

## **The connection between Holy Mount Athos and the Ukrainian and Belarusian lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16<sup>th</sup> century**

### **Związki między Świętą Górą Atos a ukraińskimi i białoruskimi ziemiemi w Rzeczypospolitej XVI wieku**

**Key words:** Mount Athos, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Volyn, Ostroh, Union of Brest, Vasyl-Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi, Ivan Vyshenskyi, Iov Knyahynetskyi, Cyprian Ostrozhanyn, Isaak Boryskovych

**Słowa kluczowe:** Góra Athos, Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów, Wołyń, Ostrog, Unia brzeska, Bazyli Konstantyn Ostrogski, Iwan Wyszyński, Hiob Kniahynicki, Cyprian Ostrożanin, Isaak Boryskowicz

### **Abstract**

The article examines the connections between the Ukrainian and Belarusian lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Mount Athos in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the monasteries of Mount Athos managed to preserve their self-government. The requirement to pay annual taxes to the Turks forced the Athos monks to go on journeys to collect alms. They often visited the Ukrainian-Belarusian lands. At that time, the city of Ostroh became one of the Orthodox spiritual and cultural main centres. Representatives of Eastern churches, including those from Mount Athos, began to come here. Athos monks Ivan Vyshenskyi, Iov Knyahynetskyi, Cyprian Ostrozhanyn, Isaac Boryskovych, and others

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were associated with the Ostroh circle. After the Orthodox bishops of the Commonwealth signed the Union of Brest with Rome in 1596, the Orthodox spiritual and cultural movements in the Ukrainian and Belarusian lands became more active, with Athos monks strongly influencing it. The existence of close spiritual and cultural ties between the Ostroh circle and Mount Athos on the eve of the Union of Brest significantly influenced further church and cultural processes in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł analizuje powiązania między ukraińskimi i białoruskimi ziemiami Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów a Górą Athos w XVI wieku. Po upadku Konstantynopola w 1453 r. klasztorom na Górze Athos udało się zachować samorządność. Konieczność płacenia corocznych podatków Turkom zmuszała mnichów z Góry Athos do podróży w celu zebrania jałmużny. Często odwiedzali oni ziemie ukraińsko-białoruskie. W tym czasie miasto Ostroh stało się jednym z prawosławnych centrów duchowych i kulturalnych. Zaczęli przybywać tu przedstawiciele kościołów wschodnich, w tym również z Góry Athos. Z kręgiem ostrogskim związani byli mnisi z Góry Athos: Iwan Wszeński, Hiob Kniahynicki, Cyprian Ostrożanin, Izaak Boryskowicz i inni. Po podpisaniu przez prawosławnych biskupów Rzeczypospolitej unii brzeskiej z Rzymem w 1596 roku prawosławny ruch duchowy i kulturalny na ziemiach ukraińskich i białoruskich stał się bardziej aktywny, a mnisi z Góry Athos wywarli na niego znaczący wpływ. Istnienie bliskich więzi duchowych i kulturowych między kręgiem ostrogskim a Górą Athos w przededniu unii brzeskiej znacząco wpłynęło na dalsze procesy kościelne i kulturowe końca XVI i początku XVII wieku.

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the conquest of the Byzantine Empire by the Seljuk Turks led to significant changes not only in the life of the country's population, but also in the life of the countries of the Byzantine Oikoumene. In particular, Bulgaria, Serbia, and other Orthodox Balkan countries finally fell under the onslaught of the Ottoman armies at the same time. The joint liberation "crusade" of Poles, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Ruthenians and others against the Ottomans initially led to the liberation of northern Bulgaria, but then ended in defeat at Varna in 1444. The catastrophe at Kosovo in 1448 finally consolidated the power of the Turks in the Balkans. In 1478, after being defeated in the

war against the Ottomans, the Crimean Khanate recognised its vassalage to the Ottomans (Gruševs'kyj 1993, 322–324). Later, the Orthodox Moldavian and Wallachian principalities also became vassal states of the Ottomans (Čuhlib 2010, 47–49; Gruševs'kyj 1993, 329; Šerbak 2019, 19).

Earlier, after the fall of Constantinople, the Greek city of Thessaloniki and the Holy Mount Athos fell to the Ottomans in 1430. In order to save the Athos monasteries from ruin and destruction, a monastic delegation visited Sultan Murad II demonstrating loyalty to the new ruler and assuring him of non-interference in political and military processes. As a result, the sultan promised to preserve all the rights and privileges of the Athos monasteries that had existed since Byzantine times. When in 1453 the Ottomans captured Constantinople and Sultan Mehmed II declared himself the new “Caesar of the Roman Empire” (*Qayser-i Rûm*), the Athos delegation also visited the sultan, confirming non-interference in politics and declaring their submission to him. The monks presented the sultan with precious gifts, in return for which Murad II confirmed all the ancient privileges and self-government of the Holy Mount Athos. Thanks to this, the monasteries of Athos received the patronage of the sultan's authorities, were protected from looting and destruction, and the monks were exempt from being sold into slavery. Because of the relative independence of Mount Athos, it gradually turned into a kind of “oasis for Christians” in the midst of the warlike Islamic world, where many fugitives from Ottoman slavery and oppression on ethnic and religious grounds took refuge („Afon” 2002, 117–118).

However, the preservation of such self-government on Mount Athos had to be compensated for by paying regular bribes to the Ottomans. A rather high per capita tax (*haraj*) was imposed on all the inhabitants of the Holy Mountain, the amount and procedure of which was determined by the Sultan's firman and other documents. Over time, the annual collection of such taxes became increasingly large, turning into an unbearable burden for the Athonite monks (Fotić 2000, 63–78). Overwhelming additional taxes and fees were also regularly collected

from the monasteries, and monastic courtyards and properties outside Mount Athos were confiscated. All of this led to the material ruin and impoverishment of the Athos monasteries under Ottoman rule.

Significant political changes also took place in the Kyivan Rusyn lands at this time, which also had a certain impact on spiritual and cultural ties with Athos.

Constant military confrontations of the Lithuanian-Rusyn state with the Teutonic Order on the Baltic coast, as well as with the Golden Horde and its vassal principality of Moscow in the east, forced the Lithuanian leadership to seek allies in the neighbouring Polish kingdom. The result of this alliance was the dynastic Union of Krewe in 1385, according to which Grand Duke Jagiello of Lithuania married Queen Jadwiga of Poland and was proclaimed King of Poland (Gruševs'kyj 1993, 129–132). Under the terms of the Union, military disputes between Poland and Lithuania over the territories of Galicia and Volhynia ended, and their armed forces were merged. In an effort to protect themselves from the influence of Moscow, which was increasingly competing with Lithuania for the Kyivan Rus' historical legacy by “gathering Ruthenian (Rus') lands”, the Lithuanian leadership had to officially convert to Roman Catholicism (Gruševs'kyj 1993, 128–129).

Having halted the advance of the Teutonic Order, Poland and Lithuania focused their joint efforts on countering the advance of the Golden Horde and its vassal principality of Moscow. The latter, having become stronger after the collapse of the Golden Horde into several separate khanates, temporarily regained Smolensk and the Chernihiv-Siverskiy regions from Lithuania in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century („*Belarus' u peryâd...*” 2008, 411–425). According to Belarusian historian V. Kavaliou, the Moscow principality had ideological aspirations to the heritage of Kyivan Rus' because of its policy of seizing the territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, especially also Ukrainian lands (Kovalëu 1992, 75). This led to irreconcilable competition and protracted wars over the “Rus' legacy” between the Lithuanian-Rusyn state and the Moscow principality.

Also, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had to constantly repel attacks by the Crimean Khanate, which by this time had become a vassal of the Ottoman Empire and was constantly raiding Ukrainian lands up to Kyiv and even Galicia (Gruševs'kyj 1993, 328–329). In an alliance with the Turks and Tatars, the Wallachian lords, who were also vassals of the Ottoman Empire, began to attack Ukrainian lands (Gruševs'kyj 1993, 329). After another unsuccessful war with Moscow, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was on the verge of a military catastrophe which forced it to finally unite with Poland. This resulted in the Union of Lublin in 1569, which united Poland and Lithuania into a single Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*Rzeczpospolita*) and transferred all Ukrainian lands from Lithuanian rule to Polish rule (Mycyk, Hynčevs'ka-Gennel' 2009, 380–784). A gradual policy of Polonisation and Catholicisation of the Ukrainian Orthodox population began, and the Orthodox hierarchy and clergy under Polish rule lost their rights and privileges (Vlasovs'kyj 1955, 166–167). As early as 1596, at the initiative of the Polish King Sigismund III Vasa, the Union of Brest of the Orthodox bishops of the *Rzeczpospolita* was concluded with Rome, after which the Orthodox Church within the Polish state was outlawed (Gruševs'kyj 1994, 612; Vlasovs'kyj 1955, 267–275; Florâ 2003, 238–242). All these processes led to the resistance and activation of the Orthodox spiritual and cultural movement within the *Rzeczpospolita*. They also resulted in a more active involvement of the Ukrainian Cossacks, who at that time had come to replace the Old Rusyn nobility that had become Polonised and converted to Catholicism, by taking on the role of the new Orthodox elite of early modern Ukrainian society. In the process, the Orthodox clergy's ties with the Holy Mount Athos were also revived (Šumylo 2014, 120–128).

Despite political upheavals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Orthodox Kyivan Metropolis, which, based on its rights autonomy, remained part of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, continued to have quite close ties with Athos. At this time, the Athonite and Hesychastic tradition continued to have a certain influence on Greek liturgical chants

and traditions, which spread to the Ukrainian and Belarusian lands, in particular in the notation manuscripts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Ignatenko 2017, 158).

Among the prominent 16<sup>th</sup> century natives of the Ukrainian-Belarusian lands on Mount Athos, the most famous was Monk Anthony Rusyn (Athonit), who was martyred for his faith around 1516. He took monastic vows in the Suprasl Annunciation Monastery (before 1506) and, under the influence of Athos monks, also went to the Holy Mountain (Turilov 2001, 680). The Suprasl Monastery, which was subordinate to the Kyiv Metropolis, was a powerful Orthodox spiritual and cultural centre at that time. It maintained close relations with the monasteries of Athos, in particular with the Great Lavra and Serbian Hilandar, from where it received manuscripts and also sent them. The monks copied these manuscripts and distributed them in the Belarusian and Ukrainian lands of the Rzeczpospolita (Temčín 2014, 184–192; Ostapčuk 2017, 425–431).

It is likely that the monk Gabriel Mstyslavych, a famous Athonite hagiographer, polemicist, and translator from Greek into Slavic languages, who in the 1510s and 1520s led the Holy Mountain brotherhood several times and was elected *prot* of the Holy Mountain, came from the Ukrainian-Belarusian lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Maksimowicz, Turilov 2002, 148).

At that time, both the clergy and hierarchs of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Athos monks travelled fairly regularly through Ukrainian-Belarusian lands to collect donations. The need to pay exorbitant taxes to the Turks forced Athos monks to embark on long and dangerous journeys every year to collect alms for their monasteries in the lands of Moldavia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Muscovy. In particular, in 1518, a delegation from the Patriarch of Constantinople travelled through the Ukrainian-Belarusian lands as part of such a mission. This delegation included a well-educated monk of the Vatopedi Monastery of Athos, Maximus the Greek (1470-1556). Later he became famous as

an outstanding translator from Greek into Slavic and produced numerous works of a theological, apologetic, spiritual and moral nature. He opposed the separation of the Moscow Metropolis from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, supported the activities of the Athos Hesychastes (rus. *nestyazhateli*) movement, and translated and corrected many Church Slavonic liturgical books. In Muscovy, he was accused of a fictitious “heresy” and was imprisoned in 1525 where he spent nearly 30 years (Pliguzov 2002, 239–240; Kartašev 1993, 460–478; Sinicyna 2006).

Subsequently, many supporters of the ideas of the Athonites, St Maximus the Greek and St Nil of Sorskyi, were forced to flee to the Ukrainian and Belarusian lands, in particular to Volyn to escape the persecution of the Moscow authorities. Among them was one of the last representatives of the Moscow Hesychastic-Non-possessors (rus. *nestyazhateli*) school of St Nil Sorskyi, the Elder Abbot Artemii Troitsky (Gruševs'kyj 1995, 443; Florovskij 1983, 31; Myc'ko 1990, 82; Isaëvyč 2002, 120; Ul'ânovs'kyj 2012, 813). He emigrated from Muscovy after the final victory of the Josephites over the Non-possessors (rus. *nestyazhateli*). Archimandrite Zacharias Kopystensky Palinodia mentions that “the Reverend Artemii” was actively engaged in educational and missionary activities among the “Rusyn people in Lithuania” (Kopystenskij 1878, 913). In some sources of that time, he was called “the Elder of Ostroh” (Vilinskij 1906, 289; Myc'ko 1990, 82). Thus, we can assume that in the Ukrainian hesychastic revival of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, two schools converged - the Athonite school and the “Non-possessors” (rus. *nestyazhateli*) school of Athonites Nil Sorskyi and of Maxim Greek, which was artificially interrupted in the Moscow state, but continued its development in the Ukrainian lands through Elder Artemius Troitsky and others (Šumylo 2014, 116).

One of the centres of spiritual and cultural life in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and, accordingly, of relations with the Holy Mount Athos in the sixteenth century, was the city of Ostroh, where, at the initiative of the Marshal of Volyn and the governor of Kyiv, Prince

Vasyl-Kostiantyn Ostrozky (a descendant of St. Theodore Ostrozky, whose relics rest in the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra), the Ostroh Orthodox Slavic-Greek Latin School (Academy) was established, book printing was introduced, and Orthodox monasteries and churches were restored (Myc'ko 1990, 81–115; Isaëvyč 2002, 120; Ul'ânovs'kyj 2012, 813). The Ostroh circle of Orthodox traditionalist scribes brought together prominent church and secular figures of the time, both from Ukraine and Greece and Athos. In particular, Cyril Lukaris, the future Patriarch of Alexandria and Constantinople, Nikephoros Kantakouzen, the exarch and protosyngel of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, Iov Knyahynytsky and Cyprian Ostrozhanyn, the future monks of Athos, taught here. Ivan Vyshenskyi was closely associated with the Ostroh circle, who at that time served Prince Vasyl-Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi and later went to Athos, where he became a monk (Šumylo 2016, 35–44). Also associated with the Ostroh Academy was a fellow Athonite of Ivan Vyshenskyi, Iov Knyahynytskyi, and Cyprian Ostrozhanyn, Isaac Boryskovych, who was also a monk on Athos and later became one of the first bishops of the restored Orthodox hierarchy (Myc'ko 1990, 81–115; Šumylo 2014, 120–128).

Prince Vasyl-Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi, a champion of Orthodoxy, also tried to maintain close personal ties with Mount Athos. Promoting the sending of Ukrainian monks to the Holy Mountain, he ordered books from there for the Ostroh Slavic-Greek School and the printing house he founded. One of these books, which he handed over to Prince Andrey Kurbsky for reprinting, was widely distributed among the Orthodox in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This book contained works by the theorists of Athonite hermeneutics Gregory Palamas and Nicolas Cabasilas (Nikitin 1997, 86).

As Anatolii Turilov notes, representatives of various strata of the Orthodox society of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the sixteenth century made generous contributions to the monasteries of Mount Athos (Romanenko, Turilov 2002, 153). Thus, in 1549, when the



next envoys of the Athos Hilandar Monastery were travelling through Volyn, the priest Kozma Vasylovych from Kovel sent the Tolkovaya Paleya to Hilandar, and Prince Oleksandr Polubynskiy (†1608) presented a magnificent late 15<sup>th</sup> century Tetraevangelion to the Hilandar Monastery (Romanenko, Turilov 2002, 153). In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a certain “pan Phylyo” donated “red” church vestments to the same Athos monastery (RGADA, F. 381. № 1840. f. 227v). Also in 1582, the monks of the Hilandar Monastery sent a message to Prince Andriy Kurbsky, who lived in Volyn, asking for help in building a monastery hospital on Mount Athos (Romanenko, Turilov 2002, 153). To this day, the library of the Hilandar Monastery still contains early printed books issued in Ostroh in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Ukrainian early printed books of this period are also kept in the Bulgarian monastery of Zograf, including the following editions: The Ostroh Bible (Ostroh, 1581) – 3 copies; On the One True Faith (Ostroh, 1588); The Words of St Basil the Great (Ostroh, 1594) – 3 copies; The Margarit of Chrysostom (Ostroh, 1595) – 2 copies; The Teachings of St John Chrysostom (Ostroh, 1607) (Šumylo 2021, 157).

In the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, envoys of Athos monasteries, including the ancient Rusyn monastery of Panteleimon (Rusyk), began to travel more and more actively through the Ukrainian-Belarusian lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to collect alms. In particular, it is known from chronicle and documentary sources that in the 1560s-1590s, with the blessing of the Patriarchs of Constantinople, representatives of Rusyk, led by Archimandrite Neophytos, among whom a certain Father Matthias is mentioned, frequently travelled through Volyn, (ARPM. Op. 16. Delo 62. Doc. A000407. f. 1). A year later, they returned to the Holy Mount Athos through the Ukrainian lands (ARPM. Op. 16. Delo 63. Doc. A000440. f. 1-1v).

During such journeys through the Ukrainian lands, representatives of the Eastern patriarchs and monasteries of Athos came into contact with local patrons and defenders of Orthodoxy, the main one being Prince

Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi. Therefore, there is no doubt that the abbots and representatives of Rusyk, including the priest Matthias, communicated with Prince Ostrozkyi in 1560-62 and 1591-92 and sought his protection and patronage.

The name of the abbot of the Athos Panteleimon Monastery, Father Matthew, is also known from a court case in 1569 (held in two stages: on Athos and in Istanbul) in connection with the so-called “vacuf reform”. As a result of this reform, all the property of Athos monasteries was declared *vacuf*, i. e., belonging to the Ottoman sultan; the monasteries had to pay high taxes (*haraj*) to the Turks for using it, which put the monasteries on the verge of ruin (ARPMA. Op. 18. Delo 2. Doc. A 000586. f. 1; Uspenskij 1847, № 32–19; Popcov 1874, 107–111).

From this file it is known that the Rusyn Panteleimon Monastery on Mount Athos was a monastic community and had a brotherhood of 47 monks in 1569. The monastery had a *pyrgos* (watchtower) by the sea and ten separate cells on its territory on the Holy Mountain, and four cells outside. The monastery also belonged to the ancient Rusyn skete “Xylurgus” (ARPMA. Op. 18. Delo 2. Doc. A 000586. f. 1; *Istoriâ...* 2015, 226–227). According to the charter of the Qadiyah of Istanbul, Mehmed ibn Khurrem, dated 1569, the above-mentioned Father Matthias was approved as the administrator of the *vacuf* in Rusyk (ARPMA. Op. 18. Delo 2. Doc. A 000586. f. 1; *Istoriâ...* 2015, 226–227).

As a result of the lawsuits against Rusyk, the monks were forced to pay a huge ransom to the Turkish authorities for the confiscated buildings and land and were forced to mortgage all the monastery’s possessions and metohija, and even the church treasury. This led to Rusyk being vacated, and its inhabitants being forced to move to nearby cells and to the Ksylurga skete (*Istoriâ...* 2015, 228). From the charter of Prot Pakhomii and the report of the Moscow tsar’s envoy Ivan Mesheninov in 1584, it is known that the Rusyn Panteleimon Monastery “has been empty for 10 years”; only a few monks remained there to perform

services (RGADA. F. 52. Op. 1. Kn. 2. f. 82-83; RGADA. F. 52. Op. 1. Kn. 2. f. 64v-67v; Dimitrijević 1922, 23-27; Muraiev 1858, 137-138; Mošyn 2002, 315; *Akty...* 1873, XVII). This state of affairs of the Rusyk monks and the adjacent sketes and cells corresponds with the description by Elder Ivan of Vyshenia of the situation of monks on Athos under the Ottoman yoke (Ivan Višenskij 1955, 209).

The revival of Rusyk begins after the aforementioned trip in 1590-1592 of a delegation of the monastery led by Archimandrite Neophytos and accompanied by priest Matthias across Ukrainian lands to Muscovy (RGADA. F. 52. Op. 1. Kn. 3. f. 12; RGADA. F. 52. Op. 1. Reestr 2, №4; RGADA. F. 52. Op. 1. Reestr 1, Kn. 3. f. 202v-204; Bantyš-Kamenskij 2001, 38-39; *Posol'skaâ kniga...* 1988, 146-148; Muraiev 1858, 231.261; Popcov, 1874, 27.415), which resulted in a generous donation for the restoration of the monastery (ARPMA. Op. 16. Delo 62. Doc. A000407. f. 1; ARPMA. Op. 16. Delo 63. Doc. A000440. f. 1-1v).

After returning from a trip to Muscovy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Rusyk monks began to restore the monastery with the donations they had collected: the monastery walls and buildings were rebuilt, and a new monastery cathedral was erected on the site of the old one (its appearance is preserved in a drawing by the Kyiv pilgrim Vasyl Hryhorovych-Barskyi).

At this time, the Rusyk Monastery on Mount Athos was being restored as a centre of spiritual and cultural life and education. In particular, there are known cases of people being sent to Rusyk from afar, even from the tsars of Moscow, to learn the Greek language and literacy (RGADA. F. 52. Op. 1. Kn. 1. f. 70-71v; Muraiev 1858, 69; *Istoriâ...* 217, 219-220; *Akty...* 1873, XVI). This fact confirms that Rusyk was an important spiritual and cultural centre where people from various Rusyn lands, including Ukraine and Muscovy, had the opportunity not only to receive a spiritual education but also to learn Greek and literacy. In turn, in contact with Ukrainian church and secular circles, Athos monks

also exerted a certain spiritual and cultural influence on them, passing on books and epistles copied on Athos, and influencing the liturgical and artistic traditions of Ukrainian monasteries.

In the 1590s, the aforementioned Father Mefodii became the abbot of the Rusyn Panteleimon Monastery on Mount Athos. It is possible that he himself came from the Ukrainian lands. During his travels with other Athonite monks through the Volyn lands, it seems that they were joined by Prince Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi's servants Ivan Vyshenskyi and Iov Knyahynytskyi, who went together to Mount Athos (Šumylo 2016, 39–43.53–54). On the basis of Iov Knyahynytskyi's life, we can restore important details of the journey of both Ukrainian ascetics to Athos (Iêromonah Ignatij 2013, 46). Having fulfilled the instructions of the Prince of Ostroh on the Holy Mountain and visited many monasteries and hermitages, Knyahynytskyi returned to Ostroh to convey to the prince the answer of the Holy Mountain elders (Iêromonah Ignatij 2013, 48–49). After that, with the permission of the prince, he went to the Holy Mountain for the second time “with some people” (Iêromonah Ignatij 2013, 49). One of them seems to have been Ivan Vyshenskyi (Šumylo 2016, 39–42).

Until recently, the testimony of Ignatius of Lubariv was considered the only source containing information about the Athonite period of Iov Knyahynytskyi's life. However, recently confirmation of this fact has been found in a document dated 1592, which is kept in the file on the arrival of a delegation of the Vatopedi Monastery from the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to Smolensk (Šumylo 2023). Another source confirming Iov Knyahynytskyi's stay in the cell of the Vatopedi Monastery is a late 14<sup>th</sup> century manuscript Slavonic Tetraevangelion, which is preserved in the Library of Vatopedi (Slav. 1). The first page of the book contains notes in Greek providing information that on 11 January 1596 the book was given for temporary use to monks Ezekiel and Sava at one of the cells of the Vatopedi monastery. In our

opinion, there is no doubt that that it is Iov Knyahynytskyi and his companion, Fr Sava, whom Ivan Vyshenskyi wrote about in his letters (Šumylo 2023) that are referred to here. Ivo Knyahynytskyi finally returned to the Ukrainian lands no later than 1601-1603, after which, together with another Athonite, Ivan Vyshenskyi, he founded the Maniavsky Skete in the Carpathian Mountains, according to the Athonite statute, which was sometimes called the “new Ruthenian Vatopedi” (Celevyč 1887, 14; Šumylo 2016, 79). Since Ivan Vyshenskyi had close ties with Iov Knyahynytskyi and “our father Sava”, we can assume that he probably also lived with them for some time at first on Mount Athos at the Vatopedi Monastery.

On behalf of Prince Vasyl-Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi, Cyprian Ostrozhanyn, Isaac Boryskovych, and others also visited Mount Athos at this time (Šumylo 2016, 59–61.65–66.70–73).

## **Summary**

Thus, spiritual, and cultural ties between the Ukrainian and Belarusian lands and Mount Athos had been well-established for centuries, ensuring mutual spiritual and cultural exchange and influence on each other. After the decline of the statehood of Kyivan Rus, they experienced new development as a result of South Slavic influences and the so-called “Hesychastic revival”, which played a significant role in shaping ancient Ukrainian culture, literature, and art in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the conquest of the Byzantine Empire by the Seljuk Turks, the monasteries of Mount Athos managed to preserve their traditional self-government and became a shelter for numerous fugitives from Ottoman slavery and oppression on ethnic and religious grounds.

Holy Mount Athos has traditionally remained a centre of Orthodox monasticism, asceticism, spirituality, literary activity, and book copying. Since the Baptism of Kyivan Rus, Ukrainian Orthodox monasticism has

traditionally had close ties with Mount Athos. One of these centres of contact with Holy Mount Athos within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was the Suprasl Monastery.

To maintain independency of Athos monasteries monks had to pay exorbitant taxes. This forced them to go on long and dangerous journeys to collect alms for their communities in the lands of Moldavia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Muscovy. In this regard, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Athonite monks often travelled through the Ukrainian-Belarusian territories to raise funds for their monasteries, which contributed to the establishment of closer contacts and influences between Athonite and Ukrainian monasticism. During this period, many supporters of the Athonite movement of the Hesychastic-Non-possessors (*nestyazhateli* – followers of St Nil of Sorskyi) also fled Muscovy to the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to escape persecution. During the sixteenth century, Volyn became one of the centres of spiritual and cultural life and ties with the Holy Mount Athos. As a result, the city of Ostroh became one of the spiritual and cultural centres of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where, on the initiative of Prince Vasyl-Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi, an Orthodox Slavic-Greek-Latin school (academy) was established, book printing was introduced, and Orthodox monasteries and churches were restored. Prominent church, and secular figures of the time from Ukraine, Greece, and Athos united around the Ostroh group of Orthodox traditionalist scribes. In particular, the Ukrainian Athonite monks Ivan Vyshenskyi, Iov Knyahynytskyi, Cyprian Ostrozhanyn, Isaac Boryskovych, and others were associated with the Ostroh group of traditionalist scribes. On behalf of Prince Vasyl-Kostiantyn Ostrozkyi, they visited the Holy Mount Athos, brought back manuscripts, among others, with the works of the Eastern Church Fathers. After the Orthodox bishops of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth signed the Union of Brest with Rome in 1596, the Orthodox spiritual and cultural movement in the Ukrainian and Belarusian lands became more active, which was significantly influenced by Orthodox monks, including those of Athos.

As a result, ties between the Orthodox clergy and monastics within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Holy Mount Athos were revived. The existence of close spiritual and cultural ties between the Ostroh group of traditionalist scribes and Ukrainian (in particular, Volyn) monasticism and Mount Athos on the eve of the Union of Brest significantly influenced further church and cultural processes in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

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CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKA AKADEMIA TEOLOGICZNA  
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