ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

Authoring : *Radic Radivoj*
Translation : *Δασκαλάκη Φωτεινή*
For citation : *Radic Radivoj , "George Sholaris (Gennadios II Sholarios)", Encyclopaedia of the Hellenic World, Constantinople*
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Summary :

George (Gennadius) Scholares was a theologian and first patriarch of Constantinople during the Turkish occupation (1454-1456, 1463, 1464-1465). At first, he supported the union of the Churches and participated in the Synod of Florence (1439), but later he became a fervent opponent of the union. He mastered Latin language and respected Latin culture, especially Thomas Akinates. He was a great supporter of Aristotle.

Other Names

Kourteses, Gennadius II

Date and Place of Birth

Between 1400 and 1405, Constantinople

Date and Place of Death

1472 or a little later, monastery of St. John Prodromos

Main Role

Patriarch (January 6th 1454-1456, 1463, 1464-1465)

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1. Family

George Scholaris was born in Constantinople between 1400 and 1405. In some texts he is also mentioned as Kourteses, which might have been his mother's last name.[1] His parents originated from Thessaly and belonged to the middle class of Byzantine society. He received his education in the Byzantine capital, his teachers being Mark Eugenikos, John Chortasmenos and Joseph Bryennios.

2. Unionist and anti-unionist

By 1438, Scholaris had already gained prestige: he was didaskalos, senator, and general judge of Byzantines (katholikos krites ton Romaion). He participated in the Synod of Ferrara and Florence in 1439, supporting the Union. He knew the Roman Church's doctrine better than most of his contemporary Byzantines. What he actually believed was that the Union should come as a result of honest reconciliation, through mutual tolerance and faith, not as the outcome of Rome's political terms and pressure.[2]

Some years later, circa 1443, Scholaris came out as a fervent opponent of the Union. After Mark Eugenikos' death (1445), he even became leader of the party that opposed the Union of the Churches. His beliefs and the intellectual atmosphere of Constantinople at that time were the reasons he lost his place in 1446/1447. Circa 1450, he was ordained as a monk and was given the name Gennadios in the monastery of Charsianitou in Constantinople.

In the meantime, Scholaris had become obsessed with the fight against the Union of the Churches. When the Union was about to be announced, after the mass offered according to the Catholic doctrine in Hagia Sophia, presided by cardinal Isidore (December 1452), it is known that Scholaris retired in his monastic cell issuing a proclamation on his door, in which he swore to God that he would rather die than betray orthodox faith. He believed that the Union was a work of the devil and that it foreboded the fall of those who turn their back to God.[3]

During the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans, Gennadios was captured and for a short period of time he was in Adrianople. After he was released, according to Mehmed II the Conqueror's wish and with his permission, he became patriarch of Constantinople (January 6th 1454-1456). As the first patriarch of Constantinople under Turkish dominion, he was trying, kat' oikonomia, to find the best way to coexist with the Ottomans. In 1456, he resigned his dignity of patriarch due to various problems and to his deteriorating health. He first retired to the monastery of Vatopedi in Mt. Athos and later settled in the monastery of St. John Prodromos in Mt. Menoikeion, near Serres. In 1463 and 1464-1465, he was summoned to the patriarchic throne, but there is

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no certain evidence that he actually assumed the patriarchic duties. He spent the rest of his days in the monastery of Timios Prodromos, in Serres, where he was also buried after his death in 1472, or a little later, definitely before the October of 1474.[4]

3. The scholar's work

The great literary work George Scholaris left behind shows that he was a highly educated scholar.[5] It is a compound literary legacy, containing obituaries, letters, war related texts, speeches, poems, translations from Latin and commendations, liturgical texts and dissertations. As a scholar, he had students of his own; Theodoros Sophianos and Matheos Kamariotis stand out among them.

Scholaris had a perfect knowledge of Latin and valued Latin culture. He appreciated Thomas Akinates and chose some of his texts to translate and to comment on. For this reason, Scholaris mentions: «Θωμάν γαρ τον εξ Ακίνου ουκ οίδα ει τις εμού πλέον τετίμηκε των αθτώ προσεχόντων» (Because I do not know any other that honored Thomas from Akinos more than myself).[6] Scholaris even tried to incorporate the interpretation of Aristotle given by the scholars and Thomas Akinates to the Byzantine thought.[7]

Considering the ancient philosophical heritage, Scholaris was a great supporter of Aristotle, strenuously defending him against the attacks of his older contemporary George Gemistos Plethon. It is known that, between 1460 and 1465, as patriarch of Ottoman Constantinople, he burned the manuscript of Plethon's Laws, because he considered it impious and antichristian.[8]

The words of Gennadios Scholarios, the "last of the Byzantines" and first patriarch during Ottoman dominion, reveal the predominance of his religious-political views over his national consciousness. When asked what he felt like, he answered: Even though I am Greek by means of language, I would never call myself Greek, because I do not think like the old Greeks,[9] on the contrary, I want to be named according to my religion, and if anyone asks me who I am, I will respond that I am a Christian («Ἕλλην ὢν τῇ φωνῇ, οὐ κ ἄν ποτε φαίην Ἕλλην εἶναι, διὰ τὸ μὴ φρονεῖν ὡς ἐ φρόνουν ποτὲ Ἕλληνες· ἀ λλ' ἀ πὸ τῆ ς ἰ δίας μάλιστα θέλω ὀ νομάζεσθαι δόξης. Καὶ εἴ τις ἔ ροιτό με τίς εἰ μί, ἀ ποκρινοῦ μαι χριστιανὸ ς εἶ ναι»).[10] This plain phrase was not uttered by position of authority, but in its simplicity epitomizes the singularity of Byzantine civilization, as well as its decline, through the lens of orthodoxy. On the other hand, it seems to mark the beginning of a new era, a new general Balkan orthodox literature, the ideas of which were Greek and Bulgarian and Serbian at the same time, irrespective of language. It was a new Balkan community that abolished the borders between the nations in the consequent centuries –until the 18th century–[11] and kept the orthodox populations in the Ottoman Empire united during the long ages of Turkish dominion. In the same time, it played a very important role in the preservation of the knowledge and traditions of the medieval Byzantine culture. George Scholaris was one of its first preachers.

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7. Podskalsky, G., "Die Rezeption der thomistischen Theologie bei Gennadios II. Scholarios (ca. 1403-1472)", *Theologie und Philosophie* 49 (1974), pp. 305-323.

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8. Τατάκης, B.N., *Βυζαντινή φιλοσοφία* (Αθήνα 1977), p. 266.

9. Mentioned by Καζάζης, N., *Γεώργιος Γεμιστός Πλήθων* (Αθήνα 1903), p. 15.

10. Gennadius Scholarius, *Refutatio erroris Judaeorum*, eds. M. Jugie, L. Petit, and X.A. Siderides, *Oeuvres complètes de Georges (Gennadios) Scholarios*, vol. III (Paris 1930), p. 253.

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Glossary :

didaskalos ton didaskalon

A layman or a priest who was teacher of religious matters. The title also designated a teacher on matters of faith and the Holy Scriptures in the Patriarchal School of Constantinople.

krites

Byzantine judicial office.

oikonomia (kat'oikonomian)

A principle of action that allows a deviation from established rules if a (considered as) higher end is to be met.

senator, the (1. Roman, 2. Byzantine)

1. A Roman body of men that originally advised the king and then the consuls; Heredity was not the only means of joining the senate and “new men” or *novi homines* could become part of it; Augustus revised the senate and left the body with less power and bolstered hereditary claims as a means to enter the senate; it continued to make laws and conferred powers on new emperors.
2. Member of the senate. The senate, a roman institution transferred from Rome to Constantinople by Constantine I during the Byzantine period was an advisory body whose rights and responsibilities were not clearly defined. It was consisted of imperial officers coming from the upper and were ranked according to hierarchical levels: viri illustri (perfectus praetoriae and the magister), viri spectabili (proconsul, vicarius and the comes), viri clarissimi (consul praetoriae) and viri perfectissimi (praeses and duces). Since the 6th c. AD a new title was established for the upper officers (viri gloriosi). The years that followed officials were entitled to officers regardless their position as senators or if they were about to be admitted to this body.

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Quotations

Gennadius Scholarius’ answer on the matter of his “identity”:

«Τὴν μὲν οὖν γλῶτταν νῦν ἀφῶμεν σκοπεῖν. Κἀγὼ γὰρ τὴν λατινικὴν οἶδα γλῶτταν· ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐρῶ Λατῖνος εἶναι, διὰ τὸ μὴ φρονεῖν ὡς Λατῖνοι φρονοῦσι, λέγω δέ, περὶ ὧν ἡμῖν διαφέρονται· καὶ αὖθις, Ἕλλην ὢν τῇ φωνῇ, οὐκ ἄν ποτε φαίην Ἕλλην εἶναι, διὰ τὸ μὴ φρονεῖν ὡς ἐφρόνουν ποτὲ Ἕλληνες· ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδίας μάλιστα θέλω ὀνομάζεσθαι δόξης. Καὶ εἴ τις ἔροιτό με τίς εἰμί, ἀποκρινοῦμαι χριστιανὸς εἶναι·»

Gennadius Scholarius, *Refutatio erroris Judaeorum*, eds. M. Jugie, L. Petit, and X.A. Siderides, *Oeuvres complètes de Georges (Gennadios) Scholarios*, vol. III (Paris 1930), pp. 253.

Chronological Table

Between 1400 and 1405: Birth

1435 (at most)-1450: *Didaskalos*

1437 (or earlier)-circa 1447: General judge of the Romans

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1439: Participates in the Council of Ferrara-Florence

1445: Leader of the anti-Unionists

1450: Becomes a monk

1453: Captured during the fall of Constantinople

1454-1456: Patriarch of Constantinople (first term)

1456: Residing in the monastery of Vatopedi

1458-1472: Most of this period, he lives in the monastery of St. John Prodromos near Serres

1463: Patriarch of Constantinople (second term)

1464-1465: Patriarch of Constantinople (third term)

1472 (or a little latter, definitely before the October of 1474): Dies and is buried in the monastery of St. John Prodromos near Serres