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NIKETAS CHONIATES VERSUS MANUEL I KOMNENOS: DISPUTES CONCERNING ISLAM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BYZANTINE TRADITION

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НИКИТА ХОНИАТ СРЕЩУ МАНУИЛ I КОМНИН: ПОЛЕМИКА, СВЪРЗАНА С ИСЛЯМА, В КОНТЕКСТА НА ВИЗАНТИЙСКАТА ТРАДИЦИЯ

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Abstract: Byzantine society had very complex relations with the Islamic Eastern neighbors. Islam, to be sure, started and continued to be a menace for Byzantium for the all long eighth centuries they used to coexist. However, Byzantine society needed a certain period of time to accept Islam as another religion, standing against Christianity in the East. After the first Byzantine revenge acts against Judaism a long tradition was formed with two main streams. The first of them envisaged Islam as a demoniac pseudo-religion (or anti-religion), the second being milder and ready to accept the Islamic neighbors not as a whole, but rather as different states, culturally not so different from Byzantium, with diplomacy playing a role for keeping balance in the East. Thus, the Byzantine *Realpolitik* appeared as a phenomenon, what provoked crusaders to accuse Byzantium as being traitor to the Christian cause in the East.

In that context should we pose the interesting incident at the end of Manuel I Komnenos' reign (1143 – 1180). Both Church and society were provoked by the decision of the Emperor to lift up the anathemas against Allah from the trivial ritual of denouncing Islam. This formula was used generally by Muslims who converted to Christianity for whatever reason. Manuel sent twice *tomoi* for approval, provoking no less than an angry reaction in the Church and society. Thus, two main concepts made a stand against each other, a more traditional one and another, more practical, political, if not to say tolerant. For Manuel and his followers, who were not missing, as we know from Choniates, the doctrine of Muhammad was just a deviation, untrue enough, of the unified Biblical tradition implying, anyhow, the existence of one and only God, Creator of the world. His opponents, Choniates being definitely among them, refused even to listen to such an interpretation. This radically harsh view on Islam corresponded with the anathemas against Islam in Choniates' *Treasure of Orthodoxy*. Although in that particular case Choniates took side with the traditional opposition against the Emperor, in his *History* he used to be more delicate observer of Muslims, especially when comparing them with the Latins who became “champions” of his wrath.

Key words: Bizantium, Niketas Choniates, Islam, polemic

Резюме: Византия демонстрира сложни и нееднозначни отношения с ислямския свят. Със сигурност ислямът е проблем за империята от появата си през VII век до края на съществуването на Византия, рухнала под ударите на османските турци. Византийското общество обаче не възприема лесно исляма като отделна религия, а често като крайна проарианска ерес или пък като продължение на юдаизма. С течение на времето се оформят две основни течения в зависимост от отношението към исляма: едни го възприемат като демонична псевдорелигия, продукт на Сатаната, докато други са склонни да разглеждат Близкия изток като палитра от държави с различни интереси, не чак толкова различни от Византия в културно отношение, за които ислямът е спойка, но не чак толкова доминиращ фактор в отношенията с християнската империя. Така се ражда традицията на византийската *реална политика*, която ще доведе до това Византия да бъде възприемана като предател на християнската кауза от страна на кръстоносците.

В този контекст е разгледан и опитът на император Мануил I Комнин (1143 – 1180) в края на своето управление (вероятно през 1179 г.) да облекчи формулата за преминаване от исляма към християнството. Този вид апостасии не

са рядкост в онази епоха, въпреки тенденцията да се фокусираме върху обратния процес. Формулата е сложна, дълга и до голяма степен унизителна. Аргументът на императора е, че наред с анатемите срещу Мохамед се предполага и отказване от лъжливия бог на мюсюлманите, а това е Богът на Стария Завет, т.е. нашият Бог. Да се хули Бог е повече от несъстоятелно, е тезата на Мануил, който застава зад идеята, че ислямът следва, макар и в силно изкривен вид, старозаветните верски традиции. Църковният и обществен елит обаче в голяма степен се противопоставя на решението на императора, като особено остри и категорични са патриархът Теодосий Ворадиот, солунският митрополит Евстатий и историкът Никита Хониат, който е описал подробно този инцидент.

Така в ромейското общество се изправят една срещу друга две тенденции при възприемането на исляма: едната е по-радикална и враждебна, разглеждаща исляма като едва ли не сатанинско учение, лишено от всякаква духовност; другата е по-мека и толерантна, склонна да построи мост към ислямския свят. Византийската дипломация има опит в това отношение, като умее да разделя религиозното противопоставяне от практическата политика на Изток. Любопитното в разказа на Хониат е това, че той следва до голяма степен инвективите срещу исляма, каквито ги познаваме от един фрагмент на неговата *Съкровищница на православието*. От друга страна, в различен контекст в своята *История* Никита Хониат умее да изразява съпричастност към мюсюлманите, особено в сравнение с *латинците*, които се превръщат в дежурния обект на неговата критика.

Ключови думи: Византия, Никита Хониат, ислям, полемика

There was an interesting incident at the end of Manuel Komnenos' reign (1143 – 1180). Both Church and society were provoked by the decision of the Emperor to lift up the anathemas against Allah from the trivial ritual of denouncing Islam. This formula was used generally by Muslims who converted to Christianity for whatever reason. Procedure was rather burdensome and in a sense humiliating. On the other side, Christianity was option for Muslims from Asia Minor, although it was not as intensive as the opposite process of Islamization. John Axouch, the great *domestikos* and father of the *protospatharios* Alexios Axouch, had very likely passed the procedure, being Turk and originally Muslim himself. Thus, what was the background of Manuel I step towards 'liberalization' of the formula and why it received so stubborn reaction against by many in the society, including the leaders of the Church and the historian Niketas Choniates himself? How this acute debate between two main parties could be placed in the context of the Byzantine polemical tradition?

The Byzantines clashed with the Arabic onslaught as early as the 7th century. This was not only military collision, but also an ideological one with the aggressive, although not quite doctrinally clarified, early Islam. The Byzantine Empire had to fight for its very existence during the next century and a half, facing the religious enthusiasm and the vitality typical for such young political formations [Kaegi, W. 1992]. The religious and ideological stand of the Byzantines *vis-a-vis* the Islamic enemy was not as clear and evident as we would probably expect. It is difficult to say if the ideological conflict with Sassanian Persia had exhausted the Byzantine society just to the extent of accepting the new menace with depletion and fatality. For the Byzantines, anyway, it continued to be rather a war against the Saracens they used to know from the pre-Islamic period, with religious zeal and antagonism not so strongly permeating historical texts. For Theophanes and Patriarch Nikephoros the enemies were the same Saracens that Romans used to know well, keeping towards them more than ambiguous attitude since at least the 4th century onwards. Syrian historical writings from the 8th century looked at the conquest as a disaster, but continued to accept the invaders as Arabs, not Muslims, the rule of the Khalifs being just a continuation of that of the Roman/Byzantine Emperors [van Ginkel, J. J. in Grypeou, E., Swanson, M. N., Thomas, D. 2006, pp. 171 – 184]. Generally the social opinion of the Christians was obviously confused in front of the new religious (or rather confessional?) challenge. St. Demetrius of Thessalonica saved his city against the incursions of the "godless" Avars and Slavs, but we have not such a glorious example in the wars against Arabs in the Eastern provinces. Only at the late 7th century some examples appeared in the East to explain the Christian collapse, but in a literature with predominantly eschatological and apocalyptic motives.

Standing against the new menace incarnated into the Muslim Arabs, the Byzantine society reacted in an interesting way by directing the anger against Judaism. Jews were traditionally accepted as enemies and a strange body in the Christian organism, but in the 7th century those types of attitude reached its heyday. Jews were accused of helping the Persians in the Middle East, especially during the capture of Jerusalem in 614. Emperor Heraclius initiated some repressions against them, although we could hardly speak about systematic persecution. Seventh century witnessed the renaissance of anti-Jewish polemical literature, too, with more and more new writing after the first Arabic successes in the 630-s [Dimitrov, D. 2005, pp. 161 – 168]. Few indicative polemical texts are to be mentioned which could be rather safely situated into the 7th and early 8th

century: *Doctrina Iacobi nuper baptizati*, *The Trophies of the God's Church in Damascus*, *Adversus Iudaeos Disputatio* (Διάλεξις κατὰ Ἰουδαίων), *The Dialogue of Stephen of Bosra*, *Disputatio Gregentii cum Herbano Iudaeo*, *The Dispute between Papiscus and Philo and the Pseudo-Athanasian Quaestiones ad Antiochum Ducem*. We have to keep in mind possible later interpolations, but the nucleus of information dates generally from the embarrassing time of the last Byzantine-Persian war and the Arabic onslaught which followed shortly after. The aforementioned polemical texts share similar concepts and structural devices, presenting usually a dispute between a Jew and a Christian, or a baptized Jew, as was the case of *Doctrina Iacobi*. Christian interlocutors were put in the uneasy position to defend the rightness of their faith and the idea of an Empire chosen by God in front of its manifest, and temporary by presumption, failure. Christians felt themselves called for the mission to expose the rightness of their religion against all the other deluding and equally dangerous pseudo-doctrines and pseudo-messiahs. There was a need for the Christians, too, to verify again and again their appurtenance to the Scriptures and the Biblical tradition, including the Old Testament.

Along with the texts mentioned above, there are yet more to be taken into consideration, but without clear dating. Among them is the *Apology against Jews concerning holy images* by Leontios of Neapolis (a bunch of texts, some of them extinct), the anonymous *Dialogue between Timotheos and Aquila*, the anti-Jewish *Dialogue* of Sergius Stylites (8th century?), the polemics of George of Cyprus and the late 'Monophysite' treatise against Jews by Dionysius bar Salibi (12th century). Those writings had the main goal to defend the veneration of icons against the Jewish attacks, based on the prohibitions from the Old Testament. It seems likely that those polemical writings were just a veiled criticism towards the an-iconic rules in Islam, but the influence of the iconoclastic controversy is not to be excluded.

A set of questions appear logically out of the anti-Jewish polemical activity of the age, including the very nature of the early Islam and the potential parallels with Judaism. Jews used to be accepted as a problem for the Christian Empire in the Middle East and the Persian wars proved it with acute overtones. Perhaps difficulties in the East, the new challenges and divisions just reinforced the animosity. Maxim the Confessor in one of his letters was searching for a scapegoat for the Byzantine defeats against answers and found it in Jews and Judaism [Laga, C. 1990, pp. 177 – 188]. For (Pseudo)Sebeos the newborn Islam was nothing more than continuation of, and deviation of, Judaism. The sermons of Andrew of Crete were anti-Jewish as sentiment and motivation, too (the early decades of the 8th century) [Brubaker, L., Haldon, J. 2001, pp. 123 – 126 with extensive literature cited].

Starting from the late 7th century onwards, new trend appeared scrutinizing the presumably demoniac nature of the new doctrine of the "Ishmaelites". The testimonies of Anastasius of Sinai (690s?), the *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* and other apocalyptic and eschatological texts with provenience mostly from Syria and Anatolia had in common the belief in future recovery of the Christian Empire, defeated for a while by demonically obsessed people, led by the devil himself. It is still difficult to answer with certainty was this new trend a reaction against the more clear declaration of the identity of Islam versus Christianity at the time of Abdal Malik and his successors. Some disputes, mostly of Syrian origin, between Christians (often members of the clergy) and Muslim officials appeared notifying the development of a popular genre in the Byzantine period reaching far ahead in time up to the last polemics with the Ottoman Turks in the 14th and 15th centuries. The main Islamic arguments were developed as a challenge for the Christians becoming *topoi* in the later period, like the Abraham's heritage (including circumcision and abstinence from certain food and beverages), the godly status of Jesus Christ, the veneration of the cross, of icons and relics and also the superiority of the Islamic warriors as an argument pro the blessing they received from God. The Syrian Zuqnin chronicle expressed the view that the Arab conquest was a punishment for the vices and sins of the Christians – an idea to be repeated later by many, including Michael the Syrian and thus paving a way to the legend about the 'Monophysite' support for the Muslims against the Byzantines developed by the scholars as later as the 19th and 20th century [Mayendorff, J. 1964, pp. 113 – 132; Khoury, Th. 1966, 1972; Reinink, G. J. and van Ginkel in Grypeou etc. 2006, pp. 153 – 184].

John of Damascus was the first Byzantine authority *par excellence* with an open view on Islam and he was, moreover, a Middle Eastern man, who used to live outside the boundaries of the Byzantine Empire, being for a certain period of time a higher servant in the Umayyad Khalifate in Damascus.¹ John, however, preferred to rate Islam well among the Christian heresies. In his catalogue of heresies, part of his famous writing *The*

¹ There is a plenty of literature concerning the life and writings of John of Damascus. For his works see especially Kotter, P. B. 1969 – 1975.

Source of knowledge (Πηγή γνώσεως), Islam was posed inside as the 101st heresy immediately after the *autoproskoptoi* (a radical monastic sect) and before the iconoclasts. In some of the manuscripts Islam was listed as heresy 100, after the Monothelites [Mayendorff, J. 1964, pp. 113 – 132]. Leaving aside the writings with spurious authorship, this is the sole relatively sure piece of information, besides possible interpolations, of the famous Byzantine theologian on Islam. There are two noticeable trends to persist later in the Byzantine literature, forming to a great extent the Byzantine attitude towards Islam. Firstly, it was the “misleading faith of the Ishmaelites”, preached by the “pseudo-prophet Muhammad” (ψευδοπροφήτης Μάμεδ) as a mischievous pro-Arian aberration from the true belief. John promoted, moreover, the idea of the Arian monk, teacher and doctrinal *guru* of Muhammad. The view on Islam as a doctrine portending Antichrist, but well embedded in the Biblical Tradition, will become widespread later – Manuel I will observe in the 12th century the doctrine of Muhammad as a strange deviation from the Holy Message, locked inside the Torah. Besides, John of Damascus shared many legendary and semi-legendary views, some of them exotic enough, to become popular later, like the idea of the lost generation of Hagar and Ishmael, the cult towards Aphrodite and the Kaaba, the crude and lacking spiritual dimension acceptance of Godhead, along with the usual *topoi* of polygamy, vices and lasciviousness. Such views were shared by Dionysius of Tell Mahr and Ana Komnena, among many others.

The treatment of Islam by John of Damascus was later developed by Theodore Abu Qura and Niketas of Byzantium (Byzantios). Abu Qura (8th-9th centuries) wrote in both Greek and Arabic and lived in Islamic milieu like John of Damascus. Abu Qura was one of the few authors in this early period to polemicize with Islam repelling thus all the Islamic criticism against the Christian faith and theology [PG 97, cols. 1461 – 1609; Lamoreaux, J. 2002, pp. 25 – 40]. Very similar task took on himself Niketas Byzantios who lived in the 9th century, obviously in Constantinople, probably in the encirclement of Emperor Michael III. Niketas wrote an extensive refutation of Islam, most likely the harshest until then [PG 105, cols. 669 A – 805; Mayendorff, J. 1964, pp. 121 – 122]. Notwithstanding the many conscious and unconscious errors, vicious jests and intentional pieces of propaganda interpretations, Niketas had used some translation of Quran, most likely his own, which invests the text with certain merits. It is especially so if we compare Niketas with his contemporaries in the West who demonstrated striking ignorance on the subject.

This line of Byzantine anti-Islamic polemic was carried on by authors like George the Monk (chapter 35 of his *Chronicle*), Leo Choiosphaktes (or Magistros), Aretas of Caesarea, Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos (*De administrando imperio*), Euthymios Zigabenos (Δογματική Πανοπλία, book 28 *Against the Saracenes*), Euthymios the Monk, Bartholomew of Edessa and Niketas Choniates (book 20 of *Θησαυρος Ορθοδόξου Πίστεως*, PG 140, 123 A – 136 C). In the late Byzantine period Islam was treated polemically by the former Emperor John Kantakusenos (already as monk Ioasaph), Demetrios Kydones (translator of *Improbatio Alcorani* by the Dominican monk Ricoldo da Monte Croce), Emperor Manuel II Palaeologos, George Sphrantzes, Dukas etc. There is a noticeable change in the acceptance of Islam from the vague image of an exotic and vicious heresy towards an odd kind of anti-religion, infamy (ἀσεβεία), unbelief (ἀπιστία) and lawlessness (ἀνομία). After the battle at Mantzikert (1071), however, the situation changed as far as the Turks, and not Arabs, came to be the main problem for the Byzantine Empire in the East. Seljuks, and later Ottomans, took the initiative against the Byzantines who were forced to take defensive position, leaving aside some of their ideological postulates which seemed to be already outdated. Theodore Metochites (circa 1270 – 1332), for example, considered the Turkish danger somehow detached from the problem of Islam. When reading Metochites, especially *On Scythians*, reader could remain with the impression that Turks are some pagan tribes, like Scythians and Huns in the past, their appearance on the great stage of life being part of the historical play of destiny (τύχη) in a very ancient manner of its own, along with the Biblical concept of the alternative kingdoms on Earth. We have to have in mind, nevertheless, that the perception of Muslim troops as “barbarians” in the classical Greek, and Byzantine, manner was laid down in the *Tactics* of Leo VI from the early 10th century. Thus, we are stumbling again on the very typical Roman and Byzantine world concept of the ‘barbaric periphery’ of the civilized world. For Joseph Bryennios in the 14th century the problem laid more in the godless behavior of the Byzantines than in their enemies. The Turkish/Islamic menace was envisaged already as castigation from God for the sins of the Christians [Vryonis, Sp. 1981, pp. 263 – 286; Ševčenko, I. 1961, pp. 169 – 186; *Tactics* 18.128–132 = PG 107, cols. 976 – 977].

Along with the anti-Islamic polemic and the growing intolerance during the 8th and 9th centuries, there was another line in development, more temperate and pragmatic one. It was connected with the official, but also with the rather unofficial, policy where the courtesy often coexisted with a good knowledge of the

realities and acceptance of the Islamic world as a *fait accompli*. There were, moreover, attempts to obtain certain advantages from the contacts with the East and South. Official correspondence on a highest level is certified since at least the time of Leo III (717 – 741) and the Khalif Umar II (717 – 720) [Mayendorff, J. 1964, pp. 125 – 127]. Despite the wars with the Arabs, Emperor Theophilos was keen to extract more and more from the Arabic culture, following Middle Eastern patterns when building and decorating his new palace in the Byzantine capital. Constantinople and Bagdad were in rivalry, too, when glamour and luxury were in concern, there intellectual schools spying from each other. At the beginning of the 10th century at least one mosque existed in Constantinople, as we know from the letters of the Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos do the Khalif of Bagdad. Later mosque appeared in Athens, too.² The apostasies from Islam to Christianity were obviously not rare cases. The Seljuk leader Koutloumous accepted Christianity at the late 11th century with some of his sons and his name remained for the famous Athonite monastery. Such conversions provoked the creation of a special ritual with 22 anathemas against Islam, included in the *Catechism*.

Official policy of Byzantium towards the Islamic world during the 11th and 12th centuries was directly connected with the Byzantine position *vis-a-vis* the Crusades as both theory and practice.³ As a matter of fact, the First Crusade provoked a real shock among the Byzantines, well described by the royal princess Anna Komnena in her *Alexiad*. Religious zeal was not alien to the Byzantine mentality nor was it lacking in the developing attitude towards Islam. However, notwithstanding some elements of crusading social atmosphere from the 7th up to the 10th century, the Byzantine Empire succeeded in creating a more pragmatic position versus its Eastern neighbors. For the Byzantines, to be sure, the relations with the Islamic East were often a question of mere survival. The war with the ‘infidels’ was both military and diplomatic task with the main goal not the destruction of the Islamic civilization as such, but rather for creation and maintenance of a certain balance of power. The appeal of Bernard of Clervaux for a mass destruction of the infidels would hardly be understood in the Byzantine world. For Byzantines the war was rather a necessary evil than a question of fervor and the whole logic of the imperial policy was more defensive, than aggressive. Religious concepts, as important and intolerant they could be, were often put in back in favor of a political realism, as a result of everyday coexistence between different religions and confessions. The epic *Digenis Akritas* (10th or rather 11th century) is a good example how animosity could sometimes be substituted by coexistence and mutual cultural symbiosis in the border region between two civilizations which were not so different and antagonistic as we would be ready to imply nowadays. For the Byzantine rulers from the 11th century onwards it by sure looked exotic, if not absurd and a nonsense, to attack Jerusalem when Asia Minor, the former Byzantine heartland, was in Turkish hands, and while the Balkans were threatened by many enemies, among them Christians, too. Byzantine eastern policy was an art of possible, a result of a long-standing experience. There was not an Islamic world in general, like some naïve crusading leaders were ready do envisage at the beginning of the Crusades, but a conglomerate of different Muslim states and societies with a lot of political tensions and confessional differences in between. Byzantium was accustomed to use the animosity among Muslims themselves in order to keep the balance intact. This Byzantine *Realpolitik* would inevitably confront with the crusading enthusiasm of the West. Thus, for a short time after the First Crusade and the creation of the Latin states in the Holy Land, the new image appeared of Byzantium as a *schismatic* Empire, a traitor to the Christian cause in the East. This gap between the Christian East and West developed, quite ironically, at the time when Byzantium had to face the last, and fatal, aggression of the Islamic world, this time presented by the Seljuk and Ottoman Turks.

² PG 111, cols. 309 C – 316 C. It is not to be excluded that the first mosque in Constantinople was built up with the approval of Emperor Leo Льв III (717 – 741): Ziaka, A. Recherche grecque contemporaine..., pass.

³ For the uneasy relations between Byzantium, the crusaders and the Middle Eastern societies see Charanis, P. 1949; Lilie, R.-J. 1981; Cowdrey, H. E. J. 1988; Shepard, J. 1988; Magdalino, P. 1996, pp. 1 – 25. See also the miscellany “The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World” [Laiou, A. E., and Mottahedeh, R. P. (eds.), 2001], with special focus on the articles of Kazhdan, A. P. Latins and Franks in Byzantium: Perception and Reality from the Eleventh to the Twelfth Century, pp. 83 – 100 (published postmortem) and Dennis, G. T. Defenders of the Christian People: Holy War in Byzantium, pp. 31 – 39. Dennis not for the first time stressed on his argument, that ‘holy war’ did not exist in Byzantium neither as a concept, nor as a practice. Similar view shares the author of the present paper, too.

Let us turn back to the issue with Manuel Komnenos' proposal and the reactions against it. What Manuel envisaged in the late 12th century was the alleviating of the whole procedure of transition from Islam into Orthodox Christianity. We know that the Emperor was generally interested in theology, being an active promoter of dispute with representatives of the Roman Church in Constantinople. At least twice, moreover, Manuel provoked scandals because of his interference in theological disputes, in 1156–7 and also in 1166 (the controversy around “My Father is greater than I”). What we know from Niketas Choniates concerning this last imperial interference in (probably) 1179 is quite curious. Manuel appealed for lifting up from the catechetical books of the anathema against the god of Muhammad who was, according to the traditional formula, “neither creator, nor created”. The reason for this appeal was that it was blasphemous for the Muslims converted into Christianity to denounce God who was actually our God so far as Muslims recognized the God of the Old Testament. The proposal, however, clashed with the stubborn resistance of the Patriarch Theodosios Boradiotes (1179 – 1183) who was not eager even to listen to that kind of arguments. According to the Patriarch, the so called god of Muhammad had been invented by the impostor and it was a material, ‘massive’ (*holosphyros*) god [Van Ditten, J. 1975, pp. 213 – 220; Magoulias, H. J. 1984, pp. 121 – 124].

Thus, the two main concepts made a stand against each other. For Manuel and his followers, who were not missing, as we know from Choniates, the doctrine of Muhammad was just a deviation, untrue enough, of the unified Biblical tradition implying, anyhow, the existence of one and only God, Creator of the world. Discussion arose around the meaning, too, of the Arabic word *samad*, accepted in Greek as *holosphyros* (ὄλοςσφυρος). The very notion *holosphyros* was probably a not quite correct translation of *samad*, meaning “eternal”, but also “massive”, “heavy”, “made of strong metal”. This interpretation led to the conclusion that Muslims accepted their God as something material. There was, perhaps, an allusion to the black meteorite, Kaaba, in Mecca. Concerning the formula “neither creator, nor created”, it followed the original concept of Islam that God is eternal and not generated (no difference with Judaism and Christianity so far), but also that God had never created son, thus being far from the Christian idea of the God-Father. As it is well-known, Jesus was treated in Islam not as the Son and Logos, but as a prophet, very important indeed, in the chain of prophets, and son of Mary.

Manuel sent twice *tomoi* for approval, provoking no less than an angry reaction in the Church and society. For the opponents of the Emperor Islam was nothing more than an absurd and demoniac pseudo-religion, false doctrine not deserving the label of theology (τοῦ Μωάμετ μωρολογίας οὐ γὰρ ἄν εἴποιμι θεολογίας). Especially acute and sarcastic was the reaction of Eusthathios of Thessalonica who scarcely avoid punishment from the angry Emperor for his harsh words that he would not accept by any reason or compression the True God to be treated as a “lover of boys (*paiderastēn*) and a camel-like, leader and instructor of every repulsive deed” (εἰ θεὸν ἀληθινὸν τὸν παιδεραστὴν ἀκὶ καμηλώδη καὶ πάσης πράξεως μῦσαρας ὑφηγητὴν καὶ διδάσκαλον [Van Ditten, J. 1975, pp. 216 – 217]). With this definitely harsh replica we encounter again the very popular topic of Muslims as over-sexual and lascivious in their behavior. For Anna Komnena, for example, they were “slaves of Dionysos (sic!) and Eros, dragged into all the skillful vices of Aphrodite” [Alexiad II.10.5.208]. Manuel was, however, stubborn in his convictions and only his death soon after prevented the scandal to continue and gave arguments into the hands of the “Church party”.

Niketas Choniates was not an impartial narrator – he took definite stance against the imperial considerations, thus supporting his beloved teacher and mentor, Eusthathios of Thessalonica. We could compare the attitude of Choniates with what is preserved on the religion of the “Saracenes” in his *Treasure of Orthodoxy* [PG 140, 123 A – 135 C]. What we have in this fragment is a vicious cluster of anathemas, starting from Muhammad himself, his family, inheritors, and continuing with the Quran, the Islamic concept of paradise, polygamy and many others aspect of Islamic religious and social world-view. There is no surprise that the Islamic vision of Jesus as a prophet, but not Son of God, was repelled as well. There are few other interesting points worth mentioning in this prolonged refutation. Firstly, the abuse and misuse of the Old Testament by Muhammad was especially anathemized: the pseudo-prophet of Islam “perverted and violated” (διαστρέγων αἰτήν καὶ νοθεύων, 129.9) the names and message of the Biblical patriarchs and prophets. Consequently, there is an emphasis by Choniates on the Islamic refusal of the free will – according to the author, the Islamic god was presented as pushing some people towards bad deeds and others towards good, thus living space also for the fortune instead of the human will. This would presumably lead to moral relativism and stress upon the bad features in the human nature. What is more interesting in the context of the quarrels provoked by Manuel I, is that in the *Thesaurus* Choniates presents once more his idea of the Islamic god as “solid, not generator neither generated” (131 – 3.17). This is not to be excluded that such anathema appeared as a result of the

discussions concerning the Islamic perception of Godhead and the possibility to treat the Islamic god as the God of the Old Testament and thus God of the Christians, notwithstanding all the ‘false doctrines’ of the Muslims otherwise.

The incident with the decision of Manuel to change the text in the *Catechism* and the reaction against it is curious for the existence of two streams in the late 12th century Byzantine society with (at least) two different visions on Islam, more traditional one and another, more practical, political, if not to say tolerant. In that particular case Choniates took side with the traditional opposition against the Emperor. In his *History*, however, he used to be more delicate observer of Muslims. In the case of the attack on a mosque by the Westerners in August 1203 his sympathy was openly at the side of the Muslims (553). The brutal sack of Constantinople was compared to the milder behavior of the “sons of Ishmael” when entering Jerusalem some years ago (576). This change, however, from a more radical to a milder view could be due to the growing negativism towards the ‘Latins’ in the later years of Choniates’ life when the last part of his *History* was written.

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Abbreviations:

PG – Patrologia graeca cursus completus (Migne).