

Review of:

*Synopsis<sup>1</sup> of the Dissertation by Sergei Akishin*

*Митрополит Исидор Киевский и вся Русь: опыт аналитической биографии*

(*"Metropolitan Isidore of Kiev and All Rus' : Writing an Analytical Biography"*). Sergiev Posad, 2018, 24 p.

Sergei Akishin's interests focus mainly on two branches of theological knowledge: Historical Liturgy and Byzantine Studies. His third field of expertise is a by-product of these two disciplines – namely, the archival history of the liturgical and Byzantine studies in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russia. He is a prolific scholar, experienced in writing articles on these topics in peer-reviewed journals and Encyclopedias, and also in editing a journal himself – each issue of the 'Messenger of Yekaterinburg Seminary' is largely dependent on his editorial work. The preparation of the present Dissertation lasted a long while, but finally it is about to fill the gap both in S. Akishin's academic curriculum and in the field of Byzantine studies he chose to treat.

The reviewed work deals with Metropolitan Isidore of Kiev (+1463), who is one of the most controversial personalities in the history of the Slavic Orthodoxy, of the late Byzantine Empire and of the Roman Catholic Church. The study offers a thorough study of all available materials concerning Isidore. S. Akishin skillfully investigated Greek, Latin, Old Church Slavonic and Italian manuscripts; he critically analyzed scholarly bibliography written in German, French, English, Italian, Modern Greek, Ukrainian and Russian; he also managed to access a number of unpublished dissertations, which is an exploit in itself. The list of the sources and literature of a total of 315 entries is a representative, if not exhaustive, bibliography on Isidore.

The Dissertation is exemplary in its structure; the Synopsis reflects it. The classical obligatory parts of the introduction are anything but formal: the chapter '**Actuality of the subject**' formulates the grounds for conducting an impartial historical investigation, in a situation when confessional interests used to bias the reception of Isidore's legacy; the author deplores the persistence of "historiographical myths and pseudo-scientific speculations" (p. 4) till today. The next chapter is dedicated to the *status quaestionis* (p. 4-9) and draws the context of progressive discoveries of Isidore's works and previous attempts at systematizing his theological and political thought. S. Akishin shows that the earlier research made it possible to locate Isidore inside the vast cultural scope of the late Byzantine scenery. The **goal** of the investigation (defined on p. 9) results from this bibliographical and historiographical essay in an utmost logical way – S. Akishin aims to "reconstruct Isidore's biography as one of the important actors of late Byzantine élite". He then lays down the **tasks** he brilliantly accomplished in what follows – each task corresponds to a chapter of the Dissertation. Methodological grounds are soundly defined on p. 12-13 and are faithfully followed in the text.

The Synopsis summarizes the results of the analysis, comparison and, sometimes, necessary deconstruction of historical sources in order to document the main periods of Isidore's life (p. 16-22). We will dwell on two sections.

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<sup>1</sup> Below we use the term 'Synopsis' for 'автореферат'.

**Chapter 1.3:** "Byzantine embassy to Basel and Isidore's role at the Basel council" (p. 17). In his Dissertation S. Akishin draws a dense picture of the procedure of the council and of Isidore's activity. He also mentions the account of John of Ragusa (Stojkovič) on Isidore (Dissertation, p. 62-63). Of course, S. Akishin is correct to limit himself with the analysis of published materials on John, but it would be interesting to investigate the role of John of Ragusa in the Greek question at Basel's council and his interaction with the members of the Byzantine embassy. It is a separate task in itself deserving a whole monograph and an extensive archival research. In a recent work (*Strika Z. Johannes von Ragusa [gest. 1443]. Kirchen- und Konzilsbegriff in der Auseinandersetzung mit den Hussiten und Eugen IV. Augsburg, 2000*) a similar study was conducted concerning John's role in the Hussite question which was one of the primary issues of the Basel council. It is interesting to note that John of Ragusa lived in Constantinople from 23/24 September 1435 and 2 November 1437; Isidore was also in the Byzantine capital at that period, at least before autumn 1436, when he was ordained Metropolitan of Kiev. John Stojkovič was collecting ancient Greek manuscripts which later entered the library of Dominican convent of Basel; the majority of them are now kept in the Library of Basel University. Just a hint: would it be possible to search the Greek manuscripts of Basel for marginal notes left by Constantinople clergy of that time, eventually including Isidore?

**Chapter 4.2:** "Literary heritage of Isidore of Kiev" (p. 21). This section is one of the most important results of S. Akishin's research. He makes a list of all known compositions of Isidore in Greek, Old Church Slavonic, Latin and Italian; each entry contains a precious summary of the content and an historical evaluation of its context, as well as a brief evaluation of earlier studies, if any. S. Akishin concludes his unique inventory saying that Isidore's texts are "outstanding" samples of late Byzantine literature; he says Isidore wrote in exquisite Greek and patterned his style on classical texts of Ancient Greek literature. As a philologist, I'd be happy to read S. Akishin's philological analyses of Isidore's works, if he decides to conduct any in future: I encourage him to do so. It would very interesting to identify the literary and patristic sources of Isidore's works. We know how much weight Orthodox members of the council laid on patristic quotations; it is intriguing to see to which extent and in which sense Unionist authors like Isidore resorted to ancient Fathers!

Summing up, I wish to stress that S. Akishin's analytical biography of Isidore of Kiev is very rich in details which are precious for depicting his everyday life and for drawing his intellectual portrait. For certain periods of Isidore's life the author manages to give such a thorough picture that a modern biographer of a modern person could envy.

I highly recommend the Commission to acknowledge the excellent quality of Sergei Akishin's Dissertation and to confer him the degree of Candidate of Theology (major "Byzantine studies"), giving his Dissertation the highest mark. I also recommend the Dissertation to be published in its actual state as soon as possible.

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*The signature of Dr. Sergey Kim is hereby authenticated*  
  
*The Review was prepared on Dr. Kim's personal initiative*