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λεξιθηρέω in Socrates' *HE* 6, 22: Heresy or Belletrism?

Abstract: This paper aims to analyze the use of the verb λεξιθηρέω in the work of the Church historian Socrates Scholasticus. The usage of this uncommon verb in Greek literature is discussed, as it has cultural and religious implications relating to the religious milieu of Socrates' time. Christian authors used λεξιθηρέω disparagingly and linked it to heresy and dilettantism. However, Socrates Scholasticus used this verb to describe the literary activity of the Novatian bishop Sisinnius, an apparently contradictory use of λεξιθηρέω prompted by the historian's sympathy for Novatianism. My working assumption is that Socrates used λεξιθηρέω as a stylistic term and applied it to Sisinnius in order to portray him as a learned bishop capable of competing with other well-educated bishops.

Keywords: λεξιθηρέω, heresy, orthodoxy, paideia, Socrates of Constantinople.

DOI 10.1515/phil-2014-0017

λεξιθηρέω was not a frequently used word in Greek literature. The term is translated by the LSJ as “hunt after words”, thus rendering the two words that compound the verb. The cultural and religious implications that the verb evoked, however, were richer than the LSJ's translation, and very difficult to render in a single word. From Aulus Gellius' coinage of the verb in the second century AD to the fifth century AD I have found λεξιθηρέω (or its adjective λεξιθηρος, or the noun λεξιθηρία) used only by Christian authors when portraying and criticizing heretics. In this sense the usage of λεξιθηρέω in the *Historia ecclesiastica* by the church historian Socrates¹ to describe the literary activity of the Novatian bishop Sisinnius is puzzling, since the historian's affinity with Novatianism – still a matter of debate in modern scholarship – should have

¹ Whether he should be called “of Constantinople” or “Scholasticus” has been a matter of debate. See Périchon/Maraval/Hansen (2004) 10–11; Maraval (2001) 281–282; van Nuffelen (2004a) 8–10; Urbainczyk (1997) 4–10; Rohrbacher (2002) 108–109.

prevented him from applying *λεξιθηρέω* to Sisinnius, a verb that in Christian literature had always been synonymous with negative concepts such as heresy and dilettantism.

It is my working assumption that Socrates broke with the Christian tradition of using *λεξιθηρέω* derogatively in a religious sense in accordance with his more flexible views on religious orthodoxy and on the place of classical *paideia* in the Christian cultural environment. Instead, Socrates used *λεξιθηρέω* as a stylistic term with the intention of presenting the Novatian Sisinnius as a learned bishop who managed to compete with similarly well-educated Christian bishops, especially with the anti-Novatian John Chrysostom. In what follows, after providing the translation of *HE* 6, 22, I will present a study of the use of *λεξιθηρέω* from its coinage and its use in the early Christian tradition to the fifth century AD. This will serve as the theoretical framework for the study of Socrates' sense of cultural and religious orthodoxy that will contribute to an explanation of his use of a verb with heretical connotations in an otherwise unequivocally positive passage. Thus Socrates' usage of *λεξιθηρέω* in *HE* 6, 22 will be considered as a programmatic statement of his religious beliefs and an open-minded consideration of the role of classical *paideia* in the context of Christian scholarship².

Socrates' *Historia Ecclesiastica* deals with the history of the Church and the secular affairs that affected it, from the reign of Constantine the Great to the Church historian's time under the rule of Theodosius II, an eventful period during which Christianity became the official religion but was also split by internal dissensions and numerous heresies. The principal aim of Socrates' *HE* was to denounce such disagreements as the root of the problems of the Church and the State³. His account of those events sheds a negative light on those emperors, clergymen and bishops whose religious allegiances lay with the unorthodoxy (i.e., non-Nicene Christianity), and in this manner his *Ecclesiastical Church* bears witness to the battle of the theological arguments and Christological debates that each heresy vindicated. For Socrates, therefore, the unity of the Church was the basic priority⁴.

In this context, his portrait of Sisinnius, a Novatian bishop in Constantinople, centres on the bishop's rhetorical abilities, which had made him a formidable competitor in the theological arena⁵. After praising his witticisms and dialectical

² On Socrates' attitudes toward classical *paideia*, see Maraval (2001) 290–291.

³ Socrates *HE* 1, 1.

⁴ For the role of allusions to heresies and sects in Socrates' work, see Allen (1990) 267–271; van Nuffelen (2004a) 83–84; 315–319.

⁵ For the limits of rhetoric, dialectic and philosophy in Socrates, see Eucken (2001). Sozomenus *HE* VIII, 1 will rely on Socrates for his description of Sisinnius.

skills and commenting on his luxurious δίατρα⁶, Socrates condenses his appraisal of Sisinnius as follows: “he is the author of many works: but they are characterized by too great an affectation of elegance of diction (λεξιθηρεῖ), and a lavish intermingling of poetic expressions. On which account he was more admired as a speaker than as a writer; for there was dignity in his countenance and voice, as well as in his form and aspect, and every movement of his person was graceful”⁷. Maraval’s translation reads thus: “Il est l’auteur de nombreux livres, dans lesquels il recherche les mots rares (λεξιθηρεῖ) et y mêle des expressions poétiques”⁸. In my opinion, Maraval’s translation is more accurate as it captures the nuances of the core meaning of λεξιθηρέω.

The usage of λεξιθηρεῖ in *HE* 6, 22 stands out for its lack of pedigree in the classical tradition and the absence of Scriptural antecedents. In fact, the verb was coined by a Roman author, Aulus Gellius, a central figure in modern reconstructions of the cultural milieu of the Second Sophistic⁸. Gellius composed his multi-layered *Noctes Atticae* in the second half of the second century AD in order to compile numerous anecdotes, data and information on a wide variety of topics (*NA Praef.* 3: *renum disparilitas*). His bookishness and inclination for *copia verborum* reflected a period in which the search for linguistic oddities with which to awe audiences and to show off the paideia of the elite Romans was in its heyday. In fact, the quest for rare words became a leitmotif of Graeco-Roman literature, as proven by the presence of terms alluding to this practice, such as λεξιθηρέω, λεπτολογία, λογοθήρας, ὀνοματοθήρας or εὐρησιλογία⁹. In *NA* 2, 9 Gellius reproves Plutarch for his criticism of the inappropriateness of a word used by Epicurus: “in the same book, Plutarch also finds fault a second time with Epicurus for using an inappropriate word and giving it an incorrect meaning. Now Epicurus wrote as follows: “The utmost height of pleasure is the removal of everything that pains”. Plutarch declares that he ought not to have said “of everything that pains”, but “of everything that is painful”; for it is the removal of pain, he explains, that should be indicated, not of that which causes pain. In bringing this

⁶ For the theological implications of non-rigorist behavior as in the case of Sisinnius, see Gregory (1975) 12–14; Vogt (1968) 245–247.

⁷ Socrates’ translations are taken from Zenos (1957).

⁸ Oikonomopoulou (2007) 1–5; 234. Thanks are due to Dr. Oikonomopoulou for granting me permission to quote passages of her PhD dissertation.

⁹ Λεπτολογία: Eus. *PE.* 14, 2, 3; 5, 14; 8, 2; Lucianus *Prom.* 6; *Bis Acc.* 34; *JConf* 10; Philostr., *VA* 1, 17; *VS* 515, 2; 568, 7; λογοθήρας: Eus. *PE.* 8, 12, 9; ὀνοματοθήρας: Athen., *Deipn.* 3, 53–55; 4, 83; 14, 60; *Epit.* 2, 1, 17–18; or εὐρησιλογία: Athen., *Deipn.* 5, 21; *Epit.* 2, 1, 69; Eus. *PE* 2, 6, 16; 3 (*Praef.* 3); 3, 13, 9; 3, 15, 1; 3, 16, 4; 5, 3, 3; 14, 10, 3; 14, 10, 7; 15, 1, 3; *HE* 1, 71, 1; Plu. *Mor.* 28a; 31e; *Quaest. Conv.* 625c; 656a; 682b. For the implications of paideia in the Second Sophistic, vid. Schmitz (1997).

charge against Epicurus Plutarch is “word-chasing” (λεξιθηρεῖ) with excessive minuteness and almost with frigidity; for, far from hunting up such verbal meticulousness and such refinements of diction, Epicurus hunts them down”¹⁰. In their French translation and commentary, Marache and Julien state that “λεξιθηρεῖ est hapax: il signifie *faire la chasse aux mots*. Il ne s’agit pas ici de la chasse aux mots telle que la pratiquait Fronton, mais de la recherche trop subtile de nuances de sens”¹¹. By coining the term λεξιθηρέω Gellius wanted to direct his audience’s attention to a practice pertaining to the cultural arena of his time, namely a concern for literary quality without corresponding efforts to scrutinize texts in great detail. Endowed with a meta-literary function in Gellius’ educational and cultural programme¹², λεξιθηρέω was intended to set the boundaries of erudition for those Roman aristocrats whose *paideia* and *otium* were meant to supply a type of knowledge that could benefit their *negotia* and marked their status in the socio-cultural elite. λεξιθηρέω was used by Gellius to interweave the limits of cultural erudition with social status, and to deprecate the linguistic quibbling and fruitless captiousness of opsimaths, dilettantes and parvenus for engaging themselves in the inefficient and inadequate practice of λεξιθηρία¹³.

As the origin of λεξιθηρέω is related to captiousness and the imposition of cultural and linguistic boundaries, it was only a matter of time before the word was adopted by Christian authors and adapted to suit their scrupulous disputes in theological and Christological controversies. Recent studies have accurately shown that the shaping of the early Christian culture took place within the cultural environment of the Second Sophistic¹⁴, a movement in which word-hunters abounded. In tune with the educational and instructive work of Gellius, Clement of Alexandria’s *Pedagogue* attested to the practice of hunting for rare words and obscure meanings. In a passage (*Paed.* 1, 6, 45, 3) comparing the relationship between the Word and the Holy Spirit with that of milk and nourishment, Clement of Alexandria refuses to elaborate on the comparison any further on the grounds that he did not want to lapse into λεξιθηρία (οὐ γάρ μοι τῆς λεξιθηρίας μέλει τὰ νῦν)¹⁵. Clement shared Gellius’ concern that linguistic

10 Gellius’ translations taken from Rolfe (1961).

11 Marache/Julien (1967–1968) 97 n. 1.

12 *NA*, Praef. 12–13. On the nature and aim of Gellius’ *NA*, see Olmos (2012).

13 *NA* 1, 7, 17; 5, 15, 9; 11, 7, 3; 14, 5; 15, 9, 6. Marache/Julien (1967–1968) III, 181: “il s’agit plutôt d’excès de zèle que de pédantisme”.

14 Most notably Brent (2006) and Winter (2002).

15 Marrou/Harl (1960) 82 consider that Clement often practiced λεξιθηρία: “Clément pratique lui aussi cette λεξιθηρία. Le *Pédagogue* est plein des mots inattendus qui surprennent l’helléniste le mieux exercé, mots pittoresques et expressifs, piquants par leur rareté même”.

zeal could obscure the content and the message of their works. In a work of a similar tone¹⁶, *On the First Principles*, Origen was the first Christian author to explicitly associate heretics with λεξιθηρία. Heretics, it was claimed, aimed to substantiate their argumentation against the teaching of Jesus in parables: “we must note the passage as an argument against heretics, who hunt out similar passages from the Old Testament” (*De Orig.* 3, 1, 16: λεξιθηροῦντας μὲν τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης τοιαῦτα). In this case, λεξιθηρία implied a deliberate misreading of the Old Testament in search of theological arguments to nullify the freedom of will.

Given that the practice and semantics of λεξιθηρία caused internal dissensions and evoked heresy, it does not strike us as odd that the word continued to worry Christian authors. The dialogue *De Recta in Deum Fide*, composed ca. 290–300 AD¹⁷, provides us with another instance of the use of the verb λεξιθηρέω. The author of this treatise – either Origen or Adamantius¹⁸ – deals with the defence of the orthodox Christian faith against the teaching of several groups of heretics (Marcionites, Bardasanes, Valentinians). In the second part of this treatise, Adamantius appeals to Eutropius, the pagan arbitrator who was judging Adamantius' disputation against representatives of these heresies, because the Marcionite Marcus was “hunting after words”¹⁹ to contest orthodox interpretations of the New Testament. Further on Eutropius will conclude that the teachings of those heretics “have turned from the straightforward and true doctrine. They have hunted down the words of Scripture (λεξιθηροῦντες τὰς ἐκ τῶν γραφῶν ῥήσεις), and ensnared them to serve their own mischievous and preconceived ideas”²⁰. Consequently by the turn of the fourth century the practice of λεξιθηρία was firmly linked to heresy in the Christian world.

The association of heresy with λεξιθηρέω would be completely consolidated by Epiphanius of Salamis, the Christian author who resorted to λεξιθηρέω most frequently. In the 370s the bishop composed a heresiology entitled *Panarion* (“Medicine Chest”) dealing with eighty heresies that had endangered the unity of Christianity. The adamant consistency of his defence of religious orthodoxy and his willingness to chastise “everything outside the one, holy, catholic, and orthodox Church”²¹ won esteem for the *Panarion* in the genre of heresiology, and earned Epiphanius a reputation for strict rectitude and for being the scourge of

¹⁶ Butterworth (1936) viii–ix.

¹⁷ Pretty (1998) 16–17.

¹⁸ On the authorship, see Pretty (1998) 9–16.

¹⁹ Adam. *De Recta in Deum Fide* 90, 12. Translations taken from Pretty (1998).

²⁰ Adam. *De Recta in Deum Fide* 236, 12.

²¹ Young (1982) 200. See also Jacobs (2012) 32–34; Kim (2010a) 385–386; Schott (2007) 560–561.

heretics, owing to his totalizing discourse²². Thus it is no wonder that Epiphanius – accurately nicknamed “name caller” by Williams²³ – used *λεξιθηρέω* against heresies consistently throughout his *Panarion* with the core meaning of “hunting for words or unorthodox readings in the Scriptures”. Williams has interpreted rather than translated *λεξιθηρέω* in many different ways: in 30, 25, 4, the Ebionites are accused of *λεξιθηρία* as “those who hunt for words (τοῖς *λεξιθηροῦσι*) <that they have invented> to their own ruin and the ruin of their converts”. For Epiphanius it was clear that a sect who spoke nonsense (30, 25, 4: *κενοφωνίας*) could not compete with the authority of Peter’s or Paul’s words (30, 25, 2) despite the Ebionites’ accusations of imposture against them (30, 16, 6–9), and their characterization of Paul as a proselyte (30, 25, 1). In 45, 4, 1 the Severians are criticized for using apocrypha together with parts of the canonical books. They, Epiphanius tells us, hunted out (*λεξιθηροῦντες*) “only those texts which they can reinterpret by combining them to suit themselves”. Those who did not accept John’s Revelation were also denounced for discrediting John (51, 34, 1) “in their endless hunt for texts (*λεξιθηροῦντες*)”. Unsurprisingly, Arians are chastised for their tendentious misinterpretations of the Scriptures (69, 61, 1; similar imputations were brought against Apollinarians in 77, 33, 3) since (69, 50, 1) “like pirates mutilating sound bodies, they chase down (*λεξιθηροῦντες*) things which have been well and rightly said by each scripture”. Their heresy was affected by their activities as *λεξιθηροῦντες* (69, 76, 4): “But since it has been indicated that the Son subjects and hands all things over to the Father, and that the Father subjects all things to the Son, the curious are left with the person of the Holy Spirit (τοῖς *λεξιθήρησι* τὸ τοῦ πνεύματος ἁγίου πρόσωπον)”.

Epiphanius vehemently replied to those groups that challenged his sense of religious orthodoxy by discrediting their alternative interpretations of the Scriptures and their canonization of unsacred books. However, beyond Epiphanius’ obvious intention of condemning heretics, these passages should be interpreted as dynamic texts that aim to provide a paradigm of the heretic. Indeed, Kim has recently interpreted the *Panarion* as an example of collective biography, and emphasized the fact that Epiphanius stereotyped the heresiarch as the unholy man, thus subverting the genre of hagiographic biographies²⁴. In this sense, *λεξιθηρέω* became one of the many boundaries that Epiphanius aimed to establish between orthodoxy and heresy. His straightforward reading of the Scriptures

²² Socrates *HE* 5, 32; 6, 10; 7, 27; Sozomenus *HE* 6, 10.

²³ Williams (2009) xxxi. See, for instance, his other insults and charges brought against heretics: poison (40, 1; 77, 1), weeds (40, 1; 73, 11), magicians (67, 1), pupils of pagan tendencies (26, 16; 31, 2; 66, 46), demons (21, 2; 25, 1; 57, 1), or snakes (69, 3).

²⁴ Kim (2012a) 393–401. In similar terms, Lyman (1995).

reflected an orthodox discourse that opposed allegorical readings, a feature that became one of the pillars of his anti-Origenism²⁵. In fact, according to Epiphanius (*Pan.* 64, 4, 2), “Arius took his cue from Origen, and so did the Anomoeans who succeeded him, and the rest”. Origen’s hunger for knowledge based on Greek education (64, 72, 9) and keen interest in the venomous classical *paideia* harmed a great deal of people (64, 72, 5): “how badly you have been hurt, and how many others you have hurt – as though you have been bitten by a baneful viper, I mean secular education, and become the cause of others’ death”.

By allowing no room for unorthodox methods of reading canonical texts, Epiphanius not only forbid λεξιθηρία but also confronted Christian educational models that incorporated elements from the classical *paideia*: a feature that he considered could undermine the orthodoxy and unity of the Nicene Creed. The supposedly careless attitude towards literary style and rude prose style of Epiphanius²⁶ should be qualified, as his pedagogical and religious programme explicitly dealt with the correct choice of terms. In his *De Fide* he clearly stated that the threat of heresy had been experienced through words (*De Fide* 1, 2: ἐν πείρᾳ τε τούτων διὰ τῶν λόγων γεγενημένοι), and thus required scrupulous attention to the choice of words in each case (*De Fide* 1, 1: τῶν ἀπὸ ἐκάστης αἰρέσεως βλασφημιῶν καὶ αἰσχρολογιῶν) and a subsequent process of validation according to the orthodoxy. His claims to σαφήνεια and βραχυλογία associated literary clarity with his straightforward understanding of the Scriptures. Thus the Scriptures are easy to explain and understand (51, 31, 10: πόθεν δὲ οὐκ ἔχομεν τούτων δεῖξαι τὴν σαφήνειαν), in opposition to the empty talk of the heresies (64, 68, 5–6: πῶς ἰσχύει σου ἡ κενοφωνία ... εἰς τὴν πᾶσαν σαφήνειαν δηλοῦ), philosophical reasoning in an Aristotelian way (69, 56; 69, 71; 76, 37), and, of course, the practice of λεξιθηρία²⁷. Such literary flaws partook of the “poetics of heresiology”²⁸ and were subject to Epiphanius’ accusation of subverting the authority of the Scriptures by interpreting the sacred texts with a kind of knowledge equidistant from Christian heresies and the classical *paideia*. In doing so, Epiphanius completely Christianized the term λεξιθηρία.

As part of a wider cultural debate (the relationship between Christian scholarship and the pagan cultural legacy), λεξιθηρία clashed with the tendency (not always shared by all Christian authors) to undecorated discourse and unadorned

²⁵ Clark (1992) 87–104. Also Jacobs (2012) 39–40; Kim (2010a) 395–396; Williams (2009) xvii–xx.

²⁶ Cameron (2003) 475–476; Schneemelcher (1962) 910–923; Jacobs (2012) 38–39; Kim (2010a) 383–384; (2010b) 161–163; Lyman (2000) 151–152; Pourkier (1992) 480–488; Williams (2009) xiii–xx; xxviii–xxx.

²⁷ Williams (1983) 56–62.

²⁸ Cameron (2003) 472–473; 481–482.

speeches that was in vogue by the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth century²⁹. The plain simplicity of the prose style had to echo religious simplicity, with simplicity taken to mean uniqueness, union and abidance to the Nicene orthodoxy. *λεξιθηρία*, of course, clashed with those stylistic and religious tenets as it proposed alternative readings of the Scriptures that demanded complex and more elaborate interpretations involving *λεξιθηρία*. Contemporary Christian authors followed Epiphanius' lead, understanding the charge of *λεξιθηρία* to be a practice that clashed with the immutability of the truth of the Nicene Creed. Attacks against the equality of the persons of the Trinity were dealt with by Didymus the Blind, who described as "word-hunters" those who thought the Holy Ghost inferior to the Father and the Son (*De Trinitate* 2, 8: Οὔτοι δὲ λεξιθηροῦντες, καὶ τὰ περὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος καθ' ἑαυτῶν συμκρύνοντες). Likewise Cyril of Alexandria expressed his perplexity at those whose *λεξιθηρία* may have brought dishonour and disgrace to the Son by considering him inferior to the Father (*De Sancta Trinitate* 485, 2: λεξιθηροῦσι δὲ οὕτως καὶ τριποθήτως ἀρπάζουσι πᾶν ὅπερ ἄν φαίνοιτο τῆ τοῦ Υἱοῦ τιμῆ τε καὶ δόξῃ). *λεξιθηρία* was also present in treatises, such as Evagrius Ponticus' *Ad Eulogium Monachum*, in which he asked for abstention from untimely and vain utterances (*Ad Eulog.*: Μὴ τὴν ἄκαιρον γλώσσαν λεξιθήρει). Also the *Constitutio Apostolorum* clearly advised against *λεξιθηρία* along with other recommendations on the language and behaviour of widows (3, 5, 3).

However, when compared with the meaning that the practice of *λεξιθηρία* had for the aforementioned authors, the heretical³⁰ and religious implications of the accusation of *λεξιθηρία* appeared greatly diminished in Socrates' *Historia Ecclesiastica*. In my opinion, two main reasons caused Socrates to break with this definition, and to empty the meaning of *λεξιθηρία* of its heretical connotations and fill the verb with a much less aggressive meaning. First, his broad-minded approach to classical *paideia* was aimed at integrating it into the cultural milieu of the Nicene Creed. His interest in educational and literary matters resulted from a complete education in the thriving cultural atmosphere of Constantinople under the instruction of two renowned grammarians, Helladius and Ammonius, and the rhetorician Troilus³¹. Besides being well-read in theology and philosophy, the breadth of his *paideia* included knowledge of classical authors and of almost contemporary authors such as Libanius, Themistius or the emperor Julian. More

²⁹ Auksi (1995) remains the main reference in this field, especially 58–66; 144–173.

³⁰ On the shifting boundaries of the conception of "heresy", see Iricinschi and Zellentin (2008) 7: "[heresy] becomes a discursive structure rather than an historical object". Inglebert (2001) 106–113; Hanson (1989) 151–153.

³¹ Socrates *HE* 5, 16. See also Allen (1987) 372–374; Chesnut (1978) 167–169; 173–175; van Nuffelen (2004a) 3–8; (2004b) 53–54; Zenos (1957) viii–ix.

important to the purpose of this paper, Hansen has proved that Socrates was familiar with the prosarhythmus of his time, a type of knowledge of prose style and composition that confirms Socrates' concern for stylistic literary issues³².

His detailed accounts of heresies and internal disputes within the Church were supplemented by the usage of cultural and literary terms. Thus Socrates' claims to follow the σαφήνεια style are ubiquitous in his work. In the prologue of book 1 he warns the reader that he will not imitate Eusebius of Caesarea's grand style (1, 1: ὑψηγορίας τῶν λόγων ... φράσεως ὄγκου), a statement that is repeated at the beginning of book 3 (3, 1: κόμπον φράσεως). Together with the deprecation of a pompous style, Socrates describes his own style and purposes: "for my object being to compile a history of the Christian religion, it is both proper in order to the being better understood, and consistent with my original purpose, to maintain a humble and unaffected style (3, 1: διὰ σαφήνειαν ταπεινὸς καὶ χαμαιζηλος πρόεισιν ὁ λόγος)". His style, in conclusion, was purposely devoid of καλλιλεξία (6, 1). By contrast, Socrates portrayed heretics as charlatans and sophists (4, 7; 5, 23; 7, 2, 29), speaking in vain (1, 18; 2, 35: κενοφωνία) and uttering empty arguments (2, 37, 45; 3, 16; 4, 7, 25; 6, 7).

Socrates not only deemed the classical paideia compatible with a Christian education but also praised those clergymen with a background in secular disciplines. By the fifth century it was taken for granted that the majority of Episcopal authorities and public figures were learned men (ἐλλόγιμος: 3, 1, 10; 4, 9, 20, 25–26; 5, 7, 10; 7, 6, 19–21)³³, and were replacing sophists not only as spokesmen for the community but also in a Philostratean, entertaining dimension, although criticism of sophistry as an invalid method to approach theological reasoning pervades Socrates' work³⁴. Without resorting to a language indebted to Imperial authors, Socrates pays particular attention to rhetorical deliveries (1, 8, 18, 23; 2, 47; 5, 23) and to the physical appearance of bishops and priests (2, 6, 43; 3, 24; 4, 7, 9).

In contrast with other Christian authors such as Epiphanius, Socrates considered the presence of rhetorical strategies and literary devices to be useful as long as they helped to delineate his conception of a cultural orthodoxy related to religion³⁵. Bearing in mind his knowledge of literary terms and his education in the classical paideia, it is unsurprising that Socrates did not consider the practice of λεξιθηρία by Sisinnius, a well-educated bishop renowned for his rhetorical

³² Hansen (1965). See also van Nuffelen (2004a) 8.

³³ On the use of ἐλλόγιμος in Socrates, see Buck (2003) 302–303. See also Allen (1987) 372–376; Krivushin (1996) 104–106; Farkas (2005); Maraval (2001) 282–283.

³⁴ Chesnut (1978) 173–175.

³⁵ Boyarin (2001).

skills, to be a heretical activity since, as Krivushin put it, in the work of the church historian “the convergence of temporal and sacred knowledge leads to wiping out the distinctions between the secular teacher and the teacher of faith. In Socrates rhetoricians turn into bishops, whereas priests give lessons in grammar and sophistry”³⁶.

Second, Socrates’ concept of religious orthodoxy differed from that of other authors that used the verb *λεξιθηρέω* (most notably Epiphanius) in that he regarded religious orthodoxy as a more flexible and inclusive concept. Central to this issue is his alleged membership of Novatianism. The basic doctrine of Novatianism may be summarized as follows: after the Decian persecution (249–251 AD), the Roman presbyter Novatian considered that the *lapsi* (baptized Christians that continued to perform sacrifices and rites in honour of pagan gods) should not be forgiven, for that pertained only to God, and that, therefore, they should not be readmitted into Christian communities. Doctrinally orthodox but different in disciplinary aspects from Nicene Christians³⁷, the way in which they were treated and considered by emperors and ecclesiastical rulers oscillated³⁸. Socrates included Novatianism within the limits of religious orthodoxy by avoiding mention of opposing doctrinal issues and emphasizing the common beliefs shared with Nicene Christianity (mainly the dogma of consubstantiality), thus provoking debates in modern scholarship on Socrates’ allegiance to Novatianism. His favourable words on Novatianism³⁹ (1, 10; 2, 38; 4, 9, 28; 5, 10, 21–22) have been interpreted as a mere token of his sympathy for them, as an implicit statement of membership of this group, or as simple recognition of the activities of a non-orthodox group⁴⁰. Treadgold has argued that the historian could not have possibly been a Novatian because his tolerant character was incompatible with a rigorist belief such as that of Novatians: “Socrates and his parents (...) are

36 Krivushin (1996) 105. See also Socrates *HE* 1, 5, 2; 1, 8, 14; 2, 2, 8; 2, 35, 9 for his hostility towards sophistry and empty dialectics.

37 See Socrates *HE* 5, 19. Main bibliography on Novatianism’s theology: D’Alès (1924) 84–130; Gregory (1975); DeSimone (1970) 53–182.

38 Thus Constantine made an exception to *CTh*. 16, 5, 1 – an edict decreeing that heretics’ churches had to be closed – and granted Novatians permission to possess their own buildings (*CTh* 16, 5, 2).

39 Van Nuffelen (2004a) 46: “la distinction entre un Socrate très philonovaten et un Socrate effectivement novatien deviant pourtant très mince, et elle est en tout cas négligeable pour l’interprétation de l’ouvrage”.

40 Status questionis in van Nuffelen (2004a) 42–46; Urbainczyk (1997) 26–28. A list of ancient sources in Wallraff (1997) 237–240. Main bibliographical references for Socrates as Novatian: Gregory (1975) 3–4; Livingstone (1997) 1513; Périchon/Maraval/Hansen (2004) 11–13; Vogt (1968) 159–161; Wallraff (1997) 250.

unlikely to have been Novatians themselves, because a tolerant Novatian was almost a contradiction in terms"⁴¹. However, I consider that van Nuffelen is right when he argues that Socrates was a Novatian whose religious discourse asked for an entente and an extension of the boundaries of religious orthodoxy: "la diminution de la distance entre nicéens et novatiens mène chez lui plutôt à un élargissement du champ de l'orthodoxie doctrinale"⁴².

Socrates' sympathy towards Novatianism makes the idea that he was using *λεξιθηρέω* depreciatively, to mark Sisinnius as heretic, implausible. In fact, Sisinnius' *λεξιθηρία* dovetailed with Socrates' positive description of the bishop's physical appearance and demeanour: his ability to read and compose properly (*HE* 6, 22: *λεξιθηρεῖ δὲ ἐν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ποιητικὰς παραμίγνυσι λέξεις· λέγων δὲ μᾶλλον, ἢ ἀναγινωσκόμενος ἐθαυμάζετο*) is linked to the description of his graceful face, gaze, manners and voice by the particle *γάρ*⁴³. Adding an unflattering adscription of *λεξιθηρία* to Sisinnius' elegant physical features would have not only unbalanced Socrates' praise for the Novatian bishop but also have undermined one of the main intentions of this passage: establishing a comparison between Sisinnius and the bishop John Chrysostom, whose hostile attitude to Novatianism caused Socrates to criticize him⁴⁴. As Maraval summarized it, "le portrait de l'évêque Sisinnios forme un saisissant contraste avec celui de Jean. Le personnage est présenté comme un homme cultivé, bon orateur, bon interprète de l'Écriture, bon théologien, vivant richement quoique vertueusement, prenant son bain aux thermes publics, d'humeur enjouée, aimé de tous (évêques, sénateurs et toutes les religions!) – bref il a les qualités de Jean sans ses défauts"⁴⁵.

Socrates allowed flexibility for *λεξιθηρέω* in order to maintain the possibility of an ampler conception of religious and cultural orthodoxy than that of previous Christian authors, who resorted to *λεξιθηρέω* as a strategy to portray heretics. Whilst the literary genre encompassing the works of such authors (heresiology, dialogues, Church orders) frequently portrayed a combative relationship between classical *paideia* and Christian culture, Socrates' *HE* advocated an inclusive policy that granted classical *paideia* a predominant position in the making of Christian scholarship. Portraying Sisinnius as a practitioner of *λεξιθηρία* demon-

41 Treadgold (2007) 136.

42 Van Nuffelen (2004a) 45.

43 Socrates *HE* 6, 22: *προσῆν γὰρ αὐτῷ χάρις τῷ τε προσώπῳ καὶ τῇ φωνῇ, καὶ τῷ σχήματι καὶ τῷ βλέμματι καὶ τῇ ὄλῃ κινήσει τοῦ σώματος*. On the importance of *σχῆμα* in non-verbal communication, see Catoni (2008) 72–79, 241–250.

44 For Chrysostom's and Sisinnius's relationship, see van Nuffelen (2004a) 26–36; 43–45; Vogt (1968) 258–260; Wallraff (1997) 277–278; Urbainczyk (1997) 130–131.

45 Périchon/Maraval/Hansen (2004) 353.

strates Socrates' conviction that the Christian elite should master rhetoric and have literary interests beyond the realm of the Christian Scriptures. In this sense, Socrates' Origenism strongly influenced the Church historian's positive appraisal of much of the classical *paideia*⁴⁶. Used as another criterion to fix the boundaries of religious orthodoxy in relation to a wider cultural milieu, Socrates' distinctive use of *λεξιθηρέω* was not aimed at heretics or at those fond of linguistic minutiae but at determining what type of rhetoric and stylistic devices were advisable. His broad consideration of Christian scholarship embraced *λεξιθηρία* as a legitimate practice, thus reflecting his open-minded conception of religious orthodoxy.

Acknowledgement: I am very grateful to the anonymous referees, to Dr. Javier Campos, and to Dr. Lucía Romero for their comments and criticism. Any remaining errors are my own.

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⁴⁶ The aim of this paper does not allow me to study in greater detail Socrates' Origenism. For this issue see Chesnut (1978) 170–173; Fedou (2001); van Nuffelen (2004a) 39–40. For a different opinion on Origenism, see Epiph. *Pan.* 64, 4, 11; 76, 13–54.

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