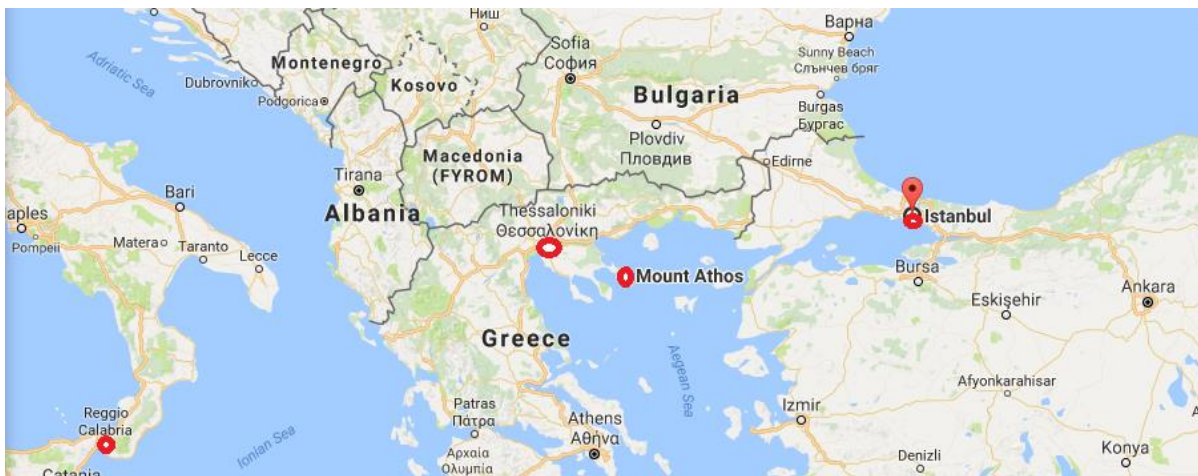


Resource Sheet 55: Saint Gregory Palamas

A summary of Saint Gregory Palamas' life:

He was probably born at Constantinople of a noble family. From his youth, he was attracted to the monastic ideal, and successfully persuaded his brothers and sisters, along with his widowed mother, to take up the monastic life. Around 1318 he and his two brothers went to Mount Athos, where they learned the way of contemplative prayer. After a while, he was forced to flee to Thessalonica, being ordained a priest there in 1326. He then took up the eremitic life at a mountain near Beroea, and eventually returned to Athos in 1331. Six years later, he became involved in a controversy with Barlaam, a Greek monk from Calabria, Italy. Barlaam believed that philosophers had better knowledge of God than did the prophets, and he valued education and learning more than contemplative prayer. As such, he believed the monks on Mount Athos were wasting their time in contemplative prayer when they should instead be studying to gain intellectual knowledge. St. Gregory criticized Barlaam's rationalism. A synod held in Constantinople in 1341 also supported St. Gregory's views, condemning Barlaam. In 1347, he was consecrated Archbishop of Thessalonica, but the political climate made it impossible for him to take up his see until 1350. During a voyage to the Imperial capital, he was captured by the Turks and held in captivity for over a year. He died in 1359 and was subsequently glorified by the Orthodox Church in 1368.



Quote from Saint Gregory Palamas:

“If you put something fragrant on to burning coals, you motivate those who approach to come back again and to stay near, but if instead you put on something with an unpleasant, oppressive smell, you repel them and drive them away. It is the same with the mind. If your attention is occupied with what is holy, you make yourself worthy of being visited by God, since this is the sweet savour which God catches scent of. On the other hand, if you nurture evil, foul and earthly thoughts within you, you remove yourself from God's supervision and unfortunately make yourself worthy of His aversion.”