

## *The Relationship of the Patriarch Photius to the Empress Theodora*

I HAD almost written at the head of this essay 'Photius and Theodora,' when I bethought me that such a title might misguide some one into looking here for something new on that baffling and alluring problem concerning the great empress of the sixth century, and on the subordinate problems touching her friend Antonina and Antonina's son Photius. But it is with a much greater Photius than the son of Belisarius and Antonina that I am now concerned, and with a much lesser Theodora than the wife of Justinian. The point which I propose to consider is trifling compared with any of the questions suggested by the 'Secret History;' it is merely the exact degree of relationship in which the scholar and archbishop Photius stood to Theodora, the wife of Theophilus, and to her brother, the Caesar Bardas.

In the records of the reigns of Michael III, the last ruler of the Amorion dynasty, and Basil I, the founder of the Macedonian dynasty, a curious drama, partly ecclesiastical, partly political, in which the pious Ignatius and the learned Photius played principal parts, stands out prominently. Each of the two rivals, Ignatius and Photius, was patriarch twice. In the reign of Michael, Ignatius was deposed to make way for Photius; and in the reign of Basil, Photius was deposed to make way for Ignatius, who was reinstated. Then, on the death of his rival, Photius became patriarch once more.

It is a curious coincidence that both these prelates had the honour of being related to imperial houses. No tie could be closer than that which bound Ignatius to Michael Rangabé—the first *Michael* who ever wore the Roman purple; for the eunuch who succeeded Methodius on the patriarchal chair was no other than a son of the curopalates who succeeded Stauracius on the imperial throne. There is no question about this relationship; it is stated clearly, along with many other details about the family of Michael I, by Nicetas the Paphlagonian, who wrote the life of the holy Ignatius.

On the other hand, the tie which connected Photius with the Amorion house is not by any means so clear; and, in any case, it

was far from being so close. It was not a tie of consanguinity; it was merely a connexion resting on the marriage of a kinsman of Photius with a sister-in-law of the Emperor Theophilus. But who this kinsman of Photius was, it is difficult to determine. For, through an unfortunate accident, the passage in which this affinity is recorded has suffered a corruption, and doubts have been felt among the learned as to its restoration.

Those who have worked at the Greek sources of the ninth and tenth century know what a large debt we owe to the grandson of the great Basil for his indefatigable industry in the compilation of historical materials. In the history of Michael III, written by the order of Constantine Porphyrogennetos and revised by him, there is a chapter<sup>1</sup> dealing with the kinsfolk of Theodora, the wife of Theophilus and the mother of Michael III. Theodora had two brothers, Bardas the Caesar, and Petronas, *Stratēgos* of the Thracian theme; and she had three sisters, Sophia and Irene and Kalomaria.<sup>2</sup> Sophia married one Constantine Babutzikos, and the 'Fair Mary' became the wife of Arsaber, who won the dignity of patrician and afterwards the office of *magister (officiorum)*. It was the marriage of Irene that connected Photius with the family of an empress. Later Greek historians of the eleventh century, Scylitzes and Cedrenus who copied Scylitzes, tell us plainly that 'Irene married Sergius who was brother of Photius.'<sup>3</sup> But Hirsch has made it clear that their statement is inconsistent with established facts.<sup>4</sup> This sister of Theodora soon became a widow, and then went to live with her august sister in the imperial palace on the acropolis of Constantinople. If her husband Sergius was a brother of Photius, how came it that Photius wrote letters to his brother Sergius at a time when he already occupied the archiepiscopal chair and Theodora had been driven from the palace to a lowlier dwelling-place?<sup>5</sup> It is clear, then, that the eleventh century writers misapprehended the fact recorded in an older source; and we may now turn back and see what stands in our text of the history of Michael III, which was composed in the tenth century by the orders of the Seventh Constantine.

ἀδελφαὶ δὲ τρεῖς, ἥ τε εὐφύμῳ οὕτω καλουμένη ὀνόματι Καλομυρία καὶ Σοφία καὶ ἡ Εἰρήνη. ἀλλ' ἡ μὲν Σοφία εἰς κοίτην ἐδίδοτο Κωνσταντίνῳ τῷ

<sup>1</sup> *Scriptores post Theophanem*, ed. Bonn., pp. 174, 175.

<sup>2</sup> Cedrenus calls her simply *Μαρία* (ii. p. 161, ed. Bonn.).

<sup>3</sup> Cedrenus, *ib.* Εἰρήνη δὲ Σεργίῳ πατρικίῳ ἀδελφῷ τυγχάνοντι Φωτίου τοῦ μετὰ ταῦτα πατριάρχου. The Greek text of Scylitzes has never yet been printed, and we are obliged to have recourse to the Latin translation of Gabius; p. 27b, line 22: '*filias tres Sophia, Maria, et Irene . . . Irene vero Sergio patricio fratri Photi qui postmodum ad patriarchatus sedem ascendit.*'

<sup>4</sup> *Byzantinische Studien*, p. 216, note.

<sup>5</sup> Theodora was constrained to leave the palace in 856, Photius became patriarch in 857.

κατὰ τὸν Βαβούτζικον, ἡ δὲ Καλομαρία Ἀρσαβήρ, τῷ, τῇ, καὶ ταῦτα μὲν πατρικίῳ ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ μαγίστρῳ, \* τῷ Εἰρήνῃς τῆς μητρός τοῦ μετὰ ταῦτα τὸν πατρι-  
 αρχικὸν θρόνον ἀντιλαβομένου Φωτίου ἀδελφῷ. μεθ' οὗ καὶ δύο τεκνώσασα  
 παῖδας Στέφανόν τε τὸν μάγιστρον, τὸν τοῦ πατρικίου Κωνσταντίνου καὶ  
 στρατηγού Σικελίας, τὸν τοῦ Κοντομύτου γαμβρόν (ἐκείθεν γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ ἡ  
 τοῦ Κοντομύτου ἐκκληρώθη προσηγορία) τὴν συγγένειαν πρὸς τὸν πατριάρχην  
 ἔσωζε Φώτιον. ἑξάδελφοι γὰρ οἱ δύο μάγιστροι οὗτοι τοῦτου ἐτύγχανον.

Schlosser, the historian of the Iconoclasts,<sup>6</sup> and Hergenröther, in his exhaustive work on Photius,<sup>7</sup> attempt to restore the corruption in this passage with the help of Cedrenus. It is clear, at least, that ἡ δὲ Εἰρήνη (or Εἰρήνη δέ) has fallen out after μαγίστρῳ, in the place which I have marked by an asterisk; and it is almost as clear that Scylitzes found in the text which was before him the name of Irene's husband, Σεργίῳ. But, as we have seen, this Sergius, whoever he was, was not the brother of Photius, and therefore we have to reject the proposal of Schlosser to omit the words Εἰρήνης τῆς μητρός and insert ἡ δὲ Εἰρήνη Σεργίῳ before τῷ. The fact is that if we make the insertion and do not make the omission we shall be much nearer the truth. Combes simply inserted ἡ δὲ Εἰρήνη, and thus it stands in the Bonn text; let us improve the reading of Combes by adding Σεργίῳ, and we shall probably have what the anonymous author wrote and his imperial master revised.

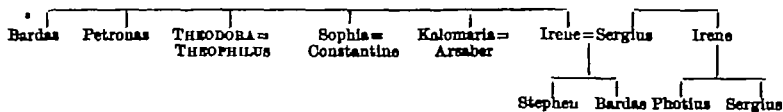
The relationship is simple enough. Irene, the mother of Photius, had a brother named Sergius; and this Sergius married another Irene, the sister of Theodora. Of this marriage were born two sons, Stephen (*magister*) and Bardas (*magister*). Thus Stephen and Bardas were first cousins (ἑξάδελφοι) of Photius.<sup>8</sup>

Here we touch another objection to the theory that the husband of Irene was a brother of the patriarch. In that case, Stephen and Bardas would have been nephews of Photius. But ἑξάδελφος does not mean a nephew, it means a first cousin, and of this fact Hirsch does not seem to have been aware.

The corruption in the text was perhaps due to the homoioteleuton of μαγίστρῳ and Σεργίῳ. When a scribe had written μαγίστρῳ, his eye fell on the last letter of Σεργίῳ instead of the last letter of μαγίστρῳ, and he went on to τῷ, omitting the intervening words. Or perhaps the circumstance that Photius' mother had the same name as her sister-in-law may have co-operated in causing the textual error. There is certainly no reason for rejecting

<sup>6</sup> *Geschichte der bilderstürmenden Kaiser*, p. 594.

<sup>7</sup> *Photius' Leben und Schriften*, i. 386.



the word *Εἰρήνης* before *τῆς μητρός*. In no other source is the name of Photius' mother recorded, and I see not why we should not on the strength of this passage conclude that she was called Irene. It certainly seems more probable that of an *Εἰρήνη* and an *Εἰρήνης*, occurring close together, one should have fallen out, than that *Εἰρήνη* should have been transposed from its proper place and become *Εἰρήνης*. But, however the corruption may have been caused, our data point, I think, to the conclusion that Photius had an uncle, as well as a brother, named Sergius; that this uncle married Irene; and that thus the patriarch's aunt by marriage was the sister of the Empress Theodora and the Caesar Bardas.

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