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NEW LIGHT ON THE VISIT OF GRIGORI TSAMBLAK TO THE COUNCIL OF CONSTANCE

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THE council of Constance, convened by Sigismund, king of the Romans, in 1413 had as its primary aim the reform of the western church in head and members. Its most urgent task, which in fact took almost three years to accomplish, was to end the schism which had divided the western church since 1378; it also took measures to combat the 'Wycliffite heresy', which resulted in the condemnation and burning of John Hus, and later of his friend and supporter, Jerome of Prague. However, the problem of relations with the eastern, or Orthodox church was not forgotten, though it played only a marginal role in the council's activities. This subject was kept before the notice of the council by the presence of delegates from Constantinople, who were among the first to arrive,¹ and by some sermons on the subject.² For the Byzantines, some kind of understanding with the western church seemed to offer the only hope of securing effective military aid from the west, which might yet save Constantinople from the Turks; and indeed it was the belief that Sigismund would place this topic on the agenda of the council that induced the emperor Manuel II Palaiologos to send representatives to Constance. Apart from the Byzantines, the only advocates of the urgency of the reunion issue were the Polish delegation, headed by the archbishop of Gnezdo, who represented the views of the king of Poland, Vladislav II, and his cousin Vitovt, grand duke of Lithuania. Their motives for wishing to end the more ancient schism that divided the eastern and western churches were clearly stated in a sermon delivered by a member of the Polish delegation, Andrew Laskaris, bishop of Posen.³ After condemning

¹ [Ulrich von] Richental, *Kronik [des Konstanzer Concils, 1414 bis 1418]*, ed M. Buck, (Hildesheim 1962) p 47; trans. [L. R.] Loomis, [*The Council of Constance*], *Records of Civilisation, Sources and Studies*, 63 (Columbia university press 1961) p 105.

² See [H.] Finke, [J. Hollsteiner and H. Heimpel], *Acta [Concilii Constantiensis]*, 4 vols (Stuttgart 1896-1928) 2, pp 530, 534, 536; see also J. Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge 1959) pp 20-3.

³ From his name he would appear to have been of Byzantine origin; Ulrich von Richental remarks that he was a doctor of theology, but that he did not know German well. (Loomis p 103).

what he describes as the 'evil-speaking against the rites and ceremonies and holy observances of the Roman and universal church' by the Greeks, the bishop says that it is now necessary for the two branches of the church to cease their mutual recriminations and 'come together in the unity of the Spirit', and that Vladislav II and Vitovt wish to offer themselves as intermediaries in this process of reconciliation. They are, he says, particularly suited to this role both because of Vitovt's connection by marriage with the imperial family (that is, the Palaiologoi),⁴ and by the geographical location of their dominions, which the bishop describes as 'near to Greece';⁵ by this he means the Orthodox Russian principalities. Moreover, there was a considerable Orthodox population in Lithuania itself. 'So vast a Greek population,' says the bishop, 'following the Greek rite, live beneath the dominion of the said lords, king and duke, that a month's time would not suffice to traverse the length and breadth of their territory . . .'⁶ It was this pro-reunion policy of the king of Poland and the grand duke of Lithuania which was responsible for the visit to Constance in the spring of 1418 of Grigori Tsamblak, Orthodox metropolitan of Kiev, in his capacity of head of the Orthodox church of Lithuania, in which Kiev was situated at that time.

Grigori Tsamblak's legal and canonical position was in fact somewhat dubious. Born in Turnovo, the capital of the second Bulgarian empire, of an illustrious family, and already well-known in the Orthodox world as a writer of sermons, he had in fact been excommunicated by the patriarch of Constantinople for holding his office without the patriarch's approval.⁷ The circumstances of his appointment as metropolitan of Kiev are complex, and lie outside the scope of this paper; it is sufficient to say that he had been elected, somewhat reluctantly, by the Orthodox bishops of Lithuania, under pressure from Vitovt (who was himself a recent convert to catholicism). His appointment resulted in a *de facto* division of the metropolis of Kiev and All Russia—a policy consistently opposed both by successive patriarchs of Constantinople and princes of Moscow,

⁴ Andrew Laskaris says that Vitovt's daughter was the wife of the 'son of the emperor of Constantinople,' (Loomis p 503), that is the future emperor John VIII. In fact John VIII's first wife was the daughter not of Vitovt but of Vasili I, prince of Moscow from 1389 to 1425. The confusion may have arisen because Vitovt's daughter was married to Vasili I, so that John VIII's wife was Vitovt's granddaughter.

⁵ Loomis p 503.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Russkaya Istoricheskaya Biblioteka* (Russian Historical Library), 6 no 40.

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then the leading Russian principality. However, patriarchal disapproval did not prevent Grigori Tsamblak from setting out for Constance.

Grigori Tsamblak and his suite arrived in Constance on 19 February 1418.⁸ According to Ulrich von Richental, he was accompanied by 'nine clerics of his own faith',⁹ two secular princes described as the 'duke of Smolensk' and the 'duke of Red Russia',¹⁰ and 'many heathen from Tartary and Turkey who hold the faith of Mahomet.'¹¹ Within a week of his arrival, Grigori had an audience with the recently elected pope, Martin V, in full consistory.¹² He was escorted by two Polish bishops, the archbishop of Gnezdo (the leader of the Polish delegation), and the bishop of Plotsk; he was also accompanied by a Czech scholar, a master of theology from Prague known as Maurice of Bohemia, who acted as his interpreter.¹³ Grigori first greeted the pope in a reverential manner, bowing three times as he walked towards him, and then took his seat in the part of the hall reserved for speakers, while Maurice of Bohemia made a short introductory speech, in which he stressed the 'long and fixed purpose of the lord archbishop [Grigori] to join the faith and obedience of the Roman church.'¹⁴ He then proceeded to read, on Grigori Tsamblak's behalf, a sermon which he himself had presumably translated into Latin. A summary of the text of this sermon is included in cardinal Fillastre's diary.¹⁵

The theme of the sermon, as presented by Fillastre, is the desire of the speaker to see the eastern and western churches reunited, a view which is expressed in unambiguous and even impassioned language. Grigori states that he himself 'had long hoped for this sacred union,'¹⁶ and that he felt encouraged to work for it by the support of Vladislav II of Poland and Vitovt. 'The sincere devotion and faith of these most serene princes,' he says, 'inspired me to a burning ardour myself for the holy faith of the church, and to diligent labour with all my strength to bring as many as I could to the same pious mind by preaching and admonition in the Ruthenian [that is Slav] tongue.'¹⁷ He says there are many among the orthodox population of Lithuania who share his

⁸ Richental, *Kronik* p 136; Loomis p 176.

⁹ *Ibid.* ¹⁰ Loomis p 178. ¹¹ *Ibid* p 176.

¹² Fillastre, *Gesta Concilii Constanciensis* (Fillastre's *Diary*); see Loomis p 434.

¹³ Grigori Tsamblak had probably been introduced to Maurice of Bohemia by another member of the Polish delegation, Paul Vladimir, dean of the university of Cracow, who had studied under Maurice. (See Loomis p 465, n 321).

¹⁴ *Ibid* p 434.

¹⁵ *Ibid* pp 435-7. For the Latin text, see Finke, *Acta* 2, pp 164-7.

¹⁶ Loomis p 435.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

opinion, which also has the support of the patriarch of Constantinople and the Byzantine emperor.¹⁸ The sermon ends with a suggestion that a general council should be summoned to discuss the reunion issue.

To anyone familiar with Grigori Tsamblak's career and the circumstances of his visit to Constance, this sermon raises many difficulties. First of all, it contradicts what is known of Grigori's views of the western church and its relations with Orthodoxy. From those of his writings which have been published,¹⁹ he appears to have been a man of sincere though rather conventional piety, and it is significant that one of his sermons is an anti-Latin polemical tract.²⁰ Nowhere does he express, even cautiously, any opinion in favour of reunion with Rome. Moreover, some of the facts stated in the sermon about the circumstances of his mission to Constance do not agree with the evidence of other sources. For example, in the course of the sermon, Grigori says that he 'chanced to be' at the court of Vitovt before he left for Constance,²¹ though in fact he had probably been more or less continuously in contact with Vitovt since 1409.²² He also says that he asked permission from Vladislav II and Vitovt to go to Constance and expound his views,²³ whereas the account of the origin of his visit in the official Russian chronicle of the times makes it clear that it was Vitovt who took the initiative.²⁴

¹⁸ *Ibid* p 436.

¹⁹ Grigori Tsamblak's most popular writings were his sermons, which have survived in numerous manuscripts. They are for the most part still unpublished, though extracts are available in metropolitan Makary, *Istoriya Russkoy Tserkvi*, [*History of the Russian Church*] 5, 2 (St Petersburg 1886) repr *Slavica Reprints*, no 17 (Düsseldorf/Vaduz 1969). He also wrote eulogies of his uncle Kiprian, (metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia from 1389 to 1406) and Evtimi, patriarch of Bulgaria from 1371 to 1393, an account of the martyrdom of saint John the New (a merchant from Trebizond who was beheaded at Belgorod, present-day Cetatea Alba, probably some time in the second half of the fourteenth century), and a biography of Stephen Dečanski, king of Serbia from 1321-31. All these have been published.

²⁰ A Popov, *Istoriko-literaturnyj obzor drevne-russkikh polemičeskikh sočinenij protiv latinjan, XI-XV vv.*, [*An historical and literary survey of Old Russian polemical tracts against the Latins from the eleventh to the fifteenth century*] (Moscow 1875, repr London 1972) pp 320-5.

²¹ Loomis p 435.

²² It was in that year that he delivered his eulogy of metropolitan Kiprian, the date of which can be calculated from internal evidence.

²³ Loomis p 435.

²⁴ *Nikonovskaya ili Patriarshaya Letopis'* [*The Nikon Chronicle*], *Polnoye Sobraniye Russkikh Letopisey* [*The Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles*] II, ed M. I. Tikhomirov (Moscow 1965) for the institute of history in the academy of sciences of the USSR, p 233.

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The doubts aroused by the content of Grigori's sermon as reported by Fillastre are increased when it is compared with another sermon of Grigori's, extant only in church Slavonic, which is still unpublished. This sermon is preserved in a sixteenth-century manuscript which formed part of the pre-1917 collection of the Vilno public library, now in the soviet republic of Lithuania. I was fortunate in securing the loan of a microfilm of it through the inter-library loan service.

More than half of his sermon (or address) consists of a diversified list of complimentary epithets addressed to the 'fathers and brothers' assembled at Constance; some of these are elaborately developed metaphors, illustrated by allusions to events and personalities from the old testament; among the simpler expressions, the members of the council are likened to 'experienced pilots, guiding the ship of the church to the quiet harbour of reconciliation,'²⁵ and to 'wise and skilled physicians, preserving the body inviolate from every disease of evil thoughts, and guiding it on the way to perpetual health.'²⁶ This long opening section is followed by expressions of regret that the church, which was originally a single and united body, has now become dismembered and divided into two hostile groups, so that it can no longer be truly considered the church of Christ. 'For how can the church be called Christian,' asks Grigori, 'which is no longer one in Christ, for Christ united us by baptism and the gospels . . .'²⁷ He goes on to plead, though in very general terms, that the two sides will try to become more humble and tolerant: 'I would venture, he says, 'to put before you one small point, if you would grant me grace—not in any spirit of accusation, but constrained by your wish; and I say this not only to you, but to the Greeks [also]. Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom as the famous prophet said, and let not the rich man boast of his wealth; but let him boast and take pride only in the Truth, as our teacher Paul boasted.'²⁸ The sermon concludes with a plea that both sides may come together in a Council to discuss the question of reunion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However Grigori concludes: 'Let us not depart in any respect whatsoever from the dogma handed down to us by our God-inspired fathers.'²⁹

Before proceeding to discuss the significance of this unpublished sermon, it is necessary to say a few words about its reliability as a

²⁵ Vilno Public Library MS 105 fol 41v.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid* fol 43v.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid* fol 44v.

source. Unlike most of Grigori Tsamblak's sermons (which were composed for the church festivals) this one is preserved in only a single manuscript; and as this dates from the sixteenth century, it is in fact a late copy. Moreover, the title is confusing, since it describes the text as an address delivered to the 'council of Florence and Constance.'³⁰ However in spite of these circumstances, the content, context and above all the very individual stylistic features all suggest that it is a genuine work of Grigori Tsamblak, and its authenticity has so far been accepted by those who have studied his career.³¹

A comparison of the Latin and Slavonic texts at once reveals that the Latin version preserved in Fillastre's diary is not a translation of the unpublished Slavonic sermon. Even allowing for the difficulty of translating Grigori Tsamblak's idiosyncratic and involved style, the content is quite different. The text reproduced by Fillastre represents a quite unequivocal pro-reunion attitude, while the unpublished sermon uses great linguistic artistry to say precisely nothing which could commit the speaker to any definite view. Indeed the only passages in which Grigori expresses any personal opinion are those in which he stresses the need for more tolerance and mutual understanding. These read as though he had at least convinced himself of this, and hoped to convince his audience. Clearly some explanation must be sought for the divergence between the two texts, especially as there is no evidence that Grigori delivered more than one sermon at Constance.

I would like to suggest that the unpublished sermon represents the text which Grigori Tsamblak prepared before his departure to Constance, in which he attempted, by means of verbal dexterity at which he was a master, to reconcile the task imposed on him by Vitovt with his own rather negative, or at least uncommitted views on the subject of the reunion of the eastern and western churches. But when he arrived in Constance, he was unable to deliver this sermon. His sponsors in the Polish delegation were strongly committed to support reunion, and they prevailed upon him to deliver an address which was more in accordance with this policy. It is also possible that even this revised form was further modified by the translator, Maurice of Bohemia. Two arguments can be cited in favour of this interpretation, one textual and the other personal. In the version in Fillastre's diary

³⁰ *Ibid* fol 40^r.

³¹ A. I. Yatsimirskiy, *Grigoriy Tsamblak: Očerok yego žizni, administrativnoy i knižnoy del'yat'nosti* [Grigori Tsamblak: a sketch of his life and administrative and literary activity], (St Petersburg 1904) p 198.

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Grigori says that he rejoiced greatly when he heard that the schism in the western church had been ended by the election of Martin V as pope.³² But Grigori Tsamblak can scarcely have heard this news until after his arrival in Constance, since Martin V was not elected until 11 November 1417, and Grigori arrived in Constance on 19 February 1418, after a journey which must have taken at least two months.³³ This suggests that some change in his sermon was made after his arrival. The other argument is that the known facts of Grigori Tsamblak's career indicate that he was not a man of very strong will in practical affairs; on the contrary, he was rather easily influenced and even coerced by stronger personalities.³⁴

But whatever the explanation of the difference in content between the Latin and Slavonic sermons, one thing is clear: the traditional view of Grigori Tsamblak on the reunion issue will have to be modified. On the basis of the sermon included in Fillastre's diary, he has usually been regarded as an enlightened champion of reunion, or a betrayer of Orthodoxy, depending on the point of view from which he was being judged. In view of the opinions expressed—or carefully not expressed—in the Slavonic sermon, this verdict is no longer acceptable.

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³² Loomis p 435.

³³ The Polish delegation left Poland on 27 November 1414—see Dlugossius, *Omnia Opera*, ed Ignatius Z. Pauli (Cracow 1877) 13 p 180—and arrived in Constance at the end of January 1415. (Loomis pp 209, 448 n 20).

³⁴ I have dealt with this point elsewhere, in a more detailed study of Grigori Tsamblak's career.