



Bulgarian Polemical
Literature in the
Confessional Strife
between Rome
and Constantinople

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Болгарская полемическая
литература
в конфессиональном
расколе между Римом
и Константинополем

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НИКОЛОВ А., *Между Рим и Константинопол:*
из антикатолическата литература в България и славянския
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Dr. Angel Nikolov, from Sofia University “St. Clement of Ohrid,” is well known among historians of Byzantium and the Southern Slavs through his book on political thought in medieval Bulgaria, based on his Ph.D. dissertation defended in 2002 [NIKOLOV 2006], and through the publication, with commentary, of the medieval polemical Slavonic text “Useful Tale on the Latins,” part of a collective research project entitled “History and Historicism in the Orthodox Slavic World” [ИДЕМ 2011]. His new book, *Between Rome and Constantinople: From the Anti-Catholic Literature in Bulgaria and in the Slav Orthodox World (11th–17th centuries)*, continues this work; here, he sets the object of his previous study along with other related texts in the Slavonic manuscript tradition of the 14th through the 17th centuries within the rich context of the Orthodox polemics against the Latins in the Byzantine, Bulgarian, and Slavonic literature relating to the Schism of 1054 and through the acute political conflicts of the 13th and 14th centuries, concluding with the debates around and after the Union of Brest of 1596.

Nikolov’s new book aims “to reveal the important place of Bulgaria in the growing confessional confrontation between the Orthodox East and the Catholic West since the

middle of the 11th century through the prism of the medieval Slavic polemical literature.” Starting from various redactions of the “Useful Tale on the Latins” in South Slavic and Russian copies of the 14th through the 17th centuries, the author analyzes other Slavonic translations and compilations from this period, accompanying the analysis with several historical excursions on the role of the Archbishopric of Ohrid in the initial stage of the Byzantine anti-Latin polemics in the 11th century; on the conversion of the Bulgarian population in the Bdin Czarndom during the Hungarian occupation in 1365–1369; and the resonance of the Brest Church Union of 1596 among the Orthodox South Slavs. In the preface (p. VIII) Nikolov, noting that the Byzantine and, accordingly, the Slavonic anti-Catholic polemics “function at two levels—theological and propagandist,” limits his task to the second level and to the appropriate texts, setting aside the “purely theological works” preserved in the same Slavonic manuscripts, and examining in depth only the “propagandist” texts in the three chapters of the book.

The first chapter, “The Great Schism (1054) and its resonance among the Balkan Slavs,” begins with a section on the role of the Archbishopric of Ohrid in the Byzantine anti-Latin polemics before the Schism in 1054 (pp. 7–22). Based partially on Nikolov’s previous book, this section sufficiently widens the interpretation of some narrative sources (additions to the Chronicle by John Scylitises, etc.) and images (frescoes of churches dedicated to St. Sophia in Ohrid and Kiev). The author insists on “the gradual formation of a whole corpus [. . .] which included a specific historical ‘dossier’ of the Great Schism and other related polemical texts” created in the territory of the Ohrid diocese and soon translated into Slavonic and transferred to Kiev. Later this body of texts was “supplemented and enriched [. . .] with new works compiled by Slavonic translators and writers” (Summary, p. 349), thus sketching, according to the author’s opinion, “the tendency to build a Byzantino-Bulgarian (and, more broadly, a Byzantino-Slavonic) spiritual community based upon Orthodoxy and framed by the imperial system of Constantinople” (p. 22).

The contents of the “Slavonic dossier of the Great Schism” (selected according to the constraints mentioned above) is revealed in the second section and covers the abridged Slavonic translation of Michael Cerularius’ epistle to Patriarch Peter III of Antioch, lists of Latin fallacies taken from this work, and the “Useful Tale about the Latins” in two redactions. Nikolov supports the conclusion, proposed by Joseph HERGENRÖTHER [1869], that the primary contents of the “Useful Tale” could originate from some Byzantine works on the roots of the Schism. While the author’s detailed historiographical and archaeographical survey represents a valuable contribution to the history of the Slavonic anti-Latin literature, his concept of the origin of the “Useful Tale” as being practically synchronous to the Schism raises some questions and doubts. Beginning with the statement that the “Useful Tale” “had been used in the compilation of some very meaningful works,” he goes on to identify some “borrowings” from it as appearing in the Russian “Tale of the Times and Years” (I share the interpretation of the original title of the “Tale” proposed by Alexey GIPPIUS [2000: 448–460]). Within the limited space of this review it is possible only to mention two problem areas: first, the introduction of the “Tale of the Times and Years” in the earliest manuscripts of the 14th century resulted from lengthy, complicated, asynchronous, and multilevel work hardly limited to “direct borrowings” from the “Useful Tale.” Second, the forms in which the “Useful Tale” and its fragments survived in the Russian manuscript tradition between the 13th century

(when the “Tale” was mentioned in the contents of the lost Archivsky miscellanea) and the mid-15th century (when the “Tale” was included in the collection called the “Book on Latins” [CHUMICHEVA 2008: 71–82]) needs further in-depth research. Before such work is completed, Nikolov’s idea that the “practically synchronous presence around the beginning of the 12th century of the same (and, beyond this, of the just-created) polemical anti-Latin text in Kiev and in western Bulgarian lands [...] could be explained through the mediating role of the Byzantine church authorities” will not appear to be well grounded. I would share the critical note by Ivan Biliarsky, quoted by the author, that the recently translated “Tale” could hardly impact almost synchronously other works created from places ranging from western Bulgaria to Kiev [BILIARSKY 2013: 55–56]. The dating of the creation of the “Narration of Prophet Isaiah,” as Biliarsky correctly calls “The Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle,” by the 11th century is accepted by the majority of scholars, but the lacuna between the archetype and the only late copy of the text leaves a great deal of space for its possible transformation.

The third finding by the author—parallels between the “Useful Tale” and the Bulgarian interpolations to the Slavonic translation of Constantine Manasses’ Chronicle made in Tarnovo in the mid-14th century—leads him to the assumption that the “Useful Tale” was present among the works accessible to Tarnovo scribes of the mid-14th century, when the Slavonic Manasses was created; this is supported by a Bulgarian manuscript (Plevlya, No. 12), where the “Useful Tale” co-exists with other texts concerning Bulgarian history (p. 84).

Commenting on Nikolov’s observations on the relationship between the “Useful Tale” and the Bulgarian Apocryphal Chronicle, I have to stress Nikolov’s continuing misunderstanding of a passage in my book published in 2000, where I wrote: “The [Bulgarian Apocryphal] Chronicle is valuable as a snapshot of Bulgarian cultural consciousness at the time when its creators and subjects had been forcefully removed from their own book tradition. That is why some attempts of contemporary scholars to read it as a *specific puzzle created by the author, who had intentionally encoded with apocryphal images the history of the first Bulgarian Czarism, known to him according to written sources, seem to us incorrect*” [POLYVYANNYY 2000: 117]. Quoting only the italicized part of the passage, Nikolov in fact ascribes to me the opposite opinion (p. 82).

A special place in the chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the origin of Emperor Basil II’s cognomen “the Bulgar-Slayer,” which is mentioned in the first Slavonic translation of the “Short Tale,” whereas it is missing from the published Greek prototype of the work. Supposing that it could be a translator’s gloss, the author reasonably challenges Paul Stephenson’s hypothesis on the late origin of the cognomen [STEPHENSON 2003], pointing to its use in the early Greek anti-Latin works of the 11th–12th centuries and offering evidence from the Life of John the New Thracian (11th century) that Basil II “received by that time his cognomen due to his victory over them” (p. 118).

The rest of the chapter (pp. 85–115) contains an archaeographical survey of the unpublished copies of the full version of the “Useful Tale” (and one published fragment). The redactions of the “Useful Tale” are subdivided as follows: an Initial group, split into two textual subdivisions—A (Plevlya, Montenegro, No. 12) and B (BAR, Romania, MS Slav. No. 636); an Interpolated redaction (Hilandar, Athos, MS No. 469); an Abridged redaction (Dečani, Serbia, MS No. 102); and the Contaminated redaction, compiled by

Vladislav the Grammarian in 1456 (Odessa State Library, Ukraine, No. III/111). Special attention is paid to the “Short Tale about the Latins,” which Nikolov identifies as a Slavonic translation of the above-mentioned Byzantine text published by J. Hergenröther, “carried out very soon after the emergence of the Greek original in the second half of the 11th–12th century” (p. 106). The manuscript tradition of the Slavonic “Short Tale” is subdivided into two major groups: Bulgarian (the same Plevlya miscellanea No. 12) and Serbian (Dečani, Serbia, No. 75). The survey is very helpful for further research, and, to my mind, construction of textological stemmata will increase its value even more.

The second chapter—“Anti-Latin polemics and confessional confrontation between Orthodoxy and Catholicism in medieval Bulgaria (the 13th–14th centuries)” —has three sections. The first one is based on an analysis of an anti-Latin miscellany written in Tarnovo around the 1360s and follows the growth of anti-Catholic tendencies in Bulgaria after the re-establishment of the Bulgarian Patriarchy in 1235. Stimulated by translated Byzantine texts of the Slavonic Nomocanon used in Tarnovo, those tendencies are reflected in a number of Slavonic texts included in miscellanea of the 13th century and their later copies. One of them, containing both full and abridged redactions of the “Useful Tale” preserved in the Plevlya MS No. 12 mentioned above, serves as a representative collection of anti-Latin Slavonic texts read and copied in the Second Bulgarian Czarodom. Moved by “the anti-Latin spirit, which prevailed in Tarnovo in this period” (p. 127), this collection, in addition to the redactions of the “Useful Tale,” includes several lists of Latin errors, translations from patristic and Byzantine literature (Anastasius of Antioch and Athanasius of Alexandria, Cyril of Alexandria, Maxim the Confessor, etc.), and includes a short Vita of St. Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher and a Tale on the renovation of the Bulgarian Patriarchy (the latter is published by Nikolov in supplement V). Their convoy consists of translated texts on the negotiations between the exiled Oecumenical Patriarch Germanus and envoys of the Roman Pope Gregory IX in 1234, thus affirming the actuality of the Latin errors. Nikolov connects this block of the miscellany with another Slavonic translation—pieces of a polemical treatise by Giovanni Grasso published by A. Turilov and E. Lomize [TURILOV 2012]. Compiled during the polemics of the 13th century, the Confession by Pope Gregory had become a new argument for the impurity of the Latin faith, which was further actualized by new conflicts between Balkan Orthodox churches and Rome.

The second section is dedicated to the lists of the “ritual deviations and bad habits of the Latin heretics in the Byzantine-Slavic polemical literature,” selecting as a basis for analysis two of the most frequently repeated features: the shaving of the clergy and the using of ‘unclean’ animals for food. According to Nikolov, these features marked the lower, mundane level of the religious polemics “resulting from the ambition of the Orthodox societies in the Balkans and Eastern Europe to strengthen through various means their ethnic and religious identity in the context of the fierce political and confessional confrontation with the Catholic world of Western Europe” (p. 158). An interesting attempt to support this conclusion is the use of later archaeological, ethnological, and folklore evidence, which, as the author hopes, “would allow [one] to clarify the sources and trends in the development and transformation of the key features of the identity of Slavic Orthodox societies during the Middle Ages and into modern times” (p. 352).

The third section analyses the attempt to convert the Bulgarian population of Bdin (including Czar Ivan Sratsimir and his family) to Catholicism during the Hungarian

occupation in 1365–1369 as the most tragic reflection of the Orthodox-Catholic conflict on Bulgarian territory; this attempt gave new impetus to the dissemination of anti-Latin ideas and (as it may be supposed) also to the relevant Slavonic texts. On the other hand, the Catholic, especially Franciscan, literature and tradition was enriched with new examples of martyrdom as a result of the massacre of five monks in Bdin after its reconquest by the Vallachian voivode Vladislav (Vlaicu) in 1369. This section differs from the rest of the book in its concrete and detailed historical analysis based upon thorough interpretation of various Latin acts and narrative sources. Nikolov does not mention the only Slavonic gloss in an Apostle, currently in the library of St. Paul's monastery in Athos (No. 3), where Dragan and his brother Rayko recall that "in the days when the Hungarians held Bdin, there was great scourge to the people" [HRISTOVA 2003: 50, No. 62]. This gloss is another "expression of Bulgarian resistance against the massive Catholicization of the local Orthodox population" (p. 198) in line with the creation of the Plevlya No. 12 miscellany.

The last, and shortest, chapter of the book returns to the analysis of the Slavonic written tradition, this time of the 15th through the 17th centuries. Its subtitle, "Rethinking and transformation of the medieval polemical tradition," to my mind looks too wide to fit two essays on two later secondary texts, the "Tale of how Rome fell away from Orthodoxy" (preserved in three copies of the 16th–17th centuries) and the "Tale about the Impious Popes" (preserved in a single copy of the 17th century). The first work prolongs the medieval tradition by combining it with the folk legends that originated from it (their dissemination in oral form is witnessed by the Bulgarian Catholic bishop Peter Bogdan in his Relation of 1640). The second work, as Nikolov mentions, exists in "only one known copy" and "bears many of the formal characteristics of a medieval anti-Latin composition and even simulates, not quite successfully, the archaic Old Bulgarian orthography" unless it had been compiled from the information in Martin Belsky's Chronicle. The author comments on its presence in the library of the Hilandar Monastery in Athos as "an omen of the impending depletion of medieval literary norms and models, in the mainstream of which developed the popular Byzantine-Slavonic polemical literature" (pp. 198, 353).

It is worthwhile to stress the significance of the rich supplement (around 100 pages), which includes seven basic Slavonic texts: the translation of the Epistle by Constantinopolitan Patriarch Mikhail Cerularius to Patriarch of Antioch Peter III against the errors of the Latins and the Lists of Latin fallacies and unholy ways that are excerpted from it; all the redactions and variants of the "Useful Tale" that are defined by Nikolov; the so-called Confession of the Roman Pope Gregory IX; the "Tale of the renovation of the Bulgarian Patriarchy in 1235" (Nikolov's is the first scholarly publication of the work based on all the preserved manuscripts); and two unpublished treatises of the 16th–17th centuries, "How Rome fell away from Orthodoxy" and the "Tale about the impious Popes." Some copies of manuscript pages containing these texts are included in the appropriate chapters. Together with Nikolov's conclusions and assumptions, noted above, they offer new and useful material for the consideration of Orthodox-Latin controversies in the Byzantino-Slavic cultural community and its descendant traditions of early modern times.

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