

SAINT GREGORY OF SINAI'S LIFE STORY AND SPIRITUAL PROFILE

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Preliminary remarks

The following abbreviated titles are used below:

EGR = *Eastern Churches Review* (Oxford 1969-1980).

OCP = *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* (Rome 1935 ff.).

Beck = Beck, H. - G., *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (München 1959).

For the Greek text of St Gregory's life, see note 28, below. There is also a Slavonic version posthumously published in the name of P o l i c h r o n A g a p. S y r k û, with a historico-archaeological introduction by the same, edited from a 16th century manuscript (Cod. 1488 of the St-Petersburg Theological Academy in those days) in Vol. 272 of the series *Pamiatniki drevnoy pis'mennosti i isskustva* (Monuments of ancient literature and art) St-Petersburg 1909. A Russian translation from the Greek — and also from the Slavonic, in the two instances where the Greek is not extant — by I. S o k o l o v, was published by St Panteleimon's monastery (Mt Athos) at Moscow in 1904. The Greek text used in this case was in Cod. Athon. 5680 (Pantel. 173) of the 16th century, ff. 63r-124v.

For historical background data, frequent recourse has been had to J e a n M e y e n d o r f f's admirable *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas (Patristica Sorbonensia 3, Paris 1959)*. As however the French edition is, alas, out of print, the English version of this work, entitled *A study of Gregory Palamas* (Faith Press, 2nd ed., 1974), has been used. It has the advantage of a slight revision by the author, but lacks the more substantial footnotes and the appendices of the original. (Quoted as «Meyendorff»).

I am also much indebted to K a l l i s t o s W a r e, *The Jesus Prayer in St. Gregory of Sinai*, a paper read at the Sixth International Conference of Patristic Studies, Oxford 1971, and reproduced in *ECR*

IV, 1 (1972), 3-21. It is the best description to hand of the Saint's ascetic and mystical doctrine. (Quoted as «Ware»).

For the influence of the Sinaïte and of Hesychasm in the Slav countries, I have used a study by Dr Muriel Heppell entitled *The Hesychast movement in Bulgaria: the Turnovo school and its relations with Constantinople* published in *ECR* VII, 1 (1975) and also an unpublished paper on St Theodosios of Trnovo read by the same author at the August 1981 Conference of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius at High Leigh. All necessary references to recent learned literature on this aspect are to be found in the above article, but one can now add to them D. Obolensky's authoritative study on St Cyprian of Kiev, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (1978) 77-98. On the Greek side, the pioneer work of A. Tachias in his thesis *Ἐπίδρασις τοῦ Ἡσυχασμοῦ εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησιαστικὴν πολιτικὴν ἐν Ρωσίᾳ, 1328 - 1406* (Salonica 1962), though now 20 years old, retains its value. It brings out the benevolent attitude of Patriarchs Kallistos I and Philotheos to the spiritual needs of the Russian Church.

The same remark applies to Ware and Meyendorff. Anyone wishing to study this subject in depth will find all he needs in them. The latter is particularly valuable, as much of his data is culled from unedited manuscript material. Though I am deliberately refraining from overloading this study with book references, I cannot refrain from mentioning also Meyendorff's work *Saint Grégoire Palamas et la mystique orthodoxe* (Paris 1959), translated into English as *Saint Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (New York 1974), and his article *Spiritual trends in Byzantium in the late 13th and early 14th centuries*, contributed to *Art et société à Byzance sous les Paléologues* (*Bibliothèque de l'Institut Hellénique*, 4, Venise 1971).

Note on Ἡσυχία. This word is easily misunderstood by the casual reader as meaning mere exemption from noise, stress or interruption, whereas in ascetico-mystical parlance it means 1) an interior state of soul, with cessation of evil and irrelevant thoughts, and/or 2) a way of life conducive to its acquisition. I have therefore translated it sometimes, where the second of these two senses seems predominant, as «the contemplative life», i.e. a manner of life preparing the soul for the divine gift of contemplation (θεωρία), but have more often transliterated it simply as «hesychia». I think this neologism, which Ware also uses, is better than such words as «Gottversenkung» (Dietz),²⁷

27. *Kleine Philokalie. Belehrungen der Mönchsväter der Ostkirche über das Ge-*

«holy quiet» (H e p p e l l), «quiétude», «tranquillité» or «contemplation» (Gouillard)^{27α}.

The early years

Our knowledge of Saint Gregory of Sinai's life derives from a single source. On the face of it, this is a good source, for it is his *Life*²⁸ written by a personal disciple, who, after living in his company for several years and consorting with others who knew him well, became Kallistos I, Patriarch of Constantinople in 1350-1353 and again in 1355-1363.²⁹ However, one may sometimes wonder whether Kallistos, in his enthusiasm for his hero and his desire to edify the reader, has not exaggerated certain aspects of his account. When, as is generally the case, he describes things which cannot be checked with any other source, one must perforce accept what he says and leave it at that; but if what he reports seems to conflict with what is known of the period or to raise insoluble problems, it is legitimate to query it. For Gregory's early life, a certain «holy Father Gerasimos», who fell under

bet, ausgewählt... von Matthias Dietz, with introduction by I. Smolitsch Zürich 1976).

27α. Jean Gouillard, *Petite Philocalie de la Priere du Coeur* (Paris 1953).

28. Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Γρηγορίου τοῦ Σιναΐτου συγγραφεὶς παρὰ τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Καλλίστου. Critical edition by N. P o m i a l o v s k i i from a single Greek manuscript of the 16th century in the Synodal Library in Moscow (now housed in the State National Museum), no. 280 of M a t t h a e i ' s catalogue, renumbered 394 in V l a d i m i r ' s (Moscow 1896), published as Part XXXV of the series *Zapiski* of the Historico-philological Faculty of the University of St-Petersburg (Academy of Sciences Press, St-Petersburg 1896). The ms. contains 342 octavo sheets with four lives of various saints and other matter. It belonged once to the Μονὴ τοῦ Σιμεῶνος on Mount Athos. Other mss. containing the *Life* include Cod. Athon. 5680 (Pantel. 173) of the 16th cent., ff. 63r-124v.

29. One must beware of following N i k o d e m o s o f A t h o s in his introduction to the 100 Chapters of the *Μέθοδος καὶ κανὼν* by Kallistos and Ignatios in the *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Νηπτικῶν*, IV, 195-196 (= PG 147, 636), and confusing this Kallistos I with Kallistos II Xanthopoulos, co-author of that well known work on the contemplative life, who became Patriarch in 1397 but died after only three months on the throne. Saint Nicodemos is not alone in so doing. The Jesuit I r é n é H a u s h e r r, who so shocked Orthodox feeling by his polemical pamphlet *La méthode d' oraison hésychaste* (*Orientalia Christiana*, IX, 2: Rome 1927), falls into the same error on his p. 132, though on the very same page he sneers at the editors of the *Philokalia* for the low «valeur de leurs dires» in the field of chronology.

his spell already on Mt Sinai, is quoted by Kallistos as witness to his ascetic prowess. His disciples will have heard something about it from Gregory too, no doubt. But there has always been a tendency in Byzantine hagiography to situate all holy men within one and the same stereotyped framework of utterly ruthless austerity;³⁰ so perhaps we are being treated once again to a sacred legend rather than to the sober truth. Be that as it may, here is the story.

Saint Gregory of Sinai is said to have been born of a well-to-do family at Koukoulos near Klazomenai (perhaps identifiable with the present-day Turkish village of Urla) near the southern shore of the Gulf of Smyrna. The date is uncertain, but it probably lies in the seventh decade of the 13th century. At a Turkish raid during the early years of the reign of Andronikos II (1282 to 1328) he was taken prisoner with the men of his family and carried off as a slave to Laodikeia. Managing to reach a church there, they sang so beautifully in it, that the local Christians made a collection and ransomed them. This Laodikeia will have been the port on the Syrian coast, not the Laodicea of the Apocalypse, in Asia Minor; for on liberation Gregory slipped across to Cyprus. Henceforth we lose track of his relatives, while he himself embarks on a life-long odyssey, constantly moving from place to place, impelled by his search for God or by force of circumstances. He is said to have made in a short time a great impression on the Cypriots by his sweet nature, facial beauty and piety, so that «Leo the Cypriot», an erudite monk who later went to Constantinople, wrote a description of him³¹. Foreseeing his great longing for virtue, Kallistos says, God brought Gregory into contact in Cyprus with a contemplative solitary; he joined him and was clothed in the monastic habit (i.e., he became a novice, a *rasophoros*). Gregory remained with him only a little while (μικρόν τι) and was initiated into the spiritual life; then he went, like Moses the seer, to Mount Sinai and was

30. See many examples quoted by Paul Magdalino, Ruth Macrides, Robert Browning and other contributors to the University of Birmingham XIVth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies on «The Byzantine Saint», ed. by Sergei Hackel as «*Studies supplementary to Sobornost*, no 5» — special number of *Sobornost, Incorporating Eastern Churches Review*, London 1981.

31. This may be the future Patriarch Gregorios Kyprios (1283-1289), but with a mistaken name attributed to him; for before becoming a monk he was apparently George (Beck 685), not Leo. It would be interesting to have his description of the Sinaite, but it has not survived.

tonsured (professed as a monk) at the monastery of St Catherine. At once he put aside all things fleshly and courageously engaged in «the divine struggle». Within a short time he astonished everyone by his austerities: fasting, vigils, earnest standing and all-night psalmody. He seemed to be without a body, and was marvelled at for it. His obedience and humility were such as cannot easily be described, «lest one seem to more supine men to be recounting improbable things». But Kallistos has learnt the exact truth from Gregory's most genuine and particularly beloved pupil, who followed in his footsteps and became a model of virtue, the holy Father Gerasimos. That blessed man certified in a circumstantial description (διεξίωσιν) that Gregory was tireless and zealous in his obedience to his superior, lived in the presence of God, and never omitted to fulfil the customary κανὼν of the brethren; but when evening came, having taken the Abbot's blessing he retired to his cell, locked himself in, and raising his hands to God and elevating his mind to draw nigh to Him, passed the whole night in psalmody, praying in the heart (ἐν καρδιακῇ τῇ σχέςσει) and on his kness, till he had recited the entire Psalter and reached a state of exultation and joy; then, when the seldomer called, he was the first to enter the church and the last to leave. His food was a morsel of bread and a little water — just enough for survival — for he wished to «melt away» so as to dissolve the bond of soul and body even before death did so. Entrusted with the kitchen and bakery for over three years, he showed incredible humility as though he was serving not men, but angels. He had such a devotion to Moses that he wished to go nearly every day to the summit of Mt Sinai and venerate the place where God had openly revealed himself. He was a skilled calligrapher and was consumed with a love of reading, spending nights and days studying the Old and New Testament and assimilating their content, as no one else could. As a polymath he far exceeded all others.

Such is Kallistos' account of Gregory's early years, spent at St Catherine's Monastery on Mt Sinai. It is exaggerated, of course, for one cannot believe that Gregory both prayed all night and read all night, and never slept at all, and simultaneously worked and copied manuscripts and studied and climbed to the summit of Mt Sinai «almost daily». But let us accept that Gregory was an exemplary young monk, quite outstanding for his ascetic zeal and his accomplishments among the numerous inmates of that famous monastic centre, a model of what was called τὸ πρακτικόν, ἡ πρᾶξις.

And now before long the inevitable happened: the other monks

became jealous of this budding saint in their midst. No details are given; we are simply told that Gregory, sensing their envy, went away more or less clandestinely (*ὄπεξέρχεται*), taking with him Gerasimos, who, admiring his extraordinary virtue, became «one of his disciples». They went first to Jerusalem as pilgrims to the holy places, and then to Crete. There they landed briefly at Kaloi Limenes (cf. Acts 27,8) on the south coast to recover from a storm; but Gregory, like a thirsty deer, began searching the countryside for some place where he could settle down and practice hesychia in perfect quiet. They did find a suitable cave and dwelt in it. Gregory now redoubled his austerities. Their food was once again a piece of bread and a little water once a day, though the danger of dying of thirst hung over them. Their rivalry with the angels and their rapid ascent towards God was astounding: their faces were pale from lack of moisture and from fasting, their members withered away, worn out with toil, having lost their resilience and become incapable of walking or any other effort.

And all the time, Gregory was seeking for a spiritual director. He had been taught ascetic discipline (*πρᾶξις*); but who would now teach him contemplation (*θεωρία*)?³² Therefore the Holy Spirit, Kallistos reports, inspired a saintly old man, Arsenios by name, a superlative hesychast, to come and knock on Gregory's door; and that venerable contemplative (*θεωρητικός*) began to explain to him «the guarding of the mind, true vigilance and pure prayer», — how the mind is purified by carrying out the commandments and how man, through this God-loving care and study, is illuminated and becomes entirely like light (*ὄλος φωτοειδής*). He then asked Gregory what sort of practice (*ἐργασία*) he followed. Gregory described to him his aspirations and his labours; but Arsenios smiled and said; «But all that, child, which you have been going through is what our Fathers and teachers call strict asceticism (*πρᾶξις*), but not contemplation (*θεωρία*) at all». Then Gregory, inspired by the Holy Ghost, fell at his feet and implored him in God's name to teach him what «prayer and hesychia and guarding of the mind» was. And Arsenios, seizing on this God-sent opportunity, taught him straight off all he himself had been taught by grace. He also described the usual trials awaiting those who trod this path from demons «from the right and from the left» and from envious men. This conversation, just summarised, is of supreme importance, for it turned

32. Kallistos somewhat cryptically explains this as meaning «hesychia and practice» (*τοῦτ' ἔστιν ἡσυχίαν καὶ πρακτικὴν*).

out to be a milestone in the great Hesychast Movement which swept through the monastic world, triumphed in the mid-fourteenth century over the philosophico-theological resistance of Varlaam, Akindynos, Gregoras and their supporters in the clergy and laity, dominated the Church of the dying Byzantine Empire, and launched among the Slavonic and other non-Greek Churches dependent on it a broad and beneficial wave of spirituality and reform, of which the effects lasted for centuries and can even be felt today.

On Mount Athos

Gregory's reaction to this was sudden and dramatic. Having listened to the man of God, he got up at once (εὐθύς), embarked on a ship and came to Mt Athos. He must have felt that he had been on the wrong track and that a complete change of surroundings was needed; he seems to have been seeking confirmation from other witnesses; perhaps also he already felt his vocation was to transmit knowledge and encouragement to his fellow monks. Be this as it may, Kallistos informs us that Gregory searched through (διερευνησάμενος) all the monasteries of the Holy Mountain, and as many as he found engaged in the contemplative life both there and in remote and inaccessible places, he made every effort as a matter of duty to visit them and pay his spiritual respects and seek their prayers and their blessing. Yet the Saint is said to have reported that he met with not a few who were highly endowed with grey hairs and understanding and every gravity of behaviour, whose entire zeal was concentrated on practical asceticism (τὸ πρακτικόν), but when questioned about hesychia and the guarding of the mind and contemplation (θεωρία), they declared they did not even know of it by name. Having reflected on this, he took a firm decision to settle in the *Skete* of Magoulâ, which stands over against the Monastery of Philotheou; for there he had come across three monks, Isaias, Kornelios and Makarios, whom he perceived to be engaged not only in τὸ πρακτικόν but also a little (ἐπι μικρόν) with contemplation (τὸ θεωρητικόν). There with great labour he built with his pupils some cells, while he himself constructed a hermitage (ἡσυχαστήριον) a short distance further away, where he gave himself up to complete solitude with God, to whom he raised his heart in prayer, at the same time imploring him by ascetic practices. For he had not yet received the great enlightenment, that penetration by the Divine Light of which Arsenios had spoken to him.

But it was soon to come. Remembering the holy man of Crete's discourse, Gregory «gathered all his perceptions inwardly within himself, exerting to the utmost his mind together with his spirit, fixing and binding it fast and, in a word, nailing it to the Cross of Christ, and with frequent repetition he said in prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner'; with his soul full of anguish, with a broken heart, sighing deeply with spiritual compunction, he wetted the ground with the warm tears which flowed in abundance from his eyes». God had mercy on him, and fired (πυρωθεις) with the energy of the Holy Spirit, he underwent «the good and strange transformation» (ἀλλοιωθεις τὴν καλὴν καὶ ξένην ἀλλοίωσιν). The hermitage was «filled with light from the effulgence of grace»; overflowing with unspeakable joy, he wept torrents of tears, pierced through with divine love. It was as though he had gone out of the flesh and of the surrounding world, so wholly was he «informed with divine desire». Henceforth the light never ceased to accompany him.

Here Gregory's disciple and biographer quotes descriptions of his mystical state, given by him in answer to questions put by his disciples, which should not be overlooked by anyone studying the doctrine embodied in the Saint's written work. A long quotation from them, beginning with a question put by Kallistos, figures in fact separately in a 17th century manuscript³³ as though it were a composition of his. Here are the principal passages from the *Life*.

«He who makes the ascent in the spirit towards God, sees the entire creation luminous (φωτοειδῆ) as in a kind of mirror, whether in the body or out of it I know not, the great apostle says,³⁴ until during that time someone gets in my way and induces me to return to myself».

«A soul which has attached itself to God and been pierced and steeled³⁵ by His love, and which has resplendantly risen above all creation and is living above things visible and wholly attached to yearning for Him, cannot be entirely hidden, as the Lord commanded,³⁶ saying 'Thy Father, which seeth in se-

33. Cod. Athon. 4720 (Iviron 600), f. 8r-8v: incip. ἄρα, ὃ θεοπεσιώτατε πάτερ... Cf. note 46, below.

34. 2 Cor. 12,2.

35. στομωθεῖσα = hardened, steeled — or possibly, muzzled.

36. Kallistos, seeing St. Gregory come out of his hermitage «with a shining face and smiling, as it were», casting a gladsome look at him as being his youngest

cret, shall reward thee openly',³⁷ and again 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven'³⁸. For the heart flourishes and the mind wells up and the face is made cheerful, as the wise man said: 'A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance'.³⁹

«If someone does not see the resurrection of his own soul, he will be unable to learn precisely what a spiritual (νοερά) soul is». ⁴⁰

«The soul which exerts itself to the utmost in this respect and strenuously restrains by practical virtue all the passions, makes them subordinate and subservient; and just as shadows accompany bodies, so do the natural virtues surround that soul and follow and accompany it: not only that, but as though to mount some spiritual ladder, they lead it up into the supernatural and teach it. And when by the grace of Christ this takes place as the result of spiritual illumination, the mind, immersed in light, expands resplendantly into a state of contemplation, and raised above itself in proportion to the grace granted to it, it sees more clearly and purely the nature of each being, in its proportion and order. And unlike those busy with vain and secular learning, who speak from their belly and frame false propositions to put to the public, and chatter and deceive, relying on a mere shadow and not attempting to follow in a likely way the essential activity of nature — for as the Scripture says, 'their foolish heart was darkened and professing themselves to be wise they became fools',⁴¹ — the soul which has received the pledge of the Spirit is later raised (gradually, owing to the multitude of the contemplations) towards things supernal and more divine, putting former things in second place, according to that great trumpet of the Church, the divine apostle, who teaches and

and best beloved disciple, had remarked on his joyful appearance and received this reply.

37. Matth. 6.8.

38. Matth. 5.16.

39. Prov. 15.13.

40. Answer given to Kallistos, who, undeterred by the Saint's remark that he is spiritually too immature for such things, insists on being told «what is the soul and how has it been seen by the saints». After it, the Saint admits with great humility that he has reached that stage himself, and continues as above (*Life* § 8).

41. Rom. 1.21-22.

expressly declares: 'Forgetting those things which are behind, I reach forth unto those things which are before'.⁴² Then the soul, thus purified by the verities, shaking off all fear and rejecting all timidity, unites with and adheres to the love of Christ the bridegroom and sees its natural thoughts brought once for all to a stop and falling away behind it, as the holy Fathers ordained; and having reached formless and ineffable beauty it converses alone with God alone, brightly illuminated by the effulgence and grace of the most Holy Spirit. So thus lit up by that ineffable light, its only movement is towards God himself, and through that marvellous and strange alteration it no longer feels this humble earthly and material body. For the soul, without any superaddition or material attachment, definitely shows itself as intelligible (νοερόν) by nature; just as Adam our forefather previously, before his fall, was covered by the energy and grace of that infinite light, but later, alas, was stripped of that resplendant glory and illumination owing to his bitter transgression, and from then on that noble animal, man, was shown up as being naked».

«When someone has reached this stage by laborous study and perceives that he has come into his proper condition, he has seen the resurrection of his soul before the general resurrection which we hope for; so that that soul, thus purified, can say with the apostle: 'Whether in the body or out of it, I cannot tell'.⁴³ Nay, baffled and astonished, it cries out in amazement: 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!'.⁴⁴

Gregory's biographer now enlarges (§ 8 to 13) on some of the disciples who gathered round the saint during his sojourn on the Holy Mountain and were raised under his direction to heights of virtue and mystical experience: Gerasimos, Joseph, Nikolaos, Mark, James, Aaron, Moses, Longinos, Kornelios, Isaias, Jacob and Clement (a Bulgarian shepherd). The spiritual exploits of most of these men are described at length. It is beside the purpose of this study to dwell on them except in so far as their story brings out the characteristics of Saint Gregory. Kallistos emphasises the extraordinary attraction of the saint: monks

42. Phil. 3.13.

43. 1 Cor. 12.2.

44. Rom. 11.33.

flocked to him for instruction like bees to honey. Some of his disciples were already outstanding personalities in the Greek monastic world before they threw in their lot with him. Gregory had, as it were, already entered heaven (ὡς ἀληθῶς τῆς ἀνωτάτω καὶ μακαρίας λήξεως γενόμενος):

«Inspired by God with pure wisdom in the Spirit and genuine knowledge, he attracted everyone joyfully with the odour of his virtue, which was more fragrant than precious balm, and with the divine breadth and height of his gift for teaching... Like a magnet,.. he attracted even those who had not seen him and talked to him, for his teaching spread far and wide... He urged himself to the extreme limit of both piety and spiritual steadfastness, and by the joy and meekness of his countenance he expressed and revealed the inner illumination of his soul, So that when really eminent men of virtue and doctrine saw him, they abandoned their own preceptors, had recourse to his teaching and company, and submitted to him for the sake of the benefit they aimed to derive therefrom».

Yet Gregory could be fiercely severe at times, and Kallistos tells how, for the edification of a peccant disciple, guided by the gift of discernment (τῷ διορατικῷ τῆς ψυχῆς ὀφθαλμῷ), he heaped unmerited reproaches on a venerable and saintly old man, whose humility under the onslaught was to serve as a lesson to the other.

But brotherly love predominated in St Gregory's teaching, and Kallistos was so closely united by his blessing to another disciple, Mark, that for 28 years they were inseparable. Gregory's spiritual illuminations and mystical gifts, which constantly raised him further, taking him from glory to glory, were such, Kallistos declares, as could not be safely described to uninitiated persons such as the Akindynists,⁴⁵ who believe the grace and gift of the Spirit is a mere creature. One of his disciples (Aaron, § 12) came to him blind, but he taught him that he could be restored in this life to the primal estate of Adam and receive the

45. Gregory Akindynos, a humanist monk of Slav descent from Prilep in W. Macedonia, whose name is linked with Varlaam in the Synodikon of Orthodoxy as having taught heretically about the «natural energies» of God, was at first patronised by Palamas and Kallistos. When the controversy between Palamas and Varlaam broke out in 1337, he tried to play a conciliatory rôle and escaped condemnation along with Varlaam in June 1341; however, his condemnation soon followed in August. Thereafter he attained great prominence and influence during the early years of the civil strife (1341-1354), siding against John VI Cantacuzene with Patri-

«eternal light» through «illumination of the heart»;⁴⁶ and this he experienced, for he received the gift of second sight through opening of «the eyes of his soul». In all simplicity Gregory imitated Christ, writes his biographer, admitting all men joyfully and thirsting for the salvation of those who had recourse to him; and many of his disciples did, it seems, achieve high things in the spiritual life, so that a great movement began. For they studiously practised «the mental and salutary work» — i.e., the Jesus-Prayer, as practised by the Hesychasts — and attracted many disciples to it. Their exceptional virtue and their spiritual gifts are enthusiastically described by the author, who was himself one of them.

Returning to St Gregory, Kallistos recounts as follows his missionary zeal among monks:

«So as truth had thus clearly shone forth, everyone, looking to this teaching as to a divine voice, converged in a body in large numbers on him — almost the entire concourse of those inhabiting the Holy Mountain, — finding it quite unbearable to miss communicating in and enjoying this doctrine which was so pleasing to God and so very beneficial. For that most venerable man was vouchsafed by God so much spiritual wisdom and grace, that to all who approached him he imparted profit for their soul, as may be learnt from those who clearly perceived it and reliably related it to me in many various ways: while this man, who was so truly sustained and encompassed by God, was speaking to us of spiritual things and of the love of God, divine grace appeared plainly (ἐπῆνθει), joined essentially with his words and accompanying them. For when he held forth on purification of the soul and told how man becomes God according to divine grace, divine love and a strange feeling of affection settled in godly wise within our soul; and just as in the case of Cornelius

arch John XIV Kalekas, who even ordained him despite that condemnation. But they became estranged in 1346, and when in 1347 Kalekas was synodically deposed by both contending parties, Akindynos was formally excommunicated. He died relatively young about 1349 and was again condemned posthumously by the final great Council of 1351. Writing in the 1350's of the «Akindynists», Kallistos will be thinking principally of Nikephoros Gregoras and his entourage. Gregoras, who entered the controversy only in 1347, was condemned in 1351 too. He died in 1359/60.

46. St Gregory's exhortation to that effect is set forth at length by Kallistos in his § 12 (pp. 23-24 in P o m i a l o v s k i i's edition). Its final passages figure at the end of the extracts mentioned above in note 33.

«the Holy Spirit», it is said, «fell upon them»⁴⁷ as the great apostle Peter was teaching, so too did it happen to him, as was later recounted by those who had been passively and actively through this beneficial experience, so pleasing to God.⁴⁸ They told of it with an assurance so full and a spiritual love so great, that it seemed unbelievable to those who had not realised how many — nay, almost innumerable — were his achievements in the field of virtue, and also indeed with what a high degree of love of God and familiarity with Him he had been enriched. But let envy fall and malice be banished; for He who said «He who believeth in Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water»,⁴⁹ and «(ye shall say unto) this mountain, remove hence to yonder place and it shall remove»,⁵⁰ and «greater works than I do shall ye do»,⁵¹ this same master and Lord of all, who «lighteth every man that cometh into the world»⁵² and is at pains to carry out His commandments, enlightened him also. For as it occurred with Christ my God, so did it with him too: being truly His genuine disciple, beginning with his own twelve he not only brought the number of his disciples to seventy wherever he chanced to have his holy dwelling,⁵³ but by night and by day he taught and enlightened almost the whole multitude of the monks⁵⁴ and zealously associated with God through pure contemplative life and prayer all those who had recourse to him. For gathering

47. Acts 10,14 and 11,15.

48. Much the same is recounted by St. Symeon of Thessalonica from personal experience, in Ch. 295 of his *Dialogue* (PG 155, 544), concerning Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos. For an English translation, see D. Balfour, *Politico-historical works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica* (Vienna 1979) 279-280. Cf. note 29, above.

49. John 7,38.

50. Matth. 17,20.

51. John 14,12.

52. John 1,7.

53. This phrase echoes that of the liturgical προσκομιδῆ, in which the particle placed on the disc representing the Apostles is said to be in memory τῶν δώδεκα καὶ τῶν ἑβδομήκοντα. For the 70 Apostles, see Luke 10,1 and 17 (*textus receptus*; a very ancient variant, represented by the Cod. Vaticanus, the Vulgate etc., makes them 72).

54. It is not clear whether the author, who began by describing the Saint's influence on Mt Athos, is still talking of the Athonites only or now of monks everywhere. Cf. his reference, below, to «the places of the Bulgars and the Serbs and beyond», which seems clearly to transcend the boundaries of the Holy Mountain.

himself together and setting in motion every beneficial thought, he did his utmost to concentrate them all within himself, desiring with all his soul and yearning in divine love for the radiance and splendour (αἴγλης καὶ λαμπρότητος) of the all-holy and kindly Spirit; and invigorated and fortified by the collaboration (with God) which resulted, he hardly left any place — not only those of the Greeks, I mean, and the Bulgars, but even those or the Serbs and beyond, — which was not most carefully worked upon by him through his own pupils, so as to sow there too, abundantly and radiantly, the beneficial seed of the contemplative life». ⁵⁵

But this activity of the great mystic stirred up opposition among the «more educated» monks. Gregory had not confined his propaganda to the hermits, but had taught those in cenobitic monasteries too his divine doctrine of spiritual sobriety, control of the mind and contemplation. In an environment where, despite an intensive search, he had found nothing of this sort, but only various virtues *περὶ τὸ πρακτικόν*, he was regarded by these «more educated» as an undesirable newcomer; attempts were made repeatedly (*πολλάκις*) to drive him from the Mountain, and he was told: «stop trying to teach us a path of which we have no understanding». Gregory, taking with him his neighbour Isaias, ⁵⁶ went to the proteion at Karyes, apparently with the intention of leaving Mt Athos, ⁵⁷ but after some initial hesitation and slight reproach, the Πρωτοσ ⁵⁸ received them with such a display of warm hospitality and appreciation, that from then onwards the whole Mountain joyfully accepted Gregory as its «common teacher». ⁵⁹

But the Saint took care not to dissipate his interior life by becoming over - absorbed in teaching others. To escape from the distractions imposed by the constant stream of visitors seeking his counsel, Gregory, «a lover of quiet if ever there was one», ⁶⁰ used often to go

55. § 13 (final sentences, pp. 29-30 in P o m i a l o v s k i i ' s edition).

56. One of the original three whom he found at Magoulâ (see p. 36, above).

57. This is not explicitly stated, but seems implicit in the words: τῆς κακίας ἐπὶ πολὺ προβαϊνούσης οὗτος αἰσθόμενος, ἐν κρῆσει τοὺς λόγους ἀεὶ ποιούμενος καὶ τόπον δεδωκώς τῇ κακίᾳ...

58. The monk holding the presidency of the whole of Athos in the Middle Ages by appointment of the Emperor or Patriarch.

59. § 14, end. The ms. has διδασκάλιον (a teaching, a lesson), which the editor corrects to διδασκαλεῖον (a teaching-place, a school); but surely διδάσκαλον is better.

60. τῆς ἡσυχίας εἴπερ τις ἐρῶν (§ 15).

away from Magoulá to less accessible places,⁶¹ where he constructed «cells» to which he could retire. He was continually (συνεχῶς) withdrawing there owing to the approach of others. He had a preference for solitude and an ardent desire for it:⁶² as far as depended on him, he would not abandon contemplation (θεωρία) even for a very short time. Yet this man of many hermitages was forced by Turkish incursions to leave the beloved Mountain altogether. The cenobites lived safely in veritable fortresses, but the marauders found the sketes and hermitages an easy hunting-ground, ambushing monks and carrying them off as slaves. Gregory «suffered much»⁶³ from such barbarians. The anxiety and mental disturbance impeded his natural activity and state of mind, so that he contemplated returning to Mt Sinai. Gathering together his disciples, including the future Patriarchs Isidore and Kallistos, he went first to Thessalonica. It was the beginning of a long odyssey. They never reached Sinai, and Gregory, after wandering through Chios and Lesbos to Constantinople and beyond, and making a further sojourn on Mt Athos, ended by founding a large monastic settlement in τὰ Παρόρια,⁶⁴ a wild mountainous district between Adrianople and the Black Sea, where Byzantine Thrace marches with Bulgaria at the northern end of the Strandzha coastal range (Istranca Dagları).

We shall return to this last phase of the Saint's life later. It is time to pause and consider two problems. Firstly, why does Kallistos make no mention of Gregory Palamas? Secondly, is he not exaggerating when he attributes the origins of the 14th century Hesychast movement in Greek-speaking lands exclusively to the Sinaïte?

Relationship to Saint Gregory Palamas.

The date of Gregory of Sinai's withdrawal from Athos is not precisely known; but as it was simultaneous (indeed, probably concerted) with that of Gregory Palamas, it may be safely dated to 1325. Gregory

61. Kallistos names some of these «various desert places»: the area of Simopetra monastery; a locality called Khéndeli; the Tzingresá ravine.

62. ποιούμενος τὴν ἀναχώρησιν περὶ πλείονος καὶ σφόδρα ταύτην ἐπιποθῶν.

63. πλείστα πέπονθε. Patriarch Philotheos, who was a hieromonk of Lavra at that time, gives a very similar description of the methods and impact of these Moslem brigands in his *Encomium* of Palamas (PG 151, 669 C) and in § 13 of his *Life* of Isidore. He calls them Ἀχαιμένιδες. They were perhaps Saracen pirates rather than Turks.

64. In English one might say «in the Borderlands».

Palamas, born in 1296, was much younger than Gregory of Sinai — at least 30 years younger. He arrived on Mt Athos in the spring of 1317, and for three years was under the spiritual direction of a certain Nikodemus, from the important Hesychast centre of Mount St Auxentios near Chalcedon, who had settled near Vatopedi. On his death, Palamas transferred (about 1320) to the territory of the Great Lavra, which henceforth became his basic monastery, as it also became that of Gregory of Sinai. For three years he lived in the Lavra itself; then (about 1323) he transferred to a hermitage at «Glossia», traditionally believed to be near Provata, which is not far from Magoulâ, the Sinaïte's skete, on the north-western slopes of the Mountain. It is hardly possible that the two Gregories should not have met at that time. Indeed Patriarch Philotheos, whose *Encomium* of Palamas⁶⁵ is our principal source for knowledge of the latter's early life, recounts how at Glossia he found himself at last in the company of ὁμότροποι καὶ φίλοι καὶ τῶν αὐτῶν σπουδασταί, who had «as sort of leader and chief that celebrated Gregory,⁶⁶ he too of Byzantine family stock, a great personality famous at that time for his contemplative life and spiritual vigilance and vision and superlatively admired not only by them. but also by those solicitous for divine things in his native place, and especially later, when after his death God witnessed to his worth «by miraculously glorifying his bones and his dust».⁶⁷ Although the details about Byzantium may seem incompatible with what we learn from Kallistos about the Sinaïte's life,⁶⁸ one is sorely tempted to suspect that either Philotheos

65. *Λόγος ἐγκωμιστικὸς εἰς τὸν... Παλαμᾶν*, editio princeps, with the Saint's Homilies, Patriarchate of Jerusalem 1857; reprint by Migne, PG 151.

66. It seems inadvisable to call this elder «Gregory the Great» (Meyendorff, p. 34) as though that were his recognised title or name: «ὁ πᾶν» (literally «the very») implies some hidden adjective like περιβόητος or θαυμαστός rather than μέγας. As a matter of fact, elsewhere Philotheos calls Palamas himself τοῦτον τὸν πᾶν (*Life of Isidore*, p. 82).

67. *Encomium*: PG 151, 568 B-C: ὦν καθάπερ εἴ τις ἐξαρχός τε καὶ κορυφαῖος Γρηγόριος ἦν ἐκεῖνος ὁ πᾶν, ἐκ Βυζαντίου μὲν καὶ αὐτὸς τὰς τοῦ γένους ἀρχὰς ἔχων, μέγας δέ τις καὶ περιβόητος ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ καὶ νήψει καὶ θεωρίᾳ κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ χρηματίσας καὶ θαυμασθεὶς καθ' ὑπερβολὴν οὐ παρ' ἐκείνους μόνους, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρὰ τοῖς ἐν τῇ πατρίδι τὰ θεῖα φιλοσοφοῦσι πολλῶ μᾶλλον ὕστερον, ὅπου καὶ τὸ τέλος τῆς προσκαιροῦ ζωῆς ταυτησί δεξάμενος καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἄληκτον μεταβάς, ἀξίως ὑπὸ Θεοῦ μεμαρτύρηται, ὑπερφυῶς τὰ ὁσπᾶ καὶ τὴν ἐκείνου κόνιν δοξάσαντος.

68. According to Kallistos (§ 3) Gregory of Sinai was born of a distinguished family near Klazomenai (west of Smyrna), and died in the Paroria; and in his *Life* of Theodosios of Trnovo (extant in Slavonic only) he tells how that saint, who had fled lest he be obliged to become Gregory's successor, went back to the Paroria

or Kallistos may have wrongly described one of the Gregories and that Γρηγόριος ὁ πᾶνυ must be identical with Gregory of Sinai, whom Philotheos praises in similar terms in his *Life of Isidore*.⁶⁹ This suspicion is enhanced by the fact that Gregory Palamas left Mt Athos about the

(about a year later?) to pay his respects to his tomb there. However it is perhaps possible that after a few years, when his remains were exhumed (as was the custom, and still is on Mt Athos), his relics were brought to near-by Byzantium and that a legendary Byzantine origin was then attributed to him. On the other hand, on close examination, Philotheos' statements (see n. 67, above) can stand as referable to the Sinaite even without such a hypothesis. For 1) he does not say that Gregory *died* in his homeland, Byzantium, but that after his death he was venerated by Hesycahst circles in Byzantium, since God had witnessed to his sanctity by the miraculous power of his remains; and that could be true even if this power was being manifested in the Paroria, which were after all only about 100 miles distant. And 2) as for his birth, we may notice that though Philotheos calls Constantinople his πατρίς, he does not definitely state that he was *born* there, but only that «he had the origins of his race from Byzantium». Had his parents or grandparents perhaps transferred from there to Asia Minor?

«Occam's Razor» (entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem) is applicable not only to philosophy, but to history. Rather than be left with the insoluble conundrum of a second great Gregory whom nobody has otherwise heard of, it is incumbent on us to make every reasonable allowance for explanations which can enable Philotheos' statements to fit the case of the obvious candidate for identification, which is Gregory of Sinai.

69. Edited by A. Παπαδόπουλος - Kerameus in Vol. LXXVI (1905) of the St. Petersburg *Zapiski* (cf. note 28, above). On p. 71 we read of how Isidore began as a novice under [Γερασίου]... παρά τῷ θαυμαστῷ Γρηγορίῳ, — τοῦ Σιναίου καὶ τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ λαμπρότητος καὶ θεοφανείας ἄρτι κατιόντι τότε, ὅθεν δηλαδὴ καὶ τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν παρά τοῖς πολλοῖς ἔσχε — τὰ τῆς ὑψηλῆς τῶν μοναχῶν ἀγωγῆς τε καὶ φιλοσοφίας ἄγαν ὑψηλῶς τελεσθέντος καὶ μηδὲν ἐν ἐκείνοις τοῦ διδασκάλου καθυστερήσαντος μηδὲν πωστῶν, εἰ μήτι καὶ πλέον εἰπεῖν ἔχωμεν. And on p. 76. Philotheos tells how Isidore, still a novice, went to Athos; and there τὸν ἤδη μοι ῥηθέντα παρ' ἐκείνοις εὔρε Γρηγόριον δηλαδὴ τὸ σοφόν, καθ' ἑαυτὸν ὡς ἔθος φιλοσοφοῦντα τὰ θεῖα καὶ ὑψηλά, Γρηγόριον ἐκεῖνόν φημι, παρ' ᾧ τὸν φοιτήσαι Γεράσιμον... ὁ λόγος ἤδη φθάσας ἐδήλωσεν. Thus it is clear that Philotheos fully recognised the Sinaite's great spiritual stature and importance. Nevertheless, it is noticeable how he insists that both Gerasimos (p. 71) and Isidore (p. 77) were of comparable stature with him. In his Encomium he does the same for Palamas vis-à-vis Γρηγόριος ὁ πᾶνυ. It has been said that Palamas «put himself under the direction» of the famous master (Meyendorff, p. 34), but actually Philotheos' purpose is rather to claim Gregory as witness to Palamas' spiritual achievements. «They say», he writes (568 C), τὸν ὁμώνυμον καὶ ὁμότροπον τοῦτον, ἐπ' ἱκανὸν τότε συγγεγονότα, τὰ κάλλιστα τε καὶ ὑψηλότατα τῆς κατὰ νοῦν ἐνεργείας καὶ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ μεγίστης τε καὶ πρώτης θεωρίας φιλοσοφῆσαι· καὶ συμφιλοσοφῆσαι, ἅπερ ὁ σοφὸς ἐκεῖνος τὰ θεῖα καὶ χρόνῳ καὶ σπουδῇ καὶ πείρᾳ καὶ θεοφόρων ἀνδρῶν ὁμιλίᾳ ἐκτήσατο. Gregory's relationship to Palamas is presented as that of συναγωνιστῆς καὶ φίλος, rather than of spiritual Father; and he witnessed to his «many and great»

same time as Gregory of Sinai owing to the same incursions, and also went to Thessalonica. On this occasion he was one of a group of φίλοι καὶ ὁμότροποι, who were «twelve in all», and they decided, after their arrival there «to leave Thessalonica with Athos and everything here, and go straight to Jerusalem; and after their pilgrimage there, to spend the rest of their lives in contemplative quiet». This last phrase conceals the fact, brought out by Kallistos' account (see p. 44, above), that in Gregory's conception the place where they were to practise ἡσυχία for the rest of their lives was Mt Sinai! But they failed to take off, because Palamas had a dream-vision in which St Demetrios seemed to order them to remain in Thessalonica, so that «they all of common accord decided they must stay on». Here again, the fact is passed over that the Sinaïte disagreed with them: «after two months had passed», we learn from Kallistos (§ 15), «finding he had not yet reached a place suitable for hesychia, without telling anyone he took only me and one other» (i.e., Mark) and embarked for Chios.

The clandestinity of this departure is significant. We should not regard the two Gregories as heading two separate groups of disciples, neither of which knew what the other was planning. It is far more likely that young Palamas, not yet 30 years old, was just one of a group of eleven followers of the Sinaïte, and that he broke away, taking the majority with him, over the issue of whether the Thessalonica area was a suitable place for Hesychasts. Gerasimos, Gregory of Sinai's elder disciple, already had a monastic centre in the neighbourhood. Isidore re-

hidden mystical «gifts and charisms», which could not entirely escape his notice (568 D).

That Γρηγόριος ὁ πᾶνω was Palamas' spiritual director may perhaps be confirmed by Cantacuzene, who in his *Hist.* II, 39 (Bonn ed. 545) states that on the death of Nikodemos, Palamas put himself under another spiritual Father for over eight years (say, 1320-1327), the tie of obedience only ceasing on the latter's death, after which Palamas went to Verroia. But this last detail cannot of course be true of Gregory of Sinai, who lived on till 1346.

It may be added that Nikephoros Gregoras asserts (*Hist.* XIX, 1; Bonn ed. II, 919) that even before Varlaam came to Greece (i. e., before 1330), Palamas and «his teacher of the same name, Gregory the Sharp» (ὁ τούτου διδάσκαλος καὶ ὁμώνυμος Γρηγόριος ὁ Δριμύς), declared to him in the presence of many others, that they «saw the essence of God with their bodily eyes». The presence of «many others» (πλείστον ἄλλων) seems to preclude this having been on Athos; the meeting must have taken place in Thessalonica, presumably in 1325-1326. The adjective δριμύς would be an apposite description of the Sinaïte's fierce asceticism, but not of his gentleness.

joined him there⁷⁰ and became intimately associated with Palamas, who tonsured him as monk and persuaded him to accept ordination as deacon. After about a year, Palamas himself was ordained priest (1326 or 1327) and settled in a hermitage near Verroia with a group of ten other monks. He had become a superior, a spiritual father.

The two Gregories henceforth lost contact, except that after Palamas went back to Athos (about 1331-1338) and settled as a hermit at St Savas's, an ἡσυχαστήριον near the Great Lavra, Gregory of Sinai also returned for a time, and was received with great honour at the Lavra too, in the neighbourhood of which (πλησίον) he «erected certain cells in various places, as he judged advantageous», at the same time using other dependencies of the Lavra, situated «both near-by and further away», which were suitable for holy quiet. There he «conversed with God».⁷¹ However, as before, Turkish incursions intervened; their disturbance of his peace drove him to take refuge inside the monastery; but there too «his love of quiet was frustrated by intercourse with the monks (ἡ τῶν μοναχῶν ὁμιλία τὸ φιλήσυχον αὐτῷ περιέκοπτε). So «behaving with great circumspection and escaping the notice of his remaining disciples, with the exception of only one, whom he decided to take with him, he embarked on a ship» and sailed away.⁷² We shall return later to his journey. It is enough here to state that there is no record of his having been in contact with Palamas during this final visit to Athos.⁷³

As in the case of his flight first from Mt Sinai and then from Thessalonica, Gregory had once again «taken French leave», as soon as he

70. Isidore had in any case been urged by the Sinaïte to regard it as his vocation to stay in contact with the world. He became an activist of Hesychasm among the intellectual élite of Thessalonica. In 1338 Palamas settled down with him there to wage his struggle against Varlaam, and it was Isidore who arranged that Palamas be invited to compose the Ἀγιορειτικὸς Τόμος, which, signed in 1340 by the leading Hesychasts of Athos, was to play such a fundamental part in the controversies of 1341-1351. In 1342 Isidore was elected Metropolitan of Monemvasia; but owing to a volte-face on the part of Patriarch John Kalekas he was not consecrated till he himself became Patriarch in his stead in 1347. He immediately consecrated 32 new bishops, most of them known Hesychasts, including Palamas, whom he made Archbishop of Thessalonica. Apart from the raging theological controversy, his election and this action of his roused the opposition of many members of the higher clergy.

71. *Life* § 16. (P o m i a l o v s k i i p. 38, 17-25).

72. *Ibid.* (p. 38-39).

73. Saint Gregory Palamas was Abbot of Esphigmenou monastery, briefly and without much success, in 1335 or 1336. It is possible that Gregory of Sinai's

found conditions unfavourable for hesychia, the contemplative life of quiet. Among such conditions he seems to have counted the company of talkative and contentious persons, and an atmosphere of strife or disagreement. If people were hostile or just inconvenient, he preferred to slip away quietly without facing them and arguing the matter out. The principal that a monk must stay in his original monastery or order, whatever the unfavourable conditions there, is one for which ecclesiastical disciplinarians have fought for centuries. It triumphed to a large extent in the west, partly owing to the influence of the Rule of St Benedict, with its scathing remarks (Ch. 1) against «Sarabaitae» and «Gyrovagi» and its cautiousness regarding hermits; indeed, in the East too, strong canonical legislation was repeatedly passed, forbidding monks to transfer from their original *μονή* without permission and limiting the number of hermitages attached to a monastery.⁷⁴ But provided the principle of *starting* monastic life under strict obedience to an individual Spiritual Father (*γέρον*) was observed, in practice, Eastern monasticism has always tended to greater latitude. For its ideal monk has been a man struggling by every available means to return to the paradisiac condition of Adam before the Fall, rather than merely a man avoiding sins and excesses and serving an ecclesiastical establishment by a disciplined life.

To sum up, on the issue of the Sinaïte's relations with Palamas, it seems likely, despite the apparent contradiction on some points between our sources, that 1) Gregory of Sinai and Gregory «ὁ πᾶν» are one and the same person; that 2) Palamas stood very close to him in his youth, and was perhaps formally under his spiritual direction; but 3) he separated from him, after accompanying him to Thessalonica, owing to a disagreement as to whether they should stay on there. The rather troubling silence of Kallistos' *Life* regarding Palamas may be explained by the inconvenience of emphasising the split between the great mystic and the great future theologian, who led away from him some of his Greek disciples. Palamas and Isidore backed away from the wandering Saint and ended by fighting the cause Hesychasm in the world, and they were joined there later by Kallistos.⁷⁵ The Sinaïte re-

visit was during his absence there. Its date and duration are uncertain, but it was before 1340, since Kallistos and Mark, whom he left behind, signed the Haghioreitic Tome at Magoulâ in that year.

74. See an interesting study by Emil Herman, *La 'stabilitas loci' nel monachismo Bizantino*, in OCP 21 (1955) 125-142.

75. Meyendorff (p. 103) goes so far as to call Palamas «the undisputed

mained apart from the world, with its theological controversies, personal quarrels and political upheavals, ever seeking isolation, serenity and the pure vision of Divine Light.

The Sinaïte had no monopoly of Hesychasm.

Similar factors may have influenced Kallistos to exaggerate the rôle of Gregory of Sinai as sole apostle of Hesychast life and prayer in his day. It may be true that on a tour of the great monasteries of Athos he found only men devoted to the discipline of external practices, τὸ πρακτικόν: regular attendance at the liturgical offices, obedience, fasting, scriptural and patristic study, vigils and prostrations (the κανὼν of each monk performed in his cell), silence, hard work and so on — a very exacting régime, but not necessarily conducive to obtention of the graces of contemplation (θεωρία), since it left little time for the practice of inner prayer and taught no technique for its effective mastery. But Gregory may have missed meeting some who, precisely because they were mystics, were reticent about their spiritual experiences. True, it was mainly in the sketes and hermitages that he could expect to find (and did find to a limited extent) the sort of men he was seeking; but it must not be forgotten that they were not stocked exclusively by new recruits coming straight from the outside world, but also included a proportion of monks who had begun their training in the monasteries and later left them for the «desert», seeking there what Gregory sought, ἡσυχία. Nor can it be believed that even in the wilderness only three men could be found who had some inkling of the sort of thing that Gregory later set out to teach. What of Arsenios in Crete? What of Nikodemos ὁ παρὰ τῆ τοῦ Βατοπεδίου λάβρα, who initiated Palamas? What of St Maximos ὁ Κουσοκαλυβίτης, whose famous conversation with Gregory

spiritual master of the two Patriarchs Kallistos and Philotheos». The latter, a theologian rather than a hermit, seems never to have been close to Gregory of Sinai; but Kallistos very definitely was. However, he clearly suffered from being dragged around by him in 1325-1334, and was no doubt glad to be able to return to Magoulá, where he stayed on and signed the Ἀγιορειτικὸς Τόμος together with Mark and Isaias in 1340. Yet during Gregory's second Paroria period he was again with him either before or after that date (cf. note 94, below). In June 1350, when Isidore died, he was called upon to succeed Kallistos I. He was dethroned in 1355 by John VI Cantacuzene and replaced as Patriarch by Philotheos for refusing to crown the former's son Matthew as co-Emperor. But in 1353, after Cantacuzene abdicated and John V became sole Emperor, he was restored, and remained on the patriarchal throne till his death in 1363 while on a mission to Serbia, after which Philotheos again succeeded him.

of Sinai is incorporated in the *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Νηπτικῶν*?⁷⁶ May not even Nikephoros ὁ Ἑσυχαστής, one of the originators of the Hesychast «psycho-technical» method taught by Gregory, have still been alive on Mt Athos when the latter arrived there? The fact is, that Kallistos is unconsciously exaggerating, firstly because, like *all* hagiographers, he must boost the reputation of his hero; secondly perhaps, because he feels that Palamas, who let him and his master, Gregory, down at Thessalonica in 1325, has stolen too much of the limelight; and lastly, because Gregory, in his conversations with Kallistos, has himself exaggerated — not of course his own prowess and importance, but the negative impression he had on first acquaintance with the Athonites. It must not be forgotten that he had not yet received the «strange transformation» which he experienced when at Magoulâ he applied the teaching received from Arsenios in Crete.⁷⁷ His precipitate transfer from Crete to Athos must have been due to his conviction that he would find many practising initiates there. He was very disappointed, and his feeling of moral isolation has reflected itself in his disciple's biography of him, in which he appears as having a kind of monopoly of the true doctrine of the contemplative way of life.

Saint Gregory of Sinai was a great mystic and a teacher of genius, but he was not the initiator of the whole Hesychast movement of the 14th century, nor the author of the Jesus-Prayer, nor even the inventor of the ἐπιστημονικὴ μέθοδος of praying it. He was simply a potent influence in furthering the movement and propagating the prayer-formula and the method. *Meyendorff* in Ch. 1 of his *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (1959) gives an excellent account of the «Immediate Forerunners» of that movement. They included Gregory of Cyprus (Patriarch, 1283-1289), Theoleptos, Bishop of Philadelphia (about 1250-1325), spiritual father of Palamas in his youth, who had been a disciple of Nikephoros the Hesychast on Mt Athos, and Patriarch Athanasios I (1289-1293 and 1303-1309). The last two are mentioned by *Palamas*⁷⁸ in a list of seven persons, ἄνδρες μικρῶ πρὸ ἡμῶν μεμαρτυρημένοι καὶ δεδειγμένοι ἐν δυνάμει Πνεύματος ἁγίου, who taught the psycho-technical method.⁷⁹ Hesychia was no new thing.⁸⁰

76. Athens 1976, E', 104-107.

77. See pp. 37, above.

78. Ὑπὲρ τῶν ἱερῶς ἡσυχάζοντων I, 2, 12 (ed. Chrestou, III, 405, 4-15).

79. On the theological side, see also G. Patacsi, *Palamism before Palamas*, in ECR 9 (1977) 1-16.

80. See I. Hausher's article *L'hésychasme; étude de spiritualité*, in OCP

The Jesus-Prayer can be traced back in one form or another to at least the early 6th century, though one must heed Ware's warning «not to assume its universal employment in Byzantine spirituality; there were many authors who do not assign to it the centrality which it possesses with Gregory of Sinai»,⁸¹ and these include no less a person than Symeon the New Theologian. As for the Hesychast method (the sitting posture, the bending over, the breath-control), it is to be found in two writings anterior to Gregory: a treatise «On the three ways of attention and prayer» which was wrongly believed in the 14th century to be by Symeon the New Theologian,⁸² and another by the above-mentioned Nikephoros «On vigilance and the guarding of the heart (Περὶ νήψεως καὶ φυλακῆς καρδίας)».⁸³ Gregory copied a good deal from them and wrote more than they on it and its concomitant ascetical régime, but the psycho-technical method itself had existed at the very least for a century before he learnt it from Arsenios. What was most remarkable in the saintly Sinaïte was his extraordinary gift for attracting pupils and imparting to them the lessons of his ascetico-mystical experience and something of his ardent zeal.

New wanderings

When Gregory slipped away from Thessalonica to Chios, leaving his disciples behind with the exception of Mark and Kallistos,⁸⁴ he had intended going on from there to Jerusalem. But on the island they met a monk who had «come back from there» and who warned them not to go,⁸⁵ so they went instead to Mytilene (Lesbos) and «spent some little

22 (1956) 5-40 and 247-285, which brings out how very ancient the expressions ἡσυχία, ἡσυχαστής, ἡσυχάζω and such notions as νῆψις are.

81. Ware, p. 13, end of note 44.

82. For suppositions as to the real authorship, see Ware p. 14, note 55. If Krivosheïn's suggestion (Philotheos of Sinai, author of 40 κεφάλαια in Φιλοκαλία B', 273-286, date unknown) is true, the method may perhaps be as old as the 10th century. Cf. Beck 453-454.

83. Φιλοκαλία, Δ', 17-28 and PG 147, 945-966. The pseudo-Symeon document has also been attributed to Nikephoros, but it cannot in any case be dated to later than the end of the 12th century (Beck 693). In the Φιλοκαλία it is only to be found in a demotic Greek version (E', 81-89); for a reliable text see Hausherr 150-172.

84. See p. 44, above; and in the *Life*, § 15, p. 33, 30-32.

85. Gregory seems to have left Kallistos in the dark about the reasons. «I know not how he became an obstacle to our going», he writes with obvious disappointment (οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως ἐμποδῶν ἡμῖν ἐγένετο τῆς εἰς αὐτὴν φερούσης ὁδοῦ).

time on Mount Lebanon». But as even there they were unable to find a place suitable for hesychia,⁸⁶ they arrived in «this blessed city of Constantinople».⁸⁷ There, however, they were caught by winter conditions so severe, that the rivers were frozen. They sat it out in distress for six months in «a corner of the city» called The Eagles (Ἄετοί), as constricted and miserable strangers, whom God alone miraculously fed, responding to the Saint's prayers in secret ways which he refrained from discussing with any of his disciples. At last their plight was made known to the Emperor Andronikos by his own nephew, the monk Athanasios Palaiologos;⁸⁸ the *basileus* summoned Gregory often and yearned for his company, — indeed, he promised him «great things».⁸⁹ But Gregory refused even to consider them, since he shunned human glory and wished only to please God. So, presumably to escape these great things, he went away with his disciples by sea to Sozopolis, on the Black Sea coast north of the Paroria. Now a monk called Amiraes, who lived at Mesomilion in the depths of the «desert» of the Paroria, heard of them; this resulted in Gregory's going up there and, finding the place suitable for his purpose owing to its utter inaccessibility, he decided to settle there. He and his disciples worked hard and built small cells for themselves, while Amiraes lived with disciples of his own about 200 metres (one stade) away. It was here that a dangerous attack on the Saint by a former disciple of his called Luke occurred; it will be dealt with below in connexion with Gregory's writings, and need not be repeated here, except to say that the Saint escaped it unhurt, showed extraordinary coolheadedness and self-restraint, and thereby converted Luke,⁹⁰ only to be subjected shortly afterwards (§16) to a similar onslaught on the

86. Κατάντημα ἡσυχίας. The identical expression was used in the case of his failure at Thessalonica. This is what he was seeking for throughout his wanderings.

87. This dates the composition of the *Life* to after Kallistos' enthronement as Patriarch.

88. The Emperor was Andronikos II (1282-1328). It would have been just possible to suppose that Andronikos III (1328-1341) might have been meant, were it not for the nephew. Called here «ἐκεῖνος», i.e. presumed well known, the monk Athanasios Palaiologos is the recipient of Letter no. 87 (pp. 87-89) in R. Guillaud's collection of *Correspondance de Nicéphore Grégoras* (Paris 1927), written about 1333, in which the philosopher expresses his grief at the deaths of Andronikos II and Theodoros Metochites.

89. Priestly and/or episcopal honours are probably meant. Gregory was averse to them, «though so great» (καίπερ τηλικαῦτα τυγχάνοντα).

90. This last detail is only extant in the Slavonic version, an extract from which in old Cyrillic script is given in a foot-note by P o m i a l o v s k i i (p. 36).

part of Amirales himself, who, mad with jealousy, demanded that Gregory depart instantly from the area, otherwise he would hire brigands to slay him and his disciples. Indeed, he actually did so. Seeing the danger, the Saint, who, it seems, had recruited several more disciples at Mesomilion, «assembled all the monks» and went off with them to a local mountain called Katakekryoméne; but a few days later a band of brigands sent by Amirales fell on them there and captured them all. Even Gregory was ignominiously bound up like a criminal and cruel attempts were made to extort from him gold and silver coins, things of which he had utterly renounced the possession «since childhood». However, it seems that they were set free, and they fled from the wilderness back again via Sozopolis to Constantinople. There they settled by the Μονὴ Παναχράντου and Church of the Three Hierarchs. Then Gregory called Kallistos and Mark,⁹¹ and having spoken to them of spiritual matters and the service of God, he exhorted them to mutual agreement and love, and sent them back to the Holy Mountain, whither he would follow them shortly. They arrived there easily, but Gregory did not come. After a time, Kallistos could no longer bear to wait for his absent master, so he went back alone to join him in Byzantion. It was December, and bitterly cold; they would be forced to wait for the spring. However, Kallistos did take off again despite very stormy weather, and the «divine Father» joined him⁹² later. It was then that, as already mentioned,⁹³ Gregory was so well received at Lavra and lived for a time in near-by hermitages, only to leave the Mountain a second time clandestinely, with a single disciple,⁹⁴ after brigandage had forced him back into the great monastery. This time he «embarked on a ship and reached Adrianople»,⁹⁵ whence he hastened by land to the

91. It seems that the other monks «who had gathered because of him (οἷτινες δι' ἐκεῖνον συνήχθησαν — 37,3)» were simply left behind!

92. Or rather, «us», — which seems to imply that Kallistos joined Mark again and perhaps settled at Magoulâ with other former disciples of the Master, such as Isaias, one of the original inhabitants of the skete.

93. See p. 48.

94. The single disciple whom he now took with him may well have been Kallistos himself, for in his *Life* of Theodosios of Trnovo, he makes it clear that Theodosios and he made friends at the Paroria. Of course, Kallistos may have gone there later. But Theodosios was a very early recruit at the Paroria (was it not he who conveyed Gregory's appeal to the Tsar of the Bulgars?), while Kallistos was back at Magoulâ in 1340 (cf. note 75, above).

95. Does this imply that his vessel took him all the way, up the Maritsa (Hebros) river?

Paroria, and once again «collecting not a few monks», eagerly settled down on Mount Katakekryoméne. They set up a large Lavra,⁹⁶ and Gregory, following the tradition of the Fathers, also prepared some of the monks to adopt the solitary life and «embrace holy quiet» as hermits. Moreover, he founded three further Lavras, entirely constructed by a crowd of monks with which God had blessed «the man of God». These were situated «at the very same cavern of Mesomilia» and at «a place called Païzouva», or Bozova, as in the Slavonic version. Another place-name mentioned is Zagorà (see note below). The envious Amira-les is no longer heard of; presumably he had left the region.

Once again, the robbers which operated with this isolated area as their base attacked them, but this time the Saint, who had reached, it seems, a heightened state of «love of the Divine Light» and was emboldened by infused hope, stood his ground, fearless and underfeated; he realised that the raids were inspired by the Devil out of envy, because «the grace of the Spirit living within him» revealed it to him; moreover God showed him the future: how through him this desert was to be

96. «Lavra» (λαύρα), basically meaning an alley, lane or passage, was originally used in monastic parlance to designate a group or row of huts («cells») where monks lived without being organised as a community under one discipline. See E. A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexikon of the Roman and Byzantine periods*. Cambridge/Mass. 1914), s.v. In this sense, the nearest approximation to-day is perhaps a skete or monastic village, though the parallel is by no means complete. But a lavra very easily developed into a highly organised community with a regular liturgical régime: this was the case with the great lavras of St. Savas (5th-6th century) in Palestine and of St Athanasios on Mt Athos (10th century), which between them set the tone to such a large extent in the Orthodox East.

By St Gregory of Sinai's day, when brigandage was so rife, it may be taken that the principal thing a new lavra was expected to provide was a safe area within a solid enclosure to protect monks from the world and its evil-doers, and the elementary necessities for communal worship on Sundays and great Feasts. Inside, the contemplatives camped out, as best they could, in makeshift sheds and cells, and led their individual ascetic lives, an essential element of which, for all beginners, was strict subordination to some elder monk. With time, of course, they tended to build more ample premises and to construct a proper church in the middle.

A lavra could gradually become a veritable fortress, inhabited by a disciplined body under a corps of officers with a powerful commander at their head, and so busy with maintaining its material fabric and its complex liturgical life and with administering its lands and possessions, that Hesychia fell well into the background. It is important not to read this conception, which tended to prevail in Russia in later centuries, into the purpose and outlook of Gregory in the 14th century. Though he founded «lavras», he was essentially a teacher of the solitary ascetic life of poverty, privation and contemplative prayer.

populated with monks and become their «splendid country». So he was neither negligent nor did he run away. He had heard of the piety, bravery and virtues of the Tsar of the Bulgars John Alexander and realised that he alone could put down the brigands, so he had a message sent to him in his name and in that of the monks, his disciples, explaining the situation, and how he had already been driven out of Athos by Turkish brigands, and could not be expected to hold out long against those of the Paroria by mere patience, nor to put them down «by hand and force». And the Tsar generously responded to their appeal.

The last, Slavic phase

Kallistos' fulsome praise of Tsar John Alexander need not be repeated here. He was indeed an enlightened ruler, a lover of monks and an active patron of art and learning. He reigned from 1331 to 1371, at a time when the Second Bulgarian Empire, with its capital at Trnovo, which had prospered greatly in the first half of the 13th century, had been overshadowed in the 14th by the greater expansive power of the Serbs, while both Bulgars and Serbs were about to face the overwhelming might of the Ottoman Empire, to which they succumbed during the last quarter of that century. John Alexander (1331-1371) ruled over a modest Bulgarian state struggling to overcome the tendencies which had been driving it to military decline and political disintegration. It may be said that the advent of Gregory of Sinai made a considerable contribution to the Tsar's effort and that the help which he gave to the Saint was not merely an act of pious charity but also one of enlightened self-interest. The shrinking Byzantine Empire, though already moribund politically, was spiritually and intellectually flourishing; the influence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and of Mt Athos extended far beyond its confines. St Gregory and his disciples contributed to the consolidation of that influence by their Christian non-racist outlook, their missionary and reforming zeal, and their encouragement of Slavonic ecclesiastical literature. Of the latter the Bulgars had long been among the principal promoters, and it was now enjoying a new upsurge among them under John Alexander's benevolent encouragement.

The Tsar provided Gregory with so many things, that it may be questioned whether this was really compatible with the ideals of poverty and solitude which had led the Saint to flee from St Catherine's of Sinai and the Great Lavra of Athos.⁹⁷ He had only asked for protec-

⁹⁷. In fact we shall soon find him fleeing from his own lavra to a neighbouring hermitage (see p. 60, below)!

tion against marauders, but John Alexander gave him money and various supplies for the monks' sustenance and had a tall strong tower built for their defence; he also built them a church⁹⁸ and proper cells, and provided them «royally and richly» with every other sort of service,⁹⁹ including stables for their beasts. He donated land, a huge fish-pond stocked with every sort of fish, sheep and «countless cattle» and many a beast of burden for the service of the monks. In return, writes Kallistos, God was favourable to the Tsar and helped him to overcome those plotting against him. Gregory's biographer seems to be attempting to explain and justify this deviation from the ideal of indigence and «angelic life» when he declares (§ 18) that this «divine Father» was forever inspired by an apostolic urge to range far and wide over the whole inhabited earth, «for he longed to attract all men to the divine ascent (ἀνάβασις), so that *having gone by his side through a course of practical virtue*, they might also be raised to the height of contemplation by ceaseless intercession of mental prayer (τῆς νοεραῶς προσευχῆς)». In other words, Gregory's lavras housed a kind of preparatory school for future contemplatives and solitaries.

By drawing various parallels (§ 19), Kallistos compares Gregory to St Anthony, Elijah and Moses, — three Saints who combined solitary contemplation with missionary activity among men. It is interesting that his resemblance to Elijah is said to consist in his «zealously standing up to those opposed to truth». Is this perhaps a reference to the Hesychast controversy? Like Moses, Gregory too «received spiritual writing from God on tablets and became the legislator of the heremitical life». Like the great Anthony, Gregory made every possible effort to heal the psychic and bodily defects of those who had recourse to him, teaching some πράξεις and others as far as possible θεωρία, guiding them to it μετ' ἐπιστήμης.¹⁰⁰ Anthony tamed the desert and fashioned «a most sacred city of monks»; while Gregory was a civilizer of the desert too, for he not only tamed by this word and contemplation all the monks

98. Literally, «he planted an altar (θυσιαστήριον πηγνύει)». The tower is mentioned in a footnote at the end of one of Gregory's works in the 15th century Bodleian manuscript Barocc. 81, f. 191r.: Ἰστέον ὅτι αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ Σιναΐτης ἐκεῖνος ὁ ποιήσας τὴν σκήτην εἰς τὴν Ζαγοράν πλησίον εἰς τινὰ τόπον καλούμενον παρόριον, ἐποίησε δὲ καὶ πύργον ἐκεῖσε, ὃς μέχρι τῆς σήμερον λέγεται τοῦ Σιναΐτου.

99. ἄλλην πᾶσαν ὑπηρεσίαν.

100. A reference to the ἐπιστημονικὴ μέθοδος or psycho-technical manner of prayer. It is not claimed that this automatically produces contemplation (θεωρία); Gregory only prepares men «as far as possible» to receive it as a gift from God.

of Athos, but converted them to «precise calm and softness of spirit», which toned down the harshness of «practical» virtue and endowed them with «splendid mastery of their thoughts.¹⁰¹ Gregory moved about from place to place, imparting to others a share in this work which was so pleasing to God, and having arrived at the Paroria, he converted that very deep and uninhabited wilderness into a «spiritual workshop», where he re-cast, as it were, and re-shaped those who came to join him. Thus, for example, most of the murderous robbers of the area were converted by him to repentance and became humble shepherds. This was due to his «economic» dexterity and to his prayers. At all times and in all places and circumstances, the Saint regarded it as his paramount duty zealously to urge «simply everyone» to a life of virtue. Some he converted by the severity of his words, others by his adaptability to each person's quality and disposition. He was particularly insistent on the duty of mutual love and harmony.

Gregory, whose sojourns on Mt Athos coincided with a period of maximum Serbian expansion and penetration of Northern Greece, affecting, to a greater or lesser extent, most of the Holy Mountain, and not merely such specifically Slav monasteries as Chilandarion, Zographou and Saint Panteleimon's, had naturally made disciples there among monks of Slavonic speech, both Serbian and Bulgarian. His fame had thus reached Bulgaria before he settled at its south-eastern extremity, so that the Paroria monastic agglomeration soon began to attract Bulgarian recruits. One of the first was a young man later known as Saint Theodosios (Teodosi) of Trnovo, whose *Life*, now extant only in a somewhat interpolated Church Slavonic version, was also written in Greek by that same Patriarch Kallistos I, under whose guidance we have been studying St Gregory of Sinai's wandering career, missionary activity as propagator of Hesychasm, and spiritual characteristics.¹⁰²

101. κυβέρνησιν λαμπράν τῶν λογισμῶν. Note the exaggeration: Gregory cannot really have tamed all the Athonites!

102. *Zhitië i zhizn' prepodobnago ota neshego Teodosia* (i. e. Βίος καὶ πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Θεοδοσίου), edited by V. I. Zlatarski in *Sbornik za narodni umovorenija, nauka i knizhina* (Collection for popular art, learning and literature) XX (Sofia 1904) 9-36. V. S. I. Kisel'kov has produced a modern Bulgarian version of this Slavonic text, *Zhitiëto na sv. Theodosii Turnovskii kato istoricheski pametnik* (The Life of St Theodosios of Trnovo as a historical record) (Sofia 1926); and in his lengthy introduction to it he rejects Kallistos' authorship. Dr. M. H. P. Pell considers that to be too hasty a judgement, though it is based on the undoubted presence in the text of alien insertions by another person, writing unreliably and in quite a different spirit.

Another outstanding Bulgarian disciple of the first generation was Roman (also called Romylos). They were both trained in the contemplative life personally by Gregory, who even took Theodosios into his own cell to live with him at a time when he was suffering from demonic infestation. Despite the Tsar's measures against banditry, the Paroria settlements continued to be harassed by marauders. Roman was sent away by Gregory to live at Sliven, while Theodosios, who had twice visited John Alexander in connexion with Gregory's appeal to that benevolent Tsar, settled on the latter's advice, after Gregory's death, at Kephalirevo near Trnovo, where a community of some 50 monks soon grew up. Meanwhile, immediately after Gregory's death he had gone to live for a while with Roman at Sliven and they had attempted to settle together on Mt Athos but, as in so many other cases, they found the Islamic predatory incursions too much for them and returned to Bulgaria. Roman succeeded Theodosios¹⁰³ as head of the community at Kephalirevo, but finished his life as a hermit in Serbia.¹⁰⁴

These two saints had been pure Hesychasts, leading the contemplative life and training others in it. But their community also took to copying manuscripts and making new translations of Greek texts. They particularly promoted the dissemination of Gregory of Sinai's works, and it was Theodosios who translated Kallistos' Life of Gregory into the Slavonic of his day.¹⁰⁵ Although the movement of manuscript production patronised by John Alexander was not mainly concerned with Hesychast literature, the Hesychast copyists and translators — the so-called Trnovo School — greatly helped to lay the basis for it.

By the end of the 14th century there were many Hesychasts in Bulgaria and Serbia, some of whom combined hesychia with administrative and literary activity. This second generation of Slav Hesychasts included two well known translators, Dionysios and John; and the hierarchs Efthymios, Patriarch of Trnovo in 1375-1393, and Cyprian Tsamblak, Metropolitan of Lithuania (1375) and then of Kiev and all Russia

103. Theodosios died on 27 Nov. 1363 at St Mamas' monastery near Constantinople, while on a visit to Kallistos I. It is noteworthy that this was exactly the 17th anniversary of St Gregory's death. Cf. below.

104. See F. Halkin, *Un érémite des Balkans au XIV^e siècle. La vie grecque inédite de St Romylos*, in *Byzantion* 31 (1961) 111-147. There is also a Slavonic version contemporary with it.

105. See P. A. Syrkû, *K istorii ispravlenia knig v Bolgarii v chetyrnadsatom veku* (Contribution to the history of the revision of (Church) books in Bulgaria in the 14th century) (St-Petersburg 1898) Part 1, p. 416.

(1390-1406).¹⁰⁶ It is beyond the scope of this study to describe the vicissitudes and activities of these men and of their successors. On the whole, they were in contact with Mt Athos and Constantinople, where Greek Hesychasm now held sway. The movement spread and produced many remarkable men: the Russian Saint Nil Sorski (Nilus of the Sora, 1453-1508) and the «Elders beyond the Volga» were typical Hesychasts. St Sergios of Radonezh (1314-1392), restorer of Russian monasticism, was under Hesychast influence.¹⁰⁷ The whole Russian hermit tradition, including St Seraphim of Sarov, descends in direct line from Gregory the Sinaïte.

Saint Gregory's death

We now come to the Sinaïte's death; and here there is a remarkable incident, extant, apparently, in the Slavonic version only, and therefore deserving a full translation:

«But let us now return to the death of this ever-memorable Father and, having narrated as far as possible the acts of prowess performed at it by the holy man, we shall bring our account to a close.

Now it took place as follows. That man of God, being a true zealot for hesychia and because of his extreme love of the contemplative life and his desire to dwell in deserts, did not find it acceptable to be always coming to a monastery and in contact with a multitude of monks, for that was an obstacle to the hesychia which he so loved and to his ascent to God. But he therefore made a very solitary cell, suitable for hesychia, not far from his honorable monastery of the Paroria, so that when he wanted to he would go forth from the monastery and withdraw there, practising hesychia and communing with God. Now as he was entirely filled with divine grace and was granted the gift of foreknowledge, he discerned many days in advance his passing from this life; and when the time came for him to leave this present life and go to God, he took with him one of his disciples and went out to the above mentioned hermitage. So shutting himself in there, he detached his mind from the things of this world and raised it to those above; his holy soul continually meditated on how terrible is the passage from this life, so that he was

106. See D. O b o l e n s k y's study of Cyprian, referred to in the Preliminary Remarks (p. 31, above).

107. See T a c h i a o s (op. cit.) 42-60.

entirely absorbed in conversing with God and exercising his mind in the lessons of those divine mysteries.

Now whenever the Saint was in that condition and was well versed in this practice, it seemed an intolerable thing to our enemies the jealous demons, who had long been in the habit of envying this man's salvation. Seeing that these were evil spirits, what did they do, the murderous ones, when they learnt that the Saint was approaching death and were envious of the future glory with which the holy man was then about to be crowned? Suddenly an innumerable multitude of demons surrounded him; they covered that place like a cloud and rose up against him like wild beasts, grinding their teeth and seeking to devour him utterly. What did they not say and do then in order to detach his mind from converse with God! But the man of God, through the grace of the Spirit living within him,³ at once understood the enviousness of the evil demons, for he was experienced in this matter. He was not frightened, nor was he defeated by such a struggle and attack; but raising his hands as well as his mind to heaven; «Many dogs have compassed me», he exclaimed to God, «have compassed me, and the assembly of evil-doers have inclosed me» etc.¹⁰⁸ But as they, the shameless ones, did not cease to attack him, he engaged in a great struggle. He gave himself up utterly to all-night singing and incessant prayer; for he neither ate anything at all, nor did he take the slightest sleep, nor during those three days did he even speak in a gentle voice to his disciple, as was his wont. Instead, on the contrary, with a distressed look and a strict word he encouraged him to wrestle hard, saying: «Be manly, brother; cling fast to prayer and psalmody, for a multitude of evil spirits has compassed us about». And this being so, God who loves mankind did not allow His servant to be much tempted, in order that, as I opine, the hostile spirits should thereby be put to shame and the holy man be victorious over them.

So when those three days had elapsed, a certain divine force suddenly settled on him and strongly intervened, making the evil spirits invisible and filling the Saint with consolation. And he, at once noticing the change, raised his voice in thanks to God as follows: «Thy right hand, O Lord», he said, «has crushed our enemies, the demons, and destroyed them utterly in the might of Thy strength». Then he called his disciple in a kind of quiet manner. And when the latter came, he saw — O miracle — that his face was ruddy and joyful and that he had be-

108. Ps. 21 (22), 17.

come different from other men¹⁰⁹ and was looking on him with such tenderness and joyful smiling. «Thou seest, child,» said he, «that some divine force has come down and driven away the evil spirits and freed us from their temptation. But now I wish you to realise this too: in a little while I shall leave the present world and go away to God, for He is calling us to go to the Jerusalem on high, as I have learnt by a divine vision».

O blessed voice full of every hope, O certain indication and good tidings, by which the disciple is informed of his master's future status! But when he heard these things, the disciple was all sorrowful, and he wept at being deprived of the master. And soon after that the ever memorable Gregory, as foretold by God, was taken out of this life and entered the life which never ends». ¹¹⁰

Saint Gregory of Sinai's death occurred on 27 November 1346. His beloved disciple, the Bulgar Theodosios (Teodòsi), ran away from the Paroria, lest he be obliged to take the Saint's place as head of the community. But after an interval which included a stay on Mt Athos, Theodosios returned to pay his respects to Gregory's tomb in the Paroria. Later, he went to visit his friend, Patriarch Kallistos I, in Constantinople, where he himself soon died. When we read of «the celebrated Gregory»¹¹¹ that «God witnessed to his worth by miraculously glorifying his bones and his dust», we realise that this was the sort of contact by which the Saint's reputation for sanctity was enhanced in Byzantium after his death.

(To be continued)

109. *Inogo ot inykh byvsha*. Here Sokolov's Russian translation, which is not without minor errors, falls into a grave one by rendering this simple phrase as «he sees someone else with him» (zrit i eshcho kogo-to, byvshago s nim), as though Gregory had a celestial visitor!

110. Slavonic text given as a footnote on pp. 44-45 of Pomialovskii's edition of the Greek.

111. Γρηγόριος ὁ πάλαι. See note 66, above.