

THE LITURGICAL VENERATION OF ST GREGORY PALAMAS IN VERIA*

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This paper provides a brief overview of the historic relationship between the ancient city of Veria and the saintly family of St Gregory Palamas. In addition to covering some historical milestones in the Palamas family's sojourn in Veria, the paper also discusses some of the specific churches and monasteries with which St Gregory and his family had personal connections, sites that contain objects of veneration and have remained prominent destinations for pilgrimages up to our current era. Finally, a brief description is given of modern sites and celebrations that honour the Palamas family, including the canonisation of St Gregory's parents and siblings in 2009.

Veria, an ancient town honoured by the visit and preaching of the Apostle Paul, has shown itself to be fertile ground for sainthood. Throughout time and on multiple levels, it has had on offer rich spiritual nourishment emanating from the lives and works of apostles, martyrs, hierarchs, monastics, and saintly families. Included in this saintly host, is an entire family of seven, the saintly Palamas family.¹

The memory of St Gregory Palamas, but also the presence of all of you here today in the apostolic city of Veria, gives us an opportunity to highlight some of the lesser-known aspects of the saint's life relating to our town and its surroundings.²

St Gregory Palamas and His Brothers in Veria

Let us take a look at some milestones in the life of St Gregory Palamas in relation to Veria:

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¹ On the Family of Saints, cf. Αρχιμ. Γεωργίου Χρυσοστόμου, 'Καθημερινή ζωή και Παύλεια πνευματικότητα στις ακολουθίες των Αγίων Οικογενειών', in *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Ἐπιστημονικοῦ Συνεδρίου, Ἡ οἰκογένεια: Παύλεια θεολογία καὶ σύγχρονη θεώρησή* (ΙΕ Παύλεια) (Βέροια, 2009), 321–56.

² The saint's first biographer was the student of Philotheos Kokkinos, Patriarch of Constantinople. Cf. *Βίος Γρηγορίου Παλαμά* (Θεσσαλονίκη: 1984). See also Μοναχῆς Ὀλυμπιάδος Ντίτορα, *Τὸ θαῦμα τῆς χάριτος. Ἀφηγηματικὴ βιογραφία τοῦ Αγίου Γρηγορίου Παλαμά τοῦ θαυματουργοῦ* (Βέροια: Ἱ. Μ. Ἁγίου Ἀθανασίου Ἀγκαθιάς, 2009).

1296—He was born in Constantinople, the son of Constantine and Kali.

1303—His father, now monk Constantine, reposes.

1310—Nephton, a native of Veria, becomes Patriarch of Constantinople. The Palamas family subsequently becomes acquainted with the town through him.

1341—Nephton elevates his native Veria to the status of Metropolis and consecrates the Church of Christ in the presence of Emperor Andronikos II Palaeologos.

1316—Gregory leaves Constantinople together with his brothers Theodosios and Makarios.

1324—He is ordained to the priesthood in Thessaloniki and departs for Veria.

1325—Gregory retreats to the Veria Skete. His mother, now nun Kalloni, reposes. His sisters, Epichari and Theodoti, enter the urban convent of Panagia Kyriotissa in Veria, while Theodosios and Makarios withdraw to the Skete. Theodosios reposes while at the Skete.

1331—Gregory and Makarios leave Veria for the Holy Mountain.

1340—Theodoti reposes (22 August).

1368—Constantinople: Palamas is recognised as a saint.

2009—Veria: the other members of the Palamas family are canonised.

St Gregory Palamas in Local Worship

The liturgical veneration of St Gregory Palamas in Veria and the entire surrounding region was and continues to be noteworthy.

1) It goes without saying that the epicentre of this veneration was the renowned Veria Skete, the place of monastic retreat for St Gregory and his brothers, Theodosios and Makarios. It must be noted that the Skete in the Aliakmon Valley had at that time become the cradle of hesychasm. The Veria Skete, a grouping of fifty monasteries, is the oldest organised monastic settlement in Greece, with a great spiritual legacy and stunningly beautiful natural surroundings. At the Skete, the cave where St Gregory lived has survived, as has the holy spring named after him. The *katholikon* features a treasured icon of saints Dionysios of Olympus and Gregory Palamas from 1834. Until twenty years ago, the bishop's throne held an icon from the seventeenth century depicting St Gregory enthroned. The presence of such a depiction, rather than of Christ the High Priest, should not surprise us, depictions of a monastery's patron saint being customary in monasteries. Regrettably, the icon was lost. The *katholikon* also contains a treasured relic from the saint's body. Feast days at the Skete are the fourteenth of November and the second Sunday of Lent. The second Sunday of Matthew (the Sunday after All Saints)

is also a feast day, celebrating the *Synaxis* of All Saints of the Skete, among whom are Gregory and his brothers, Theodosios and Makarios.³

2) Veneration of the saint was also notable in the city of Veria itself, as can be seen in the iconographical depictions of St Gregory. Specifically, the Byzantine church of St Nicholas ‘*Archontos Grammatikou*’ features a preserved fresco of the saint dating back to the fourteenth century. This means that Gregory Palamas was honoured as a saint in Veria immediately upon his repose in 1359. More recent depictions of St Gregory can also be found in other Byzantine-style churches, such as the eighteenth-century church of the Hypapantē (Presentation of the Lord in the Temple) of Kyriotissa. That St Gregory is honoured in the parish of Kyriotissa is a natural given—as we have already said—that this is where his sisters Epichari and Theodoti embarked on monastic life, today’s parish church having originally been the *katholikon* of an urban monastery. The church is obviously also associated with the saint himself, as he would not only have visited his sisters there but would also have celebrated the Divine Liturgy and other holy services. This is supported by the fact that Kyriotissa was situated very near to the city’s southern gate, which led out to the Aliakmon Valley, and thus to the Skete. It goes without saying that modern murals and portable icons of the saint adorn many a church and monastery.

3) The same veneration can also be observed in the wider region outside Veria, albeit to a lesser extent. In particular, St Gregory is one of the patron saints of the Holy Monastery of Panagia Dovra, which houses a piece of his relics. Indeed, the large church of St Luke the Physician, which is currently under construction, will feature a chapel in honour of St Gregory and his saintly family. At the village of Chariessa, beneath Naoussa, St Gregory is honoured annually as the second patron saint of the local parish on the fourteenth of November. In the parish church in the village of Palaios Prodromos, there is an icon of the saint, which its inscription dates to 1861. An old 1867 edition of a joint service to St Philip and Gregory Palamas, appointed for the fourteenth of November, survives in the parish archives of the village of Mesē.⁴

³ Cf. Γερασίμου Μοναχοῦ Μικραγιαννανίτου, *Ἀκολουθία τῶν ὁσίων καὶ θεοφόρων πατέρων ἡμῶν τῶν ἐν τῇ Σκῆτι τῆς Βερ[ρ]οίας ἀσκητικῶς διαλαμπάντων* (Βέροια, 1983). This particular service naturally does not include Macarius and Theodosius, since these had not yet been canonised at the time of its composition.

⁴ Φυλλάδιον περιέχον συναρμολογημένας τὰς δύο ἱεράς ἀκολουθίας τοῦ τε ἐνδόξου καὶ πανευφήμου ἀποστόλου Φιλίππου καὶ τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρός ἡμῶν Γρηγορίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Θεσσαλονίκης τοῦ Παλαμᾶ (Θεσσαλονίκη: Νικολάου Βαγδαμάλη, 1867).

Events Held in Honour of St Gregory and the Palamas Family

In terms of non-worship events, we should make mention of two important celebrations held in Veria in connection to the life of St Gregory Palamas: celebrations for the seven hundredth anniversary of his birth were held in 1997, while celebrations for the six hundred fiftieth anniversary of his repose were held in 2009.⁵

1) The first anniversary celebration took the form of church services at the Skete and the town of Veria itself, in addition to a one-day seminar entitled 'Asceticism and Deification: The Life and Teachings of St Gregory Palamas', which was held on Saturday, 22 March 1997 at the Holy Monastery of Panagia Sumela. Invited to participate were hierarchs, other clergy, and around two hundred monks and nuns from various monasteries in northern Greece.⁶

2) As already mentioned, the second anniversary celebration took place in 2009, on the occasion of the six hundred fiftieth year of the saint's repose. The celebration of this anniversary began with the publication of the annual pocket calendar which, as expected, was dedicated to St Gregory.⁷

In connection with the same anniversary, the Holy Metropolis produced a thirty-five minute long DVD, which has also been uploaded to the internet with English subtitles.⁸

Throughout 2009, a number of events were held in honour of St Gregory. On Saturday, 14 March, a one-day clergy seminar was organised under the title, 'St Gregory of Palamas: Herald of Grace', in which all the clergy of the Holy Metropolis took part.⁹ In early May, the holy relic of the saint was brought to the town of Galați, Romania, where events were organised in honour of St Athanasius of Patelaros (1580–1854), a follower of St Gregory's Palamite hesychast method,¹⁰ who had brought hesychasm and the philokalic spirit to the Danubian principalities, as well as Russia and Ukraine, where he subsequently reposed.¹¹ On Saturday, 13 June, a

⁵ On the year of death, see Κωνσταντίνου Δυοβουνιώτου, 'Τὸ ἔτος τοῦ θανάτου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ', *Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν* 1 (1924): 7.

⁶ See Παύλειος Λόγος 16–17 (1997): 20–23.

⁷ *Ἐγκόλπιον Ἡμερολόγιον 2009* (Βέροια: Ἱερά Μητρόπολις Βεροίας, Ναούσης καὶ Καμπανίας, 2008).

⁸ The content of the DVD is also available online with English subtitles at: <http://www.imkallipetras.gr/?p=165>.

⁹ See Παύλειος Λόγος 78 (2009): 28.

¹⁰ On Palamite teaching, see Μοναχοῦ Θεοκλήτου Διονυσιάτου, *Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς. Ὁ βίος καὶ ἡ θεολογία του* (Ἀθήνα: Σπηλιώτη, 2001). See also Γεωργίου Μαντζαρίδου, *Παλαμικά* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Π. Πουρναρά, 1973), and John Meyendorff, *Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς καὶ ἡ ὀρθόδοξη μυστικὴ παράδοση* (Ἀθήνα: Ἀκρίτας, 1983).

¹¹ Despite this, Patelaros has been characterised as 'pro-Western' according to sources. For more on this point of view, see Ἀθανάσιος Καραθανάσης, 'Ἀθανάσιος. Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Ὁ Γ', Πατελλάρος', in *Μεγάλὴ Ὀρθόδοξη Χριστιανικὴ Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία*, τ. 1 (Ἀθήνα: Στρατηγικὴς Ἐκδόσεις, 2010), 297. However, this cannot be taken in an absolute sense considering his contribution to the development of Orthodoxy, further affirmed by his canonisation, first by the Ukrainian Church and later the Romanian Church. See relevant information in Γερασίμου Μπεκέ, 'Ἅγιος Ἀθανάσιος Πατελ[λ]άρος, ὁ καθιστός ἅγιος στὸ Χάρκοβο', *Παύλειος Λόγος* 94 (2011): 20–23. We encounter similar phenomena

monastic one-day seminar on 'female monasticism' was organised, with one hundred fifty nuns taking part. The seminar was part of the fifteenth *Pauleia* events.¹²

It was within the context of these festivities that St Gregory's family—or simply 'the Palamas Family', as we refer to them—was canonised, that is, recognised as saints of the Orthodox Church.¹³ In accordance with ecclesiastical protocol, the Metropolitan of Veria submitted the proposal for canonisation to the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece. The Metropolitan's proposal was supported by various historical documentation as well as the opinions of two professors of the Theological School of Thessaloniki, Antonios Papadopoulos and Georgios Mantzarides. The affirmative decision of the Holy Synod was then forwarded to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which eventually issued a Patriarchal Act by which St Gregory Palamas' parents and siblings were to be ranked among the saints of the Orthodox Church. The first Sunday after the feast of St Gregory, that is the first Sunday after the fourteenth of November, was determined as the date on which their *synaxis* would be celebrated.¹⁴

The canonisation of the Palamas Family was held in Veria with every mark of solemnity and honour befitting the new local saints. On Friday the eighteenth and Saturday the nineteenth of December 2009, a scientific symposium was held. On the following day, Sunday the twentieth, the ecclesiastical canonisation ceremony was held in the holy Cathedral of Veria, presided over by His Beatitude Hieronymos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, in the presence of the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and many other hierarchs from Greece and abroad.¹⁵ It must be noted that our Holy Metropolis currently has one archimandrite with the

throughout the period of Turkish rule. A typical example of this is that of Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite. It has been claimed that pastoral aspects of his *Exomologitarion* are based on Roman Catholic distortions of the Gospel, something which is not entirely correct. See Gheorghios Chrysostomou, 'Esercizio della paternità spirituale nell "Exomologhitáron" di Nicodemo l'Aghiorita', in *La paternità spirituale nella tradizione ortodossa. Atti del XVI convegno ecumenico internazionale de spiritualità ortodossa* (Bose: Qiqajon, 2009), 185–186, and *id.*, 'Η πνευματική πατρότητα στο "Εξομολογητάριον" Νικοδήμου του Ἀγιορείτου', *Βελλᾶ Ἐπιστημονική Ἐπετηρίδα* 5 (2009): 135–36.

¹² For more, see "Ο γυναικεῖος μοναχισμός. Σύναξη Μοναζουσῶν στήν Ἱερά Μονή Ἀγίας Κυριακῆς", *Παύλειος Λόγος* 79 (2009): 22–23.

¹³ The sanctity of the members of the Palamas family is clearly attested to by St Philotheos Kokkinos, Patriarch of Constantinople. See Δημητρίου Τσάμη, *Φιλοθέου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τοῦ Κοκκίνου ἁγιολογικά ἔργα, Α΄ Θεσσαλονικεῖς Ἅγιοι* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Κέντρου Βυζαντινῶν Ἑρευνῶν, 1985), 423–591. See also Θεοκλήτου Μοναχοῦ Διονυσιάτου, *Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς. Ὁ βίος καί ἡ θεολογία του*, 1–7; 29–32; 163–65.

¹⁴ On the process of canonisation, see Γεωργίου Χρυσοστόμου, *Ἡ ἀναγνώριση τοῦ Μαξίμου Γραικοῦ ὡς ἁγίου καί ὁ καθορισμός κοινῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς πράξης ἀναγνώρισης ἁγίων ἀπό τήν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία* (Ἄρτα: Σκουφᾶς, 1989), 5.

¹⁵ See *Παύλειος Λόγος* 82 (2009), 16–25.

name 'Gregory,'¹⁶ two others called 'Palamas,'¹⁷ and a deacon named 'Theodosios'.¹⁸ It is the intention of our Metropolitan to name other monastic individuals, men and women, after other members of the saintly Palamas Family.

Finally, I would like to point out that today's event, graced by the presence of elected councillors, represents yet another opportunity for our local congregation to honour our local saints, with our great father St Gregory Palamas foremost among them. For this reason, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks for your decision to include our town and Metropolis on the programme of this international conference.

¹⁶ Archimandrite Gregorios Sofos, a hierokerykas of the Metropolis. See *Δίπτυχα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος* (Ἀθήνα: Ἀποστολική Διακονία, 2004), 447.

¹⁷ Archimandrite Palamas Tsilipakos, priest of the Holy Church of St Nicholas in the village of Anatonlikon, and Archimandrite Palamas Kyrillides, abbot of the Holy Monastery of the Birth of the Theotokos at Kallipetra. See *Δίπτυχα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος*, 406.

¹⁸ Deacon Theodosios (birth name, Angelos) Ermides, monk of the Holy Monastery of the Birth of the Theotokos at Kallipetra.