσουν πρόθυμος να υποστείς κάθε πόνο και κόπο, αχόμη και να διακινδυνεύσεις το θάνατο, για να ζήσεις την ημέρα που ο αυτοκράτορας, παρουσία της συγκλήτου, θα σε υποδεχόταν και θα σε έπαιρνε στην υπηρεσία του;»¹

Φαντάζομαι πώς λίγοι Βυζαντινοί θα φέρονταν διαφορετικά, μια και το κυριότερο χαρακτηριστικό της βυζαντινής πολιτείας ήταν η τεράστια δύναμη της κεντρικής κυβέρνησης. Με εξαίρεση την επανάσταση, δεν υπήρχε άλλο αντίβαρο στη δύναμη αυτή εκτός από την καθυστέρηση, την ανικανότητα, τη διαφθορά, ή απλώς την απόσταση. Κι αυτό ίσχυσε μέχρι τη σταδιακή διάλυση της κεντρικής εξουσίας, που συνέβη περίπου τον 11ο αιώνα.

Θεωρητικά δεν υπήρχαν όρια στην αυτοκρατορική εξουσία εκτός από αυτά που έθεταν οι θεϊοί νόμοι. Στο Κεφάλαιο ΙΒ' θα εξετάσουμε τα ιδανικά χαρακτηριστικά του βυζαντινού αυτοκράτορα. Έδω έντονοι ενδιαφερόμαστε για την πράξη, και στην πράξη ο αυτοκράτορας ήταν ένας άνθρωπος που ζούσε στο αυτοκρατορικό παλάτι της Κωνσταντινούπολης, κρυμμένος μακριά από τα δημόσια βλέμματα, τριγυρισμένος από την αλήθεια του. Συνήθως χρωστούσε τη θέση του σε μια άπροσδιόριστη, αλλά γενικά σεβαστή αρχή διαδοχής· διαφορετικά, μπορεί να τον διάλεγε ο πρόκατος του, να τον εξέλεγε μια ομάδα με επιρροή, ή να θύει το θρόνο του σε μια επιτυχημένη επανάσταση. Παραδόξως, το βυζαντινό κράτος ποτέ δεν ανέπτυξε μια θεωρία για την αυτοκρατορική διαδοχή. Γινό-

ταν κάποιος αυτοκράτορας με τη θέληση του Θεού, την έγκληση του την πιστοποιούσαν οι έπιφωνήσεις του στρατού και της συγκλήτου, και την έπισφράγιζε, από τον 5ο αιώνα και μετά, μια θρησκευτική στέψη την όποια πραγματοποιούσε ο πατριάρχης της Κωνσταντινούπολης. Για τους ξένους αυτό το σύστημα φαινόταν παράξενο, άσταθές και άσφαές: μερικοί άραβες συγγραφείς πίστευαν ότι ο αυτοκράτορας των Ρωμαίων χρωστούσε τη θέση του στις νίκες και ότι τον έδιωχναν αν δεν είχε έπιτυχίες.² Όποιες όμως κι αν ήταν οι περιστάσεις της ανόδου του αυτοκράτορα στο θρόνο, δεν μπορούσε βέβαια να κυβερνήσει ολομόναχος. Ο ίδιος διάλεγε τους κυριότερους ύπουργούς του κατά την κρίση του, και η πραγματική τους εξουσία δεν αντιστοιχούσε στους τίτλους που είχαν. Μερικοί αυτοκράτορες —οι πιο δυναμικοί— έπαιζαν αποφασιστικής σημασίας ρόλο στη διοίκηση, ενώ άλλοι άρκοϋνταν να την αναθέτουν είτε σε κάποιο συγγενή τους είτε σε έναν ή περισσότερους αξιωματούχους. Αν και γενικά πιστευόταν ότι ήταν καθήκον του αυτοκράτορα να όδηγεί το στρατό στο πεδίο της μάχης,³ πολλοί αυτοκράτορες δεν το έκαναν, είτε λόγω ανικανότητας είτε επειδή φοβόϋνταν για επανάσταση κατά τη διάρκεια της απουσίας τους από την πρωτεύουσα. Στην πράξη υπήρχε τόσο μεγάλη διαφοροποίηση, ώστε είναι πιο ακριβές να μιλάμε για διακυβέρνηση από το αυτοκρατορικό παλάτι παρά από τον αυτοκράτορα.

Ο αυτοκράτορας βρισκόταν έπικεφαλής μιας κοινωνίας που θεωρητικά στηριζόταν στην ιδέα της τάξης. Τα στοιχεία που την αποτελούσαν περιγράφονται στις πηγές με διάφορους τρόπους. Καμιά φορά βρίσκουμε μια τριμερή διαίρεση σε στρατό, κλήρο και γεωργούς.⁴ Επιπλέον μας λένε ότι ο στρατός αποτελούσε την κεφαλή του πολιτικού σώματος,⁵ ή ότι οι ούσιαστικότερες έργασίες ήταν η γεωργία και η στρατιωτική υπηρεσία, επειδή οι γεωργοί έτρεφαν τους στρατιώτες και οι στρατιώτες προστάτευαν τους γεωργούς.⁶ Από τον 6ο αιώνα έχουμε μια πολύ πιο λεπτομερή ταξινόμηση του πολιτικού τμήματος της κοινωνίας σε δέκα κατηγορίες, που είναι οι ακόλουθες: (1) ο κλήρος, (2) οι δικαστές, (3) οι σύμβουλοι (συγκλητικοί;), (4) οι άσχολούμενοι με την οικονομία, (5) οι έπαγγελματίες και οι τεχνίτες, (6) οι έμποροι, (7) οι προμηθευτές πρώτων ύλων, (8) οι ύποτακτικοί και οι υπηρέτες, (9) οι άχρηστοι (δηλαδή οι γέροντες, οι ανάπηροι και οι τρελοί), (10) οι άνθρωποι του θεάματος (άρματοδρόμοι, μουσικοί, ήθοποιοί).⁷ Αυτό του είδους η ταξινόμηση μπορεί να είναι ενδιαφέρουσα, αλλά δεν μας αποκαλύπτει τον τρόπο λειτουργίας της βυζαντινής κοινωνίας. Για να αναπαραστήσουμε την εικόνα της πιο ρεαλιστικά, πρέπει να ξεκινήσουμε από την Πρώιμη περίοδο και να εξετάσουμε σύν-

τομα τις κρατικές υπηρεσίες, τη διακυβέρνηση των πόλεων, την Έκκλησία, τα αστικά επαγγέλματα και, τέλος, τους γεωργούς.

Κάθε αυτοκρατορική υπηρεσία, τόσο στρατιωτική όσο και πολιτική, χαρακτηριζόταν με τον όρο *στρατεία* (λατινικά *militia*). Ανάμεσά τους ο στρατός αποτελούσε τη μεγαλύτερη ομάδα: η συνολική του δύναμη στο ανατολικό και δυτικό τμήμα του κράτους προς το τέλος του 4ου αιώνα ήταν περίπου 650.000 άνδρες. Ο αριθμός μπορεί να μη μας φαίνεται υπερβολικά μεγάλος για έναν πληθυσμό που πιθανόν να ξεπερνούσε τα σαράντα εκατομμύρια, αλλά με τη χαμηλή απόδοση της υστερορωμαϊκής οικονομίας αποτελούσε σημαντική επιβάρυνση. Μετά τις μεταρρυθμίσεις του Κωνσταντίνου, ο στρατός αποτελούνταν από δύο κύρια σώματα: μια κινητή δύναμη, τους *comitatenses*, και τη φρουρά των συνόρων, τους *limitanei*. Για την ανατολική αυτοκρατορία οι αριθμοί τους ήταν περίπου 100.000 και 250.000 αντίστοιχα. Οι *comitatenses* δεν είχαν μόλιμα στρατόπεδα. Συνήθως στρατωνίζονταν στις πόλεις, όπου μπορεί να ασκούσαν επίσης και αστυνομικά καθήκοντα (η αυτοκρατορία δεν είχε μόλιμη αστυνομική δύναμη). Μερικοί παραπονούνταν πως με τη λύση αυτή οι στρατιώτες γίνονταν μαλθακοί και προκαλούσαν αφορήτες ταλαιπωρίες σε πόλεις που δεν χρειάζονταν προστασία.⁸ Οι *limitanei*, από την άλλη, ήταν γεωργοί που στρατολογούνταν επί τόπου και επάνδρωναν τα φρούρια των συνόρων όταν δεν καλλιεργούσαν τα χωράφια τους. Δεν τους θεωρούσαν ιδιαίτερα αποτελεσματικό σώμα. Ο ιστορικός Άγαθίας παρατηρεί ότι ο Ίουστινιανός, ο μεγαλύτερος βυζαντινός κατακτητής, προς το τέλος της βασιλείας του δεν είχε πάνω από 150.000 άνδρες υπό τα όπλα, διασκορπισμένους σε διάφορες επαρχίες, ενώ οι άμυντικές ανάγκες της αυτοκρατορίας απαιτούσαν τετραπλάσιους.⁹ Φαίνεται όμως πως οι *limitanei* δεν περιλαμβάνονταν στον αριθμό αυτό, ο οποίος έτσι πρέπει να υποδηλώνει αύξηση μάλλον παρά μείωση. Ταυτόχρονα πρέπει να έχουμε υπόψη μας ότι μια έκστρατευτική δύναμη ήταν συνήθως της τάξης των 10-25 χιλιάδων ανδρών, και ότι ένας στρατός από 50.000 άνδρες, σαν κι αυτούς που καμιά φορά στέλνονταν κατά της Περσίας, θεωρούνταν ασυνήθιστα μεγάλοι.

Η στρατιωτική υπηρεσία ήταν ισόβια και άμειβόταν καλά. Έντούτοις, στις πιο πολιτισμένες περιοχές της αυτοκρατορίας δεν υπήρχε και μεγάλος ένθουσιασμός γι' αυτήν, και οι περισσότεροι προσπαθούσαν να την αποφύγουν. Την εποχή του Ίουστινιανού η στρατολογία είχε γίνει εθελοντική και βασιζόταν κατά κύριο λόγο στις λιγότερο ανεπτυγμένες επαρχίες, όπως ήταν το Ίλλυρικό, ή Θράκη και η Ίσαυρία, όπου η στρατιωτική

ζωή αποτελούσε παράδοση. Χρησιμοποιούσαν επίσης πολλούς βαρβάρους, όπως Γότθους, Ούνους και Σκύθες, που είτε ζούσαν στο κράτος είτε στρατολογούνταν από φυλές κοντά στα σύνορα, συμμάχους της αυτοκρατορίας, τους υποσπόνδους (*foederati*). Η νομιμοφροσύνη των τελευταίων δεν ήταν πάντοτε εξασφαλισμένη.

Στην Πρώιμη βυζαντινή αυτοκρατορία η στρατιωτική και η πολιτική εξουσία ήταν γενικά χωρισμένες, αν και το δεύτερο μισό του 6ου αιώνα άρχισαν να ένοποιούνται στις λιγότερο ασφαλείς επαρχίες (κυρίως στην Αφρική και την Ιταλία). Υπήρχε συνεπώς μια στρατιωτική ιεραρχία, στην κορυφή της οποίας βρίσκονταν μερικοί *magistri militum*, και μια πολιτική ιεραρχία, που ασχολούνταν με τη δικαιοσύνη, τα οικονομικά και τη διεκπεραίωση διάφορων υπηρεσιών, όπως ήταν το δημόσιο ταχυδρομείο (*cursus publicus*), η κρατική αστυνομική και μυστική υπηρεσία (*magistriani* ή *agentes in rebus*) και άλλες. Η επαρχιακή διοίκηση βρισκόταν στα χέρια των επάρχων των πραιτωρίων, που τώρα είχαν χάσει τις στρατιωτικές εξουσίες που διέθεταν παλιότερα, και κατέβαινε ιεραρχικά στους βικαρίους των διοικήσεων και τους διοικητές των επαρχιών. Η Κωνσταντινούπολη, όπως και η Ρώμη, είχε ξεχωριστή διοίκηση υπό τον επάρχο της πόλεως. Πρέπει να σημειωθεί ότι οι δημόσιοι υπάλληλοι των μέσων και κατώτερων βαθμίδων κατείχαν τις θέσεις τους μόνιμα και δεν απολύονταν σχεδόν ποτέ, ενώ στα ανώτερα αξιώματα ο διορισμός γινόταν για μικρό μόνο χρονικό διάστημα.

Μερικοί ιστορικοί μίλησαν για γραφειοκρατικό στραγγαλισμό της Ύστερης ρωμαϊκής αυτοκρατορίας, με σύγχρονα όμως κριτήρια ο αριθμός των δημόσιων υπαλλήλων ήταν μηδαμινός: έχει υπολογιστεί ότι περί το 400 μ.Χ. και στα δύο τμήματα της αυτοκρατορίας ο αριθμός τους δεν ξεπερνούσε τις 30 με 40 χιλιάδες. Ο μικρός τους αριθμός οφείλεται στο γεγονός ότι οι πόλεις αυτοδιοικούσαν μέσω των αστικών βουλευτηρίων (*βουλαί*, *civitates*), στα οποία συμμετείχαν οι πλουσιότεροι τοπικοί γαιοκτήμονες. Οι τελευταίοι, που συνήθως ονομάζονταν βουλευτές ή δεκουρίωνες, αποτελούσαν μια αρκετά πολυάνθρωπη τάξη. Αν υπολογίσουμε κάπου διακόσιους για κάθε πόλη, ο συνολικός τους αριθμός στην ανατολή θα πλησίαζε τις 200.000. Η σημασία τους, όμως, για την ιστορία του πολιτισμού ξεπερνά κατά πολύ την αριθμητική τους δύναμη, επειδή η αφοκρεμα των διανοουμένων της αυτοκρατορίας, τα ελευθέρια επαγγέλματα, οι ανώτερες βαθμίδες της Έκκλησίας και πολλές δημόσιες θέσεις βρίσκονταν στα χέρια της τάξης των δεκουριώνων. Πρέπει να τους εξετάσουμε καλύτερα.

Είναι κοινός τόπος στην ύστερορωμαϊκή ιστορία πώς η άστική άριστοκρατία βρισκόταν σε παρακμή. Όσο περιθώριο κι αν αφήσουμε για τα παράπονα που έκαναν από ιδιοτέλεια τα μέλη τής τάξης αυτής (ο Λιβάνιος είναι το παράδειγμα που αναφέρεται πιο συχνά), γεγονός παραμένει ότι από την εποχή του Κωνσταντίνου μέχρι τον Ίουστινιανό οι δεκουρίωνες έκαναν όλο και μεγαλύτερες προσπάθειες να αποφύγουν τις ευθύνες τους, που τις θεωρούσαν πραγματική δουλεία. Από νομική άποψη, όλοι οι γαιοκτήμονες που διέθεταν μια καθορισμένη κτηματική περιουσία ήταν υποχρεωμένοι να υπηρετούν στα συμβούλια, και το ίδιο ίσχυε για τους κληρονόμους τους. Ήταν συλλογικά υπεύθυνοι για όλες τις άστικές υπηρεσίες, για την επίσκεψη των δημόσιων κτιρίων, των υδραγωγείων και των όχρωσέων, τον καθαρισμό των οδών και των αποχετεύσεων, την παροχή θεαμάτων, την επίβλεψη τής αγοράς, την εξυπηρέτηση του ταχυδρομείου, και για όλες τις έκτακτες υποχρεώσεις που επέβαλλε το κράτος, όπως ήταν ο στρατωνισμός στρατιωτών, ή υποχρεωτική αγορά προμηθειών, ή στρατολόγηση των στρατευσίμων (όταν ή θητεία ήταν υποχρεωτική) και ούτω καθεξής. Οι πόλεις είχαν όρισμένα εισοδήματα από κτήματα ή φόρους για να καλύπτουν τα απαραίτητα έξοδα: αλλά οι δεκουρίωνες έπρεπε συχνά να βάζουν από την τσέπη τους. Δεν είναι λοιπόν παράδοξο που εκμεταλλεύονταν κάθε νομικό παράθυρο για να αποφεύγουν αυτά τα τόσο βαριά, μολονότι αξιοσέβαστα, αξιώματα. Οι συνθηστέροι τρόποι απαλλαγής ήταν να γίνουν δημόσιοι υπάλληλοι ή μέλη τής συγκλήτου τής Κωνσταντινούπολης (παρότι διάφοροι νόμοι το απαγόρευαν), να γίνουν κληρικοί ή δημόσιοι καθηγητές. Μερικοί δεν παντρεύονταν ποτέ, ώστε να μην αφήνουν νόμιμους κληρονόμους. Άλλοι γίνονταν φυγάδες. Η συνεχής πίεση είχε ως αποτέλεσμα τη διάλυση τής βουλευτικής τάξης: τα φτωχότερα μέλη εξαφανίστηκαν, ενώ οι πλούσιοι έγιναν πλουσιότεροι σε βάρος των γειτόνων τους. Έγιναν μεγαλοκτηματίες που καταπίεζαν τους συμπολίτες τους και συνήθως είχαν αρκετή επιρροή στο παλάτι ώστε να παίρνουν στην αυτοκρατορική διοίκηση θέσεις που τους απέλλασσαν από τα άστικά τους καθήκοντα. Στα μέσα του 6ου αιώνα τα βουλευτήρια των πόλεων είχαν ουσιαστικά εξαφανιστεί. Ο Ίωάννης ο Λυδός, που γεννήθηκε στη Φιλαδέλφεια το 490, θυμόταν ακόμη τις μέρες που διοικούσαν τις πόλεις και τα μέλη τους φορούσαν την τήβεννο.¹⁰

Το κενό που δημιουργήθηκε στο έπαρχιακό επίπεδο αναπληρώθηκε εν μέρει από τους διοικητές των έπαρχιών και εν μέρει (άλλα όλο και περισσότερο) από τους επισκόπους. Έχει σωστά παρατηρηθεί ότι ή βυζαντινή Έκκλησία δεν αποτελούσε έναν οργανισμό sui juris: με τη σύγχρο-

νη όρολογία θα μπορούσε να περιγραφεί ως ύπουργείο κοινωνικής πρόνοιας. Το καθήκον να περιθάλπει τους φτωχούς, τους ξένους, τις χήρες και τα όρφανά ήταν μια ευαγγελική υποχρέωση, που την ανέλαβε ή Έκκλησία τον 4ο αιώνα. Καθώς τα άστικά συμβούλια παράκμαζαν, οι επίσκοποι αναλάμβαναν ποικίλες εξωθησκειυτικές λειτουργίες. Τους συναντάμε να αποδίδουν δικαιοσύνη, να επιβλέπουν την αγορά, να ρυθμίζουν τα μέτρα και τα σταθμά, να επισκευάζουν γέφυρες, να χτίζουν σιταποθήκες. Στην έδρα του έπαρχιακού διοικητή ο επίσκοπος ήταν ίσος με αυτόν, ενώ στις άλλες πόλεις ήταν ανώτερος όλων, ισότιμος με διοικητή. Ο επίσκοπος λοιπόν ήταν μέλος τής διοίκησης, και κατά κανόνα προερχόταν από την άριστοκρατία, επειδή έπρεπε να είναι εύπαρουσίαστος και να διαθέτει διοικητική πείρα. Ήταν απόλυτα φυσικό ένας λαϊκός, ακόμη κι αν δεν ήταν ιδιαίτερα θρησκευόμενος, να χειροτονηθεί απευθείας επίσκοπος. Τα παραδείγματα είναι άφθονα: ως περιοριστούμε σε ένα. Στην αρχή του 6ου αιώνα υπήρχε κάποιος Harfat που προερχόταν από οικογένεια πλούσιων γαιοκτημόνων. Όταν οι γονείς του πέθαναν, αυτός κι ένας συγγενής του κληρονόμησαν τα κτήματα και κάπου πέντε χιλιάδες χρυσά νομίσματα. Τότε προσφέρθηκε στον Harfat ή επίσκοπη των Άρσαμοσάτων στην Άρμενία, αλλά αυτός αρνήθηκε. Η προσφορά επαναλήφθηκε στο συγγενή του, «με το δέλεαρ μεγάλου πλούτου και ισχυρής θέσης», κι αυτός ο άνθρωπος, που λέγεται ότι ήταν ανέντιμος χαρακτήρας, δέχτηκε.¹¹ Υπάρχουν επίσης πολλές περιπτώσεις λαϊκών που έγιναν εξαίρετοι επίσκοποι, όπως ο Συνέσιος τής Κυρήνης τον 4ο αιώνα και ο άγιος Ίωάννης ο Έλεήμων, πατριάρχης τής Άλεξάνδρειας στην αρχή του 7ου αιώνα.

Κατά την Πρώιμη βυζαντινή περίοδο ή Έκκλησία απέκτησε τεράστια πλούτη ή, για να το πούμε αλλιώς, τεράστια κονδύλια διοχετεύονταν μέσω αυτής. Εκτός του ότι έπαιρνε κρατικές επιχορηγήσεις, κατείχε μόνιμα κτηματικά κληροδοτήματα καθώς και ακίνητα στις πόλεις. Βρισκόταν συνεχώς σε επαγρύπνηση για δωρεές εκ μέρους των πλουσίων, και πρόσεχε ιδιαίτερα τις κληρονόμους που, αν ήταν χήρες, τις παρότρυνε να μην ξαναπαντρευτούν, κι αν ήταν ανύπαντρες, να ένδυθούν το ιερό ένδυμα τής παρθενίας προς δόξαν του Θεού και προς το συμφέρον των εκκλησιαστικών ταμείων. Άλλα αν τα έξοδα ήταν μεγάλα, το ίδιο ήταν και τα έξοδα. Η Έκκλησία τής Αντιόχειας στο τέλος του 4ου αιώνα περιέθαλπε τρεις χιλιάδες χήρες και παρθένες, εκτός από τους αναπήρους, τους ξένους, τους φυλακισμένους και τους επαίτες. Επιπλέον, αυτό γινόταν χωρίς να ξοδεύει το κεφάλαιό της.¹² Οι μισθοί των κληρικών και ή συντήρηση των

κτιρίων αποτελούσαν περαιτέρω επιβαρύνσεις του εκκλησιαστικού προϋπολογισμού.

Ένα χαρακτηριστικό παράδειγμα αποτελεί η Έκκλησία της Αλεξάνδρειας, όπως παρουσιάζεται μέσα από το Βίο του αγίου Ιωάννη του Ελεήμονα.¹³ Ο άγιος Ιωάννης ήταν Κύπριος, λαϊκός που είχε χηρέψει, και άνηκε σε έπιφανή οικογένεια. Διορίστηκε πατριάρχης από τον αυτοκράτορα Ήράκλειο το 610 για να αντιμετωπίσει μια πολύ δύσκολη κατάσταση: η Έκκλησία της Αιγύπτου, εκτός από τις άλλες αναστατώσεις που τη βασάνιζαν μόνιμα, είχε περάσει σχεδόν ολοκληρωτικά στα χέρια των μονοφυσιτών. Φαίνεται ότι ο διορισμός του αγίου Ιωάννη αποδείχτηκε έπιτυχεστάτος. Είχε άρχοντική έλευθεριότητα και αυτοπεποίθηση: ήταν έπισης, αν πιστέψουμε το βιογράφο του, άπόλυτα ταπεινόφρων. Ταπεινός ή όχι, ο άγιος Ιωάννης βρέθηκε στην κορυφή μις άπέραντης γραφειοκρατικής όργανωσης. Χωρίς να υπολογίσουμε τους κληρικούς των έπαρχιών, η Έκκλησία διέθετε στην Αλεξάνδρεια έκατοντάδες ύπαλληλους. Ύπηρχαν πολλοί οικονομικοί ύπάλληλοι (οικονόμοι), θησαυροφύλακας, άρχιγραμματέας, ύπεύθυνος για τη διάθεση των δωρεών, γραφείς, γραμματείς και νομικοί σύμβουλοι. Ύπηρχαν πειθαρχικοί αξιωματούχοι, με δικαίωμα να επιβάλλουν σωματικές ποινές και φυλακίσεις σε κληρικούς με άνάρμοστη συμπεριφορά, όπως για παράδειγμα σε μοναχούς που συναναστρέφονταν νεαρές κοπέλες. Στην άρμοδιότητα του έπισκόπου βρίσκονταν όσοι επέβλεπαν την αγορά και τις ταβέρνες. Ύπηρχε όλόκληρη στρατιά από άγγελιαφόρους και κλητήρες (σε μια περίπτωση αναφέρονται είκοσι), καθώς και κουβικουλάριοι, ύπεύθυνοι για τον κοιτώνα του πατριάρχη. Τέλος ήταν οι καθαυτό κληρικοί, με έπικεφαλής τον πρωτοπρεσβύτερο και τον άρχιδιάκονο μέχρι τις κατώτερες βαθμίδες, στις όποίες όσοι βρίσκονταν άσκοϋσαν συχνά κι άλλα έπαγγέλματα, όπως π.χ. του τσαγκάρη. Ο πατριάρχης ήταν πρόεδρος ενός δικαστηρίου όπου εκδικάζονταν κάθε είδους διαφορές, όχι άποκλειστικά εκκλησιαστικές. Γενικά ήταν ισότιμος με το διοικητή της Αιγύπτου (dux augustalis), που τότε συνέβαινε να είναι εξαδέλφος του αυτοκράτορα.

Ο Βίος του αγίου Ιωάννη δεν αναφέρει καθόλου αν η Έκκλησία διέθετε κτηματική περιουσία (ή Αλεξάνδρεια δεν είχε άγροτική έندochώρα), αλλά αναφέρει κάμποσες ταβέρνες από τις όποιες εισέπραττε ένοίκια και άλλα τέλη. Έπιπλέον η Έκκλησία είχε ένα στόλο από κάπου δεκαπέντε μεγάλα φορτηγά πλοία που έμπορεύονταν με τη δυτική Εϋρώπη. Σε μια περίπτωση μαθαίνουμε πως τα πλοία συνάντησαν σφοδρή κακοκαιρία στην Άδριατική και αναγκάστηκαν να ρίξουν στη θάλασσα όλο τους το φορτίο,

άξίας 3.200 λιτρών χρυσού. Οι δωρεές των εύσεβών ήταν άφθονες: μια γυναίκα κληροδότησε στην Έκκλησία 500 λίτρες χρυσού. Ένας που είχε παντρευτεί δυό φορές πρόσφερε σε έποχή λιμού 200.000 μολιούς σιταριού και 180 λίτρες χρυσού, με τον όρο να τον χειροτονήσουν διάκονο, αλλά η πρότασή του άπορρίφθηκε. Συνολικά, λέγεται ότι ο άγιος Ιωάννης, στα όκτώ χρόνια της πατριαρχίας του, συνέλεξε από δωρεές 10.000 λίτρες χρυσού, εκτός από τις 8.000 λίτρες που βρήκε στο θησαυροφυλάκιο της Έκκλησίας. Καθόλου παράξενο λοιπόν που η Έκκλησία της Αλεξάνδρειας έπαιζε το ρόλο τραπέζιτη για τους έπιχειρηματίες της περιοχής. Την ίδια έποχή όμως λέγεται ότι ο πατριάρχης περιέθαλπε 7.500 ζητιάνους. Έχτισε ξενώνες γι' αυτούς —έπιμήκη θολωτά κτίρια έφοδιασμένα με ξύλινα κρεβάτια, στρώματα και κουβέρτες. Έχτισε έπισης ξενώνες για τους μοναχούς που επισκέπτονταν την πόλη και, όταν οι Πέρσες κατέλαβαν τα Ήεροσόλυμα το 614, έστειλε τεράστια ποσά για την άνοικοδόμηση των εκκλησιών και την εξαγορά αίχμαλώτων.

Τά άλλα τρία άνατολικά πατριαρχεία, της Κωνσταντινούπολης, της Αντιόχειας και των Ήεροσολύμων, είχαν εισοδήματα άνάλογα με εκείνα της Αλεξάνδρειας. Τά Ήεροσόλυμα μάλιστα έκμεταλλεύτηκαν την άνοδο των τιμών της γής στην Άγια Πόλη και πήραν κατ' εξαίρεση άδεια να πουλήσουν όρισμένες άστικές ιδιοκτησίες που κατείχαν, με τεράστιο κέρδος.¹⁴ Οι έπαρχιακές έπισκοπές ήταν φυσικά φτωχότερες, αλλά συνήθως βρίσκονταν κι αυτές σε καλή κατάσταση. Ένας έπίσκοπος της Αιγύπτου, για παράδειγμα, είχε τη δυνατότητα να διαθέσει τριάντα λίτρες χρυσού για ένα σερβίτσιο φαγητού από σφυρήλατο άσήμι για προσωπική του χρήση.¹⁵ Γύρω στο έτος 600, ο έπίσκοπος Άναστασιουπόλεως της Γαλατίας, μις πολύ μικρής πόλης, είχε έπιχορήγηση 365 νομίσματα για τη διατροφή του, από τά όποια ξόδευε μόνο τά σαράντα.¹⁶

Έντυπωσιακή έπιβεβαίωση του πλούτου της Έκκλησίας άνάμεσα στον 4ο και 6ο αιώνα έχουμε από άρχαιολογικές μαρτυρίες. Σε όλη την περιοχή της Μεσογείου είχαν χτιστεί βασιλικές κατά δεκάδες. Παρά την άρχιτεκτονική τους τυποποίηση ήταν μεγάλα κτίρια, συχνά με μήκος πάνω από τριάντα μέτρα, πλούσια διακοσμημένες με μαρμάρινες κολόνες, άνάγλυφα και μωσαϊκά. Όλο και περισσότερες εκκλησίες χτιζονταν σε κάθε πόλη μέχρι τά μέσα περίπου του 6ου αιώνα, όποτε η δραστηριότητα αυτή άρχισε να έπιβραδύνεται, μέχρις ότου σταμάτησε έντελώς. Ύπηρχε πραγματική άνάγκη για όλες αυτές τις εκκλησίες; Άπό ποιμαντική άποψη, η άπάντηση είναι σίγουρα άρνητική. Έπειδή όμως η ίδρυση εκκλησιών αποτελούσε πράξη άξιέπαινη, και έπιπλέον ίκανοποιούσε τη ματαιο-

δοξία τῶν δωρητῶν, ἐνῶ ταυτόχρονα δημιουργοῦσε νέες θέσεις γιὰ τοὺς κληρικούς, εἶναι πιθανὸ πὼς συνεχίστηκε γιὰ λίγο ἀκόμη κι ὅταν εἶχε πάψει νὰ ἐξυπηρετεῖ κάποια πραγματικὴ ἀνάγκη.

Εἶναι ὀλοφάνερο πὼς ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἐπιτελοῦσε μιὰ σημαντικὴ κοινωνικὴ ἀποστολή. Μὲ τὴ δράση της συντελοῦσε στὴν ἀνακατανομὴ τοῦ πλοῦτου, παίρνοντας ἀπὸ τοὺς πλουσίους καὶ παρέχοντας στέγη, φαγητὸ καὶ ἰατρικὴ περίθαλψη στοὺς φτωχοὺς. Δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία πὼς ἡ Ἐκκλησία πραγματοποιοῦσε αὐτὸ τὸ ἔργο πολὺ πιὸ ἀποτελεσματικὰ ἀπ' ὅσο θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ τὸ κάνουν τὸ κράτος ἢ οἱ ἀστικές ἀρχές, ἐπειδὴ ἀπευθυνόταν στὸ συναίσθημα τῶν δωρητῶν, δελεάζοντάς τους μὲ τὸν Παράδεισο καὶ ἀπειλώνοντας τους μὲ τὴν Κόλαση. Οἱ πλούσιες χῆρες, βέβαια, δύσκολα θὰ πῆγαιναν μὲ δάκρυα στὰ μάτια νὰ προσφέρουν τὸ χρυσάφι τους στὸν *dux augustalis* ἢ στὸν κόμητα τῆς Ἀνατολῆς. Ἀλλὰ καθὼς τὰ χρήματα ἔρεαν πρὸς τὶς κατώτερες κοινωνικὲς βαθμίδες, ἕνα μεγάλο μέρος τους (ἴσα δὲν διοχετεύονταν σὲ οἰκοδομικὲς δραστηριότητες) τροφοδοτοῦσε τὸν ἐκκλησιαστικὸ μηχανισμό. Ἐπειδὴ μιὰ σταδιοδρομία στὴν Ἐκκλησία ἐξασφάλιζε ἀνετη ζωὴ καὶ ἐπιπλέον κοινωνικὸ κύρος, ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν κληρικῶν αὐξανόταν. Στὶς ἀρχές τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα, λόγου χάρι, ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης εἶχε 88 διοικητικούς ὑπαλλήλους, 525 κληρικούς καὶ 75 ἐπιστάτες,¹⁷ καὶ αὐτὸ μετὰ τὸ πάγωμα τῶν χειροτονιῶν ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰουστινιανὸ σὲ ἀρκετὰ χαμηλὰ ἐπίπεδα.¹⁸ Ἐναν αἰῶνα νωρίτερα ἡ Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἀντιόχειας ἀντιμετώπισε οἰκονομικὲς δυσκολίες ἐξαιτίας τῆς αὔξεσης τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τῶν κληρικῶν.¹⁹

Πρὶν προχωρήσουμε στὴν ἐξέταση τοῦ ἀστικοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀγροτικοῦ πληθυσμοῦ, θὰ ἦταν χρήσιμο νὰ δοῦμε τὸ νομισματικὸ σύστημα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα ποὺ παρουσίαζαν τὰ ἔσοδα καὶ τὰ ἔξοδα. Ἡ βάση τοῦ νομίσματος ἦταν τὸ χρυσὸ νόμισμα (*χρυσίνος*, *solidus*), καὶ ἀντιστοιχοῦσαν 72 νομίσματα στὴ λίτρα. Κυκλοφοροῦσαν ἐπίσης χρυσὰ μικρότερης ἀξίας, μισοῦ νομίσματος (*σημίσιον*) καὶ ἐνὸς τρίτου (*τριμίσιον*), ἀλλὰ μέχρι τὸν 7ο αἰώνα δὲν κοβόταν ἀργυρὸ νόμισμα. Ὑπῆρχαν καὶ χάλκινα νομίσματα μικρῆς ἀξίας τὰ ὁποῖα, μετὰ τὴ νομισματικὴ μεταρρύθμιση τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Ἀναστασίου τὸ 498, συνήθως κυκλοφοροῦσαν σὲ κέρματα τῶν 5, 10, 20 καὶ 40 *νομμίων*. Τὸ τελευταῖο ἦταν γνωστὸ ὡς *φόλλις*. Ἡ σχέση χρυσοῦ καὶ χαλκοῦ κυμαινόταν, ἀλλὰ θεωρητικὰ ἕνα νόμισμα ἰσοδυναμοῦσε μὲ 180 *φόλλεις* ἢ 7.200 *νομμία*. Ἡ ἔλλειψη ἐνδιάμεσων νομισμάτων ἀνάμεσα στοὺς *φόλλεις* καὶ τὰ *τριμίσια* φαίνεται ἄβολη μὲ τὰ σημερινὰ κριτήρια. Ἐπειδὴ τὸ νομισματικὸ σύστημα βασιζόταν στὸν χρυσὸ, οἱ τιμὲς καὶ οἱ μισθοὶ εἶχαν ἀξιοσημείωτη σταθερότητα,

ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὶς περιόδους ἐλλείψεων ποὺ δημιουργοῦσαν οἱ ξηρασίες, οἱ ἐχθρικές ἐπιδρομὲς καὶ ἄλλες συμφορές. Πράγματι, ἡ σταθερότητα διατηρήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν 4ο ὡς τὸν 11ο αἰώνα, ὅταν ἄρχισε ἡ νόθευση τοῦ νομίσματος.

Μὲ βάση τὶς πληροφορίες ποὺ κατέχουμε σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ ὕψος τῶν προσωπικῶν περιουσιῶν, τὰ εἰσοδήματα, τὸ κόστος τῶν εἰδῶν πρώτης ἀνάγκης καὶ πολυτελείας, τὶς τιμὲς τῶν ἀγροτικῶν ζώων καὶ τῶν δούλων, μπορούμε νὰ καταλήξουμε σὲ ὀρισμένα προφανῆ συμπεράσματα. Πρῶτον, ὑπῆρχε μιὰ κραυγαλέα ἀνισότητα ἀνάμεσα στοὺς πλουσίους καὶ τοὺς φτωχοὺς. Δεύτερον, οἱ κυβερνητικὲς καὶ διοικητικὲς θέσεις συνήθως ἀπέφεραν μεγάλα πλούτη. Τρίτον, πρέπει νὰ ὑπῆρχαν πάρα πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ μόλις καὶ ἐπιβίωναν, ἐπειδὴ οἱ ἀνειδίκευτοι καὶ ἡμειδικευμένοι ἐργάτες εἶχαν χαμηλότερες ἀμοιβές. Τέταρτον, οἱ τιμὲς τῶν βιοτεχνικῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ ἰδιαίτερα τῶν ἐνδυμάτων ἦταν συγκριτικὰ πολὺ ὑψηλές. Ἀρχίζοντας ἀπὸ τὰ κατώτερα κοινωνικὰ στρώματα, ὑπάρχουν σαφεῖς μαρτυρίες ὅτι ἡ ἀμοιβὴ ἐνὸς χειρῶνακτα ἢ ἐνὸς ἡμειδικευμένου ἐργάτη κυμαινόταν ἀνάμεσα στὰ 10 καὶ 20 νομίσματα τὸ χρόνο, ἂν εἶχε συνεχῆ ἐργασία. Στὸ τέλος τοῦ 4ου αἰώνα μιὰ ομάδα ἐργατῶν ζήτησε ἀπὸ τὸν Γρηγόριο Νύσσης, ποὺ ἤθελε νὰ χτίσει μιὰ ἐκκλησία, μισθὸ ἕνα τριακοστὸ τοῦ νομίσματος τὴν ἡμέρα καὶ τὸ φαγητὸ τους, τιμὴ ποὺ ἐκεῖνος θεώρησε ὑπερβολικὴ.²⁰ Στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα τὸν 6ο αἰώνα ἕνας οἰκοδόμος ἀμοιβόταν μὲ τὸ ἕνα εἰκοστὸ τοῦ νομίσματος τὴν ἡμέρα, δηλαδή 9 *φόλλεις*.²¹ Περίπου τὴν ἴδια ἀμοιβή, δηλαδή ἕνα εἰκοστὸ τέταρτο τοῦ νομίσματος, ἔπαιρνε ἕνας εὐκαιριακὸς ἐργάτης στὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια στὶς ἀρχές τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα.²² Ὅταν ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Ἀναστάσιος ἐχτιζε τὴν πόλη Δάρας στὴ Μεσοποταμία ὡς στρατηγικὴ βάση κατὰ τῶν Περσῶν (505-7), πρόσφερε ἐξαιρετικὰ ὑψηλὰ ἡμερομίσθια στοὺς οἰκοδόμους, δηλαδή ἕνα ἕκτο τοῦ νομίσματος τὴν ἡμέρα ἢ ἕνα τρίτο τοῦ νομίσματος γιὰ ἕναν ἐργάτη μὲ τὸ γαϊδούρι του, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα «πολλοὶ νὰ γίνουν πάμπλουτοι».²³ Ἡ τιμὴ ἐνὸς ἀνειδίκευτου δούλου (περίπου 20 νομίσματα) ἦταν ἀνάλογη μὲ τὰ μέσα εἰσοδήματα. Ἄς δοῦμε τώρα τὶς τιμὲς τῶν εἰδῶν πρώτης ἀνάγκης. Οἱ ἡμερήσιες ἀνάγκες μιᾶς οἰκογένειας σὲ λαχανικὰ κόστιζαν 5 *φόλλεις*,²⁴ δηλαδή λίγο περισσότερο ἀπὸ 10 νομίσματα τὸ χρόνο· μισὸ κιλὸ ψάρια κόστιζαν 6 *φόλλεις*,²⁵ μιὰ φραντζόλα ψωμὶ ἔφτανε τοὺς τρεῖς *φόλλεις*, ὁμολογουμένως ὅμως σὲ περίοδο ἐλλείψεως.²⁶ Ἡ φτηνότερη κουβέρτα κόστιζε ἕνα τέταρτο τοῦ νομίσματος,²⁷ ἕνα μεταχειρισμένο παλτὸ ἕνα νόμισμα²⁸ καὶ ἕνα γαϊδούρι περίπου τρία μὲ τέσσερα νομίσματα. Εἶναι φανερὸ πὼς ὁ ἐργάτης ἢ ὁ οἰκοδόμος, ἀκόμη κι ἂν εἶχε πλήρη ἀπασχόληση, μόλις καὶ

κατόρθωνε να μη λιμοκτονεί, εκτός κι αν ήταν άσκητης και μπορούσε να επιζεί με μια μερίδα λούπινα την ημέρα (τιμή ένας φόλλις).

Στό άλλο άκρο της κοινωνικής κλίμακας, ο επίσκοπος Πορφύριος της Γάζας, που καταγόταν από έπιφανή οικογένεια της Θεσσαλονίκης, μετά το θάνατο των γονέων του κληρονόμησε 3.000 νομίσματα, κι άλλα 1.400 άγνωστης προέλευσης, καθώς και ρούχα και άργυρά σκεύη. Κι αυτό ήταν μέρος μόνο της περιουσίας, γιατί ο Πορφύριος είχε κι άλλους νεότερους αδελφούς.²⁹ Αναφέραμε ήδη τον 'Αρμένιο Harfat, του οποίου η πατρική περιουσία έφτανε τα 5.000 νομίσματα εκτός από τα κτήματα. Πρέπει να σημειωθεί ότι αυτές δεν ήταν καθόλου εξαιρετικές περιπτώσεις, αλλά περιουσία που μπορούσε να κατέχει ένας αρκετά ευκατάστατος δεκουριών. "Ένας αυτοκρατορικός αξιωματούχος μπορούσε να έχει άμετρητες φορές περισσότερα. "Όταν ο στρατηγός του 'Ιουστινιανού Βελισάριος έπεσε σε δυσμένεια, το μέρος της περιουσίας του που δημεύτηκε (το υπόλοιπο του επέτρεψαν να το κρατήσει) έφτανε τα 216.000 νομίσματα.³⁰

"Ας δούμε τώρα έναν αυτοκρατορικό αξιωματούχο μέσης βαθμίδας. 'Ο 'Ιωάννης ο Λυδός, στον οποίο οφείλουμε το *Περί άρχων της 'Ρωμαίων πολιτείας* και άλλα αρχαιολογικά έργα, έφτασε στην Κωνσταντινούπολη το 511 με σκοπό να κάνει ανώτερες σπουδές και μετά να γίνει δημόσιος υπάλληλος. Για καλή του τύχη, ένας συμπατριώτης του που λεγόταν Ζωτικός ήταν τότε έπαρχος των πραιτωρίων. Με τη βοήθεια του ισχυρού αυτού ανθρώπου ο 'Ιωάννης διορίστηκε στη γραμματεία της έπαρχότητας, όπου ήδη υπηρετούσε ένας εξάδελφός του, και μέσα σε ένα χρόνο κέρδισε «τίμια» (όπως λέει ο ίδιος) 1.000 νομίσματα από προμήθειες. 'Ενθουσιασμένος με την τύχη του έγραψε έναν σύντομο πανηγυρικό για τον προστάτη του και ανταμείφθηκε με ένα νόμισμα για κάθε στίχο, ποσό που φυσικά βγήκε από το δημόσιο ταμείο. 'Επιπλέον ο Ζωτικός βρήκε μια νύφη για τον προστατευόμενό του, μια γυναίκα άπαράμιλλης αγνότητας, που του έδωσε προίκα 100 λίρες χρυσοῦ (7.200 νομίσματα).³¹ Είναι αλήθεια ότι μετά την απόλυση του Ζωτικού η σταδιοδρομία του 'Ιωάννη αντιμετώπισε προβλήματα. 'Εντούτοις έμεινε στην ίδια υπηρεσία άλλα σαράντα χρόνια, έφτασε στην κορυφή της ιεραρχίας και πήρε σύνταξη με τον τίτλο του κόμητα πρώτης τάξεως. 'Ενδιαφέρουσα περίπτωση, όχι μόνο για τις άμοιβες ενός αξιωματούχου αλλά και για το ρόλο που έπαιζε η προστασία και οι τοπικοί δεσμοί.

Δυστυχώς δεν γνωρίζουμε σχεδόν τίποτε για τα εισοδήματα της μέσης αστικής τάξης. Στην 'Αντιόχεια, λέει ο 'Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος σε ένα λόγο του, ένα δέκατο του πληθυσμού ήταν πλούσιοι, κι άλλο ένα δέ-

κατο έντελώς άποροι.³² Δεν πρέπει όμως να παίρνουμε αυτούς τους αριθμούς τους μετρητοῖς, μια και ο ίδιος ο ρήτορας αντιφάσκει στην επόμενη φράση. Το ποσοστό των άπόρων, όσων δηλαδή ζούσαν μόνο από φιλανθρωπίες, ήταν ίσως κάτω από το δέκα τοῖς εκατό, αν ανταποκρίνεται στην πραγματικότητα αυτό που αναφέρθηκε πιο πάνω, ότι η 'Εκκλησία της 'Αλεξάνδρειας συντηρούσε 7.500 ζητιάνους, αριθμός που αντιπροσώπευε λιγότερο από το πέντε τοῖς εκατό του πληθυσμού της πόλης. Ούτε μπορούμε, νομίζω, να συμπεράνουμε πως το όγδόντα τοῖς εκατό των κατοίκων της 'Αντιόχειας ήταν ευκατάστατοι. Είδαμε ήδη ότι οι χειρώνακτες ήταν εξαιρετικά φτωχοί, και το ίδιο χωρίς άλλο θα συνέβαινε και με άλλα ταπεινά επαγγέλματα, όπως του πρματευτή και του λιανοπωλητή. Οι τεχνίτες, που συνήθως ήταν οργανωμένοι σε συντεχνίες, θεωρούνταν ανώτεροι από τους λιανοπωλητές, και ορισμένα επαγγέλματα, όπως του κοσμηματοπώλη και του άργυροπράτου (άργυραμοιβού), μπορούσαν να άποφέρουν σημαντικά κέρδη. 'Αλλά παρόλο που γνωρίζουμε ολόκληρους καταλόγους αστικών επαγγελμάτων, δεν είναι δυνατό να τα κατατάξουμε σε μια αξιολογική κλίμακα. 'Η γενική εντύπωση που άποκομίζουμε είναι πως οι επαγγελματίες και οι τεχνίτες δεν κέρδιζαν αρκετά χρήματα. Κάποιος που ανήκε στην τάξη αυτή μπορούσε να ελπίζει ότι θα άποκτήσει ιδιόκτητη κατοικία, ότι θα αγοράσει ένα δούλο, θα έχει άξιοπρεπή καλύμματα για το κρεβάτι του και μερικά μπρούντζινα σκεύη. Αυτά τα πράγματα συνεπάγονταν κύρος (*σχήμα*) και συχνά τα άποκοτούσαν κάνοντας αίματηρές οικονομίες σε άλλα είδη πρώτης ανάγκης.³³

Το επάγγελμα του εμπόρου ήταν, και μάλιστα από τα πρώτα, ανάμεσα σε αυτά που μπορούσαν να οδηγήσουν στην άποκτηση κάποιας περιουσίας. Το έργο του 4ου αιώνα *Expositio totius mundi* παρέχει μια ρόδινη εικόνα των έμπορικῶν δραστηριοτήτων. Στη Μεσοποταμία, λέει, η Νίσιβη και η 'Εδεσσα ήταν πολύ πλούσιες, έπειδή το περσικό έμπόριο διοχετευόταν μέσω αυτών. Στη Συρία τα λιμάνια της Τύρου και της Λαοδικείας ήταν επίσης ιδιαίτερα πλούσια. 'Η 'Ασκαλών και η Γάζα στην Παλαιστίνη έζήγαν κρασί στη Συρία και την Αίγυπτο. 'Η Σκυθόπολη, ή Λαοδικεία, ή Βύβλος, ή Τύρος και η Βηρυτός ήταν διάσημες για τα ύφασματά τους. "Όλες αυτές οι πόλεις, λέει το κείμενό μας, ζούσαν από το έμπόριο και οι κάτοικοί τους ήταν πλούσιοι, εύφραδεῖς και έναρετοι. 'Η Βόστρα ήταν ένα άλλο σημαντικό κέντρο, έπειδή βρισκόταν κοντά στους Πέρσες και τους 'Αραβες. 'Η Αίγυπτος, φυσικά, ήταν φημισμένη για την εύφορία της. Παρήγε τα πάντα εκτός από λάδι (καί, ως προσθέσουμε, κρασί καλής ποιότητας), και η 'Αλεξάνδρεια ήταν το μεγαλύτερο λιμάνι

της αυτοκρατορίας. Οι πληροφορίες του συγγραφέα μας για άλλες περιοχές φαίνεται ότι προέρχονται περισσότερο από δεύτερο χέρι παρά από προσωπική πείρα. Ξεχωρίζει την επαρχία της 'Ασίας (δυτική Μικρά 'Ασία) για την παραγωγή κρασιού, λαδιού, ρυζιού, πορφύρας και σιταριού· άλλες παραθαλάσσιες περιοχές της Μικρᾶς 'Ασίας για αγροτικά επίσης προϊόντα, ενώ η ενδοχώρα δεν παρήγε παρά υφάσματα και δέρματα. Για τὰ Βαλκάνια δείχνει λιγότερο ένθουσιασμό: ἡ Θράκη ἦταν ἀπλῶς εὐφορη· ἡ Μακεδονία εἶχε σίδηρο, κεντήματα, καπνιστὸ χοιρινὸ καὶ τυρὶ· ἡ 'Ελλάδα δὲν μπορούσε νὰ καλύψει οὔτε τίς ἀνάγκες της, καὶ ἡ Λακωνία παρήγε μόνο μάρμαρο. Ἐντούτοις ἡ Κόρινθος ἦταν πολυσύχναστο λιμάνι.

Φυσικὰ στὴν ὑστερορωμαϊκὴ αὐτοκρατορία τὸ ἐμπόριο μεγάλων ἀποστάσεων γινόταν σὲ εὐρεία κλίμακα: ἐμπορεύονταν κρασί καὶ λάδι, παστά ψάρια καὶ αὐγοτάραχο, δούλους, μπαχαρικά τῆς Ἀνατολῆς, υφάσματα καὶ ἔτοιμα ρούχα, κεραμικὰ καὶ πολύτιμα μέταλλα. Παρ' ὅλα αὐτά, τὸ ἐμπόριο δὲν δημιουργοῦσε μεγάλες περιουσίες. Ὁ ἑκατομμυριοῦχος μεγαλοεπιχειρηματίας δὲν ὑπῆρξε ποτὲ χαρακτηριστικὸ τῆς βυζαντινῆς κοινωνίας, καὶ ἴσως ὁ μόνος ἔμπορος στὰ χρονικὰ τῆς βυζαντινῆς λογοτεχνίας ἦταν ὁ Ἀλεξανδρινὸς Κοσμᾶς ὁ Ἰνδικοπλεύστης, ποὺ ἔζησε τὸν 6ο αἰώνα: ταξίδεψε σὲ πολλὰ μῆκη καὶ πλάτη, ἀλλὰ δὲν ξέρομε ἀν κέρδισε πολλὰ χρήματα. Τὰ μικρὰ κέρδη ποὺ παρείχε τὸ ἐμπόριο ὀφείλονταν σὲ πολλές ἀλληλένδετες αἰτίες: τὴ μικρὴ ἀγοραστικὴ δύναμη τοῦ κοινοῦ, τὴν αὐτάρκεια πολλῶν περιοχῶν ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὰ εἶδη πρώτης ἀνάγκης, τοὺς κινδύνους τῶν μεγάλων ταξιδιῶν. Τὰ ναυάγια ἦταν συχνά, καὶ οἱ χειμερινοὶ μῆνες δὲν θεωροῦνταν κατάλληλοι γιὰ ναυσιπλοία, ὅποτε μεγάλο μέρος τοῦ χρόνου ἦταν οἰκονομικὰ νεκρὸ. Τὰ ἐπιτόκια τῶν ἐμπορικῶν δανείων ἦταν ἐπίσης πολὺ ὑψηλά. Ἐνας ἄλλος σημαντικὸς παράγοντας ἦταν ὅτι τὸ κράτος (ποὺ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι ὁ καλύτερος πελάτης) δὲν κατέφευγε στίς ὑπηρεσίες ἰδιωτῶν. Ὁ ἐφοδιασμὸς τῶν μεγάλων πρωτευουσῶν καθὼς καὶ τοῦ στρατοῦ ἦταν, ὅπως θὰ λέγαμε σήμερα, ἐθνικοποιημένος. Τὰ προϊόντα (αἰγυπτιακὸ σιτάρι, λινάρι, μαλλὶ κτλ.) συγκεντρώνονταν μὲ ἀπευθείας φορολογία σὲ εἶδος καὶ μεταφέρονταν ἀπὸ κρατικὴ συντεχνία πλοιοκτητῶν (navicularii), ποὺ ἦταν δεμένοι σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ὑπηρεσία κληρονομικὰ. Ἐπιπλέον τὸ κράτος διέθετε ἐργοστάσια ὄπλων καὶ ὑφαντουργεῖα γιὰ παραγωγή στολῶν, καὶ εἶχε τὸ μονοπώλιο στὰ ὄρυχεῖα. Συνεπῶς ὁ ρόλος τῶν ἰδιωτῶν ἐμπόρων περιοριζόταν ἀνάλογα. Τὸν 7ο αἰώνα ἕνας ἐμπορικὸς ἀντιπρόσωπος, ὁ Ἑβραῖος Ἰακώβ, ποὺ τοῦ εἶχαν ἐμπιστευθεῖ μιὰ παρτίδα ἐνδυμάτων ἀξίας 144 νομισμάτων (ὄχι καὶ μεγάλο ποσὸ) γιὰ νὰ τὰ πουλήσει στὴν Ἀφρική καὶ τὴ Γαλατία, ἀμοιβόταν

μὲ 15 νομίσματα τὸ χρόνο ὡς προμήθεια· καθόλου παράξενο λοιπὸν ποὺ ἐξαπάτησε τὸν ἐργοδότη του.³⁴

Ἡ κύρια πηγὴ πλούτου, ὅπως καὶ φορολογίας, ἦταν ἡ γεωργία. Ἐπικρατεῖ γενικὰ ἡ ἀποψη ὅτι τὸ σύστημα τῆς Πρώιμης βυζαντινῆς ἐποχῆς στηριζόταν στὰ μεγάλα κτήματα ποὺ τὰ καλλιεργοῦσαν δοῦλοι, ἀλλὰ, γιὰ νὰ ἀκριβολογήσουμε, αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι ἀλήθεια. Οἱ δοῦλοι δὲν χρησιμοποιοῦνταν καὶ πολὺ στὰ κτήματα, ἐπειδὴ περιορίζονταν κυρίως σὲ οἰκιακὲς ἐργασίες. Ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, ποὺ κατέκρινε τὴν ἐπιδεικτικὴ κατοχὴ μεγάλου ἀριθμοῦ δούλων, παραδεχόταν πὼς ἕνας ἐλεύθερος ἄνθρωπος δὲν ἦταν δυνατὸ νὰ μαγειρεύει ὁ ἴδιος γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του.³⁵ Συνεπῶς ἡ πλειονότητα τῶν δούλων —ποὺ ὅμως δὲν γνωρίζουμε τί ποσοστὸ τοῦ συνολικοῦ πληθυσμοῦ ἀντιπροσώπευαν— ζοῦσαν στίς πόλεις. Ὅσο γιὰ τίς μεγάλες γαιοκτησίες, αὐτὲς ὅπωςδήποτε ὑπῆρχαν, ἀν καὶ δὲν πρέπει νὰ τίς φανταζόμαστε ὡς τεράστιες συνεχεῖς ἐκτάσεις ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ὡς μεγάλο ἀριθμὸ διασκορπισμένων κτημάτων ποὺ ἀνῆκαν σὲ ἕναν ἰδιοκτήτη. Γενικὰ ὑπῆρχε μεγάλη κατάτμηση τῆς γαιοκτησίας, καὶ ἦταν πολὺ συνηθισμένο οἱ γαιοκτῆμονες, εἴτε ἦταν ἰδιῶτες, εἴτε ἡ Ἐκκλησία, εἴτε τὸ Στέμμα, νὰ κατέχουν κτήματα σὲ διάφορες ἐπαρχίες. Ἡ ὑπαρξὴ μερικῶν ἐξαιρετικὰ πλούσιων γαιοκτημόνων, ὅπως ἡ γνωστὴ οἰκογένεια τῶν Ἀπιώνων στὴν Αἴγυπτο, δὲν θὰ πρέπει νὰ μᾶς κάνει νὰ ἀγνοοῦμε τὴν παρουσία τῶν μεσαίων καὶ μικρῶν ἐλευθέρων ἰδιοκτητῶν, οἱ ὁποῖοι συχνὰ συγκροτοῦσαν ὁμάδες αὐτόνομων κοινοτήτων. Ἡ ἀρχαιολογικὴ ἐξερεύνηση τῶν ἀσβεστολιθικῶν ὑψωμάτων στὴ βόρεια Συρία, μιὰ περιοχὴ μὲ μεγάλη ἀνάπτυξη καὶ εὐημερία χάρη στὴν καλλιέργεια τῆς ἐλιᾶς, δείχνει ὄχι μόνο πὼς τὰ μεγάλα καὶ τὰ μικρὰ κτήματα συνυπῆρχαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πὼς κατὰ τὴν περίοδο ἀπὸ τὸν 4ο ὡς τὸν 6ο αἰώνα ὑπῆρχε γενικὰ τάση διάσπασης τῶν μεγαλύτερων ἰδιοκτησιῶν καὶ ἀνάπτυξης χωριῶν, τῶν ὁποίων οἱ κάτοικοι ἦταν σχετικὰ εὐκατάστατοι ἐλεύθεροι γεωργοί.³⁶ Μολοντί οἱ συνθήκες στὰ ἀσβεστολιθικὰ ὑψώματα πιθανὸν δὲν ἦταν ἀντιπροσωπευτικὲς τῆς ὑπόλοιπης Συρίας, καὶ πολὺ λιγότερο ἄλλων περιοχῶν τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, ὥστόσο ὑπογραμμίζουν πόσο παραινιδνευμένο εἶναι νὰ βγάζουμε γενικὰ συμπεράσματα μὲ βάση φιλολογικὰ καὶ νομικὰ κείμενα.

Ἄν οἱ δοῦλοι γενικὰ ἀπουσίαζαν ἀπὸ τίς γεωργικὲς ἐκμεταλλεύσεις, οἱ ἐξαρτημένοι ἀγρότες (κολονοί, coloni) ἀποτελοῦσαν σημαντικὸ χαρακτηριστικὸ τους. Ὁ κολόνος, ἄνθρωπος ποὺ ζοῦσε ὑπὸ καθεστῶς ἐξευτελιστικοῦ καὶ ἀνώμαλο, ἦταν θεωρητικὰ ἐλεύθερος, ἀλλὰ στὴν πράξη ἦταν δεμένος μὲ τὸν ἀγρὸ του. Ἦταν, ὅπως ἀναφέρει ἕνας νόμος τοῦ 393, «δοῦ-

λος τῆς γῆς». ³⁷ Ἡ θέση του ἦταν κληρονομική, ἡ ἐλευθερία του γιὰ σύναψη γάμου περιορισμένη, καὶ δὲν ἐπιτρεπόταν οὔτε νὰ στρατευτεῖ. Ὁ ἀφέντης τῆς γῆς εἰσέπραττε τοὺς φόρους τοῦ κολονοῦ, καὶ εἶχε δικαίωμα ἀκόμη καὶ νὰ τὸν ἀλυσοδέσει ἂν προσπαθοῦσε νὰ δραπετεῦσει. Ἡ κυβέρνηση παραδεχόταν ἀνοιχτὰ ὅτι ὑπῆρχε μικρὴ διαφορά ἀνάμεσα στὸ καθεστῶς τοῦ δούλου καὶ τοῦ κολονοῦ. ³⁸ Τὸ κράτος φυσικὰ δὲν τὸ ὠθοῦσαν αἰσθημάτων σαδισμοῦ στὸν περιορισμὸ τῶν ἐλευθεριῶν τοῦ ἐξαρτημένου ἀγρότη: ἡ κύρια μέριμνά του ἦταν ἡ συλλογὴ τῶν φόρων σύμφωνα μὲ τὰ ἰσχύοντα κτηματολόγια. Γιατὶ ἂν ὑπῆρχε ἓνας θεσμὸς ποὺ ἀφήσε ἀνεξίτηλη τὴ σφραγίδα του στὸν βυζαντινὸ τρόπο ζωῆς, αὐτὸς σίγουρα ἦταν ἡ φορολογία. Οἱ τακτικοὶ καὶ ἔκτακτοι φόροι — ποὺ πληρώνονταν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγρότες σὲ εἶδος καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐμπόρους καὶ τεχνίτες σὲ χρῆμα — ἦταν θεωρητικὰ ἰσοκατανεμημένοι: στὴν πράξη, ἐπλητταν τὸν ἀγροτικὸ πληθυσμὸ βαρύτερα ἀπὸ τὸν ἀστικὸ, καὶ τοὺς φτωχοὺς πολὺ περισσότερο ἀπὸ τοὺς πλουσίους. Οἱ φόροι ἀφαιροῦσαν περίπου τὸ ἓνα τρίτο τῆς σοδειᾶς τοῦ δυστυχημένου κολονοῦ, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔπρεπε νὰ πληρῶσει ἐπιπλέον καὶ ἐνοίκιο στὸ γαιοκτήμονα. Ἡ ἐπαχθὴς φορολογία ἀνάγκαζε πολλοὺς Ρωμαίους νὰ λιποτακτοῦν πρὸς τὸν ἐχθρὸ, τόσο τὸν 4ο καὶ τὸν 5ο αἰῶνα ὅσο καὶ τὸν 11ο, ³⁹ ἐξανάγκαζε τοὺς ἀγρότες νὰ ἐγκαταλείπουν τὰ χωράφια τους, γέμιζε τὰ μοναστήρια καὶ ἐξαθλιώνει τοὺς δεκουρίανες. Ἡ ἰνδικτιῶν, δηλαδὴ ἡ φορολογία μὲ βάση ἓναν κύκλο δεκαπέντε ἐτῶν, ἔγινε ὁ πιὸ διαδεδομένος τρόπος χρονολόγησής στὴ βυζαντινὴ αὐτοκρατορία.

Ἡ ἔστω καὶ σύντομη ἐπισκόπηση τῆς κοινωνικῆς καὶ οἰκονομικῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ Πρώιμου βυζαντινοῦ κράτους ἀποκαλύπτει ἓναν κλοιδὸ ἀληθένδεταν περιορισμῶν ποὺ ὅλο καὶ περισφιγγόταν. Ἡ εἰσαγωγὴ ἐνὸς σχεδιασμοῦ στὴν οἰκονομία ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Διοκλητιανὸ κατὰ τὴν τελευταία δεκαετία τοῦ 3ου αἰῶνα πιθανὸν ἀποτελοῦσε ἀναγκαῖο μέτρο: τὸ κράτος ἴσως δὲν θὰ ἐπιζοῦσε χωρὶς αὐτὴν. Ἡ σχεδιασμένη οἰκονομία δημιούργησε τὴ δυνατότητα γιὰ κάτι ποὺ δὲν ὑπῆρχε προηγουμένως, δηλαδὴ τὸν κρατικὸ προϋπολογισμὸ. Πῶς ἀλλιῶς θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ ἀνταποκριθοῦν στὸ διαρκῶς αὐξανόμενο, ἂν καὶ ὄχι σταθερὸ, κόστος τοῦ στρατοῦ; Ὁ προϋπολογισμὸς σήμαινε ἐκλογικευμένο φορολογικὸ σύστημα, τὸ ὁποῖο σήμαινε ἀπογραφὴ, ἡ ὁποία μὲ τὴ σειρὰ τῆς σήμαινε ἀνάπτυξη τῆς γραφειοκρατίας. Ἀποτέλεσμα τῶν μεταρρυθμίσεων τοῦ Διοκλητιανοῦ ἦταν νὰ γεμίσει ὁ ρωμαϊκὸς κόσμος ἀπὸ ἀξιωματοῦχοι, καὶ ἤδη τὸν 4ο αἰῶνα λεγόταν (βέβαια μὲ μεγάλη δόση ὑπερβολῆς) πῶς ὅσοι ἀπαλλάσσονταν ἀπὸ τὴ φορολογία ἦταν περισσότεροι ἀπὸ τοὺς φορολογουμένους. ⁴⁰ Ὅπως ὅλο γνωρίζουμε ὁμως, ἡ γραφειοκρατία ἀποκτᾷ μιὰ δική της κε-

κτημένη ταχύτητα, καὶ οἱ φόροι τείνουν μᾶλλον νὰ αὐξάνονται παρά νὰ μειώνονται. Εἶναι ἀναμφισβήτητο γεγονὸς ὅτι ἀπὸ τὸν 4ο αἰῶνα καὶ μετὰ ὅλο καὶ περισσότερη γῆ ἔμενε ἀκαλλιεργητὴ, καὶ εἶναι πολὺ πιθανὸ πῶς τὸ κύριο αἶτιο ἦταν ἡ φορολογία. Καθὼς οἱ φορολογικὲς εἰσπράξεις μειώνονταν, οἱ ἀξιωματοῦχοι, ὀπλισμένοι μὲ τὰ κατάστιχά τους, δὲν ἐβρισκαν ἄλλη λύση παρά νὰ ἐφαρμόζουν ὅλο καὶ πιὸ καταπιεστικὰ μέτρα: οἱ πάντες, ἀπὸ τὸν ταπεινὸ κολονὸ μέχρι τοὺς δεκουρίανες, ἔπρεπε νὰ κρατηθοῦν στὴ θέση τους. Ἀλλὰ τὰ γρανάζια τῆς διοίκησης γύρναγαν ἀργά, οἱ ἀποστάσεις ἦταν μεγάλες καὶ ὑπῆρχαν πολλὰ περιθώρια γιὰ ἀπάτη καὶ ὑπεκφυγὴ. Ἐμφανίστηκε λοιπὸν στὸ προσκήνιο ὁ τύπος τοῦ προστάτη, τοῦ μεσάζοντα, τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μὲ ἐπιρροή, σὲ βαθμὸ μάλιστα ποὺ ἀκόμη καὶ τὴ λατρεία τῶν χριστιανῶν ἀγίων τὴν ἐβλεπαν μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ πρίσμα τῆς προστασίας, ὅπως θὰ δοῦμε σὲ ἐπόμενο κεφάλαιο. Ἀναφέραμε τὴν περίπτωση τοῦ Ἰακώβ, τοῦ ἐβραίου ἐμπορικοῦ ἀντιπροσώπου. Ὑπάρχει καὶ συνέχεια στὴν ἱστορία του. Τί ἔκανε ὁ ἐργοδότης του στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ὅταν ἔμαθε ὅτι εἶχε ἐξαπατηθεῖ; Μήπως κατέφυγε στὴ δικαιοσύνη; Κάθε ἄλλο. Πῆγε νὰ βρεῖ τὸν προστάτη του, ἓνα θαλαμηπόλο τοῦ παλατιοῦ, καὶ ὁ θαλαμηπόλος ἔστειλε «τὸν ἀνθρωπὸ του» στὴν Καρχηδόνα γιὰ νὰ συλλάβει τὸν Ἰακώβ, ὁ ὁποῖος στὸ μεταξύ εἶχε γίνει χριστιανός. ⁴¹

Ἡ ἀκαμψία τῶν κοινωνικῶν καὶ οἰκονομικῶν δομῶν τοῦ πρώιμου Βυζαντίου μπορούσε πάντοτε νὰ ξεπεραστεῖ μὲ πλάγια μέσα. Ὅ,τι καὶ ἂν καθόριζαν οἱ νόμοι (καὶ δὲν ἔχουμε λόγο νὰ υποθέσουμε ὅτι ἐφαρμόζονταν αὐστηρά), κάποιος ποὺ ἦταν ἀποφασισμένος συνήθως ἔβρισκε τρόπο νὰ προοδεύει στὴ ζωὴ του. Ὑπῆρχαν βέβαια καὶ ἀναγνωρισμένοι τρόποι κοινωνικῆς ἀνόδου, κυρίως μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ στρατὸ καὶ τίς δημόσιες ὑπηρεσίες. Ὑπάρχουν πολλὲς περιπτώσεις ποὺ ἀπλοὶ στρατιῶτες ἀνῆλθαν σὲ σημαντικὰ ἀξιώματα, ἀκόμη καὶ στὸν αὐτοκρατορικὸ θρόνο, καὶ γιοὶ ἀλλαντοποιῶν ἔγιναν σπουδαῖοι ὑπουργοί. Ἐπιπλέον, ὅταν μιὰ περιουσία σχηματιζόταν, συνήθως παρέμενε στὴν οἰκογένεια γιὰ κάμποσες γενιές, ἐκτὸς ἂν δημευόταν. Μολονότι δὲν ὑπῆρχε θεσμὸς κληρονομικῆς ἀριστοκρατίας, τὰ ἀξιώματα ἔφεραν χρήματα καὶ τὰ χρήματα ἐξασφάλιζαν κυβερνητικὲς θέσεις. Ἀλλὰ ὑπῆρχαν καὶ ἄλλοι τρόποι κοινωνικῆς κινητικότητας. Ὁ αἰρετικὸς τοῦ 4ου αἰῶνα Ἀέτιος λέγεται ὅτι ξεκίνησε τὴ ζωὴ του ὡς κολονὸς σὲ ἓναν ἀμπελῶνα. Ἐπειτα κατόρθωσε νὰ γίνῃ σιδηρουργός, συνελήφθη γιὰ ἀπάτη, ἔγινε μαθητευόμενος ἐνὸς τσαρλατάνου γιατροῦ, ἐμφανίστηκε ὡς γιατρός ὁ ἴδιος, προκάλεσε τὴν προσοχὴ τοῦ καίσαρα Γάλλου (ἀδελφοῦ τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ) καὶ κατέληξε διάσημος θεολόγος. ⁴² Ἡ ἱστο-

ρία βέβαια μπορεί να είναι κακόβουλη, αλλά δείχνει πώς μια τέτοια σταδιοδρομία ήταν δυνατή. Ακαμψία που μετριοζόταν από την υπεκφυγή μπορεί συνεπώς να είναι ο κατάλληλος χαρακτηρισμός της πρώιμης βυζαντινής κοινωνικής δομής. Ίσως επίσης να ταιριάζει και σε άλλες σχεδιασμένες οικονομίες.

Η κατάρρευση του Πρώιμου βυζαντινού κράτους τη στιγμή που ο Άντωνιος Ιακώβ μεταφερόταν κακήν κακώς από την Καρχηδόνα στην Κωνσταντινούπολη πρέπει να προκάλεσε βαθιές κοινωνικές αναπροσαρμογές. Δυστυχώς δεν έχουμε αρκετά στοιχεία για να τις παρακολουθήσουμε με λεπτομέρειες. Όταν το σκοτεινό παραπέτασμα αρχίζει να αναστηλώνεται τον 9ο αιώνα, διαπιστώνουμε ότι ένας κάπως διαφορετικός κόσμος έχει γεννηθεί, αλλά γνωρίζουμε ελάχιστα πράγματα για τις διαδικασίες που μεσολάβησαν.

Εκείνο που φαίνεται καθαρά είναι πώς ολόκληρος ο μηχανισμός της αυτοκρατορικής διοίκησης έχει αλλάξει. Οι μεγάλες υπηρεσίες, όπως οι έπαρχότητες των πραιτωρίων, και οι μεγάλες στρατιωτικές διοικήσεις, όπως του *magister militum*, καταργήθηκαν. Στη θέση τους βρίσκουμε έναν μεγάλο αριθμό αξιωματούχων, που όλοι τους είναι υπόλογοι άπευθείας στον αυτοκράτορα, χωρίς να είναι καταταγμένοι σε μια ιεραρχική πυραμίδα. Η ουσία της αλλαγής, όπως την καθόρισε ο J. B. Bury,⁴³ ήταν ότι «η αρχή της ισοβαθμίας αντικατέστησε την αρχή της ιεραρχικής εξάρτησης και αυξήθηκαν τα ανώτερα αξιώματα αντί να δίνονται τεράστιες εξουσίες σε πολύ λίγους». Πιο έντυπωσιακή από όλες τις αλλαγές υπήρξε η αναδόμηση της έπαρχιακής διοίκησης, που ξεκίνησε, όπως φαίνεται, από τον αυτοκράτορα Ηράκλειο. Οι παλιές έπαρχίες, που ήταν οργανωμένες σε διοικήσεις, αντικαταστάθηκαν από μερικές μεγάλες μονάδες, που ονομάζονταν θέματα. Κάθε θέμα τὸ διοικούσε ένας στρατηγός, που είχε τόσο στρατιωτικές όσο και πολιτικές αρμοδιότητες. Η μεταρρύθμιση εφαρμόστηκε πρώτα στη Μικρά Ασία και κατόπιν επεκτάθηκε στις ευρωπαϊκές έπαρχίες, καθώς οι περιοχές αυτές ελευθερώνονταν βαθμιαία από τους βαρβάρους ταυτόχρονα τα μεγάλα θέματα που είχαν αρχικά δημιουργηθεί διαιρούνταν σε μικρότερα. Ο όρος θέμα, του οποίου αρχικά δημιουργηθεί διαιρούνταν σε μικρότερα. Ο όρος θέμα, του οποίου η άκριβης προέλευση δεν έχει ακόμη ξεκαρλωθεί, σήμαινε στην αρχή ένα στρατιωτικό σώμα και κατ'επέκταση την περιοχή που ήταν εγκατεστημένο. Μετά την πρώτη εγκατάσταση στρατιωτών, από τους οποίους συχνά τὸ θέμα έπαιρνε τὸ όνομά του, φαίνεται ότι η στρατολόγηση γινόταν επιτοπίως, και έτσι δημιουργήθηκε ένας μόνιμος, γηγενής στρατός. Η

ομοιότητα με τὸ παλιό σύστημα τῶν *limitanei* είναι ολοφάνερη, αλλά τώρα ολόκληρη ἡ ἔκταση τῆς αυτοκρατορίας μεταβλήθηκε, κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο, σε παραμεθόρια περιοχή. Μερικοί ἔρευνητές πιστεύουν πὸς ἡ σωτηρία τῆς αυτοκρατορίας κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τοῦ μακροχρόνιου ἀγώνα με τοὺς Ἀραβες ὀφείλεται σὲ αὐτὴ τὴ ριζικὴ μεταρρύθμιση. Ὑποστηρίζουν ἐπίσης ὅτι τοὺς στρατιώτες τῶν θεμάτων γίνονταν ἐξαρχῆς παραχωρήσεις γαιῶν, με ἀντάλλαγμα τὴν κληρονομικὴ στρατιωτικὴ ὑπηρεσία, καὶ ὅτι αὐτοὶ καλλιεργούσαν τὴ γῆ τους ὅταν δὲν βρίσκονταν σὲ ἐκστρατεία. Αὐτὴ ἡ εἰκόνα τῶν σθεναρῶν στρατιωτῶν-καλλιεργητῶν, ποὺ προάσπιζαν τὴς ἐστίες τους ἀπὸ τὸν εἰσβολέα, ἔρχεται σὲ ἀντίθεση με τὴν ἐκλεπτυσμένη κοινωνία τῆς προηγούμενης περιόδου, ποὺ περνοῦσε τὸν καιρὸ τῆς στὰ θέατρα καὶ πλήρωνε βαρβάρους γιὰ νὰ διεξάγουν τοὺς πολέμους.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία ὅτι ὁ θεσμὸς τῶν θεμάτων εἶχε ὡς συνακόλουθο τὴν πλήρη στρατιωτικοποίηση τῆς αυτοκρατορίας, πράγμα ποὺ ἀντιστοιχοῦσε στὴ σκληρὴ πραγματικότητα τῆς σύγχρονης ζωῆς, δὲν εἶναι ὅμως καθόλου σαφές πὸς λειτουργοῦσε τὸ σύστημα τοὺς πρώτους δύο ἢ τρεῖς αἰῶνες τῆς δημιουργίας του, ἢ σὲ ποιὲς κοινωνικὲς συνθήκες στηριζόταν. Ἡ ἐπικρατοῦσα ἄποψη εἶναι ὅτι ἡ θεματικὴ μεταρρύθμιση συνοδεύτηκε ἀπὸ γενικὴ κατάτμηση τῆς μεγάλης γαιοκτησίας, ποὺ ἦταν (ἢ τουλάχιστον ἔτσι ὑποστηρίζεται) χαρακτηριστικὴ τῆς Πρώιμης βυζαντινῆς περιόδου, καὶ ὅτι στὴν ἀγροτικὴ κοινωνία τοῦ Μεσαίωνα κυριαρχοῦσαν οἱ ἐλεύθεροι κοινότητες μεσαίων καὶ μικρῶν ιδιοκτητῶν. Ὅπως ἤδη εἶδαμε στὸ Κεφάλαιο Α', ἡ ἐγκατάσταση σημαντικοῦ ἀριθμοῦ ἐποίκων μέσα στὴν αυτοκρατορία αὐτὴ τὴν ἐποχὴ σημαίνει πὸς πρέπει νὰ τοὺς δόθηκαν καὶ κτήματα, ἀλλὰ οἱ πηγές δὲν μᾶς πληροφοροῦν κατὰ πόσον αὐτὰ ἀνήκαν στὸ Στέμμα ἢ σὲ παλιότερους μεγαλοκτηματίες. Οὔτε ὑπάρχει, ἀπ' ὅσο γνωρίζω, μνεία μεγαλογαιοκτημόνων ποὺ τοὺς ἀφαιρέθηκαν τὰ κτήματα πρὸς ὄφελος τῶν ἐποίκων ἢ τῶν στρατιωτῶν τῶν θεμάτων. Ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει, ἂν πραγματικὰ ὑπῆρξε τάση μετάβασης ἀπὸ τὰ μεγάλα στὰ μικρὰ κτήματα, ἡ τάση αὐτὴ πρέπει νὰ ἦταν σχετικὴ, μιὰ καὶ ἀφενὸς δὲν εἶναι καθόλου βέβαιο πὸς τὰ *latifundia* ἀποτελοῦσαν προηγούμενως τὸν κανόνα στὴς ἀνατολικὲς έπαρχίες, καὶ ἀφετέρου ὑπάρχουν σαφεῖς μαρτυρίες γιὰ ὑπαρξὴ μεγάλων κτημάτων τὸν 8ο καὶ τὸν 9ο αἰῶνα, ὅπως θὰ γίνῃ φανερό σὲ λίγο. Ἐκεῖνο λοιπὸν ποὺ μπορούμε ἴσως νὰ δοῦμε ἐδῶ εἶναι μιὰ βαθμιαία ἀλλαγὴ μᾶλλον παρὰ μιὰ ἐπανάσταση.

Σχετικὰ με τὸ θέμα αὐτὸ συνήθως παρουσιάζεται ἡ μαρτυρία τοῦ λεγόμενου Ἀγροτικοῦ Νόμου.⁴⁴ Αὐτὸ τὸ γραφικὸ κείμενο, ποὺ λέγεται ὅτι χρονολογεῖται στὸ τέλος τοῦ 7ου ἢ τὴς ἀρχῆς τοῦ 8ου αἰῶνα, ρυθμίζει

με απλά λόγια τις διαφορές που αναφέρονται σε μια κοινότητα χωρικών. Οι αγρότες, μερικοί από τους οποίους διαθέτουν δούλους ή μισθώνουν βοσκούς, παρουσιάζονται ως ιδιοκτήτες των κτημάτων τους και των κοπαδιών τους και είναι ελεύθεροι να μετακινούνται όπως τους άρσει. Υπάρχουν φτωχοί αγρότες που εγκαταλείπουν τη γη τους, όποτε ο φόρος που της αναλογεί επιβαρύνει την κοινότητα· μερικές φορές όμως κάποιος αγρότης που απουσιάζει συνεχίζει να εκπληρώνει τις υποχρεώσεις του απέναντι στο δημόσιο ταμείο, κι έτσι διατηρεί πλήρη κυριότητα στη γη του, είτε την καλλιεργεί είτε όχι. Υπάρχουν κοινοτικές γαίες που κατά διαστήματα διαμοιράζονται, και δασικές εκτάσεις πολύ κοντά στο χωριό. Οι όπωρωνες και οι άμπελώνες προστατεύονται με χαντάκια ή φράχτες, όχι όμως και τα χωράφια, με αποτέλεσμα τα ζώα να μπαίνουν σ' αυτά συχνά. Κοπάδια δέχονται επιθέσεις από λύκους, σκυλιά τσακνώνονται και καμιά φορά τα σκοτώνουν, αγρότες κλέβουν τα έργαλεία ή ένας του άλλου. Σκληρές και συχνά βάρβαρες ποινές επιβάλλονται στους παραβάτες — άκρωτηριασμός των χεριών ή κόψιμο της γλώσσας, τύφλωση, ανασκολοπισμός, θάνατος στην πυρά. Παρά τη συντομία του ή Άγροτικός Νόμος παρέχει μια ζωντανή εικόνα της ζωής του χωριού. Μπορούμε όμως να είμαστε βέβαιοι ότι περιγράφει μια κατάσταση τυπική της βυζαντινής ύπαιθρου; Μπορούμε να συμπεράνουμε από τη σιωπή του πάνω στο θέμα των κολωνών ότι οι τελευταίοι είχαν πάψει πια να υπάρχουν ή αποτελούσαν εξαίρεση, μολοντί εμφανίζονται πάλι με το όνομα *πάροικοι* στις αρχές του 9ου αιώνα το αργότερο; Ή μήπως ή Άγροτικός Νόμος άφορβή ένα συγκεκριμένο είδος κοινότητας, που όμως δεν γνωρίζουμε κατά πόσο ήταν συνηθισμένο ή όχι; Τέλος, ποιά σχέση έχει ή Άγροτικός Νόμος με το σύστημα των θεμάτων; Δεν κάνει καθόλου λόγο για στρατιωτική ύπηρεσία, ούτε για κατοχή γης υπό τόν όρο τέτοιας ύπηρεσίας.

Ότι τα μεγάλα κτήματα εξακολουθούσαν να υπάρχουν άποδεικνύεται από όρισμένες συγκεκριμένες περιπτώσεις. Δεν θα επιμείνω σ' αυτήν που αναφέρεται συχνά, δηλαδή του άγιου Φιλαρέτου από την Παφλαγονία (πέθανε τή 792), ή όποιος λέγεται ότι είχε 48 ύποστατικά, 12.000 πρόβατα, 600 βόδια και πολλά άλλα, που τή χάρισε όλα στους φτωχούς.⁴⁵ Ένα πιδ πειστικό παράδειγμα άποτελεί ή άγιος Θεοφάνης ή Όμολογητής, συγγραφέας τής περίφημης χρονογραφίας, ή όποιος γεννήθηκε τή 760 και ήταν γιός του στρατηγού του θέματος Αιγαίου Πελάγους. Έμεινε όρφανός σε ηλικία τριών έτων, μεγάλωσε μέσα στα πλούτη και παντρεύτηκε μια γυναίκα έξίσου πλούσια. Κατείχε μεγάλα κτήματα στη Βιθυνία και πολλούς δούλους, άντρες και γυναίκες, άκόμη και ιδιωτικό χρυσοχόο. Μπή-

κε στην ύπηρεσία του αυτοκράτορα με τή άξίωμα του στρατορα, του άνέθεσαν να επιβλέπει τή ανακατασκευή του φρουρίου τής Κυζίκου και έφερε σε πέρας αυτή τή άποστολή με δικά του έξοδα. Θα άνέβαινε πολύ ψηλότερα στην αυτοκρατορική ιεραρχία άν δεν άποφάσιζε να γίνει μοναχός και να χάρισει τήν περιουσία του· άκόμη κι έτσι όμως κατάφερε να συγκεντρώσει άρκετά χρήματα για να χτίσει ένα πολύ σπουδαίο μοναστήρι.⁴⁶ Μιά άκόμη πιδ άκραία περίπτωση άποτελεί ή χήρα Δανιηλίδα από τήν Πάτρα, που έγινε φίλη του Βασιλείου του Μακεδόνα (του μελλοντικού αυτοκράτορα Βασιλείου Α') όταν εκείνος ήταν άκόμη ένας άσημος νεαρός. Λέγεται ότι κατείχε ού μικρόν τής Πελοποννήσου μέρος. Σε δύο επισκέψεις που έκανε στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τή μετέφεραν κατά τή διάρκεια του ταξιδιού πάνω σε φορεϊό τριακόσιοι γεροδεμένοι σκλάβοι που δούλευαν σε βάρδιες. Η περιουσία τής, τήν όποία τελικά κληροδότησε στον αυτοκράτορα Λέοντα Σ', μι ά περιουσία «που ξεπερνούσε κάθε άλλη ιδιωτική και μόλις και ύπολειπόταν ενός ήγεμόνα», περιλάμβανε 80 ύποστατικά και πάνω από 3.000 δούλους, τους όποιους ή αυτοκράτορας έστειλε ως έποίικους στη Νότια Ίταλία.⁴⁷ Πρέπει να θυμηθούμε ότι ή Πελοπόννησος έγινε θέμα περι ή 810, άφου ή Βυζαντινοί τήν ανακατέλαβαν από άνεξάρτητα σλαβικά φύλα. Σύμφωνα με τις επικρατούσες θεωρίες, πρέπει να είχαν εγκαταστήσει εκεί στρατιώτες-καλλιεργητές. Όστόσο τή τεράστια κτήματα τής Δανιηλίδας δημιουργήθηκαν άκριβώς εκείνη τήν έποχή, μι και ήταν ήδη για για και βαθύπλουτη όταν συνάντησε για πρώτη φορά τόν Βασίλειο, στη δεκαετία του 850.

Άληθινά μου φαίνεται πώς ή ιστορικοί ψάχνουν σε λάθος κατεύθυνση. Έπέθεσαν ότι ή άστική ζωή συνεχίστηκε στη διάρκεια των άσκοτεινών αιώνων», κι έτσι ζητούν να ανακαλύψουν μι άγροτική επανάσταση. Στην πραγματικότητα ήταν ή άστική ζωή που κατέρρευσε, όπως θα δούμε στο επόμενο κεφάλαιο, ενώ στην ύπαιθρο ή συνθήκες ίσως δεν υπέστησαν θεμελιακές αλλαγές. Με απλά λόγια, στην αυτοκρατορία επικράτησαν άγροτικές συνθήκες ζωής. Άφενός ή άπουσία μεγάλων άστικών πληθυσμών που έπρεπε να τραφούν και άφετέρου ή είσοδη καινούριου άνθρώπινου δυναμικού στην ύπαιθρο είχαν ως άποτέλεσμα να γίνουν άφθονα και φτηνά τή τρόφιμα, πράγμα που μαρτυρείται τόν 8ο αιώνα. Ταυτόχρονα τή κόστος του στρατού μειώθηκε κατά πολύ όταν έπαψαν να στρατολογούνται βάρβαροι μισθοφόροι σε εύρεια κλίμακα. Τή άποτέλεσμα αυτών των εξελίξεων, που μπορούμε να τις διακρίνουμε μόνο σε πολύ γενικές γραμμές, ήταν ότι ή περίπλοκοι περιορισμοί τής Πρώιμης βυζαντινής περιόδου μπορούσαν τώρα να χαλαρώσουν. Άν ή χωρικοί άνέκτησαν κάποιον

βαθμό ελευθερίας, αυτό έγινε διότι πιθανόν υπήρχαν τώρα αρκετοί, σε σχέση με τις ανάγκες του δημόσιου ταμείου.

Ἄλλα και ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἐπηρεάστηκε πολὺ ἀπὸ τὴν κατάρρευση τῶν πόλεων. Οἱ ἐπαρχιακοὶ ἐπίσκοποι τῆς Μέσης βυζαντινῆς περιόδου δὲν ἦταν παρὰ ἡ σκιά τῶν προκατόχων τους. Ἡ σύνοδος τοῦ 869 ἐπιχειρήσε νὰ ἐπαναφέρει τὸ κύρος τους, καὶ μετὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ μᾶς δίνει μιὰ ἰδέα τῆς κοινωνικῆς τους θέσης. "Ὅρισε λοιπὸν ὅτι ὁ ἐπίσκοπος δὲν ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀπομακρύνεται πολὺ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησία του γιὰ νὰ προῦπαντήσει ἕνα στρατηγὸ ἢ ὅποιονδήποτε ἄλλο λαϊκὸ ἀξιωματοῦχο· δὲν ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀφιππεύει βιαστικά ἀπὸ τὸ ἄλογο ἢ τὸ μουλάρι του καὶ νὰ πλησιάζει τὸν ἐν λόγω ἀξιωματοῦχο με φόβο καὶ τρόμο· δὲν ἔπρεπε κἀν νὰ δειπνεῖ με ἕναν ἀξιωματοῦχο, μήπως καὶ ἀναγκαστεῖ νὰ τοῦ δείξει ὑπερβολικὸ σεβασμὸ.⁴⁸ Ἄν οἱ ἐπίσκοποι τρομοκρατοῦνταν τόσο πολὺ ἀπὸ τοὺς τοπικοὺς διοικητές, δὲν εἶναι παράξενο ποὺ ἔδειχναν τέλεια ὑποταγὴ στὶς ἐπιθυμίες τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, ἀκόμη καὶ ὅταν ὁ αὐτοκράτορας ἦταν αἰρετικὸς. Ἐκατὸ χρόνια ἀργότερα ὁ λουβαρδὸς πρεσβευτῆς Λιουτπράνδος παρατηροῦσε ὅτι οἱ βυζαντινοὶ ἐπίσκοποι εἶχαν λίγους ὑπηρέτες καὶ φτηνὴ ἐπίπλωση, ὅτι ἔκαναν ἀγοραπωλησίες καὶ ὅτι φρόντιζαν οἱ ἴδιοι τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους.⁴⁹ Ὁ διορισμὸς σὲ μιὰ ἐπισκοπὴ μποροῦσε νὰ ἀγοραστεῖ με ἕνα μέτριον ποσὸ: ἡ ἐπισκοπὴ τῆς Σεβάστειας (Sivas) στὴν ἀνατολικὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία κόστιζε 100 νομίσματα στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 10ου αἰώνα.⁵⁰ Γιὰ σύγκριση ἀναφέρουμε πὼς ὁ αὐλικὸς τίτλος τοῦ πρωτοσπαθαρίου, ποὺ εἶχε ἐτήσιο εἰσόδημα 2,5%, τὴν ἴδια ἐποχὴ μποροῦσε νὰ ἀποκτηθεῖ με 40 λίτρες χρυσοῦ, δηλαδὴ σχεδὸν 3.000 νομίσματα. Ἡ κάμψη ποὺ παρουσιάστηκε στὶς τύχες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν ὀφειλόταν ἀποκλειστικά στὴν ἐξαφάνιση τῆς ἀστικῆς ζωῆς: ἕνας ἄλλος παράγοντας ὑπῆρξε τὸ γεγονός ὅτι οἱ δωρεῆς κατευθύνονταν ὅλο καὶ περισσότερο πρὸς τὰ μοναστήρια, ποὺ ἀποκοτοῦσαν τάσεις ἀνεξαρτησίας, ὅπως θὰ δοῦμε στὸ Κεφάλαιο Ε'. Ἔτσι, στὶς ἐπισκοπὲς δὲν ἀπέμενε παρὰ ἡ κτηματικὴ τους περιουσία, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία πλήρωναν τὸν βασικὸ φόρο, καὶ εἰσοδήματα ποὺ προέρχονταν ἀπὸ ὅσες εἰσφορὲς μποροῦσαν νὰ ἀποσπάσουν ἀπὸ τὰ μοναστήρια, καθὼς καὶ ἀπὸ χειροτονίες, γάμους, βαπτίσεις καὶ τὰ παρόμοια. Με ἄλλα λόγια, οἱ ἐπίσκοποι βρῖσκονταν σχεδὸν στὴ θέση τῶν ἰδιωτῶν γαιοκτημόνων καὶ συχνὰ δροῦσαν ὅπως ἐκεῖνοι, ἐγκαταλείποντας τὴ σφαῖρα τῆς «κοινωνικῆς πρόνοιας». Ἐπιπλέον ἡ ζωὴ σὲ μιὰ ἐπαρχιακὴ ἐπισκοπὴ ἦταν τόσο μονότονη καὶ βαρετὴ, ποὺ γιὰ ἕναν καλλιεργημένο ἄνθρωπο, συνηθισμένο στὶς ἀνέσεις τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης, δὲν διέφερε ἀπὸ καταδίκη σὲ ἐξορία. Καθόλου παράξενο λοιπὸν ποὺ οἱ ἐπίσκοποι χρονοτριβοῦσαν ὅσο μποροῦσαν πρὸς πολὺ

στὴν πρωτεύουσα με διάφορες δικαιολογίες, καὶ συχνὰ χρειάζονταν πίεση γιὰ νὰ γυρίσουν στὰ ἀγροτικά τους ποίμνια.

Ἡ ἐξέλιξη τῆς βυζαντινῆς κοινωνίας στὴ Μέση περίοδο χαρακτηρίζεται ἀπὸ δύο ἀλληλοσυγκρουόμενες τάσεις: ἀπὸ τὴ μιὰ μεριά μιὰ σταθερὴ πορεία πρὸς ἕνα εἶδος φεουδαλισμοῦ, ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη κάποια μικρὴ ἀνάπτυξη μιᾶς ἀστικῆς τάξης. Ἡ πρώτη ἔχει μελετηθεῖ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱστορικοὺς πολὺ περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴ δευτέρη.

Οἱ ἀναστατώσεις τοῦ 7ου καὶ τοῦ 8ου αἰώνα φαίνεται ὅτι ἐξαφάνισαν ἐντελῶς τὶς ἡγετιμὲς οἰκογένειες τῆς προηγούμενης περιόδου. Ἡ καταστροφὴ τους πιθανὸν ὀφειλόταν, πᾶνω ἀπ' ὅλα, σὲ οἰκονομικοὺς λόγους. Ἐπιπλέον ὀρισμένοι αὐτοκράτορες, ὅπως ὁ Φωκάς, ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς Β' καὶ ὁ Λέων Γ', λέγεται ὅτι σκόπιμα καταδιώξαν τὶς ἀνώτερες τάξεις. Δὲν ξέρουμε ἂν ἀληθεύουν αὐτὲς οἱ κατηγορίες, πάντως οἱ ἐπιφανεῖς ἄνδρες ποὺ συναντᾶμε ἀπὸ τὸν 8ο αἰώνα καὶ μετὰ φαίνονται νὰ εἶναι σχετικὰ νεοφερμένοι, καὶ πολλοὶ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς εἶναι ὀλοφάνερα ξενικῆς καταγωγῆς. Ἄν καὶ οἱ προσωπογραφικὲς μαρτυρίες ποὺ ἔχουμε στὴ διάθεσή μας εἶναι ἐξαιρετικὰ φτωχῆς, ὥστόσο μποροῦμε νὰ ἀναφέρουμε μερικὲς περιπτώσεις σημαντικῶν οἰκογενειῶν ποὺ ἀναδείχτηκαν τὸν 8ο ἢ τὸν 9ο αἰώνα καὶ ἐπέζησαν γιὰ πολὺν καιρὸ κατόπιν. Εἶπαμε πὼς ὁ ἅγιος Θεοφάνης ὁ Ὁμοιωτῆς (ποὺ γεννήθηκε τὸ 760) ἦταν γιὸς ἐνὸς στρατηγοῦ· αὐτὸς λεγόταν Ἰσαάκ (ὄνομα ἀσυνήθιστο γιὰ Ἕλληνα), καὶ πρέπει συνεπῶς νὰ εἶχε γεννηθεῖ γύρω στὰ 720-30. Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεοφάνης δὲν εἶχε παιδιὰ, ἀλλὰ ἕνας κλάδος τῆς οἰκογενείας του πρέπει νὰ ἐπέζησε, γιὰ τὸ αὐτοκράτορας Κωνσταντῖνος Ζ' (913-959) ὑποστήριξε πὼς ἦταν συγγενῆς του ἀπὸ τὴ μεριά τῆς μητέρας του, τῆς αὐτοκράτειρας Ζωῆς.⁵¹ καὶ ἐπιπλέον γνωρίζουμε πὼς ὁ προπάππος τῆς Ζωῆς, ποὺ ζοῦσε περὶ τὸ 820, ἦταν στρατηγὸς τοῦ θέματος τῶν Ἀνατολικῶν.⁵² Ἐνα ἄλλο παράδειγμα ἀποτελεῖ ἡ οἰκογένεια τῶν Ρεντακίων ἢ Ρενδακίων. Συναντᾶμε πρῶτα τὸν πατρίκιον Σισίνιον Ρενδάκι τὸ 719 κάπου στὴ Μακεδονία.⁵³ Τὸ 867 ἕνας Ρεντάκιος ἦταν παρακοιμώμενος στὸ παλάτι,⁵⁴ καὶ ἕνας ἄλλος Ρεντάκιος, ποὺ τὸν περιγράφουν ὡς ἀκαλλιέργητο Ἑλλαδικόν, δηλαδὴ γεννημένο στὴν Ἑλλάδα, θανατώθηκε γιὰτὶ συνωμοτοῦσε με τοὺς Βουλγάρους τὸ 920.⁵⁵ Ὁ τελευταῖος, παρεμπιπτόντως, ἦταν συγγενῆς τοῦ πατρικίου Νικητῆ, ποὺ τοῦ ἀπεύθυναν τὸν σατιρικὸ στίχο γαλασσοειδῆς ὄψις ἐσθλαβωμένη (πονερὴ σλάβικη μούρη), τοῦ ὁποίου ἡ κόρη Σοφία παντρεύτηκε τὸν Χριστόφορο Λεκαπηνὸ (πέθανε τὸ 931), γιὸ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Ρωμανοῦ Α'.⁵⁶ Τὸν 10ο αἰώνα οἱ Ρεντάκιοι ἦταν ἐπιφανεῖς γαιοκτῆμονες στὴ Βοιωτία.⁵⁷

Σημαντικότερες ώστόσο ήταν οι μεγάλες οικογένειες που αναδείχθηκαν στην ανατολική Μικρά Ἀσία τὸν 9ο και τὸν 10ο αἰώνα, ὅπως οἱ Φωκάδες, οἱ Σκληροί, οἱ Μαλεινοί, οἱ Δοῦκες και ἄλλοι. Ἦταν, ἄλλοι λιγότερο και ἄλλοι περισσότερο, ἀρμενικῆς καταγωγῆς, εἶχαν μεγάλους ἐνδογαμικούς δεσμούς, και εἶχαν σχεδὸν τὸ μονοπώλιο τῶν μεγάλων στρατιωτικῶν ἀξιομάτων. Οἱ Φωκάδες τῆς Καππαδοκίας, τῶν ὁποίων ὁ πρῶτος γνωστός ἐκπρόσωπος ἦταν ἓνας ἀσημος ἀξιοματικός στὰ μέσα τοῦ 9ου αἰώνα, κατέκτησαν τὸν αὐτοκρατορικό θρόνο με τὸν Νικηφόρο Φωκά· ὁ ἐπόμενος αὐτοκράτορας, ὁ Ἀρμένιος Ἰωάννης Τζιμισκῆς, ἀνῆκε στοὺς Κουρκοῦες, μιὰ πατριὰ που εἶχε δώσει στὴν αὐτοκρατορία μιὰ σειρά ἐξαιρετοῦς στρατηγούς· οἱ Σκληροί, ἐχθροὶ τῶν Φωκάδων, μόλις και ἀπέτυχαν νὰ καταλάβουν τὸ θρόνο, ὅπως και οἱ Δοῦκες με τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Δούκα (τὸ 913). Τῶν τελευταίων ἡ σχέση με τὴν αὐτοκρατορική οἰκογένεια τῶν Δουκῶν τοῦ 11ου και 12ου αἰώνα δὲν εἶναι ξεκαθαρισμένη. Αὐτὲς και ἄλλες μεγάλες πατριές ἔφεραν στὸ Βυζάντιο καινούρια ἀριστοκρατικά ἰδεώδη. Ἐκτιμοῦσαν ἐξαιρετικά τὴν ἀρχαία καταγωγή και κατασκεύαζαν φανταστικές γενεαλογίες· οἱ Φωκάδες ἰσχυρίζονταν ὅτι κατὰγονται ἀπὸ τοὺς ρωμαίους Φαβίους,⁵⁸ οἱ Δοῦκες ἀπὸ ἓναν ἀνύπαρκτο ἐξάδελφο τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Μεγάλου,⁵⁹ και ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Βασίλειος Α΄, που εἶχε ἀσήμαντη ἀρμενική καταγωγή, συνδέθηκε κι αὐτὸς εὐφυῶς με τὸν βασιλικὸ οἶκο τῶν Ἀρσακιδῶν.

*Ἡμεῖς ἐκ τὸ ἀνατολικόν, ἐξ εὐγενῶν Ρωμαίων,
ὁ πατήρ μας κατάγεται ἀπὸ τῶν Κιναμάδων·
ἡ δὲ μήτηρ μας Δούκισσα, γένους τῶν Κωνσταντίνου·
στρατηγοὶ μὲν οὖν δώδεκα ἐξάδελφοι και θεῖοι.*

Ἔτσι μίλησαν οἱ θεῖοι τοῦ ἐπικοῦ ἥρωα Διγενῆ Ἀκρίτη, που τὰ κατορθώματά του ἦταν ἡ ἐνσάρκωση τῶν ἰδανικῶν τῆς ἀνδρείας και τοῦ ἰπποτισμοῦ τῆς ἀνατολικῆς ἀριστοκρατίας.⁶⁰

Μιὰ συλλογὴ αὐτοκρατορικῶν νομοθετημάτων, που καλύπτουν τὴν περίοδο ἀπὸ τὸ 927 περίπου ὡς τὸ 996,⁶¹ ἀποτελοῦν πολὺ σημαντικὰ ντοκουμέντα γιὰ τὴν αὐξηση τῆς περιουσίας τῶν μεγάλων γαιοκτημόνων. Ἡ ἄμεση αἰτία τῶν νομοθετημάτων ὑπῆρξε ὁ φοβερός λιμὸς τοῦ 927-8, που ἀνάγκασε πολλοὺς ἀγρότες νὰ πουλήσουν τὴ γῆ τους σὲ ἐξευτελιστικὲς τιμές. Τῆ δυστυχία τῶν πτωχῶν τὴν ἐκμεταλλεύτηκαν οἱ δυνατοί, που μπόρεσαν ἔτσι νὰ ἀπορροφήσουν τὰ κτήματα τῶν χωρικῶν και τῶν στρατιωτῶν και νὰ διεισδύσουν σὲ ἀνεξάρτητες «κοινότητες χωριῶν». Αὐτὴ ἦταν μιὰ τάση που οἱ αὐτοκράτορες τοῦ 10ου αἰώνα προσπάθησαν νὰ τὴν

περιορίσουν· και ἡ συχνότητα τῶν νομοθετημάτων τους δείχνει πὼς δὲν πετύχαιναν τὸ σκοπὸ τους. Ἀλλὰ ποιοὶ ἀκριβῶς ἦταν οἱ δυνατοί; Εἶναι ἐνδιαφέρον ὅτι τοὺς προσδιορίζουν ὄχι με οἰκονομικούς ὄρους ἀλλὰ με ὄρους σχετικούς με τὴν ἐπιρροή και τὰ ἀξιώματά τους. Οἱ δυνατοὶ ἦταν οἱ ἄνθρωποι που, εἴτε προσωπικά εἴτε μέσω τρίτων, ἦταν σὲ θέση νὰ τρομοκρατοῦν τοὺς πωλητὲς ἢ νὰ τοὺς δωροδοκοῦν με ὑποσχέσεις προστασίας. Πιὸ συγκεκριμένα, ἦταν μάγιστροι και πατρίκιοι, κάτοχοι ἄλλων πολιτικῶν ἢ στρατιωτικῶν τίτλων, μέλη τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς συγκλήτου, ἐπαρχιακοὶ διοικητὲς, ἐπίσκοποι, ἡγούμενοι, ἄλλοι ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ ἀξιοματοῦχοι, ἐπικεφαλῆς φιλανθρωπικῶν ἰδρυμάτων και αὐτοκρατορικῶν κτημάτων. Οἱ κατώτεροι δημόσιοι ὑπάλληλοι (σεκρετικοί) και τὰ μέλη τῆς φρουρᾶς (σχολάριοι) ἀποτελοῦσαν τὰ ἀνώτερα στρώματα τῆς τάξης τῶν πτωχῶν. Οἱ σχολάριοι ὅμως θεωροῦνταν πιὸ σημαντικοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς στρατιωτῶν. Οἱ δημόσιοι ὑπάλληλοι ἀνώτεροι ἀπὸ ὄσους δὲν κατεῖχαν κάποια κυβερνητικὴ θέση. Στὴ βυζαντινὴ ὑπαιθρο, συνεπῶς, ὑπῆρχε μιὰ περίπλοκη κοινωνικὴ ἱεραρχία· και μολονότι ἦταν δυνατό ἓνας συνηθισμένος ἄνθρωπος νὰ ἀνεβεῖ σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἱεραρχία, μιὰ τέτοια ἄνοδος δὲν τὴν ἔβλεπαν με καλὸ μάτι. Οἱ αὐτοκράτορες διέταζαν νὰ ἐπαναφερθοῦν ἀμέσως στὴν προηγούμενη κατάστασή τους ὅσοι ἄνθρωποι ταπεινῆς θέσης εἶχαν καταφέρει «με μυστηριώδη τρόπο» νὰ ἀνέλθουν κοινωνικά. Μιὰ περίπτωση που χρησιμοποιήθηκε γιὰ παραδειγματισμὸ ἦταν ἐνὸς Φιλοκάλη που, ξεκινώντας ἀπὸ χωρικός, ἔφτασε νὰ γίνεῖ πρωτοβεστιάριος και νὰ ἰδιοποιηθεῖ στὸ μεταξὺ ὅλη τὴ γῆ τῆς κοινότητος στὴν ὁποία ζοῦσε· ὄχι μόνο τὸν καθαίρεσαν, ἀλλὰ και ἰσοπέδωσαν τὸ ὑπέροχο σπίτι που εἶχε χτίσει. Ὁ πανοῦργος Φιλοκάλης, ὅμως, μπορεῖ και νὰ συνῆλθε ἀπὸ τὸ χτύπημα, μιὰ και τὸ ὄνομά του τὸ ἔφερε μιὰ ιδιαίτερα σημαντικὴ οἰκογένεια τοῦ 11ου και 12ου αἰώνα.

Τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς κυβερνήσεως νὰ ἐλέγξει «τὴν ἀχώρητα ἄπληστία» τῶν δυνατῶν εἶχε ἐν μέρει στρατιωτικά και ἐν μέρει δημοσιονομικά αἷτια. Ἡ στρατιωτικὴ ὑπηρεσία ἐκείνη τὴν ἐποχὴ (ἀλλὰ δὲν ξέρουμε ἀκριβῶς ἀπὸ πότε) ἐξαρτιόταν ἀπὸ τὴν κατοχὴ γῆς ἀξίας τουλάχιστον τεσσάρων λιτρῶν χρυσοῦ, και παρέμεινε σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἐπίπεδο μέχρι τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Νικηφόρου Β΄ Φωκά, ὁ ὁποῖος τὴν αὐξήσε σὲ δώδεκα λίτρες, ἐξαιτίας τῆς εἰσαγωγῆς βαρύτερου ὀπλισμοῦ.⁶² Εἶναι φανερό πὼς ὁ στρατὸς θὰ ἀποδεκατιζόταν ἂν οἱ στρατιῶτες-γεωργοὶ ἀναγκάζοντο νὰ πουλήσουν τὰ κτήματά τους. Οἱ δημοσιονομικοὶ λόγοι δὲν εἶναι και τόσο φανεροί, μιὰ και τὰ κτήματα που εἶχαν περιληφθεῖ στοὺς φορολογικούς καταλόγους προφανῶς θὰ συνέχιζαν νὰ φορολογοῦνται εἴτε

οί ιδιοκτήτες τους ήταν φτωχοί είτε δυνατοί. Αυτό που υπονοείται, φαίνεται, είναι πώς ενώ οι φτωχοί πλήρωναν τους φόρους τους, οι δυνατοί είχαν τρόπους να τους αποφεύγουν. Οι *εξκουσσειές* (φορολογικές απαλλαγές), που είναι γνωστό ότι υπήρχαν πριν από τον 10ο αιώνα και γίνονται όλο και συχνότερες τον 11ο και 12ο, ήταν ίσως ανάμεσα στα «παράθυρα» που χρησιμοποιούσαν οι άνθρωποι με επιρροή. Ἀπαλλαγή από όλους ή όρισμένους φόρους, που επιβάρυναν είτε τη γῆ είτε τους παροίκους γεωργούς, συνήθως παραχωροῦνταν σε μοναστήρια και φιλανθρωπικά ιδρύματα· παραχωροῦνταν όμως και σε άτομα ως ανταμοιβή υπηρεσιών τους πρὸς τὸ κράτος και, πιθανόν, χάρη στις προσωπικές τους διασυνδέσεις. Ἐπιπλέον, οί φορολογικοί επιθεωρητές μπορούσαν να δωροδοκηθῶν, και ἀκόμη και οί ἐπαρχιακοί δικαστές, «πιεζόμενοι ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνάγκη παρὰ ἀπὸ πρόθεση», μπορούσαν να πειστοῦν να ἐπιδείξουν τὴν τυπικά βυζαντινὴ σκοπιμότητα τῆς οἰκονομίας, δηλαδή τοῦ συμβιβασμοῦ.⁶³

Ἡ ἐδραίωση μιᾶς ἀριστοκρατίας τῆς γῆς, που ἀποκοῦσε τίτλους στὴν αὐτοκρατορική ἱεραρχία και δικαιωματικά ἀπαιτοῦσε τὶς μεγάλες στρατιωτικές διοικήσεις, ἢ σταδιακή ἀπομάκρυνση τῶν τεράστιων κτημάτων της ἀπὸ τὸν ἄμεσο ἔλεγχο τῆς κυβέρνησης, ἢ ἀναπόφευκτη μείωση τῶν μικρῶν γαιοκτημόνων —αὐτὰ φαίνεται πὼς ἦταν τὰ χαρακτηριστικά τῆς βυζαντινῆς κοινωνίας τὸν 10ο αἰώνα. Βρισκόμαστε ἀκόμη πολὺ μακριὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὸ που θὰ ἦταν θεμιτὸ να ὀνομαστεῖ φεουδαλισμὸς, ἀκόμη και ἂν πάρουμε τὸ φεουδαλισμὸ ὅχι με τὸ ἀκριβὲς θεσμικὸ του νόημα, που ἰσχύει μόνο για τὴ δυτικὴ Εὐρώπη, και ἰδιαίτερα για τὰ κράτη που προῆλθαν ἀπὸ τὴν αὐτοκρατορία τοῦ Καρόλου, ἀλλὰ με μιὰ εὐρύτερη ἔννοια που συνεπάγεται δομὲς προσωπικῆς ἐξάρτησης, δικαιώματα πάνω στὴν ἰδιοκτησία ἀντίστοιχα πρὸς αὐτὴ τὴν ἐξάρτηση, και κατὰ τμησὴ τῆς πολιτικῆς ἐξουσίας. Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ μιὰ τάση πρὸς τὸν «ἐκφεουδαλισμὸ» εἶναι χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία φανερὴ στὴν κοινωνία τοῦ Βυζαντίου. Ἐδῶ εἶδαμε τὸ ξεκίνημά της· ἢ παραπέρα ἀνάπτυξή της ἔγινε στὴν περίοδο τῶν Κομνηνῶν και κάλυψε και τὴν ἐποχὴ τῶν Παλαιολόγων.

Σχετικοί με τὸ θέμα αὐτὸ εἶναι δύο θεσμοί που ἔχουν τραβήξει ἰδιαίτερα τὴν προσοχὴ τῶν ἐρευνητῶν. Ὁ πρῶτος εἶναι ἡ *πρόνοια*, που σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς ἀντιστοιχεῖ με τὸ *beneficium* τῆς Δύσης. Μαρτυρεῖται για πρώτη φορά στὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Ἀλεξίου Α', και συνίστατο στὴν παροχὴ ἐνὸς κτήματος μαζί με τοὺς παροίκους του σὲ ἓναν πολεμιστὴ, ὑπὸ τὸν ὄρο τῆς στρατιωτικῆς ὑπηρεσίας. Ἡ πρόνοια δὲν ἦταν κληρονομική, και ὁ κάτοχος της ὀνομαζόταν ἀπλῶς *στρατιώτης*, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς και στὴ Δύση καμιά φορά ὁ βασιλεύς ὀνομαζόταν *miles*. Ὁ ἱστορικὸς Νικήτας Χω-

νιάτης, μιλώντας για τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Μανουὴλ Α' και χρησιμοποιώντας δυστυχῶς πολὺ διανθισμένη γλώσσα, ἀναφέρει ὅτι ὁ αὐτοκράτορας σταμάτησε να πληρώνει μισθὸ στοὺς στρατιῶτες, και τοὺς ἔδωσε σὲ ἀντάλλαγμα «δωρεὰς παροίκων, κάνοντας κατάρχησιν ἐνὸς συστήματος που ἔχαν ἐπινοήσει οί προηγούμενοι αὐτοκράτορες». Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἦταν πᾶς ὑπῆρξε μεγάλη προσφορά αἰτήσεων για τὸ στρατό, καθὼς ἓνας πρόσφερε ἓνα ἄλογο, ἄλλος μιὰ ποσότητα χρυσοῦ, και ἔπαιρναν «βασιλικά διπλώματα που τοὺς ἀντάμειβαν με σκιερὰ κτήματα και σιτοχώραφα και ρωμαίους φορολογουμένους να τοὺς ὑπηρετοῦν σὰν δοῦλοι, και κάποτε συνέβαινε ἓνας Ρωμαῖος ἀξιοσέβαστος ἐμφάνισης και ἐμπειροπόλεμος να πληρώνει φόρους σὲ κάποιον «μιζοβάρβαρο ἀνδράριο», που δὲν εἶχε ἰδέα ἀπὸ στρατιωτικὴ παράταξη».⁶⁴ Προφανῶς τέτοιου εἶδους παροχές ἔγιναν σὲ μεγάλη κλίμακα, και τὸ ἀποτέλεσμά τους, κατὰ τὴν ἀποψη τοῦ Χωνιάτη, ἦταν πὼς τὶς βυζαντινὲς χώρες τὶς καταλήστευαν και τὶς ἰδιοποιοῦνταν οί ξένοι —και πράγματι μερικοί ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐν λόγω στρατιῶτες ἦταν Λατίνοι και Κομῆνοι.

Ἡ δεύτερη ἀξιοπρόσεχτη ἐξέλιξη ἀφορᾷ τὴν ἀνάπτυξη τῶν ἰδιωτικῶν στρατῶν. Ἴσως παρατηρήσει κανεὶς ὅτι αὐτὸ δὲν ἦταν κάτι καινούριο σὲ τὸ Βυζάντιο, ὅτι στὴν ὑστερορωμαϊκὴ ἤδη ἐποχὴ ὑπῆρχαν ἰδιωτικὰ στρατιωτικὰ σώματα, που ὀνομάζονταν *buccellarii*, και ὅτι στὴ Μέση βυζαντινὴ περίοδο ὑπάρχουν σκόρπιες ἀναφορὲς σὲ εὐγενεῖς που περιβάλλονταν ἀπὸ ἓναν κύκλο ἀκολούθων. Ὡστόσο σίγουρα δὲν εἶναι τυχαῖο πὼς ἀπὸ τὸν 11ο αἰώνα και μετὰ ἀκοῦμε ὅλο και περισσότερο για τέτοιες ἀκολουθίες, που περιλάμβαναν ὅχι μόνο δούλους και συγγενεῖς ἀλλὰ και ἔνοπλους φρουροὺς, συχνὰ μάλιστα σὲ σημαντικούς ἀριθμούς. Φαίνεται ἐπίσης ὅτι ὑπῆρχαν δεσμοὶ ἐξάρτησης ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀνώτερους και τοὺς κατώτερους εὐγενεῖς. Ὁ Κεκαυμένος, συμβουλευόντας τὸ γιό του, ἐξετάζει τὴν περίπτωση να ὑπηρετεῖ ἓναν ἄρχοντα, πράγμα που εἶναι σαφῶς διαφορετικὸ ἀπὸ τὸ να ὑπηρετεῖ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα: «Ἄν ὑπηρετεῖς ἓναν ἄρχοντα, ὑπηρετήσέ τον ὅχι ὡς ἄρχοντα και ἄνθρωπο, ἀλλὰ σὰν αὐτοκράτορα και θεό· και ἂν εἶναι ἀδάης και ἀνίκανος, ἐνῶ ἐσύ ἔχεις περὶ σσια γνώση, σοφία και ἐπιτηδειότητα, μὴν τὸν περιφρονήσεις, μήπως και σὲ καταστρέψει». Ὁ Κεκαυμένος συνιστᾷ ἐπίσης μεγάλη αὐτοσυγκράτηση στις σχέσεις του με τὴ «δέσποινα» —«ἂν θέλει να παίξει μαζί σου, ἐσύ ἀπομακρύνσου, κράτα τὴν ἀπόστασή σου»— καθὼς και καλοσύνη πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους του, ἐνωώντας τοὺς ἀκολούθους του.⁶⁵ Τὴν ἴδια περίπου ἐποχὴ ὁ κατώτερος εὐγενὴς Εὐστάθιος Βοήλας ἀναφέρει ὅτι ὑπηρετήσε για δεκαπέντε χρόνια τὸν Ἀρμένιο Μιχαὴλ Ἀποκάπη (Aboukab), δού-

κα τῆς Ἐδεσσας, ὁ ὁποῖος τὸν εὐεργέτησε πολύ· καὶ μολονότι αὐτὴ ἡ ὑπηρεσία ἦταν μέσα στὸ πλαίσιο τῆς αὐτοκρατορικής διοίκησης, ἀξίζει νὰ σημειωθεί ὅτι ὁ Βοήλας θεωροῦσε τοὺς δύο γιούς τοῦ Μιχαὴλ ἀθθεντόπουλά του.⁶⁶

Ἡ δυσκολία μας νὰ περιγράψουμε τὴν ἀνάπτυξη τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ φεουδαλισμοῦ ξεκινᾷ ἀπὸ τὸ ὅτι ὁ φεουδαλισμὸς αὐτὸς δὲν ἀποκρυσταλλώθηκε ποτέ σὲ μιὰ νομική μορφή καὶ δὲν ἀπέκτησε «τεχνικὸν» λεξιλόγιο. Οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ φυσικὰ γινώριζαν τοὺς θεσμοὺς τῆς δυτικῆς φεουδαρχίας, καὶ στίς σχέσεις τους μὲ τοὺς φράγκους ἰππότες καὶ πρίγκιπες οἱ αὐτοκράτορες συχνὰ τοὺς ἀποσποῦσαν ὄροιο πίστεως. Ἔτσι ὁ ὄρος *λίσιος* (ὑποτελής) μπῆκε στὴν ἑλληνική γλώσσα, ἀλλὰ χρησιμοποιοῦνταν μόνο γιὰ τοὺς ξένους. Φαίνεται πὼς ὁ ἀντίστοιχος βυζαντινὸς ὄρος ἦταν *οἰκέτης* καὶ *ὑποχείριος*,⁶⁷ καὶ ἴσως αὐτὲς καὶ ἄλλες παρόμοιες λέξεις πού συναντᾶμε πολὺ συχνὰ στίς πηγές νὰ ἀφοροῦν πραγματικὰ σχέσεις ὑποτελείας, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τὰ συμφραζόμενα σχεδὸν ποτέ δὲν φαίνεται ξεκάθαρα ἡ διαφορὰ. Ἐνῶ λοιπὸν μποροῦμε νὰ δεχτοῦμε ὅτι ποτέ δὲν δημιουργήθηκε στὸ Βυζάντιο μιὰ ὀλοκληρωμένη δομὴ φεουδαλικῶν σχέσεων, ἐντούτοις πρέπει ἐπίσης νὰ παραδεχτοῦμε ὅτι ἀναπτύχθηκε ἓνα κάπως ἄτυπο σύστημα, πού εἶχε ἀπὸ πολλὰς ἀπόψεις ὁμοιότητες μὲ τὸ φεουδαλισμὸ. Ἡ διάσπαση τῆς κεντρικῆς ἐξουσίας ἦταν συγχρόνως ἡ αἰτία καὶ τὸ ἀποτέλεσμά του.

Ταυτόχρονα μὲ τὴν ἐμφάνιση ἑνὸς εἶδους φεουδαλικῶν σχέσεων, μιὰ ἀντίθετη τάση παρουσιαζόταν στὸν βυζαντινὸ κόσμο. Ὅπως θὰ ἐξηγήσουμε πληρέστερα στὸ ἐπόμενο κεφάλαιο, ἡ ἀστική ζωὴ, πού εἶχε οὐσιαστικὰ σβῆσει λόγω τῶν συμφορῶν τοῦ 7ου καὶ τοῦ 8ου αἰώνα, ἄρχισε πάλι νὰ ἀναπτύσσεται. Ἀνάμεσα στίς πιθανές αἰτίες αὐτοῦ τοῦ φαινομένου μποροῦν νὰ ἀναφερθοῦν ἡ ἀξανάμενη ἀσφάλεια καὶ τὸ ἄνοιγμα νέων ἐμπορικῶν ὁδῶν. Ἡ μουσουλμανικὴ ἀπειλὴ ὑποχωροῦσε. Στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία τὰ βυζαντινὰ στρατεύματα ἀναλάμβαναν τὴν πρωτοβουλία, μὲ ἐπιθέσεις πού ἐπρόκειτο νὰ τὰ ὀδηγήσουν πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν ὄροσειρὰ τοῦ Ταύρου, στὴν Κιλικία καὶ τὴ Συρία. Στὴν περιοχὴ τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου οἱ νεοφερμένοι Ρῶσοι, πού σύντομα θὰ προσηλυτίζονταν στὸν ὀρθόδοξο χριστιανισμό, δημιουργοῦσαν νέες δυνατότητες γιὰ μακρινὸ ἐμπόριο πού θὰ διοχετευόταν ἀπευθείας πρὸς τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ἡ Βουλγαρία ἐγινε πάλι εἰρηνική μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ τρομεροῦ τσάρου Συμεῶν (927) καὶ ὑποτάχθηκε ὀλοκληρωτικὰ τὸ 1018. Ἡ ναυσιπλοΐα στὸ Αἰγαῖο, πού ἦταν ἀκόμη πολὺ ἐπικίνδυνη τὸ πρῶτο μισὸ τοῦ 10ου αἰώνα, ἐγινε ἀσφαλῆς μετὰ τὴν καταστροφὴ τῆς ἀραβικῆς βάσης στὴν Κρήτη (961). Σιγὰ σιγὰ

βελτιώνονταν οἱ συνθήκες πού εὐνοοῦσαν τὴν ἀναγέννηση τῆς ἀστικῆς οἰκονομίας.

Δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἡ αὐτοκρατορική κυβέρνησις εἶδειξε ὑπερβολικὴ βιασὴν νὰ ἐκμεταλλευτῆ τις καινούριες εὐκαιρίες. Δύο σημαντικὰ ντοκουμέντα πού διαθέτουμε, ἀπὸ τὸ ἔτος 900 περίπου, σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν οἰκονομικὴ δραστηριότητα, δείχνουν καὶ τὰ δύο πνεῦμα καχυποψίας καὶ συντηρητισμοῦ. Τὸ πρῶτο εἶναι τὸ κείμενο δύο συνθηκῶν πού ὑπογράφτηκαν ἀνάμεσα στοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς καὶ τοὺς Ρώσους.⁶⁸ Ἀπὸ αὐτὲς μαθαίνουμε πὼς ρωσικὴ ἐμπορικὴ ἀποικία εἶχε ἐγκατασταθεῖ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη ἢ, γιὰ τὴν ἀκρίβεια, σὲ κάποια ἀπόσταση πρὸς τὰ βόρεια τοῦ Βοσπόρου, στὸ προάστιο τοῦ Ἁγίου Μάμαντα (σημερινὸ Βεşiktaş). Οἱ ἀρχές ἐνδιαφέρονταν κυρίως νὰ ἐπιβλέπουν στενὰ τοὺς Ρώσους, παρὰ νὰ ἀποκομίζουν τὸ μεγαλύτερο δυνατὸ ὄφελος ἀπὸ τις σχέσεις μαζί τους. Τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν ρώσων ἐμπόρων καταγράφονταν, καὶ τοὺς ἐπέτρεπαν νὰ εἰσέρχονται στὴν πόλη μόνο ἀπὸ μιὰ πύλη, σὲ ομάδες τῶν πενήντα ἀνδρῶν, συνοδευόμενοι ἀπὸ ἓνα κυβερνητικὸ ἀξιωματοῦχο. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη μεριά, τοὺς παρεῖχαν δωρεὰν φαγητὸ καὶ κρασί γιὰ μιὰ περίοδο μέχρι ἑξὶ μῆνες, καὶ τοὺς ἐπέτρεπαν νὰ ἐμπορεύονται χωρὶς νὰ πληρώνουν δασμούς. Οἱ συνθήκες περιλαμβάνουν καὶ ὄρους σχετικὸς μὲ βυζαντινὰ πλοῖα πού μπορεῖ νὰ βρίσκονταν σὲ κίνδυνο κοντὰ στίς περιοχές τῶν Ρώσων, δηλαδή κατὰ μῆκος τῶν ἀκτῶν τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἀναφέρουν τίποτε γιὰ δραστηριότητα βυζαντινῶν ἐμπόρων στὸ Κίεβο ἢ βορειότερα. Μὲ λίγα λόγια, οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ ἀρκοῦνταν νὰ κάθονται στὴν πατρίδα τους καὶ νὰ περιμένουν τοὺς ξένους ἐμπόρους νὰ ἔλθουν ἐκεῖ.

Τὸ ἄλλο ντοκουμέντο πού θὰ ἐξετάσουμε εἶναι τὸ *Ἐπαρχικὸ Βιβλίον*, πού χρονολογεῖται ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Λέοντα Ζ' (886-912).⁶⁹ Τὸ κείμενο, πού ἴσως εἶναι ἀτελὲς ἔτσι ὅπως μᾶς ἔχει παραδοθεῖ, ρυθμίζει τις δραστηριότητες εἴκοσι δύο ἐπαγγελματικῶν ὀργανώσεων (συστήματα, συντεχνίες) πού ἐλέγχονταν ἀπὸ τὸν ἑπαρχο τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης. Ἡ βασικὴ πρόθεση τοῦ νομοθέτη ἦταν νὰ περιορίσει κάθε ὀμάδα ἐπαγγελματιῶν μέσα στὰ αὐστηρὰ ὄρια τῆς δραστηριότητάς τους, συγκεντρωμένους σὲ ἓνα μέρος ὅπου θὰ μποροῦσαν εὐκολὰ νὰ τοὺς ἐπιβλέπουν· νὰ ἐμποδίσει τὰ παράνομα κέρδη· καὶ νὰ ἀπαγορεύσει τὴν ἐξαγωγή ὀρισμένων εἰδῶν πολυτελείας. Παρόλο πού ἡ μελέτη τοῦ *Ἐπαρχικοῦ Βιβλίου* πρέπει νὰ προξενεῖ κατάθλιψη σὲ ὅσους πιστεύουν στίς ἀρχές τῆς ἐλεύθερης οἰκονομίας, ἐντούτοις μᾶς παρέχει μιὰ ἐνδιαφέρουσα εἰκόνα τῆς ἐμπορικῆς ζωῆς στὴν πρωτεύουσα. Οἱ εἰσαγωγὲς περιλάμβαναν πρῶτες ὕλες, ὅπως κερὶ γιὰ φωτισμὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπεξεργασμένα προϊόντα, ὅπως ἄρω-

ματικές και φαρμακευτικές ουσίες, που έρχονταν μέσω της Τραπεζούντας, λινά υφάσματα από την περιοχή του Στρυμόνα και από τον Πόντο και συριακά μεταξωτά που τα έφερναν σύροι έμποροι. Αυτοί οι τελευταίοι έπρεπε να μένουν στα μιτάτα τους (κάτι σαν τα ιταλικά *fondaco* ή τα τουρκικά *han*) και δεν επιτρέπεται να παραμείνουν στην πρωτεύουσα πάνω από τρεις μήνες. Ίδιαίτερη προσοχή δινόταν στο εμπόριο υφασμάτων, το οποίο περιλάμβανε έξι διαφορετικά επαγγέλματα: τους βεστιοπράτες, που έμπορεύονταν πολύτιμα υφάσματα, τους πρανδιοπράτες, που ειδικεύονταν στις εισαγωγές από τη Συρία, τους μεταξοπράτες, που έμπορεύονταν άκατέργαστο μετάξι, τους καταρταίους, που δούλευαν το μετάξι, τους σηρικαίους, που έραβαν τα υφάσματα που αγοράζαν από τους μεταξοπράτες, και τέλος τους οθονιοπράτες, που έμπορεύονταν τα λινά. Κάθε επάγγελμα ήταν αυστηρά περιορισμένο στη δική του ειδικότητα· όλες οι αγορές αξίας άνω των δέκα νομισμάτων έπρεπε να δηλώνονται στον έπαρχο· και πρόσεχαν ιδιαίτερα ώστε τα «άπαγορευμένα προϊόντα», δηλαδή κυρίως τα πορφυρά υφάσματα, να μην εξάγονται από την πρωτεύουσα και διοχετεύονται στα βαρβαρικά κράτη. Είναι αξιοπρόσεχτο πώς απαγορευόταν στους μεταξοπράτες να αγοράζουν τα προϊόντα τους έξω από την πόλη, όπως δεν τους επέτρεπαν και να τα πουλούν σε έβραίους εμπόρους για να τα μεταπωλήσουν στο έξωτερικό. Παρόμοιοι περιορισμοί ίσχυαν και για άλλα επαγγέλματα: οι κρεοπώλες (που περιορίζονταν σε αρνιά και κατσίκες) και οι κρεοπώλες των χοιρινών έπρεπε να αγοράσουν τα ζώα σε συγκεκριμένη τοποθεσία της πόλης ζωντανά, να τα σφάζουν και να τα πουλήσουν επιτόπου. Δεν επιτρέπεται να βγούν από την πόλη και να αγοράσουν τα ζώα άπευθείας από τους κτηνοτρόφους. Κατά τη διάρκεια της Σαρακοστής κάθε έμπορία κρέατος απαγορευόταν. Οι ιχθυοπώλες δεν μπορούσαν να βγούν από την πόλη και να αγοράσουν ψάρια από τους ψαράδες, αλλά έπρεπε να τους συναντήσουν στις αποβάθρες της πόλης. "Όποιος παρέβαινε αυτούς τους κανονισμούς κινδύνευε να εκδιωχθεί από τη συντεχνία του, να μαστιγωθεί, να κουρευτεί και να έξοριστεί.

Είναι φανερό πώς το σύστημα απέβλεπε στο να αποθαρρύνει την πρωτοβουλία και τον πλουτισμό, και το δικαίωσαν αναφερόμενοι στην τάξη που επέβαλε ο Θεός στην οικουμένη. Σίγουρα πάντως θα πρέπει να δημιουργούσε και έλλειμματικό έμπορικό ισοζύγιο. Έντούτοις μπορούμε να φανταστούμε, όπως συνέβαινε και με την υπόλοιπη βυζαντινή νομοθεσία, ότι οι διατάξεις του Έπαρχικου Βιβλίου περισσότερο θα παραβιάζονταν παρά θα τηρούνταν κατά γράμμα. Βλέπουμε επίσης ότι μέλη της άριστοκρατίας, στους οποίους απαγορεύονταν οι έμπορικές ασχολίες, άρχισαν να

έπενδύουν μέρος της περιουσίας τους στην αγορά καταστημάτων, το ένοικο των οποίων τους απέδιδε εισόδημα περίπου 5%. Ένα παράξενο κείμενο της Ίδριας περιόδου αναφέρει μερικές τέτοιες αγορές: ένα κατάστημα λινών στο Φόρο (άγορά), που καταλάμβανε το χώρο ανάμεσα σε δύο κολόνες της στοάς, κόστιζε 720 νομίσματα και νοικιαζόταν για 38, ένα τμήμα άλλου μαγαζιού, που πουλούσε συριακά υφάσματα, κόστιζε 432 νομίσματα και νοικιαζόταν για 15, και ούτω καθεξής.⁷⁰

Το άνοιγμα της βυζαντινής κοινωνίας στις ευκαιρίες που παρείχε το εμπόριο και η παράλληλη αύξηση της τάξης των επαγγελματιών είναι ιδιαίτερα αξιοσημείωτα τον 11ο αιώνα. Την εποχή του θανάτου του αυτοκράτορα Βασιλείου Β' (1025) η αυτοκρατορία είχε επεκταθεί και πάλι στα «ιδανικά» της σύνορα, δηλαδή από τη μιά ως τον Δούναβη και από την άλλη ως τον Εύφρατη· και παρόλο που έπρόκειτο να κερδίσει λίγα έδαφη ακόμη (το αρμενικό βασίλειο του Άνιου, την Έδεσσα, τα ανατολικά παράλια της Σικελίας), περαιτέρω αύξηση δεν θεωρούνταν ούτε αναγκαία ούτε δυνατή. Για λίγο διάστημα καμιά σοβαρή άπειλή δεν παρουσιάστηκε στα σύνορα και έτσι, επιτέλους, η κοινωνία που βρισκόταν μονίμως επί ποδός πολέμου μπορούσε να στραφεί προς τις ειρηνικές ασχολίες. Στο θεσμικό επίπεδο η άλλαγή αντικαθρεφτίζεται στη σταδιακή διάλυση των θεμάτων και, μαζί με αυτά, των θεματικών στρατών, στην αυξανόμενη σπουδαιότητα των πολιτικών αξιωματούχων των έπαρχιών και στη συγκέντρωση της στρατιωτικής διοίκησης στα χέρια δύο δομεστικών των σχολών, ενός για την Άνατολή κι ενός για τη Δύση: με άλλα λόγια έχουμε λίγο πολύ έπιστροφή στο σύστημα της Πρώιμης βυζαντινής περιόδου. Η κατοχή κτημάτων υπό τον όρο της στρατιωτικής ύπηρεσίας σταδιακά καταργήθηκε, και η υποχρεωτική στρατιωτική θητεία αντικαταστάθηκε από ένα φόρο ο οποίος, και πάλι όπως στην Πρώιμη βυζαντινή περίοδο, χρησιμοποιήθηκε για τη στρατολογία ξένων μισθοφόρων που τώρα ήταν Σκανδιναβοί, Ρώσοι, Φράγκοι, Άραβες, Κουμάνοι και άλλοι. Από νομισματική άποψη παρατηρείται μιá έλαφρά νόθευση του χρυσού νομίσματος κατά τη βασιλεία του Κωνσταντίνου Θ' (1042-1055) και αύξηση της κυκλοφορίας των άργυρών και χάλκινων νομισμάτων, ξεκάθαρο σημάδι μεγαλύτερης οικονομικής δραστηριότητας και ανάπτυξης της άστικής οικονομίας. Από δημογραφική άποψη μπορεί να υποθέσει κανείς με κάποια πιθανότητα ότι έγινε μετακίνηση πληθυσμών από την ύπαιθρο στις πόλεις, πράγμα που δεν ήταν χωρίς κινδύνους. Τέλος, και ίσως το πιο σημαντικό, η τάξη των εμπόρων και των επαγγελματιών ξεφύγε από τα άσφυκτικά όρια των προηγούμενων περιοριστικών κανονισμών και ανέ-

λαβε ένα ρόλο με πολιτική δύναμη. Καινούριοι άνθρωποι, που δέν κατάγονταν από τις καθιερωμένες οικογένειες τῆς κεντρικῆς καὶ ἀνατολικῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τὴν πρωτεύουσα καὶ τὶς πόλεις τῶν παραλίων τοῦ Αἰγαίου, ἀνέβηκαν στὴν κορυφή. Ὑπάρχουν πολλὲς ἐνδείξεις αὐτῆς τῆς τάσης. Ὅταν, λόγου χάρι, ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Μιχαὴλ Ε' προσπάθησε νὰ ξεφορτωθεῖ τὴν ἠλικιωμένη πιά αὐτοκράτειρα Ζωή (1042), γέμισε τιμὲς «τὸν ὄχλο τῆς ἀγορᾶς καὶ τοὺς χειρώνακτες», ἀλλὰ μάταια: οἱ ἐπαγγελματίες ἦταν τόσο πιστοὶ στὴ νόμιμη δυναστεία, πού πολιορκήσαν τὸ παλάτι καὶ ὁ Μιχαὴλ ἐκθρονίστηκε, ἀφοῦ στὶς ταραχὲς σκοτώθηκαν 3.000 ἄνθρωποι.⁷¹ Ὁ ἐπόμενος αὐτοκράτορας, ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος Θ', «δέχτηκε στὴ συγκλητικὴ τάξη σχεδὸν ὅλο τὸν ὄχλο τῆς ἀγορᾶς», καθὼς παρατηρεῖ ὁ Ψελλὸς με θλίψη, μολονότι καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ἀνῆκε στὴν τάξη τῶν «νέων ἀνθρώπων».⁷² Ὁ Ἰσαάκιος Κομνηνὸς (1057) καὶ ὁ Νικηφόρος Βοτανειάτης (1078) ἀνέβηκαν στὸ θρόνο μετὰ τὴ βοήθεια τῶν ἐμπόρων καὶ τῶν ἐπαγγελματικῶν συντεχνιῶν, ἐνῶ ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος Γ' (1059-1067) ἔφτασε στὸ σημεῖο νὰ καταργήσῃ κάθε διάκριση ἀνάμεσα στοὺς συγκλητικούς καὶ τοὺς ἀπλοὺς πολίτες καὶ ἀνέβασε «τεχνίτες» σὲ ὑψηλὰ ἀξιώματα.⁷³ Δὲν ἦταν λοιπὸν χωρὶς ἀξία ἡ συμβουλὴ τοῦ Κεκαυμένου: *Πρόσεχε οὖν καὶ ἔχε ἀκριβείαν εἰς τὰ τῆς πόλεως πράγματα ὑπερβάλλουσαν, ἵνα μηδὲν σὲ λανθάνῃ, ἀλλ' ἔχε κατασκόπους πάντη καὶ πανταχοῦ εἰς πάντα τὰ συστήματα [τὶς συντεχνίας] ἵν' ὀπόταν μελετηθῇ τι, μάθῃς τοῦτο.*⁷⁴

Ἀποτελεῖ μιὰ ἀπὸ τὶς μεγαλύτερες τραγωδίες τῆς βυζαντινῆς ἱστορίας τὸ ὅτι ἡ οἰκονομικὴ καὶ κοινωνικὴ ἀνάπτυξη τοῦ 11ου αἰῶνα κόπηκε πρόωρα πρὶν προλάβῃ νὰ δημιουργήσῃ βιώσιμα ἀποτελέσματα, μετὰ ἐξαίρεση ἴσως τὸν τομέα τῆς λογοτεχνίας καὶ τῆς τέχνης. Οἱ ἄμεσες αἰτίες ἦταν ἀναμφίβολα πολιτικὲς καὶ στρατιωτικὲς: ἡ εἰσβολὴ τῶν Πετσαλέγγων στὰ Βαλκάνια, ἡ ξαφνικὴ κατάκτηση τοῦ μεγαλύτερου μέρους τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας ἀπὸ τοὺς Σελτζούκους Τούρκους, ὁ πόλεμος μετὰ τοὺς Νορμανδούς, τὰ ἀρνητικὰ ἀποτελέσματα τῶν Σταυροφοριῶν. Μήπως θὰ μπορούσαν αὐτὲς οἱ κακοτυχίες νὰ ἔχουν ἀποφευχθεῖ, ἂν ἡ αὐτοκρατορία εἶχε διατηρήσῃ τὴν προηγούμενη «ἀγίη» δομὴ τῆς, πού βασιζόταν στὰ θέματα καὶ τὸν γηγενῆ στρατό; Εἶναι εὐκόλο νὰ κατηγορήσῃ κανεὶς τοὺς «πολιτικούς» αὐτοκράτορες τοῦ 11ου αἰῶνα γιὰ ἔλλειψη προνοητικότητας, καὶ οἱ περισσότεροι ἱστορικοὶ αὐτὸ ἔχουν κάνει. Εἶναι ὅμως πιὸ δύσκολο νὰ διακρίνει κανεὶς τὶς βαθύτερες αἰτίες τῆς κατάρρευσης στὴ δεκαετία τοῦ 1070: μιὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὲς ἴσως ἦταν ἡ ἀποστρατιωτικοποίηση, μιὰ ἄλλη σίγουρα ἡ ἐπέκταση τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας πού εἶχε ἐπιτευχθεῖ προηγουμένως — ὄχι στὰ «ἐθνικὰ τῆς ὄρια», ὅπως εἶπαν μερικοὶ μελετητές, ἀλλὰ πολὺ πέρα ἀπὸ

κάθε λογικὸ ὄριο, σὲ χώρες καὶ λαοὺς πού δέν εἶχαν οὔτε συγγένεια οὔτε συμπάθεια γιὰ τὴν κυβέρνησή τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης.

Ὁ «σωτήρας» πού κλήθηκε νὰ σταματήσῃ τὴν κατάρρευση τοῦ κράτους, ὁ Ἀλέξιος Α' Κομνηνός, ἀντιμετώπιζε ἕνα ἐξαιρετικὰ δύσκολο ἔργο καὶ πιθανὸν ἔκανε, ὅ,τι μπορούσε μέσα στὰ ἔρια τῶν δυνατοτήτων του. Δυστυχῶς ἡ προοπτικὴ του ἦταν περιορισμένη καὶ ἀντιδραστικὴ. Ὁ ἴδιος προερχόταν ἀπὸ μιὰ ὄχι καὶ σπουδαία οικογένεια γαιοκτημόνων τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας καὶ δέν ἔτρεφε καμιὰ συμπάθεια γιὰ τὴ νέα τάξη τῶν ἐμπόρων. Ἡ μεγαλύτερη γκάφα του ἦταν ἡ παραχώρηση στὴ Βενετία (τὸ 1082 ἢ τὸ 1092) ἐμπορικῶν διευκολύνσεων στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη καὶ σὲ ἄλλες τριάντα δύο πόλεις, ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀδριατικὴ ὡς τὶς ἀκτὲς τῆς Συρίας, μετὰ πλήρη ἀπαλλαγὴ ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς δασμοὺς. Μετὰ τὴν πράξη αὐτὴ τὸ οἰκονομικὸ μέλλον τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας ὑπονομεύτηκε μιὰ γιὰ πάντα. Ἡ παρουσία βενετῶν καὶ ἄλλων ἰταλῶν ἐμπόρων σήμαινε φυσικὰ πὼς οἱ βυζαντινὲς πόλεις διατηροῦσαν μιὰ ἐπίφαση ζωτικότητας, μόνο πού τὸ σύνολο σχεδὸν τῶν κερδῶν διοχετεύονταν στὴ Δύση. Ἐτσι, κέντρο βάρους τοῦ κράτους τῶν Κομνηνῶν ξανάγινε ἡ γῆ, πού τὴν ὥρα ὅμως ἦταν πολὺ λιγότερη, ἐνῶ σημαντικὸ μέρος τῆς βρισκόταν στὰ χέρια μεγάλων γαιοκτημόνων. Ἡ πολιτικὴ κρίση συνοδεύτηκε ἀπὸ νομισματικὴ κατάρρευση: τὸ βυζαντινὸ νόμισμα ἔχασε πάντα ἀπὸ τὴ μισή του ἀξία στὴ δεκαετία τοῦ 1070 καὶ δέν συνῆλθε ποτέ. Ἡ διαρκὴς ἀνάγκη νὰ πληρώνονται οἱ ξένοι μισθοφόροι, ἀκόμη καὶ ὅταν τὰ κρατικὰ ταμεῖα ἦταν ἄδεια, ἀνάγκασε τὸν Ἀλέξιο Α' νὰ δημεύσῃ τοὺς θησαυροὺς τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, μέτρο ἀναγκαῖο, μετὰ προσωρινὸ χαρακτῆρα, πού ξεσήκωσε ὅμως πολλὲς ἐπικρίσεις. Μιὰ κάπως πιὸ μακροπρόθεσμη λύση βρέθηκε στὸ σύστημα τῆς πρόνοιας, γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο μιλήσαμε, ἀλλὰ μετὰ κόστος τὴν παραπέρα μείωση τῶν φορολογικῶν ἐσόδων.

Ἀρχισε νὰ διαφαίνεται σαφῶς ἡ πιθανότητα διαμελισμοῦ τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Αὐτὴ ἡ συμβουλὴ δόθηκε στὸν Ἀλέξιο πρὶν γίνῃ αὐτοκράτορας ἀπὸ τὸ γαμπρὸ του Νικηφόρο Μελισσηνό· τὸ ἴδιο πέρασε ἀπὸ τὸ νοῦ τοῦ Ἰωάννη Β' σὲ σχέση μετὰ τὶς νοτιοανατολικὲς ἐπαρχίες· καὶ ἔγινε πραγματικότητα στὴ δεκαετία τοῦ 1180 καὶ ἀργότερα, ὅταν ἡ Κύπρος, τμήματα τῆς δυτικῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας καὶ, τέλος, ἡ Τραπεζούντα ἀποσπάστηκαν. Εἶναι ἴσως ἀληθινὸ θαῦμα πού τὸ κράτος τῶν Κομνηνῶν ἐπέζησε γιὰ ἕναν αἰῶνα καὶ μάλιστα ἔτρεφε καὶ ὄνειρα δόξας, ἀλλὰ τὰ κατάφερε μετὰ τὸ νὰ γίνῃ σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ οἰκογενειακὴ «ἐπιχείρηση». Ὁ Ἀλέξιος Α' καὶ οἱ διάδοχοί του ξεκαθάρισαν τὴν παλιὰ ἀριστοκρατία καὶ περιτριγυρίστηκαν ἀπὸ συγγενεὶς ἐξ αἵματος καὶ ἐξ ἀγχιστείας, πού οἱ πομπώδεις καὶ και-

νοφανείς τίτλοι τους αντικατόπτριζαν το βαθμό συγγένειας με τον αυτοκράτορα, ενώ όλοι έπαιρναν μεγάλες κτηματικές δωρεές και απαλλαγές από τους φόρους. Οι μεταρρυθμίσεις των Κομνηνών αποτελούν την τελευταία αξιοσημείωτη αλλαγή της βυζαντινής κοινωνίας: αυτό που έκαναν οι Κομνηνοί το συνέχισαν οι Παλαιολόγοι σε μικρότερη κλίμακα.

Η ΕΞΑΦΑΝΙΣΗ ΚΑΙ Η ΑΝΑΒΙΩΣΗ ΤΩΝ ΠΟΛΕΩΝ

Τον 6ο αιώνα η αυτοκρατορία έμφανιζόταν ως ένα σύνολο πόλεων. Το έγχειρίδιο του Ίεροκλή άπαριθμεί —ή μάλλον άπαριθμοῦσε όταν ήταν πλήρες— 935 πόλεις. Έπειδή όμως δεν περιλαμβάνει ούτε την Ίταλία ούτε τις έπαρχίες της Βόρειας Αφρικῆς που άνακτήθηκαν, το σύνολο για τη βασιλεία του Ίουστινιανού πρέπει να ήταν πάνω από 1500. Δεν πρέπει να ξεχνάμε ότι η λέξη πόλις (λατινικά civitas) όπως χρησιμοποιούνταν στην αρχαιότητα δεν σήμαινε υποχρεωτικά μια πόλη όπως την έννοούμε σήμερα. Η πόλις προσδιόριζε μια αυτοδιοικούμενη μονάδα, και υπῆρχε τεράστια διαφορά ανάμεσα σε μια άληθινή πόλη όπως η Αλεξάνδρεια ή η Έφεσος, από τη μια μεριά, και σε κάποια άσήμαντη πολίχνη όπως η Ζελντέπα στη Σκυθία, από την άλλη. Κανονικά, πάντως, πόλις σήμαινε μια άληθινή πόλη με τη δική της άγροτική περιοχή, και με αυτή την έννοια θα τη χρησιμοποιήσουμε στη συζήτηση που ακολουθεί.

Στο μεγαλύτερο μέρος τους οι πόλεις του 6ου αιώνα είχαν αρχαία καταγωγή. Στην Ανατολή μερικές είχαν ιδρυθεί στη ρωμαϊκή περίοδο, πιδ πολλές από βασιλείς της έλληνιστικής εποχής, ενώ πολλές άλλες είχαν μια συνεχή ιστορία, που έφτανε μέχρι την άπώτερη αρχαιότητα. Μολονότι είναι άλήθεια ότι στην Πρώιμη βυζαντινή περίοδο αύξήθηκαν οι περιοχές στις όποιες επικρατοῦσαν οι οικισμοί αστικού τύπου, ώστόσο ο άριθμός των πόλεων που ιδρύθηκαν από χριστιανούς αυτοκράτορες ήταν σχετικά μικρός, και καμιά από αυτές δεν εξελίχθηκε σε κέντρο μείζονος σημασίας. Δεν πρέπει να φανταζόμαστε ότι το έτος 324 (ή όποια άλλη ήμερομηνία αποφασίσουμε να διαλέξουμε ως αρχή της βυζαντινής περιόδου) σημείωσε κάποια σημαντική αλλαγή για τους κατοίκους των πόλεων ή της υπαίθρου. Η ζωή συνεχίστηκε το ίδιο όπως και πριν. Μερικές αλλαγές γίνονταν βαθμιαία αλλά δεν ήταν αρκετά αίφνιδιες για να σκεφτεί κανείς ότι άνέτελλε μια καινούρια εποχή.

Τη φυσιογνωμία των πόλεων της Πρώιμης βυζαντινής περιόδου μπο-

ροῦμε νὰ τὴ συλλάβουμε εὐκόλα χάρη στὰ ἐρείτιά τους, πὺ ἀκόμη βρισκονται σπαρμένα γύρω ἀπὸ τὴ Μεσόγειο. Κατὰ κανόνα ἦταν τειχισμένες: μερικὲς εἶχαν ὀχυρωθεῖ σὲ πολὺ παλιὰ ἐποχὴ, ἄλλες τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς βαρβαρικῆς ἀπειλῆς, τὸν 3ο αἰώνα μ.Χ., ἄλλες τὸν 4ο αἰώνα. Μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ τεῖχη τὸ σχέδιο τῶν ὁδῶν ἦταν ὅσο κανονικὸ ἐπέτρεπε ἡ διαμόρφωση τοῦ ἐδάφους. Συχνὰ ὑπῆρχαν δύο κύριες λεωφόροι, οἱ ρωμαϊκὲς *cardo* καὶ *decumanus*, πὺ διασταυρώνονταν κάθετα καὶ κατέληγαν στὶς πύλες τῆς πόλης. Αὐτὲς οἱ λεωφόροι ἦταν ἀρκετὰ φαρδιές (γὶ' αὐτὸ καὶ ὀνομάζονταν *πλατεῖαι*) καὶ εἶχαν δεξιὰ καὶ ἀριστερὰ σκεπαστὲς κινοσοτοιχίες πὺ στέγαζαν μαγαζιά. Στὴ συμβολὴ τῶν κύριων ὁδῶν, ἢ καὶ ἄλλοῦ, βρισκόταν μιὰ ἀγορά, γύρω ἀπὸ τὴν ὁποία ἦταν συγκεντρωμένα διάφορα δημόσια οἰκοδομήματα: ἕνα θρησκευτικὸ κέντρο, λουτρά, ἡ αἴθουσα τοῦ Συμβουλίου, μιὰ βασιλικὴ πὺ χρησίμευε γιὰ δικαστικούς καὶ ἄλλους σκοποὺς κτλ. Συνήθως ὑπῆρχε ἕνα θέατρο πὺ εἶχε κατασκευαστεῖ σὲ παλιότερη ἐποχὴ, σπανιότερα ἕνα ἀμφιθέατρο (ρωμαϊκὴ ἐφεύρεση πὺ δὲν διαδόθηκε πολὺ στὶς ἀνατολικὲς ἐπαρχίες) καί, στὶς μεγαλύτερες πόλεις, ἕνας ἵπποδρόμος. Οἱ πιὸ βασικὲς ἀνάγκες ἐξυπηρετοῦνταν ἀπὸ σιταποθήκες, ὑδραγωγεῖα καὶ δεξαμενές. Τὰ δημόσια κτίρια καὶ οἱ δημόσιοι χώροι ἦταν διακοσμημένοι, ὅσο πλουσιοπάροχα ἐπέτρεπαν οἱ περιστάσεις, μὲ ἀγάλματα, τοιχογραφίες καὶ συντριβάνια. Ὅπωςδήποτε οἱ πόλεις ὑπερφηφάνεονταν πολὺ γιὰ τὰ μνημεῖα τους: ἡ Καισάρεια στὴν Παλαιστίνη εἶχε ἕνα περίφημο τετράπυλο, ὅπως καὶ ἡ Βόστρα στὴν Ἀραβία· ἡ Ἀλεξάνδρεια καυχιόταν γιὰ τὸ Φάρο τῆς, τὸ Σεραπεῖο καὶ τὸ Καισαρεῖο· ἡ Νίκαια στὴ Βιθυνία ἦταν γνωστὴ γιὰ τὴν κανονικότητα τοῦ σχεδίου τῆς.¹

Ἡ μετάβαση ἀπὸ τὴν εἰδωλολατρία στὸ χριστιανισμὸ ἐγινε παντοῦ μὲ ἀργὸ ρυθμὸ. Πολλοὶ εἰδωλολατρικοὶ ναοὶ εἶχαν κλείσει στὸ τέλος τοῦ 4ου καὶ τὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 5ου αἰώνα, ἀλλοῦ ὅμως συνέχιζαν νὰ λειτουργοῦν. Ἡ μετατροπὴ τους σὲ ἐκκλησίες, ὅποτε συνέβαινε, δὲν ἐγινε καθόλου γρήγορα, καθὼς μάλιστα οἱ χριστιανοὶ τοὺς θεωροῦσαν στοιχειωμένους μὲ κακοποιοὺς δαίμονες. Στὴν Ἀθήνα λόγου χάρη (ὁμολογουμένως μιὰ πόλη μὲ ἰσχυρὲς εἰδωλολατρικὲς τάσεις), οἱ εἰδωλολατρικοὶ ναοὶ φαίνεται ὅτι εἶχαν πάψει νὰ λειτουργοῦν πρὸς τὸ τέλος τοῦ 5ου αἰώνα, ἀλλὰ ὁ Παρθενώνας, τὸ Ἐρεχθεῖο καὶ τὸ Ἡφαιστεῖο (Θησεῖο) μετατράπηκαν σὲ ἐκκλησίες μόνο τὸν 7ο. Ἡ κύρια χριστιανικὴ ἐκκλησία συνήθως χτιζόταν σὲ μέρος πὺ δὲν τὸ εἶχαν μολύνει οἱ παλιὲς θρησκείες, συχνὰ σὲ κάποια ἀπόσταση ἀπὸ τὸ κέντρο τῆς πόλης, καὶ περιβαλλόταν ἀπὸ ἕνα σύμπλεγμα διοικητικῶν κτιρίων καὶ κατοικιῶν πὺ χρησιμοποιοῦσε ὁ ἐπίσκοπος. Καθὼς ὁ χριστιανισμὸς ἀποκοῦσε ὅλο καὶ βαθύτερες ρίζες, ὅλο καὶ πε-

ρισσότερες ἐκκλησίες χτιζόνταν πρὸς τιμὴν διάφορων μαρτύρων, ἢ ἀπλῶς ὡς πράξεις εὐσέβειας. Γιὰ νὰ πάρουμε πάλι τὸ παράδειγμα τῆς Ἀθήνας, δεκατέσσερις ἐκκλησίες τοῦ 5ου καὶ τοῦ 6ου αἰώνα εἶναι γνωστὲς, καὶ ἀναμφίβολα ὑπῆρχαν πολὺ περισσότερες. Τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ ὑπῆρχε παντοῦ μιὰ πληθώρα ἐκκλησιῶν, ἢ συντήρηση τῶν ὁποίων, ὅπως εἶδαμε, ἄρχιζε νὰ γίνεται σοβαρὸ πρόβλημα. Τὰ ἀστικά μοναστήρια ἦταν σπάνια, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὰ εἶχαν ἀρχίσει νὰ εἰσβάλλουν σιγὰ σιγὰ ἀπὸ τὴ γύρω ὑπαιθρο. Ἄλλες τάσεις τῆς ἀστικῆς ζωῆς τῆς Ὑστερῆς Ἀρχαιότη-τας, ὅπως ἡ ἐγκατάλειψη τῶν γυμναστηρίων, δὲν εἶχαν σχέση μὲ τὴν ἐξάπλωση τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ. Ἐξω ἀπὸ τὰ τεῖχη βρισκόνταν ἐκτεταμένα κοιμητήρια (γιατὶ ἀπαγορευόνταν αὐστηρὰ οἱ ταφὲς ἐντὸς τῶν τευχῶν), περιβόλια καὶ ἐπαύλεις καί, καμιά φορὰ, μιὰ ἐβραϊκὴ συνοικία μὲ τὴ συναγωγὴ τῆς.

Μὲ τὰ δικὰ μας κριτήρια οἱ πόλεις τῆς Πρώιμης βυζαντινῆς ἐποχῆς ἦταν ἀρκετὰ μικρὲς. Ἡ Ἀντιόχεια, ἡ ὁποία μετὰ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη καὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια ἦταν ἡ τρίτη μεγαλύτερη πόλη τῆς ἀνατολικῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, καταλάμβανε τὸν 6ο αἰώνα μιὰ ἐπιφάνεια περίπου 650 ἑκταρίων μέσα στὰ τεῖχη. Ἡ Λαοδίκεια στὴ Συρία, μὲ 220 ἑκτάρια, ἦταν μεγάλη σὲ σύγκριση μὲ ἄλλες ἐπαρχιακὲς πόλεις. Ἴσως ἕνα πιὸ τυπικὸ παράδειγμα ἀποτελεῖ ἡ Νίκαια, τῆς ὁποίας τὰ τεῖχη, πὺ χρονολογοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸν 3ο μ.Χ. αἰώνα, σώζονται ἀκόμη: ἡ περιοχή πὺ περικλείουν ἔχει μέγιστο μῆκος 1.450 μέτρα ἀπὸ βορρὰ πρὸς νότο καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνατολικά πρὸς τὰ δυτικά. Τὸ Δάρας στὴ Μεσοποταμία, πὺ ἰδρύθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Ἀναστάσιο στὰ 505-7 καὶ θεωροῦνταν ἕνα ἀπὸ τὰ πιὸ σημαντικὰ ὀχυρὰ τοῦ ἀνατολικοῦ μετώπου, εἶχε διαστάσεις περίπου 1.000 ἐπὶ 750 μέτρα. Δὲν ὑπάρχει δυστυχῶς καμία συνταγὴ γιὰ νὰ μετατρέψουμε τὴν ἐπιφάνεια μιᾶς πόλης σὲ πληθυσμὸ: ὁ χώρος πὺ καταλαμβάνουν τὰ δημόσια κτίρια, οἱ δρόμοι, οἱ πλατεῖες, οἱ κῆποι, ὁ τύπος τῶν κατοικιῶν (μονώροφες ἢ πολυώροφες), ἡ ἔκταση τῶν περιχώρων, εἶναι ἀνάμεσα στοὺς πολλοὺς ἀστάθμητους παράγοντες· οὔτε καὶ οἱ ἀρχαῖες πηγὲς μᾶς δίνουν ἀξιόπιστους ἀριθμούς. Κατ' ἐξάίρεση, ἔχουμε μιὰ λεπτομερῆ ἀπαριθμηση τῶν πτωμάτων πὺ εἶχαν περισυλλεγεῖ στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα μετὰ τὴν ἄλωση τῆς πόλης ἀπὸ τοὺς Πέρσες τὸ 614: συνολικὰ 66.509.² Δὲν ξέρουμε ὥστόσο τί σχέση εἶχε αὐτὸς ὁ ἀριθμὸς μὲ τὸν συνολικὸ πληθυσμὸ τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων, καθὼς πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε ὑπόψη μας ὅτι σὲ περιπτώσεις κινδύνου οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς ὑπαιθρου ζητοῦσαν προστασία μέσα στὰ τεῖχη μιᾶς πόλης. Ὅπωςδήποτε δὲν θὰ εἴμαστε πολὺ μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀλή-

θεια αν υποθέσουμε ότι μιὰ μεγάλη ἐπαρχιακή πόλη ὅπως ἡ Λαοδικεία μπορεῖ νὰ εἶχε πληθυσμὸ περίπου 50.000, ἐνῶ ὁ πληθυσμὸς μιᾶς μέσης ἐπαρχιακῆς πόλης μπορεῖ νὰ ἦταν τῆς τάξης τῶν 5 ὡς 20 χιλιάδων. Ἡ Ἀντιόχεια θεωρεῖται πὺς εἶχε περίπου 200.000 κατοίκους καὶ ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη, τὸν 5ο αἰώνα, ἴσως πάνω ἀπὸ 300.000.

Γιὰ τὴν ἀρχαία νοοτροπία ὑπῆρχε οὐσιαστικὴ διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα στὴν ἀστικὴ καὶ τὴν ἀγροτικὴ ζωὴ. Ὁ Προκόπιος, γράφοντας μὲ τὸ πιὸ παραδοσιακὸ τοῦ ὕφους, ἀναφέρει τὰ ἐξῆς σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν πόλη Καπούδβαδα, ποὺ ιδρύθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰουστινιανὸ στὴν Ἀφρική: «Χτίστηκε ἕνα τεῖχος, καθὼς καὶ μιὰ πόλη, καὶ οἱ συνθῆκες τῆς υπαίθρου ξαφνικὰ ἄλλαξαν. Οἱ ἀγρότες ἐγκατέλειψαν τὸ ἄροτρο καὶ ζοῦν σὰν ἀστοί. Ἐδῶ τώρα περνοῦν τὴν ἡμέρα τοὺς στὴν ἀγορὰ, συνεδριάζουν γιὰ νὰ συζητήσουν τίς ἀναγκαῖες γι' αὐτοὺς υποθέσεις, συναλλάσσονται μεταξύ τους καὶ κάνουν ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα πράγματα ποὺ ἀρμόζουν στὸν τίτλο τῆς πόλης».³ Μποροῦμε βέβαια νὰ ἀναρωτηθοῦμε πόσοι ἀπὸ τοὺς νέους πολῖτες τῆς Καπούδβαδας περνοῦσαν τὸν καιρὸ τους στὴν αἴθουσα τῶν συνελεύσεων, συζητώντας ζητήματα δημόσιου ἐνδιαφέροντος. Γιὰ ἕνα πράγμα ὡστόσο δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία: ἡ πόλη καὶ μόνο ἡ πόλη παρεῖχε ὀρισμένες ἀνάσεις ποὺ θεωροῦνταν θεμελιώδη στοιχεῖα τῆς πολιτισμένης ζωῆς. Ἄντρες, γυναῖκες καὶ παιδιὰ (ἀκόμη καὶ κληρικοὶ) πήγαιναν τακτικὰ στὰ δημόσια λουτρά καὶ ἀφιέρωναν ἀρκετὸ χρόνο στὴν ἱεροτελεστία τοῦ λουτροῦ. Αὐτὸ κανονικὰ γινόταν τίς ἐργάσιμες ὥρες, γιὰτι γνωρίζουμε ὅτι τὰ λουτρά ἦταν σχεδὸν ἄδεια τὸ μεσημέρι καὶ τὸ βράδυ.⁴ Τὸ θέατρο καὶ ὁ ἱππόδρομος ἦταν ἐξαιρετικὰ δημοφιλή, καὶ σὲ αὐτὰ ξοδεύονταν ἐπίσης μεγάλο μέρος τῆς ἡμέρας: οἱ θεατρικὲς παραστάσεις ἄρχιζαν τὸ μεσημέρι καὶ κρατοῦσαν ὡς τὸ βράδυ. Γιὰ τοὺς πιὸ καλλιεργημένους, ὑπῆρχαν οἱ ἐπιδεικτικοὶ λόγοι τῶν ρητόρων: θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ ὀνομαστοῦν καὶ δημόσιες διαλέξεις, μόνο ποὺ ἡ ἔμφαση δὲν δινόταν τόσο στὶς γνώσεις ποὺ παρεῖχαν ὅσο στὶς λογοτεχνικὲς ἀρετές. Τέλος διασκέδαζαν συναντώντας φίλους, συζητώντας στὴ σκιά τῶν κιονοστοιχιῶν ἢ συχνάζοντας στὶς ταβέρνες. Ἡ ἀστικὴ ζωὴ ἦταν πολὺ δημόσια.

Τὸ θέατρο, οἱ θηριομαχίες καὶ ὁ ἱππόδρομος ἦταν οἱ κύριοι στόχοι τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς πολεμικῆς. «Τὸ θέατρο εἶναι γεμάτο», ἀναφωνεῖ ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, «καὶ ὄλος ὁ λαὸς κάθεται στὶς κερκίδες. Συχνὰ ὡς καὶ ἡ στέγη εἶναι γεμάτη κόσμος, ἔτσι ποὺ δὲν βλέπεις οὔτε κεραμίδια οὔτε πλάκες, παρὰ μόνο ἀνθρώπινα κεφάλια καὶ σώματα».⁵ Γνωρίζουμε ἐλάχιστα πράγματα γιὰ τὸ περιεχόμενο τῶν παραστάσεων γιὰτι, ἀκόμη καὶ ἂν γράφονταν καινούρια ἔργα ἐκεῖνη τὴν ἐποχὴ, δὲν ἔχει σωθεῖ κα-

νένα. Μαθαίνουμε ὡστόσο ὅτι μερικὰ εἶχαν παραδοσιακὴ μορφή: παίζονταν μὲ προσωπεῖα καὶ παρουσίαζαν φανταστικὸς χαρακτήρες, ὅπως βασιλιάδες, στρατηγούς, γιатρούς καὶ σοφιστές. Γιὰ νὰ τονίσει τὴν ἠθικὴ διάσταση τοῦ θέματος ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος ὑπογραμμίζει τὸ γεγονός ὅτι οἱ ἠθοποιοὶ ἦταν ἄνθρωποι χαμηλῆς κοινωνικῆς προέλευσης — σχοινοποιοὶ ἴσως, μανάβηδες, ἀκόμη καὶ δούλοι.⁶ Ἐπίσης ὑπῆρχε ἡ παντομίμα, ἡ ὅποια περιλάμβανε μουσικὴ, χορὸ καὶ καμιά φορὰ, ὅπως φαίνεται, καὶ λίγο γυμνὸ. «Ὅταν κάθεστε στὸ θέατρο καὶ τὰ μάτια σας ἀπολαμβάνουν τὰ γυμνά μέλη τῶν γυναικῶν, αὐτὸ σᾶς εὐχαριστεῖ γιὰ λίγο, ἀλλὰ μετὰ, τί φοβερὸς πυρετὸς σᾶς πιάνει! Ὅταν ὁ νοῦς σας γεμίσει μὲ τέτοια θεάματα καὶ τὰ τραγούδια ποὺ τὰ συνοδεύουν, οἱ σκέψεις σας τὰ ἀκολουθοῦν ἀκόμη καὶ στὸν ὕπνο σας.»⁷ Μακάρι νὰ ἦταν δυνατό, ἀναστενάξει ὁ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς μας ρήτορας, νὰ καταργηθεῖ τὸ θέατρο. Ἄπ' αὐτὸ πηγάζει κάθε κακὸ: διασάλευση τῆς τάξης, μοιχεία, μαγεία, περιφρόνηση τῶν γυναικῶν. Ἄλλὰ μιὰ καὶ δὲν γινόταν νὰ καταργηθεῖ τὸ θέατρο, τουλάχιστον ἄς τὸ ἀπέφευγαν.⁸ Ἦταν φανερὸ πὺς τὰ θεάτρα εἶχαν δημιουργηθεῖ στὶς πόλεις ἀπὸ τὸν διάβολο. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐγκατέλειπαν ἀκόμη καὶ τὴ δουλειὰ καὶ τὰ μαγαζιά τους γιὰ νὰ πᾶνε στὸ θέατρο, καὶ ὅταν οἱ ἠθοποιοὶ ἔλεγαν κάτι ἄσεμνο, οἱ θεατῆς γελοῦσαν ἀνόητα ἀντὶ νὰ τοὺς λιθοβολήσουν. «Δὲν θὰ θέλατε νὰ δεῖτε μιὰ γυναίκα γυμνὴ στὴν ἀγορὰ, οὔτε μέσα στὸ σπίτι σας, [...] ὅμως συχνάζετε στὸ θέατρο μὲ πάθος. Καὶ μὴν πείς ὅτι αὐτὴ ποὺ γδύνεται εἶναι πόρνη, γιὰτι ἔχει τὸ ἴδιο σῶμα ὅπως καὶ μιὰ ἐλεύθερη γυναίκα. Γιὰτι νὰ ἐπιτρέπονται αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα ὅταν συγκεντρωνόμαστε δημόσια, ἐνῶ θεωροῦνται ἄσεμνα στὴν ἰδιωτικὴ μας ζωὴ; [...] θὰ ἦταν καλύτερα νὰ ρίζουμε στὸ πρόσωπό μας λάσπη καὶ βόρβορο παρὰ νὰ βλέπουμε τέτοιες αἰσχρότητες.»⁹

Οἱ ἱστορικοὶ ἀκολούθησαν τυφλὰ τοὺς Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας κατηγορώντας τὴ χυδαία ἀνηθικότητα τοῦ θεάτρου τῆς Ὑστερῆς Ἀρχαιότητος. Ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπὸ τὸ πόσο ἀνήθικες ἦταν οἱ παραστάσεις (καὶ ἴσως μὲ σύγχρονα κριτήρια νὰ ἦταν ἀρκετὰ ἀνώδυνες), τὸ σημαντικό ἐδῶ εἶναι πὺς οἱ Πατέρες ἐβλέπουν τὸ θέατρο ὡς ἕναν ἐπικίνδυνο ἀνταγωνιστὴ: τραβοῦσε τὴν πελατεία τους μακριὰ ἀπὸ τίς ἐκκλησίες καὶ ἀπορροφοῦσε χρήματα ποὺ διαφορετικὰ ἴσως νὰ κατέληγαν στὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ ταμεῖα. Οἱ κατηγορίες γιὰ ἀνηθικότητα πάντως δὲν ἴσχυαν γιὰ τὸν ἱππόδρομο, ποὺ προσέλκυε ἀκόμη μεγαλύτερα πλήθη καὶ ὅπου συχνάζε τακτικὰ καὶ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας. Θὰ μπορούσε μόνο νὰ τοῦ προσάψει κανεὶς ὅτι ὀδηγοῦσε σὲ διατάραξη τῆς τάξης καὶ καμιά φορὰ σὲ μαγικὲς τελετουργίες. Ἐπιπλέον, δὲν ἦταν σκάνδαλο ποὺ οἱ ἄνθρωποι γινώριζαν τὴν καταγωγή, τοὺς

στάβλους, την ηλικία, τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν ἀγαπημένων τους ἀλόγων, ἢ ποιὸς ἀρματοδρόμος ἀπὸ ποιά ἀφετηρία καὶ μὲ ποιοὺ ἄλλογο θὰ κέρδιζε τὴν κούρσα, ὅταν οἱ ἴδιοι ἄνθρωποι δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ ἀπαριθμήσουν τίς ἐπιστολὲς τοῦ Παύλου;¹⁰ Φαίνεται ὅτι μεγάλο μέρος τοῦ ἀστικού πληθυσμοῦ ἔδινε μικρὴ σημασία σὲ τέτοιες κατηγορίες. Ὁ ἱστορικός Μένανδρος Πρωτῆκτωρ, μιλώντας γιὰ τὸ πῶς σπατάλησε τὰ νιάτα του τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἰουστίνου Β' (565-578), λέει ὅτι παράτησε τίς νομικὲς σπουδὲς του γιὰ χάρη τῶν ἵπποδρομιῶν, τῶν χορῶν, τῆς παντομίμας καὶ τῆς πάλης.¹¹

Ἀπὸ τίς μεγάλες πρωτεύουσες Ἀντιόχεια καὶ Κωνσταντινούπολη, ὅπως τίς παρουσιάζει ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, ἄς πᾶμε σὲ μιὰ ἐπαρχιακὴ καὶ ἐλάχιστη ἐξελληνισμένη πόλη, δηλαδὴ τὴν Ἔμεσα τῆς Συρίας (Homs). Μιὰ εἰκόνα τῆς στά μέσα τοῦ βου αἰῶνα μᾶς δίνει ὁ Βίος τοῦ ἁγίου Συμεῶν τοῦ Σαλοῦ.¹² Μιὰ καὶ ὁ Συμεῶν ἦταν κοινωνικὰ ἀπόκληρος, οἱ συναστροφές του ἦταν κυρίως μὲ τὰ κατώτερα κοινωνικὰ στρώματα, ἀλλὰ εἶχε καὶ κάποιες ἐπαφές μὲ πιδ ἀξιοσέβαστους ἀνθρώπους: ὁ στενότερος φίλος καὶ προστάτης του ἦταν κάποιος διάκονος Ἰωάννης, ὁ ὁποῖος ἦταν ἄνθρωπος μὲ περιουσία. Συναντᾶμε ἐπίσης κάποιον πλούσιο ποὺ μαστίγωνε τοὺς δούλους του, ἀπὸ τὸν ὁποῖο κάποτε ὁ οἰνοχόος του ἔκλεψε πεντακόσια χρυσὰ νομίσματα, καὶ ἕναν ἔμπορο ποὺ πῆγε γιὰ προσκύνημα στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα. Ἡ βιοτεχνία ἀντιπροσωπεύεται μόνο ἀπὸ ἕναν ἐβραῖο ὑαλοουργό, γύρω ἀπὸ τοὺς φούρνους τοῦ ὁποῖου μαζεύονταν οἱ ζητιάνοι γιὰ νὰ ζεσταθοῦν. Οἱ ταβέρνες ἦταν πολυάριθμες καὶ κάπως διαφοροποιημένες, γιὰτὶ ὁ κάπηλος δὲν ἦταν τὸ ἴδιο μὲ τὸν φουσκάριο, ποὺ πουλοῦσε φτηνὸ νερωμένο κρασί (λατινικὰ rosca) μαζὶ μὲ λούπινα καὶ ρεβίθια γιὰ μεζέ. Συναντᾶμε ἐπίσης ἕνα ζαχαροπλάστη ποὺ εἶχε τὸ μαγαζί του ἀνοιχτὸ ἀκόμη καὶ τὴ Μεγάλῃ Ἑβδομάδα, καὶ πλανόδιους πωλητὲς γλυκῶν ποὺ ἔστηναν τοὺς δίσκους τους ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησία. Στὴν πόλη ὑπῆρχαν γιατροί, ἀλλὰ καὶ μάγισσες ποὺ ἔφτιαχναν φυλαχτά. Οἱ προμήθειες ἔρχονταν ἀπὸ τὴν κοντινὴ ὑπαιθρο: συναντᾶμε κάποιον ποὺ πήγαινε μὲ τὸ μουλάρι του κάθε πρωὶ ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη γιὰ νὰ ἀγοράσει κρασί ἀπευθείας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγρότες, καὶ ὁ ὁποῖος μὲ τὸν καιρὸ ἀνοίξε δική του ταβέρνα. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐπίσης ἐβγαίνουν ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη γιὰ νὰ πλύνουν τὰ ρούχα τους στὸν ποταμὸ Ὀρόντη, κάπου ἐνάμισι χιλιόμετρο πρὸς τὰ δυτικά.

Στὰ κατώτερα κοινωνικὰ στρώματα περιλαμβάνονταν μίμοι καὶ ταχυδακτυλουργοὶ ποὺ ἔδιναν παραστάσεις στὸ θέατρο, καὶ μιὰ στρατιὰ ἀπὸ πόρνες, χορεύτριες καὶ ζητιάνους. Τὰ ἦθη φαίνεται ὅτι ἦταν ἀρκετὰ χαλαρά: ὁ γιὸς τοῦ διακόνου Ἰωάννη εἶχε σχέσεις μὲ μιὰ παντρεμένη, κά-

ποιος πλούσιος ἀπατοῦσε τὴ σύζυγό του, καὶ ὁ ἅγιος πρόβλεψε πῶς μιὰ ὁμάδα μικρῶν κοριτσιῶν ποὺ τραγουδοῦσαν στοὺς δρόμους θὰ γίνονταν, ὅταν μεγάλωναν, ἀνήθικες ὅπως ὅλες οἱ γυναῖκες τῆς Συρίας. Τὸ ἐπίπεδο ὑγιεινῆς ἦταν ἐπίσης χαμηλό: ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν πύλη τῆς πόλης ἦταν ἕνας σωρὸς σκουπίδια καὶ πάνω τους ἕνας ψόφιος σκύλος, ἐνῶ ὁ ἅγιος δὲν δίστασε νὰ ἀνακουφίσει τὸ στομάχι του καταμεσῆς τῆς ἀγορᾶς. Ὑπῆρχαν πάντως δημόσια λουτρά, ἕνα γιὰ τοὺς ἄντρες καὶ ἕνα γιὰ τίς γυναῖκες, καθὼς καὶ σχολεῖο γιὰ ἀγόρια. Ἴδρυμα ἀνώτερης ἐκπαίδευσης δὲν ἀναφέρεται.

Ἐνῶ οἱ ἀξιοσέβαστες γυναῖκες ἔμεναν σπιτί, οἱ ἄντρες ζοῦσαν ζωὴ δημόσια. Στὴ γειτονιά ὅλοι γνωρίζονταν μεταξύ τους, ἀλλὰ ἂν κανεὶς ἄλλαζε συνοικία, ἐκεῖ ἦταν ἄγνωστος. Οἱ νεαροὶ τριγυροῦσαν στοὺς δημόσιους χώρους, χόρευαν, ἔπιναν σὲ ταβέρνες καὶ σύχναζαν στὶς πόρνες. Ἐπαιζαν ἐπίσης ἕνα παιχνίδι σὲ ἕνα γήπεδο ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ τεῖχη τῆς πόλης, μὲ δύο ἀντίπαλες ὁμάδες, καθὼς καὶ «πύλες», δηλαδὴ τέρματα. Μιὰ καὶ ἡ Ἔμεσα δὲν εἶχε ἵπποδρόμο, δὲν ἀναφέρονται ἀρματοδρόμοι, οὔτε γίνεται μνεῖα τῆς συνηθισμένης ἀντιζηλίας ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ὑποστηρικτὲς τῶν Πράσινων καὶ τῶν Βένετων. Οἱ θρησκευτικὲς διαμάχες ἐπίσης φαίνεται ὅτι βρίσκονταν σὲ ὕφεση, μολονότι στὸν πληθυσμὸ περιλαμβάνονταν ἰακωβίτες, ὀρθόδοξοι χριστιανοὶ καὶ Ἑβραῖοι. Ἄς ὑπεθυμίσουμε ὅτι ὁ μεγαλύτερος βυζαντινὸς ὑμνογράφος, ὁ Ρωμανὸς ὁ Μελωδὸς, λέγεται ὅτι ἦταν Ἑβραῖος ἀπὸ τὴν Ἔμεσα, ποὺ ἔγινε χριστιανός.

Σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς ἡ ἀστικὴ ζωὴ ποὺ περιγράψαμε συνεχίστηκε στὶς ἀνατολικὲς ἐπαρχίες μέχρι τὰ μέσα τοῦ βου αἰῶνα, καὶ σὲ μικρότερο βαθμὸ μέχρι τὰ μέσα τοῦ 7ου. Φυσικὰ ὑπῆρχαν τοπικὲς διαφοροποιήσεις. Στὰ Βαλκάνια ἡ ἀστικὴ ζωὴ ἀναστατώθηκε σοβαρὰ ἀπὸ τοὺς Οὐνους τοῦ Ἀττίλα στὰ 441-7 καὶ πάλι τὸ 479 ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὀστρογότθους τοῦ Θεουδερίχου. Οἱ μεγαλύτερες πόλεις τῆς ἐνδοχώρας ἔπεσαν: ἡ Σιγγηδόνα (Βελιγράδι), ἡ Ναϊσός (Niš), τὸ Σίρμιο (Sremska Mitrovica), ἡ Μαρκιανούπολη, ἡ Σερδικὴ (Σόφια). Τὸ 449 ἡ Ναϊσός ἦταν ἀκατοίκητη¹³ καὶ βρισκόταν ἀκόμη σὲ ἐρείπια ἑκατὸ χρόνια ἀργότερα, ὅταν ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς τὴν ὀχύρωσε πάλι.¹⁴ Οἱ Στόβοι καὶ ἡ Ἡράκλεια Λυγκηστὶς ὑπέκυψαν στοὺς Ὀστρογότθους. Βέβαια ὀρισμένες ἀπὸ τίς καταστροφὲς ἐπανορθώθηκαν κατόπιν, ἀλλὰ στὴν καλύτερη περίπτωση ἐπρόκειτο γιὰ μερικὴ ἐπανόρθωση χωρὶς μεγάλη διάρκεια, μιὰ καὶ τὰ πάντα παρασύρθηκαν ἀπὸ τίς εἰσβολὲς τῶν Ἀβάρων καὶ τῶν Σλάβων. Ἄλλοῦ ἐντούτοις δὲν συνέβη τέτοιου εἶδους δραματικὴ ἀλλαγὴ τὸν 5ο αἰῶνα. Μερικὲς πόλεις ἀναπτύχθηκαν, ἐνῶ ἄλλες συρρικνώθηκαν. Γνωρίζουμε, γιὰ παράδειγμα, πῶς ἡ

Σκυθόπολη στην Παλαιστίνη παράκμαζε, όπως και η Πέργαμος στη Μικρά Ασία. Το ίδιο και η Κύρρος στη βόρεια Συρία, όπου η τοπική βουλή είχε διαλυθεί και δεν μπορούσε να βρει κανείς ούτε έναν καλό φούρνο.¹⁵ Χωρίς αμφιβολία τα αίτια μιᾶς τέτοιας παρακμῆς ήταν πολύπλοκα. Ὑπάρχουν σημαντικές ενδείξεις από τη Συρία για μετατόπιση τῆς δραστηριότητος τῶν τεχνιτῶν πρὸς τὰ χωριά, ἔτσι πού οἱ χωρικοὶ δὲν χρειάζονταν πιά νὰ πωλᾶνε τὰ προϊόντα τους καὶ νὰ ἀγοράζουν τις ἀπαραίτητες προμήθειες στὶς πόλεις. Ἡ φυγὴ τῶν ἐπαγγελματιῶν πρὸς τὴν ὑπαιθρο μαρτυρεῖται σαφῶς καὶ στὴν αὐτοκρατορική νομοθεσία. Ἡ ἀνάπτυξη τῶν μοναστηριῶν, πού ἀπορροφοῦσαν τεχνίτες ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀγρότες, ἴσως νὰ συνέβαλε ἐπίσης σὲ αὐτὴ τὴ διαδικασία. Εἶναι ὡστόσο πρόωρο νὰ ὑποστηρίξει κανεὶς ὅτι ὅλες οἱ μικρὲς πόλεις συρρικνώνονταν καὶ ὅλες οἱ μεγάλες διογκώνονταν ἀνάμεσα στὸν 4ο καὶ τὸν 6ο αἰῶνα. Χρειάζομαστε περισσότερες πληροφορίες γιὰ νὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ διακρίνουμε τέτοιες γενικὲς τάσεις.

Καθὼς πλησιάζουμε τὸ ἔτος 500, ἀρχίζουν νὰ ἐμφανίζονται κάποια ἀνησυχητικὰ σημάδια. Τὸ πρῶτο ἦταν ἐντελῶς τυχαῖο: τὴν περίοδο αὐτὴ συνέβη μιὰ ἐντυπωσιακὴ σειρὰ ἀπὸ ξηρασίες, ἐπιθέσεις ἀκρίδων, σεισμοὺς καὶ ἄλλες συμφορές. Ἐδῶ πρέπει νὰ γίνῃ ἀντιληπτὸ πὼς ὁ ἐφοδιασμὸς μιᾶς ἀρχαίας πόλης στηριζόταν σὲ μιὰ λεπτὴ ἰσορροπία. Κάθε πόλη συνήθως τρεφόταν ἀπὸ τὰ ἀγροτικὰ προϊόντα τῆς περιοχῆς της. Ὅσο πιὸ πυκνὸ ἦταν τὸ δίκτυο τῶν πόλεων, τόσο πιὸ περιορισμένη ἦταν ἡ περιοχὴ τῆς καθεμιᾶς. Ἡ Αἴγυπτος ἀποτελοῦσε σχεδὸν μοναδικὴ περίπτωση στὴν Ἀνατολή, καθὼς εἶχε ἕνα τεράστιο ἀγροτικὸ πλεόνασμα, τὸ ὁποῖο ὅμως διοχετευόταν ἀποκλειστικὰ στὴν τροφοδοσία τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης καὶ τοῦ αὐτοκρατορικοῦ στρατοῦ. Ἐπιπλέον, οἱ κατὰ ξηρὰν μεταφορὲς ἦταν φοβερὰ ἀργές καὶ δαπανηρές. Μιὰ παραλιακὴ πόλη μποροῦσε νὰ ξεπεράσει μιὰ προσωρινὴ ἔλλειψη ἐφοδίων, ἀλλὰ ὅταν ἡ συμφορὰ ἐπληττε μιὰ πόλη τῆς ἐνδοχώρας καὶ τὰ ἀποθέματα τροφῶν ἐξαντλοῦνταν, ἀναπόφευκτα ὁ λαὸς πεינוῦσε. Τί σήμαινε αὐτὸ στὴν πράξη φαίνεται παραστατικὰ στὴν περίπτωση τῆς Ἐδεσσας (Urfu). Ὑστερα ἀπὸ κάμποσους σεισμοὺς καὶ τὴν ἐξάπλωση μιᾶς μεταδοτικῆς ἀσθένειας, τὸ ἔτος 500 σμήνη ἀκρίδων ἐμφανίστηκαν καὶ ἐπιτέθηκαν στὰ γεννήματα, σὲ μιὰ τεράστια περιοχὴ πού ἐκτεινόταν ἀπὸ τὴ Μεσόγειο, διαμέσου τῆς βόρειας Μεσοποταμίας, μέχρι τὰ σύνορα τῆς Ἀρμενίας. Ἐξαθλιωμένοι οἱ χωρικοὶ ἀναγκάστηκαν νὰ πωλήσουν τὰ χωράφια καὶ τὰ ζῶα τους γιὰ ἕνα κομμάτι ψωμί καὶ κατέφυγαν στὶς πόλεις γιὰ νὰ ζήσουν ζητιανεύοντας. Τὸ σιτᾶρι ἀκρίβηνε: ἀπὸ τοὺς 30 μοδίους στὸ νόμισμα πῆγε στοὺς τέσσερις,

καὶ τὸ κριθᾶρι ἀπὸ τοὺς 50 στοὺς 6. Ὅλο τὸ χειμῶνα οἱ ἄνθρωποι πέθαιναν ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα στοὺς δρόμους τῆς Ἐδεσσας, συχνὰ μέχρι καὶ 130 τὴν ἡμέρα, ἔτσι πού ὅλοι οἱ διαθέσιμοι τάφοι γρήγορα γέμισαν. Ἐξαιτίας τῶν ἀνθυγιεινῶν συνθηκῶν ξέσπασε λοιμικὴ, πού ἐξαπλώθηκε ἀπὸ τὴ Νισίβη ὡς τὴν Ἀντιόχεια. Ἡ σοδειὰ τοῦ 501 ἦταν μικρὴ, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα ἡ ἤδη ὑπερβολικὰ ὑψηλὴ τιμὴ τοῦ σιταριοῦ νὰ παραμένει σχεδὸν σταθερὴ. Μόνο τὸ 502 ἔπεσε στοὺς 12 μοδίους στὸ νόμισμα, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλι ἦταν πᾶνω ἀπὸ τὴ διπλάσια τῆς κανονικῆς. Ὁ κατάλογος τῶν συμφορῶν πού ἀναφέρονται ἀπὸ τὸ χρονογράφο τῆς Ἐδεσσας περιλαμβάνει τὴν καταστροφὴ ἀπὸ σεισμὸ τῆς Νικόπολης (Ἐμμαούς), τῆς Πτολεμαΐδας (Ἄκρα), τῆς μιστῆς Τύρου καὶ τῆς Σιδώνας, καὶ τὴν κατάκτηση τῆς Ἀμιδας ἀπὸ τοὺς Πέρσες, ὅπου 80.000 νεκροὶ μεταφέρθηκαν ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ τείχη τῆς πόλης.¹⁶ Ὁ ἀ χρειάστηκαν πολλὰ χρόνια, ἢ μᾶλλον πολλὰς γενιές, γιὰ νὰ συνέλθουν ἐντελῶς ἀπὸ τόσες ἀπανωτὲς συμφορές. Καὶ σὲ πολλὰς ἀνατολικὲς ἐπαρχίες δὲν δόθηκε τελικὰ τέτοιο περιθώριο ἀνάκαμψης.

Ἐνα ἄλλο σύμπτωμα διάλυσης ἦταν ἡ βία στὶς πόλεις. Μπορεῖ νὰ παρατηρηθεῖ φυσικὰ πὼς οἱ ταραχές δὲν ἦταν τίποτε καινούριο καὶ πὼς τοὺς δύο προηγούμενους αἰῶνες γίνονταν τακτικὰ ταραχές λόγω ἔλλειψης τροφίμων, θρησκευτικὲς ταραχές καὶ ταραχές στὰ θέατρα. Ἀπὸ τὴ βασιλεία ὅμως τοῦ Ἀναστασίου καὶ μετὰ ἄρχισε μιὰ κλιμάκωση τῆς βίας, πού ὅλο καὶ περισσότερο εἶχε ὡς κέντρο της τὸν ἵπποδρόμο. Οἱ δύο μεγαλύτεροι δῆμοι, οἱ Πράσινοι καὶ οἱ Βένετοι, συγκρούονταν τακτικὰ καὶ ὕστερα ἐπιδίδονταν σὲ πυρπολήσεις. Ὁ κατάλογος τῶν ταραχῶν εἶναι μακρὺς, καὶ μερικὲς ἀπὸ αὐτὲς κατέληγαν σὲ τεράστιες καταστροφές, ὅπως ἦταν ὁ μεγάλος διωγμὸς στὴν Ἀντιόχεια τὸ 507 καὶ ἡ πασίγνωστη στάση τοῦ Νίκα στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη (532), πού λέγεται ὅτι ἄφησε 30.000 νεκροὺς καὶ μετέτρεψε τὸ κέντρο τῆς πόλης σὲ στάχτες. Ὅταν ἡ Ἀντιόχεια καταστράφηκε σχεδὸν ὀλοκληρωτικὰ ἀπὸ σεισμὸ τὸ 526, μὲ θύματα πού λέγεται ὅτι ἔφτασαν τὶς 250.000, οἱ ἀντιμαχόμενες παρατάξεις συμφιλιώθηκαν, ἀλλὰ μόνο γιὰ λίγο διάστημα.¹⁷ Ἰδιαιτέρα ἀνατριχιαστικὴ (ἂν καὶ σίγουρα κάπως ἐξογκωμένη) εἶναι ἡ περιγραφή ἀπὸ τὸν Προκόπιο τῶν τραμπουκῶν τοῦ ἵπποδρόμου, οἱ ὁποῖοι εἶχαν, ὅπως ἰσχυρίζεται, πλήρη ἐλευθερία ἐκ μέρους τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ νὰ ληστεύουν καὶ νὰ δολοφονοῦν, νὰ βιάζουν γυναῖκες καὶ νὰ ἀποσποῦν ἐκβιαστικὰ χρήματα, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα οἱ φιλήσυχοι πολῖτες νὰ μὴν τολμοῦν νὰ κυκλοφορήσουν ὅταν σκοτείνιαζε.¹⁸ Μὲ τὴν πείρα πού ἔχουμε σήμερα δὲν εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ φανταστοῦμε αὐτὲς τὶς συμμορίες ἀπὸ νεαροὺς μὲ μακριὰ γένια καὶ μουστάκια, μὲ μακριὰ μαλλιά, ντυμένους ἐπίτηδες μὲ βαρβαρικὸ τρόπο, πού συμπλέκονταν

μεταξύ τους, όταν δὲν κακοποιοῦσαν ἀθώους πολίτες. Δὲν εἶναι δύσκολο ἐπίσης νὰ πιστέψουμε αὐτὸ πού μᾶς λένε ὅλες οἱ βυζαντινὲς πηγές, ὅτι δηλαδὴ αὐτὰ ἦταν ἄσκοπος βανδαλισμὸς καὶ τίποτε περισσότερο. "Ὅπως ἀποδειχτήκε πρόσφατα,¹⁹ οἱ Πράσινοι καὶ οἱ Βένετοι δὲν εἶχαν κάποιους πολιτικούς ἀντικειμενικούς σκοπούς, οὔτε φανερά ταξικά παράπονα ἢ συγκεκριμένη θρησκευτικὴ ταυτότητα. Ἀλλὰ μολονότι ἡ ἄσκοπη μανία καταστροφῆς δὲν ἔχει φιλοσοφία, κανένας δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀρνηθεῖ ὅτι εἶναι ἓνα σύμπτωμα —εἴτε παρακαμῆς τῶν ἀστικῶν κέντρων, εἴτε ἔλλειψης ἀξιῶν, ἢ μιᾶς ὑπερβολικῆς μονότονης καὶ αὐστηρῆς κοινωνίας.

Ἐνῶ οἱ βυζαντινὲς πόλεις ὑπέφεραν ἀπὸ τίς ἐπιπτώσεις τῆς ἔλλειψης τροφίμων, τῶν φυσικῶν καταστροφῶν καὶ τῶν βίαιων συγκρούσεων, χτυπήθηκαν ἀπὸ ἓνα ἐντελῶς ἀπροσδόκητο πλήγμα. Ἡ βουβωνικὴ πανώλη τοῦ 541-2, ἡ πρώτη τέτοια ἐπιδημία πού εἶναι γνωστὴ στὴν ἱστορία, ἦταν σύμφωνα μὲ ὅλες τίς μαρτυρίες μιᾶ συμφορὰ χωρὶς προηγούμενο. Ξεκίνησε ἀπὸ τὴν Αἰθιοπία καὶ ἐξαπλώθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Αἴγυπτο διαμέσου τῶν ὁδῶν θαλάσσιας ἐπικοινωνίας μέχρι τὴν Ἰσπανία στὴ Δύση καὶ τὴν Περσία στὴν Ἀνατολή. Στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη ἡ πανώλη ξέσπασε τὴν ἄνοιξη τοῦ 542 καὶ μαινόταν ἐπὶ τέσσερις μῆνες. Σύμφωνα μὲ τὸν Προκόπιο, πού ὑπῆρξε αὐτόπτης μάρτυρας, ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν νεκρῶν ἔφτασε τίς 5.000 καὶ ἀργότερα τίς 10.000 καὶ περισσότερους τὴν ἡμέρα.²⁰ Καθὼς οἱ διαθέσιμοι τάφοι γέμιζαν καὶ δὲν ὑπῆρχε καιρὸς νὰ ἀνοιχτοῦν καινούριοι, τὰ πτώματα σωριάζονταν στὴν παραλία ἢ ρίχνονταν μέσα σὲ πύργους στὶς Συκές (Γαλατῆς), ἀπ' ὅπου μιᾶ ἀφόρητη μυρωδιὰ ἔφτανε μέχρι τὴν πόλη. Ἐπιπλέον, ἡ ἀρχικὴ ἔξαρση ἀκολογήθηκε ἀπὸ ἀρκετὲς ἄλλες: ἐπιδημίες πανώλης ἢ ἄλλων ἀγνωστων ἀσθενειῶν ἀναφέρονται τὸ 555, 558, 561, 573-4, 591, 599 καὶ στὶς ἀρχές τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα. Ἡ Ἀντιόχεια χτυπήθηκε τέσσερις φορές ἀπὸ τὴ βουβωνικὴ πανώλη κατὰ διαστήματα πού ἀπεῖχαν μεταξύ τους περίπου δεκαπέντε χρόνια. Ὁ ἱστορικὸς Εὐάγγριος τὴν πέρασε ὁ ἴδιος σὲ νεαρὴ ἡλικία: ἀργότερα ἔχασε τὴ γυναῖκα του, κάμποσα παιδιά, μεγάλο ἀριθμὸ δούλων καί, τὴν τέταρτη φορά, τὴν κόρη του καὶ τὸ ἑγγόνι του.²¹

Εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ ὑπολογιστεῖ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν θυμάτων. "Ὅταν ὁ Προκόπιος μᾶς λέει «παραλίγο νὰ ἐξαφανιστεῖ ὅλο τὸ ἀνθρώπινο γένος»,²² ἢ ὅτι οἱ μισοὶ ἀπὸ ἐκείνους πού εἶχαν ἐπιζήσει ἀπὸ προηγούμενα θανατικά πέθαναν ἀπὸ τὴν πανώλη,²³ αὐτὸ ἀναμφίβολα εἶναι ρητορικὴ ὑπερβολή. Παρ' ὅλα αὐτά, εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ χάθηκε τὸ 542 τὸ ἓνα τρίτο ἢ τὸ μισὸ τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης, μερικὲς πόλεις, ὅπως μᾶς λένε, οὐσιαστικὰ ἐρημώθηκαν, ἐνῶ ἄλλες ἐπηρεάστηκαν λιγότε-

ρο. Τὸ γεγονός ὅτι, σύμφωνα μὲ τίς μαρτυρίες, ἡ νόσος ἐπληττε ἰδιαίτερα τοὺς νέους, σὲ συνδυασμὸ μὲ τὴν ἐπανεμφάνισή της κάθε δεκαπέντε περίπου χρόνια, πρέπει νὰ εἶχε δημιουργήσει ἰδιαίτερα καταστροφικὲς δημογραφικὲς συνέπειες. Οἱ οικονομικὲς συνέπειες ἐξᾴλλου δὲν ἦταν λιγότερο σοβαρές: ὅλες οἱ καθημερινὲς ἀσχολίες διακόπηκαν, οἱ τιμὲς τῶν ἀγαθῶν τριπλασιάστηκαν ἢ τετραπλασιάστηκαν, ἡ πείνα κυριάρχησε παντοῦ, οἱ ἄγροὶ ἐρημώθηκαν καὶ οἱ γεωργοὶ πού ἀπόμειναν φορτώθηκαν ἐπιπλέον τοὺς φόρους τῆς ἀκαλλιέργητης γῆς τῶν γειτόνων τους πού πέθαναν.²⁴

Μικρὴ ἀμφιβολία ὑπάρχει πῶς οἱ ἐπιδημίες τοῦ βου αἰώνα, σὲ συνδυασμὸ μὲ μιᾶ ἄνευ προηγούμενου συρροῆ φυσικῶν καταστροφῶν, ὑπῆρξαν ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς παράγοντες, ἴσως μάλιστα ὁ καθοριστικὸς παράγοντας, γιὰ τὴν κατάρρευση τῆς ἀστικῆς ζωῆς. Γιατὶ εἶναι γεγονός (ἂν καὶ μερικοὶ ἱστορικοὶ ἀκόμη ἀρνοῦνται νὰ τὸ δεχτοῦν) ὅτι σὲ ὅλη τὴ Μεσόγειο οἱ πόλεις, μὲ τὴ μορφή πού εἶχαν στὴν Ἀρχαιότητα, συρρικνώθηκαν καὶ κατόπιν οὐσιαστικὰ ἐξαφανίστηκαν. Αὐτὸ συνέβη σὲ διαφορετικὲς περιόδους στὶς διάφορες ἐπαρχίες, καὶ ἡ ἄμεση αἰτία ἦταν συνήθως οἱ ξένες ἐπιδρομές. Ἡ εὐκολία πάντως μὲ τὴν ὁποία ὀχυρωμένες πόλεις ἔπεσαν στὰ χέρια ἐνὸς ἐχθροῦ πού συχνὰ δὲν ἦταν οὔτε πολυἀριθμὸς οὔτε ἐξασκημένος στὶς πολιορκίες, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἀδυναμία τῶν ἀστικῶν κέντρων νὰ ἀναβιώσουν μετὰ τὴν ἀποχώρηση τοῦ ἐχθροῦ, δείχνουν ὅτι οἱ πολεμικὲς ἐπιχειρήσεις ἦταν ἀπλῶς ὁ τελευταῖος κλονισμὸς πού προκάλεσε τὴν κατάρρευση ἐνὸς ἤδη ἐτοιμόροπου οἰκοδομήματος. Καθὼς οἱ ἱστορικὲς μας πηγές περιορίζονται μετὰ τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ καὶ γίνονται σπανιότατες μετὰ τὸ 602, εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ παρακολουθήσουμε αὐτὴ τὴ διαδικασία μέσα ἀπὸ τίς γραπτὲς πηγές. Καταντάει νὰ ἔχουμε μόνο λακωνικὲς εἰδήσεις γιὰ διάφορες καταστροφὲς καὶ ἀσαφεῖς ἀπόηχους γιὰ μιᾶ γενικὴ κατάρρευση τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῆς τάξης. Μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Μαυρικίου (602), οἱ διαμάχες στὶς πόλεις ξέσπασαν «σὲ ὅλη τὴν Ἀνατολή, τὴν Κιλικία, τὴν Ἀσία, τὴν Παλαιστίνη, ἀκόμη καὶ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη». Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀλληλοσκοτώνονταν στὴν ἀγορὰ, εἰσέβαλλαν στὰ σπίτια, πέταγαν γυναῖκες, παιδιά καὶ γέρους ἀπὸ τὰ παράθυρα, λήστευαν καὶ πυροπολοῦσαν. Τὸ κύμα τῆς ἀναταραχῆς ἐξαπλώθηκε στὶς βαλκανικὲς ἐπαρχίες, καὶ ἡ Θεσσαλονικὴ σώθηκε μόνο χάρις στὴ θαυματουργὴ παρέμβαση τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου.²⁵ Καὶ ἔτσι, ἀνάμεσα σὲ σκληρὲς τέτοιας ἀταξίας, ἡ αὐλαία πέφτει.

Οἱ μαρτυρίες γιὰ τὴν κατάρρευση τῶν πόλεων εἶναι κατὰ μέγα μέρος ἀρχαιολογικὲς. Θὰ πρέπει νὰ τονιστεῖ ἐδῶ πῶς, μολονότι ἔχουν γίνει πολ-

λές ανασκαφές σε διάφορες περιοχές τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, εἶναι σχετικὰ λίγες αὐτὲς ποὺ ἔχουν γίνεῖ με ἐικανοποιητικὰ μεθοδικὸ τρόπο. Ἡ ὑπαρξη τῶν σύγχρονων πόλεων πάνω στὶς παλιὲς ἔχει ἐπίσης δυσκολέψει τὴν ἔρευνα σὲ μερικὰ κέντρα πολλῆς μεγάλης σημασίας γιὰ μᾶς, κυρίως τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη καὶ τὴ Θεσσαλονίκη. Συνεπῶς οἱ πληροφορίες ποὺ ἔχουμε στὴ διάθεσή μας εἶναι ἀκόμη μᾶλλον ἀποσπασματικές, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἀρκετὲς γιὰ νὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ συναγάγουμε ὀρισμένα συμπεράσματα. Ἄς δοῦμε μερικὰ παραδείγματα παρμένα ἀπὸ διάφορες ἐπαρχίες.

Στὰ Βαλκάνια, ὅπως εἴπαμε ἤδη, ἡ ἀστική ζωὴ ἀναστατώθηκε σοβαρὰ στὰ μέσα τοῦ 5ου αἰώνα. Ἡ ἀνάκαμψη ποὺ ἐπακολούθησε στὸ πρῶτο μισὸ τοῦ 6ου αἰώνα δὲν ἦταν ἐκτεταμένη, οὔτε ἐπρόκειτο νὰ διατηρηθεῖ πάνω ἀπὸ μερικὲς δεκαετίες. Τὸ Σίρμιο, ποὺ ὑπῆρξε κάποτε αὐτοκρατορική πρωτεύουσα, δὲν συνῆλθε ποτὲ μετὰ τὴ λεηλασία του ἀπὸ τοὺς Οὐνους καὶ ἐρημώθηκε τελείως μετὰ τὴν παραχώρησή του στοὺς Ἀβάρους τὸ 582. Ἄν ἔρθουμε νοτιότερα, στοὺς Στόβους, μιὰ ἐπαρχιακὴ πρωτεύουσα, βρίσκουμε σημαντικὲς μαρτυρίες οἰκοδομικῆς δραστηριότητος στὸ πρῶτο μισὸ τοῦ 5ου αἰώνα, καὶ πάλι μετὰ τὴ λεηλασία τῆς πόλης ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὀστρογότθους τὸ 479, ἀλλὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει κανενὸς εἶδους οἰκοδομικῆς δραστηριότητος μετὰ τὸν 6ο αἰώνα, καὶ καθόλου νομίσματα μεταγενέστερα τοῦ 7ου. Στὴν Ἡράκλεια Λυγκηστίδα, ποὺ ἔχει ἀνασκαφῆ μόνο ἐν μέρει, ἡ εἰκόνα εἶναι περίπου ἴδια: ἡ ἐπισκοπικὴ ἐκκλησία ξαναχτίστηκε στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 6ου αἰώνα, καὶ τὸ νεότερο νόμισμα ποὺ ἔχει δημοσιευτεῖ εἶναι τοῦ Ἰουστίνου Β'. Ἡ μικρὴ πόλις Βάργαλα στὴ Μακεδονία Δευτέρα (κοντὰ στὸ σημερινὸ Štip) προφανῶς μετακινήθηκε σὲ μιὰ πιὸ ὀχυρὴ θέση τὸν 5ον αἰώνα, καὶ ἔπαψε νὰ ὑπάρχει λίγο μετὰ τὸ 585. Ἄν προχωρήσουμε ἀνατολικά στὴ σημερινὴ Βουλγαρία, θὰ δοῦμε πῶς ἡ Σερδικὴ ξεκίνησε τὴ ζωὴ της ὡς μιὰ μικρὴ ὀχυρωμένη πόλις τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Μάρκου Αὐρηλίου, ἐπεκτάθηκε σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 4ου αἰώνα, ἴσως τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου, καὶ συρρικνώθηκε τὸν παλιὸ της πυρῆνα (μιὰ ἔκταση δεκαπέντε ἑκταρίων) τὸν 6ο αἰώνα· μετὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ αὐτὴ δὲν ξανακοῦμε ἄλλο γι' αὐτὴν. Ἡ Νικόπολις τὸν Δούναβη, ποὺ ἰδρύθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Τραϊανό, φαίνεται ὅτι ἐγκαταλείφθηκε τὸν 6ο αἰώνα: μερικὸι ἀπὸ τοὺς κατοίκους της ἴσως νὰ μετόικησαν νοτιότερα σὲ ἓνα λόφο στὸ Veliko Turnovo. Στὴ Φιλιππούπολη ἡ ἔκταση τῆς πόλης μειώθηκε τὸν 6ο αἰώνα στὸ μισό, καὶ κατόπιν ἡ πόλις καταστράφηκε. Ἄκουῦμε γι' αὐτὴν πάλι στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 12ου αἰώνα, ὅταν ἓνας πληθυσμὸς ἀπὸ ἀρμένιους καὶ βογόμιλους αἰρετικούς ζοῦσε ἐκεῖ ἀνάμεσα στὰ ἀρχαῖα εἱρεῖπια.²⁶

Τὸ ἴδιο πανόραμα ἐγκατάλειψης βλέπουμε καὶ στὴν Ἑλλάδα. Στὴν Ἀθήνα οἱ ἀνασκαφὲς τῆς Ἀγορᾶς ἀπέδειξαν ὅτι ὑπῆρξαν ἐκτεταμένες καταστροφὲς γύρω στὸ 580, καὶ ὕστερα μιὰ περίοδος πρόχειρων καταλυμάτων, ποὺ διάρκεσε μέχρι τὸ δεύτερο μισὸ τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα. Στὴ συνέχεια ἡ περιοχὴ τῆς Ἀγορᾶς ἐγκαταλείφθηκε τελείως καὶ ὁ οἰκισμὸς περιορίστηκε στὴν Ἀκρόπολις καὶ σὲ ἓναν μικρὸ ὀχυρωμένον περίβολο πρὸς τὴ βόρεια πλευρὰ της. Στὴν Κόρινθο, πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς κατοίκους της κατέφυγαν στὴν Αἰγίνα περὶ τὸ 580, ἐνῶ ἡ βυζαντινὴ παρουσία διατηρήθηκε στὸ ἀπρόσιτο φρούριο τοῦ Ἀκροκορίνθου. Στὴν ὑπόλοιπη Πελοπόννησο ὅλες οἱ πόλεις ἐξαφανίστηκαν. Γιὰ τὴν κεντρικὴ Ἑλλάδα οἱ μαρτυρίες ποὺ ἔχουμε εἶναι σποραδικές. Στὶς Βοιωτικὲς Θῆβες δὲν ὑπάρχουν ἐνδείξεις γιὰ ὑπαρξη ἀστικῆς ζωῆς ἀνάμεσα τὸν 6ο καὶ τὸ δεύτερο μισὸ τοῦ 9ου αἰώνα. Οἱ Φθιώτιδες Θῆβες (Νέα Ἀγχιάλος) στὴ θεσσαλικὴ ἀκτὴ καταστράφηκαν στὸ τέλος τοῦ 6ου ἢ τὸν 7ο αἰώνα, καὶ πιθανόν καταλήφθηκαν ἀπὸ σλάβους ἐπὶλυδες: δὲν ἀναβίωσαν ποτέ. Μποροῦμε νὰ προσθέσουμε ὅτι οὔτε μιὰ παλααιοχριστιανικὴ ἐκκλησία δὲν ἔμεινε ὄρθια σὲ ὅλη τὴν Ἑλλάδα, μὲ ἐξαιρέση τὴ Θεσσαλονίκη καὶ τὴν Πάρο, καὶ ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχει κανένα δεῦγμα οἰκοδομικῆς δραστηριότητος ἀνάμεσα στὸ 600 περίπου καὶ στὰ πρῶτα χρόνια τοῦ 9ου αἰώνα.

Ἡ Θεσσαλονίκη, ἔδρα τοῦ ἐπαρχοῦ τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ, παρέμεινε σὲ βυζαντινὰ χέρια σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τῶν σκοτεινῶν αἰώνων. Τὰ τεῖχη της, ποὺ πιθανόν χτίστηκαν περὶ τὸ 450, περιέκλειαν μιὰ σημαντικὴ ἔκταση: περίπου 1.750 μέτρα ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνατολικά πρὸς τὰ δυτικὰ καὶ 2.100 μέτρα ἀπὸ βορρᾶ πρὸς νότο. Πλήθος ρωμαίων προσφύγων ἀπὸ τὴν περιοχὴ τοῦ Δούναβη, τὴν Παννονία, τὴ Δακία, τὴ Δαρδανία καὶ ἄλλες ἐπαρχίες²⁷ ζήτησαν προστασία ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ τεῖχη καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν οὐράνιον προστάτη τῆς πόλης, τὸν ἅγιο Δημήτριον. Πέντε φορὲς πολιορκήθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς Σλάβους καὶ τοὺς Ἀβάρους ἡ Θεσσαλονίκη, ἐπανειλημμένα προσβλήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ λοιμὸ καὶ τὴν πείνα, ἀλλὰ κατάφερε νὰ ἐπιβιώσει —ἓνας μικρὸς βυζαντινὸς θύλακας περιτριγυρισμένος ἀπὸ ἓναν ξένο καὶ συχνὰ ἐχθρικό πληθυσμό. Οἱ χερσαῖες ἐπικοινωνίες μὲ τὴν πρωτεύουσα εἶχαν διακοπεῖ: τὸ 698 ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Ἰουστινιανὸς Β' χρειάστηκε νὰ φτάσει στὴ Θεσσαλονικὴ πολεμῶντας.²⁸ Δυστυχῶς δὲν διαθέτουμε πληροφορίες γιὰ τὴν κατάστασις πολεμῶντας.²⁸ Δυστυχῶς ἀπὸ τὰ λίγα κείμενα ποὺ ὑπάρχει τῆς πόλης αὐτὴ τὴν ἐποχὴ. Ἄν κρίνουμε ἀπὸ τὰ λίγα κείμενα ποὺ ὑπάρχουν, οἱ κάτοικοι ζοῦσαν ζωὴ ἡμιαγροτική, μιὰ καὶ σὲ κάποια περίπτωσις ἀναφέρεται ὅτι οἱ ἐπιτιθέμενοι Ἀβάροι καὶ Σλάβοι αἰφνιδίασαν πολλοὺς ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς ποὺ καλλιεργοῦσαν τὰ χωράφια τους ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ τεῖχη. Στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 9ου αἰώνα ὁ κληρικὸς ποὺ εἶχε ἀναλάβει τίς φιλαν-

θρωπικές δωρεές προς τους φτωχούς έλαβε ως προσφορά τρεις χοίρους — πράγμα που κάθε άλλο παρά ανεπτυγμένη αστική οικονομία δείχνει.²⁹ Ανατολικά τής Θεσσαλονίκης ή πόλη των Φιλίππων φαίνεται ότι είχε εγκαταλειφθεί: δεν υπάρχει πάντως μαρτυρία κάποιας δραστηριότητας εκεί μέχρι το δεύτερο μισό του 10ου αιώνα.

Η τύχη των πόλεων τής Μικράς Ασίας έχει ιδιαίτερη σημασία για την έρευνά μας. Έχει αντιμετωπιστεί με δυσπιστία ή πληροφορία του άραβα γεωγράφου Ibn-Khordādhbeh (περί το 840) ότι στην εποχή του υπήρχαν μόνο πέντε πόλεις στη Μικρά Ασία, δηλαδή ή Έφεσος, ή Νίκαια, το Αμόριο, ή Αγκυρα και τα Σάμαλα(;), καθώς και σημαντικός αριθμός φρουρίων,³⁰ τώρα όμως είμαστε σε θέση να πούμε ότι πιθανόν δεν απέιχε πολύ από την αλήθεια. Ας δούμε μερικά παραδείγματα. Στη Βιθυνία, την πύλο κοντινή στην Κωνσταντινούπολη ασιατική έπαρχία, μόνο ή Νίκαια φαίνεται ότι επέζησε. Η Νικομήδεια, που κάποτε υπήρξε αυτοκρατορική πρωτεύουσα, κειτόταν σε έρείπια τον 9ο αιώνα. Η Κύζικος, πρωτεύουσα τής έπαρχίας Έλλησπόντου και μεγάλη πόλη στην αυτοκρατορική ρωμαϊκή περίοδο, μισοκαταστράφηκε από σεισμό το 543 και έπαψε να υπάρχει μέσα στον 7ο αιώνα. Τα επιβλητικά της έρείπια χρησιμοποιήθηκαν ως λατομείο σε όλη τή διάρκεια του Μεσαίωνα, ενώ ένας μικρός οικισμός δημιουργήθηκε στην Αρτάκη (Erdek) στη δυτική πλευρά τής χερσονήσου τής Κυζίκου.

Για τή δυτική Μικρά Ασία οι αρχαιολογικές μαρτυρίες είναι σχετικά άφθονες. Η Έφεσος, που τήν αναφέρει ο Ibn-Khordādhbeh, πράγματι επέζησε, αλλά με πολύ μειωμένη τήν έκτασή της. Το αρχαίο κέντρο τής πόλης εγκαταλείφθηκε, ίσως τήν εποχή τής περσικής εισβολής, στις αρχές του 7ου αιώνα, και φτιάχτηκε μια καινούρια πόλη που περιέκλειε μια τετράγωνη έκταση, με πλευρά περίπου έννιακόσια μέτρα, ανάμεσα στο λιμάνι και στην κορυφή του λόφου Panayirdağ [άρχ. Πίονος, βυζαντ. Χειλητών]. Σε κάποια απόσταση στα ανατολικά υπώθηκε ένα ξεχωριστό φρούριο, με κέντρο τή βασιλική του Αγίου Ιωάννου του Θεολόγου. Αναφέρεται ότι στο τέλος του 8ου αιώνα το έμπορικό πανηγύρι τής Έφesus απέδιδε φόρο ένατό λίτρες χρυσοῦ,³¹ πράγμα που, αν αληθεύει, δείχνει σημαντικές έμπορικές συναλλαγές. Οι ανασκαφές όμως βρήκαν πολύ μικρές ένδειξεις οικοδομικής δράσης, έκτος από μια μικρή εκκλησία που αντικατέστησε τήν παλιότερη και πολύ μεγαλύτερη βασιλική τής Παναγίας. Στις Σάρδεις, τήν πρωτεύουσα τής Λυδίας, ή αλλαγή υπήρξε ακόμη πύλο έντυπωσιακή. Πιθανόν έξαιτίας των περσικών εισβολών ή κάτω πόλη ουσιαστικά εγκαταλείφθηκε, και μόνο το φρούριο στην κορυφή του λό-

φου έξακολούθησε να υπάρχει στο Μεσαίωνα. Στη Μίλητο, ή μεσαιωνική πόλη ήταν λιγότερο από το ένα τέταρτο τής αρχαίας. Στην Πέργαμο ή καταστροφή επήλθε τον 7ο αιώνα και, όπως στις Σάρδεις, μόνο ή ακρόπολη επέζησε ως όχυρό. Για τήν τύχη τής Σμύρνης δεν γνωρίζουμε τίποτε το συγκεκριμένο, αλλά στη Μαγνησία, στην κοιλάδα του Μαιάνδρου, ή μεσαιωνική πόλη κάλυπτε ένα ελάχιστο μέρος τής αρχαίας, μια έκταση περίπου 300 επί 250 μέτρα. Άλλες πόλεις που έχουν έρευνηθεί, όπως ή Νύσα και ή Λαοδικαία, παρουσιάζουν ουσιαστικά τήν ίδια εικόνα, ενώ οι Κολοσσές εγκαταλείφθηκαν και μετακινήθηκαν στις Χώνες, ένα φρούριο διάσημο για το ιερό του αρχαγγέλου Μιχαήλ.

Για το έσωτερικό τής Μικράς Ασίας γνωρίζουμε πολύ λιγότερα. Το Αμόριο στη Φρυγία θεωρούνταν τον 8ο και τον 9ο αιώνα σπουδαία σημασία κέντρο, και προκλήθηκε μεγάλη αγανάκτηση όταν καταλήφθηκε από τους Άραβες το 838, όπότε λέγεται ότι χάθηκαν 30.000 ζωές και πολλές χιλιάδες αιχμαλωτίστηκαν. Δυστυχώς το Αμόριο δεν έχει έρευνηθεί ποτέ, αλλά τα έρείπιά του φαίνονται ακόμη και δείχνουν ότι ήταν μάλλον μικρή πόλη. Στην Αγκυρα ή κάτω πόλη φαίνεται ότι εγκαταλείφθηκε μετά τή λεηλασία της από τους Πέρσες γύρω στο 622, και μόνο το φρούριο στην κορυφή του λόφου επέζησε. Αυτό το τελευταίο όχυρώθηκε ισχυρά με διπλό περίβολο, έναν έσωτερικό, με διαστάσεις μόλις 350 επί 150 μέτρα, και έναν έξωτερικό, περίπου 500 επί 300 μέτρα. Αυτό θεωρούνταν ή «πόλη» τής Αγκυρας, καθώς μαρτυρεί ή έπιγραφή που τοποθετήθηκε πάνω από τήν πύλη του φρουρίου από τον αυτοκράτορα Μιχαήλ Γ' γύρω στο 859: *οί εισιδόντες τήν πύλην και τήν πόλιν...*³²

Ένα ακόμη στοιχείο πρέπει να αναφερθεί σχετικά με αυτό το θέμα, γιατί έδωσε σε μερικούς ιστορικούς το κλειδί για να αντιληφθούν τή μεγάλη παρακμή των βυζαντινών πόλεων: πρόκειται για τήν απότομη πτώση του αριθμού των χάλκινων νομισμάτων που κυκλοφορούσαν. Στις περιοχές που έχουν ανασκαφεί συστηματικά, όπως στην Αθήνα, τήν Κόρινθο, τις Σάρδεις και άλλοῦ, έχει βεβαιωθεί ότι τα χάλκινα νομίσματα, τα «ψιλά» που χρησιμοποιούνταν για τις καθημερινές συναλλαγές, ήταν άφθονα σε όλο τον 6ο αιώνα και (ανάλογα με τις τοπικές συνθήκες) ένα μέρος του 7ου. Στη συνέχεια σχεδόν εξαφανίστηκαν, έπειτα άρχισαν σιγά σιγά να αυξάνονται τον 9ο αιώνα, και δεν έγιναν πάλι άφθονα παρά μόνο στο τέλος του 10ου αιώνα. Στις Σάρδεις, λόγω χάρη, για τήν περίοδο από το 491 μέχρι το 616 μ.Χ. υπάρχουν 1011 χάλκινα νομίσματα, για το υπόλοιπο του 7ου αιώνα περίπου 90, ενώ για τον 8ο και τον 9ο αιώνα μαζί δεν είναι περισσότερα από 9.³³ Τηρουμένων των αναλογιών, παρό-

μοια αποτελέσματα έχουμε σχεδόν από όλες τις έπαρχιακές πόλεις του Βυζαντίου. Φαίνεται ότι μόνο στην Κωνσταντινούπολη ή ελάττωση του αριθμού των χάλκινων νομισμάτων δεν υπήρξε τόσο καταστροφική. Είναι επίσης γνωστό ότι, στις περιοχές που βρίσκονταν υπό βυζαντινό έλεγχο, τα έπαρχιακά νομισματοκοπεία έπαψαν να λειτουργούν: στη Νικομήδεια μετά το 627, στην Κύζικο και τη Θεσσαλονίκη μετά το 629. Στη Χερσόνα δεν φαίνεται να κόπηκαν καθόλου νομίσματα ανάμεσα στις αρχές του 7ου και το δεύτερο μισό του 9ου αιώνα.

Βέβαια είναι γνωστό ότι η αυτοκρατορική κυβέρνηση δεν έπαψε ποτέ να κόβει νομίσματα χρυσά, αργυρά και χάλκινα, και συμβαίνει επίσης να γνωρίζουμε ότι κατά τη διάρκεια των σκοτεινών αιώνων ο στρατός έξακολουθούσε να πληρώνεται με χρυσάφι και κάθε στρατιώτης έπαιρνε 12 με 18 νομίσματα το χρόνο. Όμως το σημαντικό εδώ είναι πώς οι στρατιώτες πληρώνονταν μόνο μία φορά κάθε τρία χρόνια, και καμιά φορά κάθε τέσσερα, πέντε ή έξι.³⁴ Είναι δύσκολο συνεπώς να αντιληφθούμε πώς αντιμετώπιζαν οι στρατιώτες τα καθημερινά τους έξοδα από νομισματική άποψη. Γενικότερα, η ύπαρξη άστικης οικονομίας είναι άδιανόητη χωρίς την κυκλοφορία χάλκινων νομισμάτων σε ικανοποιητικές ποσότητες και, με βάση τις παραπάνω σκέψεις, δεν μπορούμε παρά να συμπεράνουμε πώς οι έκρηματισμένες συναλλαγές περιορίστηκαν στο ελάχιστο και πιθανόν αντικαταστάθηκαν από κάποια μορφή ανταλλαγών.

Αν η Πρώιμη βυζαντινή αυτοκρατορία ήταν ένα σύνολο πόλεων, ή Μέση βυζαντινή αυτοκρατορία μπορεί να χαρακτηριστεί ως ένα σύνολο κάστρων. Ακόμη και στον καθημερινό λόγο ή λέξη πόλις περιοριζόταν όλο και περισσότερο στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, ενώ ένα μέρος όπως ή Αγκυρα ή ή Έφεσος θα όνομαζόταν κάστρον. Συμβαίνει οι περισσότερες αρχαίες πόλεις στη Μικρά Άσία και στην Ελλάδα να είναι χτισμένες γύρω από ένα όχυρο που βρισκόταν σε λόφο. Στις περιπτώσεις αυτές, όπως συνέβη επανειλημμένα, ο οικισμός περιοριζόταν στο κάστρο, που γινόταν ή έδρα όποιος διοικητικής ή εκκλησιαστικής εξουσίας βρισκόταν εκεί. Το κάστρο παρείχε προσωρινό καταφύγιο σε καιρό έχθρικών επιδρομών, αλλά ήταν πολύ στενόχωρο και συχνά πολύ δυσπρόσιτο για να μπορέσει να γίνει κέντρο άστικης ζωής. Οι πόλεις που βρίσκονταν σε πεδινό έδαφος συχνά εγκαταλείπονταν· μια από τις λίγες εξαιρέσεις υπήρξε ή Νίκαια, επειδή βρισκόταν πολύ μακριά από τα έχθρικά έδαφη. Άλλο, όπως στη Θεσσαλονίκη, δεν υπήρχε δυνατότητα να υποχωρήσουν προς την άκρόπολη χωρίς ταυτόχρονα να χάσουν την πρόσβασή τους προς το λιμάνι, κι έτσι ο περίβολος των παλιών τειχών έπρεπε να διατηρηθεί, ακόμη και

αν ήταν πολύ πιο έκτεταμένος από όσο απαιτούσαν οι ανάγκες της εποχής.

Αν ή άστική ζωή συνεχίστηκε σε κάποιο μέρος της αυτοκρατορίας, αυτό ήταν σίγουρα ή Κωνσταντινούπολη. «Ω, να είσαι στην Πόλη!» αναφωνούσαν όλοι οι καλλιεργημένοι Βυζαντινοί, που για τον ένα ή τον άλλο λόγο βρίσκονταν στις έπαρχίες. Ο Νικηφόρος Ούρανός, διοικητής της Αντιόχειας γύρω στο έτος 1000, θα προτιμούσε να δει έστω και από μακριά τον καπνό της Κωνσταντινούπολης παρά να περάσει όλη του τη ζωή με την Καλυψώ.³⁵ Ω γη Βυζαντίς, ω πόλις τρισολβία, οφθαλμέ της γης, κόσμω της οικουμένης, τηλαυγές άστρον, του κάτω κόσμου λύχνε, εν σοι γενοίμην, κατατροφήσαιμί σου· σὺ και περιθάλλοις με και διεξάγοις, και μητρικῶν σῶν ἀγκαλιῶν μὴ χωρίσαις. Έτσι αναστέναζε τον 12ο αιώνα ένας συγγραφέας Βυζαντινός, που βρισκόταν κατανάγκη μακριά σε διπλωματική αποστολή.³⁶

Ας στρέψουμε λοιπόν την προσοχή μας στην πρωτεύουσα και ας εξετάσουμε με συντομία την ανάπτυξή της. Δυστυχώς οι αρχαιολογικές πληροφορίες είναι ακόμη μάλλον λιγοστές, διαθέτουμε όμως έναν μεγάλο όγκο φιλολογικού υλικού, με τη βοήθεια του όποιου είναι δυνατό να αναπαραστήσουμε την όψη της πόλης.

Η φυσιογνωμία της Κωνσταντινούπολης καθορίστηκε από την ιδρυτική της πράξη. Από την άποψη αυτή έμοιαζε με άλλες πρωτεύουσες που δημιουργήθηκαν με την άσκηση αυθαίρετης εξουσίας, όπως ή Πετρούπολη, ή Αγκυρα ή ή Μπραζιλια· όμως ή Κωνσταντινούπολη δεν χτίστηκε έντελώς εκ του μηδενός. Όταν ο Κωνσταντίνος, αφού εξέτασε άλλες πιθανές περιοχές, αποφάσισε να όρίσει ως τόπο διαμονής του το Βυζάντιο (324), είχε μπροστά του μια αρκετά μεγάλη πόλη, που έκτεινόταν πάνω κάτω από την περιοχή του Σεραγιοῦ μέχρι τη σημερινή γέφυρα του Γαλατᾶ. Το Βυζάντιο είχε χιλίων χρόνων ζωή πριν από τον Κωνσταντίνο, αλλά το ελληνικό του παρελθόν γρήγορα ξεχάστηκε, εκτός από κάποιους άσαφείς μύθους για τον επώνυμο ήρωά του, τον Βύζαντα, και τη σύζυγό του Φιδάλεια, για την Ίω που μεταμορφώθηκε σε αγελάδα και πέρασε κολυμπώντας τον Βόσπορο για να ξεφύγει από τον οίστρο που την κυνηγούσε. Η όψη της πόλης το 324 φαίνεται ότι όφειλε λιγότερα στους αρχαίους Μεγαρείς και περισσότερα στη γενναιοδωρία των αυτοκρατόρων Σεπτιμίου Σεβήρου και Καρακάλλα. Το κέντρο της πόλης βρισκόταν γύρω από μια αγορά, που σήμερα αντιστοιχεί στον ανοιχτό χώρο μπροστά στην Αγία Σοφία. Έδώ οι Ρωμαίοι έχτισαν έναν ίππόδρομο και τα δημόσια λουτρά του Ζευξίππου, ενώ μια πλατιά όδός που περιστοιχιζόταν από κιονοστοιχίες έκτεινόταν από την αγορά με κατεύθυνση δυτικά προς

τὴν πύλη τῆς πόλης. Ἡ πόλη διέθετε ἐπίσης δύο ὀχυρωμένα λιμάνια στὴν πλευρὰ πρὸς τὸν Κεράτιο Κόλπο, ἓνα θέατρο, ἓνα ἀμφιθέατρο καὶ κάμπους ναοὺς. Οἱ ἀρχιτέκτονες τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου χάραξαν τὴν καινούρια πόλη πάνω στὴν παλιά. Ὁ ἀστικός χώρος ἐπεκτάθηκε στὰ ἐπτακόσια περίπου ἐκτάρια (ἀντίστοιχος σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς μὲ τὴν ἔκταση ποὺ καταλάμβανε ἡ Ἀντιόχεια) καὶ κλεινόταν ἀπὸ τὴν ξηρὰ μὲ τείχος. Τὸ παλιὸ κέντρο διατηρήθηκε, ὁ ἵππόδρομος ἐπεκτάθηκε, καὶ δίπλα σ' αὐτόν, σὲ μιὰ περιοχὴ ποὺ κατέβαινε πρὸς τὴν Προποντίδα, χτίστηκε ἓνα ἀχανὲς αὐτοκρατορικὸ ἀνάκτορο, στὸ ὁποῖο ἔμελλε νὰ ζήσουν οἱ βυζαντινοὶ αὐτοκράτορες τοὺς ἐπόμενους ὀκτῶ αἰῶνες. Ἡ παλιὰ ὁδὸς μὲ τὶς κιονοστοιχίες ἐπεκτάθηκε πρὸς τὰ δυτικὰ καὶ ἔγινε ἡ κύρια ἀρτηρία τῆς πόλης (ἡ Μέση), μὲ δημόσιους χώρους κατὰ διαστήματα. Ὁ πιὸ σημαντικὸς ἦταν μιὰ κυκλικὴ ἀγορὰ, στὸ κέντρο τῆς ὁποίας στήθηκε μιὰ κολόνα ἀπὸ πορφύριτη καὶ ἐπάνω της τὸ ἄγαλμα τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου μὲ τὴ μορφή τοῦ θεοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα Ἡλίου. Ἐδῶ ἐπίσης βρισκόνταν ἓνα οἶκημα τῆς συγκλήτου, δύο ἀψίδες καὶ ἓνα μνημειῶδες συντριβάνι. Πολλὰ ἀρχαῖα ἀγάλματα ποὺ εἶχαν ἀφαιρεθεῖ ἀπὸ πόλεις τῶν ἀνατολικῶν ἐπαρχιῶν στόλιζαν ἐπίσης τοὺς δρόμους καὶ τὶς πλατεῖες. Ἀντίθετα σὲ ὅ,τι πιστεύεται συνήθως, ὁ Κωνσταντίνος τόνισε πολὺ λίγο στὸ οἰκοδομικὸ του πρόγραμμα τὴ χριστιανικὴ θρησκεία, στὴν ὁποία εἶχε πρόσφατα προσχωρήσει. Ἡ μεταγενέστερη παράδοση ἀπέδωσε σ' αὐτὸν πολλὰς ἐκκλησίες, λίγες ὅμως μποροῦν νὰ διεκδικήσουν αὐτὴ τὴν τιμὴ: ἴσως ἡ ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἀγίας Εἰρήνης (ποὺ σώζεται ἀκόμη ὅπως ἀνακαινίστηκε τὸν 6ο καὶ τὸν 8ο αἰῶνα), ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ ντόπιου μάρτυρα Ἀκακίου, σχεδὸν σίγουρα ἡ ἐκκλησία τῶν Ἀγίων Ἀποστόλων, ποὺ ἐπρόκειτο νὰ χρησιμοποιηθεῖ ὡς μαυσωλεῖο τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου καὶ τῶν διαδόχων του. Ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὰ δημόσια μνημεῖα της, ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη πιθανῶς ἔμοιαζε μὲ τὶς ἄλλες αὐτοκρατορικὲς πρωτεύουσες τῆς περιόδου τῆς Τετραρχίας, ὅπως ἦταν οἱ Τρεβῆροι (Trier), τὸ Σίρμιο, ἡ Θεσσαλονίκη ἢ ἡ Νικομήδεια.

Στὶς δεκαετίες ποὺ ἀκολούθησαν τὰ ἐγκαίνια της (330) ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη ἀναπτύχθηκε ἐξαιρετικά. Ἡ δωρεὰν διανομὴ ἄρτων, οἱ προοπτικὲς ἐργασίας καὶ ἡ παρουσία τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς αὐτῆς προσέλκυαν πλῆθη νέων κατοίκων. Τὸ 359 ἡ πόλη εἶχε ἀναπτυχθεῖ ἀρκετὰ ὥστε νὰ εἶναι ἄξια νὰ ἔχει ἓναν ἐπαρχο, ὅπως καὶ ἡ Ρώμη. Ἡ παροχὴ πόσιμου νεροῦ χρειάστηκε νὰ αὐξηθεῖ. Μὲ ἔδρα τὸ ναὸ τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας (ποὺ ὀλοκληρώθηκε τὸ 360) ὁ ἐπίσκοπος τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης ἄρχισε νὰ ξεπερνᾷ σὲ ἐπιρροὴ καὶ πλοῦτο τοὺς προκαθημένους τῶν ἀρχαιότερων ἀποστολικῶν ἐπισκοπῶν. Ὁ Θεοδόσιος Α' καὶ οἱ διάδοχοί του ἀνέλαβαν ἓνα ἐκτε-

ταμένο οἰκοδομικὸ πρόγραμμα: ἓνα καινούριο μεγάλο λιμάνι, ποὺ πρέπει νὰ αὐξήσε σημαντικὰ τὸ ἐμπορικὸ δυναμικὸ τῆς πόλης, καινούριες ἀποθήκες, τὶς ἀγορὲς (fora, φόροι) τοῦ Θεοδοσίου καὶ τοῦ Ἀρκαδίου καὶ μεγαλοπρεπὴ μνημεῖα. Οἱ κυρίως τῆς δυναστείας ποὺ βασιλεύεε συναγωνίζονταν μεταξύ τους ποῖα θὰ ἀποκοῦσε τὰ καλύτερα οἰκόπεδα καὶ θὰ ἔχτιζε τὶς ἀρχοντικότερες κατοικίες. Τὸ 413 ὁ ὀχυρωμένος περίβολος διευρύνθηκε καὶ πάλι μὲ τὴν κατασκευὴ τῶν διπλῶν χερσαίων τειχῶν, ποὺ ἔκαναν τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη ἓνα ὄχυρὸ μὲ ἀσύγκριτη δύναμη. Ὁ διαθέσιμος ἀστικός χώρος αὐξήθηκε στὰ 1.400 ἐκτάρια περίπου καὶ ὁ πληθυσμὸς ἴσως στὶς 300-400 χιλιάδες. Ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη ἦταν τὴν ὥρᾳ μεγαλύτερη ἀπὸ τὴν παρακαμάζουσα Ρώμη, μεγαλύτερη ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια ἢ τὴν Ἀντιόχεια.

Ὅρισμένες στατιστικὲς πληροφορίες γιὰ τὴν πόλη στὸ δεύτερο τέταρτο τοῦ 5ου αἰῶνα μᾶς παρέχει ἓνα σύντομο ἔργο γραμμένο στὰ λατινικά, γνωστὸ ὡς *Notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae*,³⁷ ποὺ περιγράφει τὶς δεκατέσσερις συνοικίες στὶς ὁποῖες, ὅπως ἡ Ρώμη, εἶχε χωριστεῖ καὶ ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη. Νὰ μερικοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς ποὺ μᾶς δίνει: 5 αὐτοκρατορικὰ καὶ 9 πριγκιπικὰ ἀνάκτορα· 8 δημόσια καὶ 153 ἰδιωτικὰ λουτρά· 4 ἀγορὲς· 5 σιταποθήκες· 2 θέατρα ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν ἵππόδρομο· 322 ὁδοὶ· 4.388 ἀρχοντικὰ σπίτια (domus)· 52 στοές· 20 δημόσιοι καὶ 120 ἰδιωτικοὶ φούρνοι· 14 ἐκκλησίες. Ἡ διοίκηση καὶ ἡ ἀστυνόμευση τῆς πόλης διεξάγονταν, ὑπὸ τὸν ἔλεγχο τοῦ ἐπάρχου, ἀπὸ 13 γειτονιάρχες (curatores, ἓνας γιὰ κάθε συνοικία), 65 νυχτοφύλακες, 560 πυροσβέστες καὶ διάφορους ἄλλους. Συνολικὰ ἡ ὑπηρεσία τοῦ ἐπάρχου πρέπει νὰ διέθετε κάπου χίλιους ὑπαλλήλους. Μολοντί ἡ συγγραφὴ τῆς *Notitia* πραγματοποιήθηκε μετὰ τὴν κατασκευὴ τῶν θεοδοσιανῶν χερσαίων τειχῶν, ὥστος ὅσο ἀναφέρεται μόνο στὴν κωνσταντινεία πόλη καὶ τὰ δύο προάστια, δηλαδὴ τὶς Συκὲς (Γαλατὰς) καὶ τὴ δέκατη τέταρτη συνοικία, ποὺ βρισκόταν στὸ μυχὸ τοῦ Κεράτιου Κόλπου (ἴσως κοντὰ στὸ σημερινὸ Eyüp). Ἡ τεράστια ζώνη ἀνάμεσα στὸ κωνσταντινέιο τείχος, ποὺ δὲν κατεδαφίστηκε, καὶ τὸ θεοδοσιανὸ προφανῶς δὲν θεωροῦνταν ἀστικός χώρος καὶ παρέμεινε ἀραιοκατοικημένη σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τοῦ Μεσαίωνα. Ἐδῶ βρισκόνταν ἐκτεταμένα νεκροταφεῖα· ἐδῶ ἐπίσης εἶχαν ἰδρυθεῖ μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ πιὸ παλιὰ μοναστήρια. Ἰσως στὴν πραγματικότητα ἡ κατασκευὴ τοῦ θεοδοσιανοῦ τείχους δὲν ὑπαγορεύτηκε τόσο ἀπὸ τὴν αὐξηση τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ ὅσο ἀπὸ ἀμυντικὸς λόγους καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνάγκη νὰ περικλειστοῦν τεράστιες δεξαμενὲς μὲ ἀποθέματα νεροῦ μέσα στὴν ὀχυρωμένη περιοχὴ.

Ἡ ταχύτατη ἀνάπτυξη τῆς πρωτεύουσας τὸν 4ο καὶ τὸν 5ο αἰῶνα πρέ-

πει να δημιουργήσει δεξιάτα προβλήματα ανεφοδιασμού. "Όπως ήδη σημειώσαμε, η γεωργία στην αρχαιότητα δεν ήταν συνήθως ρυθμισμένη για να παράγει αρκετό πλεόνασμα ώστε να ικανοποιούνται οι ανάγκες ενός τόσο άχρόταγου καταναλωτή όπως μια καινούρια πόλη με κάπου τριακόσιες χιλιάδες στόματα. Η γειτονική Θράκη παρήγγε αρκετές ποσότητες σιταριού και λαχανικών, αλλά αυτά ήταν σταγόνα στον ωκεανό. Έπιπλέον η Θράκη μαστιζόταν συνεχώς από βαρβαρικές επιδρομές, κίνδυνο που η κυβέρνηση προσπάθησε να εξουδετερώσει με την κατασκευή, κάπου μέσα στον 5ο αιώνα, των Μακρών Τειχών, τα οποία διέγραφαν ένα τεράστιο τόξο, περίπου από τη Σηλυμβρία στην Προποντίδα μέχρι τον Εύξεινο Πόντο, σε απόσταση σχεδόν εξήντα πέντε χιλιομέτρων από την πρωτεύουσα. Οι δυτικές ακτές της Μικράς Ασίας έπρεπε να θρέψουν τις δικές τους ιδιαίτερα πολυάνθρωπες πόλεις. Η μόνη χώρα που ήταν σε θέση να εφοδιάσει την Κωνσταντινούπολη με σιτάρι ήταν η Αίγυπτος. "Ηδη από την εποχή του Κωνσταντίνου η αιγυπτιακή παραγωγή άρχισε να μεταφέρεται στη νέα πρωτεύουσα, αντί για τη Ρώμη, και αποτέλεσε τη βάση της άπνωσης, δηλαδή της δωρεάν διανομής άρτων. Η ποσότητα που αποστέλλοταν ήταν αρχικά ογδόντα χιλιάδες ημερήσιες μερίδες, πράγμα που σημαίνει τουλάχιστο διπλάσιο πληθυσμό. Την εποχή του Ίουστινιανού η συνεισφορά της Αιγύπτου είχε αυξηθεί σε οκτώ εκατομμύρια άρτάβες (μέτρο που αντιστοιχούσε σε τρεις μοδίους ή περίπου 38 κιλά), ποσότητα αρκετή για να θρέψει πληθυσμό μισού εκατομμυρίου. Δεν είναι εδώ ο κατάλληλος τόπος να συζητηθούν τα πολλά προβλήματα που μάς θέτουν οι αριθμοί αυτοί, αλλά είναι σημαντικό να επισημανθεί η πολυπλοκότητα και η εύθραυστη ισορροπία του συστήματος. Η αιγυπτιακή σοδειά εξαρτιόταν πρώτα απ' όλα από την ετήσια πλημμύρα του Νείλου. Η παραγωγή έπρεπε να συγκεντρωθεί, να μετρηθεί από κυβερνητικούς έλεγκτές και να μεταφερθεί στις σιταποθήκες της Αλεξάνδρειας όχι αργότερα από τις 10 Σεπτεμβρίου κάθε χρόνου. Από την Αλεξάνδρεια το «εύτυχες φορτίο», όπως ονομαζόταν, φορτωνόταν στα πλοία για την Κωνσταντινούπολη. Έπρεπε να ληφθούν υπόψη οι κίνδυνοι της θάλασσας, ιδιαίτερα το πέρασμα των Δαρδανελίων αν τύχαινε να πνέει αντίθετος άνεμος. Για να προφυλαχθούν από αυτό το δυσάρεστο ένδεχόμενο είχαν χτίσει τεράστιες σιταποθήκες στην Τένεδο, όπου το σιτάρι ξεφορτωνόταν και αποθηκεύονταν, όπως γινόταν στην Όστια για τον ανεφοδιασμό της Ρώμης. Αν η αιγυπτιακή σοδειά δεν ήταν αρκετή, ή αν κάποιο άλλο τμήμα του μηχανισμού δεν λειτουργούσε σωστά, ο λαός της Κωνσταντινούπολης κινδύνευε να πεινάσει και έπρεπε να ληφθούν μέτρα έκτακτης ανάγκης. Το 409 έ-

πεσε σιτοδεία που προκάλεσε αίματηρές εξεγέρσεις και οδήγησε στην αναδιοργάνωση του τρόπου μεταφοράς. Σε μια άλλη περίπτωση χρειάστηκε να γίνει αναγκαστική επίταξη της σοδειάς σε τεχνητά χαμηλές τιμές στις περιοχές της Θράκης, Βιθυνίας και Φρυγίας, και καθώς δεν υπήρχε οργανωμένο σύστημα μεταφοράς από αυτά τα μέρη οι ίδιοι οι παραγωγοί φορτώθηκαν το πρόσθετο βάρος της μεταφοράς του καρπού τους στην πρωτεύουσα.³⁸ Αν λογαριάσουμε πόσα πράγματα μπορούσαν να πάνε στραβά, ο ανεφοδιασμός της Κωνσταντινούπολης σε γενικές γραμμές λειτουργούσε με αξιολόγη αποτελεσματικότητα, ενώ η κυβέρνηση του έδινε πάντα απόλυτη προτεραιότητα. Είναι ωστόσο φανερό πως η ίδια η ύπαρξη της Κωνσταντινούπολης ως μεγαλούπολης εξαρτιόταν από την όμαλη λειτουργία ενός δικτύου θαλάσσιων μεταφορών.

Είναι δύσκολο να προσδιοριστεί, έστω και κατά προσέγγιση, η εποχή που ο πληθυσμός της Κωνσταντινούπολης έφτασε στο απόγειό του. Ίσως αυτό να συνέβη γύρω στο έτος 500. Από την εποχή αυτή και μετά ακούμε όλο και λιγότερο για κατασκευές μεγάλων δημόσιων έργων, και όλο και περισσότερο για ίδρυση εκκλησιών. Ο Ίουστινιανός φυσικά ανήγειρε πολυάριθμα οικοδομήματα, αλλά οι προσπάθειές του στράφηκαν κυρίως στον εκκλησιαστικό και αυτοκρατορικό τομέα. Οι συνθήκες στην πρωτεύουσα ίσως είχαν ήδη πάρει την κατιούσα όταν ο λοιμός του 542 προκάλεσε δραστηκή μείωση του πληθυσμού. Δεν έχουμε λόγους να υποθέσουμε ότι οι απώλειες αναπληρώθηκαν. Η επιδημία, όπως είδαμε, εξακολούθησε να επανέρχεται κατά διαστήματα σε όλη τη διάρκεια του αιώνα, ενώ και άλλες συμφορές βρίσκονταν καθ' όδόν. Το 619, μετά την κατάκτηση της Αλεξάνδρειας από τους Πέρσες, οι εισαγωγές αιγυπτιακού σιταριού σταμάτησαν. Το ότι η Κωνσταντινούπολη μπόρεσε να βρει άλλες πηγές ανεφοδιασμού οφείλεται ασφαλώς στο ότι είχε πολύ λιγότερα στόματα να θρέψει. Την ίδια εποχή αναφέρεται κι άλλος λοιμός. Το 626 η πόλη πολιορκήθηκε (και παραλίγο να καταληφθεί) από τους Άβάρους, που λεηλάτησαν συστηματικά τη Θράκη, περιορίζοντας έτσι ακόμη περισσότερο τις διαθέσιμες πηγές τροφίμων. Από το 674 ως το 678 η Κωνσταντινούπολη αποκλείστηκε από τους Άραβες. Το 698 ξέσπασε πάλι λοιμός. Το 714-5, εν αναμονή νέας αραβικής επίθεσης, ο αυτοκράτορας Αναστάσιος Β' έδιωξε από την πόλη όσους δεν μπορούσαν να αποθηκεύσουν ποσότητα τροφίμων αρκετή για τρία χρόνια —και προφανώς οι περισσότεροι δεν θα μπορούσαν. Το 717-8 έγινε η δεύτερη αραβική πολιορκία και νέα λεηλασία της Θράκης. Το 747 ξέσπασε πανώλη με τέτοια ασυνήθιστη οξύτητα που η πόλη έμεινε, όπως αναφέρει μια πηγή, «σε-

δὸν ἀκατοίκητη».³⁹ «Ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἐξαιρετικῆς ἀνάγκης», γράφει ἓνας χρονογράφος, «ἐπινοήθηκε ἓνας τρόπος νὰ τοποθετοῦν πάνω σὲ σαμαρωμένα ζῶα σανίδες σὰν τετράγωνα πανέρια καὶ ἔτσι νὰ μεταφέρουν τοὺς νεκροὺς, ἢ νὰ τοὺς στοιβάξουν τὸν ἓνα πάνω στὸν ἄλλο σὲ κάρα. Ὅταν γέμισαν ὅλα τὰ νεκροταφεῖα τῆς πόλης καὶ τῶν προαστίων, καθὼς καὶ οἱ ἄδειες δεξαμενὲς καὶ οἱ λάκκοι, καὶ πολλὰ ἀμπέλια σκάφτηκαν, ἀκόμη καὶ πολλὰ περιβόλια μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ παλιὰ τείχη [δηλαδή τὰ τείχη τοῦ Κωνσταντινίου], τότε μόνο καλύφτηκαν οἱ ἀνάγκες».⁴⁰ Τὸ ἔτος 747 ἴσως ἀντιπροσωπεύει τὸ ναδὶρ στὴ μεσαιωνικὴ ἱστορία τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης.

Δὲν εἴμαστε σὲ θέση νὰ ἐξακριβώσουμε μὲ λεπτομέρειες τίς συνέπειες πού εἶχε αὐτὴ ἡ κάθετη πτώση στὴν καθημερινὴ ζωὴ τῆς πρωτεύουσας, ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ εἶναι γεγονός ὅτι σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα διατηρήθηκαν σὲ κάποιο βαθμὸ οἱ ἀστικές συνθήκες ζωῆς. Ἐνα παράξενο κείμενο, πού ὀνομάζεται *Τὰ θαύματα τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀρτεμίου* (γράφτηκε λίγο μετὰ τὸ 659), μᾶς παρέχει μιὰ ζωντανὴ ἂν καὶ ἀποσπασματικὴ εἰκόνα τῆς καθημερινῆς ζωῆς στὸ πρῶτο μισὸ τοῦ αἰώνα.⁴¹ Ὁ Ἀρτέμιος ἦταν ἓνας θεραπευτὴς ἅγιος ἀβέβαιης καταγωγῆς (εἶχε διατελέσει διοικητὴς τῆς Αἰγύπτου τὸ 360), ὁ ὁποῖος εἰδικευόταν στὴ θεραπεία τῶν ὄγκων, ἰδιαίτερα τῶν ὄγκων στὰ γεννητικὰ ὄργανα. Ἡ ἐκκλησία του βρισκόταν σὲ μιὰ ἐργατικὴ συνοικία, περίπου ἐκεῖ πού βρίσκεται σήμερα τὸ Μεγάλο Παζάρι, καὶ σύχναζαν σ' αὐτὴν ἀπλοὶ ἄνθρωποι. Ἡ θεραπεία ἐπερχόταν μέσα ἀπὸ μιὰ διαδικασία ἐγκοίμησης: οἱ ἀσθενεῖς κοιμοῦνταν στὴν ἐκκλησία ἢ στὰ βοηθητικὰ οἰκήματά της, καμιά φορὰ γιὰ ἀρκετοὺς μῆνες, μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα ὅτι θὰ τοὺς ἐπισκεφθεῖ ὁ ἅγιος σὲ κάποιο ὄνειρο ἢ ὄραμα. Ὑπῆρχε ἐπίσης μιὰ ὄργάνωση λαϊκῶν πού ἐπαιρναν μέρος σὲ ὄλονυχτιές καὶ πρόσφεραν χρήματα γιὰ κεριά, τὰ ὁποῖα συγκέντρωνε ἓνας ταμίας. Ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους πού ἀναφέρεται ὅτι θεραπεύτηκαν μὲ θαυματουργὸ τρόπο ἀρκετοὶ προέρχονταν ἀπὸ μακρινὲς περιοχές: συναντᾶμε ἓναν Ἀφρικανό, ἀρκετοὺς Ἀλεξανδρινούς, ἓνα ζευγάρι ἀπὸ τὴ Ρόδο καὶ ἓναν ἔμπορο ἀπὸ τὴ Χίο. Ἐνας ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἀλεξανδρινούς ἦταν φύλακας μιᾶς σιταποθήκης, καὶ μαθαίνουμε πὼς ἦταν ἀναγκασμένος νὰ μένει μέρα νύχτα στὴν ἀποθήκη, γι' αὐτὸ δὲν μπορούσε νὰ κοιμηθεῖ στὴν ἐκκλησία τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀρτεμίου. «Εἶμαι γέρος ἄνθρωπος», ἔλεγε στὸν ἅγιο, «καὶ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ ἐγκαταλείψω τὴν ἀποθήκη καὶ νὰ μείνω ἐδῶ κοντὰ σου. Γιατὶ ἂν φύγω θὰ βάλουν ἄλλον στὴ θέση μου καὶ θὰ χάσω καὶ τὴν κατοικία μου καὶ τὸ ψωμί μου». Κάποιος ἄλλος Ἀλεξανδρινὸς —αὐτὸ συνέβη στὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Ἡρακλείου— ἦταν ἐπαγγελματίας κωμικός, δηλαδή γελωτοποιὸς πού ἐργαζόταν στὸ σπίτι ἐνὸς πατρικίου, διότι, ὅπως μᾶς λέει, «οἱ

μεγαλόσχημοι ἀπολαμβάνουν τίς παραστάσεις». Τὰ προσόντα του ἦταν εὐστροφία πνεύματος καὶ ἀστεία προφορά, ὅπως εἶχαν ὅλοι οἱ Ἀλεξανδρινοί. Σὲ αὐτοὺς πού δὲν κατάγονταν ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη περιλαμβάνονταν κάποιος ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀμαστρον, ἓνας ἀπὸ τὴ Φρυγία καὶ ἓνας κίλικας χαλκουργός, πού ἀσκοῦσε τὸ ἐπάγγελμά του κοντὰ στὴν ἐκκλησία καὶ εἶχε, ὅπως ὅλοι οἱ συμπατριῶτες του, πολὺ δξύθυμο χαρακτήρα. Τὸ πιὸ μακρινὸ μέρος πού ἀναφέρει τὸ κείμενο εἶναι ἡ Γαλατία, ὅπου ταξίδεψε κάποιος ξυλουργός, δουλεύοντας ὡς τεχνίτης σ' ἓνα πλοῖο. Ἀνάμεσα στὰ ἐπαγγέλματα πού ἀναφέρονται στὰ *Θαύματα τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀρτεμίου* συναντᾶμε ναυτικούς, ἓναν κηροπλάστη πού κρατοῦσε τὸ ὑπαίθριο μαγαζὶ του ἀνοιχτὸ μέχρι ἀργὰ τὴ νύχτα, ἓναν κατασκευαστὴ τόξων, ἓνα βυρσοδέψη, ἓναν ἔμπορο κρασιῶν, μιὰ γυναίκα φύλακα τῶν λουτρῶν καὶ πολλοὺς ἀργυραμοιβοὺς ἢ τραπεζίτες, πού τὸ ἐπάγγελμά τους χαρακτηρίζεται ἀνέντιμο. Οἱ γιατροί, πού κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο βρίσκονταν σὲ ἀνταγωνισμό μὲ τὸν ἅγιο Ἀρτέμιο, ἐπικρίνονται ἐπίσης, καὶ ἀκοῦμε πὼς ζητοῦσαν ὀκτῶ μὲ δέκα χρυσὰ νομίσματα γιὰ νὰ ἀναλάβουν τὴ θεραπεία τοῦ παιδιοῦ μιᾶς φτωχῆς γυναίκας —ποσὸ πού ἰσοδυναμοῦσε μὲ τὸ ἐτήσιο εἰσόδημα ἐνὸς ἀνειδίκευτου ἐργάτη. Τὰ δημόσια λουτρὰ ἦταν βασικὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς καθημερινῆς ζωῆς καὶ σ' αὐτὰ σύχναζε, ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἄλλους, καὶ ἓνας διάκονος τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας. Αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος, πού εἶχε κάποια κοινωνικὴ θέση (δὲν ἦταν καὶ πολὺ πρόθυμος νὰ κοιμηθεῖ στὴν ἐκκλησία τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀρτεμίου), ἦταν ἐπίσης ὁ ἐπίσημος ποιητὴς τοῦ δήμου τῶν Βένετων μὲ ἄλλα λόγια θὰ συνέθετε τραγούδια καὶ ἐπιφωνήσεις. Παραδόξως τίποτε ἄλλο δὲν ἀναφέρεται γιὰ τοὺς δήμους. Ὁ ρόλος τους στὴν καθημερινὴ ζωὴ τῶν πολιτῶν φαίνεται ὅτι εἶχε περιοριστεῖ: ἀναφέρεται μάλιστα ὅτι ἓνας στάβλος, ὅπου παλιότερα στάβλιζαν τὰ ἄλογα τῶν ἀγώνων, τώρα βρισκόταν σὲ ἀχρηστία. Γιὰ θέατρα δὲν γίνεται καθόλου λόγος.

Ἡ ἐντύπωση πού ἀποκομίζουμε διαβάζοντας τὰ *Θαύματα τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀρτεμίου* εἶναι ὅτι ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη παρέμεινε κέντρο ἐμπορικῆς καὶ ἐπαγγελματικῆς δραστηριότητος (ἂν καὶ ἴσως σὲ περιορισμένη κλίμακα) σὲ μιὰ ἐποχὴ πού, ὅπως εἶδαμε, ἡ ἀστικὴ ζωὴ ἔσβηνε στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία καὶ τὰ Βαλκάνια. Ἡ μεγάλη κρίση στὴν ἱστορία τῆς πρωτεύουσας πιστεύω ὅτι ἐπῆλθε τὸ πρῶτο μισὸ τοῦ 8ου αἰώνα. Ὑπάρχουν ἀρκετὲς ἔμμεσες ἐνδείξεις γι' αὐτὸ. Ὅταν τὸ 740 τὰ χερσαῖα τείχη τῆς πόλης ἔπαθαν σοβαρὲς ζημιὲς ἀπὸ σεισμό, ὁ ντόπιος πληθυσμὸς δὲν ἦταν σὲ θέση νὰ τὰ ἐπιδιορθώσει, καὶ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας χρειάστηκε νὰ ἐπιβάλλει ἓναν εἰδικὸ φόρο, προφανῶς γιὰ νὰ προσλάβει ἐργατικὴ δύναμη ἀπὸ ἄλλοῦ.⁴² Μετὰ τὸ λοι-

μό του 747, ο αυτοκράτορας Κωνσταντίνος Ε' αναγκάστηκε να ενισχύσει τον πληθυσμό της πόλης φέρνοντας έποίκους από την 'Ελλάδα και τα νησιά του Αιγαίου, με άλλα λόγια από περιοχές στις οποίες ο πληθυσμός είχε επίσης μειωθεί σοβαρά.⁴³ 'Αξίζει να σημειωθεί ότι το ύδραγωγείο του Ουάλη, που ήταν το κύριο ύδραγωγείο της πόλης, περιέπεσε σε άχρηστία το 626, όταν το κατέστρεψαν οι 'Αβαραί, και δεν επιδιορθώθηκε παρά το 766, έντεκα χρόνια μετά την πύκνωση του πληθυσμού, και μόνο εξαιτίας μιας εξαιρετικά μεγάλης ξηρασίας. Για άλλη μια φορά η αναγκαία εργατική δύναμη για το έργο χρειάστηκε να μεταφερθεί από άλλοι: χίλιοι οικοδόμοι και διακόσιοι σοβατζήδες από τον Πόντο, πεντακόσιοι άγγειοπλάστες (για κατασκευή πήλινων σωλήνων;) από την 'Ελλάδα και τα νησιά, πέντε χιλιάδες εργάτες και διακόσιοι πλινθοποιοί από τη Θράκη.⁴⁴ Αυτό που μάς κάνει εντύπωση σχετικά με τους αριθμούς αυτούς είναι πώς ούτε οι ανειδίκευτοι εργάτες δεν ήταν δυνατό να βρεθούν επίτόπου. 'Αν λάβουμε υπόψη μας ότι στην Κωνσταντινούπολη δεν υπάρχουν σχεδόν καθόλου κοντινές πηγές πόσιμου νερού, αναγκαστικά θα καταλήξουμε στο συμπέρασμα πώς ο πληθυσμός πρέπει να είχε μειωθεί δραστικά αφού μπόρεσε να ζήσει χωρίς το βασικό ύδραγωγείο για ένα διάστημα 140 ετών. Πιθανόν να έπεσε και κάτω από τις 50 χιλιάδες, ίσως ακόμη και στο μισό αυτού του αριθμού.

'Ενα πολύ μπερδεμένο κείμενο, με τίτλο *Παραστάσεις σύντομοι χρονικά*,⁴⁵ ρίχνει κάποιο άμυδρο φώς στην ύψη της πόλης περί το 760. Είναι έργο ενός συγγραφέα άμαθῆ, με μεγάλη ιδέα για τον έαυτό του, και αποτελούσε ένα είδος οδηγού για τα σπουδαία αξιοθέατα της πρωτεύουσας. 'Η εικόνα που μάς παρέχει είναι εικόνα έγκατάλειψης και έρημωσης. 'Επανελημένα μάς αναφέρει ότι διάφορα μνημεία —άγάλματα, ανάκτορα, λουτρά— υπήρχαν κάποτε, αλλά τώρα ήταν κατεστραμμένα. 'Οσο για τα υπόλοιπα μνημεία, πολλά από τα όποια πρέπει να χρονολογούνταν από τον 4ο και τον 5ο αιώνα, κανένας δεν καταλάβαινε πια τί ακριβώς ήταν. Είχαν αποκτήσει μια μαγική και γενικά δυσοίωνη σημασία. Οι καταστροφές που το μέλλον επιφύλασσε ακόμη στην πόλη προφητεύονταν στα διάφορα ανάγλυφα και τις έπιγραφές που φαινονταν παντού. Οι «φιλόσοφοι» που ήταν έξασχημένοι στην έρμηνεία τους ήταν τρομοκρατημένοι. «Θά ήταν καλύτερα», έλεγε ένας από αυτούς, «να μη ζήσουμε να δούμε τί μάς μέλλεται. 'Οσο για μένα, θά ήμουν πιο εύτυχῆς αν δεν είχα διαβάσει αυτή την έπιγραφή».

Παρά τις τόσο σκοτεινές προβλέψεις, η Κωνσταντινούπολη πέρασε το 755 σε μια διαδικασία σταδιακής ανάκαμψης, που θα διαρκούσε μέχρι την

έποχή των Σταυροφοριών. Τον 8ο αιώνα δεν υπήρχε άλλη οικοδομική δραστηριότητα εκτός από όχυρωματικά έργα και έπισκευές των ζημιών που προκαλούσαν οι σεισμοί. Τον 9ο αιώνα άρχισαν να χτίζονται καινούρια οικοδομήματα, αλλά με χαρακτηρισά διαφορετικό από εκείνον της Πρώιμης βυζαντινής περιόδου: η παροχή αστικών ανέσεων δεν ήταν πια αναγκαία, και οι καινούριες κατασκευές περιορίστηκαν ως επί το πλείστον στο έσωτερικό του αυτοκρατορικού ανάκτορου, που τώρα έμοιαζε σαν να βγήκε από τις Χίλιες και μία νύχτες. 'Ενα πνεύμα «άνανέωσης» —που σημαίνει έπισκευή όσων είχαν έρειπωθεί μάλλον παρά δημιουργία κάτι νέου— καλλιεργούνταν από τους προπαγανδιστές της αλλαγής του Μιχαήλ Γ' και του Βασιλείου Α'. 'Ο κατάλογος των κτισμάτων αυτού του τελευταίου αυτοκράτορα είναι ιδιαίτερα διδακτικός. Δείχνει ότι στην ούσια όλες οι σημαντικές εκκλησίες της πρωτεύουσας ήταν παραμελημένες, μερικές σε βαθμό που να έχουν «σχεδόν εξαφανιστεί». 'Ετσι ο Βασίλειος προχώρησε στην ανακαίνιση περισσότερων από είκοσι πέντε εκκλησιών στην πόλη και άλλων έξι στα προάστια. 'Ολα τα νέα του κτίσματα ήταν μέσα στο αυτοκρατορικό ανάκτορο.⁴⁶

Με λίγα λόγια, αν μπορούσαμε να δείξουμε με μια γραφική παράσταση τις τύχες της Κωνσταντινούπολης, θα βλέπαμε μια απότομη πτώση την ίδια έποχή που οι έπαρχιακές πόλεις είχαν φτάσει σχεδόν στο μηδέν. 'Αλλά και η ανάκαμψη της πρωτεύουσας δεν ακολούθησε διαφορετική πορεία από ό,τι οι έπαρχίες. Στις αρχές του 9ου αιώνα άρχισε σιγά σιγά να αναζωογονείται η Κόρινθος· η Πάτρα και η Σπάρτη στην Πελοπόννησο έπανοικίστηκαν.⁴⁷ Λίγο αργότερα η Σηλυμβρία και η 'Αγκυρα όχυρώθηκαν και πάλι. 'Η κίνηση έπιταχύνθηκε τον 10ο αιώνα και κορυφώθηκε τον 11ο και τον 12ο. 'Από αρχαιολογική άποψη την ανάκαμψη την παρακολουθούμε στην Κόρινθο και την 'Αθήνα, αλλά και σε μικρότερο βαθμό στη Μικρά 'Ασία. 'Αξίζει να σημειωθεί όμως ότι οι νέοι οικισμοί δεν είχαν καθόλου τον μνημειακό χαρακτήρα της 'Υστερης 'Αρχαιότητας. Τα σπίτια και τα καταστήματα ήταν κακοχτισμένα και στριμωγμένα σε λαβυρινθώδεις δρόμους. 'Οπου ήταν δυνατό, τα έρείπια που υπήρχαν ένσωματώνονταν στα καινούρια κτίρια, αλλά γενικά το πολεοδομικό σχέδιο δεν παρουσίαζε καμία συνέχεια, πράγμα που προϋποθέτει μια ενδιάμεση φάση ολοκληρωτικής εγκατάλειψης. Προς το παρόν υπάρχουν έλάχιστες ένδειξεις για αστικά κέντρα με τη μορφή που τα βλέπουμε στη μεσαιωνική 'Ιταλία, δηλαδή μια πλατεία (piazza) που την περιέβαλλαν ό καθεδρικός ναός και το έπιβλητικό, φρουριακό ανάκτορο του τοπικού άρχοντα. Στην πράξη δεν υπάρχει σχεδόν ίχνος καθεδρικών ναών. 'Εδώ κι εκεί κά-

ποια έρειπωμένη παλαιοχριστιανική βασιλική ανακαινιζόταν τόν 11ο αιώνα, όπως συνέβη στις Σέρρες, τή Βέρροια, τήν Καλαμπάκα και πιθανόν τήν 'Αχρίδα. Στίς περισσότερες περιπτώσεις φαίνεται ότι ή άστική ζωή είχε διασπαστεί σέ γειτονίες, καθεμιά μέ τή δική της μικρή έκκλησούλα. Τά άστικά μοναστήρια, προστατευμένα πίσω από τούς περιβόλους τούς, ήταν φαινόμενο συχνό, και φαίνεται ότι προσέλκυαν πιό πλούσιες χρηματικές παροχές από ό,τι ή επισκοπική οργάνωση. Στήν 'Αθήνα, για παράδειγμα, ή μεγαλύτερη μεσαιωνική έκκλησία πού έχει διατηρηθει, ή Παναγία του Λυκοδήμου (ή λεγόμενη σήμερα Ρώσικη έκκλησία), ήταν μοναστηριακή. 'Η κακή ποιότητα κατασκευής τών οικιών εξηγεϊ τή μεταγενέστερη εξαφάνισή τους· αλλά όπου έχουν ανασκαφει και μελετηθει σπίτια τής Μέσης βυζαντινής περιόδου, εκεί έχει παρατηρηθει ότι περιείχαν πιθάρια μεγάλης χωρητικότητας για αποθήκευση άγροτικών προϊόντων, δείγμα μιās ζωής στενά δεμένης μέ τήν ύπαιθρο.

Οί αρχαιολογικές μαρτυρίες συμπληρώνονται από τις γραπτές πηγές. 'Ισως τó πιό έντυπωσιακό χαρακτηριστικό τής ζωής στη Μέση βυζαντινή περίοδο, σέ αντίθεση μέ τήν προηγούμενη εποχή, ήταν ó ιδιωτικός της χαρακτήρας. Δέν υπήρχαν πιά θέατρα, αίθουσες συνεδριάσεων, δημόσιες βασιλικές, στοές όπου συγκεντρωνόταν ó κόσμος. 'Ο ίππόδρομος επέζησε μόνο στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, αλλά λειτουργούσε μόνο λίγες μέρες τó χρόνο, σέ μιá επίδειξη αυτοκρατορικής τελετουργίας οργανωμένης μέ κάθε λεπτομέρεια. 'Ο Βίος του άγιου Βασιλείου του Νέου, πού μās δίνει μιá ιδέα για τις συνθήκες ζωής στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τόν 10ο αιώνα, είναι αξιοσημείωτος, γιατί όλη ή δράση διαδραματίζεται σέ κλειστούς χώρους. 'Εκτός από τις έμποροπανηγύρεις πού γίνονταν κάπου κάπου, ó μοναδικός τόπος δημόσιων συγκεντρώσεων ήταν τώρα ή έκκλησία. Βλέποντας ότι οι διάφοροι έμποροι πού άσκοῦσαν τó επάγγελμά τους στην άγορά του Κωνσταντίνου δέν είχαν πού νά καταφύγουν όταν έκανε κακοκαιρία, ó Βασίλειος Α' τούς έχτισε μιá έκκλησία.⁴⁸ Φαίνεται όμως ότι ακόμη και ή έκκλησία θεωρούνταν από πολλούς τόπος ύπερβολικά δημόσιος. Οί πλούσιοι—άλλά και οι λιγότερο πλούσιοι—έχιζαν παρεκκλήσια για ιδιωτική τους χρήση και, αν είχαν τά μέσα, συντηρούσαν σ' αυτά οικογενειακούς ιερείς. 'Ηταν μιá συνήθεια τήν όποία επέτρεψε ρητά ó Λέων Ζ', μέ τó επιχείρημα ότι διαφορετικά οι άνθρωποι θα στερούνταν τά ιερά μυστήρια και τά παρεκκλήσια θα έπαυαν νά χρησιμοποιούνται. Για τόν ίδιο λόγο επιτράπηκε και τó βάπτισμα νηπίων σέ ιδιωτικά παρεκκλήσια, πράγμα πού παλιότερα άπαγορευόταν από τó Κανονικό Δίκαιο.⁴⁹ 'Η δυσπιστία και ή ιδιωτική ζωή βρίσκουν τήν πιό εύγλωττη διατύπωσή τους στο λεγό-

μενο *Στρατηγικόν* του στρατηγού του 11ου αιώνα Κεκαυμένου. Ποτέ μη φιλοξενήσεις φίλο στο σπίτι σου, συμβουλεύει, γιατί ó φίλος μπορεί νά ξελογιάσει τή γυναίκα σου. "Άσε τον νά καταλύσει κάπου άλλου και στέλνε του εκεί τó φαγητό πού χρειάζεται. Τις κόρες σου νά τις κλειδώνεις αν νά ήταν κατάδικοι. Νά άποφεύγεις τά συμπόσια. "Αν δέν βρίσκεσαι σέ κάποια αυτοκρατορική άποστολή, νά μένεις στο σπίτι σου μέ τούς έμπιστους υπηρέτες σου, συγκέντρωνε προμήθειες και φρόντιζε για τó συμφέρον τής οικογένειάς σου.⁵⁰

"Όπως είδαμε στο προηγούμενο κεφάλαιο, ή αναβίωση τών πόλεων συνοδεύτηκε από ανάπτυξη τών μικροαστών. Μιá ζωντανή εικόνα τής άνεσης μέσα στην όποία ζούσαν οι επαγγελματικές τάξεις τής Κωνσταντινούπολης τήν εποχή τών Κομνηνών μās παρέχει ένα σατιρικό ποίημα πού άποδίδεται στον Θεόδωρο Πτωχοπρόδρομο. 'Ο συγγραφέας, πού παρουσιάζει τόν έαυτό του ως έξαθλιωμένο κληρικό, είχε παρακινήθει από τόν πατέρα του νά άποκτήσει μόρφωση:

*'Από μικρόθεν μ' έλεγεν ó γέρον ό πατήρ μου
«Παιδίμ μου, μάθε γράμματα, και ώσαν έσέναν έχει.
Βλέπεις τόν δεινά, τέκνον μου, πεζός περιεπάτει,
και τώρα διπλοεντέληνος και παχυμουλαράτος.
Αυτός, όταν έμάνθανε, ύπόδησι οὐκ ειχεν,
και τώρα βλέπεις τον φορεϊ τά μακρομύτικά του.
Αυτός, όταν έμάνθανε, ποτέ του οὐκ έκτενίσθη,
και τώρα καλοκτένιστος και καμαροτριχάρης.
Αυτός, όταν έμάνθανε, λουτρούθουαν οὐκ ειδε,
και τώρα λουτρακίζεται τρίτον τήν εβδομάδα.
Αυτός, ό κόλλπος του έγεμε φθειρας άμυγδαλάτας,
και τώρα τά υπέρπυρα γέμει τά μανοηλάτα.
Και πείσθητι γεροντικοίς και πατροκοίς μου λόγοις,
και μάθε τά γραμματικά, και ώσαν έσέναν έχει».*

'Έτσι ó Πτωχοπρόδρομος έμαθε γράμματα, αλλά τί τόν ώφέλησαν; Τó ντουλάπι του δέν είχε τίποτε παρά σωρούς χαρτιά, και ó ίδιος δέν ειχε νά φάει. Και έτσι συγκρίνει τή φτώχεια του μέ τά άφθονα άγαθά τών γειτόνων του. 'Ο χρυσοκενητής έχει τó κελάρι του γεμάτο ψωμί και κρασί, τόνο μαγειρευτό και σίρους. 'Ο τσαγκάρης, όταν ζυπνάει τó πρωί, στέλνει τόν παραγιό του νά αγοράσει πατσά και βλάχικο τυρί, και μόνο άφου κολατσίσει μέ αυτές τις λιχουδιές πιάνει δουλειά. Τήν ώρα του φαγητού αφήνει κατά μέρος τó καλαπόδι και τά εργαλεία του και βάζει τή

γυναίκα του να του σερβίρει ένα γεῦμα με τρία νοστιμότατα πιάτα. Με μακρινή προσήλωση στο τί τρώει ο καθένας, ο Πτωχοπρόδρομος συγκρίνει τον εαυτό του με διάφορους επαγγελματίες, ακόμη και τους πιο ταπεινούς: το ράφτη που τυχαίνει να έχει δικό του σπίτι, το βοηθό του φούρναρη, το γιαουρτά, τον πλανόδιο πωλητή ρούχων, τους τρίφτες των μπαχαρικών, το χασάπη. "Όλων αυτών το στομάχι είναι γεμάτο. Τί χρειάζονται λοιπόν ο Όμηρος και ο Όππιανός;⁵¹

Είμαστε τόσο συνηθισμένοι να θεωρούμε τους Έλληνες έθνος έμπορευμένων, που μάς είναι δύσκολο να φανταστούμε ότι οι Βυζαντινοί ήταν ακριβώς το αντίθετο — άνθρωποι της γης, δύσπιστοι και χωρίς έμπορικό δαιμόνιο. Έτσι λοιπόν το κέρδος της άστυκης ανάπτυξης δεν το τρύγησαν οι Βυζαντινοί αλλά οι ξένοι. Αναφέραμε ήδη την παρουσία ρώσων και Ιταλών εμπόρων στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τον 10ο αιώνα, και το άποφασιστικής σημασίας γεγονός της παραχώρησης έμπορικών προνομίων στη Βενετία από τον αυτοκράτορα Άλέξιο Α'. Μέσα σε σύντομο χρονικό διάστημα ο βασιλεύς ανακάλυψε πως δεν ήταν πια κύριος μέσα στο ίδιο του το σπίτι. Όταν το 1126 ο Ιωάννης Β' Κομνηνός επιχείρησε να ανακαλέσει τα προνόμια των Βενετών, αναγκάστηκε να εγκαταλείψει αυτή την απόπειρα υπό την πίεση των όπλων. Το 1148 η βενετική συνοικία, που βρισκόταν ανάμεσα στις δύο σημερινές γέφυρες του Κεράτιου Κόλπου, έπεκτάθηκε περισσότερο. Ο αριθμός των Βενετών που κατοικούσαν στην Κωνσταντινούπολη φαίνεται πως έφτασε περίπου τις 20 χιλιάδες, και τα πλούτη τους ήταν τεράστια. Έπειδή θεωρητικά ήταν υπήκοοι της αυτοκρατορίας, βρισκόταν αρχικά στη δικαιοδοσία των αυτοκρατορικών αξιωματούχων, αλλά σιγά σιγά κατάφεραν να γίνουν ουσιαστικά αυτόνομοι. Δεν μπορούμε εδώ να περιγράψουμε την περίπλοκη ιστορία των σχέσεων του Βυζαντίου με τη Βενετία, τις αντιζηλιές ανάμεσα στις διάφορες ομάδες Ιταλών και τις μάταιες προσπάθειες που έκαναν οι αυτοκράτορες να στρέψουν τους μὲν έναντι των δέ. Άρκει μόνο να αναφέρουμε ότι οι διάφορες παραχωρήσεις στους «Λατίνους» περιλάμβαναν τις καλύτερες έμπορικές ιδιοκτησίες της πόλης, κατά μήκος της παραλίας του Κεράτιου Κόλπου, και ότι ο αριθμός των δυτικών κατοίκων μπορεί να είχε φτάσει ακόμη και το ένα πέμπτο του συνολικού πληθυσμού, υπολογίζοντας πως το σύνολο αριθμούσε τότε 200-250 χιλιάδες.

Μια Βαβέλ ξένων γλωσσών άντηχούσε στους δρόμους της Κωνσταντινούπολης. Μια διασκεδαστική, αν και καμιά φορά σκοτεινή εικόνα αυτής της κατάστασης μάς δίνει ο ποιητής Ιωάννης Τζέτζης, ο οποίος έγραψε κατά τα μέσα του 12ου αιώνα:

και Σκύθην Σκύθαις εύροις με, Λατίνων τοίς Λατίνοις
και πᾶσιν ἄλλοις ἔθνεσιν ὡς ἓνα γένους τούτων.
και Σκύθην ἀσπαζόμενος οὕτω προσαγορεύω·

καλή ἡμέρα σου, αἰθέτριά μου, καλή ἡμέρα σου, αἰθένα μου.
σαλαμαλέκ ἄλτη [- -] σαλαμαλέκ ἄλτοῦγεπ.

τοίς Πέρσαις* πάλιν περσικῶς οὕτω προσαγορεύω·

καλή ἡμέρα σου, ἀδελφέ, ποῦ ὑπάγεις, πόθεν εἶσαι, φίλε;
ἄσαν χαῖς κουρούπαρζα χαντάζαρ χαραντάση.

τῷ δὲ Λατίνῳ προσφωνῶ κατὰ Λατίνων γλῶσσαν·

καλῶς ἤλθες, αἰθένα μου, καλῶς ἤλθες, ἀδελφέ.

βένε βενέστι δόμινε, βένε βενέστι φράτερ,

πόθεν εἶσαι και ἀπὸ ποίου θέματος ἤλθες;

οὐνδε ἐς ἐτ δεκούαλε προβίντζια βενέστι;

πῶς, ἀδελφέ, ἤλθες εἰς ταύτην τὴν πόλιν;

κόμοδο, φράτερ, βενέστι ἰνίσταν τζιβιτάτεμ;

πεζός, καβα(λλά)ριος, διὰ θαλάσσης, θέλεις ἀργεῖν;

πεδόνε, καβα(λλά)ριους, περμάρε, βίς μοράρ[ι];

τοίς Ἀλανοῖς προσφθέγγομαι κατὰ τὴν τούτων γλῶσσαν·

καλή ἡμέρα σου, αἰθένα μου, ἀρχόντισσα, πόθεν εἶσαι;

ταπαγγᾶς μέσφιλι χοινὰ κορθιν [- - - -]

οὐκ αἰσχύνεσαι - αἰθέτριά μου

τὸ φάρνετζν κίντζι μέσφιλι καιτεροφουά [- -] οὐγγε.

τοίς δ' Ἀραβῶν ὡς Ἀραβῶν ἀραβικῶς προσ[λέγω].

ποῦ ὑπάγεις, πόθεν εἶσαι, αἰθέτριά μου; αἰθένα μου, καλή ἡμέρα σου.

ἄλενταμόρ βενένεντε σιτη μουλέ σεπάχα.

πάλιν τοίς Ῥῶς ὡς ἔχουσιν ἔθος προσαγορεύω·

ἠγίανε, ἀδελφέ, ἀδελφίτζα, καλή ἡμέρα σου

τὸ σδρᾶ πράτε, σέστριτζα και (τὸ) δόβρα δένη λέγω·

τοίς δ' Ἄρ' Ἑβραίοις προσφωῶς ἑβραϊκῶς προσλέγω·

μεμαγευμένε

τυφλέ

μεμακωμένε βηθφαγή βεελζεβούλ τιμαῖε [...]

οὕτω τοίς πᾶσι προσλαλῶ πρόσφορα και πρεπιῶδη

καλλίστης ἔργον ἔγνωκῶς οἰκονομίας τοῦτο.⁵²

Σὰν ἀληθινός Λεβαντίνος, ο Τζέτζης μπορούσε να μιλήσει λίγες λέξεις σε κάμποσες γλώσσες, και μολοντί ένας θαυμαστής της γλώσσας του Κικέρωνα μάλλον δεν θα ενέκρινε τα λατινικά του, αυτή ήταν πιθανόν η ξένη γλώσσα που γνώριζε καλύτερα από όλες.

Με λίγα λόγια, η Κωνσταντινούπολη την εποχή των Κομνηνών δεν

* δηλαδή τους Σελτζούκους

ήταν διαφορετική από την Κωνσταντινούπολη πριν από τον πρώτο παγκόσμιο πόλεμο, όταν το μεγαλύτερο μέρος της οικονομικής ζωής βρισκόταν στα χέρια ξένων, καθώς και ντόπιων Έλλήνων, Αρμενίων και Εβραίων, ενώ η πλειονότητα των Οθωμανών αισθάνονταν υποβιβασμένοι σε πολίτες δεύτερης κατηγορίας. Υπήρχε επίσης στενή σχέση ανάμεσα στα προνόμια των Ιταλικών αποικιών και το καθεστώς των «διομολογήσεων» που επικρατούσε στην οθωμανική αυτοκρατορία. Και στις δύο περιπτώσεις η κατάσταση οδηγούσε σε έκρηκτική ένταση. Αλλά ενώ η σύγχρονη Τουρκία κατάφερε να εκδιώξει ή να εξουδετερώσει τα ξένα στοιχεία της Κωνσταντινούπολης, το Βυζάντιο αποδείχτηκε αδύναμο μπροστά στους Ιταλούς εκμεταλλευτές του. Η σύλληψη όλων των βενετών κατοίκων της αυτοκρατορίας και η δήμευση της περιουσίας τους το 1171, ή η σφαγή των άλλων Λατίνων στην Κωνσταντινούπολη (κυρίως Πισατών και Γενοβέζων) το 1182, άπλωσε επιτάχυναν την τρομερή εκδίχηση που πήρε η Δύση.

Όταν οι στρατιώτες της τέταρτης Σταυροφορίας στάθηκαν μπροστά στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τον Ιούνιο του 1203, δεν μπορούσαν καλά καλά να πιστέψουν στα μάτια τους, γιατί δεν είχαν ξαναδεί ποτέ πόλη τόσο μεγάλη και δυνατή, τόσο πλούσια, τόσο γεμάτη από παλάτια και εκκλησίες.⁵³ Ούτε καν υποψιάζονταν ότι ή άφιξή τους θα σήμαινε την καταστροφή της μεγάλης πρωτεύουσας. Η φοβερή πυρκαγιά που ξέσπασε τον Αύγουστο του ίδιου χρόνου και κατέστρεψε, αφού μαινόταν επί οχτώ μέρες, τη μισή πόλη, προοιωνιζόταν τί θα επακολουθοῦσε. Αφού κατακτήθηκε από τους Σταυροφόρους, λεηλατήθηκε συστηματικά για μια περίοδο σχεδόν εξήντα ετών και αποδεκατίστηκε ο πληθυσμός της, ή Κωνσταντινούπολη δεν έμεινε παρά ή σκιά του παλιού έαυτού της. Δεν θα προσπαθήσουμε εδώ να παρακολουθήσουμε τη θλιβερή ιστορία της στους επόμενους δύο αιώνες, γιατί άπλωσε επαναλαμβάνονται οι αποικιοκρατικές συνθήκες που επικρατούσαν ήδη την εποχή των Κομνηνών. Ο Ισπανός πρεσβευτής Clavijo, που είδε την Κωνσταντινούπολη το 1403, λέει ότι μέσα στα τείχη ο χώρος καταλαμβάνονταν από συνοικισμούς, που τους χώριζαν σιτοχώραφα και περιβόλια. Παντού έβλεπε κανείς έρείπια ανακτόρων και εκκλησιών. Μόνο οι παραλιακές περιοχές είχαν αρκετά πυκνό πληθυσμό, ιδιαίτερα ή έμπορική συνοικία του Κεράτιου Κόλπου. Αντίθετα ή γενοβέζικη αποικία στον Γαλατά, αν και μικρή σε έκταση, ήταν πυκνοκατοικημένη και γεμάτη έξαιρετικά σπίτια.⁵⁴ Όταν υπέκυψε στους Τούρκους, το 1453, ή Κωνσταντινούπολη είχε πληθυσμό αρκετά λιγότερο από πενήντα χιλιάδες.

Σήμερα ψάχνουμε μάταια για ίχνη βυζαντινών σπιτιών στη σύγχρονη πόλη. Ακόμη και το πολεοδομικό της σχέδιο έχει γίνει άγνωριστο. Ένα τμήμα της Μέσης έχει διατηρηθεί στη λεωφόρο Divanyolu: ο ίππόδρομος, το Αύγουσταίο και ή αγορά του Θεοδοσίου είναι ακόμη και σήμερα υπαίθριοι χώροι, αλλά οι άλλες βυζαντινές πλατείες έχουν καλυφτεί από οικοδομές. Πάνω απ' όλα, δεν υπάρχει κανένα ίχνος κάποιου κανονικού σχεδίου οδών, όπως θα πρέπει σίγουρα να το είχαν χαράξει οι αρχιτέκτονες του Κωνσταντίνου. Πιθανόν ή επέκταση της πόλης στα οθωμανικά χρόνια, οι συχνές πυρκαγιές, οι σεισμοί και οι ανοικοδομήσεις να δημιούργησαν αυτό το λαβύρινθο από φιδωτούς δρόμους που απεικονίζεται στους σχετικά ακριβείς χάρτες του 18ου και του 19ου αιώνα. Ίσως όμως αυτός ο μετασχηματισμός του σχεδίου της πόλης να έγινε πολύ νωρίς, και ή Κωνσταντινούπολη των Κομνηνών να είχε τόση σχέση με την Κωνσταντινούπολη του Ίουστινιανού, όση και ή Κόρινθος της κομνηνειακής εποχής με την Κόρινθο της Πρώιμης βυζαντινής περιόδου.

Για να πάρουμε μια ιδέα κάποιας πόλης της Ύστερης βυζαντινής περιόδου πρέπει να πάμε στον Μιστρά, στην Πελοπόννησο. Αν και συχνά ονομάζεται «βυζαντινή Πομπηία», ο Μιστράς στην πραγματικότητα ιδρύθηκε από τους Φράγκους. Το ανάκτορο του Δεσπότη έχει έντελως δυτικό σχέδιο, τα σπίτια του είναι κλειστά στον έξω κόσμο και συχνά έχουν πύργους με πολεμίστρες. Ακόμη και σε μερικές εκκλησίες υπάρχουν ίχνη γοθικής επίρροής. Σε ποιο βαθμό έμοιαζε ο Μιστράς με άλλες βυζαντινές πόλεις του 13ου και του 14ου αιώνα είναι υπόθεση άβέβαιη. Ένα πράγμα ωστόσο είναι βέβαιο: με κανέναν τρόπο δεν είναι απόγονος της πόλεως της Ύστερης Αρχαιότητας.

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ Δ'
ΟΙ ΑΙΡΕΤΙΚΟΙ

«'Επιθυμοῦμε», διακηρύσσει ένα αυτοκρατορικό διάταγμα τοῦ ἔτους 380, πού ἀργότερα τοποθετήθηκε στήν ἀρχή τοῦ 'Ιουστινιάνειου Κώδικα, «ὄλοι οἱ λαοὶ τοὺς ὁποίους κυβερνᾷ τὸ κράτος τῆς γαληνότητάς μας νὰ ἀσκοῦν αὐτὴ τὴ θρησκεία τὴν ὁποία ὁ θεῖος ἀπόστολος Πέτρος [...] παρέδωσε στοὺς Ρωμαίους [...] γιὰ νὰ πιστεύουμε τὴ μία θεότητα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ Υἱοῦ καὶ 'Αγίου Πνεύματος ὑπὸ ἴση μεγαλειότητα καὶ εὐσεβῆ Τριάδα. Διατάζουμε λοιπὸν ὄλοι ὅσοι ἀκολουθοῦν αὐτὸ τὸ νόμο νὰ ἀποκαλοῦνται καθολικοὶ χριστιανοί· οἱ ἄλλοι ὅμως, τοὺς ὁποίους θεωροῦμε ἀνόητους καὶ μανιώδεις [*dementes vesanosque*], αὐτοὶ νὰ ὑπομένουν τὴν ἀτιμία τοῦ αἵρετικοῦ δόγματος, οἱ τόποι τῶν συγκεντρώσεών τους νὰ μὴ ὀνομάζονται ἐκκλησίες καὶ νὰ τιμωροῦνται πρῶτα ἀπὸ τὴ θεία ἐκδίκηση καὶ ἔπειτα ἀπὸ τὴν τιμωρία τῆς δικῆς μας ἰσχύος, τὴν ὁποία λάβαμε ἀπὸ θεία εὐδοκία».¹

Ἐνας Θεός, μία αυτοκρατορία, μία θρησκεία —αὐτοὶ ἦταν οἱ ἀκρογωνιαῖοι λίθοι τῆς βυζαντινῆς πολιτικῆς σκέψης. Ἡ θρησκεία καθοριζόταν ἀπὸ τὶς οἰκουμενικὲς συνόδους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μετὰ βία τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ τὶς ἐξηγήσεις τῶν Πατέρων, ἀλλὰ ἦταν καθῆκον τοῦ αυτοκράτορα —τὸ ὕψιστο μάλιστα καθῆκον του— νὰ ἐπιβάλλει τὴν παγκόσμια τηρησὴ τῆς. Διότι, γιὰ νὰ ἀναφέρουμε ἕναν ἄλλο αυτοκρατορικό νόμο, «Γνωρίζουμε ὅτι τὸ Κράτος μας στηρίζεται περισσότερο στὴ θρησκεία παρὰ στὶς δημόσιες ὑπηρεσίες καὶ τὸν σωματικὸ κόπο καὶ ἰδρώτα».² «Ἄν ἐπιζητοῦμε μετὰ κάθε τρόπο», ἔγραφε ὁ αυτοκράτορας Ἰουστινιανός, «νὰ τηροῦμε τοὺς πολιτικούς νόμους, τὴν ἐξουσία τῶν ὁποίων μᾶς ἐμπιστεύθηκε ὁ θεός στὴ φιλανθρωπία του, γιὰ τὴν ἀσφάλεια τῶν ὑπηκόων μας, πόσο μεγαλύτερη φροντίδα ὀφείλουμε νὰ δείχνουμε γιὰ τὴ φύλαξη τῶν ἱερῶν κανόνων καὶ τῶν θείων νόμων πού ἔχουν ὀριστεῖ γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῶν ψυχῶν μας;»³

Τὸ πραγματικὸ νόημα τῆς ὀρθοδοξίας δὲν ἦταν τόσο ἡ ὀρθὴ πίστη, ὅσο

ΟΙ ΑΙΡΕΤΙΚΟΙ

τὸ ὀρθὸ δόγμα, πού συνίστατο πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα στὴν ὁμολογία καὶ τὴν πίστη «εἰς ἕνα θεόν, πατέρα παντοκράτορα, καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ εἰς τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα».⁴ Μετὰ ἄλλα λόγια, ὄλοι οἱ ὑπήκοοι τῆς αυτοκρατορίας παρακινουῦνταν ἐντονότατα ὄχι μόνο νὰ εἶναι χριστιανοὶ ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ ἀκολουθοῦν ἕνα μοναδικὸ καὶ ἰδιαίτερα δυσνόητο δόγμα πού καθόριζε τὴ φύση καὶ τὴ σχέση τῶν τριῶν προσώπων τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδας, γιὰτὶ ἀκόμη καὶ ἡ παραμικρότερη παρέκκλιση ἀπὸ αὐτὸ θεωροῦνταν αἵρεση.⁵ Δὲν πρέπει φυσικὰ νὰ φανταζόμαστε ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ συγκεκριμένο σύνολο δογμάτων, πού μετὰ τὸν καιρὸ ἀποτελέσει τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία μετὰ κεφαλαῖο Ο, ἦταν ἐξαρχῆς προορισμένο νὰ καταλάβει αὐτὴ τὴ θέση. Ὑπῆρξαν φορὲς πού διαφορετικὲς ἐρμηνεῖες τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ εἶχαν τὴ δραστήρια ὑποστήριξη τῆς κοσμικῆς ἐξουσίας. Οἱ αυτοκράτορες Κωνσταντῖνος Β' καὶ Οὐάλης, παραδείγματος χάρι, ἀγωνίζονταν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἀρειανισμοῦ, ὁ Ἀναστάσιος Α' ἦταν μετὰ τὸ μέρος τῶν μονοφυσιτῶν, ὁ Ἡράκλειος προσπάθησε σκληρὰ νὰ ἐπιβάλλει τὴ συμβιβαστικὴ μονοθελητικὴ πολιτικὴ του, καὶ μιὰ σειρά αυτοκράτορες τοῦ 8ου καὶ τοῦ 9ου αἰῶνα ἦταν εἰκονομάχοι. Ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ μέγας Ἰουστινιανός, ὁ πῦρ ἀκλόνητος ὑποστηρικτῆς τῆς θρησκευτικῆς ἐνότητος, τελείωσε τὴ ζωὴ του κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν ὑπόψια τῆς ἰουλιανῆς αἵρεσης. Ὁμᾶ μπορούσε, ἴσως, ὁποιοδήποτε ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ διαφορετικὰ δόγματα νὰ ἔχει θριαμβεύσει. Γιὰ ἕνα πράγμα ὅμως μπορούμε νὰ εἶμαστε σίγουροι, δηλαδὴ ὅτι ὁποιαδήποτε παρὰ τὰς καὶ ἂν εἶχε νικήσει, θὰ ἦταν τὸ ἴδιο ἀδιάλλακτο ἀπέναντι στοὺς ἀντιπάλους τῆς, ὅπως ἦταν καὶ ἡ ὀρθοδοξία. Οἱ περιπτώσεις διακηρυγμένης θρησκευτικῆς ἀνοχῆς κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς βυζαντινῆς περιόδου μετριοῦνται στὰ δάχτυλα τοῦ ἐνὸς χεροῦ.

Γεγονὸς παραμένει, πάντως, ὅτι μετὰ κανέναν τρόπο δὲν ἦταν ὄλοι οἱ ὑπήκοοι τῆς αυτοκρατορίας καθολικοὶ χριστιανοί. Ὁ ἀριθμὸς ἐκείνων πού ἡ κυβέρνησις θεωροῦσε «ἀνόητους καὶ μανιώδεις» ἦταν ἐξαιρετικὰ μεγάλος τὴν Πρώιμη βυζαντινὴν περίοδο, σὲ βαθμὸ πού ἴσως ἀποτελοῦσαν τὴν πλειονότητα τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ. Ἦταν χαμηλότερος στὴ Μέση περίοδο καὶ, πιθανόν, πολὺ μικρὸς στὴ Ὑστερὴν περίοδο. Αὐτὸ τὸ κεφάλαιο ἀφορᾷ τοὺς αἵρετικούς, ἢ διαφωνοῦντες, δηλαδὴ ἐκεῖνες τὶς ὁμάδες πού γιὰ τὸν ἕνα ἢ τὸν ἄλλο λόγὸ δὲν ἀποδέχονταν τὴν ἐπικρατοῦσα ὀρθοδοξία.

Ὑπῆρξαν πρῶτα πρῶτα οἱ ἀρχαῖοι εἰδωλολάτρες κάθε εἴδους. Ἡ ἐξάφάνισις τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας ὑπῆρξε μιὰ ἀργὴ διαδικασία, πού κράτησε ἀπὸ τὸν 4ο αἰῶνα μέχρι —σὲ ὀρισμένες περιοχὰς— τὸ τέλος τοῦ 6ου. Μετὰ ἐξάφαισις λίγες πόλεις ὅπως ἡ Γάζα, ὅπου ἡ εἰδωλολατρία λέγεται ὅτι κυριαρχοῦσε ἀκόμη περὶ τὸ 400,⁶ καὶ οἱ Κάρρες (Harran), ὅπου ἡ εἰδωλολα-

τρία επέζησε και μετά την άραβική κατάκτηση,⁷ τὰ περισσότερα αστικά κέντρα είχαν δεχτεί τὸ χριστιανισμὸ τὸν 4ο αἰώνα. Παραδόξως, ἡ παλιά θρησκεία διατηρήθηκε στὰ δύο ἄκρα τῆς κοινωνικῆς κλίμακας: ἀπὸ τὴ μιὰ μεριά ἀνάμεσα στὴν ἀστική ἀριστοκρατία, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία ἦταν ζήτημα παράδοσης, ἀκόμη και νομιμοφροσύνης πρὸς τὸ ρωμαϊκὸ κράτος, και ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀγρότες. Τὸ ἐπάγγελμα τῶν καθηγητῶν, ὅπως θὰ δοῦμε στὸ Κεφάλαιο Σ', πρόσφερε ἐπίσης καταφύγιο στὴν εἰδωλολατρία. Δὲν θὰ ἐπαναλάβουμε ἐδῶ τὴ γνωστὴ ἱστορία τῆς παρατεταμένης καταπίεσης και καταδίωξης τῶν εἰδωλολατρῶν ἀπὸ τὴν αὐτοκρατορικὴ κυβέρνηση, τοὺς τοπικοὺς ἐπισκόπους και μοναχοὺς, ἀπὸ τὰ σκληρὰ ἀλλὰ σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ χωρὶς ἀποτέλεσμα μέτρα τῶν δεκαετιῶν τοῦ 340 και τοῦ 350 μέχρι τοὺς τελευταίους διωγμοὺς τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Εἶναι μιὰ θλιβερὴ ἱστορία, κατάστικτη ἀπὸ γεγονότα ὅπως τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν εἰδωλολατρικῶν ναῶν τὸ 391, ἡ λεηλασία τοῦ Σεραπείου στὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια, ἡ θανάτωση τῆς Ὑπατίας, τὸ κλείσιμο τῶν φιλοσοφικῶν σχολῶν, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἀναφέρουμε τὴν καταστροφὴ ἀναριθμητῶν θησαυρῶν τῆς ἀρχαίας τέχνης. Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες ἐπέζησαν γιὰ μεγάλο διάστημα, ὄχι μόνο στὰ τοπικὰ βουλευτήρια και τὶς σχολές, ἀλλὰ και στὶς ἀνώτερες βαθμίδες τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς διοίκησης. Χωρὶς νὰ διατυμπανίζουν τὴ θρησκεία τους, ἀσκοῦσαν τὴ λατρεία τους ἰδιωτικὰ (καμιὰ φορὰ πίσω ἀπὸ ἕναν ψεύτικο τοῖχο) και ἔλπιζαν ὅτι δὲν θὰ τοὺς καταδώσει κανεὶς στὶς ἀρχές.

Ἐνῶ γνωρίζουμε πολλὰ πράγματα γιὰ ἐπιφανεῖς εἰδωλολάτρες, ἔχουμε πολὺ λιγότερες πληροφορίες γιὰ τοὺς ἀγροτικοὺς πληθυσμούς. Χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία, μιὰ τυπικὴ περίπτωση ἀποτελοῦν οἱ ἱεραποστολικὲς δραστηριότητες τοῦ μονοφυσίτη Ἰωάννη τῆς Ἀμιδας, ὁ ὁποῖος διορίστηκε τιτουλάριος ἐπίσκοπος τῆς Ἐφέσου τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Αὐτὸς ὁ φανατικὸς χριστιανὸς μέσα σὲ τριάντα πέντε χρόνια (542-576) προσηλύτισε κάπου ὀγδόντα χιλιάδες ἀνθρώπους στὶς ὄρεινές περιοχὲς τῆς Ἀσίας, Φρυγίας, Καρίας και Λυδίας, και κατέστρεψε τοὺς ναοὺς τους, στὴ θέση τῶν ὁποίων ἔχτισε ἐνεήντα ἐννιά ἐκκλησίες και δώδεκα μοναστήρια. Οἱ νεοπροσήλυτοι ἀπλῶς βαφτίζονταν μαζικὰ, και σὲ καθένα δινόταν ἕνα τρίτο τοῦ νομίματος ἀπὸ τὸ αὐτοκρατορικὸ ταμεῖο.⁸ Μπορεῖ βέβαια νὰ ἀναρωτηθεῖ κανεὶς τί ἀποτελεσματικὸτητα εἶχαν τέτοιου εἶδους προσηλυτισμοί. Μιὰ ἱστορία ποὺ ἀναφέρει ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Ἰωάννης ρίχνει κάποιον φῶς στὸ ζήτημα αὐτό. Ἀφορᾷ μιὰ ἀπομακρυσμένη ὄρεινὴ περιοχή κοντὰ στὴ Μελιτηνή, ἀνατολικά τοῦ Εὐφράτη, οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς ὁποίας θεωροῦσαν τοὺς εαυτοὺς τους χριστιανούς, ἀλλὰ χρησιμοποιοῦσαν τὴν ἐκκλησία τοῦ χωριοῦ

σὴν ἀποθήκη ξύλων, δὲν εἶχαν ἱερεῖς και δὲν εἶχαν ἀκούσει ποτὲ γιὰ τὶς Γραφές. Ἐνας φανατικὸς μοναχὸς ποὺ λεγόταν Συμεὼν ὁ Ὁρεσίβιος (ἦταν και μονοφυσίτης) ἔτυχε νὰ περιπλανηθεῖ στὴν περιοχή και ταραχτήκε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀδιαφορία τοῦ ντόπιου πληθυσμοῦ. Οἱ ἱεραποστολικὲς του προσπάθειες συνάντησαν σοβαρὴ ἀντίδραση, ἀλλὰ ἐπέβαλε τὴν ἀξιοπιστία του κἀνοντας ἕνα θαῦμα, και στὴ συνέχεια ἴδρυσε ἕνα σχολεῖο γιὰ ἀγόρια και κορίτσια ποὺ τὰ ἀνάγκαζε νὰ μαθαίνουν τὴ Βίβλο. Ἀγωνίστηκε σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἀποστολὴ ἐπὶ εἴκοσι ἕξι χρόνια, ὥσπου οἱ μαθητὲς του ἔγιναν ἀναγνώστες και θυγατέρες τῆς Ἐπαγγελίας.⁹ Τέτοια ἀφοσίωση σίγουρα ἦταν ἐξαιρετικὴ. Γενικὰ θεωροῦσαν ὅτι ὁ κληρὸς τῆς ὑπαίθρου χαρακτηριζόταν ἀπὸ χαλαρότητα ἡθῶν και ἔρεπε πρὸς τὴ μέθη. Ἐνας εὐσεβὴς μαθητῆς ἔπρεπε συχνὰ νὰ φύγει ἀπὸ τὴ γενέτειρά του γιὰ νὰ βρεῖ κατάλληλους δασκάλους.¹⁰

Ἦταν κάποτε τῆς μόδας ἡ ἀποψη ὅτι ἡ εἰδωλολατρία ἀπορροφήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ χριστιανισμὸ και ὅτι οἱ παλιοὶ θεοὶ ἐμφανίστηκαν και πάλι μετὰ τὴ μορφή ἀγίων, ὅτι ὁ Ἡλῖος μεταμορφώθηκε στὸν προφήτη Ἡλία, ἡ Δήμητρα στὸν ἅγιο Δημήτριο, ὁ Βάχχος στὸν ἅγιο Τύχωνα κ.ο.κ.¹¹ Μολονότι τέτοιοι ἀπολοκισμοὶ συσχετισμοὶ δὲν μᾶς πείθουν πιά σήμερα, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀρνηθεῖ κανεὶς ὅτι ὁ ἐπιφανειακὸς προσηλυτισμὸς μεγάλων τμημάτων τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἄλλαξε ἀπὸ τὴ μιὰ μέρα στὴν ἄλλη τὶς πανάρχαιες ἀντιλήψεις και πεποιθήσεις τους. Στὸ τέλος τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα ἄντρες και γυναῖκες χόρευαν ἀκόμη πρὸς τιμὴν τῶν ψεύτικων θεῶν, ἐπικαλοῦνταν ἀκόμη τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Διονύσου τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ τρύγου, ἀναβαν φωτιές ἐξω ἀπὸ τὰ σπίτια τους μετὰ τὸ νέο φεγγάρι και πηδοῦσαν ἀπὸ πάνω τους, και κάθε εἶδους μαγεία ἀνθοῦσε.¹² Δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ διαβάσει κανεὶς πολλοὺς Βίους ἀγίων γιὰ νὰ ἀνακαλύψει ὅτι ἡ λαϊκὴ χριστιανικὴ θρησκεία κληρονόμησε, και ὡς ἕνα βαθμὸ ἐκλογίκευσε, ἕναν τεράστιο ἀριθμὸ εἰδωλολατρικῶν προλήψεων.

Μετὰ τοὺς εἰδωλολάτρες ἔρχονται οἱ Ἑβραῖοι. Παρατηρήσαμε στὸ Κεφάλαιο Α' ὅτι ἡ παρουσία τους ὑπῆρξε συνεχὴς στὴν Παλαιστίνη κατὰ τὴν Πρώιμη βυζαντινὴ περίοδο, ἀλλὰ στὴν πλειονότητά τους βρίσκονταν διασκορπισμένοι σὲ ὅλη τὴν αὐτοκρατορία, κυρίως στὶς πόλεις. Ὑπῆρχε μακρὰ παράδοση στὸ ρωμαϊκὸ δίκαιο, βάσει τῆς ὁποίας οἱ Ἑβραῖοὶ ὑπάγονταν σὲ ἕνα ἰδιόμορφο καθεστῶς: ἦταν νόμιμη θρησκευτικὴ ὁμάδα, οἱ συναγωγές τους προστατεύονταν ἀπὸ ἀρπαγές, διόριζαν οἱ ἴδιοι τοὺς ἱερεῖς τους, και γιὰ ἀστικὲς ὑποθέσεις εἶχαν δικὰ τους δικαστήρια. Ταυτόχρονα ὅμως τοὺς ἀπαγορευόταν νὰ ἀσκοῦν προσηλυτισμὸ, νὰ ἔχουν χριστιανοὺς δούλους και νὰ χτίζουν καινούριες συναγωγές. Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια ἐφαρμοζό-

ταν μια πολιτική περιορισμού των Έβραίων, και τους έλεγαν ξεκάθαρα ότι από δική τους έπιλογή ήταν πολίτες δεύτερης κατηγορίας. Δεν έπαιρναν καθόλου αξιώματα, προοδευτικά τους απαγόρευαν την ύπηρεσία στην κρατική άστυνομία, στη φρουρά των παλατινών, στο στρατό, και από την άλλη μεριά ήταν υποχρεωμένοι να άσκούν, αν ενέπιπταν στην κατηγορία αυτή, τα βαριά καθήκοντα των βουλευτών, αλλά χωρίς να άπολαμβάνουν κανένα από τα σχετικά προνόμια. «Άς είναι», λέει ένας νόμος του Ίουστινιανού, «στην ίδια άισχύροτητα όσον άφορᾷ την τύχη τους, στην όποία θέλουν να βρισκxται και ή ψυχή τους» (*sint in turpitudine fortunae, in qua et animam volunt esse*).¹³ Η φρασεολογία είναι τυπική και ήθηλημένη: έπανειλημμένα τα έπίσημα έγγραφα χαρακτηρίζουν τους Έβραίους με όρους προσβλητικούς και περιφρονητικούς.

Γιατί είχαν οι Έβραίοι τέτοια άμετανόητη έπιμονή, γιατί άρνούνταν να άναγνωρίσουν τις άνώτερες άλήθειες του χριστιανισμού, όταν οι ίδιες αυτές άλήθειες περιέχονταν και στα δικά τους ιερά βιβλία; Ο Ίουστινιανός, που έπιθυμούσε να νομοθετεί για κάθε θέμα, προσπάθησε και σ' αυτό το ζήτημα να φτάσει στην καρδιά του προβλήματος. Άποφάσισε ότι οι Έβραίοι έπρεπε να άναγκάζονται να διαβάζουν την Παλαιά Διαθήκη με τέτοιο τρόπο ώστε να προσέχουν τις προφητείες που περιέχονται εκεί, αντί να παίζουν με τις λέξεις. Για να διευκολύνει αυτή την πιό άποτελεσματική προσέγγιση, ο αυτοκράτορας τους επέτρεψε ειδικά να χρησιμοποιούν στις συναγωγές τους τη μετάφραση των Έβδομήκοντα, ή κάθε άλλη κατάλληλη μετάφραση αντί για τα έβραϊκά, ενώ ταυτόχρονα άπαγορεύτηκε ή Μίσσα (*Δευτέρωσις*) που συσκοτίζε το νόημα του ιερού κειμένου.¹⁴ Έλπικε με το μέτρο αυτό να προστατέψει το έβραϊκό θρησκευτικό πλήρωμα από τους ίδιους τους ραβίνους του, οι όποιοι, κάτω από το κάλυμμα μιᾷς ιερατικής και εν πολλοίς άκαταλαβίστικης γλώσσας, εισήγαν παραπλανητικές έρμηνείες. Ύποπτευόμαστε ότι ή παρέμβαση του Ίουστινιανού είχε μικρή έπιτυχία, όπως και ή χριστιανική πολεμική, που παρήγαγε μια σειρά άντιεβραϊκά έργα τα όποια πάντοτε στρέφονταν γύρω από τα ίδια χωρία της Παλαιᾷς Διαθήκης. Μπορεί να έγιναν μερικοί προσηλυτισμοί, αλλά ο όγκος των Έβραίων παρέμενε άμετανόητος.

Η άλλαγή από μια πολιτική άπρόθυμης άνοχής σε μια άλλη βίαιων προσηλυτισμών και διωγμών φαίνεται ότι προκλήθηκε από πολιτικά γεγονότα. Άποδείχτηκε ότι οι Έβραίοι δεν ήταν νομιμόφρονες προς την αυτοκρατορία. Μια περίπτωση άνατρεπτικής δραστηριότητας εκ μέρους τους άφορούσε μια μακρινή χώρα, το βασίλειο των Χιμαριτών (ή Όμηριτών, στη σημερινή Ύεμένη). Η αυτοκρατορία είχε σπουδαία συμφέροντα στη

νότια άραβική χερσόνησο και προσπάθησε ως συνήθως να τα προωθήσει με τη βοήθεια χριστιανικών ιεραποστολών. Οι Έβραίοι άσκούσαν επίσης προσηλυτισμό στις περιοχές αυτές, και μάλιστα με μεγαλύτερη έπιτυχία, μια και για κάποιο διάστημα οι ήγεμόνες των Χιμαριτών είχαν άσπαστεί την Ιουδαϊκή θρησκεία. Ο τελευταίος από τους ήγεμόνες αυτούς, ο Dū-Nuwās, επέβαλε άπαγόρευση στο αυτοκρατορικό έμπόριο. Η αυτοκρατορία επενέβη στρατιωτικά: ο Dū-Nuwās άπάντησε διατάζοντας τη σφαγή των χριστιανών στην Ύεμένη (περί το 520). Δύο χρόνια άργότερα συντρίφτηκε, και ή χώρα του πέρασε στον έλεγχο του χριστιανικού βασιλείου της Αιθιοπίας. Αυτό που μᾶς ενδιαφέρει εδώ είναι ή συμμετοχή των Έβραίων του Βυζαντίου στα γεγονότα αυτά: ο Dū-Nuwās επέβαλε τα καταπιεστικά του μέτρα με τη δικαιολογία ότι «οι χριστιανοί Ρωμαίοι κακομεταχειρίζονται τους Έβραίους στη χώρα τους και κάθε χρόνο θανατώνουν πολλούς από αυτούς». ¹⁵ Ύπῆρχε επίσης σχέδιο να τον πιέσουν φυλακίζοντας τους ραβίνους της Τιβεριάδας.¹⁶

Έπειτα ήταν οι έξεγέρσεις των Σαμαρειτών, που άρχισαν το 484 και κορυφώθηκαν στην τρομερή επανάσταση του 555. Φυσικά οι Βυζαντινοί άντιλαμβάνονταν ότι υπῆρχε διαφορά ανάμεσα στους Σαμαρείτες και τους Έβραίους, οι τελευταίοι όμως πήραν μέρος στην επανάσταση του 555, που άποσκοπούσε στη δημιουργία ανεξάρτητου κράτους. Τέλος, το πιό σημαντικό ήταν πως οι Έβραίοι πήγαν με το μέρος του έχθρου όταν οι Πέρσες εισέβαλαν στη Μικρά Άσία και την Παλαιστίνη. Το 609-10 οι Ιουδαίοι της Καισάρειας στην Καππαδοκία παραδόθηκαν στους εισβολείς, ενώ ο χριστιανικός πληθυσμός έγκατέλειψε την πόλη.¹⁷ Στα Ίεροσόλυμα, που έπεσαν το 614, οι Ιουδαίοι άγόραζαν χριστιανούς αιχμαλώτους και τους θανάτωναν και εκαιγαν χριστιανικές εκκλησίες.¹⁸ Σε άλλες περιοχές της Παλαιστίνης συνεργάζονταν με τους ντόπιους Σαρακηνούς στις λεηλασίες μοναστηριών και στους φόνους μοναχών.¹⁹

Όταν άποκαταστάθηκε ή βυζαντινή κυριαρχία, οι Έβραίοι πλήρωσαν άκριβά τη συνεργασία τους με τον έχθρο. Όχι μόνο τους απαγόρευσαν να πλησιάζουν τα Ίεροσόλυμα σε άκτίνα πέντε χιλιομέτρων, αλλά λέγεται και ότι γύρω στο 634 ο αυτοκράτορας Ηράκλειος διέταξε να βαφτιστούν όλοι οι Έβραίοι της αυτοκρατορίας.²⁰ Αυτό ήταν το πρώτο γενικό μέτρο τέτοιου είδους κατά των Έβραίων, μολονότι μπορεί να είχαν προηγηθεί άλλα τοπικού χαρακτήρα. Έπιβλήθηκε όμως τη στιγμή που το Ιουδαϊκό πρόβλημα επρόκειτο να λυθεί με άλλα μέσα: άποτέλεσμα των άραβικών κατακτήσεων ήταν να βρεθεί ή πλειονότητα των Έβραίων έξω από τα όρια της αυτοκρατορίας.

Δὲν γνωρίζουμε πόσοι παρέμειναν. Τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ Ἡρακλείου τὸ μιμήθηκαν καὶ ἄλλοι φανατικοὶ αὐτοκράτορες. Ὁ Λέων Γ' διέταξε καὶ πάλι νὰ βαφτιστοῦν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι, καὶ ὅσοι δέχονταν ἔπαιρναν τὸν τίτλο τοῦ «νεοῦ πολίτη», ἀλλὰ τὸ ἔκαναν μὲ κακοπιστία, ἐνῶ ἄλλοι φαίνεται ὅτι κατέφυγαν στοὺς Ἀραβες.²¹ Τὴν ἀποτυχία τοῦ μέτρου αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀναγνώρισε ἡ σύνοδος τοῦ 787, ποὺ ἀποφάσισε ὅτι οἱ ἀνειλικρινεῖς πιστοὶ δὲν θὰ γίνονται δεκτοί· ἦταν προτιμότερο νὰ τοὺς ἐπιτρέπεται νὰ ζοῦν σύμφωνα μὲ τὶς πεποιθήσεις τους, ἐνῶ θὰ ἐξακολουθοῦσαν νὰ ὑπομένουν τὶς παλιῆς διακρίσεις.²² Μιὰ καινούρια προσπάθεια ἔγινε ἀπὸ τὸν Βασίλειο Α': οἱ Ἑβραῖοι προσκαλοῦνταν σὲ θεολογικὲς συζητήσεις καὶ ἂν δὲν ἦταν σὲ θέση νὰ ἀποδείξουν τὴν ἀλήθεια τῆς πίστεως τοὺς ἔπρεπε νὰ βαφτιστοῦν. Φορολογικὲς ἀπαλλαγές καὶ παροχὴ ἀξιοματίων προσφέρονταν ὡς ἀνταμοιβή· παρ' ὅλα αὐτά, μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς νεοφώτιστους πρὸς τὸν οἰκεῖον ὡς κῆνες ὑπέστρεψαν ἐμετόν.²³ Ὁ τελευταῖος γνωστὸς βίαιος προσηλυτισμὸς ἔγινε τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ρωμανοῦ Α', ἀλλὰ τὸ μοναδικὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἦταν ὅτι πολλοὶ Ἑβραῖοὶ ἀναγκάστηκαν νὰ καταφύγουν στὴ χώρα τῶν Χαζάρων, βόρεια τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου. Ἐκτοτε ὅσοι Ἑβραῖοὶ ἀπέμειναν ἀφέθηκαν νὰ ζήσουν σὲ σχετικὴ ἡσυχία· ὑπῆρξε μάλιστα καὶ μιὰ ἀντίστροφη μετανάστευσή τους ἀπὸ τὴν Αἴγυπτο πρὸς τὴν αὐτοκρατορία στὸ τέλος τοῦ 10ου καὶ τὸν 11ο αἰώνα.

Ἡ ἀνοδος τῆς ἀστικῆς ζωῆς προκάλεσε τὴν ἀνάπτυξη τῶν ἐβραϊκῶν κοινοτήτων. Τὸ 1168, ὅταν ὁ Βενιαμὴν τῆς Τουδέλα ξεκίνησε γιὰ τὸ μακρὸ ταξίδι του, μπόρεσε νὰ ἐρθεὶ σὲ ἐπαφὴ μὲ ὁμάδες ὁμοθρήσκων του σὲ κάθε λιμάνι ποὺ σταμάτησε, ἀπὸ τὴν Κέρκυρα ὡς τὴν Κύπρο καὶ τὴν Ἀντιόχεια. Στὴ Θήβα βρῆκε 2.000 ἐβραϊκὲς οἰκογένειες, «ἐξαιρετικὰ εὐδαιμονημένους ἐργάτες στὰ μεταξωτὰ καὶ πορφυρὰ ὑφάσματα σὲ ὅλη τὴν Ἑλλάδα», στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη 500, ἐπίσης ἐργάτες μεταξωτῶν, στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη 2.500, καὶ ἀνάμεσά τους πολλοὺς πλοῦσιους ἐμπόρους. Στὴν πρωτεύουσα ὡστόσο ζοῦσαν σὲ ἕνα γκέτο στὴν ἀπέναντι παραλία τοῦ Κεράτιου Κόλπου, συχνὰ τοὺς ἔδερναν οἱ χριστιανοὶ καὶ δὲν τοὺς ἐπιτρεπόταν νὰ ἱππεύουν ἄλογα (ἐξαίρεση ἀποτελοῦσε ὁ γιατρός τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, ποὺ ἦταν Ἑβραῖος). Μολονότι οἱ ἀριθμοὶ ποὺ ἀναφέρει ὁ Βενιαμὴν μαρτυροῦν κάποια ἀνάπτυξη τῶν Ἑβραίων τοῦ Βυζαντίου, πρέπει νὰ παρατηρηθεῖ ὅτι ὁ ἴδιος δίνει πολὺ μεγαλύτερους ἀριθμοὺς γιὰ μουσουλμανικὲς πόλεις ὅπως τὸ Χαλέπι (5.000) καὶ ἡ Μοσούλη (7.000).²⁴ Οὔτε μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι στοὺς Ἑβραίους τοῦ Βυζαντίου, ὅποια κι ἂν ἦταν ἡ συμβολὴ τους στὴν οἰκονομικὴ ζωὴ τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, ἐπέτρεψαν ποτὲ νὰ ἀναπτύξουν κλίση πρὸς τὴ λογοτεχνία καὶ τὴν ἐπιστήμη.

Ἄν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι ἀποτελοῦσαν μικρὸ μόνο μέρος τῶν ὑπηκόων τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, ὡστόσο οἱ χριστιανοὶ αἰρετικοὶ ἦταν ἐξαιρετικὰ πολυάριθμοι. Συνήθως χωρίζονται σὲ δύο ὁμάδες: ἀπὸ τὴ μιὰ οἱ «σχισματικοί», ποὺ οἱ πῶ πολλοὶ εἶχαν προβυζαντινὴ προέλευση, καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη οἱ ὁπαδοὶ τῶν «εὐγενῶν» αἱρέσεων, ὅπως ὁ ἀρειανισμὸς, οἱ ὁποῖοι διέφεραν ἀπὸ τοὺς ὀρθοδόξους μόνο σὲ λεπτὰ σημεῖα ποὺ διευκρίνιζαν τὴ φύση τῆς Ἀγίας Τριάδας. Οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ ὅμως δὲν ἔκαναν αὐτὸ τὸ διαχωρισμὸ, ἀλλὰ ἔτειναν νὰ βάζουν κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν ταμπέλα τῆς αἵρεσης ὅλα τὰ «ψευδῆ» δόγματα, παλιὰ καὶ νέα, κάθε εἶδους. Ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν τῶν δογμάτων ἦταν ἐκπληκτικὸς: ὁ Ἐπιφάνιος στὸ ἔργο *Πανάριον* (τὸ συνέγραψε στὰ 377-80) περιγράφει ὀγδόντα, ἐνῶ ὁ Ἰωάννης Δαμασκηνὸς τὸν 8ο αἰώνα ξεπέρασε τὰ ἑκατὸ καὶ προσπάθησε μὲ κάθε τρόπο νὰ δείξει ὅτι ὅλα προέρχονταν ἀπὸ τέσσερις ἀρχέτυπες κακοδοξίες, δηλαδὴ τὸν Βαρβαρισμὸ, τὸν Σκυθισμὸ, τὸν Ἑλληνισμὸ καὶ τὸν Ἰουδαϊσμὸ.²⁵ Ἐνῶ οἱ ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ ἄνδρες ἔκαναν καταλόγους καὶ περιέγραψαν, ἢ αὐτοκρατορικὴ κυβέρνηση χτυποῦσε πρὸς κάθε κατεύθυνση. Ὁ Θεοδοσιανὸς Κώδικας περιέχει οὔτε λίγο οὔτε πολὺ ἐξήγτα ἔξι νόμους ἐναντίον τῶν αἰρετικῶν καὶ ἐπιβάλλει διάφορες τιμωρίες: ἀπαγόρευση τῶν συγκεντρώσεων, κατάσχεση τῶν οἰκημάτων ὅπου γίνονταν οἱ συγκεντρώσεις, ἀπαγόρευση διορισμοῦ ἱερέων, κάψιμο βιβλίων, πρόστιμα. Μερικοὶ αἰρετικοὶ ἐξορίζονταν ἀπὸ τὶς πόλεις καὶ τιμωροῦνταν μὲ ἀτιμία, ὅποτε ἔχαναν τὸ δικαίωμα νὰ κληροδοτοῦν περιουσίες ἢ νὰ κάνουν διαθήκες. Ἡ ποινὴ τοῦ θανάτου ἐπιφυλασσόταν μόνο γιὰ τοὺς μανιχαίους.²⁶ Εἶναι ἀλήθεια πὼς κανένας αἰρετικὸς δὲν ὑποχρεωνόταν εἰδικὰ νὰ γίνεῖ ὀρθόδοξος, ἀλλὰ τὰ κίνητρα ἦταν τόσο ἰσχυρὰ ποὺ τὸ πράγμα κατέληγε σχεδὸν στὸ ἴδιο. Ἀκόμη καὶ ἂν ἡ αὐτοκρατορικὴ νομοθεσία ἐφαρμοζόταν στὴν τύχη (καὶ σίγουρα ἔτσι ἐφαρμοζόταν), δὲν ἔπαυε νὰ δημιουργεῖ μιὰ ἀτμόσφαιρα καχυποψίας καὶ δυσπιστίας. Οἱ καταδότες ἐνθαρρύνονταν, οἱ συντεχνίες ἦταν ὑπεύθυνες γιὰ τὶς πεποιθήσεις τῶν μελῶν τους, καὶ τὰ ἀφεντικὰ γιὰ τοὺς δούλους τους. Οἱ οἰκογένειες διέτρεχαν τὸν κίνδυνο νὰ τιμωρηθοῦν αὐστηρὰ γιὰ τὴ χρῆση ποὺ ἐπέτρεπαν νὰ γίνεταὶ στὸ σπίτι τους.

Ἀπὸ ὅλες τὶς σχισματικὲς ὁμάδες, αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἐνέπνεαν τὸν μεγαλύτερο φόβο ἦταν οἱ μανιχαῖοι, ἐξαιτίας τῆς λαθασμένης ἀντίληψης ὅτι, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ ἐπικίνδυνο δόγμα τους, ἦταν καὶ πράκτορες τοῦ ἐχθροῦ. Εἶναι ἀλήθεια πὼς ὁ Μάνης (πέθανε τὸ 277) ἔζησε στὴν περσικὴ Μεσοποταμία, ἔβλεπε ὅμως τὸν ἑαυτό του ὡς χριστιανὸ ἀπόστολο, ἢ μᾶλλον ὡς τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Παράκλητο, καὶ θανατώθηκε κατ' ἀπαίτηση τοῦ ζωροαστρικοῦ κλήρου. Οἱ ὁπαδοὶ του καταδιώκονταν στὴν Περσία τὸ ἴδιο ὅπως καὶ στὴ ρω-

μαϊκή αυτοκρατορία. Ἡ θεολογία τοῦ Μάνη, μὲ τὴ μετενσωμάτωση τῶν ψυχῶν, τοὺς ἀναρίθμητους «αἰῶνες», τὶς πέντε «παρεπιδημίες» τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοὺς πέντε «ἄρχοντες» τοῦ Σκότους, μπορεῖ νὰ φαινόταν γελοία σὲ ὀρισμένους, προφανῶς ὅμως ἡ ἔλξη ποὺ ἀσκοῦσε ὑπῆρξε ἐκτεταμένη. Τὸ δόγμα τῶν ἀντιθετικῶν καὶ ἀυθύπαρκτων ἀρχῶν τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ τοῦ κακοῦ, ἡ πεποίθησή του πὼς ἡ ὕλη ἦταν κακὴ, ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀμάρτανε ἀπὸ ἀνάγκη, ὅτι ἡ σωτηρία βρισκόταν στὴν ἀσκητικὴ ζωὴ, στὴν ἀποχὴ ἀπὸ τὸ κρέας, τὸ κρασί καὶ τὶς σεξουαλικὲς σχέσεις —οἱ ἰδέες αὐτὲς ἤχοῦσαν κάπως γνώριμες καὶ φαίνονταν νὰ ἐπιβεβαιώνονται ἀπὸ τὴν πραγματικότητά τῆς καθημερινῆς ζωῆς. Ὁ μανιχαϊσμός ἦταν πιὸ ριζοσπαστικὸς ἀπὸ τὸ χριστιανισμό, δὲν εἶχε φθαρεῖ ἀπὸ τοὺς διάφορους συμβιβασμούς ποὺ οἱ χριστιανοὶ εἶχαν ἀναγκαστεῖ νὰ κάνουν μὲ τὶς ἰουδαϊκὲς γραφές, καὶ ἐπιπλέον ἔδειξε ἐξαιρετικὴ ζωτικότητά στις προσηλυτιστικὲς του δραστηριότητες. Τὸν 4ο αἰῶνα εἶχε ἤδη ἐξαπλωθεῖ οὐσιαστικά σὲ ὅλες τὶς ρωμαϊκὲς ἐπαρχίες: τὰ πρῶτα αυτοκρατορικὰ μέτρα ἐναντίον του χρονολογοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸ 297.²⁷ Εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ ἐξηγηθεῖ γιατί στὴ συνέχεια ἔχασε τὴν ὁρμή του, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ εἶχε ἀκόμη ἀπήχηση, καὶ λέγεται ὅτι ὁ ἐπαρχὸς τῶν πραιτωρίων Πέτρος Βαρσύμης ὑποστήριξε ἀνοιχτὰ τοὺς μανιχαίους.²⁸ Πάντως ἡ περιοχὴ ὅπου εἶχε τὶς μεγαλύτερες ἐπιτυχίες του ἦταν ἡ κεντρικὴ Ἀσία, ἀπὸ τὴ Σαμαρκάνδη μέχρι τὴν Κίνα.

Ἡ μοίρα ὄλων τῶν παράνομων σχισματικῶν ἦταν νὰ ἀποσύρονται στὴν ὑπαιθρο, ὅπου δὲν ὑποβάλλονταν στοὺς ἴδιους καταναγκασμούς ὅπως στὶς πόλεις. Φυσικὰ μερικὲς αἵρέσεις εἶχαν τὶς ρίζες τους στὴν ὑπαιθρο καὶ παρέμειναν πάντα δεμένες μὲ μιὰ συγκεκριμένη γεωγραφικὴ περιοχὴ. Τέτοια ἦταν ὁ μοντανισμὸς τῆς Φρυγίας, ποὺ ἀκούγεται γιὰ τελευταία φορὰ τὸν 8ο αἰῶνα: ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Λέων Γ' διέταξε τὴν ἐπιστροφή στὴν ὀρθοδοξία ὅσων μοντανιστῶν ὑπῆρχαν ἀκόμη, ἀλλὰ αὐτοὶ προτίμησαν νὰ αὐτοπυρποληθοῦν στὶς ἐκκλησίες τους, ὅπως εἶχαν κάνει καὶ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ.²⁹ Συχνὰ διαπιστώνουμε τὴ συνεχιζόμενη ὑπαρξὴ τῆς μιᾶς ἢ τῆς ἄλλης παλιᾶς αἵρετικῆς ομάδας μόνο ἀπὸ τυχαῖες ἀναφορές. Ἔτσι οἱ Τεσσαρεσκαίδεκατίται, τῶν ὁποίων τὸ κύριο σφάλμα ἦταν ὁ «ἰουδαϊκὸς» ὑπολογισμὸς τῆς ἡμερομηνίας τοῦ Πάσχα, καὶ οἱ ὁποῖοι βρισκόνταν στὸ προσκήνιο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη σύνοδο τῆς Νίκαιας (325), ἐπανεμφανίζονται ἀπροσδόκητα τὸ 867, ὅταν ὁ πατριάρχης Φώτιος συγκέντρωσε κάμποσους ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς καὶ πέτυχε νὰ γίνουν ξανά δεκτοὶ στὴν Ἐκκλησία.³⁰ Καθὼς οἱ γνώσεις μας γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ ὑπαιθρο εἶναι ἐντελῶς ἀσαφεῖς, εἶναι σχεδὸν ἀδύνατο νὰ προσδιορίσουμε τὸ βαθμὸ ἐξάπλωσης

τῶν διάφορων αἵρετικῶν ομάδων· ἀπλῶς ὑποθέτουμε ὅτι μερικὲς περιοχές, ὅπως ἡ Φρυγία καὶ ἡ Γαλατία, ἦταν ἰδιαίτερα ἐπιρρεπεῖς στὶς αἵρέσεις.

Ὡστόσο, ἡ μεγαλύτερη πρόκληση γιὰ τὸν κρατικὸ χριστιανισμό προῆλθε ὄχι ἀπὸ τὶς σχισματικὲς ομάδες, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ μιὰ ἀπὸ τὶς «εὐγενεῖς» αἵρέσεις, τὸ μονοφυσισμὸ. Μερικοὶ μελετητὲς διστάζουν ἀκόμη καὶ νὰ τὸν ἀποκαλέσουν αἵρεση, προτιμώντας νὰ τὸν ὀνομάζουν σχίσμα. Οἱ μονοφυσίτες, ποὺ ἔβρισκαν συντριπτικὴ ὑποστήριξη στὴν Αἴγυπτο καὶ τὴ Συρία, ἦταν ἀντίθετοι μὲ τὴ σύνοδο τῆς Χαλκηδόνας (451), γιατί κατὰ τὴ γνώμη τους διαίρουσε τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ Χριστοῦ σὲ δύο φύσεις· αὐτοὶ πίστευαν στὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ ἐνσαρκωμένου Χριστοῦ, μιὰ ἐνότητα ποὺ προερχόταν ἀπὸ (ἐκ) τὶς δύο φύσεις, τὴ θεϊκὴ καὶ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη. Ἐκ γιὰ τοὺς μονοφυσίτες, ἐν γιὰ τοὺς ὀρθοδόξους —ἡ διαφορὰ ἦταν ἓνα γράμμα. Ὁ ἱστορικὸς Εὐάγγελος, ποὺ ἦταν σύγχρονος τῆς διαμάχης, σωστὰ παρατηρεῖ πὼς ἡ μία ἀποψη προϋποθέτει τὴν ἄλλη. Προσθέτει ὡστόσο πὼς τὸ ζήτημα προξενοῦσε τέτοιες διαφορὲς ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους «ἐξαιτίας τῆς προσκόλλησής τους στὴ δικὴ τους ἰδέα τοῦ Θεοῦ», ποὺ προτιμοῦσαν νὰ πεθάνουν παρά νὰ καταλήξουν σὲ κάποια συμφωνία.³¹ Ἄν ὑπῆρχε κάποια βαθύτερη αἰτία τῆς διαμάχης, ὁ Εὐάγγελος δὲν τὴ γνώριζε, καὶ αὐτὸς σίγουρα ἦταν σὲ θέση νὰ ξέρει.

Ἡ αὐτοκρατορικὴ κυβέρνηση, πρέπει νὰ τὸ ὀμολογήσουμε, ἔκανε πολὺς μεσολαβητικὲς προσπάθειες. Τὸ 482 ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Ζήνων ἐξέδωσε τὸ *Ἐνωτικόν*, ἓνα διάταγμα ποὺ ἀπευθυνόταν στὸν κληρο καὶ τὸ λαὸ τῆς Αἴγυπτου, μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο ἔκανε ἐκκλήση στὴ νομιμοφροσύνη τῶν ὑπηκόων του καὶ τοὺς ὑπεθυμίριζε ὅτι ἡ νίκη κατὰ τῶν ἐχθρῶν, ἡ εὐλογία τῆς εἰρήνης, ὁ ἥπιος καιρὸς καὶ ἡ ἀφθονία τῶν καρπῶν ἐξαρτῶνταν ἀπὸ τὴν ὀμόθυμη λατρεία τοῦ θεοῦ. Στὴ συνέχεια ἀπέρριπτε τὶς ἀκρότητες καὶ τῶν δύο πλευρῶν, ὑποστήριζε τὶς τρεῖς πρῶτες οἰκουμενικὲς συνόδους, μάλιστα καὶ ἀναφερόταν στὴ Χαλκηδόνα, καὶ διακήρυσσε τὴν πίστη του στὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.³² Ἡ ἐκκλήσή του ἦταν φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ. Ἄλλοι αὐτοκράτορες ἀκολούθησαν διαφορετικὲς μεθόδους: ὁ Ἀναστάσιος ὑποστήριξε ἀνοιχτὰ τοὺς μονοφυσίτες, ἐνῶ ὁ Ἰουστίνος Α' τοὺς καταδίωξε. Ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς διαπραγματεύεται καὶ ἔκανε διώξεις ἐναλλάξ, ἐνῶ ἡ σύζυγός του Θεοδώρα βοήθησε δραστήρια τοὺς ἀμετανόητους ἀνατολικούς. Ὁ Ἰουστίνος Β' ἐπιχείρησε ἓναν νέο συμβιβασμὸ, ὅπως καὶ ὁ Ἡράκλειος. Τὸ τελικὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἦταν μηδέν, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴ δημιουργία μιᾶς καινούριας αἵρεσης, τοῦ μονοθελητισμοῦ, ποὺ γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν προσπάθεια τοῦ Ἡρακλείου γιὰ συμφιλίωση.

Ἡ πρόθεση τῶν μονοφυσιτῶν ἀρχικὰ δὲν ἦταν νὰ ἰδρῦσουν μιὰ ξεχω-

ριστή Έκκλησία. Οί πρώτοι τους ιεράρχες, από την εποχή του Σεβήρου, μονοφυσίτη πατριάρχη τής Αντιόχειας (512-518), ήταν επίσκοποι που είχαν διοριστεί κανονικά. Ένω ή δύναμή τους ήταν μεγαλύτερη στην περιφέρεια τής Αντιόχειας, ώστόσο εκτεινόταν και στην ανατολική και νότια Μικρά Άσία. Άλλά μετά την καθαίρεση και την εξορία αυτών των επισκόπων (519), και ιδιαίτερα μετά τὸ θάνατο τής αυτοκράτειρας Θεοδώρας (548), δὲν φαινόταν νὰ ὑπάρχει ἄλλη λύση παρά ἡ δημιουργία μιᾶς ιδιαίτερης Έκκλησίας με τιτουλάριους επισκόπους, οί περισσότεροι ἀπὸ τοὺς ὁποίους ποτὲ δὲν ἐπιτρεπόταν νὰ ἐπισκεφθοῦν τὶς ἐπισκοπὲς τους. Αὐτὴ ἔγινε γνωστὴ ὡς ἰακωβιτικὴ Έκκλησία, ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰακώβ Βαραδαῖο (πέθανε τὸ 578), ποὺ πραγματοποιοῖσε τὶς περισσότερες χειροτονίες. Εἶναι ἐνδιαφέρον νὰ παρατηρήσουμε ὅτι οἱ «σκιώδεις» ἐπισκοπὲς τοῦ Ἰακώβ δὲν περιορίζονταν μόνο στὶς ἐπαρχίες ὅπου εἶχαν δύναμη οἱ μονοφυσίτες ἀλλὰ ἐκτεινόταν και σὲ ἑλληνικὰ κέντρα ὅπως ἡ Ἔφεσος, ἡ Σμύρνη, ἡ Πέργαμος και ἡ Χίος, και ἀπὸ αὐτὸ μπορούμε νὰ συμπεράνουμε ὅτι οἱ σκοποὶ τους δὲν εἶχαν ἐθνικὸ χαρακτήρα.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία πὼς ἡ μονοφυσιτικὴ διαμάχη διευκόλυε τὴν κατάκτηση τῶν ἀνατολικῶν ἐπαρχιῶν πρῶτα ἀπὸ τοὺς Πέρσες και μετὰ ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἀραβες. Τὰ βάσανα ἀπὸ τοὺς διωγμούς, οἱ ἐπίσκοποι ποὺ ἐξορίζονταν, τὰ ποιμνία ποὺ στεροῦνταν τὶς ἐκκλησίες τους και τὰ μοναστήρια ποὺ καταστρέφονταν ἀπὸ τὸ στρατὸ παρουσίαζαν τὴν κεντρικὴ κυβέρνηση στὸ ρόλο ἑνὸς ξένου καταπιεστῆ. "Ὅπως λέει ἕνας σύρος ἱστορικός:

«Ὁ Ἡράκλειος δὲν ἐπέτρεπε στοὺς ὀρθοδόξους [δηλαδὴ στοὺς μονοφυσίτες] νὰ παρουσιαστοῦν μπροστὰ του και δὲν δεχόταν τὰ παράπονά τους γιὰ τὶς ἐκκλησίες ποὺ τοὺς εἶχαν ἀφαιρεθεῖ. Γιὰ τὸ λόγο αὐτὸ ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἐκδίκησης, ποὺ μόνο αὐτὸς εἶναι παντοδύναμος [...] βλέποντας τὴ σκληρότητα τῶν Ρωμαίων, ποὺ σὲ ὅλη τους τὴν ἐπικράτεια λεηλατοῦσαν σκληρὰ τὶς ἐκκλησίες μας και τὰ μοναστήρια μας και μᾶς καταδίκαιζαν ἀνελέητα, ἔφερε ἀπὸ τὸ νότο τοὺς γιους τοῦ Ἰσμαὴλ γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἀπελευθερώσουν ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τῶν Ρωμαίων. Καὶ μολονότι πραγματικὰ ὑποφέραμε κάπως ἐξαιτίας τοῦ ὅτι οἱ ἐνοριακὲς ἐκκλησίες ποὺ εἶχαν ἀφαιρεθεῖ ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς και εἶχαν δοθεῖ στοὺς Χαλκηδόνιους [δηλαδὴ τοὺς ὀρθοδόξους] παρέμειναν στὴν κατοχὴ τους, ἐπειδὴ, ὅταν οἱ πόλεις παραδόθηκαν στοὺς Ἀραβες, οἱ τελευταῖοι ἄφησαν σὲ κάθε δόγμα τοὺς ναοὺς ποὺ κατεῖχε ἐκείνη τὴν ἐποχὴ, [...] ὡστόσο δὲν ἦταν καθόλου μικρὸ κέρδος γιὰ μᾶς νὰ ἀπελευθερωθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὴ σκληρότητα τῶν Ρωμαίων, ἀπὸ τὴν κακία τους, τὴν ὀργὴ τους, τὸ σκληρὸ φανατισμὸ τους ἐναντίον μας, και νὰ ζοῦμε εἰρηνικά».³³

Αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι οἱ μονοφυσίτες ἀντιπροσώπευαν ἐθνικιστικὲς τάσεις ἢ ὅτι εὐνοοῦσαν τὴν ξένη κατοχὴ. Δὲν θὰ μπορούσε ὅμως κανεὶς νὰ περιμένει ὅτι θὰ πολεμοῦσαν με ἐνθουσιασμὸ γιὰ λογαριασμὸ ἑνὸς μισητοῦ και μακρινοῦ αυτοκράτορα. Στὴν Αἴγυπτο, τὴ Συρία και τὴ Μεσοποταμία ἡ ὀρθόδοξη Έκκλησία εἶχε σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ ἐπιβληθεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ ἔξω και, ὅταν ἡ αυτοκρατορικὴ παρουσία ἔλειψε, συρρικνώθηκε κι ἐκείνη ἢ ἐξαφανίστηκε.

Ἡ κατάρρευση τοῦ 7ου αἰῶνα ἄλλαξε δραστικὰ τὴ σύνθεση τῶν αἵρετικῶν στὴν αυτοκρατορία. Οἱ παλιοὶ εἰδωλολάτρες εἶχαν ἐξαφανιστεῖ, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ μερικὲς ἀσήμαντες ὁμάδες σὲ ἀπομονωμένες περιοχὲς, ὅπως ἦταν οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς Μάνης στὴν Πελοπόννησο, ποὺ κατέληξε νὰ ἐκχριστιανιστοῦν στὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Βασιλείου Α΄.³⁴ Ἡ μεγάλη πλειονότητα τῶν ἰουδαίων και τῶν μονοφυσιτῶν βρέθηκαν κάτω ἀπὸ ἀραβικὴ κυριαρχία. Ὑπῆρχαν ἀκόμη κοινότητες ἰακωβιτῶν Σύρων κατὰ μῆκος τῶν ἀνατολικῶν συνόρων, και μερικοὶ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς ἐγκαταστάθηκαν στὴ Θράκη τὸν 8ο αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἀκοῦμε πολὺ γι' αὐτοὺς κατόπιν.³⁵ Ἐνα πῶς σημαντικὸ μονοφυσιτικὸ στοιχεῖο ἀποτελοῦσαν οἱ Ἀρμένιοι, ποὺ ὅπως εἴπαμε ἤδη ἔπαιξαν σημαντικὸτατο ρόλο στὴ Μέση βυζαντινὴ περίοδο. Διάφορες ἄλλες ὁμάδες ἐξακολούθησαν νὰ φυτοζωοῦν στὴν ἀφάνεια στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία, και ἄρχισαν νὰ ἐμφανίζονται μουσουλμάνοι ὡς αἰχμάλωτοι πολέμου, στοὺς ὁποίους μάλιστα ἐπιτράπηκε νὰ ἔχουν ἕνα τζαμί στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ὑπῆρχε ὅμως ἕνας πολὺ μεγάλος ἀριθμὸς ἀπὸ νέους εἰδωλολάτρες, οἱ Σλάβοι και οἱ Ἀραβοὶ, ποὺ εἶχαν οὐσιαστικὰ πλημμυρίσει ὅλη τὴν ἔκταση τῆς Βαλκανικῆς Χερσονήσου. Παραδόξως οἱ βυζαντινὲς πηγὲς δὲν μᾶς λένε σχεδὸν τίποτε γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία τους, ἂν και ὑποθέτουμε ὅτι γιὰ δύο αἰῶνες, και σὲ ὀρισμένες περιοχὲς γιὰ τρεῖς, τεράστιες περιοχὲς ποὺ τυπικὰ ἀνῆκαν στὴν αυτοκρατορία εἶχαν ἐπιστρέψει στὴν εἰδωλολατρία, και ὅτι ὁ Περσὸν, ὁ θεὸς τοῦ κεραυνοῦ, λατρευόταν ἐκεῖ ἀντὶ γιὰ τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό. "Ἐνα σικελικὸ κείμενο ἀμφίβολης ἱστορικότητος (8ος αἰῶνας;) μιλά γιὰ μιὰ ὁμάδα Ἀβάρους, «ἕνα μιὰρὸ ἔθνος με πλήρη ἄγνοια τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσας», ποὺ ζοῦσαν στὶς περιοχὲς τοῦ Δυρραχίου και τῆς Ἀθήνας και λάτρευαν ὁμοιώματα ἐρπετῶν και τετράποδων ζώων, καθὼς και τὴ φωτιά, τὸ νερὸ και τὰ ξίφη τους.³⁶ Ἡ πρώτη προσπάθεια τῶν Βυζαντινῶν νὰ διεισδύσουν στὴν ἡπειρωτικὴ Ἑλλάδα και τὴν Πελοπόννησο πραγματοποιήθηκε τὸ 783, και τὰ μέρη αὐτὰ ἀντιμετωπίζονταν ὡς ἐχθρικές περιοχὲς.³⁷ Ἐκτοτε οἱ Σλάβοι ἐκχριστιανίζονταν βαθμιαῖα, ἀλλὰ ἡ διαδικασία ἦταν ἀργὴ και κράτησε ἕναν αἰῶνα και περισσότερο. Καὶ δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεχνᾶμε ὅτι στὰ βόρεια τῆς Θράκης και τῆς Μακεδονίας εἶχε ἰδρυ-

θεϊ πρόσφατα τὸ βασίλειο τῆς Βουλγαρίας, πού ἦταν εἰδωλολατρικό, καὶ μάλιστα ἐπιθετικὰ εἰδωλολατρικό, μέχρι τὸν τυπικὸ ἐκχριστιανισμό του τὸ 864. Ἔτσι, στὴν εὐρωπαϊκὴ πλευρά, τὸ Βυζάντιο ἀντιμετώπιζε μιὰ ἔκταση πρωτόγονης εἰδωλολατρίας πού ἀπλωνόταν ὅσο ἔφτανε τὸ μάτι.

Ἐνῶ αὐτοὶ οἱ βάρβαροι ἦταν ἀκόμη βυθισμένοι στὶς δεισιδαιμονίες τους, τὸ Βυζάντιο ταράχτηκε ἀπὸ μιὰ ἄλλη θρησκευτικὴ θύελλα. Ἴσως εἶναι κάπως ὑπερβολικὸ νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζουμε τὴν εἰκονομαχίαν ὡς αἴρεση, ἀλλὰ πράγματι μᾶς παρέχει ἓνα ἐνδιαφέρον παράδειγμα τοῦ ἀποφασιστικοῦ ρόλου πού ἔπαιξε ὁ αὐτοκράτορας στὸ θρησκευτικὸ πεδίο. Ἐπίσης ὁδήγησε σὲ μιὰ περιεργὴ κατάσταση, ὅπου οἱ περισσότεροὶ κάτοικοι τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας βρέθηκαν νὰ θεωροῦνται αἰρετικοί. Τὸ θέμα ἀφοροῦσε τὴ θρησκευτικὴ πρακτικὴ μᾶλλον παρὰ τὸ δόγμα: ἦταν σωστὸ νὰ λατρεύονται οἱ εἰκόνες τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν ἁγίων; Ὅ,τι καὶ ἂν ὑποστήριζαν οἱ θεολόγοι, εἶναι φανερὸ ὅτι ἡ λαϊκὴ εὐσέβεια εἶχε δώσει στὶς εἰκόνες σημαντικὴ θέση καὶ τοὺς ἀπέδιδε ὑπερφυσικὲς δυνάμεις. Ὁ μέσος Βυζαντινὸς θὰ δυσκολευνόταν κάπως νὰ ἐξηγήσει τὴν ἰδεολογικὴ του θέση στὸ θέμα αὐτό, ἀλλὰ σίγουρα πίστευε ὅτι μιὰ εἰκόνα παρεῖχε, κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο, ἓναν «τόπου» γιὰ τὸν ἅγιο πού παρίστανε. Ἄν ὁ ἅγιος κατοικοῦσε μέσα στὴν εἰκόνα του, μποροῦσε καὶ νὰ μιλήσει καὶ νὰ κάνει θαύματα μέσω αὐτῆς. Ἡ διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα σὲ μιὰ εἰκόνα καὶ σὲ ἓνα εἶδωλο ἦταν ὅτι ἡ εἰκόνα παρίστανε ἓναν ἀληθινὸ ἅγιο, ἐνῶ τὸ εἶδωλο παρουσίαζε ὄχι τόσο μιὰ ἀνύπαρκτη ὀντότητα ὅσο ἓνα δαίμονα.

Φαίνεται πὼς οἱ στρατιωτικὲς καταστροφὲς τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα ἔκαναν μερικοὺς ἀνθρώπους νὰ πιστέψουν ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς τοὺς τιμωροῦσε ἐπίτηδες γιὰ κάποιο σοβαρὸ σφάλμα στὴ λατρεία τους. Ἄν οἱ αἰρετικὲς ομάδες ἔπαιζαν κάποιο ρόλο στὸ ζήτημα αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι γνωστὸ. Γνωρίζουμε πάντως ὅτι ὑπῆρξε λαϊκὴ ἀναταραχὴ πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ διαταγὴ πού ἐξέδωσε τὸ 730 ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Λέων Γ', πού ἦταν Σύρος ἀπὸ τὴ Γερμανικεῖα, γιὰ τὴν ἀπομάκρυνση τῶν εἰκόνων. Ἐπιθυμοῦσε νὰ ἔχει καὶ τὸν πατριάρχη μὲ τὸ μέρος του, ἀλλὰ μιὰ καὶ ὁ πατριάρχης ἀρνήθηκε νὰ συνεργήσει, διόρισε κάποιον ἄλλο στὴ θέση του. Οἱ λίγοι πού ἀντιστάθηκαν ἐνεργὰ στὸν αὐτοκράτορα τιμωρήθηκαν. Δὲν θεωρήθηκε ὅτι ὑπῆρχε ἄμεση ἀνάγκη νὰ ζητηθεῖ ἡ ἔγκριση ὀλοκληρῆς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἡ ἐξυγίανση τῆς πίστεως τῶν ὑπηκόων του ἦταν μέσα στὰ ὅρια τῶν ἀρμοδιοτήτων τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, καὶ τὰ γεγονότα στὸ πεδίο τῆς μάχης ἀπόδειχναν τὴν ὀρθοδοξία του. Μόνον τὸ 754 ὁ διάδοχος τοῦ Λέοντα Κωνσταντῖνος Ε' συγκάλεσε μιὰ σύνοδο ἀπὸ 338 ἐπισκόπους, δηλαδὴ τὸ σύνολο τῶν ἐπισκόπων τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, πού ὅλοι ὑπέγραψαν ὅ,τι τοὺς ζητήθηκε, ἄσχετα μὲ τί πίστευαν ἐνδόμυχα.

Ἀπὸ ὅσο μποροῦμε νὰ κρίνουμε, οἱ εἰκονομάχοι ποτὲ δὲν ἀπέκτησαν μεγάλη λαϊκὴ ὑποστήριξη. Ἡ μόνη ομάδα πού ὑποστήριξε ἀνοιχτὰ τὴν εἰκονομαχίαν ἦταν ὁ στρατὸς ἐκστρατείας, πού εἶχε φανατιστεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Ε' καὶ εἶχε ὀρκιστεῖ νὰ τὴν ὑποστηρίξει. Ὅταν τὸ 786 ἡ αὐτοκράτειρα Εἰρήνη προσπάθησε νὰ συγκαλέσει σύνοδο στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη γιὰ νὰ ἐπαναφέρει τὴ λατρεία τῶν εἰκόνων, τὰ σχέδιά της ματαιώθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸ στρατό. Πρέπει ἐπίσης νὰ λεχθεῖ ὅτι στὴ δεκαετία τοῦ 760 ὁ λαὸς τῆς πρωτεύουσας ἔπαιρνε πρόθυμα μέρος στοὺς διωγμοὺς τῶν εἰκονοφίλων, σέρνοντάς τους στοὺς δρόμους καὶ φτύνοντάς τους στὸν ἵπποδρομο· ἀλλὰ ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος Ε' ἦταν πολὺ δημοφιλὴς αὐτοκράτορας καὶ οἱ ἀνυπότακτοι μοναχοὶ ὅπωςδήποτε θὰ παρουσιάζονταν ὡς ἐχθροὶ του. Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ αὐτό, δὲν γνωρίζουμε νὰ ἔγιναν μαζικὲς διαδηλώσεις εἴτε ὑπὲρ εἴτε κατὰ. Ἡ κυβερνητικὴ θέληση ἦταν πού ὑπαγόρευσε τὴν κατάπιξη τῆς εἰκονομαχίας τὸ 787, τὴν ἐπαναφορὰ της τὸ 814 καὶ τὸ ὀριστικὸ της τέλος τὸ 843. Πρέπει νὰ ὁμολογηθεῖ πάντως ὅτι μαζικὲς διώξεις τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ δὲν ἔγιναν ποτὲ. Ὁ μέσος κληρικὸς γενικὰ ἔσκυβε τὸ κεφάλι, καὶ μόνον μερικοὶ μοναχοὶ (καὶ πάλι κάθε ἄλλο παρὰ ὅλοι οἱ μοναχοὶ) τολμοῦσαν νὰ ὑποστηρίξουν τὶς εἰκόνες καὶ πλήρωναν τὶς συνέπειες. Οἱ διωγμοὶ πού ἔγιναν ἐπὶ Θεοφίλου στὴ δεκαετία τοῦ 830 ἦταν πολὺ περιορισμένοι.

Ὁ πατριάρχης Φώτιος, πού πρωταγωνίστησε στὴν ἐξαφάνιση τῶν τελευταίων ἰχνῶν τῆς εἰκονομαχίας, πρόβαλλε μὲ περηφάνια τὴν ἰδέαν ὅτι ὅλες οἱ αἰρέσεις εἶχαν νικηθεῖ μιὰ γιὰ πάντα. Ἡ σύνοδος πού συγκάλεσε τὸ 867 θεωρήθηκε ὅτι σημείωσε «τὸ θρίαμβο πάνω σὲ ὅλες τὶς αἰρέσεις», καὶ ὁ πατριάρχης βεβαίωνε μὲ αὐτοπεποίθηση ὅτι «κανενὸς εἶδους ἀσέβεια δὲν θὰ μιλά στὸ ἐξῆς ἐλεύθερα».³⁸ Δὲν εἶχε καμιά ἀμφιβολία—καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ ἀποψη ἐπικράτησε στὴν ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία—ὅτι τὸ θρησκευτικὸ δόγμα εἶχε καθοριστεῖ ὀριστικά. Τίποτε δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ προστεθεῖ σ' αὐτὸ καὶ τίποτε νὰ τοῦ ἀφαιρεθεῖ, ὅπως διακήρυξε ἡ σύνοδος τοῦ Φωτίου τὸ 879-80 στὴν ἕκτη συνεδρίασή της. Καὶ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Λέων Ζ' εἶχε τὴν ἴδια πεποίθηση, ὅτι ὅλες οἱ αἰρέσεις εἶχαν ἐξαφανιστεῖ. Τὸν παλιὸ καιρὸ, λέει, ἡ πραγματοποίησις τοῦ βαπτίσματος σὲ ἰδιωτικὰ παρεκκλησία ἀπαγορευόταν ἐξαιτίας τοῦ φόβου αἰρετικῶν τελετῶν, ἀλλὰ τέτοιος κίνδυνος δὲν ὑπῆρχε πιά.³⁹ Εἶναι γεγονὸς ὅτι καμιά μεγάλη αἴρεση δὲν ξαναεμφανίστηκε στὴν Ἀνατολικὴ Ἐκκλησία, ἂν καὶ διάφορες μικρὲς ομάδες ἐξακολουθοῦσαν νὰ ἀνθοῦν τὴν ἴδια ἀκριβῶς ἐποχὴ πού ὁ Φώτιος καὶ ὁ Λέων Ζ' διατύπωναν τὶς αἰσιόδοξες ἀπόψεις τους.

Ἀπὸ αὐτὲς τὶς αἰρετικὲς ομάδες ἡ πιὸ ἀνατρεπτικὴ γιὰ τὴν κατεστη-

μένη τάξη ήταν ο παυλικιανισμός, του οποίου οι δεσμοί με τον μανιχαϊσμό δεν έχουν διευκρινιστεί έντελώς. Είχε ως κέντρο του την Ἀρμενία και από τις δύο πλευρές των βυζαντινών συνόρων, και φαίνεται πώς γεννήθηκε τον 7ο αιώνα. Το παυλικιανικό δόγμα, από όσο γνωρίζουμε, στηριζόταν στην αντίθεση ανάμεσα στον τριαδικό Θεό και τον κακό Δημιουργό που έπλασε τον υλικό κόσμο. Οι παυλικιανοί δέχονταν την Καινή Διαθήκη (έκτός από την Ἀποκάλυψη και τις δύο ἐπιστολές του Πέτρου) και είχαν βαθύ σεβασμό για τον ἀπόστολο Παῦλο ἀλλά, σὰν ἀληθινοί μανιχαῖοι, ἀπέριπταν την Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη. Πίστευαν ὅτι τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ δημιουργήθηκε στὸν Οὐρανό, ἐπομένως οὔτε γεννήθηκε πραγματικά ἀπὸ τὴν Παρθένο Μαρία οὔτε πέθανε στὸ σταυρό. Κατὰ συνέπεια δὲν ἀπέδιδαν καμμία τιμὴ στὸ σταυρὸ καὶ ἀπεχθάνονταν τὶς εἰκόνες καὶ τὴ λατρεία τῶν ἁγίων. Ὅπως καὶ οἱ μανιχαῖοι, φαίνεται ὅτι εἶχαν μιὰ τάξη μνημένων, ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶχαν κανονικὸ κλῆρο οὔτε λειτουργίες. Ἡ ἀδιαφορία τους πάντως γιὰ τὰ μυστήρια τοὺς διευκόλυνε νὰ δέχονται τὸ βάπτισμα καὶ τὶς ἄλλες τελετὲς ποὺ ἔδειχναν ἐξωτερικὰ πὺς συμμορφώνονταν. Μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ δὲν ἦταν εὐκόλη ἢ ἀνακάλυψή τους.

Μολονότι οἱ δύο πρῶτοι ἀρχηγοὶ τους λέγεται ὅτι θανατώθηκαν κατὰ διαταγὴ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, οἱ παυλικιανοὶ δὲν φαίνεται νὰ καταπιέζονταν ιδιαίτερα, μέχρις ὅτου ὁ εὐσεβὴς πατριάρχης Νικηφόρος ἔπεισε τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Μιχαὴλ Α' (811-813) νὰ τοὺς ἐπιβάλλει τὴ θανατικὴ ποινὴ. Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα αὐτῆς τῆς ἀστόχαστης πράξης ἦταν ὅτι οἱ παυλικιανοὶ πέρασαν τὰ σύνορα καὶ ζήτησαν προστασία ἀπὸ τὸν ἄραβα ἐμίρη τῆς Μελιτηνῆς, ὁ ὁποῖος τοὺς παραχώρησε μιὰ βάση ἀπὸ ὅπου μπορούσαν νὰ κάνουν ἐπιδρομὲς στὶς βυζαντινὲς περιοχές. Ἡ ἀνοιχτὴ ἔχθρα πρὸς τὸ βυζαντινὸ κράτος εἶναι αὐτὸ ποὺ ξεχωρίζει τοὺς παυλικιανούς ἀπὸ τὶς ἄλλες αἰρετικὲς ομάδες, μολονότι πρέπει νὰ παρατηρηθεῖ πὺς ὁ ἀρχηγός τους Σέργιος (ποὺ ἄλλαξε τὸ ὄνομά του σὲ Τυχιός), Βυζαντινὸς ἀπὸ καλὴ οἰκογένεια, δὲν ἐνέκρινε τέτοιες πράξεις.⁴⁰ Μετὰ τὸν Σέργιο, οἱ δύο ἐπόμενοι ἀρχηγοὶ τῶν παυλικιανῶν ἦταν ἀπλῶς στρατιωτικοὶ ἡγέτες: ὁ Καρβέας, πρῶν βυζαντινὸς ἀξιωματικὸς, ἐγκατέστησε τοὺς ὀπαδούς του στὸ ὄχυρὸ τῆς Τεφρικῆς, ἰδρύοντας μὲ αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο ἕνα σχεδὸν ἀνεξάρτητο κράτος, ἐνῶ ὁ διάδοχός του Χρυσόχειρ ἔκανε τολμηρὲς ἐπιδρομὲς μέχρι τὴν Ἔφεσο, τὴ Νίκαια καὶ τὴ Νικομήδεια καὶ ἀπαιτοῦσε ἀλαζονικὰ τὴν παραχώρησή σ' αὐτὸν ὅλης τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας. Χρειάστηκαν πολλὲς καὶ δύσκολες ἐκστρατεῖες γιὰ νὰ νικηθοῦν οἱ αἰρετικοὶ καὶ νὰ καταστραφεῖ ἡ Τεφρικὴ (878;). Πολὺ ἀργότερα, ἀφοῦ ξεχάστηκε τὸ παυλικιανὸ τους παρελθόν, ὁ Καρβέας καὶ ὁ Χρυσόχειρ ἐμφανίζονται στὸ ἔπος

τοῦ Διγενῆ Ἀκρίτη ὡς οἱ γενναῖοι μουσουλμάνοι ἀρχηγοὶ Καρῆς καὶ Χρυσόχρητης (ἢ Χρυσοβέργης), ὁ τελευταῖος μάλιστα παρουσιάζεται ὡς παππὸς τοῦ ἴδιου τοῦ Διγενῆ.

Ἡ πτώση τῆς Τεφρικῆς δὲν προκάλεσε καὶ τὴν ἐξαφάνιση τῶν παυλικιανῶν ἀπὸ τὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία. Τὸν 10ο αἰώνα ὑπῆρχαν ἀκόμη πολυάριθμοι στὴν περιοχὴ τοῦ Πόντου,⁴¹ καὶ τὴν ἴδια ἐποχὴ τοὺς συναντᾶμε στὰ δυτικὰ τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας. Ὡστόσο τὸ κύριο κέντρο τῆς δράσης τους μεταφέρθηκε στὰ Βαλκάνια ὅπου εἶχε ἐγκατασταθεῖ μιὰ ομάδα ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς ἡδη τὸν 8ο αἰώνα. Ὁ ἑτερογενὴς καὶ μέχρι τότε ἀτελῶς ἐκχριστιανισμένος πληθυσμὸς τῆς Θράκης, Μακεδονίας καὶ Βουλγαρίας ἀπέτελεσε ἰδανικὸ χῶρο γιὰ τὴν ἀνάπτυξη τῆς αἵρεσης. Ἐπανεμφανίστηκε λοιπὸν τῶρα μὲ τὸ ὄνομα βογομιλισμός, ποὺ τὸ πήρε ἀπὸ τὸν ἱερέα Βογομίλ, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο γνωρίζουμε ὅτι ἔζησε στὴ Βουλγαρία τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ τσάρου Πέτρου (927-969). Τὸ κίνημα εἶχε ραγδαία ἐπιτυχία. Στὰ μέσα τοῦ 10ου αἰώνα οἱ ἐκκλησιαστικὲς ἀρχὲς εἶχαν ἀρχίσει νὰ ἀνησυχοῦν τὸν ἐπόμενο αἰώνα, ἀν ὄχι νωρίτερα, ὁ βογομιλισμὸς εἶχε ξαναμεταφερθεῖ στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία, ὅπου οἱ ὀπαδοὶ του πήραν τὸ παράξενο ὄνομα Φουνδαγιαγίται. Μιὰ σημαντικὴ ομάδα τους ἐπίσης ὀργανώθηκε στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Μερικὲς ἐνδείξεις γιὰ τοὺς λόγους ἐπιτυχίας τοῦ βογομιλισμοῦ μᾶς παρέχει ὁ Λόγος (Σλονο) τοῦ ἱερέα Κοσμᾶ, ποὺ πιστεύεται ὅτι γράφτηκε περὶ τὸ 972. Παρουσιάζει τοὺς αἰρετικούς ὡς ἀνθρώπους ἐπιφανειακὰ ὅμοιους μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους, μόνο ποὺ ξεχώριζαν ἀπὸ τοὺς ὀρθοδόξους μὲ τὴν ἀγνότερη καὶ αὐστηρότερη ζωὴ τους. Αὐτὸ ὅμως τὸ ἔβλεπε ὁ Κοσμᾶς ὡς ἀπλὴ προσποίηση. Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὰ φοβερὰ δογματικὰ τους σφάλματα καὶ τὴν ἀποστροφή τους πρὸς τὸ γάμο καὶ τὰ παιδιά, ἦταν ἐπίσης ἀντίθετοι πρὸς τὴ χειρωνακτικὴ ἐργασία. «Διδάσκουν τοὺς ὀπαδούς τους νὰ μὴν ὑποτάσσονται στὶς ἀρχὲς, δυσφημοῦν τοὺς πλουσίους, μισοῦν τοὺς αὐτοκράτορες, κακολογοῦν τοὺς ἀνωτέρους, προσβάλλουν τοὺς ἀρχοντες, ὑποστηρίζουν ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς ἀπεχθάνεται ὅσους ἐργάζονται γιὰ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα καὶ παρακινοῦν τοὺς δούλους νὰ μὴν ἐργάζονται γιὰ τοὺς κυρίους τους.»⁴² Ἐδῶ, ἐπιτέλους, ἔχουμε ἕνα «κοινωνικὸ» κίνητρο ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ τὸ καταλάβει ἡ σύγχρονη νοστοροπία. Γιὰ τὸν Κοσμᾶ οἱ βογομίλοι ἦταν εἰρηνόφιλοι «hippies», ποὺ διάβρωναν τὴν καθεστηκυῖα τάξη, καὶ ρίχνει τὸ φταίξιμο κατευθεῖαν στοὺς ὀρθοδόξους. Οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι ἦταν ποὺ ἀδιαφοροῦσαν γιὰ τὶς ὑποχρεώσεις τοῦ γάμου, ποὺ ἐγκατέλειπαν τὶς γυναῖκες καὶ τὰ παιδιά τους καὶ μπαινόβγαιναν στὰ μοναστήρια, παρουσιάζοντας ὡς δικαιολογία τὴ δυσκολία νὰ φροντίζουν τὴν οἰκογένειά τους τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ὑπηρετοῦσαν τὸν κτηματία καὶ ὑπέμεναν τὶς βιαιότητες τῶν ἀρχόντων.⁴³ Οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι μο-

ναχοί ήταν που ζούσαν μέσα στην τεμπελιά ενώ ταυτόχρονα επενέβαιναν στις υποθέσεις των λαϊκών. Οι ὀρθόδοξοι ἱερεῖς και ἐπίσκοποι ήταν που παραμελοῦσαν τὰ ποιμαντικά τους καθήκοντα. Λίγοι κληρικοί αὐτῆς τῆς ἐποχῆς παρουσιάζουν τόσο ζωντανή εἰκόνα τῆς ἀπάθειας και τῆς χαλαρότητας τῶν ἡθῶν στὴ χριστιανικὴ ζωὴ.

Ἐχει παρατηρηθεῖ ὅτι ὁ Κοσμάς δὲν συμβουλεύει λήψη βίαιων μέτρων κατὰ τῶν βογομίλων. Πράγματι, ἡ περίοδος 950-1050 χαρακτηρίζεται ἀπὸ γενικὴ ὑποχώρηση τῶν διωγμῶν. Ἀλλὰ οἱ καιροὶ ἄλλαζαν και ἡ θέση τοῦ ἐπίσημου κράτους ἄρχιζε νὰ σκληραίνει, ἰδιαίτερα μετὰ τὴν ἄνοδο στὸ θρόνο τῆς δυναστείας τῶν Κομνηνῶν. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀλλαγὴ εἶναι φανερὴ στὴν ἱστορία τοῦ λεγόμενου Συνοδικοῦ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας. Τὸ ἀρχικὸ Συνοδικό, σκοπὸς τοῦ ὁποῖου ἦταν νὰ διαβάξεται σὲ ὅλες τὶς ἐκκλησίες τὴν πρώτη Κυριακὴ τῆς Σαρακοστῆς, συνετέθη λίγο μετὰ τὸ 843 και ἀποτελοῦσε κατὰ δίκην τῆς εἰκονομαχίας. Γιὰ δύο αἰῶνες τίποτε δὲν προστέθηκε σ' αὐτό, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τὸ 1050 περίπου και μετὰ νέες καταδικές και ἀναθέματα ἄρχισαν νὰ προστίθενται. Τὸ πρῶτο θύμα ἦταν κάποιος Γερόντιος ἀπὸ τὴ Λάμπη, ἐντελῶς ἄγνωστος σήμερα, πού δνόμαζε τὸν ἑαυτὸ του ἠλεημένον και ἐξέμεσε εἰς Κρήτην τὸ δηλητήριον τῆς μαρᾶς αὐτοῦ κακοδοξίας. Ἐπειτα ἦρθε ἡ σειρά τοῦ φιλοσόφου Ἰταλοῦ, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο θὰ μιλήσουμε περισσότερο στὸ Κεφάλαιο Ζ'. Ὑστερα ἦταν ὁ μοναχὸς Νεῖλος ἀπὸ τὴν Καλαβρία, πού διατύπωσε περίεργες ἰδέες γιὰ τὴ θεοποίηση τῆς ἀνθρώπινης φύσης τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἔπειτα ὁ Εὐστράτιος, πρῶην καθηγητῆς και μητροπολίτης Νικαίας, πού ἔσφαλε στὸ ἴδιο περίπου θέμα, και στὰ μέσα τοῦ 12ου αἰῶνα ὁ ἐκλεγμένος πατριάρχης τῆς Ἀντιόχειας Σωτήριχος Παντεύγενης, πού ἔσφαλε στὸ ζήτημα κατὰ πόσο ἡ Θεία Εὐχαριστία προσφερόταν στὸν Πατέρα μόνο ἢ στὴν Ἁγία Τριάδα.⁴⁴ Εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι πολλὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ «σφάλματα» εἶχαν ἀπλῶς ἀκαδημαϊκὸ χαρακτήρα και ὅτι πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι δύσκολα θὰ τὰ καταλάβαιναν· παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἐπιθυμοῦσε νὰ ἐπιβάλλει τὴν ἐξουσία της και ἐπιπλέον νὰ δείχνει ὅτι τὸ κάνει. Ὁ αὐτοκράτορας ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη μεριὰ ἐνίσχυε μετὰ τὴ δικὴ του δύναμη αὐτὸ τὸ θεάρεστο ἔργο. Τὸ 1114 ὁ Ἀλέξιος Α' ἦρθε σὲ ἐπαφὴ μετὰ βογομίλους και παυλικιανούς στὴ Φιλιππούπολη, μιὰ πόλη πού ἦταν σχεδὸν ἐντελῶς «μανιχαϊκὴ», και λέγεται ὅτι συζήτησε ὁ ἴδιος μετὰ τοὺς αἰρετικούς γιὰ μέρες ὀλόκληρες, μετὰ ἀποτέλεσμα πολλὰς χιλιάδες ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς νὰ ἐπιστρέψουν στὴν ὀρθοδοξία.⁴⁵ Τὸ κακὸ ὅμως εἶχε φτάσει στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ὅπου πλῆθος ἄνθρωποι ἔγιναν ὀπαδοὶ τῆς αἵρεσης, ἀκόμη και ἀπὸ τὶς καλύτερες οἰκογένειες. Ὁ Ἀλέξιος συνέλαβε τὸν ἡγέτη τῶν αἰρετικῶν, κάποιον μοναχὸ Βασίλειον, και μετὰ τρόπο τὸν ἔκανε νὰ ὁμολογή-

σει τὶς σφαλερές του ἀπόψεις. Ἐπειδὴ ὅμως ἀρνήθηκε νὰ τὶς ἀποκηρύξει, ὁ Βασίλειος καταδικάστηκε νὰ πεθάνει στὴν πυρὰ, ἐνῶ οἱ ὀπαδοὶ του τελείωσαν τὶς μέρες τους στὴ φυλακὴ. Μιὰ μεγάλη πυρὰ ἀνάφτηκε στὸν ἵππόδρομον και, ὅταν οἱ δῆμιοι ἔριξαν σ' αὐτὴν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ αἰρετικοῦ, δὲν ὑπῆρξε οὔτε μυρωδιὰ καμένης σάρκας οὔτε καπνός —τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ μιὰ λεπτὴ γραμμὴ ἀπὸ ἀτμό, γιὰτὶ ἀκόμη και τὰ στοιχεῖα ξεσηκώθηκαν γιὰ νὰ ἐξουθενώσουν τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς. Αὐτὴ ἦταν ἡ τελευταία δημόσια πράξη τοῦ ἀξιοθαύμαστου αὐτοκράτορα, ὁ ὁποῖος πέθανε λίγο ἀργότερα. Ὁ βογομιλισμὸς ὡστόσο ἐξακολούθησε νὰ ἀνθεῖ. Ἐξαπλώθηκε στὴ Σερβία και τὴ Βοσνία, στὴν Ἰταλία και τὴ νότια Γαλλία. Κατόρθωσε νὰ εἰσχωρήσει ἀκόμη και μέσα στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος, ἐνῶ στὰ Βαλκάνια ἐζήσε περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴ βυζαντινὴ αὐτοκρατορία.

Σχεδὸν κάθε διαφανία μετὰ τὸ ἐπίσημον κράτος στὸ Βυζάντιον ἔπαιρνε τὴ μορφή θρησκευτικῆς αἵρεσης. Οἱ ἱστορικοὶ ἔχουν ἐρευνήσει παντοῦ γιὰ νὰ βροῦν ἐθνικὲς και κοινωνικὲς αἰτίες —τὶς «ἀληθινές» αἰτίες, πού κρύβονταν ἀπλῶς κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ προσωπεῖον τῆς αἵρεσης— ἀλλὰ σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς οἱ προσπάθειές τους δὲν ἔχουν δικαιωθεῖ. Ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ παραδείγματα πού ἐξετάσαμε, πολὺ λίγα μποροῦν νὰ συνδεθοῦν μετὰ ἀποσχιστικὲς ἐθνικὲς τάσεις: οἱ Σαμαρεῖτες τὸν 5ο και 6ο αἰῶνα και οἱ μονοφυσίτες Ἀρμένιοι ἴσως περιλαμβάνονται σ' αὐτὴ τὴν κατηγορία. Οἱ παυλικιανοί, ἐπίσης, εἶχαν ἕνα ἀνεξάρτητον κράτος γιὰ εἴκοσι περίπου χρόνια, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ ἦταν ἀποτέλεσμα ἐντελῶς ἐξαιρετικῶν περιστάσεων, πού δὲν εἶχαν καμιά σχέση μετὰ τὸν δυῖσμὸν καθαρτό. Ὅπως εἶδαμε, οἱ βογομίλοι τηροῦσαν πολὺ εἰρηνοφιλεῖ στάση και δὲν γνωρίζουμε νὰ εἶχαν κάποιες πολιτικὲς φιλοδοξίες. Μολονότι χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία ἦταν Σλάβοι στὴν πλειονότητά τους, προσέλκυαν ὀπαδοὺς ἀπὸ πολλὰς και διάφορες ἐθνικότητες.

Ἡ ἀναζήτησις κοινωνικῶν αἰτίων ἀποδείχτηκε ἐξίσου ἀναποτελεσματικὴ. Σὲ καμιά περίπτωσι δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ διαπιστώσουμε μιὰ ξεκάθαρη σχέση ἀνάμεσα στὴν αἵρεσι και σὲ κάποια κοινωνικὴ τάξι. Γνωρίζουμε ὅτι στοὺς μανιχαίους περιλαμβάνονταν πολλοὶ ἔμποροι, ἀλλὰ και πολλοὶ διανοούμενοι, ἀριστοκράτες και ἀπλοὶ ἄνθρωποι. Οἱ παυλικιανοὶ εἶχαν προσελκύσει σημαντικὸν ἀριθμὸν στρατιωτῶν. Οἱ βογομίλοι φαίνεται ὅτι ἀνῆκαν κυρίως στὴν ἀγροτικὴ τάξι, ἀλλὰ περιλάμβαναν και κατώτερους κληρικούς και, ἂν πιστέψουμε τὴν Ἄννα Κομνηνή, μέλη μερικῶν ἀπὸ τὶς καλύτερες οἰκογένειες τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης. Φυσικὰ μπορεῖ νὰ ὑποστηρίξει κανεὶς ὅτι μερικὲς αἵρέσεις, και μάλιστα οἱ δυῖστικὲς, εἶχαν κάποια κοινωνικὴ ἐπίπτωσι ἐφόσον ἀποθάρρυναν τὸ γάμον και τὴν ἀπόκτησι παιδιῶν. Καθὼς στὴν αὐτοκρατορία ὑπῆρχε χρόνια ἔλλειψις ἀνθρώ-

πινου δυναμικοῦ, ἡ κυβέρνηση θὰ ἀνησυχοῦσε μὲ τέτοιες διδασκαλίες, ἀλλὰ ἂν ἀνησυχοῦσε γι' αὐτὸν τὸ λόγο, δὲν τὸ εἶπε ποτέ. Ἐξάλλου ὁ χριστιανικὸς μοναχισμὸς, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο συνήθως ἔτρεφαν τὴν πιὸ μεγάλη ἐκτίμηση, προκαλοῦσε τὸ ἴδιο δημογραφικὸ ἀποτέλεσμα.

Αὐτὸ πὸ συμβαίνει στὴν πραγματικότητα εἶναι ὅτι ὁ ὅρος «αἵρεση» καλύπτει μιὰ μεγάλη ποικιλία φαινομένων, πὸ κανονικὰ δὲν θὰ τὰ συνέδεε κανεὶς μεταξύ τους, ἂν δὲν ἔκανε αὐτὴ τὴ σύνδεση ἡ κρατικὴ ὀρθοδοξία. Ὑπῆρχαν ὁμάδες ἰουδαϊκοῦ χαρακτήρα, ὅπως ἦταν οἱ Τεσσαρεσκαίδεκατίται καὶ οἱ Ἀθίγγανοι, πὸ ἡ καταγωγή τους ἀναγόταν στὰ πρῶτα βήματα τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ καὶ ἀπλῶς φυτοζωοῦσαν στὴν ὑπαιθρο τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας. Ἡ «παρέκλιση» τους βρισκόταν κυρίως σὲ θέματα λειτουργικοῦ. Ἐπειτα ἦταν οἱ «εὐγενεῖς» αἵρέσεις, ἀποτέλεσμα πιὸ ἀνεπτυγμένης θεολογικῆς σκέψης, μερικὲς ἀπὸ τίς ὁποῖες διέφεραν ἀπὸ τὴν ὀρθοδοξία μόνον σὲ ζητήματα ὀρολογίας. Ἄν ἀφήσουμε κατὰ μέρος τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ὀρισμένες βασικὲς ἔννοιες ὅπως «φύση», «οὐσία», «πρόσωπο» δὲν τίς ἀντιλαμβάνονταν πάντοτε μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο, εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ βροῦμε κάποιο θεμελιῶδες σφάλμα στὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Νεστορίου ἢ τοῦ Σεβήρου τῆς Ἀντιόχειας, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἀναφέρουμε τὸν ἐξαιρετὸ θεολόγο Θεόδωρο τῆς Μοψουεστίας, πὸ καταδικάστηκε ἄδικα καὶ χωρὶς λόγο ἀπὸ τὴν πέμπτη σύνοδο. Ἡ ἱστορία τῶν «εὐγενῶν» αἵρέσεων μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι γεμάτη ἀπὸ πολιτικὲς ἴντριγκες, ἀλλὰ αὐτὲς καθαυτὲς δὲν εἶχαν ἀνατρεπτικούς σκοπούς. Ὅταν ὁμως δημιουργοῦνταν μιὰ ξεχωριστὴ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ ὑποστήριξή της γινόταν θέμα κληρονομικῆς νομιμοφροσύνης. Κάποιος πὸ γεννιόταν μονοφυσίτης, παρέμενε μονοφυσίτης, ἐκτὸς ἂν ἄλλαζε μὲ τὴ βία· καὶ δὲν ἔχω ὑπόψη μου καμία περίπτωση ὀρθοδόξου πὸ νὰ ἔγινε μονοφυσίτης ἀπὸ ἐχθρότητα πρὸς τὸ κράτος.

Μόνον στὴν περίπτωση τῶν δυιστικῶν αἵρέσεων τὰ πράγματα ἀλλάζουν κάπως. Ὁ Προκόπιος, περιγράφοντας γεγονότα πὸ γνώριζε καλὰ γιὰτι ἀφοροῦσαν τὴν ἰδιαιτέρη πατρίδα του, τὴν Καισάρεια τῆς Παλαιστίνης, λέει τὰ ἐξῆς γιὰ τοὺς Σαμαρείτες, πὸ ἐξαναγκάστηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰουστινιανὸ νὰ γίνουν χριστιανοί: «Οἱ περισσότεροὶ ἀπὸ αὐτοῦς, ἀγανακτισμένοι πὸ ἐξαναγκάζονταν νὰ ἀλλάξουν τίς προγονικὲς τους πεποιθήσεις μὲ τὸ νόμο παρὰ μὲ τὴν ἐλεύθερη θέλησή τους, στράφηκαν ἀμέσως πρὸς τοὺς μανιχαίους καὶ τοὺς λεγόμενους πολυθεϊστές». ⁴⁶ Μιὰ μεταγενέστερη μαρτυρία ἀφορᾷ τοὺς στρατιῶτες πὸ ἀπολύθηκαν τὸ 786 ἀπὸ τὴν αὐτοκρατορικήν Εἰρήνην ἐπειδὴ ὑποστήριζαν τὴν εἰκονομαχία: καὶ αὐτοὶ προσχώρησαν στοὺς μανιχαίους ἢ τοὺς παυλικιανούς. ⁴⁷ Δὲν εἶναι παράδοξο πὸ ὁ δυισμὸς προσέλκυε δυσσεσημένα στοιχεῖα, μιὰ καὶ παρυσιαζόταν ὡς

κίνημα ριζικῶν μεταρρυθμίσεων γιὰ νὰ ξανακερδιστοῦν οἱ ἀλήθειες τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ, πὸ εἶχαν σκόπιμα συσκοτιστεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν κλῆρο. ⁴⁸ Ἡ ἔλξη πὸ ἀσκοῦσε μιὰ τέτοια στάση φαίνεται ἀπὸ τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ὁ δυισμὸς ἦταν ἡ μόνη μορφή βυζαντινῆς αἵρεσης πὸ εἶχε εὐρεία ἐξάπλωση πέρα ἀπὸ ἔθνικα καὶ γεωγραφικὰ σύνορα.

Ὁ ἀληθινὸς «κακὸς» τῆς ἱστορίας εἶναι φυσικὰ ἡ κρατικὴ ὀρθοδοξία. «Γνωρίζουμε», ἔγραφε ὁ Ἰουστινιανός, «πὸς τίποτε δὲν εὐχαριστεῖ τὸν ἐλεήμονα Θεὸ περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ὁμόθυμη συναίνεση ὅλων τῶν χριστιανῶν στὰ θέματα τῆς ἀληθινῆς καὶ ἄσπιλης πίστεως». ⁴⁹ Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ὁμόθυμη πίστη δὲν ἦταν ἀρκετὴ· μὲ τὴν πάροδο τοῦ χρόνου ἡ ὁμοιομορφία στὴ λειτουργικὴ πρακτικὴ, στίς μέρες τῶν ἐορτῶν καὶ τῆς νηστείας, στὸ ντύσιμο καὶ τὴν κόμμωση ἔγιναν ἐξίσου, ἂν ὄχι περισσότερο σημαντικά. Ἄν ἡ πλήρης ἀνεξίτηρησκα δὲν ἦταν δυνατὸ νὰ ἐπιτευχθεῖ, τουλάχιστον οἱ διωγμοὶ θὰ μποροῦσαν νὰ ἔχουν ἀποφευχθεῖ. Ἀκόμη καὶ ἕνας τόσο αὐστηρὸς θεολόγος ὅπως ὁ Θεόδωρος ὁ Στουδίτης διακήρυσσε ὅτι ὁ ρόλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἦταν νὰ κατηγεῖ τοὺς αἵρετικούς, ὄχι νὰ τοὺς σκοτώνει. ⁵⁰ Τὸ κράτος, πὸ εἶχε ταυτιστεῖ μὲ τὴν ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία, συχνὰ εἶχε διαφορετικὴ γνώμη. Τὸ ἄμεσο ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς μισαλλοδοξίας του ἦταν ὅτι ἑκατομμῦρια ἄνθρωποι, πὸ θὰ μποροῦσαν νὰ εἶναι πιστοὶ ὑπῆκοοι τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, θεωρήθηκαν αἵρετικοὶ καὶ κατὰ συνέπεια ἐχθροί.

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ Ε'
Ο ΜΟΝΑΧΙΣΜΟΣ

Για καμία άλλη άποψη της βυζαντινής ζωής δεν υπάρχουν τόσο άφθονα στοιχεία όσο για το μοναχισμό. Διαθέτουμε εκατοντάδες βιογραφίες μοναχών οσίων, αναρίθμητους διαλογισμούς, επιστολές, κηρύγματα, προτροπές και απολογίες που αφορούν τη μοναχική ιδιότητα. Έχουμε, επιπλέον, έναν αριθμό κανόνων, πειθαρχικών κανονισμών, αυτοκρατορικών διαταγμάτων, ακόμη και ένα αξιόλογο σύνολο αρχαιακού ύλικου. Ωστόσο, παρά την τόσο άφθονη φιλολογία, δεν είναι καθόλου εύκολο να δοθεί μια εικόνα του βυζαντινού μοναχισμού με τρόπο κατανοητό σ' εμάς σήμερα.

Ένα πράγμα πρέπει να δηλωθεί έξαρχής: ο μοναχισμός ήταν ένα κίνημα λαϊκών (δηλαδή όχι κληρικών). Είχε συγγένεια, και ίσως εξέλιχτηκε από όρισμένες χριστιανικές ομάδες που ζούσαν μια ιδιαίτερα αυστηρή και άφοσιωμένη ζωή, χωρίς ωστόσο να αποσύρονται από τον κόσμο. Τέτοιοι άνθρωποι ήταν γνωστοί ως σπουδαίοι ή φιλόπονοι, ενώ στις συριακές επαρχίες ονομάζονταν «οι γιοι της Έπαγγελίας» και είχαν κάποια μορφή οργάνωσης για την οποία δυστυχώς πολύ λίγα πράγματα είναι γνωστά. Αν εξετάσουμε το Βίο του αγίου Αντωνίου, που θεωρείται ο πατέρας του μοναχισμού, θα δοῦμε ότι άρχισε την πνευματική του άσκηση γύρω στο 270, ακολουθώντας τα διδάγματα όποιων σπουδαίων τύχαινε να συναντήσει και μαθαίνοντας από αυτούς «το πλεονέκτημα της σπουδής και της άσκήσεως». Εκείνο τον καιρό, μάς λέει, δεν υπήρχαν ακόμη κανονικά μοναστήρια στην Αίγυπτο, ούτε ζούσαν έρημίτες στην έρημο, αλλά έκαστος τών βουλομένων έαυτῶ προσέχειν οὐ μακρὰν τῆς ιδίας κόμης καταμόνας ἤσκειτο.¹ Το άποφασιστικό βήμα που έκανε ο Αντώνιος —και ίσως να μην ήταν ο πρώτος που το έκανε— ήταν ότι απομονώθηκε, άρχικά σε έναν κενό τάφο και κατόπιν στην έρημο. Η φυγή κάποιου από το χωριό του (ανάχωρησις) ήταν από τον 1ο αιώνα μ.Χ. κοινό φαινόμενο στην Αίγυπτο στην περίπτωση ανθρώπων έξαθλιωμένων, που δεν ήταν σε θέση να πληρώσουν τους φόρους τους.² Τέτοια κίνητρα δεν μπορούν να

άποδοθοῦν στον Αντώνιο, ο όποιος ήταν πλούσιος άγρότης που διαμοίρασε έθελοντικά τα υπάρχοντά του, είναι όμως άρκετά πιθανό πώς ή ταχύτατη έξάπλωση του μοναστικού κινήματος δεν ήταν άσχετη με την επικράτηση της ανάχωρησεως ως μέσου άπόδρασης από τα βάρη της καθημερινής ζωής.

Πράγματι, ο μοναχισμός γνώρισε άμεση έπιτυχία. Πώς ακριβώς έγινε αυτό δεν γνωρίζουμε, επειδή έχουμε πολύ λίγες πληροφορίες για τα πρώτα όγδόντα ή εκατό χρόνια του κινήματος. Οι παλιότερες αξιόπιστες πηγές μας είναι από τα μέσα του 4ου αιώνα, εποχή κατά την όποία είχε ήδη έξαπλωθεί σε πολλά μέρη του ρωμαϊκού κόσμου και λέγεται ότι είχε δεκάδες χιλιάδες όπαδούς. Αν είναι αλήθεια, όπως γενικά πιστεύεται, ότι ο μοναχισμός ξεκίνησε από την Αίγυπτο, πρέπει να έφτασε στην Παλαιστίνη, τη Συρία και τη Μεσοποταμία σε πολύ μικρό διάστημα. Τον βρίσκουμε να έχει έδραιωθεί στη βόρεια Μικρά Ασία πριν από το 340, και γύρω στο 350 υπήρχαν ήδη μερικοί μοναχοί στη δυτική Εύρώπη.

Σ' ένα πρώτο στάδιο της εξέλιξης του στην Αίγυπτο, ο μοναχισμός πήρε δύο μορφές που επρόκειτο να γίνουν κλασικές και να επικρατήσουν σε όλη τη βυζαντινή περίοδο, δηλαδή τη μοναχική και την κοινοβιακή. Ο άγιος Αντώνιος ήταν το πρότυπο της πρώτης. Η άσκησή του συνίστατο ουσιαστικά στην άπομόνωση, την προσευχή και τη νηστεία. Μολονότι συχνά άγρυπνούσε και δεν πλενόταν ποτέ, ούτε έχριε το σώμα του με λάδι, έντούτοις δεν επέβαλλε στον έαυτό του καμία από τις άλλόκοτες τιμωρίες που συναντάμε σε μεταγενέστερες περιόδους. Έχθροί του ήταν οι δαίμονες που τον έβαζαν σε πειρασμούς, πρώτα με σκέψεις της προηγούμενης άνετης ζωής και της οικογένειάς του, έπειτα με πονηρές έπιθυμίες, και τέλος με τρομαχτικά όράματα άγριων ζώων: πρέπει να θυμόμαστε ότι οι Αιγύπτιοι θεωρούσαν την έρημο μια τρομερή περιοχή γεμάτη τέρατα. Όταν, σε ηλικία πενήντα πέντε ετών (γύρω στο 306), ο Αντώνιος βγήκε νικητής από την άπομόνωση, έμφανίστηκε κατά κάποιον τρόπο μεταμορφωμένος: στην εμφάνιση δεν είχε γεράσει, ενώ είχε άποκτήσει μια πνευματική δύναμη, το χάρισμα της διδασκαλίας και την ικανότητα να θεραπεύει τους άρρώστους. Τότε έπεισε πολλούς ανθρώπους να υιοθετήσουν τη μοναχική ζωή, «και έτσι ιδρύθηκαν μοναστήρια στα βουνά και η έρημος κατοικήθηκε από μοναχούς που είχαν έγκαταλείψει τα σπίτια τους». ³ Τα επόμενα πενήντα χρόνια της ζωής του —πέθανε το 356 σε ηλικία 105 ετών— τα πέρασε πιό κοντά στα έγκόσμια. Διακεκριμένοι άνθρωποι έρχονταν έπιζητώντας τη θεραπευτική του δύναμη, είδωλόατρες φιλόσοφοι λογομαχοῦσαν μαζί του, ακόμη και ο αυτοκράτορας

Κωνσταντίνος τοῦ ἔστειλε μιὰ ἐπιστολή πού ἐκεῖνος ἀρνήθηκε νά τήν παραλάβει, ὥσπου τόν βεβαίωσαν ὅτι ὁ αὐτοκράτορας ἦταν χριστιανός —κάτι πού ὁ Ἀντώνιος δέν φαίνεται νά τὸ γνώριζε. Μὲ λίγα λόγια, ἦταν μιὰ ἀξιοσημεῖωτη σταδιοδρομία γιὰ ἓναν αἰγύπτιο χωρικό πού ποτὲ δέν ἔμαθε ἑλληνικά καὶ παρέμεινε ἀγράμματος μέχρι τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς του.

Ἡ κοινοβιακὴ μορφή μοναχισμοῦ ἰδρύθηκε στὴν Ἄνω Αἴγυπτο ἀπὸ τὸν Παχώμιο, πού ἦταν σύγχρονος τοῦ Ἀντωνίου ἀλλὰ λίγο νεότερος (πέθανε τὸ 346). Ἀφοῦ ὑπῆρέτησε στὸν αὐτοκρατορικό στρατὸ καὶ μαθήτευσε ἔπειτα κοντὰ σ' ἓναν ἐρημίτη, ὁ Παχώμιος κατέληξε πῶς τὸ στρατιωτικὸ πρότυπο ἦταν τὸ πιὸ κατάλληλο γιὰ τὴ μοναστικὴ ζωὴ. Τὸ ἴδρυμα πού ὀργάνωσε στὴν Ταβέννησο (Tabennési), στὴ δεξιὰ ὄχθη τοῦ Νείλου, εἶχε τὴ μορφή ὄχυρωμένου στρατοπέδου, διαχωρισμένου τακτικά σὲ «οἴκους», πού καθένας εἶχε τὸν δικό του διοικητή. Οἱ μοναχοὶ ζοῦσαν ὁμαδικὰ στοὺς οἴκους ἀνάλογα μὲ τὴν ἀπασχόληση ἢ τὴν τέχνη τους, καὶ μεγάλο μέρος τοῦ χρόνου τους τὸ περνοῦσαν κάνοντας χειρωνακτικὲς δουλειές· ἐργάζονταν μαζί, προσεύχονταν μαζί καὶ ἔτρωγαν μαζί. Ἰδιαίτερη ἔμφαση δινόταν στὴν ὑπακοή: οἱ ἅπλοι μοναχοὶ ἦταν στὴ δικαιοδοσία τοῦ ἀρχηγοῦ τοῦ οἴκου τους, ὁ ὁποῖος μὲ τὴ σειρά του ἀναφερόταν στὸν ἡγούμενο. Τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ θανάτου του ὁ Παχώμιος ἦταν ἐπικεφαλῆς μιᾶς σειράς ἀπὸ δώδεκα περίπου ἀντρικά καὶ τρία γυναικεῖα μοναστήρια, πού ἀριθμοῦσαν ἀρκετὲς χιλιάδες τροφίμους.

Λέγεται ὅτι ἄγγελος Κυρίου ἀποκάλυψε στὸν Παχώμιο ἓναν Κανόνα, δηλαδὴ ἓνα σύνολο λεπτομερῶν κανονισμῶν, χαραγμένο πάνω σὲ μιὰ μπρούντζινη πινακίδα. Εἶναι περιττὸ νὰ ἀναρωτηθοῦμε ἂν ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Παχώμιος ἢ κάποιος ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀμεσοὺς διαδόχους του ἦταν ὁ συγγραφέας αὐτοῦ τοῦ κειμένου, πού μεταφράστηκε ἀπὸ τὰ κοπτικὰ στὰ ἑλληνικά καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ στὰ λατινικά. Ἡ πληρέστερη μορφή του πού μᾶς ἔχει διασωθεῖ εἶναι ἡ λατινικὴ μετάφραση τοῦ ἀγίου Ἱερωνύμου, πού ἔγινε τὸ 404.⁴ Περιγράφει ἓνα μοναστήρι τριγυρισμένο ἀπὸ περίβολο πού περιέκλειε ἓνα παρεκκλήσιο, μιὰ τραπεζαρία, ἓνα δωμάτιο γιὰ τοὺς ἀρρώστους καὶ ἓναν ξενώνα. Οἱ μοναχοὶ κοιμοῦνταν σὲ ξεχωριστὰ κελιά, πού δέν εἶχαν κλειδαριές, καὶ δέν ἐπιτρεπόταν νὰ ἔχουν ἄλλα ὑπάρχοντα ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ ἓνα χιτάκι, δύο ἐνδύματα χωρὶς μανίκια, ἓνα χιτῶνα καὶ λίγα ἄλλα οὐσιώδη. Οὔτε ἡ νηστεία (δύο φορές τὴν ἑβδομάδα) οὔτε ἡ προσευχὴ ἦταν ὑπερβολικὲς. Κάποια γνώση τῶν Γραφῶν καὶ λίγη γραφὴ καὶ ἀνάγνωση ἦταν ἀναγκαῖα (*etiam nolens legere compelletur*), ἀλλὰ παραπέρα μόρφωση δέν θεωροῦνταν ἀπαραίτητη. Ὅ,τι καὶ νὰ ἔκαναν, οἱ μοναχοὶ ἔπρεπε νὰ κρατοῦν ἀπόσταση περίπου μισοῦ μέτρου μεταξὺ τους, ἔπρεπε νὰ μὴ μι-

λοῦν σὲ κανένα στὸ σκοτάδι, νὰ μὴ φεύγουν ἀπὸ τὸ μοναστήρι χωρὶς ἄδεια (καὶ τότε μόνο ἀνὰ δύο), καὶ ὅταν ἐπέστρεφαν δέν ἔπρεπε νὰ διηγοῦνται τίποτε ἀπὸ ὅ,τι ἄκουσαν ἔξω. Ἀπορεῖ κανεὶς τί θέληγητρα εἶχε αὐτὴ ἢ αὐστηρὴ ζωὴ ὥστε νὰ προσελκύει χιλιάδες ἄντρες καὶ γυναῖκες. Προφανῶς ὁ Παχώμιος δέν εἶχε ὑπερβολικὲς ἀπαιτήσεις ἀπὸ τοὺς εἰσερχομένους, καὶ φαίνεται ὅτι σκοπὸς του ἦταν νὰ τραβήξει ὅσο γινόταν πιὸ πολλοὺς ὁπαδοὺς ἀπὸ τοὺς ἁπλοὺς ἀνθρώπους, στοὺς ὁποίους πρόσφερε συντροφικότητα καὶ ἓνα ἐλάχιστο ἐπίπεδο ὑλικῆς ἀσφάλειας. Ὁ Κανόνας δείχνει ὅτι γνώριζε τὸν κίνδυνο νὰ γίνουν δεκτοὶ ἐγκληματίες καὶ φυγάδες δούλοι,⁵ ἀλλὰ ἡ διαδικασία ἐπιλογῆς ἦταν στοιχειώδης, καὶ ἀναμφίβολα σημαντικὸς ἀριθμὸς ἀπὸ ληστές, ὀφειλέτες καὶ παρανόμους κάθε εἴδους θὰ ζητοῦσαν ἀνωμμία πίσω ἀπὸ τοὺς τοίχους ἑνὸς μοναστηριοῦ.

Τόσο ἡ μοναχικὴ ὅσο καὶ ἡ κοινοβιακὴ μορφή τοῦ μοναχισμοῦ ἀποτελοῦσαν ἀπειλὴ γιὰ τὴν κατεστημένη Ἐκκλησία. Πρέπει νὰ ἐπαναλάβουμε πῶς ὁ μοναχὸς ἦταν ἓνας λαϊκὸς χριστιανὸς πού ἀκολουθοῦσε κατὰ γράμμα τὴν προτροπὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ: *εἰ θέλεις τέλειος εἶναι, ὑπάγε πώλησόν σου τὰ ὑπάρχοντα καὶ δός πτωχοῖς, καὶ ἔξεις θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ* (Κατὰ Ματθαῖον, ΙΘ', 21). Ἐπιζητοῦσε νὰ γίνεῖ ὁ τέλειος χριστιανός, νὰ ἐπιστρέψει στὴν ἀπλότητα τῶν ἀποστολικῶν χρόνων, ὅταν πάντες οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά, καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσι (Πράξεις Ἀποστ., Β', 44-45). Ὑποστήριζε πῶς ὑπῆρχε μιὰ μόνο ἠθικὴ, μιὰ ἄσκησις, δηλαδὴ αὐτὴ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, καὶ πῶς, σὲ μιὰ ἰδανικὴ περίπτωσι, ὅλοι οἱ χριστιανοὶ θὰ γίνονταν μοναχοί. Εἶναι ἀξιοσημεῖωτο ὅμως ὅτι ἐπιζητοῦσε τὴν τελειότητα ὄχι μὲσω τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀλλὰ ἔξω ἀπὸ αὐτήν. Ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ ἅγιος Ἀντώνιος κατέκτησε τὴν ἀγιοσύνη χωρὶς νὰ καταφύγει στὸν κλῆρο, καὶ δέν αἰσθάνθηκε στὰ εἴκοσι χρόνια τῆς ἀπομόνωσής του καμία ἀνάγκη νὰ κοινωνήσῃ. Ὁλόκληρη ἡ ζωὴ του ὑπῆρξε μιὰ ἔμμεση καταδίκη τῆς «ἐν κόσμῳ» Ἐκκλησίας. Ἐνῶ ὁ Ὀριγένης εἶχε συστήσει τὸν ἠθικὸ μᾶλλον παρὰ τὸν φυσικὸ ἀποχωρισμὸ ἀπὸ καθεστὴ ἀνόσιο, ὁ μοναχὸς διακήρυσσε πῶς ἦταν οὐσιαστικὰ ἀδύνατο νὰ κερδίσει κανεὶς τὴ σωτηρία χωρὶς τὴ φυσικὴ ἀπομάκρυνση. Τὸ ἔργο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, οἱ λειτουργίες της, ὅλα ὅσα ὑποστήριζε παρουσιάζονταν σχεδὸν χωρὶς σημασία.

Ἡ ἀνησυχία πού αἰσθάνθηκαν μερικοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐπισκόπους γίνεται φανερὴ στοὺς κανόνες τῆς συνόδου τῆς Γάγγρας (περὶ τὸ 341), πού ἀποτελοῦν, παρεμπιπτόντως, μιὰ ἀπὸ τίς πρωιμότερες μαρτυρίες μᾶς γιὰ τὸ μοναχισμό. Τὸ πρόβλημα εἶχε δημιουργηθεῖ ἀπὸ κάποιον Εὐστάθιο, πού

είχε αποκτήσει σημαντικό αριθμό οπαδών στην επαρχία του Πόντου. "Αν πιστέψουμε τους επισκόπους που συνήλθαν στη Γάγγρα, οι πράξεις που ενθάρρυνε ήταν οι ακόλουθες: διέλυε τους γάμους, διδάσκοντας ότι οι έγγαμοί δεν έχουν έλπιδα σωτηρίας· περιφρονούσε τις εκκλησίες και όργανα δικές του λειτουργίες· ό ίδιος και οι όπαδοί του φορούσαν παράξενες ένδυμασίες και έβαζαν τις γυναίκες να φορούν άντρικά ρούχα και να κόβουν τά μαλλιά τους (αυτά τά μαλλιά που τους είχε δώσει ό Θεός σαν ύπενθύμιση τής ύποταγής τους στους άντρες)· ιδιοποιούνταν για δικούς του σκοπούς τις προσφορές τών πιστών· ενθάρρυνε τους δούλους να έγκαταλείπουν τους κυρίους τους· παραινούνσε τους πλουσίους να μοιράζονται όλα τους τά υπάρχοντα· δεν αναγνώριζε τους έγγαμους ιερείς· άγνοούσε τις νηστείες τής Έκκλησίας και καταδίκαιζε την κρεοφαγία.⁶ Είναι όλοφάνερο πως ό Ευστάθιος ύπνόμεινε την ίδια την κοινωνική τάξη πάνω στην όποία στηρίζονταν τόσο τό ήθικό κύρος όσο και ή ύλική προκοπή τής Έκκλησίας. Όστούσο δεν χαρακτηρίστηκε αίρετικός, αλλά άργότερα έγινε επίσκοπος και άσκησε αξιόλογη έπιρροή στον Μέγα Βασίλειο, ό όποίος θεωρείται από όλους άνεξαιρέτως συυλοβάτης τής Έκκλησίας.

Τό κύρος του άγίου Άθανασίου, επισκόπου Άλεξανδρείας, συνετέλεσε στο γεφύρωμα τής αντίθεσης ανάμεσα στην Έκκλησία και τό μοναχισμό. Έίτε από προσωπική πεποίθηση είτε από διορατικό ύπολογισμό, ό Άθανάσιος έμφανίστηκε δημόσια ως ύπερασπιστής του μοναστικού κινήματος.⁷ Ό Βίος του Άντωνίου που συνέγραψε ήταν μιá διακήρυξη στην όποία τόνιζε έντονα τό σεβασμό (ύποθετικό ή πραγματικό) του έρημίτη για τους κληρικούς. Όπωςδήποτε χρησιμοποίησε τον Άντώνιο ως όργανο στη δογματική του έπιχειρηματολογία κατά τών αίρετικών. Πολλοί άλλοι επίσκοποι έδρασαν με τό ίδιο πνεύμα, με άποτέλεσμα να υιοθετηθεί ένας συμβιβασμός. Ένώ ό Ευστάθιος θά ύποστήριζε ότι ή χριστιανική τελειότητα ήταν αδύνατο να έπιτευχθεί μέσα στα έγκόσμια —αυτό άκόμη και ό Μέγας Βασίλειος τό θεωρούσε δύσκολο⁸— έγιναν τώρα άποδεκτοί οι «δύο τρόποι»: ό μοναχισμός ήταν ή μεγάλη όδός προς τον ουρανό, αλλά και ή κοσμική ζωή, αν ρυθμιζόταν όπως πρέπει από την Έκκλησία, πρόσφερε τή δυνατότητα να φτάσει κανείς στον ίδιο προορισμό, αν και με λιγότερο άμεσο τρόπο. "Όχι λοιπόν ή ίδια άσκησις για όλους τους χριστιανούς, αλλά μιá πιό σκληρή για τους μοναχούς και μιá πιό χαλαρή για τους λαϊκούς. Έπιπλέον, ύποστηρίχτηκε, ή ύπαρξη τών μοναχών ήταν έξαιρετικά ευεργετική για τό κοινό έν γένει, άκόμη και για τό καλό και την ασφάλεια του κράτους. Γιατί ό μοναχός με την αυτοθυσία και τό πένθος κατακτούσε μιá έλευθερία από τά πάθη (πάθεια) πα-

ρόμοια με τών άγγέλων, και έτσι αποκτούσε οικειότητα (παρησία) με τον Θεό. Συνεπώς οι προσευχές του ήταν ιδιαίτερα άποτελεσματικές. Και αν ό Κύριος ήταν διατεθειμένος να μην καταστρέψει τά Σόδομα για χάρη δέκα δίκαιων ανθρώπων, δεν θά έδειχνε τήν εύνοιά του σε ένα κράτος που περιλάμβανε άρκετές χιλιάδες άγιους μοναχούς;

Η ιστορία του ανατολικού μοναχισμού μετά τον Άντώνιο και τον Παχώμιο χαρακτηρίζεται από γεωγραφική έξάπλωση, τοπικές προσαρμογές και άσυνείδητη έξέλιξη μάλλον παρά προγραμματισμένες μεταρρυθμίσεις. Τό μοναχικό και τό κοινοβιακό πρότυπο συνδυάστηκαν με διάφορους τρόπους. Στην Παλαιστίνη, όπου τό μοναστικό κίνημα λέγεται ότι εισήχθη στις αρχές του 4ου αιώνα από τον άγιο Ίλαρίωνα, μαθητή του άγίου Άντωνίου, αναπτύχθηκε ένας ειδικός τύπος μοναστηριού, ή λαύρα, που συγκέντρωνε μερικά ξεχωριστά κελιά ή σπήλαια γύρω από έναν κοινό οίκο. Στα κελιά κατοικούσαν έρημίτες που συγκεντρώνονταν για κοινή λατρεία τά Σάββατα και τις Κυριακές. Τό κύρος τών Άγίων Τόπων άποτέλεσε έρέθισμα για μιá μοναστική ανάπτυξη με διεθνή χαρακτήρα: ανάμεσα στα μεγάλα όνόματα που συνδέονται με τήν Παλαιστίνη, ό άγιος Γεράσιμος (πασίγνωστος για τό έξημερωμένο λιοντάρι του) ήταν από τή Λυκία, ενώ ό άγιος Θεοδοσίος ό Κοινοβιάρχης και ό άγιος Σάββας ήταν Καππαδόκες. Δεκάδες μοναστήρια διάφορων έθνικοτήτων ξεφύτρωναν γύρω από τά Ίεροσόλυμα και τή Βηθλεέμ, δίπλα στον Ίορδάνη και τή Νεκρά Θάλασσα —τουλάχιστον 140 μάς είναι γνωστά από άναφορές τών κειμένων. Έξίσου έπιτυχημένο ύπήρξε τό μοναστικό κίνημα στη Συρία και τή Μεσοποταμία, όπου, από όσο ξέρουμε, πρωτοεμφανίστηκε κατά τή βασιλεία του Κωνσταντίνου, κυρίως με τήν άναχωρητική μορφή, και γρήγορα παρأسύρθηκε σε μεγάλες ύπερβολές άυτοτιμωρίας. Μερικοί μοναχοί προτιμούσαν να ζούν σαν άγρια ζώα, αποφεύγοντας τή χρήση τής φωτιάς και τρεφόμενοι με ό,τι φυόταν από μόνο του —αυτοί ήταν γνωστοί ως βοσκοί. Άλλοι φορτώνονταν με άλυσίδες ή κλείνονταν σε κλουβιά, ενώ ό άγιος Συμεών ό Συυλίτης (πέθανε τό 459) έγινε παγκοσμίως διάσημος γιατί στεκόταν όρθιος πάνω σε μιá κολόνα που τό ύψος της σιγά σιγά έφτασε τά είκοσι μέτρα, δηλώνοντας έτσι τήν άνοδό του προς τον Θεό. Ό μόνος «δενδρίτης» ανάμεσα στους βυζαντινούς άγίους ήταν ό Δαβίδ από τή Μεσοποταμία, που πήγε στη Θεσσαλονίκη και έζησε πάνω σε ένα δέντρο σαν πουλί.

Τό 357 ό νεαρός άγιος Βασίλειος, που προσελκύστηκε στη μοναστική ζωή από τό παράδειγμα τής ευσεβοϋς μητέρας του και τής αδελφής του, ξεκίνησε για ένα ταξίδι στη Μεσοποταμία, τή Συρία, τήν Παλαιστίνη και

τήν Αίγυπτο, με σκοπό να μελετήσει τις διάφορες μορφές *άσκήσεως* και να διαλέξει την πιο κατάλληλη. Κατέληξε στο συμπέρασμα ότι ο *ἀναχωρητισμός* κατά το παράδειγμα του Ἀντωνίου, μολονότι *ἀξιοθαύμαστος* από όρισμένες απόψεις, είχε το μεγάλο μειονέκτημα να μην αφήνει περιθώρια για *ἀδελφική εὐσπλαχνία* και να μην παρέχει *εὐκαιρίες* για την τήρηση όλων τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Κυρίου. Ἐπιπλέον οἱ ἄνθρωποι χρειάζονταν βελτίωση μέσω παραδειγμάτων ἢ συμβουλῶν, κάτι που δὲν μπορούσε να ἐπιτευχθεῖ με τὴν ἀπομόνωση. Ὁ Βασίλειος, συνεπῶς, διάλεξε τὸν κοινοβιακὸ μοναχισμό, ἀλλὰ διέκρινε σωστά πῶς οἱ οἴκοι τοῦ Παχωμίου ἦταν ὑπερβολικὰ μεγάλοι γὰρ να μποροῦν να ἐπιτηρηθοῦν σωστά. Ἡ κοινότητα ποὺ ἴδρυσε, μετὰ τὴν ἐπιστροφή του ἀπὸ τὰ ταξίδια του, στοὺς Ἀνήσους (Annesi) τοῦ Πόντου ἦταν ἓνα κοινόβιο μέτριου μεγέθους, και αὐτὸ ἀποτέλεσε τὸν κανόνα σὲ ὅλη τὴ βυζαντινὴ περίοδο. Ὁπως ἔχει συχὰ παρατηρηθεῖ, δὲν ὑπῆρξε ποτὲ στὴν ἑλληνικὴ Ἐκκλησία ἓνα «βασίλειο τάγμα» ἢ ὀποιοδήποτε ἄλλο μοναχικὸ τάγμα. Ἀλλὰ τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ὁ Βασίλειος ἦταν ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς μεγαλύτερους Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὀδήγησε σὲ εὐρύτατη ἀποδοχὴ τῶν μοναστικῶν ιδεωδῶν του, τὰ ὁποῖα ἀνέπτυξε με κάθε λεπτομέρεια σὲ δύο ἔργα, γνωστὰ ὡς Ὁροι κατὰ πλάτος και Ὁροι κατ' ἐπιλογήν.⁹

Στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, πάντως, ὁ μοναχισμὸς ἔφτασε ἀπὸ τὴ Συρία. Φαίνεται ὅτι εἰσῆλθε ἀπὸ τὸν Σύρο Ἰσαάκ, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀπέκτησε κάποια φήμη προφητεύοντας στὸν αἰρετικὸ αὐτοκράτορα Οὐάλη τὴν ἡττα του ἀπὸ τοὺς Γότθους (378). Τὸ μοναστήρι ποὺ ἴδρυσε γύρω στὸ 382 ἔμεινε γνωστὸ με τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ διαδόχου του Δαλμάτου, ποὺ καταγόταν ἐπίσης ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀνατολὴ και ἦταν πρῶην ἀξιωματικὸς τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς φρουρᾶς. Φαίνεται ὅτι τὸ δεύτερο κατὰ σειρά ἀρχαιότητα μοναστήρι ἰδρύθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Σύρο Δίο. Πιθανὸν τὸ τρίτο στὴ σειρά ἦταν τῶν Ρουφινιανῶν, ποὺ ἰδρύθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν ἑπαρχο τῶν πραιτωρίων Ρουφίνο (392-395) κοντὰ στὴν ἑπαυλὴ του, ὅπου ἐγκατέστησε μιὰ ὀμάδα αἰγύπτιων μοναχῶν, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὅμως γρήγορα ἀποχώρησαν. Ἡ ἀκόμη πιὸ διάσημη μονὴ τῶν Ἀκοιμήτων, ὅπου τηροῦσαν συνεχῆ δοξολογία με τρεῖς βάρδιες ποὺ λειτουργοῦσαν με τὴ σειρά, ἰδρύθηκε περὶ τὸ 420, ἐπίσης ἀπὸ Σύρους.

Ἡ ἔλξη ποὺ ἀσκοῦσε ἢ πρωτεύουσα στοὺς ἀνατολίτες μοναχοὺς φαίνεται ἀπὸ ἓνα ἐξαιρετικὰ περίεργο κείμενο, τὸ Βίο τοῦ ἁγίου Δανιὴλ τοῦ Στυλίτη (πέθανε τὸ 493).¹⁰ Ὁ Δανιὴλ γεννήθηκε στὴν περιοχή τῶν Σαμοσάτων, μπῆκε σ' ἓνα μοναστήρι κοντὰ στὸ χωριὸ του σὲ ἡλικία δώδεκα ἐτῶν και με τὸν καιρὸ ἔγινε ἡγούμενός του. Τὴν ἐποχὴ ἐκείνη ὁ Συ-

μεῶν ὁ Στυλίτης ἦταν στὸ ἀπόγειο τῆς φήμης του, και ὁ Δανιὴλ προφανῶς διέκρινε τὰ πλεονεκτήματα ποὺ θὰ εἶχε ἢ υἱοθέτηση αὐτοῦ τοῦ καινοφανοῦς και θεαματικῶ τρόπου ἀσκήσεως. Γιὰ τὴ μεγαλύτερη δυνατὴ διαφήμιση δὲν ὑπῆρχε ἄλλος τόπος σὰν τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ἡ ἰδέα ἤρθε στὸν Δανιὴλ κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια ἓνός προσκυνήματος στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα. Ἐγκαταλείποντας χωρὶς συναίσθηματισμοὺς τὴν κοινότητα ποὺ εἶχε ἐκλεγεί να διευθύνει, ξεκίνησε γιὰ τὴ «δεύτερη Ἱερουσαλήμ», μολονότι δὲν μιλοῦσε ἑλληνικά. Φτάνοντας ἐκεῖ, διάλεξε ἓνα κατάλληλο μέρος στὴν εὐρωπαϊκὴ παραλία τοῦ Βοσπόρου, σὲ ἓνα χωριὸ ποὺ λεγόταν Ἀνάπλους, ἀρκετὰ κοντὰ στὴν πρωτεύουσα ὡστε να προκαλέσει τὴν προσοχή. Στὴν ἀρχὴ εἶχε προβλήματα με τοὺς ντόπιους, ἀλλὰ ἐδραῖωσε τὴ φήμη του ἀντιμετωπίζοντας τοὺς δαίμονες σὲ ἓναν ἐγκαταλειμμένο εἰδωλολατρικὸ ναὸ και θεραπεύοντας μιὰ ἀσθένεια τοῦ πατριάρχη Ἀνατολίου. Τότε παρουσιάστηκε μιὰ εὐκαιρία: μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ Συμεῶν τοῦ Στυλίτη ἓνας σύρος μοναχὸς ποὺ λεγόταν Σέργιος ἔφτασε στὴν πρωτεύουσα γιὰ να δωρίσει στὸν αὐτοκράτορα Λέοντα Α' τὸ δερμάτινο κουκούλιο τοῦ μεγάλου ἀσκητῆ. Καθὼς δὲν μπόρεσε να πετύχει ἀκρόαση, ὁ Σέργιος πῆγε να μείνει κοντὰ στὸ συμπατριώτη του Δανιὴλ. Εἶχε ἔρθει ἢ ὡρα να τεθεῖ σὲ ἐφαρμογὴ τὸ κόλπο τῆς κολόνας. Με τὴ βοήθεια ἓνός ἀξιωματοῦχου τοῦ παλατιοῦ, μιὰ σχετικὰ χαμηλὴ κολόνα (δύο φορὲς τὸ ὕψος ἓνός ἀνθρώπου) στήθηκε δίπλα σ' ἓνα ἀμπέλι ποὺ ἀνῆκε σὲ κάποιον ἄλλο Σύρο, ὁ ὁποῖος τύχαινε να ὑπηρετεῖ στὴν τραπεζαρία τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα. Με αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο ὁ Δανιὴλ τράβηξε τὴν προσοχὴ ὑψηλῶν ἀξιωματοῦχων και τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς οἰκογένειας. Ὁλοι ἔτρεχαν να δοῦν τὸ καινούριο θέαμα: ἢ αὐτοκράτειρα πρότεινε να ἐγκαταστήσει τὸν Δανιὴλ σὲ δικὸ της κτῆμα ἀν δεχόταν να μετακινηθεῖ —αὐτὸς ἀρνήθηκε· ὁ πρῶην ἑπαρχος Κύρος ἐγκωμίασε τὸ συριακὸ θαῦμα με μιὰ ἐλεγειακὴ ἐπιγραφή. Ὁ Δανιὴλ, ἀκολουθώντας τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ Συμεῶν, ἀνέβηκε σὲ μιὰ δεύτερη κολόνα, ψηλότερη ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη: ἔπειτα σὲ μιὰ τρίτη, ποὺ θεμελιώθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν αὐτοκράτορα, στὸν ὁποῖο ὁ Δανιὴλ εἶχε προφητέψει τὴ γέννηση ἓνός γιοῦ. Ἐνα μοναστικὸ συγκρότημα χτίστηκε με κέντρο τὴν κολόνα, και ἓνα «μαρτύριο» ἀφιερῶθηκε στὸν ἅγιο Συμεῶν, τοῦ ὁποῖου τὰ λείψανα μεταφέρθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀντιόχεια και τοποθετήθηκαν ἐκεῖ με μεγάλη ἐπισημότητα. Ὁμολογουμένως ἢ ζωὴ τοῦ Δανιὴλ δὲν ἦταν στρωμένη με ρόδα, καθὼς, μεταφέροντας τὸ «στυλιτισμὸ» ἀπὸ τὸ ζεστὸ κλίμα τῆς Συρίας στὶς ἀκτὲς τοῦ Βοσπόρου, ἔπρεπε να ἀντιμετωπίσει τὸ χιόνι τοῦ χειμῶνα: σὲ μιὰ περίπτωση κόντεψε να πεθάνει ἀπὸ τὴν παγωνιά. Αὐτὰ ὅμως ἦταν μέσα στοὺς κινδύνους τοῦ ἐπαγγέλματος. Ὁ Δανιὴλ εἶχε στὴ

ζωή του τεράστια επιτυχία και η Κωνσταντινούπολη ήταν πανευτυχής να έχει τον δικό της στυλίτη.

Τὰ πρῶτα μοναστήρια εἶχαν ἰδρυθεῖ ὄχι μέσα στήν πόλη ἀλλά ἔξω ἀπό τὰ κωνσταντινεία τείχη, καί τὸ ἴδιο συνέβαινε γενικά παντοῦ. Ἡ παρυσία μοναχῶν στίς πόλεις ἀπαγορευόταν πράγματι μὲ νόμο, καί μάλιστα τοῦ εὐσεβοῦς αὐτοκράτορα Θεοδοσίου Α', πού τοὺς διέτασσε νὰ κατοικοῦν σὲ «ἔρημα καί ἀπομονωμένα μέρη». Αὐτὸς ὁ νόμος εἶχε ἀνεπιθύμητα ἀποτελέσματα καί ἀνακλήθηκε δύο χρόνια ἀργότερα.¹¹ Παρ' ὅλα αὐτά, ἐπικρατοῦσε γενικά ἡ ἀποψη πὼς οἱ μοναχοὶ δὲν εἶχαν θέση μέσα στοὺς πειρασμοὺς καί τὸ θόρυβο τῆς πόλης: στήν Ἀντιόχεια τοὺς γιουχαΐζαν καί τοὺς ἔσερναν στοὺς δρόμους —κι αὐτὰ τὰ ἔκαναν χριστιανοί.¹² Στὴν ὕπαιθρο, ἀντίθετα, ὁ μοναχὸς ἀποτελοῦσε οἰκεία εἰκόνα καί, ἂν τύχαινε νὰ εἶναι σπουδαῖος ἀσκητής, ἐκπλήρωνε ἕναν πραγματικὸ κοινωνικὸ προορισμό: θεράπευε ἀρρώστους σὲ ἀνθρώπους καί ζῶα, ἔδιωχνε δαιμόνια καί ἀπολύμαινε, ἂν μπορούμε νὰ ποῦμε, τοποθεσίες πού ἦταν ἐπικίνδυνες λόγω τῆς σχέσης τους μὲ τὴν εἰδωλολατρία. Μὲ λίγα λόγια ἦταν κάτι σὰν μάγος-γιατρός. Πόσο σημαντικὸς ἦταν στήν ἀγροτικὴ περιοχὴ του, μὲ πόσο σεβασμὸ τὸν ἀντιμετώπιζε ὁ ντόπιος πληθυσμὸς, μπορεῖ νὰ τὸ δεῖ κανεὶς ὀλοζώντανα στὸ Βίο τοῦ ἁγίου Θεοδώρου τοῦ Συκεώτη¹³ καί σὲ πολλὰ ἄλλα κείμενα. Δὲν θὰ μπορούσαν λοιπὸν οἱ μοναχοὶ νὰ παίξουν τὸν ἴδιο ρόλο στίς πόλεις; Τὸν 6ο αἰῶνα εἶχε γίνει πιά δεκτὸ πὼς ἕνας δοκιμασμένος ἀσκητής, ἄτρωτος ἀπὸ ὄλους τοὺς πειρασμοὺς τῆς σάρκας, μπορούσε κανονικά νὰ ἀναλάβει κάποια ὑπηρεσία στήν πόλη, ἂν ἔκρυβε τὴν πραγματικὴ του ταυτότητα. Καί ἔτσι δημιουργήθηκε μιὰ παράξενη κατηγορία ἁγίων, οἱ «ἱεροὶ σαλοῖ». Ἡ ἰδέα νὰ προσποιεῖται κανεὶς τὸν τρελὸ δὲν ἦταν καινούρια, ἀλλὰ ὅταν πρωτοπαρουσιάστηκε τὸν 4ο αἰῶνα ἦταν μέσα σὲ ἕνα κοινόβιο, καί ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς ἦταν νὰ αὐξήσει τὴν ταπείνωση κάποιου στὴ γῆ ὥστε νὰ κερδίσει μεγαλύτερη ἀνταμοιβὴ στὸν οὐρανό. Διαφορετικὰ φαίνεται νὰ ἦταν τὰ κίνητρα πού ἐνέπνευσαν τὸν διασημότερο «ἱερὸ σαλὸ» πού ἔδρασε σὲ ἀστικὸ περιβάλλον, τὸν ἅγιο Συμεὼν τῆς Ἐμεσας (μέσα τοῦ 6ου αἰῶνα):¹⁴ εἶχε βάλει σκοπὸ του νὰ φέρει στὸν ἴσιο δρόμο τὰ πῦρ περιφρονημένα στοιχεῖα τῆς κοινωνίας, ὅπως τὶς πόρνες καί τοὺς ἡθοποιούς, καί νὰ ἐκχριστιανίσει τοὺς Ἑβραίους καί τοὺς αἰρετικούς. Γιὰ νὰ πραγματοποιήσει τὸ σκοπὸ του ἀφανῶς καί, κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο, παίζοντας, ἄρχισε νὰ παριστάνει τὸν ἄκακο μισοπάλαβο: ἔκανε διάφορες δουλειές τοῦ ποδαριοῦ σὲ ταβέρνες, συναναστρεφόταν γυναῖκες ὑποπτης ἡθικῆς, δὲν φερόταν ὅπως ἔπρεπε στήν ἐκκλησία, παρέβαινε ἐπίτηδες τὶς νηστείες, ἐνῶ κρυφὰ ἀσκοῦνταν μὲ τὸν σκληρότερο τρόπο.

Δὲν εἶχε πεῖ ὁ Παῦλος (*Πρὸς Κορ.* Α', Γ', 18): *εἴ τις δοκεῖ σοφὸς εἶναι ἐν ὕμιν ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, μωρὸς γενέσθω, ἵνα γένηται σοφός*; Γιὰ προφανεῖς λόγους ὁ Συμεὼν δὲν βρῆκε πολλοὺς μιμητές, ἀλλὰ ἡ παράδοση τοῦ *διὰ Χριστὸν σαλοῦ* ποτὲ δὲν πέθανε στὸ Βυζάντιο, καί τελικὰ πέρασε στὴ Ρωσία.

Ὁ 5ος καί ὁ 6ος αἰῶνας εἶδαν τὸ ἀπόγειο τοῦ μοναστικοῦ κινήματος στήν Ἀνατολή. Ἐχοντας τὴν εὐνοια τῆς ἀριστοκρατίας καί τῶν αὐτοκρατόρων καί τὴν ἐνθάρρυνση τῶν ἐπισκόπων, οἱ νέοι χριστιανοὶ «φιλόσοφοι» ἀπολάμβαναν τὴ διασημότητα πού ὑποτίθεται πὼς ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀποφεύγουν. Ἱστορίες γιὰ τὰ κατορθώματα, τὰ θαύματα, τὶς προφητείες καί τὰ ἀξιωματικὰ λόγια τῶν μοναχῶν συγκεντρώνονταν καί διαβάζονταν ἀκόρταγα. Γιὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτο ἔχουμε τὴν *Ἱστορία τῶν μοναχῶν* (περὶ τὸ 400) καί τὴν *Λαυσαϊκὴ Ἱστορία* τοῦ Παλλαδίου (419-20), γιὰ τὴ Συρία τὴ *Φιλόθεο Ἱστορία* τοῦ Θεοδώρητου (περὶ τὸ 444). Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ διάσημα ἔργα καί τοὺς Βίους ἐξεχόντων μοναστῶν ἁγίων, κυκλοφοροῦσαν σὲ ὄλες τὶς γλῶσσες τῆς Ἑγγύς Ἀνατολῆς ἀμέτρητες ἱστορίες, συχνὰ στερεότυπες καί μὲ στοιχεῖα κοινὰ μεταξύ τους, πού μὲ τὸν καιρὸ συμπεριλήφθηκαν στίς συλλογὲς πού ὀνομάστηκαν *πατερικά*. Ὡστόσο τὸ πῦρ εὐγλωττο ἀφιέρωμα στὸ κύρος τοῦ μοναχισμοῦ εἶναι χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία τὸ τεράστιο συγκρότημα τοῦ Qal'at Sim'an, πού χτίστηκε μὲ αὐτοκρατορικὴ πρωτοβουλία ὡς κέντρο προσκυνήματος τοῦ Συμεὼν τοῦ Στυλίτη. Ποιὸ μεγαλύτερο φόρο τιμῆς μπορούσε νὰ ἀποτίσει ὁ πολιτισμὸς στὸ φανατισμό;

Ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ, λοιπὸν, πού προηγουμένως ἦταν ἐθελοντικὰ ἀπόβλητοι τῆς κοινωνίας, οἱ μοναχοὶ ἔγιναν λαϊκοὶ ἥρωες καί μέλη τοῦ κατεστημένου. Αὐτὸ ὅμως τὸ πλήρωσαν μὲ τὴν ὑποταγὴ τους στήν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἐξουσία καί τὸν ἔλεγχο τους ἀπὸ αὐτήν. Ἦδη τὸν 5ο αἰῶνα βλέπουμε πὼς οἱ μοναχοὶ μιᾶς ἐπισκοπικῆς περιφέρειας βρίσκονταν ὑπὸ τὸν ἔλεγχου ἐνὸς *χωρειπισκόπου* ἢ ἐνὸς *περιοδευτοῦ*, ἢ ὑπὸ τὴν ἐξουσία ἐνὸς ἐξάρχου. Ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς προσπάθησε νὰ προχωρήσει ἀκόμη περισσότερο: μολονότι ἀναγνώριζε τὴν ξεχωριστὴ ἱερότητα τῆς μοναστικῆς ζωῆς, καθόρισε ὅτι κανένα μοναστήρι δὲν μπορούσε νὰ ἰδρυθεῖ χωρὶς ἄδεια τοῦ ἐπισκόπου, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐπιπλέον θὰ διόριζε καί τὸν ἡγούμενο. Καθόρισε ἐπίσης ὅτι ὅλοι οἱ ὑποψήφιοι μοναχοὶ θὰ παρέμεναν δόκιμοι ἐπὶ τρία χρόνια, ὅτι ὅλοι οἱ μοναχοὶ ἐνὸς μοναστηριοῦ, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀναχωρητές, ἔπρεπε νὰ κοιμῶνται στὸ ἴδιο κτίριο γιὰ νὰ ἐπιβλέπουν καλύτερα ὁ ἕνας τὸν ἄλλο, καί ὅτι θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀποθαρρύνονται μὲ κάθε τρόπο ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ ἀλλάζουν τόπο διαμονῆς.¹⁵ Δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ ποῦμε πὼς αὐτὲς οἱ διατάξεις δὲν τη-

ροῦνταν κατὰ γράμμα. Ὁ μοναχισμὸς ἦταν πολὺ διάχυτος, πολὺ διασκορπισμένος καὶ μὲ πολὺ μεγάλη ἐπιρροή ὥστε νὰ ὑποτάσσεται σὲ τέτοιους κανονισμοὺς. Ἐπίσης ἀρχίζε νὰ ἀποκτᾷ ἀξιόλογο οἰκονομικὸ πλοῦτο. Ἡ μεταγενέστερη βυζαντινὴ ἱστορία ἀποδεικνύει ὅτι διατήρησε τὴν ἀνεξαρτησία του ἀπέναντι στὴν κατεστημένη Ἑκκλησία.

Καθὼς ἡ Πρώμη βυζαντινὴ αὐτοκρατορία κατέρρεε, ἕνας κίλικας μοναχὸς μὲ τὸ ὄνομα Ἰωάννης Μόσχος, ποὺ πέθανε πρόσφυγας στὴ Ρώμη (634), παρουσίασε μιὰ ἀξιωματικὴ εἰκόνα τοῦ ἀνατολικοῦ μοναχισμοῦ ὅπως τὸν εἶχε γνωρίσει ὁ ἴδιος. Τὸ ἔργο του τὸ ὀνόμασε *Λειμῶνα*.¹⁶ Ἀκολουθεῖ τὴν παράδοση τῶν παλιότερων πατερικῶν καὶ εἶναι μιὰ σειρά ἀπὸ διδακτικὰ ἱστορίες ποὺ εἶχε συγκεντρώσει ὁ Μόσχος κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῶν ταξιδιῶν του. Ὁ κόσμος ποὺ γνώριζε, ὁ κόσμος τοῦ ὀρθόδοξου μοναχισμοῦ, εἶχε ἤδη συρρικνωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ μονοφυσικτὸ σχίσμα: εἶχε κέντρο του τὴν Παλαιστίνη, ἐκτεινόταν νότια ὡς τὸ ὄρος Σινὰ καὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια, ἀλλὰ ὄχι πολὺ μέσα στὴν Αἴγυπτο, βόρεια καὶ δυτικὰ ὡς τὴν Κιλικία, τὴν Κύπρο καὶ μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ ἄλλα ἑλληνικὰ νησιά. Μιὰ πλειάδα ἀπὸ ἀσκητὲς, ποὺ ἡ φήμη τους ἀπλωνόταν ἀπὸ στόμα σὲ στόμα, φώτιζε αὐτὸ τὸν κόσμο. Καλλιεργοῦσαν τὴν ἐγκράτεια, τὴν πενία, τὴν σιωπὴ, τὴν φιλοanthρωπία. Μεταξὺ τους ὑπῆρχαν λίγοι στυλίτες καὶ «βοσκοί», ἀλλὰ οἱ πιὸ ἀκραιῖς μορφὲς αὐτοτιμωρίας γενικὰ ἀποφεύγονταν. Ὑπῆρχε ἔντονο πνεῦμα συναγωνισμοῦ γιὰ τὴν ἐπίτευξη τῆς ἀρετῆς, ἀλλὰ αἰσθάνονταν ἐπίσης πὼς ἡ ἥρωικὴ ἐποχὴ τοῦ μοναχισμοῦ εἶχε περάσει. Ἄν ὁ Μόσχος δείχνει κάποια ἀδιαλλαξία, αὐτὴ ἀφορᾷ τοὺς μονοφυσίτες, ἀλλὰ ἡ καλοσυνάτη διήγησή του ἐλάχιστα μᾶς ἀφήνει νὰ ὑποπτευθοῦμε πὼς δίπλα στὸν δικό του κόσμο, τὴ «διεθνή» τῶν ὀρθόδοξων μοναχῶν, ὑπῆρχε ἕνας παράλληλος κόσμος τῶν μονοφυσικτῶν μοναχῶν, οἱ ὁποῖοι κάτω ἀπὸ διώξεις καλλιεργοῦσαν, ἴσως μὲ κάποιες ἀκρότητες ποῦ καὶ ποῦ, τὶς ἴδιες περίπου ἀρετὲς, ἔκαναν τὰ ἴδια θαύματα καὶ δέχονταν τὰ ἴδια σημάδια ἀπὸ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Γιὰ νὰ εἰσχωρήσει σ' αὐτὸ τὸν ἄλλο κόσμο ὁ ἀναγνώστης μπορεῖ νὰ μελετήσει τοὺς *Βίους τῶν ἁγίων τῆς Ἀνατολῆς* τοῦ Ἰωάννη τῆς Ἐφέσου.¹⁷

Ἀπὸ ὅλες τὶς κοινωνικὲς τάξεις οἱ μοναχοὶ ὑπῆρξαν πιθανὸν οἱ λιγότερο πληγέντες ἀπὸ τὶς καταστροφὲς τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα. Εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι μερικοὶ ἐξοντώθηκαν, ἐνῶ ἄλλοι κατέφυγαν στὴ Δύση—Καρχηδόνα, Σικελία καὶ Ρώμη— ὅπου ἤδη βρίσκουμε πολυάριθμους ἐκπροσώπους τους στὴ σύνοδο τοῦ Λατερανοῦ τὸ 649. Ἀλλὰ ἀκόμη καὶ ὑπὸ ἀραβικὴ κυριαρχία οἱ ὀρθόδοξοι μοναχοὶ κατόρθωσαν νὰ διατηρήσουν τὰ κυριότερα ἰδρύματά τους στὴν Παλαιστίνη (τὰ ὁποῖα διαλύθηκαν στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 9ου

αἰώνα), ὅπως καὶ στὸ ὄρος Σινὰ. Ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνὸς ἦταν ὁ διασημότερος, ἀλλὰ ὄχι καὶ ὁ τελευταῖος ἀντιπρόσωπος τοῦ ὀρθόδοξου μοναχισμοῦ στὴν Παλαιστίνη.

Παραδόξως, ὁ μοναχισμὸς ὑπέστη τὸ σοβαρότερο πλήγμα τοῦ ὄχι στὴν ἐπικράτεια τῶν ἀπίστων ἀλλὰ μέσα στὴ βυζαντινὴ αὐτοκρατορία. Ὅταν οἱ Ἰσαυροὶ ἔκαναν τὴν εἰκονομαχία ἐπίσημο δόγμα τοῦ κράτους, οἱ ἱερεῖς δὲν ἀντέδρασαν καὶ πολὺ, ὅπως εἶδαμε ἤδη· οἱ μοναχοὶ ἦταν ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ ὀργάνωσαν τὸ κίνημα τῆς ἀντίστασης. Αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι εἶχαν κάποιο ἰδιαίτερο, «καλογερικὸ» συμφέρον νὰ υπερασπίσουν τὴν «δεισιδαιμονία», οὔτε ὅτι ἡ λατρεία τῶν εἰκόνων τοὺς ἀπέφερε κάποιο ὕλικὸ κέρδος, ὅπως ὑποστηρίζουν μερικοὶ ἱστορικοί. Ἀπλῶς τὸ μεγάλο κύρος ποὺ διέθεταν στὸ λαὸ τοὺς καθιστοῦσε φυσικοὺς υπερασπιστὲς τῆς παραδοσιακῆς θρησκευτικῆς πρακτικῆς. Ἐπιπλέον ἡ κυβέρνηση δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ τοὺς πιέσει τόσο ὅσο τοὺς ἐπισκόπους. Ὅταν διώχονταν ἀπὸ ἕνα μέρος μποροῦσαν νὰ πᾶνε σὲ κάποιο ἄλλο, ἀκόμη καὶ πέρα ἀπὸ τὰ σύνορα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, γιὰτὶ διέθεταν ἕνα δίκτυο διασυνδέσεων ποὺ ἔφτανε τόσο στὴν Παλαιστίνη ὅσο καὶ στὴν Ἰταλία. Ὅπως καὶ νὰ ἔχει τὸ πρᾶγμα, ὅταν ξέσπασαν οἱ σοβαροὶ διωγμοὶ τῶν εἰκονοφίλων στὴ δεκαετία τοῦ 760, τὰ κύρια θύματα ἦταν μοναχοί. Ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Κωνσταντῖνος Ε' αἰσθάνονταν ἰδιαίτερη ἀποστροφή γι' αὐτοὺς καὶ τοὺς ὀνόμαζε «ἀμνημόνευτους». Τοὺς ἀνάγκασε νὰ παντρευτοῦν, τοὺς ὑπέβαλλε σὲ δημόσια γελοιοποίηση καὶ διέλυσε μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ διασημότερα μοναστήρια τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης. Οἱ διώξεις στὴ δυτικὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία, ὅπως μαθαίνουμε, ἦταν ἀκόμη πιὸ αὐστηρὲς, ἐξαιτίας τοῦ ζήλου τοῦ τοπικοῦ διοικητῆ Μιχαὴλ Λαχανοδράκοντα. Αὐτὸς συγκέντρωσε στὴν Ἐφεσο ὅλους τοὺς μοναχοὺς καὶ τὶς μοναχὲς τῆς ἐπαρχίας του καὶ τοὺς εἶπε: «Ὅποιος ἐπιθυμεῖ νὰ ὑπακούσει τὸν αὐτοκράτορα καὶ ἐμένα, ἄς φορέσει ἕνα λευκὸ ἔνδυμα καὶ ἄς πάρει μιὰ σύζυγο ἀμέσως. Ὅσοι ἀρνηθοῦν νὰ συμμορφωθοῦν, θὰ τυφλωθοῦν καὶ θὰ ἐξοριστοῦν στὴν Κύπρο». Ἡ διαταγὴ ἐκτελέστηκε ἀμέσως καὶ πολλοὶ μαρτύρησαν ἐκεῖνη τὴν ἡμέρα, ἐνῶ ἄλλοι, προσθέτει μὲ θλίψη ὁ χρονογράφος μας, παρέβησαν τὸν ὄρκο τους καὶ ἔχασαν τὴν ψυχὴ τους.¹⁸

Ἦταν μεγάλη μέρα γιὰ τοὺς μοναχοὺς ὅταν πέθανε ὁ Λέων Δ' ὁ Ἰσαυρὸς (784), καὶ ἀκόμη μεγαλύτερη ἡ μέρα ποὺ ἡ εἰκονομαχία καταδικάστηκε ἐπίσημα ἀπὸ τὴν ἑβδομὴ οἰκουμενικὴ σύνοδο (787), στὴν ὁποία ἐκπροσωπήθηκαν πολλοὶ μοναχοί: στὶς συνεδριάσεις τῆς ἔλαβαν μέρος ἀντιπρόσωποι ἀπὸ 132 μοναστήρια, κυρίως ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη καὶ τὴ Βιθυνία. Γιὰ τριάντα περίπου χρόνια μετὰ ὑπῆρξε μεγάλη ἀνάπτυξη στὴν οἰκοδόμηση μοναστηριῶν, ἐνῶ ἀκολούθησε μιὰ δεύτερη περίοδος ἀνα-

ταραχών όταν η εικονομαχία επιβλήθηκε πάλι (815-843). Και πάλι οι μοναχοί πρωτοστάτησαν στο κίνημα της αντίστασης. Αυτή τη φορά ήταν καλύτερα οργανωμένοι, χάρη κυρίως στην αδάμαστη δραστηριότητα του αγίου Θεοδώρου του Στουδίτη. Καταγόμενος από επιφανή οικογένεια δημόσιων υπαλλήλων, με καλή μόρφωση και πολλές διασυνδέσεις, ο Θεόδωρος ήταν πάνω απ' όλα άνθρωπος πρακτικός, που πίστευε στην αυστηρή πειθαρχία. Έπιθυμούσε να μεταρρυθμίσει το μοναστικό κίνημα έμφυσώντας του το πνεύμα των πρώτων Πατέρων. Δεν τον ενδιέφερε ο μυστικιστικός διαλογισμός αλλά η σκληρή δουλειά, η πενία και η ύπακοή. Έπέμενε να μην έχουν οι μοναχοί στην κατοχή τους δούλους, ούτε θηλυκά ζώα (μια κατάχρηση που αποδοκίμαζε ιδιαίτερα)· να μη βγαίνουν από το μοναστήρι άσκοπα, να μη δημιουργούν συγγενικές σχέσεις (όπως, για παράδειγμα, του νονού) με λαϊκούς, να έχουν σε όλα κοινοκτημοσύνη και να μοιράζουν στους φτωχούς κάθε εισόδημα που ξεπερνούσε τις ανάγκες τους.¹⁹ Το ιδεώδες του Θεοδώρου ήταν παραπλήσιο με του Παχωμίου, με τον οποίο ο Θεόδωρος είχε και άλλη ομοιότητα, καθώς ήταν επικεφαλής μιας «όμοσπονδίας» μοναστηριών που αριθμούσε συνολικά γύρω στους χίλιους μοναχούς. Για να πετύχει τους σκοπούς του χρειάστηκε να δημιουργήσει μια διοικητική ιεραρχία (βοηθό ήγούμενο, οίκονόμο, βοηθό οίκονόμο, αποθηκάριο, πειθαρχικούς αξιωματούχους και ούτω καθεξής), ακόμη και να εισαγάγει ένα είδος φυλακής, όπου οι ανυπάκοοι και αδιάφοροι μοναχοί υποβάλλονταν σε νηστεία με ψωμί και νερό, μια και ο σωφρονισμός με μαστίγωμα ήταν κατάλληλος μόνο για τους λαϊκούς.²⁰ Πρέπει να είμαστε ευγνώμονες στον Θεόδωρο γιατί τόνισε ιδιαίτερα, μέσα στις άλλες χειρωνακτικές ασχολίες, την αντιγραφή βιβλίων, και έτσι οδήγησε στη δημιουργία ενός διάσημου εργαστηρίου (σκριπτόριο) στη μονή του Στουδίου.

Ο μοναχισμός αναδύθηκε από τις εικονομαχικές έριδες πολύ ένιςχυμένος. Είχε προσθέσει μια καινούρια σειρά μαρτύρων και όμολογητών στο ήμερολόγιο της 'Ανατολικής 'Εκκλησίας· είχε επίσης καθιερωθεί ως φωνή της θρησκευτικής συνείδησης κάθε φορά που οι επίσκοποι έξαναγκάζονταν να κάνουν συμβιβασμούς σε θέματα δόγματος και πειθαρχίας. Ο πρώτος πατριάρχης της Κωνσταντινούπολης μετά το «θρίαμβο της ορθοδοξίας», ο Μεθόδιος (843-847), ήταν πρώην μοναχός· το ίδιο και ο διάδοχός του 'Ιγνάτιος (847-858). 'Υπάρχουν άφθονες μαρτυρίες πως η ίδρυση καινούριων μοναστηριών και η επέκταση όσων υπήρχαν συνεχίστηκε άμείωτη τον 9ο, τον 10ο και τους επόμενους αιώνες, έτσι που μετά από λίγο η αυτοκρατορική κυβέρνηση άρχισε να άνησυχεί. Το 935 ο Ρω-

μανός Α' Λεκαπηνός εξέδωσε νόμο που άπαγόρευε στα μοναστήρια να άποκτούν κτήματα των χωρικών, ακόμη και αν ήταν από δωρεά,²¹ και την ίδια άπαγόρευση επανέλαβε ο Κωνσταντίνος Ζ' το 947. Ο Νικηφόρος Φωκάς προχώρησε περισσότερο το 964. Σε μια γνωστή Νεαρά του έτους αυτού²² κατηρίαζε όλο το μοναστικό κατεστημένο για την άχόρταγη πλεονεξία τους και την άπόκτηση τεράστιων εκτάσεων γής, θαυμαστών κτιρίων και άναρίθμητων ζώων. Τους υπενθύμιζε ότι αυτός δεν ήταν ο τρόπος που ζούσαν οι Πατέρες στην έρημο. Στη συνέχεια άπαγόρευε την ίδρυση καινούριων μοναστηριών, και άντ' αυτού συνιστούσε την άνασύσταση όσων παλιών μοναστηριών είχαν παρακμάσει, όχι όμως με τη δωρεά κτημάτων. 'Ακόμη και τα έρειπωμένα μοναστήρια είχαν στην ιδιοκτησία τους άρκετη γή: εκείνο που τους έλειπε ήταν το ανθρώπινο δυναμικό και τα ζώα για να κάνουν αυτή τη γή παραγωγική. Τα μόνα «παράθυρα» που άφησε ο Νικηφόρος άφορούσαν τα μοναστήρια που λόγω κακής διαχείρισης είχαν χάσει τα κτήματά τους (αυτές τις περιπτώσεις θα τις διερευνούσαν κυβερνητικοί υπάλληλοι), καθώς και τα κελιά και τις λαύρες, που μπορούσαν να ιδρύνονται, άρκεί να μην άποκτούσαν άκίνητη περιουσία. Σημειωτέον ότι ο Νικηφόρος ήταν ένθερμος θαυμαστής της μοναστικής ζωής και δεν μπορεί να κατηγορηθεί για άντικληρικά αισθήματα. Ο κύριος σκοπός της νομοθεσίας του ήταν να κάνει τα μοναστηριακά κτήματα παραγωγικά και ταυτόχρονα να περιορίσει τη συνεχή μείωση της άγροτικής ιδιοκτησίας.

Ο Βασίλειος Β' εισήγαγε το 996 καινούριες ρυθμίσεις, που άποκαλύπτουν τον τρόπο λειτουργίας του μοναχισμού στο επίπεδο του χωριού. Ένας χωρικός, λέει, γινόταν μοναχός, έχτιζε μια εκκλησούλα και της άφιέρωνε τη γή του. Μπορεί να έρχονταν μαζί του και ένας δυο άλλοι. Μετά το θάνατό τους ο τοπικός επίσκοπος άρπαζε τη γή με την πρόφαση ότι άνήκε σε μοναστήρι και η την κρατούσε για τον έαυτό του ή την άνέθετε σε κάποιον ισχυρό λαϊκό. Ο αυτοκράτορας καθόρισε ότι αυτά τα παρεκκλήσια δεν θεωρούνταν μοναστήρια και έπρεπε να επιστραφούν στην κοινότητα του χωριού· ο επίσκοπος περιοριζόταν άπλώς στην έπιτήρηση της συμπεριφοράς των μοναχών που ήταν έγκατεστημένοι εκεί, και άπαγορευόταν να εισπράττει φόρους από αυτούς. Μοναστήρια θα όνομάζονταν μόνο τα ιδρύματα που είχαν τουλάχιστον οκτώ με δέκα μοναχούς. Αυτά θα ήταν στη δικαιοδοσία του επισκόπου, ο όποιος θα ήταν έλεύθερος να τα παραχωρεί κατά βούληση, με την προϋπόθεση ότι δεν θα άποκτούσαν άλλη γή.²³

Για να καταλάβουμε πόσο πολύπλοκη ήταν η κατάσταση, πρέπει να

έχουμε υπόψη μας όρισμένα στοιχεία. Πρώτον, ένα βυζαντινό μοναστήρι κατά κανόνα ήταν μια άγροτική οικονομική μονάδα που, αν διοικούνταν όπως πρέπει, παρουσίαζε κέρδος πέρα από τις εισφορές που εισπράττονταν από τους νεοεισερχομένους και τις άλλες δωρεές. Δεύτερον, με βάση την αυτοκρατορική και την κανονική νομοθεσία ή μοναστηριακή παρουσία ήταν αναπαλλοτρίωτη, πράγμα που σήμαινε ότι ή θα παρέμενε στάσιμη ή θα αύξανόταν. Τρίτον, οι ιδιοκτήτες των μοναστηριών ποίκιλλαν πολύ: μερικά ήταν αυτοκρατορικά, άλλα πατριαρχικά ή επισκοπικά: μερικά ήταν ιδιωτικά, είτε λόγω κληρονομιάς από τον ιδρυτή τους είτε για άλλους λόγους: άλλα ήταν έντελως ανεξάρτητα. Προφανώς ο ιδιοκτήτης σε κάθε περίπτωση καρπωνόταν τα εισοδήματα που παρείχε το μοναστήρι και ήταν σε θέση να ασκεί σημαντική επίρροή στις έσωτερικές υποθέσεις του ιδρύματος. Συνεπώς το παιχνίδι συμφερόντων ήταν έξαιρετικά πολύπλοκο. Έκτος από την περίπτωση που το μοναστήρι ήταν ανεξάρτητο (αυτοδέσποτο ή αυτεξούσιο), δέν ήταν οι μοναχοί εκείνοι που κυρίως ώφελούνταν. Φυσικά ζούσαν κι αυτοί μια ζωή που μπορούσε να είναι αρκετά άνετη: βασικά όμως έπαιζαν το ρόλο του επιστάτη ανάμεσα στον ιδιοκτήτη και τους καλλιεργητές της γής.

Πρός το τέλος του 10ου αιώνα συναντάμε μια ακόμη μορφή μοναστικής διοίκησης. Όπως είδαμε, ήδη επί Βασιλείου Β' ένα μοναστήρι μπορούσε να παραχωρηθεί σε έναν λαϊκό πάτρωνα (που ονομαζόταν χαριστικάριος), ο οποίος αποκτούσε ίσοβίως απόλυτο έλεγχο στα κτήματα και τα εισοδήματά του, και καμιά φορά μπορούσε να το παραχωρήσει με τη σειρά του στους κληρονόμους του, αλλά όχι πέρα από την τρίτη γενιά. Οι καταχρήσεις που μπορούσε να δημιουργήσει αυτό το σύστημα είναι προφανείς: ο πάτρωνας μπορούσε να καταληστέψει κυριολεκτικά τη μονή, και συχνά το έκανε. Έπιπλέον τα μοναστήρια γίνονταν απλώς περιουσιακά στοιχεία, αντικείμενα ανταλλαγών και έμπορικων συναλλαγών. Ο φιλόσοφος Μιχαήλ Ψελλός, ο οποίος στη διαχείριση των οικονομικών του ήταν καπάτσος σαν τον Βολταίρο, είχε αποκτήσει δικαιώματα σε περισσότερα από δώδεκα μοναστήρια. Και τί γινόταν αν ο χαριστικάριος ήταν άνθρωπος άμφιβολης ήθικης ή, ακόμη χειρότερα, ξένος; Έτσι άρχισαν να ακούγονται μερικές φωνές διαμαρτυρίας.²⁴ Όστόσο ή ίδια ή Έκκλησία δέν πήρε κανένα μέτρο για να καταργήσει αυτό το σύστημα, το όποιο αφού έφτασε στο απόγειό του τον 11ο αιώνα φαίνεται ότι υποχώρησε κάπως, αλλά παρέμεινε σε ίσχύ μέχρι το τέλος της αυτοκρατορίας. Ο λόγος μπορεί να ήταν ότι απλώς ή Έκκλησία δέν ήταν σε θέση να διοικήσει τον τεράστιο αριθμό μοναστηριών που βρίσκονταν τυπικά στη δικαιοδοσία της

και θεωρούσε ότι, όποιες καταχρήσεις και αν γίνονταν, ήταν καλύτερα να διοικούνται τα μοναστήρια από ισχυρούς λαϊκούς παρά να μη διοικούνται καθόλου.

Γνωρίζουμε αρκετά για τις μοναστηριακές περιουσίες από τον 11ο αιώνα και μετά, και θα μάθουμε ακόμη περισσότερα όταν εκδοθούν πλήρως τα άρχεϊα του 'Αγίου Όρους.²⁵ Έπάρχει έπιπλέον ή μαρτυρία των αρχιτεκτονικών μνημείων. Σίγουρα δέν είναι σύμπτωση το γεγονός ότι τα θαυμασιότερα θρησκευτικά κτίρια της Μέσης βυζαντινής περιόδου είναι μοναστηριακά. Αν περιοριστούμε στην Ελλάδα, οι σημαντικότερες από τις εκκλησίες που σώζονται από το 850 περίπου και μετά ανήκαν σε μοναστήρια: Σκριπού, Όσιος Λουκάς, Νέα Μονή της Χίου, Δαφνί και ούτω καθεξής μέχρι το τέλος της αυτοκρατορίας. Καμιά επισκοπική ή ένοριακή εκκλησία δέν μπορεί να παρουσιάσει τόσο μεγαλειώ και τέτοια έπιδειξη.

Αν ο Έωάννης Μόσχος μπορούσε να σηκωθεί από τον τάφο και να περιηγηθεί τα βυζαντινά μοναστήρια του 11ου και του 12ου αιώνα, σίγουρα θα έκπλησόταν και θα θλιβόταν αρκετά. Όστόσο έξωτερικά τίποτε δέν είχε αλλάξει: τα ίδια ιδεώδη επιδιώκονταν φαινομενικά, οι ίδιοι πειθαρχικοί κανόνες εφαρμόζονταν (ή μάλλον δέν εφαρμόζονταν), ή ίδια αντίληψη της μοναστικής ζωής προβαλλόταν στα κηρύγματα. Έπήρχαν, όπως και πριν, αναχωρητές, στυλίτες, κοινόβια, ακόμη και λαύρες κατά το παλαιστινιακό πρότυπο. Φυσικά ή γεωγραφία του μοναχισμού είχε αλλάξει πολύ. Ένώ όλες οι βυζαντινές χώρες — τώρα πλέον και οι πόλεις — ήταν κατάστικτες από μοναστήρια, είχαν επίσης έμφανιστεί και όρισμένα σημαντικά κέντρα. Το αξιολογότερο, από τον 8ο αιώνα και μετά, ήταν ο Όλυμπος της Βιθυνίας (σήμερα Uludağ) και ή γύρω περιοχή. Έδώ έζησε ο άγιος Πλάτων, ο θεός του Θεοδώρου Στουδίτη, ο ίδιος ο Θεόδωρος, ο άγιος Μεθόδιος, ο μελλοντικός πατριάρχης, ο άγιος Θεοφάνης ο Όμολογητής, ο άγιος Έωαννίκιος ο Μέγας, ο άγιος Μεθόδιος, ο μελλοντικός απόστολος των Σλάβων, και μια πλειάδα μικρότερων αγίων, που ή στιγμή της δόξας τους συνέπεσε με τη δεύτερη περίοδο της οικονομικής διαμάχης. Το δεύτερο μεγάλο κέντρο, από το δεύτερο μισό του 10ου αιώνα και μετά, ήταν το Άγιο Όρος, που τελικά έπισκίασε όλα τα άλλα ιερά βουνά. Το όρος Λάτμος (ή Λάτρος) κοντά στη Μίλητο άκμασε πριν από τον 10ο αιώνα, και το όρος Γαλήσιον κοντά στην Έφεσο τον 11ο. Ανάμεσα στα μικρότερα κέντρα ως αναφέρουμε το όρος Κυμινά, κάπου στα όρια της Βιθυνίας, και το όρος Γάνο στη Θράκη. Αξίζει να σημειωθεί πως ή κεντρική και ανατολική Μικρά Άσία, με εξαίρεση τον

Πόντο, έμφανίζονται πολύ λίγο στα χρονικά του βυζαντινού μοναχισμού. Αναμφίβολα υπήρχαν πολλά μοναστήρια στην Καππαδοκία, αλλά δεν έχουν αφήσει καθόλου γραπτές μαρτυρίες.

Όπως δὴποτε υπήρχαν περιθώρια για μεταρρύθμιση του ανατολικού μοναχισμού, ιδιαίτερα τον 11ο αιώνα, όταν η κοινωνική δομή άλλαζε και αυτή σοβαρά. Πράγματι, κάποιες ζυμώσεις εμφανίστηκαν στους μοναστικούς κύκλους, και εδώ ξεχωρίζει η προσωπικότητα του Συμεών του Νέου Θεολόγου. Ο Συμεών (γύρω στα 949-1022) ήταν μυστικιστής και όχι μεταρρυθμιστής, αλλά άσκησε σημαντική έπιρροή σε δύο ζητήματα. Πιθανόν από αντίδραση στον μονότονο υλισμό των σύγχρονων μοναστηριών, διακήρυξε ότι σκοπός της πνευματικής ζωής ήταν μια έσωτερική μεταμόρφωση που οδηγούσε σε άπευθείας ένατένιση του Θεού, ο οποίος έμφανιζόταν με τη μορφή άφατου φωτός. Έπιπλέον τόνιζε τη σημασία της πλήρους ύποταξης σε έναν πνευματικό καθοδηγητή, του οποίου η θεόσταλη εξουσία του (άλειν και δεσμεΐν) ξεπερνούσε την εξουσία οποιουδήποτε ιερέα διορισμένου από άνθρωπο. Φυσικά ο Συμεών άνηκε σε ένα μυστικιστικό ρεύμα με μακρά παράδοση στην Ανατολική Έκκλησία, ένα ρεύμα που οι ρίζες του έφταναν στον Μάξιμο τον Όμολογητή και τον Ωριγένη. Όμως το άξιοπρόσεχτο στην περίπτωση αυτή είναι η τόλμη με την οποία ο Συμεών έπιτέθηκε στο κατεστημένο του κλήρου. Υποστήριζε ότι οι έπίσκοποι και οι ιερείς, με την άνάξια συμπεριφορά τους, είχαν χάσει έντελώς το δώρο της χάρις που είχαν λάβει από τους αποστόλους, και δεν διέφεραν σε τίποτε από τους λαϊκούς. Το μόνο που παρέμενε ήταν η ύποκρισία του έξωτερικού ένδύματος της Ιεροσύνης, ενώ το πνευματικό χάρισμα είχε περάσει στους μοναχούς —και πάλι όχι σε όλους, αλλά σ' εκείνους που η άρετή τους γινόταν φανερή με σημάδια. Αυτοί ήταν οι μόνοι άληθινοί χριστιανοί, οι διάδοχοι των αποστόλων.²⁶

Όπως είναι εύλογο, ο Συμεών προκάλεσε σημαντική ένόχληση στις εκκλησιαστικές άρχές, και μάλιστα έξορίστηκε από την πρωτεύουσα. Είχε όμως την καλή τύχη να άνήκει σε έπιφανή οικογένεια και να ζει σε μια άρκετά άνεκτη έποχή, άλλιώς η μοίρα του θα ήταν πολύ σκληρότερη, καθώς μάλιστα η διδασκαλία του θύμιζε σαφώς μεσαλιανισμό.*

* [Μεσαλιανισμός ή μασαλιανισμός ήταν αίρεση που έμφανίστηκε τον 4ο αιώνα στη Μεσοποταμία και εξαπλώθηκε στη Συρία, την Αίγυπτο, τη Μικρά Άσία και τη Θράκη. Οι όπαδοί του άποστρέφονταν τη δουλειά και ζούσαν ζητιανεύοντας. Περιφρονούσαν τα μυστήρια και τις τελετές και είχαν μυστικιστικές και άσκητικές τάσεις. Κεντρικό δόγμα του μεσαλιανισμού ήταν η πίστη ότι ο άνθρωπος με τη γέννησή του κληρονομεί τον πονηρό δαίμονα, ο οποίος δεν μπορεί να εκδιωχθεί παρά μόνο με συνεχή προσευχή. Όταν με τη συνεχή προσευχή ο δαίμονας άπομακρυνθεί, οι άν-

Έπιπλέον, αν ήταν λιγότερο ένθουσιώδης, θα είχε ίσως άντιληφθεί πως ο μοναχισμός είχε γίνει στην ουσία τόσο άδρανής όσο και ο κλήρος. Πράγματι, όχι μόνο πολύ άπειχε από το να άποτελει τη φωνή της όρθόδοξης συνείδησης, αλλά είχαν άρχίσει να τον κατηγορούν και οι έπίσκοποι. Άς έξετάσουμε λοιπόν τις κατηγορίες κατά του μοναχισμού, όπως διατυπώθηκαν από τον Ευστάθιο Θεσσαλονίκης προς το τέλος του 12ου αιώνα.²⁷

Ο Ευστάθιος δεν ήταν άσκητής και δεχόταν ότι οι μοναχοί είχαν δικαίωμα να ζούν καλά, άρκει να το έκαναν διακριτικά. Αναφέρει μια ιστορία σχετική με τον αυτοκράτορα Μανουήλ Α' Κομνηνό, που μια νύχτα άποφάσισε να παραθέσει δείπνο για το γάμο κάποιου εύγενούς. Έπειδή ήταν περασμένη η ώρα, και στο παλάτι δεν βρίσκονταν τα άπαραίτητα τρόφιμα, έστειλαν κάποιον στο γειτονικό μοναστήρι του Άγίου Ιωάννου της Πέτρας. Μολοντί ήταν η έβδομάδα της Τυροφάγου, οι άγαθοί μοναχοί πρόσφεραν χωρίς κανένα πρόβλημα διάφορα είδη ψωμιού, ξηρό και γλυκό κρασί, φρούτα, έλιές, τυρί, φρέσκα και παστά ψάρια, καθώς και κόκκινο και μαύρο χαβιάρι, το τελευταίο είσαγωγή από την περιοχή του ποταμού Δόν. Αυτό για τον Ευστάθιο ήταν ένα έπαινετό παράδειγμα μοναστικού πλεονάσματος. Το πρόβλημα ήταν ότι οι μοναχοί με τους οποίους έρχόταν σε έπαφή, πιθανόν του Άγίου Όρους, ήταν άπληστοι αλλά και κακότροποι. Τους στρατολογούσαν από τα κατώτερα κοινωνικά στρώματα, μέσα από ύφαντές, ράφτες, χαλκωματάδες, βυρσοδέψες, ζητιάνους και κλέφτες. Έτσι ήταν σχεδόν άγράμματοι, ποτέ δεν διάβαζαν βιβλία (άντίθετα πουλούσαν τα βιβλία των μοναστηριακών βιβλιοθηκών) και δέχονταν με δυσκολία μορφωμένους ύποψηφίους. Αντι να «φιλοσοφούν» στα μοναστήρια τους, περνούσαν τον περισσότερο καιρό τους στην άγορά, και είχαν έξαιρετική ικανότητα να άγοράζουν φτηνά και να πουλούν άκριβά. Έπαιρναν ληστρικά νοίκια από τους παροίκους τους, έξαπατούσαν τους πλούσιους δωρητές, πλαστογραφούσαν τίτλους ιδιοκτησίας, πήγαιναν στο κυνήγι, όπλοφορούσαν. Πολλοί από αυτούς διατηρούσαν την προσωπική τους περιουσία, και μάλιστα την αύξαναν: μερικοί άσχολούνταν με το έμποριο και την τοκογλυφία. Το άποκορύφωμα ήταν ότι οι μοναχοί περιφρονούσαν τους κληρικούς. Ένοχλούσαν συνεχώς τους έπισκόπους και προκαλούσαν έπίτηδες ζημιές σε έπισκοπικά κτήματα, κλείνοντας δρόμους και κόβοντάς τους το νερό.

Ένώ οι έπίσκοποι και οι μοναχοί έξακόντιζαν κατηγορίες ο ένας ένανθρωποι δέχονται το "Άγιο Πνεύμα, άποκτούν προφητικά χαρίσματα και βλέπουν τον Θεό και τις άόρατες δυνάμεις όχι με το νοϋ αλλά με τα μάτια του σώματος.]

τίον του άλλου, ή ζωή στα μοναστήρια συνεχιζόταν όπως πριν. Για να δείξω παραστατικά την πορεία της διάλεξα δύο παραδείγματα, σχεδόν σύγχρονα, και τα δύο από την ίδια επαρχία, την Κύπρο. Το πρώτο, για τη μονή Μαχαιρά, είναι σίγουρα το πιο αντιπροσωπευτικό από τα δύο. Το δεύτερο, για τον "Άγιο Νεόφυτο, αποκαλύπτει μια εξαιρετική προσωπικότητα και τη μοίρα των μόχθων του.

Η ιστορία της μονής Μαχαιρά είναι γνωστή από το Τυπικόν του μοναστηριού.²⁸ Περί τα μέσα του 12ου αιώνα ένας παλαιστίνιος ερημίτης, ο Νεόφυτος (διαφορετικός από τον διασημότερο ομώνυμο του που μόλις αναφέραμε), εγκατέλειψε την έρημο κοντά στον Ιορδάνη και πήγε στην Κύπρο, όπου έχτισε μια καλύβα σε ένα απότομο βουνό και τον έτρεφαν οί χωρικοί. Τον ακολουθούσε ένας μαθητής του, ο Ίγνάτιος. Ο Νεόφυτος πέθανε και ο Ίγνάτιος πήρε κάποιον άλλο σύντροφο. Οί δυο τους άρχισαν να έχουν πιο φιλόδοξα σχέδια, κι έτσι πήγαν στην Κωνσταντινούπολη να υποβάλουν αίτηση στον αυτοκράτορα. Ο Μανουήλ Α' τους παραχώρησε το βουνό και τη γύρω περιοχή δωρεάν, καθώς και ένα ετήσιο εισόδημα από πενήντα χρυσά νομίσματα. Επίσης όρισε να είναι το μοναστήρι έντελώς ανεξάρτητο. Αυτό έδωσε στον Ίγνάτιο τη δυνατότητα να χτίσει μια εκκλησία και λίγα κελιά, και να ιδρύσει μια κοινότητα με πέντε έξι μοναχούς. Μέχρις εδώ, μια κοινή ιστορία.

Το 1172 ο δραστήριος Νεϊλος, που φαίνεται πως ήταν επίσης από την Παλαιστίνη, έγινε μέλος της αδελφότητας. Έξυπνήρεσε τη μονή μεταφέροντας τρόφιμα από την Κιλικία σε εποχή σιτοδείας και τελικά έγινε ηγούμενος. Το επόμενο βήμα του ήταν να ζητήσει από τους πιστούς δωρεές σε ακίνητα και ζώα. Σ' αυτό είχε αρκετή επιτυχία, και έτσι μπόρεσε να χτίσει μια εκκλησία, μια τραπεζαρία και μια πτέρυγα διαμονής, και μάλιστα περιχαράκωσε όλο το συγκρότημα με μια τάφρο. Το μοναστήρι καθιερώθηκε από τον τοπικό επίσκοπο, στον οποίο έκαναν σαφές πως το μόνο του δικαίωμα ήταν να επικυρώνει την εκλογή του ηγούμενου. Μια δεύτερη αντιπροσωπεία στάλθηκε στην Κωνσταντινούπολη και πέτυχε από τον αυτοκράτορα Ισαάκιο Β' (1185-1195) την παραχώρηση ενός όπρωάνα από τα αυτοκρατορικά κτήματα της Λευκωσίας και φορολογική απαλλαγή δώδεκα χρυσών νομισμάτων. Στη συνέχεια ένα χρυσόβουλο του αυτοκράτορα Αλεξίου Γ' (1195-1203) έδωσε στο μοναστήρι πλήρη φορολογική απαλλαγή για τα κτήματά του και για είκοσι τέσσερις παροίκους του στο διημερές. Και οί δύο αυτοκράτορες βέβαια δεν είχαν λόγους να μην είναι γενναίοδωροι, αφού κανένας τους δεν εξουσίαζε την Κύπρο, που είχε γίνει ανεξάρτητη ήγεμονία το 1185 και κατακτήθηκε

από τον Ριχάρδο τον Λεοντόκαρδο το 1191. Άλλα ακόμη και αν ο Νεϊλος δεν κέρδισε τίποτε από αυτά τα προνόμια, ή περιουσία που είχε μαζέψει ήταν αρκετή με το παραπάνω. Το 1210, όταν συντάχθηκε ή δριστική μορφή του Τυπικού, ο Νεϊλος είχε ιδρύσει και μια γυναικεία μονή στη γειτονική πόλη της Ταμασοῦ, που θα έπαιρνε το δικτώ τοίς εκατό του καθαρού εισοδήματος του μοναστηριού. Από αυτό το δικτώ τοίς εκατό οί ιερείς που λειτουργούσαν στη γυναικεία μονή θα πληρώνονταν είκοσι τέσσερα χρυσά νομίσματα το χρόνο. Αν υποθέσουμε πως ο μισθός των ιερέων ήταν το ένα τέταρτο της παροχής προς τη γυναικεία μονή (και πιθανόν να ήταν λιγότερο), το συνολικό ετήσιο εισόδημα θα ήταν 1.200 χρυσά νομίσματα, ποσό αξιολογώτατο για την εποχή αυτή, που απέιχε παρασάγγες από τα πενήντα νομίσματα που ήταν μερικές δεκαετίες πιο πριν.

Οί διατάξεις του Τυπικού είναι ιδιαίτερα λεπτομερείς στα ζητήματα διοίκησης. Η κοινότητα που άφοροῦν ήταν μεγάλη και δεν ήταν επιθυμητή περαιτέρω αύξησή της. Ωστόσο παρέχονταν ειδικά κίνητρα για την είσοδο διακεκριμένων ανθρώπων (περιφανείς), που μπορούσαν να γίνουν μοναχοί μετά από δοκιμαστική περίοδο έξι μηνών, ενώ οί άπλοοί άνθρωποι έπρεπε, σύμφωνα με την Ιουστινιάνεια νομοθεσία, να περιμένουν τρία χρόνια κάνοντας στο μεταξύ χειρωνακτικές δουλειές. Τυπικά ή άποδοχή κάποιου δεν κόστιζε τίποτε, δεν αποθάρρυναν όμως και τις δωρεές και όταν μια δωρεά γινόταν, δεν έπιστρεφόταν πιά. Εκτός από τον ηγούμενο, το προσωπικό περιλάμβανε δύο οικονόμους, ένα νεωκόρο, δύο δοχειαρίους (άρμόδιους για την ιματιοθήκη), δύο ή περισσότερους άποθηκαρίους, έναν άρμόδιο για την πειθαρχία και ούτω καθεξής. Όλα τα προϊόντα έπρεπε να μετριοῦνται προσεχτικά παρουσία μαρτύρων, να τηροῦνται κανονικοί λογαριασμοί, να ελέγχονται τα εύρετήρια, να δίνονται καινούρια ρούχα στους μοναχούς μόνο με την έπιστροφή των παλιών. Είναι άμφίβολο αν ύπρχε στην Κύπρο εκείνη την εποχή άγροτική έπιχείρηση καλύτερα οργανωμένη από τη μονή Μαχαιρά. Το μόνο ζήτημα άνωτος για το όποιο ο Νεϊλος δεν είχε να πεί πολλά πράγματα ήταν ή παιδεία. Άπαγόρευε ρητά να εισέρχονται στο μοναστήρι παιδιά λαϊκών για εκπαίδευση. Μόνο άγόρια που προορίζονταν για μοναχοί γίνονταν δεκτά για να μάθουν το Ψαλτήρι και την εκκλησιαστική λειτουργία σε ένα ειδικό κελί. Είναι όλοφάνερο πως ή μονή Μαχαιρά δεν ήταν κανένα κέντρο πνευματικής καλλιέργειας.

Λίγες δεκαετίες ωρίτερα ένας άλλος Κύπριος, ο Νεόφυτος, είχε έμπνευστεί από άυστηρότερα ιδανικά. Προερχόταν από άγροτική οικογένεια και όταν το 1152, σε ήλικία δεκαοχτώ ετών, μπήκε στη μονή Χρυσοστό-

μου κοντά στη Λευκωσία, δὲν ἤξερε οὔτε νὰ γράφει οὔτε νὰ διαβάζει. Ἔτσι ἐπὶ πέντε χρόνια τὸν εἶχαν νὰ φροντίζει τὰ ἀμπέλια τῆς κοινότη-
τας, καὶ στὸ διάστημα αὐτὸ ἔμαθε τὰ πρῶτα του γράμματα καθὼς καὶ
ὅλο τὸ Ψαλτήρι ἀπέξω. Ἐπειδὴ τὸν ἔκαιγε ἡ ἐπιθυμία νὰ γίνεи ἐρμηίτης,
τοῦ ἐπέτρεψαν νὰ πάει στὴν Παλαιστίνη γιὰ νὰ βρεῖ ἐκεῖ κάποιον κατάλ-
ληλο δάσκαλο, ἀλλὰ στὴν ἀναζήτησή του αὐτὴ ἀπέτυχε. Ἀφοῦ ξαναγύ-
ρισε στὴν Κύπρο, ἀποφάσισε νὰ πάει στὸ ὄρος Λάτμο, κοντὰ στὴ Μίλη-
το. Πῆγε λοιπὸν στὴν Πάφο ἐλπίζοντας νὰ βρεῖ κάποιον πλοῖο, ἀλλὰ τὸν
συνέλαβαν ἐπειδὴ τὸν ὑποπτεύθηκαν γιὰ φυγάδα καὶ τοῦ ἔκλεψαν ὅλα του
τὰ χρήματα, δηλαδὴ δύο χρυσὰ νομίσματα. Ἐχοντας μείνει χωρὶς καθό-
λου λεφτά, περιπλανήθηκε στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τοῦ νησιοῦ καὶ βρῆκε τὴ σπη-
λιά στὴν ὁποία θὰ περνοῦσε τὸ ὑπόλοιπο τῆς μακρᾶς ζωῆς του (πέθανε
μετὰ τὸ 1214).

Τὸ ὅτι ἔγινε διάσημος στὴ συνέχεια ὀφειλόταν κυρίως στὸν ἐπίσκοπο
Πάφου Βασίλειο Κίνναμο, ποῦ, ἂν κρίνουμε ἀπὸ τὸ ἐπώνυμό του, ἦταν
ἀριστοκράτης ἀπὸ τὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία ἢ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Αὐτὸς ἦταν
ποῦ χειροτόνησε τὸν Νεόφυτο πρεσβύτερο καὶ τὸν ἔπεισε νὰ ἰδρύσει μιὰ
μονή. Ὁ ἐρμηίτης ὅμως ἦταν τελείως διαφορετικὸς ἀπὸ τὸν παμπόνηρο
Νεῖλο. Ἀγωνιζόταν νὰ διατηρήσει τὸ μοναστήρι του μικρὸ καὶ ἀντιστε-
κόταν στὸν πειρασμὸ νὰ ἀποκτήσει κτήματα. Μόνο μετὰ τὴ λατινικὴ κα-
τάκτηση (1191), ὅταν ὑπῆρχε ἔλλειψη τροφίμων καὶ ἡ ἀδελφότητα με-
γάλωσε μὲ τὴν ἀφιξὴ ξένων, τότε δέχτηκε νὰ ἀποκτήσει λίγη καλλιεργή-
σιμη γῆ, ἕνα ἀμπέλι καὶ μερικὰ βόδια, ἀλλὰ κι αὐτὰ τὰ θεωροῦσε ἀναγ-
καῖα κακά.

Ὁλομόναχος στὴν ἐγκλείστρα του, ὁ Νεόφυτος ἀφιερῶθηκε σὲ φιλολο-
γικὲς ἀσχολίες. Οἱ γνώσεις του φυσικὰ δὲν ἦταν πολὺ βαθιές: περιορί-
ζονταν στὴ Βίβλο, σὲ μερικοὺς Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ σὲ Βίους
ἀγίων. Ὡστόσο, γιὰ ἄνθρωπο μὲ τὴ δικὴ του προέλευση, διάβασε πολὺ,
καὶ ἐπιπλέον ἀπέκτησε ἀξιόλογη γνώση τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν ἐλληνικῶν,
ἂν καὶ ὄχι τῆς σωστῆς ὀρθογραφίας. Ἐπίσης συγκέντρωνε βιβλία. Σὲ μιὰ
περίπτωση μᾶς λέει πὼς ἔψαχνε τριάντα ἐπτὰ χρόνια σὲ ὅλη τὴ δυτικὴ
Κύπρο γιὰ ἕνα ἀντίγραφο τοῦ Ἐξαήμερου τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου, ἀλλὰ
χωρὶς ἐπιτυχία —μιὰ ἐνδιαφέρουσα ὁμολογία, μιὰ καὶ τὸ Ἐξαήμερον ἦταν
ἐξαιρετικὰ κοινὸ βιβλίο. Ἐντούτοις ὁ Νεόφυτος μπόρεσε νὰ καταρτίσει
μιὰ βιβλιοθήκη μὲ πενήντα περίπου τόμους, ἀριθμὸ σεβαστὸ γιὰ ἐπαρχια-
κὸ μοναστήρι. Ὡς συγγραφέας ὁ Νεόφυτος συνέθεσε δεκαῆξι ἔργα θρη-
σκευτικοῦ περιεχομένου, ποῦ τὰ ἀπαριθμεῖ μὲ καμάρι στὸ Τυπικὸ του.
Κατὰ καιροὺς ἔγραφε καὶ στίχους. Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ τὸ μεγαλύτερο μέρος

τοῦ φιλολογικοῦ του ἔργου, μολονότι διδακτικὸ καὶ προσιτὸ σὲ ἕνα κοι-
νὸ μὲ μέτρια καλλιέργεια, παρέμεινε χωρὶς ἀναγνώστες. Ἀρκετὲς ἀπὸ τὶς
συγγραφές του ἔχουν σωθεῖ σὲ ἕνα μόνον ἀντίγραφο, αὐτὸ ποῦ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ
ἅγιος κατέθεσε στὴ βιβλιοθήκη τῆς μονῆς του. Ἐκεῖ ἔμειναν μαζεύοντας
σκόνη, ὥσπου ἀγοράστηκαν τὸν 17ο αἰῶνα ἀπὸ πράκτορες τῆς γαλλικῆς
κυβέρνησης.²⁹

Τὸ μοναστήρι τοῦ Νεοφύτου ἔζησε συνεχῶς ἀπὸ τότε μέχρι σήμε-
ρα καὶ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ὑπέφερε ἰδιαίτερα ἀπὸ τὴ λατινικὴ κατο-
χή. Ἀντίθετα, ὑπάρχουν ἐνδείξεις κάποιας εὐμάρειας: στὸ τέλος τοῦ 15ου
αἰῶνα εἶχε ἐτήσιο εἰσόδημα διακόσια βενετικὰ δουκάτα, καὶ νέα κτίρια,
ἀνάμεσά τους καὶ μιὰ μεγαλόπρεπη ἐκκλησία, ἄρχισαν νὰ οἰκοδομοῦνται.
Ὡστόσο ἡ μονή δὲν παρουσίασε οὔτε μιὰ πνευματικὴ ἢ φιλολογικὴ προ-
σωπικότητα. Ἡ ρητὴ ἐπιθυμία τοῦ ἱδρυτῆ της νὰ εἶναι ὁ ἐκάστοτε ἡγού-
μενος ἐρμηίτης, ὅπως ἦταν ὁ ἴδιος, γρήγορα ἀγνοήθηκε. Ἀντὶ νὰ γίνεи
κέντρο ἀσκητικῆς ἀρετῆς, ἡ Ἐγκλείστρα κατέληξε ἕνα συνηθισμένο κοι-
νόβιο, μιὰ ἀγροτικὴ ἐπιχείρηση ὅπως ὅλες οἱ ἄλλες μονές τῆς Κύπρου.

Σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τῆς μακρόχρονης ὑπαρξῆς του ὁ βυζαντινὸς μονα-
χισμὸς δὲν μπόρεσε ποτὲ νὰ ξεφύγει ἀπὸ τὸ ἀρχικὸ του καλούπι. Ἡ μό-
νη δυνατότητα μεταρρύθμισης βρισκόταν στὴν ἐπιστροφή σὲ μιὰ πιὸ αὐ-
στηρὴ ἐρμηίεια τῶν Πατέρων τῆς ἐρήμου, ἢ σὲ ἕναν ἐσωτερισμό, ἕνα μυ-
στικισμό ποῦ μποροῦσε νὰ γίνεи κτῆμα πολὺ λίγων. Ἐτσι τὴν κληρονο-
μιὰ τοῦ Συμεὼν τοῦ Νέου Θεολόγου τὴν παρέλαβαν τὸν 14ο αἰῶνα οἱ
ἡσυχαστὲς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους. Ἡ διαμάχη σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ «ἄκτιστο φῶς»
τοῦ ὄρους Θαβῶρ καὶ τὴ μέθοδο γιὰ νὰ πετύχει κανεὶς τὴ «θεία ἔλλαμψη»
κρατώντας τὴν ἀναπνοή του καθὼς ἀπάγγελε τὴν «νοερὰ προσευχή»
ἀνήκει περισσότερο στὴν ἱστορία τοῦ μυστικισμοῦ παρὰ τοῦ μοναχισμοῦ
ὡς θεσμοῦ. Παρατηροῦμε πάντως πὼς ἡ διακήρυξη τοῦ Γρηγορίου Πα-
λαμᾶ (1340), ποῦ κέρδισε μάλιστα τὴν ἐγκριση τῆς ἐλληνικῆς Ἐκκλη-
σίας, θεωροῦσε ρητὰ τοὺς μοναχοὺς ἀνθρώπους μὲ πνευματικὴ ἐνόραση,
στοὺς ὁποίους ἀποκαλύπτονταν τὰ μελλοντικὰ μυστικὰ τῆς Θεῆς Πρό-
νοιας, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς οἱ ἀλήθειες τοῦ χριστιανισμοῦ εἶχαν φανερωθεῖ στοὺς
προφήτες τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης.³⁰ Εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ φανταστεῖ κανεὶς
ὅτι οἱ καλοὶ μοναχοὶ τοῦ Βατοπεδίου, ποῦ ὀρμοῦσαν μὲ μαγικοῦρες στοὺς
γειτονέες τους τῆς μονῆς Ἐσφιγμένου γιὰ τὴν κατοχὴ μερικῶν χωραφιῶν
καὶ ἔκαιγαν ὁ ἕνας τὰ δέντρα τοῦ ἄλλου,³¹ ἦταν οἱ ἴδιοι μοναχοὶ ποῦ ἰσχυ-
ρίζονταν πὼς εἶχαν μιὰ τόσο ὑψηλὴ θέση στὰ μεγαλειώδη σχέδια τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Μὲ τὴ μεγάλη τους παράδοση στὴ ρεαλιστικὴ ἀντιμετώπιση τῶν κα-
ταστάσεων καὶ μὲ τὴν πείρα τους στὰ οἰκονομικὰ, τὰ βυζαντινὰ μοναστή-

ρια διέθεταν τὰ κατάλληλα ἐφόδια γιὰ νὰ ἐπιβιώσουν ὑπὸ ξένη κυριαρχία. Οἱ μονῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους κέρδισαν σημαντικὰ ὠφελήματα ὅταν περιῆλθαν στὴν ἐξουσία τοῦ σέρβου βασιλιᾶ Στεφάνου Δουσάν. Ὅταν οἱ Ὀθωμανοὶ Τοῦρκοι ἔκαναν τὴν πρώτη τους ἐμφάνιση στὴν Εὐρώπη λίγες δεκαετίες ἀργότερα, τὰ ἀθωνικὰ μοναστήρια δὲν περίμεναν κὰν νὰ ἐδραιωθεῖ ἡ τουρκικὴ κυριαρχία. Πῆγαν κατευθείαν στὸ σουλτάνο, τοῦ πρόσφεραν τὴν ὑποταγὴ τους καὶ κατόρθωσαν νὰ τοὺς δοθεῖ ἐπικύρωση τῶν τίτλων ἰδιοκτησίας τῶν κτημάτων τους (περὶ τὸ 1372).³² Στὴ σύγχυση ποὺ ἀκολούθησε κατάφεραν ἀκόμη καὶ νὰ αὐξήσουν τὶς περιουσίες τους καὶ νὰ ἀσχοληθοῦν μὲ ἄλλες ἐπικερδεῖς ἐπιχειρήσεις. Δὲν συνέβη φυσικὰ τὸ ἴδιο μὲ ὅλα τὰ μοναστήρια, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἐπιβίωσαν μετὰ τὴν κατάκτηση τὰ κατάφεραν ἀρκετὰ καλὰ στοὺς πέντε αἰῶνες τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας. Ἔτσι ὁ βυζαντινὸς μοναχισμὸς ἐπέζησε τῆς βυζαντινῆς αὐτοκρατορίας.

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ Σ'

Η ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ

Ὅταν τὸν 4ο αἰῶνα ὁ χριστιανισμὸς θριάμβευσε ἐπὶ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας, ὑπῆρχε σὲ ὅλη τὴν αὐτοκρατορία μιὰ μορφή ἐλευθέριας ἐκπαίδευσης ποὺ δὲν εἶχε ὑποστῆ θεμελιώδεις ἀλλαγές ἀπὸ τὴν ἑλληνιστικὴ ἐποχὴ, δηλαδή γιὰ ἓνα διάστημα περίπου πέντε αἰῶνων. Πρέπει νὰ ἀρχίσουμε περιγράφοντας τὰ κύρια χαρακτηριστικὰ τῆς.

Ἡ ἐκπαίδευση τῶν ἀγοριῶν περιλάμβανε, ὅπως καὶ σήμερα, τρία στάδια: τὴν πρωτοβάθμια, τὴ δευτεροβάθμια καὶ τὴν ἀνώτερη. Ἀρχίζοντας στὴν ἡλικία τῶν ἐπτὰ ἐτῶν περίπου, τὰ ἀγόρια (καμιὰ φορὰ καὶ τὰ κορίτσια) στέλνονταν σὲ ἓναν πρῶτο δάσκαλο, τὸ γραμματιστὴ, ποὺ τοὺς δίδασκε τὸ ἀλφάβητο, ἀνάγνωση, γραφὴ καὶ ἀριθμητικὴ. Αὐτὰ ἦταν βέβαια ἐντελῶς στοιχειώδη καὶ ὁ γραμματιστὴς, ποὺ συνήθως ἀσκοῦσε τὸ ἐπάγγελμά του ἰδιωτικὰ καὶ δὲν διέθετε τυπικὰ προσόντα, κατεῖχε ἀρκετὰ χαμηλὴ θέση στὴν κοινωνία —ἐλάχιστα καλὴτερη ἀπὸ τὴ θέση ἐνὸς τεχνίτη. Γιὰ ἓνα σημαντικό μέρος τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ ἡ ἐκπαίδευση σταματοῦσε στὸ πρωτοβάθμιο ἐπίπεδο, ἀφήνοντας ἀνεξάλειπτες στὴ μνήμη τῆ βέργα τοῦ δασκάλου καὶ τὶς ἀτέλειωτες ἐπαναλήψεις καὶ ἀποστηθίσεις. Στὸ ἐπόμενο στάδιο, δηλαδή τὸ δευτεροβάθμιο, βρισκόταν ἓνας διαφορετικὸς (καὶ ἀρκετὰ πιὸ καλοπληρωμένος) δάσκαλος, ὁ γραμματικὸς, ποὺ δὲν δίδασκε τόσο γραμματικὴ μὲ τὴ σημερινὴ ἔννοια —μολονότι τὸ ἔκανε καὶ αὐτὸ— ὅσο μερικὸς ἐπιλεγμένους «κλασικοὺς» συγγραφεῖς, κυρίως ποιητές, καὶ πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα τὸν Ὅμηρο. Ἡ μέθοδος ποὺ ἀκολουθοῦσε ὁ γραμματικὸς στὴν Ὑστερὴ Ἀρχαιότητα μᾶς εἶναι γνωστὴ μὲ ἀρκετὲς λεπτομέρειες: γιὰ κάθε κείμενο ἀκολουθοῦνταν τέσσερις φάσεις, ἡ διόρθωσις, ἡ ἀνάγνωσις, ἡ ἐξήγησις καὶ ἡ κρίσις. Ἡ μέθοδος αὐτὴ φαίνεται πολὺ φορμαλιστικὴ, καὶ πραγματικὰ ἔτσι ἦταν. Ἡ διόρθωσις ἦταν ἡ σύγκριση τῶν κειμένων ποὺ κρατοῦσαν ὁ δάσκαλος καὶ οἱ μαθητές, γιὰ νὰ ἐξακριβωθεῖ ἂν ἦταν ἐντελῶς ὅμοια, κάτι ποὺ δὲν μπορούσε νὰ θεωρηθεῖ ἐξαρχῆς δεδομένο. Κατόπιν ἀκολουθοῦσε ἡ ἀπαγγελία τοῦ κειμένου, μὲ

τὸν κατάλληλο χρωματισμό. Αὐτὸ ἔπρεπε νὰ γίνεῖ γιατί στὴν Ἀρχαιότητα οἱ λέξεις γράφονταν δίχως νὰ χωρίζονται καὶ χωρὶς στίξη. Ἀφοῦ τὸ κείμενο διαβαζόταν δυνατὰ, ἔπρεπε νὰ ἐρμηνευτεῖ, πρῶτα γλωσσικά (μιᾶς καὶ ἡ γλώσσα τοῦ Ὀμήρου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρχαίων ποιητῶν δὲν ἦταν γενικὰ κατανοητὴ), καὶ ἔπειτα ἱστορικά, μὲ τὴν ἔννοια ὅτι τὰ ὀνόματα διάφορων μυθικῶν προσώπων, ὅπως καὶ τὰ γεωγραφικὰ τοπωνύμια, ἔπρεπε νὰ ταυτιστοῦν καὶ νὰ ἀπομνημονευτοῦν. Τέλος ἡ κρίσις ἀφοροῦσε ὄχι τόσο τὴ φιλολογικὴ κριτικὴ, ὅσο τὸ νὰ προβληθοῦν τὰ ἠθικὰ διδάγματα ποὺ μποροῦσαν νὰ ἀντληθοῦν ἀπὸ τὰ ἀρχαῖα κείμενα.

Ἡ μελέτη τῶν ποιητῶν συμπληρωνόταν ἀπὸ τὴ μελέτη τῆς γραμματικῆς, ποὺ διδασκόταν συνήθως ἀπὸ τὸ ἐγχειρίδιο τοῦ Διονυσίου τοῦ Θρακικοῦ (1ος αἰώνας π.Χ.). Αὐτὸ τὸ βιβλίον, ποὺ διατήρησε τὸ τεράστιο κύρος του σὲ ὅλοκληρη τὴ βυζαντινὴ περίοδο, βασικὰ δὲν περιεῖχε τίποτε περισσότερο ἀπὸ μιὰ ταξινομήση τῆς γλώσσας: φωνήεντα καὶ σύμφωνα, τὴν ποσότητα τῶν φωνηέντων (δηλαδὴ ἂν ἦταν βραχέα, μακρὰ ἢ δίχρονα), τὶς διφθόγγους, τὰ ὄχτῳ μέρη τοῦ λόγου, τοὺς ἀριθμούς, τὴν κλίση ὀνομάτων καὶ ρημάτων, καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς. Μὲ αὐτὰ τὰ ἐφόδια ὁ μαθητὴς ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει ἕναν ἀριθμὸ ἀσκήσεων, τὰ προγυμνάσματα, ποὺ ἦταν προσεχτικὰ διαβαθμισμένα καὶ καθορισμένα. Ἀπὸ αὐτὰ, τὰ τέσσερα ἢ πέντε πρῶτα εἶδη γίνονταν στὸ δευτεροβάθμιον σχολεῖον, ἐνῶ τὰ ὑπόλοιπα ἀνήκαν στὸν ἀνώτερον κύκλον σπουδῶν. Στὸ ἐγχειρίδιον τοῦ Ἐρμούγενου (2ος αἰώνας μ.Χ.), ποὺ εἶχε μεγάλη ἐπιρροή, ἀπαριθμοῦνται τὰ παρακάτω δώδεκα προγυμνάσματα:

1. Ὁ μῦθος (συνήθως σχετικὸς μὲ ζῶα).
2. Τὸ διήγημα, ποὺ ὀρίζεται ὡς «ἐκθεση πράγματος ποὺ συνέβη ἢ μποροῦσε νὰ ἔχει συμβεῖν».
3. Ἡ χρεία (ρητὸ ἢ ἀξίωμα).
4. Ἡ γνώμη (τὸ γνωμικόν), ποὺ διέφερε ἀπὸ τὴ χρεία στὸ ὅτι αὐτὴ μποροῦσε νὰ περιέχει κάποια δράση (π.χ. μιὰ μικρὴ ἱστορία), ἐνῶ ἡ γνώμη περιοριζόταν σὲ μιὰ γενικὴ διατύπωση ἀποτρεπτικοῦ ἢ προτρεπτικοῦ χαρακτῆρα.
5. Ἡ ἀνασκευὴ (ἀναίρεση) ἢ κατασκευὴ (ἐπιβεβαίωση) μιᾶς δεδομένης πρότασης.
6. Ὁ κοινὸς τόπος, δηλαδὴ ἡ ἀνάπτυξη μιᾶς γενικῆς περιπτώσεως, λόγου χάριν ὑπὲρ ἢ κατὰ μιᾶς κατηγορίας ἀνθρώπων (ὑπερασπιστῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς, ἐγκληματιῶν) τῶν ὁποίων ἡ ἀξία ἢ ἡ ἐνοχὴ δὲν ἀμφισβητοῦνταν.
7. Τὸ ἐγκώμιον ἑνὸς προσώπου, ἑνὸς ζώου, μιᾶς ἀφηρημένης ἰδέας, μιᾶς πόλης καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς, ἢ τὸ ἀντίθετό του, δηλαδὴ ὁ νόσος.

8. Ἡ σύγκρισις.
9. Ἡ ἠθοποιία, δηλαδὴ ὁ χαρακτηρισμὸς, συνήθως μὲ τὴ μορφή ἑνὸς μικροῦ λόγου ποὺ κάποια γνωστὴ προσωπικότητα μποροῦσε νὰ ἔχει ἀπαγγεῖλει σὲ δεδομένη περίπτωσι. Σκοπὸς ἦταν νὰ ἀποδοθεῖ ἡ διάθεση (εὐτυχία/λύπη) καὶ ἡ φύση (ἄντρας/γυναίκα, νέος/γέρος) τοῦ ὁμιλητῆ.

10. Ἡ ἔκφρασις (περιγραφή) ἑνὸς ἀντικειμένου, ἑνὸς τόπου κτλ.
11. Ἡ θέσις, δηλαδὴ ἡ συζήτηση ἑνὸς γενικοῦ θέματος, ὅπως «Πρέπει κανεὶς νὰ παντρευεταί;». Τὰ ἐπιστημονικὰ ζητήματα ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀποφεύγονται, γιατί ἔπρεψαν στὴ δικαιοδοσίαν τῶν φιλοσόφων.

12. Ἡ νόμος εἰσφορά, δηλαδὴ ἡ πρόταση νόμου ἢ ἄλλου μέτρου.¹
Οἱ παραπάνω ἀσκήσεις διακρίνονταν σχολαστικὰ μεταξὺ τους καὶ χωρίζονταν σὲ ὑποδιαιρέσεις: γιὰ παράδειγμα, ἡ θέσις θεωροῦνταν διαφορετικὴ ἀπὸ τὸν κοινὸ τρόπο κατὰ τὸ ὅτι ἀφοροῦσε ἕνα ἀμφισβητήσιμο θέμα· ἐπιπλέον μποροῦσε νὰ εἶναι ἀπλή («Πρέπει κανεὶς νὰ παντρευεταί;»), ἀπλή μὲ συγκεκριμένη ἐφαρμογή («Πρέπει ἕνας βασιλιάς νὰ παντρευεταί;»), διπλή («Πρέπει κανεὶς νὰ ἀγωνίζεται στοὺς ἀθλητικὸς ἀγῶνες ἢ νὰ καλλιεργεῖ τὴ γῆ;») καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς. Γιὰ κάθε ἀσκηση ὑπῆρχαν θέματα τυποποιημένα καὶ δομῆ καθορισμένη. Παραδείγματος χάριν, στὴν περίπτωσι τῆς χρείας τὸ θέμα μποροῦσε νὰ εἶναι ἡ ρῆσις τοῦ Ἰσοκράτη «Παιδείας αἱ μὲν οἷζαι πικραῖ, οἱ δὲ καρποὶ ἠδεις». Ὁ μαθητὴς ἔπρεπε νὰ συνθέσει τὴν ἀσκήσιν του σὲ τρία μέρη: (1) Νὰ ἐγκωμιάσει τὸν Ἰσοκράτη γιὰ τὴ σοφία του. (2) Νὰ παραφράσει τὸ ρητό. (3) Νὰ τὸ δικαιολογήσει εἴτε θετικὰ («Τὰ πιὸ ἀξιόλογα πράγματα ἐπιτυγχάνονται μόνο μὲ κόπους, ἀλλὰ ὅταν ἐπιτευχθοῦν φέρνουν εὐχαρίστηση»), εἴτε ἀρνητικὰ, εἴτε μέσω κάποιου παραδείγματος.

Ἡ δευτεροβάθμια ἐκπαίδευση, στὴν ὁποία οἱ φιλολογικὲς σπουδὲς κατεῖχαν κυρίαρχη θέση, περιλάμβανε ἐπίσης —ἢ μᾶλλον θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι περιλάμβανε τυπικὰ— τέσσερα μαθήματα θετικῶν ἐπιστημῶν (τὸ μεσαιωνικὸ Quadrivium), δηλαδὴ ἀριθμητικὴ, γεωμετρία, ἀστρονομία καὶ μουσικὴ θεωρία, τὰ ὁποῖα ἀποτελοῦσαν αὐτὸ ποὺ ὀνομαζόταν ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία, δηλαδὴ γενικὴ, «κυκλικὴ» ἐκπαίδευση. Αὐτὸς ὁ βρος ἐμφανίζεται συχνὰ στὰ βυζαντινὰ κείμενα, ἀλλὰ εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ πεῖ κανεὶς κατὰ πόσον ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ εἶχαν λάβει αὐτὴ τὴν «ἐγκύκλιον παιδείαν» εἶχαν πραγματικὰ σπουδάσει ὅλα ἢ κάποια ἀπὸ τὰ παραπάνω ἐπιστημονικὰ μαθήματα, ἢ ἀπλῶς εἶχαν περάσει ἀπὸ τὸ δευτεροβάθμιον σχολεῖον. Πιὸ πιθανὴ εἶναι ἡ δεύτερη ἐκδοχὴ, καὶ φαίνεται ὅτι πολὺ πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ βυζαντινὴ περίοδο οἱ θετικὲς ἐπιστῆμες περιορίζονταν βαθμιαῖα στὴν ἀνώτερη ἐκπαίδευση —καὶ πάλι μόνο γιὰ ὅσους ἐπιθυμοῦσαν νὰ τίς σπουδάσουν.

Τὴν ἀνώτερη ἐκπαίδευση (πού ἤδη περιγράψαμε μεγάλο μέρος τοῦ προγράμματός της) τὴν παρείχαν ῥήτορες ἢ σοφιστές, ἀλλὰ μόνο στίς μεγάλες πόλεις. Ἄν ὁ ῥήτορας/σοφιστής κατεῖχε μιὰ καθιερωμένη ἔδρα, τότε διοριζόταν ἀπὸ τὴν τοπικὴ βουλή, ἔπαιρνε μισθὸ καὶ ἀπολάμβανε διάφορες ἄλλες ἀπαλλαγές. Στὴν πράξη πληρώνονταν ἢ ἔπαιρνε δῶρα καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς μαθητές του. Ἄν ἀντίθετα δούλευε ἰδιωτικά, ὅπως ἔκαναν πολλοί, τότε ζοῦσε ἀποκλειστικά ἀπὸ τὰ δίδακτρα. Ὑπῆρχε λοιπὸν ἕνας ἐγγενὴς ἀνταγωνισμὸς ἀνάμεσα στοὺς καθηγητές, πού καμιὰ φορὰ ξέσπαγε σὲ τσακωμοὺς καὶ ἀπαγωγές μαθητῶν. Τὰ ἀγόρια συνήθως ἄρχιζαν τὴν ἀνώτερη ἐκπαίδευση σὲ ἡλικία δεκαπέντε χρόνων καὶ συνέχιζαν ὅσο τοὺς ἐπέτρεπαν τὰ μέσα πού διέθεταν ἢ τοὺς ὑπαγόρευε ἢ ἐπιθυμία τους. Ὁλόκληρος ὁ κύκλος σπουδῶν διαρκοῦσε περίπου πέντε χρόνια, ἀλλὰ πολλοὶ σταματοῦσαν μετὰ ἀπὸ δύο ἢ τρία. Φυσικὰ οἱ περισσότεροι σπουδαστές προέρχονταν ἀπὸ εὐκατάστατες οἰκογένειες βουλευτῶν, κυβερνητικῶν ἀξιωματῶν καὶ νομικῶν. Δὲν ὑπάρχει τρόπος νὰ ὑπολογίσουμε ἀριθμοὺς σπουδαστῶν, ἀλλὰ δὲν θὰ ἦταν ἴσως λάθος ἂν λέγαμε ὅτι στὰ μεγαλύτερα κέντρα θὰ ἀνέρχονταν σὲ ἑκατοντάδες μᾶλλον παρὰ σὲ χιλιάδες. Ὁ Λιβάνιος, πού ἦταν ὁ ἐπιφανέστερος σοφιστής τῆς Ἀντιόχειας τὸ δεύτερο μισὸ τοῦ 4ου αἰώνα, συνήθως εἶχε πενήντα περίπου σπουδαστές στὴ σχολή του, πού τοὺς δίδασκε μὲ τὴ βοήθεια τεσσάρων ἀκόμη βοηθῶν. Μιᾶς καὶ ἡ ἐκπαιδευτικὴ του δραστηριότητα στὴν Ἀντιόχεια κάλυψε μιὰ περίοδο σαράντα χρόνων, μποροῦμε νὰ ὑπολογίσουμε (ἂν δεχτοῦμε μέσο ὄρο σπουδῶν τρία χρόνια) ὅτι πέρασαν ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια του κάπου ἑπτακόσιοι σπουδαστές. Ὁ Λιβάνιος ὅμως δὲν ἦταν ὁ μόνος σοφιστής στὴν πρωτεύουσα τῆς Συρίας.²

Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴ ρητορικὴ, πού ἀποτελοῦσε τὸ κύριο ἀντικείμενο τῆς ἀνώτερης ἐκπαίδευσης, δίδασκονταν καὶ μερικὰ πιδ ἐξειδικευμένα θέματα. Ἡ φιλοσοφία (πού περιλάμβανε κατὰ κανόνα αὐτὸ πού σήμερα ὀνομάζουμε θετικὲς ἐπιστήμες) ἄκμαζε στὴν Ἀθήνα καὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια, ἡ ἰατρικὴ ἐπίσης στὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια, τὴν Πέργαμο καὶ ἀλλοῦ, ἡ νομικὴ στὴ Βηρυτό. Δὲν ὑπῆρχε ὅμως στὸν ἀρχαῖο κόσμο τίποτε ἀντίστοιχο μὲ πανεπιστήμιο, μὲ τὴν ἔννοια μιᾶς ὀργανωμένης ὁμάδας ἀναγνωρισμένων καθηγητῶν μὲ διάφορες ἐιδιότητες, οἱ ὁποῖοι νὰ προσφέρουν ἕνα πρόγραμμα σπουδῶν πού νὰ καταλήγει στὴν ἀπόκτηση ἑνὸς πτυχίου. Ἡ σχολὴ τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρειας καὶ ἡ σχολὴ τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία θὰ ποῦμε περισσότερα παρακάτω, βρίσκονταν πιδ κοντὰ στὴ δική μας ἀντίληψη περὶ πανεπιστημίου· ἀκόμη καὶ ἐκεῖ ὅμως, ὅπως θὰ δοῦμε, ἡ ποικιλία τῶν θεμάτων πού δίδασκονταν ἦταν πολὺ περιορισμένη. Ἔτσι ὁ

ἐκκολαπτόμενος λόγιος ἦταν ὑποχρεωμένος νὰ μετακινεῖται πολὺ. Ἀφοῦ ὀλοκλήρωνε τὴ δευτεροβάθμια ἐκπαίδευση στὴν πόλη του, ἔπρεπε νὰ πάει σὲ μεγαλύτερο κέντρο, ὅπως ἡ Ἀντιόχεια, ἡ Σμύρνη ἢ ἡ Γάζα, γιὰ νὰ σπουδάσει κοντὰ σὲ ἕναν διάσημο ῥήτορα· ἀλλὰ ἂν τὸν ἐνδιέφερε ἡ φιλοσοφία ἔπρεπε νὰ πάει στὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια ἢ τὴν Ἀθήνα. Ἡ ἐπιδίωξη τῆς μόρφωσης ἦταν συνώνυμη μὲ τὸ ταξίδι. Ἦταν ἐπίσης πολυδάπανη, γιὰτὶ ὁ νέος ἔπρεπε νὰ συντηρεῖ τὸν ἑαυτό του γιὰ ἀρκετὰ χρόνια σὲ ξένες πόλεις καὶ ἐπιπλέον νὰ πληρώνει τοὺς καθηγητές του. Ἡ κινητικότητα τῶν σπουδαστῶν ἦταν παράλληλη μὲ τῶν καθηγητῶν: ὁ Λιβάνιος, γιὰ παράδειγμα, εἶχε διδάξει στὴ Νικομήδεια, τὴ Νίκαια καὶ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη πρὶν ἐγκατασταθεῖ στὴ γενέτειρά του, τὴν Ἀντιόχεια.

Αὐτὴ ἦταν ἕν ὀλίγους ἡ δομὴ τῆς ἐκπαίδευσης πού παρεχόταν στὸ ἀνατολικὸ τμήμα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας κατὰ τοὺς πρώιμους αἰῶνες· ἄλλωστε καὶ στὸ δυτικὸ δὲν ἦταν διαφορετικὴ, ἐκτὸς τοῦ ὅτι χρησιμοποιοῦσαν τὰ λατινικὰ ἀντὶ γιὰ τὰ ἑλληνικά. Ἀφήνοντας πρὸς στιγμήν κατὰ μέρος τὴ στάση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, δὲν μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ μὴν ἀναρωτηθεῖ τί σχέση εἶχε ἕνα τέτοιο σύστημα μὲ τίς ἀπαιτήσεις τῆς σύγχρονης ζωῆς. Εἶναι ἀναμφισβήτητα παράδοξο πῶς εἶχε ἐπικρατήσῃ μιὰ ἐκπαίδευση προσανατολισμένη κυρίως στὴν τέχνη τῆς ἐκφώνησης λόγων σὲ συνέλευση πολιτῶν (καὶ ὅπως εἶδαμε ἡ πιδ προχωρημένη ἄσκηση τοῦ Ἑρμογένη ἦταν ἡ πρόταση νόμου) σὲ μιὰ ἐποχὴ πού ἡ δημοκρατία εἶχε σβῆσει. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ φανταστεῖ κανεὶς ὅτι τὰ ἀσήμαντα θέματα πού ἀναφύονταν στὰ βουλευτήρια τῶν πόλεων, ὅπως ὁ καθαρισμὸς τῶν ὑπονόμων ἢ τὰ δημόσια θεάματα, ἀπαιτοῦσαν ρητορικὲς ἐξάρσεις τόσο ὑψηλὲς σὰν τοῦ Δημοσθένη ἢ τοῦ Ἰσοκράτη. Ἐπιπλέον ἡ ρητορικὴ διδασκόταν στὴν ἄττικὴ διάλεκτο, πού ἦταν ἀπὸ κάθε ἀποψη νεκρὴ γλῶσσα. Ἐχει τώρα ὑπολογιστεῖ πῶς ἀπὸ τοὺς πολυἀριθμοὺς μαθητές τοῦ Λιβανίου πού μποροῦν νὰ ταυτιστοῦν, περίπου 40 τοῖς ἑκατὸ μπῆκαν σὲ κυβερνητικὲς ὑπηρεσίες, 30 τοῖς ἑκατὸ ἀκολούθησαν ἐλευθέρια ἐπαγγέλματα (κυρίως τοῦ δικηγόρου, πού ἐκεῖνη τὴν ἐποχὴ δὲν ἀπαιτοῦσε νομικὴ ἐκπαίδευση), 20 τοῖς ἑκατὸ ἐπέστρεψαν στὰ κληρονομικὰ τους καθήκοντα τοῦ βουλευτῆ, καὶ 10 τοῖς ἑκατὸ ἔγιναν καθηγητές.³ Μόνον αὐτὴ ἡ τελευταία καὶ μικρότερη ὁμάδα μπορεῖ νὰ θεωρηθεῖ ὅτι ἐφάρμοσε στὴν πράξη τὴν ἐκπαίδευση πού εἶχε λάβει. Γιὰ τοὺς ὑπόλοιπους σήμαινε ἀπλῶς μιὰ ἐξάσκηση τοῦ μυαλοῦ, τὴν ἱκανότητα νὰ γράφουν μιὰ κομψὴ ἐπιστολὴ ὅταν τὸ ἀπαιτοῦσαν οἱ περιστάσεις, καὶ πᾶν ἀπ' ὅλα ἕνα κοινὸ ἀπόθεμα κοινοτοπιῶν πού θεωροῦνταν καλλιέργεια.

Δὲν εἶναι τελείως ἀναχρονιστικὸ νὰ μιλάμε γιὰ τὴ σχέση τοῦ ἐκπαι-

δευτικού συστήματος με τις απαιτήσεις της σύγχρονης ζωής, αφού συμβαίνει να γνωρίζουμε ότι η γραφειοκρατική κυβέρνηση που εγκαθιδρύθηκε από τον Διοκλητιανό και τελειοποιήθηκε από τους διαδόχους του δημιούργησε ζήτηση για όρισμένα προσόντα που η γενική εκπαίδευση αδυνατούσε να τὰ προσφέρει. Αὐτὰ τὰ προσόντα ἀφοροῦσαν τὴ μελέτῃ τῆς λατινικῆς στὶς ἀνατολικὲς ἐπαρχίες καὶ τὴν ἀπόκτηση νοταριακῶν ἱκανοτήτων, δηλαδὴ στενογραφίας καὶ λογιστικῆς. Ἡ βίαιη ἀντίθεση τοῦ Λιβανίου σ' αὐτὲς τὶς ἐξειδικευμένες σπουδὲς ἀποδεικνύει ὅτι ἐνιωθε νὰ ἀπειλεῖται τὸ ἐπάγγελμά του. Μπροστὰ στὸ πλῆθος τῶν σπουδαστῶν ποὺ ἀποφάσιζαν νὰ σπουδάσουν στὴ νομικὴ σχολὴ τῆς Βηρυτοῦ, ἀντιδρῶσε ὅπως ἕνας σύγχρονος καθηγητὴς κλασικῶν σπουδῶν ποὺ οἱ φοιτητὲς του τὸν ἐγκαταλείπουν γιὰ νὰ σπουδάσουν διοίκηση ἐπιχειρήσεων. Τὰ λατινικά, αὐτὴ ἡ βάρβαρη γλῶσσα, ὄχι μόνον γινόταν προϋπόθεση γιὰ τὶς νομικὲς σπουδὲς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ χρῆση τῆς στὴ διοίκηση ἀξανάταν κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τοῦ 4ου αἰῶνα (ἂν καὶ πρόσκαιρα, ὅπως ἀποδείχτηκε). "Ὅσο γιὰ τὴ νοταριακὴ ἐκπαίδευση, αὐτὴ, πίστευε ὁ Λιβάνιος, ἄρμοζε σὲ δούλους καὶ ὄχι σὲ κυρίους. Ἐντούτοις οἱ «τεχνοκράτες» ἀνέρχονταν στὶς ἀνώτερες διοικητικὲς θέσεις.

Αὐτὸ ποὺ ἐπιθυμοῦσε ἡ κυβέρνησις στὸν τομέα τῆς ἐκπαίδευσης γίνεται φανερὸ ἀπὸ τὴν ὀργάνωσις τοῦ «πανεπιστημίου» τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης τὸ 425. Βεβαίως, ἀνώτερη ἐκπαίδευσις παρεχόταν στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ἂν ὄχι ἀπὸ τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου, ὅπως σὴν ποτε ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Β' καὶ ἐξῆς. Οἱ ἀνταμοιβὲς ποὺ μπορούσε νὰ περιμένει κανεὶς ἀπὸ τὴ γειτνίαση μὲ τὴ βασιλικὴ αὐλὴ φυσικὰ προσέλκυναν στὴν καινούρια πρωτεύουσα ἀρκετοὺς διακεκριμένους ρήτορες. Ἐνάμεσά τους, ὅπως εἶδαμε, ἦταν ὁ Λιβάνιος, ποὺ δὲν ἔμεινε γιὰ πολὺ ἐκεῖ, καὶ ὁ Θεμιστιος (πέθανε τὸ 388), ποὺ ἔκανε λαμπρὴ σταδιοδρομία καὶ ἀνῆλθε στὴν τάξιν τῶν συγκλητικῶν, ἀκόμη καὶ στὸ ἀξίωμα τοῦ ἐπαρχοῦ τῆς πόλεως, παρὰ τὸ ὅτι ἦταν εἰδωλολάτρης. Ὁ αὐτοκράτορας τὸν ἐκτιμοῦσε γιὰτὶ ἀνέβαζε τὸ πολιτιστικὸ ἐπίπεδο τῆς πρωτεύουσας, ποὺ χάρις σ' αὐτὸν ἔγινε κοινὸν παιδεύσεως καταγῶγιον.⁴ Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη, παρὰ τὴν πρόσφατη γέννησή της, ἔτεινε νὰ γίνῃ «πανεπιστημιούπολη». Φαίνεται ὅμως ὅτι ὕστερα ἀπὸ λίγο ἡ κυβέρνησις δὲν ἱκανοποιούνταν πιά μὲ τὸ παραδοσιακὸ ἐκπαιδευτικὸ σύστημα —γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἰδρύθηκε ἕνα κρατικὸ πανεπιστήμιον. Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ διατάγματα⁵ ποὺ ἐκδόθηκαν τὸ 425 ἀρχίζει μὲ τὴ ρύθμισις τῆς θέσεως τῶν ἰδιωτῶν καθηγητῶν: μπορούσαν νὰ συνεχίσουν τὶς παραδόσεις τους ἐφόσον τὸ ἔκαναν ἰδιωτικά, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἐπιτρεπόταν νὰ χρησιμοποιοῦν δημόσιες αἴθουσες. Ἐντι-

στοιχα, οἱ δημόσιοι καθηγητὲς δὲν ἐπιτρεπόταν νὰ κάνουν ἰδιωτικὰ μαθήματα. Κατόπιν καθοριζόταν ἡ σύνθεσις τῆς κρατικῆς σχολῆς: γιὰ τὰ λατινικά τρεῖς ρήτορες καὶ δέκα γραμματικοί, γιὰ τὰ ἑλληνικά πέντε σοφιστὲς καὶ δέκα γραμματικοί, ἐνῶ οἱ «βαθύτερες σπουδὲς» ἀντιπροσωπεύονταν ἀπὸ ἕναν καθηγητὴ τῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ δύο τῆς νομικῆς. Ἄλλα διατάγματα ἀφοροῦσαν τὰ κτίρια τοῦ πανεπιστημίου (ποὺ στεγαζόταν στὸ Καπιτώλιο) καὶ τὰ ἀξιώματα στὰ ὁποῖα οἱ καθηγητὲς μπορούσαν νὰ ἀποβλέπουν: ὕστερα ἀπὸ εἴκοσι χρόνια εὐδόκιμης ὑπηρεσίας καὶ ἀμεμπτῆς ζωῆς θὰ ἀνταμείβονταν μὲ τὸν τίτλο τοῦ κόμητα πρώτης τάξεως, ὅπως καὶ ἕνας δημόσιος ὑπάλληλος μέσης βαθμίδας.⁶

Προφανῶς τὸ πανεπιστήμιον δὲν ἰδρύθηκε ἀπὸ ἀνιδιοτελὴ ἐπιθυμία γιὰ τὴν καλλιέργεια τῶν Μουσῶν, ἀλλὰ εἰδικὰ γιὰ νὰ ἐκπαιδεύσει κρατικούς ὑπαλλήλους. Αὐτὸ φαίνεται ἀπὸ τὴν πλήρη σχεδὸν ἐξίσωσις τῶν λατινικῶν μὲ τὰ ἑλληνικά, ἀπὸ τὴ φροντίδα γιὰ νομικὲς σπουδὲς, καὶ ἐπίσης ἀπὸ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι οἱ καθηγητὲς διορίζονταν ἀπὸ τὸν ἐπαρχο τῆς πόλης στὸ ὄνομα τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα. Ἄλλὰ ἀκόμη πῶς ἀξιοσημείωτο εἶναι ὅτι τὴν πλειονότητα τῶν διδασκόντων (εἴκοσι στοὺς τριάντα ἕναν) τὴν ἀποτελοῦσαν οἱ γραμματικοί, δηλαδὴ οἱ καθηγητὲς τῆς δευτεροβάθμιας ἐκπαίδευσης. Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια ἔχουμε νὰ κάνουμε μὲ ἕνα θεσμὸ ποὺ συνδύαζε τὶς λειτουργίες τοῦ γυμνασίου καὶ τῆς πανεπιστημιακῆς σχολῆς ὑπὸ τὴν ἄμεση κρατικὴ ἐπίβλεψη, εἶναι ὅμως δύσκολο νὰ ποῦμε πόση ἐπιτυχία εἶχε. Τυχαίνει νὰ γνωρίζουμε τὰ ὀνόματα μερικῶν ἀπὸ τοὺς καθηγητὲς του: γύρω στὸ 470 ὁ Αἰγύπτιος Παμπρέπιος, ποὺ ἦταν εἰδωλολάτρης καὶ κάτι σὰν μάγος, τὸν 6ο αἰῶνα τὸ ἀρχέτυπο τοῦ δημόσιου ὑπαλλήλου, ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Λυδός, ποὺ δίδασκε λατινικά, μολονότι ἴσως δὲν τὰ γνώριζε καὶ πολὺ καλά. Πάντως δὲν ἔχουμε ἐνδείξεις γιὰ κάποια πνευματικὴ ζύμωσις, κάποια πρόοδο στὴ γνώση ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ κάποια λόγια συγγράμματα ποὺ νὰ προέρχονται ἀπὸ τὸ πανεπιστήμιον τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης· ἂν δὲν ὑπῆρχαν τὰ διατάγματα τοῦ 425, οὔτε καὶ θὰ γνωρίζαμε τὴν ὑπαρξὴ του. Καὶ μολονότι μερικοὶ ἱστορικοὶ ἰσχυρίζονται ὅτι ἀπὸ τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Β' ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη εἶχε γίνῃ ἡ πνευματικὴ πρωτεύουσα τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ βρεθῇ τὸν 4ο, 5ο καὶ 6ο αἰῶνα κάποιος ἀξιόλογος λόγιος ἢ συγγραφέας καταγόμενος ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη ἢ δημιούργημα τοῦ ἐκπαιδευτικοῦ τῆς κατεστημένου.

Ἄν ἡ πολιτεία ἔκανε προσπάθειες νὰ προσδώσει κάποια πρακτικὴτητα στὸ ἐκπαιδευτικὸν σύστημα, τί γινόταν μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία; Ὅτι ἡ ἀρχαία παιδεία ἦταν σὲ τελικὴ ἀνάλυσις εἰδωλολατρικὴ στὴν εὐρύτερη προοπτικὴ τῆς καὶ βασιζόταν ἄμεσα στὴ μελέτη εἰδωλολατρῶν συγγραφέων

δὲν τὸ ἀρνεῖται κανεὶς. Πάντως εἶναι ἴσως ὑπερβολικὸ νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι οἱ εἰδωλοκρατικοὶ μῦθοι τοῦ Ὁμήρου καὶ τοῦ Ἡσιόδου, φθαρμένοι πιά ἀπὸ τῆ σχολικὴ ἀνία αἰώνων, διατηροῦσαν ἀκόμη πολλὴ ἐπιρροή. Παρ' ὅλα αὐτά, οἱ αὐστηρότεροι χριστιανοὶ ἔβρισκαν ἐδῶ μιὰ πηγὴ σκανδάλου. Οἱ Ἀποστολικοὶ Κανόνες (4ος αἰώνας) εἶναι ἀνυποχώρητοι στὸ θέμα αὐτό:

«Ἀπόφευγε ὅλα τὰ ἐθνικὰ βιβλία. Τί χρειάζεσαι τίς ξένες συγγραφές, τοὺς νόμους καὶ τοὺς ψευτοπροφήτες ποὺ ὀδηγοῦν τοὺς ἀνόητους μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὴν πίστη; Τί βρίσκεις νὰ λείπει ἀπὸ τὸν Θεῶ Νόμο ποὺ τὸ ζητᾶς στοὺς ἐθνικοὺς μῦθους; Ἄν ἐπιθυμεῖς νὰ διαβάσεις ἱστορίες, ἔχεις τὸ βιβλίον τῶν Βασιλειῶν, ἂν ρητορικὴ καὶ ποιητικὴ, ἔχεις τοὺς Προφήτες, ἔχεις τὸν Ἰώβ, ἔχεις τίς Παροιμίες, ὅπου θὰ βρεῖς σοφία μεγαλύτερη ἀπὸ κάθε ποιητικὴ καὶ σοφιστικὴ, γιὰτὶ αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ λόγια τοῦ Κυρίου, τοῦ μόνου σοφοῦ. Ἄν ἐπιθυμεῖς τραγούδια ἔχεις τοὺς Ψαλμοὺς, ἂν ἀρχαῖες γενεαλογίες, ἔχεις τὴ Γένεση· ἂν νομικὰ βιβλία καὶ ἐπιταγές, ἔχεις τὸν ἔνδοξο Θεῶ Νόμο. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀπόφευγε μὲ ἐπιμονὴ κάθε ἐθνικὸ καὶ διαβολικὸ βιβλίον».⁷

Παρόμοιες φωνές ὑψώνονταν σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τῆς βυζαντινῆς περιόδου. Τί ἀνάγκη ὑπῆρχε νὰ βρωμίζον οἱ χριστιανοὶ τὸ μυαλό τους μὲ ἀηδιαστικὲς ἱστορίες θεῶν ποὺ στὴν πραγματικότητά ἦταν δαίμονες, ἀκόμη καὶ μὲ τίς ματαιότητες τῆς ἐθνικῆς σοφίας, ὅταν τὸ μόνο θεμιτὸ ἐνδιαφέρον τους ἦταν ἡ σωτηρία τους; Οἱ εἰδωλοκράτες ἐγκαταλείπουν τὴν πατρίδα τους καὶ διασχίζουν τὴ θάλασσα γιὰ νὰ μάθουν γράμματα, ἀλλὰ ἐμεῖς δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ ξενιτευτοῦμε γιὰ νὰ κερδίσουμε τὴ Βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν: ἔτσι ἔλεγε ὁ ἅγιος Ἀντώνιος. Ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ, τί προεῖχε, τὸ μυαλό ἢ τὰ γράμματα; Ἀφοῦ ξεκάθαρα προεῖχε τὸ μυαλό, ὅποιος εἶχε ὑγιᾶς μυαλό δὲν χρειαζόταν τὰ γράμματα.⁸ Ἡ κατάργηση τῆς εἰδωλοκρατικῆς παιδείας ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ ἡ ἀποστόμωση τῶν φιλοσόφων ἀπὸ ἀμόρφωτους χριστιανοὺς ἁγίους εἶναι κοινὸι τόποι τῆς βυζαντινῆς φιλολογίας. Ἄς πάρουμε ἕνα παράδειγμα ἀνάμεσα σὲ χίλια, τὸν Ἀκάθιστο Ὕμνο ποὺ ψάλλεται ἀκόμη στὴν ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία:

*Ρήτορας πολυφθόγγους ὡς ἰχθύας ἀφώνους
ὄρωμεν ἐπὶ σοί, Θεοτόκε·*

ἀποροῦσι γὰρ λέγειν τό· «πῶς

καὶ παρθένος μένεις καὶ τεκεῖν ἴσχυσας;»

ἡμεῖς δὲ τὸ μυστήριον θαυμάζοντες πιστῶς βοῶμεν·

χαῖρε, σοφίας Θεοῦ δοχεῖον

χαῖρε, προνοίας αὐτοῦ ταμεῖον

*χαῖρε, φιλοσόφους ἀσόφους δεικνύουσα
χαῖρε, τεχνολόγους ἀλόγους ἐλέγχουσα
χαῖρε, ὅτι ἐμωράνθησαν οἱ δεινοὶ συζητηταὶ
χαῖρε, ὅτι ἐμαράνθησαν οἱ τῶν μύθων ποιηταὶ
χαῖρε, τῶν Ἀθηναίων τὰς πλοκάς διασπῶσα
χαῖρε, τῶν ἀλιέων τὰς σαγήνας πληροῦσα
χαῖρε, βυθοῦ ἀγνοίας ἐξέλκουσα
χαῖρε, πολλοὺς ἐν γνώσει φωτίζουσα.⁹*

Ἡ ἀπόρριψη κάθε ἐκπαίδευσης δὲν ἦταν, πάντως, βιώσιμη ἐναλλακτικὴ λύση, ἀκόμη καὶ μὲ τὴ φώτιση ποὺ παρεῖχε ἡ Θεοτόκος. Θεωρητικὰ ὑπῆρχε μιὰ λιγότερο δραστικὴ δυνατότητα, δηλαδή ἡ ἔδρυση σχολείων εἰδικὰ γιὰ χριστιανοὺς, σὰν τίς ραβινικὲς σχολές ποὺ εἶχαν ἰδρύσει οἱ Ἑβραῖοι τῆς διασπορᾶς, στὶς ὁποῖες τὰ μαθήματα βασίζονταν στὴν ἑβραϊκὴ Βίβλο καὶ τὰ σχόλιά της. Θὰ μπορούσε ἴσως κανεὶς νὰ φανταστῆ ἀκόμη καὶ τὴ διατήρηση τοῦ παραδοσιακοῦ ἐκπαιδευτικοῦ παισίου, μὲ ἀντικατάσταση τῶν εἰδωλοκρατικῶν κειμένων ἀπὸ χριστιανικά. Αὐτὸ δὲν ἦταν εὐκόλη λύση ἀφοῦ πολλοί, ἀκόμη καὶ χριστιανοί, θεωροῦσαν ὅτι ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή ἦταν γραμμικὴ σὲ ἰδιαιτέρα ἀκομψὰ ἑλληνικά, καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη δὲν ὑπῆρχε, τουλάχιστο κατὰ τὸν 4ο αἰώνα, χριστιανικὴ φιλολογία κατὰλληλη νὰ χρησιμοποιηθεῖ γιὰ τὴ γραμματικὴ καὶ ρητορικὴ ἐκπαίδευση τῶν νέων. Ἡ ἰδέα ὡστόσο τῆς δημιουργίας ἐνὸς τέτοιου ὕλικου ἐξεταζόταν. Τὸ 362, ὅταν ὁ εἰδωλοκράτης αὐτοκράτορας Ἰουλιανὸς ἀπαγόρευσε στοὺς χριστιανοὺς νὰ διδάσκουν στὴ δευτεροβάθμια καὶ τὴν ἀνώτερη ἐκπαίδευση μὲ τὸ ἐπιχείρημα ὅτι δὲν θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ διδάσκουν πράγματα ἀντίθετα μὲ τίς πεποιθήσεις τους, ὁ χριστιανὸς γραμματικὸς Ἀπολλινάριος καὶ ὁ συνώνυμος μὲ αὐτὸν γιὸς του μετέτρεψαν τὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη σὲ στίχους, χρησιμοποιώντας ὅλους τοὺς κλασικοὺς τύπους τοῦ μέτρου, καὶ τὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη σὲ πλατωνικοὺς διαλόγους. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀξίεπαινη προσπάθεια ἀπέτυχε, καὶ εἶναι ἀξιοπρόσεχτο ὅτι ἡ ἀποτυχία της ἀποδόθηκε ἀπὸ ἕναν χριστιανὸ ἱστορικὸ στὴ Θεία Πρόνοια.¹⁰ Γιατί; Διότι, ἐξηγεῖ, ἡ ἑλληνικὴ παιδεία δὲν εἶχε οὔτε καταδικαστεῖ οὔτε ἐπιδοκιμαστεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀποστόλους. Ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή δὲν διδάσκει τὴν τέχνη τῆς συλλογιστικῆς, τόσο ἀπαραίτητης γιὰ τὴν υπεράσπιση τῆς ἀληθινῆς πίστεως. Ἐπομένως ἦταν ἀπολύτως θεμιτὸ, ἀκόμη καὶ ἀναγκαῖο, νὰ μελετᾶ κανεὶς τὰ ἐθνικὰ κείμενα γιὰ νὰ νικήσει τὸν ἐχθρὸ μὲ τὰ ἴδια του τὰ ὄπλα, νὰ ἀσκήσει τὸ μυαλό του καὶ νὰ ἀποκτήσει εὐγλωττία. Ἀκόμη καὶ ἕνας τόσο αὐστηρὸς ἠθικολόγος ὅσο ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος δὲν

τῶν χριστιανῶν καὶ τῶν εἰδωλολατρῶν σπουδαστῶν. Ἀνάμεσα στους χριστιανούς ὑπῆρχαν ἀρκετοὶ δραστηριοποιημένοι, ποὺ συμμετεῖχαν σὲ ὀργανώσεις λαϊκῶν ζηλωτῶν (τοὺς ὀνόμαζαν φιλοπόρους στὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια), εἶχαν ἐπαφές με μοναστήρια καὶ ἦταν πάντα ἔτοιμοι νὰ καταδώσουν στὶς ἀρχές κραυγαλέες περιπτώσεις εἰδωλολατρίας. Ἐνας ἀπὸ αὐτούς, ποὺ ὀνομαζόταν Παράλιος, ἐξακόντιζε τόσο προσβλητικὲς βρισιές κατὰ τῆς εἰδωλολατρικῆς θρησκείας (ἐνῶ ὁ ἴδιος εἶχε καθηγητὴ τὸν εἰδωλόλατρη Ὁραπόλλωνα), ποὺ στὸ τέλος τὸν ξυλοφόρτωσαν οἱ συμφοιτητές του. Τὸ ἐπεισόδιο ὅμως τὸ ἐκμεταλλεύτηκαν με ἐπιτυχία οἱ χριστιανοί, κι ἔτσι ὁ Ὁραπόλλων ἀναγκάστηκε νὰ κρυφτεῖ, με τὴ βοήθεια τῶν φοιτητῶν ἀνακαλύφθηκε μιὰ μεγάλη κρυψώνα με εἰδωλα, ποὺ κἀηκαν δημόσια, καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ ἐπαρχος τῆς Αἰγύπτου βρέθηκε σὲ δύσκολη θέση.

Ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια ὁ Σεβῆρος καὶ ὁ Ζαχαρίας πῆγαν στὴ Βηρυτὸ νὰ σπουδάσουν νομικά. Αὐτὲς ἦταν μακροχρόνιες καὶ ἐπίπονες σπουδές, ποὺ κρατοῦσαν τέσσερα ἢ πέντε χρόνια, ἀλλὰ ὁ μέσος νεαρὸς ἀριστοκράτης εἶχε ἀρκετὲς εὐκαιρίες νὰ ξεκουράζεται ἀπὸ τὸν καθημερινὸ μόχθο: πῆγαινε στὰ θεάτρα ἢ τὸν ἵππόδρομο, τὰ βράδια ἔπαιζε ζάρια ἢ ἔπινε παρέα με πόρνες. Στους πρωτοετείς, ὅταν ἔφταναν, γινόταν καψόνι ἀπὸ τοὺς παλιότερους φοιτητές. Καὶ στὴ Βηρυτὸ ἡ παρουσία τῶν χριστιανῶν ζηλωτῶν ἦταν ἐντονὴ: στρατολογοῦσαν σπουδαστὲς σὲ θρησκευτικὲς ἀδελφότητες, τοὺς παρακινοῦσαν νὰ πηγαίνουν στὴν ἐκκλησία κάθε βράδυ, νὰ ἀποφεύγουν τὰ θεάματα καὶ τὰ λουτρά — ὁ ἀρχηγὸς μάλιστα τῆς ὀμάδας πλενόταν μόνο μιὰ φορὰ τὸ χρόνο. Πολλοὶ ἀπὸ αὐτούς, ὅπως ὁ Σεβῆρος, ποὺ ἐντέλει βαφτίστηκε, γίνονταν ἀργότερα μοναχοί. Ἡ Βηρυτὸς, ἀν καὶ ἀπὸ παράδοση ἀγαποῦσε περισσότερο τὶς διασκεδάσεις, ἦταν ἐκχριστιανισμένη σὲ μεγαλύτερο βαθμὸ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια, ἀλλὰ, καθὼς οἱ σπουδαστὲς προέρχονταν ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ μέρη τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, ὑπῆρχαν ἀνάμεσα τους καὶ εἰδωλόλατρες. Σὲ μιὰ περίπτωση δημιουργήθηκε ἓνα μεγάλο σκάνδαλο ποὺ ἀφοροῦσε μαγικὲς τελετουργίες. Γιὰ ἄλλη μιὰ φορὰ οἱ ζηλωτὲς ἐκμεταλλεύτηκαν τὸ γεγονός: ἔγινε ἔρευνα στὸ σπίτι τοῦ κύριου ἐνόχου, τὰ μαγικά του βιβλία κατασχέθηκαν, οἱ συνένοχοι του καταγγέθηκαν στὸν ἐπίσκοπο καὶ τὰ ἀπόκρυφα βιβλία κἀηκαν δημόσια. Ἐνας ἀπὸ τοὺς συνεργούς, κάποιος Χρυσάοριος ἀπὸ τὶς Τράλλεις, προσπάθησε νὰ τὸ σκάσει: νοίκιασε ἓνα πλοῖο, φόρτωσε πάνω τὰ νομικά καὶ τὰ μαγικά του βιβλία, τὸ ἀσημένιο του σερβίτιο, τὴν παλλακίδα του καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ ποὺ εἶχε κάνει μαζί της, ἀλλὰ, φυσικά, τὸ πλοῖο βυθίστηκε κι αὐτὸς χάθηκε. Δὲν γνωρίζουμε, παρεμπιπτόντως, ἀν ὅλοι οἱ φοιτητές ἦταν εὐκατάστατοι ὡς τὸν Χρυσάοριο, πολλοὶ ὅμως ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς εἶχαν

στὴν ὑπηρεσία τους δούλους ποὺ τοὺς εἶχαν φέρει ἀπὸ τὴν πατρίδα τους.

Ἄν ἡ πανεπιστημιακὴ ζωὴ στὸ τέλος τοῦ 5ου αἰώνα ἄρχιζε νὰ θυμίζει ναζιστικὴ Γερμανία, τὸ μέλλον ἐπιφύλασσε ἀκόμη χειρότερα. Ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς, πάνω ἀπ' ὅλους, ἦταν ἀποφασισμένος νὰ ἐπιβάλλει θρησκευτικὴ ὁμοιομορφία σὲ ὅλους τοὺς ὑπηκόους του. Τὸ διάταγμα ποὺ ἔκλεινε τὴν Ἀκαδημία τῆς Ἀθήνας (529) γενικὰ θεωρεῖται δεῖγμα τῆς μισαλλοδοξίας του, ἀν καὶ πρέπει νὰ ὑπενθυμίσουμε ὅτι ἡ Ἀκαδημία συνέχισε νὰ λειτουργεῖ, ὑποβαθμισμένα βέβαια, γιὰ μερικὲς δεκαετίες ἀκόμη, καὶ ὅτι στὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια ὁ εἰδωλόλατρες Ὀλυμπιόδωρος δίδασκε φιλοσοφία μέχρι καὶ μετὰ τὸ 565, ἔτος θανάτου τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Αὐτὲς ὅμως ἦταν, χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία, ἐξαίρεσεις. Μολοντὶ ὁ νόμος τοῦ 529, ποὺ ἀπαγόρευε νὰ διδάσκουν οἱ εἰδωλόλατρες, οἱ αἵρετικοὶ καὶ οἱ Ἑβραῖοι,¹⁴ πιθανὸν νὰ μὴν ἐφαρμοζόταν παντοῦ, δὲν μπορούμε νὰ ἀμφιβάλουμε γιὰ τὸν συστηματικὸ διωγμὸ τῶν εἰδωλολατρῶν ποὺ ἔγινε τὴν ἴδια χρονιά: καὶ πάλι τὸ 546, ὅταν «πλήθος γραμματικοί, σοφιστὲς, νομικοὶ καὶ γιατροὶ» σύρθηκαν μπροστὰ στὸν ἱεροεξεταστή, τὸν Ἰωάννη τῆς Ἐφέσου (ποὺ ἦταν καὶ ὁ ἴδιος αἵρετικὸς), καὶ τιμωρήθηκαν με μαστίγωση καὶ φυλακίσεις:¹⁵ καὶ τὸ 562, ὅταν εἰδωλολατρικὰ βιβλία παραδόθηκαν στὴν πυρὰ.¹⁶ Εὐκόλα μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ φανταστεῖ τὶς ἐπιπτώσεις αὐτῶν τῶν μέτρων στὸ ἠθικὸ τῶν ἀκαδημαϊκῶν δασκάλων, ποὺ ὑπονομεύτηκε ἀκόμη περισσότερο μετὰ τὴν κατάρρευση τῶν κρατικῶν ἐπιχορηγήσεων στους καθηγητές.¹⁷ Ἐτσι δὲν προκαλεῖ φυσικὰ ἐκπληξὴ ὅτι στὸ τέλος τοῦ 6ου αἰώνα ἡ παράδοση τῆς ἀνώτερης παιδείας εἶχε ἐπιζήσει μόνο στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια καὶ τὴ Βηρυτὸ.

Μπορεῖ ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς νὰ ἔχει βαριά εὐθύνη γιὰ τὴν ἐξασθένηση τοῦ ἐκπαιδευτικοῦ συστήματος, γιὰ τὴν κατοπινὴ του κατάρρευση ὅμως αἰτία εἶναι ἀναμφίβολα ἡ ἐξαφάνιση τῶν πόλεων. Ἀπ' ὅσο μπορούμε νὰ κρίνουμε ἀπὸ τὶς ἐξαιρετικὰ φτωχὲς πηγές μας, ὅ,τι ἀπόμεινε στὶς ἐπαρχίες ἦταν κάποια μορφὴ στοιχειώδους ἐκπαίδευσης. Φαίνεται ὅτι σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς σκοτεινοὺς αἰῶνες ἀναπτύχθηκε ἡ συνήθεια νὰ χρησιμοποιοῦν τὸ Ψαλτήρι ὡς πρῶτο ἀναγνωστικὸ τῶν μαθητῶν, συνήθεια ποὺ παρέμεινε ἀκλόνητη στὶς ἐπόμενες περιόδους. Ἄν εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι ὁ Γεώργιος Χοιροβοσκὸς, συγγραφέας μιᾶς ἐξαιρετικὰ δημοφιλῶς γραμματικῆς ποὺ βασιζόταν στὸ Ψαλτήρι,¹⁸ ἄκμασε μετὰ τὰ μέσα τοῦ 8ου αἰώνα,¹⁹ τὸ ἔργο του θὰ ταίριαζε σὲ μιὰ τέτοια ἐξέλιξη. Καὶ ἀν εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι ὁ Χοιροβοσκὸς δίδασκε στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, πρέπει νὰ συμπεράνουμε πῶς παρόμοια χρῆση τοῦ Ψαλτηρίου εἶχε ἐξαπλωθεῖ καὶ στὴν πρωτεύουσα. Ὅ,τι εἶχε ἀπομείνει ἀπὸ τὴ δευτεροβάθμια καὶ ἀνώτερη ἐκπαίδευση (καὶ

είναι συζητήσιμο κατά πόσο ήταν ακόμη διαχωρισμένες) ήταν τώρα συγκεντρωμένο στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, φαίνεται όμως ότι το Πανεπιστήμιο έσβηνε. Ο τελευταίος καθηγητής που μαρτυρείται είναι ο σχολιαστής του 'Αριστοτέλη Στέφανος ο 'Αλεξανδρέας, που μετακλήθηκε στην πρωτεύουσα από τον αυτοκράτορα 'Ηράκλειο (δηλαδή μετά το 610). 'Εκτός από τον Χοιροβοσκό, κανένα άλλο όνομα δεν αναφέρεται μέχρι τα μέσα του 9ου αιώνα.

'Ενας κανόνας της εν Τρούλω συνόδου (692), που έχει περάσει σχεδόν απαρατήρητος, αποδεικνύει πώς οι νομικές σπουδές εξακολουθούσαν να υπάρχουν εκείνη την εποχή, αφού όρίζεται πώς οι σπουδαστές της νομικής έπρεπε να μην ακολουθούν ειδωλολατρικές συνήθειες, να μη συχνάζουν στα θέατρα, να μη φορούν παρδαλά ρούχα και να μην κάνουν τουμπες στον άερα (αν αυτή είναι η έννοια της αίνιγματικής λέξης *κυλίστρα*) στην αρχή και στο τέλος της χρονιάς.²⁰ Το γεγονός ότι αναφέρονται μόνο φοιτητές της νομικής μπορεί να σημαίνει είτε πώς αυτοί ήταν ιδιαίτερα ταραχοποιοί είτε πώς δεν υπήρχαν άλλοι σπουδαστές πανεπιστημιακού επιπέδου. Πάντως, όταν εκδόθηκε η 'Εκλογή, δηλαδή ο νομοθετικός κώδικας των αυτοκρατόρων Λέοντα Γ' και Κωνσταντίνου Ε', πιθανόν το 726, η σύνθεσή του ήταν έργο του *κοιαιστωρα* του *ιερού παλατίου*, δύο πατρικών και μερικών κρατικών αξιωματούχων, χωρίς καθόλου συμμετοχή καθηγητών της νομικής· και οι συμπληρωτές όμολογούσαν με ειλικρίνεια ότι το νόημα της προηγούμενης νομοθεσίας είχε καταντήσει έντελώς σκοτεινό, «και σε άλλους τελείως ακατάληπτο, ιδιαίτερα σε όσους κατοικούσαν έξω από τη θεοφύλακτη βασιλίδα πόλη μας».²¹ Ο χρονογράφος Θεοφάνης, ο οποίος όμολογουμένως ήταν προκατειλημμένος, μπορεί να μην απέχει πολύ από την αλήθεια όταν σημειώνει στο έτος 726 ότι «τα εκπαιδευτήρια έσβησαν».²²

'Ενδιαφέρουσες πληροφορίες για την παρακμή της ανώτερης εκπαίδευσης τον 7ο αιώνα παρέχει η αυτοβιογραφία του 'Ανανία του Σιρακηνού, του άρμένιου σοφού που είσήγαγε στην πατρίδα του τις επιστήμες των μαθηματικών, των χρονολογικών υπολογισμών και της κοσμογραφίας. 'Επειδή δεν μπορούσε να βρει κανέναν στην 'Αρμενία για να τον διδάξει «φιλοσοφία», ο 'Ανανίας ταξίδεψε στη «χώρα των 'Ελλήνων» και σκόπευε να πάει στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, όταν πληροφορήθηκε ότι ένας πολύ σοφός δάσκαλος, που λεγόταν Τυχικός, δίδασκε στην Τραπεζούντα και προσέλυε μαθητές ακόμη και από την πρωτεύουσα. 'Ετσι πήγε στην Τραπεζούντα και μαθήτευσε στον Τυχικό επί οχτώ χρόνια. 'Εμαθε αριθμητική και όλες τις άλλες επιστήμες, και γενικά ικανοποίησε τη δίψα του για

μάθηση, καθώς ο δάσκαλός του είχε μια πλούσια βιβλιοθήκη με χριστιανικά αλλά και ειδωλολατρικά βιβλία. Αυτός ο Τυχικός καταγόταν από την Τραπεζούντα και είχε αρχίσει τη σταδιοδρομία του ως στρατιώτης, αλλά μετά τον τραυματισμό του σε μια μάχη αποφάσισε να ασχοληθεί με τα γράμματα. Πήγε στην 'Αλεξάνδρεια, όπου σπούδασε τρία χρόνια, έπειτα στη Ρώμη για ένα χρόνο, τέλος στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, όπου για ένα διάστημα μαθήτευσε σε έναν διάσημο αθηναίο φιλόσοφο, που δεν κατονομάζεται. Τον πίεσαν να παραμείνει στην πρωτεύουσα, αλλά αυτός αποφάσισε να επιστρέψει στην Τραπεζούντα. Λίγα χρόνια αργότερα ο 'Αθηναίος πέθανε, και κανένας από τους μαθητές του δεν θεωρήθηκε άξιος να τον διαδεχτεί. Τότε ο αυτοκράτορας, που πρέπει να ήταν ο 'Ηράκλειος, κάλεσε τον Τυχικό στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, αλλά εκείνος αρνήθηκε την πρόσκληση. 'Ετσι λοιπόν από τότε οι σπουδαστές ταξίδευαν από την Κωνσταντινούπολη στην Τραπεζούντα για να μορφωθούν, προφανώς στις θετικές επιστήμες.²³ Δεν ξέρουμε πόση αλήθεια υπάρχει σ' αυτή την ιστορία, πάντως δείχνει παραστατικά την αυξανόμενη έλλειψη δόκιμων καθηγητών, ακόμη και στην πρωτεύουσα.

Μολονότι θα ήταν ύπερβολή να πούμε ότι όλες οι ανώτερες σπουδές διακόπηκαν στη βυζαντινή αυτοκρατορία, όπωσδήποτε μειώθηκαν στο ελάχιστο μετά τη βασιλεία του 'Ηρακλείου. 'Υποπτευόμαστε μάλιστα πώς ίσως στην αραβοκρατούμενη Συρία και Παλαιστίνη να είχαν απομείνει μεγαλύτερα αποθέματα ελληνικής παιδείας και ελληνικών βιβλίων από ό,τι στην Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ο μεγαλύτερος ελληνόφωνος σοφός του 8ου αιώνα ήταν ο 'Ιωάννης ο Δαμασκηνός (πέθανε περί το 750), και δύο γενιές αργότερα ο πιο σημαντικός ιστορικός ήταν ο παλαιστίνιος μοναχός Γεώργιος Σύγκελλος (πέθανε περί το 814).

'Η αναγέννηση των φιλολογικών σπουδών στην πρωτεύουσα άρχισε με πολύ άργο ρυθμό προς το τέλος του 8ου αιώνα. Το μόνο που μπορούμε να πούμε με κάποια ββαιότητα είναι πώς την εποχή αυτή έμφανίστηκε μια ομάδα ανθρώπων, που όλοι τους είχαν σχέση με τις ανώτερες βαθμίδες της δημοσιούπαλληλίας, και οι οποίοι, χωρίς να είναι βαθυστόχαστοι λόγιοι, ωστόσο είχαν μια συμβατική ρητορική μόρφωση και κάποια γνώση φιλοσοφίας. Τέτοιοι ήταν οι μελλοντικοί πατριάρχες Ταράσιος (πέθανε το 806) και Νικηφόρος (758-828), και ο Θεόδωρος Στουδίτης (759-826). Τη μόρφωσή τους φαίνεται ότι την απέκτησαν ιδιωτικά και τη μετέδωσαν στην επόμενη γενιά με τον ίδιο ανεπίσημο τρόπο. Ο Ταράσιος, για παράδειγμα, που δεν ήταν επαγγελματίας καθηγητής, λέγεται ότι μύησε τον μελλοντικό του βιογράφο, το διάκονο 'Ιγνάτιο (πέθανε μετά το

843), στους κανόνες της αρχαίας προσωδίας.²⁴ Σίγουρα υπήρχε την εποχή αυτή στην Κωνσταντινούπολη ένας μικρός αριθμός γραμματικών, όπως ο μελλοντικός εικονομάχος πατριάρχης 'Αντώνιος Α' Κασσιματᾶς (821-837);²⁵ και ίσως ο διάδοχός του 'Ιωάννης Ζ' (837;-843), που ήταν γνωστός με το επίθετο Γραμματικός και θεωρούνταν άνθρωπος με μεγάλες γνώσεις, ακόμη και μάγος. Μέσα σ' αυτό το περιβάλλον πραγματοποιήθηκε μια τεχνική εξέλιξη αποφασιστικής σημασίας: ένοω την εισαγωγή της μικρογράμματος ή επισευρμένης γραφής, που αντικατέστησε στην παραγωγή βιβλίων τη μεγαλογράμματα (ή κεφαλαιογράμματα). Το αξιοσημείωτο σ' αυτή την καινοτομία είναι το πόσο άργησε να εφαρμοστεί —κάπου πενήντα χρόνια αργότερα στο Βυζάντιο από ό,τι στη δυτική Ευρώπη. 'Η προμήθεια του αιγυπτιακού παπύρου, στον οποίο γράφονταν τα βιβλία στην 'Αρχαιότητα, πρέπει να διακόπηκε, ή πάντως να μειώθηκε πολύ μετά την ύποταξη της 'Αλεξάνδρειας στους 'Αραβες (642), και η παραγωγή που τον αντικατέστησε ήταν και δυσεύρετη και ακριβή. Στις συνθήκες αυτές ή ανάγκη για μια πιο συνεπτυγμένη μορφή γραφής ήταν προφανής. 'Επιπλέον δεν χρειαζόταν καν να επινοηθεί, αφού ή μικρογράμματα δεν ήταν παρά ή νοταριακή γραφή που χρησιμοποιούσαν προηγουμένως στις διάφορες συναλλαγές. 'Αλλά μόνο περί το 790, από όσο μπορούμε να υποθέσουμε, άρχισαν να παράγονται βιβλία σε μικρογράμματα στο Βυζάντιο, και το παλιότερο σωζόμενο δείγμα είναι το λεγόμενο Εύαγγέλιο Uspensky, που χρονολογείται στο 834. 'Από αυτό μπορούμε να συμπεράνουμε πως μέχρι το τέλος του 8ου αιώνα δεν είχε έκδηλωθεί σημαντική ζήτηση βιβλίων.

'Ο πρώτος άληθινός καθηγητής που συναντάμε στην Κωνσταντινούπολη καθώς οι σπουδές άρχισαν να αναβιώνουν είναι ο Λέων ο Μαθηματικός. 'Αξιζει να ξαναδιηγηθούμε τη ρομαντική παράδοση για την προσωπικότητα αυτή, επειδή ρίχνει παρεμπιπτόντως φως και στην κατάσταση της εκπαίδευσης εκείνη την εποχή.²⁶ 'Ο Λέων τελείωσε τη δευτεροβάθμια εκπαίδευσή του (γραμματική και «ποιητική») στην πρωτεύουσα, αλλά δεν μπορούσε να προχωρήσει περισσότερο εκεί. 'Ετσι πήγε στην 'Ανδρο, όπου κάποιος σοφός τον δίδαξε τα βασικά στοιχεία της ρητορικής, της φιλοσοφίας και της αριθμητικής. 'Αλλά ούτε κι αυτός μπορούσε να ικανοποιήσει την περιέργεια του Λέοντα. 'Εκείνος τότε περιπλανήθηκε στο έσωτερικό του νησιού, επισκέφθηκε μοναστήρια και μελέτησε τα παλιά χειρόγραφα που σώζονταν εκεί. 'Αφού λοιπόν κατέκτησε τις κορυφές της γνώσης —«τη φιλοσοφία και τις άδελφές της, δηλαδή την αριθμητική, τη γεωμετρία και την άστρονομία, αλλά και την πολυθρύλητη μουσική»—

επέστρεψε στην Κωνσταντινούπολη και ίδρυσε σχολείο σε κάποιο ταπεινό σπίτι, όπου δίδασκε όποιο μάθημα ζητούσε κάθε μαθητής. Πέρασαν κάμποσα χρόνια και πολλοί από τους μαθητές του Λέοντα γνώρισαν επιτυχία στη ζωή τους. 'Ενας από αυτούς, που είχε σπουδάσει γεωμετρία, έγινε γραμματικός ενός στρατιωτικού διοικητή και αιχμαλωτίστηκε από τους 'Αραβες. 'Ο χαλίφης Mamun (813-833), που είχε πάθος με τις «έλληνικές σπουδές», και κυρίως με τη γεωμετρία, έτυχε να άκούσει για τον νεαρό κρατούμενο και τον έφερε μπροστά στους δικούς του μαθηματικούς. Φυσικά ο Βυζαντινός κατέπληξε τους πάντες με τις γνώσεις του. 'Όταν ο χαλίφης έμαθε πως αυτός ο φωστήρας δεν ήταν παρά μαθητής, τον έστειλε άμέσως πίσω στην Κωνσταντινούπολη με το άκόλουθο μήνυμα προς το δάσκαλό του: «Γνωρίσαμε το δέντρο από τον καρπό, το δάσκαλο από το μαθητή. 'Επειδή λοιπόν έσύ, που είσαι τόσο σπουδαίος στην έπιστήμη, είσαι άγνωστος στους συμπολίτες σου, και δεν έχεις καθόλου τιμηθεί άπ' αυτούς για τη σοφία και τη γνώση σου, καταδέξου να έρθεις σ' έμάς και να μάς μεταδώσεις τη διδασκαλία σου. Και αν γίνει αυτό, θα σκύψει μπροστά σου όλο το γένος των Σαρακηνών και θα άξιωθείς πλούτη και δωρεές, όσες δεν άξιώθηκε ποτέ κανένας άνθρωπος». Πολύ δελεαστική προσφορά για έναν φτωχό καθηγητή. 'Ο Λέων όμως φοβήθηκε να δεχτεί ένα μήνυμα από τον έχθρο και το πήγε στον ύπουργό των έξωτερικών. 'Ο αυτοκράτορας Θεόφιλος πληροφορήθηκε το θέμα, και έτσι ο Λέων πέτυχε κάποια άναγνώριση. Του έδωσαν ένα χρηματικό ποσό και τον έγκατέστησαν ως δημόσιο καθηγητή στην εκκλησία των Σαραντα Μαρτύρων. 'Απογοητευμένος ο χαλίφης άνανέωσε την προσφορά: αυτή τη φορά δύο χιλιάδες λίτρες χρυσάφι, αν ο Λέων πήγαινε έστω και για μια σύντομη έπίσκεψη. 'Ο αυτοκράτορας άρνήθηκε την πρόταση με το επιχείρημα ότι θα ήταν άνόητο να παραχωρήσει στους ξένους τη γνώση εκείνη για την οποία «το έθνος των Ρωμαίων θαυμάζεται και τιμάται από όλους». 'Όστερα από λίγον καιρό ο Λέων χειροτονήθηκε μητροπολίτης Θεσσαλονίκης, αλλά παρέμεινε σε αυτή την άσχετη μ' αυτόν θέση μόνο τρία χρόνια (840-843). Καθαιρέθηκε επειδή είχε διοριστεί ως εικονομάχος και γύρισε στην Κωνσταντινούπολη, όπου με πρωτοβουλία του Βάρδα, θείου του νεαρού αυτοκράτορα Μιχαήλ Γ', διορίστηκε επικεφαλής μιας καινούριας σχολής. Σ' αυτήν ο Λέων κατείχε την έδρα της φιλοσοφίας, ο πρώην μαθητής του Θεόδωρος την έδρα της γεωμετρίας, κάποιος Θεοδήγιος της άστρονομίας και ένας Κομητᾶς της γραμματικής. 'Ο Λέων πέθανε μετά το 869, αλλά δεν γνωρίζουμε ακριβώς πότε.

Μερικές λεπτομέρειες σ' αυτή την ιστορία είναι δύσκολο να γίνουν πι-

στευτές (για παράδειγμα ή ύπαρξη ἐπιστημονικῶν χειρογράφων στὰ πιὸ ἀπομονωμένα μοναστήρια τῆς Ἄνδρου), καὶ οἱ χρονολογίες ποὺ δίνει δὲν εἶναι ἐντελῶς ἱκανοποιητικές. Ἄν δεχτοῦμε πάντως ὅτι σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς εἶναι ἀληθινή, παρατηροῦμε πὼς ἓνα ἴδρυμα ἀνώτερης ἐκπαίδευσης ἰδρύθηκε καὶ πάλι μὲ κρατικὴ ἐπιχορήγηση στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ἡ ἔδρα τοῦ ἦταν στὴ Μαγναύρα, μιὰ αἵθουσα τελετῶν τοῦ αὐτοκρατορικοῦ ἀνακτόρου —γιὰ τὴν ἀκρίβεια ἐκεῖ ποὺ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας δεχόταν τοὺς ξένους πρεσβευτές. Σὲ σύγκριση μὲ τὸ πανεπιστήμιο τοῦ 425, τὸ προσωπικὸ τοῦ ἦταν λιγότερο, καὶ τὸ πρόγραμμα διδασκαλίας ἔριχνε τὸ βάρος κυρίως στὶς θετικὲς ἐπιστῆμες, ἀποκλείοντας τὰ νομικὰ καί, φυσικὰ, τὰ λατινικά. Συνεπῶς ἦταν μιὰ σχολὴ γιὰ τεχνικοὺς μᾶλλον παρά γιὰ δημόσιους ὑπαλλήλους. Ἄραγε ἡ δομὴ αὐτὴ ἦταν ἔργο τοῦ ἴδιου τοῦ Λέοντα, ἢ μήπως ἦταν ἡ ἀπάντηση τῆς κυβέρνησης στὶς ἐπιστημονικὲς προόδους τῶν Ἀράβων; Δὲν γνωρίζουμε. Οὔτε μποροῦμε νὰ ἐξακριβώσουμε πόση ἐπιρροὴ εἶχε ἡ σχολή, ποὺ ὥστόσο δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἦταν ἀσήμαντη, ἀφοῦ ἕκατὸ χρόνια ἀργότερα ἀναγνωρίζαν ὅτι εἶχε δημιουργήσει παράδοση στὴν πνευματικὴ καλλιέργεια.²⁷ Ἐντούτοις δὲν μποροῦμε κἂν νὰ εἴμαστε βέβαιοι ὅτι ἐξακολούθησε νὰ ὑπάρχει μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ Βάρδα (πέθανε τὸ 866) καὶ τὴν πρώτη γενιὰ τῶν καθηγητῶν της.

Ἄπὸ τοὺς πανεπιστημιακοὺς συναδέλφους τοῦ Λέοντα μόνο ὁ Κομητᾶς εἶναι γνωστὸς ἀπὸ ἄλλου: γνωρίζουμε ὅτι ἐτοίμασε μιὰ νέα ἔκδοση τοῦ Ὁμήρου, πιθανὸν μεταγραμμτισμένη στὴ μικρογράμματη γραφή.²⁸ Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Λέων ἔπαιξε κάποιον ρόλο στὴν ἔκδοση τῶν πλατωνικῶν κειμένων, καὶ εἶχε στὴν κατοχὴ του ἀρκετὰ ἐπιστημονικὰ χειρόγραφα, μεταξὺ τῶν ὁποίων ἓνα τοῦ Πτολεμαίου καὶ ἓνα τοῦ Εὐκλείδη. Ἐπίσης φαίνεται ὅτι ἀσχολήθηκε παρεμπιπτόντως μὲ τὴν ἀστρολογία καὶ ὅτι διατύπωσε προφητείες. Ἐνας ἀπὸ τοὺς μαθητές του, κάποιος Κωνσταντῖνος Σικελός, σοκαρίστηκε τόσο πολὺ ἀπὸ τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Λέοντα, ποὺ τὸν ἐξαπέστειλε μεταθανάτιως στὴν Κόλαση, νὰ καίγεται αἰώνια μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους εἰδωλολάτρες, τὸν Πλάτωνα καὶ τὸν Ἀριστοτέλη, τὸν Σωκράτη, τὸν Ἐπίκουρο, τὸν Ὀμηρο, τὸν Ἡσίοδο, τὸν Ἄρατο, καὶ ὄλους αὐτοὺς τοὺς καταραμένους.²⁹

Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀρνηθεῖ κανεὶς ὅτι τὸν 9ο αἰώνα μαρτυρεῖται μιὰ ἐντυπωσιακὴ ἀνάπτυξη τῆς παιδείας. Παραδόξως ὁμως εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ συνδέσουμε τὴν ἀνάπτυξη αὐτὴ μὲ τὸ πανεπιστήμιο τῆς Μαγναύρας ἢ μὲ ὁποιοδήποτε ἄλλο ἴδρυμα ἀνώτερης ἐκπαίδευσης. Ὁ Φώτιος, ὁ μεγαλύτερος λόγιος τῆς ἐποχῆς του, εἶχε σταδιοδρομήσει ὡς δημόσιος ὑπάλληλος πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνοδὸ του στὸν πατριαρχικὸ θρόνο τῆς Κωνσταντινού-

πολης (858), καὶ δὲν κατέλαβε ποτὲ καθηγητικὴ ἔδρα. Δὲν γνωρίζουμε μὲ ποῖον τρόπο ἀπέκτησε τὴ μόρφωσή του. Ἄν γεννήθηκε γύρω στὸ 810, ὅπως πιστεύουν σήμερα μερικοὶ ἱστορικοί, ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ γύρω στὸ 820, θὰ ἦταν ἤδη ὄριμος ἄντρας ὅταν ἰδρύθηκε τὸ πανεπιστήμιο. Στὴν ἐπόμενη γενιὰ ἡ σοφότερη φυσιογνωμία ὑπῆρξε ὁ ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Καισαρείας Ἀρέθας, ποὺ γεννήθηκε περὶ τὸ 850. Ἦταν συλλέκτης κλασικῶν κειμένων (σώζονται ἀκόμη ἀρκετὰ ἀπὸ τὰ χειρόγραφα του, ἀντιγραμμένα ὠραιότατα) καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ἔγραφε σὲ τόσο ἐκλεπτυσμένο καὶ περίπλοκο ὕφος ποὺ εἶναι σχεδὸν ἀκατανόητος. Οὔτε αὐτὸς εἶχε καμιά γνωστὴ σχέση μὲ κάποιον πανεπιστήμιο ἢ σχολή. Τὸ μόνο ποὺ μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε εἶναι ὅτι ἡ φιλολογικὴ καλλιέργεια, ποὺ ἡ ἀπουσία της ἀπὸ τὴν αὐτὴ τῶν εἰκονομάχων αὐτοκρατόρων ἦταν ἔντονα αἰσθητὴ, ξανακέρδιζε τὴν εὐνοια τῶν ἀνώτερων κύκλων. Ἄν καὶ ὁ Βασίλειος Α΄ ἦταν ἓνας ἀγράμματος ἀρμένιος χωρικός, ὁ γιὸς του Λέων Σ΄ εἶχε δάσκαλο τὸν Φώτιο καὶ ἀφιέρωθηκε σὲ φιλολογικὲς συγγραφές. Ἐγραψε μερικὲς μᾶλλον ἀνιαρὲς ὁμιλίες καὶ δοκίμασε νὰ συνθέσει θρησκευτικὸς ὕμνους. Ἐκεῖνος ὁμως ποὺ ἐνσάρκωσε πληρέστερα τὸ ἰδεῶδες τοῦ σοφοῦ αὐτοκράτορα ἦταν ὁ γιὸς τοῦ Λέοντα Σ΄, ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος Ζ΄ ὁ Πορφυρογέννητος. Γιὰ τίς φιλολογικὲς του δραστηριότητες θὰ μιλήσουμε στὸ Κεφάλαιο ΙΓ΄. Ἐδῶ θὰ ἐπισημάνουμε τὴν ἀνάμειξή του στὸν τομέα τῆς ἀνώτερης ἐκπαίδευσης. Λέγεται ὅτι, ἐπειδὴ διαπίστωσε πὼς οἱ ἐλευθέρια τέχνες καὶ ἐπιστῆμες εἶχαν παραμεληθεῖ, διόρισε μερικοὺς ἐξαιρετοὺς καθηγητές: σὲ κάποιον Κωνσταντῖνο, ποὺ ἦταν τότε μυστικός (ἐπικεφαλῆς γραφείου ἀρμόδιου γιὰ ἐμπιστευτικὲς ὑποθέσεις), ἀνατέθηκε ἡ ἔδρα τῆς φιλοσοφίας, στὸν Ἀλέξανδρο, μητροπολίτη Νικαίας, ἡ ἔδρα τῆς ρητορικῆς, στὸν πατριῖκο Νικηφόρο τῆς γεωμετρίας καὶ στὸν αὐτοκρατορικὸ γραμματέα Γρηγόριο τῆς ἀστρονομίας. Ὁ αὐτοκράτορας ἔδειχνε ἀμέριστο ἐνδιαφέρον γιὰ τοὺς σπουδαστὲς καὶ συχνὰ τοὺς προσκαλοῦσε νὰ γευματίσουν μαζὶ του. Ὅταν ἀποφοιτοῦσαν (ἂν μποροῦμε νὰ χρησιμοποιήσουμε αὐτὸ τὸν ὄρο), τοὺς διόριζε δικαστές, ἀντιγραφεῖς, δηλαδή γραμματεῖς τῶν νομικῶν ὑπηρεσιῶν, καὶ μητροπολίτες.³⁰ Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια ἔχουμε νὰ κάνουμε μὲ μιὰ ἀνακτορικὴ σχολή, ποὺ τὸ πρόγραμμά της ἦταν ἴδιο μὲ τοῦ πανεπιστημίου τοῦ Βάρδα καὶ σκοπὸς της ἦταν σαφῶς ἡ ἐκπαίδευση προσωπικοῦ γιὰ τὸ δικαστικὸ σῶμα (χωρὶς ὥστόσο νὰ ὑπάρχει ἔδρα Δικαίου!) καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Ἄπὸ τοὺς τέσσερις καθηγητὲς ὁ μόνος ποὺ εἶναι γνωστὸς ἀπὸ ἄλλου εἶναι ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Νικαίας, ὁ ὁποῖος ὑπομνημάτισε τὸν Λουκιανὸ καὶ ἔγραψε ὀρισμένες ἐπιστολὲς ποὺ σώζονται μέχρι σήμερα. Οἱ ἄλλοι ἦταν ἀξιωματοῦχοι ποὺ ἔτυχε νὰ κατέχουν κάποιες ἐπιστημονικὲς γνώ-

σεις. Κανένας τους δεν φαίνεται να ήταν επαγγελματίας στὸν κλάδο του.

Εἴμαστε καλύτερα πληροφορημένοι γιὰ τὴ δευτεροβάθμια ἐκπαίδευση στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη τὸ πρῶτο μισὸ τοῦ 10ου αἰώνα χάρις στὴν ἀλληλογραφία ἐνὸς ἀνώνυμου δασκάλου.³¹ Ἐπρόκειτο, καθὼς φαίνεται, γιὰ ἕναν κάπως δύστροπο χαρακτήρα, ποὺ ζοῦσε μᾶλλον φτωχικά, κἀνοντας κάπου κάπου καὶ τὸ γραφέα καὶ τὸν ἐκδότη, εἶχε ὅμως διασυνδέσεις μὲ τοὺς κύκλους τῶν ὑψηλῶν ἀξιωματούχων. Εἶχε μαθητὲς κάθε ἡλικίας, καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς οἱ πιὸ προχωρημένοι δίδασκαν τοὺς ἀρχαίους. Τὸ ἀντικείμενο τῆς διδασκαλίας ἦταν τὰ ἀρχαῖα ἑλληνικά (γραμματική, προσωδία, ρητορική), μὲ ἄλλα λόγια τὸ παραδοσιακὸ πρόγραμμα τοῦ γραμματικοῦ, καὶ εἶχε σκοπὸ τὴν ἐκπαίδευση ἀνθρώπων ποὺ φιλοδοξοῦσαν νὰ καταλάβουν γραφειοκρατικές καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικές θέσεις. Τὰ δίδακτρα δὲν ἦταν καθορισμένα καὶ τὰ πλήρωναν σὲ ἄτακτα διαστήματα, ἀν τὰ πλήρωναν καθόλου, πρὸς μεγάλη θλίψη τοῦ δασκάλου, ποὺ ἐπιπλέον εἶχε νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει τὸν ἀνταγωνισμὸ ἄλλων ἐκπαιδευτηρίων. Φαίνεται πὼς μολονότι τὸ σχολεῖο του ἦταν ἀνεξάρτητο, ἐντούτοις ἐπιχορηγοῦνταν ἀπὸ τὸ πατριαρχεῖο καὶ ἐλεγχόταν κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν καὶ δημοτικὴν ἀρχήν. Τὴν ἴδια περίπου ἐποχὴ, γύρω στὸ 940, ἀκοῦμε ὅτι ὑπῆρχε ἕνας «πρόεδρος τῶν σχολῶν», δηλαδή ἕνας ἐπαγγελματίας δάσκαλος ποὺ ἐπιπλέον ἐπέβλεπε καὶ ἄλλα ἐκπαιδευτικὰ ἱδρύματα, ἴσως κατὰ τὸ πρότυπο τῶν ἐπαγγελματικῶν συντεχνιῶν. Ὁ Ἀβραάμιος ἀπὸ τὴν Τραπεζοῦντα (ὁ μελλοντικὸς ἅγιος Ἀθανάσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης) φοίτησε στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη σὲ σχολεῖο ποὺ τὸ διεύθυνε ἕνας τέτοιος «πρόεδρος» καὶ ἔδειξε τόσες ικανότητες ποὺ γρήγορα διορίστηκε βοηθὸς καθηγητῆς καὶ ἔπειτα καθηγητῆς σὲ ἄλλο σχολεῖο.³² Ἴσως τὸ ἀξίωμα τοῦ προέδρου νὰ ὑποδηλώνει ὅτι εἶχε γίνῃ κάποια ἀναμόρφωση τῆς δευτεροβάθμιας ἐκπαίδευσης, ἀλλὰ οἱ πληροφορίες μας εἶναι τόσο πενιχρὲς ποὺ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ὀδηγήσουν σὲ συγκεκριμένα συμπεράσματα.

Δὲν γνωρίζουμε σχεδὸν τίποτε γιὰ τὴν ἐξέλιξη τῆς βυζαντινῆς ἐκπαίδευσης ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Πορφυρογέννητου μέχρι τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Θ' τὸν Μονομάχο, δηλαδή σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς ἀπὸ τὸ 940 ὡς τὸ 1040. Τὸ κενὸ αὐτὸ μᾶς ξαφνιάζει, ἀν σκεφτοῦμε τὰ τεράστια ἐγκυκλοπαιδικὰ ἐγχειρήματα γιὰ τὰ ὁποῖα εἴτε κοπίασε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Πορφυρογέννητος εἴτε παρακίνησε ἄλλους. Ὁ χαρακτηρισμὸς «ἀκαδημαϊκός» ἔρχεται ἀναπόφευκτα στὸ νοῦ ἀν θελήσουμε νὰ περιγράψουμε τὰ *Excerpta* (*Ἐκλογαί*), τὰ *Γεωπονικά*, τὰ *Ἱππιατρικά*, καὶ ἰδίως αὐτὴ τὴν τεράστια ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία, τὴ γνωστὴ μὲ τὸ μυστηριῶδες ὄνομα *Σούδα*, κἀνένα ὅμως ἀπὸ τὰ ἔργα αὐτὰ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ συνδεθεῖ μὲ κάποιο ἐκπαι-

δευτικὸ ἱδρυμα. Οὔτε μπορεῖ νὰ ἀποδειχθεῖ ὅτι ἡ συσσώρευση τόσων πολλῶν καὶ διαφορετικῶν γνώσεων ἔθρεψε καὶ ἐνέπνευσε κατοπινὲς γενιὲς μελετητῶν. Μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Ζ' ἡ αὐτοκρατορική προστασία τῶν σπουδῶν σταμάτησε, γιὰ νὰ ἐπαναληφθεῖ μόνο στὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Θ', ἀλλὰ καὶ τότε μὲ πολὺ διαφορετικὸ πνεῦμα.

Ὁ 11ος αἰώνας χαρακτηρίζεται ἀπὸ πιὸ δραστήριο πνευματικὸ κλίμα, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ σχετίζεται μὲ τὴν ἐντονότερη ἀστική ζωὴ καὶ τὴν ἀνοδομῆς καινούριας τάξης ἀστῶν. Ἡ ἐποχὴ κυριαρχεῖται ἀπὸ τὸν πολυμαθὴ Μιχαὴλ Ψελλὸ καὶ τὸν κύκλο τῶν διανοουμένων μὲ τοὺς ὁποίους συνδέοταν —τὸν Ἰωάννη Μαυρόποδα (ποὺ ἦταν ὁ μεγαλύτερος σὲ ἡλικία ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους), τὸν Ἰωάννη Ξιφιλίνο, τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Λειχούδη, τὸν Νικητῆ. Ἄραγε αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄνδρες ἀντιπροσώπευαν ἕνα καινούριο ξεκίνημα, ἢ μήπως προβάλλον μεγεθυσμένοι στὸν πνευματικὸ ὀρίζοντα ἐπειδὴ ὁ Ψελλὸς ἔγραψε τόσο πολλὰ γιὰ ἕνα τόσο εὐρὺ φάσμα θεμάτων; Ἀπὸ θεσμικὴ ἄποψη ἡ μόνη προφανὴς καινοτομία ὑπῆρξε ἡ ἱδρυση γύρω στὸ 1047 μιᾶς κρατικῆς νομικῆς σχολῆς ὑπὸ τὴν προεδρία τοῦ Ξιφιλίνου, στὸν ὁποῖο ἀνέθεσαν τὴν ἐκπαίδευση τῶν μελλοντικῶν δικαστῶν, δικηγόρων καὶ νοταρίων.³³ Ἀμφισβητεῖται κατὰ πόσο ἱδρύθηκε ταυτόχρονα μιὰ «σχολὴ φιλοσοφίας» μὲ ἐπικεφαλῆς τὸν Ψελλὸ, ποὺ πῆρε τὸν πομπῶδη τίτλο «ὑπάτος τῶν φιλοσόφων» (ὅ,τι κι ἀν σήμαινε αὐτό). Ἀκόμη καὶ ἀν ἱδρύθηκε, δὲν ἔζησε πολὺ, ὅπως ἄλλωστε, ἀπὸ ὅ,τι φαίνεται, καὶ ἡ νομικὴ σχολή. Στὴ δευτεροβάθμια ἐκπαίδευση ἀκοῦμε γιὰ πολὺ περισσότερα σχολεῖα τὸν 11ο αἰώνα ἀπὸ ὅ,τι τὸν 10ο —ὄχι ἀπλῶς ἰδιωτικὰ ἐκπαιδευτήρια, ἀλλὰ μόνιμα σχολεῖα ποὺ λειτουργοῦσαν προσαρτημένα σὲ ἐκκλησίες, πιθανὸν μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο ποὺ ἕνας *madrasa* (ἱεροδιδασκαλεῖο, *μεδρεσές*) εἶναι προσαρτημένος σὲ ἕνα *τζαμί*. Αὐτὰ, ἢ ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει μερικὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ, ἐλέγχονταν ἀπὸ τὸν πατριάρχη, μολονότι ἐκεῖ διδάσκονταν τὰ παραδοσιακὰ μαθήματα τοῦ γραμματικοῦ. Εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ πεῖ κανεὶς ἀν αὐτὸ ὑπῆρξε δημιουργημὰ τοῦ 11ου αἰώνα. Ὡστόσο ἡ πρωτοτυπία τῆς περιόδου αὐτῆς δὲν ἔγκειται στὸ θεσμικὸ ἐπίπεδο, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον στὴν ἐμφάνιση διανοουμένων ποὺ ἦταν κατὰ βάση καθηγητὲς οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀπέκτησαν μεγάλη φήμη, ἀκόμη καὶ σημαντικὲς θέσεις στὴν αὐτὴ καὶ στὴν Ἐκκλησία, χάρις στὴ διδασκαλία καὶ στίς μελέτες τους. Φυσικὰ, δὲν πρέπει νὰ υπερβάλλουμε. Ἡ σχέση ἀνάμεσα στὴ μόρφωση καὶ τίς δημόσιες ὑπηρεσίες ἀποτελοῦσε, ὅπως εἶδαμε, παράδοση στὸ Βυζάντιο. Ὁ Μαυρόπουλος τελείωσε τὴ ζωὴ του ὡς μητροπολίτης Εὐχαΐτων (κοντὰ στὴν Ἀμάσεια), ὁ Ξιφιλίνος ἔγινε πατριάρχης τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης καὶ ὁ Ψελλὸς κατέλαβε πολλὰ καὶ διάφορα διοικητικὰ ἀξιώματα, ἀνάμε-

σα στα όποια ήταν και του πρώτου αυτοκρατορικού γραμματέα (πρωτοασκητής). Μπορούμε όμως να πούμε πώς και οι τρεις τους ήταν πρώτα και πάνω απ' όλα καθηγητές και διανοούμενοι· ή μόρφωσή τους δεν ήταν απλώς ένα σκαλοπάτι για την παραπέρα σταδιοδρομία τους. Πρέπει επίσης να έχουμε υπόψη μας πώς το κίνημα που αντιπροσώπευαν κράτησε το πολύ πενήντα χρόνια. Αν του είχαν επιτρέψει να εξελιχτεί, το Βυζάντιο ίσως θα είχε παρουσιάσει τον δικό του Άβελάρδο, ακόμη και ένα αληθινό πανεπιστήμιο, σαν κι αυτά που θα ξεπηδούσαν στη Δύση τον επόμενο αιώνα.

Όσο διανοούμενος ο Ψελλός δεν ήταν προσωπικότητα με μεγάλη πρωτοτυπία· δύσκολα μάλιστα θα τον λέγαμε αληθινό φιλόσοφο. Υπήρξε πάντως άνθρωπος με απεριόριστη περιέργεια, που προσπάθησε να αγκαλιάσει κάθε πεδίο γνώσης. Η διδασκαλία του επίσης κάλυπτε μια εύρεια περιοχή, από τα στοιχειώδη της γραμματικής και της ρητορικής μέχρι τις φυσικές επιστήμες, τη φιλοσοφία, ακόμη και το δίκαιο. Δεν υπάρχει λόγος να υποθέσουμε ότι όλα αυτά υπέσκαπταν την καθεστηκυία τάξη, αν και οι έρευνές του τον οδήγησαν σε μερικές «σκοτεινές» περιοχές. Χωρίς αμφιβολία τον τραβούσαν οι απόκρυφες επιστήμες, οι λεγόμενες θεωρίες των Χαλδαιών, ή αστρολογία και η δαιμονολογία, και στη φιλοσοφία οι προτιμήσεις του στρέφονταν γύρω από τον Πλάτωνα και τους νεοπλατωνικούς. Άς τον ακούσουμε να μιλά ο ίδιος για τις σπουδές του:

«Βλέποντας ότι η φιλοσοφία είχε σβήσει όσον αφορά αυτούς που την καλλιεργούσαν, την αναζωπύρωσα με δικές μου προσπάθειες, χωρίς να βρω ούτε αξιολόγους δασκάλους ούτε κάποιο σπέρμα σοφίας στην Ελλάδα και στους βαρβάρους, αν και έψαξα παντού. Άλλα έπειδη άκουγα σπουδαία πράγματα για τη φιλοσοφία στην Ελλάδα, ... άγνόησα όσους μικρολογούν σ' αυτά και ζήτησα να βρω κάτι περισσότερο. Άφου μελέτησα μερικούς σχολιαστές της επιστήμης αυτής, έμαθα από αυτούς την όδδ της γνώσης: ό ένας με παρέπεμπε σε άλλον, ό χειρότερος στον καλύτερο, εκείνος σ' έτοϋτον, και αυτός στον Άριστοτέλη και τον Πλάτωνα... Ξεικωνάτας λοιπόν από εκεί σαν να έκανα περιήγηση, ήλθα στον Πλωτίνο και τον Πορφύριο και τον Ίάμβλιχο, και προχωρώντας κατόπιν από αυτούς έφτασα στον θαυμασιότατο Πρόκλο σαν σε μεγάλο λιμάνι, και άντλησα από εκεί κάθε επιστήμη και ακρίβεια των νοήσεων. Καθώς επρόκειτο, μετά από αυτά, να άνεβώ στην πρώτη φιλοσοφία και να μυηθώ στην καθαρή επιστήμη, άρχισα με τη θεωρία των άσωμάτων στα λεγόμενα μαθηματικά».

Άπό την αριθμητική ό Ψελλός προχώρησε στη γεωμετρία, έπειτα στη

μουσική και την άστρονομία και σε όλες τις επιστήμες που πηγάζουν από αυτές, (χωρίς να παραλείπει ούτε μία). «Όταν έμαθε πώς υπήρχε μια σοφία πέρα από κάθε απόδειξη, μελέτησε όρισμένα (άρρητα) βιβλία και ώφελήθηκε από αυτά όσο μπορούσε. «Γιατί ότι τά γνωρίζω όλα αυτά άκριβώς», όμολογεί, «ούτε έγω θα τό καυχιόμουν για τον έαυτό μου, ούτε θα πίστευα κανέναν άλλον που θα τό ίσχυριζόταν». Άφου έξηγει ότι η άγάπη του για τη φιλοσοφία δεν τον έκανε να παραμελήσει τη ρητορική, ό Ψελλός συνεχίζει:

«Έπειδη υπάρχει κάποια άλλη φιλοσοφία άνώτερη από αυτήν, δηλαδή εκείνη που άποτελεί τό μυστήριο της θρησκείας μας... τη σπουδάσα περισσότερο από την άλλη, από τη μια ακολουθώντας τα διδάγματα των μεγάλων Πατέρων, από την άλλη συνεισφέροντας και έγω κάτι στο θείο πλήρωμα. Και αν κάποιος (τό λέω ειλικρινά και χωρίς ματαιοδοξία) θέλει να με επαινέσει για τη μόρφωσή μου, να μην τό κάνει έπειδη διάβασα πολλά βιβλία, διότι δεν έξαπατώμαι από φιλαυτία, ... αλλά έπειδη συγκέντρωσα όση μικρή σοφία έχω, όχι από κάποιες ρεύσες πηγές, αλλά αντίθετα, άφου τις βρήκα φραγμένες, τις άνοιξα και τις καθάρισα και άντλησα με πολύ κόπο τό νάμα που βρισκόταν σε μεγάλο βάθος».³⁴

Ό Ψελλός δεν διακρινόταν για τη μετριοφροσύνη του, και παρουσιάζοντας αυτή την κάπως έξωραϊσμένη εικόνα της πνευματικής του εξέλιξης δεν άντεχε να μην αναφέρει τις περιπλανήσεις του στα κάπως επικίνδυνα θέματα του νεοπλατωνισμού και του μυστικισμού. Έξάλλου, δεν είχε κατακτήσει κάθε γνώση; Έντούτοις φρόντισε έπιμελώς να προσφέρει την απαραίτητη γονυκλισία μπροστά στην άνώτερη φιλοσοφία των Πατέρων του χριστιανισμού, όπως ό σοβιετικός επιστήμονας σήμερα προσπαθει να έξευμενίσει τη λογοκρισία υποκλινόμενος όσο πιό συχνά μπορεί στους κλασικούς του μαρξισμού-λενινισμού. Μολονότι είχε κάνει πολλούς έχθρους, ό Ψελλός δεν κατηγορήθηκε ποτέ για άσέβεια ή για διαφθορά των μαθητών του. Αυτή η έμπειρία έπιφυλάχθηκε στο διάδοχό του.

Ό Ίωάννης Ίταλός ήταν γιός νορμανδού μισθοφόρου και καταγόταν από τη Νότια Ίταλία. Ήρθε στην Κωνσταντινούπολη γύρω στο 1050, σπουδάσε φιλοσοφία με καθηγητή τον Ψελλό, δίδαξε για κάμποσα χρόνια και τέλος έγινε «ύπατος των φιλοσόφων» ως διάδοχος του Ψελλού. Τά έλληνικά του δεν ήταν και πολύ κομψά, αλλά φαίνεται πώς είχε πολλούς όπαδούς άνάμεσα στους φοιτητές, και τον προστάτευε η πανίσχυρη οικογένεια των Δουκών. Τό 1076-7, επί βασιλείας του Μιχαήλ Ζ' Δούκα, κατηγορήθηκε για άσέβεια, αλλά η ύπόθεση μπήκε στο άρχείο. Η κατηγορία άνανεώθηκε τό 1082, λίγο μετά την άνοδο στο θρόνο του Άλε-

ξίου Α'. Αυτή τη φορά ο Ίταλός υποχρεώθηκε να παρουσιαστεί μπροστά σε δικαστήριο που το άποτελούσαν και εκκλησιαστικοί και λαϊκοί αξιωματούχοι. Η όμολογία πίστεως που έδωσε δεν θεωρήθηκε ικανοποιητική, και ένας πληροφοριοδότης κατέθεσε ένοχοποιητικά στοιχεία για τις απόψεις που υποστήριζε. Έγινε ακόμη και ένα «αυθόρμητο» συλλαλητήριο από άγριεμένους πολίτες έναντιον του φιλοσόφου, που μόλις και διέφυγε τον βίαιο θάνατο σκαρφαλώνοντας στον τρούλο της Άγίας Σοφίας για να κρυφτεί σε μιὰ τρύπα. Στη συνέχεια τον αναθεμάτισαν, του απαγόρευσαν να ξαναδιδάξει και τον έκλεισαν σε μοναστήρι. Δεν ξαναεμφανίστηκε ποτέ πιά.³⁵

Έχουμε σοβαρούς λόγους να πιστεύουμε ότι η δίκη του Ίταλου είχε πολιτικά κίνητρα και ότι οι έναντιον του κατηγορίες ήταν, ως ένα βαθμό, κατασκευασμένες. Φαίνεται πως ο Ίταλός είχε αρκετές συμπάθειες ανάμεσα στους ανώτερους κληρικούς, κανένας όμως δεν τόλμησε να τον υπερασπιστεί. Πέντε από τους μαθητές του, όλοι διάκονοι, σύρθηκαν μπροστά σ' ένα συμβούλιο έπισκόπων όπου αποκήρυξαν τον πρώην καθηγητή τους και άθωώθηκαν. Συνεπώς η δίκη του Ίταλου δίνει την εντύπωση ότι άφορούσε τον ίδιο και μόνο. Για να δοθεί μάλιστα μεγαλύτερη έπιστημότητα στην καταδίκη του προστέθηκε ένα ειδικό κεφάλαιο στο λεγόμενο Συνοδικό της Όρθοδοξίας. Εκεί αναθεματιζόταν γιατί έφάρμοσε τη διαλεκτική στο άφατο μυστήριο της ένσάρκωσης του Χριστού, γιατί εισηγάγε τις κοσμολογικές θεωρίες των ειδωλολατρών, και ιδιαίτερα τη θεωρία για την αιωνιότητα του κόσμου, γιατί παραδεχόταν τη μετενάρκωση των ανθρώπινων ψυχών και την πραγματική ύπαρξη των πλατωνικών ιδεών, γιατί άμφισβητούσε τα θαύματα του Χριστού και των άγιών, και για πολλά άλλα.³⁶

Από την εποχή του Ίουστινιανού είχε να καταδικαστεί έπίσημα και να τιμωρηθεί για τη διδασκαλία του ένας βυζαντινός λόγιος που δεν ήταν θρησκευτικός ηγέτης. Από την άποψη αυτή η δίκη του Ίταλου έχει κερδίσει μιὰ θέση στα χρονικά της μισαλλοδοξίας. Δεν είναι ακόμη έντελώς ξεκάθαρο κατά πόσο οι έναντιον του κατηγορίες (που ήταν έξαιρετικά ασυνάρτητες) βασιζόνταν σε απόψεις που πραγματικά υποστήριζε, ένα όμως πράγμα μπορεί να λεχθεί: αυτός ο άλαζόνας και θρασύς βάρβαρος, όπως τον χαρακτηρίζει η Άννα ή Κομνηνή,³⁷ έπαιρνε τη φιλοσοφία του στα σοβαρά. Δεν ήταν, όπως ο Ψελλός, πάνω άπ' όλα άνθρωπος των γραμμάτων· δεν είχε γευθεί «το ρητορικόν νέκταρ». Με λίγα λόγια, ήταν ένα καινούριο φαινόμενο στη βυζαντινή πνευματική σκηνή. Δεν μπορούμε να ξέρουμε τί πορεία θα ακολουθοῦσε το εκπαιδευτικό κατεστημένο αν δεν

είχε γίνει ή βίαιη επέμβαση του Άλεξίου Α', αλλά μπορούμε να υποθέσουμε πως οι φοιτητές δεν διέθεταν τη σοβαρή άποφασιστικότητα που χρειαζόταν για να άποδώσει καρπούς ή καινούρια διδασκαλία. Οι φοιτητικοί κύκλοι άπέρριψαν τον Ίταλό σαν άξεστο ξένο, που δεν ήταν ούτε ρήτορας ούτε φιλόσοφος.³⁸

Πιθανόν εξαιτίας της ύπόθεσης του Ίταλου, ή Έκκλησία, δηλαδή το πατριαρχείο της Κωνσταντινούπολης, προχώρησε σε ένα άποφασιστικής σημασίας μέτρο: ανέλαβε τον άμεσο έλεγχο της εκπαίδευσης, τουλάχιστον της εκπαίδευσης των μελλοντικών κληρικών. Αναφέραμε προηγουμένως όρισμένες ένδείξεις ότι ήδη τον 10ο και όπωσδήποτε τον 11ο αιώνα ή Έκκλησία έπαιζε κάποιο ρόλο στη λειτουργία των δευτεροβάθμιων σχολείων. Όστόσο, μόνο από το 1100 και μετά βρίσκουμε ένα ολοκληρωμένο σύστημα λαϊκής και θρησκευτικής εκπαίδευσης. Άποτελούνταν από ένα δίκτυο δευτεροβάθμιων σχολείων στην Κωνσταντινούπολη — άναφέρονται συγκεκριμένα έξι, όλα σε εκκλησίες— και κορυφώνονταν στα μαθήματα βιβλικής έρμηνείας, που τα διδασκαν τρεις καθηγητές, του Ψαλτηρίου, των Έπιστολών και του Ευαγγελίου. Ο τελευταίος από αυτούς είχε τον τίτλο του «οίκουμενικού διδασκάλου». Η Έκκλησία διέθετε και έναν «διδάσκαλο της ρητορικής», που αναφέρεται για πρώτη φορά το μοιραίο έτος 1082. Οι ανώτεροι εκπαιδευτικοί, που ήταν ένσωματωμένοι στην ιεραρχία του πατριαρχείου,³⁹ στο τέλος της σταδιοδρομίας τους συνήθως διορίζονταν σε σημαντικές έπισκοπικές έδρες. Γνωρίζουμε τα όνόματα τριάντα τεσσάρων καθηγητών της πατριαρχικής σχολής τον 12ο αιώνα, και πολλά από τα φιλολογικά και παιδαγωγικά τους έργα σώζονται σήμερα. Ένας από αυτούς, ο μέγας σχολιαστής του Όμήρου Ευστάθιος, που έγινε άρχιεπίσκοπος της Θεσσαλονίκης, πραγματικά ξεχωρίζει. Όσο για τους υπόλοιπους, δύσκολα μπορούν να βρεθούν άνθρωποι πιο βαρετοί στη σχολαστικότητά τους.

Φαίνεται πως ή πατριαρχική σχολή κυριάρχησε στην εκπαιδευτική σκηνή της Κωνσταντινούπολης μέχρι το 1204. Η φιλοσοφία δεν περιλαμβανόταν στο πρόγραμμά της, και είναι άβέβαιο σε ποιό βαθμό διδασκόταν ή έπιστήμη αυτή σε μη θρησκευτικό επίπεδο. Γνωρίζουμε ότι ο Ίταλός είχε τουλάχιστον ένα διάδοχο, κάποιον Θεόδωρο από τη Σμύρνη, που είναι κυρίως γνωστός ως καλοφαγάς. Μετά από αυτόν κανένας άλλος «ύπατος των φιλοσόφων» δεν μνημονεύεται μέχρι το 1166, όταν ο Μιχαήλ, άνεψιός του έπισκόπου Άγχιάλου και μελλοντικός πατριάρχης (1169-77), πήρε τη θέση αυτή. Άν κρίνουμε από την έναρκτήρια όμιλία του,⁴⁰ ως φιλόσοφος δεν έλεγε και σπουδαία πράγματα.

Στόν τομέα τῆς ἐκπαίδευσης ὁ 12ος αἰώνας ἀντιπροσωπεύει τὴν κορύφωση τῆς διαμάχης πού οἱ ἀπαρχές τῆς, ὅπως εἶδαμε, ἀνάγονται στίς ἀρχές τῆς χριστιανικῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Ἴσως μᾶς ξαφνιάζει πού ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν ἀσκήσε πιδ ἀποφασιστικά τὴν ἐξουσία τῆς νωρίτερα. Πιθανὸν αὐτὸ νὰ ὀφείλεται στὸ ὅτι ἡ διδασκαλία τῆς φιλοσοφίας δὲν ἦταν συνεχῆς καὶ ὁ χαρακτήρας τῆς ἦταν γενικὰ ἀβλαβής. Μόνο τὸν 11ο αἰώνα, μὲ τὴν ἀνοδο ἐνὸς κοσμικοῦ πνεύματος, ἔγινε ὁ κίνδυνος ἄμεσος, καὶ ἔτσι ὁ φιλοσοφικὸς διαλογισμὸς στίς σχολές, αὐτὴ ἡ νέα ζήτησις πού καταδικάζεται στὸ Συνοδικό, ἔπρεπε νὰ καταπνιγεῖ. Δὲν θὰ παρακολουθήσουμε ἐδῶ τὴ μεταγενέστερη ἱστορία τῆς βυζαντινῆς ἐκπαίδευσης στὴ Νίκαια, τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη καὶ τὴν Τραπεζοῦντα, μιὰ ἱστορία πού δὲν τῆς ἔλειψαν οἱ κορυφαῖες στιγμές, παρέμεινε ὅμως περιορισμένη στοὺς παραδοσιακοὺς τύπους. Ἀντὶ γι' αὐτό, θὰ προσπαθήσουμε νὰ διατυπώσουμε μερικὲς γενικὲς παρατηρήσεις.

Ἴσως νὰ ἔγινε φανερό στὸν ἀναγνώστη ὅτι ἀπὸ τὸν 7ο αἰώνα καὶ μετὰ ἡ διάκριση ἀνάμεσα στὴ δευτεροβάθμια ἐκπαίδευση καὶ τίς ἀνώτερες σπουδές ἔτεινε νὰ ἐξαφανιστεῖ. Εἶδαμε μερικὲς μεμονωμένες ἀπόπειρες τῆς κυβέρνησης νὰ ἰδρύσει ἕνα εἶδος πανεπιστημίου, ὅπως ἔκαναν ὁ καίσαρ Βάρδας, ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Πορφυρογέννητος καὶ ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Μονομάχος, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα αὐτῶν τῶν καλοπροαίρετων προσπαθειῶν ἦταν κάθε φορὰ πενιχρό. Δὲν ὑπῆρχε λοιπὸν συνεχῆς παράδοση στίς ἀνώτερες σπουδές. Τὸ ἐπανερχόμενο κάθε τόσο θέμα τῆς «ἐπανεύρεσης τῆς γνώσης», συνήθως χάρη στὴ φωτισμένη προστασία κάποιου αὐτοκράτορα, πρέπει νὰ μὴν τὸ παίρνουμε βέβαια τοῖς μετρητοῖς, εἶχε ὅμως κάποια σχέση μὲ τὴν πραγματικότητα. Οἱ κατὰ καιροὺς λόγιοι, ὅπως ὁ Λέων ὁ Μαθηματικὸς καὶ ὁ Ψελλός, ἦταν κάπως δικαιολογημένοι νὰ πιστεύουν ὅτι εἶχαν σώσει τὴ γνώση ἀπὸ πλήρη ἐξαφάνιση. Συνεχῆς παράδοση ὑπῆρχε μόνο στὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ δικαίου μέσα στὴ συντεχνία τῶν νοταρίων καί, πᾶνω ἀπ' ὅλα, τῆς γραμματικῆς καὶ τῆς ρητορικῆς ἀπὸ τοὺς γραμματικούς. Καὶ τὰ δύο αὐτὰ εἶδη διδασκαλίας παρέχονταν ἀποκλειστικά στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη.

Τὸ κυριότερο χαρακτηριστικὸ τῆς διδασκαλίας τοῦ γραμματικοῦ ἦταν ὁ ἄκρατος συντηρητισμὸς τῆς. Ὅταν βλέπουμε τὸν Νικηφόρο Βασιλάκη, καθηγητὴ τῆς πατριαρχικῆς σχολῆς, νὰ συνθέτει τὸν 12ο αἰώνα «προγυμνάσματα» μὲ θέματα ὅπως «Τί μπορεῖ νὰ εἴπε ἕνας ναυτικὸς βλέποντας τὸν Ἴκαρο νὰ πετάει ψηλὰ καὶ τὸν Δαίδαλο νὰ ἀγγίζει τὴ θάλασσα μὲ τίς ἄκρες τῶν φτερῶν του», ἢ «Τί μπορεῖ νὰ εἴπε ἡ Πασιφάη ὅταν ἐρωτεύτηκε τὸν ταῦρο»,⁴¹ δὲν μπορούμε νὰ ἀποφύγουμε τὴν ψευδαίσθηση ὅτι

ὁ χρόνος εἶχε σταματήσει γιὰ χίλια χρόνια. Καὶ δὲν μπορούμε νὰ μὴν ἀναρωτηθοῦμε: τί χρησίμευαν ὁ Ἴκαρος καὶ ἡ Πασιφάη στὸν ἐπίδοξο δημόσιο ὑπάλληλο πού δὲν θὰ χρησιμοποιοῦσε ποτέ στὴ δουλειά του τὴν ἀττική διάλεκτο; Τὸ μόνο πού μπορούμε νὰ ποῦμε εἶναι ὅτι κάποια γνώση γραμματικῆς καὶ ρητορικῆς καθόριζε τὸ χαρακτήρα μιᾶς συγκεκριμένης ἐπαγγελματικῆς τάξης. Ἐχει ὑπολογιστεῖ πὼς τὸν 10ο αἰώνα ὁ συνολικὸς ἀριθμὸς τῶν ἀγοριῶν καὶ τῶν νέων πού σπούδαζαν γραμματικὴ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη (μὲ ἄλλα λόγια σὲ ὀλόκληρη τὴν αὐτοκρατορία) δὲν ξεπερνοῦσε τοὺς διακόσιους μὲ τριακόσιους.⁴² Συνεπῶς σὲ ὅποιαδήποτε χρονικὴ στιγμή τὸ σύνολο αὐτῶν πού εἶχαν λάβει τέτοια μόρφωση μόλις καὶ ξεπερνοῦσε τοὺς χίλιους. Ἄν καὶ οἱ ἀριθμοὶ αὐτοὶ εἶναι βέβαια κατὰ προσέγγιση, ὥστόσο μᾶς δίνουν τὴ σωστὴ διάσταση, χωρὶς τὴν ὁποία κάθε συζήτηση γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ ἐκπαίδευση εἶναι χωρὶς νόημα. Ἄς φανταστοῦμε λοιπὸν ἕνα σύνολο ἀπὸ χίλιους περίπου ἄντρες καλῶν οἰκογενειῶν, συχνὰ ἀνεπιούς ἐπισκόπων ἢ γιούς δημόσιων ὑπαλλήλων, μὲ λίγα λόγια ἀνθρώπους πού ἀκολουθοῦσαν μιὰ σταδιοδρομία γιὰ τὴν ὁποία ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι ἐγγράμματοι. Ἄν μπορούσαν, ἀνάλογα μὲ τὴν περίσταση, νὰ γράψουν μιὰ κομπῆ ἐπιστολὴ ἢ νὰ ἐκφωνήσουν ἕνα λόγο μετὰ ἀπὸ κάποιο δεῖπνο παρουσία τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, ὅπως δὲν αὐτὸ θὰ τραβοῦσε τὴν προσοχὴ πρὸς τὸ πρόσωπό τους. Ἐδῶ λοιπὸν χρειάζονταν ὁ Ἴκαρος καὶ ἡ Πασιφάη. Καὶ ἀφοῦ σκοπὸς τῆς προσπάθειας ἦταν νὰ τοὺς ἐκτιμήσουν οἱ ἀνώτεροί τους, τί λόγο εἶχαν νὰ ἀλλάξουν ἕνα ἐκπαιδευτικὸ σύστημα πού τοὺς παρέιχε τὴ σφραγίδα τοῦ καλλιεργημένου; Οἱ ἐπιπτώσεις αὐτῆς τῆς κατάστασης στὴ βυζαντινὴ φιλολογία εἶναι προφανεῖς: θὰ τίς διερευνήσουμε σὲ ἕνα ἐπόμενο κεφάλαιο.

Μιὰ τελευταία παρατήρηση. Δὲν ὑπῆρξε ποτέ στὸ Βυζάντιο μοναστικὴ ἐκπαίδευση πέρα ἀπὸ τὸ πιδ στοιχειῶδες ἐπίπεδο. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Παχωμίου μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ μεγαλύτερα μοναστήρια φρόντιζαν γιὰ τὴν ἐκπαίδευση τῶν νεοεισερχομένων, πού συχνὰ ἦταν μικρὰ παιδιὰ. Τὰ ἀγόρια αὐτὰ διδάσκονταν τὴ λειτουργία, τὸ Ψαλτήρι καὶ τμῆματα τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, κατὰ προτίμηση ἀπὸ κάποιον μεγαλύτερο μοναχό, πού ἔπρεπε νὰ χρησιμοποιοῖ ἕνα ξεχωριστὸ δωμάτιο γιὰ τὸ σκοπὸ αὐτό, γιὰ νὰ προστατεύει τὴν ἀδελφότητα ἀπὸ σεξουαλικούς πειρασμούς. Τόσο τὸ Ψαλτήρι ὅσο καὶ τὰ ἄλλα οὐσιώδη ἐκκλησιαστικὰ βιβλία συνήθως τὰ μάθαιναν ἀπέξω, καὶ ἔτσι περιοριζόταν ἡ ἀνάγκη νὰ ξέρουν γράμματα. Τὸ νὰ ἐκπαιδεύονται παιδιὰ λαϊκῶν μέσα στὰ μοναστήρια, πράγμα πού ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος τὸ θεωροῦσε ἀπρόσφορο,⁴³ ἀποθαρρυνόταν σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκειά τῆς βυζαντινῆς περιόδου.

Ο ΑΟΡΑΤΟΣ ΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΚΑΛΟΥ
ΚΑΙ ΤΟΥ ΚΑΚΟΥ

ΜΕΡΟΣ ΔΕΥΤΕΡΟ

Ο ΙΔΕΑΤΟΣ ΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΤΟΥ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟΥ

Γιὰ τὸν Βυζαντινὸ, ὅπως καὶ γιὰ κάθε ἄνθρωπο τοῦ Μεσαίωνα, τὸ ὑπερφυσικὸ ὑπῆρχε μὲ ἕναν τρόπο πολὺ πραγματικὸ καὶ γνώριμο. Αὐτὸς ὁ ἄλλος κόσμος ὄχι μόνον ἐπενέβαινε συνεχῶς στὴν καθημερινὴ ζωὴ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀποτελοῦσε ἐκείνη τὴν ἀνώτερη καὶ ἄχρονη πραγματικότητα γιὰ τὴν ὁποία ἡ γήινη ζωὴ δὲν ἦταν παρὰ μιὰ σύντομη εἰσαγωγή. Συνεπῶς κάθε περιγραφή τῆς βυζαντινῆς «κοσμοθεωρίας» πρέπει κατανάγκη νὰ ἀρχίσει ἀπὸ τὸ ὑπερφυσικὸ.

Ἐφόσον οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ ἦταν χριστιανοί, ἡ ἀντίληψή τους γι' αὐτὸν τὸν ἀνώτερο κόσμον μᾶς εἶναι σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς οἰκεία· ὥστόσο στὸ ἐπίπεδο τῶν ἀπλῶν ἀνθρώπων, ποὺ διαφέρει ἀπὸ τὸ ἐπίπεδο τῆς θεολογίας, εἶχε ὀρισμένα χαρακτηριστικὰ ποὺ χρειάζονται ἐρμηνεία. Τὸ πιὸ σημαντικὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐντελῶς φυσικὸ, εἶναι ὅτι οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ φαντάζονταν τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τὴν Οὐράνια Βασιλεία σὰν ἕνα μεγεθυμένο ἀντίγραφο τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς αὐλῆς τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης. Ἄν τοὺς ρωτοῦσε κανεὶς σχετικὰ, πιθανὸν θὰ ἐξέφραζαν αὐτὴ τὴ σχέση ἀντίστροφα, λέγοντας ὅτι ἡ αὐλὴ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα ἀποτελοῦσε μιὰ ἀντανάκλαση σὲ μικρογραφία τῆς οὐρανίας αὐλῆς. Ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπὸ τὸ ποῖα ἦταν τὸ ἀρχέτυπο καὶ ποῖα τὸ ἀντίγραφο, ἡ ὁμοιότητά τους θεωροῦνταν δεδομένη, καὶ αὐτὸ ἐξηγεῖ πολλὰ ἐκδηλώσεις τῆς βυζαντινῆς θρησκευτικότητας.

Πρὶν ἀναπτύξουμε τίς συνέπειες αὐτῆς τῆς ἀντίληψης ἴσως θὰ ἦταν χρήσιμο νὰ δοῦμε ποῖα ἀκριβῶς εἰκόνα εἶχαν στὸ νοῦ τους γι' αὐτὸ τὸ Οὐράνιο Βασίλειο. Ὅρισμένα κείμενα, ποὺ τείνουμε νὰ τὰ ὀνομάσουμε ἀπόκρυφα, παρέχουν σχετικὲς περιγραφές, καὶ μολονότι ὑπάρχουν διαφορὲς στὶς λεπτομέρειες ἀπὸ τὸ ἕνα κείμενο στὸ ἄλλο, τὰ βασικὰ συστατικὰ παραμένουν τὰ ἴδια. Διάλεξα, μιὰ καὶ εἶναι κάπως σύντομο, τὸ *Κοσμᾶ μοναχοῦ ὀπτασία φοβερὰ καὶ ὠφέλιμος*. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος αὐτὸς ἦταν θαλαμηπόλος τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Ἀλεξάνδρου (912-913), ἀλλὰ ἀργότερα ἐγκατέλειψε τὰ ἐγκόσμια καὶ γύρω στὸ ἔτος 933 ἔγινε ἡγούμενος ἐνὸς μονα-

στηριού κοντά στον ποταμό Σαγγάριο, στη βορειοδυτική Μικρά Ἀσία. Κάποτε ἀρρώστησε βαριά. Πέρασαν πέντε μήνες, και κάποιο πρωί ἔπεσε σὲ ἔκσταση: τὰ μάτια του καρφώθηκαν στὸ ταβάνι, ἐνῶ τὸ στόμα του ψιθύριζε ἀκατανόητα λόγια. Στὴν κατάσταση αὐτὴ ὁ Κοσμάς ἔμεινε ἕξι ὀλόκληρες ὥρες, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐπόμενη μέρα μπόρεσε νὰ περιγράψει τὴν ὄπτασία του στοὺς ἀδελφούς τῆς κοινότητας (αὐτὸ ποὺ ἀκολουθεῖ εἶναι μιὰ παράφραση, και ὄχι κατὰ λέξη μετάφραση):

«Ὅπως καθόμουν στὸ κρεβάτι, μοῦ φάνηκε πὼς εἶδα ἀπὸ τὸ ἀριστερὸ μέρος ἓνα πλῆθος ἀνθρωπάκια μὲ μαῦρα πρόσωπα [οἱ δαίμονες πάντα ἐμφανίζονταν ἀπὸ ἀριστερὰ ἢ ἀπὸ τὴ μεριὰ τῆς δύσης]. Ἄλλοι εἶχαν παραμορφωμένη ὄψη, ἄλλοι κατακόκκινα μάτια, ἄλλοι πελιδνὰ και πρησμένα χεῖλια. Οἱ δαίμονες μὲ ἔσυραν πρὸς ἓναν τεράστιο γκρεμό. Ἀπὸ τὸ ἓνα μέρος του, πάνω ἀπὸ ἓνα βᾶθος ποὺ ἔφτανε στὰ τάρταρα, ὑπῆρχε ἓνα τόσο στενὸ μονοπάτι, ποὺ μὲ δυσκολία πατοῦσε τὸ πόδι. Οἱ δαίμονες μὲ τραβοῦσαν μὲ βία στὸ μονοπάτι, ὥσπου φτάσαμε σὲ μιὰ μεγάλη πύλη. Ἐκεῖ καθόταν ἓνας γιγαντιαῖος ἄντρας μὲ κατὰμαυρο και φοβερὸ πρόσωπο, ποὺ ἔβγαζε καπνοὺς ἀπὸ τὰ ρουθόνια και ἡ γλώσσα του κρεμόταν μιὰ πῆχη ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα του. Τὸ δεξί του χέρι ἦταν ἐντελῶς παράλυτο, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀριστερὸ ἦταν χοντρὸ σὰν κολόνα, και μὲ αὐτὸ ἔπιανε τὰ θύματα του και τὰ ἔριχνε στὸν γκρεμό. Καθὼς πλησιάσαμε πρὸς τὸ γίγαντα, ἐκεῖνος φώναξε πρὸς τοὺς ἀπαγωγεῖς μου: «Αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι φίλος μου», και ἄπλωσε τὸ χέρι νὰ μὲ πιάσει. Ἀμέσως ὁμοῦ φάνηκαν δύο γηραιοὶ και ἱεροπρεπεῖς ἄντρες, ποὺ τοὺς ἀναγνώρισα ἀπὸ τὶς εἰκόνες τους: ἦταν οἱ ἀπόστολοι Ἰωάννης και Ἀνδρέας. Μόλις τοὺς εἶδε ὁ γίγαντας τραβήχτηκε πίσω φοβισμένος, και οἱ ἀπόστολοι μὲ ὀδήγησαν μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν πύλη, και ἀφοῦ περάσαμε μιὰ πόλη φτάσαμε σὲ μιὰ πεδιάδα μὲ ὠραιότατα χωριά. Στὴν ἄκρη τῆς πεδιάδας βρήκαμε μιὰ ὁμορφὴ και χλοερὴ κοιλάδα, στὴ μέση τῆς ὁποίας καθόταν ἓνας σεβάσμιος γέροντας μὲ ἓνα πλῆθος παιδιὰ γύρω του. «Αὐτός», μοῦ εἶπαν οἱ ἀπόστολοι, «εἶναι ὁ Ἀβραάμ». Ἐχεις ἀκούσει γιὰ τοὺς κλόπους τοῦ Ἀβραάμ». Τὸν προσκύνησα μὲ σεβασμὸ και τὸν ἀσπάστηκα, κι ἔπειτα ἤρθαμε σὲ ἓναν τεράστιο ἔλαιώνα. Κάτω ἀπὸ κάθε δέντρο ὑπῆρχε μιὰ σκηνή, και σὲ κάθε σκηνή μιὰ κλίνη, και πάνω σὲ κάθε κλίνη ἀναπαύονταν ἓνας ἄνθρωπος. Ἀνάμεσά τους ἀναγνώρισα πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τὸ παλάτι, πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τὴν Πόλη, μερικοὺς ἀγρότες και μερικοὺς ἀπὸ τὸ μοναστήρι μας, ποὺ ὅλοι τους εἶχαν πεθάνει. Καθὼς σκεφτόμουν νὰ ρωτήσω τί νὰ εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ θαυμάσιος ἔλαιώνας, οἱ ἀπόστολοι μὲ πρόλαβαν και μοῦ θύμισαν τὶς «οὐράνιες μονές» ποὺ βρίσκονταν στὸν οἶκο τοῦ Κυρίου.

»Μετὰ λοιπὸν ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἔλαιώνα ὑπῆρχε μιὰ πόλη, ποὺ ἡ ὁμορφιά της εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ περιγραφεῖ. Τὰ τεῖχη της ἦταν φτιαγμένα ἀπὸ δώδεκα ζῶνες, καθεμιὰ ἀπὸ δώδεκα πολύτιμους λίθους, και οἱ πύλες ἦταν ἀπὸ χρυσὸ και ἄργυρο. Μέσα ἀπὸ τὶς πύλες ὑπῆρχαν χρυσὰ δάπεδα, χρυσὰ σπίτια και χρυσοὶ θρόνοι. Ὅλη ἡ πόλη ἦταν γεμάτη ἀπὸ ἓνα ἀπεριγραπτο φῶς, γεμάτη εὐωδιές και χάρες. Καθὼς ὁμοῦ τὴ διασχίζαμε ὀλόκληρη, δὲν εἶδαμε οὔτε ἄνθρωπο οὔτε ζῶο οὔτε πτηνὸ στὴ γῆ ἢ στὸν ἀέρα. Στὴν ἄκρη τῆς πόλης ὑψωνόταν ἓνα θαυμάσιο παλάτι. Ἀφοῦ περάσαμε τὴν εἴσοδό του ἤρθαμε σὲ μιὰ αἴθουσα τόσο μεγάλη ὅσο ἡ ἀπόσταση ποὺ μπορεῖς νὰ ρίξεις μιὰ πέτρα. Ἀπὸ τὴ μιὰ ἄκρη τῆς αἴθουσας μέχρι τὴν ἄλλη ἀπλωνόταν ἓνα τραπέζι ἀπὸ πορφυρίτη και τριγύρω του ἦταν ξαπλωμένοι πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι. Στὴν ἄκρη τῆς αἴθουσας ὑπῆρχε μιὰ στριφογυριστὴ σκάλα ποὺ ὀδηγοῦσε σὲ ἓναν ὠραῖο ἐσωτερικὸ ἐξώστη. Δύο λαμπροὶ εὐνοῦχοι, φωτεινοὶ σὰν ἀστραπή, ἔσκυψαν ἀπὸ τὸν ἐξώστη και εἶπαν σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ μὲ κρατοῦσαν: «Ἄς ξαπλώσει κι αὐτὸς κοντὰ στὸ τραπέζι», και ἔδειξαν ἓνα μέρος, ὅπου ὀδηγήθηκα. Οἱ εὐνοῦχοι μπῆκαν ἀπὸ τὸν ἐξώστη στὰ ἐνδότερα και ἔλειψαν πολλὲς ὥρες. Σ' αὐτὸ τὸ μεταξὺ ἀναγνώρισα πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τοὺς παρευρισκομένους: ἄλλοι ἦταν ἀπὸ τὸ μοναστήρι μας και ἄλλοι ἀπὸ τοὺς ὑπαλλήλους τοῦ παλατιοῦ. Μὲ τὰ πολλὰ, οἱ εὐνοῦχοι ἔσκυψαν πάλι ἀπὸ τὸν ἐξώστη και εἶπαν στοὺς ἀποστόλους: «Γυρίστε τον πίσω, γιατί τὰ πνευματικὰ παιδιὰ του πενθοῦν πολὺ. Ὁ αυτοκράτορας τὸν ἀφήνει νὰ ἐπιστρέψει στὴ μοναστικὴ ζωὴ. Πηγαίνετε τὸν ἀπὸ ἄλλο δρόμο και φέρτε στὴ θέση του τὸ μοναχὸ Ἀθανάσιο ἀπὸ τὴ μονὴ τοῦ Τραϊανοῦ». Ἀμέσως οἱ γέροντες μὲ ὀδήγησαν γρήγορα ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ παλάτι και βγήκαμε ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη ἀπὸ ἄλλο δρόμο. Καθ' ὁδὸν περάσαμε ἀπὸ ἑπτὰ λίμνες γεμάτες μὲ ἄνθρώπους ποὺ βασιάνιζονταν: ἡ μία ἦταν γεμάτη σκοτάδι, ἡ ἄλλη φωτιά, ἡ ἄλλη δύσοσμη ομίχλη, ἡ ἄλλη σκουλήρια, και οὕτω καθεξῆς. Μετὰ συναντήσαμε πάλι τὸν Ἀβραάμ, ποὺ μᾶς ἔδωσε κρασί γλυκὸ σὰν μέλι σὲ χρυσὸ ποτήρι. Ἐπειτα ἀπὸ λίγο φτάσαμε στὸν τόπο τοῦ φοβεροῦ γίγαντα, ποὺ ἔτριξε τὰ δόντια του και μοῦ εἶπε μὲ θυμὸ: «Αὐτὴ τὴ φορὰ μοῦ ξέφυγες, ἀλλὰ δὲν θὰ πάψω νὰ μηχανεύομαι ἐναντίον σου και ἐναντίον τοῦ μοναστηριοῦ σου». Μέχρις ἐδῶ ποὺ σᾶς εἶπα θυμᾶμαι, ἀδελφοί, ἀλλὰ πῶς ξαναβρῆκα τὸν ἑαυτὸ μου δὲν τὸ ξέρω».

Ὅταν ὁ Κοσμάς τελείωσε τὴν ἱστορία του, στάλθηκε κάποιος στὸ γειτονικὸ μοναστήρι τοῦ Τραϊανοῦ, ὅπου ἔμαθε ὅτι ὁ μοναχὸς Ἀθανάσιος εἶχε πεθάνει τὴν ἴδια ὥρα ποὺ ὁ Κοσμάς ἔβλεπε τὸ ὄραμά του.¹

¹ Ἡ τόσο ζωντανὴ περιγραφή τοῦ οὐράνιου παλατιοῦ στὸ ὄραμα τοῦ

Κοσμά ἴσως ὀφείλεται στήν προϋπηρεσία του ὡς θαλαμηπόλου. Ἡ μεγάλη αἵθουσα (*τρικλίσιον*), τὰ κουβούκλια, ἡ στριφογυριστή σκάλα (*κοχλίας*), ὁ ἐξώστης (*ἡλιακόν*), τὸ τραπέζι ἀπὸ πορφυρίτη, οἱ εὐνοῦχοι ὑπηρετές — ὅλα αὐτὰ ἦταν γνώριμα χαρακτηριστικά τοῦ αὐτοκρατορικοῦ ἀνακτόρου. Ἡ μόνη διαφορά ἦταν ὅτι στὸν οὐρανὸ τὰ πάντα ἦταν κατὰ πολὺ μεγαλύτερα καὶ λαμπρότερα. Ἡ ἀντιστοιχία ἀνάμεσα στὰ γήινα καὶ τὰ οὐράνια ἀνάκτορα εἶναι πράγματι κοινὸς τόπος στὴ βυζαντινὴ σκέψη. Πολλὰ κείμενα θὰ μπορούσαμε νὰ ἀναφέρουμε ὡς ἐπιβεβαίωση αὐτῆς τῆς ἀποψης, ἀλλὰ ἓνα ἀρκεῖ. Ὅταν τὸν 11ο αἰῶνα ὁ λόγιος Ἰωάννης Μαυρόπουλος μπῆκε γιὰ πρώτη φορά στὴν αὐλὴ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Μιχαὴλ Δ' (1034-1041), συνέθεσε ἓνα φιλοφρονητικὸ ποίημα στὸ ὁποῖο ἐξέφραζε τὴν ἐπιθυμία νὰ ἐξακολουθοῦν νὰ τὸν δέχονται εὐνοϊκά. Ἐκανε πὼς φοβόταν μήπως τὸν διώξουν μπροστὰ στὶς πύλες τοῦ παλατιοῦ οἱ «πτερωτοὶ ἄγγελοι» τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα. Ἀλλὰ, ἀν ξεπερνοῦσε αὐτὸ τὸ ἐμπόδιο καὶ πλησίαζε τὸ θρόνο, μήπως θὰ τὸν χτυποῦσαν τὰ χερουβείμ μετὰ τὶς ρομφαῖες τους; Ὁ Ἰωάννης δὲν εἶχε τόσο κακὸ γοῦστο ὥστε νὰ συγκρίνει τὸν ἄξεστο Μιχαὴλ Δ' μετὰ τὸν Χριστὸ· ἐντούτοις ἄφηγε νὰ ἐννοηθεῖ ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς μπορεῖ νὰ ἦταν παρὼν στὸ παλάτι: ὅπως εἶχε παρουσιαστεῖ στους τρεῖς παῖδες ἐν τῇ καμίνῳ, ἔτσι θὰ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι παρὼν καὶ δίπλα στὴν αὐτοκρατορικὴ τριάδα — τὸν Μιχαὴλ, τὴ σύζυγό του Ζωὴ καὶ τὴν ἀδελφὴ τῆς Θεοδώρα.²

Ἡ ἀκολουθία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀποτελοῦνταν, πρῶτα ἀπ' ὅλα, ἀπὸ τὶς δυνάμεις τῶν ἀγγέλων, πού θεωρητικὰ ἦταν αὐστηρὰ ἱεραρχημένες καὶ διαφοροποιημένες. Οἱ ἄγγελοι, πού ἦταν ἄπειροι σὲ ἀριθμὸ, ἀποτελοῦσαν τὸ στρατὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, δηλαδὴ τοὺς στρατιῶτες, τοὺς ἀξιωματικούς καὶ τοὺς στρατηγούς· χρησίμευαν ὡς εἰδικοί ἀπεσταλμένοι, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς καὶ οἱ *magistriani* στὴ γῆ, καὶ ἐπιπλέον ἀποτελοῦσαν τὸ οὐράνιο *cubiculum*, δηλαδὴ τὸ σῶμα τῶν θαλαμηπόλων. Πάνω στὴ γῆ ἐκτελοῦσαν διάφορες ὑπηρεσίες ἀνάλογα μετὰ τὸ βαθμὸ τους: προστάτευαν ἄτομα, ἐκκλησίες, ἱερά, πόλεις, ἀκόμη καὶ ὀλόκληρα ἔθνη. Δὲν μπορούμε πάντως νὰ ποῦμε πὼς οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ ἀποκρυστάλλωσαν ποτὲ ἓνα συνεπὲς καὶ γενικὰ ἀποδεκτὸ σύστημα «ἀγγελολογίας». Εἶναι γνωστὸ πὼς ἡ διδασκαλία τῆς Βίβλου πάνω στὸ θέμα αὐτὸ εἶναι πολὺ συγκεχυμένη· ὅσο γιὰ τὸ *Περὶ οὐρανίου ἱεραρχίας* τοῦ Ψευδο-Διονυσίου (γύρω στὸ 500 μ.Χ.), πράγματι τὴ θεωροῦσαν ἐγκυρότατο ἔργο, ἐπειδὴ τὴν ἀπέδιδαν στὴν ἀποστολικὴ ἐποχὴ, ἀλλὰ ἦταν τόσο βαθυστόχαστο πού ὁ πολὺς κόσμος δὲν μπορούσε νὰ τὸ καταλάβει. Τὰ χερουβείμ καὶ τὰ σεραφεῖμ ἦταν ἀρκετὰ γνώριμα στους Βυζαντινοὺς, ἔτσι ὅπως περιγράφονται στὰ ὄραματα τοῦ Ἡσαΐα καὶ τοῦ

Ἰεζεκιήλ. Τὰ ἐπικαλοῦνταν συχνὰ στὴ λειτουργία καὶ τὰ ἀναπαρίσταναν στὶς ἐκκλησιαστικὲς διακοσμῆσεις, εἶναι ὅμως γεγονὸς ὅτι συχνὰ μπερδεύαν τὰ ἰδιαίτερα χαρακτηριστικά τους. Γιὰ τοὺς Θρόνους, τὶς Δυνάμεις, τὶς Κυριότητες καὶ τὶς Ἐξουσίες οἱ γνώσεις τους ἦταν ἀσαφεῖς. Ὅσο γιὰ τοὺς ἀρχαγγέλους, μόνο δύο, δηλαδὴ ὁ Μιχαὴλ καὶ ὁ Γαβριήλ, εἶχαν ἰσχυρὴ λαϊκὴ λατρεία· οἱ ἄλλοι, ὅπως ὁ Ραφαήλ καὶ ὁ Οὐριήλ, ἐμφανίζονται κυρίως σὲ προσευχὰς καὶ ὕμνους ἀπόκρυφου χαρακτήρα. Ὁ Μιχαὴλ ἦταν ὁ ἀρχιστράτηγος τῶν οὐράνιων δυνάμεων, καὶ εἶχε ἀρκετὰ κέντρα λατρείας στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία, ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα τὸ πιὸ σπουδαῖο ἦταν στὶς Χῶνες (Κολοσσές) τῆς Φρυγίας, ὅπου πίστευαν ὅτι εἶχε σχίσει ἓνα βράχο καὶ εἶχε ἀλλάξει τὴν κοίτη ἐνὸς ποταμοῦ.

Κατὰ τὰ πρῶτα χρόνια ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἦταν ἐντελῶς ἀντίθετη στὴ λατρεία τῶν ἀγγέλων. Ἦδη ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, γράφοντας (πράγμα χαρακτηριστικὸ) πρὸς τοὺς Κολοσσαεῖς, εἶχε προειδοποιήσει: *μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβεύετω θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων* (*Πρὸς Κολοσ.*, Β', 18). Ἡ σύνοδος τῆς Λαοδικείας στὴ Φρυγία, πού συνήλθε τὸν 4ο αἰῶνα, προχώρησε ἀκόμη περισσότερο: «Οἱ χριστιανοὶ δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἐγκαταλείπουν τὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ ἐπικαλοῦνται τὸ ὄνομα τῶν ἀγγέλων καὶ νὰ ὀργανώνουν τὴ λατρεία τους, γιὰ αὐτὸ ἀπαγορεύεται. Ὅποιος συλληφθεῖ νὰ ἀφοσιώνεται σ' αὐτὴ τὴν κρυφὴ εἰδωλολατρία, θὰ ἀναθεματίζεται».³ Τὸν ἐπόμενο αἰῶνα ὁ Θεοδώρητος Κύρρου σημείωνε ὅτι «ἡ ἀσθένεια αὐτὴ ἐπιζεῖ ἐδῶ καὶ πολλὸν καιρὸ στὴν Φρυγία καὶ τὴν Πισιδία» καὶ ὅτι «μέχρι σήμερα βλέπει κανεὶς ἐκκλησίες τοῦ Μιχαὴλ ἀνάμεσα στους ἀνθρώπους αὐτοὺς καὶ τοὺς γείτονές τους».⁴ Οἱ καταδίκες ὅμως ἀποδείχτηκαν ἀκαρπες: ἡ λατρεία τοῦ Μιχαὴλ ἐξακολούθησε ὄχι μόνο στὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὲ ὀλόκληρη τὴν αὐτοκρατορία. Στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη ὑπῆρχαν κάπου εἴκοσι τέσσερις ἐκκλησίες του.

Γιὰ τὴ φύση τῶν ἀγγέλων ὑπῆρχαν δύο ἐλαφρῶς διαφορετικὲς ἀπόψεις. Ἡ πρώτη, πού φαίνεται πὼς ἦταν καὶ ἡ παλιότερη, ὑποστήριζε ὅτι οἱ ἄγγελοι δὲν ἦταν καθ' ὀλοκληρίαν πνεύματα, ἀλλὰ ἀποτελοῦνταν ἀπὸ κάποια λεπτότατη ὕλη πού μπορούσαν νὰ τὴ δοῦν οἱ ἐξαιρετικὰ ἅγιοι ἄνθρωποι, «αὐτοὶ πού ὁ Θεὸς τοὺς εἶχε ἀνοίξει τὰ μάτια».⁵ Ἡ πιὸ συνηθισμένη ἀποψη ὡστόσο ἦταν πὼς οἱ ἄγγελοι εἶναι ἄυλοι, ἀλλὰ μποροῦν νὰ πάρουν ὕλικὴ μορφή, πράγμα πού, παρεμπιπτόντως, ἔδινε τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ ἀπεικονίζονται σὲ παραστάσεις. Ὅταν γίνονταν ὄρατοί, συνήθως ἐπαιρναν τὴ μορφή νεαρῶν εὐνούχων. Ἐνα δημοφιλὲς κείμενο περιγράφει τὸν φύλακα ἄγγελο τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας ὡς «εὐνούχο ντυμένο με λευκὸ ἔνδυμα, ὠραῖο στὴν ἐμφάνιση, σὰν νὰ εἶχε σταλεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ παλάτι».⁶ Στὸ

Βίο του αγίου Ἀνδρέα του Σαλοῦ, ἕνας ἄγγελος ἔρχεται νὰ μαγειρέψει ἕνα τσουκάλι φασόλια γιὰ κάποιον Ἐπιφάνιο, ἕναν νέο μεγάλης ἀγιοσύνης. Τὸ οὐράνιο πλάσμα περιγράφεται ὡς «δομορφος νέος, ὑπέροχα ψηλός, μὲ πρόσωπο λαμπρότερο καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν ἥλιο, ντυμένος μὲ θεϊκὰ ἐνδύματα —λευκὰ μὲ χρυσὰ ἀπὸ τὸ καιμὸ ὡς τὸ στῆθος, καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ στῆθος ὡς τοὺς γοφούς, καὶ τὰ γόνατα λαμπερὰ σὰν τὸ πράσινο χορτάρι καὶ τὸ κίτρο». ⁷ Ἄλλοι οὖν ἀρχάγγελος Μιχαὴλ ἐμφανίζεται «μὲ πολυάριθμη συνοδεία, καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ντυμένος μὲ τὴ στολή τοῦ πραιποσίτου». ⁸

Ὅλα αὐτὰ βέβαια εἶναι ἀπολύτως λογικά. Οἱ ἄγγελοι, ποὺ δὲν εἶχαν γένος καὶ ἦταν ἀκόλουθοι τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἶχαν στὴ γῆ πολλές ἀναλογίες μὲ τοὺς εὐνοῦχους τοῦ αὐτοκρατορικοῦ ἀνακτόρου. Ὁ ἐπικεφαλῆς τῶν εὐνοῦχων ἦταν ὁ praepositus sacri cubiculi (πραιπόσιτος τοῦ ἱεροῦ κοιτῶνος), καὶ ἡ θέση του, συνεπῶς, ἦταν ἀνάλογη μὲ τοῦ ἀρχαγγέλου Μιχαήλ. Ἐπιπλέον, γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ νοοτροπία δὲν ἦταν παράδοξο νὰ κατέχει ἕνας εὐνοῦχος θέση στρατιωτικοῦ διοικητῆ: αὐτὸ ἦταν καθημερινὴ πρακτικὴ. Γιὰ νὰ ἀναφέρουμε μόνον ἕνα παράδειγμα, ὁ Ναρσῆς, ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς μεγαλύτερους στρατηγούς τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ, ἦταν εὐνοῦχος.

Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγγέλους, ἡ αὐλή τοῦ Θεοῦ περιλάμβανε καὶ τοὺς ἀγίους. Μιὰ ἐντελῶς ξεχωριστὴ θέση, ἀνάλογη μὲ τὴ θέση ποὺ εἶχε ἡ οἰκογένεια τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, κατεῖχαν ἡ Παναγία —ἡ Θεοτόκος, ὅπως συνήθως ὀνομάζεται— καὶ ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Πρόδρομος. Αὐτὰ τὰ δύο πρόσωπα ἐμφανίζονται δίπλα στὸν Χριστὸ σὲ ἕναν ἀπὸ τοὺς πιὸ διαδεδομένους τύπους βυζαντινῆς εἰκόνας, ποὺ εἶναι γνωστὴ ὡς Δέσις: ὁ Χριστὸς στέκεται ἢ κάθεται σὲ θρόνο στὴ μέση, ἐνῶ δεξιὰ καὶ ἀριστερὰ στέκουν ἡ Παναγία καὶ ὁ Πρόδρομος μὲ τὰ κεφάλια ἐλαφρῶς σκυμμένα καὶ τὰ χέρια τους ἀπλωμένα σὲ μιὰ χειρονομία παράκλησης γιὰ λογαριασμὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου γένους. Στὴν ἴδια θέση ἐμφανίζονται καὶ στὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία. ⁹

Εἶναι περιττὸ νὰ περιγράψουμε ἐδῶ τὴν ἐξαιρετικὰ σημαντικὴ θέση τῆς Παναγίας στὸ χριστιανικὸ πάνθεο. Γιὰ τοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς, ἐκτὸς τῶν ἄλλων, εἶχε ἰδιαίτερα σπουδαῖο ρόλο γιὰ τὸ προστάτευε καὶ φρουροῦσε τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. ¹⁰ Τὸ ρόλο αὐτὸν τὸν εἶχε ἀναλάβει χάρις σὲ δύο πολὺ σεβαστὰ λείψανα ποὺ βρισκόνταν στὴν πρωτεύουσα —τὴν Ἁγία Ζώνη καὶ τὸ Μαφόριο. Ἡ Ζώνη φυλασσόταν στὴ βασιλικὴ τῆς Παναγίας τῶν Χαλκοπρατειῶν, ποὺ λέγεται ὅτι χτίστηκε ἀπὸ τὴν αὐτοκράτειρα Πουλχερία τὸ 450: ἡ ἔρειπωμένη τῆς ἀψίδα στέκεται ἀκόμη σὲ μικρὴ ἀπόσταση δυτικὰ τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας. Τὸ λείψανο, σύμφωνα μὲ μιὰ παράδοση, τὸ ἔφερε ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς ἀπὸ τὰ Ζῆλα, μιὰ τοποθεσία στὰ νότια τῆς Ἀμά-

σειας, στὴν ἀνατολικὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία: σύμφωνα μὲ μιὰ ἄλλη παράδοση, τὸ ἔφερε ἀπὸ τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Ἀρκάδιος. ¹¹

Ἀκόμη πιὸ διάσημο καὶ ἀπὸ τὴ Ζώνη ἦταν τὸ Μαφόριο, ποὺ φυλασσόταν σὲ ἕνα εἰδικὸ παρεκκλήσιο δίπλα στὴ βασιλικὴ τῆς Παναγίας τῶν Βλαχερνῶν, στὴ βόρεια περιοχὴ τῆς πρωτεύουσας. Ἐλεγαν πῶς αὐτὸ τὸ λείψανο ἀνακαλύφθηκε στὴν Καπερναοῦμ ἀπὸ τοὺς πατρικίους Γάβριο καὶ Κάνδιδο τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Λέοντα Α' (457-474). Ἀνῆκε σὲ μιὰ Ἰουδαία, ποὺ τὸ φύλαγε σ' ἕνα ξύλινο σεντούκι. Οἱ πατρικίοι ὡστόσο μπόρεσαν νὰ τὸ πάρουν ἀλλάζοντας τὸ σεντούκι μὲ ἕνα ἄλλο ἀκριβῶς ὅμοιο, καὶ ἔφεραν τὸ Μαφόριο στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Οἱ θαυματουργές του δυνάμεις φανερώθηκαν σὲ μερικές ἀπὸ τίς πιὸ ἐπικίνδυνες στιγμὲς τῆς ἱστορίας τῆς πρωτεύουσας: τὸ Μαφόριο ἔσωσε τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἀβάρους καὶ τοὺς Πέρσες τὸ 626 καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς Ρώσους τὸ 860. ¹²

Μὲ ἐξάιρεση τὸν ἅγιο Ἰωάννη τὸν Πρόδρομο, ποὺ γεφυρώνει τὴ μετὰβαση ἀπὸ τὸ Νόμο στὴ Χάρη (καὶ ὁ ὁποῖος μόνον στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη εἶχε τριάντα πέντε ἐκκλησίες ἀφιερωμένες σ' αὐτόν), οἱ προφήτες, οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ οἱ πατριάρχες τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης κατεῖχαν πολὺ μικρὴ θέση στὴ βυζαντινὴ εὐσέβεια. Ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀγίους τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, οἱ ἀπόστολοι ἦταν, γιὰ νὰ τὸ ποῦμε ἔτσι, στὴν κορυφὴ τῆς ἱεραρχίας: ἡ λατρεία τους ἦταν σημαντικὴ, δὲν θὰ λέγαμε ὅμως ὅτι ἦταν καὶ οἱ πιὸ δημοφιλεῖς ἅγιοι. Αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἦταν οἱ πιὸ δημοφιλεῖς φαίνονται ἐκ πρώτης ὄψεως ἕνα παράξενο σύνολο: πολλοί, ἢ μᾶλλον οἱ περισσότεροι, ἦταν σκοτεινὲς μορφές, γιὰ τίς ὁποῖες τίποτε τὸ συγκεκριμένο δὲν ἦταν γνωστὸ. Καὶ ἂν ἐρευνήσουμε τοὺς λόγους τῆς δημοτικότητάς τους, δὲν θὰ τοὺς βροῦμε σὲ κάποιον στοιχεῖο τοῦ ἱστορικοῦ χαρακτήρα ἢ τῆς δραστηριότητάς κάθε ἀγίου, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον στὴν ὑπαρξὴ μιᾶς τοπικῆς λατρείας ποὺ πέτυχε νὰ ἀποκτήσει κάποια φήμη.

Ἄς πάρουμε τὴν περίπτωση τοῦ ἀγίου Νικολάου τῶν Μύρων. ¹³ Τίποτε συγκεκριμένο δὲν εἶναι γνωστὸ γι' αὐτόν τὸν ἐπίσκοπο. Ὑποτίθεται ὅτι ἔζησε τὸν 4ο αἰῶνα καὶ πῆρε μέρος στὴν πρώτη οἰκουμενικὴ σύνοδο στὴ Νίκαια τὸ 325 (ἂν καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ τελευταῖο εἶναι ἐξαιρετικὰ ἀμφίβολο). Τὸν 6ο αἰῶνα μερικές ἱστορίες εἶχαν συνδεθεῖ μὲ τὸ ὄνομά του, ὅτι δηλαδὴ εἶχε σώσει ἀπὸ ἐκτέλεση τρεῖς πολίτες τῶν Μύρων καὶ ὅτι εἶχε ἐπαναλάβει τὸ ἴδιο κατόρθωμα ἀπελευθερώνοντας τρεῖς στρατηγούς τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Κωνσταντίνου. Πρὸς τιμὴν τοῦ ἀγίου Νικολάου ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς ἔχτισε στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη μιὰ ἐκκλησία. Λίγο ἀργότερα ὁ ἐπίσκοπος Μύρων ταυτίστηκε κατὰ λάθος μὲ ἕναν τοπικὸ συνονόματό

του, τὸν Νικόλαο τῆς Σιών (ἐνὸς μοναστηριοῦ στὴ Λυκία), ποὺ πέθανε τὸ 564, καὶ ὀρισμένα θαύματα ποὺ εἶχαν προσγραφεῖ στὸ ἐνεργητικὸ τοῦ τελευταίου (μεταξὺ τῶν ὁποίων καὶ ἡ κατάπαυση τῶν καταιγίδων) ἀποδόθηκαν στὸν πρῶτο. Τὸν 9ο αἰῶνα ὁ «συνδυασμένος» ἅγιος Νικόλαος ἐμφανίζεται ὡς σπουδαῖος διδάσκαλος τῆς ὀρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ ἡ παράστασή του τοποθετεῖται σὲ ψηφιδωτὸ στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία, σὲ ἴση μοῖρα μὲ τὸν Ἰωάννη τὸν Χρυσόστομο, τὸν Βασίλειο καὶ ἄλλους μεγάλους Πατέρες. Εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ πεῖ κανεὶς γιατί ἔγινε αὐτὴ ἡ ἀναβάθμιση. Ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει, ὁ Νικόλαος εἶχε τὸ πλεονέκτημα νὰ ἔχει μιὰ καθιερωμένη τοπικὴ λατρεία καὶ ἕναν θαυματουργὸ τάφο ποὺ ἀνέδιδε ἱερὸ μύρο. Ἴσως ἡ φήμη του νὰ ἐξαπλώθηκε ἀρχικὰ ἀνάμεσα στοὺς βυζαντινοὺς ναυτικούς ποὺ κατέπλεαν στὸ λιμάνι τῶν Μύρων, καὶ ἔτσι νὰ διαδόθηκε σὲ ἄλλα μέρη τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, ὥσπου ὁ καλοσυνάτος αὐτὸς γέρος μὲ τὸ κοντό, στρογγυλὸ γένι ἔγινε μιὰ ἀπὸ τὶς πιὸ γινώριμες μορφές τοῦ εἰκονογραφικοῦ ρεπερτορίου. Ἡ μεταφορὰ τῶν λειψάνων του στὸ Μπάρι τὸ 1087 συντέλεσε στὴν ἀκόμη μεγαλύτερη ἐξάπλωση τῆς λατρείας του σὲ ὁλόκληρη τὴ Χριστιανοσύνη.

Ἄς δοῦμε καὶ τὴν περίπτωση τοῦ ἁγίου Δημητρίου τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης.¹⁴ Ἦταν καὶ αὐτὸς μιὰ προσωπικότητα ὀμιχλώδης, ποὺ ὑποτίθεται ὅτι ἔπεσε θύμα τοῦ διωγμοῦ τοῦ Διοκλητιανοῦ. Ἀρχικὰ μάλιστα δὲν ἀνῆκε στὴ Θεσσαλονικὴ ἀλλὰ στὸ Σίρμιο. Ὄταν, τὸ 442-3, ἡ πρωτεύουσα τῆς ἐπαρχότητος τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ μεταφέρθηκε στὴ Θεσσαλονικὴ γιὰ νὰ προστατευθεῖ ἀπὸ τὶς ἐπιθέσεις τῶν Οὐνων, μετανάστευσε μαζὶ καὶ ἡ λατρεία τοῦ Δημητρίου. Λίγο ἀργότερα χτίστηκε πρὸς τιμὴν του μιὰ λαμπρὴ βασιλική, ποὺ σώζεται ἀκόμη, ἀν καὶ ὑπέστη μεγάλες ζημιές ἀπὸ φωτιά τὸ 1917. Ἡ ἀπουσία λειψάνων του —τὸν 7ο αἰῶνα δὲν εἶχαν ἐμφανιστεῖ ἀκόμη— σιγὰ σιγὰ ξεχάστηκε ἢ ἀποκρύφτηκε. Ὅχι μόνον ἐμφανίστηκε ἕνας τάφος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἔκαναν, μὲ ἕνα ἀπατηλὸ σύστημα κρυφῶν σωληνώσεων, νὰ ἀναβλύζει ἱερὸ μύρο, ἔτσι ποὺ ὁ Δημήτριος μοιράστηκε μὲ τὸν Νικόλαο τὸν ἐπίζηλο τίτλο τοῦ «μυροβλήτη». Ἀφοῦ μεταμορφώθηκε σὲ στρατιωτικὸ ἅγιο (ἐνῶ ἀρχικὰ ἦταν διάκονος), μὲ μορφή κατσαρομάλλη νεαροῦ, ἐπανειλημμένα («υπερασπίστηκε») τὴν πόλη του ἐναντία στὶς βαρβαρικὲς ἐπιθέσεις.

Παρόμοιες παρατηρήσεις εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ γίνουν καὶ γιὰ ἄλλους δημοφιλεῖς ἁγίους, γιὰ τὸν ἅγιο Θεόδωρο, τὸν ἅγιο Γεώργιο, τὸν ἅγιο Μάμαντα, τὸν ἅγιο Σπυρίδωνα. Ἡ μεσαιωνικὴ νοοτροπία, ἀντίθετα μὲ τὴ σημερινή, δὲν ἐνδιαφερόταν γιὰ τὴν ἱστορικότητα: αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶχε σημασία ἦταν ἡ ὑπαρξὴ μιᾶς τοπικῆς λατρείας, ποὺ παρεῖχε στὸν ἅγιο μιὰ

«βάση». Γιὰ ἕναν Θεσσαλονικιό, ὁ ἅγιος Δημήτριος ἦταν ὁ συμπατριώτης του ποὺ βρισκόταν κοντὰ στὸν Παντοδύναμο καὶ θὰ πρόσεχε ἰδιαίτερα ἕνα αἶτημα ποὺ προερχόταν ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια του τὴν πόλη: ἡ παρουσία του στὸν Οὐρανὸ ἦταν ἀκόμη καλύτερη ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ εἶχαν κάποιο συμπατριώτη τους σὲ μεγάλη θέση στὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα. Ὁ νεφελώδης χαρακτήρας τοῦ ἁγίου δὲν ἦταν ἐμπόδιο στὸ ρόλο αὐτόν: ἀντίθετα, ἦταν πλεονέκτημα, ἀφοῦ ἔτσι μπορούσαν νὰ τὸν στολίσουν μὲ ὅσες ἀρετὲς ἤθελαν, πράγμα ποὺ δὲν θὰ ἦταν δυνατὸ ἂν εἶχε μιὰ ἐντελῶς συγκεκριμένη ἱστορικὴ προσωπικότητα.

Ὁ ἀπλὸς Βυζαντινὸς θεωροῦσε πὼς κάθε ἅγιος κατοικοῦσε, κατὰ κύριο λόγο, στὴν ἐπίσημη ἐκκλησία του, καὶ κατὰ δεύτερο λόγο (ἢ ἴσως κατὰ διαστήματα) σὲ ἄλλες ἐκκλησίες ποὺ ἦταν ἀφιερωμένες σ' αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὰ λείψανά του καὶ τὶς εἰκόνες του, ὅπου καὶ ἂν βρίσκονταν. Γι' αὐτὸ ἐπιχειροῦσαν καὶ τὰ προσκυνήματα. Ὁ Ἰωάννης Μόσχος (περὶ τὸ 600 μ.Χ.) μᾶς λέει γιὰ κάποιον ἀναχωρητὴ κοντὰ στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, ποὺ εἶχε τόσο μεγάλη ἀγάπη γιὰ τοὺς μάρτυρες, ὥστε ἐπιχειροῦσε μεγάλα ταξίδια στὸν Ἁγιο Ἰωάννη στὴν Ἐφεσο, στὸν Ἁγιο Θεόδωρο στὰ Εὐχάιτα τοῦ Πόντου, στὴν Ἁγία Θέκλα στὴ Σελεύκεια τῆς Κιλικίας καὶ στὸν Ἁγιο Σέργιο στὴ Ρέσαφα τῆς Συρίας.¹⁵ Ὅπως λέει ὁ Μόσχος, ὁ ἀναχωρητὴς δὲν ἐπισκεπτόταν τὶς ἐκκλησίες αὐτῶν τῶν μαρτύρων· ἀπλῶς ἐπισκεπτόταν τὸν ἅγιο Ἰωάννη, τὸν ἅγιο Θεόδωρο καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς, σὰν νὰ τοὺς συναντοῦσε προσωπικά. «Ἐνα ἀκόμη πιὸ ἀποκαλυπτικὸ παράδειγμα μᾶς τὸ παρέχει κάποιος Γρηγόριος, βιογράφος τοῦ ἁγίου Βασιλείου τοῦ Νέου (10ος αἰῶνας). Αὐτὸς εἶχε ἕνα κτῆμα στὴ Ραιδεστὸ τῆς Θράκης, ὅπου πῆγαινε τὸ καλοκαίρι γιὰ νὰ μαζέψει τὴ συγκομιδὴ. Κάποτε, πρὶν ξεκινηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη ὅπου ἔμενε συνήθως, πῆγε στὴν ἐκκλησία τοῦ Ἁγίου Στεφάνου στὴ γειτονιά του γιὰ νὰ προσευχηθεῖ νὰ ἔχει ἀσφαλὲς ταξίδι σὲ ξηρὰ καὶ θάλασσα. Ὄταν ὅμως ἔφτασε στὴ Ραιδεστὸ, ἔπεσε στὰ νύχια μιᾶς νέας γυναίκας, ποὺ ἦταν μάγισσα. Ἀντιστάθηκε στοὺς πειρασμούς της, κι ἐκείνη γιὰ νὰ τὸν ἐκδικηθεῖ τοῦ προκάλεσε ἕναν πυρετό. Καθὼς ὁ Γρηγόριος βρισκόταν σὲ κῶμα, θυμήθηκε νὰ στραφεῖ πρὸς τὸν ἅγιο Στέφανο: «Ἁγιε πρωτομάρτυρα Στέφανε, ἀπόστολε τοῦ Χριστοῦ, δὲν σὲ παρακάλεσα νὰ μὲ βοηθήσεις καθὼς ἔφευγα ἀπὸ τὴν Πόλη; Νά, τώρα χάνομαι καὶ δὲν θὰ μὲ ξαναδεῖς, οὔτε θὰ σὲ ὑπηρετήσω ἄλλο —τὸ ξέρω καλά, γιατί εἶμαι κοντὰ στὶς πύλες τοῦ θανάτου». «Τί σοῦ συμβαίνει, φίλε μου;» ἀπάντησε ὁ ἅγιος Στέφανος. «Δὲν ἤμουν ἐδῶ. Ἔχω ἐκκλησίες σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον καὶ τὶς ἐπισκεπτόμουν, ὅπως κάνουν ὅλοι οἱ ἅγιοι. Μὴ μὲ κατηγορεῖς, λοιπόν. Μόλις ἔφτασα.» Ὁ ἅγιος Στέ-

φανος έβαλε τον Γρηγόριο να πει μιá προσευχή — μιá από αυτές τις παλιές μαγικές προσευχές με έπικλήσεις στα σερραφείμ, τὰ χερουβείμ και όλες τις ούράνιες δυνάμεις— και τὰ μάγια λύθηκαν.¹⁶

Είδαμε ότι ο Γρηγόριος πρόσφερε «ύπηρεσίες» που εύχαριστούσαν τον άγιο Στέφανο, κι έτσι γινόταν persona grata. 'Ο θεσμός τής προστασίας παρείχε τὸ ακριβές πρότυπο μιáς τέτοιας πρακτικῆς, και μερικά κείμενα τὸ δηλώνουν σαφώς. Τὸν 7ο αἰώνα ένας γεροντάκος που ὅλη του τῆ ζωῆ ἀνῆκε στη λαϊκῆ ἀδελφότητα τοῦ αἰγίου Ἄρτεμιού (ένος θεραπευτῆ αἰγίου) και ὁ ὁποῖος, ἐντούτοις, ἀπέκτησε ἔλκος, ἔλεγε με πίκρα: «Ἄν εἶχα μπεῖ στην ὑπηρεσία κάποιου ἀνθρώπου στη γῆ, θά με θεωροῦσε ἄξιο μεγαλύτερης ὑποστήριξης και προστασίας». «Ένας ἄλλος ἀπογοητευμένος πελάτης τοῦ αἰγίου Ἄρτεμιού φώναζε: «Τί εἶδους προστασία εἶναι αὐτή; Ὁ αἰγιος εἶναι ἀπατεώνας!»¹⁷ Γιατί ὅπως ακριβώς ὁ θνητός προστάτης διέθετε ἐπιρροή ἀνάμεσα σέ ἰσχυρά πρόσωπα, με τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο θεωροῦσαν ὅτι και ὁ αἰγιος εἶχε τὰ «μέσα» στίς ούράνιες δυνάμεις. Ἡ λέξη κλειδί στο θέμα αὐτό ἦταν ἡ παρηγοσία. Στα ἀρχαῖα ἑλληνικά σημαίνει («ἐλευθερία τοῦ λόγου», τὸ δικαίωμα τοῦ πολίτη νά ἐκφράζει ἐλεύθερα τῆ γνώμη του. Στη βυζαντινῆ περίοδο ὅμως ἡ λέξη ἀπέκτησε μιá ἐντελῶς διαφορετικῆ κλίμακα νοημάτων: ἐνῶ καμιά φορά εἶχε ἀκόμη τὴν ἔννοια τῆς «ἐλευθερίας τοῦ λόγου» ἢ τῆς «τόλμης» (συνήθως με τὴν κακῆ ἔννοια), ὥστόσο ὅλο και περισσότερο σήμαινε αὐτῆ τὴν οἰκειότητα ἢ δυνατότητα πρόσβασης που διέθετε ὁ εὐνοούμενος αὐλικός πρὸς τὸν κύριό του.¹⁸ Με τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο και ὁ αἰγιος διέθετε παρηγοσία μπροστά στον Θεό, με τὴν ὁποία πετύχαινε χάρες για τοὺς ἀνθρώπους του. Ὁ ἴδιος αὐτός Γρηγόριος τὸ ἐκφράζει ἀρκετά κυνικά: «Συχνά βλέπουμε» λέει «τὸ ἴδιο πράγμα και με τὸν θνητὸ αὐτοκράτορα, δηλαδή ὅτι με τῆ μεσολάβηση τῶν στενῶν του φίλων συγχωρεῖ μιá ποινῆ που θά ἐπιβαλλόταν για τὰ βαρύτερα ἐγκλήματα και παραπτώματα». Βέβαια ἡ σωτηρία μποροῦσε νά κερδηθεῖ με τὸν δύσκολο τρόπο, με νηστεῖες και στερήσεις, ἀλλά αὐτὸ δὲν μποροῦσαν νά τὸ κάνουν ὅλοι. Γι' αὐτό, συνεχίζει ὁ συγγραφέας μας, εἶναι σημαντικό νά κερδηθοῦν ἀρκετοὶ αἰγιοὶ ἀνθρωποι, ἢ, ἂν ὄχι ἀρκετοί, τότε λίγοι, κι ἂν ὄχι λίγοι, τουλάχιστον ἕνας. Ἄν ὁ αἰγιος εἶναι ζωντανός, χρησιμοποίησε τὴν περιουσία σου για νά συνεισφέρεις στίς ἀνάγκες του ὥστε νά ζεῖ καλά· ἂν εἶσαι φτωχός, ἐξιλέωσέ τον με σωματικῆ ὑπηρεσία, με ὑπακοή και ταπεινοφροσύνη. Ἄν ἔχει πεθάνει, πρόσφερε στην ἐκκλησία του ὅ,τι μπορεῖς ἀπό λάδι, κερὶ και θυμίαμα ἢ, ἂν εἶσαι ἀρκετά πλούσιος, θρέψε τοὺς φτωχοὺς και ντύσε τοὺς γυμνοὺς. Με αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο, ὅταν ἐγκαταλείψεις τῆ ζωῆ, ὁ αἰγιος θά σέ ὑποδεχτεῖ στον ἄλλο κόσμο και θά

μεσολαβήσει για λογαριασμό σου στη Δευτέρα Παρουσία. Γιατί ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός εἶπε: ὁ δεχόμενος δίκαιον εἰς ὄνομα δικαίου μισθὸν δικαίου λήψεται (Κατὰ Ματθ., Γ', 41).¹⁹

Σὲ συνεχή, ἂν και ἀνιση μάχη με τις δυνάμεις τοῦ φωτός ἦταν οἱ δυνάμεις τοῦ σκότους, οἱ ἀναρίθμητες ὀρδές τῶν δαιμόνων. Θά ἦταν λάθος νά τοὺς ἀπορρίψουμε ὡς δεισιδαιμονία, ἀνάξια τῆς προσοχῆς τοῦ ιστορικοῦ. Για τὸν Βυζαντινὸ οἱ δαίμονες ἦταν μιá πραγματικότητα, και τῆ ζωῆ του ὀλόκληρη τὴν ἐβλεπε ὡς πεδίο μάχης ἀνάμεσα στίς δυνάμεις τοῦ καλοῦ και τοῦ κακοῦ· ἰδιαίτερα μάλιστα ὁ μοναχός, που συνήθιζε νά χρησιμοποιεῖ στρατιωτικῆ φρασεολογία γι' αὐτὰ τὰ θέματα: οἱ λέξεις πόλεμος και πολεμείσθαι ἐπανερχονται συνεχῶς για νά δηλώσουν τὸν πνευματικὸ ἀγῶνα ἐναντίον τῶν δαιμόνων.

Στὴν κατηγορία τῶν δαιμόνων οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ κατέτασαν μιá μεγάλη ποικιλία πνευμάτων, καθένα ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα εἶχε συγκεκριμένη ἀρμοδιότητα ἢ καθορισμένη τοποθεσία. Στὸ πιὸ πρωτόγονο ἐπίπεδο βρίσκουμε τὰ κακοποιὰ πνεύματα τῆς φύσης, που μόλις και μετὰ βίας ἀνήκουν στη χριστιανικῆ θεώρηση τῶν πραγμάτων. Μιá πολὺ λεπτομερῆς προσευχῆ ἐξορκισμοῦ, που ἐσφαλμένα ἀποδίδεται στον Μέγα Βασίλειο, παρέχει τὴν ἀκόλουθη ἀπαρίθμηση δαιμόνων:

«Φοβῆσου, φύγε, δραπετεύσε, ἀναχώρησε, δαιμόνιο ἀκάθαρτο... ὅπου κι ἂν εἶσαι... ἢ πρωινό, ἢ μεσημβρινό, ἢ μεσονύκτιο, ἢ τοῦ ξημερώματος, ἢ τῆς αὐγῆς... ἢ σέ θάλασσα, ἢ σέ ποτάμι, ἢ κάτω ἀπὸ τῆ γῆ, ἢ τοῦ πηγαιδιοῦ, ἢ τοῦ γκρεμοῦ, ἢ ἀπὸ λάκκο, ἢ λίμνη, ἢ καλαμιώνα, ἢ δάσος... ἢ ἄλσος, ἢ δρυμό, ἢ δέντρο, ἢ ὄρνο, ἢ βροντή, ἢ ἀπὸ στέγη λουτροῦ, ἢ σέ δεξαμενῆ νεροῦ... γνωστὸ ἢ ἄγνωστο... φύγε σέ γῆ ἀνυδρη, ἔρημη, ἀγεώρητη, ὅπου δὲν κατοικεῖ κανένας ἀνθρωπος».²⁰

Οἱ Βίοι τῶν αἰγίων εἶναι γεμάτοι ἀναφορές σέ δαίμονες που στοίχειωναν τὴν ὑπαιθρο, ὅπως θά φανεῖ ἀπὸ μερικά παραδείγματα. Τὸν 6ο αἰώνα ζήτησαν ἀπὸ τὸν αἰγιο Νικόλαο τῆς Σιών, που τὸν ἀναφέραμε ἤδη, νά ἀντιμετωπίσει ἕνα δαίμονα που κατοικοῦσε σ' ἕνα τεράστιο κυπαρίσσι, τρομοκρατοῦσε τῆ γύρω περιοχή και σκότωνε ὅποιον πλησίαζε. Μπροστά σέ πολὺν κόσμο ὁ αἰγιος ἄρχισε νά κόβει τὸ δέντρο με τὸ τσεκούρι· αὐτὸ κλονίστηκε και ἄρχισε νά πέφτει πάνω στο πλῆθος (πράγμα που τὸ προκάλεσε φυσικὰ ὁ δαίμονας), ἀλλά ὁ Νικόλαος τὸ ἔπιασε ὀλομόναχος και τὸ ἔριξε πρὸς τὴν ἀντίθετη μεριά. Ἀμέσως ὁ δαίμονας παραδέχτηκε τὴν ἦττα του και ἀποχώρησε.²¹ Οἱ δαίμονες παραμόνευαν στίς ἐρημιές, παραφύλαγαν στα περάσματα ποταμῶν και χειμάρρων, και ἦταν ἰδιαίτερα πολυάριθμοι κάτω ἀπὸ τῆ γῆ. Ἄν κάποιος περπατοῦσε στο ὑπαιθρο τῆ

νύχτα, κινδύνευε να τον κυριεύσουν. "Ένα απρόσχετο σκάψιμο, ιδίως σε μέρος που υπήρχαν ειδωλολατρικά έρείπια, μπορούσε να απελευθερώσει πλήθος δαίμονες που θα κυριεύαν ανθρώπους και ζώα.

Ο Βίος του άγιου Θεοδώρου του Συκεώτη (από τη Γαλατία της Μικράς Ασίας), που πέθανε το 613, μάς προσφέρει μια εξαιρετική ποικιλία ιστοριών με δαίμονες. "Όταν ο άγιος ήταν ακόμη παιδί, έβγαινε τη νύχτα και πήγαινε σε μια εκκλησία του Αγίου Γεωργίου, που βρισκόταν πάνω σ' ένα λόφο κοντά στο χωριό του. Καθώς περπατούσε στο σκοτάδι, του έκαναν επιθέσεις δαίμονες με τη μορφή λύκων και άλλων άγριων ζώων. Μια τοποθεσία κάπου δέκα χιλιόμετρα μακριά από το χωριό των Συκεών ήταν στοιχειωμένη, ιδίως το μεσημέρι, «από τη λεγόμενη Άρτεμη, και πλήθος δαίμονες», έτσι που κανένας δεν μπορούσε να πλησιάσει. "Ένα άλλο σημείο έβριθε τόσο πολύ από ακάθαρτα πνεύματα, που ούτε άνθρωπος ούτε ζώο μπορούσε να πάει κοντά, ιδίως το μεσημέρι και μετά το ήλιοβασιλευμα. Ο άγιος έβαλε να του σκάψουν εκεί μια σπηλιά και έζησε μέσα σ' αυτήν με νηστεία και προσευχή από τα Χριστούγεννα μέχρι την Κυριακή των Βαΐων. Οί επισκέπτες άκουγαν θρηνητικές κραυγές, καθώς η παρουσία του αγίου έτρεπε τα πνεύματα σε φυγή. Στο τέλος, όχι μόνο αποκαθάρθηκε το μέρος εκείνο, αλλά επιπλέον απέκτησε και μια ιδιαίτερη ιερότητα, αφού, αν μια χούφτα χώμα από εκεί ανακατευόταν με φαγητό ή ποτό, θεράπευε ασθένειες σε ανθρώπους και ζώα. Σ' ένα χωριό στην περιοχή της Γορδιανής οί κάτοικοι έχτιζαν μια γέφυρα πάνω από ένα χείμαρρο. Το έργο είχε σχεδόν τελειώσει όταν από τους εργάτες έλειψαν οί πέτρες, όποτε άρχισαν να βγάζουν μερικές πλάκες από κάποιον κοντινό λόφο. Τότε ξεπετάχτηκαν πλήθος ακάθαρτα πνεύματα, που μπήκαν μέσα στους άντρες και τις γυναίκες του χωριού, ενώ άλλα έπιασαν όρισμένα σημεία στη δημοσιά και τις άκρες του χωριού από όπου παρενοχλούσαν τα ζώα και τους περαστικούς. "Εστειλαν λοιπόν και φώναξαν τον άγιο Θεόδωρο, και καθώς αυτός πλησίαζε οί δαίμονες άρχισαν να φωνάζουν: «Γιατί ήρθες από τη Γαλατία στη Γορδιανή; Δεν έπρεπε να περάσεις τα όριά της. Ξέρουμε γιατί ήρθες, αλλά δεν θα σε υπακούσουμε όπως οί δαίμονες της Γαλατίας. Έμείς είμαστε σκληρότεροι από εκείνους». Αλλά μάταια: ο Θεόδωρος έδιωξε τους δαίμονες από τους άντρες και τις γυναίκες. "Επειτα συγκέντρωσε τα πνεύματα που παραμόνευαν στην έξοχη και τους δρόμους (ήταν μεταμορφωμένα σε μύγες, λαγούς και άρουραίους), τα όδηγησε μέσα στο όρυγμα που είχαν ανοίξει οί εργάτες και τα ξανάθαψαν.²²

Μια άλλη φορά, ένας πλούσιος στην Ήράκλεια Ποντική (το σημερινό Karadeniz Ereğlisi) έσκαψε ένα χαντάκι κοντά στο σπίτι του, από όπου

βγήκαν ακάθαρτα πνεύματα, που επιτέθηκαν στα μέλη της οικογένειάς του και σε κατοίκους της πόλης. Σ' ένα χωριό στην περιοχή της Λαγαντινής βρισκόταν μια μαρμάρινη σαρκοφάγος με λείψανα αρχαίων ειδωλολατρών, που τα φύλαγαν δαίμονες. Οί χωρικοί πήραν το σκέπασμα για να το χρησιμοποιήσουν σαν γούρνα, και έτσι απελευθέρωσαν τους δαίμονες. "Ένα παρόμοιο επεισόδιο που συνέβη στα Γέρμια της Γαλατίας προκάλεσε μεγάλη αναταραχή. Ο τοπικός επίσκοπος άρχισε μια μεγάλη έκσκαφή για να φτιάξει μια δεξαμενή νερού. "Επese όμως πάνω σε αρχαίο νεκροταφείο, και οί δαίμονες που κρύβονταν στους τάφους βγήκαν και κυριεύσαν τους κατοίκους, πλούσιους και φτωχούς. Και ενώ οί πλούσιοι από ντροπή περιόρισαν μέσα στα σπίτια τα μέλη των οικογενειών τους που είχαν προσβληθεί, οί φτωχοί μαζεύτηκαν στην εκκλησία. "Εφεραν τότε τον Θεόδωρο, που άρχισε να άνακρίνει τους δαίμονες. Αυτόι έριξαν το φταίξιμο στον επίσκοπο. Ζούσαν πολύ εύχαριστημένοι στους τάφους τους, αλλά όταν ο επίσκοπος από φιλοδοξία τους έδιωξε από τις φτωχικές τους κατοικίες, τότε έξοργίστηκαν —κάτι που κανονικά δεν θα έκαναν στις μέρες ενός τόσο φημισμένου έξορκιστή όπως ο άγιος Θεόδωρος. Μπροστά σε μια μεγάλη συγκέντρωση κληρικών, ακόμη και Έβραίων και αίρετικών, ο Θεόδωρος πραγματοποίησε την ιεροτελεστία του. "Ανάγκασε τους δαίμονες που είχαν κυριεύσει τους φτωχούς να συγκεντρωθούν όλοι μαζί, αλλά τότε αυτοί άρχισαν να διαμαρτύρονται: «Υπάρχουν πολλοί από μάς» έλεγαν «μέσα σε σώματα ανθρώπων που κρύβονται στα σπίτια των πλουσίων και σε ξενοδοχεία. "Ας έρθουν και αυτοί πριν μάς φυλακίσουν». Ο Θεόδωρος δεν υπέκυψε: «"Αν άξιοσέβαστοι πολίτες το έκαναν αυτό από ντροπή, γιατί να τους κάνουμε δημόσιο θέαμα; "Όλα τα κρυμμένα πνεύματα, σε σπίτια ή σε ξενοδοχεία, θα έκδιωχθούν από τους άγγέλους και θα έρθουν εδώ». "Ετσι και έγινε. Υπήρχαν όμως και δυο γυναίκες, δαιμονισμένες από παλιά, που οί δαίμονές τους παραπονιούνταν —και με το δίκιο τους: «Μη μάς κλείσεις εδώ... Έμείς δεν άνήκουμε στην ομάδα τους, είχαμε έρθει από την περιοχή της Καππαδοκίας πριν άρχισει η άνασκαφή». Ο Θεόδωρος συμφώνησε να άσχοληθεί μαζί τους σε άλλη ευκαιρία. Τους υπόλοιπους δαίμονες τους άνάγκασε, για λόγους εύπρεπείας, να μη σχίσουν τελείως τα ρούχα των θυμάτων τους καθώς θα έβγαιναν από το σώμα τους, ώστε οί άντρες να μείνουν με τα έσώρουχά τους και οί γυναίκες με τους χιτώνες τους. "Ετσι οί δαίμονες όδηγήθηκαν πάλι στην τρύπα τους, που σκεπάστηκε με χώμα. Κάθε θύμα που συνεργόταν διηγούνταν τις έμπειρίες του: ένας είχε δεί ένα φίδι: να βγαίνει από το στόμα του, κάποιος άλλος έναν άρουραίο, ένας τρίτος μια σαύρα.²³

Αυτές οι τόσο άπλοϊκές διηγήσεις μάς οδηγούν σε όρισμένες παρατηρήσεις. Πρώτα πρώτα βλέπουμε πόσο ισχυρά τοπικιστικά αισθήματα έδειχναν οι δαίμονες: οι τής Γορδιανής θεωρούσαν τους έαυτούς τους σκληρότερους από εκείνους τής Γαλατίας· οι δαίμονες από την Καππαδοκία άρνούνταν να φυλακιστούν στα Γέρμια, και ή δικαιολογία τους θεωρήθηκε λογική από τον άγιο Θεόδωρο. Δεύτερο, οι δαίμονες σχετιζονταν με τά μνημεία τής άρχαίας ειδωλολατρίας. 'Η ταύτιση τών παγανιστικών θεών με δαίμονες είναι κοινός τόπος στην πρώιμη χριστιανική σκέψη· και στα παραδείγματα που αναφέραμε είδαμε πώς ή "Αρτεμη έμφανίζεται με συνοδεία δαιμόνων. 'Ωστόσο οι παλιοί θεοί είχαν πιά πεθάνει και τό μόνο που είχαν αφήσει ήταν μια θολή μνήμη, μια βλαβερή αύρα. Παρ' όλα αυτά, ή ύπαιθρος ήταν ακόμη γεμάτη από έλληνορωμαϊκές άρχαιότητες. Οι μεγάλες μαρμάρινες σαρκοφάγοι, σκαλισμένες με νεκρικά συμπόσια και άλλες παράξενες μορφές, δέν γινόταν να μήν ξαναχρησιμοποιούνται πότε πότε για γοϋρνες και συντριβάνια, ταυτόχρονα όμως είχαν και κάτι άπειλητικό. 'Από φόβο μήπως άπελευθερωθούν οι δαίμονες που φύλαγαν τις άρχαιότητες, οι άνθρωποι θεωρούσαν συχνά άσφαλέστερο να μήν τις άγγίζουν —συνήθεια για την όποία οι άρχαιολόγοι πρέπει να τους εύγνωμοούν.

Οι δαίμονες ήταν πάντα έτοιμοι να μπούν στα σώματα τών ανθρώπων και τών οικόσιτων ζώων όπου, άπολαμβάνοντας τή ζέστη και την ύγρασία, μπορούσαν να κατοικούν σαν παράσιτα για πολλά χρόνια. 'Έτσι όμως προξενούσαν διάφορες άσθένειες, καθώς και σάλεμα στα λογικά. Βέβαια όλες τις άρρώστιες δέν τις προκαλούσαν οι δαίμονες, και μερικές θεραπεύονταν με φάρμακα ή στις ιαματικές πηγές· έντούτοις πολλές ήταν άποτελεσμα δαιμονισμού, και κατά συνέπεια ήταν πέρα από τις δυνατότητες του γιατρού. Μόνο ένας έξορκιστής μπορούσε να βοηθήσει, αλλά ή μέθοδος του ήταν σκληρή. Συχνά χτυπούσε τον άσθενή στο στῆθος ή τον έριχνε κάτω και τον πατούσε στο λαιμό. 'Ο δαίμονας δέν έβγαινε εύκολα και μπορεί να προκαλούσε μετεωρισμό του σώματος· και όταν άναγκαζόταν να βγει έφερε σπασμούς στον άσθενή, τον έκανε να ξεσχίζει τά ρούχα του και τον άφηνε άναίσθητο. "Όταν όμως ή θεραπεία πετύχαινε, ήταν πλήρης.

'Εκτός από τους κατώτερους δαίμονες, υπῆρχε και μια τάξη άξιωματικών με έξειδικευμένες άρμοδιότητες. 'Ακούμε συχνά για τό δαίμονα τής πορνείας και τό δαίμονα τής πλήξης ή λιποψυχίας (άκηθίας), στις έπιθέσεις τών όποιων ήταν ιδιαίτερα εύάλωτοι οι μοναχοί. 'Ο δαίμονας τής ύπνηλίας και του χασμουρητού κοίμιζε τους πιστούς στη διάρκεια τής λει-

τουργίας.²⁴ Μερικοί από τους δαίμονες αυτούς είχαν στρατιωτικούς βαθμούς στην καταχθόνια ιεραρχία —έκατόνταρχος ή χιλίαρχος. Στην τελευταία κατηγορία άνήκε ο δαίμονας του ίπποδρόμου, που δρούσε ακόμη τον 10ο αιώνα, αν και οι άγώνες στον ίππόδρομο είχαν καταντήσει μια σπάνια τελετουργία.²⁵

'Αντίθετα από τον Σατανά του Milton, ο βυζαντινός δαίμονας δέν ήταν ένας περήφανος έπαναστάτης· άπεναντίας ήταν μάλλον έξαθλιωμένος, όπως τον είχε φανταστεί και ο Ντοστογιέφσκι. Συνήθως έμφανίζόταν σαν μικρόσωμος νέγρος ή σαν φίδι, μαύρος σκύλος, πίθηκος, κοράκι ή ποντικός. Μπορούσε όμως να πάρει κι άλλες μορφές, όπως για παράδειγμα άραβα έμπορού ή γριάς. 'Ηταν δειλός και ψεύτης και μύριζε άσχημα. "Όπως γνώριζε κάθε μοναχός, ή άγαπημένη του τακτική ήταν να προκαλεί βρώμικες σκέψεις ή αισθήματα λιποψυχίας. "Όταν αυτά δέν έφερναν άποτελεσμα, τρομοκρατούσε τό θύμα του παίρνοντας μορφή θηρίου ή γίγαντα, και καμιά φορά κατέφευγε στη σωματική βία. Πολύ συχνά έκανε προβλέψεις, όχι γιατί γνώριζε τό μέλλον, αλλά έπειδή μπορούσε να κινηθεί πολύ γρήγορα (καθώς ήταν πνεύμα) και έτσι μπορούσε ή να άναγγείλει γεγονότα που είχαν συμβεί μακριά ή να βγάλει πιθανά συμπεράσματα από αυτά. Παραδείγματος χάρη, αν κοντά στις πηγές του Νείλου έβρεχε πολύ, ο δαίμονας θα μπορούσε με σιγουριά να προβλέψει πλημμύρες στην Αίγυπτο. "Όσο πιο άγιος ήταν κάποιος, τόσο πιο πολύ τον ζήλευε ο δαίμονας και προσπαθούσε να τον παγιδέψει. 'Αλλά ο άγιος συνήθως είχε «τό χάρισμα να διακρίνει τά πνεύματα». Μπορούσε να μυριστεί, κατά κάποιον τρόπο, τό διάβολο και να τον τρέψει σε φυγή με τό σημείο του σταυρού ή λέγοντας τον Ψαλμό ΕΗ': «'Αναστήτω ο Θεός, και διασκορπισθήτωσαν οι έχθροί αυτού, και φυγέτωσαν από προσώπου αυτού οι μισούντες αυτόν». Γιατί κατά βάθος οι δαίμονες ήταν άνίσχυροι· όπως είχε παρατηρήσει ο άγιος 'Αντώνιος, έπρεπε να ζητήσουν την άδεια του Θεού ακόμη και για να μπούν στους χοίρους τών Γαδάρων. Και για ποιόν άλλο λόγο έπαιρναν τή μορφή κατώτερων ζώων;²⁶

'Η ζωή στη γῆ είχε δύο επίπεδα, ένα όρατό και ένα άόρατο, και από αυτά τό δεύτερο ήταν πολύ πιο σημαντικό. Οι άπλοι θνητοί δέν άντιλαμβάνονταν τον άγώνα που γινόταν συνεχώς για τή σωτηρία τους, αλλά οι άγιοι άνθρωποι μπορούσαν πράγματι να δούν και να όσφρανθούν τά πνευματικά όντα, τόσο τά καλά όσο και τά κακά. 'Η τελική φάση του άγώνα διαδραματιζόταν την ώρα του θανάτου του ανθρώπου και άμέσως μετά. Γιατί την ώρα που ο άνθρωπος ξεψυχούσε, πλήθος δαίμονες έτρεχαν στο νεκροκρέβατο έλπίζοντας να κερδίσουν την ψυχή του, αλλά έμποδίζονταν

ἀπὸ τὸν φύλακα ἄγγελό του. Ὄταν ἡ ψυχὴ ἀποχωριζόταν ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα ἔπρεπε νὰ ταξιδεύει στὸν ἀέρα καὶ νὰ σταματήσει σὲ ὀρισμένα τελώνια (δηλαδή τελωνεῖα) ὅπου ὑπῆρχαν δαίμονες ποὺ ἐξέταζαν τὶς πράξεις τῆς στῆ γῆ καὶ ἢ τὴν ἀφηνάαν νὰ συνεχίσει, ἀφοῦ πλήρωνε τὸν ἀνάλογο δασμὸ, ποὺ ὑπολογιζόταν σὲ καλὲς πράξεις, ἢ τὴ συλλάμβαναν ἐπιτόπου. Αὐτὴ ἡ παράξενη πεποίθηση, ποὺ εἶχε πιθανὸν αἰγυπτιακὴ καταγωγὴ, φαίνεται νὰ ὑποδηλώνεται ἤδη στὸ Βίο τοῦ ἁγίου Ἁντωνίου.²⁷ Δύο ἢ τρεῖς αἰῶνες ἀργότερα ὁ ἅγιος Συμεών, ὁ ἱερός τρελὸς τῆς Ἑμεσας, προσευχόταν μὲ αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια γιὰ τὴ σωτηρίαν τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς μητέρας του, ποὺ εἶχε μόλις πεθάνει: «Δῶσε τῆς, Κύριε, συνοδείαν ἀγγέλων γιὰ νὰ προστατεύσουν τὴν ψυχὴ τῆς ἀπὸ τὰ κακὰ πνεύματα καὶ τὰ ἄγρια θηρία τοῦ ἀέρα, ποὺ προσπαθοῦν νὰ καταπιοῦν ὅσους περνοῦν».²⁸

Σύμφωνα μὲ ἓνα κείμενο τοῦ 10ου αἰῶνα,²⁹ ὑπῆρχαν εἴκοσι ἓνα τελώνια, ποὺ τὸ καθένα ἀντιπροσώπευε μιὰ ἀπὸ τὶς παρακάτω ἁμαρτίες: συκοφαντία, διαστροφή, φθόνος, ψευδὸς, ὀργή, ἀλαζονία, κουφότητα (ποὺ περιλάμβανε τὰ χάχανα, τὰ ἀστεῖα, τὴν αἰσχροτότητα, τὸ προκλητικὸ βᾶδισμα καὶ τὰ ἀκόλαστα τραγούδια), τοκογλυφία μαζί μὲ ἀπάτη, λιποψυχία μὲ ματαιοδοξία, ἀπληστία (αὐτὸ καλυπτόταν ἀπὸ πυκνὸ σύννεφο σκότους), μέθη, ἀνάμνηση τοῦ κακοῦ, μαγεία, λαιμαργία (ποὺ περιλάμβανε τὴν ἀπαγορευμένη κατανάλωση τροφῶν στῆ διάρκεια νηστειῶν), εἰδωλολατρία καὶ αἵρεση, ὁμοφυλοφιλικὲς σχέσεις ἀντρῶν καὶ γυναικῶν, μοιχεία, φόνος, κλοπὴ, πορνεία καὶ, τέλος, σκληρότητα. Στὸ κείμενο ἀναφέρεται ὅτι ἡ μεγάλη πλειονότητα τῶν ψυχῶν ἀποτύγχανε νὰ περάσει τὰ τελώνια τῆς μοιχείας καὶ τῆς πορνείας—ἓνα ἐνδιαφέρον σχόλιο γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ ζωὴ. Εἶναι πάντως ἄξιο ἰδιαίτερης προσοχῆς ὅτι οἱ ἐπικεφαλῆς δαίμονες κρατοῦσαν λεπτομερεῖς κώδικες, στοὺς ὁποίους ἦταν γραμμένο κάθε ἁμάρτημα μὲ τὴν ἀκριβὴ ἡμερομηνία του καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν μαρτύρων. Μόνον ὅταν κάποιος ὁμολογοῦσε πλήρως τὸ ἁμάρτημά του στῆ γῆ καὶ ἐξίλειωνόταν γι' αὐτὸ σβηνόταν ἡ ἐγγραφή του ἀπὸ τὸν κώδικα. Τὸ βᾶρος τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς γραφειοκρατίας καὶ ὁ φόβος τοῦ φοροεισπράκτορα δὲν θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ ἀπεικονιστοῦν πιὸ παραστατικά.

Εἶναι δίκαιο νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία δὲν υἱοθέτησε ποτὲ ἐπίσημα τὴν ἀλλόκοτη ἰδέαν τῶν τελωνίων. Ποιὰ μπορεῖ νὰ ἦταν ἡ τύχη τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν πεθαμένων πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία ἦταν ἓνα ἐρώτημα ποὺ παρέμενε ἐκκρεμές. Ἡ συνήθεια νὰ προσεύχονται γιὰ τὸν πεθαμένο καὶ νὰ κάνουν προσφορὰς στῆν ἐκκλησία τὴν τρίτη, τὴν ἑνατὴ καὶ τὴν τεσσαρακοστὴ μέρα μετὰ τὸ θάνατο προϋποθέτει πῶς ὑπῆρχε δυνατότητα νὰ μεταβληθεῖ ἢ, ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει, νὰ γίνῃ ἐπιεικέστερη ἡ

ἐτυμηγορία. Μερικοὶ πίστευαν ὅτι γιὰ σαράντα μέρες μετὰ τὸ θάνατο ἡ ψυχὴ ἐπισκεπτόταν πάλι τοὺς χώρους τῆς γῆινης ζωῆς τῆς, ἔβλεπε τὶς χαρὰς τοῦ Παραδείσου καὶ τὰ βασανιστήρια τῆς Κόλασης καί, ἀφοῦ δῆλωνε τὴν ὑποταγὴ τῆς στὸν Κύριο, τῆς παραχωροῦνταν κάποιος τόπος διαμονῆς.³⁰ Ὄταν ρώτησαν τὸν Γεννάδιο Σχολάριο, τὸν πρῶτο πατριάρχη τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης μετὰ τὴν Ἄλωση, πάνω στὸ θέμα αὐτό, ἔδωσε τὴν ἐξῆς ἐπιφυλακτικὴ ἀπάντηση. Οἱ ψυχὲς τῶν δικαίων πηγαίνουν κατευθείαν στὸν Παράδεισο μετὰ τὸ θάνατο, καὶ οἱ ψυχὲς τῶν ἀμετανόητων ἁμαρτωλῶν πηγαίνουν στὴν Κόλαση ἢ σὲ κάποιον ἄλλο σκοτεινὸ καὶ δυσάρεστο τόπο. Ὅσο γιὰ τοὺς ὑπόλοιπους, ὑπάρχουν τρεῖς δυνατότητες: αὐτὲς οἱ «μέσες» ψυχὲς εἴτε πηγαίνουν προσωρινὰ στὸν γῆινο Παράδεισο ἢ, ὅπως πίστευαν οἱ Λατίνοι, σὲ κάποιον καθαρτήριο ποὺ βρίσκεται κοντὰ στὸ κοίλο ὄριο τοῦ ἀέρα, ἢ, τέλος, ἀναγκάζονται νὰ περάσουν ἀπὸ τὰ τελώνια. Ὁ Σχολάριος θεωροῦσε πιθανότερη τὴν τρίτη ἐκδοχή, καθὼς μάλιστα τὴν ἐπιβεβαίωσαν πολλὲς παραδόσεις. Φαίνεται πάντως ὅτι δὲν εἶχε τόσο στὸ νοῦ του μιὰ ἀπευθείας διέλευση τῶν ψυχῶν ἀπὸ τὰ τελώνια, ὅσο μιὰ παρατεταμένη διαμονή, ἢ περιφορὰ πάνω καὶ κάτω, ποὺ βοηθοῦσε τὴν ψυχὴ νὰ θυμηθεῖ τὶς κακὲς τῆς πράξεις καὶ νὰ ἐξαγνιστεῖ.³¹

Ὁ ρόλος τῶν δαιμόνων στὴν ὑπαρξὴ κάθε ἀνθρώπου ὀλοκληρωνόταν μὲ τὴ μεταθανάτια ἐξέταση τῆς ψυχῆς. Ὅπως γινόταν στῆ γῆ, ἔτσι καὶ στὴν ὑπεραισθητὴ σφαῖρα ἡ τύχη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀποφασιζόταν ἀπὸ τὴ γραφειοκρατία τῶν ἀγγέλων καὶ τῶν δαιμόνων. Χωρισμένες ἀνάλογα μὲ τὴν τάξη τους, οἱ ψυχὲς τῶν πεθαμένων περιμέναν τώρα τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία, ποὺ δὲν ἦταν κάποια κρίση ἀλλὰ ἓνα εἶδος μεγαλόπρεπης αὐτοκρατορικῆς τελετῆς, κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς ὁποίας οἱ ποινὲς ποὺ εἶχαν ἤδη ἐπιβληθεῖ ὀριστικοποιούνταν. Ἀλλὰ γι' αὐτὸ θὰ μιλήσουμε σὲ ἄλλο κεφάλαιο.

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ Η'
ΤΟ ΦΥΣΙΚΟ ΣΥΜΠΑΝ

Δὲν πρέπει νὰ μᾶς παραπλανᾷ ἡ ἀποψη ὅτι οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ κληρονόμησαν τὴν ἐπιστημονικὴ θεώρηση τῶν ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων, ὅσο κι ἂν ἀληθεύει ὡς ἓνα βαθμὸν. Εἶναι γεγονός ὅτι μερικὰ μέλη τῆς πνευματικῆς ἐλίτ τοῦ Βυζαντίου, σὲ ἄλλες περιόδους περισσότερο καὶ σὲ ἄλλες λιγότερο, ἀφοσιώθηκαν στὴ μελέτη τῆς ἀρχαίας κοσμολογίας καὶ γεωγραφίας. Κείμενα τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλη, τοῦ Πτολεμαίου, τοῦ Στράβωνα καὶ ἄλλων συγγραφέων ἀντιγράφονταν καὶ σχολιάζονταν· ἀλλὰ, μολονότι πρέπει νὰ εὐγνωμονοῦμε αἰώνια τοὺς βυζαντινοὺς λογίους πού μᾶς διέσωσαν αὐτὴ τὴν κληρονομιά, θὰ ἦταν λάθος νὰ ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι οἱ προσπάθειές τους εἶχαν κάποιον ὑπολογισμό ἀντίχτυπο στὸ πλατὺ κοινό. Βεβαίως ἀπὸ τὸν συνηθισμένο Βυζαντινὸ δὲν ἔλειπε τελείως τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον γιὰ τὸν κόσμον πού τὸν περιέβαλλε, ἀλλὰ γι' αὐτὸν τὰ προβλήματα τῶν φυσικῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἀποτελοῦσαν μέρος τῆς βιβλικῆς ἐρμηνείας τοῦ Ἑξαήμερου. Τὸ κείμενο-κλειδί ἦταν τὸ πρῶτο κεφάλαιο τῆς Γένεσης, πού παρὰ τὴ βραχύτητά του περιέχει πολλὰ παράδοξα. Ἐπρεπε ἐπίσης νὰ ληφθοῦν ὑπόψη μερικὰ βιβλικὰ κείμενα, ἰδίως οἱ Ψαλμοὶ καὶ ὁ Ἡσαΐας, ἀλλὰ τὸ κύριο πρόβλημα ἦταν ἡ ἐρμηνεία τῆς Γένεσης, πού παρουσίαζε πολλές δυσκολίες, τόσο γιὰ ἐκεῖνα πού γράφει ὅσο καὶ γιὰ ἐκεῖνα πού παραλείπει. Πρέπει νὰ ξεκινήσουμε κατανοώντας κάπως τίς δυσκολίες αὐτές.

Λέγεται ὅτι τὴν πρώτη μέρα ὁ Θεὸς δημιούργησε τὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ τὴ γῆ, ἡ ὁποία μέχρι τότε ἦταν ἀόρατη καὶ ἄμορφη. Σκότος κάλυπτε τὴν ἄβυσσος καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ πλανιόταν πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ νερό. Ὁ Θεὸς ἐπίσης δημιούργησε τὸ φῶς, πού τὸ διαχώρισε ἀπὸ τὸ σκότος, καὶ ὠνόμασε τὸ φῶς «ἡμέρα». Τὴ δεύτερη μέρα δημιούργησε τὸ στερέωμα γιὰ νὰ διαχωρίσει τὰ νερά πού ἦταν πάνω ἀπὸ αὐτὸ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνα πού ἦταν ἀποκάτω, καὶ ἀποκάλεσε τὸ στερέωμα «οὐρανό».

Ὁ ἀμερόληπτος ἀναγνώστης μπερδεύεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχή. Ἀφοῦ ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη δημιουργήθηκαν τὴν τέταρτη μέρα, πῶς ἦταν δυνατό

νὰ ὑπάρχουν τρεῖς προηγούμενες μέρες, πού ἡ καθεμιὰ εἶχε πρῶι καὶ βράδυ; Τί ἦταν αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς πού δὲν προερχόταν ἀπὸ τὸν ἥλιο, καὶ τί ἦταν αὐτὸ τὸ σκοτάδι πού δὲν φαίνεται νὰ εἶχε δημιουργηθεῖ; Ἡ ἄβυσσος ἦταν τὸ ἴδιο πράγμα μὲ τὸ νερό; Καί, προπάντων, τί ἀκριβῶς ἦταν τὸ στερέωμα πού ἦταν διαφορετικὸ ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ ἐντούτοις ὀνομαζόταν «οὐρανός», καὶ τί ἦταν τὰ ὕδατα πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ στερέωμα;

Τὴν τρίτη μέρα ὁ Θεὸς εἶπε: «συναχθήτω τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ὑποκάτω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ εἰς συναγωγὴν μίαν, καὶ ὀφθήτω ἡ ξηρά». Καὶ ὠνόμασε τὴν ξηρὰ «γῆν» καὶ τὰ συστήματα τῶν ὑδάτων τὰ ὠνόμασε «θαλάσσας». Ἀφοῦ τὸ νερὸ φυσικὰ ρεεῖ πρὸς τὰ κάτω, πῶς δὲν συμπεριφέρθηκε μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο τὴν πρώτη μέρα ἀντὶ νὰ περιμένει τὴ διαταγὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ; Γιατί ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή μερικές φορές ἀναφέρει μιὰ θάλασσα πού καταλαμβάνει ἓναν μόνο χῶρον καὶ ἄλλες φορές ἀναφέρει διάφορες θάλασσες; Τέλος, γιατί ὁ Θεὸς δημιούργησε τὰ χόρτα καὶ τὰ ὀπωροφόρα δέντρα τὴν τρίτη μέρα, ὅταν ὁ ἥλιος δὲν ὑπῆρχε ἀκόμη;

Οἱ δύο μεγάλοι φωστῆρες καὶ τὰ ἀστέρια δημιουργήθηκαν τὴν τέταρτη μέρα. Τὸ κείμενο λέει καθαρὰ ὅτι αὐτὰ ἦταν («ἐν τῷ στερεώματι») ἢ «ἐν τῷ στερεώματι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ». Δὲν διευκρινίζεται ἂν ἡ σελήνη δημιουργήθηκε πανσέληνος, ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ ἡ λεπτομέρεια ἀφοροῦσε τὴ χρονολόγηση μᾶλλον παρὰ τὴ δομὴ τοῦ σύμπαντος.

Ἡ δημιουργία τῶν ψαριῶν, τῶν πουλιῶν καὶ τῶν ζώων τῆς γῆς δὲν προκαλοῦσε ἰδιαίτερη δυσκολία. Ἀλλὰ πῶς μπορούσε νὰ ἐρμηνεύσει κανεὶς τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ ὅταν δημιουργοῦσε τὸν ἄνθρωπον; Γιατί εἶπε «ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν»; Σὲ ποιὸν ἀπευθύνονταν, καὶ ποιά εἶναι ἡ ἔννοια τοῦ «κατ' εἰκόνα»;

Ἡ περιγραφή τοῦ Παραδείσου στὸ Κεφάλαιο Β' τῆς Γένεσης ἔθετε πρόσθετα προβλήματα, αὐτὴ τὴ φορά γεωγραφικῆς φύσεως. Ὁ Παράδεισος τοποθετήθηκε κάπου στὰ ἀνατολικά, καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ ἀνάβλυζαν τέσσερις ποταμοί, δηλαδὴ ὁ Φισῶν, «οὗτος ὁ κυκλῶν πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν Εὐιλιάτ, ἐκεῖ οὐ ἔστι τὸ χρυσίον», ὁ Γεῶν, «οὗτος ὁ κυκλῶν πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν Αἰθιοπίας», ὁ Τίγρις (κατὰ τὴ μετάφραση τῶν Ἑβδομήκοντα), πού ρεεῖ ἀπέναντι ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ τῶν Ἀσσυρίων, καὶ ὁ Εὐφράτης. Ἀκόμη κι ἂν οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ δὲν εἶχαν κάποια ξεκάθαρη ἰδέα γιὰ τὸν Φισῶν καὶ τὴ γῆ Εὐιλιάτ, τὰ τρία ἄλλα ποτάμια ἦταν πασίγνωστα: ὁ Γεῶν δὲν μπορούσε παρὰ νὰ εἶναι ὁ Νεῖλος, ἐνῶ ὁ Τίγρις καὶ ὁ Εὐφράτης ἀναφέρονταν μὲ τὸ ὄνομά τους. Ἡ-ταν ἐπίσης γενικὰ γνωστὸ ὅτι οἱ δύο τελευταῖοι εἶχαν τίς πηγές τους στὴν Περσικὴ Ἀρμενία, ἐνῶ οἱ πηγές τοῦ Νεῖλου βρίσκονταν πολὺ μακριὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴ χώρα, κάπου στὴν Αἰθιοπία. Πῶς γινόταν τότε καὶ οἱ τρεῖς αὐτοὶ

ποταμοί, για να μην αναφέρουμε τον αίνιγματικό Φισών, να αναβλύζουν από το ίδιο μέρος, τον Παράδεισο;¹ Δεν θα μπορούσε κανείς να φτάσει στον Παράδεισο αναπλέοντας αυτούς τους ποταμούς; Και, αν ό επίγειος Παράδεισος υπήρχε ακόμη, όπως υπονοεί ή 'Αγία Γραφή, που άκριβώς βρισκόταν, και γιατί δεν τον είχε δεϊ κανείς μετά την έξωση του 'Αδάμ από εκεί;

Αυτές ήταν μερικές από τις κύριες δυσκολίες που σχετιζονταν με το κείμενο της Γένεσης. 'Υπήρχε επίσης μιá σημαντική παράλειψη: τίποτε δεν λέγεται για τη δημιουργία των άγγέλων, ενώ το βιβλίο του 'Ιώβ υποστηρίζει (ΛΗ', 7) —και αυτά είναι έπακριβώς τα λόγια που είπε ό Κύριος «δια λαίλαπος και νεφών»— ότι «ότε εγενήθησαν άστρα, ήνεσάν με φωνή μεγάλη πάντες άγγελοι μου». 'Επομένως οι άγγελοι υπήρχαν ήδη την τέταρτη μέρα. Και αν το έρπετο που έβαλε σε πειρασμό την Εύα ήταν ό διάβολος, τότε έγινε ή πτώση του Σατανά;

Τό σχεδόν αδύνατο έργο του συμβιβασμού του βιβλικού κειμένου με τις ιδέες περι κόσμου που ήταν γενικά άποδεκτές κατά την αρχαιότητα είχε αναληφθεί πριν από την αρχή της βυζαντινής περιόδου, και μπορεί να τό παρακολουθήσει κανείς από τον Φίλωνα τον 'Ιουδαίο, τον 1ο μ.Χ. αιώνα, στον Θεόφιλο 'Αντιοχείας (2ος αϊ.), τον 'Ωριγένη (3ος αϊ.), μέχρι τον Μέγα Βασίλειο (4ος αϊ.). 'Εμείς δεν θα τό παρακολουθήσουμε εδώ λεπτομερώς: θα σημειώσουμε μόνο ότι οι πρώιμοι έρμηνευτές έδωσαν όρισμένες άπαντήσεις που έπρόκειτο να θεωρηθούν όριστικές. "Έτσι, ό Φίλων έλυσε τό πρόβλημα της δημιουργίας των χόρτων και των δέντρων πριν από τον ήλιο. Αυτό έγινε, λέει, για να μην αποδώσουν οι άνθρωποι την ανάπτυξη της χλωρίδας στην επίδραση του ήλιου, με άλλα λόγια σαν ένα έπιχείρημα κατά της ειδωλολατρίας. 'Ο Φίλων επίσης έρμήνευσε «όρθά» τό λεγόμενο στη Γένεση (Α', 14) ότι τα ούράνια σώματα χρησίμευαν «εις σημεία και εις καιρούς», λέγοντας ότι σκοπός τους ήταν να αναγγέλλουν τις καιρικές αλλαγές και να δίνουν τη δυνατότητα στους ανθρώπους να κάνουν μερικές αναγκαίες προβλέψεις, και όχι να δικαιώσουν την άστρολογία. 'Από την άλλη μεριά, ή πιό εύφυη υπόθεση του Φίλωνα, δηλαδή ή έρμηνεία του ότι ή πρώτη μέρα της Δημιουργίας αναφέρεται σε έναν ιδεατό κόσμο, που φωτίζεται από ένα νοητό φώς, δεν έγινε άποδεκτή.²

'Η συνεισφορά του Θεοφίλου 'Αντιοχείας³ άποδείχτηκε πιό άνθεκτική, γιατί ήταν πιό προσγειωμένη. 'Εξήγησε ότι ό ούρανός που έγινε την πρώτη μέρα δεν ήταν ό ούρανός που είναι όρατός σ' έμας αλλά ένας άλλος, ακόμη ψηλότερα από αυτόν, φτιαγμένος σαν στέγη ή θόλος —σε

συσχετισμό με τό λεγόμενο στον 'Ησαϊα (Μ', 22) «ό στήσας ως καμάραν τον ούρανόν και διατείνας ως σκηνήν κατοικεϊν» (στη μετάφραση των 'Εβδομήκοντα). Τη γη την έρμήνευσε ως βάση και θεμέλιο· την άβυσσο ως πλήθος υδάτων. Τα μισά από αυτά, λέει, ύψώθηκαν πάνω από τό στερέωμα για να παρέχουν τις βροχές και τη δροσιά· τα άλλα μισά αφέθηκαν στη γη για να σχηματίσουν τα ποτάμια, τις πηγές και τις θάλασσες. 'Ο Θεόφιλος μάλλον άνόητα συσχέτισε τη βροχή με τα νερά πάνω από τό στερέωμα, και αυτό τό τμήμα της θεωρίας του άργότερα εγκαταλείφθηκε, αλλά ή εξήγησή του για τη δροσιά, που έμφανίζεται χωρίς τη μεσολάβηση των νεφών, διατηρήθηκε. 'Ο Θεόφιλος εισήγαγε επίσης όρισμένες συμβολικές συγκρίσεις που έπρόκειτο να γίνουν κοινοί τόποι: ή σελήνη που μικραίνει και ξαναγεννιέται αναφέρεται στον άνθρωπο· τα μεγάλα ψάρια και τα σαρκοβόρα πουλιά στους άπληστους και παράνομους ανθρώπους· τα τετράποδα στους ανθρώπους που άγνοούν τον Θεό. 'Ακόμη πιό σημαντική ήταν ή έρμηνεία ότι ό πληθυντικός του «ποιήσωμεν άνθρωπον» άπευθυνόταν στο Λόγο, δηλαδή στον Υίο.

'Αφήνοντας κατά μέρος τον 'Ωριγένη, που ή πολύπλοκη έρμηνεία του παραμερίστηκε, έρχόμαστε στις όμιλίες του άγίου Βασιλείου στο 'Εξαήμερον, ένα κείμενο που άποδείχτηκε έξαιρετικά δημοφιλές και με πλατιά έπιρροή σε όλη τη βυζαντινή περίοδο.⁴ Οι άπόψεις του μπορούν να συνοψιστούν στα εξής:

1. 'Απορρίπτει όλες τις ειδωλολατρικές θεωρίες περι του σύμπαντος με τό έπιχείρημα ότι άλληλοσυγκρούονται. Συνεπώς δεν συντρέχει λόγος να τις αναιρέσει κανείς· αυτοκαιροούνται. Ποιός είναι ό σκοπός όλης αυτής της αριθμητικής και της γεωμετρίας, της μελέτης των στερεών, ακόμη και της περιφημής άστρονομίας; "Όλα αυτά είναι μιá «έπίπονη ματαιοδοξία». Καθώς λέει ό άπόστολος Παύλος (ένα κείμενο-κλειδί στην περίπτωση αυτή), *εματαιώθησαν εν τοις διαλογισμοις αυτών, και έσκοτίσθη ή ασύνετος αυτών καρδιά· φάσκοντες είναι σοφοί έμωράνθησαν (Προς Ρωμαίους, Α', 21-22)*.

2. 'Η βεβαιότητα, που τόσο θλιβερά άπουσιάζει από τους ειδωλολάτρεις, παρέχεται από τον Μωυσή (ό όποιος θεωρείται συγγραφέας της Γένεσης): οι άκαδημαϊκοί του τίτλοι ήταν έξαιρετοι, αφού είχε μαθητεύσει κοντά στους αιγύπτιους σοφούς και είχε περάσει σαράντα χρόνια διολογίζόμενος. "Έτσι έξοπλισμένος είδε τον Θεό πρόσωπο με πρόσωπο και του ειπώθηκε ή αλήθεια άπευθείας. Τί χρειάζεται λοιπόν να άκούει κανείς τα ανθρώπινα έπιχειρήματα;

3. Την 'Αγία Γραφή πρέπει να την κατανοούμε κατά λέξη και όχι

αλληγορικά. "Αν άποσιωπά όρισμένα θέματα, αυτό συμβαίνει γιατί τὰ θέματα αυτά δέν μάς άφοροῦν.

4. Τό σύμπαν έχει ένα ήθικό σκοπό: είναι ένα σχολείο στο όποιο οι λογικές ψυχές διδάσκονται και καθοδηγοῦνται πρὸς τὰ άνω, πρὸς τή θεωρηση τοῦ άοράτου. Έπομένως ή μελέτη τοῦ κόσμου όφείλει νά καθοδηγεῖται από ένα πνεῦμα άποκαθαρμένο από σαρκικά πάθη, έλεύθερο από τις καθημερινές φροντίδες, που πάντοτε θά άναζητῆ μια έπαρκή κατανόηση τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Αυτά ως πρὸς τις άρχές. "Ας έρθουμε τώρα στα έπιμέρους. Πρῶτα πρῶτα ο Βασίλειος καθορίζει ότι ο κόσμος δέν είναι αιώνας: είχε άρχή και θά έχει τέλος, γιατί ο οὐρανός και ή γῆ παρελεύσονται (Κατά Ματθ., ΚΔ', 35). Φαίνεται ότι πριν από τή δημιουργία τοῦ κόσμου υπήρχε μια «παιλιότερη κατάσταση», που φωτιζόταν από ένα πνευματικό φῶς και βρισκόταν εκτός χρόνου, αλλά ο Βασίλειος δέν τήν προσδιορίζει σαφῶς. "Η χρονική δημιουργία άρχισε με τή δημιουργία τοῦ άνωτερου οὐρανοῦ, που είναι φτιαγμένος από μια ουσία φωτός, κάτι σαν τόν καπνό. Αυτό δηλώνεται από τόν 'Ησαία (ΝΑ', 6), και δέν χρειάζεται περισσότερη έρευνα. "Ο ίδιος προφήτης έξηγεῖ επίσης, όπως είδαμε, ότι ο οὐρανός φτιάχτηκε σαν θόλος. "Όσο για τή γῆ, είναι έξίσου άχρηστο νά ρωτάμε πάνω σε τί έδράζεται. "Αν στηρίζεται πάνω στον άέρα, γιατί ο άέρας δέν υποχωρεῖ από τὸ βάρος; "Αν έδράζεται πάνω στο νερό, γιατί δέν βυθίζεται ή γῆ; Και έπιπλέον, που στηρίζεται τὸ νερό; Τὸ έπιχειρημα καταντᾶ φαῦλος κύκλος: ή καλύτερη άπάντηση βρίσκεται στους Ψαλμούς (4Ε', 4): «έν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς» (στή μετάφραση τῶν Έβδομήκοντα). Μέχρις εδώ ο Βασίλειος μιλά για ένα σύμπαν που έχει επάνω και κάτω μέρος. Προσθέτει όμως ότι μερικοί φυσιοδίφες έχουν διαφορετική θεωρία: κατά τή γνώμη τους ή γῆ είναι ακίνητη, γιατί βρίσκεται ακριβῶς στο κέντρο τοῦ σύμπαντος. "Ο ίδιος ο Βασίλειος δέν έπιθυμῆ νά πάρει θέση ως πρὸς τή θεωρία αυτή. "Αν ο άναγνώστης τή βρίσκει εύλογοφανή, άς μεταφέρει τὸ θαυμασμό του στη σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ: αν όχι, εἴθε ή άπλοότητα τῆς πίστης του νά υπερισχύσει άπέναντι στα λογικά έπιχειρήματα.

Τὸ στερέωμα, σύμφωνα με τόν Βασίλειο, πρέπει νά διαχωρίζεται από τόν οὐρανὸ που δημιουργήθηκε τήν πρώτη μέρα. "Όπως ύπονοῖ τὸ όνομά του, αποτελείται από κάποια άρετὰ στερεή και άνθεκτική ουσία, ο Βασίλειος όμως άρνείται νά καθορίσει αν αυτή είναι σαν πάγος, όρεία κρύσταλλος ή λεπιδόλιθος. Είναι άκόμη πρόθυμος νά παραδεχτῆ τήν ύπαρξη ένός τρίτου οὐρανοῦ, που μαρτυρεῖται από τόν άπόστολο Παῦλο (Πρὸς Κορινθ. Β', ΙΒ', 2), ή και πολλῶν οὐρανῶν (Ψαλμοί, ΡΜΗ', 4). "Αλλά

πῶς έξηγοῦνται τὰ νερά πάνω από τὸ στερέωμα; Μερικοί κριτικοί έφεραν τήν αντίρρηση ότι, αν τὸ στερέωμα ήταν θολωτό, τὰ νερά άναγκαστικά θά κυλοῦσαν κάτω από τὸ κυρτὸ έξωτερικό του. Καθόλου, άπαντᾶ ο Βασίλειος: αν τὸ έσωτερικό είναι κοίλο, αυτό δέν συνεπάγεται ότι τὸ έξωτερικό είναι κυρτό. Μπορεῖ θαυμάσια νά είναι επίπεδο, όπως συχνά συμβαίνει στα λουτρά που έχουν θολωτές καμάρες στο έσωτερικό και επίπεδη στέγη στο έξωτερικό. "Όσο για τὰ νερά, αυτά είναι εκεί κατά κάποιοιον τρόπο σαν ψυκτικό μέσο. Γιατί ή φωτιά είναι άπαραίτητη για τή ζωή, ή φωτιά όμως έξατμίζει τὸ νερό. Στο τέλος ή φωτιά θά υπερισχύσει (κατά τή μαρτυρία τοῦ 'Ησαία, ΜΔ', 27), αλλά ο Θεός έχει σοφά ύπολογίσει τή διάρκεια τοῦ κόσμου και έχει φροντίσει νά ύπάρχει έπαρκεια νεροῦ για νά αντισταθμίσει τή δράση τῆς φωτιᾶς.

"Έχουμε ήδη αναφέρει τις δυσκολίες που δημιουργοῦνται από τή «συναγωγή» τῶν ὑδάτων τήν τρίτη μέρα. Στην πρώτη αντίρρηση, δηλαδή γιατί τὸ νερό δέν χύθηκε από μόνο του στην καθορισμένη θέση, ο Βασίλειος άπαντᾶ ότι εμεῖς γνωρίζουμε τις σημερινές ιδιότητες τοῦ νεροῦ: αλλά πῶς ξέρουμε ότι τὸ νερό είχε τήν ίδια ιδιότητα, δηλαδή νά ρέει πρὸς τὰ κάτω, πριν από τήν τρίτη μέρα τῆς Δημιουργίας; "Η έντολή τοῦ Θεοῦ καθόρισε τή φύση ή τή ροπή τοῦ νεροῦ, ή όποια προφανῶς έλειπε προηγούμενος. "Όσον άφορᾶ τήν ύπαρξη μιᾶς ή περισσότερων θαλασσῶν, ο Βασίλειος είναι διατεθειμένος νά δεχτῆ ότι ύπάρχουν πράγματι πολλές λίμνες, αλλά γι' αὐτὸν ύπάρχει μόνο μία θάλασσα. "Η Κασπία, που μερικοί ειδικοί θεωροῦσαν ότι περικλείεται από ξηρά, έπρεπε συνεπῶς νά έπικοινωνεῖ με τόν ὠκεανό. "Έπιπλέον, ή θάλασσα είχε τήν προκαθορισμένη της θέση. "Ασχετα με τὸ πόσο ταραγμένη είναι, πάντοτε σπάει στην άκτή, και μια ουσία τόσο μαλακή όσο ή άμμος είναι άρκετῆ για νά τήν περιορίσει. "Η Έρυθρὰ Θάλασσα θά μπορούσε εύκολα νά έχει πλημμυρίσει τήν Αίγυπτο, που βρίσκεται σε χαμηλότερο επίπεδο,⁵ αν ο Δημιουργός της δέν τήν είχε κρατήθει υπό έλεγχο.

Αυτά τὰ παραδείγματα άρκοῦν για νά παρουσιάσουν τήν προσέγγιση τοῦ Βασιλείου στο θέμα αυτό. Μολοντί άναζητοῦσε τή βεβαιότητα, μια βεβαιότητα που θά τήν παρεῖχε μόνο ή 'Αγία Γραφή, άρκέστηκε νά παρακάμψει μερικά από τὰ μεγάλα προβλήματα τῆς κοσμολογίας. Αισθανόταν πολύ πιὸ άνετα όταν περιέγραφε τὰ ήθικά διδάγματα που μπορούσαν νά άντληθοῦν από τήν παρατήρηση τῶν ζῶων—θέμα στο όποιο θά επανέλθουμε στο έπόμενο κεφάλαιο. "Ίσως ή καλλιέργειά του δέν τοῦ επέτρεπε νά υίοθετησει τὰ άπλοικά συμπεράσματα που συνάγονταν άναπόφευκτα από μια κατά λέξη έρμηνεία τοῦ βιβλικοῦ κειμένου, και έτσι κατέ-

φυγε σὲ ἓνα εἶδος ἀδιαφορίας. Οὕτε ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, πού ἀκολούθησε στὸ θέμα αὐτὸ μὴ ἀλληγορική προσέγγιση, ἱκανοποίησε ἀπολύτως ἓνα κοινὸ πού ἤθελε ἀπλὲς ἀπαντήσεις σὲ θεμελιώδη ἐρωτήματα. Κατὰ συνέπεια, αὐτὸ τὸ κοινὸ στράφηκε σὲ μὴ ἄλλη ἐρμηνευτικὴ σχολή, πού συνήθως ἀποκαλεῖται Σχολὴ τῆς Ἀντιόχειας. Αὐτὴ εἶχε τὸ θάρρος νὰ κατασκευάσει ἓνα σύστημα ὁλότελα βιβλικό. Διδάσκαλοί της, μετὰ τὸν Θεόφιλο Ἀντιοχείας, ἦταν ὁ Διόδωρος τῆς Ταρσοῦ, ὁ Θεόδωρος τῆς Μοψουεστίας, ὁ Σεβηριανὸς τῶν Γαβάλων καί, τέλος, ὁ Κοσμᾶς ὁ Ἰνδικοπλεύστης.

Ὁ Διόδωρος ἦταν σύγχρονος τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου. Τὸ ἔργο του μὲ τὸν τίτλο *Κατὰ Εἰμαρομένης* ἀτυχῶς ἔχει χαθεῖ, ἔχουμε ὅμως μὴ μακρὰ ἀνάλυσή του ἀπὸ τὸν πατριάρχη Φώτιο.⁶ Εἶναι φανερὸ ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴ σύνοψη ὅτι ὁ Διόδωρος εἶχε σοβαρὸ λόγο νὰ ἀρνεῖται τὸ σφαιρικὸ σύμπαν ὅπως τὸ συνέλαβαν οἱ φυσικοὶ φιλόσοφοι. Γιατὶ, ἂν δεχόταν κανεὶς ὅτι οἱ οὐράνιες σφαῖρες ἀποτελοῦνταν ἀπὸ ἓνα πέμπτο στοιχεῖο καὶ ἦταν προικισμένες μὲ αἰώνια κίνηση, τότε πλησίαζε τὴν ἀστρολογία καὶ τὴν εἰδωλολατρία. Ὁ Διόδωρος, ἀκριβῶς γιὰ νὰ ἀνατρέψει τὴν ἴδια τὴ βάση τῆς ἀστρολογίας, περιέγραψε τὴν «ἀληθινὴ» φύση τοῦ σύμπαντος. Σύμφωνα μὲ αὐτὸν «ὑπάρχουν δύο οὐρανοί· ὁ ἓνας ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς, πού βρίσκεται ψηλότερα ἀπὸ τὸν ὄρατὸ οὐρανὸ, δημιουργήθηκε ταυτόχρονα μὲ τὴ γῆ [μὲ τὴν ἔννοια ὅτι καὶ τὰ δύο δημιουργήθηκαν τὴν πρώτη μέρα], ἐνῶ ὁ ἄλλος εἶναι ὁ ὄρατός. Ὁ πρῶτος ἀπὸ τοὺς δύο λειτουργεῖ σὺν στέγη· ὁ δεύτερος κάνει τὸ ἴδιο ὡς πρὸς τὴ γῆ, ἐνῶ χρησιμεύει ἐπίσης ὡς θεμέλιο καὶ βάση γιὰ τὸν ἐπάνω οὐρανὸ. Ἡ γῆ εἶναι μία. Τὸ οὐράνιο διάστημα ἔχει παραχωρηθεῖ σὲς ἀνώτερες δυνάμεις καὶ τὸ διάστημα κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ στὰ ὄρατὰ ὄντα. Ὁ οὐρανὸς δὲν εἶναι σφαιρικός, ἀλλὰ ἔχει τὴ μορφή σκηνῆς ἢ θόλου. Σὲ ἐπίρρωση αὐτῆς τῆς ιδέας», λέει ὁ Φώτιος, «νομίζει ὅτι μπορεῖ νὰ παρουσιάσει μαρτυρίες τῆς Γραφῆς, ὅχι μόνον σχετικὰ μὲ τὴ μορφή τοῦ σύμπαντος, ἀλλὰ καὶ σχετικὰ μὲ τὴ δύση καὶ τὴν ἀνατολὴ τοῦ ἡλίου. Ἐρμηνεύει ἐπίσης τὴ μεταβαλλόμενη διάρκεια τῆς ἡμέρας καὶ τῆς νύχτας, καὶ ἐρευνᾷ λεπτομερῶς ἄλλα παρόμοια θέματα τὰ ὅποια, κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου, δὲν εἶναι ὑποχρεωτικὰ ἐπακόλουθα, ἀκόμη κι ἂν συμφωνοῦν μὲ τὴν Ἀγία Γραφή». Εὐκόλα ἀναγνωρίζουμε ἐδῶ τὸ σύστημα τοῦ Θεοφίλου.

Εἴκοσι περίπου χρόνια μετὰ τὸν Διόδωρο συναντᾶμε τὸν Σεβηριανὸ τῶν Γαβάλων, ἓναν ἱεροκέρυκα πού ἔχαιρε μεγάλης ἐκτιμῆσεως στὴν αὐλὴ τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης, παρὰ τὴ βαριά συριακὴ προφορὰ του. Στὶς ὁμιλίες του περὶ τοῦ *Ἐξαήμερου*⁷ ἀναπτύσσονται μὲ μερικὲς μικρὲς πα-

ραλλαγές οἱ ιδέες τῆς Σχολῆς τῆς Ἀντιόχειας. Ὁ Σεβηριανὸς συγκρίνει τὸ σύμπαν μὲ ἓνα διώροφο σπίτι, ὅπου τὸ ἐνδιάμεσο πάτωμα εἶναι ὁ ὄρατὸς οὐρανός, δηλαδὴ τὸ στερέωμα. Αὐτὸ ἀποτελεῖται ἀπὸ πάγο καὶ συγκατεῖ τὸ ἥμισυ τῶν ὑδάτων γιὰ νὰ ἀντισταθμίζει τὴ φωτιὰ τῶν φωστήρων. Τὸ νερὸ εἶναι τόσο ἄφθονο, πού μέρος του πέφτει στὴ γῆ ὡς δροσιά. Στὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία τὸ ἀνώτερο τμήμα τῶν ὑδάτων θὰ ἀποσυρθεῖ, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα τὴν τήξη τοῦ στερεώματος καὶ τὴν πτώση τῶν ἄστρων. Τὸ ἴδιο νερὸ χρησιμεύει ἐπιπλέον στὸ νὰ ἀντανακᾷ πρὸς τὰ κάτω τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου καὶ τῆς σελήνης, πού ἀλλιῶς θὰ πῆγαινε πρὸς τὰ πάνω. Ἡ δομὴ τοῦ σύμπαντος ἐπαναλαμβάνεται στὴ δομὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου σώματος. Τὸ πάνω μέρος, πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ στερέωμα, εἶναι παρόμοιο μὲ τὸ μυαλό, πού ἡ λειτουργία του εἶναι ἄορατη, ἐνῶ τὸ χωρίζει ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα ὁ οὐρανίσκος, πού τὸ ὄνομά του, πολὺ ταιριαστά, μοιάζει μὲ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

Ὁ Σεβηριανὸς ἀναπτύσσει τὰ σχετικὰ μὲ τὴ συναγωγή τῶν ὑδάτων μὲ πῶ ἐύφρη τρόπο ἀπὸ ὅ,τι ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος. Ἡ γῆ, λέει, δημιουργήθηκε ἐπίπεδη τὴν πρώτη μέρα, καὶ ἐπομένως ἦταν τελείως καλυμμένη ἀπὸ νερὸ. Τὴν τρίτη μέρα, ὅμως, ὁ Κύριος ἐφτιαξε τὰ βουνὰ καὶ τὶς κοιλάδες, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα τὸ νερὸ νὰ κυλήσει πρὸς τὰ κάτω σχηματίζοντας τὴ θάλασσα. Ἡ παρατήρηση τῶν βουνῶν καὶ τῶν βραχυδῶν νησιῶν ἀποδεικνύει ὅτι αὐτὰ ἦταν κάποτε ἐνωμένα.

Οἱ φωστῆρες ἀστέρες δημιουργήθηκαν ἀνεξάρτητα ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ κατόπιν τοποθετήθηκαν ἐπάνω του, ὅπως ἓνας καλλιτέχνης ζωγραφίζει ἓναν πίνακα καὶ ἔπειτα τὸν κρεμᾷ στὸν τοῖχο. Ὁ ἡλῖος τοποθετήθηκε στὴν ἀνατολὴ καὶ ἡ σελήνη στὴ δύση. Ἡ εἰδωλολατρικὴ ιδέα, σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ὁποία ὁ ἡλῖος περνᾷ κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς νύχτας, ἀπορρίπτεται. Στὴν πραγματικότητα ὁ ἡλῖος διασχίζει τὶς βόρειες περιοχές, κρυμμένος ἀπὸ ἓνα εἶδος τοῖχου, καὶ ἡ πορεία του συγκαλύπτεται ἀπὸ τὰ νερά. Αὐτὸ ἐπιβεβαιώνεται ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐκκλησιαστή (Α', 5-6): «καὶ ἀνατέλλει ὁ ἡλῖος καὶ δύνει ὁ ἡλῖος καὶ εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτοῦ ἔλκει. αὐτὸς ἀνατέλλων ἐκεῖ πορεύεται πρὸς νότον καὶ κυκλοῖ πρὸς βορρᾶν» (στὴ μετάφραση τῶν Ἐβδομήκοντα). Ἡ μεταβαλλόμενη διάρκεια τῆς ἡμέρας ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπὸ τὸ πόσο μακρὸ ταξίδι κάνει ὁ ἡλῖος, ἐφόσον δὲν ἀνατέλλει πάντοτε στὸ ἴδιο σημεῖο. Ἡ σελήνη πού μικραίνει, πεθαίνει καὶ ξαναγεννιέται εἶναι σύμβολο τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς καὶ ἐγγυητῆς τῆς ἀνάστασής μας.

Καθ' ὅδον ὁ Σεβηριανὸς ἐξηγεῖ διάφορες δυσκολίες τοῦ ἱεροῦ κειμένου. Ἡ δημιουργία τῶν ἀγγέλων δὲν ἀναφέρεται στὴ Γένεση, ἐπειδὴ ὁ Μωυ-

σῆς συνέθεσε τὸ βιβλίο μετὰ τὴν ἔξοδο, σὲ μιὰ ἐποχὴ ποὺ οἱ Ἑβραῖοι ἦταν ἀκόμη συνηθισμένοι στὴν εἰδωλολατρία ποὺ εἶχαν μάθει στὴν Αἴγυπτο: ὁ νομοθέτης δὲν ἐπιθυμοῦσε νὰ τοὺς δώσει πρόσχημα γιὰ νὰ ἐπιστρέψουν στὶς πλάνες τους. "Ὅσο γιὰ τὴ σιωπὴ τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς ἀναφορικὰ μὲ τὰ τέσσερα στοιχεῖα, αὐτὴ δὲν ἐκπλήσσει, ἀφοῦ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ φανερόνουν τὴν ὑπαρξὴ τοῦ νεροῦ, τῆς φωτιᾶς καὶ τοῦ ἀέρα. Ἐπιπλέον ἡ φωτιὰ καὶ ὁ ἀέρας συνδέονται στενά. Οἱ ἀνώτερες δυνάμεις εἶναι ἀπὸ φωτιὰ —οὐράνια καὶ ἄυλη φωτιὰ, ποὺ ἐντούτοις σχετίζεται μὲ τὴ δική μας, ὅπως δείχνει τὸ γεγονός ὅτι μπορούμε νὰ «δανειστοῦμε» τὴ φωτιὰ τοῦ ἡλίου, πράγμα ποὺ θὰ ἦταν ἀδύνατο ἂν εἶχαν διαφορετικὴ φύση. Ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ, ἂν δὲν ὑπῆρχε φωτιὰ στὴ γῆ, πῶς θὰ μπορούσαμε νὰ βγάλουμε σπινθήρα ἀπὸ μιὰ πέτρα ἢ ἓνα κομμάτι ξύλο;

Φαίνεται ὅτι τὸ ἀκροατήριό τοῦ Σεβηριανοῦ μᾶλλον βαριόταν τὶς διελξεις τοῦ περὶ φυσικῆς ἐπιστήμης. «Θέλουμε νὰ μάθουμε θεολογία», φώναζαν, «ὄχι φυσιολογία!» Ὁ ἱεροκλήρυκας ἀνταπαντοῦσε ὅτι ἡ κριτικὴ αὐτὴ εἶναι λανθασμένη, ἀφοῦ, μετὰ τὴ θεολογία, ἡ μελέτη τῆς φύσης παρέχει τὸ ἀσφαλέστερο θεμέλιο τῆς εὐσέβειας. Ἄν ἐπρόκειτο νὰ ἐξοβελιστεῖ ἡ «φυσιολογία», θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ἐξοβελιστοῦν καὶ οἱ προφήτες καὶ οἱ ἀπόστολοι ποὺ μιλοῦσαν γι' αὐτήν. Ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος, ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Σωτήρας, ἀσχολοῦνται μὲ τὴ φυσιολογία.

Οἱ ἰδέες τοῦ Σεβηριανοῦ μαζί μὲ μερικὲς ἰδέες τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου, τοῦ Διοδώρου καὶ ἄλλων συγκεντρώθηκαν τὸν 6ο αἰῶνα ἀπὸ ἓνα ἀνώνυμο συγγραφέα ποὺ τὸν ἀποκαλοῦμε Ψευδο-Καيسάριο.⁸ Τὸ ἔργο του, μὲ τὸν τίτλο *Διάλογοι*, εἶχε τὴ συνηθισμένη μορφή τῶν ἐρωταποκρίσεων καὶ ἀποτελοῦσε μιὰ μικρὴ σύνοψη χρήσιμων θεολογικῶν καὶ ἐπιστημονικῶν γνώσεων. Παρὰ τὸ δύσκολο ὕφος του ἦταν πολὺ δημοφιλές. Χρησιμοποιήθηκε σὲ ἀνθολογίες καὶ σὲ βυζαντινὰ χρονικά, μεταφράστηκε τὸν 10ο αἰῶνα στὰ σλαβονικά καὶ τὸν 11ο στὰ ἀραβικά. Γενικὰ ὁ Ψευδο-Καيسάριος ἀναπαράγει τὸ σύστημα τοῦ Σεβηριανοῦ, ἀλλὰ εἰσάγει καὶ μερικὲς δικές του σκέψεις. Δέχεται ὅτι ἡ μορφή τοῦ σύμπαντος εἶναι παρόμοια μὲ διώροφο σπίτι καὶ ὅτι ἓνα στερέωμα ἀπὸ πάγο στηρίζει τὰ μισὰ ἀπὸ τὰ νερά. Ἐδῶ προσθέτει καὶ ἓνα διαφωτιστικὸ παράδειγμα. Ὁ Φισῶν, λέει, ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς τέσσερις ποταμούς τοῦ Παραδείσου, εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ ὀνομάζεται Δούναβης (ἄλλοῦ ἰσχυρίζεται ὅτι ὁ Δούναβης καὶ ὁ Ἰνδὸς εἶναι ἓνα καὶ τὸ αὐτό!). Τὸ χειμῶνα τὸ ποτάμι αὐτὸ καλύπτεται ἀπὸ ἓνα ἀνθεκτικὸ στρώμα πάγου καὶ μπορεῖ νὰ κρατῆσει δεκάδες χιλιάδες ἐπιπλους βαρβάρους, ποὺ κάθε χρόνο κάνουν ἐπιδρομὲς στὶς ρωμαϊκὲς ἐπαρχίες πρὸς τὸ Ἰλλυρικὸ καὶ τὴ Θράκη. Αὐτὸ τὸ στρώμα πάγου βρέχεται ἀπὸ τὸ νερὸ

ποὺ εἶναι ἀποκάτω, καὶ μερικὲς φορὲς πέφτει βροχὴ καὶ πάνω στὸν πάγο, ἀλλὰ τὸ νερὸ ποὺ εἶναι πάνω ἀπὸ τὸν πάγο δὲν ἀναμιγνύεται μὲ τὸ νερὸ ποὺ εἶναι κάτω ἀπ' αὐτόν. Τὸ στερέωμα δὲν λιώνει ἀπὸ τὴ θερμότητα τοῦ ἡλίου, γιατί συγκριτικὰ ὁ ἥλιος εἶναι πολὺ μικρὸς, σὰν μιὰ λάμπα σὲ ἓνα μεγάλο σπίτι. Ἄν βάλουμε μιὰ λάμπα κάτω ἀπὸ μιὰ πολὺ μεγάλη πιατέλα, ἡ πιατέλα δὲν πρόκειται νὰ λιώσει. Παρεμπιπτόντως, αὐτὸς εἶναι καὶ ὁ λόγος γιὰ τὸν ὅποιο ὁ ἥλιος κινεῖται συνεχῶς: ἂν ἔμεινε ἀκίνητος θὰ προξενοῦσε ζημιὰ στὸ στερέωμα. Ὁ Ψευδο-Καيسάριος διαφωνεῖ μὲ τὸν Σεβηριανό, ἰσχυρίζομενος ὅτι ὁ ἥλιος δὲν εἶναι προσαρμοσμένος στὸ στερέωμα: ἀντίθετα, αἰωρεῖται στὸν ἀέρα χάρις τὴν ἐλαφρότητα τῆς οὐσίας του. Γιατί τότε, ρωτᾷ ὁ συνομιλητῆς του, δὲν παρασύρεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνεμο; Διότι, ἀπαντᾷ, ὁ ἄνεμος φυσᾷ πρὸς χαμηλά, κοντὰ στὴν ἐπιφάνεια τῆς γῆς. Ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ, ὁ ἄνεμος δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ μετακινήσει μιὰ πέτρα ἢ ἓνα σπίτι: πῶς θὰ μπορούσε νὰ κινήσει ἓνα σῶμα μεγάλο σὰν τὸν ἥλιο; Ἄν ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη ἦταν προσαρμοσμένα στὸ στερέωμα, θὰ εἶχαν ἐπιπλέον γρατσούνισι μὲ τὴν κίνησή τους τὴν ἐπιφάνεια τοῦ οὐράνιου θόλου. Ὅσο γιὰ τὴν τροχιὰ τοῦ ἡλίου, ὁ συγγραφέας προσδιορίζει ὅτι κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς νύχτας κρύβεται ἀπὸ τὸ ὑπερψωμένο ἔδαφος τῆς Καππαδοκίας, ἢ τὴν ὄροσειρὰ τοῦ Ταύρου, πράγμα ποὺ τελικὰ δείχνει ὅτι ὁ ἴδιος κατοικοῦσε στὰ νότια τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας. Στὴ βόρεια περιοχὴ πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν Καππαδοκία, οἱ ἀκτίνες τοῦ ἡλίου ἐμποδίζονται ἀπὸ τὰ νερά καὶ τὴ βλάστηση καὶ ἀντανακλῶνται πλαγίως ἀπὸ τὴν πίεση τοῦ στερεώματος, ὅπως συμβαίνει ὅταν τοποθετήσουμε μιὰ λάμπα κάτω ἀπὸ μιὰ ὀθόνη.

Ὁ Ψευδο-Καيسάριος πρέπει νὰ ἔζησε περίπου τὴν ἴδια ἐποχὴ μὲ τὸν ἄλεξανδρινὸ πρῶν ἔμπορο ποὺ ἀποκαλοῦμε Κοσμᾶ Ἰνδικοπλεύστη, συγγραφέα τῆς *Χριστιανικῆς Τοπογραφίας*.⁹ Οἱ κύριες ἰδέες ποὺ ἐκφράζει στὸ βιβλίο αὐτό, μὲ ὅλο τὸ ζῆλο τοῦ αὐτοδίδαχτου, εἶναι αὐτὲς ποὺ περιγράψαμε, ἀλλὰ εἶχε τὸ προσὸν ὅτι τις συστηματοποίησε, τις εἰκονογράφησε μὲ διαγράμματα καὶ τις ζωντάνεψε μὲ τις προσωπικὲς του ἀναμνήσεις. Μολονότι δὲν φαίνεται νὰ ἔφτασε μέχρι τὴν Ἰνδία, εἶναι βέβαιο ὅτι ταξίδεψε στὴν Ἐρυθρὰ Θάλασσα, ἐπισκέφτηκε τὴν Αἰθιοπία καὶ τὸ νησί τῆς Σοκότρας, καθὼς καὶ ἄλλες χῶρες. Εἶναι ἀτυχεῖς ποὺ ἓνα προγενέστερο γεωγραφικὸ ἔργο τοῦ Κοσμᾶ ἔχει χαθεῖ, γιατί ἐκεῖ ἀπεριέγραψε μὲ μεγαλύτερη πληρότητα ὀλόκληρη τὴ γῆ, καὶ ἐκεῖνη ποὺ βρῖσκεται πέρα ἀπὸ τὸν ὠκεανό, καὶ αὐτὴν ἐδῶ, καὶ ὅλες τις χῶρες της, μαζί μὲ τις περιοχὲς νότια τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρειας μέχρι τὸν Νότιο Ὠκεανό, δηλαδὴ τὸν Νεῖλο ποταμὸ καὶ τις γειτονικὲς χῶρες, καὶ ὅλες τις φυλὲς τῆς Αἰγύπτου καὶ

της Αιθιοπίας· εκτός από αυτές, τὸν Ἀραβικὸ Κόλπο μὲ τὶς γειτονικὲς χῶρες καὶ τοὺς κατοίκους τοὺς μέχρι τὸν ὀμώνυμο ὠκεανό, καθὼς ἐπίσης καὶ τὴ χῶρα ἀνάμεσα στὸν ποταμὸ καὶ τὸν κόλπο μὲ ὄσες πόλεις, περιοχὲς καὶ φυλὲς περιεῖχε». ¹⁰ Ἄν δὲν κάνω λάθος, αὐτὸ ἦταν τὸ μοναδικὸ γεωγραφικὸ ἔργο ὁλόκληρης τῆς βυζαντινῆς περιόδου ποὺ βασιζόταν σὲ προσωπικὴ ἐμπειρία.

Τὸ σύμπαν τοῦ Κοσμᾶ εἶχε τὸ σχῆμα ἐνὸς ὀκτάγωνου κουτιοῦ μὲ θολωτὸ καπάκι καὶ ἔμοιαζε, ὅπως παρατήρησε ἓνας βικτωριανὸς σχολιαστής, «σὰν ἓνα ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ τεράστια μπαουῖλα στὰ ὁποῖα οἱ σύγχρονες ταξιδιώτισσες μεταφέρουν τὰ φορέματά τους». Ἡ γῆ ἦταν ἐπίσης ὀρθογώνια, ἀποτελοῦσε τὴ βάση τοῦ κουτιοῦ καὶ περιβαλλόταν ἀπὸ ὅλες τὶς πλευρὲς της ἀπὸ τὸν ὠκεανό, ποὺ δὲν ἦταν πλωτός. Πέρα ἀπὸ τὸν ὠκεανό, ὅμως, ὑπῆρχε μιὰ στενὴ λωρίδα ξηρᾶς, στὸ ἀνατολικὸ μέρος τῆς ὁποίας βρισκόταν ὁ ἐπίγειος Παράδεισος. Στὴ λωρίδα αὐτὴ ἦταν κολλημένοι οἱ τέσσερις τοῖχοι τοῦ σύμπαντος. Περίπου στὸ μισὸ τοῦ ὕψους τοὺς οἱ τοῖχοι ὑποστήριζαν ἓνα ταβάνι, δηλαδή τὸ στερέωμα, μὲ τὰ νερὰ πάνω ἀπὸ αὐτό. Ἐπειτα οἱ τοῖχοι ἔκαναν καμπύλη πρὸς τὰ μέσα γιὰ νὰ περικλείσουν τὸ Οὐράνιο Βασίλειο. Ἡ ἐπιφάνεια τῆς γῆς εἶχε μιὰ κλίση ἀπὸ βορρὰ πρὸς νότο, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ ἀνηφορίζει κανεὶς ὅταν ταξίδευε πρὸς τὸ βορρᾶ. Ἐντούτοις ὁ Κοσμᾶς δὲν ἐξηγεῖ πῶς συνέβαινε καὶ τὰ νερὰ τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ δὲν ἔρεαν πρὸς τὸ νότο. Κάπου στὸ βορρᾶ ὑπῆρχε ἐπίσης ἓνα τεράστιο βουνό (τὸ ἴδιο ποὺ συναντήσαμε στὸν Ψευδο-Καϊσάριο) καὶ πίσω ἀπὸ αὐτὸ κρυβόταν ὁ ἥλιος τὴ νύχτα. Ἐνας βασικὸς ἰσχυρισμὸς τοῦ συστήματος τοῦ Κοσμᾶ εἶναι πῶς τὸ σύμπαν ἀναπαριστανόταν ἀκριβῶς στὴ Σικηνὴ τοῦ Μωυσῆ, ποὺ ἐπίσης χωριζόταν στὰ δύο ἀπὸ ἓνα βῆλο, ἐνῶ ἡ τράπεζα μὲ τοὺς δώδεκα ἄρτους, ποὺ τὸ μῆκος της ἦταν διπλάσιο ἀπὸ τὸ πλάτος της καὶ ἦταν τοποθετημένη κατὰ μῆκος ἀπὸ ἀνατολικά πρὸς τὰ δυτικά, συμβόλιζε τὴ γῆ. Ὅσο γελοία κι ἂν μᾶς φαίνεται σήμερα αὐτὴ ἡ ἰδέα, δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεχνᾶμε ὅτι ἡ θεωρία γιὰ τὸ ὀρθογώνιο σχῆμα τῆς γῆς εἶχε τὸ προηγούμενό της στὴν ἀρχαία ἐλληνικὴ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἐπιβεβαιωνόταν κάπως ἀπὸ τὴν ἐμπειρία τῶν ἀρχαίων περιηγητῶν, ποὺ γνώριζαν ὅτι μπορούσε κανεὶς νὰ διασχίσει πολὺ μεγαλύτερη ἀπόσταση ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνατολικά πρὸς τὰ δυτικά παρὰ ἀπὸ βορρᾶ πρὸς νότο. Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Κοσμᾶς ὑπολόγισε ὅτι ἡ ἀπόσταση ἀπὸ τὴν Κίνα στὸ Γιβραλτάρ ἦταν περίπου 12.000 μίλια, ἐνῶ ἡ διάσταση τῆς γῆς ἀπὸ βορρᾶ πρὸς νότο ἦταν μόνο τὰ μισά.

Τὸ σύστημα τοῦ Κοσμᾶ εἶχε μερικὲς ἀδυναμίες ἀκόμη καὶ ὡς πρὸς τὰ ἴδια τὰ σημεῖα ἀναφορᾶς του. Ἡ ἰδέα του, λόγου χάρι, πῶς οἱ ἀστέρες

τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὠθοῦνται ἀπὸ ἀγγέλους δὲν ἐπιβεβαιώνεται ἀπὸ τὴ Βίβλο. Ἄδυνατοῦσε ἐπίσης νὰ δώσει ἱκανοποιητικὴ ἐξηγήση γιὰ τὰ ποτάμια τοῦ Παραδείσου, ποὺ ἰσχυριζόταν ὅτι ἔρεαν κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν ἀνατολικὸ βραχίονα τοῦ ὠκεανοῦ πρὶν ἀναδυθοῦν ἀπὸ τὸ ἔδαφος. Παρὰ τὰ ψεγάδια αὐτά, πρέπει νὰ παραδεχτοῦμε ὅτι ὁ Κοσμᾶς πέτυχε νὰ κατασκευάσει ἓνα σύστημα ἀξιοσημείωτα συνεπές, ποὺ ἱκανοποιῶσε τὶς ἀπαιτήσεις τῆς Βίβλου, τοὺς ἰσχυρισμοὺς τοῦ συμβολισμοῦ καὶ τὴν προσωπικὴ ἐμπειρία τοῦ περιηγητῆ. Ἐπιπλέον οἱ ἰδέες του εἶχαν ἀξιόλογη διάδοση στοὺς αἰῶνες ποὺ ἀκολούθησαν, παρὰ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι δὲν θὰ ἦταν εὐκόλο νὰ ἀντιγράφεται πολὺ συχνὰ ἡ Χριστιανικὴ Τοπογραφία, ἐπειδὴ περιεῖχε σχεδὸν ἓκατὸ εἰκόνες ἀπαραίτητες γιὰ τὴν κατανόηση τοῦ κειμένου. Τὸν 9ο αἰῶνα μελετήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Φώτιο (ποὺ, σὰν λόγιος, τὴ βρῆκε γελοία), ¹¹ καὶ ἀντιγράφηκε σὲ ἓνα λαμπρὸ χειρόγραφο ποὺ σώζεται μέχρι σήμερα (εἶναι ὁ κώδικας Vaticanus graecus 699). Μεταφράστηκε ἐπίσης στὰ σλαβονικά, ἴσως τὸν 10ο αἰῶνα, καὶ μέχρι τὸν 17ο αἰῶνα διαβαζόταν στὴ Ρωσία σὰν κείμενο μὲ μεγάλο κύρος. ¹²

Δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία πῶς ἡ ἀντιοχειανὴ σύλληψη τοῦ σύμπαντος, ὅπως ἐκτίθεται ἀπὸ τὸν Κοσμᾶ, ἀνταναντιῶσε τὶς ἀπόψεις τοῦ μέσου Βυζαντινοῦ στὸ θέμα αὐτό. Ὅποτε ἓνας βυζαντινὸς ἅγιος ὁραματιζόταν τὴν Οὐράνια Βασιλεία ἢ τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία, σκεφτόταν ἓνα τετράγωνο σύμπαν, σκεπασμένο μὲ ἓνα ταβάνι, πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο ὁ Θεὸς εἶχε τὴν αὐλή του καὶ ὅπου κάποτε οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ θὰ ἀπολάμβαναν αἰώνια εὐδαιμονία. ¹³ Οἱ εἰκονογραφῆσεις τῆς Δημιουργίας στὰ χειρόγραφα τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης ἀκολουθοῦσαν περίπου τὸ ἴδιο πρότυπο, καὶ ἡ βυζαντινὴ ἐκκλησία, ἐφόσον ἦταν ἓνα συμβολικὸ ἀντίγραφο τοῦ Κόσμου, προϋπέθετε κι αὐτὴ ἓναν κόσμο ποὺ εἶχε σχῆμα κουτιοῦ. ¹⁴

Φαίνεται ὅτι μόνο τὸν 11ο αἰῶνα ἔγινε μιὰ ἀπόπειρα νὰ διαδοθοῦν ξανά οἱ κοσμολογικὲς θεωρίες τῶν ἀρχαίων. Ὁ Μιχαὴλ Ψελλός, στὸ μικρὸ ἐγκυκλοπαιδικὸ του ἔργο *Παντοδαπὴ Διδασκαλία*, ¹⁵ ἀσχολεῖται ἀρκετὰ ἐκτενῶς μὲ τὴ δομὴ τοῦ σύμπαντος. Ὁ Ψελλός ἔκανε μερικὲς παραχωρήσεις στὸν παραδοσιακὸ χριστιανισμό, ἀναγνωρίζοντας ὅτι ὁ κόσμος δὲν εἶναι αἰώνιος (αὐτὸ ἦταν πολὺ σπουδαῖο σημεῖο) καὶ ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς προκάλουσε τοὺς σεισμούς, ὅπως δηλώνεται στοὺς Ψαλμοὺς ΡΔ', 32· ὅσο γιὰ τὰ ὑπόλοιπα, πάντως, ἐνῶ καταδίκασε «τὴ μάταιη σοφία τῶν Ἑλλήνων», ἀπλῶς ἐπέστρεψε στὸ σφαιρικὸ σύμπαν. Ἡ *Παντοδαπὴ Διδασκαλία* ἀφιερώθηκε πρῶτα στὸν αὐτοκράτορα Κωνσταντῖνο Θ' καί, σὲ μιὰ ἀναθεωρημένη μορφή, στὸν Μιχαὴλ Ζ' τὸν Δούκα. Ἄν κρίνουμε ἀπὸ τὸν ἀριθμὸ τῶν χειρογράφων του ποὺ σώζονται, τὸ ἔργο ἦταν πολὺ δημοφιλὲς στοὺς

ύστερους βυζαντινούς αιώνες. Έντούτοις δὲν ἦταν ἔργο πού ὁ ἀπλὸς ἄνθρωπος ἦταν σὲ θέση νὰ τὸ κατανοήσει, καὶ εἶναι ἀμφίβολο ἂν εἶχε κάποια ἐπίδραση στὴ συνείδηση τοῦ κοινού. Ὁ μέσος Βυζαντινὸς ἀκουγε τοὺς ἱεροκλήρικες του καὶ κοίταζε τὴ ζωγραφικὴ πού κοσμοῦσε τοὺς τοίχους τῆς ἐκκλησίας του. Ὅση κοσμολογία τοῦ χρειαζόταν εἶχε γραφτεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν μεγαλύτερο ἀπ' ὅλους τοὺς ἐπιστήμονες, τὸν προφήτη Μωυσῆ.

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ Θ'

ΟΙ ΚΑΤΟΙΚΟΙ ΤΗΣ ΓΗΣ

Ἡ γῆ κατοικεῖται ἀπὸ ζῶα καὶ ἀνθρώπινα ὄντα. Ἡ διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσά τους ἐγκρίεται στὸ ὅτι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἔχουν λογικὴ ψυχὴ, ἐνῶ τὰ ζῶα δὲν ἔχουν. Αὐτὸ τὸ λέει τὸ Λευιτικόν, ΙΖ', 11: «ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ πάσης σαρκὸς αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐστίν», μὲ ἄλλα λόγια ἡ ζωτικὴ ἀρχὴ ὅλων τῶν ζώων εἶναι ὕλικῆς φύσεως. Ἡ ἴδια διάκριση καθορίζεται καὶ στὴ Γένεση, γιὰ τὴ δημιουργώντας τὰ ζῶα τῆς θάλασσας καὶ τοῦ ἀέρα ὁ Θεὸς εἶπε (Α', 20): «ἐξαγαγέτω τὰ ὕδατα ἐρπετὰ ψυχῶν ζωσῶν καὶ πετεινὰ πετόμενα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς», πού σημαίνει ὅτι ἡ ζωὴ περιέχεται στὸ ζῶο, ἐνῶ στὴν περίπτωση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ Θεὸς ἐφτιαξε πρῶτα τὸ σῶμα του καὶ ἔπειτα «ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ζωῆς» (Γέν., Β', 7), δείχνοντας ἔτσι τὴ διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα στὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ. Τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ζώου πεθαίνει μὲ τὸ σῶμα του, ἐνῶ ἡ ἀνθρώπινη ψυχὴ θὰ ζήσει αἰώνια.

Ὁ Θεὸς δημιούργησε πρῶτα τὰ ὑδρόβια ζῶα γιὰ νὰ δείξει ὅτι ἡ ζωὴ ἀρχίζει μὲ τὸ βάπτισμα. Στὴ Γένεση τὰ πουλιὰ ὑπάγονται στὴν ἴδια κατηγορία μὲ τὰ ψάρια, γιὰ τὴν κολυμποῦν στὸν ἀέρα περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅσο περπατοῦν.¹ Ἐπίσης ὑπάρχει μιὰ λεπτὴ διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα στὴν ἐντολὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ πού ἀφορᾷ τὰ ψάρια, δηλαδὴ «ἐξαγαγέτω τὰ ὕδατα ἐρπετὰ ψυχῶν ζωσῶν», καὶ τὴν ἐντολὴ πού ἀφορᾷ τὰ ζῶα τῆς ξηρᾶς, «ἐξαγαγέτω ἡ γῆ ψυχὴν ζωσῶν κατὰ γένος» (Γέν., Α', 24). Τὰ ὑδρόβια ζῶα ἔχουν ἀτελεῖ ὑπαρξή: ἡ βραση καὶ ἡ ἀκοή τους εἶναι ἀσθενικῆς, δὲν ἔχουν οὔτε μνήμη οὔτε φαντασία, δὲν ἀναγνωρίζουν ἄλλα οἰκεία ὄντα, ἐνῶ τὰ ζῶα τῆς ξηρᾶς ἔχουν ὀξύτερες αἰσθήσεις.² Ἡ φύση κάθε εἴδους ζώου ἔχει καθοριστεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐντολὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ἡ πάροδος τοῦ χρόνου δὲν θὰ τὴν ἀλλοιώσει. Κάθε εἶδος ἔχει τὰ δικά του ἰδιαιτέρως χαρακτηριστικά: τὸ λιοντάρι εἶναι περήφανο, τὸ βόδι ἥρεμο, ὁ λύκος ἀγριος. Τὰ ζῶα πού συλλαμβάνονται πιὸ εὐκόλα εἶναι ἐπίσης καὶ τὰ πιὸ παραγωγικά (κουνέλια, ἀγριοκάτσικα καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς).

Τὰ ζῶα δημιουργήθηκαν γιὰ νὰ εἶναι ὑποταγμένα στὸν ἄνθρωπο. Αὐτὸ

δείχνει τὸ ὄνομά τους (κτῆνος, πού παρετυμολογεῖται ἀπὸ τὸ κτῆμα) καὶ τὸ γεγονός ὅτι τὰ ὀνόματά τους τοὺς τὰ ἔδωσε ὁ Ἀδάμ, ἐπιβάλλοντας ἔτσι τὴν ἐξουσία του πάνω σ' αὐτά, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς ὅταν κάποιος κατατασσόταν στὸν αὐτοκρατορικό στρατὸ σημαδεύταν μὲ τὴν αὐτοκρατορική σφραγίδα.³ Τὰ χιλιάδες ὀνόματα πού μπόρεσε νὰ ἐφεύρει ὁ Ἀδάμ ἀποδεικνύουν τὴ μεγάλη του εὐφυΐα πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν Πτώση. Τρεῖς ἦταν οἱ λόγοι τῆς ὑπαρξῆς τῶν ζώων. Μερικὰ δημιουργήθηκαν γιὰ νὰ χρησιμεύσουν ὡς τροφή, αὐτὰ πού σφάζονται καὶ σήμερα· ἄλλα γιὰ τὴ μεταφορὰ φορτίων, ὅπως τὰ ἄλογα καὶ οἱ καμηῆλες. Τὸ τρίτο εἶδος εἶναι τὰ «μιμητικά» ζῶα, πού ἔγιναν γιὰ νὰ διασκεδάζουν τὸν ἄνθρωπο πού ἦταν μόνος του στὸν Παράδεισο. Μερικὰ ἀπὸ αὐτά, ὅπως οἱ πίθηκοι, μιμοῦνται χειρονομίες, ἐνῶ ἄλλα, ὅπως οἱ παπαγάλοι, μιμοῦνται ἤχους. Ἀρχικὰ τὸ φίδι ἦταν φίλος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, γι' αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς τὸ διάλεξε γιὰ ὄργανό του ὁ διάβολος. Ἐκεῖνο τὸν καιρὸ περπατοῦσε ὄρθιο, χάρη σ' ἕνα γοργὸ στριφογύρισμα τῆς οὐρᾶς του. Ἀκόμη καὶ σήμερα, ὅταν θυμώσει, προσπαθεῖ νὰ ὑψώσει τὸ κεφάλι του, σύντομα ὁμως ἐπιστρέφει στὴ θέση τοῦ ἔρπετοῦ, γιατί δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀντισταθεῖ στὴ δύναμη τῆς θεϊκῆς καταδίκης. Δὲν πρέπει ὁμως νὰ φανταστεῖ κανεὶς ὅτι τὰ ζῶα ζοῦσαν στὸν Παράδεισο, ὅπως καὶ οἱ ὑπηρέτες δὲν ζοῦν στὸ αὐτοκρατορικό παλάτι. Τὰ καλοῦσε ὁ κύριός τους μόνο ὅταν τὰ χρειαζόταν.⁴

Ἕνας ἄλλος σκοπὸς τῆς δημιουργίας τῶν ζώων ἦταν νὰ μᾶς παρέχουν ἠθικὰ διδάγματα καὶ θεολογικὰ σύμβολα. Τὰ μεγάλα ψάρια τρέφονται μὲ μικρὰ ψάρια: τὸ ἴδιο κάνουμε κι ἐμεῖς ὅταν καταπιέζουμε τοὺς ἀδύνατους. Ὁ πονηρὸς κάβουρας περιμένει τὸ ὄστρακο νὰ ἀνοίξει στὸν ἥλιο, ὕστερα πετᾷ ἕνα βότσαλο γιὰ νὰ τὸ ἐμποδίσει νὰ κλείσει, κι ἔτσι καταβροχθίζει τὴ λεία του. Κι ἐμεῖς ἐπίσης κάνουμε σὰν τὸ καβούρι ὅταν ἀρπάζουμε τὰ ἀγαθὰ τοῦ γείτονά μας. Ἡ παραλλαγὴ τῶν πολυπόδων, πού παίρνουν τὸ χρῶμα τοῦ περιβάλλοντός τους, βρῖσκει μιμητὲς σὲ ὅσους παρασιτοῦν στοὺς πλούσιους καὶ τοὺς ἰσχυροὺς, γιατί οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ εἶναι, ἀνάλογα μὲ τὶς περιστάσεις, ἐγκρατεῖς ἢ ἀκόλαστοι. Μποροῦμε ἐπίσης νὰ ἀντλήσουμε μερικὰ θαυμάσια διδάγματα παρατηρώντας τοὺς κατοίκους τοῦ βυθιοῦ. Ἄν καὶ δὲν χωρίζονται ἀπὸ φυσικὰ ὄρια, κάθε εἶδος ἀρκεῖται νὰ κατοικεῖ στὴ δική του περιοχὴ. Ἔτσι, ἔχει καθοριστεῖ ἀπὸ τὴ φύση οἱ φάλαινες, πού εἶναι μεγάλες σὰν βουνά, νὰ ζοῦν στὸν Ἀτλαντικό Ὠκεανό, πού δὲν ἔχει νησιά καὶ δὲν περιορίζεται ἀπὸ καμία ἡπειρο στὴν ἄλλη πλευρά. Δὲν συμβαίνει ὁμως τὸ ἴδιο μ' ἐμᾶς: συνεχῶς μετακινούμε «ὄρια αἰώνια, ἀ ἔθεντο οἱ πατέρες» μας (Παροιμίες, ΚΒ', 28), μοιράζουμε διαρκῶς τὴ γῆ, ἀποκτοῦμε ὅλο καὶ περισσότερα σπίτια καὶ χωράφια, ἐ-

ξαπατώντας τοὺς γείτονές μας. Ἡ σιχαμερὴ ὀχιά συνευρίσκεται μὲ τὸ χέλι, καὶ αὐτὸ ὑποκύπτει, ἔστω καὶ ἀπρόθυμα. Ἔτσι καὶ οἱ γυναῖκες πρέπει νὰ ὑπομένουν τοὺς ἄντρες τους, ἀκόμη κι ἂν εἶναι βίαιοι, μεθυσμένοι ἢ δυσάρεστοι. Ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἄντρες πρέπει νὰ ἐνστερνιστοῦν καλὰ αὐτὸ τὸ μάθημα. Ὅπως ἡ ὀχιά φτύνει τὸ δηλητήριό της πρὶν συνευρεθεῖ, παρόμοια καὶ ὁ σύζυγος πρέπει νὰ ἐγκαταλείπει τοὺς σκληροὺς του τρόπους. Ἀπὸ ἄλλη ἀποψη, ἡ συνύρεση τῆς ὀχιάς μὲ τὸ χέλι ἀποτελεῖ μοιχεία. Οἱ ἄντρες πού ὑπεισέρχονται σὲ ξένους γάμους πρέπει νὰ γνωρίζουν τί εἶδους ἔρπετο μιμοῦνται.⁵

Τὰ ζῶα μᾶς δίνουν ἐπίσης ἀνώτερα μαθήματα διακυβέρνησης καὶ θρησκείας. Οἱ μέλισσες κυβερνοῦνται ἀπὸ ἕνα βασιλιά (ἐμεῖς θὰ λέγαμε βασιλίτσα) πού ἀσκεῖ μιὰ φυσικὴ ἐπιβολὴ καί, μολονότι ὄπλισμένος μὲ κεντρί, δὲν κάνει χρῆση αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὄπλου. Ὁ βασιλιάς δὲν διορίζεται ἀπὸ τοὺς ὑπηκόους του, δὲν ἐκλέγεται μὲ κλῆρο, οὔτε καταλαμβάνει τὴν ἐξουσία μὲ κληρονομικὴ διαδοχὴ —τρεῖς ἀρχές πού συχνὰ φέρνουν τὰ χειρότερα ἀποτελέσματα: ἡ ἀνωτερότητά του ὀφείλεται στὴ φύση. Ἡ μεταμόρφωση τοῦ μεταξοσκώληκα ἀπὸ κάμπια σὲ χρυσαλλίδα καὶ μετὰ σὲ πεταλούδα μᾶς μαθαίνει νὰ πιστεύουμε στὴν ἀλλαγὴ πού θὰ ὑποστοῦν τὰ σώματά μας κατὰ τὴν Ἀνάσταση. Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ ὁ γύπας, πού ἀναπαράγεται χωρὶς συνουσία, μᾶς ἐνισχύει νὰ δεχτοῦμε τὴ γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπὸ τὴν Παρθένο.⁶ Εἰδικὰ ἕνα ἔργο πού ὀνομαζόταν Φυσιολόγος, ἐξίσου δημοφιλὲς σὲ Ἀνατολὴ καὶ Δύση, χρησίμευσε στὴ διάδοση θεολογικῶν ἐρμηνειῶν τῆς ὑποτιθέμενης συμπεριφορᾶς τῶν ζώων: τὸ λιοντάρι, πού κοιμᾶται μὲ τὰ μάτια ἀνοιχτά, συμβολίζει τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο, τοῦ ὁποῦ οἱ θεῖα φύση παραμένει ἀκοίμητη· ὁ μικρὸς πελεκάνος, πού θανατώνεται ἀπὸ τοὺς γονεῖς του καὶ ξαναγυρίζει στὴ ζωὴ τὴν τρίτη μέρα, ἀποτελεῖ ἐπίσης σύμβολο τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς.⁷

Ὅπως ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ Μεσαίωνα, οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ ἔδειχναν μεγάλο ἐνδιαφέρον γιὰ τὰ ἐξωτικά ζῶα, ἀληθινὰ καὶ φανταστικά. Ὁ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς ἱστορικὸς Φιλοστόργιος,⁸ μιλώντας γιὰ τὸν ἐπίγειο Παράδεισο, βεβαιώνει ὅτι τὰ μεγαλύτερα ζῶα βρισκόνται στὶς ἀνατολικὲς καὶ νότιες περιοχὲς τῆς γῆς, παρὰ τὴ ζέστη πού ἐπικρατεῖ ἐκεῖ. Ἀναφέρει τὸν ἐλέφαντα, τὸ Ἰνδικὸ βουβάλι πού εἶχε δεῖ σὲ ρωμαϊκὴ περιοχὴ, δράκους τριάντα μέτρα μῆκος καὶ μὲ σῶμα χοντρὸ σὰν καθρόνι, ἀπὸ τοὺς ὁποίους εἶχε δεῖ τὸ δέρμα, τὴν καμηλοπάρδαλη, τὴ ζέβρα, τὸ φοίνικα, τὸν παπαγάλο καὶ κάτι πιτσιλωτὰ πουλιὰ πού ὀνομάζονταν Γαράμαντες. Στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη εἶχε δεῖ τὴν εἰκόνα ἑνὸς μονόκερου: εἶχε κεφάλι δράκου, στριφογυριστὸ κέρατο, γένι, μακρὸ λαιμό, σῶμα ἐλαφιοῦ καὶ πόδια

λιονταριοῦ. "Όσο για τούς πιθήκους, υπάρχουν χιλιάδες διαφορετικές ποικιλίες, και πολλές είχαν μεταφερθεῖ στή ρωμαϊκή αυτοκρατορία. "Ένα εἶδος ὀνομαζόταν Πάν: εἶχε κεφάλι και πόδια κατσίκας, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα ἦταν κανονικός πίθηκος. "Ένα τέτοιο ζῶο στάλθηκε κάποτε στόν Μέγα Κωνσταντῖνο ἀπό τὸ βασιλιά τῆς Ἰνδίας, ἀλλὰ πέθανε καθ' ὁδὸν και ἔφτασε στήν Κωνσταντινούπολη σὲ μουμιοποιημένη μορφή. Ὁ Φιλοσόφου γιος πίστευε πῶς οἱ "Έλληνες εἶχαν θεοποιήσει αὐτόν τὸν πίθηκο, ὅπως ἐπίσης και τὸ σάτυρο και τὴ σφίγγα. Τὴν τελευταία τὴν εἶχε δεῖ ὁ ἴδιος: εἶχε γυμνά στήθη σὰν γυναικεῖα, στρογγυλὸ πρόσωπο και φωνὴ πού ἔμοιαζε μὲ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη, ἀλλὰ ἀναρρη και ὀργίλη. Αὐτὸ τὸ θηρίο ἦταν πολὺ ἄγριο. "Ένα τέτοιο πρέπει νὰ εἶχε μεταφερθεῖ στή Θήβα κατὰ τὴν ἀρχαιότητα. Ὁ μῦθος τὴν παρουσιάζει φτερωτὴ ἐπειδὴ πηδοῦσε γοργά, και φαίνονταν νὰ λείει αἰνίγματα ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἀκαταλαβίστικης φωνῆς της. Καὶ ὁ Κοσμᾶς ὁ Ἰνδικοπλεύστης ἀφιερώνει μιὰ παρεκβολὴ στὰ ἔξωτικά ζῶα.⁹ Περιγράφει μὲ σοβαρότητα τὸ ρινόκερο, πού τὸν εἶχε δεῖ στήν Αἰθιοπία, τὴν ταυρέλαφον (βουβάλι), τὴν καμηλοπάρδαλη, τὸν ἀγριόβουν (γιάκ), τὸν μόσχο, τὴν χοιρέλαφον, τῆς ὁποίας εἶχε γευθεῖ τὸ κρέας, και τὸν ἵπποπόταμο, δόντια πού ὁποῖο εἶχε πούλησει στήν Ἀλεξάνδρεια. Παραδέχεται ὅτι δὲν εἶχε δεῖ μονόκερο, ἀλλὰ τὸν περιγράφει σύμφωνα μὲ τέσσερα ἀγάλματα πού εἶχε δεῖ στήν Αἰθιοπία. Ὁ μονόκερος, ἐξηγεῖ, εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ πιαστεῖ. "Όταν τὸν κυνηγοῦν, πηδάει ἀπὸ ἓνα βράχο, κάνει τούμπα στόν ἀέρα και προσγειώνεται πάνω στὸ κέρατό του, πού ἐνεργεῖ σὰν ἐλατήριο. Ἡ ὑπαρξὴ του, ἐπιπλέον, ἐπιβεβαιώνεται ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή.

Ἄφοῦ ὁ Θεὸς ἐπλασε μόνο δύο λογικά εἶδη, δηλαδή τούς ἀγγέλους και τούς ἀνθρώπους, δὲν πρέπει νὰ πιστεύουμε σὲ δράκους πού παίρνουν ἀνθρώπινη μορφή και κλέβουν γυναῖκες. Οἱ δράκοι υπάρχουν, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἀπλῶς ἐρπετά. Δὲν εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι ὑψώνονται στόν ἀέρα και σκοτώνονται ἀπὸ κερανοῦς, ὅπως ἰσχυρίζονται μερικοὶ ἄδαεῖς.¹⁰ Τὸ ἴδιο ἐπιχειρήματα ἀναφέρεται γιὰ τούς σατύρους ἀπὸ τὸ στρατηγὸ πού 11ου αἰῶνα Κεκαυμένο.¹¹ Ἄν, λείει, ὑπῆρχαν, ὅπως δηλώνει ὁ Βίος πού ἁγίου Παύλου πού Θεβαίου,¹² και ἂν ἦταν λογικά ὄντα, πῶς δὲν ἦρθε και σ' αὐτούς ὁ Χριστός; Ποιὸς προφήτης, ποιὸς ἀπόστολος στάλθηκε νὰ τούς φωτίσει; Γιατί δὲν ὑπάρχει εὐαγγέλιο πού νὰ ἀπευθύνεται σὲ σατύρους; Οἱ Πατέρες τῆς ἐρήμου, συνεχίζει, εἶδαν πράγματι διάφορα παράξενα ζῶα πού ζοῦν στὰ μέρη αὐτά, ὅπως δράκους, δηλητηριώδη φίδια, βασιλίσκους και μονόκερους, πού ἢ ὑπαρξὴ τους μπορεῖ νὰ γίνε δεκτὴ, ἀλλὰ ὄχι και ἢ ὑπαρξὴ τῶν σατύρων.

Εἶναι γεγονός ὅτι οἱ μοναχοὶ εἶχαν μιὰ ἰδιαίτερη σχέση μὲ τὸ ζωικὸ βασίλειο. Μερικοὶ ἀπὸ αὐτούς ἔδειχναν ἰδιαίτερη τρυφερότητα στὰ ζῶα. "Ένας μοναχὸς ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια, καθὼς λέγεται,¹³ ἔτρεφε καθημερινὰ τὰ σκυλιὰ πού μοναστηριοῦ του, ἔδινε ἀλεύρι στὰ μικρὰ μερμήγκια, σπόρους στὰ μεγαλύτερα, και μουσκεμένα παξιμάδια στὰ πουλιὰ. Ὁ ἁγιος Στέφανος ὁ Σαβαΐτης (πού πέθανε τὸ 794) ἔτρεφε ἀκόμη και τὰ ἄκακα μαῦρα σκουλήκια τῆς ἐρήμου.¹⁴ Ἀλλὰ ἡ διασημότερη και πιὸ διδακτικὴ ἱστορία μὲ ζῶο εἶναι πού ἁγίου Γερασίμου, πού ἀργότερα ἀποδόθηκε στόν ἅγιο Ἰερώνυμο. Αὐτὸ τὸ λιοντάρι, πού ὁ ἅγιος πού εἶχε βγάλει ἓνα ἀγκάθι ἀπὸ τὸ πόδι, ἔμεινε κοντὰ του νὰ τὸν ὑπηρετεῖ, και μάλιστα κουβαλοῦσε και φορτία γιὰ χάρη του, σὰν γαϊδούρι. "Όταν ὁ Γερασίμος πέθανε, πέθανε και τὸ λιοντάρι ἀπὸ τὴ λύπη του. «Αὐτὸ συνέβη» λέει ὁ Ἰωάννης Μόσχος «ὄχι γιὰ τὸ λιοντάρι εἶχε λογικὴ ψυχὴ, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὸ Θεὸς ἤθελε νὰ δοξάσει αὐτούς πού τὸν δοξάζουν και νὰ δείξει τὴν ὑπακοὴ πού εἶχαν τὰ ζῶα στόν Ἀδὰμ». ¹⁵ "Έτσι ἡ ἐξουσία πάνω στὰ ζῶα, πού ὁ Ἀδὰμ τὴν εἶχε χάσει ἐξαιτίας τῆς Πτώσης, μποροῦσε νὰ ξανακερδηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν ἅγιο.

Ἡ ἀποψη ὅτι τὰ διάφορα εἶδη ζῶων εἶχαν τὰ δικά τους ξεχωριστὰ και ἀμετάβλητα χαρακτηριστικά — χαρακτηριστικά πού δὲν ἦταν μόνο σωματικά ἀλλὰ και ἠθικά, ὅπως ἡ περηφάνια πού λιονταριοῦ και ἡ ἡμερότητα πού βοδιοῦ— ἴσχυε και γιὰ τὶς ἀνθρώπινες φυλές και τούς λαούς. Αὐτὸ χρησιμοποιοῦν ἀπὸ παλιὰ ὡς ἐπιχειρήματα κατὰ τῆς ἀστρολογίας, πού τὸ βρίσκουμε στόν Διόδωρο τῆς Ταρσοῦ¹⁶ και ἀργότερα στόν Ψευδο-Καيسάριο.¹⁷ Σκοπὸς πού ἐπιχειρήματος ἦταν νὰ ἀποδείξει ὅτι στίς ἴδιες γεωγραφικὲς περιοχὲς ζοῦσαν λαοὶ μὲ τελείως διαφορετικὰ ἦθη και θεσμούς, ὅποτε οἱ ἰδιομορφίες τους δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ ἀποδοθοῦν στήν ἐπιρροὴ τῶν ἀστεριῶν. "Έτσι, οἱ Βραχμᾶνοι και οἱ Ἰνδοὶ ζοῦν στήν ἴδια ἀστρική περιοχή, κι ὡστόσο οἱ Βραχμᾶνοι εἶναι οἱ πιὸ ἐνάρετοι ἀνθρωποὶ, ἐνῶ οἱ Ἰνδοὶ ζοῦν σὰν γουρούνια. Οἱ Καλδαῖοι και οἱ Βαβυλώνιοι ἔχουν αἰμομεικτικὲς συνθήσεις, και ὄχι μόνο στήν πατρίδα τους ἀλλὰ και ὅταν ζοῦν ἄλλοῦ —πράγμα πού «τὸ κάνουν ἀκόμη και τώρα» ἀνάμεσα στούς Μήδους, τούς Πάρθους, τούς Ἐλαμίτες, τούς Αἰγυπτίους, τούς Φρύγες και τούς Γαλάτες, «ζώντας ζωὴ βρωμερὴ σὲ μερικὰ χωριά». Παρόμοια παραδείγματα σεξουαλικῆς διαφθορᾶς μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ δεῖ και σὲ ἄλλα μέρη τῆς γῆς, ὅπως στή Βρετανία, ὅπου πολλοὶ ἄντρες κοιμοῦνται μὲ μιὰ γυναῖκα και πολλὲς γυναῖκες μὲ ἓναν ἄντρα. Οἱ Σλάβοι, πού ὀνομάζονται και Δουνάβιοι, καταβροχθίζουν τὰ στήθη γυναικῶν πού θηλάζουν και ἐκσφενδονίζουν τὰ βρέφη τους σὲ βράχους, ἐνῶ ἄλλες φυλές πού ζοῦν στήν

Ίδια περιοχή απέχουν έντελῶς ἀπὸ τὸ κράας. Κι ἐνῶ μερικοὶ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς εἶναι ἀνυπόταχοι, θανατώνουν τοὺς ἡγέτες τους, τρῶνε ἀλεποῦδες, ἀγριογάτες καὶ ἀρκοῦδες καὶ φωνάζουν ὁ ἕνας τὸν ἄλλο μὲ οὐρλιαχτὰ σὰν λύκοι, ἄλλοι εἶναι ἐγκρατεῖς καὶ πρᾶοι. "Ἄν ὁ χαρακτήρας μας καθορίζεται ἀπὸ τὴ θέση τῶν ἀστεριῶν τὴ στιγμή τῆς γέννησής μας, καὶ ἂν ἦταν ἀληθεια πὼς ἡ σύνοδος τοῦ Ἑρμῆ καὶ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης στὸ ζῶδιο τοῦ Ἑρμῆ γεννᾷ γλύπτες καὶ ζωγράφους, ἐνῶ ἡ ἴδια σύνοδος στὸ ζῶδιο τῆς Ἀφροδίτης γεννᾷ ἄρωματοποιούς, ἡθοποιούς καὶ ποιητές, πὼς συμβαίνει αὐτές οἱ ἀσχολίες νὰ ἀπουσιάζουν έντελῶς ἀπὸ τοὺς Σαρακηνοὺς, τοὺς Λίβυες, τοὺς Μαυριτανούς, τοὺς Γερμανοὺς, τοὺς Σαρμάτες, τοὺς Σκύθες καὶ γενικὰ ἀπὸ ὅλους ὅσοι ζοῦν βόρεια τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου;

Οἱ διαφορὲς ἀνάμεσα στοὺς λαοὺς ἐρμηνεύονταν μὲ βᾶση τὴ διαίρεση τῆς γῆς στοὺς γιούς τοῦ Νῶε καὶ τὸν μετέπειτα πολλαπλασιασμό τῶν γλωσσῶν ὅταν χτιζόταν ὁ Πύργος τῆς Βαβέλ, γιὰτὶ προηγουμένως ὁλόκληρη ἡ ἀνθρωπότητα μιλοῦσε τὴν ἴδια γλῶσσα, δηλαδὴ ἐβραϊκᾶ. Ὁ βασικὸς κατάλογος τῶν λαῶν βρίσκεται στὸ δέκατο κεφάλαιο τῆς Γένεσης. Στὴ μετάφραση τῶν Ἑβδομήκοντα ὁ κατάλογος αὐτὸς περιέχει ὀρισμένα ὀνόματα ποὺ μποροῦν νὰ ἐρμηνευτοῦν ὡς ἐθνικὰ, καὶ ἄλλα ποὺ εἶναι ὀλοφάνερα ἐθνικὰ. Ἔτσι, ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ὀκτῶ γιούς τοῦ Ἰάφεθ βρίσκεται ὁ Ἰῶυαν, ποὺ φέρνει στὸ νοῦ τοὺς Ἰῶνες. Ἀνάμεσα στοὺς γιούς τοῦ Ἰῶυαν εἶναι οἱ Θάρσεις, ποὺ μοιάζουν κάπως μὲ τοὺς Θράκες, οἱ Κίτιοι (ποὺ θυμίζουν τὸ Κίτιο τῆς Κύπρου) καὶ οἱ Ρόδιοι. Ἀνάμεσα στοὺς τέσσερις γιούς τοῦ Χάμ, ὁ Μεσαῖν προφανῶς ἀναφέρεται στὴν Αἴγυπτο (Misr), ἐνῶ ὁ Χαναὰν γέννησε τὸν Σιδῶνα, τὸν Ἀμορραῖο, τὸν Ἀράδιο (ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀραδο τῆς Συρίας), τὸν Σαμαραῖο καὶ τὸν Ἀμαθί (ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη Ἀμαθο τῆς Κύπρου), καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς.

Ὁ Φλάβιος Ἰώσηπος¹⁸ καταπιάστηκε μὲ τὴν ταύτιση αὐτῶν τῶν παρὰδοξῶν ὀνομάτων, καθὼς ἐνδιαφερόταν νὰ δείξει πὼς ἡ Βίβλος προηγούνταν τῶν εἰδωλολατρικῶν παραδόσεων. Ἀπὸ τοὺς διάφορους λαοὺς, λέει, μερικοὶ κράτησαν τὸ ἀρχικὸ ἐβραϊκὸ τους ὄνομα, ἐνῶ ἄλλοι τὸ ἔχασαν ἐξαιτίας τῶν Ἑλλήνων (δηλαδὴ τῶν Μακεδόνων). Γιὰτὶ ὅταν οἱ τελευταῖοι κυριάρχησαν στὸν κόσμον, ἔδωσαν στὰ ἔθνη ὀνόματα ποὺ μποροῦσαν νὰ καταλάβουν οἱ ἴδιοι, δημιουργώντας ἔτσι τὴν ἐντύπωση πὼς αὐτὰ τὰ ἔθνη εἶχαν ἐλληνικὴ καταγωγή. Ἔργο τοῦ Ἰωσήπου ἦταν ἐπίσης ἡ γεωγραφικὴ διαίρεση τῆς γῆς ἀνάμεσα στοὺς γιούς τοῦ Νῶε, διαίρεση ποὺ ἀργότερα υἱοθετήθηκε ἀπὸ τὴ χριστιανικὴ παράδοση. Οἱ ἀπόγονοι τοῦ Ἰάφεθ, λέει, ἀρχικὰ κατοίκησαν στὸν Ταῦρο καὶ στὸ Ἀμανό (τὴν ὄροσειρὰ ἀνάμεσα στὴ Συρία καὶ τὴν Κιλικία), καὶ στὴ συνέχεια προχώρησαν στὴν

Ἀσία μέχρι τὸν ποταμὸ Τάναϊ (τὸν Δόν) καὶ στὴν Εὐρώπη μέχρι τὸ στενὸ τοῦ Γιβραλτάρ, καθὼς ὅλη αὐτὴ ἡ περιοχή ἦταν τότε ἀκατοίκητη. Οἱ γιοὶ τοῦ Χάμ κράτησαν τὴν παραλία τῆς Φοινίκης καὶ τῆς Παλαιστίνης μέχρι τὴν Αἴγυπτο, καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ ὅλη τὴ Βόρεια Ἀφρικὴ ὡς τὸν Ἀτλαντικὸ Ὠκεανό. Τέλος οἱ γιοὶ τοῦ Σῆμ πήραν τὸ μεγαλύτερο μέρος τῆς Ἀσίας μέχρι τὸν Ἰνδικὸ Ὠκεανό.

Μετὰ τὸν Ἰώσηπο καὶ πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν 4ο αἰῶνα συντάχθηκε ἕνας πῶδ συστηματικὸς κατάλογος, γνωστὸς ὡς *Μερισμὸς τῆς Γῆς*.¹⁹ Αὐτὸ τὸ κείμενο, ποὺ δὲν ἔχει διασωθεῖ στὴν ἀρχικὴ του μορφή, εἶχε μεγάλη διάδοση τὸ Μεσαιῶνα, ὅχι μόνο στὸν ἐλληνόφωνο κόσμον (περιέχεται σὲ ὅλα τὰ βυζαντινὰ χρονικὰ), ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴ Δύση, τὴ Συρία, τὴν Ἀρμενία καὶ ἄλλοι. Εἶναι μιὰ μικρὴ γεωγραφικὴ καὶ ἐθνογραφικὴ μελέτη ποὺ ἀναφέρεται σὲ ἐβδομήντα δύο ἔθνη, μιὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ἦταν ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν γλωσσῶν ποὺ δημιουργήθηκαν τὴν ἐποχὴ ποὺ χτιζόταν ὁ Πύργος τῆς Βαβέλ. Ἡ διαίρεση τῆς γῆς ἀνάμεσα στοὺς γιούς τοῦ Νῶε εἶχε γίνει, λίγο πολὺ, σὲ τρεῖς παράλληλες ζώνες ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνατολικά πρὸς τὰ δυτικά: οἱ ἀπόγονοι τοῦ Ἰάφεθ εἶχαν ὅλο τὸ βορρὰ κατὰ μῆκος μιὰς γραμμῆς ποὺ ξεκινούσε ἀπὸ τὴ Μηδία καὶ ἔφτανε στὸ Γιβραλτάρ, τοῦ Σῆμ εἶχαν τὴν ἐνδιάμεση ζώνη, καὶ τοῦ Χάμ τὸ νότο κατὰ μῆκος μιὰς γραμμῆς ποὺ περνοῦσε ἀπὸ τὸ σημεῖο ἐπαφῆς τῆς Παλαιστίνης καὶ τῆς Αἰγύπτου. Ὁ ἀνώνυμος συγγραφέας πρόσθεσε καὶ ἕναν κατάλογο ὄσων λαῶν εἶχαν ἀλφάβητο, καθὼς καὶ τῶν κυριότερων ποταμῶν, νησιῶν καὶ μεγάλων πόλεων.

Αὐτὸς ἦταν ὁ πληρέστερος κατάλογος λαῶν ποὺ ἦταν γνωστοὶ στὴ βυζαντινὴ παράδοση, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἔφτανε ἀνατολικότερα ἀπὸ τὴν περσικὴ αυτοκρατορία. Ἡ ὑπαρξὴ τῆς Ἰνδίας ἦταν γενικὰ γνωστὴ, οἱ ἄλλες ὁμοίως χῶρες τῆς κεντρικῆς καὶ ἀνατολικῆς Ἀσίας ἦταν καλυμμένες ἀπὸ μυστήριο. Οἱ πάντα δημοφιλεῖς διηγήσεις περὶ τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου ἀνέφεραν θαυμάσιες λεπτομέρειες γιὰ τοὺς λαοὺς καὶ τὰ ζῶα ποὺ κατοικοῦσαν σ' αὐτὰ τὰ ἐξωτικὰ μέρη. Ἀνάμεσα στὰ πολλὰ κείμενα ποὺ συνδέονταν μὲ τὸ μῦθο τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου κυκλοφοροῦσε καὶ ἡ Ὀδοιογία ἀπὸ Ἐδέμ τοῦ Παραδείσου ἄχρι τῶν Ρωμαίων.²⁰ Τὸ κείμενο μᾶς πληροφορεῖ πὼς κοντὰ στὸν ἐπίγειο Παράδεισον βρίσκεται ἡ χώρα τῶν Μακαρίνων ἢ Καμαρίνων, ἀπὸ ὅπου ρεῖ ἕνας μεγάλος ποταμὸς ποὺ χωρίζεται σὲ τέσσερα παρακλάδια. Οἱ Μακαρίνοι εἶναι καλοὶ καὶ εὐσεβεῖς. Δὲν γνωρίζουν τὴ φωτιὰ καὶ δὲν φροντίζουν γιὰ τροφή, ἐπειδὴ τρέφονται μὲ τὸ μάννα ποὺ πέφτει ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανό, καὶ πίνουν ἕνα μεῖγμα ἀπὸ ἄγριο μέλι καὶ πιπέρι. Τὰ ροῦχα τους εἶναι ἀπὸ τόσο ἀγνὸ ὑλικὸ ποὺ δὲν λεκιάζουν ποτέ. Ἀρρώστιες δὲν ὑπάρχουν ἀνάμεσά τους, καὶ ὅλοι φτάνουν σὲ ἡλικία ἀπὸ 118 ὡς 120 ἐτῶν.

Γνωρίζουν από πριν την ώρα του θανάτου τους και προετοιμάζονται ξαπλώνοντας σε μια σαρκοφάγο από άρωματικό ξύλο. Ἐπίσης δὲν ἔχουν κυβέρνηση, ἐπειδὴ ζοῦν σὲ πλήρη ἀρμονία. Ὅλα τὰ πολύτιμα πετράδια προέρχονται ἀπὸ τὴ χώρα τους. Κοντὰ στοὺς Μακαρίνους ζοῦν οἱ Βραχμάνοι, ποὺ ἐπίσης εἶναι ἐξαιρετικά ἐνάρετοι, ἀλλὰ καθὼς προχωροῦμε δυτικότερα τὰ πράγματα βαθμηδὸν χειροτερεύουν. Οἱ γεωργικὲς καλλιέργειες ἀρχίζουν στὴ χώρα Νεμπούς, τὴν πέμπτη ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνατολικά, ποὺ εἶναι καὶ ἡ πρώτη χώρα ποὺ ἔχει μιὰ κυβέρνηση γερόντων. Πολεμιστὲς συναντᾶμε γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ στὴν Ἀξώμη, τὴ δέκατη χώρα· κατόπι εἶναι ἡ Μικρὰ Ἰνδία, ποὺ τρέφει πλῆθος ἐλέφαντες, καὶ τέλος ἡ Περσία, ποὺ εἶναι πλούσια ἀλλὰ πολὺ διεφθαρμένη. Οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ δὲν φαίνεται νὰ ἔκαναν μεγάλη προσπάθεια νὰ ἐντάξουν αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνατολικοὺς λαοὺς σὲ ἓνα βιβλικὸ πλαίσιο, ἀλλὰ ὑποστήριζαν ὅτι τὰ ἐνάρετα ἔθνη τῆς Ἀπω Ἀνατολῆς εἶναι χριστιανοί.

Τὸ κύριο πρόβλημα ποὺ ἀπασχολοῦσε τὴ βυζαντινὴ σκέψη σὲ σχέση μὲ τοὺς λαοὺς τῆς γῆς ἀφοροῦσε τὴ θέση τους μέσα στὸ σχέδιο τῆς Θείας Πρόνοιας. Ἡ ἰσότης τῶν ἀνθρώπων διακηρύσσεται στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ἀφοῦ ὁ Θεὸς ἐποίησέ τε ἐξ ἑνὸς αἵματος πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ πᾶν τὸ πρόσωπον τῆς γῆς, ὀρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν, ζητεῖν τὸν Κύριον, εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὗροιν, καὶ γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἑνὸς ἐκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα (Πράξεις, ΙΖ', 26-27). Φαίνεται ὥστόσο πὼς οἱ διάφοροι αὐτοὶ λαοὶ δὲν ἔτυχαν ἴσης φροντίδας ἐκ μέρους τοῦ Κυρίου. Δὲν ὑπῆρχε δυσκολία γιὰ τὴν πρώτη περίοδο, τὰ 2.900 χρόνια περίπου ἀπὸ τὴ Δημιουργία ὡς τὸ διαχωρισμὸ τῶν γλωσσῶν. Ἀλλὰ τί γινόταν μὲ τὰ ἐπόμενα 2.600 χρόνια μέχρι τὴν Ἐνσάρκωση; Οἱ προφῆτες στάλθηκαν μόνο στοὺς Ἰσραηλίτες, ἐνῶ τὰ ὑπόλοιπα ἔθνη ἐξακολουθοῦσαν νὰ ἔχουν ἄγνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ μετὰ τὴν Ἐνσάρκωση; Ὅσο πλατιά διάδοση καὶ ἂν εἶχε τὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, δὲν ἐκτεινόταν σὲ ὀλόκληρη τὴ γῆ. Τέλος, ποιοὺς ἦταν, μέσα στὸ σχέδιο τῆς Θείας Πρόνοιας, ὁ ρόλος τῶν εἰδωλολατρικῶν ἐθνῶν;

Στὶς ἐρωτήσεις αὐτὲς βρίσκουμε μόνο σποραδικὲς καὶ ἀποσπασματικὲς ἀπαντήσεις. Ἐφόσον ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἦταν ἐξ ἑνὸς αἵματος, ἡ ἀρχαία κατάρτα τοῦ Νῶε βάραινε πάνω στοὺς ἀπογόνους τοῦ Χαναάν, τοῦ γιοῦ τοῦ Χάμ: «ἐπικατάρτος Χαναάν· παῖς οἰκέτης [ὑπηρέτης] ἔσται τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ. καὶ εἶπεν· εὐλογητός Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ Σῆμ, καὶ ἔσται Χαναάν παῖς οἰκέτης αὐτοῦ. πλατύναι ὁ Θεὸς τῷ Ἰάφεθ, καὶ κατοικήσάτω ἐν τοῖς οἴκοις τοῦ Σῆμ καὶ γενηθήτω Χαναάν παῖς αὐτοῦ» (Γέν., Θ', 25-27). Πίστευαν ὅτι αὐτὴ ἡ κατάρτα ὀφειλόταν ὄχι μόνο στὸ ὅτι ὁ Χάμ

εἶχε δεῖ τὸν πατέρα του γυμνὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὸ ὅτι εἶχε προβλεφθεῖ ἡ ἀπληστία τοῦ Χαναάν, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐμελλε νὰ εἰσβάλλει στὴν Παλαιστίνη καὶ τὴ Φοινίκη, χώρες ποὺ ἀνῆκαν στὸν Σῆμ. Ἐνῶ λοιπὸν ὑποβίβαζε τοὺς Ἀφρικανοὺς ἐξαιτίας τοῦ προπατορικοῦ τους ἁμαρτήματος, ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη μερὴ ὁ Νῶε προφήτευε τὸ ἐνδοξο πεπρωμένο τῶν ἀπογόνων τοῦ Ἰάφεθ, ἀφοῦ ὁ χριστιανισμὸς θὰ ἔκανε τὶς μεγαλύτερες προόδους τοῦ ἀνάμεσα σ' αὐτούς.²¹

Ἐναν ἄλλο τρόπο γιὰ νὰ δοθεῖ κάποια ἱκανοποίηση στοὺς ἀπίστους ποὺ εἶχαν ζήσει πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Χριστοῦ παρεῖχε ἡ δήλωση τοῦ ἀποστόλου Πέτρου ὅτι ὁ Κύριος καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασι πορευθεῖς ἐκήρυξεν, ἀπειθήσασι ποτε (Ἐπιστ. Πέτρου Α', Γ', 19). Ἐλεγχαν ἀκόμη ὅτι ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Πρόδρομος, ποὺ πέθανε πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστό, εἶχε ἀρχίσει νὰ διδάσκει τὰ πνεύματα στὸν Ἀδῆ, καὶ ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ ἔργο εἶχε ὀλοκληρωθεῖ ὅταν ἔγινε ἡ Κάθοδος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκεῖ. Πρὸς ἐπιβεβαίωση τοῦ ἰσχυρισμοῦ ἀναφερόταν ὅτι ἓνας δικηγόρος κάποτε κατάρσθηκε τὸν Πλάτωνα. Τὴ νύχτα ὁ φιλόσοφος ἐμφανίσθηκε στὸ ὄνειρό του καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: «Ἀνθρωπε, πάψε νὰ μὲ καταριέσαι, γιατί βλάπτεις τὸν ἑαυτό σου. Δὲν ἀρνοῦμαι ὅτι ἔζησα ὡς ἁμαρτωλός, ἀλλὰ ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς κατέβηκε στὸν Ἀδῆ ἤμουν ὁ πρῶτος ποὺ πίστεψε σ' αὐτόν». Αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει πὼς θὰ δοθεῖ στοὺς νεκροὺς ἄλλη μιὰ εὐκαιρία νὰ μετανοήσουν, γιατί αὐτὸ ἔγινε γιὰ μία καὶ μοναδική φορὰ.²²

Ἄν μετὰ αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο μποροῦσαν νὰ συμπεριλάβουν ὅλους ὅσοι εἶχαν πεθάνει πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ Σταύρωση, ἡ ἐπόμενη δυσκολία ἀφοροῦσε τὴν παγκοσμιότητα τοῦ χριστιανικοῦ κηρύγματος, πράγμα ποὺ σχετιζόταν μὲ ἓνα πολὺ σημαντικὸ θέμα. Ὅταν ὁ ἀπόστολος Πέτρος εἶπε ἐν παντὶ ἔθνει ὁ φοβούμενος αὐτὸν καὶ ἐργαζόμενος δικαιοσύνην δεκτὸς αὐτῶ ἐστί (Πράξεις, Ι', 35), μιλοῦσε σὲ μιὰ ἐποχὴ ποὺ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο δὲν εἶχε διαδοθεῖ παντοῦ, πράγμα ποὺ δὲν ἴσχυε πιά.²³ Διαφορετικὰ οἱ «ἐθνικοί», δηλαδή ὅλοι ὅσοι δὲν ἦταν χριστιανοί, θὰ μποροῦσαν νὰ σωθοῦν μόνο μὲ τὶς καλὲς πράξεις. Ἀπὸ ἐδῶ ξεκινοῦσε ἡ ἀνάγκη νὰ ἀποδειχτεῖ ὅτι πράγματι εἶχαν εὐαγγελιστεῖ ὅλες οἱ χώρες — ἓνας μῦθος ποὺ ἐνισχύθηκε ἀπὸ τὶς ἀπόκρυφες Πράξεις τῶν Ἀποστόλων. Ὑποτίθεται ὅτι πρὶν ξεκινήσουν γιὰ τὴν ἀποστολή τους, οἱ ἀπόστολοι συγκεντρώθηκαν στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ μοίρασαν μετὰξὺ τους ὅλες τὶς περιοχὲς τῆς οἰκουμένης. Ὁ Πέτρος ἀνέλαβε τοὺς περιτετημένους Ἑβραίους, ὁ Ἰάκωβος καὶ ὁ Ἰωάννης τὴν Ἀνατολή, ὁ Φίλιππος τὴ Σαμάρεια καὶ τὴν Ἀσία, ὁ Ματθαῖος τὴν Παρθία, ὁ Θωμᾶς τὴν Ἀρμενία καὶ τὴν Ἰνδία, ὁ Ἀνδρέας τὴ Βιθυνία, τὴ Λακεδαιμονία καὶ τὴν Ἀχαΐα, καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς. Ἡ περιοχὴ δράσης κάθε

ἀποστόλου ποικίλλει πολύ ἀπὸ κείμενο σὲ κείμενο. Ἔτσι συναντᾶμε τὸν Ματθαῖο ἀκόμη καὶ στὴ χώρα τῶν Ἀνθρωποφάγων, καὶ τὸν Φίλιππο καὶ τὸν Βαρθολομαῖο «στὴ χώρα τῶν Ὀφριανῶν καὶ στὴν ἔρημο τῶν θηλυκῶν δράκων». ²⁴ Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν Θωμᾶ, ποῦ ἔδρασε στὴ μακρινὴ Ἰνδία, μεγάλος ταξιδευτὴς ἀποδείχτηκε καὶ ὁ Ἀνδρέας, ἀφοῦ κήρυξε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο στὴ Σκυθία, ἔδρασε ἐκκλησίες στὶς νότιες ἀκτὲς τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου (ἀνάμεσα τοὺς καὶ τὴν ἐκκλησία τοῦ Βυζαντίου) καὶ τέλος βᾶδισε κι αὐτὸς στὴν Ἀχαΐα, ὅπου καὶ μαρτύρησε. ²⁵

Οἱ μῦθοι αὐτοὶ κρύβουν μιὰ πραγματικότητα ποῦ εἶναι ἀτελῶς γνωστή, δηλαδή τὴν πρόοδο τῶν χριστιανικῶν ἱεραποστολῶν. Τὴν πρῶτη βυζαντινὴ ἐποχὴ ὁ χριστιανικὸς κόσμος παρουσίασε ἀξιοσημείωτη ἐξάπλωση. Ὁ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς ἱστορικὸς Σωζομενός, ποῦ ἔγραφε τὸν 5ο αἰῶνα, ἀναφέρει τὸν ἐκχριστιανισμὸ ἕλων τῶν δυτικῶν λαῶν ἀνάμεσα στὸν Ρῆνο καὶ τὸν Ἀτλαντικὸ, τῶν Ἀρμενίων καὶ Γεωργιανῶν, καὶ περιγράφει τὴν πρόοδο τῆς ἀληθινῆς πίστεως ἀνάμεσα στοὺς Πέρσες. ²⁶ Ἐναν αἰῶνα ἀργότερα ὁ συνεχιστὴς τοῦ Ζαχαρία Μυτιλήνης μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὴν ἱεραποστολὴ ποῦ στάλθηκε στοὺς ἀνατολικούς Οὐνοὺς, πέρα ἀπὸ τὶς Κάσπιες Πύλες, καὶ τὴ μετάφραση τῶν Γραφῶν στὴν τοπικὴ διάλεκτο. ²⁷ Τὸ εἶχε πεῖ ὁ Χριστὸς (Κατὰ Ἰωάν., ΙΖ', 33): *θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον*. Ἄλλοῦ πάλι (Κατὰ Ματθ., ΙΖ', 18): *καὶ πύλαι ἄδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς* (τῆς Ἐκκλησίας). Ὁ Κοσμᾶς ὁ Ἰνδικοπλεύστης εἶδε καθαρὰ τὴν ἐκπλήρωση αὐτῶν τῶν προφητειῶν. Ἐπάρχουν χριστιανικὲς ἐκκλησίες, γράφει, μέχρι τὴν Κεϋλάνη, τὸ Μαλαμπάρ καὶ τὸ νησὶ τῆς Σοκότρας.

«Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ στοὺς Βακτριανούς καὶ τοὺς Οὐνοὺς καὶ τοὺς Πέρσες, καὶ στοὺς ὑπόλοιπους Ἰνδοὺς καὶ τοὺς Περσαρμενίους καὶ τοὺς Μήδους καὶ τοὺς Ἐλαμίτες καὶ σὲ ὅλη τὴ χώρα τῆς Περσίας ὑπάρχουν ἄπειρες ἐκκλησίες καὶ ἐπίσκοποι καὶ πάμπολλοι χριστιανικοὶ λαοὶ καὶ πολλοὶ μάρτυρες καὶ μοναχοὶ ἡσυχαστές. Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ στὴν Αἰθιοπία, τὴν Ἀξώμη καὶ ὅλη τὴ γύρω περιοχὴ, στὴν Εὐδαίμονα Ἀραβία, ποῦ οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς τώρα ὀνομάζονται Ὀμηρίτες, σὲ ὅλη τὴν Ἀραβία καὶ τὴν Παλαιστίνη, τὴ Φοινίκη καὶ ὅλη τὴ Συρία καὶ τὴν Ἀντιόχεια μέχρι τὴ Μεσοποταμία, στοὺς Νοβάτες [Νουβίους] καὶ Γαράμαντες, τὴν Αἴγυπτο καὶ τὴ Λιβύη καὶ τὴν Πεντάπολη, τὴν Ἀφρική καὶ τὴ Μαυριτανία ὡς τὰ Γάδαιρα [Ταγγέρη] πρὸς τὸ νότο, παντοῦ ὑπάρχουν ἐκκλησίες χριστιανῶν καὶ ἐπίσκοποι, μάρτυρες, μοναχοὶ ἡσυχαστές, παντοῦ ὅπου κηρύσσεται τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἐπίσης στὴν Κιλικία, Ἀσία, Καππαδοκία, Λαζική καὶ στὸν Πόντο καὶ στὰ ὑπερβόρεια μέρη τῶν Σκυθῶν καὶ τῶν Ἰρ-

κάνων, τῶν Ἑρούλων, Βουλγάρων, Ἑλλαδικῶν καὶ Ἰλλυριῶν, Δαλμάτων, Γόθων, Ἰσπανῶν, Ρωμαίων, Φράγκων καὶ λοιπῶν ἐθνῶν μέχρι τὰ Γάδαιρα τοῦ Ὤκεανοῦ [Γιβραλτάρ] πρὸς τὸ βορρᾶ, ὑπάρχουν πιστοὶ καὶ κήρυκες τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποῦ ὁμολογοῦν τὴν ἀνάσταση ἐκ νεκρῶν. Κι ἔτσι βλέπουμε νὰ ἐκπληρώνονται οἱ προφητεῖες σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον.» ²⁸

Βέβαια, γιὰ κάποιον ποῦ ζοῦσε τὸν 6ο αἰῶνα, σίγουρα θὰ φαινόταν πὼς δὲν ἀπέμενε νὰ καλυφθεῖ πολὺ ἔδαφος ἀκόμη. Τὸ μόνο μεγάλο ἐμπόδιο ἦταν ἡ Περσία, ὅπου ὁ χριστιανισμὸς εἶχε ἦδη πραγματοποιήσει ἀξιοσημείωτη πρόοδο. Ἀναφερόταν, πάντως, ὅτι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ βασιλιάς τῶν Περσῶν, ἐπηρεασμένος ἀπὸ τὸν χριστιανὸ γιατρό του καὶ τὸν νεστοριανὸ Καθολικό, εἶχε σταματήσει νὰ τρώει τὸ κρέας ἀκάθαρτων ζώων καὶ εἶχε χτίσει ἕναν ξενώνα, πράγμα ἀνήκουστο στὸ παρελθόν. ²⁹

Τὸ δράμα μιᾶς ὀλοκληρωτικῆς χριστιανικῆς οἰκουμένης παραλίγο νὰ γίνετο πραγματικότητα ὅταν ὁ Ἡράκλειος κατέβαλε τὴν περσικὴ αὐτοκρατορία: ἴσως μάλιστα αὐτὸ νὰ ἀποτελοῦσε σημαντικὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς πολιτικῆς τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα. Ἡ καταστροφικὴ ὀπισθοδρόμηση ποῦ ὑπέστη ὁ χριστιανισμὸς ἀμέσως μετὰ ὑπῆρξε ὀλοτέλα ἀπροσδόκητη, καὶ θὰ μπορούσαμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἡ βυζαντινὴ σκέψη δὲν προσαρμόστηκε ποτέ σ' αὐτήν. Ἰδιαιτέρως τὸν 7ο αἰῶνα οἱ ἐπιτυχίες τῶν ἐθνικῶν ἔθεταν ἕνα ἀγωνιώδες ἐρώτημα: Ἦταν θέλημα Θεοῦ ποῦ οἱ ἀσεβεῖς ἐχθροὶ ἔκαναν τόσο κακὸ στοὺς χριστιανούς; Οἱ κληρικοὶ μπορούσαν μόνο νὰ ἀπαντήσουν ὅτι αὐτὲς οἱ συμφορὲς ἦταν πράγματι θέλημα Θεοῦ γιὰ νὰ τιμωρηθοῦν οἱ χριστιανοὶ γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες τους. Ἡ καλὴ τύχη τῶν ἀθῶν, ὡστόσο, δὲν ὀφειλόταν στὶς ἀρετὲς τους. «Οἱ ἄνομοι καὶ ἀσεβεῖς ἐχθροὶ, ὑποδουλωμένοι στὴν κακοήθειά τους, μᾶς ρίχνουν σ' αὐτὰ τὰ δεινὰ, ποῦ δυσχεροῦν τὸν Θεό· ἀλλὰ γι' αὐτὰ σίγουρα θὰ πληρώσουν μὲ αἰώνια τιμωρία.» ³⁰ Σὲ μερικοὺς μάλιστα φαινόταν πὼς οἱ ἐθνικοὶ ἦταν ὑγιέστεροι, σωματικὰ ἀνώτεροι ἀπὸ τοὺς χριστιανούς, ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ὁποίους ὑπῆρχε σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ ἀρθρίτιδα, λέπρα, ἐπιληψία καὶ ἄλλες ἀρρώστιες. Τὸ ἐπιχειρημα πὼς ὁ Θεὸς ἔστελνε τὶς ἀρρώστιες στοὺς χριστιανούς ἐπειδὴ τοὺς ἀγαποῦσε δὲν ἦταν καὶ πολὺ πειστικό. Ἔτσι ὁ Ἀναστάσιος ὁ Σιναΐτης προσπάθησε νὰ διατυπώσει μιὰ διαφορετικὴ ἐξήγηση. Οἱ ἀρρώστιες, λέει, συμβαίνουν ἐπίσης (δηλαδή ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ) καὶ ἀπὸ κληρονομικοὺς λόγους, ἢ ἐξαιτίας τοῦ ἀέρα, ἢ τοῦ εὐμετάβλητου καὶ ὑγροῦ κλίματος, ἢ τοῦ ὑπερβολικοῦ φαγητοῦ καὶ ποτοῦ. Τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ἡ ποιότητα τοῦ ἀέρα φέρνει αὐτὸ τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἀποδεικνύεται ἀπὸ τὸ ὅτι οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς Αἰῶνιᾶς (Ἀκαμπα) δὲν ὑποφέρουν ποτέ ἀπὸ ἀρθρίτιδα. Ἡ σημασία

τῆς σωστῆς διαίτας γίνεται φανερὴ στοὺς Ἑβραίους, πού προέρχονται ἀπὸ ζερὴ, καὶ ἄρα ὑγιεινὴ περιοχὴ, ἀλλὰ, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ἐθισμένοι νὰ καταναλώ-
νουν κρέας, κρασί καὶ σάλτσες σὲ ὑπερβολικὲς ποσότητες, ὑποφέρουν καὶ
αὐτοὶ ἀπὸ τὶς ἴδιες ἀρρώστιες μὲ τοὺς χριστιανούς. Ἡ ἰδέα πὼς ἡ ἐπιλη-
ψία ἢ δαιμονισμὸς μπορεῖ νὰ ὀφειλόταν σὲ φυσικὲς αἰτίες ἦταν ἐντελῶς
ξένη πρὸς τὴ βυζαντινὴ νοοτροπία· ὥστόσο ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς εἶχε πεῖ γιὰ
τοὺς δαίμονες: τοῦτο τὸ γένος ἐν οὐδενὶ δύναται ἐξελεθεῖν εἰ μὴ ἐν προ-
σευχῇ καὶ νηστείᾳ (Κατὰ Μάρκον, Θ', 29). Ἄν λοιπὸν ὁ δαίμονας μπο-
ροῦσε νὰ ἐκδιωχθεῖ μὲ τὴ νηστεία, θὰ μπορούσε —φυσικὰ μὲ τὴν ἄδεια
τοῦ Θεοῦ— καὶ νὰ μπεῖ σὲ κάποιον σῶμα ἐξαιτίας τῆς λαίμαργίας. Οὐ-
τε πρέπει νὰ προξενεῖ ἐκπληξὴ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι μερικοὶ ἄθεοι ξένοι φαί-
νονται καμιά φορὰ νὰ κατέχουν ὑπερφυσικὲς ἱκανότητες, ὅπως γιὰ πα-
ράδειγμα οἱ Σαρακηνοί, πού μπορούν νὰ προβλέψουν ποιὸς πρόκειται νὰ
σκοτωθεῖ στὸ πεδίο τῆς μάχης. Τὸ κατορθώνουν παρατηρώντας ὀρισμένα
φυσικὰ σημάδια —κάτι πού τὸ ἐπιβεβαιώνουν οἱ ἔμπειροι στὴν ἰατρικὴ,
πού διαβεβαιώνουν ὅτι ἡ Πρόνοια ἔχει βάλει στὸ ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα, ἰδίως
στὰ μάτια, κάποιον μυστικὸν σημάδι πού ἀναγγέλλουν τὸ πλησίασμα τοῦ
θανάτου· τὰ σημάδια αὐτὰ τὰ παρατηροῦν οἱ δαίμονες κι ἔτσι ἐξαπατοῦν
τοὺς ἀνθρώπους κάνοντας ἀκριβεῖς προβλέψεις. Ἐξἄλλου εἶναι γνωστὸ
ὅτι οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες καὶ οἱ αἰρετικοὶ μπορούν νὰ κάνουν θαύματα μὲ τὴ
βοήθεια δαιμόνων. Λόγου χάρι, λέει ὁ Ἀναστάσιος, ἦταν κάποτε ἕνας αἰ-
ρετικὸς ἐπίσκοπος τῆς Κυζίκου ὁ ὁποῖος, ἀπαγγέλλοντας μιὰ προσευχὴ,
μπόρεσε νὰ ξεριζώσῃ ἕνα λιόδεντρο πού σκοτείνιαζε τὸ παράθυρο τῆς
ἐκκλησίας του, καὶ σὲ ἄλλη περίπτωσι ἔκανε κάποιον πτώμα νὰ μιλήσῃ.
Ὅταν πέθανε, διάφορες ὀπτασίες καὶ ὁράματα ἐμφανίζονταν πάνω στὸν
τάφο του —ὅλα ἔργα τῶν δαιμόνων. Ὁ μόνος τρόπος νὰ ξεχωρίσουμε τὸ
ἀληθινὸ ἀπὸ τὸ ψεύτικο θαῦμα, τὸν χριστιανὸ ἀπὸ τὸν ἄθεο, εἶναι ἀπὸ τὰ
ἀποτελέσματα πού ἔχουν, γιὰ τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιγνώσεσθε
αὐτούς.³¹

Ἡ αὔξησι τῶν ἀπίστων μετὰ τὶς ἀραβικὲς κατακτήσεις ἀποτελοῦσε
ἴσως ἐνδειξὴ ὅτι τὰ ἐπιχειρήματα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν γίνονταν γενικῶς
ἀποδεκτά. Ἐντούτοις σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τῆς βυζαντινῆς περιόδου οἱ ἐπι-
τυχίες τῶν ἐθνικῶν ἐξηγοῦνταν μὲ τὸν ἴδιον ἀκριβῶς τρόπο πού τὶς ἐξηγοῦ-
σε καὶ ὁ Ἀναστάσιος. Ἡ λογικὴ αὐτὴ χρησιμοποίηθηκε γιὰ τοὺς Ἀβά-
ρους, τοὺς Ἀραβες, τοὺς Βουλγάρους, τοὺς Ρώσους, τοὺς Λατίνους καὶ
τέλος τοὺς Τούρκους. Τὸ 860, στὴ διάρκεια τῆς πολιορκίας τῆς Κωνσταν-
τινούπολης ἀπὸ τοὺς Ρώσους, ὁ πατριάρχης Φώτιος διακήρυσσε: «Ὁ
λαὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ μὲ τὴ δικὴ Του συμμαχία μεγαλύνεται καὶ νικᾷ τροπαιο-

φόρος τοὺς ἀντιπάλους· ἀλλὰ τὰ ὑπόλοιπα ἔθνη, μὲ τὶς ψεύτικες θρησκείες
τους, δὲν αὐξάνονται χάρι στὶς καλὲς τοὺς πράξεις, ἀλλὰ χάρι στὶς δικές
μας κακοπραγίες μεγαλύνονται εἰς βάρος μας». ³² Τὸν 15ο αἰώνα, ὅπως
τόσες φορὲς στὸ παρελθόν, ἔμπαινε τὸ ἴδιο ἐρώτημα: Γιά τὴν οἱ Τούρκοι νι-
κοῦν, ἐνῶ ἐμεῖς βρισκόμαστε σὲ διάλυσι; Μήπως ἐπειδὴ δὲν ἔχουμε δε-
χτεῖ τὴν ἀνώτερη ἀποκάλυψι τοῦ Μωάμεθ, ὅπως τιμωρήθηκαν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι
ἐπειδὴ δὲν δέχτηκαν τὴν ἀποκάλυψι τοῦ Χριστοῦ; — Ὁχι, ἀπαντᾷ ὁ
αὐτοκράτορας Μανουήλ Β΄ Παλαιολόγος. Πρῶτον, οἱ Ἑβραῖοι δὲν μπο-
ροῦν νὰ συγκριθοῦν μαζί μας ἀφοῦ, ἀπὸ τὴν πτώσι τῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ, δὲν
ἔχουν οὔτε βασιλιά, οὔτε πόλη, οὔτε ναό. Δεύτερον, ἦλθαν καὶ παρῆλθαν
πολλὲς αὐτοκρατορίες, πού οἱ ἐπιτυχίες τους δὲν μπορούν νὰ ἀποδοθοῦν
στὴ θρησκευτικὴ τους ἀνωτερότητα —λόγου χάρι τῶν Ἀσσυρίων, τῶν
Περσῶν, ἢ τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνα, πού ἦταν ἀναμφισβήτητα ἀσε-
βῆς ἀφοῦ θυσίαζε σὲ δαίμονες. Ἐπιπλέον —κι ἐδῶ ἐπιτέλους συναντᾶμε
μιὰ καινούρια σκέψι— ὑπάρχουν στὴ Δύσι κάμποσα χριστιανικὰ κράτη
πού εἶναι ἰσχυρότερα ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους. Λίγος χρόνος ἀπομένει πρὶν
ἀπὸ τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου: ποιὸς ξέρει τί ἀλλαγὲς μπορεῖ νὰ γίνουν στὸ
μεταξί;³³

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ Ι'

ΤΟ ΠΑΡΕΛΘΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΤΗΤΑΣ

‘Ο μέσος Βυζαντινός, όπως όλοι οι άπλοοί άνθρωποι, είχε περιορισμένη επίγνωση της διαδοχής των ετών. “Αν κάποτε σιεφτόταν τέτοια θέματα, υπολόγιζε με το σύστημα των Ινδικτιώνων. ‘Η Ινδικτιώνα ήταν ένας κύκλος δεκαπέντε ετών, που είχε αρχικά εισαχθεί για φορολογικούς σκοπούς, αλλά όταν κάποιος αναφερόταν, λόγου χάρη, στην πέμπτη Ινδικτιώνα, έννοουσε τον πέμπτο χρόνο (που άρχιζε την 1η Σεπτεμβρίου) όποιουδήποτε δεδομένου κύκλου, όχι τον πέμπτο κύκλο. ‘Ο ‘Ιωάννης Μόσχος, στο έργο του *Λειμών*, διηγείται την ακόλουθη χαρακτηριστική ιστορία. Στην Κιλικία, στους πρόποδες της όροσειράς του ‘Αμανού, είχε συναντήσει δύο ήλικιωμένους λαϊκούς. Αυτοί του είπαν ότι πριν έφτά χρόνια είχαν παρατηρήσει πώς μια φωτιά άναβε τη νύχτα στην κορυφή του βουνού. Τό πρωί πήγαν να έρευνήσουν, αλλά δεν βρήκαν τίποτε. ‘Η φωτιά συνέχισε να λάμπει στο σκοτάδι για μια περίοδο τριών μηνών. Στο τέλος αποφάσισαν να πραγματοποιήσουν την ανάβαση τη νύχτα. Έντόπισαν το φώς και παρέμειναν εκεί μέχρι το πρωί, όποτε ανακάλυψαν μέσα σε μια σπηλιά έναν νεκρό αναχωρητή που έσφιγγε πάνω του ένα Ευαγγέλιο. Δίπλα του υπήρχε μια πινακίδα με την έπιγραφή: ‘Εγώ, ό ευτέλης ‘Ιωάννης, πέθανα τη δέκατη πέμπτη Ινδικτιώνα». Τότε οι δύο άντρες άρχισαν να υπολογίζουν τα χρόνια, πιθανόν στα δάχτυλά τους, και με έκπληξη τους αντίληφθηκαν ότι είχαν περάσει έφτά χρόνια από το θάνατο του αναχωρητή, μολονότι έμοιαζε σαν να είχε πεθάνει εκείνη την ήμέρα.¹

‘Η καταγραφή του θανάτου του μοναχού, που την έκανε ό ίδιος, ήταν στην ουσία μια τυπική βυζαντινή έπιτύμβια έπιγραφή της Πρώιμης περιόδου. Σ’ έμάς αυτό μπορεί να προκαλεί έκπληξη, γιατί θεωρούμε την ταφόπλακα μνημείο που πρόκειται να έπιβιώσει για άρκετους αιώνες, αν όχι για πάντα. ‘Αλλά ένας Βυζαντινός άρκοούνταν συνήθως να χαραξει σε μια πλάκα μια έπιγραφή σαν αυτή: ‘Εκοιμήθη ό δοϋλος του

Θεού Θεόδωρος, μηνί Αύγουστῳ γ’, ήμέρα Κυριακῆ, Ινδικτιώνι γ’». ‘Ηταν σαν ή πληροφορία που παρείχε ή έπιτύμβια έπιγραφή να είχε ενδιαφέρον μόνο για μερικά χρόνια, έναν ή δύο κύκλους Ινδικτιώνων τό πολύ.

‘Ο κύριος λόγος αυτής της άδιαφορίας για τις άπόλυτες χρονολογίες βρίσκεται στην έλλειψη ενός γενικά άναγνωρισμένου χρονολογικού συστήματος. Την έποχή που έγραφε ό Μόσχος (γύρω στο 600 μ.Χ.) τα έπίσημα έγγραφα χρονολογούνταν, όπως και στη ρωμαϊκή περίοδο, κατά ύπατείες. ‘Αφού όμως ό θεσμός αυτός κατάντησε κενός τύπος και ό αυτοκράτορας αναλάμβανε την ύπατεία σε άκανόνιστα διαστήματα και σε διαφορετικές έποχές του χρόνου, θα έπρεπε να είναι κανείς ειδικός για να βγάλει κάποιον νόημα από το σύστημα αυτό.² Τό έτος της βασιλείας με τό όποιο ταυτιζόταν συχνά ή ύπατεία προκαλοϋσε λιγότερη σύγχυση, μόνο που έπρεπε να ξέρει κανείς όχι μόνο τό έτος της άναρρήσεως του αυτοκράτορα αλλά και την ήμέρα και τό μήνα. “Επειτα υπήρχαν πλήθος τοπικά χρονολογικά συστήματα, ειδικά στις άνατολικές έπαρχίες. Οι Σύροι συνήθως χρησιμοποιοϋσαν τό χρονολογικό σύστημα των Σελευκιδών (γνωστό έπίσης ως έλληνικό), που άρχιζε την 1η ‘Οκτωβρίου του 312 π.Χ. Στην ‘Αντιόχεια όμως υπήρχε ένα χρονολογικό σύστημα που άρχιζε τό 49 π.Χ., στη Βόστρα ένα άλλο από τό 160 μ.Χ., ενώ ή Γάζα στην Παλαιστίνη μετροϋσε από τό 61 μ.Χ. Στην ‘Αλεξάνδρεια χρησιμοποιοϋσαν τη χρονολόγηση από ‘Οκταβιανού Αύγουστου, από τις 30 Αύγουστου του 30 π.Χ., αλλά έπίσης και από Διοκλητιανού (τό χρονολογικό σύστημα των Μαρτύρων) από τό 284 μ.Χ. και οϋτω καθεξής. Τό από κτίσεως κόσμος δεν είχε γενικευτεί ακόμη στη χρονολόγηση, και υπήρχε, όπως θα δοϋμε, σημαντική διαφωνία ως προς τη μέθοδο του υπολογισμού του. “Αρχισε να έμφανίζεται σποραδικά τον 8ο αιώνα και κέρδιζε έδαφος σιγά σιγά· όμως ακόμη και κατά τη Μέση και ‘Υστερη βυζαντινή περίοδο, όταν τό από κτίσεως κόσμος σύστημα είχε πια στεριώσει, ή χρήση χρονολογιών σε έπιγραφές, χειρόγραφα, κτίρια κτλ. παρέμενε ή εξαίρεση μάλλον παρά ό κανόνας.

Τό σύστημα από κτίσεως κόσμος παρουσιάζει ενδιαφέρον για τό θέμα μας επειδή άνταντακλά όλόκληρη τη σύλληψη του ανθρώπινου παρελθόντος όπως τό αντιλαμβάονταν οι χριστιανοί της ‘Υστερης ‘Αρχαιότητας και της βυζαντινής περιόδου, μια σύλληψη που ήταν ταυτόχρονα ‘ιστορική» και συμβολική, αλλά έπιπλέον λάβαινε υπόψη της όρισμένους άστρονομικούς παράγοντες. Τό σύστημα αυτό τό συναντάμε κατεξοχήν σε έναν τύπο βιβλίου γνωστού ως *παγκόσμιον χρονικόν* ή, όπως συνήθως τό

ἀποκαλοῦσαν οἱ Βυζαντινοί, *χροنيκὸν ἀπὸ Ἀδάμ*. Ὄταν ὁ μέσος Βυζαντινὸς ἐπιθυμοῦσε νὰ πληροφορηθεῖ τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ παρελθόντος, στρεφόταν σ' αὐτὸ τὸν τύπο βιβλίου. Ἐπομένως τὸ παγκόσμιο χρονικὸ εἶχε εὐρεία κυκλοφορία καί, καθὼς ἀπευθυνόταν στὸν μέσο ἀναγνώστη, γραφόταν σὲ ἀπλή γλῶσσα. Μὲ τὴν πάροδο τοῦ χρόνου, τὰ χρονικὰ συμπληρώνονταν μὲ ἀφηγήσεις πρόσφατων γεγονότων. Στὴν πραγματικότητα δὲν τὰ θεωροῦσαν λόγια ἔργα ἀλλὰ ἐγχειρίδια ἢ καζαμίες ποὺ χρειάζονταν περιοδικὴ ἀναθεώρηση. Τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτὸ ἔχει προξενήσει μεγάλη δυσκολία στοὺς ἐρευνητὲς ποὺ ἐπιθυμοῦν νὰ ἐντοπίσουν τὰ διαδοχικὰ στρώματα τέτοιων συμπληρωμάτων. Ἐδῶ ὅμως δὲν μᾶς ἀπασχολοῦν τὰ εἰδικὰ προβλήματα τῶν ταυτίσεων, ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶδος ὡς σύνολο καὶ οἱ ἰδέες ποὺ περιέχει.

Ἀπὸ τὰ βυζαντινὰ χρονικὰ ὁ ἀναγνώστης ἀποκομίζει μιὰ πρώτη ἐντύπωση ἀπλοϊκότητας, ἢ ἀσημαντότητα ὅμως ἐνὸς μεγάλου μέρους τοῦ περιεχομένου τους δὲν πρέπει νὰ μᾶς κάνει νὰ μὴ βλέπουμε τὸ ἐξαιρετικὰ πολὺπλοκο πλαίσιο τῆς σύλληψής τους. Τὰ χρονικὰ ἀποτελοῦν, πράγματι, προῖόν μακρᾶς ἐξέλιξης καὶ μεγάλης ἐπιστημονικῆς προσπάθειας, καὶ πρέπει νὰ σταματήσουμε γιὰ λίγο καὶ νὰ ἐξετάσουμε τὴν καταγωγή τους. Ἡ ἱστορία ποὺ διηγοῦνται δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἱστορία ἐνὸς ἔθνους ἀλλὰ ὀλόκληρου τοῦ τότε γνωστοῦ κόσμου. Τὸ πρωταρχικὸ νῆμα τῆς ἱστορίας αὐτῆς παρέχεται ἀπὸ τὴ Βίβλο, ἀλλὰ ἔχουν συνυφανθεῖ καὶ διάφορα ἄλλα στοιχεῖα — ἄσσυριακὰ, αἰγυπτιακὰ, ἐλληνικὰ καὶ ρωμαϊκὰ. Ὁ συγχρονισμὸς ὄλων αὐτῶν τῶν ξεχωριστῶν ἱστοριῶν ἀπαιτοῦσε ἓνα συνολικὸ χρονολογικὸ πλαίσιο. Ἀκόμη πῶς σημαντικὸ εἶναι ὅτι τὰ χρονικὰ ἐπιχειροῦσαν νὰ ἐρμηνεύσουν τὴ λειτουργία τῆς Θεῆς Πρόνοιας καὶ ἀφοῦ ὁ Θεὸς δρᾷ μὲ ἓναν τακτικὸ τρόπο, ἡ ἱστορία πρέπει ἐπίσης νὰ ἐκφράζει ὄχι μόνον τὸν ἠθικὸ Του σκοπὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴ συμμετρία τοῦ σχεδίου Του. Μὲ ποιά διεργασία λοιπὸν κατασκευαζόταν αὐτὸ τὸ τεράστιο πανόραμα;

Ἀρχίζοντας μὲ τὸ χρονολογικὸ στοιχεῖο, παρατηροῦμε ὅτι, πολὺ πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ γέννηση τῆς χριστιανικῆς ιστοριογραφίας, οἱ ἐξελληνισμένοι Ἰουδαῖοι εἶχαν καταπιαστεῖ νὰ ἀποδείξουν πόσο ἀρχαία, καὶ συνεπῶς πόσο ἀξιοσέβαστη, ἦταν ἡ θρησκεία τους, σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὴ συγκεχυμένη καὶ ἀνιστόρητη φύση τῶν ἐλληνικῶν καὶ ρωμαϊκῶν παραδόσεων. Ἦδη τὸν 1ο αἰῶνα μ.Χ. ὁ Ἰώσηπος ἔγραψε ἐκτεταμένα πάνω στὸ θέμα, δείχνοντας ὅτι τὰ ἰουδαϊκὰ ἱστορικὰ μνημεῖα ὄχι μόνον κάλυπταν μιὰ περίοδο σχεδὸν πέντε χιλιάδων ἐτῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἦταν πῶς ἀξιόπιστα ἀπὸ τὶς ἀντιφατικὲς ἱστορίες τῶν ἐλλήνων ἱστορικῶν.³ Οἱ χριστιανοὶ μὲ προθυμία ἀδραζαν τὴν κληρονομία τῶν ἰουδαίων ἀπολογητῶν, καθὼς κι αὐτοὶ εἶχαν νὰ

ἀντιμετωπίσουν τὴν ἴδια κριτικὴ ἀπὸ τοὺς εἰδωλολάτρεις ἀντιπάλους τους· λίγο ἀργότερα μάλιστα εἶχαν τὸ πρόσθετο καθῆκον νὰ πολεμήσουν τοὺς ἰουδαίους μὲ τὰ ἴδια τους τὰ ὄπλα. Ἀπ' ὅσο ξέρουμε, ὁ παλιότερος χριστιανὸς συγγραφέας ποὺ ἔκανε ἓναν λεπτομερῆ χρονολογικὸ ὑπολογισμὸ χρησιμοποιοῦντας ὡς βάση τὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη ἦταν ὁ Θεόφιλος Ἀντιοχείας (τέλος τοῦ 2ου μ.Χ. αἰῶνα). Χρησιμοποιοῦντας τὴ μετάφραση τῶν Ἑβδομήκοντα (ποὺ διαφέρει αἰσθητὰ ἀπὸ τὸ ἑβραϊκὸ κείμενο ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴ χρονολόγησι), ὑπολόγισε ὅτι ἡ Δημιουργία ἐγινε γύρω στὸ 5515 π.Χ.⁴ Ὁ ἴδιος παραδεχόταν ὅτι ὁ ὑπολογισμὸς του ἦταν κατὰ προσέγγιση, μὲ μέγιστο περιθώριο σφάλματος κάπου διακόσια χρόνια. Αὐτὸ ὅμως ποὺ παρουσιάζει περισσότερο ἐνδιαφέρον γιὰ μᾶς εἶναι ὅτι μπόρεσε νὰ συνδέσει τὴ βιβλικὴ χρονολόγησι μὲ τὴ χρονολόγησι τοῦ ἑλληνορωμαϊκοῦ κόσμου, γιὰτὶ στὸ Παραλειπομένων Β', Λζ', 21-22 δηλώνεται ὅτι τὸ τέλος τῆς βαβυλωνιακῆς αἰχμαλωσίας (κατὰ τὸ 4954 ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου σύμφωνα μὲ τοὺς ὑπολογισμοὺς του) συνέπιπτε μὲ τὸν πρῶτο χρόνον τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Κύρου τῆς Περσίας. Ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ ἡ χρονολόγησι προχωροῦσε εὐκόλα, γιὰτὶ ἦταν γνωστὸ ὅτι ὁ Κύρος βασίλευσε 28 χρόνια καὶ ὅτι ὁ θάνατός του συνέπεσε μὲ τὴν ἀνοδο στὸ θρόνον τῆς Ρώμης τοῦ Ταρκυνίου τοῦ Ὑπερήφανου. Ἀπὸ τότε, σύμφωνα μὲ τὰ χρονολογικὰ ἐγχειρίδια, πέρασαν 713 χρόνια μέχρι τὸ θάνατον τοῦ Μάρκου Αὐρηλίου (180 μ.Χ.). Στὸν ὑπολογισμὸ αὐτὸ ἡ ἐνσάρκωσις τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν παίζει κανένα ρόλον, οὔτε ἐνδιέφερε τὸν Θεόφιλον νὰ καθιερώσει ἓνα χρονολογικὸ σύστημα ποὺ νὰ συσχετίζει τὴ βιβλικὴ μὲ τὴν εἰδωλολατρικὴ ἱστορία. Αὐτὸ τὸ ἔργο τὸ ἀνέλαβαν μεταγενέστεροι χριστιανοὶ λόγιοι, ἰδίως ὁ Ἀφρικανὸς (3ος μ.Χ. αἰῶνας) καὶ ὁ Εὐσέβιος Καισαρείας.

Στὴν «ἱστορικὴ» αὐτὴ μαρτυρία δόθηκαν μυστικιστικὲς προεκτάσεις. Οἱ πρῶτοι χριστιανοὶ πίστευαν ὅτι, κατ' ἀναλογία πρὸς τὶς ἑξι μέρες τῆς Δημιουργίας, ὁ κόσμος θὰ διαρκοῦσε ἑξι χιλιάδες χρόνια, γιὰτὶ ἦταν γραμμένο ὅτι στὰ μάτια τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰ χίλια χρόνια εἶναι ὡς ἓνα μέρα. (Ψαλμοί, 4', 4). Μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ δεδομένο, θὰ ἦταν ἰδιαίτερα ἱκανοποιητικὸ ἂν ἡ Ἐνσάρκωσις εἶχε γίνει ἀκριβῶς τὸ ἔτος 5500, δηλαδὴ στὴ μέση τῆς ἑκτῆς κοσμικῆς ἡμέρας, καθὼς μάλιστα οἱ διαστάσεις τῆς Κιβωτοῦ τοῦ Μαρτυρίου ἐδιναν ἄθροισμα πεντέμισι πῆχες ("Ἐξοδος, ΚΕ', 9). Ὅλα τὰ πρῶτα χριστιανικὰ καὶ βυζαντινὰ συστήματα, μὲ ἐξαιρέση τοῦ Εὐσεβίου, προσπαθοῦν νὰ πλησιάσουν ὅσο τὸ δυνατόν περισσότερον αὐτὸ τὸν ἀριθμὸν.

Ἡ τρίτη ἀποψη τοῦ προβλήματος σχετιζόταν μὲ τὸ συγχρονισμὸ τοῦ ἡλιακοῦ καὶ τοῦ σεληνιακοῦ ἡμερολογίου. Ἀφοῦ ὁ Χριστὸς ἀναστήθηκε

περίπου την εποχή του έβραϊκού Πάσχα (τη δέκατη τέταρτη μέρα του μήνα Νισάν), πίστευαν ότι η πρώτη μέρα της Δημιουργίας έπρεπε να πέφτει κοντά σ' αυτή την ημερομηνία, επίσης Κυριακή, που θα έπρεπε επιπλέον να είναι 25 Μαρτίου, ημερομηνία της έαρινής ισημερίας σύμφωνα με το Ιουλιανό ημερολόγιο. Ο ύπολογισμός ήταν στην πραγματικότητα παρόμοιος με αυτόν που καθορίζει την ημερομηνία του Πάσχα, ένα πρόβλημα που απασχόλησε πολύ την Έκκλησία τους πρώτους αιώνες. Εκείνη την εποχή οι Έβραιοι είχαν ήδη εγκαταλείψει το αποκλειστικά σεληνιακό ημερολόγιο και είχαν υιοθετήσει ένα ήλιοσεληνιακό έτος 354 ημερών (12 μήνες και 29 1/2 μέρες), δηλαδή 11 μέρες μικρότερο από το ήλιακό έτος, αλλά κάθε τρία χρόνια πρόσθεταν έναν έμβόλιμο μήνα. Με τον τρόπο αυτό, αντί η ημερομηνία του Πάσχα να μετακινείται σε όλοκληρο το ήλιακό έτος, όπως γίνεται με τις μωαμεθανικές έορτές, μπορούσε να παραμένει σταθερά στην άνοιξη. Οι χριστιανοί από τη μεριά τους, που ακολουθούσαν το Ιουλιανό ημερολόγιο, είχαν πιά τον 3ο αιώνα διαλέξει έναν κύκλο 8 ετών για να υπολογίζουν την ημερομηνία του Πάσχα. Ο λόγος ήταν ότι 8 ήλιακά έτη (που περιλαμβάνουν και 2 δίσεκτα χρόνια) ισοδυναμούν με 2.922 μέρες, που πλησιάζουν πολύ τους 99 σεληνιακούς μήνες (5 έτη των 12 μηνών και 3 έτη των 13 μηνών), δηλαδή 2.923 1/2 μέρες. Ο κύκλος αυτός έδινε όχτώ πιθανές ημερομηνίες για το Πάσχα, κι έτσι τον ένατο χρόνο επέστρεφε κανείς στην ίδια μέρα του μήνα όπως τον πρώτο· δέν έδινε όμως τις ίδιες μέρες της εβδομάδας. Για να ληφθούν υπόψη και οι δύο παράγοντες, έπρεπε κανείς να πολλαπλασιάσει 8×7=56. Έτσι, μετά από 56 χρόνια το Πάσχα θα επέστρεφε στην ίδια μέρα του μήνα και στην ίδια μέρα της εβδομάδας. Το παλιότερο σωζόμενο Πασχάλιο, του Ίππολύτου, χρησιμοποιεί στην πραγματικότητα έναν κύκλο 112 ετών (56×2). Φυσικά υπήρχε ακόμη ένα κενό μιάμισης ημέρας κάθε 8 χρόνια, μειονέκτημα που διορθώθηκε αργότερα με πιό ακριβείς κύκλους.

Όμως το Πασχάλιο του Ίππολύτου είναι αρκετό για να μάς δείξει την αρχή που εφαρμοζόταν. Όπως είδαμε, η πρώτη μέρα της Δημιουργίας έπεφτε μια Κυριακή 25 Μαρτίου. Εφόσον η σελήνη δημιουργήθηκε την τέταρτη μέρα, και δημιουργήθηκε πανσέληνος (άφοι όλα τα έργα του Θεού είναι τέλεια), η πρώτη 14η του Νισάν θα ήταν Τετάρτη 28 Μαρτίου, αν η σελήνη δημιουργήθηκε το πρωί, η Πέμπτη 29 Μαρτίου, αν δημιουργήθηκε το βράδυ. Σύμφωνα με τον κανόνα του Ίππολύτου, οι πιθανές ημερομηνίες για τις 14 Νισάν ήταν 18, 21, 25, 29 Μαρτίου και 2, 5, 9, 13 Απριλίου. Επιλεγόταν συνεπώς η Πέμπτη 29 Μαρτίου, κάτι

που συνέπιπτε, σύμφωνα με τον ίδιο κανόνα, το 266 και το 322 μ.Χ. Υπολογίζοντας προς τα πίσω, η ημερομηνία της κτίσεως του κόσμου συν την μετά Χριστόν ημερομηνία μεϊον 1 (άφοι δέν υπάρχει έτος 0) έπρεπε να είναι πολλαπλάσιο του 112. Το αποτέλεσμα, αν έπρεπε να βρίσκεται όσο το δυνατόν πλησιέστερα στο 5500 π.Χ., ήταν 5503 (5.503+322-1=5.824=112×52).

Η άσυμφωνία της μιάμισης ημέρας που παρουσιάζεται κάθε 8 χρόνια στον κανόνα του Ίππολύτου ανάμεσα στο ήλιακό και το ήλιοσεληνιακό ημερολόγιο οδήγησε, όπως είπαμε, στην επινόηση κύκλων που παρουσίαζαν μεγαλύτερη ακρίβεια. Εκείνος που επικράτησε στην Ανατολή ήταν ένας κύκλος 19 ετών. Αυτό δημιούργησε την ανάγκη να επαναπροσδιοριστεί η ημερομηνία της Δημιουργίας, που τώρα θεωρούνταν ότι έγινε το 5492 π.Χ. Αυτό είναι το αποκαλούμενο Αλεξανδρινό χρονολογικό σύστημα, που το χρησιμοποιούσαν ακόμη στις αρχές του 9ου αιώνα οι χρονογράφοι Γεώργιος Σύγκελλος και Θεοφάνης. Την εποχή εκείνη όμως είχε ήδη εισαχθεί το συνηθισμένο βυζαντινό χρονολογικό σύστημα του 5508 π.Χ., ώστε να λαμβάνεται υπόψη και ο κύκλος των Ινδικτιώνων, και αυτό το σύστημα επικράτησε μέχρι το τέλος της αυτοκρατορίας.⁵

Η πιό πάνω, κάπως ξερη ανάπτυξη ήταν αναγκαία για να έρμηνευτεί το χρονολογικό υπόβαθρο της βυζαντινής θεώρησης της ιστορίας. Η βασιική δομή του παγκόσμιου χρονικού δημιουργήθηκε τον 3ο αιώνα, τελειοποιήθηκε από τον Ευσέβιο στην αρχή του 4ου και συστηματοποιήθηκε περισσότερο τον 5ο αιώνα από τους Αλεξανδρινούς Πανόδωρο και Ανιανό. Μόνο αποσπάσματα από τα έργα αυτών των πρωτοπόρων έχουν σωθεί. Το παλιότερο σωζόμενο βυζαντινό χρονικό, έργο του Ιωάννη Μαλάλα από την Αντιόχεια, χρονολογείται τον 6ο αιώνα, και ακολουθείται από το Πασχάλιο Χρονικό τον 7ο αιώνα, τον Γεώργιο Σύγκελλο και τον Θεοφάνη στην αρχή του 9ου, τον Γεώργιο Μοναχό το δεύτερο μισό του 9ου, τις διάφορες παραλλαγές του Συμεών του Λογοθέτη τον 10ο αιώνα και ούτω καθεξής. Η παράδοση του παγκόσμιου χρονικού συνεχίστηκε ακόμη και μετά την άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης από τους Τούρκους και αποτέλεσε το ιστορικό ανάγνωσμα των Ελλήνων μέχρι την Έπανάσταση του 1821.

Σε γενικές γραμμές το περιεχόμενο του παγκόσμιου χρονικού ήταν το ακόλουθο.⁶ Η αφήγηση της προκατακλυσμιαίας εποχής δέν δημιουργούσε ιδιαίτερα προβλήματα, καθώς βασιζόταν στην Αγία Γραφή και στα απόκρυφα της Παλαιάς Διαθήκης. Πρέπει όμως να σημειώσουμε ότι αυτή η μακρά περίοδος (2.362 χρόνια, σύμφωνα με όρισμένους ύπολο-

γισμούς) σημαδεύταν από μια διαδικασία ονοματοθεσίας και πρακτικῶν ἐφευρέσεων, ἀκόμη κι ἂν τὸ μεγαλύτερο μέρος τῆς γνώσης αὐτῆς χάθηκε μὲ τὸν Κατακλυσμὸ. Ὁ Ἄδὰμ ἔδωσε ὀνόματα σὲ ὅλα τὰ ζῶα· ὁ Κάιν ἐπινόησε τὴ μέτρηση τῆς γῆς, ἐνῶ οἱ τρεῖς γιοὶ τοῦ Λάμεχ ἀνακάλυψαν τὴν κτηνοτροφία, τὰ μουσικὰ ὄργανα καὶ τὴν ἐπεξεργασία τοῦ ὀρειχάλκου καὶ τοῦ σιδήρου. Ὅμως ὁ μεγαλύτερος σοφὸς τῆς ἀπόμακρης ἐκείνης ἐποχῆς ἦταν ὁ Σῆθ, ποὺ ἐπινόησε τὸ ἐβραϊκὸ ἀλφάβητο, ἀνακάλυψε τὴ διαδοχὴ τῶν ἐτῶν, τῶν μηνῶν καὶ τῶν ἐβδομάδων, καὶ ἔδωσε ὀνόματα στὰ ἀστέρια καὶ στοὺς πέντε πλανῆτες. Τὰ ὀνόματα ποὺ ἔδωσε στοὺς πλανῆτες (ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη εἶχαν ἤδη λάβει τὰ ὀνόματά τους ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ) ἦταν παραδόξως Κρόνος, Ζεὺς, Ἄρης, Ἀφροδίτη καὶ Ἑρμῆς. Ἐπομένως δὲν ἦταν οἱ πλανῆτες ποὺ πήραν τὸ ὄνομά τους ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀρχαίους θεοὺς, ἀλλὰ οἱ θεοὶ (ποὺ στὴν πραγματικότητα ἦταν ἄνθρωποι) ὀνομάστηκαν ἔτσι πολὺ ἀργότερα ἀπὸ τοὺς πλανῆτες. Ὁ Σῆθ, ποὺ εἶχε λάβει θεία προειδοποίηση γιὰ τὸν Κατακλυσμὸ, εἶχε τὴν πρόνοια νὰ γράψει τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν ἀστέρων σὲ μιὰ λίθινη πλάκα, ποὺ σώθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν καταστροφή καὶ ἔδωσε τὴ δυνατότητα στὸν Χαναάν νὰ φτιάξει μιὰ ἀστρονομία. Φαίνεται ἐπίσης ὅτι ὀρισμένα γράμματα τῶν Χαλδαίων σχεδιάστηκαν πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν Κατακλυσμὸ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀποκαλούμενους Ἀγύπνους, οἱ ὁποῖοι δὲν ἦταν ἄλλοι ἀπὸ τοὺς μυστηριώδεις υἱοὺς τοῦ Θεοῦ ποὺ νυμφεύτηκαν τὶς θυγατέρες τῶν ἀνθρώπων στὴ Γένεση Σ', 2. Αὐτὰ τὰ γράμματα χρησιμοποιήθηκαν γιὰ νὰ ἐκφράσουν κάποια μαγικὴ γνώση. Ἀργότερα ἀνακαλύφθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν Σαλά, ποὺ ἀπέκτησε αὐτὴ τὴν ἐπικίνδυνη γνώση καὶ τὴ μεταβίβασε σὲ ἄλλους.

Ὁ Κατακλυσμὸς, ποὺ κατέστρεψε ὅλη τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν Νῶε καὶ τὴν οἰκογένειά του, ἔπαιξε ἕναν σπουδαῖο ρόλο στὸν καθορισμὸ μιᾶς σχετικῆς χρονολόγησης στὴν ἰσραηλιτικὴ καὶ τὴν εἰδωλοατρικὴ ἱστορία. Ἀνάμεσα στὶς διάφορες ἐθνικὲς παραδόσεις τῆς Ὑστερης Ἀρχαιότητος μόνον ἡ ἀσσυριακὴ (ἢ τουλάχιστον ἔτσι πιστευόταν) ἀνέφερε ἕναν παγκόσμιον κατακλυσμὸ. Ὁ Κατακλυσμὸς τοῦ Δευκαλίωνα τῆς ἐλληνικῆς μυθολογίας θεωροῦνταν μᾶλλον τοπικὸς παρά παγκόσμιος. Ὅσο γιὰ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους, αὐτοὶ δὲν εἶχαν ἀκούσει ποτὲ γιὰ κατακλυσμὸ. Ἀπὸ αὐτὸ συναγόταν ὅτι μόνον οἱ Ἀσσύριοι (ἢ Χαλδαῖοι) εἶχαν μιὰ ἱστορία ποὺ ἐκτεινόταν στὴν πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν Κατακλυσμὸ ἐποχὴ. Σύμφωνα μὲ τὰ στοιχεῖά τους, εἶχαν ὑπάρξει δέκα προκατακλυσμιαῖοι βασιλεῖς, καὶ ὁ τελευταῖος ἀπὸ αὐτούς, ὁ Ἐἰσουθρος, εἶχε σωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Κατακλυσμὸ. Ἐπομένως ὁ Ἐἰσουθρος ταυτιζόταν μὲ τὸν Νῶε, καὶ ἡ ἱστορία τῶν Χαλδαίων καὶ τῶν Ἑβραίων ἦταν στὴν πραγματικότητα ἡ ἴδια. Ὅσο γιὰ τοὺς

Αἰγυπτίους, ποὺ δὲν θυμοῦνταν κανέναν κατακλυσμὸ ἀλλὰ ὑποστήριζαν ὅτι ἡ ἱστορία τους ἐκτεινόταν σχεδὸν τριάντα χιλιάδες χρόνια στὸ παρελθόν, τὸ μόνον συμπέρασμα ποὺ μπορούσε νὰ βγάλει κανεὶς ἦταν ὅτι δὲν ἤξεραν νὰ μετρᾶνε. Προφανῶς ἡ αἰγυπτιακὴ ἱστορία ἀρχίζει μετὰ τὸν Κατακλυσμὸ, καὶ ὁ πρῶτος τους ἡγεμόνας ἦταν ὁ Μεσαῖν, ὁ ἐγγονὸς τοῦ Νῶε.

Ὁ χωρισμὸς τῆς γῆς ἀνάμεσα στοὺς γιους τοῦ Νῶε (γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο μιλήσαμε ἤδη) καὶ ὁ ἐπακόλουθος πολλαπλασιασμὸς τῶν γλωσσῶν ἔδωσε τὰ φυσικὰ σημεῖα ἐκκίνησης γιὰ τὴν ἱστορία διάφορων εἰδωλοατρικῶν λαῶν. Ἐνας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀπογόνους τοῦ Χάμ ἦταν ὁ Νεμρώδ, ὁ «γίγας κυνηγός», ὁ ὁποῖος βασιλεψε σὲ κάποια περιοχὴ ποὺ ὀνομαζόταν γῆ Σεναάρ (Γένεση, Ι', 10), προφανῶς στὴν Ἀσσυρία ἢ στὴν Περσία, μολονότι ἐκεῖνο τὸ τμήμα τοῦ κόσμου φαίνεται ὅτι εἶχε παραχωρηθεῖ στὸν Σῆμ. Ἡ Ἀγία Γραφὴ παραλείπει νὰ πεῖ ὅτι ὁ Νεμρώδ ἐφευρε ἐπίσης τὴ μαγεία καὶ τὴν ἀστρολογία, τὶς ὁποῖες δίδαξε στοὺς Πέρσες, καὶ ὅτι δταν πέθανε ἀποθεώθηκε καὶ ἔγινε ἀστὴρ στὸν οὐρανὸ, τὸ ἴδιο μὲ τὸν Ὁρίωνα. Ἐπομένως ὁ Νεμρώδ ἦταν κάποιον εἶδος γίγαντα, καὶ δὲν ἦταν ἀφύσικο ποὺ τὸν διαδέχτηκε ἕνας ἄλλος γίγαντας μὲ τὸ ὄνομα Κρόνος, γιὸς κάποιου Οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς Ἀφροδίτης. Αὐτὸς ὁ Κρόνος ὑπέταξε ὀλόκληρη τὴ Συρία καὶ τὴν Περσία καὶ ἔγινε ὁ πρῶτος ἡγεμόνας τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Παντρεύτηκε τὴ Σεμίραμη (τὴν ὁποία οἱ Ἀσσύριοι ἀποκαλοῦσαν Ρέα) καὶ ἀπέκτησαν δύο γιους, τὸν Νίνο καὶ τὸν Δία (ποὺ λεγόταν ἐπίσης Πίκος) καὶ μιὰ θυγατέρα, τὴν Ἥρα, τὴν ὁποία νυμφεύθηκε ὁ Δίας. Ἀκόμη χειρότερα, ὅταν πέθανε ὁ Κρόνος τὸν διαδέχτηκε ὁ Νίνος, ποὺ παντρεύτηκε τὴν ἴδια τοῦ τῆ μητέρα, τὴ Σεμίραμη, κι ἔτσι τὸ ἀποκρουστικὸ ἔθιμο τῆς αἰμομειξίας ρίζωσε ἀνάμεσα στοὺς Πέρσες. Παρὰ τὶς ἀμαρτίες τους, οἱ ἀπόγονοι τοῦ Κρόνου ἐκτοξεύτηκαν τώρα στὴν ἱστορικὴ τους πορεία. Ὅπως θὰ περιμένε κανεὶς, ὁ Νίνος ἔχτισε τὴ Νινευή. Μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὸν βασιλεψε κάποιος Θεούρας, ποὺ μετονομάστηκε Ἄρης καὶ λατρευόταν ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἀσσυρίους μὲ τὸ περσικὸ [sic] ὄνομα Βάαλ. Ὅσο γιὰ τὸν Πίκον Δία, αὐτὸς ἔγινε κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο βασιλιάς τῆς Ἰταλίας, ἐνὸς τμήματος τοῦ κόσμου ποὺ ἐκείνη τὴν ἐποχὴ δὲν εἶχε οὔτε πόλεις οὔτε κυβέρνηση καὶ ἀπλῶς κατοικοῦνταν ἀπὸ τὴ φυλὴ τοῦ Ἰάφεθ. Αὐτὸς ὁ Δίας ἦταν ἐρωτύλος τύπος καὶ ἀπέκτησε πολυάριθμα παιδιὰ ἀπὸ τὶς παλλακίδες του. Ὁ διάδοχός του, ὁ Φαῦνος (ποὺ μετονομάστηκε Ἑρμῆς), εἶχε νὰ τὰ βγάλει πέρα μὲ τὶς μηχανορραφίες τῶν ἑτεροθαλῶν ἀδελφῶν του, ποὺ ξεπερνοῦσαν τοὺς ἐβδομήντα καί, στὸ τέλος, ἔφυγε στὴν Αἴγυπτο, ὅπου ἔγινε δεκτὸς μὲ μεγάλες τιμὲς γιατί εἶχε φέρει μαζί του με-

γάλες ποσότητες χρυσού και μπορούσε να προλέγει και το μέλλον. Με τον καιρό ο Έρμηξ έγινε βασιλιάς της Αιγύπτου. Τόν διαδέχτηκε ο κουτσός Ήφαιστος, που έμεινε στη μνήμη των ανθρώπων για δύο επιτεύγματα του: πρώτα γιατί εισήγαγε ένα νόμο που απαιτούσε οι γυναίκες της Αιγύπτου να είναι μονογαμικές και, κατά δεύτερο λόγο, γιατί χάρη σε κάποια μαγική προσευχή έλαβε από τον ουρανό μια τσιμπίδα με την οποία μπόρεσε να σφυρηλατήσει σιδερένια όπλα, ενώ μέχρι τότε οι άνθρωποι πολεμούσαν με ρόπαλα και πέτρες. Παρατηρούμε παρεμπιπτότως ότι, ενώ όρισμένα χαρακτηριστικά των ολύμπιων θεών διακρίνονται ακόμη άμυδρά σ' αυτό το συνονθύλευμα των άνοησιών, ή ελληνική τους καταγωγή έχει λησμονηθεί. Τα παιδιά του Κρόνου παρουσιάζονται είτε ως Άσσύριοι είτε ως Πέρσες· ο Δίας βασίλευε στην Ίταλία και ο Έρμηξ και ο Ήφαιστος συσχετίζονται με την Αίγυπτο.

Οι ειδωλολατρικοί θεοί και οι απόγονοί τους εντάσσονταν λοιπόν μέσα σε μια περίοδο κάπου πέντε αιώνων, που έκτεινόταν από την κατασκευή του Πύργου της Βαβέλ μέχρι τον Άβραάμ, μια περίοδο για την οποία ή Αγία Γραφή δεν αναφέρει σχεδόν τίποτε άλλο από μια σκέτη γενεαλογία (Γέν., ΙΑ'). Αυτή ήταν ή εποχή της «παλαιᾶς ειδωλολατρίας», που την έφευρε κάποιος Σερούχ της φυλής του Ίάφεθ και διάρκεσε μέχρι τον Θαρά, τον πατέρα του Άβραάμ, που ήταν γλύπτης. Η ειδωλολατρία (έλληνισμός) προήλθε από τη συνήθεια να στήνουν αγάλματα επιφανών ανδρών, έγινε δημοφιλής στην Αίγυπτο, τη Βαβυλωνία και τη Φρυγία, και κατόπιν επεκτάθηκε στην Ελλάδα, όπου έλαβε το όνομά της από κάποιον Έλληνα, γιό του Πίκου Δία.

Με τον Άβραάμ φτάνουμε σε ένα από τα αποφασιστικά σημεία που σημάδεψαν τον ρου της παγκόσμιας ιστορίας, γιατί ο Άβραάμ ήταν εκείνος που εισήγαγε την αληθινή γνώση του Θεού και έσπασε τα είδωλα του πατέρα του. Άν και ο ίδιος ήταν Χαλδαῖος, εγκαίνιασε την ιστορία του ισραηλιτικού λαού. Ο Άβραάμ ήταν επίσης σπουδαία μορφή στην ιστορία της έπιστήμης: όντας γνώστης της άστρονομίας λόγω της καταγωγής του από τη Χαλδαία, δίδαξε την έπιστήμη αυτή στους Αιγυπτίους. Από τους Χαλδαίους επίσης έμαθε τη χρήση των γραμμάτων και τη μετέδωσε στους Φοίνικες, από τους όποιους οι Έλληνες άργότερα πήραν το αλφάβητό τους. Επιπλέον, ήταν σύγχρονος του Μελχισεδέκ, του «έθνικού» ιερέα βασιλιά που ίδρυσε την Ίερουσαλήμ και ύπηρξε το πρότυπο του Χριστού. Περίπου την ίδια εποχή ιδρύθηκε το βασίλειο της Σικυώνας, που ήταν το άρχαιότερο στην Ελλάδα.

Η επόμενη φάση στην ιστορική εξέλιξη δημιουργείται από τον Μωυ-

σή, τον μεγαλύτερο από όλους τους προφήτες πριν από τον Ίωάννη τον Πρόδρομο και παρεμπιπτότως τον πρώτο ιστορικό. Η σπουδαιότητα του Μωυσή δεν σχετιζόταν τόσο με το γεγονός ότι έσωσε το λαό του από την αιχμαλωσία όσο με τη θεία αποκάλυψη που του έγινε και τα «σημάδια» που συνόδευαν ολόκληρη τη σταδιοδρομία του. Όπως ο Χριστός, ο Μωυσής βρέφος γλίτωσε από τη σφαγή των νεογέννητων άρσενικών του λαού του· όπως ο Χριστός αποσύρθηκε κι αυτός στην έρημο—όχι για σαράντα μέρες αλλά για σαράντα χρόνια. Όταν άνοιξε δρόμο στην Έρυθρά Θάλασσα, τη χτύπησε με μια σταυροειδή κίνηση, και όταν έριξε ένα δέντρο στο πικρό νερό της Μερράς κι αυτό με τη σειρά του δήλωνε τον ζωοδότη σταυρό. Οι δώδεκα πηγές του νερού και οι έβδομήντα φοινικιές στο Αίλιμ συμβόλιζαν τους δώδεκα μείζονες και τους έβδομήντα έλάσσονες αποστόλους. Το μάννα που συλλέχθηκε την έκτη μέρα της εβδομάδας και παρέμεινε αναλλοίωτο μέχρι το Σάββατο προεικόνιζε το σώμα του Χριστού. Τέλος, μολονότι ο Μωυσής πέθανε και θάφτηκε, κανένας δεν μπόρεσε να δεί τον τάφο του. Ο θρησκευτικός κώδικας που καθόρισε ο Μωυσής ήταν, φυσικά, προσωρινός και προσαρμοσμένος στην άτελή κατανόηση και στα ειδωλολατρικά έθιμα του λαού του—ήταν δηλαδή μια σκιά της μελλοντικής πραγματικότητας. Σε σύγκριση όμως με τους ειδωλολάτρες του καιρού του, ο Μωυσής—που θεωρούνταν γενικά σύγχρονος του Ίνάχου, του πρώτου βασιλιά των Άργείων—ήταν μια μορφή με άνυπέρβλητη γνώση: μια παρατήρηση που χρησίμευε για να αποδείξει άλλη μια φορά ότι όλες οι ειδωλολατρικές και ειδικά οι ελληνικές γνώσεις αποτελούσαν πολύ μεταγενέστερη και δευτερεύουσα εξέλιξη.

Ο επόμενος μεγάλος σοφός των Ισραηλιτών ήταν ο βασιλιάς Σολομών, ό οποίος, παρά τη λυπηρή αδυναμία του στις γυναίκες, γνώρισε όλα τα φυσικά πράγματα και έγραψε βιβλία για τα φυτά και τα ζώα. Κατέγραψε επίσης διάφορα φάρμακα και επικλήσεις κατά των δαιμόνων. Αυτά τα βιβλία, που τα άντέγραψαν οι Έλληνες «ιατροσοφιστές», καταστράφηκαν άργότερα κατά διαταγή του Έζεκία, ό οποίος έβλεπε ότι οι άνθρωποι τα χρησιμοποιούσαν για ιατρικούς σκοπούς αντί να προσεύχονται στον Θεό για τη θεραπεία τους. Σημαντικό ενδιαφέρον είχε επίσης ο Ναός του Σολομώντος, που ήταν ιδιαίτερα σεβαστός, γιατί την εποχή εκείνη ήταν ό μοναδικός ναός του αληθινού Θεού. Οι σκαλιστές μορφές των χερουβείμ που περιείχε χρησιμοποιούνταν συχνά ως έπιχειρήμα για να δικαιολογήσουν τη χρήση των εικόνων. Όσο για την Κιβωτό της Διαθήκης, που ήταν τοποθετημένη στα άγια των άγιων, αυτή όχι μόνο έδειχνε τη μορφή του σύμπαντος, αλλά και απέδιδε το σχήμα ενός μυστηριώδους ναού, που

είχε φανερωθεί στον Μωυσή στην κορυφή του όρους Σινά —ναού που μπορούμε να φανταστούμε ότι έμοιαζε με χριστιανική εκκλησία. Ο Σολομών έζησε μερικά χρόνια μετά τον τρωικό πόλεμο, που ή ιστορία του, όπως τη διηγούνται τα βυζαντινά χρονικά, είχε ληφθεί όχι από τον Όμηρο αλλά από τους μύθους του Δίκτυος.

Μετά τον Σολομώντα ή ιστορία των Ισραηλιτών πήρε την κάτω βόλτα και δεν άξιζε μεγάλη προσοχή —έκτος από τους προφήτες, που αγωνίζονταν μάταια να διορθώσουν τη συμπεριφορά του Περιούσιου Λαού. Το ενδιαφέρον τώρα μετατοπίζεται στα ειδωλολατρικά βασίλεια: πρώτα στους Άσσυρίους, που κατέλαβαν την Ιερουσαλήμ και κατέστρεψαν το Ναό, έπειτα στους Πέρσες, οι οποίοι απαγόρευσαν στους Έβραίους να επιστρέψουν στην πατρίδα τους. Ο ρυθμός της παγκόσμιας ιστορίας τώρα επιταχύνεται, και ο ακριβής χρόνος της Ένσάρκωσης αποκαλύπτεται από τον προφήτη Δανιήλ. Το περσικό βασίλειο διαλύεται από τον Αλέξανδρο, ο οποίος πλησίασε τη λατρεία του αληθινού Θεού και, αφού έκανε προσφορές στην Ιερουσαλήμ, ξεκίνησε την προς ανατολάς πορεία του. Στον μακρινό όριζοντα εμφανίζεται ή Ίνδία, με τον αποταμό Όκεανό», που περιβάλλει όλoκληρη τη γή, και τους ενάρητους Βραχμάνους. Η αυτοκρατορία του Αλεξάνδρου διαίρειται: ο Αντίοχος ο Έπιφανής μολύνει τον ανακαινισμένο Ναό και εγκαινιάζει «το βδέλυγμα της έρημώσεως», σύμφωνα με την προφητεία του Δανιήλ. Τα βασίλεια των Έπιγόνων πολεμοῦν συνεχώς μεταξύ τους ώσoτου υποτάσσονται στη Ρώμη.

Η ένσάρκωση του Χριστού, που είναι το κεντρικό γεγονός όλoκληρης της ιστορικής εξέλιξης, αντιστοιχεί στη βασιλεία του Αύγουστου, του πρώτου ήγεμόνα που κυβέρνησε όλη τη γή και επέβαλε παγκόσμια ειρήνη. Έπιπλέον, αφού ή ρωμαϊκή αυτοκρατορία είναι το τέταρτο βασίλειο που προφήτησε ο Δανιήλ, εισάγει όπως ταιριάζει την έλευση του Δημιουργού των τεσσάρων στοιχείων. Η λήξη των έπττα «έβδομάδων» του Δανιήλ σχετίζεται επίσης με την κατάργηση των χρισμένων άρχιερέων των Έβραίων. Οι ρωμαῖοι αυτοκράτορες μετά τον Αύγουστο εξέτάζονται κυρίως από τη σκοπιά του χριστιανισμού. Κατά τη βασιλεία του Τιβερίου σταυρώνεται ο Χριστός. Η Σταύρωση έγινε Παρασκευή, γιατί ο άνθρωπος δημιουργήθηκε την έκτη μέρα και ο Αδάμ έφαγε τον απαγορευμένο καρπό την έκτη ώρα της ήμέρας. Η Ανάσταση έπαναλαμβάνει τη Δημιουργία. Ο Πιλάτος αναφέρει τα θαύματα του Χριστού στον Τιβέριο, ο οποίος παραχωρεί απόλυτη έλευθερία στη χριστιανική διδασκαλία, κι έτσι όλoκληρη ή γή γεμίζει από αυτήν. Κατά τη βασιλεία του διεφθαρμένου Γάτου έγινε ο προσηλυτισμός του αποστόλου Παύλου

και το μαρτύριο του άγιου Στεφάνου, και την εποχή του Κλαυδίου ιδρύθηκε ο μοναχισμός από τον ευαγγελιστή Μάρκο. Στη διάρκεια της βασιλείας του Νέρωνα, του πρώτου διώκτη του χριστιανισμού, θανατώνονται ο Πέτρος, ο Παῦλος, ο Ίάκωβος και ο Λουκάς. Στο μεταξύ είχε δοθεί στους Έβραίους προθεσμία σαράντα έτών μετά την Ανάλυση για να μετανοήσουν. Το γεγονός ότι δεν το έκαναν είχε ως αποτέλεσμα τη λεηλασία της Ιερουσαλήμ και την καταστροφή του Ναού. Αυτή είναι ή τέταρτη αιχμαλωσία των Έβραίων, που δεν θά τελειώσει ποτέ, και οι Έβραῖοι δεν θά έχουν πια άλλους προφήτες. Οι μεταγενέστερες προσπάθειές τους να ξαναχτίσουν το Ναό ματαιώθηκαν με υπερφυσικό τρόπο.

Με την επέκταση του χριστιανισμού άρχισαν να εμφανίζονται οι πρώτες αίρέσεις —του Βασιλίδη, του Ουαλεντίνου, του Τατιανού και του Βαρδεσάνου. Ακόμη και ο σοφός και έγκρατης Ωριγένης περιπίπτει σε σφάλμα —ένα σφάλμα που άργότερα θά αναβιώσει με τον Άρειο. Κατόπιν εμφανίζεται ένας ψευτοχριστός στο πρόσωπο του Μάνη, όπαδοῦ κάποιου Βούδα. Αυτός απορρίπτει την Παλαιά Διαθήκη και διδάσκει ότι ο Ίησους Χριστός ήταν πνεῦμα. Η άπαισία διδασκαλία του εμπνέει πλήθος χριστιανικών αίρέσεων. Τώρα βρισκόμαστε προς το τέλος του 3ου αῖωνα μ.Χ. και μιὰ τελευταία προσπάθεια κατά του χριστιανισμού γίνεται από τους αυτοκράτορες Διοκλητιανό και Μαξιμιανό, αλλά και οι δύο τους πεθαίνουν με βίαιο θάνατο [sic]. Έπιτέλους, γίνεται αυτοκράτορας ο Κωνσταντίνος. Άρρωσταίνει, βλέπει τους αποστόλους Πέτρο και Παῦλο στο όνειρό του, θεραπεύεται από τον πάπα Σίλβεστρο και δέχεται το βάπτισμα μαζί με τη μητέρα του Έλένη. Ο χριστιανισμός θριαμβεύει, ή πρώτη σύνοδος συγκαλεῖται στη Νίκαια, και ή έδρα της αυτοκρατορίας μεταφέρεται στη Νέα Ρώμη, που είναι και ή Νέα Ιερουσαλήμ. Έτσι εγκαινιάζεται το τελευταῖο στάδιο της παγκόσμιας ιστορίας. Το μόνο που απομένει να γίνει πριν από τη Δευτέρα Παρουσία είναι να εξαφανιστούν οι αίρέσεις και να μεταδοθεί το χριστιανικό μήνυμα στα πέρατα του κόσμου.

Αυτή, εν όλoιγος, είναι ή θεώρηση του παρελθόντος που βρίσκουμε στα βυζαντινά χρονικά, ένα πανόραμα τεράστιο μαζί και σκοτεινό. Μάταια ψάχνουμε για κάποια λογική εξέλιξη της ιστορίας ή για κάποιο σημάδι του ενδιαφέροντος του Θεού για τη σωτηρία της ανθρωπότητας. Το πεδίο της καθοδηγούμενης από τη Θεία Πρόνοια ιστορίας είναι παγκόσμιο μέχρι τον Κατακλυσμό και τον Πύργο της Βαβέλ, αλλά στη συνέχεια περιορίζεται στο ελάχιστο μέχρι την έπιφώτηση του Άγιου Πνεύματος, όποτε θεωρητικά ξαναγίνεται παγκόσμιο. Η ένδιάμεση περίοδος των 2.700 χρόνων περίπου, δηλαδή πάνω κάτω ή μισή ιστορία πριν από την Έν-

σάρκωση, παραμένει στη σκιά, εκτός από ό,τι άφορᾷ τις τύχες τῶν Ἰουδαίων. Ἄλλὰ τί γινόταν με τοὺς ἄλλους λαούς, πού τὰ σύντομα χρονικά τους τὰ παρέθετε ὁ Εὐσέβιος σὲ παράλληλες στῆλες; Προφανῶς ὁ Θεὸς τοὺς εἶχε ἐμπιστευθεῖ στοὺς «ἀγγέλους τῶν ἐθνῶν», ἀλλὰ κι αὐτοί, ἀπὸ ἀνικανότητα μᾶλλον παρὰ ἀπὸ κακία τῶν λαῶν (ἀφοῦ εἶχε πέσει πάνω τους ὅλο τὸ βάρος τῆς ἐπίθεσης τῶν δαιμόνων), δὲν κατάφεραν παρὰ νὰ εἰσαγάγουν τὴ λατρεία τῶν ἄστρον. Κι αὐτὴ με τὴ σειρά της ἐκφυλίστηκε σὲ χονδροειδῆ εἰδωλοατρία.⁷

Τὰ ἔργα τῆς Θείας Πρόνοιας φανερώνονταν στὴν ἐκπλήρωση χρησμῶν καί, με ἀκόμη πιδ μυστηριώδη τρόπο, σὲ ἀριθμητικούς συσχετισμούς, σὰν ἀφηρημένο μοτίβο σὲ ἀνατολίτικο χαλί. Με ἀκόμη πιδ σκοτεινὸ τρόπο, τὸ δόγμα τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδας καὶ τῆς Παρθένου ὑποτίθεται ὅτι διακηρυσσόταν με γρίφους ἀπὸ τὸ μαντεῖο τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα καὶ ἀπὸ τις Σίβυλλες, καὶ ἦταν χαραγμένο ἐδῶ κι ἐκεῖ σὲ πέτρινες πλάκες. Ὅταν, λόγου χάρη, ἓνας πανάρχαιος εἰδωλοατρικὸς ναὸς στὴν Κύζικο μετατράπηκε σὲ ναὸ τῆς Παναγίας κατὰ τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Λέοντα Α' (457-474), βρέθηκε ἓνας χρησμὸς χαραγμένος στὸν τοίχο, καὶ ἓνας ὀλίδιος στὴν Ἀθήνα. Καὶ οἱ δύο ἀποτελοῦσαν ἀπαντήσεις στὴν ἐξῆς ἐρώτηση τῶν πολιτῶν: «Προφήτεψέ μας, μάντη Φοῖβε Ἀπόλλωνα, σὲ ποιὸν θὰ ἀνήκει αὐτὸς ὁ οἶκος». Ὁ Θεὸς ἀπάντησε: «Πρέπει νὰ κάνετε ὅ,τι ὀδηγεῖ στὴν ἀρετὴ καὶ τὴν τάξη. Πάντως ἐγὼ διακηρύσσω ἓναν τριαδικὸ Θεὸ κυρίαρχο στὸν οὐρανὸ, τοῦ ὁποῖου τὸν αἰώνιο Λόγο θὰ συλλάβει μιὰ ἀπλή κοπέλα. Σὰν πύρινο βέλος θὰ διασχίσει ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, θὰ τὸν κυριεύσει καὶ θὰ τὸν προσφέρει δῶρο στὸν Πατέρα του. Αὐτὸς θὰ εἶναι ὁ οἶκος της, καὶ τὸ ὄνομά της εἶναι Μαρία».⁸ Μολονότι βέβαια μπορούμε νὰ ἀμφιβάλουμε, καὶ με τὸ δίκιο μας, γιὰ τὴν ἀuthenticότητα τέτοιων ἐπιγραφῶν, γεγονὸς παραμένει πὼς μερικοὶ Βυζαντινοὶ προσπάθησαν νὰ δείξουν, ἔστω καὶ ἀδέξια, ὅτι καὶ στοὺς εἰδωλολάτρες εἶχε δοθεῖ μιὰ εὐκαιρία, στὰ βάθη τῆς Ἀρχαιότητας, νὰ ἀκούσουν τὸ χριστιανικὸ μήνυμα.

Ἄν καὶ ὑποβαθμίστηκε με τὴ συνεχῆ ἐπανάληψη, τὸ περίγραμμα τῆς βυζαντινῆς παγκόσμιας ἱστορίας δὲν ἔχασε ποτὲ τὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ πού ἐνσωμάτωσε ἀνάμεσα στὸν 2ο καὶ τὸν 5ο αἰώνα μ.Χ. Τὰ μυθικὰ στοιχεῖα καὶ οἱ ἀνακριβείες τοῦ «ἐθνικοῦ» (μὴ χριστιανικοῦ) περιεχομένου ὀφείλονταν στὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι οἱ πρώιμοι συγγραφεῖς χριστιανικῶν χρονικῶν ἔπρεπε ἀναγκαστικὰ νὰ στηριχτοῦν σὲ ὅποιες λαϊκὲς ἐπιτομὲς μπορούσαν νὰ βροῦν, ἰδιαιτέρως σὲ ὅσες παρῆχαν καταλόγους καὶ χρονολογίαις ἡγεμόνων τῶν διάφορων χωρῶν —τοῦ Βηρωσσοῦ γιὰ τὴν Ἀσσυρία, τοῦ Μανέθωνα γιὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτο, τοῦ Κάστορα γιὰ τὴν Ἀσσυρία, τὴν Ἑλλάδα

καὶ τὴ Ρώμη, καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς. Οἱ σοβαροὶ ἱστορικοὶ τῆς Ἀρχαιότητας δὲν ἦταν κατάλληλοι γιὰ τέτοια χρῆση. Με σύγχρονα κριτήρια, οἱ ἱστορικὲς ἐρευνες πού διεξήγαγαν ὁ Ἀφρικανὸς, ὁ Εὐσέβιος καὶ οἱ διάδοχοί τους μπορεῖ πράγματι νὰ μᾶς φαίνονται μᾶλλον ἀνάξιες λόγου, ἀλλὰ δὲν μπορούμε νὰ ἀρνηθοῦμε ὅτι ἀποτελοῦσαν πολὺ σημαντικὴ προσπάθεια, ἢ ὅποια ἐξάλλου δὲν μπορούσε νὰ ἐπαναληφθεῖ στὴν Ὑστερῆ βυζαντινῆ περίοδο, ἐπειδὴ μεγάλο μέρος τοῦ ἀπαραίτητου ἱστορικοῦ ὕλικου εἶχε στὸ μεταξὺ χαθεῖ. Στὴν ἱστοριογραφία, ὅπως καὶ στὰ περισσότερα ἄλλα πεδία τῆς γνώσης, ὁ ἀπλὸς Βυζαντινὸς ἔμενε περιορισμένος στὴν κληρονομία τῆς παλαιοχριστιανικῆς περιόδου.

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ ΙΑ'

ΤΟ ΜΕΛΛΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΤΗΤΑΣ

Παιδιά, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστὶ, καὶ καθὼς ἠκούσατε ὅτι ὁ ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν· ὅθεν γινώσκωμεν ὅτι ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν. Ἔτσι ἔγραφε ὁ ἀπόστολος Ἰωάννης (Ἐπιστ. Ἰωάν. Α', Β', 18), πού καὶ ὁ ἴδιος μισοπίστευε πῶς θὰ ζοῦσε νὰ δεῖ τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία· γιατί δὲν εἶχε πεῖ ὁ Κύριος στὸν Πέτρο, ἐὰν αὐτὸν θέλω μένειν ἕως ἔρχομαι, τί πρὸς σέ; (Κατὰ Ἰωάν., ΚΑ', 22).

Ἡ πίστη στὸ ἐπικείμενο τέλος τοῦ κόσμου ἀποτελοῦσε ἀκρογωνιαίον λίθον τοῦ πρώιμου χριστιανισμοῦ, καί, μολονότι ὅταν ἄρχιζε ἡ βυζαντινὴ περίοδος εἶχαν ἤδη περάσει τρεῖς αἰῶνες ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀνάληψη τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὸν οὐρανό, δὲν ἦταν μιὰ πίστη πού μποροῦσε νὰ ἀπορροφηθεῖ εὐκόλα. Γιατί χωρὶς τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία ἡ χριστιανικὴ θεώρηση τῆς ἱστορίας κατανατᾶ ἀνοησία. Ἐπιπλέον —κι αὐτὸ τὸ σημεῖο πρέπει νὰ ὑπογραμμιστεῖ— δὲν ὑπῆρχε θεολογικός, συμβολικός ἢ ἀριθμητικός λόγος γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀναβληθεῖ αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονός γιὰ κάποιον ἀπώτερον καὶ ἀόριστο μέλλον. Μιὰ τέτοια καθυστέρηση δὲν θὰ κατέστρεφε ἀπλῶς τὴν ἰσορροπία καὶ τὴν συμμετρία τῆς Θείας Πρόνοιας: γιὰ νὰ τὸ ποῦμε ὠμά, δὲν ὑπῆρχε ἀρκετὸ «ὕλικόν» γιὰ νὰ γεμίσει μιὰ ὑπερβολικὰ μεγάλη περίοδος ἀναμονῆς.

Τὸ «ὕλικόν» αὐτό, τὸ βασικὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς ἐσχατολογικῆς θεώρησης, τὸ δανείζονταν ἀπὸ τὴ Βίβλο καὶ τὰ ἀπόκρυφα. Ἰδιαίτερα μεγάλο κύρος, μιὰ καὶ προερχόταν ἀπὸ τὰ χεῖλη τοῦ ἴδιου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἶχε ἡ «συνοπτικὴ ἀποκάλυψη» (Κατὰ Ματθ., ΚΔ', Κατὰ Μάρκ., ΙΓ', Κατὰ Λουκᾶν, ΚΑ'). Αὐτὴ πρόβλεπε στὴν ἀρχὴ μιὰ περίοδο πολέμων ἀνάμεσα στὰ βασίλεια καὶ τὰ ἔθνη, ὅταν ἔσονται λιμοὶ καὶ λοιμοὶ καὶ σεισμοὶ κατὰ τόπους, καὶ αὐτὸ θὰ εἶναι ἀρχὴ ὠδίνων. Κάθε ἀνομία θὰ συμβεῖ τότε, καὶ θὰ ἐμφανιστοῦν πολλοὶ ψευτοπροφήτες· ὥστόσο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας θὰ κηρυχθεῖ σὲ ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη, καὶ τότε ἔξει τὸ τέλος. Τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως τὸ ἔρηθεν διὰ Δανιὴλ τοῦ προφήτου θὰ σταθεῖ ἐν

τόπω ἀγίῳ καὶ θὰ ὑπάρξει θλίψη καὶ ὄδυρμος ἀλλά, γιὰ χάριν τῶν ἐκλεκτῶν, θὰ συντηθηθοῦν οἱ μέρες ἐκεῖνες. Ἔπειτα θὰ σκοτιστεῖ ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη, τὰ ἀστέρια θὰ πέσουν ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανό, καὶ ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου θὰ ἐμφανιστεῖ πάνω στὰ σύννεφα μὲ δύναμη καὶ δόξα. Οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ πρέπει νὰ προσέχουν γιὰ τὰ κατάλληλα σημάδια· γιατί, ἂν καὶ τὸν ἀκριβὴ χρόνον τῆς Δευτέρας Παρουσίας δὲν τὸν γνωρίζουν οὔτε οἱ ἄγγελοι, παρὰ μόνο ὁ Κύριος, ὥστόσο οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη ἕως ἂν πάντα ταῦτα γένηται.

Ἡ ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀποτελοῦσε μέρος τοῦ μεγάλου κύματος ἐσχατολογικοῦ διαλογισμοῦ πού σάρωσε τὸν ἐβραϊκὸν κόσμον ἀνάμεσα στὸν 2ο π.Χ. καὶ τὸν 1ο μ.Χ. αἰῶνα. Δὲν πρόκειται νὰ ἐξετάσουμε ἐδῶ λεπτομερῶς τὶς διάφορες ἰδέες πού διατυπώθηκαν ἐκεῖνη τὴν ἐποχὴ, ἀλλὰ θὰ ἀπομονώσουμε μερικὰ σημεῖα πού ἐμελλε νὰ παίξουν σημαντικὸν ρόλον στὴ βυζαντινὴ περίοδο. Ἰδιαίτερον βάρος εἶχε ὁ μύθος γιὰ τὸν Ἀντίχριστο, πού ἀναφέρεται στὸ χωρίον τοῦ Ἰωάννη στὴν ἀρχὴ αὐτοῦ τοῦ κεφαλαίου. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀμαρτίας ἢ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας εἶχε ἤδη σκιαγραφηθεῖ στὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Δανιὴλ, ἀλλὰ παίρνει πιὸ συγκεκριμένη μορφή στὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου. Θὰ ἐμφανιστεῖ τὸν καιρὸ τῆς ἀποστασίας, λίγο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία, καὶ θὰ καθίσει στὸ ναὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ παριστάνοντας τὸν Θεὸ καὶ κάνοντας θαύματα, ἀλλὰ ὁ ἀληθινὸς Κύριος θὰ τὸν καταστρέψει τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ (Πρὸς Θεσσα. Β', Β', 8). Πίστευαν ἐπίσης ὅτι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος θὰ ἀνῆκε στὴ φυλὴ τοῦ Δάν, ὅτι θὰ τὸν ἀντιμετώπιζε ὁ Ἡλίας (ἢ ὁ Ἡλίας καὶ ὁ Ἐνώχ, πού ἦταν προφανῶς οἱ δύο μάρτυρες πού ἀναφέρονται στὴν Ἀποκάλυψη), τὸν ὁποῖο θὰ σκότωνε, ὅτι ἡ βασιλεία του θὰ διαρκοῦσε τριάμισι χρόνια, καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς. Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Δανιὴλ ἐπίσης προέρχεται καὶ ἡ ἀντίληψη γιὰ τὶς τέσσερις βασιλεῖες ἢ θηρία, τὸ τελευταῖον ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα —αὐτὸ μὲ τὰ σιδερένια δόντια καὶ τὰ δέκα κέρατα, τὸ θηρίον πού ἀκαταφάγεται πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν καὶ συμπατήσῃ αὐτὴν καὶ κατακόψει— γενικὰ ταυτιζόταν μὲ τὴ ρωμαϊκὴ αὐτοκρατορία, παρὰ τὸ γεγονός πῶς ὁ συγγραφέας εἶχε στὸ νοῦ του τὸ βασιλεῖον τῶν Σελευκιδῶν. Μετὰ τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ τέταρτου θηρίου θὰ ἐπακολουθήσῃ ἀμέσως ἡ Δευτέρα Παρουσία (Δαν., Ζ'). Ἀκόμη παλαιότερης καταγωγῆς, δηλαδὴ ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ Ἰεζεκιήλ (ΔΗ'-ΛΘ'), ἦταν ἡ ἀντίληψη γιὰ τὸν Γῶγ καὶ Μαγῶγ (ἢ, ὀρθότερα, τὸν Γῶγ ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ τοῦ Μαγῶγ), τὰ βόρεια ἔθνη πού θὰ πολεμοῦσαν μὲ τὸ Ἰσραὴλ τὶς τελευταῖες μέρες. Αὐτὸ ἐπαναλαμβάνεται στὴν Ἀποκάλυψη καὶ συσχετίζεται μὲ τὸν μικρὸν χρόνον, ὅταν λυθῆσεται ὁ σατανὰς ἐκ τῆς φυλακῆς αὐτοῦ, ὅπου βρισκόταν κλεισμένος γιὰ χίλια χρό-

νια (Ἀποκ. Ἰωάν., Κ', 8). Για τούς μεταγενέστερους Βυζαντινούς υπήρχε ἐδῶ μιὰ ἐπιπλέον ἐνδειξη, διότι ἡ μετάφραση τῶν Ἑβδομήκοντα ἀναφέρει τὸν Γ' ὡς «ἄρχοντα Ρῶς» —δηλαδή μὲ τὸ ὄνομα ποῦ εἶχαν οἱ Ρῶσοι.

Ὅταν ὅλες αὐτές, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλές ἄλλες συγκεχυμένες βιβλικές καὶ παραβιβλικές πεποιθήσεις πέρασαν στοὺς Βυζαντινούς, εἶχαν ἤδη ὑποστῆ ἕναν σημαντικὸ μετασχηματισμὸ: ἀντὶ νὰ ἀφοροῦν, ὅπως στὴν ἀρχή, τὸ μέλλον τοῦ ἐβραϊκοῦ ἔθνους καὶ μόνο, τὸ νόημά τους ἐπεκτάθηκε ὥστε νὰ περιλάβει ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ ἰδιαίτερα τοὺς χριστιανούς. Ὁ ρόλος τῆς ρωμαϊκῆς αὐτοκρατορίας στὸ σχέδιο τῶν «τελευταίων πραγμάτων» ἀναγνωρίζεται, εἴτε ἡ Ρώμη θεωροῦνταν ὡς ἐχθρὸς (ὅπως στὴν Ἀποκάλυψη) εἴτε, ἀντίθετα, ὡς ἡ δύναμη ποῦ ἀπέτρεπε τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου. Ἐπιπλέον ἡ εἰδωλολατρικὴ πίστη στὴν αἰωνιότητα τῆς Ρώμης ἐπιβεβαιωνόταν μὲ τὴν ταύτιση τῆς Ρώμης μὲ τὴν Τέταρτη Βασιλεία, ποῦ ἦταν προορισμένη νὰ διαρκέσει μέχρι τὸ τέλος τοῦ χρόνου. Ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ ἐκχριστιανισμὸς τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας μποροῦσε νὰ ταιριάζει στὸ πλαίσιο τῆς Ἀποκάλυψης, ἀφοῦ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς εἶχε προφητέψει ὅτι τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο θὰ κηρυχθεῖ σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον ὡς ἀναγκαῖο προανάκρουσμα τῆς τελικῆς καταστροφῆς. Ἐνα περιστατικὸ, πάντως, ποῦ δὲν εἶχε προβλεφθεῖ ἦταν ἡ μεταφορὰ τῆς πρωτεύουσας στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Ἡ βυζαντινὴ συμβολὴ ἔγκειται στὴν προσαρμογὴ τοῦ σχεδίου καὶ πάλι, ὥστε νὰ τοποθετηθεῖ ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη στὸ κέντρο τῆς παγκόσμιας σκηνῆς.

Ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἀποσπασματικῆς φύσης τῶν μαρτυριῶν εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ καθοριστεῖ ἡ διαδικασία τῆς προσαρμογῆς αὐτῆς. Τὸ κείμενο ἐνὸς συμβουλικοῦ χρησιμοῦ τοῦ τέλους τοῦ 4ου αἰώνα, ποῦ τὸ περιεχόμενό του μπορεῖ νὰ ἀποκατασταθεῖ μὲ κάποια βεβαιότητα, ὄχι μόνο δὲν ἀποδίδει καμία ἰδιαίτερη σημασία στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ἀλλὰ προφητεύει κιόλας ὅτι ἡ καινούρια πρωτεύουσα δὲν θὰ διατηρηθεῖ οὔτε ἐξήντα χρόνια. Ὅταν τὸ ἴδιο κείμενο ἀναθεωρήθηκε στὰ πρῶτα χρόνια τοῦ 6ου αἰώνα ἀπὸ ἕνα συγγραφέα ποῦ ἔγραφε στὴ Συρία, ὁ ἀριθμὸς 60 μετατράπηκε σὲ 180, ἀλλὰ ὁ σαρκαστικὸς τόνος τοῦ σχολίου διατηρήθηκε: «Μὴν ἀλαζονεύεσαι, πόλη τοῦ Βυζαντίου, γιατί δὲν θὰ βασιλέψεις τρεῖς φορές ἐξήντα χρόνια!»¹ Σὲ ἕνα ἄλλο κείμενο τῆς ἴδιας ἐποχῆς (γύρω στὸ 500 μ.Χ.), δηλαδή στὸ Ἑβδομὸ Ὅραμα τοῦ Δανιὴλ, ποῦ σώζεται μόνο σὲ ἀρμενικὴ παραλλαγή, ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη παίξει πῶς ἀποφασιστικὸ, ἀν καὶ καθαρὰ κακοποιὸ ρόλο. Παριστάνεται ὡς ἡ «ἐπτάλοφος Βαβυλὼν», ποῦ πλουτίζει ἡ ἴδια σὲ βάρος ἄλλων περιοχῶν καὶ ὅπου βρίθει κάθε λογῆς ἀδικία. Ὁ συγγραφέας αἰσθάνεται ἀληθινὴ εὐχαρίστηση καθὼς ἀπαριθμεῖ τὶς συμφορὲς ποῦ σύντομα θὰ χτυπήσουν τὴ διεφθαρμένη πρωτεύουσα: τὰ τείχη της θὰ κα-

ταρρεύσουν, οἱ κάτοικοί της σιγὰ σιγὰ θὰ χαθοῦν, ὡσότου στὴ «συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος» δὲν θὰ ἔχει μείνει πῶς οὔτε ἕχνος ἀπὸ αὐτὴν. Οἱ ἀνθρώποι τότε θὰ δείχνουν τὸ μέρος καὶ θὰ ἀναρωτιοῦνται, «Ἦταν ἐδῶ, στ' ἀλήθεια, πόλη;»²

Ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Ἀναστασίου, κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς ὁποίας γράφτηκαν αὐτές οἱ προφητείες, φαίνεται ὅτι υπῆρξε περίοδος ἐντονου ἐσχατολογικοῦ διαλογισμοῦ. Τὸ λόγο εἶναι εὐκόλο νὰ τὸν καταλάβουμε. Ἀπὸ τὸν 3ο αἰώνα, ἀν ὄχι νωρίτερα, εἶχε ἐπικρατήσει ἡ ἀποψη ὅτι ὁ κόσμος ἦταν γραφτὸ νὰ διαρκέσει ἕξι χιλιάδες χρόνια, σὲ ἀναλογία μὲ τὶς ἕξι μέρες τῆς Δημιουργίας. Μήπως οἱ Ὑἱαμοὶ δὲν ἀναφέρουν ἐπὶ λέξει (4', 4) ὅτι χίλια χρόνια εἶναι ὡς ἓνα μῆρας στὰ μάτια τοῦ Θεοῦ; Ἀφοῦ, ὅπως εἶδαμε, ἡ Δημιουργία χρονολογοῦνταν γύρω στὸ 5500 π.Χ., κατὰ συνέπεια ἡ ἐνσάρκωση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγίνε ἀκριβῶς στὴ μέση τῆς τελευταίας «ἡμέρας», καὶ τὸ τέλος θὰ ἐρχόταν γύρω στὸ 500 μ.Χ. Ἡ ἀκριβῆς χρονολογία ἐξαρτιόταν, φυσικὰ, ἀπὸ τὸ χρονολογικὸ σύστημα ποῦ χρησιμοποιοῦσαν. Στὴν περίπτωση τοῦ λεγόμενου ἀλεξανδρινοῦ συστήματος (δηλαδή τοῦ Ἀνιανοῦ), τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀναμένεται τὸ 508. Ὅταν δὲν ἐπῆλθε τότε, ἄφησαν κάποιο περιθώριο γιὰ νὰ μαγειρέψουν τὰ νούμερα. Αὐτὸ γινόταν ἀπὸ μερικούς, ὅπως δείχνει ἡ ἐξῆς παράξενη ἱστορία, ποῦ κυκλοφόρησε εὐρύτατα ἐκείνη τὴν ἐποχὴ. Ἐλεγαν ὅτι λίγο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸ θάνατό του (τὸ 518) ὁ Ἀναστάσιος εἶδε ἕνα ὄνειρο: ἕνας ἄγγελος παρουσιάστηκε μπροστὰ του κρατώντας ἕνα βιβλίον καὶ, ἀφοῦ γύρισε πέντε φύλλα, διάβασε τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: Ἰδοῦ, διὰ τὴν ἀπληστίαν σου ἀπαλείψω δεκατέσσερα [ἔτη]. Τρομοκρατημένος ἀπὸ τὸ ὄραμα, ὁ Ἀναστάσιος κάλεσε κάποιον «ἐπιτήδειον ὄνειροκρίτην», ὁ ὁποῖος τὸν πληροφόρησε ὅτι σύντομα θὰ πεθάνει. Πράγματι, μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο ἀρρώστησε καὶ πέθανε κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια μιᾶς τρομερῆς κακοκαιρίας.³ Καθὼς ὁ Ἀναστάσιος πέθανε σὲ ἡλικία ὀγδόντα ὀκτώ ἢ ἐνενηντα ἐτῶν, εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ φανταστοῦμε πῶς ἕνας λογικὸς παρατηρητῆς θὰ περίμενε νὰ ζήσει ἄλλα δεκατέσσερα χρόνια. Τὸ νόημα τῆς ἱστορίας εἶναι ἴσως ὅτι, ἀν δὲν ἐπέβαλλε τόσο βαρεῖς φόρους, θὰ τοῦ ἐπιτρεπόταν νὰ ζήσει μέχρι τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου τὸ 532, ἀλλὰ εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ ἐξηγήσει κανεὶς πῶς κατέληξαν στὸν ἀριθμὸ αὐτό. Ἴσως ὑπολόγισαν λογαριάζοντας ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Θείου Πάθους.

Παρὰ τὶς ταλαιπωρίες ποῦ μπορεῖ νὰ προκαλέσαν τὰ οἰκονομικὰ του μέτρα καὶ τὴν ἀντίθεση ποῦ ξεσήκωσε ὑποστηρίζοντας τὴ μονοφυσιτικὴ μερίδα, σίγουρα θὰ ἦταν δύσκολο νὰ δεῖ κανεὶς τὸν Ἀναστάσιον, ἕναν ἐξαιρετικὰ ἱκανὸ ἡγεμόνα, στὸ ρόλο ἐνὸς βασιλιᾶ τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως. Δὲν ἦταν

ὅμως τὸ ἴδιο μὲ τὸν Ἰουστινιανό, τοῦ ὁποίου ἡ χωρὶς ὄρια φιλοδοξία ἐ-
γινε αἰτία νὰ χαθοῦν τόσες ἀνθρώπινες ζωές. Αὐτὸς ὁ μυστηριώδης ἄν-
θρωπος, πού τὸ παρουσιαστικό του θύμιζε τὸν διαβόητο αὐτοκράτορα Δο-
μιτιανό, ἐκεῖνον πού ἔλεγαν ὅτι τὶς νύχτες μεταμορφωνόταν σὲ ἀκέφαλο
φάντασμα καὶ τὸ πρόσωπό του καμιά φορὰ μετατρέποταν σὲ μιὰ μάζα
ἄμορφης σάρκας, σίγουρα μποροῦσε νὰ θεωρηθεῖ ὁ Πρίγκιπας τῶν Δαι-
μόνων ἢ καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Ἀντίχριστος. Σ' αὐτὸ τουλάχιστον τὸ συμπέρασμα
κατέληξε ὁ Προκόπιος στὰ Ἀνέκδοτά του.⁴ Ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ
Ἰουστινιανοῦ ἦταν γεμάτη ἀπὸ ἀτέλειωτους πολέμους, σεισμούς, λοιμούς
καὶ κάθε εἴδους συμφορὰ. Σὲ μιὰ τέτοια περίπτωσι, ὅταν ἕνας τρομερὸς
σεισμὸς ἐπληξε τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη τὸ 557, ἡ φήμη ὅτι ἔφτανε τὸ
τέλος τοῦ κόσμου κυκλοφόρησε εὐρύτατα καὶ τὴν ἐνίσχυαν ἰδιαίτερα οἱ
«ἱεροὶ σαλοῖν», πού ὑποστήριζαν πὼς εἶχαν λάβει ὑπερφυσικὲς ἀποκαλύ-
ψεις γιὰ τὸ μέλλον. Ὁ πληθυσμὸς πανικοβλήθηκε: μερικοὶ κατέφυγαν στὰ
βουνὰ καὶ ἔγιναν μοναχοί, ἄλλοι ἔδιναν χρήματα στὶς ἐκκλησίες, οἱ πλού-
σιοι μοίραζαν ἐλεημοσύνες στοὺς φτωχοὺς, ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες στα-
μάτησαν γιὰ λίγο τὶς ἀνομίες τους.⁵

Ἡ κρίση τοῦ τέλους τοῦ 6ου καὶ τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα, πού συνεχῶς βάθαινε,
δὲν μποροῦσε παρὰ νὰ ἀσκεῖ παρόμοια ἐπιρροή στὴ σκέψη τῶν ἀνθρώ-
πων. Ὁ Τιβέριος Β', ἕνας ἐνάρετος αὐτοκράτορας, διαβεβαιώθηκε ἀπὸ
ἕναν ἄγγελο Κυρίου πὼς τὰ χρόνια τῆς τυραννικῆς ἀσέβειας δὲν θὰ ἔρ-
χονταν ὅσο αὐτὸς βασιλεύει. Καθησυχασμένος, πέθανε εἰρηνικά.⁶ Ἡ προσ-
δοκία φοβερῶν συμφορῶν ἔγινε πραγματικότητα στὴ βασιλεία τοῦ τυράν-
νου Φωκᾶ (602-610), πού τὴν ἀκολούθησε ὁ ἀπεργνωσμένος ἀγώνας ἀνά-
μεσα στὴ ρωμαϊκὴ καὶ τὴν περσικὴ αὐτοκρατορία καὶ ἡ πολιορκία τῆς
Κωνσταντινούπολης ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἀβάρους (626). Ὅλα τὰ σημάδια προμη-
νοῦσαν τὴν τελικὴ καταστροφή. Μιὰ προφητεία πού ἀποδιδόταν στὸ βα-
σιλιά τῶν Περσῶν Χοσρόη Β' διακήρυξε ὅτι ἡ «βαβυλωνιακὴ» ὑπεροχὴ
ἐπὶ τῶν Ρωμαίων θὰ διακοῦσε τρεῖς «ἑβδομάδες» ἐτῶν, ὑπολογίζοντας
ἀπὸ τὸ 591 (μὲ ἄλλα λόγια μέχρι τὸ 612), καὶ στὴ συνέχεια τὴν πέμπτη
«ἑβδομάδα» (619-626) οἱ Ρωμαῖοι θὰ ὑποδούλωναν τοὺς Πέρσες: «καὶ ὅ-
ταν πραγματοποιηθοῦν αὐτά, ἡ ἀνέσπερος ἡμέρα θὰ ἐγκατασταθεῖ ἀνά-
μεσα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους». ⁷ Συμπτωματικὰ οἱ ἐκστρατεῖες τοῦ Ἡρακλείου
κατὰ τῶν Περσῶν κράτησαν ἕξι χρόνια, σὰν τὶς ἕξι μέρες τῆς Δημιουρ-
γίας. Ἡ θριαμβευτικὴ του ἐπιστροφή στὴν πρωτεύουσα (628) ἀντιστοι-
χοῦσε στὸ θεϊκὸ Σάββατο,⁸ καὶ ἐπακολούθησε κάτι πού μπορεῖ νὰ ἐρμη-
νευτεῖ μόνο ὡς ἠθελημένα «ἀποκαλυπτικὴ» πράξη: ὁ Ἡράκλειος ταξί-
δεψε στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα γιὰ νὰ εὐχαριστήσῃ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ νὰ ὑψώσει πάλι

στὸν Γολγοθὰ τὸν Τίμιο Σταυρό, πού «βρέθηκε» ἀπὸ θαῦμα. Δὲν ἐπρό-
κειτο ὅμως νὰ παραμείνει ἐκεῖ γιὰ πολὺ.

Ὅποιοι κυκλοφόρησε τὴν προφητεία τοῦ Χοσρόη Β' ἀγνοοῦσε πὼς ἡ
πέμπτη του «ἑβδομάδα» συνέπιπτε πράγματι μὲ ἕνα γεγονὸς παγκόσμιας
σημασίας, τὸ ἔτος τῆς Ἐγίρας. Ἡ νικηφόρα ἐπέλαση τῶν Ἀράβων δὲν
εἶχε προβλεφθεῖ ἀκριβῶς ἀπὸ τὴν προηγούμενη «ἀποκαλυπτικὴ» φιλο-
λογία. Ὅταν ὅμως ὁ χαλίφης Ὁμάρ μπῆκε στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα φορώντας
ἕναν βρωμερὸ χιτῶνα ἀπὸ μαλλὶ καμήλας καὶ ζήτησε νὰ τὸν ὀδηγήσουν
ἐκεῖ ὅπου ἦταν ὁ ναὸς τοῦ Σολομῶντος γιὰ νὰ χτίσει στὴ θέση του ἕναν
εὐκτήριο οἶκο τῆς δικῆς του «βλασφημίας», ὁ πατριάρχης Σωφρόνιος
δὲν κρατήθηκε καὶ φώναξε: *ἐπ' ἀληθεία τοῦτο ἐστὶ τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐ-
ρημώσεως τὸ ὄρθεν διὰ Δανιὴλ τοῦ προφήτου ἐστὸς ἐν τόπῳ ἀγίῳ!*⁹ Ὁ
Ἀντίχριστος εἶχε ἐμφανιστεῖ· κι ἂν δὲν ἦταν ἀπὸ τὴ φυλὴ τοῦ Δάν, ἦταν
ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει ἀπόγονος τοῦ Ἰσμαήλ. Οἱ Ἀραβες ἦταν ἕνας βιβλι-
κὸς λαὸς, πού στάλθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ γιὰ νὰ πραγματοποιήσῃ τὶς συμφορὲς
τῶν «τελευταίων ἡμερῶν». Εἶναι γεγονὸς ὅτι ἡ κυριαρχία τους φαινόταν
νὰ διαρκεῖ παραπάνω ἀπὸ τριάμισι χρόνια, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἦταν δυνατὸ νὰ κρα-
τήσῃ πολὺ. Τὸ μόνο ἐρώτημα ἦταν πόσο θὰ κρατοῦσε.

Ὅχι καὶ πολὺ, γιατί τὸ τέλος εἶναι κοντὰ «καὶ δὲν ἀπομένει πολὺς χρό-
νος». Ἔτσι ἔγραφε τὸ τρίτο τέταρτο τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα ἕνας μοναχὸς ἀπὸ τὴ
Μεσοποταμία, συγγραφέας τῆς λεγόμενης *Ἀποκαλύψεως τοῦ Μεθοδίου*
τῶν Πατάρων.¹⁰ Αὐτὸ τὸ κείμενο, πού ἀρχικὰ γράφτηκε στὰ συριακὰ,
ἀλλὰ γρήγορα μεταφράστηκε στὰ ἑλληνικὰ καὶ τὰ λατινικὰ, ἐπρόκειτο
νὰ ἀσκήσει βαθιὰ ἐπίδραση στὴν ἐσχατολογικὴ σκέψη τοῦ Μεσαίωνα.
Μποροῦμε μάλιστα νὰ παρακολουθήσουμε τὴν ἐπιρροή του μέχρι τὸν 19ο
αἰώνα, καὶ αὐτὸ παρὰ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι ὁ συγγραφέας συνέθεσε τὴν *Ἀπο-
κάλυψη* σὲ ἕνα ἀπόμακρο μέρος τοῦ κόσμου, παρακινημένος ἀπὸ τὴν κατὰ-
σταση τῆς ἱακωβιτικῆς Ἐκκλησίας πού στέναζε κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ μουσουλ-
μανικὴ κυριαρχία. Ὁ ἴδιος εἶχε σκανδαλιστεῖ ἀπὸ τὴ στάση πολλῶν πρώην
πιστῶν πού ἐπιδίωκαν νὰ τὰ ἔχουν καλὰ μὲ τοὺς Ἀραβες καὶ εἶχαν φτάσει
ἀκόμη καὶ στὸ σημεῖο νὰ ἀρνηθοῦν τὴν πίστη τους. Μερικοὶ, καθὼς φαί-
νεται, εἶχαν στηρίζῃ τὶς ἐλπίδες τους στὸ βασιλιά τῆς Αἰθιοπίας, πού ἦταν
ἐκεῖνη τὴν ἐποχὴ ὁ μόνος ἀνεξάρτητος μονοφυσίτης ἡγεμόνας, βασιζό-
μενοι στὸν Ψαλμὸ ΕΗ', 32: «Αἰθιοπία προφθάσει χεῖρα αὐτῆς τῷ Θεῷ». Ἡ
πιθανότητα αἰθιοπικῆς ἐπέμβασης στὴ Μεσοποταμία ἦταν, ὁμολογου-
μένως, πολὺ ἀπομακρυσμένη: ἀντὶ λοιπὸν νὰ περιμένει κάτι τέτοιο, ὁ
συγγραφέας μας καταπιάστηκε νὰ δείξει ὅτι ἡ σωτηρία θὰ ἐρχόταν ἀπὸ
τὸ Βυζάντιο πού, κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο, ἦταν ἕνα καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ μὲ τὴν Αἰθιο-

πία. Αὐτὴ τὴν ἐκπληκτικὴ ἀποψη τὴ δικαιολογοῦσε μὲ τὶς ἀκόλουθες σκέψεις. Ὁ Φίλιππος ὁ Μακεδόνας εἶχε παντρευτεῖ τὴ Χουσέθ (ἢ ἀλλιῶς Ὀλυμπιάδα), κόρη τοῦ Φόλ, βασιλιᾶ τῆς Αἰθιοπίας. Μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ Φιλίππου, ἡ Χουσέθ γύρισε στὴν πατρίδα τῆς καὶ τὴν ἔδωσαν σύζυγο στὸν Βύζαντα, βασιλιᾶ τοῦ Βυζαντίου. Ἀπέκτησαν μιὰ κόρη, τὴ Βυζαντία, ποὺ παντρεύτηκε τὸν Ρωμόλο Ἀρχέλαο (ἢ Ἀρμάλειο), βασιλιᾶ τῆς Ρώμης, καὶ πῆρε τὴν πόλη αὐτὴ ὡς γαμήλιο δῶρο. Ὁ Ρωμόλος καὶ ἡ Βυζαντία ἀπέκτησαν τρεῖς γιούς: τὸν Ἀρχέλαο (ἢ Ἀρμάλειο), ποὺ βασίλεψε στὴ Ρώμη, τὸν Οὐρβανό, ποὺ βασίλεψε στὸ Βυζάντιο, καὶ τὸν Κλαύδιο, ποὺ βασίλεψε στὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια. Ἔτσι ἀποδεικνύεται ὅτι ἡ αὐτοκρατορία τῶν Ρωμαίων καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων εἶχε αἰθιοπικὴ καταγωγὴ, καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ αὐτοκρατορία προφανῶς θὰ «προφθάσει χεῖρα αὐτῆς τῶ Θεῷ».

Μετὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπόδειξη αὐτή, καὶ ἀφοῦ παραθέτει μερικὰ ἄλλα γεγονότα τῆς παγκόσμιας ἱστορίας, ὁ συγγραφέας μας προχωρεῖ στὴν περιγραφή τῶν καταστροφῶν ποὺ προκάλεσε ἡ ἀραβικὴ κατάκτηση καὶ ταυτίζει τὶς συμφορὲς τοῦ καιροῦ του μὲ τὴν «ἀποστασία» ποὺ εἶχε προφητέψει ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος. «Ὅταν ὅμως ἡ ἀραβικὴ κυριαρχία θὰ ἔχει διαρκέσει 77 χρόνια (ἢ μήπως 7 φορές 7;), θὰ ἐμφανιστεῖ «ένας αὐτοκράτορας τῶν Ἑλλήνων, δηλαδὴ τῶν Ρωμαίων», ποὺ θὰ σηκωθεῖ «ὡς ὁ ὑπῶν Κύριος, ὡς δυνατὸς κεκραίπαλῆκως ἐξ οἴνου» (Ψαλμοί, ΟΗ', 65), θὰ συντρίψει τοὺς Ἀραβες καὶ θὰ τοὺς ἐπιβάλει βαρὺ ζυγό. «Ὅλοι τότε θὰ γυρίσουν στὴν πατρίδα τους, τὴν Κιλικία, τὴν Ἰσαυρία, τὴν Ἀφρική, τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἢ τὴ Σικελία. Ἡ Ἀραβία θὰ καταστραφεῖ καὶ ἡ Αἴγυπτος θὰ καεῖ. Ἐπειτα θὰ βασιλέψει εἰρήνη: οἱ πόλεις θὰ ξαναχτιστοῦν, οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ τρῶνε καὶ θὰ πίνουν, θὰ παντρεύονται καὶ θὰ παντρεύουν. Ἀλλὰ ὄχι γιὰ πολὺ: γιὰ τὴν ἰσχυροῦς τὴν Ἰσραὴλ καὶ τὴν Μαγῶν θὰ ξεχυθοῦν ἀπὸ τὶς Κάσπιες Πύλες καὶ θὰ πλημμυρίσουν τὶς ἀνατολικὲς χῶρες μέχρι τὴν Ἰόππη, ὅπου ὁ ἀρχάγγελος τοῦ Κυρίου θὰ τοὺς συντρίψει. Κατόπιν ὁ ρωμαῖος αὐτοκράτορας θὰ βαδίσει στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ θὰ κατοικήσει ἐκεῖ δεκάμισι χρόνια» καὶ τότε θὰ ἐμφανιστεῖ ὁ Ἀντίχριστος, ποὺ θὰ ἔχει γεννηθεῖ στὸ Χοραζὶν καὶ θὰ ἔχει μεγαλώσει στὴ Βηθσαϊδά (πρβλ. Κατὰ Ματθ., ΙΑ', 21). Ὁ αὐτοκράτορας θὰ ἀνεβεῖ στὸν Γολγοθὰ καὶ θὰ τοποθετήσῃ τὸ στέμμα του πάνω στὸν Τίμιο Σταυρό, καὶ ὁ Σταυρὸς θὰ ἀναληφθεῖ στὸν οὐρανό. Τὸν Ἀντίχριστο θὰ τὸν ἀντιμετωπίσουν ὁ Ἐνώχ καὶ ὁ Ἡλίας, ἀλλὰ θὰ σκοτωθοῦν ἀπὸ αὐτόν, καὶ ὁ ἴδιος θὰ καταστραφεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο. Τέλος, ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου θὰ ἐμφανιστεῖ «ἐν κρίσει».

Ἡ ἐλπίδα πὼς ἡ ἀραβικὴ αὐτοκρατορία θὰ κατέρρεε τὸν 7ο αἰώνα κόντεψε γιὰ μιὰ στιγμή νὰ πραγματοποιηθεῖ. Ὁ ἀραβικὸς ἐμφύλιος πό-

λεμος (661-65), ἡ ἀνεπιτυχὴς ἐπίθεση κατὰ τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης (674-78) καὶ οἱ καταστρεπτικὲς ἐπιδρομὲς τῶν Μαρδαϊτῶν στὴ Συρία καὶ τὴν Παλαιστίνη μποροῦσε νὰ θεωρηθεῖ ὅτι ἐπιβεβαίωσαν αὐτὴ τὴν ἀποψη. Οἱ Ἀραβες ἀναγκάστηκαν νὰ δεχτοῦν ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Κωνσταντίνο Δ' εἰρήνη μὲ δυσμενεῖς ὅρους, καί, ὅπως λέει ἓνας χρονογράφος, ἐγένετο ἀμερμνία μεγάλη ἐν τε τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ δύσει.¹¹ Σύντομα ὅμως οἱ Ἀραβες πῆραν πάλι τὴν πρωτοβουλία τῶν ἐπιθέσεων. Δὲν ξέρουμε μὲ λεπτομέρειες πὼς μπόρεσαν νὰ ταιριάξουν αὐτὴ τὴν καινούρια κατάσταση μέσα στὸ ὄραμα τῆς Ἀποκάλυψης, ἐκτὸς τοῦ ὅτι ἡ ἀναμενόμενη διάρκεια τῆς ἀραβικῆς αὐτοκρατορίας βαθμηδὸν παρατεινόταν: στὸ τέλος τοῦ 8ου αἰώνα ἔδιναν στὴν περίοδο τῆς εὐημερίας καὶ τῆς δυνάμεις τῆς συνολικῆς διάρκειας 152 ἐτῶν.¹² Γύρω στὸ 820 ἓνας προφῆτης ἀπὸ τὴ Σικελία ἀρκέστηκε νὰ παραφράσει τὸν Ψευδο-Μεθόδιο, ἀλλὰ εἰσήγαγε μιὰ καινούρια λεπτομέρεια, δηλαδὴ ὅτι ὁ τελευταῖος αὐτοκράτορας θὰ ἀποκαλυφθεῖ στὶς Συρακοῦσες. Θὰ στείλει τοὺς ἀπεσταλμένους του «στὰ ἐνδότερα τῆς Ρώμης καὶ θὰ ἐξημερώσει τὰ ξανθὰ γένη, καὶ μαζὶ θὰ ἐπιτεθοῦν κατὰ τοῦ Ἰσμαῆλ». Στὴ Ρώμη ὁ αὐτοκράτορας θὰ ἔβρισκε κρυμμένο θησαυρό, ἀρκετὸ γιὰ νὰ πληρώσει τὸ στρατό του, κι ἔπειτα θὰ βιάδιζε διὰ ξηρᾶς στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Στὴ συνέχεια θὰ ἐμφανιζόταν ὁ Ἀντίχριστος, κτλ.¹³ Ἐνα ἐνδιαφέρον χαρακτηριστικὸ αὐτῆς τῆς προφητείας εἶναι πὼς ἀνέθετε στοὺς γερμανικοὺς λαοὺς κάποιο ρόλο μέσα στὸ ἐσχατολογικὸ σχέδιο. Τὰ «ξανθὰ γένη» θὰ ἔχουν σημαντικὴ θέση στὶς μεταγενέστερες βυζαντινὲς προφητεῖες, ὅπου ταυτίζονται ἄλλοτε μὲ τοὺς Δυτικούς καὶ ἄλλοτε μὲ τοὺς Ρώσους.

Οἱ ἐπαρχιακὲς Ἀποκαλύψεις ποὺ συζητήσαμε δὲν ἀντικατοπτρίζουν πλήρως τὴν ἐνισχυμένη θέση τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης στὸ μυστικιστικὸ πεδίο. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀλλαγὴ στὴν ἐμφαση, ποὺ ἐπιβεβαιώνεται μὲ τὴ μεταφορὰ τοῦ Τίμιου Σταυροῦ στὴν πρωτεύουσα, πρέπει νὰ συνέβη κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῶν σκοτεινῶν αἰώνων: ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη τώρα ἐμφανίζεται ὡς ἡ Νέα Ἱερουσαλήμ, ὁ τόπος ὅπου φυλάσσονται τὰ πολυτιμότερα λείψανα τῆς Χριστιανοσύνης. Ἡ διαφορετικὴ αὐτὴ ἀποψη ἐκτίθεται στὸ Βίο τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀνδρέα τοῦ Σαλοῦ, ποὺ τείνω νὰ τὸν τοποθετήσω στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 8ου αἰώνα, μολονότι συνήθως χρονολογεῖται στὸν 9ο ἢ τὸν 10ο. Ὁ ἅγιος Ἀνδρέας, ποὺ ἀνῆκε στὴν ομάδα τῶν ἱερῶν τρελῶν, λέγεται ὅτι ἔζησε τὸν 5ο αἰώνα, ἀλλὰ εἶναι πολὺ ἀπίθανο ἂν ὑπῆρξε ποτὲ στὴν πραγματικότητα, καὶ δὲν εἶναι σαφὲς ποῖα σκοπιμότητα ἐνέπνευσε τὴ συγγραφὴ τοῦ μακροσκελοῦς Βίου του. Ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει, αὐτὸ τὸ κείμενο ἔγινε ἐξαιρετικὰ δημοφιλές, χάρι κυρίως στὸ ἐσχατολογικὸ τμήμα ποὺ περιέχει, τὸ ὁποῖο

παρουσιάζεται με τη μορφή συζήτησης ανάμεσα στον Άνδρέα και το μαθητή του Έπιφάνιο. Χωρίς να κάνουμε κατά λέξη μετάφραση, θα δώσουμε τα κύρια σημεία του.¹⁴

‘Ο μαθητής άνοιξε τη συζήτηση ρωτώντας: «Πές μου, σέ παρακαλώ, πώς θα έλθει τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου [...] και πώς θα καταλάβουν οἱ άνθρωποι ὅτι τὸ τέλος πλησιάζει; Πώς θα έλθει ἡ συντέλεια τῆς πόλης μας, αὐτῆς τῆς Νέας Ἱερουσαλήμ, και τί θα γίνουν οἱ ἱεροὶ ναοὶ ποὺ βρίσκονται ἐδῶ, και οἱ σταυροὶ και οἱ τίμιες εἰκόνες και τὰ βιβλία και τὰ λείψανα τῶν ἁγίων;»

‘Ο ἅγιος ἀπάντησε:

«Σχηματικά με τὴν πόλη μας, γνώριζε πὼς μέχρι τῆς συντέλεια δὲν ἔχει νὰ φοβηθεῖ κανένα ἔθνος· κανένας δὲν θα τὴν καταλάβει, διότι ἔχει χάριστεῖ στὴ Θεοτόκο και κανένας δὲν θα τὴν ἀρπάξει ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τῆς. Πολλὰ ἔθνη θα ὀρμήσουν στὰ τείχη τῆς, ἀλλὰ θα συντριψουν τὰ κέρατά τους και θα φύγουν ντροπιασμένα, ἐνῶ ἐμεῖς θα ἀποκομίσουμε πολὺ πλοῦτο ἀπὸ αὐτούς.

»Ἄκουσε τώρα και γιὰ τὴν ἀρχὴ τῶν ὠδίνων και γιὰ τὴ συντέλεια τοῦ κόσμου και τὰ λοιπά. Τὶς τελευταῖες μέρες ὁ Θεὸς θα ὑψώσει ἀπὸ τὴ φτώχεια ἕναν αὐτοκράτορα, ποὺ θα πορευθεῖ με μεγάλη δικαιοσύνη και θα καταπαύσει κάθε πόλεμο και θα πλουτίσει τοὺς φτωχοὺς και θα εἶναι ὅπως τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Νῶε. [...] Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὴν ἐποχὴ αὐτὴ θα εἶναι πάρα πολὺ πλούσιοι, μέσα σὲ ἄπειρη εἰρήνη τρώγοντες και πίνοντες, γαμοῦντες και ἐγκαμίζοντες [...]. Και ὕστερα ὁ αὐτοκράτορας θα στρέψει τὸ πρόσωπό του πρὸς Ἀνατολὰς και θα ταπεινώσει τοὺς γιουὺς τῆς Ἰσραὴλ [τοὺς Ἰσραηλῆς]· γιατί ὁ Θεὸς θα ὀργιστεῖ ἀπὸ τὴ βλασφημία τους [...] και θα τοὺς ἐξολοθρεύσει και θα ἐξοντώσει τὰ παιδιὰ τους με φωτιά [...]. Και θα ξαναφέρει ὅλο τὸ Ἰλλυρικὸ στὴν κυριαρχία τῶν Ρωμαίων, και ἡ Αἴγυπτος θα προσφέρει και πάλι τοὺς φόρους τῆς. Και θα βάλει τὸ δεξὶ του χέρι πάνω στὴ θάλασσα και θα ἡμερώσει τὰ ξανθὰ γένη και θα ταπεινώσει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑπὸ τὴν κυριαρχία του, και ἡ βασιλεία του θα διαρκέσει τριάντα δύο ἔτη. [...] Ἐκείνους τοὺς καιροὺς με θέλημα Θεοῦ θα ἀποκαλυφθεῖ στὸν αὐτοκράτορα ὅσο χρυσάφι εἶναι κρυμμένο σὲ ὅποιον-δήποτε τόπο, και οἱ μεγιστάνες του θα γίνουν σὰν βασιλιάδες, ἐνῶ οἱ φτωχοὶ θα γίνουν σὰν ἄρχοντες. Θα ἔχει μεγάλο ζῆλο, και θα καταδιώξει, τοὺς Ἰουδαίους, και κανένας Ἰσραηλίτης δὲν θα βρεθεῖ στὴν πόλη αὐτὴ. [...] Κανένας δὲν θα παίξει τὴ λύρα ἢ τὴν κιθάρα, οὔτε θα τραγουδάει, οὔτε θα κάνει αἰσχρότητες, γιατί ὅλους αὐτούς θα τοὺς μισήσει και θα τοὺς ἐξολοθρεύσει ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη τοῦ Κυρίου. Και θα ὑπάρχει πολλὴ χαρὰ

τότε και ἀγαλλίαση [...] και θα εἶναι ὅπως ἦταν τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Νῶε, ποὺ εὐφραίνονταν εἰρηνικά ὥσπου ἦλθε ὁ κατακλυσμὸς.

»Ὅταν λοιπὸν τελειώσει ἡ βασιλεία του θα ἔλθει ἡ ἀρχὴ τῶν ὠδίνων. Τότε θα σηκωθεῖ ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀνομίας και θα βασιλέψει στὴν πόλη αὐτὴ τριάμισι χρόνια και θα γίνεῖ πρόξενος τόσης κακίας ὅση δὲν ἔγινε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴ τοῦ κόσμου κι οὔτε θα ξαναγίνει. Γιατί θα διατάξει νὰ συνευρίσκειται ὁ πατέρας με τὴν κόρη και ὁ γιὸς με τὴ μητέρα και ὁ ἀδελφὸς με τὴν ἀδελφή, και ὅποιος ἀρνεῖται θα τιμωρεῖται με θάνατο [...]. Και θα ἀνεβεῖ ἡ σαπίλα και ἡ βρώμα σὰν βδέλυγμα στὸν Κύριο και θα ἐξοργιστεῖ ὁ Θεὸς [...] και θα διατάξει ἀπὸ ψηλὰ τὴ βροντὴ και τὶς ἀστραπὲς του, ποὺ θα ἀρχίσουν ἀσταμάτητα και με φριχτὸ τρόπο νὰ πέφτουν πάνω στὴ γῆ, και πολλὲς πόλεις θα καοῦν, και οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τὸν πάταγο [...] θα παραλύσουν φοβισμένοι και θα βροῦν κακὸ θάνατο, και πολλοὺς θα τοὺς κάψουν τὰ ἀστροπελέκια [...].

»Μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ θα βασιλέψει ἄλλος αὐτοκράτορας στὴν πόλη αὐτὴ, και αὐτὸς [...] θα ἀρνηθεῖ τὸν Χριστό, και ἀφοῦ διαβάσει τὶς γραφὲς τῶν Ἑλλήνων θα μεταστραφεῖ στὸν Ἑλληνισμό [τὴν εἰδωλολατρία] και [...] θα κάψει τοὺς ναοὺς, και τὸν τίμιο και ζωοποιὸ σταυρὸ θα τὸν ὀνομάσει ἀγγὼν [...]. Ἐκεῖνο τὸν καιρὸ θα ἀκουστοῦν φοβεροὶ κρότοι στὸν οὐρανὸ και θα γίνουν μεγάλοι σεισμοὶ και μεγάλες πόλεις θα συντριβοῦν. Θα ξεσηκωθεῖ ἔθνος ἐπὶ ἔθνος και βασιλεία ἐπὶ βασιλείαν και θα γίνεῖ φοβερὸς χαλασμὸς πάνω στὴ γῆ και θλίψεις και στενοχωρία στοὺς υἱοὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

»Ὅταν τελειώσει και αὐτὴ ἡ ἄθη βασιλεία, τότε θα ἔλθει ὁ αἰθίοπας βασιλιάς, ποὺ λέγεται ὅτι θα κρατήσει τὸ σκῆπτρο δώδεκα χρόνια. Αὐτὸς θα εἶναι καλὸς και θα βασιλέψει εἰρηνικά και θα ξαναχτίσει τοὺς ναοὺς τῶν ἁγίων.

»Θὰ περάσει και αὐτὴ ἡ βασιλεία, και θα ἔλθει ἄλλος αὐτοκράτορας ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀραβία, ποὺ θα βασιλέψει, ὅπως λένε, ἕνα χρόνο. Και ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλείας του θα συνενωθοῦν με θέλημα Θεοῦ τὰ ἅγια κομμάτια τοῦ τίμιου και ζωοποιῦ ξύλου και θα δοθοῦν στὸ βασιλιά. Και αὐτὸς θα πάει στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα και με τὰ χέρια του θα τοποθετήσει ἐκεῖ τὸ τίμιο ξύλο και τὰ σκῆπτρα τῆς βασιλείας. Και μαζί με αὐτὰ θα παραδώσει στὸν Θεὸ και τὴν ψυχὴ του.

»Τότε θα ἐμφανιστοῦν στὴν πόλη αὐτὴ τρεῖς νεαροὶ ἀναιδεῖς και ἀνόητοι ποὺ θα βασιλέψουν εἰρηνικά 150 μέρες. Ἐπειτα θα τοὺς παρακινήσει ὁ διάβολος νὰ ὀργιστοῦν ὁ ἕνας ἐναντῖον τοῦ ἄλλου και θα κάνουν πόλεμο μεταξύ τους. Ὁ πρῶτος θα σηκωθεῖ και θα πάει στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη [...]

και θα στρατολογήσει τὸ λαὸ τῆς ἀπὸ ἑπτὰ ἐτῶν και ἄνω, ἀκόμη και τοὺς ἱερεῖς και τοὺς μοναχοὺς. Θὰ φτιάξει μεγάλη πλοῖα και θα πάει στη Ρώμη, και θα στρατολογήσει τὰ ξανθὰ γένη.

»Ὁ δεῦτερος νεαρός θα ἐκστρατεύσει στη Μεσοποταμία και τις Κυκλάδες και θα στρατολογήσει κι αὐτὸς τοὺς ἱερεῖς και τοὺς μοναχοὺς. Και θα ἔλθει στὸν ὀμφαλὸ τῆς γῆς, ἢ στὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια ὅπως λένε ἄλλοι, και ἐκεῖ θα περιμένει τοὺς συντρόφους του.

»Ὁ τρίτος θα βγεῖ και θα στρατολογήσει στρατὸ στη Φρυγία, τὴν Καρία, τὴ Γαλατία, τὴν Ἀσία, τὴν Ἀρμενία και τὴν Ἀραβία και θα εἰσέλθει στὸ Σύλαιο [στὴ νότια ἀκτὴ τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας] λέγοντας: «Σύλαιο ὀνομάζονται και δὲν θα συληθεῖς οὔτε θα καταληφθεῖς στὸν αἰῶνα τὸν ἅπαντα».

»Ὅταν συναντηθοῦν, θα κάνουν μεγάλο και φοβερὸ πόλεμο ὁ ἕνας ἐναντίον τοῦ ἄλλου και θα ἀλληλοσφαχτοῦν σὰν πρόβατα στὸ σφαγεῖο. Και θα σκοτωθοῦν και οἱ τρεῖς βασιλιάδες, και στη σφαγὴ θα χυθεῖ τὸ αἷμα τῶν Ρωμαίων σὰν ἀσταμάτητη βροχὴ, και δὲν θα σωθεῖ οὔτε ἕνας. Τότε κάθε γυναίκα θα εἶναι χήρα, και ἑπτὰ γυναῖκες θα ζητοῦν νὰ ἔχουν ἕναν ἄντρα και δὲν θα βρίσκουν [...]. Τότε μακάριοι και τρισμακάριοι ὅσοι ὑπηρετοῦν τὸν Κύριο σὲ ὄρη και σπηλιές, γιατί δὲν θα δοῦν αὐτὰ τὰ κακά.

»Καθὼς δὲν θα ἔχει ἐπιζήσει οὔτε ἕνας ἐπίσημος ἄντρας, θα ἐμφανιστεῖ μιὰ αἰσχρὴ γυναίκα ἀπὸ τὸν Πόντο και θα βασιλέψει στη πόλη αὐτὴ [...]. Στις μέρες τῆς θα γίνουν συνωμοσίες και σφαγὲς στοὺς δρόμους και στὰ σπίτια, και θα σφάζει ὁ γιὸς τὸν πατέρα και ὁ πατέρας τὸ γιὸ και ἡ μητέρα τὴν κόρη και ἡ κόρη τὴ μητέρα [...] και θα γίνουν ἀσέλγειες μέσα στις ἄγιες ἐκκλησίες και ἀσωτίες και αἰμομειξίες και κιθάρες και χοροὶ και τραγούδια σατανικά και χλευασμοὶ και παιχνίδια, πὸν ἄνθρωπος δὲν εἶχε δεῖ μέχρι τότε. Ἡ μαρὴ αὐτὴ βασίλισσα θα παραστήσει τὴ θεὰ και θα πολεμήσει τὸν Θεό, και θα μολύνει μὲ κοπριά τὰ ἅγια θυσιαστήρια, και θα ἀρπάξει κάθε σκεῦος ἀπὸ τις ἐκκλησίες και θα συγκεντρώσει τις τίμιες εἰκόνες και τοὺς τίμιους σταυροὺς και τὰ ἅγια εὐαγγέλια και κάθε βιβλίο και θα φτιάξει ἕναν μεγάλο σωρὸ και θα τὰ κάψει. Θα καταστρέψει τις ἐκκλησίες και θα ἀναζητήσει λείψανα ἁγίων για νὰ τὰ ἐξαφανίσει και δὲν θα τὰ βρεῖ, γιατί ὁ Θεὸς μὲ ἀόρατη δύναμη θα τὰ μεταφέρει ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη αὐτὴ. Τότε θα καταστρέψει τὴν ἁγία τράπεζα τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας και στρέφοντας πρὸς ἀνατολὰς θα πεῖ φράζοντας πρὸς τὸν Ὑψιστο: «Μήπως δὲν ἔκανα ὅ,τι μπορούσα, ὡ λεγόμενε Θεέ, για νὰ ἐξαφανίσω τὸ ὀνομά σου ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ; Δὲς τί σοῦ ἔκανα, ἀνήμπορε, και δὲν κατάφερες νὰ μοῦ πειράξεις οὔτε μιὰ τρίχα. Περίμενε λίγο, λοι-

πόν, και θα χαλάσω τὸ στερέωμα, και θα ἀνεβῶ ἐκεῖ, και θα δοῦμε ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ δυνατότερος».

»Τότε θα στρέψει ὁ Θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτορας τὸ τόξο του και μὲ μεγάλο θυμὸ και μὲ τὴ φοβερὴ του δύναμη θα ἀπλώσει τὸ χέρι του και θα πιάσει δυνατὰ αὐτὴ τὴν πόλη. Και μὲ τὸ ἰσχυρὸ του δρεπάνι θα κόψει τὸ ἔδαφος κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν πόλη και θα διατάξει τὰ νερὰ νὰ τὴν καταπιοῦν. Αὐτὰ θα ὑπακούσουν και μὲ ἦχο φοβερὸ θα ὀρμήσουν και θα τὴν ἀποσπάσουν ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ και θα τὴ σηκώσουν σὲ μεγάλο ὕψος, στριφογυρίζοντάς τη σὰν μολόπετρα [...] και γρήγορα θα πέσει κάτω και τὰ νερὰ θα τὴ βυθίσουν στὸ φοβερὸ και ἄχανὸς πέλαγος τῆς ἀβύσσου. Ἔτσι λοιπόν, παιδί μου Ἐπιφάνιε, θα ἔλθει τὸ τέλος τῆς πόλης μας».

Κατόπιν ὁ ἅγιος Ἀνδρέας ἐξετάζει τὸ πρόβλημα κατὰ πόσο μετὰ τὴν καταστροφή τοῦ βασιλείου τῶν ἐθνῶν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι θα συγκεντρωθοῦν στην Ἱερουσαλήμ και θα τοὺς ἐπιτραπεῖ νὰ βασιλέψουν μέχρι τὸ τέλος τῆς ἑβδομῆς χιλιετίας. Τεῖνει νὰ πιστέψει ὅτι θα συγκεντρωθοῦν, ἀλλὰ για νὰ τιμωρηθοῦν και ὄχι για νὰ ἀνταμειφθοῦν. Ἐντούτοις ὁ Ἐπιφάνιος δὲν ἐνδιαφέρεται για τὴ μοῖρα τῶν Ἑβραίων. «Ἀφήστε τα αὐτὰ, πάτερ», λέει, «και πέστε μου ἂν ἡ Ἀγία Σοφία θα ἐξαφανιστεῖ μαζί μὲ τὴν πόλη, ἢ ἂν, ὅπως ἰσχυρίζονται μερικοὶ, θα παραμείνει μετέωρη στὸν ἀέρα, κρατημένη ἀπὸ μιὰ ἀόρατη δύναμη.» «Τί λές, παιδί μου;» ἀπαντᾷ ὁ ἅγιος. «Πῶς θα παραμείνει ἡ Ἀγία Σοφία ὅταν βυθιστεῖ ὀλόκληρη ἢ πόλη; Ποιὸς θα τὴ χρειάζεται; Μήπως ὁ Θεὸς κατοικεῖ σὲ χειροποίητες ἐκκλησίες; Θα μείνει μόνο ἡ κολόνα στην Ἀγορὰ, γιατί περιέχει τοὺς τίμιους ἦλους, και τὰ πλοῖα πὸν θα περνοῦν ἀπὸ κεῖ θα δέσουν σ' αὐτὴν τὰ σχοινιά τους και θα κλάψουν και θα θρηνήσουν τὴ Βαβυλῶνα [...]. Τὸ πένθος για τὴν πόλη θα διαρκέσει σαράντα μέρες. Ἐπειτα τὸ βασίλειο θα δοθεῖ στη Ρώμη, στὸ Σύλαιο και στη Θεσσαλονίκη, τὸ τέλος ὅμως θα εἶναι ἤδη κοντά. Τὸν ἴδιο ἐκεῖνο χρόνο ὁ Κύριος θα ἀνοίξει τις Κάσπιες Πύλες και θα ξεχυθοῦν ἑβδομήντα δύο βασιλεῖς μὲ τοὺς λαοὺς τους, τὰ ἐπινομαζόμενα ρυπαρὰ ἔθνη, και θα διασκορπιστοῦν σὲ ὀλόκληρη τὴ γῆ πὸν βρίσκεται κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸ, τρώγοντας σάρκες ζωντανῶν ἀνθρώπων και πίνοντας τὸ αἷμα τους και τρώγοντας ἐπίσης μὲ εὐχαρίστηση σκύλους και ποντίκια και βατράχους και κάθε εἶδος ρυπαρότητα. Ὁ ἥλιος θα γίνεαι αἷμα. Ἡ σελήνη και τὰ ἀστέρια θα σβήσουν. Τότε οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς Ἀσίας θα καταφύγουν στις Κυκλάδες και θα πενήθουν για 660 μέρες. Τότε θα ἐγερθεῖ ὁ Ἀντίχριστος Σατανὰς ἀπὸ τὴ φυλὴ τοῦ Δάν (δὲν θα ἔχει βεβαίως γεννηθεῖ μὲ φυσικὸ τρόπο, ἀλλὰ ὁ Κύριος θα τὸν πλάσει, ἕνα αἰσχρὸ και ρυπαρὸ σκεῦος, για νὰ ἐκπληρωθοῦν τὰ λεγόμενα ἀπὸ τοὺς προφῆτες). Ὁ

Ἡλίας καὶ ὁ Ἐνώχ καὶ ὁ γιὸς τῆς βροντῆς [ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Εὐαγγελιστής] θὰ βγοῦν καὶ θὰ διακηρύξουν τὴν πλάνη τοῦ Σατανᾶ καὶ τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ θὰ γίνουν πιστευτοὶ ἀπὸ λίγους. Ὁ Ἀντίχριστος πρῶτα θὰ σκοτώσει τὸν Ἡλία, ἔπειτα τὸν Ἐνώχ, καὶ τέλος τὸ γιὸ τῆς βροντῆς. Τότε θὰ διεξαχθεῖ φοβερὸς πόλεμος ἀνάμεσα στὸν Κύριο καὶ τὸν Ἀντίχριστο. Μακάριοι θὰ εἶναι τότε ὅσοι πεθάνουν γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Κυρίου.» Φυσικὰ ὁ Ἀντίχριστος θὰ ἠττηθεῖ καὶ θὰ συρθεῖ πίσω στὴν Κόλαση. Ἡ σάλπιγγα θὰ ἠχήσει, ὁ Θεὸς θὰ ἐμφανιστεῖ στὴ Σιών καὶ θὰ γίνῃ ἡ Κρίση.

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἀνατριχιαστικὴ προοπτικὴ ποὺ περιγράφει ὁ ἅγιος Ἀνδρέας ὁ Σαλός. Εἶναι ἓνα συνονθύλευμα στοιχείων μὲ τὰ ὁποῖα πρέπει πιά νὰ ἔχει ἐξοικειωθεῖ ὁ ἀναγνώστης. Ἀφήνοντας μερικὲς λεπτομέρειες ποὺ εἶναι τυπικὲς τῆς βυζαντινῆς νοοτροπίας (ἀποδοκιμασία τῆς μουσικῆς καὶ τῶν παιγνιδιῶν, ἀπέχθεια γιὰ τὶς σεξουαλικὲς σχέσεις καὶ ἰδιαίτερα γιὰ τὴν αἰμομειξία), μποροῦμε νὰ παρατηρήσουμε ὅτι οἱ Ἀραβες θεωροῦνται ὁ κύριος ἐχθρὸς, χωρὶς πάντως νὰ ἐμπνέουν καὶ μεγάλο φόβο. Ὁ ἅγιος Ἀνδρέας δὲν προβλέπει περίοδο ἀραβικῆς ἐπικράτησης: ἀντίθετα προβλέπει ὅτι γρήγορα θὰ ἠττηθοῦν. Ὡστόσο, ἡ ὑποδύλωση τοῦ ἐχθροῦ δὲν ἐγκαινιάζει μιὰ περίοδο εὐτυχίας καὶ ἡρεμίας. Τὰ ἔτη εὐημερίας ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ περιμένει κανεὶς στὴ γῆ εἶναι ὅλα ὅλα σαράντα πέντε· τὰ ὑπόλοιπα θὰ εἶναι μιὰ ἱστορία ἀκατάπαυτου μακελειοῦ καὶ καταστροφῆς. Μποροῦμε ἐπίσης νὰ σημειώσουμε τὴ στενότητα τῆς γεωγραφικῆς θεώρησης τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀνδρέα: εἶναι ἐνήμερος γιὰ τὴν ὑπαρξὴ ὀρισμένων περιφερειακῶν πόλεων ὅπως ἡ Ρώμη, ἡ Θεσσαλονίκη καὶ τὸ Σύλαιο, τῶν ὁποίων οἱ κάτοικοι θὰ διαφύγουν τὶς συμφορὲς ποὺ θὰ συμβοῦν στὸ κέντρο τῆς ἱστορίας, οὐσιαστικὰ ὅμως ἐνδιαφέρεται μόνο γιὰ τὴ μοίρα τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης. Καὶ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη τὸ κύριο ἀντικείμενο τοῦ ἐνδιαφέροντος τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀποτελοῦν μᾶλλον τὰ λείψανα τῶν ἁγίων καὶ τοῦ Πάθους παρὰ οἱ ἐκκλησίες καὶ οἱ εἰκόνες.

Ἔχουμε διδαχτεῖ νὰ θεωροῦμε τὸ δεύτερο μισὸ τοῦ 10ου αἰῶνα τὸ ἀπόγειο τοῦ μεσαιωνικοῦ Βυζαντίου, ἀλλὰ ἀκόμη καὶ ἐκεῖνη τὴν ἐποχὴ τῶν στρατιωτικῶν ἐπιτυχιῶν πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι παρέμεναν βαθιὰ ἀπαισιόδοξοι. Ὁ ἱστορικὸς Λέων ὁ Διάκονος, ποὺ γιὰ χάρη τῶν μεταγενεστέρων ἀποφάσισε νὰ καταγράψῃ σὲ ἓνα χρονικὸ ὅλα ἐκεῖνα τὰ τρομερὰ πράγματα ποὺ εἶχε δεῖ, δὲν ἦταν καν βέβαιος ὅτι θὰ ὑπάρχουν μεταγενέστεροι: ὁ Θεὸς μπορεῖ νὰ ἀποφάσιζε νὰ σταματήσῃ ἀκριβῶς ἐκεῖ, στὸ λιμάνι τῆς συντέλειας τοῦ κόσμου, τὸ βιωτικὸν πορθμεῖον, δηλαδὴ τὸ πλοῖο τῆς ζωῆς.¹⁵ Λίγο ωρρίτερα ὁ Νικήτας Δαβίδ ὁ Παφλαγῶν εἶχε καταφέρει

νὰ δείξει μὲ κάποιους σκοτεινοὺς ὑπολογισμοὺς ὅτι ὁ κόσμος θὰ τελείωνε τὸ 1028. Ἀπὸ τὴν κοσμικὴ ἐβδομάδα) μόνο ἔξι ἄρες καὶ ὀχτὼ λεπτὰ εἶχαν ἀπομείνει: ὁ ἰσχυρισμὸς ὅτι ἐπικεῖται τὸ τέλος ἦταν τόσο προφανὲς ποὺ δὲν χρειαζόταν ἀπόδειξη, καὶ τὸν ἐπιβεβαίωσαν ἡ ἀνοησία τῶν αὐτοκρατόρων, ἡ διαφθορὰ τῶν δικαστῶν καὶ ἡ πλήρης ἀναξιοτήτα τῶν ἐπισκόπων καὶ τῶν μοναχῶν.¹⁶ Οἱ ἄπλοὶ ἄνθρωποι ὅμως δὲν ἔκαναν ὑπολογισμοὺς παρὰ κοίταζαν τὰ αἰνιγματικὰ μνημεῖα τῆς πόλης τους, τὰ ἀγάλματα, τὶς θριαμβευτικὲς ἀψίδες καὶ τοὺς κίονες πάνω στοὺς ὁποίους ἀπεικονίζονταν σκηνὲς πολέμου καὶ αἰχμαλωσίας. Ἦταν πεπεισμένοι ὅτι ὅλα αὐτὰ εἶχαν κατασκευαστεῖ ἀπὸ ἀρχαίους «φιλοσόφους» ποὺ πρόλεξαν μὲ αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο τὴν πτώση τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης καὶ τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου. Γιὰ ἓνα διάστημα μάλιστα (προφανῶς μετὰ τὴν ἐπιδρομὴ τοῦ Ἰγκὸρ τὸ 941) νόμιζαν ὅτι ἡ πόλη ἦταν γραφτὸ νὰ ἄλωθεῖ ἀπὸ τοὺς Ρώσους.¹⁷

Δὲν εἶναι ἀνάγκη νὰ παρακολουθήσουμε βῆμα πρὸς βῆμα τὴν περαιτέρω ἐξέλιξη τῆς βυζαντινῆς ἐσχατολογικῆς σκέψης. Τὴν ἐποχὴ τῶν Κομνηνῶν ἰσχυρίζονταν ὅτι ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη δὲν θὰ ἐπιβίωνε χίλια χρόνια, συνεπῶς θὰ ἔπεφτε πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸ 1324, ὑπολογίζοντας ἀπὸ τὴ χρονολογία τῆς ἱδρύσεώς της.¹⁸ Προῖον τῆς ἴδιας ἐποχῆς ἦταν μιὰ σειρά δυναστικῆς προφητείας, ποὺ ἀργότερα κυκλοφόρησαν μὲ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Λέοντα τοῦ Σοφοῦ (886-912) καὶ χρησίμευσαν ὡς πρότυπο γιὰ τὶς παπικὲς προφητείες ποὺ ἀποδόθηκαν στὸν Ἰωακείμ ντὲ Φλόρις.* Οἱ προφητείες αὐτὲς πρόλεξαν μιὰ διαδοχὴ πέντε αὐτοκρατόρων, ποὺ θὰ τοὺς ἀκολουθοῦσε ἡ διαίρεση τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας καὶ μετὰ ἡ παλιγγενεσία της.¹⁹ Στὸ τέλος τοῦ 12ου αἰῶνα ἐμφανίστηκε ἓνα αὐξανόμενο ἐνδιαφέρον γιὰ τὸν «ἐλευθερωτὴ βασιλιά» —αὐτὸν ποὺ ἤδη συναντήσαμε στὸ Βίο τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀνδρέα τοῦ Σαλοῦ— τὸ βασιλιά ποὺ ἦταν προορισμένος νὰ βασιλέψῃ τριάντα δύο χρόνια καὶ νὰ νικήσῃ τοὺς Ἰσλαμῆτες: ὁ Ἰσαάκιος Β΄ Ἀγγελος (1185-95) μὲ μεγάλη φαντασία ταύτισε τὸν ἑαυτό του μὲ αὐτὴ τὴ μορφή.²⁰ Ὅπως εἶναι ἐπόμενο, ὅταν ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη καταλήφθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς Σταυροφόρους καὶ ἡ αὐτοκρατορία διαμελίστηκε, ὁ μῦθος τοῦ «ἐλευθερωτῆ βασιλιά» ἀπέκτησε ἀκόμη μεγαλύτερη σημασία: εἶναι ἓνα θέμα ποὺ ἐπανέρχεται συνεχῶς κατὰ τὴ μεγάλη ἄνθηση τῶν χρησιμολο-

*[Ἰταλὸς θεολόγος καὶ ὁραματιστὴς μὲ μυστικιστικὲς τάσεις. Γεννήθηκε στὸ Celico τῆς Καλαβρίας τὸ 1130 καὶ πέθανε τὸ 1202. Μπῆκε στὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ βασιλιά τῆς Σικελίας Ρογήρου Β΄ καὶ ταξίδεψε στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα. Ἐγινε μοναχὸς στὸ τάγμα τῶν Κιστερσιανῶν, ἀλλὰ ἀποσπάστηκε ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἱδρυσε δικό του μοναστήρι στὸ Flore. Ἀπέκτησε κύρος ὡς θεολόγος καὶ οἱ ἰδέες του, ποὺ εἶχαν πολλὲς φορὲς χαρακτῆρα προφητικὸ, ἄσκησαν μεγάλη ἐπίδραση στοὺς μεταγενεστέρους. Τιμᾶται ὡς ἅγιος χωρὶς νὰ ἔχει ἐπίσημα ἀναγνωριστεῖ ἀπὸ τὴ Ρωμαιοκαθολικὴ Ἐκκλησία.]

γικῶν κειμένων τὸ δεύτερο μισὸ τοῦ 13ου αἰώνα, ἐν μέρει ὡς ἀντίδραση στὴν προδοσίαν τῆς ὀρθόδοξης πίστεως ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Μιχαὴλ Η΄ Παλαιολόγο στὴ σύνοδο τῆς Λυών (1274). Νὰ μιὰ τυπικὴ προφητεία τῆς ἐποχῆς, ποὺ δείχνει πῶς, γιὰ μιὰ φορὰ ἀκόμη, παραδοσιακὰ στοιχεῖα ἔχουν ὑποστεί νέα ἐρμηνεία γιὰ νὰ ταιριάξουν σὲ μιὰ μεταβαλλόμενη πραγματικότητα.

«Ἐτσι μίλησε ὁ Παντοκράτορας: “Ἀλίμονό σου, Ἐπτάλωφε, ὅταν τὸ σκῆπτρο τῶν ἀγγέλων [ἐννοεῖ τὴ δυναστεία τῶν Ἀγγέλων] βασιλέψει σὲ σένα! Ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη θὰ περικυκλωθεῖ ἀπὸ στρατόπεδα καὶ θὰ πέσει χωρὶς ἀντίσταση [τὸ 1203]. Ἐνα νήπιο θὰ βασιλέψει τώρα στὴν Πόλη [ὁ νεαρὸς Ἀλέξιος Δ΄]. Θὰ βάλει χέρι στοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς καὶ θὰ δώσει τὰ ἱερά σκεύη στοὺς γιουὺς τῆς ἀπωλείας [ὁ Ἀλέξιος ἀναγκάστηκε νὰ δημεύσει ἐκκλησιαστικὰ σκεύη γιὰ νὰ ξεπληρώσει τοὺς Σταυροφόρους καὶ τοὺς Βενετούς]. Ἐπειτα τὸ κοιμισμένο ἐρπετὸ θὰ ξυπνήσει, θὰ χτυπήσει τὸ νήπιο καὶ θὰ πάρει τὸ στέμμα του. Τὸ ξανθὸ γένος θὰ βασιλέψει στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη ἐξήντα πέντε χρόνια”» (στὴν πραγματικότητα πενήντα ἐπτὰ).

Ὡς ἐδῶ πρόκειται γιὰ τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ παρελθόντος· τώρα ἀρχίζει ἡ προφητεία. Τὰ βόρεια ἔθνη θὰ πορευτοῦν πρὸς τὰ κάτω καὶ θὰ πολεμήσουν μὲ τὰ νότια ἔθνη. Οἱ δρόμοι τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης θὰ πλημμυρῶσουν αἷμα. Ἀφοῦ αὐτὴ ἡ τιμωρία θεωρηθεῖ ἐπαρκής, ἕνας γέρος, φτωχικὰ ντυμένος, θὰ βρεθεῖ στὴ δεξιὰ πλευρὰ τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης (πιθανὸν ἀναφορὰ στὸν φυλακισμένον νόμιμον αὐτοκράτορα Ἰωάννη Δ΄ Λάσκαρη). Οἱ ἄγγελοι θὰ τὸν στεφανώσουν μέσα στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία καὶ θὰ τοῦ δώσουν ἕνα σπαθὶ λέγοντας: «Ἀναθάρρησε, Ἰωάννη, καὶ νίκησε τὸν ἐχθρό!» Θὰ νικήσει τοὺς Ἰσμαηλίτες καὶ θὰ τοὺς ἀπωθήσει μέχρι τὸ «μοναχικὸ δέντρο» (δηλαδὴ τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου). Μὲ τὴν ἐπιστροφή του οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς γῆς θὰ ἀποκαλυφθοῦν, καὶ ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ γίνουν πλούσιοι. Θὰ βασιλέψει τριάντα δύο (σὲ ἄλλες παραλλαγές δώδεκα) χρόνια. Θὰ προβλέψει τὸ θάνατό του, θὰ πάει στὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ θὰ ἐπιστρέψει τὸ στέμμα του στὸν Θεό. Μετὰ ἀπ’ αὐτὸν θὰ βασιλέψουν οἱ τέσσερις γιοὶ του, ἕνας στὴ Ρώμη, ἕνας στὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια, ἕνας στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη καὶ ἕνας στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη, θὰ ἐμπλακοῦν ὅμως σὲ πολέμους μεταξύ τους καὶ θὰ καταστραφοῦν. Ὑστερὰ ἕνα «αἰσχρὸν γύναιον» θὰ βασιλέψει στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Αὐτὴ θὰ βεβηλώσει τοὺς ναοὺς, καὶ γιὰ τιμωρία ἡ πόλη θὰ πλημμυρίσει, καὶ μόνο ὁ Ξηρόλοφος (ὁ ἔβδομος λόφος) θὰ ἐξέχει ἀπὸ τὸ νερό. Μετὰ θὰ κυβερνήσει γιὰ ἕνα μικρὸ διάστημα ἡ Θεσσαλονίκη, γιὰτι καὶ αὐτὴ θὰ πλημμυρίσει, ὅπως καὶ ἡ Σμύρνη καὶ ἡ Κύπρος. Ἐπειτα θὰ

βασιλέψει ὁ Ἄντιχριστὸς ἐπὶ τριάμισι χρόνια καὶ θὰ ἐξυψώσει τοὺς Ἑβραίους καὶ θὰ ξαναχτίσει τὸ Ναὸ τῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ. Ὁ Θεὸς θὰ κρατήσει τὴ βροχὴ καὶ θὰ κάψει τὴ γῆ σὲ βάθος δεκατρεῖς πῆχες. Οἱ οὐρανοὶ θὰ ἀνοίξουν, καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς θὰ ἔλθει σὲ ὅλη του τὴ δόξα.²¹

Μία μόνο χρονολογία γιὰ τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου παρέμενε ἀκόμη, δηλαδὴ τὸ τέλος τῆς ἑβδομῆς χιλιετίας, ποὺ κατὰ τοὺς βυζαντινοὺς ὑπολογισμοὺς ἀντιστοιχοῦσε στὸ 1492 μ.Χ. Καθὼς οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης ἔβλεπαν τὴ σταθερὴ πρόοδο τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν Τούρκων, δὲν μπορούσαν παρὰ νὰ πιστεύουν ὅτι τούτῃ τὴ φορὰ ὅλα τὰ σημάδια ἔδειχναν ἀλάθητα τὴν τελικὴ καταστροφή. Τὸ μοτίβο αὐτὸ ἐπαναλαμβάνονταν ἀδιάκοπα, ἀνάμεσα σὲ ἄλλους καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν δημοφιλὴ ἱεροκῆρυκα Ἰωσήφ Βρυνένιο. Ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τοῦ ἀντιλατινικοῦ κόμματος στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ὁ Γεννάδιος Σχολάριος, ἦταν πεπεισμένος ὅτι ὁ κόσμος θὰ τελειῶνε τὸ 1493-4 (ὑπολόγιζε ἀπὸ τὸ 5506 π.Χ.), καὶ πιθανὸν ἢ πίστη του αὐτὴ νὰ τὸν ἔκανε νὰ δεχτεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Μωάμεθ τὸν Πορθητὴ τὸ καθῆκον νὰ ἠγηθεῖ τῆς ὀρθόδοξης κοινότητος, ἀφοῦ ὁ ἐπίγειος ἀγώνας ἔφτανε πια στὸ τέλος του καὶ ἡ οὐράνια ἀνταμοιβὴ ἦταν κοντά. Τὸ μόνο πράγμα ποὺ εἶχε πια σημασία ἦταν νὰ κρατήσει κανεὶς τὴν πίστη του ἀμόλυπτη. Εὐλογημένοι εἶναι ὅσοι διατηροῦν τὴν πίστη τους στὴ διάρκεια τῶν τελευταίων συμφορῶν.²²

Γιατὶ ἔπεσε ἡ Πόλη; Αὐτὸ ἦταν τὸ ἀγωνιώδες ἐρώτημα ποὺ ἀπασχολοῦσε τοὺς Ἕλληνας ποὺ ἐπιβίωσαν, ἐνῶ προσπαθοῦσαν ἀπεγνωσμένα νὰ ἐξαγοράσουν τοὺς συγγενεῖς τους καὶ νὰ βροῦν ἕνα modus vivendi μὲ τοὺς καινούριους τοὺς ἀφέντες. Ἐνας κληρικὸς, ποὺ ἔγραφε στὶς 29 Ἰουλίου 1453—δύο μῆνες ἀκριβῶς μετὰ τὴ συμφορὰ— παρακαλεῖ ἕνα φίλο στὴν Αἴνο (τὸ σημερινὸ Enez): «Σὲ παρακαλῶ ιδιαίτερα, στείλε μου τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ ἀγίου Μεθοδίου τῶν Πατέρων, εἴτε ἕνα παλιὸ ἀντίγραφο εἴτε ἕνα καινούριο, ἂν ἔχεις. Σὲ παρακαλῶ μὴν τὸ ἀμελήσεις, γιὰτι τὸ ἔχω μεγάλη ἀνάγκη. Σὲ παρακαλῶ ἐπίσης νὰ μοῦ στείλεις, ἂν μπορεῖς νὰ βρεῖς, λίγο ξερὸ αὐγοτάραχο».²³ Τὸ μοιραῖο ἔτος 1492 ἔφτασε καὶ πέρασε. Ὁ κόσμος ἐξακολούθησε νὰ ὑπάρχει.

Τὸ τελικὸ δράμα τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ἱστορίας, ποὺ ὁ Θεὸς «μὲ τὴν ἀκατάληπτη κρίση του» συνεχῶς τὸ ἀνέβαλλε, ἦταν ἡ Δευτέρα Παρουσία. Ἄς σταθοῦμε γιὰ λίγο νὰ ἐξετάσουμε πῶς περίμεναν νὰ πραγματοποιηθεῖ. Θὰ παρακολουθήσουμε ἐδῶ τὸ ἀκριβὲς ὄραμα αὐτοῦ τοῦ γεγονότος, ὅπως περιγράφεται στὸ Βίο τοῦ Βασιλείου τοῦ Νέου (10ος αἰώνας), τοῦ ὁποῦ ὁ μαθητὴς Γρηγόριος ἀναλήφθηκε στοὺς οὐρανοὺς, ὅπου τοῦ παραχωρήθηκε, κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο, μιὰ εἰδικὴ «πρώτη παράσταση». Ἀπὸ

τὴν ὑπερυψωμένη θέση του μὲ τὴν πανοραμικὴ θέα ὁ Γρηγόριος εἶδε πρῶτα μιὰ πόλη χτισμένη μὲ χρυσάφι καὶ πολύτιμους λίθους. Ἦταν μεγάλη ὅσο ὁ κύκλος τοῦ στερεώματος, τὰ τεῖχη της εἶχαν τριακόσιους πῆγες ὕψος καὶ ὑπῆρχαν δώδεκα πύλες, ὅλες σφαιλισμένες καλά. Αὐτὴ ἦταν ἡ Νέα Σιών, τὴν ὁποία εἶχε χτίσει ὁ Χριστὸς μετὰ τὴν ἐνσάρκωσή του ὡς τόπο ἀνάπαυσης γιὰ τοὺς ἀποστόλους του καὶ τοὺς προφῆτες. Ὑστερα ἀπὸ ὀρισμένες προετοιμασίες ποὺ ἔκαναν οἱ ἄγγελοι, φάνηκε ἕνα ἀνοιγμα στοὺς οὐρανούς καὶ μιὰ κολόνα φωτιᾶς κατέβηκε στὴ γῆ. Ταυτόχρονα στάλθηκε ἕνας ἄγγελος στὸν Σατανά (τὸν Ἀντίχριστο), ποὺ εἶχε βασιλέψει τρία χρόνια στὴ γῆ. Ὁ ἄγγελος κρατοῦσε ἕνα πύρινο εἰλητήριο στὸ ὁποῖο ἦταν γραμμένη μιὰ ἐντολὴ τοῦ Κυρίου, ποὺ διέτασσε τὸν Σατανά νὰ ἐξαλείψει κάθε κακὸ καὶ διαφθορὰ ποὺ εἶχε προκαλέσει κι ἔπειτα νὰ ἀποσυρθεῖ στὴν Κόλαση. Κατόπιν ἤχησαν οἱ σάλπιγγες τοῦ ἀρχάγγελου Μιχαήλ καὶ δώδεκα ἄλλων ἀγγέλων καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ σηκώθηκαν. Ὅλοι ἔμοιαζαν μεταξὺ τους, μὲ ἄλλα λόγια δὲν ὑπῆρχε διαφορὰ μεταξύ ἀντρῶν καὶ γυναικῶν, οὔτε σημάδια ἡλικίας —ἀκόμη καὶ τὰ νήπια ἦταν μεταμορφωμένα σὲ ἐνήλικες. Μερικοὶ ὅμως εἶχαν ἐκθαμβωτικὰ πρόσωπα, καὶ λαμπερὲς ἐπιγραφές στὰ μέτωπά τους δῆλωναν τίς ἀρετές τους, ἐνῶ οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἦταν καλυμμένοι ἀπὸ βρώμα καὶ κοπριά, λάσπη, στάχτες ἢ λέπτρα, ἀνάλογα μὲ τίς ἁμαρτίες τους. Ὑπῆρχαν καὶ μερικοὶ ποὺ ἔμοιαζαν μὲ ζῶα —αὐτοὶ ἦταν οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες, ποὺ ποτὲ δὲν εἶχαν ἀκούσει γιὰ τὸν Χριστὸ ἢ τὸν Μωυσῆ. Οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ, ὅπως καὶ οἱ δίκαιοι, δηλώνονταν μὲ ἐπιγραφές, κι ἀνάμεσά τους ἦταν οἱ αἰρετικοὶ —ἀρειανοί, μανιχαῖοι, παυλικιανοί, εἰκονομάχοι, ἰακωβίτες καὶ πολλοὶ ἄλλοι. Στὸ σημεῖο αὐτὸ ἐτοιμάστηκε ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Κυρίου: δὲν ἀκουμποῦσε στὴ γῆ ἀλλὰ αἰωροῦνταν στὸν ἀέρα, καὶ δίπλα του ἦταν στημένος ἕνας σταυρὸς ποὺ μόλις τὸν εἶδαν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι καὶ οἱ Ἰσραηλίτες παρέλυσαν ἀπὸ φόβο. Τέσσερα τάγματα ἀγγέλων πῆραν τίς θέσεις τους στὰ τέσσερα σημεῖα τοῦ ὀρίζοντα καὶ ἄλλα τέσσερα τάγματα στὶς τέσσερις γωνιὲς τῆς γῆς. Ἐπειτα μέσα σ' ἕνα σύννεφο ἐφανίστηκε ὁ Χριστὸς, καὶ οἱ δίκαιοι ἔβγαλαν φτερά καὶ τὸν συνάντησαν στὸν ἀέρα. Καθὼς ὁ Χριστὸς κάθησε στὸ θρόνο Του ἡ γῆ ξανάνωσε καὶ τὸ στερέωμα ἔγινε καινούριο: τὰ ἀστέρια χάθηκαν, μιὰ καὶ τὴ θέση τους τὴν πῆραν τώρα οἱ ἅγιοι, καὶ ὁ ἥλιος ἐξαφανίστηκε, ἀφοῦ ὁ Χριστὸς ἦταν τώρα ὁ νέος ἥλιος. Ἀντὶ γιὰ τὸν ὠκεανὸ ἕνας πύρινος ποταμὸς ἄρχισε νὰ ρεεῖ ὀλόγυρα. Ἐπειτα οἱ ἄγγελοι ποὺ εἶχαν σταθεῖ στὴ δύση συγκέντρωσαν ὅλους τοὺς εἰδωλολάτρες καὶ ὅλους ὅσους δὲν γνώριζαν τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἔριξαν μέσα στὸ πύρινο ρεῦμα. Ὅσοι ἀπέμεναν νὰ κριθοῦν ἦταν οἱ Ἰσραηλίτες, οἱ χριστιανοὶ καὶ ὅσοι ἀπὸ τοὺς «ἐθνικοὺς»

δὲν εἶχαν λατρέψει εἰδῶλα. Οἱ δίκαιοι τώρα στάθηκαν στὰ δεξιά τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ, μιὰ συντριπτικὰ μεγαλύτερη ὁμάδα, στὰ ἀριστερά. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἀδάμ ὡς τὸν Ἀβραάμ μόνο ἕνας στοὺς εἴκοσι χιλιάδες ἢ ἕνας στοὺς σαράντα χιλιάδες σώθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀβραάμ μέχρι τὴν Ἐνσάρκωση, ἕνας στοὺς χίλιους ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ ἕνας στοὺς δέκα χιλιάδες· καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ κηρύγματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ μετὰ, ἕνας στοὺς τρεῖς ἢ ἕνας στοὺς τέσσερις.

Τότε ὁ Χριστὸς ὀδήγησε ἐν πομπῇ τοὺς δικαίους στὴν Οὐράνια Πόλη. Ἡ Παναγία πῆγαινε πρώτη, κατόπιν ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Πρόδρομος, οἱ ἀπόστολοι, οἱ μάρτυρες καὶ οἱ ὁμολογητές, οἱ προφῆτες καὶ οἱ καλοὶ βασιλιάδες τῶν Ἑβραίων καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς. Ἀνάμεσα στὶς μεγαλύτερες ὁμάδες τῶν δικαίων ἦταν οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, οἱ πενθοῦντες, οἱ ἐλεήμονες, οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί, οἱ δεδιωγμένοι καὶ οἱ παρθένοι. Οἱ μικρότερες ὁμάδες περιλάμβαναν τοὺς «ἐθνικοὺς» ποὺ εἶχαν ζήσει πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοὺς ἱερούς σαλούς, τοὺς δικαίους δικαστὲς καὶ ὅσους εἶχαν διατηρήσει τὸ γάμο τους ἄσπιλο.

Καὶ ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν. Πρῶτα χωρίστηκαν κατὰ περιόδους (ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀδάμ μέχρι τὸν Κατακλισμό, ἀπὸ τὸν Νῶε μέχρι τὸν Μωυσῆ κ.ο.κ.), ἔπειτα κατὰ κατηγορίες. Γιὰ μιὰ ἀκόμη φορὰ κάθε κατηγορία ἀναφέρεται μὲ μιὰ ἐνδειξη γιὰ τὸ σχετικὸ της μέγεθος, πράγμα ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ ἐνδιαφέρον σχόλιο γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ ζωὴ. Ἡ μεγαλύτερη ὁμάδα ἀπὸ ὅλες, ποὺ τὴν ἀποτελοῦσαν κληρικοὶ καὶ λαϊκοί, ἦταν οἱ «ἄσωτοι»: αὐτοὶ ποὺ συνήθιζαν νὰ ἱππεύουν ἄλογα καὶ παχιὰ μουλάρια, ποὺ ἀγόραζαν πολλὰ ροῦχα, ἔκαναν ἐπενδύσεις σὲ πολυτελῆ σπίτια καὶ ἀγροτικὲς ἰδιοκτησίες, οἱ μέθυσοι, οἱ πόρνοι καὶ οἱ μοιχοί. Τοὺς ἀκολουθοῦσαν πολλοὶ μοναχοὶ ποὺ εἶχαν δεῖξει ἀδιαφορία, ὀκνηρία, πλεονεξία καὶ ἀνυπακοή —στὴν πραγματικότητα λέγεται ὅτι ὅλη σχεδὸν ἡ τάξη τῶν μοναχῶν εἶχε περιπέσει σὲ τέλεια παρακμὴ στὰ τελευταῖα στάδια τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ἱστορίας. Ἄλλες μεγάλες ὁμάδες ἀποτελοῦσαν οἱ μάγοι, οἱ παιδραστὲς καὶ οἱ σοδομίτες, οἱ κλέφτες (ἄπειροι σχεδὸν σὲ ἀριθμὸ), οἱ ὀργίλοι, οἱ ζηλόφθονοι, οἱ φλύαροι, καί, φυσικά, οἱ αἰρετικοὶ καὶ οἱ Ἑβραῖοι (ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ ἐκείνους ποὺ εἶχαν τηρήσει τὸν Μωσαϊκὸ Νόμο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐνσάρκωση τοῦ Κυρίου). Χάρη στὴ μεσολάβηση τῆς Παναγίας, δυὸ μέτριες σὲ μέγεθος ὁμάδες σώθηκαν τὴν τελευταία στιγμὴ ἀπὸ τὴν καταδίκη καὶ τοὺς δόθηκαν κατοικίες —ὄχι βέβαια στὴν οὐράνια Ἱερουσαλήμ, ἀλλὰ στὰ λιγότερο ἐπιθυμητὰ προάστια της. Αὐτὲς ἦταν οἱ ὁμάδες τῶν ἀβάπτιστων παιδιῶν τῶν χριστιανῶν καὶ ὅσων δὲν ἦταν οὔτε καλοὶ οὔτε κακοί.

Τὸ ἐπόμενο βῆμα ἦταν ἡ «περιβολὴ» τῶν δικαίων, ποὺ ἔγινε ἀπὸ τὸν

ἴδιο τὸν Χριστὸ σὲ μιὰ τεράστια ἐκκλησία μέσα στὴν Οὐράνια Πόλη. Θρόνοι, στέμματα καὶ πορφύρες δόθηκαν στοὺς ἄγιους μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο ποὺ ὁ βυζαντινὸς αὐτοκράτορας ἀπένεμε ἀξιώματα στοὺς ἀξιωματοῦχους του. Τὴν περιβολὴ τὴν ἀκολούθησε λειτουργία καὶ τὴ λειτουργία ἓνα πνευματικὸ συμπόσιο. Τέλος, ὅλοι οἱ δίκαιοι μπῆκαν στὴ νέα καὶ αἰώνια καθημερινὴ ζωὴ τους. "Ἐνα «ἄνω βασίλειο» ἰδρύθηκε στὰ ἀνατολικά τῆς Πόλης ὡς κατοικία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῆς Παναγίας, τοῦ Ἰωάννη τοῦ Προδρόμου καὶ ἐκείνων τῶν ἁγίων ποὺ εἶχαν ἀρκετὰ δυνατὰ φτερά γιὰ νὰ πετάξουν μέχρι ἐκεῖ. Οἱ ὑπόλοιποι παρέμειναν στὴν Πόλη, ποὺ εἶχε σπίτια, ἐκκλησίες, παρεκκλήσια, κήπους καὶ ἄλλες ἀνέσεις. Ἦταν μὲ δυὸ λόγια ὅχι τόσο μιὰ Νέα Ἱερουσαλήμ ὥστε μιὰ Νέα Κωνσταντινούπολη.²⁴

Τὸ περίγραμμα ποὺ δώσαμε γιὰ τὶς βυζαντινὲς ιδέες σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ μέλλον τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας καὶ τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία δείχνει, παρὰ τὶς βαθμιαῖες ἀλλαγές ἐρμηγείας ποὺ υπέστησαν, μιὰ ἀξιοσημείωτη προσκόλληση στὰ βιβλικὰ πρότυπα. Θὰ ἦταν λάθος νὰ θεωρήσουμε ὅτι τέτοιες ιδέες ἀνῆκαν στὸ βασίλειο τῆς φαντασίας καὶ τῶν παραμυθιῶν, γιατί, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή, σχεδὸν κανένα ἄλλο λογοτεχνικὸ εἶδος δὲν διαβαζόταν τόσο ἀχόρταγα ἀπὸ τοὺς κοινούς ἀνθρώπους ὥστε τὰ προφητικά κείμενα. Μᾶς παρέχουν ἓνα κλειδί γιὰ νὰ κατανοήσουμε τὴ βυζαντινὴ νοοτροπία, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἀξίζουσι τὴν προσοχὴ τῶν ἱστορικῶν. Ἀποδεικνύουν, πρῶτα πρῶτα, πὼς καμία εὐτυχία ἢ ἐκπλήρωση δὲν ἀναμενόταν νὰ διαρκέσει πάνω στὴ γῆ. Ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς «συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος» ἦταν νὰ υποβάλλει τοὺς χριστιανούς σὲ μιὰ σειρά σκληρῆς δοκιμασίας ὥστε νὰ ξεχωρίσουν οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀμαρτωλούς. Ἀφοῦ ὁ Μεσσίας εἶχε ἤδη ἔλθει, δὲν μπορούσε νὰ ὑπάρξει μεσσιανικὴ ἐποχὴ στὸ μέλλον. Ἡ Ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Ἰωάννη, τὸ μόνο βιβλικὸ ἔργο ποὺ προσβλέπει σὲ χίλια χρόνια εὐτυχίας πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου, δὲν θεωροῦνταν ἐπίσημο λειτουργικὸ βιβλίον στὸ Βυζάντιο, καὶ ὡς ἐκ τούτου δὲν λαμβανόταν ὑπόψη στὴν περίπτωση αὐτῆ. "Ἐνα ἄλλο ἐντυπωσιακὸ χαρακτηριστικὸ τῶν βυζαντινῶν προφητειῶν ἀποτελεῖ ἡ ἔλλειψη κάθε ἐθνικοῦ πνεύματος. Ὁμολογουμένως, τὸ γεωγραφικὸ πεδίο τῶν προφητειῶν σταδιακὰ συρρικνωνόταν, ὥστε τοῦ περιορίστηκε οὐσιαστικὰ στὶς τύχες τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ ἦταν ἀπλῶς δεῖγμα μυωπίας. Ἀπασχολημένοι μὲ τὰ δικά τους προβλήματα, οἱ κάτοικοι τοῦ συρρικνωμένου βυζαντινοῦ κράτους δὲν διέθεταν τὴν ἀπαιτούμενη εὐρύτητα θεώρησης ὥστε νὰ περιλάβουν ὀλόκληρη τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα. Ἡ ἐκπλήρωση τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν τους συνίστατο στὴν ταυτόχρονη καταστροφὴ καὶ τῶν Δυτικῶν καὶ τῶν Ἰσμαηλιτῶν, ποὺ τώρα ταυτίζονταν μὲ τοὺς Τούρκους. Παρ' ὅλα

αὐτά, ὁ «ἐλευθερωτὴς βασιλιάς» δὲν θὰ ἐγκαινίαζε μιὰ περίοδο ἐθνικῆς ἀναγέννησης· καθὼς θὰ ἐκδικουῦνταν τὰ βάσανα τῶν Βυζαντινῶν, θὰ ἔφερνε καὶ τὴ συντέλεια τοῦ κόσμου. Μόνο μετὰ τὴν ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης, καὶ μάλιστα πολὺ ἀργότερα, ὁ «κοιμισμένος» ἢ «μαρμαρωμένος» βασιλιάς πῆρε τὶς διαστάσεις τοῦ ἐθνικοῦ ἥρωα ποὺ θὰ ἐδιώχνη τοὺς Τούρκους ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, θὰ ἐπανεφέρε τὸ σταυρὸ στὸν τροῦλο τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας καὶ θὰ ἴδρνε ἓνα ἐλληνικὸ κράτος.

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ ΙΒ΄

Η ΙΔΑΝΙΚΗ ΖΩΗ

Πῶς ἔπρεπε νὰ ζεῖ κανεὶς στὴ γῆ μὲ τὴν προοπτικὴ τοῦ ἐπικείμενου τέλους τοῦ κόσμου; Μετὰ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ ἀνθρωπότητα εἶχε φτάσει στὴν ὠριμότητά της, πράγμα ποὺ σήμαινε ὅτι ἴσχυαν αὐστηρότεροι κανόνες συμπεριφορᾶς ἀπὸ ἐκείνους ποὺ ἦταν ἀποδεκτοὶ προηγουμένως. Στὸς χρόνους τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης κάποια ἀνεκτικότητα ἦταν ἐπιτρεπτή. Ὁ Νῶε μπορεῖ νὰ ἦταν δίκαιος ἄνθρωπος καὶ τέλειος γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ του, δὲν θὰ μπορούσε ὅμως νὰ θεωρηθεῖ τέλειος τώρα. Τότε ἀρκοῦσε ἡ τήρηση τοῦ Νόμου· τώρα ἡ εἴσοδος στοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἦταν κλειστή, ἐκτὸς ἂν κάποιος ξεπερνοῦσε σὲ ἀρετὴ τοὺς γραμματεῖς καὶ τοὺς Φαρισαίους (Κατὰ Ματθ., Ε΄, 20). "Ὅχι μόνο ὁ φόνος, ὅπως συνέβαινε παλιότερα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ὀργὴ καὶ ἡ ὑβριστικὴ γλώσσα ἦταν τώρα αἰτίες ἀπωλείας· ὄχι μόνο ἡ μοιχεία, ἀλλὰ καὶ μιὰ λάγνα ματιὰ σὲ μιὰ γυναίκα· ὄχι μόνο ἡ ἐπιорκία, ἀλλὰ καὶ κάθε ὄρκος.¹

Γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτύχει τὴν τελειότητα ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔπρεπε νὰ πουλήσει ὅλα τὰ ὑπάρχοντά του, νὰ μοιράσει τὰ χρήματα στοὺς φτωχοὺς καὶ νὰ ἀπαρνηθεῖ τὰ ἐγκόσμια, ὑλικά καὶ πνευματικά —μὲ δυὸ λόγια νὰ γίνεῖ μοναχός. Ἀφοῦ ὅμως οἱ περισσότεροὶ ἄνθρωποι ἦταν πολὺ ἀδύναμοι ἢ πολὺ ὀκνηροὶ γιὰ νὰ ἀκολουθήσουν αὐτὸ τὸ δύσκολο μονοπάτι, εἶχε ὀριστεῖ ἓνας τρόπος ζωῆς μέσα στὴν κοινωνία. Ἡ βασικὴ ἀρχὴ του ἦταν ἡ τάξις (κόσμος, εὐταξία). Ὁ Θεὸς ἔχει διατάξει τὸ σύμπαν μὲ εὐταξία καὶ ἐπιθυμεῖ οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ ζοῦν μὲ τὸν ἴδιον τρόπο.² Τηρώντας τὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς θεϊκῆς καθορισμένης τάξεως, τόσο στὶς κοινωνικὲς σχέσεις ὅσο καὶ στὸν ἰδιωτικὸ τομέα, συμμορφωνόμεστε μὲ τὴν ἁρμονία τοῦ σύμπαντος: παρὰ τὶς ἐγγενεῖς ἀτέλειές της, ἡ ἐπίγεια ζωὴ ἀποκτᾷ κάποια ὁμοιότητα μὲ τὴν ἐπουράνια.

"Ὅπως ὁ Θεὸς βασιλεύει στὸ σύμπαν, ἔτσι κυβερνᾷ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα καὶ ὁ ρωμαῖος αὐτοκράτορας. Καθὼς ἔχουμε ἡδὴ ὑπογραμμίσει, ἡ ἐνσάρκωση τοῦ Χριστοῦ καθορίστηκε ἀπὸ τὴ Θεῖα Πρόνοια νὰ συμπέσει

μὲ τὴν ἐγκαθίδρυση τῆς ρωμαϊκῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, ποὺ ἔδωσε τέλος στὶς διχόνοιες καὶ στοὺς πολέμους, δηλαδή στὴν ἀταξία ποὺ προξενοῦσε ἡ *πολυαρχία*, ὁ διαμοιρασμὸς τῆς ἐξουσίας ἀνάμεσα σὲ πολλὰ αὐτόνομα κράτη.³ Ὁ Θεὸς ὄχι μόνον καθόρισε τὴν ὑπαρξὴ τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, ἀλλὰ ἐπιλέγει ἐπίσης τὸν ἐκάστοτε αὐτοκράτορα, γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο καὶ δὲν ὑπάρχουν καθορισμένοι ἀνθρώπινοι κανόνες γιὰ τὴν ἐκλογή του. Αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι ὁ αὐτοκράτορας εἶναι πάντοτε καλός: ὁ Θεὸς στὴ σοφία του μπορούσε ἐπίτηδες νὰ ἐπιλέξει ἓναν κακὸ αὐτοκράτορα γιὰ νὰ τιμωρήσει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες τους.⁴ Οἱ ἐναλλακτικὲς καταστάσεις στὴ νόμιμη αὐτοκρατορικὴ διοίκηση εἶναι ὁ σφετερισμὸς (*τυραννίς*) καὶ ἡ ἀναρχία. *Τύραννος* εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἐπιχειρεῖ νὰ γίνεῖ αὐτοκράτορας παρὰ τὴ θέληση τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ συνεπῶς ἀποτυγχάνει· γιατί, ἂν πετύχαινε, ὁ Θεὸς ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι μὲ τὸ μέρος του, ἐπομένως ἔπαυε νὰ εἶναι σφετεριστής. Ἡ ἔλλειψη μιᾶς καὶ μόνο ἀρχῆς, δηλαδή ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ ὄχλου (*δημοκρατία*), ἰσοδυναμεῖ μὲ χάος.

Ὁ Θεὸς κυβερνᾷ τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα ἐμπνέοντας τὸ φόβο τῆς κόλασης καὶ ὑποσχόμενος ἀνταμοιβὴ στοὺς οὐρανοὺς,⁵ μὲ ἄλλα λόγια μὲ ἀπειλὲς καὶ ὑποσχέσεις. Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας κυβερνᾷ τοὺς ὑπηκόους του ἐμπνέοντας τὸ φόβο: οἱ ἐχθροὶ του ρίχνονται στὶς φυλακὲς, ἐξορίζονται, μαστιγώνονται, τυφλώνονται ἢ θανατώνονται. Ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ ἀθῶοι ἄνθρωποι («τὸν ὑπηρετοῦν τρέμοντας»): μπορεῖ νὰ τοὺς στείλει στὸν πόλεμο ἢ νὰ τοὺς ἀναθέσει δυσάρεστα καθήκοντα, ἀλλὰ κανένας δὲν τολμᾷ νὰ παρρακοῦσει.⁶ Φυσικὰ εἶναι προτιμότερο γιὰ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα νὰ κυβερνᾷ πρόθυμος ὑπηκόος, καὶ γιὰ νὰ τὸ κάνει πρέπει νὰ ἐπιδείξει ὀρισμένες ιδιότητες ποὺ ἔχει καὶ ὁ Θεός. Πρέπει προπάντων νὰ εἶναι φιλόανθρωπος. Ἐνῶ πρέπει νὰ προξενεῖ δέος μὲ τὴν ἐξουσία του, πρέπει συνάμα νὰ γίνεταί ἀγαπητὸς μὲ τὶς εὐεργεσίες του. Ἡ γενναιοδωρία καὶ ἡ ἐπιείκεια ἀρμόζουν ἰδιαίτερος στὸν αὐτοκράτορα, ὁ ὁποῖος ὅμως ὀφείλει ἐπίσης νὰ ἐπιμένει στὴν ἐπιβαλλόμενη τήρηση τοῦ νόμου (*εὐνομία*). Ὁ ἴδιος πρέπει νὰ αὐτοσυγκρατεῖται, νὰ εἶναι προσεκτικός, ἀποφασιστικὸς στὴ δράση καὶ ὄχι εὐέξαπτος. Ἡ μοναδικὴ του θέση ὅμως καθορίζεται κυρίως ἀπὸ τὴ σχέση του μὲ τὸν Θεό, γιατί μόνον αὐτὸν ἔχει ἀνάγκη. Συνεπῶς τὸ μεγαλύτερο στολίδι του εἶναι ἡ εὐσέβεια.⁷ Εἶναι ἐξ ὀρισμοῦ πιστὸς ἐν Χριστῷ καὶ φιλόχριστος, καὶ αὐτὰ τὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ ἐκφράζονται στοὺς τίτλους του, ὅπως καὶ τὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ νικητῆς καὶ καλλίνικος, μὰ καὶ ἡ νίκη τοῦ παραχωροῦνταν ὡς ἀντάλλαγμα τῆς εὐσέβειάς του.

Ὁ αὐτοκράτορας ἦταν ἅγιος καὶ στὰ πορτρέτα του συνήθως ἀπεικονίζόταν μὲ φωτοστέφανο. Τὸ παλάτι του ἦταν ἐπίσης ἱερό (*domus divina*),

καί τὸ περιέβαλλε μιὰ προστατευτικὴ ζώνη ἀπομόνωσης (*nam imperio magna ab universis secreta debentur*).⁸ Οἱ δημόσιες ἐμφανίσεις του γίνονταν μὲ μιὰ τελετουργία ποῦ ἦταν ἀντανάκλαση τῆς ἀρμονικῆς λειτουργίας τοῦ σύμπαντος — εἶχε μάλιστα καί τὸ ἴδιο ὄνομα (τάξις).⁹ Οἱ ὑπῆκοοὶ του ἐπικοινωνοῦσαν μαζί του μὲ ρυθμικὲς καὶ ἐπαναλαμβανόμενες ἐπευφημίες, ὅπως στὴ θεία λειτουργία, καὶ ὅταν γίνονταν δεκτοὶ σὲ ἀκρόαση ἐπεφταν στὸ ἔδαφος. "Ὅ,τι ἦταν ὁ αὐτοκράτορας γιὰ τοὺς ὑπηκόους του ἦταν ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα. "Ἔτσι, ἀπὸ τὸν 7ο αἰῶνα καὶ μετὰ βρίσκουμε ἀπεικονίσεις τοῦ γήινου αὐτοκράτορα νὰ ἐκτελεῖ τὴν ἴδια πράξη τῆς *adoratio* ἢ *προσκυνήσεως* μπροστὰ στὸν ἔνθρονο Χριστό.

Ἦταν ὁ αὐτοκράτορας μαζί καὶ ἱερέας, ἓνας νέος Μελχισεδέκ; Πρέπει νὰ ὁμολογήσουμε ὅτι ἡ θέση του σὲ σχέση μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία δὲν ἦταν ξεκαθαρισμένη τὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς μεταστροφῆς τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου στὸ χριστιανισμὸ καὶ παρέμεινε μέχρι τέλους κάπως ἀσαφής: δὲν ὑπῆρχαν ἀκριβῆ ὄρια μεταξὺ βασιλείας καὶ ἱεροσύνης, γεγονός ποῦ συχνὰ ὀδηγοῦσε σὲ σύγκρουση ἀρμοδιοτήτων. Πρέπει ὅμως νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἐνῶ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας ποτὲ δὲν ἄσκησε τὴν ἱερατικὴ λειτουργία τῆς προσφορᾶς τῆς Θείας Εὐχαριστίας καὶ κατὰ κανόνα δὲν καθόριζε τὸ θρησκευτικὸ δόγμα, ἐντούτοις θεωροῦνταν σὲ τελικὴ ἀνάλυση ὑπεύθυνος γιὰ τὴ διατήρηση τῆς καθαρότητος τῆς πίστεως, γιὰ τὴ σύγκληση τῶν οἰκουμενικῶν συνόδων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ γιὰ τὸν ἐξαναγκασμὸ τῶν αἰρετικῶν νὰ μεταστραφοῦν. Πιθανὸν ὁ πιὸ ἐμφαντικὸς ὀρισμὸς τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἐξουσίας σὲ σχέση μὲ τὴν αὐτοκρατορικὴ σὲ ἐπίσημο βυζαντινὸ ἔγγραφο βρίσκεται στὸν νομικὸ κώδικα τοῦ Βασιλείου Α', ποῦ πιστεύεται ὅτι εἶναι ἐμπνευσμένος ἀπὸ τὸν πατριάρχη Φώτιο. Ἐκεῖ ὁ πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως περιγράφεται ὡς *εἰκὼν ζωσα Χριστοῦ*, καὶ ὡς σκοπὸς του δηλώνεται ἡ συντήρηση τοῦ ὀρθόδοξου πληρώματος, ἡ μεταστροφή τῶν αἰρετικῶν καὶ ἀκόμη ἡ παρακίνηση τῶν ἀπίστων νὰ γίνουν *μιμηταὶ* τῆς ἀληθινῆς πίστεως.¹⁰ Ἐντούτοις ὁ Λέων Σ', ὁ διάδοχος τοῦ Βασιλείου, νομοθέτησε πάνω σὲ καθαρὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ θέματα καὶ ἐπιπλέον ἐπέπληττε τὸν πατριάρχη του γιὰτὶ δὲν ἐπαιζε πιὸ ἐνεργὸ ρόλο σὲ ὑποθέσεις ποῦ τὸν ἀφοροῦσαν.¹¹

Θεωρητικὰ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας κυβερνοῦσε ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἢ τουλάχιστον ὅλους τοὺς ὀρθόδοξους χριστιανούς. Ἡ ὑπαρξὴ εἰδωλοατρῶν ἡγεμόνων δὲν παραβίαζε αὐτὸν τὸν ὅρο γιὰτὶ, ἐφόσον οἱ εἰδωλοάτρες δὲν μεταστρέφονταν, παρέμεναν ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν κύρια σφαῖρα τῆς Θείας Πρόνοιας, ἀν ὅμως ἀσπάζονταν τὴν ὀρθοδοξία ἀναγνώριζαν *ipso facto* τὴν ἀνώτατη ἐξουσία τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα. Αὕτῃ ἡ ἐκδοχὴ εἶναι πιθανὸν νὰ εἶχε

κάποια σχέση μὲ τὴν πραγματικότητα στὴν Πρώιμη βυζαντινὴ περίοδο, ὅταν διαμορφωνόταν ἡ δομὴ τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς ἰδεολογίας, γίνονταν ὅμως ὀλοένα καὶ λιγότερο ἐφικτὸ νὰ ὑποστηριχτεῖ, καθὼς κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῶν Μέσων Χρόνων ἄρχισαν νὰ δημιουργοῦνται ἀνεξάρτητα χριστιανικὰ κράτη. Κατὰ συνέπεια, τέθηκε σὲ κυκλοφορία καὶ καλλιεργήθηκε προσεκτικὰ μὲ τὶς συνταγὲς τοῦ αὐλικοῦ πρωτοκόλλου ὁ μῦθος «τῆς οἰκογένειας τῶν ἡγεμόνων», στὴν ὁποία ὁ βυζαντινὸς αὐτοκράτορας κατεῖχε τὰ πρεσβεῖα. Ἀποτελεῖ περιέργο σχόλιο γιὰ τὴν ἀνικανότητα τῶν Βυζαντινῶν νὰ ἀναθεωρήσουν τὶς ἀρχές τους τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ὁ αὐτοκρατορικὸς μῦθος προβαλλόταν ἀκόμη καὶ στὰ τέλη τοῦ 14ου αἰῶνα, ὅταν ἡ αὐτοκρατορία εἶχε περιοριστεῖ στὴν περιοχὴ τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως.

Ὁ αὐτοκράτορας μεταβίβαζε τὴν ἐξουσία του στοὺς ἄρχοντες ποῦ διόριζε. Εἶναι ἀξιοπρόσεχτο πὼς ὁ ὅρος *ἄρχων* σήμαινε ὅλα τὰ πρόσωπα στὰ ὁποῖα εἶχε ἀνατεθεῖ κάποια διοίκηση —στρατιωτικὴ, πολιτικὴ καί, σὲ μερικές περιπτώσεις, ἀκόμη καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ. Τὸ καθῆκον τῶν ὑπηκόων νὰ ὑπακούουν τοὺς ἄρχοντες τους δηλωνόταν καθαρὰ στὴν Ἀγία Γραφή: *Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω. οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ Θεοῦ· αἱ δὲ οὖσαι ἐξουσίαι ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν· ὥστε ὁ ἀντιτασσόμενος τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ τῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ διαταγῇ ἀνθέστηκεν· οἱ δὲ ἀνθεστηκότες ἑαυτοῖς κολίμα λήφονται* (Πρὸς Ρωμ., ΙΓ', 1-2). Οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τόνιζαν τὴν ἀναγκαῖότητα μιᾶς τέτοιας ὑπακοῆς γιὰ *χάρη* τῆς *εὐταξίας* καὶ ἀπὸ σεβασμὸ πρὸς αὐτὸν ποῦ διόριζε τοὺς ἄρχοντες, ὁ ὁποῖος ἦταν σὲ τελικὴ ἀνάλυση ὁ Θεός, ποῦ δροῦσε διαμέσου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα.¹² Ἐξἄλλου ὅλοι γνώριζαν πὼς οἱ ἰσχυροὶ εἶναι σὰν τὰ μεγάλα ψάρια ποῦ καταπίνουν τὰ μικρά: δὲν κερδίζει κανεὶς τίποτε μὲ τὸ νὰ τοὺς ἐναντιώνεται.¹³

Στὸ πλαίσιο τῆς ἰδανικῆς ζωῆς ἡ θέση τοῦ κλήρου καὶ ἰδιαίτερα τῶν ἐπισκόπων ἦταν ταυτόχρονα τιμητικὴ καὶ δύσκολη. Ὁ ἱερέας, χειροτονημένος μὲ τὴν «ἐπίθεση» τῶν χειρῶν, ὅπως ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοῦ Ναυῆ, εἶναι ὁ μόνος ποῦ ἔχει τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ βαπτίσει, νὰ δώσει ἄφεση ἀμαρτιῶν καὶ νὰ τελέσει τὴν ἀναίμακτη θυσία. Τὸ καθῆκον του εἶναι νὰ καθοδηγεῖ τὸ ποίμνιό του καὶ νὰ προστατεύει τοὺς φτωχοὺς, καὶ πρέπει νὰ καθοδηγεῖ ὄχι μόνο μὲ λόγια ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὸ παράδειγμα. Πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ταπεινὸς μιᾶς καὶ εἶναι ὑπέρβλητος ὄλων, καὶ ἀφοῦ οἱ ἀδυναμίες του εἶναι σὲ ὅλους φανερὲς πρέπει νὰ ζεῖ ζωὴ ἄψογη. Χρειάζεται νὰ ἔχει πείρα, ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἐπαγρύπνηση, νὰ γνωρίζει ποιὸν νὰ κεντρίσει καὶ ποιὸν νὰ χαλιναγωγήσει, ποιὸν νὰ παινέψει καὶ ποιὸν νὰ ἐπιπλήξει. Μολονότι τὸ ἀξίωμα του εἶναι ὑψηλὸ —γιὰτὶ ὅπως τὸ πνεῦμα ὑπερέχει τοῦ σώματος, ἔτσι καὶ

ή ιεροσύνη είναι υψηλότερη από την επίγεια εξουσία—ο ιερέας πρέπει να θυμάται ότι στο τέλος θα δώσει λόγο για τη διαχείρισή του και, εάν όλους τους ανθρώπους, διατρέχει τον κίνδυνο της αιώνιας καταδίκης.¹⁴

Μετά τον κλήρο, οι δικαστές, οι καθηγητές και οι γιατροί κατείχαν ιδιαίτερα υπεύθυνες θέσεις. Ο δικαστής λίγο απέχει από τον άρχοντα, αφού στο δικαστήριό του ορίζει τη μοίρα των διαδίκων. Χρειάζεται να έχει εκπαιδευτεί εκ των προτέρων και να διαθέτει μεγάλη εύφυια. Πάνω από όλα, πρέπει να έχει συνεχώς στο νοῦ του την εικόνα της αληθινής δικαιοσύνης, εάν το σκοπευτή που ρίχνει το βέλος στο στόχο, και να αντιμετωπίζει τους πάντες ως ίσους—φίλους ή ξένους, πλούσιους ή φτωχούς—κάτι που, δυστυχώς, δεν συμβαίνει συχνά. Αδιαφορώντας για τα φαινόμενα, πρέπει να ψάχνει στις κρυφές πτυχές της καρδιάς, και έχει καθήκον να επιδεικνύει τη βασιλική αρετή της φιλανθρωπίας και να μετριάξει το φόβο με την επίεικεια.¹⁵ Ο καθηγητής πρέπει να δίνει το καλό παράδειγμα, όπως ο επίσκοπος. Έχει στην κατοχή του ένα χάρισμα, και είναι υποχρεωμένος να δίνει από αυτό με άπλοχεριά σε όσους επιθυμούν να μάθουν, αλλά για το σκοπό αυτό είναι αναγκασμένος συχνά να χρησιμοποιεί τη βέργα.¹⁶ Τους γιατρούς φαίνεται πώς τους εκτιμούσαν λιγότερο: οι Βίοι των αγίων κάνουν συχνές αναφορές στο πόσο άχρηστοι και πόσο απληστοί ήταν, και επικρατούσε γενικά η αντίληψη πώς, αντί να γιατρεύουν τους ασθενείς, τους έκαναν συχνά χειρότερα. Παρ' όλα αυτά, ο έμπειρος γιατρός παίζει έναν απαραίτητο ρόλο, που δεν είναι μόνο φυσικός αλλά και ηθικός: ξέρει πώς να εφαρμόσει μια θεραπεία σταδιακά, ώστε να φέρει το καλύτερο αποτέλεσμα, πώς να δώσει ένα μικρό φάρμακο μέσα σ' ένα ποτήρι αλειμμένο με μέλι, και πώς να ενσταλάξει υγιεινές συνήθειες σε ύγιη άτομα, επιδεικνύοντάς τους τα τρομερά σύνορα της τέχνης του.¹⁷

Από τα απλά μέλη της κοινωνίας, οι στρατιώτες και οι γεωργοί ήταν οι πιο χρήσιμοι. Ο ρόλος των στρατιωτών είναι να διατηρούν την ειρήνη, πράγμα για το οποίο ανταμείβονται καλά με παροχές. Είναι καθήκον τους, όπως είχε τονίσει και ο Ιωάννης ο Πρόδρομος (Κατά Λουκᾶν, Γ', 14), να είναι ευχαριστημένοι με την αμοιβή τους και να μη δημιουργούν φασαρίες.¹⁸ Η ζωή του στρατιώτη δεν είναι τόσο δύσκολη όσο του γεωργού, που πρέπει να κοιμάται άσταμάτητα μέσα στο κρύο και τη ζέστη, να σηκώνεται από το κρεβάτι νωρίς και να υπερασπίζεται την απομονωμένη καλύβα του. Το χῶμα που καλλιεργεί είναι συχνά φτωχό και πετρώδες, αλλά αν κατορθώσει να το κάνει να καρπίσει, ή χαρά του είναι μεγαλύτερη παρά αν καλλιεργοῦσε ένα εύφορο χωράφι.¹⁹ Από την άλλη μεριά, οι

έμποροι ασκοῦσαν ένα ἐπάγγελμα που ὀδηγοῦσε κατευθείαν σὲ παρανομίες. Ὑπάρχει μεγάλο περιθώριο γιὰ ἀτιμίες στὶς ἀγοραπωλησίες, ἐνῶ ὁ δανεισμός μετὸ τόκο εἶναι ἀναμφισβήτητη ἀμαρτία. Εἶναι καθήκον μας νὰ μὴ ἀποδιώχνουμε κάποιον ποὺ μᾶς ζητᾷ δάνειο (Κατὰ Ματθ., Ε', 42), ἀλλὰ ἀπαγορεύεται νὰ παίρνουμε τόκο. Ὅποιος βαρύνεται μετὸ δάνειο δὲν βρίσκει χαρὰ στὴ ζωὴ οὔτε ἡσυχία στὸν ὕπνο του. Βλέπει τὸ δανειστή του στὸ ὄνειρό του καὶ μισεῖ τίς μέρες καὶ τοὺς μῆνες ποὺ τὸν φέρνουν κοντότερα στὴν ἡμερομηνία τῆς ἐξόφλησης. Οἱ δανεισμοὶ προκαλοῦν ψεῦδος, ἀχαριστία καὶ ψευδορκία. Εἶναι ἀπείρως καλύτερο νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς εὐχαριστημένος μετὰ αὐτὰ ποὺ ἔχει, ὅσο ταπεινὰ κι ἂν εἶναι, παρά νὰ καταφεύγει στὰ χρήματα κάποιου ἄλλου.²⁰ Ὅσο γιὰ τοὺς τεχνίτες, αὐτοὶ ἀσκοῦν μερικὲς χρήσιμες τέχνες ποὺ ἔχουν ἐφευρεθεῖ μιὰ γιὰ πάντα, ὄχι τόσο ἀπὸ τὸ ἀνθρώπινο μυαλὸ ὅσο μετὰ τὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Εἶναι μάταιο νὰ ταλαιπωρεῖται κανεὶς προσπαθώντας νὰ τίς τελειοποιήσει περισσότερο.²¹

Οἱ δοῦλοι, τὸ κατώτερο στοιχεῖο τῆς κοινωνίας, εἶχαν ἀπαράβατο καθήκον, ὅπως τονίζει ἐπανειλημμένα ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή, νὰ ὑπακούουν τοὺς κυρίους τους, ἀκόμη καὶ ἂν ἦταν σκληροί. Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ θεσμὸς τῆς δουλείας εἶναι ἓνα κακό, ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς ἀμαρτίας τοῦ Χάμ (Γέν., Θ', 25), καὶ τὸ νὰ ἀπελευθερώνει κανεὶς τοὺς δούλους ποὺ εἶχε κληρονομήσει εἶναι πράγμα ἀξίεπαίνο, στὴν πράξη ὅμως εἶναι σχεδὸν ἀδύνατο νὰ ζεῖ κανεὶς ἐντελῶς χωρὶς αὐτούς. Ἐνας ἄνθρωπος μετὰ κάποια κοινωνικὴ θέση καλὸ εἶναι νὰ πλένει τὰ πόδια του μόνος του καὶ γενικὰ νὰ αὐτοεξυπηρετεῖται. Δὲν χρειάζεται ὑπηρετὴ γιὰ νὰ τοῦ δίνει τὰ ροῦχα του ἢ γιὰ νὰ τὸν συνοδεύει στὰ λουτρά, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἀδιανόητο ἓνας ἐλεύθερος ἄνθρωπος νὰ μαγειρεύει ὁ ἴδιος.²² Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη μεριά εἶναι ἄπρεπο νὰ ἀγοράζει δούλο ἓνας ἀπλὸς ἄνθρωπος, μόνος καὶ μόνος γιὰ νὰ κάνει ἐπίδειξη. Γενικά, οἱ ἀφέντες παρακινοῦνταν νὰ μεταχειρίζονται τοὺς δούλους τους μετὰ ἀνθρωπιά καὶ νὰ μὴ τοὺς χτυποῦν.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία πὼς ὁ χριστιανισμὸς εἰσήγαγε κάποια ἠπιότητα στὶς κοινωνικὲς σχέσεις, ἰδιαίτερα σὲ ὅ,τι ἀφοροῦσε τὴ δουλεία. Οἱ Βίοι τῶν αγίων ἐπανειλημμένα τονίζουν τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι φτιαγμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο πηλὸ καὶ καυτηριάζουν τοὺς σκληροὺς ἀφέντες. Ποῦ καὶ ποῦ γίνεται καὶ ἐκκλήση γιὰ ἀνακατανομὴ τοῦ πλοῦτου. Ἔτσι, ὁ Ἀγαπητὸς τὸν ὅμοιο αἰῶνα παρατηρεῖ ὅτι οἱ πλούσιοι καὶ οἱ φτωχοὶ «υποφέρουν μετὰ παρόμοιο τρόπο ἀπὸ ἀνόμοια πράγματα· οἱ πρῶτοι σκᾶνε ἀπὸ τὸν κόρο, ἐνῶ οἱ δεῦτεροι πεθαίνουν ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα». Κατὰ συνέπεια παρακινεῖ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα νὰ πάρει λίγο ἀπὸ τὸ περισσεύμα τῶν πλουσίων

και να τὸ δώσει στους φτωχοὺς γιὰ νὰ πετύχει μεγαλύτερη ἰσότητα.²³ Τονίζοντας συνεχῶς τὴν ὑποχρέωση τοῦ χριστιανοῦ νὰ δίνει ἐλεημοσύνες, ἡ Ἐκκλησία πέτυχε τὸ ἴδιο ἀποτέλεσμα μὲ καλύτερο τρόπο καὶ σὲ εὐρύτερη κλίμακα ἀπὸ ὅ,τι θὰ τὰ κατάρφερνε ὁποιαδήποτε κυβερνητικὴ παρέμβαση. Ταυτόχρονα ἕμως πρέπει νὰ παραδεχτοῦμε ὅτι δὲν ἐπιδικώταν κανενὸς εἴδους θεμελιωδὴ ἀλλαγὴ τῆς κοινωνίας, πόσο μάλλον ποὺ ἡ ἀγαθοεργία ἐπαφιόταν στὴν καλὴ θέληση. Ἄν ὁ πλοῦτος καθαυτὸς ἦταν κακὸς, δὲν θὰ εὐχόμεσταν ὅλοι νὰ ἀναπαυτοῦμε στους κόλπους τοῦ Ἀβραάμ, ποὺ ἔταν ζοῦσε ἦταν πλούσιος ἄνθρωπος, ἀφέντης τριακοσίων δεκαοχτῶ δούλων.²⁴ Εἶναι γεροντὸς πὼς οἱ ρίζες τῆς ἄνιστης κατανομῆς βρίσκονται στὴν ἀδικία: ὁ Θεὸς δίνει ἐξίσου σὲ ὅλους, ὅπως καὶ ὁ αὐτοκρατορικὸς δημόσιος τομέας εἶναι στὴ διάθεση ὅλων. Δὲν γίνονται διαμάχες ἢ δίκες γιὰ τὴ χρῆση τῶν λουτρῶν, τῶν δρόμων ἢ τῆς ἀγορᾶς, ἀλλὰ οἱ ἄνθρωποι συνεχῶς ἀλληλομηνύονται ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἰδιωτικῆς περιουσίας. Ἐπειδὴ ὁ πλοῦτος κληροδοτεῖται ἀπὸ τὸν πατέρα στὸ γιὸ καὶ εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ ἀνακαλύψουμε τὴν ἀρχικὴ πράξη ἀδικίας, ἐκείνο ποὺ ἔχει σημασία εἶναι ὁ τωρινὸς του ἀτόχος νὰ τὸν χρησιμοποιεῖ σοφᾶ καὶ νὰ τὸν μοιράζεται μὲ αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἔχουν ἀνάγκη.²⁵

Ἡ ἀπλοχεριὰ ἐπιβαλλόταν σὲ ὅλους, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ δὲν σήμαινε πὼς ἡ τάξη τῆς κοινωνίας, στὴν ὁποία καθέννας εἶχε τὴν καθορισμένη του θέση, ἔπρεπε νὰ ἀλλάξει. Δύο χωρία τῆς Ἀγίας Γραφῆς ἀναφέρονταν σχετικᾶ: *ἕκαστος ἐν τῇ κλήσει ἢ ἐκλήθη, ἐν ταύτῃ μενέτω* (Πρὸς Κορινθ. Α', Ζ', 20) καὶ «Μὴ μέταιρε ὄρια αἰῶνια, ἀ ἔθεντο οἱ πατέρες σου» (Παροιμ., ΚΒ', 28). Ὁ ἐπαναστάτης, ὁ ἀνατροπέας τῆς τάξης (νεωτεριστῆς) καταδικάζεται ἀπὸ τοὺς πάντες. Ἐξἄλλου οἱ πλούσιοι καὶ οἱ ἰσχυροὶ τιμωροῦνται ἀρκετὰ ἀπὸ ἀλλαγὴς τῆς τύχης ἀπὸ τὶς ὁποῖες οἱ φτωχοὶ δὲν ἐπηρεάζονται, καὶ τελικὰ ἡ ἰσότητα ἐπέρχεται μὲ τὸ θάνατο. «Ὅταν βλέπουμε ἕναν ἄρχοντα νὰ πεθαίνει, τότε βλέπουμε ἕνα μεγάλο μυστήριο· πὼς σέρνεται σὰν κατὰδικος αὐτὸς ποὺ τὸν φοβοῦνταν ὅλοι οἱ κατὰδικοι; πὼς δικάζεται σὰν φυλακισμένος αὐτὸς ποὺ ἀλυσόδενε φυλακισμένος;»²⁶

Μιὰ ἰδιαίτερη ομάδα στὴν κοινωνία, ἀνεξάρτητη ἀπὸ ὅλες τὶς κοινωνικὲς τάξεις, ἦταν οἱ μοναχοί. Εἶναι διδακτικὸ νὰ ἐξετάσουμε ἐδῶ τὶς εὐαγγελικὲς ρήσεις ποὺ ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνὸς θεωροῦσε ταιριαστὲς στὴ μοναστικὴ ζωὴ:²⁷ ὅλες τους ἀπευθύνονται σὲ ὁλόκληρο τὸ χριστιανικὸ πλήρωμα. Γιὰ παράδειγμα: *οὕτως οὖν πᾶς ἐξ ὑμῶν, ὃς οὐκ ἀποτάσσεται πᾶσι τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ὑπάρχουσιν, οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητῆς* (Κατὰ Λουκ., ΙΔ', 33)· *οὐ δύνασθε Θεῶ δουλεύειν καὶ μαμωνᾶ* (Κατὰ Λουκ., ΙΣ', 13)· *οὐδεὶς στρατευόμενος ἐμπλέκεται ταῖς τοῦ βίου πραγματείαις* (Πρὸς Τι-

μόθ. Β', Β', 4) καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς. Ὅπως τονίσαμε στὸ Κεφάλαιο Ε', ὁ μοναχὸς ἦταν λαϊκός. Ἦταν ὁ τέλειος χριστιανός, ὁ ἀληθινὸς φιλόσοφος· πράγμα ποὺ σημαίνει ὅτι, σὲ μιὰ ἰδανικὴ περίπτωσι, ὅλοι οἱ χριστιανοὶ θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ γίνουν μοναχοί. Γιατί τότε ἦταν ἀπαραίτητο νὰ ἀποσύρονται ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμο; Διότι ἡ καθημερινὴ ζωὴ εἶναι γεμάτη περισπασμούς καὶ ἀναστατώσεις, ποὺ σκοτεινιάζουν τὸν καθρέφτη τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τὴν κάνουν ἀνίκανη νὰ ἀντανακλᾷ τὸ θεῖο φῶς· διότι τὸ παραγμένο μυαλὸ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ πετύχει τὸ ἀμέριμνον, δηλαδή τὴν ἀποδέσμευση ἀπὸ τὶς φροντίδες, ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ τὸ χαρακτηριστικὸ τῆς τελειότητος. Κατὰ συνέπεια ἡ μοναχικὴ ζωὴ εἶναι προτιμότερη ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ στὴν κοινωνία. Ἡ ἡσυχία εἶναι ἀπαραίτητη γιὰ τὴν κάθαρση τῆς ψυχῆς· χρησιμεύει στὸ νὰ καταπραῖνει τὴν ἐπιθυμία, τὴν ὀργή, τὴ λύπη καὶ τὸ φόβο, καὶ νὰ κάνει αὐτὰ τὰ «ἀγρία θηρία» πῶς ἐπιδεικτικὰ στὴ δύναμη τῆς λογικῆς. Παραδόξως, ὅμως, ὁ μοναχὸς γίνεται ἀκόμη πῶς τρωτὸς στὶς ἐπιθέσεις τοῦ διαβόλου, γιατί εἶναι ὁ κύριος ἐχθρὸς του. Εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ ντύνεται μὲ τὴν πανοπλίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ δὲν παλεύει πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σάρκα, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὰς ἀρχάς, πρὸς τὰς ἐξουσίας, πρὸς τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκότους τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις (Πρὸς Ἐφεσ., Σ', 11-12). Ἄλλὰ ἂν ἔχει κατακτήσει τὰ δικά του πάθη, ἔχει τὴ δύναμη νὰ ἀντιστέκεται σὲ ὅλες τὶς δαιμονικὲς ἐπιθέσεις.

Μποροῦμε τώρα νὰ καταλάβουμε γιατί τὸ ἐρώτημα τῆς «κοινωνικῆς χρησιμότητος» τοῦ μοναχοῦ δὲν τέθηκε ποτὲ στὸν βυζαντινὸ κόσμο. Ἦταν ὁλόκληρο ξεκάθαρο πὼς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ ἔχει καταφέρει νὰ κυριαρχήσει στὶς δυνάμεις τοῦ σκότους καὶ ἔχει κερδίσει τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι τὸ πῶς χρῆσιμο μέλος τῆς κοινότητος καὶ ἐγγυᾶται τὴν εὐημερία ὅχι μόνο τῆς περιοχῆς του ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁλόκληρης τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Ἡ ἀποστολὴ του εἶναι κατὰ βάση ἐσωτερικὴ, ὅχι ἐξωτερικὴ· καὶ μόνο ὅταν ἔχει κερδίσει τὸν δικὸ του πνευματικὸ ἀγώνα εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ ἐκπληρώσει τὸν γενικότερο σκοπὸ του. Θὰ μπορούσαμε ἐπίσης νὰ προσθέσουμε πὼς ἀκόμη κι ἕνας ἀνάξιος ἱερέας ἦταν σὲ θέση νὰ ἐπιτελεῖ τὰ ἱερατικὰ του καθήκοντα, ἐνῶ ὁ ἀνάξιος μοναχὸς ἦταν ἀπολύτως ἀχρηστος.

Γιὰ τοὺς μοναχοὺς καὶ τοὺς λαϊκοὺς ἴσχυε ὁ ἴδιος ἠθικὸς κώδικας. Μολονότι εἶναι ἴσως ὑπερβολικὸ νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι τὴν ἀρετὴ τὴν ἐβλεπαν σχεδὸν πάντοτε μὲ ἀρνητικὸ τρόπο, εἶναι χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία γεροντὸς ὅτι ἡ Ὑστερη Ἀρχαιότητα καὶ μεγάλο μέρος τοῦ Μεσαίωνα χαρακτηρίζονταν ἀπὸ ἔμμονη ἀποστροφή πρὸς τὸν ὑλικὸ κόσμο —καὶ αὐτὸ δὲν συνέβαινε μόνο ἀνάμεσα στους χριστιανούς. Πὼς ἀλλιῶς μπορεῖ νὰ ἐξηγηθεῖ ἡ ἐπιτυχία τῶν μανιχαίων; Τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ψυχὴ τὴν ἐβλεπαν σὰν κάστρο ποὺ πρέπει νὰ

φυλάγεται άγρυπνα από έξωτερικές επιθέσεις. Τά πιό άδύνατα σημεῖα της εἶναι οἱ πύλες της, πέντε τόν αριθμό, πού άντιστοιχοῦν στίς πέντε αἰσθήσεις. Ἡ πρώτη πύλη εἶναι τοῦ λόγου, καί χρειάζεται ἐνίσχυση μέ ἰσχυρά ὑποστηρίγματα, δηλαδή τή συνεχή ἀπαγγελία τῶν Γραφῶν: μέ τόν τρόπο αὐτόν, ὅποιος ἀνεπιθύμητος προσπαθεῖ νά μπεῖ ἀποκλείεται. Ἡ δεύτερη πύλη εἶναι τῆς ἀκοῆς: εἶναι σημαντικό νά μήν ἐπιτραπεῖ μέσα ἀπό αὐτήν ἡ εἴσοδος σέ κουτσομπολιό ἢ ὀτιδήποτε ἄπρεπο. Ἡ τρίτη πύλη, τῆς ὄσφρησης, πρέπει νά κλειδώνεται μπροστά σέ ὅλες τίς γλυκές ὀσμές πού ἔχουν ἀποτέλεσμα τή χαλάρωση τῆς «έντασης» τῆς ψυχῆς. Ἡ πύλη τῆς ὄρασης εἶναι ἰδιαίτερα ἐκτεθειμένη, γι' αὐτό εἶναι σημαντικό νά βλέπει κανεῖς ὅσο τὸ δυνατὸν λιγότερες γυναῖκες καί νά ἀποφεύγει τὸ θέατρο. Ἡ σωστή λειτουργία τῆς ὄρασης εἶναι νά ἀτενίζει τίς ὁμορφιές τῆς φύσης. Ἡ πέμπτη πύλη, τῆς ἀφῆς, πρέπει νά φυλάγεται ἀπὸ τὰ ἀπαλά ρούχα, τὰ ἀνετα κρεβάτια καί ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπαφή μέ ἄλλα ἀνθρώπινα σώματα. Δὲν εἶναι ὅμως ἀρκετὸ νά φυλάει κανεῖς σκοπιὰ στίς πύλες· οἱ πολῖτες πού ζοῦν μέσα στὸ κάστρο τῆς ψυχῆς πρέπει νά τηροῦν «αὐστηροὺς καί ἐπίφοβους νόμους» καί νά ὑπακούουν τοὺς δικούς τους «ἄρχοντες». ²⁸ Ἐξίσου ἀρνητικές συνταγές ἴσχυαν καί γιὰ τὴν ἠθικὴ τοῦ σώματος. Ὁ ἄντρας ἔπρεπε νά ἀπέχει ἀπὸ τὴν πορνεία, τὴ μέθη καί τὴ λαίμαργία, ἡ γυναῖκα νά μὴ χρησιμοποιεῖ ἀρώματα καί φτιασίδια. Τὸ σῶμα χρειάζεται μόνο ὄση φροντίδα εἶναι ἀναγκαῖα γιὰ τὴ διατήρηση τῆς υἰγείας. ²⁹

Ἀνάμεσα στὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων καί ἐλαττωμάτων στὰ ὁποῖα οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ἐπιρρεπεῖς, μερικὰ ἀντιμετωπίζονταν μέ μιὰ ἀποδοκιμασία πού σήμερα μπορεῖ νά φαίνεται μᾶλλον παράδοξη. Σὲ μιὰ ἐποχὴ πού οἱ τροφές γενικὰ δὲν ἦταν ἀφθονες, δὲν μᾶς ἐκπλήσσει ἴσως ὅτι ἡ λαίμαργία θεωροῦνταν σοβαρὴ ἀμαρτία, σ' ἐμᾶς ὅμως δὲν εἶναι καί τόσο αὐτονόητο ὅτι ὀδηγεῖ σὲ ἀκάθαρτες ἐπιθυμίες καί ἀκολασία καί ὅτι ἀνοίγει τὸ δρόμο γιὰ κάθε ἀμαρτία. Ἐντούτοις αὐτὴ ἦταν ἡ ἐπικρατούσα ἀποψη, καί πίστευαν ὅτι, ὅπως ὁ καπνὸς διώχνει τίς μέλισσες, ἔτσι καί ὁ λαίμαργος διώχνει μακριὰ του τὴ χάρη τοῦ Ἀγίου Πνεύματος. ³⁰ Ἡ παρηγορία θεωροῦνταν ἐπίσης μεγάλο ἐλάττωμα, τὸ ἴδιο καί τὸ ἀμάρτημα στὸ ὁποῖο οἱ μοναχοὶ ἦταν ἰδιαίτερα ἐπιρρεπεῖς, δηλαδή ἡ ἀδιαφορία τῆς ἀνίας, ἡ ἀκηδία. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη τὸ πένθος θεωροῦνταν ἀρετὴ, κυρίως γιὰ τοὺς μοναχοὺς, ἦταν ὅμως ἀξιέπαινο σὲ ὅλους. Τὸ πιό παράξενο ἀπὸ ὅλα εἶναι ἡ καταδικὴ τοῦ γέλιου: «Δὲν ἐπιτρέπεται καθόλου στοὺς χριστιανούς νά γελοῦν, καί μάλιστα στοὺς μοναχοὺς». ³¹ Καθὼς φαίνεται ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν εἶχε γελάσει ποτέ. Τὸ πολὺ πολὺ μποροῦσε κάποιος νά χαμο-

γελάσει, ὅπως ὁ σύρος ἅγιος Ἰουλιανὸς Σάββας ὅταν ἔμαθε ὅτι πέθανε ὁ Ἰουλιανὸς ὁ Παραβάτης. ³²

Ὁ ἀντιφεμινισμὸς ἦταν βασικὸ δόγμα στὴ βυζαντινὴ σκέψη, ὡσὸτου ἄρχισαν σποραδικὰ νά εἰσάγονται οἱ δυτικὲς ιδέες περὶ ρομαντικοῦ ἔρωτα γύρω στὸν 12ο αἰώνα. Ἡ θεὰ τῆς γυναῖκας, ἔλεγαν, εἶναι σὰν τὸ φαρμακερὸ βέλος: ὅσο περισσότερο μένει τὸ δηλητήριο στὴν ψυχὴ, τόσο μεγαλύτερη διαφθορὰ προκαλεῖ. ³³ Ὑπάρχει φυσικὰ καί ἡ ἐνάρετη γυναῖκα: εἶναι αὐτὴ πού ποτέ δὲν δείχνει τὸ πρόσωπό της σὲ ξένο. ³⁴ Γενικὰ ὅμως εἶναι ἓνα σκουλήκι πού σέρνεται, ἡ κόρη τοῦ ψεύδους, ὁ ἐχθρὸς τῆς εἰρήνης. Ὁ κατάλογος τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων καί τῶν ἀδυναμιῶν της εἶναι ἀτελείωτος: εἶναι ἐλαφρόμυαλη, φλύαρη καί ἀκόλαστη. Πάνω ἀπὸ ὅλα εἶναι παθιασμένη μέ τὴν πολυτέλεια καί τίς δαπάνες. Φορτώνεται μέ κοσμήματα, πουδράρει τὸ πρόσωπό της, βάφει τὰ μάγουλά της μέ κοκκινάδι, βάζει μυρωδικὰ στὰ ρούχα της καί ἔτσι γίνεται θανάσιμη παγίδα γιὰ τὸν ἐκμαυλισμὸ τῶν νέων μέσω ὄλων τους τῶν αἰσθήσεων. Ὅσοι καί νά εἶναι ὁ πλοῦτος, δὲν ἐπαρκεῖ γιὰ νά ικανοποιήσει τὴ γυναικεῖα ἐπιθυμία. Μέρα καί νύχτα ἡ γυναῖκα δὲν σκέφτεται τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ τὸ χρυσάφι καί τὰ πολύτιμα πετράδια, τὰ πορφυρὰ ὑφάσματα καί τὰ κεντήματα, τίς κρέμες καί τὰ ἀρώματα. Ἄν δὲν ὑπῆρχε ἡ σεξουαλικὴ ἐπιθυμία, κανένας ἄντρας μέ τὰ σωστά του δὲν θὰ ἤθελε νά μοιράζεται τὸ σπῆτι του μέ μιὰ γυναῖκα καί νά ὑφίσταται τίς ἐπακόλουθες ζημιές, παρὰ τίς οἰκιακὲς ὑπηρεσίες πού ἐκτελεῖ. Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο ὁ Θεός, γνωρίζοντας τὴν ἐλλειψὴ τῆς φύσης, τὴν προίκισε ἐξαρχῆς μέ τὸ ὄπλο τῆς σεξουαλικότητος. ³⁵

Ἀγωνώντας τίς πίκρες πού τοὺς περίμεναν, οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ ἐξακολουθοῦσαν νά παντρεύονται, καί σ' αὐτὸ εἶχαν τὴν ἀπρόθυμη ὑποστήριξη τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου. Στίς ἀρχές τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ἱστορίας, πού περιγράφονται ἀπὸ τὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη, ὁ γάμος ἀποσκοποῦσε στὴν ἀναπαραγωγὴ, πού τόσο τὴν ἐκτιμοῦσαν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι. Τώρα ὅμως «πὸ τὰ πράγματα χάνονται καί πλησιάζουν στὸν τελικὸ τους σκοπὸ», τέτοιου εἴδους σκοπιμότητες δὲν ἔχουν πιὰ κανένα νόημα. ³⁶ Ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ, ἡ γῆ ἔχει ἀρκετὸ πληθυσμὸ, καί ἡ ιδέα ὅτι τὸ ἀνθρώπινο γένος θὰ ἔσβηνε ἂν παγκοσμίως τηροῦνταν ἐγκράτεια εἶναι ἀπολύτως ἀδικαιολόγητη. Ὁ πολλαπλασιασμὸς τῶν εἰδῶν ὀφείλεται ἀποκλειστικὰ στὸν Θεό, καί ἡ μοναδικὴ περίπτωση κατὰ τὴν ὁποία τὰ εἶδη εἶχαν σχεδὸν ὀλοκληρωτικὰ ἐξαφανιστεῖ, στὸν Κατακλυσμὸ, εἶχε προκληθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀκολασία, τὸ ἀντίθετο τῆς ἀγνότητος. Ἀφοῦ ἡ ἀναπαραγωγὴ δὲν ἦταν πλέον οὐσιώδης, ὁ κύριος σκοπὸς τοῦ γάμου ἦταν νά προστατεύει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἀπὸ τὴ σεξουαλικὴ ἐλευθεριότητα. Ὁ γάμος εἶναι σὰν ἓνα «λιμάνι ἀγνότητος», ἓνας

κυματοθραύστης που πάνω του σπάζουν τὰ κύματα τοῦ πόθου. Είναι ἀναγκαῖος γιὰ τοὺς ἀδύναμους, ἀλλὰ ἐμπόδιο γιὰ τοὺς δυνατοὺς, που γνωρίζουν πῶς νὰ δαμάζουν τὴν ὀρμὴ τῆς φύσης μὲ νηστεῖες καὶ ἀγρύπνιες. Γιὰ νὰ ἐπιτύχει ὁμοῦς ὁ γάμος τὸν ἀξιέπαινο αὐτὸ σκοπὸ, εἶναι ἀναγκαῖο οἱ γονεῖς νὰ παντρεύουν τὰ ἀγόρια τους ὅσο τὸ δυνατόν νωρίτερα καί, ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει, πρὶν σταδιοδρομήσουν ἢ καταλάβουν θέσεις τὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα. Γιατὶ, ἂν ὁ γάμος καθυστερήσει, ὁ νέος θὰ καταφύγει στὶς πόρνες καὶ θὰ ἀρχίσουν νὰ τοῦ ἀρέσουν τὰ χάχανα, ἡ ἐλαφρότητα καὶ ἡ ἄκοσμη συμπεριφορά. Μιὰ γυναίκα καλῆς οἰκογένειας θὰ ἀρνηθεῖ νὰ ἱκανοποιήσῃ τέτοιες ἐπιθυμίες, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ ἀρχίσει νὰ τὴν παραμελεῖ ὁ γαμπρὸς μετὰ ἀπὸ μερικὲς νύχτες.³⁷

Ὅσες προφυλάξεις κι ἂν παροῦν, ὁ γάμος εἶναι πηγὴ ἀτέλειωτων προβλημάτων. Εἶναι ἓνα εἶδος ἀμοιβαίας ὑποδούλωσης, που γίνεται χειρότερη ἂν οἱ σύζυγοι δὲν ἔχουν τὴν ἴδια οἰκονομικὴ κατάσταση. Καταστρέφει τὴν ἡρεμία μὲ τὴν παρουσία τῶν παιδιῶν καὶ μὲ τὶς οἰκονομικὲς στενοχώριες. Ἄν ἓνας ἄντρας ζητήσῃ διέξοδο παίρνοντας μέρος στὰ κοινά, ἀναπόφευκτα θὰ σπιλωθεῖ ἀπὸ ἀμαρτήματα: θὰ ἐκνευριστεῖ μὲ τοὺς συμπολίτες του, θὰ ὑπομείνει ὕβρεις, θὰ υἱοθετήσῃ ἀνείλικρινεῖς θέσεις. Τὰ κακὰ τοῦ δευτέρου γάμου εἶναι ἀντιστοίχως μεγαλύτερα: καθὼς εἶναι ἄπρεπος, δημιουργεῖ διχόνοια στὴν οἰκογένεια, οὕτως ὥστε ἀκόμη καὶ ἡ τέφρα τοῦ νεκροῦ συζύγου ἀποβαίνει πηγὴ φθόνου.

Γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ ἀνεκτὴ μιὰ κακὴ κατάσταση, ἔπρεπε νὰ τηροῦνται αὐστηροὶ κανόνες στὴ διαχείριση τοῦ νοικοκυριοῦ. Κανένας συναισθηματισμὸς δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἐκδηλώνεται πρὸς τὰ παιδιά, που εἶναι ἀναγκαῖο νὰ ἀποκαθαρθοῦν ἐξαρχῆς ἀπὸ τὴν ἀμαρτία τῆς ματαιοδοξίας. Εἶναι ἀσφαλῶς κακὸ νὰ φοροῦν τὰ κορίτσια κοσμήματα, ἀλλὰ ἐντελῶς ἀπαίσιο νὰ ἔχουν τὰ ἀγοράκια μακριὰ μαλλιά καὶ νὰ στολίζονται μὲ περιδέραια καὶ σκουλαρίκια. Τὸ ὑποδειγματικὸ ἀγόρι, που ἴσως μιὰ μέρα γίνῃ ἅγιος, ἔχει τὴ σοβαρότητα ἐνὸς γέρου (puer senex): δὲν παίζει ποτὲ παιχνίδια καὶ δὲν κάνει παρέα μὲ τοὺς συμμαθητὲς του γιὰ νὰ μὴ μολυνθεῖ ἀπὸ τὶς κακιὲς τους. Ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ πατέρα στὸ σπίτι εἶναι ἀπόλυτη, παροτρύνεται ὁμοῦς νὰ μὴν τὴν ἐπιβάλλῃ δέρνοντας τὰ παιδιά του: τὰ σκληρὰ λόγια καὶ οἱ ἐπιπλήξεις εἶναι πιὸ ἀποτελεσματικὲς. Ὁ μόνος ἰσχυρὸς λόγος γιὰ νὰ ἀρνηθεῖ τὸ παιδί τὴν ὑπακοή πρὸς τὸν πατέρα του εἶναι ἡ ἀπόφασή του νὰ ἀνταποκριθεῖ σὲ ἓνα ὑψηλότερο κάλεσμα: ἓνα ἀγόρι που ἀποφασίζει νὰ γίνῃ μοναχὸς δικαιολογεῖται ἂν δραπετεύσῃ ἀπὸ ἓναν προκαθορισμένο γάμο. Γιατὶ, ὅ,τι εἶναι ὁ οὐρανὸς γιὰ τὴ γῆ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, αὐτὸ εἶναι καὶ ἡ παρθενία γιὰ τὸ γάμο. Ἡ ἀνωτερότητά της

ἀποδεικνύεται ἀπὸ τὸ γεγονός ὅτι μόνο ἡ χριστιανικὴ Ἐκκλησία τὴν ἐκτιμᾷ: οἱ Ἑβραῖοι τὴν ἀποφεύγουν καὶ οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες τὴν ἀντιμετωπίζουν μὲ ἀμηχανία. Βέβαια τὴν παρθενία τὴν τηροῦν καὶ ὀρισμένοι αἱρετικοί, ὅπως οἱ μανιχαῖοι, ἀλλὰ «ἡ σωφροσύνη τῶν αἱρετικῶν εἶναι χειρότερη ἀπὸ κάθε ἀσέλγεια».³⁸ Ὅπως ἡ νηστεία, τὸ ἴδιο καὶ ἡ παρθενία δὲν εἶναι ἀπόλυτο καλὸ καθαυτὴ, ἀλλὰ γίνεται καλὴ ἀπὸ τὶς προθέσεις μας. Καθὼς δυσχεραίνεται ἀπὸ τὶς ἐγκόσμιες φροντίδες, ἀπαιτεῖ νὰ εἴμαστε ἀγνοὶ τόσο στὸ σῶμα ὅσο καὶ στὸ πνεῦμα. Εἶναι τὸ πιὸ σίγουρο μέσο γιὰ νὰ ὑψωθεῖ κανεὶς πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ βοῦρκο τῶν ἐγκοσμίων.

Ἡ οἰκογένεια ἦταν τὸ βασικὸ κύτταρο τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ὑπαρξης, ὑπῆρχαν ὁμοῦς καὶ ὀρισμένες ἀπαιτήσεις τῆς κοινότητος, ἡ ὅποια συχνὰ συνέβαινε νὰ εἶναι μιὰ πόλη. Ἐχομε ἤδη σχολιάσει τὶς δηλητηριώδεις ἐπιθέσεις που ἐξαπέλυε ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἐναντία σὲ ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ σημαντικότερα θέλητρα τῆς ἀστικῆς ζωῆς στὴν Ἰσπερη Ἀρχαιότητα, δηλαδὴ τὸ θέατρο, ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀποδοκιμασία της δὲν περιοριζόταν μόνον σ' αὐτὸν τὸ θεσμό: ἡ πόλη στὸ σύνολό της ἦταν κακὴ. Ἄν κοιτάξουμε καὶ πάλι τὸν Ἰωάννη Δαμασκηνό, ἀνακαλύπτουμε ὅτι τὸ σχετικὸ τμήμα τῆς ἀνθολογίας του ἔχει τίτλο *Περὶ τῆς πλήρους ἀσεβείας πόλεως καὶ ἀποτελεῖται ὀλοκληρο ἀπὸ ἐπικριτικὰ ἀποσπάσματα, ἀρχίζοντας μὲ τὸν Ψαλμὸ ΝΕ', 10* («εἶδον ἀνομίαν καὶ ἀντιλογίαν ἐν τῇ πόλει») καὶ συνεχίζοντας μὲ τὶς κατηγορίες τοῦ Ναοῦμ, τοῦ Σοφονία, τοῦ Ὡση, τοῦ Ἡσαῖα, τοῦ Ἰερεμία, τοῦ Ἰεζεκιήλ, τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου καὶ τοῦ Γρηγορίου Ναζιανζηνοῦ.³⁹ Οὕτε μιὰ καλὴ λέξη γιὰ τὴν πόλη. Ἡ πόλη εἶναι ὁ τόπος μὲ τοὺς χοροὺς καὶ τοὺς ἀστεϊσμούς, τὶς ταβέρνες, τὰ λουτρά καὶ τὰ πορνεῖα. Οἱ γυναῖκες κυκλοφοροῦν μὲ ἀκάλυπτα κεφάλια. Τὰ πάντα σ' αὐτὲς εἶναι ἄσεμνα: οἱ ὀμιλίες τους, οἱ χειρονομίες τους, οἱ ἐνδυμασίες τους, οἱ κομμώσεις τους, οἱ κινήσεις τοῦ σώματός τους καὶ οἱ λοξὲς ματιὲς που ρίχνουν. Καὶ οἱ νεαροὶ που βλέπει κανεὶς στὴν πόλη μιμοῦνται τὶς γυναῖκες καὶ ἔχουν μακριὰ μαλλιά.⁴⁰ Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸ παρακάνουν τόσο ὥστε διακοσμοῦν ἀκόμη καὶ τὶς μπότες τους. Καὶ τί νὰ πεῖ κανεὶς γιὰ τὴν ἀγορά, τὴ γεμάτη χρυσαφικὰ καὶ πολύτιμα ὑφάσματα;⁴¹ Ἀκόμη καὶ ἡ Ἰερουσαλήμ, ἡ Ἁγία Πόλη, δὲν εἶναι καλύτερη ἀπὸ τὶς ἄλλες, γιατί κάθε εἶδος πειρασμὸς βρῖσκεται ἐκεῖ: στρατῶνες, πόρνες, μίμοι, κωμικοὶ καὶ τέτοιο πλῆθος ἀντρῶν καὶ γυναικῶν «ὥστε αὐτὸ που κάπου ἄλλοῦ θὰ ἤθελες νὰ ἀποφύγεις ἐν μέρει, ἐδῶ εἶσαι ὑποχρεωμένος νὰ τὸ ὑφίστασαι ἐξ ὀλοκληρου».⁴² Ἡ ἀρετὴ μπορεῖ νὰ ἦταν σπάνια στὶς πόλεις, ἦταν ὁμοῦς ἀφθονη στὴν ὑπαιθρο. «Πόσο συχνὰ» παρατηρεῖ ὁ ἅγιος Συμεὼν ὁ Σαλὸς «δὲν ἔχω δεῖ χωρικοὺς νὰ ἔρχονται στὴν πόλη γιὰ νὰ μεταλάβουν!

Είναι πιο άγνοι και από το χρυσάφι με την καλοσύνη και την απλότητά τους, κι επειδή τρώνε το ψωμί τους με τον ιδρώτα του προσώπου τους.»⁴³

Πώς έπρεπε λοιπόν να ζει ο χριστιανός στις πόλεις; "Αν χρειαζόταν άναψυχή, μπορούσε να πάει βόλτα σ' έναν κήπο, στο ποτάμι ή στη λίμνη; θα άκουγε τὰ τζιτζικια να τραγουδοῦν ή θα έπισκεπτόταν τὸ ἱερό ἑνὸς μάρτυρα, ὅπου τὰ σώματα ξαναβρίσκουν τὴν ὑγεία τους και οἱ ψυχές διδάσκονται. Θα μπορούσε να προσπαθήσει, παρ' ὅλα ὅσα λέχθηκαν πιο πάνω, ἀκόμη και να χαρεί τὴν οἰκογένειά του. Δὲν εἶχαν κάποτε παρατηρήσει κάποιιοι βάρβαροι ὅτι οἱ Ρωμαῖοι ἀνακάλυψαν τὴ χαρὰ τοῦ θεάτρου επειδὴ δὲν εἶχαν οὔτε γυναῖκες οὔτε παιδιά;⁴⁴ Πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα, φυσικά, ὁ χριστιανὸς ἔπρεπε νὰ πηγαίνει στὴν ἐκκλησία —ὄχι μόνο τις Κυριακές και τις ἄλλες γιορτές, ἀλλὰ ὅσο πιο συχνὰ γινόταν, και τουλάχιστον δύο ὥρες τὴν ἡμέρα. Γιατί, ἀλήθεια, τί θὰ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι πιο εὐχάριστο ἀπὸ τὸν ἐκκλησιασμὸ; Ἐντὶ γιὰ διαβολικὰ τραγούδια και πόρνες ποὺ χορεύουν, στὴν ἐκκλησία ἄκουγε τοὺς ψαλμοὺς τῶν προφητῶν, τὰ ἄσματα τῶν σεραφεῖμ και τὰ λόγια τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου. Ὁ Χριστὸς βρισκόταν ἐκεῖ, πάνω στὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα, ἐνώπιον τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Ἡ ἐκκλησία ἦταν σὰν τὸ ἤρεμο λιμάνι μέσα στὴ θαλασσοταραχή. Ἐντούτοις οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἔπρεπε νὰ δελεαστοῦν γιὰ νὰ πᾶνε ἐκεῖ. Ἐβρισκαν τὴ λειτουργία βαρετή, και μόνο ἡ φήμη ἑνὸς διάσημου ρήτορα τοὺς τραβοῦσε στὴν ἐκκλησία κατὰ ἑκατοντάδες. Ἄλλὰ ἀφοῦ χειροκροτοῦσαν τὸ κήρυγμα σὰν νὰ ἦταν στὸ θέατρο, δὲν ἔκαναν τὸν κόπο οὔτε νὰ μείνουν στὴ λειτουργία γιὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς.

Ὁ περίπατος στοὺς κήπους, τὸ ἄκουσμα τῶν τζιτζικιῶν και ἡ παρακολούθηση τῆς λειτουργίας μπορούσαν νὰ γίνουν ἐξίσου καλά στὸ χωριὸ ὅσο και στὴν πόλη. Μολοντί ἡ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀντλοῦσε τὰ εἰσοδήματά της, τοὺς ἡγέτες της και τὴ ρητορική της ἀπὸ τις πόλεις, τὸ μήνυμά της ἦταν κατὰ βάση ἀντιαστικὸ. Ἐπεχθανόταν ὄχι μόνο τὰ θέατρα και τὰ λουτρά, τὴ μουσική και τοὺς χοροὺς, τὴν αἴθουσα τοῦ συμβουλίου και τὸ δικαστήριο, ἀλλὰ και αὐτὸ καθαυτὸ τὸ γεγονός ὅτι οἱ ἄνθρωποι μαζεύονταν σὲ δημόσιες συγκεντρώσεις ἐνῶ ἔπρεπε νὰ μένουν στὰ σπίτια τους. Ἐτσι, ὅταν κατέρρευσε οἱ πόλεις, τὸ ὄνειρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας πρέπει νὰ ἔγινε πραγματικότητα. Ἄν ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος ἐπανερχόταν στὴ ζωὴ και ἐπισκεπτόταν τὸ κάστρο τῆς Καισάρειας τὸν 9ο ἢ τὸν 10ο αἰώνα, δὲν θὰ ἔβρισκε θέατρα, μίμους ἢ κωμικούς, οὔτε γυναῖκες νὰ κυκλοφοροῦν με ἀκάλυπτα κεφάλια. Θα ἔβλεπε ὅτι ὅλοι ἔμεναν στὰ σπίτια τους και συγκεντρώνονταν μόνο στὴν ἐκκλησία. Δὲν χρειαζόταν καν κάποιος διάσημος ἱεροκῆρυκας γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ἐλκύσει ἐκεῖ· πιθανότατα δὲν ὑπῆρχε κα-

θόλου ἱεροκῆρυκας. Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος θὰ ἔμενε μᾶλλον εὐχαριστημένος· ἴσως ὅμως με τὴ διεισδυτικὴ ματιά του νὰ ἔβλεπε ὅτι τὰ ἔργα τοῦ διαβόλου ἀνθοῦσαν ἀκόμη, παρὰ τὴν ἀλλαγὴ τῶν συνθηκῶν.

Ἐχει τόσο συχνὰ συζητηθεῖ ἡ διείσδυση τοῦ ἑλληνισμοῦ στὸν χριστιανισμό ὥστε τείνουμε νὰ παραβλέπουμε ἕνα πολὺ βασικὸ γεγονός: τὸ σχῆμα τῆς χριστιανικῆς ζωῆς, ὅπως τὸ ἔθεσαν οἱ Πατέρες τοῦ 4ου αἰώνα και διατηρήθηκε σὲ ὅλη τὴ βυζαντινὴ περίοδο, ἦταν τὸ ἄκρο ἀντίθετο τοῦ ἑλληνικοῦ ἰδεώδους τῆς πόλεως. Μολοντί εἶχε βαθιὰ τις ρίζες του στὴν Ἁγία Γραφή, τὸ χριστιανικὸ σχῆμα ἀντανακλοῦσε ἐπίσης τὴν αὐταρχική και πειθαρχική ὀργάνωση τῆς Ὑστερης αὐτοκρατορίας. Εἶχε τις βάσεις του στὴν ἀπόλυτη μοναρχία, τὴν κοινωνικὴ ἀκαμψία και τὴ δουλικότητα. Ἐβλεπε τὸν ὑλικὸ κόσμο, τὸν κόσμο τῆς σάρκας, με μιὰ σχεδὸν μανιχαϊκὴ φρίκη. Καθρέφτιζε ἐπίσης τὴν ἀστάθεια τῶν καιρῶν, παρομοιάζοντας τὸν ἑνάρετο ἄνθρωπο με ὀχυρωμένη ἀκρόπολη. Ἄν και δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ φανταστοῦμε ὅτι ὁ μέσος Βυζαντινὸς ζοῦσε μιὰ ζωὴ ἀπόλυτα συμμορφωμένη πρὸς τὴν προπαγάνδα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία γιὰ τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἑνὸς μηνύματος ποὺ ἐπαναλαμβάνονταν στὴ διάρκεια τῶν αἰώνων. Ἡ ἐξέταση τῆς βυζαντινῆς λογοτεχνίας θὰ ἀποκαλύψει ἀπὸ πολ- λές ἀπόψεις τὰ ἔχνη της.

ΜΕΡΟΣ ΤΡΙΤΟ
Η ΚΛΗΡΟΝΟΜΙΑ

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟ ΙΓ'
Η ΛΟΓΟΤΕΧΝΙΑ

“Όπως αναφέραμε στὸ Κεφάλαιο Α', ἡ πολυεθνικὴ αὐτοκρατορία τῆς Νέας Ρώμης δὲν ἐκφραζόταν μόνο στὰ ἑλληνικά. Πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς κατοίκους τῆς μιλοῦσαν καὶ ἔγραφαν ἄλλες γλῶσσες. Ἄν συνεπῶς καθορίσουμε τὴ βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία ὡς τὴ λογοτεχνία μιᾶς αὐτοκρατορίας καὶ ἐνὸς πολιτισμοῦ, πρέπει νὰ περιλάβουμε σ' αὐτήν, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ κυρίαρχο ἑλληνικὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς, καὶ ἓνα σημαντικὸ σύνολο ἔργων στὰ λατινικά, τὰ συριακά, τὰ κοπτικὰ, τὰ παλαιοσλαβονικά, ἀκόμη καὶ στὰ ἄρμενικά καὶ τὰ γεωργιανά. Αὐτὸ δὲν θὰ τὸ κάνουμε ἐδῶ, ἀλλὰ εἶναι χρήσιμο νὰ θυμόμαστε ὅτι μὲ τὸ νὰ περιοριζόμαστε στὰ ἑλληνικά παραβλέπουμε μιὰ πολυπλοκὴ εἰκόνα ἀλληλεπιδράσεων ποὺ διαμορφώνεται ὄχι μόνο μὲ τὴ διασπορὰ τῶν κειμένων ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὶς συνήθειες ποὺ ἀφοροῦν τὴ γλῶσσα καὶ τὶς νοοτροπίες.

Ἡ ἑλληνικὴ βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία, μὲ ἄλλα λόγια καθετὶ ποὺ γράφτηκε στὰ ἑλληνικά ἀνάμεσα στὸν 4ο καὶ τὸν 15ο αἰῶνα, μᾶς ἐκπλήσσει πρῶτα πρῶτα μὲ τὸν ὄγκο τῆς. Πόσος ἀκριβῶς εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ ὄγκος δὲν φαίνεται νὰ τὸ ἔχει ὑπολογίσει κανεὶς. Ἄς ποῦμε, κάνοντας ἓναν πολὺ χοντρικὸ ὑπολογισμό, πὼς θὰ γέμιζε δύο μὲ τρεῖς χιλιάδες τόμους κανονικοῦ σχήματος. Ἐνα μέρος τῆς —ἂν καὶ τώρα πιά ὄχι πολὺ μεγάλο οὔτε καὶ πολὺ ἐνδιαφέρον— παραμένει ἀκόμη ἀνέκδοτο, δηλαδὴ βρίσκεται μόνο σὲ χειρόγραφα, καὶ ἓνα σημαντικὸ κομμάτι τῆς ἔχει χαθεῖ —ἀρκετὰ μεγάλο γιὰ τὴν Πρώιμη περίοδο, μικρότερο γιὰ τὴ Μέση καὶ πολὺ μικρὸ γιὰ τὴν Ὑστερὴ περίοδο.

Θὰ ἦταν ἐνδιαφέρον ἂν εἶχαμε μιὰ ποσοστιαία ἀνάλυση τῶν περιεχομένων τῆς βυζαντινῆς λογοτεχνίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλι τέτοιος ὑπολογισμὸς δὲν ἔχει γίνῃ. Εἶναι ὅμως ἀμέσως προφανὲς ὅτι στὴ συντριπτικὴ τους πλειονότητα τὰ περιεχόμενα εἶναι θρησκευτικῆς φύσεως: μόνο ἡ ἀγιολογία ἀριθμεῖ κάπου 2.500 ἔργα.¹ Μετὰ τὴν ἀγιολογία ἔρχονται οἱ θρησκευτικοὶ λόγοι, τὰ λειτουργικὰ βιβλία (συμπεριλαμβανομένης καὶ τῆς ὕμνου-

γραφίας), ή θεολογία, τὰ λατρευτικά ἔργα, τὰ σχόλια στὴ Βίβλο καὶ τοὺς Πατέρες, καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα. Ἀντίθετα, τὸ κοσμικὸ (μὴ θρησκευτικὸ) στοιχεῖο εἶναι πολὺ περιορισμένο: ὅλοι οἱ ἱστορικοὶ θὰ χωροῦσαν σὲ ἕκατὸ περιπίου τόμους, καὶ οἱ ἐπιστολογράφοι τὸ ἴδιο. Τὰ λεξικά καὶ τὰ ἄλλα συμπληήματα, τὰ σχόλια στοὺς ἀρχαίους συγγραφεῖς, τὰ ἐπιστημονικά καὶ ψευδπιστημονικά ἔργα θὰ ἔπιαναν ὅλα μαζὶ κάπου διακόσιους τόμους. Ὅσο γιὰ τὴ μὴ θρησκευτικὴ ποίηση, θὰ καταλάμβανε πιθανὸν κάπου τριάντα τόμους. Οἱ περισσότερες συζητήσεις γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία ἔχουν βασιστεῖ σ' ἓνα πολὺ μικρὸ δεῖγμα τῆς συνολικῆς παραγωγῆς.

Θὰ ἦταν ἄδικο νὰ κρίνουμε τὴ βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία μὲ κριτήριον τὴν αἰσθητικὴ ἀπόλαυση ποὺ προκαλεῖ στὸν σύγχρονο ἀναγνώστη. Ἄν δὲν μᾶς συναρπάζει ἢ δὲν μᾶς συγκινεῖ, αὐτὸ ὀφείλεται κατὰ μέγα μέρος στὸ ὅτι οἱ λογοτεχνικές μας προτιμήσεις εἶναι διαμετρικὰ ἀντίθετες ἀπὸ τὶς προτιμήσεις τῶν καλλιεργημένων Βυζαντινῶν. Ἐμεῖς ἐκτιμᾶμε τὴν πρωτοτυπία, ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνοι θαύμαζαν τὴν κοινοτοπία· ἐμεῖς δὲν ἔχουμε ὑπομονὴ γιὰ ρητορεῖες, ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνοι τὶς ἀγαποῦσαν μὲ πάθος· ἐμεῖς ἐκτιμᾶμε τὴ βραχυλογία, ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνοι ἀπὸ τὴ φύση τοὺς εἶχαν κλίση πρὸς τὴ μακρηγορία καὶ τὸ βερμπαλισμὸ. Ἄς ἀναβάλουμε πρὸς τὸ παρὸν τὴν κρίση μας, καὶ ἄς προσπαθήσουμε νὰ κατανοήσουμε κάπως τὴ βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία μέσα στὸ ἱστορικὸ της πλαίσιο. Γιὰ τὸ σκοπὸ αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰ λάβουμε ὑπόψη μας πολλοὺς παράγοντες.

Ὁ πρῶτος ἀφορᾷ τὴν ἐξέλιξη τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσας. Γιὰ τοὺς περισσότερους κλασικοὺς φιλολόγους τὰ ἑλληνικά φαίνονται ὡς νὰ ἔχουν ἀκίνητοποιηθεῖ σὲ δύο φάσεις, τὴν ἐπική ("Ὀμηρος, Ἡσίοδος) καὶ τὴ φιλολογικὴ ἀττική τοῦ 5ου καὶ 4ου αἰῶνα π.Χ. Ἡ μετέπειτα ἐξέλιξί της, ποὺ περιλαμβάνει καὶ τὴ λεγόμενη ἑλληνιστικὴ κοινὴ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, θεωρεῖται μιὰ φάση παρακμῆς. Ὡστόσο, ὅπως ὅλες οἱ ζωντανὲς γλώσσες, ἔτσι καὶ τὰ ἑλληνικά συνεχῶς ἐξελίσσονταν στὸ φωνολογικὸ, τὸ μορφολογικὸ, τὸ συντακτικὸ καὶ τὸ λεξιλόγιο. Ἡ ἀποφασιστικὴ ἀλλαγὴ ἐπῆλθε τὴν ἑλληνιστικὴ ἐποχὴ, ὅταν τὰ ἑλληνικά ἔγιναν μέσο διεθνοῦς ἐπικοινωνίας. Ἐδῶ δὲν εἶναι ὁ κατάλληλος τόπος γιὰ νὰ περιγράψουμε λεπτομερῶς τὶς ἀλλαγές αὐτές, ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ ὑπογραμμίσουμε ἓναν παράγοντα ποὺ ἐπρόκειτο νὰ ἔχει μακροχρόνιες συνέπειες: τὴν ἐξαφάνιση τῆς ποσότητος τῶν φωνηέντων (μακρὰ καὶ βραχέα ἀνάλογα μὲ τὴ φύση ἢ τὴ θέση τοὺς), μὲ ἄλλα λόγια τῆς προσωδιακῆς προφορᾶς, καὶ τὴν ἀντικατάστασή της ἀπὸ τὴν τονικὴ προφορὰ. Κατὰ συνέπεια τὰ προσωδιακά μέτρα στὰ ὁποῖα βασιζόταν ἡ ἀρχαία ἑλληνικὴ ποίηση κατάντησαν ἀκατανόητα. Τὴν ἴδια ἐποχὴ ἢ λίγο ἀργότερα συνέβησαν πολλὲς ἄλλες ἀλλα-

γές: οἱ δίφθογγοι ἔπαψαν νὰ προφέρονται, ὁ δυϊκὸς ἀριθμὸς, ἡ μέση φωνή, ἡ εὐκτική, ἡ δοτικὴ πτώση, ὅλα ἐξαφανίστηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν κοινὴ καθημερινὴ χρῆση. Ἀπὸ ὅσο γνωρίζουμε, τὰ καθημερινὰ ὁμιλούμενα ἑλληνικά τῆς βυζαντινῆς περιόδου ἦταν πολὺ κοντύτερα στὰ νέα παρὰ στὰ ἀρχαία ἑλληνικά.

Παρὰ τὴν ἀποδοκιμασία τῶν κλασικῶν φιλολόγων, δὲν ὑπῆρχε τίποτε κακὸ στὶς ἀλλαγές αὐτές. Ἄν καὶ τῆς ἔλειπαν πολλὲς ἀπὸ τὶς λεπτές ἀποχρώσεις τῶν ἀρχαίων ἑλληνικῶν, ἡ ὁμιλούμενη γλώσσα θὰ μπορούσε νὰ ἔχει ὑψωθεῖ σὲ λογοτεχνικὸ ἐπίπεδο. Ἐκτὸς αὐτοῦ, πολλοὶ ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ ἄνδρες ὑποστήριζαν ἐνεργὰ τὴ χρῆση ἀπλῆς γλώσσας καὶ ἀπέριπταν «τὸ λεπτὸ ὕφος τῶν Ἑλλήνων», ποὺ τὸ παρομοίαζαν μὲ τὸ μέλι τῆς παροιμίας ποὺ στᾶζει ἀπὸ τὰ χεῖλη τῆς πόρνης. Κατὰ τὴν ἀποψή τους, τὸ νὰ καλλιεργοῦνται τὰ ἐπικά καὶ ἱαμβικά μέτρα δὲν ἦταν μόνον παιδαριῶδες ἀλλὰ καὶ προσβολὴ κατὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν ἀποστόλων.² Στὶς συμβουλές αὐτές ὥστόσο δὲν δόθηκε σημασία. Καλῶς ἢ κακῶς, ἡ σχολαστικὴ παράδοση ἐπικράτησε, καὶ ἔτσι δημιουργήθηκε ὅχι ἀπλῶς διγλωσσία ἀλλὰ μιὰ ὀλόκληρη σειρά γλωσσικῶν ἐπιπέδων. Τὰ ἀττικά χρησιμοποιοῦνταν στὴν «ὑψηλὴ» φιλολογία. Δὲν ἦταν ὅμως ἡ ἀττικὴ διάλεκτος τοῦ 5ου αἰῶνα π.Χ., ἀλλὰ τῶν ἀττικιστῶν τῆς ρωμαϊκῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς περιόδου, καὶ ὅσο πῶς ἐξεζητημένη ἦταν τόσο τὸ καλύτερο. Ἐπειτα ἦταν ἡ γλώσσα τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς καὶ τῶν λειτουργικῶν βιβλίων, ποὺ ἀντιστοιχοῦσε στὴν ἑλληνιστικὴ κοινὴ. Τέλος ὑπῆρχε ἡ καθομιλούμενη γλώσσα, ποὺ εἶχε ἤδη ἀπομακρυνθεῖ ἀρκετὰ ἀπὸ τὴν κοινὴ. Ἀνάμεσα στὰ τρία αὐτὰ βασικά ἐπίπεδα ὑπῆρχε δυνατότητα ἀπειρων διαβαθμίσεων. Ὁ «ἀνώτερος» καὶ ἐξεζητημένος συγγραφέας ἔπρεπε νὰ βρίσκειται διαρκῶς σὲ ἐπιφυλακὴ, ἀλλιῶς θὰ τοῦ ξέφευγαν ἐκφράσεις ποὺ δὲν ἦταν κλασικές. Ὁ «μέσος» συγγραφέας συχνὰ προσπαθοῦσε, ἂν καὶ χωρὶς ἐπιτυχία, νὰ πλησιάσει τὸ ὕφος τῶν ἐξεζητημένων. Ὁ λαϊκὸς συγγραφέας ἀγωνιζόταν νὰ γράψει τὴ γλώσσα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Τὸ γλωσσικὸ χάος ἦταν χειρότερο ἀπὸ ὅ,τι φανταζόμαστε, ἀφοῦ οἱ ἐκδόσεις ποὺ χρησιμοποιοῦμε ἔχουν περάσει ἀπὸ μιὰ διαδικασία διορθώσεων. Μόνον ὅταν μελετήσουμε χειρόγραφα ἔργων ποὺ δὲν θεωροῦνταν «κλασικά» καταλαβαίνουμε πόσες διαφοροποιήσεις ἐπιτρέπονταν.

Ἦταν γενικὰ παραδεκτὸ πὼς τὸ κλασικὸ ὕφος δὲν συνέβαλλε στὴ σαφήνεια, καὶ ἔπρεπε κατανάγκην νὰ ἐγκαταλείπεται σὲ ἔργα τεχνικοῦ περιεχομένου, ἀλλὰ, ὅταν τὸ ἐγκατέλειπαν, αἰσθάνονταν συνήθως τὴν ἀνάγκη νὰ ἀπολογηθοῦν. Ἐτσι ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Πορφυρογέννητος, στὴν εἰσαγωγὴ τοῦ ἔργου του *Πρὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν Ῥωμανόν* (*De administrando*

imperio), θεωρεί απαραίτητο να δηλώσει: «Δὲν ἐνδιαφέρθηκα νὰ κάνω ἐπίδειξη ἐκλεπτυσμένης συγγραφῆς ἢ ἀττικοῦ λόγου, διογκωμένου μὲ τὸ ἀνώτερο καὶ τὸ ὑψηλὸ, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον φρόντισα μὲ κοινὴ καὶ καθομιλούμενη γλῶσσα νὰ σὲ διδάξω αὐτὰ πού νομίζω ὅτι δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἀγνοεῖς».³ Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ στὴν εἰσαγωγή τῆς *Ἐκθέσεως τῆς βασιλείου τάξεως (De ceremoniis)*: «Καὶ γιὰ νὰ εἶναι σαφὴ καὶ εὐκολονόητα αὐτὰ πού γράφω, χρησιμοποίησα τὴν ἀπλούστερη καὶ καθομιλούμενη γλῶσσα καὶ τὶς λέξεις καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα πού ἀπὸ παλιὰ λέγονται καὶ ἀναφέρονται γιὰ κάθε πράγμα».⁴ Δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ ψάξουμε γιὰ παραστατικότερη παρουσίαση τῆς βυζαντινῆς στάσης ἀπέναντι στὴ γλῶσσα καὶ τὸ ὕφος. Τὸ νὰ λεχθεῖ κάτι μὲ τὸ ὄνομά του ἦταν καμιά φορά ἀναγκαῖο, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἦταν κομψὸ ἂν λεγόταν μὲ τὸ κλασικὸ του ὄνομα, αὐτὸ παρεῖχε πολὺ μεγαλύτερη εὐχαρίστηση. Ἡ «ἐπίδεικτικὴ» λογοτεχνία εἶχε τὴ θέση της, καὶ ἡ συνηθισμένη συγγραφὴ τὴ δική της. Τὸ ἀνώτερο καὶ τὸ ὑψηλὸ ἀνῆκαν ἀποκλειστικά στὴν πρώτη.

Ἐφόσον ἡ ἀττικὴ διάλεκτος ἦταν νεκρὴ γλῶσσα, ἡ συνέχιση τῆς χρήσης της εἶχε ὄχι μόνον λογοτεχνικὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ κοινωνικὴ διάσταση. Ἀπὸ λογοτεχνικὴ ἀποψη τὸ μόνον πού χρειάζεται νὰ ποῦμε εἶναι ὅτι πολὺ λίγοι βυζαντινοὶ συγγραφεῖς κατάφεραν νὰ τὴ χειριστοῦν δημιουργικά (ὁ Ψελλὸς ἀποτελεῖ ἀξιόλογη ἐξαιρεση). Οἱ ὑπόλοιποι πού φιλοδοξοῦσαν νὰ γράφουν τὴν ἀττικὴν διάλεκτο ἀγωνίζονταν σκληρὰ μὲ τὶς εὐκτικὲς καὶ τοὺς ὑπερσυντέλικους, δὲν ἦταν καὶ πολὺ σίγουροι πῶς νὰ κάνουν τὶς αὐξήσεις, τί νὰ κάνουν μὲ τὸ μόριο ἂν, ἂν θὰ χρησιμοποιοῦσαν δύο σ ἢ δύο τ. Εἶναι ἴσως ἀπορίας ἄξιον πού, σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς, τὰ κατάφεραν ὅσο καλὰ τὰ κατάφεραν, ἀλλὰ εἶναι μάταιον νὰ ψάχνουμε γιὰ λογοτεχνικὲς ἀρετὲς στὶς πομπώδεις συνθέσεις τους. Αὐτὸ πού ἴσως ἔχει μεγαλύτερη σημασία ἀπὸ ἱστορικὴ ἀποψη εἶναι ὅτι ἡ γνώση τῆς ἀττικῆς διαλέκτου ἀποτελοῦσε τὸ διακριτικὸ μιᾶς ἐλίτ —ὄχι ἀπαραίτητα τῶν πλουσίων καὶ τῶν δυνατῶν, οὔτε πάντοτε τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς αὐλῆς, ἀλλὰ πάντως μιᾶς ἐλίτ. Ὅπως ἐξηγήσαμε στὸ Κεφάλαιο Σ', ἡ γνώση τῆς ἀρχαίας γλώσσας ἐξαρτιόταν ἀπὸ μιὰ ρητορικὴ ἐκπαίδευση ἢ ὁποία, μετὰ τὴν κατάρρευση τοῦ 7ου αἰώνα, περιορίστηκε σὲ μιὰ μικρὴ ομάδα ὑποψήφιων δημόσιων ὑπαλλήλων καὶ κληρικῶν. Ἡ λογοτεχνία πού παρήγγαν ἦταν ἡ λογοτεχνία μιᾶς «συντροφιάς»: κανένας ἄλλος δὲν ἦταν σὲ θέση νὰ τὴν καταλάβει.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία πῶς τὰ «ἐκκλησιαστικά» ἐλληνικὰ ἀποτελοῦσαν τὸ κύριο μέσον ἐκφρασης τῆς βυζαντινῆς λογοτεχνίας, μὲ ἐξαιρεση τὶς «ἀνώτερες» συγγραφές, καὶ μὲ τὴ μιὰ ἢ τὴν ἄλλη μορφή ἀντιπροσωπεύουν περίπου τὸ 80 τοῖς ἑκατὸ τῆς παραγωγῆς της. Ἀφοῦ χρησιμοποιοῦνταν

στὴν Ἐκκλησία πρέπει νὰ ἦταν κατανοητὰ σὲ σημαντικὸ τμήμα τοῦ πληθυσμοῦ, δὲν δουλεύτηκαν ὅμως ποτὲ ὥστε νὰ ἀποτελέσουν ἓνα εὐαίσθητο ἐκφραστικὸ ὄργανο. Κατὰ βάθος ὑπῆρχε σ' αὐτὰ κάτι ἄψυχο καὶ μονότονον. Οἱ «μέσοι» συγγραφεῖς, πασχίζοντας γιὰ ἓνα πλουσιότερο ἀποτέλεσμα, εἶχαν τὴν τάση νὰ φορτώνουν τὸ ἓνα ἐπίθετο πάνω στὸ ἄλλο, νὰ ἀραδιάζουν μιὰ σειρά ἀπὸ σχεδὸν συνώνυμες φράσεις ἢ νὰ περιπλέκουν τὴ σύνταξη μὲ κωμικὰ ἀποτελέσματα, ὅπως τοῦτο: *ὄσοι... τὴν ἀποταγὴν ταύτην διὰ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς ἐν τῇ κατὰ Χριστὸν ἡλικία προήκοντας ἐβεβαίωσαν ὑποταγῆς*. Μὲ αὐτὴ τὴ συνάθροιση λέξεων ὁ Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς προσπάθησε νὰ περιγράψει ὄσους μοναχοὺς ἐπιβεβαίωσαν ὅτι ἔχουν ἀποκηρύξει τὸν κόσμον καὶ ὑποτάσσονται στοὺς πνευματικὸς πατέρες.⁵ Τὸ μεγάλο ποσοστὸ παρατακτικῶν συντάξεων, πού κληρονόμησαν ὅπως φαίνεται τὰ ἐλληνικὰ ἀπὸ τὸν σημιτικὸν κόσμον, προξενοῦσε ἀφόρητη μονοτονία, ἐνὼ μεγάλες ἀσάφειες δημιουργοῦνταν ἀπὸ τὴ χωρὶς διάκριση χρῆση τῶν δεικτικῶν καὶ κτητικῶν ἀντωνυμιῶν. Ὅταν ὁ Θεοφάνης γράφει γιὰ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Νικηφόρον ὅτι *ἐπιβάς ἵππων πάντων ἡμεροτάτων καὶ πρῶν ἐκ θείας προνοίας τοῦτον καταβαλὼν τὸν δεξιὸν πόδα αὐτοῦ συνέτριψεν*,⁶ εἶναι δύσκολον νὰ καταλάβουμε ποιὸς ἔκανε τί σὲ ποιόν. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τί συμπέρασμα νὰ βγάλουμε ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴ φράση στὸ Βίο τοῦ ἁγίου Παχωμίου: *Καὶ λαβὼν ἄρτον παρ' αὐτοῦ ὁ πρὸς ταῖς θύρας ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ, ὅπως ψωμίση αὐτὸν κατὰ τὴν παραγγελίαν αὐτοῦ ὥστε ἰαθῆναι αὐτόν*;^{7*}

Ὅσο γιὰ τὴν καθημερινὴ γλῶσσα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, αὐτὴ δυστυχῶς δὲν θεωρήθηκε ἄξια νὰ καταγραφεῖ. Τὴ γλῶσσα τῆς Πρώιμης καὶ τῆς Μέσης βυζαντινῆς περιόδου τὴ γνωρίζουμε μόνον ἀπὸ μερικὰ ἀποσπάσματα διαλόγων, ὅπως αὐτὸς ἀνάμεσα στοὺς δήμους τοῦ ἵπποδρόμου καὶ τὸν ἀγγελιαφόρο τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ,⁸ ἀπὸ μερικοὺς στίχους λαϊκῶν ποιημάτων καὶ ἀπὸ τὶς μαρτυρίες τῶν παπύρων καὶ τῶν ἐπιγραφῶν. Ὅπως θὰ δοῦμε σὲ λίγο, ἡ ἐμφάνιση τῆς δημοτικῆς στὴ λογοτεχνία ἔπρεπε νὰ περιμένει μέχρι τὸν 12ο αἰώνα.

Γιὰ τὸν δεῦτερον παράγοντα πού πρέπει νὰ λάβουμε ὑπόψη μας ἔχουμε ἤδη κάνει νύξη: πρόκειται γιὰ τὴν ὑπαρξὴ λογοτεχνικοῦ κοινοῦ. Στὴν Πρώιμη βυζαντινὴν περίοδο ἡ βουλευτικὴ τάξη τῶν ἐπαρχιακῶν πόλεων ἀποτελοῦσε ἓνα τέτοιο κοινόν, πού ὅμως ἀναμφίβολα συρρικνωτόταν: ὁ Προκόπιος μποροῦσε ἀκόμη νὰ ἰσχυριστεῖ ὅτι τὸ ἔργο του διαβαζόταν σὲ ὁλόκληρη τὴν αὐτοκρατορία.⁹ Καθὼς ὅμως οἱ πόλεις παράκμαζαν, ἐξα-

* [Τὸ νόημα τῆς φράσης: Ἀφοῦ ὁ θυρωρὸς πῆρε ψωμὶ ἀπὸ αὐτόν (τὸν ἄγιο), τὸ ἔδωσε σὲ αὐτόν (τὸν πατέρα ἑνὸς δαιμονιζόμενου παιδιοῦ) γιὰ νὰ ταῖσει αὐτόν (τὸ γιό του) σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ἐντολή του (τοῦ ἁγίου) ὥστε νὰ γιαντρευτεῖ (ὁ γιός).]

φανιζόταν επίσης και το άναγνωστικό κοινό. Σίγουρα δεν είναι τυχαίο ότι έπαψαν να παράγονται έκλεπτυσμένα έργα. Χρυστούμε μεγάλη εύγνωμοσύνη στη μικρή ομάδα των μορφωμένων δημόσιων υπαλλήλων και κληρικών που φρόντισαν για τη μετάδοση της αρχαίας κληρονομιάς τον 8ο και 9ο αιώνα, αλλά δεν μπορούμε να θεωρήσουμε ότι αποτέλεσαν ένα αρκετά μεγάλο κοινό για την παραγωγή λογοτεχνικών έργων που είχαν σκοπό να διασκεδάσουν και να ευχαριστήσουν. Εύνοϊκές συνθήκες ξαναεμφανίστηκαν μόνο με την αναγέννηση των πόλεων περίπου τον 11ο αιώνα, πράγμα που επιβεβαιώνεται πλήρως από τα έργα που έχουν διασωθεί μέχρι τις μέρες μας. "Ας πάρουμε για παράδειγμα τα έρωτικά μυθιστορήματα, ένα αρχαίο λογοτεχνικό είδος που είχε εξαφανιστεί τον 3ο αιώνα μ.Χ. και ξαφνικά επανεμφανίστηκε την εποχή των Κομνηνών. Είναι γεγονός ότι τα τέσσερα τέτοια μυθιστορήματα που κατέχουμε¹⁰ είναι άπιστευτα βαρετά, αλλά τη στιγμή αυτή δεν μās άπασχολούν οι ελάχιστες λογοτεχνικές τους άρετές. Το σημαντικό έδω είναι πώς τέτοια έργα, που μοναδικό σκοπό είχαν να διασκεδάσουν και να γαργαλήσουν τις αισθήσεις, άρχισαν και πάλι να παράγονται, και μάλιστα από έπιφανείς ποιητές. "Οτι άπευθύνονταν σε μορφωμένο κοινό είναι προφανές από το ύφος που χρησιμοποιούσαν και από τις άφθονες λόγιες αναφορές που περιλάμβαναν, συχνά σαν παιχνίδι· και ότι είχαν κάποια έπιτυχία το δείχνει ο άριθμός των χειρογράφων στα όποια σώζονται τα μυθιστορήματα αυτά. "Ίσως να γράφονταν κυρίως για να άπαγγέλλονται προφορικά στα φιλολογικά σαλόνια που ξέρουμε πώς υπήρχαν στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τον 11ο και 12ο αιώνα. "Εν πάση περιπτώσει, ή σφαίρα της έκλεπτυσμένης λογοτεχνίας επεκτεινόταν: δεν ήταν πια περιορισμένη σε μια επαγγελματική «συντροφιά», αλλά κατέκτησε και ένα μέρος της άριστοκρατίας. Με το ίδιο πρίσμα μπορούμε ίσως να δούμε και τις προσπάθειες του Μιχαήλ Ψέλλου να προσφέρει τη γνώση με ευχάριστο τρόπο (συχνά σε στίχους) σε διάφορους ευγενείς. Φυσικά δεν πρέπει να φανταζόμαστε ότι αυτό το νέο κοινό ήταν μεγάλο ή ότι άπλωνόταν και πέρα από τα κύρια κέντρα, δηλαδή την Κωνσταντινούπολη και τη Θεσσαλονίκη. Μιάς και δημιουργήθηκε, όμως, δεν έπαψε να υπάρχει μέχρι το τέλος της αυτοκρατορίας, και αποτέλεσε το φόντο πάνω στο όποιο πρέπει να εξετάζεται ή κατοπινή βυζαντινή λογοτεχνία.

Ο τρίτος παράγοντας που πρέπει να λάβουμε υπόψη μας άφορα τη διαθεσιμότητα των βιβλίων. Στο Κεφάλαιο ζ' αναφερθήκαμε ήδη στο μεγάλο κόστος και τη σπανιότητα της περγαμηνής, του ύλικού πάνω στο όποιο συνήθως γράφονταν τα βυζαντινά βιβλία από τον 7ο αιώνα και με-

τά, όταν σταμάτησε ή εξαγωγή αίγυπτιακού παπύρου. "Εντούτοις, άκόμη και πριν από την άπώλεια της Αίγυπτου, τα βιβλία ήταν κάθε άλλο παρά φτηνά. Ο Ίωάννης Μόσχος αναφέρει μια ιστορία σχετικά με κάποιον πολύ φτωχό μοναχό στην Παλαιστίνη που ποθούσε να άποκτήσει μια Καινή Διαθήκη. Μολονότι ένας συνάδελφός του του πρόσφερε ένα αντίτυπο δωρεάν, εκείνος δεν ήθελε να το πάρει σαν δώρο και πήγε να έργαστεί ως έργάτης στα Ίεροσόλυμα. Πληρωνόταν 9 φόλλεις την ήμέρα, δεν ζόδευε σχεδόν τίποτε για φαγητό, και μετά από ένα διάστημα συγκέντρωσε 3 νομίσματα, που ήταν ή τιμή της Καινης Διαθήκης.¹¹ "Αφού 1 νόμισμα είχε 180 φόλλεις, ό μοναχός μας πρέπει να είχε διαθέσει 60 εργάσιμες ήμέρες, χωρίς να λογαριάσουμε τα έξοδα για τη διαβίωσή του. Σε σημερινές αντιστοιχίες ή τιμή της Καινης Διαθήκης θα ξεπερνούσε τις 120.000 δραχμές. Με το ίδιο ποσό, όπως είδαμε, μπορούσε κανείς να αγοράσει ένα γαϊδούρι, πράγμα που ίσως αποτέλεούσε τη σημαντικότερη επένδυση ενός φτωχού.

Η παραγωγή ενός μεγαλύτερου χειρογράφου, ιδίως κάποιου που έπρεπε να αντιγραφεί κατά παραγγελία, ήταν φυσικά πολύ πιο δαπανηρή υπόθεση. Για να αναφέρουμε ένα παράδειγμα, ό διάσημος Κλαρκιανός κώδικας του Πλάτωνα, που παραγγέλθηκε από τον Καισαρείας Άρέθρα, ένα χειρόγραφο καλής ποιότητας που αποτελείται από 424 φύλλα, κόστισε 13 νομίσματα για μεταγραφή και 8 για περγαμηνή, που ίσοδυναμούσαν με ήμερομίσθια δύο ετών ενός χειρώνακτα έργατη. Με σημερινές τιμές το κόστος θα ήταν κάπου 1.200.000 δραχμές. "Άσχετα με το πώς μετατρέπεται κανείς αυτούς τους άριθμούς σε σημερινές αντιστοιχίες, είναι φανερό ότι μόνο οι πλούσιοι και τα ιδρύματα με περιουσία είχαν τη δυνατότητα να κατέχουν βιβλία. "Ενας ευκατάστατος Βυζαντινός μπορεί να κατείχε, ως πούμε, είκοσι τόμους, ή και κάπως περισσότερους αν είχε τύχει να κληρονομήσει μια οικογενειακή βιβλιοθήκη που πλουτιζόταν από γενιά σε γενιά. Στο μοναστήρι που ίδρυσε τον 11ο αιώνα ό Μιχαήλ Άτταλειάτης, ένας πλούσιος και καλλιεργημένος άνθρωπος, δόθηκαν αρχικά 28 βιβλία, που αξιήθηκαν σε 79 μετά το θάνατο του ιδρυτή του.¹² Το διάσημο μοναστήρι του Άγίου Ίωάννου στην Πάτμο την εποχή της μεγαλύτερης άκμης του (1201) κατείχε 330 τόμους· αυτό όμως ήταν καρπός συλλογής βιβλίων επί έναν αιώνα και πλέον από ένα ίδρυμα που την εποχή εκείνη άριθμούσε 150 μοναχούς και είχε ευεργετηθεί επανειλημμένα από τους αυτοκράτορες.¹³

Το κόστος των βιβλίων σχετιζόταν άμεσα με τη χρήση για την όποία προορίζονταν. "Ενας επαγγελματίας λόγιος, που κατέφευγε συχνά στη λύ-

ση να τὰ δανειζεται, χρειάζοταν ἕναν ἀριθμὸ σχολικῶν κειμένων, καθὼς καὶ ἀντιπροσωπευτικὰ δείγματα ἀρχαίου πεζοῦ λόγου καὶ ποιήσης, μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα ἔπαιρνε ὅ,τι χρειάζοταν γιὰ νὰ πλουτίζει τὰ γραφτὰ του. Ὁ μέσος εὐπορος Βυζαντινὸς δὲν χρειάζοταν καὶ πολὺ τοὺς ἀρχαίους συγγραφεῖς· προτιμοῦσε κάποια πατερικὰ κείμενα ἢ ἴσως μερικὰ βιβλία ποὺ θὰ ἱκανοποιοῦσαν τὴν περιέργειά του γιὰ τὰ θαύματα τῆς Δημιουργίας, ὅπως ὁ *Φυσιολόγος*, ἓνα δυὸ χρονικά, καὶ φυσικὰ ἕναν ὄνειροκρίτη. Τὸ διάβασμα ἦταν μιὰ ἐπίπονη ὑπόθεση, ποὺ ἀποσκοποῦσε πρῶτα πρῶτα στὴ διδασχὴ, ὄχι στὴν εὐχαρίστηση. Ἄς δοῦμε τί συμβουλὲς δίνει ὁ Κεκαυμένος, ἕνας πρῶην στρατηγός, σὲ ἕναν νεαρὸ ποὺ προορίζεται γιὰ στρατιωτικὴ καριέρα:

«Ὅταν ἔχεις ἐλεύθερο χρόνον καὶ δὲν ἀσχολεῖσαι μὲ στρατιωτικὲς ὑποθέσεις διάβαζε βιβλία, τόσο ἱστορίες ὅσο καὶ τὰ βιβλία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Καὶ μὴν πείς: “τί ὠφελεῖται ὁ στρατιώτης ἀπὸ τὰ δόγματα καὶ τὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ βιβλία;” —γιατί θὰ ὠφεληθεῖς πολὺ. Καὶ ἂν προσέξεις καλὰ, θὰ κερδίσεις ἀπὸ αὐτὰ ὄχι μόνο δόγματα καὶ ψυχοφελεῖς ἱστορίες ἀλλὰ καὶ γνωμικὰ καὶ ἠθικὰ καὶ στρατιωτικὰ διδάγματα, ἀφοῦ ὅλη σχεδὸν ἡ Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη ἀφορᾷ στρατιωτικὲς ὑποθέσεις. Ἄλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη ὁ προσεχτικὸς ἀναγνώστης θὰ ὠφεληθεῖ μὲ ὄχι καὶ λίγα γνωμικὰ».

Καὶ πάλι: «Διάβαζε πολλὰ καὶ θὰ μάθεις πολλὰ. Καὶ ἂν δὲν καταλαβαίνεις, νὰ ἐπιμένεις· γιατί ἂν διαβάσεις τὸ βιβλίον πολλές φορές, θὰ σοῦ δώσει γνῶση ὁ Θεὸς καὶ θὰ τὸ κατανοήσεις». Καὶ σὲ ἄλλο σημεῖο:

«Ὅταν πάρεις ἕνα βιβλίον, διάβασέ το μόνος σου. Καὶ ὅταν διαβάσεις λίγο, μὴν ἀρχίσεις νὰ μετρᾷς τὰ φύλλα ἢ νὰ διαλέγεις τὰ σημεῖα ποὺ σοῦ φαίνονται καλύτερα καὶ νὰ διαβάζεις μόνο αὐτὰ, γιατί δὲν θὰ ὠφεληθεῖς. Ἄλλὰ ἀφοῦ ἀρχίσεις ἀπὸ τὸ ἐξώφυλλον, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ κειμένου, διάβασε τὸ βιβλίον ὥσπου νὰ μὴ μείνει οὔτε γράμμα, καὶ θὰ ὠφεληθεῖς πολὺ. Διότι εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ τοῦ ἐπιπόλαιου νὰ μὴ διαβάζει τὸ βιβλίον δυὸ καὶ τρεῖς φορές, ἀλλὰ νὰ ξεδιαλέγει λίγα, μόνο καὶ μόνο γιὰ φλυαρία».¹⁴

Θὰ ἦταν ἴσως λάθος νὰ φανταστοῦμε πὼς μιὰ ἰδιωτικὴ βιβλιοθήκη (ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴ βιβλιοθήκη ἐνὸς ἐπαγγελματία λογίου) διέφερε σημαντικὰ ὡς πρὸς τὸ περιεχόμενον ἀπὸ μιὰ μοναστηριακὴ. Αὐτὸ ἐπιβεβαιώνεται μὲ μιὰ ματιὰ στὴ διαθήκη τοῦ εὐγενοῦς ἀπὸ τὴν Καππαδοκία Εὐσταθίου Βοήλα (1059), ποὺ τὸν ἀναφέραμε καὶ σὲ ἄλλη εὐκαιρία. Ὁ Βοήλας ἔχτισε μιὰ ἰδιωτικὴ ἐκκλησία κάπου στὴν περιοχὴ τῆς Ἐδεσσας (Μεσοποταμία) καὶ τῆς ἀφιέρωσε διάφορα πολύτιμα σκεύη, καθὼς καὶ μιὰ ἀπροσδόκητα

μεγάλῃ συλλογῇ βιβλίων, ὀγδόντα συνολικά.¹⁵ Μιὰ ἀνάλυσή τους παρέχει ὁ ἐπόμενος πίνακας.

Βιβλικά	10
Λειτουργικά	33
Πατέρες	12
Πατέρες τῆς ἐρήμου	3
Ἐπὶ ἀποκρυφα (<i>Διαθήκη τῶν δώδεκα Πατριαρχῶν</i>)	1
Ἐπιτομολογία	4
Διάφορα χριστιανικά (<i>Πανδέκτης, Μέλισσα</i>)	2
Κανονικὸ Δίκαιο	3
Μὴ θρησκευτικὰ (1 νομικὸ· 1 ὄνειροκρίτης· 1 Αἰσώπος· 1 Γεώργιος Πισίδης· 2 χρονικά· 1 μυθιστόρημα τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου· 1 Ἀχιλλεύς Τάτιος· 1 γραμματικὴ· 1 <i>Περσικά</i>)	10
Ἀπροσδιόριστα	2

Πρόκειται γιὰ διαφοριστικὸν κατάλογο, καθὼς μάλιστα ἀφορᾷ μιὰ ἀρκετὰ ἀπομακρυσμένη ἐπαρχία. Δυστυχῶς δὲν ξέρουμε πὼς ἀπέκτησε ὁ Βοήλας αὐτὰ τὰ βιβλία. Μιὰ καὶ ὁ ἴδιος δὲν ἦταν καλλιεργημένος, εἶναι πιθανὸ νὰ ἐπρόκειτο γιὰ οἰκογενειακὴ βιβλιοθήκη, ποὺ συγκεντρώθηκε στὸ διάστημα κάμποσων γενεῶν καὶ ἀποσκοποῦσε κατὰ μέγα μέρος στὴν ἐξυπηρέτηση τῶν ἀναγκῶν ἐνὸς ἰδιωτικοῦ παρεκκλησίου. Κάποιος προηγούμενος Βοήλας ἴσως εἶχε πάει σχολεῖο στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, πράγμα ποὺ θὰ ἐξηγοῦσε τὴν ὑπαρξὴ τῆς γραμματικῆς, τοῦ Αἰσώπου καὶ τοῦ Ἀχιλλεῖα Τατίου. Ὑπάρχουν δύο ἀξιοσημεῖα χαρακτηριστικά. Πρῶτον, μὲ μοναδικὴ ἐξαιρέση τὸν Πισίδην (ἴσως τὸ ποίημά του *Ἐξαήμερον ἢ Κοσμογραφία*), οὔτε ἕνας «λόγιος» βυζαντινὸς συγγραφέας δὲν ἀντιπροσωπεύεται. Δεύτερον, οὐσιαστικὰ δὲν περιλαμβάνονταν πρόσφατα ἔργα, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴ *Μέλισσα* (μιὰ συλλογὴ διδασκτικῶν κειμένων ποὺ λέγεται ὅτι χρονολογεῖται ἀπὸ τὸν 11ο αἰῶνα) καὶ τὸ Βίο τοῦ ἀγίου Μιχαὴλ τοῦ Μαλεῖνου (πέθανε τὸ 961). Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀδιαφορία γιὰ τὴ σύγχρονη ἢ σχεδὸν σύγχρονη λογοτεχνία ἦταν ἀντιπροσωπευτικὴ τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ κόσμου.

Τότε λοιπὸν ποῖος ἦταν ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς λογοτεχνικῆς δημιουργίας; Χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία, κανεὶς βυζαντινὸς συγγραφέας δὲν ἔτρεφε φιλοδοξίες ἢ ψευδαισθήσεις ὅτι θὰ ἔφτανε τοὺς κλασικοὺς —δηλαδὴ ὄχι τόσο τοὺς κλασικοὺς τῆς Ἀρχαιότητος, ὅσο τοὺς χριστιανοὺς κλασικοὺς— τὸν Ἰωάννη τὸν Χρυσόστομο, τοὺς δύο Γρηγορίου, τὸν Μέγα Βασίλειον, τὸν Συνέσιον. Αὐτοὶ στέκονταν σὲ ἰδιαίτερον βᾶθρον καί, ἂν κρίνομε ἀπὸ τὸν ἀριθμὸ τῶν

χειρογράφων που σώζονται, διαβάζονταν περισσότερο από όποιοδήποτε άλλο συγγραφέα. Το καθήκον των μεταγενεστέρων ήταν να καταγράφουν τα πρόσφατα γεγονότα μην τύχει και σβηστούν από τη μνήμη (μια ανησυχία που εκφραζόταν συχνά), να καταγράφουν τους βίους των σύγχρονων αγίων, να κατανοούν καλά τα δόγματα και τα ηθικά διδάγματα των Πατέρων και να παράγουν κάθε είδους χρήσιμο έγχειρίδιο. Καθόλου παράξενο που οι Βυζαντινοί ενδιαφέρονταν πολύ λίγο για τη σύγχρονή τους λογοτεχνία και καθόλου για τη ζωή των συγγραφέων τους —γι' αυτό και γνωρίζουμε τόσο λίγα γι' αυτούς.¹⁵ Ήταν αρκετό να δηλωθεί στον τίτλο ότι ο δείνα ήταν διάκονος της Αγίας Σοφίας, ή επίσκοπος των Συνάδων, ή πρωτοσπαθάρης, με άλλα λόγια να τοποθετηθεί στην ιεραρχία.¹⁶ Ο ρόλος της «έκλεπτυσμένης» λογοτεχνίας, όπως πιθανόν να έγινε φανερό στο κεφάλαιο για την εκπαίδευση, περιοριζόταν στη ρητορική επίδειξη. Φαίνεται πως μεγάλο μέρος αυτής της καλλιτισμένης λογοτεχνίας προοριζόταν για προφορική απαγγελία, και όχι μόνο οι λόγοι και τα κηρύγματα αλλά και επιστολές, Βίοι αγίων γραμμένοι σε «ύψηλό» ύφος, ίσως ακόμη και κεφάλαια από ιστορίες. Μετά το τέλος της απαγγελίας, και αφού ο ρήτορας χειροκροτούνταν από τους φίλους του, το κείμενο μπορούσε να ξεχαστεί, εκτός αν ο ίδιος ο συγγραφέας ή κάποιος από τη συντροφιά του έμπαινε στον κόπο να το αντιγράψει ως αξιομίμητο κείμενο. 'Αλλά και αν ακόμη αντιγραφόταν, δεν κυκλοφορούσε εύρως: πολλά τέτοια κείμενα σώζονται σε ένα και μοναδικό χειρόγραφο. Σ' αυτό όφείλεται ο «άχρονος» χαρακτήρας της βυζαντινής λογοτεχνίας, με την έννοια ότι οι συγγραφείς κάθε γενιάς δεν έπωφελούνταν από την πείρα και τις ιδέες της προηγούμενης, αλλά μάλλον βρίσκονταν σε μια διαρκή σχέση με τα μακρινά τους πρότυπα. Αυτό αποδεικνύεται, όπως γνωρίζει κάθε φοιτητής της βυζαντινής φιλολογίας, από το γεγονός ότι, αν ένα κείμενο δεν αποδίδεται με βεβαιότητα σε κάποιο συγγραφέα που να μπορούμε να τον αναγνωρίσουμε, και αν δεν έχει καμία ξεκάθαρη ιστορική αναφορά, είναι σχεδόν αδύνατο να χρονολογηθεί. Τα παραδείγματα είναι άφθονα και συχνά μās φέρνουν σε δύσκολη θέση —και δεν αναφέρομαι μόνο σε απομιμήσεις, όπως οι Ψευδολοικιάνειοι διάλογοι ή οι Λεπτίνειοι λόγοι, που από παλιά θεωρούνταν έργα του Αιλίου Αριστείδη (2ος αιώνας μ.Χ.) αλλά τώρα είναι γνωστό πως γράφτηκαν από τον Θωμά Μάγιστρο (14ος αιώνας).¹⁷ Επιστολές του Ίσιδώρου Πηλουσιώτη (5ος αιώνας) αποδόθηκαν από φημισμένο έρευνητή στον πατριάρχη Φώτιο (9ος αιώνας), ενώ άμφισβητείται ακόμη αν ή ελληνική παραλλαγή του Βαβλαάμ και Ίωάσαφ γράφτηκε από τον Ίωάννη Δαμασκηνό (8ος αιώνας) ή, όπως φαίνεται

πιό πιθανό, είναι έργο του 11ου αιώνα. 'Ακόμη και ένα ιστορικό κείμενο, το *Εις την άλωσιν της Θεσσαλονίκης* του Ίωάννη Καμενιάτη, υποστηρίχτηκε ότι γράφτηκε όχι λίγο μετά το 904, όπως πιστεύουν όλοι, αλλά στις αρχές του 15ου αιώνα.¹⁸ Τέτοια άβεβαιότητα δεν θα ήταν δυνατή αν το ύφος της βυζαντινής λογοτεχνίας εμφάνιζε μια συνεπή εξέλιξη.

Μετά από τις προκαταρκτικές αυτές παρατηρήσεις θα εξετάσουμε τρία λογοτεχνικά είδη, καθένα από τα όποια άφορā διαφορετικό γλωσσικό επίπεδο. Ίσως χρειάζεται να ζητήσουμε συγγνώμη γιατί από τη θεώρηση αυτή άπουσιάζει ή λειτουργική ποίηση. Κανείς δεν μπορεί να άρνηθεί πως οι ύμνοι του Ρωμανού του Μελωδοῦ, πρώτα άπ' όλα, του Κοσμά Μαΐουμαῦ, του Άνδρέα Κρήτης και του Ίωάννη του Δαμασκηνού κατά δεύτερο λόγο, δείχνουν μια άπιτυχία στην έκφραση και ένα βάθος συναισθημάτων που γενικά άπουσιάζουν σχεδόν από όλα τα άλλα βυζαντινά ποιητικά έργα· εντούτοις θα ήταν παραπλανητικό αν τους άντιμετωπίζαμε μέσα από την ποιητική όπτική και μόνο. 'Η κατανόηση της ύμνογραφίας άπαιτεί κάποια γνώση του λειτουργικού της ρόλου, της μουσικής της δομής και του σημειτικού της παρελθόντος· πάνω άπ' όλα, άπαιτεί ένα είδος άντιμετώπισης που ο σύγχρονος άναγνώστης δεν είναι πιθανό να διαθέτει.

Θά εξετάσουμε πρώτα την ιστοριογραφία, χωρίς άμφιβολία ένα από τα μεγαλύτερα άπιτεύγματα των βυζαντινών γραμμάτων. Δεν θα μιλήσουμε έδῶ για τις χρονογραφίες, που ήδη τις συζητήσαμε στο Κεφάλαιο Γ'. 'Η (ίστορία) άνηκε σε διαφορετικό είδος: γραφόταν στα άρχαία ελληνικά, μιμούνταν άρχαία πρότυπα και παρείχε μια συσχετική μάλλον, και όχι άπλῶς χρονολογική έκθεση των γεγονότων. Ζητούσε να έξηγήσει το πῶς και το γιατί, ικαθῶς πράγματι είναι βουβό και χωρίς περιεχόμενο το σώμα της ίστορίας αν στερείται τις αίτιες των πράξεων».¹⁹ Άποτελούσε επίσης κλάδο της ρητορικής, καθῶς συχνά διολίσθαινε προς τον έπαινο ή τον ψόγο, και συνήθως περιλάμβανε τόσο την παράθεση φανταστικῶν δημηγοριῶν ὅσο και έθνογραφικές παρεκβάσεις. Ίσως το πιο άξιοσημείωτο χαρακτηριστικό της βυζαντινής ιστοριογραφίας άποτελεῖ ή συνέχειά της: ενώ οι περισσότερες ίστορίες του 4ου και του 5ου αιώνα έχουν έξαφανιστεί, εντούτοις έχουμε μια σχεδόν άδιάσπαστη συνέχεια από τον 6ο αιώνα μέχρι τον 15ο. 'Ο Προκόπιος, που περιέγραψε τους πολέμους του Ίουστινιανού, συνεχίστηκε από τον Άγαθία για τα χρόνια 552-559, τον Μένανδρο τον Προτήκτορα (που σώζεται μόνο σε άποσπάσματα) για το διάστημα 559-582 και τον Θεοφύλακτο Σιμοκάττη για την περίοδο 582-602. 'Η καταστρεπτική βασιλεία του Φωκά σημειώνει μια διακοπή, αλλά ή ίστορία συνεχίστηκε άργότερα από τον πατριάρχη Νικηφόρο, που κάλυψε

τήν περίοδο 602-769. Για τὸν ἐπόμενο μισὸ αἰῶνα, μέχρι τὸ 813, ἐξαριτιόμαστε ἐντελῶς ἀπὸ τὸν Θεοφάνη, ἀλλὰ ἡ ἱστορία ἀναβιώνει μὲ τὸν Γενέσιο (813-886) καὶ τοὺς Συνεχιστὲς τοῦ Θεοφάνη (813-961), ποὺ ἀκολουθοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸν Λέοντα τὸν Διάκονο (959-976) καὶ τὸν Μιχαῆλ Ψελλό (976-1078), τὸν ὁποῖο ἐπικαλύπτουν λίγο ὁ Μιχαῆλ Ἀτταλειάτης (1034-1079) καὶ ὁ Νικηφόρος Βρυένιος (1070-1079). Για τὴν ἐποχὴ τῶν Κομνηνῶν ἔχουμε τὴν Ἀλεξιάδα τῆς Ἄννας Κομνηνῆς (1069-1118), ποὺ συνεχίζεται ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰωάννη Κίνναμο (1118-1176) καὶ τὸν Νικήτα Χωνιάτη (1118-1206)· γιὰ τὴν αὐτοκρατορία τῆς Νίκαιας τὸν Γεώργιο Ἀκροπολίτη (1203-1261)· γιὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῶν Παλαιολόγων τὸν Γεώργιο Παχυμέρη (1261-1308), τὸν Νικηφόρο Γρηγοῦρα (1204-1359) καὶ τὰ ἀπομνημονεύματα τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Ἰωάννη Καντακουζηνοῦ (1320-1356)· τέλος τὸν Λαόνικο Χαλκοκονδύλη (1298-1463) καὶ τὸν ἐγκωμιαστὴ τῶν τούρκων κατακτητῶν Μιχαῆλ Κριτόβουλο (1451-1467).

Φυσικὰ ὅλοι αὐτοὶ οἱ ἱστορικοὶ δὲν εἶναι τῆς ἴδιας ἀξίας, καὶ ὀρισμένοι, ὅπως ὁ πατριάρχης Νικηφόρος, δὲν ἔκαναν σχεδὸν τίποτε ἄλλο ἀπὸ παράφραση χρονικῶν σὲ ἀρχαϊκὴ γλῶσσα. Ὡστόσο πολλοὶ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς ἦταν ὄχι μόνον ἐπιτυχημένοι συγγραφεῖς ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ βρισκόνταν μέσα στὰ πράγματα καὶ γνώριζαν τὰ γεγονότα ποὺ περιέγραφαν ἀπὸ πρῶτο χέρι, ἐνῶ ἀρκετοὶ ἦταν αὐτοκράτορες ἢ μέλη τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς οἰκογένειας. Αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονός δίνει στὴ βυζαντινὴ ἱστοριογραφία ἕνα κύρος καὶ μιὰ ἀμεσότητα ποὺ δὲν θὰ τὰ διέθετε ἂν εἶχε ἀφεθεῖ σὲ ἐπαγγελματίες λογίους.

Ἀπὸ πολλὰς ἀπόψεις ὁ μεγαλύτερος βυζαντινὸς ἱστορικός καὶ ὀπωσδήποτε ὁ πιὸ γνωστὸς σήμερα εἶναι ὁ Προκόπιος ἀπὸ τὴν Καισάρεια, ἂν καὶ τὸν θαυμάζουμε πιθανὸν περισσότερο γιὰ τὸν εὐρὺ ὀρίζοντα τῆς διήγησής του, τὴν ἀντικειμενικότητα καὶ τὴν ἀκρίβειά του, παρὰ γιὰ τὸ βάθος τῶν ἀπόψεών του ἢ τίς καθαρὰ λογοτεχνικὲς του ἀρετές. Στὸ ὕφος καὶ τὴ μέθοδο εἶχε ὡς πρότυπο τὸν Θουκυδίδη, χωρὶς ὅμως νὰ μιμεῖται καὶ τὴν περίπλοκη γραφὴ τοῦ Ἀθηναίου. Ἦταν ἐκλεκτικὸς καὶ ἀπαιτητικὸς συγγραφέας καὶ ὀρισμένους φορές —ὅπως ὅταν περιγράφει τὰ τελευταῖα στάδια τῆς ἀντίστασης τῶν Ὀστρογόθων στὴν Ἰταλία— ἦταν σὲ θέση νὰ μεταδώσει μιὰ αἰσθησιὴ τραγικοῦ μεγαλείου. Σὲ ἄλλα θέματα ἡ ἐπιτυχία του ἦταν μικρότερη. Οἱ παρεκβάσεις του δὲν ἔρχονται πάντα στὴν κατάλληλη στιγμή, ὅπως ὅταν διακόπτει τὴ διήγησι τῆς πρώιμης περσικῆς ἱστορίας μὲ ἕνα γελοῖο ἀνέκδοτο γιὰ ἕνα ἕστρακο ποὺ «κολυμποῦσε» καὶ καταδιώχτηκε ἀπὸ ἕναν καρχαρία,²⁰ ἐνῶ οἱ χαρακτηρισμοὶ του δὲν εἶναι πάντοτε πετυχημένοι. Ἀκόμη καὶ στὴν περίπτωσι τοῦ στρατηγοῦ Βελισσα-

ρίου, τὸν ὁποῖο εἶχε ἀκολουθήσει ὡς σύμβουλος καὶ γραμματέας σὲ κάμποσες ἐκστρατεῖες καὶ θὰ τὸν γνώριζε πολὺ καλά, δὲν καταφέρνει νὰ μᾶς παρουσιάσει μιὰ ζωντανὴ προσωπογραφία.²¹ Ἡ στάσι τῆς ἀφ' ὕψηλοῦ θεώρησις ποὺ υἰοθετεῖ στὸ Ἰνὲρ τῶν πολέμων καὶ ὁ φαινομενικὸς σκεπτικισμὸς του ἀπέναντι στὸ χριστιανισμὸ ἀποτελοῦν σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ χαρακτηριστικὰ λογοτεχνικοῦ ὕφους, ἂν καὶ μπορούμε νὰ ἀμφιβάλουμε ἂν ἦταν μόνον αὐτό. Σὲ ἕνα ἔργο ποὺ προοριζόταν γιὰ εὐρεία κυκλοφορία κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ δεσποτικὴ διακυβέρνησι τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ, ἡ «ἀπόστασι» ἦταν ἡ πιὸ σώφρων στάσι ποὺ μπορούσε νὰ υἰοθετηθεῖ ἕνας ἄνθρωπος σὰν τὸν Προκόπιο, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶχε σταθερὲς πολιτικὲς ἀπόψεις, ποὺ δὲν συνέπιπταν μὲ τίς ἀπόψεις τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα. Ἀλλὰ ἀκόμη καὶ στοὺς Πολέμους ἡ ἀποδοκιμασία του γιὰ τὸν Ἰουστινιανὸ διαφαίνεται πίσω ἀπὸ τίς λέξεις. Ὅσο γιὰ τὴ θρησκευτικὴ του στάσι, ἀξίζει νὰ ἐξετάσουμε ἕνα χωρὶο του ποὺ ἀναφέρεται συχνά, σχετικὰ μὲ τίς δογματικὲς διαφορὲς ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ὀρθοδόξους καὶ τοὺς μονοφυσίτες:

«Ἄν καὶ γνωρίζω καλὰ τίς ἐκατέρωθεν διαφορὲς, θὰ ἀναφερθῶ σ' αὐτὲς πολὺ λίγο. Διότι θεωρῶ δεῖγμα ἀνόητης παραφροσύνης νὰ διερευνᾶται ἡ φύσι τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὶα δηλαδὴ μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι. Ἀφοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, κατὰ τὴ γνώμη μου, οὔτε τὰ ἀνθρώπινα πράγματα δὲν κατανοεῖ ἐπακριβῶς, πόσο μᾶλλον ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἀφοροῦν τὴ φύσι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐγὼ λοιπὸν θὰ σιωπήσω γι' αὐτὰ χωρὶς κίνδυνο, μόνον καὶ μόνον γιὰ νὰ μὴν πάψουν νὰ γίνονται πιστευτὰ ὅσα τώρα τιμῶνται. Καὶ δὲν θὰ πῶ τίποτε ἄλλο γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ παρὰ ὅτι εἶναι πανάγαθος καὶ ὅτι τὰ πάντα βρισκονται στὴν ἐξουσία του. Ἀλλὰ ἄς λέει ὁ καθένας, εἴτε ἱερέας εἴτε ἰδιώτης, ὅ,τι νομίζει πὼς γνωρίζει σχετικὰ μὲ αὐτά».²²

Ἡ προσκόλλησι στὰ κλασικὰ πρότυπα δὲν ἀρκεῖ βέβαια γιὰ νὰ ἐξηγήσει αὐτὴ τὴν προσεχτικὰ διατυπωμένη ἀλλὰ καὶ παράξενα διαφορούμενη δῆλωσι. Μήπως ἐννοεῖ ὁ Προκόπιος ὅτι ἡ ἀνάλυσι τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου (ἢ μονοφυσιτικοῦ) δόγματος γιὰ τὴ φύσι τοῦ Θεοῦ θὰ κατέληγε στὸν ἐξουτελισμὸ του; Καὶ τί εἰδους κίνδυνο θέλει νὰ ἀποφύγει;

Μὲ τὸν Προκόπιο ὑπάρχει ἕνα χρόνιο πρόβλημα, δηλαδὴ πὼς ἕνας ἄνθρωπος τῶν δικῶν του ἀναμφισβήτητων ἱκανοτήτων καὶ τῆς φαινομενικῆς του ἀκεραιότητος συνθέσει μέσα σὲ δέκα χρόνια τρία ἔργα ἐντελῶς διαφορετικοῦ πνεύματος: τὸ ἀντικειμενικὸ καὶ μεγαλόπρεπο Ἰνὲρ τῶν πολέμων, τὰ ὕβριστικὰ Ἀνέκδοτα καὶ τὸ ξεδιάντροπα ἐγκωμιαστικὸ Περί κτισμάτων. Ὑποθέτουμε πὼς τὸ τελευταῖο, ποὺ περιγράφει μὲ ὑπερβολικὸς ἐπαίνους τὸ τεράστιο οἰκοδομικὸ πρόγραμμα τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ, γράφτηκε μὲ ἀφορμὴ κάποια προαγωγὴ ἢ ἄλλη εὐνοια ποὺ δέχτηκε ὁ συγ-

γραφέας από τον αυτοκράτορα. Ἄλλα τί νά ποῦμε γιά τὰ Ἐνέκδοτα; Ἀφοῦ δὲν σκόπευε νά τὰ ἐκδώσει, τὸ πιθανότερο εἶναι πὼς ἐκφράζουν πιστὰ τὶς προσωπικὲς ἀπόψεις τοῦ Προκοπίου, ἢ ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει τὶς ἀπόψεις πού εἶχε στὴ συγκεκριμένη στιγμή τῆς καριέρας του. Ἐντούτοις, ἀπὸ τὰ τρία αὐτὰ ἔργα, τὰ Ἐνέκδοτα εἶναι ἐκεῖνο πού ἔχουμε τὴ μεγαλύτερη δυσκολία νά τὸ ἀποδεχτοῦμε. Μᾶς διασκεδάζει ἡ σκαμπρόζικη διήγηση τῶν νεανικῶν χρόνων τῆς Θεοδώρας, ἀλλὰ μᾶς ἐνοχλεῖ ἡ ἀσταμάτητη ἐπίθεση ἐναντίον ὅλων τῶν ἐκφάνσεων τῆς πολιτικῆς τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ Βελισάριος, πού στὸ Ὑπὲρ τῶν πολέμων παρουσιάζεται ὡς ἄνδρας θαρραλέος, ἀποφασιστικὸς ἀλλὰ καὶ μετριόφρων, ἐδῶ παριστάνεται ὡς ἀξιολύπητο ἀνθρωπάκι. Πιὸ παράξενη ἀπὸ ὅλα εἶναι ἡ προφανὴς πεποίθηση τοῦ συγγραφέα, πού δηλώνεται χωρὶς ἔχνος εἰρωνείας, ὅτι ὁ αυτοκράτορας ἦταν δαίμονας μὲ ἀνθρώπινη μορφή. Εἶναι ἀπίθανο νά τὸ ἔλεγε γιά ἀστεῖο, καὶ μένουμε μὲ τὴν ἀπορία μήπως ὁ Προκοπίος, κάτω ἀπὸ τὴ μάσκα τοῦ καλλιεργημένου σκεπτικιστῆ, ἦταν κι αὐτὸς ἐξίσου δεισιδαίμων μὲ τοὺς περισσότερους ἀπὸ τοὺς συγχρόνους του.

Μετὰ τὸν Προκόπιο παρατηρεῖται μιὰ ἐμφανὴς πτώση στὴν ἱστορικὴ συγγραφὴ. Ὁ διάδοχός του Ἀγαθίας, ἐπαγγελματίας δικηγόρος ἀλλὰ καὶ ποιητής, δὲν εἶχε πείρα ἀπὸ δημόσιες ὑποθέσεις, οὔτε τάχθηκε νά ὑπηρετήσῃ τὴν ἀντικειμενικότητα τῆς ἱστορίας. Θεωροῦσε ὅτι ἡ ἱστορία συγγένευε μὲ τὴν ποίηση καὶ ὅτι βασικὰ ἐξυπηρετοῦσε ἕναν ἠθικὸ σκοπὸ.²³ Μιὰ περαιτέρω κατάρπωση γίνεται φανερὴ στὸ ἔργο τοῦ Θεοφύλακτου Σιμοκάττη, πού τὸ χαρακτηρίζει ὁ πομπώδης ἀποφθεγματισμὸς. Μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὸν ἐπῆλθε μακροχρόνια διακοπὴ τῆς ἱστοριογραφίας. Ἡ ἀναγέννησή της (ἀφήνοντας κατὰ μέρος τὴν ὄχι καὶ πολὺ πετυχημένη προσπάθεια τοῦ πατριάρχη Νικηφόρου) ἔπρεπε νά περιμένει μέχρι τὰ μέσα τοῦ 10ου αἰώνα, τότε πού ἡ προστασία τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Πορφυρογέννητου ὀδήγησε στὴ συγγραφὴ δύο ἱστοριῶν πού ξεκινοῦσαν ἀπὸ τὸ 813, δηλαδή ἀπὸ τὸ σημεῖο πού σταμάτησε τὴ χρονολογία του ὁ Θεοφάνης. Οἱ ἀνώνυμοι Συνεχιστὲς τοῦ Θεοφάνη ἔχουν κάποια ἐπιφανειακά δάνεια ἀπὸ κλασικὰ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ πρῶιμα βυζαντινὰ πρότυπα, καὶ ἀξίζουν κάποιον ἔπαινο γιὰ τὴν παρέστησαν τοὺς εἰκονομάχους αυτοκράτορες μὲ χρώματα ὄχι ἀποκλειστικὰ μαῦρα, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὰ ἐννέα δέκατα μαῦρα καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἕνα δέκατο γκριζα. Ἄν θεωρήσουμε πὼς κάποια σπέρματα ἀνθρωπισμοῦ ἐμφανίζονται σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἐλάχιστη παραχώρηση πρὸς τὴν ἀντικειμενικότητα, θὰ πρέπει νά ὑπενθυμίσουμε ὅτι οἱ Συνεχιστὲς κυριαρχοῦνταν τόσο ἀπὸ θεολογικὲς ὅσο καὶ ἀπὸ δυναστικὲς προκαταλήψεις. Ἦταν αὐλικοί

ἱστορικοί, ἐπιφορτισμένοι νά διαιωνίσουν σέ ἀνεκτὸ πεζὸ λόγο τὴν ἐπίσημη ἐκδοχὴ τῶν γεγονότων.

Πηδώντας ἄλλον ἕναν αἰῶνα καὶ προσπερνώντας τὴ σοβαρὴ Ἱστορία τοῦ Λέοντα τοῦ Διακόνου, βρισκόμαστε μπροστὰ σὲ ἕνα ἀριστοῦργημα πού ἡ πρωτοτυπία του μᾶς ἐκπλήσσει ἀκόμη περισσότερο, καθὼς δὲν ἐξηγεῖται ἀπὸ κάποια προηγούμενη ἐξέλιξη. Ἡ Χρονολογία τοῦ Μιχαὴλ Ψελλοῦ δὲν μπορεῖ καν νά καταταχτεῖ σὲ καθορισμένο εἶδος, μιὰ καὶ δὲν εἶναι τόσο ἱστορία ὅσο προσωπικὰ ἀπομνημονεύματα. Κατὰ παράδοση ὁ ἴδιος ὁ ἱστορικὸς παρέμενε στὸ παρασκήνιο: ἀφοῦ παρουσίαζε τὸν ἑαυτό του στὸν πρόλογο (γιὰ παράδειγμα: «Ὀνομάζομαι Ἀγαθίας, κατάγομαι ἀπὸ τὴ Μύρινα, ὁ πατέρας μου λεγόταν Μεμνόνιος»), καὶ τὰ παρόμοια), μποροῦσε, ἂν χρειαζόταν, νά ἐμφανίζεται σποραδικὰ γιά νά πῆ ὅτι εἶχε δεῖ τοῦτο ἢ ἐκεῖνο μὲ τὰ ἴδια του τὰ μάτια. Ὁ Ψελλὸς ὅμως κάθε ἄλλο: συνεχῶς φλυαρεῖ γιά τὸν ἑαυτό του, γιά τὶς σπουδὲς του, τὰ πνευματικὰ του ἐπιτεύγματα, τὴν ἀποχώρησή του σὲ μοναστήρι, τὴ γοητεία πού ἐξάσκησε σὲ μιὰ σειρά αυτοκράτορες καὶ οὔτω καθεξῆς. Οἱ πολεμικὲς ἐπιχειρήσεις, τὸ συνηθισμένο θέμα τῶν ἱστοριῶν, δὲν τὸν ἐνδιαφέρουν ιδιαίτερα καὶ συχνὰ τὶς παρακάμπτει. Εἶναι ἐνδεικτικὸ, λόγου χάρι, ὅτι κατορθώνει νά διηγηθεῖ τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ Βασιλείου Β' χωρὶς νά ἀναφέρει οὔτε μιὰ φορὰ τὴν ὑποταγὴ τῆς Βουλγαρίας. Ἐκεῖνο πού πραγματικὰ τὸν ἐνδιαφέρει εἶναι τὸ κουτσομπολιὸ τῆς αὐλῆς καὶ ἀνάω ἀπὸ ὅλα ἡ περιγραφή τῶν ἀνθρώπινων κινήτρων καθὼς καὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπινου χαρακτήρα. Ἡ Χρονολογία ἀποτελεῖ ἀληθινὸ προσωπογραφικὸ πανόραμα. Ἐπιπλέον δείχνει τοὺς χαρακτήρες καθὼς ἀλλάζουν. Ὁ Βασίλειος Β' (τὸν ὁποῖο δὲν εἶχε γνωρίσει ὁ Ψελλὸς) κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν πίεση τῶν γεγονότων ἐξελισσεται ἀπὸ φιλήδοιο σὲ αὐστηρό, φιλύποπτο καὶ ὀξύθυμο ἄνθρωπο. Μποροῦμε εὐκολὰ νά τὸν φανταστοῦμε ντυμένο μὲ ἀπλά ροῦχα, νά μιλάει πιὸ πολὺ σὰν χωριάτης παρὰ σὰν εὐγενῆς, νά στρίβει τὸ ἀραιὸ του γένι ἢ νά βάζει τὰ χέρια στοὺς γοφούς. Ὁ Ρωμανὸς Γ', τὸν ὁποῖο ὁ Ψελλὸς ἀπεχθανόταν, ἀλλάζει ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἀρρώστιας. Ὁ ὠραῖος ἀλλὰ ἄξεστος Μιχαὴλ Δ', τὸν ὁποῖο ἡ ὠριμὴ αυτοκράτειρα Ζωὴ πῆρε ὡς ἐραστή, γίνεται σοβαρὸς καὶ εὐσυνειδητὸς ἡγεμόνας μόλις ἀνεβαίνει στὸ θρόνο. Κάθε σημαντικὸ χαρακτήρα πού εἰσάγει τὸν ἀποτυπώνει στὴ μνήμη μας τόσο μὲ ἠθικὴ ὅσο καὶ μὲ φυσικὴ περιγραφή: τὸν κοῦφο Κωνσταντῖνο Η' (μαθαίνουμε μὲ ἐκπληξὴ ὅτι ἦταν καὶ ἐξαιρετικὸς μάγειρος), τὴ Ζωὴ καὶ τὴ Θεοδώρα, τὸν εὐνοῦχο Ἰωάννη πού σκόρπιζε τὸ φόβο περισσότερο ὅταν ἔπιπε παρὰ ὅταν ἦταν ξεμέθυστος, τὸν ροδοκόκκινο καὶ εὐθυμο Κωνσταντῖνο Θ' τὸν Μονομάχο, καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους. Ὅσο γιά ψυχολογικὲς παρατηρήσεις, ἀρκεῖ

νά διαβάσουμε την παράγραφο που περιγράφει την ένοχη άποστροφή με την οποία ο Μιχαήλ Δ', καθώς πιά υπέφερε από επιληψία, έβλεπε την αυτοκρατορική του σύζυγο.²⁴

Φυσικά ο Ψελλός έχει κλασικά πρότυπα, και μās διευκολύνει άπαριθμώντας τα ό ίδιος (Δημοσθένης, Ίσοκράτης, Αΐλιος Άριστειδής, Πλούταρχος κτλ.).²⁵ Τά ίδια όμως πρότυπα είχαν στή διάθεσή τους και ό Κωνσταντίνος ό Πορφυρογέννητος και οι Συνεχιστές του Θεοφάνη και τά χρησιμοποιήσαν όπως νόμιζαν καλύτερα. Τό πρόβλημα δέν βρίσκεται εδώ, αλλά πιό πολύ στό ότι ό Ψελλός δείχνει μιá ευαισθησία και μιá διορατική παρατηρητικότητα που προηγουμένως έλειπαν. "Αν δέν άποδώσουμε αυτά τά χαρακτηριστικά άποκλειστικά στην προσωπική του ιδιοφυΐα, τότε πρέπει νά ψάξουμε για μιá ευρύτερη έρμηνεία, που ίσως βρίσκεται στην ανάπτυξη μιās τάξης άστών στους όποιους ανήκε και ό Ίδιος ό Ψελλός. Στην πραγματικότητα δέν ήταν μόνος· και μολοντί κανένας από τους συγχρόνους του δέν άφησε έργα παρόμοιας ποιικιλίας, έντούτοις δέν είναι δύσκολο νά διακρίνουμε και σ' έκεινα κάποιες ανάλαμπές αυτού που δέν μπορεί παρά νά όνομαστεί κοσμικό (μη θρησκευτικό) πνεύμα. Παράδειγμα τό άξιοπρόσεχτο ποίημα στό όποιο ό Χριστόφορος ό Μυτιληναΐος σατιρίζει τή συλλογή λειψάνων άμφίβολης γνησιότητας,²⁶ ποίημα που, παρεμπιπτόντως, κάποτε θεωρούνταν έργο τής είκονομαχικής περιόδου.

Άποτελεί θλιβερό σχόλιο για τά γούστα των Βυζαντινών τό γεγονός ότι ή *Χρονογραφία* του Ψελλού διασώθηκε σέ ένα και μοναδικό χειρόγραφο. Πάντως σίγουρα τή χρησιμοποιήσαν, άκόμη και τής έκλεψαν όλόκληρα κομμάτια, μεταγενέστεροι ιστορικοί, κυρίως ό Βρυέννιος, ή Άννα Κομνηνή και ό Ζωναράς. Και πρέπει νά πούμε ότι μετά τον Ψελλό δέν χάθηκε ή ποιότητα τής προσωπικής παρατήρησης και τής ζωντανής άπεικόνισης του χαρακτήρα. Αυτές οι ιδιότητες είναι όλοφάνερές στην Άλεξιάδα, έργο συχνά κακόπιστο, που ώστόσο δέν αποτελεί μόνο προϊόν λεπτομερούς έρευνας, αλλά είναι επίσης ζωντανό και γεμάτο από ψυχολογική διορατικότητα. Είναι επίσης εμφανείς στη σημαντική Ίστορία του Νικήτα Χωνιάτη. Και είναι ταιριαστό που τό τέλος τής ήγεμονικής έποχής του Βυζαντίου (γιατί ό Νικήτας υπήρξε μάρτυρας τής καταστροφής του 1204) καταγράφηκε από ένα συγγραφέα που συνδύαζε όλα τά παραδοσιακά τερτίπια τής έντεχνης ρητορικής με καινοφανή άνθρωπιά, ευρύνοια και σκεπτικισμό.²⁷

Τό δεύτερο δείγμα μας άφορά τήν άγιολογία που, όπως έχει ήδη αναφερθεί, αντιπροσωπεύει ίσως τό πλουσιότερο λογοτεχνικό είδος τής βυζαντινής φιλολογίας. Κάτω από τον τίτλο τής άγιολογίας συνήθως συγκεν-

τρώνεται ένα εύρο φάσμα κειμένων, με κοινό χαρακτηριστικό τό γεγονός ότι αναφέρονται σέ προσωπικότητες για τις όποιες υπάρχει κάποια μνεία στό λειτουργικά βιβλία, τόσο χριστιανούς άγιους όσο και βιβλικά πρόσωπα: βιογραφίες άγιων, μικρές διηγήσεις, ιστορίες μαρτυριών, μεταθανάτιων θαυμάτων, άνεύρεσης και μεταφοράς λειψάνων, ιστορίες για εικόνες, άποκαλύψεις κτλ. Ό τρόπος τής παρουσίασης ποικίλλει πολύ, όπως και τό γλωσσικό επίπεδο. Τά πιό ένδιαφέροντα έργα, πάντως, είναι γραμμένα στα συνηθισμένα «έκκλησιαστικά» ελληνικά.

Ή παλιότερη μορφή χριστιανικής άγιολογίας είναι τό *Μαρτύριον*, δηλαδή ή διήγηση τής δίκης και του θανάτου ενός μάρτυρα, αλλά τό είδος αυτό ανήκε ήδη στό παρελθόν όταν άρχισε ή βυζαντινή περίοδος. Οι δύο κύριες μορφές που θα μās άπασχολήσουν είναι ή μικρή διήγηση και ό πλήρης Βίος. Και τά δύο έμφανίστηκαν σχεδόν ταυτόχρονα στό περιβάλλον του αίγυπτιακού μοναχισμού, πράγμα που δέν ήταν τυχαίο άφοϋ ό μοναχός ήταν ό διάδοχος του μάρτυρα. Άπλές ιστορίες για τό πώς ό πατήρ Πατερμούθιος ταξίδευε στον άέρα και μπορούσε νά περνάει μέσα από κλειστές πόρτες, πώς ό πατήρ Έλλης διέσχισε ένα ποτάμι στην πλάτη ενός κροκόδειλου, πώς ό άγιος Μακάριος γιάτρεψε τά μικρά μιās ύαινας, κυκλοφορούσαν από στόμα σέ στόμα και μετά συγκεντρώνονταν σέ βιβλία που όνομάζονταν *πατερικά* ή *γεροντικά*. Στο *Κεφάλαιο Ε'* αναφέραμε μερικές από τις γνωστότερες τέτοιες συλλογές. Έκτός από τήν περιγραφή των υπερφυσικών κατορθωμάτων των μοναχών, οι διηγήσεις τόνιζαν διάφορα ήθικά διδάγματα, τά άξιωμαμόνευτα λόγια και τή συγκριμένη άσκηση (*έργασία*) του ενός ή του άλλου άσκητή. Μια και οι ρίζες τής λογοτεχνίας αυτής βρίσκονταν στον προφορικό λόγο, ήταν φυσικό νά υπάρχουν διακυμάνσεις και έπαναλήψεις: ίδιες ή παρόμοιες ιστορίες αναφέρονταν για διαφορετικούς άγιους. Ή χρυσή έποχή των πατερικών αρχίζει στό τέλος του 4ου και φτάνει μέχρι τον 7ο αΐωνα. Είναι πάντοτε γραμμένα σέ άρκετά δημώδες ιδίωμα και διαθέτουν σημαντικά χαρίσματα, αλλά δέν μπορούν νά άποφύγουν και τή μονοτονία.

Ό παλιότερος έκτενης Βίος είναι του άγίου Άντωνίου, γραμμένος από τον Άθανάσιο Άλεξανδρείας (γύρω στό 360 μ.Χ.), για τον όποιο έχουμε ήδη μιλήσει άρκετά. Ήπειδή ό Βίος (ή συχνά «Βίος και πολιτεία») ενός άγίου άποτελούσε πιό πολύ έγκώμιο παρά κριτική βιογραφία, ήταν φυσικό νά έχει δομή βασισμένη σέ όρισμένες άρχές που είχαν καλλιεργηθεί για τό σκοπό αυτό στις σχολές ρητορικής. Ποιές ήταν αυτές οι άρχές τό μαθαίνουμε από τό έγχειρίδιο του Μενάνδρου, ό όποιος εδώ αναφέρεται στό έγκώμιο ενός ήγεμόνα (*βασιλικός λόγος*). Θα αρχίζετε, λέει,

μέ ένα προοίμιο, όπου θα εκφράζετε τη δύσκολη θέση σας καθώς αναλάβατε έργο τέτοιας σπουδαιότητας. Μετά τὸ προοίμιο θὰ ἀναφέρετε τὴν πατρίδα τοῦ ἡγεμόνα. ἌΝ τυχαίνει νὰ ἔχει γεννηθεῖ σὲ κάποια σπουδαία πόλη, θὰ τὴν ἐπαινέσετε· ἂν ὄχι, ἴσως μπορεῖτε νὰ μεγαλοποιήσετε τὸ ἔθνος στὸ ὁποῖο ἀνήκει. Θὰ συνεχίζετε μὲ τὸ γένος του: ἂν ὑπῆρξε ἔνδοξο, θὰ ἀναπτύσσετε τὸ θέμα, ἂν ὄχι, θὰ τὸ παραλείπετε. Ἐπειτα ἔρχονται ἡ γέννησή του καὶ τὰ διάφορα θαυμαστά σημάδια πού τὴ συνόδεψαν (ἂν δὲν συνέβη κανένα, μὴ διστάσετε νὰ ἐπινοήσετε μερικά), ἡ φυσικὴ ἐμφάνιση, ἡ ἀνατροφή, ἡ μόρφωση, μὲ ιδιαίτερη ἔμφαση στὶς ἐπίδοσεις τοῦ νεαροῦ φωστήρα (φυσικά, ξεπερνοῦσε ὅλους τοὺς συμμαθητές του), τὰ χαρίσματα καὶ οὕτω καθεξῆς, μέχρι τὰ κατορθώματά του ὅταν ἐνηλικιώνεται, κατάλληλα χωρισμένα κατὰ κατηγορίες καὶ ἀρετές.²⁸

Μὲ ἀνάλογο τρόπο οἱ ἔτοιμοι αὐτοὶ κανόνες ἐφαρμόστηκαν στὰ ἐγκώμια χριστιανῶν ἁγίων. Ὅρισμένοι τομεῖς φυσικά δὲν εἶχαν πιά σημασία, ὅπως ἡ σωματικὴ ὁμορφιά, τὰ πολεμικὰ κατορθώματα, οἱ ναυμαχίες καὶ τὰ παρόμοια, ἀλλὰ τὰ ὑπόλοιπα μπορούσαν νὰ χρησιμοποιηθοῦν μὲ σημαντικό ὄφελος. Ἐτσι λοιπὸν ἀναπτύχθηκε ἓνα ἀγιογραφικὸ σχῆμα, τὸ ὁποῖο, στὴν περίπτωσή ἐνὸς μοναστῆ ἁγίου, ἀκολουθοῦσε πάνω κάτω τὴν ἐξῆς πορεία. Στὸ προοίμιο ὁ συγγραφέας παραδεχόταν τὴν ἀνικανότητά του νὰ ἐγκωμιάσει τὰ χαρίσματα τοῦ ἁγίου Χ. Τὸν εἶχε, ὅμως, διατάξει νὰ τὸ κάνει ἓνας ἀνώτερός του (ἡγούμενος ἢ ἐπίσκοπος) καὶ δὲν τολμοῦσε νὰ παρακούσει, παρὰ τὴν ἀδυναμία τοῦ νοῦ του καὶ τὴν ἀγροικία τῆς γλώσσας του. Ἐτσι ἄρχιζε μὲ τὴν πατρίδα τοῦ ἁγίου: ἡ ἀληθινὴ του πατρίδα ἦταν, φυσικά, ἡ Οὐράνια Ἱερουσαλήμ, ἀλλὰ ἔτυχε νὰ γεννηθεῖ στὴ δεῖνα πόλη ἢ τὸ τὰδε χωριὸ πού, ἀκόμη καὶ ἂν ἦταν ἐντελῶς ἄσημο, ἀποκτοῦσε τώρα ἀθάνατη δόξα. Οἱ γονεῖς τοῦ ἁγίου ἦταν, σχεδὸν χωρὶς ἐξαιρέση, πλούσιοι καὶ εὐγενεῖς (ἐνδοξοὶ), καὶ τὴ γέννησή του συνήθως τὴν προέλεγε κάποιον ὄνειρο ἢ τὴ συνόδευαν ἄλλα σημάδια. Ὅταν ἔφτανε στὴν ἡλικία νὰ πάει σχολεῖο, ἀπέφυγε τὴν παρέα τῶν ἄλλων ἀγοριῶν. Εἶτε ἀπεχθανόταν ὀλότελα ὅλη τὴν κλασικὴ παιδεία εἶτε ἀπλῶς σταχυολογοῦσε ἀπὸ αὐτὴν ὅσα θεωροῦσε ἀναγκαῖα, μολοντί οἱ φυσικὲς του ἱκανότητες ἦταν ξεχωριστές. Ὅταν γινόταν ἔφηβος, ὁ ἅγιος ἀρνοῦνταν τὸ γάμο πού εἶχαν κανονίσει γιὰ λογαριασμό του οἱ καλοὶ γονεῖς του καὶ ἀποσυρόταν σὲ κάποιο γειτονικὸ μοναστήρι. Γιὰ κάμποσα χρόνια ἐκτελοῦσε μὲ ἀπόλυτη ταπεινοφροσύνη τίς πιὸ βαριές δουλειές καὶ εἰδειχνε παραδειγματικὸ ζῆλο στὶς νηστείες καὶ τίς προσευχές. Ὅταν ἀποκτοῦσε τὴν ἀπαιτούμενη δύναμη καὶ ἀπάθεια ἀποσυρόταν σὲ κάποιο ἀπομονωμένο κελὶ ἢ στὴν ἔρημο. Οἱ νίκες του πάνω στοὺς δαίμονες, οἱ ἰάσεις καὶ οἱ προφη-

τεῖες του γέμιζαν τὸ ὑπόλοιπο τῆς ζωῆς του. Στὸ τέλος χειροτονοῦνταν ἱερέας, ἀλλὰ συνήθως ἀπέκρουε κάθε πρόταση νὰ γίνει ἐπίσκοπος. Πρόβλεπε τὸ τέλος του καὶ πέθαινε εἰρηνικὰ σὲ προχωρημένη ἡλικία. Τέλος, ἡ ἀγιότητά του ἐπιβεβαιωνόταν μὲ μεταθανάτια θαύματα, μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα συνήθως καταγράφονταν, ὅπως σημειωνόταν καὶ ἡ μέρα καὶ ὁ μῆνας τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ ἁγίου.

Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ πλεονεκτήματα αὐτοῦ τοῦ σχήματος εἶναι πὼς μπορούσε νὰ ἐφαρμοστεῖ σὲ κάθε μοναστῆ ἅγιο, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο δὲν ἦταν γνωστὸ τίποτε συγκεκριμένο ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ ὄνομά του, τὴν πατρίδα του καὶ τὴν ἡμερομηνία τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς του γιορτῆς. Ἐνας μεγάλος ἀριθμὸς Βίων (ὄχι μόνον μοναχῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ μαρτύρων, ἐπισκόπων κ.ἄ.) δὲν εἶναι λοιπὸν παρὰ μιὰ σειρά ἀπὸ κοινοτοπίες· ἄλλοι ὄχι μόνον εἶναι φανταστικοὶ οἱ ἴδιοι, ἀλλὰ ἀφοροῦν καὶ ἁγίους πού πιθανὸν δὲν ὑπῆρξαν ποτέ· καὶ μερικοὶ εἶναι φανταστικοὶ μολοντί ἀναφέρονται σὲ ἁγίους πού συμβαίνει νὰ εἶναι ἀρκετὰ καλὰ γνωστοί (ὅπως ὁ Βίος τοῦ Ἐπιφανίου Σαλαμίνος). Ἀφήνοντας κατὰ μέρος αὐτὰ τὰ ἀμφίβολα δημιουργήματα, ἀπομένει ἓνα σημαντικό ὑπόλοιπο Βίων πού εἶναι σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς ἀξιόπιστοι. Πολλοὶ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς γράφτηκαν ἀπὸ ἓνα μαθητῆ τοῦ ἁγίου ἢ ἀπὸ κάποιον μεταγενέστερο, πού μπορούσε ὅμως νὰ ἀντλήσει ἀπὸ πηγὲς προφορικῶν πληροφοριῶν. Περιέχουν ἄφθονες, ἀκριβεῖς καὶ γραφικὲς λεπτομέρειες, πού εἶναι πολύτιμες γιὰ τὸν ἱστορικὸ μιὰ καὶ λείπουν ἀπὸ τίς ἐπίσημες ἱστορίες. Οἱ Βίοι τῶν ἁγίων μάλιστα ἀποτελοῦν συχνὰ τὴν καλύτερη πηγὴ μας γιὰ τὴν ἀναπαράσταση τοῦ καθημερινοῦ περιβάλλοντος τῶν βυζαντινῶν χωριῶν καὶ πόλεων. Ἐπάρχει εὐτυχῶς μιὰ μεγάλη σειρά ἀπὸ ἐξαιρετικὰ κείμενα, ὅπως ὁ Βίος τοῦ Πορφυρίου, ἐπισκόπου Γάζας, γραμμένος ἀπὸ τὸν Μάρκο τὸν Διάκονο (5ος αἰώνας), ὁ Βίος τοῦ Ἰσακίου ἀπὸ τὸν Καλλίνικο, τῶν ἁγίων Εὐθυμίου καὶ Σάββα ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριλλο τὸν Σκυθοπολίτη (συγγραφέα γνωστὸ γιὰ τὴν ἀκρίβειά του), τοῦ Συμεῶν τοῦ Νέου τοῦ Στυλῆτη, τοῦ Θεοδώρου Συκεώτη, τοῦ Συμεῶν τοῦ Σαλοῦ, τοῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Ἐλεήμονος, καὶ πολλοὶ ἄλλοι ἀκόμη. Ἡ εἰκονομαχία προκάλεσε τὴν παραγωγή μιᾶς πληθώρας σημαντικῶν Βίων (ὅπως ὁ ἀξιοσημείωτος Βίος τοῦ Στεφάνου τοῦ Νέου), καὶ ἡ ἀγιογραφία ἐξακολούθησε νὰ ἀκμάζει μέχρι τὸν 11ο αἰώνα, ὅποτε διαφαίνεται μιὰ κάμψη.

Ὅχι μόνον οἱ αὐθεντικοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ μερικοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς φανταστικούς Βίους διαβάζονται ἀκόμη μὲ εὐχαρίστηση. Ἀπὸ τὴ δική μας, ὅμως, τὴ σημερινὴ σκοπιὰ, τὸ κύριο μειονέκτημά τους εἶναι πὼς δὲν μᾶς μεταδίδουν τὴν αἴσθησή τῆς ψυχολογικῆς ἐξέλιξης τοῦ ἁγίου, μολοντί ἀσχολοῦνται σαφῶς μὲ τὴν πνευματικὴ του πρόοδο. Μιὰ καὶ ὁ ἅγιος εἶναι πρότυπο ἀρε-

τῆς ἀπὸ τὰ παιδικὰ του χρόνια καὶ δὲν ἔχει καθόλου ἀρνητικές πλευρές, γνωρίζουμε ἐκ τῶν προτέρων ὅτι θὰ παραμείνει ἴδιος σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τῆς γήινης ζωῆς του. Ξέρουμε ὅτι δὲν θὰ ὑποκύψει ποτὲ στὸν πειρασμὸ καὶ ποτὲ δὲν θὰ σφάλει, παρὰ μόνο ἀπὸ ὑπερβολικὸ ζῆλο ἢ ἀπὸ ἐσφαλμένες πληροφορίες. Αὐτὴ ἢ ἐκ τῶν προτέρων γνώση τῆς ἐξέλιξης εὐχαριστοῦσε τὸ βυζαντινὸ κοινὸ ὅσο εὐχαριστεῖ τοὺς σύγχρονους θεατὲς μιᾶς ταινίας ἢ γνώση πὼς ὑπάρχει «εὐτυχησμένο τέλος» —γιατὶ εἶναι ἀναμφισβήτητο πὼς ὁ Βίος τοῦ ἁγίου ὄχι μόνο δίδασκε, ἀλλὰ ἦταν συνάμα καὶ μέσο ἐκπλήρωσης τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ Μεσαίωνα, πού ζοῦσαν σὲ μιὰ πραγματικὴ γεμάτη φόβο, ἀβεβαιότητα καὶ ἀρρώστιες, χρειάζονταν ἥρωες πού συνέτριβαν τοὺς δαίμονες, ντρόπιαζαν τοὺς γαιτροὺς καὶ παρέμεναν ἀταλάντευτοι στὸ σκοπὸ τους.

Οἱ Βίοι ἁγίων πού μᾶς ἀρέσουν πιὸ πολὺ ἔχουν γραφεῖ σὲ ἀπλὴ γλώσσα, πού καμιὰ φορὰ πλησιάζει τὴν ὀμιλουμένη, ἀλλὰ πιὸ συχνὰ ἀντανάκτῃ τὴ συνηθισμένη γλωσσικὴ ἔκφραση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἡ ἀνάγκη ἐπικοινωνίας μὲ ἕνα ἀπαιδευτο κοινὸ δὲν παραβλεπόταν πάντα. Ὁ Λεόντιος Νεαπόλεως (7ος αἰώνας) τονίζει αὐτὸ τὸ σημεῖο στὸν πρόλογο τοῦ Βίου τοῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Ἐλεήμονος: «Αὐτὸ πού ἰδιαίτερα μᾶς παρακίνησε στὴ συγγραφή αὐτῆ ἦταν τὸ νὰ τὴ διηγηθοῦμε μὲ τὸ πεζὸ καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστο καὶ ταπεινὸ ὕφος μας ὥστε νὰ μπορεῖ καὶ ὁ ἀδαῆς καὶ ὁ ἀγράμματος νὰ ὠφελεῖται ἀπὸ τὰ λεγόμενα». ²⁹ Ὡστόσο ἡ ἀντιμετώπιση αὐτῆ δὲν ἔμελλε νὰ διατηρηθεῖ. Στὴ Μέση βυζαντινὴ περίοδο ἐπικρατοῦσε ἡ ἀποψη πὼς οἱ ἀπλοῖκοι βιογράφοι δὲν εἶχαν ἀρθεῖ στὸ ὕψος τοῦ θέματός τους: «Ἄλλες (ἀπὸ τίς πράξεις τῶν ἁγίων) τίς διαστρέβλωσαν, ἐνῶ σὲ ἄλλες, μὴν μπορώντας νὰ παρουσιάσουν αὐτὸ πού ἄρμοζε, περιέγραψαν τὴν ἀρετὴ καὶ τὴν ταπεινότητά τους μὲ ἄκομφο τρόπο, καὶ ἔτσι οὔτε σωστὴ ὑπόθεση παρουσίασαν οὔτε τὴν κόσμησαν μὲ ὠραῖες λέξεις». Ὡς ἐκ τούτου οἱ Βίοι τῶν ἁγίων κατάντησε νὰ θεωροῦνται γελοῖοι, ἐνῶ τὸ ἀκατάστατο ὕφος τους ἀπωθοῦσε τὸ κοινὸ. ³⁰ Τὸ ἔργο τῆς ἀνασύνθεσης τῆς ἀγιολογικῆς κληρονομίας τῶν προηγούμενων αἰώνων τὸ ἀνέλαβε πρῶτος περὶ τὸ 900 ὁ Νικήτας ὁ Παφλαγῶν, πού ξαναδούλεψε κάπου πενήντα Βίους χωρὶς ὅμως νὰ πετύχει μεγάλη ἀναγνώριση. Λίγες δεκαετίες ἀργότερα ὁ Συμεὼν ὁ Μεταφραστῆς, πού πιθανὸν παρακινήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Πορφυρογέννητο, προχώρησε σὲ μιὰ πληρέστερη ἀναθεώρηση. Παρέφρασε κάπου 135 Βίους, ἄφησε ἄλλους δώδεκα ἀμετάβλητους, καὶ ἐξέδωσε ὀλόκληρη τὴ συλλογὴ σὲ δέκα τόμους καταταγμένους σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ ἡμερολόγιο. Οἱ κόποι του γνώρισαν τόσο μεγάλη ἐπιτυχία ὥστε διασώζονται κάπου ἑπτακόσια χειρόγραφα τοῦ *Μηνολογίου* του, πράγμα πού ση-

μαίνει ὅτι μεγάλος ἀριθμὸς ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ μοναστηριῶν τὸ υἱοθέτησαν γιὰ λειτουργικὴ χρήση.

Ὁ Μεταφραστῆς ἔγραψε σὲ «κανονικὰ» ἑλληνικά, ὄχι τόσο περιπεπλεγμένα ὅσο ὁ Νικήτας ὁ Παφλαγῶν. Μερικοὶ σύγχρονοί του τὸν κριτικάρανε γιατί δὲν ἦταν ἀρκετὰ ἐκλεπτυσμένος, ἄλλοι ὅμως τὸν ἐπαίνεσαν γιατί ἀκολούθησε τὴ μέση ὁδὸ καὶ κατάφερε καὶ νὰ εὐχαριστηθεῖ τὸ καλλιεργημένο κοινὸ μὲ τὴν ποιικιλία καὶ τὴν ὁμορφιὰ τοῦ ὕφους του ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ γίνεται κατανοητὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀμόρφωτους. Γιὰ τὸν Μιχαὴλ Ψελλὸ τὸ κατόρθωμα τοῦ Μεταφραστῆ ἦταν μεγαλύτερο ἀπὸ ὅλη τὴν *ἑλληνικὴ ἀρχαιολογία* (δηλαδὴ τὴν ἀρχαία ἑλληνικὴ σοφία). ³¹ Αὐτὴ ἢ παράξενη ἀποψη μᾶς φέρνει στὴν καρδιὰ τῆς βυζαντινῆς στάσης ἀπέναντι στὴ λογοτεχνία. Ναι μὲν ὁ Μεταφραστῆς ἔγραψε σὲ σωστὰ ἑλληνικά, στὴν οὐσία ὅμως ἐκεῖνο πού ἔκανε ἦταν νὰ πάρει ἕνα σύνολο κειμένων πού εἶχαν ὅλη τὴ ζωντάνια καὶ τὴν ἰδιαιτερότητα ἐνὸς συγκεκριμένου χώρου καὶ νὰ τὰ καταντήσει μιὰ σειρά ἀπὸ κοινοτοπίες. Παρασιωποῦσε τίς συγκεκριμένες λεπτομέρειες καὶ παρέφραζε τοὺς ἄκομψους ὄρους. Δὲν ἦταν ἀρκετὰ ἀποφασιστικές οἱ ἀπαντήσεις ἐνὸς μάρτυρα στοὺς βασιανιστὲς του; Τίς βελτίωνε. Ἡ διήγηση τῆς ἄσκησης ἐνὸς μοναχοῦ γινόταν μὲ ἀπλοῖκο τρόπο; Τὴν ἀνύψωνε στὸ ἀπαιτούμενο ἐπίπεδο. Ἴσως εἶναι ὑπερβολὴ νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ὁ Μεταφραστῆς καταδίκασε σὲ θάνατο τὸ εἶδος τῶν ἑλληνικῶν Βίων, σίγουρα ὅμως συνέβαλε στὸν εὐνοχισμό του, ἐνῶ συνάμα μὲ τίς παραφράσεις του προκάλεσε τὴν ἐξαφάνιση πολλῶν παλιότερων κειμένων. Εἶναι ἀστεῖο νὰ βλέπουμε στὸν 12ο αἰώνα τὸν πατριάρχη Νικόλαο Μουζάλωνα νὰ διατάζει τὴν καταστροφὴ ἐνὸς Βίου τῆς ἁγίας Παρασκευῆς τῆς Νέας, μὲ τὴ δικαιολογία ὅτι εἶχε γραφεῖ «ἀπὸ κάποιον χωριάτη» σὲ καθημερινὴ γλώσσα. ³²

Δὲν πρέπει νὰ ὑποκίπτουμε στὸν πειρασμὸ καὶ νὰ φτάνουμε στὸ ἄλλο ἄκρο, δηλαδὴ νὰ θεωροῦμε πὼς καθετὶ γραμμένο σὲ λαϊκὴ γλώσσα εἶναι αὐτομάτως προικισμένο μὲ λογοτεχνικὰ χαρίσματα. Ἡ ἐπιφύλαξη αὐτὴ δικαιώνεται ἀπὸ τὸ τρίτο μας δεῖγμα, πού ἀφορᾷ τὴ βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία σὲ δημώδη γλώσσα. Τὰ λίγα τέτοια ἔργα πού ὑπάρχουν ἔχουν τραβήξει ἀρκετὰ τὴν προσοχὴ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ ρομαντικοῦ κινήματος καὶ ἔχουν κερδίσει μιὰ θέση στὸ καθιερωμένο πρόγραμμα τῶν νεοελληνικῶν σπουδῶν. Σίγουρα ἔχουν ἐνδιαφέρον γιὰ τὸ φιλόλογο καὶ τὸν κοινωνικὸ ἱστορικὸ, πρέπει ὅμως νὰ παραδεχτοῦμε ὅτι ὡς λογοτεχνία εἶναι μᾶλλον ἀπογοητευτικά.

Ἴσως τὰ πιὸ πρῶμα λογοτεχνικὰ ἔργα στὴ δημοτικὴ εἶναι τὰ λεγόμενα Προδρομικὰ ποιήματα, πού φαίνονται νὰ χρονολογοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸ πρῶ-

το μισό του 12ου αιώνα.³³ Αποδίδονται στον αυλικό ποιητή Θεόδωρο Πρόδρομο, από όπου και το παραδοσιακό τους όνομα, αλλά η απόδοση αυτή αμφισβητείται και δεν είναι καν βέβαιο αν έχουμε να κάνουμε με τα γραφτά κάμποσων διαφορετικών συγγραφέων ή με ένα πρόσωπο που εμφανίζεται με διαφορετικές μορφές. Τα ποιήματα είναι γραμμένα στον λαϊκό δεκαπεντασύλλαβο ή πολιτικό στίχο, και έχουν τη μορφή παραπόνων που απευθύνονται στους αυτοκράτορες 'Ιωάννη Β' και Μανουήλ Α', καθώς και σε άλλο ένα μέλος της οικογένειας των Κομνηνών. Σε μια περίπτωση ο ποιητής μας παρουσιάζεται ως σύζυγος που τον καταπιέζει ή γυναίκα του, σε μια άλλη ως πατέρας μιας πολυμελούς οικογένειας που δεν τα βγάζει πέρα με τα μέτρια οικονομικά του, σε μια τρίτη ως φτωχός μοναχός που τον κακομεταχειρίζεται ο ήγούμενός του, σε μια τέταρτη ως άνθρωπος του πνεύματος που λιμοκτονεί (αυτός που αναφέραμε ήδη στο Κεφάλαιο Γ'). Η δράση εξελίσσεται σε ένα περιβάλλον μέσης αστικής τάξης, και η κύρια φροντίδα του συγγραφέα είναι το στομάχι του. Προσπαθεί να γίνει διασκεδαστικός παρουσιάζοντας σκηνές φαρσοκωμωδίας και έπινοώντας παράξενες παραλλαγές λέξεων, ίσως σαν παρωδία των ποιητών που χρησιμοποιούσαν τα αρχαία ελληνικά· το χιούμορ πάντως το καταστρέφει ένας τόνος μονότονης δουλικότητας και μια κουραστική επανάληψη.

Η αυξανόμενη έπιρροή της δυτικής μόδας στην άριστοκρατία του ύστερου Βυζαντίου, αν όχι και στο γενικότερο κοινό, αντανακλάται σε μερικά έμμετρα ιπποτικά μυθιστορήματα γραμμένα στη δημοτική. Από αυτά σώζονται πέντε, που χρονολογούνται από τον 12ο ή 13ο αιώνα ως τον 15ο. Μόνο ένας από τα πέντε, του *Κατά Καλλίμαχον και Χρυσορρόην*,³⁴ είναι ο συγγραφέας γνωστός, δηλαδή ο Ανδρόνικος Παλαιολόγος, εξάδελφος του αυτοκράτορα Ανδρονίκου Β'. Συνεπώς η συγγραφή του χρονολογείται γύρω στο 1300. Για δύο από τα πέντε έχουν βρεθεί τα ακριβή δυτικά τους πρότυπα, δηλαδή για το *Φλώριος και Πλάτζια Φλώρα* (που ήταν το πολύ διαδεδομένο *Floire et Blancheflor*) και για το *Ιμπίριος και Μαργαρώνα* (από το γαλλικό *Pierre de Provence et la belle Maguelonne* ή κάποιο πρόδρομό του). Αυτές είναι ουσιαστικά όλες κι όλες οι συγκεκριμένες πληροφορίες που διαθέτουμε για αυτά τα περίεργα ποιήματα.

Αντίθετα με τα έκλεπτυσμένα έρωτικά μυθιστορήματα του 12ου αιώνα, στα όποια ήδη αναφερθήκαμε, τα ιπποτικά μυθιστορήματα δεν παρουσιάζουν τη δράση σε ένα ψευτοκλασικό περιβάλλον, αλλά μάς μεταφέρουν σε έναν καθαρά μεσαιωνικό κόσμο με γενναίους ιππότες, όμορφες κυράδες, μάγισσες, δράκους και άπορθητα κάστρα. Στο ποίημα που είναι κα-

τά πάσα πιθανότητα το πιο πρώιμο αλλά και το πιο χαριτωμένο, δηλαδή στο *Βέλθανδρος και Χρυσάντζα*,³⁵ το γεωγραφικό περιβάλλον είναι αρκετά αληθινό. Ο ήρωας, ο νεότερος γιός ενός βυζαντινού αυτοκράτορα, αφήνει το σπίτι του, περνάει τη Μικρά Ασία, που βρίσκεται στα χέρια των Τούρκων, του στήνουν ενέδρα σε κάποιο πέρασμα στην όροσειρά του Ταύρου, φτάνει στην Ταρσό και στα σύνορα της Αρμενίας της Κιλικίας και προχωρεί στην Αντιόχεια, όπου έρωτεύεται τη Χρυσάντζα, κόρη του λατίνου βασιλιά. Όλες οι ενδείξεις ταιριάζουν απόλυτα με τον 12ο ή το πρώτο μισό του 13ου αιώνα. Το μόνο φανταστικό στοιχείο είναι το Έρωτόκαστρο, δέκα μέρες μακριά από την Ταρσό, αλλά υπάρχουν πολλά ρομαντικά κάστρα στην Κιλικία που μπορεί να είχε ακούσει ο συγγραφέας. Το ενδιαφέρον όμως εδώ δεν είναι η γεωγραφία αλλά το πολιτιστικό περιβάλλον του ποιήματος. Το όνομα Βέλθανδρος προφανώς προέρχεται από το Bertrand, ενώ ο πατέρας του ο αυτοκράτορας ονομάζεται Ροδόφιλος, που θυμίζει αρκετά το Rudolf. Ο ξανθός ήρωας δεν διστάζει να γίνει ύποτελης (*λίσιος*) του βασιλιά της Αντιόχειας. Είναι σπουδαίος κυνηγός και πολεμιστής, αλλά δεν έχει ούτε το ελάχιστο θρησκευτικό συναίσθημα. Δεν έχει μάλιστα κανέναν ένδοξο να κάνει ένα είδος γάμου με την υπηρέτρια της αγαπημένης του, γάμο που τον ιερολογεί ο πατριάρχης της Αντιόχειας. Το Έρωτόκαστρο με τα αλληγορικά του αγάλματα είναι όπωσδήποτε ξένο προς τη βυζαντινή παράδοση, όποιο και αν είναι το πρότυπό του. Το πιο αξιοσημείωτο, όμως, είναι η στάση του ποιητή απέναντι στον έρωτα. Σε αντίθεση με κάθε βυζαντινό προηγούμενο, οι νεαροί πρωταγωνιστές έχουν ελεύθερα προγαμιαίες σχέσεις και, αφού διασχίσουν ένα φουσκωμένο ποταμάκι, μένουν να τριγυρνούν όλόγυμνοι για κάμποσες μέρες. Μόνο όταν ένα βυζαντινό πλοίο τυχαίνει να τους πάρει, εμπιστεύονται τη γυμνή πριγκίπισσα στη φροντίδα ενός ευνούχου. Η ίδια ελευθεριότητα κυριαρχεί και στο πιο φανταστικό και μάλλον πιο βαρετό ποίημα *Κατά Καλλίμαχον και Χρυσορρόην*. Η ήρωίδα εμφανίζεται για πρώτη φορά να κρέμεται γυμνή από τα μαλλιά στο Δρακοντόκαστρο, και αφού τη σώζει ο ώραϊος πρίγκιπας δεν χάνει καθόλου χρόνο αλλά ικανοποιεί το πάθος του, αφού πρώτα κάνουν μπάνιο μαζί. Αυτή η ήπια μορφή πορνογραφίας δεν είχε φυσικά καμία σχέση με τον ελληνικό «λαό»: αντιπροσώπευε τις φαντασιώσεις μιας άριστοκρατίας που είχε δεχτεί τα δυτικά ήθη, αλλά δεν ήταν αρκετά ευαίσθητη στα λογοτεχνικά χαρίσματα των δυτικών διηγημάτων που μιμούνταν από μακριά. Ο Βέλθανδρος έχει μερικούς καλούς στίχους και σχετικά λίγα περιττά παραγεμίματα· ο Καλλίμαχος σχεδόν δεν έχει παρά φλυαρίες.

Μέχρι τώρα δεν αναφέραμε το πολύ πιο αξιόλογο έπος ή μάλλον μυθιστόρημα του Διγενή Ἀκρίτη, γιατί είναι δύσκολο να το κατατάξει κανείς σε ένα συγκεκριμένο επίπεδο λογοτεχνικής παραγωγής.³⁶ Βασίζεται σε ήρωικές ιστορίες κατά μήκος των ανατολικών συνόρων, δηλαδή στις περιοχές για τις οποίες συγκρούονταν Βυζαντινοί και Ἀραβες τον 9ο και 10ο αιώνα. Την εποχή που γράφτηκε το ποίημα οι ιστορίες αυτές ήταν αρκετά συγκεχυμένες, αλλά η σύγχρονη έρευνα έχει καταφέρει να ταυτίσει αρκετά ιστορικά πρόσωπα και γεγονότα: όλα δεν είναι της ίδιας περιόδου, αλλά ανήκουν σε διάφορα στρώματα, ένα από τα οποία σίγουρα σχετίζεται με τους πολέμους κατά των παυλικιανών, και ένα άλλο με τις βυζαντινές κατακτήσεις τον αιώνα που ακολούθησε. Οι έρευνες για την ανακάλυψη του αρχικού πυρήνα του ποιήματος δεν γνώρισαν την ίδια επιτυχία, αλλά αυτό δεν οφείλεται σε έλλειψη προσπάθειας. Έχουν διατυπωθεί πολυάριθμες θεωρίες, αλλά καμία δεν είναι εντελώς πειστική. Η κύρια δυσκολία ξεκινάει από το γεγονός ότι κατέχουμε πέντε διαφορετικές ελληνικές παραλλαγές του, καθώς και αποσπάσματα από μια ρωσική. Η ανασύνθεση, λοιπόν, της αρχικής Διγενειάδας που, σύμφωνα με όρισμένους έρευνητές, χρονολογείται, τουλάχιστον εν μέρει, στα χρόνια 934-944, συνεπάγεται τη διατύπωση αρκετών εικάσιών. Οι γνώμες επίσης δίστανται σχετικά με το αν η υποθετική Διγενειάδα ήταν γραμμένη σε δημώδη ή, όπως φαίνεται πιθανότερο, σε λόγια γλώσσα. Η παραλλαγή της Grottaferrata, ή πιο ικανοποιητική και συνεπής ελληνική παραλλαγή (που αποτελείται σχεδόν από τέσσερις χιλιάδες στίχους), δεν μπορεί να χρονολογηθεί νωρίτερα από τα μέσα του 11ου αιώνα και πρέπει όπωσδήποτε να είναι έργο ενός συγγραφέα με κάποια μόρφωση, γιατί γνώριζε όχι μόνο την Αγία Γραφή και μερικά πατερικά αποφθέγματα αλλά και τις μυθιστορίες του Ἀχιλλέα Τατίου και του Ἡλιοδώρου. Η δημοτικότητα αυτών των αρχαίων μυθιστοριών τον 11ο αιώνα μαρτυρείται από τον Μιχαήλ Ψελλό,³⁷ και είδαμε ότι ένα αντίγραφο του Ἀχιλλέα Τατίου υπήρχε στη βιβλιοθήκη του Εϋσταθίου Βοήλα, που βρισκόταν στην Ὁσροηνή, δηλαδή ακριβώς στην περιοχή όπου φαίνεται να έγινε η σύνθεση της Διγενειάδας.

Ὁ Διγενής της παραλλαγής της Grottaferrata αποτελείται από δύο ιστορίες διαφορετικής καταγωγής και χρονολογίας: την ιστορία του ἄραβα ἑμίρη που παντρεύεται μια βυζαντινή ἄρχοντοπούλα και γίνεται χριστιανός, και την ιστορία του γιού του, Βασιλείου Διγενή Ἀκρίτη. Ὄταν ὁ Βασίλειος μεγαλώνει γίνεται ένα είδος ἄρχοντα των συνόρων, ἀπάγει την ὁμορφη Εὐδοκία Δούκαινα και την παντρεύεται, και σε ὅλη του τη

ζωή πολεμάει τους ἀπελάτες ἐπιδρομείς και τὰ ἄγρια θηρία. Τελικά χτίζει ένα μεγάλο πρεπο παλάτι δίπλα στον Εὐφράτη και πεθαίνει ενώ είναι ἀκόμη στο ἄνθος τῆς νιότητος του. Ὁ Βασίλειος δεν είναι βυζαντινός στρατηγός ἀλλὰ ένας ἀνεξάρτητος ἄρχοντας, ένας ἥρωας με ὑπερφυσική δύναμη και ἀνδρεία, που ἐπανελημμένα συντρίβει ὀλόκληρους στρατούς ὀλομόναχος. Είναι παρακινδυνευμένο να μιλήσουμε για τις λογοτεχνικές ἀρετές ενός ποιήματος που θαμπά μόνο μπορούμε να τις διακρίνουμε μέσα ἀπὸ τις διάφορες παραλλαγές του. Στὴν παραλλαγή της Grottaferrata ἡ γλώσσα συχνὰ πλησιάζει τὸν πεζὸ λόγο και ὑπάρχουν πολλές ἠθικολογίες. Ἀλλὰ και ἡ δράση παρουσιάζει ἀσάφειες και ἀνακολουθίες. Παραδείγματός χάρη, πρὸς τὸ τέλος (VII, 201 κέ.) πληροφοροῦμαστε ὅτι ὁ Διγενής εἶχε ὑποτάξει τοὺς Ἀραβες και εἶχε εἰρηνεύσει τις ρωμαϊκές χῶρες, ἐνῶ τίποτε σχετικὸ δεν ἔχει ἀναφερθεῖ προτύτερα. Ἐξἄλλου, σὲ μιὰ ἱστορία ἀπὸ ὅπου γενικὰ λείπουν τὰ ὑπερφυσικὰ στοιχεῖα, μᾶς ξαφνιάζει να συναντᾶμε ξαφνικὰ ἕνα ἐρπετὸ που ἔχει πάρει ἀνθρώπινη μορφή και ἔπειτα βγάζει τρία κεφάλια. Ἡ πολεμοχαρὴς Μαξιμώ, ἀπόγονος τῶν Ἀμαζόνων που εἶχε φέρει ὁ Μέγας Ἀλέξανδρος ἀπὸ τὴ χώρα τῶν Βραχυμάνων, φαντάζει παράξενα σ' ἕναν κόσμο που, με ἐξαιρέση τὴν ἴδια, κατοικεῖται ἀπὸ ἀληθινὸς ἀνθρώπους. Καὶ οἱ ἀπιστίες τοῦ ἥρωα, ἀν και συγχωροῦνται ὡς ἕνα βαθμὸ, δεν ἐνσωματώνονται ἱκανοποιητικὰ στὴν πλοκή. Πάντως, παρὰ τὰ πολλὰ του μειονεκτήματα, ὁ Διγενής Ἀκρίτης δεν παύει να μᾶς δίνει μιὰ εἰκόνα ἐνὸς ἀληθινὰ ἥρωικοῦ κόσμου, που ἔρχεται σὲ ζωηρὴ ἀντίθεση με τις ἀναιμικές φαντασιώσεις τῶν ἱπποτικῶν μυθιστοριῶν.

Τὰ λίγα δείγματα που ἀναφέραμε δεν είναι, φυσικὰ, ἀρκετὰ για να κρίνουμε τὴ βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία σὸ σύνολό της, ἐλπίζουμε ὅμως να μετέδωσαν μιὰ γεύση της. Για τὸν σύγχρονο παρατηρητὴ αὐτὴ ἡ λογοτεχνία ἔχει ἀρκετὰ ἐλαττώματα. Περιέχει πλῆθος στιχογραφήματα, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν καθόλου ποίηση και καθόλου δραματικὰ ἔργα. Περιέχει εἰρωνεία, συχνὰ ἐπιθετικὴ, ἀλλὰ καθόλου χιοῦμορ. Με πολὺ λίγες ἐξαιρέσεις, δεν ἀσχολεῖται με τὴν ἀγάπη, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν ἱερὴ ἢ τὴ γονικὴ ἀγάπη. Δεν περιέχει χυδαιότητες ἀλλὰ οὔτε και χαρὰ τῆς ζωῆς. Ἡ βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία ἔχει τόνο σοβαρὸ και ἐπίσημο και πετυχαίνει καλύτερα ὅταν περιγράφει θανάτους, καταστροφές και τὴν ἀσάθεια τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ὑπαρξης.

Συνήθως ὑποστηρίζεται πὼς τὸ μεγαλύτερο ἐπίτευγμα τῶν βυζαντινῶν λογίων βρίσκεται ὅχι στὴ δημιουργία πρωτότυπων ἔργων, ἀλλὰ στὴ διατήρηση τῆς κλασικῆς κληρονομιάς. Είναι ἀναμφισβήτητο γεγονός ὅτι τὸ μεγαλύτερο μέρος τῆς ἀρχαίας ἐλληνικῆς λογοτεχνίας που σώζεται σήμερα ἔχει φτάσει σ' ἐμᾶς μέσω τοῦ Βυζαντίου. Είναι ἐπίσης ἀλήθεια ὅτι

ή διατήρηση δὲν ἦταν μιὰ παθητικὴ διαδικασίᾳ: ἀπαιτοῦσε τὴ συλλογὴ βιβλίων, τὴν ἀντιγραφὴν τοὺς καὶ τὴν ἐκδοσὴν τοὺς. Χρειαζόταν νὰ γραφοῦν σχόλια, λεξικά καὶ ἐγκυκλοπαίδειες. Ἡ Βιβλιοθήκη τοῦ Φωτίου, ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ἀνθολογία, οἱ Ἐκλογές (*Excerpta*) τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Πορφυρογέννητου, ἡ Σούδα, τὰ σχόλια τοῦ Εὐσταθίου στὸν Ὅμηρο ἀντιπροσωπεύουν μεγάλα ἔργα τῆς φιλολογικῆς ἐπιστήμης, ὅπως καὶ τὰ ἔργα τῶν φιλολόγων τῆς παλαιολόγειας περιόδου, τοῦ Μάξιμου Πλανούδη καὶ τοῦ Δημητρίου Τρικλινίου. Γιατί, τότε, οἱ Βυζαντινοί, ποὺ ἀφιέρωσαν τόση προσοχὴ στοὺς ἀρχαίους κλασικούς, δὲν κατανόησαν ποτὲ τὸ πνεῦμα τοὺς; Τὸ φταίξιμο τὸ ἔχουν ἀποδώσει στὴν Ἐκκλησίᾳ, στοὺς μοναχοὺς, στὴν αὐταρχικὴ διακυβέρνηση. Δὲν πιστεύω πὼς κάποιος ἀπὸ τοὺς παρὰγοντες αὐτοὺς ἀρκεῖ γιὰ νὰ ἐξηγήσει τὴν παράξενη στεγανότητα τοῦ μεσαιωνικοῦ μυαλοῦ σὲ ἓνα σύνολο ἰδεῶν ποὺ τίς θεωροῦσε ξένες, κακοήθειες καὶ παρωχημένες. Συνεπῶς ἴσως εἶναι πιὸ ἀποτελεσματικὸ ἂν ζητήσουμε μιὰ ἀπάντηση σὲ μερικὲς ἀπὸ τίς σκέψεις ποὺ διατυπώθηκαν στὴν ἀρχὴ αὐτοῦ τοῦ κεφαλαίου. Θεμελιώδεις ἀλλαγές στις νοοτροπίες σπάνια συμβαίνουν χωρὶς ἀντίστοιχες ἀλλαγές στις κοινωνικὲς δομές. Ἡ βυζαντινὴ κοινωνία θὰ μπορούσε νὰ ἔχει μετασχηματιστεῖ, καὶ ἡ γενιὰ τοῦ Ψελλοῦ μᾶς παρέχει κάποιους λόγους νὰ ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι καὶ οἱ διανοητικὲς τῆς συνήθειες, συμπεριλαμβανομένης καὶ τῆς στάσης τῆς ἀπέναντι στοὺς κλασικούς, μπορεῖ νὰ εἶχαν ἐξελιχτεῖ πρὸς μιὰ νέα κατεύθυνση. Δυστυχῶς, τὰ γεγονότα ἀποφάσισαν διαφορετικά.

ΤΕΧΝΗ ΚΑΙ ΑΡΧΙΤΕΚΤΟΝΙΚΗ

Πρέπει νὰ ὁμολογήσουμε ὅτι ἡ τέχνη εἶναι τὸ μόνο τμῆμα τῆς βυζαντινῆς κληρονομιάς ποὺ ἀσκεῖ πάνω μας μιὰ ἄμεση ἐλξη. Ἡ ἀποψη αὐτὴ δὲν θὰ ἀλήθευε πρὶν ἀπὸ ἑκατὸ χρόνια, καί, ἂν ἰσχύει σήμερα, αὐτὸ συμβαίνει γιὰτὶ οἱ δικές μας αἰσθητικὲς προτιμήσεις ἔχουν ἀπομακρυνθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ νατουραλισμὸ πρὸς τὴν κατεύθυνση μιᾶς μερικῆς ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ ὀλιγκῆς ἀφαίρεσης. Ὅπως ἔγραφε ὁ Robert Byron τὸ 1930, «Ἀπὸ τοὺς πολυάριθμους εὐρωπαϊκούς πολιτισμούς ποὺ ἡ αἰσθητικὴ μας θεωρεῖ τὰ μνημεῖα τοὺς μεγάλα, ἡ βυζαντινὴ εἰκαστικὴ τέχνη ἦταν ἡ πρώτη ποὺ ἀνακάλυψε τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ἐρμηνείας, ἀντὶ τῆς ἀναπαράστασης, τῶν νοητῶν φαινομένων, πράγμα ποὺ στὴν ἐποχὴ μας ἀποτελεῖ τὴ βάση κάθε καλλιτεχνικῆς ἔκφρασης».¹ Γιὰ ἐντελῶς διαφορετικούς λόγους, τὰ βυζαντινὰ καλλιτεχνήματα ἔχαιραν μεγάλης ἐκτιμῆσεως καὶ στὸ Μεσαίωνα. Ὁ ἄραβας λόγιος al-Djahiz (9ος αἰώνας), μολονότι διατείνεται πὼς οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ δὲν εἶχαν οὔτε ἐπιστῆμὴ οὔτε λογοτεχνία, ἐντούτοις ἐκτιμᾷ τὰ ξυλόγλυπτα, τὰ ἄλλα γλυπτὰ καὶ τὰ ὑφάσματά τους. «Οἱ ἀρχαῖοι Ἕλληνες» καταλήγει «ἦταν ἄνθρωποι τῶν γραμμάτων, ἐνῶ οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ εἶναι καλλιτέχνες.»²

Πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκτίμησή της, ποὺ σήμερα εἶναι γενικὴ, δὲν ἔχει ἀκόμη ἐπιτευχθεῖ πλήρως μιὰ σωστὴ κατανόηση τῆς βυζαντινῆς τέχνης στὴν ἐξέλιξή της καὶ στις σχέσεις της μὲ ἱστορικούς καὶ κοινωνικούς παράγοντες. Ὑπάρχουν πολλοὶ λόγοι γι' αὐτό. Πρῶτα πρῶτα ἡ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη, ὅπως καὶ ἡ βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία, ἦταν ἀναμφίβολα πολὺ συντηρητικὴ. Ἐπειδὴ ἐξελισσόταν μὲ ἀργὸ ρυθμὸ, ἡ χρονολόγησή τῶν ἔργων τῆς σπάνια εἶναι εὐκόλη, καθὼς μάλιστα στὴ μεγάλη τους πλειονότητα τὰ ἀντικείμενα καὶ τὰ κτίρια δὲν φέρουν χρονολογίες. Δεύτερον, ἡ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη ἦταν ἀνώνυμη καὶ ἀπρόσωπη. Στὴν τέχνη τῆς δυτικῆς Εὐρώπης, τουλάχιστον ἀπὸ τὸν ὕστερο Μεσαίωνα καὶ μετὰ, ἡ προσοχὴ μας ἐπικεντρώνεται κυρίως στις προσωπικότητες. Ἔτσι, ἡ ἱστορία τῆς εὐρωπαϊκῆς τέ-

χνης δὲν ἀφορᾷ μόνο τὴν ἐξέλιξη τῶν μορφῶν ἀλλὰ εἶναι καὶ ἱστορία προσωπῶν πού γνωρίζουμε τὴ ζωὴ τους, πού εἰσήγαγαν καινοτομίες, πού ἐκφράσανε τὶς ἀπόψεις τους γιὰ τὴν τέχνη, πού ἀσκήσαν ἐπιρροὴ σὲ ἄλλους γνωστούς καλλιτέχνες. Τίποτε ἀπὸ ὅλα αὐτὰ δὲν ἰσχύει γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη. Στὸ Βυζάντιο τοὺς καλλιτέχνες τοὺς ἐβλεπαν σὰν τεχνίτες καὶ δὲν αἰσθάνονταν κανένα ἐνδιαφέρον νὰ καταγράψουν τὰ ὀνόματά τους ἢ τὶς προσωπικότητές τους. Ὁ πρῶτος καὶ μοναδικὸς βυζαντινὸς καλλιτέχνης πού μᾶς εἶναι γνωστὸς ὡς ἄτομο εἶναι ὁ Θεοφάνης, πού ἔδρασε στὴ Ρωσία στὸ τέλος τοῦ 14ου καὶ τὶς ἀρχές τοῦ 15ου αἰώνα. Ὅσο γιὰ ἀρχιτέκτονες, κανένας δὲν ἀναφέρεται ὀνομαστικά μετὰ τὸν Ἀνθέμιο καὶ τὸν Ἰσίδωρο, πού ἐχτίσαν τὴν Ἀγία Σοφία τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Ἡ τρίτη μας δυσκολία προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν οὐσιαστικὴ ἀπουσία βυζαντινῆς καλλιτεχνικῆς κριτικῆς, δηλαδὴ ἀπὸ τὴν ἔλλειψη κειμένων πού θὰ συζητοῦσαν ἢ θὰ ἀξιολογοῦσαν ἔργα τέχνης μετὰ τρόπο διαφορετικὸ ἀπὸ τὸν καθαρὰ ρητορικὸ. Ἡ τελευταία καὶ ἴσως ἡ σοβαρότερη δυσκολία μας ὀφείλεται στὸ ὅτι ἡ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη σώζεται μόνο ἀποσπασματικά. Οἱ καταστροφές πού ὑπέστη τὸ μεγαλύτερο μέρος τῶν βυζαντινῶν ἐδαφῶν ἀνὰ τοὺς αἰῶνες ἔχουν μόνο ἐξαφάνισαν σημαντικὸτατο μέρος τῆς βυζαντινῆς καλλιτεχνικῆς δημιουργίας ἀλλὰ καὶ καθόρισαν αὐτὸ πού θὰ ὀνομάζουμε διαδικασίᾳ τῆς ἐπιβίωσης: ἡ καταστροφὴ τῶν μνημείων ὑπῆρξε πιὸ συστηματικὴ στὸ κέντρο τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας, στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, τὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία καὶ τὴ Θράκη, παρὰ στὴν περιφέρεια, ὅπως γιὰ παράδειγμα στὴν Ἰταλία, τὴν Ἑλλάδα, τὴ γιουγκοσλαβικὴ Μακεδονία, τμήματα τῆς Συρίας καὶ τὴν Κύπρο. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι ἡ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη μᾶς εἶναι καλύτερα γνωστὴ στὴν ἐπαρχιακὴ τῆς ἔκφραση ἀπὸ ὅ,τι στὴ μορφή τῆς πρωτεύουσας. Μιὰ ἄλλη πλευρὰ τῆς καταστροφῆς ἦταν ὅτι ἀφοροῦσε τὰ μὴ θρησκευτικὰ μνημεῖα πολὺ περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὰ θρησκευτικὰ, μιὰ καὶ μετὰ τὴν ὀθωμανικὴ κατάκτηση ὑπῆρχε πιθανότητα νὰ παραμείνουν οἱ ἐκκλησίες στὰ χέρια τῶν χριστιανικῶν κοινοτήτων ἢ καμιά φορὰ νὰ διατηρηθοῦν λόγω τῆς μετατροπῆς τους σὲ τζαμιά. Μιὰ περαιτέρω συνέπεια τῆς καταστροφῆς εἶναι ἡ σχετικὴ σπουδαιότητα πού ἀπέκτησαν τὰ ἔργα τῆς μικροτεχνίας μέσα στὸ ὑπολειπόμενο σύνολο τῆς βυζαντινῆς καλλιτεχνικῆς δημιουργίας. Ἐνῶ κτίρια καὶ τοιχογραφίες κατεδαφίστηκαν, τὰ κινητὰ ἀντικείμενα ἀξίας, ὅπως ἔργα χρυσοχοΐας, σμαλτοτεχνικῆς, γλυπτὰ ἀπὸ ἔλεφαντόδοντο καὶ εἰκονογραφημένα χειρόγραφα, μπόρεσαν νὰ μεταφερθοῦν στὴ δυτικὴ Εὐρώπη, ὅπου διασώθηκαν στὰ θησαυροφυλάκια τῶν καθεδρικῶν ναῶν καὶ στὰ μουσεῖα.

Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ αὐτὲς τὶς ἀντικειμενικὲς δυσκολίες, ἐμπόδια δημιουργήθη-

καν καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς μελετητὲς πού τὰ τελευταῖα ἑκατὸ χρόνια κατέβαλαν τόσες προσπάθειες γιὰ νὰ ἀνακαλύψουν τὰ *disiecta membra* τῆς βυζαντινῆς τέχνης. Δὲν ἔχω πρόθεση νὰ μειώσω τὰ ἐπιτεύγματά τους. Ἐγίναν μεγάλα βήματα τόσο στὸν τομέα τῆς ἀρχαιολογικῆς ἔρευνας ὅσο καὶ στὴ μελέτη τῶν κινητῶν ἀντικειμένων. Στὰ 1886-91 ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς δημιουργοὺς τῆς ἱστορίας τῆς βυζαντινῆς τέχνης, ὁ N. P. Kondakov, δημοσίευσε σὲ γαλλικὴ μετάφραση τὸ ἔργο του *Histoire de l'art byzantin considéré principalement dans les miniatures*. Ὁ περιορισμὸς πού διατυπώνεται στὸν τίτλο ὀφείλεται στὸ γεγονός ὅτι τὴν ἐποχὴ ἐκείνη πολὺ λίγα πράγματα ἦταν γνωστὰ γιὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ μνημειακὴ ζωγραφικὴ. Σήμερα ἡ κατάσταση ἔχει ἀλλάξει: πολυάριθμες τοιχογραφίες καὶ ψηφιδωτὰ ἔχουν ἀνακαλυφθεῖ σὲ ὅλα τὰ Βαλκάνια, τὴ Ρωσία, τὴν Καππαδοκία, τὸν Πόντο, τὸν Καύκασο καὶ τὴν Κύπρο. Παρόμοιες ἢ μεγαλύτερες πρόοδοι ἔχουν γίνει καὶ σὲ ἄλλους τομεῖς. Ἀλλὰ ἐνῶ οἱ γνώσεις μας ἔχουν αὐξηθεῖ ἐξαιρετικὰ καὶ συνεχίζουν νὰ αὐξάνονται, πρέπει νὰ παραδεχτοῦμε ὅτι ἡ ἐρμηνεία τῶν δεδομένων πού ἔχουν συσσωρευθεῖ δὲν ἀκολούθησε πάντα λογικὲς κατευθύνσεις. Ἐοδεύτηκε πολὺ μελάνι γιὰ διαμάχες πάνω σὲ ἐξωπραγματικὰ ζητήματα: ἂν, λόγου χάρη, οἱ ἀρχές τῆς βυζαντινῆς τέχνης πρέπει νὰ ζητηθοῦν στὴν Ἀνατολὴ ἢ στὴ Δύση, καί, στὴν περίπτωσή τῆς Ἀνατολῆς, ἂν ἡ ἀποφασιστικὴ ὠθηση προῆλθε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια ἢ τὴν Ἀντιόχεια ἢ τὴ Μεσοποταμία ἢ ἀπὸ κάπου στὴν κεντρικὴ Ἀσία. Ὅλων τῶν εἰδῶν οἱ «σχολές» ἔχουν ἐπινοηθεῖ, καὶ διάφορα ἀντικείμενα ἀσαφοῦς προέλευσης ἔχουν ἀποδοθεῖ τότε στὴ μία σχολὴ καὶ τότε στὴν ἄλλη. Ὑποστηρίχτηκε ἡ ὑπαρξὴ μιᾶς σειρᾶς «ἀναγεννήσεων». Ἐκεῖνο πού δὲν ἔχει γίνει σαφῶς ἀντιληπτὸ εἶναι πῶς ἡ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη ἀκολούθησε σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο ἐξέλιξης μετὰ τὴ βυζαντινὴ λογοτεχνία καὶ ἐν γένει κάθε ἄλλη ἔκφραση τοῦ βυζαντινοῦ πνευματικοῦ πολιτισμοῦ. Στὴ σύντομη ἐξέταση πού ἀκολουθεῖ θὰ προσπαθήσουμε νὰ τὴν παρουσιάσουμε, ὅσο εἶναι δυνατό, μέσα ἀπὸ μιὰ ἱστορικὴ προοπτικὴ.

Ὅταν μιλάμε γιὰ πρώιμη βυζαντινὴ ἢ παλαιοχριστιανικὴ τέχνη (πού σχεδὸν καταλήγει νὰ εἶναι τὸ ἴδιο πράγμα) πρέπει νὰ μὴν ξεχνᾶμε πῶς ἐννοοῦμε τὴν τέχνη τῆς ὕστερης ρωμαϊκῆς αὐτοκρατορίας προσαρμοσμένη στὶς ἀνάγκες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἴσως ἡ ἀντίθεση τῶν χριστιανῶν τῆς παλαιοχριστιανικῆς ἐποχῆς πρὸς τὴν καλλιτεχνικὴ ἀναπαράσταση νὰ ἔχει ὑπερτονιστεῖ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱστορικούς· πάντως δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε πῶς εἶχαν κάποιο καλλιτεχνικὸ πρόγραμμα. Ἡ διδασκαλία τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἀντίθετα μετὰ τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Μάνη, δὲν μεταδιδόταν μέσω εἰκόνων. Τὸ πρόβλημα μιᾶς χριστιανικῆς τέχνης παρουσιάστηκε γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ τὴν ἐπο-

χή τῆς θρησκευτικῆς μεταστροφῆς τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου, ὅταν ὁ ἴδιος ὁ αὐτοκράτορας, οἱ συγγενεῖς του καὶ μέλη τοῦ ἀνώτερου κλήρου (πού, ὅπως εἶδαμε, βρέθηκαν ξαφνικά μετὰ μεγάλα πλούτη) ἄρχισαν νὰ ἰδρύνουν λαμπρὲς ἐκκλησίες. Γιὰ τὴν ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ τους μορφή βρέθηκε γρήγορα μιὰ λύση (πού ἴσως μάλιστα καὶ νὰ προϋπήρχε): ἦταν ἡ βασιλική, μιὰ ὀρθογώνια αἴθουσα μετὰ κίονες καὶ ἓνα ὑπερυψωμένο βῆμα στὸ ἓνα ἄκρο. Ἡ χριστιανικὴ βασιλική, προσαρμογὴ ἐνὸς τύπου κτιρίου πού εἶχε εὐρύτατη χρῆση στὸν ρωμαϊκὸ κόσμον γιὰ δικαστικούς, ἐμπορικούς, στρατιωτικούς καὶ τελετουργικούς σκοπούς, ἦταν σχεδιασμένη γιὰ νὰ ἐξυπηρετεῖ τὶς ἀνάγκες τῆς συνάξεως: ὁ εὐρύχωρος ναὸς στέγαζε τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικόν, ἐνῶ τὸ ὑπερυψωμένο βῆμα ἦταν γιὰ τὸν κλῆρο, μετὰ τὸ θρόνον τοῦ ἐπισκόπου στὸ κέντρο. Ὑπήρχε ἓνα τραπέζι γιὰ τὴν προσφορά τῆς Θεῆς Εὐχαριστίας καὶ ἄλλο ἓνα γιὰ τὶς προσφορὰς τῶν πιστῶν. Ἐνῶ τὸ ἀρχιτεκτονικὸ σχέδιον τῆς ἐκκλησίας δὲν παρουσίαζε καμμία ἐγγενῆ δυσκολία, τὸ ἀντίθετον συνέβαινε μετὰ τὴ διακόσμησίν της.

Φυσικά, ἀκόμη καὶ πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου, οἱ χριστιανοὶ εἶχαν υἱοθετήσει ὀρισμένους εἰκονογραφικούς κανόνες σὰν αὐτοὺς πού βλέπουμε στὶς διακοσμήσεις τῶν παλιότερων κατακομβῶν, σὲ σαρκοφάγους καὶ στὸ παρεκκλήσιο τῆς Εὐρωποῦ (Δοῦρα) στὸν Εὐφράτη. Εἶχαν ἐκτελεσθεῖ μετὰ τὴν τεχνολογία πού χρησιμοποιοῦσε τότε ἡ ρωμαϊκὴ ζωγραφικὴ καὶ γλυπτικὴ, καὶ ἦταν μικρὰ σχέδια (βινιέτες) πού εἰκονογραφοῦσαν μετὰ ἄκρα οἰκονομία μερικὰ βασικά ἐπεισόδια ἀπὸ τὴν Παλαιὰ καὶ τὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη σχετικὰ μετὰ τὴ σωτηρία καὶ τὴ μετὰ θάνατον ζωὴ. Αὐτὰ τὰ σχέδια ὡστόσο, πού συχνὰ εἶχαν κρυφὸ νόημα, δὲν ἦταν κατάλληλα γιὰ νὰ διακοσμήσουν τὶς πελώριες ἐπιφάνειες τῶν τοίχων τῶν μνημείων πού ἰδρύνονταν πλουσιοπάροχα στὴν κωνσταντινεια περίοδο. Στὴν ἀρχὴ δὲν φαίνεται νὰ εἶχε βρεθεῖ καμμία ἱκανοποιητικὴ λύση. Οἱ «βραχυγραφικὲς» συνθέσεις τῆς τέχνης τῶν κατακομβῶν διατηρήθηκαν καὶ ἐμπλουτίστηκαν μετὰ περίπλοκα μοτίβα πού τὶς πλαισίωναν· κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα, εἰσάχθηκαν «οὐδέτερα» θέματα ἀπὸ τὸ κοσμικὸ ρεπερτόριο, ὅπως σκηνὲς μετὰ κυνήγι καὶ ψάρεμα ἢ ἀπλῶς τεράστιες φυτικὲς συνθέσεις. Αὐτὰ βρίσκουμε στὰ πολὺ λίγα σωζόμενα δείγματα διακόσμησης ἀπὸ τὰ μέσα τοῦ 4ου αἰώνα, ὅπως γιὰ παράδειγμα στὸ μαυσωλεῖο τῆς Ἁγίας Κωνσταντίας στὴ Ρώμη καὶ στὸ μαυσωλεῖο, ἴσως τοῦ Κωνσταντῆ Α', στὸ Centelles κοντὰ στὴν Ταρραγκόνα. Φαίνεται ὅτι μόνον πρὸς τὸ τέλος τοῦ 4ου αἰώνα βρέθηκε μιὰ πιὸ λογικὴ προσέγγιση τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς διακόσμησης μετὰ τὴ χρῆση βιβλικῶν κύκλων, δηλαδὴ ἐνοτήτων μετὰ ἀρκετὰ περίτεχνες εἰκονογραφίες, πού δικαιολογοῦνταν μετὰ τὸ ἐπιχείρημα ὅτι δίδασκον τοὺς

ἀγράμματος. Ἡ μεταλλαγὴ πρὸς μιὰ διηγηματικὴ χριστιανικὴ τέχνη μαρτυρεῖται σὲ μιὰ ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ ἀγίου Νείλου, τοῦ 400 μ.Χ. περίπου,³ ἀλλὰ τὸ παλιότερον σωζόμενο μνημεῖον πού ὑλοποιεῖ τὴν καινούρια προσέγγιση εἶναι ἡ ἐκκλησία τῆς Santa Maria Maggiore στὴ Ρώμη (περὶ τὸ 445 μ.Χ.).

Αὐτὸ μᾶς φέρνει στὸ θέμα τῆς χριστιανικῆς εἰκονογραφίας, ἡ ὁποία ἐπρόκειτο νὰ παίξει τόσο σπουδαῖο ρόλον στὴν ἱστορία τῆς βυζαντινῆς τέχνης. Ἦδη ἀπὸ τὸν 3ο καὶ τὸν 4ο αἰῶνα βλέπουμε νὰ ὑπάρχει ἀρκετὴ ὁμοιομορφία στὴν παράσταση βιβλικῶν σκηνῶν, καὶ μάλιστα σὲ μνημεῖα πού ἀπέχουν πολὺ μετὰ τὸν 200 μ.Χ., εἶναι διαφορετικὴ. Παραστάσεις τῶν θαυμάτων τοῦ Χριστοῦ παρουσιάζονται ἤδη ἀπὸ τὸν 3ο αἰῶνα, ἂν καὶ σὲ ἐντελῶς σχηματικὴ μορφή, ἀλλὰ ἡ πλήρης ἀνάπτυξη τῶν εἰκονογραφικῶν θεμάτων τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης φαίνεται νὰ πραγματοποιήθηκε μόνον τὸν 4ο καὶ 5ο αἰῶνα. Τὸ παλιότερον σωζόμενο παράδειγμα ἐκτενοῦς εἰκονογραφικοῦ κύκλου ἀπὸ τὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη σὲ μνημειακὴ μορφή βρίσκεται στὴν ἐκκλησία τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀπολλιναρίου τοῦ Νέου στὴ Ραβέννα (περὶ τὸ 500 μ.Χ.)· τὰ παλιότερα σωζόμενα εἰκονογραφημένα Εὐαγγέλια εἶναι τοῦ 6ου αἰώνα: πρόκειται γιὰ τὸν κώδικα Rossanensis, τὸ ἀπόσπασμα τῆς Σινώπης, πού τώρα βρίσκεται στὸ Παρίσι, καὶ τὸν συριακὸ κώδικα τοῦ Ραβουλά, πού βρίσκεται στὴ Φλωρεντία. Εἶναι σημαντικό γιὰ τὴ μετέπειτα ἱστορία τῆς βυζαντινῆς τέχνης ὅτι πλήρεις κύκλοι τόσο τῆς Παλαιᾶς ὅσο καὶ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, ἀπὸ ὅπουδήποτε καὶ ἂν προέρχονταν τοπικὰ ἢ χρονολογικὰ, εἶχαν πάρεي ὀλοκληρωμένη καὶ ἐπίσημη μορφή τὸ ἀργότερον γύρω στὸ 500 μ.Χ. Ὑπάρχουν ἐπίσης ἐνδείξεις ὅτι ἀνάμεσα στὸν 4ο καὶ τὸν 6ο αἰῶνα ἀναπτύχθηκαν καὶ ἀγιογραφικοὶ κύκλοι γιὰ τὴ διακόσμηση τῶν τοίχων τῶν μαρτυρίων, δηλαδὴ τῶν ἱερῶν τῶν μαρτύρων. Αὐτὸ τὸ σύνολον τοῦ εἰκονογραφικοῦ ὕλικου, ἀπὸ τὸ ὅποιο τόσο λίγα σώζονται σήμερα, πρέπει νὰ ἐπαιξε στὸ Μεσαίωνα τὸν ἴδιον ρόλον πού ἐπαιξε καὶ ἡ πατερικὴ φιλολογία σὲ σχέση μετὰ τοὺς μεταγενέστερους θεολόγους καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικούς ῥήτορες. Ἐξασφάλισε ἓνα σταθερὸ σημεῖον ἀναφορᾶς καὶ ἓνα σύνολον κοινῶν τόπων.

Τὸ καλλιτεχνικὸ ἐπίτευγμα τοῦ 4ου καὶ τοῦ 5ου αἰώνα ἦταν ἡ δημιουργία μιᾶς τέχνης ποὺ ἦταν χριστιανικὴ τόσο στὸ περιεχόμενον ὅσο καὶ στὸ σκοπὸ. Ἡ ἐποχὴ αὐτὴ ἐπίσης συνέπεσε μὲ μιὰ τεχνοτροπικὴ τάση ἀνεξάρτητη ἀπὸ τὸ χριστιανισμό, ποὺ θὰ ταίριαζε νὰ τὴν ὀνομάσουμε («ἐπαρχιωτισμὸς») τῆς ἑλληνορωμαϊκῆς τέχνης. Οἱ πρόδρομοι αὐτῆς τῆς ἐξέλιξης βρίσκονται στὸν 1ο καὶ 2ο αἰώνα μ.Χ., γιὰ παράδειγμα στὰ ἐπιτύμβια γλυπτὰ τῆς Παλμύρας καὶ τὴν εἰδωλολατρικὴ ζωγραφικὴ καὶ τὰ γλυπτὰ τῆς Εὐρώπῃ. Ἡ κυριαρχία τοῦ διακοσμητικοῦ στοιχείου, ἡ σταδιακὴ ἀπώλεια τῆς τρίτης διάστασης, ἡ μετωπικότητα τῶν ἀνθρώπινων μορφῶν, ἡ ἀδιαφορία γιὰ τὴν κλίμακα —αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ ποὺ κυρίως ξεχωρίζουν σὲ μεγάλο μέρος τῆς ἐπαρχιακῆς τέχνης τῆς ὑστερῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς περιόδου. Ἡ διατήρηση τῶν κλασικῶν προτύπων ἐξαριτόταν ἀπὸ τὴ φωτισμένη προστασία καὶ ἀπὸ μιὰ παράδοση τεχνιτῶν ὑψηλοῦ ἐπιπέδου: καὶ οἱ δύο αὐτοὶ παράγοντες καταστράφηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐμφύλιους πολέμους καὶ τὴν οἰκονομικὴ κρίση τοῦ 3ου αἰώνα. Ἡ νομοθεσία τοῦ 4ου αἰώνα μαρτυρεῖ τὴν ἔλλειψη ἀρχιτεκτόνων καὶ εἰδικευμένων τεχνιτῶν, ποὺ γιὰ νὰ προσελκυστοῦν ἀπαιτοῦνταν κρατικὲς ὑποτροφίες καὶ παροχὴ διάφορων ἀπαλλαγῶν.⁴ Τέτοια μέτρα, ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ ἰδανικὲς συνθῆκες, χρειάζονται κάποιον χρονικὸ διάστημα γιὰ νὰ καρποφορήσουν, ἐνῶ τὸ φιλόδοξο οἰκοδομικὸ πρόγραμμα τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου καὶ τῶν διαδόχων του εἶχε ἄμεση ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ κάθε εἶδους τεχνίτες, καὶ μάλιστα σὲ μεγάλους ἀριθμούς. Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἦταν οἰκοδομήματα κακῆς ποιότητος καὶ ἕνα εἶδος διακόσμησης ποὺ, παρὰ τὶς φιλοδοξίες της, δείχνει καθαρὰ τὸν ἐπαρχιωτισμὸ καὶ τὴν ἀδεξιότητα τῶν δημιουργῶν της. Οἱ «Τετράρχες» ἀπὸ πορφυρίτη ποὺ βρίσκονται στὴ Βενετία, ἀλλὰ σήμερον γνωρίζουμε ὅτι μεταφέρθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ἀποτελοῦν ἕνα καλὸ παράδειγμα σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ τί ποιότητος ἔργα θεωροῦνταν κατάλληλα γιὰ αὐτοκρατορικὲς ἀπεικονίσεις τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου.

Καθὼς ἡ παραδοσιακὴ τεχνικὴ παράκμαζε, ἀξανάταν ἀντίθετα ἡ ζήτηση γιὰ τὸ ἐπιδεικτικὸ, τὸ πομπῶδες καὶ τὸ φανταχτερό. Ἐδῶ τὸ παράδειγμα τὸ ἔδινε ἡ αὐτοκρατορικὴ αὐλὴ, μὲ τὰ θεατρικὰ σκηνικά, τὰ μάρμαρα καὶ τὰ ψηφιδωτά, τὰ πορφυρὰ παραπετάσματα, τὴν ἐπίσημη λειτουργία τῶν ἀκροάσεων, τῶν εισόδων καὶ τῶν ἐξόδων, τὸν προκλητικὸ πλοῦτον τῶν ἐνδυμάτων. Ὑπῆρχε μιὰ τέχνη αὐτοκρατορικῆς προπαγάνδας μὲ τὴ δική της εἰκονογραφία: ὁ αὐτοκράτορας πάντοτε θριαμβευτῆς, σὲ ὑπερφυσικὸ μέγεθος, σὲ μιὰ στάση παγωμένης ἀκίνησιος, νὰ τὸν προσκυνοῦν, νὰ μοιράζει ἀξιώματα, νὰ πατάει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς στὸ λαϊμὸ, νὰ προεδρεύει στὰ δημόσια ἀγωνίσματα. «Ο,τι ἦταν κατάλληλον γιὰ τὸν γήινο αὐ-

τοκράτορα ἦταν ἐξίσου κατάλληλον καὶ γιὰ τὸν Χριστό, καὶ ἔτσι ἡ τέχνη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν δίσταζε νὰ δανείζεται ἀπὸ τὴν προϋπάρχουσα τέχνη τῆς αὐλῆς. Ὁ Καλὸς Ποιμένας στὸ μαυσωλεῖο τῆς Γάλλας Πλακιδίας στὴ Ραβέννα δὲν εἶναι πιά ντυμένος σὰν βοσκός: φορᾶει πορφυρὸ χιτῶνα μὲ χρυσὲς ρίγες. Στὴν ἐκκλησία τῆς Santa Pudenziana στὴ Ρώμη (γύρω στὸ 400 μ.Χ.) ὁ Χριστός, ντυμένος μὲ λαμπρὸ ἐνδυμα, κάθεται σὲ θρόνον σὲ μιὰ ἡμικυκλικὴ ἐξέδρα καὶ δέχεται τὴν προσκύνηση τῶν ἀποστόλων. Ἄλλου πατάει στὴν ἀσπίδα καὶ τὸ βασιλίσκο, ὅπως πατοῦσε ὁ αὐτοκράτορας τοὺς πεσμένους κάτω ἐχθροὺς, ἢ δέχεται ἀπὸ τοὺς μαθητῆς του καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους τὴν προσφορά χρυσῶν στεμμάτων. Παρατηροῦμε στὴν τέχνη μιὰ ἀξανάνομη χρήση τοῦ φανταχτεροῦ, ὥσπου τὸ βάθος τῶν συνθέσεων κατανατᾶει μιὰ συμπαγῆ χρυσὴ μάζα, ὅπως στὸ ψηφιδωτὸ τοῦ τρούλου τῆς Ροτόντας στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη, ποὺ πιθανὸν ἀνήκει στὰ μέσα τοῦ 5ου αἰώνα.

Ἄν τὴν τέχνη τοῦ 4ου καὶ τοῦ 5ου αἰώνα μπορούμε νὰ τὴ θεωρήσουμε παρακμὴ τῆς κλασικῆς τεχνοτροπίας, τὸ κριτήριον αὐτὸ δὲν ἀρκεῖ πιά γιὰ νὰ κρίνουμε τὴν τέχνη τῆς Ἰουστινιάνειας ἐποχῆς. Σὲ μιὰ χρονικὴ στιγμὴ ποὺ δὲν ἀπείχε πολὺ ἀπὸ τὸ 500 μ.Χ. ἐπῆλθε μιὰ αἰσθητικὴ ἀλλαγὴ. Δὲν εἴμαστε ἀκόμη σὲ θέση νὰ ἐξηγήσουμε πῶς ἢ γιατί συνέβη, ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχουν ἐνδείξεις ὅτι ἡ καινούρια τεχνοτροπία ἐγκαινιάστηκε συνειδητὰ, καὶ μάλιστα στοὺς ἀνώτερους κοινωνικοὺς κύκλους. Ἡ ἐξέλιξη τῆς διακοσμητικῆς γλυπτικῆς, καὶ ἰδιαίτερα τοῦ κιονοκράνου, μᾶς δίνει μιὰ καλὴ εἰκόνα τοῦ φαινομένου αὐτοῦ. Πρέπει νὰ διευκρινίσουμε ὅτι τὰ λατομεῖα μαρμαροῦ τῆς Προκοννήσου στὴ Θάλασσα τοῦ Μαρμαρᾶ διεξῆγαν ἐκεῖνη τὴν ἐποχὴ ἔντονον ἐξαγωγικὸ ἐμπόριον καὶ ὅτι ἔτοιμα κομμάτια, ὅπως κιονόκρανα, θωράκια, ἄμβωνες καὶ τὰ παρόμοια, ἐξάγονταν σὲ ὅλη τὴν αὐτοκρατορία, καθὼς καὶ στὴ Δύση. Ἄσχετα μὲ τὸ ποῖος σχεδίαζε αὐτὰ τὰ κομμάτια, τὰ θεωροῦσαν ἐξαιρετικῆς ποιότητος, καὶ ὅπωςδήποτε καθόριζαν τὴν τελευταία μόδα σὲ πολλὰς ἀπομακρυσμένες περιοχές. Μέχρι καὶ ἕνα μεγάλο μέρος τοῦ 5ου αἰώνα τὰ κρατικὰ ἐργαστήρια τῆς Προκοννήσου συνέχιζαν τοὺς παραδοσιακοὺς τύπους κιονοκράνων, δηλαδὴ τὸ κορινθιακὸ ἢ σύνθετον καὶ τὸ ἰωνικόν. Ὅσο κι ἂν τὰ φύλλα τῆς ἀκάνθου καὶ οἱ ἔλικες εἶχαν ἀπομακρυνθεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ κλασικὰ πρότυπα, οἱ βασικὲς μορφὲς διατηροῦνταν. Ἄλλὰ ἀπὸ τὸ 500 μ.Χ. περίπου καὶ μετὰ συναντᾶμε μιὰ ἐντελῶς νέα μορφή, τὸ θεοδοσιανὸν κιονόκρανον (κιονόκρανον μὲ ἐπίθημα), διακοσμημένο μὲ ἕνα ἐνιαῖον σχέδιον, συχνὰ σκαλισμένο βαθιὰ ἀπὸ κάτω ὥστε νὰ μοιάζει μὲ δαντέλα σὲ μαῦρον φόντον. Αὐτὴ τὴν ἐποχὴ ἐμφανίζεται ἕνα ἐξ ὀλοκλήρου καινούριον λεξιλόγιον σχετικὸ μὲ τὴ διακόσμηση, καὶ

τὸ καλύτερο μέρος γιὰ νὰ τὸ μελετήσῃ κανεὶς εἶναι ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Ἀγίου Πολυεύκτου στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη (περὶ τὸ 524-527), ποὺ ἀνασκάφηκε πρόσφατα.⁵ Ἦταν μιὰ πολὺ μεγάλη ἐκκλησία (τετράγωνο μὲ πλευρὰ πενήντα μέτρων περίπου), πιθανὸν μὲ τρούλο, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐποικοδόμημα ἔχει ἐξαφανιστεῖ τελείως, ἀφήνοντας μόνον τὴ θεμελίωση καὶ πολυάριθμα γλυπτὰ μέλη ἀπὸ προκοννήσιο μάρμαρο. Αὐτὰ τὰ τελευταῖα παρουσιάζουν μιὰ ἐκπληκτικὴ διακοσμητικὴ ποικιλία: παγώνια μὲ ἀνοιγμένες οὐρές, στυλιζαρισμένα φοινικόδεντρα, ἀνθέμια τοῦ τύπου τῶν Σασσανιδῶν, ἐλικοειδεῖς βλαστοὶ ἀμπέλου, καλάθια, βάζα μὲ παράξενες φυτικὲς μορφές νὰ ξεπηδοῦν ἀπὸ μέσα. Ἡ συνολικὴ ἐντύπωση πρέπει νὰ ἦταν ὑπερβολικὰ πλούσια καὶ ἴσως ὄχι ἐντελῶς ἀρμονικὴ: ἐν πάσῃ περιπτώσει ἀντιπροσώπευε μιὰ συνειδητὴ ρῆξη μὲ τὴν κλασικὴ παράδοση. Γιὰ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ Ἀγίου Πολυεύκτου πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε ὑπόψιν μας δύο σημαντικὰ στοιχεῖα: ὅτι χτίστηκε ἀπὸ τὴν πριγκίπισσα Ἀνικία Ἰουλιανή, μιὰ ἀπὸ τὶς ἀριστοκρατικότερες καὶ ἴσως τὴν πλουσιότερη γυναίκα τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης τότε, καὶ ὅτι χτίστηκε λιγότερο ἀπὸ δέκα χρόνια πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀγία Σοφία.

Οἱ ἀρχιτέκτονες καὶ οἱ διακοσμητὲς τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας (532-537) δὲν μπορεῖ παρὰ νὰ γινώριζαν τὸν Ἅγιο Πολύευκτο, ἀλλὰ φαίνεται νὰ διάλεξαν μιὰ πιὸ συγκρατημένη προσέγγιση. Δὲν ὑπάρχει λόγος νὰ περιγράψουμε τὸν λαμπρὸ ναὸ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ, καθὼς ἔχει συζητηθεῖ καὶ περιγραφεῖ πολὺ συχνά. Ἐπιπλέον τὸ κτίριο σώζεται σχεδὸν ἀκέραιο. Ὁ ἐπισκέπτης πρέπει μόνον νὰ θυμᾶται ὅτι ὁ ἀρχικὸς τρούλος ἦταν κάπου ἐπτὰ μέτρα χαμηλότερος ἀπὸ τὸν σημερινό, ἔτσι ποὺ ἡ καμπύλη τῆς στέγης σχημάτιζε ἕναν πιὸ συνεχὴ θόλο καὶ παρουσίαζε ἕνα τολμηρότερο ἀποτέλεσμα. Ἐπίσης ὁ ἐσωτερικὸς φωτισμὸς ἦταν δυνατότερος ἀπὸ τὸν σημερινό, καθὼς τὰ τύμπανα τοῦ κυρίως ναοῦ φαίνεται πὼς εἶχαν πελώρια παράθυρα. Πρέπει ἐξάλλου νὰ συμπληρώσουμε μὲ τὴ φαντασίαν μας τὴν τεράστια ἔκταση τοῦ χρυσοῦ ψηφιδωτοῦ, ποὺ σήμερὰ σώζονται μόνον τμήματά του, καὶ τὴ λαμπρότητα τῶν ἐπίπλων καὶ σκευῶν, ποὺ ἦταν ὅλα ντυμένα μὲ φύλλα ἀσημιοῦ —τὸ τέμπλο, τὸ κιβώριο πάνω ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγία τράπεζα, τὰ ἡμικυκλικὰ καθίσματα τοῦ κλήρου στὸ ἱερό, ὁ μνημειώδης ἀμβωνας στὸ μέσο τοῦ ναοῦ. Καθὼς ἀτενίζουμε τὸ ἄδειο κέλυφος σήμερὰ, δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ μὴν παρατηρήσουμε πὼς καὶ ἡ Ἀγία Σοφία εἶναι στὴν οὐσία τῆς ἕνα ἀντικλασικὸ κτίριο. Ἡ ἰσχνὴ ὑπόψιν τῆς βασιλικῆς στὸ σχέδιον εἶναι ἡ κύρια παραχώρηση πρὸς τὴν παράδοση, ἀλλὰ οἱ ἐσωτερικὲς ὀπτικὲς γωνίες παίρνουν παράξενες καμπύλες· οἱ κίονες ἔχουν διαφορετικὰ μεγέθη καὶ ἀναλογίες· τὸ ἐπάνω μέρος ἔχει κατασκευαστεῖ συ-

νειδητὰ ἔτσι ὥστε νὰ μὴν εὐθυγραμμίζεται πρὸς τὸ κάτω· τὰ κιονόκρανα εἶναι θεοδοσιανά, σκαλισμένα βαθιά· καὶ ἡ ἀρχικὴ ψηφιδωτὴ διακόσμηση, ἀπὸ ὅσο μποροῦμε νὰ καταλάβουμε, ἦταν ἐντελῶς ἀνεικονικὴ καὶ μιμοῦνταν τὴν ἐντύπωση ποὺ δίνουν τὰ ἀστραφτερὰ μεταξωτὰ, ζωντανεμένη μὲ ἀφηρημένα σχέδια. Ὅρισμένοι ἐπισκέπτες τοῦ 18ου αἰῶνα δὲν εἶχαν ἐντελῶς ἄδικο ποὺ χαρακτηρίζαν τὴν Ἀγία Σοφία «γοθικὴ».

Ἐπάρχουν καὶ ἄλλα δείγματα συνειδητῆς ρῆξης πρὸς τὸ παρελθὸν τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Ἐνῶ ἡ βασιλικὴ ἐξακολουθοῦσε νὰ ἀποτελεῖ τὸν συνηθέστερο τύπο ἐκκλησίας στὶς ἐπαρχίες, τὰ πιὸ φιλόδοξα κτίρια ἔτειναν ὅλο καὶ περισσότερο νὰ εἶναι τρουλαῖα, ὅπως ὁ Ἅγιος Βιτάλιος τῆς Ραβέννας (περὶ τὸ 530-545) καὶ ἡ ἐκκλησία τῶν Ἀγίων Σεργίου καὶ Βάκχου στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη (περὶ τὸ 531-536). Τὸ μωσαϊκὸ δάπεδο, ποὺ ἦταν οὐσιαστικὰ ἐπιβεβλημένο στὶς πρώιμες βυζαντινὲς ἐκκλησίες, ἀντικαταστάθηκε στὴν Ἀγία Σοφία ἀπὸ μεγάλες μαρμαρίνες πλάκες, καὶ δὲν ἀναβίωσε τοὺς ἐπόμενους αἰῶνες. Τὸ ἐπιστύλιο ἐμφανίζεται γιὰ τελευταία φορὰ στοὺς Ἅγίους Σέργιο καὶ Βάκχο. Ὅσο γιὰ τὴ μνημειακὴ ζωγραφικὴ, εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ διακρίνουμε κάποια ξεκάθαρη τάση στὰ ἔργα ποὺ σώζονται σήμερὰ. Ἴσως ἕνα παράδειγμα ἔργου ποὺ βρίσκεται πολὺ κοντὰ στὴν τέχνη τῆς πρωτεύουσας μᾶς παρέχει τὸ ψηφιδωτὸ τῆς Μεταμόρφωσης στὴν λόγχη τῆς ἀψίδας τοῦ ἱεροῦ τῆς μονῆς τοῦ Σινά, ποὺ χρονολογεῖται ἀπὸ τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Μὲ τὸ συμπαγὲς χρυσοῦ φόντο του καὶ τὶς γωνιώδεις φιγούρες ποὺ αἰωροῦνται στὸ χῶρο, δημιουργεῖ ἕνα ἀποτέλεσμα ὑπνωτικῆς ἀφαίρεσης.

Μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε, λοιπόν, ὅτι τὸν 6ο αἰῶνα δημιουργήθηκε μιὰ καθαρὰ βυζαντινὴ τεχντροπία, χωρὶς ὅμως νὰ ὑποκαταστήσει ἐντελῶς ὅ,τι εἶχε ἀπομείνει ἀπὸ τὴν κλασικὴ παράδοση. Ἄν τὸ ψηφιδωτὸ τῆς μονῆς τοῦ Σινά, μὲ τὴν ὀλοκληρωτικὴ ἐξαφάνιση τοῦ τοπίου, ἦταν «προοδευτικὸ», τὰ ψηφιδωτὰ τοῦ Ἀγίου Βιταλίου τῆς Ραβέννας ἦταν συντηρητικὰ, γιὰ τὴν οἱ συνθέσεις στὸ ἱερό του προσπαθοῦν ἀκόμη νὰ πετύχουν νατουραλιστικὸ ἀποτέλεσμα. Οἱ μορφές εἶναι συμπαγεῖς καὶ βρίσκονται σὲ ἕνα «ἀληθινὸ» σκηνικὸ μὲ οὐρανὸ, βράχους καὶ δέντρα. Ἀκόμη καὶ τὰ πορτρέτα τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ καὶ τῆς Θεοδώρας, ποὺ ἔχουν ἐπισημότερο χαρακτήρα, θέλουν νὰ δώσουν τὴν ἰδέαν μιᾶς κίνησης ποὺ συμβαίνει στὸν τριδιάστατο χῶρο. Μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν ἀντιλαμβανόμεστε στὴν ἀρχὴ ὅτι ὁ Ἰουστινιανὸς καὶ ἡ ἀκολουθία του παριστάνονται νὰ περπατοῦν καὶ ὄχι νὰ στέκονται ἀκίνητοι, ἀλλὰ παρατηροῦμε πὼς ἡ πομπὴ βρίσκεται στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ, κάτω ἀπὸ μιὰ φατνωτὴ στέγη. Ἡ συνύπαρξη τοῦ παλιοῦ καὶ τοῦ νέου, τοῦ νατουραλιστικοῦ (ἄσχετα μὲ τὸ πόσο ἀδέξια ἀποδίδεται) καὶ τοῦ

Ἡ ἱστορία τῆς βυζαντινῆς τέχνης ἀπὸ τὸ 650 μέχρι τὸ 850 περίπου εἶναι σχεδὸν ἕνα κενό. Μποροῦμε ἴσως νὰ βγάλουμε μερικά συμπεράσματα γιὰ τὴν τέχνη τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 8ου αἰώνα ἀπὸ τὰ ψηφιδωτὰ καὶ τὶς τοιχογραφίες ποὺ ἔφτιαξε στὴ Ρώμη ὁ πάπας Ἰωάννης Ζ' (705-707), ἀπὸ τὰ ὁποῖα ἕμως σήμερα σώζονται τμήματα μόνο. Στὴ βασιλεία μάλιστα τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Δ', καὶ ἰδιαίτερα στὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια τῆς (681-685), τὸ καλλιτεχνικὸ ἐπίπεδο τῶν χρυσοῦν αὐτοκρατορικῶν νομισμάτων βελτιώθηκε, καθὼς μιμήθηκαν ἄμεσα τοὺς τύπους τοῦ 5ου καὶ τοῦ 6ου αἰώνα, καὶ διατηρήθηκε ὑψηλὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ Β', τοῦ πρώτου αὐτοκράτορα ποὺ τοποθέτησε τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὰ νομίσματά του. Αὐτὰ τὰ ἐπιτεύγματα δὲν πρέπει νὰ μᾶς ξεφνιαζοῦν, γιατί συμπίπτουν μὲ τὴ σύντομη περίοδο εὐφορίας καὶ σταθεροποίησης ποὺ ἀκολούθησε τὴν ἀποτυχία τῆς ἐπίθεσης τῶν Ἀράβων κατὰ τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης.

Οἱ ἐπιπτώσεις τῆς εἰκονομαχίας στὴν τέχνη πρέπει κατανάγκην νὰ ἐκτιμηθοῦν μὲ βάση τὴ μαρτυρία τῶν κειμένων μᾶλλον παρὰ τῶν σωζόμενων μνημείων. Ὅπωςδήποτε ἔγιναν ἐκτεταμένες καταστροφές ἔργων μὲ θρησκευτικὲς παραστάσεις: οἱ εἰκονομάχοι ἔκαψαν φορητὲς εἰκόνες, ἀπέξυσαν ἢ ἄσπρισαν τοιχογραφίες καὶ ψηφιδωτὰ, ἔλιωσαν πολὺτιμα λειτουργικὰ σκεύη, κατέστρεψαν ἱστορημένα χειρόγραφα. Φυσικὰ δὲν πρέπει νὰ φανταστοῦμε ὅτι οἱ καταστροφὲς αὐτὲς πραγματοποιήθηκαν μὲ τὴν ἀνηλεὴ συστηματικότητα ἐνὸς σύγχρονου ἀστυνομικοῦ κράτους. Γιὰ παράδειγμα, μαθαίνουμε μὲ ἐκπληξή μας ὅτι μερικά ψηφιδωτὰ καὶ τοιχογραφίες στὸ πατριαρχικὸ μέγαρο, δηλαδὴ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, τὸ ἀρχηγεῖο τῆς εἰκονομαχίας, ἀπομακρύνθηκαν μόλις τὸ 768, κάπου σαράντα χρόνια μετὰ τὴ διακήρυξη τῆς ἀπαγόρευσης.⁷ Στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη, τὰ ψηφιδωτὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου δὲν φαίνεται νὰ πειράχτηκαν, ἐνῶ τὸ ψηφιδωτὸ στὴν κόγχη τῆς ἀψίδας στὴ μονὴ Λατόμου ("Ὅσιος Δαβὶδ) στὴν ἴδια πόλη κρύφτηκε πίσω ἀπὸ ἕνα προστατευτικὸ κάλυμμα. Γενικὰ φαίνεται πὼς οἱ καταστροφὲς ὑπῆρξαν μεγαλύτερες στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη καὶ τὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία, δηλαδὴ σὲ περιοχὲς κάτω ἀπὸ ἄμεσο κυβερνητικὸ ἔλεγχο, καὶ μικρότερες σὲ ἀπομακρυσμένες ἐπαρχίες. Οἱ εἰκονομάχοι δὲν κατάφεραν νὰ ἐξαφανίσουν κάθε ἕχνος παλαιοχριστιανικῆς θρησκευτικῆς τέχνης στὴν Ἀνατολή, ἀλλὰ σίγουρα μείωσαν τὸν ἀριθμὸ τῶν ἔργων.

Στὴν προσπάθειά τους νὰ δημιουργήσουν μιὰ ἐναλλακτικὴ μορφή ἐκκλησιαστικῆς διακόσμησης, οἱ εἰκονομάχοι στηρίχτηκαν σὲ «οὐδέτερα» μοτίβα. Τὴν περιφέρη ἐκκλησία τῶν Βλαχερνῶν στὴν Κωνσταντινούπο-

λη τὴ διακόσμησαν μὲ δέντρα καὶ διάφορα ζῶα, καθὼς καὶ γερανοὺς, κοράκια καὶ παγώνια ποὺ περιβάλλονταν ἀπὸ πλέγματα κισσοῦ, πράγμα γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο κατηγορήθηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀντιπάλους τους ὅτι μετέτρεψαν τὸν οἶκο τοῦ Θεοῦ σὲ «ἀπωρῶνες καὶ ὀρνιθῶνες».⁸ Ἔτσι, συνειδητὰ ἢ ἀσυνείδητα, ἐπέστρεψαν στὸ εἶδος τῆς διακόσμησης ποὺ εἶχαν οἱ ἐκκλησίες τὸν 4ο αἰώνα. Οἱ εἰκονομάχοι ἔδωσαν ἐπίσης μεγάλη ἔμφαση στὸ σύμβολο τοῦ σταυροῦ. Στὴν ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἁγίας Εἰρήνης στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ποὺ ξαναχτίστηκε μετὰ τὸ σεισμὸ τοῦ 740, ἕνας ἀπλὸς σταυρὸς σὲ βαθμιδωτὴ βάση καταλαμβάνει τὸ ἡμιθόλιο τῆς ἀψίδας. Τὸ ἴδιο σύμβολο χρησιμοποίησαν συστηματικὰ οἱ εἰκονομάχοι αὐτοκράτορες καὶ στὰ νομίσματά τους. Παρόμοιοι σταυροὶ ἐξἄλλου ὑπῆρχαν καὶ στὴν ἀψίδα τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη καὶ τῆς Κοιμήσεως τῆς Θεοτόκου στὴ Νίκαια (ποὺ καταστράφηκε τὸ 1922) καὶ στὶς δύο περιπτώσεις ὁ σταυρὸς ἀργότερα ἀντικαταστάθηκε ἀπὸ παράσταση τῆς Παναγίας ποὺ κρατᾶ τὸν Χριστό. Μερικὰ ἀγροτικὰ παρεκκλήσια στὴν Καππαδοκία καὶ ἄλλοι διαθέτουν ἀνεικονικὴ διακόσμηση ἀπὸ σταυροὺς καὶ διάφορα διακοσμητικὰ μοτίβα, ὅπως ζῶα καὶ φυτὰ. Αὐτὰ συχνὰ ἀποδίδονται στὴν περίοδο τῆς εἰκονομαχίας, ἀν καὶ στὶς περισσότερες περιπτώσεις ἡ χρονολόγησή τους εἶναι ἐντελῶς ἀβέβαιη.

Μολοντί οἱ εἰκονομάχοι ἦταν ἀντίθετοι στὴ χρῆση τῆς ἀνθρώπινης μορφῆς στὴ θρησκευτικὴ τέχνη, εἶναι γνωστὸ πὼς ἀνέχονταν ἢ καὶ ἐνθάρρυναν μὴ θρησκευτικὲς παραστάσεις, ὅπως σκηνές ἀπὸ κυνήγι ἢ ἀπὸ τὸν ἵππόδρομο. Ἐνα τέτοιο παράδειγμα μᾶς παρέχει τὸ μνημεῖο ποὺ ὀνομαζόταν Μίλιον, μιὰ μνημειώδης ἀψίδα στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ἀφιερωτὴ τῆς μεγάλης ὁδοῦ ποὺ διέσχισε τὰ Βαλκάνια. Αὐτὸ τὸ μνημεῖο ἦταν διακοσμημένο μὲ παραστάσεις ἀπὸ τὶς ἑξι οἰκουμενικὲς συνόδους, οἱ ὁποῖες ὅμως ἀφαιρέθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Ε' καὶ ἀντικαταστάθηκαν μὲ εἰκόνες τοῦ εὐνοούμενου τοῦ ἀρματοδρόμου.⁹ Κοσμικὰ θέματα εἶχαν ἐπίσης περίοπτη θέση στὰ λαμπρὰ οἰκοδομήματα ποὺ ἔχτισε στὸ παλάτι ὁ αὐτοκράτορας Θεόφιλος: ἀναφέρονται συγκεκριμένα εἰκόνες ἀσπίδων καὶ ἄλλων ὅπλων, ζῶων, δέντρων καὶ ἀνθρώπων ποὺ μάζευαν καρπούς.¹⁰ Παρόμοια διάκριση ἀνάμεσα σὲ θρησκευτικὴ καὶ κοσμικὴ τέχνη γινόταν ἀπὸ τοὺς Ὁμμεϊάδες χαλίφες τῆς Δαμασκοῦ: ἐνῶ στὰ τζαμιά ἀπαγορευόταν ἡ ἀπεικόνιση ὁποιοῦδήποτε ζωντανοῦ ὄντος, ἀκόμη καὶ τῶν ζῶων, τὰ ἀνάκτορα τῶν ἡγεμόνων διακοσμοῦνταν ἐλεύθερα μὲ τοιχογραφίες, ψηφιδωτὰ καὶ γλυπτὰ, ποὺ ἀπεικόνιζαν κυβερνήτες καὶ αὐλικούς, παραστάσεις κυνηγίων καὶ συμποσίων, μουσικούς, ἀκόμη καὶ γυμνὲς γυναῖκες. Ὅσο τὸ χαλιφάτο εἶχε ὡς κέντρο του τὴ Συρία, ἡ τέχνη τῆς ἀραβικῆς αὐλῆς καὶ

ή τέχνη τῶν εἰκονομάχων αὐτοκρατόρων φαίνεται πὼς ἀκολουθοῦσαν παράλληλες πορείες.

Ὡστόσο, ἡ πιὸ σημαντικὴ συνεισφορά τῆς εἰκονομαχικῆς περιόδου στὴ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη ὑπῆρξε τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ἀποκρυστάλλωσε μιὰ συγκεκριμένη θεωρία καὶ δικαίωση τῆς θρησκευτικῆς ζωγραφικῆς. Γιὰ ἕναν δλόκληρο αἰῶνα τὰ καλύτερα μυστὰ τοῦ Βυζαντίου εἶχαν ἐγκύψει σ' αὐτὸ τὸ πρόβλημα: καὶ μολοντί τὰ συγγράμματα τῶν εἰκονομάχων θεωρητικῶν ἔχουν καταστραφεῖ, τὰ ἔργα τῶν ὀρθόδοξων ἀντιπάλων τους — τῶν πατριαρχῶν Γερμανοῦ καὶ Νικηφόρου, τοῦ Ἰωάννη τοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ, τοῦ Θεοδώρου Στουδίτη — καταλαμβάνουν πολλοὺς τόμους. Ἡ διαμάχη γινόταν σὲ θεολογικὸ καὶ φιλοσοφικὸ ἐπίπεδο καὶ ἐπικεντρωνόταν σὲ προβλήματα ὅπως ἡ ἀθηντία τῶν εὐαγγελικῶν καὶ πατερικῶν κειμένων, ἡ σχέση ἀνάμεσα στὴν εἰκόνα καὶ τὸ ἀρχέτυπο (δηλαδὴ τὸ πρόσωπο ποὺ παρίστανε), καὶ ἰδίως τὸ κατὰ πόσο ἦταν ἐπιτρεπτὴ ἡ ἀπεικόνιση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποὺ ἦταν καὶ θεὸς καὶ ἄνθρωπος. Τελικὰ κατέληξαν στὸ συμπέρασμα πὼς ἦταν ἐπιτρεπτὸ νὰ ἀπεικονίζονται ἱερά πρόσωπα, ἀφοῦ εἶχαν ἐμφανιστεῖ στὴ γῆ μὲ ὀρατὴ μορφή: ὁ Χριστός, μιὰ καὶ ἦταν τέλειος ἄνθρωπος, οἱ ἅγιοι, ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι, μιὰ καὶ ἔπαιρναν ἀνθρώπινη μορφή σὲ ὀρισμένες περιπτώσεις· ὄχι ὅμως ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Πατέρας, οὔτε ἡ Ἁγία Τριάδα. Ὑποστηρίχθηκε ἐπίσης ὅτι ἡ εἰκόνα διέφερε ἀπὸ τὸ ἀρχέτυπο ὡς πρὸς τὴν οὐσίαν, ἀλλὰ ταυτιζόταν ὡς πρὸς τὴν ὑπόστασιν. Ἦταν κάτι σὰν τὸ ἀποτύπωμα τῆς σφραγίδας ἐνὸς δαχτυλιδιοῦ ἢ σὰν τὸ εἶδωλο στὸν καθρέφτη. Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια, θεωροῦσαν τὴν εἰκόνα ἀληθινὴ καὶ πιστὴ προσωπογραφία.

Ἀναπόφευκτη συνέπεια αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὀρισμοῦ ἦταν τὸ ἀμετάβλητο τῶν εἰκονογραφικῶν τύπων: ὁ καλλιτέχνης δὲν εἶχε τὸ δικαίωμα νὰ ἀλλάξει τὰ καθιερωμένα χαρακτηριστικὰ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἢ τοῦ ἄλλου ἁγίου. Ἀλλὰ ὁ ὀρισμὸς συνεπαγόταν ταυτόχρονα καὶ κάτι ἄλλο, δηλαδὴ τὴν ἰσχὺ τῶν εἰκονογραφικῶν τύπων. Σὲ κανένα ἔργο τῆς εἰκονομαχικῆς φιλολογίας, ἂν δὲν κάνω λάθος, δὲν σκέφτηκε κανεὶς νὰ θέσει τὸ πρακτικὸ ἐρώτημα: πὼς ξέρουμε ὅτι ἡ εἰκόνα ἀποδίδει τὸ πρόσωπο; Τί ἀπόδειξη ἔχουμε, λόγου χάρι, ὅτι ὁ ἀπόστολος Πέτρος εἶχε γαμπρὴ μύτη καὶ γκριζὰ κατσαρὰ μαλλιά; Ἀκόμη καὶ ἂν εἶχε, εἶναι ἀρκετὸ νὰ παραστήσουμε ἕναν ἄνθρωπο μὲ γαμπρὴ μύτη καὶ γκριζὰ κατσαρὰ μαλλιά γιὰ νὰ ἀποδώσουμε ἀκριβῶς τὴ μορφή τοῦ ἀποστόλου Πέτρου; Τὸ γεγονός ὅτι οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ δὲν ἦταν σὲ θέση νὰ θέσουν τέτοια ἐρωτήματα, οὔτε νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσουν τὸ πρόβλημα τῶν εἰκόνων παρὰ μόνον κάτω ἀπὸ θεολογικὴ ὀπτικὴ γωνία, ἀποκαλύπτει μιὰ γενικὴ ἀλήθεια γιὰ τίς καλλιτεχνικὲς τους ἀντιλήψεις. Ἡ τέχνη τους

δὲν ἐνδιαφερόταν γιὰ τὸ ἀτομικὸ καὶ τὸ ἰδιαίτερο. Λίγες γενικὲς διαφοροποιήσεις, ὅπως τὸ χρῶμα τῶν μαλλιῶν, τὸ μῆκος καὶ τὸ σχῆμα ποὺ εἶχαν τὰ γένια, λεπτομέρειες τοῦ ἐνδύματος καὶ μιὰ ἐπιγραφή ποὺ νὰ παρέχει ἀθηντικὴτητα θεωροῦνταν ἀρκετὰ γιὰ νὰ καθορίσουν τὴν ταυτότητα κάποιου. Καθόλου παράξενο λοιπὸν ποὺ ἡ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη δὲν παρήγαγε ποτὲ ἀληθινὲς προσωπογραφίες.

Ἡ ἐπαναφορά τῆς λατρείας τῶν εἰκόνων ἀνάμεσα στὸ 780 καὶ τὸ 814 ἦταν παροδικὴ καὶ δὲν εἶχε μακροχρόνια ἀποτελέσματα. Μόνον μετὰ τὴν ὀριστικὴ ἦττα τῆς εἰκονομαχίας, τὸ 843, ἔγινε σοβαρὴ προσπάθεια νὰ ξαναδημιουργηθεῖ ἡ θρησκευτικὴ τέχνη. Ὡστόσο αὐτὸ δὲν θὰ ἦταν εὐκόλο, γιατί ἡ παράδοση τῆς ἀγιογραφίας εἶχε διακοπεῖ. Ὅπως δὲ ποτὲ τὸ ἀρκετὰ ἀνεκτικὸ καθεστῶς τοῦ Μιχαήλ Β' καὶ τοῦ Θεοφίλου δὲν θὰ μπορούσε νὰ ἐμποδίσει μερικοὺς ἀποφασισμένους νὰ ζωγραφίσουν εἰκόνες καὶ νὰ εἰκονογραφοῦν χειρόγραφα, ἀλλὰ ἀκόμη καὶ ἔτσι, ὅταν ὁ ζωγράφος Λάζαρος (ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς πολὺ λίγους ποὺ ξέρουμε τὸ ὄνομά τους) πιάστηκε νὰ κάνει αὐτὴ τὴ δουλειά, ρίχτηκε στὰ βασιανιστήρια καὶ στὴ φυλακὴ.¹¹ Ὑπῆρχε ὅμως μεγάλη διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα στὸ μικρὸ ἔργο, ποὺ μπορούσε νὰ παραχθεῖ στὰ κρυφά, καὶ τὴν παραγωγὴ κανονικῶν ἐργαστηρίων ποὺ νὰ εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ διακοσμήσουν καὶ πάλι τοὺς τεράστιους ναοὺς τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης. Τὸ ἔργο ἦταν τόσο μεγάλο, ποὺ ἡ πραγματοποίησή του χρειάστηκε κάπου μισὸν αἰῶνα: στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία, τὸ πρῶτο εἰκονιστικὸ ψηφιδωτό, ἡ Παναγία μὲ τὸ Βρέφος στὴν κόγχη τοῦ ἱεροῦ, ποὺ σώζεται ἀκόμη, κατασκευάστηκε τὸ 867· ἡ ἐκκλησία τῶν Ἁγίων Σεργίου καὶ Βάχχου ξαναδιακοσμήθηκε ἀνάμεσα στὸ 867 καὶ τὸ 877, τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων ἀνάμεσα στὸ 867 καὶ τὸ 886, τῆς Παναγίας τῆς Πηγῆς (ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ τείχη τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης) λίγο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸ 879. Ἐξάλλου χτίζονταν καὶ μερικὲς καινούριες ἐκκλησίες ποὺ χρειάζονταν κι αὐτὲς ζωγραφικὴ διακόσμηση. Τὸ δεύτερο μισὸ τοῦ 9ου αἰῶνα πρέπει νὰ ἦταν ἐποχὴ ἔντονης δραστηριότητος γιὰ τοὺς βυζαντινοὺς καλλιτέχνες.

Πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς τύπους ποὺ υἱοθετήθηκαν μετὰ τὸ 843 ἐμελλε νὰ παραμείνουν ἐν χρήσει τὰ ἐπόμενα τριακόσια χρόνια, ἂν ὄχι καὶ περισσότερο. Στὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ οἰκοδομήματα, τὸ τρουλαῖο κτίσμα εἶχε πιά καθιερωθεῖ πλήρως. Σὲ σύγκριση μὲ τίς ἐκκλησίες τῆς ἐποχῆς τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ, οἱ ἐκκλησίες ἀπὸ τὸν 9ο αἰῶνα καὶ μετὰ ἦταν σαφῶς μικρές. Στὴν πραγματικότητα οἱ βυζαντινοὶ ἀρχιτέκτονες δὲν θὰ ξαναέκτιζαν ποτὲ οἰκοδομήματα σὲ μεγάλη κλίμακα — πράγμα ποὺ ἀξίζει νὰ μᾶς βάλει σὲ σκέψεις. Τὸ σχέδιο τοῦ κτιρίου «μὲ διπλὸ κέλυφος» (βασιλικὴ μὲ τρούλο), ὅπως ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία, ἐγκαταλείφθηκε γιὰ χάρι ἐνὸς ἐσωτερικοῦ μὲ με-

γαλύτερη ένότητα. Ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη προτιμοῦσε τὸν σταυροειδῆ ἐγγεγραμμένο ναό, ὅπου ὁ κεντρικὸς τροῦλος στηριζόταν σὲ τέσσερις ἐλεύθερους κίονες, σχέδιο ποὺ συναντᾶμε γιὰ πρώτη φορά σὲ μοναστήρια τῆς Βιθυνίας πρὸς τὸ τέλος τοῦ 8ου αἰώνα. Ὑπῆρχε πάντως τάση νὰ αὐξάνεται ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν τροῦλων. Αὐτὸ ἤδη ἔγινε στὴ Νέα Ἐκκλησία, ποὺ ἰδρύθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Βασίλειο Α΄ τὸ 880, ἡ ὁποία εἶχε πέντε τροῦλους, προφανῶς ἕναν στὸ κέντρο καὶ ἀπὸ ἕναν στὶς τέσσερις γωνίες τοῦ τετραγώνου. Τὸ ἐξωτερικὸ ἔμεινε στὴν ἀρχὴ κάπως γυμνὸ, ὅπως στὴν Πρώιμη βυζαντινὴ περίοδο, ἀλλὰ προοδευτικὰ τοῦ δόθηκε μεγαλύτερη ζωντάνια μὲ προεξέχοντες ἐντοιχισμένους πεσσούς καὶ μὲ ἀψιδώματα, ὥστε νὰ δημιουργεῖται ἕνα πλαστικότερο ἀποτέλεσμα. Ἄρχισαν ἐπίσης νὰ προτιμοῦν μορφές ψηλότερες, λιγότερο κοντόχοντρες. Ἀπὸ τὸν 10ο αἰώνα καὶ μετὰ ἄρχισαν νὰ χρησιμοποιοῦν τὸ τοῦβλο γιὰ νὰ σχηματίζουν διακοσμητικὰ μοτίβα στὸ ἐξωτερικὸ, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ ἴσχυε περισσότερο στὶς ἐπαρχίες παρὰ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη.

Ἡ ἐμφάνιση τοῦ ἐσωτερικοῦ παρέμεινε θεωρητικὰ ὅπως ἦταν στὴν Πρώιμη βυζαντινὴ περίοδο. Οἱ κάθετες ἐπιφάνειες τῶν τοίχων καλύπτονταν μὲ ποικιλόχρωμες μαρμάρινες πλάκες μέχρι τὴ γένεση τῶν τόξων καὶ τῶν καμαρῶν, ποὺ σημειωνόταν μὲ ἕνα γείσωμα ποὺ προεξείχε. Ὁ χώρος πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ γείσωμα διακοσμοῦνταν μὲ ψηφιδωτά. Σὲ λιγότερο φιλόδοξες ἐκκλησίες τὸ ἴδιο ἀποτέλεσμα δημιουργοῦνταν μὲ ζωγραφικὸ τρόπο. Ἀβαθὴ διακοσμητικὰ σκαλισματα, ποὺ συνήθως τονίζονταν μὲ χρώματα καὶ ἐπιχρυσώσεις, γίνονταν στὸ γείσωμα, στὰ θωράκια, στὰ θυρώματα καὶ τὰ πλαίσια τῶν παραθύρων, καὶ ἰδιαίτερα στὸ ἀνοιχτὸ μαρμαρίνο τέμπλο ποὺ χώριζε τὸ ἱερὸ ἀπὸ τὸν κυρίως ναό. Εἶναι δύσκολο σήμερα νὰ συλλάβουμε τὸν ἐξαιρετικὸ, ἀν καὶ κάπως ὑπερβολικὸ, πλοῦτο ἐνὸς τέτοιου ἐσωτερικοῦ, γιὰτὶ ὅλες οἱ σωζόμενες βυζαντινὲς ἐκκλησίες ἔχουν ὑποστῆ καταστροφές. Μόνον ὁ Ὁσίου Λουκάς στὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Μάρκος στὴ Βενετία βρίσκονται ἴσως πλησιέστερα στὴ συνολικὴ ἐντύπωση ποὺ ἐπιδίωκαν.

Ἡ μεγαλύτερη ἐπιτυχία τῶν βυζαντινῶν καλλιτεχνῶν ἦταν ἡ ψηφιδωτὴ διακόσμηση. Ἐχομε λόγους νὰ πιστεύουμε πὼς ἕνας κανόνας γιὰ διακόσμηση τέτοιου εἶδους, προσαρμοσμένος στὴ σύγχρονη ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ, ἀναπτύχθηκε τὸν 9ο αἰώνα, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἔχει διασωθεῖ κανένα σχετικὰ ὁλοκληρωμένο δείγμα παλιότερο ἀπὸ τὸν 11ο. Στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης, τὰ εἰκονιστικὰ ψηφιδωτὰ ποὺ ἐκτελέστηκαν ἀπὸ τὸ 867 καὶ μετὰ μόνον παρένθετα μποροῦν νὰ χαρακτηριστοῦν—ὑπέροχα αὐτὰ καθαυτά, ἀλλὰ ἀναποφεύκτως ἀσυμβίβαστα μὲ τὸν ἀχανῆ ἀρχιτεκτονικὸ τους

περίγυρο. Στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης μόνον ἡ Ἀνάληψη στὸν τροῦλο ἴσως εἶναι ψηφιδωτὸ τοῦ 9ου αἰώνα. Γιὰ νὰ βροῦμε μιὰ ψηφιδωτὴ διακόσμηση ποὺ νὰ καλύπτει ὀλόκληρο τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας πρέπει νὰ πᾶμε στὸν Ὁσιο Λουκά (ἀρχὲς 11ου αἰώνα), στὴ Νέα Μονὴ τῆς Χίου (1042-1056) καὶ στὸ Δαφνί (γύρω στὸ 1100). Παλιότερα δείγματα μᾶς εἶναι γνωστὰ μόνον ἀπὸ μαρτυρίες τῶν κειμένων.

Παρὰ τίς διαφορὰς τους, οἱ διακοσμήσεις αὐτὲς ἔχουν πολλὰ κοινὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ. Τὸ πιὸ σπουδαῖο: ἡ διάταξη τῶν θεμάτων εἶναι ἱεραρχημένη. Μιὰ τυπικὴ διάταξη τῆς Μέσης βυζαντινῆς περιόδου (χωρὶς νὰ ἀναφερόμαστε σὲ κάποιο συγκεκριμένο μνημεῖο) ἀκολουθεῖ πάνω κάτω τὴν ἐξῆς σειρά. Τὸ ψηλότερο μέρος τῆς ἐκκλησίας, τὸ κέντρο τοῦ τροῦλου, προορίζεται ἀποκλειστικὰ γιὰ τὸν Θεό, συνήθως μὲ τὴ μορφή τοῦ Χριστοῦ Παντοκράτορα, δηλαδὴ μιὰ προτομὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποὺ περικλείεται σὲ κύκλο. Ὁ Χριστὸς καμιά φορὰ περιτριγυρίζεται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγγελικούς του σωματοφύλακες, δηλαδὴ τοὺς ἀρχαγγέλους, τὰ σεραφεῖμ καὶ τὰ χερουβεῖμ. Ἡ δευτέρα κατὰ σειρά τιμητικὴ θέση—ἡ κόγχη τῆς ἀψίδας τοῦ ἱεροῦ—προορίζεται γιὰ τὴν Παναγία, ποὺ συνήθως περιβάλλεται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀρχαγγέλους Μιχαὴλ καὶ Γαβριήλ. Κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ τὴν ἀκολουθία του ἔρχονται οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ προφῆτες. Κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν Παναγία τοποθετεῖται ἡ Κοινωνία τῶν Ἀποστόλων καθὼς καὶ κληρικοὶ ἄγιοι, ὅπως ἐπίσκοποι (ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος, ὁ Μέγας Ἀθανάσιος, οἱ δύο Γρηγόριοι) καὶ διάκονοι (ὁ ἅγιος Στέφανος, ὁ ἅγιος Λαυρέντιος κ.ἄ.), οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔτσι συμμετεῖχαν κατὰ κάποιο τρόπο στὴ λειτουργία ποὺ τελοῦνταν μέσα στὸ ἱερὸ. Στὰ τέσσερα σφαιρικὰ τρίγωνα ποὺ στήριζαν τὸν τροῦλο τοποθετοῦσαν κατὰ παράδοση τοὺς τέσσερις εὐαγγελιστές. Στὶς θολωτὲς καμάρες πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ γείσωμα εἶχε τὴ θέση του ἕνας κύκλος μὲ σκηνὲς ἀπὸ τὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη. Ὁσὴ ἐλεύθερη ἐπιφάνεια τοίχων ἀπέμενε στὸν κυρίως ναό καταλαμβάνονταν ἀπὸ μεμονωμένους «λαϊκοὺς» ἁγίους, συχνὰ συγκεντρωμένους κατὰ κατηγορίες, ὅπως πολεμιστὲς ἁγίους (Γεώργιος, Δημήτριος, οἱ δύο Θεόδωροι), γιατροὺς (Κοσμάς, Δαμιανός, Παντελεήμων), μοναχοὺς (Ἀντώνιος, Ἀρσένιος, Εὐθύμιος) καὶ μάρτυρες. Οἱ γενικὲς ἀρχὲς αὐτῆς τῆς διάταξης ἴσχυσαν μέχρι τὸ τέλος τῆς βυζαντινῆς αυτοκρατορίας, στὴν ὀρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μάλιστα ἰσχύουν μέχρι σήμερα.

Τὸ νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἕνα διακοσμητικὸ σχῆμα σὰν αὐτὸ ποὺ περιγράψαμε ἀποτελεῖ μιὰ civitas Dei (πολιτεία τοῦ Θεοῦ) θὰ ἦταν αὐτονόητο, μιὰ καὶ κάθε χριστιανικὴ Ἐκκλησία προσπαθεῖ μὲ τὸν ἕναν ἢ τὸν ἄλλο τρόπο νὰ ἀναπαραστήσει τὴ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ διαχωρίζει τὸ

βυζαντινό σύστημα από το ρωμανικό, για παράδειγμα, η το γοτθικό είναι πώς η civitas Dei έχει περιοριστεί σε μία κύρια ιδέα: την Καινή Διαθήκη. Δεν αποτελεί ένα speculum mundi (πανόραμα του κόσμου): δεν βρίσκουμε στη βυζαντινή εκκλησιαστική διακόσμηση αλληγορίες των άρετων και των κακιών, σύμβολα των ζωδίων, τις εργασίες κάθε μήνα, ελευθέριες τέχνες, σχέδια των επαγγελματιών και των τεχνών. Αυτό που οι Βυζαντινοί αποκαλούσαν *θύραθεν παιδεία* είχε αποκλειστεί. 'Ακόμη και την Παλαιά Διαθήκη είχαν αποκλείσει, με εξαίρεση τους προφήτες που ανήγγελλαν την 'Ενσάρκωση. Για άλλη μια φορά οδηγούμαστε στην Πενθέκτη σύνοδο και το Συνοδικό της 'Ορθοδοξίας: οι σκιές και τα σύμβολα της παλιάς τάξης έχουν άχρηστευτεί από την ύψιστη αλήθεια, την έλευση του Θεού ανάμεσα στους ανθρώπους μέσω της Παρθένου Μαρίας. 'Η βυζαντινή civitas Dei είναι η Καινή Διαθήκη και ο χορός των χριστιανών αγίων.

'Ενα άλλο χαρακτηριστικό της βυζαντινής εκκλησιαστικής διακόσμησης από τον 9ο ως τον 12ο αιώνα αποτελεί ο περιορισμός του άφηγηματικού στοιχείου. 'Αντί για τους μακροσκελείς κύκλους που βρίσκουμε στην παλαιοχριστιανική τέχνη, η ιστορία της Καινής Διαθήκης έχει συμπυκνωθεί σε περιορισμένο αριθμό βασικών επεισοδίων, ένα είδος λειτουργικού ημερολογίου που αποτελείται από τις μεγάλες γιορτές, αρχίζοντας με τον Εύαγγελισμό (συνήθως στους πεσσούς εκατέρωθεν του ιερού) και τελειώνοντας με την Κοίμηση της Θεοτόκου (στον δυτικό τοίχο του ναού). Αυτό ο έκλεκτισμός ήταν σύμφωνος με την αρχιτεκτονική μορφή της εκκλησίας στη Μέση βυζαντινή περίοδο. 'Όσο οι κάθετες επιφάνειες των τοίχων καλύπτονταν από μάρμαρο, με δυσκολία υπήρχε χώρος στον κυρίως ναό για πάνω από δέκα ή δώδεκα παραστάσεις, με την προϋπόθεση ότι παριστάνονταν σε σχετικά μεγάλη κλίμακα.

'Όταν εξετάζουμε τη βυζαντινή εκκλησιαστική διακόσμηση της Μέσης περιόδου από τυπική άποψη, εκείνο που μάς εκπλήσσει πρώτα από όλα είναι η εξαφάνιση του «εικονιστικού χώρου». Στοιχεία τοπίου και αρχιτεκτονικής έχουν ελαττωθεί όσο είναι δυνατό και αντικατασταθεί από ένα ομοιόμορφο χρυσό φόντο. Σε μερικές συνθέσεις, όπως η Γέννηση, η Βάπτισμα και η Εϊσοδος στα 'Ιεροσόλυμα, ο περίγυρος δεν ήταν δυνατό να εξαφανιστεί τελείως και δινόταν με όρισμένα απλά σκηνικά στοιχεία, όπως γίνεται στο σύγχρονο θέατρο. Για τη Σταύρωση ένας σταυρός ήταν αρκετός. Για την Κάθοδο στον 'Αδη, η εικόνα του κάτω κόσμου αποδιδόταν με ένα μικρό σκοτεινό χάσμα, γεμάτο διάφορα σιδερικά (οι άλυσιδες και τα κλειδιά της Κόλασης), καθώς και δύο σαρκοφάγους από τις

όποιες αναδύονταν οι έκλεκτοι. Στον Εύαγγελισμό, το σπίτι της Παναγίας μπορούσε να παραλειφθεί, ώστε να παριστάνονται μόνο οι δύο πρωταγωνιστές. Στον Νιπτήρα, όπως βλέπουμε στον "Όσιο Λουκά, δύο σκαμνιά και μια λεκάνη ήταν τα μόνα σκηνικά που χρειαζόνταν.

'Η απουσία φυσικής προοπτικής, που αποτελεί άλλο χαρακτηριστικό της βυζαντινής τέχνης, μπορεί να αναχθεί κατευθείαν στην παλαιοχριστιανική περίοδο. Το μέγεθος των προσώπων σε μια σύνθεση εξαρτάται περισσότερο από τη θέση τους στην ιεραρχία παρά από τη θέση τους στο χώρο. 'Ας πάρουμε για παράδειγμα την όμορφη Γέννηση στο Δαφνί: η Παναγία και ο 'Ιωσήφ βρίσκονται στο ίδιο επίπεδο, και όμως η Παναγία είναι σαφώς μεγαλύτερη από το σύζυγό της. Οι άγγελοι έχουν περίπου το ίδιο μέγεθος με τον 'Ιωσήφ, αν και στέκονται αρκετά μακριά, πίσω από ένα βουνό: δύο μάλιστα από αυτούς καταφέρνουν και απλώνουν τα χέρια τους πάνω από το βουνό, που έτσι μοιάζει σαν χαρτονένιο, με ύψος ούτε ένα μέτρο. 'Αντίστροφη ή απλώς λανθασμένη προοπτική εφαρμόζεται κατά κανόνα στα έπιπλα, όπως για παράδειγμα στους θρόνους, που φαίνονται πιο στενοί μπροστά από ό,τι πίσω και το κάθισμά τους συνήθως γέρνει προς τα εμπρός σαν κεκλιμένο επίπεδο, φαινόμενο που παρατηρείται ήδη τον 5ο αιώνα στα ψηφιδωτά της Santa Maria Maggiore. 'Η απόσταση δεν υποδηλώνεται πια με χρωματικές διαβαθμίσεις, ούτε υπάρχει μια ομοιόμορφη πηγή φωτός. Τα σώματα δεν ρίχνουν σκιά. Παρ' όλα αυτά τα αντιψευδαισθητικά μέτρα, οι ίδιες οι ανθρώπινες μορφές παραμένουν καμιά φορά εκπληκτικά αρχαιοπρεπείς. Πιστεύουμε ότι αυτό οφείλεται στην παράδοση διαιώνιση της εικονογραφικής παράδοσης των βιβλικών σκηνών. Την εποχή της μαθητείας του ο βυζαντινός καλλιτέχνης αναπαρίστανε τύπους που, όπως είδαμε, άναγονταν στην περίοδο της ύστερης ρωμαϊκής αυτοκρατορίας. Για τον ίδιο λόγο, όλα τα βιβλικά πρόσωπα διατηρούσαν το αρχαϊκό τους ένδυμα, που το αποτελούσαν ο χιτώνας και η χλαμύδα: το σύγχρονο βυζαντινό ένδυμα δεν το χρησιμοποιούσαν καθόλου. 'Εδώ αντιμετωπίζουμε ένα ευρύτερο πρόβλημα, που έχει γίνει αντικείμενο μακρόχρονων συζητήσεων, δηλαδή τη σχέση της βυζαντινής με την αρχαία τέχνη, και πρέπει να σταματήσουμε λίγο για να το εξετάσουμε.

Σύμφωνα με τη γνώμη πολλών πρόσφατων μελετητών, η ιστορία της βυζαντινής τέχνης χαρακτηρίζεται από όρισμένα αναγεννησιακά κινήματα, από τα οποία σπουδαιότερα θεωρούνται οι λεγόμενες αναγεννήσεις των Μακεδόνων και των Παλαιολόγων. 'Η πρώτη παίρνει το όνομά της από τη δυναστεία των Μακεδόνων και πιστεύεται, με κάπως αδύναμα επιχει-

ρήματα, πώς έφτασε στο απόγειό της την εποχή του Κωνσταντίνου Ζ' του Πορφυρογέννητου. Πρέπει να λεχθεί άμεσα ότι η μακεδονική αναγέννηση δεν άντικαθρεφτίζεται σε καμία σωζόμενη τοιχογραφία ούτε σε ψηφιδωτό· η επίδρασή της φαίνεται μόνο στα μικροτεχνήματα, ιδιαίτερα στα ιστορημένα χειρόγραφα και στα σκαλιστά από έλεφαντόδοντο.

Στον τομέα των εικονογραφημένων χειρογράφων τα πιο σημαντικά «αναγεννησιακά έργα» είναι το παρισινό Ψαλτήρι (Parisinus gr. 139), ή Βίβλος του πατρικίου Λέοντα στο Βατικανό (Reginensis gr. 1), το ειλητάριο του Ίησού του Ναυή, επίσης στο Βατικανό (Palatinus gr. 431), και τα Εύαγγέλια Σταυρονικήτα, της μονής Σταυρονικήτα του Άγιου Όρους (κώδ. 43). Το παρισινό Ψαλτήρι άποτελεί ίσως το πιο έντυπωσιακό από τα χειρόγραφα αυτά, γι' αυτό άς εξετάσουμε την περίφημη μικρογραφία που παριστάνει την προσευχή του Ήσαία. Έξωτερικά είναι πολύ αρχαϊκή. Ο προφήτης περιτοιχίζεται από δύο προσωποποιήσεις: του Όρθρου, με τη μορφή μικρού παιδιού, και της Νύχτας, μιιάς ραδινης μορφής που κρατά ένα κυματιστό πέπλο, η όποία μοιάζει να κατάγεται από κάποια αρχαία Έκάτη ή Σελήνη. Έντούτοις η γενική έντύπωση δεν είναι έντελώς ικανοποιητική. Οι μορφές παρατάσσονται χωρίς την αίσθηση της σύνθεσης ή της κλίμακας, το σχέδιο σε όρισμένα μέρη έχει λάθη (ιδίως στην περίπτωση του Όρθρου), το έδαφος δεν απομακρύνεται στο βάθος, και η γραμμή του όρίζοντα καλύπτεται άδέξια από άνθισμένους θάμνους. Άς εξετάσουμε επίσης το Χρίσμα του Δαβιδ στον κώδικα Reginensis gr. 1, που χρονολογείται γύρω στο 940. Και έδω ύπάρχει ένας έπιφανειακός τόνος αρχαϊκότητας, αλλά τα αρχιτεκτονήματα στο βάθος είναι χωρίς νόημα, στη μορφή της Έπιείκειας ο άριστερός καρπός φυτρώνει κατευθείαν από τον άγκώνα, και τα έξι άδέλφια του Δαβιδ μοιράζονται μόνο δύο ζευγάρια πόδια. Το ειλητάριο του Ίησού του Ναυή, μοναδικό παράδειγμα συνεχούς εικονογραφημένης ταινίας, παρουσιάζει το ίδιο ανακάτεμα αρχαίων προσωποποιήσεων, «πομπησιών» σκηνηκών και σχεδίων με μορφές που έχουν έν μέρος παρανοηθεί. Και τα τρία χειρόγραφα αναπαράγουν παραδοσιακά εικονογραφικά θέματα της Παλαιάς Διαθήκης και άποτελούν λίγο πολύ πιστά αντίγραφα προτύπων της Πρώιμης βυζαντινης περιόδου. Σε ποιο βαθμό τα αντίγραφα διέφεραν από τα χαμένα πρότυπά τους είναι σήμερα σχεδόν άδύνατο να καθοριστεί· αλλά άκόμη και αν ύπήρξε κάποια προσαρμογή, αυτό δεν ίσοδυναμεί με ένα γνήσιο δημιουργικό φαινόμενο. Όντας ψευτοκλασικά μάλλον παρά κλασικά, τα εικονογραφημένα χειρόγραφα της μακεδονικής αναγέννησης άντανακλούν την τεχνητή και άναμικη άρχαιοφιλία των αυλικών κύκλων.

Παρόμοιες παρατηρήσεις ίσχύουν και για τα σκαλιστά από έλεφαντόδοντο της μακεδονικής περιόδου. Μεμονωμένες μορφές έχουν καμιά φορά κάτι από την ποιότητα των αρχαίων άγαλμάτων, όπως στην άνάγλυφη πλάκα που παριστάνει τους άποστόλους Ίωάννη και Παύλο (σήμερα βρίσκεται στη Βενετία), το αντίστοιχό της άνάγλυφο του Άνδρέα και του Πέτρου στη Βιέννη, ή το τρίπτυχο Harbaville στο Λούβρο. Ο κλασικισμός, ώστόσο, δεν προχωράει ποτέ πέρα από τις μεμονωμένες μορφές. Στο έλεφαντόδοντο του Ρωμανού στο Cabinet des Médailles, που κατασκευάστηκε περι το 945, ο Χριστός είναι αρχαϊκής τεχνοτροπίας, ένω το αυτοκρατορικό ζευγάρι μοιάζει με παραγεμισμένες κουκλες, και τα άντικείμενα άποδίδονται με άντίστροφη προοπτική. Οι άφηγηματικές συνθέσεις θα μπορούσαν να άποτελέσουν άφορμή για «εικονογραφικά άνάγλυφα» κατά την έλληνιστική τεχνοτροπία, αλλά η εύκαιρία έμεινε άνεκμεταλλευτη. Άς δούμε, για παράδειγμα, την πλάκα με τους Σαράντα Μάρτυρες στο Μουσείο του Βερολίνου. Το θέμα, που πρέπει να άνάγεται σε κάποιο πρότυπο της Πρώιμης βυζαντινης περιόδου, άπεικονίζει τους άγιους να πεθαίνουν από το κρύο σε μιιά λίμνη. Άν διαβάθμιζε το ύψος του άναγλύφου ο τεχνίτης θα μπορούσε να πετύχει την ψευδαίσθηση του βάθους—άλλά δεν το έκανε. Οι μορφές είναι δουλεμένες έξαιρετικά, αλλά το όμοιόμορφο βάθος έχει ως άποτέλεσμα να φαίνονται οι άγιοι σωριασμένοι ο ένας πάνω στον άλλον. Ίδιαιτερα αξιοσημείωτο στον τομέα των βυζαντινών έλεφαντόδοντων είναι το γεγονός ότι βρίσκουμε τη λιγότερο κλασικίζουσα τεχνοτροπία εκεί άκριβώς που θα περιμέναμε να τη βρούμε πιο πολύ, δηλαδή στην όμάδα των κιβωτιδίων που διακοσμούνται με μυθολογικά και άλλα μη θρησκευτικά θέματα. Άπό αυτά, το κιβωτιδίο Veroli στο Μουσείο Βικτωρίας και Άλβέρτου άποτελεί έξαιρετικό παράδειγμα. Οι μορφές στα άντικείμενα αυτά έμφανίζονται πάντοτε σάν παχύσαρκοι πηδηχτοί πυγμαίοι, χωρίς να έχουν καθόλου την κομψότητα και την ήρεμία που χαρακτηρίζει στα έλεφαντόδοντα τους χριστιανούς άγιους και μόνο αυτούς.

Είναι συνεπώς έντελώς παραπλανητικό να ονομάζουμε την αναγέννηση των Μακεδόνων έπιστροφή στην Άρχαιότητα. Άν οι βυζαντινοί καλλιτέχνες φλέγονταν να μιμηθούν την κλασική τέχνη, δεν είχαν έλλειψη προτύπων στο άμεσο περιβάλλον τους. Η ίδια ή Κωνσταντινούπολη ήταν ένα μουσείο αρχαίων γλυπτών, που είχαν συγκεντρωθεί για να διακοσμήσουν την πόλη άνάμεσα στον 4ο και τον 6ο αιώνα· αλλά και η ύπαιθρος ήταν γεμάτη από κλασικά έρείπια. Για να πάρουμε ένα μόνο παράδειγμα, ο μεγάλος ναός του Άδριανού στην Κύζικο, με τον πλούτο των γλυ-

πτῶν του, στεκόταν ακόμη ὀρθῶς τὸν 15ο αἰώνα, ὅταν τὸν περιέγραψε ὁ Κυριακὸς τῆς Ἀγκῶνας, ἀλλὰ κανένας Βυζαντινὸς δὲν φαίνεται νὰ τοῦ ἔδωσε ποτὲ τὴν παραμικρὴ σημασία. Στὴν πραγματικότητα, σκοπὸς τῆς ἀναγέννησης τῶν Μακεδόνων, τόσο στὴν τέχνη ὅσο καὶ στὴ φιλολογία, ἦταν ἡ ἐπιστροφή ὄχι στὴν εἰδωλολατρικὴ Ἀρχαϊότητα, ἀλλὰ στὴν περίοδο πού ἡ χριστιανικὴ αὐτοκρατορία ἦταν μεγάλη, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς ὁ πολιτικὸς σκοπὸς τῶν Μακεδόνων αὐτοκρατόρων ἦταν ἡ ἀνασύστασις τοῦ κράτους τοῦ Ἰουστινιανοῦ. Τὰ διάσπαρτα κομμάτια τῆς παλαιοχριστιανικῆς τέχνης, ὅσα εἶχαν διασωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν εἰκονομαχικὴ διαμάχη, τὰ μιμοῦνταν γιὰ χάρη τῶν αὐτοκρατόρων καὶ τῶν αὐλικῶν, ἀλλὰ δὲν ὑπῆρχε ἀφομοίωσις κλασικῶν ἀξιῶν. Ἡ κίνησις, ὅπως εἶπαμε, φαίνεται νὰ περιοριζόταν στὴ μικροτεχνία· εἶναι ἀξιοσημείωτο ὅτι δὲν ἔγινε καμία προσπάθεια νὰ δημιουργηθοῦν μεγάλα γλυπτὰ ἀπὸ πέτρα ἢ χαλκὸ, οὔτε κἀν αὐτοκρατορικοὶ ἀνδριάντες. Στὸ τέλος τοῦ 10ου αἰώνα ἡ αὐλικὴ ἀναγέννησις εἶχε σβῆσει. Μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπηρέασε κάπως τὸ σχεδιάσμα τῶν μορφῶν τὴν ἐπόμενῃ περίοδο, δὲν προκάλεσε ὅμως τὸ ξεστράτισμα τῆς βυζαντινῆς τέχνης ἀπὸ τὴ φυσικὴ της πορεία.

Ἡ ὠριμη, ὅπως θὰ τὴ λέγαμε, φάσις τῆς βυζαντινῆς τέχνης πέφτει περίπου ἀνάμεσα στὰ χρόνια 1000 καὶ 1150, δηλαδὴ στὴν περίοδο τῆς ἀστικῆς ἀνάκαμψης. Ἡ τέχνη αὐτὴ εἶχε μεγάλη ἀκτινοβολία καὶ πέρα ἀπὸ τὰ ὄρια τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας: βυζαντινοὶ καλλιτέχνες προσκαλοῦνταν στὸ Κίεβο καὶ τὸ Νόβγκοροντ, στὸ Μόντε Κασσίνο, τὸ Παλέρμο καὶ τὴν Τσεφαλού. Ἡ βυζαντινὴ ἐπιρροὴ ἔμπαινε στὴν Ἰταλία μέσω τῆς Βενετίας, μέσω τῆς Σικελίας καὶ μέσω τῶν αὐτοκρατορικῶν ἐδαφῶν πού βρισκόνταν στὰ νότια τῆς χερσονήσου. Βορειότερα, ἰδίως στὴ Γερμανία, ἡ διάδοσις τῆς βυζαντινῆς τεχντροπίας πραγματοποιήθηκε κάπως ἀργότερα, περίπου ἀπὸ τὸ τέλος τοῦ 12ου αἰώνα, καὶ κυρίως μέσω φορητῶν ἔργων, ὅπως ἦταν τὰ ἱστορημένα χειρόγραφα.

Στὸν τομέα τῆς ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς, ὁ 11ος αἰώνας ἔγινε μάρτυρας περισσότερο δραστηριότητος ἀπὸ οποιαδήποτε προηγούμενη ἐποχὴ μετὰ τὴν κατάρρευσις τοῦ Πρώμου βυζαντινοῦ κράτους. Ἐπίσης ἐμφάνισε κάποια πρωτοτυπία. Δυστυχῶς γνωρίζουμε πολὺ λίγα πράγματα γιὰ τὰ αὐτοκρατορικὰ οἰκοδομήματα στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, πού ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τους καυτηριαζόταν ἀπὸ τὸν Ψελλό, ὅπως ἦταν λόγου χάρη ἡ μονὴ τῆς Παναγίας τῆς Περιβλέπτου (πού χτίστηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Ρωμανὸ Γ') καὶ ἡ μονὴ τοῦ Ἀγίου Γεωργίου τῶν Μαγγάνων (ἀπὸ τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Θ'). Ὑποθέτουμε ὅτι αὐτὰ τὰ κτίρια ἀποτελέσαν τὰ πρότυπα σύγχρονων μνημείων τῆς Ἑλλάδας, ὅπως τοῦ Ὁσίου Λουκά, τῆς Νέας Μονῆς καὶ τοῦ

Δαφνιοῦ. Καὶ τὰ τρία ἔχουν ἓνα καινούριο σχέδιο, τοῦ δικταγωνικοῦ ἐσωτερικοῦ μὲ τροῦλο πού στηρίζεται σὲ γωνιαῖες κόγχες. Καθὼς αὐτὸ τὸ σχέδιο σχεδὸν σίγουρα προῆλθε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀρμενία, οἱ βυζαντινοὶ καλλιτέχνες πρέπει νὰ ἦταν πρόθυμοι νὰ δεχτοῦν ἐπιδράσεις ἀπὸ μακριά. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη μερὴ οἱ ἴδιοι μετέφεραν τίς γνώσεις τους στὸ ἐξωτερικόν, ἀναλαμβάνοντας μεγάλα ἔργα σὰν τὴν Ἁγία Σοφία τοῦ Κιέβου καὶ τὴν ἀνοικοδόμησις τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Παναγίου Τάφου στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα.

Ἐχομε ἤδη ἀναφέρει μερικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ κύρια χαρακτηριστικὰ τῆς ζωγραφικῆς αὐτῆς τῆς περιόδου, χωρὶς ἴσως νὰ τονίσουμε ἀκριετὰ τὴν τεχντροπικὴ τῆς πρωτοτυπία. Τὰ ἔργα τοῦ 9ου καὶ τοῦ 10ου αἰώνα συχνὰ φαίνονται σὰν νὰ ἀναπαράγουν πολὺ παλιότερα πρότυπα χωρὶς κάποιο δημιουργικὸ μετασχηματισμό, ἐνῶ τοῦ 11ου αἰώνα διαθέτουν μιὰ πιὸ προσωπικὴ σφραγίδα. Ἐχομε ἀπομακρυνθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν κλασικισμὸ πρὸς μιὰ καλλιγραφικὴ καὶ ἐπίπεδη προσέγγισις, πού ἄλλοτε εἶναι διακοσμητικὴ καὶ κομψή, ὅπως σὲ πολλὰ ἱστορημένα χειρόγραφα, καὶ ἄλλοτε δυναμικὴ καὶ αὐστηρή. Ἡ γραμμὴ, ἀντὶ γιὰ τὸν ὄγκο, παίξει ὄλο καὶ σπουδαιότερο ρόλο. Τὸ ἐνδύμα παίρνει συχνὰ δική του ζωὴ μὲ ἓναν κυματισμὸ πού δὲν δικαιολογεῖται ἀπὸ τὴν κίνησις τῶν μορφῶν. Στρόβιλοι ἀπὸ ὁμόκεντρος πτυχωσεις σχεδιάζονται στὸ στήθος καὶ τοὺς γλουτούς, καὶ ἡ ἄκρη τῆς χλαμύδας συχνὰ κυματίζει σὰν νὰ τὴ φυσάει δυνατὸς ἄνεμος. Μολονότι δὲν εἶναι εὐκόλο νὰ ταξινομήσει κανεὶς τὰ σωζόμενα ἔργα σὲ μιὰ ἐξελικτικὴ σειρά, μποροῦμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι στὴν περίοδο αὐτὴ ἀναπτύχθηκε μιὰ εἰκονογραφικὴ κοινὴ, μιὰ γλώσσα πού οἱ βυζαντινοὶ καλλιτέχνες καταλάβαιναν καὶ χρησιμοποιοῦσαν σὲ ἓναν ἐκτεταμένο γεωγραφικὸ χῶρο.

Τὰ μέσα τοῦ 12ου αἰώνα σημειώνουν ἄλλη μιὰ καμπὴ καὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴ μιᾶς ταχύτερης ἐξέλιξης στὴ βυζαντινὴ ζωγραφικὴ. Οἱ νέες τάσεις εἶναι φανερὲς στὴ διακόσμησις τοῦ Νερεζί, στὴ γιουγκοσλαβικὴ Μακεδονία, πού χρονολογεῖται ἀπὸ τὸ 1164. Πρόκειται γιὰ δουλειὰ ὑψηλῆς ποιότητος, πού παραγγέλθηκε ἀπὸ ἓνα μέλος τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς οἰκογένειας, τὸν Ἀλέξιο Κομνηνόν, ἐγγονὸ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Ἀλεξίου Α'. Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ Νερεζί εἶναι ἐντελῶς στυλιζαρισμένες, ἐντούτοις ὅμως εἶναι φορτισμένες μὲ δραματικὴ ἔντασις. Ἐδῶ παρατηροῦμε ὀρισμένα φαινόμενα πού συνεχίστηκαν καὶ ἔφτασαν στὴν ὑπερβολὴ τὰ ἐπόμενα πενήντα χρόνια: ἀναταραχὴ στὰ ἐνδύματα, πού τείνουν νὰ σχηματίζουν φιδωτὲς πτυχωσεις, διάταξις τῶν μορφῶν κατὰ ομάδες (ὅπως στὴν Ἀποκαθήλωσις, πού ἡ Παναγία καὶ ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς σκύβουν μπροστὰ γιὰ νὰ κρατήσουν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, σχηματίζοντας ἔτσι κάτι σὰν ἀψίδα), καὶ ἓναν τρόπο νὰ περικλείονται τὰ ἀνθρώπινα σώματα μέσα στὸ περι-

γραμμα λόφων που ακολουθούν το σχήμα των σωμάτων (όπως στον Έπιτάφιο Θρήνο και τη Μεταμόρφωση). Το επόμενο στάδιο της εξέλιξης, που χαρακτηρίζεται από αυξανόμενη όρμητικότητα στην κίνηση των σωμάτων και των ένδυμάτων, ένοποίηση των συνθέσεων και μεγαλύτερη έμφαση στα αρχιτεκτονήματα του βάθους, το βλέπουμε στην τεράστια ψηφιδωτή σύνθεση του Monreale, που εκτελέστηκε στις δεκαετίες του 1170 και 1180 από ένα έργαστήριο που γνώριζε την τελευταία λέξη της μόδας στην Κωνσταντινούπολη. Και έτσι φτάνουμε στην τελευταία φάση της βυζαντινής ζωγραφικής πριν από το 1204, που τη βλέπουμε σήμερα σε μερικές μικρές επαρχιακές εκκλησίες: στο Kurbinovo στη λίμνη Πρέσπα (1191), στους Άγιους Αναργύρους της Καστοριάς (άχρονολόγητη) και στα Λαγουδερά της Κύπρου (1192). Μια όμορφη εικόνα του Εύαγγελισμού από το Σινά παρουσιάζει την ίδια τεχνοτροπία με μεγαλύτερη χάρη, και συνεπώς μπορεί να προέρχεται από την Κωνσταντινούπολη. Η τεχνοτροπία αυτή είναι αληθινά fin de siècle: οι μορφές, έπιμηκυμένες και κινήμενες σφοδρά, καλύπτονται από ένα στρόβιλο φιδωτών πτυχώσεων, και μερικές φορές από έναν ιστό χρυσών αυλακώσεων. Στα Λαγουδερά χρησιμοποιούνται για φόντο πολύπλοκα αρχιτεκτονήματα, μοιλονότι ή εκτέλεσή τους παραμένει έπιπέδη. Η εικόνα από το Σινά παρουσιάζει αναπάντεχα ένα ποταμάκι να ρέει σε πρώτο πλάνο: στο νερό του υπάρχουν έρωδιόι, πάπιες, ψάρια και χταπόδια. "Όλα είναι ζωγραφισμένα σε μιá παράλογα μικρή κλίμακα σε σχέση με τις ανθρώπινες μορφές, δείχνουν όμως ένα καινούριο ενδιαφέρον για τις γραφικές λεπτομέρειες.

Η έντύπωση που δίνουν τα παραπάνω μνημεία για μιá καλλιτεχνική αναστάτωση ανάμεσα στο 1150 περίπου και το 1200 έπιβεβαιώνεται και από άλλες πηγές. Η «μεγάλη» γλυπτική, που άπουσίαζε αιώνες όλόκληρους, φαίνεται πώς αναβίωσε, ή εν πάση περιπτώσει υπήρχαν κάποιες σκέψεις για την αναβίωσή της: λέγεται ότι ο αυτοκράτορας Ανδρόνικος Α' έτοιμαζόταν να στήσει τον χάλκινο ανδριάντα του όταν ανατράπηκε από το θρόνο.¹² Η μη θρησκευτική τέχνη εξαπλωνόταν: ο νομικός Βαλασμάων (πέθανε γύρω στο 1195) αναφέρει ότι οι πλούσιοι είχαν στα σπίτια τους εικόνες με έρωτικά θέματα και μορφές σκαλισμένες σε γύψο.¹³ Το πιό σημαντικό από όλα ήταν η εμφάνιση του καλλιτέχνη ως άτομου. Ο αξιολογότερος ζωγράφος αυτής της περιόδου ήταν κάποιος Εύλάιος, ο οποίος πήρε μέρος στην επαναδιακόσμηση των Άγιων Αποστόλων στην Κωνσταντινούπολη και λέγεται ότι παρέστησε και τον εαυτό του, ντυμένο με τὰ καθημερινά του ρούχα, σε μιá σύνθεση όπου εικονίζονταν οι Μυροφόρες¹⁴ —ένα τόλμημα έντελώς έκπληκτικό για τὰ βυζαντινά δεδομένα. "Αλ-

λοι δύο ζωγράφοι, που ονομάζονταν Χήναρος και Χαρτουλάρις, είχαν την εύνοια της αυλής.¹⁵ Το 1200 ο ρώσος προσκυνητής Αντώνιος του Νόβγκοροντ αναφέρει έναν σύγχρονο ζωγράφο πολύ ταλαντούχο, κάποιον Παύλο, που απέδωσε τη Βάπτιση του Χριστού στην Άγία Σοφία με μεγάλη τέχνη.¹⁶ Μέσα στην ίδια πεντηκονταετία εμφανίζονται στη μνημειακή τέχνη «υπογραφές» των ζωγράφων, δηλαδή έπιγραφές που αναφέρουν το όνομά τους. Το παλιότερο παράδειγμα, αν δεν κάνουμε λάθος, είναι στο ναό της Γεννήσεως στη Βηθλεέμ, όπου το 1169 μερικές καινούριες ψηφιδωτές συνθέσεις κατασκευάστηκαν από τους καλλιτέχνες Έφραϊμ και Βασίλειο. Το 1183 κάποιος Θεόδωρος Άψευδής υπογράφει τις τοιχογραφίες στην Έγκλειστρα του αγίου Νεοφύτου στην Κύπρο. Μολονότι άποτελοϋσαν πάντοτε εξαίρεση, οι υπογραφές των ζωγράφων εμφανίζονται σχετικά συχνότερα από την έποχή αυτή και μετά.

Η ιστορία της βυζαντινής τέχνης τον 13ο αιώνα, και ιδιαίτερα την περίοδο 1204-1261, δεν έχει ακόμη ξεκαθαριστεί ικανοποιητικά. Υποθέτουμε πώς μεγάλος αριθμός καλλιτεχνών διέφυγαν από την Κωνσταντινούπολη και βρήκαν δουλειά στις αυλές διάφορων ορθόδοξων ήγεμόνων: πρώτα πρώτα στη Νίκαια, την Τραπεζούντα και την Άρτα, και ίσως επίσης στις αυλές της Σερβίας και της Βουλγαρίας. Είναι κρίμα που δεν γνωρίζουμε τίποτε το συγκεκριμένο για την τέχνη της Νίκαιας, ή όποια άποτελοϋσε το κέντρο του πιό δυναμικού από τὰ τρία έλληνικά κράτη, και κατά συνέπεια πρέπει να έπαιξε ήγετικό ρόλο στις καλλιτεχνικές εξελίξεις. Ίσως ριχτεί κάποιος φώς στο θέμα αυτό αν ποτέ καθαριστούν οι μαυρισμένες τοιχογραφίες της έρειπωμένης εκκλησίας της Άγίας Σοφίας στη Νίκαια. Το μόνο που εΐμαστε σε θέση να πούμε προς το παρόν είναι ότι τὰ αξιολογότερα μνημεία βυζαντινής ζωγραφικής του 13ου αιώνα βρίσκονται στη Γιουγκοσλαβία —και αναφερόμαστε συγκεκριμένα στο Mileševο (περί το 1230-36) και το Sopoćani (περί το 1265). Δυστυχώς δεν γνωρίζουμε τίποτε για τους αληθινά μεγάλους καλλιτέχνες που διακόσμησαν τις δύο αυτές εκκλησίες. Και στις δύο περιπτώσεις έγινε μιá άσυνήθιστη προσπάθεια ώστε οι τοιχογραφίες να μιμουνται ψηφιδωτά. Έτσι, αντί για το συνηθισμένο μπλε φόντο, συναντάμε κίτρινο βάθος, αρχικά έπιχρυσωμένο, καλυμμένο με λεπτό πλέγμα από σκοϋρες γραμμές. Η τεχνοτροπία των τοιχογραφιών αυτών, μοιλονότι δείχνει κάποια σχέση με παλιοχριστιανικά πρότυπα, είναι ιδιαίτερα αξιόλογη για την αΐσθηση του όγκου που παρουσιάζει. Οι ανθρώπινες μορφές, ιδιαίτερα στο Sopoćani, μοιάζουν με αγάλματα και τοποθετούνται μπροστά σε φόντο με αρχιτεκτονήματα που σχεδιάζονται σε τρία τέταρτα —σπίτια, έξώστες, κιονοστοιχίες,

μέ κομμάτια ύφασμα τυλιγμένα γύρω από κολόνες ή άπλωμένα από τὸ ἓνα οἰκοδόμημα στὸ ἄλλο, με ἄλλα λόγια φόρμες πού ἀνάγονται στὴν ὕστερη Ἀρχαιότητα. Οἱ ἴδιες τάσεις ἐμφανίζονται καὶ στίς πρόσφατα καθαρισμένες τοιχογραφίες τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας στὴν Τραπεζοῦντα (περὶ τὸ 1250), πράγμα πού δείχνει ὅτι ἔχουμε μπροστά μας ἓνα φαινόμενο πού δὲν περιορίζεται μόνο στὴ Σερβία ἀλλὰ ἦταν κοινὸ σὲ ὅλοκληρο τὸν βυζαντινὸ κόσμο.

Τὴν τελευταία δημιουργικὴ προσπάθεια τῆς βυζαντινῆς τέχνης τὴν ἀντιπροσωπεύει ἡ παλαιολόγια ζωγραφικὴ πού, ὅπως μπορούμε νὰ δοῦμε ἤδη στὸ Σοροάνι, ἐμφανίζεται σχεδὸν ταυτόχρονα με τὴν ἀνακατάληψη τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης τὸ 1261. Ἡ ἀκτινοβολία τῆς τεχντροπίας αὐτῆς, ἀν καὶ δὲν ἦταν τόσο πλατιά ὅσο τῆς τέχνης τῶν Κομνηνῶν, ἦταν ἐντούτοις σημαντικὴ: τὴ συναντᾶμε σὲ ὅλα τὰ Βαλκάνια, σὲ ὀρισμένες περιοχὲς τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας, καὶ κάπως ἀργότερα στὴ Ρωσία. Αὐτὸ ἀποδεικνύει ξεκάθαρα τὸ πνευματικὸ κύρος τοῦ Βυζαντίου, ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ μιὰ ἐποχὴ μεγάλης πολιτικῆς ἀδυναμίας.

Τὸ πὺ φημισμένο δείγμα παλαιολόγιας τέχνης μᾶς τὸ προσφέρουν τὰ ψηφιδωτὰ καὶ οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ Ἀγίου Σωτήρος τῆς Χώρας (Kariye Camii) στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, πού ἔγιναν γύρω στὰ 1315-1321 με πρωτοβουλία τοῦ Θεοδώρου τοῦ Μετοχίτη, ὑπουργοῦ οἰκονομικῶν καὶ ἀργότερα πρωθυπουργοῦ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Ἀνδρονίκου Β'. Αὐτὸ τὸ μνημεῖο λοιπὸν μπορεῖ νὰ βοηθήσει στὸν καθορισμὸ τῶν χαρακτηριστικῶν τῆς νέας τέχνης. Ἐκεῖνο πού μᾶς κάνει ἐντύπωση πρῶτα ἀπὸ ὅλα —καὶ αὐτὸ ἰσχύει γιὰ ὅλες τίς ἐκκλησίες τῶν Παλαιολόγων— εἶναι ὁ πολλαπλασιασμὸς τῶν παραστάσεων καὶ τὸ μικρὸ τους μέγεθος. Σὲ σύγκριση με τὴ βυζαντινὴ τέχνη τοῦ 11ου καὶ τοῦ 12ου αἰῶνα, τὸ ἀφηγηματικὸ στοιχεῖο αὐξήθηκε κατὰ πολὺ. Στὴ μονὴ τῆς Χώρας ἔχουμε στοὺς δύο νάρθηκες μόνο (ἡ διακόσμηση τοῦ κυρίως ναοῦ ἔχει σχεδὸν ἐντελῶς ἐξαφανιστεῖ) ἓναν κύκλο ἀφιερωμένο στὴ ζωὴ τῆς Παναγίας, πού ἀρχικά τὸν ἀποτελοῦσαν εἴκοσι ἐπεισόδια, ἓναν κύκλο ἀπὸ τὴν παιδικὴ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, σὲ δεκατέσσερα ἐπεισόδια, καὶ ἓναν κύκλο ἀπὸ τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πού τὸν ἀποτελοῦσαν τουλάχιστον τριάντα δύο σκηνές. Ἐπειδὴ ἔχουμε νὰ κάνουμε με ἀρκετὰ μικρὸ χῶρο, ἡ γενικὴ ἐντύπωση εἶναι ἐνὸς ὑπερβολικοῦ εἰκονογραφικοῦ συνωστισμοῦ. Σὲ ἄλλες παλαιολόγιας τοιχογραφίες, ὅπως στὸ Dečani τῆς Σερβίας (γύρω στὸ 1348), ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν σκηνῶν εἶναι ἀκόμη μεγαλύτερος: ἔχει κανεὶς τὴν ἐντύπωση ὅτι οἱ τοῖχοι ζωντανεύουν ἀπὸ τίς μορφές.

Ἡ ἐντύπωση τοῦ συνωστισμοῦ ἐπιτείνεται ἀπὸ τὸ γεγονός ὅτι τὸ φόν-

το ὅλων τῶν ἀφηγηματικῶν συνθέσεων, ἀντὶ νὰ ἀφεθεῖ σχετικὰ ἐλεύθερο, ἔχει φορτωθεῖ με ἓνα πλῆθος ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς μορφῆς. Αὐτὸ δημιουργεῖ κάποια ψευδαίσθηση βάθους, ἀλλὰ ὁ τρόπος παρουσίας τῆς τρίτης διάστασης εἶναι πάντοτε ἀντιφατικὸς καὶ μᾶς προκαλεῖ σύγχυση. Κατὰ κανόνα ἡ δράση παρουσιάζεται σὲ ἓνα εἶδος στενῆς σκηνῆς πού κόβεται στὸ πίσω μέρος ἀπὸ ἓναν τοῖχο ἀπὸ τὸν ὁποῖο προβάλλουν διάφορες πτέρυγες ἢ «περίπτερα». Ἀντὶ ὅμως νὰ ὑπάρχει μιὰ ὀπτικὴ γωνία, συνήθως ὑπάρχουν περισσότερες: στὴν ἴδια εἰκόνα ἓνα κτίριο μπορεῖ νὰ τὸ βλέπουμε ἀπὸ πάνω καὶ ἓνα ἄλλο ἀπὸ κάτω, ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὰ δεξιά καὶ ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὰ ἀριστερά. Οὔτε ἔγινε ποτὲ προσπάθεια νὰ δημιουργηθεῖ κάποια ἐντύπωση ἐσωτερικοῦ χῶρου, ὅπως εἶχαν κάνει ὁ Duccio καὶ ὁ Giotto λίγα χρόνια πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκτέλεση τῶν τοιχογραφιῶν τῆς μονῆς τῆς Χώρας. Ἀκόμη καὶ ὅταν μιὰ σκηνὴ ὑποτίθεται ὅτι συμβαίνει στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ, ἡ στέγη πάντοτε παραλείπεται.

Μέσα στὰ «θεατρικὰ» σκηνικὰ τῶν παλαιολόγιας τοιχογραφιῶν βλέπουμε ἐπιμηκυμένες μορφές πού χαρακτηρίζονται ἀπὸ μικρὰ κεφάλια καὶ πόδια (τὰ τελευταία συνήθως συνδέονται ἄσχημα στοὺς ἀστραγάλους), χοντρές μέσες καὶ πρησμένες γάμπες. Εἶναι τυλιγμένες σὲ φαρυδιὰ ρούχα πού ἀνεμίζουν ἢ πέφτουν σὲ καταρράχτες πτυχώσεις πού συνήθως καταλήγουν σὲ μυτερές γλῶσσες. Μολοντὶ ἡ ἀνατομικὴ κατασκευὴ τῶν μορφῶν εἶναι ἀβέβαιη, ἐντούτοις οἱ φιγούρες δείχνουν ἀνάγλυφες καθὼς χρησιμοποιεῖται ἐντονη φωτισίαση. Τὸ χρωματικὸ φάσμα εἶναι πλούσιο καὶ συχνὰ προβάλλει τολμηροὺς συνδυασμούς, ὅπως γιὰ παράδειγμα μπλε καὶ πορφυρὸ. Ἡ ἔκφραση τῶν προσώπων εἶναι σκεπτικὴ, γλυκιὰ καὶ σχεδὸν τρυφερή. Ἡ αὐστηρότητα τῆς παλιότερης βυζαντινῆς ζωγραφικῆς ἔχει ἐξαφανιστεῖ.

Ὅταν τὰ ψηφιδωτὰ τῆς μονῆς τῆς Χώρας τράβηξαν τὴν προσοχὴ τῶν εἰδικῶν γιὰ πρώτη φορά, πρὶν ἀπὸ ἓκατὸ χρόνια περίπου, μπορούσαν νὰ συγκριθοῦν μόνο με τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Cavallini, τοῦ Giotto καὶ τοῦ Duccio. Λίγο ἀργότερα ἔγιναν γνωστὲς οἱ παρόμοιες ἐκκλησιαστικὲς τοιχογραφίες τοῦ Μιστρά, καὶ ἔτσι γεννήθηκε τὸ ἐρώτημα «Ἀνατολὴ ἢ Δύση;» —ἀν δηλαδὴ προηγήθηκε ἡ ἰταλικὴ ἢ ἡ βυζαντινὴ Ἀναγέννηση, ἐρώτημα γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχει ξοδευτεῖ πολὺ μελάνι. Σήμερα ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν τοιχογραφιῶν τῆς παλαιολόγιας ἐποχῆς πού μπορεῖ νὰ μελετήσῃ κανεὶς εἶναι πάρα πολὺ μεγάλος, καὶ πολλὲς ἀπὸ αὐτὲς εἶναι ἀρκετὰ πρωιμότερες ἀπὸ τὴ μονὴ τῆς Χώρας, ἡ ὁποία θεωρεῖται ὅτι ἀντιπροσωπεύει μιὰ κάπως ἀκαδημαϊκὴ καὶ παρακμασμένη φάση τῆς σχολῆς αὐτῆς. Ἡ σχέση τῆς παλαιολόγιας ζωγραφικῆς, πού τώρα ἀναγνωρίζουμε πῶς εἶχε ἐπιτόπια κατα-

γωγή, με τη ζωγραφική της Ιταλίας παραμένει ασαφής, και μολονότι μπορεί να γίνει λόγος για κάποιον γενικό παραλληλισμό ανάμεσα στις δύο, τα συγκεκριμένα δάνεια που πήραν οι βυζαντινοί ζωγράφοι από τη Δύση είναι ελάχιστα. Αυτό δεν μάς εκπλήσσει, αν σκεφτούμε πώς αυτή την εποχή στο Βυζάντιο επικρατούσε έχθρότητα προς τους Λατίνους και την Καθολική Έκκλησία. Αντί να στραφούν προς τη Δύση, οι βυζαντινοί ζωγράφοι γύρισαν στο δικό τους παρελθόν και βρήκαν πρότυπα κυρίως, όπως φαίνεται, μέσα στα κλασικίζοντα χειρόγραφα του 10ου αιώνα, που με τη σειρά τους μιμούταν πολύ παλιότερα χειρόγραφα του 5ου και του 6ου αιώνα. Το να μιλάμε λοιπόν για παλαιολόγεια Αναγέννηση είναι κάπως παραπλανητικό, καθώς ο όρος «αναγέννηση» ύπονοει μια διεύρυνση των οριζώντων και μια άπελευθέρωση του πνεύματος, ενώ η παλαιολόγεια τέχνη φανερώνει μια αρχαϊκή έσωστρέφεια.

Η τεχνολογία του πρώτου μισού του 14ου αιώνα είχε δυνατότητες να εξελιχτεί παραπέρα. Μπορούσε να προχωρήσει προς την κατεύθυνση μιας έντονότερης πνευματικότητας, όπως έγινε με το έργο εκείνου του άληθινά κορυφαίου τεχνίτη, του Θεοφάνη του Έλληνα, που έδρασε στο Νόβγκοροντ και τη Μόσχα ανάμεσα στο 1378 και το 1405· ή θα μπορούσε να προχωρήσει προς έναν μεγαλύτερο «λαϊκισμό», απορροφώντας λεπτομέρειες από τη σύγχρονη ζωή και ένδυμασία, και κάνοντας τις συνθέσεις πιο γραφικές, όπως στις χαριτωμένες τοιχογραφίες της Ravanica (γύρω στα 1375-85) και της Manasija (1406-18) στη Σερβία, καθώς και της Περιβλέπτου (τέλος 14ου αιώνα) και της Παντάνασσας (1428-45) στον Μιστρά. Η πολιτική κατάρρευση του Βυζαντίου όμως εμπόδισε και τις δύο αναφαινόμενες τάσεις από το να εξελιχτούν περαιτέρω στον τόπο τους. Τώρα η βυζαντινή καλλιτεχνική κληρονομιά, μεταμορφωμένη από μια άλλη ένδραση, θα παρουσίαζε τους πλουσιότερους καρπούς της στη Ρωσία, ενώ στη βενετοκρατούμενη Κρήτη αναμίχθηκε με την Αναγέννηση και τον Μανιερισμό της Ιταλίας.

Η αρχιτεκτονική της εποχής των Παλαιολόγων, αν και όχι τόσο σημαντική όσο η ζωγραφική, έχει τη δική της αξιόλογη χάρη. Έδω τα δάνεια από τη Δύση είναι καμιά φορά πιο έμφανη. Η Παρηγορίτισσα της Άρτας (περί το 1290) μοιάζει με Ιταλικό palazzo και περιέχει σκαλιστά τόξα έντελως δυτικής τεχνολογίας. Ορισμένα μη εκκλησιαστικά οικοδομήματα, όπως το λεγόμενο Tekfur Saray στην Κωνσταντινούπολη (τέλος 13ου αιώνα), τα ανάκτορα του Μιστρά και της Τραπεζούντας, έχουν την ίδια κυβική πολυώροφη μορφή, και τα δύο τελευταία έχουν όξυκόρυφα παράθυρα. Στην πλειονότητά τους, πάντως, οι παλαιολόγειες εκκλη-

σίες ακολουθούν την καθαρά βυζαντινή παράδοση. Ξεχωρίζουν με τις ψηλές τους σιλουέτες, το σπάσιμο των επίπεδων επιφανειών και με την υπερβολικά πλούσια έξωτερική διακόσμηση. Η εκκλησία των Αγίων Αποστόλων της Θεσσαλονίκης (περί το 1315) αποτελεί χαρακτηριστικό παράδειγμα. Το έξωτερικό τους μάλιστα είναι πιο έντυπωσιακό από το εσωτερικό, το οποίο, εξαιτίας του αυξημένου ύψους, δεν δίνει την εντύπωση του ενιαίου θολοσκεπάστου χώρου — του ουράνιου θόλου των παλιότερων βυζαντινών εκκλησιών. Όταν κοιτάμε τον τρούλο μιας παλαιολόγειας εκκλησίας είναι σαν να κοιτάμε μέσα σε ένα αναποδογυρισμένο πηγάδι. Έτσι λοιπόν η σχέση που είχε επικρατήσει τους προηγούμενους αιώνες ανάμεσα στην αρχιτεκτονική και τη ζωγραφική διακόσμηση τελικά διασπάστηκε: από πλευράς αρχιτεκτονικής, επειδή η στέγη και τα ψηλότερα μέρη των τοίχων φαίνονται μέσα από πολύ όξυες γωνίες, και από πλευράς ζωγραφικής, επειδή κάθε εικόνα έχει αποκτήσει τη δική της αυτοτέλεια.

Για να ολοκληρώσουμε αυτή την επί τροχάδην θεώρηση της βυζαντινής τέχνης, ως μάς επιτραπεί να διατυπώσουμε μερικές γενικές σκέψεις. Αναμφίβολα η δική μας αντίληψη αυτής της τέχνης είναι πολύ αποσπασματική και όχι ισορροπη. Αν είχαν διασωθεί περισσότερα μη θρησκευτικά έργα, όπως οπωσδήποτε θα διαπιστώναμε μεγαλύτερη ποικιλία και δεκτικότητα σε έξωτερικές επιδράσεις. Λέγεται, για παράδειγμα, πως ο αυτοκράτορας Θεόφιλος είχε γοητευτεί τόσο πολύ από περιγραφές των ανατοκράτορας Βαγδάτης ώστε πάσχιζε να τα μιμηθεί¹⁷ και ότι μια αΐθουσα σε σελτζουκικό στυλ, με σταλακτίτες και σμαλτωμένα πλακίδια, είχε χτιστεί στο αυτοκρατορικό ανάκτορο στα μέσα του 12ου αιώνα.¹⁸ Και μια και μιλάμε για σμαλτωμένα πλακίδια, μόνο τα τελευταία σαράντα με πενήντα χρόνια έχει αναγνωριστεί η έκτεταμένη χρήση τους από τους Βυζαντινούς στη διακόσμηση των τοίχων, αν και ακόμη δεν αντιλαμβανόμαστε καλά ποιά εντύπωση επιδίωκαν να δημιουργήσουν. Γινόταν επίσης μεγάλη διακίνηση εισαγόμενων αντικειμένων, όπως ήταν τα ισλαμικά έργα μεταλλοτεχνίας, τα μεταξωτά και τα αντικείμενα από όρεϊα κρύσταλλο, που οπωσδήποτε άσκησαν κάποια επίρροη στα βυζαντινά γούστα. Για μερικά έργα μικροτεχνίας μάλιστα, όπως τα υφάσματα και τα κεραμικά, είναι συχνά δύσκολο να ξεχωρίσουμε ένα βυζαντινό προϊόν από άλλα προϊόντα της Έγγυς Ανατολής.

Καθώς είμαστε σε μεγάλο βαθμό περιορισμένοι στη συντηρητική σφαίρα της βυζαντινής θρησκευτικής τέχνης, και ταυτόχρονα προκατειλημμένοι από το θαυμασμό μας για την κλασική Αρχαιότητα, τείνουμε να δίνουμε υπερβολική έμφαση στην αρχαία παράδοση. Προσπαθήσαμε να δει-

ξουμε ότι όπως ακριβώς οι βυζαντινοί συγγραφείς δεν κατανοούσαν αληθινά την αρχαία ελληνική λογοτεχνία, έτσι και οι βυζαντινοί καλλιτέχνες δεν ενδιαφέρονταν για την κλασική τέχνη της ειδωλολατρικής εποχής, είτε την ελληνική είτε τη ρωμαϊκή. "Όσα γνώριζαν για την 'Αρχαιότητα τα έπαιρναν από τους κύκλους των βιβλικών και άγιογραφικών εικονογραφησεων, και επανειλημμένα επέστρεφαν σε πρώιμα δείγματα τέτοιων έργων. "Έτσι όμως οι βυζαντινοί καλλιτέχνες του Μεσαίωνα αναπόφευκτα «παρέφραζαν» τα πρότυπα που μιμούνταν, και σ' αυτή την έκλεκτική παράφραση όφείλεται μεγάλο μέρος της όμορφιάς της βυζαντινής τέχνης. Ένώ η παλαιοχριστιανική τέχνη ήταν επιδεικτική, και, αν την κρίνουμε με κλασικά κριτήρια, αδέξια, η βυζαντινή τέχνη ενστάλαξε στις παλιές φόρμες τη δική της ξεχωριστή πνευματικότητα και κομψότητα. Έγκατέλειψε το νατουραλισμό χωρίς να πέσει σε ολοκληρωτική αφαίρεση και διατήρησε πάντα κάποια κατανόηση της ντυμένης ανθρώπινης φιγούρας. Παρέλαβε μια παράδοση έντονης πολυχρωμίας και τη μετέτρεψε σε μια παλέτα υπέροχου πλούτου και άρμονίας, που αργότερα την κληρονόμησαν οι Βενετοί. Ήταν βέβαια μια τέχνη κοινών τόπων, αλλά η πρωταρχική της λειτουργία ήταν να εκφράζει ένα μήνυμα που ποτέ δεν μεταβαλλόταν: την άχρονη αναπαράσταση του χριστιανικού δράματος, την παρουσία της Ουράνιας Βασιλείας, τη μεσολάβηση των αγίων. Μέσα σ' αυτά τα όρια πέτυχε θαυμαστά αποτελέσματα.

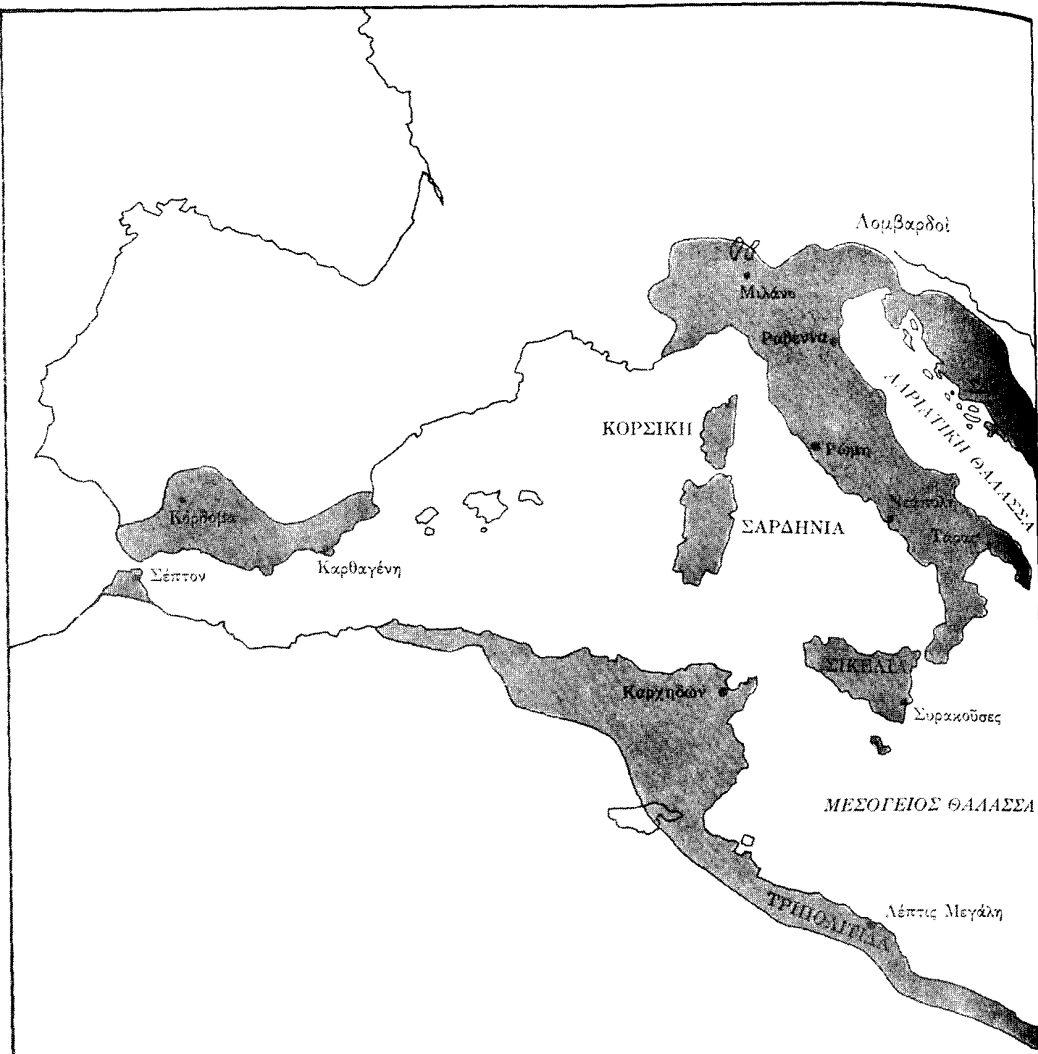
ΠΑΡΑΡΤΗΜΑ
ΚΑΤΑΛΟΓΟΣ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΩΝ
ΧΑΡΤΕΣ

ΧΡΟΝΟΛΟΓΙΚΟΣ ΚΑΤΑΛΟΓΟΣ
ΤΩΝ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΩΝ

Κωνσταντίνος Α' (μονοκρατορία)	324-337	Ίουστινιανός Β' Λεόντιος	685-695 695-698
Κωνσταντίνος Β'	337-361	Τιβέριος Β'	698-705
Ίουλιανός	361-363	Ίουστινιανός Β' (πάλι)	705-711
Ίοβιανός	363-364	Φιλιππικός	711-713
Ουάλης	364-378	Αναστάσιος Β'	713-715
Θεοδόσιος Α'	379-395	Θεοδόσιος Γ'	715-716
Αρκάδιος	395-408	Λέων Γ'	716-740
Θεοδόσιος Β'	408-450	Κωνσταντίνος Ε'	740-775
Μαρκιανός	450-457	Λέων Δ'	775-780
Λέων Α'	457-474	Κωνσταντίνος Ζ'	780-790
Λέων Β'	474	Ειρήνη	790
Ζήνων	474-475	Κωνσταντίνος Ζ' (πάλι)	790-797
Βασιλίσκος	475-476	Ειρήνη (πάλι)	797-802
Ζήνων (πάλι)	476-491	Νικηφόρος Α'	802-811
Αναστάσιος Α'	491-518	Σταυράκιος	811
Ίουστίνος Α'	518-527	Μιχαήλ Α' Ραγκαβές	811-813
Ίουστινιανός Α'	527-565	Λέων Ε'	813-820
Ίουστίνος Β'	565-578	Μιχαήλ Β'	820-829
Τιβέριος Α'		Θεόφιλος	829-842
Κωνσταντίνος	578-582	Μιχαήλ Γ'	842-867
Μαυρίκιος	582-602	Βασίλειος Α'	867-886
Φωκάς	602-610	Λέων Ζ'	886-912
Ήρακλειος	610-641	Αλέξανδρος	912-913
Κωνσταντίνος Γ' και Ήρακλωνᾶς	641	Κωνσταντίνος Ζ'	913-959
Κώνστας Β'	641-668	Ρωμανός Α'	
Κωνσταντίνος Δ'	668-685	Λεκαπηνός	920-944

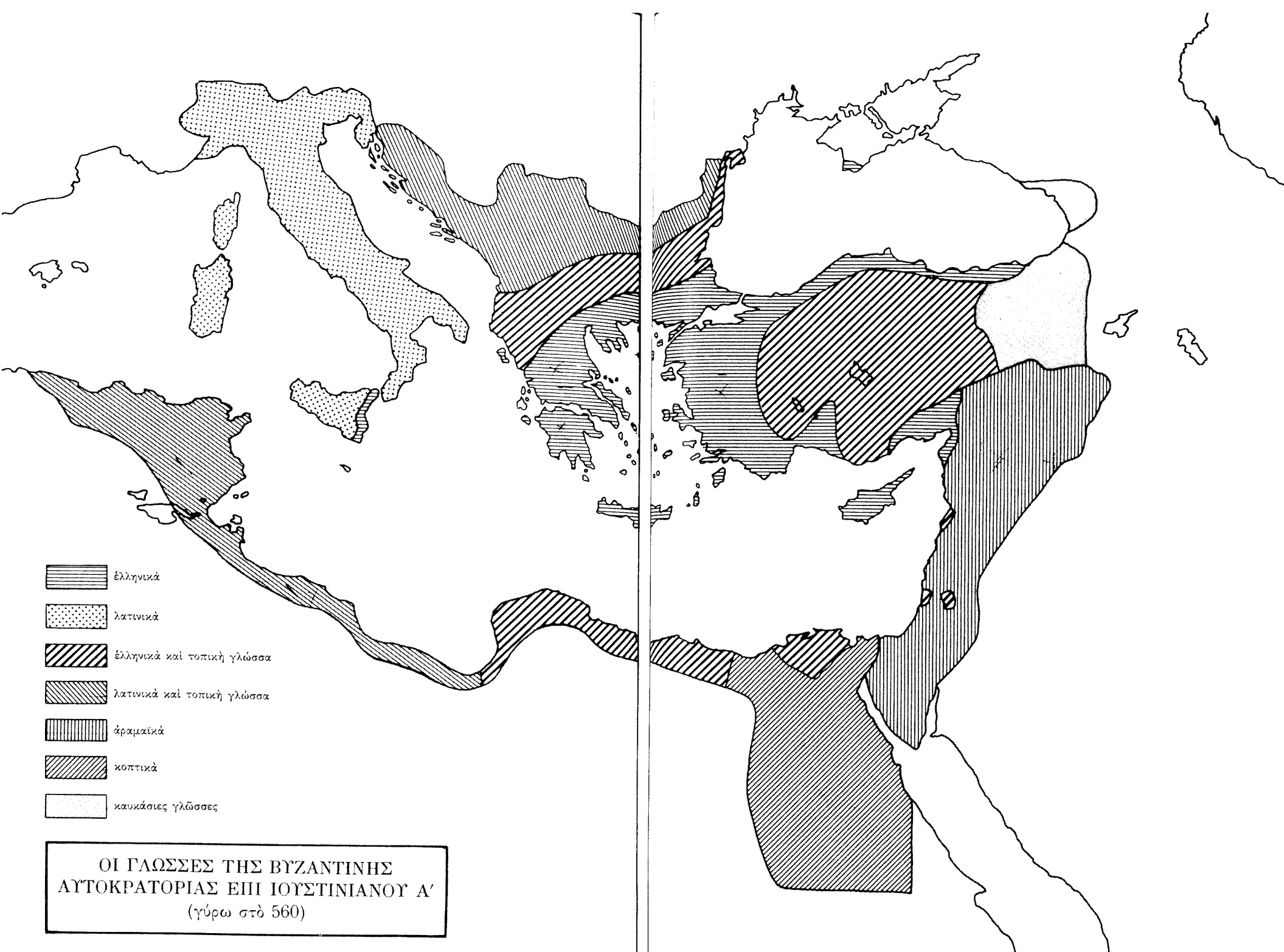
ΚΑΤΑΛΟΓΟΣ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΩΝ







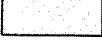
Ρωμανός Β'	959-963	Αλέξιος Ε'	
Νικηφόρος Β' Φωκάς	963-969	Μούρτζουφλος	1204
Ίωάννης Α' Τζιμισκῆς	969-976		
Βασίλειος Β'	976-1025		
Κωνσταντίνος Η'	1025-1028	Στή Νίκαια	
Ρωμανός Γ'			
Αργυρός	1028-1034	Θεόδωρος Α'	
Μιχαήλ Δ'	1034-1041	Λάσκαρις	1204-1222
Μιχαήλ Ε'	1041-1042	Ίωάννης Γ' Δούκας	
Ζωή και Θεοδώρα	1042	Βατάτζης	1222-1254
Κωνσταντίνος Θ'		Θεόδωρος Β'	
ο Μονομάχος	1042-1055	Λάσκαρις	1254-1258
Θεοδώρα (πάλι)	1055-1056	Ίωάννης Δ'	
Μιχαήλ Ζ'	1056-1057	Λάσκαρις	1258-1261
Ίσαάκιος Α'			
Κομνηνός	1057-1059		
Κωνσταντίνος Ι'		Μιχαήλ Η'	
Δούκας	1059-1067	Παλαιολόγος	1258-1282
Ρωμανός Δ'		Ανδρόνικος Β'	
Διογένης	1068-1071	Παλαιολόγος	1282-1328
Μιχαήλ Ζ' Δούκας	1071-1078	Ανδρόνικος Γ'	
Νικηφόρος Γ'		Παλαιολόγος	1328-1341
Βοτανειάτης	1078-1081	Ίωάννης Ε'	
Αλέξιος Α' Κομνηνός	1081-1118	Παλαιολόγος	1341-1391
Ίωάννης Β' Κομνηνός	1118-1143	Ίωάννης Ζ'	
Μανουήλ Α'		Καντακουζηνός	1347-1355
Κομνηνός	1143-1180	Ανδρόνικος Δ'	
Αλέξιος Β' Κομνηνός	1180-1183	Παλαιολόγος	1376-1379
Ανδρόνικος Α'		Ίωάννης Ζ'	
Κομνηνός	1183-1185	Παλαιολόγος	1390
Ίσαάκιος Β'		Μανουήλ Β'	
Αγγελος	1185-1195	Παλαιολόγος	1391-1425
Αλέξιος Γ' Αγγελος	1195-1203	Ίωάννης Η'	
Ίσαάκιος Β' (πάλι)		Παλαιολόγος	1425-1448
και Αλέξιος Δ'		Κωνσταντίνος ΙΑ'	
Αγγελος	1203-1204	Παλαιολόγος	1449-1453



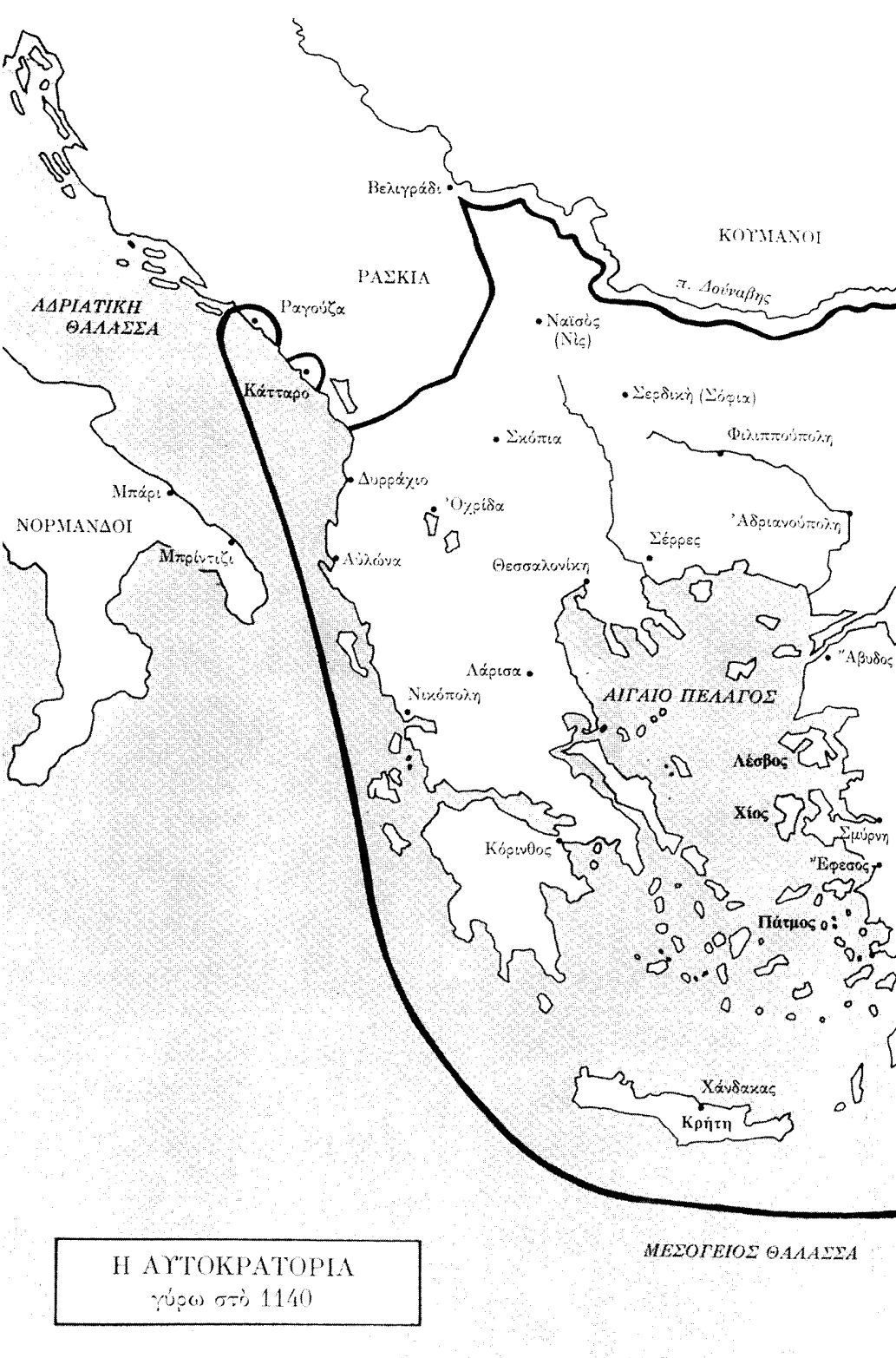
- Έκταση κατά την ανάρρηση του 'Ιουστινιανού Α'
- Κατακτήσεις του 'Ιουστινιανού

Η ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΙΟΥΣΤΙΝΙΑΝΟΥ Α'
 (γύρω στο 560)



-  έλληνικά
-  λατινικά
-  έλληνικά και τοπική γλώσσα
-  λατινικά και τοπική γλώσσα
-  άραμαϊκά
-  κοπτικά
-  καυκάσιες γλώσσες

ΟΙ ΓΛΩΣΣΕΣ ΤΗΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΗΣ
ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΙΑΣ ΕΠΙ ΙΟΥΣΤΙΝΙΑΝΟΥ Α'
(γύρω στο 560)



Η ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΙΑ
γύρω στὸ 1140



ΕΥΡΕΤΗΡΙΟ

- Ἄβαροι 36, 83, 88, 89, 97, 100, 119, 187, 222, 242
 Ἄβασγοί 27
 Ἄβραάμ 182, 183, 232, 255, 264, 305
 Ἄβραάμιος βλ. Ἀθανάσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης
 Ἀγαθίας 46, 285, 288
 Ἀγαπητὸς 263
 Ἄγγελοι (δυναστεία) 252
 ἄγγελοι 184-186, 193, 196, 197, 200, 214, 236, 241, 242, 244, 252, 254, 314, 319· ἀρχάγγελοι 185, 317· λατρεία ἀγγέλων 185, 186· Γαβριήλ 185· Μιχαήλ 91, 185, 186, 254· Οὐριήλ, Ραφαήλ 185· σεραφεῖμ 184, 190, 270, 317· χερουβείμ 184, 190, 233, 317
 Ἄγια Τριάδα 108, 109, 115, 124, 236, 314
 ἀγιογραφία 315
 Ἄγιοι Τόποι 29, 133
 ἀγιολογία 275, 283, 284, 290-295· *Μαρτύριον* 291· βλ. καὶ Βίοι ἁγίων
 Ἄγιον Ὄρος 19, 125, 143, 145, 149, 150, 320· ἀρχεῖα 143· βλ. καὶ μονές
 Ἄγκυρα 28, 90-93, 101
 ἀγορά 48-50, 73, 78, 81, 87, 94, 95, 145, 264, 269· Κωνσταντινούπολης 93, 94, 249· Ἀρκαδίου 95· Θεοδοσίου 95, 107· Κωνσταντίνου 93, 94, 102
 ἀγροκτήματα 21
 ἀγρότες 66, 84, 87, 110, 125, 140· ἐξαρτημένοι (κόλονοι) 57-59, 62-64· βλ. καὶ γεωργοί
 Ἀγροτικὸς Νόμος βλ. νόμοι
 Ἄγρυπνοι 230
 Ἀγχιάλος 175
 Ἀδριανοῦ ναὸς 321
 Ἀδριατικὴ 26, 33, 50, 75
 Ἀέτιος, αἰρετικὸς 59, 91, 101
 Ἀθανάσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης, ἅγιος 170
 Ἀθανάσιος Ἀλεξανδρείας ὁ Μέγας, ἄγιος 291, 317
 Ἀθανάσιος, μοναχὸς 183
 Ἀθήνα 36, 78, 79, 89, 91, 101, 102, 119, 154, 155, 236· Ἀγορά 89· Ἀκαδημία 163· Ἀκρόπολις 89· Ἐρεχθεῖο, Ἡφαιστεῖο, Παρθενώνας 78· σχολές 154, 155
 Ἀθίγγανοι 126
 Αἰγαῖο 70, 74
 Αἰγαίου νησιά 37, 100, 138
 Αἴγινα 36, 89
 Αἴγυπτος 16, 19, 29, 31, 35, 37, 50, 55, 57, 84, 86, 96, 98, 114, 117, 119, 128, 129, 134, 137, 138, 144, 160, 195, 203, 206, 207, 216, 217, 220, 231, 232, 236, 244, 246, 281· Ἄνω Αἴγυπτος 130
 Αἰγύπτιοι 26, 38, 129, 160, 215, 230, 231
 Αἰθιοπία 86, 113, 119, 207, 208, 214, 220, 243, 244
 Αἰλὰ ἢ Αἰλᾶθ ἢ Ἀιλέχ, ἀρχ. Αἰλιανὰ, σημ. Ἀκαμπα 221
 Αἴλιος Ἀριστείδης 284, 290
 Αἶνος 43, 253
 αἰρέσεις 108-127, 196, 235· αἵτια 125· δυιστικὲς 125, 126· αὐθενεῖς 115, 117, 126· βλ. καὶ ἀρειανισμός, βογομιλισμός, μανιχαϊσμός, μοντανισμός, μονοφυσιτισμός, παυλικιανισμός
 αἰρετικοὶ 43, 88, 108-127, 132, 136, 163, 193, 222, 254, 255, 260, 269· βλ. καὶ ἀρειανοί, βογόμιλοι, ἰακωβίτες, μανιχαῖτοι, μονοφυσίτες, νεστοριανοί, παυλικιανοί, τεσσαρεσκαιδεκάτιοι
 Αἴσωπος 283
 αἰχμάλωτοι 37, 51, 113, 119
 Ἀκάθιστος Ὕμνος βλ. ὕμνοι θρησκευτικοί
 ἀκηδία 266
 ἀκόλουθοι 69
 Ἀκροκόρινθος 89

Τὸ Εὐρετήριο τὸ συνέταξε ἡ φιλόλογος Ἑλένη Γεωργιάδη.

- Ἀκροπολίτης Γεώργιος 286
Ἀλανοί 105
Ἀλεξάνδρεια 31, 50, 55, 77-79, 95, 96, 110, 138, 154, 161-163, 165, 166, 207, 214, 215, 225, 244, 248, 252, 303· κατάρκτηση ἀπὸ Πέρσες 97· Ἐκκλησία 50, 51, 55· Καισαρείο 78, Σεραπεῖο 78, 110· Σχολή 154, 155, 161, 162· Φάρος 78
Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μέγας 29, 217, 223, 234, 299
Ἀλέξανδρος, αὐτοκράτορας 181
Ἀλέξανδρος, μητροπολίτης Νικαίας 169
Ἀλέξιος Α΄ Κομνηνὸς 68, 75, 104, 124, 173-175, 323
Ἀλέξιος Γ΄ 146
Ἀλέξιος Δ΄ 252
Ἀμαζόνες 299
Ἀμαθί 216
Ἀμαθος 216
Ἀμανὸ ὄρος 216
Ἀμάσεια 186-187
Ἀμαστρη 99
Ἀμιδα 29, 85
ἀμοιβές 53, 54, 56, 57
Ἀμόριο 90, 91
Ἀναγέννηση Μακεδόνων, Παλαιολόγων βλ. τέχνη
Ἀναγέννηση ἰταλική 16, 327, 328
Ἀνανίας ὁ Συρακηνὸς 164
ἀνάπηροι 45, 49
Ἀνάπλους 135
ἀνασκαφές 88-90· βλ. καὶ ἀρχαιολογία
Ἀναστασιανὸ Μακρὸ Τεῖχος βλ. τείχη
Ἀναστάσιος Α΄ 52, 53, 79, 85, 109, 117, 241
Ἀναστάσιος Β΄ 97
Ἀναστάσιος ὁ Σιναΐτης 221, 222
Ἀναστασιούπολις 51
Ἀνατολία ὑψίπεδο 37
Ἀνατόλιος, πατριάρχης 135
ἀναχώρησις 128, 129, 134
ἀναχωρητές 137, 143, 189, 224· βλ. καὶ ἀσκητές
Ἀνδρέας, ἀπόστολος 182, 183, 219, 220, 249, 321
Ἀνδρέας ὁ Σαλός, ἅγιος 186, 245-251
Ἀνδρέας Κρήτης 285
Ἀνδρόνικος Α΄ Κομνηνὸς 324
Ἀνδρόνικος Β΄ Παλαιολόγος 296, 326
Ἄνδρος 166, 168, 296, 326
ἀνεξίτηρησκία 127
Ἀνθέμιος 302
Ἀνικία Ἰουλιανή 308
Ἀνίου βασιλεῖο 73
Ἄννα Κομνηνή βλ. Κομνηνοί
Ἄνησοι Πόντου 134
Ἄννιανὸς 229, 241
ἀννόνα 94, 96
Ἄντες 33
ἀντιγραφεῖς 169
Ἀντιόχεια Πισιδίας 28
Ἀντιόχεια Συρίας 28, 29, 34, 51, 52, 54, 55, 79, 80, 82, 85, 86, 93-95, 114, 118, 124, 135, 136, 154, 155, 220, 225, 297, 303· Ἐκκλησία 49, 51, 52· Σχολή 204, 205
Ἀντίοχος ὁ Ἐπιφανῆς 234
Ἀντώνιος, ἅγιος 128-134, 158, 195, 196, 291, 317
Ἀντώνιος Α΄ Κασσιματᾶς, πατριάρχης 166
Ἀντώνιος τοῦ Νόβγκοροντ 325
ἀξιωματοῦχοι 45, 58, 60, 67, 71, 73, 135, 154, 164, 169, 170, 174, 184, 186, 187, 256· αὐτοκρατορικοὶ 54, 58, 59, 64· ἐκκλησιαστικοὶ 66
Αἰζώμη 218, 220
ἀπάθεια 132
Ἀπάμεια 29
ἀπελάτες 299
Ἀπίωνες, οἰκογένεια 57
ἀπογραφή 58
Ἀποκάτης Μιχαὴλ 69, 70
Ἀπολλινάριος, γραμματικὸς 159
Ἀπόλλων 236
ἄποροι 55
Ἀποστολικοὶ Κανόνες 158
ἀπόστολοι 144, 159, 187, 214, 219, 220, 233, 254, 255, 277, 307, 317
Ἄραβες, ἀραβική κατάρκτηση 15-17, 19, 30, 35, 37, 38, 45, 55, 61, 73, 91, 97, 105, 110, 113, 114, 118, 119, 166-168, 222, 243-246, 250-252, 254, 298, 299, 312
Ἄραβία 78, 113, 220, 247, 248
Ἄραβικὸς Κόλπος 208
Ἄραδίος 216
Ἄραδος 216
Ἄρατος 168
Ἀρέθας, ἐπίσκοπος Καισαρείας 169, 281
ἀρειανισμὸς, ἀρειανοὶ 109, 115, 254
Ἄρειος 235
ἀριθμητική 151, 153, 164, 166, 172, 201
ἀριστοκράτες, ἀριστοκρατία 48, 49, 59, 65, 66-68, 72, 74, 75, 110, 125, 137, 162, 278, 280, 296, 297· ἄνοδος στὴν ἐξουσία 65-68
Ἀριστοτέλης 164, 168, 172, 198
Ἀρκάδιος, αὐτοκράτορας 95, 187
Ἀρμενία 28, 29, 49, 84, 122, 164, 217, 219, 248, 297, 322· Περσική Ἀρμενία 199

- Ἀρμένιοι 28, 38-42, 88, 106, 119, 125, 220
Ἀρσαμοσάτων ἐπισκοπή 49
Ἀρσένιος, ἅγιος 317
Ἄρτα 325, 328
Ἀρτάκη 90
Ἀρτέμιος, ἅγιος 98, 99, 190· Τὰ θαύματα τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀρτεμίου 98, 99
ἀρχαῖα κείμενα 152, 165
ἀρχαιολογία, ἀρχαιολογικὲς μαρτυρίες 17, 18, 20, 51, 57, 78, 87, 88, 93, 101, 102, 303, 311, 321· βλ. καὶ ἀνασκαφές
ἀρχιτεκτονική: ἐκκλησιαστική 304-330· μοναστηριακή 143· βλ. καὶ ἐκκλησίες, τέχνη
ἄρχοντες 40, 69, 123, 261, 262
Ἄσια 27, 217, 219, 220, 248, 249, 303
Ἀσκαλὼν 55
ἀσκησις 128, 129, 132, 134
ἀσκητές 135, 136, 138, 145, 291
ἀσκητικὴ ζωὴ 116
Ἀσσυρία 231, 236
Ἀσσύριοι 199, 223, 230, 232, 234
ἀστικά ἐπαγγέλματα 55· ἀστικά κέντρα 86, 110· ἀστικὴ ἀνάπτυξη 104· ζωὴ 20, 27, 63, 70, 80, 86-88, 93, 99, 102, 269· οἰκονομία 71, 73, 90, 92· τάξη 54, 55, 65, 171, 290, 296· ἀστικὸς πολιτισμὸς 17, 75
ἀστρολογία 168, 172, 200, 204, 215, 231
ἀστρονομία 153, 166, 167, 169, 173, 201, 230, 232· ἔδρα ἀστρονομίας 169
ἀστυνομία κρατική 112
ἀτιμία 115
Ἄτταλειάτης Μιχαὴλ 281, 286
Ἄττίλας 83
Αὐγουσταῖο 107
Αὐγουστίνος, ἅγιος, ἐπίσκοπος Ἴππῶνος 32
αὐτοκρατορική αὐλὴ 44, 181, 259-260
Ἀφρική 32, 37, 47, 56, 80, 220, 244· Βόρεια 16, 25, 77, 217
Ἀφρικανοὶ 27
Ἀφρικανὸς, λόγιος 227, 237
Ἀφροδίτη 231
Ἀχαῖα 219, 220
Ἀχρίδα 102
Ἀψευδῆς Θεόδωρος, ζωγράφος 325
Βάαλ 231
Βαβὲλ Πύργος 216, 217, 232, 235
Βαβυλωνία 232
Βαβυλώνιοι 215
Βάκχος 111
Βαλκάνια 17, 18, 25, 26, 33, 35-37, 41, 56, 74, 83, 87, 88, 99, 119, 123, 125, 303, 313, 326
Βαλσαμών, νομικὸς 324
Βαλτική 17
βανδαλισμὸς 86
Βάνδαλοι 32
Βαραδαῖος Ἰακώβ 118
βάρβαροι 16, 26, 31, 32, 34, 41, 42, 47, 60, 61, 63, 72, 78, 96, 120, 172, 174, 188, 206, 270, 310
Βάργαλα 88
Βάρδας, καίσαρ, 167-169, 176· πανεπιστήμιο τοῦ Βάρδα 169
Βαρθολομαῖος, ἀπόστολος 220
Βαρθολαῖμ καὶ Ἰωάννης 284
Βαρσούμης Πέτρος 116
Βασιλάκης Νικηφόρος 176
Βασίλειος ὁ Μέγας 132-134, 148, 160, 177, 188, 191, 200-206, 269-271, 283, 317· Ἐξαήμερον 148, 198, 201, 204· Ὅροι κατὰ πλάτος, Ὅροι κατ' ἐπιλογὴν 134
Βασίλειος ὁ Νέος, ἅγιος 102, 189, 253
Βασίλειος Α΄ Μακεδὼν 40, 63, 66, 101, 102, 114, 119, 169, 260, 316· Νομικὸς Κώδικας 260· Κτισμάτων Κατάλογος 101
Βασίλειος Β΄ 73, 141, 142, 289
Βασίλειος Κίνναμος, ἐπίσκοπος Πάφου 148
Βασίλειος, μοναχὸς 124, 125
Βασίλειος, ψηφιδογράφος 325
βασιλική 51, 78, 102, 304, 308, 309, 315· Ἁγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης 188, 310, 312· Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου 90· Παναγίας Βλαχερνῶν 187, 312· Παναγίας Ἐφέσου 90· Παναγίας Χαλκοκρατειῶν 186
Βελισάριος 54, 286-288
Βενετία 104, 306, 316, 321, 322
Βενετοὶ 75, 104, 106, 252, 330
Βένετοι 83, 85, 86, 99· βλ. καὶ δῆμοι
Βενιαμὴν τῆς Τουδέλα 114
Βέρβεροι 31
Βέρροια 102
Βηθλεὲμ 133
Βηθσαῖδα 244
Βηρυτὸς 55, 154, 156, 162, 163
Βηρωσσὸς 236
Βησιγότθοι 32
βιβλιοθήκες 19, 165, 281-283· μοναστηριακὲς 140, 145, 148, 149, 166
Βίβλος 30, 111, 184, 209, 216, 226, 238, 276
Βιθυνία 38, 39, 41, 62, 78, 90, 97, 139, 219, 316

βικάριοι 47
 Βίοι ἁγίων 20, 111, 128, 137, 148, 191, 262, 263, 284, 291-295· ἁγίων τῆς Ἀνατολῆς 138· Ἀνδρέου τοῦ Σαλοῦ 186, 245-251, Ἀντωνίου 128, 196, 291, Βασιλείου τοῦ Νέου 102, 253, Δανιὴλ τοῦ Στυλῆτου 134, Ἐπιφανίου Σαλαμίνος 293, Εὐθυμίου καὶ Σάββα 293, Θεοδώρου τοῦ Συκεώτη 136, 192, 293, Ἰωάννου τοῦ Ἐλεήμονος 50, 293, 294, Μιχαὴλ τοῦ Μαλεῖνου 283, Παρασκευῆς τῆς Νέας 295, Παύλου τοῦ Θηβαίου 214, Παχωμίου 279, Πορφυρίου, ἐπισκόπου Γάζας 293, Σεβήρου, πατριάρχου Ἀντιοχείας 161, Στεφάνου τοῦ Νέου 293, Συμεὼν τοῦ Νέου 293, Συμεὼν τοῦ Σαλοῦ 82, 293, Ὑπατίου 293· βλ. καὶ ἀγιολογία
 βιοτεχνία, βιοτεχνικά ἀγαθὰ 53, 82
 Βλάχοι 41
 Βλέμμυες 31
 Βογομίλ, αἰρετικὸς 123
 βογομιλισμός, βογόμιλοι 88, 123-125
 Βοήλας Εὐστάθιος 69, 70, 282, 283, 298
 Βοιωτία 65
βοσκοί 133, 138
 Βοσνία 125
 Βόσπορος 71, 93, 135
 Βόστρα 55, 78
βουλαί (curiae) 47-49, 84, 154
 Βουλγαρία 40, 70, 88, 120, 123, 289, 325
 Βούλγαροι 33, 37, 43, 65, 221, 222
 βουλευτὲς ἢ δεκουρίωνες 47, 112, 154, 155, 161
 βουλευτήρια ἀστικά 47, 48, 110, 155
 βουλευτικὴ τάξις 48, 279
 Βραχμάνοι 215, 218, 234, 299
 Βρετανία 215
 Βρυέννιος Ἰωσήφ 253
 Βρυέννιος Νικηφόρος 286, 290
 Βύβλος 55
 Βυζακηνὴ 32
 Βυζαντία 244
 βυζαντινὴ αυτοκρατορία 41· ἐξάπλωση-συρρίκνωση 41· ἐνότητα 42
 βυζαντινὴ ἱστορία 17, 18· περίοδοι: Πρώμη 15-18, 20, 21, 25, 28, 31, 43, 45, 47, 49, 57-61, 63, 73, 77, 79, 92, 101, 107, 109, 111, 138, 161, 224, 261, 275, 279, 311, 316, 320-322· Μέση 15-18, 20, 21, 41, 43, 64, 65, 69, 92, 102, 109, 119, 143, 225, 261, 275, 279, 294, 317, 318· Ὑστερη 15-17, 20, 21, 47, 56, 107, 109, 151, 161, 225, 236, 271, 275, 296
 βυζαντινὴ κοινωνία 56
 βυζαντινισμὸς 21
 βυζαντινὸ κράτος 15, 17, 25-43
 Βυζάντιο ἀρχαῖο 93
 Βύζας 93, 244
 Γαβριήλ, βλ. ἄγγελοι
 Γάγγρα 131, 132
 Γάζα 55, 109, 155, 161
 γαῖες, γαιοκτησία 57-59, 61, 62, 66, 68, 69, 73, 75, 89, 141, 142, 148, 153
 γαιοκτημονες 19, 48, 49, 57, 58, 61, 64, 66, 68, 75, 129, 142
 Γάιος, αυτοκράτορας 234
 Γαλάτας 93, 95, 107
 Γαλάτες 215
 Γαλατία 20, 28, 35, 51, 56, 99, 117, 192-194, 248
 Γάλβιος, πατρίκιος 187
 Γαλήσιον, ὄρος 143
 Γάλλος, καίσαρ 59
 Γάνος, ὄρος 143
γειτονιάρχες 95
 Γενέσιος 286
 Γεννάδιος Σχολάριος 197, 253
 Γενοβέζοι 106
 Γεράσιμος, ἅγιος 133, 215
 Γερμανικαία 120
 Γερμανοὶ 26, 216
 Γερμανός, πατριάρχης 314
 Ἔρμια 193, 194
γεροντικά βλ. *πατερικά*
 Γερόντιος 124
 γεωγραφία 26, 198
 γεωμετρία 153, 166, 167, 169, 172, 201· ἔδρα 167, 169
 Γεῶν, ποταμὸς 199
Γεωπονικά 170
 γεωργία 45, 57, 96
 Γεωργιανοὶ 41, 220
 Γεώργιος, ἅγιος 188, 317
 Γεώργιος Μοναχὸς βλ. Μοναχὸς
 Γεώργιος Σύγκελλος βλ. Σύγκελλος
 γεωργοὶ 37, 45, 46, 57, 141, 142, 262· βλ. καὶ ἀγρότες
 γιατροὶ 82, 99, 163, 262, 294
 Γιβραλτὰρ 16, 32, 208, 217
 γλυπτὰ βλ. τέχνη
 γλώσσα δημοτικὴ 278, 279, 295, 296, 298· ἐκκλησιαστικὴ 294· λόγια 275-279, 298
 γλῶσσες 25-43, 104, 106, 216, 217, 231, 275-277· ἀραβικά 206· ἀραμαϊκά 29, 30, 35· ἀρμενικά 34, 39, 275· βερβερίνικα 32· βεσσικά 34· γεωργιανά 275· ἐβραϊκά 31, 216· ἑλληνικά 25-

31, 33-35, 39-41, 119, 130, 135, 155, 157, 159, 161, 170, 173, 243, 275-277, 279, 285, 291, 295· ἀττικὴ διάλεκτος βλ. διάλεκτοι· ἑλληνιστικὴ κοινὴ 276, 277· θρακικά 34, 35· ἰλλυρικά 34· καππαδοκικά 28· κελτικά 28· κοπτικά 31, 34, 35, 130, 275· λατινικά 25-27, 30, 31, 33-35, 39, 43, 106, 130, 155-157, 161, 168, 243, 275· σλαβονικά 39, 40, 206, 209, 275· συριακά 29-31, 34, 243, 275· φοινικικά 32· φρυγικά 28
 Γορδιανὴ 192, 194
 Γόθοι 27, 34, 47, 134, 221
 γραμματικὴ 152, 170, 172, 176, 177, 283· ἔδρα 167
γραμματικός 151, 157, 161, 163, 166, 167, 170, 171, 176
γραμματιστής 151, 161
 γραφειοκρατία 19, 50, 58, 156, 196
 γραφή: μεγαλογράμματη 166· μικρογράμματη 166, 168· νοταριακὴ 166
 Γρηγορίας Νικηφόρος 286
 Γρηγόριος ὁ Δεκαπολίτης, ἅγιος 43
 Γρηγόριος ὁ Ναζιανζηνὸς 269, 283, 317
 Γρηγόριος ὁ Μέγας, πάπας 27
 Γρηγόριος ὁ Νύσσης 53, 283, 317
 Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς βλ. Παλαμᾶς
 Γρηγόριος, αυτοκρατορικός γραμματέας 169
 Γρηγόριος, βιογράφος 189, 190, 253, 254
 Γῶγ 239, 240, 244
 Δαβίδ 320
 Δαβίδ, ἅγιος 133
 δαίμονες 120, 129, 135, 136, 144, 182, 191-197, 222, 223, 233, 236, 292, 294· ἐξορισμὸς δαιμόνων 191
 δαιμονολογία 172
 Δάκες, Δακία 33, 89
 Δαλμάτης 134
 Δαμασκὸς 313
 Δαμιανός, ἅγιος 317
 Δανιὴλ, προφήτης 234, 238-240, 243
 Δανιὴλ, ἅγιος 31
 Δανιὴλ ὁ Στυλίτης, ἅγιος 134, 135
 Δανιηλίδα 63
 Δάρας 29, 53, 79
 Δαρδανέλια 96
 Δαρδανία 89
 δασμοὶ 71, 75
 Δαφνὶ βλ. μονές
 δεισιδαιμονίες 120, 191
 δεκουρίωνες 47, 48, 54, 58, 59· βλ. καὶ βουλευτὲς

«δενδρίτες» 133
 Δεσπότης τοῦ Μιστραῦ 107
 Δευτέρα Παρουσία 205, 209, 235, 238, 239, 250, 253
 δημεύσεις 54, 106
 Δημήτρα 111
 Δημήτριος, ἅγιος 87, 89, 111, 188, 189, 317
 Δημιουργία 198-204, 209, 218, 227-229, 234, 241, 242, 282
 δῆμοι 85, 99, 279· βλ. καὶ Βένετοι, Πράσινοι
δημοκρατία 259
 Δημοσθένης 155, 290
 δημόσια ἔργα 97
 δημόσιες ὑπηρεσίες 59, 108, 155, 171
 δημόσιο ταμεῖο 54, 62, 64, 75
 δημόσιοι ὑπάλληλοι 47, 48, 54, 67, 140, 141, 157, 165, 168, 177, 278, 280
 διαθήκες 115
Διαθήκη τῶν δώδεκα Πατριαρχῶν 283
 διάκονοι 174
 διάλεκτοι 34· ἀττικὴ διάλεκτος 155, 160, 177, 276-278
 διαλογισμοὶ 128
 διανοούμενοι 21, 26, 47, 125, 171, 172
 Δίας 231, 232
 Διγενής Ἀκρίτης 66, 123, 298, 299· ἔπος ἢ μυθιστόρημα Διγενῆ 122, 123, 298· παραλλαγές 298, 299
 δίδακτρα 154, 170
διδασκαλία: ἀσκήσεις 152, 153· μέθοδος 151-155· «κλασσικὸν» συγγραφεῖς 151, 157· βλ. καὶ ἀρχαῖα κείμενα, ἐπιστήμες
 δίκαιο 22, 102, 169, 172, 176· Κανονικὸ Δίκαιο 102· ἔδρα Δικαίου 169
 δικαιοσύνης ἀπονομή 47, 49, 59, 262
 δικαστὲς 45, 169, 171, 251, 155, 262· ἐπαρχιακοὶ 68
 δικαστήρια 270· ἐβραϊκά 111
 δικηγόροι 155, 171
 Δίκτυος μῦθοι 234
 Διόδωρος τῆς Ταρσοῦ 204, 206, 215· *Κατὰ Εἰμαρμένης* 204
 διοίκησις 26, 59, 110, 156, 261· αυτοκρατορικὴ 45, 48, 60, 70· δημόσια 46-48· δημοτικὴ 46-48· ἐκκλησιαστικὴ 261· ἐπαρχιακὴ 19, 47, 48, 60, 73· στρατιωτικὴ 45-47, 60, 261· διοικητικὲς ὑπηρεσίες 27· ὑπάλληλοι 52
διοικήσεις 60
 Διοκλητιανός 58, 156, 188, 225, 235· μεταρρυθμίσεις 58· διωγμοὶ 188
 Διονύσιος ὁ Θραξῆς 152
 Διόνυσος 111
 Δίος ὁ Σύρος 134

διωγμοί 43, 85, 124, 127, 138, 188·
 'Εβραίων 112· ειδωλολατρών 110, 163·
 εικονοφίλων 121, 139· μονοφυσιτών
 118, 138
 δόγματα 109, 115, 118, 120, 121, 139,
 140, 282
 δομές κοινωνικές 59, 60· οικονομικές 59
 δομέστικοι τών σχολών 73
 Δομιτιανός, αυτοκράτορας 235, 242
 Δορύλαο 28
 Δοῦκες 66, 173
 δοῦλοι 26, 53, 55, 57, 58, 62, 63, 69,
 81, 82, 86, 111, 115, 123, 131, 132,
 140, 156, 163, 263, 264
 Δούναβης 41, 73, 88, 89, 206
 Δοῦρα-Εὔρωπος 304-306
 δράκοι 214
 δούσιμος 125-127
 δούσιτες αἰρέσεις βλ. αἰρέσεις
 δυνατοί βλ. ἀριστοκράτες
 Δυρράχιο 25, 26, 33, 119
 δωρεές 50-52, 63, 64, 76, 90, 141, 142,
 146, 147, 167, 190

'Εβδομήκοντα (Μεταφράση τών Ο') βλ.
 Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη
 'Εβραῖοι 27, 28, 30, 31, 33, 35, 43, 72,
 83, 105, 106, 111-115, 136, 159,
 163, 193, 206, 218, 219, 222, 223,
 226, 228, 230, 234-236, 246, 249,
 253-255, 267, 269
 'Εγερσία 30
 'Εγίρα 243
 ἐγκυκλοπαίδειες 300
 'Εγνατία 33
 'Εδessa 29, 42, 55, 70, 73, 84, 85, 282
 'Εζεκίας 233
 ειδωλολάτρες, ειδωλολατρία 40, 41, 43,
 78, 109-111, 119-122, 129, 136-139,
 151, 156-158, 160-164, 168, 174,
 193, 194, 196, 200, 201, 204, 206,
 216, 218, 222, 227, 231-233, 236,
 247, 255, 260, 269, 315· θεοὶ 111,
 231, 232· κείμενα 159, 161, 163, 165,
 201· βλ. καὶ ἀρχαῖα κείμενα· νοοὶ 78,
 110, 135, 194, 236, 254, 255
 εἰκόνας 120-122, 139, 186, 189, 248,
 250, 291, 303, 310, 312, 314, 315·
 Λέησις 186
 εἰκονογραφία βλ. τέχνη
 εἰκονομαχία, εἰκονομάχοι 120, 121, 124,
 126, 139, 140, 143, 166, 167, 254,
 290, 293, 310, 312-315, 322· εἰκονο-
 μάχοι αυτοκράτορες 109, 114, 169
 Ἐιρήνη, αυτοκράτειρα 121, 126
 'Εκκλησία 19, 39, 42, 43, 46-52, 64,

108, 116, 118-121, 123, 124, 126,
 127, 131, 132, 134, 138, 140, 142,
 144, 149, 155, 157, 158, 161, 169,
 171, 175, 176, 185, 188, 196, 220,
 222, 228, 260, 264, 269-271, 277,
 279, 294, 300, 303, 307, 317· ἰακω-
 βιτική 118, 243· ρωμαιοκαθολική
 251, 328· βλ. καὶ 'Αλεξάνδρεια, 'Αν-
 τιόχεια, 'Ιεροσόλυμα· ἔργο τῆς 'Εκ-
 κλησίας 51, 52· κρατικές ἐπιχορηγή-
 σεις πρὸς τὴν 'Εκκλησία 49· περιου-
 σία 50, 51, 57· προσφορές 132
 ἐκκλησίες: 'Αθήνα Παναγία τοῦ Λυκο-
 δήμου (Ρώσικη ἐκκλησία) 102· 'Ἄρτα
 Παρηγορήτισσα 328· Βενετία 'Άγιος
 Μάρκος 316· Βηθλεὲμ ἐκκλησία τῆς
 Γεννήσεως 325· Γαλατία Μ. 'Ασίας
 'Άγιος Γεώργιος 192· Εὐχάιτα Πόν-
 του 'Άγιος Θεόδωρος 189· 'Εφεσος
 'Άγιος Ἰωάννης 189· Θεσσαλονίκη
 'Αγία Σοφία 313, 317, 'Άγιοι 'Από-
 στολοι 329, 'Άγιος Δημήτριος 310,
 312, Ροτόντα 307· 'Ιεροσόλυμα Πα-
 ναγίου Τάφου 323· Καστοριά 'Άγιοι
 'Ανάργυροι 324· Κίεβο 'Αγία Σοφία
 323· Κωνσταντινούπολη 'Αγία Εἰρή-
 νη 94, 313, 'Αγία Σοφία 52, 93, 99,
 174, 185, 186, 188, 248, 249, 252,
 257, 284, 302, 308, 309, 315, 316,
 325, 'Άγιοι 'Απόστολοι 94, 315, 324,
 'Άγιοι Σέργιος καὶ Βάκχος 309, 315,
 'Άγιος Ἀρτέμιος 98, 99, 'Άγιος Πο-
 λυεύκτος 308, 'Άγιος Στέφανος 189,
 'Άγιος Σωτήρ τῆς Χώρας 326, Μάρ-
 τυρας 'Ακάκιος 94, Σαράντα Μάρτυ-
 ρες 167, Παναγία τών Βλαχερνῶν
 187, 312, Παναγία τῆς Πηγῆς 315,
 Νέα 'Εκκλησία 316· Λαγουδερὰ Κύ-
 προν 324· Μιστράς Παντάνασσα, Πε-
 ρίβλεπτος 328· Νίκαια 'Αγία Σοφία
 325· Ραβέννα 'Άγιος Ἀπολλινάριος
 ὁ Νέος 305, 'Άγιος Βιτάλιος 309· Ρέ-
 σαφα Συρίας 'Άγιος Σέργιος 189·
 Ρώμη Santa Maria Maggiore 305,
 319, Santa Pudenziana 307· Σελεύ-
 κεια 'Αγία Θέκλα 189· Τραπεζοῦντα
 'Αγία Σοφία 326· Dečani 326· Kur-
 binovo 324· Manasija 328· Mileševo
 325· Monreale 324· Nerezi 323· Ra-
 vanica 328· Sopoćani 325, 326· βλ.
 καὶ βασιλική
 'Εκλογαὶ 170, 300
 'Εκλογή 164
 ἐκπαίδευση 151-177, 284· πρωτοβάθ-
 μια 151· δευτεροβάθμια 152, 153·
 ἀνώτερη 154, 155
 ἐκχριστιανισμός 41, 119, 120, 220

'Ελαμίτες 215, 220
 'Ελλάδα 18, 20, 33, 39, 40, 56, 64, 65,
 89, 92, 100, 114, 143, 164, 172, 236,
 244, 302
 'Ελλαδικοί 39
 'Ελλην 232
 'Ελληνες 33, 35, 39, 104, 106, 209, 214,
 216, 232, 244
 ἑλληνιστικά βασίλεια 29
 ἑλληνιστική ἐποχή 28, 29, 77, 151
 'Ελλης 291
 'Ελλησπόντου ἐπαρχία 90
 'Εμεσα 29, 82, 83
 ἐμπόριο 17, 19, 55, 56, 70, 71, 72, 75,
 113, 145· θαλάσσιο 18, 56· εἰσαγωγές
 71, 72· ἐξαγωγές 72· ἐμπορικά προ-
 νόμια 104· ἐμπορικές διευκολύνσεις
 75· ἐμποροπανηγύρεις 90, 102
 'Ενσάρκωση 174, 218, 227, 234-236,
 241, 254, 255, 318
 'Ενώχ 239, 244, 250
 'Εξαήμερον βλ. Βασίλειος ὁ Μέγας
 ἔξαρχος 137
 ἔξουσιαι βλ. φορολογικὲς ἀπαλλαγές
 ἐξορία 115
 ἐπαγγέλματα ἀστικά 46, 55, 151, 155,
 156
 ἐπαῖτες 49, 82
 ἐπαρχίες βυζαντινὲς 17, 21, 25, 26, 37,
 39, 42, 46, 47, 50, 60, 73, 79, 87, 88,
 90, 92, 93, 101, 118, 146, 163, 206,
 279, 283, 309, 316· ἀνατολικές 20,
 26, 41-42, 61, 78, 83, 118, 156, 225·
 ἀρμενικὲς 28· ἑλληνογλωσσες 32· διοι-
 κητὲς ἐπαρχιῶν 47, 48, 49, 60, 66
 ἐπαρχοί: Αἰγύπτου 162· Ἰλλυρικοῦ 89·
 Κωνσταντινουπόλεως 71, 72, 94, 95,
 156, 157
 ἐπαρχος πόλεως 47
 ἐπαρχος τῶν πραιτωρίων 47, 60, 116
 'Επίγονοι 234
 ἐπιγραφές 34, 91, 100, 135, 225, 279·
 ἐπιτύμβιες 34, 224
 ἐπιδημίες 84-89, 97, 99, 100, 238, 242
 ἐπιδρομές 33, 37, 53, 87, 92, 96, 122,
 206, 245, 251
 'Επίκουρος 168
 ἐπισιτισμὸς πόλεων 95-97
 ἐπισκοπές 40, 51, 64, 94, 118, 175
 ἐπίσκοποι 42, 48-51, 64, 67, 78, 94,
 110, 118, 120, 131, 132, 137, 139-
 141, 144-146, 162, 174, 177, 193,
 220, 251, 261, 262, 284, 292, 293,
 304
 ἐπιστῆμες 114, 153, 162, 164, 165, 168,
 169, 172, 173, 301· ἀπόκρυφες 172·
 θετικές 165, 168· φυσικὲς 172, 198

ἐπιστολογραφία 20
 'Επιφάνιος Σαλαμίνος, ἅγιος 31, 293·
 Πανάριον 115
 'Επιφάνιος 246, 249
 ἐρημίτες 128, 130, 133, 146, 149
 ἔρμος 30, 146, 149, 214, 215, 292· αἰ-
 γυπτιακὴ 20, 128, 129
 'Ερμῆς 231, 232
 'Ερμογένης 152, 153, 155
 'Ερυθρὰ Θάλασσα 203, 207, 233, 305
 ἐσχατολογικὸ μῦθος 238-258
 Εὐαγγέλια εἰκογραφημένα 305
 Εὐαγγέλια Σταυρονικήτα 320
 Εὐαγγέλιο βλ. Καινὴ Διαθήκη
 Εὐαγγέλιο Uspensky 166
 Εὐάγγελος 86, 117
 Εὐβόια 36
 Εὐδοκία Δούκαινα 298
 Εὐθύμιος, ἅγιος 317
 Εὐλάτ γῆ 199
 Εὐκλείδης 168
 Εὐάλιος, ζωγράφος 324
 εὐνοῦχοι 183, 185, 186, 297
 Εὐξείνιος Πόντος 17, 25, 27, 36, 37, 70,
 71, 96, 114, 216, 220
 Εὐρώπη δυτικὴ 17, 18, 26, 27, 50, 68,
 129, 150, 166, 217, 301, 302, 328
 Εὐσέβιος Καισαρείας 227, 229, 236, 237
 Εὐστάθιος Θεσσαλονίκης 145, 175, 300
 Εὐστάθιος, μητροπολίτης Νικαίας 124
 Εὐστάθιος, μοναχὸς 131, 132
 Εὐφρατιμ, ψηφιδογράφος 325
 Εὐφράτης 16, 73, 110, 199, 299, 304
 Εὐχάιτα 189
 'Εφεσος 28, 77, 90, 92, 118, 122, 139,
 143, 189

Ζαχαρίας Μυτιλήνης 220
 Ζαχαρίας ὁ Ρήτωρ 161, 162
 Ζελντέπα 77
 Ζῆλα 186
 ζηλωτὲς 162
 Ζήνων, 'Ενωτικὸν 117
 Ζῶα 203, 211-215, 217, 233, 311, 324
 ζωγραφικὴ βλ. τέχνη
 ζωγράφοι 324, 325
 Ζωὴ Καρβουοφίνα 65
 Ζωὴ ἡ Πορφυρογέννητη 74, 184, 289,
 290
 Ζωναρᾶς 290
 Ζωτικὸς, ἐπαρχος πραιτωρίων 54

ἡγούμενοι 67, 130, 134, 137, 146, 147,
 181, 292, 296
 ἦθη 215, 297

ἄθοποιοι 45, 81, 82, 98, 136
 Ἡλίας 111, 239, 244, 250
 Ἡλιόδωρος 298
 Ἡλιος 111
 ἡμερολόγιο 227-229· λειτουργικό 318
 Ἡπειρος 36
 Ἡπείρου δεσποτάτο 18
 Ἡράκλεια Λυγυησιτίδα 83, 88
 Ἡράκλεια Ποντική 192
 Ἡράκλειος 36, 37, 50, 60, 98, 109, 113, 114, 117, 118, 164, 165, 221, 242
 Ἡσαίας 184, 198, 201-203, 269, 320
 Ἡσίοδος 158, 160, 168, 276
 ἡσυχαστές 149
 Ἡφαίστος 232

 Θαβῶρ 149
 θαλαμηπόλοι 184
 Θάρσεις 216
 θαύματα 120, 137, 138, 188, 222, 234, 239, 291, 293, 305
 θεάματα 45, 48, 80-83, 155
 θέατρο 61, 78, 80, 82, 85, 94, 95, 99, 102, 162, 164, 266, 269, 270
 Θέκλα, ἅγια 189
 θέματα 60-62, 73, 74· Αἰγαίου Πελάγους 62· Ἀνατολικῶν 65· Ὁρακήσιον 39· Ὀφίκιον 41· Πελοποννήσου 63
 θεματικοὶ στρατοὶ 73
 Θεμίστιος 156
 Θεόγνις 160
 Θεοδοσιανὸς Κώδικας 115
 Θεόδωσιος ὁ Κοινοβιάρχεις, ἅγιος 34, 133
 Θεόδωσιος Α', αὐτοκράτορας 17, 94, 95, 136
 Θεοδώρα, αὐτοκράτειρα 27, 118, 288, 309
 Θεοδώρα (δυναστείας Μακεδόνων) 184, 289
 Θεοδώρητος Κύρρου 185· Φιλόθεος ἱστορία 137
 Θεόδωρος, ἅγιος 188, 189, 317
 Θεόδωρος Στουδίτης, ἅγιος 127, 140, 143, 165, 314
 Θεόδωρος ὁ Συκεώτης, ἅγιος 136, 192-194, 293, 317
 Θεόδωρος Μοψουεστίας 126, 204
 Θεόδωρος, καθηγητῆς γεωμετρίας 167
 Θεόδωρος, φιλόσοφος 175
 Θεοφάνη Συνεχιστὲς 286, 288, 290
 Θεοφάνης ὁ Ὁμολογητῆς 62, 65, 143, 164, 229, 279, 286, 288· Χρονογραφία 62, 288
 Θεοφάνης, ζωγράφος 301, 328
 θεολογία 22, 181, 206, 276
 θεολόγοι 120, 305
 Θεόφιλος, αὐτοκράτορας 121, 167, 313, 315, 329
 Θεόφιλος Ἀντιοχείας 200, 201, 204, 227
 Θεοφύλακτος Σιμοκάττης βλ. Σιμοκάττης
 θεραπείες 98, 99, 129, 135, 136
 θεσμοὶ 215, 225
 Θεσσαλία 39
 Θεσσαλονίκη 36, 54, 87-90, 92, 94, 114, 133, 145, 167, 175, 188, 189, 247, 249, 250, 252, 280, 307, 310, 312, 329
 Θεωδέρικος 83
 Θήβα 114, 214
 Θήβες Βοιωτικές 89
 Θήβες Φθιώτιδες 89
 θησαυροφύλακες 50
 Θεουκιδίδης 286
 Θούρας 231
 Θράκες 26, 33, 216
 Θράκη 33, 38, 39, 43, 46, 56, 96, 97, 100, 119, 123, 143, 144, 189, 206, 302
 Θρακήσιοι 39, 40
 θρησκεία 40, 43, 108-127
 Θωμάς, ἀπόστολος 219, 220
 Θωμάς Μάγιστρος 284

 Ἰακώβ, ἔμπορος 56, 59, 60
 Ἰακωβίτες 83, 118, 119, 254
 Ἰάκωβος, ἀπόστολος 219, 235
 Ἰάμβλιχος 172
 ἱατρική 154, 222
 Ἰάφεθ 216, 217, 219, 231, 232
 Ἰβήρες 27
 Ἰγκόρ 251
 Ἰγνάτιος, πατριάρχης 140
 Ἰγνάτιος, διάκονος 165
 Ἰγνάτιος, ἐρημίτης 146
 Ἰεζεκιήλ 185, 239, 269
 ἱεραποστολὲς 27, 113, 220
 ἱερεῖς βλ. κληρὸς
 Ἰερεμίας 269
 ἱεροκήρυκες 210, 270, 271
 Ἰεροκλής, *Συνέκδημος* 26, 77
 Ἰεροσόλυμα 30, 51, 53, 79, 82, 113, 133, 135, 187, 189, 219, 223, 232, 234, 235, 242-244, 247, 249, 251, 269, 281, 318· ἄλωση ἀπὸ Πέρσες 79· Ἐκκλησία 51
 Ἰερώνυμος, ἅγιος 130, 215
 Ἰησοῦς τοῦ Ναυῆ 261· εἰλητάριο 320
 Ἰχόνιο 28
 Ἰλαρίων, ἅγιος 133

Ἰλλυρικό 33, 38, 46, 89, 188, 206, 246
 Ἰλλυριοὶ 26, 27, 33, 38
 Ἰναχος 233
 Ἰνδία 17, 207, 214, 217, 219, 220
ἰνδικτιῶν 58, 224, 225, 229
 Ἰνδοὶ 215, 234
 Ἰνδός, ποταμὸς 206
 Ἰοβιανὸς 29
 Ἰόπη 244
 Ἰορδάνης, ποταμὸς 133, 146
 Ἰουδαῖοι 113, 119, 226, 227· βλ. καὶ Ἑβραῖοι
 Ἰουλιανὸς 59, 159, 267
 Ἰουλιανὸς Σάββας, ἅγιος 267
 Ἰουστινιάνειος Κώδικας 108
 Ἰουστινιανὸς Α' 17, 25-28, 30, 32-35, 46, 48, 52, 54, 77, 79, 80, 83, 85, 87, 96, 97, 107-110, 112, 116, 126, 127, 137, 163, 174, 186, 187, 242, 279, 285, 287, 288, 302, 308-311, 315, 322
 Ἰουστινιανὸς Β' 38, 65, 89
 Ἰουστίνος Β' 27, 82, 88, 117
Ἰππιατρικά 170
 ἰππόδρομος 80-82, 85, 93-95, 102, 107, 121, 125, 162, 195, 279, 313
 Ἰππόλυτος 228, 229
 ἰπποτισμὸς, ἰπποτές 66, 70, 296
 Ἰσαάκ, Σύρος 134
 Ἰσαάκιος Α' Κορινθῶν 74
 Ἰσαάκιος Β' Ἀγγελοσ 146, 251
 Ἰσαυρία 46, 244
 Ἰσαυροὶ, αὐτοκράτορες 139
 Ἰσαυροὶ (κάτοικοι Ἰσαυρίας) 26, 28
 Ἰσιδώρος 302
 Ἰσλάμ 17
 Ἰσλαμισμὸς 15
 Ἰσμαηλίτες 251, 252, 254, 256
 Ἰσοκράτης 153, 155, 290
 Ἰσπανία 17, 32, 35, 86
Ἰστορία τῶν μοναχῶν 137
 ἱστορικοὶ 19, 81, 91, 169, 256, 276, 286, 290· αὐτικοὶ 288, 289
 ἱστοριογραφία βυζαντινὴ 226, 285-290
 Ἰταλία, Ἰταλοὶ 18, 25, 27, 32, 33, 47, 63, 77, 101, 104, 106, 125, 139, 232, 286, 302, 322, 327· Νότια Ἰταλία 19, 63, 173
 Ἰταλιῶται 32
 Ἰταλὸς Ἰωάννης 124, 173-175
 Ἰωακείμ ντὲ Φλόρις 251
 Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνὸς, ἅγιος 115, 139, 165, 264, 269, 285, 314· *Περὶ τῆς πλήρους ἀσεβείας πόλεως* 269
 Ἰωάννης ὁ Ἐλεμήμων, ἅγιος, πατριάρχης Ἀλεξανδρείας 49-51, 293, 294
 Ἰωάννης ὁ Εὐαγγελιστῆς 182, 183, 219, 238, 239, 317, 321, 323· βλ. καὶ *Καὶνὴ Διαθήκη*
 Ἰωάννης ὁ Πρόδρομος 186, 187, 219, 233, 255, 256, 262
 Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος 54, 55, 57, 80-82, 159-161, 188, 204, 283, 317
 Ἰωάννης Α' Τσιμισκής 66
 Ἰωάννης Β' Κομνηνὸς 41, 75, 104, 296
 Ἰωάννης Δ' Λάσκαρις 252
 Ἰωάννης Σ' Καντακουζηνὸς 286
 Ἰωάννης Ζ' Γραμματικὸς, πατριάρχης 166
 Ἰωάννης Ζ', πάπας 312
 Ἰωάννης τῆς Ἀμιδᾶς (ἢ τῆς Ἐφέσου) 35, 36, 110, 138, 163, 310· *Βίοι τῶν ἁγίων τῆς Ἀνατολῆς* 138
 Ἰωάννης τῆς Ἐφέσου βλ. Ἰωάννης τῆς Ἀμιδᾶς
 Ἰωάννης ὁ Λυδὸς 48, 54, 157· *Περὶ ἀρχῶν τῆς Ῥωμαίων πολιτείας* 54
 Ἰωάννης Μόσχος βλ. Μόσχος
 Ἰωάννης, διάκονος 82
 Ἰωάννης, εὐνοχὸς 289
 Ἰωαννίκιος ὁ Μέγας, ἅγιος 143
 Ἰωνες 216
 Ἰωὺαν 216

 καθηγητὲς 110, 154-157, 161, 163-167, 169-172, 174, 262· δημόσιοι 48, 156, 157, 167, 175· ἰδιωτικοὶ 156
 Καθολικός 221
Καὶνὴ Διαθήκη 122, 159, 160, 177, 187, 276, 281, 282, 304, 305, 310, 317, 318· Εὐαγγέλιο 131, 175, 214, 218, 219, 221, 222, 224, 240, 248, 270· *Κατὰ Ματθαῖον* 131, 191, 202, 220, 238, 244, 258, 263· *Κατὰ Μᾶρκον* 222, 238· *Κατὰ Λουκᾶν* 238, 262, 264· *Κατὰ Ἰωάννην* 220, 238, 239· *Πράξεις τῶν Ἀποστόλων* 131, 218, 219· Ἐπιστολὲς Παύλου: *Πρὸς Ῥωμαίους* 201, 261· *Πρὸς Κορινθίους Α'* 137, 264· *Πρὸς Κορινθίους Β'* 202· *Πρὸς Ἐφεσίους* 265· *Πρὸς Κολοσσαεῖς* 185· *Πρὸς Θεσσαλονικεῖς Β'* 239· *Πρὸς Τιμόθεον Β'* 264, 265· *Ἐπιστολὴ Καθολικῆ Πέτρον Α'* 219· *Ἐπιστολὴ Καθολικῆ Ἰωάννου Α'* 238· *Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου* 122, 239-241, 245, 256
 Καισάρεια 28, 78, 113, 126, 286
 Καλαβρία 36, 124
 Καλαμπάκα 102
 Καλλίνικος 293
 Καμενιάτης Ἰωάννης, *Εἰς τὴν ἄλωση τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης* 285

Κάνδιδος, πατρίκιος 187
Κανονικό Δίκαιο βλ. δίκαιο
Καπερναούμ 187
κάπηλος 82
Καπιτώλιο 157
Καπούδβαδα 80
Καππαδόκες 133
Καππαδοκία 28, 38, 39, 66, 113, 143, 193, 194, 207, 220, 282, 303, 313
Καρακάλλας 93
Καρβέας 122
Καρία 110, 248
Καρόης 123
Κάρολος ο Μέγας (Καρλομάγνος) 68
Κάρρες 109
Καρχηδόνα 59, 60, 138
Κασπία 203
Κάσπιες Πύλες 220, 244, 249
Κάστορας 236
κάστρα 21, 92, 296, 297· κάστρο τῆς Καισάρειας 270
Κατακλυσμός 160, 230, 231, 235, 247, 255, 267· τοῦ Δευκαλίωνα 230
κατακόμβες 304, 305
καταρτάριοι 72
Καυκάσιοι 27, 28
Καύκασος 303
Κάφηροι 40
Κεκαυμένος 69, 74, 214, 282· *Στρατηγικόν* 20, 103
Κέλτες 28
Κεράτιος Κόλπος 94, 95, 104, 106, 114
Κέρκυρα 114
Κιβωτός τῆς Διαθήκης 233
Κιβωτός τοῦ Μαρτυρίου 227
Κίεβο 71
Κιλικία 27, 28, 70, 87, 138, 146, 189, 216, 220, 224, 244, 297
Κιλικίες Πύλες 28
Κίναμος Ἰωάννης 286
Κιστερσιανοί 251
Κίτιο 216
Κίτιοι 216
Κλαύδιος, αὐτοκράτορας 235
κλήρος 40, 45, 48-50, 52, 80, 89, 102, 111, 117, 121, 122, 124, 125, 127, 128, 131, 132, 139, 144, 145, 147, 175, 193, 221, 248, 255, 261, 262, 278, 280, 304
κοιμιστῶρ τοῦ ἱεροῦ παλατίου 164· βλ. καὶ ἀξιωματοῦχοι
κοινόβια 134, 136, 143, 149, 182
κοινοτήτες 57, 61, 62, 66, 67, 141, 269, 302· μοναστικές 146-148
κολονοὶ βλ. ἀγρότες
Κολοσσές 91
Κομητᾶς 167, 168
Κομνηνοὶ 68, 75, 76, 103, 106, 107, 124, 251, 280, 286, 296, 326· Ἀλέξιος 323· Ἄννα 41, 125, 174, 286, 290· Ἀλεξιάδης 290
Κόρινθος 36, 56, 89, 91, 101, 107
Κόριππος 27
Κοσμᾶ μοναχοῦ ὀπτασία φοβερά καὶ ἀφελίμος 182-184
Κοσμᾶς, ἅγιος 317
Κοσμᾶς, ἱερέας 123, 124
Κοσμᾶς ὁ Ἰνδικοπλευστής 26, 56, 204, 207-209, 214, 220· *Χριστιανικὴ Τοπογραφία* 207, 209
κοσμογραφία 164
κοσμολογία 198, 203
κουβικουλάριοι 44, 50· βλ. καὶ ἀξιωματοῦχοι
Κουμάνοι 69, 73
Κουρκοῦες 66
Κρήτη, Κρήτες 40-42, 70, 124, 328
Κριμαία 27, 37
Κριτόβουλος Μιχαῆλ 286
Κροάτες 36
Κρόνος 231
κτηματολόγια 58
κτίρια δημόσια 48, 78-81, 83, 95, 101, 102
Κύζικος 38, 63, 90, 92, 236, 321
κυλίστρα 164
Κυμινάς, ὄρος 143
Κύπρος 31, 38, 75, 114, 138, 139, 146-149, 216, 252, 302, 303, 325· λατινικὴ κατάρκτηση 146-149
Κυριακὸς τῆς Ἀγρόνας 322
Κύριλλος, ἅγιος 40
Κύριλλος ὁ Συμβοπολίτης 293
Κύρος, βασιλεὺς τῶν Περσῶν 227
Κύρος, ἑπαρχος 135
Κύρρος 84
κώδικες: Κλαρκιανὸς 281, Ραβουλά 305, Palatinus Gr. 431 320, Parisinus Gr. 139 320, Reginensis Gr. 1 320, Rossanensis 305, Vaticanus Gr. 699 209· βλ. καὶ χειρόγραφα
Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Μέγας 17, 29, 48, 66, 88, 93, 94, 96, 102, 107, 130, 133, 156, 187, 214, 235, 260, 304, 306
Κωνσταντῖνος Δ' 245, 312
Κωνσταντῖνος Ε' 100, 120, 121, 139, 164, 313· *Ἐκλογή* 164
Κωνσταντῖνος Ζ' ὁ Πορφυρογέννητος 64, 141, 169-171, 176, 277, 288, 290, 294, 320· *Ἐκθεσις τῆς βασιλείου τάξεως* 278· *Ἐκλογαί* 170, 300· *Πρὸς τὸν ἴδιον υἱὸν Ῥωμανὸν* 277, 278
Κωνσταντῖνος Θ' ὁ Μονομάχος 73, 74, 170, 171, 176, 209, 289, 322

Κωνσταντῖνος Η' 289
Κωνσταντῖνος Ι' Δούκας 66, 74
Κωνσταντῖνος, μυστικός 169
Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Σικελὸς 168
Κωνσταντινούπολη 15, 18, 26-27· γλῶσσες 26-27· Ἑβραῖοι 114· ἐκπαίδευση 168-177· ἐπιδημίες 86, 97, 99-100· ἐπιθέσεις: Ἀβάρων 97, 100, 242, Ἀράβων 97, Περσῶν 37, Ρώσων 222· ἐσχατολογικὲς προφητεῖες 240, 251-253· ἱστορία 93-101· κτίσματα 93-95 (βλ. καὶ ἐκκλησίες)· μοναχισμὸς 134-136· ξηρασία 100· Παλάτιον 311· Πανεπιστήμιο (425) 150-157, Μαγναύρας 168· παρακμὴ 98-100· πληθυσμὸς 79, 97· σιτοδεία 97· σφαγὴ Λατίνων 106· ὡς Νέα Ἱερουσαλήμ 245
Κωνσταντῖνος Β' 109, 156, 157

Λαγαντινὴ 193
Λάζαρος, ζωγράφος 315
Λαζική 220
Λαζοὶ 27
λαῖκοι 124, 128, 131, 132, 140-144, 147, 167, 177, 224, 255, 265
Λακεδαιμονία 219
Λακωνία 40, 56
Λάμειχ 230
Λαοδίκεα 28, 29, 55, 79, 80, 91
λατινικὰ κράτη τῆς Ἀνατολῆς 18
λατινικὴ φιλολογία 27
Λατίνοι 30, 33, 69, 104-106, 222, 328· Λατίνων σφαγὴ 106
Λάτμος ἢ Λάτρος, ὄρος 143, 148
λατρεία 110, 117, 120, 133· ἁγίων 122, 187-191· εἰκόνων βλ. εἰκονολατρία· ἱερῶν λειψάνων 186-188
λαύρα 133, 143
Λαυρέντιος, ἅγιος 317
Λαχανοδράκων Μιχαῆλ 139
Λεβαντῖνοι 31
Λειχούδης Κωνσταντῖνος 171
λείψανα ἱερὰ 186-188, 245, 248, 250, 290, 291· Ἁγία Ζώνη 186, 187· Μαφόριο 186-187
Λεκαπηνὸς Χριστόφορος 65
λεξικά 276, 300
Λεόντιος Νεαπόλεως 294
Λευκωσία 146, 148
Λέων Α' 135, 187, 236
Λέων Γ' 65, 114, 116, 120, 164· *Ἐκλογή* 164
Λέων Δ' 139
Λέων Σ' 63, 71, 102, 121, 169, 251, 260· *Ἐπαρχικὸ Βιβλίον* 71, 72

Λέων ὁ Διάκονος 250, 286, 289
Λέων ὁ Μαθηματικὸς 166-168, 176
Λιβάνιος 34, 48, 154-156
Λίβυες 216
Λιβύη 26, 31, 32
λίλιος 70, 297
Λιουτπράνδος 64
λόγιοι 155, 198, 281, 282, 286, 299
λόγοι θρησκευτικοὶ 275, 284
λόγος βασιλικὸς 291, 292
λογοτεχνία βυζαντινὴ 20, 22, 56, 74, 114, 271, 275-301, 303· βλ. καὶ γλῶσσες (ἐλληνικά, ἐλληνιστικὴ κοινή) καὶ διάλεκτοι (ἀττικὴ διάλεκτος)
λοιμοὶ βλ. ἐπιδημίες καὶ πανώλη
Λουκάς, Εὐαγγελιστῆς 235, 317· βλ. καὶ Καινὴ Διαθήκη
Λουκιανὸς 169
λουτρά 78, 80, 83, 95, 99, 100, 162, 263, 264, 269, 270· λουτρά Ζευξίπτου 93
Λυδία 90, 110
Λυκία 133, 188

μαγεία, μάγοι 81, 111, 136, 162, 166, 189, 231, 255
μάγιστροι 67· βλ. καὶ ἀξιωματοῦχοι
Μαγναύρας πανεπιστήμιο 168, 169, 176
Μαγνησία 91
Μαγὼν 239, 244
Μαιάνδρου κοιλάδα 91
Μαῖουμας Κοσμᾶς 285
Μακαρίνοι ἢ Καμαρίνοι 217, 218
Μακάριος, ἅγιος 291
Μακεδόνες 216
Μακεδονία 41, 56, 64, 119, 123, 302, 323· Μακεδονία Δευτέρα 88
Μαλάλας Ἰωάννης 229
Μαλεῖνοι 66
Μάμας, ἅγιος 188
Μανέθων 236
Μάνη 119
Μάνης 115, 116, 235, 303
μανιχαῖοι, μανιχαϊσμὸς 115, 116, 122, 124-126, 166, 254, 265, 269
Μανουὴλ Α' Κομνηνὸς 69, 145, 146, 296
Μανουὴλ Β' Παλαιολόγος 223
Μαξιμιανὸς 235
Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητῆς 144
Μαξιμῶ 299
Μαρδαίτες 245
Μαρκελλίνος, Χρονικὸς 27
Μαρκανούπολη 83
Μάρκος, Εὐαγγελιστῆς 235, 317· βλ. καὶ Καινὴ Διαθήκη
Μάρκος Αὐρήλιος 88, 227

- Μάρκος ὁ Διάκονος 293
 μάρτυρες 79, 140, 189, 196, 220, 239, 255, 270, 291, 293, 295, 305, 317
 «μαρτύριο» 135, 170, 270, 305
 Μαρτύριον βλ. ἀγιολογία
 Ματθαῖος Εὐαγγελιστής 219, 220, 317· βλ. καὶ Καινὴ Διαθήκη
 Μαύρη Θάλασσα βλ. Εὐξεινὸς Πόντος
 Μαυρικός 38, 87
 Μαυριτανία 32
 Μαυριτανοὶ 216
 Μαυρόπουλος Ἰωάννης 171, 184
 μωσαλεῖο: Γάλλος Πλακιδίας 307, Ἄγ. Κωνσταντίας 304, Κώνσταντα Α΄ 304· Κωνσταντίνου 94
 Μεγαρεῖς 93
 μεδρεσές 171
 Μεθόδιος, ἅγιος 143
 Μεθόδιος, ἀπόστολος Σλάβων 40, 143
 Μεθόδιος τῶν Πατάρων, ἅγιος 253· Ἀποκάλυψις τοῦ Μεθοδίου τῶν Πατάρων 243
 Μεθόδιος, πατριάρχης 140
 Μέλισσα 283
 Μελισσηνὸς Νικηφόρος 75
 Μελιτηνὴ 28, 110, 122
 Μελχισεδέκ 232, 260
 Μένανδρος, Ἐγχειρίδιο 291
 Μένανδρος Προτῆκτωρ 82, 285
 Μερισμὸς τῆς Γῆς 217
 Μεσαίωνας 17, 19, 27, 39, 61, 90, 91, 95, 181, 213, 217, 243, 265, 294, 301, 305, 330
 μεσαλιανισμὸς ἢ μασαλιανισμὸς 144-145
 Μεσόγειος 15, 16, 18, 26, 51, 78, 84, 87
 Μεσοποταμία 29, 30, 35, 53, 55, 79, 84, 115, 119, 129, 133, 144, 220, 243, 248, 282, 303
 Μεσοποτάμιοι 26
 Μεσραῖν 216, 231
 Μετοχίτης Θεόδωρος 326
 Μῆδοι 215, 220
 μητροπολίτες 169, 171
 Μικρά Ἀσία 15, 17-19, 27, 35, 37-39, 43, 56, 60, 64, 66, 70, 74, 75, 90-92, 96, 99, 101, 113, 118, 119, 122, 123, 126, 129, 139, 143, 144, 148, 182, 185, 187, 192, 207, 297, 302, 312, 326
 μικροτεχνία βλ. τέχνη
 Μιλάνο 32
 Μίλητος 91, 143, 148
 Μίλιον 313
 μισθοὶ 52, 53, 69, 281· ἱερέων 147· καθηγητῶν 154
 μισθοφόροι 63, 73, 75, 173
- Μίσσα 112
 Μιστράς 107, 327, 328
 μιτάτα 72
 Μιχαήλ βλ. ἄγγελιοι
 Μιχαήλ Μαλέινος, ἅγιος 283
 Μιχαήλ Α΄, αὐτοκράτορας 122
 Μιχαήλ Β΄ 315
 Μιχαήλ Γ΄ 91, 101, 167
 Μιχαήλ Δ΄ 184, 289, 290
 Μιχαήλ Ε΄ 74
 Μιχαήλ Ζ΄ Δούκας 173, 209
 Μιχαήλ Η΄ Παλαιολόγος 252
 Μιχαήλ, πατριάρχης 175
 μνημεῖα 18, 20, 78, 94, 95, 100, 143, 194, 251, 301, 302, 305, 312, 313· Ἰουδαϊκὰ 226
 μοναστήρια 30, 32, 34, 42, 63, 64, 68, 79, 84, 95, 102, 110, 118, 123, 128-131, 133, 134, 136, 137, 139-143, 146-150, 162, 166, 168, 177, 181-183, 187, 215, 281, 289, 292, 316· Βιθυνίας 143, 316· Καππαδοκίας 144· Κωνσταντινούπολης 34, 139· διοίκηση 142, 146, 147· περιουσία 142, 143, 146, 147, 150· προνόμια 147
 μοναχικὰ τάγματα 134
 μοναχισμὸς 126, 128-150, 160, 235, 291· κοινοβιακὸς 129, 130, 134
 μοναχοὶ 20, 26, 31, 34, 42, 44, 50, 63, 110, 111, 113, 121, 123, 124, 128-150, 162, 191, 195, 215, 220, 242, 243, 248, 251, 255, 258, 264-266, 268, 279, 281, 291, 293, 295, 296, 300
 Μοναχὸς Γεώργιος 229
 Μονεμβασιά 36
 μονές: Ἁγίου Γεωργίου τῶν Μαγγάνων 322· Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου Πάτμου 281· Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου Πέτρας 145· Ἀκοιμήτων 34, 134· Βατοπεδίου 149· Δαφνίου 143, 317, 319, 323· Ἐσφιγμένου 149· Λατόμου (Ἵσσιος Δαβίδ) 312· Μαχαιρᾶ 146, 147· Νέα Μονὴ Χίου 143, 317, 322· Νεοφύτου 148, 149, 325· Ὀσίου Λουκά 143, 316, 317, 319, 322· Παναγίας Περιβλέπτου 322· Ρουφινιανῶν 143· Σινᾶ 34, 139, 309, 310, 324· Σικριτοῦ 143· Σταυρονικήτα 320· Στουδίου 140· Ταμασοῦ 147· Τραϊανοῦ 183· Χρυσοστόμου 147, 148· Χώρας 326, 327
 μονοφυσίτες, μονοφυσιστῆς 29, 31, 43, 50, 109, 111, 117-119, 125, 126, 138, 161, 241, 243, 287
 μοντανισμὸς 116
 Μοραβία 17, 40
 Μοσούλη 114
- Μόσχος Ἰωάννης 31, 138, 143, 189, 215, 225, 281· Δειμών 138, 224, 225
 μουσικὴ 153, 166, 173, 270
 μουσουλμάνοι 119
 μυθικὰ πρόσωπα, μυθολογία 152, 158, 160, 161, 311
 μυθιστόρημα 280, 296-299· Ἀλεξάνδρου 283· Βέλθανδρος καὶ Χρυσάντζα 297· Διγενῆ 298, 299· Ἰμπέριος καὶ Μαργαρώνα 296· Τὸ κατὰ Καλλιμαχὸν καὶ Χρυσορόσην 296, 297· Φλώριος καὶ Ἰλάτζια Φλώρα 296
 Μυσοὶ 33
 μυστικισμὸς 140, 149, 173
 μυστικιστὲς 144
 μυστικὸς 169
 Μωάμεθ 223
 Μωάμεθ ὁ Πορθητῆς 253
 μωσαϊκὰ βλ. τέχνη
 Μωσαϊκὸς Νόμος 255
 Μωσσηὶς 160, 201, 205, 208, 210, 232-234, 254, 255
- Ναβαταῖοι 30
 Ναϊσὸς 33, 83
 ναοὶ: ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ, διακόσμηση 302, 307-309, 312-318, 322-329· βλ. καὶ ἐκκλησίες
 Ναούμ 269· βλ. καὶ Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη
 Ναρσής 186
 Ναυκράτις 31
 ναυσπιλοῖα 70
 Νεῖλος, ποταμὸς 31, 96, 130, 195, 199, 207
 Νεῖλος, ἅγιος 305
 Νεῖλος, μοναχὸς ἀπὸ Καλαβρία 124
 Νεῖλος, μοναχὸς ἀπὸ Παλαιστίνη 146, 147
 Νεκρὰ Θάλασσα 30, 133
 Νεμπούς, χώρα 218
 Νεμρώδ 231
 νεοπλατωνικοὶ 172, 173
 Νεόφυτος, ἅγιος, μοναχὸς 146-148· βλ. καὶ μονές
 Νεόφυτος, ἐρημίτης 146
 Νέρων 235
 νεστοριανοὶ 221
 Νεστόριος 126
 νηστεία 129, 130, 132, 136, 140, 222, 268, 269, 292
 Νίκαια Στάση 85
 Νίκαια 78, 79, 90, 92, 122, 155, 176, 313, 325
 Νικαίας αὐτοκρατορία 18, 286
 Νικήτας Δαβίδ ὁ Παφλαγῶν 250, 294, 295
- Νικήτας, καθηγητῆς 171
 Νικήτας, πατρίκιος 65
 Νικηφόρος Α΄ 40, 279
 Νικηφόρος Β΄ Φωκᾶς 65-67, 141
 Νικηφόρος Γ΄ Βοτανειάτης 74
 Νικηφόρος, πατριάρχης 122, 165, 285, 286, 288, 314
 Νικηφόρος, πατρίκιος 169
 Νικόλαος τῶν Μύρων, ἅγιος 187
 Νικόλαος τῆς Σιών, ἅγιος 188, 191
 Νικόλαος Μουζάλων, πατριάρχης 295
 Νικομήδεια 41, 90, 92, 94, 122, 155
 Νικόπολη 85, 88
 Νινευὴ 231
 Νίνος 231
 Νίσιβη 29, 42, 55, 85
 Νοβάδες 31
 νομικὴ ἐπιστήμη 154, 156, 157, 162, 164, 168, 176
 νομικὴ σχολὴ 171· Βηρυτοῦ 156
 νόμισμα αὐτοκρατορικὸ 41, 52-54, 73, 75, 85, 88, 91, 92, 99, 146-148, 281, 312, 313· νόθευση νομισματοῦς 53, 73· νομισματικὴ κατάρρευση 75· νομισματικὴ μεταρρύθμιση Ἀναστασίου 52· νομισματοκοπεῖα 92
 νομοθεσία 84, 115, 141, 142, 164, 306
 νόμοι 57, 59, 108, 153· Ἰουστινιανοῦ 112, 147· Ἀγροτικὸς Νόμος 61, 62· Ἐκλογὴ 164
 Νορμανδοὶ 74
 νοτάριοι 171, 176
 Νουμιδία 32
 Νύσα 91
 Νῶε 216-219, 230, 231, 246, 247, 255, 258
- Ξενῶνες 51, 221
 Ξεσουθρος 230
 Ξιφιλίνος Ἰωάννης 171
- Ὄδησος 25
 ὀδικὸ δίκτυο 28, 48, 93-95
 Ὄδοιπορία ἀπὸ Ἐδέμ τοῦ Παραδείσου ἄξι τῶν Ῥωμαίων 217
 Ὄθωμανοὶ Τούρκοι 15, 41, 106, 107, 150, 253, 302
 οἰκονομία 68
 οἰκονόμοι 50
 Ὀκταβιανὸς Αὐγουστος 225, 234
 Ὀλυμπόδαρος 163
 Ὀλυμπος Βιθυνίας 143
 Ὀμάρ, χαλίφης 243
 Ὀμηρος 104, 151, 152, 158, 160, 161, 168, 175, 234, 276, 300

- Ὁμμεύαδες 313
 ὁμολογητές 140, 255
 Ὁππιανός 104
 ὀράματα 129, 240
 Ὁρθοδοξία 108, 109, 116, 121, 124, 126, 127, 140
 Ὁρθοδοξίας Συνοδικὸ 124, 174, 176, 311, 318
 ὀρθόδοξοι 115, 117-119, 123, 126, 287
 Ὁρόντης, ποταμὸς 29, 82
 Ὁσιος Λουκάς βλ. μονές
 Ὁσροηνή 298
 Ὁστρογόθοι 32, 33, 83, 88, 286
 Οὐάλης 100, 109, 134
 Οὐνοί 26, 33, 47, 83, 88, 188, 220
 Οὐράνια Ἱερουσαλήμ (ἢ Βασιλεία) 42, 181, 208, 209, 255, 292, 330
 οὐράνια σώματα 198-207, 216, 230, 254
 Οὐρανὸς Νικηφόρος 93
 Οὐριήλ βλ. ἄγγελοι
 ὀχυρωματικὰ ἔργα 48, 101
 Ὄψικιον βλ. θέματα
- παιδεία: ἐκκλησιαστικὴ (θερησκευτικὴ) 157-177· κλασικὴ 151, 152, 157, 158, 160, 161, 165-170· βλ. καὶ ἐκπαίδευση, ἀρχαῖα κείμενα
- Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη 112, 122, 149, 159, 160, 187, 209, 227, 229, 235, 258, 267, 282, 304, 305, 310, 318, 320· Γένεση 158, 198-201, 205, 211, 216, 218, 230-232, 263· Ἐξοδος 227· Λευιτικὸ 211· Βασιλειῶν 158· Παραλειπομένων Β' 227· Ψαλμοὶ 158, 195, 198, 202, 209, 227, 241, 243, 244, 269· Ἰώβ 158, 200· Παροιμίαι 158, 212, 264· Ἐκκλησιαστὴς 205· Προφήτες 158: Ὡσηέ, Ναούμ, Σοφονίας 269· Ἡσαΐας 198, 201-203· Ἱερεμίας 269· Ἰεζκιήλ, Δανιήλ 239· μετάφραση τῶν Ἐβδομήκοντα (Ο') 112, 199, 201, 202, 205, 216, 227, 240
 Παλαιολόγοι 68, 76, 286, 326
 Παλαιολόγος Ἀνδρόνικος, *Τὸ κατὰ Καλλιμάχον καὶ Χρυσορρόην* 296
 Παλαιστίνη 16, 29-31, 34, 35, 37, 55, 78, 84, 87, 111, 113, 126, 129, 133, 138, 139, 146, 148, 165, 217, 219, 225, 245, 281
 Παλαμῆς Γρηγόριος 149, 279
 παλάτι 45, 64, 94, 95, 100, 101, 106, 107, 145, 156, 168, 184, 212, 215, 259, 311, 329
 Παλλάδιος, *Λαυσαϊκὴ ἱστορία* 137
 Παλμύρας ἐπιτύμβια γλυπτὰ 306
 Παλμυραῖοι 30
- Παμπρέπιος 157
 Παμφυλία 27
 Πανδέκτης 283
 Παννονία 89
 Πανόδωρος 229
 Παντελεήμων, ἅγιος 317
 πανώλη βλ. ἐπιδημίες
 Παράδεισος 199, 200, 206, 208, 212, 213, 217
 Παράλιος 162
 Παρασκευὴ ἢ Νέα, ἀγία 295
Παραστάσεις σύντομοι χρονικαὶ 100
 Παρθία 219
 Πάρθοι 215
 πάροιχοι 19, 62, 68, 69, 145, 146· βλ. καὶ ἀγρότες
 Πάρος 89
παρησία 132, 190, 266
 Πασχάλιο τοῦ Ἱππολύτου 228
 Πασχάλιο Χρονικὸ 229
πατερικὰ ἢ γεροντικὰ 20, 137, 138, 282, 291, 305, 314
 Πατερμουθίος 291
 Πάτρα 36, 63, 101
 Πατριαρχεῖο Κωνσταντινουπόλεως 175
 πατριαρχικὴ σχολὴ 175, 176
 πατρίκιοι 14, 67, 98, 164, 187
 παυλικιανισμὸς, παυλικιανοὶ 122-126, 254, 298
 Παῦλος, ἀπόστολος 122, 137, 185, 201, 202, 206, 234, 235, 239, 244, 267, 321· Ἐπιστολὲς 82· βλ. καὶ Καινὴ Διαθήκη
 Παῦλος ὁ Ὁθηβαῖος, ἅγιος 214
 Παῦλος, ζωγράφος 325
 Παφλαγόνες 39, 42
 Παφλαγονία 62
 Πάφος 148
 Παχυμέρης Γεώργιος 286
 Παχώμιος 130, 131, 133, 134, 140, 177, 279· Κανόνας 130, 131
 Πελοπόννησος 36, 39-41, 63, 89, 101, 107, 119
 Πέργαμος 38, 84, 91, 118, 154
περιοδευτὴς 137
περιφανεῖς 147
 Περούν 119
 Πέρσες, Περσία 16, 17, 28, 29, 37, 42, 46, 51, 53, 55, 79, 85, 86, 90, 91, 97, 113, 115, 118, 187, 218, 220, 221, 223, 227, 231, 232, 234, 242
Περσικὰ 283· περσικὴ ἱστορία 286
 Πέτρα 30
 Πέτρος, ἀπόστολος 108, 219, 235, 314, 321· Ἐπιστολὲς 122· βλ. καὶ Καινὴ Διαθήκη
 Πέτρος, τσάρος Βουλγαρίας 123

- Πετσοσέγγιοι 74
 πηγές: ἀρχαϊκῆς 16, 18-20, 39, 79, 119, 128, 129, 143· γραπτῆς 18, 20, 86, 87, 102, 144, 163· μνημειακῆς 18, 143, 163· φιλολογικῆς 34, 93
 Πηλουσιώτης Ἰσίδωρος, Ἐπιστολὲς 284
 Πιλάτος 234
 Πισάτες 106
 Πισίδης Γεώργιος, *Ἐξαήμερον ἢ κοσμογραφία* 283
 Πισιδία 161, 185
 Πλανούδης Μάξιμος 300
 Πλάτων, ἅγιος 143
 Πλάτων 160, 168, 172, 174, 219, 281
 πληθυσμὸς 19, 25, 30-33, 35-40, 46, 52, 54, 55, 57, 73, 79, 80, 83, 86, 88, 89, 95-97, 99, 100, 104, 106, 109-111, 113, 121, 136, 151, 267, 279· ἀγροτικὸς 58, 63· ἀστικὸς 58, 63, 81· διαφοροποίηση 18· κατανομὴ 35· μετακινήσεις 38, 73
 πλοιοκτῆτες (navicularii) 56
 Πλούταρχος 160, 290
 Πλωτίνος 172
 πνεύματα 191-193
 ποίηση 276, 277, 279, 288, 299· ἀρχαῖα 282· λειτουργικὴ 285· ποιητικὰ μέτρα 276
 ποιητὲς 280, 296, 297· ἀρχαῖοι 152
 ποινὲς 62, 115, 163, 190
 πόλεις 21, 26, 27, 29, 35, 46-48, 57, 73, 77-107, 110, 111, 116, 136, 154, 155, 163, 269-271, 279, 280· κλασικῆς ἐποχῆς 20· κατάφραση 64, 163
 πολεοδομία 101, 107
 Πόντος 39, 42, 72, 100, 123, 132, 134, 144, 189, 220, 248, 303
 Πουλυερία 186
 Πορφύριος, ἐπίσκοπος Γάζας 54, 293
 Πορφύριος 172
πραϊπόσιτος 186· βλ. καὶ ἀξιωματοῦχοι
 Πράσινοι 83, 85, 86· βλ. καὶ δῆμοι
 Πρισκιανός, Γραμματικὴ 27
 Πρόκλος 172
 Προκόννησος 307
 Προκόπιος 32, 33, 80, 85, 86, 126, 242, 279, 285-288, 310· Ἀνέκδοτα 242, 287, 288· Ὑπὲρ τῶν πολέμων 285, 287, 288· *Περὶ κτισμάτων* 287
 πρόνοια 68, 75
 προοπτικὴ 319, 326
 Προποντίδα 94, 96
 προσηλυτισμὸς 110-116
προσκύνησις 260
 πρόστιμα 115
 προσωδία 166, 170, 276
 προφητεῖες 112, 137, 168, 220, 221,
- 240, 241, 245, 251, 252, 256, 292, 293
 προφῆτες 149, 187, 214, 218, 234, 235, 245, 249, 254, 255, 270, 317, 318· βλ. καὶ Δανιήλ, Ἡλίας, Ἡσαΐας, Ἰεζκιήλ, Μωυσῆς, Ναούμ, Σοφονίας, Ὡσηέ
πρωτοασκηρῆτις 172· βλ. καὶ ἀξιωματοῦχοι
πρωτοσπαθάριος 64, 284· βλ. καὶ ἀξιωματοῦχοι
 Πτολεμαῖδα 31, 85
 Πτολεμαῖοι 29
 Πτολεμαῖος 168, 198
 Πτωχοπρόδρομος Θεόδωρος 103, 104, 296· Πρόδρομικὰ 295
- Ραβέννα 19, 33, 305, 307, 309
 ραβῖνοι 111-113· σχολὲς ραβινικῆς 159
 Ραιδεστός 189
 Ραφαήλ βλ. ἄγγελοι
 Ρενδάκιοι ἢ Ρεντάκιοι 65
 Ρενδάκις Σισίνιος 65
 Ρέσαφα 189
 Ρήγιο Καλαβρίας 36
 ρήτορες 154-157, 161, 175, 270, 284, 305
 ρητορικὴ 154, 155, 158-161, 165, 166, 169, 170, 172, 173, 175-177, 270, 278, 284, 285, 290· ἔδρα 169· σχολὲς 291
 Ριχάρδος ὁ Λεοντόκαρδος 147
 Ρογγήρος Β' 251
 Ρόδιοι 216
 Ρουφιανοὶ 134
 Ρουφίνος 134
 Ρωμαῖοι 33, 108, 243, 244, 270· αὐτοκρατορία 16, 115, 116· δίκαιο 111· διοίκηση 31
 Ρωμανὸς Α' Λεκαπηνὸς 43, 65, 114, 140, 141
 Ρωμανὸς Γ' 289, 322
 Ρωμανὸς ὁ Μελωδὸς 83, 285
 Ρώμη 17, 25, 28, 32, 37, 42, 47, 94-96, 138, 165, 234, 237, 240, 243, 245, 248-250, 252, 304, 305, 307, 312· πολιορκίες 32
 Ρωμύλος Ἀρχέλαος 244
 Ρωσία 137, 209, 303, 326, 328
 Ρῶσοι 17, 70, 71, 73, 104, 105, 187, 222, 240, 245, 251· ἐμπορικὴ ἀποικία 71
- Σάββας, ἅγιος 133
 Σαγγάριος, ποταμὸς 182

Σαγουδάους 41
 σαλοί ιεροί 136, 137, 242, 245, 255
 Σάμαλα 90
 Σαμαραίος 216
 Σαμάρεια 219
 Σαμαρείτες 30, 113, 125, 126
 Σαμόσατα 134
 Σαρακηνοί 31, 113, 167, 216, 222
 Σάρδεις 28, 90, 91
 Σαρμάτες 216
 Σασσανίδες 16
 Σεβάστεια 64
 Σεβηριανός τῶν Γαβάλων 204-207
 Σεβήρος, πατριάρχης Ἀντιοχείας 118, 126, 161, 162
 σεισμοί 84, 85, 90, 99, 101, 107, 209, 238, 242, 247, 313
 σεκρετικοί 67· βλ. καὶ ἀξιοματοῦχοι
 Σελεύκεια 29, 189
 Σελευκίδες 29, 225, 239
 Σελτζούκοι Τοῦρκοι 17, 74, 105
 Σεπτίμιος Σεβήρος 93
 σεραφεῖμ βλ. ἄγγελιοι
 Σερβία 125, 325, 326
 Σέρβοι 36, 41
 Σέργιος, ἅγιος 189
 Σέργιος, μοναχὸς 135
 Σερδικὴ (Σόφια) 33, 83, 88
 Σέρρες 102
 Σήθ 230
 Σηλυμβρία 36, 96, 101
 Σήμ 217-219, 231
 σηκιάριοι 72
 Σίβυλλες 236
 Σιγγηδόνα (Βελιγράδι) 83
 Σιδάνα 85
 Σιδών 216
 Σικελία 18, 33, 37, 73, 138, 244, 245, 322
 Σικυώνας βασιλεῖο 232
 Σιλβεστρος, πάπας 235
 Σιμοκάττης Θεοφύλακτος 285, 288
 Σινά μονή βλ. μονές
 Σινά ὄρος 34, 138, 139, 234
 Σίρμιο 83, 88, 94, 188
 Σκανδιναβοί 73
 Σκήπητ 31
 Σκληροί 66
 σκοτεινοὶ αἰῶνες 63, 89, 92, 163, 245
 Σκριπού βλ. μονή
 Σκύθες 47, 105, 216, 221
 Σκυθία 77, 220
 Σκυθόπολη 55, 84
 Σλάβοι 17, 33, 35-41, 63, 83, 89, 119, 125, 143, 215· εἰδωλόατρες 40, 41
 Σμύρνη 28, 91, 118, 155, 252
 Σόδομα 132, 160

Σοκότρα 207
 Σολομών 233, 234· Ναὸς τοῦ Σολομώντος 233-235, 243, 253
 Σόλων 160
 Σούδα 170, 300
 Σόφια βλ. Σερδική
 σοφιστὲς 154, 157, 161, 163
 Σοφονίας 269
 Σοφρώνιος, πατριάρχης 243
 Σπάρτη 41, 101
 σπουδαῖοι ἢ φιλόπονοι 128
 σπουδή 128
 Σπιριδών, ἅγιος 188
 Σταυροφορίες 74, 101· Τέταρτη 18, 106
 Σταυροφόροι 15, 18, 106, 251, 252
 Στέφανος, ἅγιος, πρωτομάρτυς 189, 190, 235, 317
 Στέφανος ὁ Νέος, ἅγιος 293
 Στέφανος ὁ Σαβαίτης, ἅγιος 215
 Στέφανος ὁ Ἀλεξανδρέας 164
 Στέφανος Δουσάν 150
 Στόβοι 83, 88
 Στράβων 26, 198
 στρατεία 46
 στρατηγὸς 60
 στρατιῶτες 28, 37, 38, 45, 48, 59-61, 66, 67, 69, 92, 125, 126, 165, 184, 262· comitatenses 46· limitanei 46, 61· magistri militum 47, 60· στρατιῶτες καλλιεργητὲς 61, 63, 67, 73
 στρατιώτης 68
 στρατός 26, 37-39, 45-47, 58-63, 67, 69, 74, 84, 92, 112, 118, 121, 130, 245, 248· διοίκηση καὶ ἱεραρχία 46, 47· ἐφοδιασμός 56, 84· θεματικὴ μεταρρύθμιση 60-61· ἰδιωτικοὶ στρατοὶ 69· μεταρρυθμίσεις Μ. Κωνσταντίνου 46· στρατιωτικὴ ὑπηρεσία 46, 47, 61, 62, 67, 73· στρατολογία 38, 46-48, 58, 60, 63, 73· στρατόπεδα 46
 στράτωρ 63
 Στρυμόνας 72
 στυλίτες 134-136, 138, 143
 Σύγκελλος Γεώργιος 165, 229
 συγκλητικοὶ 156
 σύγκλητος 45, 48, 66, 74, 94
 Συκὲς 86, 95
 Σύλαιο 249, 250
 Συμεὼν τῆς Ἐφέσσας, ἅγιος 136, 137, 196
 Συμεὼν ὁ Νέος ὁ Στυλίου, ἅγιος 293
 Συμεὼν ὁ Σαλός, ἅγιος 82, 83, 269, 293
 Συμεὼν ὁ Στυλίου, ἅγιος 133, 135, 137
 Συμεὼν τῆς Βουλγαρίας 43, 70
 Συμεὼν ὁ Λογοθέτης 229
 Συμεὼν ὁ Μεταφραστὴς 20, 294, 295· Μηνολόγιο 294

Συμεὼν ὁ Νέος Θεολόγος 144, 149
 Συμεὼν ὁ Ὁρσεύβιος 111
 σύμπαν 198-224, 258
 συναγωγὰς 79, 111, 112
 Συνέσιος τῆς Κυρήνης 49, 283
 Συνοδικὸ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας βλ. Ὁρθοδοξίας Συνοδικὸ
 σύνοδοι: Οἰκουμηνικὲς 108, 117, 121, 260, 313· Α' Νίκαιας 116, 187, 235· Δ' Χαλκηδόνος 117· Ε' 126· Πενθέκτη ἐν Τρούλω 164, 310, 318· Ζ' 139· Γάγγρας 131· Λαοδικείας 185· Λατερανοῦ 138· τοῦ 754 120· Φωτίου 121· τοῦ 869 64· Λυδῶν 252· συντεχνίες 55, 71, 72, 74, 115, 170, 176
 Συρακοῦσες 245
 Συρία, Σύροι 16, 26, 29-31, 35, 37, 38, 41, 42, 55, 57, 70, 72, 75, 79, 82-84, 117, 119, 120, 129, 133-135, 137, 144, 154, 165, 189, 216, 217, 220, 225, 231, 240, 245, 302, 313
 συστήματα 71, 74
 σχίσματα, σχισματικοὶ 43, 115-117
 σχολάριοι 67
 σχολεῖα 83, 111, 175
 σχολῆς 176· βλ. καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρεια, Ἀντιόχεια, ἐκπαίδευση, νομικὴ σχολή
 Σωζομενὸς 220
 Σωκράτης 168
 Σωτήριχος Παντεύγενης, πατριάρχης Ἀντιοχείας 124
 Ταβέννησος 130
 ταμεῖο αὐτοκρατορικὸ 110
 Τάναϊς ποταμὸς 217
 τάξεις κοινωνικὲς 125· βλ. καὶ ἀγρότες, ἀριστοκρατία, ἀστικὴ τάξη
 ταξίδια 56, 63, 138, 155, 165, 189
 ταξιδιώτες 25, 26, 32, 33, 56
 Ταράσιος, πατριάρχης 165
 Ταρκύνιος ὁ Ὑπερήφανος 227
 Ταρσὸς 28, 297
 Τάτιος Ἀχιλλεὺς 283, 298
 Ταύρος ὁρσεύρα 27, 37, 70, 207, 216, 297
 ταχυδρομεῖο δημόσιο 47, 48
 τείχη 78, 79, 101· Θεσσαλονίκης 92· Κωνσταντινούπολης 94, 315· Ἀναστασιανὸ Μακρὸ 36, 96· Θεοδοσιανὰ χερσαῖα 95, 99· Κωνσταντινέιο 95, 98, 136
 τελώνια 196, 197
 Τένεδος 96
 Τεσσαρεσκαίδεκατίται 116, 126
 Τεφρική 122, 123

τέχνη 22, 74, 169, 301-330· ἀρχαία 110, 130· παλαιοχριστιανικὴ 303, 312, 318, 319, 322, 330· ἀναγέννηση Μακεδόνων 319-322· Παλαιολόγων 319, 326-329· ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ 302, 308, 309, 315, 318, 322, 328, 329· γλυπτικὴ-γλυπτὰ 301, 306-308, 313, 322, 324· εἰκόνες φερητὲς 310, 312· βλ. καὶ εἰκόνες· εἰκονογραφία 305, 306, 326, 327· εἰκονογραφημένα χειρόγραφα βλ. κώδικες, χειρόγραφα· ζωγραφικὴ μνημειακὴ 303, 309, 314, 323-330· μικροτεχνία 302, 303, 312, 320-322, 327, 329· μωσαϊκὰ 51, 309, 311· τοιχογραφίες 302, 303, 311-313, 320, 323, 325-327· ψηφιδωτὰ 188, 303, 306-313, 315-317, 319, 320, 325, 326
 Τζέτζης Ἰωάννης 104, 105
 Τιβεριάδα 113
 Τιβέριος, ρωμαῖος αὐτοκράτορας 234
 Τιβέριος Β' 242
 Τίγρης ποταμὸς 28, 199
 τιμὲς 52, 53
 Τουρκία 27, 106· Τοῦρκοι 16, 222, 223, 229, 256, 257, 297
 Τραϊανὸς 88
 Τράλλεις 162
 Τραπεζούντα 27, 72, 75, 164, 165, 170, 176, 325· αὐτοκρατορία 18
 Τρεβήροι 94
 τρελοὶ 45· βλ. καὶ σαλοὶ ἱεροὶ
 Τρικλίνιος Δημήτριος 300
 Τριπολίτιδα 26, 32
 Τύανα 28
 Τυνησία 32
 τυραννίς, τύραννος 259
 Τύρος 55, 85
 Τυχικός 122, 164, 165
 Τύχων, ἅγιος 111
 Ὑεμένη 113
 ὕμνογραφία 275, 276, 285
 ὕμνοι θρησκευτικοὶ 169, 285· Ἀκάθιστος ὕμνος 158, 159
 Ὑπάτια 110
 Ὑπάτιος, ἅγιος 293
 ὑπερφυσικὲς δυνάμεις 21
 ὑπηρέτες 45, 103, 212
 ὑπόσπονδοι (foederati) 47
 Φαρισαῖοι 258
 φεουδαλισμός 65, 68-70
 Φιδάλεια 93
 Φιλαδέλφεια 48

φιλανθρωπία, φιλανθρωπικά ιδρύματα 55, 68
 Φιλάρετος, άγιος 62
 Φίλιπποι 90
 Φίλιππος ο Μακεδόνας 244
 Φιλιππούπολη 88, 124
 Φιλοκάλης, πρωτοβεστιάριος 67
 φιλολογία 16, 128, 158, 159, 177, 284, 322· άρχαία 160
 φιλολογικές σπουδές 153, 165, 169
 φιλόπονοι 162
 φιλοσοφία 154, 155, 157, 163-166, 171-173, 176· έδρα φιλοσοφίας 167, 169
 φιλοσοφικές σχολές 110, 171
 φιλόσοφοι 129, 153, 158, 161, 165, 171, 175· φυσικοί φιλόσοφοι 204
 Φιλοστόργιος 213, 214
 Φίλων ο Ίουδαϊός 200
 Φισών, ποταμός 199, 200, 206
 Φλάβιος Ίώσηπος 216, 217
 Φοίνικες 232
 Φοινίκη 217, 219, 220
 φοιτητές, φοιτητική ζωή 161-163, 174, 175
 Φόλ, βασιλιάς Αιθιοπίας 244
 φόροι 48, 58, 59, 62, 64, 68, 69, 73, 87, 90, 99, 128, 141, 241, 246· έκτακτοι, τακτικοί 58· εισφορές 142
 φορολογία 19, 42, 56-59, 67, 68, 75, 224
 φορολογικές άπαλλαγές (έξκουσσειές) 68, 76, 114, 146
 Φουνδαγιαγίται 123
 φουσκάριος 82
 Φράγκοι 73, 107, 221
 φρούρια 36, 37, 46, 90, 91· Κυζίκου 63
 Φρύγες 215
 Φρυγία 28, 91, 97, 99, 110, 116, 117, 185, 232, 248
 Φυσιολόγος 213, 282
 Φωκάδες 66
 Φωκᾶς, τύραννος 242, 285
 Φώτιος, πατριάρχης 116, 121, 168, 169, 204, 209, 222, 260, 284, 300· Βιβλιοθήκη 300
 Χάζαροι 17, 114
 Χαλδαῖοι 172, 215, 230, 232
 Χαλέπι 29, 114
 Χαλκοκονδύλης Λαόνικος 286
 Χάμ 216-218, 231, 263
 Χαναάν 216, 218, 219, 230
 χαριστικάριος 142
 Χαρτουλάρις, ζωγράφος 325
 Χειλητών 90
 χειρόγραφα 19-20, 99, 166-169, 209, 225, 275, 277, 280, 281, 284, 290· εικονογραφημένα χειρόγραφα 302, 305, 312, 315, 320, 322, 323· βλ. και κώδικες
 χειρουβείμ βλ. άγγελιοι
 Χερσώνα 92
 Χήναρος, ζωγράφος 325
 Χιμαριίτες ή Όμηριίτες 112, 113
 Χίος 118
 Χοιροβοσκός Γεώργιος 163, 164
 Χοράζιν 244
 Χοσρόης Β΄ 242, 243
 χρησιμοί 236· σιβυλλικοί 240
 χριστιανισμός 16, 25, 94, 111, 112, 116, 161, 219, 221, 234, 235, 238, 260, 271, 287, 306
 Χριστόφορος ο Μυτιληναῖος 290
 χρονικά 206, 226, 229, 234, 235, 236, 282, 283, 286· «χρονικόν από Ἀδάμ» ή παγκόσμιο 226, 229· Χρονικό της Μονεμβασιάς 36, 40
 χρονογράφοι, χρονογραφίες 19, 85, 98, 229, 245, 285
 χρονολόγηση 164, 227, 230, 301, 310
 χρονολογικά συστήματα 225, 227, 229, 241
 Χρυσάριος 162
 Χρυσοβέργης ή Χρυσοχέρης 123
 Χρυσόχειρ 122
 Χώνες 91, 185
 Χωνιάτης Νικήτας 68, 69, 286, 290
 χωρεπίσκοπος 137
 Ψελλός Μιχαήλ 74, 142, 171-174, 176, 209, 278, 280, 286, 289, 290, 295, 298, 300, 322· Παντοδαπή Διδασκαλία 209· Χρονογραφία 289, 290
 Ψευδο-Διονύσιος Περί ούρανιου Ιεραρχίας 184
 Ψευδο-Καισάριος 206, 207, 215· Διάλογοι 206, 208
 Ψευδο-Μεθόδιος 245
 ψηφιδωτά βλ. τέχνη
 ψυχή 195-197, 265, 266, 270· μετεναμάτωση 116· μετεμψύχωση 174
 Ώραπόλλων 162
 Ώριγένης 131, 144, 200, 201, 235
 Ώσηέ 269

Abukarib 30
 al Djahiz 301
 Baynes Norman 21
 buccellarii 69
 Bury J. B. 60
 Byron Robert 301
 Cavallini 327
 Clavijo 106
 curatores 95
 Dečani 326
 Duccio 327
 Dû-Nuwás 113
 dux augustalis 50, 52
 Excerpta βλ. Έκλογαί
 Expositio totius mundi et gentium 26, 55
 Giotto 327
 Harfat 49, 54
 Ibn-Khordádhbeh 90
 Kondakov N. P. 303
 latifundia 61
 magister militum 60
 magistriani ή agentes in rebus 47, 184
 Mamûn, χαλίφης 167
 Mileševó 325
 Notitia urbis Constantinopolitanae 95
 Qal'at Sim'an 137
 Quadrivium 153
 Sopočani 325, 326
 Tekfur Saray 328
 Tur 'Abdin 29
 Velico Turnovo 88