

Paweł Dziadul

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1178-9399>
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

**ASSESSING THE CONTACTS BETWEEN STEFAN
BÁTHORY AND THE SERBIAN MONKS FROM HILANDAR
MONASTERY ON MOUNT ATHOS IN THE LIGHT
OF A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MODEL LETTER***

Abstract

The paper deals with contacts between Polish King and Lithuanian Grand Duke Stefan Báthory (1576–86) and the Serbian monks from Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos. The contacts are presented based on a model letter found in the letter-writing manual from the Hilandar Archive (no. 153). The monks asked Báthory for the introductory and travel letters for their journey to Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where they would search for new benefactors [*ktetors*] and financial assistance from the Ruthenian Orthodox Christians. The model letter, supported by other written sources, also sheds light on the general characteristics of contacts with Catholic Polish-Lithuanian authorities and other rulers who mediated intercultural relations between the Ruthenian Orthodox Church and the Serbian (and Balkan in general) monastic milieus. These relations had a special significance for the group (confessional-cultural) identity of the Ruthenian Orthodox Christians and their tradition in the Counter-Reformation climate due to the proselytic policy and polemical attacks in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Keywords: the Serbian monks, Mount Athos, Hilandar, the Orthodox Church in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, letter writing, Stefan Báthory

I
INTRODUCTION

The Archive of Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos possesses a very interesting work of an epistolary nature – a letter-writing manual

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from the second half of the sixteenth century (№ 153). It consists of several epistolary templates in the form of a roll of paper pasted together end to end. The templates or model letters were written mainly in the Serbian Church Slavonic language (Serbian recension of Church Slavonic language, but there are traces of Russian recension). Although Mount Athos had an 'international' character and was inhabited by Orthodox monks of various ethnic origins, such monasteries as Hilandar and St Paul Monastery had a Serbian character in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, often defined as 'Serbian lavras' or 'lavras of the Serbs'.¹ The model letters were addressed to Russian Tsar Ivan IV, his wife Tsaritsa Anastasija, nobles/boyars (Nikita Yuryev, Andrei Yakovlevich, Andrei Kurbsky) and Polish King and Lithuanian Grand Duke Stefan Báthory. The model letters had their specific addressees, but they were generalised by adding such rubrics as 'to a tsaritsa', 'to boyars', 'to princes', and 'to a king' to be used as patterns in future correspondence with Russian and Polish-Lithuanian rulers and nobility who were asked for financial support in the practice of alms collecting. Special attention will be paid to the model letter addressed to Stefan Báthory, as it was connected with contacts between the Serbian monks from Hilandar and the king or, in general, the central Catholic Polish-Lithuanian authorities in the sixteenth century.

In the wake of the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, the Orthodox monastic milieu started to create fixed model letters (used during monks' missions in foreign lands), addressed to various benefactors [*ktetors*], both laymen and clergymen, and inserted into letter-writing manuals. Letter-writing manuals were utilitarian epistolary handbooks or guides that contained epistolary formulas (usually opening and closing), titles (referring to the addressees' position in a hierarchy) and model letters (reworked actual letters). Serbian Church Slavonic letter-writing manuals have rarely been the subject of interest in studying the character of contacts and relations. Some epistolary works in the manuals deserve particular attention because they may reveal the specificity of contacts with specific addressees, communities or areas. It seems that epistolary contacts between Polish-Lithuanian rulers and the Serbian monks, especially on Mount Athos, have not

¹ Aleksander Fotić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar u Osmanskom carstvu (XV–XVII vek)* (Beograd, 2000), 100–1.

been analysed, representing a gap in the research literature. In a broader context, an analysis of these contacts can contribute to a better understanding of the intercultural relations between the Orthodox Church in Poland-Lithuania and the Serbian (and Balkan in general) monastic milieu. After incorporating the Ruthenian lands into the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (officially united in 1569), Polish kings and Lithuanian grand dukes, as rulers of all confessional communities in their state, had to mediate in these relations.

The specificity of the work analysed here demands interdisciplinary methods that concentrate on both textual and non-textual dimensions. It is important to combine different approaches that can provide an interesting insight into various (inter-)cultural phenomena in which the written word and the text played a significant role. Because Old Serbian letter writing in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries (until the middle of the eighteenth century) was created according to post-medieval, traditional, conservative patterns, aesthetics, poetics and imagery during the Ottoman period, it is vital to take rhetoric rules and ideas into account. Conventionality and normativity considerably determined the character of Old Serbian epistolography, whereas letter-writing manuals played a crucial role in creating letters. However, the oldest surviving works of this type come from the sixteenth century; therefore, they can help to understand characteristics of letter writing only in a particular period, after the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans (although some letter-writing manuals retained some features that reveal pre-Ottoman reality). Furthermore, all surviving Serbian Church Slavonic letter-writing manuals were created by the one milieu – ecclesiastics (monks, church dignitaries). Therefore, epistolography was connected with the clergy's experiences, needs, standpoint, and practices.

To understand the nature of these contacts and the nature of letter-writing manuals, it is crucial to explore their non-textual context because they were only small pieces of more extensive processes that involved much more than writing. Promising results can be provided by the pragmatic approach and anthropology of writing, especially in the category of literacy practice. By employing this category in analysing epistolary material and contacts, it is possible to find appropriate bonds between different levels, i.e., micro- and macro-, textual and non-textual (contextual) ones. The category of literacy practice makes it possible to situate epistolary works in a dynamic and pragmatic context, a fact which can help to decode more cultural meanings

because a text did not have an autonomous character, as it was dependent on its social, cultural or confessional applications.² On the one hand, letter-writing manuals were normative literacy practices because they set norms, rules, and fixed templates for letter writers. On the other hand, these works reflected particular cultural practices such as establishing relationships with benefactors, travelling, and raising funds for monasteries.

II

STEFAN BÁTHORY AND THE CHRISTIAN EAST

Before the Hungarian nobleman Stefan Báthory married Anna Jagiellon (Sigismund I the Old's daughter) and became king of Poland and grand duke of Lithuania (1576–86), he had been the ruler of Transylvania, skillfully manoeuvring between the Habsburgs and Ottomans. In the post-Trent reality (after the Council of Trent in 1545–63), Báthory, a very pious ruler, was devoted to the Roman Church, the pope and the Counter-Reformation, propagating its concepts and founding Jesuit colleges. However, he tried to comply with ideas of religious tolerance and freedom (granted by the Warsaw Confederation in 1573),³ aiming to work out a compromise and assure the peaceful coexistence between different confessional communities in the state, including the Catholic and Orthodox Christians.⁴ Indeed, there are a few examples of his compromising and benevolent policy towards the Orthodox Christians in Poland-Lithuania. For instance, he confirmed Sigismund's I privilege to the Orthodox Church in 1581,⁵ and gave privileges to Orthodox

² David Barton and Mary Hamilton, 'Literacy Practices', in David Barton *et al.* (eds), *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context* (London, 2000), 7–15; Grzegorz Godlewski, 'Antropologia pisma: nowe obszary', in Philippe Artières and Paweł Rodak (eds), *Antropologia pisma. Od teorii do praktyki* (Warszawa, 2010), 53.

³ Janusz Tazbir, 'Tolerancja w Rzeczypospolitej XVI–XVII stulecia', *Biblioteka Teologii Fundamentalnej*, iii (2008), 122.

⁴ Jan Dzięgielewski, 'Sprawy wyznaniowe w Rzeczypospolitej w czasach panowania króla Stefana I', in Adrienne Körmendy and Radosław Lolo (eds), *Stefan Batory – król Rzeczypospolitej i książę państwa siedmiogrodzkiego* (Pułtusk, 2008), 61–71.

⁵ Leszek Ćwikła, *Polityka władz państwowych wobec Kościoła prawosławnego i ludności prawosławnej w Królestwie Polskim, Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim oraz Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w latach 1344–1795* (Lublin, 2006), 45.

brotherhoods.⁶ Moreover, after protests by the Orthodox Christians, he did not force them to accept the Gregorian calendar.⁷

Stefan Báthory also promulgated a royal decree of free activity for Eastern patriarchs⁸ in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, contributing to the development of relations with the Christian East. Despite the king's devotion to the ideology of the Roman Curia, the Orthodox clergy in the Balkans held him in high regard. Apart from the model letter from the Hilandar letter-writing manual, there are other traces of epistolary contacts maintained between the Polish king and Balkan ecclesiastics. For instance, Báthory wrote a letter (1577) to the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremias II Tranos, asking him to accept and bless the new metropolitan of Kiev Elias.⁹ Owing to the political-historical circumstances (the Ottoman conquests and the fall of the Byzantine capital in 1453), the patriarchs of Constantinople started to give only a written blessing (as a formal acceptance) to the metropolitans of Kiev (the official title: 'metropolitan of Kiev, Halych and all Rus') at the king's request, but this procedure was not always employed.¹⁰ Báthory's letter confirms that the king took pains to maintain the traditional canonical unity between Kiev and Constantinople. Later the Ecumenical Patriarchate decided to foster closer relations with the Orthodox Church in Poland-Lithuania (visited by the Patriarch of Antioch Joachim V in 1586¹¹ and Patriarch of Constantinople Jeremias II in 1588 and 1589¹²) and employ a repair plan, including several reforms due to intensifying policy of proselytism

⁶ Antoni Mironowicz, *Kościół prawosławny w dziejach dawnej Rzeczypospolitej* (Białystok, 2001), 50.

⁷ Ćwikła, *Polityka władz państwowych*, 45; Jan Stradomski, 'O merytorycznych i konfesyjnych problemach reformy kalendarza w świetle XVI- i XVII-wiecznej polemiki religijnej w Rzeczypospolitej', in Piotr Chomik (ed.), "Pokazanie Cerkwie prawdziwej...". *Studia nad dziejami i kulturą Kościoła prawosławnego w Rzeczypospolitej* (Białystok, 2004), 41.

⁸ Andrzej Borkowski, *Patriarchaty Wschodu w dziejach Rzeczypospolitej (1583–1601)* (Białystok, 2014), 109.

⁹ *Akty, odnosząshchiesya k istorii Zapadnoi Rossii*, iii (Sankt-Peterburg, 1848), no. 80, 208.

¹⁰ For instance, there are no written sources linked to the patriarch's formal acceptance and blessing of the metropolitans of Kiev from Sigismund II Augustus' reign, Ćwikła, *Polityka władz państwowych*, 47.

¹¹ Borkowski, *Patriarchaty Wschodu*, 37–8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 95–117.

(after the papal legate Antonio Possevino's unsuccessful mission in Russia in 1582 and the creation of the Patriarchate of Moscow in 1589, the proselytic efforts of the Roman Curia were focused on the Orthodox Church in Poland-Lithuania).

Báthory also maintained contacts with the archbishop of Ohrid Gavril, who asked the Polish king to mediate between him and Pope Sixtus V. According to Báthory's letter to this pope (1586), the archbishop had travelled abroad, where he collected charitable donations among 'Christian rulers', because the Archbishopric of Ohrid had huge debts caused by Ottoman taxation. At Gavril's request, the Polish king recommended (in his letter to the pope) 'Greek bishops and presbyters', who were sent by the archbishop to Greek Orthodox communities in the Italian lands (Sicily, Apulia, Calabria), and asked the pope to prevent local Catholic bishops from interfering with the procedure of ordaining Orthodox clerics.¹³ Earlier, Gavril had personally visited the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where he had met the king. Gavril collected charitable alms in Poland-Lithuania and visited the Monastery of the Annunciation in Supraśl in 1582, giving Archimandrite Timotheus the right to wear the mitre.¹⁴

It should be noted that Báthory's tolerance towards the Orthodox Church in Poland-Lithuania seemed to be a part of the Counter-Reformation policy because the king tried to gain the goodwill of the Ruthenian Orthodox Christians (preparing the ground for future confessional negotiations) and reduce any influence of the Reformation. During his former reign as a prince of Transylvania, he gained valuable political, diplomatic and military experience in territories inhabited by different confessional communities (as Transylvania). This fact undoubtedly helped him in designing religious policy in the Polish-Lithuanian state. As a Catholic prince, Báthory had to confront a complicated confessional situation in Transylvania, where Protestantism (Calvinism, Lutheranism, Unitarianism) enjoyed popularity

¹³ Ivan Snegarov, *Istoriya na Okhridskata arkhiepiskopiya-patriyarshija*, ii: *Ot padaneto ò pod turcite do neynoto unishtozhenie (1394–1767 g.)* (Sofija, 1995), 570; Augustin Theiner, *Vetera monumenta Poloniae et Lithuaniae gentiumque finitimarum historiam illustrantia maximam partem nondum edita ex tabularis Vaticanis deprompta collecta ac serie chronologica disposita*, iii, 2 (Romae, 1864), 1–2.

¹⁴ *Arkheografichesky sbornik dokumentov, otnosyashchysya k istorii Severo-Zapadnoj Rusi*, ix (Vilnius, 1870), 82–3.

among the elite groups (the Saxons and the Hungarians). Prince Báthory advocated religious tolerance, which had become an official principle of the state (the Edict of Torda in 1568).¹⁵ However, Báthory did try to strengthen the influence of the Roman Church, weaken the Protestant movement, restrain the process of church reform, and stop further religious innovations. One aspect of Báthory's strategy was linked to the fact that he supported and promoted Orthodox Christianity among the local (Proto-Romanian) Transylvanian people because there had been systematic efforts to convert them to Protestantism (especially Calvinism). Báthory wanted to restore and reinforce the local Orthodox hierarchy as a counterweight to the already existing Romanian Calvinist Church leadership.¹⁶ In 1571, Báthory named the Moldavian monk Eftimie (*iħumen* of the Neamț monastery) an Orthodox bishop who was sent to the seat of the Patriarchate of Peć to be formally ordained and blessed by the Serbian patriarch.¹⁷ Thus, Báthory maintained relations with the Serbian Patriarchate of Peć before the royal election in Poland-Lithuania. The Hilandar monks probably knew about this fact and perceived the ruler positively.

The model letter to Stefan Báthory from the Hilandar letter-writing manual shows that the Serbian monks wanted to receive his written permission and recommendation during their trip to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where they would collect alms. However, they must have had in mind other benefits that could be derived from this kingly endorsement. On the one hand, the monks could have perceived Báthory as a future Christian leader of the anti-Ottoman campaign during the ongoing wars between the Ottoman Empire and Christian European powers¹⁸ (during Báthory's reign, there were some plans for

¹⁵ The edict was a crucial decree of religious tolerance, but it only sanctioned the existence of four religious institutions in Transylvania: the Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist and Unitarian Churches.

¹⁶ István Keul, *Early Modern Religious Communities in East-Central Europe: Ethnic Diversity, Denominational Plurality, and Corporative Politics in the Principality of Transylvania (1526–1691)* (Leiden–Boston, 2009), 134.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 134–5; Ioan-Aurel Pop, 'Romanian Culture in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century', in Ioan-Aurel Pop *et al.* (eds), *The History of Transylvania (from 1541 to 1711)*, ii (Cluj-Napoca, 2009), 286.

¹⁸ It is noteworthy that the Serbs turned to a few Catholic Christian rulers during the Long Turkish War (1593–1606) and the Balkan Christians' revolts against the Ottomans. They asked them for military and political support, offering

an anti-Ottoman league conceived by the Roman Curia, although the king sought instead to maintain peaceful relations with the Ottoman Empire¹⁹). On the other hand, it is highly possible that the monks knew about the good (or occasionally neutral) relations between Báthory and Ottoman sultans, such as Selim II²⁰ (who had ordered the confiscation of monastic possessions in 1568/9²¹) and Murad III; therefore they wanted to have the ruler on their side to influence the sultans' decisions. Of course, for the Athonite monastic milieu, including the Serbian monks from Hilandar monastery, Báthory, as a Catholic ruler, could not be equal to Orthodox rulers such as the Wallachian and Moldavian *hospodars* or Russian tsars (according to confessional hierarchy, the model letter to Ivan IV was given priority in the Hilandar manual). However, the fact of inserting the model letter to Báthory into the Hilandar letter-writing manual points to the fact that the Hilandar monastic community perceived the king as one of the most significant addressees, an influential and powerful king who ruled over the large state, including the Ruthenian lands inhabited by the Orthodox Christians. Therefore, Báthory functioned as a mediator in relations between the Serbian monks from Hilandar and the Orthodox Church in Poland-Lithuania.

There was no homogenous religious policy during Báthory's rule, and in general, each king during this era had his strategy toward the Orthodox Church in the state. The situation in which a non-Orthodox ruler ruled over the Orthodox Christians was interpreted as untypical and untraditional, i.e., incompatible with the old religious-political tradition introduced in the Byzantine Empire, i.e., the concept of diarchy or *symphonia* (Emperor Justinian's *Sixth Novella*; Basil I the Macedonian's

the 'empty throne' of the Serbian medieval rulers. One of those addressees was the prince of Transylvania, King's nephew, Sigismund Báthory; Radovan Samardžić *et al.* (eds), *Istorija srpskog naroda*, iii (Beograd, 1993), 244.

¹⁹ Kazimierz Dopierała, *Stosunki dyplomatyczne Polski z Turcją za Stefana Batorego* (Warszawa, 1986), 145–56; Ludwik Boratyński, *Stefan Batory i plan ligi przeciw Turkom (1576–1584)* (Kraków, 1903), 139–40.

²⁰ As the ruler of Transylvania, Stefan Báthory enjoyed Selim's II support.

²¹ The monastic possessions were resold to the same monasteries (they had the right of pre-emption). The order badly influenced the Balkan monasteries, which were experiencing financial difficulties and had got into debt. After the confiscation affair, the practice of alms collecting took on a more official, well-organised and widespread character, Fotić, *Sveta Gora*, 221.

legal code – *Epanagoge*), functioned as the foundation of state–Church relations. The Byzantines believed that representatives of the *imperium* and *sacerdotium*, i.e. secular (an emperor) and spiritual (a patriarch) authorities (symbolically referred to the patriarchal structure of the Trinity, later to the Incarnation, i.e. Christ’s human and divine nature) should cooperate and support each other.²² The concept of diarchy could not function in its original form in the Polish-Lithuanian Orthodox Church, and it was necessary to rework and adapt it in accordance with the new historical-political and religious-social contexts.

Even though the Ruthenian Orthodox Christians were (politically) loyal to their kings during the sixteenth century (until the middle of the seventeenth century),²³ the Orthodox Church did not grant the status of ‘faithful ruler’ to them and did not mention them in its liturgy. However, the attitude towards kings changed after the Union of Brest (1596), when the Orthodox Church had to adopt a more conciliatory and pragmatic approach to matters. This strategy gradually developed, and kings started to be presented as pious and faithful rulers, ordained by God and included in the sphere of *eusebeia*, later receiving a liturgical status in the Orthodox Church (during the reign of King Ladislaus IV Vasa, Metropolitan of Kiev Petro Mogila ordered that the formula of public prayer for kings should be introduced to liturgical books)²⁴. However, the Union and proselytic policy had to change the general perception of Polish-Lithuanian rulers in the eyes of the Athonite monks, who had started to perceive them more often as enemies of the Orthodox tradition and the ‘Greek rite’.

²² Vladimir Val'denberg, *Drevnerusskie ucheniya o predelakh tsarskoy vlasti. Ocherki russkoy politicheskoy literatury ot Vladimira Svyatogo do konca XVII veka* (Moskva, 2006), 49–51; Dorota Gil, *Prawosławie, historia, naród. Miejsce kultury duchowej w serbskiej tradycji i współczesności* (Kraków, 2005), 65–86; Hanna Kowalska, *Kultura staroruska XI–XVI w. Tradycja i zmiana* (Kraków, 1998), 87–102.

²³ Mironowicz, *Kościół prawosławny*, 26; Aleksander Naumow, ‘Berło innowiercy’, in Teresa Dąbek-Wirgowa and Andrzej Makowiecki (eds), *Obraz kapłana, wodza, króla w kulturach słowiańskich* (Warszawa, 1998), 20.

²⁴ Aleksander Naumow, ‘Król w polsko-litewskim piśmiennictwie prawosławnym pierwszej połowy XVII wieku’, *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Studia Religioznawcza*, xxxii (1999), 131–4; Marzanna Kuczyńska, ‘Wizerunek króla i wizja władzy w homiletyce Joannicjusza Galatowskiego’, in Chomik (ed.), *“Pokazanie Cerkwie prawdziwej...”*. *Studia*, 73–84.

The model letter addressed to Stefan Báthory contains interesting information confirming that the Hilandar monastery's Serbian monks had visited Poland-Lithuania earlier and cultivated contacts with Báthory's predecessors. Moreover, the monks wrote that they intended to send their envoys to Poland-Lithuania during future missions (fol. 8).²⁵ The monastic milieu from the Christian East (the Balkans, Athos, Jerusalem) travelled to Poland-Lithuania to collect alms from the end of the fifteenth century onwards. Some traces reveal contacts between the Serbian ecclesiastics and the Polish-Lithuanian rulers: Báthory's predecessors and successors. For instance, in the first half of the sixteenth century, Bishop Pavle of Smederevo (he used the title of Serbian archbishop), after the conflict with the Archbishopric of Ohrid (Archbishop Prohor), visited (apart from the Muscovite lands, Wallachia and Transylvania) the 'Lechitic' (Polish) land, where he received a letter from the Polish king (Sigismund I the Old), who enabled him to travel and collect alms in his state without problems.²⁶ Travelling monks collected charitable donations and received various gifts, such as liturgical and non-liturgical books, which often contained crucial data referring to their visits to the 'Lechitic' land and 'Little Ruthenia', and occasionally to Polish-Lithuanian rulers. For instance, marginal notes from the *Tetraevangelion* (1551) and *Psalter* (1561) inform that the first book was written in Nesukhoizhi (present-day Volya) in Volhynia,²⁷ and the second one in Włodawa, in Podlachia²⁸ (both transferred to the Papraća monastery) during the reign of King Sigismund II Augustus. A marginal note from the printed *Triodion Cvetnaja* (transferred to the Vrdnik monastery) confirms that it was written in Lviv, in the state of John III Sobieski, the "pious king of the Lechitic land" (1695).²⁹

²⁵ Letter-writing manual from the sixteenth century – a collection of model letters no. 153 – Archive of the Hilandar Monastery (Mount Athos), the model letter to Stefan Báthory, fol. 8; cf. Stefan Dimitrijević, 'Dokumenti hilendarske arhive do XVIII veka', *Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije*, liii (1922), 24.

²⁶ Silviu Dragomir (ed.), *Documente noua privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Sibiu în secolii XV și XVI* (București, 1929), 56; Đorđe Radojičić, 'Iz prošlosti Srpske Crkve: Prilog biografiji Pavla, episkopa smederevskog', *Vesnik Srpske Crkve*, xxxii (1927), 628–9.

²⁷ Sreten Petković, 'Nektarije Srbin, slikar XVI veka', *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti*, viii (1972), 212.

²⁸ Ljubomir Stojanović (ed.), *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi*, i (Beograd, 1902), no. 622, 195.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 1998, 465.

As the intellectual ecclesiastical elite during the Ottoman period, the Serbian monks were usually well informed about various historical events in Europe, including the struggle between the Ottoman Empire and Poland-Lithuania in the seventeenth century (references can be found in some marginal notes from the Serbian Church Slavonic manuscript codices³⁰). The Balkan Christians wanted to be liberated from 'Ottoman captivity'. They pinned their hopes on various Christian rulers and European powers, such as the Habsburg Empire, the Republic of Venice, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russia. In particular, victorious battles raised the prestige and authority of some Polish-Lithuanian rulers among the Balkan Christians, who perceived them as leaders of the anti-Ottoman crusade and the conquerors of the Ottomans (e.g., the Battle of Khotyn in 1621, or the Battle of Vienna in 1683). For instance, during the war between the Ottoman Empire and the Christian powers (the Holy League), two Athonite monks visited Poland-Lithuania and delivered Eastern patriarchal letters to King Ladislaus IV Vasa in 1646, informing him that the Balkan Orthodox communities wanted to be free, and would join the anti-Ottoman campaign.³¹ Apart from specific aims linked to the collection of donations, the Athonite and Balkan travelling monks or clerics played an important emissary role. They were perceived as perfect messengers who disseminated letters between the Ottoman Empire, Danubian Principalities, Poland-Lithuania and Russia (however, during the wars, Polish-Lithuanian authorities often accused the travelling monks of being Ottoman or Russian spies). Information about letters written by Sigismund II Augustus to monks from Mount Athos (1539) on their way to Moscow, and his permission and recommendations for them, can be found in the *Lithuanian Metrika*, where it is written that the Athonite monks had come to Poland-Lithuania and then to Russia with the emissary of Sultan Suleiman, Andrew the Greek.³² In 1668, King John II Casimir wrote a letter to Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich, recommending the Transylvanian Metropolitan (of Serbian origin) Sava II Branković, who, along with his brother Đorđe Branković (they claimed to be the descendants of the medieval

³⁰ Stojanović (ed.), *Stari srpski*, no. 1064, 293; no. 1094, 299; no. 1278, 330; no. 1722, 417.

³¹ Wiktor Czermak, *Plany wojny tureckiej Władysława IV* (Kraków, 1895), 92.

³² Darius Antamavičius (ed.), *Lietuvos Metrika (1506–1539)*, vii (Vilnius, 2011), 607.

Serbian Branković dynasty), had a special mission in Warsaw and Moscow, where they endeavoured to reconcile two rulers (i.e. the king and the tsar).³³

After Báthory's death (1586), the Uniate activists decided to elect a candidate who would help them propagate the concept of a union between the Churches in Poland-Lithuania. In consequence, Sigismund III Vasa, raised by the Jesuits, was elected in 1587. Supporters of the union started to be recruited among representatives of the Orthodox hierarchy. The Union of Brest was finally introduced in 1596, causing a deep ecclesiastical division, a fact which made the Orthodox Church illegal in practice after the creation of the Uniate Church.³⁴

III

THE PRACTICE OF ALMS COLLECTING

Serbian Church Slavonic letter-writing manuals contain very useful and crucial cultural data that can reveal several aspects of the existence and strategies of monastic milieus in the Balkans after the Ottoman conquest. These works can shed light not only on the poetics of epistolary writing but also on the policy and ideology of this particular social group.³⁵ As products of community life and experience, epistolary manuals present a system of authoritative addressees, which was significant for the Serbian monks.³⁶ Model letters found in surviving epistolary manuals suggest the importance and regularity of correspondence with a particular group of addressees. Model letters made it possible for us to reconstruct some epistolary-communicative circles created by the Serbian monastic milieus.

³³ Stefan Dimitrijević, 'Prilozi raspravi 'Odnosaj pečkih patrijarha s Rusijom u XVII veku' u Glasu LVIII i LX', *Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije*, xxxviii (1900), 69–70.

³⁴ The Orthodox Christian hierarchy in Poland-Lithuania was restored in 1620 by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophanes III (supported by the Ecumenical Patriarch), who travelled between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russia. Nevertheless, the hierarchy and rights of the Orthodox Church were legalised later, in 1632, by King Ladislaus IV.

³⁵ Janet Altman, 'The Letter Book as a Literary Institution 1539–1789: Toward a Cultural History of Published Correspondences in France', *Yale French Studies*, lxxxi (1986), 34.

³⁶ Anatolij Demin, *O drevnerusskom literaturnom tvorcestve: opyt tipologii s XI po seredinu XVIII vv. Ot Ilariona do Lomonosova* (Moskva, 2003), 189.

Most of the epistolary material found in the surviving Serbian Church Slavonic letter-writing manuals from the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries reflected some practices that became popular during the Ottoman period in the Balkans. After the Ottoman conquests and the liquidation of Serbian statehood, the Orthodox Church was incorporated into the Ottoman fiscal system, as a tax farm [*iltizam*].³⁷ The three prominent Orthodox institutions in the Balkans, i.e., the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Archbishopric of Ohrid and Archbishopric of Peć (the Serbian Patriarchate after its restoration in 1557), were included in the system. In contrast to Orthodox hierarch tax farmers [*mültezim*], monks had far fewer opportunities to raise funds needed for Ottoman taxes; or their survival. Although some monasteries had special rights and privileges (primarily when they provided some services for the Ottoman state), they lost regular financial support received earlier from Serbian and Byzantine sovereigns and nobility. Monasteries had to adapt to the harsh circumstances in the Ottoman reality and search for new benefactors [*ktetors*] and new sources of regular income.

Balkan monasteries started to organise special missions which would travel all over the Orthodox world and collect charitable donations. Monasteries asked for help from the local hierarchs (Serbian patriarchs and bishops), laymen (the new secular Serbian ‘elite’ linked to the Ottoman system, e.g., Christian *sipahis*, elders of local peasantry communities – *knezes*³⁸, *voyvodas*), and foreign rulers, especially Orthodox ones such as the Russian tsars or the Wallachian and Moldavian *hospodars*. Monastic missions demanded epistolary support, hence fixed model letters were required to simplify and enhance the procedure. Later, model letters were collected, reworked, rewritten and included in letter-writing manuals.

The practice of travelling, alms [*milostinja*] collecting, and cultivating contacts with benefactors became a regular cultural practice and a part of Orthodox Christian tradition of both the Orthodox Greek

³⁷ Macit Kenanoğlu, ‘Is Millet System a Reality or a Myth? The Legal Position of the Non-Muslim Subjects and Their Religious Leaders in the Ottoman Empire’, *Türk Hukuk Tarihi Araştırmaları*, xii (2011), 27–30; Ágoston Gabor and Masters Bruce (eds), *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York, 2008), 555–6.

³⁸ The Serbian term *knez* means literally a ‘prince’, but during the Ottoman rule it did not have any connections with the aristocratic system. The title was borne by elected local Christian chiefs of villages who were linked to the Ottoman administration.

and South Slavic (Serbian and Bulgarian) monastic milieus during the time of Ottoman rule in the Balkans. The practice heavily influenced letter writing in the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, and many model letters found in surviving Serbian Church Slavonic epistolary manuals were its written reflection or literacy practices (the category perceived as a general norm of producing, shaping, distributing, and interpreting, and the function of written texts or the manifestation of writing in social or cultural circumstances³⁹). Moreover, the practice informed not only the character of epistolary contacts, but also the profile of intercultural relations cultivated by the Serbian monastic milieus with various subjects, institutions and centres. Monasteries created both individual (i.e., addressed to individuals) and circular letters [usually called *pittakia*; singular: *pittakion*] addressed to a wide range of recipients of all social ranks from various geographical areas. Monks collected donations mainly among Orthodox Christians, travelling throughout the European part of the Ottoman Empire and abroad: the Habsburg Empire (e.g., the Military Frontier), the Republic of Venice (e.g., Dalmatia), the Danubian Principalities (Wallachia, Moldavia), Russia, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (mainly the Ruthenian lands).

Monastic missions had to be well organised and prepared, so *ihumens* wrote actual letters on behalf of their monasteries (referring to templates found in letter-writing manuals) to various addressees from whom they required financial support, patronage, and permissions to travel and collect alms. Then monasteries sent their envoys on journeys which were called *pisaniya* ('listing'), because the names of the benefactors were registered in special monastic books (depending on the amount and character of the donations/gifts, the names of the *ktetors* were listed in such books as *pomenik*, *opshti list*, *proskomidija/proskomidijski pomenik*). Then, based on information from these books, the benefactors' names were mentioned during the liturgy in a particular monastery. In exchange for money or gifts received from benefactors, travelling monks could then offer blessings, special prayers or the display of relics and icons for public veneration.⁴⁰ As for the financial support received abroad, it generally took two primary forms. On the one hand, some monasteries received regular subsidies, mainly from

³⁹ Godlewski, 'Antropologia pisma', 53.

⁴⁰ Fotić, *Sveta Gora*, 227–8.

Wallachian or (less frequently) Moldavian rulers and Russian tsars. On the other hand, state authorities (of Russia, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Danubian Principalities) permitted monks (in limited number) to visit their territories (usually at specified time intervals) and collect charitable alms among their subjects.⁴¹

Although the Ottoman authorities acknowledged the Holy Mount as a monastic community with a separate territory, certain rights and privileges, financial problems and debts occasionally accumulated, especially during crises of the Ottoman state or wars with the Christian powers, a fact which made monks search for new sources of income⁴². It should be noted that ideas, codices and works from the Holy Mount usually enjoyed great prestige and value among Orthodox Christians. Thus, it seems pretty logical that Athonite monasteries regulated and popularised the practice of alms collecting in the Balkans, giving impetus to other Greek and South Slavonic (Serbian, Bulgarian) monastic centres to organise analogous missions. It is probable that other Balkan monasteries also followed the Athonite example in creating a letter-writing manual when they noticed its usefulness and practical application. However, in contrast to other Balkan monasteries (e.g., located in the territories of the Patriarchate of Peć), the Athonite monasteries, such as Hilandar or St Paul Monastery, had many more possibilities to collect charitable donations, owing to the popularity and the prestigious and universal character of the Holy Mountain among Orthodox Christians. Therefore, the Athonite monasteries maintained and cultivated contacts with many different benefactors.

As the largest independent Orthodox Christian state, Russia became the most important destination for Serbian monks both from Mount Athos and the monasteries located in the territories of the Patriarchate of Peć. After the Ottoman conquests and the fall of Constantinople, some Muscovite ideologists started to emphasise the hereditary role of their state in the Orthodox world (e.g., the idea of Moscow as being the third Rome); as a successor of Byzantium. Thus, grand princes (e.g., Vasili III) and tsars (e.g., Ivan IV⁴³) were perceived by

⁴¹ László Hadrovics, *Srpski narod i njegova Crkva pod turskom vlašću*, transl. Radoslav Kovačević (Zagreb, 2000), 81–3.

⁴² Aleksander Fotić, *Sveta Gora*, 157–8.

⁴³ Ivan IV wanted to continue the tradition of *ktetorship* and follow in the footsteps of his ancestors, as he was related to the Serbian noble families. On the one hand,

Balkan ecclesiastics as great patrons and donators. However, Poland-Lithuania was not only a transit territory during monastic journeys to Moscow. It also became one of the most important destinations for the Serbian monks. They usually visited the Ruthenian lands, where they searched for help, patronage and support among the Orthodox Christians. It is known that Serbian monks from Mount Athos (Hilandar) cultivated contacts with different subjects (e.g. the Orthodox nobility), centres (e.g. in Kiev, Lviv, Chernihiv, Kovel, Ostrog, Vilnius, Supraśl) and institutions (the Kievan Metropolis) in Poland-Lithuania during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴⁴ Apart from the Athonite monastic centres, it is known that the Serbian monks from monasteries under the auspices of the Patriarchate of Peć, such as Papraća, Velika Remeta, Lepavina and Ravanica, visited Poland-Lithuania, where they received financial support and various gifts (mainly books).⁴⁵ The practice of travelling and alms collecting created specific trails or channels for Balkan monastic milieus with foreign political and religious centres. As for the Polish-Lithuanian rulers, Serbian monks turned to them not for financial support or patronage but rather for ensuring legal certainty during their journeys throughout the state. Even though contacts with Polish-Lithuanian rulers were only occasional, kings played a mediatory role in intercultural relations between the Serbian monastic milieus and the Ruthenian Orthodox Church.

Ivan IV had blood kinship with the Jakšić noble family, owing to his grandmother Ana Jakšić (Elena Glinskaya's mother). On the other hand, the tsar was related to the Branković noble family, as his second grandmother's Sophia Palaiologina's sister Elena was the wife of the Serbian despot Lazar Branković.

⁴⁴ Cf. Stojan Novaković, 'Prilozi k istoriji srpske književnosti: 3. Jedan stari svjetovni zbornik ćirilovski', *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva*, xxv (1869), 19–63; Đorđe Trifunović, 'Svetogorski obrazac za pisma u Lešku zemlju ili Malu Rusiju', *Arheografski prilozi*, iii (1981), 161–5.

⁴⁵ Cf. Đorđe Trifunović, 'Lechici i ziemia lechicka w starym piśmiennictwie serbskim', transl. Elżbieta Pułka, *Pamiętnik Słowiański*, xxxiv (1984), 167–78; Petar Bunjak, *Pregled poljsko-srpskih književnih veza (do II svetskog rata)* (Beograd, 1999), 9–16; Dorota Gil, 'O kierunkach związków kulturalnych Serbii z "Lešką zemlą" uwag kilka', in Halina Mieczkowska and Julian Kornhauser (eds), *Studia Slawistyczne* (Kraków, 1998), 121–7.

IV
THE MODEL LETTER TO STEFAN BÁTHORY

Although the Hilandar monks did not ask Stefan Báthory for financial help or patronage, their letter was closely connected with the practice of alms collecting, as they requested the king's permission and recommendation during their stay in Poland-Lithuania. The model letter was written in the Serbian Church Slavonic language, with traces of vernacular Serbian language and a scattering of Russianism. The work was created according to traditional post-medieval and post-Byzantine aesthetics, imagery and poetics (rhetoric). It is very concise and clear, occasionally supplemented with theological allusions. This fact indicates three main aesthetic categories important in Greek and Byzantine epistolography (e.g., crucial for ancient theorists of epistolography such as Pseudo Libanius⁴⁶ or Gregory of Nazianzus⁴⁷): conciseness/brevity [*syntomia*; *brevitas*], clarity [*sapheneia*; *claritas*] and elegance [*charis*; *elegantia*]. Old Serbian letters were created under the significant influence of Byzantine letter writing, inheriting specific epistolary mechanisms, imagery, formulas, motifs etc. Byzantine and Old Serbian letters were rhetorically constructed, and their primary purpose was not to transfer news but to cultivate social interactions and relationships. Messengers usually provided detailed information, and letters legitimised the senders' requests and confirmed the credibility of monastic missions. Since the work from the Hilandar Archive represents the epistolary manual in its 'initial form', it does not have a typical formula *ИМЯ ПИСАТЕЛИ* "tell a name" (found in other manuals from manuscript codices) which was inserted instead of senders' and addressees' names in templates. Although it is possible to find addressees' real names in the Hilandar epistolary manual, its model letters were slightly reworked to give them a more universal function. The model letter to Stefan Báthory was generalised by adding the rubric "to a king" (*к царю*), a fact which indicates that the template must have been traditionally used in correspondence with Polish kings. The model letter has a typical structure and three main parts, i.e., introduction, body and closing. The introduction begins with a prescript containing

⁴⁶ Pseudo Libanius, 'Epistolary Styles', in Abraham Malherbe (ed.), *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (Atlanta, 1988), 73.

⁴⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, 'Epistle 51', in *ibid.*, 59–61.

three elements: the addressee's name (*adscriptio*), the sender's name (*superscriptio*) and the greeting (*salutatio*). Apart from the addressee's name, the most crucial element is his royal title in this section.⁴⁸ Moreover, the monks wanted to win the king's favour and benevolence, so various eulogising epithets and attributes were listed next to the addressee. The senders (the Hilandar monks) highlight that they are writing to "your highness" (прѣвысокоу), "glorious" (славноу), "great" (великоу) and "gracious" (милнвоу) Polish king (fol. 8). The senders call Báthory the "Christian lord", emphasising a universal (Christian) religious aspect which should join the correspondents, irrespectively of their confessional identity, especially concerning the common enemy, the Muslim Ottoman Turks.

It was believed that a letter reflected the writer's personality as an imprint of his/her character⁴⁹ or icon of the soul.⁵⁰ This motif was very popular both in Byzantine and Old Serbian letter writing. However, according to the feudal hierarchy and typical medieval humbleness or modesty (highlighted by epistolarians), letter writers usually tried to express their humility and addressees' superiority or greatness. Thus, the Hilandar monks concentrate rather on the king's image, glorifying his virtues and personality by using praising words. The senders refer to the rhetorical mode of *ethopoeia* – the creation of character which played a relevant role in persuasion.⁵¹ To secure Báthory's benevolence, the monks portray the king and his domain in an idealised way. Apart from the introduction, the senders repeat various titular and commendatory words in the body of the model letter, e.g., "your royal grace" (твоѣи кралеѣскоѣ милн; fol. 8), "your royal mercy" (твоѣе кралеѣскоу милосрдїѣ; fol. 8), "enlightened gracious king" (свѣтлан милнн кралан; fol. 8), and the Polish-Lithuanian state is called "your royal state" (твоѣи кралеѣскоѣ дрѣжавѣ; fol. 8) or "your enlightened kingdom" (твоѣ свѣтлоѣ кралеѣцтво; fol. 8). Furthermore, referring to the rhetorical technique of *captatio benevolentiae* (winning of goodwill),⁵² the senders also use

⁴⁸ "... to Stefan, by the grace of God, the king of Poland, grand duke of Lithuania, Ruthenia, Prussia, Samogitia, Masovia, Livonia, Podolia, Kiev, Volhynia, the prince of Transylvania and ruler of the whole northern land" (fol. 8).

⁴⁹ Philostratus of Lemnos, 'On Letters', in Malherbe (ed.), *Ancient*, 43.

⁵⁰ Demetrius, 'On Style', in *ibid.*, 19.

⁵¹ Mirosław Korolko, *Sztuka retoryki. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny* (Warszawa, 1990), 118.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 79.

specific formulas expressing their respect and humility towards the king. They refer to themselves as “we humble ones” (мы смиренни; fol. 8) and “poor Christian devotees” (на ѹбогѣи христіанскѣ вѣомолющѣ; fol. 8), who beg the king not to disregard them.

The creator of a real letter (a prototype of the model letter) was archimandrite Makarije with the Hilandar monastic community. Makarije and other monks appear as the senders of the model letter. In the work, they define their place of origin, i.e., Hilandar, calling the monastery a “great Serbian lavra” (сръбская велика лавра; fol. 8). Additionally, they remind the addressee that in the past, the monastery was built and supported by the greatest Serbian saints, i.e., Sts. Sava and Simeon, and by Serbian medieval kings (сстроение сѣго сави, ѿ сѣмѣна новѣ мѣроточца ѿ ѿны сръбскѣ кралеви; fol. 8). Sava was the first Serbian archbishop, thanks to whom the Serbian Church became autocephalous (1219), and his father, grand *župan* (leader) Stefan Nemanja (later monk Simeon), the founder of the Nemanjić dynasty, became one of the most prominent symbolic figures for Serbian confessional and cultural identity. Referring to these characters, the senders sought to highlight their role in the history of Hilandar and its particular bonds with the Serbian community. However, two periods of Hilandar history are contrasted in the model letter: its past prosperity during the Nemanjić period and its present decay following the Ottoman conquest. On the one hand, it is emphasised that Hilandar flourished for a long time owing to the charitable activity of the Serbian medieval *ktetors*, but was now in a situation of great despair caused by the “coming of the God-rejecting Turks” (пріегіе вѣоѡверднны тѣрѣ; fol. 8), who humiliate, according to the senders, not only the Hilandar monks, but all Christians due to their sins (interpretation of the Ottoman conquest as a result of Christians’ sins was a very popular cliché).

The salutation formula contains expressions of respect (смеренѡ мѣтаніе съгварѣ; fol. 8), where the senders try to comply with behavioural etiquette, describing their ceremonial comportment. It is written that they humbly fall “to the surface of our mother earth” (до лица мѣре нашихъ земли; fol. 8), fold their hands; and, being on their knees, they bow their foreheads in honour of (imagined) king’s presence. The formula (*proskynema*) reflects an act of obeisance by the senders before the king, referring to the Byzantine ceremonial gesture of reverence, respect and supplication (*proskynesis*). This part of the model letter also contains a prayer formula. The senders highlight that they pray to God for both

the king and whole Orthodox Christianity. It is worth noting that the letters had to be created appropriately (style, imagery, composition) according to their addressee, subject and situation (occasion), a fact conditioned by an epistolary *decorum*. Textual etiquette found in letters had to be adjusted to behavioural etiquette and attuned to addressees' positions in the feudal hierarchy.

The body of the model letter mainly consists of the monks' petition to the king, but they start with a description of the "Ottoman oppression" to familiarise the addressee with their hard life and their urgent needs. The image of the "Ottoman oppression" was a popular motif [related to the rhetorical method of persuasion, called *hypotyposis/descriptio*]⁵³, and it is evident that the monks introduced it by purposely exaggerating the narration to highlight their difficult situation and to persuade their addressees to be more merciful, helpful and supportive. Alluding to the Bible, the senders claim that they have to look for help and support ("making the best use of the time, because the days are evil"; Ephesians 5:16), as they are in a situation of great distress, oppression and harassment caused by the "godless Hagarenes" (=the Ottoman Turks;⁵⁴ Genesis 16:1–16): *КАКО ПРѢКЪВЛѢ ВЪ ВЕЛИКОИ НѢЖИ Н ПЧЕМОУГЕ Н УДЖЕНИИ ѿ БЕБОЖНЫ АГАРЕ* (fol. 8). This unbearable situation has made them send their envoys not only to the king and his kingdom but also to the "whole Orthodox Christianity" (*ДО ВСЕГО ПРАВОСЛАВІА*; fol. 8), a fact that indicates a wide range of monastic missions organised by the Hilandar monks. It is written that among the Hilandar envoys was [*ekklisiarhos*] Grigorije, along with other monks. In the model letter, Stefan Báthory is asked to have a mercy on the envoys, i.e., the senders request him to welcome and listen to them, as the king's "previous royal brothers" used to do (*КАКО Н ПРѢЖНІ КРАЛЕВЕ ТВОІА БРАТІА*; fol. 8), a fact which indicates that the Hilandar monks earlier maintained contacts with other Polish kings. The main aim of the model letter is to request that the king write a special royal document in the form of a certificate (*КРАЛЕВІСКО ГРАМАТѢ*; fol. 8) for the envoys. The senders emphasise that the document would be used during future missions, which shows that the Hilandar monks

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 118–19.

⁵⁴ The Ottoman Turks were believed to be descendants of the biblical figures Abraham's slave Hagar and her bastard son Ishmael, therefore they were often called the 'Ishmaelites' or 'Hagarenes'.

planned other missions to Poland-Lithuania. The royal document with the king's seal would enable the Hilandar monks to travel and collect charitable alms (ДЛЯ МИЛОСТИНИ; fol. 8) throughout the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth without hindrance.

The model letter ends with a typical formula of wishes for good health (*errhoso*) and a prayer formula (*euche*). It is important to note that while at the beginning of the letter, the senders allude to the universal Christian relationships bidding them to the addressee, in the end, they express the particular (Orthodox Christian) aspect of their confessional identity, praying for the whole of Orthodox Christendom and the Orthodox faith, and in doing so highlight (implicitly) that they have preserved its 'purity' and homogeneity on Mount Athos, regardless of the difficult living conditions during the Ottoman occupation.

V

CONCLUSIONS

Like many other templates found in surviving Serbian Church Slavonic letter-writing manuals from the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, the model letter addressed to Stefan Báthory was closely linked to both travelling and the collecting of alms, which became a regular cultural practice cultivated by the Serbian (and Balkan in general) monastic milieus during the Ottoman period. Because a large part of the epistolary material from letter-writing manuals functioned as a written reflection of this practice (perceived as a literacy practice), it is possible to reconstruct some characteristics of contacts that were created and maintained by the Serbian monks with different subjects, centres and institutions, including Polish kings and Lithuanian grand dukes. Moreover, letter-writing manuals also reflected the system of authoritative addressees, which was crucial for the Serbian monastic milieus. The model letter to Báthory found in the letter-writing manual from the Hilandar Archive sheds light on contacts between the king and the Serbian monks from Hilandar monastery. However, the fact of inserting the template into the letter-writing manual shows that the work had a general and universal character, i.e., the works found there functioned as a point of reference for actual letters which could have been addressed to Báthory's successors. Thus, the model letter can help to reveal the specificity of contacts with other Polish-Lithuanian rulers,

who became important addressees for the Serbian monastic milieu from Hilandar Monastery in the sixteenth century. The monks needed the king's permission and recommendation during their journeys in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where they collected alms and tried to find new benefactors among the Orthodox Christians in the Ruthenian lands. Despite the Catholic profile of authority and devotion to the Roman Church, Polish-Lithuanian rulers functioned as patrons and protectors of all confessional communities in the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-confessional state, including the Ruthenian Orthodox Christians. Therefore, they were perceived as influential and respectful rulers, whose favour and benevolence the Serbian monks tried to gain, considering the long-term aims and advantages (linked not only to alms collecting). Undoubtedly, the Union of Brest, proselytism and the intense polemical attacks on the Ruthenian Orthodox Church started to change the image of the Polish-Lithuanian rulers among the Balkan Orthodox Christians, including the Serbian monastic milieus.

King Báthory's reign was the last period of prosperity for the Orthodox Church in the sixteenth-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Despite the anti-Orthodox policies of some kings, Poland-Lithuania functioned as one of the most significant destinations for Serbian travelling monks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the difficult situation of the Orthodox Christians and important historical events in the seventeenth century, such as the Khmelnytsky Uprisings (1648–57), the loss of Kiev (temporarily in 1667 in the Truce of Andrusovo, permanently in 1686 in the Treaty of Perpetual Peace), and the transfer of the Kievan Metropolis from the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to the Moscow Patriarchate (1686) caused a further fissure in the Ruthenian Orthodox Church. It led it to drift towards the tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church.

In the post-Trent reality and Counter-Reformation climate (polemical attacks and confessional endangerment), the Ruthenian Orthodox Church consciously and deliberately supported relations with the Balkan and Athonite monastic milieus, including the Serbian monks.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Aleksander Naumow, *Wiara i historia. Z dziejów literatury cerkiewnosłowińskiej na ziemiach polsko-litewskich* (Kraków, 1996), 62; Aleksander Naumow and Dorota Gil, 'Poljsko-litvansko pravoslavlje i Sveta Gora – Atos', in Vojislav Korać (ed.), *Međunarodni naučni skup. Osam vekova Hilandara: istorija, duhovni život, književnost, umetnost i arhitektura* (Beograd, 2000), 101–8.

These relations helped reinforce the group (confessional-cultural) identity of the Orthodox Christians in Poland-Lithuania. Furthermore, maintaining relations with the Serbian monks, mainly from Athonite monasteries such as Hilandar (they transferred theological knowledge, ascetic or polemical works and ideas), proved to be a component of a more extensive process perceived as 'keeping' spiritual unity with the Christian East and the Eastern Patriarchates; as a way of preserving the 'purity' of tradition, faith and the 'Greek rite'. The practice of traveling and alms collecting shaped the framework of intercultural relations, which involved much more than just a quest for funds or patronage. The practice also entailed cultural exchanges, i.e., the exchange of icons, liturgical utensils, relics, books, ideas, and texts (e.g., the veneration of saints). The model letter to Báthory (presented here as an example of such intercultural relations), supported by other written sources, reveals that Polish-Lithuanian rulers mediated in these relations, a fact which should be taken into account when analysing the Orthodox Christian cultural heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

proofreading Barry Keane

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Paweł Dziadul – Old Orthodox Slavonic cultures (Old Serbian, Bulgarian, Ruthenian and Russian until the 18th century), ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, intercultural links between the Balkans, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russia throughout history; assistant professor at the Institute of Slavonic Philology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; e-mail: pdziadul@amu.edu.pl