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Church Policy of Byzantium after the Triumph of Orthodoxy (843–886)

Predrag Komatina

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Preface

The monograph *Church Policy of Byzantium after the Triumph of Orthodoxy (843–886)* represents an amended and reworked version of the Serbian edition *Crkvena politika Vizantije od kraja ikonoborstva do smrti cara Vasilija I*, Beograd 2014, which, again, was based on the doctoral dissertation "Crkvena politika Vizantije (843–886)", defended at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy in 2012, before an international commission, which consisted of Prof. Dr Vlada Stanković, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy (mentor), Prof. Dr Radivoj Radić, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy, Prof. Dr Angel Nikolov, University "St Clement of Ohrid", Sofia, Prof. Dr Tatjana Subotin-Golubović, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy.

The phrase "Church policy of Byzantium", indicated in the title, should be understood to refer to the "policy of the Byzantine Empire in ecclesiastical affairs", that is the policy that the emperor and the imperial authorities conducted towards the Church and in the field of ecclesiastical affairs more generally. In the period concerned, this covers the various issues of Iconoclasm and Orthodoxy, the appointment of the patriarchs, relations with the Church of Rome, theological disputes with the Muslims, Non-Chalcedonian Christians and Christian sects, missionary activity outside the borders of the Empire aimed at the conversion of foreign peoples to Christianity, as well as towards the religious minorities inside it, but also the political and intellectual potential that stood behind these policies. It is important to emphasize that this does not mean church policy was always the same or even consistent. It depended largely on the personality of the emperor or other holders of supreme state authority, on the

personality of the patriarch, and on general circumstances, and shifted in accordance with these factors. Furthermore, it is not the intention to suggest that the imperial and patriarchal authority should be viewed as institutions *per se*, existing independently of the personalities of their bearers.

It is apparent that the relationship between the two was more complex and in many respects depended on the person of the emperor or the patriarch, on their personal relationship and personal attitudes towards one another. The same can be said of relations between the Eastern and Western Churches, which again were complex and changed, sometimes dramatically, in accordance with political and other circumstances making it impossible always to speak of a constant and consistent policy of the emperor towards the pope, or of the pope towards the patriarch or vice-versa, even when dealing with the same protagonists. The same was also true for the relationship within the camp of the victorious iconophile party in the post-iconoclastic period, which cannot be viewed as strictly divided into "extremist" and "moderate" factions, as is usually assumed in the scholarship. Thus, the "church policy of Byzantium" in the post-iconoclastic period is not presented as a kind of a historical phenomenon, but rather as a history of the events that marked the ecclesiastical affairs of Byzantium in the given period.

The restoration of the cult of icons in 843 is taken as a starting point, as it represented a crossroads in both the ecclesiastical and political history of Byzantium, when the Christian Empire of the Romans returned to its Orthodox roots. The period that followed was marked by turbulence in the Byzantine church, further schisms, when the old gave birth to new, and the new threw the old into the shadows, in which the state tried to stabilize the church, but disturbances in the church often destabilized the state. Moreover, the period also witnessed the restoration of secular learning, the representatives of which strove more than ever to take over the management of ecclesiastical affairs and the most important positions from the hands of strict, rich in spirit, but poorly educated monasticism. Monasticism, persecuted under the iconoclasts, re-emerges as the greatest moral authority in Byzantine society. In such internal circumstances, an unprecedented external expansion of the Byzantine church and religion took place, including the inclusion of vast numbers of barbarian Russians, Khazars, Bulgarians and Slavs in Central Europe into the Byzantine cultural and spiritual circle. Byzantine Orthodoxy then successfully coped with the theological challenges of Islam, while threatening the very survival of the Jews in its territory. Finally, in that era, the Church of

Constantinople tried for the first time to act completely independently of the Apostolic See of Old Rome and to see itself as the centre of the entire Christian universe. The main protagonists in all those events were the bearers of the highest state authority—Empress Theodora (842–856), Logothete Theoctistus (until 855), Caesar Bardas (until 866), Emperor Michael III (842–867) and Emperor Basil I (867–886); then the holders of the highest ecclesiastical authority—patriarchs of Constantinople Methodius (843–847), Ignatius (847–858, 867–877) and Photius (858–867, 877–886). Nor should we forget intellectuals, such as Constantine the Philosopher († 869) and monks, such as his brother Methodius († 885). This epoch, so rich in events and so important for Byzantine and European history, ended with the disappearance of the last of its protagonists—the death of Methodius and Emperor Basil I and Photius' final withdrawal from the stage. Those events, in 885 and 886, marked a new turning point in the history of Byzantine church politics, and directed its course in a different direction.

The period of Byzantine history between 843 and 886 is fairly well covered by historical sources. As far as narrative sources are concerned, the period this book deals with did not, however, produce any contemporary historians or chroniclers to describe it. The only one writing in the genre at the time was George the Monk, and his *Chronicle* ends precisely in the year 843, with the events that are taken as the starting point here. Other chroniclers whose works cover the period between 843 and 886 wrote almost a century later, in the middle of the tenth century. These are the Continuator of Theophanes, Genesius, Symeon the Logothete, authors from the so-called groups of Symeon the Logothete and the continuers of George the Monk. However, due to the distance in time from the events they were describing, the statements of these chroniclers are not always the most accurate or precise, sometimes obscured by legend, and often burdened with ideology. Since they were created during the reign of emperors from the Macedonian dynasty, descended from Basil I, on the whole, they portray the reign of Michael III in a negative light.

The lack of reliable, contemporary histories and chronicles is largely made up for by the contemporary documentary sources. The Acts of the councils of 869–870 and 879–880 are the most reliable sources for the schism in the Church of Constantinople between the faction of Patriarch Photius and the faction of Patriarch Ignatius, and now a new edition of the Latin translation of the acts of the council of 869–870 by Anastasius the Librarian, with its prehistory, is available to researchers. However, it is the

extremely rich opus of Patriarch Photius himself that constitutes the outstanding source for the era. The main part, in terms of the knowledge available to historians, consists of almost three hundred preserved epistles, addressed to the most prominent representatives of leading state and church circles, both within the Empire and throughout the entire area that came within the framework of his ecclesiastical policy at the time, of which certainly the most significant is his correspondence with Pope Nicholas I, Bulgarian prince Boris and the Armenian prince and catholicos. In addition to the epistles, there are sermons (*Homiliae*), letters to a friend, Metropolitan Amphilochius of Cyzicus (*Amphilochia*), the impressive *Bibliotheca*, but also other, shorter writings. In addition to Patriarch Photius, the writings of Patriarch Methodius have also been preserved, a number of which refer to current circumstances in the church related to the *Studite Schism*, which arose during his tenure, and represent a first-class source for those events.

A special place in the reconstruction of events for the period 843–886 and the roles of different personalities in them belong to Byzantine *hagiography*. This genre, one could say, flourished in the period after 843. Patriarch Methodius and Patriarch Ignatius both received saintly *lives*, and they provide a wealth of information on politics at the very top of the Church of Constantinople. The resistance to iconoclasts during the second iconoclast period gave birth to numerous ascetics and heroes of Orthodoxy. The most important of them, such as Joannicius, Michael the Syncell, Symeon the Stylite, Hilarion of Dalmatos, as well as various members of the Studite monastic community, also got *lives*. These *lives* are also the main source of information on events related to the restoration of the veneration of icons and the years that immediately followed, far better than the later, distorted accounts of the chroniclers of the tenth century, and among them, a compilation known as the *Acts of David*, *Symeon and George*, is especially significant. A detailed analysis of the mentioned hagiographic works, but also of all other written sources composed during the ninth century in the historical circumstances that this book deals with, along with an assessment of their historical value, in addition to studies of other researchers, was recently given by Óscar Prieto Domínguez, *Literary Circles in Byzantine Iconoclasm: Patrons, Politics and Saints*, Cambridge 2020, making their use as historical sources significantly easier.

In addition to Greek, a large amount of information about this period is provided by sources in Latin. First of all, there are the numerous letters of the Roman popes Leo IV, Benedict III, Nicholas I, Hadrian II, John

VIII and Stephen V, addressed to Byzantine emperors and patriarchs, secular and spiritual dignitaries, but also to the rulers of Bulgaria and neighbouring Slavic countries, which, with the aforementioned acts of the church councils of 869–870 and 879–880, contribute the most to elucidating the circumstances related to the so-called *Schism of Photius*, not only in the field of mutual relations between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople during the schism, but also in the field of relations within the Byzantine church itself. Useful, albeit fragmentary data can also be found in the Frankish annals of the time, which have the advantage of being contemporary.

Left to last, but by no means less significant, there are the Slavic sources, composed in the infancy of Slavic literature, which were the fruit of the very Byzantine church policy of the period 843–886 with which this book deals. These are primarily the *lives* of the Slavic teachers, Constantine, Cyril and his brother Methodius, written shortly after the death of one or the other, in the last decades of the ninth century. Apart from being contemporary, both *lives* are also rich with an abundance of data of first-class historical importance, which, compared to other *lives*, prevail over commonplaces and glorification of the saints, venerating their heroes Constantine and Methodius not so much as saints but as historical figures, which sheds welcome light on many very significant aspects of the Byzantine ecclesiastical and especially missionary policy of the period under consideration. The verdict on their historical value has already been pronounced many times in the scholarship, and despite sporadic attempts, remains indisputable.

The period between 843 and 886 has always attracted the attention of researchers because of all the characteristics mentioned above. However, scholars have often overestimated the significance of the change of ruling imperial dynasty in 867, leading most reviewers of Byzantine history to divide the period into two parts, up to 867 and after that year. Thus, in the modern and useful *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, the material is divided into two parts—the first including personalities active between 641 and 867, and the second, personalities who acted between 867 and 1025. The editors were thus forced to depict many personalities who marked not only the period 843–886 but also the entire Middle Byzantine period, divided into two parts and published in two separate editions. Such a fate befell Photius, Ignatius, Basil I, Gregory Asbestas and many others.

When looking only at the ecclesiastical politics of the period 843–886, it should be noted that it has never been treated as a separate and unique entity. On the other hand, some of its aspects have attracted considerable attention from researchers and have been dealt with quite well. Such is the case with the question of the overthrow of the iconoclastic clergy after 843 or with the *Studite Schism*, which arose at the same time. Researchers have often referred to the personality of Patriarch Photius and his role in the Byzantine history of this period. In this field, the voluminous work of Joseph Hergenröther, created a century and a half ago, is indispensable. Nevertheless, the most prominent place in the research of Byzantine history, and above all the Byzantine church policy of the ninth century, certainly belongs to Francis Dvornik and his great monographs on Byzantine-Roman-Slavic relations, the *Schism of Photius*, the life and activities of Constantine and Methodius, Byzantine missionary activity among the Slavs and other topics. Besides Dvornik, many authors have devoted their works to the activities of the Byzantine missionaries Constantine and Methodius among the Slavs and the emergence of Slavic literacy and literature. This issue has been so thoroughly addressed in scholarship that it is a challenge to say anything new and original about it. The issue of the Christianization of the Bulgarians and the organization of the Bulgarian church is also well covered. In recent times, Evangelos Chryosos devoted a number of important studies to the research of the relationship between the Byzantine and Roman churches during the *Schism of Photius* in the 860-ies and 870-ies, and in special studies the issues of Byzantine-Armenian relations on ecclesiastical matters, the problem of the Paulicians on the eastern borders of the Empire and the Byzantine policy of conversion of the Jews during the reign of Basil I have been thoroughly addressed again. On the other hand, some phenomena of this period of Byzantine history have gone completely unnoticed, for example, the sudden expansion of the jurisdictional area of the Patriarchate of Constantinople during the time of Emperor Basil I. However, it is most indicative that after the mentioned impressive, both in terms of scope and importance, works of Hergenröther and Dvornik, there has been no comprehensive study dedicated to the history and all aspects of Byzantine church policy during the decades that followed the Triumph of Orthodoxy. In this study, I have tried to fill that gap as far as possibilities allowed and in accordance with the current state of research on individual issues, without pretensions to have reached any definitive judgment about them.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the editors of the edition *New Approaches to Byzantine History and Culture*—Florin Curta, Leonora Neville and Shaun Tougher—for the honour they showed me by inviting me to participate with my contribution in the mentioned edition and the inspiring opportunity to once again dedicate myself to the issues with which I started my research work many years ago and the possibility of supplementing and improving my research and offering its results to the international research community and interested readers. I am indebted to the reviewers for their advice, suggestions and remarks, which proved so helpful to me. I also owe special thanks to Mr Charles Robertson, who was so kind to proofread the English text, and Dr Milan Vojnović, who created the maps.

Belgrade, Serbia
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Predrag Komatina

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscrirpt.

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Orthodoxy Re-Enthroned (843–856)

Introduction

The history of the Byzantine Empire, from its very beginnings, was the history *of the Christian Empire*. The founder of New Rome on the Bosporus, Constantine the Great, not only ended the centuries-long persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, but also made a decisive contribution to the organization of the Christian Church. In Nicaea, not far from his New Rome, Constantine presided over a great Council in 325, which, according to tradition, was attended by three hundred and eighteen Christian bishops. It was the best sign that, by entering the legal order of the Roman Empire, the Christian Church had also received an earthly emperor. In such circumstances, and shaped by Constantine's contemporary and biographer, Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, the ideology of the Christian empire emerged, which holds that just as there is one God in heaven, so there is one Emperor on earth, who is chosen by God and the vicar of Christ. That one emperor can only be a Christian emperor and a Roman emperor, starting with Constantine the Great. In the following centuries, the Roman–Byzantine emperors followed in the footsteps of the first Christian emperor and were the true supreme heads of the Christian Church. Constantine's successors presided over ecumenical councils, founded bishoprics, appointed bishops, and their word was often decisive in matters of the ecclesiastical dogma itself and its formulations. The official version of the creed of the entire Church often depended precisely on the personal religious convictions of a particular emperor. The iconoclastic

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movement, which marked Byzantine and Christian history in the period between 730 and 843, is perhaps the best example of this.[1]

Imposed on the Church by the Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717–741),[2] later called the *Iconoclast*, stemming from his personal convictions, the movement that rejected the veneration of holy icons and condemned it as idolatry left a deep mark on Christian history. Appearing suddenly, at a time when all intra-Christian theological disputes already belonged to the past, and when it seemed that the Orthodox doctrine of Christianity had finally resisted and prevailed after so many temptations, the attack on the veneration of holy icons was experienced as the most detestable heresy. However, with unlimited imperial power behind it, iconoclasm endured within the Christian Church longer than any previous heresy.

Founded by Leo III the *Iconoclast*, iconoclasm was strongly supported by his son Constantine V, called "the Namesake of excrement" (Κοπρόνυμος) in later Orthodox historiography, during whose reign it was made official at the *headless* Council of Hieria in 754, where the veneration of icons was labelled heresy. Its momentum weakened during the reign of Leo IV, so that in 787, at the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, in the same place where the Three Hundred and Eighteen Fathers, under the watchful eye of Constantine the Great, had long ago established the official Orthodox creed of the Christian Church, it experienced a temporary collapse during the time of Irene, the wife of Leo IV profoundly devoted to Orthodoxy, and their son Constantine VI. However, this was not the final defeat of iconoclasm. Orthodoxy was maintained while Orthodox emperors sat on the throne—Irene (797–802) and Michael I Rangabe (811–813), and between them Nicephorus I (802–811), who did not show significant interest in religious disputes, and while the patriarchal see of Constantinople during that time was occupied by the Orthodox patriarchs Tarasius (784–806) and Nicephorus (806–815).

However, when the iconoclastic emperor, Leo V the Armenian (813–820), originally from the eastern, traditionally iconoclastic areas of the Empire, ascended to the imperial throne, iconoclasm once again became an official form of Christianity. The new emperor convened a new iconoclastic Council in Constantinople in 815, at which the decisions of

[1] On the role of emperors in the history of the Byzantine Church, cf. the study of Dagron 1996.

[2] PmbZ, no. 4242.

the Council of Nicaea of 787 were rejected and condemned, and those of Hieria of 754 were revived, and iconoclasm was once again declared an official form of Christianity—the Orthodox patriarch Nicephorus was deposed, and the iconoclast Theodotus Melissenus (815–821) was appointed in his stead. Other bishops were also replaced by the iconoclasts. The new emperor Michael II the Amorian (820–829), originally also from the East, from pro-iconoclast Phrygia, continued the iconoclastic direction of his predecessor, and the same religious policy was continued by his son and successor, the emperor Theophilus (829–842). During that time, the patriarchal throne of Constantinople was occupied by the iconoclast patriarchs Antony Cassymatas (821–837) and John VII the Grammarian (837–843).[3]

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[3] General overview of the Iconoclastic period, ODB II, 975–977 (P. A. Hollingsworth, A. Cutler). Collected works on iconoclasm, cf. Bryer, Herrin 1977, especially Mango 1977, 1–6; Auzépy 2007; Brubaker, Haldon 2015; Humphreys 2021. On the Second Iconoclasm 815–843, cf. Signes Codoñer 2014.

The End of Iconoclasm

As was the case many times in the history of the Christian Empire, a change on the throne brought a change in religious politics. The death of the Emperor Theophilus on 20 January 842 also marked the beginning of the end of the iconoclastic movement. The emperor's wife Theodora, who was deeply loyal and committed to Orthodoxy, assumed the imperial power in the name of their young son Michael III. She had a clear goal to end the iconoclastic movement at the very beginning of her reign.

The following lines from the *Life of Patriarch Methodius* most vividly testify to what a turning point in the life of the Byzantine Church the death of the emperor Theophilus was:

> *The Lord sent death to the emperor, and it also came to his heresy. Because when this one died, this heresy ended with him. Since the child Michael with his mother received the Empire, the Orthodox Church of Christ obtained the freedom of confession, and the perversion of heresy was removed as if by a human hand and was rebuked by force, and those willing to talk and listen about them, were prevented.*[1]

[1] Ἐν τούτοις τοῦ ἁγίου ἀνδρὸς ἐξεταζομένου, θάνατον ἀπέστειλε Κύριος ἐπὶ τὸν βασιλέα, καὶ ἦλθεν ἐπὶ τὴν αἵρεσιν αὐτοῦ· ἅμα γὰρ ἐτεθνήκει, συντελευτᾷ αὐτῳ καὶ ἡ αἵρεσις. Τοῦ γὰρ παιδὸς Μιχαὴλ σὺν τῇ μητρὶ τὴν βασιλείαν παραλάβοντος, ἡ ὀρθόδοξος Χριστοῦ Ἐκκλησία παῤῥησίαν λαμβάνει, καὶ τὸ κίββηλον τῆς αἱρέσεως ὡς ἀνθροπίνη χειρὶ φυέν τε καὶ κρατηθὲν ἀπηλέγχετο,

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However, not everything was so simple. More than a year passed between the death of the emperor Theophilus, on 20 January 842, and the day of the official re-establishment of the cult of icons and thus the restoration of Orthodoxy, on 11 March 843.

After Theophilus, the iconoclast movement remained firmly institutionalized—the Church remained in the hands of the iconoclast bishops, led by the patriarch John VII the Grammarian,[2] the Orthodox bishops had been deposed after the renewal of iconoclasm in 815, or else forced to accept the new iconoclast dogma, and all priests appointed after 815 were ordained by the iconoclast bishops; lay clergy were obliged to follow the religious confession of their bishops. Within the fold of the Church, only the monks mostly remained loyal to the Orthodox faith and the veneration of the holy icons, and throughout the time of iconoclasm they had remained steadfast in preserving their faith and rejecting the iconoclastic heresy, suffering many persecutions from the iconoclastic emperors as a result.

The most important monastic centres at that time were the capital's monasteries, such as Studion and Dalmatou, and among those outside Constantinople, the monasteries of the Bithynian mountains, Olympus and Ida, stood out in particular. The monks of these centres, as well as solitary hermits, were the leaders of the monastic community.[3] Chroniclers from the tenth century, Genesius and the Continuator of Theophanes, attribute the decisive impetus for the change in church policy towards the re-establishment of the cult of icons to the monks of the Studite Monastery in Constantinople.[4] However, the lives of the prominent Studite monks of the time, composed in the second half of the ninth century, describing the events surrounding the establishment of the cult of icons, do not assign their heroes any such role.[5] The monks had always been the bearers of the

καὶ οἱ λαλεῖν καὶ ἀκούειν βουλόμενοι περὶ τούτων, ἐκωλύοντο…, Vita Methodii, 1252 D–1253 A.

[2] On Patriarch John VII the Grammarian, cf. PmbZ, no. 3199; Signes Codoñer 2014.

[3] About the most important monasteries and monks of the first half of the ninth century, especially about the Studites and the Bithynian Olympus, cf. Morris 1995, 9–18, 35–39. Cf. also Janin 1953–1975 I, 86–89, 444–455; II, 127–191.

[4] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.1; Genesius, IV.2. On later historiography about the events of 842–843, cf. Torgerson, Humphreys 2021, 199–201.

[5] The most important of these lives is the *Life of Nicholas the Studite*, Vita Nicolai Studitae, 863–925 (for the events surrounding the establishment of the cult of icons, cf. 901 B–D); Prieto Domínguez 2020, 308–314. On that issue, cf. also Morris 1995, 10–11.

iconodule movement, but they were never able to prevail over the secular authorities and make a decisive contribution to the establishment of the veneration of icons. The decision on that lay in the hands of the secular authorities.

Empress Theodora and Her Associates

Theophilus' death was disastrous for the survival of iconoclasm because it left the Empire and the Church without a strong iconoclastic emperor. His son and successor, the new emperor Michael III (842–867), was only a two-year-old child,[6] whose true reign still belonged to the far distant future and Theophilus died too early to be able to educate his successor in the iconoclastic spirit and thus ensure the continuation of his religious policy. Along with the minor emperor, according to the known practice,[7] his mother, the dowager empress Theodora, and her daughter, the eldest sister of the new emperor, Thecla, took over the imperial power. Thanks to circumstance, the supreme power in the Empire belonged to the leading member of this tripartite imperial body, the empress Theodora, deeply devoted to the Orthodox faith and the veneration of icons, as evidenced in all the sources that speak of her. In those sources, it is especially emphasized that she persisted in her faith and respect for icons even during the reign of her husband, a fierce persecutor of the icon-worshippers.[8] The position in which Theodora found herself after Theophilus' death allowed her not only to freely exercise her religious views, but also to pass them on to her children, among whom was the emperor himself, but also, what was most important, to the entire Church and Christian Empire. Although the later historiographical tradition would find behind the personage of the empress other initiators of these significant changes in the history of the Christian Empire and the Church, such as her collaborator the logothete Theoctistus, or her brother Bardas, and even the empress' uncle Manuel,

[6] Michael III was born on 9 January 840, cf. Mango 1967, 253–258; Treadgold 1979, 183, 1988, 319.

[7] Cf. the example of the emperor Constantine VI and his mother the Empress Irene, PmbZ, no. 1439, 3704.

[8] About Theodora, cf. PmbZ, no. 7286.

who had died in 838,[9] it was primarily her action and exclusively her merit that contemporaries recognized in this act.[10]

[9] According to Symeon, 131.2, Theodora established the Orthodox faith *with her opinion and guidance and encouragement by Theoctistus, caniclius and logothete* (…γνώμῃ μὲν ἑαυτῆς, ὑποθήκῃ δὲ καὶ παραινέσει Θεοκτίστου κανικλείου καὶ λογοθέτου…). Theophanes Continuatus, IV.1–3 and Genesius, IV.2–3, attribute the leading role in the change of religious politics to Bardas and *Manuel*, and mention also a certain *Constantine the Armenian*, a drungary of the Watch, the father of Thomas, the latter logothete of the Drome and the ancestor of the historian Genesius, about which, cf. Markopoulos 1986, 103–108. An overview of the events that followed the death of Emperor Theophilus and the establishment of the cult of icons, mainly based on the data of the chroniclers of the tenth century, is provided by Varona Codeso 2009, 59–96.

[10] The role of the empress and her young son Michael III in the establishment of icons is already celebrated by the *canon* dedicated to that event composed by Theophanes *Graptus* on the celebration of its first anniversary in 844, cf. Gouillard 1961, 381. This is explicitly testified to by the contemporary and one of the oldest preserved texts that mention the establishment of the cult of icons, the *Life of St. Joannicius* by the monk Peter, written between 847 and 852/853, perhaps even as early as the first half of 847, before the death of Patriarch Methodius on June 14, 847, Talbot 1998, 247; Timotin 2010, 184; Price 2021, 258–259; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 120–127. The author of this text writes that his hero, St. Joannicius, died *on the third day of the month of November, the tenth indiction* (i.e. 846), *during the reign of our Orthodox Emperor Michael, the young and meekest infant of Orthodoxy, and the aptly named Theodora* ("Gift of God"), *she who was truly given to the world by God as a divine gift of Orthodoxy and who granted complete peace to the Church, together with her offspring, who are God-protected and God-crowned*, Vita Ioannicii, 433; Talbot 1998, 344–345.

The *Life of Michael the Synkellos* († 846), which was compiled by an unknown monk of the Chora Monastery in Constantinople, *no more than one generation after the saint's death*, that is, certainly before the death of the Emperor Michael III in 867, Life of Michael, 5–6; Sode 2001, 146–147; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 358–361, also recognizes the exclusive merit of the empress Theodora in the establishment of icons: since she and her son Michael assumed the imperial power, *Theodora placed a diligent and prudent thought before all other benefits and favors, which the emperors usually reach for to be glorified, to announce her authority as sure and to show male nobility in a female transformation, not otherwise than by the grace of God, she achieved this through a splendid presentation of pious dogmas and honorable icons and united those already divided into one unity, so that through the union of these the firm and unshakable correctness of the faith of the apostolic and paternal dogmas be preserved*, Life of Michael, 100.6–16.

There is a similar statement in the *Sermon on the Exile of the Patriarch Nikephoros* by the presbyter Theophanes, Discourse on the exile, 336–338. Jean Gouillard, Synodikon, 122, n. 19, believes that in the aforementioned section the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* relies entirely on the corresponding section of Theophanes' *Sermon*. However, that claim was difficult to reconcile with the dating of the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* to the time before 867, given that the creation of Theophanes' *Sermon* was usually dated to the end of the ninth century, Synodikon, 122. On the other hand, Kazhdan 1999, 257–258, considered, though uncon-

The first step that the empress took on the way to establishing the cult of icons and the Orthodox faith was to consult on the issue with her close associates, i.e. with the people who helped her manage the Empire. After she herself decided to raise the issue of restoring the Orthodox faith, the empress *talked about this matter with those who held magisterial positions and dignities*, as stated in *Sermon on the exile of Patriarch Nikephoros* by the presbyter Theophanes composed in 847.[11] This meeting between the empress and the highest state dignitaries, held sometime during 842, was decisive for her endeavour. If she secured the undivided support of the holders of the highest state positions, the empress' plan to restore the cult of icons and the Orthodox faith would be a guaranteed success. Otherwise, if one of the high-ranking officials opposed her decision and showed loyalty to iconoclasm and the memory of the late Emperor Theophilus, it would inevitably lead to dissension at the top of the state government and serious destabilization of the Empire. The meeting was exclusively of a state nature, where the empress's initiative to restore the cult of icons was discussed as a state issue. Representatives of the church and monasticism did not participate in it.[12]

vincingly, that the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* is a work of somewhat later creation, so the use of Theophanes' *Sermon* in its composition could be explained by that. Prieto Domínguez 2020, 114–116, 143–149, argued, however, that the presbyter Theophanes, the author of the *Sermon*, was a member of the literary circle of the patriarch Methodius. The issue was finally solved by D. Afinogenov who has recently decisively proven that the *Sermon on the Exile of the Patriarch Nikephoros* by the presbyter Theophanes was composed as early as 847, after the translation of the relics of patriarch Nicephorus on 13 March and before the death of patriarch Methodius on 14 June, and was used as a source by the author of the *Life of Michael the Synkellos*, Discourse on the exile, 325–330.

[11] Discourse on the exile, 338.

[12] J. Gouillard, in his commentary with the edition of the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, believes that the representatives of the monks also participated in this gathering, i.e. that this was *a preliminary gathering of representatives of the authorities and the monastic order*, Synodikon, 122. However, the almost contemporary *Sermon on the exile of Patriarch Nicephorus and the transfer of his relics* by the presbyter Theophanes clearly testifies that the Empress arranged this meeting with *bearers of worldly dignities*, and that she approached the most prominent representatives of the monastic order regarding the restoration of the cult of icons only *after she had discussed the matter with those who held magisterial positions and dignities*, Discourse on the exile, 338. The same can be concluded from the text of the *Life of Michael the Synkellos*, according to which the empress issued the order to release the imprisoned monks and the order to gather the representatives of monasticism at the council in Constantinople only after she had considered her intention to establish the cult of icons *with wise shrewdness and prudent consciousness*, Life of Michael, 100.17 sq. In this last statement, an allusion to the aforementioned meeting of the empress with her secular dignitaries could be recognized. In the

Who were those people who *held magisterial positions and dignities*, to whom Empress Theodora first turned when she wanted to restore the cult of icons? Describing the events in connection with the great church council that followed Theodora's aforementioned consultation with court dignitaries, the *Lives of David, Symeon and George* lists in one place the names of these dignitaries who, along with the empress, decisively contributed to the victory of Orthodoxy—Sergius Nicetiates,[13] Theoctistus,[14] Bardas,[15] and Petronas,[16] characterizing them all together as *the most Orthodox people, who happened to be the foremost of the Council of Senate*.[17] There is no

Lives of David, Symeon and George, there is a mention of the letters that the empress sent to the monk Symeon, inviting him to come to Constantinople with the other monks who were with him, Acta Davidis, 243.8–10, which served A.-M. Talbot, in her commentary with the English translation of this work, as a basis for the assumption that with those letters the empress initiated a series of events that would lead to the restoration of the cult of icons, i.e. that they were an invitation to certain monks to come to the meeting that the empress arranged with her secular collaborators on this matter, Talbot 1998, 211, n. 338. However, it is already clear from the following lines of the same text that the aforementioned *letters* should be recognized as those letters, invitations and orders that the empress sent to the monks *after* she had held a meeting with secular dignitaries, at which the decision was made to implement the restoration of the cult of icons, which is mentioned in *Life of Michael the Synkellos*. Namely, acting according to the will of the empress and sailing towards Constantinople, Symeon saw in a dream St. Antony. Asked by Symeon where he was traveling, the saint replied: *To Byzantium, to establish Orthodoxy and prepare a place for you and those with you in the Caniclium*, Acta Davidis, 243.12–20. On the other hand, his brother George, to whom the empress' wish had previously been announced by Symeon himself through his letter, Acta Davidis, 243.10–12, sailing to Constantinople, dreamed of St. Spyridon, who, when asked why he had come, answered: *I come to fight together with you at the council that is to be assembled in Byzantium*, Acta Davidis, 243.30–31. From this it is clear that, in response to the empress' letters, they went to the *great church council*, which she decided to call *after a meeting with her highest secular dignitaries*, and which, according to the following text of the *Life of David, Symeon and George*, was to take place exactly in the building of the Caniclium, Acta Davidis, 246.11–12 sq.

[13] On Sergius Nicetiates, cf. PmbZ, no. 6664.

[14] On Theoctistus, cf. ODB III, 2056 (P. Hollingsworth); PmbZ, no. 8050. The only previous attempt to write Theoctistus' biography was made a long time ago by Mališevskij 1887, 265–297. Cf. also Guilland 1971, 48–50.

[15] On Bardas, cf. ODB I, 255–256 (P. Hollingsworth, A. Cutler); PmbZ, no. 791.

[16] On Petronas, cf. ODB III, 1644–1645 (P. Hollingsworth); PmbZ, no. 5929; Halkin 1944, 199–202. Treadgold 1988, 326, n. 451, suggests that at the time of the death of the Emperor Theophilus, Petronas was also a domestic of the Schools.

[17] …Σέργιον τὸν Νικητιάτην, Θεόκτιστον, Βάρδαν καὶ Πετρωνᾶν, ἄνδρας ὀρθοδοξοτάτους καὶ τῆς συγκλήτου τυγχάνοντας πρώτους βουλῆς…, Acta Davidis, 245.31–246.2; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 253.

doubt that Theophanes' *Sermon*, too, speaking of the people who *held magisterial positions and dignities*, is also referring to them. According to chroniclers a century younger, the first three men, with the exception of Petronas, were the people to whom Emperor Theophilus, aware that his end was nearing and that he was leaving behind him the empress-widow and a weak, only two-year-old son, wishing that, despite this, their position on the throne would remain safe, appointed on his deathbed as *guardians and deputies of the daily imperial duties* of his young son. To tell the truth, the aforementioned chroniclers do not mention Sergius Nicetiates along with Bardas and Theoctistus, and his place in their accounts is taken by *Manuel*, magister and domestic of the Schools, the uncle of Empress Theodora.[18] However, Manuel had died in the conflict with the Arabs near Anzen, on 27 July 838, and could by no chance have been a participant in the events that occurred later. Byzantine chroniclers of the tenth century attributed to him the role played in these events by Sergius Nicetiates.[19] He was, along with Bardas and Theoctistus, one of the members of the imperial regency, and one of those who had the main say in the matter of restoring the cult of icons. Petronas,[20] the empress' and Bardas' younger brother, was not formally involved in exercising the highest authority, but as brother to both the empress and one of the

[18] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.1; Genesius, IV.1, omits Bardas from the regency. On Manuel the Armenian, cf. Signes Codoñer 2014, 83–101, 132–136.

[19] Grégoire 1933, 520–524; Treadgold 1988, 267–278, 293–304; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 186–187, 241–255. On the date of Manuel's death, cf. Halkin 1954, 9–11. Varona Codeso 2009, 60–71, giving full confidence to the chroniclers of the tenth century, maintains that the mentioned Manuel really participated in the events of 842–843, while Signes Codoñer 2012, 231–242, tries to completely rehabilitate the value of the data about Manuel's life and activities after 838.

[20] According to the later chronicle tradition, Emperor Theophilus entrusted Theoctistus and Petronas to remove the prominent military leader, the patrician Theophobus the Persian, whom he suspected of wanting to harm the empress and the young heir to the throne and take the throne after his death, Symeon 130.43–44; Treadgold 1988, 326. About Theophobus, cf. Grégoire 1934, 185–197; ODB III, 2067–2068 (P. Hollingsworth, A. Cutler); PmbZ, no. 8237; Signes Codoñer 2014, 111–124, 132–180; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 251–252. After the death of magister Manuel, domestic of the Schools in 838, Treadgold 1988, 301, in addition to the emperor's son-in-law and possible successor, caesar Alexius Mouzele, until he assumed the monastic vows after the birth of the true heir to the throne Michael in 840, Theophobus was the most prominent military leader and associate of Emperor Theophilus, cf. Signes Codoñer 2014. Of particular importance is the information of later chroniclers that he was *Orthodox* and therefore *loved by the people of Constantinople no less than by the Persians* which he commanded, Symeon, 130.29.

regents, his place was in their immediate vicinity and his role in management and decision-making was certainly not negligible. Therefore, along with Empress Theodora, the mentioned four were persons in whose hands lay the entire power after the death of the Emperor Theophilus. Given that the mentioned dignitaries were her collaborators and assistants in the exercise of imperial power, it is quite understandable that Empress Theodora first turned to them and consulted with them on the issue of restoring the cult of icons and the Orthodox faith. What answer could she expect from them, that is, what were the understandings of these four people when it came to respecting the cult of icons?

In the *Lives of David, Symeon and George*, all four are labelled as *the most Orthodox people*. The *Life of Empress Theodora* called Theoctistus *a fervent zealot of Orthodox faith*.[21] In the *Synaxarium of the Church of Constantinople*, Sergius Nicetiates was remembered as *a prominent zealot of the Orthodox faith and who fought a lot for the establishment of the Orthodoxy of holy and venerable icons*.[22] However, such formulations could also be a later echo of the role and merits of those figures in establishing the cult of icons, and they do not have to be taken as direct evidence of their religious beliefs during Theophilus' life and at the time of his death. Some other circumstances should be taken into account here. Bardas and Petronas were the brothers of Empress Theodora. Their rise in the hierarchy of the Empire was made possible thanks to her position, and that of their uncle Manuel, and their mother, zosta patricia Theoctista. It is known that their entire family was always devoted to Orthodoxy, and that even during Theophilus' reign, a circle of iconodules formed around them, whose most prominent members were zosta patricia Theoctista, but also the stepmother of the Emperor Theophilus himself, Euphrosyne.[23] In addition, Sergius Nicetiates, a magister, was also a relative of Theodora.[24]

Of the four people who, together with Empress Theodora, made the decision to restore the cult of icons, only Theoctistus can be found to have a trace of an iconoclastic past. Theoctistus, a eunuch, magister and

[21] …Θεόκτιστος ὁ λογοθέτης, ὁ καὶ Κανίκλειος, θερμὸς τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως ζηλωτὴς τυγχάνων…, Vita Theodorae, 10.72–73; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 253–255.

[22] …ὃς καὶ ζηλωτὴς διάπυρος τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως γέγονε καὶ πολλὰ ἠγωνίσατο εἰς τὸ τὴν ὀρθοδοξίαν γενέσθαι τῶν ἁγίων καὶ σεπτῶν εἰκόνων…, Synaxarium CP, 778.1–4; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 187, 244, 253.

[23] Treadgold 1988, 271. On the religious significance of Petronas, cf. Prieto Domínguez 2020, 255–260.

[24] Synaxarium CP, 777.13–778.1; PmbZ, no. 6664; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 244.

logothete of the Drome, whose rise in the hierarchy of the dignitaries of the Empire, from the chartularius of the Caniclium during the reign of Michael II until that of the logothete of the Drome before the middle of 838, was tied exclusively to service and loyalty to the iconoclastic emperors Michael II and Theophilus, participated in the persecutions of the iconodules carried out by these emperors. In December 831, as chartularius of the Caniclium, along with the then logothete of the Drome Arsaber Morocharzanius, he participated in the interrogation of the captured iconodule monks Methodius, the future Orthodox patriarch, and Euthymius of Sardis,[25] and in July 839, when he himself was a logothete of the Drome, in the interrogation of two captured monks from Jerusalem, the brothers Theodore and Theophanes, in the process that ended on 18 July 839 with the carving of iambic verses on the faces of the two brothers, who were to remain remembered and respected ever after as the *Grapti* (*Γράπτοι*, that is, "the Inscribed Ones"), saints and confessors of Orthodoxy.[26] Describing the troubles he suffered at that time in Constantinople, Theodore *Graptus* himself, in the letter he sent after these events to John, the metropolitan of Cyzicus,[27] also described his meeting

[25] Vie d'Euthyme de Sardes, § 18, ll. 339–349; Acta Davidis, 238.4–16; Treadgold 1988, 277, 435, n. 383; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 105–108.

[26] Vita Theodori Grapti, 672 B–680 A; Life of Michael, 78.23–96.4; Praise of Theodore Graptos, 133–146; Symeon 130.37–39. Of the above sources, the first two state the month and date, but only the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* also states that it was the *fourteenth* indiction, Life of Michael, 96.3–4, which would be the year 836. However, Treadgold 1979, 187–189, convincingly showed that the mentioned information from the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* is wrong, since all other sources testify that it was after John the Grammarian became the patriarch of Constantinople in 838, and that the events related to the suffering of the Grapti brothers should be placed in 839. The question of the chronology remains open, since M. Cunningham, Life of Michael, 15–16, n. 51, insists on the year 836, Sode 2001, 233–234, rejects such dating, while Prieto Domínguez 2020, 159–163, accepts it.

The *Life of Theodore Graptus* and the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* state that on 14 July the brothers were interrogated by the *logothete of the Drome*, Vita Theodori Grapti, 676 C; Life of Michael, 90.32–92.1, but do not mention his name. However, in July 839 it could only be Theoctistus, who appears in that position for the first time in July–August 838, Theophanes Continuatus, III.27; Genesius, III.15; Treadgold 1988, 301, 443 n. 411. M. Cunningham, Life of Michael, 158–159, n. 153, sticking to the dating of these events in 836, also considers the mentioned logothete of the Drome to be Theoctistus, since he could have held that position for some time before he first appeared as such in 838, and before that there was mentioned in the sources as the logothete of the Drome Arsaber in 831, Treadgold 1988, 277.

[27] The entire letter is reproduced in the *Life of Theodore Graptus*, Vita Theodori Grapti, 672 B–680 A, which the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* is completely based on and which it follows almost verbatim in the respective chapters, Life of Michael, 80.22–96.4.

with the *logothete of the Drome*, i.e. Theoctistus. The logotete questioned Theodore and Theophanes as to *why they rejoiced at the death of the Emperor Leo* (the Armenian, in 820) and *why they did not want to accept his religion* (iconoclasm), *since it was during his reign that they fled to Constantinople*. The brothers readily answered that they *neither rejoiced at the death of the Emperor Leo, nor did they accept his faith, nor did they come during his reign, but during the reign of the one before him* (i.e. the Orthodox Emperor Michael I, 811–813).[28] To that, the logothete only replied: *Well, well, leave*.[29] From these words it was assumed in historiography that the logothete Theoctistus, although doing his duty as a loyal imperial official, sympathized to a certain extent with the two persecuted and punished iconodule monks, and that Theodore *Graptus* himself was aware of this.[30] However, it seems that the compiler of the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* already understood these words of Theoctistus in a different way, since he paraphrases them as follows: *Go, then, on the path that was assigned to you by the emperor*.[31] Since they were then taken to the Praetorium, in order for their suffering to continue, culminating four days later with the engraving of iambic verses onto their faces,[32] after which they were again sent into exile, to Apameia in Bithynia,[33] it is clear which way *was designated by the emperor* for them. It cannot be said that logothete Theoctistus found an appropriate way to express sympathy for the sufferings of Theodore and Theophanes by alluding to the new misfortunes that still awaited them. Indeed, it is hard to discern any benevolence in his attitude towards the iconodules in the way he conducted the interrogation of the *Grapti* brothers. How then did it happen that a loyal servant of the iconoclastic emperors and their regime, who at the end of the fourth decade of the ninth century faithfully carried out the tasks entrusted to him in the pursuit of the iconodules, had grown into *a fervent zealot of the Orthodox faith* by 843? In the aforementioned interrogation conducted by Theoctistus, the *Grapti* brothers answered him at one point: *We do not agree to distort and innovate the faith because of you who are transformed by circumstances*.[34]

[28] Vita Theodori Grapti, 676 B–C; Life of Michael, 90.24–32; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 159–163.

[29] Vita Theodori Grapti, 676 C.

[30] Treadgold 1988, 311, 447, n. 428.

[31] Life of Michael, 92.1–2.

[32] Vita Theodori Grapti, 676 C–680 A; Life of Michael, 92.2–96.4.

[33] Vita Theodori Grapti, 680 A.

[34] Vita Theodori Grapti, 676 B.

With these words, spoken to Theoctistus' face, they characterized him as one who was guided by current circumstances, who was not steadfast in his convictions, as they were. This meant that, in their eyes, Theoctistus was someone who professed iconoclasm only because circumstances dictated. It is not difficult to understand that he would have changed this belief at the first opportunity after circumstances had also changed. After the death of the iconoclast emperor Theophilus, finding himself in the position of collaborator and official of an empress who professed respect for icons, Theoctistus adapted to the new circumstances and became *a fervent zealot of the Orthodox faith*. However, we may be misjudging Theoctistus if we were to attribute the change in his religious beliefs solely to the change on the imperial throne. This personal change could also have been a consequence of a wider spiritual trend in the Constantinopolitan environment, which had begun to turn its back on institutionalized iconoclasm even in the last years of Theophilus' life.

Be this as it may, at the mentioned meeting with four of her closest collaborators in managing the Empire—Sergius Nicetiates, Theoctistus, Bardas and Petronas—the Empress Theodora encountered no opposition. On the contrary, all four men then fully shared her religious convictions, and she received undivided support from all of them for the undertaking of the restoration of the cult of icons in the Church of Constantinople. Since the full agreement of the entire state leadership on the matter was reached at this meeting, a decision was made to present such a position to the representatives of the Church, as the official position of the state government, and to discuss it at a large church council, which would be convened for this purpose and held in Constantinople. Only then did the empress turn to the monks.[35]

However, the first next step she had to take was self-imposed. Firmly determined to break with the iconoclastic policy of her late husband, the empress issued an order that all those who, *for the sake of the Orthodox faith, were either sent into exile or imprisoned in dungeons* be freed and released.[36] This measure included not only monks, but also *a number of*

[35] Theophanis Oratio, 163 D–164 A.

[36] Life of Michael, 100.18–20; De Theophili absolutione, 21.15–22.8. Vita Theodorae, 10.61–64, and Georgius Monachus II, 803.17–26, describe this measure with similar words, with the difference that this step by the empress is presented as a consequence of the previously held council on the establishment of the cult of icons. I believe that the version given by the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* and *On the Absolution of Theophilus* is more credible, that Theodora first issued an order to stop the further persecution of iconophile monks, and only

pious laymen, whom Theophilus had tyrannically persecuted, confiscating their property, as well as all others who had been punished because they did not want to submit to the late emperor's religious policy.[37] This, in fact, officially ended the state persecution of the icon-worshippers. In this way, the imperial power restored to the Orthodox the right to freely practise their religion and legitimized their position. However, the official religion of the Byzantine Church was still iconoclastic. It was only a great church council that could decide on a change at that level, at which representatives of the official church would gather, i.e. bishops and their clergy, representatives of monasticism and representatives of state authorities. Determined to carry out her idea of the restoration of the cult of icons to the end, the empress decided to organize such a council in Constantinople. With this intention, she sent letters and orders to the representatives of the Orthodox movement—monks and confessors, inviting them to gather in Constantinople for the upcoming council that would decide the fate of the heresy.[38]

Council of 843

The council that the empress decided to convene must have been conceived as a local council of bishops from the territory of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[39] According to the canons of the Church, only the council of bishops had the power to make decisions that would be binding for the entire church that those bishops represented.[40] Iconoclasm in the Patriarchate of Constantinople had been established at one such council, in Constantinople in 815.[41] Only by the same procedure could it be

after that was a council held on the establishment of the cult of icons. Of course, Theodora's wish was for as many monks as possible to participate at that council, so it is quite natural that she first ordered their release from prisons and their return from exile, so that they could come to Constantinople for the council. Acta Davidis, 243.2–8, also links the liberation of the monks to the time immediately after the death of Emperor Theophilus.

[37] Vita Theodorae, 10.61–68; De Theophili absolutione, 21.22–24.

[38] Life of Michael, 100.18–23; Acta Davidis, 243.8–10; Theophanis Oratio, 164 A.

[39] Church canons recognize only *episcopal councils*, which can be *local eparchial*, *local diocesan* (in this case "supradiocesan") and *ecumenical*, ODB I, 540–543 (A. Papadakis, A. Cutler).

[40] I Ecum. (Nicaea I) 5, Syntagma II, 124–125.

[41] Alexander 1953, 35–66.

rejected and forced to give way to Orthodoxy.[42] The fact that the bishops, to whom that authority belonged, were then mostly supporters of iconoclasm, certainly did not sadden Empress Theodora overmuch. The bishops also had to bow to her will and that of her collaborators. In any case, the monks, a numerous and powerful Orthodox group, were her main trump card at the upcoming council. Extremely well-versed in theology, with an admirable life that gave them indisputable authority, the empress could be sure that, with the strong support of the secular authorities, the monks would convince the bishops to depart from their heresy at the upcoming council.

All sources agree that the council concluded on 11 March 843, the Sunday of the first week of Great Lent.[43] According to the *Acts of David, Symeon and George*, most of the parliamentary debates were over by Shrove Sunday, which was 4 March, and seven days later, on 11 March, only the solemn final act remained.[44] On the other hand, according to the work *On the Absolution of Theophilus*, the conciliar sessions took place exactly in these seven days.[45] It is hard to imagine that the entire council took place in one day, on the first Sunday of Great Lent. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that the council ended the week before, so that the next seven days passed in idleness. In addition, it is unlikely that the ceremonial announcement of conciliar decisions would have to wait for seven whole days. The closest to the truth seems to be the statement of *On the Absolution of Theophilus*. The conciliar sessions were held continuously during the first week of Great Lent and resulted in the solemn announcement of the conciliar decisions and a solemn procession on the Sunday of that week, from then on called the *Sunday of Orthodoxy*. Whether the very beginning of the conciliar sessions coincided with the beginning of that week, or whether it fell on Shrove Sunday or some day earlier, cannot be said with certainty. It would be best to conclude that the council began in

[42] This is how at the Council of Nicaea in 787 the decisions of the Iconoclast coucil of 754 were discarded, while at the new Iconoclast council of 815 the decisions of the Orthodox council of 787 were discarded and those of the Iconoclast council of 754 restored, Alexander 1953, 40–41.

[43] Vita Theodorae, 10.14–23; Acta Davidis, 250.16–28; Vita Irenes, 603 A; De Theophili absolutione, 39.8 sq; Theophanes Continuatus, IV.6; Symeon, 131.2; Pseudo-Symeon, 647.15–18; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 811.13–16.

[44] Acta Davidis, 249.11–250.28.

[45] De Theophili absolutione, 31.13–39.29.

early March, lasted through the first week of Great Lent, and ended on the first Sunday of that week, 11 March 843.

The time set for convening episcopal councils has been prescribed by the canons of the Church on several occasions. The thirty-seventh Apostolic rule also determined that episcopal councils should be convened *twice a year*—on the fourth Sunday of Pentecost and *on the twelfth day of the month of Hyperbereteus* (i.e. September).[46] The fifth rule of the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea I, 325) changed these deadlines to some extent—the first council of the year should be held *before the Fortieth*, i.e. before Great Lent, and the second *in autumn*.[47] Since it was not easy in practice to hold a gathering of bishops twice a year, later provisions rationalized this rule and determined that councils must be held at least once a year, between Easter and the end of October.[48] These provisions refer to eparchial (provincial) but certainly also to diocesan and wider regional councils, as well as ecumenical councils. The last provision, about holding a council between Easter and the end of October, was passed at the Council of Trullo in 691/692, and repeated at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787. However, the council convened by Theodora was held, as will be seen, on 3 March 843, the last Saturday before the beginning of Great Lent. This would be in accordance with the provisions of the fifth rule of the First Ecumenical Council. Why did Theodora rely on this ancient rule and not on the more recent rules of the Council of Trullo and the Seventh Ecumenical Council? Obviously, at the moment when Theodora started preparing the council, it seemed that there would not be enough time for everything to be prepared, for all the participants to arrive in Constantinople and for the council to be held by the end of October 842. Aware of this, and not wanting to drag it out until after Easter the following year, Theodora ignored the eighth rule of the Council of Trullo and wisely invoked the fifth rule of the First Ecumenical Council. Thus, she convened a great church council for the last week before the beginning of the next Great Lent, which was the beginning of March 843. With this, she ensured enough time to prepare all the conditions in Constantinople, but also for the monks, who were then the main pillar of the iconodule movement on the fringes of the Church, many of whom

[46] Apostles 37, Syntagma II, 50.

[47] I Ecum. (Nicaea I) 5, Syntagma II, 124–125. Similarly, IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 19, Syntagma II, 265.

[48] Trullo 8, Syntagma II, 324–325; VII Ecum. (Nicaea II) 6, Syntagma II, 577–578.

hailed from monastic centres in the provinces, to arrive in the capital. Therefore, Theodora's decision to convene the council would have been made at the end of the summer of 842, and then her orders and letters to the monks to come to the upcoming council would have been drawn up. Accordingly, her meeting with associates and imperial regents, and the order to release and stop the persecution of iconodule monks and laymen can be chronologically placed in the spring or early summer of the same year.

Freed from years of persecution, responding to the orders of the empress, representatives of monastic communities rushed to the capital to contribute to the victory of Orthodoxy at the upcoming council. At a certain time, towards the end of the winter of 843, *all Orthodox hierarchs and monks* gathered in Constantinople,[49] i.e. *Christ's confessors and martyrs*, *living pillars of Christ*, from various parts and cities, *like wonderful flowers from spring meadows*, as they are vividly described in the *Life of Michael the Synkellos*.[50] Certainly, the monks who came from abroad were joined by the monks of numerous monasteries in the capital. Among these monks, the sources single out a few who stood out for their authority, and who can be considered leaders of the monastic movement of that time. These are Joannicius, Hilarion and Symeon.[51] Joannicius, certainly one of the greatest ascetics of that time,[52] spent his days in the peace of Bithynian Olympus and was not physically present at the sessions of the council in Constantinople.[53] However, his spiritual authority was omnipresent, and his example and genuine commitment to the veneration of holy icons inspired the monks who gathered in Constantinople, so it can rightly be

[49] Acta Davidis, 244.1–2.

[50] Life of Michael, 100.22–24. Genesius mentions monks from monastic communities from Mount Olympus, Athos and Ida and from Cyminas, Genesius, IV.3, although the mention of Athos in this group must be considered an anachronism, Komatina 2015, 27–33. On the role of monks in the restoration of the cult of icons, cf. Krausmüller 2021, 220–221.

[51] The three of them are mentioned by Patriarch Methodius (843–847) in his sermon on the attitude towards clerics who fell into heresy, Darrouzès, Documents, 296.5–6; Darrouzès, Méthode, 54, no. 1.11–13. *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* acclaims them among the memories of the worthy fighters for the establishment of Orthodoxy, Synodikon, 53.128–132. Vita Theodorae, 10.28–29. mentions Joannicius, while leaving out Hilarion and Symeon, but mentions two other otherwise unknown monks—Arsacius and Isaiah, and adds Methodius, who was elected patriarch at the council in 843. A certain *Arsacius* is also mentioned by De Theophili absolutione, 32.2–3; Afinogenov 1996, 90–91.

[52] About St. Joannicius, cf. PmbZ, no. 3389; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 118–127.

[53] Vita Ioanicii B, 431; Life of Michael, 102.23–25.

said that he was also one of the most significant figures of the Council of Constantinople in 843, and that the historical writings devoted to this event attributed to him such a role for a reason. For the monk Hilarion, the abbot of the monastery of Dalmatos, one of the most important and respected monastic centres in Constantinople, it could be said that at that moment, and therefore at the aforementioned council, he acted as the leader of the monasticism of the capital.[54] Opposite him, the monk Symeon, once a Stylite, then a prisoner of Emperor Theophilus in Constantinople and finally an exile on the island of Aphusia,[55] played the role of the real leader of provincial monasticism at the council in Constantinople, in the absence of St. Joannicius. Apart from these three, there were other prominent monks who gave their imprint to the Council of Constantinople in 843. It is certain that the monks of the Studion monastery, to which, in the previous generation, the energetic abbot and meritorious fighter against the iconoclastic heresy Theodore the Studite had brought great fame and influence,[56] were led by the then abbot Naucratius, and Athanasius, abbot of the Sacudion monastery, a Studite monastic community in Bithynia.[57] However, they could not have had the same influence on other monks as their predecessor Theodore.[58] Sources also attribute a role at the council to a certain John, called Katasambas, probably the abbot of the Kata Sabbas monastery.[59] Methodius was also present at the council, and at the end of the sessions was elected as the new patriarch of Constantinople.[60] Also present was Michael, the former syncell of

[54] About St. Hilarion, cf. PmbZ, no. 2584; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 407–410.

[55] About Symeon the Stylite, cf. PmbZ, no. 7178; Acta Davidis, 218.25–242.31; Talbot 1998, 144–145.

[56] Morris 1995, 13–18. On Theodore the Studite and his works, cf. PmbZ, no. 7574; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 44–72; Torgerson, Humphreys 2021, 224–228. On the Studion Monastery, cf. Janin 1953–1975 I, 444–455; ODB III, 1960–1961 (A. Kazhdan, A.-M. Talbot, A. Cutler).

[57] About Naucratius the Studite, cf. PmbZ, no. 5230; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 72–77; on Athanasius, cf. PmbZ, no. 675. About the Sacudion Monastery, cf. Janin 1953–1975 II, 177–181; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 44–53.

[58] Prieto Domínguez 2020, 41–98.

[59] Acta Davidis, 245.17–18; Vita Ioanicii B, 4 31–432, where the form Κατασάμβας is used first, and then the form Κακοσάμβας. Here, this personality is brought into close contact with the Studite community and its leaders Naucratius and Athanasius, and he appears with them again, during their conflict with patriarch Methodius. About John Katasambas cf. PmbZ, no. 3219; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 383–384.

[60] Acta Davidis, 244.1 sq., gives Methodius a very prominent place in the events connected with the council. That he was present at the council can also be concluded according to the

the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, whose *life* is a valuable source for the circumstances surrounding the renewal of the cult of icons.[61]

According to the empress' wishes, the council was supposed to be held, according to some sources, *in a separate part of the palace*,[62] and according to other sources—in the *Caniclium*.[63] This place, on the coast of the Golden Horn, was the residence of the imperial official ἐπὶ τοῦ κανικλείου, the keeper of the imperial purple ink, with which the emperors signed their acts.[64] At that time, this position was held by Theoctistus, one of the members of the imperial Council of Regency, one of the four closest associates of the empress and, together with her, the initiator of the restoration of the cult of icons. This fact alone is not enough to explain why the empress wanted the council to be held there, but there seems to be no reason to doubt it either, considering that several independent sources clearly indicate the Caniclium as the location of the council. The *whole ecclesiastical and ascetic body* gathered at that place, but in addition to them also the *whole syncletus*, i.e. the empress with all the highest state dignitaries, above all the aforementioned four of her closest collaborators—Sergius Nicetiates, Theoctistus, Bardas and Petronas, then members of the clergy, both those who preserved devotion to the cult of icons, as well as those who professed iconoclasm, and those who were ordained from iconoclasts, and finally a large number of ordinary people.[65] The mentioned words convey a clear idea of the appearance and size of the council that met in Constantinople, in the Caniclium, at the end of the winter of 843, an idea that the priest Theophanes, the contemporaneous author of the *Sermon on the Transfer of the Relics of Patriarch Nicephorus*,

Vita Ioanicii B, 431; Discourse on the exile, 338. Vita Theodorae, 10.28–29, lists Methodius as one of the most important *venerable and thrice-blessed fathers who were gathered at that time*. Vita Methodii, 1253 A–B, does not mention the council at all, but only that Methodius was elected patriarch as the most worthy, after the patriarch John was expelled with all his clergy. Only the Life of Michael, 104.10–26, states that Methodius was in exile in the monastery of the Eleobomi at the time of the council and that he came to Constantinople only after he was invited by the council to assume the patriarchical throne.

[61] Life of Michael, 100.22 sq., especially 102.14–104.31. On the *life* and its historical value, cf. above, n. 13.

[62] Life of Michael, 100.28–30; Discourse on the exile, 338.

[63] Acta Davidis, 246.11–12; Genesius, IV.2; Synodicon Vetus, 156.4.

[64] About the office of ἐπὶ τοῦ κανικλείου (also called χαρτουλάριος τοῦ κανικλείου or simply *caniclius*), cf. Kanikleios, ODB II, 1101 (A. Kazhdan). About the quarter of *Caniclium*, cf. Talbot 1998, 211, n. 343.

[65] Life of Michael, 100.29–102.1; Discourse on the exile, 338.

vividly, if somewhat exaggeratedly, but again clearly enough, described as *a multitude that cannot be understood by number*.[66]

The course of the assembly was conceived as *a debate based on divine scriptures* (προσδιάλεξις ἐκ τῶν θείων γραφῶν).[67] In fact, there was no discussion. Just as the iconoclasts at their council in 815 used certain chapters of holy and paternal writings to refute the decisions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787,[68] so now the representatives of the iconodule movement used some other allegations to refute the decisions of the council of 815.[69] Since the bishops and their clergy were mostly iconoclasts, it was quite natural that the iconophile view of the dispute was represented by the monks. If the *Acts of David, Symeon and George* are to be believed, the iconophile arguments based on the *divine scriptures* were presented to the council by the monk Methodius, and so powerfully and effectively that the *entire phalanx of the iconoclasts, notwithstanding the first and only attack, threw away their shields and immediately became fugitives from the battlefield*…[70] Nevertheless, judging by the assessment of contemporaries, the main figure among the monks at the council was Symeon the Stylite.[71] Therefore, although the description of the council given in his *life*, contained within a later hagiographical compilation known as the *Acts of David, Symeon and George*, cannot be trusted in every detail,[72] one can still accept the significant role at the council that this description gives to its hero—after Methodius' presentation, the *exarch of the presbyters of the Great Church*, i.e. Saint Sophia, approaches Symeon with all his clergy, falls on his knees before him, publicly renounces

[66] Discourse on the exile, 338.

[67] Acta Davidis, 246.12–13.

[68] Alexander 1953, 40–41, 1958, 497–502; Alexakis 1996, 34–37.

[69] Synodikon, 126; Talbot 1998, 218, n. 373.

[70] Acta Davidis, 246.13–17. The *Life of Patriarch Methodius* also highlights that its hero transcended everybody by his *familiarity with the Scriptures and a gift of eloquence*, Vita Methodii, 1253 V. Vita Ioanicii B, 431 contains a similar assessment.

[71] His name is distinguished among other monks by patriarch Methodius (843–847) in one of his sermons, Darrouzès, Méthode, 54. no. 1.11–12; Darrouzès, Documents, 296.5–6; also the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, Synodikon, 53.132.

[72] Acta Davidis, 244.1 sq. About this text, which contains the most concise and detailed description of the council of 843, compared to all other sources that mention this council, and its historical value, cf. Talbot 1998, 143–147; Karlin-Hayter 2006b, 361–373; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 382–389, who convincingly argues that the parts concerning the restoration of the cult of icons in 843 in this compilation originate from a number of earlier hagiographical works composed close to the time of the council.

iconoclasm as a heresy and hands it over to anathema together with its heresiarch, i.e. patriarch John.[73] This was the turning point. After that, the entire assembly of *God's hierarchs and venerable martyrs*, led by the empress herself and her young son, Emperor Michael, anathematized those who fought against holy and divine icons.[74] Hearing this and realizing what was happening, and surprised by the speed and suddenness with which it all occurred, patriarch John found himself on the edge of reason.[75] His mental state suffered such a blow that, according to some sources, it even led him to attempt suicide.[76] After this act, all his spiritual, moral and physical authority was completely destroyed. Because of the *insults against God he allowed*, this *wretched and wicked sorcerer*, as certain sources characterize him, was deposed from the holy patriarchal throne of the imperial city by the unanimous decision of the council and by the order of the empress and handed over to anathema, and then, by order of the empress, he was exiled from the city and imprisoned in the Kleidion Monastery, on the European shore of the Bosporus, north of

[73] Acta Davidis, 246.17–21.

[74] Discourse on the exile, 338; Life of Michael, 102.3–6. In the *Sermon on the Exile of the Patriarch Nikephoros*, the council's pronouncement of anathema on the iconoclasts immediately follows the sentence in which it informs us that the council was attended, among others, by the *priests and administrators of the churches* appointed by the iconoclasts, Discourse on the exile, loc. cit. From this connection it can be inferred that the author of this sermon, the presbyter Theophanes, was also familiar with the role played by the priests of the Great Church, i.e. Saint Sophia, in the condemnation of the heresy at the council.

[75] Discourse on the exile, 338; Life of Michael, 102.6–9; Acta Davidis, 246.21–22.

[76] Discourse on the exile, 338. On the other hand, the *Acts of David, Symeon and George*, in the desire to celebrate as much as possible their main hero, Symeon the Stylite, make a major digression at this point. Since the patriarch John went crazy and *was filled with fear and terrible darkness*, Acta Davidis, 246.21–22, he convinced the empress to allow him to face Symeon alone in a debate, in her presence and in the presence of the little emperor, hoping that he would easily win the victory, since he believed that Symeon lacked the *all-encompassing education* (ἐγκυκλίου παιδεύσεως ἄμοιρον). After a series of events accompanied by various miracles, it happened that the patriarch became speechless in the middle of a sentence, which allowed Symeon to prevail. The empress then sent him back to the Caniclium, to join the other fathers in choosing a new patriarch. Symeon then prophesied that John would not easily step down from his patriarchal throne, *until he harmed himself with his own hand*. After that, Symeon returned to the Caniclium, Acta Davidis, 246.22–248.22. Symeon's prophecy that John would attempt suicide came true, according to this source, only after a new patriarch was elected at the council and while the solemn procession on the occasion of the restoration of the cult of icons went through the streets of Constantinople, Acta Davidis, 249.21–250.13.

Constantinople.[77] Together with him, *all the heretics on the whole earth under the Sun* were overthrown.[78] This probably meant that on the same occasion, all the bishops and priests who were supporters of the iconoclast heresy lost their positions.

After those events, the council took upon itself the task of electing a new head of the Church of Constantinople. Certainly, even before the council, none of the iconophile representatives thought about keeping John the Grammarian on the patriarchal throne. It was already known then that he would be anathematized along with his heresy and removed from office. Therefore, it is clear that from the very moment the council was convened, it was conceived as an electoral one, and that many participants already coming to it were thinking about the election of the future head of the church and about their possible candidates for that position. Although in certain sources it is stated that the monk Methodius was chosen as the new patriarch *by God's providence* and *by the general decision of all the Orthodox*,[79] there are still enough testimonies that this choice was not simple at all. Methodius was present at the council and played one of the most significant roles in it, considering that it was he who officially presented the iconodule arguments against the earlier iconoclastic teachings, as stated above. According to the *Acts of David, Symeon and George*, the candidacy of Methodius for election as the new patriarch was presented by the leader of provincial monasticism at the council, Symeon the Stylite, with the explanation that no one is *more distinguished than father Methodius the confessor, in wisdom and brilliance of virtue and his achievements in piety*.[80]

The preserved *life* of patriarch Methodius itself describes the choice as follows. Since the patriarch John was deposed with all his clergy, *a worthy*

[77] Discourse on the exile, 338; Vita Theodorae, 10.30–33; Georgius Monachus II, 802.13–21; Acta Davidis, 250.13–14; Life of Michael, 102.9–12; Vita Methodii, 1253 A; Life of Ignatius, 20.8–11; De Theophili absolutione, 22.9–21; Genesius, IV.4; Theophanes Continuatus, IV.3; Symeon, 131.2; Pseudo-Symeon, 647.9–11; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 811.9–11. The place of his exile is mentioned only by Symeon the Logothete and the writers of his group, while Theophanes Continuatus, IV.3, writes that he was exiled *to the suburbs*, to a place called Τὰ Ψιχά, which is most likely the same Kleidion, cf. Life of Michael, 163, n. 176; Janin 1953–1975 I, 290–291. All other sources say only that he was driven out of the city.

[78] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.6.

[79] Discourse on the exile, 338; Life of Michael, 104.24–25; Vita Theodorae, 10.35–37; Georgius Monachus II, 802.21–23; De Theophili absolutione, 22.22–23.2.

[80] Acta Davidis, 248.34–249.3.

one was demanded to hold the throne, the one who should be adorned with human work and thought and many divine experiences, and trained, strong in letter and deed according to the Divine Scripture. Since so many great and holy men were surpassed, the only one was chosen and appointed the victory-bringer Methodius, surpassing all by his asceticism, and his knowledge of the Scriptures and the gift of eloquence, and his endurance of effort, and his modesty of reason, and his way of life, and his readiness for the most pleasant companionship.[81] Apart from the fact that, like the previous quote, it highlights the virtues of Methodius that made him worthy of the patriarchal throne, this section also testifies to the existence of other candidates for the same position, those whom Methodius surpassed with his virtues.

Only a few years later, the monk Peter in his *Life of St. Joannicius* wrote quite openly about the uncertainty surrounding the election of a new, Orthodox, patriarch at the council of 843. At the time of the council, namely, St. Joannicius was visited in his seclusion on the Bithynian Olympus by the monk Eustratius, his close friend and former abbot of Agauri monastery. On that occasion, Eustratius asked Joannicius to reveal to him with the gift of the Holy Spirit who would be elected as the new patriarch of Constantinople, *because the opinion among the people is very divided, one wants to proclaim and appoint one man, the other another. Because some insist on celebrating Athanasius and Naucratius and John, called Katasambas, while some support Methodius, who is prominent in words and the wisest, and some others.*[82] Athanasius, Naucratius and John Katasambas mentioned in this passage were the leaders of the monks of one of the most influential monasteries in the capital—Studion, and other monasteries in the capital that were under its predominant influence.[83] The candidacy of one of them for the patriarchal position was certainly highlighted and supported by the capital's monastics. In contrast, Methodius seems to have been the candidate favoured in provincial monastic circles, whose leader at the council was Symeon the Stylite.

As with the Peter's *Life of St. Joannicius*, the *Life of Michael the Synkellos* also contains the episode about Eustratius' visit to Joannicius on the

[81] Vita Methodii, 1253 A–V.

[82] …ὅτι πάνυ ἡ δόξα ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μερισμένη ἐστί, και ἄλλος ἄλλον ἀνακηρύττειν καὶ ἀναβιβάζειν ἐπείγεται. Οἱ μὲν γὰρ τοὺς ἀμφὶ Ἀθανάσιον καὶ Ναυκράτιον καὶ Ἰωάννην τὸν λεγόμενον Κακοσάμβαν δοξάζειν ἀγωνίζονται, οἱ δὲ τὸν ἐν λόγοις ἐξοχώτατον καὶ φιλοσοφώτατον Μέθοδιον, καὶ ἄλλοι ἑτέρους…, Vita Ioanicii B, 431. About Eustratius, cf. Life of Michael, 164, n. 180.

[83] On Athanasius, Naucratius and John Katasambas, cf. above, nn. 60–62.

Bithynian Olympus at the time of the council, with a question for the old ascetic about who should be the new patriarch. However, in the *Life of Michael the Synkellos*, Eustratius was accompanied on that occasion by the hero of this writing, Michael the Syncell, as well as an imperial dignitary with the title of *spatharius*. Eustratius and Michael were sent to Joannicus as emissaries of the council, and the mentioned *spatharius* as an emissary of the imperial court (ἐκ τὼν βασιλικῶν αὐλῶν σπαθάριον οὕτω λεγόμενον). Having received from Joannicus the answer that Methodius is the one who should become the new patriarch, the three of them return to Constantinople, to the council, which then invites Methodius, absent, according to this source, from the council and living in seclusion in the monastery of the Eleobomi, to come to the city in which he suffered so much and take over its episcopal throne.[84] First of all, this story is probably a legend. The council could hardly have sent a delegation of any kind to Joannicus on the Bithynian Olympus, because it would have taken too long. The representatives of provincial monasticism always referred to the authority of Joannicius, and the council was no exception, wanting to secure the election of their candidate for the patriarchal throne. Eustratius, the former abbot of the Agauri monastery, using the fact of his great friendship with Joannicius, could very easily declare that the favour of the greatest of all living ascetics and a model of monastic life, who more than others deserved and possessed the grace of the Holy Spirit, belonged to Methodius.

There is a special question about the attitude of the empress and her associates, that is, the state authorities, about the election of the new patriarch and about their candidate for that position. Already at the council in 861, as recorded in the acts of that council as they are preserved, Emperor Michael III himself stated on one occasion that *Methodius was made patriarch by the empress*.[85] According to later chroniclers, Methodius was the chosen one of *God and Empress Theodora*, but in the background of the entire story about the overthrow of the old patriarch and the installation of a new patriarch was the personality of the empress' brother Bardas, according to the Continuator of Theophanes, or, the logothete and

[84] Life of Michael, 102.19–104.20. The testimony of this source that the Empress and the council first offered the patriarchal throne to its hero Michael the Syncell, Life of Michael, 102.14–19, and only after he refused it did they send him to ask for the advice of Joannicius, cannot be accepted as well-founded, because it clearly has an intention to glorify its hero beyond measure.

[85] Deusdedit, 605.2–3.

official ἐπὶ τοῦ κανικλείου Theoctistus, according to Symeon Magister.[86] From the hagiographical texts about the state's attitude, we can only conclude that the empress left the choice of the future patriarch entirely to the monastic circles and the agreement among them, as can be seen from a quote in the *Acts of David, Symeon and George*: *Go, father*, said the empress to Symeon, *and with those who think like you consider and vote together about a worthy with God head of the Church*; when she later found out that Methodius had been chosen, she simply confirmed it.[87] Perhaps the simplest and clearest choice of Methodius as patriarch is explained in the *Life of Patriarch Ignatius*, with the words that Methodius *was appointed by God's voice and with the empress' cooperation as head of the Church of the City of Constantine*.[88] The motif of the *spatharius from the imperial court*, who, according to the above-mentioned description in the *Life of Michael the Synkellos*, accompanied the representatives of the council Michael the Synkellos and Eustratius on their visit to St. Joannicus to receive his advice on the personality of the future patriarch, also serves to show how the imperial government was ready to agree with the monastic choice. This motif is also a distant echo of an understanding of some kind of alliance that was established during the election of Methodius between the imperial court and the representatives of provincial monasticism, an alliance that was to the detriment of the powerful monasteries of the capital and their influential abbots.

All in all, the council chose Methodius, the candidate of provincial monasticism and the imperial court, as the new patriarch of Constantinople[89] over the candidates nominated by the representatives of the capital's monasteries. This development had repercussions for the latter party and the feelings engendered would soon give rise to sharp conflict in the camp of the victors over the iconoclasts. Further exacerbated by disagreements on other issues related to the complete restoration of Orthodoxy, this conflict would develop into a major schism that was to have far-reaching consequences for newly re-established Orthodoxy. But more on that later.

[86] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.3, esp ll. 19–24; Symeon, 131.2. A. M. Talbot, sticking to these chroniclers' data, considers Methodius exclusively an imperial candidate, while she considers the statements in the hagiographic sources to be echoes of the imperial need to secure the support of monks for Methodius' election, Talbot 1998, 221, n. 388.

[87] Acta Davidis, 247.29–31, 249.17–20.

[88] Life of Ignatius, 20.11–16.

[89] Karlin-Hayter 2006a, 55–74; Auzépy 2021, 396; Krausmüller 2021, 217–218.

According to the *Acts of David, Symeon and George*, Methodius' election took place on Saturday, 3 March, actually the night between Saturday and Sunday, 3 and 4 March, and was officially announced on Sunday, 4 March. It was the Shrove Sunday. After that, the empress allegedly addressed the monks, allowing them to go and spend the next week, the first week of Great Lent, in fasting and prayer, and to return on Sunday so that they could celebrate together with a solemn liturgy in the Great Church (Saint Sophia) the results of the council.[90] It has already been pointed out that such a development is unlikely. The conciliar sessions were in full swing during the entire first week of Great Lent and Methodius' election must have been somewhere near the end of these sessions. It is hard to imagine that he could have been elected as patriarch as early as 4 March, and that his enthronement was postponed for the next seven days. Especially when it is known under what circumstances his election took place, who was opposed to that election and what their strength was. Therefore, I believe that the conciliar session at which Methodius was elected patriarch of Constantinople took place no more than a few days before 11 March, if not immediately before or perhaps on that very day. According to the *Life of Patriarch Methodius*, immediately after his enthronement, the new patriarch gave a solemn sermon, in which he emphasized that thanks to Christ, after *almost thirty years under the heavy yoke of heresy*, on that day *they were finally granted freedom*.[91]

The first Sunday of the first week of Great Lent, 11 March 843, was the day for the conclusion of the council and the solemn announcement of its decisions. Unlike the previous days, when the sessions were held in the building of the Caniclium, that day all the participants of the council gathered in the Great Church of Constantinople, the Church of Saint Sophia.[92] Apart from the symbolic, this relocation of the council to the cathedral of Constantinople also had practical significance. St Sophia was the cathedral church of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, it housed the patriarchal throne and only there could the patriarch of Constantinople be enthroned.[93] On that day, in front of the entire council, the monk

[90] Acta Davidis, 249.11–250.20. The dates of 3 or 4 March are mostly accepted in historiography, cf. PmbZ, no. 4977; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 108–109.

[91] Vita Methodii patriarchae, 1253 C–1257 A. The authenticity of this sermon is disputed, cf. Prieto Domínguez 2020, 108–109.

[92] Acta Davidis, 250.14–23. According to De Theophili absolutione, 39.8 sq, *The great church* was the starting point of a great procession that solemnly celebrated the Triumph of Orthodoxy on the streets of Constantinople, on the first week of the Great Lent.

[93] ODB I, 520–521 (A. Kazhdan, A.-M. Talbot); II, 867–868 (A.-M. Talbot).

Methodius was ordained and ceremonially enthroned, introduced to the throne of the bishops of Constantinople, and thus became the head of the church of the imperial city and the entire Christian Empire.[94]

After the enthronement of the new patriarch, the council moved on to defining the conclusions reached in the field of dogmatic issues related to the veneration of icons, for which it was convened. According to the established practice in the Christian Church, each council had its own *Definition of Faith*, i.e. *Horos*.[95] This council, however, was convened for the same reasons as that fifty-six years earlier, in Nicaea (the Seventh Ecumenical Council, 787), i.e. with the aim of cleansing the church of iconoclastic heresy. Its task was, as stated above, to refute the decisions of the iconoclastic council of 815, which had rejected the decisions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787. In fact, in the field of ecclesiastical dogma and the determination of faith, the council of 843 had nothing else to do but establish the decisions on respecting icons made at the Seventh Ecumenical Council. Thus, this council did not have its own *Horos*.[96] On this occasion, by way of a dogmatic conclusion at the final session, they simply read the *Horos* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, held in Nicaea in 787. The provisions of that *Horos* were accepted and thus the Seventh Ecumenical Council, that is, *the God-convened holy and ecumenical second Council of Nicaea, organized by that namesake of peace, the most pious Empress Irene and Tarasius the greatest and by divine inspiration most blessed patriarch*, recovered *its solid authority and auspiciously acquired validity, while everyone rejoiced, confidently decreeing the God-inspired "horos" it had proclaimed*.[97] With these provisions the establishment and

[94] Acta Davidis, 250.22–24.

[95] Enciklopedija pravoslavlja, II, 1380; III, 1740 (G. Madžarević).

[96] Georgius Monachus II, 802.10–11, mentions how *the word of Orthodoxy rose from the dark abyss of heresy*, while Vita Theodorae, 10.19–20, whose author used the *Chronicle of George the Monk*, writes that the *Horos and the word of Orthodoxy rose to the whole world*. A particular *Horos* of the council of 843 could be recognized in these words. There is even a document that is presented as such; the famous *Horos of the council (held) under Michael and his mother Theodora*, Synodikon, 291–298. However, the modern publisher of this text, J. Gouillard, has already debunked it as a forgery from the beginning of the tenth century, created in Southern Italy, Gouillard 1964, 439–449; Synodikon, 161–163.

[97] Discourse on the exile, 338. For the analysis and clarification of the entire problem related to the issue of the *Horos* of the council of 843, cf. Synodikon, 160–168. There is nothing to add to the conclusions presented there by J. Gouillard, except that perhaps under the designation *Horos and the word of Orthodoxy* in the Vita Theodorae, 10.19–20, one could recognize exactly *the Horos* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

respect of the holy icons was declared a dogma,[98] and *all churches regained their splendour and appeared wondrously adorned with the beauty of the venerable icons*,[99] which are exactly the provisions contained in *Horos* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council.[100] According to the word of the same *Horos*, those who *dare to think or teach differently*, who *reject church traditions or create some innovations or reject something of what the church has established*, among other things the *painting of icons*, if they are bishops or clerics, should be deposed, and if they are monks or lay people, excluded from communion.[101] It is these last provisions of the *Horos* of the council of 787, restored and repeated at the conclusion of the council of 843, which provided the basis for shaping and implementing internal church policy in the coming period.

The Procession of Orthodoxy

The memory of that day and the events that took place at that time was commemorated in later times with a solemn procession through the streets of Constantinople. The path it travelled, its appearance, content and significance are well known from sources from the end of the ninth and during the tenth century—it started in the Church of the Virgin of Blacherne

[98] Acta Davidis, 250.27–28.

[99] Discourse on the exile, 338. Similarly, Vita Ioanicii B, 431, mentions that the newly elected patriarch Methodius *restored to the churches of God the splendor that befits them, the ancient beauty of the incarnated life and works of Christ*.

[100] That part of the *Horos* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council reads: …*We decree with all accuracy and care, that revered and holy icons, those made of colors and mosaics and any other suitable material, are placed in the holy churches of God, approximating the image of the honorable and life-giving cross, on sacred vestments and vessels, on walls and boards, in homes and on roads; the icon of the Lord God and our Savior Jesus Christ and the Most Pure Mistress of ours Holy Mother of God, the Holy Angels and all the Holy and Venerable people*…, Concilium universale Nicaenum Secundum, 3, 826; Price 2021, 233–236; Parry 2021, 426–463.

[101] Concilium universale Nicaenum Secundum, 3, 828. That these provisions of the *Horos* were also read at the council of 843, is testified by the *Sermon on the exile of Patriarch Nikephoros*, Discourse on the exile, 338, which briefly paraphrases them. In the Life of Michael, 104.26–28, it is written that Patriarch Methodius, after being solemnly enthroned as the patriarch of Constantinople, *himself subjected the heretics to countless anathemas and having purified the entire clergy, freed the Church of God from their tyranny*. This probably also refers to the stated final provisions of *Horos* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, read at the conclusion of the council of 843, on the cleansing of the Church from defeated heretics.

and ended with a festive meal in the patriarchal secreton.[102] A question that has long troubled researchers was when this rite was established and when it took its original form. The essence of the question lies with the following: when the victory of Orthodoxy over the heresy of iconoclasm was pronounced the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 843, was it also marked with a solemn procession through the streets of the imperial city on the same day, or was that rite established later? If the latter thesis is correct, then the question arises as to when the custom began.[103] Jean Gouillard dealt with this question in most detail, and decisively rejected the theses about the late origin of that rite.[104] Nevertheless, his conclusion that the *procession of Orthodoxy*, in the form in which it has been known since the end of the ninth century, probably dates from the restoration of the icons in 843,[105] must be accepted with caution.

According to the text *On the Absolution of the Emperor Theophilus*, composed during the rule of Theodora in order to absolve her late husband of the guilt of his iconoclast rule,[106] after the conclusion of the council, a large crowd gathered in the Church of Saint Sophia, which, led by patriarch Methodius, Emperor Michael and Empress Theodora and the *entire Senate*, with true crosses, holy gospels and holy icons, set off in procession *from the altar having descended to the imperial doors called Ctenarian*. The litany prayers were said there, and the procession, *with remorse and many tears and sobs, saying "Lord, have mercy"*, returned to the nave, where *the divine liturgy ended. In this way, holy icons were established in the temple of God, to be honoured and respected and to be worshiped by all the faithful*.[107]

[102] The description of the procession and the festivities that followed it is given by the *Clitorologion of Philotheos*, Oikonomidès, Listes, 195.4–15. That entire work is included in the *Book of Ceremonies*, Livre des cérémonies III, II, 52. However, in the *Book of Ceremonies* there is also a more detailed description of the celebration of the *holiday of Orthodoxy*, Livre des cérémonies I, I, 37. The difference is that at the end of the solemn procession, according to the *Clitorologion*, the feast is organized by the patriarch, and according to the *Book of Ceremonies*, by the emperor. Chroniclers from the mid-tenth century describe a similar litany, Theophanes Continuatus, IV.10; Genesius, IV.5. On the festive processions in Constantinople, cf. Berger 2001, 73–85.

[103] On the opinions about establishment of the procession in memory of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, cf. Synodikon, 129–138; Afinogenov 1999, 1–10; Herrin 2001, 209–210; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 109–110.

[104] Synodikon, 129–138.

[105] Synodikon, 138.

[106] Markopoulos 1998, 37–49; Afinogenov 2004; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 261–267.

[107] De Theophili absolutione, 38.1–39.8.

Then *the pious emperors commanded with the virtuous and most holy patriarch Methodius* that *the holy and honourable holiday be celebrated annually in the Great Church of God* (Saint Sophia), *on the first Sunday of the Holy Lent*.[108] In the *Life of St. Irene* it is only briefly stated: (the empress) *commanded that on the Sunday of the first week of Lent, we organize a mass procession, which is called* (the procession) *of Orthodoxy and is celebrated to this day*.[109] The *Acts of David, Symeon and George* describe in more detail the procession that celebrated the restoration of the Orthodoxy of the holy and venerable icons in 843. They place this event immediately after the election of Methodius as patriarch, and since they place that election on the eve of Shrove Sunday, they place the procession on Shrove Sunday, seven days before the Sunday of Orthodoxy. The reasons why this dating is wrong have already been explained, but the description of the procession itself is very interesting. According to this source, the procession was formed spontaneously, when, after the election of the Orthodox patriarch, there gathered, led by Symeon the Stylite, the hero of the text, *a large phalanx, raising their hands and publicly carrying through the street the venerable icon of our Lord and his parent, the Mother of God*. They gathered in the Church of Christ the Saviour, and then the procession moved along the road between Milion and the Bronze Gate.[110] Other hagiographical sources do not mention any procession after the council on the first Sunday of Great Lent in 843. The chronicles of the tenth century convey the image of the procession as it looked at the time when those chronicles were written.[111] According to them, the celebration began with the singing of the all-night vigil in the temple of Blacherne, and at dawn the procession would depart from there to St. Sophia,[112] which is a description that fully corresponds to the description preserved in *Clitorologion of Philotheus*, included in the *Book of Ceremonies*.[113]

The latter description is a description of the procession that commemorated the event of the first week of Great Lent in 843, but certainly not the procession that was part of the event itself. It was already emphasized above that the new patriarch was enthroned and that the council was solemnly closed with the reading of the *Horos* of the Seventh Ecumenical

[108] De Theophili absolutione, 39.8–18.
[109] Vita Irenes, 603 A.
[110] Acta Davidis, 249.11–22.
[111] Synodikon, 131.
[112] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.6, 10; Genesius, IV.5.
[113] Oikonomidès, Listes, 195.4–15; Livre des cérémonies I, I, 37.1–92.

Council on the very Sunday of the first week of Great Lent. Those events took place in Saint Sophia. Therefore, there can be no question of chanting an all-night vigil in the church of Blacherne on the eve of this day. This must mean that the route of the procession was not the same either. The question arises whether there was a procession at all on that day. Considering that all the key events of the day took place in St. Sophia, some trust could be placed in the text *On the Absolution of the Emperor Theophilus*, which places the ceremony in honour of the restoration of icons in St. Sophia. This description has gained value since it was established that *the imperial doors called Ctenarian*, represent, in fact, the entrance to the altar of one of the chapels of Saint Sophia herself.[114] Therefore, the *solemn procession* would be held inside Saint Sophia, the liturgy would be observed until the end and then the icons would be installed in the *Great Church*. However, this could hardly be called a *procession*, given the space limitations. The question arises, why does the author of this text describe in that way the origin of a celebration that was very well known to him and which he experienced many times in his life as significantly different?[115] It is clear that he knew the ceremony, but not its original form, and that he was aware that it was not the form he knew. In addition, since the council was concluded in Saint Sophia, it is quite natural that its conclusion was marked with a solemn liturgy, in the same place. Therefore, it is possible to accept the lines of the text *On the Absolution of the Emperor Theophilus* about the liturgy held in Saint Sophia after the conclusion of the council, but not that this liturgy was the forerunner of the procession that later commemorated that event annually.

It seems that the description which is closest to the truth about the event from the first week of Great Lent and about the origin of the *Procession of Orthodoxy*, however, comes from the *Acts of David, Symeon and George*. They describe the formation of the procession as a spontaneous gathering of the people who, driven by enthusiasm for the just-made decisions on the restoration of the Orthodoxy of the holy and venerable icons and the election of a new, Orthodox, patriarch, raise the icon of the Mother of God with Christ as a sign of triumph. People certainly gathered in front of Saint Sophia, while a solemn liturgy was sung inside this temple in honour of the installation of icons. As participants in the procession

[114] Synodikon, 132–133.

[115] He himself says that this ceremony is held *to this day, until now*, De Theophili absolutione, 39.18–19.

along with the people, the text mentions only monks, embodied in Symeon the Stylite, the hero of this text, but does not mention that either the patriarch, the empress or any other of the ecclesiastical and secular dignitaries participated in it. This is understandable, considering that they all attended the liturgy in Saint Sophia at the same time.[116] The empress only later greeted the procession when it passed by the Palace of Magnaura.[117] That spontaneously formed popular procession, raising high the icon of the Virgin with Christ, shouting *"Lord, have mercy"*, headed across Milion, towards the Bronze Gate. The choice of destination was symbolic. Ever since the time of Leo III the Iconoclast, as well as Leo V the Armenian, the absence of the icon of Christ from the Bronze Gate was the way in which the iconoclast emperors made it known to the people that the veneration of icons was forbidden.[118] Now, the people symbolically celebrated the victory over iconoclastic oppression with a procession and by bringing the icon of the Mother of God with Christ to the same place. The empress greeted the popular procession, as it was said, when it passed by the Palace of Magnaura, and thus she accepted the people's commemoration of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. It gave the empress and the new patriarch the idea to commemorate and celebrate this event in the same way in the future, so an official decision was made to hold an annual *Procession of Orthodoxy* in memory of these events, on the first Sunday of Great Lent.[119]

The described events took place on 11 March 843, the first *Sunday of Orthodoxy*. That day was included in the calendar of Christian holidays and it was decided that in the future it would be celebrated as a movable holiday, on the first Sunday of Great Lent.[120] A cult began to form around the new holiday. The procession itself took on a different and final form over time, and the first step towards its formation was undoubtedly made on the first anniversary, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 844, when the first organized procession was held. However, on that occasion, the cult that

[116] De Theophili absolutione, 38.6 sq.

[117] Acta Davidis, 249.15–21.

[118] Talbot 1998, 223, n. 398; Mango 1959, 108–132; Auzépy 1990, 445–492, showed how the story of the destruction of the icon of Christ on the Bronze Gate by Leo III was actually fictional, but the act of Leo V in 815 was real. In any case, in 843 the symbolism of that act was still alive.

[119] Vita Irenes, 603 A; De Theophili absolutione, 39.8–18.

[120] On that day, by the way, the church commemorated the Old Testament prophets Moses and Aaron, Synodikon, 133–134.

was created around this holiday was complemented with other elements. As is the practice of the Church, the celebration of this holiday also received a poetic expression. Two *Canons commemorating the establishment of icons* were composed for the occasion. They were compiled by none other than patriarch Methodius and Theophanes *Graptus.*[121] Most likely, these are the hymns that were sung at the all-night vigil service on the eve of the holiday in the Church of the Virgin of Blacherne, before the beginning of the solemn procession, as the celebration of this holiday is described by writers a century later.[122] In this case, the procession, as part of the organized celebration of the restoration of icons, received the basic features of its final form as early as the celebration of the first anniversary of that event, i.e., it was determined that its route would be from the Church of the Virgin of Blacherne to Saint Sophia at that time.[123] One thing is certain; the *Procession of Orthodoxy* marked the return of the Church of Constantinople to the path of Orthodoxy and marked its entry into a completely new era.

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[121] Canon epinicius, 1767 B–1780 B; Gouillard 1961, 380–387; Synodikon, 134–136; Sode 2001, 292–293; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 162.

[122] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.6; Genesius, IV.5; Livre des cérémonies I, I, 37.1–10.

[123] J. Gouillard, Synodikon, 135, rightly recognized the canons of patriarch Methodius and Theophanes *Graptus* in the hymns that, according to the sources of the tenth century, were sung on the eve of the feast in the church of Blacherne, and concluded that, in the text of these canons, this very church can be identified as the place where they were chanted. But this certainly did not occur during the event of 843 itself, and it is quite natural that they were composed on the occasion of the first annual commemoration.

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Challenges of Methodius' Patriarchate

The Triumph of Orthodoxy on 11 March, 843, was only the beginning of the arduous task facing the Church and, above all, Patriarch Methodius as its head.[1] It was the task of undoing the consequences of the almost thirty-year reign of iconoclasm and the challenge would turn out greater than it might have seemed in the early days. Some of the goals would remain unreached, leading to new disputes and schisms, this time among those who had together won the *Triumph of Orthodoxy* in 843.

The Overthrow of the Clergy

Testimonies about the circumstances of the election of Antony and Theophanes *Graptus* to the metropolitan sees of Thessalonica and Nicaea, which will be discussed in the following text, clearly indicate that the council sessions continued even after the solemn restoration of the *Definition of the Faith* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council and its decisions on 11 March 843, to facilitate the implementation of those decisions.[2] The provisions of the restored *Horos*, i.e., the *Definition of the Faith* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council from 787, included a ruling that those who

[1] About patriarch Methodius, PmbZ, no. 4977.

[2] According to J. Gouillard, Synodikon, 168, the entire patriarchate of Methodius was one "permanent synod", which seems to be bit of an exaggeration.

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rejected certain church dogmas, including *icon-painting*, *if they were bishops or clerics, be deposed* (καθαιρεῖσθαι) and *if they were monks or laymen, be excluded from communion* (τῆς κοινωνίας ἀφορίζεσθαι).[3] This provision quite clearly defined the direction of the policy towards iconoclasts. The first part of the provision was particularly important because it concerned the actual organization of the Church. The iconoclast bishops and priests had to be deposed in order to carry out what the later hagiographic sources called *the overthrow* (καθαίρεσις) *of the clergy*.[4] The question arises whether this provision in itself meant the automatic removal from office of all iconoclastic bishops and clerics or whether a separate council decision was required for each individual case. I think there is little doubt that the decision was immediately applied to the most prominent representatives of the iconoclastic movement, those whose positions during the iconoclastic period and loyalty to this heresy were plain to see. Such people, quite naturally, occupied the most important episcopal positions and ordained their subordinate clergy.

According to the *Life of Patriarch Methodius*, Patriarch John was deposed *with all his clergy*.[5] By the *patriarchal clergy*, strictly speaking, one should understand the clergy, i.e., priests and deacons, of St. Sophia of Constantinople, the patriarch's cathedral church.[6] Other sources confirm that the first overthrows and new appointments in the clergy of Saint Sophia did indeed take place at the council. Theodore Crithinus, the former archbishop of Syracuse, who was deposed by the patriarchal synod as *unworthy of archpriesthood*, was appointed after that, around 840, by

[3] Concilium universale Nicaenum Secundum, 3, 828.

[4] Surveying most testimonies in sources from the middle of the ninth century to refute the responsibility of the Studites in the schism that occurred during the time of Patriarch Methodius, which will be discussed later, researchers generally came to the conclusion that Methodius pursued a so-called *moderate* policy towards former iconoclasts, i.e., that he was largely tolerant towards them, and that the Studites, who supposedly represented a *zealot movement*, resented such a policy and therefore came into conflict with him, cf. Pargoire 1903, 190–191; Dobschütz 1909, 41–105; Ostrogorski 1959, 220; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 112–113; Krausmüller 2021, 217–218. However, drawing on contemporary sources, other researchers have come to the opposite conclusion—that Methodius pursued a hard-line policy towards former iconoclasts, cf. Grumel 1935, 385–401; Karlin-Hayter 1977, 141; Afinogenov 1996, 79–91. For the history of the so-called conflict between the *zealots* or *extremists* and the so-called *politicians* or *moderates* in Byzantine society of the eighth and the first half of the ninth century, cf. Dvornik 1950, 37–51.

[5] Vita Methodii, 1253 A.

[6] ODB I, 520–521 (A. Kazhdan, A.-M. Talbot).

Emperor Theophilus the *oeconomus of the Great Church*, i.e., the patriarchal church of Saint Sophia.[7] He certainly lost this important office by the Council of 843, since Patriarch Methodius, in his *Victorious Canon on the Restoration of the Holy Icons*, compiled on the first anniversary of this event, in 844, in as many as four places anathematizes Theodore, together with the deposed patriarch John and other iconoclastic leaders.[8] However, it is not known who succeeded him as the *oeconomus* of Saint Sophia. There is more information on the position of the patriarch's *syncellus*. According to the *Life of Michael the Syncellus*, the new patriarch Methodius ordained the protagonist of this text to this position *by the order of the emperors*.[9] On the other hand, the *Acts of David, Symeon and George* state that their hero, Symeon the Stylite, was appointed to the same position, *the syncell of the patriarch, by the empress's will*.[10] Leaving aside this contradiction in the sources and the issue of the appointment of two men to the same position at the same time, and under the same circumstances,[11] these statements are sufficient to show that, at the council, in addition to the patriarch, the entire patriarchal clergy was indeed deposed and replaced with new persons whose loyalty to Orthodoxy was well established.

A few recorded examples testify that the most important representatives and supporters of the iconoclastic heresy among the bishops were immediately deposed and replaced by equally prominent leaders of the Orthodox movement. The famous scholar of that era and a relative of the deposed patriarch John, Leo the Mathematician, was dismissed from the position of the archbishop of the Empire's second most important

[7] Symeon, 131.14. About the position of *oeconomus*, ie. *great oeconomus* (μέγας οἰκόνομος) of St. Sophia of Constantinople, cf. ODB III, 1517 (P. Magdalino, A.-M. Talbot).

[8] Canon epinicius, 1769 A, D, 1773 C, 1780 A. On Theodore Crithinus, cf. Gouillard 1961, 387–401; PmbZ, no. 7679; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 173, 183–185.

[9] Life of Michael, 104.28–30. About Michael the Syncellus, cf. PmbZ, no. 5059; Sode 2001, 31–298; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 151–159.

[10] Acta Davidis, 250.23–25.

[11] Talbot 1998, 225, n. 409. On the function of syncell, cf. Darrouzès 1970, 17–19; ODB III, 1993–1994 (A. Papadakis). Efthymiadis 1995, 153, n. 53, suggested that Patriarch Methodius appointed both Symeon and Michael as his syncelli. Sode 2001, 241–242, however, denies that Michael was ever the syncell of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Prieto Domínguez 2020, 149–155, thinks that Methodius appointed both men his syncelli at the same time, but that it was not Symeon the Stylite who was appointed patriarch's syncell, but Symeon Dekapolites. Torgerson 2022, 384–386, on the other hand, holds that the two syncelli were not appointed by the patriarch, but by the empress Theodora, who made Michael the leader of all the abbots of the imperial city.

city—Thessalonica.[12] The former archbishop of Dyrrachium and a staunch opponent of iconoclasm from the time of Emperor Leo V the Armenian (813–820), Antony, was appointed in his place. According to the *Life of Theodora of Thessalonica*, Antony, *by the voice of the synod*, i.e., council, *received the archbishop's throne of the glorious city of Thessalonica*.[13] However, he did not enjoy this position for long. He died soon after, on 2 November 843, *without having performed a bloodless sacrifice or ordination in Thessalonica or anything else that bishops usually do, having ordained only one cleric*.[14] Based on those allegations, it seems that at one of the sessions held after 11 March, a decision was made to entrust the metropolitan see of Thessalonica, considered vacant since its previous holder, Leo the Mathematician, was considered deposed according to the provision of the council's *Definition of the Faith*, to Antony. He apparently stayed in Constantinople for some time before arriving in Thessalonica.

At a similar, if not the same, session of the council, Patriarch Methodius appointed the famous confessor Theophanes *Graptus* metropolitan of Nicaea, one of the most important episcopal positions in the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[15] It is not entirely clear which of the prominent supporters of iconoclasm had held that position until the Council of 843, although the possibility that it was Ignatius the Deacon, a prominent author of that time, should still not be dismissed.[16]

[12] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.26. Leo the Mathematician held the position of Metropolitan of Thessalonica between 840 and 843, Chatzēantōniou 2007, 286; PmbZ, no. 4440; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 176–177.

[13] Vita Theodorae Thessalonicensis, § 17, 100–102. On the *Life*, cf. Talbot 1996, 159–237, with an English translation and commentary; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 233–234.

[14] Vita Theodorae Thessalonicensis, § 17.23–25, 100–102. S. Paschalidēs, ibidem, 59, and Paschalidēs 1994, 212, considers that 2 November 844, should be taken as the date of Antony's death, but Talbot 1996, 179, n. 98, correctly concludes that it was 843. On Antony, cf. PmbZ, no. 556.

[15] Life of Michael, 108.25–110.22; Praise of Theodore *Graptus*, 147–148. On Theophanes *Graptus*, cf. PmbZ, no. 8093. Teophanus' brother, Theodore *Graptus*, succumbed to iconoclastic persecution and died in Apameia in Bithynia, on 27 December 841. About him, cf. PmbZ, no. 7526. About the *Grapti* brothers, cf. Sode 2001, 31–298; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 159–163.

[16] It is certain that Ignatius the Deacon was, at one period of his life full of sudden turns of fortune and favour, the Metropolitan of Nicaea, but it is not clear when. There are three possibilities: 1) at the end of the second decade of the ninth century, 2) during the reign of Theophilus (829–842), and 3) after the death of Theophanes *Graptus*, on 11 October 845. Of these possibilities, only the third can be ruled out. On that cf. Life of Tarasios, 43–46. On Ignatius the Deacon, cf. PmbZ, no. 2665; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 127–134. His literary activity, works and significance for the era of the patriarchate of Methodius and Ignatius will be discussed in one of the following chapters.

There was also a change on the archbishop's throne of Syracuse, the metropolitan centre of all Sicily, by then largely conquered by the Arabs. Interestingly, the so-called *Cambridge Chronicle* reports that, *in the year 6352, Archbishop Gregory brought Orthodoxy, in the seventh indiction*.[17] This was Gregory Asbestas, a Syracusan and a compatriot and acquaintance of Patriarch Methodius.[18] The year 6352 from the Creation of the World, 7th indiction, spans from 1 September 843, to 31 August 844. Gregory certainly arrived in Sicily towards the end of 843, but he had been appointed Archbishop of Syracuse at the council sessions shortly after 11 March. Obviously, like the newly appointed Archbishop of Thessalonica, Antony, Gregory also needed some time to arrive from Constantinople to the diocese assigned to him. In this case, it was also his homeland. It is interesting to note that Archbishop Gregory reportedly *brought Orthodoxy* to Sicily. After Theodore Crithinus, one of the most prominent leaders of the iconoclastic movement, was dismissed as the archbishop of Syracuse around 840 and appointed to the office of *oeconomus* of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, the island apparently remained under the firm control of the iconoclasts until the Council of Constantinople in 843 decided to send Gregory Asbestas as the new archbishop.

Other examples of deposing old and installing new bishops after 11 March 843, have not been recorded. There is no doubt, however, that all more important episcopal sees, primarily those with the rank of metropolitanates, were *cleansed* of iconoclastic bishops and entrusted to Orthodox ones. There is a bigger problem, however, with ordinary bishoprics, especially those of lesser importance, in ordinary provincial towns. There was a multitude of such bishoprics in the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[19] The attitude towards the iconoclastic heresy of their bishops was probably unknown in Constantinople. However, in Constantinople, there was an understanding that the positions of all bishops ordained by iconoclastic metropolitans were illegal and were, therefore, automatically considered vacant,[20] and filled with new Orthodox bishops. The words of the

[17] Vasiliev 1935–1950 I, 345; Kleinchroniken I, 45.5.

[18] On Gregory Asbestas, cf. PmbZ, no. 2480, 22348; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 173–178, 410–420.

[19] On the bishoprics and metropolitan sees of the Church of Constantinople in the ninth century, cf. Notitiae, nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

[20] The automatic overthrow of all iconoclast clergy at the Council of 843 seems to be suggested by Theophanes Continuatus, who reports that *all the heretics on the whole earth under the sun* were deposed together with Patriarch John, Theophanes Continuatus, IV.6.

biographer of Patriarch Methodius most likely refer to this: *ordinations took place all the time* because the patriarch *wanted to reorganize the bishoprics*, i.e., to put their administration in order by entrusting then to the Orthodox bishops.[21] However, during the ordination of new bishops, the patriarch asked that each candidate prove, in an examination, that he had always been loyal to Orthodoxy.[22]

However, the situation with the non-monastic priesthood was much more complicated. That church order was by far the most numerous, with thousands of members. "Overthrowing" the entire clergy was not feasible for practical reasons. How could they look into the beliefs of so many people? Who would fill their positions if most were overthrown? However, there is no doubt that, like all bishops ordained by iconoclast metropolitans, all priests ordained by iconoclast bishops were also deposed because their position was considered equally illegal.[23] Methodius and the newly appointed bishops replaced them with new people who had a clear Orthodox past.[24] However, many priests had been ordained even before the establishment of iconoclasm in 815, during the time of the Orthodox patriarchs Tarasius (784–806) and Nicephorus (806–815, † 829) and by Orthodox bishops, who had endorsed the heresy after 815.[25] Therefore, their appointment was not illegal, and neither was their position. In these cases, Patriarch Methodius decided to implement the policy that the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus, faced with the same circumstances after the end of the first iconoclast period in 787, had pursued. Those priests were to be accepted back into the clergy, restored to their former ranks, *and be counted as their own members according to their own accord*, on the

[21] …Συνεχεῖς οὖν ἐποιεῖτο χειροτονίας, τὰς ἐπισκοπὰς προκαταρτίσαι βουλόμενος, Vita Methodii, 1257 A; …ἀνίστησι δὲ Ἐκκλησίαν καίνην…, Life of Ignatius, 20.16 sq.

[22] …Καὶ ὁ ζῆλος εἶλκεν, καὶ χάριν ἤδη τῷ χειροτονίαν ἐρχομένῳ, μόνον εἰ πρὸ τούτου ὀρθόδοξος ἐγνορίζετο…, Vita Methodii, 1257 A–B. Similarly, in the *Life of Patriarch Ignatius* it is stated that *priests and bishops were ordained on the basis of their Orthodox faith* (…ἱερεῖς τε καὶ ἀρχιερεῖς ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῆς καθ' αὐτὸν ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως προεχειρίσατο…), Life of Ignatius, 20.18–19.

[23] I think that among *all the heretics* who were overthrown together with the patriarch John, which is spoken about by the Continuator of Theophanes, Theophanes Continuatus, IV.6, there should be understood also the priests in addition to the bishops.

[24] New priests, ordained at the time of Patriarch Methodius, are mentioned in Methodius' fragment no. 1, which speaks of their opposition to priests who belonged to the heresy of iconoclasm retaining their positions if they repented, Darrouzès, Méthode, 54, no. 1; Darrouzès, Documents, 294.28–296.6; Afinogenov 1996, 81–83.

[25] Afinogenov 1996, 80–81.

condition that they repent and renounce the heresy, anathematize its leaders and *hand them over to their abhorrent wickedness* and *that they persevere in professing the definitions* (*Horoi*) *of piety and exalting Orthodoxy*.[26]

The first year after the restoration of the veneration of icons passed in determining and implementing the described policy based on the council decisions of March 843. The first commemoration of this event, i.e., the first *Sunday of Orthodoxy*, was solemnly celebrated on 2 March 844. To mark the occasion, in all likelihood, Patriarch Methodius composed his *Victorious Canon on the Restoration of Icons*.[27] The patriarch's canon still manifests the spirit of triumph over the iconoclastic heresy, with an arguably euphoric tone to it. The canon lauds Orthodoxy and condemns, anathematizes, and shames the heresiarchs—the deposed patriarch John, along with his predecessors Antony and Theodotus, and associates Leontius Lysicus and Theodore Crithinus.[28] Along with the patriarch, the new metropolitan of Nicaea, Theophanes *Graptus*, also wrote a canon for this event.[29] These canons were sung for the first time at the vigil before the celebration in the Church of the Virgin of Blacherne, as already discussed. On that occasion, most likely, the first organized *Procession of Orthodoxy* was held. What is particularly significant about that celebration of 2 March 844, is that there were no disagreements among the members of the victorious iconophile movement. This is apparent in the text of Patriarch Methodius' *Victorious Canon*. In it, the leaders of the iconoclastic movement are still designated as the only opponents of the true faith and structure of the Church.

By 844, however, the first signs of discord appeared in the victorious iconophile camp. The germ of this discord lay in the dissatisfaction of certain circles with Methodius' policy of accepting into the clergy priests appointed before 815 who had subsequently fallen into heresy. The first to voice this complaint, quite naturally, were those who were harmed by such

[26] Methodius explains this in a letter to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sergius, sent more than three years later, in 846, Methodii epistola, 1291 D–1293 A; Afinogenov 1996, 83–84; Signes Codoñer 2013, 102–106; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 111. However, Afinogenov 1996, 87–90, argues that Methodius didn't intend to recieve those priests back into the clergy.

[27] Canon epinicius, 1767 C–1780 B.

[28] On the patriarchs Antony and Theodotus and Leontius Lysicus (Zelix), cf. PmbZ, nos. 550, 7954, 8642.

[29] Gouillard 1961, 380–387; Synodikon, 134–136; Sode 2001, 292–293; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 162.

a policy: the new priests appointed by Methodius and the new bishops after 11 March 843, in place of the deposed iconoclastic priests. These new priests, with a clear and untainted Orthodox past, openly raised their voices against accepting clerics who had once been followers of the heresy into the clergy and making them equal to them in titles, rights and honours.[30] One gets the impression that Methodius understood their dissatisfaction to a certain extent when he answered their objections, saying that they were *worthy of distinguishing themselves as natives among foreigners, as un-disgraced members from those who have disgraced themselves.*[31] However, Methodius did not give them the right to be the only judges because, regardless of the fact that he had *brought them to the shrine* (altar), i.e., introduced them into office, grace did not dwell only in them. He adds that there are also *those who protect themselves in the desert, those who keep godly silence in the city, abbots and stylites and hermits, all who are God-minded and who have become famous as saints, such as the great Joannicius and the famous Symeon and Hilarion, who is famous by thoughts.*[32] Therefore, Methodius remained faithful to the principle that, three years later, before his death, he would emphasize in his *testament*: that, for the sake of *divine economy*, it cannot be that *the word of repentance is unworthy of reception*.[33] Responding to those who thought otherwise, he mentions those who supported his policy and were equally Orthodox and possessed God's grace. Among them are three eminent and respected monks who had contributed to the victory of Orthodoxy—Joannicius, Hilarion and Symeon. It is obvious that when Methodius wrote those lines, all three were alive. This allows us to date this text and, by extension, the events of which it speaks to before September 844, when Symeon the Stylite, the first of those three confessors, died.[34] Therefore, the first disagreements in iconophile ranks,

[30] Methodius discusses this in one of the preserved fragments, Darrouzès, Méthode, 54, no. 1.1–13; Darrouzès, Documents, 294.28–296.6; Afinogenov 1996, 81–83. He also alludes to these events in his *Ecclesiastical Testament*, emphasizing that he wanted to bring out those who had fallen and restore them to the common service of God but failed because the *brothers opposed the reception of [those] priests and deacons*, Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 7.1–5; Darrouzès, Documents, 292.33–294.2.

[31] Darrouzès, Méthode, 54, no. 1.5–6; Darrouzès, Documents, 294.33–35.

[32] Darrouzès, Méthode, 54, no. 1.6–13; Darrouzès, Documents, 294.35–296.6.

[33] Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 7.4 –5; Darrouzès, Documents, 292.36–294.1.

[34] According to the *Acts of David, Symeon and George*, Symeon and George left Constantinople some time after the restoration of the cult of icons in 843, and returned to Mytilene on the Nativity of the Virgin, 8 September 843, Acta Davidis, 253.5–22. After that, George was made a bishop, and Symeon helped his brother for a whole year, before he died, ibidem, 255.8–31. Therefore, Symeon died most likely in September 844. Cf. also PmbZ, no. 7178.

due to the complaints of the newly appointed priests that the clerics who had supported the heresy were equal to them, must have occurred between March and September 844. Notably, these sentences from Methodius do not mention the monks of the Constantinopolitan monasteries, above all, the Studion Monastery, as opponents of his policy, nor is there any hint of their dissent. On the contrary, these monasteries and their elders should perhaps be recognized as *those who keep godly silence in the city*.

However, Methodius' opponents did not back down. They came up with the idea of using the very authorities Methodius had cited as his pillars of support, so they began spreading rumours that Joannicius himself, living in his desert on Bithynian Olympus, disagreed with Methodius' policy and sent him the following message: *If you receive the heretic ministers and priests, you undertake to bring to the Church not only Judaism but also paganism through them*.[35] Of course, Joannicius' position and support for Methodius' policy were well known, and he would confirm them in a letter he sent to Methodius in 846.[36] Two years later, when Joannicius and Methodius met shortly before the former's death, Joannicius spoke about these rumours and proved that he had never said such a thing, pointing out that he had always supported Methodius' policy.[37] However, at that time, which in 844 still seemed far away, and the burden that pressed him was not yet felt, Methodius would ironically accept these rumours as the *truest proclamations* and use them against his opponents at the time and new heretics within the Church—the monks of the Studion Monastery and their supporters.

The *Studite Schism*

Around that time, on 11 November 844, eighteen years had passed since the death of Theodore the Studite. The body of this confessor of Orthodoxy, one of the most important from the time of the second

[35] Methodius talks about this in Fragment no. 2, Darrouzès, Méthode, 54, no. 2.4–10; Darrouzès, Documents, 296.21–28, Afinogenov 1996, 85–86, where it is said that these rumors began to spread *two years ago*. Given that at the end of the fragment, he mentions Joannicius as alive, and that he died on 3 November 846, so this fragment must have been composed before that date and therefore describes the events that took place before November 844.

[36] Vita Joannicii B, 431. Letter of Joannicius to Methodius, the text of which is transmitted by another biographer of Joannicius, Sabbas, Vita Joannicii A, 372–374, is not authentic.

[37] Vita Joannicii B, 432.

iconoclasm, still rested in the place of his exile, on the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara. His successor at the head of the Studite monks, abbot Naucratius, with the help of Athanasius, abbot of the second most important monastery of the Studite community, Sacudion, launched the initiative to transfer the body of this saint from the island and lay it to rest in his monastery. Having secured the consent of Empress Theodora and Patriarch Methodius and their cooperation, the body of Theodore the Studite was transferred from the Princes' Islands and buried in the Studion Monastery, in the tomb of his uncle Plato, on 26 January 845. The ceremony was officiated by Patriarch Methodius, with all church clergy.[38] The body of his brother Joseph, the former archbishop of Thessalonica, who had died on 15 July 832, was buried together with Theodore's.[39]

The transfer of the relics of Theodore the Studite on 26 January 845 seems to be the last event in which Patriarch Methodius and the monks and abbots of Studion and the associated monasteries worked together. After that, a great schism arose between them, plunging the Church into a new crisis, the biggest after the defeat of the iconoclastic heresy and particularly painful because it was internal and not imposed by the will of the imperial authorities as the iconoclastic controversy had been. It is impossible to say what its immediate cause was and how the schism came about. The sources are silent on this. However, it is difficult to escape the

[38] The event is described, comprehensively and in detail, in the anonymous document *On the transfer and deposition of the relics of our blessed father and confessor Theodore*, composed not much later, in 848–849, Translatio Theodori, 54.35–58.24, 59.33–60.26; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 76–77. The date, January 26, is given in Vita Nicolai Studitae, 904 A–B. The sources unequivocally point to the conclusion that the date was 26 January 845. According to Translatio Theodori, 55.11, 35, it happened *after eighteen years had passed* (Ὠκτωκαίδεκα τοίνυν ἐτῶν διαγεγονότων) since the death of Theodore the Studite (died 11 November 826). Other sources testify to the same. Vita Theodori Studitae A, 232 B, makes the same statement: ἐν ὀκτὼ πρὸς δέκα ἔτεσιν τῇ αὐτῇ παραφυλαχθὲν νῆσῳ, Vita Theodori Studitae B, 328 A, points out that the body of Theodore the Studite was preserved in this [the Princes'] *island for eighteen years*—ἐν ὀκτὼ πρὸς δέκα ἔτεσιν τῇ αὐτῇ παραφυλαχθὲν νῆσῳ. Therefore, the time in question is *after* 11 November 844. However, it is usually taken that the transfer of the relics of Theodore the Studite took place on 26 January 844, Translatio Theodori, 27 sq; ODB III, 2045 (A. Kazhdan); Zielke 1999, 244, no. 260; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 75–77. That claim is based on the understanding that 26 January 845, is too late a date for the *terminus ante quem non* for the beginning of the conflict between patriarch Methodius and the Studites, led by Naucratius and Athanasius, which most certainly occurred after the transfer of the relics of Theodore the Studite.

[39] Translatio Theodori, 46, 58.25–60.26. On Joseph the Studite, cf. Pmb Z, no. 3448; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 81–84.

impression that it was, to some extent at least, connected with the events surrounding the transfer of the relics of Theodore the Studite.

The transfer of the relics itself was a momentous event, *a general holiday and popular ceremony*, attended by massive crowds, both monks and ordinary people, who welcomed Theodore's body, gathered around it and kept vigil for two whole days, *not allowing him to be buried*.[40] This was an obvious sign of the immense respect that Theodore the Studite enjoyed among lay people and monastics alike. The empress and the patriarch allowed the Studites to organize this event and worked with them on its organization.[41] Patriarch Methodius was at the head of the ceremony, and on that occasion, he showed utmost respect to Theodore's relics and personally laid them in the new grave.[42] The empress herself was present, as well as *those who deal[t] with imperial authority*, i.e., the empress' associates, certainly her brothers Bardas and Petronas, logothete Theoctistus and Sergius Nicetiates, and they all *lavishly honoured the tomb of the saint*.[43] However, unlike many monks and most ordinary citizens, it seems that the patriarch, the empress and her entourage did not appreciate such a mass outpouring of affection for the figure and legacy of Theodore the Studite. It was not easy for Naucratius and Athanasius to persuade them to approve their undertaking and provide cooperation and support. In his address to the empress and the patriarch asking them to allow the transfer of the relics of Theodore the Studite, Naucratius had to emphasize his merits and sufferings, as well as the importance that bringing his relics to Constantinople could have for the capital,[44] despite his belief that even before his request, both the empress and the patriarch had cherished the memory of the late saint.[45] In the same address, however, he notes that Theodore's body has been on the Princes' Islands for eighteen years *because of the iconoclastic anger, because of secret contempt for him*.[46] *The iconoclastic anger* is clear, and the hatred of the iconoclasts towards any Orthodox figure was by no means secret. Therefore, the Orthodox circles, the highest ones, harboured *a secret contempt for him*. Theodore the

[40] Translatio Theodori, 57.30–58.2, 19–24, 59.33–60.3.
[41] Translatio Theodori, 56.9–11.
[42] Translatio Theodori, 58.10–16; 60.7–9.
[43] Translatio Theodori, 58.7–9.
[44] Translatio Theodori, 55.25–56.8.
[45] Translatio Theodori, 55.25–28.
[46] …διὰ τὴν τῶν εἰκονομάχων λύτταν, διὰ τὴν κατ' αὐτοῦ ἀκήρυκτον δυσμένειαν…, Translatio Theodori, 55.35–37.

Studite, for all his devotion to Orthodoxy, perseverance in the faith and merits in the fight against heresy, still carried the heavy burden of a schismatic. At the time of the Orthodox restoration between the two iconoclastic periods, i.e., between 787 and 815, he often, together with his monastic comrades from the Studion and Sacudion monasteries, clashed with the then emperors and patriarchs Tarasius (784–806) and Nicephorus (806–815) over various issues and therefore suffered the consequences: excommunication and exile.[47] That is why, despite his immeasurable contribution to the struggle against iconoclasm, Theodore was perceived as a schismatic in Orthodox circles. As the patriarch, Methodius could not ignore this. The Studites, on the other hand, were steadfastly faithful to the memory of their teacher and loyal followers of his ideas. The masses that attended the transfer of his relics and the respect he enjoyed among the people could not help but encourage the Studites and give Methodius a cause for worry.

In the verdict he pronounced against them, Methodius charged Naucratius and Athanasius with disobedience and demanded that they anathematize the writings of Theodore the Studite against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus.[48] One of the inferences that can be made from this is that the Studites, carried away by the enormous reputation of their teacher among the monks and the people, emphasized his authority even more in all matters, including his condemnation of the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus. With this, they openly challenged Patriarch Methodius, whose election they had already opposed at the Council of 843, lobbying for a person from their own ranks to take the patriarchal position. Those "writings" or even "books" of Theodore the Studite against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus, however, have not survived.[49] The biggest disagreement that Theodore the Studite had with the two patriarchs concerned the so-called *Mychaean dispute*, the issues of the divorce and second marriage of the former emperor Constantine VI (780–797).[50] However,

[47] On conflicts in the church in 787–815, cf. Alexander 1958, 80–101. On Theodore the Studite, his works and role in those events, cf. PmbZ, no. 7574; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 44–77.

[48] Darrouzès, Méthode, 31, no. I, ll. 18–35, 105–127; Periorismos, 98, ll. 20–35. As we will see later, the illegitimacy of their position as abbots was not the reason behind Methodius' accusation against them, as suggested in Zielke 1999, 248–249, but just another reason that the monks subordinate to them were not obliged to obey to them.

[49] Zielke 1999, 249.

[50] About that, cf. Alexander 1958, 82–101; Speck 1978, 252 sq.

the real reason for his antagonism towards them was that they both became patriarchs as laymen.[51] Therefore, the *Studite Schism* was merely a continuation of the intra-Orthodox struggle between rigid monasticism, led by the Studites, and the secular intelligentsia, supported by more open-minded monks, for supremacy in the Church. That struggle was more permanent than any schism.[52] It would continue for a little while after the *Studite Schism* and produce a new one, the so-called *Schism of Photius*, when in 858, the long-serving monk Ignatius, a friend of Studites and Methodius' successor, was deposed from the patriarchal throne and replaced by a layman of exceptional intellectual abilities, Photius, a scion from Tarasius' family. He would justify his election as Patriarch Photius to the Roman Pope Nicholas I, among other things, by citing the election of Tarasius and Nicephorus as examples of the same practice.[53]

However, regardless of his attitude towards him, Methodius had not wanted to offend the memory of Theodore the Studite. In the introductory part of the verdict against Naucratius and Athanasius, comparing Theodore with the Old Testament Canaan, a descendant of Ham, Noah's second-born son, who was cursed by his father, and his disciples Naucratius and Athanasius with the descendants of Canaan, who suffered for the curse of Ham because God gave their land to the Jews, Methodius clearly points out that the curse did not fall on "Canaan", i.e., Theodore the Studite, *because of the first blessing with which he was blessed by God*, but only on his disciples.[54] Methodius' stance is even more apparent in the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, in which Theodore the Studite was celebrated, but his writings against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus were anathematized.[55] Furthermore, it was Methodius who in the last years of his patriarchate composed the first, now lost, *life* of St. Theodore the Studite.[56]

[51] Life of Tarasios, 14–15; Alexander 1958, 65–71; Ostrogorski 1959, 184, 192. About the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus, cf. PmbZ, nos. 5301, 7235.

[52] The rivalry between rigid monasticism and free-spirited worldly intellectuals for supremacy in the church was the driving force of change and progress in Byzantine society of the eighth and ninth centuries, which is best noted by Alexander 1958, 80–82, and not the struggle between the supposedly *zealot* and *moderate* factions within the church, as suggested by Dvornik 1950, 37–51 sq, and others.

[53] Photii epp., 290.154 sq.

[54] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 10–13; Periorismos, ll. 13–16.

[55] Synodikon, 53.114–116, 127.

[56] Krausmüller 2006, 14–150; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 78, 116–117.

Writing not long after those events and still under their influence, the monk Peter, the biographer of St. Joannicius, reflects the attitude of the supporters of Patriarch Methodius about the Studites at the time of the conflict.[57] Their stance is quite negative, and Peter mirrors it even when he writes about earlier times. In one instance, he claims that they *tend to see scandals in everything* because *they always think they are better than others.*[58] Elsewhere, he opines that the Studites and their then-leaders Naucratius and Athanasius, are in the habit of causing trouble and undermining not only the Church of God but also everyone dedicated to God, adding, with a rhetorical flourish, that they direct their poisonous tongues at holiness and present themselves and their *barking* as God-inspired.[59]

Later sources tend to change the historical account of these events. They do not mention the Studites at all as the culprits for the schism but look for its cause in Patriarch Methodius' policy towards former iconoclasts. According to the younger biographer of St. Joannicius, the monk Sabbas, some were in favour of removing all iconoclast priests, and others suggested leaving some in office.[60] Instead of the priests who were appointed during the time of the Orthodox patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus and supported the heresy after 815, about whom Methodius wrote to the patriarch of Jerusalem in 846,[61] they now speak of iconoclastic bishops and priests whom Tarasius accepted into the church after 787, after they had pledged not to revert to heresy, and in 815 they violated their oath and again espoused iconoclasm.[62] In this, Sabbas is followed by Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, in the *Life of Ignatius.*[63] Sabbas also, instead of the clear provision of the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* against *everything written and said against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus* (essentially, a condemnation of the writings of Theodore the Studite),[64] mentions its relativized version—anyone is condemned *who does not accept*

[57] Monk Peter composed the *Life of St. Joannicius* quite soon after his death on 3 November 846 and before the death of Methodius on 14 June 847, in support of the patriarch and with strong anti-Studite tendencies, Prieto Domínguez 2020, 120–127; Price 2021, 258–259. On the literary circle of patriarch Methodius, cf. Afinogenov 2017, 26–31; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 118–167.

[58] Vita Ioannicii B, 405.

[59] Vita Ioannicii B, 422.

[60] Vita Ioannicii A, 372; Afinogenov 1996, 86–88.

[61] Methodii epistola, 1291–1292

[62] Vita Ioannicii A, 373.

[63] Life of Ignatius, 20.20–30.

[64] Synodikon, 53.114–116.

Methodius, along with Germanus, Tarasius and Nicephorus, the illustrious patriarchs,[65] replacing the specific provision related to the *Studite Schism* with a general reference to the iconoclastic period.[66] The *Life of Patriarch Methodius* attributes the schism to the attack of some bishops and clerics on Methodius for *performing ordinations without prior investigation*.[67] This text, which is his only biography completely preserved to this day, was authored, as it is now known, by the same monk Sabbas, and can also be added to the writings created to erase the memory of the *Studite Schism*.[68] There was also another, earlier *life* of the patriarch, compiled by Gregory Asbestas, the Metropolitan of Syracuse, but no trace of it has reached us, except for a paraphrase of a short passage in *Thesaurus orthodoxae fidei* (Thesaurus of Orthodoxy) by Nicetas Choniates, the famous Byzantine writer and thinker of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[69] The most reliable account of the events concerning the *Studite Schism*, however, is provided in the contemporary writings, acts and sermons of the patriarch Methodius, and Joannicius' older biographer, Peter.

The conflict began after 26 January 845, but the council session at which Naucratius and Athanasius were condemned was not held immediately after the outbreak of the quarrel but later. St. Joannicius' biographer, the monk Peter, recounts the events in the conflict between the Studites and Patriarch Methodius: *The glory-loving* Studites, led by Naucratius, Athanasius and John *Kakosambas*, began to *talk nonsense* and, with their help, gained many supporters and caused disorder in the church; Peter points out that everyone knows *the shameless faces of those people and all that they did against the martyr Methodius*, exposing him to unjust attacks—the biographer compares Methodius before the attacks of the Studites with St. Athanasius in the hands of the Arians.[70] News of this reached Joannicius, who, through his friend Eustratius, sent a letter of support and consolation to Methodius, encouraging him not to succumb in the face of trouble. At the end of the letter, he invites Methodius to visit

[65] Sabbas writes about this in his account of the visit of Patriarch Methodius to Joannicius, Vita Ioannicii A, 382.

[66] On Sabbas' *Life of St. Joannicius*, cf. Prieto Domínguez 2020, 395–399.

[67] Vita Methodii, 1259.

[68] Prieto Domínguez 2020, 410–424.

[69] Nicetae Choniatae Thesauri, 281 D–284 A; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 410–424.

[70] Vita Ioannicii B, 431.

him in his monastic retreat.[71] Rejoicing at such encouragement, Methodius *showed the letter to the emperors without hesitation*, after which he handed over *the impious ones* (Studites) *to just and canonical exile and anathema*.[72] Having done so, he hastened to comply with Joannicius' wish to visit him in person.[73] They met on 1 November 846, and therefore, the trial and verdict of the Studite leaders Naucratius and Athanasius must have taken place before that date.[74]

At the beginning of the verdict, Methodius says that he thought long and hard about this issue and discussed it with those close to him, which could also be an allusion to the letter that Joannicius had sent him.[75] The judgment of Patriarch Methodius against the leaders of the Studite opposition, Naucratius, the abbot of the Studion monastery, and Athanasius, the abbot of the Sacudion monastery, was presented to them at a kind of a council attended by *brothers and fellow ministers*, that is, monks and bishops.[76] On that occasion, Methodius sentenced Naucratius and Athanasius to imprisonment in their monastery (περιορισμὸς ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ

[71] Vita Ioannicii B, 431. The monk Peter only briefly paraphrases the letter that Joannicius sent to Methodius through Eustratius. A letter quoted in full by Joannicius' younger biographer, the monk Sabbas, Vita Ioannicii A, 372–374, which does not mention the Studites but explains at length why Methodius should not receive *iconoclastic bishops into the church and priests* and should instead depose them all, which he did after having received the letter and showed it to *the emperors*, Vita Ioannicii A, 377, obviously has no connection with the real letter of Joannicius mentioned by Peter. It was created, like the entire younger *life* of Joannicius, as already mentioned, with the intention of erasing from memory the real reasons and the real history of the church schism during Methodius' patriarchate and the Studites as the culprits for that schism. On this, cf. also Talbot 1998, 340, n. 506; Mango 1983, 393–404; Timotin 2010, 184–185; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 410–424.

[72] Vita Ioannicii B, 432.

[73] Vita Ioannicii B, 432.

[74] Joannicius died three days after his meeting with Methodius, on 3 November 846, Vita Ioannicii B, 433. As the monk Peter writes that in his letter to him Joannicius invited Methodius to visit him *intimating his own end*, Vita Ioannicii B, 431, not much time seems to have passed between the sending of the letter and the meeting between Joannicius and Methodius, and that Methodius' confrontation with the leaders of the Studites, which took place between those two events, should be dated closer to 1 November 846.

[75] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 1–2; Periorismos, ll. 5–6. On this act cf. Darrouzès, Méthode, 18–20; Periorismos, 101–102.

[76] In the verdict, Methodius invites the Studites to anathematize Theodore's writings *either today in front of the brothers and fellow ministers, or on a certain day, when they come to their monastery*, Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 109–112; Periorismos, ll. 99–102.

μονῇ).[77] They were allowed to live there but could not leave it. They could receive monks in it, but only those from their monastery, not others, as well as anyone who would come from the outside, whether monks or laymen. They could send their students wherever they wanted, *except to administrators, charitable institutions and the imperial court*. They were also allowed to send them to the market to procure food and to perform regular work at the rural estates of their monasteries. They could not ask to come or go without the patriarch's permission.[78] The second point was even more significant. Naucratius and Athanasius were asked to anathematize the writings against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus by their teacher and abbot Theodore the Studite. They were given a choice: to do it either on that day, *in front of the brothers and fellow ministers*, i.e., before the council, or on another day when they, i.e., the representatives of the council, would come to their monastery to hear them. If they refused and continued to uphold the writings, the patriarch threatened that he would *not only anathematize them but also most terribly catathematize them*. Then he explains that Theodore the Studite, towards the end of his life, *had with his deeds defeated his own words* or else they would not have accepted him into the community if he still believed in his heart what he had written.[79]

In the judgment, Methodius also presents the case of a certain abba Theodore, a young monk who disobeyed his Studite elders and joined the patriarch's side.[80] With this example, Methodius wanted to encourage the other followers of the Studites to do the same.[81] He makes it clear to the two Studite leaders that, since they refused obedience to the head of the Church, they cannot expect submission from their subordinates either, because their examples have taught them disobedience.[82] In connection

[77] Darrouzès, Méthode, 31; Periorismos, l. 2. It is not clear whether this phrase refers only to the Studion monastery, where, therefore, they would have been imprisoned together, or whether it refers to both monasteries—Studion in the case of Naucratius, or Sacudion in the case of Athanasius, which would mean that each was imprisoned in his own monastery.

[78] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 35–45; Periorismos, ll. 35–44.

[79] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll.105–127; Periorismos, ll. 96–115. This passage was later also quoted by John Chylas, metropolitan of Ephesus, when giving an example of earlier schisms in his discussion of the so-called *Arsenite schism* at the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, Darrouzès, Documents, 367.13–368.3. On the Arsenite schism, cf. ODB I, 188 (A.-M. Talbot).

[80] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 52–35.66; Periorismos, ll. 50–62.

[81] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 46–52; Periorismos, ll. 44–49.

[82] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 31–35; Periorismos, ll. 32–35.

with this, Patriarch Methodius used this occasion to add another accusation against Naucratius and Athanasius—the legality of their position as abbots. After a long exile due to the iconoclastic persecutions, these two Studites had taken the helm of their monasteries in the "troubled times" between the death of Emperor Theophilus in January 842 and the official establishment of the cult of icons in March 843. Methodius now asks them who had made them abbots. He had not, and neither had Nicephorus (died in 828), the last Orthodox patriarch before him. That is why their position is illegal, and that is why, Methodius concludes, *those who separate from you are not doing anything wrong because you have never been declared abbots*.[83] By this provision of the verdict, all monks subordinate to Naucratius and Athanasius were officially freed from their subordination, which made it easier for them to switch sides and align themselves with the official Church.

This was the official condemnation of the culprits for the *Studite Schism*. However, it did little to heal the schism, on the contrary, a fairly numerous faction gathered around the Studites.[84] First of all, these were the monastic communities of the Sacudion and Kata Sabas monasteries, close to the Studites, and some others. Numerous priests and, more importantly, some bishops also joined the Studites.

After dealing with the Studite leaders, according to the *Life of St. Joannicius* by the monk Peter, Methodius went to personally visit the great hermit Joannicius. They met on 1 November 846, two days before Joannicius' death on 3 November. Methodius' entourage included almost seventy bishops, priests and monks. On that occasion, Joannicius delivered a sermon in which he expressed his views on the current situation in the Church. He also spoke of those who had falsely claimed that he supported them, as already discussed. Then he called on all those present and through them those *in the cities and villages*, to distance themselves *from the unholy heretics, and the most hated Studites and those from Kakosambas who are with them, and the bishop of Nicomedia Monomachus, or rather Theomachus, i.e. the God-fighter and the mindless eunuch of the church of Cyzicus* because they *speak foolish things against God and our father, the most prominent patriarch*. One should distance himself from those who dare speak badly

[83] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 67–93; Periorismos, ll. 63–85.

[84] The biographer of St. Joannicius, Peter, writes how the devil *attracted a large part (of the Church) through the Studites and through them incited disorder in the Church of God*, Vita Ioanicii B, 431.

against God's Church, and those who speak the same against the earlier fathers and holy patriarchs have already committed scandals in the Church. Therefore, anyone who does not accept the great Methodius as a patriarch should be anathematized, and *anyone who separates from the communion with him will be separated from the glory of God on Judgment Day.* Inspired by Joannicius' sermon and his views, Methodius then *subjected these impious people to many anathemas.*[85]

The views expressed by Joannicius in his sermon became the basis for Methodius' further steps regarding the *Studite Schism.* Methodius repeats the call for the faithful to distance themselves from the schismatics in the text usually called the *Second Letter of Methodius to the Studites*, a sermon spoken by Methodius on an unknown occasion, but certainly after the sentencing of the Studites.[86] In it, the patriarch addresses these apostate monks, especially the Sacudionites and Sabatians (or Katasabatites), as members of the Studite community and reminds them of the canonical provisions against monks who rebel against their bishops.[87] For the same reason, he addresses the priests, but also the bishops rebelling against their patriarch.[88] In that address, Methodius proposes an interesting understanding of the position of the patriarch. *Priests are assigned dignities by bishops, that is, hierarchs, and hierarchs by apostles, that is, successors of the apostles, that is, patriarchs.*[89] Therefore, the rebellion of a bishop against the patriarch as the apostolic successor is a rebellion against the apostle

[85] Vita Ioannicii B, 432. The reference to those who speak against *the earlier fathers and holy patriarchs*, Dvornik 1926, 130, considered an allusion to the Studite condemnation of the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus.

The younger biographer of Joannicius, the monk Sabbas, again reflecting his tendency to erase the memory of the Studites as schismatics, conveys Joannicius' sermon quite differently—he does not mention the Studites, the main culprits for the current problems in the church are the iconoclasts, those who maintain relations with the iconoclasts are condemned, as well as those who do not accept Patriarch Methodius and, with him, Germanus, Tarasius and Nicephorus, Vita Ioannicii A, 382. Like in Joannicius' letter to Methodius, Sabbas inaccurately and tendentiously transmitted his sermon. The mention of the patriarchs Germanus, Tarasius and Nicephorus alongside Methodius is quite in keeping with the interpolations in the text of the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* made to relativize the provision on the condemnation of the writings of Theodore the Studite against Tarasius and Nicephorus and present it as a provision against the iconoclasts and not against the Studites, which will be discussed further below.

[86] Darrouzès, Méthode, 20–22.

[87] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 1–163.

[88] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 164–187.

[89] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 90–92.

himself, and is equal to the rebellion of a priest against his bishop.[90] According to the canons, such priests and, by extension, bishops should be deposed.[91] In this sermon, the patriarch also points out that he repeatedly called in writing to end the schism, but with the opposite effect—there were more and more apostates.[92] He also emphasizes how at that moment (μέχρις ἀρτίως = *until now*, *until this moment*), *the disciples of Theodore the Studite*, i.e., the condemned Naucratius and Athanasius, still hold accusations against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus in Theodore's writings,[93] which means that they still refuse to anathematize these writings, according to the verdict. In the end, he calls on the schismatics, which he says are the puppets *of the Tartar duo*, i.e., of Naucratius and Athanasius,[94] to anathematize the writings of Theodore the Studite against the two patriarchs, emphasizing that they would not thereby anathematize Theodore himself, but only those writings. If they refused, he threatened to submit them to the *catathema of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*, and *everyone who listens to them, cooperates with them and encounters or meets them in friendly company, will be subject to their catathema*.[95] In addition to anathema and *catathema*, as a sanction for the schismatics, Methodius also introduced *excommunication*, threatening with anathema and catathema all who had anything to do with them. He emphasized this in another sermon, in which he urged the flock *not to eat with them and not to greet them*, so that they would not *participate in their actions, and should it come to that,* [their] *anathema*.[96] This invitation is in keeping with the words addressed to the patriarch and his companions by

[90] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 164–167, 179–181.

[91] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 164–165, 179–187, 188–193.

[92] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 193–196. Perhaps this group of the patriarch's letters also includes the one addressed to *the Sacudians and the Boscitians*, the preserved part of which J. Darrouzès published as Fragment no. 5 in his edition of the writings of Patriarch Methodius against the iconoclasts and Studites, Darrouzès, Méthode, 55. no. 5.

[93] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 196–210.

[94] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 224–232.

[95] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 233–249. The passage is quoted in the thirteenth century by the Metropolitan of Ephesus, John Chylas, in a document on the *Arsenite Schism*, Darrouzès, Documents, 368.4–30.

[96] This is a fragment titled *Second Sermon on those who revile the most holy patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus and do not accept to anathematize what is said to have been written against them by the confessor Theodore the Studite, so that they do not think they are (thereby) anathematizing (this) holy father*, Darrouzès, Méthode, 55, no. 4.1–2.

Joannicius during their meeting, calling on everyone to separate themselves *from those who shattered the unity of the Church into many parts.*[97]

In any case, after his meeting with Joannicius on 1 November 846, Methodius began to implement decisive measures against the schismatics, i.e., all who supported the condemned Studites Naucratius and Athanasius. Then he deposed the bishops who agreed with them, and those were definitely the bishops mentioned in the sermon of Joannicius, i.e., the metropolitans of Nicomedia and Cyzicus, and probably some others, too. [98]

For Patriarch Methodius, the anathematization of Theodore the Studite's writings against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus became an indispensable prerequisite for the schismatics to return to the fold of the church. This request was put before Naucratius and Athanasius in the verdict against them and repeated in the first sermon, and Methodius would retain it as the main condition in his so-called *Ecclesiastical Testament.*[99] However, with the exception of the *testament*, Methodius points out at every opportunity that Theodore himself had rejected these writings before his death. In the verdict, he says that he *had with his deeds defeated the words*, and in the first sermon, compares him with Theodoretus of Cyrrhus, who had renounced his writings.[100] In the verdict and in the *epistle to the Sacudians and Boscitians*, which was, quite possibly, one of the epistles in which he called for an end to the schism, which he discusses in the first sermon,[101] he points out that if Theodore had not rejected his writings against the two patriarchs, he would not have been admitted back into communion with the other Orthodox.[102] That and the fact that in the first sermon, he plainly says that the anathematization of Theodore's writings does not mean the anathematization of Theodore himself, which is reiterated in the title of the second sermon,[103] testifies that Methodius had already formulated his policy towards the personality and work of Theodore the Studite. His writings against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus, as schismatical, should be anathematized, but not Theodore

[97] Vita Ioannicii B, 432.

[98] Vita Ioannicii B, 432. In his *Ecclesiastical Testament* (before 14 June 847), Patriarch Methodius mentions bishops who were deprived of their position because of the *Studite Schism*, Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 7.20–27.

[99] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 105–120; 53, no. II, ll. 233–249; 56, no. 7.20–22.

[100] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 116–120; no. II, ll. 236–238.

[101] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 193–196.

[102] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. I, ll. 116–120; 55, no. 5.

[103] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 233–236; 55, no. 4.

himself. On the contrary, he should be celebrated and respected as a great confessor of Orthodoxy and a worthy warrior against the heresy of iconoclasm. As we will see, Methodius would introduce this policy into the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, codifying it as the official dogma of the Orthodox Church.

In addition to the writings and words of criticism against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus, seen as deserving of the harshest punishment—an anathema, Methodius responded to the Studite attacks against the two patriarchs in another way—by creating and fostering their cult. At that time, namely, and most likely at the instigation of Patriarch Methodius himself, Ignatius the Deacon, a former iconoclast and deposed Metropolitan of Nicaea, but also one of the greatest writers of his time, compiled the *Life of Patriarch Tarasius* and edited the *Life of Patriarch Nicephorus*, which he had penned earlier but had yet to publish, and added them to his rich opus. In these two works, especially in the first, some anti-Studite indications can be found.[104]

The transfer of the relics of Patriarch Nicephorus from the Monastery of St. Theodore to the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, on 11–13 March 847, should be seen in the same context. The initiator and mastermind of this project was precisely Patriarch Methodius. As recorded in the *Sermon on the Exile of the Patriarch Nikephoros*, composed shortly after that event by the presbyter Theophanes, *after four years had passed* from the restoration of icons (χρόνου τοιγαροῦν ἐκ τούτου τετραετοῦς παροιχομένου), Methodius, *moved by the divine spirit*, approached the empress and asked that the body of Patriarch Nicephorus be transferred to the capital *so that he would not remain condemned to exile and un-free*. Convinced by those words, the empress gave her permission. The patriarch, with all his clergy and many monks, went to the Monastery of St. Theodora, where Nicephorus' body rested. There he found the body of the patriarch, *intact and preserved over all nineteen years* (ἐν ὅλοις ἔτεσιν ἐννεακαίδεκα). This was on 11 March, the day of the fourth anniversary of Methodius' patriarchate. Liturgies and ceremonies lasted three days. When the body arrived in Constantinople, the then seven-year-old Emperor Michael took an active part in the festivities, leading the procession that carried the body to the Great Church, i.e., Saint Sophia. Finally,

[104] Efthymiadis 1991, 73–75, 80–83; Pratsch 2000, 97–101; Correspondence of Ignatios the Deacon, 7–12; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 130–138; Price 2021, 254–256. Cf. Life of Tarasios, 46–50; Vita Nicephori, 41–160; English translation: Talbot 1998, 25–142.

on 13 March 847, the remains of Patriarch Nicephorus were laid to rest, with the due solemn rites, in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, the mausoleum of the Roman emperors and patriarchs of Constantinople.[105] This event was attended by many, including the imperial family and *officials with the highest dignities and patricians*.[106] In all respects, it was reminiscent of the transfer of the relics of Theodore the Studite two years earlier—just as that event was the reason for the Studites to rise up and launch attacks on Methodius, as their teacher Theodore had done against Methodius' predecessor Nicephorus, so was the event of March 847 a way for Methodius to celebrate the memory of Nicephorus, to show how much respect he commanded among the people, and thus deal a serious blow to the Studites and all those who refused to condemn the writings against this holy patriarch. Priest Theophanes, in his *Sermon on the exile of Patriarch Nicephorus and the transfer of his relics*, states that, *although many ceremonies were held by emperors and priests at different times, none compare to this one*.[107] These words highlight the advantage of this event over the transfer of the relics of Theodore the Studite and, therefore, the advantage of Patriarch Nicephorus over Theodore the Studite, and ultimately, the advantage of Patriarch Methodius over the Studites and their followers, at least on a symbolic level. For this occasion, the *Canon on the Transfer of the Relics of Saint Nicephorus the Patriarch* was composed, probably also by Ignatius the Deacon, again on the orders of Patriarch Methodius.[108]

At the time when the confrontation with the Studite schismatics was at its bitterest, just before the transfer of the relics of Patriarch Nicephorus, an important event was marked—the celebration of the fourth anniversary of the victory over iconoclasm, on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, 27 February 847. This great and significant day for the Church was celebrated amidst the schism and deep strife within that same Church. This made the day even more significant and gave the patriarch an opportunity to underscore

[105] Sermo in translationem Nicephori, 232.20–233.21; Discourse on the exile, 325–330, 338–342; Zielke 1999, 256–257; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 114–116, 143–149, who inappropriately dates the event to 13 March 846. As stated in the source, since Patriarch Nicephorus died on 5 April 828, PmbZ, no. 5301, the transfer of his relics on 11–13 March 847 took place just two weeks before the nineteenth anniversary of his death, and after the fourh anniversary of the Triumph of Orthodoxy in 843.

[106] Sermo in translationem Nicephori, 232.36–233.6; Discourse on the exile, 342.

[107] Discourse on the exile, 342.

[108] Life of Tarasios, 46; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 143.

the importance of the victory over heresies and all the danger of church disunity and schism. There are solid grounds to believe that it was on that occasion that Patriarch Methodius compiled the famous *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*.

The *Synodicon, which is read on the Sunday of Orthodoxy*, as its full name reads, is a solemn liturgical text composed to commemorate the Triumph of Orthodoxy over iconoclasm, won on 11 March 843, and to be read every year during the commemoration of that event. It thanks God, praises the champions of the true faith, and finally condemns, i.e. anathematizes heretics and their leaders.[109] Although new provisions were constantly added to the original text of the *Synodicon*, there is no doubt that its author was Methodius. However, the question arises whether he wrote it during the Council of 843, during the celebration of its first anniversary in 844, or on some other occasion, which could have been the *Sunday of Orthodoxy* in 845, 846 or 847.[110] First of all, the document was certainly not compiled and read during the Council of 843 because it is clear from its *Preface* that it was compiled and read during *a celebration and commemoration* of that event.[111] The *Preface* provides another pointer for dating this text, which has so far escaped the attention of scholars. It is the place where the two periods of iconoclasm and the two victories over it are discussed. For the first time, *after many years of objurgating holy icons*, piety returned to the church. *Now, which is the second time,* ***a little after the thirtieth anniversary*** (μικροῦ μετὰ τριακονταετηρίδα) ***of evil****, salvation from burdens, deliverance from persecutors, proclamation of piety and safety and always bringing us salvation, the feast of icon veneration is established for us who are unworthy.*[112] Researchers saw in this section a parallel with a passage from *Methodius' sermon*, recorded in his *Life*, held, allegedly, immediately after his enthronement at the Council of 843,[113] which looks

[109] Critical edition and commentary, Synodikon, 1–316. Briefly on *Synodicon*, ODB III, 1994 (A. Kazhdan).

[110] For a discussion on the origin and composition of the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, cf. Synodikon, 138–168; Grumel, Regestes, no. 425; Zielke 1999, 246–247; ODB III, 1994 (A. Kazhdan), only takes as certain that it was created between 843 and 920; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 109–110, holds that it was composed by Methodius either on the occasion of his inauguration on 11 March 843, or in 844; Lauritzen 2021, 26–27, dates it to 844.

[111] For example, the place where it says τῶν ἐγκαινίων τὴν ἡμέραν ἑορτάζομεν, Synodikon, 45.5. Cf. also Synodikon, 141–142; Grumel, Regestes, no. 425.

[112] Synodikon, 47.38–43.

[113] Synodikon, 141.

similar but is in fact quite different in meaning and in essence. There, Methodius says the following: *I and all of you owe the good giver Christ the Lord, because he has today honoured us, who have* ***suffered for almost an entire thirty years*** (σχεδόν που, ὅλοις τριάκοντα πεπονημένοις ἔτεσιν) *under the heaviest yoke of heresy, with freedom.*[114] The difference is quite clear. In his sermon, Methodius says that *the iconoclastic yoke* lasted *almost thirty years*, which is correct, because twenty-eight years had passed between 815 and 843. However, the *Synodicon* clearly states that the Church celebrates *the feast day* on that day, *shortly after the thirtieth anniversary of evil*. The *thirtieth anniversary of evil*, that is, the thirtieth year since the beginning of the second iconoclasm, ended in April 845.[115] Therefore, the *Synodicon* must have been compiled after 845, which leaves two more possibilities for its composition date during Methodius' lifetime—the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 846 or 847.

In the light of the above, the information in the part of the *Synodicon* that includes expressions of gratitude to the meritorious fighters for Orthodoxy, along with the formula of *eternal memory*, gain importance as a decisive argument for dating its creation. In this part, *eternal memory* is expressed to the Metropolitans Euthymius of Sardis, Emilian of Cyzicus, Theophylact of Nicomedia, Peter of Nicaea, Michael of Synada, Joseph of Thessalonica, John of Sardis or Chalcedon and George of Mytilene († 845?), who were all persecuted or martyred during the iconoclasm, between 815 and 843.[116] The hierarchs are followed by deserving monks—Theodore the Studite († 826), *Isaacius*, i.e., Theophanes the Confessor († 818), Joannicius († 3 November 846), Hilarion of Dalmatou († 845) and Symeon the Stylite († 844).[117] There is no reason to relativize the value of the last three names—Joannicius, Hilarion and Symeon—and consider them later additions to the text of the *Synodicon*.[118] All three are known to have been held in very high regard by Methodius—while still alive, they were mentioned in one of Methodius' fragments as supporters of his policy towards the priests who had espoused the heresy of

[114] Vita Methodii, 1253 C.

[115] The council at which iconoclasm was established was held in April 815, Ostrogorski 1959, 206.

[116] Synodikon, 53.121–126; 142–144. Hierarchs Theophilus and Nicholas are also mentioned, but they are not known from other sources.

[117] Synodikon, 53.127–132, 144–147.

[118] Synodikon, 147.

iconoclasm.[119] It is quite understandable that all three found their place in a text of this nature by Methodius. Taking into account the circumstances of Methodius' patriarchate, it seems even more understandable and, contributing to the actuality, additionally supports the premise that Methodius was the creator of the *Synodicon*. Therefore, since Joannicius died on 3 November 846, his death is the *terminus post quem* for the composition of the *Synodicon*. The only remaining possibility is that the text was written to mark the fourth anniversary of the Triumph of Orthodoxy on 27 February 847.

Finally, the provision of the *Synodicon* which casts an anathema on *everything written or said against the holy patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus*,[120] after everything that has been exposed above about the dispute between Methodius and the Studites and their followers, fits perfectly with the proposed dating. That provision targeted the Studites rather than the iconoclasts and was a consequence of the *Studite Schism*, which arose after 845. Later, when there was a tendency to forget the *Studite Schism*, this provision was interpolated by adding the name of Patriarch Germanus (715–730), a victim of the first iconoclastic period, and Patriarch Methodius himself, so it lost its anti-Studite character and took on a general anti-iconoclastic one. This tendency appears already in the *Life of Joannicius* by the monk Sabbas, which we have already discussed.[121] Although there are no interpolations in an entire group of manuscripts,[122] there is one fragment in which a certain monk Joseph and his colleague George Cenas clearly refer to the original text of that part of the *Synodicon*: *Patriarch Methodius*, he writes, *in the Synodicon of the Church, as everyone knows,* ***condemned to anathema everything that was said and written against the holy patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus.***[123] We have seen how Patriarch Methodius made the anathematization of the writings against Patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus a necessary condition for those who wanted to return to the church from the *Studite Schism*, and how he insisted that this did not mean the condemnation of Theodore the Studite himself. This ideology found an official expression precisely in the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, where *everything written or spoken against the holy*

[119] Darrouzès, Méthode, 54, no. 1.11–13.
[120] Synodikon, 53.114–116.
[121] Vita Ioannicii A, 382; Grumel, Regestes, no. 429, 436; Grumel 1935, 399.
[122] Synodikon, 147, n. 236.
[123] Darrouzès, Méthode, 55, no. 6.11–14.

patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus is condemned to anathema,[124] but *eternal memory* is given to Theodore, the venerable abbot of the Studite monks.[125] Since in his sermons addressed to the flock and, above all, to the apostate monks of Sacudion, Kata Sabas and Boscition, written after his meeting with Joannicius on 1 November 846, Methodius expresses these views still in a rudimentary form,[126] the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 847 seems the perfect time for them to receive their final form and official expression.

The problem with the Studites completely overshadowed the issue of the readmission into the Church of those priests who had been ordained by the Orthodox patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus but had endorsed heresy after 815. Methodius left them in their positions and was willing to receive them back into the Church on the condition that they repent, anathematize the heresy and promise to remain forever faithful to Orthodoxy.[127] The priests who had been ordained under Methodius, with a clear Orthodox background, protested against such leniency,[128] which already made the implementation of Methodius' policy difficult, but the *Studite Schism*, it seems, had disastrous consequences for it. So as early as spring or summer of 846, *after three years had been completed and the fourth had begun* since the victory over iconoclasm, Methodius wrote to the patriarch of Jerusalem, Sergius, and complained to him that in all that time he *had never seen any fruit of repentance through any word of humility and austerity of life or voluntary silence shown by any of them*.[129] Although he was probably exaggerating when he wrote that such a policy had not borne any fruit at all, Methodius nevertheless recognized its essential failure and began to change it. One of the surviving fragments of Methodius' writings even explicitly testifies to a shift in this policy. He points out that he found out that *two years ago*, at a time when he was firmly applying the policy he had proclaimed on this matter, a rumour spread about him and his associates that Joannicius had told him not to accept *heretical ministers and priests into the Church*, because by accepting them, he would bring *not only Judaism, but also paganism to the Church*.[130] Although he knew at the

[124] Synodikon, 53.114–116.
[125] Synodikon, 53.127.
[126] Darrouzès, Méthode, no. II, ll. 233–236; 55, no. 4.
[127] Methodii epistola, 1291 D–1293 A.
[128] Darrouzès, Méthode, 54, nos. 1–2.
[129] Methodii epistola, 1293 B; Afinogenov 1996, 83–84; Signes Codoñer 2013, 102–106.
[130] Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 2.4–8; Darrouzès, Documents, 296.21–25.

time that it was just a rumour and although Joannicius insisted at their later meeting on 1 November 846, that he had never said such a thing, Methodius now speaks of it as being the *truest proclamation* and the real words of Joannicius, which he is now fulfilling by deeds, that is, he is not receiving *heretical ministers and priests* into the Church and thus does no disgrace to himself.[131]

Methodius announced the failure of this policy and its revision even more explicitly in his *Ecclesiastical Testament* (Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ διάταξις), a kind of *will* that he composed before his death, in early June 847, at the end of his tumultuous administration of the Church of Constantinople.[132] In it, Methodius explains his policy on the two key problems of his patriarchate—the issue of the readmission of the priests who had sided with the iconoclasts after 815 and the issue of the *Studite Schism*, and the results of that policy. In the first part of this text, which refers to heretical priests, Methodius points out that he was *willing to bring out those who had fallen and restore them to the common ministry*, but that this *did not happen* because the *brothers*, i.e., priests ordained during his patriarchate, *rose up against the reception of priests and deacons* and because the matter turned out to be a question *not only of rebellion, but also of divine economy because it can never be that the word of repentance is unworthy of reception*.[133] However, these priests not only espoused heresy, but some defended their dogma so persistently that it could be compared to Arianism. Methodius then decided to conduct a stricter investigation into their views, but the Orthodox priests also opposed this. There, Methodius praises them, emphasizing that they did so *moved by God's grace*. After that, he treated the priests who had endorsed iconoclasm as Arians and subjected them to the catechism *so that they would be completely cleansed of heresy*.[134] Finally, on this matter, Methodius bequeaths to his flock that, since they know what dishonour it is, *they guard themselves against insults and do not dare to make any concessions to them regarding the priestly and ministerial rank so that they do not bring upon themselves and the brothers with twofold evil,*

[131] Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 2.8–10; Darrouzès, Documents, 296.25–28; Afinogenov 1996, 79–90.

[132] Methodius says at the end of that text that he speaks *at the hour of death and at the height of his illness, but moved by the Holy Spirit and keeping the Church unharmed*, Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 7.32–35; Darrouzès, Documents, 294.25–27.

[133] Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 7.1–5; Darrouzès, Documents, 292.33–294.2.

[134] Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 7.6–13; Darrouzès, Documents, 294.2–9.

folly and shame,[135] and tells all who were under his jurisdiction that *they had no power to permit the reception of those without the said strict examination*.[136] In other words, Methodius admitted the defeat of his policy of readmitting into the clergy priests ordained before 815 who subsequently supported iconoclasm. He found justification in the fact that those priests had refused to renounce their heresy as he had ordered them to do, and thus they fell into an even deeper heresy. In his *testament* from early June 847, the patriarch determined that those should not be readmitted into the Church and restored to priestly offices. That was the final outcome of the question about the priests who were ordained before 815 and then fell into heresy. This leads us to another noteworthy detail. Those priests were appointed before 815. When Methodius' *testament* was written in 847, they had already been in service for more than thirty years. Therefore, their number grew smaller and smaller over time, and new, young Orthodox priests took their place. With that, their question lost relevance and resolved itself naturally until it ultimately disappeared, along with the last of them.

In the *Ecclesiastical Testament*, Methodius also gives his last word on the issue of the *Studite Schism*, but he limits himself to the problem of schismatic bishops. If they repent, he determines, they should be honoured and accepted back into the community. The condition is clear: *to anathematize the writings against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus and to wholeheartedly embrace piety*. In that case, they should *be given a simple priestly rank*, but they should by no means be restored to their previous episcopal titles and returned to their former bishoprics, but if they are in need, they should be provided with food for life—*grain, wine and oil, as much as they need*.[137] Therefore, the bishops who sided with the Studites in the schism, which was discussed above, after fulfilling all the conditions, should be received back into the Church, but only as priests. He does not mention schismatic monks and priests here, probably because in their case, under Methodius' earlier provisions against them, and even the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, everything was clear—if they anathematized the writings of Theodore the Studite against the two patriarchs, they would be readmitted into communion with the Church as equal monks and priests. With the schismatic bishops, the question arose as to whether,

[135] Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 7.14–18; Darrouzès, Documents, 294.9–13.
[136] Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 7.29–30; Darrouzès, Documents, 294.21–23.
[137] Darrouzès, Méthode, 56, no. 7.19–27; Darrouzès, Documents, 294.13–21.

if they repented and returned to the fold of the Church, they should also be restored to their previous episcopal rank and their former bishoprics. That is why this question found a place in Methodius' *Ecclesiastical Testament*, the last dilemma concerning the *Studite Schism* that required an answer.

The *Ecclesiastical Testament* contains the last words and views of Patriarch Methodius on the issues that characterized the church policy of his relatively short, four-year patriarchate. He died on 14 June 847, aged between sixty and sixty-seven, and was buried in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.[138]

The period between 843 and 847, when Patriarch Methodius governed the church of the City of Constantine, although short, was remarkably significant in the history of the Byzantine church policy. However, what stands out the most is the almost complete absence of the state in these events and its non-interference in resolving the most challenging issues of church policy. In the first chapter, we saw how immense the influence of Empress Theodora and her closest associates was in the events surrounding the Council of 843, the restoration of the cult of icons and the election of Patriarch Methodius. In the period that followed, however, those that wielded supreme power in the Empire chose not to interfere in church policy. Their positions regarding readmitting the priests ordained before 815 who later embraced the heresy of iconoclasm or the *Studite Schism* are unknown, with no hint of how they might have felt about these issues.

In all those events, the empress and her associates are mentioned only three times: the first time, in connection with the transfer of the relics of Theodore the Studite, on 26 January 845, when the Studites asked the empress for permission to carry it out, and when she, Emperor Michael and other dignitaries attended this event; the second time, during a similar ceremony, the transfer of the relics of Patriarch Nicephorus, on 11–13 March 847, when Methodius also asked the empress for permission to organize this and when the underage Emperor Michael personally led the solemn procession with the body of the deceased patriarch. On the second occasion, the empress granted the wishes of Patriarch Methodius, and on the first occasion, she made the decision together with him. The third time, having received a letter of support in the conflict with the Studites and encouragement from Joannicius to settle the matter with them, Methodius went to *the emperors* and showed them the missive and then

[138] PmbZ, no. 4977.

punished, tried and indicted the leaders of the Studites. One gets the impression that he sought and received permission from the imperial authorities for such a step.

It could be said that in the period 843–847, the policy of the imperial circles in ecclesiastical matters always coincided with the policy implemented by Patriarch Methodius. This suggests that Empress Theodora had complete confidence in Methodius and, therefore, after his election at the Council of 843, withdrew and chose not to interfere in church policy, leaving it entirely to him. Methodius was aware of the unreserved support of the empress and her associates and tried to keep that support and ensure he would not have to share it. A provision of the verdict on the detention of the Studites Naucratius and Athanasius can be interpreted in this sense: the one that prohibits the pair from sending their students to the *administrators and the imperial court*.[139] It seems that the best way for Methodius to maintain his advantage over the Studites was to prevent them from turning to the imperial court and seeking tolerance for their views and position. It can be said that, during the patriarchate of Methodius, between 11 March 843 and 14 June 847, the highest ecclesiastical and the highest state authorities in Byzantium worked in complete *symphony*.

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Patriarch Ignatius Between Conflicting Factions

About twenty days after the passing of Patriarch Methodius, on Sunday, 3 July 847, a new Patriarch of Constantinople was elected and ordained: the monk Ignatius,[1] the abbot of several monasteries he had founded on his family estates on the Princes' Islands, son of the former emperor Michael I Rangabe (811–813), grandson of his predecessor Nicephorus I (802–811) and younger brother of Stauracius (811). Born in 798/799 in Constantinople as *Nicetas*, he grew up at the imperial court with his grandfather, uncle and father. During the fall of Michael I and the usurpation of Leo the Armenian in July 813, when he was fourteen, Nicetas was castrated, permanently becoming ineligible to claim his father's inheritance, and tonsured under the name of *Ignatius*. He spent his monastic days with his family on the Princes' Islands—Plateia, Hyatrus and Terebinthus—which were his family's property and where he built a

[1] The date of the election and anointment of Ignatius as Patriarch of Constantinople is known from the information provided in the Synodicon Vetus, 159.11–13, which reports that Ignatius first sat on the patriarchal throne *for eleven years, four months and twenty days*, and it is known that he was deposed from his position on 23 November 858. On Patriarch Ignatius, cf. PmbZ, no. 2666.

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number of monasteries.[2] He rose through the church ranks, from anagnostes to priest, partially protected from iconoclastic persecutions, and provided refuge and hospitality to those fleeing from those persecutions.[3]

Election of Ignatius as Patriarch

Although he reportedly had *a good reputation for many years due to the grace of the priesthood* and *gained a good position for himself due to his great sincerity and faith in Christ Jesus*, and *because of that, he was praised by everyone*,[4] his influence in church circles of that time was meagre and his role in the events during the period of iconoclasm and Methodius' four-year patriarchate negligible and imperceptible. This naturally leads us to the reasons behind Ignatius' appointment to the patriarchal throne and the circumstances under which it happened.[5] His biographer, Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, writing more than half a century later, presents the election of Ignatius as patriarch as the result of quite an ordinary course of events. According to him, many competed for the leadership of the Church, but others gave up their candidacy *for various reasons*. Although he refused to accept the burden of the dignity, Ignatius, *nevertheless, through the action of the divine Spirit and the cooperation and election of God's archbishops, became worthy of the divine priesthood, and was enthroned on the throne of the Imperial City*. However, Nicetas David adds, before all the archbishops and the people, the empress wanted to know who was worthy of becoming the new patriarch, so she turned to Joannicius, who, prophetically, pointed to *Ignatius*.[6] Although this last claim is a figment of the imagination, because Joannicius died seven

[2] On the Prince's Islands and the local monasteries, cf. Janin 1953–1975 II, 61–76.

[3] Life of Ignatius, 4.18–20.2; PmbZ, no. 2666.

[4] Life of Ignatius, 20.33–22.4.

[5] Dvornik 1950, 49–50, believed that Ignatius was elected on the suggestion of the logothete Theoctistus, that the empress, wishing to avoid quarrels, decided not to convene a synod and only consulted with some of the most prominent representatives of the clergy and then simply appointed Ignatius the new patriarch. According to Dvornik, the election of Ignatius seemed like a victory for the faction he called *zealot*, but he was accepted by all the others. There is another interesting interpretation: that Ignatius was a former iconoclast who was chosen by Empress Theodora as Methodius' successor in order to attract steadfast iconoclasts and soften Methodius' overly harsh policy towards them, Karlin-Hayter 1977, 142, but it has no basis in the sources. Cf. also, Prieto Domínguez 2020, 273–274; Krausmüller 2021, 218–219.

[6] Life of Ignatius, 22.8–13.

months before Methodius, i.e., eight months before the election of Ignatius,[7] Nicetas David reveals what he wanted to hide in the previous sentences—that Empress Theodora had a decisive role in the election of the new patriarch. This intention becomes completely clear when we compare his account of the election of Ignatius—*by the action of the divine Spirit and the cooperation and election of God's bishops* with his description of the election of Methodius—*by God's appointment and the empress' cooperation*.[8] It is obvious that he is deliberately silent about the role of the empress in the election of Patriarch Ignatius and, on the contrary, emphasizes the role of the council of bishops who voted for and elected the patriarch according to the established procedure and the relevant canons.[9] He stresses this once again when he laments the decision of the Council of 861 to confirm Ignatius' deposition from the patriarchal throne because it was held non-canonically. On that occasion, Nicetas David writes, almost in desperation: *So who does not know that Ignatius was canonically and lawfully elected by the votes of all the archbishops together and with the consent of the entire Church?*[10] The *Synodicon Vetus*, from the end of the ninth century, also reports that Ignatius *canonically succeeded to the throne*.[11] However, emphasizing the canonicity of Ignatius' election by both Nicetas David the Paphlagonian and the *Synodicon Vetus* from the end of the ninth beginning of the tenth century was but a tendentious response to the accusations of his non-canonicity, presented in 858 and made official by the decisions of the aforementioned Council of 861.

Eleven years later, Ignatius was deposed from the patriarchal throne on 23 November 858, under circumstances that will be discussed later. His opponents found legal and canonical grounds to remove him in his allegedly non-canonical election as patriarch. On that occasion, he was officially accused of having ascended to the patriarchal throne *without election*,

[7] Dvornik 1950, 49–50, believes that Nicetas David invented this in order to refute the accusations against Ignatius that he had betrayed Methodius' policy, since it was well known that Joannicius had been a great supporter of Methodius.

[8] Life of Ignatius, 20.15–16.

[9] The legal election of the Patriarch of Constantinople was considered a procedure during which the bishops would choose three candidates and present them to the emperor, who would then select one of them and confirm his appointment as the new patriarch. A description of that procedure was recorded in the tenth century by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, Livre des cérémonies III, II, 14, 38. Cf. ODB I, 521 (A. Kazhdan, A.-M. Talbot).

[10] Life of Ignatius, 48.27–29.

[11] Synodicon Vetus, 157.1–3.

and "witnesses" were produced to confirm the accusation.[12] Ignatius' overthrow was confirmed at the Councils of 859 and 861 and an explanation was given for his non-canonical election. According to a fragmentary Latin translation of the conciliar acts of 861, Ignatius was accused by his opponents of having become the head of the church *without an election*.[13] Nicetas David's testimony in this regard is more extensive: Ignatius was accused in front of the Council that, *having been a hierarch for a little less than twelve years, he managed the church being ordained without an election* (ἀψηφίστως). In his case, the Council applied the provision of the Apostolic Canon 30: *If any bishop obtain possession of a church by the aid of the temporal powers, let him be deposed*.[14] Thus, already during the overthrow of Patriarch Ignatius, the accusation was made that he had been ordained as a patriarch without election and with the help of the secular authorities. Simply put, this means that he was appointed to the patriarchal position by an act of the secular authorities, in this specific case, of course, Empress Theodora. The mentioned allegation, for all its tendentiousness, still predates the later emphasis on the canonicity of Ignatius' election in the *Synodicon Vetus* and by Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, which, as already emphasized, was only a response to the same accusation. That said, it's hard to imagine that the accusation, malicious as it might have been, was entirely unfounded. At that time, the election of Ignatius as patriarch was still a recent memory. Bardas and Photius would have presumably sought another way to remove Ignatius if the claim about his non-canonical election had been completely unfounded. On the other hand, the Roman Church, when it later got involved in the matter concerning the deposed Ignatius and the "usurper" Photius, never accepted Photius' arguments about Ignatius' non-canonical election nor questioned the canonicity of his patriarchal position.

I think, however, that the premise about the direct participation and influence of Empress Theodora in the election of Patriarch Ignatius must

[12] Theognosti Libellus, 860 C–D.

[13] Deusdedit, 608.33–34.

[14] Apostles 30, Syntagma II, 37; Life of Ignatius, 48.13–16. According to Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, later on, Photius forced Ignatius to sign, with the symbol of the cross, the act of his own abdication, which was drawn up by Photius himself and which read: *I, Ignatius, the unworthy (bishop) of Constantinople, confess that I succeeded (to the throne) without election, and that for so many years I did not govern (the church) devotedly, but tyrannically*, Life of Ignatius, 52.23–29. Other sources that mention Ignatius' act of abdication do not report its content, cf. Grumel, Regestes, no. 455.

be accepted. She appointed him as the new head of the Church of Constantinople; whether a formal vote was then carried out by the hierarchs remains unclear, but is less significant. That he owed his position to the empress is unambiguously evidenced by the statement he made to Emperor Michael III, according to Nicetas David the Paflagonian, refusing to tonsure the empress and her daughters after they were deprived of participation in government in 856. On that occasion, Ignatius replied: *It is impossible for me to do that, because in the beginning, taking over the helm of the Church, I gave a written oath that I would never devise any malice and wrongdoing against your imperial authority.*[15] Why did Patriarch Ignatius, during his election and consecration in 847, give the empress *a written oath* to that effect?[16] There is no doubt that the empress stood behind his appointment and that she asked for something in return. Interestingly, Ignatius' oath is a promise that he would never take part in any conspiracies against Theodora's *imperial authority* or, in other words, would not interfere in political matters. If that was all the empress asked of him, it suggests that he was left to manage church affairs as he liked.

Therefore, it is apparent that Empress Theodora chose Ignatius to succeed Patriarch Methodius and that he owed that position to her. Another question is why he was her choice. The sources offer no direct information on this. However, the answer can be drawn from the overall policy he led during his first eleven-year-long administration of the Church of Constantinople, which, as we will see, betrays no traces of state interference. The fact that Ignatius was a monk with a long monastic career could guarantee Theodora that he would be accepted without resistance and that even the Studites would have no reason to protest, as they had done in the elections of patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus. Other advantages that made Ignatius a suitable candidate might have been his imperial descent and, above all, that he seems to have been outside of all the existing monastic and clerical factions, which clashed during the election of the

[15] Life of Ignatius, 26.27–31.

[16] According to a review of the history of the schism in the Church of Constantinople presented by the papal librarian Anastasius, which was sympathetic to Ignatius, in a letter to Pope Hadrian II written after the Council of 869/870, in which he presents the results and a brief prehistory of that council, it was customary for the patriarch to give such an oath to the emperor and empress—the patriarch, *according to custom, like some emperors and empresses, had sworn that he would never be included in any kind of conspiracy*, Gesta octavae synodis, 9. However, such a *custom* is not recorded in the Byzantine sources in any other enthronement of a patriarch.

patriarch at the Council of 843 and throughout Methodius' patriarchate. As such, he could be an objective judge who would look after the entire flock with equal pastoral care. In addition, the ideological underpinnings of his activity at the head of the Byzantine Church are very interesting, a very tenuous thread of which can be recognized in the few testimonies on Ignatius' gestures. Having ascended the patriarchal throne, Ignatius dared to send a bishop's omophorion (pallium), the sending of which by one bishop to another was a symbol of the canonical superiority of the former over the latter, to none other than the pope of Rome. This greatly offended the pope—at that time, the chair of St. Peter was occupied by Leo IV (847–855)—since the Apostolic See considered itself the head of all other churches.[17] During the Council of 861, Ignatius denied the role of supreme judges to the envoys of Pope Nicholas I (858–867), Zacharias and Radoald, saying that he was the patriarch who occupied *the throne of St. John the Apostle and St. Andrew, the first-called disciple of Christ*.[18] Both of these acts—one from the beginning of his patriarchate and the other shortly after his deposition—testify that Ignatius staunchly advocated the primacy of the Patriarchal See of the Imperial City of Constantine, even over the Apostolic See of Saint Peter.[19] The fervour with which he advocated this idea, at least until and during the council of 861, as well as some of his other moves, which will be discussed in more detail, reveals Ignatius as a rather strong personality and not a mere martyr figure, as his biographer Nicetas David the Paphlagonian would have us believe. Finally,

[17] Jaffé, Regesta, no. 2647.

[18] Deusdedit, 603.28–29.

[19] The idea of the Apostolic succession of the episcopal see of Constantinople and its connection to the Apostle Andrew the First-Called and his disciple Stachius was widely accepted in Byzantium by the end of the seventh century, cf. Dvornik 1958, 138–180, 223–238. In the ninth century, the origin of the Church of Constantinople is also linked to John the Theologian, as in Ignatius' above-mentioned speech and in a letter by Photius, ibidem, 238–244. Cf. also a *notitia episcopatuum*, in which the patriarchal throne of Constantinople is described as the throne *of the first-called apostle Andrew and the great theologian and evangelist and apostle John*, Parthey, Hieroclis Synecdemus, 5.21. It is also important to note that both examples of Ignatius' emphasis on the primacy of the Church of Constantinople come from independent sources and not from his life compiled by Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, who was himself a fervent supporter and representative of the same ideology, which is better reflected in his other works, cf. Dvornik 1958, 234–235. About Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, whose *Life of Ignatius*, although marked by a strong pro-Ignatian and anti-Photian tendency, is a valuable historical source, since its information often finds support in more contemporaneous sources, cf. Jenkins 1965, 241–247; Yannopoulos 1999, 599–602; Paschalidēs 1999; Treadgold 2013, 134–152.

Empress Theodora must have been very familiar with Ignatius' personality and views. Although the sources say nothing about their earlier contacts, there must have been some. The reason they are unknown to us certainly lies in the desire of the writers who cherished his memory to erase any trace of Empress Theodora's influence on the appointment of Ignatius as patriarch and emphasize the groundlessness of the accusations brought against him for that reason.

Ignatius' Policy Towards Former Iconoclasts and Studites

Along with the throne of Methodius, Ignatius also inherited the policy that Methodius had led in the four years of his patriarchate. The two issues he dealt with throughout that time had not yet received an epilogue, but Methodius, in his *Ecclesiastical Testament*, left guidelines for their resolution. The first—the question of the readmission into the church of priests ordained before 815 who later embraced the heresy of iconoclasm—gradually lost relevance. Towards the end of his life, Methodius changed his earlier policy and agreed that such clerics should be readmitted into the church only after a detailed examination of their religious views. With this, he removed the reason for opposition to his previous policy that existed among a large part of the clergy. At least on that issue, there was unanimity in the Church of Constantinople. In addition, as already pointed out, priests ordained before 815 must have been fewer and fewer every day. Thus, Ignatius was able to fully follow the guidelines from Methodius' *Ecclesiastical Testament* and to put an end to the matter without major upheavals and, finally, close the chapter on the second iconoclastic period.

As for the other central issue of Methodius' patriarchate—the *Studite Schism*—things were somewhat different. Until the very end of his life and office, Methodius remained steadfast in this matter. The Studites could only be accepted into church unity if they anathematized the writings of their teacher Theodore the Studite against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus. He clearly formulated that position in the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* and did not deviate from it, not even in the *Ecclesiastical Testament*. However, Ignatius does not seem to have followed Methodius' guidelines in the case of the Studites. As already explained, in 846, Methodius had the former abbot of the Studion Monastery Naukratius, together with Athanasius, the abbot of Sacudion Monastery, sentenced to

imprisonment in the Studion Monastery and forbade him to communicate with anyone except his disciples. According to sources of Studite origin, above all the *Life of Nicholas the Studite*, which does not mention his imprisonment, Naucratius lived to see the death of Methodius and the enthronement of Ignatius, and died the following 14 April, in 848. Before his death, he appointed Nicholas, in whose life these statements can be read, as his successor at the head of the Studion Monastery and the community of Studite monks.[20] It is usually thought that Patriarch Ignatius freed Naucratius the Studite from the imprisonment to which he had been condemned by Patriarch Methodius.[21] The cited passages from the *Life of Nicholas the Studite* point to such an inference. If Naucratius had the power to appoint Nicholas his successor and get that decision accepted and respected by the Studites, it seems that very little remained of the strict sanctions that Methodius had imposed on him. According to his biographer, Nicholas the Studite managed the Studion Monastery in peace and prosperity for the next three years, i.e., between 848 and 851.[22] Then he decided to leave the monastery and retreat into solitude in Phirmopolis. He was succeeded by Sophronius, an equally distinguished Studite. The same source reports that, on that occasion, Nicholas left his flock *in the presence of the hierarch*, which would have been Patriarch Ignatius.[23] When Abbot Sophronius died four years later, on 4 November 855, the Studites invited Nicholas to take over the management of their monastery and community again. He remained in this position until Patriarch Ignatius was deposed from the patriarchal throne on 23 November 858. Disagreeing with the development of the patriarchal authority, Nicholas followed Ignatius into exile to Praenetus in Bithynia,

[20] Vita Nicolai Studitae, 904 B–C. On Nicholas the Studite and his life, composed by the monk Michael the Studite, cf. PmbZ, no. 5576; ODB II, 1471 (A. Kazhdan); Prieto Domínguez 2020, 76–77, 308–314.

[21] PmbZ, no. 5230.

[22] Usually, the three-year period of Nicholas' administration of the Studion Monastery is dated to 846–849, PmbZ, no. 5576; ODB II, 1471 (A. Kazhdan), but with little reason, since he succeeded Naucratius only after the latter died in 848, Prieto Domínguez 2020, 311.

[23] Vita Nicolai Studitae, 904 C–905 B. Throughout this text, the term *hierarch* usually refers to the Patriarch of Constantinople. In any case, the Patriarch of Constantinople was *the hierarch* in whose direct jurisdiction the Studion Monastery lay. On Sophronius the Studite, cf. PmbZ, no. 6848, where it is assumed that he died on 3 November 853, after his administration of the monastery lasted from 849 to 853. This chronology is also flawed due to the circumstances explained in the previous note.

where his monastery had an estate.[24] It is obvious, therefore, that from 847 through 858, while Ignatius served as the patriarch, the Studite community lived in peace. Changes at the head of the monastery were the result of their internal relations and personal projects.[25] The likelihood—if not probability—that Ignatius freed Naucratius the Studite from captivity in 847, his presence at the abdication of Nicholas the Studite from the position of abbot in 851, and Nicholas' siding with Ignatius in 858 eloquently testify to the harmonious relations in that period between the patriarch Ignatius and the Studite leadership. Therefore, it could even be said that Ignatius was sympathetic to the Studites.

Notably, shortly after the death of Patriarch Methodius, all information about the *Studite Schism* disappears. The last to write in a strongly anti-Studite tradition was the monk Peter, the author of the first life of St. Joannicius, written around the time of Methodius' death. What followed was a thorough *rewriting of history*, as already discussed. Writings were composed to obscure the truth about the *Studite Schism* and their conflict with Patriarch Methodius; these events were simply omitted, and the problems that plagued Methodius' patriarchate were attributed to iconoclasm and its consequences. Soon the new life of St. Joannicius by the monk Sabbas appeared, completely ignoring the anti-Studite accounts given by the monk Peter.[26] Therefore, it is to this period that we should also date the first interpolations in the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, which had one provision quite clearly directed against the Studites—*to anathematize anyone who does not condemn everything that was said and written against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus*. The names of Patriarch Germanus (715–730, † 741) and Patriarch Methodius were added to this provision, giving it a completely different meaning—a general anti-iconoclastic sense instead of an anti-Studite one. To the works that reflect the tendency to cover up and forget the *Studite Schism*, which occurred during Ignatius' patriarchate, one should also add a second, the only preserved, *Life of Patriarch Methodius*, written by the same monk Sabbas also with the

[24] Vita Nicolai Studitae, 905 V–909 A; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 311.

[25] Some believe that Nicholas renounced the position of abbot for political reasons, ODB II, 1471 (A. Kazhdan).

[26] The monk Sabbas compiled a new *Life of St. Joannicius* around 855, at the persuasion of Joseph, abbot of the Antidion Monastery on the Bithynian Olympus, Laurent, Pierre d'Atrois, 15–16; Mango 1983, 394–395; PmbZ, no. 6447; Timotin 2010, 184–187; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 395–399. On the monk Sabbas, his life and rich literary activity, cf. Prieto Domínguez 2020, 391–427.

intention to eradicate the memory of the *Studite Schism* which is thought to have been present in the now lost first *life* of Patriarch Methodius, composed by Gregory Asbestas, from which only a paraphrase of a small fragment survives in the work *Thesaurus orthodoxae fidei* by Nicetas Choniates.[27] It could be said that, during the time of Patriarch Ignatius, after the troubles and persecutions they suffered under Patriarch Methodius, the Studites received amnesty and experienced a revival.

It is difficult, however, to say why Ignatius "rehabilitated" the Studites and, in particular, how his policy was related to the fact that he owed his election to the patriarchal throne to Empress Theodora. In the time of Patriarch Methodius, the attitude of the state, i.e. of the empress, towards the *Studite Schism* was not clearly explained, but, as we saw, she accepted the patriarch's policy. The position of the state on the Studite issue during the time of Patriarch Ignatius is also not clearly stated anywhere. It is difficult to say whether she supported the amnesty of the Studites or opposed it, but, considering that Ignatius implemented such a policy, it seems that she chose not to get personally involved in the decision-making process, leaving it all to church circles. Therefore, it could be concluded that, during the time of Methodius (843–847) and the first patriarchate of Ignatius (847–858), the state authorities did not directly supervise the internal affairs of the Church or interfere in them as long as those issues did not affect the broader strata of their subjects and officials and did not threaten the stability of the Empire. It was enough for the state authorities to have a loyal man on the patriarchal throne who would never *devise any malice and wrongdoing against imperial authority*, as Ignatius had sworn in writing upon his enthronement.

The Schism of Gregory Asbestas

The chief reason why the problems of Methodius' patriarchate were so quickly forgotten was new dissension within the Church of Constantinople. It was this rift that marked Ignatius' first tenure on the patriarchal throne. It was at the same time the root and seed of a new deep and long-lasting schism, which would mark the rest of Ignatius' life: the schism of Gregory Asbestas, Archbishop of Syracuse.

Gregory Asbestas, a Sicilian from Syracuse, a countryman and probably a disciple of Methodius, was, as has been said, ordained in 843–844 as the

[27] Nicetae Choniatae Thesauri, 281 D–284 A; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 410–424.

Archbishop-Metropolitan of Syracuse.[28] However, he soon created a problem for himself that would determine his path and actions in life from that point onwards. Namely, Patriarch Methodius sent a priest called Zacharias as his emissary to Rome. However, while he was in Syracuse, Archbishop Gregory ordained and consecrated him as the bishop of Taormina, a small town in Sicily. This was a breach of the canons, and Gregory was summoned to Constantinople to justify himself before Patriarch Methodius and then suspended from his position as archbishop.[29] Patriarch Methodius died in the meantime, and the final decision on Gregory's case had to be resolved by the new patriarch, Ignatius. During the anointment of the new patriarch in St. Sophia, on 3 July 847, Gregory offered to assist in the consecration rite. However, Ignatius firmly refused to allow Gregory to participate in the ceremony, arguing that Gregory's case should be investigated and his guilt determined, deeply offending Gregory. According to Ignatius' biographer, Nicetas David, he threw down the candlesticks he was holding and began insulting Ignatius in front of the whole congregation, shouting that they were bringing into the church *not a shepherd but a wolf*. Then he left the church. Several bishops stood by him—Peter of Sardis, Eulampius of Apameia and some others.[30] This incident heralded the beginning of a new schism in the Byzantine Church, which would mark the following epoch.

The consequence of the events of 3 July was the convening of a council at which Gregory of Syracuse and his followers, Peter of Sardis and Eulampius of Apameia, were stripped of their episcopal dignities and anathematized.[31] This happened either in 847 or 848.[32] Throughout

[28] On Gregory Asbestas, cf. PmbZ, no. 2480; Dagron, Traité, 340–347; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 410–424.

[29] Pseudo-Symeon, 671.1–5. According to Life of Ignatius, 36.16–20, Gregory appeared in Constantinople after he had been expelled from the *Roman Church*, because he was *acting outside the canons*. Dvornik 1950, 53–54, believes that the information about Gregory being called to account during Methodius' lifetime is incorrect, and that it is quite certain that Methodius would not have suspended him. Here Dvornik obviously has in mind the common Sicilian origin of Methodius and Gregory and their friendship, but this is unlikely to have had any influence when making decisions on observance of the canons.

[30] Life of Ignatius, 36.20–38.6; Gesta octavae synodis, 7–8; Stiernon 1967, 15–17.

[31] Life of Ignatius, 38.3–6; Gesta octavae synodis, 7–8, 428 B.

[32] In an anti-Photian text, a summary of the decisions of the Council of 869/870, written *thirty-four years* after Photius became patriarch, i.e., in 892, it is written that Photius had already been *anathematized for forty-five years*: thirty-four years since he first became patriarch and *eleven years before that*, i.e. from 847/848, because he was a supporter of Gregory

Ignatius' eleven-year-long first tenure on the patriarchal throne, the case of Gregory Asbestas and his followers remained a constant threat to the patriarch.[33] It is very possible that this was precisely the reason that pushed Ignatius into the arms of the Studites at the very beginning of his patriarchate, which led him to turn his back on the policy of his predecessor Methodius and the provisions of his *Ecclesiastical Testament*, and with that, to the "revision" of accounts in the sources, including the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy*, in order to erase anti-Studite tendencies. Despite their disagreement over the issue of Gregory's breach of the canons, Gregory Asbestas was a faithful follower of the departed patriarch and fully supported his anti-Studite policy. The oldest preserved *Life of Theodore the Studite* reports that the disciples of Gregory Asbestas mocked a bishop from Sardinia who sang the *Triodion* of Theodore the Studite, telling him that the chant was not composed as the rules dictated.[34] The condemnation of the views of Theodore the Studite against the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus, i.e., against the inadmissibility of appointing laymen to episcopal positions, was very close to Gregory Asbestas' heart. His attitude on this matter would become plain eleven years later with the example of Photius, whom Gregory himself would take through all six monastic and priestly ranks in six days from layman to bishop, that is, patriarch.

Ignatius' biographer Nicetas David the Paphlagonian writes that, in the eleven years of his first tenure, Ignatius tried to treat Gregory with respect. However, the latter "haunted the doorsteps" of high secular dignitaries and openly spoke against Ignatius, claiming that he was not even worthy of being called *a Christian*.[35] They could not accuse him of impiety or any canonical offenses, but Gregory and his supporters still found an excuse

Asbestas, Mansi, XVI, 452 A; Varona Codeso, Prieto Domínguez 2013, 114–115. Based on that, Grumel, Regestes, no. 445, believes that the synod at which Gregory was deposed and anathematized with his supporters took place in 847 and early 848. Dvornik 1950, 50–53, tried to move the dating of that council to 852/853, followed by Stiernon 1967, 19–20. Dagron, Traité, 343, rejects Dvornik's dating as unfounded and accepts that of V. Grumel. However, in PmbZ, no. 2480, Dvornik's opinion is accepted, while Prieto Domínguez 2020, 274–275, is undecided on the matter. It is my opinion that we should accept the mentioned chronology given in the source of 892, especially because it is also confirmed by Nicetas David's reports in Life of Ignatius, 38.7–16, that *for all eleven years of his first reign on the patriarchal throne*, Ignatius had no peace because of the actions of Gregory Asbestas against him.

[33] Life of Ignatius, 38.7–16.

[34] Vita Theodori Studitae B, 312 C–313 B.

[35] Life of Ignatius, 38.10–12.

for their hostile attitude towards him. They suspected him of *defiling the work of his predecessor, Methodius, the patriarch of holy memory*, whom Ignatius had not only respected but also solemnly celebrated the day of his passing (14 June) every year. However, Gregory and his supporters convinced all those *who burned, as if in noble fervour, around Methodius*, i.e., those to whom the memory of the departed patriarch was sacred, that Ignatius was *the destroyer of the same holy memory of Methodius.*[36] Although it is clear that Ignatius showed great and well-deserved respect for Methodius' legacy, his reconciliation with the Studites, Methodius' sworn enemies, nevertheless gave Gregory and his followers enough reason to accuse him of having betrayed the memory of the deceased patriarch. According to Nicetas David, however, Gregory's attacks on Ignatius at that time were best received *by Photius and his relatives.*[37] Photius, a high dignitary from a distinguished family,[38] would become one of the most loyal followers of Gregory Asbestas and one of the leaders of his movement.

Patriarch Ignatius and Rome

At the very beginning of his patriarchal tenure, Ignatius tried to establish good relations with the Apostolic See of Old Rome. This also shows his closeness with the Studites, who respected the pope of Rome as the first among equals in the Orthodox universe.[39] Relations with Rome had not

[36] Gesta octavae synodis, 8–9. The fact that Gregory Asbestas and his supporters accused Ignatius only of desecrating the memory of Methodius shows that the accusation about his non-canonical accession to the patriarchal throne had not yet been formulated and would not surface until the run-up to his overthrow in 858. However, this does not mean that his enthronement was completely canonical, but only that, during the reign of Empress Theodora, until the beginning of 856, even his opponents would not dare to accuse him of having come to the position by the will of the empress.

[37] Life of Ignatius, 38.10–14.

[38] Photius came from an extremely significant and respectable Constantinopolitan family—his father Sergius was the nephew of Patriarch Tarasius, and his mother Irene was related to the family of the Empress Theodora and the iconoclast Patriarch John the Grammarian. In the imperial service, he advanced to the position of *protasecretis*, and was also honoured with the dignity of *protospatharius*, which he held at the time he became patriarch, on 25 December 858. On Photius' family and its status in Constantinopolitan society, cf. Ahrweiler 1965, 348–363; Lemerle 1971, 177–182; Mango 1977, 133–140; PmbZ, no. 6253; Varona Codeso, Prieto Domínguez 2013, 115–148; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 344–348.

[39] The Studites were loyal to the old idea of the *five-headed Church* (Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem), which had been ardently advocated by Theodore the Studite himself, cf. Dvornik 1958, 168–171; Chrysos 2023, 155–156.

been good during the iconoclastic controversy of 815–843,[40] and it seems that the West was not familiar with the political and religious developments in Byzantium concerning the restoration of the cult of icons in 843,[41] until Patriarch Methodius sent a mission to Rome, but the leader of that mission, the priest Zacharias, as mentioned above, remained in Sicily and was consecrated bishop of Taormina by Gregory Asbestas. However, Ignatius' first step in establishing better relations with Rome was not well thought out. Namely, the patriarch sent the symbol of episcopal dignity, an omophorion (pallium) to the new pope, Leo IV (847–855), as Leo wrote in his reply, *with purity of soul and benevolence*. However, the pope had to refuse the gift because the Apostolic See, as *the teacher and head of all churches*, cannot receive *the pallium sent from another place, but instead sends it all over Europe to the one for whom it is intended*. Because of this, the pallium was sent back to the patriarch.[42] Given that the issue of Gregory Asbestas and the bishops deposed with him was not mentioned on this occasion, but would mark Constantinopolitan-Roman relations until the end of Ignatius' first pontificate, the event must have taken place in its early days.[43]

However, the sources tell a different story of the involvement of the Roman Church in resolving the dispute between Patriarch Ignatius and the deposed hierarchs from the faction of Gregory of Syracuse. In the letters he sent on 13 November 866, to Emperor Michael III and the clergy of the Byzantine Church, Pope Nicholas I (858–867) wrote that Gregory Asbestas had been deposed at the council held under Patriarch Ignatius. The patriarch had then asked the Apostolic See to agree with the verdict. However, the popes Leo and Benedict were reluctant to pass judgment, having heard the testimony of only one side, which is why they did not confirm the decision. In the meantime, Gregory sent his envoy Zacharias to persuade the pope not to confirm his dismissal.[44] Several years later, Bishop Stylianus of Neocaesaria offered a different version of the events in a letter to Pope Stephen V (885–891). According to him, after they were deposed and anathematized, Gregory, Eulampius and Peter were the first

[40] Stiernon 1967, 14–15; Nobble 2021, 538–561.

[41] Nobble 2021, 561.

[42] Jaffé, Regesta, no. 2647; Grumel, Regestes, no. 446; Stiernon 1967, 17–19. The ideological underpinnings of that act and Ignatius' intentions behind it have already been discussed.

[43] About this letter, cf. also Dvornik 1950, 52–53.

[44] Nicolai I epp., 499.39–500.11, 527.2–15.

to turn to Pope Leo through letters and messengers, *asking him for justice* (ζητοῦντες τὴν παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐκδίκησιν).[45] Then the pope wrote to Patriarch Ignatius to send an envoy to *Old Rome* in order to hear his side of the story about these schismatics. In response, the patriarch sent the monk Lazarus, a Khazar by birth, with letters *accurately presenting the case of Gregory*.[46] It was thus only at this point that the Roman Church became involved in the affairs of the Byzantine Church, an involvement that was to last for some time to come.[47]

From a letter of Pope Leo IV to Patriarch Ignatius, of which only the regest has survived, we learn that the patriarch informed him about the deposition of the three bishops. The pope received this news with disapproval and in the mentioned letter to the Patriarch pointed out that his predecessors had always turned to the Roman Pontiff in all *disagreements and disputes of their church*. In the end, the pope reproaches Ignatius for having deposed the bishops without his consent and warns that he should not have done so without consulting his envoys or letters.[48] After that, Patriarch Ignatius sent the monk Lazarus. However, when the monk Lazarus arrived in Rome, he found a new pope, Benedict III (855–858), on the throne of Saint Peter. This would mean that his arrival in Rome should be dated to 855 at the earliest. Lazarus brought with him the conclusions of the council where Gregory Asbestas and his followers had been dismissed and anathematized.[49] As Pope Nicholas testifies, contrary to the testimony of Stylianus of Neocaesaria, Pope Benedict III did not confirm those conclusions but wanted to hear the other side as well. Then Gregory Asbestas sent his envoy to Rome. It was Zacharias, Bishop of Taormina,

[45] Grumel, Regestes, no. 448, wrongly attributes that letter and mission to Patriarch Ignatius and equates it with the mission of monk Lazarus, which Ignatius sent after the pope wrote to him about the mission of the deposed bishops, about which, cf. further below.

[46] Mansi, XVI, 428 B–C.

[47] Nobble 2021, 561–565.

[48] Jaffé, Regesta, no. 2629. On that letter and its dating, cf. Grumel, Regestes, no. 447; Dvornik 1950, 51–53, 58–59.

[49] Mansi, XVI, 428 C; Deusdedit, 608.2–4. According to Liber pontificalis II, 147.22–24, Lazarus was an envoy *of the Constantinopolitan emperor Michael, son of Theophilus*. Empress Theodora is not mentioned there, so based on that, Lazarus' mission could possibly be dated to 856, after the overthrow of Theodora and the beginning of Michael's sole rule. About that mission and its dating, cf. also Grumel, Regestes, no. 448; Dvornik 1950, 59; Stiernon 1967, 19–21.

whose consecration to that position by Gregory had started the dispute.[50] However, in Rome, Zacharias not only pointed out the illegality of the deposition of Gregory and the other two bishops but, according to the acts of the Council of 861, preserved only in Latin translation in a canonical collection from the eleventh century, he also accused Ignatius of having illegally come to the patriarchal position—that he was appointed to it by the empress, not by the votes of the bishops.[51] It was the first open accusation of this kind against Ignatius, which was later taken as the canonical grounds for his overthrow in 858. Based on that, it can be said quite reliably that the mission of Bishop Zacharias to Rome took place after the overthrow of the empress on 15 March 856, when it became possible to expose such accusations. Having heard Gregory's side from Zacharias of Taormina, the pope did not make a decision but sent a letter to Ignatius, asking him to also send his legates again to answer the accusations that the opposing party had made through Zacharias.[52] According to Ignatius' testimony during his interrogation at the Council of 861, he received this letter from Pope Benedict III in July 858. However, he did not get a chance to reply because he was deposed soon after.[53] His overthrow led to a new controversy that burdened relations between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome, forcing the dispute over Gregory Asbestas aside, though, in fact, it continued through this new controversy. Nevertheless, that matter introduced a new factor into the internal relations of the Byzantine Church. That was the Church of Rome, which in the following years would directly and decisively influence the course of events in the Byzantine Church.

The Coup in Constantinople

While the conflicting factions within the Byzantine Church looked to the West, each expecting the judgment of Rome each in their own favour, profound changes were taking place on the political scene. Bardas, brother

[50] Nicolai I epp., 499.39–500.11, 527.2–15. This is the same mission of Gregory and the other deposed bishops, about which Stylianus of Neocaesaria writes, Mansi, XVI, 428 B–C, but, contrary to his claim, it did not precede the arrival of Ignatius' envoy Lazarus to Rome but followed it.

[51] Deusdedit, 608.33–35.

[52] Deusdedit, 604.1–5, 21–26.

[53] Deusdedit, 604.21–28. For more details, Dvornik 1950, 58–68.

of Empress Theodora and uncle of Emperor Michael, who had lived for too long in the shadow of the powerful logothete Theoctistus, decided to remove him and take over his role in the affairs of the state. By this time the emperor was already a young man, and it was necessary to ensure that he would soon assume the sovereign rule that rightfully belonged to him. However, Theodora and Theoctistus firmly—too firmly—retained power in their hands, leaving little room for the empress' brothers or her son—the emperor himself.

Because of this, Bardas approached other influential people in the empress' circle, *parakoimomenos* Damianus, of Slavic extraction, and *protospatharius* Theophanes Phalganus, saying that the emperor would neither *reign nor rule* while Theoctistus was at the empress' side. They also began spreading rumours that he intended to marry the empress and thus become the emperor, depriving young Michael of the throne. Theoctistus was killed by the conspirators on 20 November 855, and the empress was deeply affected by his death. Although the conspirators tried to come to an agreement with her, she remained unwavering in her condemnation of their act. Finally, four months after Theoctistus' death, on 15 March 856, the Senate of Constantinople (σύγκλητος) decided to make Emperor Michael III *an autocrat*, i.e. that he alone should take over the power he had shared with his mother and eldest sister Thecla, and to appoint Bardas the magister and domestic of the schools. Empress Theodora lost the power she had sovereignly held on behalf of her son for more than fourteen years. However, she was allowed to stay with her daughters at the imperial palace until they were forced to take the monastic veil more than two years later.[54]

After that, all the power in Constantinople lay in the hands of the young emperor Michael III and his uncle Bardas, now a magister and the domestic of the schools. With that, they also assumed control of church policy and related matters. In that field, they would prove much more assertive and energetic than Theodora herself.

[54] Symeon, 131.19–22; Genesius, IV.9–11; Theophanes Continuatus, IV.19–20; Pseudo-Symeon, 657.12–658.23; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 821.14–824.2; Vita Nicolai Studitae, 905 B; Life of Ignatius, 24.20–28–17; Vita Theodorae, 11.1–16; Varona Codeso 2009, 112–128. The chronology of the death of Theoctistus, based on the date of his memory recorded in the *Synaxarium of the Church of Constantinople*, Synaxarium CP, 244.16–18, is established by Halkin 1954, 11–14.

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Expansion of the Byzantine Church (856–867)

The Schism of Photius

The coup at the beginning of 856 brought the care of the Empire and the church into the hands of the young Emperor Michael III and his uncle, *magister* Bardas. This could not pass without consequences for the Byzantine Church. The removal of Theoctistus and the deprivation of power of Empress Theodora left Patriarch Ignatius without firm and reliable support. However, his position was not directly threatened by this—the new rulers had nothing against his personality. For more than two years after the coup, the patriarch remained in his position. Moreover, the information from the biography of Pope Benedict III in the *Liber pontificalis,* that the monk Lazarus the Chazar, who presented the views of Patriarch Ignatius in his dispute with the faction of Gregory of Asbestas to the said pope, came to Rome as an envoy of the emperor of Constantinople, Michael, the son of Theophilus, suggests that he was sent after Michael's assumption of power on 15 March 856. In that case, the imperial authority was siding with Ignatius in the aforementioned dispute, even after the coup. Ignatius himself, in his defence against the accusations he faced at the council where he was officially deprived of his patriarchal position at the end of 858, addressed the following words to the emperor: *If I am not a hierarch, neither are you an emperor nor are these bishops…, because you*

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are all the product of my unworthy hands and prayers.[1] The only occasion in which Ignatius had an opportunity to consecrate Emperor Michael III was when he took over the administration of the Empire in 856. Based on this, it may be concluded that there were no disagreements, at least initially, between the old patriarch and the new emperor. The troubles for Patriarch Ignatius only started when he came into a direct conflict with both magister Bardas and Emperor Michael.

The Fall of Ignatius and the Enthronement of Photius

The conflict between Patriarch Ignatius and Bardas was of a personal nature. Namely, rumours were spreading in Constantinople that Bardas was in an illicit relationship with his own daughter-in-law, the wife of his son, whose name is not known. When the matter was brought to him, the patriarch, guardian of the spiritual health of his flock, strongly reprimanded Bardas. At first he urged him to save his soul and abandon such inappropriate behaviour, and when the latter failed to repent, Ignatius felt compelled to take more drastic measures. On the Feast of the Epiphany, 6 January 858, he forbade Bardas communion, considering him unworthy of the Lord's Body. This mortally offended Bardas and became the cause of permanent enmity between the two men.[2] In response, Bardas immediately connected with Ignatius' enemies—Gregory Asbestas and his followers, among whom the *protasecretis* Photius already occupied a prominent place.[3] What the patriarch had done to Bardas was not insignificant. Prohibition from the Holy Sacrament of Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Christ, actually meant that the one upon whom such a

[1] …οὐχοῦν εἰ ἐγὼ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἀρχιερεύς, οὐδὲ σὺ βασιλεύς, οὐδ' οὗτοι ἐπίσκοποι… Πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς τῶν ἀναξίων μοῦ χειρῶν καὶ εὐχῶν ἐστε ἀποτέλεσμα…, Theognosti Libellus, 860 D.

[2] Vita Nicolai Studitae, 905 C–908 A; Life of Ignatius, 24.20–26.10; Gesta octavae synodis, 8–9; Mansi, XVI, 296 C–D; Genesius, IV.18; Theophanes Continuatus, IV.30; Symeon, 131.28; Pseudo-Symeon, 667.6–668.14; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 826.3–14; Grumel, Regestes, no. 449; Jenkins 1965, 245–246; Dvornik 1966, 7–22; PmbZ, no. 791; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 275–277. The *Life of Patriarch Ignatius* and the prehistory of the council of 869/870 of Anastasius the Librarian places Bardas' quarrel with Ignatius in the time before the overthrow of Empress Theodora. According to the *Life of Nicholas the Studite* and chroniclers from the tenth century, this happened after the overthrow of the empress, which is undoubtedly true.

[3] Gesta octavae synodis, 8–9.

ban was imposed was separated from the Church, i.e. excommunicated from the community of believers for a certain period of time. Excommunication (ἀφορισμός, excommunicatio) was one of the most severe punishments that the Church could impose on one of its members. Given such severity, it is quite understandable how deeply Bardas resented this measure,[4] and it is explanation enough for his subsequent antipathy towards the patriarch.

However, Bardas' enmity alone was not enough to threaten Ignatius. The patriarch's position was still not seriously shaken until he directly opposed Emperor Michael III himself. This is why, according to Nicetas David, from the moment he came into conflict with Ignatius, Bardas tried in every way possible to accuse the patriarch in front of the emperor, and bring the two into conflict.[5] In the end he found a way. Two and a half years after Empress Theodora had been deprived of her power, Michael, at Bardas' instigation, decided to remove her from the court, force her to become a nun, along with her daughters, and send her to a monastery.[6] He instructed Ignatius to perform the act of monastic ordination. However, Ignatius refused to do so, justifying himself by saying that when he ascended the patriarchal throne, he took *a written oath that he would never devise any malice and misdeed* against her imperial authority.[7] The empress was nevertheless made a nun and sent to the Carianou monastery. This now brought Ignatius into direct conflict with the emperor himself, or, from another point of view, brought the emperor into the anti-Ignatian camp of Bardas and the schismatics gathered around Gregory Asbestas. By order of the emperor, Ignatius was removed from the patriarchal throne in July 858 and sent into captivity on the island of Terebinthus, where his family estates and monasteries were located.[8] Immediately before that, Ignatius received the already mentioned letter from Pope Benedict III, by

[4] ODB I, 768 (A. Papadakis).

[5] Life of Ignatius, 26.8–10.

[6] Gesta octavae synodis, 8–9; Theognosti Libellus, 856 D–857 B; Life of Ignatius, 26.12–28.12; Symeon, 131–22; Pseudo-Symeon, 657.18–658.23; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 822.19–824.2; Varona Codeso 2009, 123–128.

[7] Life of Ignatius, 26.20–28.1; Gesta octavae synodis, 9.

[8] That this happened in July 858 is testified by Ignatius himself, speaking before the Roman legates at the council in 861, Deusdedit, 604.26–28. On the very event, cf. Life of Ignatius, 28.12–14; Gesta octavae synodis, 9; Synodicon Vetus, 157.5–8. According to Life of Ignatius, 28.1–17, Ignatius' banishment to Terebinthus is chronologically and causally linked to the appearance of a certain Gebon, a pretender to the imperial throne, about whom other sources know nothing, cf. PmbZ, no. 1942.

which the pope invited him to send his emissaries to Rome and present his defence against the accusations brought against him by Zacharias of Taormina, on behalf of the party of Gregory Asbestas. Being exiled, Ignatius was not able to respond to this papal letter.[9] However, after his banishment, and then his formal removal from the patriarchal throne, the case of Gregory Asbestas would be side-lined, and the case of Ignatius himself arose as the main topic in the relations between Rome and Constantinople.

In July 858, Ignatius had only been removed from the patriarchal throne and from Constantinople, and had not yet been formally deposed. Officially, he was still the patriarch of Constantinople. Ignatius took advantage of such a situation and forbade anyone but him to act in the church of Saint Sophia.[10] According to his biographer, Nicetas David, only three days after his expulsion, those *chosen from among the bishops* came to him in order to persuade him, *due to the current bad circumstances*, to give his written resignation from the patriarchal position. Since they achieved nothing, a few days later a delegation of bishops came to Ignatius again, but now accompanied by *patricians and the most respected among the judges*. Convincing him by all means, and even threatening physical violence, they again failed to achieve anything; Ignatius remained firm.[11] Describing these events, Nicetas David asks himself an interesting question,– *who were those bishops*, and then answers—*those who had sworn in written form to Ignatius and prayed to the same Holy Trinity*.[12] We learn, therefore, that they were those who, up to that point, had stood firm with Ignatius, and not the schismatics gathered around Gregory Asbestas. Apparently, a number of them, at the very beginning, had switched to the anti-Ignatian camp, which was now also the imperial camp, therefore, the most attractive and certainly the most powerful. It is entirely possible that they were persuaded, or forced, to take such a step by the state authorities, which would also be the case in further events related to Ignatius' overthrow.[13]

Since they could not force Ignatius to resign, the ruling circles of Constantinople had to think of a way to further implement their

[9] Deusdedit, 604.3–5, 21–28.

[10] Gesta octavae synodis, 9.

[11] Life of Ignatius, 28.18–30.2. The pressure on Ignatius to resign is also mentioned by Anastasius the Librarian, Gesta octavae synodis, 9.

[12] Life of Ignatius, 28.21–24.

[13] On that, cf. further.

intentions regarding the patriarchal throne. The sources clearly testify that the just-mentioned *ruling circles* had the main say and made all the decisions in the new circumstances in which the Church of Constantinople found itself. These were the men whom Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, as well as other sources, call *those around the emperor*, *the emperor's men* and the like.[14] There is no doubt that among them, the emperor's uncle Bardas, then still a *magister*, had the main say. Having tried many things to soften Ignatius, the emperor, Bardas and the highest state dignitaries held one or more meetings devoted to Ignatius' question and carefully considered what should be done further in that matter. After careful consideration, it was decided that Photius, *protospatharius* and imperial *protasecretis*, should be appointed as the new patriarch.[15] Therefore, it was only at this stage that the decision was made on who should replace Ignatius.

Since, despite all the pressures, Ignatius did not want to resign, the only way to enable the appointment of a new patriarch was to depose him. The decision on this, which would be legally binding, could only be made by the council of bishops. However, in order for such a decision to be made, there had to be a valid reason, i.e. the council of bishops could depose the former patriarch only if he was accused and convicted of a crime. Since everything was obviously very precisely planned, the state government convened a council of bishops, which, according to the compiler of the *Synodicon Vetus* from the end of the ninth century, was held in the imperial palace (ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ).[16] Ignatius was summoned to appear before the council to be tried. The accusation was already known—the same one that his opponents had posed against him ever since the overthrow of Empress Theodora in 856—that *he was appointed and ordained without election*. Ignatius was brought before the court by one deacon and one layman, although according to the canons it should have been done by two or three bishops. These brought witnesses, *ready to take an oath*, who accused him of *being appointed and ordained without election*. Ignatius did not

[14] Life of Ignatius, 32.24; Theognosti Libellus, 857 B –860 B.

[15] Life of Ignatius, 32.24–30. The words of Nicetas David: …οἱ παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως… πλεῖσθα καθ' ἑαυτοὺς συσκεψάμενοι, καὶ πᾶσαν κεκινηκότες βουλὴν, Φώτιον πρωτοσπαθάριόν τε ὄντα καὶ πρωτοασηκρῆτην, εἰς ἀρχιερέα τῆς βασιλίδος προχειρίζονται…, clearly testify that the ruling circles of Constantinople consulted among themselves and carefully considered the future of the Church of Constantinople, before deciding that Photius should be the one to replace Ignatius on the patriarchal throne.

[16] Synodicon Vetus, 157.8–10.

remain silent in the face of these accusations and fiercely defended himself, attacking the witnesses and questioning who they were and who believed them. He then condemned the emperor himself, declaring that there is no canon according to which the emperor should bring witnesses to accuse someone. The peak of Ignatius' anger was the already mentioned words addressed to the emperor: *If I am not a hierarch, neither are you an emperor nor are these bishops…, because you are all the product of my unworthy hands and prayers.* According to the document known as the *Libellus Ignatii*, which was compiled in his defence and which after the council of 861 the monk Theognostus took to Rome to Pope Nicholas I, on the same occasion Ignatius attacked also the candidate for his successor, Photius, by saying that he was a foreigner, of those who were excommunicated, who were suspended not only by the hierarchical throne of Constantinople but also by others (minding the Roman one) and forbidden to serve, then that he was *from the military and lay order*, and finally that he was too young and inexperienced, so that he cannot *become a shepherd before he was a sheep*.[17]

However, Ignatius' hard position was not shared by the metropolitans who made up the council, including those who were his supporters. As they themselves admitted at the council in 861, faced with two evils, the *emperor's anger* on the one hand and the *resentment of the people* on the other, they chose lesser—they bowed to the will of the emperor and his associates and agreed to overthrow Ignatius.[18] Obviously, it was more desirable and acceptable to cause discontent in the wider strata of society than to bring oneself into the emperor's disfavour. In this way, the state government, led by Emperor Michael III and Bardas, finally managed to put into practice their plan to depose Patriarch Ignatius, although he himself did not agree to resign even under such circumstances.[19] It happened

[17] Theognosti Libellus, 860 D–861 A.

[18] This information is recorded in *Libellus Ignatii*, Theognosti Libellus, 857 D–860 A, but it is not found in the fragmentary acts of the same council in the collection of Cardinal Deusdedit. The siding of the bishops with the emperor, i.e. Bardas in the moment that was decisive to Ignatius was also recorded in an anonymous anti-Photian writing from the last decades of the ninth century, Mansi, XVI, 441 B–C.

[19] Synodicon Vetus, 157.8–10. A pro-Photian text from the beginning of the tenth century, the *Life of St. Euthymius the Younger*, tells that Ignatius *stepped down from the throne and the church, either voluntarily or forced, and devoting himself to his own monastery, he submitted a statement of renunciation to the Church, considering that it is better to give oneself up to silence and peace with God than to bring trouble on oneself and one's neighbours, being at the mercy of those who rule*, Euthyme le Jeune, 24.22–32. Based on this data and his interpretation of data

on 23 November 858.[20] The next step according to the same plan was the installation of the *protasecretis* Photius as the new patriarch. On this issue, however, the Byzantine metropolitans showed a somewhat firmer attitude. They did not want to accept a man who would simply be imposed on them by the emperor, certainly bearing in mind the serious shortcomings of that man for the position of bishop that Ignatius had already stated, but they demanded that the established procedure be followed—that they choose three possible candidates, among whom the emperor would choose one. And indeed, the hierarchs chose three other candidates and persisted in that position for days. However, even on that occasion, their will was broken under the firm hand of the state authorities. Either by bribery or coercion, the vast majority of bishops agreed with the emperor's proposal to accept Photius as patriarch. Only five hierarchs remained steadfast, among them Metrophanes of Smyrna. Seeing how the situation was developing, the most they could do was to submit a statement to Photius to sign that he would never do, speak or listen to anything bad about Ignatius, that he would not persecute him and that he would always respect him as a father. According to the sources sympathetic to Ignatius, Photius did indeed sign such a statement.[21] Therefore, since it was a compromise, the most probable conclusion is that, at the council in the imperial palace at the end of November 858, Ignatius was overthrown from the patriarchal throne, but was not anathematized. After that, the metropolitans gathered in council, *reluctantly and forced by those who rule*, as Metrophanes of Smyrna lamented later, accepted Photius as the future patriarch.[22]

After that, the process of ordaining Photius as the new patriarch was started. That process began on 20 December 858, which means that by then all the conciliar debates described above had ended. Since he was a

from other sources, Dvornik 1950, 77–89, concludes that Ignatius resigned and invited the archbishops to elect a new patriarch. However, all relevant sources clearly testify against that thesis. *Life of St. Euthymius the Younger* reveals a very clear pro-Photian tendency, while the mentioned passage about Ignatius' abdication from the throne is very similar to the official version about Ignatius' abdication, which Photius provides in his letters to Pope Nicholas and the Eastern Patriarchs from 860, which will be discussed later.

[20] According to Life of Ignatius, 84.7–13, Ignatius was restored to the patriarchal throne on 23 November 867, the same day on which he had been deposed nine years earlier. Similarly, Synaxarium CP, 160.5–9, provides the information that Ignatius regained the patriarchal throne on the same day on which he was overthrown nine years earlier, but it does not provide the exact date.

[21] Theognosti Libellus, 861 A; Mansi, XVI, 416 A–C, 441 C; Life of Ignatius, 38.20–23.

[22] Mansi, XVI, 416 C

layman, Photius did not fulfil any conditions for the position of a bishop. Contrary to the canons, he passed all six ecclesiastical ranks in six days—on the first day he became a monk, on the second an anagnostes, on the third a subdeacon, on the fourth a deacon, on the fifth a priest, and on the sixth day he was solemnly ordained to the highest ecclesiastical rank—the rank of bishop, and introduced to the throne of the *archbishop of Constantinople New Rome and the ecumenical patriarch.* The day was Christmas, 25 December 858. On that occasion, he wished peace to the gathered people, but, as Ignatius' biographer Nicetas David the Paphlagonian points out, *he did not think anything worthy of true peace*. His ordination as patriarch was carried out, as the chief among those who witnessed the act, by none other than Gregory Asbestas, a man deposed by Patriarch Ignatius, and even suspended from performing ecclesiastical services by the Church of Rome.[23] This fact would become an additional argument for Ignatius and his party in the upcoming struggle against Photius.

The events surrounding the overthrow of Patriarch Ignatius and the enthronement of Photius were not well received in Byzantine society. What happened was exactly what the metropolitans who turned their backs on Ignatius in 858 characterized as *a lesser evil* than the emperor's anger—resentment among the clergy and the people. Many metropolitans, bishops, ordinary priests and monks, as well as the common people, sympathized with Ignatius' fate and began to demand that he be returned to his rightful position. The prelates sympathetic to Ignatius, according to the testimony of one of them, Metrophanes of Smyrna, held their council in the church of Saint Irene, where they anathematized Photius and declared him deposed, threatening anathema to anyone who would ever recognize Photius as a patriarch.[24] Faced with this, Photius convinced the emperor, with Bardas' help, to convene a council where Ignatius' question would be discussed once again.[25] According to Ignatius himself and Metrophanes of Smyrna, that council was held forty days, or according to

[23] Life of Ignatius, 32.30–36.15, 38.14–16; Gesta octavae synodis, 9. The fact that Photius was ordained by one who had been anathematized and deposed was also emphasized by Ignatius himself, through the monk Theognostus, Theognosti Libellus, 861 A. This was to be one of the main points in the condemnation brought against him by the Roman Council in 863, under the presidency of Pope Nicholas I, Nicolai I epp., 519.5 sq, 557.20 sq. On Photius' ordination as Patriarch of Constantinople, cf. Dvornik 1950, 92–96; Chrysos 2019a, 24–43, with reference to earlier opinions.

[24] Mansi, XVI, 416 C–D.

[25] Gesta octavae synodis, 9–10.

Nicetas David *not even two months* after Photius' enthronement, in any case, at the beginning of February 859, in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople.[26] At this, *first* council in the Church of the Holy Apostles, Ignatius was deposed *again*, i.e. the decision on his overthrow was confirmed, but he was also anathematized, based on the same accusations and testimony that he was *ordained as a patriarch without an election*. Ignatius himself was not present on that occasion. Of those bishops who were on his side, many again, partly through bribery, partly out of fear, agreed with the opposing side, and the written oath that he would no longer work against Ignatius, which Photius supposedly gave before they all agreed to his election, was declared false and invalid. Ignatius' overthrow and anathematization was proclaimed *publicly* (δημοσίως), since the rulers and the new patriarch hoped that in this way they would induce the people to turn their backs on the deposed and anathematized patriarch.[27] However, all this was still not enough without Ignatius' formal resignation, and that is why his opponents continued to try to force him to give it in every way. Sometime later, he himself was brought before the council, confronted with the so-called witnesses and bishops from the opposing camp and persuaded to resign, but his position remained unchanged.[28]

It was after this council that the cruel persecution of Ignatius and his supporters began. The deposed patriarch was first tortured for seven days, and then, together with the bishops who remained with him, he was chained and imprisoned in Numeri. From there, in August 859, he was sent to the remote island of Mytilene (Lesbos), while the other bishops were sent into exile in different parts of the Empire.[29] Metrophanes of

[26] Theognosti Libellus, 861 A–B; Mansi, XVI, 416 C–D; Life of Ignatius, 38.23 sq. According to Synodicon Vetus, 158.1–8, the council was held not in the Church of the Holy Apostles, but in Blacherne. Dvornik 1950, 101–107, confused by that information, believed that immediately after the council in the Church of the Holy Apostles, another, smaller council was held in Blahernae.

[27] Theognosti Libellus, 861 A–B; Mansi, XVI, 4 A, 416 C–D, 441 C–D; Life of Ignatius, 40.26–42.14. Dvornik 1950, 107, believed that Ignatius was not anathematized, *because there was no need for it*.

[28] Theognosti Libellus, 861 C–D.

[29] Theognosti Libellus, 861 D; Mansi, XVI, 416 D; Synodicon Vetus, 158.1–8. Life of Ignatius, 40.1–25, holds that Ignatius from Terebinthus was first transferred to Hieria, where he also had family estates, from there to Promotus, and only then to Numera and Mytilene. It is possible that his transfer from Terebinthus to Hieria and Promotus occurred before the council of February 859, i.e. after the council at which Photius was enthroned and gave a promise not to persecute Ignatius, in December 858, and that this was the reason why

Smyrna was sent even to distant Cherson in the Crimea, where he stayed in the winter of 860/861, and where he met Constantine the Philosopher, who was then in Cherson on his way to the court of the Khazar khagan.[30] Photius' supporters were installed in the places of the deposed metropolitans.[31]

Therefore, after a little less than eleven and a half years, Ignatius was overthrown from the patriarchal throne of the City of Constantine, so that Photius, *protospatharius* and *protasecretis*, a layman, but one of the most learned men of his time, was raised upon it. It is quite clear that he was brought to that position by the will of the state authorities, i.e. Emperor Michael himself and magister Bardas. Pro-Ignatian sources that are not in favour of him do not miss the opportunity to emphasize this. Metrophanes of Smyrna writes that Photius was not elected by the bishops, but was simply appointed *by the one who ruled together with the emperor* (τοῦ παραδυναστεύοντος).[32] Anastasius the Librarian attributes all the credit, that is, the *blame*, for Photius' appointment to Bardas, and an anonymous author of a short text about the *Photian schism* writes similarly.[33] A little later, Nicetas David the Paphlagonian describes how Photius, with the help of Bardas and secular rulers, uncanonically and tyrannically occupied the throne of the church.[34]

However, although his opponents emphasized that he had always longed for the patriarchal throne,[35] and later even presented the whole matter as if, in fact, Photius had used the state power to get hold of the

part of the bishops and the people stood up in Ignatius' defence, which led to the organization of a council in the Church of St. Irene and to Photius' condemnation, which is why Photius then convened the *first* council in the Church of the Holy Apostles. Nicetas David, by the way, places the council in the Church of the Holy Apostles during Ignatius' stay in Mytilene, Life of Ignatius, 40.26–29, whose beginning he dates to August 859. However, the testimony of Ignatius himself, which was presented in Rome after 861 by the monk Theognostus, that the council was held *forty days* after Photius' enthronement, and by Metropolitan Metrophanes, that Ignatius was exiled to Mytilene after the mentioned council, seems more accurate. On the persecution of Ignatius' supporters, cf. Hergenröther 1867–1869 I, 392–405; Dvornik 1950, 107–115. On the literary activity of Ignatius' circle, cf. Prieto Domínguez 2020, 273–329, on Metrophanes of Smyrna, ibidem, 295–302.

[30] Anastasii Bibliothecarii epp., 437.5–18.

[31] Dvornik 1950, 107–108. On Photius' supporters and their literary activity, cf. Prieto Domínguez 2020, 355–390.

[32] Mansi, XVI, 416 A–B.

[33] Gesta octavae synodis, 9; Mansi, XVI, 441 B–C.

[34] Life of Ignatius, 48.30–50.1.

[35] Life of Ignatius, 32.30–36.15.

coveted office,[36] based on the testimonies of Photius himself, it can be concluded that this was not quite the case.[37] In the letters that he sent to Pope Nicholas I and the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem in the spring of 860, after he was confirmed in his position, in which he actually informs them that he is now the patriarch of Constantinople,[38] Photius speaks of his enthronement as something that was imposed on him by force. Although he himself points out that since he was a boy he had longed to become a monk, which he could not achieve because he was distracted by *worldly thoughts and the civil dignities that the imperial hand and imperial will granted him*,[39] he still writes that *the dignity of a hierarch* represented *a terrible yoke* for him and that he had never found the courage to accept it.[40] His ancient desire to *bring his life to an end freed by silence from the things and noise of life*,[41] i.e. to become a monk, does not contradict his aversion to the position of a prelate. The mentioned place indicates that he dreamed of spending his old age in monastic silence, and not of becoming a prelate. Circumstances dictated that he be ordained a monk earlier than he desired, so that only five days later he could be made a prelate.

The way in which he was designated as the future patriarch of Constantinople, which happened, as detailed above, at the consultation of the emperor and the holders of the highest state power, at the end of the summer or during the autumn of 858, the way in which he was then accepted by the other bishops, and his position in all this, Photius explains in both the mentioned letters. Since his predecessor Ignatius, according to

[36] Nicetas David even writes that Photius took the ecclesiastical throne *using Bardas and secular rulers as collaborators* (…Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ Φώτιος μᾶλλον τῷ τε δεινῷ Βάρδᾳ καὶ τοῖς κοσμικοῖς ἄρχουσι χρησαμένος συνεργοῖς…), Life of Ignatius, 48.30–50.1.

[37] Dvornik 1950, 91–96, explains Photius' election as patriarch in 858 by the fact that he was a *homo novus*, who was not involved in the previous conflicts between the factions that he calls *extremists* and *moderates*, and that as such he represented a compromise solution between the two, in order to ensure internal peace in the Church. However, could it be true if we follow the testimony of Nicetas David and other sources, that he was close to the group of Gregory Asbestas, Ignatius' opponents? Varona Codeso, Prieto Domínguez 2013, 138–139, believe that Photius was recommended for the patriarchal throne primarily by his origin and the multigenerational kinship of his family with the most powerful families of Constantinople, including the imperial ones.

[38] Prieto Domínguez 2020, 291–293.

[39] Photii epp., 288.15–21, 289.48–60.

[40] Photii epp., 288.9–10, 20–21.

[41] Photii epp., 288.15–17.

the official version of events, which was valid during Photius' tenure, *stepped down from the bishop's dignity*,[42] everybody asked for *a shepherd who would be able to connect the disjointed members of the church, and to erase the discord in matters*, since then there ruled in the church *different and all kinds of movements and turmoil*.[43] At the council of bishops that followed, which is certainly the one at which Ignatius was formally deposed, in November or December 858, the emperor himself imposed on the bishops to request that Photius *receive the burden of governing the church*, even *if he himself does not want it*. In this way, he was *forced to accept the yoke of the position of hierarch*.[44] On that occasion, Photius writes, the emperor himself, whom he considers to be *virtuous and Christ-loving*, *just* and *philanthropic* so much so that *none of those who reigned before him are equal to him in terms of fairness*, appeared to him to be *inhumane, violent and extremely terrible*.[45] Faced with this, Photius was deeply saddened. He addressed the assembled bishops, pleading with them not to bow down to force, to choose another, he begged them to help him in any other way. No one was to hear him, because all the prelates were apparently forced to obey the will of the emperor.[46] Photius refused to accept the appointment *for many days*, but since the secular authorities *did not give up on coercion, the wish of the majority* prevailed, as he himself expressed it.[47] Finally, he had to agree to the will of the council, which was actually the emperor's will and the will of those around him, above all Bardas. After that, there were negotiations with the bishops who supported the deposed Ignatius and a compromise with them, which has already been discussed, and finally Photius was made a monk on December 20, and five days later, a patriarch, on Christmas 858.

What he wrote in 860 to Pope Nicholas and the Eastern patriarchs, about not wanting *the yoke of the position of hierarch* and being *forced* to accept it, is more than simple phraseology, and rather expresses his heartfelt feelings on the matter. This is particularly well shown in another letter by Photius to Pope Nicholas, sent in August or September 861. Photius wrote this letter after the *second* council in the Church of the Holy Apostles, in the spring of 861, which will be discussed later, and in response

[42] Photii epp., 288.46–47, 289.65–66.
[43] Photii epp., 289.66–69.
[44] Photii epp., 288.47–60, 289.70–72.
[45] Photii epp., 288.49–53.
[46] Photii epp., 288.61–70, 289.72–87.
[47] Photii epp., 289.74–76.

to the Pope's letter of 25 September 860, which was a response to the above-mentioned first letter of Photius. In that second letter, in which he presents his defence against the Pope's accusations, Photius writes in great detail and explicitly, with noticeable emotional charge, about how he experienced being appointed patriarch of Constantinople. He writes that a yoke was imposed on him unwillingly, he endured violence, he was subjected to evil, he was elected with his head bowed, he was ordained crying, sobbing… He also points out that *everyone knows this*.[48] The most interesting and impressive place, which perhaps tells the most about how he really felt when he became the patriarch, is where he writes the following: *I lost a peaceful life. I lost the sweetness of peace. I also lost fame, because the loss of worldly fame is really difficult for some people. I lost the dear silence, the clean and pleasant presence of loved ones, a safe, innocent and untroubled residence*.[49] Thus, Photius experienced his enthronement as the patriarch of Constantinople as a loss of almost everything that had fulfilled him until then. There he particularly emphasizes *worldly fame*, by which he certainly means his high rank in the imperial service, but, it is possible, also his place within the intellectual circle of the School of Magnaura, which had brought him the exalted reputation, which, among other things, recommended him for the position of patriarch. He also points out that he is deprived of the *clean and pleasant presence of his loved ones*, and that because of all he is shedding *springs of tears*.[50] Having pointed out what he had to sacrifice, Photius points out to the pope what befell him in return. He already knew, he writes, how problematic and full of worries and troubles the bishop's throne of Constantinople was. He knew the dissatisfaction and licentiousness of the Constantinopolitan crowd, their inveterate quarrelling, ill-will, uprisings, rebellions, pressure on those who were placed in positions of authority, and the general disorder in its management where everyone pulls to his own side, etc.[51]

I am of the opinion, therefore, that there is no reason not to accept the testimony of Photius himself that he was appointed as patriarch of Constantinople by force and that he was not entirely enthusiastic about it. He was brought to that position by the decision of the representatives of the highest authority—Emperor Michael III himself and his uncle Bardas.

[48] Photii epp., 290.34–49.
[49] Photii epp., 290.49–52.
[50] Photii epp., 290.82–83.
[51] Photii epp., 290.83–96.

It is not clear from the sources which of the two had a greater role in this. The sources mainly highlight Bardas. Certainly all decisions were officially the emperor's, and Bardas stood behind them as much as his personality stood behind any other decision of the young emperor during his formal self-rule. There were several reasons why Photius was appointed as the new patriarch. Photius came from a very prominent and respectable Constantinopolitan family, with a significant place at the very top of the capital's society and strong connections within it. Like his brothers and distant relatives, he occupied high court dignities and had made considerable progress in the imperial service. In addition to all that, he belonged to that narrow intellectual circle that Bardas himself formed around the School of Magnaura, and was one of its most respected members.[52] It was that intellectual circle that Bardas intended to rely on in all important matters of religious and cultural policy that the Empire was to pursue, both inside and outside its borders. It was precisely in this field that the Empire faced great challenges at the time. The theological dispute with Muslim scholars, which will be discussed in more detail, that began after Michael III and Bardas took over the administration of the state in 856, was maintained through the theological treatises and epistles of Nicetas of Byzantium, and ended with a discussion at the caliph's court in late 857 or early 858, in which the Christian and Roman side was represented by Constantine the Philosopher, a student of Photius. It was, therefore, quite natural to entrust the management of the church to someone who belonged to that circle. As a member of the intellectual circle and secular elite, Photius was a stranger within the episcopate, but he had already become connected with the group of bishops, led by Gregory Asbestas, who had been in conflict with Ignatius since 847. After his conflict with Ignatius on 6 January 858, Bardas himself had sided with that group, and when Ignatius fell, it was logical that someone from it should replace him. This circumstance also, together with all the above, determined Photius as the appropriate choice.

On the other hand, the fact that they now had someone from their inner circle at the head of the church was assurance enough for the emperor and Bardas for another aspect of their policy. They believed that in this way they would be able to manage the church smoothly and that all

[52] On the School of Magnaura, cf. Fuchs 1964, 18–22; Lemerle 1971, 158–175; Speck 1974, 1–21; Wilson 1996, 79–147; Markopoulos 2008, 785–795; Varona Codeso 2009, 141–152.

the decision-making levers in church affairs would be in their hands. Ignatius proved to be too disobedient and self-willed and this was his great flaw, which after two years of *peaceful coexistence* with the new regime finally cost him the bishop's throne and brought him many troubles. Photius accepted the position that was imposed on him by force, but as a man of great abilities, he quickly got used to his new role and began to perform his new duties very zealously. He soon showed that he had no intention of just blindly following the orders of the secular authorities and conflict soon arose between him and Bardas. In an epistle sent to the curopalates Bardas, which is usually dated to the time of the *first* council in the Church of the Holy Apostles, in February 859, but which apparently had nothing to do with the question of Ignatius and his supporters, as its publishers and previous commentators believe,[53] Photius writes that he was *deceived, forced, dishonoured, the victim of a conspiracy*, that he suffered great injustices and punishments, and he says that Bardas was *the chief instigator of those injustices.*[54] He complains that *half of his power is being taken away from him* and that he cannot function without that half. Because of this, he even threatens to quit the episcopal throne.[55] It is not clear to which events Photius is referring, but it is clear that there were significant disagreements between him and Bardas in the first years of his pontificate. However, until Bardas' death, there would be no further disputes, and the secular and spiritual authorities would act in harmony.

At this point, we should refer to the question of the canonicity of Photius' election. Photius was a layman. During his election and ordination as patriarch, he went through all six ecclesiastical ranks within six days. However, this fact was not what earned him enemies in the ranks of the Byzantine Church. He was most reproached for the fact that he came to the position of patriarch with the help of the imperial authority, but his main fault was that, according to them, he illegally usurped the position still rightfully belonging to Ignatius. They considered him simply a usurper, an *intruder* (pervasor), or figuratively an *adulterer* (μοιχός, adulter).[56] Even the council of Ignatius' supporters in the Church of St.

[53] Photii epp., 3; Hergenröther 1867–1869 I, 388–392; Grumel, Regestes, no. 470; Dvornik 1950, 96–97. The only thing that is certain is that the epistle was written at the earliest in 859, when the then *magister* Bardas received the dignity of *curopolates* from Emperor Michael III, ODB I, 255 (P. A. Hollingsworth, A. Cutler); PmbZ, no. 791.

[54] Photii epp., 3, especially ll. 6–7, 28–29.

[55] Photii epp., 3.31–81.

[56] Mansi, XVI, 416 A. Cf. Dvornik 1950, 153–154.

Irene in early 859 did not mention Photius' elevation from the rank of layman to the position of bishop, but on that occasion only condemned him for breaking his written promise not to persecute Ignatius, anathematized and declared him deposed, and threatened anathema to each of the present bishops who ever recognized him as a patriarch.[57] Photius' lack of ecclesiastical rank was only mentioned as an obstacle to the position of bishop by Ignatius himself, at the council where he was overthrown, at the end of 858, before Photius' enthronement, and that only as one of the obstacles.[58] In the Byzantine environment, quite understandably, such a thesis could not serve as a basis for an accusation against anyone. Before Photius, the patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus had been ordained in the same way, as laymen they became bishops, just like Photius passing all church ranks in six days.[59] Theodore the Studite and his followers were against them and against appointing bishops in such a way. Because of this, Patriarch Methodius clashed with the Studites and excommunicated them from the church. All of this was written in detail in one of the earlier chapters, where it was pointed out that Patriarch Methodius included into the *Synodicon of Orthodoxy* a provision on the anathematization of the aforementioned positions against Patriarchs Tarasius and Nicephorus, which in practice meant condemning anyone who disputed the right of a layman to be elected a bishop. Therefore, had anyone in Constantinople raised his voice against Photius, pointing out that as a layman he had no right to become a bishop, he would have put himself in the situation of becoming a schismatic himself, because he would have practically followed the path of the condemned Studites, at a time when the memory of the *Studite Schism*, albeit suppressed to a degree, still had to be very much alive. Therefore, at the time of Photius' enthronement, it was not considered illegal to ordain a layman as a bishop. The thesis about the illegality of Photius' position because he became a bishop as a layman was actually put forward and strengthened by Pope Nicholas I, in his letters to Emperor Michael and Photius from 25 September 860, which were brought by his legates to the *second* council in the Church of the Holy Apostles, in spring of 861. There the pope refers to the "thirteenth" canon of the local council of Serdica in 343, which sets certain conditions for the election of

[57] Mansi, XVI, 416 C–D.
[58] Theognosti Libellus, 861 A.
[59] Cf. chapter *Challenges of Methodius' patriarchate*.

bishops from among the laity, which the popes then interpreted too rigidly, assuming that bishops cannot be elected from among the laity.[60] The pope constantly insisted on this thesis even later.

Intervention of Rome

The delegation consisted of Metropolitan Methodius of Gangra, Bishop Samuel of Chonae, two bishops whom Ignatius had deposed for collaborating with Gregory Asbestas—Zacharias of Taormina and Theophilus of Amorium, and, as the emperor's personal envoy, *protospatharius* Arsaber. They took rich gifts to Rome, as well as the emperor's and Photius' letters to the pope.[61] The emperor's letter has not been preserved, but its content can be deduced on the basis of the pope's reply, drawn up on 25 September 860, as well as of the note about the emperor's delegation in the biography of Nicholas I in the *Liber pontificalis*. The emperor asked the pope to send his emissaries to Constantinople *to deal with the issue of iconoclasts*, but also to give his word in the matter of Ignatius' overthrow and Photius' enthronement, *hoping that the verdict of the Apostolic See would condemn Ignatius and confirm Photius in his position*.[62] In the same words, that he

[60] Nicolai I epp., 434.30–436.21; 440.7–16; Chrysos 2019a, 27–28. In question, however, is not the thirteenth, but the tenth canon of the council of Serdica, cf. Sardica 10, Syntagma III, 256–257. That canon, in fact, does not prohibit laymen from being elected as bishops, but only determines that whoever is elected as a bishop from *a civil office*, rich or learned, must first go through all the lower priestly ranks and spend *enough time* in each of them, in order to show whether he is worthy of episcopal office. Exactly how much time is not specified in the canon itself. Cf. Milaš 1895–1896 II, 117–119. From the point of view of the strict interpretation of that canon, the choice of Photius, as well as Tarasius and Nicephorus before him, was not disputed, because they had passed through all the lower ranks before they were ordained to the episcopate, regardless of the fact that in each of them they had only spent one day.

[61] Liber pontificalis II, 154.21–155.10, 158.15–27; Life of Ignatius, 42.15–31; Gesta octavae synodis, 10; Photii epp., no. 288; Nicolai I epp., 458.36–459.4, 505.31–34, 513.13–19; Dvornik 1950, 116–124.

[62] Liber pontificalis II, 155.1–5; Nicolai I epp., 433.15–438.24. Dvornik 1950, 122–123, believes that the issue of iconoclasts was actually the only reason why Emperor Michael requested the presence of papal envoys in Constantinople, and he considers this a confirmation of his position on the survival of the iconoclast heresy even at that time, Dvornik 1950, 116; Dvornik 1953, 68–97. Montinaro 2020, 349–356, also believes that iconoclasts too were condemned at the council of 861. However, the issue of iconoclasts was certainly not the main reason for calling the Roman legates to Constantinople, but rather the need to confirm Ignatius' overthrow. The issue of iconoclasts would have been touched upon only in

hoped to *make the overthrow of Ignatius confirmed by the Roman hand*, the background of sending of the mission to Rome is described by Nicetas David and the compiler of the *Synodicon Vetus*, with the fact that they attribute the initiative in this to Photius, and not to the emperor.[63] Things are presented similarly by Anastasius the Librarian, who also assigns the main role to Photius.[64] However, from the testimony of the *Liber pontificalis* it is clear that the mentioned lines were in the emperor's letter, and the pope responded to them in a letter addressed to the emperor. Photius' letter, in contrast, contains only the description of the manner in which he came to the patriarchal throne which has already been discussed in this chapter, a dogmatic exposition of the Creed, and the Seven Ecumenical Councils.[65] It was, therefore, an ordinary epistle by which Photius announced that he was now occupying the throne of the Church of Constantinople (*epistula inauguralis*), which he sent at the same time to the patriarchs of the eastern churches—Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.[66] In both of these epistles, Photius also writes about the fate of his predecessor Ignatius. Hiding the truth, he writes to the heads of the Roman and Eastern churches that Ignatius himself *has stepped down from dignity*.[67] According to Nicetas David, Photius wrote to the pope also that the cause of Ignatius' retreat was that he was *overcome by old age and illness*, so that he had taken refuge at the family estate and monastery, where he enjoyed the honour and care of those who rule and of the whole city and church.[68] However, since those words are not in Photius' epistle itself, it is possible that they were presented to the pope orally by the envoys themselves, who were all friends and supporters of Photius, that is, opponents of Ignatius, at least when it comes to the spiritual members of the delegation. In his answer to Photius of 25 September 860, which is very short compared to his answer to the emperor on the same occasion, the

passing. However, among the canons adopted at the council in its second, dogmatic-disciplinary part, there is none that concerns iconoclasts. For the mentioned canons, cf. Protodeutera, Syntagma II, 647–704; COGD 4.1, 9–22 (ed. F. Lauritzen).

[63] Life of Ignatius, 42.19–21; Synodicon Vetus, 159.1–5.

[64] Gesta octavae synodis, 10.

[65] Photii epp., 288.1–185.

[66] Photii epp., 289,1–95. In these two epistles, the layout of the matter in the first part of the exposition is the same, with only small differences in the text itself, while the second part of the exposition, the dogmatic one, is completely identical.

[67] Photii epp., 288.46–47, 289.65–66.

[68] Life of Ignatius, 42.23–28.

pope writes only about the problem of the canonicity of Photius' election, not wanting to go into other related problems at all.[69]

I am of the opinion that the initiative for sending an embassy to Rome in 859/860 in any case came from Emperor Michael III or the *curopalates* Bardas, who stood behind him, i.e. from the bearers of state authority, and that Photius played only the role they assigned to him. I believe that the reason which led them to bring an internal dispute of the Church of Constantinople to the Roman pope was the same one that had led to the holding of the *first* council in the Church of the Holy Apostles, in February 859. The council was convened, even though Ignatius had already been deposed at a council of bishops, so that he would be anathemized and thus presented in a negative light to the clergy and the people who were warming to his cause. Clearly this move did not bear fruit, and when they realized it, almost a whole year later, the Constantinopolitan authorities reached for additional means. They turned to Rome, hoping that with the judgment of the Apostolic See, the condemnation and anathema against Ignatius would be strengthened and definitely established, just as is reported by the author of the *Liber pontificalis* and Nicetas David the Paphlagonian. It is possible that, when considering this step, they were guided by the text of the third canon of the local council of Serdica from 343, which prescribes that, if a bishop is condemned for an offence, and if he believes himself unjustly condemned, the bishops who condemned him should appeal to the bishop of Rome, so that the trial could be repeated, and Rome should send men to investigate the case.[70] It was for this reason that the Byzantine authorities turned to Pope Nicholas I in 859/860, but the decision led to complications which probably could not have been foreseen at the time, and turned Pope Nicholas and the Church of Rome into irreconcilable opponents. Although he was not aware of the full truth surrounding events in Constantinople and the intentions of the Byzantine side,[71] the pope nevertheless read and understood well what was written in the letters sent to him by the emperor and Photius.

In his answers to the letter of the emperor and Photius, composed on 25 September 860, the pope clearly expresses his position.[72] In his opinion, Ignatius had been *deprived of his honour without the consent of the*

[69] Nicolai I epp., 440.1–22.
[70] Sardica 3, Syntagma III, 233–234.
[71] Liber pontificalis II, 155.5–6.
[72] Chrysos 2018a, 319–323.

Roman Pontiff,[73] which meant that such an act was illegal. Second, Photius was *from the ranks of the laity* immediately consecrated as a bishop, which, according to the pope, was also uncanonical.[74] He found support for both these positions in the extreme interpretation of the fifth and tenth canons of the local council of Serdica in 343. According to the fifth canon of this council, a bishop condemned and deposed by the bishops of his diocese had the right to appeal to the Roman bishop, who would stand up for him and ask for the charges to be reconsidered.[75] However, the council of Serdica was a regional council of ecclesiastical dioceses that were under the jurisdiction of the Roman bishop, not an ecumenical one, and the local council of Carthage in 419 had already explicitly indicated this and challenged the Roman pope's right to apply the provision to the entire church. After that, the popes themselves had refrained from citing it, until the time of Nicholas I, when the extreme interpretation was renewed.[76] According to the tenth canon of the same council, which the pope mistakenly referred to as the thirteenth, a rich or learned man of the lay class, in order to become a bishop, had first to pass through all the lower ecclesiastical ranks, and spend *enough time in each of them*, although it was not specified how long.[77] Later, the popes interpreted this canon too strictly, considering it unacceptable for someone to rise from layman to bishop in a short time. All in all, the pope's position was that he could not agree to Ignatius' dethronement and Photius' enthronement until he was better acquainted with the situation. That is why he agreed to send the requested envoys to Constantinople, so that they would report to him objectively. He appointed two of his suffragan bishops for that task—Zacharias of Anagni and Radoald of Porto. The task he entrusted to them was only to investigate the events, discover the truth of what was happening in the Church of Constantinople and report to him, but not to participate in making any decisions.[78] So, although still a formally unbiased judge, who had yet to examine the case and reach a just judgment, the pope showed that he was aware, at least superficially, of what was happening in the Church of Constantinople and was already hinting at his commitment to Ignatius'

[73] Nicolai I epp., 434.5–9.
[74] Nicolai I epp., 434.30–436.21, 440.7–16.
[75] Sardica 5, Syntagma III, 239–240.
[76] Milaš 1895–1896 II, 112–113; Chrysos 2019a, 27–43.
[77] Sardica 10, Syntagma III, 256–257.
[78] Nicolai I epp., 436.22–37, 439.12–24, 440.17–21; Liber pontificalis II, 155.5–8, 158.23–27; Life of Ignatius, 42.29–31; Gesta octavae synodis, 10.

side in the dispute. This is supported by the testimony of deacon Marinus, one of the Roman representatives at the council of 869/870, that the pope did not want to receive the Byzantine ambassadors Zacharias of Taormina and Theophilus of Amorium as bishops and co-ministers, because, as followers of Gregory Asbestas, they had been suspended by the earlier decision of Pope Benedict III.[79]

On the issues of the veneration of holy icons, for which the emperor Michael allegedly asked the papal envoys to come to Constantinople, the pope wrote that he had nothing to add to what his predecessors had already written on the matter, but repeats the views of Pope Hadrian I (772–795) from the time of the Council of Nicaea in 787.[80] Last, but not least, at the end of the same letter to Emperor Michael, the pope also presents a request, which had little to do with current problems, but rather an issue that had been burdening relations between the Church of Rome and Constantinople for a long time. The pope asked that certain provinces and rights in those provinces which had been taken away in the previous century and a half be returned to the Roman Church. First, he requested restoration of the *vicariate of Thessalonica*, which the Apostolic See had for bishops located in the regions under the rule of the Byzantine emperor, i.e. for Old and New Epirus and Illyricum, Macedonia, Thessaly, Achaia, Dacia Ripensis, Dacia Mediterranea, First Moesia, Dardania and Praevalitana. Then, he calls for the return to the Roman See of the patrimonies in Sicily and Calabria, which were its old possessions. Finally, he asks that the right to consecrate the Archbishop of Syracuse be returned to the pope.[81] All these rights and possessions had gradually been taken away from the Church of Rome in favour of the Church of Constantinople or the emperor himself, starting with the decree on the exemption of Crete, Sicily and Calabria from the jurisdiction of the Church of Rome in 732.[82] Emphasizing the rights of the Roman See to the minutely enumerated provinces of the former prefecture of Illyricum would soon, quite unexpectedly, become a topic of crucial importance in relations between the Church of Rome and Constantinople, when the two, after the conversion

[79] Gesta octavae synodis, 109–110. Dvornik 1950, 118–121, however, rejects Marinus' testimony and trusts the testimonies of Theophilos and Zacharias themselves, trying to prove that the Pope still received them with honours.

[80] Nicolai I epp., 436.37–437.10.

[81] Nicolai I epp., 438.25–439.11.

[82] Cf. Grumel 1952, 191–200; Anastos 1957, 14–31; Prigent 2004, 557–594; Komatina I. 2016, 47–48, n. 71; Basić 2020, 17–19, n. 9.

of the Bulgarians in 864–866, would fight for jurisdiction over them. However, the right of the Roman pope to ordain the archbishop of Syracuse had in 860, in the midst of schisms caused, ultimately, by the actions of one archbishop of Syracuse, Gregory Asbestas, quite clear significance.

Council in the Church of the Holy Apostles in 861

The pope's delegates, with his letters for the emperor and the patriarch, appeared in Constantinople in the spring of 861. The council was held in the Church of the Holy Apostles, sometime during March and April.[83] It was the *second* council in the Church of the Holy Apostles in a short period of time. The acts of the council have only been preserved in fragments, in a Latin translation, in the canonical collection of Cardinal Deusdedit, from the end of the eleventh century.[84] The authenticity and credibility of the text of the acts preserved in this way has often been challenged.[85] Such a judgment is, in my opinion, too strict, since many of the details contained in the acts in the compilation of Deusdedit are also found in other writings, much closer to the time of the council, such as the *Libellus Ignatii*, a text written in defence of Ignatius himself, addressed to the pope through the monk Theognostus, and in *Vita Ignatii* by Nicetas David.

The council was presided over by the emperor himself. The papal envoys Zacharias and Radoald sat on his right, next to them the metropolitans and bishops, representatives of the Church of Constantinople. On the emperor's left side sat high secular dignitaries of the Byzantine state, i.e. *many from the most exalted Senate*.[86] It is interesting that, even though it was *an ecclesiastical* council, there was an equal representation of secular and ecclesiastical dignitaries in attendance. At the final session of the council, mention is made of *eight patricians and others from the Senate, up to seventy-two*.[87] One would say, the entire top-level of Constantinopolitan

[83] Between the second and third session of the parliament was Easter, Deusdedit, 606.31–32, which that year was 6 April. On the council, cf. Dvornik 1950, 124–143; Stiernon 1967, 35–41; Chrysos 2019a, 32.

[84] Deusdedit, 603.1–610.5.

[85] Dvornik 1950, 62–63, 125. The original Greek acts were destroyed according to the decision of the council of 869/870, which annulled them, cf. loc. cit.

[86] Deusdedit, 603.4–7.

[87] Deusdedit, 609.22–23.

and Byzantine society.[88] However, only Bardas and John Coxes are mentioned by name.[89] Nicetas David, in addition to John Coxes, also mentions the *praepositus* Baanes, called Angures, the patrician Leo Creticus and the patrician Theodotacius, among those seventy-two senators.[90] These representatives of the secular aristocracy and the emperor's closest collaborators not only attended the council, but also took an active part in the conciliar discussions and together with the emperor dictated their course.

The church dignitaries were led by Paul, the metropolitan of Caesarea of Cappadocia, the first in the order of suffragans of the patriarch of Constantinople, then Theodore, the metropolitan of Laodicea and Amphilochius, the metropolitan of Cyzicus, a great friend of Photius.[91] What is particularly striking is the fact that Photius himself is not mentioned in any of the preserved acts of the council. Only in the final words, with which the participants of the assembly exclaim *Many years!* to him, Pope Nicholas and the papal envoys, does his name appear.

At the opening of the council, the emperor declared that Ignatius' case had been resolved and that he had been condemned and deposed for many crimes at the previous council in the Church of the Holy Apostles in 859. Nevertheless, *out of respect for the Holy Roman Church and the most holy Pope Nicholas*, he agrees to re-examine the whole case before his deputies.[92] The position of the hierarchy of Constantinople, which was then presented by Paul of Caesarea, completely followed that of the emperor.[93] Apparently, when he sent his envoys to Rome the previous year and asked for papal legates, the emperor counted on the pope and his legates to simply confirm the decisions of the Council of 859 against Ignatius. Now, when the legates appeared and brought the pope's letters, in which much

[88] According to Nicetas David, the council was attended by *the emperors, all the archons and almost the entire city*, Life of Ignatius, 46.5–9. The great influence of secular dignitaries is highlighted by Ignatius himself, who calls them simply *the emperor's people* (οἱ περὶ τὸν βασιλέα, οἱ βασιλικοί), Theognosti Libellus, 857 B–860 B.

[89] Deusdedit, 604.29–30, 606.35–36, 608.13, 609.12, 25. On John Coxes, cf. PmbZ, no. 3315. Several letters from Photius' correspondence are addressed to him, Photii epp., 5, 61, 94, 155.

[90] Life of Ignatius, 46.9–48.4. About the mentioned persons, cf. PmbZ, no. 719, 4455, 7896.

[91] Deusdedit, 603.10–14, 17–20, 605.14–16, 20–22, 26–33, 606.1–3, 24–26, 608.29–32, 609.16–20. On the mentioned prelates, cf. PmbZ, no. 223, 5865, 7726.

[92] Deusdedit, 603.6–10.

[93] Deusdedit, 603.10–14, 17–20.

was written that was not welcome to the Byzantine side, the emperor and the hierarchy of Constantinople had reason to fear a re-examination of the whole case and the result of that examination, which they could no longer predict. The Roman legates, on the other hand, had a clear basis for action. Its starting point was the Council of Serdica in 343 and its third, fourth and fifth canons, about which an extreme interpretation had been established in the Roman Church at that time, partly thanks to the Byzantines themselves. According to this interpretation, as discussed above, the Roman pope was called to judge through his legates in the disputes of the entire Church. Citing those canons the legates now demanded that Ignatius appear before them so that his sentence could be reconsidered. Pointing out that the Roman pope had the right to reconsider the case of any bishop,[94] they claimed for themselves that they did not want to judge according to *their* custom, but according to the *canonical authority and the constitution of the Roman Church*.[95]

Though the ruling circles in Constantinople had received the content of the pope's letters with reservations and therefore feared the outcome of the upcoming council, paradoxically, it was Ignatius himself who made the best part of their case for them, with his reckless, overly haughty and unyielding attitude at the council. Kept as he was in captivity and isolation, he certainly cannot have known the attitude of Rome towards his question, nor did he know the contents of the papal letters addressed to the emperor and Photius. When he was summoned to appear before the council, he thought that nothing but further humiliation awaited him there. The Roman legates requested that Ignatius appear before the council so that they could examine him on behalf of the Roman bishop, according to the fifth canon of the Council of Serdica.[96] Although the Byzantine bishops felt that there was no need for this, they nonetheless agreed.[97] Certainly, according to the emperor's order, *praepositus* Baanes went to bring Ignatius to the council. When the latter informed Ignatius that *the great and holy council invited him to appear before it*, Ignatius responded by enquiring in what capacity he should appear—as a bishop, as a priest or as a monk. The emperor's men did not know what to answer, so they hurried to the emperor for additional instructions. The Roman envoys did not

[94] Deusdedit, 603.14–16, 605.22–26,
[95] Deusdedit, 606.26–28.
[96] Deusdedit, 603.14–16.
[97] Deusdedit, 603.17–20.

care in what capacity he appeared before the council, it was only important that he appear. The emperor's officials conveyed this to Ignatius the next day. He then put on a bishop's robes and, accompanied by his supporters—bishops, priests and monks, headed towards the Church of the Holy Apostles.[98] He was determined to appear before the council as a patriarch. However, the state government did not want to allow this. The emperor sent the patrician John Coxes, who intercepted Ignatius on the way and threatened him that he would be putting his life in danger if he dared to appear before the council in any way other than as an ordinary monk.[99] This, at first glance seemingly unimportant question had a great impact on further events and the course of the council. Ignatius was further irritated and angry with the Roman legates, thinking that they had also had a part in it. When he appeared before the council, the first words he addressed to the papal envoys were: *You condemned me before examination, because you, as bishops, sit and judge me, who am a patriarch, while I stand before you*.[100] In the chapter devoted to his patriarchate from 847 to 858, it has already been shown that Ignatius did not care much for the pretensions of the Roman Church to primacy in the entire Christian world and to the position of judge in the episcopal disputes of other churches, and that he was a faithful advocate of at least the equal supremacy of the patriarchal throne of Constantinople in the whole *ecumene*. Therefore, he had no inclination to countenance the Roman interpretation of the third, fourth and fifth canons of the Council of Serdica, on the basis of which he now stood in court before the papal envoys. When deposing bishops, Ignatius himself did not seek the pope's approval, merely informing him of his actions. Pope Leo IV's sharp response to the patriarch's letter regarding the overthrow of Gregory of Syracuse and his followers, whereby, for the first time in that period the Roman Church had sought to set itself up as judge in the internal disputes of the Church of Constantinople, may also have served to further deepen Ignatius's distrust of the Roman Church. His understanding even at that moment was that the Church of Rome was not above the Church of Constantinople and that, therefore, there was no reason to judge him. This is best seen when he, upon the insistence of the Roman envoys that they represented the place of the Apostolic See, replied: *And I have the throne of John the Apostle and Andrew, who is the*

[98] Life of Ignatius, 46.9–25.
[99] Life of Ignatius, 46.25–31.
[100] Deusdedit, 603.23–25.

first-called disciple of Christ.[101] Bearing in mind his attitude, it is quite understandable that at one of the later sessions of the council he categorically declares: *I did not complain to Rome, nor am I doing so now*.[102] Ignatius maintained his uncompromising stance until the end of the council. He declared that he would recognize as the only just sentence of the Roman legates that his throne should immediately be returned to him.[103] Later he demanded that the letters, which he believed must have been sent to him by the pope, be handed over to him. When he learned that the pope had not sent any letters to him, but only to the emperor and Photius, he became even more angry and declared that he did not want to accept the Roman legates as judges.[104] He also expressed great distrust towards the personality of Pope Nicholas himself—he said that he would have turned to Rome, like *Paul and Athanasius* once had, if he knew that in Rome he would find a *Julius*.[105] Obviously, at that moment, he did not consider Pope Nicholas a worthy successor of the great pope of the fourth century. Unlike Ignatius himself, his supporters recognized the Roman legates as judges, but demanded a fair trial from them.[106]

Ignatius's non-recognition of the primacy of the Church of Rome over Constantinople provoked the papal legates and their initial inclination to sympathy shifted towards reserve. First of all, they reminded him of the fact that they did not find him on the patriarchal throne, but in exile. Then they recounted the story of past events, reminding him that his opponents (Gregory Asbestas and his "party") had accused him before the Holy See, and that he had not responded to Pope Benedict III's invitation of 858 either to appear in Rome himself, or to send envoys, in order to justify himself in light of the accusations. To this Ignatius responded that he had not had the opportunity to do so, because only a few days later he had been overthrown and exiled, in July of 858.[107] Instead of being investigators of the correctness of his overthrow, they had become his judges. Ignatius' opponents on the Byzantine side noticed more than well that the

[101] Deusdedit, 603.26–29.

[102] Deusdedit, 607.12.

[103] Deusdedit, 603.30–31; Theognosti Libellus, 857 C–D.

[104] Deusdedit, 607.14–28, 33.

[105] Deusdedit, 608.7–10. Julius I (337–352) was the Pope of Rome during the time of the Arian heresy and he used his authority to protect Athanasius of Alexandria and Paul of Constantinople.

[106] Deusdedit, 604.6–14.

[107] Deusdedit, 603.29–30, 604.1–5, 21–28, 607.29–32.

mood of the Roman legates was changing in their favour and they took advantage of it. As early as the beginning of the second session of the council and contrary to what they had emphasized at the beginning of the first, that there was no need to review Ignatius' conviction, they agreed to re-examine Ignatius' case and repeat the verdict.[108] The entire third session was devoted to establishing the jurisdiction of the papal legates as judges in the dispute, which Ignatius rejected. The bishops of the Church of Constantinople, the emperor, Bardas and all the patricians agreed that the presence of the papal legates was equal to the presence of the pope himself and that their authority was indisputable and complete.[109] Finally, at the fourth session, it was possible to do what the council had been called for—to try Ignatius again. The accusations were the same—that Ignatius had come to the throne *without an election* and that he had uncanonically deposed the Metropolitan of Syracuse and two other bishops and installed others in their place.[110] The accusation having been made, Bardas summoned the Roman legates to pass judgment. They referred to the *Canon of Saint Sylvester*, according to which a bishop cannot be condemned without the testimony and oath of seventy-two witnesses. On behalf of the Church of Constantinople, Paul of Caesarea declared that, although according to the customs of the Church of Constantinople, *five or ten or seven witnesses are sufficient*, they would yield to the will of the Roman legates in this matter as well.[111] By itself, the question arises as to how difficult it could have been for the imperial government to find *seventy-two* men who would confirm what it instructed them to do and testify as it told them. All seventy-two were found in the ranks of the senators present at the council, among them eight patricians, even if *it was not customary for patricians to take an oath*.[112] Bardas then pointed out how they were proceeding in everything according to the wishes of the papal envoys.[113] All that was left for them to do was to officially judge that *Ignatius is worthy of being deposed*, that is, unworthy of the position of hierarch. While the council shouted *Unworthy!*, by order of the papal envoys, the subdeacon Procopius approached Ignatius and took off his

[108] Deusdedit, 605.10–36.

[109] Deusdedit, 606.31–608.26.

[110] Deusdedit, 604.29–605.3, 608.29–35; Life of Ignatius, 48.4–50.3; Synodicon Vetus, 159.5–13.

[111] Deusdedit, 609.12–20.

[112] Deusdedit, 609.21–32; Life of Ignatius, 46.31–48.4; Synodicon Vetus, 159.5–17.

[113] Deusdedit, 609.25–32.

omophorus, a sign of a bishop's honour, after which Ignatius was expelled from the council. The council ended with the exclamations of *Many years!* to Pope Nicholas, Patriarch Photius and the papal envoys.[114]

The papal envoys, bishops Zacharias of Anagni and Radoald of Porto, therefore, failed in the task entrusted to them by the pope when he sent them to Constantinople, only to examine the case and convey to him an objective point of view, and not pass judgment themselves. They did the exact opposite of this—they participated in reaching a new verdict against Ignatius and confirmed it themselves on the pope's behalf. Because of this, they were later condemned and punished in Rome. Roman circles, as well as Ignatius' supporters in Byzantium, explained the envoys by deeming that they had been *bribed with gifts*.[115] Anastasius the Librarian even justifies them by saying that Photius and his supporters, when they saw that the contents of the papal letters brought by the envoys were favourable to Ignatius, did not want to announce this correctly at the council, and that they gave the wrong translation of the letters, and that the envoys, who did know the real content of the letters, were unable to express it, because they didn't understand Greek.[116] However, it seems that Ignatius himself bears the greatest responsibility for the loss of favour of the Roman envoys at the council, due to his intransigent attitude in rejecting the right of the Roman Church to judge him and his haughty recklessness during the proceedings. However, he would soon realize his mistake.

Thus, the *second* council in the Church of the Holy Apostles in the spring of 861 confirmed the decisions of the *first* council in the same place, held in February 859. Since they discussed the same issues and reached the same decisions, these two councils, held at the same place, were considered one organic entity, so the council of 861 was called the *First-Second Council in the Church of the Holy Apostles*.[117] After the verdict on Ignatius, the council continued its sessions, dedicated to dogmatic and canonical

[114] Deusdedit, 610.1–5; Life of Ignatius, 50.5–16. Brief accounts of the council are also given by pro-Ignatian treatises of Anastasius the Librarian and Mitrophanes of Smyrna, Gesta octavae synodis, 10; Mansi, XVI, 416 E – 417 B, as well as the Synodicon Vetus, 159–5–17.

[115] Liber pontificalis II, 155.5–10; Gesta octavae synodis, 10; Mansi, XVI, 417 A; Life of Ignatius, 58.21–27.

[116] Gesta octavae synodis, 10.

[117] The explanation of that name is given by John Zonaras in the twelfth century, in his commentary on the provisions of canon law, Protodeutera, Protodeutera, Syntagma II, 647–648.

issues, and adopted seventeen new canons.[118] Of these, the first six concern the organization of monastic life and monasteries.[119] The thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth canons are directed against opposition in the church, primarily against Ignatius' supporters, or those within the clergy who might side with Ignatius in the future. This is why they repeat the canons of earlier councils, which forbid priests to break relations with their bishops, bishops with their metropolitans and all together with their patriarch. The penalty of excommunication and deprivation of priestly rank is foreseen for such transgressions, but apostasy is praised in cases where the patriarch publicly preaches heresy.[120] The sixteenth canon determines that the bishop who, without resigning, leaves his flock and resides in another place for more than six months, must be legally deprived of his episcopal position after the expiration of that period, and another appointed in his place.[121] It is clear that this canon was directed against Ignatius himself, who, although he had been overthrown three times at the councils, still refused to resign. Regardless of all the councils held and the overthrow and anathematization of Ignatius, his resignation was still needed in order to strengthen the position of the new patriarch. Finally, the last, seventeenth canon, confirmed the provisions that *a layman or a monk* cannot be appointed as a bishop before *he has spent the time specified by law in all the lower degrees of the priesthood*, regardless of the fact that by then some had quickly become bishops *out of necessity, were excellent in virtues and highly exalted their churches.*[122] This canon, therefore, simultaneously prohibits the practice in the future, while justifying its usage in the past.

Nicetas David the Paphlagonian describes what happened to Ignatius next, after the council and his renewed conviction in 861. As can also be seen, according to the sixteenth canon of the council, the fact that Ignatius

[118] Montinaro 2020, 350–355, expresses the opinion that the Council of 861 consisted of two separate "assemblies" and that canons were adopted at each of them, the first sixteen at the first and the seventeenth at the second, and that the name "First-Second" actually refers to that circumstance. However, there is no data in the sources that would point to such a conclusion, nor any reason to doubt that the "first" council refers to the one of 859, which also passed the canons, preserved in the canons of the council from 861. On the other hand, explaining the term "First-Second" in the name of the council from 861, John Zonaras explicitly states that after the "first", *since the time has passed* (παραῤῥυέντος καιροῦ), there was held a "second" council in the same temple, Protodeutera, Syntagma II, 647–648.

[119] Protodeutera, Syntagma II, 648–668.

[120] Protodeutera, Syntagma II, 688–693.

[121] Protodeutera, Syntagma II, 696–697.

[122] Protodeutera, Syntagma II, 701.

had not resigned was still a big problem for Photius. In the eyes of many clerics and believers, Photius was still an intruder, as long as he sat on the throne of the hierarch who was still alive and had not voluntarily stepped down from the throne. All the judgments against him could only contribute to the creation among the people, who were not familiar with canonical disputes, of the image of Ignatius the righteous and the martyr, who suffered unjust persecution. All the verdicts were insufficient, and the resignation had to be forced by any means possible. The most difficult trials were yet to come for Ignatius. According to Nicetas David and the chroniclers of the tenth century, he was forced to sit on the tomb of Constantine V Copronymus. In the torture of Ignatius, a certain Morotheodore, John Gorgonite and Nicholas Scutelops stand out.[123] They forced him to make the sign of the cross with his own hand on a piece of paper on which Photius himself had written the following: *I, Ignatius, the unworthy* (bishop) *of Constantinople, confess that I was appointed without election and that for so many years I did not govern devotedly, but tyrannically* [124] This was supposed to represent Ignatius' official resignation, and was sent to the emperor. Ignatius' torments finally ended, and he was able to retire to Poseus, although he would not be free of harassment even there.[125] Nicetas David sees the hand of Photius behind all these indignities. However, the chroniclers of the tenth century attribute everything to Bardas' will and decision. Even according to Nicetas David, the supposed act of Ignatius' abdication was forwarded to the emperor himself, which speaks enough to the fact that the state power was indeed the prime mover.

Consequences of the Council of 861

The Emperor sent the decisions of the council to the pope, accompanied by his letter, through his envoy the *asecretis* Leo. The content of that letter, unfortunately, has been lost, but it can be reconstructed on the basis of the pope's answer to it, dated 18 March 862. On the same occasion, Patriarch Photius also sent a letter to the pope. Fortunately, this one has

[123] Life of Ignatius, 52.7–15; Theophanes Continuatus, IV.31; Pseudo-Symeon, 667.13–19.

[124] Life of Ignatius, 52.16–29. That act was invoked by Photius' followers at the council of 869/870 Gesta octavae synodis, 169–181, while the council did not want to recognize it, as forced, which was also accepted by the emperor Basil I, Gesta octavae synodis, 163–164; Mansi, XVI, 345 D–E, 349 C–D; Dvornik 1950, 80–89.

[125] Life of Ignatius, 52.29–54.11.

been preserved. From its content, it can be seen that it does not touch at all on the *second* council in the Church of the Holy Apostles from 861, but is simply a response to the pope's letters addressed to Photius and the emperor from 25 September 860. From this, one could perhaps conclude that it was written before the council itself, immediately after the pope's letters reached Constantinople, but it was certainly sent to Rome together with the emperor's letters after the council, most likely in the summer of 861.[126] Photius himself writes in the letter that it is not a *contradiction* (ἀντιλογία) to the pope's accusations, but a *justification* (ἀπολογία).[127] Indeed, the first part of it consists of Photius' lamentation and presentation to the pope of the circumstances under which he, reluctantly and under coercion, had to accept the patriarchal throne.[128] It is actually a repetition of the content of Photius' first letter to the pope, only now with even greater emphasis. The rest of the letter is dedicated to an extensive refutation of the pope's accusations that Photius was elected to the position non-canonically, since before his election and enthronement he was an ordinary layman. Photius bases his defence on the understanding that not all canons are universal, i.e. that those which are valid in some part of the world and the church are unknown in other parts.[129] This must refer to the pope's reference to the canons of the Council of Serdica on the election of laymen to episcopal office. Since that council was not ecumenical, its canons, according to Photius, are not binding for the entire church. He further justifies his choice by citing earlier examples of laymen who became bishops and were very important for the church, and mentions more recent examples of patriarchs Tarasius (784–806) and Nicephorus (806–815), but also ancient examples from the fourth century—Gregory the Theologian, Nectarius of Constantinople (381–397) and Thalasius of Caesarea (fifth century), not bypassing Ambrose of Milan (370–397), who himself was a Latin.[130] Photius was particularly close to the case of Patriarch Tarasius, who was also his father's uncle. I would single out two instances in this letter as particularly interesting. The first is the one in which Photius, explaining to the pope how he was forced to become a patriarch by violence, points out that the condemnation rests on those

[126] The editors date it to August or September 861, Photii epp., no. 290. On the content of the letter, cf. Stiernon 1967, 41–43; Chrysos 2019a, 33–38.

[127] Photii epp., 290.36–37.

[128] Photii epp., 290.1–122.

[129] Photii epp., 290.123 sq.

[130] Photii epp., 290.123–384; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 337–344.

who committed violence, not on those who suffer it.[131] Is Photius here covertly condemning those who placed him on the patriarchal throne—the emperor and magister Bardas, while continuing to act publicly in unison with them in everything? Perhaps this is related to the fact that Photius played almost no role at the council of 861. Another interesting place is the one where he explains to the pope how different canons, rules and customs apply in different churches. Thus, he points out the differences in customs and rituals between the Roman and Constantinopolitan churches. He points out that in the Constantinopolitan church it is not customary to fast on Saturdays, that priests can be married, and some other details.[132] This is interesting precisely because a few years later, in 867, Photius was to use all those arguments against the Roman Church, but on that occasion he would not explain them as natural differences in the customs and rituals of different churches and regions, but as a *heresy of the Roman Church*.[133] Photius also takes it upon himself to respond to the request that the pope addressed directly to the emperor in 860—to restore the *vicariate of Thessalonica*, which was the lieutenancy of the Roman Church for all provinces of the prefecture Illyricum. Photius therefore looks back at the issue of *bishops who once used to receive ordination* from the Roman pontifex, stressing that he believes that the ecclesiastical division of jurisdictions should coincide with the civil and political one.[134] Thus, the patriarch answers the question addressed to the emperor by confirming the primacy of the civil order of things over the ecclesiastical, when it is in his interest, but in full accordance with canon law.[135] Finally, Photius asks the pope not to receive priests who come without letters of recommendation, since many transfer to Rome under the pretext of pilgrimage.[136] This was obviously directed against those priests who, as supporters of Ignatius, fled from persecution in Byzantium and went to Italy. They were able to strengthen Ignatius' faction before the pope, as would soon be seen in the example of the monk Theognostus.

When the pope found out what had happened at the council, he was stunned. He immediately wrote letters, first of all *to all believers of the Holy*

[131] Photii epp., 290.113–122.
[132] Photii epp., 290.200–240.
[133] Photii epp., 2.
[134] Photii epp., 290.385–418.
[135] IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 17, Syntagma II, 258–259; Trullo 38, Syntagma II, 392.
[136] Photii epp., 290.419–480.

Church of God, as well as to Emperor Michael and Photius himself, and sent them through the same Emperor's envoy, Leo. In these letters, which are dated 18 March 862, he declared that he did not agree either with Ignatius' deposition, or with Photius' enthronement and pointed out that his legates Zacharias and Radoald had not been empowered to participate or give consent in decision-making, but only to examine the case and convey to him what they had found out, so that he could judge himself.[137] The letter *to all believers* was intended to reveal to the *ecumene*, especially to its eastern part, i.e. to the patriarchs, metropolitans, bishops, priests, monks and faithful people under the ecumenical authority of the patriarch of Constantinople, that the pope considered the decisions of the council of 861, which had been recognized on his behalf by his legates, null and void.[138] In the letter to the emperor, the pope pointed out that Ignatius had obtained the patriarchal throne legally, from his ecclesiastical rank and monastic life, with the consent of the entire council of the church. In contrast, Photius had been appointed patriarch without any ecclesiastical rank and from the ranks of the laity. Therefore, all the accusations against Ignatius were null and void and the pope neither wanted nor agreed to his deposition.[139] In his letter to Photius, the pope first asserted the primacy of the Roman Church in all matters.[140] Then he refuted Photius' justification for the election of the patriarch with the example of the patriarchs of Constantinople Nectarius and Tarasius and the bishop Ambrose of Milan, because the circumstances had been different.[141] Specifically, at the time of the election of Tarasius, the pope reminded Photius, iconoclasm reigned, and Tarasius deserved the position due to his great merit in the fight in favour of icons.[142]

Condemned, persecuted and physically abused, Ignatius was in an extremely unpleasant position. However, he apparently quickly discovered how wrong he had been in opposing the papal envoys so fiercely at the

[137] Liber pontificalis II, 158.28–159.10; Nicolai I epp., 441.1–451.4; Stiernon 1967, 43–44; Chrysos 2018a, 324–325, 2019a, 38.

[138] Nicolai I epp., 441.1–442.31.

[139] Nicolai I epp., 444.3–22.

[140] Nicolai I epp., 447.11–448.23.

[141] Nicolai I epp., 448.8–450.7. The Pope does not comment on other examples that Photius cited for his justification in the epistle from 861, i.e. the example of Patriarch Nicephorus and Metropolitan Thalasius.

[142] Nicolai I epp., 448.24–449.4.

council of 861 and rejecting any thought that the Roman Church could judge him. In the meantime, he somehow realized that the Roman Church and the pope himself did in fact look favourably on him, and that the papal legates had come with the intention of helping him. As a result, he fundamentally changed his attitude towards the Apostolic See and decided to turn to it for support. In the company of his supporters—ten metropolitans, fifteen bishops, *an endless number of abbots, priests and other monks*—Ignatius composed an epistle for the Pope Nicholas. In the address of the epistle, he now addresses the pope with selected words—*the most holy and blessed chairman and patriarch of all thrones* (!) *and Corypheus' successor and universal pope*, and he calls the Roman Church *the wisest Church of the Romans.*[143] The epistle, known as the *Libellus Ignatii*, was taken to Rome by the monk Theognostus, *archimandrite of Old Rome and exarch of Constantinople.*[144] In that epistle, Ignatius did not deny that he had not wanted to recognize the papal legates Zacharias and Radoald as his judges.[145] However, this fact could only benefit him now, due to new circumstances and the fact that the pope's legates had actually exceeded the powers the pope had given them and acted contrary to his orders. Finally, Ignatius now accepted both the thesis of the primacy of the Roman Church and its arguments based on the canons of the Council of Serdica of 343. Of course, why would he not, when the Church of Rome was on his side and could assist him in regaining his throne? On the other hand, he was the one who needed help, and such a concession was the least he could do. In such circumstances, it suited Ignatius himself to apply to his case the fourth canon of the council of Serdica, which orders that *if a bishop is deposed, he has the right to present a defence; that another is not placed on his throne until the bishop of the Roman Church examines the case.*[146] In his epistle to the pope, Ignatius referred to exactly that canon,[147] pointing out that it was violated when, at the first council, held in Blachernae at the end of 858, he was formally deposed from the patriarchal throne, without the possibility of addressing Rome, and Photius was immediately appointed in his place.[148]

[143] Theognosti Libellus, 856 C.
[144] Theognosti Libellus, 856 C;Prieto Domínguez 2020, 288–291.
[145] Theognosti Libellus, 857 C–860 A.
[146] Sardica 4, Syntagma III, 238.
[147] Theognosti Libellus, 860 B–C.
[148] Theognosti Libellus, 860 B–861 A.

Ignatius' envoy Theognostus came to Rome already in 861.[149] After his arrival, the pope convened a local council in Rome, which was held sometime during 863, most likely in the summer months, where the decisions of the Council of Constantinople of 861 on the overthrow and anathematization of Patriarch Ignatius and the enthronement of Photius were officially rejected.[150] Furthermore, the Roman Church condemned the anathematized Photius, because he had been ordained on someone else's throne by those deprived of the episcopal dignity, and on the basis that he was uncanonically ordained as a bishop, i.e. the patriarch, from among laymen. His associate and inspirer, Gregory Asbestas was also convicted, and all those who had been appointed by Photius to ecclesiastical services were deposed. Ignatius was confirmed as the legitimate and sole patriarch of Constantinople. As for the bishops Zacharias and Radoald, who had exceeded the powers that the pope had given them as his legates to Constantinople in 861, the council also decided on them—Zacharias was deprived of his priestly rank and ecclesiastical communion, while the case of Radoald was suspended, since at the time of the council he was in another embassy, at the Frankish court, but was punished a year later.[151] The decisions of that council were formulated in six canons, which the pope communicated to the clergy of Constantinople and the Eastern patriarchates in his letters dated 13 November 866.[152]

After that council and its decisions, relations between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople reached their lowest point. However, still uninformed of the decisions of this Roman council, but in response to the pope's letters of 18 March 862, brought by the *asecretis* Leo, Emperor Michael III and patriarch Photius sent a new letter to the pope, full of insults, which was delivered by *protospatharius* Michael. The text of that letter has not been preserved, but its tone can be guessed to some extent from the pope's reply, composed and sent to Constantinople through the same *protospatharius* Michael, on 28 September 865, although the

[149] In his letters to Patriarch Ignatius and Emperor Basil I from 1 August 868, Pope Hadrian II (867–872) points out that the monk Theognostus has been staying in Rome for *seven years*, Hadriani II epp., 748.4–10, 749.15–25; Gesta octavae synodis, 228–229, 231.

[150] On the mission of the monk Theognostus and the Roman Council of 863, cf. Dvornik 1950, 149–157; Stiernon 1967, 44–47.

[151] Nicolai I epp., 519.4–522.39; 557.19–560.29; Liber pontificalis II, 159.11–18; Synodicon Vetus, 160.1–9; Dvornik 1950, 151–157.

[152] Nicolai I epp., 519.4–522.39, 557.19–560.29.

political and ideological background of the pope's reply should certainly be kept in mind, behind which the personality of the papal librarian Anastasius is rightly recognized.[153]

The most interesting statement in the emperor's letter to the pope was his characterization of the Latin language as *barbaric and Scythian*. Responding to this in his reply, dated 28 September 865, the pope vehemently opposed such a slur upon the Latin language.[154] In its defence, he stated that Latin was one of the three languages, along with Hebrew and Greek, in which Jesus' name was written on the cross: *Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews* (Mt 27.37, Mk 15.26, Lk 23.38, Jn 19.19–20).[155] The pope then proceeded to criticize Constantinople in a similar vein. *If you say that the Latin language is barbaric, because you do not understand it, then it is really ridiculous to call yourself emperors of the Romans, without knowing the Roman language.*[156] This was a direct blow to the entire ideology of the Roman Empire. Although it had long since abandoned the official use of Latin, it had never ceased to be Roman. A mere change of language could not change its identity. However, it is even more significant that the aforementioned remarks from Byzantine dignitaries, denigrating the Latin language, provoked a strong reaction in the West.[157] On the basis of the pope's defence of the sanctity of the Latin language; that in addition to Hebrew and Greek, Pilate had used it to write the name of Christ on the cross, as presented in the letter of 28 September 865, the ideology of the *three sacred languages*, as the only ones permitted in the official use of the church—Hebrew, Greek and Latin, was revived with great fervour among Western clerics.[158] The Byzantine missionaries Constantine the Philosopher and Methodius, who were active in Moravia and Pannonia from 863, preaching and teaching in Slavic, a language that was not one of the three, would feel the whole strength and exclusivity of that ideology on their own skins. Although initially suppressed as a heresy, the ideology would survive in the lap of the Roman Church as official

[153] Nicolai I epp., 454.25–487.24, 487.31–488.18; Chrysos 2018a, 326–339; Chrysos 2019, 261–275.
[154] Nicolai I epp., 459.5–460.6.
[155] Nicolai I epp., 459.7–14.
[156] Nicolai I epp., 459.19–21; Fögen 1998, 17–22; Chrysos 2019, 269–270.
[157] Chrysos 2019, 271–275.
[158] Thomson 1992, 80–97.

dogma, due to which the use of the Slavic language would finally be prohibited from the area under its jurisdiction, which was to nullify the activity of the Byzantine Church among the Slavs of Central Europe.

Regardless of events in Rome and the pope's decisions on Photius' question, in Constantinople, after the decisions of the Council of 861, Photius considered the question of Ignatius' deposition and his enthronement solved and felt quite secure on the patriarchal throne. Already after the council of 859, he had begun to settle the internal situation in his church, in which a considerable schism had arisen. Many of the bishops, metropolitans and priests, as well as the people, stood by the persecuted Ignatius. Photius deposed these from their positions and brought in his supporters. Gregory Asbestas was returned to his metropolitan see in Syracuse, instead of Ignatius' supporter Theodore. Zacharias of Taormina was transferred from this small Sicilian town to the very important metropolitan see of Chalcedon in Bithynia, thereby becoming a metropolitan from a bishop. Amphilochius, a good friend of Photius, became the metropolitan of Cyzicus. Peter of Miletus was transferred to the metropolitan see of Sardis. All these arrangements took place between the two councils in the Church of the Holy Apostles in 859 and 861.[159] After the final condemnation and anathematization of Ignatius at the *second* council in 861, and especially after his forced resignation, it seemed that the opposition was largely overcome. Photius' sixth *sermon* (*homily*), composed certainly after the Council of 861, talks about those *who fell away from the Mother Church*, i.e. Ignatius' followers, as a small and insignificant group.[160]

However, despite the serious straining of relations with Rome and the difficult situation on the internal level, it was precisely in these years that the Byzantine church and state, under the leadership of the Emperor Michael III, *magister*, then *curopalates* Bardas, whom his nephew elevated to the dignity of Caesar,[161] at that time the most important next to the emperor, and from 858 Photius himself, achieved some of the most magnificent successes, very significant even for world history.

[159] Dvornik 1950, 108.
[160] Photii Homiliae, 71.31–72.12; Mango, Homilies, 123–124.
[161] ODB I, 255–256 (P. Hollingsworth, A. Cutler); PmbZ, no. 791.

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Constantine the Philosopher at the Caliph's Court

After the triumph of Orthodoxy over iconoclasm in 843, the restored and empowered Byzantine Church returned to the scene of international politics in the mid-fifties of the ninth century. Historical development compelled the Church to confront a force on that stage which had been omnipresent in the consciousness and everyday life of the Byzantines for more than two centuries; a force which was inextricably linked to and had determined every aspect of its life for all that time. That force was the Muslims.

Beyond their immediate political relations, i.e. frequent war, peace agreements, capture and exchange of prisoners,[1] the Muslim Caliphate and the Christian Roman Empire were also in a constant ideological conflict which was conducted primarily in the field of religion, on which both, to a great degree based their civilization.[2] While for the Roman side the Christian-Muslim polemic was only a matter of international politics, considering that within the borders of the Empire after the great Muslim conquests in the seventh century, there were not many Muslim residents,

[1] For an account of Byzantine-Arab wars in the ninth and tenth centuries, cf. Vasiliev 1935–1950 I–II; Whittow 1996, 82–89, 175–81, 310–27; Kaegi 2008, 365–394; Shepard 2008, 493–522.

[2] On the Christian-Muslim religious controversy, both in Byzantium and in Muslim countries, cf. Meyendorff 1964, 115–132; Epalza 1971, 99–106; Khoury 1969; Khoury 1972; ODB II, 1017–1018 (A. Kazhdan); Husseini 2014; Savić A. 2019, 23–38.

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for the Muslim side it was also an internal issue, since many members of different Christian communities had lived within Caliphate from its very foundation. The position and daily life of these communities was often determined precisely by the current attitude of the Muslim authorities towards Christianity as a religion.[3]

One such wave of religious puritanism, initially instigated by Caliph al-Mamun (813–833),[4] swept the Arabian state during the reign of Caliph al-Mutawakil (847–861). The insistence on the original, orthodox form of Islam could not stand without consequences for the caliph's subjects of other religions, primarily Christians. Throughout the Caliphate, the rights of these *protected subjects* (i.e. *dhimmī*) were reduced in several aspects.[5] Especially after the outbreak of the great uprising in Armenia in 850, Christians had acquired the reputation of extremely unreliable subjects.[6] The caliph also decreed that depictions of demons be painted above the doors of Christian homes,[7] which the Byzantine envoys who visited the caliph's court at that time saw with their own eyes.[8] At the same time, anti-Christian theological thought experienced a renaissance in Muslim intellectual circles, directed primarily against Christian teachings on the Holy Trinity. Its most significant representatives and bearers were al-Ğāhiz († 868), Ali ibn Rabban al-Tabari († 860), and al-Qāsim ibn Ibrahim († 860), among others.[9]

It was in such a spiritual environment that the initiative arose to send the Roman emperor, as the supreme earthly head of the Christians, an *epistle* condemning the fundamental dogmas of the Christian faith. There are two types of source which testify to this Muslim "attack" and the Byzantine response to it. The first type consists of the writings of the leading Byzantine theologian of the time, Nicetas of Byzantinum, born out of the need for a thorough theological response to Muslim blasphemies.[10]

[3] Husseini 2014, 11–20.

[4] Husseini 2014, 30–39.

[5] On religious conditions and the deterioration of the position of Christians during the time of Caliph al-Mutawakil, cf. Versteegh 1979, 239–242.

[6] About the Armenian uprising of 850–855 and its consequences for the position of Christians in the Caliphate, cf. Grousset 1947, 355–371; Garsoïan 1997, 140–141; Greenwood 2008, 349–351.

[7] Versteegh 1979, 243.

[8] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.10–13.

[9] Versteegh 1979, 244; Husseini 2014, 40–46.

[10] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 669 A–841 D. For a new critical edition, cf. Niketas von Byzanz, 1–153. On Nicetas of Byzantium and his works, cf. PmbZ, no. 5505, 25713;

The second is represented by the Old Slavonic *Life of Constantine*, the sixth chapter of which describes the mission of Constantine the Philosopher to the caliph's court in Samarra and the theological-philosophical discussion he held there with Muslim scholars.[11] According to the said sources, the above-mentioned Muslim epistle with the condemnation of the basic Christian teachings provoked an energetic reaction on the Byzantine side. In the title of one of Nicetas' writings, created in connection with the Muslim attacks on Christianity, it is stated that it is a *Refutation of the Epistle sent to Emperor Michael, the son of Theophilus, from the Hagarenes for the sake of blaspheming the Christian faith*,[12] while in the *Life of Constantine* it is stated that the *Saracens blasphemed the only God, the Holy Trinity*, and asked that men be sent to them who would *clearly explain* the Christian teaching and represent it in discussion with them.[13]

Constantine, today revered as Saint Cyril, the enlightener of the Slavs, was a native of Thessalonica, from the family of the distinguished dignitary Leo, who held the rank of a *drungary under the strategus*. According to the unknown writer of his Slavonic *life*, he was noticed as a boy by the logothete Theoctistus, *the emperor's guardian*, and brought to Constantinople, *to be educated with the emperor*, where he was taught by Leo the Grammarian and Photius and where he mastered all the "seven skills".[14] Theoctistus even gave him the administration of his home, and later, on his and the empress' orders, Constantine was ordained a priest and appointed the patriarch's librarian, i.e. *chartophylax*, in Constantinople's

Krausmüller 2004, 163–171; Rigo 2006, 147–187; Høgel 2010, 65–74; Ulbricht 2021, 1351–1394.

[11] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.14–57. On the assessment of the historical value of the mentioned chapter of the *Life of Constantine* in the historiography so far, cf. Savić A. 2019, 26–32.

[12] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 807.

[13] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.1–4.

[14] Costantinus et Methodius, VC, II.1–8, IV.1–20. The words *to study with the emperor* should not be taken literally, because there was a large difference in age between Constantine, who, according to the *Life*, was born in 827, and Emperor Michael III, born in 840. Nevertheless, the information of Constantine's biographer should not be dismissed, because at that place he shows that he is perfectly familiar with the circumstances of the Byzantine politics of that time—the emperor is a minor and is taken care of by the *logotete*, his guardian, actually Theoctistus. On Constantine's origin and education, cf. Dvornik 1933, 1–84; Tachiaos 1993–1994, 41–46.

Saint Sophia.[15] His outstanding intellectual abilities and enviable erudition soon earned him the prestigious title of *philosopher*.[16]

The aforementioned Muslim *epistle* caused, obviously, increased activity in Constantinopolitan ruling and intellectual circles and encouraged the Byzantine state and church to take its first serious actions, beyond the political and cultural boundaries of the time. This is why it is necessary first to determine the precise chronological framework of its origin and arrival in the Constantinopolitan environment. Based on the fact that it was the reason for Constantine the Philosopher's visit to Samarra, which his anonymous biographer places in the twenty-fourth year of his life, researchers have dated the mentioned events to the year 851.[17] However, referring to the fact that neither Byzantine nor Arab sources mention any Roman mission to the caliph in 851, and that, in the *Life of Constantine,* a certain *asecretis* George is mentioned as the saint's companion in that endeavour,[18] a person known from the Arab sources to have led the Byzantine mission during the famous exchange of prisoners in early 856,[19] J. Ivanov and C. H. M. Versteegh conclude that it was the same mission, and that Constantine's visit to Samara should be dated to the year 856.[20] Based on this conclusion, Versteegh goes further, suggesting that the mentioned visit was not at all religious in character, but belonged to the usual political, diplomatic sphere, and that Constantine the Philosopher was not its leader at all, but only one individual in the retinue of the *asecretis* George.[21]

We should, however, bear in mind the fact that the author of the *Life of Constantine*, writing about these events, never once mentions the empress Theodora, which he normally does in the earlier sections of the writings, where he describes events from the time when she and the logothete Theoctistus had a decisive say in Constantinople.[22] On the contrary, on this occasion, it is written quite clearly that, since the Muslim envoy

[15] Costantinus et Methodius, VC, IV.6–20. On the relationship between Constantine and Theoctistus and the position of patriarchal *chartophylax*, cf. Dvornik 1933, 42–67.

[16] Prieto Domínguez 2020, 371.

[17] Dvornik 1933, 93–98. For other literature on Constantine's stay in the Caliphate, cf. KME III, 534–536 (I. Iliev).

[18] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.9. About this George, cf. PmbZ, no. 2257.

[19] Vasiliev 1935–1950 I, 222–226; translation of al-Tabari's information about it, ibidem, 317–318.

[20] Ivanov 1965, 98; Versteegh 1979, 243, 255–256.

[21] Versteegh 1979, 243, 255–257.

[22] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, III–IV.

arrived, *the emperor* (Michael III) was the one who *called a council* in which he addressed Constantine the Philosopher.[23] Also, in the title of the response to the Muslim *epistle*, which was compiled by Nicetas of Byzantium, it is written that it is a response to the *epistle* sent by the *Hagarenes to the Emperor Michael, the son of Theophilus*.[24] This clearly points to the conclusion that the caliph's letter arrived at the Roman court after the young Michael III had taken over the official administration of the Empire himself, after he deposed his mother Theodora with the help of his uncle Bardas, on 15 March 856. On the other hand, the delegation led by George, for the purpose of exchanging prisoners, was formed by Empress Theodora at the end of 855, and had completed its task before February 856, that is, while she was still at the head of the Empire.[25] In addition, it is abundantly clear from al-Tabari's description of the event that the exchange of prisoners took place on the border between the two empires, on the river Lamos in Cilicia, and that the Roman envoys did not enter Muslim territory at all, let alone travel as far as the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates.[26]

It is therefore difficult to accept the thesis that Constantine's visit to Samarra was part of the diplomatic mission of patrician George in connection with the exchange of prisoners on the river Lamos. Nevertheless, the dating of this visit to the *twenty-fourth year* of Constantine's life, i.e. 851, should definitely be rejected. It is quite clear from the sources that it came about only after Michael III had taken over the imperial power, in March 856. On the other hand, the reliable *terminus ante quem* is Constantine's new mission, to the Khazars towards the end of 860. However, since, in the preface of his second writing composed on the occasion of the Muslim *epistle*, *The Refutation of the False Book of Muhammad the Arab* (*The Refutation of the Qur'an*), Nicetas of Byzantium praises the emperor who takes care of *the peaceful and undisturbed administration of the Church*,[27] it can be inferred that the Muslim *epistle* arrived in Constantinople before the overthrow of Patriarch Ignatius and the enthronement of Photius, since the situation in the Church of Constantinople after that could hardly be described as *peaceful and undisturbed*. The rift between the emperor

[23] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.5–9.

[24] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 807.

[25] Vasiliev 1935–1950 I, 222–226.

[26] Vasiliev 1935–1950 I, 226; a translation of the corresponding information of al-Tabari, ibidem, 318. Treadgold 1980, 34, especially insists on this.

[27] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 669 B.

and patriarch Ignatius, and thus the beginning of unsettled circumstances in the church, occurred as early as July 858, so that would be the *terminus ante quem* for the creation of the Muslim *epistle* on the blasphemy of Christianity and the Byzantine response to it.

After receiving the Muslim *epistle for blaspheming the Christian faith*, the emperor, according to the *Life of Constantine*, convened *a council*.[28] There should be no doubt that even on this occasion, the strong and determined personality of his uncle, *magister* Bardas, stood by the young emperor. The emperor and Bardas obviously took the Muslim *epistle* very seriously and dealt with it in the same spirit. The council they convened certainly brought together the most prominent figures in the political and spiritual life of Constantinople, those most responsible to make political decisions and to consider spiritual issues. According to the *Life of Constantine*, the council was attended by the young Constantine the Philosopher,[29] and it is certain that other representatives of the highest intellectual circle of the capital were also present—above all Nicetas of Byzantium, the leading theological expert of that time, most probably Photius, and others. It can also be assumed that the content of the Muslim *epistle* was certainly announced at the council and possible responses were discussed.

The writer of the *Life of Constantine* presented only the briefest essence of the contents of the Muslim *epistle*. *The Hagarenes, called Saracens, blasphemed the one God of the Holy Trinity, saying: how can you Christians, knowing one God, divide him into three, saying that he is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.*[30] The content of that *epistle* can be reconstructed more precisely on the basis of the above-mentioned—*Refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes* by Nicetas of Byzantium—in which he refutes its allegations segment by segment.[31]

It was Nicetas of Byzantium who played the most important role in explaining Christian teachings and refuting the Muslim *blasphemy*. Three works dedicated to that theme have been preserved from his pen. The first is a voluminous work entitled *Refutation of the False Book Written by Muhammad the Arab* (Confutatio falsi libri quem scripsit Mohamedes Arabs, *Refutation of the Qur'an*), which consists of two parts. The first

[28] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.5–6.
[29] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.5–8.
[30] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.1–2.
[31] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 807 A–821 C.

part presents the exposition of the basic elements of the Christian dogma, primarily the teachings about the Holy Trinity,[32] while the second part presents a gradual refutation of the *Qur'an* in thirty chapters.[33] The second work is the repeatedly mentioned *refutation* of the Muslim *epistle* to the Emperor Michael, the full title of which actually reads: *Exposition prepared with the proof of the Christian dogma derived on the basis of the common understanding and dialectical method and natural conclusions and cognitive omniscience, and the refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes sent to the Emperor Michael, son of Theophilus, for the sake of blaspheming the Christian faith* (Refutatio Agarenorum epistolae, *Refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes*).[34] Nicetas' third work is entitled *Refutation and expulsion of the second Epistle from the Hagarenes sent to the Emperor Michael, the son of Theophilus, for blasphemy of the Christian faith* (Confutatio et eversio secundae Agarenorum epistolae, *Refutation of the second Epistle of the Hagarenes*).[35]

Nicetas' *Refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes* was most certainly the official response of Constantinople to the Muslim challenge. The emperor most likely entrusted Nicetas with the task of composing this answer precisely at the council where the Muslim *epistle* was discussed, as mentioned in the *Life of Constantine*. However, there is a problem with Nicetas' voluminous composition on Christian teaching and refutation of the *Qur'an*, which is entitled *Refutation of the False Book Written by Muhammad the Arab*, i.e. *The Refutation of the Qur'an*. This work was most likely composed on the same occasion and for the same reasons. In addition to the fact that it is dedicated to *the most God-loving emperor*,[36] it is hard to imagine that it could have been the product of Nicetas' independent interest and not related to current political needs and circumstances. Another theological composition by Nicetas, directed against the Monophysite Armenians,[37] was created exactly at the moment when the political need for it appeared, and when the emperor and the patriarch asked him to do so, for the purpose of the Byzantine policy directed at the conversion to Orthodoxy of the Monophysite Armenians between 862 and 867. This is why I think that his great work, *The Refutation of the*

[32] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 669 A–701 D.
[33] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 701 D–805 D.
[34] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 807 A–821 C.
[35] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 821 D–841 C.
[36] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 669 A.
[37] Nicetae Refutatio epistolae ab Armeniae principe, 587 A–665 C.

Qur'an, was created as a response to a Muslim *epistle* to Emperor Michael III.[38] Therefore, it could be concluded that, in all probability, at the council convened on the occasion of the Muslim *epistle*, the emperor instructed Nicetas of Byzantium, as the leading expert in theological matters in Constantinople at the time, and also well trained in dialectics and other *liberal arts*,[39] to compose an answer to it. He obviously studied its allegations well, but also the *Qur'an* itself,[40] on the basis of which he compiled *The Refutation of the Qur'an*, in which he presents Christian teaching in detail and refutes the allegations of the Muslim holy book.[41] He would certainly have needed a long time to complete such a task. The short *Refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes* was created only after Nicetas' great work. This is clear because in it Nicetas literally repeats the entire first part of *The Refutation of the Qur'an*, the one in which the teaching of the Christian faith is presented, while the second part, in which the teaching of the *Qur'an* is refuted, is omitted.[42] It is obvious that Nicetas' great composition was too voluminous and unsuitable for diplomatic use. On the basis of his *Refutation of the Qur'an*, Nicetas composed a short *Refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes* for such purposes. In it, Nicetas consistently takes into account diplomatic principles, so that when rewriting the first part of his *Refutation of the Qur'an*, he omits all those passages could have been offensive to his Muslim correspondent.[43]

Who, in fact, was Nicetas' correspondent? There is no doubt that the Muslim *epistle* was composed in the name of the Caliph al-Mutawakil, just

[38] Meyendorff 1964, 121–122, on the contrary, believes that the work was the result of an increased interest in the Muslim holy book that developed within the intellectual circles of Constantinople of the time. The editor of the modern critical edition of the work, K. Förstel, dates the composition of text to 866–870, Niketas von Byzanz, x–xi. Rigo 2006, 156–158, and also believes that this Nicetas' work was created after his epistles, i.e. after 860, or only during the reign of Emperor Basil I, after 867.

[39] Nicetas refers to his knowledge of philosophical methods and their use when composing the *Refutation of the Epistle from the Hagarenes Sent to the Emperor Michael* in the very title of that work, Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 807.

[40] On knowledge of the *Qur'an* in Byzantium, cf. ODB III, 1768 (A. Shboul). Based on Nicetas' statements, it is clear that at that time there was already a Greek translation of the *Qur'an*, now lost, cf. Høgel 2010, 65–119, who believes that the translation arose out of practical needs, beyond any polemical reasons, already during the reign of the Umayyads (661–750).

[41] Cf. Høgel 2010, 75–119.

[42] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 808 A–821 C.

[43] Cf. the commentary of the first editor of the text of Nicetas' works, Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 809 A.

as it was addressed to Emperor Michael III.[44] However, the caliph himself did not compose it, just as the emperor himself did not write an answer to it. The initiative for its compilation originated in the intellectual environment of the Caliphate of that time, so its author was one of the members of that environment, whose anti-Christian writings have been preserved to this day, and which were discussed above. In his letters, Nicetas himself addresses the correspondent as *a friend*, that is, *the most educated friend*.[45] That correspondent of his was certainly one of *the wise and bookish people*, with whom, as we shall see, Constantine the Philosopher would later conduct a discussion at the caliph's court in Samara.[46]

According to the biographer of Constantine the Philosopher, in addition to condemning Christian teaching, the Muslim *epistle* also contained an invitation for the government of Constantinople to send people who would *clearly explain* Christian teaching to the Muslims and *convince them* of it. At the council that was called because of the *epistle*, the emperor ordered Constantine the Philosopher to be the one who would go on a long journey to the heart of the *Saracen* empire to expound and philosophically defend Christian teaching, with the words: *Are you listening, philosopher, to what the impure Hagarenes are saying about our faith? Therefore, if you are a servant and disciple of the Holy Trinity, go and oppose them.*[47] However, there is no indication of this in Nicetas' reply to the *epistle*, so it is not clear whether Constantine's biographer should be given full credence in connection with this information. Indeed, C. H. M. Versteegh noticed certain places in the description of Constantine's dispute with the Muslims in Samarra in the *Life of Constantine* that can be found in Nicetas' writings on the occasion of the Muslim *epistle*,[48] on the basis of which he put forward the assumption that Constantine was actually tasked with taking Nicetas' response to the Muslim *epistle* to Samarra and explaining it in the discussion.[49] That understanding is not far from the truth, but the precise answer is hidden in Nicetas' second letter—*Refutation of the Second Epistle of the Hagarenes.*

Namely, as can be clearly seen from the title and content of that writing, Nicetas of Byzantium composed the *Refutation of the Second Epistle of the*

[44] Versteegh 1979, 241 sq, calls the epistle the "Mutawakkil's letter" (Briefe Mutawakkils).
[45] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 808 B, 821 D.
[46] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.14 sq; Versteegh 1979, 244–253.
[47] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.5–6.
[48] Versteegh 1979, 246–249, 254–255.
[49] Versteegh 1979, 256–257.

Hagarenes as a response to the Muslim response to his first *Refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes*, which he compiled by order of Emperor Michael III based on his great work *The Refutation of the Qur'an*. The *First Refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes* was sent, apparently, in writing to Muslim theologians in Samarra, where the Caliph's court was located at the time. One of them, probably the one who composed the first Muslim *epistle* to the Emperor Michael, composed a response to Nicetas' *Refutation* and sent it back to Constantinople, where it was received as the *Second Epistle of the Hagarenes*. Nicetas once again took the task upon himself and compiled a *Refutation of the Second Epistle of the Hagarenes*,[50] based on the content of which one can easily recognize the content of the *Second Epistle of the Hagarens* itself. At the very outset, Nicetas' opening lines make it clear that he is writing in response to the Muslim reply to his previous letter.[51] Then he methodically refutes the Muslim arguments against certain statements in his previous epistle. First, he repeats the entire content of the ninth chapter of his first *Refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes*, in which he explains the nature of the Christian understanding of the Son as *a partaker* (κοινωνός) in the Divine authority of the Father,[52] and then answers extensively and in detail the basic Muslim counter-argument—that *God is one having no partaker in his authority* (Θεός ἐστιν εἷς, κοινωνὸν μὴ ἔχων τῆς αὐτοῦ ἐξουσίας).[53] By the end of the text, he tries to explain to the Muslims the Christian understanding of *the three hypostases in one essence* with additional arguments, which represents the Holy Trinity.[54]

The comparison carried out by Versteegh, of Constantine the Philosopher's debate with Muslim scholars in Samarra as recorded in his *Life*, and Nicetas' writings,[55] makes it clear that certain statements from Nicetas' *Refutation of the Second Epistle of the Hagarenes,* which were not present in the initial *Refutation* appear in the details of the debate. This is especially true for the part in which Constantine explains to the Muslims how humans by nature stand between angels and beasts, differing from the former *in anger and lust*, and from the latter *in reason and*

[50] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 821 D–841 C.
[51] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 821 D–823 C.
[52] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 817 C–819 B, 823 C.
[53] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 823 C–832 A.
[54] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 832 A–841 C; Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.26–32.
[55] Versteegh 1979, 245–255.

understanding, which is expressed in almost the same words by Nicetas in the third chapter of his *Refutation of the Second Epistle of the Hagarenes.*[56] This is, in my opinion, sufficient reason to conclude that Constantine's visit to the caliph's court in Samarra and the discussion he held there with the Muslim scholars followed Nicetas' composition of his *Refutation of the Second Epistle of the Hagarenes.*

Therefore, the sequence of events related to the Christian-Muslim polemic in the middle of the ninth century could be reconstructed as follows. The Muslims sent their *Epistle to Emperor Michael, the son of Theophilus, for the sake of blaspheming the Christian faith* after he assumed sole rule on 15 March 856. After receiving the mentioned *epistle*, the emperor convened a council, at which representatives of the highest state and church authorities and the intellectual elite of Constantinople took part, and Nicetas of Byzantium was instructed to compose an answer to the Muslim *epistle*. For this purpose, he compiled a large work, the *Refutation of the Qur'an*, and after that a short *Refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes*, suitable for diplomatic and polemical use. This short writing was then sent to the Muslims. The Muslims composed a new *epistle* in response, and sent it to Constantinople, where it was considered the *Second Epistle of the Hagarenes.* Nicetas then composed a response to that second Muslim *epistle*, entitled *The Refutation of the Second Epistle of the Hagarenes.* Only after that did Constantine the Philosopher enter the scene. The emperor's decision to send him to Samarra to present and explain the Christian faith to the Muslims was apparently not a consequence of the Muslims' wish, apparently expressed in their letter to the emperor, to send such people to them for theological-philosophical discussion, as Constantine's biographer writes.[57] There is no trace of such a wish in Nicetas' response to the *Second Epistle of the Hagarenes* either. That decision was most likely the product of the understanding that prevailed in Constantinople after the reception of the *Second Epistle of the Hagarenes* that simply sending arguments in defence of the Christian teaching in written form was unlikely to be efficacious in convincing the Muslims and that it would be desirable to send them a man who would additionally explain these views orally in a philosophical discussion. It seems that such an attitude would be best expressed precisely in the words

[56] Nicetae Refutatio Mohamedis, 829 C; Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.17–25; Versteegh 1979, 246–247.

[57] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.3.

that the emperor, according to Constantine's biographer, addressed to Constantine the Philosopher: *Are you listening, philosopher, to what the impure Hagarenes are saying about our faith? Therefore, if you are a servant and disciple of the Holy Trinity, go and oppose them.*[58] Therefore, the emperor did not address those or similar words to Constantine at the council he convened after receiving the first Muslim *epistle*, as Constantine's biographer testifies, but on some occasion after the arrival of the *Second Epistle of the Hagarenes* and after Nicetas of Byzantium had composed a response to that second epistle. Constantine was entrusted with the task of going to Samarra and taking with him Nicetas' *Refutation of the Second Epistle of the Hagarenes.*

It is not entirely clear why the court of Constantinople chose Constantine for this undertaking. It is true that he was a philosopher and skilled in dialectics and other skills, but so were other Constantinopolitan intellectuals of that time, including Nicetas himself. In addition, Constantine's knowledge of the theological matter could in no way exceed that of Nicetas.[59] One indisputably advantage Constantine had over others, as can be concluded from his *Life*, was the ease with which he mastered foreign languages, although there is no direct information that he also knew Arabic.[60] Nevertheless, knowing that the emperor later entrusted him with the most important missions, such as those to the Khazars and the Slavs in Moravia, it does not seem unreasonable to say that Constantine the Philosopher surpassed most of his highly distinguished contemporaries in his overall intellectual abilities.

Commissioned by the emperor and the court with Nicetas' *Refutation of the Second Epistle of the Hagarenes* as a new response to the Muslim blasphemy of the Christian faith to take part in a debate in which he would defend Christian teaching, Constantine the Philosopher set off on the

[58] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.5–6.

[59] Savić A. 2019, 28–38, indicates that Constantine's remarks during the discussion with Muslim scholars lag behind the complex theological argumentation of Nicetas' writings.

[60] A little later, travelling to the Khazars as part of his second missionary assignment, in order to meet Jewish theologians there, while in Cherson Constantine learned the Hebrew and Samaritan languages, and then the enigmatic *Russian*, Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VIII.10–15. He had knowledge of the Slavic language even from his home in Thessalonica, ibidem, 107. If his learning of Hebrew in Cherson was part of his preparations for a discussion with the Jewish theologians among the Khazars, and his biographer clearly writes that he thereby *gained a better knowledge* (*razumъ boli vъspriimъ*), it is also possible that, preparing for the visit to the caliph's court, he mastered the basics of Arabic.

long journey to Samarra. As his companion, the emperor assigned the *asecretis* George.[61] If this was really the same person who had led the Byzantine-Arab negotiations regarding the exchange of prisoners on the Lamos River in Cilicia in the beginning of 856, then George was certainly well-versed in Arab politics and therefore the right person to accompany Constantine the Philosopher. The time of Constantine's visit to Samarra is not known. It has already been shown above that the information of his biographer that it was in Constantine's twenty-fourth year should be rejected. The Muslim delegation only arrived in Constantinople after Michael III had taken over power from his mother Theodora on 15 March 856. Nicetas of Byzantium would certainly have needed several months to study the statements of the *epistles* and the text of the *Qur'an* in order to compile the *Refutation of the Qur'an*, and then the *Refutation of the Epistle of the Hagarenes* as well, so that the latter could be sent to the Muslims, that they should compose their answer to it and send it back to Constantinople, and that Nicetas should then compose his *Refutation of the Second Epistle of the Hagarenes*. After all this, in my opinion, Constantine's mission could hardly have begun before the beginning of 858.

The description of Constantine's stay in Samarra and his debate with the most prominent Muslim theologians is given in the sixth chapter of his *Life*.[62] A detailed analysis of this discussion was given by C. H. M. Versteegh, who compared the statements from the *Life* with statements from the anti-Christian works of the most prominent Muslim theologians of the time.[63] Precisely on the basis of this, it is possible to conclude who Constantine's opponents were in that discussion, *the wise and bookish people*, as his anonymous biographer calls them, *learned in geometry and astronomy and other sciences*.[64] In the discussion, Versteegh found traces of quotations from the writings of prominent Muslim theologians of the time—al-Ǧāhiz (d. 868), Ali ibn Rabban al-Tabari (d. 860), al-Qāsim ibn Ibrahim (d. 860), and a further anonymous author.[65] Since the first three were all alive at the time of Constantine's visit to Samarra, and since quotes from their works were used in the discussion with him, it is very possible

[61] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.7–9.

[62] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.10–57; Vavřínek 2000, 535–542; Ivanova 2024, 64–67.

[63] Versteegh 1979, 245–253.

[64] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.14.

[65] Versteegh 1979, 244–253.

that they participated in the discussion as representatives of the Muslim point of view and Constantine's opponents. Be that as it may, there is no need to repeat Versteegh's analysis of the discussion here.

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The Gospel Beyond the *Hospitable Seas*: The Khazar Mission and the *First Baptism of the Russians*

After Constantine the Philosopher's mission to the caliph's court in Samarra some years earlier, in 860 circumstances directed Byzantine church and religious policy even further afield—to the little-known regions beyond the *Hospitable Seas* (Ἄξεινος Πόντος), to the endless expanses of the Eastern European steppes and plains.

The Russians Under Constantinople

A major political event drew Byzantium's attention to the northern shores of the Black Sea and the expanses that lay beyond them. The Russians, a people little known to the Romans until then, appeared quite suddenly on 18 June 860, with a fleet of about two hundred ships, under the walls of Constantinople. According to data from later Russian chronicles, the attack was led by the Russian princes of Kiev—Askold and Dir.[1] Constantinople was under siege, and the suburbs and the neighbouring coasts and islands in the Bosporus and the Sea of Marmara were savagely plundered. The city was practically defenceless, since the imperial army, led by the emperor himself, Michael III, and certainly also by his uncle Bardas, was in the east, fighting *against other barbarians*, i.e. Arabs. In his

[1] PSRL I, 21–22.

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absence, the emperor had left the administration of the city to the prominent dignitary Nicetas Ooryphas. Besides him, the main figure under the mentioned circumstances in the city was the patriarch, Photius.[2] Constantinople, however, was impregnable to many stronger and better equipped attackers, and was unlikely to succumb to a Russian Viking horde. The Russians had more success looting the suburbs of Constantinople, and their ships also reached the Prince's Islands in the Sea of Marmara, where they caused great damage to the monasteries founded there by the former Patriarch Ignatius, who was then himself in exile on one of those islands, Terebinthus.[3] According to the eyewitness of that event, Patriarch Photius, in the second of his two famous sermons about the Russian siege, delivered immediately after the end of the siege, the Russians retreated after the citizens, led by the patriarch, conducted a religious procession around the city walls.[4] Photius does not mention the presence of the emperor in that procession.[5] Therefore, the Russian withdrawal from the walls of Constantinople most likely occurred before Emperor Michael managed to return to the city from the campaign against the Arabs on the eastern border of the Empire. The conclusion would follow from this that the Russian siege of the city was relatively short-lived and ended in the summer of 860.[6]

[2] Photii Homiliae, 33.5 sq, 34.24–36.22, 40.1–44.31; Theophanes Continuatus, IV.33; Symeon, 131.29–30; Vasiliev 1946, 150–165. Cf. also the commentary accompanying the information of Photius' *Sermons* on that event, Mango, Homilies, 74–82. The most detailed presentation of the siege, with a broad review of the complete source material and the entire previous literature is still found in Vasiliev 1946. For more recent reviews, cf. Zuckerman 2000, 95–120; Shepard 2017, 111–128.

[3] Life of Ignatius, 44.10–46.2, 68.5–7.

[4] Photii Homiliae., 44.32–46.3. Similar information is also found in the Continuer of Theophanes, writing a century later, Theophanes Continuatus, IV.33.

[5] The presence of the emperor in the procession is not mentioned by the Continuer of Theophanes, Theophanes Continuatus, IV.33. On the other hand, Symeon the Logothete, also a tenth-century chronicler, writes that the emperor, at the invitation of Nicetas Ooryphas, arrived in the city under siege and together with the patriarch took part in a religious ceremony, Symeon, 131.29–30. Such a sequence of events is not certain, since it is clear from Photius' sermons that at the time when they were published, the emperor was not in the city, cf. Mango, Homilies, 76–81.

[6] Photius' second sermon about the Russian attack, which was composed shortly after their retreat, clearly testifies that the Russian attack on the city was an incident rather than a real, planned and prolonged siege (…*unexpected was their attack, sudden their retreat*…), Photii Homiliae, 40.13–41.3, 45.34–35. Cf. also Mango, Homilies, 81, according to whom Photius' first sermon on the Russian attack was read most likely on 23 June 860, the first

Delivering his second sermon about their siege immediately after the withdrawal of the Russians, at the beginning of July 860, Photius only states that the barbarians unexpectedly and surprisingly raised the siege and fled: *The fear of them was indescribable, but they became insignificant by fleeing.*[7] Unfortunately, this exhausts the extremely important contemporary testimony about Byzantine relations with the Russians in the summer of 860. Those relations, however, did not end there. What followed the end of the Russian siege and the retreat of the Russian fleet below the walls of Constantinople is of great importance for this work. According to the later Continuer of Theophanes, *not long after* (μετ' οὐ πολύ), *their embassy once again hit the capital, begging that they become partakers of divine baptism. And it was so.*[8] In his sermon, Photius does not say anything about this mission, which means that it came to Constantinople after the composition of the sermon. In any case, a short time after the withdrawal of the Russian ships from the walls of Constantinople and the return to their country, the Russian embassy arrived in Constantinople and requested that their people be baptized. It is difficult to say what influenced this step by the Russian leaders. The sources do not give the slightest hint and the researcher can only recall the old thesis of V. Lamanskij, on how the superstitious barbarians were captivated by the Christian religious service, led by the patriarch, around the walls of the city while they were under siege, because of which they raised the siege and lost faith in their gods.[9] A barbaric superstition and its influence on political decisions are interesting questions, but it is difficult to say what role it could have played in the Russian decision to request baptism in Constantinople. In his sermon, Photius does not even mention that any peace treaty was reached with the

week after the beginning of the Russian attack, and the second no later than the beginning of July, after their withdrawal. On the contrary, Vasiliev 1946, 203–218, believes that the siege lasted longer, almost a whole year, until the late spring of 861, but that from March 861 it was already of a much weaker intensity. Data from the *Life of Patriarch Ignatius* describing the council of 861 also testifies against such an interpretation, Life of Ignatius, 46.3–50.25, as well as the acts of the council itself, held in the winter and spring of 861, which do not show any indication that the city was under siege, Deusdedit, 603.1–610.5, but also the *Life of Constantine*, Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VIII.1–10, because the departure of Constantine the Philosopher to the Crimea, which must have happened at the end of 860, would have been impossible if the city was still under Russian siege and if the Russians still dominated the waters of the Black Sea.

[7] Photii Homiliae, 45.36–46.1.

[8] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.33.

[9] Lamanskij 1915, 130–131; Vasiliev 1946, 219.

Russians during their retreat, with which some kind of agreement on the organization of the Byzantine mission of Christianization could be connected. That is why I think that the initiative for this must have come from the Russians themselves.

The wish that the Russian envoys expressed in Constantinople came true—the Byzantine state and the Church of Constantinople carried out the Christianization of their people. Continuator of Theophanes, in the conclusion of the section about the Russian embassy that sought baptism for its people in Constantinople, briefly states that *it was so* (ὃ καὶ γέγονεν). That expression finds confirmation in another work of Photius, his famous epistle to the Eastern patriarchs from the spring of 867. In it, Photius informs the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, among other things, about how the Russians, the most warlike and cruel people, became Christians, *subjects and friends* of the Romans.[10]

When did it happen? It is certain that the Russian envoys appeared in Constantinople after the second sermon of Photius on the Russian siege was written, and it was written at the beginning of July 860, because such envoys are not mentioned in it. The statement of the Continuer of Theophanes that it was *not long after* the end of the Russian siege is insufficiently precise, while from Photius' epistle we can only conclude that the baptism of the Russians took place before 867. Another source that provides information about the baptism of Russians in the ninth century, the *Life of Basil* by the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, in fact the fifth book of the history of the above-mentioned Continuer of Theophanes, places this event during the reign of the hero of that text, the Emperor Basil I (867–886) and the second tenure of Patriarch Ignatius, that is, between 867 and 877.[11] However, such a dating is not certain because of the aforementioned references from Photius' epistle of 867, which clearly testify that the baptism of the Russians took place before that year.[12] The Russian delegation came to Constantinople to request that their people be baptized after the beginning of July 860, and before the spring of 867. I will explain later the reasons why I believe that the event should be dated closer to the first determinant. Here the consideration of the so-called first baptism of the Russians should be interrupted because of another mission, which most certainly visited Constantinople at the end of 860, with a similar task as the aforementioned Russian embassy.

[10] Photii epp. I, 2.293–305.

[11] Vita Basilii, 97.1–46.

[12] Literature on the so-called *first baptism of the Russians* is very extensive, cf. PE 38, 723–730 (J. A. Artamonov).

The Beginning of the Khazar Mission of Constantine the Philosopher

There is a question about the envoys of the Khazars.[13] The *Life of Constantine* reports what they said when they appeared before the emperor, which was actually the content of the letter that their ruler sent to the emperor on behalf of his people: *At first we knew one God, who is above everything, and we worshiped him towards the east and kept our other ugly customs. The Jews, on the one hand, convince us to accept their faith and customs, and the Saracens, on the other hand, by offering peace and many gifts, lure us to their faith, saying: Our faith is the best of all nations. That is why we are sending* (an embassy) *to you, who keep the old friendship and love. Because you are a great nation, you hold the Kingdom from God, and seeking your advice, we ask a learned man from you that, if he overcomes the Jews and the Saracens, we will accept your faith.*[14] The mention of the original Khazar faith in *one God, who is above everything* and whom they *worship towards the east*, undoubtedly refers to a religion based on respect for the *Eternal Sky*, i.e. *Tengri*, which was practised by all the Turkic and Mongol peoples of the Eurasian steppes, including the Khazars.[15] This is a strong argument in favour of the authenticity of the mentioned lines in the *Life of Constantine*, on the basis of which it can be concluded that the unknown biographer faithfully conveys the content of the Khazar epistle to the Byzantine emperor. It should be added that the Khazars, when addressing the emperor, refer to their *old friendship and love* with the Romans, which is a well-known fact from the political history of the eighth and ninth centuries.[16] Therefore, these lines can be trusted when it comes to the reasons for the appearance of the Khazar envoys in Constantinople and the purpose of their visit. At that time, many Jewish and Muslim missionaries visited the Khazar court and propagated their faith. Faced with them, the Khazar khagan turned to the old ally of his people, the Roman emperor, in order to become acquainted with the teachings of the Christian faith.

No matter how eloquent and essentially authentic and credible the testimony of the biographer of Constantine the Philosopher about the arrival

[13] On the Khazars, their political, social and religious development until the middle of the tenth century, cf. Golden, Ben-Shammai, Róna-Tas 2007.

[14] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VIII.1–5.

[15] Golden 2007, 130–136.

[16] On the Byzantine-Khazar relations in the eighth and ninth centuries, in general, cf. ODB II, 1127 (O. Pritsak); Obolenski 1991, 207–214.

of the Khazar delegation in Constantinople, it still illuminates only one side of the background of that significant event. It certainly had a political background, which remains unexplained in the preserved sources, but it would be desirable to reconstruct this as fully as possible. It should hardly be taken as a coincidence that the Khazar embassy appeared in Constantinople in the same year the city was besieged by the Russians and visited by a Russian embassy. The Khazars, ruling the steppes between the Black and Caspian seas, were neighbours of the Russians at that time. In the first half of the ninth century, their empire extended its authority over the southern part of the East Slavic tribes in the Dnieper basin, while the Russians, coming from Scandinavia, first established themselves in the north and imposed tribute on the northern part of the East Slavs, and then gradually expanded their power towards the south, where their interests inevitably collided with the interests of the Khazars.[17] Faced with a sudden Russian attack, were the Romans the ones who turned to their old trans-Pontine allies the Khazars for help in containing the onslaught of their Russian neighbours and thus initiated the events that led to the appearance of the Khazar legation in Constantinople? This does not seem likely. According to Patriarch Photius, the Russian attack on Constantinople was quite sudden and of short duration, and the way it ended does not indicate the participation of a foreign power. In addition, his testimony that the Russians were an almost unknown people in Constantinople until then,[18] speaks to the fact that in Byzantium they did not care much about the potential danger that the Russians posed to them. The speed with which the Russian attack and then retreat took place, as well as the absence of the emperor and the leading people of the Empire from the capital at that moment, appear as circumstances in which an agile Byzantine diplomatic action towards the Khazars far across the Black Sea could not have been organized. On the other hand, there are strong grounds for believing that the Khazars could have been the ones for whom diplomatic rapprochement with Byzantium was of crucial importance at that time. Living in the neighbourhood of the Russians and having faced the danger they posed much more directly and for much longer than Byzantium, the Khazars were far better apprised of the Russians' strength and political aspirations. The Khazars were certainly pleased by the news that the Russians had been defeated under the walls of Constantinople in June 860, so at that moment

[17] PSRL I, 16–21; Vernadsky 1959, 92–97, 174–226.
[18] Photii Homiliae, 42.8–10.

political association with the Empire seemed to them the most useful foreign policy step. Their country already had real religious pluralism, due to the presence of Turkish Tengrism, Judaism and Islam, and was thus open to different religious influences. Therefore, it is not unusual that the Khazar authorities included in their address to Constantinople the invitation to Christian missionaries, if this would contribute to rapprochement with the great Christian empire. As in the case of the Russians, the initiative therefore came from the Khazars, and their embassy arrived to Constantinople after the Russian siege of the city, that is, in the second half of 860.

The Emperor Michael III on this occasion also addressed Constantine the Philosopher, who at that time lived in seclusion, among the monks on Mount Olympus, with his brother, the monk Methodius, *talking only with books*.[19] The emperor explained to him the content of the Khazar mission and said: *Go, Philosopher, to the people and make them word and answer about the Holy Trinity, with Its help; because no one else can do it properly.*[20] In these latter words, there is an explanation as to why the emperor entrusted such a significant undertaking yet again, to Constantine the Philosopher, just like the visit to the caliph's court a few years earlier. This new mission was to be largely similar to that at the caliph's court, and Constantine's experience from the previous mission could only further convince the emperor that there was no other suitable person for this undertaking. As before, it was again necessary to present the teaching of the Christian faith before unbelievers and defend it against their attacks with the help of the knowledge of dialectics and other skills. The difference, however, was that the Khazars, unlike the Muslims a few years earlier, were not launching a direct attack on the Christian faith, which required an answer. This time there was no need for the participation of Constantinopolitan theologians, with Nicetas of Byzantium at their head. The Khazars only wanted the Christian teachings to be presented to them and compared to the Jewish and Muslim teachings. According to the quoted words of Emperor Michael III, which are reported by Constantine's biographer, only Constantine the Philosopher could *have done it properly.*

The emperor promised Constantine, who agreed to the task, that he would give him everything he needed and told him: *Knowing the imperial*

[19] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VII.1–5.
[20] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VIII.6–7.

state and honour, go honourably with the imperial help.[21] Setting off on a long journey, Constantine arrived in the Crimea, in Cherson, one of the Byzantine possessions there. According to the biographer, there he *learned Jewish speech and books, translated eight parts of the grammar and improved his knowledge from that*.[22] He also met a Samaritan there, from whom he received *Samaritan books*, which, *locking himself in the house and committing himself to prayer, with God's help, he began to read without error*.[23]

In Cherson, he found out that the body of St. Clement, the pope of Rome from the first century, one of the first successors of St. Peter, still rested at the bottom of the sea near the city.[24] Constantine convinced the archbishop of Cherson that it was possible to find the saint's relics and take them out of the sea. Since, according to Constantine's biographer, the relics of St. Clement were revealed in a miraculous way to Constantine, the archbishop of Cherson and the clergy, they then *took them with great honour and brought them into the city with the glory of all the citizens*. This is what, as Constantine's anonymous biographer concludes the description of the event, was written *vъ obrětenьi jego*, i.e. in the text on the discovery of the relics of St. Clement.[25] In order to magnify and celebrate the event, Constantine first wrote a *canon*, then a short sermon during the deposition of the relics in the new grave in the Church of St. Leontius in Cherson, so that in memory of it, a few years later, most likely in Rome, where he transferred these relics, he also wrote the famous *Sermon on the translation of the relics of the most glorious Clement*, mentioned by Constantine's biographer, preserved only in an early Slavic translation.[26] It is this work of Constantine that contains key chronological information for dating the entire story of his Khazar mission. The discovery of the relics of St. Clement took place on 30 January 6369 from the Creation of the

[21] Ibidem.

[22] Ibidem.

[23] Ibidem.

[24] Pope Clement I was exiled by Emperor Trajan (98–117) to the Crimea, where he was laid to rest, cf. Dvornik 1933, 190–197.

[25] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VIII.16–18.

[26] Butler 1993–1994, 15–39. The description of events related to the discovery of the relics of St. Clement recorded in the *Sermon* of Constantine was confirmed in 869–870 to the papal librarian Anastasius by Metropolitan Metrophanes of Smyrna, who at the time of the discovery was in Cherson, where, as a faithful follower of Ignatius, he was in exile imposed on him by Photius. Anastasius writes about this in his letter to Bishop Gaudericus of Velletri in 875, Anastasii Bibliothecarii epp., 436.5–438.14; Butler 1993–1994, 19–20.

World, i.e. 861 from the Nativity of Christ.[27] Therefore, Constantine left Constantinople and arrived in the Crimea, in Cherson, most likely at the end of 860. Therefore, the arrival of the Khazar embassy in Constantinople occurred most certainly in the second half or at the end of 860.

The *Russian Letters* of Constantine the Philosopher and the Byzantine Mission to the Russians

The most interesting and enigmatic event related to Constantine the Philosopher's stay in Cherson, according to the presentation schedule of his biographer, happened after learning the Jewish and Samaritan languages, and before finding the relics of St. Clement, on 30 January 861. This event is also interesting because it suddenly brings us back to the topic of the Byzantine mission to convert the Russians. The well-known quotes from the *Life of Constantine* provide the following: *He found there* (i.e. in Cherson) *the Gospel and the Psalter written in the Russian letters and found a man who spoke that language, and by talking to him he learned many words, compared them with his own language, distinguished vowels and consonants, and Praying to God, he soon began to read and speak, and many people admired him, praising God*.[28] These lines have troubled generations of researchers and still represent an unsolved problem. What, then, were the *Russian letters* in Cherson in the Crimea, and even the Gospel and the Psalter written in those letters, two years before Constantine the Philosopher himself invented the Slavonic alphabet, began to translate liturgical scriptures, and enabled and laid the foundations of Slavic literature? Some researchers believed that it was the writing of the Crimean Goths, the descendants of those Goths for whom Bishop Ulfilas invented the alphabet in the fourth century.[29] Others thought that it was primarily a scribal error, and that the original manuscript read *Surian script*, i.e. Syriac letters, with the existence of which, along with a rich tradition of Christian literature, Constantine and his brother Methodius were well acquainted.[30] Against this thesis, as many of those who advocated it also

[27] Butler 1993–1994, 22, 28, n. 3.

[28] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VIII. 15.

[29] Dvornik 1926, 139, n. 3; Dvornik 1933, 184–188; Vasiliev 1936, 113–114.

[30] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVI. The *Syriac thesis* was advocated by Vaillant 1935, 73–77; Jakobson 1944, 181–186; Patri 2003, 83–94; Daiber 2021, 311–318. On the whole controversy, cf. Tachiaos 1993–1994, 61–71. Cf. also a detailed review, KME III, 500–503 (K. Kostova), where the thesis that it was the *runic script* of the Scandinavian Russians is accepted as the most probable. It is this thesis that I will try to strengthen here.

admitted, clearly speaks that part of the statement from the *Life of Constantine* where it is said that, while learning the language, *he distinguished between vowels and consonants*, while it is well known that the Syriac alphabet, like the other alphabets of the Semitic peoples, had no signs for vowels.[31]

The main reason for the misunderstanding of the mentioned passage of the *Life of Constantine* lies in the fact that researchers approach it with the notion of the Russians, who are mentioned in it, as a Slavic people, and of the Russian language as a Slavic language. However, it is very well known that at the time of the compilation of the *Life of Constantine*, between 869 and 882,[32] and especially at the time to which the mentioned passage refers, which is 860–861, the Russians were not Slavs. They were still distinct, even in the middle of the tenth century, when the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus made a clear distinction between the Russians and their subjects from various Slavic tribes.[33] Before they merged with their Slavic neighbours and subjects and lost their original ethnic identity to become Slavs, the name of the *Russians* denoted a completely different people—the Northmen (Nordmanni) from Scandinavia.[34] These were the *Russians* who appeared in Constantinople and Ingelheim in 838 and 839,[35] and who besieged Constantinople in 860. These were the Russians at the time of the compilation of the *Life of Constantine* in 869–882. So naturally, these were also the *Russians* that it mentions in connection with Constantine's stay in the Crimea in the winter of 860–861.

Since the name *Russians* mentioned in the *Life of Constantine*, as well as in all other contemporary sources, refers to the Scandinavian Northmen, the question arises whether this helps in clarifying the puzzle of the *Russian letters*. It is well known that the Scandinavians used a special script in the Viking Age, the so-called runes or futhark. Many inscriptions were

[31] Phillips 1866, 7.

[32] Birnbaum 1993–1994, 7.

[33] DAI I, 9.1–65.

[34] On the various names used for the Scandinavian Northmen in the ninth and tenth centuries and the term *Russians* as one of them, cf. Vasiliev 1946, 3–5. On the Russians in the ninth century, cf. Zuckerman 2000, 95–120. Among the many sources of the time that confirm the identification of the *Northmen* and the *Russians*, it is worth highlighting Liutprand of Cremona, in whose work, among the peoples who are the northern neighbours of the Byzantines, mention is also made of *Russians, whom we* (i.e., those who use the Latin language) *call by another name Nordmani* (… Rusios, quos alio nos nomine Nordmannos apellamus…), Liutprandi Antapodosis, I.11, V.15.

[35] Annales Bertiniani, 19–20.

carved in that script throughout the Scandinavian countries and the areas of their political and cultural influence in the period from the ninth through the eleventh century, mainly before the spread of Christianity to those areas.[36] What is important for the question of the *Russian letters* that Constantine the Philosopher encountered in the Crimea is the fact that prominent scholars of the Latin West of that time were aware of the existence of a special script of the Scandinavian Northmen. They refer to that script as the *Abecedarium Nordmanicum*. The famous Rabanus Maurus, archbishop of Mainz in 848–856, in his work *De inventione linguarum*, describes and gives an overview of letters for the script of the Northmen (*Marcomani, which we call Northmen*, Rabanus writes), in addition to the Jewish, Greek, Latin and enigmatic *Scythian* scripts.[37] *Abecedarium Nordmanicum*, i.e. a table with the letters of the Scandinavian runes, in addition to the Jewish, Greek and related Anglo-Saxon runes, is also found in Saint Gallen manuscript no. 878, which contains mostly compositions from the ninth century.[38] There is no reason to doubt that the same script was used by the *Russians*, the eastern branch of the Scandinavian Northmen, and that the mentioned place of the *Life of Constantine* confirms that.

The existence of a special script used by the Northmen was not unknown in the ninth century either in the West or in the East of Europe. Its existence was known in all the regions that they reached, either with destructive raids, or through peaceful trade. Constantine the Philosopher mastered that script, as well as the language written in it, during his stay in Cherson in the Crimea, in the winter of 860–861. There remains, however, one more question arising from this section of the *Life of Constantine*. There it is written that Constantine found the *Gospel and the Psalter written in the Russian letters*. Whence came the Christian liturgical writings in the script and language of the Scandinavian Russians—Northmen in Cherson in the Crimea in the winter of 860–861? Only one answer to this question comes to mind. It was shown above how these same Russians, after their unsuccessful siege of Constantinople in June 860, sent an embassy to Constantinople, through which they asked to be baptized, and attention was drawn to the testimonies of Patriarch Photius and the Continuer of Theophanes, confirming that this really did happen. According to the

[36] About the Scandinavian runic script, in general, cf. Roesdahl, Sørensen 2003, 132–134.
[37] B. Rabani De inventione linguarum, 1581–1582.
[38] Scherrer 1875, 307–309; Birkmann 2004, 213–223.

latter, the Russian embassy that expressed the desire for the Russians to be baptized arrived in Constantinople *not long after* the unsuccessful siege of the city in June 860.[39] The mention of the *Gospel and the Psalter written in the Russian letters*, which Constantine the Philosopher *found* in Cherson in the Crimea in the winter of 860–861, represents valuable testimony to the first steps of the Byzantine state and church in the process of Christianizing the Russians. The Constantinopolitan government apparently took very seriously the implementation of the policy of Christianizing the Russians after the arrival of their embassy. In order to bring this distant nation closer to the faith of Christ, the translation of the liturgical scriptures into their language was begun. It was a process that required a long time. It is no coincidence that Constantine in the winter of 860–861 in the Crimea found only the translation of the Gospel and the Psalter, and not the entire Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and liturgical writings. The translation of the Gospels and the Psalter had to be the very beginning of that process, since they are the most basic and necessary liturgical writings. Later, when he was preparing for the mission to Moravia, after having invented the Slavonic script, Constantine began to translate the Gospels first.[40] According to the *Life of Methodius*, Constantine and Methodius during their mission to Moravia in 863–867 translated into the Slavic language only the most basic liturgical writings—namely the *Psalter and the Gospels*, with the *Apostle and selected ecclesiastical services*, while the rest of the Holy Scriptures and other ecclesiastical writings were translated later, thanks to the care of Methodius. According to that statement, Methodius took *two priests who were quite quick writing scribes*, who translated all the books of the Old and New Testaments, *except for the Maccabees*, from Greek to the Slavonic language in six months, between the month of March and Feast of St. Demetrius, 26 October.[41] Therefore, it is clear that for the translation of the four Gospels and one hundred and fifty Psalms, a good scribe and a master of a language needed much less time—precisely the amount of time that passed between the arrival of the Russian envoys in Constantinople, after the unsuccessful siege of the city in the summer of 860, so most likely in the second half 860, and the moment when Constantine the Philosopher saw these translations in the Crimea, a few months later, at the end of 860 or the beginning of 861.

[39] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.33.
[40] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIV.13.
[41] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XV.1.

Who made these translations? The Byzantine understanding of religion meant that each nation should praise God in its own language.[42] How that notion was put into practice is well known, because Emperor Michael and Constantine the Philosopher himself explained it somewhat later, using the example of the Slavs. In order for liturgical writings to be translated into a language, it was only necessary for that language to have its own script. Because *the Divine word cannot be written on water*.[43] Since the Russians had an alphabet for their language, it was only necessary to find a man who knew their language and alphabet. This could have been an imperial subject, but it is more likely that it was a Russian, who already had a good command of the Greek language and alphabet.[44] In the *Life of Constantine* it is also written that, when he *found the Gospel and the Psalter written in the Russian letters*, in Cherson Constantine *also found a man who speaks that language* and that he had a long conversation with him, and after those conversations he learned the Russian language.[45] This would mean that, before Constantine learned Russian, the conversations between them were conducted in some other language, most likely Greek. It is not unreasonable to assume that the man from whom Constantine learned the Russian language in Cherson, and who carried with him the Russian translation of the Gospel and the Psalter, was one of those who were involved in the very translation of religious writings and in the process of Christianizing the Russians. Finally, the fact that Constantine encountered the translation of the Gospel and the Psalter into Russian and the man who owned these translations precisely in Cherson in the Crimea, in the winter of 860–861, additionally confirms the thesis that the appearance of those writings is closely related to the process of Christianization of the Russians, which began in the second half of 860, due to the fact that through Cherson, and the Crimea in general, led the way from

[42] The position was based on examples from the Holy Scriptures, Ps. 117:1; Acts 2:11; Phil. 2:11; 1 Cor. 14:4. During his discussion with *trilingualists* in Venice in 867, Constantine enumerates the nations that praise God in their own language, Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVI.8. Cf. Vavřínek 1978, 257–259.

[43] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIV.11.

[44] The Holy Scriptures were most often translated from Greek into *national languages* by members of the people for whom the translation was intended. Thus it was translated into Latin by the Roman Jerome, and into Gothic by the Goth Ulfilas, and into Armenian by the Armenian Mesrop Mashtots. By contrast, the Slavs had the privilege of having the translation of the most holy Book from Greek into their language done by those whose mother tongue was Greek. Cf. Vavřínek 1978, 257–259.

[45] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VIII.15.

Constantinople to the then Russian settlements on the banks of the Dnieper.

The fact is that Constantine encountered the aforementioned translations of liturgical scriptures into Russian only in the Crimea. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that they were made in Constantinople. How is it that he did not become acquainted with them back in Constantinople and that he was not at all involved in the work of Christianizing the Russians carried out by his government, given that he had played an important role and acquired great experience in international relations previously, when religious issues were centre stage? The answer is probably to be found in two circumstances. The first is that at the time of the arrival of the Russian embassy and the organization of the mission to convert the Russians, Constantine was not in Constantinople. It is known that after returning from a visit to the caliph's court, he withdrew from "public life" and joined his brother Methodius and the monks on Mount Olympus, from where he returned only at the emperor's request, in order to undertake a mission to the Khazars.[46] Another circumstance is that Constantine was never actually involved in the Christianization of the peoples. Both among the Muslims and among the Khazars, his task was to participate in polemics and, with the help of his intellectual abilities and philosophical skills, defend the teachings of the Christian faith. In Moravia, his task would be to bring Christian education to an already Christianized people in the language of that people themselves. He would not be engaged by the emperor and patriarch even during the Christianization of the Bulgarians, in 864, and not only because he was then in Moravia. It seems that the Constantinopolitan government at that time had elaborate mechanisms and a well-thought-out policy of implementing the process of Christianizing foreign peoples, in which the participation of Constantine the Philosopher was not so essential. That policy was implemented during the Christianization of the Russians, but it is best illustrated by the example of the Christianization of the Bulgarians.

Nothing else is known about the Byzantine mission of Christianization of the Russians. It is not known who the missionaries were and how they spread the Christian faith and the use of liturgical books translated into Russian. It is not known whether their activity was limited only to the Russians, or whether it affected their Slavic subjects as well. It is only certain that it was a long and gradual process. Patriarch Photius recorded in

[46] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VII.1–5.

867 that the Russians were successfully brought to the faith of Christ. At the end of his review of the Christianization of the Russians, Photius expresses his wish *that they receive both bishops and pastors and that they respect the beliefs of the Christians with great care and concern*.[47] With this sentence, he expresses what has yet to happen, what he hopes for.[48] According to Photius, this was supposed to be the next step in the process of the Christianization of the Russians in 867—for them to get their own bishop, their own *shepherd*. Pope Nicholas I, in his famous *Answers to the Questions of the Bulgarians*, which he sent to the Bulgarian prince Boris at the end of 866 and which will be discussed at the appropriate place, briefly described the course of the mission of Christianizing a people, from the beginning to the moment when it comes to the establishment of the church organization and the creation of bishoprics. First, the pope writes, the people are baptized by the priests, and when a certain time has passed and the number of faithful people and the number of priests have multiplied, a bishop is appointed to them.[49] The first Byzantine mission in Bulgaria operated according to the same principle, which during its activity in 864–866, which will also be discussed further, did not produce a single bishop, except for those who came from Byzantium to convert the Bulgarians. Obviously, by 867, the process of Christianizing the Russians has still not reached a stage that would allow, or require, the appointment of a bishop. Photius hoped that this might happen soon. However, the confluence of circumstances meant that after 24 September of the same year 867 he was deposed from the patriarchal throne, to which his rival Ignatius was restored. Ignatius would continue where Photius left off in the process of the Christianization of the Russians, and only he was to dedicate an *archbishop* to the Russians.[50]

[47] Photii epp., 2.304–305.

[48] Without exception scholars have interpreted the mentioned place as if Photius had already consecrated a bishop to the Russians, and not that this had yet to happen, cf. L'Huillier 1992, 282; Seibt 1992, 291.

[49] Responsa Nicolai, 592.27–593.17.

[50] Vita Basilii, 97.1–9.

Constantine the Philosopher at the Court of the Khazar Khagan

Constantine left Cherson after 2 February 861, when the solemn deposition of the relics of St. Pope Clement, found three days earlier, at the Church of St. Leontius in that city took place.[51] He went further by ship, towards the Khazar country, *across the Maeotian lake*, i.e. the Sea of Azov, *towards the Caspian Gate of the Caucasian Mountains*.[52]

In the letter that the Khazars had sent to the Byzantine emperor, which was the reason for Constantine's arrival to their country, it was stated that they wanted a man be sent to them who would be able to argue with the Jews and Muslims and that if he prevailed over them in that argument, they would convert to Christianity. However, although open to different religious influences and tolerant of different cults, at the time of Constantine's visit to the Khazar court, their society was already Judaized to a considerable extent.[53] Scholars, however, disagree about when the process of Judaization of the Khazars began, how it proceeded, and when it was completed. Medieval Jewish sources on the matter, such as the correspondence of the Khazar Khagan Joseph and Hasdai ibn Shaprut, Jewish vizier of the caliph of Córdoba Abd al-Rahman III (912–961), the so-called *Genizah Letters*, also from the middle of the tenth century, and the writer Judah Halevi from the middle of the twelfth century, provide data on the basis of which the reception of Judaism by the Khazar ruling circles can be roughly dated to the eighth century. Those sources link the act of acceptance of Judaism by the Khazars to the so-called *contest of religions*, a theological debate between representatives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, before the Khazar khagan, in which the representative of Judaism won, so the khagan decided to accept his religion. Arab writers from the end of the ninth century and from the tenth century generally only state that the Khazars profess Judaism, although some go so far as to chronologically place the Khazar conversion to Judaism during the reign of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786–809). The earliest source to discuss the matter is the work of a Western European writer, Christian of Stavelot, who testifies that the Khazars already professed the Jewish faith at the time when the process of the Christianization of the Bulgarians took place,

[51] Butler 1993–1994, 25–26.
[52] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, IX.1.
[53] Golden 2007, 140–141, and 150 sq. for similar opinions of earlier scholars.

between 864 and 870.[54] Recently, C. Zuckerman tried to connect the debate led by Constantine the Philosopher at the Khazar court with the aforementioned *contest of religions* of the Jewish sources, and based on that he concluded that the decision of the Khazars in favour of the faith of Moses came precisely in 861 or very shortly after.[55] However, after he had presented the results of his research on the subject, a hoard of Khazar coins was found in Sweden, bearing the Arabic inscriptions *Ard al-Khazar* (*Land of the Khazars*) and *Moses is the Prophet of God*, which are dated to 837/838.[56] This unequivocally testifies that the Khazars had already officially professed Judaism at that time.[57]

From the description of Constantine's stay at the court of the Khazar khagan and the discussions he held there, it is also clear that Judaism was already the dominant religion among the Khazars. Although it was never directly stated in that section of the *Life of Constantine*, it can be concluded that the Khazar khagan himself was a Jew. Namely, at the dinner arranged at the court on the occasion of Constantine's arrival, the khagan toasted him, saying: *I drink in the name of the One God Who created all matter*, to which Constantine replied: *I drink in the name of the only God and His Word, who created all matter with the Word, by which the heavens were established, and the life-giving Spirit, from whom all their power proceeds.* To that, the khagan said the following: *While saying the same thing, we still have different opinions about it. Because you venerate the Trinity, and we the One God, as the books teach us.*[58] The khagan's entire surrounding was predominantly Jewish. Constantine's biographer writes that during

[54] Christiani Druthmari Expositio, 1456 A–B. Literature on the Judaization of the Khazars is very extensive. For more recent works, in which all available source data from Jewish, Arabic, Latin and Slavic sources are analysed in detail (not a single Byzantine source mentions Judaism among the Khazars) and an overview of the older literature and a critical review of it is provided, cf. Zuckerman 1995, 237–270; Shepard 1998, 11–34; Golden 2007, 136–162, with reference to all recent opinions on the chronology of the conversion of the Khazars on p. 150–158.

[55] Zuckerman 1995, 250.

[56] Kovalev 2005, 220–253.

[57] Golden 2007, 156, 159; Signes Codoñer 2014, 355–362.

[58] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, IX.15–22. According to Golden 2007, 147, the faith represented by the Khazar khagan in the discussion with Constantine could easily be not Judaism, but the cult of Tengri. However, the fact that the khagan emphasizes the superiority of his belief in *the One God* over the Christian belief in the Holy Trinity rather speaks in favour of the fact that his religion was Judaism, and the fact that the khagan refers to the teachings *of the books*, which could not be connected with the cult of Tengri.

the same dinner *Jews were standing all around him*.[59] The general term *Jews* is also used by the biographer for those with whom Constantine later argued.[60] He does not say of them that they were *wise and bookish people, learned in geometry and astronomy and other sciences*, as for the Muslim theologians with whom Constantine argued a few years earlier in Samarra.[61] Therefore, they were not some brand of Jewish missionary who came to convert the Khazars to Judaism, but people who were permanently living in the Khazar environment, either descendants of earlier Jewish settlers, or converted Khazars themselves. Constantine himself, addressing the khagan with the words: *I am but one man among you, without kin and friend*, actually opposes himself, as a Christian envoy, to all the others. On the same occasion, he tells the khagan: *Those of you who are strong in mind, when we discuss, let them say what they understand that it is so, and what they do not understand, let them ask and we will tell them*.[62] So he was there to counter and answer all of them.

Constantine's discussion at the khagan's court, as described in the tenth chapter of his *Life*, was not *a contest of the three religions*. It was a discussion between the Khazar Jews and Constantine, as a representative of Christianity, in which they expressed their complaints and objections to the teaching of the Christian faith, trying to show that it was a false religion, attacks which the Byzantine missionary was at pains to refute.[63] In that respect, his discussion was very similar to the one he had held a few years earlier at the Caliph's court with Muslim theologians. The Jews made the usual arguments against the Christian faith. They pointed out that the Law of Moses was the first law that God gave to man, and criticized Christians for believing that a woman gave birth to God (the Holy Virgin), for not adhering to circumcision, for monogamy, for respecting icons, for eating pork, etc. Constantine answered everything logically, using numerous biblical quotations, exclusively from the Old Testament books, especially the Prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Micah, Malachi.[64] Besides, as the writer of the *Life of*

[59] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, IX.23.

[60] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, X.16 sq.

[61] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VI.14.

[62] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, X.1–2.

[63] It was not, therefore, a *contest of religions*, which is spoken of in the Jewish *Genizah Letters*, cf. Zuckerman 1995, 242–245. On Constantine's mission among the Khazars and his discussion at the kagan's court, cf. Ivanov 2003, 149–152; Ivanova 2024, 67–73.

[64] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, IX–X.

Constantine testifies, Constantine recorded the sermons he delivered on that occasion in a book, which his brother Methodius later translated into Slavonic, *dividing it into eight lessons*, i.e. chapters,[65] which has unfortunately been lost to posterity.

The Muslims had no part in the whole discussion. Only the day after the great discussion with the Jews, when they all gathered so that Constantine could explain to them the details of the teachings of the Christian faith, did one of the advisers of the Khazar khagan, who was a Muslim by faith, appear and ask him why Christians do not recognize Muhammad as a prophet, when he wrote so many beautiful words about Jesus Christ, citing those places *from the Qur'an*. Constantine answered that if the Christians were to recognize Muhammad as a prophet, then they would disprove the Old Testament prophet Daniel, who predicted that *after Christ all prediction and prophesying will cease*,[66] and that therefore, since he appeared after Christ, Muhammad cannot possibly be a prophet.[67] There were certainly followers of Muhammad's law among the Khazars, such as the aforementioned adviser, since the Khazars had been in continuous contact with the Muslims for two centuries, perhaps more than with Byzantium, either in frequent wars, or even more frequently through trade and cultural relations.[68] However, it seems that Islam was still not widely present in Khazar society, and that only rare individuals belonged to it, while the vast majority professed Judaism. This is best reflected by Constantine's biographer, conveying the reaction of the observers to the mentioned conversation of Constantine with the Muslim advisor: *Many of them said—Daniel spoke with the spirit of God, while we all know Muhammad was a liar and the destroyer of everyone's salvation, who brought out his greatest fornications on malice and shamelessness.*[69] Can anything describe more eloquently the attachment of the Khazar environment to the Old Testament religion and mistrust towards Islam?

The day after the great debate with the Jews was actually the most significant day of Constantine's mission to the Khazars. On that day, the Khazars asked him to show them, *with his words and mind*, *the faith that is more brilliant than all.*[70] After he convinced them that *the law of Christ*

[65] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, X.95–96.
[66] Dan., 12:9.
[67] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.21–27.
[68] On the Khazar-Muslim relations, cf. Wasserstein 2007, 373–387.
[69] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.28–29.
[70] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.1 sq.

proclaims the strictness of a pious life, which brings a hundredfold fruit in the eternal dwellings, and explained to the Muslim adviser why Christians do not recognize Muhammad as a prophet, the Khazar leaders, according to Constantine's biographer, recognized the superiority of the Christian faith over other faiths.[71] This was expressed by the *first adviser* of the Khazar khagan, with the words: *Just as the God gave power over all nations to the Christian emperor and perfect wisdom, so (he) also (gave) the faith to them, without which no one can live eternal life*.[72] To this, Constantine declared that he believed that he had succeeded in convincing them of the validity of his words and that, if anyone still opposed them, they should enter into a new discussion with him. If they understood all his words, he invited them to be baptized *in the name of the Holy Trinity*. The Khazars, however, although they recognized the advantages of the Christian faith, were still not ready to fully surrender to it. Their decision was that, from that day on, they would permit to *be baptized at will whoever wants to*. Only *two hundred people* were baptized, who thus *broke away from pagan hatreds and illegal marriages*.[73] The khagan, however, composed a letter to the emperor, in which he pointed out how Constantine, the emperor's envoy, had explained the Christian faith to them by reason and deed, and how, realizing that it was the true faith, he had commanded that the people be *baptized according to their will*, hoping that he himself would do the same. The letter concludes by stating how the Khazars are *associates and friends* to his Empire, and how they are ready to enter his service if need be.[74] Constantine was offered many gifts by the khagan, but instead, he asked the khagan to release and hand over to him Roman prisoners, which turned out to be around two hundred in number. Thus ended the stay of Constantine the Philosopher in the land of the Khazars, and he returned to Constantinople.[75]

For those two hundred Khazars who were immediately baptized, Constantine's biographer points out that by baptism they *broke away from pagan hatreds and illegal marriages*. This would mean that among them there were members of all religions then represented among the Khazars—the followers of Turkish Tengrism, Jews and Muslims. I believe that these

[71] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.7–32.
[72] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.30–32.
[73] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.33–41.
[74] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.42–44.
[75] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.45.

conversions in the country of the Khazars are the subject of certain information from a source that is well known, but which has never been connected with them. The source in question is the letter of Patriarch Photius addressed to Antony, the Archbishop of (Cimmerian) Bosporus, the second most important Byzantine stronghold in the Crimea after Cherson. The letter is short, so I will convey its contents in their entirety.

> *Once it was the Inhospitable Scythian sea… The Milesians, with their philanthropy and culture, changed the brutal and barbaric custom, and turned it into a Hospitable one. Now through you and because of your virtuous efforts and labours and because of other care for the Divine work, not only Hospitable, but also Blessed it becomes and is called. How much, therefore, while I think and write this, with joy and gaiety should I be filled? If you also, having subjugated the Jews there into the subjection to Christ, intend to convert them from the darkness and the Scriptures into grace, as you wrote, I trust and wish for the beautiful fruits of the good hopes that I have always had about you.*[76]

It is known that bishop Luke of Bosporus (Λουκᾶς Βοσπέρης) was present at the *Photian Council* of 879–880, where he is mentioned in the conciliar acts immediately before Paul of Cherson.[77] Therefore, this letter must have been composed during the time when Photius first occupied the patriarchal throne of Constantinople, i.e. between 858 and 867.[78] At one place in the letter Photius says *as you wrote* (ὡς ἔγραψας), which testifies that he is actually composing a reply to a previous letter of the archbishop of Bosporus. The city of Bosporus was located on the very border of the Khazar territory, so when its archbishop talks about the conversion of Jews, it must be related to the Khazars. The only Christianization of the Khazar Jews at that time was the one resulting from the mission of Constantine the Philosopher. It should be remembered how Constantine's biographer describes his journey from Cherson to the Khazar land: *Getting into the ship, he began to travel towards the Khazars, to the Meotian Lake and the Caspian Gate of the Caucasian Mountains.*[79] The journey by boat from the Black Sea to the *Maeotian Lake*, i.e. The Sea of Azov led through the strait, which in ancient times was called the *Cimmerian Bosporus*, in contrast to the Bosporus on which Constantinople lies, which was called

[76] Photii epp., 97.2–12.
[77] Mansi, XVII, 373 C.
[78] Cf. Photii epp., n. 97.
[79] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, IX.1.

the *Thracian Bosporus*. On the Crimean coast of the mentioned strait stood the city of the same name Bosporus, today's Kerch, to whose archbishop Antony Photius addressed the aforementioned letter. As the last Roman and Christian stronghold before entering the land of the barbarians and infidels, Bosporus was also the most suitable place for the connection of Constantine's mission with Constantinople. The news about Constantine's adventures in the land of the Khazars would first reach Bosporus, and from there they would easily be forwarded to Constantinople. Wasn't that exactly the case with the conversion of the two hundred Khazars, mostly pagans and Jews? The news of this certainly first reached Bosporus, and the archbishop there then informed the patriarch in Constantinople. The fact that the patriarch in his reply to the archbishop attributes all the merits for the above-mentioned conversion of Jews to him is quite understandable, because the new Christians in Khazaria were most likely placed under spiritual authority, i.e. episcopal jurisdiction, of the bishop of the nearest city, which was Bosporus. The archbishop of Bosporus, therefore, as the responsible hierarch, would be in charge of implementing the Christianization resulting from Constantine's mission in an organizational sense. Therefore, the letter of Patriarch Photius to the archbishop of Bosporus Antony should be dated to 861. It represents for now the only known contemporary Greek source which, albeit indirectly, testifies to an episode in the life and activities of Constantine the Philosopher.[80]

The road to Constantinople led Constantine again through the Crimea and Cherson.[81] In Cherson, he met again with the archbishop of that city.[82] There is no doubt that it was then that Constantine took with him the relics of St. Clement, which he had found a few months earlier and organized to be stored in the Church of St. Leontius in Cherson. His biographer does not mention it explicitly, but later, when he describes Constantine's arrival in Rome after the Moravian mission in 867, he writes that he brought with him the relics of St. Clement, pope of Rome.[83] Constantine could only have taken these relics during his second stay, when he returned from the land of the Khazars. Having returned to

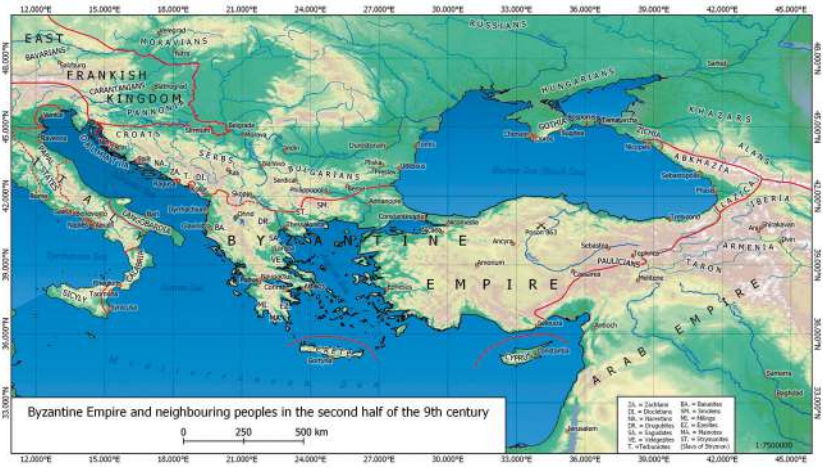
[80] Simeonova 1998, 72–73, understands this letter only as a sign of Photius' interest in a stronger connection with the peripheral parts of the Empire, but does not connect it with the mission of Constantine the Philosopher to the Khazars.

[81] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XII.7–9.

[82] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XII.7.

[83] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVII.1–4.

Constantinople, Constantine met with the emperor and conveyed to him his experiences during the task he had just completed. After that, he lived peacefully for some time, in the capital's Church of the Holy Apostles. He stayed there until, soon after, new tasks and challenges were set before him, or, as his biographer vividly described it, *an effort no less than the first*.[84]



Map 1 Byzantine Empire and neighbouring peoples in the second half of the 9th century

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[84] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIII.1, XIV.1.

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Photius and the Armenians: *Against the Heresy of the Theopaschites*

In the year 311 of the Armenian Era (between 25 April 862 and 24 April 863), *Patriarch Photius of Constantinople sent Archbishop of Nicea Vahanes to the Catholicos of Greater Armenia Zacharias, for the sake of an agreement on faith. Therefore, the Armenian Catholicos Zacharias convened a council of numerous bishops and monks in Shirakavan, in the presence of the Armenian sparapet Ashot, who was encamped there with the army of his nobles, which he gathered because of the rebellions in the northern regions.*[1] Thus reads the text of the colophon at the beginning of the exposition on the council in Shirakavan, which has been preserved in the Armenian texts. The aforementioned council was a central event in Byzantine-Armenian political and religious contacts during the seventh decade of the ninth century, in the era of greatest Byzantine spiritual expansion. That expansion, therefore, also touched Armenia.

The Armenians were an ancient Christian people, because their king Tiridates (298–330) accepted the Christianity preached by St. Gregory the Illuminator and declared it the state religion at the beginning of the fourth century, at the time when emperors Constantine and Licinius ended the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire with the Edict

[1] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 196.1–7, 246; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 1.

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of Milan in 313.[2] However, Armenian Christianity was schismatic, as they had become supporters of Monophysitism at the time of the Christological debates in the fifth century, determined to reject the conclusions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon in 451, and did not deviate from this belief even in the centuries that followed.[3] Patriarch Photius first expressed his intention to overcome the schism and win over the Armenians to the Orthodox form of Christianity in his well-known epistle to Pope Nicholas I from the summer of 861, cited in this work,[4] and in the *Circular Epistle to the patriarchal thrones of the East* in 867, he proudly pointed out that the *inhabitants of Armenia, who were defeated by the wickedness of the Jacobites*, strengthened themselves to reject the old delusion, and that now *part of the Armenians serve a purely and orthodox Christian service and cast anathema on Eutychus and Severus and Dioscorus* and the other leaders of the anti-Chalcedonian movement.[5] It was precisely in the period between the mentioned two epistles, that the extensive activity of Photius and the Byzantine state authorities in imposing Byzantine dogmatic views on the Armenians took place.

Chronology of the Byzantine-Armenian Correspondence During the Time of Photius and Ashot I

In addition to the aforementioned writings dedicated to the Armenian council in Shirakavan, this Byzantine activity, led primarily by Photius, is best reflected by the voluminous correspondence that existed in those years between Constantinople and the Armenian ecclesiastical and political leaders, and which has been preserved to the greatest extent, partly in Greek and partly in Armenian manuscripts. The following letters have been preserved: Patriarch Photius to the Armenian catholicos, known as the *Epistle to the Armenians* (Photii epp. 285),[6] Patriarch Photius to the

[2] ODB I, 179, II, 883–884, III, 2110 (N. Garsoïan); Grousset 1947, 121–125; Garsoïan 1997, 81–84.

[3] Meyendorff 1989, 102–110, 165–206, 280–292; ODB I, 179 (N. Garsoïan).

[4] Photii epp., 290.359–365.

[5] Photii epp., 2.38–47.

[6] Darrouzès, Deux lettres, 155–181 (with French translation); Photii epp., 285.1–479.

Armenian ruler, Prince Ashot (Photii epp. 298),[7] the answer of Prince Ashot to Patriarch Photius, compiled by the Armenian teacher Sahak Mrut,[8] the second, extremely extensive letter from Patriarch Photius to Prince Ashot, entitled *Against the heresy of Theopaschites* (Photii epp. 284),[9] and a letter to Prince Ashot, which was composed by Nicetas of Byzantium in the name of Patriarch Photius by the order of the Byzantine court.[10] There are two more letters, one from the Patriarch Photius to Catholicos Zacharias (855–876), and the other from the same patriarch to Prince Ashot, which were found not to be authentic,[11] and cannot be taken into account when elucidating Byzantine-Armenian relations in Photius' time. In some of the above-mentioned authentic letters, some others are also mentioned, which have not been preserved, but the mention of which allows the whole correspondence to be viewed in its entirety and in all its segments. Determining the exact order of sending the individual letters that made it up and as precisely as possible the chronology of their creation is key to understanding the entire correspondence, and therefore to a clear understanding of Photius', i.e. Byzantine policies towards the Armenians in the sixties of the ninth century. One letter of Pope Nicholas I to Prince Ashot, of which only a fragment has been preserved,[12] should

[7] The letter was preserved only in Armenian. Here we use an old edition of Photius' writings preserved in Armenian, Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 210.14–213.23, 261–264 (Russian translation); Finck, Gjandschezian, Brief des Photios an Aschot, 1–4 (German translation); Photii epp., 298.1–161 (Latin translation); Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 24–32 (French translation); Grumel, Regestes, no. 515.

[8] Preserved only in Armenian, Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 214.1–226.4, 265–279 (Russian translation); Finck, Gjandschezian, Brief des Photios an Aschot, 4–17 (German translation); Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 32–53 (French translation).

[9] Darrouzès, Deux lettres, 141–153 (parts, with a French translation); Photii epp., 284.1–3294.

[10] Nicetae refutatio epistolae ab Armeniae principe, 587–665; Grumel, Regestes, no. 516.

[11] The supposed letter of Photius to the Catholicos Zacharias, preserved only in Armenian, was published by Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 179–195, 227–245 (Russian translation); Grumel, Regestes, no. 473. B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink argued that it could not be a letter of Photius, Photii epp. III, XI. Recently, however, Greenwood 2006, 134–142, tried to rehabilitate its authenticity and put forward the assumption that it is chronologically the second letter of Photius to Catholicos Zacharias, written before the Council of Shirakavan, most likely in August or September 861. The second letter, entitled *Answer to the letters of Prince Ashot written by Sahak, the teacher of the Armenians*, but better known as the *Answers of Patriarch Photius to the questions of Prince Ashot*, Photii epp., 299.1–80 (Latin translation), was rejected as inauthentic by Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 91.

[12] Nicolai I epp., 451.25–454.9.

certainly be added to that Byzantine-Armenian correspondence, because it is also important for shedding light on the issue.[13]

The chronology of the aforementioned Byzantine-Armenian correspondence during the time of Patriarch Photius and Prince Ashot I has not yet been reliably established, and the opinions that have been expressed so far in scholarship are diametrically opposed. The first publishers of some of the mentioned letters, along with their editions and translations, made no attempt to address the question of their dating. The first detailed historical analysis of the letters was made by Joseph Laurent, who placed the entire correspondence chronologically at the time of Photius' first tenure at the head of the Church of Constantinople, and after the council of Shirakavan, that is, between 862 and 867.[14] Venance Grumel, proceeding from the fact that at the beginning of the letter of Nicetas of Byzantium, which is a response to Ashot's letter to Photius, which was composed by Sahak as a response to Photius' first letter to Ashot, *the most pious and orthodox emperors* are mentioned,[15] concluded that both mentioned Byzantine letters—first Photius' letter to Ashot and Nicetas' response to Ashot's response to Photius—were created during the reign of Emperor Basil I and his sons Leo and Alexander, between 879 and 886, since during most of Photius' first tenure, only one emperor ruled in Constantinople—Michael III, until he crowned Basil the Macedonian as emperor and co-ruler on 26 May 866.[16] Jean Darrouzès, who discovered and first published two important parts of that correspondence—the letter of Photius to the Armenian Catholicos (*Epistle to the Armenians*) and the second letter of Photius to Prince Ashot (*Against the heresy of the Theopaschites*)—is inclined to date the entire correspondence to the period of Photius' first tenure, and that as close as possible to the time of the council of Shirakavan in 862.[17]

[13] In addition to the aforementioned correspondence, data on Byzantine-Armenian relations in the second half of the ninth century are also provided by later Armenian writers from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, cf. Laurent 1919, 309–310. However, their data about that time are mostly incorrect, especially on the issue of chronology, due to their great distance from the events they wrote about, and they are mutually contradictory.

[14] Laurent 1919, 309–316.

[15] Nicetae refutatio epistolae ab Armeniae principe, 588 A.

[16] Grumel, Regestes, nos. 515–516.

[17] Darrouzès, Deux lettres, 138–139. J. Darrouzès recognizes *the most pious and orthodox emperors* of Nicetas' epistle as Michael III and his uncle Bardas after the former made him Caesar on 26 April 862.

However, recently, a hitherto unknown copy of the Armenian text of Photius' first letter to Ashot was discovered and published, which enabled later editors and researchers to place not only that letter but also the chronology of the entire correspondence, which largely rests on the dating of that letter to the time when Photius occupied the patriarchal throne of the city of Constantine for the second time, between 877 and 886. Namely, in manuscript no. 960 of the collection of the Armenian Monastery of St. James in Jerusalem (*Hierosolymitanus S. Iacobi Armeniorum 960*), which originates from 1602, a copy of the mentioned letter of Photius to Ashot has been preserved with two sections that are not found in other previously known copies.[18] Exactly that copy was used by B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink as a basis for the Latin translation of that letter, which they published in their collection of Photius' epistles.[19] In the first of those two new sections, Photius points out how his *dangerous misfortunes* have passed and how he rejoices over his *return to that imperial city*, and a little further on how he writes a letter managing *spiritual matters after his return …which were entrusted to him by the emperors appointed by God*.[20] The same section also mentions a letter with expressions of the deepest friendship that Ashot had previously sent to Photius, as well as his concern for Photius' sufferings in exile.[21] Those lines led the editors to date the letter, and according to it the entire correspondence, to the period of Photius' second term, after his return from exile to Constantinople and during the reign of multiple emperors, Basil I and his sons, more precisely to the period between 877 and in 879.[22] Such dating, though, created a small problem for them, since they could not fit in it the letter of Photius that he, as patriarch, addressed to the Armenian Catholicos (*Epistle to the Armenians*), which was found and published by J. Darrouzès, because Catholicos Zacharias died in 876. In order to overcome this problem, they resorted to combinations and constructions, as, ostensibly, Photius, after returning to Constantinople in 873 or 875, and reconciling with Patriarch Ignatius, assumed patriarchal duties during Ignatius' lifetime.[23]

Igor Dorfmann-Lazarev, the author of an extensive study on Byzantine-Armenian relations during the time of Patriarch Photius, fully accepted

[18] Cf. Photii epp. IV, pp. IX–X.
[19] Photii epp., 298.1–161, for the mentioned sections, cf. ll. 6–65, 134–153.
[20] Photii epp., 298.33–34, 46–49.
[21] Photii epp., 298.23–27, 34–41.
[22] Photii epp., nos. 284, 298, 299.
[23] Photii epp., no. 285.

the post-877 dating of Photius' letter to Ashot, even finding arguments to move the date to 881/882. Namely, in the statement of Photius' letter to Ashot that *Old Rome respects the Fourth Council in the same way as we do the three councils that preceded it*,[24] Dorfman-Lazarev sees an indication that Photius is writing this after the reconciliation with the Roman Church, which was reached at the Council of 879/880.[25] According to him, the time after that council is also indicated by the fact that Photius mentions *seven ecumenical councils* recognized by the entire church, which was finally established precisely at that council.[26] Nevertheless, his key argument for dating Photius' letter to Ashot in 881/882 is a note that is found in front of the copy of the letter in a thirteenth-century manuscript, which states that it was created *during the pontificate of the Armenian Catholicos George and in the twentieth year of the reign of the prince of princes Ashot*. Since Ashot received the title of *Prince of Princes* from the Caliph in 862/863, the twentieth year of his reign would exactly be 881/882.[27] Dorfman-Lazarev finds the last argument for the late dating of Photius' first letter to Ashot in the fact that Photius writes at the very end of the letter that he is sending Ashot a gift of the Holy Cross, which, according to certain Armenian sources, was given to Ashot by Emperor Basil I (867–886), and the author connects this donation with Basil's victorious campaign in the east in 878/879.[28] Since Ashot's letter to Photius, composed by the teacher Sahak, was a response to the aforementioned letter of Photius, it therefore must have been written after it, most likely in 882. The letter written by Nicetas of Byzantium by order of the Byzantine emperor and on behalf of the Patriarch Photius (*Refutation of the Epistle of the Prince of Armenia*) was a response to Sahak's aforementioned letter, so it was written after it, thus most likely in 883.[29] However, rejecting the notion that Photius' second letter to Ashot, the one entitled *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites*, was also a response to the same letter of the teacher Sahak, which is clearly supported by modern editors of Photius' epistles,[30] Dorfman-Lazarev expresses the opinion that both it and Photius'

[24] Photii epp., 298.88–89.
[25] Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 83–84.
[26] Photii epp., 298.88–92; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 83–84.
[27] Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 24, 84.
[28] Photii epp., 298.160–161; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 84–85.
[29] Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 85–87.
[30] Photii epp., no. 284.

letter to the Armenian Catholicos (*Epistle to the Armenians*) still belong to the period of his first term on the patriarchal throne and closer to the council in Shirakavan, so to the time before 867.[31] Following largely the same line of argumentation, with a few additions, Tim Greenwood also assumes that Photius' letter to the Prince of Princes Ashot was composed after his return to the patriarchal throne, around 878, that it provoked Sahak's reply, but that the second letter of Photius to Ashot (*Against the heresy of the Theopaschites*), as well as Nicetas' *Refutation of the Epistle of the Prince of Armenia* was created in response to Sahak's letter in around 880–882, while, according to him, Photius' letter to the Armenian Catholicos (*Epistle to the Armenians*) was not addressed to Zacharias, who died in 876, but to his successor George (877–897).[32] Carl Dixon also believes that Photius' first letter to Ashot was written at the beginning of his second patriarchate, and that the epistle *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites*, as a response to Sahak's refutation of the allegations from the first letter, was created around 878–879,[33] while the *Epistle to the Armenians*, on the other hand, was written during Photius' first administration of the Church of Constantinople.[34]

The dating of the Byzantine-Armenian correspondence to the time of Photius' second term as the patriarch of Constantinople, after 877, which is held in modern scholarship, rests, therefore, primarily on the data of one of the two previously unknown sections of Photius' first letter to Prince Ashot. The section mentions Photius' return to the capital, as well as Ashot's supposed concern for his troubles in the exile and Ashot's earlier letter and also several emperors on the throne in Constantinople. What exactly do those sections represent? They are found only in one of the five preserved copies of the letter, in the mentioned manuscript *Hierosolymitanus S. Iacobi Armeniorum 960*, from 1602. Those sections are not found in the oldest copy from 1298/1299, or in the remaining three copies from the seventeenth century. According to the manuscript tradition, the five mentioned copies are divided into two redactions—the first redaction includes the copy from the end of the thirteenth century, while the second includes all four copies from the seventeenth century, including the one

[31] Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 87–91.
[32] Greenwood 2006, 152–164.
[33] Dixon 2019, 210–219.
[34] Dixon 2019, 219–241.

from the manuscript *Hierosolymitanus 960*.[35] Since they belong to the same redaction, it is clear that all four copies come from the same archetype. That archetype, however, apparently did not contain the disputed two sections, because they are not found in the three copies based on it. In this respect, that archetype also agreed with the older redaction of the copy, the one to which the copy from 1298/1299 belongs. Therefore, the two mentioned sections in the transcription of the letter in the manuscript *Hierosolymitanus 960* from 1602 do not come from the archetype on the basis of which the transcription was created. Therefore, they were neither in the autograph nor in the original Armenian translation. They were obviously added later in the aforementioned manuscript. This is confirmed by the remark of the editors B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink that those two sections *were added by another hand* (alia manu) among the folios of the manuscript.[36] That manuscript, by the way, is the only one that contains the letter *Answers of Patriarch Photius to the questions of Prince Ashot*, which has been proven not to be authentic.[37] Apparently, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, for some reason, someone had the intention to further emphasize the relationship between Patriarch Photius and Prince Ashot, even resorting to unauthentic texts. The tendency to highlight the good and friendly relations between the patriarch and the Armenian lord is more than noticeable in the sections interpolated into the text of Photius' letter to Ashot, because it is in great contrast with the strict tone in which the patriarch addresses the prince in the authentic part of the letter.[38]

Other arguments put forward in support of the late dating of Photius' letter to Ashot are not strong enough. Mentioning that *Old Rome* respects the Fourth Ecumenical Council as well as the first three is nothing more than stating a well-known fact, especially since the continuation of the sentence states that the *Great See of Alexandria and the See of Jerusalem do the same*,[39] and it does not necessarily mean that Photius was then on good terms with Rome. That Photius considered the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 as *the seventh ecumenical council* even during his first term on the patriarchal throne is evidenced by his *Circular Epistle to the patriarchal thrones of the East* from the first half of 867.[40] Colophon recorded in a

[35] Photii epp. III, pp. IX–X.
[36] Photii epp. III, pp. IX–X.
[37] Photii epp. III, p. X, no. 299.1–80; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 91.
[38] Photii epp., 298.1–5, 66–133, 154–161.
[39] Photii epp., 298.88–91.
[40] Photii epp., 2.349–387.

manuscript created in 1298/1299, which contains the oldest copy of Photius' letter to Ashot, with information about *the twentieth year of the reign of the prince of princes Ashot* as the time of creation of the letter, does not necessarily bear any original value, because it could be said that it reflects the understanding that the copyist from the thirteenth century had of an event of the ninth century. Data from the Armenian sources about the donation of a fragment of the Holy Cross to Prince Ashot by Emperor Basil I are also not of decisive importance for the dating of Photius' letter to Ashot.

The first letter of Patriarch Photius to Prince Ashot and the entire Byzantine-Armenian correspondence of Photius' time belong, however, to the first period of Photius' administration of the Byzantine Church (858–867). Arguments in support of this can be found in the content of the letters themselves. Important data for the dating of the entire correspondence is found in Photius' second epistle to Prince Ashot, the one entitled *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites*. At its beginning, Photius points out how *other Armenians* returned to the Orthodox confession of faith *not much time ago* (οὐ πρὸ πολλοῦ χρόνου), and that *at the persuasion of Blessed John, Archbishop of Nice*.[41] John, archbishop of Nice, mentioned by Photius in that place, is the same John or Vahanes, archbishop of Nicaea, who was Photius' emissary to the Armenian Catholicos Zacharias and a participant in the council of Shirakavan in 862.[42] His activity among the Armenians, which Photius has in mind, certainly belongs to the time of the aforementioned council and included the council itself. On the other hand, in the same epistle, Photius instructs the prince in one place that for everything that would remain unclear to him in the more than exhaustive theological consideration that he presented to him in that letter

[41] Photii epp., 284.15–20.

[42] The identification of John, archbishop of Nice from Photius' epistle and Vahanes, archbishop of Nicaea, Photius' emisary, from the acts of the council of Shirakavan, was established by Grumel 1956, 169–173, where he also showed that the seat of that archbishop was not the well-known Nicaea, as scholarship assumed until then, but Nice, a small town in Thrace, which was turned into the seat of an autocephalous archbishop in the middle of the ninth century, cf. Notitiae, 7.69, 8.83, 11.103, 12.106. Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 66–68, accepts the identification of John of Nice from the epistle and Photius' emissary at the council of Shirakavan, but considers that he did not present the Byzantine confession of faith at the beginning of the council, because the text of that confession, which has been preserved, is allegedly Monophysite, Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 1–19, 130–211, but that it was done by a certain Armenian, whose real name was Vahanes. The identification of John and Vahanes is also accepted by Greenwood 2006, 133; Dixon 2019, 208.

he should seek for clarification in *another epistle* that he sent to his *most God-loving and venerable brother and co-minister Zacharias and those of the Armenians who are Orthodox*.[43] This is the usual way of addressing a bishop, which in no way implies that Zacharias was deceased at that moment, as has been suggested in the scholarship,[44] while the fact that Photius mentions him as his *co-minister* clearly testifies that it is someone who at that time was performing an active priestly, i.e. episcopal ministry. Therefore, since Zacharias died before Photius' return to the patriarchal throne in 877, the epistle *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites* was composed during his first patriarchate, in the years following the Council of Shirakavan in 862. Since it was a response to Ashot's letter to Photius that had been composed by the Armenian teacher Sahak, the mentioned letter of Ashot/Sahak was written before it. Since in that letter Ashot uses the title of *Prince of Princes of Great Armenia* (*išxanac' išxan Hayoc' Medzac'*),[45] which he received from the caliph between November 862 and April 863, in any case after the council of Shirakavan, because then he was still only a *sparapet*, i.e. the supreme commander of the army,[46] it could have been created as early as 863. As that letter of Ashot/Sahak was written in response to the first letter of Photius to Ashot, it must have been written after it. However, even in that first letter of Photius to Ashot, the Armenian ruler is addressed as *prince of princes*,[47] so it could have been written at the beginning of 863 at the earliest. Finally, the letter of Nicetas of Byzantium was also composed as a Byzantine response to the letter of Ashot/Sahak to Photius,[48] and was therefore composed at the same time as Photius' epistle *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites*, after 863.[49] Thus,

[43] …ἡ πρὸς τὸν θεοφιλέστατον καὶ ὁσιώτατον ἀδελφὸν καὶ συλλειτουργὸν ἡμῶν Ζαχαρίαν καὶ τῶν Ἀρμενίων τοὺς ὀρθοδοξήσαντας δευτέρα πάλιν σταλεῖσα ἐπιστολή…, Photii epp., 284.3191–3197.

[44] Greenwood 2006, 161; Dixon 2019, 216.

[45] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 214.7–12, 265; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 33.

[46] Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 63–66; Greenwood 2006, 132–133.

[47] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 210.19–20, 261; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 25.

[48] About Nicetas' letter being a response to the Sahak's, cf. Photii epp., nos. 284, 298, pp. 3, 167; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 86–87.

[49] The thesis that Nicetas' response to Sahak's epistle was created at the behest of Emperor Basil I, who entrusted the task to Nicetas, instead of Photius, is unfounded, Dixon 2019, 214–218, given that the passage from the title of Nicetas' response to the Armenian prince's epistle that he compiled it ἐκ προσώπου τοῦ πατριάρχου, Nicetae refutatio epistolae ab Armeniae principe, 587, does not mean "instead of the patriarch", but "in the name of the patriarch".

the entire correspondence between Constantinople and the Armenian prince of princes Ashot belongs to the time between 863 and 867.

The *second epistle* that he sent to his *most God-loving and venerable brother and co-minister Zacharias and those of the Armenians who are Orthodox*, to which Photius refers Ashot in the epistle *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites*,[50] in all likelihood is precisely his letter to the Armenian catholicos known as the *Epistle to the Armenians*.[51] Therefore, the *Epistle to the Armenians* was written before the epistle *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites*. Moreover, in his first letter to Ashot, Photius points out that what he is writing about on that occasion, *he has already written several times in numerous words* to Ashot's *teacher and high priest*,[52] which certainly refers to Catholicos Zacharias. Thus, before he first addressed the Armenian prince, Photius had already developed an extensive correspondence with the Armenian church leader. In the *Epistle to the Armenians*, Photius repeatedly points out that it is a response to Zacharias' response to one of his earlier epistles.[53] It is entirely possible that Photius, when he mentions that rich correspondence with Catholicos Zacharias in his first letter to Ashot, also has in mind the *Epistle to the Armenians*. Therefore, both the *Epistle to the Armenians* and the entire correspondence between Photius and Zacharias would have been composed before Photius addressed Prince Ashot for the first time, after the beginning of 863. Thus, we come to the conclusion that the correspondence between the two church leaders was conducted precisely at the time of the council of Shirakavan, in 862. Thus, the entire preserved Byzantine-Armenian correspondence should be chronologically placed between 862 and 867. Only now is it possible to begin the analysis of the content of that correspondence, so that, with the analysis of the data from other sources, the Byzantine policy towards the Armenians in the seventh decade of the ninth century can be reconstructed.

[50] Photii epp., 284.3191–3197.

[51] Dixon 2019, 219–241. Greenwood 2006, 142, on the other hand, believes that Photius' *second epistle* to Zacharias is actually Photius' letter to the Armenian catholicos which is considered inauthentic in scholarship, and whose authenticity he tries to rehabilitate.

[52] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 212–213, 263; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 30.

[53] Photii epp., 285.32–36, 61 sq, 91 sq, 127–134, 146–149; Greenwood 2006, 134–142.

Byzantine Military Penetration into Parts of Armenia and the Council of Shirakavan

As already noted, the first indication of Byzantine activity aimed at converting the Monophysite Armenians to the Orthodox form of Christianity appears in Photius' epistle to Pope Nicholas I from the summer of 861. In it, Photius, speaking of schismatics within the church, states that there are, in addition to the iconoclasts, *those who unite or completely deny the natures in him* (Christ), *who, by introducing another, newer nature, reject those earlier ones and attack the Fourth Council with innumerable blasphemies. We have captured many in subjection to Christ through the war we waged against them and prepared for a long time*.[54] This cannot refer to any other Monophysites but the Armenians.[55] So, at the time when Photius wrote those lines, the Byzantine campaign to win over the Armenians had not only begun, but had also yielded its first results.

What inspired Byzantine action in that direction at the beginning of the second half of the ninth century? The Armenians had resisted the Chalcedonian dogma for several centuries. Why did Photius think that the time had come for them to be converted? It is unlikely that the entire enterprise in that field arose solely from Photius' personal ambition and inspiration. The real reason for the initiation of action among the Armenians is hidden, in all likelihood, in the changed political circumstances on the eastern border of the Roman Empire in the fifties and sixties of the ninth century. The exchange of prisoners between Byzantines and the Arabs, which took place at the beginning of 856, did not mark the beginning of permanent peace on the border of the two empires. In the same year, the fighting continued, and the Byzantine army, led by the patrician Petronas, *strategus* of the Thracesian theme, uncle of Emperor Michael III and Bardas' younger brother, crossed the upper reaches of the Euphrates, attacked Amida and began a major offensive on the eastern border of the Empire, directed against the Muslim emirates along the upper Euphrates. The great attack on Samosata was carried out in 859, and was led by Emperor Michael III himself and Bardas. Border skirmishes were more or less incessant. Finally, on 3 September 863, the Roman army under the command of Petronas won a decisive victory over the Emir of Melitene Amr ibn Ubaydallah near Poson. That victory

[54] Photii epp., 290.359–365.
[55] Photii epp., no. 284, p. 3.

secured Byzantine supremacy in the area of the upper Euphrates.[56] That area included precisely the western regions of Armenia, which from the end of the seventh century had been predominantly in the Arab sphere of political influence. The military successes and the more immediate political presence of Byzantium on the border, and even in a part of the Armenian territory, created the necessary preconditions for the increased activity of the Byzantine state and the church in Armenia also on the spiritual level.[57]

Conditions in Armenia at that time were difficult. After the failure of the great uprising against Arab rule from 850–855, the country was in a difficult position. All the leading men of Armenia, headed by the previous head of the country, prince of princes Bagrat Bagratuni (826–851), and his brother *sparapet*, i.e. the supreme military commander, Smbat, had been punished for starting an uprising by imprisonment in the caliph's capital, Samarra, where some had died.[58] In the decapitated country, the leading role was gradually assumed by Ashot Bagratuni, later called "The Great", the new head of the Bagratuni family, the most powerful among the Armenian nobles, who was the son of the *sparapet* Smbat and nephew of the prince of princes Bagrat. As a result of his father's captivity, he assumed the position of the supreme commander of the Armenian army, which was hereditary in his family, and which gave him the greatest authority in Armenia at that time, but did not make him the formal political head of the country, because the appointment of the *prince of princes of Greater Armenia* (*išxanac' išxan*, Arabic. *batrîq al batârîqa*, Greek. ἄρχων τῶν ἀρχόντων) was in the exclusive jurisdiction of the Arab caliph, through his viceroy in Armenia.[59] In such a difficult political situation, Catholicos Zacharias (855–876) came to the head of the Armenian Church. In a country without recognized political leadership, his role as high priest became even more pronounced. The Byzantine military offensive, which took place at the time on the Armenian borders, led to increased interest of the Byzantine Church in the religious affairs of Armenia, and it was to Catholicos Zacharias that the greatest burden of relations with it fell.

[56] Cf. Vasiliev 1935–1950 I, 227–257; Varona Codeso 2009, 131–141.

[57] Greenwood 2006, 128–132; Dixon 2019, 206–207.

[58] Grousset 1947, 355–371; Garsoïan 1997, 140–142; Greenwood 2008, 349–351; Martin-Hisard 2000, 369.

[59] Grousset 1947, 372–377; Garsoïan 1997, 146–148.

The military successes of the patrician Petronas on the upper Euphrates brought Byzantine political influence first to the western regions of Armenia, primarily to the province of Taron. It was also the first Armenian area where the Byzantine Church began work on the conversion of the Monophysite Armenians to Orthodox, Chalcedonian Christianity. According to the information provided by Patriarch Photius in his epistle *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites*, his emissary John, archbishop of Nice, with his *persuasions* influenced a part of the Armenians to return to the correct confession of faith.[60] At the end of the same epistle, he points out that those Armenians *who are Orthodox* are the Taronites.[61] Therefore, it could be concluded that the first consequence of Archbishop John's activity, and therefore Byzantine church policy, among the Armenians was precisely the conversion of the Taronites. They should also be recognized among those Monophysites who were *captured in subjection to Christ*, whom Photius mentions in the letter to Pope Nicholas from the summer of 861. Therefore, the Byzantine church activity in the territory of Armenia began before the middle of 861, and vary soon after, yielded results in the conversion of the Taronites. On behalf of the Byzantine Church, this action was led by John, Archbishop of Nice in Thrace. According to some sources, John himself was originally an Armenian of the Orthodox faith, so he may have experienced his participation in the conversion of his compatriots as the fulfilment of his personal aspirations.[62]

However, the Byzantine policy of Armenian conversion did not stop in the area of Taron. In Constantinople they wanted to convert all Armenians. That is why Patriarch Photius turned to the head of the Armenian Church, Catholicos Zacharias, and sent him Archbishop John of Nice as his emissary and representative in religious matters. The voluminous correspondence between him and Zacharias, which Photius mentions in the *Epistle to the Armenians* and the first letter to Prince Ashot,[63] most likely began on that occasion, because it is natural that when Photius sent Archbishop John to the Catholicos to Zacharias, he also sent, through him, a letter for

[60] Photii epp., 284.15–20.

[61] … ἡ πρὸς τὸν θεοφιλέστατον καὶ ὁσιώτατον ἀδελφὸν καὶ συλλειτουργὸν ἡμῶν Ζαχαρίαν καὶ τῶν Ἀρμενίων τοὺς ὀρθοδοξήσαντας δευτέρα πάλιν σταλεῖσα ἐπιστολή - τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν τετάρτην Ἀρμενίαν Ταρρωνίτας…, Photii epp., 284.3193–3197.

[62] Laurent 1919, 311, n. 2.

[63] Photii epp., 285.32–36, 61 sq, 91 sq, 127–134, 146–149; Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 212–213, 263; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 30.

Zacharias.[64] That letter has not been preserved.[65] However, in the Armenian texts related to the council of Shirakavan, the confession of faith presented at that council by Archbishop John, as a representative of Patriarch Photius, is recorded,[66] so it can be concluded that the text of that confession was a significant part of Photius' letter to Zacharias, which John had brought.

The council of Shirakavan, a city in the north of what was then Armenia, was held, according to research by I. Dorfmann-Lazarev, in September or October 862.[67] As the main protagonists of the council, the introductory colophon of the council acts lists Archbishop John of Nice, emissary of Patriarch Photius of Constantinople, Catholicos of Greater Armenia Zacharias, and the Armenian *sparapet* Ashot Bagratuni. In addition to them, it mentions another important figure in the spiritual history of the Middle Eastern Christianity of the ninth century—deacon *Nana the Syrian*, i.e. Nonnus of Nisibis.[68] In front of the council, John of Nice, as an emissary of the patriarch of Constantinople and a representative of the Byzantine Church, on the occasion of whose arrival the council was convened, presented the Orthodox confession of faith and the Orthodox theological understanding of the basic dogmas of Christianity—about the Trinity, its hypostases and the natures of Christ.[69] John's confession of faith is completely Orthodox, as it was valid in Byzantium and in the West,

[64] Laurent 1919, 312; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 80.

[65] An epistle found in the Armenian manuscripts related to the council of Shirakavan and deemed a *Photius' epistle to the Catholicos Zacharias*, Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 179–195, 227–245; Grumel, Regestes, no. 473, was often considered by the researchers as that first, initial, letter of Photius to Zacharias, Grumel, loc. cit.; Laurent 1919, 310, 313; Darrouzès, Deux lettres, 146, n. 13, 157, n. 4. That it cannot be Photius' work was explained by B. Laourdas and L. G. Westerink, Photii epp. III, XI. The text is certainly the work of an Armenian because it is full of historical and chronological data related to the development of the church in Armenia, data that could not have had any significance for the Constantinopolitan environment. Greenwood 2006, 134–142, who analysed its content in detail and tried to rehabilitate its historical value, sees in it Photius' *second* letter to Zacharias, composed in August–September 861 as a response to Zacharias' letter, which was a response to Photius' *first* letter

[66] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 196.1–198.29, 246–249; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 1–19.

[67] Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 55–66. About the council of Shirakavan in brief, cf. Grousset 1947, 382–384; Greenwood 2008, 351.

[68] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 196.1–9, 246; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 1.

[69] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 196.10–198.29, 202.9–210.9, 246–249, 252–261; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 1–19.

formulated at the Seven Ecumenical Councils. This is best seen precisely in those sections dedicated to the understanding of Christ and his natures, which was the biggest difference between the Byzantine Church, as Orthodox, and the Armenian Church, as Monophysite. In those sections, which therefore occupy the largest part of his exposition, John speaks quite clearly about *the two natures in Christ, ununited and indivisible*, about Christ as *a complete God and a complete Man*, completely in the spirit of the conclusions of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon.[70]

As can be clearly seen from the canons adopted there, the council of Shirakavan agreed with John's confession and accepted all the main elements of Byzantine Christology. The canons recognize that in Christ there are two natures, divine and human, that he is *timeless God and true man* (3rd canon), that he is perfect in his divinity and in his humanity, because of the *two natures in one hypostasis* (7th canon), that he was crucified in the flesh (9th canon) and that he suffered bodily on the Cross, but that his divinity did not suffer (15th canon), they curse the teachings of Nestorius (5th canon), Eutychus (6th canon) and the Manichaeans (8th canon), and finally, they recognize the Council of Chalcedon as a universal council, *in the tradition of the apostles and prophets and the three holy councils*, cursing anyone who does not recognize it as such (13th and 14th canons).[71]

Judging by the canons adopted at it, the Council of Shirakavan represented the complete success of the Byzantine policy towards the Armenians. However, the correspondence between Patriarch Photius and representatives of the Armenian Church and State, which followed the council, testifies that the Byzantine struggle to win over the Armenians continued. In the *Epistle to the Armenians*, which he writes to the Catholicos Zacharias, Photius, as already pointed out, states that it is a response to Zacharias' letter, which was a response to Photius' previous letter. That previous letter of Photius is taken here as the beginning of the Byzantine-Armenian correspondence, and it is assumed that it was brought to Catholicos Zacharias by Archbishop John of Nice, Photius' envoy at the council of

[70] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 198.16–29, 202.9–208.11, 248–249, 252–259; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 7–17. When the above lines are read, the Orthodox nature of John's exposition is completely obvious. Because of this, it is not at all clear why Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 66–68, considers that it is not Orthodox and in the spirit of the canons of the Council of Chalcedon, but closer to the Armenian Monophysite understandings, which he tries to argue in a wide discussion, ibidem, 130–211.

[71] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 199.1–202.8, 249–252; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 19–23, 212–240.

Shirakavan. This would mean that Zacharias' answer was written immediately after the council and it is very likely that John himself brought it to Photius. By the way, John had to have brought to Constantinople, if not the canons of the council of Shirakavan themselves, then at least the general impression that the Armenians were ready to accept the Byzantine form of Christianity, as evidenced by those canons. However, in the *Epistle to the Armenians*, Photius points out that he is not satisfied with Zacharias' answer to his previous letter and that the content of that letter is *contradictory* and *unclear*.[72] This would mean that the content of Zacharias' letter to Photius differed from the content of the canons of the Council of Shirakavan. Why did this happen? Did the Armenians really mean what they proclaimed with the canons adopted in Shirakavan? There is no doubt that the resistance to the acceptance of the Byzantine understanding of the basic Christian dogmas among the Armenians was very great and that they did not intend to deviate from their age-old convictions just like that. There is no doubt that at the council itself, the majority of participants were of such an understanding and that their tendency was given more weight by the presence of the mentioned Nonnus of Nisibis, a representative of the Syrian Jacobites, one of the most important Monophysite thinkers of that era.[73] The canons issued in Shirakavan, too provisional to express the sincere feeling of the Armenian environment deeply devoted to Monophysitism, were obviously only a formal expression of readiness to achieve church unity with the politically significantly more powerful Orthodox empire. In reality, nobody in Armenia wanted to implement them. The content of the council's canons was a consequence of the presence of the patriarch's emissary at the council, Archbishop John, and the Byzantine troops on the western borders of the country. Catholicos Zacharias explained how the Armenians honestly perceived church relations with Constantinople at that time in his letter to Patriarch Photius. Photius' *Epistle to the Armenians*, written in response to that letter of Zacharias, brings the whole thing back to the beginning. In it, he again theologically presents to the head of the Armenian Church what his emissary, Archbishop John, explained at the council of Shirakavan, defending above all, decisively and in a polemical tone, the validity of the Fourth Ecumenical Council.[74]

[72] Photii epp., 285.127–134.
[73] On Nonnus of Nissibis, cf. Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 68–79.
[74] Photii epp., 285.163–479.

The Byzantine-Armenian Polemics After the Council of Shirakavan

In the months that followed the council of Shirakavan, but certainly between November 862 and April 863, Ashot Bagratuni received from Caliph al-Mustain (862–866) the title of *prince of princes of Greater Armenia*.[75] Two decades later, he would take the royal title, restore the Armenian kingdom and begin the era of the rise of medieval Armenia under the Bagratuni dynasty.[76] At the time of the council, he was still only a *sparapet*, but with the title of *prince of princes*, he also became the formal ruler of Armenia. Since by addressing the Catholicos Zacharias he had not achieved his goal, Photius now turned to Ashot as the new secular authority. Photius' first letter to Ashot, mentioned many times, was most likely written in the first half of 863. In it, the patriarch writes to the Armenian prince briefly about the essence of the Byzantine-Armenian church dispute—the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451. The patriarch points out that this council is only a "continuation" of the Third Ecumenical Council, the one of Ephesus in 431, which the Armenian Church recognizes, and the validity of the Council of Chalcedon is supported by the fact that it is also recognized by the Churches of Rome, Alexandria and Jerusalem. In the continuation of the letter, Photius refers to the problem of the natures of Christ, but does not try too hard to explain the Orthodox belief in the two natures of Christ to the prince in detail, but only tells him that he has already written about it several times to his *teacher and high priest*, i.e. Catholicos Zacharias.[77]

However, Photius and Constantinople were not the only centres of Christian Europe with which Ashot was in correspondence at that time. Namely, a fragment of a letter sent to the Armenian prince by none other than Photius' greatest enemy at the time has been preserved, the Roman pope, Nicholas I. The preserved passage does not record the name of the Armenian prince to whom the letter was addressed, but it is clear that it could only have been Ashot. In the letter, the pope first informs the prince that he has confirmed Ignatius as patriarch of Constantinople and that he

[75] Grousset 1947, 372–373; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 64, believes that Ashot received the title of *prince of princes* between November 862 and October 863. However, as he himself points out, Armenian sources date the event to the year 311 of the Armenian era, which ended on 24 April 863. Greenwood 2006, 133, dates the event to November 862.

[76] Grousset 1947, 394–397; Garsoïan 1997, 147–148; Martin-Hisard 2000, 371.

[77] Photii epp., 298.1–32, 66–133, 155–161.

has threatened anathema to anyone who recognizes Photius in that position or maintains a relationship with him or any of his followers. He then points out that he is doing this in order that Ashot should know *how to take into account with whom he should maintain relations, and from whom he should stay away. Whoever receives those who think like us*, writes the pope, *receives us, and through us the prince of the apostles* (St. Peter), *and through him Christ.*[78] In those lines, the pope obviously alludes to the decisions of the Roman Council from 863, which confirmed Ignatius as patriarch of Constantinople and condemned Photius, so the letter was certainly composed after that council. After that, the pope turns to the faith in the Armenian country, emphasizing that he knows that *some are deceived by the perversion of many heresies.* He especially resents the fact that they believe that Christ did not have a human nature and that his divinity suffered on the Cross. In order to help them abandon such delusions, the pope writes that he will send to Prince Ashot the epistle of Pope Leo I (440–461) to Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople (446–449), the famous *Tome*, in which the Orthodox teaching on the two natures of Christ, the divine and the human, is formulated and explained, and which was the foundation for the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, and is still the foundation of the Orthodox faith today.[79] The surviving passage of the letter ends with the pope encouraging Ashot to take the right path, leading both himself and his subjects out of the darkness of heresy and bringing them to the correct confession of faith, and also sending messengers with gifts.[80]

Why did the pope show interest in Armenia and write to Ashot? At one point in the letter, the pope states that *Ashot wrote to him* about his faith.[81] Thus, the pope's letter to Ashot was a response to an earlier letter from Ashot to the pope, which has not been preserved. The question should then be why the Armenian prince wrote to the pope. He could hardly have entered into a relationship with the pope before he received the first letter from Photius, in the first half of 863. It is clear that the pope's letter was written after the Roman Council of 863, therefore after Photius' letter to Ashot. Did the Armenian prince decide to write to the pope after receiving a letter from the patriarch of Constantinople? Did he perhaps want to verify the allegation from that letter that *Old Rome respects the Fourth*

[78] Nicolai I epp., 451.33–452.12.
[79] Nicolai I epp., 452.13–453.15.
[80] Nicolai I epp., 453.14–454.9.
[81] …*Ceterum de fide vestra, quam ad nos scripsistis*…, Nicolai I epp., 453.16.

Council in the same way as we do the three councils that preceded it.[82] The conclusion that Ashot's letter to the pope followed Photius' letter to Ashot is also indicated by the fact that the pope insists in his reply that Photius is an illegitimate patriarch and that relations with him should not be maintained. As far as the dogmatic side is concerned and the understanding of the nature of Christ and the relationship to the Fourth Ecumenical Council, Ashot could only have received from the Roman pope, as he did, exactly the same opinion that was represented by the patriarch of Constantinople. Both Romes, the Old and the New, shared at that time the Orthodox heritage of the once unified Roman Empire. There is no further information on Roman-Armenian relations at that time.

Independently of his address to the pope, Ashot had a reply to Photius' letter drawn up. The answer was compiled by the leading Armenian theologian of the time, teacher (*vardapet*) Sahak (Isaac) Mrut.[83] The contents of that famous *Letter of Sahak to Photius*, preserved in the Armenian language, are characterized by an uncompromising Monophysite and completely anti-Chalcedonian attitude. For Sahak, the followers of the Council of Chalcedon are the followers of Nestorius himself, condemned at the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431. He tries to prove this by comparing quotations from the *Tome* of Pope Leo I, on which the Chalcedonian Orthodoxy rests, and certain quotations from Nestorius, pointing out their similarity or coincidence. Opposite to the *Tome* of Pope Leo, Sahak points out the theology of Cyril of Alexandria (412–444), which, as they themselves interpreted it, was the basis of the beliefs of the Monophysites in Egypt, Syria and Armenia. After that, he presents the Armenian Monophysite teaching, defending and justifying it with various theological arguments.[84] The very end of the letter, however, completely deviates from Sahak's theological exposition, which occupies the largest part of its content. The last few lines apparently contain the words of Ashot himself addressed to Photius. In them, it is stated that he received

[82] Photii epp., 298.88–89.

[83] About teacher Sahak Mrut, also known as Apikuresh, cf. Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 91–95, where his firm Monophysite and anti-Chalcedonian attitude is presented as a consequence of his earlier disputes with monks in Orthodox Georgia (Iberia), because of which he had to leave the area of Tayk, where he was a bishop. At the beginning of the ninth century, Tayk (Tao) became the political centre of the Georgian branch of the Bagratuni family, which was Orthodox.

[84] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 214.1–226.4, 265–278; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 32–52.

his letter with pleasure and that he is ready *to obey and serve the holy and God-given Empire*, that he never deviated, but was always available to obey, *if any will of the autocrat emperor was communicated to him*, that he is ready to fulfil *with zeal and earnestness* everything *that would be according to the thought and intention of his exalted grace*.[85] It is impossible not to notice how much these words deviate from the harsh tone of Sahak's theological presentation. Is it precisely in this contrast that the truth about the Armenian position in the complicated political and ecclesiastical relations with Byzantium in the middle of the ninth century lies? The Armenians were not ready to renounce the faith of their ancestors and to accept a religion that they basically considered extremely heretical. However, the political supremacy of the Roman Empire was so great at that time that they simply could not ignore it. In all probability, Sahak and Ashot's reply to Photius' letter to Ashot was written in the second half of 863, most likely immediately after the great victory of the Byzantine forces under Petronas over the Arabs at Poson, on 3 September 863, which consolidated Byzantine supremacy on the upper Euphrates and the Armenian borders, and with it the Byzantine presence in the western parts of Armenia. When all this is taken into account, it becomes quite clear why in the same letter the teacher Sahak expresses a firm Monophysite position in the theological field, and the prince Ashot declares that despite this he is ready to submit and serve the Roman emperor.

Regardless of the declarations of political submission to the emperor, from the theological point of view Sahak's letter to Photius was a strong blow to Byzantine Orthodoxy. Such an attack could only be compared to the Muslim blasphemy of the Christian faith in the previous decade. That is why it was appropriate to respond to it forcefully. Sahak's letter received not one, but two responses from Constantinople, both exceptional and composed by the most intelligent and knowledgeable people of the time. One was composed by the Patriarch Photius himself, and is entitled *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites*.[86] The second was compiled by the well-known Nicetas of Byzantium,[87] the author of writings against Muhammad's teachings and responses to the Muslim epistles. Why two responses to Sahak's epistle were compiled in Constantinople is not

[85] Papadopulos-Keramevs, Fotija tvorenija, 226.5–24, 278–279; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 52–53.

[86] Photii epp., 284.1–3294.

[87] Nicetae refutatio epistolae ab Armeniae principe, 587 A–665 C.

entirely clear.[88] Both compositions, Photius' and Nicetas', were formally addressed to Ashot, the prince of princes, just as Sahak's epistle was formally the epistle of Ashot himself. Both, however, gradually refute the statements of Sahak's epistle and defend the basic principles of Orthodox Christianity, the belief in the two natures of Christ, the conclusions of the Council of Chalcedon, the statements of the *Tome* of Pope Leo. The difference is mainly that Photius' arguments are more extensive, literary and philosophically refined, and more clearly arranged, while Nicetas' are shorter. It is also true that Photius' epistle contains certain data significant for the history of Byzantine-Armenian relations at that time, such as those concerning the mission of Archbishop John of Nice and the baptism of the Armenian Taronites,[89] while Nicetas focuses mainly on the theological issues.

Both letters were written after Sahak's epistle arrived in Constantinople, most likely during the year 864. The title of Nicetas' epistle states that it represents a *Refutation and rejection of the epistle sent by the prince of Armenia for the purpose of attacking our Orthodox faith and the holy and ecumenical Fourth Council, by order of our Christ-loving and pious emperor, written for the prince, in the name of the patriarch.*[90] At the very beginning we find the following lines: *by God's love for humanity, by divine judgment, by favour of our most pious and orthodox emperors appointed to manage the bishop's degree of the Imperial City, with all my diligence and good will I strive to lawfully manage and steer the reasonable flock of our archpastor Christ…*[91] It has often been pointed out that the quoted section mentions *the most pious and Orthodox emperors*, and this was taken as evidence that Nicetas' epistle was composed later, during the reign of Emperor Basil I (867–886), who, starting from 867/868 formally shared power with one or more of his sons.[92] However, there were two emperors at the head of

[88] Photii epp. III, no. 284, p. 3. The same question is asked by Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 89, but in a completely different context, in the conviction that Sahak's letter to Photius was written in 882 and that Nicetas' letter is a response to it, while Photius' epistle *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites* was composed before 867 and apparently does not represent a response to Sahak's letter, which is certainly not true.

[89] Photii epp., 284.15–20, 3191–3197.

[90] Nicetae refutatio epistolae ab Armeniae principe, 587.

[91] Nicetae refutatio epistolae ab Armeniae principe, 588 A.

[92] Grumel, Regestes, no. 516; Dorfmann-Lazarev 2004, 86–87.

the Roman Empire in the period between 26 May 866, when Michael III crowned Basil I his co-ruler, and 23 September 867, when Basil himself killed Michael. Therefore, Nicetas' epistle could have been written in that time interval as well. However, it should be clearly emphasized that the lines at the beginning of the epistle do not refer to Nicetas himself, but to Patriarch Photius, because, as its title states, it was written *in the name of the patriarch*. This is quite clear, because it is the patriarch who *manages the bishop's degree of the Imperial City* and *lawfully manages and steers* Christ's flock. With that in mind, *the favour of the most pious and orthodox emperors*, by which he was *appointed to manage the bishop's degree of the Imperial City*, must refer to the time and manner in which Photius came to the head of the Church of Constantinople, in 858. At that time, there was only one emperor, Michael III, but his uncle, Bardas, also played a significant role, so it could be concluded that the term *most pious and orthodox emperors* refers in general to those who, according to the understanding of the subjects, jointly ruled in the time of Photius' election as patriarch, i.e. the Emperor Michael and Bardas.[93] At the time when Nicetas' epistle to the Armenians was written, only one emperor ruled in Constantinople, and this is clearly seen from the title of the epistle, which states that it was written *by order of the Christ-loving and pious emperor*. This, as well as the allusion to Bardas as an equal participant in the *de facto* government with Emperor Michael in the phrase *the most pious and orthodox emperors*, testifies that the epistle was written before Bardas' death and the coronation of Basil the Macedonian as co-emperor in May 866, most likely, as already pointed out, in 864, after 12 April, when Bardas became *caesar*.

Photius' response to Sahak's epistle is entitled *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites* (Κατὰ τῆς Θεοπασχιτῶν αἱρέσεως).[94] It is an impressive

[93] Darrouzès, Deux lettres, 139, n. 7, correctly recognizes Michael III and his uncle Bardas as the *emperors*, although Bardas was not formally an emperor, but only a *caesar*. That after Bardas' elevation to the dignity of caesar in 862, Michael III and he were perceived as co-rulers in Constantinople, is tesitified by Patriarch Photius, who in his tenth homily from 864 and in his epistle no. 18, created immediately after Bardas' death, at the end of April or beginning of May 866, speaks of Bardas as *an associate and partaker of the imperial dignity*, i.e. as someone who, *having risen to the scepter of the empire and reign, if not the name itself, certainly became a partaker of the power*, Photii Homiliae, 104.10–17; Photii epp., 18.22–25.

[94] Photii epp., no. 284.

theological writing, both in scope and content, and the longest of all Photius' epistles. The name originates in the fact that the Monophysites, due to their denial of Christ's human nature and belief exclusively in his divinity, put themselves in the unenviable position of believing in an obvious nonsense—that God suffered on the Cross (Θεόπασχα = "Suffering of God"). That is why the Orthodox often called them *Theopaschites*, and so did Photius.[95] Before going into the theological matter of refuting the *Theopaschite* delusions, Photius briefly looks back at the results of the church policy he had led in Armenia until then and mentions the mission of Archbishop John of Nice, who had already converted a part of the Armenians, the Taronites, to Orthodoxy, which has already been discussed.[96] Photius then expresses the hope that the rest of the Armenians and the prince himself, to whom the epistle was addressed, will be counted among them, and that when that happens, *another holiday greater than the one that happened then will be upheld and celebrated, because the greater reason for rejoicing is the salvation and correction of multitudes.*[97] However, if it is not so, he continues, *we have fulfilled our duty before God and people*.[98] Therefore, Photius hopes that the prince himself and all of Armenia will follow in the footsteps of the Taronites and convert to Orthodoxy. However, if it does not happen, he is not responsible for the failure, because he did everything he could. At the time he wrote this epistle, the Taronites were still the only Armenians who had converted to Orthodoxy.[99]

The caution about further successes among the Armenians that Photius expressed at the beginning of the epistle *Against the heresy of the Theopaschites* was completely justified. By simply sending epistles, nothing concrete could be done to convert the heretics, especially when they were so deeply devoted to their heresy and had learned theologians who could always come to its defence, as Sahak did with his letter to Photius. After the great victory at Poson at the end of the summer of 863, the Byzantine

[95] The majority of Monophysites did not accept the extreme Theopaschitic teaching, which appeared in the first half of the sixth century, ODB III, 2061 (T. Gregory). However, the name of *Theopaschites* appeared to Orthodox circles quite suitable for all the Monophysites.

[96] Photii epp., 284.15–20.

[97] Photii epp., 284.20–23.

[98] Photii epp., 284.23–25.

[99] Photii epp., 284.3191–3197.

pressure on the western Armenian borders weakened a little, and Petronas' death in 865 contributed in particular to this.[100] Prince Ashot turned to the policy of establishing good relations with the Arabs, which, as a reward for the successful balancing between them and the Romans, would bring him the royal crown in 884 and the long-desired independence for his country.[101] In the *Circular Epistle to the patriarchal thrones of the East* from the first half of 867, Photius announces how *the inhabitants of Armenia*, who were overcome by the Jacobite heresy and cursed the Council of Chalcedon, *strengthened themselves to reject the old error*, and how now *a part of the Armenians* (ἡ τῶν Ἀρμενίων λῆξις) *serves the service of Christ in a clean and orthodox manner and casts anathema on Eutychus, Severus, Dioscorus* and other monophysite heresiarchs, *as the Catholic church* does.[102] As one can see, Photius is proud of the achievements of the church policy towards the Armenians, which he carried out during almost his entire first tenure on the patriarchal throne of Constantinople. However, at the same time he is aware of the incompleteness of those achievements, admitting that he managed to convert only a part of the Armenians. That part of the Armenians were certainly the Taronites, who were brought to Orthodoxy by Archbishop John of Nice at the very beginning of the seventh decade of the ninth century. After that, the Byzantine church policy towards the Armenians apparently did not produce concrete results. Not long after writing these lines, Photius lost his position of hierarch of Constantinople, on 24 September 867. At the same time, Basil the Macedonian took all the imperial power into his hands. During his reign, the main object of Byzantine state and church policy on the eastern borders of the Empire would no longer be the Armenians, but the followers of the Paulician heresy.

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The Great Moravian Mission of Constantine and Methodius

At a time when all the efforts of Byzantine spiritual and military policy, in the lull of the conflict with Rome over the canonicity of Photius' patriarchal position, were directed towards the eastern borders, while the imperial army was successfully pressing the Muslim emirs on the upper Euphrates, and the patriarch, with his associates, fought in the theological field for the souls of the schismatic Armenians, a completely new and previously unknown field of action opened before them, quite suddenly. Envoys of Rastislav (846–870), prince of the Moravians, a Slavic people from Central Europe, appeared in Constantinople in 863.[1] Testimonies about that mission and the events initiated by it have been preserved in two related Slavic texts, the *life* of Constantine the Philosopher, which has already been mentioned many times, and the *life* of his brother Methodius. Although founded on a rather thin source basis, there is an extremely

[1] According to the *Life of Constantine*, Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XV.18, Constantine and Methodius spent *forty months* in Moravia, and according to the *Life of Methodius*, Constantinus et Methodius, VM, V.13, *three years*. Returning from there, they came to Rome towards the end of 867, so the old opinion expressed by Dvornik 1926, 147, 1933, 228–229, 1970, 73, that Rastislav's embassy arrived in Constantinople as early as 862, seems too early.

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voluminous scientific literature about the mission of Constantine and Methodius in Moravia, and it would be difficult to say much new and original about it.[2]

About the motives that led a Slavic prince from Central Europe to send an embassy to distant Constantinople, with a completely unusual task, the mentioned sources relate the following. According to the *Life of Constantine*, Rastislav, the Moravian prince, after consulting with his princes and the Moravians, sent an embassy to the Emperor Michael with the message: *Our people have renounced paganism and adhere to the Christian law, but we do not have a teacher who would teach us in our language the true Christian faith, so that other countries, when they see it, will imitate us. Therefore, Lord, send us such a bishop and teacher, because good law always comes from you in all directions.*[3] The *Life of Methodius* provides, however, a somewhat different account. According to the hagiographer, Rastislav, Prince of the Slavs, together with Svetopluk, sent envoys from Moravia to Emperor Michael with the following message: *By God's grace we are healthy, and many Christian teachers have come to us from the Vlachs* (= Romans, i.e. from Italy) *and from Greeks and Germans, teaching us differently. And we Slavs are simple people, and we have no one to teach us the truth and give us knowledge. Therefore, good lord, send such a man who will teach us all justice.*[4]

The account from the *Life of Constantine*, which is also an older source, is certainly the more reliable. It explains the appearance of the Moravian envoys in Constantinople by the need of Prince Rastislav and the Moravians for a teacher who would explain, in their Slavic language, the Christian faith, which they had already accepted, so that they themselves could understand it more clearly and fully, and also see it brought closer to their Slavic, but still pagan neighbours. Christianity had already spread among the Moravians under Frankish influence, from the beginning of the ninth

[2] For bibliographic reviews of older works, cf. KME I, 177–183 (I. Dujčev); KME II, 739–740 (G. Sotirov). More general reviews: Obolenski 1991, 163–186; Ivanov 2003, 157–161. Of particular importance are recent reviews of individual issues with an assessment of existing knowledge in the compilations created on the occasion of the 1150th anniversary of the mission, cf. Kouřil 2014; Tachiaos 2015, as well as the latest critical review, Vavřínek 2017, 70–98. Recent monographic studies, cf. Betti 2014; Ivanova 2024, with extensive literature. On the *lives* of Constantine and Methodius and their historical value, cf. Ševčenko 1999, 214–221; Kulik et al. 2016; Temchin 2021, 466–474; Ivanova 2024, 35–175.

[3] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIV.1–5.

[4] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, V.1–3.

century. It was spread in the way that it was common in Western Europe of the early Middle Ages—it was preached by foreign missionaries, in a foreign, i.e. Latin language.[5] In this sense, the decision of the Moravian prince to request teachers who would preach Christianity to his people in their own language represents a real revolution in the spiritual climate of Western Europe in the ninth century. The *Life of Methodius*, on the other hand, does not mention the need for Christian teachers in the Slavic language at all. It explains the decision of the Moravian prince to send envoys to Constantinople only in general with the need to preach *the true faith* to the Moravian Slavs, since many Christian teachers, coming from the *Vlachs*, i.e. Italy, *Germans*, i.e. East Francia and *Greeks*, that is, Byzantium, learn differently. Christian teachers from Italy and Francia were certainly the ones who brought the basics of the Christian faith to the Moravians in the first half of the ninth century, but there is no information that Moravia was visited by any teachers *from the Greeks* before Constantine and Methodius.[6] That information in the *Life of Methodius*, and in general the entire description of the Moravian embassy in Constantinople provided by that source, can best be explained by the changed circumstances that had arisen by the time this writing was composed, after Methodius' death in 885.

What kind of revolution in the political field was caused by the decision of the Moravian prince to turn to the Byzantine emperor for the sake of a spiritual question, there is no need to comment in detail. The constant struggle against the pressures of the East Frankish rulers did not leave the Central European Slavs much room for independent development. The situation for the Moravians was particularly difficult in 863, when they found themselves caught between the attacks of the East Frankish king Louis, from the west, and his Bulgarian allies, from the east.[7] In such circumstances, asking for help and establishing an alliance with the distant Byzantine emperor, whose army could attack the Bulgarians from behind and thus considerably ease the position of the Moravians, can be understood as a completely logical move.[8] However, what interest could the Byzantine emperor have, at a time when his main forces were engaged in

[5] Dvornik 1926, 149–151, 1970, 77–92; Galuška 1998, 161–180; Pentkovskij 2014, 32–41; Steinhübel 2020, 125–128 sq.

[6] That opinion was expressed by Dvornik 1970, 80–81.

[7] Annales Fuldenses, 56. About Moravia in the ninth century, cf. Třestik 2001; Lübke 2014, 86–82; Steinhübel 2020, 110–238.

[8] Dvornik 1926, 152, 1933, 226–231, 1970, 98–102, saw in such foreign political circumstances the sole reason for Rastislav to send envoys to Constantinople.

an extremely important struggle with the Arabs on the eastern borders, to start a conflict with the always unpleasant Bulgarians at the other end of the Empire, just to help such a distant and unknown people, which had never entered the sphere of Byzantine politics? Because of this, it is difficult to say how much, and if at all, the mentioned political circumstances influenced the Moravian prince Rastislav to turn to the Byzantine emperor. After all, he was not looking for political and military help, but only for teachers who would teach his people Christianity in the Slavic language. The most that he could get in the political field in that way was for Constantinople to become familiar with the situation in which that people found themselves and, due to the future presence of Byzantine missionaries in that territory, to take an interest in their fate.

The spiritual background of Rastislav's address to the Byzantine emperor was, however, definitely woven on political motives. The part of his message to the emperor, in which it is said that the Moravians want a Christian teacher in their language, *so that other countries, when they see it, will imitate them*, is a very clear testimony to this. Rastislav had in mind the other Slavic peoples, his neighbours on the Elbe, Oder and Vistula, who were still not Christians. Their resistance to the new religion rested in large part, which Rastislav seemed to know very well, on the fact that it was spread in a foreign language, behind which always stood the political influence of the powerful Franks. Rastislav, as can be very clearly concluded from the mentioned passage, was of the opinion that Christianity, if preached in the Slavic language, would be much better received by the other Slavic peoples of Central Europe. In short, his decision to ask for teachers of the Christian faith in the Slavic language, revolutionary for the conditions of Latin Europe of the ninth century, rested on such an understanding.

However, his decision to request such teachers from the Byzantine emperor certainly deserves the greatest attention. It is explained in Rastislav's message to the emperor with the words that *good law always comes from them* (i.e. Byzantines) *in all directions.* Although Rastislav's words at first glance indicate exactly that, it is hard to believe that in Moravia they could have been informed about the successful Byzantine mission of Christianizing the Scandinavian Russians in Eastern Europe, or about the mission of Constantine the Philosopher at the even more distant Khazar court. Due to the circumstances in which Moravia was developing at that time, i.e. the predominance of the Frankish and Latin cultural influence and the ecclesiastical authority of the Roman Church, what they

could first learn about the Byzantine spiritual policy would first of all concern the then current ecclesiastical dispute with Rome, about the canonicity of the position of the then patriarch Photius. However, what they must have known in Moravia at that time was that many Christian Slavs lived under the rule of the Byzantine emperor. The words that from the Byzantines *a good law always come in all directions* would first of all refer in general to the glory of Constantinople as one of the greatest cultural centres in the world, which could not remain unknown even to the Slavs in Central Europe.[9] In the combination of those two factors—that there were many Slavs who were Christians living in the empire of the Byzantine emperor and that the empire was the centre of all learning—there would be a basis for Rastislav's hope that the Byzantine emperor would be able to send him teachers who would preach Christianity to his people in the Slavic language.

Preparing the Mission

In Constantinople, this issue was also received as a matter of exceptional state importance. As in the case of the Arabs, on that occasion the emperor also called a *council*, where it was discussed. The sources do not mention the role of the church and the participation of its representatives, first of all the then patriarch Photius, in that council. However, under the emperor's *council*, here is most certainly meant a gathering of the most prominent figures of the Empire, either in state or church affairs. The topic to be discussed had both a state and church character, so the church certainly participated in its consideration, and above all, Photius.[10] At that council, the emperor decided that once again Constantine the Philosopher would be the one to bear the burden of this new undertaking. The emperor's

[9] Pentkovskij 2014, 41–46, on the other hand, connecting the information from Rastislav's letter to the emperor according to the *Life of Constantine* that from the Byzantines *a good law always comes in all directions* with the information from the prince's letter to the emperor Michael according to the *Life of Methodius* to send him a man who will *teach them all justice*, believes that, in fact, the main motive of the Moravian prince to turn to the Roman emperor was the need for the latter to send him people who will help him carry out the judicial reform of his principality based on the Byzantine legal tradition, from which, during the mission of Constantine and Methodius in Moravia, originated the *Law for Judging the People*, the oldest Slavic legal monument, created on the basis of Chapter XVIII of the *Ecloga*, which will be discussed further in the text.

[10] About that, cf. Anastasiou 1971, 10–12; Christou 1992, 109–115.

explanation for this decision was, according to the *Life of Constantine*, the same as in previous cases—that no one else could perform that task, except Constantine himself.[11] However, the *Life of Methodius* adds to that reason another, which in this case was certainly more important. Convincing Constantine to accept the task, together with his brother Methodius, the emperor addressed him with the words: *Because you two are from Thessalonica, and the Thessalonians all speak purely Slavic*.[12] Obviously, for the task of preaching Christianity in the Slavic language, in a distant Slavic country, Constantine the Philosopher was certainly the most suitable person. In earlier missions, he had successfully mastered Jewish and Samaritan, as well as the Norse language of the Russian Varangians. Now he was required to teach in a language he had known since childhood. That task suited him more than any of the previous ones, and this one would be the most famous and secure him the place of a person of global historical importance.

Constantine agreed to this task as well. He knew the Slavic language well and could preach Christianity in it. However, in order to perform God's service in that language, and to teach it to others, he had to translate liturgical texts into it. Constantine conditioned his consent on the existence of a script for the Slavic language.[13] However, he certainly knew that the Slavs living under the rule of the Byzantine emperor and in the neighbourhood of his hometown of Thessalonica did not have a script. Therefore, his doubt probably refers specifically to the Moravians. Constantine thought that perhaps the Slavs who were far from Byzantium did have a script.

However, the emperor's answer to Constantine's doubt about whether the Slavs have *letters in their language* is even more interesting: *My grandfather and father and many others, looking for it, did not find it. So how can I find it?*[14] What did Emperor Michael III have in mind when he said that his grandfather, Emperor Michael II (820–829) and father, Emperor Theophilus (829–842), *and many others*, had tried to find out if the Slavs had a script for their language? Why did they want to know? What reasons led them to do so? Did they also want exactly what the Moravian prince Rastislav wrote to Michael III for—to teach the Slavs Christianity in the

[11] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIV.6–8.
[12] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, V.4–8.
[13] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIV.9–12.
[14] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIV.9–10.

Slavic language? Apart from the mentioned information in the *Life of Constantine*, there is not even the slightest hint about it in the sources. However, if this information carries even a grain of truth, it would be a unique testimony to the existence of a certain missionary policy of the two iconoclastic emperors.

All in all, the Slavs did not have a script. Under such circumstances, Constantine would not be able to fulfil the purpose of his mission in Moravia. For this reason, since he knew the Slavic language well and knew its phonetic composition, and according to the *Life*, also at the instigation of Emperor Michael and his uncle Bardas, Constantine composed the Slavic alphabet *himself*, that is, as it is written in his *Life*, *he composed the letters*, or *organized the letters*, according to the *life* of his brother Methodius.[15] Then he wrote the first sentence in the letters of the new script. It was the opening sentence of the *Gospel according to John*: *In the beginning there was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*… (Jn, 1:1).[16] Those were the first words written in the Slavic language, in the Slavic script. They started the long history of Slavic literacy and literature, and Constantine the Philosopher was recorded as its creator. That act brought him greater fame than all his other endeavours. It took place in Constantinople, just before he and his brother Methodius set out for Great Moravia in 863.

The origin of the Slavic alphabet is also discussed in a somewhat later writing, *On Letters*, by an unnamed Bulgarian monk from the beginning of the tenth century, who came to be known to history as *Chernorizets Hrabar* ("Hrabar the Monk"). According to his testimony, the Slavs did not have writing when they were pagans, but they *read and divined with lines and cuts*. After they were baptized and became Christians, they wrote Slavic words *in Roman*, i.e. Latin *and Greek letters*. This lasted for *many years*, but it happened to be a big problem for them, because *how can one properly write in Greek letters: Богъ, or živwtъ or sъlo, or сѣкы, or čaanie, or šivwta, or ѣd, or жdou, or ѧzykъ and others similar to these?*[17] Hrabar wanted to emphasize that Greek letters cannot be used to write Slavic words that contain sounds that do not exist in the Greek language, and therefore in the alphabet—such as *b*, *ž*, *dz* (**s**), *c* (ts), *č*, *š*, *jat* (**ѣ**, whose

[15] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIV.13–14, VM, V.10–11.

[16] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIV.14.

[17] Černorizec Hrabăr, 113–115. About the work, cf. Florja 1981, 55–63; Ziffer 2001, 707–710; Karpenko 2004, 159–170; Ivanova 2024, 188–215.

phonetic value was *ě*), nasal big and small *jus* (ѫ and ѧ, as well as their preiotized variants ⱑ and ⱔ, whose phonetic values were *ǫ*, *ę*, and *jǫ*, *ję*). That is why God sent Constantine the Philosopher to the Slavs, who created *thirty-eight* letters for them—*some according to the image of Greek letters, the other according to Slavic words.*[18] With this, Hrabar wanted to explain that Constantine, creating the Slavic alphabet, took over all the letters of the Greek alphabet and added new signs for those Slavic sounds that were not in the Greek language and script. The number of thirty-eight letters is explained by the fact that the Greeks use as many signs for sounds, because in addition to the standard twenty-four letters, the Greeks also use *eleven diphthongs* (αι, ει, ηι, οι, υι, αυ, ευ, ηυ, ᾳ, ῃ, ῳ), and *three for numbers* – ϛ (= 6), ϙ (= 90), and ϡ (= 900).[19] The Slavonic script that was compiled in 863 by Constantine the Philosopher and about which his life and Chernorizets Hrabar speak is called *Glagolitic*.[20]

The Slavic language for which Constantine created the alphabet and in which he was supposed to preach and teach in Moravia was, without any doubt, the language of the Slavs from around Constantine's native Thessalonica, the language that he himself knew. That language, which is always in the sources of the ninth and the tenth century called *Slavonic*, and today, for the purposes of science, *Old Slavonic*, became, thanks to Constantine, one of the languages in which God's service was performed.[21] Therefore, it must have contained numerous expressions related to the Christian teaching and tradition. Recent research points to the fact that numerous biblical expressions that appear in the early monuments of Slavic literacy are recorded in a form that points to the vernacular Greek language as their origin.[22] This would mean that the Slavs around Thessalonica became familiar with these expressions and their meaning from the language of their Greek-speaking neighbours before the emergence of Slavic literacy, which would lead to the conclusion that by then Christianity was already present in the Slavic language. With such a lexical foundation, the Slavic language could soon become the language used for Christian worship.

[18] Černorizec Hrabăr, 115–116, 121–122.
[19] Černorizec Hrabăr, 122–124.
[20] On Glagolitic script, cf. KME I, 491–509 (P. Ilčev).
[21] Huntley 1993, 125–187
[22] Savić V. 2011, 157–159.

Having compiled the Slavic alphabet and translated the first texts into the Slavic language, Constantine was ready to move towards Moravia. Emperor Michael composed a letter for the Moravian prince Rastislav, which he sent through Constantine. In that letter, the emperor particularly emphasizes the fact that now the Slavs have also received letters for their language, *which were not there at first*, and that now they too will join *the great nations that glorify God in their own language.* In it, he presents Constantine, the bearer of the letter and his messenger, as the one to whom God *revealed* those letters, and as *a man of integrity and good faith, highly educated and a philosopher*.[23] Constantine was accompanied by his older brother, the monk Methodius, who was ready to *obey and serve the philosopher and teach with him*.[24]

The sources do not indicate by which route Constantine and Methodius travelled to Moravia. It is often believed that they went from Constantinople along the old and well-known route, the *Via militaris*, through Thrace, then through the Morava and Danube valleys, to Belgrade, and then through Pannonia.[25] The largest part of that route was in the hands of the Bulgarians in the middle of the ninth century, and was not suitable for use, especially by Byzantine envoys. That is why I share the opinion that F. Dvornik developed in the later stage of his scientific work that the second route is more likely.[26] They would use the old *Via Egnatia*, from Constantinople, via Thessalonica, to Dyrrachium, and from Dyrrachium by boat, along the coasts of Dalmatia and Istria, to Venice. From Venice they would then head through Carantania or Pannonia to Moravia. The route via Thessalonica and Dyrrachium, and then the maritime route from Dyrrachium across the Adriatic Sea, was also used by the Roman envoys when they returned to Italy from the council of Constantinople in 869/870.[27] A little more than three years later, when they had completed their task in Moravia, Constantine and Methodius would head back to Constantinople via Pannonia and Venice,[28] where they apparently intended to board a ship. Is it not natural to assume that they went back exactly the way they came? Finally, the so-called *Excerptum de Karentanis*, extract

[23] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIV.15–19.
[24] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, V.11–12.
[25] Dvornik 1926, 153–154; Cibulka 1965, 318–364.
[26] Dvornik 1970, 307–314; KME II, 734–735 (G. Sotirov).
[27] Liber pontificalis II, 184.24–31; Dvornik 1970, 310–311.
[28] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XV–XVI.

from the text *De conversione Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, a contemporary source well-acquainted with the activity of the Thessalonian brothers in Moravia and Pannonia, especially with the activity of Methodius after 870, although wrongly considering Methodius a Slav, testifies that he came *ab Hystriae et Dalmatiae partibus*, i.e. *from the parts of Istria and Dalmatia*.[29]

Thessalonian Brothers in Moravia

Constantine and Methodius were received in Moravia by Prince Rastislav *with great honour*. As already pointed out, their task there was not to preach Christianity, but to organize the service of the liturgy in the Slavic language in an already Christianized country and to train the local priests in it. Therefore, Constantine soon translated all the texts needed for daily liturgical practice. As his biographer writes, *he translated all ecclesiastical service*—matins, hours, vespers, compline, services of the Holy Mysteries. It is well known which books were used, and are still used today, in the performance of the aforementioned services. However, the biographer of Constantine's brother Methodius explicitly mentions them: *Psalter and Gospel with the Apostle*, as well as other *selected services of the church*.[30] Then he taught these texts and services to the students given to him by Rastislav.[31] They were the first to start worshipping God and serving him in the church in the Slavic language. In this way, the *Slavonic church* was born.[32]

Apart from teaching priests to serve God in the Slavic language, Constantine and Methodius also worked in other fields of missionary work.[33] They preached the correct confession of Christian dogmas and eradicated residual pagan traces from popular beliefs, which the Frankish missionaries and priests had failed to do, and according to Constantine's biographer, did not even want to ban.[34] This primarily concerned sacrifices and unlawful marriages. In particular, Constantine's biographer gives a lot

[29] Conversio, 82; Wolfram 1995, 214–217.

[30] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XV.4.

[31] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XV.1–4.

[32] On the translations of liturgical texts made by Constantine and Methodius in Moravia, cf. Dvornik 1970, 105–118; Florja 1981, 31–37; Temčin 1999, 114–154; Turilov 2015, 130–152.

[33] On the pastoral activity of Constantine and Methodius in Moravia, cf. Dujčev 1968b, 113–121; Dujčev 1968c, 123–135; Dvornik 1970, 118–126.

[34] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XV.10–17.

of space to his sermons on the sanctity of marriage and monogamy.[35] Provisions of marriage law occupy a large part of the oldest Slavic legal monument, the *Law for Judging the People* (*Zakon Sudnyi Liudem*, *ZSL*), in which they appear in as many as three different places.[36] This law code was compiled for the Slavs based on certain chapters of the *Ecloga*, according to the latest research, by Constantine and Methodius at the time of their activity in Moravia, between 865 and 867, or by Methodius himself, between 870 and 881.[37] It is entirely possible that the creation of the *Law for Judging the People* is directly related to the challenges that Constantine and Methodius faced in Moravia and to their efforts to transform Moravia into an exemplary Christian society. This can be supported by some other provisions of the aforementioned law code, which were clearly aimed at eradicating remnants of pagan customs.[38] This reveals the other side of the mission of the Thessalonian Brothers among the Slavs in Moravia. They not only brought them the Christian Service of God in the Slavic language, but also introduced to them the achievements of the Roman legal system, creating the first law collection based on the *Ecloga*, then the basic Roman legal manual. In order to achieve this, the Thessalonian Brothers had to have with them the text of the *Ecloga*, so it is most likely that in addition to liturgical texts, they also brought Byzantine legal texts to Moravia, which indicates a very well-planned and organized mission, which was conceived in such a way as to cover all aspects of civilization.

The activity of Constantine and Methodius in Moravia had, of course, enemies. These were, as Constantine's biographer describes them, *Latin communicants, hierarchs, priests and students*, i.e. Frankish missionaries and priests, who served in the Latin language and who, with the arrival of

[35] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XV.12–17.

[36] Ilievska, ZSL, 76–82, 86–91, 107–115.

[37] Scholars have long disputed the origin of this legal document. Some advocated the thesis that it originated in Bulgaria at the time of Prince Boris, while others emphasized its Cyrilo-Methodian and Moravian origin, although there were also those who believed that it originated among the Macedonian Slavs. On that, cf. Maksimovič, ZSL, 7–25; Ilievska, ZSL, 16–40; review of older scholarship, cf. Maksimovič, ZSL, 169–197; Ilievska, ZSL, 359–370. In the latest research, the "Moravian theory" about the origin of *ZSL* is absolutely accepted, cf. Maksimovič, ZSL, 53–56; Ilievska, ZSL, 232, with the difference that Kirill Maksimovich is more inclined to the view that the *ZSL* was compiled by Methodius himself, as a bishop, after 870, while Krasimira Ilievska allows both possibilities—that it was compiled by Constantine and Methodius between 865 and 867, or by Methodius alone between 870 and 881.

[38] Ilievska, ZSL, 69, 90–92.

the Thessalonian Brothers, lost the possibility to operate in the area that they had previously introduced to Christianity and considered the zone of their exclusive influence. They were especially afraid of the newly introduced liturgy in the Slavic language. They knew that their influence in Moravia would weaken considerably if it came to life. Because of this, they harshly condemned and attacked Constantine and Methodius, their teaching and the Slavic service, emphasizing that it is not *from God*, because it did not exist *from the beginning*. There were only three languages, they claimed, which God had honoured to be worshipped in, and those were the three languages in which Pilate wrote on the Cross of Christ the words: *Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews*. Therefore, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Constantine called their claims a heresy, and them *trilingualists* and *pilatists*.[39] The ideology of *trilingualism* gained momentum, as shown in one of the previous chapters, in the mid-sixties of the ninth century in the lap of the Roman Church as its response to the insults made against the Latin language by Emperor Michael III in a letter to Pope Nicholas I sent in 862 or 863. The discussion that Constantine had with the *trilingualists* in Moravia was the first in which the Thessalonian Brothers had to stand up in defence of the Slavic liturgy against their attacks. The *trilingualists* would become sworn enemies of the Slavic liturgy and would try in every way to make it impossible. Constantine, and especially Methodius, would have to endure many more of their attacks.[40]

Constantine and Methodius stayed in Moravia for a total of forty months, i.e. three years and four months,[41] probably until the beginning of 867. The *Life of Methodius* testifies that during that time they *taught the disciples* and decided to go back.[42] Apparently, their intention was to return to Constantinople. However, while they were passing through Pannonia, they were received by Kotzel, the prince of the Pannonian Slavs, who

[39] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XV.5–9.

[40] On the *trilingualists* and their attacks on the Slavic liturgy and the work of Constantine and Methodius, cf. Dujčev 1968a, 43–68; Ševčenko 1964, 222. F. Thomson, starting from his assumption that the understanding that Hebrew, Greek and Latin are *the three sacred languages* did not mean that only they are allowed in the liturgy, Thomson 1992, 80–97, tried to prove that the attacks of the Latin clergy on the activities of Constantine and Methodius were not related to the introduction of the liturgy in the Slavic language, but to *the invention of a new, Slavic alphabet*, op. cit., 98–99. Such a position, in my opinion, is unsustainable, because contemporary sources testify to the complete opposite.

[41] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XV.18, VM, V.13.

[42] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, V.13.

ruled in Blatnograd (*Moosburg*), on Lake Balaton. He truly liked the *Slavic books*, so much so that he learned them himself. It should be understood that he liked the very idea of God's service in the Slavic language, which the brothers introduced in Moravia. Thus Kotzel also decided to join the venture, and gave the brothers fifty students, whom they, or perhaps their first students, had to teach Slavic liturgy.[43] Thus, the Slavic mission of Constantine and Methodius from Moravia was extended to Pannonia. As Rastislav had envisioned, other countries, seeing the Slavic service in Moravia, emulated it.

The road took the Thessalonian Brothers further to Venice, where they apparently intended to board a ship for Dyrrachium or Constantinople.[44] However, this is where their plans would change significantly. When they arrived in Venice, they were met with new challenges. Supporters of the *trilingual heresy*, bishops and priests and monks, attacked them *like crows on falcons*.[45] A debate ensued, the last one led by Constantine the Philosopher. In it, he did not fail to live up to his former exceptional performances in the discussions with the Muslims at the caliph's court ten years earlier, or with the Jews at the Khazar court in 861. To the attacks of the *trilingualists* that he had now created for the Slavs books that no one knew before, *not even the apostles, neither the pope of Rome, nor Gregory the Dialogist,*[46] *nor Jerome, nor Augustine*, and that they only know of three languages in which it is worthy to praise God, Hebrew, Greek and Latin,[47]

[43] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XV.18–22.

[44] On the intention of Constantine and Methodius to return to Constantinople, their temporary stay in Venice and their sudden decision to go to Rome at the invitation of the pope, cf. Dvornik 1970, 131–137.

[45] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVI.1; Thomson 1992, 98–106; Velikov 2012, 113–126.

[46] The edition used has *Theologian*, while different manuscripts have variants *theologъ* i *dialogъ*, Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVI.2, cf. p. 136. It would appear that the more correct form is *Dialogist* (*Dialogus*) and that the Latin hierarchs here mean Pope Gregory I the Great (590–604), i.e. St. Gregory the Dialogist, rather than the Cappadocian father of the fourth century, St. Gregory the Theologian († ca. 390).

[47] *…My že tri tъkъmo języky věmъ, imiže dostoitъ vъ kъnigalъ slaviti Boga, Evrei, Eliny i Latiny*, Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVI.3. In accordance with his thesis that the Latin clerics did not attack Constantine for introducing worship in the Slavic language, but for inventing a new, Slavic, alphabet, Thomson 1992, 98–99, gives an incorrect translation of the above quote into English: *We know of only three peoples for whom it is fitting to praise God in alphabets: the Jews, Greeks (and) Latins.* Although in Old Slavonic *języky* can also mean "peoples" and *kъnigy* "alphabets", however, due to the use of the instrumental case *imiže* and not the dative *imъže*, it is clear that in this case the expression *…języky… imiže dostoitъ*

Constantine answered in his already many times proven manner, using his skill of dialectics and his immense education. Along with numerous references from the Old and New Testaments and some other arguments,[48] Constantine also used one indisputable fact, which refuted all the arguments of the *trilingualists*. *We*, he told them, *know of many peoples who are skilled in books and who give glory to God each in their own language; they are Armenians, Persians, Abkhazians, Iberians* (Georgians), *Sugdians* (from the Crimea), *Goths* (from the Crimea), *Obri* (Avars?), *Tursi* (?), *Khazars, Arabs, Egyptians and Syrians and many others.*[49] Therefore, there is no reason for the Slavs not to join all those nations, exactly as Emperor Michael III wrote in the epistle to Rastislav, which he sent through Constantine—that they too *should be counted among the great nations, who praise God in their own language*.[50] Obviously, the mentioned passages best reflect the ideological background of the Byzantine understanding of the spread of Christianity among the Gentiles. Every nation should glorify God in its own language, and this was something completely natural in the Byzantine understanding of the ninth century.[51] This attitude was defended philosophically and theologically by Constantine before the Latin hierarchs in Venice in 867. From such a point of view, the *trilingualism* of the Latin spiritual environment of that period could be considered as nothing but the most heinous heresy, contrary to both common sense and the messages of the Psalms and the Gospels.

It was then that Pope Nicholas I invited Constantine and Methodius to come to Rome. He had probably heard about their activities before, but only then did he send them an invitation.[52] That was during 867 and they arrived in Rome near the end of that year, because they were welcomed there by the new pope, Hadrian II,[53] who ascended to the Apostolic See on 14 December 867. For the next little more than a year, Constantine would live in Rome, where he ensured that the pope officially recognized and blessed the Slavonic liturgical language. During that time in Rome, he

vъ kъnigahъ slaviti Boga…, means: *languages… by which it is fitting to praise God in Holy Scriptures*. The author also goes too far by proposing a reconstruction of the mentioned passage of the original text, so that it would fit his thesis, op. cit., 98, n. 199.

[48] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVI.4–59.

[49] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVI.4–8.

[50] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIV.16.

[51] Ps. 117:1; Acts 2:11; Phil. 2:11; 1 Cor. 14:4.

[52] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVII.1, VM, VI.1.

[53] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVII.2.

developed close contacts with the most learned people of the West of that time, among whom a prominent place belongs to the repeatedly mentioned Anastasius the Librarian.[54] Constantine died in Rome on 14 February 869, receiving on his deathbed the monastic vow and the name Cyril, by which he is better known in history and tradition.[55] For his brother Methodius, however, who was by his side all the time, great challenges were yet to come.

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[54] Betti 2014, 65–71, 90–107.

[55] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XVII–XVIII.

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Conversion of the Bulgarians

At the time when Constantine and Methodius were developing their activity in a distant, but already Christianized Slavic country in the heart of Europe, Constantinople was carrying out another mission, in a neighbouring but until then pagan and strongly anti-Christian country—Bulgaria. The Bulgarian prince Boris received baptism in the second half of 864 by the care of Constantinople, together with his magnates.[1] After that, Byzantine missionaries came to Bulgaria and began work on the conversion of the Bulgarian population and the organization of the church.

Even for Photius, who was certainly the organizer of the activities of the Byzantine Church in Bulgaria after the baptism of Prince Boris, their accession to the Christian faith came as a surprise of the first order. Given that the Bulgarians, living in the immediate vicinity of Constantinople and Christian Roman culture, had resisted all Christian influences and remained

[1] About the date, causes and manner of baptism of the Bulgarian prince a lot has been written in scholarship, cf. especially, Zlatarski 1918–1927 I–2, 1–43; Vaillant, Laskaris 1933, 6–15; Angelov 1965, 38–57; Petrov 1965, 33–60; Dvornik 1970, 126–128; Sullivan 1966, 55–139; Cankova–Petkova 1973, 21–39; Săbev 1987, 131–176; Litavrin 1988, 40–56; Obolenski 1991, 103–114; Šepard 1995 (2007), 35–39; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 171–177; Ivanov 2003, 161–169; Varona Codeso 2009, 99–108; Nikolov 2021, 140–142; Ziemann 2021, 344–345. A review of ideological aspects of Christianization, cf. Nikolov 2006, 44–64. An overview of some lesser-known sources on the Christianization of Bulgarians, from different eras, translated into Bulgarian, Gjuzelev 2006.

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steadfast in their pagan beliefs for almost two centuries, the surprise caused by their baptism in Constantinople is quite understandable, regardless that the first traces of the presence of Christianity among the Bulgarians and the Slavs who were subordinated to them appear as early as the beginning of the ninth century.[2]

Circumstances and the Time of the Christianization of the Bulgarians

During the decades that followed the Christianization of the Bulgarians, several different traditions about that event formed in Byzantine historiography. They were transmitted by Nicetas David the Paphlagonian at the beginning of the tenth century, and by three Byzantine chroniclers from the middle of the same century—Genesius, the Continuer of Theophanes and Symeon the Logothete and the writers of his *group*.[3]

Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, in the *Life of Patriarch Ignatius*, talks about the Christianization of the Bulgarians after relating the events connected to the great earthquake in August 862. Concluding this account, Nicetas writes that *at that time the Bulgarians were also seduced by God's providence, a great famine, and at the same time by the gifts of the autocrat, having laid down weapons, joined the holy baptism*.[4]

Genesius places the Christianization of the Bulgarians in the time immediately after the great Byzantine victory over the Arabs in the Battle of Poson, which took place on 3 September 863.[5] Having learned about that event and encouraged by it, the Bulgarian leader (καθηγεμών) decided to establish peace with the Empire, not only because he had been encouraged to do so before, *but also because of the hunger that was pressing his*

[2] Cf. Săbev 1987, 106–120; Litavrin 1988, 30–40; Nikolova 1997, 33–34; Ziemann 2021, 334–344, cf. n. 65, for more important views in scholarship. About relationship between Bulgarians and Slavs in the Bulgarian state before Christianization, cf. Šepard 1995 (2007), 25–36.

[3] A detailed analysis of data from Byzantine sources on the Christianization of Bulgarians has recently been provided by Speck 2000, 342–359. A brief overview is given by Nikolov 2006, 45–46.

[4] Life of Ignatius, 58.18–20.

[5] On the Battle of Poson, Genesius, IV.15; Symeon, 131.24, 26; Pseudo-Symeon, 665.9–10, 666.8–15; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 824.12–14, 825.1–9; Halkin 1944, 196, 199–202, 215.19–223.15; Acta Davidis, 252.15–31; Vasiliev 1935–1950 I, 249–255; Huxley 1975, 443–450; Whittow 1996, 311.

people. Therefore, they *all received Christian baptism, and their prince chose to be called Michael, after the emperor's name*. Some of the *famous hierarchs* were sent to Bulgaria to strengthen the Christian faith.[6]

In the *Chronicle* of Symeon the Logothete, the Christianization of the Bulgarians was described after the attack of the Arab leader, emir Umar of Melitene on Byzantine territory in 863, but before the Byzantine victory over him in the aforementioned Battle of Poson, on 3 September of the same year. Emperor Michael, with Caesar Bardas, *having led the army, went against* ***Michael****, prince of Bulgaria, by land and sea, after he heard that the Bulgarian people were dying of hunger. When the Bulgarians found out about it, they succumbed as if by the echo of thunder, and before conflict and battle, they lost hope of victory and asked to become Christians and to submit to the emperor and the Romans. The king, having baptized and received their prince, gave him his name, and bringing his nobles to Constantinople, baptized them all, and from then on there was a deep peace.*[7]

Continuer of Theophanes conveys two completely different, but equally legendary traditions about the Christianization of the Bulgarians. Both place this event during the reign of Empress Theodora, therefore, between 852, when Boris came to power in Bulgaria, and 856, when Theodora was overthrown. According to the first version, a Byzantine monk named Theodore Cupharas was in Bulgarian captivity for a long time. At one point, Empress Theodora wanted to buy him out of captivity, and she wrote to Boris about it. Boris himself requested that she, in turn, release his sister, who was in Byzantine captivity and then lived at the imperial court, where she had already been baptized. To the joy of both sides, the prisoners were exchanged. Theodore Cupharas had already told Boris a lot about the Christian God and faith, and now Boris's sister continued his work and *sowed the seeds of faith* with Boris. The prince, however, remained loyal to his religion. After that, Bulgaria began to suffer from a terrible famine. Faced with the scourge, Boris turned to the Christian God of Theodore Cupharas and his sister for help and deliverance. After the hunger stopped, Boris decided to be baptized. A bishop (*hierarch*) was sent from Constantinople who baptized him and named him Michael, after Emperor Michael III.[8]

[6] Genesius, IV.16.

[7] Symeon, 131.25; Pseudo-Symeon, 665.11–18; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 824.14–23.

[8] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.14.

The second version transmitted by the Continuer of Theophanes is entirely legendary in spirit. Namely, Boris had a hunting residence, as he was a passionate hunter, where he often spent nights and days. He wanted that residence to be painted, *for the sake of entertaining the eyes*. For this job, he hired a Byzantine painter, the monk Methodius. However, instead of scenes of war exploits and hunting beasts, Boris, prompted by God's providence, ordered him to paint some scenes according to the Holy Scriptures. Methodius painted scenes of the Last Judgment and the Second Coming of Christ. The scene of the Judgment Day, where the faithful and righteous stand on one side of the Son of God and await the heavenly settlement, and on the other side stand the unfaithful and the wicked, who await eternal torment in the fires of hell, left a great impression on the Bulgarian prince. Feeling the fear of God in him through the latter, Boris asked to be initiated into the Christian mysteries and was baptized overnight. When this became known among the people, a general rebellion broke out against him. However, Boris, with the help of the Christian God, crushed the rebellion and made Christians out of all his people. After that, he wrote to Empress Theodora that, since they were now united by one faith and love, she would give him land on the border between the Bulgarians and Romans, towards to Debeltus, called *Sidera*, and by the Bulgarians *Zagora*.[9]

Both versions presented by the Continuer of Theophanes are incorrect for being chronologically wrong, because they place the Christianization of the Bulgarians between 852 and 856. The identity of the monk Theodore Cupharas is not known from other sources,[10] neither is anything known of the stay of a sister of Boris' as a prisoner at the imperial court in Constantinople.[11] The story of the painter Methodius and the scene of the Last Judgment that he painted in Boris' hunting residence seems quite legendary, while the story of the revolt of the Bulgarian people against the Christianization policy implemented by their prince describes, in fact, the events that took place two years after Boris' baptism, in 866, about which

[9] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.15; Pseudo-Symeon, 665.18–666.7.

[10] On Theodore Cupharas, cf. PmbZ, no. 7723.

[11] One could think that the basis for the story of the Continuer of Theophanes about the stay of Boris' sister at the imperial court in Constantinople was based on the stay of Boris' son Symeon, who, according to Liutprand of Cremona, in his early youth lived in Constantinople, where he studied *Demosthenes' rhetoric and Aristotle's syllogisms*, until he, *leaving the studies of skills*, dedicated himself to monastic life, only to be later *attracted by the desire to rule*, Liutprandi Antapodosis, (III, 29) 87.21–28; Nikolov 2006, 90–96.

more will be said below. The story of the surrender of the land of *Zagora* to the Bulgarians is connected in Byzantine sources to the time of Justinian II, who is said to have ceded the land to his ally, the Bulgarian Khan Tervel, as a reward for the assistance provided during his return to the throne, back in 705.[12]

The other three sources contain a chronologically more accurate and historically realistic account of the events. Nicetas David the Paphlagonian places the Christianization of the Bulgarians immediately after the great earthquake of August 862 and the forty days of smaller earthquakes that followed it. Symeon the Logothete places it in the midst of military operations on the eastern borders of the Empire against Umar of Melitene in the summer of 863. Genesius is chronologically the most precise—he places the baptism of the Bulgarian prince at the time after the Byzantine victory of Poson on 3 September 863. It is also the date before which it is difficult to imagine any military action against the Bulgarians, if that also played a role in their Christianization, as Symeon the Logothete writes, since all the more important imperial forces were deployed in the East.

All the mentioned sources speak of the *hunger* that tormented the Bulgarians as one of the factors that contributed to the decision of Prince Boris to be baptized. The Continuer of Theophanes, nevertheless, talks about it only in one of the two versions he transmits, but there he presents it as the sole reason for Boris' decision. Nicetas David the Paphlagonian mentions it along with the imperial gifts to win over the Bulgarians, Genesius adds it to the news about the great Byzantine victory over the Arabs, while Symeon the Logothete presents it as a reason for the imperial military action against the Bulgarians, which eventually led to their baptism. It is obvious that, despite being the only common point in all four sources, the famine alone was not a sufficient reason for the Bulgarian prince to make the decision to baptize himself and all his people. If it were, the closest to the truth would be the telling of the first version of the Continuer of Theophanes, which is undoubtedly the product of legend. On the other hand, even the news of the great Byzantine victory over the Arabs in 863 cannot constitute sufficient reason for the Bulgarian prince to leave the centuries-old beliefs of his ancestors and approach the religion of their and his greatest enemies. Symeon the Logothete's version, however, seems the most realistic, that the imperial army attacked the Bulgarians, and that their prince, faced with that attack, instead of

[12] Symeon, 117.1; TIB 6, 441, 503.

resisting, decided to submit and be baptized with the whole people.[13] Clues pointing to such a development of events can be found in the description of the Christianization of the Bulgarians in the *Life of Patriarch Ignatius* of Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, where it is written that the Bulgarians, starving and seduced by the emperor's gifts, *laid down their arms*. While the origin of the motif of *famine*, present in all Byzantine sources about the Christianization of the Bulgarians, remains unclear, it seems quite certain that some sort of Byzantine military action against them really took place, which influenced Prince Boris to accept Christianity from Constantinople. However, the aforementioned *famine* in Bulgaria, if there really was such a famine at the time, does not seem to be a sufficient reason for military action. On the other hand, it is quite certain that it could have happened only after the end of the Byzantine military operations in Asia, after 3 September 863. More precise and clear answers, however, are contained in contemporary sources.

In the middle of 864, the East Frankish king Louis "the German" sent Bishop Solomon I of Constance to Pope Nicholas I, with various questions related to state and church politics. Among those questions was one that concerned the Bulgarians. King Louis informed the pope that he was going to Tuln, *in order to establish peace with the prince of the Bulgarians and make Rastislav, the Moravian prince, subject to him by grace or force*. In addition, he tells him that *he hopes that the prince of the Bulgarians himself wants to convert to the* (Christian) *faith and that many of them* (Bulgarians) *have already become Christians*. The pope answers that for this reason one should be grateful to God *and ask him to increase the yield of fruits in his granary*, and prescribes that for this *fast should be held and prayers made*.[14] The contemporary *Annals of St. Bertin* also report that in 864, the Bulgarian prince promised King Louis that he would be baptized.[15] Therefore, in the middle of 864, the Bulgarian prince had not yet been baptized, but he had a desire to do so, about which he informed the East Frankish king.

This information from the Western sources is perfectly followed up by a significant piece of chronological information on the time of the Christianization of the Bulgarians, which is contained in the repeatedly

[13] The imperial military action is presented as a reason for the baptism of the Bulgarian prince in the later *Short Chronicles*, as well, Kleinchroniken I, 110.1.

[14] Nicolai I epp., 293.1–9.

[15] Annales Bertiniani, 72.

mentioned *Circular Epistle to the patriarchal thrones of the East* by Patriarch Photius from the first half of 867. Having pointed out how the Bulgarians finally accepted Christianity, Photius laments how *not even two years have passed since that people respected the correct Christian faith, when wicked and hateful people* appeared among them, *people from darkness, since they come from the western regions*, and started to divert them from the right path.[16] Photius here has in mind the Roman missionaries, who appeared in Bulgaria at the end of 866, as will be discussed later. Based on this notice by Photius, it can be concluded that the Christianization of the Bulgarians began in the second half or end of 864 and that Prince Boris was baptized exactly then.[17] If Symeon the Logothete and, to a certain extent, Nicetas David the Paphlagonian are to be believed, the baptism of the Bulgarian prince was preceded by a military action carried out against him by Emperor Michael and Caesar Bardas. That action, therefore, must be dated to the middle of 864, which fully corresponds to the capabilities of the Byzantine army, which after the victory over the Arabs in September 863 had a free hand to act on the other side. This was approximately the time when Boris was supposed to *establish peace* with Louis "the German" in Tuln and form an alliance against the Moravian prince Rastislav, who had been attacked by the joint forces of the two rulers as early as 863.[18]

As already explained, the Byzantine missionaries Constantine the Philosopher and his brother Methodius were active in Moravia from 863, where they taught the population about Christian service in the Slavic language. Their actions carried with them the Byzantine influence in Moravia and culturally distanced that country from its Frankish neighbours, who also aspired to political power over it. This is why their mission was as dangerous for the East Frankish king as Rastislav's political independence, which he persistently tried to crush. In Constantinople, however, they had reasons to fear that Rastislav's possible military defeat at the

[16] Photii epp., 2.52–64.

[17] There are different understandings about the year of the Christianization of the Bulgarians in the scholarship, and all the years ranging from 863 to 866 have been proposed. Numerous works have been written on the subject, the most significant being Lascaris, Vaillant 1933, 5–15; Petrov 1964, 569–590. In them numerous data that could be used as arguments for determining the precise chronology of the Christianization of the Bulgarians are explained, but I think that Photius' testimony that it happened *less than two years before the arrival of the Roman missionaries in Bulgaria in the late autumn of 866* is quite enough by itself for dating the event to the second half or the end of 864.

[18] Annales Fuldenses, 56.

hands of the combined forces of the East Franks and Bulgarians would significantly hamper the actions of Constantine and Methodius in Moravia. On the other hand, just as the Moravian prince turned to distant Constantinople for Christian missionaries, the Bulgarian prince first expressed his desire to be baptized to the East Frankish king. At the time of the schism between the Church of Constantinople and Rome, it was unthinkable for Constantinople that Roman missionaries should work in Bulgaria, almost at the very gates of the capital, and the pope's influence be established there. Therefore, the imperial court had two strong reasons to act vigorously against Bulgaria in the middle of 864. The first was to prevent the execution of the Frankish-Bulgarian alliance and prevent the participation of the Bulgarian forces in the attack on Moravia, and thus protect the activities of the Byzantine missionaries in that country, and the second, to prevent the Bulgarian prince from being baptized under the patronage of the West, extending the pope's influence to the very gates of Constantinople. Finally, under such circumstances, Boris' decision to be baptized becomes clear and understandable. With the Byzantine missionaries in Moravia and their activities, Bulgaria found itself wedged between Byzantium and a strong country under its influence. Boris' answer was a desire to bind himself to the pope and the West through baptism, in order to protect himself from the Byzantine influence that surrounded him. The military action of Emperor Michael and Caesar Bardas, *by land and sea*, that is to say on a large scale, in the middle of 864 forced him to give up the western alliance and instead to be baptized by Byzantine missionaries, under the patronage of Emperor Michael III himself as a "godfather". The aforementioned Byzantine military action against Bulgaria undoubtedly protected the mission of Constantine and Methodius in Moravia, because the planned joint Frankish-Bulgarian attack on Moravia did not take place.[19]

The Christianization of the Bulgarians in 864, along with the conversion of some Armenians from the Monophysite heresy to Orthodoxy, is the only example of decisive and energetic action on the part of the

[19] On the political relations in the triangle East Franks-Bulgarians-Byzantium in the first half of the seventh decade of the ninth century and their influence on the Christianization of the Bulgarians, cf. Petrov 1966, 43–48. I believe that the author's thesis that the wars that Prince Boris waged against the Serbs and Croats, about which Constantine Porphyrogenitus writes, DAI I, 31.60–67, 32.44–57, belong to the same political circumstances, i.e. the need of Byzantium to break the strength of Bulgaria in every way and thwart the conclusion of the Bulgarian-Frankish alliance against Great Moravia in 863, is not unfounded.

Byzantine state in order to achieve success in the field of church policy towards foreign actors in the middle of the ninth century. In all other cases, either when sending missions to the Arabs, Russians, Khazars or Moravians, the initiative was taken by those nations, and Constantinople merely responded to it. This creates the impression that the Byzantine church and missionary policy towards those peoples in the middle of the ninth century represented only an adaptation to circumstances and a simple reaction to them. However, we must ask ourselves to what extent Byzantium was able to express the initiative in these processes and take action. It did not have political authority over the Arabs, Russians, Khazars or Moravians, that would have enabled the state and church authority to act more decisively and directly on the development of religious conditions among those peoples. The Byzantine state and church could not simply send their missionaries to a foreign country, to foreign rulers, and expect them to achieve success there. On the other hand, where the Empire could exert more direct political influence, it did not hesitate to use that influence to strengthen the position of its church. Thus, the victories on the eastern border attracted the Armenians to negotiations to overcome the centuries-old dispute over dogmatic differences, and the energetic action against the Bulgarians in 864 forced their prince, who had already decided to be baptized, to do so through Constantinople, not Rome. The conditionality of direct action by the Byzantine church in a certain area on the political presence there of the Byzantine state was very well expressed by the tenth-century Byzantine writer Symeon the Logothete, who, speaking about the Christianization of the Bulgarians, did not fail to emphasize that on that occasion the Bulgarians *submitted* to the Byzantines, no matter how relative that statement may be. Where it did not have decisive political influence, Byzantium could not use it to implement its church politics. However, for such cases, it had worked out mechanisms, which, when the opportunity arose, it could put into full operation at any moment. Those mechanisms were developed after 843, in the era of internal consolidation, when the imperial court, high clergy of the capital and secular intelligentsia gathered around the School of Magnaura joined forces, and found their full application during the Arab, Russian, Khazar and Moravian missions.

The Byzantine Mission in Bulgaria

According to Continuer of Theophanes, Boris was baptized in Bulgaria. He was baptized by a bishop (*hierarch*) who was sent from Constantinople to Bulgaria for this purpose.[20] Genesius corroborates this point of view by stating that they were sent to Bulgaria *chosen of the hierarchs* to spread and strengthen the faith.[21] Only the writing of Symeon the Logothete deviates from such a representation of events. According to him, after the emperor baptized Prince Boris and gave him his name, he brought the Bulgarian nobles *to Constantinople* and baptized them all there.[22] The correctness of the latest information cannot be confirmed. However, it is quite reliable that several bishops were sent to Bulgaria from Byzantium, whose task was to baptize the prince and nobles, and to organize the conversion of the people, introducing them to the Christian faith and presenting its details to them. One of these bishops was met in Bulgaria by Blasius of Amorium, during his journey to Rome, and spent a long time with him.[23] In Bulgaria, the seal of a certain bishop Isaias has been found, which is dated by the sigilographers to the time of the Byzantine mission in 864–866.[24] Together with the bishops, many lay priests came to Bulgaria, who had to bear the greatest and most responsible part of the mission—to baptize and preach among the common people.

The head of the entire mission was, however, the patriarch of Constantinople himself, Photius. He himself left testimony of his direct participation and role in the Christianization of the Bulgarians. This testimony is his famous *Epistle to the most famous and respected spiritual son, beloved in the Lord, Michael, from God the prince of Bulgaria*. The epistle of the superior of the Imperial Christian Church to the newly baptized leader of the newly baptized nation is a real lecture of the sort a teacher presents to his pupil, who has just sat down at the school desk. It is often believed that the epistle contains the patriarch's answers to the questions previously addressed to him by Boris himself.[25] However, this is not expressed

[20] Theophanes Continuatus, IV.14.
[21] Genesius, IV.16.
[22] Symeon, 131.25.
[23] Vita S. Blasii Amoriensis, 661–662.
[24] Jordanov 2001, 78–79; Jordanov 2003, 51, no. 19.3.
[25] Dujčev 1965, 107–108. On the epistle and its importance, cf. Obolenski 1991, 105–106; Simeonova 1998, 112–156; Nikolov 2006, 47–53; Nótári 2015, 49–52; Ziemann 2021, 353.

anywhere in the epistle,[26] indeed Photius clearly points to the opposite. He himself sends an epistle to the Bulgarian prince, as a *friendly and much-needed gift*, in which, *in a wise and short word*, he explains to him the teachings of the true Christian faith, the history of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, as well as its influence in everyday life, *since he found that his* (Boris') *thinking soul is worthy of such great joy and gift*.[27] In the mentioned passage, which is at the beginning of the epistle, its content is already presented. However, apart from the mentioned three units, the epistle also contains certain passages which directly discuss the time in which it was created. Photius calls Boris Michael *the most famous and respected spiritual son beloved in the Lord*, *the most famous and beloved son*, *Christ-loving and spiritual son*, and wonders *what other glorious and beautiful and worthy of love name he can* give him.[28] In addition, he addresses him as *a beautiful representation* of his *efforts*,[29] and calls him *not to disappoint his hopes*, nor to show that *the efforts and struggles he joyfully undertook for* his salvation *were in vain*.[30] Having explained to him the teaching of the Christian faith and its dogma through the history of the Seven Ecumenical Councils and pointed out that all Christians think according to it, believe in it and are governed according to it, Photius addresses the Bulgarian prince with the words: *it is this that should be received and embraced with a sincere vow and correctness of cognition and unshakable faith by your God-guarded reason, which has already turned towards our inheritance of piety, and which should deviate from it neither to the right nor to the left even a little*.[31] Then he warns the prince that it is not enough for him to do this, but that all those who are subordinate to him should follow in his footsteps, because the prince cannot think only of his own salvation, but also about the salvation of his subjects.[32] In the same chapter, the patriarch explains to Boris the difference between the Christian faith and paganism, the advantages of the former over the latter and how it has always managed to overcome all the temptations that came before it.[33] Comparing Boris' work to that of Constantine the Great, the exemplar

[26] Cf. Dujčev 1965, loc. cit.
[27] Photii epp., 1.19–28.
[28] Photii epp., 1.1–3, 497–498.
[29] Photii epp., 1.54–55.
[30] Photii epp., 1.487–496.
[31] Photii epp., 1.475–479.
[32] Photii epp., 1.480–487.
[33] Photii epp., 1.497–559.

throughout the Middle Ages for all rulers who sought to bring their peoples into the light of the Christian faith, placing them on an equal footing with the apostles,[34] Photius calls on Boris *to stick to his original knowledge, will and reason*, and *to stand firmly on the rock of faith, on which he has been well founded under the Lord*, and to do good deeds with his correct faith and lead a virtuous life.[35] The most interesting section immediately follows this one. In it, Photius declares that he himself wanted to be with Boris and personally manage affairs, to be informed about actions taken and see with his own eyes what is happening, to be a participant in the successes and joys, and if something unforeseen occurs, that he can easily correct it. However, since *the will is different from the possibilities*, he can only give advice in writing.[36]

It is clear from all the above passages that the epistle was written at the very beginning of the Byzantine mission in Bulgaria, immediately after the baptism of Prince Boris.[37] While composing it, Photius still felt the danger that Boris might renege on his decision and return to paganism, thus bringing all the patriarch's hopes and efforts to nothing. This is why he calls on Boris in several places, since he has already made the decision to be baptized, to remain faithful to that decision. This is also the purpose of the sections in which the superiority of the Christian faith over paganism is shown. It is also clear that serious work on the Christianization of the people is yet to come, and that Boris himself should make sure that it is done in the best way. How much Photius himself cared that things in Bulgaria should unfold exactly as he imagined is shown by his desire to participate in them personally and his regret that this was impossible. Nevertheless, the fact that Photius was in written contact with Boris during the entire period of the activity of the Byzantine mission in Bulgaria is evidenced by another of his letters to the Bulgarian ruler, which mentions the frequent exchange of letters between the two.[38] In this second letter,

[34] Dujčev 1965, 109–110.

[35] Photii epp., 1.560–578.

[36] Photii epp., 1.579–586.

[37] Nikolov 2006, 47, believes that it was created in 865.

[38] Photii epp., 271.1–13. The editors dated that letter to the second patriarchate of Photius, between November 877 and September 886. However, the earlier editors of the Bulgarian translation of the letter believed that it originates from the time immediately after the Christianization of the Bulgarians, i.e. 865 or 866, since there is no mention in it of the Roman missionaries, who came to Bulgaria at the end of 866, IBI VIII, 103, n. 5.

some places are mentioned which are clearly recognizable in the epistle.[39] This proves that the epistle was written first. Since it also mentions other letters that were exchanged between Photius and Boris in the meantime, it is probable that the epistle was written before all of them, at the very beginning of the mission, at the end of 864 or the beginning of 865.

The epistle, as Photius conceived it and presented it from the outset, consists of three parts. The first part represents the exposition of the *holy and God-wise teaching of the undefiled and pure Christian faith*. The second part is an exposition on *the holy and universal Seven Councils*, which are *the protectors and defence* of the aforementioned *divine and Orthodox teaching*. The third part includes that which testifies to the correctness of the faith in everyday life.[40]

This is quite understandable, since in that short text the entire belief of the Christians is perfectly presented. Through it, from the first words—*I believe in One God, the Father, the Almighty*—to the last—*I await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the future ages*—Boris was introduced to the essence of Christianity and what was expected of him as a believer.

Laying out the history of the Seven Ecumenical Councils was an excellent way for Photius, briefly but precisely, to introduce Boris to the historical development of Christianity and the Christian Church, the stages they went through and the challenges they had to overcome. Photius speaks about each of the Seven Councils separately, stating the time and place where it was held, how many bishops attended, who were the most prominent representatives of the official, Orthodox current, and who were the supporters and leaders of *heresies and innovations*, who were condemned at the councils, together with their representatives.[41] Thus, Boris became familiar with the teaching and fate of Arius, who was discussed by the First Ecumenical Council, in Nicaea in 325; Macedonius, who was condemned by the Second Council, in Constantinople in 381; Nestorius, condemned at the Third Council, in Ephesus in 431; with the Monophysitism of Eutychius and Dioscorus and their followers Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who were discussed by two councils—the Fourth, in Chalcedon in 451 and the Fifth, in Constantinople in 553; with

[39] For example, that he be *a good and eternally remembered example of instruction to the people subordinated to* his *god-guarded rule*, Photii epp., 271.16–18, which is the very essence of the entire third part of Photius' epistle, about which cf. further.

[40] Photii epp., 1.21–26.

[41] Photius states the mentioned principles of the presentation of the history of the seven councils at the beginning of the account about them, Photii epp., 1.53–62.

Monothelitism, which was supported by the patriarchs of Constantinople Sergius, Pyrrhus and Paul, the Roman pope Honorius and the Alexandrian patriarch Cyrus, and which was condemned at the Sixth Council, in Constantinople in 680/681; finally, with iconoclasm, which was rejected at the Seventh Ecumenical Council, in Nicaea in 787. Through the story of how the councils dealt with all these heresies, Photius introduces Boris to the figures and works of the most outstanding and deserving fighters for the purity of Orthodoxy—Gregory the Theologian, Cyril of Alexandria, Leo of Rome, but also the Orthodox emperors, protectors of the true faith—Theodosius the Elder and the Younger, Marcian, Justinian, Constantine IV, Constantine VI and Irene. At the end of the section on each council, Photius completes it with his own theological consideration and explanation of why a certain heresy was condemned at the corresponding council and why it was labelled a heresy, i.e. what in its teaching was not in accordance with correct and true Christian doctrine.[42] With special attention, Photius writes about iconoclasm, the last heresy to seriously shake the life of the church, which appeared even after the Seventh Ecumenical Council and which had finally been defeated only twenty years earlier, the consequences of which were therefore felt even at the moment when Boris was baptized and while Photius composed the epistle. Through the story of iconoclasm, Photius explains to Boris the symbolism of the objects of worship of the Christian faith—the Cross and the icons of Christ, the Virgin, saints and holidays—so important in the life and belief of Christians.[43]

The third and most comprehensive part of the epistle, which covers the rest of the text, is the one that, as Photius envisioned, should present the place and role of faith in everyday life. It is, in fact, Photius' lesson to Boris about how a ruler should rule correctly, since he, as the head of a nation, is also responsible for the well-being and salvation of his nation.[44] Although the chapters presented there are not Photius' independent work, but belong to the rich Byzantine literature devoted to the "profession" or "craft" of rulership and are based on known ancient and earlier Christian writings of the same genre,[45] the exposition is still somewhat adapted to

[42] Photii epp., 1.63–468.

[43] Photii epp., 1.383–468.

[44] Photii epp., 1.587–1208.

[45] The so-called *Fürstenspiegel* (*Mirror of Princes*), cf. Dujčev 1965, 110–115, where cf. also a short analysis of those chapters. On the texts of that genre in medieval literature, cf. Marjanović-Dušanić 2002, 135–148; Odorico 2009, 223–246.

the specific case of a newly baptized ruler, who needs to take care of providing his people with a way to salvation.

It has been pointed out that Photius' epistle is written in difficult, even artificial, learned Greek, which many Byzantines of the time could not easily have understood, and that Boris could not possibly even have read it, let alone grasped and comprehended all its subtleties.[46] However, from the second letter of Photius to Boris, it is known that a developed correspondence had been maintained between the two for the duration of the Byzantine mission and that a close relationship was established between teacher and the student. In the aforementioned letter, Photius looks back at the statements from his epistle, especially the third part, and points out that he is happy that Boris is progressing on the path of growing into a true Christian ruler, which is the path he presented to him in his epistle.[47] Therefore we must conclude that Boris understood well what Photius was writing to him about, accepted the patriarch's epistle as basic doctrine of faith and at least tried to act and work in accordance with it. It can be seen from the mentioned letter that, at the time when it was written, the Byzantine mission and the Christianization of the Bulgarians were progressing in every respect.[48]

However, apparently this was only the impression received by Photius and Boris. At a lower level, among the common people, the spread of the Christian faith was not proceeding quite as Photius had imagined. Boris' subjects did not have such good teachers as the prince himself. Indeed, when Photius expressed in the epistle the desire and need to personally participate in the mission and oversee its implementation,[49] he was absolutely right. How the mission took place on the ground, far from the eyes of Photius and Boris, is illuminated by another source—*Answers of the Pope Nicholas to the questions of the Bulgarians*. This is a source which provides a far more complete picture of the Byzantine mission in Bulgaria and its achievements.

In the spring of 866, a revolt broke out against Boris, led by the Bulgarian nobles who were not satisfied with the introduction of a new religion and demanded the restoration of the old pagan beliefs. After suppressing that rebellion, Boris turned his back on Photius and Constantinople

[46] Dujčev 1965, 115–117.
[47] Photii epp., 271.1–19.
[48] Photii epp., 271.8–13.
[49] Photii epp., 1.579–586.

and turned to the Roman pope Nicholas I and the East Frankish king Louis, asking them to send him new missionaries of the Christian faith. To Pope Nicholas he sent a long list of questions concerning the Christian faith, its laws and customs. Before sending his missionaries to Bulgaria, in November 866, the pope composed his famous *Answers* to the aforementioned Bulgarian questions.[50] From the pope's *Answers*, one can recognize the questions that the Bulgarians asked him. Based on these questions, it can be established what the Byzantine mission looked like and what the Byzantine missionaries had taught the Bulgarians.

Although the mission was led by *selected hierarchs*, its personnel as a whole, it seems, was not so select. Among the priests who conducted it, there were various individuals from various countries. Naturally, most were Greek speaking, but there were also Armenians and others, who taught and preached differently.[51] Based on this, it could be said that priests who belonged to non-Orthodox factions of the Church, those who had been condemned at the various Ecumenical Councils, about which Photius wrote to Boris in his epistle, came to Bulgaria as part of the Byzantine mission, probably Armenian Monophysites, as well as others. They preached to the people differently than the Orthodox Greek priests did and thus spread only confusion among the newly baptized. There is also mention of a Jew, for whom it was not known *whether he was a Christian or a pagan*, who himself baptized many people in Bulgaria.[52] There was also an "adventurer", who pretended to be a priest, although he was not, and as such baptized many Bulgarians. However, when he was exposed, the Bulgarians themselves punished him.[53] The Bulgarians complained to the pope about another "real" priest that was even caught in fornication.[54] However, even the pope himself could not deny that baptisms and other Holy Mysteries performed among the Bulgarians by unworthy people had all the "validity" and sanctity that even the unworthiness of those who performed them could not desecrate, and that therefore the rite should not be repeated.[55] So, even in that way, and regardless of its composition, the Byzantine mission in Bulgaria performed its task and left its mark.

[50] About that cf. in the next chapter.
[51] Responsa Nicolai, 599.30–33.
[52] Responsa Nicolai, 599.7–22.
[53] Responsa Nicolai, 575.16–576.41.
[54] Responsa Nicolai, 592.11–26.
[55] Responsa Nicolai, 575.36–576.19; 592.11–26.

From the Bulgarian questions addressed to the pope, it can be seen that they had been well instructed in the *Holy Mysteries* by the Byzantine missionaries (in the pope's *Answers* referred to as "Greeks"). They are aware of the importance *of baptism*,[56] and they ask the pope whether pagans should be baptized by force.[57] They are familiar with *communion*, so they ask whether it should be received daily during Great Lent, how it should be received, who is unworthy to receive it, and who should perform it.[58] They were especially interested in having the pope clarify their doubts regarding *marriage*—which marriage is allowed and which is not, how blood relations affect it and whether it is permitted to have two wives.[59] They are also familiar with Christian understandings of sins, such as murder, adultery, theft…[60] They are aware of the importance of temples and prayer.[61]

The Bulgarians were also well acquainted with the concept of *holidays*, and that on those days one should abstain from work and many other things. However, they were not quite sure what those days were, except for Sunday and Saturday.[62] They were particularly well acquainted with the concept of *fasting* in general and Great Lent in particular, though not all segments related to it were clear to them, and they had many doubts that they asked the pope to clarify—e.g. was hunting permitted during Great Lent, was it permissible to sentence someone to death, was it possible, in case of emergency, to wage war, were they allowed to organize games, weddings, feasts, have sexual intercourse…[63]

The Byzantine missionaries taught the Bulgarians the ordinary external manifestation of faith—for example, that men should not cover their heads in the church and women should not uncover them.[64] Some of the teachings seem quite strange, since they are not in the canons of the church, such as the prohibition against bathing on Wednesday and Friday, standing in church without crossing their arms, receiving communion without

[56] Responsa Nicolai, 575.16–576.19; 591.33–592.2.
[57] Responsa Nicolai, 599.1–2.
[58] Responsa Nicolai, 573.20–40; 587.27–39; 590.25–41; 592.11–26.
[59] Responsa Nicolai, 582.8–17; 586.26–39.
[60] Responsa Nicolai, 579.25–28; 580.5–24.
[61] Responsa Nicolai, 588.18–25; 590.42–591.4; 591.25–32; 593.18–26; 596.10–13; 598.20–28.
[62] Responsa Nicolai, 574.1–575.9.
[63] Responsa Nicolai, 585.1–586.5; 586.17–25; 599.7–22.
[64] Responsa Nicolai, 588.15–25; 590.42–591.4.

a belt or not eating food from animals slaughtered by eunuchs.[65] So much insistence on external forms of faith, some of which are not even canonical, leads one to suspect that the faith of a number of the Byzantine missionaries in Bulgaria already bore with it a certain degree of superstition, which indicates that a good part of the priests who participated in the mission belonged to broad layers of the common people. The Bulgarians even recorded one example of senseless divination among the Byzantine missionaries.[66] Especially interesting, as a testimony of how convinced the Byzantine missionaries in Bulgaria were of the supremacy of their church over the whole of Christianity, is the claim of the Bulgarians that the *Greeks* told them that the Holy Myrrh grows in their country, which they then give to the whole universe.[67]

Judging by these questions to the pope, the Byzantine mission instructed the Bulgarians, i.e. their prince and nobles, in the foundations of the organization of the Christian church. At the time he sent the embassy to the pope, Boris knew that there were several *patriarchs at the head of the Christian Church*, which he had to have known anyway, from his political relations with Constantinople. He asked the pope for clarification about who the true patriarchs are and how many there are.[68] Also, he wondered which patriarch was *second*, after that of Roman.[69] However, he was most interested to know if he was permitted to have a *special* patriarch in Bulgaria and who was competent to ordain him.[70] It is obvious, therefore, that the Byzantine mission in Bulgaria had also worked to subordinate the new church organization in the newly baptized country to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. That was the end of her teachings to Boris about the organization of the Christian church. However, it is very interesting that Boris already knew at the time that, of the several patriarchs who governed the Christian universe, the Roman pope was the first and most important. Since he asked the pope which patriarch was second to him, it can be assumed that the Byzantine missionaries, while they could not dispute the primacy of the Roman pope, had explained the relationship between the patriarchs according to the interpretation accepted in

[65] Responsa Nicolai, 572.18–33; 587.8–39; 588.7–17. For some of these teachings, the pope openly says that he does not know what they are based on.
[66] Responsa Nicolai, 593.32–37.
[67] Responsa Nicolai, 597.17–19.
[68] Responsa Nicolai, 596.32–597.12.
[69] Responsa Nicolai, 597.13–16.
[70] Responsa Nicolai, 592.27–593.17.

Constantinople and enshrined in the 28th canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council which regulated this question—*after the bishop of Rome, the bishop of Constantine's imperial city has the priority of honour, because that city is the New Rome*.[71] Boris' desire to establish *a special patriarch* for his country is clear, but this was something that the Byzantine mission could not promise him.[72]

It has already been mentioned that, from the questions addressed to the pope by the Bulgarians and their prince, it can be guessed what they *did not like* about the Christian faith. These were mainly teachings directly opposed to their previous way of life, which required a complete rejection of their previous pagan customs and superstitions. The *Greeks* forbade them to wear their *linen bandages* on their heads while in the holy temple, they forbade them to wear *a horse's tail as a battle standard*, which they believed had brought them luck and success on the battlefield until then, they forbade them to perform their pagan rites of fortune-telling before going into battle, those *auspiciae* that foretold the outcome of the battle and consequently instilled courage or caution. They were no longer allowed to *swear by the sword*. Some *sacred stone* of their pagan religion had now to be abandoned and cast down, like an idol. They were no longer allowed to wear amulets either. The strict fasting, which covered a good part of the year, was also difficult for them.[73] In a word, they were obliged and forced to replace their previous *superstitions* with true *faith* in the One God and the Holy Trinity.

The raw warrior nature of the descendants of the Bulgarian Horde was not used to this much restraint and repudiation, and the demolition of ancient idols and customs aroused in them a superstitious fear that their world would collapse and they would lose their privileges.[74] This led them to raise a rebellion against their prince, accusing him of not giving them a good law.[75] The revolt of the Bulgarian nobles against Prince Boris and Christianity shook the Byzantine mission in Bulgaria to its foundations and marked the beginning of its end.

[71] IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 28, Syntagma II, 280–281.

[72] In scholarship, the opinion has long prevailed that this was the main reason for the collapse of the Byzantine mission and the turning of Boris to the Pope, Ostrogorski 1959, 228.

[73] Responsa Nicolai, 570.35–571.19; 580.25–581.9; 581.24–38; 589.32–590.3; 590.42–591.24; 594.4–9.

[74] Ostrogorski 1959, 228; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 175–176.

[75] Responsa Nicolai, 577.1–5.

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Photius at the Peak of Power and His Fall

It could be said that during the years 864 to 866, the church policy implemented by Emperor Michael III, Caesar Bardas and Patriarch Photius was at its peak. With the Byzantine missionaries in Bulgaria and a patriarch who influenced all the decisions of the Bulgarian prince, his loyal disciple, with Constantine and Methodius, who were spreading Byzantine culture in the Slavic language in the heart of Europe, with a mission working successfully among the distant Russians, with the seed of faith sown among the nomadic Khazars of the Eurasian steppe, which vied successfully with the challenges of the teachings of Moses and Muhammad, with a part of the Armenians in Greater Armenia, forced to renounce their heresy and accept the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon and the Orthodox faith, finally through turning their backs on Rome and its interference in the matters of the Church of Constantinople, and in addition to all of this, with great military victories over the Muslims on the eastern border, the results of that policy were more than evident. Most of these achievements under his management of the church Photius would mention, not without pride, in his famous *Circular Epistle to the patriarchal thrones of the East* from the spring of 867. By then, however, the situation on the ground had already shifted to some extent.

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Death of Caesar Bardas

As had been the case a decade before, the changes first occurred in the state government. Caesar Bardas, the emperor's uncle and all-powerful advisor, who had managed all state affairs with the emperor for ten years, was still not powerful enough in the face of the young emperor's whims. Emperor Michael III had recently made a close friend of one Basil, a man of poor origin from the theme of Macedonia, because of which he was called the *Macedonian*, who, although without property or education, had managed to make his way into the highest circles of state power by virtue of his strength and personal ability—from stableman, through *strator*, *protostrator*, *patrician*, *parakoimomenos*, *magister*, to co-emperor, and then emperor-autocrat.[1] In the conflict that arose between the emperor's uncle and his new friend, the emperor sided with the latter. The campaign against Crete in the spring of 866 was the last venture of Caesar Bardas. He was killed by Basil the Macedonian on 21 April by his own hand. Upon his return to Constantinople, on 26 May 866, Michael III crowned Basil as emperor and co-ruler, with the sacred part of the act performed by Patriarch Photius.[2] It is interesting to ponder how the patriarch could have accepted this change in political circumstances, the disappearance of Caesar and the enthronement of a complete newcomer. However, we have no clear data on which to judge. Although in the epistle to Emperor Michael, which he composed at the end of April or the beginning of May 866, immediately after receiving from the emperor a report on the events in Crete, i.e. about Bardas' death, the patriarch expresses regret for the tragedy and writes about Caesar as *a modest man*; he does not omit to emphasize the latter's ingratitude towards the emperor from whom he had received everything, even the imperial power itself, by saying that he *raised his hands of anger against the benefactor's head*, i.e. emperor.[3] Fear for the emperor's safety and expressions of insecurity in Constantinople after receiving the news, as well as calls to the emperor to return to the safety of the capital as soon as possible and bring peace to all,[4] nevertheless testify to the uncertainty brought about by Bardas' death.

In itself, the change at the top level of state power initially had no effect on the course and conduct of church policy in Constantinople. When

[1] On Basil I, cf. PmbZ, 832; Vogt 1908; Tobias 2007.
[2] Varona Codeso 2009, 171–178.
[3] Photii epp., 18.20–29.
[4] Photii epp., 18.43–67.

compared to what he did in that field after depriving Michael III of his throne and life, it is quite clear that during the period of one year and four months that he was his co-ruler, Basil did not in any way influence the conduct of imperial church policy. There is no indication in any of the writings of Patriarch Photius of any conflict between him and the new co-emperor during that time. However, even before Basil removed Michael and Photius from the scene, changes in Byzantine policy in the field of church affairs would be caused by external factors.

Shift in Bulgaria

Somewhere around the time of the coup in Constantinople in 866, Bulgaria, the greatest success of the church policy of Michael III, Bardas and Photius, began to slip out of Byzantine hands. The Bulgarian nobles, *from all the ten "counties"*,[5] set the whole nation in revolt against the prince and gathered around the prince's court, with the intention of killing him and appointing a new prince, under the pretext that *he did not give them a good law*.[6] But Boris had fully surrendered to the new faith, which was the great success of the Byzantine mission, and he had no intention of leaving it. In a difficult situation, his faith in the Christian God manifested itself in a decisive way. At the head of forty-eight loyal warriors, Boris rode out of the city, invoking the name of Christ, led by seven priests (certainly Byzantine ones), each of whom carried a lighted candle in his hand.[7] Byzantine sources also write that on that occasion the prince wore the sign of the cross on his chest.[8] Seeing that scene, the rebels were allegedly petrified with fear, and could neither defend themselves nor run away. The prince and his followers rushed at them and defeated them. The punishment was harsh. The prince executed fifty-two of the nobles most responsible for stirring up the people against him. The others he allowed to leave unharmed.[9] It is certain that this event took place before August 866.[10]

[5] Annales Bertiniani, 85.

[6] Responsa Nicolai, c. 17, 577.1–5.

[7] Annales Bertiniani, 85.

[8] Theophanes Continuatus (IV, 15), 164.17–21; Pseudo-Symeon, 665.20–666.1.

[9] Annales Bertiniani 85–86. About the revolt of the Bulgarian nobles as an example of the so-called *pagan reaction*, cf. Săbev 1987, 167–170; Božilov, Gjuzelev, 175–177; Gjuzelev 2006, 22–23; Ziemann 2021, 346–348.

[10] According to Liber pontificalis II, 164.17–18, the Bulgarian envoys, who were sent to the pope after the described events, arrived in Rome *mense augusto indictione XIV*, i.e. in August 866.

However, an interesting piece of information from a thirteenth-century Serbian manuscript menologium was recently brought to scholarly attention, in which the memory of the *victory of the Bulgarian prince Michael, whose people rebelled against the cross*, was recorded under the date of 28 March, and therefore the suppression of the rebellion of the Bulgarian nobles would have occurred on 28 March 866.[11]

Byzantine sources relate that after this event, the prince carried out a decisive and complete Christianization of his people.[12] On the other hand, he decided to make sure that such a rebellion would never happen again—turning his back on Constantinople and the Byzantine mission, he approached Rome and the pope. The reason for the rebellion of the nobles was that Prince Boris, after being baptized himself, and then followed by the people, allegedly *did not give them a good law*.[13] After the manifestation of such indignation among the people, Boris could indeed ask himself whether the *law*, here obviously in the sense of *order*, which the Byzantine mission introduced in Bulgaria, was really correct and appropriate. One fact certainly had a decisive influence on it. From one of the *Answers of Pope Nicholas to the questions of the Bulgarians*, it is known that *those priests who had come to Bulgaria*, that is, the members of the Byzantine mission, *refused to grant forgiveness to the rebels who repented*.[14] This was clearly contrary to the basic tenets of the Christian faith, which they themselves

[11] Turilov 1999, 19; Gjuzelev 2006, 94; Nikolov 2006, 47–49; Nikolov 2021, 141–142.

[12] Theophanes Continuatus (IV, 15), 164.20–21; Pseudo-Symeon, 665.22–666.1. These sources always talk about the rebellion within the framework of the story of *Methodius the Zograph* and the picture of the *Last Judgment* that he painted for Prince Boris, and they end with the fact that Boris, after suppressing the rebellion and baptizing the entire nation, asked the emperor to give him a piece of land in order to solve the problem of overpopulation in his country. The emperor granted him the border land, up to the city of Debeltus, called *Sidera*, and in the language of the Bulgarians (i.e. in Slavic)—*Zagora*, Theophanes Continuatus (IV, 15), 163.19–165.10; Pseudo-Symeon, 665.18–666.7. After that, the Bulgarians and Romans remained faithful friends. This account seems too general and unlikely, when it is known that it was soon followed by Boris' address to the pope and the termination of the Byzantine mission, which inevitably led to the deterioration of relations between Boris and the Empire. On the memory of Boris Michael as a zealot for the Christian faith, cf. Ziemann 2021, 348–359.

[13] Responsa Nicolai, c. 17, 577.1–5.

[14] Responsa Nicolai, § 78, 593.38–41. According to Nikolov 2006, 49, this was the main reason and motive for Prince Boris to address the Pope. On the rebellion of the Bulgarian nobles in 866 and Boris' turning to the pope, cf. Simeonova 1998, 175–198; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 175–182; Gjuzelev 2009, 122–125.

preached. For that, and for many other issues, which will be discussed in more detail, Boris had to ask someone for an explanation. He did not choose the patriarch of Constantinople, with whom he had previously had excellent cooperation and constant correspondence, but the more distant pope of Rome.

From his political experience, Prince Boris knew about the conditions in the Christian world, its disunity and polycentricity, about the institution of the Roman pope and his role in Europe at that time. From the Byzantine missionaries who had already been working in his country for almost two years, he had to have learned about the conflict that existed at that time between the patriarch of Constantinople Photius and the pope of Rome, perhaps also about the pope's pretensions to be the supreme judge in the entire Christian universe, which, in Constantinople, were resolutely denied. Addressing the pope was a way for Boris to remain in the Christian faith, while at the same time reviewing the achievements of the Byzantine mission in his country. However, the main incentive for Prince Boris to turn to the pope came, in my opinion, from the changed political circumstances. Less than a month after Boris suppressed the rebellion of the nobles, Caesar Bardas lost his life. Sometime later, Basil the Macedonian became emperor and co-ruler with Michael III. The political and military supremacy of an Empire governed by Michael III and Bardas forced Boris in 864 to give up his intention to receive Christianity through Rome and to do so through Constantinople. If this supremacy had existed in the spring and summer of 866, Boris would certainly not have turned to Rome, to the obvious detriment of Byzantine interests. Conflicts at the top of the highest authority must have shaken the reputation of the Empire in Boris' eyes, so that he then felt free enough to act according to his own will. That he had correctly assessed the political moment is evidenced by the fact that no more decisive reaction to his move came from Constantinople.

The way to the pope of Rome led through Boris' old ally, King Louis "the German", with whom Boris had an alliance agreement dating back to 864 and who he first informed of his intention to be baptized. Boris first sent his emissaries to King Louis, looking for bishops and priests. King Louis then sent his emissaries to his brother Charles the Bald (840–877), king of West Francia, asking him for priests, sacred objects and books to be sent to the Bulgarians.[15] The second mission, which was the mission at

[15] Annales Bertiniani, 85–86; Annales Fuldenses, 65.

the highest level, led by the prince's son (most likely the eldest, Vladimir), with the most prominent nobles and many gifts for the Apostolic See, was sent by Boris straight to Rome, to Pope Nicholas I.[16] That mission brought the pope a list of questions *about the sacred secrets of the faith*,[17] about what remained insufficiently clear to Boris and the Bulgarians or what they did not like about the work of the Byzantine mission. To those questions, the pope gave his famous *Responsa*.

It was a great defeat, although not the definitive end of the Byzantine mission in Bulgaria. It seems that the nobles, and with them Boris, were quite impatient. In *less than two years*,[18] the Byzantine mission could not answer all the questions, which must have grown in number as their knowledge of the Christian faith grew. By the summer of 866, the Byzantine mission could only carry out a rudimentary form of Christianization of the Bulgarians. What the new religion brought to the Bulgarians was a completely new civilization, unknown to them, and its acceptance inevitably had to lead to serious turbulence in their society. The Byzantine mission itself eventually became the victim of those changes and upheavals. The Byzantine missionaries would continue their work in Bulgaria for a few more months, but at the end of autumn 866, the Roman missionaries arrived in Bulgaria to suppress them and take up their work. Until the arrival of the Roman missionaries and the return of his envoys, Boris could not know the content of the pope's *Answers* to his questions. Therefore, he allowed the Byzantine mission to continue its work, although he knew that missionaries from the West, whom he himself had sought, would soon come to replace them.

Boris's envoys reached the pope in Rome in August 866.[19] The pope received them with joy and enthusiasm, as he himself points out.[20] He kept them for some time in order to readily answer their questions and inquiries. The pope took seriously the task suddenly placed before him. He answered the questions that the Bulgarian envoys brought to him in detail in his *Responsa Nicolai papae ad consulta Bulgarorum*.

[16] Annales Bertiniani, 86; Liber pontificalis II, 164.14–26.

[17] Annales Bertiniani, 86; Liber pontificalis II, 164.14–26; Responsa Nicolai, 568.17–21.

[18] The Byzantine missionaries, according to information provided by Photius, taught the Bulgarians *for less than two years*, Photii epp., 2.55–56.

[19] Liber pontificalis II, 164.14–18.

[20] Liber pontificalis II, 164.20–23; Nicolai I epp., 603.2–6.

However, it is no less important that on that occasion the pope realized that, quite suddenly, a new, previously unknown and extremely deadly weapon had been placed in his hands in the current dispute with the Byzantine church and state. Just at the time when the Bulgarian envoys arrived, the pope was preparing to send his envoys to Constantinople, with the decisions of the Council of Rome of 863, which confirmed Ignatius as patriarch of Constantinople and anathematized Photius.[21] Nevertheless, as the pope himself wrote a little later in a letter to Hincmar, the archbishop of Reims in Frankish Gaul, the *sea route* to Constantinople *seemed very difficult*, and one had to be constantly on the lookout for possible *Greek ambushes*. That is why the arrival of the Bulgarian representatives at that moment was a true "gift from heaven" for the pope. Through their land led a land route to the *land of the Greeks*. So the pope decided to send his envoys to the emperors to Constantinople together with the Bulgarian envoys and his envoys to the Bulgarian prince.[22] From that moment on, the *Bulgarian question* would become an unavoidable factor in the mutual relations between the Church of Rome and Constantinople. On 13 November 866, Pope Nicholas I sent his 106 *Answers to questions of the Bulgarians*, and together with them, nine letters addressed to the heads of the Byzantine state and church, in connection with the ongoing church dispute. The letters were addressed to Emperor Michael,[23] archbishops, metropolitans, bishops and all the clergy of the Church of Constantinople,[24] Photius,[25] Bardas,[26] whom the pope apparently did not know at the time to have been dead for six months, nor did he have any idea about a certain Basil, who had taken Bardas' place next to Emperor Michael, then to Ignatius, the former, but for Rome still current patriarch,[27]

[21] The question arises as to why the pope hesitated to send the decisions of the council of 863 to Constantinople, so that he intended to do so only in 866. The most likely reason for this were the difficulties the pope had in Italy itself. Namely, since the Pope refused to confirm the divorce of the Middle Frankish king Lothair II and Queen Teutberga in 862, Lothair's brother Emperor Louis II laid siege to Rome in 864, Alexander 1978, 273–277; Heidecker 2010.

[22] Nicolai I epp., 602.28–603.11.

[23] Nicolai I epp., 488.28–512.17.

[24] Nicolai I epp., 512.28–533.11.

[25] Nicolai I epp., 533.19–540.18.

[26] Nicolai I epp., 540.24–544.6.

[27] Nicolai I epp., 544.15–547.11.

the empress-nun Theodora,[28] the empress Eudocia,[29] the *senators* of Constantinople,[30] i.e. to a group of the most respected dignitaries in Constantinople and the Empire, finally to the priests, patriarchs, metropolitans and all believers *in Asia and Libya*,[31] i.e. the patriarchal thrones of the East. In those letters, the pope mainly sets out the history of the current dispute between the Church of Rome and Constantinople, starting with the overthrow and anathematization of Gregory Asbestas, through the overthrow of Ignatius and the enthronement of Photius, the Council of 861, the exchange of envoys and epistles, until the decisions of the Roman Council against Photius in 863. This is precisely why these letters are among the main sources on the aforementioned ecclesiastical dispute, and many of their references have been used in previous chapters. The letters to the clergy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the clergy of the patriarchates of the East also contain the decisions of the Roman Council of 863 on the legality of Ignatius' position and anathematization of Photius.[32] Since it is, according to the pope's understanding, a purely ecclesiastical matter, he communicates it only to the ecclesiastical institutions.

The envoys sent by the pope to the Bulgarians were the bishops Formosus of Porto and Paul of Populonia. The role of missionaries who had the task of preaching the Christian faith to the Bulgarians was thus also intended for them.[33] They took with them the pope's *Answers to the questions of the Bulgarians* and various other canonical and legal texts that are mentioned or alluded to in the *Answers*. For the even more responsible task, the embassy to Constantinople, three other prominent papal suffragans were appointed—Donatus, bishop of Ostia, priest Leo and deacon Marinus, who took with them all the mentioned papal letters to the Byzantine dignitaries, *to announce to everyone the position of the Apostolic See on the issues of the Church of Constantinople*.[34]

[28] Nicolai I epp., 547.18–548.38.
[29] Nicolai I epp., 549.6–552.7.
[30] Nicolai I epp., 552.13–553.15.
[31] Nicolai I epp., 553.33–565.23.
[32] Nicolai I epp., 519.4–522.39, 557.19–560.29.
[33] Liber pontificalis II, 164.24–26.
[34] Liber pontificalis II, 164.26–33.

The Roman mission in Bulgaria

The Roman envoys arrived to Bulgaria sometime in the late autumn of 866, since the papal letters they brought were dated 13 November. They were well received by the prince and the people and immediately set to work of preaching around the country, conveying the pope's advice to the prince. For Boris, the *Responsa* of Pope Nicholas were a supplement to Photius' teachings from the epistle of 864, and the pope was his second teacher. The Bulgarian *consulta* are very thorough and interesting, and are an extremely important source.[35] As already pointed out, they provide the possibility to reconstruct, to a degree, the work of the Byzantine mission in Bulgaria and evaluate some of its results, but they also enable an assessment of the civilizational progress achieved by the Bulgarians, which must also have been the product of the *less than two years* work of the Byzantine mission in Bulgaria. During that time, the Bulgarians had become aware of the necessity of *law* and a legally ordered state. Many of these questions relate to individual cases of law-breaking. The pope answers each one, referring to secular laws, and in his answers, articles of various Germanic, primarily Lombard laws (*Edictum Rotharii*, *Liutprandi leges*, *Liber Papiensis Pipini*, *Liber Papiensis Karoli Magni*) can be recognized, but also of the Roman *Codex Iustinianus*.[36]

The pope understood the arrival of the Bulgarian delegation as an opportunity for a true mission of Christianization, similar to the great ones of the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, which had been organized and blessed by his illustrious predecessors, Gregory I, Gregory II and Gregory III, which aimed at baptizing the Germanic pagan peoples in the British Isles and in Germany. In his *Answers* to the Bulgarian questions, the pope often quotes Pope Gregory I the Great (590–604), a distinguished theologian, and usually with the epithet *gentis Anglorum apostolus* (*apostle of the English people*).[37] In his zeal, in his desire to follow in the footsteps of his great predecessors, to be included in the ranks of the great evangelizers among the popes, to be remembered as the *gentis Bulgarorum*

[35] On the historical value of *Responsa ad consulta Bulgarorum* of Pope Nicholas I, cf. Dujčev 1965, 125–148; Dujčev 1971, 143–174; Obolenski 1991, 106–113; Simeonova 1998, 198–222; Božilov, Gjuzelev, 178–180; Nikolov 2006, 53–61; Gjuzelev 2009, 294–303; Nótári 2015, 52–58; Simeonova 2020, 43–58; Ziemann 2021, 345–346.

[36] Responsa Nicolai, c.13, 575.10–15; c. 19, 578.37–43; c. 21, 579.12–20; c. 26, 580.5–9; c. 84, 595.14–22; IBI VII, 77, n. 4; 84, n. 6; 85, n. 2.

[37] Responsa Nicolai, c. 6, 572.20; c. 10, 574.2–3; c. 64, 590.18–20; c. 68, 591.26–27.

apostolus, Pope Nicholas I, it seems, completely forgot the fact that the Bulgarians were already baptized.[38]

Roman missionaries had already been preaching extensively in Bulgaria when the missionaries sent there by King Louis "the German" arrived in 867, in response to the request of Prince Boris from the summer of 866. They were led by Bishop Hermeric of Passau. Realizing that the pope's missionaries were already working in Bulgaria, the missionaries from Germany did not want to interfere with their work and, having received permission from their king, returned to their country.[39]

Prince Boris was very satisfied with the work of the Roman missionaries in his country. He listened to their sermons alone. This was the definitive end of the Byzantine mission in Bulgaria. Prince Boris expelled all the Byzantine missionaries from his country. Soon after, he sent a second mission to Rome, asking the pope to carry out the final ecclesiastical organization in his country, by sending him priests and appointing Formosus *archbishop*.[40] As already stated, several questions to which Boris requested answers and clarifications from the pope were related to the institution of the patriarch. Boris asked the pope if it was permitted to ordain a patriarch for the Bulgarians and who was competent to perform that act. He received certain clarifications from the pope. Since he considered Bulgaria a barbaric and pagan country where a mission of Christianization was being carried out, and ignoring the fact that it was already a Christian country, the pope, ignoring all the ancient rights of the Christian organization in this country, presented to Boris the rules of the organization of the Christian Church in a newly baptized country. Namely, first the missionaries should do their work and sow the seeds of the Christian faith. Then one of them should become a bishop. Then, when the faith was consolidated and spread, new bishops should be installed. After that, one of them should be chosen to be their head and he would come to Rome for the pope to consecrate him as an *archbishop* and give him the shepherd's pallium so that he would have the authority to appoint bishops in the future, and that again they themselves to choose and appoint and ordain their

[38] The missionary activity of Pope Nicholas I towards the Bulgarians left a deep mark and a lasting memory in the tradition of the Latin West, in which the Christianization of the Bulgarians is linked almost exclusively to that activity, cf. Bărlieva, Batalova 2002, 418–432. It could be said that in this matter, Pope Nicholas fulfilled his goal—he was remembered for centuries as a *gentis Bulgarorum apostolus*.

[39] Annales Fuldenses, 65–66.

[40] Liber pontificalis II, 165.10–17.

successors.[41] Instructed, therefore, by such guidelines, the Bulgarian prince, through his envoys, asked the pope to send him priests and appoint the bishop Formosus, whom he obviously valued most, for many reasons, as the *archbishop of Bulgaria*. The pope sent the priests, and with them two new missionary-bishops, Dominic of Trivena and Grimoald of Polimartia. However, he replied that Formosus, since he was already a bishop and had his own flock that he could not leave, could not be the archbishop of Bulgaria, but that they should choose one of the priests the pope was sending to them for that position.[42] That was in the second half of 867.[43]

The papal envoys sent to Constantinople could not, however, fulfil their task. On the border between Bulgaria and the Empire, a certain *Theodore, who took care of the border*, stopped them and prevented them from entering the Empire, telling them that his emperor *does not consider them necessary*.[44] The relations between the two Christian metropolises had already deteriorated enough with the schism over Photius' canonicity, but the arrival of the Roman missionaries in Bulgaria and the expulsion of the Byzantine ones was the final straw. The imperial authorities understood that act as direct interference in the internal affairs of the Empire and the Patriarchate and were deeply offended. Prince Boris besought the emperor via his embassy, to allow the Roman envoys to come to Constantinople, but the emperor was persistent, saying that had the envoys of the Apostolic See not come by chance through Bulgaria, but straight to the Empire, *in their lifetime they would never again see either his face or Rome*. After waiting at the border for forty days, the papal envoys Donatus, Leo and Marinus headed back to Rome.[45]

Photius' Answer: *The Circular Epistle* and Council of 867

The arrival of the Roman mission in Bulgaria and the expulsion of the Byzantine missionaries was a development that required a more energetic response from the imperial authorities. Turning back the papal envoys at

[41] Responsa Nicolai, cc. 72–73, 592.27–593.17.

[42] Liber pontificalis II, 165.17–22. At that time, according to the canons, it was still not possible for one bishop to leave his bishopric and go to another, cf. Apostles 14, Syntagma II, 18; I Ecum. (Nicaea I) 15, ibidem, 145; IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 5, ibidem, 229.

[43] IBI VII, 186, n. 1; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 180–182.

[44] Liber pontificalis II, 165.1–5; Nicolai I epp., 603.9–16.

[45] Liber pontificalis II, 165.6–9; Nicolai I epp., 603.9–16.

the Bulgarian-Byzantine border in late 866 was only the beginning. At that moment, Pope Nicholas was the main enemy not only of Patriarch Photius but also of the vital interests of the Byzantine state. The patriarch and the emperor began to prepare a response to the pope's action. This answer would be conceived as an interesting mix of ecclesiastical and political resources which at the time seemed to be at the disposal of the ruling circles in Constantinople. First, they began to prepare a great council, which was intended to be ecumenical, at which they would discuss the actions of the pope and the Roman Church. While preparing the council, Photius sent his well-known *Circular Epistle to the patriarchal thrones of the East*, inviting the three Eastern patriarchs to send their legates to the council being prepared. In that epistle, Photius states what the council should discuss. First of all, he highlights his great successes—part of the Armenians renounced their heresy and accepted the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon, the Bulgarians renounced their paganism and accepted the faith of the Christians,[46] and later in one place in the epistle he points out that the Russians also did so, about which we also spoke above.[47] However, not *even two years had passed* since the Christianization of the Bulgarians, when Latin missionaries appeared among them—*people of darkness, because they come from the West*—and began to teach them their science.[48] Photius then attacks the science that the Roman missionaries spread among the Bulgarians. He was referring to teachings about fasting on Saturdays, separating the rite of anointing from the rite of baptism, the inadmissibility of marriage for priests….[49] These are actually the teachings and rites of the Roman Church that differed from the corresponding teachings and rites of the Byzantine Church. Photius had referred to them on an earlier occasion, in his second letter to Pope Nicholas in 861,[50] but on that occasion he had portrayed the mentioned differences as wholly uncontroversial, because it was to be expected that such slight differences in practice should exist between regions so distant from one another. Clearly, at that moment and under the circumstances prevailing at that time, it had suited him to present such dissimilarities as inconsequential. However, now he presented these differences in the practice of the Roman

[46] Photii epp., 2.38–51.

[47] Photii epp., 2.293–305. On the aspects of Byzantine missionary policy in Photius' *Circular Epistle*, cf. Hurbanič 2005, 103–116.

[48] Photii epp., 2.52–64.

[49] Photii epp., 2.65–100, 205–276.

[50] Photii epp., 290.200–240.

Church in relation to the Church of Constantinople in a completely different way. Now he interpreted them as nothing less than the *heresy* of the Roman Church. The kind of interpretation that Photius put forward on this occasion was to become the root of deepening discord on a dogmatic basis between the two centres of European Christianity, the intensification of which would lead to the final split in 1054. However, in that process, the greatest bone of contention became another peculiarity of the Roman Church, which Photius pointed out for the first time in 867. This was the understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit *from the Father and from the Son* (*ex patre filioque*). It was to this teaching, which had not yet officially been included into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan *Creed* by the Roman Church, but was practiced in some parts of Western Europe, that Photius dedicated the largest part of his *Circular Epistle*.[51] For these reasons, he said, the patriarchs of the thrones of the East should also be allies and collaborators in preserving the true faith and send their emissaries to the upcoming assembly, where all would be resolved.[52]

From Photius' *Circular Epistle* it is known that he had even received complaints against Pope Nicholas from Italy itself.[53] In the West at that time there was an ecclesiastical dispute regarding the divorce of the Middle Frankish king Lothair II (855–869) and his wife, Queen Teutberga. The Frankish bishops, gathered in Metz in June 863, decided that the marriage was null and void, thus granting the king's wish for a divorce. However, the pope reversed that decision. Lothair II was then supported by his brother, Emperor Louis II (855–875), who came into open conflict with the pope and even besieged Rome in February 864, but soon retreated.[54] Certainly, those who were supporters of the emperor in that conflict were opponents of the pope. They then turned to the patriarch of Constantinople, whom they knew was also in great conflict with the pope.[55] The

[51] Photii epp., 2.101–204; Kolbaba 2008; Turner 2016, 475–489; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 348–354, 359–360.

[52] Photii epp., 2.277–292. At the end of the epistle, Photius calls on the Eastern Patriarchs to officially count the Second Council of Nicaea of 787 among the Ecumenical Councils and recognize it as the *Seventh Ecumenical Council*, because, as he points out, this has not been done among them yet, due to the Arab rule, op. cit., 2.349–387.

[53] Photii epp., 2.317–341.

[54] On the political and religious turmoil in the West in the sixties of the ninth century, cf. Heidecker 2010.

[55] In question were the Archbishops Gunther of Cologne, Thietgaud of Trier and others. Their manifesto against Pope Nicholas also reached Photius, Alexander 1978, 276–277; Heidecker 2010, 105–135.

mentioned circumstances were of great importance for the Byzantine emperor and patriarch in the political part of their plans to deal with the bishop of Rome.

The council was most likely held during the summer of 867, and certainly before September. It was presided over by the two emperors, Michael III and Basil, and was attended by the bishops of the Church of Constantinople and *a whole host of senators*. The representatives of the Eastern patriarchs did not come, so Photius had himself to appoint three monks, who were intended to play their role. At the council, Pope Nicholas was condemned and anathematized, along with all those who communicated with him. The conciliar decisions were signed by both emperors, all present bishops, abbots and patricians.[56] Later, however, at the council of 869/870, after Photius had been overthrown and Ignatius was installed, under the newly created circumstances, the ruling state and church circles of Constantinople, including the new autocrat Basil I, tried to "wash their hands" of the aforementioned council and its decisions. Thus, they presented the story to the Roman legates of that time, which was recorded by Anastasius the Librarian, that no one had wanted to sign the decisions of the Council of Photius of 867 except *twenty-one bishops*, and that all the other signatures, *including the imperial ones*, had been forged by Photius![57] Metrophanes of Smyrna also testified in similar vein in a letter he wrote to patrician Manuel on the same occasion.[58] However, that there really was a "washing of hands" by Emperor Basil is also evidenced by the fact that, according to Anastasius, only Emperor Michael presided over the Council of 867, while it is clear from other sources that Basil also sat next to him. It hardly seems credible that Photius could do such a thing, especially if it had been contrary to the wishes of the emperor himself or his co-ruler. Finally, Photius' eighteenth *sermon* (*homily*), which was placed in the context of the events surrounding the Council of 867 by the efforts of Cyril Mango, testifies to the solid unity and harmony among all the bearers of

[56] Gesta octavae synodis, 11–12; Mansi, XVI, 417 C–E; Life of Ignatius, 76.7–28; Synodicon Vetus, 161.1–9. On the Council of Constantinople of 867, cf. Hergenröther 1867–1869 I, 639–666; Hefele, Leclercq 1911 IV, 442–449; Dvornik 1950, 181–186; Stiernon 1967, 63–66; Mango, Homilies, 299–306; Chrysos 2018, 145–148.

[57] Gesta octavae synodis, 11–12.

[58] Mansi, XVI, 417 D. Vague echo of that thesis can also be noticed in Nicetas David, Life of Ignatius, 76.23–28.

state and church power in Constantinople.[59] Unfortunately for posterity, during the council in 869/870 and according to its decision, the conciliar acts of 867 were destroyed,[60] so it is not possible to gain a more detailed insight into the relationships and the role of each of the important factors during the council itself.

That the entire Byzantine state and church leadership really stood behind the decisions of the Council of 867 becomes clearer when we consider the political side of the plan then conceived and implemented to deal with Pope Nicholas. The decisions of the aforementioned council, which were signed by both emperors, the entire clergy and all senators, were addressed to the Western emperor Louis II and his wife, Empress Engelberga. They were believed in Constantinople to be in conflict with the pope, and the intention was that they should use the judgment of the Council of Constantinople against him, as a pretext to enter Rome and overthrow its bishop. Such messages were taken to Italy by metropolitans Zacharias of Chalcedon and Theodore, now of Laodicea, who were already used to the route, and were proven supporters of Photius.[61]

At the same time, the Bulgarians were reprimanded not only for receiving the Roman missionaries, but also for letting the papal envoys pass through their country.[62] Then the emperors and the patriarch sent a letter to the Bulgarian prince in which they explained the decisions of the council. The content of that letter was immediately communicated by the Bulgarian prince to the pope, who wrote about it in a letter addressed to the Frankish bishops dated 23 October 867.[63] The content of the letter addressed to the Bulgarian prince, as can be inferred from the letter to the Frankish bishops, was very similar to the content of Photius' *Circular Epistle to the patriarchal thrones of the East*, at least as it concerned the accusations against the Roman Church, its customs and rituals.[64] The pope chose to interpret these accusations as if the emperors and the patriarch *were blaspheming the entire church which uses the Latin language*.[65]

[59] Photii Homiliae, 173.1–180.11; Mango, Homilies, 298–299.
[60] Mansi, XVI, 384 B–C; Mango, Homilies, 299.
[61] Mansi, XVI, 417 E; Life of Ignatius, 76.16–32.
[62] Nicolai I epp., 603.9–16.
[63] Nicolai I epp., 603.17–22.
[64] Nicolai I epp., 603.23–604.7.
[65] Nicolai I epp., 603.23–24.

The similarity in the content of those two epistles testifies to the fact that the council really did discuss the Roman Church as a whole, as Photius envisioned it in the *Circular Epistle*, and that it was not just a council focused on the anathematization of Pope Nicholas, as represented by pro-Ignatian sources. Finally, the pope's letter to the Frankish bishops dated 23 October clearly testifies that, in all of this, there was a considerable degree of unity in the Byzantine state and church leadership, because according to him, the joint efforts of both emperors—Michael and Basil—and Patriarch Photius were behind it all.

Nevertheless, the strongest and most far-reaching message of the events related to the Council of 867 was the one that Photius had already expressed in the *Circular Epistle*—that he nourished *good hopes that the multitude of the Bulgarians, newly taught and newly enlightened in Christ, would return to the faith handed over to them.*[66] Thus, the patriarch announces the struggle for the realization of the rights of the Byzantine Church in the country where its missionaries had sown the seeds of faith. By then, however, Prince Boris was deeply loyal to the pope and in constant contact with him. And he was the figure on whose mood everything related to the Christianization of Bulgaria depended. In the meantime, Pope Nicholas ordered that, of his four bishops who were then in Bulgaria, two—Formosus and Dominic—should go to Constantinople. However, they gave up on that venture, when they received word of the coup in Constantinople, which took place on the night of 23–24 September 867.[67]

Patriarch Photius did not have time to see his struggle through to the end. The political changes in Constantinople carried him off as well. Basil the Macedonian, after removing Bardas and becoming emperor and co-ruler with Michael III, was still not satisfied. He aspired to the highest power. There was only one obstacle left to overcome—the emperor himself, and only one step was required—to remove him. This is exactly what he did, on the night between 23 and 24 September 867, when he cold-bloodedly killed Emperor Michael III in his sleep. Having no heir, the emperor was the last of the Amorian dynasty. Basil, as his co-emperor, was the only legitimate heir, so he became the new autocrat. He would rule for the next two decades (867–886) and would be the founder of a new dynasty on the imperial throne of Augustus and Constantine, the Macedonian dynasty.[68] During all that time, his word would be decisive in all the ecclesiastical affairs of the Roman Empire.

[66] Photii epp., 2.289–292.
[67] Liber pontificalis II, 165.23–31.
[68] Varona Codeso 2009, 178–181.

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The Emperor's Church (867–886)

The Schism of Photius and the Council of 869/870

Having finally become the sole and undisputed master of the Empire, Basil I (867–886) now had the final word in all matters of state. Church issues were among the most important of these, and the new autocrat immediately assumed the main role in them as well. Soon everyone came to understand that the Church of Constantinople, in his person, had received not only an emperor but also a master. Basil was a man of strong will, great abilities and an exceptional sense of political pragmatism. He wanted his Empire completely under his control and did not intend to tolerate any dissension within it.

The Overthrow of Photius and the Return of Ignatius

Photius was the first to feel the determination of the new emperor on his own skin. Immediately after assuming the highest power, Emperor Basil I overthrew Photius and sent him to the Monastery of Scepis.[1] Ignatius was enthroned on the episcopal throne of the imperial City of Constantine for the second time, on 23 November 867, exactly on the ninth anniversary

[1] Gesta octavae synodis, 13–14; Life of Ignatius, 78.22–24; Vita Nicolai Studitae, 913 B; Vita Basilii, 32.1–18; Symeon, 132.5; Pseudo-Symeon, 688.22–689.6; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 841.1–6; Dvornik 1950, 202–203.

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of his overthrow.[2] Raised to the highest position by the imperial will, and then removed from it by the imperial will, Photius was forced to retire from public life.[3]

Basil's act has been the subject of much scholarly debate, but his motives have not been fully elucidated.[4] In the letter that he sent to Pope Nicholas I on 11 December 868, but which, since Nicholas died on 13 November 867, was received by his successor, Hadrian II (867–872), the emperor explains it by the simple imperative to replace the disorder, dissension and divisions that reigned in the Byzantine church at the time of his coming to power, with order. Therefore, he writes, the *simplest solution* was to cast Photius off the throne, and put Ignatius back upon it. As a reason for this, the emperor cites the *verdicts in favour of Ignatius*, which he found *in various papal letters*. Those letters, however, were *hidden and in no way would they have been made public* by those who *held power* before him.[5] Basil's act was explained in a similar way by his son Leo VI, in the posthumous speech dedicated to Basil, and by his grandson and biographer Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, in *Vita Basilii*—the emperor did not want to ignore the state of the church, which was experiencing upheavals and disturbances, so he restored to it, its *legal groom*, i.e. Ignatius.[6] According to the *Life of Nicholas the Studite*, the emperor only *returned Ignatius his own throne*.[7] Nicetas David, however, in the *Life of Ignatius*, only writes that the emperor, *immediately after the proclamation, overthrew Photius from the patriarchal throne and sent him to a monastery called Skepis*, and that *the next day* he sent Helias, a *drungary* of the imperial fleet, to bring Ignatius from captivity on his island to Constantinople, but not to the patriarchate and to the throne, but to the palace of his parents, Emperor Michael I and Empress Procopia—the Palace of Mangana.[8] A century after the event, Symeon the Logothete and the writers of his circle saw the immediate reason for Emperor Basil to overthrow Photius in their

[2] Life of Ignatius, 84.7–15; Synaxarium CP, 160.7–8; PmbZ, no. 2666, 22712.

[3] On Photius after the overthrow, cf. Hergenröther 1867–1869 II, 183–258; PmbZ, no. 26667.

[4] Cf. Dvornik 1950, 201–203.

[5] Gesta octavae synodis, 87–88.

[6] Oraison funèbre, 62.6–64.24; Vita Basilii, 32.1–18; Stanković 2003, 55–56.

[7] Vita Nicolai Studitae, 913 B.

[8] Life of Ignatius, 78.22–29. On the connection of Ignatius' family and Mangana, cf. OBD II, 1283 (C. Mango, A.-M. Talbot).

personal animosity. Namely, after killing the legitimate ruler and his benefactor, Emperor Michael III, the new autocrat entered the church to receive communion from the patriarch. However, Patriarch Photius then called him *a robber and a murderer and unworthy of divine communion*. The emperor was enraged by this and dismissed him from the patriarchal throne.[9]

This last view on the reason for Basil's decision to remove Photius is not generally given much credence in scholarship.[10] The problem lies in the striking similarity to the description of the cause of the conflict between patriarch Ignatius and Bardas, ten years earlier, which has persuaded researchers that the account of the conflict between Photius and Basil is simply a copy of the earlier clash between Ignatius and Bardas.[11] Basil's act has often been interpreted as a consequence of his desire to achieve good relations with Rome, in order to secure the alliance of the Western emperor Louis II in the struggle against the Arabs in southern Italy.[12] However, Emperor Louis II himself was on bad terms with Pope Nicholas I, so it was far from certain that the pope would be able to influence his political decisions. Furthermore, it was Louis II that was in need of Byzantine military assistance in the fight against the Arabs in southern Italy. He had waged a successful struggle there for years, but he was unable to dislodge the Arabs from their most important strongholds, such as Bari, because he did not have a fleet, which was precisely why he needed an alliance with Byzantium. An agreement was reached in 869, and Basil I sent the imperial fleet to Italy, and joint Frankish-Byzantine troops managed to capture Bari in early February 871. As part of those negotiations, the marriage of Louis' daughter Ermengard to Basil's eldest son and co-ruler Constantine was also discussed, for which the Carolingian deputies *archiminister* Supo, Count Eberhard and Anastasius the Librarian visited Constantinople in February and March 870.[13] After all, as we shall see, Basil only approached the pope with the desire to condemn Photius in December 868, and that

[9] Symeon, 132.5; Pseudo-Symeon, 688.22–689.6; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 841.1–6.

[10] An important exception is made by Chrysos 2018/2019, 141, who highlights the importance of Photius' reaction to Basil's act for the further development of events.

[11] Dvornik 1950, 203.

[12] Ostrogorski 1959, 233; Dvornik 1950, 203–204.

[13] Cf. Ludwig II, Kg. v. Italien, Ks., LdMA V, 2177 (H. Zielinski); Kislinger 2013, 245–256.

at the persuasion of Patriarch Ignatius. I therefore believe that the issue of relations with Rome and the Western emperor can be dismissed as a possible motive for Basil's decision to depose Photius.

The understanding that Basil was motivated only by a desire to restore Ignatius to the throne and establish order in the church, as he himself claims in the above-mentioned letter to the pope, does not seem sufficiently well-founded either, in spite of Basil's clear dedication and commitment to the idea of *order* (τάξις, εὐταξία) and *peace* (γαλήνη).[14] According to Nicetas David, although Ignatius was returned to Constantinople immediately after Photius' overthrow, there passed exactly two months until his re-enthronement.[15] Finally, if Photius had been deposed only so that Ignatius could be established, I do not think he would have suffered the fate he did in the following years. Namely, in one of his letters addressed to Emperor Basil, and in a letter addressed to the *protospatharius* Michael, Photius claims that, instead of being in the company of friends, relatives and monks, he remains under the supervision of *soldiers, tribunes and vicars*, under *military guards and traps*.[16] Such treatment was meted out to enemies of the state, those who were in direct conflict with the state authorities. During the previous nine years, Ignatius had experienced similar conditions, precisely because he came into direct conflict with the holders of the highest secular authority. Judging by this, the cause of Photius' troubles was his personal conflict with the new autocrat. Such a conclusion directly refers to the data on the event that followed the murder of Michael III, when the patriarch refused Basil I communion and openly called him a *robber* and a *murderer*.

Excommunication from communion, and thus from the Church, was and is a very common means by which bishops punish those believers whose behaviour they consider unacceptable. Therefore, it is not at all impossible that Ignatius used the same means in the case of Bardas and his inappropriate relationship with his own daughter-in-law, and Photius in the case of Basil I and the murder of Michael III. After all, it was all they could do. If Ignatius could not approve of Bardas' relationship with his daughter-in-law, should we believe that Photius could approve of Basil's murder of the emperor? Regardless of the fact that, according to Nicetas

[14] Stanković 2003, 51–56.
[15] Life of Ignatius, 78.30–84.15.
[16] Photii epp., 86.16–19, 98.57–61.

David, Photius skilfully manoeuvred between the two emperors, wanting to secure his position in the eyes of both,[17] I still do not think that he could have looked favourably on the murder of an emperor with whom he had worked perfectly well for almost ten years. The information about Photius crowning Basil refers to his coronation in May 866, at the behest of Michael III, and not to a coronation after the murder.[18] Since he was already crowned after the murder of Bardas and thus a legitimate emperor and co-ruler, Basil had no need to be crowned again after the murder of Michael III, but was only proclaimed *autocrat* (αὐτοκράτωρ), i.e. the *only emperor* (μόνον βασιλέα).[19] In this regard, he did not need Photius' cooperation. However, when he came to take communion, the patriarch showed what he thought of his actions and pronounced upon him the sentence of *excommunication*. It was all he could do, and it was enough to enrage the emperor, who, according to Nicetas David, was already suspicious of Photius because of his manoeuvring between Basil and Michael III,[20] and with it Photius brought great difficulties upon himself. This happened, as evidenced by Nicetas David, *the day after* Basil assumed self-rule on 24 September 867.[21]

It has already been pointed out that two whole months passed from that moment until the re-enthronement of Ignatius. Ignatius was brought to Constantinople immediately after the overthrow of Photius, but was not immediately restored to the throne. During that time, the emperor and his associates, first and foremost the *praepositus* Baanes, persecuted and interrogated Photius and tried to extract from him the documents which he allegedly had taken from the patriarchate, just before he was expelled from it. Nicetas David writes that they took away the records of the alleged council against Ignatius, which was never held, in which they found incredible accusations, which shocked them all, and also the records

[17] Life of Ignatius, 78.6–11.

[18] Symeon, 131.40; Pseudo-Symeon, 679.15–17; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 832.15–833.9.

[19] Life of Ignatius, 78.18–20; Vita Basilii, 28.1–5; Symeon, 132.1; Pseudo-Symeon, 687.6–7; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 839.5–7. There is no information in the sources that Basil was crowned on 24 September 867 by Patriarch Ignatius, as stated in PmbZ, no. 20837.

[20] Life of Ignatius, 78.6–12.

[21] Life of Ignatius, 78.22–24.

of the council of 867, which had condemned Pope Nicholas.[22] Probably on that occasion, Photius was also deprived of other books, about which he complains bitterly to Emperor Basil in the letter already mentioned.[23] Since *praepositus* Baanes, the same who had once had the task of bringing Ignatius before the council in 861 by order of Michael III and Bardas, was on that occasion the executor of Basil's orders against Photius, it will be in the same circumstances that Photius' letter to Baanes was written, in which he speaks indignantly about what he suffers from his side.[24] The data of the aforementioned epistles of Photius obviously confirm the data of Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, and therefore there is no reason not to accept the latter's report with full confidence.

After all this was revealed, according to Nicetas David, the emperor discussed the case with the *Senate*, and then everything was announced to the people. Only after that did Emperor Basil *make a syllention* in the Palace of Magnaura, to which he brought the former patriarch Ignatius, *praised him a lot*, and restored him as the head of the church of the City of Constantine, and then a solemn enthronement ceremony was held. This happened on Sunday, 23 November 867, the very day of Ignatius' exile, nine years earlier.[25] Again, therefore, the fate of the Church of Constantinople was decided by the emperor and the highest state dignitaries, gathered in the Senate and *syllention*. Therefore, the decision to return Ignatius to the throne was not made suddenly, but was discussed, regardless of the fact that the emperor's decision was inviolable. In any case, the emperor discussed it with his associates, certainly to analyse all its good and bad sides and possible consequences. It could still be said that Ignatius was certainly not returned to the throne in order to correct the injustice inflicted on him by Michael III, Bardas and Photius, but because Photius had to be overthrown due to a conflict with the emperor. In such circumstances, Ignatius was no more than the most adequate candidate for the new patriarch. It was, however, almost impossible to imagine that the emperor would appoint a third person, in addition to the two living patriarchs.

[22] Life of Ignatius, 78.30–84.6.

[23] Photii epp. 98.16–56. Therefore, the mentioned letter, which the editors date roughly in the year 868, was most probably composed between September and November 867.

[24] Photii epp., 115.1–18. The editors date that letter approximately between October 867 and 871, or more precisely in November 869.

[25] Life of Ignatius, 84.7–15; Synaxarium CP, 160.7–10.

Renewing ties with Rome

Not long after the death of Pope Nicholas I, in the midst of earth-shattering events in Constantinople, on 13 November 867, at a time when an unknown biographer was compiling notes on Nicholas's life and pontificate as part of the *Liber pontificalis*,[26] rumours reached Rome that *by the judgment of God, a worthy punishment had overtaken the Greek emperor Michael*, that the new emperor Basil had expelled *the intruder and adulterer Photius, newly baptized*, and that *according to the provisions of the Apostolic See Patriarch Ignatius regained the throne of Constantinople*.[27] Of course, as has been said, the emperor did not do this out of respect for the decisions of the Apostolic See, but for his own reasons. Meanwhile, Photius' legates, Zacharias of Chalcedon and Theodore of Laodicea, sent after the council of 867 to the Western emperor Louis II with the exhortation to depose Pope Nicholas, were recalled by Basil, immediately after he assumed the throne, and ordered to turn back from the halfway point.[28] This was primarily an act of a political and diplomatic nature, aimed at preventing unnecessary foreign policy entanglements and additional conflicts with Rome, especially now that Photius, the main cause of the previous conflicts, had been removed from the patriarchal throne. The emperor then informed the Apostolic See himself about the changes that had taken place in Constantinople—about the death of one emperor and the self-rule of the other, the overthrow of Photius and the restoration of Ignatius. This is why Basil sent a *spatharius*, Euthymius, as his emissary to officially announce in Rome what rumour had already foretold.[29] Euthymius arrived in Rome by the spring or early summer of 868, because the new pope, Hadrian II, writes of him and his mission in his letter to Patriarch Ignatius, dated 1 August 868.[30] In response to Euthymius' mission, the pope composed two letters that day, the first for Emperor Basil and the second, just mentioned, for Patriarch Ignatius. In the letter to the emperor, the pope expresses his satisfaction that the episcopal throne of Constantinople has

[26] The author of the biographies of Pope Nicholas I (858–867) and his successor Hadrian II (867–872) within the *Liber Pontificalis* is most often recognized as Anastasius the Librarian, McKitterick 2020, 9.

[27] Liber pontificalis, 165.27–31.

[28] Life of Ignatius, 78.20–21.

[29] Regesten, no. 472b.

[30] Hadriani II epp., 749.35–40; Gesta octavae synodis, 231.

been returned to its *shepherd*, and that *the adulterer has been driven out*. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that he does not intend to depart from the provisions made by his predecessor, Pope Nicholas I, regarding Photius and Ignatius, and calls on the emperor to agree with those decisions.[31] On this occasion, the pope himself testifies that Roman politics have no influence on the decisions of Basil I. Calling him, namely, to agree with the provisions made against Photius by Nicholas I, the pope points out that what he had already done was in accordance with *divine rules*.[32] In the letter to Patriarch Ignatius, the pope emphasizes the merits and dedication of Pope Nicholas for his case and that of his supporters.[33] The pope writes to both that it is finally time for all those who are supporters of Ignatius and who had suffered in consequence and lived abroad and in exile to return to their positions. Among them was the well-known Theognostus, a monk who in 861, after the *second* council in the Church of the Holy Apostles and the final condemnation of Ignatius, fled to Italy and conveyed Ignatius' complaints to Pope Nicholas, and who had already been in Rome for seven whole years. Now the pope was sending him back to Constantinople, as bearer of his letters to the emperor and the patriarch with the imperial envoy Euthymius.[34] Several things are clear from the pope's letters. First, Roman politics had no influence on Emperor Basil's decision to depose Photius and reinstate Ignatius. The mission of the *spatharius* Euthymius was intended only to inform the pope of the changes in Constantinople, and not to negotiate an upcoming ecclesiastical council, which even the pope himself was not thinking about when he composed the mentioned letters on 1 August 868.

Having regained his own throne, Ignatius excommunicated Photius from the liturgy, along with all those whom he had ordained, and all those who were in communion with them.[35] Ignatius wanted to secure full legitimacy for these decisions, and for that reason, according to Nicetas David the Paphlagonian, it was he who wanted to convene an *ecumenical council*, which would confirm them, and he actually *convinced the emperor to convene such a council*.[36] This is also evidenced by Anastasius the Librarian's

[31] Hadriani II epp., 747.10–22; Gesta octavae synodis, 227–228.
[32] Hadriani II epp., 747.20–22; Gesta octavae synodis, 228.
[33] Hadriani II epp., 748.31–749.14; Gesta octavae synodis, 230.
[34] Hadriani II epp., 748.1–22, 749.15–40; Gesta octavae synodis, 228–231.
[35] Life of Ignatius, 84.26–30.
[36] Life of Ignatius, 84.30–86.1.

statement in the preface to the Latin translation of the acts of the latter council of 869/870, that Ignatius did not want to accept his former throne, unless he received the confirmation of the Roman and Eastern churches for that act, that is, the full consent of the universal Church.[37] Therefore, the initiative for convening and holding the council of 869/870, at which Photius was sentenced, did not come from Emperor Basil I, but from Patriarch Ignatius himself. The emperor assented to the wishes of the patriarch, because at that moment he could not have suffered any harm from the condemnation of Photius, and in addition he would be achieving ecclesiastical reconciliation with the Roman and Eastern churches. However, the internal peace of the Byzantine Church, which he himself certainly cared most about, would not have been achieved even then, because Photius' supporters would have been affected and dissatisfied. The emperor and the patriarch composed letters for the pope and sent them to Rome with a new delegation. This delegation consisted of *spatharius* Basil, as the emperor's representative, metropolitan John of Sylaeon, as a representative of Ignatius' faction, and metropolitan Peter of Sardis, a well-known opponent of Ignatius from the time of the overthrow of Gregory Asbestas in 847–848, as a representative of Photius' faction. In the letters, the emperor and the patriarch explain to the pope the motives of that mission and invite him to send his legates to Constantinople, to a new council that would discuss the issue of Photius.[38] The mission was sent towards the end of 868, because the letters were written on 11 December of that year.[39] This was before the earlier emperor's envoy, Euthymius, had returned from Rome with the monk Theognostus, because the emperor and the patriarch addressed their letters to Pope Nicholas, and they would certainly have learned from the earlier embassy that a new pope, Hadrian II, had been in Rome for more than a year. The fact that the letters were composed only at the end of 868 confirms the veracity of Nicetas David the Paphlagonian's report, that the desire to

[37] Gesta octavae synodis, 14; Chrysos 2018/2019, 141.

[38] Gesta octavae synodis, 14–15, 87–94; Life of Ignatius, 86.2–11; Regesten, no. 474; Chrysos 2018/2019, 141–144.

[39] It is generally considered that the letters were sent already on 11 December 867, Regesten, no. 474, but Dvornik 1950, 206–207, correctly showed that it was 11 December 868, which was definitively established by Kislinger 2012, 19–27, for a chronological overview of the most important events and missions between Constantinople and Rome in the period 867–869, cf. ibidem, 27.

convene the council was Ignatius', not Basil's, because it took some time for emperor and patriarch to reach an agreement on this, and the fact that the letters were sent to Rome with a new delegation, without waiting for the earlier envoy from the emperor, Euthymius, to return, confirms that this was an initiative independent of the emperor's relations with Rome, as established in the first half of 868 through Euthymius. The three eastern patriarchs were expected to send their envoys to the upcoming assembly, and for this purpose the emperor himself sent *gifts and letters to the archon of Syria*, i.e. to the Arab lord of Syria and Egypt, so that he would allow his subjects to go to Constantinople.[40] Therefore it is clear that the upcoming council was conceived as ecumenical, and the address of the emperor and patriarch to Rome and the pope should not be understood as seeking the judgment of the pope, as some kind of supreme arbiter in intra-Byzantine church matters, but in the same way as the invitation to the Eastern patriarchs. The initiative to hold that great ecumenical council in Constantinople that would condemn Photius came from Patriarch Ignatius, not from Emperor Basil. The emperor merely accepted the idea, and gave it his stamp. The patriarch intended the upcoming council simply to condemn Photius. The emperor's understanding, however, was different. He thought that the entire case of Photius should be presented at the council from the beginning and thoroughly investigated. The emperor would represent this position at the council itself, but it can be recognized already at the very beginning of the implementation of the idea of the council. The fact that, in addition to his envoy Basil and Ignatius' representative John of Sylaeon, the emperor also sent Photius' supporter Peter of Sardis to Rome testifies to the fact that he considered Photius' side to be an equal party in the dispute.

The Byzantine envoys, with the exception of the representative of Photius' side, Peter of Sardis, who died on the way, while crossing the Adriatic Sea,[41] arrived in Rome in the spring of 869. After receiving them, Pope Hadrian II convened a local council of the Diocese of Rome, at which the decisions of the Council of Photius of 867 were condemned and the decisions of the Council of Rome of 863 were strengthened. At that council, the pope appointed bishops Donatus of Ostia and Stephen of Nepi and deacon Marinus to go to Constantinople as his deputies and

[40] Life of Ignatius, 86.14–21; Regesten, no. 473.
[41] Life of Ignatius, 86.7–9; Gesta octavae synodis, 14.

deliver the decisions of the aforementioned Roman council, for acceptance at the great council that was supposed to be held in Constantinople.[42] At the same time, he also sent through them the letters that he composed for the emperor and the patriarch on that occasion, which are dated 10 June 869. In them the pope calls, in fact commands, the emperor and the patriarch that at the upcoming council they must accept without question the decisions of the Roman councils held under Nicholas I in 863 and himself in 869, that is, that the decisions of the Council of Photius against Pope Nicholas of 867 must be burned.[43]

Council of 869/870

Roman envoys Donatus of Ostia, Stephen of Nepi and deacon Marinus arrived in Constantinople at the end of the summer of 869. In the meantime, the emissaries of the Eastern patriarchs had also reached the imperial city—Thomas, the metropolitan of Tyre, on behalf of the then vacant Church of Antioch, and Elias, the syncell of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as the representative of Patriarch Theodosius.[44] Joseph, archdeacon and syncell, emissary of Michael, pope of Alexandria, came only later, to the ninth session.[45] The Council, envisioned as the *Eighth Ecumenical Council*, as the Roman Church still treats it today, began in Constantinople on 5 October 869. It was ceremoniously opened by the Emperor Basil I. The course and conclusions of the council are well covered in the scholarship, so there would be no sense and no need to recount the results of present historiography so far.[46] Here I will limit my analysis to those moments in

[42] Dvornik 1950, 208–213; Stiernon 1967, 81–86; Chrysos 2018/2019, 144–146.

[43] Hadriani II epp., 750.13–754.5, 754.15–758.34; Gesta octavae synodis, 38–45, 94–99; Chrysos 2018/2019, 146–148.

[44] Life of Ignatius, 86.12–21; Synodicon Vetus, 162.1–12.

[45] Stiernon 1967, 89–90.

[46] The acts of the council have been preserved in the original Greek version only in an extract, cf. Mansi, XVI, 308–409, while they have been preserved as a whole only in the Latin translation, made by Anastasius the Librarian, who was in Constantinople at the time of the council as a member of the embassy of Emperor Louis II that negotiated the marriage between his daughter and Basil's son Constantine and attended the final, tenth session of the council on 28 February 870, cf. Mansi, XVI, 13–207; a new critical edition: Gesta octavae synodi. On the course and conclusions of the council, cf. Hergenröther 1867–1869 II, 63–132; Hefele, Leclercq 1911 IV, 481–545; Dvornik 1950, 213–221; Stiernon 1967, 87–165; Chrysos 2018/2019, 148–161; Chrysos 2019, 39–41; Chrysos 2023, 161–169.

the course of the council at which the role of the emperor and his position on the issues discussed by the council can be discerned. In addition to the Roman and legates of the Eastern churches, the representatives of the Church of Constantinople were, of course, Patriarch Ignatius himself and a certain number of metropolitans, archbishops and bishops, which varied from session to session, of which, at the final session, there were a total of one hundred and two, which was actually only a small part of the episcopate of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and a far smaller number than at the Council of Photius in 861.[47] However, in the acts of all sessions of the council, after the representatives of the western and eastern churches and Patriarch Ignatius, and before all the bishops of the Church of Constantinople, a record was made of the participants of the council from the ranks of the *most exalted archons*, who were present there *by the order of the emperor*, and were his representatives, whether the emperor himself was present or not. In the acts of the council they are also called the *Holy Senate*. These were the most prominent dignitaries of Basil's government: magister Christopher, patrician and *praepositus* Baanes, patrician and *praepositus* Paul, Leo, domestic of the Excubites, logothete John, patrician Theophylact, Petronas, Orestes, *protospatharius* and domestic of the *Hicanati*, patrician Manuel, *spatharius* Sisinnius, proconsul and patrician Himerius, *sacellarius* Stephen, *protoscriniarius* Marinus, proconsuls and patricians Theophilus, Tarasius and some others, depending on the session.[48] Each of the sessions was, by the order of the emperor, chaired by one of those persons, usually the *praepositus* Baanes, who had the main word, determined the issues on the agenda, and gave the floor to whomever he deemed appropriate. The emperor himself was personally present and presided over the sixth, seventh and eighth sessions, and together with his son and co-ruler Constantine at the final, tenth.[49]

In addition, the emperor's position about Photius and his question during the council itself is of great importance. Although the emperor and the patriarch agreed that the papal *libellus satisfactionis*, in which Pope Nicholas I formulated the official position of the Church on the issue of

[47] Life of Ignatius, 88.11–12; Stiernon 1967, 89–90; Chrysos 2018/2019, 153.

[48] Gesta octavae synodis, 34–35, 69–70, 83–84, 101–102, 140–141, 157, 186–187, 253–254, 272–273, 305. On the mentioned persons, cf. PmbZ, no. 20716, 21255, 22623, 22797, 24325, 24867, 24977, 26191, 26302, 26415, 27100, 27228, 27562, 28139, 28179.

[49] Gesta octavae synodis, 156, 186, 253, 304.

Photius and his supporters, which reflected the absolute primacy of the Roman Church as the supreme universal authority in canonical matters, be presented to the council so that the Byzantine bishops would sign it and thereby gain the right to be full participants in the council,[50] the emperor still did not want everything to be played according to the will of the Roman Church, which had condemned Photius at its local councils in 863 and 869. The aforementioned *libellus* was read and accepted by the Byzantine bishops and envoys of the Eastern patriarchs at the first session of the council, but the emperor's position on the matter was that each of those condemnations was illegal, because it was passed in the absence of Photius, and that therefore he should be tried again in his own presence and when he was able to present a defence.[51] According to the emperor's will, which was expressed on that occasion by the *praepositus* Baanes, Photius was brought before the council at the fifth and seventh sessions of the council.[52] Before the council, he was interrogated by Baanes himself, who had previously interrogated him by order of the emperor during 867–868, but his attitude and approach towards Photius was now much more favourable, which was also reflected in the attitude towards his followers.[53] It could be said that the emperor and his *archons* sincerely tried to give Photius and his followers a fair trial. However, the canons passed by the council agreed with the condemnations of Photius and his deeds which had been passed by the Roman councils of 863 and 869, but in such a way that they were presented as a decision of the entire church, governed by the *five patriarchs*.[54] In addition to the papal legates, the Byzantine bishops from the ranks of Ignatius' supporters insisted on this, but also the Eastern delegates, as well as the patriarch himself.[55] The emperor did not object, because his desire was above all to restore order in the Church of Constantinople.[56] Nevertheless, based on everything recorded in the acts of the council, we could agree with the assessment of Nicetas David the Paphlagonian that the general impression was that the decisions of the

[50] Gesta octavae synodis, 51–56; Liber pontificalis II, 180.25–181.20; Life of Ignatius, 88.1–10; Stiernon 1967, 86, 88–89, 93–95; Chrysos 2018/2019, 148–161.

[51] Gesta octavae synodis, 63–68; Stanković 2003, 58.

[52] Gesta octavae synodis, 141–155, 186–252.

[53] Gesta octavae synodis, 101–139.

[54] Chrysos 2023, 161–169.

[55] Gesta octavae synodis, 383–386.

[56] Gesta octavae synodis, 347–356, 382–383.

council, which he considers unfavourable in many ways, did not harm the glory of Patriarch Ignatius, who, since *he did not have the power to do everything he wanted, preferred to leave to the Romans the power of judgment according to the ancient tradition of the Church*, while the emperor, on the other hand, showed *too much compassion towards those who communicated with Photius, because of his simplicity, i.e. shallowness*, and that he, *being overcome by the pleas of individuals and encouraged by the praises of people, completely disregarded the accuracy of God's justice*.[57] The emperor certainly did not intend to hand over the church of his Empire to the power of the Roman Church, as was the impression given by the decisions adopted at the council, which led to a controversy regarding the fate of the *libellus satisfactionis* after the conclusion of the council and the disappearance of the copies of the council acts that the papal envoys carried to Rome, during their crossing of the Adriatic Sea.[58] The Council also passed a canon that forbade anyone *from the senatorial or any other lay order* to be made a bishop. This condemned the way in which Photius had become patriarch, but also Tarasius and Nicephorus before him, and thwarted the practice aimed at by the enlightened and educated circles of Byzantine society, in order to take the church out of the hands of the monks, who they considered insufficiently learned. Finally, provisions were made on the legality of the veneration of icons, which strengthened the decisions of the council from 843.[59] The decisions of the council were signed by all of its participants.[60]

The canon on the veneration of icons was the third canon of the council of 869/870. The issue of the veneration of icons, actually the issue of the *iconoclasts*, often runs through the events related to the *Schism of Photius* and the relations between the churches of Rome and Constantinople in the sixties of the ninth century. Thus, the imperial embassy in Rome in 860 invited the pope to send envoys to Constantinople to deal with the issue of the iconoclasts.[61] Anastasius the Librarian in the fore-history of

[57] Life of Ignatius, 94.16–25.

[58] Liber pontificalis, II, 182.3–11, 184.24–185.3; Gesta octavae synodi, 51, n. 20; Chrysos 2018/2019, 153–155.

[59] Canons of the Council of Constantinople from 869–870, cf. Gesta octavae synodis, 309–335; Mansi, XVI, 160 A – 178 E, 397 D – 406 E; COGD 2.2, 23–48 (ed. P. Gemeinhardt).

[60] Gesta octavae synodis, 356–369.

[61] Nicolai I epp., 436.17–438.24; Liber pontificalis II, 155.1–3.

the council from 869/870 even wrote that Basil set to ask for papal judgments both on the issue of Photius *and on the issue of the iconoclasts, who seemed to rustle little by little against the holy icons with revived insolence*.[62] Constantine Porphyrogenitus in *Vita Basilii* also says that the council of 869/870 convened, among other things, to *confirm the holy Seventh Council that preceded it and to cast anathema upon the remaining heretic iconoclasts*.[63] Finally, there is an epistle of Photius from the time of his first tenure, addressed to a certain *Stephen, who converted to Orthodoxy*, and from the content of which it can be discerned that this Stephen until his *conversion* was a follower of the iconoclastic movement.[64] Based on this, it could be concluded that the issue of iconoclasts was still alive in the Empire even after 843. However, at the Council of 861, iconoclasts were not discussed, not even in the second part, devoted to canonical and disciplinary issues. This can be seen from the fact that the aforementioned council did not adopt any canons about them.[65] In contrast, at the council of 869/870 iconoclasts were discussed at the eighth session of the council. The course of that session provides an answer to the problem of iconoclasts during the sixth and seventh decades of the ninth century. By the will of the Emperor Basil, Theodore Crithinus, the former archbishop of Syracuse and one of the leaders of the iconoclastic heresy, deposed and anathematized at the council in 843, was brought out before the council, i.e. Roman and Eastern legates.[66] Apparently, he had not changed his religious views since then, but had even gathered new supporters around him. Certainly, the disputes that shook the Byzantine church after 843, the *Studite schism*, the conflict between Patriarch Ignatius and Gregory Asbestas, and especially the conflict between Ignatius and Photius after 858, provided fertile ground for the revival of the iconoclastic movement. The remaining leaders of the iconoclastic movement from the time before 843 well knew how to exploit these divisions, and Theodore Crithinus was, it seems, the last

[62] Gesta octavae synodis, 13.

[63] Vita Basilii, 32.11–13.

[64] Photii epp., 214.1–72.

[65] Despite this, Dvornik 1953, 79–80, nevertheless tries to find traces of anti-iconoclastic decisions in the canons of the council of 861, while Montinaro 2020, 349–356, believes that the council decisions included also the condemnation of iconoclasts.

[66] Gesta octavae synodis, 263 sq. On Theodore Crithinus and the iconoclasts between 843 and 869, cf. Dvornik 1953, 79–84; Gouillard 1961, 387–394, 400–401; Mango 1977, 133–140; Montinaro 2020, 345–358; PmbZ, no. 7675; Prieto Domínguez 2020, 333–337.

of them.[67] In the circumstances of the attempted revival of iconoclasm, the official Orthodox ruling circles in the state and the church had to react. Their first step was symbolic and was made by none other than Emperor Michael III in the last years of his reign. He ordered that the remains of the Emperor Constantine V Copronymus, a symbol of iconoclastic tyranny, as well as of the patriarch John VII the Grammarian, deposed and anathematized in 843, be exhumed and burned after public insult. He then had the tomb of Copronymus, where the unfortunate Ignatius had been imprisoned and abused after the Council of 861, destroyed and its green marble was used in the construction of the columns of Michael's main endowment, the Church of the Virgin in the Palace of Pharus (Holy Mother of God of Pharus).[68] It has long been established that Photius gave his tenth sermon (*homily*) precisely during the consecration of that temple.[69] This fact can help determine the chronology of the mentioned event. In his sermon, Photius celebrates the founder and inspirer of the god-pleasing work of the construction of the mentioned temple—Emperor Michael III and Caesar Bardas,[70] which means that the temple was consecrated between 26 April 862, when Bardas became Caesar, and 21 April 866, when he was killed.[71] Since the conversion of the Bulgarians is not mentioned among the many merits of the emperor and his uncle that the patriarch celebrates, it is very likely that the sermon was written before that event, i.e. before the last months of 864.[72] Since marble from the destroyed tomb of Copronymus was used for the construction of the mentioned temple, the destruction of that tomb occurred before the completion, and therefore the consecration of the temple. As Copronymus' tomb still existed during 861 or early 862, when the former patriarch Ignatius was imprisoned in it, it could be concluded that Emperor Michael III took his anti-iconoclastic measures most likely during 862 or 863.

Basil I continued the policy of his predecessor and sought a final reckoning with the remnants of the iconoclasts. He took advantage of the convocation of the council of 869/870 to set that question before the

[67] The last iconoclast patriarch, John the Grammarian, had by then already died, Dvornik 1953, 83. It is clear from the information of Pseudo-Symeon that during the reign of Michael III his remains were burned, Pseudo-Symeon, 681.4–9.

[68] Pseudo-Symeon, 681.4–12.

[69] Photii Homiliae, 99.1–104.27; Jenkins, Mango, Tenth Homily, 123–140; Mango, Homilies, 177–183; Stanković 2003, 269–271.

[70] Photii Homiliae, 99.22–100.19, 103.28–104.16.

[71] Jenkins, Mango, Tenth Homily, 130–131; Mango, Homilies, 180.

[72] Jenkins, Mango, Tenth Homily, 130–131; Mango, Homilies, 180

council and consider it in legal and canonical frameworks. It was, however, also necessary. The Roman and Eastern churches had not had representatives at the council of 843. Therefore, they had not participated in the decision-making of that council, nor had they confirmed those decisions at a later date. Invitations from Constantinople to Rome to deal with the issue of the iconoclasts starting in 860 also meant that the Roman, as well as the Eastern legates should confirm the decisions of the Church of Constantinople on the veneration of icons from 843 at the new council. In other words, the decisions of the Council of Constantinople from 843 on restoring veneration of icons also needed ecumenical confirmation, which they did not have until then.[73] This is clearly evidenced by the fact that the emperor, by bringing Theodore Crithinus before the council, was directly addressing the Roman and Eastern legates. The Council of 869/870 was an ideal opportunity for a final showdown with the iconoclasts in Constantinople and sanctioning by the representatives of the whole Church. At the eighth session of the council on 7 November 869, Theodore Crithinus and several of his followers were brought before the council, and after everything was canonically examined and discussed, the iconoclastic heresy, its former and current leaders, were anathematized.[74] The condemnation of the iconoclastic heresy was then formulated as the third canon of the Council of Constantinople of 869/870.[75]

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Bulgarian Church Question

During that time, it seems that the greatest concern of Prince Boris was to secure a special archbishop for his newly baptized country. It is certain that Boris had in mind and in front of his eyes the events surrounding the patriarchal throne in Constantinople, where emperors appointed and deposed patriarchs, who therefore owed them their favour and support, and he certainly wanted similar power for himself in his country. Since his first attempt, made in the second half of 867, to get Formosus of Porto from Pope Nicholas as archbishop had failed, Boris continued his attempts. In the spring of 869, bishops Formosus and Paul left Bulgaria and headed for Rome, to participate at the Roman Council which was discussed in the previous chapter.[1] Boris took advantage of their departure to send his envoy Peter with them to the new pope, Hadrian, with the same request—that the pope designate and ordain as archbishop of Bulgaria either the deacon Marinus, who was well-known to them, a former envoy to Constantinople, stopped at the border by the imperial authorities in 866, or whomever among his cardinals, who happened to be *the most worthy in*

[1] Dvornik 1950, 208–211. On the relations between the Bulgarian prince and the Roman Church in the period 867–870, cf. Simeonova 1998, 248–263; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 177–184.

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terms of wisdom, character and life.[2] Boris' fervent desire that the person appointed as his high priest be either someone well-known or someone who can be guaranteed to be a valid person stands out. The pope could not consecrate Marinus to them, because he had appointed him as one of the representatives at the upcoming council in Constantinople.[3] Instead he sent a certain Sylvester. The Bulgarians did not even want to hear about him, they sent him back, and the missionaries Dominic of Trivena and Leopard of Ancona left with him, carrying a new letter from Boris, in which he expressly demanded that Formosus of Porto be consecrated as their archbishop.[4]

This was the beginning of the deterioration of relations between Bulgaria and the Roman Church. Of all the Roman missionaries, after the departure of Formosus and Paul, and then Dominic and Leopard, only Grimoald of Polimartia and many priests remained in Bulgaria.[5] It seems that the Roman mission was also coming to an end as the mood and temper of the Bulgarian prince changed. His envoy Peter returned at the end of 869 from Rome without a solution to the question about the archbishop.[6] The pope kept postponing a solution to the issue, and Boris did not like that at all. From all Boris' actions regarding the consecration of an archbishop for Bulgaria, it is quite clear that the only thing he wanted was for the church organization in Bulgaria and its head to be as close as possible to the ruling court and as independent as possible from any foreign church centre, including Rome. After the latest failure in Rome on the question of an archbishop for Bulgaria, Boris faced the obvious problem of the final organization of the church in his newly baptized country. He could not expect an independent ecclesiastical organization for his country from the pope, and this distanced him from Rome. It was at that point that Byzantine diplomacy intervened and reminded Boris that he and his people had received Christianity from Constantinople and from Byzantine missionaries and that the Church of Constantinople claimed jurisdiction over Bulgaria.

[2] Liber pontificalis II, 185.4–11.
[3] Dvornik 1950, 211.
[4] Liber pontificalis II, 185.11–17.
[5] Liber pontificalis II, 185.21–30.
[6] Liber pontificalis II, 185.18–21.

The Question of Bulgaria at the Council of 869/870

In the biography of Pope Hadrian II in the *Liber pontificalis*, it is written that Boris decided to send his ambassador Peter, who had returned from Rome with unfinished business, to the emperor in Constantinople with the question to whom the church in Bulgaria should be subordinated, and that he was *lured by the Greek emperor* to take that step.[7] The new emperor Basil, although he had rid himself of Photius' presence in the capital and from the position of patriarch, did not intend to give up his policy of defending Byzantine rights in the matter of the mission to Bulgaria. Byzantine diplomacy continued to work with Boris on the matter, sending gifts and written explanations. According to Anastasius the Librarian, the *Greeks* constantly sent numerous gifts to Prince Boris and persuaded him with many *sophistic arguments* to separate from the Church of Rome, until they enticed him to send envoys to the council.[8] First of all, the fact that the Bulgarians had first been baptized by the Byzantine mission was emphasized. It is possible that, trying to convince Boris to reconsider his church policy, they used a new argument for the first time—the fact that the entire country of the Bulgarians at that time, before the Bulgarians themselves had conquered it, was a completely Christian country that belonged to the Empire of Constantinople and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[9] The fact was undeniable and Boris had to accept it. Knowing all this, and being a Christian already educated enough to understand the issue of legal rights, he became fully aware that the question of who Bulgaria should legally belong to—Rome or Constantinople—must be resolved. The council underway in Constantinople was an ideal opportunity for him to ask for and receive an answer to that question. This is why he bent to Byzantine persuasion and sent his emissary Peter there, at the beginning of 870, as soon as he had returned from Rome with unfinished business.

The Bulgarian delegates did not arrive at the council itself, where the issue of Bulgaria was not discussed.[10] The council was concluded in St.

[7] Liber pontificalis II, 185.18–21.

[8] Gesta octavae synodis, 21–23.

[9] Gesta octavae synodis, 20–21.

[10] According to Mansi, XVI, 389 E – 392 A, the envoys of the Bulgarian prince Michael attended the ninth session of the council, on 12 February 870, together with the envoys of the Western emperor Louis II, but did not participate in the discussion, since the Bulgarian

Sophia on 28 February 870. Bulgarian envoys attended the tenth, closing session of the council that day.[11] Three days after that, on 4 March, the emperor called all the delegates, Roman, Constantinopolitan and Eastern, to meet again in the imperial court and solve another problem—to answer the question of the Bulgarian envoys—*to whom Bulgaria should belong*—Rome or Constantinople.[12] When the delegates met the Bulgarian envoys, that question was set before them. The Roman delegates did not want even to discuss the issue—they had discussed everything they had come to Constantinople for. For them, the question of Bulgaria did not even exist, they clearly observed the situation—the prince and the people had received Christianity thanks to Pope Nicholas I and his missionaries; he had sent them priests and preachers, who continued to work in Bulgaria; therefore, Bulgaria should be subject to the Apostolic See of St. Peter.

Opposing the Roman delegates, there came forward the delegates of the Eastern patriarchs, who were given the role of arbiters in this dispute between the Roman and Constantinopolitan churches. Their main argument in that debate was the fact that before the Bulgarians occupied it, the then Bulgarian land had belonged to the Empire of Constantinople and that Greek priests served in it.[13] The delegates of the Roman Church had to accept that fact, but they tried to relativize it and derive three counter-arguments from it. First, the division of empires is one thing, and the jurisdiction of church thrones is another, i.e. if that country did belong to the Empire of Constantinople, it was under the jurisdiction of the Church of Rome. Referring to old documents, the Roman delegates began to emphasize the old pretensions of the Roman Church to jurisdiction over *Eastern Illyricum* (the provinces of First Moesia, Coastal and Mediterranean Dacia, Dardania, Praevalitana, First and Second Macedonia, New and Old Epirus, Thessaly, Achaea and Crete). As they claimed, the Apostolic See had in its canonical jurisdiction the provinces of *both Epirus, i.e. New and Old, and the whole of Thessaly and Dardania… whose country is now called*

issue, which was not on the agenda of the council, could only be discussed after the conclusion of the main part of the council.

[11] Gesta octavae synodis, 304–306.

[12] Liber pontificalis II, 182.12–31. On the Bulgarian question at the council of 869/870, cf. Simeonova 1998, 263–270; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 184–186; Podskalsky 2000, 57–58, 67–68.

[13] Liber pontificalis II, 183.3–17.

Bulgaria by these Bulgarians, and that by conquering them, the Bulgarians had violated its rights.[14]

The delegates of the Roman See were indisputably right in asserting that the provinces of Eastern Illyricum had once belonged to the Church of Rome. However, they were wrong when they said that the division of empires was one thing, and the rights of the cathedrae another. Namely, the church canons prescribe quite the opposite: …*The division of ecclesiastical affairs should follow the division of state and civil affairs.*[15] At the time of their arrival on the Balkan Peninsula, the Bulgarians occupied only the provinces of Second Moesia and Scythia Minor, which before their arrival belonged to the Diocese of Thrace of the Prefecture of the East, and ecclesiastically to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and only in the first half of the ninth century had they occupied territories in the area of the former Eastern Illyricum in the interior of the Balkan Peninsula.[16]

The second argument of the Roman delegates in itself relativized the first, by asserting that the Bulgarians had subjected the land they conquered to *barbarian law* and rendered it *terra infidelium*, nullifying the old rights of the patriarchal cathedrae and leaving only rights of mission, and the Roman mission was the one that had converted the Bulgarians to Christianity.[17] The fact that many Roman priests had been working in that country *for three years* was offered as the third argument.[18] Each of these arguments was weak. The delegates of the Eastern patriarchs reiterated once again that the Bulgarian land was once part of the Empire of Constantinople and that Constantinopolitan priests were active in it. Based on that, they ruled that …*the Bulgarian land, which was once under Greek rule and had Greek priests… should now return through Christianity to the Church of Constantinople, from which it was separated by paganism.*[19]

The decision was made by the competent institution, the council, and was legally binding. However, the Roman legates could not accept it, and

[14] Gesta octavae synodis, 21–22; Liber pontificalis II, 183.13–23; Betti 2014, 118–119.

[15] IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 17, Syntagma II, 258–259; Trullo 38, ibidem, 392.

[16] On the expansion of the Bulgarian rule to the areas in the interior of the Balkan Peninsula, cf. Zlatarski 1918–1927 I–2, 341–352; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 160–161; Komatina 2010b, 55–82.

[17] Liber pontificalis II, 183.23–26.

[18] Liber pontificalis II, 183.26–184.1.

[19] *Quaprotper Vulgarum patriam ex Grecorum potestate dudum fuisse et Grecos sacerdotes habuisse comperimus, sanctae ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae a qua per paganismum recesserat nunc per Christianismum restitui iudicamus…*, Liber pontificalis II, 184.1–11.

they did not even have the authority to do so from the pope. They contested the right of the Eastern delegates to be mediators and judges in the dispute between Rome and Constantinople, they appealed to Patriarch Ignatius, *for whom the Roman Church fought to be reinstated*, but to no avail.[20] The council then definitely ended. Imperial dignitaries accompanied the Roman delegates to Dyrrachium, where they boarded a ship bound for Italy. After many vicissitudes on the Adriatic Sea, where they fell into the hands of the Slavic pirates who took from them the proceedings of the sessions of the council, they arrived in Rome only on 22 December 870.[21] The pope did not accept the decision of the council on Bulgaria, nor was he to do so in the future.[22] For the next ten years, the Apostolic See would try with all its might to *regain* power over Bulgaria.

The decision of the council that Bulgaria should be under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was a great victory for Byzantine missionary policy. It was the final fulfilment of Photius' vow from 867, expressed in the *Circular Epistle to the Eastern patriarchs*, that there would be no sleep or peace until the Bulgarians *rose up from their fall*. Even though Photius had been overthrown and removed, and even though Emperor Basil had yielded to Rome on this matter, in Constantinople the foreign policy interests of the Byzantine state, from which the church was inseparable, were beyond any division. The state interest was equally represented by Basil I and Ignatius, as in the past by Michael III, Bardas and Photius.

Photius' vow to continue the struggle for jurisdiction over Bulgaria seems to have found a worthy continuer in Emperor Basil I. His role in this, for Byzantium favourable, outcome of the "Bulgarian question" was decisive. The merits of Byzantine diplomacy have already been highlighted in making Prince Boris doubt the rights of the Roman See over his country and persuading him to send envoys to the council to raise the issue. Let us now consider the emperor's role in discussing the issue itself, and making the key decision. Anastasius the Librarian, one of the participants at the council and our main source, writes in the letter he sent to Pope Hadrian after the council, how everything was designed to lead to a decision to take Bulgaria away from the power of the Roman See. The most

[20] Gesta octavae synodis, 21–23; Liber pontificalis II, 184.11–23.

[21] Liber pontificalis II, 184.24–185.3.

[22] Zlatarski 1918–1927 I–2, 133; Ostrogorski 1959, 232, n. 1, believed, however, that the Church of Rome did recognize the decision of the council on Bulgaria.

obvious example of this, according to Anastasius, was that in the discussion everyone used their own language, while there were no interpreters other than the *imperial ones*, who were not allowed to translate sentences other than the way *the emperor ordered*.[23] This really looks like just another of Anastasius' justifications before the pope, for the Roman failure on the Bulgarian question, and the fact stands that Anastasius himself knew Greek perfectly, so the *imperial interpreters* could not easily deceive him, but his impression of the emperor's involvement in a decision unfavourable to Rome is significant. After all, all the circumstances under which the Bulgarian issue was discussed point to this: the meeting was held after the conclusion of the council, it was held at the imperial court, the Roman delegates were then escorted by the order of the emperor from Constantinople all the way to Dyrrachium, the Eastern delegates were not and could not be neutral and objective judges in the dispute.... In any case, it was certain that, if the question of jurisdiction over Bulgaria was raised at the council, a decision would be made in favour of Constantinople, which is why the imperial government persuaded the Bulgarian prince to send envoys to Constantinople.

In this way, Emperor Basil I, the council of 869–870 and both Byzantine diplomacy and the ecclesiastical high clergy saved Bulgaria for the Byzantine Church and the Orthodox faith, and thus the results of the Byzantine mission of 864–866. Photius' vow was fulfilled, and the Byzantine Church could continue its work in Bulgaria, which had been interrupted three years earlier.

Organization of the Church in Bulgaria after 870

The decision of the eastern delegates that Bulgaria should rightfully belong to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was communicated to the Bulgarian delegates in a letter in Greek,[24] which they took to their prince. After learning about it, Boris began to implement the decision of the council. He immediately expelled the Roman priests and the only remaining papal missionary, Bishop Grimoald, from his country. Byzantine priests returned to Bulgaria.[25] The fact that they appeared there almost immediately, even before the departure of the Roman priests,

[23] Gesta octavae synodis, 21–22.
[24] Gesta octavae synodis, 22.
[25] Liber pontificalis II, 185.21–30.

shows that the Byzantine Church had expected this outcome, and had been preparing for it, so the organization of a new Byzantine mission, to begin after the deliberations had been completed, ran concurrently with the negotiations on the Bulgarian question. The renewed Byzantine mission in Bulgaria was to continue in 870 where it had left off towards the end of 866. Its task was no longer to baptize the Bulgarians and teach them the faith—they had already received these teachings, they only needed to be purified a little from Roman *bruises*. The task now was something else, the next step, the next stage—the organization of the Christian Church in Bulgaria.

Older scholarship accepted the thesis that after the victory over the Church of Rome and the assumption of jurisdiction over Bulgaria in 870, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as vividly described by George Ostrogorski, *learned a lesson from recent events and now proved to be lenient: by the order of the emperor, Patriarch Ignatius ordained the archbishop of Bulgaria and several bishops.*[26] In this way, the *Bulgarian archbishopric* would be created. The differences among scholars relate only to the question of whether it became an *autonomous* church area within the Patriarchate of Constantinople, or a completely independent, i.e., *autocephalous* church.[27]

Indeed, in some contemporary sources there are indications of the existence of the institution of *archbishops* in Bulgaria immediately after 870. A letter of Pope John VIII to the Croatian prince Domagoj, written between December 872 and May 873, claims that *Greek cunning* (*Graeca falsitas*) has deprived the pope of the Bulgarian land, and that, to compound the offence, Patriarch Ignatius had *sent some schismatic there under the name of archbishop.*[28] There is also a long letter from Peter of Sicily, the imperial envoy in the camp of the Paulician heretics in 871, addressed *to the*

[26] Ostrogorski 1959, 229.

[27] The thesis about the *autocephalous* church was advocated by Ostrogorski 1959, 229; *Istorija na Bălgarija* II, 229–230 (V. Gjuzelev); Dvornik 1926, 248–251; Šepard 1995 (2007), 40–41. On the other hand, Obolenski 1991, 115; Săbev 1987, 226–232; Nikolova 1997, 38–42; Simeonova 1998, speak about the *autonomy* of the Bulgarian Church within the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and not about its *autocephaly*. Lately, Gjuzelev 1999, 99–103, convincingly showed that the Bulgarian Church received autocephaly not in 870, but in 879/880. Cf. also Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 190–191; Podskalsky 2000, 68; Komatina 2010, 363–364; Nikolov 2021, 142–144.

[28] *…quemdam scismaticum sub nomine archiepiscopum destinavit…*, Johannis VIII epp., 278.7–17.

chairman of Bulgaria (τῷ προέδρῳ Βουλγαρίας), after returning from Tefrica.[29] At one place in that text, Peter calls the one to whom it was addressed the *archpastor* (ἀρχιποίμην) *of the newly gathered holy and honourable flock of the Lord*, and around him are *all the divine shepherds and the whole fullness of the church*,[30] and at another he addresses him as the *divine and holy head* (ὦ θεία καὶ ἱερὰ κεφαλή).[31] Finally, another letter of the same Pope John VIII, sent in August 879 *to the emperors Basil, Leo and Alexander*, says that in Bulgaria, which should belong to the Roman Church, *bishops and priests were illegally ordained by the archbishop* (*archiepiscopo*, sing.) *and bishops* (*episcopis*, pl.), *who seem to be there*, although the patriarch himself *decided not to send them the pallium*.[32] Of documentary sources, several seals of *George, the archbishop of Bulgaria*, found in the vicinity of Pliska, but also in other places outside Bulgaria, are known. However, according to their iconography, they belong to the same group as the seals of Patriarch Photius from his second tenure (877–886) and the seals of his successor, Patriarch-Prince Stephen (886–893),[33] so they cannot be taken as confirmation of the existence of the institution of the *archbishop of Bulgaria* in the period 870–877.

Some later sources also write of the *archbishop of Bulgaria*. So Constantine Porphyrogenitus in *Vita Basilii* writes that his grandfather, Emperor Basil, *with his generosity and many gifts, urged the people of Bulgaria*, who had *earlier* converted to the Christian faith, *to accept to their country an archbishop and a large number of bishops*.[34] The Slavic source, the *Miracle of St. George the Martyr*, from later times, gives a brief retrospective of the Christianization of the Bulgarians. They were enlightened by God, through his chosen one Boris, called Michael at the holy baptism, who then confirmed them in the faith of Christ with the holy

[29] Pierre de Sicile, Histoire, § 7, 11.1. The title of the text, which explicitly mentions that it was addressed *to the archbishop of Bulgaria* (πρὸς τὸν ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Βουλγαρίας), ibidem, 7.3, is not authentic, but was added by a later copyist, cf. Lemerle 1973, 20.

[30] Pierre de Sicile, Histoire, § 2, 7.11–13.

[31] Pierre de Sicile, Histoire, § 6, 9.28.

[32] *…ibidem sunt inlicite ordinati episcopi vel sacerdotes ab archiepiscopo vel episcopis, qui ibidem videntur existere, nec sacrum pallium… ipse patriarcha mittere presumpserit…*, Johannis VIII epp., 173.43–174.5.

[33] The seals contain the inscription Θεοτόκε βοήθει τῷ σῷ δούλῳ Γεωργίῳ ἀρχιεπισκόπῳ Βουλγαρίας, Jordanov 2001, 79–81; Jordanov 2003, 53–55, no. 19.4; Nikolov 2021 144–145.

[34] Vita Basilii, 96.1–13.

books, *brought the holy archbishop Stephen (Joseph)* and many teachers and instructors, built churches and monasteries and appointed bishops, abbots and priests.[35]

Do the mentioned sources confirm the existence of the *archbishop of Bulgaria* in the time immediately after the council of 869/870? Quotations from *Vita Basilii* 96 and *Miracle of St. George the Martyr* are later, and chronologically imprecise. The first attributes the merit for the arrival of the *archbishop* to Bulgaria to Emperor Basil I, i.e. the time between 867 and 886, the second relates it to the reign of Prince Boris, after the Christianization, i.e. 864–889. In addition, the *Vita Basilii* 96 mentions that the Bulgarians had converted to Christianity *earlier*, which means that some time had passed from that moment to the moment when they received the first archbishop. In any case, nothing in that statement irrefutably indicates that it happened in 870 or soon after, and not after 879 or even later, i.e. anytime between 870 and 886. Both of these testimonies are only a confirmation that Bulgaria got its archbishop during the time of Emperor Basil and Prince Boris, but they do not say when it happened.

As for the papal letters, first of all, the one to Domagoj of 872/873 and that to the Byzantine emperors of 879, initially everything seems clear. However, one should not lose sight of the fact that the Roman Church has a slightly different organization than the Byzantine Church. The supreme bishop in a province (eparchy), who ranks first in the Byzantine Church after the patriarch, has the title of *metropolitan*.[36] In the Roman Church, the position of head of an ecclesiastical province (archdiocese) is held by a bishop with the honorary title of *archbishop*. It is possible, therefore, that the *archbishop* mentioned by Pope John VIII in his letter to Prince

[35] Gjuzelev 2006, no. 19, p. 89; Nikolov 2021, 144–145.

[36] As is clear from Oikonomidès, Listes, 51.13, 14; 143.28, 29; 249.1, 2; 269.18, 19, and from the *notitiae episcopatuum*, in the Byzantine Church the *metropolitan* (pl. αἱ μητροπολίται) represents a rank that is immediately below the patriarch in the hierarchical structure. *Autocephalous archbishop* (pl. οἱ αὐτοκέφαλοι ἀρχιεπίσκοποι) occupies a lower rank than the metropolitan and represents a bishop who is exempt from the jurisdiction of his diocesan metropolitan and subordinated directly to the Patriarch of Constantinople. A special case were the *archbishops* of Cyprus, Iberia and, after 879/880, Bulgaria. They were independent in relation to the patriarch and therefore occupied a higher rank in relation to the metropolitans, which can be seen in the case of the *archbishop of Bulgaria*, first in the *Cletorologion of Philotheus* from 899, Oikonomidès, Listes, 137.17, and then in other lists. The canonical basis for this position is the 8th canon of the Third Ecumenical Council (Ephesus, 431 AD), which gave the archbishop of Cyprus independence in relation to the Patriarch of Antioch, III Ecum. (Ephesus) 8, Syntagma II, 203–204.

Domagoj from 872/873 was actually one of the *metropolitans* who, as will be seen further on, was sent by the patriarch of Constantinople to occupy the restored metropolitan seats in Bulgaria. This interpretation can also be applied when it comes to the second papal letter, the one addressed to the emperors in August 879. However, since that letter was created in a new temporal context, other possibilities regarding its interpretation will be considered within that context. It remains, however, quite clear that Peter of Sicily sent in 871–872 a letter *to the chairman*, i.e. *archpastor*, that is, the *head of Bulgaria*. That fact cannot be disputed. The question of whether the *archbishop of Bulgaria*, as the office was known at a later time, really hides behind that name will be considered further on.

On the other hand, in support of the thesis that the church in Bulgaria did not receive the status of an autonomous or autocephalous archbishopric immediately after the council decisions of 870, but, in accordance with the decisions of the same council, was fully included in the structure of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, we can rely on a source which has not received any attention in this context so far. The source in question is *notitia no. 3* in the edition of the episcopal *notitiae* of the Church of Constantinople by Jean Darrouzès.[37] The said editor has numbered it *3* and, given its apparent dependence on the list of participants of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, dated it to a time after 787, roughly in the ninth century, closer to its end than to its beginning.[38]

[37] Notitiae, 3.1–779.

[38] According to J. Darrouzès, it is a list that does not reflect the actual situation on the ground in all details, but a compilation compiled on the basis of various existing ecclesiastical and administrative records, including the list of the participants of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787 and the late Antique *Hieroclis Synecdemus*, Notitiae, pp. 20–33. In the earlier scholarship, the mentioned notice was dated mostly to the eighth century, i.e. in the first iconoclast period 730–787, and because of this it was sometimes called *the notitia of the Iconoclasts*, cf. Konidarēs 1934, 25–85. Recently Kountoura-Galaki 1996, 45–73; Kountoura-Galaki 1997, 279–287; Kountoura-Galaki 1998, 169–176; Prigent 2002, 931–954; Prigent 2008, 393–417; Moulet 2011, 45 tried to strengthen such a dating. Basically accepting Darrouzès' arguments for dating *notitia* 3 to the time after 787, but not to the second half of the ninth century, Zuckerman 2006, 202–214, dates it to the period 787–806, more precisely to the last years of the patriarch Tarasius (784–806), i.e. around 802–805, recognizing in it a realistic representation of the state of the church organization at that time, which is followed by Basić 2020, 27–51, who provides a detailed overview of existing opinions. Brandes 2014, 187–188, basically accepts Darrouzès'dating, Maksimović 2002, 18, opts for the middle rather than the beginning of the ninth century, while Salamon 2007, 89–102, was the first to more precisely define it at the time of the missionary successes of the Byzantine church due to the Christianization of new peoples and the inclusion of their

However, from the *notitia* itself, and the content of the other *notitiae* close to it in time (no. 2, 4, 5, and 6), it is evident that it is more recent than all of them. Namely, it contains information that is not found in the other *notitiae*, very unique and specific information, which allows it to be dated to a very specific time context—the seventies of the ninth century, precisely at the time between the council of 870 and the one of 879.

Besides providing a picture of the Patriarchate of Constantinople after the former Roman, *western provinces* (Sicily, Calabria and Eastern Illyricum) had been fully integrated into its jurisdictional area, to a much greater extent than is clear from the *older notitiae* (notitiae no. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6),[39] *notitia* no. 3 provides several more unique data points, which are not found in *older notitiae*. A certain number of bishoprics which according to *notitiae* 1, 2 and 4 were subject to the metropolitan of Laodicea in Phrygia,[40] according to *notitia* 3, were subject to the metropolitan of Hierapolis.[41] They were also subject to the same metropolitan already at the time of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787, judging by their signatures in the acts of the council,[42] so it is clear that a change in their status had occurred before that, but that change, as concluded by J. Darrouzès, was not recorded in *notitiae* 2 and 4, in which only the changes that had occurred in the rank of metropolitans and autocephalous archbishops, but not metropolitan suffragans, were recorded.[43] Lists of suffragans of the metropolitans of Laodicea and Hierapolis that correspond to those in *notitia* 3 are also found in *notitia* 7 and *notitiae* 9 and 10 from the tenth

territories within the framework of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the second half of the ninth century, recognizing in it a plan for the integration of new ecclesiastical structures into the existing order.

[39] In *notitia* no. 1, from the seventh to eighth century, there are no *western provinces* at all, because then they still belonged to Rome. In *notitia* no. 2 (806–814) some of those provinces, but not yet all (e.g. there was no metropolitanate of Dyrrachium) were integrated into the hierarchy of the Church of Constantinople, Notitiae, 2.10–13, 38–41, 79, 86–87, 207–243. In *notitiae* no. 4, 5 and 6 they are under Constantinople, but are seen as a separate phenomenon and are listed in a separate section of the *notitiae*, Notitiae 4.39a, 483–492; 5.34–43; 6.37–46; Komatina 2009, 29–32; Komatina 2013, 202–211.

[40] In question are the bishoprics of Tiberiopolis, Ancyra Synaus, Azani, Cadi, Synaus, Notitiae, 1.313–315, 318, 2.376–378, 381, 4.332–334, 337.

[41] Notiatiae, 3.593, 597, 600–602.

[42] Cf. Concilium Nicaenum II, 1, 216 (237–239); 2, 520 (324–327, 330); 3, 816 (321, 324), 852 (297–300); Lamberz 2004, 77–78.

[43] Notitiae, 25–28, 32–33.

century,[44] which means that *notitia* 3, as concluded by J. Darrouzès, in that sense is closer to *notitia* 7 from 920 than to *notitiae* 1, 2 and 4,[45] and that it was certainly composed after them. *Notitia* 3 mentions Amorium as the seat of a bishop in the eparchy of the metropolitan of Pessinus, as in *notitiae* 1 and 2.[46] However, around 814, Amorium became the seat of a separate metropolitanate, as evidenced by *notitiae* 4 and 6.[47] Nevertheless, the city was abandoned due to the Arab conquest and destruction in 838, and when, after the return of the enslaved inhabitants, it was restored in 845, it was again, as independent sources testify, only an ordinary bishopric subordinated to the metropolitan of Pessinus, only to regain the lost metropolitan rank in 879.[48] In *notitia* 3, in the list of autocephalous archbishops, as the seat of a hierarch of the mentioned rank from the "eparchy of Thrace", actually Rhodope, "Nicopolis of Boleron" (ὁ Νικοπόλεως τοῦ Βουλέρου) is listed,[49] and the toponym Boleron itself, and precisely in the form "Βουλερόν", is mentioned for the first time in the *Life of St. Gregory the Decapolites* by Ignatius the Deacon from the middle of the ninth century.[50] *Notitia* 3 also mentions the eparchy of the island of Crete, which was under Arab rule from 828,[51] which is therefore taken as an argument that *notitia* 3 itself was composed before 828.[52] However, there are indications in the sources about the possible short-term restoration of nominal Byzantine sovereignty on the island after the campaign of Nicetas Ooryphas in 872–873,[53] so the reintroduction of the eparchy of Crete within the Patriarchate of Constantinople in *notitia* 3 could be related to that event. In any case, Basil, archbishop of Crete, was among the participants of the council of 879/880.[54] Some of the eparchies of the "western provinces"—Crete, Macedonia, Old Epirus, New Epirus—as well as

[44] Cf. Notitiae, 3.397–418, 592–602, 7.388–409, 633–642, 9.270–291, 507–516, 10.323–345, 597–606.

[45] Notitiae, 25, 32. On the dating of *notitia* 7 to the year 920, cf. Zuckerman 2006, 219–229.

[46] Notitiae, 1.139, 2.301, 3.251.

[47] Notitiae, 4.477, 6.35; Komatina 2013, 196–201.

[48] Komatina 2013, 199–201.

[49] Notitiae, 3.74.

[50] Notitiae, 3.74; Vita des Hl. Gregorios Dekapolites, c. 52.23. In later sources the usual form is Βολερόν, cf. TIB 6, 212–213.

[51] Notitiae 3.14, 239–250; Komatina 2013, 202–204.

[52] Basić 2020, 45–46.

[53] EI III, 103–104 (M. Canard); Tobias 2007, 125–128.

[54] Mansi, XVII, 496 D.

Isauria, were integrated into the standard order of eparchies of the Patriarchate of Constantinople,[55] while the others were listed after the eparchy of Hierapolis of Phrygia,[56] the last in the traditional order of the Patriarchate of Constantinople—Second Moesia, Gothia, Sicily, Calabria, Coastal Scythia, Thrace, *Second* Thessaly, Hellas, *Second* Haemimontus, Peloponnese, *First Epirus*.[57] Of particular interest is the case of Thrace and *Second* Haemimontus,[58] which had belonged to the Church of Constantinople since ancient times and which in *notitiae* 1, 2 and 4 are traditionally placed in front of the eparchy of Hierapolis.[59] Their inclusion in *notitia* 3 in the final section could mean that they had been re-introduced in the order of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, after having previously been excluded from it. While the exclusion of those eparchies from the framework of the Patriarchate of Constantinople would have to be related to the Bulgarian conquest of the area of the upper reaches of the Marica River between Stara Planina and the Rhodope in 812 and Philippopolis

[55] Notitiae, 3.14, 16, 20, 34, 239–250, 257–276, 294–308, 508–533.

[56] Notitiae, 3.41, 592–602.

[57] Notitiae, 3.42–54, 603–779. That Patras is not listed among the metropolitanates, but among the autocephalous archbishoprics, and among them at the first place, Notitiae, 3.55–56 (ἐπαρχία Ἑλλάδος, ὁ Πατρῶν; ἐπαρχία Πελοποννήσου, [ὁ Ἀρκαδίας]), is taken as an argument that *notitia* 3 was composed between 783 and 805, Zuckerman 2006, 204–207; Salamon 2007, 92–93, when Patras had that rank, cf. Komatina 2009, 32–38. However, Patras, as a newly founded autocephalous archbishopric, would certainly not be at the head of the list of autocephalous archbishops, ahead of Bizye, Euchaita and Pompeiopolis, with which the list traditionally began, cf. Notitiae, 1.39–72, 2.42–87, 4.40–81, 5.44–84, 7.52–99, 8.66–124, and in all probability its place in the original manuscript of *notitia* 3 was actually at the end of the list of metropolitans. The list of metropolitan suffragans lists the suffragans of the metropolitans of Larissa, Corinth and Athens, Notitiae, 3.667–686, 687–726, 732–768, certainly according to the late antique situation, and not according to the real state, cf. Parthey, Hieroclis Synecdemus, 8, 642.1–13, 649.2, and from the signatures of the suffragans of the metropolitan of Corinth from the list of the participants of the council of 787, Concilium Nicaenum II, 1, 266 (106), 216 (251–253); 2, 508–510 (191–198); 3, 808 (190–197), 818 (336), 842–844 (180–185, 188–190); Lamberz 2004, 62–63; Komatina 2009, 40–46, a phantom eparchy of "First Epirus" was created, headed by the "metropolitan of Cephalenia" (ἐπαρχία Ἠπείρου α΄, Κεφαληνία μητρόπολις), Notitiae, 3.769–776, which is identified with the "eparchy of Cephalia" under the "metropolitan of Dalmatia" (ἐπαρχία Κεφαλίας, ὁ Δελματίας), from the end of the list of metropolitans, Notitiae 3.54, and linked to the role that the theme of Cephalonia had in the Byzantine administration in the area of the Adriatic Sea, Salamon 2007, 93–94; Basić 2020, 53–112.

[58] Notitiae, 3.46–47, 657–666, 727–731.

[59] Notitiae, 1.33, 37, 418–421, 444–449, 2.32, 36, 487–490, 512–517, 4.33, 37, 439–442, 462–467.

itself, the seat of the metropolitan of Thrace around 832,[60] their re-inclusion in its framework would certainly be related to the Conversion the Bulgarians and establishment of a church organization in their country.[61] In this connection, the issue of other eparchies and bishoprics in the territory of Bulgaria mentioned in *notitia* 3 should also be considered. Namely, in the territory of Bulgaria, there used to be, before the arrival of the Bulgarians, the Roman provinces of *Second Moesia* and *Scythia Minor*. These provinces were also ecclesiastical provinces (eparchies), and each of them was headed by a *metropolitan* in the capital city (metropolis) of the province—Odessus (now Varna) in Second Moesia and Tomis (now Constance) in Scythia Minor. Each of them had suffragan bishops in other provincial cities.[62] As part of the Diocese of Thrace of the Prefecture of the East, these eparchies were under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[63] After the arrival of the Bulgarians, the Christian ecclesiastical organization in these provinces disappeared. Nevertheless, the bishops of Odessus—Second Moesia and Tomis—Scythia Minor are still mentioned in the episcopal *notitiae* of the Church of Constantinople—*notitiae* no. 1, 2, 4 and 5, not, however, in the list of metropolitans and

[60] Theophanes, 495.27–496.6; Beševliev, Părvobălgarskite nadpisi, no. 13–14, 41–42, 47; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 158–160; Sophoulis 2012, 189–192, 207, 221–227, 278–280.

[61] Kountoura-Galaki 1997, 279–287, considers that the increase in the number of bishoprics in the four provinces in Thrace (Europe, Thrace, Rhodope and Haemimontus), which can be observed in *notitia* 3, can be connected with the fortification of that area during the time of the emperors of the Isaurian dynasty in the eighth century, thereby supporting her conclusion that the said *notitia* was composed at that time. The metropolitan of Philippopolis in the eparchy of Thrace and his suffragan bishops are not recorded among the participants of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787, Lamberz 2004, 21, 49, n. 192, 55, n. 230, but the greatest number of new bishoprics in the province of Haemimontus, the eparchy of the metropolitan of Adrianople, already appears among the signatures of the participants of the mentioned council, Concilium Nicaenum II, 1, 20 (24), 198 (27), 216 (243–250); 2, 494 (34), 518 (295–302); 3, 796 (34), 814–816 (294–301), 832 (31), 850–852 (282–289); Lamberz 2004, 22, 45, 74–75, and corresponds to a significant extent to the list of his suffragans in *notitia* 3, but also in the later *notitia* 7, Notitiae, 3.582–591, 7.40, 621–632. Therefore, the fact that the mentioned cities and their bishoprics appear at the end of the eighth century can only be taken as a terminus post quem for the creation of *notitia* 3 and in no way excludes the possibility that it was composed a whole century later.

[62] On the administrative organization of the mentioned provinces, cf. Parthey, Hieroclis Synecdemus, 636.1–637.17.

[63] Cf. IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 28, Syntagma II, 280–281.

their suffragans, but in a separate list of *autocephalous archbishops*, direct suffragans of Constantinople.[64]

In contrast, *notitia* no. 3 contains the eparchies of Odessus—Second Moesia and Tomis—Scythia Minor *within the list of metropolitans with all their suffragans*,[65] while they are no longer listed at their previous places in the list of *autocephalous archbishops*. In *notitia* no. 3 there is mentioned in that list, at the 36th place, the *eparchy of First Mysia (?)—metropolis of Odessus* and its seven suffragans. In the 40th place is the *eparchy of Scythia on the coast of Pontus—the metropolis of Tomis*, and its fourteen suffragans.[66] Such a large number of bishoprics in those two provinces actually corresponds to the situation in Late Antiquity, and was taken, together with their names, from late antique texts on imperial and ecclesiastical administration.[67] Therefore it does not reflect the true state of ecclesiastical organization in Bulgaria in the seventies of the ninth century. However, the entire *notitia* no. 3 was not even created with the intention of presenting the actual situation on the ground in full. It arose from the need to record the expansion of the jurisdictional area of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the seventies of the ninth century, which will be discussed later, which came as a consequence of the great missionary successes of the previous decade.[68] *Notitia* no. 3 was composed in the middle of that process, when some of its aspects had been established, and were therefore recorded in it, while others were not yet complete, making it a kind of *sketch* of the organization of the jurisdictional area of the Patriarchate of Constantinople

[64] This could be an indication that the composition of *notitia* no. 1 dates back to the time after the arrival of the Bulgarians in these provinces in 680, cf. Notitiae, 1.39–40, 2.42–43, 4.40–41, 5.44–45. Since these were coastal cities, it is possible that they preserved both the Christian population and the ecclesiastical organization and link with the Empire and Constantinople, and in all probability the political presence of the Empire. An indicative analogy would be with the coastal cities on the Adriatic, in Dalmatia, which, even after the Slavic conquest of their hinterland, remained part of the Empire and preserved their ecclesiastical organization.

[65] Notitiae, 3.55–94.

[66] Notitiae, 3.603–610, 642–656.

[67] Cf. Parthey, Hieroclis Synecdemus, 636.1–637.17.

[68] It has already been pointed out that *notitia* no. 3 contains various data that are not found in earlier or later notices. In addition to data on metropolitans and bishoprics in Bulgaria, data on metropolitans and bishoprics in *Khazaria* and *Cyprus* are of the greatest importance. The actuality of those data for the period of the seventies of the ninth century will be discussed in the chapter *Expansion of the area of jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople*.

as it was intended to appear after the process was complete. The organization of the church in Bulgaria fell into this latter category.

In view of what has been said, an alternative solution can be offered for the question of the ecclesiastical organization in Bulgaria after the decision of the council of 4 March 870. Patriarch Ignatius did not ordain an autocephalous archbishop for Bulgaria. The Church in Bulgaria was not given autocephaly or autonomy, but the Patriarchate of Constantinople firmly held on to the right that was its main argument in the discussion with the delegates of the Roman See about jurisdiction over Bulgaria—the right that arose from the fact that the then country of the Bulgarians was once a Christian country with an ecclesiastical organization within the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Based on that right, the Patriarchate received jurisdiction over Bulgaria at the council. From that foundation it then conducted the organization of the church in Bulgaria. The decision of the council meant, in fact, only the *restoration* of the jurisdiction of Constantinople over its long-lost provinces of Second Moesia and Scythia Minor and other provinces that had become part of Bulgaria. However, for the entire time since the Bulgarian conquest of these provinces, the bishops of Odessus and Tomis continued to represent these lost provinces in the *notitiae* (diocesan lists) of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as the *notitiae* themselves testify. Since the establishment of the jurisdiction of Constantinople over Bulgaria in 870, from the point of view of Constantinople, was no more or less than its *restoration* over the provinces of Second Moesia and Scythia Minor, so the introduction of the ecclesiastical organization in Bulgaria should actually have been only its *restoration* in the aforementioned provinces. This was the peak of the policy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople towards Christianity in Bulgaria. Its entire territory became an integral part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the old eparchies were restored within it—*Second Moesia*, with the *metropolis of Odessus* and *Scythia Minor*, with the *metropolis of Tomis*, and then bishoprics were founded in smaller towns, which were supposed to be the seats of the suffragans of those two metropolitanates.[69] The patriarch of Constantinople had the exclusive right to ordain these metropolitans and bishops and send them the *omophorion* (*pallium*). The right of ordination and sending the omophorion is one of the most important indications of

[69] Zlatarski 1918–1927 I–2, 202–218, believed that there were a large number of bishops in Bulgaria in the seventies of the ninth century, of whom he mentioned only a few.

the superiority of one episcopal see over another.[70] That the patriarchs of Constantinople had this right in Bulgaria and exercised it as in any other of their many eparchies in Europe and Asia is clear from the acts of the *Photian Council* of 879/880 and the great effort the Roman legates were willing to make, to deprive them of that right.[71] After all, in the Acts of the mentioned Council of 879/880 there is no indication that the Church in Bulgaria was independent to any degree of the Patriarchal See of Constantinople. On the contrary, all the efforts of the Roman legates there to "pluck" Bulgaria from under the rule of the Patriarchate of Constantinople only testify to how complete and absolute that rule actually was. The *independence* of the church in Bulgaria can only be discussed after the *Photian Council* of 879/880 and in accordance with its decisions. This is something to which we will return later.

Nevertheless, how are we to interpret the aforementioned data from Peter of Sicily, who in 871 or 872 sent a letter to the head of the church in Bulgaria about the Paulician heresy and their attempts to infiltrate newly baptized Bulgaria? It is immediately noticeable that in no place does Peter address the person he is writing to with the title *archbishop*, but rather uses other, less specific terms: *chairman*, *archpastor*, *head*.[72] Pope Hadrian II, in his letter to Emperor Basil dated 10 November 871, also uses the term *chairman*, in Latin *antistes*, when he complains to the emperor that *Patriarch Ignatius intended to consecrate a chairman in Bulgaria*.[73] The term *chairman* is quite vague and was given to various church dignitaries, sometimes even the pope himself, and the canons of the III Ecumenical Council address three bishops from Cyprus this way;[74] in general, church canons have addressed many bishops in this way, making it fair to say that the term is used as a synonym for *bishop*, or *hierarch*. Pope Hadrian himself in the mentioned letter, although he uses unofficial names, still makes a distinction between the *chairman* of Bulgaria and the patriarch Ignatius, who ordained him, calling the former *antistes* and the latter *praesul*.[75] However, the fact that Peter of Sicily calls this dignitary the *chairman of Bulgaria*, and that he addresses the letter only to him, as someone he

[70] Omophorion, ODB III, 1526 (N. Patterson–Ševčenko).

[71] Gjuzelev 1999, 102–103; Komatina 2009, 364. Cf. further in this chapter.

[72] Pierre de Sicile, Histoire des Pauliciens, §§ 2, 6, 7; 7.11–13, 9.28, 11.1.

[73] …*Ignatius in Vulgarum regione consacrare praesumpsit antistitem*…, Hadriani II epp., 760.14–15.

[74] III Ecum. (Ephesus) 8, Syntagma II, 203–204.

[75] Hadriani II epp., 760.12–20.

considers responsible for the whole country, shows that it is not just an ordinary bishop. So, who could actually be hiding behind that name, if it is not the *archbishop of Bulgaria*, known from the time after 880?

During the late Roman Empire, the church was organized in exactly the same way and according to the same boundaries as the civil administration.[76] There were *cities* (civitates) headed by *bishops*, then provinces and, within their boundaries, ecclesiastical *eparchies*, headed by a *metropolitan*, in the *metropolis*, i.e. the capital of the province; several provinces (*eparchies*) made up the *diocese*. The capital of one of the provinces within a diocese was also the capital of that diocese, so its bishop, as the metropolitan of his eparchy, was respected as the first among all the metropolitans of the same diocese. Thus, the metropolitan of Caesarea of Cappadocia was the first among the metropolitans of the Diocese of Pontus, the metropolitan of Ephesus among the metropolitans of the Asian Diocese, and the metropolitan of Heraclea on the Propontis among the metropolitans of the Diocese of Thrace, when it comes to the dioceses that formed the immediate area of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[77] This first diocesan metropolitan is given the title *exarch* (ἔξαρχος) in canons of the Church,[78] but they are also called *archbishops* on their seals.[79] This title is also used for the metropolitans of Caesarea, Ephesus and Heraclea in official documents such as the acts of the councils, like the acts of the councils of 869/870 and 879/880.[80]

The use of the unofficial title of *chairman* for the head of the church in Bulgaria in one Greek and one Latin document almost at the same time leads to the conclusion that the ecclesiastic to whom that title refers occupied a position that was not completely defined and clear in the circumstances of the period, but which resembled the position of *diocesan exarchs*, i.e. *archbishops*. They had no real authority over the other metropolitans of

[76] IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 17, Syntagma II, 258–259; Trullo 38, ibidem, 392.

[77] II Ecum. (Constantinopolis) 2, Syntagma II, 169–170; IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 9, 17, ibidem, 237, 258–259; Milaš 1895–1896 I, 189–199; Meyendorff 1989, 54–59; ODB I, 625–626 (A. Papadakis, A. Kazhdan); II 767 (A. Kazhdan, A. Papadakis), 1359 (A. Papadakis).

[78] IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 9, 17, Syntagma II, 237, 258–259; ODB II, 767 (A. Kazhdan).

[79] Laurent, Sceaux V/1, no. 246–247, 254–258, 262 (*Isaac, by the grace of God, archbishop of Ephesus, reverend and exarch of all Asia*), 301; Byzantine Lead Seals I/2, no. 1350, 2214; I/3, no. 2986, 2987; II, no. 682, 777, 898.

[80] Gesta octavae synodis, 141, 157, 187, 273, 306, 357; Mansi, XVII, 373 B, 388 C, 391 A, 408 D, 409 B, E, 420 B, 480 D, 485 A, 488 B, 501 A–B, 509 E, 521 B, E.

the diocese, except that they held the primacy of honour and had the right to judge in mutual disputes between bishops and metropolitans of a certain diocese if the dispute could be resolved without bringing it before the patriarch.[81] As the canons stipulate that the *division of ecclesiastical affairs should follow the division of state and civil affairs*,[82] it is quite clear that the eparchies that were restored in Bulgaria, as an independent country, had to form a certain whole within Bulgarian state borders. Since it was not a separate patriarchate, nor was it autocephalous, and it consisted of several eparchies—metropolitanates, it would principally be that it represented exactly one such *diocese* within the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It was probably headed by one of the eparchial metropolitans, mentioned in *notitia* no. 3, metropolitan of Odessus or metropolitan of Tomis. Moreover, he could bear the title of one of these two cities, and still reside near Prince Boris in the state capital Pliska which, although it was a new city and did not have a bishop according to ancient custom, was not far from Odessus. The authority of this metropolitan over the other metropolitans and bishops, according to canon law, was not great, indeed only honorary, but bearing in mind that Bulgaria was an independent country, the situation on the ground all but ensured that his influence would be greater than that of similar titulars within the emperor's state. In the organization of the Church of Rome, a similar position of the chief metropolitan of a larger territorial unit composed of several metropolitan eparchies was held by a metropolitan with the honorary title of *primate* (*primas*).[83] According to one source from the second half of the twelfth century, the head of the church of Bulgaria "was first called *primate* (πρίμας), that is, in the language of Hellas, πρῶτος, and in Slavic or Bulgarian *prvul* (*прьвуль*, πρεβόλεος), which also means the first, because among the Bulgarians, *prvul* is the first (ὁ πρῶτος)... The Latins call him *primas*".[84] Although, like the church leaders of Caesarea, Ephesus and Heraclea, he could bear the honorary title of *archbishop*, he was not in any case the *archbishop of Bulgaria* (ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Βουλγαρίας) which is mentioned in the *Cletorologion of Philotheus* from 899.[85]

[81] IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 17, Syntagma II, 258–259.
[82] Trullo 38, Syntagma II, 392.
[83] LdMA VII, 209–210 (M. Stratamann).
[84] Prinzing 1978, 279; Nikolov 2021, 146–147.
[85] Oikonomidès, Listes, 137.17; 245.17.

Thus, in Bulgaria in 870, the old episcopal and metropolitan sees would be restored, as prescribed by the holy canons,[86] and considering their special position, within an independent country, they would be united to represent a separate diocese. However, as that *diocese* included an *independent country*, the natural course of things dictated that one of the metropolitans, certainly the one closest to the prince, should appear and impose himself as the first among the others, his position appearing more prominent, exactly analogous to the position of the head of state, the prince of Bulgaria. In every other respect, he and the other metropolitans and bishops in Bulgaria were subordinate to the patriarch of Constantinople, part of his hierarchy, dependent on him for ordination and the sending of omophoria, as well as for the election of bishops, since bishops were still sent from Byzantium. Therefore, they were not autocephalous or autonomous. This situation would change only after the decisions of the council of 879/880, according to which the church in Bulgaria became autocephalous in relation to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

It remains an open question how Prince Boris, who had embarked on the path of breaking with Rome because the pope did not want to appoint him an archbishop according to his wish, came to terms with the situation established in this way after the decision of 870. It is known that he accepted that decision, and the rest was probably the work of Byzantine diplomacy, but also of Christian laws and canons on the rights of the sees, which he showed himself willing to respect when he sent his emissaries to the council of 870 to ask about the *legal rights* of a certain patriarchal see over Bulgaria.

Another question remains open, and that is the question of bishoprics and ecclesiastical organization in the western parts of the Bulgarian state, in the territory conquered by the Bulgarians during the ninth century, which was located in the area of the former *Prefecture of Illyricum*. *Notitia* no. 3 limits itself, as far as the Bulgarian land is concerned, only to its eastern part, i.e. to the provinces of Second Moesia, Scythia Minor and Thrace, which had always belonged to the throne of Constantinople, and in the area of the former Prefecture of Illyricum, it mentions only one metropolis—*Serdica*, without an indication of the name of its eparchy (province—Mediterranean Dacia) and without suffragans.[87] This area had once

[86] Trullo 37, Syntagma II, 388, clearly prescribes that the episcopal sees that have fallen into desolation *at different times* due to barbarian invasions have to be restored.

[87] Notitiae, 3.49; Komatina 2023, 791–794.

belonged to the Roman See which still asserted its rights, on which, indeed, it based its claims to the whole of Bulgaria. This was the argument of the Roman legates at the Council of 870, and the Roman Church did not give up on it even after that. However, since it was part of the Bulgarian state, the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was undisputed. Between the two councils, the one that closed in 870 and the one that opened in 879, the church organization was renewed in that area as well. This is evidenced by the signature of Bishop *Agathon of Morava* in the acts of the aforementioned council of 879,[88] while a letter of Pope John VIII from 878 also mentions Bishop *Sergius of Belgrade*.[89] Moreover, the first mentioned, Agathon of Morava, was not only a bishop, but a metropolitan.[90] His seat was at the confluence of the Great Morava and the Danube, in the land of the Slavic tribe of the Moravians, who had been conquered by the Bulgarians during their westward expansion during the second quarter of the ninth century.[91] The eparchy that he managed as a metropolitan certainly included the western parts of the then Bulgarian state, i.e. the Morava River Valley, and the aforementioned bishop of Belgrade was most likely his subordinate.[92] Thus, in the significant decade between 870 and 880, he would actually be the westernmost metropolitan of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, right on the border with the Roman Church and the domain of the Frankish Empire. In this capacity, he was the most suitable person to be the ambassador of the Byzantine emperor Basil I to the East Frankish king Louis the German in 873.[93] This is the best example of how strong Byzantium's influence was on the church in Bulgaria in those ten years. If a hierarch on the soil of Bulgaria could serve the Byzantine emperor for purely political purposes, then it is completely clear how much he and the other hierarchs acted in accordance with the interests of the Byzantine church and the emperor in church matters. Agathon himself, as the metropolitan of a border area, could very easily, with the support of the emperor's authority, extend his influence to the neighbourhood. Here I am primarily thinking of Serbia, which lay on the western borders of his metropolitanate.[94] In the acts of the council of

[88] Mansi, XVII, 373 D; Komatina 2023, 792–794.
[89] Johannis VIII epp., 58.24–60.31; Komatina 2023, 792–793.
[90] Komatina 2010, 359–363. Cf. Pirivatrić 1997, 179–180, 187–188, 191–192.
[91] Komatina 2010b, 74–78.
[92] Komatina 2010, 364–366; Komatina 2023, 791–794.
[93] Annales Fuldenses, 81; Komatina 2010, 362–363, 366.
[94] Komatina 2010, 366–367.

879/880 some other bishops are also mentioned, who are often connected with the ecclesiastical organization in Bulgaria at that time, such as *Theoctistus of Tiberiopolis*, *John of Dardanus* and *Gabriel of Ohrid*.[95] However, it is certain that the mentioned Theoctistus was the bishop of Tiberiopolis in Asia Minor, and not of Strumica, which later appears under the other name of Tiberiopolis, that John of Dardanus was the bishop of Dardanus in Asia Minor, and not of one of the cities in the late Roman province of Dardania in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula, while Ohrid itself was probably still not under Bulgarian but under Byzantine rule at that time and under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Dyrrachium of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[96]

Since at the council of 879, Patriarch Photius claimed that since his (re) instatement on the patriarchal throne, on 26 October 877, he had not ordained or sent an omophorion to any bishop in Bulgaria, this means that all bishops in Bulgaria had assumed their positions before that date, and that the organization of the metropolitan and episcopal network in Bulgaria was entirely the work of the administration of Patriarch Ignatius.

Neither should we neglect to emphasize the easily noticeable difference between the Roman and Byzantine ecclesiastical organization in Bulgaria. Although at no time during the struggle for jurisdiction did the Roman church cease to appeal to its ancient rights, it attempted nonetheless to organize the church in Bulgaria on the basis of a successfully implemented mission in a pagan country, according to the pattern that it had successfully applied in the past centuries in the Germanic countries (from Anglo-Saxon Britain in 597 to Saxony in the eighties of the eighth century), and which Pope Nicholas described to Prince Boris in his *Answers*—first a bishop is consecrated, then the flock is multiplied, then the number of bishops is multiplied, and an archbishop is placed among them, as the head of the country.[97] Constantinople, on the other hand, carried out the organization of the church in Bulgaria according to strict rules and laws, and fully referring to the existing tradition of the Christian church in the Bulgarian land.

[95] Mansi, XVII, 373 E – 376 A, 376 B, 377 D.

[96] Cf. Nikolova 1997, 67–68, 76–77; Stefoska 2008, 77–87; Cheshmedjiev 2011, 143–156; Filiposki 2011, 257–276; Komatina 2023, 791–796.

[97] Responsa Nicolai, c. 72–73, 592.27–593.17.

Papal Diplomacy in the Struggle to Regain Influence in Bulgaria

As already mentioned, Rome did not accept the council decision of 4 March 870 that Bulgaria should fall under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and not of Rome. It was a great defeat for the papal delegates in Constantinople, which left a painful impression on them and overshadowed all the other decisions of the council. They had already pointed out during the discussion on the issue that they had not come to the council for that reason, that the pope had not authorized them to discuss that issue, which he considered indisputable, let alone to participate in making a decision against the interests of the Apostolic See. Therefore, Anastasius the Librarian, who at the time of the council was in Constantinople as a representative of the Frankish emperor Louis II and attended the final session of the council and provided all the necessary assistance to the papal legates,[98] in the preface to his Latin translation of the acts of the council, addressed to Pope Hadrian II, after a brief forestory of the conflict within of the Church of Constantinople from the time of the restoration of the cult of icons in 843, gives a brief overview of the events at the council, emphasizing that the decision of the council on the Bulgarian question cannot and must not be considered an official decision of the council and that it is not found in the official acts and protocols of the council in their Greek original.[99]

The then Pope Hadrian II fully agreed with the opinion of his legates and considered all the decisions made regarding the church in Bulgaria illegal. Therefore, he reacted energetically, and a year later, in a letter dated 10 November 871 addressed to *Emperors Basil, Constantine and Leo*, the pope strongly protested against the fact that Patriarch Ignatius had ordained *a bishop* in Bulgaria.[100] In the same year, the pope sent a letter to the patriarch himself, protesting once again against the patriarch's activities in Bulgaria, even accusing him of certain canonical improprieties.[101]

However, this was still a mild reaction compared to what followed from his successor on the Throne of St. Peter, Pope John VIII (872–882). An energetic man who, in a West torn apart by the struggles within the

[98] Chrysos 2018/2019, 153–161; Cò 2020, 23–39.
[99] Gesta octavae synodis, 7–25.
[100] Hadriani II epp., 760.14–15.
[101] Hadriani II epp., 762.10–21.

Carolingian dynasty, was striving to ensure the pope's word was final, John was also ready and determined to exert all his powers, all his political and pastoral influence, as well as the great reputation of the Apostolic See in the East. During the ten years of his pontificate, he dispatched an impressive number of letters to almost all the relevant actors of state and church politics in the Balkan Peninsula, starting with Emperor Basil and Prince Boris, through Patriarch Ignatius and then Photius, the largest number of influential Bulgarian dignitaries, church clergy of Byzantium, Bulgaria and Dalmatian cities, to the Serbian and Croatian princes Mutimir, Domagoj, Sedeslav and Branimir. All these letters were written with the aim of either consolidating or expanding the influence and jurisdiction of the Roman Church in the Balkans.[102]

Several different periods can be very clearly observed in which John VIII's "epistolary diplomacy" was particularly pronounced. The first came at the very beginning of his pontificate, in 872 and 873. He ascended the throne of St. Peter between 14 November and 13 December 872, and probably before the year was out, or at the beginning of the next, he sent the first of many letters to the Bulgarian prince Boris Michael. In it he expressed his firm and irreconcilable position concerning the interests of the Apostolic See in Bulgaria. The letter makes it abundantly clear just how strongly the pope opposed any decision of the council of 870 on the surrender of Bulgaria to the jurisdiction of Constantinople. In his opinion, Bulgaria was exclusively under the jurisdiction of Rome. The Byzantine priests in Boris' lands were intruders, and because of this John threatened to excommunicate Patriarch Ignatius himself, and to anathematize and excommunicate the priests he had sent to Bulgaria. Moreover, angry that his apostolic and missionary rights had so recklessly been trampled upon, the pope threatened Prince Boris himself with excommunication.[103] With this letter, the struggle of the Roman See against the decision of the council of 870 on Bulgaria, which had been begun by Pope Hadrian II in 871 with his letters to Emperor Basil and Patriarch Ignatius, continued, but this time with far greater fervour, energy and self-awareness. Pope Hadrian II had limited himself in 871 to protests only, in 872/873 Pope John VIII added threats of excommunication from the church.

[102] On the relations in the Rome-Constantinople-Bulgaria triangle in the period between 870 and 882, cf. Simeonova 1998, 296–330; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 186–193

[103] Johannis VIII epp., 277.23–39.

However, the renewed struggle for Bulgaria was just beginning at that time. In order to have a reliable basis for action in that direction, the pope first decided to prevent any possible further spread of Byzantine influence. Therefore, at the same time as the above letter to Boris was dispatched, he also wrote to the Croatian prince Domagoj, warning him of the *Greek cunning* that had deprived the Church of Rome of Bulgaria, and accusing Patriarch Ignatius of having ordained some schismatic there *under the name of archbishop*.[104] Under such circumstances, the pope could not but warn the Croatian prince of the dangers lurking from the Byzantine side, especially in the context of the strong political presence of the Empire in Dalmatia and Croatia in those years, which we will discuss further in the following chapter.

The pope's basic ideological position throughout the "struggle for Bulgaria" was, as with his two predecessors, the fact that the whole of Eastern Illyricum once belonged to the Roman Church. In that case, the Church of Rome claimed not only Bulgaria but also Serbia, which also included a part of the aforementioned prefecture. The pope was familiar with the ecclesiastical circumstances in Serbia and tried to use them to his advantage and for the purpose of further strengthening his position in the *Bulgarian question*. In May 873, he composed a series of letters concerning the position and circumstances of the bishop/archbishop of Pannonia and Moravia, Methodius, the brother of Constantine the Philosopher.[105] On that occasion, the pope well noted the importance of the tradition of the see of ancient Sirmium, which was at least formally occupied by Methodius, and the role it could play in his Eastern policy. It could have been the centre and starting point for the expansion of Roman jurisdiction in the area of ancient Illyricum, because it was located right on the border with Bulgaria and Serbia. There were also historical grounds for such an undertaking. It has already been said that the pope derived his right to Bulgaria from the fact that a good part of its territory once belonged to the Prefecture of (Eastern) Illyricum, which was under the Apostolic See from the ecclesiastical point of view until the eighth century. Sirmium, as an ancient imperial city, was the centre of this prefecture in the fourth century, and its bishop was the papal *vicar* for its territory (a position that would be taken over by the bishop of Thessalonica at the beginning of the

[104] Johannis VIII epp., 278.13–17.
[105] Johannis VIII epp., 281.1–286.10.

fifth century). At the time of the beginning of the Roman mission in Bulgaria, in 866, the bishopric of Sirmium did not exist, but in 869, on the basis of its tradition, the brother of the Slavic teacher and Byzantine missionary among the Slavs of Central Europe, Constantine the Philosopher, Methodius, was appointed *bishop of Pannonia*. Now, when the struggle over Bulgaria flared up again, the pope noticed the obviously favourable position of the Pannonian diocese in that struggle. He immediately invoked its old rights and sent an invitation to the Serbian prince Mutimir, in May 873, to *return* to its jurisdiction, *following the custom of his ancestors*, bearing in mind those rights.[106] The purely political motive of this action is already visible in the fact that the mentioned letter is clearly distinguished by the name and position of its addressee, who is a Serbian prince, while all the other letters from the same group, all written in May 873, were addressed to the secular and ecclesiastical authorities of Bavaria—the King Carloman, Archbishop Adalwinus of Salzburg, bishops Hermericus of Passau and Anon of Freising and the papal legate Paul of Ancona, under circumstances which it is not necessary to discuss now, but which will be dealt with in the proper place.[107]

After this, there was a slight lull in the pope's "diplomatic offensive" related to the *Bulgarian question*. He sent the following letters at the end of 874 or at the beginning of 875 to Prince Boris and Emperor Basil. They reflect a new phase of Pope John's struggle for the return of papal authority over Bulgaria. At this stage, the pope seems to have switched from words to actions. He now seems to be fulfilling the threats that he had made to Boris in 872/873. The bishops and priests who were sent to Bulgaria from Byzantium are not only openly not recognized by the pope, but will also be anathematized *if they do not come to their senses*, as well as those who sent them,[108] i.e. Patriarch Ignatius. That the pope was quite serious about this, he made clear in the letter sent to Emperor Basil at the same time, in which he called Ignatius to appear before the Apostolic See, as the supreme canonical court, and to justify himself before it for his sins, the greatest of which was appropriation of the "other's" *newly baptized Bulgarian people*.[109] On that occasion also, the pope played on the card of

[106] Johannis VIII epp., 282.24–30.
[107] Cf. chapter *Methodius' activity and the birth of the Slavic Church.*
[108] Johannis VIII epp., 294.20–295.8.
[109] Johannis VIII epp., 296.23–34.

the Bulgarian prince's honour, telling him that it seemed his people had rejected idolatry not to become true Christians, but simply schismatics.[110]

There were no answers to the pope's letters from 872/873, or those of 874/875. In Bulgaria and Constantinople, things continued in the manner established in 870. The Church of Constantinople ordained the bishops who were sent to Bulgaria and gave them the omophorion, and these bishops ordained the priests there. Nobody paid attention to the pope's protests and threats, neither the emperor, nor the patriarch, nor the Bulgarian prince himself. During all that time, not a single letter has been preserved that any of them sent to the pope, either in response to his requests or for any other purpose, nor can it be recognized from the pope's letters that he received any response. This was a far cry from the time when, between 866 and 869, Boris had sent embassies to Rome several times. Between 870 and 877, the ties between Rome and Constantinople seem to have been completely severed. No delegation was exchanged in those years. It is as if the council of 869/870, convened for the sake of reconciliation, only deepened the divide even more, precisely because of its decisions on the *Bulgarian question*. Ignatius, before 870 an ally of Rome, as an opponent of Photius, after that year became as unfit a figure from the Roman point of view as his rival. Horrified by the violation of the rights they believed they had in Bulgaria, in Rome they accused Ignatius of stealing other's dioceses, ordaining laymen as deacons, schismatics as bishops, etc., and they summoned him to justify himself before the Apostolic See, as some kind of heretic.

All these efforts and harsh words were in vain—the pope's word in Constantinople seemed to be ignored. Emperor Basil himself was no longer interested in any cooperation with the Roman Church. The hopes he had placed in it for the sake of a joint fight against the Arabs came to naught because of a misunderstanding about Bari. The city, which was captured from the Saracens in 871 by the forces of the Western emperor Louis II, finally, after his death in 875, passed into the hands of the Byzantines, who thus gained complete control over Southern Italy.[111] The death of this ruler brought about the complete disintegration of secular power in the West. At that moment the pope was the one who needed Byzantine protection from the Arabs, because he could not get it from anywhere else. However, his intransigence related to the *Bulgarian*

[110] Johannis VIII epp., 295.6–8.
[111] Ostrogorski 1959, 234.

question certainly alienated Constantinople. In such circumstances, the pope's initiative could not have yielded any results. Therefore, in 876 and 877 there were no changes in the field of the *Bulgarian question*.

Of course, the pope did not give up his pretensions, but only waited for more favourable circumstances, which began to take shape quite suddenly and unexpectedly. At the end of the summer of 877, for the first time in several years, an embassy from Emperor Basil went to Rome. The task of this delegation was to ask the pope to send his delegates to Constantinople, in order to settle the dispute between Photius and Ignatius once and for all and finally bring stability to the ranks of the Byzantine Church.[112] For, despite great external successes, such as the organization of the church in Bulgaria, the traces of the *Schism of Photius* were still present in the Byzantine church. The clergy and priesthood were deeply divided between supporters of Ignatius and supporters of Photius, and the latter had already been persecuted for ten years, the object of intolerance.

On that occasion, the emperor certainly did not even mention the *Bulgarian question*. From his perspective it had been decided in 870, and after that he turned a deaf ear to every attempt by the pope to get back at him. The issue of the *Schism of Photius* for the emperor was completely separate from the *Bulgarian question*. However, for the pope, an ideal opportunity had now arisen to connect these two issues, and to condition the solution of one upon the solution of the other, which would be in his favour. The emperor himself requested ambassadors to solve the problem of Photius in Constantinople. For Pope John VIII and his constant preoccupation, this appeared to be an excellent opportunity, once again to raise before emperor and patriarch in Constantinople the *Bulgarian question*—an opportunity that should not be missed. Pope John invested most of his energy and political skill into the implementation of this strategy and this constitutes the third phase of his diplomatic action in Byzantium and Bulgaria.

On 16 April 878, in response to the emperor's request from the summer of the previous year, the papal legates, bishops Paul of Ancona and Eugene of Ostia, left for Constantinople. They took with them a series of letters addressed by the pope to all the main political and ecclesiastical leaders of Byzantium and Bulgaria. There is one letter each for Prince Boris Michael, for his brother, for *comes* Peter, for the Byzantine bishops in Bulgaria, as well as one each for Emperor Basil and Patriarch Ignatius.

[112] Cf. further, the chapter *Photius' return and the council of 879/880*.

Apparently, the pope did not know at that moment that the old patriarch Ignatius had died on 23 October of the previous year, in 877. The patriarchal throne was immediately retaken by Photius.

We should now return to the pope's letters of 16 April 878. Although the envoys were sent to Constantinople for other reasons, these letters deal primarily with the issue of Bulgaria, and thus show that it was the pope's main concern, and the *Schism of Photius* was already receding into the background. In the letters addressed to the Bulgarian lords, Prince Boris, his brother (Dox?) and the *comes* Peter, the former ambassador to Rome and Constantinople in 869 and 870, the pope undisguisedly points out his pretensions. He wants to govern the Bulgarian ecclesiastical diocese, according to the ancient right which his See possesses. He publicly attacks the *Greeks*, *whom the Lord also abandoned*, accuses them of heresy and apostasy, and thereby tries to persuade the Bulgarians that they must not follow them in their fall. Now, for the first time, the pope was openly interfering in the internal affairs of the church in Bulgaria, and ordered the bishop of Belgrade, a Slav, the eunuch Sergius, ordained by George, one of the Byzantine bishops in Bulgaria, whom the pope thus also did not recognize, to be deposed for improper actions.[113] In his letters to the prince's brother and *comes* Peter, the pope mentions the merits of St. Peter and the rights of the See that he founded, wanting to convince both of them of the correctness of their pretensions to their land and emphasize their obligation to return to the See of St. Peter.[114] Important here is the note that the pope makes in his letter to Boris that he *does not want to rule their country*, but only to administer, by right, the church in it.[115] Obviously, the pope was aware of the great connection and interdependence of state and church power in Bulgaria, and he thought that the reason why Boris did not want to accede to the Apostolic See was actually the fear that he would lose his power over the church, i.e. that if he did not rule the church, then the church would rule him and the country.

The letters addressed to the Byzantine political and ecclesiastical authorities on the same occasion on the same issue are equally decisive. In a letter to Patriarch Ignatius, whom he did not yet know had died, the pope demanded for the third time that he withdraw the bishops he had

[113] Johannis VIII epp., 60.22–30.
[114] Johannis VIII epp., 61.1–62.12, 65.14–66.8.
[115] Johannis VIII epp., 59.12–19.

consecrated and sent to Bulgaria.[116] In the first instance, in 872, Pope Hadrian merely stated his request; the second time, in 874/875, Pope John threatened Ignatius *with an excommunication* and called him to justify himself before the Apostolic See. The third time was also the last. Therefore, the pope's repeated request now took the form of an ultimatum: if all Byzantine bishops were not withdrawn from Bulgaria within 30 days, Patriarch Ignatius would be deposed and excommunicated from the church.[117] The pope sent a letter with the same contents to the same bishops in Bulgaria, demanding that they themselves leave this diocese within 30 days, and promising them in return some other episcopal see that was found vacant.[118]

This was the most energetically conceived diplomatic action of Pope John VIII related to the *Bulgarian question*, addressed to the Bulgarian secular and Byzantine secular and spiritual authorities. However, what was demanded in the letters remained no more than a dead letter on paper. When they arrived in Constantinople, the envoys Eugene and Paul would discover how much conditions had changed since Pope John had received any news. The letters of 16 April 878 most likely never even reached Bulgaria,[119] because in the meantime it had become clear that the *Bulgarian question* would be decided upon in Constantinople, at a new council dedicated to solving the question of Photius.

The circumstances they found in Constantinople fully occupied the papal legates Paul and Eugene. They could not complete their task and did not go to Bulgaria. When he was finally informed of all the events, which will be discussed below, Pope John VIII found another way to address Boris directly, without the mediation of Constantinople. In the meantime, embassies came to him from Emperor Basil and Patriarch Photius, asking him to send a legate who would officially recognize Photius at the council being prepared for the occasion, and certainly instilled in him additional hope and faith that he would finally resolve the *Bulgarian question* in his favour. It was just a sign that additional pressure should be exerted on Boris himself. Therefore, in May 879, the pope sent a new envoy, the priest John of Venice, with two letters for the Bulgarian lords—one for Prince Boris, and the other for his most prominent boyars. The letters

[116] Johannis VIII epp., 62.20–63.36.

[117] Johannis VIII epp., loc. cit.

[118] Johannis VIII epp., 66.14–67.5.

[119] This can be seen from the following papal letter to Boris, composed in May 879, Johannis VIII epp., 146.14–37. On that, cf. Simeonova 1998, 306–312.

made the usual arguments, about the primacy of St. Peter and the obligation of the Bulgarians to return to the authority of his Apostolic See, but, interestingly, with very few accusations to the account of the *Greeks*.[120]

This time the pope did not send his envoy via Constantinople, but directly to Bulgaria, via Dalmatia and Croatia. This is why he furnished him with another letter, addressed to the Croatian prince Sedeslav, in which he requests free and safe passage for the papal legate to Bulgaria.[121] This prince Sedeslav was a Byzantine protégé on the Croatian throne. During his reign, Emperor Basil's influence on the situation in Croatia was at its peak. It seems that the mentioned prince also acted in ecclesiastical matters in favour of the Byzantine Church and that he tried to subjugate Croatia to it.[122] This, again, could have been the inevitable result of the several years of Byzantine overlordship, conceived as early as 870. In May 879, the priest John sailed from Italy to Croatia with the aforementioned three papal letters (to Boris, the Bulgarian boyars and Sedeslav). However, arriving there, sometime before Ascension Day, on 21 May, he no longer found Sedeslav alive and on the throne. He had been killed by the anti-Byzantine pretender Branimir who took the throne.[123] Branimir immediately severed all ties with the Empire, especially ecclesiastical ties, and solemnly announced that he was returning to the Roman Church. This is why the papal envoy John did not continue his journey to Bulgaria, but returned from Croatia to Rome to carry Branimir's letter to the pope. The pope took note of these events and on Ascension Day, 21 May 879, celebrated a mass where he thanked God for the changes in Croatia and blessed its prince, people and country.[124]

Thus, the success of the Byzantine Church in Croatia and Dalmatia was short-lived, thanks to the apostasy of the local prince, who saw belonging to the Roman Church as a pledge of independence from the Byzantine Empire. But that was not the end of the mission of John of Venice. He has not yet completed his main task, the visit to Bulgaria, nor has the pope given up on it. Soon after, on 8 June 879 the pope composed a new letter for the Bulgarian prince, with almost the same content as the previous

[120] Johannis VIII epp., 147.6–18.

[121] Johannis VIII epp., 147.24–34.

[122] In the letter of the pope to Sedeslav's successor Branimir, dated 7 June 879, it is stated that the pope received with joy and gratitude the news that the same Branimir had returned to the Roman Church, Johannis VIII epp., 152.4–40. About that, cf. chapter *Expansion of the area of jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople*.

[123] Istoria Veneticorum, 142.

[124] Johannis VIII epp., 152.28–35.

one, reminding him of the history of his Christianization, and convincing him to return to the authority of the Roman Church, with the fact that now he no longer mentions the *Greeks* at all.[125] He sent the letter, again via Dalmatia and Croatia, through John of Venice, who therefore brought two more letters, one for the clergy of the Dalmatian cities, and the other for Prince Branimir—from those we learn about the events described above that had taken place in these countries that spring.[126]

Unfortunately, there is no information about the further fate of John of Venice's mission. In the letter to Boris, the pope wanted the prince to send his answer through the same ambassador, John. However, that answer is not known. What else is known about the relations between Boris and the pope in the time before the Council of Photius, which began at the beginning of November 879, we learn from another letter that the pope sent to the Bulgarian prince. It is dated 14 June 879, thus only a few days after these letters sent through John of Venice. Therefore, scholars believe that it was written later, sometime after the mission of John of Venice.[127] However, if the dating is correct, it would open the possibility for different interpretations. Namely, the letter states that it is a response to the messages and gifts brought to the pope from Boris by *his* representative Sundica. Could it have happened that at the very time when the pope was preparing his envoy, John of Venice, for the journey to Bulgaria, a delegation from the Bulgarian prince himself arrived in Rome, quite unexpectedly, led by the boyar Sundica, bearing the prince's greetings and gifts for the Holy Father? If this is the case, then it would turn out that the mission of John of Venice was unnecessary, and that he would not reach Bulgaria that time either—the Bulgarian envoys would definitely return to their country, so they would take the pope's letter to their prince. That new letter is dated 14 June 879. The question arises as to what the reason was for Boris to send a mission to Rome, since he had not done so for ten years, ever since the unsuccessful mission of the boyar Peter in 869, when he had asked Pope Hadrian to consecrate an archbishop for Bulgaria, a development which led to Boris' decision to appeal to Constantinople again. Judging by the content of the aforementioned letter dated 14 June, Boris did not express a desire to return to the authority of the Roman

[125] Johannis VIII epp., 153.36–154.27.

[126] The letter to Branimir is dated 7 June, the letter to Boris 8 June and a letter to the clergy of Dalmatian cities 10 June 879, but it is clear that they are connected and that all of them were taken by John of Venice when he left for Bulgaria, via Dalmatia and Croatia, shortly after 10 June 879, cf. Johannis VIII epp., 151.36–154.27, 157.1–38.

[127] Cf. IBI VII, 167, n. 1.

Church through his embassy. From his side, only gifts reached the pope. Therefore, the pope again, with extreme zeal, invited Boris to return to the bosom of the Roman Church, his *mother, who gave birth to him in faith*, through the missionaries of Pope Nicholas. He emphasized that this *mother* loved him as an only son and that the *Greeks* were illegally governing the diocese of his country. In the end, he concluded that he would expel them from the land *by the decision of the apostolic throne*, if the prince himself did not bow to him in this.[128] Is this move, to send an embassy to Rome after ten years, to be attributed to Boris' cautious diplomacy? Let us remember that ten years earlier, he had timely and correctly presented the problem of the church in his country before the council, which was then underway in Constantinople in 869/870, and from all the circumstances surrounding it, it was clear that he maintained diplomatic relations with Constantinople and was well informed about everything that was happening and had to do with his country. Is it unlikely that Boris found out this time as well that a new council was soon to be held in Constantinople, where Photius' question would be resolved? Finally, we should remember the papal envoys from 878, Paul and Eugene, who were still in Constantinople. If Boris was a very thoughtful ruler, which he had undoubtedly proved himself to be, it becomes clear that, as soon as he learned a great council was to be held in Constantinople, well aware of the pretensions that the pope had on his country, he immediately sent an embassy to Rome, after ten years, with the sole aim of once again examining the position of the Roman Church, which would be presented at the upcoming council, where the question of the fate of his country and the church in it would certainly be resolved.

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The Question of the Role of Basil I in the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats

According to the information provided by his grandson, Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959), Emperor Basil I played a decisive role in the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats. However, the value and credibility of Porphyrogenitus' account of that process are obscured by their mutual contradictions. Considering that Porphyrogenitus is the only one who gives direct information about the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats, researchers of this issue have always been forced to navigate the confusion that he left behind with his information.[1]

[1] The bibliography of works on the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats is extremely extensive. Maksimović 1996, 155–174, stands out in the sea of contributions of different value, where an overview and critical evaluation of the most interesting earlier opinions are given. Of the previous works, we should highlight: Radojičić 1952, 253–256; Klaić 1971, 191–208; Obolenski 1991, 120–124; Goldstein 1995, 227–241. The generalized and standard manual in the West, Vlasto 1970, 187–199, 207–209. In recent times, this question has been addressed in more detail by Živković 2002, 283–314, 341–343, 382–401; Živković 2004, 73–84; Živković 2012, 56–61, 140–143, 163–166; Živković 2013, 35–38; Vedriš 2015, 191–197; Komatina 2021, 147–157, 182–184, 194–202, 225–227, 295–298.

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Constantine Porphyrogenitus' News about the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats

In principle, Porphyrogenitus brings two traditions about the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats in his writings. The first places their conversion to Christianity immediately after their settlement in the Balkans, during the time of Emperor Heraclius (610–641). Another tradition assigns the main role in that process to Emperor Basil I (867–886). There is also a third tradition, which refers only to the Croats, which links their conversion to Christianity with the expansion of the power and influence of the Franks over them at the beginning of the ninth century.

The first tradition is presented by Porphyrogenitus in chapter 31 of *De administrando imperio (DAI)*, where he talks about the Croats, and in chapter 32 of the same book, where he presents the history of the Serbs. In chapter 31, talking about the Croats, Porphyrogenitus writes how they came to Dalmatia during the reign of Emperor Heraclius, how, according to the emperor's order, they fought with the Avars, who had previously conquered and devastated that province, how the Croats prevailed in that battle, suppressed the Avars and settled the land. Then their ruler was *Porga's father*.[2] Emperor Heraclius then, *having sent and bringing priests from Rome and making from them archbishops and bishops and priests and deacons, baptized the Croats*. At that time, the Croats were ruled by the Prince Porga.[3]

In chapter 32, in his history of the Serbs,[4] Porphyrogenitus writes the well-known lines about how the Serbs, from their homeland in the north, defected to the same Emperor Heraclius and how he allowed them to settle in the region of Thessalonica, where they founded the city of Servia, how they then wanted to return to the north, but, having crossed the Danube, they changed their minds, and through the commander of Belgrade, requested that the emperor grant them another land for settlement. The emperor then allowed them to settle the territories that they inhabited in the time of Porphyrogenitus, i.e. *Serbia, Pagania, the land of the Zachlumi, Terbunia and the land of the Kanalites*, because those lands

[2] DAI I, 31.8–21.

[3] DAI I, 31.21–25. Cf. Komatina 2021, 194–198.

[4] About chapter 32 of *De administrando imperio* and its *Serbian history*, cf. Ostrogorski 1949, 24–29; Maksimović 1982, 25–32; Komatina 2021, 264–271.

were deserted due to the Avar conquests.[5] The emperor settled them there as his subordinates, and then, *bringing priests from Rome, baptized them and, teaching them to do well the works of piety, exposed them the Christian faith.*[6]

Another tradition about the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats, in which he links their Christianization to the reign and personality of his grandfather, Emperor Basil I, is transmitted by Porphyrogenitus in chapter 29 of *De administrando imperio*, and in sections 52 and 54 of the text of the *Vita Basilii*, the biography he wrote and dedicated to his grandfather. In both writings, the statements, with certain discrepancies, largely match, so it is clear that they are mutually dependent—either they come from the same source, or the text of one served as a source for the other. It is known that in chapter 29 of *De administrando imperio* Porphyrogenitus himself writes that he composed that chapter in 948/949.[7] As the latest research has shown, the *Vita Basilii* was created between 957 and the emperor's death in 959,[8] which means that the data from chapter 29 of *De administrando imperio* have chronological priority over the data from the *Vita Basilii*, and that they represent the original version of the account, and that the data from the *Vita Basilii* represent a reworking.[9]

In chapter 29 of the *De adminstrando imperio*, the emperor writes that since the time of Emperor Heraclius, the whole of Dalmatia and the peoples who live near it, i.e. *Croats, Serbs, Zachlumi, Terbuniotes, Kanalites, Diocletians and Narentans, also called Pagans*, recognized Roman rule.[10] Then he states how, due to the incompetence of the later Roman emperors, especially Michael of Amorium, the Stammerer (820–829), the Dalmatian cities became independent, not obeying the emperor or anyone else. Also the peoples there, *Croats, Serbs, Zachlumi, Terbuniotes, Kanalites, Diocletians and Pagans*, overthrew the authority of the Empire and

[5] DAI I, 32.7–25. In this passage, Porphyrogenitus omits to mention *Dioclea* among the countries inhabited by the Serbs, which is also why in chapter 35 of the same text, dedicated to Dioclea, it is not explicitly stated that it was inhabited by the Serbs during the time of Emperor Heraclius, as it appears in chapters 33, 34 and 36, dedicated to Zachlumia, Terbunia with Kanali and Pagania, DAI I, 33.8–10, 34.3–7, 35.6–9, 36.5–10, but it is clear from the entirety of his account about the Serbs and Croats that he considers it a Serbian territory, cf. Komatina 2015a, 33–43; Komatina 2021, 222–223.

[6] DAI I, 32.25–29. Cf. Komatina 2021, 225–227.

[7] DAI I, 29.233–235.

[8] Vita Basilii, 8*–9* (C. Mango); Varona 2009, 772–775.

[9] Komatina 2021, 36–47, 320–322.

[10] DAI I, 29.54–58.

became autonomous and independent, subordinate to no one.[11] Moreover, *most of these Slavs were not baptized, but remained unbaptized for a long time. In the time of the Christ-loving Emperor Basil, they sent emissaries asking and begging him to baptize the unbaptized among them, and to be, as from the beginning, subjects of the Roman Empire*. After listening to them, the emperor sent the "imperial man" with the priests (βασιλικὸν μετὰ καὶ ἱερέων) *and baptized all those who were found unbaptized among the mentioned nations.*[12] Having previously pointed out that the aforementioned peoples, like the other *Sclavenias*, *do not have archons, but only elders župans*, Porphyrogenitus continues that Emperor Basil, *after baptizing them, then appointed them archons, whom they themselves wanted and chose, from the family from which they themselves loved and wanted*. Then he points out that even up to his time, they were ruled by archons from the same lineages, and not from others.[13] However, Pagans (Narentans), *due to the inaccessibility of their land*, remained unbaptized. After that, turning to the same emperor, *they asked to be baptized as well. And (the emperor) having sent (his envoys) baptized them too.*[14] Then follows the story about the Arab attack on the Dalmatian cities of Budva, Rose, Kotor and Ragusa and the arrival of the imperial fleet of Nicetas Ooryphas to help the latter, about the departure of the Arabs to Bari, and the Byzantine-Frankish siege of that Italian city in 870/871, in which soldiers from Dalmatian cities and those from Slavic tribes in their hinterland participated as Byzantine subjects.[15]

In sections 52 and 54 of the biography of his grandfather, Emperor Basil I (*Vita Basilii*), Porphyrogenitus writes about the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats very similarly to the account of chapter 29 of *De administrando imperio*. The chronological and historical context is the same, the differences are in the order of presentation, the way of presentation, but also in some important details. By describing the events in connection with which he writes about the issue of the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats, Porphyrogenitus actually begins the second large unit of the description of the life and reign of his grandfather—the one in which he presents the events in the West of the Empire, since in the first unit he

[11] DAI I, 29.58–66.
[12] DAI I, 29.68–75.
[13] DAI I, 29.66–68, 75–79.
[14] DAI I, 29.79–84. Cf. Komatina 2021, 147–153.
[15] DAI I, 29.84–216.

described the events in the East. Porphyrogenitus begins this whole by stating that during the reign of Michael II (820–829) state affairs were neglected, that almost all of Italy and Sicily fell under the rule of the neighbouring *Carthaginians*, i.e. Muslims from *Africa*. And not only that, but also the *Scythians* who lived in Pannonia, Dalmatia and the neighbourhood, i.e. Croats, Serbs, Zachlumi, Terbuniotes, Kanalites, Diocletians and Narentans, *overthrew the primal authority of the Romans and became independent, obeying only their own archons. Many, showing even greater apostasy, separated themselves from divine baptism, so that they would not have any pledge of friendship and obedience to the Romans.*[16] Then he writes about the Arab attack on Budva, Rose and Kotor and the siege of Ragusa, and how the people of Ragusa sent emissaries to Constantinople asking for help from the then still reigning Emperor Michael III. Arriving in Constantinople, after 24 September 867, the Ragusan envoys found a new emperor on the throne, Basil I, who sent to their aid the imperial fleet led by Nicetas Ooryphas. Before that fleet, the Arabs retreated and headed for Bari in Italy.[17] When they found out about this, and about the virtues of the new emperor, the *Croats, Serbs and others hurried to recognize their former lordship over themselves and return to submission to Roman rule. For this reason, they also sent envoys to the emperor, both those who had apostatized with the same faith and those who had completely fallen away from divine baptism, remembering in a timely manner the ancient submission and how useful they had once been to the Romans, asking that they too submit to the humane yoke of the Roman government and under its shepherd*. The emperor listened to their ambassadors and granted their pleas. With these he sent *priests with the "imperial man"* (καὶ ἱερεῖς εὐθέως μετὰ καὶ βασιλικοῦ ἀνθρώπου), to free them *from spiritual dangers and bring them back to their former faith*. Since everyone *returned to the divine baptism and once again came under Roman subjection, the full authority of the emperor was accepted in that region, because the Slavic tribes accepted that, according to the emperor's order*, they be ruled by local archons, their tribesmen, i.e. those whom they themselves chose and ordained.[18] After these lines, Porphyrogenitus, as in chapter 29 of *De*

[16] Vita Basilii, 51.32–52.14.
[17] Vita Basilii, 53.1–45.
[18] Vita Basilii, 54.1–35. Cf. Komatina 2021, 320–324.

administrando imperio, describes the joint Byzantine-Frankish siege of Bari and the participation of South Slavic tribes, as Byzantine vassals, in it.[19]

We should also mention the third tradition transmitted by Porphyrogenitus, in chapter 30 of the *De administrando imperio*, which refers only to the Christianization of the Croats. In that place, Porphyrogenitus offers a somewhat different story about the settlement of the Croats and their struggle for Dalmatia with the Avars than the one in chapter 31. He also mentions the emigration of a part of the Croats to *Pannonia and Illyricum*, where they formed a separate principality. He then talks about the attack of the Franks on the Croats and the seven-year struggle they waged against them.[20] Since after this struggle they remained *independent and self-governing, they requested baptism from the pope of Rome, and (the pope) sent bishops and baptized them in the time of Porin, their archon*.[21] Despite significant differences, this tradition about the Christianization of the Croats is closer to that of *DAI* 31 than to that of *DAI* 29 and *Vita Basilii* 52–54 and, as we have shown elsewhere, lies at its foundation. It actually originates from the Croatian folk tradition, which is recorded in its original form in chapter 30 of the *DAI*, and in chapter 31 in Porphyrogenitus' interpretation. The Croats received their baptism from Rome, and the name of the archon *Porin* (Πόριν̃ος) certainly corresponds to the name of the archon *Porga* (Ποργᾶς < *Πορνᾶς), who was the ruler of the Croats at the time of their Christianization according to chapter 31 of the *DAI*, and both refer to the Croatian prince Borna, who ruled in c. 818–821 as a Frankish vassal, which is why the mentioned events are placed at the beginning of the ninth century, when the presence and activity of the Franks in Croatian lands were very prominent.[22]

About the origin of Porphyrogenitus' data on the Christianization of the Croats and Serbs in chapters 30, 31 and 32 of *DAI* we wrote in more detail elsewhere.[23] The task of this section is to investigate the validity of Porphyrogenitus' information about the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats during the time of Emperor Basil I, since it would chronologically belong to the scope of Byzantine church politics in the period between 843 and 886, which this book deals with. Porphyrogenitus writes about

[19] Vita Basilii, 55.1–58.39.

[20] DAI I, 30.61–87.

[21] DAI I, 30.87–90.

[22] VIINJ II, 42, n. 119 (B. Ferjančić); Goldstein 1995, 235; Maksimović 1996, 170, n. 67; Loma 1998, 122; Komatina 2021, 182–184, 194–198.

[23] Komatina 2021, 182–184, 194–198, 225–228, 264–271.

this only in chapter 29 of *De administrando imperio* and in sections 52 and 54 of the *Vita Basilii*. Despite all the obvious similarities, the two statements have certain differences. In *Vita Basilii* the Croats and Serbian tribes send ambassadors to Emperor Basil I after the Arab siege of Ragusa, after hearing about the successful intervention of the imperial fleet against the Arabs, while in chapter 29 of *DAI* they do it independently of those events, and the description of the Arab siege and the intervention of the imperial fleet comes only after the description of the Christianization of the Slavic tribes. In chapter 29 of *DAI* Porphyrogenitus knows that the mentioned Slavic tribes settled during the time of Emperor Heraclius, in which he comes close to the statements in chapters 31 and 32–36, while in *Vita Basilii* he doesn't mention that. However, the most interesting difference concerns directly the story of conversion. In chapter 29 of *DAI* Porphyrogenitus writes that most of the Slavs, although they settled at the time of Emperor Heraclius, were not yet baptized. On the other hand, in *Vita Basilii* it is written that all of them were already baptized, but at the time of Michael II, when they overthrew Byzantine rule, a large number of them also rejected the Christian faith, which they considered *a pledge of submission to the Romans*. Therefore, according to chapter 29 of the *DAI*, the representatives of the Slavic tribes asked Emperor Basil I to baptize *all those who were found unbaptized among them*, while according to *Vita Basilii* the envoys were sent *both by those who kept their faith and those who renounced it*, and their goal was *to return to the emperor's rule*. The emperor, almost on his own initiative, sent them priests *to return them to their former faith*. It is important to note that in none of the two statements does the emperor deny the presence of Christianity among the Serbs and Croats in the time before Basil I, in fact, in the time before Michael II. Descriptions of the way in which Emperor Basil, after their Christianization, assigned archons to the Slavs from the native ranks and the same families, are not of great importance here, but I will refer to them later.

The activity of the priests who, together with the *imperial man*, were sent by Emperor Basil I to the Croats and Serbian tribes, either *to baptize the unbaptized among them*, or *to bring back to the faith those of them who had abandoned it*, Porphyrogenitus places in a very specific chronological and historical framework. This would have happened in the first years of the mentioned emperor's reign, at the time of the Arab attack on Budva, Rose and Kotor and the siege of Ragusa and the intervention of the imperial fleet led by Nicetas Ooryphas. The mentioned events are placed in

867/868.[24] Terminus ante quem is set by the Byzantine-Frankish siege of Arab Bari, in which, according to Porphyrogenitus, soldiers from the South Slavic countries also participated as part of the Byzantine forces, which happened in 870/871. Therefore, the mission of the Byzantine priests among the Serbian tribes and the Croats would have taken place between 868 and 870. However, did this really happen?

The Question of Byzantine Authority Over Dalmatian Cities, Serbs and Croats in the Ninth Century

Porphyrogenitus, as one can see, brings the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats of that time into direct connection with the restoration of Byzantine authority over them and over the Dalmatian cities, which followed the intervention of the imperial fleet under the command of Nicetas Ooryphas against the Arabs who besieged Ragusa in 868. In older historiography, Porphyrogenitus' information about this was fully accepted, and the *restoration* of the Byzantine rule on the Eastern coast of the Adriatic during the time of Basil I was accepted as an established historical fact.[25] However, when talking about the *restoration* of Byzantine rule, it is assumed that it once existed and then ceased, meaning that it did not exist for a while. Porphyrogenitus in both chapter 29 of the *DAI* and the *Vita Basilii* talks about it, and links the end of the earlier Byzantine rule over the Dalmatian cities and the Slavs in their hinterland to the reign of Emperor Michael II (820–829). In *DAI* he writes that during the reign of the mentioned emperor, the *Dalmatian cities became independent, not obeying the emperor or anyone else*. Also, *the peoples there, Croats, Serbs, Zachlumi, Terbuniotes, Kanalites, Diocletians and Pagans overthrew the authority of the Roman Empire and became autonomous and independent, subordinate to no one*.[26] In the *Vita Basilii*, however, there is no mention of the Dalmatian cities rejecting Roman rule. It is only emphasized that, during the time of the same emperor, Muslims from Africa conquered *almost all of Italy and Sicily*, and that the *Scythians living in Pannonia, Dalmatia and the neighbourhood, i.e. Croats, Serbs, Zachlumi, Terbuniotes, Kanalites, Diocletians and Narentans, overthrew the primal authority of the*

[24] Ferluga 1957, 68–70; Ferjančić 1997, 11–14; Živković 2002, 364–366.
[25] Cf. Ferjančić 1997, 9–30, with a critical review of older scholarship.
[26] DAI I, 29.60–66.

Romans and became independent, obeying only their own archons.[27] How much truth is there, however, in the aforementioned passages of Porphyrogenitus?

Based on what is written in the mentioned passage of the *Vita Basilii*, it is not difficult to conclude why Porphyrogenitus links the end of Byzantine rule over the Dalmatian cities and the Slavs on the eastern Adriatic coast precisely to the reign of Emperor Michael II the Amorian (820–829). In addition to the general tendency of the entire *Macedonian historiography* to humiliate and portray in the worst light possible the reign of the previous, Amorian dynasty, the specific reason is that during the reign of the aforementioned emperor, there were serious Byzantine losses in the West. Muslims from North Africa, led by the ruling house of the Aghlabids, began the conquest of Sicily in 827, and in 828, Muslim adventurers, originally from Andalusia, but based in Egypt, occupied Crete.[28] It is precisely because of this, and not because he had access to a source with exact data related to Dalmatia and its neighbouring Slavic countries, that Porphyrogenitus says those territories also rejected Roman rule at the time of Michael II. The mentioned losses really did lead to the creation of a general impression of a Byzantine disaster in the West at the time of that emperor, which provided Porphyrogenitus with a suitable context to add to them the alleged losses of Byzantine positions on the Eastern coast of the Adriatic.[29]

When it comes to the Dalmatian cities, Porphyrogenitus' assertion that Byzantine authority over them was non-existent in the period between the twenties of the ninth century and 867 is not at all likely. According to the Treaty of Aachen of 812, concluded between Byzantium and the Franks, it is recognized that the Franks should have their conquests in the continental part of Dalmatia, but that Byzantium should retain the exclusive right of rule over the coastal cities and islands.[30] Five years later, in 817, a

[27] Vita Basilii, 52.1–11.

[28] Vasiliev 1935–1950 I, 49–88.

[29] Cf. Živković 2002, 353, n. 1162; Komatina 2019, 50–54; Komatina 2021, 147–157, 320–324.

[30] This is emphasized by Einhard in the *Life of Charlemagne*, when he describes the expansion of Charlemagne's empire: …*Histriam quoque et Liburniam atque Dalamciam, exceptis maritimis civitatibus, quas ob amicitiam et iunctum cum eo foedum Constantinopolitanum imperatorem habere permisit*…, Einhardi Vita Caroli Magni, 18.19–22. On the Treaty of Aachen, its prelude and consequences, cf. Ančić 2018, 25–34; Majnarić 2018, 43–50; Štih 2018, 57–68.

demarcation was made between Byzantine and Frankish possessions in Dalmatia, i.e. the *Romans*, Byzantine subjects and the *Slavs*, Frankish subjects.[31] Somewhere in the middle of the period that Porphyrogenitus marks with the apostasy of the Dalmatian cities from Roman imperial authority, between 846 and 848, a contemporary source mentions how the Croatian prince Trpimir went to war against the *Greek people and their patrician*,[32] which certainly refers to the Byzantine governor in the Dalmatian cities. The most telling evidence of Byzantine rule in Dalmatia in the middle of the ninth century is certainly the existence of the *archon of Dalmatia* and the *spatharius and aparchon of Dalmatia and other archonties*, which are recorded in the *Tacticon of Uspenski*, composed between 842 and 856, more precisely, in 842/843.[33]

As far as the Croats are concerned, they certainly were not ruled by Constantinople at the beginning of the ninth century, given that, by the time of the Treaty of Aachen in 812, Emperor Michael I (811–813) recognized the authority of the Frankish Emperor Charlemagne over the entirety of continental Dalmatia, homeland of the Croats, who were conquered by the Franks at the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century, after the conquest of the Avar Khaganate in 796.[34] It was the Frankish authorities who in 817, together with the Byzantine imperial emissaries, regulated the relations and the border between the *Slavs* of continental Dalmatia, Frankish subjects, and the *Romans* from the Dalmatian cities, Byzantine subjects.[35] How strong Frankish rule over the Croats in Dalmatia was can be gauged from events connected with the

[31] Annales Regni Francorum, 145.

[32] …*Cum enim Tripemirus, rex Sclavorum, iret contra gentem Graecorum et patricium eorum*…, Katić 1932, 8; Ferjančić 1997, 17; Stanković 1999/2000, 73–74; Komatina 2021, 200–201.

[33] Oikonomidès, Listes, 57.12, 59.8–9. On the Byzantine rule in Dalmatia during the ninth century, cf. Ferluga 1957, 46–86; Goldstein 1995, 256–260; Ferjančić 1997, 17–19; Rajković 1997, 228–231; Basić 2018, 170–197; Komatina 2021, 147–157, where the opinion that Dalmatia was a Byzantine *archonty* at that time, and that it received the rank of a *theme* later, at the time of the action of Basil I, is assumed, while the opinion that Dalmatia had the rank of a *theme* already at the beginning of the ninth century, and that in the twenties of the same century it lost that rank and was demoted to the rank of *archonty*, Živković 2002, 341–354, is rejected, as well as the opinion that the *theme* of Dalmatia was formed during the reign of Emperor Michael III, Prigent 2008, 408–416.

[34] Ferluga 1957, 46; Klaić 1971, 167–172, 203–206; Goldstein 1995, 139–150; Živković 2002, 333–340; Živković 2012, 124–133; Komatina 2021, 179–181.

[35] Annales Regni Francorum, 145.

uprising of the Slavic prince Ljudevit in Pannonia in 817–823, when the Croatian prince in Dalmatia, Borna, was a loyal Frankish subject and held the position of Frankish *duke of Dalmatia and Liburnia*.[36] The same applies to his successors. The first of them, his nephew Vladislav, was also appointed with the consent of the Frankish ruler.[37] The fact that, as already mentioned, Prince Trpimir waged war between 846 and 848 *against the Greek people and their patrician* tellingly testifies that at this time the Croats were not under Byzantine rule, while the Dalmatian cities were. A few years later, in 852, in his donation to the Church of Split, the same Croatian ruler himself emphasized his subordination to the Frankish rulers of Italy, dating his charter by the *reign in Italy of the most pious Lothair, king of the Franks*.[38]

However, the restoration of the Byzantine rule over the Croats did happen in the first years of the reign of Basil I, as Porphyrogenitus writes. Based on some Western sources, the chronology and the way in which it happened are known. The council held in Constantinople between October 869 and March 870 was discussed above. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, after the council had concluded, the papal legates were escorted by land from Constantinople to Dyrrachium, where they boarded a ship for Italy. However, at sea, after a few days of sailing, *they fell into the hands of the Slavs*, led by Domagoj. Thanks to the *apostolic and imperial letters*, they were released, and finally arrived in Rome on 22 December 870.[39] More precise information about the manner in which the aforementioned papal legates were released is provided by a letter sent in 871 by the Frankish emperor Louis II (855–875) to Emperor Basil I, the text of which is preserved in the *Salernitan Chronicle* from the second half of the tenth century. The papal legates were saved by the imperial fleet of the *patrician Nicetas*. However, that imperial fleet also destroyed the Slavic cities and took many of them into captivity. The Frankish emperor complains to Basil about the consequences of this intervention: *his cities were destroyed* and the people of *his Sclavinia were captured*, and that happened while *his Slavs* with their ships participated in the siege of Saracen Bari *for*

[36] *…dux Dalmaciae atque Liburniae…*, Annales Regni Francorum, 155; Gračanin 2011, 157–163.

[37] Annales Regni Francorum, 155.

[38] CD I, 4.

[39] *…In Sclavorum deducti Domagoi manus pro dolor! inciderunt…*, Liber pontificalis II, 184.24–31.

the common good.[40] It is usually believed that this raid was carried out by the Narentans (Pagans), notorious pirates on the Adriatic of that time. However, *Domagoj* is mentioned as their leader, a well-known Croatian ruler in the period between 865 and 876. Therefore, the attack was carried out by Croats.[41] *Patrician Nicetas* from the letter of Louis II is the well-known Nicetas Ooryphas, who, according to Porphyrogenitus, led the imperial fleet in the Adriatic at that time. Therefore, he attacked the Croats and forced them to release the papal legates, but at the same time he destroyed their cities and enslaved many of them. After that, the Croats were forced to recognize Byzantine supreme authority. This development of events hurt the interests of the Frankish emperor in Italy, Louis II, since until then the Croats had recognized his authority, which he clearly points out in his letter to Basil I, calling them *our Slavs*, and their land *our Sclavenia*.

Therefore, Porphyrogenitus is right when he talks about the restoration of the Byzantine rule over the Slavs of the Adriatic hinterland in the first years of the reign of Basil I, at least when it comes to the Croats. However, it did not happen as he described—that the Croats, together with the other Slavs, voluntarily asked to recognize the imperial authority again, through the envoys they sent to Constantinople, after seeing the effects of the intervention of the imperial fleet against the Arabs in the Adriatic. On the contrary, imperial authority was established over them by an act of aggression by the same imperial fleet in 870. There are indications that the Byzantine rule over the Croats lasted for almost an entire decade. The

[40] *…castra nostra dirructa et tot populis Sclaveniae nostre in captivitate…subtractis…, …eisdem Sclavenis nostris cum navibus suis apod Barim in procinctu comunis utilitatis consistentibus…*, Chronicon Salernitanum, 117–118; Kislinger 2013, 250–255; Komatina 2019, 48–50; Komatina 2021, 156–157.

[41] Abbot L. Duchesne, the editor and commentator of the aforementioned account, already believed that the Narentans were in question, and considered Domagoj quite mistakenly a Narentan ruler, Liber pontificalis II, 190, n. 52. Similar view about that attack is shared by Klaić 1971, 217; Goldstein 1995, 254–255; Živković 2002, 365, n. 1225. However, the fact that Domagoj was the ruler of the Slavs who carried out the attack clearly testifies that it was the Croats, and whether the Narentans also acted in alliance with them is of lesser importance. Živković 2002, loc. cit., tries to harmonize the thesis about the Narentans as attackers, with the mention of Domagoj as the leader of the attack, considering that the Narentans were then Domagoj's, i.e. Croatian vassals, while Kislinger 2013, 251, allows the possibility that they were in alliance with him. About the Narentans in the ninth century, cf. Klaić 1971, 212–220. About Domagoj, cf. ibidem, 244–250; Goldstein 1995, 253–256; PmbZ, no. 21576.

Venetian History mentions around 875 an attack *by the worst nations of the Slavs and Dalmatians* on Venetian Istria, which *dissolved the alliance that once existed between the Slavs and the Venetians.*[42] The mentioned *Slavs* are certainly Croats, since their country was in the neighbourhood of Istria. This data also shows something else—Slavs and *Dalmatians* worked together. This can only mean that the imperial power came powerfully to life in the area of continental Dalmatia and began to act as an integrating factor for the local Slavs and their Roman neighbours from the coastal cities. Around the year 878, Sedeslav, *from the offspring of Trpimir*, was appointed to the position of the prince of Croatia, with the support of the emperor.[43] It can be said that until his fall in 879, when he was killed and Branimir took over his power, Croatia was undeniably under Byzantine supreme authority. This is also the time when the Byzantine mission of Christianizing the Croats could first take place, as described in chapter 29 of *De administrando imperio* and *Vita Basilii* by Porphyrogenitus.

When it comes to the Serbs and Serbian coastal tribes, there is far less data on their political position in the first half and the middle of the ninth century than there is on the Croats. Also, the data that we have come from the pen of Porphyrogenitus, mainly from chapter 32 of *De administrando imperio*. However, if we judge only on this basis, the Serbs never broke with the supreme authority of the Byzantine emperor,[44] and the Serbian archons regularly sent ambassadors to the emperors,[45] although this understanding is only a consequence of Porphyrogenitus' ideological postulation that the Slavic tribes, since their settlement at the time of the Emperor Heraclius, recognized the supreme authority of the Roman

[42] …*Sclavorum pessime gentes et Dalmacianorum Ystriensem provinciam depredare ceperunt…. Et propter hoc fedus quod inter Sclavos et Veneticos olim fuerat, disruptum est*, Istoria Veneticorum, 136–138. The *Venetian History* places the mentioned event after the attack of the Saracens on Grado, ibidem, 136, and before the death of *Domagoi, the worst prince of the Slavs* (*Dehinc mortuo Domagoi, Sclavorum pessimo duce…*), after which *peace and harmony with the Slavs* was again concluded, ibidem, 138.

[43] …*Sedesclavus, Tibimiri ex progeniae, imperiali fultus presidio Constantinopolim veniens, Sclavorum ducatus arripuit, filiosque Domagoi exilio trusit…*, Istoria Veneticorum, 140.

[44] According to DAI I, 32.35–38, in the first half of the ninth century, Serbs and Bulgarians were peaceful neighbours, who were *in submission and subordination to the emperors of the Romans and from whom they received good deeds.*

[45] Writing about the Serbian prince Zacharias (923–925), Porphyrogenitus says that *he never stopped, like the archons before him, sending ambassadors to the emperors of the Romans and submitting and obeying them*, DAI I, 32.115–116.

emperors.[46] The Serbian history of the middle of the ninth century is marked by the struggles with the Bulgarians, in which the very existence of the Serbian state was called into question, bearing in mind the process of expansion of the Bulgarian power to the west and the neighbouring Slavic principalities, which reached the borders of Serbia by the fifth decade of the same century.[47] In such circumstances, the imperial patronage could only help the Serbs. For this reason, it is unlikely that the Serbs sent some kind of embassy to Emperor Basil I at the beginning of his reign, of the kind they did not send to the emperors who reigned before him, asking to return to Byzantine rule. On the other hand, in a lesser-known source, the *Life of St. Germanus of Cosinitra*, a certain Neophytus and Nicholas are mentioned as envoys that the then emperor sent from Constantinople to the Serbs (*Tribali*).[48] Considering that the mentioned Germanus is identical with the hermit Germanus, who lived in Bulgaria at the time of Prince Boris Michael (852–889), and therefore at the time of the Emperor Basil I (867–886), I. Dujčev concluded that it was precisely this mission that Emperor Basil sent with priests to baptize the Serbs,[49] but such a conclusion cannot be sustained.

Data on Christianity among the Serbs and Croats Before the Time of Basil I

It is a fact that Porphyrogenitus even in chapter 29 of *De administrando imperio* or in the *Vita Basilii* does not deny the presence of Christianity among the Serbs and Croats even before the reign of Basil I. What can other sources tell us?

Not counting Porphyrogenitus' data from chapters 31 and 32 of *De administrando imperio* on the baptism of the Croats and Serbs at the time of Emperor Heraclius, the earliest evidence of the presence of Christianity among the South Slavs is contained in a letter of Pope Agathon (678–681), addressed to Emperor Constantine IV (668–685) and his brothers and

[46] On Porphyrogenitus' account of the Serbian history of the seventh to tenth centuries in the chapter 32 of *DAI*, cf. Komatina 2021, 210–300, on the real possibility of imperial political influence on internal conditions in Serbia of that period, ibidem, 232–233.

[47] Cf. Komatina 2010b, 63–78. On the Serbian-Bulgarian relations in the ninth to tenth centuries, cf. Komatina 2021, 231–264.

[48] Vita S. Germani abbatis, 9*, 21.

[49] Dujčev 1961, 56–60. His conclusions are followed by Ferjančić 1997, 25. This information is also referred to by Živković 2002, 399–400.

co-rulers Heraclius and Tiberius, on the occasion of the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 680/681, in which it is stated that many of the bishops also serve *among the barbarian Lombards and Slavs, as well as Franks, Gauls and Visigoths and Britons.*[50] In an episcopal *notitia* from the mid-eighth century, which shows the territorial extent of all the five patriarchates, the *Slavs* are mentioned as part of the jurisdictional area of the Roman Church.[51]

It is quite certain that the Croats were Christians in the first half of the ninth century. In the 830-ies and 840-ies, the Croatian princes were building and donating Christian temples.[52] One of them, Trpimir (before 845 – after 852), had a son named *Peter*.[53] Between 846 and 848, the Frankish Benedictine monk Gottschalk stayed at the court of the same prince Trpimir, an unequivocal fact indicating that this country was Christian,[54] and according to Porphyrogenitus, another visitor to Trpimir's court was the *pious man Martin*, who *came from Francia, which is between Croatia and Venice*, i.e. from the territory of the Patriarchate of Aquileia.[55] Roman pope Nicholas I (858–867) wrote *to the clergy and people of the Church of Nin*, from which it can be seen that there was already a Croatian bishop at that time in the city of Nin.[56] Frankish spiritual influences are evident in Croatia at that time, especially the influences of the neighbouring

[50] …καὶ μάλιστα ἐπειδὴ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἐθνῶν τῶν τε Λαγγιβάρδων καὶ Σκλάβων, οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ Φράγγων, Γάλλων καὶ Γότθων καὶ Βρετανῶν πλεῖστοι ἐκ τῶν συνδούλων ἡμῶν εἶναι γνωρίζονται…, Concilium Constantinopolitanum III, 1, 132–134.

[51] „Ὁ πρῶτος θρόνος τοῦ κορυφαίου τῶν ἀποστόλων Πέτρου, τῆς πρεσβυτέρας Ῥώμης προέδρου, διέποντος τὸν ἀποστολικὸν καὶ πατριαρχικὸν θρόνον ἄχρι τῶν ὁρίων Σάξων καὶ Γάλων καὶ Κάμπων καὶ Φράγκων καὶ Ἰλλυρικῶν, καὶ μέχρι Γαδείρων καὶ Ἡρακλείων στηλῶν καὶ ὠκεανοῦ… ἄχρι Ῥαβέννης καὶ Λογγιβάρδων καὶ Θεσσαλονίκης, καὶ Σκλάβων καὶ Ἀράβων καὶ Ἀβάρων καὶ Σκυθῶν καὶ Δανουβίου τοῦ ποταμοῦ…," Parthey, Hieroclis Synecdemus, 138.2–139.17; Komatina I. 2016, 47, n. 71.

[52] There is a well-known grant of the Croatian prince Trpimir from 852, with which he donates the Church of St. George in Putalj to the Church of Split, in which is also mentioned a grant of the previous prince Mislav, CD I, 3–8; Živković 2002, 342, и n. 1110; Goldstein 1995, 198–199, 241–243. About this charter, cf. works listed in Komatina 2021, 143, n. 682.

[53] Kos, Gradivo II, no. 328, pp. 251, 254; Klaić 1971, 226–227.

[54] Katić 1932, 8–30.

[55] DAI I, 31.31–57; Komatina 2010b, 83–94; Lončar 2010, 113; Komatina 2021, 199–202.

[56] CD I, 8. About the bishopric of Nin and the question of the time of its establishment and ecclesiastical status, cf. Klaić 1971, 232–239; Živković 2004, 111; Strika 2011, 1–47; Betti 2014, 64–65.

Patriarchate of Aquileia.[57] The above data are completely in accordance with the data of the Croatian tradition recorded in chapter 30 of *DAI*, which links the Christianization of the Croats to the beginning of the ninth century and the reign of Prince Borna.[58]

During the decade of the Byzantine rule over the Croats, Pope John VIII sent a series of letters between 872 and 879 to the Croatian rulers Domagoj, Sedeslav and Branimir.[59] They do not mention any activity of Byzantine priests among the Croats, nor do they give any hint of it. It is hard to believe that such action on the part of the Byzantine Church would have gone unnoticed by Rome, especially at a time when Rome was having such a hard time coming to terms with the establishment of the jurisdiction of the Byzantine Church in Bulgaria, after 870. The only action of the Byzantine Church among the Croats and the inhabitants of the Dalmatian cities was the attempt by Basil I to subordinate the already existing church organization of those regions to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, to the detriment of the rights of the Roman Church, in 878–879, which will be discussed in the chapter *Expansion of the area of jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople*. According to all the above, Porphyrogenitus' information about the activities of the Byzantine mission during the time of Basil I, at least when it comes to the Croats, seem unfounded.

Now it can be confidently said that the earliest direct evidence of Christianity among the Serbs is the well-known baptismal font, which, according to its stylistic features, dates from the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century, and which, according to the inscription on its sides, was commissioned by the *priest John during the reign of Prince Višeslav* ("Joh(annes) pr(es)b(yter) sub tempore Vuissasclavo duci").[60] Scholars generally believed that the baptismal font came from the Croatian city of Nin and that the inscription referred to an otherwise unknown Croatian prince. However, it has recently been shown that, based on the epigraphic features of the inscription, the font is attributable to the "stone carvers' workshop" of the bishop John of Kotor from the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century, which means that it originates

[57] Goldstein 1995, 229, 235–236; Živković 2004, 112–113; Vedriš 2015, 193–197; Ančić 2016, 228; Komatina 2021, 182–183, 202.

[58] Komatina 2021, 182–183.

[59] Johannis VIII epp., 147, 151–152, 165–166, 258, 278, 295–296; CD I, 8–17; Betti 2014, 128–132.

[60] Matijević-Sokol 2007, 11.

from the Bay of Kotor and mentions the contemporary Serbian prince Višeslav, also mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in chapter 32 of *DAI* as the first Serbian prince known by name.[61] The oldest preserved Christian church in Serbia, the church of St. Apostles Peter and Paul in Ras (Peter's Church), which according to its characteristics belongs to the so-called proprietary temples, was built, according to the latest research, at the same time, at the beginning of the ninth century, under the influence of pre-Romanesque art from the coastal cities of Byzantine Dalmatia, and its construction is attributed to Višeslav's heir, Prince Radoslav.[62] Basic Christian and liturgical terminology in the Serbian language, architecture of the oldest Serbian sacred buildings, traces in toponymy, as well as traces of the Roman liturgical calendar in the Serbian folk calendar directly testify to the fact that the first foundations of the Christian faith came to the Serbs through the activity of the Roman Church, exactly as Porphyrogenitus recorded on the basis of the existing Serbian tradition in chapter 32 of DAI, although chronologically it certainly cannot be attributed to the reign of Emperor Heraclius, but to a longer period of time between the seventh and ninth centuries.[63]

A reliable testimony to the presence of Christianity among the Serbs is the appearance of Christian names in the Serbian ruling family, whose history is presented by Porphyrogenitus in chapter 32 of *De administrando imperio*. One of the sons of the Serbian prince Mutimir, who ruled from the middle of the ninth century until around 891, was named *Stephen*, and the son of his younger brother Gojnik was named *Peter*.[64] The chronology of their birth depends on the dating of the second Serbian-Bulgarian war, since when it ended, the mentioned *Stephen* was a child. The history of the Serbian-Bulgarian wars of the ninth century is related by Porphyrogenitus in the following way. During the time of the Serbian prince Vlastimir, the son of the aforementioned Radoslav, Presian, the prince of Bulgaria, made war against the Serbs, wanting to subjugate them. However, after three years of war, not only did he achieve nothing, but he also lost many of his men. After the death of Prince Vlastimir, three of his sons took power over Serbia: Mutimir, Strojimir and Gojnik, dividing the country. During their

[61] Cf. Komatina 2022, 7–22, cf. n. 1. for earlier scholarship. About the Serbian prince Višeslav, DAI I, 32.30–35; Komatina 2021, 229–230.

[62] Vojvodić 2020, 238–262; Marković, Vojvodić 2021, 13–30, 85–125. About the Serbian prince Radoslav, DAI I, 32.33–35; Komatina 2021, 230.

[63] Komatina 2021, 225–227, cf. n. 1220, for earlier scholarship.

[64] DAI I, 32.52, 61–62, 65–72 sq.

time, the prince of Bulgaria Boris Michael appeared, wanting to avenge the defeat of Presian, his father, and made war against them. However, the Serbs not only beat him, but also captured his son, Vladimir, along with twelve great boyars. Boris was forced to make peace with the Serbs. *Wanting to return to Bulgaria and afraid that the Serbs might ambush him on the way, he asked for his safe passage the two sons of Prince Mutimir – Bran and Stephen, who happily escorted him unharmed to the border, to Rasa*.[65] The first war certainly took place before 852, when the Bulgarian prince Presian died and was succeeded by Boris.[66] The dating of the second war varies widely, from the first years of Boris's reign, between 852 and 860, until the very end of his reign, in the eighties of the ninth century.[67] The answer to the question of whether the first Serbian princes with Christian names, Stephen and Peter, were born and baptized before the

[65] DAI I, 32.38–53.

[66] The first Serbian-Bulgarian war had to end no later than 852, when Presian died, and since it lasted three years, it had to begin no later than 849, Komatina 2021, 234–235. On the dating of that conflict in scholarship, cf. VIINJ II, 51, n. 159 (B. Ferjančić), with an overview of older works. B. Ferjančić does not enter into a closer dating of the conflict, except that he states that it must have been fought between 836 and 852, while he quite correctly sees its causes exclusively in Serbian-Bulgarian mutual relations, and not in the interference of Byzantium or Byzantine-Bulgarian relations. His conclusions were followed by ISN I, 147–148 (S. Ćirković); Blagojević 2011, 54. In recent times, Živković 2002, 387–392; Živković 2006, 14–15; Živković 2012, 169–170, dates the first Serbian-Bulgarian war to 848–851, and explains its causes in the broader context of Byzantine-Bulgarian relations, i.e. by the alleged alignment of Serbia on the side of Byzantium in the renewed conflict between Byzantium and Bulgaria after 846, while Aleksić 2019, 195–197, dates the conflict between 840 and 845.

[67] VIINJ II, 50–52, n. 159–163 (B. Ferjančić) presents previous opinions, and gives his own, that the second Serbian-Bulgarian war should be dated to 852–867. Maksimović 1979, 69–76, with a review of earlier works, opts for a late dating, around 880, basing that point of view on the conclusions expressed by Radojičić 1952, 253–256, that the Serbian princes Stephen and Peter, who are mentioned as children at the time of the war, were born between 867 and 874. His opinion is followed by ISN I, 148, 151, n. 26 (S. Ćirković), and it is accepted also in a later work by B. Ferjančić himself, cf. Ferjančić 1997, 25; Blagojević 2011, 55. On the other hand, Živković 2002, 390–393; Živković 2006, 21–26, dates the war to 853/854. Nikolov 2006, 75, believes that during the Byzantine-Bulgarian rapprochement in 869/870 there was some kind of division of the "spheres of interest" in the Balkans and that the Bulgarian attack on Serbia was a consequence of that agreement. However, the thesis that deserves special attention is the one put forward by Petrov 1966, 48–52, according to which the Second Serbian-Bulgarian war took place in 863, at the same time as the Bulgarian-Croatian war, which is also mentioned by Porphyrogenitus, DAI I, 31.60–67, and within the Byzantine attempts to thwart the conclusion of the Bulgarian-Frankish alliance against Great Moravia.

accession to the throne of Basil I in 867, or after that, depends on this. Đorđe Sp. Radojičić took it for certain that the Christian names of these two princes were the result of the Christianization carried out by the Byzantine missionaries sent by Emperor Basil I after 867. Using the fact that Peter, after Mutimir and his eldest son Prvoslav, became a Serbian prince in 892, and assuming that he must have been at least eighteen years old at the time, Radojičić pointed out that Peter must have been born in 874 at the latest, and based on that he came to the far-reaching conclusion that the Christianization of the Serbs took place between 867 and 874.[68] This conclusion became the most relevant point of reference for all those who later looked back on the Christianization of the Serbs.[69]

However, it is hard to believe that Boris Michael would have waited more than thirty years to avenge his father's defeat. In addition, the second Serbian-Bulgarian war could be determined more precisely in chronological terms by the age of Boris' eldest son Vladimir, who participated in it.[70] From Porphyrogenitus' statement, a certain parallelism can be established between the generations of Serbian and Bulgarian rulers; Presian is at war with Vlastimir; his son Boris is at war with Vlastimir's sons Mutimir, Strojimir and Gojnik; Boris' son Vladimir belongs to the generation of Mutimir's sons Boren and Stephen, and Gojnik's son Peter. Later in the text, Porphyrogenitus testifies that Peter was *godfather* (σύντεκνον) to Vladimir's brother, Symeon (893–927),[71] which also fits their age. It is known, however, that in 866 Vladimir was already old enough to lead his father's embassy to Rome, to Pope Nicholas I.[72] Therefore, the second Serbian-Bulgarian war was most likely fought before Basil I ascended the throne in 867.[73] Since the Serbian prince Stephen was a *child* (παιδίον) at

[68] Radojičić 1952, 253–256.

[69] Ostrogorski 1959, 233; ISN I, 150–151 (S. Ćirković), assumed that the Christianization of the Serbs took place *at the beginning of the reign of Basil I*, between 870 and 874 at the latest. Maksimović 1996, 163, believes that the appearance of Christian names in the Serbian ruling house *in the sixties or at the beginning in the seventies* of the ninth century, is a testimony that the Christianization during the time of Basil I had decisive importance for Serbia. Blagojević 2011, 56–58, believes that it happened *around 870*. The issue of the Christianization of the Serbs is treated similarly in foreign scholarship, cf. Vlasto 1970, 208–209; Obolenski 1991, 121–122; Histoire du Christianisme IV, 938 (Ch. Hannick).

[70] Vladimir was Boris' eldest son and heir, who ruled in 889–893, cf. KME I, 449–450 (I. Božilov); Iliev 2002, 407–410.

[71] DAI I, 32.80–81.

[72] Annales Bertiniani, 85–86.

[73] Komatina 2021, 236–242.

the time of that war, it would appear that he was born at least ten years earlier, at the end of the first half of the ninth century, in any case well before the beginning of the reign of Basil I.[74] The Serbian ruling family, therefore, was not baptized thanks to Emperor Basil I, but it had already professed the Christian faith even before the beginning of his reign. This is unequivocally supported by the golden signet ring of Strojimir, a Serbian prince from the middle of the ninth century, who was the son of Vlastimir and the brother of Mutimir and Gojnik, on which there is a representation of a cross around which there is the circular Greek inscription Κ(ύρι)ε βοΐ(θει) Στροήμιρ (*Lord, help Strojimir*).[75]

Information about the Christian faith among the Serbs at that time is provided by a source well-known in historical science. It is a very short letter that Pope John VIII sent to the aforementioned Serbian prince Mutimir in May 873. Due to the importance of that source, I include here the text and translation in its entirety.

(1) Presbiteri illic absoluti et vagi ex omni loco adventantes quaedam ecclesiastica contra canones oficia peragunt, immo numerosa, cum sint ascephali, scelera contra Dei precepta committunt.

(2) Quapropter ammonemus te, ut progenitorum tuorum secutus morem quantum potes ad Pannonensium reverti studeas diocesin. Et quia illic iam

[74] Komatina 2021, 225–227.

[75] Živković 2007, 23–29. The signet ring was bought by the Government of the Republic of Serbia at an auction in Munich on 11 July 2006, for the Historical Museum of Serbia. How it ended up at the auction is not explained, ibidem, 23, n. 1. Referring to the fact that Strojimir is mentioned on the seal without any title, T. Živković believes that it was made after Strojimir was deprived of his share of power in Serbia by his eldest brother Mutimir and exiled to Bulgaria, Živković 2007, 27–28. Namely, according to Porphyrogenitus, shortly after the victory over the Bulgarian prince Boris, the three brothers—rulers of Serbia quarreled and the eldest Mutimir, wanting to rule alone, banished the younger brothers Strojimir and Gojnik to Bulgaria, keeping only Gojnik's son Peter, DAI I, 32.57–62. According to T. Živković, this happened around 855/856, and it was a consequence of the changed religious circumstances in Serbia. Mutimir, as assumed by Živković, became a Christian not long before that. Certain members of the ruling family also accepted the new faith, including Gojnik's son Peter, while Strojimir and Gojnik remained pagans. After establishing peace with Bulgaria, Mutimir would banish the pagans to the then still pagan Bulgaria, while he would keep the Christian Peter with him, cf. Živković 2002, 392–393. His conclusion is doubtful that the appearance of the *patriarchal cross* on the seal does not necessarily mean that the owner of the seal was a Christian, but that it could allegedly be just a *fashion of the time*, Živković 2007, 28, n. 27, and the inscription *Lord, help Strojimir* should certainly not be explained in such a way, cf. also Antonović 2013, 567, n. 16.

Deo gratias a sede beati Petri apostoli episcopus ordinatus est, ad ipsius pastoralem recurras sollicitudinem.[76]

So,

Disbanded priests and wanderers there, coming from all sides, occupy some ecclesiastical offices against the canons, certainly numerous, since they are ***acephali****, evil deeds do they commit against God's rules.*

That is why we admonish you that, following the custom of your progenitors, try as much as you can to return to the Pannonian Diocese. And since a bishop was just appointed there by God's grace from the See of the blessed Apostle Peter, do return to his pastoral care.

In its brief lines this letter hides more information on church conditions at the time of its creation, in the year 873, than is obvious at first glance. Two things are immediately clear, and they explain why the letter was written. First, the pope warns the Serbian Prince Mutimir that he is aware of the so-called *acephali priests*, who occupy ecclesiastical services contrary to the canons. Second, in the circumstances mentioned, the pope calls on Mutimir to, *following the custom of his progenitors*, place himself (*return*) under the authority of the Pannonian Diocese, which was restored thanks to Pope Hadrian II in 869, when the Slavic teacher Methodius, the brother of Constantine the Philosopher, was appointed as its bishop.[77] In other

[76] Johannis VIII epp., 282.25–30. This letter has been much discussed in scholarship. The identity of its addressee was mainly questioned. Although chronologically and contextually, the identification of that *Slavic prince Mutimir* with the Serbian prince Mutimir is perfectly correct, and although most researchers support it, on which cf. Maksimović 1979, 73, n. 21, where an overview of earlier opinions is given, in Croatian historiography, starting with Rački, Documenta, 367–368, such identification has been contested, and in the person of Mutimir, to whom the letter was addressed, some other prince *of Pannonia between the Sava and Drava* of the same name, unknown from other sources, is sought. There are representatives of this trend even today, cf. Margetić 2008, 28–32. Vedriš 2011, 63, maintains a neutral position regarding the identification of Prince Mutimir, while Gračanin 2011, 188–189, believes that it was a Serbian prince. Serbian historiography also approached with reserve the very identification of Mutimir from the papal letter with a contemporary Serbian prince of the same name, Maksimović 1979, 73; ISN I, 152, n. 29 (S. Ćirković). In recent times the identification of the addressee of the papal letter with the Serbian prince Mutimir is generally not questioned, cf. Živković 2004, 68–69, 163; Curta 2006, 145; Živković 2013, 44–46; Betti 2014, 136–138, 149–151; Komatina 2015b, 713–718.

[77] Cf. chapter *Activity of St. Methodius and the birth of the Slavic church.*

words, the pope invites Mutimir to place himself under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Methodius and his Pannonian Diocese.

It is of great importance that, in the pope's letter to Mutimir, the *ecclesiastical offices* (ecclesiastica officia) are mentioned, the occupation of which is regulated by canons, which testifies to the fact that there was a regular, canonically organized, ecclesiastical organization in Serbia at that time. The most interesting element, however, is the mention of the priests who are *acephali*, who come to Serbia *from all sides*, occupy ecclesiastical services *against the canons*, thereby committing *evil deeds against God's rules*. This information has not been paid sufficient attention in Serbian or foreign historiography. It was usually passed over with the observation that these were priests who were not subordinate to the authority of a bishop, from which the conclusion was most often drawn that there was no episcopal organization in Serbia at that time, and the expression *cum sint ascephali* researchers have translated simply with *since they are without a head* or *without a superior*, without paying attention to the meaning actually intended.[78] *Acephali* priests, however, were a well-known phenomenon, present within the Roman Church throughout the early Middle Ages.[79]

Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636) already makes a distinction in his work *On ecclesiastical offices* (De ecclesiasticis officiis), and in the section *On types of clerics* (II, 3), he writes that there are *two types of clerics* (*duo sunt autem genera clericorum*). One type are *ecclesiastical priests* (ecclesiastici), *who are under the episcopal rule*. The second type are *acephali*, *that is,*

[78] Dvornik 1970, 38, 171, in the *acephali priests*, who *come from all sides*, recognizes missionaries of different origins—Latin from the cities of the Adriatic coast, Dalmatian and Pannonian Croatia and Greek from Dyrrachium, and in these statements he sees evidence of the Serbia of Mutimir's time as a *missionary territory*. Živković 2004, 68, believes that these are simply *false priests*, while in a later paper he had come to believe that these were priests *of the acephalous* church, i.e. those who were neither under the papacy nor under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople, who were sent to Serbia by Emperor Basil I from Constantinople, but who did not have a bishop as their head, Živković 2013, 44–46. Without going deeper into the issue of *acephali priests*, in an earlier paper I myself suggested that the phrase described priests who were without a head, from which I drew the conclusion that, at that time, there was no episcopal organization in Serbia, and that, considering that the pope was complaining about their actions, it must be that they came from somewhere under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and suggested that it was the diocese of the metropolitan Agathon of Morava, Komatina 2010a, 366–367. Betti 2014, 137, recognizes in them only travelling missionary priests.

[79] Cf. Acephali, Du Cange 1883 II, 52–53; Acephalus, Niermayer 1976, 12.

headless, therefore, *ignorant. They are*, Isidore writes further, *neither held for laymen by the care of the secular services, nor for clerics by the divine religion, but they are attracted by the dissolute and wandering lonely, ugly and nomadic life. While all of them, fearing nothing, follow the freedom to fulfil their own will, like stupid animals they are led by their desire and freedom, having a sign of faith, and not the service of faith, befitting Hippocentaurs, neither horses, nor men... Oppressed more than enough by their, certainly dirty and infamous, numerosity, our side prevails.*[80] Based on these definitions of Isidore, the official church built its position on these priests and viewed them in that way. During the ninth century, several great councils of the Roman Church discussed, among other things, their existence and activity. Starting from Isidore's definitions, the church tried to suppress their action and eradicate their appearance. Thus, the 22nd canon of the council of Mainz of 813 determines that wherever such priests are found, the bishops should without hesitation subject them to canonical care, and in no case allow them to live as they please, wandering and vagabonding. If they do not want to canonically submit to their bishops, they should be excommunicated until the decision of the responsible archbishop. If even he does not succeed in bringing them back to order, then they should be thrown in chains until the council at which they are to be judged, either *according to the judgment of the Lord*, or to be surrendered to the same council *under public care*.[81] The Council of Pavia of 850, in its 18th canon, determines that there is no reason for there to be clerics and priests *who are not governed by the discipline and foreknowledge of any bishop*, whom the *old custom of the church* called *acephali*, i.e. *headless*, etc.[82] However, it was not easy for the church to deal with this phenomenon. They are mentioned in Francia as late as the 860-ies,[83] and the Latin church writers refer to them even later.[84]

It is striking that in his letter to the Serbian prince, Pope John VIII defines them in the same terms as Isidore of Seville—*absoluti*, *vagi*. They

[80] Isidori Hispalensis De ecclesiasticis officiis, 54.

[81] Concilium Moguntinense A. 813, c. XXII (De clericis vagis), 267.8–22; Mansi, XIV, 71.

[82] Konzilien 843–859, 227.18–228.6; Mansi, XIV, 936–937.

[83] Reginonis Chronicon, 91.

[84] Burchardi Wormaciensis Decreta, II, c. 226, 663 A–B. Next to the *acephali* priests there were in the ninth century in the West also *acephali* monks, who are mentioned in the 57th canon of the Council of Meaux, in 845, Konzilien 843–859, 111; Mansi, XIV, 832, which is also the chapter 57 of the branch VII of the *Capitulary* of King Charles the Bald (840–877), Mansi, XVIII (B), 36–37.

came to Serbia *from all sides* (*ex omni loco*). In any case this is a reference to an area where their appearance was known and their activity was developed, i.e. to Western Europe, primarily Francia and Italy, from where they could come to Serbia via Croatia, Dalmatia and Pannonia. By calling on Mutimir to pay attention to them, the pope is actually inviting him to act as the canons of the councils of the Western Church dictated, and to put them into practice. The pope's letter of 873 to the Serbian Prince Mutimir is valuable testimony to the degree of Christianization in Serbia at that time,[85] and shows that the country was facing the same phenomena troubling Western Europe at that time. This also demonstrates the strength of the spiritual influence of the Roman Church in Serbia, but the presence of or danger from this influx of *acephali* was not the pope's main motive for addressing the Serbian prince. Above all, it was a pretext to order Mutimir to submit to the spiritual authority of the Pannonian bishop Methodius.[86]

The mere presence of *acephali* priests in Serbia does not necessarily mean that there were no bishops there, since in Western Europe they operated in areas with a very well-developed episcopal organization. More in support of this speaks the fact that the pope, referring to the presence of the *acephali* priests in his country, *admonishes* Mutimir to try to *return* to the Pannonian Diocese and the *pastoral care* of its bishop Methodius, and that by *following the custom of his progenitors* (*progenitorum tuorum secutus morem*). However, in speaking of Mutimir's *progenitors*, the pope does not have in mind his physical and biological ancestors, that is, earlier Serbian rulers, who could not belong to the Pannonian Diocese that was restored only in 869 for Methodius himself, but rather the people who once lived in the same territory. When he says that they fell under the

[85] This becomes particularly clear when its content is compared to that of the letters that the same pope sent at the same time to another Slavic ruler, the prince of the Pannonian Slavs, Kotzel. While he writes to the Serbian prince about the complex issues of *acephali* priests and the ecclesiastical organization, in the mentioned letters the pope explains to Kotzel the nature of the Christian understanding of marriage and the position of the church on the issue of divorce, therefore, some basic elements of the Christian faith, Johannis VIII epp., 282.9–15, 283.6–10. It should be remembered that Kotzel's family had been in contact with Christianity since around 828, when the church was consecrated in Nitra, the then capital of his father Pribina, although he himself accepted Christianity at the Frankish court a few years later, Conversio, 74–76; Dvornik 1970, 77–78; Steinhübel 2020, 110–180. Constantine and Methodius had similar problems in explaining the Christian understanding of marriage during their mission to Moravia between 863 and 867, Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XV.13–17.

[86] Betti 2014, 137; Komatina 2015b, 713–714.

pastoral care of the Diocese of Pannonia, he has in mind the fourth century situation, when the metropolitan of the province of Second Pannonia and the archbishop of the Diocese of Pannonia with his seat in Sirmium, whose episcopal see Methodius at least formally occupied, was also the papal vicar (*vicar*, *exarch*) for the entire Prefecture of Illyricum, until, at the end of the same century, it was divided into eastern and western parts, and the position of the papal vicar transferred to the bishop of Thessalonica.[87] Since Serbia was located on the territory of the former Illyricum, the pope could refer to the ancient rights that the Church of Sirmium, that is, the Pannonian Diocese had in Illyricum, and based on them the call to place the Serbian prince under the spiritual jurisdiction of Methodius as the Pannonian bishop.

Pope John VIII wrote the aforementioned letter to Mutimir in May 873, at the same time that he was writing many letters to the state and church authorities with influence in Pannonia, trying to strengthen Methodius' position and enable him to operate undisturbed at a time when, thanks to the same pope, he had been freed from two and a half year imprisonment in Swabia.[88] In another letter, which he composed on the same occasion, in May 873, and sent to his legate for the issue of Methodius' release, Bishop Paul of Ancona, the pope points out that since ancient times the Roman Church *had the custom of ordaining, appointing and deposing not only in Italy and some provinces of the West, but also within the entire borders of Illyricum*.[89] This passage reveals the pope's intention to use Methodius' activity to strengthen his authority in Illyricum, where Serbia was located. That authority had been seriously shaken by the decisions of the council of 869/870, which removed the whole of Bulgaria from the jurisdiction of Rome and subordinated it to the Church of

[87] The bishop of Sirmium claimed the position of head of the church in all of Illyricum until the division of the prefecture into eastern and western parts in 380, and during the short period when it was reunited in 437–441, after which the position of the papal vicar for Illyricum definitely fell to the bishop of Thessalonica; in the meantime, he was the head of the church in Western Illyricum, i.e. *Diocese of Pannonia*, cf. Bubalo, Mitrović, Radić 2010, 14–15, 21–22; Komatina I. 2016, 31–34.

[88] Johannis VIII epp., 280.18–286.36. The letters in question were addressed, in addition to this Serbian prince Mutimir, also to the East Frankish king Louis, his son, the Bavarian king Carloman, Kotzel, the prince of the Pannonian Slavs, Adalwin, the archbishop of Salzburg, Paul, the bishop of Ancona, Hermeric, the bishop of Passau and Anno, the bishop of Freising, Betti 2014, 132–138; Komatina 2015b, 714. On Methodius' imprisonment in Swabia, cf. Dvornik 1970, 151–157; Betti 2014, 146–149.

[89] Johannis VIII epp., 284.8–11.

Constantinople. There is no doubt that this was the main reason for the pope to write to Mutimir.[90] At the very borders of Serbia, the Church of Constantinople had organized a metropolitanate in Morava, headed by Metropolitan Agathon, which could direct its actions towards Serbia as well.[91] The pope's letter to Mutimir makes no mention of any activity by a Byzantine clerical mission in Serbia that Emperor Basil I might have sent, nor does he complain of the spiritual influence of the Church of Constantinople in Mutimir's lands. As we have seen, Serbia appears to have been largely integrated into the spiritual sphere of the Roman Church. However, the phraseology of the pope's letter to Mutimir, in which he admonishes him to *return to the Pannonian Diocese*,[92] is similar to that used in the letter of the same pope to the Bulgarian prince Boris, dated 8 June 879, in which he admonishes him to return *to his holy mother, the Roman Church*,[93] and also in the letter to the Dalmatian bishops from 10 June of the same year, whom he admonishes *to return to the bosom of the Holy Roman Church, their mother*.[94] In both cases, these were territories that had previously fallen away from the Roman Church and come under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and which the pope was trying to bring back under his jurisdiction.[95] Based on this, it can be

[90] Komatina 2015b, 714–716. Betti 2014, 136–138, on the other hand, believes that the pope's letter to Mutimir is his response to Mutimir's previous letter, in which the latter asked the Apostolic See for information on how to organize the church in his country and the Christian missionaries so as not to fall under the ecclesiastical influence of his enemies, the Bulgarians, or subordinate his country to the Bulgarian church, so the pope took the opportunity to include his country in the "nebulous" plan of creating the geographically illogical Pannonian Diocese. She also believes that the very project of the Pannonian Diocese was directed against the pretensions of the Bavarian clergy to jurisdiction over Pannonia, so she points out that it is therefore not clear how Mutimir's Serbia fits into it, and concludes that the invitation to Mutimir was after all only an attempt to attract Serbia into the Roman sphere of influence, in accordance with Mutimir's anti-Bulgarian policy, and thus to protect Methodius himself, ibidem, 148–151.

[91] Komatina 2010a, 363–367.

[92] *Quapropter ammonemus te, ut progenitorum tuorum secutus morem quantum potes ad Pannonensium reverti studeas diocesin*…, Johannis VIII epp., 282.28–29.

[93] *Quapropter, monemus gloriam vestram, ut ad sanctam matrem vestram Romanam ecclesiam devota mente libentique animo redeatis*…, Johannis VIII epp., 154.15–17.

[94] *Quapropter vos… paterna benignitate monemus atque hortamur, ut, sicut diximus, ad gremium sanctae Romanae ecclesiae matris vestrae redire ovanter adtendatis*…, Johannis VIII epp., 157.16–24.

[95] Cf. chapters *Bulgarian Church Question* and *Expansion of the area of jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople*.

concluded that, at that point in time, the church in Serbia was also beyond the framework of the Roman Church, to which it had previously belonged, and subordinated to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which should certainly be viewed within the framework of the organization of the church in Bulgaria and attributed to the political authority of Emperor Basil I. Therefore, the pope was attempting to use the position of the newly appointed Pannonian bishop Methodius, as the hierarch of the neighbouring area under the jurisdiction of the Roman Church and *admonishes* Mutimir to *return* to the jurisdiction of his Pannonian Diocese and through it to that of the Roman Church. It is not known whether Mutimir complied with the pope's wishes, and placed himself under the authority of the first Slavic hierarch, as is believed in scholarship.[96] The sources are silent on the connections between Serbia and Methodius' activities in Pannonia and Moravia.[97] The church in Serbia, that is, the bishopric that was established at that time in the aforementioned church of St. Apostles Peter and Paul in Ras,[98] in the following period was associated with the church in Bulgaria, within which it would remain until the establishment of the autocephalous Serbian church by St. Sava in 1218/1219.[99]

When it comes to the religious circumstances in the coastal Serbian lands—Dioclea, Trebunia, Zachulmia and Pagania—in the ninth century, there is far less data. Only in Dioclea has the presence of Christianity been confirmed on the basis a number of archaeological finds of Christian sacred objects dating from as early as the beginning of the ninth century.[100] As for Pagania, other sources confirm Porphyrogenitus' thesis that the Narentans were also called Pagans because they did not receive Christianity when the rest of the Serbs did, since *pagans* in the language of the Slavs means *unbaptized*.[101] In the *Venetian History*, it was recorded that around 830, during the reign of Doge John I Particiacus (829–836),

[96] Savić V. 2019, 36–38; Savić V. 2019a, 156; Marković, Vojvodić 2021, 39–44.

[97] Betti 2014, 151; Pirivatrić 2014, 103–107. According to the later Greek life of St. Naum from the middle of the thirteenth century, the disciples of St. Cyril and Methodius following their expulsion from Moravia and arrival in Bulgaria after Methodius' death in 885 enlightened through their teaching "Dacia, Mysia, Pannonia, Tribali up to Illyricum", Trapp 1974, 176–177, which means that they appeared among the Serbs ("Tribali") only after Methodius' death and the arrival in Bulgaria.

[98] Marković, Vojvodić 2021, 30–39.

[99] Komatina 2015b, 716–718; Komatina I. 2016, 73–123, 268–296.

[100] ICG I, 355–358, 367–380 (J. Kovačević); Živković 2002, 399; Živković 2004, 154–155.

[101] DAI I, 29.79–84, 36.9–11; Komatina 2021, 295–300.

an envoy of the Slavs from the Narentan Islands came to Venice to the doge to establish peace with him, and on that occasion was baptized by the doge himself (*ab eo baptizatus est*).[102] So, in the 830-ies, the Pagans were still *pagans*, but individual cases of conversion to Christianity had begun to occur among them as well.[103] Porphyrogenitus' assertion in chapter 29 of *De administrando imperio*, that all the Serbs and Croats were baptized at the beginning of the reign of Emperor Basil I, with the exception of the Narentans, and that they were called *Pagans* as a result, but then came to the same emperor for baptism themselves before the end of his reign in 886, seems extremely improbable. Remaining faithful to paganism for such a short time after the Christianization of their neighbours, they would hardly have had time to earn the epithet of *pagans* from them. Their recalcitrance and refusal to be baptized must have lasted much longer after the conversion of other Serbs and Croats.[104] The word *pagans*, which even in Porphyrogenitus' time in the Slavic language meant the *unbaptized*, is actually Latin, i.e. Romance. The Slavs must first have been baptized by the Roman Church to have taken that word in the above meaning and used it as a label for another group.

The Origin of Porphyrogenitus' Information about the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats in the Time of Basil I

Taking into account all the above, it is clear that Porphyrogenitus' information about the Byzantine mission that either baptized or completed the Christianization process of the Serbs and Croats in the first years of the reign of Emperor Basil I has no basis in historical truth. However, it is difficult to say that he completely invented the information. As with much else in his works, he was drawing on another source. Identification of that source is not impossible. Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus acquired much of his data on the Christianization of the Slavs during the time of his

[102] Istoria Veneticorum, 120.

[103] Cf. Živković 2002, 342–343, n. 1111.

[104] Cf. Maksimović 1964, 149–150; Maksimović 1996, 163–164. Accepting Porphyrogenitus' information about the Christianization of Serbs and Croats during the reign of Emperor Basil I, and the Christianization of the Narentans in the later period of the reign of the same emperor, the researchers dated the latter between 874 and 886, or more precisely, between 876 and 879, cf. ibidem, 164, n. 39.

grandfather, Emperor Basil I (867–886), from a work by his father, Emperor Leo VI the Wise (886–912)—his well-known *Tactics*.

In *Tactics,* Leo VI writes about the way of fighting of various peoples with whom the Romans came into contact during their long history, and about the way the Romans should fight against them. Slavs are among those peoples. Emperor Leo's information on the Slavs and their combat tactics, in turn, is taken entirely from Pseudo-Maurice's *Strategicon*, which dates to the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century.[105] However, aware that these data belong to a distant past, when, as he himself says, *the Slavs lived in their own country, on the other side of the Danube*, Leo adds some further information related to their later history, after they crossed the Danube and *bent their neck under the yoke of the Romans.*[106] According to Leo, after they crossed over to this side of the Danube and came under Roman rule, the Slavs kept their own way of life and obeyed only their native rulers, rather than submitting and subjecting themselves to Roman laws. *Those, though, who received the sacrament of salvation-bringing baptism*, continues Leo, *and to our days, as much as it is up to them, preserve the inclination towards the old freedoms.*[107] A little further, Leo continues: *Our father, by the will of God, and autocrat of the Romans Basil made them abandon their old customs, and having graecized and submitted them to the archons in the Roman manner and honoured them with baptism, freed them from their submission to their own archons and taught them to fight against the peoples who made war against the Romans…*[108]

That this very place served Porphyrogenitus as a source for the story about the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats in chapter 29 of *De adminstrando imperio* and sections 52 and 54 of the *Vita Basilii* is evidenced by the statement that Basil I on that occasion *freed the Slavs from their submission to their own archons* and *submitted them to the archons in the Roman manner*. The same information can be found in the mentioned accounts about the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats in *DAI* and *Vita Basilii*, only in a modified form. Namely, reading that information, Porphyrogenitus could not understand how Basil could have deprived the Slavs of their own archons, when in his time they were still ruled by local

[105] Taktika, 18.96–102 (461–494); VIINJ I, 257–261 (B. Krekić); Haldon 2014, 318, 350; Komatina 2021, 70–71.

[106] Taktika, 18.370–376. Cf. Komatina 2021, 71–73.

[107] Taktika, 18.446–449.

[108] Taktika, 18.453–457.

archons from local dynasties. Porphyrogenitus therefore adapted his father's words to what he himself knew to be a fact. Thus, in Constantine's interpretation, Basil did not deprive the Slavs *of their own archons* and *submit them to archons in the Roman manner*, but on the contrary, after baptizing them, *he appointed them archons which they themselves wanted and chose, from the family from which they themselves loved and wanted*,[109] that is, ordered that they be ruled by *archons from among their tribesmen*, those whom *they themselves choose and ordain*, and not those who could buy authority.[110] It is obvious that Porphyrogenitus drew this information from Leo's *Tactics*, and interpreted it, in a slightly different way, in chapter 29 of *DAI* and in *Vita Basilii*.[111]

What Porphyrogenitus did not understand was that the same information, as well as the entire above-mentioned passage in Leo's *Tactics*, did not refer to the Serbs and Croats, but to the Slavs in Greece. This conclusion is sufficiently supported by the place in the same passage where Leo writes that Basil *graecized* (γραικώσας) those Slavs. In no sense could it be said that the Serbs and Croats were *graecized* by anyone. It is precisely because, by the time of Porphyrogenitus, those same Slavs in Greece had been *graecized* to a considerable extent, thanks to the policies of his grandfather and father—in large part, as Leo testifies, because the emperors had deprived them of their local rulers and subordinated them to Byzantine officials—that Porphyrogenitus did not understand that the information from Leo's *Tactics* referred to the Slavs of Greece, and not those of Illyricum. In the time of Basil's grandson, these Slavs had not represented any independent political factor for many years, unlike the Slavs of the western part of the Balkan Peninsula. This is why Porphyrogenitus concluded that the information about the Slavs recorded by his father, including that about their Christianization, referred in fact to the Serbs and Croats. However, other sources on which he based his writings in chapters 31 and 32 of *DAI* informed him that the Serbs and Croats had received Christianity earlier, before the reign of Basil I. Aware of the information from Leo's *Tactics* that it was Basil who *had honoured them with baptism*, Porphyrogenitus found himself faced with contradictory information on the matter. His constructions in chapter 29 of *DAI* and in *Vita Basilii*,

[109] DAI I, 29.75–78.

[110] Vita Basilii, 54.27–35.

[111] DAI. Commentary, 103; Živković 2002, 369–371; Ančić 2010, 137–138; Alimov 2013, 28–29; Komatina 2021, 149–152, 323–324.

that among the Serbs and Croats only some were baptized, while the majority remained unbaptized until Basil's time, or that all of them were once baptized, but at the time of Michael II some of them had rejected baptism together with the imperial authority, also stem from this apparent contradiction.[112]

Thus it can be seen that Porphyrogenitus took the information about the Byzantine mission of Christianizing the Slavs during the reign of Emperor Basil I from the *Tactics* of his father, Emperor Leo VI, and mistakenly applied it to the Serbs and Croats. The additional data accompanying his report of this mission, to be found in chapter 29 of *De adminstrando imperio* and in sections 52 and 54 of *Vita Basilii*, i.e. the manner in which the Christianization was carried out, must be seen as his own construction—and the activity of the Byzantine fleet in the Adriatic Sea at the beginning of the reign of Basil I served as a convenient time frame. The data on the Christianization of the Slavs in Leo's *Tactics*, however, actually refer to the Slavs in Greece. More will be said about this in the following chapter.

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[112] Komatina 2021, 71–73, 150–152.

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Internal Homogenization

The Byzantine church policy of the first years of the reign of Basil I was marked with brilliant successes. Reconciliation with Rome was achieved, and the establishment of the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople over the whole of Bulgaria in 870 was the crown of the efforts of the Byzantine Church from the previous period. The restoration of Ignatius on the patriarchal throne also brought a lull in friction between the quarrelling factions within it. Under such circumstances, Emperor Basil turned to improving the image of the Church within the Empire itself. Some sources attribute to him the initiative for the Christianization of certain population groups that did not yet belong to the official Byzantine Orthodoxy—Slavic and Greek pagans and Jews. Also, it is well known that it was Basil I who took the most decisive measures to eradicate the heretical communities on the eastern borders of the Empire—the Paulicians.

Christianization of the Slavs in Greece and the Peloponnese

According to one account from the *Tactics* of Leo VI the Wise (886–912), his father, Emperor Basil I, *made the Slavs abandon their old customs and, having graecized them and submitted them to the archons in the Roman*

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manner and honoured them with baptism, freed them from their submission to their own archons and taught them to fight against the peoples who made war against the Romans, so carefully arranging it, for which reason he freed the Romans from worry because of the frequent uprisings of the Slavs, from whom they had suffered many troubles and wars in the old days.[1] In the previous chapter, it has already been pointed out that the mentioned passage does not refer to the Serbs and Croats, but to Slavs in Greece.[2] Apart from the statement that Basil I *graecized* (γραικώσας) those Slavs, which in the case of the Serbs and Croats he certainly did not do, that the passage concerns the Slavs in Greece is indicated by the statement that, before this, those Slavs had raised frequent rebellions against the Romans. Unlike the Serbs and Croats, who were far beyond the reach of direct Byzantine authority, the Slavs in Greece were in far more direct contact with the Byzantine imperial authorities and had had a clear place in their system since the time of their settlement, at the beginning of the seventh century.[3]

However, it is precisely in this fact that the problem with the precise interpretation of Leo's words lies—that Basil I honoured the mentioned Slavs *with baptism*. The beginnings of Christianity among these Slavs certainly appear as early as the seventh century.[4] Emperor Justinian II used the title the "Chosen People" for the army that he recruited in 691/692 for the war with the Arabs, among the Slavs that he had moved in 688/689 from the vicinity of Thessalonica to the Opsician theme, and among them there were Serbs from the vicinity of Thessalonica, for whom the bishopric τῶν Γορδοσέρβων was founded in the new homeland in the province of Bithynia.[5] In the eighth century there had even been a patriarch of

[1] Taktika, 18.453–460.

[2] Cf. Komatina 2021, 70–73, 150–152. The *Slavs in Greece* mean all the known Slavic tribes that according to the sources of the seventh to ninth centuries inhabited the area of today's Greece—Drugubites, Sagudates, Velegezites, Baiunites, Berzites, Slavs of the Strymon and Rhychios, Smolens, as well as Milings and Ezerites in the Peloponnese, cf. Živković 2002, 43–262; Komatina 2019a, 4–11, 2021, 63–86, 93–95, 325–330. In Byzantine sources they are most often referred to by the collective term *Sklavinias* (αἱ Σκλαυηνίαι, Σκλαβηνίαι), cf. Sklavinia, ODB III, 1910–1911 (O. Pritsak); Sklavinien, LdMA VII, 1988 (J. Koder); Chrysos 2007, 123–135; Gkoutzioukostas 2016, 639–646; Mühle 2016, 3–13.

[3] Cf. Živković 2002, 43–262; Komatina 2021, 63–86, 93–95, 325–330.

[4] Cf. Dvornik 1926, 235; Ivanova 1988, 10–15; VIINJ I, 268, n. 6 (M. Rajković), for a review of older opinions and scholarship on the process of Christianization of the Slavs in Greece; Obolenski 1991, 97–99.

[5] Komatina 2014, 33–39.

Constantinople who was a Slav—Nicetas (766–780).[6] Also the Christianization of the Slavs in the Peloponnese, who resisted for longest the establishment of imperial authority over them and inclusion, not only into the imperial state order but also into the currents of Byzantine civilization, began shortly after their subjugation in 783, and intensified after the establishment of the metropolitanate of Patras in 805.[7] The Slavs in the vicinity of Thessalonica seem to have been Christians for a long time by the beginning of the ninth century, because at that time St. Gregory the Decapolites chose precisely their lands in which to seek asceticism in silence.[8] In the chapter on the Moravian mission of Constantine the Philosopher and Methodius, mention has already been made of the possible activity of the emperors of the Amorian dynasty among them, and attention was also drawn to the statement from *On Letters* by Chernorizets Hrabar, that the Slavs had been baptized even before Constantine the Philosopher composed an alphabet for them.

The situation is similar with the statement that Basil I freed the Slavs from subordination to their own archons and submitted them *to the archons in the Roman manner*. It is a fact that the territories of individual Slavic tribes, in Byzantine sources usually referred to as *Sclavenias,* had their own native princes during the seventh and eighth centuries.[9] However, as early as the eighth century, there appear administrators of those *Sclavenias* who are certainly ordinary imperial officials, because they also bore high imperial dignities. They were, in first place, the descendants of the native Slavic princely families, who, retaining power over their people, recognized the supreme authority of the emperor and became his officials and viceroys over those peoples, thus entering the administrative and social system of the Empire.[10] However, during the ninth century, it seems that it became the practice to appoint Romans themselves to the positions of imperial administrators over Slavic tribes instead of members of local princely families. Thus, the *Life of Methodius* explicitly states that Methodius, a Roman and the son of a high Byzantine dignitary, in his youth, before taking the monastic vow, was appointed by the emperor *to*

[6] Theophanes, 440.11–13; PmbZ, no. 5404.

[7] Dvornik 1926, 240–248; Ivanova 1988, 15–16; Komatina 2009, 46–47.

[8] Vie de Saint Grégoire le Décapolite, 35–36, 61.20–62.4; Vita des Hl. Gregorios Dekapolites, § 49.1–15.

[9] Živković 2002, 208–219, 231–239; Cvetković 2017, 193–196.

[10] Živković 2002, 231–239.

hold a Slavic principality, certainly one in the vicinity of Thessalonica.[11] This proves irrefutably that the process of replacing local princes in the *Sclavenias* with Byzantine officials had begun even before Basil I came to power in 867.[12]

Leo's *Tactics* itself also contains contradictory information about the Christianization of the Slavs. First of all, Leo writes that the Slavic tribes were freedom-loving in *their own country*, on the other side of the Danube, so even when they crossed over to the Roman side, they preferred to be *destroyed by the archons of their tribe than to submit and subject to Roman laws. Even those who received the sacrament of the salvation-bringing baptism to our days, as far as they are concerned, preserve their inclination towards the old freedoms.*[13] A little further on, however, is the place mentioned above where Leo writes that Emperor Basil I *graecized* the Slavs and *honoured them with baptism*, and also freed them from subordination to their own archons.[14] If the *old freedoms* of the Slavs mean the desire to be ruled by their own rulers, instead of submitting to *Roman laws*, then those freedoms would have been finally abolished by Basil I, but baptism, according to the first statement, preceded that. In any case, Emperor Leo VI in his *Tactics* closely connects the process of political subjugation of the Slavs to the imperial authority with the process of their Christianization, giving credit in both cases primarily to his father, Emperor Basil I.

One Arab source was long believed to speak about the Christianization of the Slavs in Greece during the time of Emperor Basil I. The traveller Harun ibn Yahya, who passed through Byzantine territory on the way from Constantinople to Thessalonica and further towards the Adriatic Sea, it is assumed in 894/895, recorded that, after leaving Thessalonica, one entered the *land of the Slavs*, *who are Christians and were baptized during the reign of King Basus.*[15] Earlier researchers identified the Emperor Basil I in *King Basus*, but it was then pointed out that Arab writers wrote the name of Emperor Basil as *Basil*, while the name *Basus* for some of them actually meant the Bulgarian prince Boris,[16] and, therefore, Harun's

[11] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, II.5; Tachiaos 1993–1994, 46–61, with a critical review of earlier scholarship; Živković 2002, 256–257.

[12] On the integration of the Slavic tribes into the thematic system and political order of the Empire, Cvetković 2017, 190–204; Koder 2020, 92–93; Komatina 2021, 70–80.

[13] Taktika, 18.441–449.

[14] Taktika, 18.454–456.

[15] Cvijanović 2007, 39.

[16] Cvijanović 2007, 39–40, n. 39.

information about the Christianization of the Slavs might also refer to the Christianization of the Bulgarians in 864. Information from John Caminiates, who describes the relations between the inhabitants of Thessalonica and the Slavs in the vicinity of that city at the beginning of the tenth century, that *the source of Holy Baptism made the people of the Scythians similar to the Christian folk*,[17] could refer to the Slavs there, but also to the Bulgarians, whom he also called Scythians in his text.[18]

It is a fact that during the reign of Basil I, there appear for the first time in the sources bishoprics for certain Slavic tribes in Greece. The *Photian Council* of 879/880 was attended, among others, by the bishops *Stephen of Vagenetia* (Στεφάνου Βαγονειτείας), *Peter of Drugubitia* (Πέτρου Δρουγουβιτείας) and *Paul of Strymon* (Παύλου Στρύμονος).[19] In those, one should certainly recognize the church leaders of the Slavic tribes of the Baiunites, Drugubites and Slavs of the Strymon.[20] In the episcopal *notitiae* of the Church of Constantinople, starting with *notitiae* 7 and 9 from the tenth century, there appear bishops of Drugubitia within the metropolitanate of Thessalonica,[21] as well as the bishop of Petra, who in the later *notitia* 13 is also called the bishop of Sagudania—ὁ Πέτρας (ἤτοι Σαγουδανείας), i.e. of the Slavic tribe of the Sagudates.[22] The bishopric of the Baiunites, who lived in Epirus, does not appear in the episcopal notices, because from the end of the ninth century this was part of the Bulgarian state,[23] but, starting from the aforementioned *notitiae* from the tenth century, some other bishoprics appear, which by their names can be concluded to be Slavic. In the metropolitanate of Larissa, the bishopric of Ezera is mentioned,[24] in the metropolitanate of Philippopolis, the bishopric of Velikia,[25] and in the metropolitanate of Philippi, the bishopric of another Velikia and the bishopric of the Smolens.[26] Episcopal *notitiae* that were composed before 879 do not contain a list of bishoprics within the metropolitanates of the *western provinces*, i.e. those that once belonged to

[17] Caminiates, § 9.2–3.
[18] Caminiates, § 6.6–8, 8.6; VIINJ I, 268, n. 6 (*M. Rajković*); Komatina 2021, 76–77.
[19] Mansi, XVII, 376 A, 377 D.
[20] Dvornik 1926, 235–236; Živković 2002, 252–253.
[21] Notitiae, 7.299, 9.185, 10.218, 13.228.
[22] Notitiae, 7.303, 10.222, 13.828.
[23] Komatina 2016, 84–96; 2023, 798–799.
[24] Notitiae, 7.569, 9.440, 10.519, 13.568.
[25] Notitiae, 7.593, 9.464, 10.551, 13.601.
[26] Notitiae, 7.616, 618, 9.490, 492, 10.580, 582, 13.630, 632.

Rome, and that, starting from the eighth century, were gradually included in the framework of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Therefore, it is not possible to establish whether any of the mentioned bishoprics also existed before the reign of Emperor Basil I. In any case, even if he did not play a decisive role in their Christianization, the possibility remains that Emperor Basil I decisively contributed to the establishment of a permanent ecclesiastical, episcopal organization among the Slavs in Greece.[27]

The data from Leo's *Tactics,* that Emperor Basil I *graecized* (γραικώσας) the Slavs,[28] which comes from the verb *γραικόω, derived from the noun Γραικός, meaning *to graecize*, *to make someone become Greek*,[29] would indicate the final outcome of the imperial policy of integrating the Slavs in the south of the Balkan Peninsula into the Byzantine political order, which led to their cultural assimilation, loss of a special identity and merging with the neighbouring Greek-speaking population.[30] Its results, however, were not effective everywhere, especially in the Peloponnese, where the local Slavic tribes of the Milings and Ezerites offered long-term resistance to the imposition of imperial authority and raised frequent rebellions against it.[31] It can be seen from later sources that the process of Christianization of the Slavs in the Peloponnese was not complete, even after the death of Emperor Basil I.[32]

The Last *Hellenes*—Mainotes in the Peloponnese

In connection with the Peloponnese, there is also some highly interesting information about the activity of Christianization of certain groups on the territory of the Empire during the reign, and thanks to the agency of Emperor Basil I. In chapter 50 of *De administrando imperio*, after he finished describing the history of rebellions against the imperial authority of the Slavic tribes in the Peloponnese, the Milings and Ezerites, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus provides a brief account of the inhabitants of the Maine peninsula, the middle "finger" in the south of the Peloponnese,

[27] Dvornik 1926, 233–239; Ivanova 1988, 22–23; Živković 2002, 251–253, 255–256; Komatina 2016, 93–96; Komatina 2021, 68–69, 72–73; Cvetković 2023, 285–294; Komatina 2023, 795–796.

[28] Taktika, 18.454.

[29] Lexikon II, 328; Koder 2000, 199–202.

[30] Haldon 2014, 350–351; Kaldellis 2019, 136–151; Komatina 2021, 73.

[31] DAI I, 49.1–75, 50.1–70; Komatina 2021, 307–315.

[32] VIINJ 1, 263; Zakythēnos 1945, 95, no. 2; Živković 2002, 143, n. 340.

between the Messenian and Laconian gulfs. They, writes Porphyrogenitus, *are not descended from the aforementioned Slavs, but from the older Romans, and until now their neighbours call them Hellenes, because in ancient times they were idolaters and worshiped idols in the manner of the ancient Hellenes. They were baptized and became Christians during the reign of the glorious Basil*.[33] Then he gives other information about them. The land they live in is arid and impassable, but it produces olives, from which their income comes. It is located *near Malea*, *on the other side of the lake*, towards the coast. They are submissive and receive the archon appointed by the *strategus* (of the Peloponnese), and obey and are subject to the orders of the *strategus*, paying from ancient times a tribute of 400 nomisms.[34]

Porphyrogenitus' information about Maina complements the information of the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* and *Arethas' Scholion* that during the *218 years* of Slavic domination of the Peloponnese (allegedly between 587 and 805), the eastern part of the peninsula, from Corinth to Malea, remained outside Slavic rule and obeyed the emperor of the Romans and the *strategus* of the Peloponnese.[35] According to Porphyrogenitus, the same was the case with Maina in the south of the Peloponnese. Its inhabitants also obeyed the emperor and the *strategus* during all that time and paid a tribute of 400 nomisms. However, while, according to the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, the inhabitants of the eastern Peloponnese, *from Corinth to Melea*, were Christians,[36] the inhabitants of Maina, according to Porphyrogenitus, were pagans, and their neighbours, certainly the just-mentioned inhabitants of the eastern Peloponnese, because of that called them *Hellenes*.

How accurate is the mentioned information of Porphyrogenitus? According to the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, invading the Peloponnese, the Slavs *attacked and destroyed noble and Hellenic peoples* (τὰ εὐγενῆ καὶ

[33] DAI I, 50.71–76.

[34] DAI I, 50.76–82. On the political status of the Mainotes, cf. Cvetković 2017, 229–231.

[35] Cronaca di Monemvasia, 12.90–20.121; Kougeas 1985, 192–193.

[36] The *Chronicle of Monemvasia* describes the fate of the earlier inhabitants of the Peloponnese before the Slavic invasion. Some fled to neighbouring islands, like the Corinthians and Argives, some to distant Italy, like the inhabitants of Patras, others to Sicily, like the Lacedaemonians. Another part of the Lacedaemonians took refuge in Malea, together with their bishop, and built there the city of Monemvasia, where their bishop continued his service. Those who engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry settled in the karst areas in the neighbourhood, which were called *Tzaconies*, Cronaca di Monemvasia, 12.90–16.133.

ἑλληνικὰ ἔθνη).[37] In all likelihood, the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* tells of two groups of inhabitants of the Peloponnese before the Slavic invasion at the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh centuries. One is *noble peoples*, which should mean Christians, and the other is *Hellenic peoples*, i.e. pagans. During most of the Byzantine era, *Hellen* was synonymous with pagan.[38] After all, Porphyrogenitus also shows this, writing the above lines about the Mainotes. It is unlikely that the term *Hellen* could mean something else in the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*. In Byzantine usage, this term is always opposed to something *noble*, Christian. Therefore, according to the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, there were still pagans in the Peloponnese at the time of the arrival of the Slavs at the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century. Arethas of Caesarea († after 932), writing his well-known scholion to a copy of the *Short Chronographer* of Patriarch Nicephorus, inserts almost the same information about the invasion and rule of the Slavs in the Peloponnese, as found in the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*.[39] However, at the place where the chronicle says the Slavs attacked the *noble and Hellenic peoples* (τὰ εὐγενῆ καὶ ἑλληνικὰ ἔθνη), Arethas mentions the *native Hellenic peoples* (τὰ ἐγγενῆ ἑλληνικὰ ἔθνη).[40] Bearing in mind what has been said about the meaning of the term *Hellen* in the Byzantine era, Arethas' version would only confirm and strengthen the thesis about the perseverance of pagans in the Peloponnese until the arrival of the Slavs, since it follows from his scholion that the Slavs, having arrived there, attacked and destroyed the pagans, i.e. the indigenous pagan population.[41]

Another thing that should be emphasized is the fact that, unlike the bishop of Monemvasia from the neighbouring Malean Peninsula and some other cities in the eastern Peloponnese, who are mentioned during the

[37] Cronaca di Monemvasia, 12.88–90.

[38] Lexikon III, 484–485; Kaldellis 2007, 115–117, 120–131.

[39] On the relationship between Arethas' data and the *Chronicle of Monemvasia*, cf. Lemerle 1963, 16–17, 22, 25–27; Lemerle 1964, 236–237; Koder 1976, 75–80; Anagnostakis, Kaldellis 2014, 106–115; Komatina 2021, 80–86, with earlier scholarship.

[40] Kougeas 1985, 192–193. Koder 1976, 75–76; Anagnostakis, Kaldellis 2014, 109–115, consider that the phrase τὰ εὐγενῆ καὶ ἑλληνικὰ ἔθνη found in the *Chronicle of Monemvasia* is only a scribal error, and that the form τὰ ἐγγενῆ ἑλληνικὰ ἔθνη brought by Arethas is the only relevant one, and in the utilization of the term "Hellenic peoples" the use of ancient sources is recognized.

[41] On the vanishing of paganism and the spread of Christianity in the Peloponnese until the sixth century, cf. Bon 1951, 4–9.

seventh and eighth centuries,[42] the bishop of Maina is mentioned for the first time only in episcopal *notitiae* from the tenth century, i.e. in *notitiae* 7, 9 and 10 as a suffragan of the metropolitan of Corinth, like the bishops from the area of the eastern Peloponnese.[43] The fact that in the mentioned *notitiae* the bishop of Maina is always in the last place among the suffragans of the metropolitan of Corinth is also significant, because it may indicate the later establishment of the bishopric. Also, noteworthy and useful information is that in *notitia* 7, the bishop of Monemvasia is mentioned as the bishop *of Monemvasia or Tenaro.*[44] Tenaro is the southernmost cape of the Maina Peninsula. His placing under the bishop of Monemvasia could be explained by the fact that in the time before the Slavic invasion, Maina was under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Lacedaemon, whose successor was the bishop of Monemvasia, but also by the fact that while the Mainotes were pagans and before there was a bishop of Maina, the bishop of Monemvasia, as the nearest neighbouring bishop, claimed their country and developed missionary activity within it.

The Mainotes, therefore, were among those natives of the Peloponnese who remained pagans until the arrival of the Slavs. If they were not baptized before the arrival of the Slavs, then it is quite understandable that they could not be baptized after either, since most of the peninsula was possessed by them, and the remains of the Christian Roman civilization and most of the imperial institutions were mostly destroyed. Remaining pagans for a long time, the Mainotes were also perceived as such by their neighbours, the Christian Romans from the eastern Peloponnese, and they therefore called them *Hellenes.* There is a striking similarity between the Mainotes and the South Slavic pagan Narentans on the Adriatic coast, whom the neighbouring Christian Serbs and Croats called *Pagans.* The similarity between the Mainotes and the Narentans is also in the fact that, according to Porphyrogenitus, they both lived in impassable and inaccessible regions, which to some extent explains their remaining in the pagan faith.[45] After the subjugation and Christianization of the Slavs of the Peloponnese between 783 and 805, their entire territory came under the newly founded metropolitanate of Patras, including the restored episcopal see of Lacedaemon. Maina, however, fell under the metropolitan of

[42] Komatina 2009, 37, n. 50, 43–45.
[43] Notitiae, 7.495, 9.378, 10.448, 13.444; Komatina 2009, 43–45.
[44] Notitiae, 7.491.
[45] DAI I, 29.79–81, 50.76–78.

Corinth.[46] Bearing in mind that the reorganization of the church administration in the Peloponnese at the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century was not based on the ancient rights of the cathedral sees from the time before the invasion of the Slavs, but on the situation that arose as a result of the two centuries of their domination of the peninsula,[47] the reason for the Mainotes falling under the metropolitanate of Corinth, however, should be sought in the claims laid by and the action developed by the bishop of Monemvasia among them. Since Maina was not under the Slavs, but recognized the authority of the emperor, the bishop of Monemvasia had the right to jurisdiction over them even before the imperial reoccupation of the Slavic parts of the Peloponnese between 783 and 805. However, since they were still pagans, the jurisdiction of the bishop of Monemvasia was only formal. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that it was the bishop of Monemvasia who was the main instrument of the imperial authorities in the Christianization of the Mainotes. When most of them were baptized, a special bishopric for the Mainotes was established, also under the metropolitan of Corinth. Since that bishopric was first mentioned at the beginning of the tenth century, it is not impossible that it was created during the time of Emperor Basil I, and that the Mainotes were finally brought to the faith of Christ at that time.

Conversion of the Jews

Certainly the most radical measure undertaken by Basil I in order to achieve religious homogenization within the Empire was the forcible Christianization of the Jews, which he carried out in 873/874. The event left a strong impression on both contemporaries and posterity. Unlike Basil's efforts to convert the Slavic and Greek pagans in the Peloponnese, which left few traces in the sources, the conversion of the Jews is quite well documented.[48]

The chronology can be precisely established thanks to the so-called *Cambridge Chronicle*, which informs us that the *Jews were baptized in the year 6382, in the seventh indiction*.[49] The year 6382 from the Creation of

[46] Komatina 2009, 40–47.

[47] Komatina 2009, 40–50.

[48] About that issue, cf. Sharf 1971, 82–94; Dagron, Traité, 347–353; Prieto Domínguez 2014, 283–302.

[49] …Ἔτους .ϛτπβ΄ ἐβαπτίσθησαν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι. ἰνδικτιῶνος ζ΄…, Kleinchroniken I, 45.21. Pseudo-Symeon, 691.8–10, places the conversion of the Jews in *the seventh and eighth years*

the World, which is also the seventh indiction, lasted from 1 September 873 to 31 August 874. Basil's motive for the step was justified by his son, Emperor Leo VI the Wise, in *novel no. 55*, *by the great love* that Basil I had towards *the salvation of the Jews*, which is why he was *not content to leave them, like those* (emperors) *before him, in the regulation of existing laws, but having converted them, both by expositions of the holy scriptures and by their admonitions, to the salvation-bringing Christian faith, he managed to bring them to the life-giving water of baptism*.[50] Basil's grandson, and Leo's son, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, writing the account of that event in section 95 of *Vita Basilii*, does not explain his grandfather's motives with reference to *love for the salvation of the Jews*, but rather Basil's awareness that *God does not care about anything so much as the salvation of souls*, which is why he did not want *to appear careless and negligent towards that apostolic work*. That is why he *caught the Judean nation first, uncircumcised in heart, as much as it was in his power, into the submission to Christ*.[51]

The way in which the Jews were converted to the Christian faith is firstly indicated by a contemporary text, created precisely as a response to Basil's policy of Christianizing the Jews. Under the name of *The Treatise which states that one should not hastily extend a baptizing hand to Jews unless someone investigate them thoroughly beforehand*, the document was compiled by a contemporary of the event, the well-known Gregory Asbestas who, following the fall of Syracuse to the Arabs in 878, became the metropolitan of Nicaea, in 878/879.[52] At one place, Asbestas writes that the Jews who should be baptized are called *by the one who holds the power*, i.e. emperor,[53] and before the emperor they renounce their *old laws*,[54] i.e. rules and rituals of the Jewish faith. Porphyrogenitus describes this method in more detail. According to him, the emperor commanded the Jews to

of Basil's reign, which would be 872/873 and 873/874, counting from his coronation after the murder of Bardas, in May 866, i.e. 873/874 and 874/875, counting from the assumption of self-rule in 867, but in any case, very close to the chronology given by the aforementioned short chronicle. However, no serious conclusions can be based on the chronology of Basil's reign in the work of Pseudo-Symeon, since every single event of Basil's reign is linked to one precisely determined year of his reign.

[50] Novelles, no. LV, 211.3–9.

[51] Vita Basilii, 95.1–6. Basil's attempt to convert the Jews to Christianity was also described by Symeon the Logothete, Pseudo-Symeon and the Continuer of George the Monk, Symeon, 132.10; Pseudo-Symeon, 691.8–10; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 842.12–16.

[52] Dagron, Traité, 313–357.

[53] Dagron, Traité, 319.

[54] Dagron, Traité, 327.

present arguments in support of their own faith at the *debates* (διαλέξεις), so that they would either show themselves *strong and undisputed*, or believe *that the head of the Law and the Prophets was Christ and that the Law had the form of a shadow, which was scattered by the shining of the sunlight*, and *to approach the teachings of the Lord and be baptized*.[55] The *novel no. 55* of the Emperor Leo VI does not mention such discussions, although the allusion to them could be hidden behind the testimony that emperor Basil brought the Jews to the faith of Christ *by expounding the holy scriptures*.[56] The description of one such theological debate between Emperor Basil and the Jews was recorded in praise poems about the conversion of Jews from the end of the ninth century.[57] Finally, a later Jewish source, *Sefer Yuhasin* from the eleventh century, speaks of some kind of public debate that took place in Constantinople between Emperor Basil I and the Jewish Rabbi Shefatya from southern Italy. Since the emperor prevailed over the rabbi in the debate, he ordered the persecution of the Jews to begin.[58] It is most likely that the baptism was performed in the presence of the emperor and the patriarch as part of the holy liturgy in the church, with prior exposition to the Jews of the dogmas of the Christian faith and their renunciation of Judaism.[59] On the other hand, according to the contemporary Latin writer Auxilius († c. 912), the emperor simply made the Jews accept baptism by force (*per vim baptizari fecit*).[60]

The emperor would reward those who joined the Christian faith by giving them money and conferring dignities—he delivered them *from the anguish of the previous levies*, he announced that he would make them *from the despised to the respected*, and he freed many of *the imposed veil of blindness* and *brought them to the faith of Christ*.[61] With that, he made abandoning the faith of their ancestors more bearable, and at the same time gave them an additional motive to decide on such a step. However, he forced them to renounce everything that belonged to their old faith and forbade them to practice circumcision, keep the Sabbath and everything else that

[55] Vita Basilii, 95.6–12.
[56] Novelles, no. LV, 211.7–9.
[57] Prieto Domínguez 2014, 284–285.
[58] Dagron, Traité, 349–350.
[59] Dagron, Traité, 350–353; Prieto Domínguez 2014, 284–285.
[60] Auxilius und Vulgarius, 109.
[61] Vita Basilii, 95.12–16; Symeon, 132.10; Pseudo-Symeon, 691.8–10; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 842.12–16; Dagron, Traité, 319.

goes with it.[62] In the Christian empire of the Romans, the Jews were generally in a bad position, quite low on the social ladder and in an unenviable condition of life. They were discriminated against in many ways, and such a position was imposed on them by existing imperial laws.[63] They were, though, allowed to follow their own religion and only the emperors Heraclius (610–641) and Leo III (717–741) before Basil I seriously thought about their Christianization.[64]

The Byzantine Church, which normally would not have had anything against winning new believers, was quite divided on the issue of the emperor's policy of Christianizing the Jews. Some church circles fully supported his policy, while others were firmly against it. However, it was not the policy of Christianizing the Jews in itself that bothered the critics, rather it was the manner in which it was carried out. Their representative was Gregory Asbestas, who, with Photius' return to the patriarchal throne in 877, had himself returned to the head of the church of Syracuse, and after that city fell into the hands of the Arabs on 21 May 878, transferred to the even more significant position of metropolitan of Nicaea.[65] As metropolitan of Nicaea, in 878/879 he composed the already mentioned *Treatise which states that one should not hastily extend a baptizing hand to Jews.* In it, he presents the views that led him and the church circles to which he belonged to believe that the emperor's policy of Christianizing the Jews was wrong, after five years of its implementation.[66] The first thing that concerned the opposition was that the Jews were persuaded to convert with money and material benefits. Baptism must not be a way to improve one's material and social position. If they accepted baptized for that, then they remained Jews in their hearts. They should be baptized only if they do it voluntarily, because they feel it in their soul.[67] In the second place was the fact that the emperor was carrying out the

[62] Novelles, no. LV, 211.9–13.

[63] On that, cf. Dagron, Traité, 350–352. For an overview of the anti-Jewish legislation of the Byzantine emperors, cf. Kohen 2007, 42–50; Tolan et al. 2014. On the status of the Jews in Byzantium from the seventh to the tenth century, cf. ODB II, 1040–1041 (S. B. Bowman); Sharf 1971, 61–105; Kohen 2007, 51–61; Dagron, Déroche 2010.

[64] Dagron, Traité, 347.

[65] According to *notitia* no. 7, from the beginning of the tenth century, the metropolitan of Nicaea held the 8th place in the hierarchy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and that of Syracuse the 13th, cf. Notitiae, 7.8, 13, 232–238, 274–287.

[66] Dagron, Traité, 340–357; Prieto Domínguez 2014, 296–297.

[67] Dagron, Traité, 317–325.

Christianization of the Jews completely non-canonically, bypassing the relevant ecclesiastical rules. Namely, if one of the Jews still wanted to be baptized, without being lured to it by money and promises of material gain, he should not be accepted into the church just like that, but rather his zeal should be carefully examined. In such a case, the 8th canon of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787 is binding, which orders that Jews, who declare themselves Christians, are not admitted *to prayer or to church*, unless they wish to become Christians due to *their sincere faith* and *confess it with all heart, conquering their own customs and rituals*, and if they investigate and correct the customs and rituals of other Jews. Only then should they be received and baptized.[68] However, they should not renounce Jewish customs and rituals before the emperor, as Basil I requested and implemented, but *before the Church of God and its bishops and priests*. And not only should they renounce the teachings of their faith, but also anathematize them, and then spend a certain time as *catechumens*, before becoming full members of the church.[69] In the third part of his text, Gregory addresses his opponents in the church, i.e. those who supported Basil's policy. They justified their position by saying that by the emperor's policy of baptizing Jews *the dogmas were not endangered*. However, Gregory warns them that baptism is one of the most fundamental *dogmas* of the Christian faith.[70] Finally, Gregory looks back on the role played in Basil's policy of Christianizing the Jews by secular figures, primarily the emperor himself. He reminds that the canons of the church explicitly decree that secular persons should not interfere in church affairs and that they must limit themselves to duties appropriate to their position.[71] Apparently under the orders of the secular authorities, priests were baptizing Jews without reporting the fact to the competent bishop. Although in the normal run of things, such an ordinary and everyday rite as baptism did not oblige the priest to address his bishop, such a new and unusual act as the baptism of a Jew should not be performed by priests without informing their bishops about it. According to the canons, priests who act outside the will and knowledge of the bishop should be deposed.

[68] Dagron, Traité, 325–327; VII Ecum. (Nicaea II) 8, Syntagma II, 583.
[69] Dagron, Traité, 327–329, 354–356.
[70] Dagron, Traité, 329–333.
[71] Dagron, Traité, 335–337; Trullo 64, Syntagma II, 453–454.

Moreover, even the bishops themselves should not act without the knowledge and approval of their responsible metropolitan.[72]

In this last statement, Gregory's ideological position on church issues is fully recognized. Even bishops should not act without the approval of their metropolitan, and the metropolitan over all metropolitans is the patriarch. Therefore, the patriarch is the supreme judge in all matters related to the organization and functioning of the church and believers. At the time when Basil began his policy of Christianizing the Jews, in 873/874, the patriarch of Constantinople was Ignatius (second tenure, 867–877). There is no indication that he was in the least opposed to Emperor Basil's policy or the way it was implemented. It can be assumed that his followers were at the same time followers and supporters of that policy and that they were the wing in the church that Gregory Asbestas opposed with his writings. Who made up the circle of Gregory's like-minded people it is not difficult to guess. From the very beginning, Gregory was with Photius, whose teacher and faithful follower he was on all occasions. Emperor Basil restored Photius to the patriarchal position after Ignatius' death in 877. It was during his tenure, in 878/879, that Gregory Asbestas dared to write a document in which he strongly attacked the way in which the emperor's policy of Christianizing the Jews was carried out. Emphasizing in that writing that the secular authorities should not interfere in church affairs, and ending it with the view that the patriarch is the supreme judge in all ecclesiastical matters, Gregory actually presents Photius' ideology about the relationship between secular and church authorities in the Christian Empire, which Photius himself would immediately after fully shape and expound in the significant legal monument of his era, the *Epanogoge* (*Eisagoge*), composed near the end of Basil's life, in 885 or 886.[73]

The ideology that Emperor Basil was guided by when he ordered the conversion of the Jews constitutes a special question and is explained in the surviving sources only as an expression of his exclusive will and his own judgement. It enters into the framework of the general question about the role of the emperor in the history of the Byzantine Church and the

[72] Dagron, Traité, 337–339; Apostles 15, 39, Syntagma II, 20–21, 54; IV Ecum (Chalcedon) 5, 13, ibidem, 229–230, 250; Trullo 17, 31, ibidem, 343, 371; Antioch 9, Syntagma III, 140–141; Laodicea 57, ibidem, 222.

[73] Schminck 1986, 15; Prieto Domínguez 2014, 299–300.

ideology that lay behind it.[74] Such a question cannot be discussed in detail here, but from the entire activity of Basil I in the ecclesiastical affairs of his time, it is clear how significant and important that role was. In scholarship, however, the initiative of Patriarch Photius is recognized in the background of the emperor's decision to initiate the Christianization of the Jews, with particular reference being made to the fact that the emperor enacted this measure just after Photius' return to Constantinople in 873, although, as we have seen, the manner in which it was implemented did not correspond to Photius' understanding of the relationship between the imperial and patriarchal authorities.[75]

The conversion of the Jews, which took place in 873/874 implemented by Basil I, did not produce lasting results. With his death in 886, the policy was terminated and most of the baptized Jews returned to their previous faith. As Porphyrogenitus writes, *most of them returned like dogs to their own vomit after the passing of the emperor*.[76] The contemporary Latin writer Auxilius points out how few were the baptized Jews who, after a short time, still willingly *gave confirmation of their belief in Christ and freely confessed that they kept the Gospel commandments and the apostolic writings according to custom*, and yet that *none of them was baptized a second time*.[77] Basil's son and successor Emperor Leo VI finds the reason for the failure of the policy and the return of baptized Jews to Judaism, in the fact that, although he *partly tore them away from Jewish thinking*, he did not also *by the letter of the law* revoke and cancel the earlier laws that allowed them a Jewish way of life,[78] although Basil in his legal collections, the *Prochiron* from c. 870–879 and the *Eisagoge* from c. 885–886, whose issuance was instigated by Photius, reiterated and further strengthened the anti-Jewish provisions of the laws of Justinian.[79] Therefore, Leo VI himself included the aforementioned provisions in his *Basilica* from as early as 888, and strengthened the anti-Jewish legislation with additional regulations,[80] especially with his *novel no. 55*, by which he *imposed silence*

[74] About this in connection with Basil's policy of Christianizing the Jews, cf. Dagron, Traité, 356–357, in Byzantine history in general, Dagron 1996.

[75] Prieto Domínguez 2014, 292–302.

[76] Vita Basilii, 95.16–18.

[77] Auxilius und Vulgarius, 109–110.

[78] Novelles, no. LV, 211.13–15.

[79] Prieto Domínguez 2014, 286–287.

[80] Prieto Domínguez 2014, 286–292.

on all the old legislation on Jews, so that they would not dare to behave differently but as *is the will of the pure and salvation-bringing faith of the Christians*. All those who would leave the Christian faith in the future and return to Jewish customs and dogmas should be treated in accordance with the old legal provisions regarding apostates from the Christian faith.[81] This *novel* was brought by the new emperor in 894, eight years after the death of Basil I and the end of his policy of Christianizing the Jews, but he did not continue that policy. Most of the baptized Jews had already returned to their previous faith. However, as Basil's grandson, the Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus concluded, the very effort that Emperor Basil I put into the policy was enough to earn him a sufficient reward from God.[82]

If one follows Porphyrogenitus' information from the beginning of the account of the conversion of the Jews in section 95 of *Vita Basilii*, that Basil I knew that *God does not care about anything so much as the salvation of souls*, and that for this reason he did not want *to appear careless and negligent towards that apostolic work*, and that is why he first (πρῶτα) brought the Jews into submission to Christ,[83] it could be concluded that his actions aimed at the Christianization of the last Greek and Slavic pagans in Greece followed the official beginning of the Christianization of Jews in 873/874. However, since Porphyrogenitus in *Vita Basilii* places the section on the baptism of Jews before the sections on his grandfather's actions in the process of the baptism of the Bulgarians (section 96) and Russians (section 97),[84] while he does not say anything about the baptism of the Slavs in Greece and the Greek pagans in that text, that information could not be used for determining the chronology of the Christianization of the pagans in Greece. The role of Basil I in matters of church organization among the Bulgarians has already been discussed, and in the following chapters the issue of the effect of his church policy among the Russians will be touched upon.

[81] Novelles, no. LV, 211.16–22. According to the Jewish chronicle *Sefer Yuhasin* of the eleventh century, Leo VI revoked his father's anti-Jewish measures, Dagron, Traité, 349–350, but it is clear from this *novel* that this was not the case. However, according to Prieto Domínguez 2014, 302, its provisions remained only a dead letter.

[82] Vita Basilii, 95.19–21.

[83] Vita Basilii, 95.1–6.

[84] Vita Basilii, 96.1–13, 97.1–46.

The Fight Against the Paulician Heresy

Finally, Basil I, as is well known, played a decisive role in eradicating the Paulician heresy on the eastern borders of the Empire. Representing a problem for the Empire since its origin in the seventh century, members of this dualistic heresy of Armenian origin intensified their activity in the middle of the ninth century, when Empress Theodora became more serious about their suppression. Then, using the void and insecurity left on the always unstable border by the frequent Byzantine-Arab conflicts, they established their stronghold in the city of Tephrica on the upper Euphrates and developed a quasi-state around it.[85] Militarily strengthened, led by their leaders Carbeas and, after his death in battle with the Romans in 863, his nephew and also son-in-law Chrysocheir, in the Byzantine-Arab battles of the 850-ies and 860-ies, they followed only their own interests and caused great trouble for the Byzantine state.[86]

At the beginning of the reign of the new emperor Basil I, the Paulicians, under the leadership of Chrysocheir, penetrated so far west into Byzantine territory that they reached Nicaea, Nicomedia and Ephesus.[87] After that, the emperor sent them an embassy, wanting to make peace with them. To such an offer from the emperor, Chrysocheir boldly replied: *Oh, emperor, in order to make peace with us, leave all your power in the east, keep the one in the west, and we will have peace with you. If not, we will do our best to expel you from the empire.*[88]

It is usually accepted that this mission was led by Peter of Sicily,[89] who spent nine months among the Paulicians and based on the experience he gained there compiled his famous *History of the heresy of the Manichaeans, also known as the Paulicians*, which he presented in an epistle addressed to

[85] On the history of the Paulician movement with an overview of the source material and earlier scholarship, cf. Lemerle 1973, 1–144; Dixon 2022.

[86] The attitude of the Empire towards the Paulicians and their role in the Byzantine-Arab struggle of 842–867, in more detail, cf. Vasiliev 1935–1950 I, 227–257; Lemerle 1973, 85–96; Varona Codeso 2009, 108–112; Dixon 2022, 271–297.

[87] Genesius, IV.35. Dixon 2022, 40–41, 298–308, identifies the *spatharius* John Chrysocheir, the addressee of several epistles of Patriarch Photius, Photii epp., no. 33–40, 57, 80, 134, with the Paulician leader Chrysocheir, and based on their content, he concludes that in the first years after Carbeas' death in 863, Chrysocheir had good relations with the Empire, but that these relations deteriorated after the arrival of Basil I to power in 867.

[88] Genesius, IV.35.

[89] Vasiliev 1935–1950 II–1, 26–32.

the church leader of newly baptized Bulgaria.[90] Judging by the statement from Peter's own text, he was sent to the Paulician "capital" of Tephrica by order of the emperors Basil, Constantine and Leo, in the *second year of their reign*.[91] Since of the mentioned three emperors, Leo was the last to be crowned emperor and became co-ruler with his father and brother on 6 January 870,[92] so the second year of their joint reign would have lasted between 6 January 871 and 5 January 872. Therefore, the departure of Peter of Sicily to Tephrica and his nine-month stay among the Paulicians falls in any case in the year 871.[93]

Chrysocheir's insolent reply reached Constantinople through Peter of Sicily at the end of 871. According to Genesius, the emperor did not make

[90] Pierre de Sicile, Histoire, 3–67. The circumstances of the creation of that text and its authenticity have been called into question in scholarship, but P. Lemerle decisively restored its value, Lemerle 1973, 17–26, with an overview of earlier opinions. More recently, Dixon 2022, 54–77, 121–126, has returned to the understanding that it was a forgery from the middle of the tenth century, but without more convincing arguments. His key argument, ibidem, 71–77, is that the section on the persecution of the Paulicians in the first decades of the ninth century in Peter's *History*, Pierre de Sicile, Histoire, 65.19–25, presents a reworking of the data on the persecution of the Paulicians during the reign of Empress Theodora in the 840-ies in the chronography of the *Continuer of Theophanes*, Theophanes Continuatus, IV.16, composed in the mid-tenth century. However, the Arab emir of Melitene, Amr ibn Ubaydallah (c. 830–863), PmbZ, no. 8552, with whom they sought protection due to persecution, is mentioned by the *Continuer of Theophanes* as Amer (Ἄμερ), while Peter of Sicily mentions him as *Monocherares* (Μονοχεράρης), which is the Greek translation of his family nickname al-Aqta' ("one-armed"), which is not mentioned in the work of the *Continuer of Theophanes*, nor in other Byzantine sources, except Photius' reworking of Peter's *History*. This means not only that the information given in the *History* of Peter of Sicily is independent of that from the *Continuer of Theophanes*, but also that the author of the *History* had direct information about the family of the Arab emirs of Melitene.

[91] Pierre de Sicile, Histoire, 39.17–41.6, 67.25–35.

[92] ODB II, 1210 (A. Kazhdan, A. Cutler)

[93] Vasiliev 1935–1950 II–1, 26–32, relying on the information of the contemporary Arab historian al-Tabari, according to which the leader of the Paulicians Chrysocheir died in 872, after the battles between the Romans and the Paulicians that followed Peter's mission, dates the stay of Peter of Sicily in Tephrica to the year 869, and his return to Constantinople at the beginning of 870. Lemerle 1973, 19, comes to a similar conclusion, considering that the information about the second year of the reign refers only to Basil, i.e. that the mission began in the second year of his reign, which was before September 869, lasted nine months and ended before June 870, and in the meantime Leo was also crowned as his father's and brother's co-ruler, which is why Peter mentions all three emperors. However, Peter's information about the *second year of the reign of emperors Basil, Constantine and Leo* is quite precise enough. Leo became his father's co-ruler during the *third* year of his reign, so Peter's data, if Lemerle's interpretation were to be accepted, would not make sense.

any diplomatic reply to it.[94] His answer was military and it marked the beginning of several years of hostilities.[95] The Byzantine army, most likely at the end of 871 or at the beginning of 872, attacked Tephrica directly, but was unsuccessful in the first attack. The emperor himself was almost captured, but was saved by Theophylact Abastactus, the father of the later emperor Romanus Lacapenus.[96] After that, *in the second year* after rejecting the emperor's peace proposals of 871, that is, in the second half of 872, Chrysocheir went into action again, penetrated deep into Byzantine territory and this time attacked Ancyra in Galatia.[97] His forces were opposed by the forces of the themes of Charsianon and the Armeniacs. Chrysocheir was defeated at Bathyryax and killed by his former supporter, a certain Pullades. His head was sent to the emperor in Constantinople. At the same time, *domestic of the Schools* Christopher, who was sent by the emperor, made an attack on Tephrica.[98]

In the wake of these struggles, interest in the Paulicians grew in Constantinople. Peter of Sicily compiled the *History of the heresy of the Manichaeans, also known as the Paulicians*, and it is believed that it was he who composed the so-called *Excerpt about the Paulicians, also called Manichaeans*, as an abbreviated, more accessible and more popular version.[99] At the same time, the former patriarch Photius, most likely still living in exile and the disgrace of the emperor, who even earlier had compiled a text against the Paulicians, i.e. Manichaeans, now, based on the *History* of Peter of Sicily, reworked his own writings, and published the

[94] Genesius, IV.35.

[95] On the Byzantine-Paulician conflict of 871–878/879, cf. Tobias 2007, 95–114; Dixon 2022, 308–320.

[96] Symeon, 132.7.

[97] Genesius, IV.36.

[98] Genesius, IV.36–37; Vita Basilii, 41.1–43.41. The campaign of the *domestic of the Schools* Christopher to Tephrica is mentioned by Symeon, 132.7, who adds that on that occasion he captured the city and *razed it to the ground*, which Lemerle 1973, 104, considers a legend. The contemporary Arab author al-Tabari dates Chrysocheir's death to AH 258 (*that year, Chrysocheir was killed in the land of the Romans, at the head of a detachment of his followers*), which corresponds to the period between 18 November 871 and 6 November 872, Vasiliev 1935–1950 II–1, 6 (*M. Canard*). Since all these events took place in the second year after the return from Tephrica of the mission of Peter of Sicily, they should be dated to the autumn of 872. For the analysis of sources and a chronological overview of those events, cf. Vasiliev 1935–1950 II–1, 32–42; Lemerle 1973, 96–103; Dixon 2022, 309–316.

[99] Pierre l'Higoumène, Précis, 69–97. On the circumstances of the creation of that text, cf. Lemerle 1973, 26–31. Dixon 2022, 89–98, however, recognizes in it an independent source, older than Peter's *History*.

new version under the title *Short account about the reappearance of the heresy of the Manichaeans*.[100] All the mentioned writings briefly describe the history of the Paulician movement and its religious aspects, instructing the Byzantine population that it was a dangerous and difficult heresy, which had caused many problems to the Christian Empire for such a long time.

However, the hostilities did not end with the death of Chrysocheir, nor was the Paulician problem solved. They managed to hold on to the Byzantine-Arab border, and their stronghold in Tephrica remained unconquered for several more years. Emperor Basil had to devote the next period of his reign to the fight with them. Already in the spring of the following year, in 873, the emperor personally led the army to Tephrica, but he failed to capture it even then. He directed the campaign against other Arab and Paulician strongholds on the upper Euphrates. He captured Sozopetra and Samosata, while he besieged Melitene without success. He also captured several smaller Paulician cities. Then he returned to Constantinople and celebrated his triumph.[101] Once again he attacked Melitene in 876/877, did not conquer the city, but took many prisoners and booty.[102] Finally, after the Arabs captured Syracuse on 21 May 878, and provoked by this, the emperor, in the summer of the same year,

[100] Photius, Récit, 99–173. Treadgold 2002, 8–9, believes that Photius' text against the Manichaeans was actually his first literary composition, written around 843, and that in the midst of the anti-Paulician actions of Emperor Basil in the early 870-ies, he published a revision of it. Cf. also Markopoulos 2004, 9–10. Dixon 2022, 77–86, 127–135, considers that work also a forgery from the mid-tenth century, which, along with the *History* of Peter of Sicily, also a forgery from the same time, according to him, served the purpose of *reinvention* of the Paulicians on the eastern borders of the Empire during the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. Information from the *Short History* that as a result of the persecution by the Byzantine emperors in the first decades of the ninth century, the Paulicians fled to Melitene, where *there were then the rule of the Christ-hating Saracens ruled by an emir called Monocherares*, Photius, Récit, 167.36–169.6, which is taken as an argument that the text was created only after the arrival of that city under Byzantine rule in 932, or 934, is actually, as shown by Dixon 2022, 81–83, a paraphrase of information from the *History* of Peter of Sicily, that *then the emir of the Saracens there was Monocherares*, Pierre de Sicile, Histoire, 65.22–23, and therefore does not represent an argument for dating the origin of the text after 932–934, especially since it is known that the manuscript in which it is preserved originates from the last third of the ninth or the first quarter of the tenth century, cf. Dixon 2022, 83–85.

[101] Theophanes Continuatus (V, 37–40), 266.13–271.10; Vasiliev 1935–1950 II–1, 6 (M. Canard); Lemerle 1973, 98–100, 104–105; Dixon 2022, 312–320.

[102] Symeon, 132.15.

launched a decisive campaign against the Arabs and Paulicians on the eastern frontier. He led the campaign personally, followed by his eldest son Constantine. He conquered Germanicea in Syria, Adata, but this time also Tephrica. On their return to Constantinople, the emperor and his successor celebrated a great triumph.[103]

After the fall of Tephrica, the Paulician movement was finally suppressed on the eastern borders. The Paulicians either perished, or fled to the neighbouring Arab emirates, or were forced to renounce their beliefs and accept official Orthodox Christianity. In this latter case, they had to be governed according to the formulas of renunciation of heresy drawn up by Orthodox church circles. The formulas intended for the former Paulicians had a specific content that could only be applied to them.[104] Some of the converted Paulicians later made considerable progress in the imperial service, such as a certain Diaconitzes, who distinguished himself during the reign of Emperor Leo VI.[105] However, the remnants of the Paulician heresy survived and during the tenth century they would not only reappear on the eastern borders and in Asia Minor, but the seeds of their teachings would also sprout up in the Balkans, as well as in Western Europe, under the names of the Bogomils, Cathars and Patarenes.[106]

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[103] The campaign *against Syria on Germanicea* is mentioned by Symeon, 132.17. The triumphant return of the emperors from *Tephrica and Germanicea* is described in one of the military treatises of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, Three treatises, 140–146. A description of the entire campaign is given by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in *Vita Basilii*, Vita Basilii, 46.1–49.28. For an overview of the events that followed the death of Chrysocheir and an exhaustive analysis of the source data, cf. Lemerle 1973, 103–108; Vasiliev 1935–1950 II–1, 43–49, 70–94; Dixon 2022, 312–320.

[104] Formules d'abjuration, 185–207.

[105] Genesius, IV.37; Dixon 2022, 314–315.

[106] On the fate of remnants of the Paulicians after the fall of Tephrica, cf. Lemerle 1973, 108–110; Dixon 2022, 321–325.

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Expansion of the Area of Jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople

It has already been shown how the expansion of the Byzantine church influence after missionary endeavours in the 860-ies led to the expansion of the jurisdictional area of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and this process is explained through the example of the organization of the church in Bulgaria after 870, and is best illustrated in the so-called *notitia no. 3* according to the numbering established by J. Darrouzès in his edition of episcopal *notitae* of the Church of Constantinople. The problems related to this *notitiae* are explained in the chapter on the organization of the church in Bulgaria after 870. In this chapter, we will discuss the expansion of the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to other areas, according to the data of *notitia* 3, as well as according to some other sources. In some aspects of that process, the direct role of Emperor Basil I is evidenced, as in the case of the organization of the church among the Russians, the church *annexation* of Cyprus and a similar attempt in the area of Byzantine Dalmatia and neighbouring Croatia, while in some other examples, such as the case with the church organization in the Khazar state, such an imperial role is not directly indicated in the sources. Nevertheless, it is clear that the development of the ecclesiastical organization in those areas also belongs to the time of Emperor Vasil I, and it is therefore considered within the framework of his achievements in the field of church politics. It is important to point out that the expansion of the

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jurisdictional area of the Patriarchate of Constantinople during the time of Emperor Basil I, in some of the cases mentioned, was a consequence of the successful missionary activity of the previous decade, and in some it was a consequence of the new understanding that the entire area which fell under the political influence of the Empire should also fall in the ecclesiastical aspect under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which was first pointed out by Patriarch Photius in his letter to Pope Nicholas I in 861.[1]

The Metropolitanate of Gothia and the Organization of the Church Among the Khazars

Among the few unique data provided by *notitia 3*, one stands out, which is completely unknown to all other *notitiae*—that of the existence within the canonical order of the Patriarchate of Constantinople of the special *eparchy of Gothia—the metropolitanate of Doros*.[2] The information is given in section 37 (although in the manuscript it is labelled ΛΗ΄, i.e. 38) in the list of metropolitans with their suffragans and contains the following:[3]

ΛΗ΄ ἐπαρχία Γοτθίας
α΄ Δόρος μητρόπολις
β΄ ὁ Χοτζίρων
γ΄ ὁ Ἀστήλ
δ΄ ὁ Χουάλης
ε΄ ὁ Ὀνογούρων
ς΄ ὁ Ῥετέγ
ζ΄ ὁ Οὔνων
η΄ ὁ Ταμάταρχα

At the very end of the *notitiae*, in section 47, an explanation is given which clearly supplements the list in section 37, and judging by its Greek numbering (ΛΖ΄ = 37, not 47),[4] it was originally intended to stand with the mentioned list. There it says:[5]

[1] Photii epp., 290.385–418.
[2] Notitiae, 3.611–618, 777–779.
[3] Notitiae, 3.611–618.
[4] It was put at the 47th place in the *notitia* no. 3 by J. Darrouzès, because that place followed the last section of the *notitia*.
[5] Notitiae, 3.777–779.

ΛΖ΄ ἐπαρχία Γοτθίας

α΄ ὁ Χοτζίρων σύνεγγυς Φούλων καὶ τοῦ Χαρασίου, ἐνῶ λέγεται τὸ Μάβρον Νερόν.

β΄ ὁ Ἀστήλ, ἐνῶ λέγεται ὁ Ἀστὴλ ὁ ποταμὸς τῆς Χαζαρίας, ἔστιν δὲ κάστρον.

This data testifies to the existence of the ecclesiastical eparchy of *Gothia* within the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It can be seen that it is an eparchy with a full metropolitan organization, with the seat of the metropolitan in the city of Doros, the capital of the Crimean Goths, who were under the rule of the Khazars in the eighth to ninth centuries,[6] and with its suffragans among the *Chotzirs*, *Onogurs*, *Huns*, *Chalisians*, in the Khazar capital of *Astil*, and cities like *Tamatarcha* (the former Phanagoria, the latter Tmutarakan).[7] Episcopal *notitiae* 1, 2, 4 and 5 do not show any other traces of ecclesiastical organization in the Trans-Pontian regions, except for the three autocephalous archbishoprics, subordinated, therefore, directly to the patriarch of Constantinople, in the Byzantine strongholds there *Cherson*, *Bosporus* and *Nicopsis*, all three with an indication that they are in the *eparchy of Zichia*.[8] *Notitia* 1 was composed before the beginning of the iconoclastic heresy in 730,[9] *notitia* 2 during the time of Patriarch Nicephorus (806–815), more precisely, between 806 and 814,[10] *notitia* 5 also in the time of Patriarch Nicephorus, but after *notitia* 2, *notitia* 4 after them both, between 814 and 828.[11] As *notitia* no. 3 was formerly considered a product of the eighth century, i.e. of the period either immediately before or immediately after the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787, so the organization of the *eparchy of Gothia* described in it was placed precisely in that time frame.[12] In support of this, data from

[6] About the Goths in the Crimea and Gothia, cf. Vasiliev 1936; Alekséenko 1996, 271–275; Cvetković 2017, 240–243.

[7] Notitiae, 3.611–618; Dvornik 1933, 160–168; Vasiliev 1936, 97–104; Zuckerman 2006, 202–218.

[8] Notitiae, 1.62–64, 2.66–68, 4.63–65, 5.67–69. On the Byzantine possessions in the Crimea, cf. Hrapunov 2009, 64 sq; Cvetković 2017, 150–153.

[9] Notitiae, 7–9.

[10] Notitiae, 18–19; Komatina 2009, 29–30, n. 8.

[11] Komatina 2013, 195–214. For dating in earlier scholarship, cf. Notitiae, 42–45, 47–48.

[12] Dvornik 1933, 160–168; Vasiliev 1936, 97, believing that the *notitia* originates from the first iconoclast period (730–787), concludes that it provides *interesting and unexpected information about the position of the Christian church in Khazaria in general in the 8th century*. Similarly Huxley 1978, 164–166; Obolenski 1991, 210–211. In recent times, the dat-

certain hagiographic and documentary sources that mention the ecclesiastical unit of *Gothia* in the eighth century are cited. The work in question is the *Life of St. John of Gothia*, the head of that ecclesiastical unit, who lived and worked during the second half of the eighth century († 792). The life was composed at the beginning of the second iconoclastic era (815–843) on the southern coast of the Black Sea.[13] In addition, in the acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, held in Nicaea in 787, there are signatures, among other hierarchs, of *Cyril, the monk and representative of Nicetas* (or, in one place *John*), *bishop of Gothia*.[14] In the Georgian life of St. Abo of Tiflis, composed shortly after his death in 786, it is recorded that this young man of Arab origin received Christianity precisely in the land of the Khazars around the year 780, *since there are many cities and villages in the northern country whose inhabitants live carefree in the faith of Christ*.[15] Although the Patriarchate of Constantinople at that time claimed jurisdiction over the land of the Khazars,[16] in the middle of the eighth century, the aforementioned Bishop John was ordained as a bishop in Georgia by the catholicos-archbishop there, which is explained by the circumstances that after the iconoclastic council of 754 there were no

ing of the aforementioned *notitia* 3 to the time after the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 has been accepted, Notitiae, 32–33, so the organization of the metropolitanate of Gothia described in it is also dated to the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century, Auzépy 2007, 199–207; Zuckerman 2006, 214–218; Basić 2020, 32–37.

[13] Vie de Jean de Gothie, 69–85 (Greek text with French translation 78–85); Huxley 1978, 161–169; Auzépy 2007, 202–207.

[14] Concilium Nicaenum II, 1, 20 (26, *Cyril, monk and holder of the place of Nicetas, bishop of Gothia*), 200 (29, *Cyril, representative of the venerable bishop of Gothia*), 278 (35, *Cyril, most reverend monk and the holder of the place of Nicetas, bishop of Gothia*); 2, 496 (39, *Cyril, monk and representative* ***of John****, bishop of Gothia*); 3, 796 (38, *Cyril, monk and representative of Gothia*), 832 (36, *Cyril the sinful monk and holder of the place of Nicetas, bishop of Gothia*); Lamberz 2004, 45.

[15] Cf. Bíró 1977, 250, 254–256; Auzépy 2007, 201–202, where the given information is interpreted to in the context of dating ecclesiastical organizations in Khazaria described in *notitia* 3 to the eighth century.

[16] According to an episcopal *notitia* from the mid-eighth century, which outlines the territorial extent of all the five patriarchates, cf. Komatina I. 2016, 47, n. 71, *the second most holy apostolic and patriarchal see of Constantinople of the first-called of the apostles Andrew and the great theologian and evangelist and apostle John, comprises Europe and Asia to western Sicily and the Cyclades to Pontus and Cherson, Abkhazia and Chaldia and Khazaria to Cappadocia, all climates of the north*, Parthey, Hieroclis Synecdemus, 140.21–29.

Orthodox, non-iconoclastic bishops in the Empire to whom the still Orthodox inhabitants of Gothia would turn to ordain their bishop.[17]

The fact that in the *Life of St. John of Gothia* the saint is constantly referred to as a bishop, while there is made a clear distinction between this rank and the higher, metropolitan rank,[18] also points to the conclusion that the hierarchical structure of Khazaria, described in the section 37 of the *notitia* 3, does not reveal the situation in that area in the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century. In addition, the fact that he went for the ordination to Iberia clearly testifies to the fact that he does not have his episcopal synod and his own suffragans who could ordain him themselves. Therefore, it is clear that at this time there was no *eparchy of Gothia—metropolitanate of Doros*, as stated in the *notitia* 3,[19] as an ecclesiastical unit headed by a metropolitan, but only the bishopric of Gothia, headed by a bishop based in the city of Doros, while bishoprics among the Khazars, listed in the *notitia* 3 as its suffragans,[20] at this time still did not exist.[21] The fact that the signatures of the representatives of Gothia at the Seventh

[17] According to the *Life of St. John of Gothia*, after Emperor Constantine V Copronymus at the iconoclastic Council of Hieria appointed the then Bishop of Gothia as the metropolitan of Heraclea of Thrace, *those Orthodox from Gothia, who did not recognize the evil doctrine of the council, finding themselves without a shepherd, wanted this Venerable John for the* (*new*) *shepherd*. However, he had already gone to visit Jerusalem and spent three years there. When he returned to Gothia, its inhabitants *sent him to Iberia, before the Catholic throne* (…Εἰθ'οὕτως ἐπὶ Ἠβερίαν οἱ τῆς Γοτθίας πρὸς τὸν καθολικὸν θρόνον ἐξέπεμψαν…), where he was *ordained as a bishop*, Vie de Jean de Gothie, § 2, 79.20–21; Synaxarium CP, 772.32–773.3; Vie de Georges L'Hagiorite, § 51.1078–1081, 76; Vasiliev 1936, 90; Auzépy 2007, 203–204. On the other hand, according to the *Life of St. Stephen the Younger* († 765), which was written at the beginning of the ninth century, precisely the lands on the northern shores of the Pontus, *which lay in the eprchy of Zichia, from Cherson, Bosporus, Nicopsis and those who approached towards Hollow Gothia*, were among the main refuges of Orthodoxy and the Orthodox during the iconoclastic persecutions after the Council of 754, Vie d'Etienne le Jeune, 125.16–25; Vasiliev 1936, 88; Huxley 1977, 99–102; Auzépy 2007, 206–207.

[18] Cf. Vie de Jean de Gothie, 2, p. 79.13, 15, where it is said that the previous *bishop of Gothia* was appointed by the emperor as the *metropolitan of Heraclea of Thrace*.

[19] Notitiae, 3.611.

[20] Notitiae, 3.612–618.

[21] Information from the *Menologion of Emperor Basil* about an iconophile monk, a follower of St. Stephen the Younger, who, due to iconoclastic persecution during the reign of Emperor Constantine V, left Cherson and *fled to Khazaria, where he even became a bishop and later died*, Menologium Basilianum, PG 117 181 D, which is often cited as confirmation of the data of the *notitia* 3 about the developed episcopal organization among the Khazars in the eighth century, Huxley 1978, 166; Auzépy 2007, 201, is too late and vague to base far-reaching conclusions on.

Ecumenical Council in 787 are found at a significant place, among the signatures of the autocephalous archbishops,[22] is considered in scholarship to be a testimony of the natural course of development of the ecclesiastical organization in Gothia, the next logical step of which would be the creation of a metropolitanate, as described in the *notitia* 3.[23] However, from the data of the same *Life of St. John of Gothia*, it can be seen that the circumstances in the Khazar state of that time were generally not favourable to Christians. The same text does not mention the missionary activity of St. John of Gothia among the Khazars. On the contrary, it talks about the revolt of the Goths, raised by the *lord* (κύρος) of Gothia and his nobles, who were supported by the bishop himself, against the Khazars in 787, after their takeover of the Gothic capital and the episcopal see of Doros, about the revenge of the Khazar khagan, to the capture of Bishop John himself and his imprisonment in the city of Phuli, from where he escaped and died in exile in Amastris, on the opposite, southern coast of Pontus around 792.[24] Although it is considered in scholarship that the above-mentioned events did not seriously affect the church conditions in Gothia,[25] it is still difficult to assume that immediately after all that, Christianity could have experienced a greater expansion among the Khazars, which would have led to the development of such a well-organized ecclesiastical administration in the Khazar territory as described in *notitia* 3. On the contrary, the above circumstances could have led rather to the decline of Christianity in the Khazar state, which could also be the reason why the bishopric of Gothia is not mentioned in *notitiae* 2, 4 and 5 from the first decades of the ninth century.[26]

The data of section 37 of the list of metropolitan suffragans of *notitia* 3, about the *eparchy of Gothia*, is not the only novelty that this *notitia*

[22] Concilium Nicaenum II, 1, 20 (26), 200 (29), 278 (35); 2, 496 (39); 3, 796 (38), 832 (36); Lamberz 2004, 45.

[23] Zuckerman 2006, 218.

[24] Vie de Jean de Gothie, §§ 4–8, 75, 81.50–85.117; Huxley 1978, 166–169; Zuckerman 2006, 216–217; Auzépy 2007, 204–206.

[25] Auzépy 2007, 204–205.

[26] In a letter of Theodore the Studite, dated between 821 and 826, addressed to the *archimandrite of Gothia*, the author talks about the circumstances in the church there, Theodori Studitae epp., 486.1–77. Although the letter is a valuable testimony to the existence of monastic life in Gothia at that time, Auzépy 2007, 205, it is interesting that Theodore mentions as a responsible hierarch a certain Philaretus, Theodori Studitae epp, 486.14–18, who is considered to actually be the archbishop of Sugdea of the same name, successor of Stephen of Surozh, Vasiliev 1936, 104–105.

brings in relation to previous *notitiae*. Another such is found in the list of autocephalous archbishoprics. In the *notitiae* 1, 2, 4 and 5, as already mentioned, among the autocephalous archbishoprics there are, in a compact sequence, three in the Byzantine cities of the trans-Pontic regions: Cherson, Bosporus and Nicopsis, all three indicated to be in the eparchy of Zichia.[27] The *Life of St. Stephen the Younger* from the beginning of the ninth century also classifies the mentioned cities in the eparchy of Zichia.[28] *Notitia* 3, however, introduces the following change: in it, after Cherson and Bosporus,[29] as the third autocephalous archbishopric in the eparchy of Zichia mention is made of *Sugdea*,[30] while Nicopsis is a little further on the list, but now with an indication that it is in the eparchy of Abkhazia (*Abazgia*).[31] In all the other mentioned *notitiae*, the only representative of Abkhazia in the hierarchy of the patriarch of Constantinople was the autocephalous archbishop of Sebastopolis (now Sukhumi).[32]

The existence of the bishop of Sugdea (Surozh, now Sudak), which, like Cherson and Bosporus, was a Byzantine stronghold in the Crimea,[33] was attested in the eighth century, thanks to the *lives* of its bishop St. Stephen of Surozh,[34] and his signatures on the acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787, which are among the signatures of the autocephalous archbishops.[35] It is therefore considered that he had a position identical to that of the church leaders of other Byzantine possessions in the Crimea—Cherson and Bosporus, and that together with them

[27] Notitiae, 1.62–64, 2.66–68, 4.63–65, 5.67–69. On Zichia, cf. Zihija, PE XX, 186–192 (A. J. Vinogradov).

[28] Τὰ πρὸς τὸ ἄναντες τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου, ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς Ζηχίας ἐπαρχίαν συγκείμενα ἀπό τε Χερσῶνος, Βοσπόρου, Νικόψεως..., Vie d'Etienne le Jeune, 125.17–19.

[29] Notitiae, 3.82–83.

[30] ... ἐπαρχία τῆς αὐτῆς (i. e. Ζηκχίας), ὁ Σουγδάων, Notitiae, 3.84.

[31] ...ἐπαρχία Ἀβασγίας, ὁ Νικόψεως, Notitiae, 3.89. J. Darrouzès believes that it is only a scribal error or a misinterpretation of the source by the compiler of the *notitia* 3, ibidem, 3.84 comm.

[32] ...ἐπαρχία Ἀβασγίας, ὁ Σεβαστοπόλεως, Notitiae, 1.72, 2.76, 4.74, 5.77, as well as 3.94.

[33] On Sugdea, cf. ODB III, 1931 (O. Pritsak).

[34] Vie Arménienne de Saint Ettiene, 87–107; Slavonic Life of Saint Stefan, 109–167, where the Greek text of a short life is also given, ibidem, 165–167. S. Ivanov, ibidem, 110, believes that the core of all these lives, its Greek archetype, was composed already at the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century, shortly after the saint's death, by one of his close people, perhaps his successor Philaretus.

[35] Concilium Nicaenum II, 1, 22 (58), 202 (55); 2, 496 (41); 3, 796 (40), 834 (37); Lamberz 2004, 46.

he belonged to the eparchy of Zichia.[36] However, ecclesiastical life also vanished from it, in the period that followed his death. In the *Life of Stephen of Surozh*, it is stated that soon afterwards the city was attacked and destroyed by infidels, but nothing is said about the origin of the barbarians who captured and plundered the city.[37] If we take into account the intolerance of the Khazars towards Christians due to the rebellion of the Goths in the Crimea led by their bishop St. John, it is not impossible that a similar fate befell the Christians in Sugdea.

Nicopsis (*Napsa*) is mentioned in the Georgian *Life of St. Abo of Tiflis* from the end of the eighth century along with Trebizond and Apsarea as a city in the neighbourhood of Abkhazia *under the rule of the servant of Christ, the king of the Ionians, who rules in the great city of Constantinople*.[38] In the *Life of the Apostle Andrew* by Epiphanius the Monk, who visited the city c. 815–820, mention is made of the grave of St. Simon the Cananite, which is found in *Nicopsis in Zichia*,[39] so it is clear that at that time the city belonged to Zichia, exactly as stated in *notitiae* 1, 2, 4 and 5 from the eighth and first half of the ninth century, and not to Abkhazia, as stated in *notitia* 3. Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in the mid-tenth century, in the chapter 42 of his work *De Administrando imperio*, specifies the geographical position of Nicopsis, stating that *up to the river Nicopsis, on which the city of the same name as the river is located, is the land of Zichia*, and that *from the river Nicopsis is the land of Abkhazia*.[40] Porphyrogenitus, therefore, testifies that the river Nicopsis (now Nechepsukho) represented the border between Zichia and Abkhazia, but not to which of them the city of Nicopsis belonged. Contrary to the information of Epiphanius the Monk from the beginning of the ninth century, that the grave of St. Simon the Cananite was found in *Nicopsis in Zichia*, in the *Life of St. George the Hagiorite* from the eleventh century (c. 1068), the apostle is said to have

[36] Auzépy 2007, 200–202.

[37] Vie Arménienne de Saint Ettiene, 104–106. Slavonic Life of Saint Stefan, 31.989–1051, states that they were Russians from Novgorod, but that interesting and much discussed question should be left aside here.

[38] Bíró 1977, 251; Huxley 1977, 101–102.

[39] Ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἕτερος τάφος εἰς Νίκοψιν τῆς Ζηκχίας ἐπιγραφὴν ἔχων Σίμωνος Κανανίτου..., Grečeskie predanija, 178.

[40] ...μέχρι τοῦ Νικόψεως ποταμοῦ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ κάστρον ἐστὶν ὁμώνυμον τῷ ποταμῷ, ἔστιν ἡ χώρα τῆς Ζιχίας..., ἀπὸ... τοῦ Νικόψεως ποταμοῦ, ἐστὶν ἡ τῆς Ἀβασγίας χώρα..., DAI I, 42.95–99, 108–110.

been buried *in Abkhazia, in a place called Nicopsis*,[41] so it is clear that, at that time, the city belonged to Abkhazia. In the absence of other data, it could be assumed that its political status was the same at the time of Porphyrogenitus, a little more than a century earlier. Since Nicopsis is no longer mentioned in the episcopal *notitiae* of the Church of Constantinople, including *notitia* 7 from 920, it could be concluded that it already belonged to Abkhazia and the church there at that time.[42] The situation that *notitiae* 1, 2, 4 and 5 from the eighth and first half of the ninth century state that Nicopsis belonged to the eparchy of Zichia, and that *notitia* 3 places it within the eparchy of Abkhazia, after which it disappeared from the episcopal *notitiae* of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, can be explained by the fact that in the meantime the city had come under the political control of the Abkhaz rulers, who were expanding their authority from the mid-ninth century,[43] which additionally indicates that *notitia* 3 was created after *notitiae* 1, 2, 4 and 5, that is, in the second half of the ninth century.

Due to the constant threat of attacks by the pagan Hungarians and Russians,[44] as well as the religious intolerance of the Khazars, who were already strongly inclined to Judaism,[45] there were no conditions for the restoration and further development of the ecclesiastical organization on the northern shores of the Black Sea during the entire first half of the ninth century. Circumstances for Christians improved only after the mission carried out by Constantine the Philosopher at the Khazar court in 860/861.

The causes, course of the mission and its results are described in the chapter dedicated to it in this work. The Philosopher invited those present to be baptized, or to dispute, if they could, his words. The Khazar authorities allowed anyone who wanted to be baptized.[46] Therefore, on this occasion, everyone in Khazaria was allowed to be baptized and convert to the

[41] Vie de Georges L'Hagiorite, c. 51.1067–1069, p. 76.

[42] The Church in Abkhazia became autocephalous in relation to the Patriarchate of Constantinople at the beginning of the tenth century, cf. Martin-Hisard 1993, 562–563.

[43] Cf. Martin-Hisard 2000, 459–465.

[44] On the political situation in the area north of the Black Sea in the first half of the ninth century, cf. Signes Codoñer 2014, 337–364; Curta 2019, 128–151.

[45] The *Life of Constantine* records the persecution of the Christians of the Crimea, in the hinterland of Cherson, carried out by the Khazars themselves, i.e. their local authorities, Constantinus et Methodius, VC, VIII.31–33.

[46] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.37–38.

Christian faith at will. Two hundred of them did so, on the spot.[47] In a letter which he composed and handed to the Philosopher to take to his emperor, the content of which we have already presented, the khagan does not create any obstacles for those who want to convert to Christianity:

> *My Lord, you sent us a man who explained the Christian faith to us by word and example. Convinced that this is the true faith, we ordered to be baptized those who wish so, and we hope that we ourselves will follow that path…*[48]

Therefore, this letter from the Khazar khagan to the Byzantine emperor, handed over to Constantine the Philosopher, also represents, in my opinion, an act of official recognition of the activity of the Christian church on the territory of the Khazar state, as well as a fundamental act for the establishment of a Christian ecclesiastical organization in it. Only after such a decision did the episcopal organization of the Christian Church in Khazaria became possible and legal. Emperor Michael himself was informed of this decision, in a letter brought by Constantine, and certainly also Patriarch Photius. After the return of the missionary Constantine to Constantinople,[49] further work on the conversion of the inhabitants of Khazaria and the organization of bishoprics in their country continued with the cooperation of the Khazar authorities, and under the supervision of Patriarch Photius, as will be seen below. It was only then that the conditions for the establishment of an ecclesiastical organization among the Khazars as described in section 37 of the list of metropolitan suffragans in *notitia* 3 were met, and in such circumstances the bishoprics recorded therein were established.[50] Certainly, as a result of Constantine's mission, a bishopric was founded in the Khazar capital of Itil—*Astil* (Ἀστήλ), on the *river of the same name*, as noted in *notitia* 3,[51] which is also known from other Greek sources.[52] With the further development of missionary activity, bishoprics

[47] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.41.

[48] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.42–44.

[49] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XIII.1–10.

[50] Such an opinion was already proposed by Vernadsky 1940–1941, 67–76; Naumenko 2003, 133–142.

[51] Notitiae, 3.613, 778.

[52] The position of the Khazar capital of Itil or Atil, known mainly from Arabic sources, on the river of the same name, which is identified with the Volga, is not reliably established, Zuckerman 2006, 214. On the mention of the river and the city of *Astil* or *Atil* in the Byzantine sources, cf. Moravcsik 1958, 78–79.

were also founded in peripheral parts of the Kaganate,[53] such as in the large city of Tamatarcha (Ταμάταρχα), the former Phanagoria, the latter Tmutarakan, today's Taman, on the Taman Peninsula, opposite Bosporus (Kerch).[54] The bishop of the tribe of the *Chotzirs* (Χοτζίρων),had his residence near the city of Phuli in the Crimea, as is reported by the supplementary record at the end of *notitia* 3.[55] The city of Phuli, according to the *Life of Constantine*, was visited on his return from the Khazar mission by Constantine the Philosopher, who found inhabitants there who, although Christians, worshiped an old tree. Constantine convinced them to cut down that tree and to keep their faith correctly.[56] Mention is also made of the bishop of the *Chalisians* (Χουάλης), most probably on the shore of the Caspian Sea,[57] the bishop of the *Onogurs* (Ὀνογούρων), on the lower course of the Don,[58] and the bishop of the Huns (Οὔννων), in what is now Dagestan.[59] It is a little more difficult to locate the bishopric of *Reteg* (Ῥετέγ).[60] What is most interesting is the fact that, according to *notitia* 3, all these bishoprics make up the *eparchy of Gothia*, subordinate to the bishop of the city of Doros, who was given the rank of metropolitan.[61] Certainly, the reason for this lies in the reliable knowledge of the history of the church situation in the Trans-Pontic countries in the Constantinopolitan circles who managed the organization of the church among the Khazars after the mission of Constantine the Philosopher, which was reflected in *notitia* 3. As pointed out above, before the mission of Constantine the Philosopher, Gothia was the only bishopric in the land of the Khazars. Since the mission was the work of the Church of Constantinople, it is certain that all the rights derived from the mission belonged to this church. The khagan also admitted this when he sent to the emperor the letter allowing the spread of Christianity in his lands.[62]

[53] On the identification and location of the mentioned bishoprics, cf. Dvornik 1933, 160–168; Vasiliev 1936, 98–101; Naumenko 2003, 133–137; Zuckerman 2006, 214–215, 223–226.

[54] Notitiae, 3.618.

[55] Notitiae, 3.612, 778; Zuckerman 2006, 214, 223–226.

[56] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XII.10–24.

[57] Notitiae, 3.614.

[58] Notitiae, 3.615.

[59] Notitiae, 3.617.

[60] Notitiae, 3.616; Vasiliev 1936, 100, believes that it is a scribal error and that it is in fact the city of Τερέγ, on the west coast of the Caspian Sea.

[61] Notitiae, 3.611, 777.

[62] Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XI.42–44.

Thus, the Patriarchate of Constantinople gained complete authority over the Christians in Khazaria and organized the church there according to its own rules. Since several bishoprics were founded, and all of them were covered by the same political organization, it was logical that they should all be covered by one metropolitanate. At the same time, the patriarch of Constantinople recognized the antiquity of the Gothic bishopric, in the city of Doros, and the rights that arose from it, and therefore appointed its bishop as the metropolitan and head of the whole Christian church in Khazaria. This is how the *eparchy of Gothia* was created in the Khazar state, recorded in section 37 of the list of metropolitan suffragans of *notitia* 3.

It can be said that this was the *golden age* of Christianity among the Khazars, and it can be chronologically placed in the 860-ies and 870-ies. At the end of that period, however, there was a collapse. Obviously, the barbaric nomadic communities could not embrace the new faith with absolute conviction, and the Christian ecclesiastical organization was not well-adapted to the wandering nomadic life of its new flock, since converting the nomads to Christianity meant forcing them into a sedentary lifestyle.[63] Thus, the results of the great missionary endeavour of the Church of Constantinople among the Khazars and their subjects from the 860-ies faded after less than two decades.

Notitia 3 itself provides an insight into the process of the decline and gradual disintegration of the ecclesiastical organization among the Khazars. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, at the very end of the list of the metropolitan suffragans, another section was subsequently added, which shows the new state of the ecclesiastical organization in Khazaria: the *eparchy of Gothia* still existed, but its metropolitan, instead of the former seven, had only two suffragans: *Chotzirs near Phuli* (ὁ Χοτζίρων σύνεγγυς Φούλων καὶ τοῦ Χαρασίου, ἐνῶ λέγεται τὸ Μάβρον Νερόν) and *Astil* (ὁ Ἀστήλ, ἐνῶ λέγεται ὁ Ἀστὴλ ὁ ποταμὸς τῆς Χαζαρίας, ἔστιν δὲ κάστρον), the Khazar capital.[64] Therefore, there was no longer any bishopric among the nomadic tribes of Khazaria, but neither was there one in the ancient and great city of Tamatarcha.[65] Only the bishopric of the *Chotzirs* survived, which is explicitly said to be near the city of Phuli, known from

[63] Ivanov 2007, 256.

[64] Notitiae, 3.777–779.

[65] Dvornik 1933, 180–181, believes, however, that the bishop of this city can be recognized among the signatures of the participants of the council of 879/880, in the signature of Baanes, the bishop of Μαστράβων, Mansi, XVII, 377 A.

the *Life of Constantine the Philosopher*, but also from the earlier *Life of St. John of Gothia*,[66] and which may have survived precisely by being attached to a certain city, i.e. retaining its sedentary structure, and the bishopric in Astil, the capital of Khazaria, which was also the largest, and therefore probably had the largest number of Christian residents.

However, the disintegration of the ecclesiastical organization in Khazaria, dependent on the general decline in the number of Christians in the Khaganate, did not stop there. *Notitiae* from the tenth century show the even more unfavourable state of the church in the Khazar territories. Namely, from them it can be seen that the *eparchy of Gothia* no longer existed. *Notitia* 7 from 920 and *notitia* 8 from the tenth century no longer know of the bishopric of Astil. Of the former bishoprics of the *eparchy of Gothia*, only Gothia itself and Phuli still existed. However, since it was obvious that there was no need for only these two bishoprics to form a separate metropolitanate, the *eparchy of Gothia* was dissolved, and both bishoprics were subordinated directly to the patriarch of Constantinople as autocephalous archbishoprics, but without an indication of the eparchy to which they belong.[67] In this way, they found themselves in the same position as the sees of Cherson, Bosporus and Sugdea, as well as, in Tamatarcha, which appears again in *notitia* 8.[68] The mentioned two bishoprics are, therefore, all that remained of the ecclesiastical organization in the Khazar territory in the first half of the tenth century, but even their existence is interpreted as a new development, i.e. as the result of the missionary activity that was started afresh in that area by the patriarch of Constantinople Nicholas Mysticus around 914–915.[69]

[66] Vie de Jean de Gothie, § 8.108–111, 85; Constantinus et Methodius, VC, XII.10–24.

[67] Notitiae, 7.97, 99, 8.113, 115.

[68] In *notitia* 7, the church heads of Cherson and Bosporus are mentioned in the list of autocephalous archbishops, and in *notitia* 8, those of Cherson, Bosporus and Tamatarcha, with the indication that they belong to the eparchy of Zichia, Notitiae, 7.72, 90, 8.86, 105, 120. The autocephalous archbishop of Sugdea is mentioned in both lists between the ecclesiastical heads of Gothia and Phuli, without indication of the eparchy, Notitiae, 7.97–99, 8.113–115. At the council of 879/880, Bishop Paul *of Zichia* was also present, Mansi, XVII, 377 C, but it is not clear precisely which church in Zichia he represented. Since in *notitia* 8 instead of Nicopsis in the eparchy of Zichia Tamatarcha is mentioned, A. J. Vinogradov believes that the church see of Nicopsis was transferred to Tamatarcha in the meantime, cf. Zihija, PE XX, 188–189 (A. J. Vinogradov).

[69] Nicholas I, Letters, nos. 68, 106; Zuckerman 2006, 218–229.

The Russian Archbishop

Among the significant successes of Byzantine church policy from the time when the state and the church in Constantinople were governed by Emperor Michael III, Caesar Bardas and Patriarch Photius, we must not overlook the beginning of the Christianization of the Scandinavian Russians in the wide expanses of Eastern Europe. That process, begun at the end of 860, was quite advanced by the summer of 867. However, as Photius testifies in his epistle to the Eastern patriarchs, written at that time, it had not yet reached the level at which it was possible to establish an ecclesiastical organization. At that moment, his wish remained that the Russians should get *a bishop and a shepherd*.[70] That next step in the development of the Christian order among the Russians was made thanks to the new Emperor Basil I and the new-old Patriarch Ignatius.

Direct evidence of this is preserved in the *Vita Basilii* of the emperor's grandson Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. There it is written that the Russians *prepared to receive the archbishop who received ordination from Patriarch Ignatius*.[71] This is, however, only one passage from his lengthy exposition on the Christianization of the Russians. According to the *Vita Basilii*, the aforementioned archbishop, who was ordained by Patriarch Ignatius, was sent to the Russians to baptize them. There he had various discussions with the Russian *prince and his elders*, and after a series of legendary details, he managed to convince them of the supremacy of his faith over paganism, after which they agreed to be baptized.[72] However, as has already been pointed out, the Christianization of the Russians, or at least a part of them, had taken place before Emperor Basil came to the throne, and before Patriarch Ignatius was restored in 867. The manner in which this was achieved has also been investigated. Just as with the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats, which was completed before the reign of Basil I, Porphyrogenitus again gives his grandfather the credit for the Christianization of the Russians, which had taken place before Basil came

[70] Photii epp., 2.304–305.

[71] Vita Basilii, 97.5–7. L'Huillier 1992, 282; Seibt 1992, 291, considering that Photius had already consecrated a *bishop* to the Russians, they consider the mention of an *archbishop* sent to them by Ignatius as evidence of the evolution of the ecclesiastical organization among the Russians.

[72] Vita Basilii, 97.1–46.

to power.[73] It is intriguing, however, that precisely at the time when Porphyrogenitus was writing the biography of his grandfather Basil I, in 957 his imperial court was visited by the Russian princess Olga, who was ceremoniously received and baptized on that occasion, taking the name of her godmother, Porphyrogenitus' wife Empress Helena.[74] Therefore, an interesting question arises as to how this event could have influenced Porphyrogenitus' shaping of the story of the Christianization of the Russians during the reign of his grandfather. In any case, the only information that can be taken from his account is that during the time of Emperor Basil I and Patriarch Ignatius, i.e. between 867 and 877, an archbishop was sent to the Russians, which fulfilled the next step in the development of the Christian mission among them, that Photius envisioned before his fall in 867. When exactly this happened can perhaps be guessed from the internal chronology of the *Vita Basilii*. Namely, it has already been pointed out that Porphyrogenitus, in section 95 of the same work, in which he describes Basil's policy of Christianizing the Jews, points out that, since the emperor realized that *God does not care about anything so much as the salvation of souls*, which is why he did not want *to appear unconcerned and careless of that apostolic work*, the Jewish people were *the first* to be brought to the faith of Christ thanks to him.[75] Only after that, do the accounts about the role of Emperor Basil in the Christianization of the Bulgarians and Russians follow. Since it is known that the Christianization of the Jews began in 873/874, the dispatch of the *archbishop* to the Russians would have happened after that, and before the death of Patriarch Ignatius, so between 873/874 and in 877.

The Russian *archbishop* is not present in *notita* 3, probably because it was drawn up shortly before his ordination. For the hierarch sent to the Russians, Porphyrogenitus uses the title *archbishop* and writes that he was ordained by the patriarch of Constantinople. It was most likely the position of an *autocephalous archbishop*, specific to the hierarchy of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which meant a bishop exempted from the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of the eparchy in which his seat was located and subordinated directly to the patriarch.[76] Such a position also

[73] On the Christianization of the Russians in the second half of the ninth century, in general, cf. PE 38, 723–730 (J. A. Artamonov).

[74] Livre de cérémonies III, II, 15.557–634; IV/2, 693–698; Featherstone 2003, 241–251.

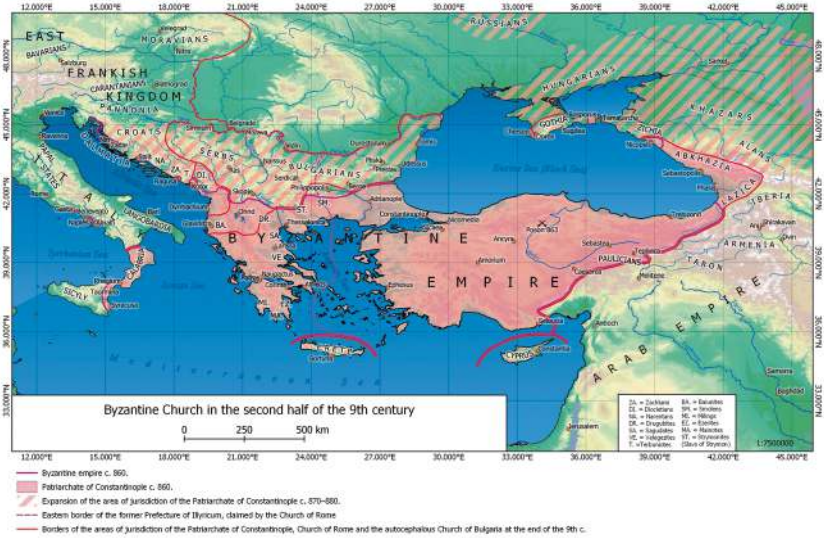
[75] Vita Basilii, 95.1–6.

[76] Cf. L'Huillier 1992, 282. On the status of *autocephalous archbishops*, cf. ODB I, 155–156 (A. Papadakis).

belonged to hierarchs whose seats were outside the borders of the Empire, as lonely islands of Christianity among the heathen, or on the edge of the Christian universe, e.g. the archbishop of Patras among the pagan Slavs in the Peloponnese between 783 and 805, or the above-mentioned bishops of Cherson, Bosporus and Nicopsis from the northern shores of the Black Sea and Sebastopolis in Abkhazia. The position of the newly appointed hierarch among the Russians was of precisely this kind. He was the only hierarch among the Russians. Other bishops had not been appointed, so it was not possible to organize a complete eparchy, with a metropolitan at its head. That may have been the next step planned by the Byzantine Church in Russian territory. Without more bishops, it was not possible to establish an autocephalous church, in which the bishops themselves would choose and consecrate their archbishop, as would be the case with Bulgaria after 880. Such a thing was certainly not even possible among the Russians at that moment, and hardly anyone would have thought of establishing an autocephalous church among them, at such an early stage of Christianization. Therefore, it can be determined with certainty that the *archbishop* whom Patriarch Ignatius ordained and sent to the Russians was actually an *autocephalous archbishop*, a direct suffragan of the patriarch of Constantinople and a member of his synod. However, nothing can be said about his personality.

The seat of this archbishop was certainly in the city of Kiev. The Russian princes who led the attack on Constantinople in 860, Askold and Dir, were the princes of the southern Russian groups and ruled in the city of Kiev on the Dnieper. The two of them were baptized and led their people on the way to Christianity—they were the ones who sent an embassy to Constantinople in 860 with the desire that the Russians be baptized. When their compatriot from the north, Oleg, tricked them to their deaths in 882, they were buried on the so-called Hungarian mountain. Christians built the Church of St. Nicholas over Askold's grave, and the Church of St. Irene above Dir's grave.[77] However, the spatial scope of the Christianization of the Russians at that time was limited only to those Russians who were under the rule of Askold and Dir. The northern groups of the Russians, led by Rurik and his nephew Oleg, based in the city of Novgorod, did not feel the call of the Christian faith and remained devoted to their ancient pagan religion for all that time. Nothing, however, is certain about the degree to which the Christianization of Askold's and Dir's Russians reached their subject Slavs in the southern parts of the Eastern European lowlands (Map 2).

[77] PSRL I, 23.



Map 1 Byzantine Church in the second half of the 9th century

The next step in the development of the ecclesiastical organization among the Russians, i.e. the establishment of a complete eparchial organization, with several bishops led by a metropolitan, was not taken. The ecclesiastical organization among the Russians, built with so much effort over twenty years, vanished together with all traces of Christianity among them, in the year 882. According to the Russian chronicles, in that year the prince of the northern Russian groups, Oleg, leading a large army of northern Russian groups and their subordinate Slavic and Finnish tribes, attacked his compatriots, the southern Russian princes Askold and Dir, defeated and executed them, and captured their capital, Kiev.[78] With his rule, he also imposed the old faith. Another whole century would pass until the Russians, thanks to one of Oleg's successors, prince Vladimir, completely surrendered to the faith of Christ in 988.

[78] PSRL I, 22–24; L'Huillier 1992, 283.

Ecclesiastical "annexation" of Cyprus

Notitia 3 stands out from the others also because it is the only one that includes Cyprus in the list of metropolitans within the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In this list of metropolitans and their suffragans, in the third place, after the metropolitanates of Caesarea of Cappadocia and of Ephesus, the *notitia* contains the following section: *the island of Cyprus, has 15 cities: the metropolis of Cyrine or Constantia, Paphus, Tamasus, Arsinoe, Soli, Lapethus, Cyrenia, Carpasia, Cythri, Leucosia, Citium, Amathus, Neapolis, Curium, Trimithus.*[79]

Cyprus was a constant stumbling block between Byzantium and the Arabs. Ever since 688, it had been under a kind of condominium of both interested powers,[80] whereby the Byzantine administration on the island was represented by the *archon of Cyprus.*[81] The Church of Cyprus, with the headquarters of its head, the archbishop in Constantia, ancient Salamis, was, by the decision of the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431, autocephalous and did not fall under any of the five patriarchates.[82] The inclusion of Cyprus in the eparchial list of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, recorded in *notitia* 3, was possible only at the time when the island was under the full authority of the same patriarchate, and this was only possible in the case of the full authority of the Byzantine state on the island.[83]

According to one of the works of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, known as *De thematibus*, the island of Cyprus came under complete and direct Byzantine rule precisely during the reign of Emperor Basil I. Describing Cyprus in that work as one of the *themes*, the military administrative units of the Byzantine Empire, Porphyrogenitus writes that the island had fallen under *Saracen* rule *during the reign of Heraclius.*[84] His grandfather, Emperor Basil I, *elevated it to the order of themes, and placed in it in power as a strategus a famous Alexius, an Armenian by race, who ruled it for seven*

[79] Notitiae, 3.8, 143–159.

[80] On the status of Cyprus in the seventh to tenth centuries and the extent of Byzantine rule over it, cf. Chatzēpsaltēs 1953, 327–341; Jenkins 1953, 1006–1014; Ahrweiler 1966, 71–73, 100–101, 115, 121; Browning 1989, 101–116; Byzantinē Kypros, 199–208 (Ai. Asdracha), 235–291 (R. Browning); Haldon 1997, 217; Tobias 2007, 125–128; Zavagno 2013, 3–23.

[81] Oikonomidès, Listes, 57.15; Cvetković 2017, 149–150.

[82] III Ecum. (Ephesus) 8, Syntagma II, 203–204; Chrysos 2019, 769–772.

[83] Adhering to the dating of the *notitia* 3 to the first years of the ninth century, Basić 2020, 37–39, relates it to the rebellion of the Cypriots against the Arab rule in 805–806.

[84] De thematibus, XV.18–20.

years.[85] However, the island was then reoccupied by the *Saracens*, and they collected tribute from it as before.[86]

Researchers generally, following Porphyrogenitus' information that Alexius the Armenian was the *strategus* of the Cypriot theme for seven years, considered that the entire Byzantine administration of the island lasted that long. A. A. Vasiliev also tried to define that seven-year period more precisely in terms of chronology. He believed that the imperial fleet attacked and occupied the island in response to the Arab incursions into the Adriatic in 872 and the Aegean in 873, and that the island again fell into Arab hands shortly after May 878, i.e. after the fall of Syracuse, because it was left defenceless since all the available naval forces of the Empire had to be sent to Sicily, to help the besieged city, which, again, they did not manage to save.[87]

However, a letter from Patriarch Photius addressed to a certain *Stauracius spatarocanditatus eparchon of the island of the Cypriotes* (Σταυρακίῳ σπαθα[ρο]κανδιδάτῳ ἐπάρχοντι τῆς Κυπρίων νῆσου) has also been preserved.[88] The same title of *imperial spatarocandidatus and archon of Cyprus* (βασιλικὸς σπαθαροκανδιδᾶτος καὶ ἄρχων τῆς Κύπρου) is also recorded on the seals of a certain Theodosius and Michael, which originate from the second half of the ninth and the first half of the tenth century,[89] which means that the mentioned letter of Photius probably originates from the time of his second pontificate 877–886, and that the aforementioned Stauracius could have been Alexius' successor as governor of the island, but also the representative of the Byzantine administration after the previous regime of dual authority was restored on it. That the Byzantine rule on Cyprus during the time of Basil I lasted for more than seven years becomes quite clear when to the letter of Photius, which dates from the time after 877, is added another letter, which dates from 870.[90] This is an epistle that was written shortly after the Council of 869/870 sent to Patriarch Ignatius by Archbishop Epiphanius of Cyprus, in which he emphasizes his joy over Ignatius' return to the patriarchal throne and

[85] De thematibus, XV.20–23.
[86] De thematibus, XV.23–24.
[87] Vasiliev 1935–1950 II–1, 64–65; Tobias 2007, 128.
[88] Photii epp., 278.1–28.
[89] Cvetković 2017, 149–150.
[90] Chatzēpsaltēs 1953, 335, considered that Porphyrogenitus' information on *seven years* refers to the duration of Alexius' rule of Cyprus, and not to the total duration of the Byzantine rule on the island under Basil I.

accepts all the decisions made at the council. The archbishop expresses his loyalty and that of his fellow citizens to the patriarch of Constantinople in the following words: *Above all, we also, poor and sinful, who inhabit this island at the end of the world, want to participate in your joy and to be filled with spiritual blessings. But we hesitate with fear and respect and even consider it imprudent to do so without command. Because we consider it unworthy, without the order of our pious and just great emperors and your episcopal holiness, to dare to do so.*[91] This letter testifies that at the beginning of 870, the island of Cyprus was under Byzantine rule, because Epiphanius points out that he obeyed the orders of his *great emperors* (Basil and his sons Constantine and Leo), but also that the church in Cyprus recognized the Patriarch of Constantinople as its head, because he addresses the patriarch in the letter as *episcopal holiness* and accepts his orders.

Therefore, the island fell completely into Byzantine hands between 867 and 870. Most likely, at the same time, it lost its autocephalous status, recognized by universal canons and jealously guarded for centuries, and was attached to the jurisdictional area of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, although it is not clear how this was done. Under these circumstances, a place had to be found for the Cypriot archbishop in the complex hierarchical order of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The head of a long-standing autocephalous church must have had a very high place in the patriarchal hierarchy. That place was determined on the basis of the acts of the last ecumenical council held until then, in which the representatives of Cyprus also participated—the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in 787. Most of the metropolitans and bishops of the Patriarchate of Constantinople participated in that council, so it was easy to see what the position of the archbishop of the autocephalous Church of Cyprus was, compared to them. In all the acts of that council, the archbishop of Constantia of Cyprus, head of the Church of Cyprus, was placed at the very top of the list, right behind the most important metropolitans subject to the patriarch of Constantinople—Caesarea and Ephesus, and ahead of the third most important, Heraclea.[92] This order was followed on the later occasion as well, and the archbishop of Cyprus, who had become an

[91] Mansi, XVI, 308 B–D.

[92] Concilium Nicaenum II, 1, 18 (3), 190 (3) 270 (3); 2, 490 (3); 3, 794 (3), 830 (3); Lamberz 2004, 42, on the place of his suffragans, cf. ibidem, 57. In the list of signatories of the *Horos* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, the signatures of the five bishops from Cyprus, as well as the three bishops from Dalmatia, are found between the signatures of the suffragan bishops of the metropolitan of Ephesus and the metropolitan of Heraclea of Thrace,

ordinary metropolitan within the Patriarchate of Constantinople, was assigned third place among all the metropolitans, which was recorded in *notitia* 3.[93]

The cities listed in *notitia* 3 as the seats of bishops subject to the archbishop, i.e. now metropolitan of Cyprus,[94] correspond almost entirely to the list of the cities in the *theme* of Cyprus, given by Porphyrogenitus in *De thematibus*,[95] but both lists come from late antique *Hieroclis Syncdemus*, which describes the administrative division of the Eastern Roman Empire at the time of Emperor Justinian in the sixth century.[96] This is why it is not possible to say whether all those cities had bishops in the 870-ies.[97]

According to *De thematibus*, Cyprus was recaptured by the Arabs during the reign of Emperor Basil I, that is, before 886. After the island ceased to be under direct imperial rule, there was no longer any possibility that it would remain part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, nor would the Arab authorities allow it. Thus, the church on the island regained its former autocephalous status.

Attempt to Subjugate Dalmatia and Croatia to the Patriarchate of Constantinople

Although the policy of Basil I, as shown above, did not play a significant role in the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats, it nevertheless affected the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea in one respect. With direct authority over the Dalmatian cities and having established supreme authority over the Croats in their hinterland in 870, Basil also intended to directly influence church conditions in them. In a letter written between December 872 and May 873, Pope John VIII was already warning the Croatian

Concilium Nicaenum II, 3, 838, exactly at the place where the signature of their metropolitan is found among other metropolitans.

[93] Byzantinē Kypros, 141–143 (A. Mitsidēs), discusses the inclusion of Cyprus as a metropolitanate in the structure of the Patriarchate of Constantinople according to the *notitia* 3, but refrains from further assumptions with the statement that the compiler of the *notitia* placed the metropolitanate of Cyprus in third place in the hierarchy of the patriarchate, having in mind the acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787.

[94] Notitiae, 3.143–159.

[95] De thematibus, XV.1–5.

[96] Parthey, Hieroclis Synecdemus, 706.3–707.8.

[97] In addition to the metropolitan of Constantia, five more bishops from Cyprus participated in the Seventh Ecumenical Council—from Cythri, Soli, Citium, Trimithus and Amathus, cf. Lamberz 2004, 57.

prince Domagoj of the *Greek cunning* (*graeca falsitas*), which had deprived the Church of Rome of its *legitimate* jurisdiction over Bulgaria.[98] This was at the very beginning of Byzantine supreme authority over Croatia, and it seems that the pope was already anxious about the expansion of the Byzantine ecclesiastical sphere in previously indisputably Roman Dalmatia and Croatia as well.[99]

The pope's fears for his authority in Dalmatia and Croatia, expressed as early as 872/873, seemed to have materialised when, with support from Constantinople, Sedeslav, a Byzantine protégé, was brought to the throne in Croatia in 878.[100] It was during this reign that Emperor Basil's influence on conditions in Croatia was strongest, and it was certainly felt at the ecclesiastical level as well, creating circumstances highly favourable for an attempt to subjugate Croatia to the Byzantine Church. In letters dated 7 June 879, the pope wrote to the new Croatian prince, Sedeslav's successor, Branimir, emphasizing that he had received with joy and gratitude the news that he *had returned to the fold of the Roman Church*,[101] while in a letter to the priests in his country and to the entire nation, he praised their desire to *return, as the dearest sons, with all their soul and all their will to the Roman Church, from where their fathers received the honeyed dogmas of the holy sermon*, receiving them *with open arms and paternal love*.[102] In a similar tone, three days later, on 10 June 879, he addressed the episcopate and the clergy of the Dalmatian cities, whom he also invited *to return to the bosom of the Holy Roman Church, their mother*, i.e. to receive once again from his hand, according to the old custom, consecrations and pallium.[103]

From the above passages it is clear that Emperor Basil I, using his undisputed political authority over the Dalmatian cities and Croatia after 870, had attempted to subjugate the church there to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and place it under its jurisdiction. Moreover, it seems that even the bishops of the Dalmatian cities had been forced to turn to the patriarch of Constantinople for consecrations and pallium, meaning that the Dalmatian church had been formally assimilated into the canonical

[98] Johannis VIII epp., 278.14–18.

[99] On the issue of the ecclesiastical affiliation of Dalmatian cities in the eighth to ninth centuries, cf. Komatina 2018, 253–257.

[100] Istoria Veneticorum, 140.

[101] Johannis VIII epp., 152.4–40.

[102] Johannis VIII epp., 165.35–166.15.

[103] Johannis VIII epp., 157.1–38.

order of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[104] This was in the midst of the struggle of the Roman Church to regain jurisdiction over Bulgaria, which had been lost in 870, but Emperor Basil had gone further, and deprived the Roman Church of its previously undisputed control over the eastern Adriatic coast. He probably took the decisive step in that direction at the time of the installation of his protégé Sedeslav on the Croatian throne in 878. However, this act of imperial church policy was short-lived. After the removal of Sedeslav in the spring of the following year, 879, the new Croatian prince Branimir returned to the papal fold, and the Dalmatian cities probably followed suit.[105]

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[104] In *notitia* 3, there is an enigmatic piece of information that could testify to the intentions of the Byzantine authorities to place Dalmatia under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople. Namely, at the last place in the list of metropolitans there reads the following: ἐπαρχία Κεφαλίας, ὁ Δελματίας, Notitiae 3.54, but it is interpreted in terms of administrative connections between the Byzantine *theme* of Cephalonia and Dalmatia, cf, Salamon 2007, 93–94; Basić 2020, 53–112.

[105] Cf. Komatina 2018, 256–257.

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Photius' Return and the Council of 879/880

In the 870-ies, the Byzantine Church, guided by the firm hand and wise thinking of Emperor Basil I, lived through an era of unprecedented expansion. Within the Empire, the remnants of paganism and heretics were eradicated, and Jews Christianized, for the Patriarchate of Constantinople wide expanses of Bulgaria, Russia, the Khazar lands, Serbia, Dalmatia and Croatia, Cyprus were conquered…. Internal conflict after the decisions of the Council of 869/870 slowly subsided. With the patriarchal throne Patriarch Ignatius and his faction also received the moral satisfaction of an official condemnation of Photius. However, the emperor's main goal on that occasion was to establish peace and order within the church, not to punish Photius and make him suffer for it. For the active policy as he was pursuing, Basil could not easily deprive himself of a man of such ability as Photius.

Photius' Return to Constantinople and the Emperor's Mercy

The conflict of 867, between Emperor Basil I and his perhaps over-mighty and self-willed high priest, had been primarily of a personal nature, and subsequently relations between them thawed. As early as the council of 869–870 Emperor Basil's desire to treat Photius well and ensure a fair trial

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can be discerned.[1] The emperor's refusal to accept the earlier condemnations of Photius by the Roman and Eastern churches did not reflect so much a desire to ensure that the Church of Constantinople should have the last word in the matter,[2] as it did an honest intention to see Photius' guilt fairly investigated, and to show that, as emperor, he was not an implacable enemy who had made up his mind in advance, but a righteous judge. Finally, Photius was certainly not without supporters among the most powerful men in the circle around the emperor. Metrophanes of Smyrna, who has been mentioned and quoted several times here, compiled an account of the conflict between Ignatius and Photius, leaving posterity a very valuable source on the issue, since he was asked by one of the most prominent magnates from the emperor's circle, *the patrician and logothete of the Drome* Manuel, normally present at all sessions of the council, who was interested *in what Photius had actually done wrong*.[3] Perhaps one should also point out the personality of the patrician and proconsul Tarasius, who, among the most prominent of the emperor's dignitaries, attended a good part of the conciliar sessions, starting with the sixth.[4] This individual has not been processed and identified more precisely, but the possibility cannot be ruled out that he was none other than Photius' well-known, and, as he called him, *most beloved* brother, who also had the dignity of a patrician and a high rank in Constantinopolitan society.[5] If this is the case, Tarasius was in a position to further influence Emperor Basil, and soften his attitude towards Photius. Be that as it may, Photius imposed on the emperor quite enough, simply by virtue of his abilities and the value of his advice and intellectual skills.[6] Though still in exile Photius, most likely as early as 872/873, returned to the political life of the capital, publishing, as we have seen, a new version of his earlier work on the *Reappearance of the heresy of the Manichaeans*, i.e. Paulicians, in the midst of Basil's most massive military action against them, when they suddenly became the main preoccupation of Constantinopolitan society. After that, there came a complete reconciliation between the emperor and the former patriarch. Authors and chroniclers of the tenth century, hostile to Photius, attributed this to his cunning. However apocryphal their accounts may be of

[1] Gesta octavae synodis, 189–195.
[2] Gesta octavae synodis, 104.
[3] Mansi, XVI, 413 E. On Manuel, cf. PmbZ, no. 24869.
[4] Gesta octavae synodis, 157, 186, 254.
[5] On Tarasius, cf. PmbZ, no. 7237.
[6] Tougher 1997, 32–33; Simeonova 1998, 284–291; Prieto Domínguez 2014, 292–293.

Photius seeding the imperial library with books discussing the alleged ancient Armenian royal root of the genealogical tree of Emperor Basil I, and prophecies on the destiny of a family whose acronym was ΒΕΚΛΑΣ to rule the Empire, and however justified the subsequent caution engendered among researchers,[7] there is little doubt that Photius was at pains to court Emperor Basil in order to get back into his favour.[8]

It was precisely the emperor's successes in the fight against the Paulicians, in which, as has been said, Photius also contributed in the way he could best—with his knowledge—that offered an excellent opportunity for this. The composition of the famous *Laudatory Poem to Emperor Basil*, which celebrates his successes, above all those in suppressing the Paulician, i.e. Manichaean heretics, has long been attributed to Photius.[9] However, the time of its origin is disputed. Contrary to earlier opinions that it was composed at the time of the emperor's victory over Chrysocheir in 872/873, A. Markopoulos tried to establish the supposition that the poem was composed in 877, on the eve of the emperor's attack on Tephrica, the fall of which marked the definitive defeat of the heretics.[10] However, the poem could have been composed at any time during the struggle with the Paulicians, between 871 and 878/879. Most probably it was composed before Photius' return to the patriarchal throne in 877. The whole poem, although dignified, as such compositions must be, is noticeably coloured by the author's tone of flattery to the emperor. Photius celebrates Basil as the chosen one of Christ, as the new David, glorifies his dynasty, extols his successes…[11] Surely such fawning was enough? In none of his sermons from the time of his first tenure and the reign of Emperor Michael III, did Photius glorify the ruler with such words or so effusively. Finally, because the poem seeks to breath enthusiasm

[7] Photius allegedly found that the family of Emperor Basil descended from the Armenian king Tiridates, otherwise the first ruler who converted to the faith of Christ. Also, he invented a prophecy that promised the highest authority to the ΒΕΚΛΑΣ family, which was an acronym for Basil's family, i.e. the first letters of the names of his, his wife Eudocia, and sons Constantine, Leo, Alexander and Stephen. Then he made sure that the emperor knew about it. The emperor quickly realized that only Photius could do such a thing, so he invited him back to the court and into his grace, Life of Ignatius, 118.11–120.26; Pseudo-Symeon, 689.5–690.3. Cf. Tougher 1997, 70–71; Eisagoge, 25–26; Markopoulos 2013, 951–958; Leidholm 2020, 444–471.

[8] Cf. Prieto Domínguez 2014, 293.

[9] Markopoulos 1992, 226–229; Markopoulos 2013, 951–953.

[10] Markopoulos 1992, 229–230.

[11] Markopoulos 1992, 230–231.

into the emperor's struggle against the Paulicians, it seems logical to assume that it originates from the earlier stages of that conflict,[12] when their forces, led by Chrysocheir, had daringly penetrated far into the west, all the way to the shores of the Aegean. The emperor's response, provoked by this and the conflicts in which Chrysocheir died in 872, did in fact turn out to be decisive in the war against the Paulicians, while the later clashes, culminating in their final defeat, were more routine actions which did not cause as much excitement in Constantinople. Therefore, the earlier opinion on the dating of the poem to 872/873 and the crisis point of the war with the Paulicians seems more probable, and as a result it should be seen as an important step on the way towards imperial favour for the former patriarch.

During Basil's battles with the Paulicians, Photius showed him and everyone else the two most significant sides of his personality at that moment—immense knowledge of inestimable value and willingness to be loyal to the emperor and his circle. These tactics bore fruit, and finally opened the door of the emperor's mercy to him. Soon after, probably as early as 873, Photius returned to Constantinople, got a position as a lecturer at the School of Magnaura and was entrusted by the emperor with the upbringing and education of his sons Constantine, Leo, Stephen and Alexander.[13] Soon after, there followed a reconciliation between Photius and the old patriarch Ignatius.[14]

When Patriarch Ignatius died on 23 October 877, Photius easily took over the patriarchal throne on 26 October, ten years after he had been deposed and exiled. There is no doubt that everything took place by prior agreement and as the emperor had envisaged. Photius himself, in his speech during the second session of the council of 879/880, testifies that the emperor organized an official and ceremonial reconciliation between him and Ignatius in the imperial palace. He himself points out that he often visited Ignatius when he fell ill, and that he did not seek the patriarchal throne for himself, but only to stop the persecution of his followers.[15] The role of Emperor Basil I in the reconciliation of the two patriarchs is

[12] Markopoulos 1992, 231.

[13] Theophanes Continuatus (V, 44), 276.11–277.4; Hergenröther 1867–1869 II, 258–278; Dvornik 1950, 236–240; Ostrogorski 1959, 235; Simeonova 1998, 287–291; Stanković 2003, 62–67; Eisagoge, 24–28; Varona Codeso, Prieto Domínguez 2013, 113–114; Prieto Domínguez 2014, 292–293.

[14] Dvornik 1950, 240–246; Stiernon 1967, 175–178.

[15] Mansi, XVII, 424 B – E.

emphasized by his son Leo VI.[16] Apparently, the emperor took care that after Ignatius' death, Photius should take over the governance of the Church of Constantinople without any interference. Photius had already been a monk for almost twenty years at that moment, and there were no canonical obstacles to his appointment as patriarch. That everything had already been arranged and prepared for Photius to take over his throne for the second time after Ignatius' death is also evident from the fact that even before Ignatius' death, in 877, Emperor Basil sent a letter to Pope John VIII, inviting him to send legates to Constantinople, in order to hold a council at which the decisions of the council of 869/870 by which Photius had been condemned would be revoked. As F. Dvornik noticed, the reconciliation of Ignatius and Photius meant the beginning of the process of reconciliation in the entire Byzantine Church, so that the old discords would end once and for all, and for this reason the emperor turned to the pope, advocating for the convening of a new council.[17]

The Council of 879/880

In response to the emperor's embassy from the summer of 877, while Ignatius was still alive and in office, the pope sent the legates Paul and Eugene to Constantinople, who set out from Rome on 16 April 878. When they arrived in Constantinople, they realized that Ignatius had passed away, and Photius was in his position. However, they still did not have the pope's authority to recognize him, nor to participate in the council that would decide on it. That is why the emperor and the new patriarch sent new envoys to Rome, who informed the pope about the changed circumstances in the See of Constantinople, and expressed the wish that the pope would send a new delegate, whom he would authorize to participate in the council where Photius would be officially recognized as patriarch, and the decisions against him of the council of 869/870 officially revoked. In the summer of 879, a local council was held in Rome, at which the policy that would be represented by the papal delegates at the future council in Constantinople was formulated. That policy is set out in a document known as the *Commonitorium*.[18] The pope appointed cardinal Peter as his legate and he left for Constantinople in August 879, bearing letters

[16] Oraison funèbre, 62–64; Tobias 2007, 236–252.
[17] Johannis VIII epp., 64.31–39; Mansi, XVI, 461 C–D; Dvornik 1950, 245–246.
[18] Dvornik 1950, 249–256; Stiernon 1967, 178–183; Boojamra 1982, 1–23.

with that date.[19] These were the pope's letters to Emperor Basil,[20] Patriarch Photius,[21] all the clergy of the Byzantine Church,[22] the prominent imperial dignitaries, patricians John, Leo and Paul, and the most loyal of Ignatius' supporters, Stylianus of Neocaesaria, John of Sylaeon and Metrophanes of Smyrna,[23] as well as a letter with the pope's instructions to his legates, the bishops Paul and Eugene, with the *Commonitorium*.[24] In the letters and in the *Commonitorium*, the demands the pope makes to recognize Photius as patriarch and the compensations he seeks in return are set forth.

Once again, the question of the ecclesiastical affiliation of Bulgaria was brought into direct connection with resolution of the *Schism of Photius* within the Church of Constantinople and the position of Rome on the matter. Only this time it was the Church of Rome that sought to connect the two issues. Also, in the letters that cardinal Peter brought from Rome, written in August 879, the pope himself indicated that he was ready to compromise on the *Bulgarian question*. He no longer insisted that all *Greek* bishops and priests immediately leave Bulgaria, as he had done not long before. This time he demanded that the patriarch of Constantinople should give up the right to ordain bishops in Bulgaria in the future, to install them and send them the omophorion (pallium).[25] This now became one of his conditions for his legates to recognize Photius as patriarch at the upcoming council. The pope ordered the same in his instructions to his legates at the upcoming council, i.e. in the *Commonitorium*:

> *We want you to convince before the council the mentioned most holy patriarch Photius not to send an omophorion to Bulgaria and not to ordain anyone in that diocese. If he does, he will be excommunicated according to the canons.*[26]

This was precisely the basis for the upcoming compromise on Bulgaria at the *Council of Photius* in 879/880.[27]

[19] Johannis VIII epp., 167.1–187.35.
[20] Johannis VIII epp., 167.1–176.30.
[21] Johannis VIII epp., 181.26–186.22.
[22] Johannis VIII epp., 177.1–181.15.
[23] Johannis VIII epp., 186.29–187.35.
[24] Johannis VIII epp., 188.9–12, 189.1–4, 190.1–4; *Commonitorium*, cf. ibidem, 188.17–44, 189.5–41, 190.22–38; Mansi, XVII, 468 C – 473 D.
[25] Johannis VIII epp., 173.32–174.5, 179.29–45, 185.26–186.2.
[26] Johannis VIII epp., 189.23–25.
[27] Dvornik 1950, 294–295.

The papal legate, cardinal Peter, sent from Rome in August 879, arrived in Constantinople during the autumn. The earlier papal envoys, bishops Paul and Eugene, were already waiting for him there. The three of them together were to represent the pope and the Church of Rome at the upcoming council. The conciliar sessions began in early November 879. Here too, there is no need to go into a detailed account of the course and conclusions of the council, since they have been dealt with several times before.[28] Only two questions are of greater importance for this work—the role and influence of Emperor Basil, and its decisions and the decisions of the council regarding the *Bulgarian question*. Grief-stricken by the death of his first-born son and successor, Constantine, on 3 September 879, Emperor Basil played a negligible role in the council. He and his remaining sons and co-rulers, Leo and Alexander, as well as Stephen, who was destined for an ecclesiastical career and who was then a subdeacon, attended only the sixth session of the council, on 3 March 880, where they were supposed to confirm with their signatures the decisions it had reached. They also presided over that session.[29] All other sessions were presided over by Patriarch Photius himself. It was entirely a *Council of Photius*, because he had the main word. There were no other representatives of state authority—there were no senators, as at the council ten years before—except for scribes and translators. Photius' strength consisted of almost three hundred and eighty metropolitans, archbishops and bishops from all parts of the Byzantine Empire and the Church of Constantinople from its new, expanded area of jurisdiction, thus far more than the one hundred and two who had condemned him at the council ten years earlier.[30] In addition to the Roman legates Paul, Eugene and Peter, there were also representatives of the Eastern patriarchs—Cosmas, the legate of the patriarch of Alexandria, Elias, the legate of the patriarch of Jerusalem and Peter of Martyropolis, the legate of the patriarch of Antioch. And not only did they attend, but their role at the council was even more significant than that played by the representatives of the same patriarchates at the council in 869/870. In any case, the council of 879/880 was for Photius not only satisfaction for the defeats he had suffered ten years earlier but

[28] Cf. Hergenröther 1867–1869 II, 449–528; Hefele, Leclercq 1911 IV, 585–606; Dvornik 1950, 258–283; Stiernon 1967, 184–195. Acts of the council were published in Mansi, XVII, 369–527.

[29] Mansi, XVII, 512 C – 519 B.

[30] The participants of the council are listed in the acts of the first session, Mansi, XVII, 373 A – 377 E.

also a great victory, after which he would become—it is not an exaggeration to say—the second man of the Empire, next to the emperor whose reign had begun with Photius' overthrow.

The Solution of the *Bulgarian Question*

The *Bulgarian question* was discussed at the second, third and fourth sessions of the council.[31] The second session was held on 17 November 879, and at its opening, the mentioned papal letters to the emperor, the clergy and Photius were read, in which the papal view of the solution to the *Bulgarian question* was highlighted—that the patriarch of Constantinople should renounce the right to ordain bishops in Bulgaria and send them an omophorion. Photius accepted this proposal. He emphasized that he was doing so as a sacrifice for the sake of reconciliation and harmony, but also pointed out that, since his return to the patriarchal throne in October 877, he had not ordained a single bishop in Bulgaria or sent him an omophorion.[32] It is not clear whether Photius in any way influenced the work of the Byzantine clergy in Bulgaria after his return from exile in 873,[33] but it is reasonable to assume that all the bishops in Bulgaria had already been ordained by Patriarch Ignatius, before 877, and that in the meantime there had been no need for Photius to appoint new ones.[34]

At the fourth session of the council, on the Day before Christmas, 24 December 879, the most important questions from the papal *Commonitorium* and his letters to the emperor and the patriarch were discussed. The question of Bulgaria, otherwise the ninth point of the *Commonitorium*, was set first: *that the patriarch of Constantinople not ordain nor send an omophorion to Bulgaria in the future*.[35] Representatives of the high clergy of the Byzantine patriarchate, led by the *protothronos* metropolitan of Caesarea of Cappadocia, Procopius, Theophilus of Iconium and Nicetas of Smyrna, gave their opinion on the pope's request. According to them, the issue of Bulgaria was exclusively under the authority of the emperor, and only he had the power to resolve that problem. It was not necessary, they believed, to divide the dioceses now, when the

[31] Simeonova 1998, 319–321.
[32] Mansi, XVII, 417 D–E; Dvornik 1950, 270.
[33] Simeonova 1998, 291–295.
[34] Dvornik 1950, 295.
[35] Mansi, XVII, 488 A.

pope and the patriarch were finally in harmony, and it would be sufficient for the patriarch to agree not to send the omophorion to Bulgaria.[36]

The fifth session of the council was concluded on 26 January 880 and the canons of the council were given their final form at it. The pope's envoys, bishops Paul and Eugene, and cardinal Peter, signed the acts of the council, which gave them the legal force of Canons of the Church.[37] With this, Photius was finally recognized by the pope and the whole Church as the patriarch of Constantinople, the anathema was removed from him, and all the decisions of the council of 869/870 against him were revoked. The decisions of the council were then signed by the representatives of the Constantinopolitan and Eastern Patriarchates, and then by all three hundred and eighty-three bishops participating in the council.[38] All that remained was for the emperor to sign them, so that they would have the force of generally binding state civil laws. That signature was made on 3 March 880.[39]

The papal legates, satisfied with what had been achieved, left Constantinople, carrying the acts of the council and letters from the emperor and the patriarch to the pope. In the summer of 880 they arrived to Rome. The pope accepted the decisions of the council and responded to the emperor's and patriarch's letters with his own letters, dated 13 August 880.[40] Although he was not entirely satisfied with the performance of his delegates at the council, he accepted and sanctioned the decisions of the council without opposition, primarily because they resolved the *Bulgarian question* in his favour.[41] The pope did not fail to thank the emperor for this fact in his letter of 13 August 880,[42] while in his letter to Photius from the same day, he did not mention Bulgaria at all. Of course, from his point of view, the pope had only received what was rightfully his. Why, in that case, should he say anything about it to Photius, whose merit in the whole affair was nil, since he had only given up something that had never rightfully belonged to him in the first place?

[36] Mansi, XVII, 488 B–D; Dvornik 1950, 270–272; Simeonova 1998, 319–322; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 190–191; Nikolov 2021, 143–144.

[37] Mansi, XVII, 497 D – 512 C; COGD 2.1, 65–71; 4.1, 37–39 (ed. P. Gemeinhardt); Dvornik 1950, 272–283.

[38] Mansi, XVII, 512 B – C.

[39] Mansi, XVII, 517 C–D.

[40] Johannis VIII epp., 227.4–228.16, 229.4–230.7.

[41] Dvornik 1950, 288–294.

[42] Johannis VIII epp., 229.30–31.

The pope had finally got what the Apostolic See, and above all he, had been fighting for, for a full ten years—the patriarch of Constantinople had renounced jurisdiction over the church in Bulgaria. With this, the pope believed, it was returned to the fold of the Roman Church. The pope now expected the Church of Rome to immediately begin to exercise its rights in that country. However, there was no response from the other side—from Bulgaria itself.[43] It is not known, unfortunately, how Prince Boris was made aware of the decisions of the council or how he received them. Apparently, he wasn't entirely thrilled. It can be seen that he was in no hurry to send an embassy to the pope that would officially accept, in his name, subjection to the Roman Church, according to the decisions of the council. The pope, most likely, first sent his emissary, the Croatian bishop of Nin, Theodosius, to inform Boris of the decision of the council and invite him to submit to the Roman Church. Boris promised to send an envoy to Rome, to the pope, but he did not do so. The pope found this attitude of the Bulgarian prince very difficult. Somewhere in 881/882, the pope sent Boris a new letter, from the content of which we learn about the described events—visibly disturbed by this development, surprised that his mission has not yet arrived to Rome, the pope reminded Boris of his duty to return fully to the fold of the Apostolic See of St. Peter, his mother-church.[44] But this appeal also remained unanswered. The pope was forced to intervene once again. He sent another letter in 882 to Boris, dissatisfied with the behaviour of the Bulgarian prince. By this stage it is as if he is becoming aware that what he considered a success, the crown of his ten-year policy, is eventually turning into a failure. *Good things boast of the end, not the beginning*, writes the pope in that letter. The end of the story was not good for the Apostolic See, and the pope seems to have understood this. Ever since the conclusion of the council, in March 880, the Bulgarian prince had not addressed him with an embassy—a full two years, and the pope was expecting one any day. John is visibly disappointed in the Bulgarians. *Once*, he says, *after your conversion*, you were faithful *to your mother, the Church of Rome*—then they went astray. Here, for the first time, the pope accuses the Bulgarians of disrespecting his apostolic rights. Since the disagreements with Constantinople no longer existed, the pope finally began to understand that it was the Bulgarians themselves who did not want to be under his ecclesiastical administration. Although he has

[43] Simeonova 1998, 321–331.
[44] Johannis VIII epp., 260.7–21.

begun to lose patience, he still has not given up on their country, but calls on their prince once again to *correct* his mistake and send an envoy to Rome who will restore everything to its rightful place.[45]

This letter from 882 was the last that Pope John VIII sent to the Bulgarian Prince Boris Michael. The great pope, the last of the three consecutive notable holders of the Apostolic See of St. Peter from the middle of the ninth century, died on 16 December 882. He did not receive an answer to this letter, nor did the long-awaited Bulgarian delegation arrive. It never came, because Boris had no intention of sending it. The Roman See had failed to implement its right to jurisdiction over Bulgaria, recognized by the decisions of the council of 879/880. This had been prevented by the irreconcilable attitude of the Bulgarian prince. Or had Byzantine diplomacy been involved again? Was not such an outcome perhaps the consequence of an earlier agreement between the Byzantine Church, the state and the Bulgarian prince?

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The Patriarch and the Emperor

Since his return to the patriarchal throne of the City of Constantine, by the emperor's will in 877, Photius was fully aware that in respect to the ecclesiastical situation in the Empire it was the imperial power that "brightened and clothed". By the will of those who held the highest worldly power, he had been torn from the glittering career of an imperial official, wielder of the highest spiritual power, and by the will of the same actor he had been brought down to the deepest abyss of defeat, then raised again to a degree of reputation and importance, and finally placed on the patriarchal throne. A man of such native strength and ability, he could not help but feel like a plaything in the hands of the more powerful. Some aspects of his second reign over the Church of Constantinople (877–886) indicate attempts to consolidate and strengthen the position of the patriarch of Constantinople in the constellation of forces of Byzantine society, making him more independent of the imperial authority.

Photius and Legislation of Basil I

Photius did not want to strengthen his position as patriarch of Constantinople by entering into a new conflict with the emperor, in which he would inevitably be defeated, but in the way he knew best—through scholarship and ideology. The development of events was in his favour. At

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the council of 879/880 his side achieved complete victory, both over internal opponents and over the Church of Rome. The position of Bulgaria in the spiritual framework of the Byzantine Church, as will be seen, was actually established at that time, which was the culmination of his diligence and care from the time of his first tenure. At that time, on 3 September 879, Emperor Basil I also suffered a great personal loss—the death of his first-born son, Constantine.[1] After that, overwhelmed with grief, he neglected state and therefore church affairs to a certain extent.[2] Photius sensed the opportunity to act a little more freely. It has already been pointed out that he was, if not among the opponents of the emperor's policy of Christianizing the Jews, then certainly against the way in which it was carried out, judging by the fact that the author of an important document in which this policy is refuted was his friend and political "precursor" Gregory Asbestas.[3] It is particularly interesting that in some places in that work, bishops and priests are called to openly resist emperors, if they think they are right.[4]

However, as already pointed out, Photius was not looking for a way to strengthen the patriarchal position in opposing the emperor and clashing with him. He did so by tying the patriarchal position to the imperial position, through the development of the long-known ideology of the *symphony* of imperial and spiritual authority. The *symphony* he envisioned was one in which everybody would independently take care of their own field of activity—the emperor over the worldly aspect, and the patriarch over the spiritual aspect of their subjects' lives. That ideology is best expressed in the *Epanagoge* (Ἐπαναγωγὴ τοῦ νόμου = *Reintroduction into law*), more properly called *Eisagoge* (Εἰσαγωγὴ τοῦ νόμου = *Introduction to law*), the law code of emperors Basil, Leo and Alexander, which was composed during their formal joint rule, between 879 and 886, more precisely, at the very end of that interval, in 885 or 886, in the compilation of which the role of Patriarch Photius was indisputable.[5] The second and third articles of this code are devoted to the role and importance of the emperor, vis-a-vis the patriarch. The emperor is the *lawful governance*

[1] Vogt 1908, 58–59; Halkin 1954, 14–17; Karlin-Hayter 1966, 624–626; ODB I, 498 (A. Kazhdan, A. Cutler).

[2] Ostrogorski 1959, 237; Stanković 2003, 67.

[3] Cf. the chapter *Internal homogenization*

[4] Dagron, Traité, 317.2–4; Stanković 2003, 69.

[5] Cf. Scharf 1956, 385–400; Schminck 1986, 12–15; Fögen 1998, 11–12; Eisagoge, 30–41, 68–188 and passim; Prieto Domínguez 2014, 286–292; Troianos 2015, 156–160.

(ἔννομος ἐπιστασία), his goal is to do good, so he is thus *called a benefactor* (εὐεργέτης); the emperor, however, is obliged to preserve *everything that is written in the Divine Scripture*, which are the *dogmas of the seven universal councils*, as well as the *Roman laws by which judgments are made*; he should be most prominent in orthodoxy and piety; should interpret old laws and establish new ones in those cases where they do not exist; in cases for which there are no written laws, *custom and habit* should be followed, etc.[6] The patriarch, on the other hand, is a *living and spiritualized icon of Christ, who reflects the truth in deed and word*; it is the duty of the patriarch to protect *with piety and virtues of life* those whom he received from God; his goal is the salvation of the souls of those who believe him; also, he should be a teacher, he should be gentle, lenient towards the disobedient, but also that, *when it comes to the truth and presentation of dogmas, he should speak even against the emperor and not be ashamed*; he alone has the right to interpret the old canons, the rules of the Holy Fathers and what was established by councils.[7] Thus, the ideal division of duties between the emperor and the patriarch, where each manages his own domain, without interfering with the other. In the *Eisagoge* it is illustrated and explained with exemplary clarity: *Since society is composed of parts and limbs, like a man, the largest and most necessary parts are the emperor and the patriarch; because of this, the peace and well-being of the soul and body of the subjects in everything is one-mindedness and consent* (ὁμοφροσύνη καὶ συμφονία) *of the imperial and hierarchical authorities.*[8] However, perhaps the most significant section for the history of the Byzantine Church is the final part of the article on the patriarch, the one in which it is predicted that the (hierarch's) *throne of Constantinople, which is decorated with the empire*, and the one who sits on it, has the right to interfere in disputes within the territory of other thrones, to determine the situation and judge.[9] This finally defined the ideology of the *ecumenical patriarch*, who is above all others on earth. The goal of this provision was to emphasize the role of the patriarch of Constantinople in the *ecumene* as well as to prevent further interference *of other thrones* in his internal affairs, which in previous decades Rome had done so frequently and so recklessly.

As the *Eisagoge* was created in 885 or 886, its composition was preceded by Photius' work on another, no less significant legal monument of

[6] Epanagoge, § 2.1–12, Jus Graecoromanum II, 240–242.
[7] Epanagoge, § 3.1–7, 242.
[8] Epanagoge, § 3.8, 242.
[9] Epanagoge, § 3.9–11, 242–243.

that era—the *Nomocanon in fourteen titles*, which was composed in 882/883.[10] In the preface to that work, Photius presents the reasons why he undertook the task of compiling it. Namely, until then there had been a complete collection of canons of ecumenical and local councils only until the Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 553). However, warns Photius, after the Fifth there were other councils, convened for different reasons. First of all, these are the Sixth and Seventh Ecumenical Councils, but also the *First and Second* Council, held in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople in 861. That is why it was necessary to compile a canon collection that would include the canons of these councils.[11] In these lines, one recognizes the re-examination of the existing legal codes and their relevance for the circumstances of the life of Byzantine society that then prevailed. To that should be added Photius' refined understanding of *law* and *legitimacy*, which developed at that time and which is explained in the preface and the first article of the *Eisagoga*, and also the point of view expressed in the second article of the same code, that the task of the emperor is to *interpret the old laws* and *establish new ones* where they do not exist.[12] With this in mind, researchers have rightly raised the question of Photius' role in initiating the great undertaking known as the *Purification of the old laws* (ἀνακάθαρσις τῶν παλαιῶν νόμων), which gave the most visible results at the beginning of the reign of the new emperor Leo VI (886–912), in his *Basilica* and *Novels*.[13]

The patriarch's cooperation with the emperor, completely in the spirit of the ideology that Photius advocated at that time, in addition to his participation in compiling the collection of imperial and ecclesiastical laws, was also reflected in his support of the emperor's endowments. The most prominent of these was the construction of the *Great New Church* in Constantinople, which the patriarch consecrated on 1 May 880.[14] Basil's deep piety in the last years of his life is also evidenced by the fact that he

[10] Syntagma I, 5–335. The date of creation is recorded at the end of Photius' *Preface*, ibidem, 9; Eisagoge, 46–48; Troianos 2015, 125–128, 217–219.

[11] Syntagma I, 5–9.

[12] Epanagoge, 236–242.

[13] Ostrogorski 1959, 235–241; Fögen 1998, 11–22; Eisagoge, 53–274; Prieto Domínguez 2014, 286–292; Troianos 2015, 137–173.

[14] Symeon, 132.19; Pseudo-Symeon, 692.18–19; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 845.1–4; Stanković 2003, 67–68. On Basil's founding activity, cf. Vita Basilii, 78.1–94.29; Symeon, 132.12–14; Pseudo-Symeon, 691.17–7; Georgius Monachus Continuatus, 843.3–844.2.

appointed one of his sons, Stephen, for monastic service, which brought with it the prospect of the position of a hierarch. According to the sources, this act was an expression of Basil's deep respect for the church, for he offered his son to God *as Abraham offered Isaac*.[15] Given that Stephen was the third son of Basil, his consecration to the church certainly falls before 879, when their eldest brother Constantine died, after which Basil appointed his youngest son Alexander as second co-ruler, next to Leo. His instructor in spiritual affairs was Photius himself, whose syncell Stephen was before becoming his successor on the patriarchal throne in 886.[16]

It is not clear what the attitude of the emperor himself was towards Photius' policy and ideology after 879. After that year, Basil I did not involve himself significantly in church matters, leaving Photius with a free hand. The joint welcome, which they gave in 882 in Constantinople to the already aged Methodius, then archbishop of the Slavic lands of Pannonia and Moravia, was more a reflection of the *symphony* that Photius imagined than an expression of the supremacy of one or the other, although Methodius' biographer still assigns a more significant role to the emperor. However, it seems that at that time the patriarch's role in state affairs was greater than the emperor's role in church affairs.

Rome Out of Favour with the Emperor and Patriarch

The symphony between the emperor and the patriarch also manifested itself at that time on the foreign policy level. Although smoothed over at the council of 879/880, relations with the Roman Church soon cooled again. However, this was not something that has often been seen as, or called the *Second Schism of Photius*.[17] This time it was the Church of Rome that transgressed the canons, and the Church of Constantinople now set itself up as judge. Namely, after the death of Pope John VIII on 16 December 882, by the will of the bishops of the Diocese of Rome, Marinus

[15] Oraison funébre, 64.13–24; Vita Basilii, 35.7–9. Basil also sent his daughters to the monastery of St. Euphemia, Vita Basilii, 35.9–16; Stanković 2003, 69–70, 75–78.

[16] Tougher 1997, 42–67; Stanković 2003, 69–70; PmbZ, no. 27207.

[17] Certain sources indicated that Pope John VIII condemned his emissaries at the Council of 879/880 after they returned to Rome, and again anathematized Photius, which was the cause of the so-called *Second Schism of Photius*, but such an understanding has justifiably been rejected in scholarship, cf. Dvornik 1950, 302–328; Hussey 1986, 86.

I (882–884) became the new pope. This was the same Marinus, a Roman deacon and cardinal, whom Pope Nicholas I had sent via Bulgaria to Constantinople at the end of 866, and who had then served Hadrian II as one of his three representatives at the council of Constantinople in 869/870. However, in 880 Marinus had been appointed bishop of the city of Caere in Italy, outside the Diocese of Rome.[18] According to the interpretations of the canon at the time, it was not permitted for a bishop to leave the throne of his bishopric and take up the leadership of another.[19] Therefore, since he was already bishop of Caere, Marinus could not become bishop of Rome.[20] Marinus was, furthermore, a consistent opponent of Photius, and it seems that he had even opposed the decision of Pope John VIII and the Roman synod in 879 that Photius be recognised as patriarch, and the decisions of the council of 869/870 against him be revoked.[21] His election as pope and the manner in which it had been carried out soon became known in Constantinople. As we learn from the letter that his second successor, Pope Stephen V (885–891), sent to Emperor Basil in the winter of 885/886, it seems that in Constantinople, at the insistence of Patriarch Photius and with the participation of the emperor himself, a council of the Byzantine Church had been convened, at which Pope Marinus was condemned for his non-canonical enthronement.[22] Since Marinus himself soon died, the emperor sent those decisions to the new pope, Hadrian III (884–885), in a letter taken to Rome by the bishop of Oria, Theodosius.[23] Since Hadrian also died in the meantime, the letter was received by the third pope in this short time, Stephen V. In addition to the condemnation of Pope Marinus, this letter also contained an accusation that the Roman Church was not sending envoys *according to the old custom of the councils* to Constantinople,[24] which was probably a

[18] On Pope Marinus I, cf. Liber pontificalis II, 224; PmbZ, no. 24983.

[19] Apostles 14, Syntagma II, 18; I Ecum. (Nicaea I) 15, ibidem, 145; IV Ecum. (Chalcedon) 5, ibidem, 229.

[20] Supporters of Marinus' election justified that act by saying that Marinus had abdicated his position as bishop of Caere, so that at the time he was elected pope he was only an archdeacon, cf. Liber pontificalis II, 224, n. 1.

[21] Grumel 1953, 133–136.

[22] In section 44 of his letter to Emperor Basil, Pope Stephen V asks the emperor which accusers and witnesses he heard when he condemned Pope Marinus, and in the section 58 he calls on him and his successors to fight for the *restoration*, i.e. *rehabilitation* of the same pope, Grumel 1953, 144, 146 (§ 44, 58).

[23] Regesten, no. 505.

[24] Grumel 1953, 144 (§ 48).

reference to announcing the enthronement of a new pope, i.e. the sending of the *synodicon*. According to the same Theodosius, the new pope sent the emperor an answer to the Byzantine accusations against Pope Marinus. The letter was composed in the winter of 885–886, before April 886.[25] As it testifies, Pope Stephen saw exclusively the hand of Photius behind the emperor's decision to condemn Pope Marinus.[26] There can be no doubt about that. It is not clear, however, whether the condemnation of Pope Marinus by the Byzantine Church should be seen as Photius' personal revenge against a sworn opponent, or whether the Byzantine Church as a whole was using the occasion as an opportunity to retaliate in equal measure against the Roman Church for interfering in its internal affairs over the previous almost thirty years. Despite the fact that researchers have tried to see in the mentioned letter of Pope Stephen V a restatement of the Apostolic See's hard stance on Photius and resentment against his acceptance, it is nevertheless absolutely clear that the letter is an apology for Pope Marinus I by his successor Stefan V.[27] The pope first protests against the emperor's interference in church affairs, and then tries extensively to justify Pope Marinus.[28] In this letter, therefore, it is not Photius who stands accused, but a Roman pontiff. Just to show that he is resigned to such a situation, Pope Stephen touches on Photius' case and reiterates the old accusations against him, that he became a bishop as a layman and that he is not a true and legitimate patriarch, and that no one can revoke the conciliar decisions of his predecessors against such a *transgressor*.[29] This, however, seems quite incidental, and the pope has neither the strength nor the courage to bring the question of Photius back to the fore.[30] He and his church are now in such a position that they ask to be forgiven for what

[25] Grumel 1953, 137, 147 (§§ 1, 61, 63); Blysidou 2008, 9–16.
[26] Grumel 1953, 137.
[27] Grumel 1953, 132–136.
[28] Grumel 1953, 137–144 (§§ 1–43).
[29] Grumel 1953, 144–146 (§§ 49–50, 56).
[30] Grumel 1953, 133–136, overemphasizes the anti-Photian tendency of the letter and involves too much the case of Photius in the background of its composition. It is certain that Photius wasn't in any way at that time trying to create a revocation of his condemnation from the council of 869/870, given that those condemnations were revoked and annulled back at the council of 879/880. Pope Stephen V alludes to them and points out that *no one can revoke them*, wanting only to remind that it was Photius who was condemned. However, this does not mean that the Roman Church did not respect the decisions of the council of 879/880 about Photius' rehabilitation, because Pope Stephen himself testifies in his letter that the Roman high priests sent their *synodica* to Photius, ibidem, 144 (§ 49).

they have *sinned*: …*What has the holy Roman Church sinned?* (Τί γὰρ ἡ ἁγία τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐκκλησία ἥμαρτεν;), Pope Stephen V wonders in the letter.[31] However, that was not all. At that moment, the pope was in an awkward political situation, and was forced to ask the Byzantine emperor, whom he calls *the new Constantine*, sitting on the *throne of Constantine himself*, for military help and protection against Muslim attacks,[32] considering that, at the time, the Byzantine military and political presence in southern Italy was getting ever stronger.[33] So, at the time the letter was written, the Byzantine church and state had clear spiritual and political supremacy over the Church of *Old Rome*.

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[31] Grumel 1953, 144 (§ 48).

[32] Grumel 1953, 145, 147 (§§ 53, 61).

[33] Whittow 1996, 308–309; Eisagoge, 29–30; Blysidou 2008, 9–32; Tobias 2007, 142 sq, 179 sq; Nef 2021, 209–212.

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The Activity of St. Methodius and the Birth of the Slavic Church

After all the tumultuous events that had shaken the Byzantine state and church internally and externally between 867 and 880, when things finally settled down and the Byzantine ship of state and church sailed into calmer waters, in Constantinople they remembered the missionaries which they had sent far into the heart of Europe almost two decades previously. According to the *Life of Methodius*, in 882 Emperor Basil I sent a letter to Methodius, which contained the words: *Venerable father, I really want to see you. So do good and make an effort (to come) to us, so that we can see you while you are in this world, and receive your prayer.*[1]

Methodius as a Hierarch of Pannonia

Far from all the tempestuous events in the Byzantine Empire and neighbouring Bulgaria, outside the church disputes between Constantinople and Rome, as a Byzantine plantation on Roman soil, during all that time the Slavic mission of the Thessalonian Brothers had been maintained. Constantine the Philosopher died in Rome on 14 February 869, receiving the monastic vow and the name Cyril at his death. With his last words, he encouraged his brother, the monk Methodius, not to return to the

[1] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XIII.2–4.

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monastic life of solitude, which he loved so much, but to continue the teaching that they had carried out together in recent years, in the Slavic countries of Central Europe.[2]

A little later, the Slavic prince of Pannonia, Kotzel, with whom the brothers had stayed for a while on their way back from Moravia, sent a letter to Pope Hadrian II, begging him to send him Methodius, to continue where he and his brother had left off a year before. The pope replied that he would be happy to send, not only to him but also to all the Slavic countries there, *a teacher from God and from the Holy Apostle Peter*. In the epistle that he then sent, addressed to *Rastislav, Svetopluk and Kotzel*, and known by its introductory words as *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, the pope presents the fore story of the arrival of Constantine the Philosopher and his brother Methodius in the Slavic regions of Central Europe. Although these Slavic princes appealed to Emperor Michael and he sent them teachers, these, realizing that they were in territory belonging to the Roman Church, did not do anything against the canons, but came to Rome bearing the relics of Saint Clement. This was why the pope was happy to send Methodius and his disciples to them, *to teach them the book in their language, fulfil everything according to the church order, the Holy Mass, i.e. service and baptism, as Constantine the Philosopher had begun to do*. The only condition he placed upon them was *that they first read the Apostle and the Gospel in Latin, and then in the Slavic language*. Those who would challenge and attack worship in Slavic were threatened by the pope with excommunication from the church.[3]

Kotzel received Methodius with great honours, but soon sent him back to Rome, with twenty men, so that the pope would consecrate him as bishop of Pannonia, on the throne of St. Apostle Andronicus, one of the Seventy.[4] In this way, the pope created a special ecclesiastical unit for the Slavs in Central Europe. Within that unit, of which Methodius became the

[2] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, VII.1–2.

[3] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, VIII.1–16. This epistle was not preserved among the other letters and acts of Pope Hadrian II and is known only in this Slavic version, but it is considered authentic, cf. Constantinus et Methodius, 225–228; Grafenauer 1968, 63–77. In contrast, Betti 2014, 80–81, 85–89, 105; Ivanova 2024, 167–172, on the basis of certain similarities in the content, consider that it is based on the epistle *Industriae tuae* of Pope John VIII from 880, Johannis VIII epp., 222.27–224.14. However, their content is, apart from certain details which were equally current in 869 and 880, completely different.

[4] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, VIII.17.

head, worship in the Slavic language was allowed.[5] The ecclesiastical unit was established by the pope based on the historical right of the Pannonian Church from Roman times, which, according to tradition, had been founded by St. Apostle Andronicus, one of the disciples of St. Apostle Paul and which had its centre in the city of Sirmium.[6] However, it had disappeared due to the Avar conquest of Sirmium in 582. When Charlemagne destroyed the Avar Khaganate in 796, the archbishop of Salzburg claimed Pannonia in the matter of ecclesiastical organization.[7] Therefore, the honour that the pope gave him by appointing him as (arch)bishop of Pannonia,[8] would bring many problems to Methodius. Although based on the historical traditions of the Pannonian Diocese, which in Late Antiquity had its seat in Sirmium, Sirmium itself was certainly not the seat of the Methodius' diocese. At that time, its borders most likely coincided with the borders of the Pannonian Principality of Prince Kotzel, and the seat of the archbishop was in the princely capital—Blatnograd (*Moosburg*) on Lake Balaton, but it also included Prince Svetopluk's Moravia.[9]

Several South German bishops, in the first place Archbishop Adalwin of Salzburg (859–873), then Bishop Hermeric of Passau (866–874) and

[5] Pentkovskij 2014, 49–58.

[6] Bubalo, Mitrović, Radić 2010, 18–19; Betti 2014, 88, 179–180, 192–203; Komatina I. 2016, 31–34.

[7] Reimitz 2001, 188–207; Wolfram 2014, 28–34; Betti 2014, 49–53, 61–62, 69–71, 134–135, 142–154.

[8] In their letters, the popes most often call Methodius *a bishop*, Johannis VIII epp., 281.22–23, 282.28–30, 285.1, 36 (all from May 873), but alongside that also *an archbishop*, Johannis VIII epp., 286.19–21 (May 873), 160.28, 161.6 (both from June-July 879), 222.28–29, 223.6, 27 (June 880), 243.32 (March 881). The fact is that Methodius, as the head of the Pannonian and Moravian Church, was not subordinated to any neighbouring archbishop, but directly to the pope, so that in this respect he was equal to other archbishops, and above other bishops. However, he did not have subordinate suffragan bishops under him, so he was not even a real archbishop-metropolitan. Only in 880, when the pope ordained Viching as bishop of Nitra and Methodius' suffragan, and invited Svetopluk to send another priest to Rome so that he too could be appointed bishop and Methodius' other suffragan, it was envisioned that Methodius' diocese would receive the canonically necessary three bishops, in order to become a real, canonically organized, metropolitanate, in which other new bishoprics could then be founded, Johannis VIII epp., 223.21–29.

[9] On the borders of the area under Methodius' jurisdiction and his seats, Bubalo, Mitrović, Radić 2010, 32–35, with an overview of relevant earlier scholarship; Tăpkova-Zaimova 2011, 221–222; Betti 2014, 138–203; Pentkovskij 2014, 51.

Anno of Freising (854–875),[10] attacked Methodius, saying: *You are teaching in our territory*. Although Methodius justified himself by saying that the territory was not theirs, but *St. Peter's*, and even though the East Frankish king Louis was sympathetic to him, they managed to condemn him at a council they held, and send him to Swabia, where they kept him in captivity for two and a half years.[11] This was at the end of 870, at a time when King Louis himself was in Bavaria.[12] The background of this conflict lay in the pretensions of the archbishop of Salzburg to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over Pannonia.[13] Precisely at that time and in those circumstances, one of the priests of the Archbishopric of Salzburg, in order to justify the pretensions of his church and accuse Methodius and his activity, compiled an extremely important document for our knowledge of the early medieval history of the Central European regions. It is the well-known text *On the Christianization of the Bavarians and Carantanians* (*Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*).[14] The text contains the account of the history of the establishment of the Christian ecclesiastical organization in the lands of the Bavarians and Carantanians after their Christianization during the eighth century, which resulted in the establishment of the Archbishopric of Salzburg in 798.[15] It further advocates the theory that Charlemagne, after destroying the Avar Khaganate in 796 and *liberating* Pannonia, subordinated that territory in ecclesiastical terms precisely to the archbishop of Salzburg, as the closest hierarch. After that, during the full seventy-five years (796–871), no one had ecclesiastical

[10] According to the *Life of Methodius*, Constantinus et Methodius, VM, X.1–3, there were more bishops who condemned Methodius, and four of them died shortly after his release. Other bishops are not mentioned in other sources, and as for the three mentioned, all three died between 873 and 875.

[11] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, IX.1–9. Pope John VIII writes about the aforementioned council of three bishops against Methodius in the letters to his legate Paul of Ancona and bishops Hermeric and Anno in May 873, Johannis VIII epp., 284.21–285.13, 285.34–286.2. About the actions of the Bavarian clergy against Methodius and his work and his imprisonment, cf. Dvornik 1970, 151–157; Alexander 1978, 266–293; Betti 2014, 146–149.

[12] Annales Fuldenses, 72. According to the *Life of Methodius*, Constantinus et Methodius, VM, IX.9, his imprisonment lasted *two and a half years*, while according to the pope's letter to Paul of Ancona, written in May 873, *three years* have passed since Methodius' exile, Johannis VIII epp., 284.21–285.4.

[13] In a letter addressed to Archbishop Adalwin in May 873, Pope John VIII speaks of him as the main initiator of the persecution of Methodius, Johannis VIII epp., 283.17–20.

[14] For an extensive study of this source, cf. Wolfram 1995.

[15] Conversio, 58–74.

authority over Pannonia, except the Archbishopric of Salzburg itself. Then the *Greek Methodius* appeared, who *invented the Slavic alphabet*, and suppressed the Latin language and the Roman doctrine.[16] However great the influence of the archbishop of Salzburg in Pannonia during those seventy-five years, well documented in the text of *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*,[17] from the point of view of the Roman Church, that country officially belonged directly to the Apostolic See, that is, as Methodius defended himself, to *Saint Peter*. This is exactly what Hadrian's successor, Pope John VIII, states in his letters to King Louis and Bishop Paul of Ancona from May 873.[18]

It was the new Pope John VIII (872–882) who sided with the persecuted Methodius. In May 873, he sent bishop Paul of Ancona, as his legate, to secure the release of Methodius and his return to the episcopal throne to which he was consecrated. In the letter he gave him on that occasion, the pope ordered him to present to King Louis the evidence that Pannonia fell under the immediate authority of the Apostolic See.[19] He had to reprimand the South German bishops, above all Adalwin of Salzburg and Hermeric of Passau, because against the law and the canons they had deprived Methodius of his position as bishop and kept him in prison. He threatened that they should not perform sacred rites as long as they kept Methodius in captivity and prevented him from doing the same.[20] At the same time, the pope sent other letters to secure Methodius' release and ensure that he should continue his activities unhindered. The first was to King Louis himself, explaining to him that Pannonia belonged to the Apostolic See.[21] To his son, the Bavarian king Carloman, who was also in charge of Pannonia, the pope explained that, since the Pannonian bishopric was restored, Methodius, who was appointed by the Apostolic See as its bishop, should be provided with the rights proper to a bishop.[22] He ironically invited Archbishop Adalwin of Salzburg, openly accusing him of being the initiator of Methodius' troubles, to be the one who

[16] Conversio, 74–78.

[17] Conversio, 74–78.

[18] Johannis VIII epp., 281.1–12, 284.1–20.

[19] Johannis VIII epp., 284.1–20.

[20] Johannis VIII epp., 284.21–285.13. The pope's ban on South German bishops to celebrate mass as long as they hold Methodius is also mentioned in the *Life of Methodius*, Constantinus et Methodius, VM, X.1.

[21] Johannis VIII epp., 281.1–13.

[22] Johannis VIII epp., 281.20–24.

would restore Methodius to his bishopric.[23] He also addressed the other two culprits of Methodius' misfortunes, Hermeric of Passau and Anno of Freising, very harshly, repeatedly forbidding the former to perform rites until Methodius was freed, and even ordering the latter to appear in Rome by September of the same year for justification.[24]

At the same time, in May 873, the pope planned to expand the authority of Methodius' episcopal see, inviting the Serbian prince Mutimir to submit to his pastoral care, *following the custom of his progenitors.*[25] More was said about that letter in the chapter *The question of the role of Basil I in the Christianization of the Serbs and Croats*, where it was discussed as a source for ecclesiastical and religious circumstances in Serbia at that time. It was pointed out there that, by Mutimir's *progenitors* the pope meant those who had lived in the territory of Serbia in Roman times, that is, the then Illyricum, which until 380 had been ecclesiastically subordinate to the bishop of Sirmium in Pannonia,[26] on whose throne, at least formally, Methodius now sat. The pope's intention to extend Methodius' jurisdiction to the regions of Illyricum is also highlighted in the already mentioned letter to Paul of Ancona, written at the same time, in which, among other things, it is said that the Apostolic See *had the custom of ordaining, appointing and deposing not only in Italy and some provinces of the West, but also within the entire borders of Illyricum.*[27] As was pointed out, the Serbian prince probably did not follow the pope's order and annex his country to Methodius' ecclesiastical unit.

Methodius in Moravia

After the aforementioned papal action in 873, Methodius was freed and returned to his see. It is only at this point that work really began, on what would lead to something that could justifiably be called the *creation of the Slavic Church*. According to the *Life of Methodius*, only after his return from captivity, did the Moravian prince Svetopluk (870–894), the nephew and successor of the Rastislav who had asked Emperor Michael III for teachers in the Slavic language, ask the pope *to give him Methodius, the*

[23] Johannis VIII epp., 283.17–20.
[24] Johannis VIII epp., 285.33–286.10, 286.17–36, 287.10–26.
[25] Johannis VIII epp., 282.24–30.
[26] Bubalo, Mitrović, Radić 2010, 21–22; Komatina I. 2016, 31–34.
[27] Johannis VIII epp., 284.8–11.

archbishop and teacher, claiming that their fathers also received baptism *from St. Peter*. In the meantime, after the departure of Constantine and Methodius from Moravia in 867, German priests had begun to operate again in that country, attempting to erase all trace of the three-and-a-half year mission of the Thessalonian Brothers. The pope agreed to Svetopluk's request and then Methodius came to Moravia, where Svetopluk received him with honours and entrusted him with the administration of all churches and priests. From then on, the biographer writes, the teaching of God began to grow, priests multiplied in all cities and many pagans were converted to Christianity. Also, the Moravian state began to expand and strengthen and defeat all enemies.[28]

The reason for Methodius' move to Moravia may also have been Kotzel's death, which occurred after 874,[29] and which left Pannonia without a Slavic prince, and Methodius and his Slavic teaching without a strong patron. In such circumstances, Svetopluk could offer him the best conditions for work, but Methodius' move from Pannonia to Moravia did not change the essence of his activity. He continued to work in a Slavic country and spread religious teachings in the Slavic language, and the pope expressly allowed him to do so in Moravia as well. It is not clear, however, what consequences his leaving Pannonia had for his jurisdiction over that country. Until the moment of his transfer to Moravia, i.e. while he was presiding over Pannonia, he was called exclusively the *(arch)bishop of Pannonia*, and his church the *Pannonian Diocese*, the *Pannonian Church*.[30] After moving to Moravia, he is called the *archbishop of the Holy Moravian Church*,[31] although he is sometimes still called the archbishop of the Pannonian Church.[32] In any case, the Moravian capital Velegrad became the new centre of Methodius' activity and the seat of his diocese.[33]

In Moravia, Methodius developed his full pastoral activity. There he completed the work of translating the liturgical books into the Slavic language. Previously, together with his brother Constantine, he had translated only those most necessary for daily worship—the *Psalter and the*

[28] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, X.4–9; Steinhübel 2020, 210–226.

[29] Wolfram 1995, 325–334; Kocelj, SSS II, 435 (T. Lehr-Spławiński); Kocel, LdMA V, 1244 (Ch. Lübke); Komatina 2021, 179–184.

[30] Johannis VIII epp., 281.3, 22–23, 282.28–30, 284.2–3, 286.20–21.

[31] Johannis VIII epp., 222.28–29.

[32] Johannis VIII epp., 161.6; Betti 2014, 138–168, 183–193; Pentkovskij 2014, 58–66.

[33] Galuška 1998, 161–180; Bubalo, Mitrović, Radić 2010, 34–35; Kalhous 2019, 110–129.

Gospel with the Apostle and the selected ecclesiastical services. Now, with the help of two of his disciples, the priests who wrote very quickly (*two priests who were very fast scribes*), he translated from Greek into the Slavic language all the books of the Old and New Testaments, with the exception of the Maccabees, in six months, from March to 26 October, i.e. on the day of St. Demetrius the Great Martyr, but it is not recorded in what year. Then he also translated the Nomocanon, i.e. *Zakonu pravilo*, as well as the books of the Holy Fathers.[34] Methodius' sermon addressed to the princes on Christian marriage and the obligations it implies, preserved in the *Codex Clozianus*, as well as many other works, certainly belong to this time. It is most likely that the life of Methodius' brother, Constantine the Philosopher, Cyril, was written at that time and under the aforementioned circumstances.[35] His invitation to the pagan prince of the Slavic tribe of the Vistulans to be baptized is also recorded, as well as to some other pagans, certainly the Slavs north and northeast of Moravia, with whom Prince Svetopluk was at war at that time.[36]

However, Methodius could not pass there without trouble either. His relations with Svetopluk deteriorated when the latter began to doubt the correctness of the faith he preached and informed the pope about it through his envoy John in mid-879.[37] The pope, in his answer to the prince's letter, declares that he is very surprised by this, but that he will summon Methodius to appear in Rome as soon as possible, so that the pope can personally see if he believes and preaches in the way that he has, orally and in writing, confessed before the Apostolic See.[38] What he had promised the prince, the pope fulfilled. On the same day, he composed a letter and sent it to Methodius, emphasizing in it that he had heard that the people entrusted to his pastoral care were not being preached to according to the doctrine held by the Roman See, and that the same

[34] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XV.1–5.

[35] On the literary activity of Methodius and his circle in Moravia, cf. Dvornik 1970, 174–185; Florja 1981, 37–51; Temčin 1999, 114–154; Betti 2014, 72–76; Pentkovskij 2014, 66–80; Kulik et al. 2016. In recent times, the old thesis that the *Life of Constantine* was originally written in Greek, possibly in Rome, and then translated into Slavic, is becoming more prevalent, cf. Ševčenko 1999, 214–221; Daiber 2017, 377–382; Temchin 2021, 466–474; Ivanova 2024, 42–101, while Lienhard 2020, 57–78, puts forward the hard-to-accept thesis that the *Life of Constantine* and the *Life of Methodius* were created only in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

[36] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XI.1–5; Steinhübel 2020, 210–231.

[37] Johannis VIII epp., 160.13–33.

[38] Johannis VIII epp., 160.28–32.

people were being led into error. Therefore, he orders Methodius to put aside everything else and appear before him in Rome, to declare whether or not he professes the faith as he had promised the Apostolic See that he would. The pope particularly resents the fact that he has heard that Methodius said mass in a *barbarian*, Slavic language, although he had been commanded, through Paul of Ancona a few years earlier, to hold it only in Latin or Greek, and to give sermons and homilies in whatever language he wanted.[39] Methodius acted according to the pope's command and appeared in Rome. There, before the pope and all the bishops of the Diocese of Rome, he fully justified himself. Convinced of the correctness of his teaching, the pope sent him back to Moravia. Together with Methodius, a priest, Viching, also stayed in Rome on that occasion, as an envoy of Svetopluk. The pope consecrated him as bishop of Nitra, one of the most important Moravian cities, and sent him back, together with Methodius. In an epistle dated June 880, known according to its introductory words as *Industriae tuae*, Pope John informs Svetopluk of all that has occurred, and instructs him to choose, in agreement with Methodius, and send to Rome another priest to be ordained as bishop of some other place where episcopal care is needed. In this way, as the canons dictate, Methodius, as an archbishop with two bishops, can begin independently to ordain new bishops in places where bishops should and can be installed. He also orders that *priests and deacons or clerics of any order, Slavs or of any nation*, who are in Svetopluk's land, should be subordinated and subject to Archbishop Methodius in everything. In addition, the pope gives Methodius unequivocal permission to celebrate Mass in the Slavic language, referring to the first verse of Psalm 117 *that all languages should glorify God and all peoples should praise him* (Ps. 117:1). If any object to this, the pope continues, he should know that God who created *the three main languages*—Hebrew, Greek and Latin, also created all other languages, for his own praise and glory. As the only restriction on the use of the Slavic language in worship, he repeated what Pope Hadrian II had decreed ten years earlier—that the mass should first be sung in Latin, and then in the Slavic language.[40]

During this time, while Methodius was absent, justifying himself before the pope in Rome, the German bishops continued their activities against him. They again accused him of acting in lands belonging to them, and

[39] Johannis VIII epp., 161.6–21.
[40] Johannis VIII epp., 222.27–224.14.

claimed that the pope had ordered that they be given authority over Moravia and that Methodius be expelled. However, when the pope's epistle to Svetopluk was read, it was clear that the pope had confirmed to Methodius all the authority he had given him, saying that in his hands from God and from the Apostolic See are all the Slavic areas, and that whoever curses him is cursed, and whoever sanctifies him is sanctified.[41] The epistle mentioned in the *Life of Methodius* is most likely the epistle discussed above, which the pope sent to Svetopluk in June 880. However, Methodius' troubles did not end there. Svetopluk was no longer devoted to Slavic worship as before. From the letter from June 880, it can be seen that it was already clear to the pope himself that Svetopluk and his magnates were more comfortable listening to the service in Latin.[42] The newly appointed Bishop Viching of Nitra, Svetopluk's man, although Methodius' suffragan, very quickly completely turned against his superior, so in a letter dated 23 March 881, the pope verbally supported Methodius in this new conflict.[43] In his epistle from 880, the pope invited Svetopluk to send another priest to Rome, where he would ordain him as a bishop, to be Methodius' second suffragan next to Viching, after which new bishoprics could be founded in Svetopluk's lands, but that, however, as the sources testify, never happened.[44] A particularly difficult time for Methodius came when his patron, Pope John VIII, died in 882. John VIII was the last of the three great popes of the ninth century, and along with the previous two, Nicholas I and Hadrian II, was very deserving for the foundation and defence of the Slavic worship. The popes who followed him did not share such understandings.

Methodius' Visit to Constantinople and His Death

In the new circumstances, it seemed that Methodius was all alone and that there was no one to support his actions. Rumours began to circulate that even the Byzantine emperor was angry with him *and would kill him if he found him*. However, it was at that time that Methodius received a letter from the Byzantine emperor Basil I, the content of which is transmitted by

[41] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XII.1–6.

[42] Johannis VIII epp., 224.12–13.

[43] Johannis VIII epp., 243.32–244.20. On Viching and the bishopric of Nitra, cf. Betti 2014, 152–154, 181–182; Steinhübel 2020, 215–219.

[44] Betti 2014, 181–182, 191–192.

Methodius' biographer, and which is quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The emperor wrote the following to Methodius: *Venerable father, I really want to see you. So do good and make an effort (to come) to us, so that we can see you while you are in this world, and receive your prayers.*[45] Almost twenty years had passed since Constantine the Philosopher and Methodius left Constantinople and went to Moravia. Constantine never returned. After doing so much for the Byzantine state, church and culture, he went to his repose far from his homeland. There is no doubt that the papal envoys at the Council of Constantinople in 869/870, first and foremost Anastasius the Librarian himself, who knew them personally,[46] brought to Constantinople the news of their activities and of Constantine's death. However, Methodius' activities after 869 took place completely within the sphere of the Roman Church and under its auspices, far from the eyes of Constantinople, which was busy with other issues. When most of these questions were resolved, after the council of 879/880, interest in Methodius and his activities reawakened in Constantinople.[47] It can be seen from the emperor's letter that they did not even know if Methodius was still alive at the time. Although operating in territory canonically subordinated to the Roman Church and under the exclusive authority of the pope, Methodius' loyalty to the Byzantine heritage from which he came is unquestionable. Moreover, when he translated liturgical books into the Slavic language, he translated them from Greek, not from Latin. He venerated saints whose cult was particularly developed in Byzantine areas, for example Saint Demetrius, the patron saint of his hometown of Thessalonica. In Moravia, they often doubted the correctness of his teachings, and they certainly thought that he did not observe rituals entirely according to the Roman rules, but somewhat according to the Greek. Finally, although he always managed to justify himself in Rome from these attacks and prove his loyalty to the Roman rituals, there is no doubt that he introduced many specifically Greek elements into his sermons and services. Ultimately, this would be the formal reason for Pope Stephen V to condemn his teaching after his death, and forbid his disciples from further activity in Moravia.

[45] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XIII.1–4.

[46] Betti 2014, 65–71, 90–107.

[47] Betti 2014, 207–208, believes that the coup in Constantinople in 867 completely deprived Constantine and Methodius of the support and protection of the imperial court.

Methodius complied with the emperor's wish and travelled to Constantinople. This journey is usually dated to the year 882.[48] The emperor received him *with great honour and joy*. What is even more significant, the emperor *praised his teaching*, and kept by him in Constantinople two of Methodius' disciples, one priest and one deacon, *with books*.[49] It was an official recognition of the liturgical use of the Slavic language by both the Byzantine emperor and the Church, and from that moment that language could be used in Byzantium, where it had originated, but was not yet used. The stay of two of Methodius' disciples in Constantinople, with Slavic books, marked the beginning of the history of the Slavic language in the centre and at the source of the Byzantine culture. According to Methodius' biographer, along with the emperor, Methodius was also received in Constantinople by the patriarch,[50] certainly Photius at that time, but his role in those events was far less than the role that the biographer attributes to the emperor.

From Constantinople, Methodius returned to Moravia. It was now clear to everyone that he still enjoyed the support of the distant but powerful Roman emperor. Methodius further strengthened his position in Moravia by meeting and having a friendly conversation with another emperor—the Western emperor Charles III (emperor in 881–888), when in 884 he was staying on the eastern borders of his empire, on the Danube.[51] Before his death, he designated one of his disciples, Gorazd by name, a Moravian by birth, and consecrated him as his successor in the position of Archbishop of Moravia and Pannonia. One of the main reasons why he chose this man, according to the confession of Methodius himself, was that he was *well learned in Latin books*.[52]

[48] The emperor's letter to Methodius mentioned in the *Life of Methodius* is considered authentic in scholarship, and his journey to Constantinople in 882 as credible, cf. Dvornik 1970, 170–174. On the other hand, Ivanova 2024, 144–149, rejects the credibility of those data and contrary to the data of the *life* itself, questions any connection between Constantinople and Methodius' activities, ibidem, 139–175.

[49] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XIII.5–6.

[50] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XIII.5–6.

[51] The *Life of Methodius* talks about the alleged *Hungarian king*, Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XVI.1–3. However, it is clear that this is the Frankish emperor Charles III, who in 884 stayed on the Danube, on the border of Moravia, Annales Fuldenses, 101, 113; Vavřínek 1964, 266–267; Komatina I. 2019, 35–36.

[52] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XVII.4–6.

The Slavic teacher Methodius died on 6 April 885. He was buried with great honours, the presence of many people and the singing of services in Latin, Greek and Slavic, in the cathedral church of the Moravian capital.[53] However, his enemies immediately went into action. They found great support in the person of the new pope, Stephen V (885–891), who, in contrast to his predecessors, was not in the least inclined to the Slavic service. At the end of 885, he sent ambassadors, Bishop Dominic and priests John and Stephen, to the *Slavic regions*, i.e. to Moravia. Their task was, first, to forbid the celebration of mass in the Slavic language, except that after the mass the sermons could be held in it; secondly, to establish that the fast be observed correctly (according to the Roman manner); thirdly, that the *heir whom Methodius appointed himself contrary to all paternal rules*, i.e. Gorazd, be forbidden by the apostolic authority to perform priestly duties, until he himself appeared before the pope and presented his case.[54] The same decisions, with the exception of the latter, were communicated by him personally to Prince Svetopluk, in another letter from the same time, with the fact that in it he devoted more space to the prohibition of Slavic liturgy.[55] The result of such a papal attitude was that neither Gorazd nor the other disciples of Methodius could stay in Moravia. They had to leave that country and go south, towards the empire of the Roman emperor. Most of them found refuge and fertile ground for their activities in Bulgaria, a country baptized shortly before that, which finally fell under the sphere of influence of the Byzantine Church in 870, and gained ecclesiastical independence from it in 880. However, that is no longer the subject of this work. Bishop Viching remained the only ecclesiastical authority in Moravia, and soon managed to eradicate all visible traces of the activities of the Thessalonian Brothers—the *Apostles of the Slavs*.[56]

[53] Constantinus et Methodius, VM, XVII.1–15; Galuška 1998, 176–178. The *Life of Methodius* is thought to have been composed shortly after his death, in 885–886, in Moravia, cf. Betti 2014, 77–83, while Ivanova 2024, 114–138, assumes that it was composed somewhat later, between 885 and 896, in the Latin literary environment, cf. Lienhard 2020, 57–78, for dating to the tenth to eleventh century.

[54] Fragmenta registri Stephani V, 352.17–353.26.

[55] Stephani V epp., 355.1–358.5. This epistle was significantly interpolated by Bishop Viching, in line with the epistle of the pope John VIII to Svetopluk from June 880, Constantinus et Methodius, 75–77.

[56] Dvornik 1970, 189–193; Pentkovskij 2014, 81–84; Ivanova 2024, 167–174.

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The Autocephalous Church of Bulgaria

With the decision of the *Council of Photius* of 879/880 that the patriarch of Constantinople would no longer ordain bishops in Bulgaria nor send them the omophorion, the church in Bulgaria was separated from the framework of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. As the pope's efforts to submit it to the jurisdiction of the Roman Church did not bear fruit, the church in Bulgaria became autocephalous. What actually stands behind this development of events, which the Roman Church obviously did not count on? The Church of Constantinople, with Photius at its head, acquiesced so readily in all this that it is unlikely the events took place without their direction.

The Origin of Bulgarian Autocephaly

In order to understand the further development of events, it is necessary to make a brief review of their fore story. After the Christianization, at the time of the Byzantine mission in 864–866, Byzantine bishops and priests came to Bulgaria. They were expelled in 866, when Roman missionaries came to the country. However, after the decision of the council of 4 March 870, they too were forced to leave Bulgaria, to which Byzantine bishops and priests returned. These bishops were ordained by Patriarch Ignatius and the Byzantine high clergy, and they then ordained priests. The Roman

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popes Hadrian II and John VIII protested many times afterwards, insisting that the Byzantine bishops and priests must leave Bulgaria. The pope sent this request to the council that was supposed to be held in 879. In August of that year, he sent his cardinal Peter to the council in Constantinople, entrusting him with letters to the emperors, bishops and patriarchs, which were to be read at the council, because in them the pope laid out his demands and conditions. In the letter addressed to Emperor Basil and his sons, the pope wrote that there were *illegally ordained bishops and priests in Bulgaria*.[1] In the letter addressed to Patriarch Photius, he insisted that Photius make sure the bishops and other clerics who were in Bulgaria leave there as soon as possible.[2] However, the pope added a new request in both letters which, after all, was formally inseparable from the previous one, but until then had never been clearly and particularly highlighted—that the patriarch of Constantinople should no longer ordain bishops for Bulgaria nor send them the omophorion, which are the prerogatives of a hierarch's position. It was precisely this that provided the wise Photius with a basis for the solution to the problem.

Namely, Photius desperately needed a conciliar decision on the legality of his position and the revocation of the decisions against him from the council of 869/870, in order to achieve complete calm and overcome the multi-year schism in the Byzantine Church, and perhaps also so that he would not suffer the fate to be remembered in history only as an anti-patriarch and schismatic, despite all his values. Therefore, Photius had to agree to some compromise. The pope conditioned the fulfilment of his demands on the fulfilment of his own—the withdrawal of Byzantine clerics from Bulgaria and the patriarch's renunciation of the right to ordain them and send them an omophorion. Photius saw in the pope's demand to give up his prerogatives over the bishops in Bulgaria a way of ostensibly satisfying Rome, without changing anything, by ignoring the demand for the withdrawal of Byzantine clerics from Bulgaria.

At the session of the council on 17 November 879, Photius stated that he agreed without any caveats to the request, no longer to ordain bishops in Bulgaria and not to send them an omophorion. He added that, since his return to the patriarchal throne, he had never done so.[3] Of course, all the

[1] Johannis VIII epp., 173.32–174.5.

[2] Johannis VIII epp., 185.26–186.2.

[3] Mansi, XVII, 417 D–E. Cf. Dvornik 1950, 270–272; Simeonova 1998, 319–322; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 190–191; Nikolov 2021, 143–144.

bishops in Bulgaria had been appointed there during the pontificate of Ignatius, and it was he who had ordained them and sent them the omophorion. Photius could agree to the pope's first request, if he managed to avoid the second—to withdraw the Byzantine clerics from Bulgaria. Because, if he withdrew the Byzantine clerics from Bulgaria, the pope would send Roman ones instead. The Roman priesthood in Bulgaria would have meant an indisputable Roman influence at the gates of Constantinople. This was something that neither Photius nor others at the top of Byzantine society could agree to. Many years ago, F. Dvornik noted that this was precisely the main Byzantine preoccupation in the fight for Bulgaria—to save that neighbouring country from Latin and Frankish influence.[4] On the other hand, to keep bishops and priests from Byzantium in Bulgaria, or those who were trained in Byzantium or according to the Byzantine patterns, would mean permanently tying that country to Byzantine spiritual and political thought, to Byzantine civilization. This would also be some guarantee of peace with an often dangerous neighbour, who, while a pagan, had caused great harm to the Empire. Leaving it to the Latins and Franks would inevitably increase tensions on the border and encourage conflicts. Keeping the Byzantine clergy in Bulgaria meant keeping that country in the Byzantine spiritual and ecclesiastical sphere. This was the goal for which it was necessary to sacrifice the purely formal prerogatives of the supreme authority—ordination and presentation of the omophorion. The essence was much more important.

However, the pope had specifically requested the withdrawal of Byzantine clerics from Bulgaria and had not separated this from the issue of the right to ordination. So, to put it bluntly, he somehow had to be tricked. Photius' associates got to work. The pope's envoy cardinal Peter brought the pope's letters, of course, in Latin. In the imperial office they were translated into Greek, and the translation was made to suit the interests of the Byzantine side. Namely, the place in the pope's letter to the emperor where it is indicated that the Byzantine bishops and priests who are in Bulgaria were illegally ordained is translated into Greek by simply and vaguely speaking about bishops who have sinned before the canons of the church.[5] Those lines, therefore, are worded in such a way that, when the translation was read at the session, the Fathers of the council would not be asked to expel all the Byzantine bishops and priests from Bulgaria.

[4] Dvornik 1950, 297.

[5] Johannis VIII epp., 174.8–15 (graece).

The second step was to convince the papal legates, Peter, Paul and Eugene, that their request had been met by Photius' agreement to renounce the right to ordination and sending the omophorion to Bulgaria. How successful Byzantine diplomacy was in this matter is shown by the fact that, in the conclusions of the council signed by the papal legate Paul, the question of Bulgaria is nowhere mentioned.[6] Perhaps the papal envoys were fooled by the formal recognition of the papal prerogatives of supreme judge in canonical matters, which reflected the entire situation surrounding Photius' recognition. In any case, cardinal Peter, Bishop Paul of Ancona and Bishop Eugene of Ostia then made a serious mistake. Having received from them the decisions of the council in the summer of 880, Pope John VIII realized this. In the letter he sent to Photius on 13 August 880, in which he officially recognized the council's decisions, the pope emphasized that he did not recognize the deeds of his legates and does not attach any value to them, because, *they perhaps worked against his instructions*.[7] However, those were the decisions of the council, signed by his legates on his behalf, and he could do nothing more. He was facing a fait accompli. He was aware of everything he had won, and especially of what he had not achieved—the Byzantine bishops and priests were not obliged to leave Bulgaria. However, as the patriarch of Constantinople had renounced the right to ordain bishops in Bulgaria and send them an omophorion, it seemed to the pope at that moment, in the summer of 880, that Bulgaria was finally left under his jurisdiction. Therefore, he could accept even such a half-solution, believing that in time he would be able to replace the Byzantine clergy with Roman, when he exercised his rights, especially if he could secure Prince Boris to his side. From this came the letters he sent to Boris in 881 and 882 demanding he send envoys to Rome who would officially recognize the authority of the Roman Church.[8] Only after the envoys failed to arrive did the pope realize that he had been hoodwinked, or was prevented from realizing it by his own death on 16 December 882.

Nevertheless, the question of the jurisdiction over Bulgaria was raised at the council on one occasion, at a session held on the Day before Christmas, 24 December 879. But, on that occasion, representatives of the high Byzantine clergy thwarted any further discussion, claiming that

[6] Dvornik 1950, 274.
[7] Johannis VIII epp., 227.22–228.16; Dvornik 1950, 289.
[8] Johannis VIII epp., 260.7–21, 266.33–267.29; Simeonova 1998, 321–331.

the council had not been convened to divide dioceses and that this was in the exclusive competence of the emperor.[9] This is another indicator of the extremely well-organized and orchestrated Byzantine position on the *Bulgarian question* at the council. As in 870, even now the Byzantine clergy defended state interests, and in this, of course, it has the support of the emperor. So, after Patriarch Photius renounced his supreme rights over Bulgaria on 17 November 879, which meant that this country ceased to be formally part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the council concluded, on 24 December, that the decision on whose right it would be in the future belonged to the emperor. Emperor Basil I certainly did not make the decision that it should belong to the Roman Patriarchate. In this way, the church in Bulgaria remained independent in relation to both patriarchates, but under the administration of the Byzantine clergy and in the Byzantine spiritual and political sphere. There is no direct confirmation in contemporary sources of the extent of the emperor's role in this development of events, but there is information from his grandson, Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959), in section 96 of the *Vita Basilii*, that Emperor Basil *inclined the Bulgarian people, previously converted to the Christian faith, to receive an archbishop in their country and multiply the number of bishops in the country.*[10]

Thus, the position of the church in Bulgaria was determined at the council of 879/880. The patriarch renounced his rights over Bulgaria, but the emperor did not grant them to the pope, and thus the church in this country gained independence, i.e. *autocephaly.*[11] Bearing that in mind, we come to the problem of introducing the institution of the *archbishop of Bulgaria*. What did it practically mean that the patriarch of Constantinople renounced the right to ordain bishops in Bulgaria and send them an omophorion? Exactly what the 8th canon of the Third Ecumenical Council of 431 meant for the church in Cyprus—*let the chairmen of the holy churches of Cyprus have complete and indisputable authority, to appoint the most pious bishops by themselves.*[12] Bishops in Bulgaria now also had that right. As we saw in one of the earlier chapters, the head of the church in Bulgaria during the time when it was part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople

[9] Mansi, XVII, 488 A–B; Dvornik 1950, 272; Simeonova 1998, 320–321; Nikolov 2021, 143–144.

[10] Vita Basilii, 96.6–9.

[11] Gjuzelev 1999, 102–103; Božilov, Gjuzelev 1999, 190–191; Podskalsky 2000, 68; Nikolov 2021, 144.

[12] III Ecum. (Ephesus) 8, Syntagma II, 203–204.

between 870 and 880 had a position that resembled the position of an *exarch of the diocese* within the Patriarchate of Constantinople, that is, the *primate* within the Roman Church, and like the first mentioned, he had the honorary title of *archbishop*. Now, however, like the archbishop of Cyprus, he was an *archbishop of the autocephalous church* and occupied a much higher rank in the hierarchy of the Byzantine dignitaries than the metropolitans themselves, as evidenced by *Cletorologion of Philotheus*, from 899, and then by the *Tacticon of Benešević*, composed after 934.[13]

Organization of the autocephalous Church of Bulgaria

This was the way in which the independent (autocephalous) Church of Bulgaria was established in 880, in close relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Prince Boris certainly had nothing against this development of events, since an independent archbishopric had been his cherished desire of old. Doubtless it contributed to Boris' lack of enthusiasm in responding to the pope's calls to send him an embassy and recognize the supreme rights of Rome. It is not illogical to assume that, at this moment, the emperor's decision to assign a special archbishop to Bulgaria was an inducement to Boris to remain loyal to the Byzantine Church and not finally assent to the papal demands, which might have seemed justified to him after Photius' renunciation of his own rights in that land. In 870 Constantinople had simply had no reason to allow Boris an independent church and archbishop, because the council had ruled in its favour. This need, however, arose in 880, when the patriarch of Constantinople renounced his rights to Bulgaria, which had been recognized by the council of 870. To give Bulgaria ecclesiastical independence, headed by an archbishop from Byzantium, and for Byzantine bishops and priests to remain in their positions in that country, was a sure way to ensure that it would never again fall under the influence of the rival Roman See. The final solution of the *Bulgarian question* in 880 was a great victory for the Byzantine missionary policy over that of Rome.

That the Bulgarian Church really did gain full independence at that time is also shown by the fact that its eparchies were henceforth excluded from the episcopal lists of the Church of Constantinople—the already

[13] Oikonomidès, Listes, 137.17, 245.17; Nikolov 2021, 144–145. On the issue of the personality of the first Bulgarian archbishop, cf. chapter *Bulgarian Church Question*.

many-times-mentioned *notitiae*. The first known *notitia* that originates from the time after 880, *notitia* 7 according to the edition of J. Darrouzès,[14] was composed in the summer of 920, during the time of Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus and the sole rule of Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus,[15] with an indication that its goal was to bring order to the list of metropolitans and archbishops.[16] When its data are compared with the data provided by the earlier, *notitia* 3, composed in the 870-ies, it becomes clear which eparchies had been excluded from the hierarchy and composition of the Patriarchate in the meantime, i.e. entered the framework of the newly independent Bulgarian Church, which makes it possible to reconstruct the scope of that Church.

It is easy to see that *notitia* 7, unlike *notitia* 3, does not contain the eparchies of *Second Moesia* and *Scythia Minor* north of the Balkan Mountain, as well as the eparchy of *Second Haemimontus*, that is the metropolitanate of Marcianopolis, which is also mentioned in all the *notitiae* older than *notitia* 3.[17] In the *notitiae* of the Church of Constantinople there is no more mention either of the autocephalous archbishopric of Beroe (Stara Zagora), between the Balkan Mountain and the Marica river, so it is clear that it too was included in the autocephalous Church of Bulgaria. It is particularly interesting, however, that the eparchy of Thrace, whose metropolitan had his seat in Philippopolis, a city which had belonged to the Bulgarian state from the middle of the ninth century until the Russian conquest in 969,[18] is still mentioned in the episcopal *notitiae* of the Church of Constantinople from the tenth century.[19] This means that, even after 880, the metropolitanate of Philippopolis belonged to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, and not to the autocephalous Bulgarian Church. However, what is worth noting in this case is that all the bishoprics that are mentioned in the *notitiae* from the tenth century as suffragans of the metropolitan of Philippopolis were located south of the Marica river and the Erkesiya Wall.[20] Since some of these were already mentioned at the council of 879/880 (Leuca, Ioannitza, Bucuba),[21] it may be assumed that

[14] Notitiae, 7, p. 269. sq
[15] Zuckerman 2006, 219–229.
[16] Notitiae, 7, pp. 270–271.
[17] Notitiae, 1.444–449, 2.512–517, 3.727–731, 4.462–467, 5.32, 6.32.
[18] Cf. TIB 6, 399–400; Stanković 2002, 283.
[19] Notitiae, 7.36, 584–594, 8.38, 9.455–465, 10.542–552, 11.38, 12.36, 13.591–602.
[20] Cf. TIB 6, 168, 197–198, 209, 223, 253–254, 286, 314, 334–336, 448.
[21] Mansi, XVII, 376 B – 377 C.

as early as the occasion of the restoration of the metropolitanate of Philippopolis within the organization of the Church in Bulgaria as part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 870–880, its territory had been reduced to the area south of the Marica river, and that on the occasion of the establishment of the autocephalous Bulgarian Church after the Council of 879/880 that river was designated as the border between it and the Patriarchate of Constantinople, regardless of the political demarcation between the Bulgarian state and the Byzantine Empire.

As for the bishoprics in the western part of the Bulgarian state, in the area of the old Eastern Illyricum, which are not mentioned in earlier *notitiae*, but are mentioned in *notitia* 3 or other sources from the period 870–880, such as Serdica, Morava, Belgrade and, probably, Skopje,[22] they certainly became part of the independent Bulgarian Church.[23] The same could probably be said for the bishopric of Ras in Serbia, which was already connected with the church in Bulgaria in the period 870–880.[24]

With the establishment of the independent Bulgarian Church in 880, and the refusal of Prince Boris to respond to the papal demands in 881 and 882, the *Bulgarian church question*, opened by the baptism of the same prince in 864 and the arrival of the first Byzantine mission, was definitely resolved and ended. Byzantine policy won a great victory over Rome, but in fact it was only defending its legal and natural rights to a country in its immediate neighbourhood, destined to coexist with the Empire. The Byzantine emperor and the patriarch took care of the further development of the ecclesiastical organization in Bulgaria. Byzantine priests who in 869/870 returned to Bulgaria continued their missionary activity among the Bulgarians. They worshiped in the Greek language.[25] However, the disciples of St. Methodius, exiled from Moravia, were soon to appear in Bulgaria, bringing with them the Slavic script, literature and liturgical language, which would only gain their true and full meaning in Bulgaria and be established as a *sacred language* of the Christian faith. In this way, two great achievements of Byzantine church policy of the ninth century would be combined in Bulgaria—the Christianization of the Bulgarians and worship in the Slavic language.

[22] Komatina 2023, 791–796. Cf. chapter *Bulgarian Church Question*.

[23] On the development of the diocesan organization in the western parts of the Bulgarian state from the ninth to the beginning of the eleventh century, cf. Komatina 2023, 789–814.

[24] Komatina 2015, 716–718; Komatina 2023, 812–813.

[25] Nikolova 2002, 44–47.

Prince Boris had already decided in 870 that the future of his country lay within the spiritual and cultural sphere of Constantinople, and his decision only became stronger over time. Even before the final settlement of the *Bulgarian church question*, most likely in 877 or 878, he sent his second son, then still a boy, Symeon, to Constantinople to be educated by studying Aristotle and Demosthenes. Like his father, when he abdicated his throne in 889, Symeon also took the path of a monastic life.[26] However, the confluence of circumstances called him to take over his father's throne from his older brother Vladimir in 893 and lead his country on the path of its greatest political and cultural ascent.[27] In both fields, that ascent rested on the solid foundations of Byzantine civilization.

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[26] Liutprandi Antapodosis, III.29; Nikolov 2006, 90–96; PmbZ, no. 27467.
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The Results of the Byzantine Church Policy in 886

Emperor Basil I died on 29 August 886. The imperial throne was inherited by two of his sons and co-rulers, Leo and Alexander. Formally, Leo VI (886–912) was the older co-ruler, so he had an advantage over his younger brother, and in fact he had all the power in his hands.[1] Photius awaited the emperor's death on the patriarchal throne. Moreover, it seemed to him that he would develop a good cooperation with the new emperors and that everything would continue to function in the spirit of the symphony that he had developed in previous years. This is evidenced by the letter that he sent shortly after the death of Emperor Basil to the Bulgarian Prince Boris Michael, his spiritual son, in which he informs him of the death of the emperor and the sadness that overcame the Romans because of it. On that occasion, he introduces Boris to the new and young emperors and expresses his hopes for their just and noble administration.[2] However, his hopes, at least as far as his personality was concerned, were soon dashed. Within a month after the death of Emperor Basil, Emperor Leo once again deposed Photius from the patriarchal throne, on 29 September 886.[3] This was the final end of Photius' career. He would live a few more years, apart from all matters of state, but died on 6 February

[1] On the reign of Leo VI (886–912) and Alexander (912–913), cf. Tougher 1997 68 sq.
[2] Photii epp., 287.1–57.
[3] Tougher 1997, 68–88; Stanković 2003, 74–79.

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most likely in 893.[4] In his place, Emperor Leo appointed none other than his younger brother, still a young man, Stephen. This act demonstrated with sufficient clarity what he thought about Photius' ideology of the symphony of imperial and patriarchal power, that is, the cooperation of both and the non-interference of one in the competence of the other. The imperial power once again played with the patriarchal power and proved its supremacy. The church was placed, once again, firmly in the hands of the emperor, who governed it sovereignly through the person of his brother. Leo VI was obviously closer in thinking to the ideology of the *emperor and the high priest*.

At the time of the changes in Constantinople, in the late summer of 886, the internal state of the Byzantine Church was far better and more peaceful than at any time during the previous century. The *Schism of Photius* was still smouldering, because there were still those who were divided by their loyalties to either Photius or Ignatius, and among the latter were mostly those who could never forgive Photius for all the transgressions of the canons that he had committed, and most of all the troubles that Ignatius had suffered because of him. After all, Photius' opponents were encouraged after he was overthrown again by the new emperor in 886.[5] However, no new quarrels or disagreements became serious enough to have left a trace in the historical record. Basil I's policy of baptizing Jews failed, because after his death those who had been baptized returned to Judaism. However, the policy of Christianizing the pagans among the Slavs and Greeks in the Peloponnese was largely successful. The Paulician heretics on the eastern border were also finally crushed and would never again represent a military threat, although they would not completely disappear, and would even transfer and spread the seeds of their teachings all the way to Western Europe.

On the outside, things stood differently depending on the territory. Christianity failed to gain a foothold among the Khazars and had to retreat and leave that people to the exclusive influence of Judaism, even before the end of the ninth century. The Russians from the southern parts of the Eastern European steppe, who had accepted Christianity, were defeated in 882 by their pagan compatriots from the north, who erased all traces of the new religion. Methodius of Thessalonica, Archbishop of Pannonia and

[4] Jenkins 1965, 244. According to Varona Codeso, Prieto Domínguez 2013, 113–115, Photius died certainly after 25 December 892.

[5] On Photius' supporters and opponents after 886, cf. Dvornik 1950, 329–381.

Moravia, died on 6 April 885. Within a year, his disciples, under pressure from Latin priests, were forced to leave Moravia and Pannonia and flee to the south, mostly to Bulgaria. They brought with them the Slavic alphabet and liturgical literature, the traces of which would soon be erased in Central Europe, only to find conditions for a new and extremely fulfilling life in the Balkans. On the island of Cyprus, the Arabs regained political influence, and the Church of Cyprus thereby regained its ancient autocephalous status. In 879, the pope and the local lords prevented the expansion of the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to Dalmatia and Croatia. As the flames of the *Schism of Photius* died down, so did the anger of the Roman Church towards Constantinople. Especially since in Rome they slowly began to forget about their pretensions to Bulgaria. Relations between the two largest and most important centres of the Christian universe would continue without major upheavals in the coming decades. The lasting success of the Byzantine church policy of the ninth century on the external front was the Christianization and winning over of Bulgaria, which after 880, although autocephalous, i.e. independent in relation to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, nevertheless permanently remained within the framework of the Byzantine church and culture. Its ruler—and that was still Boris Michael—received the disciples of St. Methodius, exiled from Moravia and Pannonia, with their Slavic alphabet and emerging culture. In this way, Bulgaria also preserved the heritage of the Byzantine church policy of the ninth century. Having enabled Methodius' disciples to work unhindered, and then accepting the Slavic language to replace Greek as the official language of the church and state, during the reign of Boris' younger and Constantinople-educated son Symeon, Bulgaria became the real cradle of a new, Slavic culture, formed on Byzantine foundations and within the Byzantine cultural sphere, to which Bulgaria already belonged. At that time, Serbia also entered this framework, as part of the Bulgarian church and Slavic culture. Considering that the aforementioned framework was created precisely by the activity of the Byzantine church policy in the second half of the ninth century, it could be said that one of its results was the success of Byzantium, at least on the religious and cultural level, to regain under its auspices the largest part of the Balkan peninsula, to the banks of the Danube, Sava and the Adriatic.

Finally, the most significant and long-lasting result of the church policy of the Byzantine Empire in the period that followed the *Triumph of Orthodoxy* in 843 and lasted until 886 is the idea that all territories that are

under the distinct political influence of the Empire on the Bosporus should also be under its direct spiritual influence, which led to the firm connection of the Byzantine state, Byzantine Christianity and Byzantine culture, which rested above all on the rich Greek cultural heritage, into a single organism that enabled the creation of a special Byzantine cultural circle, a Byzantine *community of peoples*, which Dimitri Obolensky aptly named the *Byzantine Commonwealth*.

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