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Constantine and Patriarch Photius

In our paper, we intend to outline the relationship between St. Constantine, the inventor of Slavic script, and Photius, the famous Patriarch of Constantinople.

Even today, views on the mutual relationship between these two important representatives of 9th century Byzantine scholarship differ quite significantly.

Certain scholars draw mainly on the account of Anastasius Bibliothecarius and see in St. Constantine not only a close friend and a reliable follower of the Patriarch but also a dedicated representative of his interests.

Others claim that because of Photius's commitment to certain heretic beliefs, St. Constantine became alienated from his former friend to such an extent that their relationship eventually became hostile.

When trying to resolve the issue, we must turn primarily to available contemporary sources.

Much to our surprise, contemporary Slavic sources, most importantly the so-called *Pannonian Legends* which deal with the lives of St. Constantine and Methodius, hardly touch on this issue. Perusing the surviving Latin sources, we find that Anastasius Bibliothecarius is the only author ever to mention the friendship between Constantine and Photius. This obvious shortage of sources explains why scholars tend to come to their conclusions from such *indirect sources* as the events of Constantine's and Photius's lives or the analysis of the facts of ecclesiastical policy and cultural history.

The events of Constantine's life have been preserved in the *Constantine Legend*, one of the collection known as the *Pannonian Legends*.

The legend, which was partly edited by Constantine's brother Methodius after the death of the former, probably dates back to the period between 869 and 886. Even this excellent source mentions Photius's name only at one point. In Chapter 4 of the Legend, which discusses Constantine's studies in Constantinople, we find the following:

In three months he mastered grammar and began other studies. He studied Homer and geometry with Leo, and dialectics and all philosophical studies with Photius; and in addition to that, rhetoric and arithmetic, astronomy and music, and all the other Hellenic arts.¹

As we can see, the masters introducing the talented youth into the secrets of *enkyklios paideia* [=septem artes liberales] were none other than Leo, the mathematician, and Photius, the future Patriarch.

1. M. Kantor: *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*. Ann Arbor 1983. 31.

By Christmas 858, Photius, who started out as a high-ranking secular official of the Byzantine Empire, made it all the way to the seat of the Patriarch, taking all the intermediary offices leading to that supreme position within just one week.

It is difficult to establish with absolute certainty where Leo and Photius taught Constantine. It is widely debated whether the Constantinople college, the Magnaura School, which was reorganized by Theodosius II, operated before 858. It is a well known fact that Theodosius appointed Leo the mathematician as a professor of mathematics in the Church of the 40 Martyrs, providing him with regular salary directly from the Treasury. The famous professor taught in this church until he was appointed as the Metropolitan of Thessalonica. Following the defeat of the Iconoclasts, he returned to the capital, but we have no information as to his activities before the founding of the college by Bardas (863). As a working hypothesis, we may accept Professor D. Angelov's view and assume that Leo returned to Constantinople after 843 and he continued his work as a teacher of the Magnaura School.² Here Photius, the famous scholar and outstanding professor was one of his fellow teachers. Among their students, we find the young Constantine as well.

As we are primarily interested in the person of Photius, it seems necessary to give a short account, based on the most recent literature in the field, of the views on the founding figure or the first Byzantine Renaissance.

It is beyond any doubt that Photius, the founder and spiritual leader of the new Byzantine literary trend, was a personality of astonishing diversity: a cunning and ambitious politician and ecclesiarch, a tolerant but sophisticated literary critic, and most definitely an inspiration for Constantine and Methodius. The modern literature of the field emphasizes his „congenital” talent for teaching. His activity as a professor is far more impressive than his originality as a philosopher, although even this latter is not without interest for the history of philosophy.

Ever since J. Hergenröther, modern literature has been keen to underline that Photius, in complete agreement with Ioannes Damascenus, favored Aristotle to Plato.

One of the most significant features of Photius's personality is his sober tolerance with which he evaluates the antique literary heritage. He appreciates antique rhetorical prose, even though he refuses both the poetry of that age, which he finds heavily burdened with heathen mythological elements, and Plato's philosophy, which he considers much too mystical and often obscure. He adamantly refuses the theoretical realism of the concepts of genus and species. He lays special emphasis on logic in his philosophy. Another of his characteristics is his peculiar sort of rationalism. Even though he was oftentimes accused of paganism, Photius's thought is characterized by two particular features: his adherence to the teachings of the Church, and his devotion to the tradition of reason, which helped him avoid the mysticism of the Neoplatonic school. When we deduce these features from Photius's sober tolerance, we must also mention another, equally important one of his characteristics, which nevertheless seems to stem from the former: his utilitarianism, which was one of the motivating principles behind his actions at all times. These are the peculiarities of Photius's character that are most often emphasized in modern scholarship, and, as S. S. Averincev, the

2. Ангелов: История на Византия. I. часть. София 1976. 358.

excellent scholar of the history of Byzantine philosophy concludes, these are the features that his followers and students must have also shared.³

Photius was truly a devoted educator. His activities as a teacher were not in the least confined to the opportunities provided by „organized instruction”; in fact, his students were always welcome to visit his home, where they frequently discussed philosophical questions, thus creating a peculiar „literary salon” of sorts in the capital of the Empire.

In the foreword of an account of the 7th Synod of Constantinople, which was prepared by Anastasius Bibliothecarius for Pope Hadrian II, we find further information concerning Photius the educator and his expectations of his students.

This foreword mentions that several of Photius’s students came from well known families. However, Anastasius Bibliothecarius also draws our attention to something that is not at all flattering to the Patriarch. The learned scholar and professor, we are told, required his students – mostly the ones leaving for foreign lands – to sign a declaration written in their own hands stating that they have no other faiths (fides) than their master, Photius himself.⁴ Without discussing in what Photius’s own faith exactly lay, we must note that, before the commencement of their foreign missions, Constantine and Methodius were also required to write and sign such a declaration.

Photius was also known to raise his followers (e.g. Aretas) into high offices. Yet not even one reference is to be found in the Constantine Legend to Photius as a sponsor or supporter of Constantine’s missionary enterprise.

This is what we read about the Arabian mission in Chapter 6 of the Constantine Legend:

Having convened a council, the Emperor summoned Constantine and said to him...⁵

The Emperor convened a council, which probably suggested that he should send Constantine on a mission to the Arabs.

Dating the Arabian mission to 855,⁶ we may conclude that during this period – in the years after 851 – Photius was not a professor of the imperial university/college any more. As a high-ranking state official, a Protoascretis, he must have had significant influence in the court council. Yet we hear nothing of him in the Legend.

At the time of the appointment of the members of the Khazarian mission (around the summer of 860), Photius already held the office of the Patriarch, which means that he must have had a say in the appointment of the members of the mission; the Legend still fails to mention his name. The same may be said later of the Moravian mission. On this occasion, the Emperor convened the council again, and Constantine was also invited to participate in the discussion; yet again, the name of the Patriarch is never mentioned.

3. Аверинцев, С. С.: *Философия VIII–XII вв.* Под редакцией З. В. Удальцовой и Г. Г. Литаврина. Москва, 1989. 43–44.

4. F. Grivec – F. Tomšič: *Constantinus et Methodius Thessalonicensis. Fontes.* Zagreb 1960. 66.

5. M. Kantor: *Op. cit.* 35.

6. F. Grivec: *Konstantin und Method. Lehrer der Slaven.* Wiesbaden 1960. 40. F. Grives – F. Tomšic: *Op. cit.* 179.

Anastasius Bibliothecarius's letter to Gauderich, Bishop of Veletri, which discusses the search for St. Clement's relics eventually found by Constantine during the Khazarian mission, also lacks any reference to the name of Patriarch Photius as one of the organizers of the mission.

However, Gauderich's so-called *Italian Legend* [*Legenda Italica*] does mention that Emperor Michail III conferred with the Patriarch just before the commencement of the Khazarian mission. Although the name of the Patriarch is not given in the Legend, we know from other sources that at that time the office of the Patriarch was held by Photius:

Tunc imperator simul cum patriarcha consilio habito, prefatum Philosophum advocans... transmisit illuc.⁷

Even though the Constantine Legend fails to mention Photius's role in appointing Constantine for the mission, the Italian Legend seems to be able to convince us that Photius did play a role in appointing Constantine for at least the Khazarian and the Moravian missions.

We have no reason to believe that the author did not know about this; in fact, his silence concerning Photius's cooperation seems intentional. The relationships are those of ecclesiastic policy. Fully aware of the relationship between Photius and the Papal Court in Rome as well as of the standpoint taken by the Pope regarding the Patriarch, the author neglected to mention Photius's name in order to avoid the disapproval of Rome. Besides, he also had solid tactical reasons not to mention Photius, since at the Synod of Constantinople held during the fall of 867, Photius dethroned Pope Nicholas I. Preserving one segment of the historical truth, the author of the Constantine Legend mentions Photius only as Constantine's teacher, a learned scholar well known and well respected even in Rome.

Constantine, although a follower of his teacher in many respects, never accepted the teachings of Aristotle; rather, his philosophy was primarily influenced by Leo, who himself was a Neoplatonic. It was through St. Gregory of Nazianzus that Constantine became acquainted with certain Neoplatonic ideas. Still, many of his actions and comments seem to find their explanation in Photius's influence. These are the following:

1. The dogma (*fides*) attributed to Photius by Anastasius Bibliothecarius may refer to the so-called Filioque problem. Photius believed and taught that the Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Holy Trinity, takes its origin only from the Father and not from the Son. This is what the Patriarch claims in his Patriarchal Encyclical Letter issued in 866 as well as in his 885 treatise entitled *Mystagogia*. Constantine and Methodius also shared this view, which bothered certain representatives of the Frankish clergy to such an extent that they actually reported the two brothers to the Popes of Rome. Despite such reports, they were never prosecuted by the Papal Court as heretics, since the Filioque dogma was only declared official by Rome as late as 1014. It might be that Constantine became acquainted with Photius's teaching when still in college, and he may have been one of the students who actually signed the declaration required by their professor.

7. F. Grivec – F. Tomšič: Op. cit. 59.

2. One of the most fundamental teachings of Photius treated the matter of man's free will (*liberum arbitrium*). He believed that God attributed man with intelligence and free will.⁸ This view is quite obviously one of the underlying principles of the introductory section of the *Methodius Legend*, and, as we remember, this is the part of the Legend which is attributable to Constantine with significant certainty.⁹ Constantine himself also emphasizes that God gave man three things: his soul, his mind, and his free will.¹⁰

3. Chapter 4 of the Constantine Legend describes the young scholar's attachment and dedication to science, the final aim of which is to regain the honor and wealth of the ancestors of humankind, that is, the primordial state of Adam and Eve: their yearning for perfection and their approach of God:

... for me nothing is greater than learning. Having acquired knowledge. Through it I wish to seek the honor and wealth of our ancestors.¹¹

Although it is beyond any doubt that this statement of Constantine's demonstrates the influence of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, they are nevertheless related to Constantine's master's words emphasizing the importance of science as well:

Der Größte Theil der Menschen strebt nach Reichtum und irdischen Gütern.

...erdene Seelen streben vor Allem der Weisheit nach, die unvergängliche Schätze verleiht... Durch diese Weisheit werden die Sinne der Seele geübt, mit Sicherheit Gutes und Böses zu unterscheiden.¹²

These thoughts of Photius's, surviving in his collection of philosophical lectures entitled *Amphilochia*, may not have been entirely original, yet they may have had the capacity to influence some of his more talented students, and, among them, the young Constantine.

4. In the Preface (*Proglas*) to the Gospel translations, which was written in verses most probably by Constantine, the poet emphasizes the great importance of books. The soul, if deprived of books, is in effect dead:

...Besides, the soul of man, if deprived of books, is dead.¹³

8. J. Hergenröther. Photius. II. Regensburg 1867. 441.

9. F. Grivec: Op. cit. 211,222.

10. F. Grivec – F. Tomšič: Op. cit. 215.

11. M. Kantor: Op. cit. 32–33.

12. Quotes J. Hergenröther. Photius I. Regensburg 1867. 325–326.

13. П. Динеков – К. Куев – Д. Петканова: Христоматия по старобългаристика литература. II-о издание. София 1967. 52.

Constantine's high respect and extraordinary affection for books was probably also influenced by Photius, who himself compiled an anthology entitled *Myriobiblon*. Photius, when eventually in exile, complained of nothing but the lack of books.¹⁴

5. Finally, we must mention the hypothesis that Constantine, when translating the Bible, probably utilized the basic principles expressed by Apostle Paul in Chapter 14 of *his First Letter to the Corinthians*. These basic principles touch on such issues as meaningful speech, the power manifested in words, and clear and understandable expression. These views are reflected, among others, in Constantine's Venetian dispute, in his prose preface to the Gospel translations, as well as in his already mentioned verse preface (*Proglas*) to the same, where the author actually mentions by name Apostle Paul as the source of the principles he followed. Certain scholars suggest that Photius's view of Apostle Paul may have inspired his one-time student in his translation of the Gospels.¹⁵

In his previously mentioned letter to Pope Hadrian II, Anastasius Bibliothecarius mentions Constantine, his personal acquaintance, as a man who leads a righteous and holy life. He also mentions that this man of righteous and holy life was the best friend¹⁶ (*amicus fortissimus*) of Photius. Still, he relates the story of a dispute between the two. The dispute can be dated to the time when Ignatius still held the office of the Patriarch, but Photius's position as a professor of the Magnaura School was probably already taken by his friend and one-time student, Constantine.

The matter of disagreement between the friends was Photius's judgement of Patriarch Ignatius, a man he much despised. Photius, a learned man, when examining Ignatius's reply, propagated the errant belief (error) or the misconception (*propositio*) that every human being has two souls. Photius had no intention to insult anybody with his statement; his only goal was to shake the reputation of Ignatius, who objected to secular science and who preferred the ascetic ideal of life in the seclusion of a monastery.

However, Photius failed to achieve his aim; even many of his closest friends openly criticized him both for his teaching and for his intention.

Before we move on, let us attempt to determine upon what theories and principles Photius based his hypothesis.

Several possible answers are to be considered.

Photius was widely known as a follower of Aristotle's philosophy; thus it is only logical to look for the source of this view in the teachings of the Stageirite.

We do find a similar duality in Aristotle; however, the Philosopher locates this duality within the soul and defines it as a duality of the mind (*νοῦς*). The soul contains two minds, one passive (*νοῦς παθητικός*), and one active and creative (*νοῦς ποιητικός*).¹⁷ The active mind is of divine origin and is immortal.¹⁸ Based on the aforesaid, we may confidently eliminate Aristotle as a possible source of Photius's theory.

In trying to identify the source, J. Hergenröther suggests the following:

14. R. Dostálová. *Byzantská vzdělanost*. Praha 1990. 63.

15. R. Dostálová: *Op. cit.* 63.

16. F. Grivec – F. Tomšič: *Op. cit.* 66.

17. Aristoteles: *A lélekről*. Fordította Förster Aurél. Budapest 1915. 76–77. (*De anima* 430a 10–25).

18. Halasy – Nagy József: *Az antik filozófia*. Budapest 1934. 263.

1. The Platonic trichotomy: the presence of pneuma, psyche, and animal soul.

2. The Manicheist's dualistic view of the good and the evil soul.

J. Hergenröther emphasizes, however, that Photius was neither a Manicheist, nor a Platonist. Thus, we must discharge both of these hypotheses.¹⁹

A possible source may have been the teaching of Numenius of Apamea, who worked between 160 and 181 and who was one of the spiritual predecessors of Plotinus. The Apamean philosopher, who started out from Pythagoreism and gradually became a Neoplatonist, held that human beings have two souls: „one intelligent and one non-intelligent”, which are present in everybody.²⁰ It is highly probable that it was Numenius's dualism that Photius had in mind when he tried to provoke the Patriarch.

We must not forget that the probleme was originally raised merely as a matter of strictly theoretical importance. The solution of a philosophical problem required Ignatius's reaction. Photius and his students often discussed similar topics, oftentimes in Photius's own home. This time, however, the outcome of the discussion caused unpleasant moments and brought severe scolding to the future Patriarch; several years later, simply because of the question raised, he was still unpopular with monks and clergymen alike. Constantine himself was also astonished at Photius's action, since he raised indignation in many and he offended the faith of even more. The young scholar compared his master's teaching to an arrow and said that he had injured human souls by raising the question of psychological dualism.

Constantine considers Photius's procedures as a manifestation of secular wisdom, which was already condemned by Apostle Paul as useless for faith (Romans 1:22; Corinthians 1:6–7).

Constantine, who Theophylactus of Ochrid believed to be equally adept at external (secular) philosophy and internal philosophy (theology), held that philosophy was merely the means and not the purpose itself. His soteric philosophy was based on faith, at least this is what one of his comments seems to imply:

„He entrusted also to them the faith without which none can live eternal life.”²¹

In Constantine's system of values, the first place was taken by the thoughts of approaching God and becoming like him. True philosophy is designed to help this endeavour. Consequently, Constantine held that philosophy was the servant of theology; Photius himself was of the same belief,²² although he seems to have forgotten about it at that one instant.

Astonished at Photius's procedure, Constantine accused his professor of blindness: the eyes of his wisdom were so much blinded by the smoke of avarice and hatred that he could not see the truth any longer.²³

19. J. Hergenröther: *Fotius*. III. 446.

20. F. Ueberwegs. *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie* I. Die Philosophie des Altertums. XII. Auflage. Berlin 1926. 521. Magyary Zoltán, Techert M.: *A hellén újplatonizmus története*. Budapest 1941. 109–110.

21. M. Kantor: *Op. cit.* 61.

22. J. Hergenröther: *Fotius* I. ... 326.

23. F. Grivec – F. Tomšič: *Op. cit.* 66–67.

In making this comment, Constantine also expressed his opinion that not only had Photius challenged his opponent, the noted philosopher was also motivated to do so by greed and his hatred towards the Patriarch.

It is fairly probable that this incident marks the beginning or the period through which the two friends became alienated from each other, although Constantine never joined those openly criticizing the Patriarch.

One of the teachings for which the 8th Synod of Constantinople prosecuted Photius was his teaching of the two distinct souls.²⁴ This shows that Constantine's disapproval was more than personal criticism. Of course, Photius, who died in Rome on 14th February, 869, could not participate in the Synod session rejecting his teachings; however, several members of the Synod participating in that procedure may have known of the heated debate between Photius and Constantine. It is also probable that Symeon Magister had some part in recalling some of the details of the actual debate, even though he was not fully aware of its philosophical significance.²⁵ Consulting the sources and considering the information included therein allows us to conclude that Constantine and Photius were very close friends at a specific time during their lives. Because of Photius's provocation of Ignatius, this friendship between Photius and Constantine may have grown colder, yet we have no reason to believe that it actually turned into hostile feelings on either side. While, on the one hand, Constantine probably respected his one-time teacher well enough not to allow their relationship to deteriorate in such a manner, Photius's sense of tactics, on the other hand, may have acted much to the same effect.

24. J. Hergenröther: *Photius III.* ... 441.

25. J. Hergenröther: *Photius III.* ... 444–445.