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**PHILOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE
TREATISE *ON PARADISE* BY NIKETAS STETHATOS**

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Central European University

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Boiarintseva Uliana

(Russia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,

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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

Chair, Examination Committee

Thesis Supervisor

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I, the undersigned, **Boiarintseva Uliana**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

This thesis is dedicated to the treatise *On Paradise*, written by the Byzantine theologian of the eleventh century, Niketas Stethatos (c. 1005 – c. 1090). The main aim of my work is to reconstruct the historical and philological background of the treatise in order to provide a better understanding of his work. The thesis includes three chapters, intending to answer the following questions:

- 1) In which historical circumstances did Niketas create the treatise and what kind of agenda did he have?
- 2) Which authors did Niketas rely on and how did he apply their ideas on the philological level?
- 3) Which exegetical models did he use and how were they reflected in the composition of the treatise?

In my thesis I claim that composing his treatise, Niketas followed a specific “politics” of referencing, implying a particular hierarchy of authors, expressed in the author’s choice of this or another way of quoting. While some of them he quoted word to word, the traces of others can only be distinguished after the deep analysis of the treatise’s structure. Therefore, I argue that the treatise *On Paradise* had different levels of meaning, corresponding with the Byzantine exegetical schemes, already well formed by the eleventh century.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Introduction.....	3
Existing Scholarship.....	3
Chapter 1 – Historical Context of the Treatise. Polemics among Socio-Political Groups of the Eleventh Century	7
The Patriarchate of Alexios Stoudites (1025-43).....	8
Michael Keroularios (1043-1058): a Figure Changing the Colour.....	12
The Role of Niketas in the Trial of John Italos	15
Chapter 2 – References to Church Authorities in the Treatise On Paradise: the Boundaries of Theological Thought.....	19
Types of References	20
Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith by John of Damascus as a Framework of the Treatise On Paradise.....	21
Chapter 3 – Structure and Meaning of the Treatise <i>On Paradise</i> : Exegetical Model of Evagrius Ponticus.....	34
Exegetical Models of the Alexandrian School in the Treatise On Paradise: Praktikē, Physikē, and Theologia of Evagrius of Pontus	40
Elements of Poetical Language in the Descriptions of Paradise: Influence of Symeon the New Theologian	50
Conclusion	53
Bibliography	55

Introduction

In this work, I will scrutinize the treatise *On Paradise* by Niketas Stethatos. He was a Byzantine theologian of the eleventh century, who became famous, first of all, as a biographer of his teacher, Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022). Having become at the end of his life the Father Superior of the Studite monastery in Constantinople, he was quite influential in the capital. In different periods of his life, he was involved either in protection of his teacher's honor, which was attacked by representatives of the Church, opposing the authority gained by him; or in polemics with the Latins. For a long time, researchers did not appreciate Niketas as an outstanding historical figure, but rather as someone who was only a close associate to the influential people of his time: both to secular and ecclesiastic authorities. It was only during the last fifteen years that the historians began to show more concern with his works.

Existing Scholarship

One can define several problems in the historiography of Niketas Stethatos' works. These problems were interesting for historians in different periods. I specified four of them: a) Stethatos as a biographer of Symeon the New Theologian; b) Stethatos as a participant of the events of 1054; c) Stethatos as a source (interest to the edition of his works); d) Stethatos as a theologian. There is an additional problem in defining the chronology of Stethatos' life and works.

The main points of the historiography in chronological sequence:

1) Interest in Niketas starts from the 60s of the XIX century, when his *Centuries*¹ were edited in the *Patrologia Graeca* series. In 1861 and 1879 there were published two articles, dedicated to Niketas: one by C. Will,² and another by M. V. Chelcov³ – both authors were concerned with Niketas as a polemist with the Latins. Afterwards, up to the late 1920s (1928, strictly speaking) Stethatos did not attract the scholars.

2) At the end of 1920s, and the first half of the 1930s, Niketas became interesting for scholars again. One can hardly trace any historiographical tendency, which could explain this, because it is mainly connected with the name of one scholar, A. Michel⁴, who wrote four of seven articles, edited in this period. All of them are dedicated to Niketas as a participant in the schism. K. Schweinburg was also concerned with this problem, having published an article *Die Textgeschichte des Gesprächs mit den Franken von Niketas Stethatos*⁵. The year 1928 is important for the study of Simeon the New Theologian's heritage: I. Hausherr and G. Horn⁶ edited his biography authored by Niketas'. Perhaps, as a reaction to this work, L. A. Freiberg published her

¹ Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca* (Paris, 1857 - 1904) vol. 120, 825–1005.

² Cornelius Will, ed., *Acta et scripta quae de controversiis Ecclesiae Graecae et Latinae saeculo undecimo composita extant* (Leipzig: Elwert, 1861), 127 – 136.

³ Mikhail Chelcov, "Niketas Stethatos. An Epistle to the Romans about the Azymes and Fasting on Saturday" [Nikita Stifat. Poslanie rimljanam ob opresnokah i poste v subbotu] in *The Polemics on Azymes between the Greeks and Latins* [Polemika mezhdru grekami i latinjanami po voprosu ob opresnokah], Mikhail Chelcov (Saint Petersburg, 1879): 357-368.

⁴ Anton Michel, *Amalfi und Jerusalem im griechischen Kirchenstreit (1054-1090): Kardinal Humbert, Laycus von Amalfi, Niketas Stethatos, Symeon II von Jerusalem und Bruno von Segni über die Azymen*, (Rome: Pont. Inst. Orientalium Studiorum, 1928).

Anton Michel, "Die Anticipation des Paschamales im Schisma des XI. Jahrhunderts," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 2 (1936): 155–163.

Anton Michel, *Humbert und Kerullarios, Quellen und Studien zum Schisma des XI. Jahrhunderts* (Paderborn, 1930) vol. 2, p. 322–342.

Anton Michel, "Die vier Schriften des Niketas Stethatos über die Azymen," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 35 (1935): 308–336.

⁵ Kurt Schweinburg, "Die Textgeschichte des Gesprächs mit den Franken von Niketas Stethatos," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 34 (1934): 313–347.

⁶ Irénée Hausherr and Gabriel Horn, "Un grand mystique byzantin. Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien (949–1022) par Nicéas Stéthatos," *Orientalia Christiana* 45 (1928).

edition *Life and Deeds of Our Father* among the Saints, *Symeon the New Theologian, Abbot of St. Mammars Monastery in Kserokerkos*⁷. Therefore, from 1861 to 1944 Niketas appears within the eyeshot of scholars as a polemist against the Latins: seven studies out of ten written in this period describe him in this context.

3) From the mid-1940s, the works of Stethatos are becoming very appealing for editors. In 1944 M. Chalendar published a part of his treatise *On Paradise*⁸. The edition of P. K. Chrestou, S. Sakkos and G. Mantzaridis *Νικήτα Στηθάτου Μυστικά Συγγράμματα*⁹, who used more manuscripts than Chalendar, thus having made the edition more complete, followed it. At the same time, Sakkos printed a separate brochure *Νικήτα Στηθάτου θεωρία εἰς τὸν Παράδεισον*¹⁰. In 1961 J. P. Darrouzès included into his work a manuscript which was omitted by his predecessors, and finally presented a complete edition of Stethatos' corpus¹¹. Nevertheless, his contribution remained in abandon for quite a long time: from the end of the 1950s up to the beginning of the 1990s there appeared only seven new studies, dedicated to Niketas. However, the editorial activity of the 1940s and 1960s left its imprint on the new materials: there appeared some studies dedicated to the theology of Stethatos. For instance, D. G. Tsamis was the first one to cover the issue of Christian anthropology in Niketas' works¹². In 1982 J. Touraille¹³ published three centuries of Stethatos, but

⁷ L. A. Freiberg, *Venerable Niketas Stethatos, Life and Deeds of Our Father* among the Saints, *Symeon the New Theologian, Abbot of St. Mammars Monastery in Kserokerkos* [Prep. Nikita Stifat. Zhizn' i podvizhnichestvo izhe vo svjatyh otca nashego Simeona Novogo Bogoslova, igumena monastyrja svjatogo Mamanta Ksirokerka]. (Saint Petersburg, 1928).

⁸ Marie Chalendar, Nicéas Stéthatos. *Le Paradis Spirituel et Autres Textes Annexes* (Paris, 1944).

⁹ P. K. Chrestou, Stergios Sakkos, and G. Mantzaridis, *Νικήτα Στηθάτου Μυστικά Συγγράμματα* (Thessaloniki, 1957).

¹⁰ Stergios Sakkos, *Νικήτα Στηθάτου θεωρία εἰς τὸν Παράδεισον* (Thessaloniki, 1957).

¹¹ Jean Paul Darrouzès, *Nicéas Stéthatos. Opuscles et Lettres* (Paris, 1961), 434–435.

¹² D. G. Tsamis, *Ἡ τελείωσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατὰ Νικήταν τὸν Στηθάτον* (Thessaloniki, 1971).

¹³ Jacques Touraille, *Nicéas Stéthatos, Trois Centuries, Pratique, Physique, Gnostique: Introduction et Traduction* (Bégrolles-en-Mauges, 1982).

his work was too insignificant against the background of the previous years and was left almost without notice.

4) The last fifteen years have shown that the concern with Stethatos has increased: from the beginning of the 1990s up to 2014 there appeared 22 studies, touching upon very different questions. The scholars mostly focus on theological issues, which Niketas mainly developed in two treatises: *On the Hierarchy* and *On Paradise*. The most prolific researchers are A. Golitzin and F. Lauritzen: Golitzin concentrates on the theological context of Stethatos' works, while Lauritzen pays more attention to the influence of Niketas on the following theologians, Michael Psellos in particular. I should also mention N. Kim, who was the first to translate the treatise *On Paradise* into Russian¹⁴.

¹⁴ Nikolai Kim, *The Venerable Niketas Stethatos and His Treatise "On Paradise"* [Prepodobnyj Nikita Stifat i ego traktat "O raje"] (Saint Petersburg, 1998).
See also Nikolai Kim, *Paradise and Man: the Heritage of the Venerable Niketas Stethatos* [Raj i chelovek: Nasledie prepodobnogo Nikity Stifata] (Saint-Petersburg, 2003).

Chapter 1 – Historical Context of the Treatise.

Polemics among Socio-Political Groups of the Eleventh Century

The main aim of this chapter is to describe the historical circumstances in which the treatise *On Paradise* emerged. By the end of his life Niketas Stethatos, Abbot of the Studios monastery, was an influential figure in Constantinople. That is why in order to understand his work, it is important to reconstruct the social and political environment, in which he was living. On the methodological level, this chapter implies an analysis of social groups and institutions, which shaped the society in the second half of the eleventh century, as well as the conflicts between them. Therefore, I will try to reconstruct the polemical context of the eleventh century, the main actors in these debates and define Niketas' position in this system. I would like to specify that this position was not stable, but rather dynamic, while the continuous struggle between court fractions and political interest groups constantly changed the whole historical background.

Although Niketas Stethatos' is the main hero of my work, he was not the one to determine the course of history in the eleventh century. Neither a prince, nor a bishop, he was nevertheless a competent participant in the events described. Born around 1005¹⁵, he entered the Studios monastery in 1020¹⁶ and became a pupil of Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) who, by that time, had been condemned by the Synod, but who had returned to his position of abbot under the

¹⁵ Jean Darrouzès. *Nicétas Stéthatos, Opusculs et lettres* (Paris 1961), 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

protection of the patriarch Sergius II Studites (999-1019). Symeon died in 1022¹⁷, when Niketas was just seventeen. In three years a new patriarch was appointed, who was to open a new chapter in the history of the Byzantine Church.

The Patriarchate of Alexios Stoudites (1025-43)

During the last year of his life, Emperor Basil II (976-1025) made Alexios I, abbot of the Studios monastery, the new patriarch¹⁸. Although Alexios managed to join the list of the three candidates who were proposed to the emperor, yet Basil promoted him outside the law. As soon as he occupied the patriarchal throne, Alexios started to work closely with the new emperor, Constantine VIII (1025-28). He edited a document, according to which he was obliged to anathematize any revolt against the emperor. At the same time, he made a set of reforms, which were supposed to strengthen monastic property and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. All these tendencies were very much in tune with the spirit of time: Krausmüller writes that “what distinguishes Byzantine monasticism of the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries from earlier periods is the production of normative texts, the so-called *typika*”¹⁹. Already in the late tenth century in the Studios monastery there was written a monastic rule, which is now lost. It was “the first typikon that bears all the hallmarks of monastic reform: rejection of entrance fees, prohibition of clandestine eating and the requirement to confess to the abbot and to obey him in all things”²⁰. Thus, during the end of the tenth and the first quarter of the eleventh century there was formed a Church fraction which was trying to

¹⁷ Ibid, 8.

¹⁸ Alexey Pentkovsky, *Typikon Patriarxa Aleksija Studita v Vizantii i na Rusi* (The Typikon of the Patriarch Alexios Studites in Byzantium and Rus), (Moscow 2001), 42.

¹⁹ Dirk Krausmüller, Olga Grinchenko. “The Tenth-Century Stoudios-Typikon and its Impact on Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Byzantine Monasticism,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, vol. 63 (2013), 153.

²⁰ Ibid, 153.

establish a strict hierarchy with a distinct authority of the abbot. The politics of Alexios was very much in tune with this tendency.

At the same time, Alexios had to fight with tendencies towards independence, existing in monastic communities (mostly provincial), expressed in creating their own cults without the approval of ecclesiastical authorities. One famous example is the promotion of the cult of Symeon Eulabes, or the Pious (died in 986), promoted by Symeon the New Theologian during all his life.

Symeon originated from a very wealthy family and was initially destined by his uncle to be a eunuch at the royal court. However, when the patronage of his uncle ended, while he was a participant of a palace revolution in 963 and was eventually killed – Symeon had to flee to a Stoudios monastery²¹. However, after one year of noviciate Symeon was expelled and transferred to St Mamas Monastery, where he became superior. There he began to promote the cult of Symeon the Pious. Persistently using his images as icons in order to proclaim his sanctity, Symeon was finally brought to the synod and condemned. It is important to mention that, as far as Byzantium did have an official procedure of canonization, “a saint was recognized by being the object of an existing cult, a cult which grew up slowly and went beyond its initiators”²². That is why the promotion of a cult was largely based on local initiatives, in which both the monks and lay people were involved. This tendency was a clear evidence of local “civil” initiative and was dangerous for central authorities, while they could not control it. The fact of “canonization”, namely, entering of admired person into the cult, was the result of “the work of his followers, who expected from it

²¹ J.A. McGuckin, “Symeon the New Theologian (d. 1022) and Byzantine Monasticism,” in *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism: Papers from the Twenty-eighth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 1994*, ed. A. Bryer and M. Cunningham (Aldershot 1996), 19.

²² Nikos Oikonomides, “How to Become a Saint in Eleventh Century Byzantium,” in *Οι ήρωες της ορθόδοξης εκκλησίας*, ed. E. Kountoura-Galake (Athens 2004), 474.

important and tangible advantages, spiritual and material, but had to face eventual opposition of competitors”²³.

Although by the time Alexios I was enthroned Symeon had already died, yet the patriarch had to make up his mind on the status of Symeon’s authority. Alexios decided to put him under censure²⁴. However, the promotion of the cult of Symeon the Pious was not just a whim of Symeon – it was a part of the overall tendency of returning to the ascetic ideal of the Early Christianity. Just like his charismatic contemporary from Burgundy, Odo of Cluny, Symeon was referring to the early Christian ideal of asceticism and severe discipline. Some monks did not welcome this initiative and this finally led to an unsuccessful revolt. Another current, opposing Symeon, was represented by an influential figure, close to the emperor, archbishop Stephen, metropolitan of Nicomedia, protosynkellos of the patriarch. Nikos Oikonomides is skeptical about the idea, expressed by Stethatos in the *Vita*, that Stephanos initiated a trial against Symeon because of “personal jealousy”. He supposes that “his actions reflected the attitude of the patriarch, whose main assistant he was”²⁵. This is quite strange, because patriarch Sergius II protected Symeon during the trial. With a reference to I. Hausherr²⁶, Oikonomides provides another view that probably “his opposition to the New Theologian concerning the sanctification of Symeon Eulabes was due to the fact that he was involved in the composition of the *Menologium* of Basil II, a liturgical book, which includes a list of the saints with their feast days²⁷. But maybe there was also another reason for condemnation: Symeon’s idea that inspiration, got by the monk from the Holy Spirit can make

²³ Ibid, 474.

²⁴ Angold Michael, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081-1261*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20.

²⁵ Oikonomides, *How to Become a Saint*, 480.

²⁶ Irénée Hausherr, “Un Grand Mystique Byzantin: Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien par Nicetas Stethatos,” *Orientalia Christiana* 12:45 (1928), p. lv

²⁷ Oikonomides, *How to Become a Saint*, 479.

him equal to the bishop, which was significantly undermining traditional hierarchy. In his Letter of Confession he claims directly:

When time had passed and the bishops became useless, this dread authority passed on to priests of blameless life... [and] when the latter in their turn had become polluted... it was transferred... to God's elected people, I mean to the monks²⁸.

These words summarize the core idea of Symeon and his outrageous acceptance of the right of monks, who were not ordained, to hear confessions. It obviously resulted in deep indignation of the clergy and led to the accusations of heresy. When Symeon was brought to Synod as a heretic he turned out to be quite uncompromising. Despite the threat, he refused to accept an annual honoring of Symeon the Pious as just a local event of St. Mamas. In 1009 he was finally sent to exile and died there in 1022, surrounded, however, by his disciples, who were allowed to come to him by the patriarch Sergius II (999-1019). Obviously enough, there was no unity inside the Church: tensions were growing especially intense between different groups of clergy. The aim of both: Stephen of Nicomedia and Alexios I was to concentrate power in their hands and hence, fighting with local cults was an inevitable part of their politics.

We do not know much about the life of Niketas during that period. When Alexios ascended the patriarchal throne, Stethatos was probably in his twenties, and even his earliest works a later period. Most probably, the biography of Symeon, was not written by Niketas upon the commission

²⁸ Alexander Golitzin, Hierarchy Versus Anarchy: Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and Their Common Roots in the Ascetical Tradition», *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994), 138.

of the new patriarch but, rather, it was inspired by his own devotion to Symeon. In fact, the times of Alexios could not be very inspiring for him. Even if being a devoted follower of his spiritual father, Niketas would have had not to announce it. Niketas only became “visible” as a writer and historical figure during the times of Michael Keroularios. Another guess I have about the “invisibility” of Niketas in this period, relates to his age. He was twenty when Alexios was enthroned and thirty seven when the position passed to Michael Keroularios. By the time of Michael Niketas was already mature enough and had enough experience to assist such an important figure as the patriarch. Obviously, it was not all of a sudden that he became his close associate: he had to gain enough authority in the monastery to get so close to such position, but before that, he could also be too young and inexperienced to become “visible” as a theologian.

Michael Keroularios (1043-1058): a Figure Changing the Colour

Michael Keroularios was a highly dubious person. Having made a brilliant career, compared with a chess excelsior, his figure was still without a colour: he was changing it very often, and although being a monk – still resembled a civil officer. He started his career at court and in 1040 was intriguing with the future Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-55) against Michael IV the Paphlagonian (1034-41). When the plot was discovered, the only way in which Michael could escape punishment was to take the vows. When Constantine became an emperor he granted his former ally a high position, appointing him patriarch²⁹. Being himself quite interested in the mystical teaching of Symeon, Keroularios was trying to strengthen his authority with the help of

²⁹ Alexander Kazhdan, Alice-Mary Maffry Talbot, Anthony Cutler, Timothy E. Gregory, and Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1361.

Symeon's mystical writings. During that period Niketas was commissioned to write Symeon's biography, *Life of St. Symeon*³⁰ as a part of his canonization process, initiated by Keroularios³¹.

Following Keroularios, many monks became favourable to the idea that a churchman, in order to have the legitimacy for holding a high position and leading theological debates, should be "granted" a gift from the Holy Spirit. It could even make a monk, deacon or priest equal to the bishop³². This idea was in turn taken directly from the works of Symeon, and Niketas who was obviously deeply familiar with them, happened to be in tune with Keroularios' politics and his interest in the ascetic tradition. The message underlying the teachings of Symeon was rather straightforward: the Church is not the same as it used to be in the times of apostles, hence now the pious and devoted monks are to acquire more authority than the priests and the bishops.

The year 1054 became a culminating point in a fierce struggle between the Constantinopolitan and Roman episcopates for the highest position in the Pentarchy (including the episcopal sees of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem). This struggle turned differences in liturgy into bitter disputes. Two of the most important ones concerned the procession of the Holy Spirit and the use of leavened or unleavened bread during the Eucharist. In 1053 the Roman authorities of Rome put a number of Greek churches in southern Italy before the choice either to acknowledge the Latin liturgy or to stop their services. Michael Keroularios responded by a closure of Latin churches in Constantinople³³. Leo IX sent his legates, led by Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida, to Constantinople, in order to seek help from the Byzantines in the face of the Norman conquest

³⁰ See Hausherr, "*Un Grand Mystique Byzantin*."

³¹ Angold, *Church and Society*, 28-29.

³² Ibid, 29.

³³ John Bagnell Bury. *The Cambridge Medieval Histories, Vol. IV: The Eastern Roman Empire 717-1453*. (Cambridge: Plantagenet Publishing, 1923), 267.

of Sicily and, although Constantine IX was looking for alliance with the West, Keroularios refused to accept the request for help. It resulted in the excommunication of Keroularios, who did not hesitate to initiate a retaliatory excommunication of the legates, which was an unprecedented case that resulted in schism. According to Basil Krivocheine, for the polemics of Keroularios with Humbertus Niketas wrote the treatise *On the Stoudite Customs*³⁴, where he questioned the Latin monastic custom of wearing belts and at the same time stressed the authority of his monastery, emphasizing the Stoudite customs as an example to follow. Moreover, he composed another anti-Latin treatise, called *Synthesis*³⁵, where he argues against fasting on Saturdays and the usage of unleavened bread during the liturgy³⁶.

The events of 1054 came in parallel with a military turmoil on the borders of the Empire. Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1055), having “inherited a government geared for war”, decided to change the priorities of the empire and to give preference to intellectuals, rather than military men. Naturally enough, people belonging to military aristocracy, such as Joannes Scylitzes (circ. 1040 – circ. 1100), considered intensive intellectual entertainments to be “an irresponsible and frivolous political behavior”³⁷. He turned out to be right: such a course finally resulted in the loss of territories, while by 1050 the Pechenegs took control of the eastern part of Balkans, and this symbolized the defeat of all of Constantine’s politics of peace. On 11 January 1055, Constantine died. Two most important officials of his court: John Xiphilinos (died 2 August

³⁴ Darrouzès, *Nicéas Stéthatos*, 486-507.

³⁵ Anton Michel, “Humbert und Kerullarius”, *Quellen und Forschungen der Görres-Gesellschaft*, 21, (Paderborn 1925).

³⁶ Vasiliu, Archbishop of Brussels and Belgium (Basil Krivocheine). *In the Light of Christ: Saint Symeon, the New Theologian (949-1022), Life, Spirituality, Doctrine*. Translated from the French by Antony P. Gythiel. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986), 43.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 90.

1075) and John Mauropous (circ. 1000 – circ. 1070) decided to flee to a monastery. Having achieved great influence in Constantinople, Michael Keroularios came into conflict with the successor of Monomachos, Theodora (1056), he then supported Michael VI (1056-57) and, after that, initiated the overthrow of Michael in favor of a military aristocrat, Isaac I Komnenos (1057-59), having organized a revolt. In 1058, during Isaac's short reign, Keroularios died.

These events show that Niketas was in the thick of things for more than a decade. His alliance with Keroularios and active participation in the events of 1054 should have risen his status significantly. Twenty years later, in the second half of the 1070s³⁸, Niketas got involved into another polemics, connected with the humanistic interests of the Doukids and the group of “philosophers”, enjoying their protection.³⁹ According to the marginalia of codex *Angelicus* 30, containing one of the manuscripts of the treatise *On Paradise*, Niketas wrote it against one of the members of the “philosophical” faction, John Italos (1025-85).⁴⁰

The Role of Niketas in the Trial of John Italos

After Isaac I Komnenos laid down the power, Constantine X Doukas (1059-67) took the throne, and the Doukid dynasty, preceding to the enthronement of the Komnenoi (1081-1185), ruled in Byzantium from 1059 to 1081. The members of this family became the protectors of education, philosophy and culture. That is why a pupil of John Mauropous, Michael Psellos (1018-78), famous for initiating, developing and promoting interest to Ancient Greek teachings – became very

³⁸ Darrouzès, *Nicéas Stéthatos*, 21.

³⁹ See Cheynet, Jean-Claude, *Pouvoir et Contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*. Publications de la Sorbonne: Série Byzantina Sorbonensia, vol. 9, (Paris 1990).

⁴⁰ Darrouzès, *Nicéas Stéthatos*, 21.

desirable at the court. What is important is that neither Psellos, nor his pupil John Italos, against whom, according to the scholia of *Angelicus 30* the treatise of Niketas was directed⁴¹, were just lovers of the Ancient teachings. They used the opportunities of the Byzantine educational system in order to find followers, thus creating a significant community of people, “deviating” from Orthodoxy. All of this was not welcomed by the monasteries, who, along with the Emperor and the secular clergy, were an influential institution in the Byzantine society. Lowell Clucas drew important general conclusions about the transforming sphere of education in the eleventh century: he claims that the division of theology and philosophy was traditional for Byzantium, and when a new tendency, represented by Psellos, appeared – it was stopped by the state, which shows that its control of intellectual sphere was quite significant.⁴²

Clucas defines long-term factors, which defined the framework of Italos’ trial. The first one is the Byzantine tradition of division between theology and philosophy: Clucas underlines the conservative character of Byzantine theology, claiming that although Greek heritage became an essential part of Byzantine culture, philosophy, with its’ logical constructions, it was never applied to theology per se, and the ultimate role of revelation was always emphasized.⁴³ To sum up:

The result of the challenge of heresy and the need to adapt Greek philosophical cosmology to the Christian religion was the production of the formative works of Byzantine theology, but even so, the underlying goal was to defend and consolidate

⁴¹ Nicéas Stéthatos, *Opuscles*, 21.

⁴² Clucas Lowell, *The Trial of John Italos and the Crisis of Intellectual Values in Byzantium in the Eleventh Century*, (Munich 1981), 77.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 77.

dogma, not to pursue theological research for its own sake on an experimental level.⁴⁴

The second long-term factor is the influence of monasteries, supporting and developing this “anti-rationalistic and anti-intellectual attitude” to theological questions combined with the overall conservative politics of the Byzantine emperors.⁴⁵ The authority of an absolute ruler justified intervention into the process of solving theological problems, and some emperors did not hesitate to use it when necessary.

The third one was the very structure of Byzantine education, offered by lay teachers privately and hence having lots of variations. It was not organized and did not have any long-lasting tradition. Clucas is quite skeptical about the idea of “Imperial University”, developed by the scholars, which was created in the fifth century, then disappeared in the eight and was revitalized in the eleventh century again. He supports the idea that this “ebb and flow” picture reflects just how the state was financing higher education, but it does not mean that the “Imperial University” was “a self-sustained organization”.⁴⁶ It all changed during the reign of Alexios II Komnenos (1081-1118), by his decree of 1107 there was finally “established ecclesiastical control over education”, with “this supervision applied primary to deacons with teaching positions who wished to become priests”. However, even in this situation education still had a “weak organizational structure” and preserved its’ private character. As Clucas notes, this structure “tended to put the non-conformist intellectual in a more isolated and uncomfortable light”.⁴⁷ Although education remained the prerogative of secular teachers, “there were long-standing canonical prohibitions against laymen

⁴⁴ Ibid, 76.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 85.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 81.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 82.

teaching dogma”.⁴⁸ Only during the reign of Alexios these prohibitions became even stricter by the decree of 1107.⁴⁹

Thinking within this system, it would certainly be an oversimplification to describe Niketas as an “anti-rationalist” monastic intellectual and the advocate of traditionalism in the face of “the government of philosophers”. First, I would rather identify him as a proponent of the interests of the Stoudios monastery, rather than “monasticism” in general, while the Byzantine monastic communities differed significantly from each other and the Stoudios monastery was for sure a special case. Second, despite the fact that theological literature implied an idea of inspiration, granted to the writer by God, it had a set of rules, defining the composition of the text, which I aspire to demonstrate in the next two chapters.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 83.

⁴⁹ Paul Gautier. *L'édit d'Alexis Ier Comnène sur la réforme du clergé*, *Revue des études byzantines*, 31 (1973): 165-201.

Chapter 2 – References to Church Authorities in the Treatise On Paradise: the Boundaries of Theological Thought

It is commonly acknowledged that the Byzantine notion of “author” and “originality” differed significantly from the contemporary one.⁵⁰ Originality of thought was not considered to be a value, on the contrary, it was usually frowned upon. This is getting especially obvious when we are talking about theological texts. The epoch of the Ecumenical Councils (IV-VIII cc.) created a dogmatic framework for all sorts of discussions concerning divinity, however, “it happens that certain doubts are raised about these dogmas, and sometimes even the whole system of Christian biblical exegesis is challenged, the well-known system based on the interpretation of certain *loci probantes* from the Old Testament as an allegory of the New Testament”.⁵¹ It shows that quite often the Byzantine Christian writers were getting doubtful about the authority of the Holy Scripture and its traditional interpretation. Of course, these doubts were not welcomed and that is why it became necessary for Niketas to put his speculations into the framework of tradition. In this chapter I will discuss how Niketas Stethatos used references to Church authorities in his treatise which could, to a certain extent, protect him from possible accusations in heresy, while from the dogmatic point of view some of the ideas he expressed were highly dubious.

⁵⁰ See *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. by P. Armstrong (London-New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁵¹ Albrecht Berger, ‘Believe it or not: authority in religious texts’, in: *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. by P. Armstrong (London-New York: Routledge, 2012), 249.

Types of References

I have identified three ways of referring to the existing tradition in the text of Niketas: verbatim citations, paraphrases and allusions. In this chapter I try to identify Niketas' borrowings from other authors. The very idea of "borrowing" needs a revision when we are talking about the Byzantine literature. Every Byzantine theological text is full of cross-references, nevertheless, some ideas were so common for the Byzantine thought, that it is hardly possible to attribute them to a certain author. The problem of unwelcomed originality is valid for all Byzantine writers – that is why it is highly questionable, if one can call it "borrowing" at all. Moreover, I should specify that, in the text, there are three ways of referencing – verbatim citations, paraphrases and allusions, which cannot be certifiably attributed to specific authors: for instance, allusions can sometimes be quite vague and not easy to detect. One should also distinguish when Niketas refers to a text and when he refers to the idea expressed by a certain text. That is why textual analysis gets more problematic with Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nazianzus and Symeon the New Theologian, whose concepts Niketas shares, although not referring to their works verbatim. At the same time, Gregory is the only person whom he mentions by name.⁵² That is why one of my main research tasks is to find concealed references and try to explain what made the author conceal them.

⁵² *Nicétas Stéthatos. Opuscules et lettres*, ed. by J. P. Darrouzès, (Paris, 1961), 194.

Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith by John of Damascus as a Framework of the Treatise On Paradise

Citations from and paraphrases of the *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* by John of Damascus made approximately a quarter of the treatise *On Paradise*. This work was the third part of John's trilogy called *The Fountainhead of Knowledge*. In the course of the centuries, it became very influential both within and outside the Byzantine world. At the end of the tenth century, it was already translated into Arabic and Old Slavonic. At the beginning of the eleventh, the *Exact Exposition* was translated into Latin, thus providing "access to the dogmatic tradition of the Greek East for the scholastics of the High Middle Ages".⁵³ Quotes from this work are scattered through the whole treatise *On Paradise*, practically making a frame for other ideas and interpretations that Niketas expressed. The whole narrative on Paradise and the creation of man is taken from the relevant chapters of the *Exact Exposition* – namely *Concerning Paradise*, *Concerning Man* and *Concerning Pleasures*. The table in the appendix shows all fragments from this work of John of Damascus, which Stethatos inserted into his text. I would divide the excerpts from the table in two groups: § 3-21 and 39-45.

- 1) The first group contains some general ideas about paradise and creation, shared not only by Niketas and John of Damascus, but also found in Gregory of Nazianzus, Maximus the Confessor

⁵³ *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology*, ed. by Andrew Louth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 85.

and Symeon the New Theologian. The following fragments illustrate the idea of the double nature of man and creation, constituted of visible and invisible elements.

On Paradise	Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith
<p>3. Having formed a man as a double being, I mean from visible and invisible nature, to be visible and invisible, perceptible and intelligible, God created a similar dwelling place, the paradise, in correspondence with, being perceptible and intelligible, visible and invisible, planting in the middle of it the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, which is called the knowledge of good and evil. He planted the perceptible one in Eden, in accordance with this visible world, “placed in the East”, higher than the entire earth for the delight of Adam – for Eden is interpreted as delight – , illuminated all around with subtle, gentle and the cleanest air, decorated with the evergreen plants, full of light and of ineffable fragrance, surpassing the notion of all</p>	<p>Since God intended to fashion man after His own image and likeness from the visible and invisible creation to be a sort of king and ruler over the whole earth and the things in it, He prepared a sort of kingdom for him, in which he might dwell and lead a blessed and blissful life. And this divine paradise prepared in Eden by the hands of God was a treasure house of every joy and pleasure. For 'Eden is interpreted as meaning 'delight.' It was situated in the east and was higher than the rest of the earth. It was temperate in climate and bright with the softest and purest of air. It was luxuriant with ever-blooming plants, filled with fragrance, flooded with light, and surpassing all conception of sensible fairness and beauty. In truth, it was a divine place and a worthy habitation for God</p>

<p>perceptible grace and of all beauty, which in that case it needed to be in order to become a dwelling place for someone created in the image of God, while the other one, which is intelligible and invisible, he planted being and placed within man, man who had been created as a large world in this small visible one,⁵⁴ and whom God placed on the earth.</p>	<p>in His image. And in it no brute beasts dwelt, but only man, the handiwork of God.⁵⁵</p>
<p>6. The paradise itself is also double, in accordance with us, also composed of two natures. Of what sort is it? I mean that it consists of all the visible creature and of the invisible one, that is inside us, about which the divine Paul together with David the prophet say: “For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made” (Romans 1:20), and David [says]: “Your knowledge has become too wonderful</p>	<p>It is in such a way that I think that the divine paradise was of a twofold nature, and the inspired Fathers taught rightly, both those who taught the one aspect and those who taught the other. Moreover, it is possible to take 'every tree* as meaning the knowledge of the divine power which comes from the things that have been created, as the divine Apostle says: 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.' Of all these thoughts</p>

⁵⁴ See Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 38* below.

⁵⁵ *John of Damascus. Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, trans. by the Reverend SDF Salmond, in *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. 2nd Series vol 9. (Oxford: Parker, 1899) [reprint Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963], 230.

for me; I cannot attain unto it” (Psalm 139:6), that is, [it has become too wonderful] for my make-up and creation, so that this [knowledge] turned out to be dangerous at that time for the newborn Adam, who was not yet able to attain to its [that is, of the knowledge of God] contemplation and comprehension.	and considerations, the loftiest are those which concern our constitution, I mean, as the divine David says: "Thy knowledge from myself is become wonderful,' that is to say, 'from my own make-up.' In the newly made Adam, however, this was dangerous for the reasons we have stated. ⁵⁶
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Gregory of Nazianzus	Maximus the Confessor	Symeon the New Theologian
Now the Creator-Word, determining to exhibit this, and to produce a single living being out of both—the visible and the invisible creations, I mean —fashions Man; and taking a body from already existing matter, and placing in it a Breath taken from Himself which the Word knew to be an intelligent soul and the Image of God, as a sort of second world.	Scripture says that the Lord God planted paradise in Eden and placed there the man whom he had formed (Gen 2:8). Now, what are the trees in it, being either the objects of contemplation, or of intelligence, and what is the tree of life in the middle of the paradise, which Adam, who received the commandment to eat from every tree, perhaps did not even touch? In fact, Scripture	You are blessed, o, Lord, you are blessed, o, Only one, you are blessed, o, Merciful, o, Blessed above all, who placed in my heart the light of your commandments, and planted in me the tree of your life and manifested me as another paradise in the visible world, an intelligible one among those perceptible by the senses, intelligible for [spiritual] sense-perception.

⁵⁶ Ib, 233.

	says: “you shall eat from every tree that is in the paradise.” (Gen 2:16). ⁵⁷	For you have united with the soul another divine Spirit of yours, which you have implanted in my interior. This is indeed the only Tree of Life... ⁵⁸
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In the treatise *On Paradise* Niketas emphasizes the double nature of human beings, mentioning that the body is built of four elements⁵⁹ and talking about the capacities of the soul without specifying what he means by that. That is why the treatise *On the Soul* is helpful, although being a later one, for understanding Niketas’ theology. There, the author explains in detail how God created man. He took natures (φύσεις), reasons (λόγοι) and movements (κινήσεις) of the creatures formed before man and mingled them in order to create a new being. From nature God took primary elements, qualities of plants, irrational living beings with feelings and matter without feelings. From primary elements he took the following: dry and cold from earth to form black bile, cold and humid from water to coagulate phlegm, humid and hot from air to give colour to blood,

⁵⁷ ἐφύτευσε γάρ, φησίν, κύριος ὁ θεὸς παράδεισον ἐν Ἑδέμ, καὶ ἔθετο ἐκεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὃν ἔπλασεν—, καὶ τίνα τὰ ξύλα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, εἴτε θεωρούμενα εἴτε νοούμενα, καὶ τί τὸ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ παραδείσου ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς· ὧν πάντων ἐσθίειν πρόσταγμα λαβὼν ὁ Ἀδὰμ τυχὸν οὐδὲ ἤψατο· ἀπὸ παντὸς γὰρ ξύλου, φησίν, τοῦ ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ βρώσει φάγη. *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium. Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca* 7 & 22, ed. by C. Laga and C. Steel, 2 vols, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1:1980; 2:1990), 1:3-539; 2:3-325.

⁵⁸ Εὐλογητὸς εἶ, κύριε, εὐλογητὸς εἶ μόνη, εὐλογητὸς εἶ, εὐσπλαγχνε, ὑπερευλογημένε, ὁ δοὺς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ μου τὸ φῶς τῶν ἐντολῶν σου καὶ ἐμφυτεύσας ἐν ἐμοὶ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς σου ξύλον καὶ δείξας με παράδεισον ἄλλον ἐν ὁρωμένοις, ἐν αἰσθητοῖς μὲν νοητόν, νοητὸν δ’ ἐν αἰσθήσει. Συνήνωσας γὰρ τῇ ψυχῇ ἄλλο Πνεῦμά σου Θεῖον, ὅπερ καὶ ἐνεσκήνωσας ἐν τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἐγκάτοις. τοῦτο τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς ὄντως ὑπάρχει μόνον...

Hymn XLVII, 1-9, *Syméon le nouveau théologien: Hymnes*, tome III, SC 196, ed. J. Koder, J. Paramelle, (Paris: Cerf1973), p. 119.

⁵⁹ *Nicétas Stéthatos. Opuscles et lettres*, 208.

and hot and dry – from fire – to die the yellow bile. From plants he took growth and nutrition, from irrational living beings – capability to feel, sense-perception, ability to pass from one place to another, from the insensible matter of rocks – he took solidity (τὸ στέγανον) and continuity, to create the bones. That was the formation of body. In order to create soul – the God borrowed from the angelic natures the reasoning and intellectual faculty (τὸ λογικὸν τε καὶ νοερόν), incorruptibility and immortality. And then by His own breath he breathed life into this creature – that is how the intellectual and immortal soul was formed. However, the soul also has four elements, just like the material world, these are: prudence (φρόνησις), courage (ἀνδρεία), justice (δικαιοσύνη), moderation (σωφροσύνη).⁶⁰

Christian theology adopted these virtues from Plato's Republic Book IV, 426-435. God's breath is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in the human being, just like Niketas says:

The tree of life is the holy Spirit, living in the faithful man, as Paul used to say: 'know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?' (1 Cor. 6:19). The tree of knowledge of good and evil is sense-perception, bearing two opposite fruits, and each of them is of double nature.⁶¹

This very Holy Spirit, as Niketas indicates in the treatise *On the Soul*, gives man the knowledge of beings, permanence and capability to make prophecies. God made man equal to Himself by

⁶⁰ Ibid, 76-77.

⁶¹ Ibid, 176.

granting him free will and through this gift proposing him a place in paradise. Both the structure of human constitution and the capability to obtain a deep knowledge of beings through contemplation – develop into two other important ideas.

2) The second group of fragments illustrates the idea that the tree of life is divine contemplation (§ 14), and the tree of knowledge is contemplation of one's own nature (§ 15) and exercising obedience or disobedience to divine command (§ 21).

On Paradise	Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith
<p>14. Thus, this tree of life is God, having the live-giving activity (ζωῆς ἐνέργειαν ἔχον παρεκτικήν) and bringing an fruit that is eatable only to those who deserve life, since they are not subjected to death, – produces unspoken sweetness to those who take part in this divine participation and gives them a part of eternal life. This is duly called “tree of life” and “all the trees/universal tree” (πᾶν ξύλον) For that One is all things/the universe (τὸ πᾶν), in Whom and by Whom are all things/the universe (τὸ πᾶν) (Col. 1:17).</p> <p>15. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is the discernment of the manifold contemplation, according to how others were</p>	<p>The tree of life was either a tree possessing a life-giving force or a tree that was to be eaten of only by such as were worthy of life and not subject to death. «...» Now, this is indeed what is fittingly called the tree of life, for the sweetness of divine contemplation communicates a life uninterrupted by death to them that partake of it. It is just this that God meant by 'every tree' when He said: Of every tree of paradise thou shalt eat.' For He is the all, in whom and by whom the universe endures.⁶²</p>

⁶² John of Damascus. *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 232.

<p>thinking and philosophizing in a most beautiful way before us. It is the full knowledge of our own constitution and nature. It is good for those who have risen to the “perfect man and the measure have walked in the contemplation of God for them that have no fear of changing, of the age of Christ” (Eph. 4:13) through the absolute freedom from passions and the wisdom of the Spirit, who, from this contemplation and beauty are ascending to the magnificent work of the Creator. Who, because of acquiring firmness in virtue in the course of time, do not experience, nor could they experience, any turning away from the Good, having stepped securely into divine contemplation. But for those who are still young and greedy in desire it is not good, while they are not yet fixed firmly in the foundation of virtue in steadiness in and close attention to good deeds. For them, due to insecurity of remaining in the better part, the contemplation and observation of their own body is not useful, having power to draw to itself and dissipate the one who is uncertain and to throw him into indecent thoughts, motions and considerations.</p> <p>21. But a good and divine tree is the sensation, which is taken in proper time, as said, because</p>	<p>The tree of knowledge of good and evil is the power of discernment by multiple vision, and this is the complete knowing of one's own nature. Of itself it manifests the magnificence of the Creator and it is good for them that are fullgrown and because in the course of time they have acquired a certain habit of such contemplation. It is not good, however, for such as are still young and are more greedy in their appetites, who, because of the uncertainty of their perseverance in the true good and because of their not yet being solidly established in their application to the only good, are naturally inclined to be drawn away and distracted by their solicitude for their own bodies.⁶³</p> <p>In its midst God planted a tree of life and a tree of knowledge. He planted the tree of knowledge as a sort of trial, test, and exercise of man's obedience and disobedience. It is either for this reason that it has been called the tree of knowledge of good and evil, or because it gave to them that partook of it the power to know their own nature which, while it is good for the perfect, is bad for them that are less perfect and more given to their desires, as strong meat is to them that are tender and still in need of milk.⁶⁴</p>
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⁶³ Ibid, 232-233.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 231.

<p>of natural need and necessity, through which it creates into us the knowledge of the good. For it is planted for the sake of trial, proof and exercise of the human inclination and obedience or disobedience. This is why it is called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as it gives to those who get a share of it the power to know their own nature, which is good for those perfect and evil for those more imperfect, who are greedy of sense-perception, just like solid food for those who still need milk (Hebr. 5:12), whenever the participation in it leads to lust and repletion.</p>	
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Maximus the Confessor proposes a wider perspective of this question in his *Questiones et Dubia* (question 44). Although I did not find a similar fragment in John of Damascus – Niketas expresses the idea of paradise planted in human souls in § 18 of his treatise.

Maximus the Confessor	Niketas Stethatos⁶⁵
I think, the paradise means that [garden] that is planted in the heart of man in the East of God's knowledge. In its very center God planted the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And the tree of life should be taken to mean the reason of the intelligible things, while the tree of the	Let us also say about the divine and intellectual paradise, planted into the hidden creation of our souls. And which divine plants are planted in it? And which is our work in it? We did not meet anything about these questions in the investigations of ancient divine fathers or wise men. But for those who

⁶⁵ The fragments are taken from the edition of J. P. Darrouzès, *Nicetas Stéthatos. Opuscles et lettres*, (Paris, 1961).

<p>knowledge of good and evil to mean the reason of the things perceptible [things]; for this [the reason of the perceptible things] carries the knowledge of good and evil. For those who are reflecting upon the creator from the beauty of the creatures, and are ascending through them to their cause, it is the knowledge of good, while for those who are limited only to sense-perception and, being deceived by the surface of the perceptible things, had turned all the desire of the soul to matter, it is the knowledge of evil.⁶⁶</p>	<p>have worked in it and who kept the commandment; or for those who after the fall were called back to tend and keep it, its' contemplation is pleasant and very joyful, that is, for those who have prepared the sense organs of their soul and have enjoyed the fruit of the tree of life and were not damaged by that of the other tree, which is the tree of knowledge. As for the others, who don't give a word for the divine things, nor have given any effort or intent for the intellectual work of the Spirit, those who are not able to imagine anything beyond the visible things, this will be folly as they read the following, because they are psychic, according to the divine Apostle: «But the psychic man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him» (1 Cor. 2:14). He does not see that the law is spiritual, (Rom. 7:14) and we «compare the spiritual with the spiritual» (1 Cor. 2:13). And they will call it elevation, not the vision of truth. And having denounced their arrogance, we will proceed to the contemplation of the intellectual paradise.⁶⁷</p>
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⁶⁶ Παράδεισον οἶμαι δηλοῦσθαι τὴν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καρδίαν φυτευθεῖσαν ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ γνώσεως. Ἐν τῷ μεσαιτάτῳ ταύτης ἐφύτευσεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τὸ ξύλον τοῦ εἰδέναι γνωστὸν καλοῦ καὶ πονηροῦ. Καὶ τὸ μὲν ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς λαμβάνεται ἐπὶ τοῦ λόγου τῶν νοητῶν, τὸ δὲ γνωστὸν καλοῦ καὶ κακοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ λόγου τῶν αἰσθητῶν· οὗτος γὰρ ἔχει γνῶσιν καλοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ· τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἐκ τῆς καλλονῆς τῶν κτισμάτων τὸν δημιουργὸν ἐννοοῦσιν καὶ δι' αὐτῶν ἀναγομένοις εἰς τὸν αἴτιον τούτων, γνῶσις ἐστὶν καλοῦ, of good τοῖς δὲ μόνῃ τῇ αἰσθήσει ἐναπομένουσιν καὶ τῇ ἐπιφανείᾳ τῶν αἰσθητῶν φενακίζομένοις ἐπὶ τὴν ὕλην τὴν πᾶσαν ὀρεξίν τῆς ψυχῆς τρέψασιν, γνῶσις ἐστὶν κακοῦ. *Maximus the Confessor. Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca 7 & 22, 325.*

⁶⁷ *Nicétas Stéthatos. Opuscles et lettres, 174.*

3) The notion of micro- and macrocosm is another idea, which one comes across here and there in Byzantine theological literature. It is closely connected with the position of human being in the hierarchy of creation: God made man the ruler of all beings, a new Angel, as if standing between heaven and earth and at the same time, being a large world in a small one – through his connection with God, granted to him by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. I would propose to compare the following passage from the treatise (§ 19) with similar fragments from the *Theological Oration 38* of Gregory, and *Oration 2* of Symeon the New Theologian:

Having created a man as a large world, God, after he had led being from non-being, put a man into this visible world, as in a small one, having created him according to his image and proclaimed a ruler of everything of earth. That is why he intellectually plants into him another paradise, as in a big world, which lies high above the sensual one, abundant in eternal and ever-green plants and illuminated with the sun of truth. That is the very place of heavenly kingdom, situated to the east of the sun of truth, in the land of the meek (Matt. 5:5), as God himself says: “The heavenly kingdom is within you” (Luke 17:21). ⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Nicétas Stéthatos. *Opuscles et lettres*, 176.

<p style="text-align: center;">Gregory of Nazianzus</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Oration 38</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Symeon the New Theologian</p>
<p>He placed him, great in littleness on the earth; a new Angel, a mingled worshipper, fully initiated into the visible creation, but only partially into the intellectual; King of all upon earth, but subject to the King above; earthly and heavenly; temporal and yet immortal; visible and yet intellectual; half way between greatness and lowliness; in one person combining spirit and flesh; spirit, because of the favour bestowed on him;</p>	<p>After resting on the seventh day and when that day had ended, then, he planted the paradise in the East. In what way and for what reason? In order that, from this world [that is, from the world created in six days], as if into some palace and most splendid city, he [that is, the newly created Adam] should be led by God as an emperor into it [that is, the paradise]; , and when he would transgress God's commandment and he would fall out from the imperial rank and would be expelled and thrown out from the imperial palace, then, he should again be condemned to live in this world in hope. In fact, had God not done this way, had he left the world alone and placed man in it, where could he expel him after he had transgressed, had not confessed his sin and had not repented?⁶⁹</p>

Therefore, the first group of chapters, selected from the treatise *On Paradise* reveal numerous parallels with the writings of such authors as John of Damascus, Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor and contains the ideas, quite common for the Byzantine theological

⁶⁹ ἀλλὰ μετὰ τὸ καταπαῦσαι ἐν τῇ ἐβδόμῃ ἡμέρᾳ καὶ πληρωθῆναι αὐτήν, τότε ὕστερον ἐφύτευσε τὸν παράδεισον κατὰ ἀνατολάς. Τίνα τρόπον καὶ διὰ τί; Ἵνα ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου, ὡς ἐν παλατίῳ τινὶ καὶ πόλει περιφανεστάτῃ, οἷα δὴ βασιλεύς, ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ εἰσαχθῇ, ὁπότεν δὲ τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ παραβῇ ἐντολήν καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐκπεσεῖν μέλλῃ τῆς βασιλείας καὶ τῶν βασιλείων οἴκων ἐξορισθῆναι καὶ ἀπορριφῆναι, ἐν τούτῳ πάλιν τῷ κόσμῳ διάγειν ἐπ' ἐλπίδι κατακριθῇ.

Symeon the New Theologian. Ethical Treatises 2, Chapter 3, 17-25, *Traitées théologiques et éthiques*, tome I, ed. J. Darrouzès, SC 122 (Paris : Cerf, 1966), p. 342.

thought. Namely, the ideas of: 1) two-fold creation comprised of visible and invisible elements, 2) micro- and macrocosm, 2) two trees of paradise, being the embodiment of divine contemplation and the contemplation of the human nature, 3) human being as a new Angel and the ruler of all creatures on earth.

Chapter 3 – Structure and Meaning of the Treatise

On Paradise: Exegetical Model of Evagrius

Ponticus

In many spiritual systems of the previous (and later) teachers, the ascent of the soul was envisaged as a three-fold progress: first one repents and begins the painful purification process where the soul withdraws from a crass and external life, to a more disciplined ethical and studious condition. “...” The threefold ascent was given various labels: praxis, theoria, gnosis, or in the West: purgative, illuminative, unitive, more or less based on the taxonomy established by the great fourth century spiritual writer Evagrius of Pontus, and underlined by the sixth century theologian Dionysius the Areopagite.⁷⁰

This classical division is also represented in Pauline thought, dividing human beings into psychic (ψυχικοί) and spiritual (πνευματικοί)⁷¹ and in the Neoplatonic philosophical tradition with the enneadic structure of the world, adopted by Pseudo-Dionysius. The Neoplatonic doctrine of the “intelligible triad” (νοητὴ τριάς), including *being, life, and intellect* (ὄν, ζωή, νοῦς; εἶναι, ζῆν, νοεῖν) turned out to be very important for the development of Christian theology. Plato was the first one who introduced this scheme in the dialogue *Sophist*⁷², which then evolved among his

⁷⁰ John McGuckin, “Symeon the New Theologian’s Hymns of Divine Eros: A Neglected Masterpiece of the Christian Mystical Tradition,” *Spiritus* 5 (2005): 192.

⁷¹ Niketas also adds bodily (σωματικοί). See Chalendar, Marie, eds. *Le Paradis Spirituel et Autres Textes Annexes* (Paris: Sources Chrétiennes, 8, 1943), 19.

⁷² Alexey Fokin, The Doctrine of the ‘Intelligible Triad’ in Neoplatonism and Patristics, in *Studia Patristica* 58/6: *Neoplatonism and Patristics* (Leuven-Paris-Walpole, MA: Peeters), 44.

followers during the third and fourth centuries. Alexei Fokin specifies that Plotinus presented the “intelligible triad” as three stages of self-deployment, not just as three static elements of the second hypostasis. At the same time, “Plotinus puts the ‘intelligible triad’ in a close connection with the self-knowledge of human soul, which is a living and thinking substance, ‘seeking to know itself’.”⁷³ The scheme of ascent to divine knowledge is also present in the Christian tradition. Supposedly, Marius Victorinus became the first theologian who, in the fourth century, integrated the scheme of Life-Being-Intellect into Christian thought.⁷⁴ He identified Being with the Father, Life with the Son and Intellect with the Spirit, thus creating a continuity between the Neoplatonic and Christian thought. He also used the idea, adopted from the *Anonymous Commentary on the Parmenides*, of the interpenetration of the three hypostases – every element of the triad contains the other three, so that Being is also Life and Intellect etc. – to explain the dogma of the consubstantiality through a philosophical rationalization of the concept of the interpenetration (περιχώρησις) of the three persons of the Christian Trinity. However, in Byzantium there was a much more influential author, who made a significant contribution to the formation of Christian theology – Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

Since the work of Joseph Stiglmayr and Hugo Koch, some scholars have demonstrated Pseudo-Dionysius’ dependence on Proclus⁷⁵, who was developing the notion of the “intelligible triad” in

⁷³ Ibid, 47.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 53.

⁷⁵ Joseph Stiglmayr, “Der neuplatoniker Proclus als Vorlage des sogenannten Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Übel,” in *Historisches Jahrbuch* 16 (1895), 253-73, 721-48; Hugo Koch, “Proklus als Quelle des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in der Lehre vom Bösen,” *Philologus*, 54 (1895), 438-44; id. *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita in seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen* (Mainz: F. Kirchheim, 1900). Carlos Steel, “Proclus et Denys: De l’existence du mal,” in Y. de Andia (ed.), *Denys l’Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident. Actes du colloque international de Paris, 29 Septembre-3 Octobre, 1994* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 89-108. See also Istvan Perczel, “Pseudo-Dionysius and the Platonic Theology,” in: A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel with the assistance of C. Luna and A. F. Mettraux (eds), *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne. Actes du colloque international de Louvain (13-16 mai 1998) en l’honneur de H. D. Saffrey et L. G. Westerink/Ancient and Medieval*

his own works. Pseudo-Dionysius supposedly adopted this basic Neoplatonic scheme, which is present almost everywhere in his corpus, including the treatises on Divine Names (Περὶ θεῶν ὀνομάτων); Celestial Hierarchy (Περὶ τῆς οὐρανίου ἱεραρχίας); Ecclesiastical Hierarchy (Περὶ τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἱεραρχίας) and Mystical Theology (Περὶ μυστικῆς θεολογίας). Alexander Golitzin and István Perczel have demonstrated the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Symeon the New Theologian, the teacher of Niketas Stethatos.⁷⁶

It is quite natural to assume that Symeon the New Theologian the closest author from whom Niketas could adopt this structure. The written heritage of Symeon includes *Practical, Gnostic and Theological Chapters*⁷⁷, reproducing this threefold structure of approaching the divine. Niketas himself wrote three *Centuries on Practical, Physical and Gnostic Chapters*⁷⁸ very probably inspired by his teacher. Here I would propose to trace how Symeon reinterpreted the Neoplatonic triadic structure and adopted it to the Byzantine theological thought, comparing a passage from an anonymous *Commentary on Parmenides*, which Pierre Hadot attributed to Porphyry but whose authorship remains highly disputed⁷⁹, which Fokin cites in his article, and an eloquent passage from Symeon. The author of the commentary describes the following interaction among the elements of the triad:

Philosophy: De Wulf-Mansion Centre Series I/xxvi/ (Leuven and Paris: Leuven University Press and «Les Belles Lettres»), 491.

⁷⁶ Alexander Golitzin, “Hierarchy Versus Anarchy: Dionysius Areopagita, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicetas Stethatos, and Their Common Roots in the Ascetical Tradition”, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994): 131-179 and István, Perczel, “Denys l’Aréopagite et Syméon le Nouveau Théologien” in *La postérité de Denys l’Aréopagite en Orient et en Occident*, 341-357.

⁷⁷ Paul McGuckin, (1982). *Symeon the New Theologian: The Practical and Theological Chapters and Three Theological Discourses*. Volume 41: Cistercian Studies. Cistercian Publications.

⁷⁸ Niketas Stethatos, *Practical Chapters, Physical Chapters, Gnostic Chapters*, eds. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 120, (Paris 1880), 851–1010

⁷⁹ Pierre Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* vols. 1-2 (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1968).

[The One] is one and simple in its first form, in itself taken in itself, a power, which for clarity's sake should be called ineffable and incomprehensible. But it is not one nor simple in existence and life and thought. The thinker and that which is thought are the same in existence, but the thinker, when Intellect comes forth from Existence to become the thinker, so that it may return to the intelligible and behold itself, is Life. Hence it is infinite in Life. All are acts: as Existence the act is immobile, as Thought the act has turned toward itself, as Life it has come forth from Existence.⁸⁰

I assume that this successive chain of authors is a channel, connecting Neoplatonic thought with theological developments of the eleventh century. Further I will show how significant this triad was for Niketas himself and how he embedded it into the treatise *On Paradise*. His thoughts are very similar to what Symeon writes in the third ethical discourse:

What is the 'image of heavenly man' (1 Cor. 15:49)? Listen to the divine Paul: 'he is the reflection of the Glory and very stamp of the nature' and the 'exact image' of God the Father (Heb. 1:3). The Son is then the icon of the Father, and the Holy Spirit the icon of the Son. Whoever, then, has seen the Son, has seen the Father, and whoever has seen the Holy Spirit, has seen the Son.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Fokin, *The Doctrine of the 'Intelligible Triad,'* 49. The translation is Fokin's.

⁸¹ Alexander Golitzin, "Adam, Eve, and Seth: Pneumatological reflections on an unusual image in Gregory of Nazianzus's 'Fifth Theological Oration'," *Anglican Theological Review* 83, no. 3 (2001): 546.

If we reinterpret the commentator's quote within the framework of Christian Trinitarian doctrine, it will look like: *The thinker and that which is thought are the same in substance, but the thinker, when Spirit comes forth from substance to become the thinker, so that it may return to the intelligible and behold itself, is Christ.* This short formula could summarize the whole theology of deification. In one of his articles⁸² Dirk Krausmüller proposed an idea that Symeon the New Theologian formulated a new idea of Trinity, which he analyzes schematically, demonstrating to the reader the seeming inconsistency of Symeon in defining each hypostases: Father, Son, or Spirit. The main conclusion of Krausmüller is that by creating discrepancy in the description of divine attributes, Symeon was thus showing that all the elements of the Trinity are naturally consubstantial to each other.⁸³ Perczel came to a different conclusion, analyzing the interaction of Substance (οὐσία) and Nature (φύσις) in each Person (ὑπόστασις) of the Holy Trinity within Symeon's theology. Golitzin came to his own result,⁸⁴ speaking of Archbishop Basil Krivochéine, according to whom, Symeon's "references to a 'substantial participation' only indicate the 'truth' and the 'reality' of the experience, while Symeon prefers to use other terms, such as 'glory, energies, power, grace and light'."⁸⁵ Therefore, one is faced with the same aspect of spiritual life and, in fact, the core of mystical theology, described in different terms and not accessible within the logical categories. Niketas, after all, talks about it using the term μετουσία (participation, partnership, communion) or μέθεξις (participation, communion), for example:

⁸² Dirk Krausmüller, 'Reconfiguring the Trinity: Symeon the New Theologian, the "Holy Spirit", and the 'Imago Trinitatis',⁸³ *Byzantion* 81 (2011): 212-36.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁸⁴ Alexander Golitzin, *Symeon the New Theologian On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses. Vol. 3. Life, Times and Theology* (Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1997), 134-140.

⁸⁵ Istvan Perczel, "Saint Symeon the New Theologian and the Theology of the Divine Substance," in: *HM Jovan Culibrk* (ed.), *Никон Јерусалимац. Вријеме – личност – дјело: Зборник радова са међународног научног симпозиона на Скадарском језеру 7-9. септембра 2000. године* (Cetinje: Svetigora), 139.

Thus, this tree of life –God -, having the life-giving activity (ζωῆς ἐνέργειαν ἔχον παρεκτικήν) and bringing a fruit that is eatable only to those who deserve life, since they are not subjected to death, – produces unspoken sweetness to those who take part in this divine participation and gives them a part of eternal life.⁸⁶

Unlike the Jewish scapegoat, who was a passive object of sacrifice – Christ, being perfect man and perfect God, engaged His free will into the act of Crucifixion. Therefore, talking in modern terms, the Christian sacrifice united its subject and object. Moreover, as far as Christ was suffering for the redemption of human sins – those who accepted His deed were also becoming one with Him. The Christian liturgy shows this the most explicitly, when during the sacrament of communion the participants are uniting with Christ through partaking the substance of bread and wine. Thus, the Christian God uniting divine and human will – decides to become a sacrifice, offers it and contemplates it at the same time. However, He also involves into this act the members of the Christian community, making them consubstantial to these decision, offer and contemplation. That is how the Son, who enters the thinker through the Spirit, also bears an image of the thinker’s final purpose. Niketas repeats this idea again and again, explaining what the tree of Life is:

The tree of Life is the holy Spirit, living in the faithful man, as Paul has said: ‘know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?’ (1 Cor. 6:19).⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Nicétas Stéthatos, *On Paradise*, ed. J. Darrouzès, *Nicétas Stéthatos. Opuscles et lettres* (Paris 1961), 170.

⁸⁷ Nicétas Stéthatos, *On Paradise*, 176.

As I have already said, according to Niketas the final purpose of man is to become divine, thus, to follow the image of Christ, whose image exists in his intellect as a reminder of the final purpose. Nevertheless, the intellect is the very thing which allows the divine image to enter a human being. That is why here the distinction between them is becoming very subtle. I am convinced that Niketas preserved this three-fold system of intellectual ascent in his own treatise as far as there are three “turns,” which he mentions throughout the treatise.

Exegetical Models of the Alexandrian School in the Treatise On Paradise: Praktikē, Physikē, and Theologia of Evagrius of Pontus

Evagrius of Pontus (345-399 CE) distinguished three levels of contemplation, forming the ladder of ascent to the knowledge of the Divine: *praktikē* (πρακτική), *physikē* (φυσική), and *theologia* (θεολογία). In the first stage, a faithful person has to practice all the virtues in order to achieve impassibility and to withstand the temptations. From this stage, he rises to *physikē theōria*, the contemplation of natural forms. Having passed these two stages – he is getting closer to knowing the Trinity, both dwelling in itself and being transcendent to all being. The scholia of *Parisinus gr. 2747* indicate that Stethatos, following the Pauline tradition, divided souls into bodily (σωματικοί), psychic (ψυχικοί) and spiritual (πνευματικοί).⁸⁸ I have already mentioned above that Niketas wrote

⁸⁸ *Le Paradis Spirituel*, 19.

three *Centuries on Practical, Physical and Gnostic Chapters*,⁸⁹ probably inspired by Symeon's *Practical, Gnostic and Theological Chapters*.⁹⁰ In an article, Perczel mentions that Darrouzès “wondered whether Evagrius Pontikos – who had taught a doctrine of ‘substantial knowledge’ – could have influenced Symeon either directly or indirectly.”⁹¹ I assume that it was very probable, taking into consideration how Niketas reproduces the same structure as Evagrius throughout his treatise. In order to demonstrate how Niketas was shaping his argumentation through the structure of the treatise – I present a concise outline of the topics, covered in each chapter of his work. The very structure of the treatise *On Paradise* implies different levels of understanding the text. Three chapters out of seven are called: “*a divine turn from one contemplation to another*,” “*another contemplation: revealing the hidden and more sublime*,” “*another contemplation of the intelligible paradise, the wisest and the most sublime*,” each time indicating a new interpretation of the divine command:

Of every tree of the garden thou mayest eat; But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt die (Gen. 2:16-17).

The reflection of hierarchy of knowledge, which I would call the “gnostic” level,⁹² does not fit the organization of the text, namely, seven chapters. Although the ideas of *praktikē*, *physikē*, and

⁸⁹ Nicétas Stéthatos, *Practical Chapters, Physical Chapters, Gnostic Chapters*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 120, (Paris 1880), 851–1010.

⁹⁰ St Symeon the New Theologian, *Theological, Gnostic and Practical Chapters* ii, 9, ed. J. Darrouzès (Sources Chrétienes 51: Paris, 1957).

⁹¹ Perczel, *Saint Symeon the New Theologian*, 130.

⁹² Here I imply the initial meaning of the word γνῶσις (seeking to know, inquiry, investigation).

theologia are clearly present in the treatise, they are not organized in any strict order. Thus, I would like to specify that when I talk about levels of interpretation – it does not mean that they perfectly fit into the structure of the text and each chapter is dedicated to one or another exegetical level. Sometimes only the comparison of quotes can reveal the conceptual background of Niketas, his interpretations are scattered within the treatise. Having made it clear, I proceed with the order of chapters. The first chapter is called “*In how many ways does a divine paradise become visible for us in pious contemplation,*” thus emphasizing the importance of moral purity for understanding the text. It also has a clear didactic purpose, interpreting the divine command in Eden in the following way:

As we are of changeable nature and are too weak to remain in this way of life forever, because of this we undergo Adam’s fate. For the human thought, from youth being inclined to sin, just like Eve, welcoming the approach of the evil serpent as something advantageous, elevates it to the human mind and persuades it to taste what is forbidden as something good which immediately becomes the cause of his fall. ⁹³

In parallel with this interpretation, underlining the moral aspect of the divine command, Niketas also introduces the idea of natural contemplation, very much resembling the Evagrian *physikē theōria*.

⁹³ Nicétas Stéthatos, *On Paradise*, 166.

Evagrius of Pontus	Niketas Stethatos
<p>We practice the virtues in order to achieve contemplation of the inner essences of the created things, and from this we pass to the contemplation of the Logos who gives them their being, and He manifests Himself when we are in a state of prayer.⁹⁴</p> <p>As for those who are far from God ... God has made it possible for them to come near to the knowledge of him and his love for them through the medium of creatures. These he has produced, as the letters of the alphabet, so to speak, by his power and his wisdom, that is to say, by his Son and by his Spirit. The whole of this ministry is performed by creatures for the benefit of those who are far from God.⁹⁵</p>	<p>5. So, having entered, as if into another paradise, that is, to this visible world, let us contemplate its creation as much as this is possible, so that, being uplifted, from the beauty of the beings, as Scripture says, to their Creator (Rm 1:20), illuminated by the Spirit, we might receive the knowledge of the divine and human things. Thus, through the reason and wisdom of God's grace, not only we should enter the intelligible Paradise, and should examine thoroughly the natures (τὰς φύσεις) and movements and reasons, but also we should enjoy its flowers and piously cultivate the garden of the immortal goods.⁹⁶</p> <p>15. The one who is scrutinizing with an untroubled intellect and mind the reasons and the movements of the entire creation and is fed by the divine understanding that is abstracted from all the perceptible things, such a person, having despised the worries and cares of this life and having become above all the desires of worldly pleasures, rises up to the Creator and the Cause of all things through these things [that is, through</p>

⁹⁴ G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, ed./trans., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*. Vol 1, compiled by St. Nikodimos and St. Makarios (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 61-62.

⁹⁵ Martin Parmentier, "Evagrius of Pontus' Letter to Melania," *Bijdragen* 46 (1985), 19.

⁹⁶ Nicétas Stéthatos, *On Paradise*, 160.

	the reasons and movements of the entire creation] , according to the divine Paul (Rm 1:20). For he is the full and indivisible tree, bringing only the sprout of goodness and graciously giving participation to those who deserve it. ⁹⁷
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It is possible to notice that both authors describe the same spiritual process. However, what Evagrius calls “prayer,” Niketas perceives as “paradise.” In the second chapter, called “*Hereafter, in how many ways is an intellectual paradise visible to us through contemplative consideration and which are the plants in there*” he develops his speculations on paradise, at the same time emphasizing the hierarchy of corporeal (σωματικοί), psychic (ψυχικοί) and spiritual (πνευματικοί) men:

As for the others, who don’t give a word for the divine things, nor have given any effort or intent for the intellectual work of the Spirit, those who are not able to imagine anything beyond the visible things, this will be folly as they read the following, because they are psychic, according to the divine Apostle: « But the psychic man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him» (1 Cor. 2:14). He does not see that the law is spiritual, (Rom. 7:14) and we «compare the spiritual with the spiritual» (1 Cor. 2:13). And they will call it elevation, not the vision of truth. And having denounced their arrogance, we will proceed to the contemplation of the intellectual paradise.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Nicétas Stéthatos, *On Paradise*, 168.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 174.

In the second chapter Niketas gives a colorful description of what Evagrius called “inner essences”:

That is why he (God) intellectually plants into him (in man) another paradise, as in a large world, which lies high above the perceptible one, abundant in eternal and ever-green plants and illuminated by the Sun of Truth. That is the very place of the heavenly kingdom, situated to the East of the Sun of Truth, in the land of the meek (Matt. 5:5), as God himself says: ‘The heavenly kingdom is within you’ (Luke 17:21).⁹⁹

The third chapter is dedicated to the question “*which are the fruits of the two kinds of plants of the intellectual paradise?*” and discusses pleasure and grief as the fruits of the tree of knowledge, which is the contemplation of human nature by the man himself.¹⁰⁰ The fourth chapter, which Niketas called “*a divine turn from one contemplation to another*”¹⁰¹ develops the idea of moderation, necessary for everyone, who wants to move farther in his understanding of the divine things. Here, however, the author proceeds with the *moral* interpretation of the divine commandment, not talking about mystical theology, which the term “divine turn” may expectedly imply. With the “divine turn,” however, Niketas introduces a new interpretation of the divine commandment of not to eat from the tree of knowledge. According to him, sensual experience

⁹⁹ Ibid, 176.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 178.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 181.

leads to excess, of which God warned Adam and Eve. The reader can grasp the main idea of the third and fourth chapters through the following passage:

Man, deceived by pleasure and plunged either into surfeit and greediness; or into misuse and excessiveness; or into abuse and sexual and unnatural pleasures, dies – woe! – with eternal death, falling out of the connection with God and of the participation in the Holy Spirit. That is why it is said: ‘For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt die’ (Gen. 2:16-17).¹⁰²

In chapter five Niketas proposes a new interpretation of the commandment, which I would define as allegorical, as far as Niketas called the chapter “*another contemplation, more elevated – through considering the deeper sense – of God’s order and commandment to Adam.*”¹⁰³ Stethatos begins the chapter claiming that there is also another possible understanding of the commandment, revealing its’ hidden sense. God addresses his commandment to two persons, thus appealing not only to Adam and Eve, but also to the rational and irrational parts of man, indicating his duality and the capacities of the human soul (δυνάμεις τῆς ψυχῆς). However, before the sixth chapter, Stethatos mainly describes paradise as the material world, whose beauty is perceived both sensually and intellectually. In the sixth chapter his definition of paradise changes and he begins to call it “the valley of practical philosophy,” eventually meaning the practice of the virtues. Therefore, before the sixth chapter the author touches some aspects of *praktikē*, but only in chapter six does he conceptualize it under the name of “the valley of practical philosophy.” The sixth chapter of the treatise, which Niketas called “*another, most wise and elevated, contemplation*

¹⁰² Ibid, 184.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 186.

about the intelligible paradise, and on the question of which are the gates leading into it and out of it, and which are the divine plants in it” starts with the following words:

In another sense, the paradise is the large plain of practical philosophy, covered with all kinds of immortal plants and the ideas of virtues, in which God planted the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, that is, the knowledge of good and evil.¹⁰⁴

The author clearly indicates that in this chapter he is going to introduce the philosophical level of interpretation. At the same time, this part plays a role of a preparatory one to the highest stage of understanding divine and human things – the mystical one. In the sixth chapter Niketas describes paradise as a large plain, full of “eternal plants,” representing virtues. One can only enter this valley through the gates of humility, situated in the west, and then find an entrance to the heavenly kingdom through the eastern gates of love.

31. For every road of piety leads the one who follows it through the western gates of humility and thus leads him to paradise through them...

33. Thus, in the middle of this divine paradise God planted two wonderful plants, due to the above reason. I mean the tree of life and the tree of knowledge, called the tree of knowledge of good and evil. What are they? Natural contemplation, in accordance with the teaching of the divine Gregory, and mystical theology.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 190.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 192.

The seventh chapter, titled “*What is the work and guarding of the intellectual paradise and what does the participation in its’ fruits cause to those who are working in it in different ways?*” – which is the highest mystical level of interpretation, contains an extant confession of faith, summarizing the Nicaea-Constantinopolitan and the Chalcedocian Creeds.¹⁰⁶ However, Niketas does not refer directly to these Creeds, but rather cites John of Damascus, who already did this in the eighth century. Almost one third of the seventh chapter of the treatise *On Paradise* is borrowed from John of Damascus’ *Exact Exposition of Orthodox Faith*, emphasizing Niketas’ adherence to the “standard” formulae proclaimed by the Ecumenical Councils in 325, 381 and 451. Moreover, Niketas condemns Origen, Didymus, Evagrius,¹⁰⁷ Arius, Manes and Nestorius¹⁰⁸ as heretics, for whom contemplation became the source of “arrogance and blasphemy.”¹⁰⁹ Apparently, such a long confession of faith had to precede any sort of speculations on mystical theology. I have got the impression that it was necessary, while mystical theology per se was on shaky ground, and the author, writing about that, had to protect himself with such a confession of faith, thus emphasizing his loyalty to the Church and its formulae. Only after this preliminary confession Niketas begins to talk about the gates of love and humility, established in paradise and “turning as cherubim.”¹¹⁰ Further, Niketas defines mystical theology, obviously referring to *The Mystical Theology* of Dionysius the Areopagite. That is how we describes the way of the believer into the “darkness of theology.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 202-8.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 196.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 210.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 196.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 214.

Having distinctively scrutinized the principles, natures and movements of all the creatures, due to the perfect love of God he leaves all visible and invisible creation, raptured from there to the third heaven of theology by the Spirit, rising above the humbleness of the body ...he finds the pasture of the divine intellections, entering the darkness of theology as if another paradise, into which the divine Paul was also raptured ... and can in no way prevent his lips from preaching the mercy and truth of God in the great assembly of the faithful, even if he wanted to, nor does the Spirit, who is instigating him and waking him up to speak, permit him to hide the truth of God in his heart.¹¹¹

This level of understanding corresponds to the stage of *theologia* in the system of Evagrius of Pontus and with the heights of theological thought in Pseudo-Dionysius. Nevertheless, Niketas himself refers to Gregory of Nazianzus, who was less controversial, thus protecting himself from possible accusations in declining from Orthodoxy. At the same time, one may have the impression that, in talking about someone who achieved a high level of divine ascent, the author has a particular person in mind. His speculations are not as abstract as it may seem when he talks about someone who could “*no way prevent his lips from preaching mercy and truth of God into the big assembly of the faithful.*”¹¹² Apparently, he talks here about the model of his teacher, Symeon the New Theologian, as he uses similar terms in the Life of Symeon.¹¹³ Therefore, I want to emphasize that the treatise has an explanatory aim and at the same time, by a succession of more and more sophisticated interpretations, it reproduces the ascent of the mind and the soul to the Divine.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 220.

¹¹² Ibid, 220.

¹¹³ Nicéas Stéthatos, Life of Symeon, 111 ff.

Following the examples provided by Krausmüller, Perczel and Golitzin, I have already illustrated how philosophers and theologians were describing the process of purification through different words, talking about the same state of body and mind. That gives me an opportunity to assume that what Evagrius understood as “prayer” – Niketas perceived as “paradise.”

Elements of Poetical Language in the Descriptions of Paradise: Influence of Symeon the New Theologian

Although Symeon the New Theologian was quite a questionable authority, Niketas was his pupil. That is why the question of his influence is one of the most obvious here. I did not find any direct references to Symeon in the treatise *On Paradise*, although sensual imagery also constituted part of Niketas’ argumentation. One of the most common metaphors is light and darkness, which Stethatos associates with the clear vision of the “divine and human” things, God Himself and His grace.¹¹⁴ The image of abundance is also present in the treatise: Niketas compares his discourses with the “celestial table of immortality,” thus emphasizing intellectual pleasure, which the reader can get from both: the feeling of the text’s beauty and spiritual growth, as the result of edifying literature. Although one of the most eloquent passages describing paradise which I met in Niketas’ works belongs to the treatise *On the Soul* – the author is talking about the treatise *On Paradise* in this passage. It also shows how the author interweaves classical Greek imagery with the didactic aim of his text.

¹¹⁴ Nicétas Stéthatos, *On the Soul*, 58.

4. From the contemplation of paradise of the rays of the Spirit, which I planted for you in the east, fill your perceptions of the good things of all sorts. For from there through the contemplation of the immortal plants – I mean the reasons (logoi) of the soul – the vision is overwhelmed with light streams and delight; the hearing is filled with the delight through the sound of the knowledge of the sirens of knowledge, who are flying around you and chanting; the sense of smelling is filled with refreshment and strengthening through the fragrance of the flowers, meaning the allegorical understanding of the letters of Scripture; the senses of taste and touch are filled with sweetness and truly intellectual sensation, got through touching and partaking in the fruits of the Holy Spirit,¹¹⁵ which will never change.¹¹⁶

In this passage Niketas echoes the traditional doctrine of the spiritual senses. Here by paradise he means not only his own treatise, but also a process of introspection, which is guided by the Holy Spirit. In Niketas' perception the rays of the Spirit are penetrating the soul, thus allowing it to see eternal entities. This feeling, which Stethatos describes in visual, audial and sensual terms – is gained through introspection. In turn, intellectual contemplation, or philosophizing, as Niketas calls it, creates a direct connection with the Holy Spirit. It is very similar to the idea of Evagrius

¹¹⁵ Sholia of *Parisinus* 2747 specify, what exactly Niketas meant by the fruits of the Holy Spirit: the list on the margins includes love (ἀγάπη), joy (χαρά), peace (εἰρήνη), patience (μακροθυμία), kindness (ἀγαθωσύνη), goodness (χρηστότης), faith (πίστις), mildness (πραότης), self-control (ἐγκράτεια), see Chalendard, *Le Paradis Spirituel*, 19. What is nothing else than the traditional Pauline teaching on the fruits of the Spirit, based on Gal 5:22-23.

¹¹⁶ Nicétas Stéthatos, *On the Soul*, 60.

of Pontus, for whom a faithful man is rising from the practice of virtues to the inner contemplation of nature, and that is the very moment, “when the intellect (νοῦς) begins to see its own light,”¹¹⁷ and from where it can ascend to the contemplation of the Holy Trinity.

¹¹⁷ John Eudes Bamberger, ed. *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos (Chapters on Prayer)* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 33-34.

Conclusion

Niketas Stethatos managed to make a bright career in Constantinople, by the end of his life having become Abbot of the monastery of Stoudios monastery. His alliance with Michael Keroularios and active participation in the events of 1054 allowed him to achieve this high position. Twenty years after the schism, Niketas got involved in another polemics, connected with the humanistic interests of the Doukids and the group of “philosophers”, enjoying their protection. According to the marginalia of codex *Angelicus 30*, containing one of the manuscripts of the treatise *On Paradise*, Niketas wrote it against one of the members of the “philosophical” fraction, John Italos. Being a proponent of the interests of the Studios monastery, Niketas wrote a number of theological works, and the treatise *On Paradise* was one of them. Despite the fact that theological literature implied an idea of inspiration, granted to the writer by God, it had a set of rules, defining the composition of the text.

References to Church authorities were among these rules. Thus, paraphrasing the *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* written by John of Damascus made approximately a quarter of the treatise *On Paradise*. Quotes from this work are scattered through the whole treatise *On Paradise*, practically making a frame for other ideas and interpretations that Niketas expressed. Moreover, the treatise *On Paradise* reveals numerous parallels with the writings of such authors as Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor and contains the ideas, quite common for the Byzantine theological thought. Namely, the ideas of: 1) two-fold creation comprised of visible and invisible elements, 2) micro- and macrocosm, 2) two trees of paradise, being the embodiment of divine

contemplation and the contemplation of the human nature, 3) human being as a new Angel and the ruler of all creatures on earth. The part of the treatise where Niketas expresses his own notion of divine ascent, contains numerous references to: 1) decisions of the Ecumenical Councils; 2) condemned heretics; 3) authority of Gregory of Nazianzus.

In addition, although Niketas does not refer directly to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, he does it indirectly through the text of John of Damascus. The only authority, however, whom Niketas openly acknowledges as his source – is Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzus). Most probably, he omitted other names because those authors were cited so widely that the quotes did not need any specific indication.

In my thesis I also claim that Niketas adopted the exegetical model of Evagrius of Pontus, who distinguished three levels of contemplation, forming the ladder of ascent to the knowledge of the Divine: *praktikē* (πρακτική), *physikē* (φυσική), and *theologia* (θεολογία). Although the ideas of *praktikē*, *physikē*, and *theologia* are clearly present in the treatise, they are not organized in any strict order. Nevertheless, through the succession of more and more sophisticated interpretations Niketas clearly reproduces the ascent of the mind and the soul to the Divine. Assuming that many philosophers and theologians were describing the process of purification through different words, talking about the same state of body and mind, I propose the idea that what Evagrius understood as “prayer” – Niketas perceived as “paradise”.

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