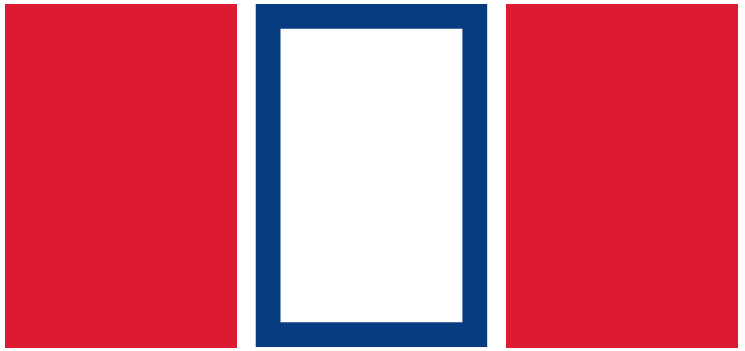


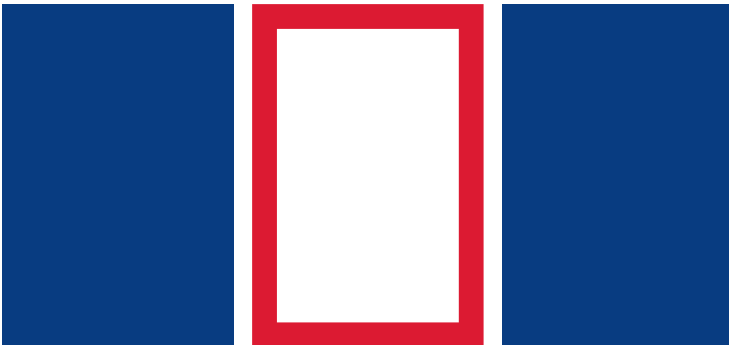


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The False Continuity of Nations: Contributions of Paschalis Kitromilides to the Study of the Orthodox Commonwealth and Nationalism in the Balkans

Edited by S. G. Markovich



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TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORTHODOX COMMUNION IN THE EARLY MODERN AGE:

On the Book *An Orthodox Commonwealth* by Paschalis Kitromilides

Abstract: The author analyses the contribution of Paschalis Kitromilides to the understanding of the supra-identity of Orthodox peoples that had existed for many centuries until the revolutionary 19th century. He particularly focuses on the importance of a common Orthodox culture and of Greek culture in the Balkans, and considers several examples from Serbian cultural history in that context, particularly the cases of Partenije Pavlović and Dositej Obradović. He also agrees with Kitromilides's interpretation of the problem of the abolishment of the Patriarchate of Peć and criticises the ethnic way of interpreting this issue in Serbian historiography, which he sees as another anachronism.

Key words: Christian Orthodox identity, Orthodox communion, Orthodox Commonwealth

To begin with, I would like to express my twofold pleasure: firstly, that I have been presented with the opportunity of delivering an address at the Faculty of Political Sciences, where I have never done so before, for which I owe my gratitude to Professor Slobodan Markovich. Secondly, the reason for my exposé is a book that we may safely describe as precious, *An Orthodox Commonwealth*, recently published in Serbian, whose author, Professor Paschalis Kitromilides, I have been fortunate

enough to meet personally. Moreover, I once had the privilege of contributing a paper on Dositej Obradović for the collection of papers *Enlightenment and Religion in the Orthodox World*, edited by him and published by the Voltaire Foundation of the University of Oxford.

Let me say immediately that I do not consider myself sufficiently qualified to speak about this book from a narrowly professional perspective, a book which primarily operates in the domains of political, social and cultural history of the early modern era. But just like every good academic work, this book is characterised by its great scope, both in terms of its breadth and depth, and again, like every good academic work, it both provides answers to a lot of questions and raises a lot of new questions. To me, as someone who, among other things, deals with the Serbian cultural history of the 18th century, this book provides insight into numerous phenomena and processes which very much correspond to my own interests and scholarly research, and which are very useful in my own work in a number of ways.

But one can say, without any exaggeration, that this book is a necessary reading matter for each and every intellectual in Serbia who is open to re-examining the reigning scholarly, political and cultural paradigms among the Serbs and other Orthodox peoples, because it very convincingly problematizes them or entirely rejects them. Namely, this book is essentially a kind of revenge on those unquestionably non-academic and anti-academic interpretations of early modern history in the key of 19th-century national romanticism, which is the dominant approach and discourse of the elites, political as well as academic ones, of the Orthodox peoples of South-Eastern Europe. Such an interpretation, or more precisely post-reinterpretation, only finds and emphasises the differences among these peoples, and what is much worse, proclaims them perennial and perennially self-evident. That has led to the minimisation or even denial of common and linking elements in the cultural and social history of these peoples.

In Serbia, this has led to this branch of scholarly studies taking a back seat when it comes to studying the early modern era in history and other disciplines. The long period of Ottoman rule, as well as the history of the Serbs under the Habsburg and the Venetian rule, has been reduced in our academic thought to a transitional period between the old and the new epoch in an ethnically viewed state history, to a kind of preparation for the establishment of a modern national state. Few scholars deal with this epoch, and the results of their scholarly work are insufficiently heard in our academic, let alone broader public.

Hence one tends to overlook that the periods of peace and stability in the Balkans tended to last for centuries, leaving behind many civilisational achievements. These periods coincide with the rule of great empires over the Balkans, first the Roman, then the Byzantine, and finally the Ottoman Empire. Among other things, the first civilisation mentioned above left us an infrastructural heritage that still remains very much alive, as evidenced by the roads that even today follow the routes of the Roman ones, and often enough by the identical directions of city streets. The second civilisation left us, first of all, the Orthodox Christian faith and a system of values linked with it, which even today remains inextricably woven into our identity. The third civilisation left us all those very characteristic Balkan forms of everyday life, from cooking onward.

Professor Kitromilides's book points to Orthodox Christianity as the primary identity of Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs and Romanians during the time of the Ottoman rule, as a kind of supra-identity of these peoples for many centuries, and the main link between them until the revolutionary 19th century. This constant factor, however, is not manifested as something static. On the contrary, the book *An Orthodox Commonwealth* points to the surprising ability of the common Orthodox identity to adapt to the challenges of time and place, of politics and ideology. Justifying and developing his main thesis about the Orthodox cultural model as the fundamental identity and the basic

framework within which the history of the above-mentioned peoples should be seen in the discussed period, Professor Kitromilides has shown himself not only as a top expert in the sphere of historical and political sciences, but also an exceptionally knowledgeable scholar of Orthodox Christianity and the Orthodox Church. Such knowledge, of course, is presupposed when it comes to the topics that he discusses, but I consider it necessary to point out that in the case of Professor Kitromilides this knowledge is far greater than is usually the case in our academic community, but what is much more important is the fact that this knowledge does not derive from books only, but also from experience, which is quite rare among our academics.

I believe that it is important to bear this in mind in order to understand some specific estimates that Professor Kitromilides makes in this book. What I mean by this, among other things, is his interpretation of the abolition of the Patriarchate of Peć, to which he dedicates considerable space in his book (pp. 44–45, 65–68, 107–108). He strives to convey to the interpreters of this event who are guided by the national idea – and who, I must add, often lack the kind of sensitivity to Orthodox Christianity possessed by Professor Kitromilides – that this event occurred within one Orthodox ecclesiastic community, not between two peoples, the Greeks and the Serbs. (Leaving aside the fact that the main party involved in this event was the Ottoman power with its pacifying intentions and financial demands.) What supports the thesis of Professor Kitromilides that the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in the given circumstances, was looking for a solution that would not violate the canonical tradition, let me add, is something that the mainstream of Serbian academic thought fails to mention, but which is known to us from the works of the best Serbian church historian, Radoslav Grujić – namely, that after the abolition of the Patriarchate of Peć, its unit which was not affected by this change, the Metropolitanate of Karlovci, took over the place that the Patriarchate of Peć had had in the diptychon (i.e. register) of the Patriarchate of

Constantinople, in other words, that the Serbian Church continued to exist as an autocephalous church in the centre of ecumenical Orthodoxy.¹

I would also like to point out that, among the many examples that he provides in order to support his observations about “the Orthodox Commonwealth”, Professor Kitromilides accords an important place to our Dositej Obradović, especially owing to the fact that for the Serbian edition of his book he added the chapter “Dositej Obradović and the Greek Enlightenment” (pp. 295–302), which is not found in the original English edition. It is usually overlooked – even though Dositej’s autobiography and other sources unequivocally indicate – that our greatest modern enlightener was not only a European but also a pan-Orthodox intellectual, constantly and intensely connected to the Greeks; a person who maintained fruitful contacts with the Romanians and the Russians, and felt at home in all Orthodox surroundings. Dositej’s example also shows that “the Orthodox Commonwealth” was not limited to the area under Ottoman rule, that it was so powerful and so deeply rooted in the religious-cultural model that it radiated its influence onto Orthodox Christians from other political communities. Hence Russia features in Professor Kitromilides’s analyses even though it is spatially distant and politically separated (v. pp. 109–127).

In order to support the approach of Professor Kitromilides, I shall offer another, much less known example than that of Dositej, the one provided by Partenije Pavlović, who was compared to Dositej on account of his many travels and contacts.² Partenije was born towards the end of the 17th century in Silistra, in the territory of today’s Bulgaria, was trained in rhetoric and philosophy by Greek teachers in Bucharest, in today’s Romania,

1 Радослав Грујић, “Проблеми историје Карловачке Митрополије” [“The problems of the history of the Metropolitanate of Karlovci”], *Glasnik Istoriskog društva u Novom Sadu* II/3 (1929), pp. 365–379.

2 Е.г. Милорад Павић, *Историја српске књижевности барокној доба (XVII–XVIII век)* [History of Serbian Literature in the Age of Baroque] (Belgrade: Nolit, 1970), pp. 358–359.

and also in Siatista and Castoria, in today's Greece; for a while he stayed in Italy and Bohemia, started his ecclesiastical career in Dalmatia under Venice, then continued in Ottoman Belgrade and Peć, and in Habsburg Buda and Vienna after that, and eventually (1751–1760) became the Vicar of the Metropolitan of Karlovci Pavle Nenadović. He wrote in the Church-Slavonic language, among other things his autobiography,³ and translated Greek works into this language. However, in his writings he did not leave any other indication of his identity apart from the fact that he was an Orthodox Christian. He never wrote a single word that might classify him among figures of narrowly understood Bulgarian, Serbian or Greek cultural history.

What made it possible for Partenje and Dositej, and many other similar intellectuals among Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs and Romanians, to travel all over that wide area and to find a place for themselves everywhere in it was, first and foremost, the well-developed and functional structure of the Orthodox Church. This particularly pertains to its educational institutions. Among these, Professor Kitromilides singles out the Academy on Mt Athos, short-lived in terms of duration but emblematic in terms of the enlightenment-imbued vision of its founders, placing it at the centre of the chapter “Mt Athos and Enlightenment” (pp. 131–147). I would like to remind you that, in the words of Dositej in his autobiography, the reputation of this Academy and its principal, the famous modern Greek enlightener Evgenios Voulgaris, was well known even as far away as Dalmatia, where our enlightener was at the time, which initiated his departure for the Greek East to be educated there.⁴ (It is no accident that the photo on the cover of the Serbian edition of *An Orthodox Commonwealth* shows how the remains of this Academy look today.)

3 Димитрије Руварац, “Аутобиографија Партенија Павловића, епископа посвећења” [“Autobiography of Partenje Pavlović, *episcopus consecratus*”], *Srpski Sion* No. 14 (1906), pp. 396–399; No. 15, pp. 430–432; No. 17, pp. 493–495; No. 18, pp. 526–528; No. 19, pp. 553–556.

4 Доситеј Обрадовић, *Сабрана дела Доситеја Обрадовића*, vols. I–VI [Collected Works of Dositej Obradović], (Belgrade, 2007), vol. I, p. 92.

In connection with this, there is another cohesive element of “the Orthodox Commonwealth” without which Partenije’s and Dositej’s lives and intellectual profiles would have been impossible and unthinkable, namely Greek culture and the Greek language. This topic runs through Professor Kitromilides’s book almost in its entirety, and the chapter “The Presence of Greek Culture in the Balkans” (pp. 213–227) is specifically dedicated to it. It is well known that for centuries, from the Middle Ages onward, Serbian writers and cultural workers were continually educated in the Greek language and in Greek educational traditions. The Greek culture and its language remained a foundation and a role model even under changed historical-political circumstances. This is best evidenced by the fact that even the greatest advocates of introducing the Western model of education among the Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy, such as Metropolitan Mojsije Petrović and Pavle Nenadović, along with professors educated in the West, still employed Greeks to teach in Serbian schools. In addition to this, they also supported Greek diaspora schools in Serbian communities. Some of those Greek schools played an important role in Serbian education, for example, the one in Zemun, which gave Serbia an outstanding professional Hellenist – Vukašin Radišić, an outstanding poet – Sima Milutinović Sarajlija, and an outstanding politician – Ilija Garašanin. This combination of new, Western education and old, traditional Greek education, well-known by the example of Dositej, is also well-illustrated by the case of Mojsije Rašković, who, in the 1770s, as a student in Leipzig, took private lessons in Greek philology under the tuition of the famous modern Greek enlightener Nikiphoros Theotokis, who happened to be there at the time.

In formal terms, the Greek language was not the official language of the Orthodox Church in the way that Latin was in the Catholic Church, but we can say that in practice that was how it functioned. There were attempts to make this official. A while ago I came across the information that sometime during the 17th century the Patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch

and Jerusalem sent an epistle to the Russian Episcopate, wherein they stated their request that each Orthodox bishop must know the Greek language. As justification, they stated that this request of theirs could not be questioned when peoples that were not Orthodox and even hostile towards Orthodox Christianity rate the knowledge of Greek very highly and cultivate it.⁵ I mention this interesting historical fact because it seems to correspond to Dositej's steadfast insistence on the importance of learning the Greek language. We see in Dositej an element of the idea that is contained in the words of the epistle referred to above – that the Greek language is a kind of a “brand” of Orthodox peoples. For, owing to his knowledge of Greek, Dositej was able to support himself during his stay in England by giving private Greek lessons to local philhellenically minded intellectuals.⁶

I shall take the freedom of digressing yet again in my lecture, which is more in the nature of sharing with you my thoughts about Professor Kitromilides's book than providing a systematic analysis of it. More than a hundred years ago, my famous predecessor occupying the post of Professor of Classical Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy of Belgrade University, Veselin Čajkanović, described Dositej Obradović as the last and greatest gift of Byzantium to the Serbs.⁷ This observation of his has remained without a proper understanding and reception. Čajkanović did not have at his disposal the finely tuned terminological innovation provided by Professor Kitromilides through the term “Orthodox Commonwealth”, following in the footsteps of the term “Byzantine Commonwealth”, introduced by Dimitri Obolensky (v. “Introduction”, p. 7). But Čajkanović estimated, and he was perfectly right in his estimate, that Dositej, as a philhellenic Christian humanist, had been the final

5 Ђорђе Перић, “Један рукопис митрополита Дамаскина Грданичког”, [“A Manuscript of metropolitan Damaskin Grdanički”], *Glasnik, službeni list SPC* (Jun. 1984), p. 117.

6 Доситеј Обрадовић, *Сабрана дела Досијеја Обрадовића*, vol. I, p. 143.

7 Веселин Чајкановић, “О Доситејевим грчким и римским изворима” [“On Dositej's Greek and Roman sources”], in *Споменница Досијеја Обрадовића* [A Book of Homage to Dositej Obradović] (Belgrade, 1911), p. 63.

point in the history of that type of culture, which was shaped in Byzantium and continued to be cultivated in the post-Byzantine era in “the Orthodox Commonwealth”. And that is the type of culture which in itself combines the religious tradition of Eastern Christianity and the intellectual-literary heritage of Hellenic Antiquity.

Whatever has been said in Professor Kitromilides’s book and in my review of it should not by any means be understood as an attempt at ignoring the ethnic-cultural specificities of the peoples making up “the Orthodox Commonwealth”. This is best evidenced by the fact that, no matter how important the Greek language was for all Orthodox peoples, non-Greeks, first of all the Slavs among them, created in their own languages according to the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition (“Slavia orthodoxa”). Moreover, examples of Orthodox non-Greeks writing in Greek as a kind of learned entertainment, otherwise practised by many Western humanists, are rare. That was what recently puzzled my classicist colleague from Zagreb Professor Vladimir Rezar, who deals with Dubrovnik Renaissance poets writing in Greek, and who is toying with the idea of compiling a collection of poetry representative of the area of the Balkans without Greece in the early modern era. He has found only a few such examples among Orthodox peoples (Alek Vacarescu, Gligor Prličev), and I could only provide him with one among the Serbs (a certain Jovan Mladenović, who served in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the 18th century and wrote two epigrams in Greek).⁸

It is my impression that this fact is in connection not only with the said ethnic-cultural specificities but also with the animosities stemming from them, whose occasional manifestations

8 Nenad Ristović, “Грчки језик и књижевност у нововековној српској просвети и култури до Вукашина Радишића” [“Greek Language and Literature in Modern Serbian Education and Culture up to Vukašin Radišić”], in *Почеци настајаве грчког језика код Срба [The Beginnings of Studying Greek among the Serbs]*, ed. Miodrag Stojanović (Kragujevac: Centar za naučna istraživanja SANU i Univerziteta u Kragujevcu, 2011), p. 13.

are well known. I have often enough come across in Serbian sources dating from the 18th century – regardless of all the respect felt towards Greek culture that did exist, as I have mentioned – various statements directed against the Greeks, even among the most educated Serbs of their time, such as Jovan Rajić⁹ or Zaharija Orfelin.¹⁰ As far as I know, such statements can be encountered in other Slavic Orthodox peoples. In the case of the Serbs, the reason for this was often a certain jealousy felt on account of the cultural superiority of the Greeks in “the Orthodox Commonwealth”. Dositej, however, was inspired by the said superiority to point out the Greeks as an enlightenment role model to the Serbs. I think that we still lack a sufficiently clear understanding of this problem of “the Orthodox Commonwealth”, and that we do not have an adequate scholarly interpretation of it. (Otherwise, to me, as a classicist, this phenomenon is “dèjà vu” because I find it irresistibly reminiscent of the confrontation of anti-Greek and pro-Greek attitudes that were constantly in evidence in ancient Rome and marked the thought of its cultural trendsetters.)

Sometimes the problem of interpreting issues of this kind arises from a mere linguistic misunderstanding. This is evident at one point in Professor Kitromilides’s book. When he critically reviews the claim made by non-Greek historians in Orthodox Balkan countries about the attempts of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to carry out a process of Hellenising these peoples, he says (on p. 65) that it is an academically inadmissible anachronism, for such an idea would have been veritable blasphemy to the Orthodox clergy in Constantinople. He undoubtedly bears in mind the fact that, until the 19th century, the Greeks used the term “Ἕλληνες solely to mean “pagans/heathens”, and that, ever since they adopted Christianity, that is, from the time of the Roman and Byzantine Empires, they called themselves Ρωμαῖοι/

9 Cf. *Димитрије Руварац, Архимандрит Јован Рајић 1726–1801*. [Archimandrite Jovan Rajić, 1726–1801] (Sremski Karlovci, 1901), pp. 81–82.

10 *Захарија Орфелин, Петар Велики I–II* [Peter the Great, in two vols.] (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1970), Vol. I, p. 49.

Ρωμοῖ. Let me note that in Professor Kitromilides's book a very important place is given to dealing with the problem of ambiguity in the modern Greek identity – between the Orthodox and the Western, the classical and the Byzantine heritage. I would single out the chapter “Europe and the Dilemmas of Greek Conscience” (pp. 197–212) as particularly instructive for every reader who is not acquainted with this specific characteristic of modern Greece, which has manifested itself pertaining to the issue of the very name of its people. But let me go back to the terminological problem that I have mentioned. As opposed to the term Ρωμαῖοι/Ρωμοῖ, which the Greeks used as their name, among the Slavs in the early modern era they were always referred to as either *Греки*, taken over from the Latin *Graeci*, or, less often, by the word *Еллины*, derived from the Old Greek Ἕλληνες. Therefore, when in non-Greek academic literature some acts of the Patriarchate of Constantinople are designated as Hellenisation, and the Patriarchate itself as a Hellenic institution, this presupposes a designation based on the language and on the culture rooted in that language, relying on a use of the word Ἕλληνες and its derivations different from what was the case among the Greeks before the 19th century.

The language barrier is also visible in the book *An Orthodox Commonwealth* due to the fact that Professor Kitromilides had only two Serbian sources that he could read in an English translation at his disposal (Dositej's autobiography and the memoirs of Prota Mateja Nenadović). This problem is not due to him but to our neglect. This is all the more so because Professor Kitromilides drew the attention of our academic community to this problem when, several years ago, he participated in the work of a large-scale scholarly conference held in Belgrade. Bearing in mind that secondary literature by Serbian scholars in world languages dealing with the topic of this book is also lacking, and I would say that the situation is similar concerning the sources and literature of other Orthodox peoples, it is fascinating that in his book Professor Kitromilides managed to provide a coherent and nuanced presentation of a phenomenon with which

he practically dealt seriously for the first time ever. This book should also constitute a kind of appeal for translating Serbian sources into some of the world languages, as well as a stimulus for compiling a lexicon of “the Orthodox Commonwealth”, which would be jointly prepared by experts from all the areas that are historically and scholarly connected to it.

If the greatest achievement of an academic work, apart from presenting new viewpoints, is to inspire new directions in research, then we can safely say that the book *An Orthodox Commonwealth* by Professor Paschalis Kitromilides is one such work. I hope that I have managed to show that it is so in this presentation.

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