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Two Remarks on the Nature of the *Breviarium* of Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople and its Final Chapters¹

SUMMARY: In the last modern edition of Nikephoros' *Breviarium* (Mango 1990), the editor stated that this work is nothing but a few chronicle sources rewritten in Attic style (maybe sentence by sentence) and that the text shows clear signs of progressive weariness at the end of the narrative. Even if contested by some scholars, Mango's view on Nikephoros and his work prevails. Careful analysis of the story of deposition and execution of patriarch Constantine (c. 83–84) proves that Nikephoros consciously rearranged his source material to create his own narrative and present the events in a smooth way; it also explains whence comes the supposedly confused chronology in this part of the text. Secondly, the comparison of the Nikephoros' (c. 86) and Theophanes' (443, 22–26) descriptions of destructions done in the imperial palace by patriarch Niketas shows that Nikephoros did rewrite his source material in a classical way par excellence, even at the very end of the work. These remarks indicate the need of rethinking or, at least, nuancing Mango's view on the nature of the Breviarium

KEYWORDS: Patriarch Nikephoros, Breviarium, Middle Byzantine historiography.

¹ This article is based on a part of my master thesis in classical philology (a Polish translation of *The Short History* of Patriarch Nikephoros with an introduction and commentary), written under the supervision of the late prof. Dariusz Brodka, to whom I can only thank for his patience and help during my whole philological studies.

Ίστορία σύντομος – the Short History or Breviarium of Patriarch Nikephoros, written most probably somewhere at the end of the 8th century, went through historical and literary scrutiny a few times in the last four decades.2 By far the most influential was the one done by Cyril A. Mango in his critical edition of 1990, which essentially shaped the discussion around the text in the following years. One of the key topics in the introduction to his work is the so-called "Nature of the Breviarium", where he stated that "what Nikephoros did, to all intents and purposes, was to paraphrase into ancient Greek a small number of chronicle sources written in «vulgar» Greek", and that the text concerning the period after AD 713 shows clear signs of progressive weariness (expressed in leaving the chronicle indiction entries on the last pages, carefully replaced in most parts of the text with other phrases, more pertaining to what we would expect from the genre of history).³ This statement has been contested to a different degree by some scholars, most notably by Paul Speck in his numerous publications (both before and after the appearance of Mango's edition), who identifies multiple Tendenzen in Nikephoros' writing and stresses the purposefulness of his chosen wording and material arrangement in the process of writing the whole work, which nevertheless remains unfinished.⁴ Again, and from a different perspective, this view has been challenged lately by Dragoljub Marjanović in his 2018 monograph, dedicated solely to the Breviarium, which for him was "by no means a passive work that merely compiled source material. Nikephoros [...] managed to use the historical processes which he portrayed to create an idea about the place and role of the Church, its patriarch, and their multifaceted relations with both the Empire and the emperor himself." This view of the work, however attractive in putting our author in the position of an informed historian and not merely a young apprentice testing his literary skills, unfortunately does not withstand scrutiny, even though

² In older literature discussed mostly in general terms: Krumbacher 1897: 350; Moravcsik 1958: 457; Hunger 1978: 343–347. See also Липшиц 1950, who dedicated more place to Nikephoros' historical works.

³ Mango 1990: 6, earlier also Mango 1986: 541–542, 551–552.

⁴ See esp. Speck 1988: 452 et passim and his critical review of Mango's edition (Speck 1990); also Speck 1981; Speck 2002 etc.

Marjanović 2018: 232.

the work itself carries some interesting observations on various minor topics.⁶ Others, as Warren Treadgold or James Howard-Johnston, accepted Mango's views in this regard.⁷ Accepting the general statements that Nikephoros' work is mostly just a paraphrase of his sources and that he does seem to be less meticulous in its last part, in the following analysis I am trying to sophisticate this view and defend Nikephoros as an independent author, at least to a degree.⁸

Firstly, I would like to take a closer look at the chapters 83–86 of the *Breviarium* (as it is divided by modern editors), that is to say the story of the deposition and execution of the patriarch Constantine. The description begins with the accusation of him having been well aware of a plot against the Emperor discovered shortly before, and goes with his immediate deposition and exile to Hieria. Appointment of Niketas in his stead follows. The paragraph ends in the following way: "ταῦτα δὲ πάντα ἐπράττετο κατὰ τὸν Αὕγουστον μῆνα τῆς τετάρτης ἰνδικτιόνος" (c. 83, 30–31). The next one begins with the phrase "Κατὰ δὲ τὸν Ὀκτώβριον μῆνα τῆς ἕκτης ἰνδικτιόνος", which has been put in square brackets by the editor, since after that follows the phrase "Μετ' οὺ πολὸ δὲ", clearly a classicisation typical for Nikephoros' work.

⁶ Most of all, the very assumption that Nikephoros had in mind some specific and concrete ideas concerning his contemporary times which he wanted to express in an indirect way – which Marjanović then tries to identify and what leads him to the aforementioned conclusion – is something to be proven itself, on the basis of the text analysis, and which the work fails to achieve. Incidentally, this is something the author himself seems to be to some extent aware of (Marjanović 2018: 230). This failure lays partially on the insufficient comparisons made between the *Breviarium* and Theophanes' *Chronicle*, and on ignoring the research on their sources done to date (see e.g. his analysis of Philippikos' reign, pp. 164–166). Cf. Treadgold 2018; Κιαπίδου 2019.

⁷ Howard-Johnston 2010: 241–242; Treadgold 2013: 26–31. In more general publications on the Byzantine historiography and literature, the question of Nikephoros' originality is rather not touched upon, see Kazhdan 1999: 213–214; Neville 2018: 72–73; on the other hand, $K\alpha\rho\pi\delta\zeta\eta\lambda\sigma\zeta$ 2002: 63 seems to accept Mango's view.

⁸ His value as a historical source is not questioned, although it is attributed rather to his sources' worth than his own. See Treadgold 2013: 29, who even wrote that "[t]he main virtues of Nicephorus' *Concise History* can be attributed to its sources, and its main faults to Nicephorus' lack of skill in using those sources".

⁹ On patriarch Constantine II (in office 754–766), see Rochow 1999; PmbZ: Konstantinos II; PBE: Konstantinos 4.

On the plot see Rochow 1994: 31.

Mango rightly observes that "it seems that Nik[ephoros] began by writing down the date, then decided to omit it for stylistic reasons". Next in the same chapter is the description of Constantine's recall from exile, reading aloud of the accusations, public humiliation, execution in the Kynegion of the City, and burial (c. 84). Thereafter begins the next paragraph with the words "Πέμπτη δὲ ἰνδικτιόνι" etc., with the description of a drought and a rebuild of an aqueduct conducted by the Emperor Constantine, who is also called the new Midas (c. 85). The next paragraph again begins with "Κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἑβδόμην ἰνδικτιόνα" etc. (c. 86, 1).

From these passages comes an obvious observation that the paragraph 84 is "out of sequence with regard to the next paragraph", ¹² as the chronological order would require another configuration of chapters, namely 83, 85, 84, 86. This leads us to the following question: whence comes this supposed error and why did it occur? As both Nikephoros and Theophanes follow here the same source, ¹³ lets have a closer look at the exact chronology of the events amid these authors, according to their appearance in *Breviarium's* narrative:

Mango 1990: 224. If it is not a phrase taken from a marginal note of a later copyist and integrated into the main text, but that would entail the assumption that he had Nikephoros' source at his disposal, which then would rise a question, why would he not make such corrections in other parts of the work.

¹² Mango 1990: 224.

The chronicle of Theophanes (de Boor 1882), who was writing at the beginning of the 9th century, is generally considered the most important historical source for this period of Byzantine history, as he both used a greater variety of sources and preserved much more information than Nikephoros from their common source. On the sources of Theophanes, Nikephoros, and their interrelationship see Mango, Scott 1997: lxxiv–xcv; Rochow 1991: 44–50; Mango 1990: 12–18; discussion on these topics is still ongoing, e.g. Afinogenov 2002 and more recently the joint publication Jankowiak, Montinaro 2015, where esp. Forrest 2015.

Event according to	Nikephoros' chronology		Theophanes' chronology	
Nikephoros				
The deposi-	c. 83,	August, 4th	438,	30 August, 4th
tion and exile	21–28	indiction	26–439,	indiction, AM
of patriarch		[AD 766] ¹⁴	5	6257
Constantine				[AD 766] ¹⁵
Appointment	c. 83,	August, 4th	440,	16 November,
of Niketas	28-30	indiction	11–13	5 th indiction,
		[AD 766]		AM 6258
				[AD 766]
The ridiculing	c. 84	October, 6 th	441,	6–15 (?) Octo-
and execution		indiction	5-442,	ber, 6 th indiction,
of patriarch		[AD 767]	13	AM 6259
Constantine				[AD 767]
Draught and	c. 85,	5 th indiction	440,	5 th indiction,
rebuilding of	1–12	[AD 766/767]	14–24	AM 6258
an aqueduct				[AD 766/767]
The artificial	c.85,	[5 th indiction]	443,	AM 6259
lowering of	12-21	[AD 766/767]	18-22	[AD 767/768]
prices				[6 th indiction]
The birth of	c. 86, 1–2	7 th indiction	_	_
Anthimos		[AD 768/769]		
Destructions	c. 86, 2–8	7 th indiction	443,	AM 6259
in the imperial		[AD 768/769]	22-26	[AD 767/768]
palace				[6 th indiction]
Coronation of	c. 87, 1–3	Holy Saturday,	443,	1 April, Satur-
Eudokia		April, 7 th indiction	28-31	day, 7th indic-
		[AD 769]		tion, AM 6260
				[AD 769]

From this comparison we can clearly see that a few discrepancies emerge: the aforementioned discontinuity in Nikephoros' narration, the attribution of Niketas' appointment and the last events to different years by both authors, and the lack of information about Anthimos in

The dates in square brackets are added here for the clearness of this analysis.

Theophanes' AM for the period from 727 to 774 is one year behind his indictions (which are correct), on which problem see Mango, Scott 1997: lxv–lxvii, also Rochow 1991: 53–54 who stresses the correctness of some AM for this period.

Theophanes. The solution to this problem can be, I believe, reduced to two alterations made by our writers to the original chronicle they have used for the description of the period in question. The first one is in accordance with a generally accepted statement that Theophanes simply omitted sometimes certain information from his source, which Nikephoros preserved. 16 This hypothesis would entail that, as in *Breviarium*, the description of the year 768/769 began with the date (indiction 7) and the birth of Constantin's son Anthimos. The omission of this fragment (possibly facilitated by a double indiction entry, as in Nikephoros cc. 86, 1 and 87, 1) led Theophanes to a confusion and misplacing the following event under the previous year ("τῶ δ' αὐτῶ ἔτει", which for Theophanes was thus AM 6259, not 6260). Additionally, as the chronicler omitted, or simply overlooked, the information about Anthimos' birth, he wrote later that Niketas had been the youngest child of Constantine during the event described a moment later (444, 5), a detail Nikephoros (correctly?) does not employ.¹⁷

The other alteration seems to be a deliberate one on the part of Nikephoros. Firstly, the misattribution of Niketas' appointment to August of the 5th indiction, rather than the correct November of the 6th, has been rightly credited to the author's intent to "round off the story". The same thing, however, can be said about the (supposed) greater mistake and misplacement of the events in chapters 83–85 – as the story of the deposed patriarch Constantine continues right away, without the chronological obstacle to the narrative, i.e. the story of a draught and rebuilding of an aqueduct right in the middle of it. The patriarch is accused, deposed and exiled, ridiculed and executed, a small yet smooth

¹⁶ Mango 1990: 16.

¹⁷ Th. 444, 5: τὸν ἔσχατον ἀδελφὸν αὐτῶν, i.e. the Caesars' Christophoros and Nikephoros; cf. Nik. 87, 4–5. On Constanine's children see Rochow 1994: 10–15, who was inclined to the correctness of Nikephoros' dating as well (Rochow 1991: 206). Another possible solution to these discrepancies would be that Nikephoros used another source, or another redaction of the same source, where the information on Anthimos' birth was placed. In that case this event could be dated after the procession with the Ceasars of 2 April 769, misplaced by Nikephoros, and Theophanes' comment on Niketas' age correct. This hypothesis is not likely, as it stands in direct opposition to strongly supported *communis opinio* of one and the same source used by both authors for this period. Hence would, however, come the double 7th indiction in *Breviarium*.

¹⁸ Mango 1990: 224.

change for the story. That is why, of course, he decided to write "Mετ' οὐ πολὺ δὲ", instead of the indiction, which would disclose the actual, longer time lapse (in case we rightly interpret the double date as his deliberate removing of the indiction entry). Hence comes the last little discrepancy – the apparent dating of the artificial lowering of the prices (c. 85, 12-21) to the 5th indiction, as it comes in the same chapter as the draught, beginning with Πέμπτη δὲ ἰνδικτιόνι. The solution is simple: Nikephoros must have gone back to his source's narration, omitting the already applied section on Constantine (together with the indiction entry), and continued with the events put originally right after them, that is to say, the events of the 6th indiction, as in Theophanes' Chronicle. So the 5th indiction simply applies only to the story of the draught. The confusion is amplified for the modern reader, as the text is somehow arbitrarily (as there is no other option) divided by its editor into chapters, leaving the impression that the events for a single chapter are pertinent to the year with which the chapter began, as would be the case with a chronicle. But Nikephoros' Short History is not one, even if he follows some chronicle source here. Incidentally, one would ask if the chapter 85 should not have been actually divided into two to avoid this chronological misconception.

Now let us take a look at the "clear signs of progressive weariness" in the section after AD 713, where the chronicle entries are "barely disguised", in a contrast with the earlier parts of the work. ¹⁹ James Howard-Johnston observes that Nikephoros, in this last part of his work, "only smartens up his language for one set-piece description, of a severe winter, when the Black Sea froze and icebergs came down the Bosporus (ch. 74)". ²⁰ But is it actually the case? Let's take a look at c. 86, 2–8, that is, virtually the last page of the manuscript, where after writing about the already mentioned birth of Anthimos our author goes on with the description of destructions done in the palace by patriarch Niketas:

ύπὸ δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν καιρὸν Νικήτας ὁ τῆς πόλεως πρόεδρος τινὰ μὲν [τῶν] ἐκ χρόνου διαφθαρέντα τῆς καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀνακαινίζει κτίσματα,

¹⁹ Mango 1990: 6.

²⁰ Howard-Johnston 2010: 242.

τὰς δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἐκεῖσε ἱδρυμένοις τῶν προόδων οἴκοις, οὓς Ῥωμαῖοι σέκρετα καλοῦσι, τό τε μικρὸν δόμημα καὶ τὸ μέγα, τοῦ σωτῆρος καὶ τῶν ἀγίων οὕσας διὰ ψηφίδων χρυσῶν καὶ κηροχύτου ὕλης εἰκονογραφίας ἀπέξυσε.

The same story Theophanes (443, 22–26) recounts as follows:

τῷ δ' αὐτῷ ἔτει Νικήτας, ὁ ψευδώνυμος πατριάρχης, τὰς ἐν τῷ πατριαρχείῳ εἰκόνας τοῦ μικροῦ σεκρέτου διὰ μουσείου οὕσας ἔξεσεν, καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου σεκρέτου τῆς τροπικῆς ἐξ ὑλογραφίας οὔσας κατήνεγκεν, καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν εἰκόνων τὰ πρόσωπα ἔχρισεν· καὶ ἐν τῷ Ἀβραμιαίῳ δὲ ὁμοίως πεποίηκεν.

As we can see, this is a classicising style par excellence on Nikephoros' part, carefully avoiding the contemporary (vulgar) terms, replacing them with more antique, descriptive ones. And so "the (false) patriarch" (ὁ ψευδώνυμος πατριάρχης) became "the bishop of the City" (ὁ τῆς πόλεως πρόεδρος), the ceremonial halls named "secreta" (τοῦ σεκρέτου) are rendered in a much more elaborate way, with a characteristic phrase "which the Romans call..." (οῦς Ῥωμαῖοι σέκρετα καλοῦσι), and images "of mosaics" (διὰ μουσείου οὕσας) and "painted in encaustic" (ἐξ ὑλογραφίας οὕσας) are images "of golden pebbles" (οὕσας διὰ ψηφίδων χρυσῶν) and "a waxen substance" (κηροχύτου ΰλης).²¹ This is not, of course, a change of a sort seen in the aforementioned c. 74, where Nikephoros lengthens significantly his description in comparison to the parallel text preserved in Theophanes, but he does nonetheless make an effort to rephrase the source material in his particular way – just after writing an indiction entry, which is supposedly the indicator of his weariness

In the analyses above we can see two important observations concerning the character of the *Breviarium*:

1) Nikephoros did in fact manipulate his source material, not only in his language, but also arrangement, so as to smoothen the flow of his narrative. This can be clearly seen in the story of the deposition and execution of patriarch Constanine (c. 83–84), the chronological

On the terminology used by both authors see Rochow 1991: 206.

misplacement of which was hitherto treated rather as some peculiarity of the text, ²² and

2) Nikephoros did strive to use antique and classical style even at the very end of his narrative, when he is thought to have been rather tired of the task.

Hence, firstly, without ambition to some radical reshaping of our view on Nikephoros, whose historical work still does not seem to be of finest quality, written in a meticulous and well-thought manner, we can safely say that he was by no means a thoughtless writer, who merely paraphrased his source material sentence by sentence.²³ He did understand what he read and created his own narrative out of his sources. Secondly, an objection can be made to the statement of his weariness at the end of the work – did he decide that the indiction entries may be useful and left them there on purpose (he did leave a few in earlier parts of his work), or was he really just tired, and writing again and again various forms of "After some time" and similar was too much, but he did find strength to rewrite more interesting parts? These are of course questions without answers, at least for now. Nevertheless, these two objections show the need of rethinking or, at least, nuancing Mango's idea about the "nature of the *Breviarium*".

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Mango restrains himself to writing: "Out of sequence with regard to next paragraph". By Marjanović left without a word, even though he performs a detailed analysis of the Constantine's story, calling attention to its connection to the martyrdom of monks, and linking it to his theory of Nikephoros showing the patriarchate in a positive light in general, even the one of the iconoclast era. Mango 1990: 224; Marjanović 2018: 208–225.

²³ See Mango 1990: 27: "Nikephoros was not so much composing an original text as paraphrasing a source, perhaps sentence by sentence".

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