

Was Innovation unwanted in Byzantium?

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ABSTRACT: A well-established thesis in Byzantine studies is that Byzantium was a conservative civilization, negative –if not hostile– to innovation. This general idea influenced the study of innovation in Byzantium, which has been presented by modern scholars as either absent or as being decisively opposed to. After a presentation of some preliminary questions on the use of terms as innovation in modern historical writing this article examines the use of Byzantine terms related to the concept of innovation in Byzantine lexicographical, historiographical and theological texts. The comparison of these works to ancient Greek ones demonstrates that the Byzantines continued using words and concepts as innovation, novelty etc. in a way similar to that used by their predecessors. Furthermore, the article demonstrates that the Byzantines probably had more than one understandings of innovation and were not negative towards innovation as such.

In memory of Tomas Hägg

It is often said that Byzantium and the Byzantines were negative, if not inimical and hostile, to innovation¹. Albeit not thoroughly studied² and contradicted, directly or not, by a number of modern studies³, the notion of Byzantium as a static and changeless civilization has influenced a great number of historians, who have presented the Byzantine understanding of innovation in negative light, particularly in the fields of politics and religion, where the Byzantines are supposed to have perceived innovation as rebellion and heresy correspondingly⁴. But, really, did the Byzantines have one and only one understanding of innovation? Were they negative or sceptical towards innovation as such? And furthermore, did they evaluate innovation in a way that was originally their own?⁵

I would like to thank Prof. Emer. Jonny Holbek (University of Agder) for having shared with me thoughts on innovation, types of innovation and innovation in Byzantium; this essay would not be the same without our discussions, which I am deeply grateful for. I am also thankful to Prof. Benoît Godin (INRS, Montreal) and Dr. Vasileios Syros (Finnish Centre of Political Thought & Conceptual Change), for their comments, corrections and criticisms.

¹ See for example the entry on innovation in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*: “The Byzantines did not appreciate innovation and claimed to have stuck to tradition. Imitation or repetition of the standard authorities was praiseworthy. [...] Reforms were usually couched in terms of the restoration of the past rather than of innovation.” [*ODB*, ed. A. P. Kazhdan [et al.], Vols. 1–3 (Oxford, 1991), here vol. 2: 997].

² See A. Spanos, “‘To Every Innovation Anathema’(?). Some preliminary thoughts on the study of Byzantine Innovation”, in *Mysterion, strategike og kainotomia. Et festskrift til ære for Jonny Holbek*, ed. H. Knudsen, J. Falkenberg, K. Grønhaug & Å. Garnes (Oslo, 2010), 51–59.

³ See, e.g., A. R. Littlewood (ed.), *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music. A Collection of Essays* (Oxford, 1995); A. P. Kazhdan & A. W. Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley, 1985); A. Ödekan, E. Akyürek, N. Necipoğlu (eds.), *First International Sevgi Gonul Byzantine Studies Symposium. Change in the Byzantine World in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Istanbul, 2010).

⁴ See for example *ODB* 3: 997: “More often the word [*kainotomia*] was used in a broader sense of novelty and breach of tradition and applied predominantly to heretical doctrines or even rebellions”.

⁵ This paper will not enter in the discussion of whether the Byzantines had a *notion* of innovation similar to our own, a problem that still waits for an *ad hoc* study.

This paper aims at answering these questions by studying Byzantine sources⁶. After some preliminary reflections on the study of *innovation* in historical writing, it looks briefly at the Byzantine explanation of innovation in Byzantine lexica. Then it considers if the Byzantine understanding of innovation in politics, that is to say innovation as rebellion, was as monolithic as modern scholarship seems to believe. Finally, it deals with innovation in theology, or, according to modern historians, innovation as heresy. While studying innovation as rebellion and as heresy, the paper employs ancient Greek sources, to examine whether the Byzantines understood innovation in politics and religion in a way different than that of the Ancient Greeks.

Innovation in Historical Writing

A classical definition of *innovation* presents the modern concept of the term as “any idea, practice, or material artifact perceived to be new by the relevant unit of adoption”⁷. By focusing on the crucial role of the adoptive unit in the process (and eventually the result) of any innovation, this definition points to the main problem of the historical study of innovation, namely the oversimplification of the relation between innovation(s) and unit(s) of adoption⁸. To make the point clear: by speaking about Byzantine innovation in general the historian creates and applies a unit of adoption (Byzantium or the Byzantine civilization) that was enormous both in space (at its largest from present Middle East to Spain and from the Danube to North Africa) and time (from the fourth to the fifteenth century). Furthermore, and this is the most important in our case, this superstructure, inhabited by a big number of

⁶ As the sources studied are not more than a drop in the ocean of Byzantine literature, the thoughts presented here could not be anything but preliminary.

⁷ G. N. Zaltman, R. B. Duncan & J. Holbek, *Innovations and Organizations* (New York, 1973), 10; cf. E. M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, (New York, 1995 [1962]), 11. Let it be noted that the term *innovation* is used in the rest of my text in its modern meaning, while when referring to the Byzantine understanding of innovation, I am using the two words mainly used by the Byzantines themselves, namely *kainotomia* and *neoterismos*.

⁸ Some of the questions related to the use of concepts as innovation, novelty, invention and the like in historical writing are to be studied in an *ad hoc* paper in preparation, in collaboration with Jonny Holbek, under the working title: “Historical Innovation: Rethinking the Concept of Innovation in Historical Writing”.

peoples, completely different between them and with varying interests and sets of concerns and priorities, is supposed to have been homogeneous enough to have articulated one and only one understanding of what innovation was. Even more, it is also supposed to have had and applied the same criteria on which new ideas, practices or artefacts were to be accepted as positive innovations and which were to be rejected as negative or even dangerous.

While speaking about innovation in Byzantium, or any other civilization, a historian should consider the civilization as a mega-system encompassing countless units of various types, as –to name but a few– the state, the church, the emperor, the army, the society in general, various local societies and social groupings, local aristocracies, or monastic communities. A new idea, for example a theological doctrine, or a new practice, let us say a fiscal system, could be accepted or enforced by the central government and opposed by the church or the society. An innovative law could be accepted by the state and the largest part of the society but opposed by the big landowners or the nobility. An innovation could be rejected right after its first appearance to be accepted later, by the same or another unit of adoption, or could be introduced to just one of the cities or the provinces of the empire (that is to say: to one unit of adoption) to be adopted later by some other provinces or the whole empire.

Another problem in the historical study of innovation is that modern scholarship presents, more often than not, concepts as originality, novelty, invention and the like as synonyms to innovation⁹, something that may easily lead to perplexity and wrong conclusions. These concepts are not identical, neither in modern times nor in a historical perspective. To make this clear by focusing only on originality: it is not of axiomatic truth that every innovation by default is an *original* idea, practice or artefact. There are cases, where an

⁹ One example will suffice: Summing up the anthology *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music*, A. Cutler realizes that "the authors of the papers that precede this treat originality variously as a synonym for creativity, invention, or innovation" [A. Cutler, "Originality as a Cultural Phenomenon", in Littlewood, *Originality*, 203].

innovation indicates simply the creative use or realization of an old idea, or a newly imported or transplanted idea or practice, that was originally invented or set up by another unit, as for example an individual, a group, a state, a civilization etc. (it is also possible that two or more old ideas add up to an innovation). The adaptation of this(-ese) old idea(s) and its appropriation, transformation or reinvention by the new unit may be so differentiating that the new product or practice becomes an innovation, even though the idea it is based on is not original.

Another point should be added: unlike what is usual in other fields, in historical writing innovation is used as an unambiguous concept, without any reference to the various types of innovation¹⁰. Due to the scope and the limitations of this paper, there is space enough to refer, by way of example, to only two distinct types of innovation, namely the *radical* and *incremental* innovations. *Radical* innovations require a high degree of new knowledge and skills and they introduce fundamental and, at least sometimes, revolutionary changes. *Incremental* innovations may be achieved with a low degree of new knowledge and they introduce minor improvements or simple adjustments in current ideas¹¹ (it should be noted though that a series of incremental innovations might result in a radical innovation). The aphorisms on an anti-innovative Byzantium in modern scholarship refer most probably to Byzantium's scepticism towards radical innovation, particularly in politics and religion. Even though, a study of sources of various types demonstrate that the Byzantines were not hostile to innovation as such, neither to radical not to incremental innovations.

¹⁰ Zaltman et al., *Innovations and Organizations*, 17–32, present a typology based on whether an innovation is: (a) programmed or non-programmed, (b) instrumental or ultimate, and (c) radical or not. On types of innovation see also N. King & N. Anderson, *Managing Innovation and Change: A Critical Guide for Organizations* (London, 2002), 141–145; G. Zaltman & N. Lin, "On the Nature of Innovations", *American Behavioral Scientist* 14 (1971) 651–683; R. D. Dewar & J. E. Dutton, "The Adoption of Radical and Incremental Innovations: An Empirical Analysis", *Management Science* 32 (1986) 1422–1433; H. W. Chesbrough & D. J. Teece, "Organizing for Innovation: When Is Virtual Virtuous?", *Harvard Business Review* 80 (2002) 127–135.

¹¹ See Dewar & Dutton, "The Adoption of Radical and Incremental Innovations", 1422–1423.

Innovation in Byzantine Lexicography

The study of Byzantine texts and lexis¹² shows that the Byzantines used mainly two words for innovation: *kainotomia* (καινοτομία) and *neoterismos* (νεωτερισμός)¹³. The verb *to innovate* occurs in Byzantine lexicographical sources as *kainotomein* (καινοτομεῖν), *neoterizein* (νεωτερίζειν) and *kainourgein* (καινουργεῖν).

Modern scholarship seems to accept that the Byzantines used all these words in the same meaning; and, mainly, in a negative way. But was it so?

The largest surviving Byzantine lexicon was composed in the fifth–sixth century and is attributed to Hesychios¹⁴. This lexicon defines the verb *kainotomein* in a neutral way: “to innovate: to make/do something new” (Καινοτομησαι· καινὸν ποιῆσαι)¹⁵. This definition appears in a number of later Byzantine lexis, deriving from or influenced by that of Hesychios, who adds that the word also means the opening of a new mining field (Καινοτομεῖν· καινήν λατομίαν τέμνειν)¹⁶. An innovator (*kainourgekos*) is someone who works/produces new things (Καινουργηκότα· νέα πράγματα ἐργασάμενον)¹⁷. The verb *neoterizein* is presented as having a different meaning from *kainotomein*; while *kainotomein* is defined as *making* new things, *neoterizein* has the meaning of *doing* new things (Νεωτερίζει· καινὰ πράττει)¹⁸.

A lexicon ascribed to the fifth-century patriarch of Alexandria Cyril (412–444), under the title *Συναγωγή*, also presents the verbs *kainotomein* and *neoterizein* as not having exactly the same meaning. *Kainotomein* is described

¹² On Byzantine lexicography see K. Alpers, “Lexikographie. B. I–III”, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* (Tübingen, 2001), 194–210; K. Alpers, “Griechische Lexikographie in Antike und Mittelalter”, in *Welt der Information*, ed. Hans-Albrecht Koch (Stuttgart, 1990), 14–38.

¹³ The word *kainourgema* (καινούργημα) was also used, but not very often.

¹⁴ Ed. Moritz Schmidt, 5 vols (Jena, 1858–1868); a part of the lexicon is edited by K. Latte, *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, vols. I (A–Δ) – II (E–O) (Copenhagen, 1953–1966).

¹⁵ *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, ed. Latte, II, 393.

¹⁶ *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, ed. Latte, II, 394. The definition is not originally Byzantine, as it appears for example in Xenophon, *De vectigalibus*, tr. Marchant, 4: 27.

¹⁷ *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, ed. Latte, II, 394.

¹⁸ *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, ed. Latte, II, 708.

as *working/producing* something new (Καινοτομεῖ· καινουργεῖ), while *neoterizein* as *doing* new things (νεωτερίζει· καινὰ πράττει)¹⁹. Somebody who deals with *neoterismos*, a *neoteropios*, is characterized as rebel, tyrant, plotter (Νεωτεροποιός· ἀντάρτης, τύραννος, ἐπιθέτης)²⁰.

The great ninth-century Byzantine statesman, scholar and patriarch of Constantinople Photios (858–867 and 877–886) composed a lexicon, where he presents *kainotomia*, *neoterizein*, and *neoteropios* in exactly the same way to Cyril of Alexandria (Καινοτομεῖ· καινουργεῖ²¹; Νεωτερίζει· καινὰ πράττει; and Νεωτεροποιός· ἀντάρτης τύραννος ἐπιθέτης²²).

The tenth-century *Etymologicum Gudianum* presents *kainotomia* as something changed against the rules and the laws of nature (Καινοτομία, ἔστι πράγμα, παρὰ τοὺς τῆς φύσεως ὅρους καὶ νόμους παρηλλαγμένον)²³. This definition is most probably from the corollary of a theological understanding of *kainotomia*, that is to say the Incarnation of Christ, which took place exactly against the rules and the laws of nature²⁴.

The so-called *Souda Lexicon*, a compilation of lexica, *etymologica* and other sources, most probably produced around 1000, explains the verb *kainotomein* as to produce/work something new, relating it to politics (Καινοτομεῖ·

¹⁹ *Synagoge. Συναγωγή λέξεων χρησίμων. Texts of the Original Version and of MS: B*, ed. Ian C. Cunningham (Berlin–New York, 2003), 282 and 351.

²⁰ *Synagoge*, ed. Cunningham, 351.

²¹ *Photii patriarchae lexicon*, ed. C. Theodoridis, vol. II (E–M) (Berlin–New York, 1998), 348, nr. 68. The lexicon also includes an entry on the infinitive *kainotomein*, which presents the literal meaning of the word in mining, identically to the lexicon by Hesychios: “mainly to cut fresh into a mine” (καινοτομειν· καινήν λατομίαν τέμνειν κυρίως; *ibid.*, nr. 59).

²² *Φωτίου τοῦ πατριάρχου λέξεων συναγωγή*, ed. Porson (Cambridge, 1822), 1: 297.

²³ *Etymologicum Graecae linguae Gudianum et alia grammaticorum scripta e codicibus manuscriptis nunc primum edita*, ed. F. W. Sturz (Leipzig, 1818), 292.

²⁴ See, for example, the definition of *kainotomia* as the Incarnation of Christ in the entry of a thirteenth-century lexicon wrongly attributed Ioannes Zonaras (12th c.). This lexicon presents innovation as “what is by any means changed against the common nature and not identified in anything to the human custom. It is necessary to get a deep knowledge of this term because of those who misunderstand the innovation in Christ. Because although he innovated nature by being born without semination, after his birth and as he was growing, quite much (of the features) of his body ... he did not have in innovation but in sameness to us, with only the exception of sin” [=Τὸ κατὰ πάντα τρόπον παρηλλαγμένον τῆς κοινῆς φύσεως, καὶ ἐν μηδενὶ τῆ τῶν ἀνθρώπων συνηθεία ἐξομοιούμενον. Τοῦτον δὲ τὸν ὅρον ἀναγκαῖον ἐπίστασθαι διὰ τοὺς κακῶς νοοῦντας τὴν καινοτομίαν ἐν Χριστῷ. Εἰ γὰρ ἐκαινοτόμησε τὴν φύσιν ἀσπύρωσ γεννηθεὶς, ἀλλ’ ὅμως μετὰ τὸν τόκον τὴν αὐξησιν τῆς ἡλικίας, καὶ τὰ πολλὰ τὰ ἐν τῷ σώματι ... οὐ κατὰ καινοτομίαν ἔσχεν, ἀλλὰ καθ’ ὁμοιότητα ἡμῶν χωρὶς ἀμαρτίας. Pseudo-Zonaras, *Lexicon*, ed. Tittmann, (Leipzig, 1808): 1154]. [Translations are mine, unless noted otherwise.]

αἰτιατικῇ. καινουργεῖ. ὅτι τὸ καινοτομεῖν ἐπὶ τοῦ ἄρχειν)²⁵. In the entry on the lyric poet Melanippides the verb *kainotomein* is used in a way that reminds of the modern use of the verb *to innovate*, as the lexicon reads that Melanippides innovated a lot in the composition of the dithyramb²⁶. The noun *kainotomia* is also listed in *Souda*, without any explanation. *Souda* presents the verb *neoterizei* as doing something new (Νεωτερίζει: καινὰ πράττει)²⁷. It also includes a passage by Thucydides under the entry *neoterizein*²⁸, and explains *neoterismos* as rebellion and *neoteropoios* in exactly the same way to Cyril and Photios, as rebel, tyrant, plotter (Νεωτερισμός: ἀνταρσία and Νεωτεροποιός: ἀντάρτης, τύραννος, ἐπιθέτης)²⁹.

All the studied lexica present *kainotomia* and *kainotomein* in a neutral way, not reflecting any negative understanding of the term. An *argumentum ex silentio* may be added here, as a number of other Byzantine lexica and *etymologica* that have been examined, do not include an entry on our “innovation-terms”; this probably demonstrates that the lexicographers did not find the words worthy of an explanation, as they should –I am tempted to think– if *kainotomia* was generally understood as something negative, or even dangerous or harmful. This is, more or less, the case for the verb *neoterizein* as well, while *neoterismos* is clearly presented as a negative change, or effort to change or alter, usually of the political order or existing regime.

²⁵ *Suidae Lexicon*, ed. A. Adler, 5 vols. (Leipzig, 1928–1938), K 1177.

²⁶ “Μελανιππίδης, [...] ὃς ἐν τῇ τῶν διθυράμβων μελοποιῖα ἐκαινοτόμησε πλεῖστα” (*Suidae Lexicon*, ed. Adler, M 454). Let it be noted that in this entry the verb *kainotomein* is used in the same meaning as in the lexica of Hesychios, Cyril and Photios studied above.

²⁷ *Suidae Lexicon*, ed. Adler, N 243.

²⁸ «Νεωτερίζειν. Θουκυδίδης· τῆς ἡμέρας τὸ πνίγος ἐλύπει, νύκτες δὲ μετοπωρῖναι καὶ ψυχραὶ τῇ μεταβολῇ ἀσθένειαν ἐνεωτέριζον. ὁ δὲ βάρβαρος οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τὴν νεωτερίζουσαν τὰ πράγματα τύχην ἔσχεν ἀνενεγκεῖν τὴν αἰτίαν, ὡς ἂν ἔννομόν τινα καὶ ὑπαιθρον ἀγωνισάμενος μάχην» (*Suidae Lexicon*, ed. Adler, N 244). Cf. Thucydides, *Historiae*, ed. Jones & Powell (Oxford, 1942), 7.87.1 (τῆς ἡμέρας–ἐνεωτέριζον) and Eunapius, *Fragmenta historica*, ed. Dindorf (Leipzig, 1870), 226 (ὁ δὲ βάρβαρος–μάχην)].

²⁹ *Suidae Lexicon*, ed. Adler, N 245, 247. The words are also used in this sense when employed in other entries of the lexicon.

Thus, we may say that the study of the verbs *kainotomein* and *neoterizein* and their derivatives in Byzantine lexica does not support the theory of a sclerotic negative understanding of innovation in Byzantium. Furthermore, they demonstrate that in Byzantine lexicography the words *kainotomia* and *neoterismos* do not have the same meaning, since *kainotomia* is presented in a neutral way, while *neoterismos* includes negative meanings, as for example that of rebellion or sedition. This is also confirmed by the study of the words on those who introduce *kainotomia*i and *neoterismo*i: the word *kainotomos* (καινοτόμος), is not evaluated as so important to be honoured by an entry, while a *neoteristes* (νεωτεριστής) is presented only negatively as «rebel, tyrant, plotter». To examine this deduction further, let us turn to Byzantine historiography and theology.

Innovation in Byzantine Political Life

According to modern scholarship, in the field of politics the Byzantines understood innovation as rebellion, revolt, or revolution. One of the main arguments for that, expressed in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, is a text by the eleventh-century Byzantine scholar, Michael Psellos. In his *Chronographia* (Χρονογραφία), Psellos comments on a revolt against the emperor Michael V (1041–1042), writing that «by the majority the act was understood as an irrational innovation»³⁰. But is this passage representative of the hostile tendency of the Byzantines towards innovation? First of all, the argument does not pay attention to a word that is of importance, namely the word irrational, or senseless (ἄλογος). The fact that Psellos uses this adjective to define the kind of innovation means that in the Byzantine mentality of his time there were also rationally founded, or non-senseless, innovations.

³⁰ «Τοῖς μὲν οὖν πολλοῖς καινοτομία τις ἄλογος τὸ πραττόμενον ἔδοξεν» [Michel Psellos: *Chronographie ou histoire d'un siècle de Byzance (976–1077)*, ed. E. Renault, vols I–II (Paris, 1926–1928), 5.27]. E.R.A. Sewter translates: “To most of the others it seemed a senseless revolt”; E.R.A. Sewter (trans.), *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers* (New York, 1966), 139 (the translation is free online at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/psellus-chrono05.asp>). This text is used as an argument for the Byzantine understanding of *kainotomia* as revolt in *ODB* 2: 997.

Furthermore, Psellos uses *kainotomia* and *kainotomein* no less than twelve times in his *Χρονογραφία*, in a variety of meanings; he refers, for example, to innovations by the divine justice³¹ or by the emperor himself³². In another text, his encomium on the patriarch of Constantinople Constantine Leichoudes (1059–1063), he praises the patriarch for having opened for him the path to education; the verb used by Psellos for opening the way is *kainotomein*.³³

A number of other passages from various periods demonstrates that Byzantium also had developed a positive understanding of innovation in politics. I could refer, for example, to Anna Comnena and her *Alexias*, where she commends her father Alexius I (1081–1118) as introducing *kainotomia*, writing that

“if anyone were to reckon the art of ruling as a science and a kind of high philosophy, as if it were the art of all arts and the science of all sciences, then he would certainly admire my father as a skilful scientist and artist for having invented [*kainotomounta*] those new titles and functions in the Empire”.³⁴

³¹ «Λέξω ..., ὡς ἂν οἴός τε ᾧ, ὅποσα μετὰ τὴν τῆς βασιλίδος ὑπερορίαν ἢ θεία δίκη τῷ τε καιρῷ καὶ τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐκαινοτόμησεν» (= I will tell ..., to the best of my ability, an account of all those things that the Divine Justice innovated in relation to time and the circumstances; *Chronographie*, ed. Renault, 5.24; Sewter, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 137 translates: At all events, to the best of my ability, I will tell my story – an account of all those strange happenings that followed the empress’s exile, events that Divine Justice brought to pass at this moment in history).

³² Even if the evaluation of the *kainotomia* is here clearly negative, it could not be understood as rebellion and the like: «Ἦοντο δὲ μηδὲ τοὺς ἐν τῇ Πόλει τῷ βασιλεῖ προσθήσασθαι, τούτοις δὲ ἀντιστήσασθαι, δι’ ὀργῆς τε τὸν αὐτοκράτορα ἔχοντας, ἐπειδὴ καὶ καινοτομεῖν τι κατ’ αὐτῶν ἤρξατο, καὶ τὴν προεδρίαν αὐτοῦ δυσχεραίνοντας, καὶ βουλομένους στρατιώτην ἰδεῖν αὐτοκράτορα, σφῶν τε προκινδυνεύοντα καὶ τὰς ἐπιδρομὰς τῶν βαρβάρων ἀνείργοντα» (Besides, they were under the impression that the inhabitants of Constantinople would not remain loyal; they expected no opposition there, because the emperor had made himself unpopular by introducing reforms which curbed the liberty of the citizens. The people loathed him as a ruler and wanted to see a soldier-emperor, a man who would endanger his own life on their behalf and put an end to barbarian incursions; *Chronographie*, ed. Renault, 6.104; translated by Sewter, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, 209–210).

³³ Αὐτός γάρ μοι τὴν τῆς παιδείας ὁδὸν πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἐκαινοτόμησας (*Encomium in patriarchem Constantinum Leichudem*, ed. in K. N. Sathas, *Ἐπιτάφιοι Λόγοι*, vol. 4 [Bibliotheca Graeca Medii Aevi (1874)], 420). Psellos also uses positively *kainotomia* in theology; see, for example, footnotes 45 and 46).

³⁴ Εἰ γὰρ τις εἰς ἐπιστήμην καὶ τινα ὑπερτάτην φιλοσοφίαν ἀνάγοι τὴν βασιλείαν ὥσπερ τέχνην οὖσαν τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστήμην ἐπιστημῶν, θαυμάσαιτο ἂν καὶ τὸν ἐμὸν πατέρα οἶόν τινα ἐπιστήμονά τε καὶ ἀρχιτέκτονα τὰ ὑπὸ τὴν βασιλείαν καινοτομοῦντα καὶ πράγματα καὶ ὀνόματα [*Annae Comnenae Alexias*, ed. A. Kambylis and D. R. Reinsch (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae. Series Berolinensis XL/1, Berlin–New York, 2001) 96; transl. by Elizabeth A. Dawes (London, 1928),

To depart from the eleventh century, let us recall Pseudo-Kodinos and his *Treatise on the Dignities and Offices* (*De officiis*, composed between 1347 and 1368), where he makes clear that “it is possible to the emperors to *kainotomein* unhindered, both in functions and titles”³⁵.

Let us note that in all these cases where the concept of innovation is used in a neutral or positive way the verb expressing the concept is *kainotomein* and not *neoterizein*. Thus, it could be argued that the positive understanding of innovation in politics was expressed with the use of the word *kainotomein* and its derivatives, while *neoterizein* was almost always, if not always, used for negative, not accepted radical changes in political life and state organization.

But was this negative understanding of *neoterismos* as rebellion, revolt or revolution an originally Byzantine understanding? Or was it something the Byzantines inherited by their predecessors?

A study of ancient sources demonstrates that a negative understanding of *neoterizein* and *neoterismos* in political thinking existed at least from the fifth century BC. One may refer, for example, to Plato³⁶, Aristotle³⁷, or Demosthenes³⁸. Almost half a millennium later, the great biographer Plutarch (c.46–120 AD) uses the word in the same negative meaning, for example in his

available free online at <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/basis/AnnaComnena-Alexiad.asp>, last accessed 2 October 2012].

³⁵ Ἐξεστὶ δὲ καὶ τοῖς βασιλεῦσι καινοτομεῖν καὶ πράγματα καὶ ὀνόματα ἀκαλύτως [Pseudo-Kodinos. *Traité des offices*, ed. J. Verpeaux (Paris, 1966), 135].

³⁶ «Αἰτίαν δὴ ἔσχον ὑπὸ τῶν ἑτέρων, κἂν μὴ ἐπιθυμῶσι νεωτερίζειν, ὡς ἐπιβουλεύουσι τῷ δήμῳ καὶ εἰσὶν ὀλιγαρχικοί (=And thereupon the charge is brought against them by the other party, though they may have no revolutionary designs, that they are plotting against the people, and it is said that they are oligarchs)» (Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Shorey, 8.565b).

³⁷ «...Δεῖ δὲ τοιοῦτους εἶναι τοὺς ἀρχομένους πρὸς τὸ πειθαρχεῖν καὶ μὴ νεωτερίζειν (...unfriendliness in the subject classes is a good thing with a view to their being submissive to authority and not making revolution)» (Aristotle, *Politica*, tr. Rackham, 1262b).

³⁸ «Ἔστι γὰρ ἐν ταῖς συνθήκαις ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τοὺς συνεδρευόντας καὶ τοὺς ἐπὶ τῇ κοινῇ φυλακῇ τεταγμένους ὅπως ἐν ταῖς κοινωνοῦσαις πόλεσι τῆς εἰρήνης μὴ γίνωνται θάνατοι καὶ φυγαὶ παρὰ τοὺς κεμένους ταῖς πόλεσι νόμους, μηδὲ χρημάτων δημεύσεις, μηδὲ γῆς ἀναδασμοί, μηδὲ χρῶν ἀποκοπαί, μηδὲ δούλων ἀπελευθερώσεις ἐπὶ νεωτερισμῶ» (=For it is provided in the compact that it shall be the business of the delegates at the Congress and those responsible for public safety to see that in the states that are parties to the peace there shall be no executions and banishments contrary to the laws established in those states, no confiscation of property, no partition of lands, no cancelling of debts, and no emancipation of slaves for purposes of revolution) [Demosthenes, *Περὶ τῶν πρὸς Ἀλέξανδρον συνηθηκῶν*, 17.15; ed. Dilts, *Demosthenis orationes* (Oxford 2002), p. 203; transl. *Demosthenes. I. Olynthiacs, Philippics, Leptines I–XVII, XX. With an English translation by J. H. Vince*, (Cambridge & London, 1930), 473].

biography of the second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius (715–673 BC)³⁹. To the evidence given by Greek sources we may add an *argumentum* related to the Roman precursors of the Byzantines: in Latin sources the concept of revolution may be expressed as *novae res* (=new things), that is to say radical changes, or *neoterismoι*.

Innovation in Byzantine Religion

When it comes to the Byzantine understanding of innovation in religion, modern scholarship demonstrates that the word *kainotomia* is used in Byzantine theology mainly in relation to: (a) the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ and (b) radical changes in dogma, which were not in accordance to the official doctrines and teachings of the Church.⁴⁰

Innovation as unacceptable changes in dogma is presented clearly in the so-called *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*, a liturgical document produced in the period between 843 and 920⁴¹. The study of Byzantine theological and religious texts reveals a good number of passages, where *kainotomia* is used in this meaning. But was this use of the word representative of the Byzantine understanding and evaluation of innovation in religion? A good number of theological texts shows clearly that innovation is anathematized when it reflects drastic changes in faith and/or the ecclesiastical traditions and practices, when these changes are not accepted by the Church; this means that the understanding of

³⁹ «Οὔτε γὰρ πόλεμος οὔτε στάσις οὔτε νεωτερισμὸς περὶ πολιτείαν ἰστόρηται Νομᾶ βασιλεύοντος (For there is no record either of war, or faction, or political revolution while Numa was king)» [*Plutarch's lives*, ed. and tr. Perrin, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1914) 374–375]. The sentence is quoted by the Byzantine historian Ioannes Zonaras in his *Epitomae Historiarum*, ed. L. Dindorf, 2:111.

⁴⁰ This is, once again, an oversimplification of the study of innovation, as innovation in religion could be studied from many different viewpoints. One may focus on innovations in religion as theory (belief, theology) and as practice (ritual). Another possibility could be to study innovation in religions as independent systems of cognitive beliefs or as systems that function within one or more wider cultures which host them. Related aspects are discussed in C. Disbrey, *Innovation and Tradition in Religion* (Aldershot, 1994).

⁴¹ One example could be enough: Τοὺς παραχαράττοντας τὰς ἀποστολικὰς καὶ πατρικὰς καὶ συνοδικὰς παραδόσεις τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ ἄλλο τι καινοτομοῦντας ἢ ἐπινοοῦντας κατὰ τῆς πίστεως, ἀνάθεμα (=To those falsifying the traditions of the apostles and the fathers and the councils of the Church, and any other thing innovating or excogitating against faith, anathema); J. Gouillard, "Le Synodikon de l'Orthodoxie. Édition et Commentaire", *Travaux et Memoires* 2 (1967) 313.

innovation is not different from that in the Byzantine lexica, the making/doing something new, the opening of new paths. The problem for the Church was that novelties *in specific fields* or *with specific content* were not acceptable, as they would threaten its foundations. The discussion, for instance, on Christology was not just a theoretical debate but directly connected to the salvation of the human being. Thus, the innovation of Arius on Jesus as created by the Father was not to be accepted. At the same time, the innovative theologies of the *homoousios* and the triune God were accepted by the First Ecumenical Council, becoming thus doctrines of the church.

The opinion that the Byzantine Church was not hostile to any innovation in theology as such may be strengthened by an argument the modern scholarship agrees on, namely that the Byzantine Church understood –as we have seen previously– the Incarnation of Christ as a *kainotomia*.⁴² And this was an innovation understood in a very positive way. The *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* demonstrates this clearly by anathematizing those who do not believe in this *kainotomia*.⁴³ It should be noted here that in the passages studied, the Incarnation is presented as *kainotomia*, not *neoterismos*, which may indicate that Byzantine theology was acutely aware of the specific differences between *kainotomia*, which could be either positively or negatively evaluated, and *neoterismos*, which was always a negative change in doctrine or practice –this should be studied on the basis of a sufficient amount of sources.

Apart from that, Christianity seems to have understood itself, from the very beginning, as a religion that should express the innovative change from the antique world. When it comes to its theology, Christianity's fundamental doctrine is not completely new: gods and deities coming down to earth, getting killed and being resurrected were known before Christ. But the

⁴² Let us refer here to the Chrysostomic "καινοτομοῦνται φύσεις, και Θεός ἄνθρωπος γίνεται" (=Natures are innovated, and God becomes a man; *In sancta lumina*, PG 36: 348).

⁴³ Τοῖς [...] λόγοις διαλεκτικοῖς [...] ἐπὶ τῆς ὑπὲρ φύσιν καινοτομίας τῶν δύο φύσεων τοῦ Θεοῦ και ἀνθρώπου λογομαχεῖν πειρωμένοις, ἀνάθεμα (=To those who by conversational words try to argue against the over the principles of nature *kainotomia* of the two natures of God, anathema); Gouillard, "Le Synodikon de l'Orthodoxie", 57.

Christian dogma of the one and only God being at the same time one nature and three persons is as innovative as one can get in Antiquity, not only in theology but also in philosophy. The same may be said for the doctrine on afterlife, which was not original, but was vested in the Christian world a new content and meaning.

Thus, we may say that Byzantine theology seems not to have been hostile to the concept of innovation as such. Otherwise, we would never get neither the theology nor the practices originated during two very important theological controversies in Byzantium, namely Iconoclasm and Hesychasm.

Iconoclasm (ca. 720–843) has been seen, studied and understood from diverse perspectives and points of view: political, ecclesiastical, economic, and theological. For the purpose of the present paper, let us focus on only one dimension of it: the iconoclastic part of the church (and, of course, the state) represents a conservative understanding of the ritual and the ecclesiastical practice; during the iconoclastic debate they upheld “the unbroken and continuous tradition which existed between the views they expressed and the teachings of Christ, the Apostles, and the Fathers of the Church, in contrast to the false and *innovative* doctrine of their opponents”⁴⁴. The iconophiles, on the other hand, supported the veneration of icons, which was indeed an innovation (by any means, including the painting’s technique and style). After some 150 years of turbulence and persecutions of the iconophiles by the iconoclasts, the innovative veneration of the icons evolved into the official dogma of the Church as a result of the Council of Nicaea (843). Thus, the way was open to new innovations within painting and the production of icons, as for example with the production of the so-called *narrative icons*, from the twelfth century onwards⁴⁵.

Hesychasm (14th c.) is the last great theological controversy in the Byzantine world, related to a specific practice of monastic praying, which –

⁴⁴ L. Brubaker, “Icons and Iconomachy”, in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Chichester, 2010), 331 (emphasis added).

⁴⁵ See P. Chatterjee, *Narrating Sanctity: The Narrative Icon in Byzantium and Italy* (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2007).

according to the theologian Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) and his followers—led to the physical experience of the divine energy, through the so-called *silent prayer* (the word Hesychasm derives from the Greek *ἠσυχία*, silence). It is through this debate that new doctrines, as for example the distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies, were canonized as dogma, in the Council of Constantinople in 1351, even if they have been previously refuted by parts of the church (the patriarchate of Antioch for example) as innovations. Once more, an innovative new understanding and argumentation won the battle.

Apart from these two great eras of theological innovations one could also refer to passages from other periods, as for example Psellos arguing that “faith equal to a grain of mustard seed removes mountains and innovates [*kainotomei*] the impossible”⁴⁶, or that it is not the apostle Paul who first innovates [*kainotomei*] the third heaven, as he bases himself on the Bible⁴⁷.

Let us now try again to compare the Byzantine understanding of innovation in theology to the understanding of the ancient Greeks. Was innovation in theology and philosophy always acceptable before Byzantium?

Religion in ancient Greece was not as systematic and doctrinal as in Byzantium. Its ethical system was not so dominating as the Christian one and the priesthood had neither the authority nor the power to intervene in the political and social life as the Byzantine church did. Furthermore, polytheism facilitated, one should think, the introduction of new gods, new ideas and new doctrines, in contradiction to the religious Byzantine state and society, where the powerful and conservative church could prevent innovations in theology and religious practices. But was it so? The famous trial, indictment and death of Socrates probably shows otherwise. Let us not forget that the Athenian philosopher was sentenced to death for corrupting the youth, not

⁴⁶ Πίστις ἑοικυῖα κόκκῳ σινάπεως ὄρη μεθιστάνει καὶ καινοτομεῖ τὰ ἀμήχανα [*Michaelis Pselli orationes hagiographicae*, ed. E.A. Fisher, (Stuttgart, 1994), 300 (=Oratio in decollationem Ioannis Baptistae, v. 222–223)].

⁴⁷ Τὸν δὲ τρίτον τοῦτον οὐρανὸν οὐ πρῶτος καινοτομεῖ ὁ ἀπόστολος, ἀλλὰ τοῖς τῆς γραφῆς ἀποχρώμενος ῥήμασι καὶ τρίτον φησὶν οὐρανὸν [*Michaelis Pselli theologica*, ed. P. Gautier (Stuttgart, 1994), opusculum 27].

believing in the established gods of the city and *introducing new gods* in Athens⁴⁸. One could hardly avoid thinking that the last accusation in reality means innovating in religion, a negative evaluation of which is thus shown as much older than Byzantium, at least in specific cases (as was also the case in Byzantium).

Conclusions

Taking into consideration everything presented above on the use and the meanings of our innovation-terms in Byzantine lexicography, historiography and theology (even if in an infinitesimal sample), we may deduce that the Byzantine understanding of innovation was not as monolithic as argued in prior scholarship.

The first striking element is that in Byzantine thinking *kainotomia* and *neoterismos* seem not to have exactly the same meaning. While *kainotomia* was understood in both a positive and a negative way, *neoterismos* seems to have been evaluated mainly, if not only, negatively. Even if this should be studied on the basis of more sources, we may at this stage say that *neoterizein* seems to have been closer related to undertaking or attempting something against well established traditions, customs or conventions, while *kainotomein* also has the meaning of changing the *status quo* in a way that leads to positive results or, at least, does not harm the unit of adoption.

As to the overall Byzantine understanding of innovation: there were of course fields in which most Byzantines understood innovation as something negative. In other fields, though, innovation was not only accepted, but also appreciated and encouraged. Furthermore, skepticism towards innovation, or

⁴⁸ See for example Plato's *Apologia Socratis*: Σωκράτη φησὶν ἀδικεῖν τοὺς τε νέους διαφθείροντα καὶ θεοὺς οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει οὐ νομίζοντα, ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινὰ (=It states that Socrates is a wrongdoer because he corrupts the youth and does not believe in the gods the state believes in, but in other new spiritual beings; *Apologia Socratis*, ed. and tr. Fowler, 24b–c), and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*: Ἡ μὲν γὰρ γραφή κατ' αὐτοῦ τοιάδε τις ἦν· Ἀδικεῖ Σωκράτης οὓς μὲν ἡ πόλις νομίζει θεοὺς οὐ νομίζων, ἕτερα δὲ καινὰ δαιμόνια εἰσφέρων· ἀδικεῖ δὲ καὶ τοὺς νέους διαφθείρων [=The indictment against him was to this effect: *Socrates is guilty of rejecting the gods acknowledged by the state and of bringing in strange deities; he is also guilty of corrupting the youth*; *Xenophontis Memorabilia*, tr. E. C. Marchant, 1.1].

at least certain kinds (probably: types?) of innovation, or innovation in specific fields, seems to have existed long before Byzantium, as the study of ancient Greek sources may demonstrate⁴⁹.

The widespread modern evaluation of Byzantium as anti-innovative could be proven wrong by the study of various innovations in Byzantine architecture⁵⁰ (one should need no more than studying the pendentives of Hagia Sophia), military techniques and practices⁵¹ (the Greek fire being a very good example, even if not the only), technology (see for example the fifth-century mechanical sundial treasured today at the British Museum of Science⁵², or the famous tenth-century hydraulic systems of the imperial palace described by Liutprand of Cremona⁵³), painting (the narrative icon), theology (see above, on Iconoclasm and Hesychasm), or music⁵⁴.

Thus, we may conclude that the modern thesis on innovation having been more or less unwanted in Byzantium is contradicted by a great number of sources of various types. Hence, one can assume that this thesis is a result of (a) a minimal study of the Byzantine understanding (or understandings?) of innovation and (b) neglect of a principle in innovation studies that almost every innovation meets resistance, whose power depends on the specific characteristics and valence of the adoptive unit (whether, for example, the majority of its members are receptive and amenable to adopting new ideas and changes)⁵⁵. So, one is tempted to think that since innovation seems not to have been unwanted in Byzantium, it is most probably the study of Byzantine innovation that has not been so far very wanted by modern scholarship.

⁴⁹ See B. Godin (with the collaboration of Pierre Lucier), "Innovation and Conceptual Innovation in Ancient Greece", *Project on the Intellectual History of Innovation – Working Paper No 14*, (INRS/Montreal, 2012).

⁵⁰ R. Ousterhout, "Beyond Hagia Sophia: Originality in Byzantine Architecture", in Littlewood, *Originality*, 167–185.

⁵¹ See E. N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁵² J. V. Field & M. T. Wright, "Gears from the Byzantines: A Portable Sundial with Calendrical Gearing", *Annals of Science* 42 (1985) 87–138.

⁵³ See P. Squartiti (transl.), *The complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona* (Washington D.C., 2007), 197–198.

⁵⁴ Miloš Velimirović, "Originality and Innovation in Byzantine Music", in Littlewood, *Originality*, 189–199.

⁵⁵ See for example the chapter "Resistance to change" in King & Anderson, *Managing Innovation and Change*, 195–220.

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