

The Interchange between Religious Heterodoxies in the Balkans and Caucasus - the Case of the Paulicians

The settlement and presence of Georgian monastic and non-Chalcedonian (Armenian and Syriac-speaking) communities in the early to high medieval Balkans is an acknowledged sphere of the religious interchange between the Balkans and the Caucasus (and Transcaucasia and northern Mesopotamia in general) which, however, is rarely explored in depth. The study of the parallel development of Christian and Islamic religious heterodoxies in the Balkans and Caucasus and their role in the religious interchange between the two regions and the formation of modern sectarian religious identities is an even less explored area of research. The long-standing neglect of this particular dimension of Balkan-Caucasian religious contacts is regrettable not only in the framework of the regions' religious history but in the context of the study of medieval Christian dualist heresy, as both medieval polemicists and modern historians have recognized the role of the Caucasus and Balkans as its respectively early and high medieval cradles.

Although it still abounds in major gaps and uncertainties, the history of the rise of the Paulician movement in Armenia, its expansion in Byzantine Anatolia and the re-settlement and migrations of Paulician communities in the Balkans and their later evolution there provides some very valuable evidence of the nature and dynamics of such Caucasian-Balkan interrelations in the area of religious heterodoxy. This evidence also indicates some potentially promising vistas for future research into other areas of religious exchange between religious heterodoxies (both Christian and Islamic) between the Caucasus and Balkans which certainly can profitably be pursued in the future.

Paulicianism emerged and took shape as a dissenting movement in the complex and tense religious world of early medieval Armenia which following its Christianization at the beginning of the fourth century had been politically and religiously contested for centuries by the two great imperial rivals of late antiquity, the Christianized East Roman (Byzantine) and Sasanian Persian empires. There are some indications that with the introduction of increasingly harsh anti-heretical (especially anti-Manichaean) legislation in the Christianized East Roman empire, Christian dissident groups, labeled heterodox and heretical by its institutionalized clerical elite, sought refuge in Armenian lands. The

characteristic Zoroastrian-Christian religio-political strife in Armenia continued at various levels of intensity and in a variety of political-military circumstances until the last Sasanian-Byzantine war (603-628) which preceded the seventh-century Muslim Arab conquests in the Near East, conquests that included also the establishment of the Arab caliphate's suzerainty over Armenia itself. The inevitable anti-Zoroastrian polemic in early Armenian Christianity was accompanied by the maintenance of Zoroastrian and pre-Christian Armenian survivals in its popular versions.¹ At the same time, the Armenian church's rejection of the "Definition of Chalcedon" (the Christological formula of "One Person in Two Natures"), asserted at the Fourth Oecumenical Council in 451, conveyed also a rejection of the authority of the imperial Chalcedonian church of Byzantium, which was to lead to frequent strains, conflicts and polemics in the sphere of Byzantine-Armenian ecclesiastical relations

The rise and spread of Paulicianism needs to be considered against the background of these tensions and peculiarities in the early medieval religious climate in Armenian-speaking areas in the Caucasus and eastern Asia Minor. The early phases and fortunes of the movement are extremely obscure and it is very difficult to reconstruct even their basic outlines, whereas the origin of the designation "Paulician" remains controversial.² The ninth-century Byzantine chronicler of Paulicianism, Peter of Sicily, traces its beginnings to the missionary activities of a "Manichaean" woman, Callinice, who taught the heresy to her two sons (characterized as a "viper mother" rearing "two snakes"), and preached it around Samosata in eastern Anatolia.³

1 See James R. Russell, *Zoroastrianism in Armenia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations; National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, 1987).

2 The most plausible explanation of the origin of the name remains that of Paul Lemerle, "L'Histoire des Pauliciens d'Asie Mineure d'après les sources grecques", *Travaux et mémoires*, 5, 1973, pp. 1-137, on p.

3 Peter of Sicily, *Historia Manichaeorum qui Pauliciani dicuntur*, 85-86, ed. D. Papachryssanthou, in C. Astruc, W. Conus-Wolska, J. Gouillard, P. Lemerle, D. Papachryssanthou and J. Paramelle (eds.), "Les Sources grecques pour l'histoire des Pauliciens d'Asie Mineure", *Travaux et mémoires*, 4, 1970, pp. 3-67, on pp. 37-39.

While this report regarding a female Manichaean heresiarch of original Paulicianism seems largely fictitious, the tradition that the formulation of actual Paulician doctrine as a Christian dualism should be ascribed to an Armenian, Constantine-Silvanus of Mananalis (on the upper Euphrates), executed during the reign of the Byzantine emperor, Constantine IV (668-685), appears more reliable.⁴ It is almost certain that Paulicianism owed to Constantine-Silvanus its specific Christian dualism and Docetism, the first version of its canon (comprising the four Gospels and the epistles of Paul), the enduring veneration of Paul, and the foundation of its first “church” at Cibossa (near Colonea), situated in the Byzantine-Armenian borderlands (Byzantium re-extended its authority in Armenia under Constans II (641-668) in the 650s).⁵ Constantine-Silvanus was eventually accused of Manichaism and executed; he was the first of the Paulician religious leaders and teachers, the *didaskaloi*, who continued the missionary work in Armenia and Byzantium and on occasions were to share the fate of the first *didaskalos*.

Paulicianism began to spread thus in Byzantine-ruled Anatolian areas early in its history and enjoyed some periods of toleration under the Byzantine iconoclastic emperors. In the following centuries the movement posed some serious problems for the Byzantine secular and ecclesiastical authorities, being predominantly approached and treated by the latter as a revival of Manichaeism – by that time accusations of Manichaeism in Byzantium were used not only against actual or alleged Christian heretics but also to stigmatize religious and political adversaries. Indeed Byzantine descriptions of Paulician doctrines as “Manichaean” and dualist have provoked intense and ongoing debates regarding the origins of Paulician teachings and religious observances. Apart from asserting that the Paulicians adhered to emphatic iconoclasm and rejected the sacraments, prerogatives and hierarchy of the normative church, Byzantine

4 Peter of Sicily, *Historia Manichaeorum*, 94-104.

5 On the career of Constantine-Silvanus of Mananalis and his role as a Paulician heresiarch, see Lemerle, “L’Histoire”, pp. 84f.; Bernard Hamilton, “Historical Introduction”, in Janet Hamilton and Bernard Hamilton (eds.), Yuri Stoyanov (assist. ed.), *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World c. 650–c.1450* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 1-57, on pp. 11-13.

polemical works consistently described the Paulicians as outright Manichaeans and attributed to them the radical dualist doctrine of two gods or principles, the evil creator of the present material world and the good God of the future world. The Paulicians are also described as professing Docetic Christology, according to which Christ's incarnation was proclaimed illusory and the Virgin Mary was praised not as the mother of Christ but as the 'heavenly Jerusalem'.⁶

However, differing readings of references to the Paulicians in Armenian and Byzantine sources have led to conflicting conclusions whether they were originally dualist or embraced dualism later in their history.⁷ Assigning priority to the Armenian sources, Nina Garsoïan has challenged the influential view that Paulicianism originated as a dualist heresy, presenting arguments in her wide-ranging reassessment of Paulician history and teachings that both the dualist and Docetic doctrines represent late developments in the Paulician movement.⁸ According to this reassessment

6 The principal Byzantine sources on Paulicianism have been edited and collected in Astruc, Conus-Wolska, Gouillard, Lemerle, Papachryssanthou and Paramelle, "Les Sources grecques pour l'histoire des Pauliciens d'Asie Mineure", pp. 1–227. A valuable selection of Byzantine sources for Paulician history and teachings have been translated, with commentaries, in Hamilton, Hamilton and Stoyanov, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World*, pp. 57–114, 139–42, 166–75, 259–60. Generally, on the Byzantine sources for Paulicianism, cf. H. Grégoire, "Les Sources de l'histoire des Pauliciens", *Bulletin de la Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, 5e serie, 22, 1936, pp. 95–114; Bartikian, *Istochniki*, ch. 2, pp. 55–102; Nina Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy, A Study of the Origin and Development of Paulicianism in Armenia and the Eastern Provinces of the Byzantine Empire*, The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1967, ch. 1; Lemerle, "L'Histoire".

7 For a discussion of the posited references to and discussions of Paulicianism in the Armenian sources, cf., R. M. Bartikian, *Istochniki dlia izucheniiia istorii pavlikianskogo dvizheniia*, (Erevan, 1961), ch. 1; Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy*, ch. 2; Hamilton and Hamilton, Appendix 2, "Armenian Sources and the Paulicians", pp. 292-93.

8 Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy*, with a proposed critical reconstruction of Paulician history, ch. 3, pp. 112–51, and of Paulician doctrine, ch. 4, pp. 151–86; Garsoïan, "Byzantine Heresy. A Reinterpretation", *Dumbarton Oak Papers*, 25, 1971, pp. 87–114; Garsoïan, "L'abjuration du moine Nil de Calabre", *Byzantinoslavica: revue internationale des études byzantines*, 35, 1974, pp. 12-27.

original Paulicianism adhered to Adoptionist teachings current in early Armenian Christianity according to which Christ had been adopted as the son of God during his baptism.⁹ However, this reappraisal of Paulician religious evolution has not succeeded in explaining convincingly the timing and cause of the later Paulician doctrinal reorientation posited in its reconstruction of religious chronology; indeed its proposal that this dualist reformation within Paulicianism was effected by the ninth-century Paulician heresiarch, Sergius, under the impact of radical circles in the Byzantine iconoclastic movement,¹⁰ as well as its bridging of the sources for the heresy has itself met strong criticism.¹¹

Byzantine reports of Paulician teachings reiterate they professed dualism between the recognized creator-god and ruler of this world and the concealed god of the world to come (who could be seen as lord of heavens); scholarly and theological debates have persisted regarding the veracity of these reports and whether such dualist teachings could have derived from Manichaeism, Marcionite or other dissenting Christian groups' influences.¹² It is also wholly plausible that the formulation of Paulician dualist version

9 Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy*, ch. 5, pp. 186–231.

10 Garsoïan, *The Paulician Heresy*, pp. 183–5; Garsoïan, “Byzantine Heresy”.

11 See, Lemerle, “L’Histoire”, pp. 12ff. and *passim*; L. Barnard, “The Paulicians and Iconoclasm”, in A. Bryer and J. Herrin (ed.), *Iconoclasm: Papers Given at the Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, March, 1975* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Centre for Byzantine Studies, 1977), pp. 75–83, esp. 81; Ioan P. Coulianu, *The Tree of Gnosis, The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), pp. 192–94; Hamilton and Hamilton, Appendix 2, “Armenian Sources and the Paulicians”, *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World*, pp. 292–93.

12 For argument that Manichaeism was in many respects a direct ancestor of Paulicianism which experienced also some Marcionite influences, see Dimitri Obolensky, *The Bogomils. A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), pp. 44–7, followed by Dimităr Angelov, *Bogomilstvoto* (Sofia: Bulvest-2000, 1993), pp. 83, 97, n. 57; for arguments that Paulician dualism may have been a development of Marcionite teachings, cf., Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott: eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der Katholischen Kirche*, 2nd edn., (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1924), pp. 382–83 (with reservations); Grégoire, ‘Les Sources’; J. Anastasiu, *Oi paulikianoi*, Athens, 1959, pp. 153 ff.; Milan Loos, ‘Le Mouvement pauliciens à Byzance’, *Byzantinoslavica*, 25, 1964, pp. 55–56; Milan Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Prague: Akademia, rozmn. ST 5), 1974, pp. 34–35; for arguments for Gnostic influences on Paulician dualism, see Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger, *Beiträge zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters*, vol. 1, *Geschichte der gnostisch-manichäischen Sekten im frühen Mittelalter* (Munich: C. H. Beck 1890; repr.

of Christianity was not the result of a heretical chain of transmission of ideas but was developed independently through a spiritualist and allegorical reading of the New Testament in sixth-seventh century Armenian sectarian milieus, its dualist element being influenced directly or indirectly by the various dualist residues still active in the religious scene of late antique and early medieval Armenia, ranging from Zoroastrian to Christian heterodox and possible Gnostic-related survivals.¹³

Some substantial uncertainties surround the chronology of the development of Paulicianism in the Armenian lands before Constantine-Silvanus of Mananalis and the movement began to make inroads into Byzantine territory, as well as the attested interrelations between the early Paulicians and iconoclastic circles in Caspian Albania. Following the execution of the first reported leader of the Paulician movement one of his original persecutors, the imperial official Symeon, was converted to Paulicianism. Symeon eventually succeeded Constantine-Silvanus as a *didaskalos* (Symeon-Titus) but was denounced to Justinian II and sentenced to death, most probably during the emperor's first reign (685-695). During the reign of Leo III (717-741) the Byzantine Iconoclastic movement found its imperial patron and apparently after his iconoclastic edict of 730 the contemporary Paulician *didaskalos* Timothy was summoned and faced a patriarchal

Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), pp. 2–3; Hans Söderberg, *La Religion des Cathares: études sur le gnosticisme de la basse antiquité et du moyen âge* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktr.), 1949, pp. 52 ff.; cf. the cautious approach to the problem of possible Manichaean and/or Marcionite impact on Paulicianism in Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee. A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), pp. 46-59; cf. the views of Coulianu, *The Tree of Gnosis*, pp. 190–96, who, while treating Paulicianism as a ‘popular Marcionism’, argues that the Marcionite influence need not have been a direct historical one. See also Lemerle, “L’Histoire des Pauliciens”, pp. 132–35, for a discussion of the parallels and the important differences between Marcionism and Paulicianism, and an emphasis on Paulician reinstatement of evangelical Christianity and the Pauline tradition.

13 Cf. Hamilton, “Historical Introduction”, pp. 7-8; Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God. Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 125-129; on fifth-century reports of trends and movements in Armenian Christianity perceived as Gnostic-related, see Vrej N. Nersessian, *The Tondrakian Movement: Religious Movements in the Armenian Church from the Fourth to the Tenth Centuries* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1987), pp. 79.

examination, most probably by the Iconoclast Patriarch of Constantinople, Anastasius (730-754). Due to the strong Iconoclastic strand in Paulicianism, Timothy certainly enjoyed a more sympathetic hearing than usual on such occasions and was declared orthodox, which was to have important implications for securing legal toleration of the Paulician movement, at least in such imperial and ecclesiastic iconoclastic frameworks. During an Iconophile revolt in 742-743 Timothy and his followers felt threatened enough to flee to Arab-held Armenian lands.

During the campaigns of the Iconoclastic emperor Constantine V (741-775) in eastern Anatolia he not only brought in but re-settled Syrian and Armenian Christians in Thrace.¹⁴ The Armenian colonies included Paulicians, who were expected to form garrisons during the contemporaneous Bulgaro-Byzantine confrontations in the disputed Thracian borderlands but were probably also positioned as a counterpoise to Constantine V's iconophile opponents. Hence Constantine was blamed for reintroducing the Paulicians into the empire, while the transplantation of Christian heterodoxy from the Caucasus and eastern Anatolia to Thrace entangled further the complicated religious climate of the contemporaneous Balkans.

The Paulicians were forced into either Byzantine or Arab territory during the following Arab-Byzantine struggle for control of Armenia and exposed to its vicissitudes, but were not subjected to extensive imperial persecution even when the cult of the icons was restored under Empress Irene (797-802) and Nikephorus I (802-811). However, incited by Patriarch Nikephorus (806-815), Michael I (811-813) re-established anti-Paulician legislation and this time the restoration of the Iconoclastic decrees under his successor, Leo V (813-820), did not bring a respite from the anti-Paulician measures and repression. The Paulicians in Byzantine Anatolia were now forced to seek refuge beyond the eastern borders of the empire into areas largely dominated by Islamic powers such as the emirs of the Melitene and Tarsus. The Greek Paulician heresiarch and missionary Sergius-Tychicus was permitted to settle in the lands of the emir of Melitene in eastern Cappadocia where he founded more Paulician churches. Sergius-Tychicus' flight to the emir of Melitene paved the way to the emergence of a bellicose Paulician principality on the upper Euphrates centred around the fortress of Theprice in close proximity to the Paulician Caucasian birth-lands and their remaining co-sectarians there.

Following the restoration of Iconophile orthodoxy in Constantinople in 843 the Paulicians suffered a new wave of persecution and more Paulicians sought refuge in the Paulician principality in

14 Theophanes, *Chronographia*, Carl de Boor (ed.). 2 vols., Leipzig: Teubner, 1883-1885, pp. 422, 429.

eastern Cappadocia which was now threatening the eastern borders of the empire. The religious conflict between Byzantine Iconophile Orthodoxy and Paulician dualist iconoclasm which had entered Byzantium from western Armenia evolved thus into a full-scale political and military confrontation in central-eastern Anatolia during which the imperial armies suffered some heavy defeats. What is more, the Paulicians of the Cappadocian principality were apparently in contact with their co-sectarians transferred to the Balkans, as c. 869-870 they were reported to have been planning to send missions to the newly Christianized Bulgarian kingdom.¹⁵

Yet the life-span of the Paulician principality was not long and following the initial successes of the Paulician military leaders Carbeas and Chrusocheir against the Byzantine troops, it soon succumbed to Byzantine military pressure. Having scored earlier a major victory against the imperial forces of Basil I (867-886), in 872 the Paulician army was routed in a carefully orchestrated Byzantine campaign and Chrusocheir was himself murdered. The imperial army overran the Paulician dominions and annexed Theprice to Byzantium. The capture of Theprice delivered the death-blow to Paulicianism as a major political and religious power as well as a factor in the Byzantine-Arab confrontation in eastern Anatolia and the Armenian lands. Scattered and persecuted, the Paulician communities fled back to the Caucasus and the Near East where their continuing existence was reported by the chroniclers of the First Crusade (1095-1099).

Paulicianism may have been depleted politically, militarily and religiously in the Byzantine-Armenian borderlands, but the Paulician colonies transplanted earlier from there to Thrace were to play a major role in the reassertion of the Christian dualist tradition in the newly Christianized Balkan world. When during the reign of John Tsimisces (969-976) the onset of the Byzantine reconquest of the Balkans was accompanied by military expansion into Armenia, upper Mesopotamia and Syria, the emperor transferred further Paulician colonies he encountered during these campaigns to Thrace, namely to the Philippopolis area.¹⁶ This re-settlement of Paulician communities represents the last reported episode of the transplantation of Paulician religious heterodoxy, with its origins in the Christian Caucasus, to the Balkans. Significantly, this major reinforcing of Paulician presence in the Balkans coincided with the period of the early diffusion of a new and influential version of Christian dualism, Bogomilism, which made its first steps there during the reign and in the dominions of the Bulgarian Tsar Peter (927-969).

15 Peter of Sicily, *Historia Manichaeorum*, 5, p. 9.

16 Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum* 17.1, ed. I. Dindorf (Leipzig: Teubner), pp. 92.96-93.4.

The history and extinction of Paulician communities (and any survivals) in Armenia, eastern Anatolia and the Near East after the First Crusade are very obscure and under-explored. The role of the Paulicianism in western Armenia in the formation of the new Armenian Christian heterodoxy of the Thondrakites and the exact nature of the relationship between the two movements has been intensely debated.¹⁷ Comparable disputes have been waged on the interrelations between Paulicianism and Bogomilism in the high and late medieval Balkan-Byzantine world (given some principle differences in the sphere of doctrines, sectarian organization and hierarchy between the two movements) but the outlines of the history of the Balkan Paulician communities during this period is more readily discernible. Direct and circumstantial evidence indicates the spread and continuing religious presence of Paulician communities in the Balkans into the Ottoman era (when a large number of them were won over to Catholicism after a succession of Catholic missions from the late sixteenth century onwards), the occasional re-emergence of some of these communities as a factor in diverse politico-military contexts,¹⁸ and their likely and intriguing role in the formation of high medieval Balkan-Byzantine (and European) radical Christian dualism.¹⁹

Another important and controversial area which has seen some sharply contesting and ideologized scholarly and popular theories and which would certainly benefit from a comparative scrutiny of the Caucasian and Balkan evidence concerns the fortunes and position of Paulicianism (and related Christian heterodoxies) vis-a-vis the Islamisation processes following the Islamic conquests in the Caucasus, Anatolia and the Balkans. Earlier historiographic models (traceable mostly to the late nineteenth century) envisaging a quick and en masse conversion of Paulician and Bogomil communities to Islam have been exposed as untenable and anachronistic by the progress of subsequent evidence-based and -oriented research.²⁰ This has not prevented the continuous and ongoing re-application of these early and outdated models in updated ethno-religious and ideological frameworks which in some recent popular

17 Nersessian, *The Tondrakian Movement*, pp. 47-55; Hamilton, Appendix 2, “Armenian Sources and the Paulicians”, pp. 293-295.

18 See, for example, Ioannes Scylitzes, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. Hans Thurn (New York and Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1973), p. 741; Geoffroi de Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, ed. E. Farral, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Letres, 1938-1939), vol. 2, p. 210.

19 Cf. Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, pp. 157-162; Bernard Hamilton, “The Origins of the Dualist Church of Drugunthia”, *Eastern Churches Review*, 6, 1974, pp. 115–24; Stoyanov, *The Other God*, 198-201.

20 For such evidence-based study invalidating these models in the case of the Paulician communities in the Balkans, see M. Iovkov, *Pavlikiani i pavlikianski selishta v bŭlgarskite zemi XV-XVIII v.* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski” 1991).

works go as far as fabricating evidence to back up such sweeping conjectures.²¹ Such abuse of the evidence should not though prejudice the objective study of the spheres of parallels and plausible or likely contacts and interchange between Islamic and Christian heterodoxies in the Balkans and Caucasus, in which Paulicianism is frequently suggested to have played a role.²²

These historical and religious trajectories of Paulicianism show that further comparative study of the crosscurrents of Caucasian and Balkan religious heterodoxy could contribute some important insights to the understanding of important subcurrents of religious development in these two regions. Such comparative study would have implications for a number of important areas of religious and cultural history (the nature and linguistic aspects of the transmission of Paulicianism through Armenian, Greek and Slavonic idioms have been hardly explored) and can be profitably expanded in the future to other trends of religious heterodoxy which spread from Transcaucasia and the Caucasus to the Balkans such as Hurufism in the early Ottoman area.

21 For such recent articulations of these early historiographic models, see Yuri Stoyanov, "Early and Recent Formulations of Theories for a Formative Christian Heterodox Impact on Alevism", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 37:3 (2010), pp. 261-272.

22 On the state of evidence and research in this area of study, see Yuri Stoyanov, "On Some Parallels Between Anatolian and Balkan Islamic Heterodox Traditions and the Problem of their Co-Existence and Interchange with Popular Christianity", in G. Veinstein (ed.), *Sycrétismes et hérésies dans l'Orient seljoukide et ottoman des XIIe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Peeters, 2005), pp. 75-119.