

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: NUMBER TWO HUNDRED TWENTY-ONE

David M. Goldfrank

Nil Sorsky:
The Authentic Writings



Early 18th century miniature of Nil Sorsky and his skete
(State Historical Museum Moscow, Uvarov Collection, No. 107. B 1?).

CISTERCIAN STUDIES SERIES: NUMBER TWO HUNDRED TWENTY-ONE

NIL SORSKY:
THE AUTHENTIC WRITINGS

TRANSLATED, EDITED, AND INTRODUCED

BY
DAVID M. GOLDFRANK

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Ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν νοητὸς πόλεμος τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ χαλεπώτερος.
Есть мысла рать, внасъ самѣх, чювьственна лютѣиши.

— Philotheus the Sinaite —

Within our very selves is a war of the mind fiercer than of the senses.

Φκ 2: 274; Eparkh. 344: 343v

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Let us start by clearing the air on two issues. First, this volume contains as its centerpiece the ninth published translation, or alleged translation, to date of Nil Sorsky's theoretical-practical treatise for monks, known as his *Ustav* (Typikon). Only three of the other eight are, however, genuine translations: Fairy von Lilienfeld's German (1963), *monachos* Vasileios Grolimund's modern Greek (1985), and Gelian Prokhorov's modern Russian (2005). Helène Izwolsky's English (1948) is free and also incomplete. The French text of Sr Sophia Jacamon OSB (1980) is a translation, with some recourse to the original, of the modern Russian explicated adaptation by Archimandrite Iustin (1892). Marusja Galmozzi's and Lisa Cremaschi's Italian (edited by Enzo Bianchi, 1988) seems for the most part to translate Jacamon. Finally the English rendition of George Maloney sj (2003) is a free translation and somewhat paraphrased version of Iustin, perhaps mediated by Jacamon or Galmozzi/Cremaschi, and again with some recourse to Nil himself and also to Izwolsky. Hence the need, as well as utility, of this volume's faithful English translations.¹

Second, consider a situation where virtually everyone believes a paradigm on the basis of anachronistic documentation which came to light a century and a half ago—a paradigm diametrically opposed to what actually happened. Such is the case with Nil Sorsky (1433/34–1508), medieval Russia's outstanding master and teacher of stillness or hesychasm. Since the 1850s most people

1. See further below III. 'Preface to the Translations.'

with any knowledge of Nil have viewed him through the lens of the later struggle between so-called ‘Nonpossessors’ or Transvolgan Elders and ‘Possessors’ or Iosifites (Josephites). The analysis since the 1950s of the genuine paper trail has led to a different historical picture, one which, for sure, not all specialists accept, but whose crucial evidence has yet to find a serious rejoinder, much less a refutation. Accordingly, in the most pressing religious issue of Nil’s day, the conflict between traditional Orthodoxy and dissidence, Nil Sorsky collaborated with Iosif Volotsky (1439/40–1515), the master-pen behind Russia’s inquisition, coenobitic reorganization, and rationalization of commemorations for departed souls. Nil’s and Iosif’s different life styles, reflected in their respective monastic teachings and rules, did not lead in Nil’s lifetime even to a literary debate, much less to a public, politicized struggle between them over the propriety and fate of monastic estates and wealth or anything else.

I am therefore asking the readers, if they have any preconceptions of Nil based on the traditional paradigm, to lay these aside and let Nil speak for himself from his authentic works. As a teacher, writer, and, so far as we can tell, practitioner of traditional Orthodox monastic spirituality and of the newer methods of mystical prayer, Nil enjoyed the acclaim of Orthodox contemporaries and future generations of all stamps. His Sora hermitage flourished as such for well over two hundred years as the model small, individualistic cloister. His writings are a unique witness to how Orthodox stillness was taught and practiced in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, perhaps in the Balkans as well as Russia. They also are major cultural and historical, as well as religious documents from the Russia of his time, but not of the nineteenth century with its quite different spiritual agendas.

As with my translation and analysis of Iosif Volotsky’s Rules for this series, I have attempted, while making no concession to the strictest standards of scholarship, to do justice to Nil as a bearer of a great sacred tradition and to let his voice be heard. Two other scholars, von Lilienfeld (1963) and Maloney (1973), each far more qualified than I, have elucidated where Nil stands within this dynamic ongoing tradition of mystical prayer. In so doing, they—the

first as rigorous professor, the second more as zealous pastor—have used Nil to present the fundamentals of this tradition to the contemporary reader. Their adherence to the Nil-vrs-Iosif paradigm does not detract from the value of this aspect of their books. Since prayer is such an individual experience, I leave it to interested individuals to sort out in their own way the devotional matters. My introductory chapters, rather, should serve, for everybody, to contextualize Nil and his writings on the basis of the available documents, the latest scholarship, how people thought in his time, and how we can imagine his world in today's terms.

My source work with the Old Slavic translations, as well as the Greek originals, if the most ambitious concerning Nil to date, suffers from my concessions to quotidian needs. I thereby utilized mainly the available photocopies of microfilmed Hilandar Serbian recensions and the microfilms of Iosifov Russian versions, both at Ohio State University, rather than the Saint Petersburg-housed, Kirillov-Belozersk and Sora manuscripts—ones most likely to contain the precise recension, maybe even the very codex Nil studied. Still, my experience with these papers leads me to believe that the manuscripts I consulted are close enough for my purposes. Hopefully, a future, critical Russian edition of Nil, by consulting the most useful Russian manuscripts, will complete the collective *Quellenforschung* presented here.

As author-translator, I would like to thank this series editor, E. Rozanne Elder, for suggesting that I produce this volume. It has been an illuminating, intellectual adventure. I never imagined that I could do justice to such a powerful spiritual figure as Nil, and am not at all certain that I have done so.

I would also like to single out four library complexes for special appreciation. As usual, the Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies and the Woodstock Library at Georgetown University have been invaluable, as has been the regular Georgetown Lauinger Library's Interlibrary Loan and Reference staffs. At Dumbarton Oaks, Professor Ned Keenan, Alice-Mary Talbot, Nancy Hinton, and Deborah Brown, and at Georgetown, J. Leon Hooper SJ, Pamela Anne Noyes, and Susan Karp have been especially helpful. A genuinely new experience for me, supported by travel grants

from Georgetown's Center for Eurasian, Russian, and East European Studies, was the Hilandar Research Library at the Ohio State University. Working there seems like being in three or four fine medieval Slavic monastery book depositories and simultaneously a modern, reference-rich, reading room, within a major research library and with an expert and generous staff, that is the team under Predrag Matejic and Mary-Allen 'Basha' Johnson. Moreover, thanks to photocopies of some of its Serbian codices and to the Georgetown library stacks, my home office became my own 'Little Hilandar.' Finally, unexpected delays due to pressing family matters postponed my submission of this manuscript and other business in Saint Petersburg, allowed me to consult some key manuscripts, locate several more sources, and examine first hand Nil's collaboration with Iosif. I am thus most grateful to Elena Shevchenko and to the entire helpful and friendly staff of the Manuscript Division of the Russian National Library (RGB) there. In addition, the Library of Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary kindly supplied me with maybe North America's unique available copy of Grolimund's annotated translation, and the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library's Slavic and Baltic Division, Harvard's Widener Library, and the Slavonic Collection of the National Library of Finland (University of Helsinki) proved welcoming and useful.

To their credit, the free and adapted translations are replete with inspired renderings, which I have mined, of various turns of Nil's speech. Likewise, I owe a great debt of gratitude to other past and present professional colleagues and scholars, including some whose conclusions I sometimes dispute—among them, the late John Meyendorff and Iakov S. Lur'e, Tomáš Špidlík SJ (created Cardinal on 21 October, 2003), Fairy von Lilienfeld, Boris M. Kloss, Gelian. M. Prokhorov, Andrei Pliguzov, Elena Romanenko, Tamara Lënngren, and Jennifer Spock. While she was located in Saint Petersburg, Erika Monahan sent me invaluable information about some Kirillov manuscripts. Similarly, my old close friend and colleague Richard Stites dispatched useful photocopies from Helsinki, and Marcello Garzaniti of Rome and Florence supplied me with a copy of the Bianchi volume. Francis Butler, Henry Ronald

Cooper, Bill Darden, Michael Flier, Ann Kleimola, George Majeska, Olga Meerson, and William Veder responded to my urgent request and shared thoughts concerning some vexing translation problems. My Georgetown colleagues and former students, in this case, Elizabeth Zelensky, Catherine Evtuhov, Jo Ann Moran-Cruz, Dennis McManus, David Collins sj, Argyrios Pisiotis, and Isaiah Gruber, provided excellent sounding boards for ideas.

I wish to thank Donald Ostrowski and Robert Romanchuk for their comments on my introductory chapters, and the latter singularly for his most careful reading of my translations. If this work is good deal less flawed than it might have been, these two, along with Polyvia Parara of Georgetown, who proofread the Greek, and Ludwig Steindorff of Kiel, who pointed out some German-language and other flaws, deserve a large share of the credit. Moreover, without Ostrowski's pioneering source criticism and Romanchuk's brilliant analysis of pedagogy and hermeneutics in fifteenth-century Kirillov, this work would have far less that is new to offer the reader.

Penultimately, Princeton Ph.D. candidate Ilya Kharin, a 2005 graduate from Georgetown who was planning at that time to specialize on the development of Russian-introduced Orthodoxy in Meiji Era Japan, proved an invaluable assistant to me under the Georgetown University Undergraduate Research Program, especially in the spring and summer of 2003, when I started this project. The identification of a fair number of Slavic sources and some excellent choices of words in the translation, as well as the avoidance of all sorts of mistakes, are due to his acumen, labor, and devotion to Orthodoxy. I, of course, bear responsibility for all of the shortcomings.

Finally, I must not neglect to mention once more (the now, unfortunately, late) M. Basil Pennington ocsso (1931–2005), founder of this series, and such a generous and exemplary teacher, pastor, and ecumenist, to whose memory I happily dedicate this volume.

D.M.G.

March, 2008

TABLE OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC ABBREVIATIONS¹

ANSSSR	Akademiia nauk USSR (now RAN)
ASEI	<i>Akty sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii Severo-Vostochnoi Rusi</i> (9)
BLDR	<i>Biblioteka literatury Drevnei Rusi</i> (3)
BMFD	Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents (3)
ChOIDR	<i>Chtenie v Imperatorskom obshchestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh</i>
CMMHRL	<i>Catalog. Manuscripts on Microform of the Hilandar Research Library</i> (Matejic) (4)
CS	<i>Cistercian Studies</i> (3)
DRIU	<i>Drevnerusskie inocheskie ustavy</i> (3)
EO	<i>Echos d'Orient</i>
Eparkh.(GIM)	Eparkhal'nyi Fond (5)
FC	<i>Fathers of the Church</i> (3)
GBL	Gosudarstvennaia biblioteka imena Lenina, Moscow. (now R.GB)
GIM	Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii muzei, Moscow

1. Numbers in parenthesis refer to divisions in the Bibliography.

GPB	Gosudarstevnaia publichnaia biblioteka, Saint Petersburg (now RNB)
HM	Hilandar Monastery
HUS	<i>Harvard Ukrainian Studies</i>
KB	(GPB/RNB) Kirillov-Belozerskii Fond (5)
IRI	<i>Istorii Rossiskoi ierarkhii (Amvrosii) (1a)</i>
Ios.	(GBL/RGB) Iosifo-Volokolamskii Fond
KTsDRIVM	<i>Knizhnye tsenry drevnei Rusi. Iosifo-Volokolamskii monastyr' (4)</i>
KTsDRRAI	<i>Knizhnye tsenry Drevnie Rusi. Raznye aspekty issledovaniia (7)</i>
MKVZ	<i>Monastyr'skaia kul'tura. Vostok i Zapad (7)</i>
MMR	<i>Monashestvo i monastyri v Rossii XI-XX veka (7)</i>
MRC	<i>Medieval Russian Culture (7)</i>
MRKIS/CIM	<i>Moskovskaia Rus' (1359-1584): kul'tura i istoricheskoe samoznanie (7)</i>
MRIV	<i>The Monastic Rule of Iosif Volotsky (2nd ed) (Goldfrank) (9)</i>
NPNF	<i>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (3)</i>
NSA	<i>Τοῦ ἐν ὁσίῳ πατρὸς ἡμῶν Νείλου Σόρσκου (Grolimund) (10a)</i>
NSE	<i>Nil Sorskij e l'esicismo (Bianchi, et al.) (7)</i>
NSSS	<i>Nil Sorskij und seinen Schriften (von Lilienfeld) (10a)</i>
NSTRM	<i>Nil Sorskii i traditsii russkogo monashestva (Romanenko) (10c)</i>
OCA	<i>Orientalia christiana analecta</i>
OCP	<i>Orientalia christiana periodica</i>

Ostr.	<i>The Ostroh Bible 1581</i> (6).
PB/SB	<i>Palaeobulgarica/Starobŭlgarskita</i>
PDP	<i>Pamiatniki drevnei pis'mennosti (i iskusstva)</i>
PG	Patrologiae . . . graeca (3)
PL	Patrologiae . . . latina.(3)
PNSIK	<i>Prepodobnyi Nil Sorskii i Innokentii Komel'skii.</i> (Prokhorov) (1a)
PSRL	<i>Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei</i> (9)
PSW	<i>The Philokalia.</i> Edd. Palmer, Sherrard, Ware. (3)
RAN	Russian Academy of Sciences
RGB	Russian State (formerly, 'State . . . Lenin') Library, Moscow
RH	Russian Hesychasm (Maloney) (10a)
RH/HR	<i>Russian History/Histoire russe</i>
RNB	Russian National (formerly, 'State Public') Library, Saint Petersburg
SC	Sources chrétiennes
Sinod.	(GIM) Holy Synod Fond (5)
SKKDR	<i>Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti drevnei Rusi</i> (2)
SMS	(HM) Slavic Manuscripts (5)
SNS	<i>Sobornik Nila Sorskogo</i> (1a)
Sol.	(RNB) Solovetskii Fond (5)
TODRL	<i>Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury</i>
VMCh	<i>Velikii Minei chetii.</i> (Makar'ii) (3)
VMCh-M	<i>Velikie Minei chet'i . . . March . . .</i> (3)
VPS	<i>Vassian Patrikeev i ego sochieniia</i> (Kazakova) (10a)
Φκ	Φιλοκαλία τῶν ἱερῶν νηπτικῶν (3)

TRANSLITERATION FROM CYRILLIC LETTERS¹

a	а	о	о, ѿ
b	б	р	п
ć	ђ (Serbian only)	ps	пс, ѡ
ch	ч	г	р
d	д	s	с
e	е, е; also э	sh	ш
ě	ѣ	shch	щ
f	ф, ѿ	sht	шт
g	г	t	т
i	и, ї, і also й	ts	ц
ia	ѧ, Ѧ, я	u	оу, Ѹ, у, v
iu	ю	ŭ	ъ (Bulgarian)
k	к	v	в
kh	х	y	ы
ks	ѣ, кс	z	з
l	л	zh	ж
m	м	ъ (brief ѡh)	ъ
n	н	ь (brief їh)	ь

1. The original Cyrillic alphabet kept or transformed all of the Greek letters, including the obsolete digamma (F -> s) and koppa (Ϙ -> ч), necessary for the letter-number system (here 6 and 90). Besides creating some new letters and combinations, it also directly or indirectly took two Hebrew letters (צ -> ц), (ש -> ш).

TECHNICAL ABBREVIATIONS IN THE FOOTNOTES

[]	contains the numbered paragraphs of this discourse
“	the text within the quotations
1 st	first person
2 nd	second person
3 rd	third person
abs.	the absolute construction (with dative in Old Slavic)
acc.	the accusative case
act.	active voice
adv.	adverb
affirm.	affirmative
alt.	alternative
aor.	ao­rist (simple past)
dt.	dative case
Gk	the (printed) Greek original
fin.	feminine
fut.	future
gn.	genitive case
gram.	grammatical(-ly)
imprv.	imperative

ind.	indicative case
inf.	infinitive
instr.	instrumental (quasi-ablative) case (in Slavic)
msc.	masculine
MS(s)	manuscript(s)
nt.	neuter
nm.	nominative case
orig.	original
pl.	plural
prp.	prepositional case (Slavic)
prs.	present tense
prtcl.	participle
pssv.	passive voice
pst.	past tense
sg.	singular
subj.	subjunctive
transl.	translation
v	the <i>verso</i> side of a book or codex page, numbered on one side only
var.	variant

. . . Father Nil, who was at the Sora Hermitage in Beloozero, courageously struggled physically and mentally against the devil in our years of the last generation. That he was a virtuous man is intelligible from . . . his divinely-inspired and soul-profitng writings. And having raised them out of the vineyard of his heart, he departed to his loving Christ, leaving for us, as a specific deposit or loan, his divinely inspired and soul-profitng writings, not hiding Christ's talent, which were of sweat and toils.

— Nil Polev —

PART I

TOWARD A STUDY OF NIL SORSKY

I

THE LITTLE WE KNOW

Omega as Alpha

I beg you, cast my body in the desert, so that beasts and birds consume it, since it has sinned greatly before God and is not worth a burial. If you do not do this, then, digging a pit in the place where we live, bury me in total dishonor.¹

Thus implores Nil in his *Testament*, and thereby invites us to start this brief, *ersatz* biographical sketch of him with his death. For his manifest opposition to having his relics serve as a miracle cult likely slowed its development, with the result that his *de facto* local canonization occurred well after any eyewitnesses could supply details of his life.² We thus hardly know more about him than his extant writings allow us, and what little turns up is mostly literary or theological, with a sprinkling of a few unconnected autobiographical facts. Paradoxically, Old Russia's greatest writing spiritual figure is almost a hagiographic cipher. We do not even know his original first name.³

1. See below, *Testament 2*.

2. Romanenko places these events in the 17th c.: NSTRM, 188–194.

3. To my knowledge, the claim found in SNS I (p 10), that Nikolai was Nil's baptismal name lacks a reliable source.

The Shadows of the Kremlin

Can any good come to us from Moscow? Do we not already obtain from there burdens, heavy tributes, oppression, stewards, informers, and bailiffs?⁴

The hagiographer Epifanii the Wise weaved words well, as he placed this celebrated if fictive rhetorical question and provincial gripe into the mouth of a Finnic shaman a few decades before Nil's birth year, 1433/34. Epifanii also clouded a most important fact about our subject's home town. For sure Moscow's commoners also faced their share of 'burdens . . . oppression, stewards, informers, and bailiffs'. But they enjoyed the advantages of an ecclesiastical and political capital, which skimmed off for itself a generous share of Russia's 'heavy tributes', officially destined for the Qipchak Khanate (Golden Horde).

Moscow at that time was a stone-walled kremlin, which dated from 1367 and covered almost its present area. A patchwork of palace and boyar estates and stables, cloisters, apiaries and other productive enterprises, and plebeian faubourgs containing modest artisans' homesteads with vegetable gardens and orchards surrounded this rather large citadel. Within the ramparts stood the Grand Prince's and the Metropolitan's palaces and the homes of the boyar and mercantile elites—all of wood—along with at least eight masonry construction churches, two of them monastic. None of these edifices approached in any dimensions a respectable Western cathedral. A few other masonry churches lay outside the walls, but there too wood predominated. A network of roads, waterways, and portages provided Moscow with links in all directions: to the fur-rich Russian North; to the cattle- and horse-raising steppe to the southeast; to the ancient Rus 'mother-city' Kiev and further to the original Byzantine and Balkan founts of Rus Orthodoxy to the southeast; to Lithuania and its half of Old Rus to the west; and to the flourishing Russian republics of Novgorod and Pskov and then the Baltic lands beyond to the northwest. Samples of

4. *Zhitie Sv. Stefana Permskogo*, 40/*Slovo o zhitii . . . Stefana*, 180.

virtually all regionally produced goods or ideas eventually reached this city of destiny on the River Moskva.

A literal reading of Nil's tropological ' . . . I am an ignoramus and a rustic'⁵ prompted his first monographer, A.S. Arkhangel'skii, to hypothesize peasant family origins.⁶ Other scholars assumed that Nil's hearsay Moscow origin and Maiko/Maikov family name meant that he sprang from the 'well-born'.⁷ In my opinion, a middling pedigree of some type, service gentry, mercantile, even clerical, seems likely, as it allows for the education and career of his brother Andrei Fëdorovich. In any case, their parents or guardians provided a literate education for the boys, Andrei, moving up the scribal ranks to finish as a state secretary (*diak*) and diplomat.⁸ The Sora 'tale' from the 1660s claims that Nil was at first a judicial clerk,⁹ so maybe he did follow his brother into the world of Moscow's chancery scribes before the momentous decision renounce the secular kingdom for that of the Divine Writings.

The records allow us to present the great events that someone born in Moscow around 1433/34, or who moved there soon thereafter, would have experienced, if only indirectly. A certain degree of disorder as well as order prevailed all over Rus. Moscow's throne was in dispute until 1452. So was that of the Church until

5. *poselianinb*, literally, *villager*; see below, *To Gurii* 16; also Fedotov, *Russian Religious Mind* 2: 265, and others, but rightly criticized by von Lilienfeld, *NSSS*, 71, note 79; this trope is in Nikon, *Taktikon*, Fwd. 8, more precisely, within the source of Nil's Confession of Faith: see below, *Predanie* 2.

6. Arkhangel'skii, *Nil Sorskii i Vassian Patrikeev*, 3.

7. The oft-used term 'noble', as in a good deal of scholarship, clouds this issue, since Russia had no legal 'nobility' until Peter the Great, but rather the vague status of 'princes', 'boyars', and various 'servicemen', and the descriptive 'well-born'.

8. See below, under II, 'The Congenital Connection.'

9. *sudiiam* (dt. pl.) *knigbchiiu* (dt. sg.) *chinomb* (instr. sg.) *emu* (dt. sg.) *byvshu* (dt. sg., as dative absolute)—literally, *his having been by rank/profession a bookman/scribe for the judges* (most of whom would have been illiterate then): Prokhorov, 'Povest' o Nilo-Sorskome skite', 161; PNSIK 388, 395; The author Ivan Pleshkov (see below, III. 'Making It') or his source seems to have made a singular out of the Old Slavic rendition of the LXX Dt 1:15 *knigchia*=γραμματοεισαγωγεις (nm./acc. pl.) *sudiiam*=τοις κριταις (dt. pl.) of Dt 1:15, as in KB 3/8: 384, rather than combined the *knigchia* and *sudii* of Dt 1:15 and Jsh 8:3: cf. Prokhorov, PNSIK, 10.

1448. The Greek Photius (or Fotii, r. 1410–1433) was the last metropolitan to preside uncontested over the Orthodox of Moscow-dominated eastern Rus (part of what we call Russia), Polish-Lithuanian western Rus (future Belarus and Ukraine), and Great Novgorod (northwest Russia), which enjoyed a precarious independence between the two. Also in disarray was the longstanding regional suzerain, the Qipchak Khanate, now split among rival successor states, with some of these Tatars having recently moved north from the steppe into the forested borderlands.

Our young Nil would observe in succession the capture of Grand Prince Vasiliï II (r. 1425–62 with interruptions) by a Tatar band outside of Suzdal in 1445, his extorting a large ransom from his Russian subjects, and their subsequent dethroning of him in favor of his cousin Dmitriï Shemiaka. As Vasiliï had earlier blinded Dmitriï's rebellious elder brother, now Dmitriï in turn deprived the deposed ruler of his sight. But the tide of elite Russian opinion soon turned against the usurper, and by 1447 Vasiliï II was back on his throne. Soon he was able to stabilize relations with his former Tatar captors by granting them a buffer vassal khanate in the eastern part of his domains, another sign of Moscow's rising power. Finally, in 1456, he imposed a treaty on Great Novgorod, whereby the latter promised to subordinate its foreign policy to Moscow.

By now, Nil was twenty-two or twenty-three years old and may have heard how a decade earlier the hegumen of the elite Troitsa-Sergiev (Trinity-Saint Sergius) Monastery had sided with Shemiaka, while the hegumen of the rising Kirillov-Belozerskii cloister lifted Vasiliï's oath of submission to the former. Early in 1462, if Nil was still a layman, he would have noticed the high stakes of political intrigue, when the retainers of one of the moribund Vasiliï II's disgraced cousins tried to free their prince from prison and, during Lent of all time, suffered spectacular tortures, dragging 'by horses through every town and market place' before their beheading.¹⁰ Later that year, the reputedly very intelligent, twenty-two year old Ivan III (r. 1462–1505) ascended the throne and set the

10. Alef, *The Origins of Muscovite Autocracy*, 15–16.

realm on a determined course of eastern Rus unification, westward expansion, technological imports from Europe, and the rebuilding of the Moscow kremlin as would befit a regional great power under a mighty monarch, cut out to be the first of Russia's three 'Greats'.

Ecclesiastical affairs, if less violent, provided their own drama. In 1441, Nil would have been only about eight when the last Greek metropolitan of all Rus, Isidor (r. 1436–1441), returned from Italy to Moscow as a cardinal and papal legate. Two years earlier, in Florence, he and the accompanying Russians, as well as the Greeks there, had agreed under pressure to Church Union with Rome. The Byzantines, however, not to say the other Eastern patriarchates, never formally ratified or acknowledged this rapprochement, as huge opposition prevailed among the Orthodox masses, monks, and a few bishops. The Russians themselves soon pulled back from this decision by what they derisively termed the 'Eighth Council', where 'Greek, Church Latin, and Philosophy' (i.e., Western Scholasticism) were spoken.¹¹ Placating the Russian faithful, but avoiding a diplomatic scrape, Vasilii II shortly expelled Isidor and later promoted the local candidate for metropolitan, Iona of Riazan (r. 1448–1461).¹²

Nil would have been about twenty when the news reached Moscow that Constantinople had fallen to the Ottoman Turks, an event often interpreted in Russia as divine retribution for the recently attempted Church Union. While Moscow welcomed the Greek patriarchate's return to strict Orthodoxy under the conquering Sultan Mehmet, and Russians continued to regard a pious and learned Greek as a source of spiritual wisdom, they would not countenance a return to their former hierarchical subordination.

11. *grecheskii, friazskii* (literally, *Frankish*, which might also mean *Italian*), *filosofskii*: PSRL 8: 102.

12. This act led to Moscow's jurisdictional separation from Kiev and Orthodox Western Rus, which lasted, depending upon how and what one counts, for two-to-five centuries, and has resurfaced since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 among some Orthodox of Ukraine, not to say the revived Uniat, that is, Eastern Rite Catholic Church there. The Orthodox still recognize as valid Ecumenical Councils only the first seven.

Henceforth their church would be autocephalous. Religious-patriotic notions such as ‘New Israel’, ‘New Jerusalem’, ‘New Constantinople’, and ‘Third Rome’ were logical next steps in Russia’s transformed, if not yet articulated, self-image. But our future Nil would reside outside of this process.

The Northern Beacon

And of Saint Kirill, why should I write and speak out?
His traditions and teachings, now kept in his cloister,
which shines like the light of a candelabrum in the
present times, are a witness¹³

So wrote Iosif Volotsky, maybe in the early 1500s, of what he had seen first-hand twenty-odd years earlier, and he ought to have known what he was talking about. But even assuming, as we have no right to do, that he was not consciously skewing events to promote his pedagogic and political purposes, his sense of history was the victim of hagiography hiding how much Kirillov’s celebrated coenobitic rigor developed after the death of the founder. Nil’s Kirillov of the 1470s may have shone ‘like . . . a candelabrum’, but due to later innovations as much as to ‘the traditions of Saint Kirill’ (d. 1427).

What is our story here? Thanks to the recent, meticulous research of Robert Romanchuk, we have a reasonably good picture of Kirill’s cloister, starting as a smallish hermitage on a lake about five hundred kilometers north of Moscow in 1397, but, after the death of his second disciple-successor Khristofor (r. 1428–1434), developing into a property-holding coenobium with masonry structures.¹⁴ If, as one of Kirill’s encyclopedic miscellanies shows, he arrived in Beloozero equipped with the authoritative canonical, penitential, ceremonial, calendrical, and doctrinal texts to serve, if needed, as an episcopal vicar and prince’s advisor in this frontier

13. MRIV 10.13:229.

14. Romanchuk, *Byzantine Hermeneutics*, 94–104, 128–136.

region,¹⁵ the manuscript evidence shows him chiefly as the personal, ascetic-hesychastic *abba* to maybe fifteen monks. Externally guided by the *Scete Typikon*, which hearkened back to a disciple of the latest, highly influential master of stillness, Gregory the Sinaite (c. 1263–1346),¹⁶ Kirill and his literate acolytes apparently immersed themselves in the asceticism of the Desert Fathers and the classics of hesychasm.¹⁷

This orientation changed in Nil's boyhood under Khristofor's successor, Trifon (r. 1435–1448)¹⁸, the very hegumen who lifted Vasilii II's oath to Shemiaka. Not only did Trifon introduce the coenobitic rule and acquire property for the monastery. He also mobilized some of the intellectual resources of the better established, coenobitic Spaso-Kamennyi (Savior-of-the-Rock, on Lake Kubenskii, north of Vologda) and Troitsa-Sergiev monasteries to establish a more sophisticated grammar or reading curriculum. Such training went beyond the ascetic and ethical concerns of the original Christian monastics and grounded the more mentally agile adepts in contemplating the real world, as then knowable, with categories from John of Damascus's watered down Aristotelianism.¹⁹ For reasons we can only surmise, the Kirillov elders, including Trifon's learned Troitsa recruits, deposed and replaced him with another Spaso-Kamenny trainee, Kassian (r. 1448–1464/5, 1465/6–1470), under whom Romanchuk sees greater balance between what he calls the traditional 'desert' pedagogy and (for

15. Prokhorov, *Entsiklopediia*.

16. E.V. Beliakova, 'Russkaia rukopisnaia traditsiia Skitskogo ustava'; 'Skitskii ustav i ego znachenie v istorii russkogo monashestva'; 'Ustav pustyna Nila Sorskogo'; and below, Appendix I.

17. At least that is what the surviving MSS would indicate: Prokhorov, 'Keleinaia isikhatskaia literatura . . . v Kirillo-Belozerskogo'; 'Keleinaia isikhatskaia literatura . . . v . . . Troitse-Sergievoi'; 'Knigi Kirilla Belozerskogo. Egorova argues that the Slavic 'ascetic miscellany', which figured so heavily in cell life, originated in the mid 1300s under these same influences: 'Russkie asketicheskie sboriki', 182–183. (The earliest extant such Greek miscellany is from the tenth century.)

18. Corrected from 1435–1447 of MRIV (2000), 94.

19. Romanchuk, *Byzantine Hermeneutics*, 138–140, 149–150, 172–173; and below, under III, 'Technical terms', note 132 and text thereto.

Russia) the newer 'academic'. It was Kassian who presided over the great Serbian immigrant Pakhomii Logofet's ('the Logothete') composing the Life of Kirill, which paints the founder essentially as a hesychast, coenobiarch, and healer.²⁰ Kassian also was possessed of diplomatic talents, and headed missions on Metropolitan Iona's behalf, to Constantinople in 1448 and to Western Rus a decade later.²¹ So under the able Kassian, Kirillov 'shone' in more than one way.

Why Nil resolved to become a monk and when he actually did so is not known. If quantity counts for something and if Nil's later treatise contains a clue to his character, then, among the dangerous moral failings for laymen that could have led him to repent, he was more concerned with pride, lust, and gluttony, in that order, than with vengeful wrath or avarice.²² In other words, he was normal as a lay youth, but neither especially 'macho' nor particularly ambitious for glories of this world. If, however, quantity and quality together are what counts in this regard, then it was the positive attraction of prayer that drew Nil into monasticism.²³ Either way, this surely occurred after he was fifteen and before he was thirty-six, that is, under Kassian.²⁴ In extant land documents dated 1460–1470 and 1470–1475, a 'Nil' is listed as an elder of the monastery, in the latter case as the junior-most member of the hegumen's inner council of five.²⁵ One hint of a *terminus ad quem* of the early 1460s is a Kirillov manuscript written under Pakhomii's direction with some orthography, which our leading specialists on Nil's manuscripts provisionally detect his hand.²⁶ Whenever it was that he joined the brotherhood, he probably

20. *Pachomij Logofet. Werke in Auswahl*, ix–xlix.

21. Toucas-Bouteau, 'Nil Sorskij e il monastero di Kirill di Belozero', 77–78.

22. Note the space devoted to each of the 'eight urges', *Ustav* 5.

23. See *Ustav*, Fwd, 2.

24. The murky period around 1465, when Trifon, now Kirillov's suffragan archbishop of Rostov, tried unsuccessfully to impose his brother Filofei as hegumen, seems an unlikely time for anyone as intelligent as Nil to join this brotherhood.

25. ASEI 2.173:109, 215:139, 290:234; or Lur'e, 'K voprosu ob ideologii Nila Sorskogo, 189.

26. Lénngren SNS 1:15; Prokhorov, PNSIK, 13.

relinquished a promising proto-bureaucratic career in the rising, but potentially dangerous Muscovite court and state for possibly Russia's most successful cloister in integrating communal life, stillness, and the mentalities of the extreme ascetic and the moderately curious, if disciplined, monk-intellectual.

The most impressive such thinker was the hieromonk and master editor-copyist, bibliographer, and pedagogue Efrosin (d. 1511–1514). This quite rare figure abstracted chronologies for framing hagiography and secular history; he de-allegorized the fanciful zoological descriptions from bestiary-influenced Old Testament stories; he de-tropologized geography from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land; and in doing all of this, he produced new, serviceable texts for students. He also collected semi-secular literature, such as perhaps the earliest known *Dracula Tale* and Russia's earliest extant *Alexander the Great* narrative, in ways that no countryman before him or for another century would do. Taking a cue from recent scholarship on the medieval West, Romanchuk sees in Efrosin the peak of 'Byzantine Humanism' in Russia.²⁷

Nil's *in situ* education, however, may have commenced under a third graduate of Spaso-Kamenny, Paisii Iaroslavov (d. 1501), considered one of the most learned and able elders of his era. We shall return to Paisii and his source problem a bit later,²⁸ since our interest now is the substance of Nil's training. This had to commence with obedience and the daily routine of the community Matins and liturgy, the refectory meal, one's assigned labor, chanting the Hours, Vespers, a light supper, Compline, and silent handicraft, reading, psalmody, prostrations, and stillness in one's cell before sleep.²⁹ Even if Nil had already acquired certain monastic

27. Compared to Western philosophical developments, this humanism is 'pre-Scholastic'. On Efrosin, Lur'e, *Ideologicheskaia bor'ba*, 70–72; 'Literaturnaia i kul'turno-prosvetitel'naia deiatel'nost' Efrosina'; Kagan, et al., 'Opisanie sbornikov XV v. knigopista Efrosina'; Romanchuk, *Byzantine Hermeneutics*, 197, 202–203.

28. See below, II. 'The Maybe Mentor'.

29. Cf. MRIV, the provisions of *Extended Rule* 1–9, which, while omitting the Hours and individual cell rule prostrations and psalmody, ought to give a picture of life in a cloister consciously modeled on the Kirillov of Pakhomii's early 1460's *Life of Kirill*, plus what Iosif himself experienced there in the late 1470s.

tastes while a layman, he surely would have developed his interactive love of the liturgical hymnographers during the long daily services, his desire for eloquent hagiography at the daily refectory readings, his penchant for patristic metaphrasis in the course of spiritual conversations, and his longing to replicate the mystical feats of the hesychastic masters, as he engaged in his evening and nocturnal devotions.

As we already noted, Nil eventually became involved in the monastery's administration, specifically in the legal titles of its land holdings.³⁰ Perhaps, given his presumed scribal background, this is no surprise: he probably knew the ins and outs of official paper work as well as anyone in the cloister. Nil's writings, as we shall see, also exhibit some of the marks of Kirillov's 'academic' environment, and since its leading epistemological source, John of Damascus, was also revered for his liturgical hymns and his defense of Orthodoxy,³¹ Nil would have had no pious grounds to reject the available 'academic' analytical tools, which included systematic thinking, a conscious grasp of literary-rhetorical devices, and a sense of the scientific as then understood. Nil's special *métier* at Kirillov may have been book-copying, but we lack any authenticated codices or even pages by his distinct hand from this period.³² It is likely that he also acquired some experience with saints lives, which a certain Kiprian, a contemporary fellow Kirillovian, would also compile, if not redact in Nil's later manner.³³

At any rate, Nil's two chief interests turned out to be hagiography and prayer, the future focus of his literary talents. Elena Romanenko has recently suggested that his selection of Nil as his monastic name reflected an early commitment to hesychasm, as Neilos the Sinaite (d. c. 430) was then credited with the *Chapters in Prayer* by the earliest of the theoreticians of stillness, Evagrius

30. See above, note 25.

31. See below under III, 'Centrality of Sources'.

32. On Nil's orthography, Prokhorov, 'Avtografy', 44 (the letters б, и, ш), and Kloss, 'Nil Sorskii i Nil Polev', 159 (the letter ж).

33. Romanchuk, *Byzantine Hermeneutics*, 202, 242–243, which offers manuscript-based corrective to Romanenko's assertion that such collections were produced in Kirillov during 1458–1470: NSTRM, 8; also SNS 1:15.

of Pontus (346–397).³⁴ In one of Nil's rare, later, autobiographical moments, he claimed that while in the cloister, he became an expert in his own right in the 'Divine Writings' and, accordingly, avoided 'worldly entanglements'.³⁵

We can be reasonably certain that Nil advanced at Kirillov from discipleship and acquired at least one like-minded acolyte, Innokentii Okhliabinin.³⁶ Then at some point Nil, or maybe both of them, became restless. He/they could have left to found his/their own community—what each of them eventually did. Before that, however, in the 1470s or possibly the 1480s,³⁷ he/they set out from Kirillov for Mount Athos on a quest for Orthodoxy's spiritual holy grail.³⁸

The Holy Mount

A stone / hurled by one of the gods³⁹ / fell into the
 sea / and was transformed / into the Church of God./
 The wilderness / scented by incense, / the desert / in
 blossom; / here one cannot tell apart earth from heaven.
 / The garden / planted / for the Mother of God. / The

34. Cf. Romaneko, NSTRM, 7–8, which does not mention the generally accepted attribution of 'Neilos the Sinaite's' *Chapter on Prayer* to Evagrius: see below under III, 'Centrality of Sources.'

35. *To German* 4.

36. We have no sound evidence that Innokentii traveled with Nil, just part of a suspect invented tradition that first appears in known, extant writing as hearsay in 1784: ChOIRD 1887.4. 'Materialy istoriko-literaturnye', 123–124; Prokhorov, PNSIK, 399. Yet it makes sense that Nil did not travel alone; further on Innokentii, see below, text to note 46 and II. 'The Compatible Companion'.

37. Prokhorov, PNSIK, 3–24: note here from Prokhorov, Sergei Bolshakov's unsubstantiated 1465–78, Irina Dergacheva's guess of their accompanying Mitrofan Byvaltsov (MRIV 10.37) with the surmised nine years of 1470–1479, and von Lilienfeld proposing between 1455 and 1475: 'Der athonitische Hesychasmus des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts', 442: Nobody knows!

38. On the prestige of Mt. Athos as the model for Russian monastic practices, MRIV 10.31.

39. Poseidon/Neptune, according to legend.

mountain / crowded with fugitives; / mystified / by
the ultimate enigma / they find the answer / here.⁴⁰

Thus divined the poet, professor, and Serbian Orthodox priest who personally microfilmed many medieval Slavic manuscripts for his brainchild and foundation, the Ohio State University's remarkable Hilandar Research Library. And as he so toiled, he reflected upon those pre-Edisonian copyists, 'at the light of a candle . . . gradually losing their sight' to 'enable others to see'.⁴¹

For us, though, pious and romantic musings about the venerable monastic republic on the roughly 20-x-5-mile Euboeian peninsula known by its highest peak Mount Athos (2039 m) will not solve the mystery of what Nil (and perhaps Innokentii) actually did there. In this sphere we know even less than we do about Nil's origins, his Kirillov experiences, and later life. When did he/they go? What route(s) did he/they take? Where else did he/they travel besides the environs of Constantinople, as he reported?⁴² Who financed the journey? Did he/they undertake any special mission for Moscow's church or state authorities? Where did he/they stay at Athos? Did he/they interact with Greeks as well as Slavs—or, should one ask, with Slavs as well as Greeks? What did Nil learn that he did not already know or could not imbibe at home?

We can only try to imagine some answers. This pilgrimage would have occurred between the early 1470s and the late 1480s, coinciding with the second and last upsurge in Russian copying of 'hesychastic cell literature'.⁴³ Nil/They may have taken an overland route through Kiev and modern Romania, and Bulgaria past Constantinople. More likely, the voyage included some sea travel, because that is the easiest way from Constantinople to the base of Mount Athos off the Aegean Sea, and because Nil used some

40. Fr. Mateja Matejić, bi-lingual author, *Holy Mount/Sveta Gora*, in *Hilandar Manuscript/Hilandarsko rukopis*. Belgrade: Raška škola (1998), 6–7.

41. *Scribes of Hilandar/Pisari Hilandarskih Rukopisa*, in *Ibid.*, 42–43.

42. See below, *Ustav* 11.12

43. Prokhorov, 'Keleinaia iskhastskaia literatura . . . v biblioteke Kirillo-Belozerskogo monastyrja s XIV po XVII v.'; 'Keleinaia iskhastskaia literatura . . . v biblioteke Troitse-Sergievoi lavry s XIV po XVII v.'

imagery of waves and maritime storms in his writings.⁴⁴ Moscow's generally good relations at the time with the Crimean Khanate also would have facilitated the voyage down the Don River to the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea, and thence to Constantinople. The Ottomans would have posed little problem, as they had ruled over the region since the early 1400s and generally left the monks to their own devices in return for the taxes and periodic extraordinary contributions imposed upon non-Muslims.⁴⁵ Perhaps inspired by Nil's comments on more temperate climes,⁴⁶ a later tradition from the Sora hermitage has him visiting Palestine too⁴⁷—a suspect jaunt which would have almost doubled the distance he is known to have covered.

Athos in the 1470s–1480s had several thousand monks and nineteen or twenty major cloisters in various states of repair, disrepair, and inhabitation, and headed by the founder Athanasius's Laura. Among the other leading monasteries were a second Greek establishment, Vatopedi, and then the Serbian Hilandar, the 'Rus Pantaleimon', and the Bulgarian Zograf.⁴⁸ All of these served at various times as loci of the efforts of Greek-reading Slavs to amplify and modernize the original literary corpus of *Slavia Orthodoxa*. Scattered among the large abbeys were various dependent kellia and scetes of one or several brothers, at least some of whom, according to Nil's testimony, practiced stillness.⁴⁹ Hilandar's Karyes Kellion had possessed an elite scriptorium, which played a central

44. *Ustav* 1.19, 2.26, 5.6.68, 6.4, 11.10, of which, however, only the first has not been identified as taken from a patristic source.

45. Kastorskii, *Sostoianie pravoslavnogo vostochnogo monashestva so vremeni zavovaniia turkami*, 5, 41; Zachariadu, "A safe and holy mountain;" Speak, *Mount Athos*, 113–120.

46. *Ustav* 5.1.16.

47. NSTRM, 10; Prokhorov, PNSIK, 399; for a purported Rus pilgrimage itinerary escalating in the fourteenth century literary imagination from Athos to Mt. Sinai, see Goldfrank, 'Vojselk', 54.

48. Diakon Zosima, 'Kniga glagolaema Ksenos', 126; from various data, Kastorskii gives 2200–6000 ascetics for the sixteenth century: *Sostoianie*, 146.

49. See below, *Ustav* 11.12; Kastorskii, *Sostoianie*, 141–142; the latter's descriptions of *kaliuy* (houses with 1–3 monks and postulants) and scetes correspond respectively to what Nil called *keliia* and to what his foundation became, with a small church.

role in the diffusion of hesychastic texts a century earlier. As in Russia, the major monasteries were generally supposed to be coenobitic, with a central role for the council of leading elders, but paths actually diverged. State support in this era facilitated the conversion of Russian cloisters from the ‘separate-life’,⁵⁰ where monks fully supported themselves and rarely dined together, to the communal type. Harder times for Christians under the Ottomans produced at Athos an individualistic move in the opposite direction.

The extant manuscripts give us scant information on the intellectual life of the resident Slavs around when Nil sojourned there, or of what he would have gained from their libraries. The three dozen or so surviving Balkan Slavic codices from the 1450s–1490s are almost exclusively liturgical, scriptural, and hagiographic. The only purely monastic text from the period is an *Alphabetic Patericon*.⁵¹ If the Slavic Athonites were recopying their century-old codices of the hesychastic masters, these books are outside the Balkans or lost—except for one copy of Climacus from about 1500.⁵² The few extant writings that would qualify as ‘academic’, such as the *Chronicle* of Gregory Harmartolus or the *Physiologus* (a Christian bestiary), had been copied earlier and were no more sophisticated than what Efrosin glossed and reworked in Kirillov.⁵³ An observant Slav at Athos in the 1470s might have noted an interest in canons of Andrew of Crete,⁵⁴ and the *Life of John of Damascus*,⁵⁵ both of which Nil later shared. A Slavic visitor could also have been introduced to the creativity of Dimitur Kantakuzeni (b. 1435), who composed prayers modeled on those attributed to

50. *Osobozhitie*, not necessarily the full *idiorhythma*, which may be thoroughly individualistic; Sinitsyna, ‘Tipy monastyri’, 116–129, notes the fluidity of these terms.

51. Panteleimon (Pan.) No. 15: CMMHRL 2: 816, dated 1485.

52. A systematic manuscript search outside of the Balkans might invalidate the thrust of this paragraph.

53. Panteleimon (Pan.) No. 17, 22: CMMHRL 2: 818, 821, dated 1381, 1410s.

54. Great Lavra (GLZ) No 7: CMMHRL 2: 111, dated 1470s.

55. Hilandar (HM SMS) No. 465: CMMHRL 1: 555, dated 1450s.

Ephrem (Ephraim) of Syria—a practice not foreign to Nil’s future activities.⁵⁶ Nil could not have missed the veneration of Sava (1169–1237), the renovator of Hilandar and the founder of the autocephalous Serbian Church, and perhaps it is no accident that Nil’s disciple or devotee, Gurii Tushin, copied down Russia’s earliest known copy of Sava’s Life.⁵⁷ Nil also might have run into some rather questionable prophesying, such as predictions for the years 1452–1459 embedded with a number table in a Book of Hours.⁵⁸ Everything here is hypothetical.

The greatest puzzle regarding Nil’s stay at Athos remains his interaction with his Greek counterparts. If the extant codices with Symeon/Pseudo-Symeon the New Theologian are any guide, then the half dozen which stem from Athos before 1500, despite the vicissitudes of Ottoman domination, would indicate some serious interest in stillness, but how intensive or widespread is anybody’s guess.⁵⁹ We also lack an indication that a first-rate Greek or Slavic practitioner was present for Nil to encounter. He certainly met no one capable of being the writing teacher that he turned out to be, only, maybe, some seasoned adepts. As he recounted:⁶⁰

. . . just as we were eye-witnesses at the Holy Mountain of Athos. . . . If a spiritual elder is found anywhere having a disciple or two, and, when need be, three, and if any nearby are engaged in stillness, by coming at the proper time, they are enlightened by spiritual conversations.

Perhaps some future scholar will make the necessary investigation of all of the texts associated with Nil’s works to ascertain if and where one can determine that Nil bypassed the Slavic versions available in Russia and relied on those found only in the Balkans

56. Novi Sad (NS) No. 158: CMMHRL 2:801; *Ustav* 5.8.96, 7.22, 29.

57. See below under II, ‘The Best of the Bookman’.

58. Hilandar (HM SMS) No. 357: CMMHRL 1: 484, dated 1450s.

59. Krivochéine, ‘Introduction’, 67–112.

60. *Ustav* 11.12.

or on the original Greek—and for the latter, where these might have been located. For now, however, we must be content with the conclusion that while at Athos Nil either learned or finished learning how to read Greek, even if he might have ignored the diacritical marks.⁶¹ He undoubtedly mastered stillness as it was then practiced there and does not seem to have worried about its fourteenth-century detractors or the hot debate instigated by Barlaam of Calabria.⁶² Nil certainly did not become a proponent of Gregory Palamas's more philosophic and natural-scientific defense of hesychasm or doctrine of divine light.⁶³ Further than this into such matters we dare not go, except to propose that Nil may have already been thinking about his future collection of monastic saints lives, and even checking his Slavic texts against the available Greek originals.⁶⁴ Some language study, some hagiographic *Quellenforschung*, and an advanced practicum in Athonite stillness is as good a guess as any to why Nil went, but it could be 'none of the above'.

The Quiet Kelliot

Then, with the departure for my pilgrimage, upon returning to the monastery, I made a cell outside near the monastery and so lived in keeping with my power.⁶⁵

This next autobiographic tidbit by Nil recounts his attempt to emulate the Athonites who sought the best of both the anchoritic

61. See Gurii Tushin's copy of the Slavic-influenced Greek signature of 'Sinful and Witless Nil' in Prokhorov, *Avtografy*, 39/PNSIK 47, and below, *Sobornik Postscr.*: the signature employs one or two ligatures.

62. Von Lilienfeld, 'Der athonitische Hesychasmus des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts', 442, 447–448.

63. This is clear not only from Nil's writings, but also from his ignorance or rejection of Palamas's anachronistically didactic redaction of the Life of Peter of Athos in favor of the original version. Cf. Lake, *Early Days of Monasticism on Mount Athos*, 17–39; Gregory Palamas, *Oratio in . . . Petri*, PG 150:996A–1040C; SNS 1:227–268.

64. See below, under I, 'Four and Twenty Saints Lives'.

65. *To German* 4.

and cœnobitic. The late 1470s–early 1480s, after Nil’s presumed return from Athos, moreover, would have been the logical time and place for him to acquire more disciples, followers, and lay devotees. If, for example, Gurii Tushin (1452/5–1526), who took the tonsure in 1478/1479, was indeed such an acolyte before his brief tenure as Kirillov’s hegumen in 1484, we ought to place Nil’s kelliotic period at least a few years before that.

At this point Nil could have remained nearby Kirillov as the resident master-teacher of hesychasm, and thereby, with the more worldly Efrosin, co-directed the equivalent of a two-chair collegium. For all we know, Nil tried this, for he later wrote:⁶⁶

. . . those who lived in monasteries . . . and . . . were in cities, like Symeon the New Theologian, and his elder Symeon the Studite in the middle of the Imperial City, in the great cloister of Stoudion—in such a populous city—shone like heavenly lights with spiritual gifts; and similarly were Nicetas Stethatos and many others.

What worked in Constantinople five centuries earlier, however, proved not to Nil’s liking—maybe due to his character, maybe due to the politics of Kirillov’s administrative or intellectual leadership, or maybe due to the Russian customs of day and the annoying penetration of secular habits into the great cloisters.⁶⁷ Certainly the circumstances of 1483–1484, when Kirillov’s ‘fifteen major elders’, staged a demonstrative departure until hegumen Serapion resigned,⁶⁸ even if Nil might have sympathized with their discomfort, would have appeared incompatible with his saintly models.

And Isaac says to those who wish truly to practice stillness and purify the intellect in prayer: withdraw far from the visions of the world, and sever conversations, and do not wish habitually to host friends in your cell,

66. *Ustav*, Fwd. 8.

67. See below, *Ustav* 5.8.95, 10.5, 11.17.

68. MRIV, 95.

not even in good form, except for some, who are like-minded, harmonious, and fellow-initiates.⁶⁹

In other words, the genuine hesychast must reside in a place dedicated to stillness and only to stillness. Nil's academy would have only one chair *in situ*—his. Only time and events would tell how quiet it would be.

A Busy 'Abode of Stillness'⁷⁰

Now I have relocated far from the monastery, because, with the grace of God, I found a place pleasing to my knowledge, since it is little traveled by children of the world, as you yourself have seen

With these words, and, by present standards, this run-on sentence, Nil finished explaining his move to a distraught devotee.⁷¹ It turns out that about twelve miles of dense and mossy spruce forest, with various berries but no other edible plants,⁷² constituted 'far from the monastery' for Nil, as he settled north of Kirillov near the little Sora River and Lake by the name. It was also about twelve miles to the west of Ferapontov, the other prestigious cloister of the defunct Beloozero principality. Not too distant from either for useful contacts, Nil was less likely to attract unwelcome visitors by the Sora than in the vicinity of Kirillov.

Nil's 'many reverent brothers come to me wishing to dwell with us', is tropological, adapted from the encyclopedic Nikon of the Black Mountain. We do not know how Nil gathered resident disciples 'of his ethos' and ready to live strictly by 'the traditions of the Holy Fathers . . . according to the Divine Writings',⁷³ as he

69. *Ustav* 10.11: partially adapted from Isaac the Syrian.

70. Cf. below, *Ustav* 11.14.

71. To *German*, 4; see below under II: 'The Loose Cannon'; Nikol'skii dates the founding of the scete 1486: *Kirillo-Belozerskii monastyr'* 2: 416.

72. Prokhorov, 'Povest' o Nilo-Sorskom skite', 16.

73. See below, *Predanie* 3, 4, 6.

put it. But he seems to have established something like Kirill's original hermitage, with about a dozen residents clearly subordinate to one superior, while they followed the *Scete Typikon*. Kirill's version of it, faithful to the original, provided for illiterate monks, who defaulted to the Jesus Prayer when they did not know the required psalms of the standard cell rule.⁷⁴ Nil, however, omitted that provision,⁷⁵ as if, in the manner ascribed to the ancient Athenian Academy, he had inscribed outside 'our scete', as he termed it,⁷⁶ 'The Unlettered Shall Not Enter'.⁷⁷ On the economic side, he forbade ethical transgressions, such as exploitation of others labor, acceptance of ill-gotten gains as charity, or even bargaining over prices. Adornments were out of the question, and only seasoned elders were to speak to visitors.⁷⁸

The mid-seventeenth century 'Tale of the Arrival of Nil Sorskii' and the later descriptions and sketches of the hermitage indicate, perhaps *de rigueur*, that Nil himself dug the well, made the pond for watering the garden, and constructed a mill for his hermitage. The cells were small log cabins, sitting apart from each other, with trees still standing for full privacy, and housing one monk only.⁷⁹ Well away, perhaps two hundred fifty yards, from the housing complex, Nil personally made a hill of dirt over a swamp and there raised a little wooden church dedicated to the Presentation

74. Prokhorov, *Entsiklopediia*, 162. Accordingly, the entire Psalter was equivalent to 6000 recitations of 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me' or '... have mercy upon me, the sinner'; cf. MRIV 13.2.1, where Iosif has his monks who are ignorant of Psalm 144/145 recite the Jesus Prayer.

75. See below, *Scete Typikon* 33, note 61; also Prokhorov, 'Avtografy', 50, an PNSIK, 28, and Elena Shevchenko's forthcoming 'Neizvestnyi avtograf Nila Sorskogo', concerning another copy in Nil's hand of this recension of the *Scete Typikon* (personal communication in the Manuscript Division of the Russian National Library, 20 July, 2006).

76. *Predanie* 41.

77. Plato allegedly had stipulated that one unschooled in geometry (ἀγεωμέτρητος) could not study philosophy—at least with him.

78. *Predanie* 29, 31–34.

79. *Povest' o Nilo-Sorskom skite*, 398–399; see the frontispiece illustration of the skete.

(Candlemas).⁸⁰ Elena Romanenko claims from an early sixteenth-century manuscript that Nil composed the Vigils service.⁸¹

The extant copy of Nil's *Predanie* by his hand contains a supplement providing for communion via consecrated bread without a priest.⁸² However, by the time of death in 1508 his scete may have already had a regular hieromonk-superior, as definitely would be the case by 1515.⁸³ In the 1670s, the hermitage also had a 'guard', who heated the narthex of one of the churches in winter, checked daily for the superior on the health of the monks, and cared for the ill.⁸⁴ Whether such held under Nil is impossible to ascertain.

Romanenko also argues that Nil was consciously transposing into the forest the description of such 'scetes', found in the ancient monastic Lives, which he redacted and copied.⁸⁵ This point is moot and quite possibly true, but it is clear Nil's established his as a place where he could pray, write, and teach. Curiously, so far as we know, none of his major or writing disciples or followers stayed with him and remained to continue this work at his foundation. Rather, his literary legacy indicates that he kept up his connections with genuine acolytes like Innokentii and with Kirillov, attracted talented elders from elsewhere to establish their own kellia or hermitages in the vicinity, and employed scribes to do some of the copying. Nil's two most important literary colleagues, Gurii Tushin, who remained at Kirillov, and Nil Polev, who moved nearby from Iosifov without severing his ties with the latter, were master-copyists and codex-publishers employing their own scribe-assistants, yet taking credit for the resultant books.⁸⁶ So 'far from the monastery' was no hindrance to solid networking with Russia's most productive cloistered scriptoria.

80. Prokhorov, 'Povest' o Nilo-Sorskoi skite', 12; NSTRM, 136–137.

81. Romanenko (E. Kolkutina), 'Nil Sorski e il suo "skit"', 113; NSTRM, 152.

82. See below, Appendix II.

83. *Akty Arkheograficheskoi ekspeditsii* 1: 161.

84. *Povest' o Nilo-Sorskoi skite*, 397.

85. NSTRM, 133–138.

86. See below, II. 'The Best of the Bookmen' and 'The Man in the Middle'.

Publish Lest They Perish

But in his mercy God has caused grace to diminish from the saints for a while, so that they may accomplish the provisioning and the care of the brothers with a discourse of ministry, that is, instruction in piety, as Saint Macarius says of those who have attained perfection.⁸⁷

This abstraction and paraphrase from Byzantium's model metaphoriser provides a clue to Nil's activities at his scete. The ultimate goal may have been the praxis of *theoria*, that is, well trained mystical contemplation and communication with the divine, but Nil saw himself as part of a chain of instruction originating with God.⁸⁸ The bulk of his literary creativity was didactic, his original works serving for hesychastic 'distance learning' as well as on-the-spot pedagogy.

Furthermore, as a comparison with his epistles shows, his *Ustav* could and did serve as a didactic source book. For example, in response to an alleged request for a remedy for the *logismos* ('urge') of blasphemy, Nil cribbed from the corresponding section of the *Ustav* that identifies despondency, via ingratitude, with blasphemy, and from related passages.⁸⁹ Thus the recipient or other reader of the epistle would have on hand, besides the advice contained therein, an example of how to use the *Ustav*, or anything like it, to instruct on his own. In this case, the nominal addressee, Gurii Tushin, certainly knew Nil's writings as well as anyone other than Nil himself and hardly needed the epistle for his own instruction, but could gain from its construction for his edification of others.⁹⁰ As we shall see in the next part of this book, Nil's writings are

87. Nil Sorsky, *Ustav* 2.39, inspired by Pseudo-Macarius via Symeon Metaphrastes.

88. Nil Sorsky, *Predanie* 1; *Ustav*, Fwd. 1, 13–14.

89. *To Gurii* 7–9.

90. Gurii's Sof. 1468: 166v contains the brief 'On the Blasphemous Urge', which most likely is partially streamlined from *To Gurii* 8, or its source, *Ustav* 5.6.78.

replete with explicit and implicit advice and paradigms for the teaching and writing elder.⁹¹

Didactic purpose and hence intended audience, moreover, can serve as the key for our grasping the essential difference between the formal structures envisioned by Nil's two chief original compositions, his *Predanie* and his *Ustav*, also to be examined further on.⁹² The *Predanie* provided for a community of disciplined and supervised lavriotes, who confessed monastic infractions to their superior. Though specific to his scete, the *Predanie* was available, with modifications, for others.⁹³ The *Ustav*, focusing on the linked struggles against passions and for stillness, was, theoretically, for all monks, and thus could abstractly treat 'two or three' as the royal road between solitude and the coenobium.⁹⁴ Nil's contemporaries and literary executors did not see any of these ideal types as the sole route to Orthodoxy's monastic nirvana, and neither should we.

Four and Twenty Saints Lives

I have written from various manuscripts, striving to find the correct ones. And I found in those manuscripts much uncorrected, and as much as was possible for my meager knowledge, I corrected them. And what was impossible, I left be, so that someone having more knowledge than we correct the uncorrected and fill in the lacunae.⁹⁵ . . . And—what is not readily knowable—this, with simplicity of speech, have I placed within knowledge.⁹⁶

Employing Gregory the Sinaite's analogy of a 'sluggish monk' to 'a ship . . . at standstill' in need of 'oars or a galley', Nil advised his

91. See below, II. 'Literary Devices'.

92. See below, III. 'Texts and Structures'.

93. See below, under II, 'The Compatible Companion', and Innokentii, *Zavět*.

94. *Ustav* 11.8.

95. *Sobornik, Forew.* 1.

96. *Sobornik, Postscr.* 2.

disciples to ‘read the . . . Lives of the Fathers’.⁹⁷ But, as this extract from his *Foreword* indicates, he did more than that. Using his linguistic and metaphrastic skills, he created his own three-volume *Sobornik o Bože* (Collection in God) of twenty-four Lives of monastic saints, who lived from the third to the tenth centuries. According to Prokhorov, the watermarks on the paper Nil used indicated that he may have been working on this collection as early as the 1480s.⁹⁸ Tamara Lënngrén, who has taken it upon herself to publish this work and provide a verbal concordance, treats it as important as the *Predanie* and *Ustav* for understanding Nil’s overall outlook.⁹⁹ If any precise gaging with respect to such a comparison may be impossible, still the *Sobornik* affords us a unique peek into what Nil most valued and gives us another glimpse at how his mind operated.

True to liturgical principles, Nil structured his *Sobornik* in order by feast days, starting with 1 September—then the beginning of Russia’s calendar year—and with one undated saint attached to the last one (Paisius).¹⁰⁰ By using our own chronological, geographical, and analytical criteria, however, we can see that Nil devoted about a third each to the early history of monasticism in Egypt and Palestine, both eremitical and coenobitic, and the rest to Syria and Greece.

Commencing in Egypt with the murky Paul of Thebaid (?228–341), who had fled imperial Roman pagan persecution, Nil moves next to Paul’s pre-death acquaintance, the central monastic figure of Anthony the Great (251–356), and then on to a loosely linked cluster of fellow anchorites, Hilarion (291–371/372), Paisius the Great (d. 400), and Arsenius the Great (c. 354–c.450). The person of Patriarch Athanasius the Great of Alexandria (r. 328–373), not the Life, provides the connection from Anthony to Pachomius the Great (290/292–346/348), the founder of coenobiticism and

97. *Ustav* 2.26, paraphrased from Gregory.

98. Prokhorov, PNSIK, 33.

99. SNS 1:11–17; ‘Nil Sorskii i ego “Sobornik”’; also NSTRM, 63–98.

100. According to the annual calendar commencing 1 September, Lënngrén’s ‘Part 1’, with Lives for 24 May, 12 June, and 5 July (two), as well as Paisius’s, would have been Nil’s third volume, her ‘Part 2’ his first, her ‘Part 3’ his second.

initiator of the black garb, and thence to the ex-coenobite Onouphrius the Hermit (d. 400). Implicitly, Paisius's alleged biographer John Colubus ('the Dwarf', 339–?405) and Onouphrius's—Paphnutius the Recluse, Abbot of Scetis—also figure in Nil's panorama of the foundation figures of desert monasticism.

Nil's parallel presentation of Palestine's pristine asceticism commences with another refugee from persecution, Chariton of Iconium (mid 3rd–mid 4th c.), at whose Pharan Monastery Euthymius the Great (377/8–473) later settled. After the latter come two celebrated Cappadocians, Theodosius the Coenobiarch (423–529), and Euthymius's disciple Sabbas the Sanctified (439–532), whom Patriarch Sallust of Jerusalem appointed as supervisors, the one over the regional coenobia and the other over the laurae. Nil also included Euthymius's disciple Cyriacus the Recluse (447/9–554/6), Sabbas's disciple Bishop John the Hesychast (454–559), and a free floating anchorite Martinian (d. c. 400). Numerous references in the *Life of Euthymius*, moreover, point to the close ties between Palestine and Egypt.¹⁰¹

Palestine links up with Syria and its pillar sages, as Theodosius, en route to Palestine, had visited Symeon Stylite the Elder (390–459). From the top of his column, Symeon appears as well in the *Life of Euthymius*. Symeon's Life, celebrated on 1 September, commences the *Sobornik*. Nil similarly redacted the Life of that Syrian's namesake, Symeon the Stylite and Thaumaturge of the Wondrous Mountain (521/2–592)—the longest piece in the collection. The latter's monastery, we might note, figured in the real life and writings of one of Nil's most important sources, the eleventh-century Nikon of the Black Mountain.¹⁰² Nil also ties Palestinian monasticism to the Levantine and Byzantine defenders of icon-worship in the eighth and ninth century via the Saint Sabbas Laura theologian-hymnographer John of Damascus (c. 675–750). The historic scene now shifts to the

101. SNS 3: 272–273; Cyril/*Kirill*, 21; Cyril Scythop., *Lives* 30. Cyril of Scythopolis also composed the originals of the Lives of Sabas, John the Hesychast, and Cyriacus, but not Nil's version of Theodosius.

102. SNS 3:30, 288; see below under III, 'Centrality of Sources'; also MRIV13.9. This Symeon was also the purported recipient of an Epistle (Slavic version, *Slovo* 55) of Isaac the Syrian, another of Nil's key sources.

great coenobitic cloister of Stoudion in Constantinople and the Lives of Theodore (759–826) and his kinsman and successor abbot Nicola (d. 847–50). In the Greek sphere, Nil has already included two unconnected anchorites: Isaac of Dalmatia (d. 383) and Theodore of Sykeon (d. 613), and for the later period adds a third—Ioannikios the Great (752–846).

Nil finally takes us a bit further westward to his era's and his personal monastic Mecca, Mount Athos. He gives us first the model ninth-century, ex-soldier anchorite Peter, and then its tenth-century pedagogue and coenobiarch, Athanasius. So for Egypt, Palestine, Byzantium, and, specifically, Athos, Nil does not discriminate among the recluse or the non-communal *laura*, on the one hand, and the coenobium on the other hand. In fact, Athanasius or his acolytes, by calling his communal cloister a *laura*, symbolize Sorsky's sense of the sanctity of all modes of monasticism.

The style and content of Nil's *Sobornik* still require extensive monographic treatment, though some excellent, if conflicting work has already commenced. Comparisons with the earlier Slavic translations clarify that Nil was essentially a talented editor, making grammatical, syntactical, lexical, and even interpretative alterations for the sake of consistency and his readers' comprehension.¹⁰³ Whether he had recourse to Greek originals, no trace of which remain from his era in Russia, is a mystery. The pioneering imperial Russian hagiologist Ivan Pomialovskii, unaware of Nil's hand here, was sure that the redactor of his Slavic version did not check the Greek *Life of Sabbas*, and Nil's lacunae would back this position. The team of T. Helland and Tamara Lënngrén, though, are convinced that Nil did so for his *Life of Symeon the Stylite of the Wondrous Mountain*, even if he privileged the available Slavic.¹⁰⁴ This question for sure remains open.

We still, however, can say a few useful things about the portée of these Lives. Virtually all of them combine healing and other

103. Romanenko, NSTRM, 69, building upon K.V. Pokrovskii, 'K literaturnoi deiatel'nosti Nila Sorskogo'; Lur'e, *Ideologicheskaia bor'ba*, 325–331; Kloss, 'Nil Sorskii i Nil Polev', 164–166.

104. Lënngrén, 'Zhitiinii tekst', also citing Ivan Pomialovskii, *Zhitie sv. Savvy Osviashchennogo*.

miracles (some by relics), the prerequisite for sanctity, with the three essential elements of Nil's specific spirituality: consistent renunciation—poverty, dogged seeking of solitude—stillness, and energetic prayer, especially against demons. Nil's coenobiarchs hardly spurned hesychasm. Where solitude completely takes a rear seat, the Stylite pursuit of the public good or the Studite battle with heresy strides to the forefront.

In fact, a majority of Nil's subjects defended Orthodoxy, a half-dozen of them—such as the lone Isaac of Dalmatia who won over the Emperor Valens's top 'boyars'—at serious risk to their own necks. Characteristically, at the behest of their supreme bishop, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, both the ceonbiarch Theodosius and the lauraite Sabbas interrupt their abbatial superintendency to battle the Monophysiticism of their day. Similarly, Anthony aids Athanasius against Arianism, and the later Stylite heads the successful opposition to Manicheanism and astrology in Antioch. Meanwhile Cyriacus and John the Hesychast fight Nestorianism and also Origenism, which is still kicking around, at least as a straw horse, in the fifth and sixth centuries. Even some obscure heresies, which never make the Church History headlines, appear to be fought, such as the denial of the hypostatic equality of the Holy Spirit, faced by Paisius. In the pro-active sphere, Euthymius, an opponent also of Manicheanism, and the elder Symeon Stylite converted many nearby Arabs.¹⁰⁵

Nil may have included his unconnected monk-saints for just one lesson or two. The recluse Martinian's Life has a series of fantastic escapes from the lures of lust, before he dies at an unseemingly young age for an ascetic of that time.¹⁰⁶ Theodore of Sykeon, first a bordello offspring, next a protector of female virtue, and always an avid advocate of the cult of the martyr Saint George,

105. SNS 1: 127–129, 419–420; 2: 30–32, 37, 76, 508; 3: 99–100, 209–210, 255–261, 373, 434–439. Nil retained from the original *Life of Euthymius* the characterization of Nestorians as 'Jewish-reasoning' (*zhidovomudreni*) and of the Monophysite Theodosius as 'precursing the Antichrist'—terms also applied against contemporary Russian dissidents: SNS 3: 281, 282; Cyril Scythop., *Lives*, 37, 38; Cyril/*Kyryllos*, 26, 27; AfED, 425, 428; and below, I. 'The Church at Large', and II. 'The Unexpected Bedfellow'.

106. SNS 3: 337–365.

upbraids the tyrant-Emperor Phocas to his face for murdering his subjects.¹⁰⁷ The ex-heroic warrior (“Second David”), extreme ascetic, and wonder-worker Ioannikos can levitate, walk over water, and make himself invisible to rescue prisoners under the noses of their guards.¹⁰⁸ Were there any spiritual fortresses that these ascetic athletes for Christ could not storm?

If we take into account the fact that Nil utilized for his original writings the corpus of only two of these monk-saints, John of Damascus and the Theodore the Studite, but neither very much, and otherwise only a few instructive episodes from the *Sobornik*,¹⁰⁹ we can see how this collection meshed with his reading-teaching curriculum. The major spiritual masters, with their own collections of discourses, brief chapters, or apophthegms, spoke for themselves and constituted a different set of courses in the theory and practice of asceticism and stillness. The *Sobornik* contained not so much the abstract word as living history and models, for which Nil’s editing and his glosses of hellenisms, as Lënngren and Romanenko have shown, could only aid his reader.¹¹⁰ They have also demonstrated how the *Sobornik* amplifies what we already know of Nil from his writings and book-copying.¹¹¹

One of the strangest accusations leveled at Nil—and it may have been part of a polemical pommeling of prelates and Iosifites in the 1550s—is Pseudo-Vassian Patrikeev’s placing in the mouth of the long-gone Iosif the charge that Nil ‘deleted miracles’ from the Lives of the ‘ancient . . . wonder-workers’.¹¹² To the contrary, some of these Lives are so full of miracles as to muddle the modern mind with incredulity over the credulity of yore. Almost a century ago, Konstantin Pokrovskii, agreeing with Nil’s mid-sixteenth

107. SNS 3: 341.

108. SNS 2: 165, 171, 178–180.

109. For example, Pachomius’s pulling down his lovely church and Arsenius’s burial instructions: *Predanie* 34; *Testament* 2.

110. NSTRM, 77–80; Lënngren, ‘Zhitiinyi tekst’, 28.

111. NSTRM, 80–98; Lënngren, ‘Nil Sorskii i ego “Sobornik”’, *et al.*

112. Pseudo-Vassian Patrikeev, ‘Prenie s Iosifom’, 280; on its late date, maybe the 1550s, see Ostrowski, *Fontological Investigation*, 186–239; Pliguzov, *Polemika*, 253–77; for the text, see the citation, below, commencing the Epilogue.

century defender, argued from two of the Lives that our hero did not tamper with content and only corrected from originals,¹¹³ but this story may be more complex. For all we know, by resorting to his ‘meager knowledge’,¹¹⁴ Nil may have incorrectly ‘corrected’. In other words, formally speaking, Nil may have corrupted a text, though I doubt that any suggestion of subverting substance could survive serious scrutiny of this sumptuous ascetic smorgasbord.

The Church at Large

Would you please write to Paisii and Nil and consult with them over this: ‘As soon as three years shall have come, the seven thousand will terminate’. . . and please write back to me, if Paisii and Nil can visit me to talk . . . about these heresies, and whether you have at Kirillov and Ferapontov and Kamennyi these books: *Pope Sylvester of Rome*, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, . . . and *The Logic*, and *Dionysius the Areopagite*, because the heretics have them all.¹¹⁵

In these words Novgorod’s energetic and inquisition-seeking Archbishop Gennadii (r. 1484–1504, d. 1505) implored his former Rostov colleague Ioasaf (from the Princes Obolensky, r. 1481–1489, d. 1514) in 1489—an excellent starting point for our inquiry into Nil’s involvement in public life. At this time the archbishop was not only launching an offensive against purported, learned dissidents in Novgorod and Moscow (the so-called ‘Judaizers’), he was also trying to limit Grand Prince Ivan III’s confiscation and bestowal of archepiscopal and monastic lands in his recently acquired Novgorodian domains upon loyal and often needy warriors. According to the older scholarly paradigm, Nil should have been the

113. Pokrovskii, ‘K literaturnoi deiatel’nosti Nila Sorskago, 33, approved by Lur’e, ‘K Voprosu ob ideologii Nila Sorskago’, 199–201; NSTRM, 66.

114. *razum*: for the difficult choice of English words here, see below under III, ‘Technical Terms’, text to notes 152–156.

115. AfED 318, 320.

Grand Prince's ally, not someone to whom Gennadii would turn, since the prelate's proclaimed preference regarding 'heretics' was, consciously *modo iberico*, to 'burn and hang them'.¹¹⁶

How did Nil stand on these two issues that so troubled this admirer of Spain's budding inquisition? If the *Sobornik* is a guide, Nil would not have shed any tears over lost monastic wealth, though he might not have approved of the Grand Prince's high-handed measures which apparently caused the deaths or impoverishing displacement of thousands of Novgorodians.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, if asked by the church leaders, Nil himself would have been in the thick of the fight against heresy, and, like Anthony, Theodosius, Euthymius, or Sabbas, ready to lend all talents to the cause. However, more than one scholar has credited the reluctance of the Moscow Synod of 1490 to execute the accused heretics to (Paisii's and) Nil's presence there and influence,¹¹⁸ though not a shred of paper, authentic or pseudo, points directly to Nil here. We shall see later on that the *Sobornik* Nil is the real one, not the Nil of some wishful-thinking modern admirers.¹¹⁹

Here we turn to what would become another burning public issue: a cycle of documents from the 1550s and 1560s see Nil at the epicenter of the moral and theological backing of Ivan III's purported attempt at a synod in 1503 to terminate monastic land-holding.¹²⁰ This not being the forum to present the pros and cons regarding the evidence, suffice it to say that the opinion of the most knowledgeable, source-based Nil scholars, who still accept the historicity of such a conclave and debate, envision his giving only a personal opinion against monastic property and not presenting a

116. AfED, 381; on the inspiration from Spain's persecution of Jews, relapsed *conversos*, and other heretics, see Goldfrank, 'Theocratic Imperatives', 34, 290, note 20.

117. Skrynnikov, *Tragediia Novgoroda*, 12–21.

118. Von Lilienfeld, NSSS, 67–68; Skrynnikov, *Gosudarstvo i tserkov'*, 181; *et al.*; Nil's brother Andrei was definitely there as one of Ivan III's representatives: AfED, 385; see below II, 'The Congenital Connection,' text to note 15.

119. See below under II, 'The Unexpected Bedfellow'.

120. Note Alekseev, Sinytsina, and Skrynnikov against Ostrowski and Pliguzov: Prokhorov and Romanenko do not enter this debate at all.

principled political pose.¹²¹ What is certain, from about thirty per cent of Nil's *Predanie* and the occasional statement in the *Ustav*, is that on paper he was a consistent 'non-possessor' in the organization of his scete, and that in his teachings he considered worldly attachments to be pernicious. He implored monks to:

recognize by what wretchedness we are enveloped and to what mindlessness we surrender ourselves, striving for participation and success in this world, acquiring perishable objects, and on their account marching into clamor and fights, and effecting a loss for our souls.¹²²

But he never, so far as can be ascertained from his writings or reliable sources, summoned the state to manage or confiscate monastic properties, so that, free from worldly concerns, monks might practice *theoria*.¹²³

Perhaps a more fruitful approach here is not to argue over what we do not and cannot know about any synodal activity in 1503, but rather take a look at Nil's relations with his attested closest companions, collaborators, and devotees and see what such evidence may tell us about him, his public life, and his influence.

121. Prokhorov, *PNSIK*, 27–28; Romanenko, *NSTRM*, 124; contrast Nikol'skii, 'Obshchinnaia i keleinaia zhizn', 177–178; Moiseeva, *Valaamskaia beseda*, 20–32; Lur'e, *Ideologicheskaia bor'ba*, 412–417; Zimin, *Krupnaia feodal'naia votchina*, 67–72, and *Rossii na rubezh*, 197–209; Kazakova, *Ocherki*, 68–86; Sinitsyna, 'Spornye voprosy'; 'Tipy', 133; Alekseev, *Pod znakov kontsa vremeni*, 245–68; and the old emigré and religious scholarship, such as Meyerdorff, 'Partisans et enemis', 38–41, or Špidlík, *Joseph de Volokolamask*, 161. Writing before Ostrowski and Pliguzov challenged the older paradigm, von Lilienfeld, *NSSS*, 167–174 and Maloney, *RH*, 44–45, as well as Lur'e and also Goldfrank for the first edition of *MRIV*, 10–11 (contrast the revised ed., 37–39), assumed the validity of the later sources.

122. *Ustav* 2.45; see below under III, 'Further on Nil's Non-Possession'.

123. 'When the synod on widower-priests was concluded, the elder Nil started to say that monasteries should not have villages, and monks should live in hermitages, and they should feed themselves via handicrafts, and the Beloozero hermits were with him'. Thus wrote the unknown author of the 1550s–1560s (Prokhorov would date it 1540s) 'Pis'mo o neliubkakh' (Writ of Emmities), *PIV*, 367. This same source has the dead Paisii Iaroslavov also in attendance at this synod. See Ostrowski, *Fontological Investigation*, 107–120; Prokhorov, 'Skazanie Paisiia Iaroslavova', 143.