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Are the Fasts of the Apostles, the Dormition and Christmas Obligatory or Voluntary (or Even Prohibited)? Religious Controversy in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Byzantium

ABSTRACT: This article seeks to cast light on a debate in eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium. At that time it was discussed whether the fasts of the Apostles, the Dormition and Christmas were obligatory or a matter of personal choice. The champions of the latter view argued that there was no canon requiring their observance. Others accused them of laxity but found it difficult to argue their case. Since proof texts were few and far between and not as informative as they would have wished the defenders of the fasts came to quite different conclusions.

KEYWORDS: Fast of Christmas; Fast of the Dormition; Fast of the Apostles; Nicholas III Grammatikos; Michael Glykas

Today the Orthodox Church recognises four periods of extended fasting: the movable Great Lent before Easter, which lasts seven weeks, the fast preceding the feast of the Holy Apostles on 29 June, which begins after All Saints, the movable Sunday after Pentecost, and varies in length between eight and forty-two days, the fast of the Dormition, which lasts from 1 to 14 August and the fast of Christmas, which begins after the feast of St Philip on 14 November and ends on 24 December¹. The authors of contemporary *fastenspiegel* take it for granted that the four fasts have been observed since time immemorial. Yet this is not the case. Only the fast of the Great Lent goes back to the early church². Firm evidence for the fasts of the Apostles and of Christmas is only found in monastic rules of the tenth century, and the fast of the Dormition was instituted even more recently: the first attempts to implement it were made in the second half of the eleventh century. Given that the fast of the Dormition was a new development it comes as no surprise that it was controversial. It is more striking that it was also questioned whether the two other lesser fasts should be observed. The participants in the debate seek to support their positions with proof texts whereas unwritten traditions are rejected as invalid. This is a new trend, which sets the later eleventh and twelfth centuries apart from earlier periods when such traditions were readily accepted.

THE FAST OF THE DORMITION

For anyone who wishes to study the fast of the Dormition the first port of call is Venance Grumel's article *Le jeûne de l'Assomption dans l'Église grecque*, which came out in 1933³. Responding to an earlier contribution by Karl Holl⁴, Grumel sought to determine how the custom evolved. His article is an impressive feat of scholarship. It not only considers almost all the surviving evidence but also

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¹ See e.g. the homepage of the St Peter the Apostle Antiochian Orthodox Church: Feasts and Fasts of the Church 2023/2024 <https://stpeterantiochian.org/downloads/2023-2024%20Church%20Year.pdf> (consulted: 02.01.2024).

² See R. ARBESMANN, Fasttage, in: *RAC* VII. Stuttgart 1969, 500–520.

³ V. GRUMEL, Le jeûne de l'Assomption dans l'Église grecque. *EO* 32 (1933) 162–183. J. HERBUT, De ieiunio et abstinencia in ecclesia byzantina ab initiis ad saec. XI. Rome 1968, 75–77, follows Grumel. For a recent summary see B. CASEAU, Nourritures terrestres, nourritures célestes, la culture alimentaire à Byzance. Paris 2015, 174–177.

⁴ K. HOLL, Die Entstehung der vier Fastenzeiten in der griechischen Kirche, in: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*. Tübingen 1928, II.1 155–203.

contains many pertinent observations. I am greatly indebted to Grumel's work but will discuss the sources in a different sequence in order to bring out more clearly the dynamics of the debate.

The beginnings of the fast of the Dormition are shrouded in mystery. The first text that appears to mention it dates to the year 920. It is the so-called *Tomus Unionis*, which ended the controversy about the four marriages of Emperor Leo VI⁵. This text stipulates that those who get married for a third time are permitted to partake of the Eucharist on the feast of the Dormition because it is preceded by a fast⁶. Yet there is no evidence to show that this fast was implemented. Other sources that seem to date to the same or an even earlier period turn out to be pseudepigrapha⁷. Indeed, it is not mentioned in monastic rules of the tenth and early eleventh centuries, our most important sources for the Byzantine fasting regime⁸. It first appears in the *kanonarion* of Nikon, monk of the Black Mountain in the region of Antioch⁹. In another of his works, the *Pandectes*, which he wrote in the 1060s, Nikon claims that it was endorsed by the patriarchs of Antioch and observed in the monasteries of Mt Olympus¹⁰. Other evidence, however, suggests that it was unknown in the Byzantine heartland even after this date. The monks of Mt Athos seem to have become aware of it only around the year 1100 when they enquired of Patriarch Nicholas III Grammatikos (1084–1111) whether they should observe it¹¹. Indeed, it is not yet mentioned in the *Notificatio perspicua*, an update of Athanasius' *Hypotyposis* for Lavra, which was written during the same years by the *protos* John Tarchaneiotēs¹². The first Constantinopolitan rule to include the fast of the Dormition is the *typikon* of the monastery of Phoberos on the Bosphorus, which was composed soon after the year 1113¹³. Its author, the abbot John, adds it to the text of his model, the Evergetis *Typikon*, where it is not mentioned¹⁴. Yet even in the twelfth century references to the fast of the Dormition

⁵ For the Tetragamy controversy see S. TOUGHER, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People*. Berlin – New York – Cologne 1997, 157–159.

⁶ *Tomus unionis* (ed. L.G. WESTERINK, *Nicholas I Patriarch of Constantinople: Miscellaneous Writings*. Washington, DC 1981, 66). See V. GRUMEL – J. DARROUZÈS, *Les registes des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople, I: Les actes des patriarches, 2–3: Les registes de 715 à 1204*. Paris 1989, 244–246 (n. 715).

⁷ Grumel who seeks to arrange the evidence in chronological order begins with five texts that he dates to the eighth to tenth centuries: the Stoudite Catechesis chronica, which he considers to be by Theodore the Stoudite († 826), a canon of Patriarch Nicephorus I (806–815), a treatise by John of Nicaea, which he dates to the later ninth century and a brief text that refers to the time of Leo VI. See GRUMEL, *Jeûne* 163–172. Yet these texts must be dated to the eleventh or twelfth centuries. See below notes 56, 70, 22. Holl claims that the fast was instituted at the initiative of Pope Nicholas I (858–877). See HOLL, *Entstehung* 198–200. This argument is highly speculative since Holl only produces circumstantial evidence.

⁸ See the Stoudios *Hypotyposis*, Athanasius' *Hypotyposis* for Lavra and the Testament of Paul of Latros, which date to the tenth century, and the Iviron *Hypotyposis*, the *Typikon* of Patriarch Alexius and the lost *Typikon* of the Panagios monastery, which date to the first half of the eleventh century. For references see note 37.

⁹ Nikon, *Kanonarion* (Logos 1) 89 (ed. Chr. HANNICK – P. PLANK – C. LUTZKA – T.I. AFANAS'EVA, *Das Taktikon des Nikon vom Schwarzen Berge: Griechischer Text und kirchenslavische Übersetzung des 14. Jahrhunderts*. Freiburg i. Br. 2014, I 48–134, esp. 120.19–121.8).

¹⁰ See GRUMEL, *Jeûne* 173. The Greek text has not yet been edited. Grumel refers to a Latin summary of an Arabic translation in A. MAI, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio e Vaticanis codicibus edita*. Rome 1831, IV 162–163. For the date of the *Pandectes* see HANNICK – PLANK – LUTZKA – AFANAS'EVA, *Taktikon*, I xxvii.

¹¹ This is pointed out by GRUMEL, *Jeûne* 176.

¹² John Tarchaneiotēs, *Notificatio perspicua* (Εἰδησις εὐσύννοπος) (ed. A.A. DMITRIEVSKIĬ, *Opisanie liturgiĭeskikh rukopisej chranjaščichsja v bibliotekach pravoslavnago vostoka, III: Typika*. Petrograd 1917, 135–151, esp. 145–150). On this text see D. KRAUSMÜLLER, *The Athonite monastic tradition during the eleventh and early twelfth centuries*, in: *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, ed. A.A. Bryer – M. Cunningham. Aldershot 1996, 57–65.

¹³ John, *Phoberos Typikon* (ed. A. PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS, *Noctes Petropolitanae*. St Petersburg 1913, 1–87, esp. 50).

¹⁴ Timothy, *Evergetis Typikon* (ed. P. GAUTIER, *Le typikon de la Théotokos Évergétis*. *REB* 45 [1982] 1–101, esp. 43).

are absent from most rules¹⁵. The only other exception is the Southern Italian Patirion *Typikon*¹⁶. Fasting in August appears to have become *de rigueur* only in the Late Byzantine period¹⁷.

The treatment of the topic in the rules of Nikon and of John of Phoberos is strikingly similar. As is customary the two authors prescribe a particular diet for the two weeks. Yet this is not their main concern. The bulk of their chapters is taken up with explanations as to why the fast of the Dormition should be observed. Nikon and John of Phoberos refer to two texts, the *Tomus Unionis*, and an anti-Armenian treatise by a certain John of Nicaea, which lists the fast of the Dormition as one of the official fasts of the Byzantine church¹⁸. It is evident that these texts are meant to justify the practice and to persuade those who do not yet recognise its existence.

That this was an up-hill struggle can be seen from Nikon's *Pandectes* and from another text originating in the patriarchate of Antioch, a treatise by Anastasius, bishop of Caesarea, which postdates the year 1084¹⁹. In the *Pandectes* we read:

We have asked not a few people about such a fast and we have found that for some reason unknown to us their answers do not match. And some say that the fast is lawful and canonical, and it is painstakingly kept by them, whereas others confess that it does exist but say that they do not observe it, and yet again others do not accept it at all but rather denounce those who observe it²⁰.

The first group finds Nikon's reasoning convincing and acts accordingly. By contrast, the second and the third groups maintain that the fast of the Dormition is without testimony. Nikon offers no further explanation, but we can reconstruct their argument from other sources. For one thing, they criticised that the 'proofs' produced by Nikon, Anastasius and John of Phoberos were few in number: despite all their efforts the three authors had only managed to unearth two texts. (When Anastasius claims that he could have offered more evidence he is being disingenuous.) Moreover, they did not consider these texts to be authoritative. They pointed out that the *Tomus Unionis* was of late date and had no counterpart in earlier canonical literature²¹, and they may have known that the anti-Armenian treatise of 'John of Nicaea' was in reality written by the Constantinopolitan monk Euthymius of Peribleptos in the second quarter of the eleventh century²².

While the second and third groups agreed in rejecting the evidence they differed in their responses. The second group was of the opinion that there was no obligation to fast in August but that everyone was free to do so since the custom had been introduced by pious people. The third

¹⁵ It is not mentioned in the Kecharitomene *Typikon*, in the Mamas *Typikon*, in the Pantokrator *Typikon*, in the Machairas *Typikon* and in the Kosmosoteira *Typikon*. See GRUMEL, *Jeûne* 186–187.

¹⁶ Patirion *Typikon* (MS Jena, Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, G.B.q.6a, fol. 161–189, esp. fol. 163v–164r [*Diktyon* 34174]). See D. ARNESANO, La penitenza dei monaci a S. Maria del Patir e a S. Nicola di Casole. *REB* 72 (2014) 249–273.

¹⁷ See GRUMEL, *Jeûne* 178–179.

¹⁸ Pseudo-Isaac, *Oratio I contra Armenios* (*PG* 132, 1155–1217, esp. 1197A–1204C). See below note 21.

¹⁹ Anastasius of Caesarea, *De jejuniis ss. Deiparae* (ed. G.A. RHALLES – M. POTLES, *Syntagma tōn theiōn kai hierōn kanonōn tōn te hagiōn kai paneuphēmōn apostolōn kai tōn hierōn oikoumenikōn kai topikōn synodōn kai tōn kata meros paterōn*. Athens 1854, IV 585–588). See GRUMEL, *Jeûne* 174; and HOLL, *Entstehung* 201.

²⁰ Nikon, *Pandectes* (excerpt) (589 RHALLS – POTLES): Οὐκ ὀλίγοις δὲ περὶ τὴν τοιαύτην νηστείαν ἐπερωτήσαμεν, καὶ οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως ἀσυμφώνους εὐρωμεν τὰς τούτων ἀποκρίσεις, καὶ οἱ μὲν λέγουσιν ὅτι ἐνθεσμός ἐστι, καὶ κανονικὴ νηστεία, καὶ ἐν ἀκριβείᾳ φυλάττεται παρ' αὐτῶν, ἕτεροι δὲ ὁμολογοῦσι μὲν αὐτὴν εἶναι, λέγουσι δὲ μὴ φυλάττειν αὐτήν, ἄλλοι δὲ οὐδὲ ὅλως αὐτὴν παραδέχονται, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατηγοροῦσιν μᾶλλον τοὺς ταύτην φυλάττοντας. (my translation) It is not entirely clear whether the passage is by Nikon himself. In the *Coislinianus* 37, it is identified as σχόλιον ἑτέρου (scholion by someone else). See MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, *Coislin* 37, fol. 1–367, esp. fol. 324v (*Diktyon* 49179). A comparison of the numerous manuscripts is beyond the scope of this article.

²¹ See below note 51.

²² See V. GRUMEL, Les invectives du 'catholicos Isaac'. *REB* 14 (1956) 179–186, esp. 184–186. GRUMEL, *Jeûne*, 168–169, still thought that John of Nicaea was a ninth-century figure.

group was much more aggressive. For them any custom that was not mentioned in the canons was downright heretical. Anastasius gives us a hint as to how they may have argued their case. He avers that the fast of the Dormition should be accepted because it was instituted in honour of the Virgin and not a pagan custom like the *artzibourion*, the Armenian fast during the second week before Great Lent when the Byzantines still partook of all types of food²³. In treatises against the *artzibourion* it was claimed that the Armenians had no proof texts that would justify their custom²⁴. This suggests that the third group drew a parallel between the heretical *artzibourion* and the fast of the Dormition, which for them was equally undocumented.

Anastasius and Nikon do not name names, which makes it difficult to reconstruct the debate. Yet it would be wrong to think that the demand for proof texts was a clever strategy devised by people who wished to shirk a new burden. In fact, their views were shared by none other than the saintly Patriarch Nicholas. When the Athonite monks asked him about the fast of the Dormition he responded tersely: ‘One must not ... observe the fast from the beginning of August to its fifteenth day.’²⁵ After the Athonite monks had enquired whether the *Tomus Unionis* was not valid proof he qualified his position. He now stated that the fast mentioned in the *Tomus Unionis* had been transferred but that ‘many people still fasted in order to purify themselves from illnesses’²⁶. The focus on the health of the body shows clearly that Nicholas did not accord the fast of the Dormition a religious significance. This is in stark contrast to Nikon and Anastasius who declared that those who kept the fast honoured the Virgin.

At this point we must ask: why would Nicholas reject the fast of the Dormition? He was certainly no laxist. He spent much of his time attempting to implement a stricter regime for the two weekly fast days Wednesday and Friday²⁷. This does not, however, mean that he was inconsistent. He, too, believed that a custom was only valid if it could be supported by canon law. When he championed the weekly fasts he based his argument on canon 69 of the Apostles, which did not permit relaxation on any day of the year. As a pronouncement of Christ’s disciples this text had the highest possible authority²⁸. By contrast, he could not accept the late and dubious testimonies of John of Phoberos, Nikon and Anastasius.

Significantly, Nikon and John of Phoberos also propagated the weekly fasts, buttressing their arguments with extensive florilegia of canonical texts²⁹. Such exclusive reliance on written sources was a new development, which set the late eleventh and twelfth centuries apart from earlier periods

²³ Anastasius, *Jejunio* (586 RHALLES – POTLES).

²⁴ See A. SHARF, *Byzantine Orthodoxy and the ‘Preliminary Fast’ of the Armenians*, in: *Byzance: Hommage à André Stratos*. Athens 1986, II 650–672, esp. 652–658.

²⁵ Nicholas, *Responsa ad monachos I* (ed. J.B. PITRA, *Spicilegium solesmense complectens sanctorum patrum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum anecdota hactenus opera*. Paris 1858, IV 477): Οὐ δεῖ ... φυλάττειν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τοῦ αὐγούστου καὶ μέχρι τῆς πεντεκαιδεκάτης αὐτοῦ νηστεύειν. (my translation) See GRUMEL, *Jeûne* 175.

²⁶ Nicholas, *Responsa ad monachos II* (477 PITRA): ἔτι πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων διὰ τὸ καθαρεύειν τῶν ἀρρωστημάτων νηστεύουσιν. (my translation) There also exists an abbreviated redaction of the text with Balsamon’s commentary. It has the same content but omits the reference to illnesses (419 RHALLES – POTLES). See HOLL, *Entstehung* 176, 200. For a discussion see GRUMEL – DARROUZÈS, *Regestes* 434–440 (n. 977). A transferral is also mentioned in a text by Patriarch Michael II Kourkouas (1143–1146). There it is claimed that the fast was moved from August to November and December and thus became the fast of Christmas. Consequently, Michael II was also of the opinion that there was no fast of the Dormition. See GRUMEL, *Jeûne* 177–179.

²⁷ For the following see KRAUSMÜLLER, *Tradition* 60–65.

²⁸ In reality it is, of course, a fourth-century forgery. See F.X. FUNK, *Die apostolischen Konstitutionen, eine litterar-historische Untersuchung*. Rottenburg 1891.

²⁹ See Nikon, *Taktikon* (Logos 6) (266–278 HANNICK – PLANK – LUTZKA – AFANAS’EVA); and John, *Phoberos Typikon* 16 (27–28 PAPADOPOULOS-KERAMEUS).

when oral tradition had played an important role³⁰. Only rarely do we hear a dissenting voice. One example is found in a collection of canons:

Some people do not keep the fast from the beginning of the month of August until the fifteenth day, because concerning it no canon is found. But since many people fast in order to purify themselves from sins, and it has become a custom in the church, and piety abounds worthily, he who does not keep it must be excommunicated³¹.

Here it is claimed that established custom is as binding as canon law and that those who disregard it must be punished. In the manuscripts the canon is attributed to Patriarch Nicholas and it indeed bears a resemblance to Nicholas's second answer to the Athonites: in both texts mention is made of purification. Yet in the canon the wording is subtly changed. 'Sins' has been substituted for 'illnesses', which gives the fast a religious significance³². There can be no doubt that the original text was reworked by a champion of the fast of the Dormition who wished to enlist of the authority of the patriarch³³. Interestingly, it was no longer enough to appeal to custom: the validity of tradition itself had to be affirmed by canon law.

THE FASTS OF THE APOSTLES AND OF CHRISTMAS

Secondary literature about the development of the fasts of the Apostles and of Christmas in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is sparse. Karl Holl's wide-ranging and erudite article *Die Entstehung der vier Fastenzeiten in der griechischen Kirche* only discusses the previous period³⁴. And Joachim Herbut's monograph deals with the topic only in cursory fashion³⁵. The most important contribution remains Grumel's article on the fast of the Dormition where several sources pertaining to the other two fasts are also analysed.

Since it was a recent development it is not surprising that the fast of the Dormition became a bone of contention. By contrast, the two other lesser fasts, that of the Apostles and that of Christmas, were much more firmly rooted in tradition: already in the late seventh century Anastasius of Sinai speaks of 'fasts' in the plural³⁶. They are then mentioned in all monastic rules that contain stipulations about diet, beginning with the Stoudios *Hypotyposis* from the late ninth or early tenth

³⁰ See J.-M. SANSTERRE, La parole, le texte et l'image dans les auteurs byzantins des époques iconoclaste et posticonoclaste, in: Testo e immagine nell' alto Medioevo. Spoleto 1994, 197–240; and K. PARRY, Chapter 16: Written and Unwritten Tradition, in: *Depicting the Word. Byzantine Iconophile Thought in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries*. Leiden – New York – Cologne 1996, 156–165.

³¹ Nicholas, Synodicae constitutiones 10 (470 PITRA): Τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς αὐγούστου μηνὸς καὶ μέχρι ιε' νηστείαν τινὲς οὐ φυλάττουσι, διὰ τὸ μὴ εὐρεθῆναι περὶ αὐτῆς κανόνα· ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων διὰ τὸ καθαρεύειν τὰ ἁμαρτήματα νηστεύουσι, καὶ εἰς συνήθειαν ἐκράτησεν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, καὶ τὸ ψυχοφελὲς πλεονάζει τιμίως· ταύτην γοῦν ὁ μὴ φυλάξας, ἀφοριστέος. (my translation) See GRUMEL – DARROUZÈS, Regestes 440–443, esp. 441 (n. 977).

³² See GRUMEL, Jeûne 177.

³³ So also GRUMEL, Jeûne 177. Here one must briefly mention the thorny issue of the *Fastengedicht*, which in the manuscripts is almost unanimously attributed to Nicholas Grammatikos. There it is stipulated that one must observe the fast of the Dormition (ed. J. KODER, Das Fastengedicht des Patriarchen Nikolaos III. Grammatikos. Edition des Textes und Untersuchung seiner Stellung innerhalb der byzantinischen Fastenliteratur. *JÖB* 19 [1970] 203–241, esp. 226). Grumel thought that it was a pseudepigraphon. See GRUMEL, Jeûne 177. In several instances it is much more lenient than other texts by Nicholas, which begs an explanation. A detailed study remains a desideratum.

³⁴ See HOLL, Entstehung 155–203.

³⁵ See HERBUT, Abstinencia 72–75.

³⁶ Anastasius of Sinai, Quaestiones et Responsiones 51 (ed. M. RICHARD – J.A. MUNITIZ, Anastasii Sinaitae Quaestiones et Responsiones. Turnhout – Leuven 2006, 304–305). See HOLL, Fastenzeiten 184 who only knew the much more elaborate version in PG 89, which is a later reworking. See below note 64.

century³⁷. Thus one would expect their observance to be a matter of course. Yet this was not the case as can be readily seen from the following text:

Noone shall break the fast in the so-called fast of St Philip and in that of the Holy Apostles. If someone transgresses our decree, if he is a cleric he shall be deposed, and if he is a layman he shall be deprived of the participation in the good (i.e. the Eucharist)³⁸.

The text presents itself as a canon issued by Patriarch Nicholas. Unfortunately, this attribution is not beyond doubt. The canon is found in the same collection as the anathema of those who do not fast in the first half of August, which as we have seen cannot have Nicholas as its author. Yet in this case no other text by Nicholas is known that would contradict its contents. Thus it could well be genuine.

If this conclusion is correct the canon does not seem to have had the desired effect. At the end of the twelfth century the famous canonist and patriarch of Antioch, Theodore Balsamon (1193–1195), was faced with the same problem. In his *Epistula de jejuniis*, which he sent to his flock in Syria, he makes the following statement:

We see some indifferent people who only keep the forty-day-long fast of the Pascha without fail, whereas they not only debase the others, but also consider them almost to be non-existent, for they extol the feast of the birth of Christ and the feast of the holy and leading Apostles through a fast of four days. And they seem <not> to transgress but rather to honour the feasts because they do that supposedly out of piety, what has not been canonically handed down by the divine Fathers³⁹.

Here it is claimed that some of those who fast before the feasts of Christmas and the Apostles do not regard this as a canonical obligation but as a voluntary act of piety and therefore feel free to fast as long as they like. This argument is already familiar to us from the previous discussion: the second group mentioned in Nikon's *Pandectes* had drawn the same conclusion for the fast of the Dormition. Yet in this case there is no mention of an outright rejection. Noone appears to have been prepared to take such a radical stance.

More detailed information about the debate can be gleaned from the treatise *De tribus quadragesimis*, which goes under the name of Anastasius of Sinai, patriarch of Antioch, but was written by an unknown author in the middle of the twelfth century⁴⁰:

³⁷ Stoudios Hypotyposis (PG 99, 1704–1720, esp. 1716); Lavra Hypotyposis (ed. Ph. MEYER, Die Haupturkunden für die Geschichte der Athosklöster. Leipzig 1894, 130–140, esp. 137); Iviron Hypotyposis (tr. K. KEKELIDZE, Liturgiĉeskie gruzinskie pamyatniki v oteĉestvennykh knigokhraniliščach. Tiflis 1908, 228–313, esp. 307–308); Typikon of Patriarch Alexius (Church Slavonic translation) (ed. A. PENTKOVSKIĬ, Tipikon patriarcha Aleksija Studita v Bizantii i na Rusi, Moscow 2001, 374–375). In this text there is no reference to the fast of the Apostles but this may be due to the clumsiness of the translation. Evergetis *Typikon* (43 GAUTIER); Petritzos *Typikon* (ed. P. GAUTIER, Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos. REB 47 [1984] 5–145, esp. 71). Both fasts are then also found in the twelfth-century rules of the Phoberos, Patirion, Kecharitomene, Mamas, Kosmosoteira, Machairas and Pantokrator monasteries.

³⁸ Nicholas, Synodicae constitutiones 17 (472 PITRA): Τὴν τοῦ ἁγίου Φιλίππου τεσσαρακοστὴν ὀνομαζομένην καὶ τὴν τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων μηδεὶς καταλύτω, εἴ τις δὲ παραβαίνει τὸν ἡμέτερον ὅρον, εἰ μὲν κληρικὸς καθαιρεῖσθω, εἰ δὲ λαϊκὸς ἀφορίζεται τῆς τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ κοινωνίας. (my translation) See GRUMEL – DARROUZÈS, Regestes, 442 (n. 980).

³⁹ Balsamon, *Epistula de jejuniis* (ed. G.A. RHALLÉS – M. POTLES, Syntagma tōn theiōn kai hierōn kanonōn tōn te hagiōn kai paneuphēmōn apostolōn kai tōn hierōn oikoumenikōn kai topikōn synodōn kai tōn kata meros paterōn. Athens 1854, IV 577): Βλέπομεν ἀδιαφόρους τινὰς μόνην τὴν τεσσαρακονθήμερον νηστείαν τοῦ πάσχα συντηροῦντες ἀπαρασάλευτον, τὰς δὲ λοιπὰς οὐ μόνον παραχαράττοντες, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὡς μηδὲ οὕσας λογιζομένους σχεδόν· τὴν γὰρ ἑορτὴν τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ τὴν ἑορτὴν τῶν ἁγίων καὶ κορυφαίων ἀποστόλων διὰ τετραήμερον νηστείας ἀποσεμνύνοντες, δοκοῦσι <οὐ> παρανομεῖν, ἢ μᾶλλον φιλοτιμεῖσθαι τὰς ἑορτὰς ὅτι τὰ τοῖς θεοῖς πατράσι μὴ παραδοθέντα κανονικῶς, αὐτὰ ποιοῦσι δῆθεν θεοφιλῶς. (my translation) Also translated by GRUMEL, *Jeûne* 185.

⁴⁰ Pseudo-Anastasius, *De tribus quadragesimis* (CPG 7773) (PG 89, 1389–1397). For the date see HOLL, *Entstehung* 200; and GRUMEL, *Jeûne* 181.

Now he (sc. the devil) has entered some of ours, not only laypeople and the ignorant and illiterate but already also those who pride themselves on their powers of reasoning and haughtily lift their eyebrows because of their very great wisdom, I mean bishops, metropolitans and priests and deacons and the other clerics and perhaps also monks whose God is considered to be their belly, who without blushing shamelessly teach that there is only one fast that has been handed down from the holy Apostles and the divine Fathers, the so-called Great one, but that of Christmas, which some also call of St Philip, for a reason that we will state further down, and the one before the commemoration of the holy chiefs of the Apostles Peter and Paul are not based on the command of the Apostles and the Fathers but inventions and projects of some monks who observe these two aforementioned fasts⁴¹.

Pseudo-Anastasius claims that this resulted in great confusion. Some fasted eighteen days, some twelve days, some six days, and some four days. Moreover, the diet also varied: some abstained from meat only and others also from cheese and eggs⁴².

In the quoted passage mention is made of members of all ranks of the clergy and even some monks. These were people capable of arguing their case. They pointed out that the canons of the Church councils only mentioned the Great Lent but no other fasts. In this they were right: after a diligent search Balsamon had to confess that he was unable to find a canon pertaining to the topic⁴³. At the same time they rejected the monastic rules as inventions of individuals, which had no authority.

To gauge the force of this argument we need briefly to return to the parallel debate about the weekly fasts⁴⁴. Around the year 1100 the Athonite monks discussed the question ‘whether one must rather follow the rules and synaxaries in the breaking of the fast or follow the more ancient commandments, I mean those of the Apostles and of the Fathers.’⁴⁵ The issue was of great practical importance since the rules were much more lenient than the canons. In this debate hardliners such as Patriarch Nicholas insisted that the canons be followed to the letter and denied the validity of more recent texts such as the *Hypotyposis* of Lavra. This evidently put them in a difficult position. How could they then defend the fasts of the Apostles and of Christmas, which were only known from *typika*?

The lack of ‘ancient’ proof texts is keenly felt by Pseudo-Anastasius. He disingenuously claims that those who rejected the lesser fasts were disobedient to the Apostles and the Fathers. But then he has very little to offer. He quotes canon 69 of the Apostles, the central proof text of the champions of weekly fasts⁴⁶. Yet there mention is made of only one period of fasting, the Great Lent. Pseudo-Anastasius’ *pièce de résistance* is a lengthy quotation from the *Acts* of the Apostle Philip⁴⁷. In this apocryphal text Philip is said to have been punished for his cruelty against his

⁴¹ Pseudo-Anastasius, *Quadragesimis* (PG 89, 1392A): Ὅτι δὲ γε καὶ μάλιστα ὑπεισῆλθέ τις τῶν ἡμετέρων οὐ μόνον λαϊκῶν ἢ ἀγνώστων καὶ ἀγραμμάτων, ἀλλ’ ἤδη καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν ἐπὶ λόγῳ σεμνυνομένων καὶ ἐπὶ μεγίστῃ σοφίᾳ τὴν ὀφρὺν αἰρόντων, ἐπισκόπων φημὶ μητροπολιτῶν καὶ ἱερέων καὶ διακόνων, καὶ λοιπῶν κληρικῶν, καὶ αὐτῶν δήπου ἴσως τῶν μοναχῶν, ὧν θεὸς ἡ κοιλία λελόγισται, οἱ καὶ ἀπηνυθριασμένως οὕτως καὶ ἀναιδῶς διδάσκουσι μόνην εἶναι νηστείαν, ἐκ τε τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν θείων πατέρων παραδιδομένην τὴν λεγομένην μεγάλην, τὴν δὲ γε τῶν Χριστοῦ γέννων, ἦν καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Φιλίππου τινὲς ὀνομάζουσι, δι’ αἰτίαν ἣν παρακατιόντες εἵπωμεν, καὶ τὴν πρὸ τῆς μνήμης τῶν ἁγίων κορυφαίων ἀποστόλων Πέτρου καὶ Παύλου μὴ εἶναι μήτε ἐξ ἀποστολικῆς καὶ πατρικῆς διαταγῆς, ἀλλὰ τινῶν εὐρέματα μοναχῶν καὶ θελήματα, τῶν ταύτας τὰς ρηθείσας δύο νηστεούντων νηστείας. (my translation)

⁴² Pseudo-Anastasius, *Quadragesimis* (PG 89, 1392B).

⁴³ Balsamon, *Epistula* (566 RHALLS – POTLES).

⁴⁴ See KRAUSMÜLLER, *Tradition* 57–65.

⁴⁵ John, *Notificatio* (136 DMITRIEVSKIJ): Εἰ δεῖ τοῖς τυπικοῖς συναξαρίοις ἀκολουθεῖν μᾶλλον ἐν ταῖς καταλύσεσι τῶν νηστειῶν, ἢ τοῖς ἀρχαιότεροις ἐπεσθαι διατάγμασι, λέγω δὴ τοῖς ἀποστολικῶν καὶ πατρικῶν. (my translation)

⁴⁶ Pseudo-Anastasius, *Quadragesimis* (PG 89, 1393C).

⁴⁷ Pseudo-Anastasius, *Quadragesimis* (PG 89, 1396A–1397A).

enemies by a wait of forty days before he could enter Paradise⁴⁸. Moreover, we are told that before he died Philip enjoined his companions Bartholomew and Mariamne to pray for him during the forty days following his death⁴⁹. Pseudo-Anastasius adds that they also fasted and that they informed the other Apostles about this so that they, too, could fast and pray. After these modifications he can conclude that the Apostles had instituted a fast that began after 14 November, the day of Philip's commemoration.

Pseudo-Anastasius soon found readers⁵⁰. Among them was a correspondent of the theologian Michael Glykas († after 1200), the monk and recluse Alypius. Alypius, too, had encountered people who would argue that the fast of Christmas should not be observed because it is not mentioned in the canons of the Apostles⁵¹. In order to refute this claim he, too, had had recourse to the *Acts* of Philip. Glykas pours scorn on this argument. He states that the canons of the Apostles were not the only authoritative texts since the decrees of later Fathers also needed to be taken into consideration. Then he continues:

Most people, then, do not know this, as we have said, and are held in the grip of considerable doubt, from which I think you, too, suffer, and therefore are in doubt about the topic at hand and introduce a strange and unseemly fairy tale. And how would this not be strange, if indeed some make the fanciful claim that such a fast is kept each year because of the disciple of Christ and Apostle Philip? ... But put this out of your mind as being mythical blather⁵².

Glykas quotes the *Tomus Unionis*, which declares that those who got married for the third time are permitted to partake of the Eucharist on Christmas because it is preceded by a fast⁵³. Then he draws the following conclusion:

There (sc. in the *Tomus Unionis*), then, this fast is mentioned in an indefinite manner, for which reason some traverse this fast in one way, some in another way, and others in full forty days—for it is written that he who is able to comprehend may comprehend it⁵⁴.

Unlike Pseudo-Anastasius, Glykas leaves it open how long one should fast since the *Tomus Unionis* does not specify the number of days. As he had no firm view on this matter he had no need to adopt the fanciful interpretation of the *Acts* of Philip.

TWO OR THREE LESSER FASTS?

The *Tomus Unionis* lists three fasts, Great Lent and the lesser fasts of the Dormition and of Christmas. No mention is made of the fast of the Apostles, despite the fact that it was observed in Byzantine monasteries at this time. In the later eleventh and twelfth centuries this discrepancy

⁴⁸ Acta Philippi 31 (ed. F. BOVON – B. BOUVIER – F. AMSLER, Acta Philippi: Textus. Turnhout 1999, 396).

⁴⁹ Acta Philippi 41 (426 BOVON – BOUVIER – AMSLER).

⁵⁰ Balsamon was one of them, see HOLL, Entstehung 200.

⁵¹ Michael Glykas, Epistula 45 (ed. S. EUSTRATIADES, Michaël tou Glyka eis tas aporias tēs theias graphēs kephalaia. Alexandria 1912, II 19–29, esp. 19).

⁵² Michael Glykas, Epistula 45 (20–21 EUSTRATIADES): Ταῦτα μὲν οὖν οἱ πλείους ἡγνοήκοτες, ὡς εἶπομεν, ἀπορία κὰν τῷ τυχόντι συνέχονται, ὃ δὴ καὶ σὲ πεπονθέναι οἶομαι, κάντεῦθεν ἡπορηκότα περὶ τοῦ προκειμένου ζητήματος ἀλλόκοτόν τι παρεισάγειν καὶ οὐκ εὐπρεπὲς μυθολόγημα. Καὶ πῶς γὰρ οὐκ ἀλλόκοτον τὸ τοιοῦτον, εἴπερ τινὲς τὴν τοιαύτην τεσσαρακοστήν διὰ γε τὸν μαθητὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀπόστολον Φίλιππον ἐπιτελεῖσθαι καθ' ἕκαστον ἔτος κομψεύονται ... Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ὡς μυθώδη ληρήματα τῆς διανοίας σου ἐξέλε. (my translation)

⁵³ Tomus Unionis (66 WESTERINK).

⁵⁴ Michael Glykas, Epistula 45 (24 EUSTRATIADES): Ἐκεῖσε οὖν ἀορίστως ἡ νηστεία ταύτη ἐμφέρεται, ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ ἄλλοι μὲν ἄλλως, ἄλλοι δὲ ἑτέρως, καὶ ἕτεροι ἐν ὅλαις ἡμέραις τεσσαράκοντα – ὁ δυνάμενος γὰρ, φησί, χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω – τὴν τοιαύτην νηστείαν διέρχονται. (my translation)

caused much confusion. Glykas follows the *Tomus Unionis* but runs into conceptual problems when he offers a Biblical justification for the need to fast three times:

The nation of the Hebrews celebrated each year three very great feasts, and let holy Scripture convince you, which says: ‘Three times a year all males will be seen before your God’, when the sheep is sacrificed, when the Pentecost occurs to them, and when the feast of the Tabernacle holds sway⁵⁵.

Here Glykas quotes and then paraphrases Exodus 23:14–17 where three Jewish solemnities are mentioned: Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. It is clear that Pesach corresponds to Christian Easter and Sukkot to Christmas. By contrast, the identity of the third celebration is ambiguous. According to Glykas it should be the Dormition. Yet the fact that Shavuot follows fifty days after Pesach and that it is celebrated between 15 May and 14 June, makes the fast of Apostles a more likely candidate since it began soon after Pentecost.

The reason for this incoherence can be found in other texts of the time. In the *Catechesis chronica*, which is attributed to Theodore of Stoudios but dates to the twelfth century⁵⁶, three fasts are mentioned: the fasts of Christmas in honour of the Father, the fast of Easter in honour of the Son, and the fast of the Apostles in honour of the Spirit⁵⁷. When they are correlated with the Jewish feasts, Shavuot is consequently linked to the fast of the Apostles⁵⁸. Interestingly, the author of the text acknowledges the existence of the fast of the Dormition but he does so only in passing and clearly felt no need to change his overall argument⁵⁹.

Although Glykas’ reasoning is not altogether transparent it seems that he wished to replace the traditional fast of the Apostles with the new fast of the Dormition in order to maintain the link with the three Jewish feasts. Corroborating evidence is lacking but it is noticeable that the champions of the latter fast showed no great interest in the former. Indeed, Anastasius of Caesarea claimed that the fast of the Dormition should be accorded greater honour than the fast of the Apostles⁶⁰.

The majority of authors were not prepared to go so far. They were then faced with a problem: how could one have four Christian feasts preceded by fasts and only three Jewish feasts? Balsamon offered a completely new interpretation. He averred that there were in fact five periods of fasting: the fast of Great Lent, the fast of the Apostles, the fast of the Transfiguration, the fast of the Dormition and the fast of Christmas⁶¹. These he correlated with *five* Jewish feasts, which he unearthed in the Old Testament⁶². Balsamon also claimed that each of the lesser fasts lasted just

⁵⁵ Michael Glykas, Epistula 44 (21 EUSTRATIADES): Μεγίσταις τρισὶ πανηγύρεσιν ἐκάστῳ ἐνιαυτῷ τῶν Ἑβραίων γένος ἐώρταζε, καὶ πειθέτω ἡμᾶς ἡ θεία γραφὴ λέγουσα· τρεῖς καιροὺς ὀφθῆσεται τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ πᾶν ἄρσενικὸν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ σου, καθ’ ὃν τε καιρὸν ἐθύετο τὸ πρόβατον, ἡνίκα ἡ πεντηκοστὴ παρ’ ἐκείνοις συνέπιπτε, καὶ ὅτε ἡ τῆς σκηνοπηγίας ἐπεκάτει πανήγυρις. Τρεῖς ἦδη καὶ ἡμεῖς τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ κατ’ ἐκείνους πανηγυρίζομεν. (my translation).

⁵⁶ *Catechesis chronica* (PG 99, 1693–1702). GRUMEL, Jeûne 165–166, regards it as a work of Theodore of Stoudios, as do CASEAU, Nourritures 183; and D. KAKLAMANOS, O agios Theodōros o Stouditēs kai to agiologiko tou ergo. Symbolē stē meletē tēs ekklēsiastikēs grammateias tēs mesobyzantinēs periodou. Thessaloniki 2018, 215–217. As Migne points out it is found in none of the collections of Theodore’s catecheses. The subtitle is best understood as a clumsy attempt to claim it as a genuine work (PG 99, 1993): Πολλαὶ γὰρ κατηχήσεις εἰσὶ τοῦ Στουδίτου, ἀλλ’ αὕτη λέγεται κατήχησις χρονικὴ (There are many catecheses of the Stoudite but this is called catechesis about times). A reference to the legend of the *artzibourion* (PG 99, 1700A) presupposes the anti-Armenian treatise of Euthymius of Peribleptos from the second quarter of the eleventh century. See above note 22. For this legend see P. ERMILOV, ‘Satanic Heresy’: On One Topic in Anti-Armenian Polemic, in: Orthodoxy and Heresy in Byzantium. The Definition and the Notion of Orthodoxy and Some Other Studies on the Heresies and the Non-Christian Religions, ed. A. Rigo – P. Ermilov. Rome 2010, 79–90, esp. 80–83.

⁵⁷ *Catechesis chronica* (PG 99, 1696ABC).

⁵⁸ *Catechesis chronica* (PG 99, 1693B).

⁵⁹ *Catechesis chronica* (PG 99, 1697A).

⁶⁰ Anastasius, Jejunio (586 RHALLS – POTLES). See HOLL, Entstehung 201.

⁶¹ Balsamon, Commentarii (488 RHALLS – POTLES).

⁶² See HOLL, Entstehung 202–203.

seven days and that the only *quadregesima* in the strict sense of the word was the Great Lent. This entailed a considerable shortening of the fasts of the Apostles and of Christmas whereas the fast of the Dormition remained intact since Balsamon had split it into two, from 1 to 7 and from 9 to 14 August. Only monks had to fast from 14 December and from the Sunday after Pentecost if they were constrained to do so by their rules⁶³.

The diametrically opposite stance is found in the treatise *De tribus quadregesimis*. Pseudo-Anastasius continues to speak of three fasting periods and to quote Exodus 23 as proof. Indeed, he emphasises this point by quoting a passage, supposedly by John Chrysostom, which states that the number three could not be changed because doing so would be an attack on the Trinity⁶⁴.

Pseudo-Anastasius claims that the fast of the Apostles and the fast of the Dormition were originally one continuous period of fasting. In order to make his case he adduces a proof text:

The fast after the Pentecost is this one, which has been mentioned in the Constitutions of the holy Apostles, for they say: ‘After this day of the Pentecost let us celebrate one week and after that one you shall fast. For it is right to rejoice at the gift of God and to fast after the relaxation.’⁶⁵

This is a literal quotation from the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* but with one important qualification: in the original text we are told that one must fast one (week) after the Sunday following Pentecost⁶⁶. By leaving out the word ‘one’ Pseudo-Anastasius can give the impression that the Apostles themselves had instituted a fast that lasted from the feast of All Saints until the feast of the Dormition⁶⁷. His next proof text is a canon of Patriarch Nicholas:

When he was presiding over the synod the most holy patriarch of Constantinople Lord Nicholas was asked by the monks of the Holy Mountain if it was necessary to keep a fast before the Dormition of the more-than-holy God-bearer, and he set this out in writing: ‘This fast was before at this time of the month of August. But it was transferred because it coincided with Gentile fasts that took place at that time. But we still keep this fast and fast’⁶⁸.

This canon is already familiar to us. In it Nicholas seeks to explain why in his time people did not observe the fast of the Dormition when the *Tomus Unionis* suggested that there had been such a custom in the early tenth century. It is evident that Nicholas’ argument could not serve Pseudo-Anastasius’ needs. Indeed, Balsamon once remarks that those who did not wish to fast in August

⁶³ Balsamon, *Commentarii* (420 RHALLS – POTLES).

⁶⁴ The combination of the two texts may not be the author’s own invention since the quotation from Exodus followed by the passage from Chrysostom (although not identified here as such) is also found in a florilegium appended to quaestio 64 of the reworked *Quaestiones et Responsiones* of Anastasius of Sinai (*PG* 89, 668AB). It is not found in the genuine collection and cannot be dated with any precision. See above note 36.

⁶⁵ Pseudo-Anastasius, *Quadregesimis* (*PG* 89, 1397B): Ἡ δὲ μετὰ τὴν πεντηκοστὴν νηστεία αὕτη ἐστὶν ἐν ταῖς διατάξεσιν τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων ῥηθεῖσα· φασὶν γὰρ ἐν ταύτῃ ὅτι μετὰ τὴν ἁγίαν πεντηκοστὴν ἐορτάσωμεν ἑβδομάδα μίαν, καὶ μετ’ ἐκείνην νηστεύσατε· δίκαιον γὰρ εὐφρανθῆναι ἐπὶ τῇ θεοῦ δωρεᾷ καὶ νηστεῦσαι μετὰ τὴν ἄνεσιν. (my translation)

⁶⁶ *Constitutiones apostolorum* V.20.14 (ed. M. METZGER, *Les constitutions apostoliques*. II. Paris 1986, 282): Μετὰ οὖν τὸ ἐορτάσαι ὑμᾶς τὴν πεντηκοστὴν ἐορτάσατε μίαν ἑβδομάδα, καὶ μετ’ ἐκείνην νηστεύσατε μίαν· δίκαιον γὰρ καὶ εὐφρανθῆναι ἐπὶ τῇ ἐκ θεοῦ δωρεᾷ καὶ νηστεῦσαι μετὰ τὴν ἄνεσιν.

⁶⁷ This was noticed by HERBUT, *Jejunio* 69.

⁶⁸ The version of the treatise that is found in the *PG* appears to be abbreviated at the end. A fuller text of the last section is found in the MS Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana, graecus 725 (*Diktyon* 67356), fol. 5r-v, which has been dated to the twelfth century and is thus close to the time of composition. There the text reads as follows: Ὁ δὲ ἁγιώτατος πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως κύρις Νικόλαος ἡρωτήθη ἐπὶ συνόδου προκαθήμενος παρὰ τῶν μοναχῶν τοῦ ἁγίου ὄρους, εἰ χρὴ νηστεύειν νηστείαν πρὸ τῆς κοιμήσεως τῆς ἁγίας θεοτόκου, καὶ ἐξέδωκεν οὕτως ἐγγράφως· αὕτη ἦν ἡ νηστεία πρότερον ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τούτῳ τοῦ αὐγούστου μηνός, μετετέθη δὲ διὰ τὸ περιπίπτειν ταῖς κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τούτον γενομέναις ἐθνικαῖς νηστεαῖς, πλὴν καὶ ἐτι ταύτην ταύτην τὴν νηστείαν φυλάσσομεν καὶ νηστεύομεν. (my translation) Partially edited in A. MAI, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio*. Rome 1837, IX 618, without author’s name.

would justify their stance through recourse to it⁶⁹. In order to be able to use it as a proof text Pseudo-Anastasius had to manipulate the wording. He adds a sentence at the end, which gives the impression that the patriarch considered the fast of the Dormition to be obligatory.

The rest of the argument is equally idiosyncratic. Pseudo-Anastasius claims that the ‘transferral’ mentioned by Nicholas was in reality a ‘splitting into two parts’, the fast of the Apostles and the fast of the Dormition. He intimates that the danger from non-orthodox fasts was no longer given and that one should therefore again fast from All Saints to the Dormition. His mindset becomes evident when he declares that the real reason for the ‘splitting’ was an *oikonomia* of the Fathers, which took into account the laziness of the Christian people. It is clear that he wishes to return to the original *akribeia*.

Pseudo-Anastasius’ ideal is a period of continuous fasting in Summer. Since All Saints was a movable feast the resulting timespan varied according to year between fifty-seven days and seventy-eight days. As such it was longer than Great Lent. This strengthened Pseudo-Anastasius’ argument considerably. He could now maintain that all fasts must be ‘forty-day’ periods of fasting and that the fast of Christmas should therefore start on 14 November.

The curious idea of a ‘split’ fast is also found in a supposed canon of Patriarch Nicephorus I (806–815), which is no doubt spurious⁷⁰. The author of the text claims that the fast in Summer used to last from the Sunday after Pentecost to 15 August until the days of Nicephorus:

For this godly Father together with the rest of the holy synod, knowing the oppressiveness of the season and the sluggishness (sc. of the people) decreed that the fast after Pentecost be split into two, the one from the week after Pentecost until the commemoration of the divine Apostles Peter and Paul, and the other from 1 August until the Dormition⁷¹.

We can assume that this text was not known to Pseudo-Anastasius because otherwise he would certainly have referred to it. Yet the opposite might be the case. It is conceivable that the author of the ‘canon’ was influenced by Pseudo-Anastasius’ argument.

Pseudo-Anastasius and Michael Glykas had felt the need to look for proof texts because they accepted the terms of the debate. Not everyone, however, did so. Balsamon mentions that the fast of the Dormition was discussed during a meeting in the palace, which was attended by Emperor Manuel I, Patriarch Luke Chrysoberges (1156–1169) and the synod. As one might expect it is claimed that the *Tomus Unionis* provides sufficient justification for the practice. Yet this did not completely solve the problem:

When some were then still doubting because one does not find anywhere a fixed quantity of the days of such a fast, the same most holy patriarch said that although the days of this one and of the fast that takes place before the feast of the birth of Christ are not indicated by any written

⁶⁹ Balsamon, *Epistula* (578 RHALLS – POTLES).

⁷⁰ See GRUMEL – DARROUZÈS, *Regestes* 48 (n. 404). There it is considered to be of doubtful authenticity as it is only preserved in a late manuscript. Indeed, since the *Catechesis chronica* and ‘John of Nicaea’ are pseudepigrapha it would be the only text predating 920, and that by more of a hundred years.

⁷¹ MS Sinai, Monastery of St Catherine, graecus 1609 (*Diktyon* 59984), s. 15, f. 315r: Ἐόρταζον γὰρ τὴν νηστείαν μετὰ μίαν ἐβδομάδα τῆς ν’ μέχρι τῆς ιε’ τοῦ Αὐγούστου μηνός, ἐν τῇ κοιμήσει τῆς θεοτόκου· τὸ γὰρ καὶ τὴν τῶν θείων μετάληψιν τῷ λαῷ μετέδιδον· καὶ γὰρ ἐκράτει οὕτως μέχρι καὶ τὰς ἡμέρας τοῦ ἐν ἁγίοις πατρὸς ἡμῶν Νικηφόρου, πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, τοῦ ὁμολογητοῦ· ὁ γὰρ οὗτος ὁ θεοφόρος πατὴρ σὺν τῇ λοιπῇ ἁγίᾳ συνόδῳ εἰδὼς τὸ βαρὺ τοῦ καιροῦ καὶ τὸ ῥάθυμον, εἰς δύο τυπώσας, τὴν μετὰ τὴν ν’ νηστείαν, ἀπὸ γὰρ τῆς ἐβδομάδος τῆς μετὰ τὴν ν’, ἕως οὗ καὶ τὴν μνήμην τῶν θείων ἀποστόλων Πέτρου καὶ Παύλου, τὴν μίαν, τὴν δὲ ἑτέραν ἀπὸ τὴν α’ τοῦ Αὐγούστου μηνός ἕως οὗ καὶ τῆς κοιμήσεως. (my translation)

source, we are forced to follow the unwritten tradition of the church, and we must fast from the first day of the month of August and from the fourteenth day of the month of November⁷².

The patriarch claims that the unwritten tradition of the church is as binding as the canons. This argument may well be directed against the viewpoint of men like Michael Glykas who had concluded from the vague reference in the *Tomus Unionis* that individual Christians could decide for themselves how long they wished to fast. This does not, however, mean that the argument from tradition was accepted by everyone. Balsamon himself begs to differ. As we have seen he then advocates fasts that do not last longer than a week. This shows clearly that he put little store by the patriarch's reasoning.

To conclude: In the second half of the eleventh and in the twelfth centuries laymen, monks, and clerics of all ranks debated whether one must observe the lesser fasts. In this debate canon law played a crucial role. Most of the participants took it for granted that a custom was only valid if it was mentioned in canonical literature. Some went so far as to accept only the pronouncements of Late Antique councils and reject all later texts. There were a few dissenters who claimed that the unwritten tradition of the church was just as binding. Yet it does not seem that their views were taken seriously. The fast of the Dormition is first mentioned in the *Tomus Unionis*, which dates to the year 920. There is, however, no sign that it was observed at the time. The monastic rules of the tenth and early eleventh centuries do not mention it. The first attempts to implement it were made around the year 1060. Its propagators, Nikon of the Black Mountain who lived in the region of Antioch and John of Phoberos who was based outside Constantinople, not only included it in their *typika* but also supplied two proof texts, the *Tomus Unionis* and a treatise by John of Nicaea (in reality Euthymius of Peribleptos), in order to show that it needed to be kept. From Nikon's *Pandectes* it is clear that not everyone accepted the validity of the two testimonies. Nikon distinguishes between two groups of opponents. The former asserted that the fast of the Dormition was not a canonical requirement but that one could fast if one wished to do so since it had been instituted by pious people. By contrast, the latter rejected it as being contrary to canon law. A treatise by Anastasius of Caesarea suggests that they drew a parallel with the *artzibourion* fast of the Armenians, which the Byzantines considered to be heretical because it had not been sanctioned by a synod. The most prominent representative of this position was Patriarch Nicholas III Grammatikos who stated that the fast of the Dormition must not be kept, denying it any spiritual relevance. The fasts of the Apostles and of Christmas were much more firmly rooted in tradition. They are first mentioned in the monastic rules of the tenth and early eleventh centuries. Yet they, too, became the subject of a debate. It seems that they were never rejected outright. Yet it was again claimed that they were voluntary and that it was left to the individual how long he wished to fast. Theodore Balsamon and the author of the treatise *De tribus quadragesimis*, Pseudo-Anastasius of Sinai, state that this opinion was held by highly educated metropolitans and patriarchal deacons. These men averred that monastic rules had no authority, a position that was shared by Patriarch Nicholas. Searching for 'ancient' proof texts Pseudo-Anastasius lighted on a narrative source, the apocryphal *Acts* of the Apostle Philip. His fanciful argument was, however, made fun of by Michael Glykas who argued that more recent sources such as the *Tomus Unionis* should also be accepted. An additional problem concerned the number of the fasts. Traditionally there had been

⁷² Balsamon, *Commentarii* (419–420 RHALLS – POTLES): Ἀμφιβαλλόντων δὲ καὶ εἰσέτι τότε τινῶν, διὰ τὸ μὴ εὐρίσκεισθαι ὅπουδὴποτε ὠρισμένην τὴν ποσότητα τῶν ἡμερῶν τῆς τοιαύτης νηστείας, εἶπεν ὁ αὐτὸς ἀγιώτατος πατριάρχης ὡς τῶν ἡμερῶν ταύτης τε καὶ τῆς τελουμένης νηστείας πρὸ τῆς ἐορτῆς τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ δηλουμένων ἕκ τινος ἐγγράφου, ἀναγκάζομεθα ἔπεσθαι τῇ ἀγράφῳ ἐκκλησιαστικῇ παραδόσει, καὶ ὀφείλομεν νηστεύειν ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης τοῦ αὐγούστου μηνός, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδ' τοῦ νοεμβρίου μηνός. (my translation)

three, the fast of Great Lent and the fasts of the Apostles and of Christmas, which were correlated with three Jewish feasts. Yet the *Tomus Unionis* mentioned the fast of the Dormition instead of that of the Apostles. Glykas gives the impression that he wanted the latter to be suppressed. Other authors proposed other solutions. Theodore Balsamon suggested that there were as many as five fasts, each lasting a week, and that they corresponded to several more Jewish feasts. Pseudo-Anastasius held the diametrically opposite view. He continued to claim that there were only three fasts. Yet he averred that the fast of the Apostles and the fast of the Dormition had originally been one continuous period of fasting. All these authors take it for granted that one must produce proof texts. There was only one dissenting voice, Patriarch Luke Chrysoberges, who argued that the unwritten tradition of the church had to be followed. Yet this view was by no means universally accepted. Even Balsamon who records the patriarch's words did not find them convincing. When analysing the sources we can see that authors holding different views responded to each other and grappled with each other's arguments. We thus get a glimpse of the liveliness of religious debate in Constantinople during the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. More research needs to be done in order to establish how this debate continued in the Late Byzantine period.

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