



Thought and Culture in Christian Egypt 284-641 AD. Cyril of Alexandria (412-444) and his patriarchic period according to Socrates Scholasticus

Pensamento e Cultura no Egito Cristão (284-641 a. C.). Cirilo de Alexandria (412-444) e seu período patriarcal de acordo com Sócrates, o *Escolástico*

Pensamiento y cultura en el Egipto cristiano 284-641 AD. Cirilo de Alejandría (412-444) y su período patriarcal según Sócrates *Escolástico*

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Resumen: Cyril of Alexandria (412-444) was not only one of the finest Christian theologians of his day, he also stands out in the ranks of the greatest patristic writers of all generations as perhaps the most powerful exponent of Christology the church has known. He brought great influence both in church life and in making the Christian teaching and especially in the formulation of Christological doctrine in the 5th century. For the life of the holy father, little is known. He was born between 370-380 AD Alexandria. The exact date of his birth we are not able to know it. He came from a wealthy family of the Greek city of Alexandria, although often the patriarch of Constantinople Nestorius calls him “Egyptian”, i.e. one who hails from Egypt, in order to taunt him. Nowhere was the divide more clearly seen in 415 CE than between Orestes, the Pagan Prefect of Alexandria and Cyril, the Archbishop of Alexandria, who lead the Christian mobs against the Jews of Alexandria, looted their synagogues and expelled them from the city. Orestes maintained his Paganism in the face of Christianity and cultivated a close relationship with Hypatia which Cyril, perhaps, blamed for Orestes’ refusal to submit to the “true” faith and become a Christian. Tensions between the two men, and their supporters, grew increasingly high as each brushed off the other’s advances of reconciliation and peace. His early life is known only from notices in Socrates Scholasticus and a few elsewhere. The latter explains the relations of Cyril of Alexandria with

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Orestes and Hypatia. Also, Socrates, although, was enemy to Cyril of Alexandria remains the most objective source for the life and actions of Cyril of Alexandria.

Resumen: Cirilo de Alejandría (412-444) no solo fue uno de los mejores teólogos cristianos de su tiempo, sino que también se destacó en las filas de los más grandes escritores patrísticos de todas las generaciones como tal vez el más poderoso exponente de la cristología que la iglesia haya conocido. Él produjo una gran influencia tanto en la vida de la iglesia como en la formación de la enseñanza cristiana, especialmente en la formulación de la doctrina cristológica en el siglo V. Poco se conoce sobre la vida de este santo padre. Nació entre 370-380 d. C. en Alejandría, aunque no conocemos la fecha exacta de su nacimiento. Provenía de una familia adinerada de la ciudad griega de Alejandría, si bien a menudo el patriarca de Constantinopla Nestorio lo llama “egipcio”, es decir, oriundo de Egipto, con el fin de burlarse de él. En ninguna parte fue la brecha más clara en el año 415 que entre Orestes, prefecto pagano de Alejandría, y Cirilo, arzobispo de Alejandría, quien lideró las multitudes cristianas contra los judíos de Alejandría, que saquearon sus sinagogas y los expulsaron de la ciudad. Orestes mantuvo su paganismo frente al cristianismo y cultivó una estrecha relación con Hipatia, a quien Cirilo tal vez culpó de la negativa de Orestes a someterse a la “verdadera” fe y convertirse al cristianismo. Las tensiones entre los dos hombres y sus partidarios eran cada vez más altas, ya que cada uno de ellos despreciaba los avances hacia la reconciliación y la paz. Los inicios de la vida de Cirilo nos son conocidos solo por las informaciones de Sócrates Escolástico y algunas otras de distintas fuentes. Este último explica las relaciones de Cirilo de Alejandría con Orestes e Hipatia. Además, Sócrates, aunque era enemigo de Cirilo de Alejandría, sigue siendo la fuente más objetiva para la vida y las acciones de Cirilo de Alejandría.

Keywords: Thought – Culture – Christian Egypt – Cyril of Alexandria – Socrates Scholasticus.

Palabras-clave: Pensamiento – Cultura – Egipto cristiano – Cirilo de Alejandría – Sócrates Escolástico.

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I. Early days of Cyril of Alexandria before his Episcopal career and his relation to Isidore of Pelusium

Cyril was a great theologian: he was the most distinguished Saint of Byzantine Orthodoxy and exercised such an important influence on the ecclesiastical doctrine which, apart from Athanasius, was not exercised by any of the other Greek fathers. And, as it has been said, there is none among all the other fathers whose works have been adopted so extensively by ecumenical Councils as a standard expression of Christian Faith². As a ruler of the church of Alexandria and president of the Third Ecumenical Council of 431, Cyril was one of the most powerful men of the fifth century.

There is almost no information on his life prior to his election to the important See of Alexandria. He was known for his Christological formulations during the Nestorian debate. His birth date was between 370-380. Our knowledge of his childhood, education and early upbringing is quite meagre. His mother and her brother, Theophilus, hailed from Memphis. Some researchers support that the father of Cyril of Alexandria and the bishop Theophilus were brothers. He (=Cyril) had the misfortune to become orphan in a very young age. His father died when he was a small child³.

Cyril, a native Egyptian, was one of the greatest theologians and ecclesiastical leaders of the patristic age. He was born in the town of Theodosion, Lower Egypt, very close to the current city Mahhalla El Kobra in the region of Mansoura, and moved as the child to the “cosmopolitan city of Alexandria”⁴.

² C. Drastellas, *Questions of the Soteriological Teaching of the Greek Fathers, With Special Reference to St. Cyril of Alexandria*, Athens 1969, p. 10. J.A. McGuckin states that: "For the Eastern Church he is the father of Orthodox Christology par excellence; a great exegete as well as a spiritual guide, a Saint in the full rage of his doctrine and his life's energy and focus, the two aspects being inseparable in the Orthodox understanding of the nature of theology and sanctity", J. A. McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004, p. 1.

³ E. Artemi, "Saint Cyril of Alexandria and his relation to the governor Orestes and the philosopher Hypatia", *Ecclesiasticos Faros*, t. 78 (2007), 7-16, p. 7.

⁴ L. M. Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, A New Testament Exegete. His commentary on the gospel of John*, Gorgias Dissertations 29, Early Christian Studies 7, publ. Gorgias Press, New Jersey 2007, p. 3.



He was the nephew of the patriarch of the city of Alexandria⁵, Theophilus⁶. From his writings, it appears that Cyril received a solid literary and theological education at Alexandria and was ordained by his uncle. His education was thorough and comprehensive. At a young age, he studied Greek and Latin. He was later trained in rhetoric, grammar, and biblical studies by the time he reached the Catechetical School of Alexandria. Against Julian, he demonstrates his familiarity with the classic works of Aristotle, Homer, Pythagoreas, Hermes and Euripides, which he probably studied in the Catechetical School. His knowledge of Latin allowed him to access St. Jerome's commentaries on the Holy Scripture and facilitated his later contacts with Rome.

Patriarch Theophilus, who knew the Alexandrian tradition of consecrating experienced and well educated clerics, he directed his young nephew Cyril to the monastic community at Nitria⁷ to study Scriptures⁸. The latter spent five years in the desert of Nitria, studying the Holy Scriptures under St. Macarius, St. Serapion of Thmuis, and St. Isidore of Pelusium. Cyril was Isidore's disciple. Specially, Isidore and Cyril lived in the surrounding area of Egypt for many years. Following the detailed studies of their lives, this finding is exported effortlessly that one knew each other. In our point of view, this acquaintance was not only social and superficial, but also deeper and more substantial both intellectually and socially⁹.

⁵ E. Artemi, "Saint Cyril of Alexandria and his relation to the governor Orestes and the philosopher Hypatia", *Ecclesiasticos Faros*, t. 78 (2007), 7-16, p. 7.

⁶ Socrates Scolasticus, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VII, 7, PG 67, 749C-762A. Theodoretus of Cyrrihus (Cyrus). *The Ecclesiastical History*, V, 40, PG 83, 1277D. Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopoulos, *The Ecclesiastical History*, XV, 14, PG 146, 1100A- 1104A. Mansi IV, 1464. Ed. Schwartz I, I, 3 p. 75. Chr. Papadopoulos, *History of the church of Alexandria*, Alexandria 1933, p. 264. A. Theodorou, *The christological vocabulary and the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoretus of Cyrrihus (Cyrus)*, Athens 1955, p. 37. Ch. Krikonis, «Cyril of Alexandria and his christological teaching», *Proceedings of the 19th. theological conference «Saint Cyril of Alexandria» Thessaloniki 1999*, p. 236. E. Artemi, "Saint Cyril of Alexandria and his relation to the governor Orestes and the philosopher Hypatia", *Ecclesiasticos Faros*, t. 78 (2007), 7-16, p. 7.

⁷ C. Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2006, p. 219.

⁸ B. Evetts, trans., *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria, vol. 1*, Patrologia Orientalis, ed. R. Graffin and E. Nau, Librairie de Paris, Paris 1907, p. 427.

⁹ E. Artemi, *Isidore's of Pelusium teaching for the Triune God and its relation to the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria*, Athens 2012, p. 33.



Isidore of Pelusium was considered the spiritual father of Cyril of Alexandria. Some researchers and scholars have expressed serious reservations if Cyril stayed or not as a monk near Isidore. Many of them converge on the view that the letters¹⁰ of St. Isidore of Pelusium, which were referred to a bishop, Cyril or Cyril of Alexandria, had consignee Patriarch Cyril himself¹¹. We cannot say with confidence that the name of Cyril was that of the patriarch of Alexandria in Isidore's letters. We just suppose, always based on their content that rather had as recipient the patriarch Cyril. The historian Evagrius Scholasticus supports that Isidore wrote letters to someone Cyril, but he doesn't address the question whether it was the patriarch of Alexandria, or for another priest namesake to Patriarch¹².

However, I suppose that the name of Cyril should be correlated with the person of the Patriarch of Alexandria for the simple reason that determinations (adjectives and nouns) with the same or different cases are not used near the name of Cyril. It was known who Cyril was¹³. But if another

¹⁰ Isidore of Pelusium, *Epistle II*, 127 - *To Cyril Episcopo*, PG 78, 565A-572C. *Epistle III*, 306 - *To Cyril Episcopo*, PG 78, 976B. *Epistle I*, 370 - *To Cyril of Alexandria*, PG 78, 392CD. *Epistle I*, 310 - *To Cyril of Alexandria*, PG 78, 361BC. *Epistle I*, 323 - *To Cyril of Alexandria*, PG 78, 369B. *Epistle I*, 497 - *To Cyril*, PG 78, 452CD. *Epistle I*, 25, 493 - *To Cyril*, PG 78, 197BC, 404B.

¹¹ Chr. Papadopoulos states that "Isidore's of Pelusium two of the epistles are referred not to Cyril of Alexandria but to another monk, who is called Cyril" (*Epistle I*, 25, 493 - *To Cyril*, PG 78, 197BC, 404B), Chr. Papadopoulos, *St. Cyril of Alexandria*, Alexandria 1933, p. 30-31. Opposite, Metropolitan Filaret Vafidis accepts that all letters of Isidore were addressed to Cyril of Alexandria. F. Vafeidis, *Cyril of Alexandria and the struggles against Nestorius*, Thessaloniki 1932, p. 7-8. Finally, P. Christou accepts that Cyril was a monk besides the Nitric desert and in Pelusium; for this reason it is very likely one of his letters to be addressed to someone Cyril, who could be the patriarch of Alexandria. Christou, *Patrology*, vol. 4, Thessaloniki 1989, p 339. E. Artemi, *Isidore's of Pelusium teaching for the Triune God and its relation to the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria*, Athens 2012, p. 33.

¹² Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History*, 1, 15, PG 86, 2464A: "Besides his numerous other writings, well stored with various profit, there are some addressed to the renowned Cyril; from which it appears that he flourished contemporary with the divine bishop. R. Ceiller, «Isidore de Péluse», *Histoire générale des auteurs sacrés et ecclésiastiques*, 13 (1937), 604.

¹³ E. Artemi, *Isidore's of Pelusium teaching for the Triune God and its relation to the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria*, Athens 2012, p. 34.



Cyril was referred, then an additional relevant information would be required to be attached¹⁴.

In addition, there is the information that Cyril and Isidore belonged to the same family. Isidore of Pelusium was Egyptian by birth and from a prominent Alexandrian family, which included Alexandrian Patriarchs Theophilus and Cyril. Isidore and Cyril knew each other on a personal level. The relative relationship of the father of Pelusium with Theophilus and Cyril¹⁵, patriarchs of Alexandria, was predicated on relative witness of Synaxarion¹⁶, of Menologion of Basilus the Porphyrogenitus¹⁷ the young and on writings of Fakoundos¹⁸, Bishop of Hermeianis.

This information isn't referred to any other source of their time nor the letters of the sacred Isidore to Cyril. An important testimony for the spiritual relationship between two men is supported to Isidore's letter to Cyril of Alexandria¹⁹. There, Isidore reported that Cyril called him "father"²⁰, revealing their spiritual relationship that had developed between them. Patriarch of Alexandria Cyril had stayed as a monk in Pelusium for a short time, before he succeeded his uncle Theophilus in the patriarchal throne²¹. There, probably,

¹⁴ Today, if someone talks about Francesco, everyone will understand the Pope. If you say the name Cleopatra, everyone will understand Cleopatra, the Pharaoh of Egypt, Cleopatra VII Philopator (in 69BC–30BC).

¹⁵ D. Ballanos, in his article with the title, "Isidore of Pelusium" in *Patristic Biblical Lexicon* 4 (1991) 146, accepts that Isidore originated from the same wealthy family as Cyril and his uncle Theophilus. For this reason Isidore could make sharp and strict criticism to them. Also, Isidore dared to make strict criticism and to other ecclesiastical and political lords of his time. As for him, He was only a monk and a priest in a monastery. Cf H. Leclercq, «St. Isidore of Pelusium», *OCE* 8 (1910) 185-186.

¹⁶ According to the Alexandrian Synaxarion, *CSCO* 78, p 489 the Arab Synaxarion Jacobean, Coptic Version: PO 56, p 814, Isidore of El Pharama otherwise Pelusium was relative with the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Theophilus and Cyril.

¹⁷ Basilus the Porphyrogenitus the young, *Menologion Greek*, 2, PG 117, 296A.

¹⁸ Facundi Hermiansis episcopi, *Pro Defensione trium capitulorum concilii Chalcedonensis*. Libri XII Ad Justinianum Imperatorem, PL 67, 573-574

¹⁹ Isidore of Pelusium, *Epist. I*, 370 – *Cyril of Alexandria*, PG 78, 392CD.

²⁰ *Ibid*, PG 78, 392C.

²¹ Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Feast Letter*, W. H. Burns, *Lettres Festales*, t. I, SC 372, Paris 1991, p. 17-18.



he met Pelusiote father, and became his disciple²², Otherwise how can it be explained that the supreme spiritual leader in the hierarchy of Alexandria called a simple monk as “father”²³? Later, in the same letter, Isidore emphasized that he considered himself as the “son”²⁴ of holy Cyril. It is clearly that Isidore didn’t feel as Cyril’s son because of his age, because he was born around 360 to 370 and Cyril around 380 to 390, but because of the position was held by each of the both in the priesthood hierarchy. Cyril, successor to the Evangelist Mark in the episcopal throne of Alexandria²⁵, was the spiritual leader of the specific Patriarchate. He had the responsibility and supervision of all clerics and monks of Egypt²⁶, besides Isidore.

Therefore, did Cyril experience the ascetic life in the desert of Nitria? As a desert resident, he was required to experience and practice good knowledge of Scriptures, the asceticism, prayer and spirituality of the desert fathers²⁷. These days of his life will have a continuous appearance in his writings and his commentaries. The desert monks had an esteemed status in the Church of Alexandria and when Nestorius’ teaching and ideas began traveling to Egypt,

²² P. Évieux considers this conclusion as exaggerated. He argues that Cyril called Isidore as "father", not because he had stayed as a monk near Isidore, but he did so because he was stimulated by courtesy. Isidore was a venerable and wise monk. He had the reputation of one of the best interpreter of the Scriptures and for this reason he was addressed with this way by Cyril. Moreover, Cyril frequently used the word "father" in his addresses to venerable monks, because it was common to be used as a simple and common type of courtesy among clergy of that time. Cf P. Évieux, *Isidore de Péluse*, TH 99, Paris 1995, p. 83.

²³ Isidore of Pelusium, *Epist. I, 370 – Cyril of Alexandria*, PG 78, 392CD. The fact that Cyril called Isidore "father" and in conjunction with the word "believe (eikas)" in the Isidore’s letter II, 127 – Cyril Episcopo, PG 78, 565B, make C. Fouskas to believe in conclusion that Cyril had replied to letters of Isidore. Unfortunately the reply letters of Cyril were lost through the ages. Cf C. Fouskas, *St. Isidore of Pelusium – His life and works*, Athens 1970, p 45, footnote 133.

²⁴ Isidore of Pelusium, *Epist. I, 370 – Cyril of Alexandria*, PG 78, 392C.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ P. Évieux, *Isidore de Péluse*, TH 99, Paris 1995, p. 83

²⁷ L. M. Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, A New Testament Exegete. His commentary on the gospel of John*, Gorgias Dissertations 29, Early Christian Studies 7, publ. Gorgias Press, New Jersey 2007, p. 3.



Cyril sent letter²⁸ to the monks first with explanations for his attitude to Nestorius, explaining the orthodox faith²⁹.

After finishing his studies, he probably became a disciple of his uncle, Patriarch Theophilus, as testified by St. Jerome to Rufinus, and he loved Theophilus very much³⁰. He stayed in the patriarch's cell, where he continued his study of the Fathers and won the heart of his uncle. His uncle was certainly present at the Council of Constantinople in 381, during which St. Cyril was a mere lad. It is uncertain whether at this time the *Διδασκαλεῖον* was still open, since it began to languish after the departure of St. Didymus. In 403, Theophilus ordained him a reader in the Church of Alexandria and he began his formal ministry. He accompanied Theophilus to the Synod of the Oak in July of 403, during which St. John Chrysostom³¹ was deposed³².

²⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter to the monks in Egypt*, PG 77, 9-40. ACO 1.1.1.

²⁹ L. M. Farag, *St. Cyril of Alexandria, A New Testament Exegete. His commentary on the gospel of John*, Gorgias Dissertations 29, Early Christian Studies 7, publ. Gorgias Press, New Jersey 2007, p. 3.

³⁰ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History*, 7, 7. PG 67, 749C-762A. Theodoretus Cyrus, *Ecclesiastic History*, 5, 40 PG 83, 1277D. Nichephorus Callistus, *Ecclesiastic History*, 15,14 PG 146, 1100A- 1104A. Mansi IV, 1464. Ed. Schwartz I, I, 3 p. 75. Chr. Papadopoulos, *History of the church of Alexandria*, Alexandria 1933, p. 264. A. Theodorou, *The Christological terminology and teaching of Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoretus Cyrus*, Athens 1955, p. 37. Chr. Krikonis, «Cyril of Alexandria and his christological teaching», proceedings of 19th theological conference with subject «Saint Cyril of Alexandria», Thessaloniki 1999, p. 236.

³¹ «Cyril learned to overcome his prejudice against the memory of the great John Chrysostom. Theophilus, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and uncle of Cyril, was an antagonist of John, and presided in a council in judgment of him. Cyril thus found himself in a circle antagonistic to John Chrysostom, and involuntarily acquired a prejudice against him. Isidore of Pelusium repeatedly wrote to Cyril and urged him to include the name of the great Father of the Church into the diptychs of the saints, but Cyril would not agree. Once in a dream he saw a wondrous temple, in which the Mother of God was surrounded by a host of angels and saints, in whose number was John Chrysostom. When Cyril wanted to approach the All-Holy Lady and venerate her, John Chrysostom would not let him. The Theotokos asked John to forgive Cyril for having sinned against him through ignorance. Seeing that John hesitated, the Mother of God said, "Forgive him for my sake, since he has labored much for my honor, and has glorified me among the people calling me Theotokos." John answered, "By your intercession, Lady, I do forgive him," and then he embraced Cyril with love. Cyril repented that he had maintained anger against the great saint of God. Having convened all the Egyptian bishops, he celebrated a solemn feast in honor of John Chrysostom», ³¹ E. Artemi, *Isidore's of Pelusium teaching for the Triune God and its relation to the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria*, Athens 2012, p. 38 cf. Nickiforos Callistes -



After Cyril's return in Alexandria, he was tonsured a reader by his uncle, Theophilus, in the Church of Alexandria and under his uncle's guidance advanced in knowledge and position³³. Cyril became lector in the church with a bright future in ministry.

II. Cyril of Alexandria, a powerful archbishop on the ecclesiastical throne of Alexandria

In the early part of the fifth century, the great city of Alexandria in Egypt was still nearly one-half pagan, and the Jewish population also was very large. No populace in the Empire was so turbulent and seditious, and therefore the emperors had invested the patriarchs with extensive civil authority, although the force at the prelates' disposal was not always sufficient to repress the disorders of the mob. In the year 413, St. Cyril was raised to the patriarchate, and was almost immediately involved in difficulty with Orestes, the imperial prefect. Often he conjured this officer on the Gospels to put an end to this enmity for the good of the city. When bishop Theophilus died in AD 412, Cyril was made the next bishop of Alexandria on 18 October 412, though not without controversy.

He succeeded his uncle Theophilus, following a contest with Archdeacon Timothy for the patriarchal throne. As new Archbishop, he severely criticized social inequality and callousness of the rich. He found fault with the political power to tolerance in phenomena of injustice against the poor, fraud, perjury, in seemingly dissolute life³⁴. He did not hesitate to oppose the political establishment, which guided citizens of Alexandria, and generally of Egypt to a miserable living and exacerbated social inequality between rich and poor³⁵. Cyril maintained a harsh stance towards the Gentiles, because he regarded

Xanthopoulos, *Ecclesiastical History*, XIV, 28, PG 146, 1149D-1152A. George Kedrinou, *Synopsis of Histories*, PG 121, 625BC. Athanasios Parios, *Collections of divine dogmata of our Faith*, Lipson 1806, p. 312.

³² Palladius, *Dialogus*, XVI; Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 7; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, VIII, 12.

³³ J. McGuckin, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: The Christological Controversy. Its History, Theology and Texts*, publ. Brill, Leiden 1994, p. 5.

³⁴ . E. Artemi, "Saint Cyril of Alexandria and his relation to the governor Orestes and the philosopher Hypatia", *Ecclesiasticos Faros*, t. 78 (2007), 7-16, p. 8.

³⁵ Chr. Krikonis, «Cyril of Alexandria and his christological teaching», proceedings of 19th theological conference with subject «Saint Cyril of Alexandria», Thessaloniki 1999, p. 240.



them as being responsible for the tendency of several Christians to be involved in sorcery, astrology and not astronomy, and in general for remaining attached to superstitions, biases and paganism. In order to wipe out the remnants of paganism, the saint cast out devils from an ancient pagan temple and built a church on the spot, and the relics of the Holy Unmercenaries Cyrus and John were transferred into it. According to Socrates Scholasticus, Patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria and Cyril's uncle, had taken strict measures against gentiles and had destroyed the Serapeion and the Mithreon. The reason for this was that the idolaters were attacking Christians, which is why the former were afraid of the Emperor Theodosius' wrath³⁶. Pope Theophilus «attempted to turn one of the temples of the city into a church. After a resistance from pagan side, which led to street-fighting and much destruction, Theophilus obtained the approval of the emperor Theodosius I for closing all the temples, including the Serapeum»³⁷.

Cyril's initial plan was to fight all those who constituted danger to the established Christian Church that time³⁸. At this point, he was accused by many opponents such as Nestorius as an ill-tempered, quarrelsome, hasty, and violent man³⁹, but that is rebutted if someone studied his completely public action carefully. His purpose was to shield Christian Church from any appeal, any threat, which cloned the faithful and not its foundations, because it has as a head the enfleshed God's Word and it will be eternal.

Cyril began to exert his authority by causing the churches of the Novatians in the city to be shut up, and their sacred vessels and ornaments to be seized; an action censured by Socrates, a favourer of those heretics. Socrates was the main historical and objective source for the information about Cyril of Alexandria as Bishop. Socrates' writings are especially weighty, given that Socrates belonged to the heresy of Novatianism. This heresy was one that

³⁶ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History*, 5,16-17.

³⁷ R. MacLeod, ed., *The Library of Alexandria. Centre of Learning in the Ancient World*, L.B. Tauris, London, New York 2000, p. 73

³⁸ Aik. Christophilopoulou, *Byzantine History*, vol. I, publ. Vantias, Thessaloniki 1996, 4th ed., p. 206.

³⁹ J. A. McGuckin, «Cyril of Alexandria: Bishop and Pastor», in *Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria, A critical Appreciation*, ed. Th. G. Weinandy, D. A. Keating, T & T Clark, London – N. York 2003, p. 205-206.



Cyril had fought against passionately⁴⁰. Also, Socrates had lived in the same era as Cyril of Alexandria.

He (=Cyril) had quite bad relations with Orestes the eparch of Alexandria. Orestes was presented as a Christian striving to maintain delicate balances between the Judean, Gentile and Christian inhabitants of Alexandria. Orestes had most probably acceded to Christianity out of political interest. Socrates Scholasticus mentioned that by many Christians of Alexandria, Orestes was referred to as “Sacrificer and Hellene”, implying that he was an idolater on account of his unjust behaviour towards Christians. The same historian further mentioned the hatred that Orestes felt towards Christian bishops⁴¹. A fact, which was one of the causes for the beginning of bad relations between Orestes and Cyril, was about the Jews⁴², whom Cyril drove from the city, which housed one of the largest Jewish communities of the Roman Empire. Governor Orestes with Cyril disagreed about some of his actions.

However, Cyril paid no heed and the Jews were expelled. The Jews had the overt support of the prefect Orestes and they practiced brutal usury towards Christians. The latter could not meet the depreciation of loans or generally debts and because of them; they became slaves to Jews and confiscated their property. For this reason, Cyril believed that the Jews were more dangerous

⁴⁰ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History* 7, 7. PG 67, 752A.

⁴¹ Socrates, *Ecclesiastic History* 7, 7. PG 67, 764A.

⁴² “About this same time it happened that the Jewish inhabitants were driven out of Alexandria by Cyril the bishop on the following account. The Alexandrian public is more delighted with tumult than any other people: and if at any time it should find a pretext, breaks forth into the most intolerable excesses; for it never ceases from its turbulence without bloodshed. It happened on the present occasion that a disturbance arose among the populace, not from a cause of any serious importance, but out of an evil that has become very popular in almost all cities, viz. a fondness for dancing exhibitions. In consequence of the Jews being disengaged from business on the Sabbath, and spending their time, not in hearing the Law, but in theatrical amusements, dancers usually collect great crowds on that day, and disorder is almost invariably produced. And although this was in some degree controlled by the governor of Alexandria, nevertheless the Jews continued opposing these measures. And although they are always hostile toward the Christians they were roused to still greater opposition against them on account of the dancers. When therefore Orestes the prefect was publishing an edict -- for so they are accustomed to call public notices -- in the theatre for the regulation of the shows, some of the bishop Cyril's party were present to learn the nature of the orders about to be issued”, *Ibid*, 7, 15-PG 67, 762C.



than pagans, because the first threatened throughout the social status of Christians and the second they were doing the work of Satan. Some of the tensions between Jews and Christians were prompted by an alleged slaughter of Christians at the hands of Alexandrian Jews who lured Christians into the streets at night claiming that the church was on fire. Socrates describes the events as follows:

Cyril was accompanied by an immense crowd of people, going to their synagogues—for so they call their house of prayer—took them away from the synagogues and drove the Jews out of the city, permitting the multitude to plunder their goods. Thus, the Jews who had inhabited the city from the time of Alexander the Macedonian were expelled from it, stripped of all they possessed, and dispersed some in one direction and some in another⁴³.

Cyril had judged Orestes for his various incongruities, based on the Holy Bible. To refute Cyril's accusations as well as the other Christians', the Eparch stressed that he himself was also a Christian, who had been baptized by Atticus of Constantinople⁴⁴. We must mention of the tortures that Orestes had imposed on Hierax⁴⁵, a confidant of Cyril⁴⁶. The latter was charged with the canonization of the monk Ammonius, who threw a stone and hit seriously Orestes in head.

The truth was that canonization of Ammonius⁴⁷ was not a real fact. Ammonius was a monk from Nitria⁴⁸. In the region of Nitria there were about

⁴³ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History*, VII, 8.

⁴⁴ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History*, VII, 13, PG 67, 761A-C.

⁴⁵ "Hierax, a teacher of the rudimental branches of literature, and one who was a very enthusiastic listener of the bishop Cyril's sermons, and made himself conspicuous by his forwardness in applauding. When the Jews observed this person in the theatre, they immediately cried out that he had come there for no other purpose than to excite sedition among the people", Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 7, 13-34. PG 67, 761C-764C.

⁴⁷ Cf. Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History*, (Hierax)VII, 13, PG 67, 761B as well as Nicephorus Callistus, *Ecclesiastic History* XIV, 14 –PG 146; 1101 and (Ammonius) Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History*, VII, 14, PG 67, 765 as well as Nicephorus Callistus, *Ecclesiastic History* XIV, 14-15, PG 146; 1102ss.

⁴⁸ John, Bishop of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 84. 87-88.



five hundred monks, who fervently upheld the Christian teaching⁴⁹. Cyril had lived monastically with them for quite a number of years, as we said before. Perhaps it was to them that the Alexandrian Patriarch's passion to defend the Christian teaching can be attributed. On account of Ammonius' verbal attack on the Eparch Orestes and the stone that he threw at him, he was arrested, tortured, and put to death. Cyril called him a martyr and buried him with honours, but he didn't proclaim him a saint. In Orthodoxy, saints are proclaimed by God, and not by people.

In those days, there appeared in Alexandria a female philosopher, a pagan named Hypatia, the daughter of the mathematician Theon, and she was devoted at all times to magic, astrolabes and instruments of music, and she beguiled many people through (her) Satanic wiles⁵⁰. And the governor of the city honored her exceedingly; for she had beguiled him through her magic. And he ceased attending church as had been his custom. But he went once under circumstances of danger⁵¹. And he not only did this, but he drew many believers to her, and he himself received the unbelievers at his house. In addition, on a certain day when they were making merry over a theatrical exhibition connected with dancers⁵², the governor of the city published an edict regarding the public exhibitions in the city of Alexandria: and all the inhabitants of the city had assembled in the theater.

Hypatia was born in 365 A.D., at the time that Cyril became Patriarch, and she would have been nearing the age of fifty. This was quite an advanced age, both for men and women during that time; subsequently, the myth of a young and appealing woman, which had acquired flesh and blood thanks to certain pseudo-historians of mediaeval times as Damascius⁵³, is debunked. Furthermore, it was a well-known fact to all the inhabitants of Alexandria

⁴⁹ J. Chapman, "St. Cyril of Alexandria", *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. (26 January, 2014), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04592b.htm>.

⁵⁰ John, Bishop of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 84. 87-103.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Damascius (458 – after 538) cf. P. Athanassiadi, "Persecution and Response in late Paganism. The evidence of Damascius", In: *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 113 (1993), p. 1–29.



during that time that she was the main reason that Orestes could not achieve excellent relations with Cyril⁵⁴.

There is no mention whatsoever in historical sources of that time that Cyril had ever referred to Hypatia as a sorcerer; on the contrary, he appeared to have a great respect for her scientific knowledge. It is worth noting that many Christians were also students of Hypatia - for example Synesios, Bishop of Cyrene⁵⁵, his brother Evoptios of Ptolemais, perhaps Isidore of Pelusium and others. Many scholars are influenced by Damascius' writings and regard Cyril as being the moral perpetrator of Hypatia's death; however, neither Socrates the Scholastic nor any other historical source of that era ascribes such an act to the Patriarch of Alexandria.

If there had been even the slightest suspicion that Cyril had indeed participated in the assassination of the philosopher, it would have been exploited by Nestorius of Constantinople in the theological dispute that he had with Cyril. Furthermore, his assorted enemies would have also made references to it. The Patriarch of Alexandria was proclaimed a saint by the Triune God, not only for his life but also for his theology on the incarnation of the second Person of the Holy Trinity, as well as for his defense of the term "Theotokos"⁵⁶ for the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁴ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History*, 7, 15. PG 67, 768B. Nicephoros Kallistus, *Ecclesiastic History* 14,16, PG 146, 1105C-1108B.

⁵⁵ C. Lacombrade, *Synesios de Cyrene, hellene et chretien*, Paris 1951, p.54-55. An. Kalogiratou, "The Portrayal of Socrates by Damascius". In: *Phronimon: Journal of the South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities* 7 (1) 2006, pp. 45-54.

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⁵⁶ E. Artemi, "The rejection of the term Theotokos by Nestorius Constantinople and the refutation of his teaching by Cyril of Alexandria", *De Medio Aevo* 2 (2012/2) ISSN-e 2255-5889, p. 125-149.

<http://capire.es/eikonimago/index.php/demedioaevo/article/view/55/96>. Also, E. Artemi, "Cyril of Alexandria's critique of the term Theotokos by Nestorius Constantinople", *Acta Theologica* 2 (2012) 1-16, *Acta theologica* vol.32, no.2, Bloemfontein Dec.2012, University of the Free State, Print version ISSN 1015-8758. E. Artemi, "The Virgin Mary, Theotokos, and Christ, true God and true man. The mystery of Incarnation according to Cyril of Alexandria", *Mirabilia* 17 (2013/2) 52-74, Jun/Dez 2013/ISSN 1676-5818, <http://www.revistamirabilia.com/issues/mirabilia-17-2013-2>. E. Artemi, "The Modulation of the term THEOTOKOS from the Fathers of 2nd Century to Cyril of



Hypatia's murder was the result of the political jealousy, which at that time prevailed. "Since Hypatia had frequent interviews with Orestes, the Christian populace calumniously thought that it was she who prevented Orestes from being reconciled to the bishop. Some of them, therefore, hurried away by a fierce and bigoted zeal, and led by reader named Peter, waited her returning home in ambush. They dragged her from her carriage, and took her to the church called Caesareum, where they completely stripped her, and then murdered her with tiles. After tearing her body in pieces, they took her mangled limbs to a place called Cinaron, and there burnt them"⁵⁷.

The murder of Hypatia took place on 15th March 415. Cyril was not accused for the murder of Hypatia by anyone at his time⁵⁸, only some centuries later this accusation was charged to Saint Cyril by some neoplatonic philosophers⁵⁹.

Alexandria", *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, vol. 2, issue 1, pp. 27-30, Month January – March 2014, available at www.researchpublish.com, ISSN 2348-3164 (online). E. Artemi, "The Christological Controversy between Nestorius of Constantinople and Cyril of Alexandria", *VOX PATRUM* 32 (2012), t. 57, 34-51, Lublin Poland.

⁵⁷ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History*, 7, 15. PG 67, 768B.

⁵⁸ McGuckin writes: "Socrates says that this event 'brought no small reproach on Cyril and the church of the Alexandrians'. Some, most famously Gibbon who calls the murder 'an exploit of Cyril's,' blatantly misinterpret this remark when they consider the murder as an act in which he was personally involved...The pagan philosopher Damascius also recounted the incident specifically attributing personal blame and complicity to Cyril, but he was writing 130 years after the events, and his whole account is evidently prejudiced from the start and suffused with a bitter hatred of the way in which Christianity had suppressed his profession and way of life. Following Gibbon, Charles Kingsley, with more regard for romance than fact in his novel 'Hypatia', lost no opportunity to paint Cyril as the evil villain of the piece, and the mythic caricature he provided became fashionable. More recently, Wickham is more just to Cyril, and certainly on the grounds of deeper scholarly judgment, when he summarizes the early crises of his administration as follows: 'The facts are not to be denied. The picture they yield is not one of a fanatical priest, hungry for power, heading a howling mob, but of an untried leader attempting, and initially failing, to master popular forces', J. A. McGuckin, *Saint Cyril of Alexandria and the Christological Controversy*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004, p. 14-15.

⁵⁹ J. McGuckin says that "the irresponsible condemnation of Cyril's moral character is found especially in the romantic nonsense pedaled as history in Charles Kingsley's novel Hypatia. This latter cost Cyril his volume in the Victorian series of patristic translations into English, such as the Nicene and Post – Nicene Fathers. C. Core and H. M. Relton exemplify those who, while versed in early in early Christian doctrine, advocated a Kenotic- Humanist Christology. Cyril then was one of the victims of a sea – change transpiring in the face of Anglican Christology in the generation after the Oxford Movement and in the time of that



Some researchers though that responsible for Hypatia's murder were the parabalani but this is not correct. It is needful to distinguish between the Parabalani⁶⁰ and the Christian mob whom slayed Hypatia. The Parabalani were not involved in her murder, but as we shall see, blame was wholly laid upon the Christian mob after the murder. Socrates Scholasticus underlines that the Parabalani were prone to social unrest⁶¹.

Cyril was a worthy successor to the Patriarchal Throne of the Great Athanasius. He tried in every way to bring peace among the people of Alexandria. However, this did not make him cringe towards any Political power. On the contrary, he did not hesitate to speak out when he saw that the things of the Church and other Christians Alexandria were threatened. His work and reputation were quickly spread throughout the Empire. His love for the Church was his shield against any threat from where and whether originated⁶².

In later years, he did not hesitate to oppose with vigor in doctrinal falsehoods of Patriarch Nestorius of Constantinople. He reached the point of seeing by himself Emperor Theodosius⁶³, despite the obstacles he had to face up and

church's increasing self-alignment with the continental Liberal Protestant agenda", J. A. McGuckin, «Cyril of Alexandria: Bishop and Pastor», in *Theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria, A critical Appreciation*, ed. Th. G. Weinandy, D. A. Keating, T & T Clark, London – N. York 2003, p. 208.

⁶⁰ A note on the epithet Parabalani: "From the Greek meaning "to venture" or "to expose one's self," the name denotes members of a brotherhood which in the early church, first at Alexandria and then at Constantinople, nursed the sick and buried the dead. They risked their lives in their exposure to contagious diseases, and probably originated during an epidemic. They were also a kind of bodyguard for the bishop. Their number was never large: the Codex Theodosianus (416) restricted the enrollment to 500 in Alexandria, with a later increase to 600, while in Constantinople their number was reduced from 1,100 to 950, according to the Codex Justinianus. Chosen by the bishop and under his control...they were listed among the clergy and enjoyed those privileges. Their presence at public gatherings or in theatres was legally forbidden, but they did take part in public life. It appears they are not mentioned after Justinian's time". J.D. Douglas, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church: Revised Edition*. Michigan, 1978, p. 747.

⁶¹ Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastic History*, VII, 13, PG 67, 761A

⁶² E. Artemi, "Saint Cyril of Alexandria and his relation to the governor Orestes and the philosopher Hypatia", *Ecclesiasticos Faros*, t. 78 (2007), 7-16, p. 14.

⁶³ Cyril transformed as a beggar and by this way, he appeared to the Emperor without the guards noted him.



report Emperor the delusions of Nestorius, which were thorn for the Christology of the Church. Of course, he was not merely content to see the Emperor. He had written epistles to the queens⁶⁴, who had more dynamic character than the Emperor did. Finally, he organized the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus and achieved the condemnation of Nestorianism. His vindication came with the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedony in 451, seven years since his death. There, his teaching was recognized as the very important for the Christianity. Some centuries later, he was honored with the title of “doctor Ecclesiae”.

Conclusions

Socrates Scholasticus was one of the most important historical source for Cyril of Alexandria. He wrote a seven book *Ecclesiastical History* that continued the history of Eusebius Caesarea. Socrates' Ecclesiastical History covers religious and secular controversies and uses a wide variety of sources, including oral ones. Because of this source, we learn about Cyril of Alexandria. The latter was very significant Bishop as Athanasius the Great.

Pastors like Cyril showed that the bishops of the Church should not have as their preoccupation only the ecclesiastical things, but they should stand vigil custodians of national and religious interests of the country, raising his voice even to the Emperor himself, or to any governor to protect him from intentional or unintentional faults. Cyril tried to become a good archbishop. Unfortunately, some bad facts of that period of Cyril were charged to him. Generally, “Cyril of Alexandria had been the victim of a good deal of European scholarly myopia” as professor McGuckin writes.

Through the history of Socrates, we tried to show that Cyril was not the assassin of Hypatia the Philosopher and he tried to have good relations with the perfect Orestes, but with no success. Socrates does not suggest that Cyril himself was to blame for the Hypatia's murder. Damascius, indeed, accused him, but he is a late authority and a hater of Christians. In addition, he in all attempts to rule his turbulent church appeared himself an able and strategic thinker. He tried to protect his Christians from the paganism and Jewish teaching. He took the characteristic titles of “the Pillar of faith” and “Seal of

⁶⁴ Cyril of Alexandria, *Oration for the real fide to the most pious queens*, PG 76, 1201- 1420.



all the Fathers” for his teaching for the enfleshed Word of God and for the introduction of the term “Theotokos” for the Holy Virgin Mother of Jesus.

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