

The Vocabulary of a Heresy: The Case of Iconoclasm

Lev LUKHOVITSKIY (Moscow)

<https://doi.org/10.58377/byzslav.2025.6>

The academic vocabulary used to describe the Iconoclastic Controversy in Byzantium includes both authentic Middle Greek lexemes and artificial terms coined in 16th–17th century Western Europe, developed in the context of Reformation theological debates. The former category is largely represented by terms referring to the so-called Iconoclasts (εἰκονομάχοι, εἰκονοκλάσται, εἰκονοκαῶ[σ]ται), while the latter includes designations for their opponents (iconophiles, iconodules). Authentic Byzantine terms for the supporters of icon veneration (εἰκονολάτραι, εἰκονοσεβᾶσται) are attested only rarely and are notably underrepresented in the surviving corpus. This imbalance can be attributed to their origin as pejorative labels coined by opponents – terms that the participants of the conflict avoided using to describe themselves, preferring instead the designation “Orthodox.” This avoidance applied to both sides of the conflict, but after Orthodoxy was redefined in 843 as icon veneration, the vocabulary of the victors became normative, while the idiom of their adversaries was erased from collective memory. Although the original iconoclastic vocabulary remained unfamiliar to most historians of the controversy, some of its elements were reappropriated by hagiographers seeking to enhance the psychological realism of the antagonists through speech characterization. A hypothesis is advanced that the reconstructed idiom of the Iconoclasts, as presented by these later writers, owes more to their literary imagination than to archival research.

Introduction

Byzantine “Orthodoxy” was in constant flux while simultaneously remaining one and the same throughout the Byzantine era. Local and ecumenical church councils continuously redefined its nature by adding or subtracting essential elements and nuancing theological formulations. Yet no council ever promulgated an “Orthodoxy 2.0.” The unity of the term and the salient idea of the *consensus patrum* that permeated Byzantine sources led believers to reimagine theological controversies of the past as struggles between a self-identical, unmovable “Orthodoxy” on one side and numerous multifaceted “heresies” on the other. These heresies, importantly, often had their own – frequently exotic-sounding – names. From a modern perspective, this view does not withstand scrutiny, since as long as a controversy is not resolved it is impossible to know which faction will prevail and incorporate its dogmas into the definition of “Orthodoxy.” Byzantine “Orthodoxy” thus emerges as a moving target: a fluctuating entity with one stable component – its name – while all other constituents are contingent and subject to change.

Scholars of Byzantium are aware of this phenomenon and duly acknowledge it in reference works.¹ However, what is rarely addressed is how this imbalance – so many names for the vanquished and only one for the victors – distorts modern discourse as well. The designations for factions that ultimately lost are either severely underrepresented in the surviving corpus of sources or entirely absent. An example of the first case is the Monophysites (105 occurrences in the TLG) compared to the Dyophysites (one occurrence) or Diphysites (six occurrences).² The controversy over Christ’s human and divine wills illustrates the second case. We conceptualize this debate as a struggle between Monothelites and Dyothelites (or Dithelites).³ However, while the term “Monothelite” is well attested in Medieval Greek (215 occurrences for μονοθελι/ητ-), the word “Dyothelite” appears to be non-existent (no results for δυοθελι/ητ- or διθελι/ητ-). This absence reflects the fact that those whom we now designate as Dyothelites ultimately triumphed and erased traces of the period when their claim to Orthodoxy was contested. There was no need for victors to define themselves as “Dyothelite Orthodox,” as Dyothelitism became an inherent part of Orthodoxy’s definition.⁴ Such a collocation would be inherently flawed and potentially dangerous, as it could suggest that Orthodoxy might accommodate other attributes different from Dyothelitism. Consequently, our modern portrayal of the controversy is paradoxical. It is, on the one hand, more impartial (neither faction is explicitly privileged) but, on the other, distorted, as the neologism “Dyothelite,” composed from Greek roots, creates the false impression of historical authenticity.

A more cautious approach might define each specific take on Orthodoxy through negation, framing the above-mentioned controversy as a struggle

-
- 1 To quote a recent one, A. KALDELLIS, *The New Roman Empire: A History of Byzantium*, Oxford 2024, 72: “(...) there never was just one Christianity. At any time, multiple competing groups claimed ownership of the name and fought to exclude their Christian rivals from using it. (...) It was this insistence that one was right, and all others were wrong that led official Christianity to self-identify as Orthodoxy, meaning ‘right belief.’ But every rival group claimed to be the true Orthodox Church.” Compare A. CAMERON, How to read heresiology, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33/3, 2003, 471–492, here 472: “We tend to have only the version of the orthodox or of the persecutors, and they themselves irritatingly call their subjects by a variety of anachronistic or otherwise inappropriate names.”
 - 2 Unless otherwise stated, here and below the statistics from the TLG searches refers to queries performed in the Word Index search mode for the sources produced in the 4th–15th centuries (retrieved May 8, 2025).
 - 3 Dyothelete, in: J. A. Simpson – E. S. C. Weiner (eds.), *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford 1989, V, 9: “(...) f. Gr. δύο two + θελητής agent-n. from θελ-ενν to will: lit. a ‘two-willer.’ Opposed to μονοθελήτης a ‘one-willer.’ (...) an opponent of Monothelism.”
 - 4 M. JANKOWIAK, The invention of Dyothelitism, in: M. Vinzent (ed.), *Studia Patristica*, LXIII, (= Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies Held in Oxford 2011, 11: Biblica, Philosophica, Theologica, Ethica), Leuven et al. 2013, 335–342 makes a good case that the Dyothelite doctrine was less firmly embedded in the preceding theological tradition than its Monothelite rival, which “belong[ed] to the mainstream of Chalcedonian theology.”

between “Monothelites” and “Anti-Monothelites.”⁵ While this method has its advantages, it becomes impractical when discussing more obscure movements, such as, e.g., those who were dubbed Heliotropites or Agonyclites mentioned by John of Damascus.⁶ Terms like “Anti-Heliotropites” would misrepresent historical realities, reducing self-identification of the adherents of a more widespread Christian denomination to opposition to marginal sects with limited influence. In such cases, we must recur to abstract entities like the “official” or “mainstream” Christianity, which are as vague as the “Orthodoxy” of the Byzantine idiom. Intriguingly, the Agonyclites and Heliotropites may have had their own names for their adversaries, but these were erased by the victors’ rewriting of history.

The Iconoclastic controversy stands out in this context because at least some of the terms applied today to the factions in this debate are not alien to Byzantine usage. This exceptional status of Iconoclasm warrants closer examination. The argument of this article proceeds in two stages. In the first section, I analyze the terms used to describe the opposing parties in the Iconoclastic controversy, focusing on the lexemes denoting supporters of image veneration (Iconolaters, Iconophiles, Iconodules, Iconomaniacs). I argue that the labels created by the opponents of icon veneration for their adversaries had unique advantages over those invented by other heterodox movements because both factions shared a fundamentally positive attitude toward “icons.” In the second section, I examine how the idiom of Iconoclasm was integrated into post-Iconoclastic literature. I argue that its preservation owes more to the literary ambition of Byzantine writers than to the needs of theological polemics or preservation of historical memory. Specifically, the terms coined by Iconoclasts to vilify their opponents found a second life in hagiographical texts, where they enhanced the emotional impact of the legends by portraying psychologically complex and convincing villains characterized by their own distinctive idiom.

How to call an image-worshiper? Byzantine pejoratives and modern inventions

The Modern Greek Wikipedia asserts: “Iconomachy divided the inhabitants of the Empire into Iconomachs (also referred to as Iconoclasts) and Iconolaters (also referred to as Iconophiles and Iconodules).”⁷ This claim is supported by two references to the basic dictionary of Modern Greek, which further clarify

5 KALDELLIS, *New Roman Empire*, op. cit., 390–393. However, the “Ditheletes” appear in the book once too (402).

6 *Ioannes Damascenus, Liber de haeresibus*, in: *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, IV, (Patristische Texte und Studien, 22), P. B. Kotter (ed.), Berlin – New York 1981, 57 (Nos. 89 and 91).

7 Wikipedia contributors, Εικονομαχία, in: *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia* <https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/Εικονομαχία> (retrieved May 8, 2025): “Η Εικονομαχία διαίρεσε τους κατοίκους της αυτοκρατορίας σε Εικονομάχους (επίσης αναφερόμενους ως Εικονοκλάστες) και Εικονολάτρες (επίσης αναφερόμενους ως Εικονόφιλους και Εικονόδουλους).”

the connotations of the terms, in which “Iconoclast” is defined as “a derogatory and ideologically loaded term for characterizing an Iconomach,” whereas “Iconodule” as “a derogatory and ideologically loaded term for characterizing an Iconophile.”⁸ The ideological clash within Byzantine society is described as a conflict between Iconomachs (image-fighters), which is ostensibly a politically correct term, also known as Iconoclasts (image-breakers), which is a pejorative label, on one side, and Iconolaters (image-worshippers), also known as Iconophiles (image-lovers) and Iconodules (image-servants), on the other. Interestingly, among the three designations for the second faction, only the last is perceived as offensive by Modern Greek speakers.⁹ Since all five words contain Greek roots, the reader might assume that they are all intrinsic to the controversy. Furthermore, because three of these terms are not qualified as pejoratives, one might suppose that these were terms of self-reference. However, if a participant in the debate now referred to as the Iconoclastic controversy had read this definition, regardless of the side they represented, they would likely have protested that the new generation of speakers of Greek has misunderstood the issue.

As noted in the Introduction, describing the conflict in its own terms presents an impasse due to the impossibility of clearly distinguishing between the opposing groups, who mirrored each other’s rhetoric while laying claim to the notion of “Orthodoxy.” The Iconophile (to use this term, which is by no means neutral) version of Orthodoxy was immortalized due to the famous *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* (after 843, Orthodoxy became equated with icon-veneration).¹⁰ However, there was also an Iconoclastic interpretation of the same “Orthodoxy.” A cursory glance at the *Definition* of the Iconoclastic Council of 754 (the Seventh Ecumenical Council, by their reckoning) leaves no doubt that the Iconoclasts heavily relied on the rhetoric of Orthodoxy.¹¹ It becomes difficult to distinguish an Iconoclast from an Iconophile. Both employ the same motifs (e.g., claim that the Devil cunningly introduces heresy disguised as Christian-

8 D. Koutsogiannis et al. (eds.), *Λεξικό της κοινής νεοελληνικής [Λεξικό Τριανταφυλλίδης]*, <https://www.greek-language.gr/greekLang/moderngreek/tools/lexica/triantafyllides/index.html> (retrieved May 8, 2025), s.v. εικονοκλάστης: “μειωτικός και ιδεολογικά φορτισμένος όρος για να χαρακτηρίσει τον εικονομάχο,” s.v. εικονόδουλος: “μειωτικός και ιδεολογικά φορτισμένος όρος για να χαρακτηρίσει τον εικονόφιλο.”

9 See, for instance, E. CHRYSOS, The monks’ role in the restoration of the Icons in 843, *Annales Historiae Conciliorum* 52/1, 2022, 1–12, here 2, n. 6, who suggests avoiding the term as “the product of inimical parlance.”

10 J. GOUILLARD, *Le Synodikon de l’Orthodoxie: édition et commentaire, TM 2*, 1967, 1–316.

11 The *Definition* was read at the sixth session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787), each paragraph was followed by a lengthy refutation: *Concilium Nicaenum Secundum*, I–III, E. Lamberz (ed.), (ACO Series secunda, 3/1–3), Berlin – Boston 2008–2016, III, 602–793. For the fragments stripped of the refutations and combined into a coherent text, see: T. Kranich – Ch. Schubert – C. Sode (eds.), *Die ikonoklastische Synode von Hierieia 754: Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar ihres Horos*, (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, 15), Tübingen 2002.

ity);¹² swear allegiance to apostolic tradition;¹³ view themselves as upholders of the Six Ecumenical Councils;¹⁴ abhor the same heresies of old (primarily Nestorianism and Arianism, hence the famous Iconoclastic dilemma, which reduces icon veneration to either the former or the latter teaching);¹⁵ rely on the same patristic authorities (Epiphanius of Salamis, Gregory of Nazianzos, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Athanasius of Alexandria, Amphilochios of Iconium, and others); and share a common set of laudatory terms (for themselves) and pejoratives (for the opponents). No party denies itself the pleasure of being considered pious, peaceful, and orthodox. Paradoxically, if history had taken an opposite turn and the Iconoclasts had won the dispute, the feast commemorating their victory would still be called “The Triumph of Orthodoxy,” albeit the essence of this “Orthodoxy” would have been understood differently.

The array of epithets listed on the Wikipedia page includes both genuine Byzantine words and artificially constructed Byzantine-like terms.

| term | meaning | number of occurrences |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| anti-icon faction | | |
| εἰκονομαχ- | from μάχομαι, “image-fighters” | 748 (including adjectives and forms of the verb εἰκονομαχέω) |
| εἰκονοκαυ- | from καίω, “image-burners” | 34 |
| εἰκονοκλαστ- | from κλάω, “image-breakers” | 23 |
| pro-icon faction | | |
| εἰκονολατρ- | from λατρεύω, “image-worshippers” | 7 |
| εἰκονοσεβ- | from σέβομαι, “image-reverends” | 1 |
| εἰκονοφιλ- | from φιλέω, “image-lovers” | 1 |
| εἰκονοδουλ- | from δούλος, “image-servants” | 0 |

Table 1: Distribution of designations for the participants of the Iconoclastic controversy according to TLG (4th to 15th c.)

A clear pattern emerges from Table 1. The terms employed to designate the Iconoclastic faction are relatively common, with the *terminus technicus* being εἰκονομάχος.¹⁶ By contrast, the epithets for their opponents are extremely rare,

12 *Concilium Nicaenum Secundum*, III, Lamberz (ed.), 624.8–14.

13 *Ibid.*, 630.5–12.

14 *Ibid.*, 618.1–2, 636.33, 638.13–23, 640.2–9, 644.2–6.

15 *Ibid.*, 648.11–12, 650.4–5, 662.7–11, 666.7–22.

16 The prevalence of εἰκονομάχος over εἰκονοκλάστης is acknowledged in secondary literature. L. BRUBAKER – J. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: a History*, Cambridge 2011, 412–413 assert that this terminology “more accurately responds to the period as we now understand it: (...) there is remarkably little evidence for any actual iconoclast destruction.” I am not fully convinced by this explanation: εἰκονομαχία seems to be a general term for all anti-icon activities (scraping, breaking, burning, smearing), which also evokes associations with θεομάχος and Χριστομάχος.

some of them even entirely absent in the Byzantine sources. While the TLG does not index all surviving Greek texts, it undoubtedly reflects a general trend. A few additions from the LBG, such as one more occurrence of εἰκονολάτραι in a Middle Byzantine treatise ascribed to Isaac, Katholikos of the Armenians (discussed below), do not significantly alter the overall impression of a deeply unequal distribution.¹⁷ Additions from paratextual sources, which remain under the TLG radar, are unlikely to change the picture either. For example, in the famous Khludov Psalter (Moscow, State Historical Museum, Khludov 129d [Diktyon 44147]), anti-Iconoclastic miniatures are accompanied by captions in which the Iconoclasts are designated as εἰκονομάχοι (fol. 51v, 67r), whereas their opponents remain unnamed.¹⁸ Two recently published collections of early 11th century anti-Iconoclastic marginal scholia, attributed by the editor to the patriarch of Antioch, John IV Oxeites, show a similar pattern. In Parisinus graecus 910 [Diktyon 50498] (Nikephoros of Constantinople), εἰκονομαχ- appears seven times, εἰκονοκλαστ- once; in Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, gr. 120 [Diktyon 56026] (Maximos the Confessor), εἰκονομαχ- appears twice, εἰκονοκαυ- once.¹⁹

The most problematic terms are εἰκονοφιλ- and εἰκονοδουλ-, both of which appear to be nonexistent in Byzantium. The sole occurrence listed in the TLG for εἰκονοφιλ- is suspicious. It appears in the Greek translation of *The History of Armenians* by Agathangelos, originally written in Armenian, where the term is used without any connection to the Iconoclastic debate. Agathangelos' translator uses εἰκονόφιλοι to denote idol-worshippers. Furthermore, this might not even reflect the original reading, as the *variae lectiones* indicated by the editor include also εἰκονογλύφους (this is the reading accepted by patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople in the first quarter of the 9th century) and εἰδωλογλύφους.²⁰

17 For a comprehensive list of derivatives from εἰκών, see E. TRAPP, Lexikalische Notizen zur Wortfamilie von εἰκών, in: B. Borkopp – Th. Steppan (eds.), *ΑΙΘΙΟΣΤΡΩΤΟΝ: Studien zur byzantinischen Kunst und Geschichte: Festschrift für M. Restle*, Stuttgart 2000, 287–294. Some of the lexemes listed in this study suggest a wholly different perspective for the study of pejoratives in Byzantium. The word εἰκονιστής is a case in point: in and of itself, this rare word simply indicates one's activity or profession ("icon-painter"), but in the idiolect of an Iconoclast, John the Grammarian, it acquires derogatory overtones. J. VAN DEN GHEYN, Acta Graeca ss. Davidis, Symeonis et Georgii Mitylenae in insula Lesbo, *AnBoll* 18, 1899, 211–259, at 250 (30.20–22): Δράμετε, ὑπὸ τῶν φωνευτῶν εἰκονιατῶν [εἰκονιστῶν corr. Trapp] (οὕτω γὰρ εἴθεται τοὺς προσκυνητὰς τῶν εἰκόνων καλεῖν) βιαίως ὄδε κατασφάττομαι. Occasional pejoratives, i.e. the words that do not imply offence under normal circumstances, but might sound offensive in specific situations, are likely to elude superficial search and require in-depth literary study of each source.

18 On the iconographic program of the Psalter, see: K. CORRIGAN, *Visual Polemics in the Ninth-Century Byzantine Psalters*, Cambridge 1992.

19 N. SIETIS, Ai margini di una biblioteca: sulle tracce di un anonimo lettore bizantino, *Scripta* 12, 2019, 183–201. N. SIETIS, Contro lo sciocco Nilo e i folli iconoclasti: le lotte di un patriarca nei margini della sua biblioteca, *Scripta* 15, 2022, 123–155.

20 *Agathangelos, History of the Armenians*, in: *Agathangelus, La version grecque ancienne du livre Arménien d'Agathange*, (Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, 7), G. Lafontaine (ed.), Louvain-la-Neuve 1973, 202 (34/1–13) = *Nicephorus Constantinopolitanus*,

However this might be, it is highly doubtful that the modern term derives from the Greek Agathangelos.

Both terms go back to the debates about icon veneration in 16th century Western Europe. In an illuminating article on the history of the term “Iconoclasm,” J. N. Bremmer discovered that the term “Iconoclast” employed in the Latin translation of Theophanes’ *Chronicle* by Anastasius the Librarian reemerged in the writings of Thomas Netter (Waldensis) (c. 1372–1431) directed against the anti-iconic teaching of John Wyclif (c. 1331–1384). From there, the term entered the polemical arsenal of Catholic writers of Counter-Reformation nearly a century later.²¹ Bremmer’s passing remark (“Perhaps understandably, I have not been able to find the term in sixteenth-century Protestant theologians”) indicates where one might search for the words we discuss. Indeed, it is the abusive terms for the proponents of icon veneration that the writings of the Protestant polemicists should be mined for. By the mid-16th century, εικονολάτρης (or rather, *iconolatra*) had gained a new life. In 1552, German theologian Georg Witzel asserted that “an Iconolater” could not rely on the authority of John of Damascus.²² In 1563, Polish-Belarusian intellectual Szymon Budny mentioned in a letter to the Swiss Reformer Heinrich Bullinger the “churches of the Iconolaters.”²³ It remains unclear what sources these writers relied on. The most accessible text containing this rare word must have been the Iconoclastic Definition of 754, included in the *Acts* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. This source was available in a late 9th century Latin translation by Anastasius the Librarian, but in his version, the word in question was explained rather than borrowed (*imagingum servitor*).²⁴ Will it be too far-fetched to hypothesize that the term was coined anew by analogy with “idolatria,” independently from the Byzantine precedent?

It is in this intellectual atmosphere that the term “Iconodules” emerged. In 1567, French theologian Gentian Hervet complained that his Protestant opponent Hugues Sureau had disparagingly referred to Catholics as image-servants: “(...) vous nous appelez non seulement Iconomanes et Iconodules, c’est à dire

Contra Eusebium, in: *Spicilegium Solesmense complectens sanctorum patrum scriptorumque ecclesiasticorum anecdota hactenus opera*, J. B. Pitra (ed.), Paris 1852, I, 370–503, here 500–501 (75). See a detailed discussion below. Cf. TRAPP, *Lexikalische Notizen*, op. cit., 287.

21 J. N. BREMMER, *Iconoclast, Iconoclastic, and Iconoclasm: notes towards a genealogy*, *Church history and religious culture* 88, 2008, 1–17, esp. 10–11.

22 G. WITZEL, *Dritte theil des Typi Ecclesiastici oder Kirchforms, aus den alten Kirchbüchern von newem gesamlet*, Mainz 1552, 24: “Aus Jo. Damasceno kan sich keyn Iconolatra behelffen weil er klar sagt *Non materiam uenerantes* (...)”

23 *Bullinger Digital: Digitale Erschliessung von Heinrich Bullingers Briefwechsel*, Institut für Computerlinguistik und Institut für Schweizerische Reformationsgeschichte der Universität Zürich (ed.), Zürich 2020–2025, www.bullinger-digital.ch/letter/5694 (retrieved May 8, 2025): *Pręterea templa iconolatrarum aut claudi aut repurgari iussit* (...).

24 *Concilium Nicaenum Secundum*, III, Lamberz (ed.), 783.5.

Amateur et seruiteurs d'images, mais ausi Idolatres (...).²⁵ The notion of “servitude” perhaps stems from discussions of the difference between *Latria*, *Dulia*, and *Hyperdulia*. While these distinctions were of little importance to Byzantine thinkers who focused instead on differentiating between the two modes of veneration (προσκύνησις), relative (σχετική) and adorational (λατρευτική), they had become central to Latin theological thought since Thomas Aquinas. In the second half of the 16th century, this issue gained prominence in anti-Catholic pamphlets by Philips van Marnix and Johann Fischart, who were responding to Heruet.²⁶

The second pejorative mentioned by Hervet, “Iconomaniacs,” also deserves examination. This term follows a well-established template for compound nouns with the suffix -μανής (literally “mad after the thing denoted by the first root”), as seen in examples like παιδομανής, θηλυμανής, έρωμανής, δοξομανής, and οϊνομανής. Its Greek equivalent, εικονομανής, is easy to imagine, but it is unattested in Byzantine Greek. In fact, an abstract noun *iconomania* is attested in a mid-17th century history of Iconoclasm (*De imaginibus narratio historica*) written by the Scottish theologian John Forbes.²⁷ Once again, εικονομανία is easily imaginable in Greek, but it is unattested, except for a single (and obviously inferior) *varia lectio* in Constantine Manasses. This curious detail suggests that, as we argued above in the case of the 16th century *iconolatras* and Byzantine εικονολάτρης, linguistic intuition can lead writers, both native speakers of Greek and not, to same neologisms independently from one another.²⁸

F. Dell’Acqua has recently discussed the emergence of the term “Iconophile,” noting that it is attested only since the 18th century onward and that, until at least the late 19th century, its most common meaning was that of “a connoisseur of pictures.”²⁹ This observation is undoubtedly correct; for example, an appendix on fine arts to a bibliographic catalogue by Dutch bibliographer Cornelis van Beughem, printed in 1685, opens with an address to *icono-philospectatori* (with a hyphen).³⁰ Nevertheless, the term occasionally appeared in the context of the controversy over images even earlier. For instance, Theodor

25 G. HERUET, *L’Antihugues, c’est-à-dire response aux escrits et blasphemés de Hugues Sureau (...)*, Reims 1567, 273.

26 J. J. BERNS, *Von Strittigkeit der Bilder: Texte des deutschen Bildstreits im 16. Jahrhundert*, III, (Frühe Neuzeit, 184/3), Berlin – Boston 2023, 359–361.

27 I. FORBESIUS À CORSE, *Instructiones historico-theologicae de Doctrina Christiana (...)*, Amsterdam 1645, 355: Eousque autem invaluerat iconomania, ut imagines religiose adorarent ipsi jam Pontifices Romani (...).

28 TRAPP, *Lexikalische Notizen*, op. cit., 288, discusses the case of εικονομανία in detail and treats its modern equivalents in European languages as “spontane Neubildungen.”

29 F. DELL’ACQUA, *Iconophilia. Politics, Religion, Preaching, and the Use of Images in Rome, c. 680–880*, (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies), London – New York 2020, 2.

30 C. VAN BEUGHEM, *Bibliographia historica, chronologica et geographica novissima (...)*, Amsterdam 1685, 685.

Zwinger (the Younger), the antistes of Basel, used it derisively to describe those who stubbornly clung to images and accused of “Iconomachy” the pious magistrates who removed them following the example of King Hezekiah.³¹

We observe a competition among several learned neologisms composed from Greek roots with roughly the same meaning, of which “Iconomaniacs” eventually lost to “Iconodules” and “Iconophiles.”³²

Returning to the statistics presented above, the imbalance in the distribution of terms for the two factions can be easily explained. All these words, without exception, are pejorative labels. Calling someone an “image-fighter” is offensive if they profess adherence to the “true images,” which, in the case of Christ, are the Eucharistic bread and wine, and in the case of the saints, the virtues imprinted in their words and deeds, recorded in hagiographic accounts.³³ The language of the Iconoclastic *Definition* of 754 is strikingly icon-friendly, as it presents an array of positive epithets attributed to εικόν. The Iconoclasts affirm their allegiance to the true holy icon bequeathed by God and created with reverence and awe. Indicative expressions include τὴν ἀληθῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰκόνα (“the true icon of Christ”), ἡ εἰκὼν (...) ἡ ἐντίμως καὶ τετιμημένως πραττομένη (“the icon (...) made with reverence and honor”), ἡ εἰκὼν αὐτοῦ ἁγία (“His holy icon”), ἀψευδῆ εἰκόνα (“the truthful icon”), and ἡ θεοπαράδοτος εἰκὼν (“the God-given icon”).³⁴ Conversely, it is equally disrespectful to label someone an “image-worshipper” if they base their theology on a clear distinction between relative veneration (σχετικὴ προσκύνησις), which is due to icons as mediums that communicate it to the archetype, and adorational veneration or worship (λατρεία), which is due to God alone, on the other.³⁵

The polysemy of the Greek word εἰκόν³⁶ allowed for a positive attitude toward objects called εἰκόνες among partisans of both factions. Paradoxically,

31 TH. ZWINGER, *Theatrum sapientiae coelestis ex Joh. Calvini Institutione Christianae religionis (...)*, Basel 1652, 197: Inprimis quoque imagines in Templis, quae Pontificiis olim prostabant ad idololatriam, quas tamen Iconophili non solum pertinaciter retinent, quin et Magistratus, qui exemplo pio Hiskiae, eas sustulerunt, contemptim Iconomachos vocitant.

32 The question of when and how these two words entered Modern Greek deserves further investigation. S. ΚΟΥΜΑΝΟΥΔΕΣ, *Συναγωγή νέων λέξεων ὑπὸ τῶν λογίων πλασθεισῶν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἀλώσεως μέχρι τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς χρόνων*, Athens 1900, I, 329 lists both with references to mid-19th century writers Spyridon Zabelios, Konstantinos Kontogonis, and Frangiskos Zamvaldis, who most likely were influenced by contemporary Western European historiographical thought.

33 M. V. ANASTOS, The Ethical Theory of Images Formulated by the Iconoclasts in 754 and 815, *DOP* 8, 1954, 151–160.

34 *Concilium Nicaenum Secundum*, III, Lamberz (ed.), 670–672. See L. LUKHOVITSKIY, Speaking as an Iconoclast: another’s voice in 9th century hagiography, *TM* 24/2, 2020, 359–376, esp. 359–361.

35 For a basic orientation in the matter, see K. PARRY, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries*, (The Medieval Mediterranean, 12), Leiden 1996, 166–177.

36 Even the most ardent defenders of image veneration acknowledge that pictorial representations are only one type of “icons” alongside, e.g., written accounts about past events and

if we look past the distortions of the sources, we will find ourselves dealing with two pro-icon doctrines quarreling over a hair-splitting issue of what precisely constitutes a proper icon. This shared acceptance of icons contributed to the exceptional polemical force of the hostile terms under discussion. By comparison, the label “Dyophysite” discussed above does not seem to carry equally offensive connotations for someone who professes the doctrine of the two natures. Both “Dyophysite” and “Monophysite” function as labels rather than pejoratives, precisely because there is much less common ground between the two factions than in the Iconoclastic controversy. Similarly, the polemical force of a rare term ὁμοουσιότητας (“consubstantialist”), coined by opponents of the Trinitarian doctrine of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father,³⁷ turned out to be meager, as Severian of Gabala in a *Homily on the Incarnation of Christ* reclaimed this stigmatizing label:

(...) the founders of each heresy are well-known. The Arians [are named] after Arius, the Makedonians after Makedonios (...) But even if they say “Homousians,” they do not pronounce a name but merely show the unity of [our] faith. So if you ask them, “Who was the first to introduce [the doctrine of] the same essence?” they won’t be able to say, “It was this or that person,” because it was the three hundred and eighteen fathers who unanimously proclaimed the pious teaching with one voice.³⁸

The pejorative fails to achieve its intended effect because the partisans of the doctrine of the same essence can easily reappropriate the disparaging label as a term of self-reference. No such reclamation could be achieved with either εικονολάτρης or εικονομάχος.

Iconoclastic idiom in hagiography

The party that ultimately prevailed in the Iconoclastic conflict ensured that all insults against them would be buried once and for all, while the labels invented to humiliate their opponents, who eventually lost the battle, would be permanently affixed to them in the historical memory of future generations. How and why, then, did these “inconvenient” epithets, which could sow seeds of doubt about the only correct understanding of Orthodoxy and even re-Christianize the demonized Iconoclasts, still survive? I believe the answer lies in the domain of literature.

construction plans of future buildings: *Ioannes Damascenus, Contra imaginum calumniatores*, in: *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, III, (Patristische Texte und Studien, 17), P. B. Kotter (ed.), Berlin – New York 1975, 83–86 (I 9–13).

37 *Saint Basile, Lettres*, Y. Courtonne (ed.), Paris 1957–1966, III, 26 (226.3.5–7): Οὗτοι νῦν καὶ τὴν ἐν Νικαίᾳ διαβάλλουσι πίστιν καὶ ὁμοουσιότητας ἡμῶς ἀποκαλοῦσι (...).

38 *Severian of Gabala, Homily on the incarnation of Christ*, R. F. Regtuit (ed.), Amsterdam 1992, 282 (8): (...) πάσης αἰρέσεως φανεροὶ εἰσιν οἱ ἕξαρχοι. Ἀπὸ Ἀρείου Ἀρειανοί, ἀπὸ Μακεδονίου Μακεδονίανοι (...) ἀλλὰ κἂν εἴπωσιν· “Ὁμοουσιασταί,” οὐκ ὄνομα εἶπον, ἀλλὰ τῆς πίστεως ἔδειξαν τὴν συμφωνίαν. Ἐὰν οὖν ἐρωτήσης αὐτούς· “Καὶ τίς πρῶτος εἶπε τὸ ὁμοούσιον;” οὐκ ἔχουσιν εἰπεῖν· “Ὁ δεῖνα καὶ ὁ δεῖνα,” ἀλλὰ τριακόσιοι δέκα καὶ ὀκτὼ πατέρες σύμφωνον ῥήξαντες φωνὴν ὁμολογίας συμφώνησαν εἰς εὐσέβειαν.

Let us examine the occurrences of the term εικονολάτρης in a more analytical way. To begin with, neither historians nor polemicists use it. If a chronicle-writer or a heresiographer wants to report the accusations brought against image-veneration by the Iconoclasts, the most common choice is to say that they accused their opponents of “idolatry.”³⁹ The term under discussion emerges in other genres and under different circumstances. Eight occurrences of εικονολάτρης can be sorted into three categories:

1. Three texts are not related to the Iconoclastic debate: an anti-Judaic *Dialogue of Papiscus and Philo the Jews with a Monk* (tentatively dated to the late 7th c.);⁴⁰ *The History of Armenians* by Agathangelos (between the early 6th and the early 8th century);⁴¹ and the *Second Invective against the Armenians* attributed to Isaac, Katholikos of the Armenians (between mid-11th and 13th centuries), which merely rephrases Agathangelos.⁴² The series of synonyms in Agathangelos (τοὺς εἰκονοκτίστας καὶ εἰκονοφίλους καὶ εἰκονολάτρας) and the *Dialogue* (εἰδωλοθύτας καὶ τεκνοθύτας καὶ εἰκονολάτρας καὶ ἀπίστους) make clear that in these sources εἰκονολάτρης is a sophisticated way to refer to idolaters, and εἰκῶν is equated with εἰδῶλον.
2. Two texts are produced during the Iconoclastic controversy: the first contains a direct utterance by the bishops of the Iconoclastic Council of 754, where it is used as a pejorative label for John of Damascus;⁴³ the second is a polemical treatise by Nikephoros of Constantinople, who quotes Agathangelos.⁴⁴ Noteworthy, the latter context proves that by the first quarter of the 9th century the term had not yet become inseparably associated with the Iconoclastic idiom. Nikephoros felt as free to use it in relation to pagan idols as the early Byzantine writers mentioned above.
3. Three occurrences belong to hagiography and merit closer examination.
 - 3.1. The anonymous *Life of Michael the Synkellos* (BHG 1296), from the second half of the 9th century, where the word in question is used in a report submitted by some Iconoclastic officials to the emperor:

39 For chronography, see, e.g., *Michael Glykas, Annales*, (CSHB), I. Bekker (ed.), Bonn 1836, 505.5–6, for heresiology, *Euthymius Zigabenus, Panoplia dogmatica*, in: PG, 130, 1308d (XXVII 11).

40 *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*, A. C. McGiffert (ed.), New York 1889, 78 (XV).

41 See note 20 above.

42 *Pseudo-Isaac, Second Invective against the Armenians*, in: PG, 132, 1217–1237, here 1232d. On the date, see V. GRUMEL, Les invectives contre les Arméniens du “catholico Isaac,” *REB* 14, 1956, 174–194, at 176–179 and T. M. KOLBABA, East Roman Anti-Armenian Polemic, Ninth to Eleventh Centuries, *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 3/2, 2020, 121–173, at 155.

43 *Concilium Nicaenum Secundum*, III, Lamberz (ed.), 782.5.

44 See note 20 above.

Καίπερ τοῦ βασιλέως τιμὰς παντοίας καὶ ὑπερβαλλούσας ὑποσχέσεις ὑποσχομένου καὶ θρόνων μεγίστων, εἰ ἐπιστρέψαντες ἐκ τῆς μυσαρᾶς τῶν εἰκονολατρῶν, μᾶλλον δὲ εἰδωλολατρῶν, αἰρέσεως συνθῶνται τῇ καθολικῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, οὐχ εἴλοντο οὔτε μὴν ὑπήκουσαν ταῖς ὀρθοδόξοις αὐτοῦ διδασκαλίαις.

Although the emperor promised them manyfold honours and the surpassing promise of high thrones if they should turn away from the abominable heresy of image worshippers, or rather the idolaters, and obey the catholic church, they did not accept or even heed his orthodox teachings.⁴⁵

Noteworthy, the hagiographer steps on thin ice, allowing the Iconoclastic character to refer to the Iconoclastic teaching as an “orthodox” one.

3.2. The *Passion of Theodosia of Constantinople* by John Staurakios (BHG 1774a), from the late 13th century, portrays the devil manipulating Leo III the Isaurian into forbidding icon veneration. The word in question appears in a reported speech of the antagonist:

(...) καὶ ὅπως ὄργανον καὶ αὔθις ὁ κοινὸς τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους πολέμιος (ὦ Θεοῦ κριμάτων καὶ ἀνοχῆς!) τὸν ἐξ Ἰσαύρων θηριώνυμον Λέοντα, εὔρατο πρὸς ὑπηρεσίαν τῶν αὐτοῦ βουλευμάτων (...) ἐκεῖνο τὸ δύσοδομον καὶ τὸν ἀέρα μολύνον αὐτῷ ὑπηγόρευσε· εἶδωλα τὰς σεβασμίας εἰκόνας (ὦ τῆς ἀσεβείας!) καὶ τὴν τῶν ἁγίων μορφῶν προσκύνησιν, εἰκονολατρίαν ἢ μᾶλλον εἰπεῖν εἰδωλολατρίαν καὶ πλάνην, καὶ πολὺν ὅ, τι μάλιστα σκοτασμόν.

(...) the common foe of the human race (o, God’s judgment, o, God’s patience!) found a new instrument to serve his will – Leo the Isaurian, a man with a beast’s name (...) and gave him this foul-smelling and air-polluting [idea: to call] the revered images (o, what impiety!) idols, the veneration of holy imprints iconolatry, or rather idolatry, delusion, and utter darkness.⁴⁶

3.3 For the anonymous early Palaiologan author of the *Passion of Theodosia of Constantinople* (BHG 1773z), who E. Kountoura-Galaki suggests may have been Manuel (Maximos) Holobolos,⁴⁷ the word is a hallmark of the Iconoclastic idiom. It appears again in a report to the emperor:

45 *The Life of Michael the Synkellos*, (Belfast Byzantine Texts and Translations, 1), M. B. Cunningham (ed., trans.), Belfast 1991, 76–78 (text), 77–79 (translation).

46 *John Staurakios, Encomium Theodosiae*, in: *Das hagiographische Dossier der heiligen Theodosia von Konstantinopel*, (Byzantinisches Archiv, 21), S. Kotzabassi (ed.), Berlin – New York 2009, 54–106, here 88 (8).

47 E. KOUNTOURA GALAKI, Ideological conflicts in veiled language as seen by the Palaiologan hagiographers: the Lives of St. Theodosia as a case study, in: A. Rigo, in collaboration with M. Trizio and E. Despotakis (eds.), *Byzantine Hagiography: Texts, Themes, and Projects*, (Studies in Byzantine History and Culture, 13), 401–418. E. KOUNTOURA GALAKI, Rewriting on martyrs of Iconoclasm during the Palaiologan period, in: A. Binggeli – S. Efthymiadis –

“(...) ἀλλά τις εἰκονολάτρης ἐνταῦθα γυνὴ σκοτεινόφρων τὴν τύχην,” (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἤθελον ἔτι μοναχὴν ἐκείνην καλεῖν οἱ τοῦ ἐξωτερικοῦ σκοτούς ἐτοιμασταὶ καὶ οἰκήτορες) “Θεοδοσία τὸ ὄνομα, μία καὶ αὐτὴ οὕσα τῶν ἀποκτεινάντων τὸν τοῦ σοῦ κράτους τιμιώτατον ἄνδρα σπαθάριον, οὐ μόνον ταῖς εἰκόσι μόνη λατρεύειν κατατολμᾷ καὶ κατὰ τῆς ἰδίας ψυχῆς μόνης ἔχει τὸν κίνδυνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλοὺς ὑποστηρίζει πρὸς τὴν δοκοῦσαν ἐκείνης εὐσέβειαν (...).”

“(...) but an iconolater woman, who chose the darkness as the way of life,” (the preparers and dwellers of outer darkness did not wish to call her a nun) “Theodosia by name, who is one of those who murdered your most respectable spatharios, not only dares to worship images and endanger her own soul, but also strengthens many others in what she perceives to be piety (...).”⁴⁸

The hagiographer’s skill is admirable: not only does he allow for the possibility that the Iconoclasts had their own understanding of piety and were not pure evil, but he even grants them the right to think similarly about their opponents, that is, to allow for the possibility that those who venerate images do so not because they are evil by definition, but because they follow their own understanding of piety.

The authentic Iconoclastic idiom was preserved not in the writings of historians and chronographers, but in hagiography. An anti-Iconoclastic hagiographer faces a dilemma: there is an inherent tension between psychological authenticity, which helps the reader empathize with the protagonist’s situation, and the needs of propaganda. The laws of fiction writing, which demand psychological complexity and persuasiveness, come in conflict with the demands of religious polemics, which prescribe the dehumanization of heretics; the former creates anti-heroes, the latter – supervillains. Every hagiographer had to make their own choice. A supervillain (e.g., emperor Constantine V in the early 9th century *Life of Stephen the Younger* by Stephen the Deacon) despises images, does not consider himself a pious Christian, and oppresses the orthodox; an anti-hero (emperor Theophilos in the *Life of Michael the Synkellos*) has his own truth and understanding of Orthodoxy and oppresses those whom he considers unorthodox.⁴⁹

There is also the problem of sources. If the hagiographers preserved the genuine Iconoclastic idiom, where could they have become acquainted with it, given that it is not attested in historiography? They must have taken enormous pains to find these terms in the depths of archives. Is it possible to assume that they invented this idiom from scratch? Consider the two Palaiologan *Passions*

S. Métivier (eds.), *Les Nouveaux Martyrs à Byzance, I: Vie et Passion de Bacchos le Jeune par Étienne le Diacre; II: Études sur les nouveaux martyrs*, (Byzantina Sorbonensia, 31), Paris 2021, 285–304.

48 [Holobolos], *Encomium Theodosiae*, in: Kotzabassi (ed.), *Das hagiographische Dossier*, op. cit., 30–53, at 42 (12).

49 LUKHOVITSKIY, *Speaking as an Iconoclast*, op. cit.

of Theodosia: both words (the feminine *nomen agentis* εικονολάτρίς and the abstract noun εικονολατρεία) are *hapax legomena*, as is the word εικονοσεβάστης, which appears in the first *Life of Peter of Atroa* by Sabas the Monk, from the mid-9th century (*BHG* 2364):

(...) ὄθεν ἐκ τῆς πρὸς τὸν θεῖον Ἀθανάσιον ἐπισκέψεως ὑποστρέφοντι τῷ ὁσίῳ σὺν τῷ αὐτοῦ ἀδελφῷ Παύλῳ, ἀπήνησέν τις αὐτῷ καὶ ἤρξατο διαλέγεσθαι· “Πόθεν ἐστὲ καὶ ἕως τίνος τὴν ὁδοιπορίαν ποιεῖσθε; Μὴ τῶν ἀποσχιστῶν εἰκονοσεβαστῶν ἐστε ὑμεῖς;”

(...) when the saint was returning with his brother Paul after a visit to the godly Athanasios, a man met him and started a conversation: “Where are you from, and what is your destination? Do you not perchance belong to the schismatics who revere images?”⁵⁰

Which of the two assumptions is more economical?

1. These words were actually used by the Iconoclasts but did not eventually find their way into the extant texts of the period.
2. The hagiographers of later epochs attempted to reframe their view to look at the conflict from the perspective of the losing party in order to persuasively role-play the heretics and thus coined these terms.

The hypothesis about independent creation of similar (or even same) terms put forward in the first and the second sections of the article needs nuancing. The case of the term εικονόφιλος is different from that of the term εικονοσεβάστης or εικονολάτρίς. The first one is created independently twice: first, by anti-pagan or anti-Jewish polemicists in Late Antiquity; second, by Protestant reformers in the 16th century. The term is coined according to a widespread template under similar circumstances out of the need to disparage the opponents who, in the eyes of those who invent this label, are guilty of superstitions and paganism. By analogy with convergent evolution in biology and linguistics and with the concept of multiple discoveries in the history of science, I would propose to describe the process that ensures this effect as convergent creation of neologisms.⁵¹

50 Sabas, *Life of Peter of Atroa*, in: *La Vie merveilleuse de saint Pierre d'Atroa (†837)*, (Subsidia hagiographica, 29), V. Laurent (ed.), Brussels 1956, 125 (26). The most recent edition of this text, Sabas, *The Life of Saint Peter of Atroa*, I. Polemis – A. Markopoulos – R. P. H. Greenfield (ed., trans.), (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, 85), Washington, D.C. 2024 remained inaccessible to me.

51 This instance of convergence is of course not unique. On possible “spontaneous parallels” between English and Greek, see E. TRAPP, Greek as the receiving language in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, *Lexicographica* 33, 2017, 33–68, at 65. On the related problem of distinguishing between direct continuity between Medieval and Modern Greek, on the one hand, and “spontaneous parallels” within one language, on the other, see E. TRAPP, Zum Wortschatz des Neophytos Enkleistos, in: A. Rhoby – E. Schiffer (eds.), *Imitatio – Aemulatio – Variatio: Akten des internationalen wissenschaftlichen Symposions zur byzantinischen Sprache und Literatur (Wien, 22.–25. Oktober 2008)*, (Veröffentlichungen zur

The second case, that of εικονοσεβάστης and εικονολάτρης, is different: if my hypothesis is true, we are dealing with historical psychological reconstruction on the part of hagiographers who set to recreate the logic of the Iconoclasts and start thinking like them in order to enhance the emotional impact of the legends about the saints who defended icon veneration.

Passing to the broader cultural implications of our analysis, Modern European pluralism, which affirms the equality of diverging religious and philosophical concepts, transforms our languages, forcing them to avoid normativity in describing these concepts. In academic context, “Orthodoxy” cannot be contrasted with “Iconoclasm” because depending on one’s ideological stance one element in this pair will inevitably have positive and the other one – negative connotations: we will either have a dichotomy between “bad” Orthodoxy, which stands for obscurantism and fundamentalism, and “good” “Iconoclasm,” which stands for innovation and creativity, or vice versa (tradition and moral values vs arrogance and destruction). A close analogy might be the construction of the language of gender diversity: if we want to overcome the idea of gender normativity, we replace the unequal antonymic pair “normal VS transgender” with the pair “cisgender VS transgender,” neither of which is a priori “normal” or “deviant.” Medieval society, including the Byzantine world, insists on the existence of norm and deviation; it retains the context of words once spoken and is reluctant to rehabilitate stigmatizing labels (Severian of Gabala quoted above appears to be a rare exception). Of the two antonymic pairs generated by a common normative vision of the world – “the Orthodox VS the Iconoclasts” and “the Orthodox VS the Iconolaters” – the former one survived. With the triumph of icon veneration, “the Iconolaters” should have disappeared forever, if not for the last tiny loophole – the word εικονολάτρης could still be pronounced in someone else’s speech. The only chance of survival for this word was in literature – a space of freedom where artistic persuasiveness could prove stronger than polemical necessity.

Lev Lukhovitskiy
Institute for Oriental and Classical Studies
HSE University
21/4 Staraya Basmannaya Ulitsa
Moscow, 105066
lukhovitskiy@gmail.com

Byzanzforschung, 21. Denkschriften der philosophisch-historischen Klasse, 402), Vienna 2010, 273–278, at 277. A. РНОВЬ, *Varia Lexicographica III, JÖB 71*, 2021, 303–393, at 308, 354, 372, 374.