

Niketas Byzantios, Islam, and the Aristotelian Shift in Ninth-century Byzantium

The ninth century was a period of a significant revival for Aristotelian philosophy in both Byzantium and the Islamic world¹. This revival can be seen across cultural, linguistic and political boundaries. It is also in the ninth century that we see the first production of manuscripts of Aristotle. Inter-faith polemic, between Muslims and Christians, Jews and Christians, and Jews and Muslims, and also intra-faith polemic, played a role in this ninth-century Aristotelian revival. This paper will explore how Niketas Byzantios, a ninth-century Byzantine intellectual known only through his writings, which included anti-heretical and anti-Islamic treatises, not only changed the Byzantine intellectual discourse about Islam but also helped to usher in a new emphasis on Aristotelian method in Byzantine intellectual discourse. This shift emphasized Aristotelian syllogisms rather than traditional patristic and scriptural citations. While the study of Aristotle had never died out in Byzantium, a brief comparison with Niketas' writings and earlier thinkers, like those from the iconoclast controversy and also his near contemporary Patriarch Photios, demonstrate how a new approach in theological polemic was initiated by Niketas. Later Byzantine anti-Islamic writers chose to follow Niketas' definition of Islam as an illogical, other religion, rather than that of John of Damascus, who viewed Islam as a Christian heresy. Ironically, as this paper will also demonstrate, this new approach was inspired by an Islamic thinker, and this exchange gives new insight into the exciting intellectual cross-fertilization of the early medieval eastern Mediterranean.

While I am not the first to argue that we find in the ninth century a new »Byzantine Scholasticism«, there is a dearth of scholarship on Niketas Byzantios and his role in this movement. A critical edition of his anti-Islamic writings was only produced in 2000. Writers that mention him, usually in surveys of medieval views of Islam, dismiss him as someone not to be taken seriously². Yet, compared with similar texts of the day, whether against heretics or with Islamic *kalām*, the text clearly relates an argument that would have struck its contemporaries as something to take seriously, whether the

reader was a Christian or a Muslim. The only writer to analyze his anti-Latin treatises has been Tia Kolbaba in her recent study on ninth-century Byzantine anti-Latin treatises³. While little is known about Niketas, much is known about the ninth century, including Byzantine intellectuals like Photios⁴. The ninth century was a period of revival for the Byzantine Empire after the iconoclast controversy had been finally ended.

Before undertaking a historical and literary analysis it is important to be clear about certain terms and dates. Aristotelian logic refers to the system of epistemology developed by Aristotle in his *Prior Analytics*, *Posterior Analytics*, *Metaphysics 4*, and *Categories*. However, Aristotelianism, by the ninth century of the Common Era, had been expanded by his followers, pseudo-Aristotelian treatises, some neo-Platonic influences and centuries of commentators. Writers of the period make it clear that they are appealing to Aristotelian method by particular vocabulary: ἔκθεσις, ἀπόδειξις, διαλεκτικῆ, and συλλογιστικῆ. Such writings, like those of Niketas Byzantios, which are considered here, are explicitly Aristotelian and are contrasted with other writings, like those of John of Damascus, which are implicitly Aristotelian. Christian theologians for centuries had relied on the basics of logic for argument, but use of Aristotelian terms is quite unusual.

Christian writers in this period, whether writing in Greek, Syriac, or Arabic, could draw on a long tradition of classical philosophy in the service of Christian theology. The synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy into theology, primarily by the use of logic and terminology at the service in explication of the Trinity, had occurred by the end of the fourth century. Philosophers like the pagan Ammonios (late fifth century), and his students Olympiodoros of Alexandria (ca. 500-ca. 565), who was thought to be a Christian, and the Christian John Philoponos (ca. 490-ca. 574) had presented Aristotle in a way that was compatible with Christian teaching. In the seventh century, Aristotelian logic still formed the cornerstone of Byzantine education, and by the ninth century, we have evidence of earnest manuscript production that continued unabated until the sixteenth century, so that Aristotle was

1 The classic study of the Byzantine humanistic revival is Lemerle, *Humanism*. There have been a series of studies of Aristotelian logic and philosophy in Arabic, e.g. Peters, *Aristotle*. Most significantly from the standpoint of the Islamic tradition is Gutas, *Greek Thought*. A more comparative approach can be seen in Booth, *Aristotelian*. Gutas argues, contra Lemerle, that the Arabs in Baghdad had led the ninth-century revival in Aristotelian thought.

2 Cf. Daniel, *Islam 15*; Daniel dismisses the significance of Niketas in one sentence. Even more recent works like Goddard, *History*, only consider Niketas briefly and do not at all situate him in intellectual history.

3 Kolbaba, *Inventing* 120-130.

4 Historians still bemoan the lack of sources, but compared to the seventh and eighth centuries there is a plethora of source material. Cf. Brubaker, *Ninth Century*.

by far the most widely copied non-Christian ancient Greek author. It is no coincidence that the Aristotelian revival in Byzantium and the translation movement in the caliphate began with a renewed interest in scientific and mathematical texts. Aristotle's logically demanding conception of ἀπόδειξις is based on a mathematical model of knowledge, so renewed interest in mathematics and science neatly intertwined with a renewed interest in logic⁵.

A few brief observations about John of Damascus (676-749) and Theodore Abū Qurra (ca. 750-ca. 823), two writers prior to Niketas, illustrate the cross-fertilization and intellectual milieu of the period. John wrote in Greek, but was fluent in Arabic. Theodore wrote in Greek, Arabic, and Syriac and was on the cusp of the translation movement. These two thinkers are prime examples of the Christian use of Greek philosophy at the service of theology, long after the Second Sophistic had ended, and the philosophical school of Athens had been closed by Justinian. While philosophical inquiry continued, Justinian's action certainly emphasized a renewed rigor in the symbolic efforts of the imperial government to cleanse the empire of remaining vestiges of paganism. However, these writers still prioritized revelation. The *Dialogue between a Christian and Muslim*, attributed to John of Damascus, but now widely thought not to be authentic, reflects *kalām* literature in style and demonstrates a high-level of understanding of Islam⁶. It still appeals to revelation. Within the iconoclastic debate, earlier writers like the patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople, as well as John of Damascus, and Theodore Abū Qurra, who also defended icons from without the Empire, preferred an appeal to authority, whether scriptures, church councils, or patristic citations, even if their arguments still are undergirded with Aristotelian logic⁷. This pattern is continued in their inter-faith polemics with Islam.

Dirk Krausmüller has highlighted how the use of Aristotelian logic could create a divergence in Christian thinkers. In his article, »Killing at God's Command: Niketas Byzantios' Polemic against Islam and the Christian Tradition of Divinely Sanctioned Murder«, Krausmüller has argued convincingly that Niketas' reasoning represents a dramatic shift from John of Damascus and that this shift was largely motivated by Aristotelian logic and categories of absolute good rather than strict scriptural exegesis⁸. Krausmüller focuses only on the specific issue of murder. John of Damascus, like his Muslim counterparts, argued that it was permissible and moral to murder if God commanded it, as is frequently the case in the

Hebrew Bible and in the Qur'an. Niketas argued that God would never command murder because it is always wrong. To kill is to end an absolute good, human life, and God would never command the destruction of an absolute good. Examples of divinely-sanctioned murder from the Scriptures, mostly the Hebrew Bible, must have an allegorical or metaphorical interpretation. Thus, on this one issue, Krausmüller demonstrates that Niketas moves Christianity away from Islam by arguing from Aristotelian logic rather than a literal interpretation of Scripture. This one example illustrates the Aristotelian shift of this period, yet almost all of Niketas' arguments follow this pattern. He repeatedly argues a point from logic, only occasionally quoting Christian Scriptures to illustrate his point, that the Christian faith is reasonable. Incidentally, later Byzantine theologians, particularly when discussing the topic of divinely-sanctioned murder, followed Niketas, not John.

Again, John of Damascus, in his *On the Orthodox Faith*, utilizes an Aristotelian Neo-Platonism that is firmly grounded in the patristic tradition, but the emphasis remains upon revelation in the form of Scripture. This synthesis has its roots in the early Christian tradition and reached its height by the fourth century, with the Cappadocians, and later with Leontios of Byzantium (died ca. 543), a sixth-century theologian whose works have been attributed to Theodore Abū Qurra. With Theodore, we begin to see the shift in Arabic Christian disputational literature. On the one hand, Theodore closely follows John of Damascus. On the other hand, he wrote in Arabic, and with the express aim of proving the rationality of Christianity to Muslims. John of Damascus had been writing to his fellow Christians. While John sought to catalog heresies in his *De Haeresibus*, Theodore in his treatise, *On True Religion*, attempts to directly engage Islam and demonstrate the rational superiority of Christianity⁹. For John of Damascus, the truth of Christianity is apparent when held up to the mirror of falsehood. In Theodore, we have a Christian theologian who explicitly says that he is aiming to use the language of logic but he will still prioritize revelation. With Theodore, we might hope to find the missing link between Niketas and *kalām* literature: Theodore was a Christian who directly imitated Islamic *kalām*, argued in an explicitly Aristotelian method, and then whose works were translated into Greek and seem to have had a direct influence upon Niketas, since Theodore's *On True Religion* circulated in a Greek translation. Still, *On True Religion* does not go as far as Niketas' letters; it has numerous quotations from Christian Scriptures. For

5 For further explanation of the importance of mathematics and science, cf. Booth, *Aristotelian* 2 f.

6 *Kalām* covers a broad range of Islamic literature over a period of time beyond the scope of this study. For the purposes here, it refers to a class of Islamic theological dialectical literature from the first or second century of the hijra. This literature often uses dialectical syllogisms in the course of debate, either intra-Islamic disputations or interfaith disputations with Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians. The most thorough introduction to *kalām* is still Wolfson, *Philosophy*; for a more recent investigation, cf. Haleem, *Early Kalam*.

7 The iconoclastic controversy, however, did encourage the use of Aristotelian texts within Byzantium. For a detailed study of Aristotelian logic in the iconoclastic

period, cf. Anagnostopoulos, *Object*. Cf. also, Lemerle, *Humanism* 152 f., for the use of Aristotle in the iconoclastic controversy and 167 f. for Aristotelian philosophy in scientific texts. For texts on the defense of icons, cf. Iōānēs Damaskēnos, *Three Treatises* and Theodore Abū Qurra, *Traité du culte des icônes*. For more on Nikephoros, whose works have yet to appear in critical edition (except for his *Refutatio et eversio*, cf. Nikēphoros: *Refutatio et eversio*), cf. Parry, *Depicting*, and Travis, *Patriarch Nikephoros*.

8 Krausmüller, *Killing*.

9 Iōānēs Damaskēnos, *Schriften*; Theodore Abū Qurra, *Traité de l'existence*.

example, to prove that God is the Trinity, and God begets a Son, Theodore argues that man is made in the image and likeness of God, and man begets. Therefore, God must beget, since, according to Gen 1:27, man is made in God's likeness:

»If there is attributed to Adam or one of us headship over another human being, one from him or like him, we do not consider that degradation, but glory, exaltation, and honor. If this is so, then God – may he be blessed and exalted! – is surely head, not over his creatures, but over one like him. And if he is head over one like him, he, too, has begotten a Son and there has proceeded from him a Spirit, and he and Adam resemble one another with regard to begetting and headship. Thus, among the many things the mind can infer from the likeness of Adam's nature is that God is three persons: one who begets, another who is begotten, and another who proceeds. In this manner, confirmation is given to the words of the speaker, who did not lie in what he spoke when he said, »And God created humans, and in the image of God he created them«. [Gen 1:27] This too is among God's attributes¹⁰«.

In contrast, Niketas argues that God's absolute goodness must be a greater goodness than the goodness we encounter in humans. Man can beget, and this ability is an absolute good. Since man has the potential to beget, God must be a greater good than the good encountered in man. Therefore, God *must* beget, not just have the potential. Theodore's syllogism starts with a premise from Scripture; Niketas attempts to make an axiomatic statement about God by constructing an analogy in what is known about man:

»Since therefore, in us there are both productivity and unproductivity, birth and barrenness, fruitfulness and unfruitfulness, both sprouting and its negation and the better things, those such as birth and production, and also sprouting, and qualities like these, but also the weaker, like unproductivity, barrenness, unfruitfulness, and the negation of sprouting, we imagine and describe God as having the stronger qualities without the corresponding weaknesses in us – just as we clearly said, so we would say something has production, sprouting, fecundity, and those qualities like these. For even if someone might endeavor in these, even if I myself would, that death is better than life and darkness than light, such would be ludicrous. Therefore it is clear that God is productive and begets the Word. For, begetting is more valuable than infertil-

ity and unfruitfulness, and all opposition to this axiom is barren. If this is the case, clearly, God has a Son. It is proved thus.

10. We naturally describe God as having these stronger qualities in us: begetting, productivity, and sprouting. So it is that every such quality has its correspondence in the Son: sprouting, fruitfulness, and productivity. Therefore it follows that God, on account of these qualities, is fittingly described by us as having a Son, and it is properly believed by us and taught that the Logos is substantially, impassively, and changelessly begotten by Him. If this is so, even clear for those who are strong but see dimly, that the substantial power and Wisdom of God, through which he is powerful and by which he creates and without which nothing is made, and which the argument shows to be consubstantial with God the Father and alike in every aspect except begetting, and the Son is of God, his Wisdom, and his Word as is rightly confessed and believed by us Christians¹¹«.

We have no proof that Niketas read either John of Damascus or Theodore Abū Qurra, although he so closely follows Abū Qurra's *On True Religion* in his apology in his first letter and general refutation of the Qur'an that one assumes that he must have had a Greek translation of the text.

While Niketas was responding directly to an attack from a Muslim intellectual, there is still temptation to follow Paul Lemerle and to see the foundation for the ninth-century Aristotelian shift in Byzantine intellectual life itself, especially iconoclasm. In the second phase of the iconoclastic controversy, Patriarch Nikephoros and Theodore the Studite embraced an »Aristotelian platform« to address the issue of images. This phase of the debate has even been called a »scholastic phase« because of the use of Aristotelian logical terminology, especially that of the *Categories*, a text that was particularly influential upon Niketas Byzantios and his Muslim counterparts¹². However, for the iconodule defense, Aristotelian philosophy is always just a means to an end, rarely cited as a source – although Niketas never directly quotes Aristotle either. The Aristotelian legacy in Byzantium never died out, nor was it forgotten in the Levant: Syriac Christian theologians in particular played a significant role in transferring it to the Arab world. In the ninth century, before and after Niketas Byzantios, we see a sudden increase in Aristotelian syllogistic reasoning that might be appropriately, if anachronistically

10 Theodore Abū Qurra, Theologus Autodictactus 13, D228. In the beginning of the paragraph, Abū Qurra uses the classic *kalām* form of argument: »Suppose someone denies that Adam and God resemble one another with regard to begetting...We answer...« Michael Cook, in his article, the »Origins of Kalam,« has pointed out that *kalām* literature has many Christian parallels in Greek and Syriac and a few examples illustrate a common pattern, where a series of questions are presented with, »if you say..., we say«, and »if he asks...we shall answer...« a consistent dialectical form for answering the challenges of an interlocutor, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. Cf. Cook, Origins 37.

11 Niketas Byzantios, Apologia 9,239-10,262: Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἐν ἡμῖν ἔστι γόνιμον τε καὶ ἀγονον, γέννησις τε καὶ στέρωσις, καρπός τε καὶ ἀκαρπία, βλάστησις τε καὶ ἡ ταύτης στέρησις καὶ τὰ μὲν κρείττονα, (19^α) οἷον γέννησις τε καὶ γόνιμον, βλάστησις τε καὶ, ὅσα τούτοις ὁμοία, τὰ δὲ χεῖρονα, οἷον ἀγονον, στέρωσις, ἀκαρπία καὶ ἡ τῆς βλαστήσεως στέρησις, τὸν δὲ Θεὸν διὰ τῶν κρεττόνων καταγράφομεν καὶ καταφάσκομεν ἄνευ ἡμῖν συμβαινόντων συμπτωμάτων, ὡσπερ ἔφαμεν – φανερόν, ὅτι γόνιμον, γέννησιν ἔχοντα, βλαστὸν, καρπὸν καὶ τὰ τούτοις ὁμοία φήσομεν. Εἰ

γὰρ καὶ τις ἐν τούτοις φιλονεικίῃ, φιλονεικίῃσῃ κάγω, ὅτι ὁ θάνατος τῆς ζωῆς κρείττων καὶ τὸ σκότος τοῦ φωτός, ὅπερ ἐστὶ γελόιον. Ὡστε φανερόν, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς γόνιμός τέ ἐστιν καὶ γεννητικὸς Λόγος. (20^α) Πάσης γὰρ ἀντιλογίας ἀργούσης τιμώτερον ἢ γέννησις τῆς στειρώσεως καὶ ἀκαρπίας· εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, φανερόν, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς Υἱὸν ἔχει. Ἔστι γὰρ συλλογίσασθαι οὕτως.

10. Τὸν Θεὸν ἐκ τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν κρεπιτόνων γεννητικόν τε καὶ γόνιμον καὶ βλαστάνοντα προσφύως διαγράφομεν· πᾶν δὲ τὸ οὕτως ἔχον πρὸς υἱὸν ἢ βλαστὸν ἢ καρπὸν ἢ γόνον τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔχει. Συνάγεται ἄρα, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς πρεπόντως ἐκ τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν διαγραφόμενος Υἱὸν τε ἔχει καὶ παρ' ἡμῖν καλῶς πιστεύεται καὶ δοξάζεται τὸν ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἐνυποστάτως καὶ ἀπαθῶς καὶ ἀρ(ρ)εῦστως γεννηθέντα Λόγον. Εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, φανερόν καὶ τοῖς (20^α) ἀμυδρῶς συνορᾶν ἰσχύουσιν. ὅτι ἡ ἐνυπόστατος δύναμις τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Σοφία, καθ' ἣν ἐστὶ δυνατὸς καὶ δι' ἧς ποιεῖ καὶ ἡς χωρὶς οὐδὲν ποιεῖ, ἦν καὶ ὁ λόγος ὁμοούσιον τῷ Θεῷ καὶ Πατρὶ καὶ κατὰ πάντα ὁμοιον εἰδείξεν χωρὶς τῆς γεννήσεως, Υἱός τε ἐστὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σοφία καὶ Λόγος καὶ εἰκότως παρ' ἡμῶν τῶν Χριστιανῶν ὠμολόγηται τε καὶ πεπιστευταί.

12 Alexander, Patriarch Nicephorus 189-191.

labeled, Byzantine scholasticism, so that we see in Niketas' work an emphasis on syllogistic arts rather than the patristic and scriptural legacy presented with the tools of Aristotle. He pushes the envelope more than any other thinker, foreshadowing later thinkers like John Italos whose devotion to classical philosophy will earn the ire of the church hierarchy¹³.

Niketas is so self-consciously syllogistic in his response that he felt compelled to state in both letters that he is aiming for logic as his primary method of argumentation, but only because he was prompted to do so by his correspondent, a statement that comes across as disingenuous since Niketas' syllogisms at time seem somewhat labored. He uses an explicitly Aristotelian vocabulary, even in the title of his letters, which were by him. The title of the first letter (Epistle A) is as follows (notable vocabulary is in parenthesis in the original Greek):

»Positive (κατασκευαστική)¹⁴ exposition (ἔκθεσις) of Christian dogma with deductive proof (ἀποδειξίως) brought forth on the basis of (προαγομένη)¹⁵ common sense, dialectical (διαλεκτική) method, natural (φυσικῶν)¹⁶ dialectical proofs (ἐπιχειρημάτων)¹⁷, and multiple syllogistic arts (συλλογιστικῆς πολυτεχνίας); and a refutation (ἀντίρρησις)¹⁸ of the letter written by the Hagarenes¹⁹ to the emperor Michael, son of Theophilus, to slander the faith of the Christians²⁰«.

Κατασκευαστική has a particular technical meaning for constructive or positive in relation to philosophical proofs, (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, p. 377H and *Prior Analytics*, 1403^a25). Niketas uses the phrase λόγων κατασκευαστικῶς from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1043^a25) at the close of the opening of his letter. He contrasts his rigorous logic with the Muslim epistler's eloquence. ἔκθεσις is philosophical exposition in Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* (48^a25 and 49^b6). ἀπόδειξις is the technical term for deductive proof, Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* (71^b17, 81^a40). The other Greek words here also all have technical philosophical meanings. The title to the second letter (Epistle B) continues in the same vein: »Refutation (ἀντίρρησις) and rebuttal (ἀνατροπή)²¹ of the second letter written by the

Hagarenes to the emperor Michael, the son of Theophilus, to slander the faith of the Christians«²².

Epistle A opens with florid eloquence and a series of metaphors that equate the search for knowledge to trying to see through smoke before shifting the search for truth to military metaphors:

»Therefore as long as those who have been seized by ignorance and insouciance follow closely upon those who have somehow arrived at this point, they will enjoy nothing inferior to this same divine nature than these. After the first has been delayed, they do not refrain from undertaking the second voyage. For they will no longer be able to escape the reproach of doing evil. For if they do not seek the assistance that results from an ascetic life, in order to achieve a certain measure of secure knowledge of God, and if they are not persuaded by those who have achieved it, but depend only on their own deliberations, how will they be able to reach that which can only be achieved in one way, if they pursue another [way]²³«?

It becomes clear that Niketas is trying to outdo his Muslim counterpart, for he exclaims, with an ironic vocative, »since reflection is more than your eloquence, my much-experienced friend«²⁴! He then moves on to say that he is forced to argue in deductive proof because the Muslim has dared to attack the Christian faith with logic and as a problem, so he will demonstrate to him its truth with logic. However, in the first paragraph, he insists that:

»The truth is a matter that is hard to catch, and that can be concealed even to those who are exceedingly sharp-sighted, unless in some degree the soul is able to penetrate through the entire thickness of this bodily darkness, the soul will be able to touch upon the paths of some truth, if it is fully persuaded to lay to rest the traces of the corporeal world«²⁵.

Thus, he leaves open the notion that ultimate truth can only be known by intellect and faith. Niketas insists that logic (as in deductive proofs, ἀπόδειξις), if one is truly open to it, still has the power to lead one to true knowledge of God²⁶.

13 Cf. Clucas, Trial.

14 For the parenthetical references, I have deliberately left the words in the cases which reflect their grammatical function in the original Greek.

15 Used in reference to advancing philosophical arguments, cf. Liddell/Scott.

16 Has specific sense of »natural philosophy,« Aristotelēs, *De partibus animalium* 640a2; cf. Liddell and Scott. Cf. supra, n. 5 on the importance of science and mathematics in Aristotelian philosophy and the Aristotelian logic of Islamic and Christian thinkers.

17 The phrase might better be translated, »proofs from nature.« Ἐπιχειρημάτων is a technical term for dialectical proofs, Aristotelēs, *Topica* 162a16, et al., cf. Liddell/Scott.

18 Has particular reference as refutation or counter-argument in debate or rhetoric; cf. Liddell and Scott.

19 Niketas uses the plural here.

20 Nikētas Byzantios, Ep. I 1-6 (156): »Ἐκθεσις κατασκευαστικῆ μετὰ ἀποδείξεως τοῦ Χριστιανικοῦ δόγματος ἐκ κοινῶν καὶ διαλεκτικῆς μεθόδου καὶ φυσικῶν ἐπιχειρημάτων καὶ συλλογιστικῆς πολυτεχνίας προαγομένη καὶ ἀντίρρησις τῆς σταλείσης ἐπιστολῆς ἐκ τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν πρὸς Μιχαὴλ βασιλεῖα υἱὸν Θεοφίλου ἐπὶ διαβολῇ τῆς τῶν Χριστιανῶν πίστεως; With the last phrase »of the faith of the Christians«, Niketas seems deliberately to personalize the attack on Christian dogma.

21 More forceful than mere »refutation«: Aristotelēs, *Metaphysics* 1013b14.

22 Nikētas Byzantios, Ep. II (176): Ἀντίρρησις καὶ ἀνατροπὴ τῆς δευτέρας ἐπιστολῆς τῆς σταλείσης παρὰ τῶν Ἀγαρηνῶν πρὸς Μιχαὴλ βασιλεῖα υἱὸν Θεοφίλου ἐπὶ διαβολῇ τῆς τῶν Χριστιανῶν πίστεως.

23 Nikētas Byzantios, Ep. I 1,27-35 (156): Μέχρι μὲν οὖν τοῖς ὧδε πῆ καταφθάσαν οἱ ἀγνοία ἢ βραθυμία κεκρατημένοι παρέπονται, οὐδὲν ἦττον τῆς αὐτῆς ἐκείνοις θεϊότητος ἀπολαύσονται· ὀπηνίκα δὲ μῆδὲ τὸν δεῦτερον πλοῦν ἀναβληθέντος τοῦ πρώτου μεταδιώκειν ἀνέχονται, οὐκέτι που πάντως τὸ τῆς κακοουργίας ἐγκλημα διαδρᾶναι δυνήσονται. Εἰ γὰρ βίον μὲν ἐξηρηκμένου φροντίδα οὐ τίθενται, ὡς ἂν εἰς τὸ τῆς ἀπλανοῦς θεογνωσίας καταφθάσασαι μέτρον, τοῖς τε κατελιγμένοι οὐ καταπαίθονται, μόνοις δὲ τοῖς οἰκείοις ἐπεριείδονται λογισμοῖς, πόθεν τοῦ δι' ἄλλης ὁδοῦ λαμβανομένου ἑτέραν ἐπιτρέχοντες καταλήψονται;

24 Nikētas Byzantios, Ep. I 1,36f. (156): ἐπειδὴ φροντίς μᾶλλον τῆ λογιστικῆ σου, πολυπειρότατε φίλε.

25 Nikētas Byzantios, Ep. I 1.8-11 (156): Δυσθήρατόν τι χρέμα ἀλήθεια καὶ τούς γε λίαν δέωυποῦντας λαθεῖν δυνάμενον, εἰ μὴ που ἄρα τέλεον τοῦ σωματικοῦ τοῦδε γνόφου τὸ πάχος διασχοῦσα ψυχὴ μῦσαι ἢ ἀργῆσαι τὰς αἰσθήσει καταπέισσασαι ἴχνους τινὸς αὐτῆς ἐφικέσθαι δυνήσεται. The τὰς is problematic, but in this translation is taken with ἴχνους, which does not grammatically fit, but seems to be the only solution to getting the sense of the sentence. I wish to thank Robert Irons and James Arieti for having a look at this passage and offering helpful insights.

26 Nikētas Byzantios, Ep. I 1,35-45 (156-158).

The apologia is an explication of Christian theology, especially the nature of the Trinity as one οὐσία with three hypostases, with a pointed emphasis towards responding to Islam. Niketas begins to respond directly to the complaints of the Muslim writer: »the calumnies in your writing against our faith«²⁷, an indication which suggests that Niketas thinks that the Muslim merely does not understand Christian truth. Indeed, it is a suggestion that Niketas likes to make, that Muslims suffer from a lack of will and ability to understand the superiority of Christian truth. He then responds to the »censures« through a series of quotations from the Muslim letter, with a refutation of each.

Before he begins his refutation, through a series of syllogisms in the apologetic section of his letter, Niketas emphasizes the omnipotence of God, and at several points, Niketas will even conclude his syllogism or point with »as even the Hagarenes say«, a clear echo of *kalām* arguments which often begin with a proposition held as axiomatic by both sides in order to force an opponent to accept a premise with which he does not agree. Niketas argues that God is eternal, unbegotten, uncreated, the supreme mover and creator of all, and as one. Of course, all of these points are common ground between Christianity and Islam. However, Niketas will attempt to deduce from these premises that a completely benevolent omnipotent creator must have a Son eternally begotten. Throughout his argument he does not appeal to Scripture.

Niketas quotes the Muslim as having written »Each begetter is prior to its own begotten«, the statement Niketas clearly regards as vitally important, since he repeats it so many times and devotes so much space to it. Niketas says that the statement, »has in one way, some truth to it, but in another way also some falsehood«²⁸. His main goal in the letter is to explain and defend the classical Orthodox Christian formulation of the Trinity. His rejection of this statement is immediate:

»For while we confess the consubstantiality and identity of the Father and the Son, and while we agree that the Father is called the begetter, and the Son is called the begotten, you take from earthly relationships the statement, »Each begetter is prior to its own begotten«, and falsely apply it to divine nature. This has, on the contrary, validity when applied to begotten and created nature, but for God this does not apply (many, indeed, innumerable statements have validity to us, but in relation to God are entirely inapplicable). This then you understand as true as far as God is concerned, and you

conclude thus: if each begetter is prior to its own begotten, the Son, in whom we believe, ought not be coeternal and consubstantial with the Father. But if conversely, the Son is coeternal to the Father and the statement is true: »Each begetter is prior to its own begotten«, their relationship of one to the other is forced apart²⁹«.

Niketas proceeds from this paragraph to explicate the Trinity. Yet, the problem is evident from the beginning. For Niketas and his fellow Orthodox Christians, it is axiomatic that the Father and the Son are co-eternal, an axiom that only applies to God, an axiom that the Muslim thinker rejects. Time and again, it is clear that the two thinkers start with axiomatic statements that are based on faith, and thus, debate is pointless.

Moving from his faith perspective, in the following paragraphs Niketas expresses amazement that the Muslim thinker would apply such a statement, which is clearly true about creatures, to the creator. Niketas implies that it is foolish or even blasphemy to judge the creator with statements that apply to creatures. For Niketas, to do such is clearly illogical, yet he gives no clear reason why his Muslim counterpart must agree, since the Muslim counterpart is thinking by analogy, a logical method commonly used in Islamic jurisprudence. Ultimately, Niketas will attempt to create a syllogism that would force his Muslim counterpart to accept that the statement, »each begetter is prior to its own begotten«, is illogical when applied to God:

»Each begetter is prior to its own begotten«. This [statement] is postulated about God, by someone who speaks in no way the truth. Therefore the designation »begetter« is one that either exists by itself, or in relation to something else. Now it is not a designation that exists by itself, otherwise it would not make reference to the begotten. It is clear that this designation belongs to those that are »in relation to something else«! If then the designation »begetter« is »in relation to something else«, and if those that are »in relation to something else« are by nature simultaneous, and if those things that are »by nature simultaneous« at the same time exist and do not exist, then the designation, »begetter«, – in as much as he is a begetter, to whom this makes reference – will not have either priority or posterity. If then the begetter has no priority or posterity, but you said that »each begetter is prior to its own begotten«, then it is clear that the designation »begetter« does not merely refer to being a begetter, but refers to being a begetter in relation to something else, for example Socrates or Peter³⁰«.

27 Nikētas Byzantios, Ep. I 2,46f. (158): τὰς ἐν τῷ σῶ γράμματι διαβολὰς κατὰ τῆς ἡμετέρας πίστεως.

28 Nikētas Byzantios, Ep. I 2,55f. (158): ἐπὶ τι μὲν τὸ ἀληθὲς ἔχει ἀπλῶς τιθέμενον, ἐπὶ τι δὲ τὸ ψεῦδος.

29 Nikētas Byzantios, Ep. I 2,61-73 (158): Ἡμῶν γὰρ ὁμολογούντων ὁμοουσιότητα καὶ ταυτότητα τοῦ τε Πατρὸς καὶ Υἱοῦ καὶ τὸν μὲν ὡς γεγεννηκότα Πατέρα καλεῖσθαι, τὸν δὲ ὡς γεγεννημένον Υἱὸν λαβῶν σὺ ἐκ τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς ἀξίωμα τὸ λέγον, ὅτι »Ἐκαστος γεννήτωρ πρότερός ἐστι τοῦ οἰκείου γεννήματος« καὶ τοῦτο ἐπὶ τῆς θείας φύσεως κακῶς ἐπισυναψάς ὅπερ μᾶλλον ἐπὶ γενητῆς καὶ κτιστῆς φύσεως χώραν ἔχει, ἐπὶ δὲ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἔρρωται (καὶ γὰρ πολλὰ μὲν

καὶ, εἰ χρῆ τὰληθὲς εἰπεῖν, ἅπειρα ἐφ' ἡμῶν χώραν ἔχει, ἐπὶ δὲ Θεοῦ παντελῶς ἀλλοτρία ἐστὶ) – τοῦτο οὖν ὡς ἀληθὲς ἐπὶ Θεοῦ λαβῶν ὡδέ πως συνάγει· Εἰ ἕκαστος γεννήτωρ πρότερός ἐστι τοῦ οἰκείου γεννήματος, οὐκ ἔσται ὁ παρ' ἡμῶν πιστευόμενος Υἱὸς τῷ Πατρὶ συναϊδὸς τε καὶ ὁμοούσιος. Εἰ δ' αὖ πάλιν συναϊδὸς ὁ Υἱὸς τῷ Πατρὶ, ἀληθὲς δὲ τὸ λέγον »Ἐκαστος γεννήτωρ πρότερός ἐστι τοῦ οἰκείου γεννήματος«, καταναγκάζεται ἡ σχέσις ἐξ ἀλλήλων διακεχωρισθαι.

30 Nikētas Byzantios, Ep. I 4,101-111 (160-162): »Ἐκαστος γεννήτωρ πρότερός ἐστι τοῦ οἰκείου γεννήματος«. Τοῦτο νομοθετοῦντός ἐστιν ἐπὶ Θεοῦ, τὸ ἀληθὲς δὲ οὐδαμῶς λέγοντος. Τὸ τοῖνυν γεννήτωρ ὄνομα ἦτοι τῶν καθ' αὐτό ἐστιν ἢ τῶν πρὸς τι· ἀλλὰ μὴ τῶν καθ' αὐτό οὐκ ἐστίν· οὐ γὰρ ἂν πρὸς γέννημα τῆν

For Niketas, begetter and begotten refer to a relationship, not a temporal reality, but the Muslim asserts that this relationship requires a temporal reality. For Niketas this statement should not apply to God because God is above time. For humans, the relationship of begetter to begotten implies a temporal relationship. For God, there is no such implication.

Although Niketas has given no legitimacy to the Muslim intellectual's analogical reasoning, he himself attacks the statements of the Muslim with a series of analogies. He tries to beat the Muslim at his own game, so to speak, suggesting that the Muslim's pithy statement implies that God has a beginning, so the Muslim must not believe that God is eternal. For the Muslim, the major objection to the Trinity is that it ascribes companions to the one God, so this topic is taken up yet again. For Niketas, this accusation is proof that the Muslim just does not understand the Trinity, which he then begins to explain in a somewhat pedantic series of analogies:

»For a stone is not called a companion to a stone, because the same essence (οὐσία) is common to both. In the same way, a horse is not called a companion to a horse, on the grounds that they have one essence in common. If then »that which is common« is more prevalent, and »the companion« less so, and we declare that the Father holds his reign in common and is indivisible with his Son, you change this by writing: »if the reign and the power is common with the Son, then the Son will hold the reign of the Father entirely in common with him«. And you expose yourself to false reasoning, rather than us, because you engage in the false argument of the so-called avoidance of exchange [of the second part with the first]³¹«.

For the Muslim, the concern is that by ascribing partners to God, Christians diminish his sovereignty, an accusation that Niketas spends the next few paragraphs refuting, since the Word of God is only greater proof of God's power and sovereignty. After further elaborations, Niketas concludes with a sound rejection of the errors of his Muslim counterpart, a sort of rhetorical flourish to ensure that the Muslim realizes that his letter was not effective.

The Aristotelian method was not just applied to Islam, but also to Latin Christians as well, now defined as heretics in the 9th century. While anti-heretical writers for centuries had been well-versed in Aristotle, no one was so rigorous and purely Aristotelian in his approach as Niketas Byzantios, who applied his syllogistic method to Latin Christianity, just as he had to Islam. His anti-Latin treatise is entitled: »Syllogistic chapters put together from the common notions concerning God and from the demonstrative (ἀποδεικτικῶς) and disjunctive (διαρετικῶς) method...against those who impiously and

atheistically add and say and teach in the holy symbol of the Orthodox faith of the Christians... »and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son« – instead of »from the Father alone«³². Niketas includes few quotations from authorities, scriptural or patristic, although there are echoes of John of Damascus, Gregory Nazianzus, and Basil of Caesarea³³. There are more quotations from Scripture than in his anti-Islamic texts, but we should expect them, since his text is directed at fellow Christians. The anti-Latin treatise was almost certainly written after the anti-Islamic treatise, as he had honed his method against Islam. Christians are true monotheists, a point asserted again against the Latins: the Trinity must have only one source: *archē*. So we see that an exchange with a Muslim influenced arguments against fellow Christians.

This text is completely in the style of his anti-Islamic writings, and contrasts with other anti-Latin texts of the ninth century, particularly those of Niketas' contemporary Photios who also wrote an anti-Latin and anti-Armenian treatise. One assumes Niketas was in the circle of Photios, but there is no clear reference to one another in the works of either. Photios displays the same confidence in reason, at the same time asserting that reason alone cannot lead one to ultimate truths about the divine. Photios never makes such an effort to be as explicitly Aristotelian in the way that Niketas did. Photios has become known to posterity as the urbane and learned humanist, the inveterate foe of the austere, fanatical Ignatius. Indeed, Photios was accused of loving classical learning too much by his opponents³⁴. Most of his writing is theological, and even his *Bibliotheca* makes it clear that he prioritized Christian writing. His anti-Latin texts, his epistles and his *Treatise regarding the Mystagogia of the Holy Spirit*, the latter perhaps only partially by him, display the Attic style and literary flourishes he so clearly prized in his *Bibliotheca*. However, his *Quaestiones Amphiloichianae* make a foray into Aristotelian method, particularly its application to theological topics. Photios is interested in the means of classification, and so offered a commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* and how it applied to the iconodule defense. At times, Photios seems to want to display his knowledge of ancient philosophy rather than style. The writings of Niketas and the *Quaestiones Amphiloichianae* of Photios give us an indication of how logic was studied and used in the ninth and tenth centuries. More work should be done on logical handbooks, to give us a fuller picture of Byzantine education in this period.

ἀναφορὰν εἶχε· δῆλον, ὅτι τῶν πρὸς τι. Εἰ οὖν τὸ γεννήτωρ τῶν πρὸς τί ἐστιν, τὰ δὲ πρὸς τι ἅμα τῇ φύσει, τὰ δὲ ἅμα τῇ φύσει ἅμα τέ εἰσιν καὶ οὐκ εἰσίν, τὸ γεννήτωρ ἄρα, καθ' ὃ γεννήτωρ, πρὸς ὃν τὴν ἀναφορὰν ἔχει, τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον οὐκ ἔξει. Εἰ οὖν τὸ γεννήτωρ τὸ πρότερον καὶ καὶ ὕστερον οὐκ ἔξει, ἔφης δέ, ὅτι ἕκαστος γεννήτωρ πρότερός ἐστιν τοῦ οἰκείου γεννήματος, φανερόν, ὅτι τὸ γεννήτωρ οὐ, καθ' ὃ γεννήτωρ, ἀλλὰ κατ' ἄλλο τι, καθ' ὃ Σωκράτης ἢ Πέτρος.

31 Niketas Byzantios, Ep. I 9,229-237 (168): λίθος γὰρ λίθῳ οὐ λέγεται κοινωνός, ἐπεὶ κοινὴ ἀμφοτέρων ἡ οὐσία· ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ ἵππος ἵππῳ κοινὴ καὶ μίαν οὐσίαν ἔχοντες οὐ λέγονται κοινωνοί – εἰ οὖν τὸ κοινὸν ἐπὶ πλεόν, τὸ δὲ κοινῶς ἐπὶ

ἐλαττον, ἡμῶν δὲ λεγόντων κοινὴν καὶ ἀμέριστον ἔχειν τὸν Πατέρα τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείαν πρὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ Υἱὸν αὐτὸς μεταφέρειν γράφεις· »Εἰ κοινὴ βασιλεία καὶ ἐξουσία πρὸς Υἱόν, πάντως καὶ κοινωνὸς ἔσται ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ Πατρὸς τῆς αὐτοῦ βασιλείας«, καὶ παραλογίζη μᾶλλον σαυτὸν ἢ περ ἡμᾶς ποιῶν τὸν παραλογισμόν παρὰ τὸ μὴ ἀντιστρέφον καλούμενον.

32 Niketas Byzantios, *Kephalaia syllogistika*.

33 Kolbaba, *Inventing* 120-130.

34 Photios' theological writings were also heavily influenced by Aristotelēs: Anton, *Photius* 158-183.

The generation after Niketas and Photios includes Arethas of Caesarea (860-c. 932), who was in the same circle as Photios and may have personally known Niketas. Arethas is recognized primarily as a scholar who commissioned manuscripts and commented on Plato and other classical literature³⁵. However, his »Letter to the Emir of Damascus« is ostensibly a letter defending Christianity and attacking Islam³⁶. If Arethas' marginal annotation is to be believed, he wrote in an uncharacteristically simple style of Greek so that his recipient would easily understand it. The letter takes an offensive tone in the extreme, almost going to the point of parodying Muslim beliefs about paradise and their prophet. Clearly, he is following many of the same stereotypes in Niketas' *Refutation*, which unlike the two letters was not intended for a Muslim audience. Arethas indulged in more vitriol than Niketas. One wonders if Arethas, an experienced diplomat, ever sent this letter or intended it as a pamphlet to be circulated among his friends.

Niketas was hugely influential in the twelfth century upon Euthymios Zigabenos (d. after 1118)³⁷. Zigabenos relied on Niketas Byzantios for his *Panoplia dogmatica*, chapter twenty-eight, and this work was influential in popularizing Niketas' views. Zigabenos was a close associate of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118), and his text devotes more attention to the Bogomils than the Muslims. The preoccupation with the Bogomils in the reign of Alexios confirms the pattern that internal heresies were always of more concern to Byzantine Christian intellectuals than »other« external religions. The antepenultimate Byzantine emperor, Manuel II Palaiologos (1391-1425), continued the tradition of Niketas by emphasizing that Islam was illogical. His treatise is modeled after a Platonic dialogue, a turn away from the strictly syllogistic method of Niketas but with the same arguments against Islam. In the late Byzantine Empire, numerous Latin philosophical works and polemics against Islam were translated into Greek, as religious polemic became more of an intellectual preoccupation of the entire Mediterranean world.

The Byzantines followed Niketas, not John of Damascus, in their intellectual conception of Islam. However, excessive devotion to Aristotle became suspect. By the eleventh century, the Christians of Byzantium would view reliance on pure reason and syllogistic arguments with much the same suspicion as Ibn Ḥanbal and the other Muslim theologians who opposed Mu'tazilite rationalism. John Italos, the Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic-intellectual, was accused of heresy and condemned in 1082 in Constantinople. In the fifteenth century at the Council of Ferrara-Florence, Greek theologians complained about the frequent quotations of Aristotle from their Latin counterparts.

In closing, it is worthwhile to reflect once again on a significant point: the emphasis on logic was initiated by a Muslim. Hence, this intellectual movement, the Aristotelian shift, may have been inspired by arguments from Islam, even if the tools were there in Byzantium. The emphasis on logic came from a Muslim attack. It was a Muslim thinker who stimulated a Byzantine thinker, Niketas, to use logic and to attack Islam as illogical because Christianity was attacked as illogical. Letters had been exchanged between caliphs and the Byzantine emperors before, for the sake of treaties and prisoner exchanges, but also for the exchange of religious ideas, as in the case of the letters between Leo III and 'Umar II in the eighth century, which exclusively addressed religious and theological matters, although logic was not claimed by either³⁸. It is a shame that we do not have the full text of the Islamic letters, only selective quotations from Niketas.

Internal propaganda within the caliphate suggests that there was a deliberate effort to portray the Byzantines as not the true heirs of Greek philosophy. Just as the Byzantines felt the need to assert their Roman-ness in the face of Carolingian claims, so they also felt the need to assert in their Greek-ness in the face of Abbasid claims. Muslims had created an image, primarily for internal consumption, that the Byzantines and their religion were illogical. This portrayal of the Byzantines as illogical was not the sudden invention of a single Muslim intellectual. It was the official propaganda of the caliphate, and the intellectual who wrote to Michael III was reflecting a prevalent attitude in ninth-century Baghdad³⁹. For example, al-Ġāḥiẓ (d. 255/868), who according to Gutas, was the »pro-gandist-laureate of al-Ma'mūn and his Mu'tazilī successors« describes the Byzantines as accomplished but believing in an illogical religion. For him Christianity is illogical because of belief in the Trinity and incarnation. This emphasis on logic had been spurred on by the Muslims' own rediscovery of Aristotelian and pseudo-Aristotelian texts of the ninth century. Legends circulated in which the caliph saw Aristotle in a dream, and Aristotle instructed the caliph that the duty to study his philosophy had fallen upon the Arabs. Aristotelian logic had become a cultural and intellectual commodity claimed by both Muslims and Christians.

As regards to the theme of borderlands and exchange: the Greek translation of the Qur'an that Niketas used is still something of a mystery, although a few articles have been written about it⁴⁰. It may have originated in Edessa or a similar place. Niketas' *Refutation*, not intended for a Muslim audience, may have been in fact intended for Muslims in these border areas, in hopes of converting them to Christianity. The Aristotelian shift, however, transcended borders, and should be regarded as eastern Mediterranean movement. The term »shift« is

35 Reynolds/Wilson, Scribes 57 f.

36 Cf. Arethas, ep. 14; cf. also Karlin-Hayter, Letter. Arethas' uncharacteristically simple style and marginal note is remarked upon by Mullett, Writing 179.

37 Euthymios Zigabenos, *Panopliae dogmaticae*.

38 Jeffery, *Ghevond* 269-332.

39 Shboul, *Byzantines* 57-58.

40 Trapp, *Koranübersetzung*, remains foundational, but Versteegh, *Greek Translations* is more recent. The most extensive and detailed study is Ulbricht, *Coranus Graecus*.

useful for three reasons. First, terms like renaissance and have become passé and are considered inaccurate. Dating the »rebirth« is nearly impossible, as well as identifying precisely what was reborn – intellectual life, art, culture in general? The term shift takes us away from the whole notion of rebirth, and it allows us to focus on one topic – Aristotelian logic, which was not reborn because it never died out. Second, we are able to examine and analyze this shift in a particular localities and as part of a broader Mediterranean intellectual movement. There is the translation movement in Baghdad, and Latin scholasticism from the twelfth century is also part of this movement. Third, the notion of shift does not commit us to a definite notion of a permanent change. Niketas, I would argue, is foundational in this shift, and he has a leg-

acy that has yet to be realized largely because he remains an understudied figure. Yet, he remains, as I have pointed out, in comparison with his predecessors and even contemporaries like Photios, a somewhat idiosyncratic figure. Arethas of Caesarea, scarcely a generation later, had more enthusiasm for Plato. Perhaps we will never know the impact of Niketas on Byzantine education. However, it is clear, that in his deliberate and explicit effort to out-syllogize his Islamic correspondent, he epitomizes a shift in the Byzantine approach to Islam. This shift happened on account of an exchange in letters and was aided by a Greek translation of the Qur'an. Therefore, it should be seen in the larger context of what we may one day come to know as Mediterranean scholasticism and not an isolated Byzantine humanism or Arab translation movement.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

Niketas Byzantios, Islam, and the Aristotelian Shift in Ninth-century Byzantium

The ninth century was a period of a significant revival for Aristotelian philosophy in both Byzantium and the Islamic world. This revival can be seen across cultural, linguistic, and political boundaries. It is also in the ninth century that we see the first production of surviving manuscripts of Aristotle. Inter-faith polemic, between Muslims and Christians, Jews and Christians, and Jews and Muslims, and also intra-faith polemic, played a role in this ninth century Aristotelian revival. This paper explores how Niketas Byzantios, a ninth-century Byzantine intellectual known only through his writings, which included anti-heretical and anti-Islamic treatises, not only changed the Byzantine intellectual discourse about Islam but also helped to usher in a new emphasis on Aristotelian method in Byzantine thought. This shift emphasized Aristotelian syllogisms rather than traditional patristic and scriptural citations. While the study of Aristotle had never died out in Byzantium, a brief comparison with Niketas' writings and earlier thinkers, like those from the iconoclast controversy and also his near contemporary Patriarch Photios, demonstrate how a new approach in theological polemic was initiated by Niketas. Ironically this new approach was inspired by an Islamic thinker, and this exchange gives new insight into the exciting intellectual cross-fertilization of the early medieval eastern Mediterranean.

Niketas von Byzanz, der Islam und die Aristotelische Veränderung im Byzanz des 9. Jahrhunderts

Das neunte Jahrhundert war eine Zeit bedeutender Erneuerung der aristotelischen Philosophie sowohl in Byzanz als auch in der islamischen Welt. Diese Erneuerung lässt sich über kulturelle, sprachliche und politische Grenzen hinweg beobachten. Aus dem 9. Jahrhundert stammen auch die ersten überlieferten Aristoteleshandschriften. Die interreligiöse Polemik zwischen Muslimen und Christen, Juden und Christen und Juden und Muslimen sowie die intrakonfessionelle Polemik spielte bei dieser aristotelischen Wiederbelebung des neunten Jahrhunderts eine wichtige Rolle. Dieser Artikel untersucht, wie Niketas Byzantios – ein byzantinischer Intellektueller des 9. Jahrhunderts, der nur aus seinen eigenen Schriften bekannt ist, die antihäretische und antiislamische Abhandlungen enthalten – nicht nur den byzantinischen intellektuellen Diskurs über den Islam veränderte, sondern auch dazu beitrug, die aristotelische Methode nachdrücklich und neu in das byzantinische Denken einzuführen. Infolge dessen wurde stärker aristotelische Syllogismen benutzt statt der traditionellen patristischen und biblischen Zitate. Auch wenn die Beschäftigung mit Aristoteles in Byzanz nie ausgestorben war, so zeigt doch ein kurzer Vergleich von Niketas' Schriften mit den älteren Denkern, etwa mit denen aus der Zeit des Bilderstreits oder auch mit seinem Zeitgenossen, dem Patriarchen Photios, wie Niketas einen neuen Ansatz in der theologischen Polemik initiierte. Ironischerweise wurde dieser neue Ansatz von einem islamischen Denker inspiriert, und dieser Austausch gibt neue Einblicke in die spannende intellektuelle gegenseitige Befruchtung im Frühmittelalter im östlichen Mittelmeerraum.