

**A SCHOLAR FROM THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES: “THE CASE”
OF GREGORY CAMBLAK**

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Abstract: During the medieval epoch and the pre-modern period the history of the Romanian population has been deeply marked by the contacts established with the Slavs and materialized in political, cultural, confessional and linguistic influences of great importance (the cultural transfer consisting of habits, beliefs and institutions as well as the use of the Slavonic language within Church and chancellery). Apart from archaeology or linguistics as means used in studying the history of the Slavic-Romanian contacts, a major role is played by the cultural dimension through the preoccupation for Slavonism as cultural phenomenon, for its ways of expression and also for its contributions to the development of the Romanian culture.

Initially the Slavonic language has been used within Church, but it has been adopted also in the literary field and within the chancellery. One must admit the contacts established between the educated monks and bishops coming from the Romanian lands and the Serbians and the Bulgarians. The Serbian and the Bulgarian manuscripts have been copied in the Orthodox Romanian monasteries, leading to the spread of an incipient Romanian literature. After the Ottoman advance in the Balkans, a series of educated persons coming from Serbia and Bulgaria have moved forward the Romanian lands, of which one must mention the figure of Gregory Camblak.

Keywords: ecclesiastical jurisdiction, Slavonic language, peregrinatio academica, Konstanz, cultural heritage

During the medieval epoch and the pre-modern period the history of the Romanian population was deeply marked by the contacts established with the Slavic populations and materialized in political, cultural, confessional and linguistic influences of great importance (the cultural transfer consisting of habits, beliefs and institutions as well as the use of the Slavonic language within Church and chancellery). Apart from archaeology or linguistics as means used in studying the history of the Slavic-Romanian contacts, a major role was played by the cultural dimension through the preoccupation for *Slavonism* as a cultural phenomenon, for its ways of expression and also for its contributions to the development of the Romanian culture.¹

Initially the Slavonic language had been used within Church, but soon afterwards it was also adopted in the literary field and within the chancellery.² The introduction of the Slavonic language within Church, the assumption of an official liturgy, the use of the terms specific to the ecclesiastical hierarchy were all aspects that brought into light the existence of

¹ See Grigore Nandriş, “The Beginning of Slavonic Culture in the Romanian Countries”, in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. XXIV, no. 63, 1946, pp. 160-171; Dennis Deletant, “Slavonic Letters in Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania from the Tenth to the Seventeenth Centuries”, in *The Slavonic*, vol. LVIII, no. 1, 1980, pp. 1-21; Petre P. Panaitescu, *Interpretări româneşti. Studii de istorie economică și socială*, Bucharest, 1994, pp. 13-29.

² I. D. Negrescu, *Limba slavă veche: perioada slavonă la români, texte paleoslave și româno-slave, glosar slavo-român*, Printing Press The Biblical and Orthodox Mission Institute, Bucharest, 1961, p. 101; Ion Gheție, Alexandru Mareș, *Originile scrisului în limba română*, Scientific and Encyclopedic Printing Press, Bucharest, 1985, pp. 128-129; Maria Cvasnîi Cătănescu, *Limba română: origini și dezvoltare*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1996, p. 70; R. W. Seton-Watson, *O istorie a românilor: din perioada romană până la desăvârșirea unității naționale*, Printing Press Istros, Brăila, 2009, p. 65.

a political organization that managed to adapt the Slavic liturgy to the Romanian population; to exemplify, the chronicles attested Slavic-Romanian “states” at the north of Danube whose leaders were Slavs, an element that could facilitate the adoption of an official liturgy.³ After the assimilation of the Slavs, the liturgy was still officiated in the Slavonic language since its maintenance was due to the influence of the second Bulgarian tsardom and also to the permanent contact between the Bulgarian language and the Romanian civilization.

Apart from Church, the Slavonic language was used in the literary field as well, the main literary influences being transmitted through the Bulgarian and the Serbian channels. One must emphasize the vivid contact established between the educated monks and bishops coming from the Romanian territories and the Serbians and the Bulgarians. The Slavic manuscripts from Bulgaria and Serbia were copied within the Romanian monasteries and by this way they brought their major contribution to the spread of an incipient literature in the Romanian Principalities.⁴ In addition to this, after the institution of the Ottoman domination upon Balkans, a large number of scholars coming from Bulgaria and Serbia moved toward the Romanian lands, of which one must mention the figure of Gregory Camblak.⁵

There are few information about the life of this historical character, the largest part of them being the result of analyzing the events in which Gregory Camblak took part and the role assumed in those historical evolutions. Gregory Camblak was probably born at Veliko Târnovo (Târnovgrad, Târnov), in 1365, within one of the most important noble families during the second Bulgarian tsardom.⁶ The earliest testimony regarding the Camblak family dated from the year 1211 and was represented by the document *Synodikon* of tsar Boril (1207-1218), which included also a list of those persons who deserved to be awarded for their adhesion to the Orthodox faith.⁷ Gregory Camblak studied Greek at Veliko Târnovo and in order to complete his humanist instruction he travelled to Athos and Constantinople (*peregrinatio academica*), where he also worked at the elaboration of the sermons that lately would bring his fame; at the beginning of the 15th century (1401), Camblak appeared to be working for Matthew, the patriarch of Constantinople, and most probably to occupy the function of clerical worker or translator (*syncellus*).⁸

The first occasion for proving his abilities as a preacher outside Constantinople arrived in the year 1401 and involved a special mission in Moldavia; the main objective of that mission was to search for the circumstances that had facilitated the naming of bishop Josef,

³ Alexandru Greco [Petre P. Panaitescu], „Bulgaria în nordul Dunării în veacurile al IX-X-lea”, in *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Medie*, vol. I, no. 1, 1950, pp. 223-236.

⁴ *Romanoslavica*, vol. 13, Association, Bucharest, 1966, p. 198; *Studii și cercetări de documentare și bibliologie*, vol. 9, The Academy of the Romanian Socialist Republic. The Center for Scientific Documentation, no. 1, 1967, pp. 265-267; Alexandru Dimitrie Xenopol, Alexandru Zub, *Istoria românilor din Dacia Traiană*, vol. 3, Scientific and Enciclopedic Printing Press, Bucharest, 1988, p. 533; see also Ion Țurcanu, *Istoria românilor: cu o privire mai largă asupra culturii*, accessed at <http://books.google.ro/books?id=ahEDAwwAAQBAJ&pg=PT142&dq=cronici+slavo-romane&hl=ro&sa=X&ei=m3F7U8OIHbHB7AaFqoC4Bw&ved=0CEQQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=cronici%20slavo-romane&f=false>, on 20.05.2014, at 6:18 p.m.

⁵ Ioan-Aurel Pop, Ioan Bolovan (coords.), *Istoria României*, Center of Transylvanian Studies, Cluj-Napoca, 2007, p. 290.

⁶ *Romanoslavica*, vol. 13, p. 79.

⁷ Muriel Heppel, *The Ecclesiastical Career of Gregory Camblak*, London, 1979, pp. 5-6.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10.

the leader of the Moldavian Orthodox Church.⁹ The earliest political relations of the Romanian lands (Moldavia, Wallachia) had been established with Hungary, but from an ecclesiastical point of view, both Romanian territories were part of the Byzantine world, being submitted to the jurisdiction of the archbishopric of Ohrid (Ohri). Moldavia was the first Romanian land to gain a certain religious autonomy during the period 1370-1380 when two monks, Josef and Meletius, directed their attention to Anthony of Galicia (Halychyna, Halics, Galizien).¹⁰ After Meletius' death however, Josef was consecrated bishop, an element that caused the discontent of the Byzantines who regarded the event as a clear possibility of usurping the Constantinopolitan control upon Moldavia.

The situation changed during the reign of Alexander the Good (1400-1432) who sent a delegation to Constantinople with the intention of obtaining the confirmation of Josef in the function of bishop from the part of the patriarch; subsequently a synod was convoked and established that the circumstances of Josef's consecration should be analyzed. The responsibility was thus attributed to a special mission.¹¹ There were various reasons that could explain the patriarchal decision to include Gregory Camblak in that mission: first of all, he was a natively-speaking Slav and that could facilitate the communication with the Romanian priests since the Church language was the Slavonic one. Furthermore, there was necessary to send a good preacher because the influence of the Latin rite in Moldavia was becoming more evident owing to the Polish channel (one must mention the fact that a Catholic bishopric and a Dominican convent were functioning at Siret). The result of the enquiry turned to be satisfactory for the patriarchy of Constantinople since Josef continued to be the leader of the Moldavian Orthodox Church all over the following period.

The presence of Gregory Camblak in Moldavia must be analyzed through a permanent resort to the context, to the political and ecclesiastical action initiated by Constantinople with the aim of consolidating its influence on the Romanian territories; there were some historians who stressed the fact that soon after the events mentioned above, Gregory Camblak became abbot of the Neamț Monastery between 1403-1415.¹² According to some documents, the Bulgarian scholar was named abbot of the monastery whose dedication was that of Jesus the Pantokrator, an information difficult to be proved if we took into consideration the fact that the dedication of the Neamț Monastery was that of Jesus' Ascension.

Another major moment from Gregory Camblak's career following the Moldavian mission was the period spent in Serbia. After the death of Lazar Hrebeljanovic in the battle of Kossopolje (Kosovo Polje) (1389), the Serbian territory was governed by his son, Stephan Lazarevic, a great patron of arts and literature. Since Gregory Camblak became famous due to his sermons, it was obvious that Serbia would search for his presence. Camblak became abbot of the Dečani Monastery (most probably, that was the monastery dedicated to Jesus the Pantokrator), where he wrote *The Life of Stephan Dečanski*, the Serbia's ruler during 1321-

⁹ Constantin Prisnea, *The Neamț Monastery*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1964, p. 24.

¹⁰ Heppel, *The Ecclesiastical Career*, p. 18.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹² Rebecca Haynes (ed.), *Occasional Papers in Romanian Studies*, no. 3: Moldavia, Bessarabia, Transnistria, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2003, p. 16.

1331 and the founder of the monastery, and also a short story about the transfer of the Saint Petka's relics from Vidin (Bulgaria) to Serbia.¹³

The culminant moment regarding Gregory Camblak's ecclesiastical career coincided with the period spent in Russia. During the second half of the 14th century, Russia became more difficult to be administered by the Constantinople, an aspect owing in principal to the tensions manifested by a power in a complete expansion, Lithuania. During the reign of Algirdas (Olgiard) (1341-1377), a period characterized by intern tensions and by the diminishing of the military force of the Gold Horde, Lithuania managed to conquer Kiev and the surrounding areas; under those conditions, Algirdas claimed a separate ecclesiastical organization for the territories submitted to his authority, a demand that was strongly rejected by Constantinople; its refusal was motivated by the necessity of maintaining one jurisdiction for the entire territory populated by Russian Christians with the intention of counterpartying the dissensions between the Russian Principalities.¹⁴ As a direct consequence of Algirdas' insistence, the patriarch Philotheus regarded as necessary the existence of a distinct metropolitan for the dioceses of West Russia, awarding Cyprian Camblak, Gregory Camblak's uncle, the function of metropolitan of Kiev, Lithuania and Small Russia in the year 1375.¹⁵ While Cyprian was activating at Kiev, there were scored important changes in the Lithuanian territory, evolutions that would be reflected in Gregory Camblak's career as well. After Algirdas' death, the authority was taken by Władisław II Jagiełło who received the Catholic baptize and who founded the Polish-Lithuanian Union. In that context, the administration of the dioceses from West Russia was becoming more difficult since they constituted an Orthodox enclave within a big Catholic state; moreover, one must not neglect Cyprian's death in the year 1406 as well as the time passed until the consecration of a new metropolitan.

From that period there came the most important pieces of information that could help us reconstitute Gregory Camblak's activity: the chronicle of Nikon mentioned his consecration as metropolitan of Kiev in 1415¹⁶, most probably as a direct consequence of the reputation he had benefitted from as a preacher at Kiev, but also of the relation with the ex-metropolitan, Cyprian. The contemporary sources put into light the difficulties Gregory Camblak had to cope with at the beginning of his activity in Kiev: on one hand, the refusal of the patriarch of Constantinople to recognize him as a metropolitan and on the other hand, the Tatar invasion that affected Kiev and its surroundings.

From the last period of his life, one must count in the pieces of information related to his participation at the Council of Konstanz.¹⁷ Convoked at the initiative of Sigismund of Luxemburg, the king of Hungary, in 1414, the major objective of the council consisted of

¹³ John V. A. Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1994, p. 444; Jean W. Sedlar, *East Central Europe in the Middle Ages, 1000-1500*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1994, p. 439.

¹⁴ Heppel, *The Ecclesiastical Career*, pp. 38- 39.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 40

¹⁶ Jerzy Kloczowski, *A History of Polish Christianity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 74.

¹⁷ Nelson H. Minnich, "Councils of the Catholic Reformation: A Historical Survey", in Gerald Christianson, Thomas M. Izbicki, Christopher Bellitto (eds.), *The Church, the Councils and Reform: The Legacy of the Fifteenth Century*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC, 2008, p. 34; Pawel Jasienica, *Jagiellonian Poland*, American Institute of Polish Culture, 1978, p. 117; *Bulgarian Review*, vol. 15, Foyer Bulgare, 1975, p. 40.

ending the schism born within the Roman Church and caused by the existence of three rival popes, John XXIII, Gregory XII and Benedict XII. The presence of Gregory Camblak within the council of Konstanz owed to the initiatives of Vytautas (Witold), the newly elected ruler of Lithuania; one must doubt whether the Bulgarian scholar was an active adherent at the idea of the union of the two Churches or an advocate of the policy initiated by Cyprian and Vytautas¹⁸. That aspect was illustrated by one of the sermons composed by Gregory Camblak, which was translated into Latin and read within the Council. Consisting of four parts, the sermon began with expressing the joy that the schism between the two Churches had come to an end and continued with a plea for the union of the two Churches, consolidated by the strong desire of the Byzantine emperor and of the patriarch of Constantinople that the union be realized. At the end of the sermon, Gregory Camblak expressed his demand for the convocation of a general council that should re-discuss the problematic of the union of the two Churches.¹⁹

The period between the Council of Konstanz and Gregory Camblak's death was voided of information; most probably, he was the victim of a plague epidemic that affected Kiev and the surrounding areas in 1419, year that was mentioned by the Russian chronicles as the date of his death.

If the first part of this argument has focused on the education and the main stages from Gregory Camblak's ecclesiastical career, it is worth analyzing the results of his activity: *The Life of Stephan Dečanski, laudations* (Saint John the New, Saint Petka, Saint Dimitri, Saint George), *an encomium dedicated to Cyprian*, the metropolitan of Kiev and the *collections of sermons*.²⁰

Considered as the most elaborated writing, the biography of Stephan Dečanski represented an important historical source, bearing relevant pieces of information about the political context as well as about the standards of the monastic life from Serbia.²¹

For the history of the Romanian nation, the most important writing rested *The Martyrdom of Saint John the New*²², considered one of the first original writings of the Romanian literature. The paper included information related to the life of Saint John the New, merchant of Trebizond, who assumed the martyrdom in the year 1330, in the White Fortress (Akkerman) after he had refused to renounce at the Christian faith. Soon afterwards his death, there were scored a large number of miracles, so his relics were moved to Suceava (Szucsáva, Suczawa), most probably in the period when the special mission sent by the patriarch of Constantinople and in which Gregory Camblak took part was arriving to Moldavia; in honor of the above mentioned event, either from his own initiative or from a demand, Gregory

¹⁸ Giedre Mickunaite, *Making a Great Ruler: Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania*, Central European University Press, Budapest, 2006, p. 202.

¹⁹ Heppel, *The Ecclesiastical Career*, pp. 87-89; see also Oskar Halecki, W. F. Reddaway, J. H. Penson, *The Cambridge History of Poland*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1941, p. 220.

²⁰ Zaga Gavrilovic, "Women in Serbian Politics, Diplomacy and Art at the Beginning of Ottoman Rule", in Elizabeth Jeffreys (ed.), *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization: In Honour of Sir Steven Runciman*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 75.

²¹ Henrik Birnbaum, *On Medieval and Renaissance Slavic Writing: Selected Essays*, Mouton and Co's Publishers, Haga, 1974, p. 310.

²² „Martiriul sântului, slăvitului Martiru Ioanu celu Nou, carele s-a martirisatu în Cetatea Albă. Scrisus-a de Grigorie Monachulu și presbiterulu la marea Biserică a Moldovlachiei”. Melchisedec, *Viața și scrierile lui Grigorie Țamblacu*, The Typography of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 1884, p. 83.

Camblak wrote a relation about the martyrdom of Saint John the New.²³ Furthermore, *The Life of Saint John the New* included pieces of information regarding the political and economic context during the 14th and the 15th centuries: at the beginning of the 14th century, the White Fortress, an important commercial point, was dominated by the Tatars; the period coincided with the moment when Akkerman (name given by the Ottomans to the White Fortress) was brought under the rule of Moldavia because in 1392, Roman was calling himself “ruler of Moldavia, from the mountain to the sea”; in what concerned the name of Moldavia, it appeared in the documents as “Moldovlachia” or “Rusovlachia” (The Romania from the side of Russia), a name used by the Byzantines during the 15th century so as to distinguish it from Walachia or “Ungrovlachia” (The Romania from the side of Hungary).²⁴

Gregory Camblak’s writing generated vivid debates and its paternity was seriously called in question. P. Năsturel brought a series of arguments through which he intended to contest the fact that Gregory Camblak was the real author of that paper, such as: the martyrdom took place in Crimea and the saint’s relics were moved to Suceava in the year 1415, year in which Gregory Camblak was in Kiev; in what concerned the writing style, this was characterized by “grecisms”, which would mean that the paper could have been translated from a Greek original.²⁵ A research focused on the paternity of the writing overcame numerous difficulties: first of all, as a direct consequence of the lack of the original paper. The pieces of information came from the year 1439 when Gavriil Uric copied the original writing within a *Sbornic* of Saints²⁶ at the Neamț Monastery. On the scale of this manuscript the bishop Pahomie of Roman made an annotation; according to it, Gregory Camblak, preacher in Moldavia, abbot at the Neamț Monastery and bishop of Kiev was also the author of that *Sbornic*.²⁷ The chronological reference points from Gregory Camblak’s writing could be confusing, but this was not a source contemporary to the event since the paper was elaborated in the first half of the 17th century, most probably turning to good account the oral tradition and not the written mentions. Moreover, the “grecisms” found in the writing were a strong argument for Gregory Camblak’s paternity as far as his education as well as the elaborate style implied a good knowledge of the Greek language and of the Greek models.

As to the *laudation dedicated to Cyprian*, the metropolitan of Kiev, it served to reconstitute the activity of Cyprian during the period 1375-1378 if correlated to all his writings and to the *Chronicle of Nikon*, but it also included some references to Gregory Camblak’s own career.

Finally, his *sermons* made a direct reference to the Holy Sacraments, to the death Christians, to graciousness, but also to various feasts from the liturgical calendar. Analyzing his writings, one must notice Gregory Camblak’s preoccupation for style, for the modalities

²³ Heppel, *The Ecclesiastical Career*, p. 21.

²⁴ Melchisedec, *Viața și scrierile*, pp. 103- 104.

²⁵ Heppel, *The Ecclesiastical Career*, pp. 21- 22.

²⁶ Religious writing that includes a selection of lives and teachings belonging to different saints.

²⁷ „Mucenicia Sfântului Ioan Novii a fost scrisă de Grigorie Țamblac, ce a fost dascăl în Moldova și egumen la Neamț și mai apoi mitropolit de Kiev”. Florin Grigorescu, *Sfântul Ioan cel Nou de la Suceava în viața credincioșilor*, The Archbishop of Suceava and Rădăuți Printing Press, Suceava, 2003, accessed at <http://sfantulioancelnou.ro/carti/grigorescu/carte.htm>, on 21.05.2014, at 3:46 p.m.

of elaborating a literary composition, for stylizing the portraits and for exploiting the persuasive function of the words.²⁸

To conclude, it is necessary to evaluate the historical character Gregory Camblak and the role played by him during the events of the 15th century since the lack of fundamental pieces of information and the mistaken interpretation of other historians and researchers are to lead to serious confusions. As we have already seen, the name of Gregory Camblak has begun to be related to a series of movements from the history of the Eastern Church (the development of the School of Veliko Tărnovo, the institution of an autonomous ecclesiastical organization in Moldavia, but also the first attempts of unifying the two Churches, the Roman Church and the Eastern one.²⁹ The question one must address is to what extent all these initiatives have belonged to Gregory Camblak or rather he has acted as a direct consequence of the demands made by some persons (the metropolitan of Kiev, Cyprian or Vytautas, the ruler of Lithuania). We surely are aware of the inestimable value of his papers, the spread of the manuscripts containing his sermons being a good indicator of the popularity he has benefitted from. The *Chronicle of Nikon* comes to validate this idea and records the fact that Gregory Camblak has been a cultivated scholar and has given the posterity an important cultural heritage, namely his writings.³⁰

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²⁸ Dmitrij Ciževskij, *History of the Russian Literature: From the Eleventh Century to the End of the Baroque*, Mouton and Co.'s Publishers, Haga, 1971, pp. 163-165.

²⁹ Heppel, *The Ecclesiastical Career*, p. 101.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

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