Chapter VII
Photios and Classicism

One feels a lively curiosity, mingled with some trepidation, in approaching this figure who is counted among the greatest in the history of Byzantium, and who perhaps most truly represents Byzantine civilisation. From the outset the platitudes about Photios' role in a renaissance of the antique must be considered carefully. He was a complex figure, and the inadequacy of our documentation and also the nature of the works devoted to him do not help us to understand him better. Studies of him are all too often inspired by sentiments which are pro- or anti-Roman or pro- or anti-Latin. Let me state my own opinion straight away. He was the defender of orthodoxy, the adversary of all those who to a greater or less extent deviated from the true faith, and the inspirer of Byzantium's great missionary work. In short it was the patriarch who, in the final reckoning, prevailed. But the man had enormous talent, perhaps genius, and an astonishing output as a result of his wide-ranging interests. Consequently, from our point of view, too, he takes on an importance that is directly related to his exceptional qualities. He dominated this great ninth century in Byzantium. With the reigns of Theophilos, Michael III and Basil I, it already contained the seed for the brilliant heights reached in the following century.

But we should no longer, and this is the great innovation, present the problems in terms of conflict. While at the frontiers the campaigns of Petronas and Bardas marked the decisive turning-point in the life-and-death struggle Byzantium fought against the expansionism of Islam, internally the iconoclastic crisis was drawing to a close. I have shown that in one sense it ended with the victory of a form of Hellenism, a form of humanism. At the same time there was a great

1. Part of my seminar at the Ecole des Hautes-Etudes, in 1964-1965, was devoted to Photios: cf. the Annuaires of the 4th Section, 1965-66, pp. 235 ff; and earlier the Annuaires 1960-1961, pp. 35-36, and 1961-1962, pp. 47-48. [In the work by P. SPECK already cited: Die kaisarliche Universität..., chap. II, "Photios und Konstantinos-Kyrillos als Lehrer" (pp. 14-21), corresponds in some parts with the present chapter. Speck's views are usually more conservative than mine: Photios was indeed a teacher in a school, etc. They have not caused me to modify my conclusions.]
reconciliation, and almost a return to the roots of Hellenising Christianity. Certainly, much had been lost or discarded on the way, but what had been preserved was henceforth viewed without suspicion. This conciliation, or reconciliation, which was the starting-point for a long and brilliant period in Graeco-Byzantine civilisation, in my opinion is best personified in Photios.

This is not the point of view from which he has most often been considered up till now. Western, or more precisely Roman, historiography has until recently, and with a curious mixture of ignorance and pique, detested the man as a schismatic who denounced the addition of the *filioque* clause. Furthermore, though without admitting it, these scholars took vengeance on the man who had definitively preserved Byzantium from the universalism of the pope in dogma and jurisdiction. This was the man who had triumphed over the pope in the conflict in which Bulgaria was the stake, and who had inspired the grandiose and civilising missionary work which historically speaking was perhaps the Empire's main title to glory. It was not so long ago that the truth was again established essentially through a few works, of which the most notable, it must be pointed out, were those by two members of the Roman Church, Father V. Grumel and Father F. Dvornik.

This is certainly no longer the only point of view from which Photios should be considered. Religion in Byzantium was too much a part of the State, or rather it was too close to being the State, for the patriarch Photios, long trained in the most important affairs in the emperor's councils, not to have been also a great statesman. His vast enterprises abroad of converting the "atheists" and rallying the eastern patriarchs must also have been a political enterprise. His domestic conflict with Ignatios and his partisans must also have had a political significance. Has the story of his two patriarchates and two depositions a further dimension to it?

Almost everything has yet to be said about Photios. But to return to our subject let us note some encouraging signs at least. There now exists an edition and study of his homilies, which are so rich in historical content, the edition of the *Bibliotheca*, and

2. The examples are innumerable and some amusing, e.g. the precautions the abbé MIGNE thought he had to take to be excused for having dared to give Photios a place in his *Patrologia Graeca*. Indeed, consider how he dealt with him in the Introduction to the first volume of his works (PG 101) : "Doctrina celebris, at facinoribus, quibus diu ecclesiam perturbavit, et tesserimum schisma inauguravit (...) cal-lidus, hypocrita, ambitiosus, falsarius, schismaticus, tyrannus." The three volumes, by Cardinal J. HERGENRÖTHER (*Photius, Patriarch von Konstantinopel*, Regensburg, 1867-1869), while praiseworthy and quite sincere, if not always impartial, have insidiously enshrined, rather than corrected, this point of view.