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BEGINNINGS OF RUSSIAN MONASTICISM: THE PROBLEMS OF BYZANTINE AND NON-BYZANTINE INFLUENCE

The rather blurry image that we have of the beginnings of Russian monasticism in general and the genesis of the Kievan Monastery of the Caves in particular, is, undoubtedly, caused above all by the lack of relevant information on the given times. On the basis of the data available, the historical investigation usually stresses the varying political and religious factors: the political attitudes of both the protagonists of Kiev-Pechora monasticism. Antonij is characterized as a Graecophile, and even as a Byzantine creature, while Feodosij is characterized as an adherent of Western orientation¹. It is evident that missing from this image is the first known Russian monk, Ilarion, and that this image does not give a satisfactory answer to the question of why the Graecophile Antonij was canonized later than the West-oriented Feodosij. Apart from the considerations about Feodosij's Western orientation, often avoided is the well known fact that it was notably he who brought life in the Monastery of the Caves closer to the Byzantine model, by introducing into it the typicon of the Studite monastery². The question of what were the character and the orientation of the monastery before Feodosij's reform remains unanswered.

In principle, the above problematic questions can be summed up into one basic problem stemming from the insufficient differentiation between Byzantine and non-Byzantine orientation in the monastic tradition of the Monastery of the Caves. Its basis does not lie in characterizing the political or religious-political attitudes of the main protagonists, but in revealing the different monastic ideals that existed within the beginnings of the monastery. It seems that in this context it is important to continue in line with the evaluations made by G. P. Fedotov, who saw in Antonij and Feodosij the representatives of two different streams of Russian spiritual and monastic life that he characterized as ascetic-heroic and social-charitative³. The general but instructive differentiation made by G. P. Fedotov can be specified and made more concrete from the aspect of the cultural-geographic regions from which both impulses came.

Certain indications in this direction are already provided by the life and literary work of the first Russian monk and later the first metropolitan of Russian origin, Ilarion. The chara-

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¹ Б.Д. Греков, *Киевская Русь*. (Moscow, 1949), p. 408. В. Пархоменко, "В какой мере было тенденциозно несохранившееся древнее житие Антония Печерского." *Известия Отделения Русского языка и литературы* 19, 1914, p. 238. М. Д. Приселков, *Очерки по церковно-политической истории Киевской Руси 10-12 вв.*, СПб., 1913, p. 248. А. С. Хорошев, *Политическая история русской канонизации (10-16 в.)*, (Moscow, 1986), p. 36. Recent works with complete literature of the problem Podskalsky G., *Christentum und theologische Literatur in der Kiewer Rus (988-1237)*. (Munich, 1982), p. 124 and G. Podskalsky, "Der Hl. Feodosij Pečerskij historisch und literarisch betrachtet." *Proceedings of the International Congress Commemorating the Millennium of Christianity in Rus'Ukraine. Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 12-13, (1988-89), p.716. А. Ф. Замалеев, *Философская мысль в средневековой Руси*, (Leningrad, 1987), p. 44.

² *Повесть временных лет*, 1, ed. Д. С. Лихачев, (Moscow, 1950), p. 160. *Патерик Киевского Печерского монастыря*, ed. Д. И. Абрамович. СПб., 1911, p. 39. Д. С. Лихачев, "Устав студийский по списку 12 в. (фрагменты)." *Источники по истории русского языка*. (Moscow, 1976), p. 109, 114.

³ Федотов Г. П., *Святые Древней Руси (10-17 вв.)* (New York, 1959), p. 32, 59.

cters of Ilarion the monk and Ilarion the author of the Sermon on Law and Grace are connected only by one conspicuous feature: Ilarion's monastic way of life, eremitical cave life, differed from the then prevailing coenobitism. This way of life indicates certain Palestinian connections or impulses. Palestinian motives play an important role also in the later literary work of Ilarion and they have there an evident ideological function. On the one hand, Ilarion in principle unanimously respects the genetic relationship of Russian Christianity with the Byzantine one, on the other hand, however, his work also contains a contradictory tendency, the aim of which is to weaken the impression of the all-embracing and ever-present Byzantine influence and to stress the independently existing roots of Russian political power and the Russian Orthodox religion⁴.

Among the motives in Ilarion's work which support this tendency are the Old Testament borrowings and reminiscences. When Ilarion speaks about moving Christianity from Constantinople to Russia, he does not call the capital of Byzantium by its own name, nor by the name which was given to it by the Slavs, but he denotes it as New Jerusalem⁵. The name itself is in no way exceptional and, in Byzantium, is rather common; nevertheless, in the given context, it has a more profound background and specific function. It allows, within the intentions of the whole conception of Ilarion, the understanding of Constantinople as one of the stops in the course of spreading and bringing to perfection the Christian religion. Constantinople, seen in a historical perspective, is only one of the centers in which a reformation of the Old Testament tradition into a qualitatively new stage occurred. Judaism as the religion of the Law and Christianity as a religion of Grace are not, in Ilarion's Sermon, placed only in exclusive opposition; they are, at the same time, understood as two developmental stages of religion. This relativizing attitude of Ilarion to Constantinople as an exclusive source of Russian Christianity is still more evidently shown in the comparison of Vladimir to Solomon and David, and of Saint Sofia of Kiev to the Jerusalem shrine⁶. Although Ilarion was thoroughly familiar with the Byzantine connections between the Russian Saint Sofia and the Constantinople Hagia Sofia, he looks for a model in Jerusalem, in the Old Testament, in a Palestinian environment. Hence, he intentionally disregards the Byzantine tradition in one of its most marked connections with the Russian development. Although the use of Old Testament nomenclature is inspired by Byzantine traditions, its content, in the context of the overall mood of Ilarion's work, has a different importance and mission. The choice of terms in the East European cultural tradition is never an arbitrary one. A name does not have the character of a conventional sign; it is rather a symbol, gnoseologically very closely connected with its substance, implicating the relation or axiological evaluation of the described reality from the point of view of its user⁷.

It is possible to meditate over whether these motives in Ilarion's work have an "Old Testament" character, i.e. whether they have also a "Palestinian" character, and whether they are inspired and intentionally connected with a certain spiritual environment that is different from the standard Byzantine environment. They are very important also for a deeper understanding of Ilarion's life before he entered the high religious and political sphere, and for understanding

⁴ А. Н. Рогов, Б. Н. Флоря, *Развитие самосознания славянских народов в эпоху раннего средневековья*. (Moscow, 1982), p. 10. A. Avenarius, "Metropolitan Ilarion on the Origin of Christianity in Rus: The Problem of Transformation of Byzantine Influence." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 12-13, (1988-89), p. 689.

⁵ L. Müller, *Ilarions Lobrede auf Vladimir der Heiligen und Glaubensbekenntnis*. (Wiesbaden, 1962), p. 118, 102.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷ Р. Якобсон, "В поисках сущности языка." *Семантика*. (Moscow, 1983), p. 102 about the difference of symbol and sign. Cf. more detailed A. Avenarius, "Der Geist der byzantinischen Ikonodulie und seine Tradition." *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 42, 1992, p. 43. See in general E. Cassirer, "An Essay on Man," (New Haven and London, 1944), passim. Ю. Лотман, Б. А. Успенский, "О семиоти ческом механизме культуры." *Семантика*, 5, Труды по знаковым системам. (Tartu, 1971), p. 154-155.

his monastic ideal, as it is possible, at least hypothetically, to presuppose that Ilarion's inclination to the Palestinian forms of monasticism, which was manifested in his choice of the eremitical cave life, had the same function as the later utilization of Palestinian literary and ideological motives and it meant a conscious reaction to the prevailing influences stemming from the official, Constantinople environment.

With regard to Antonij, the continuator of the work of Ilarion, this hypothesis seems to be documented also by a contemporary source. Antonij chose as his abode Ilarion's cave, which in Nestor's Chronicle is contrasted with the existence of the rich Kiev monasteries which were being founded by the prince's court and, undoubtedly, supported also by the Byzantine environment in Kiev, concentrated around the Byzantine metropolitan⁸. These monasteries, as it stems from their description (the stressing of richness), were coenobitic.

Certain Palestinian motives and elements in Ilarion's and Antonij's monastic image, however, need not directly stem from the territorially understood Palestinian environment. Eremitical features in general were preserved in Byzantium in the eleventh century, parallel with the prevailing coenobitism, and survived mostly in its marginal areas, i.e. on Athos. Antonij's monastic course of life is, undoubtedly, connected with Athos, and at least two "Palestinian" features known from his monastic life can be related to this particular mediating environment.

First of these is the fact that Antonij arrived at eremitical life only after a certain period of his stay in a coenobitic monastery, or Laura, and that even after his withdrawal into seclusion he did not lose contact with his original monastic environment and kept interfering in its life⁹. In contrast to the Constantinople monastic ideal, which after the Studite reform nearly exclusively professed coenobitic forms of monasticism, there was preserved, above all on Athos, the eastern (Palestinian) tradition of hesychia as a more thorough and highly valued stage of monastic life. The same procedure is also documented in the case of Athanasios the Great on Athos, and also in connection with Michael Maleinos¹⁰. The procedure from coenobitism to eremitical life during which, however, the contact with the maternal monastery is not interrupted, is a typical feature stemming from Palestinian monastic traditions; it is documented also in the case of St. Sabas.

Noteworthy in this connection is the analogy between Antonij and the tradition that arose in connection with the first Bulgarian Saint, Ivan of Rila, in the thirteenth century in Bulgaria. Although Ivan started as an eremite, very soon he came to the conviction that there existed a more thorough form of coenobitic monasticism which, similar to the contemporary tenth-century attitude of Byzantium, he preferred to the other forms of monastic life. This more original form, which had arisen already during the life or shortly after the death of Ivan of Rila, was reshaped later, in the twelfth century, at the time of the Byzantine domination over Bulgaria. In the anonymous Slavonic folk life story of the saint, Ivan is depicted as a thorough eremite who kept his ideal to the end of his days¹¹. The later folk interpretation, differing from the more original tradition preserved also in the Byzantine life story of Ivan of Rila by J. Skylitza, could also indicate – as in the case of Antonij – that, closer to the Bulgarian environment, there was an ideal monastic life which was not based on the prevailing contemporary Byzantine models but on older or more marginal traditions.

⁸ *Повесть временных лет* 1, p. 107.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁰ J. Leroy, "La conversion de Saint Athanase l'Athonite à l'idéal cénobitique et l'influence studite." *La Millénaire du Mont Athos 963-1963. Études et Mélanges* I. (Chevetogne, 1963), p. 106; P. Dumont, "L'higoumène dans la règle de Saint Athanase l'athonite." *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹¹ Иванов Й. *Житие на св. Иван Рилски*. (Sofia, 1936), p. 38, 47.

The other fact binding Antonij to the non-Constantinople, i.e. Athonite, environment, and via it binding him with the eastern, Palestinian monastic traditions, were his fasting habits. The concretization of these habits (Antonij ate only bread, and only once in two days) is identical with the habits of St. Athanasios the Great. Similar fasting practices are not restricted only to Athos. Similar habits were also observed by the earlier mentioned Michael Maleinos, while their practice is connected with the tradition of St. Sabas and Euthymios, and also by the Hungarian (Zoerardus) St. Svorad from the eleventh century; here the tradition of St. Zosimas and the old (i.e. eastern) fathers in general is being stressed¹². Despite the fact that the introduction of the typikon of the Studite monastery by Feodosij resulted in acceptance of the Byzantine coenobitic form of monasticism prevailing at this time, the anchoritic tendency of Russian monasticism did not end entirely. Even in the Life of Feodosij we can trace the symbiosis of anchoritic and coenobitic features which determine both his monastic ideal and practice. It is remarkable that one of the important sources of the life of Feodosij is also the life of St. Sabas, the founder of Palestinian anchoritism. Like Sabas, Feodosij also abandoned his monastery at times, preferring to live in solitude.

Summarizing the ideas presented so far, it is possible to express three generalizing presuppositions and considerations:

1. The basic problem of the beginnings of Russian and Kiev-Pechora monasticism does not lie so much in differentiating the Byzantine and the Western attitudes of its first protagonists, but, above all, in differentiating the various impulses stemming from the varied cultural areas and traditions of the Byzantine sphere. The identification of the Byzantine and non-Byzantine (Palestinian) features provides answers also to the problematic questions presented in the introduction: Antonij was canonized with hesitations and with a delay because of the fact that he was not an adherent of the Constantinople monastic ideal. Feodosij was not only politically oriented to the West, but religiously, he was linked with the Constantinople monastic ideal; that is why he was canonized earlier than Antonij. After all, the Monastery of the Caves in its beginnings preserved the Palestinian-Athos type of monasticism. That is why a reform of it was necessary, and this brought it closer to the standard Byzantine models. This reform could not definitively suppress the earlier tradition, despite the fact that this reform was no more than thirty or forty years old.

2. The rise of direct or indirect, or rather mediated, Palestinian influence is not entirely an isolated phenomenon. Palestinian/eastern habits or older traditions were more persistently preserved in the marginal cultural centers of Byzantium, and these were the ones which, by their influence, radiated far more actively also outside the Byzantine territory.

3. The fact that the surrounding nations took over from Byzantium these older, more marginal and non-standard features, is not restricted to the area of Russian or Slavonic monasticism. It ranks among such phenomena which are characterized by the typical avoiding of the most developed or older cultural impulses. In the Slavonic environment there exist several examples of this type of reception and of the acculturation of the Byzantine influence, starting with the influence of Constantine and Methodius, through the selection of literature for its translation into a Slavonic language, up to, e.g., the character of the decorations in the Church of St. Sofia of Kiev. This is a phenomenon which necessitates an adequate evaluation.

¹² Патерик, ed. Д. И. Абрамович, p. 48. cf. E. Schwartz, *Kyrillos von Skythopolis*, (Leipzig, 1939), p. 906. *Повесть временных лет*, I, p. 105. J. Le Roy, *La conversion*, p. 105; J. Millik, *Saint Andrew Zoerardus*. (Rome, 1966), p. 93.