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THE EXCLUSIONARY RHETORIC AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ORTHODOX OTHER IN THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHN OF CAPISTRANO*

Abstract: This paper examines the narrative and rhetorical strategies in John of Capistrano's correspondence concerning Orthodox Christians during his stay in Hungary (1455–1456). It shows how derogatory language and framing techniques were deployed to portray the Orthodox as religious, political, and social “others” in relation to the Roman Catholic identity of the letter-writers. This exclusionary rhetoric, manifested in calls for repression, conversion, and papal intervention, is contextualized within the broader framework of anti-Orthodox Latin medieval discourse, the region's religious conflicts, and complex political relations amid the rising Ottoman threat. Finally, the paper considers the impact of such rhetoric and its persistence along the frontier regions.

Keywords: John of Capistrano, heresy, medieval letters, 15th century, othering.

1. Introduction

John of Capistrano was a prominent 15th-century Franciscan preacher and inquisitor. After leaving his career as a jurist, he entered the Franciscan order in 1416. Following the death of his teacher, Bernardino of Siena (1444), Capistrano emerged as one of the leaders of the Observant movement. From the time he joined the Franciscans until he died in 1456, “he was almost constantly on the move in Italy and beyond,” preaching religious and moral reform of the cities, both within and outside Italy, strengthening the Observant movement, advocating loyalty to the papacy, and opposing religious adversaries such as heretics and Jews.¹

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¹ Galamb 2023: 33–36, quote at 33; Hofer 1965: 57–419.

Capistrano's correspondence, written between 1418 and 1456, includes more than 665 letters. The portion examined in this study was produced in the context of his mission in Central and Eastern Europe (1451–1456). He began his journey in Vienna and concluded it in Hungary, following the missionary aims outlined above. This “grand tour” of Capistrano was characterized by his fiery sermons, especially against the Jews and in favor of the moral renewal of towns, which left a strong impact on his audiences, as well as by anti-Hussite polemics.²

After the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, promoting the crusade became a significant addition to Capistrano's missionary goals. To that end, he participated in the Imperial Diets of Frankfurt (1454) and Wiener Neustadt (1455). He then set out for Hungary to preach the crusade and personally assist in its organization. Arriving in May 1455, he established contacts with John of Hunyadi and other Hungarian nobles and, in June 1455, took part in the Diet of Győr, where the campaign against the Ottomans was discussed.³ Soon after his arrival, however, it became evident that the crusade would not be his sole concern. Parts of southern Hungary and the Serbian-Hungarian-Bosnian frontier were zones of Catholic–Orthodox conflict. In Transylvania and the neighboring areas, efforts to socially exclude the Orthodox had been ongoing since the mid-fourteenth century.⁴ In addition, anti-Catholic violence and murders occurred in the western parts of the Serbian Despotate following the expansion of Franciscan missions in the mid-15th century.⁵

Faced with the perceived Orthodox threat, Capistrano organized a mission aimed at their conversion in the southern regions of Hungary (September 1455–early 1456).⁶ At the same time, in Hungary, he met Serbian Despot Đurađ (George) Branković (1427–1456), an Orthodox ruler allied with Hungary, who was expected to join the crusading cause. While aware of Đurađ's strategic position, Capistrano was also expected to act as a protector of the allegedly persecuted Franciscans in Serbia.⁷

From February 1456 onward, Capistrano concentrated his Hungarian mission primarily on the anti-Ottoman crusade. His preaching helped to gather a contingent of forces that joined the defense of Belgrade from the Ottomans in the summer of 1456, alongside the army of John Hunyadi and the Hungarian barons, with additional support from the Serbian Despot. Capistrano himself took part in the battle, encouraging the crusader troops with his sermons. The battle ended in an Ottoman defeat in July 1456. Shortly afterward, Capistrano died in Ilok on October 23, 1456.⁸

² Galamb 2023: 35–36, 38; Housley 2004; Elm 2016; Sedda 2025; Sedda 2014. Different aspects of Capistrano's mission in Central and Eastern Europe are examined in the volume Kras and Mixson (eds.) 2018. For the strengthening of the Franciscan Observance and the spread of papal policy, see Viallet 2018; Kalous 2018. For anti-Jewish and moral preaching, as well as the polemical letters against the Hussites, see Soukup 2018; Klaniczay 2018; Zaremska 2018.

³ Housley 2004: 94–97; Galamb 2023: 36–38.

⁴ Daniel 2014: 130–133, 194–195; Magina 2021: 251.

⁵ Andrić 2016: 217–218; Antonović 1993: 66.

⁶ Hofer 1965: 357–361; Damian 2024: 21–28; Dobrei 2021.

⁷ Andrić 2016; Spremić 2005.

⁸ Pálosfalvi 2018: 178–181; Housley 2004: 97–107; Hofer 1965: 389–410; Kalić 1967: 127–170. For sources in English translation regarding the battle, see Mixson (ed.) 2022.

Capistrano's correspondence regarding the Orthodox has so far been considered in studies on particular phenomena, such as his Transylvanian mission,⁹ relations with the Serbian Despot,¹⁰ and Serbian-papal relations in the 15th century.¹¹ The recent critical edition of the Hungarian correspondence has laid the foundations for further systematic research of this type of source.¹² Eastern Christianity was identified as one of the three main thematic layers of the correspondence, alongside the crusade and the strengthening of Franciscan Observance.¹³

The main objective of this research is to reveal the narrative and rhetorical strategies employed to define the Orthodox within the aforementioned political-religious context. Primary sources consist of letters sent and received by Capistrano from June 1455 to August 1456, grouped in two sets: (1) letters related to the mission in southern Hungary¹⁴ and (2) letters concerning Despot Đurađ and the Serbian Orthodox.¹⁵ Their examination allows for an investigation of the correspondents' exchange of ideas, immediate reactions to the religious and political crises, and connection of their rhetoric to broader discursive trends in late medieval Latin Christianity.¹⁶ Research focused on the construction of otherness through derogatory language and framing techniques reveals the manners in which issues were presented and shared in communicative discourse.¹⁷ The theoretical and methodological basis of the research consists of historical, discourse, and rhetorical analysis, as well as communication framing theories, and historical contextualization.¹⁸

⁹ Hofer 1965: 357–361; Damian 2009; Daniel 2014: 112–227; Damian 2024: 23.

¹⁰ Andrić 2016.

¹¹ Antonović 1993: 68–69.

¹² Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023.

¹³ Galamb 2023: 60, 62–64.

¹⁴ These include invitation letters to Capistrano from the city authorities of Lipova (September 18, 1455) and the provost of Arad church (October 5, 1455); Capistrano's letters to the barons of Transylvania (Azach (likely Hatég), January 6, 1456), cardinal Juan Carvajal (Pest, February 3, 1456), and letters concerning Orthodox bishop John of Caffa to Cardinal Domenico Capranica (Buda, April 15, 1456), and Pope Callixtus III (1455–1458) (Buda, April 1456); letters from friar Michael Székely to Capistrano (Lipova, February 6, 1456; Lipova, February 10, 1456); letters from John Hunyadi to Capistrano (Timișoara, January 18, 1456; Lipova, February 7, 1456; Lipova, February 8, 1456); a letter from János Geszti, guardian of Tövis monastery to Capistrano (March 26, 1456). Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 230–231, no. 74, 232–233, no. 76, 259–260, no. 95, 266–268, no. 100, 271–276, nos. 102–105, 287, no. 116, 297, no. 128, 314–315, no. 133.

¹⁵ These include four Capistrano's letters to the pope (Győr, June 21, 1455; Győr, July 4, 1455; Csanád, September 17, 1455; Stari Slankamen, August 17, 1456), John of Hunyadi's letter to Capistrano (Dobra, September 8, 1455) and Pope Callixtus III's letter to Capistrano (Rome, December 10, 1455). Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 177–180, no. 50, 181–185, no. 52, 215, no. 69, 218–228, no. 72, 244–246, no. 86, 367–373, no. 173.

¹⁶ Further on the importance of medieval letters in investigating complex relations and conceptual perceptions in medieval societies, see Høgel and Bartoli 2015; Riehle 2020; Perelman 1988; Šaranac-Stamenković 2022, 249–252.

¹⁷ Entman 1993, 52–53; Nshom 2024; Collins and Christianson 2024.

¹⁸ For theoretical and methodological basis, and its implementation in medievalistics, see Van Dijk 2015; Fairclough 1992; Tracy 2005; Kuypers and King 2021; Eisenbeiss and Saurma-Jeltsch (eds.) 2012; Yıldız 2019; Goetz and Wood (eds.) 2021; Nieto-Isabel and Milian (eds.) 2022.

2. Source Analysis

2.1. Letters Related to the Mission in Southern Hungary

The choice of certain terms and labels is the way in which concepts are highlighted and made more salient in the communicative discourse.¹⁹ In the analyzed correspondence, the most frequent terms used to define the Orthodox were “schismatics” (*scismatici/schismatici*)²⁰ and labels directly connoting infidelity, such as “unbelievers” (*increduli*)²¹ and “infidels” (*infideles*).²² Christian theology distinguished between schism, which denoted ecclesiastical disobedience without necessarily nonorthodox teachings, and heresy as a more severe form of apostasy.²³ However, this distinction was not always obviously made in the high and late Middle Ages.²⁴ Heresy was rather a “willful disruption of a saving awareness of God previously shared with others” than a strictly defined sum of false teachings.²⁵ Thus, the near-synonymous usage of “schismatics” and “heretics” for the Orthodox in the analyzed letters followed the established discursive pattern in the Latin West, including Hungary, in which the Franciscans were its proponents.²⁶

The opposition between the concepts of *infidelitas* (infidelity) and *Christianitas* (Christendom) frequently appears in the letters. Terms *Christiani* and *fides Christianitatis* were used solely to refer to Catholics.²⁷ This reflects the medieval conceptual framework of *Christianitas*, which was exclusively related to Roman Catholicism.²⁸ *Infidelitas* referred primarily to non-Christians, most commonly Muslims, but also to heretics, carrying the connotation of separation from the *fideles* (i.e., the Catholics).²⁹ In the letters, both the Orthodox and Muslims were designated with the term *infideles*.³⁰ This conceptual framing was frequent in contemporary Eastern and Central European discourse in relation to

¹⁹ Entman 1993: 51–55.

²⁰ Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 231, no. 74, 233, no. 76, 260, no. 95, 275, no. 105, 298, no. 128, 315, no. 133.

²¹ *Ibid.* 231, no. 74, 266, no. 100. The cited letter from the town representatives of Lipova also mentions *pagani* alongside *schismatici* and *increduli*. *Ibid.* 231, no. 74. Although the Orthodox were occasionally labeled as pagans in contemporary Central and Eastern European discourse, unlike the other two terms, *pagani* does not appear elsewhere in Capistrano’s correspondence to designate them. Therefore, it cannot be stated with certainty that the term in this case referred to the Orthodox community. On the labeling of the Orthodox as pagans in other sources, see Petkov 1995: 172–173, 176–177.

²² *Ibid.* 266–267, no. 100, 298, no. 128, 315, no. 133.

²³ Peters 1980: 17; Baker 1972: 1, 17–18.

²⁴ Baker 1972: 7–9, 41–44.

²⁵ McGrade 1999: 135.

²⁶ Neocleous 2019; Daniel 2014: 24–27; Petkov 1995: 172–180, 174–175, 177; Galamb 2002.

²⁷ “Sed tamen ipsos incredulous nobiscum ducere non possumus, quos nos ad fidem Christianitatis converti optaremus.” Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 231, no. 74; “Scilicet suis fidelibus Christianis ipsas inhabitantibus plurimum defectum patitur et detrimentum, quas nunc vilissimi scismatici pro maiori parte inhabitant, [...] alios novellos Christianos malis variis ipsorum operibus inficiunt.” *Ibid.* 233, no. 76.

²⁸ Berend 2010.

²⁹ Weltecke 2015.

³⁰ For the Orthodox, see Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 266–267, no. 100, 298, no. 128, 315, no. 133. For the Muslims, see *Ibid.* 178–180, no. 50.

religious others.³¹ In the context of the Ottoman threat on Hungary's borders, labeling both the Turks and Orthodox with identical terms further reinforced a derogatory image of Orthodoxy as the opposite of Christendom.

The term *heretici* was used in the correspondence both for the Hussites³² and the Orthodox.³³ Furthermore, the Orthodox were portrayed as heretics by analogy and allusive meanings. Capistrano grouped them with the Hussites as the corrupted religious group,³⁴ and Orthodox bishop John of Caffa was described in terms which clearly implied heresy, such as *heresiarcha* and *magister omnium schismatum et haeresum*.³⁵ Additionally, disobedience to the pope and the Church was ascribed to the Orthodox by Capistrano³⁶ and the provost of the Arad church.³⁷ This misconduct was a defining heretical feature in the anti-heretical Latin discourse.³⁸

In his letter to Transylvanian barons, Capistrano labeled the Orthodox churches as *sinagogas Sathane eorum scismaticorum*.³⁹ In medieval inquisitorial rhetoric, the term “synagogues of Satan” was used to denote sites of heretical practices, desacralizing them as places of Devil worship. Consequently, their churches were typically ordered to be demolished.⁴⁰ This measure is explicitly demonstrated in Capistrano's letter.⁴¹ A similar example of justifying violence against the Orthodox appears in friar Michael Székely's letter to Capistrano from February 10, 1456.⁴² Székely labeled the Orthodox priests as *pseudopresbyteri*, a term typically attributed to heretical priests.⁴³ This term was employed in his call for the “rooting out” of these priests to facilitate the conversions.

Schism-related terminology and heretical framing of non-Catholic groups bear similarity to Capistrano's earlier rhetoric found in anti-Hussite and anti-Jewish polemics.⁴⁴ Moreover, he portrayed the Transylvanian Orthodox as an isolated group, outside even the boundaries of Greek Orthodoxy, stating that Orthodox Bishop John

³¹ Petkov 1995: 175–176; Srodecki 2016: 104; Jenks (ed.) 2018: 458–501, nos. 97–104.

³² Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 259, no. 95.

³³ *Ibid.* 287, no. 116, 315, no. 133.

³⁴ “Fidedigna relatione cognovi vos [...] pro augmento sancte fidei nostre vehementer ardere, precipue contra scismaticos, ideo Walachos et Rascianos et hereticos Hossitas [...]” *Ibid.* 260, no. 95.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 298, no. 128, 315, no. 133; Cross and Livingstone (eds.) 1974: 639.

³⁶ “Non enim ecclesiam Dei, non papam, non Sanctam Sedem Apostolicam quidquam pendebat, sed abscissus et alienus effectus.” Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 315, no. 133. This quotation relates to Bishop John, previously described in the letter as “heresiarch.” *Ibid.* 315, no. 133.

³⁷ “[...] quas nunc vilissimi scismatici pro maiori parte inhabitant, qui Deum non timent, nec cognoscunt, et proprium dominum naturalem spernunt [...]” *Ibid.* 233, no. 76.

³⁸ Fudge 2023: 2–4; Ames 2018: 42–44; Galamb 1997: 216–217; Siecienski 2017: 256, 279, 282–283, 290–294.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 260, no. 95.

⁴⁰ Novotný 2021: 155, 166–167, 186–187, 229; Kras 2020: 258; Radek 2022.

⁴¹ “Nam exemplo magnifici d(omini) Iohanni wayvode [...] et aliorum baronum regni Hungarie moveri debetis, qui sinagogas Sathane eorum scismaticorum comburi mandaverunt ubique in dominiis suis, querentes quod sacerdotes scismatici aut baptizetur aut omnino expellantur.” Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 260, no. 95.

⁴² “Siquidem nisi ipsi pseudopresbyteri, [et] nov[elli] et ant[i]qui, [extirpentur, conversio gentis scismatice non sortie]tur eff[ectu]m.” *Ibid.* 275, no. 105.

⁴³ Souter 1957: 332.

⁴⁴ Sedda 2014; Johannes de Capistrano 1858a: 697, 698, 699, et passim. Capistrano explicitly considered any non-Catholics to be heretical: “Omnis Judaeus, omnis infidelis gentilis et schismaticus dicuntur heretici.” Johannes de Capistrano 1858a: 698.

“adhered neither to the Roman nor the Greek rite,”⁴⁵ and that he consecrated the priests “in his own way.”⁴⁶ In the letter Capistrano received from Arad, Orthodox Christians are described as a threat to Catholics, being corruptors of converts labeled as *novellos Christianos*.⁴⁷ This threat narrative also appears in Michael Székely’s letter, in which he complained to Capistrano about the anti-Catholic sermons of the Orthodox archdeacon Peter of Hunyad.⁴⁸

Calls for repression and forced conversions were particularly characteristic of Capistrano’s and Székely’s narrative. When referring to conversions, both friars explicitly used the verb *baptizo*, which implied the actual act of baptism.⁴⁹ This choice of words suggests that the Orthodox may have been subjected to rebaptizing. Referring to conversions as actual baptisms reinforced the otherness of the Orthodox, positioning them closer to non-Christians than heretics, as heretics were typically received into the Church through revocation and reconciliation, without rebaptism.⁵⁰ Justification of violence mostly relied on the traditional Latin anti-heretical discourse, in which violent acts were seen as a means of saving heretical souls.⁵¹ Capistrano’s letters reflect this by describing forced conversions as bringing the Orthodox to the “knowledge of the truth”⁵² or “saving [their, I.S.] souls.”⁵³

While the Transylvanian barons adopted derogatory rhetoric toward the Orthodox in communications with Capistrano,⁵⁴ Székely’s letters reveal their actual reluctance to implement the harsh measures advocated by the friars.⁵⁵ The barons’ repressive actions targeted only Bishop John and priests ordained by him, and not the entire Orthodox community.⁵⁶ This suggests that the need for stable subjects ultimately prevailed over religious zeal and that Capistrano’s rhetorical strategy had a rather limited effect.⁵⁷

⁴⁵ “Hic enim cum multitudine sequacium et complicum suorum neque Romanum neque Graecum ritum tenebat.” Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 315, no. 133.

⁴⁶ “[...] consecrabat Valachos suo modo”. *Ibid.* 298, no. 128.

⁴⁷ “Vilissimi scismatici [...] alios novellas Christianos malis variis ipsorum operibus inficiunt et errare cogunt.” *Ibid.* 233, no. 76.

⁴⁸ “[...] quoniam et in perti[nentiis] Hwnyad [et Dewa vulgus satis ad conversionem foret inclina]tum, si Petrus a[rchidiaconus] presbiterorum Valacho[rum] de [Hwnyad suis sermonibus cauterinis aliter] non suaderet. De quo, ut relatu veridico percepi, timentes populi [converti non auderent], po[tius enim ignem ...] ut eligant, consulit, q[uam] bap[tismum] suscipiant in [forma ecclesie] Ro[ma]ne.” *Ibid.* 275, no. 105. Recent studies suggested that these “archdeacons” hold semi-episcopal status in the Greek-rite communities. Daniel 2014: 156.

⁴⁹ Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 260, no. 95, 266, no. 100.

⁵⁰ Kras 2020: 256–266.

⁵¹ Ames 2020: 482–485; Valodzina 2024.

⁵² “[...] pro cognitione veritatis Iesu Christi d(omini) nostri, ad salutem eorum.” Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 260, no. 95.

⁵³ “[...] etsi mens mea non nihil amaritudinis tulerit ob fructum salutis animarum, quem sic imperfectum reliqui.” *Ibid.* 266, no. 100.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 271–272, no. 102, 274, no. 104.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 271–272, no. 102, 275–276, no. 105; Petkov 1995: 178; Damian 2009: 148. After Capistrano’s and Hunyadi’s deaths, radical efforts waned, and King Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490) later granted privileges to Orthodox communities. Daniel 2014: 113.

⁵⁶ Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 274, no. 104.

⁵⁷ Hunyadi, although undoubtedly dedicated to Catholicism, led thoughtful policy toward the Orthodox depending on his interests. Simon 2020; Daniel 2014: 182, 203–204.

2.2. Letters Related to the Serbian Orthodox

A significant portion of the Serbian set of letters considers the role of Despot Đurađ Branković in contemporary political and religious processes. There were several shifts in Capistrano's way of addressing Branković's Orthodoxy. Initially, writing from the assembly at Győr, he maintained a neutral tone, focusing on coalition-building against the Turks, and even expressing sympathies for the Serbian losses in wars against the Ottomans. Capistrano acknowledged the despot's faith without condemnation.⁵⁸ However, in July and September 1455, his tone shifted, portraying Branković and the Serbian Orthodox as hostile to Catholics and harmful to Christendom. According to Capistrano, the change was caused by the reports by Bosnian friars about anti-Catholic Orthodox violence and Branković's refusal to convert to Western Christianity.⁵⁹ Additionally, the shift coincided with Branković's negotiations with Sultan Mehmed II (1444–1446; 1451–1481) after the failure of crusading plans proposed at Győr.⁶⁰ In a letter from September 17, Capistrano denounced this as "peace with the most savage enemy of Christ" and a part of the ongoing "dangers facing the Christian Republic."⁶¹

Following the crusader victory at Belgrade (1456), in which the despot acted as an ally, Capistrano's tone softened again. He described Branković as "the illustrious lord despot (who even if he does not accord with our faith, nevertheless [...] is with us in coming together against the faithless Turks)."⁶² However, this rhetorical shift does not necessarily indicate a change in Capistrano's theological stance toward Orthodoxy. Notably, the despot was still rhetorically isolated as someone who "does not accord with our [Catholic, I.S.] faith."

The letter of July 4, 1455, contains the most detailed critique of the Orthodox in the entire correspondence, especially its appendix, which consists of eighteen articles on Serbian religious "errors."⁶³ In the first part of the letter, Capistrano listed several accusations against Despot Đurađ Branković. He criticized the despot for persisting in Orthodox traditions, rebaptizing his granddaughter Elisabeth of Cilli, the fiancée of Hunyadi's son Matthias Corvinus at that time, and for intending to establish monasteries in

⁵⁸ "[...] despotum Rassiae, qui hic cum his dominis et baronibus anhelat ab eis subsidium et defensionem domini sui, denunciens ipsi despoto et baronibus nefandissimum nominis Christi hostem, Mahometh, Turcarum imperatorem occupasse potissimam Rasciae civitatem, Hobordam nomine. [...] Despotus autem Rasciae, quamvis valde damnificatus sit, obtulit se paraturum decem millia [equitum, I.S.], licet in sua fide perduret." Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 178–179, no. 50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 182–183, no. 52; Andrić 2016: 221; Spremić 1994: 454–455.

⁶⁰ Spremić 1994: 459.

⁶¹ "[...] post ceteras notifications de periculis Reipublice Christiane nunc insinuo [...] quod despotus ille [...] pacem iniiit cum Christi hoste sevissimo Magno Theucro Mahumeth." Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 219, no. 72.

⁶² "[...] illustris dominus despotus, qui licet cum nostra fide non concordet, cum intentione tamen vestre sanctitati conveniens contra perfidos Turcos nobiscum est." *Ibid.* 369, no. 173. English translation was taken from Mixson (ed.) 2022: 105, no. 13. According to John of Tagliacozzo's biography of Capistrano, the friar indeed softened his anti-Orthodox rhetoric during the battle of Belgrade. However, this change likely reflected his pragmatic need for military cooperation. Andrić 1999: 33; Daniel 2014: 202.

⁶³ Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 182–184, no. 52. It represents a sort of a treatise-letter, which is a form that Capistrano frequently used in his anti-Hussite polemics. Soukup 2018. This example complements the others noted in Galamb 2023: 48. Similar short anti-heretical treatise-letters, without firm organizing structure, were written by other contemporary Franciscans. See Galamb 2002: 43–49.

Hungary staffed with “Greek monks” (*calogeri Graeci*).⁶⁴ These monks were accused of denying the filioque and purgatory, as well as stating that the saints “do not enjoy any glory until the Day of Judgment,” and that the damned will not be punished until the Judgment Day.⁶⁵ Moreover, Capistrano disregarded the bull of Pope Nicholas V (1447–1455), which confirmed that Branković’s faith aligned with that of the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1445), as issued *ex non bona informatione*.⁶⁶

Regarding the portrayal of the Serbian Orthodox community, Capistrano predominantly used heretical and schismatic framing, combined with allegations of anti-Catholic hostility. Serbian Orthodox were labeled as *schismatici*,⁶⁷ and were referred to as those who “rend and tear to pieces the seamless tunic of our Lord,”⁶⁸ which served as a typical allusion to schism.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Capistrano asserted that Serbian errors were supra-heretical, since they had particularities that were “beyond the heresies of the Greeks.”⁷⁰ As in the Transylvanian correspondence, the term *Christiani*, or *Christianos catholicos*, was used exclusively to denote Roman Catholics.⁷¹ Serbian Orthodoxy, like its Transylvanian counterpart, was framed as isolated from Greek Orthodoxy. Folk beliefs, such as the notion that “man was once a bear” and the avoidance of certain foods due to superstition, were likely cited as markers of cultural deviance.⁷²

A significant portion of accusations centered on Orthodox hostility toward Catholics, such as property seizures, forced baptisms,⁷³ and mocking Catholic rituals and prayers.⁷⁴

⁶⁴ Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 182, no. 52. On Elisabeth’s alleged rebaptism into Orthodoxy, see Andrić 2016: 208–209.

⁶⁵ “[...] calogeros Graecos, qui omnino dicunt Spiritum Sanctum non procedere scilicet a filio, qui negant purgatorium esse, qui inficiantur animas quorumcunque sanctorum nullam gloriam usque ad diem iudicii habere, nec animas quorumcunque damnatorum aliquam poenam pati usque ad iudicium, et multa alia.” Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 183, no. 52.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 183, no. 52. Further on the bull, see Stamenović 2023.

⁶⁷ Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 183, no. 52.

⁶⁸ “Non satis aequo animo ferre possum [...] discidentes atque dilacerantes tunicam inconsutilem domini nostri Jesu Christi [...]” *Ibid.* 181–182, no. 52.

⁶⁹ Blumenfeld-Kosinski 2009; Metaxas-Mariatos 1988: 72; Whelan 2014: 513. Pope Pius II (1458–1464) used this metaphor in his oration *Subjectam esse* (Mantua, 1459) to strengthen the thesis that the unity of the Church rests upon the Apostolic See in which “the undivided tunic of the Lord is kept” (“hic indiscissa [indivisa, cor. M. Cotta-Schönberg] domini tunica custoditur”). Pius PP. II 2024.

⁷⁰ The eighteen articles were described as “[...] articuli, in quibus errant Rasciani ultra haereses Graecorum.” Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 183, no. 52.

⁷¹ “[...] compellunt Christianos aliquas quintas et sextas ferias et nonnulla festa secundum opinionem eorum”; “[...] non permittunt Christianos quarta feria vendere nec comedere carnes”; “[...] quando vero quis interficit Christianum, duodecim tantum [ferias, I.S.]” *Ibid.* 183–184, no. 52.

⁷² “Dicunt, ursum hominem fuisse, sed de exercitu Pharaonis hominem in ursum conversum, ratione cuius carnes ursi non comedunt”; “Non comedunt animalia, nisi prius per ferrum interficiantur; et si gallinas vel aves trahendo collum interficiantur, pro vita non comederent. Vel si canis leporem occideret, abiiciunt, impingendo Christianis, quod cadavera comedunt, qui huiusmodi comedunt.” *Ibid.* 184, no. 52.

⁷³ “Violenter Christianos catholicos arripiunt baptizando eos invitos, qui nollent, quandoque eis auferendo bona, et quandoque incarcerando eos.” *Ibid.* 183, no. 52.

⁷⁴ “Derident divina officia nostra”; “Compellunt Christianos catholicos violare ieiunia nostra in vigiliis sanctorum et festorum vel quatuor temporum”; “Quod orationes fidelium catholicorum et Romanorum nihil eis prosint, et dicunt quod sunt inutiles.” *Ibid.* 183–184, no. 52.

Similar to the Transylvanian set of letters, disrespect and disobedience toward the Roman Church were highlighted, alluding to the heretical behavior.⁷⁵ Orthodox scorn toward the Catholic Eucharist was another pattern in Capistrano's religious othering, previously used in his anti-Hussite and anti-Jewish polemics.⁷⁶ The image of Orthodox hostility was further supported by allegations of light Orthodox penances for killing Catholics, which were three times lighter than for killing a dog.⁷⁷

In the eighth article, Capistrano described the Serbian "baptismal" rite that supposedly included an explicit renunciation of the Latin faith, which is not known to other sources.⁷⁸ Just a few articles after, however, Capistrano referred to a well-documented Eastern Orthodox baptismal formula.⁷⁹ This was likely done to contrast it with the Catholic practice, as forms of baptismal rites were a point of contention between the two traditions.⁸⁰ The rite described in the eighth article may not have been completely fabricated, though. The rebaptism of Catholic converts was a frequent practice in Orthodox Christianity, and it was criticized by the Catholic theologians.⁸¹ The inclusion of an explicit renunciation of the Latin faith and Saturday fasting suggests that the described rite may have been performed specifically for Catholic converts. However, this still remains a hypothesis, until it can be substantiated with evidence from other sources.

The aim of Capistrano's critical letter was to strategically urge the pope to "address these evils and errors [malis et erroribus]" in order to protect the Catholics, prevent the despot from establishing Orthodox monasteries in Hungary, and to reconsider his role as an anti-Ottoman ally.⁸² Doctrinal polemic was of secondary significance, since only five of the twenty-two "errors" enumerated in the letter directly address doctrinal issues. The final impact of the accusations was limited. John of Hunyadi's letter to Capistrano (September 8, 1455) mentions Hunyadi's ill daughter-in-law, *neptis domini despoti* Elisabeth, without any mention of her rebaptism or derogatory language used.⁸³ Moreover, Pope Callixtus III, responding to Capistrano's letter, valued the Serbian despot solely for his military usefulness, and seemed indifferent to Capistrano's religious concerns.⁸⁴

⁷⁵ "Iura ecclesiastica confringunt"; "Sacerdotes eorum dicunt, quod sunt Romani abscissi de fide eorum, et Romana fides non est, sed ab eis derivata"; "De obedientia papae nihil curant"; "Indulgentias ecclesiarum et papae contemnunt, dicentes, quod haec vera non sunt"; "Contemnunt festa Corporis Christi, et Beatae Virginis non tenentes." *Ibid.* 184, no. 52.

⁷⁶ "Quando portatur sacramentum Eucharistiae ad infirmos, ipsi violenter spernunt, tanquam rem abhominabilem, in contemptum fidei catholicae." *Ibid.* 183, no. 52. For earlier uses of this pattern, see Johannes de Capistrano 1858b: 808–812; Sedda 2014: 145–146, 151–152; Rubin 2004: 120–125.

⁷⁷ "Quando quis gattam interficit, pro poenitentia [...] ferias sextas; quando interficit canem, triginta sextas ferias; quando vero quis interficit christianum, duodecim tantum". Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 184, no. 52.

⁷⁸ "Quando [...] baptizant, dicunt baptizandis: abrenuntias fidem Latinam? Et ille respondet: abrenuntio. Et illi: abrenuntias ieiunium sabbati? Et ille respondet: abrenuntio. Et illi: abrenuntias Petrum Guignani? Et ille respondet: abrenuntio." *Ibid.* 184, no. 52. Petrus Guignani still remains unidentified. *Ibid.* 184, note 1.

⁷⁹ "Quando baptizant, dicunt: baptizetur servus vel serva Dei in nomine Patris, Amen; in nomine Filii, Amen; in nomine Spiritus Sancti, Amen." *Ibid.* 184, no. 52.

⁸⁰ Avvakumov 2011.

⁸¹ Neocleous 2019: 58–61, 81–82; Kolbaba 2005.

⁸² Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 182, no. 52.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 215, no. 69.

⁸⁴ Andrić 2016, 223. The pope wrote: "De despoto autem et futuris [periculis displicent nobis ea, que scribis, sed

3. Conclusion

Both sets of letters mostly portray Orthodox Christians as the excluded “enemy-other” in Christendom, using medieval Latin derogatory terms to depict them as heretical, schismatic, socially and culturally deviant, and opposed to Roman Catholic *Christianitas*. Derogatory language and framing played a crucial role in this process by shifting the focus away from commonalities with the Orthodox to highlighting their “dangerous” otherness.⁸⁵

While the exclusionary language used in both sets of letters was largely similar, its strategic deployment varied: the Transylvanian letters, emerging from a position of Catholic power, aimed to compel Orthodox conversions and assert dominance, whereas the Serbian letters, reflecting Catholic vulnerability, warned of Orthodox hostility. The overall reach of this rhetorical othering appeared to be limited and “out of time” in relation to declining anti-Orthodox discourse in the Latin West.⁸⁶ At the same time, the analyzed correspondence shows that religious conflicts continued to generate exclusionary rhetoric and reinforce Catholic identity and Catholic–Orthodox distinctions on a localized scale in the frontier regions.

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spe]randum est in misericordia Dei, que non sinet gregem suum disperdi, et aderit nobis in brachio potenti, adversu[s] quod non prevalebit infidelium feritas. Ne]que vero credas, omnem spem nostram po[su]isse nos dudum in prefato despoto, neque ita necessaria] esse praesidia sua, [u]t aliter fieri non possit.” Galamb et al. (eds.) 2023: 244–245, no. 86.

⁸⁵ In situations of violent conflicts between different cultural groups, these distinctions become accentuated, often leading to the legitimization of violence as a means of excluding the “other” and reinforcing group identity. Murer 2009; Murer 2014.

⁸⁶ Petkov 1995: 187, note 38; Bisaha 2004: 122–133.

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ИГОР СТАМЕНОВИЋ
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**РЕТОРИКА ИСКЉУЧИВАЊА
И КОНСТРУКЦИЈА ПРАВОСЛАВНЕ ДРУГОСТИ
У КОРЕСПОНДЕНЦИЈИ ЈОВАНА КАПИСТРАНА**

Резиме

Угарска кореспонденција Јована Капистрана (1455–1456) настала је у контексту сложених околности православно-римокатоличких конфликта на простору јужне Угарске и западних делова Српске деспотовине, те превирања на хришћанско-османској граници. Православни су у писмима примарно представљени као група позиционирана изван граница хришћанства (*Christianitas*), поистовећеног са римокатоличанством. Искључивање се највећим делом остваривало кроз појмове који су наглашавали верску другост, попут *scismatici*, *infideles*, *heresiarcha* (за епископа), *sinagogas Sathane* (за храмове) и др. Употребом датих појмова, упоредо са реториком културне и друштвене другости, православни су изједначавани са јеретицима и неверницима. У писмима везаним за Српску деспотовину, Капистранов став према православљу деспота Ђурђа варирао је упоредо са Ђурђевим променама у антиосманској политици. Критике у овој групи писама истицале су, између осталог, насиље православних над католицима, непоштовање римског ауторитета, исмејавање католичких традиција и сујеверје.

Терминологија и реторика обе групе писама већим делом је слична и ослања се на латински средњовековни противправославни и јересиолошки дискурс. Међутим, употреба искључујуће реторике варирала је у односу на политички контекст, примаоце писама и различите позиције моћи римокатолика и православних. У јужној Угарској, где су католици били у доминантном положају у односу на православне, конструкција православне другости служила је јачању католичког идентитета, истицању доминације и легитимизацији насиља у циљу покрштавања православних. У случају Српске деспотовине, реторика другости служила је стварању слике рањивости и угрожености католика у већински православној средини, како би се придобила папска заштита. Анализирана кореспонденција показује опстајање негативног наратива према православнима у пограничним и конфликтним подручјима, упркос његовом ширем опадању на латинском Западу након пада Константинопоља (1453).

Кључне речи: Јован Капистран, јерес, средњовековна писма, 15. век, другост.

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