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Metropolitan Ignatius of Tarnovo and the Union of Florence (1439)

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Abstract⁵

The article investigates a little-known figure, Ignatius of Tarnovo, a metropolitan at least from 1437 until 1463/64 and one of the participants at the Council of Florence in 1439. His status is examined, as well as his possible special links with the Slavic world.

Keywords: Ignatius of Tarnovo, Patriarchate of Constantinople, Council of Florence

Introduction

In October 1437, within the context of the preparation of the Council of Florence, Patriarch Joseph II convened in Constantinople a synod gathering all the metropolitans of his patriarchate [1, pp. 174-177, 604-605]. On this occasion, he designated those who were to be members of the Byzantine delegation in Italy. Ignatius of Tarnovo was one of the twenty-one selected metropolitans: he represented the see of Tarnovo, which was at that time beyond the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Indeed, Ignatius held the see of Tarnovo at least since 1437 until about 1463/1464 [2, no. 8054; 3, pp. 473-474; 4; 5, pp. 94-104].

The narrative Greek sources on the Council of Florence – that is the *Greek Acts* [6] and the *Memoirs* by Syropoulos [1] – give little information on Ignatius' deeds: it is said that he expressed some reservations about the Union of the Churches at the time of the discussions on the procession of the Holy Spirit, but he finally signed the Union decree on 5th of July 1439.

In the following, his name appears among those who have changed their position and have rejected the Union. He was indeed one of those signing the two antiunionist manifestos in the name of the Synaxis of the Orthodox in 1445, and then in 1452 [7, p. 193; 8, p. 18; 9, pp. 472-474].

Studying Ignatius' role at the Council of Florence means analysing the place of the metropolitan see of Tarnovo within the Patriarchate of Constantinople half a century after the fall of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1393) and, a few years after, the collapse of the Patriarchate of Tarnovo. Did this metropolitan see have any special privilege? Was the metropolitan put in charge of specific tasks? Was he treated by the patriarch as a mere metropolitan, or is there any evidence to suggest that he enjoyed greater consideration?

The Official Title

The title used by Ignatius on the Florentine decree is as follows: “The humble Metropolitan of Tarnovo, who holds the rank of that of Nicomedia” [6, p. 466 l. 3-4; 4, p. 705]. Before handling the question of the “rank of Nicomedia” held by Ignatius, it must be emphasized that

⁵ I would like to thank for their help my colleagues Sebastian Kolditz, Konstantinos Vetochnikov, Dan Ioan Mureşan and Thierry Ganchou, and in Veliko Tarnovo the staff of the university library, and Prof. Dimitar Dimitrov and Liliana Kirova.

this plain title corresponds to that of any metropolitan of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which was indeed Ignatius' position. In this regard, we must recall the terms of a somewhat earlier text, a letter dated between 1410 and 1416 from the Patriarch of Constantinople Euthymios II to an archbishop of Bulgaria who was the successor of Archbishop Matthaios on the set of Ohrid. Patriarch Euthymios II reproached the archbishop of Ohrid with the consecration of a bishop in Sofia and another in Vidin, and he explained that “none of those archbishops of Achrida, whose successor you yourself are, carried out consecrations there in Sofia or Bidyne or elsewhere, where you, from what we have heard, want to do, but these are the Ecumenical Patriarch's dioceses. And the most holy patriarchs before us sent metropolitans thither before Trinabos [= Tarnovo] became a patriarchate, and again after its restitution to us” [10, pp. 256-257]. This allusion to the “restitution” (τὸ ἀποκαταστήναι πάλιν) of the see of Tarnovo and its entire jurisdiction to the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople makes it possible to conclude with G. Prinzing that this situation was effective some time before 1410 [10, p. 250; 11, pp. 77-78]. It should be noticed that the title of the Archbishop of Ohrid in this correspondence includes the reference to “All Bulgaria”: “the very holy Archbishop of Justiniana Prima and All Bulgaria” (τὸν παναγιώτατον ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Πρώτης Ἰουστινιανῆς καὶ πάσης Βουλγαρίας) [10, pp. 256-257, 260-261].

Tarnovo was therefore a mere metropolis at the time of the preparation of the Union of Florence. There is no *notitia episcopatum* between the end of the fourteenth century and the fall of Constantinople in 1453 [12]. The last list published by J. Darrouzès, *notitia* 21, is the only one that includes the see of Tarnovo, but it already dates from the period of the Ottoman domination: it can therefore be mentioned for information only that this *notitia* attributes to the metropolis of Tarnovo three suffragan bishoprics, those of Lophtzou (Loveč), Tzerbenon (Červen) and Preslaba (Preslav) [12, pp. 197-198 and 419 l. 16, 420 l. 105-108].

I will now move on to the question of the rank of this metropolis. According to the same *notitia* 21, dated after 1453, the see of Tarnovo ranked eleventh in the ecclesiastical hierarchy [12, p. 419 l. 16]. In order to honour Ignatius of Tarnovo during the council, as mentioned by the *Greek Acts*, the emperor conferred on him the honorary rank of the metropolitan of Nicomedia, which he conferred as well on Metropolitan Methodius of Lacedaemon.

According to the *notitiae* from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the see of Nicomedia ranked seventh in the ecclesiastical hierarchy [6, p. 12 l. 26-29; 12, pp. 412, 416, 419]. This practice was not exceptional in Byzantium: it was possible to grant to a metropolitan the hierarchical rank of another, even though the latter was actually holding his see [13, p. 371, no. 325, pp. 273-277]. J. Darrouzès describes this practice of granting the honorary rank of a metropolis to a metropolitan holding an inferior see, and he calls it “epidosis de topos”. The formula used in these cases is the one used by Ignatius in his own signature: “[the metropolitan] who holds the rank of that of Nicomedia” (τὸν τόπον ἐπέχων τοῦ Νικομηδείας).

Another example is provided by the two metropolitans of Hungaro-Wallachia (or Hongrovlachia), whose ranks were in the last ones in the hierarchy because of their recent creation, but who also held the ranks of Nicomedia and Amaseia respectively, so the seventh and the twelfth ranks according to the *notitia* 20 [12, p. 418]. During the Council of Florence, Damian of Moldovlachia was granted the rank of the metropolis of Sebasteia, that is to say the eleventh rank [14, no. 3373; 15, pp. 53-55; 16, pp. 223-224, n. 268].

The three prelates of same rank – Makarius of Nicomedia, Methodius of Lacedaemon, and Ignatius of Tarnovo – signed the Union Decree in the ninth, tenth and eleventh place respectively, after the emperor, the four representatives of the Eastern Patriarchs, and three more metropolitans who were higher in the hierarchy – Dorotheus of Trebizond, Metrophanes of Cyzicus, the future Patriarch Metrophanes II, and Bessarion, Metropolitan of Nicaea [17, pp. 77-79].

From the hierarchical point of view, it therefore appears that the metropolitan of Tarnovo held one of the most prestigious sees in the Patriarchate of Constantinople, but he did not

enjoy any particular prerogatives linked to the fact that the see of Tarnovo was previously an autocephalous patriarchate.

An agent of Influence in the Slavic World?

Did Ignatius play an intermediary role between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the territory of his jurisdiction, the region of Veliko Tarnovo under Ottoman rule? Did he sometimes act as an ambassador towards certain leaders of Eastern Europe, as it was often the case, for instance, as regards the metropolitans of Kiev or Moldovlachia, just as Syropoulos testifies concerning Metropolitan Damian? [1, pp. 162-163; 18, pp. 731-732; 19].

The question arises in the first place for the period preceding the Council. Several sources allude to preparatory meetings to the Council of Florence which would have been held in various places. In addition to Syropoulos [1, pp. 162-165, 604-605], some of these sources are well known: these are letters from John of Ragusa and Simon Freron, ambassadors of the Council of Basel, dated 9 February 1436 and 5 March 1436 respectively [20, pp. CCII, CCXII]. According to these letters, ambassadors had already been sent by Emperor John VIII Palaiologos and Patriarch Joseph II to the farthest orthodox regions (“ad extremas Grecorum partes”), namely in Georgia, in Trebizond, to the Eastern Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, in Russia, Wallachia, Serbia, and finally in Bulgaria (“Bulgariam”).

Syropoulos confirms this information, but he does not mention Bulgaria. Some information on this topic is also to be found in an unpublished chronicle by Leonhard Heff, mentioned by I. Tjutjundjiev and V. Gjuzelev [4, pp. 689-690; 21, p. 172], on which I was able to get much more information thanks to S. Kolditz, whom I thank. Leonhard Heff came from the city of Eichstätt in Bavaria, he then studied in Vienna between 1459 and 1461 and settled in Regensburg from 1466 to 1476. His chronicle, entitled *Imago mundi*, deals with the universal history since the creation of the world until 1475 [22, pp. 211-214; 23, pp. 176-177, n. 28 and 29].

According to f. 494v of Cod. *Monacensis latinus* (Clm) 14065, which contains this unpublished work, Leonhard Heff states that “in the year of the Lord 1435, the Greek Christians held synods in Russia, Bulgaria, Constantinople, Trebizond, Jerusalem and Alexandria. Then Eugenius IV, after the Council of Florence had been celebrated, brought the Greeks themselves back to the obedience to the Roman faith and the Roman Church” (“Anno domini MCCCC35 Greci christiani Concilia habuerunt in Russia, in Bulgaria, in Constantinopoli, in Trapesunda, in Hierusalem et in Alexandria. Tunc etiam Eugenius quartus Concilio Florencie celebrato ipsos grecos ad fidei obedientiam ecclesiamque Romanam reduxit”).

Even if the information provided by John of Ragusa and Syropoulos is much more reliable than that of Leonhard Heff, who was not an eyewitness of those events, these sources allude to the preparation of the Council of Florence in the Eastern Patriarchates, in Georgia and in Serbia on the one hand, and on the other hand in the remote Orthodox areas depending upon the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople: the seas of Trebizond, Kiev – which had at that time moved to Moscow – Hongrovlachia and Bulgaria. The common point between Trebizond and Kiev, but also Wallachia, Moldavia and Serbia at that time, lies in the leadership of a Christian ruler independent from the Byzantine Empire. Such was not the case in Bulgaria, since the whole area, which corresponds to medieval Bulgaria was then under Ottoman domination. The presence of Bulgaria in these lists is therefore strange. As S. Kolditz concludes about the mention of John of Ragusa, the place where a synod could have been organized should have been either Tarnovo or Ohrid [16, p. 196, n. 128; 4, p. 690]. But in view of the fact mentioned above that the name “Bulgaria” is part of the official title of the Archbishops of Ohrid, the latter interpretation seems more convincing (although there is no evidence in the sources, the Archbishop of Ohrid had in any case to be warned and invited to

the council, as he had been by Patriarch Philotheus in the preceding century in the context of the preparation of the council planned to take place in 1369 [24, no. 2524]).

If the role of Ignatius of Tarnovo remains unclear before the Council of Florence, another source mentioned by I. Tjutjundjiev might show his possible links with the Slavic world [4, p. 694; 25]. This text is a Russian panegyric in direct connection with the Council, probably written a little later, around 1453, and attributed to the ambassador in Florence of the prince of Tver [26, pp. 108-111; 27, pp. 607-608]. Thomas of Tver was the representative of Prince Boris Alexandrovich (1425-1461) in Italy, his presence is well attested in Ferrara and then in Florence, where he accompanied Isidore of Kiev. We even possess a safe-conduct made for him in Florence by Pope Eugenius IV on 28 February 1439 [26, pp. 136-137]. Thomas is likely to be the author – or at least an information source for the author named Thomas the monk – of a panegyric in honor of Boris Alexandrovich, in which the main Byzantine protagonists of the Council of Florence intervene, one after the other, in order to praise the prince's excellence and his commitment in favor of the Christian faith and unity. Although the main goal of the text is the exaltation of the Prince of Tver, in an implicit rivalry with Moscow for pre-eminence in Russia, it is worth noticing the pro-unionist tendency of this panegyric, in which the Union, before being achieved, is presented as fully worthwhile [27, p. 270].

The device used in the text consists in having the main members of the Byzantine delegation meet Thomas of Tver on his arrival in August 1438, just as he was handing the letter of the Russian prince over to the Byzantine emperor. Then, according to the text, the first to speak in praise of Boris Alexandrovich was Emperor John VIII Palaeologus, followed by Patriarch Joseph II, and after them the Metropolitans Anthony of Heraclea, Dorotheus of Trebizond, Metrophanes of Cyzicus, Bessarion of Nicaea, Makarius of Nicomedia, Method of Lacedaemon, Ignatius of Tarnovo, and twelve others after him. Nevertheless, there are quite important figures missing in this list: Gregory the protosyncellus, Isidore of Kiev, Dositheus of Monembasia and Mark of Ephesus are not mentioned; on the other hand, Denys of Sardes is mentioned, whereas he died at Ferrara on 13 April 1438 [1, pp. 256-257]. The entire part devoted to these speeches within the panegyric is clearly rhetorical, and, as writes the editor of the text Ja. Lourie, they cannot have been really delivered [27, p. 610]. There is, therefore, no need to give special significance to the words attributed in this text to Ignatius: “and Metropolitan Ignatius of Tarnovo said: ‘The use of the speech of praise brings us together for the great Prince Boris. But it is fitting that you should multiply praises for him, and that your speech should not be indigent’” [27, pp. 274-276].

A last source may now testify to some actual relations of Ignatius of Tarnovo with Russia, but it dates from a much later period. Indeed, Ignatius of Tarnovo remained in office as a metropolitan of Tarnovo until the fall of Constantinople, as shows his signature on the two anti-unionist manifestos of the Synaxis of the Orthodox, as well as his attendance at the proclamation of the Union at Constantinople on 12 December 1452, according to the testimony of Posculo [9, pp. 442, 443, n. 95, and pp. 472-474; 28, p. 55 l. 672]. He apparently retained his title after 1453, and certainly also his see, since his death as a metropolitan of Tarnovo is reported in 6972, that is between September 1463 and August 1464, in a marginal note of the *Laurentianus Plut.* 5, 2, f. 3v and 4r [2, no. 8054; 4, pp. 714-715]. Therefore, he may well be the “Constantinopolitan Metropolitan Ignatius” mentioned in the first chronicle of Pskov in June 1454, as already assumed by I. Tjutjundjiev and D. I. Mureşan [4, pp. 713-714; 29, p. 401; 30]. This chronicle, which dates from the last quarter of the fifteenth century, and records the events that occurred in Pskov year after year, gives the following information: “the same year [6962] came to Pskov the Constantinopolitan Metropolitan Ignatius, six weeks after Easter, on a Saturday, the first day of June, when the holy martyr Justin the Philosopher is commemorated; and he stayed in Pskov four weeks, then, showered with gifts, he left Pskov for Novgorod Veliky” [31, p. 52]. The expression “the Constantinopolitan

Metropolitan Ignatius” can be understood either as a reference to the Constantinopolitan jurisdiction on which Ignatius depended, or as an allusion to his place of residence: as it seems that Ignatius of Tarnovo was generally living at Constantinople [4, p. 715; 9, p. 411], this term is quite applicable to him in every case. But there were some other metropolitans called Ignatius after the fall of Constantinople: D. and M. Apostolopoulos have recorded in the “Regestes” of the years 1454-1498 [32] two other metropolitans named Ignatius, that of Peritheorion, and that of Anchialus. The signature of Ignatius of Peritheorion appears in an act of 15 January 1467 [32, p. 138] and the signature of Ignatius of Anchialos in an act of 10 October 1474 [32, p. 153]. In both cases, we know their predecessors: for Peritheorion, an act of March 1463 mentions Metropolitan Gregory [32, pp. 94-95], and for Anchialos, the act of 15 January 1467 [32, p. 138] gives the signature of Metropolitan Sophonias. It is therefore possible, in the current state of research, to propose to identify the metropolitan Ignatius reported to have been in Pskov in 1454 with Ignatius of Tarnovo. As suggested by D. I. Mureşan, he might have been sent at that time by Patriarch Gennadius II, possibly for a diplomatic mission [29, p. 401; 30].

Although certain assumptions concerning the role played by Ignatius and his possible contacts in the Slavic regions must be ruled out, he may have at times exerted certain diplomatic functions, as can be inferred from his presence at Pskov in 1454. A final element has yet to be added: as already mentioned above, a marginal note of the *Laurentianus Plut.* 5, 2, f. 3v and 4r gives the date of the death of Ignatius of Tarnovo (1463/1464), but also its place: the “monastery of the Prodomos in Kalamita” (ἐν τῇ ἀγίᾳ μονῇ τοῦ Προδρόμου τῆς Καλαμῆτας). This indication arouses a certain perplexity: Καλαμῆτας must correspond to a place named Kalamita (with an iotacism mistake). I. Tjutjundjiev dismissed this proper name and considered that the place should be the monastery of the Prodomos in the quarter of Petra, in Constantinople, in which Ignatius could have lived at the end of his life [4, p. 715].

However, I owe to T. Ganchou, whom I thank, a possible identification of this name: Kalamita is the name of a Byzantine fortress in Crimea nearby a famous troglodyte monastery dedicated to St. Clement of Rome [33, pp. 557-558]. The city is now called Inkerman, it is located near Sebastopol. Before 1475, the date of the Ottoman conquest, this part of the diocese of Gothia still depended on the Patriarchate of Constantinople. However, I have not been able to identify any monastery of St. John Prodomos in Inkerman, so that Ignatius’ ending his life in Crimea has to remain a hypothesis.

Ignatius of Tarnovo is thus connected to the Slavic world by several signs, though without much evidence. It would be interesting to know whether the dignitaries of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in charge of the metropolitan sees in the Slavic world were chosen according to their origin and whether they spoke the Old Slavonic language. For the see of Kiev in the late 14th century and the 15th century, the choice was made with the consent of the great prince of Moscow, and most of the metropolitans were of Slavic origin, such as Cyprian of Kiev and Gregory Tsamblak, who came from Bulgaria [4, pp. 700-701; 18, pp. 731-732]. If Ignatius himself was a descendant of a Slavic family, his role would be more easily explained.

There is indeed a debate on that question. Thanks to a marginal note found by V. Laurent in the manuscript of Florence *Laurentianus Plut.* 59, 13, fol. 171, we know that Patriarch Joseph II was of Bulgarian origin: according to this note, he would have been the illegitimate son of “Emperor Shishman”, so according to V. Laurent, the son of Tsar Ivan Shishman [34].

According to I. Bojilov, he might rather be the son of Shishman, himself son of the Bulgarian Tsar Michael III Shishman Asen: Shishman lived in Constantinople in 1341, at the time of the Second Civil War between the party of the regency and John VI Cantacuzene, whom he supported [35, pp. 459-462]. Even though the precise identification of his kinship remains impossible, it is nevertheless true that Joseph II was most probably of Bulgarian origin by his father – but not by his mother, who probably belonged to the family of Philanthropenoi [34, p. 134] – and he was known for speaking Old Slavonic [20, p. CCVII].

Now, according to Syropoulos, one day during their stay in Florence, Joseph II sharply addressed three metropolitans who opposed the Union and reminded them that they were “part of his suite (τοῦ κελλίου μου) and of his family (τῆς φαμιλίας μου)” and that he was the one who had allowed them to make an ecclesiastical career [1, pp. 450-451]. The three metropolitans involved were Damian of Moldovlachia, Ioasaph of Amaseia and Ignatius of Tarnovo. As already pointed out by D. I. Mureșan [18, pp. 729-732], the Greek word φαμιλία refers to the Latin term “familia” and thus to the Roman family law [36, pp. 157-158, 172 n. 1].

Moreover, this word is rarely used in the Greek sources of the fifteenth century, as it can be checked thanks to TLG: it is not to be found in the ecclesiastical literature – neither Mark of Ephesus, nor John Eugenikos, George Gennadios Scholarios, Bessarion –, it is a bit more used by the chroniclers – two attestations in Doukas and one in Sphrantzes –, and mostly in of law language as it can be found for instance in Harmenopoulos. Syropoulos, by using this term, undoubtedly emphasized the family tie that united Joseph II with these three metropolitans: they might have been his nephews or cousins. He also insisted on their duty of obedience and the necessity for them to conform to his opinion: he thus acted as a kind of *paterfamilias* whose word is incontestable. It follows, therefore, that Ignatius of Tarnovo was related to Joseph II: but was he by the father or the mother of the latter? Did he belong, as Joseph II, to the family of Asenides, or to the Greek aristocracy of Constantinople? It seems to me impossible to give an answer on this issue because of the few available sources I can only go on the assumption that Ignatius was close to the Greco-Bulgarian milieu settled in Constantinople [18, pp. 730-732].

To conclude, it seems that Ignatius of Tarnovo had no particular prerogative as holding a see, which was previously a patriarchate. His special and close relationship with Patriarch Joseph II was due to a kinship tie. He may have known Old Slavonic and have had at times diplomatic tasks in the Slavic world, but there is one only reliable piece of information on this matter, that is the first chronicle of Pskov, which mentions his stay in this town in June 1454.

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