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DUNGAL'S "RESPONSA CONTRA CLAUDIUM": A NINTH-CENTURY VOICE IN DEFENCE OF THE HOLY CROSS AND ICONS

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СЪЧИНЕНИЕТО „RESPONSA CONTRA CLAUDIUM“ НА ДАНГЪЛ: ГЛАС ОТ ДЕВЕТИ ВЕК В ЗАЩИТА НА СВЕТИТЕ КРЪСТ И ИКОНИ

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Abstract: This paper looks at the Christian Image debate in the ninth-century West. It examines the arguments that the celebrated Irish recluse and scholar Dungal put forward in response to the radical iconoclastic ideas of Claudius of Turin against the Holy Cross and Icons. There are echoes of Dungal's argumentation in the writings of later authors, such as Jonas of Orléans and Walafrid Strabo.

Key words: Carolingians, Iconoclasm, Image veneration

Резюме: Статията разглежда проблема за християнския образ (св. икони) през девети век на Запад и по-конкретно аргументите на известния ирландски монах и учен Дангъл в отговор на епископ Клавдиевото отрицание на светите Кръст и икони. Ехото от Дангълвите защитни аргументи може лесно да се проследи в текстовете на по-късни автори като архиепископ Йонас от Орлеан и Валафрид Страбо.

Ключови думи: Каролинги, иконоборство, иконопочитание

The discussion about the Christian image (Icons) extends beyond the Byzantine *oecumene*. However, while in the eighth-century West there was a predominately positive attitude towards the icons, at the turn of the same century and throughout the ninth century, a different tendency was to be observed. In fact, the issue of image veneration is a significant aspect of the kaleidoscopic history of the eighth-ninth century. Also, the text, best known as *Opus Caroli regis contra Synodum*¹, is one of the basic sources dealing with this subject. A reason for the composition of such a piece of writing might be the fact that the Carolingian period follows the so-called Dark Ages [Otten, W. 1997, p. 7], after which the Carolingians started to consider themselves responsible for the unity and welfare of the Church. Although *Opus Caroli* (in short *Libri Carolini*) turned out to be unacceptable in the West and even Pope Hadrian I “pigeon-holed” this book, it appears to highlight the Franks' theological claims, adamantly describing the iconophile position in eighth-century Byzantium as a threat for the entire Catholic church. In other words, as Thomas F. X. Noble puts it, the argument of *Libri Carolini* is as follows: “Abraham was a Frank, and David was a Carolingian”; that is why, “God in Heaven rules the world and his agent on the Earth is Charlemagne.” [Noble, T. 1995, p. 249].

As a matter of fact, reflections of *Libri Carolini* can also be traced in the ninth century, when some Western theologians continued the onslaught against the Holy Icons. Then, it was the Irishman Dungal who appeared on the historical stage through his exposition on image veneration and his rebuttal of the extreme

¹ See Freeman, A. 1998; cf. Mitalaitė, K. 2007, pp. 21-40, for an overview of the text rationale and structure.

iconoclastic position of Bishop Claudius of Turin. In this paper, therefore, some observations on Dungal's *Responsa*² against Claudius will be presented and they will be discussed in parallel with Claudius's *Apologeticum*³ to Abbot Theodemir.

In his work Claudius addresses several issues and those of them that bear on the Holy Cross and Icons are of particular relevance to the subject of the present paper; therefore, they will be considered in detail. Having been elected Bishop of Turin, Claudius had to face customs that terrified him: "I found all churches filled, in defiance of the precept of truth, with those sluttish abominations – images."⁴ He further asserted that the roots for his clearly negative position towards the image were to be found in the Old Testament [*Exodus* 20: 4, *Deuteronomy* 5: 8 and *Leviticus* 26: 1]. This fact takes us to the *locus classicus* in the debate on the Christian image – the *Second Commandment*.⁵ Also, in the act of image veneration, he could recognise the long-abandoned cult of demons and self-humiliation in front of false images [*Apologeticum*, §§ 8, 12 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 277, 279)]. This reasoning is not new and, as mentioned earlier, it is an argument characteristic of the iconoclastic view against the Holy Icons. There is also little doubt that Claudius' behaviour is influenced by *Libri Carolini*, whose authorship is actually attributed to the Archbishop of Orléans, Theodulf⁶. In addition, it is important to note that *Libri Carolini*, divided into four books, denounces not only the Niceae Council (787), which promulgated the veneration of icons, but also the Council of Hieria (754), which rejected icon veneration on idolatrous grounds. In other words, in *Libri Carolini* we see a "middle course of accepting the presence of images in the churches but rejecting their adoration which Theodulf sets out to defend." [Otten, W. 1997, p. 12, esp. note 20].

Interestingly, the Old Testament *Second Commandment* appears to be persistently exploited in the West in the age of Carolingian theology although a pleiad of eighth-century iconophiles, such as Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople, Pope Gregory II, John of Damascus⁷ and the ninth-century theologians Theodore of Studium and Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople, rejected its validity with respect to images. In his *Responsa* Dungal refuted such an argument pointing out that images in God's honour are allowed, but not other idols: "It is in fact forbidden to have images which are made not to divine honour, but to somebody else's, that is not to the Creator's, as is wrongly stated in the letter, but to the honour of a creature." [*Responsa*, § 38 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 27)]. Dungal's assertions can be attributed to a recurring tradition that existed as early as in the eighth century, and to a trend that renders the Old Testament's "no" as "whatever" (unworthy). It is in fact an apologetic device that was implicitly used by Germanus of Constantinople and explicitly employed by Pope Gregory II, St John of Damascus, Elder George of Cyprus and St Theodore of Studium [see Velikov, Y. 2005, p. 48 – 49]. Similar textual parallels between the Irish recluse and the Church Fathers mentioned earlier as well as the framework for the development of the argumentation flow can be traced in Dungal's quotations from *Exodus* and *Numbers*: "not only God didn't forbid images, but even ordered that they should be made" [*Responsa*, § 19 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 27), §§ 20 – 21 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 29)]. In his criticism, in *Responsa*, Dungal includes arguments exposing Claudius in mishandling the Latin. In other words, he is considered a person with insufficient knowledge of Latin and the nature of the Icons; thus, he is referred to as an unreliable speaker:

² The full title is as follows: *Responsa Contra Perversas Claudii Tauronensis Episcopi Sententias* [PL, t. 105, 465 – 530 A] (from now on: *Responsa*).

³ For a more thorough treatment of the work entitled *Apologeticum atque rescriptum Claudii episcopii adversus Theutmirum abbatem* [PL, t. 105, 459 D – 464 D], see my paper: Velikov, Y. 2010, pp. 349 – 354.

⁴ *Apologeticum*, § 4, cited from Zanna's new edition: Zanna, P. 2002, p. 275.

⁵ *Apologeticum*, § 5 [Zanna, P. 2002, p. 275]; see also §§ 10 – 11 [Zanna, P. 2002, p. 277].

⁶ On the authorship, see Freeman, A. 2003, pp. 17 – 52; Meyvaert, P. 1979, pp. 29 – 57, and Wallach, L. 1959, who ascribes the authorship to Alcuin.

⁷ See Velikov, Y. 2011, pp. 57 – 209 (in Bulgarian). In personal communication with Professor Thomas Noble (University of Notre Dame, US), I had the chance to discuss the issue with him and to note that he is not correct in claiming that "Christological defense of images, or of deriving Christological perspectives from the existence of images... was done for the first time in the eighth century by John of Damascus [Noble, T. 2009, p. 377, n. 77]. This, in fact, happens earlier and it is Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople (*De haeresibus et Synodis, Epistola ad Joannem, Epistola ad Thomam*), who for the first time uses a *Christological* defence, together with *Apophatic*, *Cataphatic* arguments in defence of the Holy Icons [S.P.N. Germani archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani, Opera omnia. – PG, t. 98, 80 A, 157 BD, 173 B]. See Velikov, Y. 2011, pp. 57 – 101.

“One rather ought to question the boastful speaker... while he himself, in some odd way, as some lethargic person filled almost all his speech with contradictory claims, undermining one another.” [*Responsa*, § 42 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 29)].

Claudius showed no awareness of the different attitudes towards God, on the one hand, and towards the Saints, the angels and the Holy Cross, on the other [*Responsa*, § 84 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 63)] and “ignoring his misuse of words... he attacks Christians [in the Latin version *secundum Apostolum*] exceedingly not understanding either what he reads or what he is talking about.”⁸

Claudius’s negative thinking about the Holy Icons also led to his unfavourable position on the veneration of the Holy Cross. Such a radical view against the Cross was actually not to be found among the “official” eighth- and ninth-century iconoclasts in the East⁹. Moreover, it is hardly possible to attribute his opinion to the influence of *Libri Carolini*. This is so, mainly because Theodulf’s work shows a favourable attitude to the Cross [Freeman, A. 2003, p. 168] while Claudius considered the veneration of the Holy Cross as a “false religion”, and the iconophile practice as contradicting the Apostolic writings [*Apologeticum*, § 13 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 279)]. Hence, the Bishop of Turin rejected the relation between Christ’s resurrection and the veneration that the iconophiles paid to the *topos* where Death was defeated: “If they [the iconophiles] wish to adore all wood fashioned in the shape of a cross because Christ hung on a cross, then it is fitting for them to adore many other things which Christ did in flesh.” [*Apologeticum*, § 15 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 279)]. “Virgins,” “ships,” “lamb,” even “donkeys,” “bush thorns” and “spears” [*Apologeticum*, § 15 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 281 – 283)] are among the items that, if we follow the iconophile thinking, should have been the objects of even stronger veneration than the Holy Cross. This opinion could hardly be defined as an “exaggerated hyperbole”, as Paolo Zana has called it [Zanna, P. 2002, p. XC], but is rather a kind of reasoning that is adopted as a model probably from *Libri Carolini* (and it cannot be regarded, therefore, as Claudius’s unique invention), where it exists for the same reasons mentioned by the Iconoclast: “against the fools we are compelled to propose foolish things, and against stony hearts to hurl, not verbal arrows and sentiments, but stony blows.”¹⁰ In other words, the nonsensical list of objects to be venerated is only comparable to the absurd attitude of the “false iconophiles” towards the Cross:

“You who crucify the Son of God anew and hold him up for display and thereby cause the souls of wretched ones in disordered masses to become partners of demons. Estranging them through the impious sacrilege of idols, you cause them to be cast away by their own Creator and thrown into eternal damnation.” [*Apologeticum*, § 17 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 283)].

The iconophiles’ veneration, Claudius candidly continued, is nothing but twisting the Savior’s words: “God commanded them to bear the Cross, not to adore it. They wish to adore what they are spiritually or corporally unwilling to bear.” [*Apologeticum*, § 18 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 283)].

These arguments against the Holy Cross are the object of Dungal’s rebuke, where he rightly emphasizes that Claudius “hardly considers the power of the Cross of Salvation through which life is restored for the humankind who died by eating the enjoyable fruit of the forbidden tree” [*Responsa*, § 79a (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 59)]. Furthermore, Claudius’s *trampling* on the Cross is not characteristic of Western theology as a whole, which, according to Dungal, following St Paul the Apostle, Blessed Jerome of Stridona and Augustine of Hippo, among others, is centred around the praise of the Holy Cross as a glorious tool of Salvation and as the core of Christian belief.¹¹ In addition, Dungal’s citations of *Carmina Pange Lingua* and *Virtus celsa crucis* by Fortunatus [*Responsa*, §§ 79 – 80], and *Apotheosis* by Prudentius [*Responsa*, §§ 100 – 100a], as well as

⁸ *Responsa*, § 78 (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 59). It should be noted that the meaning of the terms “*adoratio*” and “*veneratio*” and their distinction was the subject of many theological debates both during the first and the second iconoclastic period in the East.

⁹ See *infra*.

¹⁰ *Apologeticum*, § 16, (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 283). *Libri Carolini* reveals a similar thinking (LC, c. IV 21, A fol. 228 v [11] to A fol. 229 r [36]; Freeman, A. 1998, p. 540); see also Freeman, A. 2003, p. 164 – 165.

¹¹ *Responsa*, § 79 a (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 59); see quotations from St Paul and Blessed Jerome (§§ 62 – 73) and Blessed Augustine (§ 142).

of such authors like Sedulius and Paulinus [*Responsa*, §§ 106 – 107] aggravates the apologetic accusation of Claudius's iconoclasm. Furthermore, the fact that Dungal heavily draws upon Western authors could be explained by his desire to neutralise the arguments already presented by Claudius in his efforts to condemn the veneration of the Holy Cross.¹²

It is important to note that *prima facie* Claudius's violent rejection of the Holy Cross does not seem to have its counterpart in the eighth- and ninth-century iconoclastic East¹³ and it is not inspired by *Libri Carolini* where the praise of the Cross is very much the same as in the „official” Eastern iconoclastic tradition.¹⁴ For instance, Theodulf expressed a negative attitude towards the Holy Icons, but he placed the Cross “among all these things, holy and mighty and ordained by God before Creation, the essential means of Salvation.” [Freeman, A. 2003, p. 168; see also Chazelle, C. 1986, p. 165; Dales, D. 2013, p. 54]. On the other hand, it would not be correct to consider Claudius' teaching as a single deviation. Clearly, the position of the Bishop of Turin unambiguously points to the conclusion that *iconoclasm eventually evolves into rejection of the Holy Cross*. This is particularly evident in the dispute described in the East in *Nouthesia* (*Νουθεσία γέροντος περί τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων*) and associated with the name of Elder George of Cyprus¹⁵. According to this text, the Elder was having a debate with Bishop Kosmas, the latter adhering to image prohibition as mandated by the Old Testament. Kosmas' arguments reveal a person who has undergone (earlier than Claudius of Turin on the West) an evolution in his iconoclasm towards the rejection of the Holy Cross on the grounds that it has been “made by hand”¹⁶. To this claim the Elder George of Cyprus offers extensive counter-arguments¹⁷.

An important component of Dungal's apologetic argumentation is the use of the Old Testament's foreshadowing of the Cross [*Responsa*, § 118], while the patristic exegesis has been sought as an unrefutable authority even for Claudius himself. The prophetic vision of the Cross by Isaiah and Ezechiel [*Responsa*, §§ 129 – 130; § 132, § 135], its allegorical interpretation in St Paul,¹⁸ as well as the record of epigrams and poems on the crosses by Paulinus of Nola [*Responsa*, §§ 160 – 167] – all of these, as Dungal pleaded, lead us to the conclusion that Claudius is a “perverse waster”: “It is most evident then that he can be said to be a most perverse waster and subverting enemy of the universal [Catholic] faith.” [*Responsa*, § 82s (Zanna, P. 2002, p. 63)].

By way of conclusion, it can be noted that Dungal's treatise, briefly presented and discussed here, can be regarded as a typical example of the genre of *Responsa*.¹⁹ The author's profound knowledge not only

¹² Prudentius is a good example in this respect and his treatise *Contra Symmachum* was mentioned by Theodulf. According to Ann Freeman, this passage can be seen as a prototype and model for the tone and much of the argument of the *Libri Carolini* [Freeman, A. 2003, p. 177].

¹³ Among other examples on the matter, the eighth- and ninth-century Byzantine emperors' correspondence is of high interest. Byzantine Emperor Leo III, for example, guarded the Holy Cross [Chahnazarian, G. 1856, p. 88; Jeffery, A. 1944, p. 322], alongside with Emperors Michael II and Theophilus in their letters to Louis the Pious, stating their accusations against the iconophiles for having replaced crosses with icons [Moorhead, J. 1985, p. 168]. Moreover, the Image of a Cross appears on Leo III's silver *miliaresion* [Breckenridge, J. 1972, p. 5]. Obviously in the next century, iconoclasts exalted both the idea and the representations of the Cross [Gero, S. 1973, pp. 16, 30 (n. 80)] which even forced St Nicephorus of Constantinople, in his *Third Antirrheticus*, to give evidence in favour of the holy icons over the priority given to the Cross by the iconoclasts [Parry, K. 1996, pp. 187 – 188].

¹⁴ Gero, S. 1973, p. 17; also compare with *Libri Carolini* [LC, c. II, 28; Freeman, A. 1998, pp. 296 – 300].

¹⁵ *Nouthesia* (*Νουθεσία*) or *The Admonition of the Elder Concerning the Holy Images*, published by B. M. Melioranski, elaborates on *vis-à-vis* dispute between the Elder George of Cyprus and Bishop Kosmas [Мелиоранский, Б. 1901, pp. V – XXXIX]. *Νουθεσία γέροντος περί τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων* cited according to this edition (from now on: *Νουθεσία*).

¹⁶ “Καὶ μετ' ὀλίγα περί τοῦ σταυροῦ λέγει.” τὸ δὲ χειροποίητον ἐπικατάρατον αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ ποιήσας αὐτό.” [Мелиоранский, Б. 1901, p. XVI (ē. 151ā)].

¹⁷ Мелиоранский, Б. 1901, pp. XVI – XVII (ē. 151ā). The rejection of the Holy Cross is a potential component of the iconoclastic thought and actions; in other words, *iconoclasm in its final form of development inevitably leads to the rejection of the Cross* [see Velikov, Y. 2013 a, pp. 233 – 242 (in Bulgarian)].

¹⁸ *Responsa*, § 140. Probably in his interpretation (§ 142) Dungal alludes to Blessed Augustine's exposition on St Paul's symbolic understanding of the Holy Cross (about Augustine's explanation see Ladner, G. 1983, pp. 197 – 208).

¹⁹ On the genre typology of *Responsa*, see Zanna, P. 2002, pp. CV – CVII. In his study, Paolo Zanna also puts forward the idea that Dungal's argumentation reveals some scholastic elements.

of Virgil but also of other classical authors and his exceptional command of the Latin language, acquired in the court libraries of Charlemagne and his successor Louis the Pious,²⁰ undoubtedly had refined his writing style and rhetoric. Furthermore, Dungal's patristic reading of Paulinus, Prudentius, Fortunatus, Blessed Jerome and Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom, on the one hand,²¹ as well as the arguments borrowed from the eighth-century iconophiles like Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople, John of Damascus, contribute to the density of iconophile evidence in his work. Thus, Dungal's *Responsa* discloses a distinct *Orthodox model* of argumentation in defence of the Holy Icons. In addition, his refutation of iconoclasm can be seen as closely linked to the traditional line of icon veneration in the West that was earlier pursued by Popes Gregory II, Gregory III, Stephen III and Hadrian I and later by Archbishop Jonas of Orléans.

This paper is hence concerned with a theologian, who led the life of a solitary monk while also making great progress in astronomy.²² Being clear-sighted, he was well aware of the dogmatic and liturgical challenges brought by Claudius's iconoclasm. Dungal's work, in fact, reveals Claudius as a Bishop, who in between his fights in the crusades against the Moors and his assiduous theological activities,²³ eventually became a perfectly accomplished Iconoclast – a *σταυροπάτης*.

In contrast to Dungal's immediate response, Jonas of Orléans' writing (*De cultu imaginum*²⁴), condemning Claudius' teaching against the Holy Cross and Icons, came years later after his death. Claudius of Turin disturbing influence on the West was to be felt for a long time, which is the reason why Walafridus Strabo (*Libellus de exordiis et incrementis quarundam in observationibus ecclesiasticis rerum*)²⁵ also produced a published his condemnation of the Bishop of Turin position. The chapter *De imaginibus et picturis* (Caput VIII)²⁶ deals with the debate about the Holy Cross and Icons, though, it should be pointed out, it is not as profound in its depth as the iconophile writings in the East [See Velikov, Y. 2013 b, pp. 309 – 313 (in Bulgarian)].

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²⁰ The writings of Lucan, Terence, Tibullus, Horace and Cicero and many others obviously circulated in the Franks' court [Brown, G. 1994, p. 33] along with those of Pliny and Seneca, as some palaeographic studies pointed out [Bischoff, B. 1994, pp. 56–75, 76–92]. Probably Dungal used some of them in his "Pavian studium" [Ferrari, M. 1972, p. 36].

²¹ For numbered quotations, see Zanna, P. 2002, p. CVIII–CIX.

²² *Epistola De Duplici Solis Eclipsi Anno 810. Ad Carolum Magnum* [PL, t. 105, 447–458 C].

²³ See Bibliography of Claudius's works in Migne's edition [PL, t. 104, 609 C–928 A]. Aspects of Claudius's writings have been discussed by Cavadini J. 1986, pp. 43–50; Wemple, S. 1974, pp. 222–237; Gorman, M. 1997, pp. 279–329, Italiani, G. 1979, among others. See also Claudius of Turin. Introduction. . . , pp. 214–215, 217.

²⁴ *De cultu imaginum libri tres* (Jonas Aureliensis episcopus) (Gregorii IV, Sergii II, pontificum Romanorum, Jonae, Freculphi, Frotharii, Aurelianusensis, Lexoviensis et Tullensis episcoporum, Opera omnia; PL, t. 106, 305 B–388 A).

²⁵ Information about the author see in Harting-Correa, A. 1996, pp. 6–12.

²⁶ *Walafridi Strabonis, Libellus de exordiis et incrementis quarundam in observationibus ecclesiasticis rerum (Capitularia Regum Francorum (tomi II, pars secunda), in MGH, Legum sectio II, 475 (9)–516 (25))*.

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Abbreviations:

Apologeticum – Apologeticum atque rescriptum Claudii episcopii adversus Theutmirum abbatem.

Claudius of Turin. Introduction... – Claudius of Turin. Introduction. – In: Early Medieval Theology [The Library of Christian Classics, 9]. Edited by George McCracken. London: SCM Press, 1957.

LC – Libri Carolini [= Opus Caroli regis contra Synodum].

MGH, Legum sectio, II – Victor Krause (eds), Monumenta Germaniae Historica Legum sectio, II. Hannoverae: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1897.

Νουθεσία – Νουθεσία γέροντος περὶ τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων.

PG – Patrologia graeca cursus completus (Migne).

PL – Patrologia latina cursus completus (Migne).

Responsa – Responsa Contra Perversas Claudii Tauronensis Episcopi Sententias.