

Emir O. FILIPOVIĆ:

St. Gregory, the Patron Saint of Bosnia*

This paper attempts to shed light on the fluctuating identity of the patron saint of medieval Bosnia. Using available written sources and surviving contemporary numismatic material from the fourteenth and fifteenth century, it presents a curious situation whereby in the late Middle Ages at least three different saints of the same name were revered as patrons of the realm. The author argues that the choice of the specific saints and the changes in their identity were motivated by the peculiar religious conditions in Bosnia where, in light of the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans, the existence of the schismatic Bosnian Church increased external pressure on the ruling structures within the Kingdom of Bosnia to finally accept Latin Christianity as the official state religion.

Keywords: St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Gregory the Great, St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, Bosnia, charters, coins



Numerous written documents from the fourteenth and fifteenth century, as well as surviving contemporary numismatic evidence, indicate that the patron saint of Bosnia during the Middle Ages was St. Gregory. However, the same sources also show that during those two centuries at least three different saints of the same name were revered as patrons of the realm: St. Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 329–390), also known as *the Theologian*, Pope Gregory I (ca. 540–604), i.e. *St. Gregory the Great*, and St. Gregory Thaumaturgus (ca. 213–270), *the Miracle-Worker*.¹ The choice of these specific patron saints was

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¹ On St. Gregory as the patron saint of Bosnia in the Middle Ages see: GLUŠAĆ 1924; SOLOVIEV 1949; LOVRENOVIĆ 2008.

obviously motivated by the peculiar religious conditions in Bosnia where, in light of the Ottoman expansion in the Balkans, the existence of the schismatic Bosnian Church increased external pressure on the ruling structures within the Kingdom of Bosnia to finally accept Latin Christianity as the official state religion. This paper will seek to demonstrate how the fluctuating religious policy of the Bosnian rulers in the fifteenth century reflected on the identity of the patron saint and will attempt to understand these changes within the context of the complex religious and political situation in Bosnia at the time.

The roots of unconventional Christianity in Bosnia

The land of Bosnia begins to appear under that name in written sources from the middle of the tenth century,² but the beginnings and development of this secluded mountainous country in the early period of its existence are still shrouded in mystery.³ The lack of virtually any extensive sources or archaeological material from that time does not allow us to follow this process with any kind of certainty. We only know that its political reality in the following centuries was shaped by the conflict between Byzantium and Hungary for supremacy over the broader region of the Balkans.⁴ It is in these circumstances that more and more information about Bosnia emerges during the second half of the twelfth century. From then on, we know that Bosnian rulers bore the title of “ban” and were under the influence of the Hungarian kings, while maintaining a certain degree of independence in matters of trade, economy, military, and religion. The liberty in religious issues was specifically manifested through the existence of a Bosnian diocese which was headed by a presumably native Bosnian bishop, and through direct contacts and correspondence between the ruler of Bosnia and the pope in Rome.⁵

But it is exactly in light of the growing Bosnian autonomy that at the very end of the twelfth century its ruler, Ban Kulin (ca. 1180–1203), was denounced to the pope and accused by one neighbouring lord of receiving and protecting heretics in his realm.⁶ Pope Innocent III subsequently wrote to the king of Hungary urging him to take swift and decisive action against the insubordinate ruler of Bosnia. Protesting his innocence in the whole matter, believing that the accused heretics were actually faithful Christians, Kulin allowed them to be investigated by a papal emissary who managed to extract an admission and promise from the leaders of the group that they will in future abstain from the sins they had committed in the past. Their written abjuration was confirmed

² DAI p. 160–161.

³ See: ŽIVKOVIĆ 2010.

⁴ MAKK 1989.

⁵ DUJMOVIĆ – JUKIĆ 2010.

⁶ The letter was published in VMS p. 6. Nr. 10.

by the Hungarian king, Emeric in 1203 and the whole issue seemed to have been settled without much discussion.⁷

But the coerced renunciation did not alter the unconventional religious situation drastically; Bosnian bishops remained apparently ignorant of the Holy Christian rites and could not speak a word of Latin.⁸ Using this as justification, the Catholic establishment of Hungary attempted to further destabilize Bosnia in order to gain more control over the region which was slowly slipping out of their hands. However, in Bosnia the introduction of Latin Christianity was perceived to be associated with the establishment of greater Hungarian political influence, so this process was opposed by the local Bosnian elites who considered the Hungarian and Catholic advances as foreign, strange and potentially destructive to the autonomous position they had enjoyed thus far.

In the absence of a military solution to the problem, the Hungarian kings and bishops applied pressure on the pope to replace the noncompliant Slavic Bosnian bishop with a Hungarian prelate and to subject the Bosnian diocese to the metropolitan see of Kalocsa in Hungary. When this did not have the desired effect, they managed to remove the existing ecclesiastical structures from Bosnia, including the bishop and his chapter, and transfer them to Đakovo in Slavonia which was then a part of the diocese of Pécs.⁹ By dislocating the see of the diocese and placing its administration into the hands of Hungarian priests, King Bela IV and Pope Innocent IV had hoped to exert greater political and religious control over Bosnia, but their common project ultimately backfired. Instead of reaffirming Hungarian political influence and Latin Christianity in Bosnia, this seemingly insignificant landlocked state remained outside of firmer reach of the Hungarian kings and its doors were firmly shut to institutional Catholicism.¹⁰ It would take more than six centuries until regular diocesan Catholic hierarchy was reintroduced in Bosnia.¹¹

This development did not seem to deter the thirteenth-century Bosnian elites who soon found a replacement for the relocated see of the Bosnian diocese. The solution consisted of establishing a kind of a national Bosnian Church which was in essence a fusion of the old monastic order accused of heretical practices with the remnants of the ecclesiastical institution that had existed there previously. This church had its own local bishop of Bosnian origin, a distinct hierarchical structure, its own liturgy performed in the Slavic language, its particular religious teachings, influenced by western Christianity, but even more so by eastern monastic traditions, and was considered schismatic and heretical both by the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Likewise, members of the Bosnian Church called themselves “Christians” and also

⁷ For the text of the document, see: ČOŠKOVIĆ 2003. p. 113-115. Cf. MAJNARIĆ 2017; DALL’AGLIO 2019a; DALL’AGLIO 2019b.

⁸ CDCDS III. p. 361–362. Nr. 315.

⁹ ŠIDAK 1955; BRANDT 1970; BASLER 1973; BARABÁS 2014. p. 252, n. 697; BARABÁS 2017. p. 22.

¹⁰ DŽAJA 1985.

¹¹ GAVRANOVIĆ 1935. See also: DŽAJA 1992.

assumed their religion to be “the one and true apostolic faith”, meaning that the established versions of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity were thought of as heretical. To the Bosnian Christians, their Church was nothing else but a continuation of the dislocated bishopric, and a shelter which protected their traditional understanding of religion, language and identity.¹²

Due to a lack of sources, the early history of this institution is virtually unknown. For instance, its first mention in contemporary sources is dated to the 1320s, that is to say more than 70 years after the diocesan see was removed from Bosnia. But by then it was clearly an established and structurally fully formed organization.¹³ The ascent of the Bosnian Church corresponds to the political rise, expansion, and integration of Bosnia in the first half of the fourteenth century under the rule of Ban Stjepan II (1322–1353), and it is precisely the sources emanating from the chancery of this ruler that we first encounter the association of St. Gregory with Bosnia.

St. Gregory: more than just a dynastic patron

Since there was no Catholic bishop in Bosnia who would be able to invest and anoint the ruler, Ban Stjepan II had to rely on the Bosnian Church to authorize, legitimize, consecrate and bless his reign.¹⁴ In neighbouring Hungary the monarchy and the Catholic Church canonized rulers to strengthen the position of their royal descendants,¹⁵ and the Orthodox Church did likewise in Serbia with rulers from the Nemanjić dynasty.¹⁶ However, it seems that the atypical religious situation in Bosnia prevented the same models being applied to its rulers from the Kotromanić dynasty since none of them were ever pronounced holy or blessed by the Bosnian Church.¹⁷ Therefore, other forms of religious legitimation had to be employed. The veneration of saints was particularly widespread in the coastal towns of Dalmatia where each commune had its own patron saint,¹⁸ and in that regard Ragusa, where the cult of St. Blaise was especially strong,¹⁹ might have been a significant influence. Apart from the cultural and economic connections which existed between Bosnia and Ragusa at that time, the two were also linked with religious ties from the past century when the Bosnian diocese was subjected to the Ragusan metropolitan archbishop. Thus, the cult of St. Blaise might have paved way for St. Gregory, a saint evidently revered by the Bosnian Christians and members of the Kotromanić dynasty, to assume an exalted position in the ruling ideology of the Bosnian ban, as can be discerned from the existing documents.

¹² The extant literature on the Bosnian Church is vast, presenting diverse and often even conflicting interpretations. This is a selection of the most authoritative works published thus far: ŠIDAK 1975; FINE 1975; ČIRKOVIĆ 1987; ČOŠKOVIĆ 2005.

¹³ ČOŠKOVIĆ 2009.

¹⁴ See: LOVRENOVIĆ 2005a. p. 193–237.

¹⁵ KLANICZAY 2000. On royal sanctity see also: RIDYARD 1988; BOUREAU 2006.

¹⁶ POPOVIĆ 2006; POPOVIĆ 2016; MARJANOVIĆ-DUŠANIĆ 2007.

¹⁷ See: FILIPOVIĆ 2019b.

¹⁸ MEDVED – SELAK 2015. p. 180–189; BORIĆ 2016; ODAK MIHAILOVIĆ 2016.

¹⁹ NAGY 1972; JANEKOVIĆ RÖMER 2008.

In the first available charter, issued by Ban Stjepan II to count Vukoslav Hrvatinčić in 1323, we encounter a rather peculiar intitulation of the Bosnian ruler. Namely, he styles himself as: "I Saint Gregory, called Ban Stjepan, Bosnian lord".²⁰ Three years later he issued another charter to the same recipient with an almost exact title: "I Saint Gregory, called Ban Stjepan, son of lord Ban Stjepan, by the Grace of God lord to all the Bosnian lands...";²¹ and the title is again repeated in a charter issued in 1329.²² From these examples it seems that St. Gregory was much more than just a dynastic patron as they clearly show that the saint was somehow supposed to be embodied or incarnated in the person of the Bosnian ban, who by the Grace of God assumed the throne to rule the Bosnian lands, defend his subjects and dispense justice. The name of Saint Gregory was obviously invoked to sacralise the legal actions of the ruler and to afford him an aura of sanctity.²³

However, in a charter issued in 1351, this title was somewhat altered. The main idea seemed to have remained the same, but the order was inverted: "I Ban Stjepan, called the servant of Saint Gregory".²⁴ It is unclear what caused this modification and what had changed in the meanwhile. Even though it is not a definitive answer, one must be aware that from the early 1340s Ban Stjepan II embraced a different, more moderate religious course, allowing the establishment of a Bosnian Franciscan Vicariate and intensifying his dealings with the pope.²⁵ It seems that when he died in 1353, Ban Stjepan II was a Catholic and was buried in a Franciscan church.²⁶ The change of St. Gregory's role in the title is perhaps a trace of the small amendments that had to be made in order to reconcile Ban Stjepan II's new religious policies with the teaching of the Bosnian Church which was still supported by the nobility of the realm.²⁷

Almost the exact same title is preserved on a charter of Ban Stjepan II's brother, count Vladislav, issued in 1353 in the name of his fifteen year old son, Ban Tvrtko, the designated successor to Ban Stjepan II: "I servant of God and of Saint Gregory, called lord count Vladislav".²⁸ No further deviations from this title were made in the following period, and the young Ban Tvrtko also titled

²⁰ THALLÓCZY 1914. p. 11; SOLOVIEV 1949. p. 264, calls this "une intitulation bizarre".

²¹ THALLÓCZY 1914. p. 7.

²² THALLÓCZY 1914. p. 14.

²³ BLAGOJEVIĆ 2011. p. 119–120, claims that this unusual title was constructed by "theologically uneducated scribes" who worked in heretical surroundings. However, aside from the fact that Ban Stjepan's designation was obviously not a result of scribal error, since the same title appears in three different documents composed in the period of almost a decade, it can also be pointed out that scribes in the Middle Ages had no authority to create or define royal titles.

²⁴ THALLÓCZY 1914. p. 17.

²⁵ DŽAMBO 1991. p. 77–82.

²⁶ LOVRENOVIĆ 2005b. p. 298, 304.

²⁷ LOVRENOVIĆ, 2008. p. 17.

²⁸ THALLÓCZY 1914. p. 19.

himself in 1366 as: "I servant of God and of Saint Gregory, called lord Ban Tvrtko".²⁹

There are a few observations which can clarify certain issues regarding these documents. Namely, it has been noticed that St. Gregory is only mentioned in those charters issued to the Bosnian nobility which adhered to the Bosnian Church. The Saint is not invoked in any of the contemporary charters issued to the Catholic merchant commune of Ragusa, nor indeed in any letters sent from Bosnia to Venice or Hungary.³⁰ This could possibly mean that the cult of Saint Gregory was particularly strong among the Bosnian Christians, and was something that was nurtured only internally within Bosnia itself. The apparent lack of any further diplomatic sources prevents us from reaching any other concrete conclusions.

The document from 1366 is the last one which mentions Saint Gregory in the title of the Bosnian ruler. After 1377, when Ban Tvrtko had himself crowned as king of the Serbs and Bosnia, he and his successors adopted a new name – Stefan (Gr. *στέφανος*), the crowned one – borrowed from the ruling ideology of the Serbian Nemanjić dynasty.³¹ This meant that from then on St. Gregory was omitted from the royal title and was not invoked anymore in any of the existing diplomatic documents. Furthermore, in his expansionist policy towards the Adriatic, King Tvrtko established two towns on the seacoast, one named after St. Stephen,³² and the other after St. Michael.³³ However, this did not mean that St. Gregory's role radically diminished after the establishment of the Bosnian Kingdom. In fact, the earliest preserved charter of Tvrtko as king, issued to Ragusa in June of 1378, was composed and written in the "royal court in Trstivnica ... in the church of St. Gregory",³⁴ which shows that the chapel in the capital of Bosnia was also dedicated to the patron saint.³⁵

Which St. Gregory was the patron saint of Bosnia?

The one question that the analysed sources do not speak of, is the identity of this St. Gregory who was so appreciated and honoured in Bosnia. *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia* lists at least ten different individuals named Gregory who were considered as saints prior to the fourteenth century, and since the saints' cognomen does not appear in written documents we must turn to coins as a completely different kind of evidence in order to follow the story of the

²⁹ RAČKI 1889, p. 81–82. The same title is used in one other charter from 1366 which has only been preserved in the form of a transcription probably made in the late seventeenth century. Hrvatski spomenici, p. 85–86. Cf. ŠIDAK 1954.

³⁰ SOLOVIEV 1949, p. 265.

³¹ The standard work on Tvrtko's coronation and its political implications is still ĆIRKOVIĆ 1964; ĆIRKOVIĆ 2014. For a different approach which reconsiders the location and the identity of the person who crowned the king see: LOVRENOVIĆ 1999. On the dynastic name of Stefan see: MARJANOVIĆ-DUŠANIĆ 1997, p. 42–59.

³² SSPP I/1, p. 84. Cf. HRABAK 1978.

³³ Akta i povelje I/1, p. 179. Cf. TOŠIĆ 1976.

³⁴ SSPP I/1, p. 82.

³⁵ ANĐELIĆ 1973, p. 165–171.

Bosnian patron. Namely, both Ban Stjepan II and Ban Tvrtko minted currency which showed Jesus Christ on the obverse and an image of the enthroned ruler on the reverse. But after Tvrtko's coronation in 1377, he ceased to produce his own coins and allowed the Ragusans to have a monopoly on trade and coinage in Bosnia.³⁶ Therefore, these are not helpful in determining which of the many possible St. Gregorys was the Bosnian patron and protector.

After a gap of almost 60 years, the next ruler who minted coins in Bosnia was Tvrtko's son, appropriately named Tvrtko II Tvrtković (1420–1443). In the mid-1430s he began striking coins with a representation of St. Gregory on the reverse, which included an inscription identifying this saint as Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 329–390), the fourth century Archbishop of Constantinople (Figure 1, 2).³⁷ On the coins the saint is portrayed as wearing a long-draped toga with an episcopal crozier in his right and a book in his left hand. He has no discernible beard, there is an aureole above his head and to his left side there is a fleur-de-lys which had become one of the most prominent political symbols of medieval Bosnia. Even though the legend on the coin does not claim that St. Gregory of Nazianzus was indeed the patron saint of Bosnia or the personal guardian of the ruler, this can nevertheless be deduced since it was customary to adorn medieval currency with an image of a holy protector.³⁸



Fig 1. Coin of King Tvrtko II Tvrtković minted between 1435 and 1443
Numismatik Lanz München, Auction 152, Lot 167 (1 July 2011)

Rv. 2 GRAGORIVS NAZIANVS

Fig 2. Inscription on the reverse side of King Tvrtko II's coin

³⁶ This policy was also maintained by his immediate successors who abstained from minting their own currency while permitting the circulation of Ragusan coins. See: REŠETAR 1924. p. 332–333.

³⁷ RENJEO 1943. p. 259, 280–282.

³⁸ In Ragusa, which was a great influence on Bosnia in financial and trade matters, almost all coins of that time bore an image of the commune's patron St. Blaise. REŠETAR 1924. p. 249–250.

Also known by the exalted cognomen “the Theologian”, Gregory was one of the most accomplished writers and orators of his time. He was born in Cappadocia in Asia Minor, and studied rhetoric and philosophy in Nazianzus, Caesarea, Alexandria and Athens.³⁹ As a saint he is revered both in Eastern and Western Christianity, and his identity cannot be used as an argument in the entirely modern dispute whether the Bosnian Church was more Catholic or more Orthodox in nature.

A few details from Gregory’s life and work might serve as an explanation why this particular saint might have been chosen to be the patron of Bosnia. Namely, in his formative years Gregory developed a close friendship with Basil of Caesarea (ca. 329–379) who is considered as the founder of the monastic traditions in the East.⁴⁰ It has already been pointed out that the Bosnian Church was essentially a monastic community which might well have followed the Basilian *Asketikon*.⁴¹

Moreover, in autumn of 379 Gregory of Nazianzus was appointed bishop in the imperial capital where he became the leader of the pro-Nicene community. In fact, the learned and eloquent author left extensive works which defined the classical Trinitarian doctrine both in the Greek and Latin world thus making Trinity the basic principle of orthodox Christianity.⁴² It seems that the Slavic-speaking Christians of the Balkans, and the members of the Bosnian Church in particular, especially cherished the Nicene Creed and the Nicene Fathers.⁴³ In the charters of Bosnian rulers and nobles who adhered to the Bosnian Church an oft-used sanction formula included the invoking of the 318 Holy Fathers of Nicea. Among others, this was the case in the charter of the Sanković brothers issued in 1391,⁴⁴ in the charter of Bosnian king Stefan Ostoja issued in 1409,⁴⁵ in two charters of Bosnian duke Sandalj Hranić issued in 1419 and 1420,⁴⁶ in a charter of Bosnian duke Radoslav Pavlović issued in 1420, and in two others issued a year later,⁴⁷ as well as in a charter of Bosnian duke Stjepan Vukčić issued in 1454.⁴⁸

Another reason why Gregory of Nazianzus could have been held in high regard by the Bosnian Christians is possibly down to the fact that he was the principal patron of St. Cyril (ca. 826–869) who was instrumental in the development of Slavic scriptures and liturgy.⁴⁹ The Cyrillic script, admittedly conceived by the early disciples of Cyril and Methodius, as well as the Slavic

³⁹ DALEY 2006. gives a detailed and comprehensive biography of the saint.

⁴⁰ FEDWICK 1981.

⁴¹ MILETIĆ 1957. p. 55–66; LOVRENOVIĆ 2008. p. 11–14; ĆOŠKOVIĆ 2005. p. 443–450. On the *Asketikon* see: SILVAS 2005.

⁴² BEELEY 2008. See also: ŠPIDLÍK 1971.

⁴³ BRKOVIĆ 1998. p. 273.

⁴⁴ Monumenta Serbica. p. 219.

⁴⁵ Monumenta Serbica. p. 273.

⁴⁶ Monumenta Serbica. p. 290, 303.

⁴⁷ Monumenta Serbica. p. 307, 312, 314.

⁴⁸ Monumenta Serbica. p. 468.

⁴⁹ ŠIDAK 1940. p. 137; HADŽIJAHIĆ 1985. p. 173; ŠPIDLÍK 1988.

liturgy, both represented a kind of a symbol of Bosnian cultural individuality in the struggle between Slavic and Latin Christianity that became so prevalent during the fifteenth century.⁵⁰ In fact, literacy in the Slavic vernacular became a strong bastion of defence against the Romanization and Latinization of Bosnia, which was fiercely resisted by the local aristocracy.

Therefore, acting perhaps as a link to the Slavic saints and their traditions, the image of St. Gregory was also minted on the reverse of the early coins issued by Tvrtko II's successor King Tomaš (1443–1461). He even struck coins with the Latin inscription *Sanctus Gregorius* on which the saint was depicted without a crozier, performing a blessing gesture with his right hand while holding a book in his left (Figure 3 , 4).⁵¹ However, the reign of King Tomaš corresponded to the time of the greatest Ottoman political, economic and military pressure on the Bosnian Kingdom.⁵² Understanding that he could not defend the country using only his own resources, Tomaš sought to ally himself as early as possible with the powers of Western Christendom.⁵³ But the Bosnian Church, accused of heresy, was a stumbling point in any negotiation attempted with the pope. The Bosnian king had to show that, unlike his predecessors, he personally did not support this institution, that he was outwardly a Catholic, and that he intended to steer the country openly on the course of Catholicism.⁵⁴



Fig 3. Coin of King Tomaš minted between 1443 and 1446
Numismatik Lanz München, Auction 152, Lot 168 (1 July 2011)

⁵⁰ DVORNIK 1964; SOULIS 1965. See also: HADŽIJAHIĆ 1985; STERK 2012.

⁵¹ RENGJELO 1943. p. 263, 284–285.

⁵² FILIPOVIĆ 2019a. p. 343–401.

⁵³ See: FILIPOVIĆ 2016.

⁵⁴ On 19 June 1447 Pope Nicholas V took Tomaš and his successors under the protection of the Holy Apostolic See, stating that he was the first among the kings of Bosnia to reject Manichaeism and openly accept Catholicism: "*Hinc est, quod cum Carissimus in Christo filius noster Stephanus Thomas Rex Bosne Illustris, spretis atque abiectis Manicheorum erroribus, quibus irretitus fuerat, primus inter Reges Bosne sanctam fidem catholicam acceptaverit, ipsamque publice confessus fuerit [...]*" – VMH p. 237. Nr. 395.

Rv. $\overline{S\bar{A}} - \overline{GR}$ (*Sanctus Gregorius*).

Fig 4. Inscription on the reverse side of King Tomaš's coin

The changing identity of the Bosnian patron saint

One of the visible signs that Bosnia had finally adopted Catholicism as the official state religion was the changing identity of its patron saint, as reflected on the coins of King Tomaš, and his son Stjepan Tomašević (1461–1463). Both rulers replaced St. Gregory of Nazianzus with an image of St. Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604),⁵⁵ who was pope of the Roman Catholic Church from 590 to 604.⁵⁶ Aside from the circular inscription which reveals his identity, on the coins the pope is shown as a figure wearing full pontifical robes with a papal mitre which is surrounded by an aureole. In his left hand he is holding a crozier while performing a gesture of benediction with his right hand (Figure 5, 6).

The choice of St. Gregory the Pope was a skilful compromise, whereby the name of the saint remained the same, thus facilitating a smoother transition into Catholicism. Even though the eastern saint was venerated in Latin Christianity, his replacement – a Roman pope – obviously represented a clear statement of intent on the part of the Bosnian king. No Saint could encapsulate the recently restored ties between Bosnia and Rome better than Pope Gregory I. However, the change still showed that the cult of St. Gregory was deeply ingrained into the consciousness of the king's immediate family as well as his Bosnian subjects and that they had to be appeased somehow. It seems that, at least on a superficial level, it was important to keep St. Gregory as the patron saint, and that common believers did not get the chance to be overly concerned about the particulars of his true identity.



Fig 5. Coin of King Stjepan Tomašević minted between 1461 and 1463
Numismatik Lanz München, Auction 152, Lot 173 (1 July 2011)

⁵⁵ RENGJE0 1943. p. 266, 269, 286–288.

⁵⁶ MOORHEAD 2005.

Rv. S. GRAGO — RI • PAPA

Fig 6. Inscription on the reverse side of King Stjepan Tomašević's coin

But this story has one more final and dramatic twist. After the death of King Tomaš in summer of 1461, his son and successor sought to finish his father's business and complete the transformation of the Bosnian Kingdom into a completely Catholic realm by having the royal crown and bishops sent to him directly from Rome. After ascending to the throne, he sent an emotional message to Pope Pius II:

"I am informed that the Turkish emperor Mohamed intends to attack me with his forces the following summer, and that he has already prepared everything he needs. I cannot stand up to such a force by myself. I have begged the Hungarians, Venetians and George the Albanian to help me in these times of trouble, and I beg you the same. I am not asking for hills of gold, but I would be satisfied if my enemies and subjects knew that your help would not be lacking. If the Bosnians see that they will not be alone in this war, but that they will be helped by others, they will fight more bravely, and the Turks will think twice about entering my country, where the passes are very tight, and the fortresses in many places unreachable, preventing easy entrance into my Kingdom. Your predecessor Eugene offered the crown to my father and wanted to establish episcopal churches in Bosnia. My father rejected that, not to cause the ire of the Turks, because he was a new Christian and did not yet expel the heretics and Manicheans from his Kingdom. I have been baptised as a child, I have learned the Latin language, and I firmly observe the Catholic faith, so I am not afraid of the things that my father was afraid of. Therefore, I want to accept the crown and the holy bishops from you, which will be a clear sign that you will not leave me in the time of trouble. With your aid I will bring my subjects more confidence, and to my enemies more fear."⁵⁷

Pope Pius II duly obliged and sent the crown, but while preparing his coronation, the king again sent messengers to Rome, enquiring about the matter of the patron saint. His letter was not preserved, but the pope's response survived. Replying positively to the king's pleas, in St. Peter's in Rome on 7 November 1461 Pius II issued a document stating that "the more we praise, venerate and pray to the glorious saints of God, the more we can hope to aid the heavy and frequent miseries, calamities and needs of the Christian

⁵⁷ The contents of this letter are relayed by Pope Pius II himself in his famous *Commentarii*, p. 534–535.

faithful”.⁵⁸ Moreover, the pope claimed that the Bosnian king, Stjepan had sent him messengers, saying that in his kingdom everybody publicly held and considered blessed Gregory the Miracle-Worker to be the patron and defender of the said kingdom. Therefore, answering the pleas of the king and his subjects, who desire to make this Saint’s intercessions with God more effective, pope Pius II used his apostolic authority to decree, will and command, that the feast of Saint Gregory, which falls on the 16th day before the Kalends of December [*sic!*], ought to be celebrated in Bosnia, including the octaves, in the same way that the church celebrates many other such feast days.⁵⁹

So, in addition to the two Gregorys that had previously been considered patron saints of Bosnia, this document introduces the third one – St. Gregory Thaumaturgus (ca. 213–270). Also known as the Miracle-Worker, Gregory was a third-century bishop of Neocaesarea in the area of Pontus in Asia Minor.⁶⁰ He is a saint both in Western and Eastern Christian traditions, and the Pope clearly stated that everybody in Bosnia considered him to be the patron and protector of the kingdom. Does this mean that the unspecified St. Gregory from fourteenth century sources was St. Gregory the Miracle-Worker all along? If he was, then what was the point of introducing the image of St. Gregory Nazianzen on King Tvrtko II’s coins and did that modification reflect any fundamental religious changes in Bosnia?⁶¹

Concluding remarks

The deficiency of any kind of direct evidence does not allow us to give categorical answers to the posed questions other than stating that the issue of the patron saint was obviously perceived as fundamentally important. However, certain aspects of the Miracle-Worker’s cult can be emphasized as relevant to the Christians of medieval Bosnia. Namely, St. Gregory Thaumaturgus was an early Father of the Church, described as a recipient of the “Revealed Creed” and as such certainly must have been respected by those

⁵⁸ “PIUS EPISCOPUS etc. Ad futuram rei memoriam. Gloriosos dei sanctos quanto maiori prosequimur laudum et orationum veneratione, eo maiora et frequentiora Christifidelium miseriis, calamitatibus ac necessitatibus sperare possumus adiumenta” – VMH p. 371. Nr. 554. (7 November 1461)

⁵⁹ “Cum itaque Carissimus in Christo filius noster Stephanus Bosne Rex Illustris per suos oratores nobis significare curaverit, beatum Gregorium miraculosum nuncupatum, in eius regno Bosne pro patrono et defensore dicti regni publice ab omnibus haberi et reputari, eiusdem Regis et regnicolarum supplicationibus inclinati, cupientes dicti sancti suffragia et intercessionem apud deum reddere efficaciores, auctoritate apostolica et ex certa scientia decernimus, volumus et mandamus, festum diem eiusdem sancti Gregorii, qui dies in predicto regno esse dicitur XVI. Kal. Decembris [16 November], celebrari debere, etiam sub octava, prout multorum dei sanctorum festivitas ab ecclesia celebratur. Nulli ergo etc. nostre constitutionis, voluntatis et mandati etc. Datum Rome apud Sanctum Petrum Anno Incarnationis dominice MCCCCLXI, VII Idus Novembris. Anno Quarto” – VMH p. 371. Nr. 554.

⁶⁰ SLUSSER 1998; VAN DAM 1982; TELFER 1936.

⁶¹ Both SOLOVIEV 1949. p. 274, and LOVRENOVIĆ 2008. p. 25, argued in their works that St. Gregory Thaumaturgus was indeed the patron saint of Bosnia and the Kotromanić dynasty throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth century, but they did not explain why he was replaced by St. Gregory Nazianzen on the coins of Tvrtko II.

who claimed to follow “the true apostolic faith”.⁶² He also appealed to monastic communities since he was considered as a principal founder of ascetic life,⁶³ and this might have brought him to the attention of the Bosnian monks, some of who were well known for their austerity and monastic rigour.⁶⁴

But another, more viable reason to why the identity of St. Gregory the Miracle-Worker as the protector of the Kingdom was revealed so late in the history of Bosnia might be down to the quite common medieval practice of confusing the two eastern saints both of whom were called Gregory. Namely, as William Telfer puts it: “There are plentiful examples of mere ignorant or careless confusion in which the *Thaumaturge* receives the epithet *Nazianzen*, but it is probable that the *Thaumaturge* is meant”.⁶⁵ Furthermore, there seems to have been a conscious attempt to give St. Gregory the Miracle-Worker the title of *Theologian*, usually reserved for St. Gregory of Nazianzus, which only contributed to the misunderstanding. The two saints were also similarly portrayed in iconography – both as elderly bearded men embracing a codex with their left hand, and because both were bishops, one of Neocesarea and the other of Nazianzus, sometimes they were shown with episcopal croziers, as is the case on the described Bosnian coins. Both of them were eastern saints and early Church Fathers who dealt with the question of the Holy Trinity, making it even more difficult to distinguish between them.⁶⁶

Although it is difficult to believe that this was a mere mix-up created as a consequence of error or ignorance, confusion remains the only plausible explanation since the information provided by available sources makes it almost impossible to determine whether the St. Gregory invoked by Ban Stjepan II and Ban Tvrtko in the fourteenth century was either *Nazianzen* or *Thaumaturge*. Irrespective of this conundrum, the last Bosnian king was acutely aware that Bosnia needed a miracle and perhaps believed that a Miracle-Working saint would save his kingdom. He requested papal confirmation of the royal patron saint so that he could arrange his coronation ceremony to correspond with the feast day of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus – November 17.⁶⁷ But one thing is for sure – despite the best efforts of the King

⁶² These are the words used by Gost Radin, a high-ranking dignitary of the Bosnian Church, to describe his religion. His testament, composed in Ragusa in 1466, was discovered and published by TRUHELKA 1911. p. 372. In this case, the title of “apostolic” was intended to preserve the authenticity, origin, legitimacy and orthodoxy of the Bosnian Church, especially in relation to the two other Christian churches.

⁶³ TELFER 1936. p. 243.

⁶⁴ ĆIRKOVIĆ 1987. p. 220, 237.

⁶⁵ TELFER 1936. p. 245.

⁶⁶ One prominent example of confusing and equating saints is the case St. Procopius of Scythopolis [feast day: 8 July] and St. Procopius the Reader [feast day: 22 November]. See: ROSS BARKER 1913. p. 195–196. On the perceived significance of cognomens for saints, see: CERVA 2012. p. 520.

⁶⁷ The feast day of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus was traditionally celebrated on November 17. VAN DAM 1982. p. 277. However, in the papal document it is erroneously stated that the feast falls on the “sixteenth day before the Kalends of December”, meaning 16 November. The exact date of King Stjepan’s coronation is unknown and historians presume that it could have occurred on 17 November. See: LOVRENOVIĆ 2006. p. 345.

and the Pope, no miracle occurred. The Ottomans conquered Bosnia and beheaded King Stjepan Tomašević in Jajce in 1463.⁶⁸ In the new circumstances St. Gregory was quickly forgotten and soon replaced by other saints who, in the tradition of Bosnian Franciscans, assumed the role of patrons and protectors of Bosnian Catholics: St. Vitus, St. George and St. Elijah the Prophet.⁶⁹

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⁶⁸ See: FILIPOVIĆ 2012.

⁶⁹ Already by the beginning of the eighteenth century these saints were considered as “protectors and helpers of the whole Bosnian Kingdom”. MARGIĆ 1708. p. 18, 30, 39. In 1752 Pavao Dragičević, the Apostolic Vicar for Bosnia, managed to obtain official papal confirmation which proclaimed St. Elijah as the first and St. George as the second protector of the “Bosnian Kingdom”. JELENIĆ 1912. p. 203. See also: DUVNJAK 2008.

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