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PHILOTHEOS KOKKINOS:
THE LIFE AND WORKS OF A LATE-BYZANTINE PATRIARCH

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**PHILOTHEOS KOKKINOS:
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ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation (233 pages, and an additional 106 pages of bibliography and appendices) centers on Philotheos Kokkinos (*ca.* 1300–1378), one of the most prominent theological figures of late Byzantium, venerated as a saint by the Orthodox Church shortly after his death. A multifaceted cultural personality – hesychast monk, abbot, metropolitan, patriarch of Constantinople (for two tenures), man of letters, theologian, hagiographer, hymnographer, and liturgist – Kokkinos emerged on the ecclesiastical, theological, and political stage of the fourteenth century as a vigorous advocate of hesychast theology and an exceptionally prolific author. Through his writings and ecclesial activity, he proved to be a tireless and skillful promoter of hesychasm. As ecumenical patriarch, he sought to consolidate the prestige and expand the influence of the Patriarchate of Constantinople beyond the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire and throughout the broader Orthodox world. Despite his pivotal role in shaping the religious landscape of his time, Kokkinos’s theological and literary legacy has remained in the shadow of other major figures of fourteenth-century Byzantium, most notably Saint Gregory Palamas, the hesychast theologian and metropolitan of Thessaloniki. Surprisingly, his complex and extensive oeuvre has not yet been the subject of a comprehensive monograph that would capture the richness of his theological and literary contributions. The absence of such a study has led to a partial and often fragmented understanding of his role, works, and significance. This dissertation thus aims to address this gap by offering a rigorous, synthetic, and contextually grounded assessment of the life, works, and legacy of Philotheos Kokkinos—intended as a foundational step toward a comprehensive monograph dedicated to this key figure of late Byzantium.

The dissertation is structured in two complementary parts, preceded by a substantial introduction that situates Philotheos Kokkinos within the complex historical framework of fourteenth-century Byzantium – a period marked by major political, social, and religious crises, but also by a remarkable cultural effervescence. The introduction critically assesses the current state of scholarship on Kokkinos and argues for the urgent need to produce a comprehensive monograph dedicated to this pivotal figure of late Byzantium. It also outlines key terminological clarifications, defines the scope and limitations of the present research, and explains the interdisciplinary methodology employed (including historical, theological, and

philological analysis, Greek palaeography, and textual criticism), as well as the structure of the dissertation.

The first part of the dissertation – *The Life, Ecclesiastical Career, and Recognition of Philotheos Kokkinos as a Saint* – offers a contextualized reconstruction of the biography of this key figure of late Byzantium, based on a critical examination of Kokkinos's own writings (particularly hagiographic, liturgical, and devotional texts), in conjunction with contemporary sources, including previously unpublished material preserved in manuscripts. The accusations leveled by theological adversaries such as Nikephoros Gregoras and Prochoros Kydones – alleging Jewish ancestry or insufficient theological education – are critically analyzed and situated within the polemical dynamics of the period's doctrinal disputes. The biographical narrative begins with Kokkinos's education under the renowned rhetorician Thomas Magistros, followed by his entry into monastic life at the Monastery of Chortaïtes, near his native city of Thessaloniki. Around 1328, he settled on Mount Athos, where he underwent a dual phase of spiritual apprenticeship – first at Vatopedi under the guidance of Sava (Tziskos) the Younger, and later near the Great Lavra, under the direction of Germanos Maroules.

Philotheos Kokkinos's ecclesiastical career was impressive: he was appointed abbot of the Monastery of Philokalles in Thessaloniki, and subsequently of the Great Lavra on Athos. During this period, he also began to distinguish himself as a gifted theologian, composing – at the request of Gregory Palamas – his two *Dogmatic Treatises against Akindynos on the Tabor Light*, a major contribution to the defence of hesychast theology. In 1347, he was appointed Metropolitan of Herakleia in Thrace by the newly elected Patriarch Isidore Boucheiras. In this capacity, Philotheos Kokkinos played an active role in the hesychast synod of May-August 1351, composing the synodal *Tomos*, a foundational document that affirmed Palamite theology as official doctrine. Later that same year, his metropolitan see was captured by Genoese forces, prompting Kokkinos to intervene on behalf of the local community by mobilizing financial support from the inhabitants of Constantinople to secure the release of captives.

Philotheos Kokkinos's two patriarchal tenures – separated by a period of withdrawal to the Monastery of Jesus Christ the Incomprehensible (*Akatalēptos*) – are examined in detail. His first term (1353–1354/5) was marked by political and ecclesiastical tensions that ultimately led to his deposition. His second tenure (1364–1376) was considerably more stable and productive, characterized by efforts to strengthen the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in relation to the other Orthodox Churches, the active promotion of hesychast theology, the reorganization of ecclesiastical administration, as well as the reinforcement of clerical discipline. A defining moment of this second patriarchate was the hesychast synod of April 1368, presided over by

Kokkinos, which condemned the anti-hesychast positions of Prochoros Kydones and officially introduced Gregory Palamas's name in the calendar of the Great Church of Constantinople, Hagia Sophia. During this period, Kokkinos also played a central role in the dissemination of his own writings, overseeing an ample project of textual transmission through the editing and copying of his works in manuscript form – a process carried out in close collaboration with professional scribes, particularly those affiliated with the patriarchal chancery. Finally, the first part of this dissertation offers an account of the final years of Kokkinos's life and his implicit canonization, formally affirmed by the composition of a liturgical service in his honor during the tenure of the hesychast patriarch Neilos Kerameus.

The second part of the dissertation – *The Literary Activity of Philotheos Kokkinos* – presents a comprehensive and systematic analysis of his oeuvre, which positions him as one of the most prolific and influential Byzantine authors of the fourteenth century. His writings are thematically grouped into five major categories: dogmatic and polemical works; hagiographic writings; homilies and orations; liturgical and hymnographic compositions; and prayers. Each work is examined in a dedicated section, with particular attention to theological content, the historical context of composition, manuscript tradition, and the state of scholarly research, including available critical editions and modern translations.

Philotheos Kokkinos's dogmatic writings include some of the most significant texts within the “dossier” for the defense, affirmation, and official sanctioning of hesychast theology, most notably, the synodal *Tomoi* of 1351 and 1368. These are complemented by Kokkinos's 15 *Antirrhetics against Nikephoros Gregoras*, as well as other important texts, some of which remain unpublished, such as the letter addressed to a certain Petriotes. This dogmatic corpus reflects not only the author's erudition and theological acumen, but also his deep familiarity with the patristic tradition.

In the field of hagiography, Kokkinos stands out as the most prolific author of saints' lives in fourteenth-century Byzantium. His works include both *metaphraseis* of saints from the early Christian period (Demetrios the Myrrh-Streamer, Anysia, Febronia of Nisibis, Phokas of Sinope, and Onouphrios) and biographies of contemporary saints, particularly those associated with the hesychast controversy. Among those he extolled are his own spiritual mentors – Sava (Tziskos) the Younger and Germanos Maroules – as well as major ecclesiastical figures such as Isidore Boucheiras and Gregory Palamas. These texts are examined not only for their theological content but also as rhetorical and ideological instruments employed to legitimize a new spiritual paradigm centered on hesychast theology and experience.

The section devoted to Kokkinos's homiletic writings highlights the complexity and versatility of his preaching, which he skillfully adapted to various contexts and audiences. His homilies, marked by theological density and rhetorical sophistication, were addressed to members of the imperial elite (e.g., Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos and his daughter Helena Kantakouzene Palaiologina), bishops, and monastic communities alike. The structure of his sermons is supported by a rich intertextual fabric that weaves together scriptural and patristic quotations, occasionally supplemented by classical references, thus lending the homilies both theological authority and stylistic balance. Particularly significant is the autobiographical dimension present in some of his works – most notably the *Logos historikos* composed after the Genoese conquest of Herakleia in Thrace – which combines a dramatic account of the event with a personal and theological justification of his absence from the city during the siege.

Kokkinos's liturgical and hymnographic writings reflect a profound engagement with the renewal of Byzantine liturgical life, inspired by the hesychast movement. His *Diataxis of the Divine Liturgy*, likely composed during his tenure as abbot of the Great Lavra on Athos, marks a significant stage in the codification of the Eucharistic rite, influencing both subsequent Byzantine practice and the Slavic liturgical tradition. With regards to hymnography, Philotheos stands out for his creativity and doctrinal depth, as exemplified by a remarkable hymn in honor of the Theotokos, structured as a dialogue in a reversed alphabetical acrostic – an eloquent testament to his literary refinement and deep Marian devotion.

A distinct section of the analysis is devoted to the prayers composed by Philotheos Kokkinos – a corpus that, until recently, remained largely unexplored. The author produced an impressive number of prayers for a wide range of occasions and needs, notable both for their thematic variety (for instance, prayers for drought, plague, earthquakes, invasions) and for their documentary value, offering unique insights into the multiple crises that afflicted fourteenth-century Byzantium. Some of these prayers are associated with key moments in Kokkinos's ecclesiastical career – such as his consecration as metropolitan in 1347 – while others circulated widely and were adapted in later contexts, including within the Slavic liturgical tradition.

The final section is dedicated to Philotheos Kokkinos's editorial activity, examining his involvement in the collection, editing, copying, and dissemination of his own writings. During his second patriarchate, Kokkinos initiated an ample editorial project, collaborating with professional scribes – particularly those affiliated with the patriarchal chancery, such as John Chrysokephalos Holobolos, Demetrios Gemistos, Malachias, and Manuel Tzykandyles – and personally overseeing the production of “author's editions.” Manuscripts preserved today in Moscow (*GIM Bibl. Synod. gr.* 349) and Venice (*Marcianus gr.* Z 582) contain numerous

autograph interventions – corrections, additions, marginal notes, etc. – that attest to Kokkinos’s meticulous supervision of the transmission of his texts. These aspects are documented in the appendices of the dissertation, based on careful philological and palaeographical examination.

The dissertation concludes with a general synthesis of the main findings, highlighting the significance of Philotheos Kokkinos not only in the ecclesiastical, political, and theological landscape of fourteenth-century Byzantium, but also in the enduring legacy of the Orthodox tradition up to the present. His literary, theological, and liturgical legacy establishes him as one of the defining figures of late-Byzantine spirituality – a true architect of hesychast memory and a model of intellectual and ecclesiastical authority.

The present dissertation opens several promising avenues for future research, aimed at deepening our understanding of lesser-studied aspects of Kokkinos’s biography, oeuvre, and influence. Given the intricate theological fabric of his texts and their dense intertextuality – marked by extensive engagement with the patristic tradition – a critical edition of his complete works is both necessary and urgent, accompanied by a thorough philological, theological, and historical analysis. In particular, his hymnographic corpus – still largely unexplored – warrants systematic scholarly attention through critical editions, translations, and commentary. Also, a detailed and comparative study of Kokkinos’s *metaphraseis* alongside those of contemporaries such as Nikephoros Gregoras could enhance our understanding of how earlier hagiographical works were re-written through theological, political, and social lenses. Furthermore, a detailed mapping of the scribes with whom Kokkinos collaborated would shed light on the mechanisms of textual transmission, both of his writings and of the broader theological corpus generated in the context of the hesychast debates. Finally, the official inclusion of Philotheos Kokkinos’s name in the liturgical calendar of the Romanian Orthodox Church would represent more than a symbolic act of restoring historical memory; it would serve as a powerful reaffirmation of the enduring connection between Byzantine heritage and Romanian spiritual identity. In this light, Philotheos Kokkinos stands out as a figure worthy of renewed attention and veneration – a compelling model of erudition, theological insight, and faithful ecclesial leadership for our own time.

KEYWORDS

Philotheos Kokkinos, Late Byzantium, Constantinople, ecumenical patriarch, Thessaloniki, Thracian Herakleia, Gregory Palamas, Isidore Boucheiras, Hesychast Controversy, Byzantine history, theology, hagiography, hymnography, prayers, manuscripts, textual criticism

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