



Summary :

Patriarch of Constantinople and important scholar of the 13th century. He was born in Lapithus of Cyreneia around 1241 and moved to Constantinople after 1261 where he studied under George Acropolites. A few years later, he started teaching and took the patriarchal throne of Constantinople in 1283. As a scholar he belongs to the Palaiologan Renaissance and many works of him survive, such as letters, lives of saints and an autobiography. His work influenced many contemporary and subsequent scholars, such as Theodore Mouzalon, Nikephoros Choumnos, Nikephoros Gregoras and Gennadios Scholarios.

Other Names

Gregory II of Cyprus, George of Cyprus

Date and Place of Birth

Around 1241, Lapithos, Kyreneia

Date and Place of Death

1290, Constantinople

Main Role

Patriarch

1. Biographical elements and education

George was born in Lapithus of Kyreneia around 1241, when Cyprus was under Latin rule. His family was wealthy and had high social position.¹ He received basic education in his birthplace under Greek speaking teachers and later he went to Nicosia for his [encyclical education](#). He completed his education in a Latin school, under Latin speaking teachers. However, he was not satisfied with his education. He criticized school saying he did not learn grammar properly and as far as philosophy is concerned. He believed that he had attended only a introduction in Aristotelian logic and believe that his gaps is due to the insufficiency of his teachers and the foreign language in which the classes were taught. He searched for a teacher to continue his studies in Greek but with no success, so he asked his parents to send him to [Nicaea](#) of [Bithynia](#), the [centre of the intellectual life](#) of his time where he believed he could have high standard education, since he considered that the spirit of ancient Greece survived there.² After they denied that he left in secret and through Acra (Ptolemais) of Palestine he travelled to Anaia and then to [Ephesos](#), trying to contact [Nikephoros Blemmydes](#) in order to become accepted to the [school](#) of higher education that was located in the monastery of the Lord-Christ-Who-Is.³ But the locals prevented him from doing so emphasizing on his young age and his poorness, so after six months of difficult travels he reached Nicaea where he attended classes, mainly grammar and rhetoric. However his teachers then did not satisfy him.

His next stop was [Constantinople](#). He moved there after the [recapture](#) of the city by the Byzantines in 1261, with the intention to complete his studies under [George Acropolites](#). In 1266/7, he was finally accepted to the school directed by Acropolites, which was under the control of the emperor. He was taught rhetoric and mathematics from Acropolites: the foundation of rhetoric was the Aristotelian philosophy, while the works of Nikomachos Gerasenos and of Euclides were used in the teaching of mathematics and of geometry, respectively.⁴ He studied under Acropolites for seven years, until 1273/4.⁵

After completing his education, George began to teach himself, around 1273/4; he probably resided in the monastery of [Christ Akataleptos](#)⁶ and undertook the place of his teacher. At the same time he held the offices of [anagnostes](#) and [protospatharios](#) and became an official adviser of the emperor [Michael VIII Palaiologos](#).⁷ In 1283 [Andronikos II Palaiologos](#) made him patriarch, but after a troubled period in this office he resigned in 1289. He went to the small monastery of Aristene, owned by [Theodora Raoulaina](#), where he lived until his death in 1290 and was concerned only with his literature interests.

2. Teaching activity

George of Cyprus proved very successful as a teacher. He gained the appreciation of the imperial cycle and most of his pupils took high offices. He taught grammar, rhetoric, geometry and mathematics and he considered Aristotelian philosophy as the highest level of his teaching.⁸ According to Nikephorus Choumnos for the teaching of rhetoric he used works of Plato, Aristotele and Thycucides.⁹ Most of the surviving texts where written to cover his own needs as a teacher. As himself says he did not accept everybody but those who would make a good effort and wanted to study.¹⁰ Apart from Nicephorus Choumnos, some of his pupils were [Theodore Mouzalon](#), subsequent [megas logothetes](#), John XIII Glykys, who would become [patriarch of Constaninople](#) (1316-1320), Manuel Neokaisarites, [protasekretis](#), Kaloeidas, the protégé of the metropolitan of Ephesos Isaac, Melitas and the monk Mark.¹¹ It is possible that [Constantine Acropolites](#) and [Maximus Planoudes](#) were his also his pupils. He remained friends with many of his students and he corresponded with them when they were away. He taught for ten years until he became patriarch of Constantinople.

3. Ecclesiastical career

Already before the death of Michael VIII and while he continued his teaching activity, George was appointed [protapostolarios](#) of the palace by the patriarch Joseph. He was in favour of the union of the churches and had adopted the political views of Michael VIII as well as the decisions of the Council of Lyon (1274).

After the ascend of Andronikos II to the Byzantine throne (1282) and the change of the imperial policy in ecclesiastical matters, the emperor chose George as the new patriarch. It was a choice aimed to ease the tensions inside the Church: George had been ordained by Joseph which meant that he would be accepted by the Josephites, while the emperor reassured the [Arsenites](#) that their condemnation by Joseph would be considered invalid. George was appointed patriarch under the name Gregory II in [Hagia Sophia](#), on Palm Sunday of 1283.¹² In the following days¹³ an [ecclesiastical council](#) was held in the [church of Blachernai](#) for the condemnation of the heretics and the punishment of the hierarchs that were in favour of the union or had been ordained by [John XI Bekkos](#) (1275-1282). The council issued a [Tomos](#), on Gregory II's responsibility, which provided that all unionist priests should be disordained.¹⁴

To face the problem with the Arsenites, an ecclesiastic council was held in [Adramyttion](#), on April 8, 1284.¹⁵ However, instead of easing the differences, the council aggravated them. Gregory found himself accused by both the Arsenites and the unionists under Bekkos. In the following years, the dispute continued and the patriarch, who did not manage to put an end to the tumult and the controversies, resigned from the patriarchal throne in 1289. However, during the time he was patriarch, he took particular care for the education of the church officers.

4. Œuvre



George of Cyprus is considered as the introducer of the humanistic ideal which the scholars of the Palaiologan renaissance followed. He influenced his contemporary and subsequent scholars, although as he writes he was not particularly eager as an author.¹⁶ Three factors may have caused this: a lack of time and money, the fear for his life because of his involvement in ecclesiastical controversies and his shattered health. Despite all these, many works of him survive; some of them aimed to cover his instructive needs, while others were copies made under his guidance.

4.1. Instructive works

George wrote 17 myths, 3 short stories and one *ethopoia* (description of characters), a *Praise to the sea* and a *chreia*. In these works seem to have been modelled on the *Progymnasmata* of Aphthonios. He wrote three rhetoric speeches, which constituted the next level in the teaching of rhetoric and was taught after the *progymnasmata*. To this genre also belongs a collection of proverbs that he wrote.

4.2. Vitae of saints

George was very interested in the hagiology, just like his teacher George Acropolites. Five *Vitae* survive: of saint George, of Dionysios Areopagites, of Euthymios of Madyta, of Marina of Antioch and of [Lazaros of Mt. Galesios](#). According to a letter of his, he also wrote a canon for St. Christopher.¹⁷

4.3. Letters

The letters of George, written in the attic dialect, are a rich source of information for him and his era. He sometimes refers in details to what was going on when he was patriarch. The receivers of the letters are various scholars and notable personalities of the administration and the ecclesiastic hierarchy of his time. Among them is Andronikos II Palaiologos, the *sebastokrator* John Palaiologos, Andronikos's brother, Theodore Mouzalon the megas logothetes, the metropolitans of Ephesos Isaac and John Cheilas, the grand archdeacon Constantine Meliteniotes, the scholars George Pachymeres, Manuel Neokaisareites, John Peditasimos, [Manuel Holobolos](#) and Nikephoros Choumnos. George himself collected the 197 letters and put them in chronological order. Later on Andrew Lopadiotes used the letters for the compilation of the *Lexicon Vindobonense*,¹⁸ and Makarios Chrysocephalos added some of them in his *Rhodia*, an anthology with citations by ancient Greek and Byzantine authors which he compiled in the years 1326-1336.¹⁹

4.4. Autobiography

His autobiography (*Γρηγορίου τοῦ ἁγιωτάτου καὶ μακαριωτάτου οἱ κουμηνικοῦ πατριάρχου περὶ τοῦ καθ' ἑαυτὸν βίου ὡς ἂν π' ἄλλου προσώπου*)²⁰ in which he speaks of his youth, was probably influenced by the one of Nikephoros Blemmydes. It is a vivid presentation of the situation in the [empire of Nicaea](#) and Constantinople as far as education is concerned. It is a rich source of historical information but also a way to approach George's personality through his thoughts and considerations. It is noteworthy that George wrote in the third person, thus probably meaning to keep a distance from the text and to remain as much objective as possible in his description.

5. Influences

George had influence on both his contemporary and subsequent scholars. Theodore Mouzalon refers to him as the most important scholar of his era, and Nicephorus Choumnos compares him Gregory of Nazianzos.²¹ Pachymeres, who did not belong to his cycle, however, emphasized on his spirituality.²² Nikephoros Gregoras, a pupil of John Glykys, believes that George played a significant role in the revival of the attic dialect²³ and Gennadios Scholarios considers him an important theologian, philosopher, mathematician and rhetor.²⁴ The works of George were very popular, although today we do not know his work on the whole.²⁵

He also contributed in literature. He was very interested in classical texts; he even developed a particular philological technique in their study, and urged others to copy and collect books, such as Theodora Raoulaina, who was his spiritual child. Thus he contributed in the establishment of a philological and intellectual tradition that was preserved for a long time. Subsequent well-known Byzantine scholars, such as Maximos Planoudes and John Moschopoulos in Constantinople, and Magistros and Demetrios Triklinios in Thessalonike, followed George of Cyprus in many ways in their approach and editing of texts.

1. As we read in his autobiography "Autobiographie de Grégoire de Chypre", in Lameere, W., *La tradition manuscrite de la correspondance de Grégoire de Chypre, patriarche de Constantinople (1283-1289)* (Bruxelles – Rome 1937). However later, in a letter to Andronikos II he refers to the poverty of his relatives see Ευστρατιᾶ δης, Σ., *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Κυπρίου οὐ οἱ κουμηνικοῦ Πατριάρχου ἐπιστολαὶ καὶ μῦθοι* (Ἀλεξάνδρεια 1910), no. 136. It probably means that his relatives lost their fortune during the Latin rule.

2. As he says in his autobiography, «[...] τὰς ἐν Νικαίᾳ διατριβὰς ὅπου καὶ λόγος ἐκράτει γενομένῳ τινὶ αὐτὰς ἐξεῖναι δοκεῖν, τὰ γ' ἐς σοφῶν ἀνδρῶν ἀφθονίαν, τὰς παλαιὰς Ἀθήνας ὁρᾶν», see "Autobiographie de Grégoire de Chypre", in Lameere, W., *La tradition manuscrite de la correspondance de Grégoire de Chypre, patriarche de Constantinople (1283-1289)* (Bruxelles – Rome 1937), p. 179.26-28. Nicaea was the capital of the namesake empire at the time, which explains how it developed into a center of intellectual life.

3. Lameere, W., *La tradition manuscrite de la correspondance de Grégoire de Chypre, patriarche de Constantinople (1283-1289)* (Bruxelles – Rome 1937), p. 181.12-24. George explains his desire to study with Blemmydes, whom he characterised as 'the most wise'.

4. See Lameere, W., *La tradition manuscrite de la correspondance de Grégoire de Chypre, patriarche de Constantinople (1283-1289)* (Bruxelles – Rome 1937), p. 185.12-17.

5. It was when Acropolites put aside his teaching activity and went to Lyon as a member of the Byzantine delegation, to take part of the council for the union of the churches.

6. See Ευστρατιᾶ δης, Σ., *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Κυπρίου οὐ οἱ κουμηνικοῦ Πατριάρχου ἐπιστολαὶ καὶ μῦθοι* (Ἀλεξάνδρεια 1910), no. 20.

7. See Γεωργίου Παχυμέρη, *Μιχαὴλ Παλαιολόγος*, Bekker, I. (ed.), *Georgii Pachymeris. De Michaelo Paleologo* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1835), p. 392.14-16.

8. As we can deduce from a letter sent to his student and friend John Peditasimos in Ochrid, see Ευστρατιᾶ δης, Σ., *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Κυπρίου οὐ οἱ κουμηνικοῦ Πατριάρχου ἐπιστολαὶ καὶ μῦθοι* (Ἀλεξάνδρεια 1910), no. 35.

9. See Boissonade, J.F., *Anecdota Graeca* 3 (Paris 1831), p. 370.



10. See Ευστρατιάδης, Σ., *Γρηγορί ου του Κυπρί ου οι κουμηνικου Πατριάρχου ε πιστολαι κα μύθου* (Αλεξάνδρεια 1910), no. 108.
11. Mark gave some writings for correction to his former teacher. According to a view, these writings caused the deposition of George from his throne, see *Γεωργί ου Παχυμέ ρη, Ανδρό νικος Παλαιολό γος*, Bekker, I. (ed.), *Georgii Pachymeris, De Andronico Paleologo* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1835), pp. 117.4-118.5.
12. The ceremony took place in a church that had not operated for a long time, an so the arsenites would not consider it «desecrated» by the followers of the patriarch Joseph; it was made so in order to avoid a possible dispute over the legitimacy of the appointment with the arsenites. The ceremony was conducted by the bishop of Kozyle of Epirus, who had no involvement with either the unionists or the and antiunionists. On the appointment of Gregory, see *Γεωργί ου Παχυμέ ρη, Ανδρό νικος Παλαιολό γος*, Bekker, I. (ed.), *Georgii Pachymeris, De Andronico Paleologo* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1835), pp. 44-45, and Γουναρί δης, Π., *Το κί νημα των Αρσενιατών (1261-1310). Ιδεολογικέ ς διαμά χες την εποχή των πρώτων Παλαιολό γων* (Αθή να 1999), pp. 130-137.
13. On this council, see Dölger, F., *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453, 4: Regesten von 1282-1341* (Μό ναχο – Βερολί νο 1960), no. 2091.
14. Laurent, V., *Les actes des patriarches*, Fasc. IV, *Les Regestes de 1208 à 1309* (Paris 1971), no. 1463.
15. *Γεωργί ου Παχυμέ ρη, Ανδρό νικος Παλαιολό γος*, Bekker, I. (ed.), *Georgii Pachymeris, De Andronico Paleologo* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1835), p. 60.
16. See Lameere, W., *La tradition manuscrite de la correspondance de Grégoire de Chypre, patriarche de Constantinople (1283-1289)* (Bruxelles – Rome 1937), p. 187.14 - 189.24.
17. See Ευστρατιάδης, Σ., *Γρηγορί ου του Κυπρί ου οι κουμηνικου Πατριάρχου ε πιστολαι κα μύθου* (Αλεξάνδρεια 1910), no. 196.
18. *Lexicon Vindobonense, Recensuit et adnotatione critica instruxit*, Nauck A. (St. Petersburg 1867), pp. XI-XII.
19. Codex Marc.gr. 452 (*collocatione* 796). On the letter of Gregorius see Ευστρατιάδης, Σ., *Γρηγορί ου του Κυπρί ου οι κουμηνικου Πατριάρχου ε πιστολαι κα μύθου* (Αλεξάνδρεια 1910), pp. 3-211.
20. Lameere, W., *La tradition manuscrite de la correspondance de Grégoire de Chypre, patriarche de Constantinople (1283-1289)* (Bruxelles – Rome 1937), pp. 176-191.
21. Boissonade, J.F., *Anecdota Graeca* 3 (Paris 1831), p. 367.
22. *Γεωργί ου Παχυμέ ρη, Ανδρό νικος Παλαιολό γος*, Bekker, I. (ed.), *Georgii Pachymeris, De Andronico Paleologo* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1835), p. 42.15-16.
23. *Νικηφό ρου Γρηγορά, Ρωμαϊκή ς Ιστορί ας Λό γοι*, Shopen, L. (ed.), *Nicephori Gregorae, Byzantina Historia* 1 (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1829), p. 163.9-15.
24. Demetrakopoulos, A.K., *Ορθό δοξος Ελλά ς* (Λειψί α 1872), p. 74.

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Glossary :

anagnostes
Reader, a member of the minor clergy who read from the ambo texts from the Old Testament and the Epistles during the Liturgy.

chreia
An instructive exercise, part of the *progymnasmata*, in the teaching of rhetoric. Chreia is a brief speech of text commenting on a well-known event or saying.

enkyklios education
The secondary education in Byzantium. The students, from 12 years old, were taught grammar, rhetorics and eloquence.

megas logothetes
The head of the civil Byzantine administration. Megas logothetes was a title used at the end of the 12th century during the reign of Isaac II Angelos (1185-1195), replacing the "logothetes ton sekreton", an office which was created during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118) to bring the entire civil administration under the control of a single individual.

progymnasmata
A method - compilation of models - fundamental to the teaching of prose composition and rhetorics in general.

protapostolarios
An anagnostes (lector) who was assigned the reading of ecclesiastical writings (prophecies, epistles of the Apostles) in imperial ceremonies inside the Palace.

protasekretis
[proto-a-secretis]: office that appears in the 7th c. Protasekretis was head of the secreta and was appointed by the Emperor. He was aware of all political and diplomatic affairs. His post required an excellent education and was considered highly confidential. In the Palaiologan period the office was reduced and eventually became a mere title.

protospatharios
The first spatharios. A higher byzantine official of the imperial hierarchy which usually permitted participation in the senate. It was awarded even to eunuchs. After the 11th century, it gradually lost its importance. It was also an honorary title.

sebastokrator
Honorary title of the Byzantine court. The office was established in 1081 by Alexios I Komnenos for his elder brother Isaac, equivalent to the one of regent

tomos
A term denoting the official ecclesiastical acts.

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Chronological Table

Around 1241: George is born in Lapithus, Kyreneia

After 1261: He goes to Constantinople.

1266/1267: Begins to study in the school of George Acropolites

1273/1274: He teaches in the school replacing Acropolites

1283: He becomes Patriarch

1289: He resigns the patriarchal throne

1290: He dies in Constantinople