

ORTHODOX AND CATHOLICS IN THE PELOPONNESE AFTER THE FOURTH CRUSADE: CONFLICTS, COM- PROMISES, AND PEACEFUL TIES

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Abstract: *The sack of Constantinople in 1204 was a turning point for the Byzantine Empire. The subsequent conquest of the Byzantine territories by the Latins further widened the gap between Western and Eastern Christianity. This article is devoted to the peculiarities of interfaith interaction in the Peloponnese after the Frankish conquest. The policy of religious tolerance towards the local population, which the princes of Achaea pursued, was one of the main reasons for the relatively stable relationship between the Franks and the Greeks. But the Venetians repeatedly tried to prevent the connection of their citizens with the Orthodox, even going so far as to prohibit any Greek priest performing the sacraments for the Latins in the territories controlled by the Commune. The paper will analyze the issues of the coexistence of Orthodox and Catholics on the peninsula from the time of the Latin conquest to the first half of fifteenth century.*

Keywords: *Peloponnese, Morea, Catholics, Orthodox, interfaith interaction*

The capture of Constantinople because of the Fourth Crusade was a turning point for most Eastern Christians in their attitude towards the papacy and the Catholic Church.¹ Among the Greeks, the belief grew stronger that it was the Latin clergy who played the leading role in planning the capture of the Byzantine capital and the plunder of the city.² The conquest of the Byzantine territories by the crusaders in 1204 further widened the gap between Western and Eastern Christianity, and until the final fall of the Empire, it repeatedly provoked political and interfaith conflicts in the Balkans. The diversity of surviving sources allows us to consider the late medieval Peloponnese as a striking example of interfaith dialogue after 1204 on both the Latin and Byzantine sides. By what principles was religious interaction between them built? Did conflict or contact dominate their daily communications? Answers to the questions posed should clarify the role of confessional affiliation in the intercultural interaction of Greek and Latins after the Fourth Crusade, as well as expand the understanding of the meaning of religious otherness in Latin Romania and particularly in the Morea.

¹ Kolbaba 2021, p. 56.

² Harris 2017, p. 192.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

The anonymous author of the Chronicle of the Morea reports the circumstances of the agreements between the Greeks and the Franks, which were reached in the first years of the Frankish presence in the Peloponnese. These agreements primarily implied guarantees that the local Greek population would retain the right to freely perform their religious rites, the right to property and the preservation of the Byzantine inheritance system.³ These agreements formed the basis for the generally peaceful coexistence of the conquerors and the local population. Unlike the owners of other Latin seigneuries in Greece, the Franks of the Peloponnese were quite loyal to the Greek clergy.⁴ On March 30, 1210, Pope Innocent III, in his letter to the bishops of the Peloponnese, ordered the protection of Greek priests who were ready to cooperate with Catholics, as well as the local population who took the authority of the Latin.⁵ At the same time, it is difficult to say whether the Greek parish priests who remained in their places were subordinate to the Latin hierarchs. Most likely, in rural areas and inaccessible mountainous areas of the peninsula, direct interfaith contacts between the Greeks and the Latins were practically absent since Catholics in the Peloponnese lived mainly in cities and feudal castles.⁶

According to the Chronicle of the Morea, before his death in 1278, Prince Guillaume II drew up his will in such a way that he especially noted the need to preserve the previous order and volume of feudal estates in “*the monasteries of the Franks, as well as the Romaioi, which were founded and erected*” by his will for prayers to the ruler of Heaven for the entire Christian world.⁷ It follows from this fragment that during his reign Guillaume II contributed to the founding of not only Catholic monasteries in the Principality but also Orthodox ones. Considering that most of the population of the Principality were Greeks, the construction of Greek monasteries looks like a prudent step by a ruler interested in supporting the population and the clergy, who enjoyed authority among the laity. Indeed, unlike many Greek territories under Frankish and Italian rule, there were practically no major uprisings of the local population in Achaia in the thirteenth century.⁸ The policy of religious tolerance followed by the princes of Villehardouin became the reason for the relatively stable relations between the Franks and the Greeks of the Principality. This same fragment also contains the very remarkable lines “*prayers to the ruler of Heaven for the entire Christian world.*”⁹ They seem to reflect the idea, either of the prince or

³ X τ M, 2089–2095.

⁴ Angold 2008, p. 741.

⁵ Gottsmann & Winkelbauer (eds.), *Die Register* 2014, 59–60, № 37.

⁶ Ilieva 1991, p. 217.

⁷ X τ M, 7771–7795.

⁸ Ilieva 1991, p. 180.

⁹ X τ M, 7780.

of the author, attributed to Villehardouin, that the Greeks and Latins, despite the contradictions between them, constitute a single whole. The appeal to the general Christian idea seems more consistent with the time of compilation of the text of the Chronicle in the first half of the fourteenth century when the Principality of Achaea entered a state of political crisis and part of the Frankish nobility actively advocated an alliance with the Greeks. It is also noteworthy that the text uses the word “βασιλέα”¹⁰ to relation to God in a source created in the Frankish milieu and expressing sympathy for the Latins, who professed predominantly Catholicism. The local situation on the peninsula at that time differed from the general imperial one, which was still characterized by greater hostility in relation to Western Christians. In particular, the anonymous chronicler does not report anything about the relations between representatives of different branches of Christianity after the adoption of the Union of Lyons, outrageous for the Greeks (1274), even when describing the circumstances of the conclusion of the “eternal” peace in the Peloponnese in 1289. This suggests either the low activity of religious contacts in that period or the secondary importance of religious affiliation in the Peloponnese in everyday life.

The religious aspect of everyday life in the Peloponnese is also revealed in a fragment of the French version of the Chronicle of the Morea about the uprising of the Archons of Skorta in response to the attempt of Prince Philip of Savoy (1301–1307) to re-collect taxes from them in 1305. The chronicler reports that from among the inhabitants of Skorta were chosen two “*the most sensible and eloquent of their comrades*” – certain Guillaume Macri and Nicole Zilliamary, who went to negotiate with the governor (κεφαλή) of the Morea in Mystras under the guise of pilgrims to Byzantine Lacedaemon.¹¹ Thus, pilgrimages of the Greeks of the Principality of the Achaea to the territory of the Greeks were commonplace at the beginning of the fourteenth century and did not encounter obstacles from the Latin nobility.

Interfaith contradictions in the Peloponnese are recorded by sources of the first half of the fourteenth century. Mostly they consisted of active calls from the papal throne to maintain the purity of the Catholic faith in Romania.¹² In particular, in a letter dated 1 October 1322, Pope John XXII (1316–1334) insisted that the Archbishop of Patras carefully monitor the continued loyalty of the Latins of Morea to the prince and the Catholic Church, which increasingly “*out of ignorance accepted the schismatic rites of the Greeks*,”¹³ which allows us to say that in Morea there was not so much an interfaith conflict, but, on the

¹⁰ X τ M, 7780. Spelling has been preserved.

¹¹ L de C, 924.

¹² Page 2008, p. 240.

¹³ Ann. Eccl. 1872, p. 187.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

contrary, a rapprochement between representatives of two Christian churches. The Pope's dissatisfaction of this situation was directed at the religious tolerance that had developed in the Principality, which was disadvantageous to the Catholic Church, which actively advocated for the unification of Western and Eastern Christians under the auspices of Rome. During the pontificate of John XXII, these aspirations were also reinforced by the long-standing interest of the Byzantine Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282–1328) in an alliance with the Catholic Church and his desire to end the schism.¹⁴ Also, from the above message of the Pope, it can be concluded that in this region the practice of joint celebration of church services and rituals by the Latins and Greeks of Achaia was probably widespread, but not frequent cases of change of religion (which, however, should also have taken place). Apparently, because of the long and close proximity, the mental and cultural boundaries between Western and Eastern Christians in the Principality of the Achaia were no longer so keenly felt by its population. The attendance of Greek church services by Latins, as well as the admission of Greeks to Catholic masses, testifies, first of all, to the increased tolerance of representatives of the two Christian churches towards each other, as well as a general softening of intercultural and interfaith interaction at the everyday level.

At the same time, after the conquest, not only the Franks but also the Venetians settled in the Peloponnese. In Coron and Modon, which were ceded to Venice, the Greek bishops were forced to live outside the city walls.¹⁵ We do not find such demands in the sources of the Principality of the Achaia, where the Franks initially relied on dialogue with the Orthodox population. However, in the Venetian cities of the Peloponnese they also relied on cooperation with the local Greek population, and, if possible, in a religious direction. It is important to note that Venice's system of colonial administration in the Eastern Mediterranean was not uniform. The Venetian regime in Corona and Modon was very different from Crete, where the Greek population was completely ousted from the spheres of government.¹⁶ Despite the initial distrust of the Greek population, especially in matters of protecting trading posts, the Venetians as a whole, over more than two centuries of rule, showed themselves to be very pragmatic rulers.

In Coron and Modon there appears to have been no ban on interfaith Greco-Latin marriages, at least from the second third of the fourteenth century, as archival documents evidence. The first mention of a Venetian - Greek marriage in the Peloponnese dates to 1333. We know about this marriage thanks to a receipt given on 21 June in Modon by a Venetian named Giovanino to his

¹⁴ Hussey 2010, p. 255.

¹⁵ Coureas 2014, pp. 153–154.

¹⁶ Chrysostomides 2011, p. 156.

wife Stamatia (Σταματία) that he had received her dowry of 120 hyperpers.¹⁷ In the document from Coron dated October 29, 1370, Giovanni, son of the now deceased Michele Latino, appointed his mother Irene as his confidant.¹⁸ Considering that the son of a Venetian by 1370 had the right to legal capacity, the marriage of his parents was concluded much earlier. Considering the lack of tradition among Latins to name children with Greek names,¹⁹ we can confidently say that Giovanni was the son of a mixed marriage between a Venetian man and a Greek woman.

But there was another side to the interfaith interaction between the Venetians and the Greeks of Coron and Modon. Being ready for dialogue with the local population, the Venetian central administration nevertheless sought to prevent the serious integration of its citizens into Byzantine society. These intentions were manifested in the prohibitions on any Greek monk or priest to perform the sacraments for the Latins in the territories controlled by the Commune.²⁰ The Peloponnese was no exception, especially during periods of crisis in the Republic's relations with Byzantium. Thus, on October 4, 1356, the Venetian Senate decided to prohibit the Greek "schismatic bishop" from freely performing all church rites.²¹ This suggests a serious religious rapprochement between the Greeks and Venetians, which was decidedly not beneficial for the Republic for several reasons, primarily for fear of losing these trading posts out of control due to the growing influence of the Greek hierarchs.

Returning to the decree of 1356, the Latin bishop and canons were free to settle in Modon and free to leave it if necessary.²² In addition, the Commune expressed its intention to support Catholic priests living in Coron and Modon.²³ The content of this document shows that Coron and Modon in the middle of the fourteenth century experienced a serious shortage of church personnel. Perhaps this situation arose due to the consequences of the plague epidemics or was associated with the reluctance of Latin clergy to serve in the Peloponnese (which is supported by the clause in the decree on the exemption of the clergy from taxes). One way or another, church positions were vacant, and this situation caused an additional danger of the local Latin population turning to the services of Orthodox clergy and the growth of their authority as spiritual leaders. Thus, the Republic's decisions regarding Orthodox priests in

¹⁷ Nanetti (ed.), *Documenta* 1999, 88. № 1.56.

¹⁸ Nanetti (ed.), *Documenta* 1999, 135. № 3.7.

¹⁹ Lock 1995, p. 291.

²⁰ Chrysostomides 2011, p. 165.

²¹ Thiriet (ed.), *Régestes* 1958, pp. 84–85, № 307.

²² Thiriet (ed.), *Régestes* 1958, pp. 84–85, № 307.

²³ Thiriet (ed.), *Régestes* 1958, p. 85.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

the cases considered were aimed precisely at suppressing active interaction, the practice of which had by that time also developed in the Venetian territories of the Peloponnese.

The confessional separation of the Latins from the Greeks persisted in the Venetian territories of the Peloponnese into the fifteenth century. Grand Ecclesiarch of Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos, who accompanied Emperor John VIII Palaiologos (1425–1448) and Patriarch Joseph II (1416–1439) to the Council of Florence,²⁴ recorded in his memoirs the religious contradictions between the Greek and Latin clergy of Modon. On the way to Italy, the delegation made a stop in the Peloponnese, and Syropoulos provides unkind information about the Venetian government, which received the patriarch with disrespect. In addition, he cites the story of Metropolitan Modon about the separate performance of religious rites by Orthodox and Catholics.²⁵ Moreover, Syropoulos writes about the reproaches that they met from the local Greek population, stopping again in Modon on the way back from the Council.²⁶ This makes it possible to conclude that, at least at the clergy level, religious disputes did not subside even after 200 years of cohabitation in these territories. However, in Coron, a joint religious procession was organized for the arrival of the delegation led by the Emperor himself: “*They walked in pairs: the Greek on one side and the Latin on the other, thus demonstrating unification.*”²⁷ This information is very important because it complements the source material of the fourteenth century, confirming the possibly increased duality in the interfaith relations of the Latins and Greeks. Under the strict leadership of the Venetian Republic, daily contacts between Orthodox and Catholics could (and most often were) peaceful, but at the levels of political and church administration, the Republic, like the Orthodox clergy under its rule, could not allow rapprochement.

One of the key features of interfaith interaction during the reign of Byzantine Despot Manuel Kantakouzenos (1348–1380) was a desire to smooth out relation contradictions between the Greeks and the Latins. His father John VI Kantakouzenos noted that one of Manuel’s first actions in Morea was the conclusion of a peace treaty with the Principality of Achaia.²⁸ the main goal of this Greco-Latin alliance was to jointly defend the peninsula from external enemies (Catalans, Turks), since by the second half of the 14th century the situation in the region had become extremely tense. This unity led to fewer

²⁴ Kondyli et al. 2016, p. 11.

²⁵ Laurent (ed.), Les “Mémoires” 1971, p. 204, 12–15.

²⁶ Laurent (ed.), Les “Mémoires” 1971, p. 536. 8–18.

²⁷ Laurent (ed.), Les “Mémoires” 1971, pp. 22–24.

²⁸ Kant., III. 90. pp. 5–10.

interfaith conflicts in the Morea, which, in particular, was reflected in the correspondence between Manuel and Pope Gregory XI (1370–1378).²⁹ The Pope liked Manuel's leadership qualities, thanks to which he, together with the Franks, more than once held back the Turkish onslaught in the region, as well as his "*nobility*" and "*loyalty to Christianity*."³⁰ At the same time, the pope in his correspondence did not hide his hopes for the return of the Greek Church to the fold of Catholicism and saw in Manuel a link with his father, the ex-emperor and supporter of Hesychasm. The nature of interfaith interaction between the Greeks and Latins of the Morea was thus determined by the affiliation of its participants to a particular religious doctrine, and religious heterogeneity was observed within each of the societies of the Peloponnese.

The Byzantine world in the 14th century was disturbed not only by Uniate disputes, but also by the teachings of George Palamas, which divided the Orthodox Greeks into Palamites (hesychasts) and anti-Palamites. Representatives of each movement could have different views on the neighbours of another confession and build relationships with them in various ways. While the Hesychast program did not imply any rapprochement with the Latins, since Hesychasts considered them heretics, representatives of the Latinophile wing allowed alliance with Catholics. In the Byzantine Peloponnese, apparently, sympathy for the Latins in a religious sense did not spread due to the concentration of Hesychast monasticism in the main centers of the Despotate of the Morea.³¹ However, this did not at all mean a rejection of concordance at the everyday and situational political level: rather, on the contrary, rapprochement with the Franks in the last decades of the fourteenth century became a priority for the local Byzantine nobility, despite differences in religion.³² In general, interfaith contacts and conflicts between the Greeks and Latins of the Morea were determined by many external factors directly related to other areas of their interaction. Apparently, a high role for religious affiliation was assigned mainly to clergy and representatives of the intellectual community, while for most of the secular population the religion of their usual neighbours faded into the background.

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, part of the Greek aristocracy of the Peloponnese, who linked the prospects of their well-being with the Venetians, shared pro-Latin sympathies. These trends were reflected in the matrimonial policy of the Despots of Morea. In 1419 one of the local Greek nobility Nicholas Eudaimonoioannes took part in organizing the marriage of young

²⁹ Runciman 1980, p. 54.

³⁰ Ann. Eccl. 1880, pp. 234–235.

³¹ Medvedev 1973, p. 74.

³² Belorussova 2023, pp. 8–9.

Despot Theodore II Palaiologos (1407–1443). He went to Italy to arrange the marriage of the Despot and his brother, the future Emperor John VIII, with representatives of the Italian nobility.³³ The marriage of Theodore II to Cleopa (or Cleofa) Malatesta, contracted in 1421, was part of a project initiated by Pope Martin V (1417–1431) and Emperor Manuel II in the late 1410s to organize a crusade. The marriage of Theodore II with Cleopa Malatesta was soon marked by a conflict between the spouses on religious grounds. Traditionally, Latin noble ladies, marrying Greeks from the ruling families, converted to Orthodoxy. In the case of the marriage of a Despot with a relative of the Pope, special agreements took place since on 8 April 1418, Pope Martin V officially allowed Latin princesses to marry Palaiologoi, provided they maintained the Catholic faith.³⁴ On 29 March 1419, the Despot of Morea promised his future wife to respect her religious beliefs: she was allowed to have a chaplain who would perform rituals according to Western models, to maintain her habits and the Italian way of life.³⁵ In the first half of the fifteenth century, the issue of relations between the two Christian churches was still acute, which was reflected in the Peloponnese.

Soon after the marriage, Theodore tried to persuade his wife to accept Orthodoxy. This is confirmed by a letter from a relative and probably Cleopa's maid of honour, Battissa Sforza da Montefeltro, addressed to Pope Martin V (ca. 1425). She called on the pope to come to the aid of Despina, who was exhausted, in her words, by "*domestic enmity and internal struggle*" with her husband,³⁶ which indicates a conflict of customs and traditions in Mystras between the Orthodox majority and the Catholic retinue of Cleopa Malatesta. The difficulties that Despina and her Latin circle had to face in Morea are also evidenced by two letters from the pope: to Theodore II and Cleopa, which probably followed as a reaction to Battissa's letters. These letters are undated, but the time of their writing can be placed between 1425 and 1429.³⁷ In the letter to Cleopa, Martin V urged his niece to defend the Catholic faith and expressed fears that, due to the Orthodox milieu Despina would become accustomed to Eastern rites.³⁸ The question of preserving her Catholic faith, therefore, was fundamental for the papacy. On the part of the Latins, and primarily Rome, the marriage of the Palaiologos to Italians meant the opportunity to strengthen the influence of the Catholic Church on the political elite of Byzantium.

³³ Necipoğlu 2009, p. 264.

³⁴ Medvedev 1973, p. 34.

³⁵ Λαμπρος (ed.), *Παλαιολόγεια*, IV, 102–103.

³⁶ Iorga (ed.), *Notes*, II, p. 197.

³⁷ Zakythinos 1932, p. 189.

³⁸ Ronchey 2000, p. 522.

In the letter to Theodore, the pope recalled the project for the union of churches, which the Despot's father had been working on, and the importance of preserving the opportunity for Cleopas to adhere to Catholic rites, as well as the need to achieve pan-Christian unity, which his discord with his wife was jeopardizing.³⁹ The marital conflict probably reached its peak in 1429, when the Despot, tired of discord within the family, wished to retire to a monastery for a time.⁴⁰ Significantly, the intellectual elite of Mystras did not dislike the Latin Despina. Byzantine authors, despite her Catholic faith and Latin origin, characterized her exclusively positively and mourned her early death in 1433. Thus, Georgios Gemistos Plethon dedicated a monody prepared to her on the occasion of Cleopas' funeral. This source shows that Cleopa eventually accepted Greek customs and faith, as evidenced by the lines: "the proof of her piety is her reverence for God, which she demonstrated by prolonged prayers and fasts in accordance with our custom."⁴¹ Religious customs and rites are perhaps the key points both in papal correspondence and in this monody. Such markers of self-identification (as well as the otherness of their neighbours) were extremely important for the Latins and Greeks, since the religious traditions that accompanied his entire life occupied a special place in the life of a medieval person. This explains the persistence of all participants in religious confrontations in the Peloponnese, regardless of their reasons and political component.

Interfaith interaction in the Peloponnese, like any other relationship between Latins and Greeks in the Mediterranean, was seriously subject to change against the backdrop of the political challenges of the late Middle Ages. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Peloponnese became a contact zone, where the key to long-term and relatively peaceful coexistence was the very loyal strategies towards people of other faith, adopted in the first years of the Latin presence on the peninsula. As a result, for most of the Morean population (both Greeks and Latins), relationships with neighbours of other faiths were most often of a compromised nature, and over time, the cultural boundaries between them in everyday life were erased. Compromising forms of interfaith interaction between Latins and Greeks, based on the analyzed source material, seem to be more common than open conflicts specifically on religious grounds. The main prerequisite for religious rapprochement was long-term cohabitation in the same territory, thanks to which both Latins and Greeks adopted, perhaps unconsciously, each other's ritual traditions. Religious interaction between the Franks, Greek and Venetians of the Peloponnese was also determined by many external factors related to other areas of their relations.

³⁹ Zakythinos 1932, pp. 299–300.

⁴⁰ Medvedev 1973, p. 36.

⁴¹ Λαμπρος (ed.), *Παλαιολόγεια*, IV, p. 167.

THE CHURCH AND OTHERNESS

The obstacles to the rapprochement of the mixed population of the peninsula included the different political orientation of the Principality of Achaea, the Despotate of the Morea and the Venetian Coron and Modon, initially serious cultural differences and the stable disinterest of local authorities and/or the central administration in the further rapprochement of the Greek and Latin populations. The few religious conflicts were associated, as a rule, with specific figures – outsiders, representatives of the central government, and often had or acquired a pronounced political overtone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research is sponsored by the Russian Science Foundation (project № 22–18–00481 “Intercultural Communications in the Christian Mediterranean in the Context of Global Challenges in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: The Forms, Dynamics, and Results”).

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