DIRK KRAUSMÜLLER
Universität Wien, Österreich
dkrausmuller@hotmail.com

CAN HUMAN BEINGS KNOW THE HOUR OF THEIR OWN DEATH OR OF THE DEATH OF OTHERS? A NINTH-CENTURY CONTROVERSY AND ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Between the seventh and the ninth century holy men acquired a new role. They no longer just exorcised demons and healed diseases but also foretold people when they would die. This development was caused by a shift in religious belief. Under the influence of relentless preaching, people had come to think that salvation or damnation was determined by the state in which one found oneself at the moment of death. What was feared was a sudden death, which would not leave time for the necessary preparation through repentance and almsgiving. Contemporary holy men responded to this fear by offering their services as prophets. These activities incurred the criticism of coenobitic monks who were opposed to them for moral and metaphysical reasons.

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In the mid-nineteenth century the English poet Alfred Tennyson chose as subject matter for one of his dramatic monologues the fifth-century Syrian holy man Symeon the Stylite. At the end of a long and rambling speech Tennyson lets Symeon declare: 'By the warning of the Holy Ghost, I prophesy that I shall die to-night, a quarter before twelve.'1 Tennyson’s Victorian audiences were most likely amused by this holy exactitude. However, had Symeon given the same speech to his devotees they would have reacted rather differently. For them such precision would have been a sure sign that Symeon had indeed received a revelation from God. A survey of Late Antique hagiographical texts reveals that almost all saints knew the time of their death in advance. What is almost entirely missing, however, are prophecies of

1 Alfred Tennyson, Works, 152.
the impending death of others. The situation in the Iconoclastic period was starkly different. At that time such prophecies were frequently made by holy men and were regarded by their hagiographers as an indispensible marker of saintly status. The present article seeks to explain how this change came about, and to reconstruct the debate that it engendered.2

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During the Second Iconoclasm three individuals – Joannicius 'the Great', Peter of Atroa, and Gregory the Decapolite – acquired the reputation of being holy men. The authors of their Lives, Peter the Monk, Sabas the Monk and Ignatius the Deacon respectively, present their heroes as efficient wonderworkers. As one might expect the texts contain numerous episodes in which demons are driven out and bodily illnesses are healed.3 However, there is a further type of miracle, which is given equal prominence, namely prophecies of impending death. Joannicius, Peter and Gregory know well in advance when their lives will end.4 In the case of Peter and Gregory the prophecies are astonishingly precise. The former states that he will die within twelve days, whereas the latter declares that he will pass away on 1 January.5 The hagiographers assure their audiences that the saints did indeed depart from this world at the specified days. Yet this is not all they have to say about this topic. Further inquiry into their texts shows that they also claim that the saints know when others will die. The Life of Peter of Atroa contains one;6 the Life of Gregory the Decapolite five;7 and the Life of Joannicius no fewer than twelve such episodes.8 Analysis of two stories from the last text helps us understand the function of these prophecies. The first story concerns the monk Thomas who visits Joannicius in order to ask for his prayers. When Thomas is about to depart the following interaction takes place:

2 The secondary literature on this topic is very limited. The articles of Constas, Death and dying in Byzantium, 124–145, and Dennis, Death in Byzantium, 1–7, are not relevant. Timotin, Visions, prophéties et pouvoir, 71–73, deals with the issue only in a very cursory fashion and with no regard for chronology.

3 For miracles of Joannicius and Peter of Atroa other than prophecies of impending death see Euthymiadis, Le miracle et les saints, 153–182. The secondary literature on the texts is scarce; see Mango, Two Lives of St Ioannikios, 393–404; and Mango, On Re-reading the Life of St Gregory, 633–646. See also now Efthymiadis, Hagiography from the Dark Age, 110–111.

4 Peter, Life of Joannicius, 68, 428D.

5 Ignatius, Life of Gregory the Decapolite, 78, 142.3–6; Sabas, Life of Peter of Atroa, 82, 217.5–14.

6 Sabas, Life of Peter of Atroa, 129, 133–135.8–14. The fact that the Life of Peter contains only one such story does not mean that the topic was not important to the hagiographer since the text contains several comparable but even more outré episodes. Peter is said to have been able to extend the life-spans of people who were about to die and even bring dead people back to life, cf. Sabas, Life of Peter of Atroa, 22, 47, 53; 119, 163, 173.

7 Ignatius, Life of Gregory the Decapolite, 43, 44, 45, 51, 58; 105, 107, 112, 123. Gregory performs fifteen other miracles. See the brief comments in Pratsch, Hagiographische Topos, 291.

"Our divine Father said to the most pious Thomas: 'Be ready to take care of your soul and prepare the things that are needful for the dying because you will soon depart from this world.' And after a prayer had been spoken and they had been dismissed, the most pious Thomas, in keeping with the prophecy of the saint, took the greatest care, and having distributed well his possessions among the poor, he lived for another fifteen days and then died in peace."9

The meaning of this story is clear. Joannicius declares that Thomas will die soon and thus gives him a chance to ensure his salvation through the performance of good deeds, which he otherwise might not have done. What was at stake can be seen from the second story, which describes the fate of the metropolitan Inger. Joannicius foresees Inger’s death and sends one of his guests, the monk Basil, to him in order to warn him:

Our divine father (sc. said): "Tell him this: 'If you wish to see the face of God, abandon your see and turn to repentance, for your death has already approached, and see to it that you do not lose your toils.'" When the saint said this and prayed for the men he dismissed them. And in keeping with the command of the father, Basil went to Inger and told him everything he had been charged with. He (sc. Inger) was moved to repentance for a little while but was then again ensnared by the glory of this transient and corrupting life and forgot what he had been told. Then after fifteen days he died while he was sitting on his throne without having said anything further and without having put his affairs in order. In the same hour the saint learnt this through his prophetic gift and having called the most admirable Eustratius he said, crying bitterly: "Know, brother Eustratius, that the miserable Inger has died, having been caught out unrepentant."10

In this story we encounter the belief that the 'toils', that is, the good deeds and ascetic feats, which one has performed during one's life, do not contribute to one's salvation if one does not die in a state of repentance. This belief goes a long way to explain why it was so important to know the time of one's death. It must have made people fearful of dying without forewarning. Indeed, it can be argued that such fear was the ultimate reason why the saints offered this particular service.

9 Peter, Life of Joannicius, 65, 427C: Φησιν ὁ θεσπέσιος πατήρ ἡμῶν πρὸς τὸν εὐλαβέστατον Ἰωάννης- Θέλησον φροντίδα τῆς σῆς ψυχῆς ποιῆσαι καὶ ἑτοίμασον τά πρὸς τὴν ἐξοδον ἔργα σου ώστε ἐν τάχει τῶν τῆς μεταναστεύσεως. Καί δή εὐχής γεναμένης καὶ ἀπολυθέντων, ἐμελεστατὴν φροντίδα κατὰ τὴν προφητείαν τοῦ ἀγίου ὁ εὐλαβέστατος Θωμᾶς ποιῆσαι, καὶ πάντα τὰ αὐτῶν καλῶς διανείμας τοῖς πένησι, ἔξας ἄλλας πεντεκαίδεκα ἡμέρας ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἐκοιμήθη.

10 Peter, Life of Joannicius, 38, 406C: Ὁ δὲ θεσπέσιος πατήρ ἡμῶν· Τάδε ἐρεῖς πρὸς αὐτὸν ὅτι· Εἰ βουλεῖς πρόσωπον τοῦ Θεοῦ θεάσασθαι, τὴν μητρόπολιν ἐάσας τῇ μετανοίᾳ πρόσδραμε· ὁ γὰρ θάνατός σου θήδη ἑγγίκη καὶ βλέπε τοὺς καμάτους σου μὴ ἀπολέσῃς. Τάτα ὁ ἄγιος εἰπὼν καὶ τοῖς ἀνδρίσι ἐπεζέμνευς· Ὁ δὲ Βασίλειος κατὰ τὴν κέλευσιν τοῦ πατρὸς ἀπελθὼν πρὸς τὸν Ἰγγερ, ἀπήγγειλεν αὐτῷ πάντα ὅσα διετέτακτο. Ὁ δὲ κάμπτεται μὲν πρὸς μικρὸν τῇ μετανοίᾳ, τῇ δὲ δόξῃ πάλιν τοῦ χριστιανοῦ βίου κλαπεὶς ἀμηνονεί τῶν λεχθέντων. Εἶτα μετὰ πεντεκαίδεκα ἡμέραν καθεξερεύειν αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ βρόντῳ, μηδὲν τὸ σύνολο τοῦτον ἐπειπότος μήτε τὰ κατ᾽ αὐτὸν διαθεμένου, ἐξέπνευσεν. Ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὠρῇ τῷ προοριστικῷ χρόνῳ μνήμης τὸν ἄγιος, προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν πανάγαστον Εὐστράτιον πικρῶς ἀποκλαίομενος, φησίν· Ἐστω γινώσκω, ἄδελφε Εὐστράτιε, ὅτι ὁ ταπεινὸς Ἰγγερ ἀμετανόητος φθασθεὶς τέθνηκε.
The frequency of prophesies of death in the Lives of Joannicius, Peter and Gregory is all the more surprising as it was a relatively recent development. This can be seen from a comparison with the Lives of the two greatest holy men of the sixth and early seventh centuries, Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain and Theodore of Sykeon, who performed countless miracles, exorcising demons and healing all manner of diseases. Yet foretelling the death of other people plays virtually no role. There is only a single example in each text. According to his hagiographer Symeon knew that John, the stylite who had accepted him into his community and who had let him stand on a column next to him, was about to die. Significantly, however, we are not told how John reacted to this prophecy. There is no reference to the need for repentance before the appointed hour, undoubtedly because John was a holy man himself. The story in the Life of Theodore is rather different. It is about a woman who wanted to know whether she would die before or after her husband. When Theodore told her that she would have the longer life she asked him to pray to God that she might die earlier. The story then continues:

"And having been informed by a divine revelation, he said to her: ‘God has granted your wish, take care now of your affairs, for you will die after not many days.’ Having been dismissed in great joy at the answer that she had been given by the saint, she arranged her affairs well and departed from the human life after forty days."

This episode bears a closer resemblance to the stories that we have discussed above. However, one must not forget that it is only one of more than fifty miracles that the saint performed during his life-time.

This raises the question: why did prophecies of impending death gain such an importance in the following centuries? In order to find an answer we need to turn to the spiritual and homiletic literature of the time. The first text to be considered is the Ladder of John Climacus, which dates from the first half of the seventh century. There we are told:

"Some people enquire and wonder why when the remembrance of death is so beneficial for us God has hidden the foreknowledge of it from us. These people do not understand that God brings about our salvation through it (sc. the lack of foreknowledge)

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11 See Déroche, Quelques interrogations, 65–79.
13 Life of Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain, 36, 34–35.
14 George Eleusius, Life of Theodore of Sykeon, 90, 74.
15 George Eleusius, Life of Theodore of Sykeon, 90, 75.12–17: Καὶ ἐκ θείας ἀποκαλύψεως πληροφορηθεὶς εἶπεν αὐτῇ· Δέδωκεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ αἴτημά σου, σκέψαι οὖν τὰ κατὰ σεαυτήν· μετ’ οὐ πολλὰς γὰρ ἡμέρας τελευτᾷς. Ἀπολύθησα δὲ μετὰ πολλῆς χαρᾶς ἐπὶ τῇ δοθείση αὐτῇ ἀποκρίσει ὑπὸ τοῦ ἁγίου, διαταξαμένη καλῶς τὰ καθ’ ἑαυτήν, μετὰ τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας ὑπεξῆλθε τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον.
16 See Chryssavgis, John Climacus, 8–15.
in a wondrous fashion. For nobody who foreknew his own death would approach baptism or the monastic life but (sc. everybody) would spend his days in transgressions and would come to baptism and to repentance on the (sc. day) of his death."

This passage suggests that the uncertainty of the time of death had become a source of worry. This impression is reinforced by a similar passage in the Questions and Answers of Anastasius of Sinai, which date from the late seventh or early eighth century. There we read:

"Question: Some say that if human beings foreknew the day of their death, they would then all repent.

Answer: Again let us assume that he who had foreknowledge would live a hundred years. He would no longer care for virtue or justice, wallowing in sins, and would begin to repent a few days before his death. And what grace is there then for a human being to serve Satan the whole time of his life, and to serve God out of necessity for a few days?"

Anastasius makes the same point as John Climacus. If people knew the hour of their death they would sin throughout their lives and only repent a few days before they died. A look at his sermon On the sixth Psalm helps us understand why Anastasius held this view:

"‘There is none in death that remembers you, Lord, and in the underworld who will confess to you?’ Therefore I hasten, therefore I tremble, therefore I struggle, knowing full well that when the end of my life has arrived I will in no way be able to confess to God in the underworld. For there is no repentance in the underworld, there is no forgiveness of sin, it is not possible to obtain release in the grave. For our life is a fair, and when the fair is closed, nobody can do business there anymore. ... For hear what Scripture says: 'Death is rest for a man, whose path has been hidden, for God has closed (sc. the door) behind him.' For where God has closed (sc. the door), what repentance is then there?"

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17 John Climacus, Ladder, 795D4-796A5: Ζητουσί τινες καὶ διαποροῦσι, τίνος ἐνεχώρηγεν ὀσφορεὺς ἡμᾶς τῆς τοῦ θανάτου μνήμης, τὴν τούτου προγνωσίν ὁ Θεός εἰ ἡμῶν ἀπέκρυψεν, μὴ γινώσκοντες ὅτι τὴν σωτηρίαν ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός διὰ τούτου εἰργάσατο θαυμασίως. Οὐδεὶς γὰρ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ θάνατον προφόρον πρὸ πολλοῦ χρόνου τῷ βαπτίσματι ἢ τῇ μοναδικῇ πολιτείᾳ προσέτρεχεν· ἁπάσας δὲ τὰς ἑαυτοῦ ἡμέρας ἐν ἁμαρτίαις διέτριβεν, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῆς ἐξόδου εἰς τὸ βαπτίσμα τῇ τὴν μετάνοιαν προσήρχετο. For a discussion of this text see Llewellyn Ihssen, John Moschos’ Spiritual Meadow, 107–108.


19 Anastasios of Sinai, Questions and Answers 17, 23.1-3: ΕΡΩΤΗΣΗΣ Λέγουσί τινες, ὅτι εἰ προεισώσκον οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ θανάτου αὐτῶν, λοιπὸν ἠμέλλον πάντες μετανοεῖν.

20 Anastasios of Sinai, Questions and Answers 17, 23-24.4-14: ΑΠΟΚΡΙΣΙΣ Πάλιν δὲ ὁ προγνώσας ὑπόθου ὅτι ἐκατόν ἐπὶ καθαρά ἡμέρα, οὐκ εὔχεται ἡμέρας ἡ διακοσμήσας εὐρύντειν, ἀλλὰ πάσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ζωὴν ἐν ἀσωτίαις ἢν, καὶ ἁμαρτίαις κυλιόμενος, πρὸ ὅλην ἠμέλλον τοῦ θανάτου μετανοεῖν ἢρχετο. Καὶ ποια λοιπὸν χάρις τῷ ἁναρπῆσω δουλεύσαι καὶ ἀναρπῆσω δουλεύσαι τῷ Θεῷ; See the brief comments in Munitiz, The Predetermination of Death, 13.

21 Anastasios of Sinai, On the sixth Psalm, 1096C7-D2: ‘Ὡς ἐστίν ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ ὁ νομοθέτης αὐτοῦ, ἐν δὲ τῷ ἀδητῇ τοῦ ἀναρπῆσεται σοι;’ Διὰ τοῦτο σπεύδω διὰ τοῦτο τρέμω διὰ τοῦτο ἀγωνίαν, γινώσκων ἀκριβῶς ὅτι ἐπάν τὸ πέρας τῆς ζωῆς μου φθάση, ἐν τῷ ἀδητῇ οὐδαμῶς τῷ Θεῷ ἀναρπήγησομαι.
This passage shows that Anastasius was a rigorist who used fear of death as a means to improve the morals of his audience.

The picture can be completed through analysis of another collection of Questions and Answers, which in the manuscripts is attributed to Athanasius of Alexandria but which most likely dates from the eighth century.\(^\text{22}\) Pseudo-Athanasius, too, is confronted with the question why we do not know the hour of our death. His answer resembles closely that given by Anastasius, another sign that the two surviving collections are re-worked versions of a now lost common source.\(^\text{23}\) However, Pseudo-Athanasius adds one element that is not found in Anastasius. He declares that "God has spoken through the prophet: 'In which state I find you, in that state I will judge you'".\(^\text{24}\) A similar phrase is found in a later section of the text. There Pseudo-Athanasius is asked how often God accepts repentance after repeated sinning. He replies that God knows the weakness of our nature and deals leniently with us but that one needs to be careful because a person that sins continually comes to despise God.\(^\text{25}\) Then he makes the following comment: "Besides, since the end of our life is uncertain, we must guard ourselves lest we be caught out in sin and found unrepentant, and be given over to the never-ending punishment."\(^\text{26}\) This answer must have caused some anxiety because the topic is again broached at the end of the text where the interlocutor wishes to know what will happen to those who die as sinners. There we read again: "In what state a human being is caught out in his death, to that state he will also go, be it good or bad."\(^\text{27}\) All these passages express the same notion, namely that the state in which one finds oneself at the moment of one's death will decide whether one will be saved or damned, regardless of what one had done before. Such a belief is already familiar to us.

Thus we can

\[\text{oú γὰρ ἔστιν ἐν τῷ ᾱδῇ μετάνοια, οὐκ ἐστὶ θανάτου συγχώρησις, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῷ μνήματι ἄφεσις· πανήγυρις γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θεὸς κατά τὰ τοῦ προφήτου, ἐν ὃ ἔσται ἐν ὃ καταληφθήσεται. ... Καὶ πάντος ἔκρυβεν κατά τὸν θεὸν, εἰς ὃ καταληφθῆ ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ, ἐν ὃ καταληφθήσεται, ἐν ὃ καταληφθήσεται.} \]

\[\text{See Haldon, Works of Anastasius of Sinai, 120–121.} \]

\[\text{See Krausmüller, "At the resurrection we will not recognise one another", 207–227.} \]

\[\text{Pseudo-Athanasius, Questions and Answers, 36, 617D3: ἀκούσας τοῦ θεοῦ διὰ τοῦ προφήτου εἰπόντος ὅτι· ἐν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, καὶ ἐν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, ἐν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, κατά τὸν θεὸν, κατά τὸν θεὸν.} \]

\[\text{See also below note 42: μὴ καταφθασθῶμεν ἀνετοίμως.} \]
conclude that the prophecies of holy men were a response to a growing anxiety about dying in a state of sin. These fears were probably stoked by sermons about the hour of death, which often included dramatic deathbed scenes. A typical example of this genre is a sermon attributed to Ephraem the Syrian, which was a popular reading for the feast of All Souls. There a dying man is made to say the following:

"Behold I have been caught out without having repented, and nobody is there who will ransom me. Behold, I beg, and there is nobody who will hear. Behold I am being condemned, and there is nobody who will save me. For how many times have I promised myself that I would repent, and have again done what is even worse."30

Analysis of spiritual and homiletic literature has helped us understand how the fear of a bad death became lodged in the minds of the ordinary faithful. However, it also suggests that prophecies of impending death would not have been uncontentious. The comments of John Climacus and Anastasius of Sinai contain an implicit criticism. Both men clearly considered such knowledge to be corruptive and would probably not have thought much of Joannicius, Peter and Gregory who considered foretelling of death to be one of their main tasks.

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This raises the question: how were the activities of the three holy men regarded by their contemporaries? Since they were all ardent Iconophiles it might be thought that criticism was voiced by their Iconoclast adversaries. Unfortunately the scarcity of reliable sources makes it impossible to corroborate this hypothesis. One can point out that predictions of the deaths of others do not feature in what has been termed 'Iconoclastic Lives'.31 The discrepancy is particularly obvious in the hagiographical oeuvre of Ignatius the Deacon. Ignatius crams as many prophecies of death as possible into his Iconophilic Life of Gregory the Decapolite but does not narrate a single story of this kind in his 'Iconoclastic' Life of George of Amastris, where he limits himself to stating that the saint himself knew the time of his death in advance.32 However, this evidence may not be as significant as it first seems because not all saints conformed to the template of the 'holy man'. Moreover, literary form may also play a role. Some authors strove for brevity and presented to their audiences only a very small number

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29 It was read out in tenth-century Studios. See Pentkovskij, Tipikon patriarkha Aleksija Studita, 236.5-7: и чытет (с) сло(в) ста(г) ефрыма.
30 Pseudo-Ephraim, On Those Who Die in Christ, 102.11-14: ἰδοὺ ἀμετανόητος ἐφθάσθην, καὶ οὐδεὶς ὁ λυτρούμενος ἐφθάσθη ἐμπρός, καὶ οὐδεὶς ὁ εἰσακούων· ἰδοὺ καταδικάζομαι, καὶ οὐδεὶς ὁ σώζων. Καὶ ποσάκις γὰρ ἐν ἑαυτῷ μετανοεῖν συνετασσόμην, καὶ πάλιν τὰ χείρω διέπραττον. See also Marinis, "He who is at the point of death", 61–62.
31 Four 'Iconoclast' saints have been identified: Leo of Catania, Philaretus the Merciful, George of Amastris and Eudocimus the Just. For an interpretation of the miracles that they performed see Auzépy, L'analyse littéraire et l'historien, 57–67. See also Ševčenko, Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period, 113–131. The Life of Leo of Catania suggests that some Iconoclasts were opposed to holy wonderworkers in general.
32 Ignatius, Life of George of Amastris, 40, 63.4–5: οὐδαμώς τὸν ὄρον τοῦ τέλους ἦγνόησεν. A very similar phrase is found in Ignatius, Life of Patriarch Nicephorus, 213.28-29: ἐπιστάντα τὸν ὄρον τοῦ τέλους οὐδαμώς ἦγνόησεν.
of miracle stories. These traits are very obvious in the *Life* of John, abbot of the Psichas monastery, which also contains no foretelling of death, despite the fact that the saint was an Iconophile confessor.\(^3\) Thus it can no longer be ascertained whether or not the Iconoclasts rejected the notion that holy men could foretell the death of others.

However, this does not mean that there was no opposition at all. Criticism was voiced in monastic milieus that were staunchly Iconophile but preferred the coenobitic life-style over that of the holy man. At this point we need to return to the *Lives* of Joannicius. In the original *Life*, which was written by the monk Peter soon after the end of the Second Iconoclasm, we are told about a meeting of Joannicius with other champions of icon worship, including Theodore of Stoudios and some of his monks. During this meeting Joannicius told one of the visitors, Joseph of Kathara, to make preparations for his imminent death. Joseph heeded the saint's warning and distributed his possessions among the poor so that he was ready when he died eighteen days later.\(^3\) This is a scenario we are already familiar with from the stories of Thomas and Inger. However, in this case a further dimension is added. According to the hagiographer Peter Jocannicius' foretelling elicited the following reaction from Theodore of Stoudios and his monks:

"Being scandalised by this, the Stoudites ... rebuked the saint not a little in their thoughts, saying this, too, in their minds: 'Who knows the death of each one apart from God alone?'\(^3\)

Here we thus have a group of people who denied that human beings, including holy men, can know the time of death of other people. What did the Stoudites find so reprehensible in such prophecies? One clue is given in the immediately preceding passage. Before Joannicius addresses John of Kathara he has a dinner-table conversation with his Stoudite guests. The topic of this conversation is the question of which virtue should be considered the most important. Everybody names a different virtue but when Joannicius mentions humility the others immediately agree with him.\(^3\) This sequence is not coincidental. It is surely meant to shelter Joannicius from criticism that his predictions are a sign of spiritual pride.

However, this is not the only concern of the Stoudites. Their claim that only God has foreknowledge of each person's death shows that they are also worried about a potential blurring of the boundary that separates God from creation. When we look at Peter's explanations for Joannicius' talent we can see why it might have been considered problematic. Peter asserts that the saint knew things that are hidden from

\(^{33}\) Life of John of Psichas, 103–125.

\(^{34}\) Peter, *Life of Joannicius*, 36, 404D, 405B.

\(^{35}\) Peter, *Life of Joannicius*, 36, 405AB: Σκανδαλισθέντες οὖν ἐπὶ τούτῳ οἱ Στουδῖται ... οὐ μικρῶς ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς κατεμέμφοντο τὸν όσιον, ἐπιλέγοντες καὶ τούτῳ ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ: 'Τίς ἀρα γινώσκει τὸν ἐκάστου θάνατον πλὴν μόνου Θεοῦ;'

\(^{36}\) Peter, *Life of Joannicius*, 36, 404D.
other people ‘because his senses were exceedingly purified’, and that ‘that the purest mind learnt what would happen in the future’. Such statements give the impression that the power of prophecy was an intrinsic part of Joannicius’ self and that it had been acquired by him through his own efforts, which in a sense puts him on a par with God. Such a notion was clearly considered blasphemous by the Stoudites.

The impact of the Stoudites’ criticism can be seen from the reworking of Peter’s text by Sabas. As is well known Sabas omits any references to the Stoudites and speaks only in general terms about people who were present at the meeting. However, he also gives us more detailed information about the debate:

When some of those who dined with him heard this, they thought to themselves in a crude and envious manner: ‘What does he say? And who among human beings knows the death of his brother? For it is written: “Death is rest for a man, whose path has been hidden from him, for God has shut (sc. the door) against him.” But if nobody knows his own (sc. death), how does he know that of another?’ But they did not understand correctly the true meaning of these verses. For insofar one is a human being one does not know one’s own death and that of one’s brother. But insofar as one has the spirit of God in oneself, which explores the depths of God, to speak with the Apostle, insofar one can sense and see many and different things yet not what pertains to everybody but what pertains to most people, and not of whom one wishes but of whom it has been revealed through the Holy Spirit.

Here Joannicius’ powers are affirmed but at the same time considerably limited. Joannicius does not have his knowledge from himself but from the Holy Spirit that resides in him. Moreover, he is not in control of this knowledge but entirely dependent on what the Holy Spirit tells him. There is thus no question that Joannicius might have arrogated God’s powers.

The passage is interesting for another reason. It gives us an insight into the manner in which the debate was conducted. According to Sabas the Stoudites cited Job 3:22, which they claimed denied human beings the knowledge of their own deaths, and then argued a fortiori that knowledge of the death of others would be even more impossible. This interpretation of the verse is not new. It already appears in a commentary on the Book of Job by the sixth-century Alexandrian exegete Olympiodorus.

37 Peter, Life of Joannicius, 53, 414C: λίαν τὰς αἰσθήσεις κεκαθαρμένος; 14, 391B: ο δὲ καθαρωτάτους νοῦς ἐκείνος γνωτός τὸ μέλλον γενήσεται.
38 See Mango, Two Lives of Ioannikios, 395.
39 Sabas, Life of Joannicius, 28, 357C-358A: Ταῦτα τινὲς τῶν συνεστιωμένων ἀκούσαντες ἱδωτικῶς καὶ ἐμφθόνως ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἐλογίζοντο· Τί οὗτος λαλεῖ; καὶ τὶς γινώσκει ἄνθρωπος τὸν τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ θάνατον; Ἐγίγνετο γὰρ ἄνδρι ἀνάπαυσις γεγραμμένα· οὐ δὲ οὗτος ἀπεκρύθη ἀπ' αὐτοῦ· συνέκλεισε γὰρ ὁ Θεὸς κατ' αὐτὸν. Εἰ δὲ τὸν ἴδιον οὐδεὶς ἐπίσταται, τὸν ἀλλότριον πόσον. ἀλλ' οὖν σὺν ὀρθῶς ἐκεῖνο τῆς γραφῆς ταύτης ἰδοντις ἐνόησαν· καθ' ὃ γὰρ ἀνθρώπως τὸν τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ θάνατον, καθ' ὃ δὲ πνεύμα Θεοῦ ἔχει ἐν ἑαυτῷ, τὸ τὰ βάθη τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀποστολικῶς ἐρευνῶν, κατά τοῦτο δύναται νοεῖν καὶ ὀραν πάρμιλλα καὶ ποικίλα οὐ τὰ πάντων ἀλλὰ τὰ πλείστων, καὶ οὐχ ὃν βουλεῖται ἀλλ' ὃν ἀποκαλυφθεὶς διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος.
"Death is rest for a man, whose path has been hidden from him. The meaning is as follows: The path of death has been hidden from man, for man does not know when death will come because of its suddenness."40

However, it is the first time that we find it quoted in a controversy. Of course, we need to ask: did the Stoudites really argue in this manner? Theodore never mentions Job 3:22 in his surviving writings. However, this does not mean that he did not have an opinion on the matter. At this point we need to turn to one of Theodore's catecheses:

"Behold, your brother Liberius has been taken, too, and his death has filled at least my humble soul with contrition. For he was found, as they say, suddenly dead in his cell, lying crosswise in the shape of one who sleeps. And his end was thus. But we do not know how ours will turn out, and nor do we know what kind of death we will suffer. Will it be sudden, or after an illness? Will it happen on land or on sea? Will we be alone or together with brothers? And who knows the mind of the Lord? Or who has become his counsellor', so that he might know the day and the hour and the manner and the place of his own death?"41

Here Theodore quotes Romans 11:34: 'Who knows the mind of the Lord? Or who has become his counsellor?‘, which is part of a passage that emphasises the inscrutability of God's plans.42 Significantly, Sabas alludes to a very similar verse, I Corinthians 2:16: 'Who knows the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' However, here the context is quite different. It is Paul's famous distinction between the man of the soul and the man of the spirit. The former is incapable of understanding God's mind but the latter knows it because he has the spirit, which explores the depths of God. By privileging this passage Sabas lets the Stoudites destroy their own argument. They can then indeed be said to have misunderstood Paul, that is the Paul of I Corinthians, and they can be disqualified as not being spiritually advanced.43

40 Olympiodorus of Alexandria, Commentary on the Book of Job, 47.10-14: "Θάνατος ἀνδρὶ ἀνάπαυσις· οὗ ἡ ὁδὸς ἀπεκρύβη ἀπ' αὐτοῦ." ο ἐ ν νοὸς όντος τοῦ θανάτου ἡ ὁδὸς ἀπεκρύβη ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου· ο γάρ οἶδεν ὁ ἀνθρώπος, πότε ὁ θάνατος ἐφίσταται διὰ τὸ αἰφνίδιον.

41 Theodore of Studios, Short Catechesis 112, 384.1-6: Ἰδοὺ προσελήφθη καὶ ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἰνδέρις καὶ γε κατήνυξέ μου τὴν ταπεινήν ψυχὴν καὶ κοίμησις αὐτοῦ. ἐξαπίνης, ἢ προνοσηκότες; ἀρα ἐπὶ τῆς ἥξις, ἢ ἐπὶ τῆς ύγράς; ἀρα μεμονωμένοι καὶ συνημμένοι ἀδελφοίς; "Καὶ τίς ἔγνω νοῦν Κυρίου; ἢ τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο," ὡστε εἰδέναι καὶ ἡμέραν καὶ ἄραν, καὶ τρόπον καὶ τόπον τοῦ οἰκείου τέλους;

42 Romans 11:33-34: Ὄι βάθος πλούτου καὶ σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως θεοῦ· ὡς ἀνεξεραύνητα τὰ κρίματα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνεξηκνίαστοι αἱ ὁδοὶ αὐτοῦ. Τίς γάρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου; ἢ τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο; Τίς γάρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου; ἢ τίς σύμβουλος αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο;

43 I Corinthians 2:10, 14-15: ἡμῖν δὲ ἀπεκάλυψεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος· τὸ γάρ πνεῦμα πάντα ἑραυνὰ, καὶ τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ. ... ψυχικὸς δὲ ἀνθρώπος οὐ δέχεται τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ, μωρία γάρ αὐτῶ ἐστιν, καὶ οὐ δύναται γνῶναι, ὅτι πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνεται· ὁ δὲ πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνει [τὰ] πάντα, αὐτὸς δὲ ὑπ' οὐδὲνός ἀνακρίνεται. τίς γάρ ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου, ὡς συμβιβάσει αὐτοῦ; ἡμεὶς δὲ νοῦν Χριστοῦ ἔχομεν.
The worry that the boundaries between God and creation might be muddied is a new theme that is not yet found in the Ladder or in the Questions and Answers of Anastasius of Sinai and Pseudo-Athanasius. As we have seen there the morally corrupting effect of such knowledge is emphasised. However, this second theme is also present in Theodore's writings. In his Catecheses Theodore frequently warns his monks that they may die suddenly. Here one passage may suffice:

"Therefore I cry, beg, entreat you and roll in the dust before your feet: 'Let us not be caught unprepared; let not negligence close shut our term of life!'"44

The uncertainty of the time of death thus becomes a goad for moral improvement, just as it had been in the sermons of Anastasius of Sinai and Pseudo-Ephraem.

However, it needs to be admitted that Theodore was not entirely consistent. In his Encomium of Theophanes the Confessor we read:

"What was his death like? After he had arrived there he lived twice eleven days and having foretold his last day to those who were with him, so that in this matter, too, he was shown to be righteous, he came to the Lord in ripe old age."

Here hagiographical convention asserts itself. The saint knows in advance when he will die. This gives the impression that Theodore was prepared to make exceptions for holy men, at least insofar as the knowledge pertained to their own death.

* * *

There was, however, a milieu that took a more uncompromising stance, the coenobitic community of Medikion, which produced two hagiographical texts, the Life of the founder saint Nicephorus, and the Life of his successor and confessor of icon worship Nicetas, written by the monk Theosterictus.46 Nicephorus’ hagiographer tells us that the saint made a journey to the capital where he fell ill, and then continues:

"He himself (sc. Nicephorus) sensed through a divine revelation his departure from earth to heaven and his coming to God from the world, saying to those who were present: 'I will go in order to say farewell to the fathers there to whom God calls me, the road of my fathers. Let us hurry to the monastery, children, to see if I will be given the grace from God to be restored to the brothers alive. But not as I wish, he said, 'but as you (sc. wish), Lord.' And he left the city in a hurry. When they had reached the island of Chalkis, he was more seriously affected by the illness and knew that his term of life was approaching. He asked to partake of the divine and undefiled

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45 Theodore of Stoudios, Encomium of Theophanes 16, 282.8-11: Πῶς δὲ ἡ κοίμησις; Μετὰ τὴν έκείσε ἀποκατάστασιν διό ενδέκα ἡμέρας ἐπίθησα καὶ τοῖς συνοῦσιν τὴν τελευταίαν ἡμέραν προειπών, ἃς ἂν κάνειτεθην ἄνει δίκαιος, ἐνδημεί τόν τῆς ζωῆς ὄρον ἡ ἁμέλεια.

46 See Rosenqvist, A Philological Adventure, 183–194.
mysteries of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and having said amen and having par-
taken he died in ripe age, through a blessed and enviable end, on the fourth (sc. day)
of the month of May.47

At the first glance this looks like a conventional piece of Byzantine hagiograph-
ical writing: God informs the saint of his impending death. However, a closer look re-
veals that we are far from the certainties of the Lives of Joannicius, Peter and Gregory.
The saint does not know the exact date of his death, and his wish to see his community
one last time is not granted. Significantly, the hagiographer stresses that everything
depends on the will of God, a theme with which we are already familiar from Sabas'
Life of Joannicius.

Theosterictus, the author of the Life of Nicetas, took an even more extreme
stance. His narrative includes accounts of the deaths of three persons, the steward
Athanasius, the abbot Nicephorus, and finally Nicetas himself:

"The great Athanasius, the loyal and prudent steward, who had administered the
affairs of the monastery in a good manner during many years, who had suffered much
together with the father (sc. Nicetas), who was his fellow-fighter and helper, who had
achieved many things in the coenobium, suffered an illness from which he died.48

Shortly afterwards our common father, Nicephorus, who had founded the
monastery with the help of God, who had given all his possessions to God, who had
been honoured by God and human beings, who was loved by all because of his mellow
character, also ended his life, on the fourth (sc. day) of the month Artemisios.49

When the time had come for him to pass away and be with Christ, since the
illness was progressing more violently and was wasting his powers, when Sunday
dawned, around the sixth hour, he (sc. Nicetas) stretched out his pious feet, which
had run well in the confession of the faith, and departed together with the angels who
had come to get him, on the third (sc. day) of the month Xanthikos.50
These passages seem entirely unexceptional if somewhat laconic. However, they are more significant for what they do not say than for what they do. The absence of any reference to foreknowledge of death is extremely unusual in Iconoclastic and post-Iconoclastic hagiography where virtually every saint is said to have known the time of his or her death in advance.\(^{51}\) This suggests strongly that Nicetas’ hagiographer deliberately avoided this topos. Indeed, one can argue that his reticence is a logical consequence of the saint’s teachings. These teachings are presented in the form of a catechesis that Nicetas delivers to his monks:

"Bringing them together more frequently in the church our most Holy Father taught, advised, begged, saying: 'Brothers whom grace has joined, let us consider why we have been brought together. Let us fight as long as we have time and let us not become lax through negligence. Let us multiply the profit of the soul as long as the fair is open. Because once it is closed nobody does business. He says: 'In death there is nobody who remembers you, in the underworld there is no confession.’ Let us consider what kinds of punishment await those who sin indiscriminately and do not repent. Here the judge is well-meaning, here he is merciful, there he punishes. Here he forgives seventy-seven times, there he sends us to the outer darkness. Therefore let us work and toil here, without being unnerved by accidie. Let us run zealously, for there is need of running, and running strenuously in order that we reach the measure of perfection. Let us be sober, let us be vigilant, because our Lord will come at an hour when we do not expect it.’\(^{52}\)

Speeches of abbots are not uncommon in Iconoclastic and post-Iconoclastic hagiographical texts. However, nowhere do we find such an emphasis on death and the afterlife.\(^{53}\) The closest parallel is Anastasius of Sinai’s sermon *On the Sixth Psalm*, ἐκδαπανώσης, Κυριακῆς διαφαούσης, περὶ ἡωρὰς ἐξ ὁσίους πόδας, τοὺς καλῶς δραμόντας ἐν τῇ ὁμολογίᾳ τῆς πίστεως, τοῖς ἐλθοῦσιν ἀγγέλοις συνεδήμησεν, τῇ τρίτῃ τοῦ Ἑκάνθικο μηνός.

\(^{51}\) See Life of Macarius of Pelekete, 16, 161.1-3; Life of John of Psichas, 10, 121.10-13; Life of Athanasia of Aegina, 21, 218.39-219.5; Theophanes, Life of Joseph the Hymnographer, 14, 11.20-22; Basil, Life of Euthymius the Younger, 37, 202.27-32; Life of Eustratius of the Agauroi, 35, 390.25–391.18; Life of Constantine the Ex-Jew, 80, 643B-C; Life of Blaise of Amorion, 25, 668F; Life of Anthony the Younger, 18, 221; Life of Nicetas Patrikios, 22, 348; and Life of Eustratus of Kokorobion, 41, 320. For the hagiographical oeuvre of Ignatius the Deacon see above, note 28.

\(^{52}\) Theosterictus, *Life of Nicetas of Medikion*, xxi: Πυκνότερον δὲ συνάγων αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ κυριακῷ ὁ ἁγιώτατος πατὴρ ἡμῶν ἐδίδασκεν, ἐνουθέτει, παρεκάλει "Αδελφοί", λέγων, "οὓς συνῆψεν ἡ χάρις, μελετήσωμεν συνεχῶς διὸ συνέχθημεν. Ἐως καιρὸν ἔχωμεν ἀγωνισώμεθα καὶ μὴ τῇ ῥᾳθμίᾳ ἐξαιτούς χαυνώσωμεν· ἐως ἐν πανήγυρι ἑσταταί, τὸ κέρδος τῆς ψυχῆς πολυπλασιάσωμεν· ταύτης γὰρ λυθείσης οὐδεὶς πραγματεύεται. ‘Οὐκ ἔστιν’, φησίν, ‘ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ ὁ μνημονεύων σου, οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν τῷ ἐξ οἰκομολογήσις. Ἐννοήσωμεν οἷα τιμωρίαι μένουσιν τοῖς ἁμαρτάνουσιν αἰδίαιρως, καὶ μὴ μετανοούσιν. Ύδε συμπαθής ὁ κριτής, ὡδὲ ἐλεεί, ἐκεῖ κολάζει· ὡδὲ συγχωρεῖ ἐκεῖτο ὡδὲ ἐποτρεπομένην ἐπέτα, ἐκεῖ τῷ ἑξωτέρῳ σκότει παραπέμπει. Διὸ κάμνωμεν ἐνθὲν ἀμπόνως, τῇ ἀκήριῳ μὴ ἐκλύομεν· δράμωμεν ἐν αὐτῶν, δρόμου γὰρ χρεία, καὶ δρόμου συνοδοῦ, ἵνα θάσωμεν εἰς τὸ μέτρον τῆς τελείοτητος. Νήψωμεν, γρηγορήσωμεν, ὅτι ἢ ὡρὰ ὡς δοκῶμεν ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν ἔρχεται.

\(^{53}\) Life of John of Psichas, 11, 121.16-122.14: about different virtues; Life of Eustratius of the Agauroi, 38, 392.25–393.12: very general exhortation; Life of Macarius of Pelekete, 16, 161–162: about unanimity and orthodoxy. Moreover, these sermons are delivered immediately before death of the saints whereas the catechesis in the *Life of Nicetas* is integrated into an account of the saint’s activities as abbot of Medikion.
which we have analysed before. The same motifs appear there: the quotation of Psalm 6:6 and the comparison of human life with a fair. This suggests that the monks of Medikion participated in an ongoing discourse. In this discourse the fear of death was used as a means to bring about moral improvement. Since nobody knows when he will die it is necessary to be prepared at all times. It is evident that this argument would lose much of its force if the time of death could be foretold. Thus one can argue that the hagiographer omitted such prophecies in the case of the three saintly figures Athanasius, Nicephorus and Nicetas because they would have been irreconcilable with the teachings of these men, even though this meant a radical break with hagiographical convention. By doing so he ruled out that human beings could in any way be sharers of the knowledge of God.54

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The discussion so far has shown that two criticisms were levelled against the practice of foretelling deaths; that it was morally corrupting, both for the foreteller who would show himself to be prideful, and for the others who would become lax, and that it was a blasphemous arrogation of God's powers.

However, there was a third, potentially more dangerous, challenge to the claims that hagiographers made for their heroes, namely the simple disbelief that the predictions of the saints were derived from a supernatural source. This view is alluded to in Methodius' Life of Theophanes the Confessor, which dates to the Second Iconoclasm.55 There we read:

"He, then, had got so close to God both before death and after death, that his servant who from the complete weakening of the strength of the body realised his invalidity and guessed that he would die, said to him on the seventh day of the month of March with some consolation: 'I guess, father, that you will die on the day of the holy Forty Martyrs together with whom you will also receive the inheritance of life as it is fitting.' But he said to him presently: 'No, child, no, but a little later. For I will be perfected on the twelfth day of the month when the martyrdom of the holy Codratus is celebrated. Such an end had the pious one and thus did he foreknow his coming to the Lord and departure from the body, since the word of the one who speaks in the Lord and speaks through him what has been shown earlier by him had not weakened."56

54 Theosterictus also denied that human beings can have visions of God. See Krausmüller, Diorasis Denied.
55 See Zielke, Methodios I., 183–260.
56 Methodius, Life of Theophanes Confessor, 55, 36.1-11: Οὗτος οὖν εἰς τοσοῦτον ἤγγισεν τῷ Θεῷ καὶ πρὸ θανάτου καὶ μετὰ θάνατον, ὥστε τῷ παντελῶς ἔξασθενητας τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ σώματος συνείς τὸ ἀτόνον ὁ τούτῳ λειτουργός καὶ τὸν θάνατον τεκμαιρόμενος φησὶ πρὸς αὐτόν τῇ Μαρτίου μνήμι ἐβδομή μετὰ τινος παρακλήσεως ὁπλαμβάνω, πάτερ, τῇ τῶν ἁγίων τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρᾳ μήλες τελευτάν, μεθ΄ ἄν καὶ τὸν κλήρον τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκδέξῃ ἐπάξια. Ὁ δὲ πρὸς αὐτόν ἐποιμόται: "Οὐχί, τέκνον, οὐχ ὁτέως, ἀλλ’ ἐν μικρόν ὅστερον τῇ γὰρ δωδεκάτῃ τοῦ μνήμι τελειούμαι, ἐν ἕ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Κοδράτου τελεῖται ἡ ἁθλήσις." Οὕτως ἐσήκη τὸ τέλος ὁ ὁσίος καὶ ὁτέως προέγγει τὴν πρὸς κύριον αὐτοῦ ἐκδήμην καὶ ἐκδημεῖν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος, ἐπεὶ ὁ λόγος οὐκ ἠρθενε τοῦ ἐν κυρίῳ φιλομένου καὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος τὰ παρ’ αὐτοῦ προδικοκυνέμενα.
At first sight this episode appears to describe a standard foretelling of death. However, it deviates from the norm in two important ways. Firstly, the foretelling is very precise. This is a feature we are already familiar with from the Lives of Gregory the Decapolite and Peter of Atroa. However, it needs to be emphasised that the majority of hagiographers let their heroes make much vaguer predictions. Thus we can conclude that Methodius aligns himself with the extremists. Secondly, Methodius juxtaposes knowledge of the future based on divine revelation with knowledge of the future based on the reading of outward signs. This juxtaposition, which has no counterpart in other hagiographical texts of the period, is evidently important for Methodius because he has already created an identical scenario in a previous episode. There a disciple guesses that the emperor will let the saint return to his cell where he may then die in peace but Theophanes prophesies that he will be exiled to the island of Samothrace. The point that these two episodes drive home is that conjecture can be wrong or at least imprecise whereas true prophecy is always right and can therefore be very precise.

This raises the question: why was it so important for Methodius to make this point? The most straightforward explanation is that he was confronted with people who doubted that saints received their knowledge though divine revelation, and argued that they simply guessed the conditions of others from outward signs just like ordinary people do. The notion that conjecture is an alternative to prophecy is already found in Late Antique texts such as the Life of Syncletica. Moreover, it appears again in the Life of Andrew the Fool where some people argue that the saint’s knowledge of hidden things comes from God whereas others claim that it is the result of clever guesses. These texts suggest that Methodius was challenging sceptics who did not think much of holy men in general. However, the matter is not quite as straightforward. In his Encomium of Plato of Sakkoudion Theodore of Studios exclaims: 'For who was better at guessing so as to foresee the future than him?' This shows that devotees of saints could also have recourse to the same theory. The two sources of knowledge are neatly juxtaposed in the tenth-century Life of Nicephorus of Miletus. As an imperial cleric Nicephorus took part in a military expedition to Sicily, which ended in a complete rout. At this point the hagiographer makes the following comment:

57 See the Lives of Macarius of Pelekete, John of Psichas, Eustratius of the Agauroi, Athanasia of Aegina and Joseph the Hymnographer. For references see above note 51.
58 Methodius, Life of Theophanes Confessor, 48, 31.3-18.
59 See Life of Syncletica 87, 1540D-1541A: Στοχαστικός ὁ τρόπος, ἀβέβαιος ἡ γνώμη. Οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀναγκαίως ἀκολουθεῖ τὰ παρ’ αὐτῶν λεγόμενα. Ὁσπέρ γὰρ τοῖς ιδιώταις καὶ τοῖς ναυτίλοις ἐκ τῆς τῶν νεφῶν ἱδιότητος ἐστὶ τις ἁμωδρὰ γνώσις ἀνέμων ἢ ὑετῶν οὕτω τούτοις ἐκ δαιμόνων ἢ σαθρὰ πρόγνωσις
60 See Life of Andrew the Fool, 64, 705A. See also Life of Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain, 78, 67.
61 Theodore of Studios, Encomium of Plato, 13, 816B6-7: Τίς γὰρ ἐκείνου τὸ μέλλον προβλέψαι στοχαστικώτερος;
The pure Nicephorus foreknew what would happen, on the one hand because of his own cleverness for he saw that the generals were very undisciplined, and on the other hand also from a local visionary ... whose name was Prasinacius.\textsuperscript{62}

Here Nicephorus’ foreknowledge is said to have been derived from two sources: the saint’s own shrewd observations of the lack of discipline among the soldiers; and the prophecy of a local holy man who had his information directly from God. It is evident that the former way of gaining knowledge is not presented as something inferior. Indeed, there may be a supernatural element there, too. Nicephorus is characterised as ‘pure’, which suggests that his powers of perception were heightened beyond those of normal man and that he therefore always guessed correctly. Thus one can argue that the people whom Methodius targeted were not unbelievers but rather proponents of a different kind of sanctity, which sought to reduce the supernatural element to a minimum and thus close the gap between holy men and ordinary human beings. In this context it is worth noting that the hagiographer of Nicetas of Medikion does not present his saint as a clairvoyant who knows the thoughts of his monks but rather as an experienced doctor who makes inferences about the inner states of the monks based on outward appearances and manners.\textsuperscript{63} This raises the question: why did Methodius find this view so reprehensible? Lack of evidence prevents us from giving a definitive answer. However, it should be noted that Methodius had close contacts with eremitic milieus.\textsuperscript{64} These contacts may account for his affinity to the hagiographers of Joannicius and Peter of Atroa.

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To conclude: Between the seventh and the ninth century holy men acquired a new role. They no longer just exorcised demons and healed diseases but also foretold people when they would die. This development was caused by a shift in religious belief. Under the influence of relentless preaching, people had come to think that salvation or damnation was determined by the state in which one found oneself at the moment of death. What was feared was a sudden death, which would not leave time for the necessary preparation through repentance and almsgiving. Contemporary holy men responded to this fear by offering their services as prophets. However, not everybody approved of their new role. In the early ninth century coenobitic milieus rejected the notion that the time of death could be foreknown because it corrupted both the foreteller who would become prideful, and the beneficiaries who would become lax. Moreover, they insisted on the impermeability of the ontological boundary between God and creation, asserting that human beings could not have the same powers as God. Such criticism forced the devotees of holy men to tone down their claims and

\textsuperscript{62} Life of Nicephorus of Miletus, 10, 142: Προγνοὺς ὁ καθαρὸς Νικηφόρος τὰ πραχθησόμενα τὸ μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκείας μάλα συνέσεως· ἑώρα γὰρ ἀναγωγίαν πλείστην τῶν στρατηγῶν, τὸ δὲ καὶ ἀπὸ τινὸς τῶν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ θεοπτικῶν ... Πρασινακίου καλομένου.

\textsuperscript{63} See Krausmüller, Diorasis Denied.

\textsuperscript{64} Methodius was a friend of Joannicius and did not get on with the Stoudites, see See von Dobschütz, Methodios und die Studiten, 41–105.
to emphasise the sovereignty of God. Potentially even more problematic was another argument, namely that prophecies of death were not the result of divine revelations at all but rather based on a shrewd assessment of people's appearances and manners. This view was held not only by those who rejected the concept of sainthood altogether but also by coenobitic milieus, which did not accord their leaders supernatural powers of perception, thus again emphasising the gulf that separated human beings from God. The devotees of holy men reacted by stressing that reading outward signs could only ever give imprecise knowledge and that the precision with which holy men made predictions was proof that they derived their knowledge from God. The bitterness of the controversy is all the more astonishing as both defenders and detractors of holy men were opposed to Iconoclasm. This cautions us not to see the Iconophile party as a monolithic group.

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Дирк Краусмилер
Универзитет у Бечу, Аустрија
dkrausmuller@hotmail.com

ДАЛИ ЉУДСКА БИЋА МОГУ ДА ЗНАЈУ ЧАС СВОЈЕ ИЛИ СМРТИ ДРУГИХ? ЈЕДНА КОНТРОВЕРЗА ИЗ ДЕВЕТОГ ВЕКА И ЊЕН ИСТОРИЈСКИ КОНТЕКСТ

Између VII и IX века светитељи су добили нову улогу. Они више нису само изгонили демоне и исцељивали болесне, него су и прорицали људима када ће они умрети. Такав развој био је узрокован променом у веровањима. Под утицајем немилосрдних проповедника људи су почели да размишљају да је спасење или проклетство предодређено стањем у коме се неко налазио у тренутку смрти. Оно чега су се плашили била је изненадна смрт, која не би оставила времена за неопходну припрему кроз покајање и милостињу. Савремени светитељи су одговарали на тај страх нудећи своје услуге као пророка. Те активности су изазвале критику киновијских монаха који су им се противили из моралних и метафизичких разлога.