

MONKS VS. THE STATE: THE STOUDITES AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE STATE AND ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITIES IN LATE EIGHTH- AND EARLY NINTH- CENTURY BYZANTIUM

Alexey Stambolov

During the long history of the Byzantine Empire, religious groups, especially monks,¹ played an important role in society. For various reasons the monks were particularly influential in late eighth- and early ninth-century Byzantium, although their relations with the state and church authorities during this period were not always smooth and monks often opposed the official state and ecclesiastical policy.²

Two parties – the Moderates and Radicals or Zealots – were active on the ecclesiastical scene of Byzantium at that time.³ The head of the Moderates, after his election to the patriarchal throne in 784, was Patriarch Tarasios (ca. 730–806), and the leaders of the Radicals were Sabbas and Theoctistus of Symboloi, Plato of Sakkoudion (ca. 735–814), and his nephew and successor, Theodore, later the abbot of Stoudios monastery in Constantinople (759–826). The two parties expressed different opinions for the first time during the Seventh Ecumenical Council on the question of the *lapsi*, i.e., those who, during the first iconoclastic period (730–787), had yielded to iconoclasm. The Radicals, uncompromising, demanded that the backsliding bishops, at least the ringleaders, should lose their sees, while the Moderates adopted a conciliatory policy, which the Radicals finally

¹ The name “Stoudites” is used in the title more or less as an alternative to the term “the monks.” This is because of the distinguished role played by the Stoudites in late eighth- and early ninth-century Byzantium. Other monasteries outside Constantinople and those on Mount Olympus in Bithynia were definitely of minor significance for the political and religious scene of the empire during these years.

² This was one of the reasons that some scholars have used the term “theocracy” to describe the church-state relations in Byzantium. Arguments for and against the characterization of Byzantium as a theocratic state can be found, among others, in the classic book of Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1977), and in the article of Anastasios Philippidis, “Was the Byzantine State a Theocracy?” online at: <http://www.impantokratoros.gr/byzantine-stathe-theocracy.en.aspx> (accessed on 15.4.2014).

³ About the division of the ecclesiastical forces at Constantinople into Moderates and Radicals see Pavlos Niavis, “The Reign of the Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus I (802–811),” PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1984, 174f.

agreed to. Other issues on which the two parties were opposed were simoniacs⁴ and the second marriage of Constantine VI (r. 776–797).

The last issue, known as the Moechian controversy (from the Greek word *μοιχεία* – adultery) or Moechian Schism, was even more severe than the previous ones. It arose in 795, when the emperor decided to divorce his lawful wife, Maria of Amnia, to marry one of the empress's ladies-in-waiting (κουβικουλαρέα), Theodote, who had been his mistress for a number of years.⁵ Patriarch Tarasios initially opposed this decision, since a divorce without proof of adultery on the part of the wife was uncanonical, but ultimately acceded.⁶ The wedding ceremony was performed in September of the same year, although not by the patriarch, as would be usual, but by a certain priest, Joseph, steward of St. Sophia and abbot of the Kathara monastery. Maria was persuaded to enter a convent.⁷

Although Patriarch Tarasios himself was not directly involved in this issue and though the new empress, Theodote, was a cousin of Theodore, at the time the abbot of a private family monastery at Sakkoudion (or Saccudium) in Bithynia, a new conflict between the two parties arose. It had two stages – the first in the years 795 to 797, and the second from 806 to 811. During the first period, the Radicals, led by Plato and Theodore, considering the marriage between Constantine and Theodote illegal, abstained from communion not only with the emperor and his court, but also with Joseph and Patriarch Tarasios. They accused the emperor of having committed adultery, calling him the new Herod; then they directed their indignation against the abbot of Kathara for performing the wedding ceremony and also accused Patriarch Tarasios of having refused to forbid Maria taking the

⁴ This term included both those who had paid money in order to be ordained as priests or bishops and bishops who had received money to ordain priests.

⁵ Patrick Henry, "The Moechian Controversy and the Constantinopolitan Synod of January A.D. 809," *Journal for Theological Studies* 20, no. 2 (1969): 495.

⁶ Rumors were circulating that Constantine had threatened to restore iconoclasm unless the patriarch acceded to his demand for a second marriage. These rumors are recorded in three sources, the earliest of which seems to be Theodore of Stoudios, *Epistulae*, I, 36 (PG t. 99, col. 1032 D); then the anonymous *Narratio de sanctis patriarchis Tarasio et Nicephoro* (Patrologia Graeca (hereafter PG) 99, 1852 D), and the *Life of Theodore of Stoudios* (PG 99, 144 A). However, one might argue that if the emperor really made such a threat, Theophanes would not have omitted recording it in order to support Irene's attitude against her own son in August 797. See Niavis, "The Reign," 179.

⁷ Gary Wayne Alfred Thorne, "The Ascending Prayer to Christ: Theodore Stoudite's Defence of the Christ-icon against Ninth-Century Iconoclasm," MA thesis, Durham University, 2003, 19. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3158/>.

veil (clearly against her will) or the wedding (Maria was still alive, so the marriage was adulterous) or to excommunicate Constantine VI after the wedding.⁸

Initially, Constantine tried to reconcile with Plato and Theodore (who, on account of his marriage, were now his relatives). In the name of their kinship, Theodote sent Theodore some valuable presents and the emperor invited them to visit him during an extended vacation at the imperial baths of Prusa in Bithynia. But all this was in vain. The monks refused to accept Theodote's presents and ignored Constantine's arrival in their area.⁹ Such behavior on the part of the monks irritated the emperor enough to order the flogging of Theodore and the most courageous among them (February 797). Plato was imprisoned in Constantinople; Theodore, with ten other monks, was sent into exile in Thessalonica. Bishops and abbots along their way were forbidden to greet them. The other monks of Sakkoudion, numbering about one hundred, were dispersed.¹⁰

The monks arrived in Thessalonica in March 797, but did not remain long; in August of that same year, Irene, Constantine's mother, deposed and blinded her son, taking his place on the throne as sole ruler for a period of five years, i.e., until October 802. The balance of forces changed. The new empress took measures in favor of the Rigorists; she lifted the exile of Theodore and the other monks and released Plato from prison. All of them returned to Sakkoudion Monastery almost immediately. On his return to Constantinople, Theodore was welcomed as a hero. Patriarch Tarasios then hastened to depose the priest Joseph from his office and wrote a letter of apology to Plato; order was restored to the church.¹¹

Soon after that, at the end of 797 or in early 798,¹² Theodore with his brotherhood left Sakkoudion and settled at the ancient Stoudios Monastery inside Constantinople's walls. According to the sources, their move from Bithynia to

⁸ Thorne, "The Ascending Prayer," 19–20.

⁹ Such a refusal to welcome the emperor may sound unbelievable, but there is an explanation; according to Michael, Theodore's biographer, Theodore and the other monks no longer recognized Constantine as emperor. He had lost the imperial throne by committing adultery. See Niavis, "The Reign," 180.

¹⁰ Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 107.

¹¹ Niavis, "The Reign," 181; Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 111; Thorne, "The Ascending Prayer," 20; Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium AD 527–1204* (London: Routledge, 2002), 89.

¹² The date of the removal cannot be fixed precisely, but, since it was connected with Arab incursions, it must be noted that Theophanes the Confessor records an Arab raid in the vicinity of Sakkoudion under the year A.M. 6291 (AD 798) (sic). Niavis, "The Reign," 199.

the capital was prompted by an Arab raid in Asia Minor and the gentle pressure of Patriarch Tarasios and Empress Irene.¹³ It seems that Theodore exercised influence on the empress until her fall in 802.

The Stoudios¹⁴ Monastery (now Imrahor Camii), was located in the former Psamathia region, near the Golden Gate, in the southwestern corner of Constantinople.¹⁵ Dedicated to St. John the Baptist, the main church (καθολικόν) of the monastery was erected by a certain Stoudios, a consul in Rome along with Aëtius, in the year 454.¹⁶ Its official name was the Monastery of the Forerunner (τοῦ Προδρόμου, i.e., John) τοῦ Στουδίου. According to Cyril Mango, it was founded before 454, most likely in 453 or, as recent archaeological evidence suggests, in 450.¹⁷

About a decade later, probably between 460 and 463, a group of “sleepless monks” (ἀκοίμητοι) was called by Stoudios to establish a monastic community attached to the church. The name “sleepless” does not mean that the members of the community took no rest, but that they were divided into choirs in such a fashion that the liturgical services never ceased in their monastic houses. It seems that the sleepless continued to staff Stoudios until the end of the eighth century and the names of some of their abbots appear in the acts of various synods. In the first three hundred years of its existence, the monastery did not play any important role in Byzantine ecclesiastical life.

During the Iconoclastic Controversy (726–843) it emerged as a bulwark for the iconophile cause. In 765, along with other chief iconophile monks, the sleepless of Stoudios were exiled for about ten years by Emperor Constantine V Copronymos (r. 741–775).¹⁸ At the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea (787), their abbot, Sabbas, played an important role as one of the leaders of the Radicals.

¹³ J. Leroy has questioned the traditional view that the threat from the Arabs forced them to move. Cf. Niavis, “The Reign,” 196f.; Alexander Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. Vol. 3. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 2045. (Hereafter ODB).

¹⁴ One may also encounter alternative versions of the name, such as the monastery of Studios, Studios, Studium, and the Stoudite monastery.

¹⁵ John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero, ed., *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000), 67 (Hereafter BMFD.); ODB Vol. 3. 1960.

¹⁶ Alice Gardner, *Theodore of Studium: His Life and Times* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), 67.

¹⁷ Brick stamps uncovered in recent excavations suggest that the building of the church began in 450. ODB Vol. 3. 1960; BMFD, 67. The year 463 can be found in earlier authors.

¹⁸ BMFD, 67; Gardner, *Theodore of Studium*, 69.

The legal and practical details of the transition from the direction of Sabbas to that of Theodore are not clear. Upon his arrival in 798 Theodore inherited about ten Stoudite monks. Miller¹⁹ maintains that monks from the sleepless still resided there, though there is no direct evidence for such a view. The fate of Sabbas after the installation of the new brotherhood from Sakkoudion remains unknown. There is a chance that he was still alive when Theodore became abbot (still in contact with Theodore as late as 797). Hatlie²⁰ maintains that they were relatives, so the transfer of power to the latter was not as unexpected as has normally been assumed based on the sources. Although there is no direct evidence, he infers that in 798 the Stoudios was a private, family monastery whose direction passed from Sabbas to Theodore just as the Sakkoudion had passed from Plato to Theodore four years before. The difference between it and other family monastic communities was that it obtained imperial support around the time of these transfers of power.²¹

In 802, Irene was dethroned and sent into exile and a new emperor, Nikephoros I (r. 802–811), was installed. In 806, Patriarch Tarasios died and Nikephoros took on the difficult task of finding a suitable successor. It was impossible to satisfy the emperor and the various clergy and civil servants. At that time, Theodore the Stoudite was already one of the most distinguished churchmen. He was not only the head of a large and thriving monastic community in Constantinople with four other major monasteries dependent upon it,²² but a

¹⁹ T. S. Miller, “*Theodori Studitae Testamentum*,” in *Byzantine Monastic Foundations Documents*, vol. 1, 68.

²⁰ Peter Hatlie, *The Monks and Monasteries of Constantinople, ca. 350–380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 337.

²¹ Hatlie, *The Monks and Monasteries*, 338.

²² The number of the monks at the Stoudios monastery grew rapidly: seven hundred in 806 (according to Theophanes), almost a thousand in 815 (according to Michael, *Vita Theodore of Stoudios*). See Niavis, “The Reign,” 199. Surely it is an exaggerated figure, unless it includes monks in outlying lodgings (μετόχια) under the direct ownership of the Stoudios, cf. ODB, Vol. 3, 1960. “Exactly how many monks lived in the central house in Constantinople as compared to those of the countryside is difficult to ascertain. The number of 700–1000 resident monks reported in sources would initially seem to point to Constantinople alone, although there are also reasons to suppose that this figure is too high for a single monastic establishment. Archeological remains of the main church of the Stoudios proper indicate, for example, that liturgical services for the whole community of 700–1000 men would have been an uncomfortably cramped affair in such a space. Hence it seems likely that the Stoudios had up to several hundred resident monks in Constantinople and an unknown but still substantial fraction of their community living in one of the formally affiliated houses in Bithynia or in transit at one of the Stoudite

reformer of commanding authority who had introduced a rigorous regime of coenobitic asceticism, hard work, and Christian learning into Byzantine monastic life.²³ Theodore, however, had been accustomed to exercising influence on both the political and the ecclesiastical affairs of the empire. His zeal for maintaining strict standards had not been universally popular among the clergy and his unwillingness to compromise for political reasons, evident in the Moechian controversy, was not what Nikephoros wanted in a patriarch. Yet no other candidate was clearly preeminent.²⁴

The emperor appears to have asked for the opinion of the Stoudites, as seen from the preserved response of Theodore to his inquiry.²⁵ In his highly respectful letter of reply, the Stoudite's abbot professed himself unable to name a candidate who was truly suitable, but he urged Nikephoros to choose the wisest and worthiest man he could find among the bishops, abbots, stylites, and hermits, and certainly no one who was not ordained or tonsured. This letter is a good source for the relations between the emperor and the Stoudites as concerned the relations between the church and state. It throws light on the question of how far Theodore was an advocate of the church's full independence against the state.²⁶

Having no obvious candidate, Nikephoros declared that he would hold a free election for the patriarchate. He spent the early weeks of Lent consulting a number of priests, monks, and civil officials as electors, among them Theodore and Plato. It appears likely that during these consultations Plato put forward Theodore's name. Since the electors distributed their votes among a wide number of candidates, the emperor was free to select whomever he wished. Then, in spite of Theodore's counsel to choose a cleric, the emperor chose a layman, a relatively obscure former civil servant, also named Nikephoros.²⁷

As might be expected, the Stoudite brotherhood expressed their dissatisfaction with the election of a layman to the patriarchate. This reaction should be explained in the light of Theodore's letter to the emperor (noted above) and his zeal for an independent ecclesiastical policy, not for personal reasons (rivalry, for instance). In Theodore's eyes only a clergyman who had spent many

metochia. Whatever the exact distribution of monks within the community, the total number of monks was impressive and the organization in which they lived and worked highly innovative" (Hatlie, *The Monks and Monasteries*, 324–325).

²³ Cf. Thorne, "The Ascending Prayer," 21–23.

²⁴ Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival, 780–842* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 141.

²⁵ It is his *Epistula* I, 16. PG t. 99, col. 960A–961A.

²⁶ Niavis, "The Reign," 200.

²⁷ Niavis, "The Reign," 199 ff. Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 141.

years in the service of the church, and certainly not a layman, even less an imperial bureaucrat, would be capable of caring for the interests of the church with sufficient courage against the state authorities. Theodore's uncle Plato tried to make the emperor reconsider. In a nocturnal visit to Symeon the Monk, a relative of the emperor, Plato seems to have warned that he and Theodore might feel compelled to organize a schism if a layman were selected. Nikephoros took this warning seriously enough to sequester both Plato and Theodore under arrest until the new patriarch could be safely ordained and enthroned.²⁸

With the election of the "moderate" layman, Nikephoros, the influence of the Stoudites was ignored. This does not mean that they were ready to abandon their hard line and moderate their policy. It would seem, however, that they adopted a conciliatory line towards the new patriarch. Theodore's letters reveal that the Stoudites accepted this appointment. They mentioned the name of Nikephoros as well as that of the emperor in religious services. Such an attitude was dictated not so much by the need for compromise as the belief that a person ordained to the highest level of the priesthood already had God's grace bestowed upon him.²⁹

At the same time, Theodore's brother, Joseph, was chosen to be archbishop of Thessalonica, the second largest city in the empire. Probably in the same year, Theodore was invited to take part in the election of the abbot of the Dalmatou monastery. Theodore attended the election and voted for the winning candidate, Hilarion, and Joseph accepted the archbishopric.³⁰

These two issues, both of which seem to have been of a purely ecclesiastical nature, can certainly be seen as a gesture of goodwill and an effort for reconciliation on behalf the two Nikephori, emperor and patriarch. However, in another case, which might be called "semi-political," Emperor Nikephoros did not show the same readiness for compromise with the Radicals. Probably later in the same year, 806, he requested that Patriarch Nikephoros rehabilitate the priest, Joseph of Kathara, who had officiated at the wedding of Constantine and Theodote, probably because Joseph had contributed to the peaceful resolution of the revolt of Bardanes Tourkos in 803. To settle the matter the patriarch held a local synod in Constantinople. He invited fourteen bishops, and also Theodore the Stoudite, who does not seem to have ever recognized this assembly as a legitimate synod. When the bishops voted to rehabilitate Joseph, Theodore kept silent, finding no

²⁸ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 142; Niavis, "The Reign," 203.

²⁹ Niavis, "The Reign," 204.

³⁰ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 143; Niavis, "The Reign," 204.

one else in the mood to support dissent. Since he was not a bishop he could not vote. Eventually Joseph took up his old position as steward of St. Sophia.³¹

The readmission of Joseph to the priesthood gave rise to an immediate protest from the Stoudites. They broke their communion with Joseph and everyone else who communicated with him, including the patriarch, the emperor, and his court. In the course of the next two years, 806 to 808, Theodore and Plato remained in isolation in their monastery, avoiding taking part in ceremonial celebrations that they were supposed to attend. Perhaps in 808, the emperor realized that they were deliberately avoiding celebrating the Eucharist with him. He took up the case not with the fiercely principled and equally inflexible Theodore, but with Theodore's brother, Joseph, who had shown some flexibility by accepting imperial appointment as archbishop of Thessalonica. Nikephoros send his most responsible official, the postal logothete, who demanded that Joseph state his reason for not taking communion with the emperor and the patriarch. "I do not have anything against our devout emperor or against the patriarch," Joseph replied, "but only against the steward [Joseph of Kathara] who wedded the adulterer and who for this reason was deposed in accordance with the sacred canons." The logothete, clearly prepared for this reply, told the archbishop that the emperor had no further need of his services.³²

In what appears to have been an effort at intimidation, imperial troops surrounded Studios monastery, so that, in Theodore's words, "the monks could scarcely breathe."³³ Theodore, Joseph of Thessalonica, their uncle, Plato, and an unnamed leading Stoudite, called simply "Kalogeros" (monk), were taken from Stoudios and held in custody at the monastery of St. Sergius.³⁴

A synod was then convoked in January of 809, which reached four decisions: 1) Joseph's restoration to the priesthood was confirmed; 2) anyone who refused to apply the "economies" (*oikonomia*) of the saints (clearly Theodore and his followers) was anathematized; 3) the archbishop of Thessalonica was reduced to the rank of priest, and 4) Theodore, Joseph, and Plato were sent into exile to the Princes' Islands.³⁵ The Stoudites rejected the "adulterous" synod. The emperor decided to give them one last chance for compromise. He called the whole brotherhood into his presence and tried to win over the leading monks privately. When this attempt failed, he promised clemency to the whole community, on the

³¹ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 143; Niavis, "The Reign," 205ff.

³² Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 143; 154; Niavis, "The Reign," 210–211.

³³ Niavis, "The Reign," 211.

³⁴ Niavis, "The Reign," 212.

³⁵ About the synod and its decisions see Patrick Henry "The Moechian Controversy."

condition that they would re-establish their communion with the patriarch. As the emperor was standing in the middle, he bade that those who wanted reunion with the patriarch stand to his right side, and those who were with Theodore to move to his left. No one agreed with the emperor, and all of them, guarded by soldiers, were sent to various monasteries, the abbots of which treated them with special hardness.³⁶ The persecution seems to have been extended to some people who did not belong to the Stoudite brotherhood, but simply sympathized with the strict stance adopted by the Radicals on the Moechian controversy. Theodore the Stoudite speaks of a certain abbot in Thessalonica who suffered punishment with his monks just because they had refused to communicate with the person who had succeeded Theodore's brother, Joseph, as archbishop of that city. Another abbot was flogged, also in Thessalonica, probably for the same reason.³⁷

The persecution of the Stoudites and their sympathizers went on for a period of more than two and a half years, until Nikephoros' death and the retirement of his son Staurakios. When Nikephoros' son-in-law, Michael I Rangabe, came into power (October 811), he restored the Stoudites and once more defrocked Joseph of Kathara, thus ending the Moechian Schism. Theodore was reconciled with Patriarch Nikephoros. The radical monks not only came back from their exile, but became influential with the new emperor.³⁸

There are, however, indications about certain dissensions between Theodore the Stoudite and the patriarch in at least two instances. The first, in 812, concerned the persecution of certain heretics in Phrygia and Lycaonia, with Theodore arguing against and Nikephoros for punishment;³⁹ the second, also in 812, concerned a peace treaty proposed by the Bulgarian Khan Krum (r. 803–814) according to which Byzantium and Bulgaria should exchange refugees. The Stoudite abbot argued against extradition as it would require that Christians be surrendered to the hands of barbarians, while Nikephoros urged the emperor to accept the peace treaty.⁴⁰

Michael I was a pious, but far from successful, emperor in terms of foreign policy. In course of two years, from 811 to 813, he suffered heavy losses at the

³⁶ Thorne, "The Ascending Prayer," 25.

³⁷ Niavis, "The Reign," 213–214.

³⁸ Niavis, "The Reign," 214. Thorne, "The Ascending Prayer," 25.

³⁹ On this topic, see, for instance, Hieromonk Patapios, "St. Theodore the Stoudite and the Problem of the Paulicians," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 43, no. 1–4 (1998): 143–154.

⁴⁰ Vassil Gyuzelev, "Studijskiat manastir i bulgarite prez Srednovekovieto (VIII–XIV v.)" [Studios Monastery and the Bulgarians in the Middle Ages (eighth–fourteenth centuries)], *Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'études byzantines* 39 (2001/2002): 55.

hands of the Bulgarian Khan Krum. After a defeat at the battle of Versinikia (22 June 813), Michael was forced to abdicate in favor of one of his generals (στρατηγός), Leo the Armenian.

In the Byzantines' eyes, the previous almost 30 years, since the council of Nicaea in 787, had represented a string of military defeats and stood in clear contrast to the victories of the iconoclastic emperors, their lengthy reigns and peaceful succession. It is the reason, usually stressed by scholars, that the new emperor, known by the name Leo V (r. 813–820), decided to reach back to the religious policy of the more successful Isaurian dynasty and restore iconoclasm.⁴¹ Patriarch Nikephoros, who opposed this initiative, was forced to retire to a monastery (in March 815) and a new iconoclastic patriarch, Theodotus, was enthroned. The change in policy was formalized by a local council in Constantinople in April 815, which re-introduced iconoclasm officially, recognized Constantine V's Council of Hieria of 754 as the Seventh Ecumenical Council, and accordingly repudiating the Second Council of Nicaea of 787.⁴² The Stoudites refused Theodotus' invitation to attend.⁴³

Many monasteries, however, conformed to the imperial policy, so that there was no true monastic opposition of the sort which had occurred under Constantine V. Theodore the Stoudite's letters suggest that nearly all the monasteries in Constantinople yielded to the iconoclast position.⁴⁴ The monastery of Sergios and Bakkhos, under its abbot, John the Grammarian (later, patriarch of Constantinople from 837 to 843), became a center for disseminating iconoclast

⁴¹ John Haldon, "Iconoclasm in Byzantium: Myths and Realities," 8, online at: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/UMICH/classics/Home/News/Platsis%20Endowment/2007%20-%20Haldon,%20Iconoclasm%20in%20the%20Byzantine%20World%20myths%20and%20realities.pdf> (accessed: 17.5.2014); Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850. A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 361–363; cf. Cyril Mango, "Historical Introduction," in *Iconoclasm. Papers given at the Ninth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, March 1975* (Birmingham: Centre for Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1977), 5.

⁴² Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 213. Thorne, "The Ascending Prayer," 25; Marie-France Auzépy, "State of Emergency (700–850)," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 289. For the 815 council, see P. J. Alexander, "The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and Its Definition (*Horos*)," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953): 35–66.

⁴³ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 212–213.

⁴⁴ Haldon, John. "Iconoclasm in Byzantium: Myths and Realities," 9, online at: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/UMICH/classics/Home/News/Platsis%20Endowment/2007%20-%20Haldon,%20Iconoclasm%20in%20the%20Byzantine%20World%20myths%20and%20realities.pdf> (accessed: 17.5.2014).

ideas, and iconophiles who refused to conform to the new dogma were confined there for re-education. Among the monasteries which conformed were also, for instance, those of Medikion (the abbot of which, Niketas, was imprisoned for his resistance to iconoclasm)⁴⁵ and Kathara.⁴⁶ Most of the secular clergy also seem to have been exiled, intimidated, or won over to the other side.⁴⁷

With Nikephoros in exile, Theodore the Stoudite, until his death in 826, played a leading role in the iconophile opposition, organizing most of his fellow abbots in “underground” resistance. Initially, he remained in Constantinople and on 25 March 815, Palm Sunday, he had his brotherhood process solemnly around the Studios monastery singing church hymns, each of them holding an icon.⁴⁸

This manifestation elicited a rebuke from Emperor Leo, who quickly realized that Theodore would be uncompromising in his resistance to the iconoclast policy. Thus, he became one of the first targets of Leo’s persecutions of the iconophiles, which continued to the end of his reign.⁴⁹ Not long after the iconoclast council was held, in April 815, Theodore was exiled by imperial command to a Metopa, a fortress in the Opsician theme in Bythynia. It is from there that he probably wrote the *Antirrheticus*, his apology for venerating (προσκύνησις) icons, before being moved farther off, to Boneta in the Anatolian theme in the spring of 816.⁵⁰ Just before his departure, Theodore divided his monks into small groups and recommended that they disperse so as to avoid governmental pressure.⁵¹ Theodore the Stoudite’s exile was followed by other bishops and abbots who rejected conforming to iconoclasm, notably Theophanes the Confessor, Makarios of Pelekete, and Niketas of Medikion from Bithynia.⁵²

A certain Leontios, a Stoudite monk who had shown himself prone to defection in the Moechian Schism, revolted against Theodore again during the Iconoclastic Controversy and was appointed by the emperor as the new abbot of

⁴⁵ *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and in the Fogg Museum of Art: West, Northwest, and Central Asia Minor and the Orient* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 103.

⁴⁶ Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 377.

⁴⁷ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 212–213.

⁴⁸ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 212–213; see “Iconoclasm” in ODB, vol. 3, 976; Auzépy, “State of Emergency,” 289.

⁴⁹ While the emperor clearly wanted to avoid persecution whenever possible, he could not ignore the refusal of the Stoudites (and the iconophile bishops as well) to subscribe to his council’s decree. About Leo’s measures against iconophiles see, for instance, Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 377–383.

⁵⁰ Thorne, “The Ascending Prayer,” 26–27.

⁵¹ Thomas, Hero, *op. cit.*, 68.

⁵² Auzépy, “State of Emergency,” 289.

Stoudios. Thus, the general dissolution of the monastery was avoided. Leontios for a time adopted the iconoclast position; however, he was eventually won back to the iconophile party. That abbots faced similar challenges may help to explain the apparent ease with which the iconoclast emperors won iconophile abbots over to their side. In *Epistulae* 190, Theodore notes that some of the Stoudite monks who had been whipped or threatened with whipping had succumbed to the threat and changed sides. Theodore ultimately lost about twenty monks to iconoclasm, at least two of whom, like Leontios, earned themselves abbeys. Most likely Theodore never regained control of the Stoudite monastery.⁵³ The Stoudite situation mirrored a general trend, with a number of bishops and abbots initially yielding to the iconoclast positions, but then renouncing them in the years between 816 and 819, a movement that was perhaps motivated by the martyrdom of the Stoudite monk Thaddaios.⁵⁴

Theodore exercised wide influence during his exile, primarily through a massive letter-writing campaign. Under his leadership, the iconophiles were in constant communication by letter, recognized the bishops of their party as the real hierarchy, enjoyed recognition by the pope of Rome and the Orthodox patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, refused communion with iconoclasts, and demanded strict penance from all their members who lapsed. Everywhere Theodore and the other rigorist clergy could depend upon broad support from the laity. Like their leaders, many ordinary iconophiles venerated icons secretly and avoided iconoclast communion.⁵⁵

On Christmas Day, 25 December 820, Leo V was murdered, and the new emperor, Michael II (r. 820–829), tried to place himself above the Iconoclastic Controversy. He stopped the persecution and recalled iconophiles who had been exiled, but did not restore them to their positions.⁵⁶ This allowed the return of Theodore the Stoudite to Constantinople, but not the restoration of Nikephoros to the patriarchal throne. It was suggested that Nikephoros might return if he agreed to remain neutral on the question of icons.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibidem; Peter Hatlie, “Women of Discipline during the Second Iconoclast Age,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 89, no. 1 (1996): 39.

⁵⁴ Thomas Pratsch, *Theodoros Stoudites (759–826) – zwischen Dogma und Pragma: der Abt des Studiosklosters in Konstantinopel im Spannungsfeld von Patriarch, Kaiser und eigenem Anspruch* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), 245–246 and 252; Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 377.

⁵⁵ Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival*, 221.

⁵⁶ Auzépy, “State of Emergency,” 289.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eight and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 14.

Following his release, Theodore returned to the capital, travelling through northwestern Asia Minor and meeting with numerous monks and abbots on the way. At the time he appears to have believed that the new emperor would adopt a pro-icon policy. In fact, in the religious controversy Michael tried to tolerate both Orthodoxy and iconoclasm but personally favored iconoclasm. An imperial audience was arranged for a group of iconophile clerics, including Theodore. However, the emperor showed little interest in the finer points of the controversy, and expressed his intention to “leave the church as he had found it.” The monks were to be allowed to venerate the icons if they so wished, as long as they remained outside of Constantinople.

Having been unable to reach an accommodation with the new ruler, Theodore the Stoudite seems to have retreated into what seems to have been a sort of self-imposed exile, probably in 823, first to the peninsula of St. Tryphon near Cape Akritas, southeast of the city, and later to Prinkipo in the Princes’ Islands. In his final years, he continued to write numerous letters supporting the use of icons, and appears to have remained an important leader of the opposition to imperial iconoclasm. He also denounced the second marriage of Michael II to the nun Euphrosyne, daughter of Constantine VI, which took place about 823, although in a very moderate fashion, and with none of the passion of the Moechian controversy.⁵⁸

Theodore the Stoudite died in Prinkipo 11, November 826, after having his disciple and chosen successor, Naukratios, write down his final testament.⁵⁹ His revival of the Stoudios had a major effect on the later history of Byzantine monasticism. His successor, Naukratios, recovered control of the monastery after the end of the Iconoclastic Controversy in 843, and for the remainder of the ninth century the Stoudite abbots continued Theodore’s course, maintaining an independent position in relation to the church and the state authorities.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ See “Michael II” in ODB, 2, 1363.

⁵⁹ BMFD, 68.

⁶⁰ Ibid.