

# ST. MAXIMUS THE GREEK (ARTA, CA. 1470 – MOSCOW, 1556) AND HIS BYZANTINE WORLDVIEW AS HIS CONTRIBUTION TO SLAVIC INTELLECTUAL ETHICAL ENCODING

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**Abstract:** ZAJC, Neža. *St. Maximus the Greek (Arta, ca. 1470 – Moscow, 1556) and His Byzantine Worldview as His Contribution to Slavic Intellectual Ethical Encoding*. The paper investigates the foundations of the ethical values that shaped the deeply personal theology of St. Maximus the Greek. By providing the original evidence from his writings (as well as from manuscripts) and the precise biographical context, the author reveals significant disagreement between Maxim's Russian co-speakers and his previous philological, ascetic and monastic experience, concerning the Byzantine system of education, especially the Byzantine consideration of divine wisdom and human knowledge. In particular, this paper analyses Maxim's understanding of (Greek) grammar. It also discusses the question of 'the Jesus prayer' and its possible literal traces in the writings of Maxim the Greek. In conclusion, it seems that Maxim the Greek created a completely unique ethical system of intellectual knowledge that should be connected to the Athonite prayer and liturgical practice.

**Keywords:** *St. Maximus the Greek (npen. Максим Грек), Byzantine ethical system, Italian humanism, grammar, liturgy, Jesus prayer, liturgical canticles, monastic values, asceticism, the Holy Mount Athos, the Holy Monastery of Vatopedi*

## Some biographical facts and notes on the writings

Born as Mihail Trivolis in Arta, a town in Greek Epirus, near the border of Ioannina's patriarchate and the Albanian lands, which followed the Byzantine rites with the bilingual liturgical languages, Old Greek and Albanian (Janin 1955, 21, n. 1, 533), Mihail received an excellent education at home. His uncle Demetrius<sup>1</sup> was well known for his passion for manuscripts (Denissoff 1943, 121-123) and developed his own collection. He collected precious manuscripts and books, and had been in contact with Greek and Italian intellectuals who were seeking Greek knowledge. The Library of Trivolis was probably one of the sources of manuscripts for the Medici Library (Denissoff 1943, 126). It seems that in his youth Mihail was already on the path to a lifetime of learning in various languages, and especially in his native Greek. In his later theological writings he claimed that grammar (and particularly Greek grammar) is the beginning of every kind of wisdom, and that it is the first step into philosophical taught:

“Grammar is the Lord's and apostolic teaching, which is trained (practised) intensely among the Hellenes. Because it is the entrance into philosophy, its power cannot be understood within short words and in a short time.” (Moscow, RGB, Mss. Rum. 264, f. 132 r.)

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<sup>1</sup> He is known to have been one of Mihail's relatives (cf. Denissoff 1943, 83).

In these words can be recognised an emphasis on the meaning of the Hellenic nation, that was significant for the late Byzantine period from the 13th century on (Ševčenko 2002, 284). From the other side, this could be explained as the reflection of the significance which the early-Renaissance gave to intellectual activity<sup>2</sup>, in which (Mihail) Maxim chose its specific aspect, particularly, that philological practice should be the main condition for understanding and further valuation of the natural sources as the basic philosophical foundations (origins: gr. arche) of Divine and human mind. While, if this kind of understanding of grammar might reflect the bilingual practice of Technê by the Byzantine diplomat and first teacher of Greek who was invited to the West, Manuel Chrysoloras, as it was given in his *Erotemata* (Robins, 237), it could be compared with the view of the Byzantine scholar, polyhistorian and a monk himself, a member of “the first Greek diaspora”, Maximus Planudes, who stood theologically against the controversial lat. *Filioque* (Robins 1993, 202) – exactly what Maxim the Greek attacked in his polemic works in Muscovite Russia. However, both Chrysoloras who was responsible for the real beginnings of humanistic teaching in the West (Mann 2001, 16-17), and Planudes, who taught non-Greek-speaking citizens of the Byzantine Empire classical Greek and translated many scientific and philosophic texts from Latin, shaped the intellectual sphere with which Mihail Trivolis first identified himself. Indeed, the above-mentioned view of grammar was characteristic for those Greek speakers who were refining their language over all their lives.

When he was 20 years old, Mihail Trivolis travelled across Crete, Kerkyra and the Croatian Islands to North Italy, while he became close to Greek philologists, especially to Janos Laskaris and Marko Mousuros. It is likely that in Florence, where in 1492 he met Aldo Manuzio, he not only copied Greek texts (Strabo’s *Geography*, a Byzantine manuscript book called *Geoponica* and Joseph Flavius’s *Jewish Antiquities*), and transcribed old manuscripts, but also edited Greek philosophic texts and perhaps translated them. In autumn 1496 Mihail was recommended to Venetian typographer Aldo Manuzio (Speranzi 2010, 281, 283), who later utilised his handwriting as ‘Druckvorlagen’ for printing of Theocritus’s *Idylls*.

It seems possible that Mihail’s non-academic (non-institutional) education contained at least two practices. One was teaching non-Greeks his native language, which was Mihail’s first employment at the Mirandola Castle, teaching Greek to Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola, the nephew of Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola. At around that time Gianfrancesco completed his philosophical works *De imaginatione* (by December 1500) and *De rerum praenotione* that speaks against pretended modes of prophecy (Schmitt 1967, 191-192). It has to be mentioned that Giovanni Pico also wrote the work *Against astrology*. *De imaginatione* and *De rerum praenotione* had a great influence on Mihail Trivolis, who worked to spread anti-Aristotelian views with regard to Platonic philosophy shared by the Mirandola thinkers. He insisted on studying the ancient philosophers from the original texts and objected to adoption or simplification of Platonic ideas, a view that he had in common with the Byzantine scholar John Argyropulos. Nevertheless, we know nothing for certain about Mihail’s opinion of Neoplatonism (Denissoff 1943, 312, n. 5).

The other practice which Mihail followed was his study of Greek patristic texts by comparing individual words from Greek biblical texts with the corresponding Latin versions. At the Mirandola Castle Mihail probably first encountered ascetic writings, such as those of Basil the Great and the teachings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, whom he understood as a direct follower of Jesus

<sup>2</sup> The philologist (lat. grammaticus) was considered as a devotee (‘philoï’) of the study of words (‘logoi’) who drew on the expert knowledge of the language, culture and history of Greece and Rome to determine the precise meaning of an ancient author’s word in a specific context. Within that they were entitled to interpret any type of work – historical, rhetorical, philosophical, or poetical. Philosophers were searching for fundamental truths and timeless wisdom (‘wisdom’) (Kraye 2001, 142, 148).

and the Apostle Paul, and of Roman origin. There he may have become familiar with the texts of early Byzantine monasticism, including the influential sixth-century work by John Climacus, known as *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. This would certainly shed some light on Maxim's later writings, not only literally but also iconographically.

Mihail Trivolis lived at the Mirandola Castle twice and between his stays he travelled again to Kerkyra (Corfu). When he returned to Mirandola, he was accepted "with joyful greetings, confirmed by several signs" as he said himself in a letter to John Grigoropoulos, a Greek scholar from Crete who lived in Venice (Denissoff 1943, 230). It was from the Mirandola Castle that he wrote most of his letters to Scipion Carteromach, and established his personal preference of ethical values that were based on intellectual pleasure, combined with a significant touch of ascetic spirituality. He practised intellectual pursuits in the workshop of Manuzio, where he collaborated with other Greek members of the diaspora, such as Nikolaos Sophianos and Zacharias Kalliergis, but also with his Italian colleagues, like Angelo Poliziano, Marcilio Ficino, Giovanni Crastones and Cristophoro Landino. Ficino and Crastones were monks, and Crastones edited the Psalter and *Bilingual Lexicon* (Greek-Latin Dictionary) which were printed by Aldo Manuzio. Landino, a former teacher of Ficino, was one of those humanists who adhered to the view of "natural magic" based on Pliny's *Natural History*, commentaries on which Landino made in collaboration with the Medici Academy, when he was residing at the Mirandola Castle (cf. Manetti 2007, 133).

Mihail's interest in ascetic practice also arose from listening to the preaching of Girolamo Savonarola. As a matter of fact, after the death of Savonarola in 1498, Mihail Trivolis entered the Florentine Monastery of San Marco, but remained there less than a year as a novice, and then he left it (Sinitsyna 2008, 24-25). When he received an invitation to Bologna University from the canonist and scholar Urceo Codro (who was of Slavic origin), he refused it (Denissoff 1943, 92-93).

Mihail Trivolis moved from Italy in 1503 and returned to his native Greece. In 1506, he joined the Vatopedi (Vatopaidi) Monastery at the Holy Mount Athos, which was dedicated to the Holy Annunciation of the Mother of God. Mihail Trivolis was ordained and given the monastic name Maxim (following the monastic example of Saint Maximus the Confessor). In the Athonite monastery Maxim worked on manuscripts and continued his extensive writing, translation and transcribing activities, to which he added the knowledge of Slavic languages. At the Holy Mount Athos he began to revise liturgical and hagiographic books. His previous experience from Italy was well appreciated, and the monk Maxim soon became known for his competence in dealing with precious and delicate manuscripts. Moreover, it could be presumed that he kept some of the contacts that he had established with Italian-Greek colleagues from his time in North Italy (Denissoff 1943, 322). It is of great interest to hypothesise about the correspondence between Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola and Maxim, the Athonite monk, while having in mind that at that time (1503 – 1506) both started to write poetic works in verse. Unfortunately, there is no historical evidence that such communication took place. The Vatopedian monks entrusted Maxim with the work of copying a damaged document from the 11th century which was crucial in the land disputes between the Zoograph and Kastamonitou Monasteries. This small document shows Maxim's knowledge and ability to handle manuscripts and his understanding of the importance of old documents that had not been touched for centuries (Fonkich 2003, 71-73).

It was at the Holy Mount Athos that the monk Maxim created his own poetic works which were sent to Constantinople (Denissoff 1943, 322), where these were approved by Manuel "The Great Rhetor" (ca. 1460 – ca. 1531), to whom Maxim dedicated some of his epigrammatic verses. Maxim's verses showed a humanistic sense of synthesis with the vision of "the songs, born from Muses, Graces and Wisdom" (Grek 2008, 104). Besides Maxim's epigrammatic (short) works, his poetical texts had homiletic character. For example, he composed a service-prayer to Saint

Erasmus of Ochrid, a saint known for very strict asceticism practiced in caves in the Balkans. At this time he became a close disciple of the Constantinople Patriarch Niphon II, who was a Metropolitan in Walachia. With him Maxim participated in Orthodox missions outside the Holy Mount Athos, particularly in Macedonia, Albania and Moldo-Walachia. The need for such missions arose because of the spread of various heretical teachings in the Balkans and central Europe, and during these travels Latin was used as the language of diplomatic conversation, as a sign of respect and consideration of the equality of all members of the Church, with the rite of baptism realised in non-violent conditions of converting people to Christianity.

During his Orthodox missions the monk Maxim became familiar with the colloquial language of the South Slavs. He must have become familiar also with the phonetic side of Slavonic language that was liturgically confirmed by the Orthodox Church of the Slavs. If he had previously, around Venice and on the Croatian islands, heard the Slavic dialects and perhaps sporadically the related Slavonic liturgical language, he could now get a more profound insight into Slavic common language, and particularly into the sacred language of the Church and liturgy. When he afterwards described such missions in his letter to Metropolitan Macarius (1542 – 1546/7 – Sinitsyna 2014, 15), he reported that at that time he was already working on polemic writings against heresies, and declared that when preaching the Orthodoxy he was truly inspired by the Holy Spirit:

“I was doing a great work for our Orthodox faith, as not only here, among you, but already previously I wrote down the proper teachings against the biggest heresies, that means, against the Hebrews, Muslims, and even against Hellenes, and against those who are seducing the Orthodox believers, that means liars, the superstitious, astrologers [...] and in front of the very noble men, called ‘Lachs’, I preached our Orthodox faith in the pure Light and totally unambiguous, only with the grace of the Holy Paracletus.” (Paris, NB, Mss. Slave 123, f. 79 r.)

This paragraph also indicates among which nations the Athonite monk Maxim might have preached the Orthodox faith, and it is clear that such assignments were likely conducted among the Italians, Albanians, or Romanians, whose language was of Roman origin. He crossed the Balkan Peninsula where he certainly came into contact with the Slavs. However, some Balkan nations were already Orthodox Christians, and Maxim experienced their Slavonic liturgical language as one of the Orthodox linguistic features of the religion.

In the Athonite monastery of Vatopedi he also wrote many poetic works for Patriarch Niphon II, such as *Elegiacs* and *Verses*. After the Patriarch's death Maxim, his disciple, wrote the ‘biographical epigraph’, *The First Epitaph on Patriarch Niphon II*, which by mentioning the prophet Elijah reminds us that this saint was particularly popular among the South Slavs. For Maxim's spiritual development at that time his most important work was a hymn in the form of a Canon dedicated to St. John the Baptist, one that still remains in the Athonite manuscript. In contrast to Romanos Melodos, who in the sixth century composed a poem of 18 odes on the death of St. John the Baptist (Tillyard 1923, 14-15), Maxim's Canon included seven odes with an overture and hirmos(es), marked by a highly lyrical notion. Since then, Maxim's poetic works were most closely connected to liturgical contemplation that could be associated with the understanding of the Church in the context of the interpretation of the Holy Bible. This approach could be particularly connected with ‘the Mystagogy’ of St. Maximus the Confessor (Bornert 1966, 112-115) and his theological interpretation of the sacred space. At that time the Vatopedian monk Maxim had already revised various liturgical manuscripts, since his critical marks in the form of theological variants (reader's commentaries) have been found in the margins of *The Hagiography of Clement of Ochrid*. This text is included in a rare Greek manuscript (Vatopedi, Mss. 1134) in

the paleographic style of a late Byzantine bouléé (14th century), similar to the characteristics of the Constantinople (S. Sophia, the convent of the Theotokos) parchment formation of the manuscripts (cf. Barbour 1981, 23-24) which also contained the monastic service to this saint (in the Menologion of November the 25th).

Perhaps Maxim could have become a prominent liturgical monastic poet, had he not accepted a mission to Russia in 1516 where he was to work as a translator and redactor of liturgical books on the request of Muscovite Great Prince Vasili III. This was a part of an Orthodox mission in his sincere service to the Vatopedi Monastery, which at that time faced poverty and starvation. Maxim came to Moscow with a completed system of his ethical values, and immediately began to work as a redactor and translator, dedicating his work to the Highest. After first translating the Apostolic Works, he soon started work on translating an annotated Psalter with exegetical commentaries, together with an extended patristic interpretation of the canticles. Maksim Grek – as he was called in Russia – became the first translator of the entire manuscript of the Exegetical Psalter into Old Church Slavonic. He soon received many confirmations of his spiritual influence on the highest ecclesiastical and imperial circles in Moscow, and was known as one of the most educated theologians and philosophers of the age. However, in 1525 he was suddenly accused of making heretical mistakes in his translation work by the Moscow Church council, and remained imprisoned until almost his dying day (for about 25-7 years). He was not only forbidden to communicate, read (his own Greek books were taken from him) and write (Sudnye spiski 1971, 55), but also to attend liturgical service (the Divine Liturgy) and to receive the Holy Eucharist, which was surely the harshest punishment for an Athonite Orthodox monk. These punishments resulted from the fact that Maxim refused to translate the text of the *Church History* of Theodoret of Kyrr, as he was asked to by the Metropolitan Daniil because he thought that its complex theological content might be too difficult (with theologically doubtful terms) for some Russians. Then in 1531 further accusations against him were raised. He was suspected of being a Turkish spy (Sudnye spiski 1971, 133), of witchcraft, and of insulting the honour of the Holy Mother of God, due to his translation of the hagiographic text on the *Life of The Mother of God*, from the *Menologion* of the Byzantine hagiographic author Symeon Logothet Metaphrastos (Sudnye spiski 1971, 127). That translation Maxim completed in 1521 (Sinitsyna 1977, 65, n. 20).

After the second trial he was moved to another prison in Tver Otroch Monastery. After that, the conditions of his imprisonment were mitigated and he was allowed to write. It seems reasonable to suggest that Maxim began to write mainly auto-apologetic texts in his self-defence. In these, he mostly referred to various biblical correspondences with his autobiographical approach that he got already acquainted with in Italy (when he was at Mirandola and in Florence, where he was in the with the Camaldulian monk Pietro, and in the writings of Savonarola). His special consideration of the Bible in the form of an apologetic answer, named by him as 'Libellus' (Sinitsyna 1977, 153), might be compared to a literary genre commonly used by educated monks in the early Renaissance in the North Italy as a call to a philologically attested theology (cf. Hay, Law 1979, 302, 144, n. 10). This effort places Maxim within the contemporary European humanistic movement. Secondly, he started to write polemical works, especially against the Latin additions (modifications) to the Credo of the Christian faith, which was the controversial *filioque*.

## II. Works

Maxim began to work on his most profound writings (selected author's works), which were mainly apologetic and he claimed that he was innocent until the end of his life. From his point of view his work (of translation and revising the texts) was highly righteous, because his translations

were done under the rule and power of the Holy Spirit. However, it seems clear that in Maxim's experience in Moscow two (Orthodox) ethical systems – Byzantine and Russian (Slavic?) – confronted each other.

Maxim's Orthodox ideal could be associated with the intellectual life of the early church, participating in theological debate and production of manuscripts and books. His intellectual hierarchy was therefore particularly influenced by the ascetic rule dividing knowledge into two kinds: one, *external*, proceeded from the human mind (including the medieval quadrivium and trivium which were not secularized),<sup>3</sup> and the other, the respectable one, *internal* knowledge which had been associated only with prayer, meditation, liturgy, reading and contemplating the Bible.<sup>4</sup> It could be said that such a view places him alongside members of "the first Greek diaspora" that considered theology the 'queen of sciences' (Robins 1993, 201), but it seems that Maxim alone came to the conclusion that, according to his words, "only those texts that are inspired by the Holy Spirit are sacred and in essence good and profitable for people" (the internal knowledge). However, the latter could be also recognized as Maxim's contemplation of the Holy Bible.

As noted above, Maxim the Greek understood grammar as a gateway to philosophy (**the first level**). At the first level grammar should represent condition for more sophisticated contemplation, and specifically for philosophy which Maxim the Greek saw as a form of *external* knowledge, attributed to human beings. Moreover, the knowledge of grammar should be the basis for further learning and the foundation for education in the (literary, literate) sciences, and for the teaching of philosophy, theology, history, geography, rhetoric and poetics. It means, according to Maxim the Greek, that grammar is the science of the written and spoken word. Indeed, according to his very important saying which Maxim might have adopted from quite similar thoughts of St. Maxim the Confessor: "The human soul is made of words (rational), and it is at the same time immortal" (cf. Grek 2014, 155) and if it is pure and in accordance with God, it can also "participate in godlike discussions/words of God" (Paris, Mss. Slave 123, 217 v.-218 r.). Consequently, such view of grammar suggests that it is at the same time created in accordance with the human mind (soul). Additionally, it has to be mentioned that Maxim considered theology only from the Christological aspect, or as he called it directly "the theology of Jesus Christ" (Grek 2008, 194-195). In truth, he felt that the only fruit of one's life should be literary activity, and thus creation of texts. In point of fact, he understood words as a platform for Jesus Christ's constant presence.

On the other hand, in the text entitled "About correcting Russian books" Maxim considered grammar in a new aspect (**the second level**). He stated that grammar is "sacred" (and apologized, saying that he corrected mistakes that previous Russian scribes or translators had made because they had not studied and practiced "the Holy grammar" enough – Grek 2014, 136). Literally, he said: "*grammar as the Holy*" (the adjective in the reverse position – Mss. Slave 123, f. 260 r.), which could have two meanings. Firstly, an understanding of grammar as (one of the forms of) sacred knowledge; secondly: because Maxim had in mind the texts of the Holy Scripture and liturgical texts, this statement could be related to biblical philological textuality. Therefore, at the second level, in the second example, the Holy grammar is especially related to biblical exegesis as the approach not only to learn more about the history of the Bible but also to meditate every single

<sup>3</sup> However, it has not been yet confirmed whether the Byzantines accepted the theory of education corresponding to the *trivium* and *quadrivium* of Western Europe (Reynolds, Wilson 1991, 75).

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, one could find the similar view in 'Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium' (1520) of Gianfrancesco della Mirandola, where he employed Sceptical arguments (taken from Sextus Empiricus) in order to demonstrate the unreliability of all human knowledge, and in particular Aristotelian philosophy, compared with the absolute certainty of the divinely revealed Bible (cf. Kraye 2001, 155; Schmitt 1967).

word (verse, phrase, sequence) of the Holy Scripture, which was reasonably connected with the Byzantine art and humanistic practice of biblical exegesis.

It should be kept in mind that, as mentioned above, in this context the phrase means ‘the grammar of the sacred texts’, or, directly ‘the grammar of the Holy Bible’. Knowledge of the Holy grammar, according to Maxim the Greek, educated the purest part of spiritual consciousness of the human mind (humanity). The Holy grammar was one of the tools shaping the inner world of one’s intimacy, formed by monastic values and ascetic ethics. The latter created the space of the *internal* knowledge, inspired entirely by the redirecting (overcoming) of the actions of one’s calling of the Holy Spirit, analogous to the liturgical invocation (gr. Epiklesis). Consequently, for Maxim grammar and philological activity were never separated from his prayer and spiritual practice. This is the reason why he, even when he purposely supported the traditional Byzantine dogmatic doctrine, free from innovation or alien influences, ascribed a lot of value to grammatical education, and learning from sacred manuscripts and to learning which led beyond those ends.

In the exegetical commentaries of his extended interpretation of 150 psalms of the Psalter, there are profound commentaries on the biblical canticles, among which one can find an explanation of Mary’s canticle (‘Magnificat’) by Gregory Nazianzen, who interpreted that canticle from the perspective of a hierarchical cosmographical worldview, and expressed heartfelt praise of the humanity created by God and the glorification of the Holy Word as the incarnated God the Son.

In fact, in an (unpublished) text about the saying: “Go, my people, go and step forward, and along etc.” (“the Divine prophet Isaiah is saying ‘Go, my people, step into your cellar; close the door, etc.’”), which in the Parish manuscript follows after the Letter to Metropolitan (Archbishop) Macarius, Maxim provided his own understanding of the 5th liturgical song, based on the verses of Old Testament prophet Isaiah’s canticle (cf. Semjachko 2011, 128), and singularly, of one verse (“Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment until the indignation be overpast”; Is 26, 20), and he interpreted the liturgical verses (Psalm 125, 6; the Book of Isaiah) in an ascetic context.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Maxim included here verses from other liturgical canticles (from the ‘Song of three children’), as one could find them in the Exegetical Psalter and also in the Liturgical Psalter after the reading of the 150 psalms – which Maxim the Greek translated-revised four years before his death (1552).

Furthermore, in the same text Maxim founded the theological cosmography of the internal space, shaped only by a person’s inner life, limited by his soul, spirit and mind. To describe the space untouched by five external senses he created the term ‘internal man’<sup>6</sup>, one who lives in silence and hidden peace. According to Maxim, such spiritual space is not formed by geographical movement or someone’s actions, but by the virtuous fulfilment of Christ’s sacred commandments, which could give rise to the contemplating reality of prayer and meditation. After providing Christ’s words (“Walk while ye have the light” – Jn 12, 35) Maxim clearly explained them: “Not walking between the places (cities), but virtuous realization of Christ’s Holy commandments” (Mss. Slave 123, f. 80 v.). In other words, the man of virtue should be at the same time marked by the signs and influence of the Holy Spirit. Maxim defined the subjects of the oxymoronic verse of Isaiah’s liturgical song (cf. Is 26, 14), “The dead cannot be alive, and the healers do not rise”, as follows: “the dead” are

<sup>5</sup> However, it seems that the source for those Old Testament’s words came from the Septuagint as the full phrase is not provided (there are no words: ‘Let step’) in the (Standard and Slavic) Bible.

<sup>6</sup> This expression (‘internal man’) Maxim used also in his text ‘About the Permission to the Less Fasting’ which follows the above-mentioned text (Mss. Slave 123, f. 73 v.), and in the text ‘The Teaching About the Improvement of the Monastic Life and About the Power of the Great Schema (The Highest Monastic Degree)’ by which the “monastic cycle” (f. 80 r. – 90 r.) of the texts in the Paris manuscript collection of Maxim the Greek’s works is completed.

the non-Christian nations that will not receive eternal life. “The healers” (their ‘spirits’) Maxim explained in the reversed sense and in the soteriological context with the crucial meaning that ‘the healers’ are apostolic words (epistles) by which even the fallen souls (and dead bodies) will rise (cf. Is 26, 19; Mss. Slave 123, f. 80 r. - 81 v). He tried to explain the liturgical Song of Isaiah not only with regarding the prophecy of the (contemporary?) threat to Christianity (“the irrational Seldjukes and Pharisees who imprisoned Apostles in dark confinements”), but also with the connection to the New Testament claims about the torture of Christ (eschatological stress on the closeness of the Lord’s Judgment and His Second Coming), and to apostolic preaching (by the words: “who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and please not God, and are contrary to all men” – 1 Tess 2, 15-16; “You want to foreshadow us the blood of this Man” – cf. Acts 13, 27-32). It could be said that he compared the Old and New Testament signs of the never-ending, uninterrupted and continued presence of Christ. However, a detailed reading reveals another aspect of Maxim the Greek’s interpretation. If he truly synthesized the Old and New Testament at the synchronic level, at the same time he implicitly stressed the personal impact (‘Seldjukes’, ‘us’, ‘blood of the man’) in the explanation of Isaiah’s words (cf. Is 26, 19) by the following interpretation: “the fertile man will be joyful and he will be refreshed in the dew of the morning, which means God’s baptism, the Communion of the sacred gifts of the Holy Spirit and the pure pleasure, coming from the sacred scriptures”. The ‘Dew of the morning’ is defined in the liturgical Song of Isaiah as ‘the future recovery’ which is coming to the Earth after Lord’s (illness, recovery and) birth of “the Spirit of salvation” (Moscow, GIM, Mss. Uvar. 85/14, f. 130r. – 130 v.).<sup>7</sup> One should notice that Maxim mentioned spiritual experience and advancing towards intellectual perfection alongside baptism. The immanent autobiographical semantic features act as the juxtaposition of two realities, biblical and contemporary - the age of the early Renaissance.

An intimate and very personal aspect, characteristic for Maxim’s interpretation, declares the third point of view, which notes the eternal value and liturgical moment. It could be defined as ‘tertium comparationis’, by which Maxim’s understanding of the biblical message could not be described as only allegorical (cf. Sinitsyna 2014, 41), or symbolic, but as highly metaphorical with moral sense (a metaphorical figure with moral teaching and with the theological dimension of cosmography as the dogmatic concept of the Holy Trinity as well as the support of future human’s dignity – cf. Grek 2008, 155-156). That means of ‘saying differently, in other words’ those biblical verses, that were at the same time written under the power of the Holy Spirit and should be interpreted in the poetic discourse, led ultimately by the Holy Spirit. This is the legacy of the lyrical effect and of the meaning of biblical interpretation by which Maxim approved his system of ethics.

Holy Spirit, accessible through liturgical experience, was the main guidance of all Maxim’s actions and literary inspirations, and allowed him to do his translation work and his polemical, theological and other literal personal work during his imprisonment in Muscovite Russia. The description of collecting all mental energies in the heart corresponds to the so-called ‘prayer of the heart’ or ‘the Jesus prayer’, better known from the beginnings of Athonite hesychasm, which, as Byzantine’s last religious controversy (1341 – 1357), had a decisive impact on Byzantine philosophical and theological thought, although, in fact, it went back to earlier ascetic practices (Reinert 2002, 265-267). For Gregory Palamas, Theodore the Studite and the mainstream of Russian hesychasts, such as Nil Sorsky, the expression of the “sun of the mind”, coming from the interpretation of the Corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (Prochorov 2010, 208), and the contemplation and vision from the light of Mount Tabor as the visual sign of divine’s energy (Prochorov 1968, 92), were very significant. However, in the writings of Maxim the Greek the

<sup>7</sup> Cited from the original manuscript (one of the earliest copies of) Maxim the Greek. This is the Psalter without commentaries, the so-called ‘Liturgical Psalter’ that Maxim the Greek revised-translated in 1552.



emphasis on such light cannot be found. Instead, he brought to Russia his experience of “the man who is righteous and therefore has the right to experience the sun as a pure reflection of God’s light”, and his own, very strict hierarchical view of the sequence of Christological history, attainable only through the spiritual development. It could be said that Maxim the Greek combined Byzantine worldviews with Athonite ascetic values, but, in fact, he endorsed a specific, intra-biblical ethical view, to which he added patristic interpretation. In one of his earlier texts written in Moscow (*The First Letter to Fiodor Karpov against Astrology*), he clearly expressed his understanding of the levels of spiritual knowledge available to enlightened individuals. He stated that only three Apostles, James, John and Peter, those who witnessed the moment of Christ’s Transfiguration, were able to see Christ in His glory, and could perceive the real and deep meaning of salvation. In other words, they gained an insight – meant in a theophanic sense – into Christ’s mind by Holy Grace. All others, including patristic authors (Maxim the Greek named particularly Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzen, John Chrysostom and Basil the Great) stayed only at the bottom (at the foot) of Mount Tabor. In the same passage Maxim mentioned the contribution of Gregory of Nazianzen (in “the 7th Homily on the Silence”) and his consideration of ascetic life which is exactly “the hidden life in Christ”, gained after the loss of the pearl by the merchant who willingly chose the life of complete poverty (Grek 2008, 313-314).

In his programmatic text *The confession of the Orthodox faith*, Maxim the Greek stated that he was continuously singing-pronouncing the name of the Lord (“All days and nights I am singing [...] also in everyday praising I am singing, blessing, praising and saying: ‘Lord, Thee, my God, the lamb Divine, the Son of God, please, accept the sins of the earth, have mercy upon us’”, Grek 2014, 55), which could be a proof that he practised the prayer of the heart, and that it was in Old Church Slavonic – what was very important, regarding the Russian accusations on his account that he “did not know enough Russian Slavonic language” (cf. Bulanin 2017, 90-91; Ivanov 1969, 17). The latter was decisive for Maxim when he was put to the Monastery’s prison (“in dark, solitude, and in starvation, without the right to speak, to read, to write and to communicate” – Sudnye spiski 1971, 55) and suffered discrimination from Russian church authorities. He was prohibited to attend the liturgy which could be the reason that led him to interpret the Bible using theological and liturgical keys, similarly to Maximus the Confessor, albeit in a deeply personal way that differed from previous interpretations due to his own implicit self-identification. The highly personal path of every single interpretation, very significant for Maxim the Greek’s writings and his deeply personal theology, was, however, a reflection of his involvement in his age, in an age of mixed religious values and horror of individual disappearance along with the threat of losing the Christian state in the early Renaissance. In conclusion, he came to a strict division of knowledge, one that did not provide for even the minimum area of mixed values. Moreover, Maxim understood the confusion of different sorts of knowledges in Russia as a lack of faith in the Holy Spirit.

However, the internal knowledge was never specified by Maxim. Instead, it is possible to suggest that this knowledge could be achieved only by the most advanced monastic practice, completed during the training of the mind by the teachings of sacred writings, wakeful prayers and vigils that are pleased to God – as he indicated in the text “The Teaching About the Improvement of Monastic Life and About the Power of the Great Schema”. (Paris, Mss. Slave 123, f. 88 r.). This creative act could be healing because it reflects the (historically, theologically, philosophically) non-limited knowledge. The experience of prayer, under the control of the Holy Spirit, can lead to an allowance to visionary or mystical experience, what could be properly related to the gift of prophecy in the context of the biblical historical reality. Maxim the Greek implicitly suggested that all these “wisdoms”, related to the so called internal knowledge, can (should) be expressed exclusively in the literal form (by words) – in the Christological sense (the Lord as the

Holy Logos). His understanding of the internal knowledge is therefore closely associated with the concept of 'studia humanitatis' which Maxim got to know in North Italy, where he also saw the threat to the Christian religion from the Turkish invasion. He was one of the few people at that time who felt that the pristine canonical Christian knowledge in Europe and the Christian Church itself were endangered.

## Epilogue

In Muscovite Russia Maxim realised that the value of the Good, in terms of human virtue, could be neglected and that it is possible to manipulate the sources of morality in the name of Orthodox faith. Perhaps in this sense we can understand Maxim's words which he pronounced with a mild smile and in a peaceful voice when he heard that Russian collaborators with whom he had worked on translation lied about him to the council: "His soul will raise him up" (Sudnye spiski 1971, 102). No scholar has previously discussed or interpreted his words, although they are among the most characteristic of Maxim the Greek, even if not directly expressed in his writings. If we look deeper at this phrase, which Maxim the Greek used several times during the trials against him, we could come closer to the nature of his mind. He forgave his accusers and was capable of seeing their souls rising them up. This was clearly the evidence of his spiritual superiority over the injustice that he experienced in Russia. Maxim was aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit in his literary works, translated texts and edited liturgical manuscripts. In Moscow, however, he experienced the diminishing role of the Holy Spirit as a basic inspirational value in one's literary, translation and writing activity. Additionally, he understood that in Russia people did not believe in the immortality of the human soul, as "licensed" by the action of the Holy Spirit. Finally, it is possible that Maxim did not observe properly ministered procession of 'Epiclesis' in the Russian liturgical practice of sacred gifts of the Holy Spirit. It was the faith in the guidance of the Holy Spirit which led him in his personal prayer, the ascetic practice that had already acquired at the Holy Mount Athos. Consequently, he arrived in Moscow with a developed ethical hierarchical system of intellectual and theological values.

In Russia he met with a lack of grammatical knowledge, and his linguistic knowledge was proclaimed heretical. This was strange and new for the Vatopedian monk Maxim, who received scholarly (philological, humanistic) training and education in North Italy. In North Italy, he was influenced and intellectually shaped by the special humanistic theory of poetic and rhetoric works of literature, appreciated as a new educational ideal under the term 'studia humanitatis', expressed by Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Simoniti 1979, 139-140) whose 'Story about the Fall of Constantinople' Maxim the Greek also translated in Moscow. However, such ideal of literal knowledge was uncommon in other places or cities in Europe.

It seems that Maxim the Greek successfully synthesised the humanistic view of life-time intellectual development and moral theology (which differed also from Italian humanists) based on the interpretation of 'biblical reality', with his monastic Athonite knowledge (theological, patristic, hagiographic, liturgical), in a deeply personal and strict theocentric approach that he named "Orthodox".

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