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Greek and Byzantine Authors and Augustinus Moravus Olomucensis Part One: Plato and Bessarion

The present study is a continuation of the introduction to and analysis of the antique predecessors of Augustinus Moravus Olomucensis' *De modo epistolandi* (1495).¹ Related to the Budapest conference on 24-28 November 2014, entitled "*Byzanz und das Abendland III.*", this paper examines references to Greek and Byzantine authors in the works of Augustinus Moravus (1467–1513), and has two main objectives. First, the circumstances of the Bessarion edition (Strasbourg, 1513) suggested and initiated by Augustinus are introduced. Secondly, as the form and content of Augustinus' *Dialogus in defensionem poetices* (1493, hereafter: *Dialogus*) is largely based on Plato's dialogues, the intention is to present the parts relevant from the perspective of the *Dialogus*.

1. The Strasbourg Edition of Bessarion's Two Works (1513)

The readings, education and interests of Augustinus Moravus are well characterized by his intention of having two of Bessarion's (1403–1472) works published. The starting point is Cardinal Bessarion's own codex containing three of his writings. At the turn of the 15th and 16th century, this codex was kept in the Buda library, the location where Augustinus must have read it. Today it is in the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library,

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¹ EKLER, P., Classical Literature as a Model and Standard in the *De Modo Epistolandi* of Augustinus Moravus Olomucensis. In: HORVÁTH, L. (ed.), *Investigatio Fontium: Griechische und lateinische Quellen mit Erläuterungen. Beiträge der Tagung Klassisches Altertum – Byzanz – Humanismus der XI. Ungarischen Konferenz für Altertumswissenschaft*. Budapest 2014. 159–169.

marked as *Cod. Lat. 438*. Out of the three pieces, we focus on the two that, as initiated by Augustinus, were printed in Strasbourg in 1513.² One is a treatise entitled *De sacramento eucharistiae*, that Bessarion wrote around 1464, while the other is *Epistola ad Graecos*, a letter the cardinal addressed to the Greeks and wrote in 1463.

The printed text at the end of the *Epistola ad Graecos* says that the Strasbourg edition (1513) is based on a manuscript in the Buda library.³ The content of the codex (*Cod. Lat. 438*) gives us valuable insights into 15th century Hungarian book culture and books read in the country. Naturally, any writing dealing with the causes of the fall of the Byzantine Empire and with the debates between the Eastern and Western Christian churches and the possibilities of their reunification attracted special interest in the parts of Europe threatened by the Turks, including Hungary. It is no accident that Augustinus could take off the Buda library shelf Bessarion's old codex, and it is no accident either that he recommended to Sebastian Murrho (or Joachim Vadianus) that he should publish the writings in it. (Bessarion's certain works must have been familiar to Augustinus.)⁴

According to the words of Murrho in the dedication letter,⁵ Bessarion's writings were well known in Central Europe in the early 16th century, which is why Augustinus must have suggested that the Buda codex should be issued. The Strasbourg edition was issued in December 1513, only a month after Augustinus's death in November of the same year.

² Bessarion, *Oratio de sacramento eucharistiae. Epistola ad Graecos*. Ed. Augustinus Moravus. Argentorati ex aedibus Schurerii, men. Decemb. 1513.

³ "Ex libro syncaerae fidei transcripta, qui in bibliotheca Budensi Pannoniae inferioris habetur, cura Augustini Moravi, viri doctissimi." (Strasbourg 1513. fol. G_{ii}^v.) Cf. BARTONIEK, E., *Codices Latini Medii Aevi*. Budapest 1940. num. 438, p. 393–394; CSAPODI, Cs., *The Corvinian Library. History and Stock*. Budapest 1973. num. 115, p. 160.

⁴ For Bessarion's codex, see Edina Zsupán's recent paper: ZSUPÁN, E., Bessarion immer noch in Buda? Zur Geburt der *Bibliotheca Corvina*. In: EKLER, P. – KISS, F. G. (eds.), *Augustinus Moravus Olomucensis. Proceedings of the International Symposium to Mark the 500th Anniversary of the Death of Augustinus Moravus Olomucensis (1467–1513). 13th November 2013, National Széchényi Library, Budapest*. Budapest 2015. 113–138. For the links between Bessarion and Hungary, see Dan Ioan Muresan's paper: MURESAN, D. I., Bessarion et l'Église de rite Byzantin du royaume de Hongrie (1463–1472). In: GASTGEBER, CHR. – MITSIOU, E. – POP, I.-A. – POPOVIĆ, M. – PREISER-KAPPELLER, J. – SIMON, A. (eds.), *Matthias Corvinus und seine Zeit. Europa am Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit zwischen Wien und Konstantinopel*. Wien 2011. 77–92.

⁵ "Quam variae quamque reconditae doctrinae fuerit Bessarion ... neminem latere arbitror ..." (Strasbourg 1513. fol. Aii^{r-v})

The Strasbourg edition starts with Murrho's dedication letter to Joachim Vadianus, who must have acted as a mediator in having a copy of the manuscript sent to Strasbourg.⁶

Based on these reasons, it seems justified to include in its entirety the dedication letter to the 1513 Strasbourg edition, which documents the activities and outstanding merits of Augustinus:

S. Murrho Iun. Colmariensis Ioachimo Vadiano s.

Quam variae quamque reconditae doctrinae fuerit Bessarion, Constantinopolitanus patriarcha, neminem latere arbitror, qui libros eius in calumniatorem Platonis legerit, e quibus facile percipi potest, quantum in utraque lingua, et Graeca et Latina, quantum in philosophia valuerit, seu Platoniam sive Aristotelicam malis. Oratio autem haec de eucharistia, quam tu nobis, Ioachime Vadiane, imprimendam misisti, Bessarionem non minus subtilem fuisse theologum quam philosophum acutum, ni fallor, ostendet. Nam quid dici vel debuit, vel potuit de divino eucharistiae sacramento, quod idem oratio haec breviter non complectatur? Docet primum, quibus potissimum verbis, panis in corpus et vinum in sanguinem dominicum convertatur, an id fiat verbis domini, *hoc est corpus meum*, et *hic est sanguis meus*, an quibusdam aliis sacerdotum precibus, et quid super ea re Latinorum pariter atque Graecorum doctissimi ac sanctissimi quique senserint, in medium adducit. Dein Chrysostomum, Ioannem Damascenum, Basilium Magnum et alios eiusdem prorsus sententiae cum Latinis demonstrat. Porro rationes, quaecunque obiici solent, ordine refellit persuadetque omnibus tam Graecis quam Latinis ita sentiendum, ita credendum esse, quemadmodum Romana ecclesia et sentit et credit.

Orationi epistola subiungitur, elegantissima quidem illa, sed non tam elegans, quam gravis ac docta. Quae causam ruinae Graecorum exponit, eos scilicet in tam miseram servitutem praecipitatos, quia ecclesiae Romanae minime paruerint, sed diversa quaedam dogmata ipsi sibi finxerint, et quum saepius ab ea, tanquam pientissima omnium matre invitarentur, ut palinodiam canerent, faterenturque errores suos, renuerint. Ubi itidem Bessarion ostendit veteres Graecos nihil diversum asserere ab his, quae Romana ecclesia affirmat. Quare et ipsi tandem

⁶ For the relationship between Augustinus and Vadianus, see Christian Gastgeber's recent paper: GASTGEBER, CHR., Augustinus Moravus und seine Beziehungen zum Wiener Humanistenkreis. In: EKLER – KISS (n. 4) 11–29. esp. 26–29.

resipiscant, nec sapientiores patribus suis videri pertinaciter contendant. Hae tantae res in oratione una et una item epistola continentur.

Quapropter publice quidem studiosi omnes, praecipue sacris initiati, quorum res agitur, privatim Bessarionis ipsius manes gratias tibi, mi Vadiane, maximas, sed multo maiores Augustino Moravo, praeposito Olomucensi habebunt; huic quod studuerit e pulverulentis inferioris Pannoniae bibliothecis eruere et in lucem proferre, tibi, quod imprimi curaveris. Est is praepositus (ut scribis) vir tum magna sapientia, tum politioris literaturae amantissimus, a cuius certe instituto multum abhorrent nostrates (pace quorundam dixerim) et praepositi et canonici. Qui utinam se non tantum inani quadam doctrinae umbra venditarent, sed literas etiam humaniores amplecterentur aut, si amplecti nollent, studiosos earundem foverent aut saltem non insectarentur. Sed surdis fabulam. Ego Augustinum illum virum magnum et praestantem iudico. Cui dicatum esset hoc, quicquid est libelli, si fuisset nobis vel de facie notus. Tibi dicavimus, cuius opera et diligentia ad nos pervenit. Vale. Ex aedibus Schurerii, Nonis Decembib.[!]⁷ An. MDXIII.

2. Plato and Augustinus Moravus's *Dialogus*⁷

Augustinus Moravus dedicated the *Dialogus in defensionem poetices* to Johannes Roth (1426–1506), bishop of Wrocław. The dedication letter itself starts with a mention of Plato. Thus, let us see the relevant sections of the letter.

⁷ Thanks to Karel Svoboda, we have a modern edition of the *Dialogus* as well as studies about it, also by Svoboda: SVOBODA, K. (ed.), *Augustini Olomucensis Dialogus in defensionem poetices*. Prague 1948; SVOBODA, K., Augustina Olomouckého “Dialog na obranu básnictví”. *Listy filologické / Folia philologica* 69 (1942) 20–33. and SVOBODA, K., Il dialogo “In difesa della poesia” di Agostino da Olomouc. *Lettere italiane* 8 (1956) 34–49. Most recently, Farkas Gábor Kiss has written about the *Dialogus*, evaluating its originality, its novelty and analyzing its sources (e.g. Macrobius and Fulgentius), placed his sources among 14th and 15th century works defending poetry. This is his summary: “... Augustinus does more than simply copy the arguments of the most important Renaissance apologetics of poetry, Boccaccio and Petrarch, adding evidence from ancient allegorical literary interpretation, from Macrobius and Fulgentius. ... Augustinus Moravus – unlike the Italian master humanist [i.e. Petrarch] – points also to the common root of poetry and medicine, their oracle-like character and their cosmic-astrological correspondence. Drawing on a large number of late antique and Renaissance sources (Macrobius, Fulgentius and Petrarch among others), Augustinus has created a synthetic defense of poetry, in which the traditional lines of controversy, according to which poetry is exempt of the pursuit of material interests and it contains a hidden, allegorical meaning, are melted with astrological and moralizing arguments.” See: KISS, F. G., Augustinus Moravus and the Transmission of Ancient Wisdom in the Context of Poetry: *In defensionem poetices*. In: EKLER – KISS (n. 4) 77–91. esp. 91.

Augustinus Moravus Olomucensis r. d. Ioanni, episcopo Vratislaviensi s. p. dicit.

Non inutilem a maioribus nostris consuetudinem observatam invenio, praesul reverendissime, et a Platone illo divinissimo in posteros etiam traductam, ut, si res aliquas pro varietate diversa quandoque opinantium pertractandas forte susciperent, sermonibus eas sive dialogis quibusdam potissimum committerent, ut dum in eis varie interlocutorum repeterentur sententiae, erueretur mox aliquid, quod sibi solers lectoris ingenium non aliter quam ex uberiore quodam litterarum penu depromeret. Sic idem Plato, quom Socratem illum omnium sapientissimum cum Phaedro, Gorgia vel Thymeo variis de rebus disputantem in libris suis introduceret, ita validis utrobique rationibus dissertabat atque ita rem ipsam omni ex parte munitam relinquebat, ut difficile intellectu foret, in quem finem sua ipse opinione evaderet.

[...] Quum itaque animum meum in varias cogitationes distraherem, quodnam videlicet mihi in hoc studiorum meorum tyrocinio exercitationis genus obeundum interim foret, nihil mihi utilius visum est, quam Platonico illo instituto ad id genus scriptionis me conferre, quod non minus eruditionis contineret quam leporis, faceciarum et salis, utpote quod quotidiani sermonis formulam et affectuum qualitate effingeret et adagiis diceriis et iocis non secus ac floribus quibusdam amoenioribus lasciviret.

Id ipsum itaque, ut ad ipsius etiam originis eius rationem, unde id emanasse dixi, instituerem, talem mihi potissimum materiam deligere volui, quam ita effingerem tandem, ut quem ad modum Platonice illis dialogis, sic sermonibus etiam istis, quod sibi providus lectoris animus eliceret, relinqueretur.⁸

In his *Dialogus*, Augustinus relies mainly on three of Plato's works: *Phaedrus*, *Ion* and *Republic*.

A)

As will be seen, *Phaedrus* acts as a model for Augustinus as in choosing the scenes for the *Dialogus*, he imitates the scene of the *Phaedrus* dialogue.

⁸ *Dialogus in defensionem poetices* 12,1–15; 12,22–13,10.

(As we have seen, already in the dedication letter, Augustinus turned our attention to *Phaedrus*.)

The *Dialogus* is basically a rivalry between Augustinus (“Augustinus” is Augustinus Moravus’s alter ego) and Laelius, trying to decide whether poetry or medicine is superior, with Augustinus arguing for poetry and Laelius for medicine. Thus, at the beginning of the *Dialogus*, they are looking for the right site for the debate, quoting Augustinus:

Augustinus: Admonere me videris platani illius, quam in Phaetro suo divinus ille Plato disputatione Socratis adprime illustratam reliquit. Nam et opacitas est eadem, et aquila subterlabens non minus huic quam illi foecundioris fomenti suppeditat.

Laelius: Anne hic quiescendum putas?

Augustinus: Maxime, talia siquidem loca ingenio et Musis vehementer accomodata iam pridem expertus sum.⁹

The pleasant sounding lines remind the reader of *Phaedrus*: Augustinus and Laelius start their debate in an environment similar to that of the *Phaedrus* dialogue. In *Phaedrus*, they sit down to argue under trees near the River Ilissos (*Phaedrus* 229a, 230b), while in the *Dialogus* they sit under trees not far from the Brenta River.

B) Augustinus refers to Plato’s two other works, the *Republic* and *Ion* in a more organic way, responding to their content. In a later passage of the debate between Augustinus and Laelius, they say that poets (and medical doctors) are excluded from the republic and expelled from the town. This is what we read:

Laelius: Ita sententia ista tua omne id, quicquid usquam medicorum est, humano consortio excludis, ut, quod olim Plato de poetis tuis censuit, id tu modo de medicis rectius fore dicas.

Augustinus: Tanquam scilicet si id eis accadat, inauditum quoddam piaculum admissum autumes?

Laelius: Ut libet, inquam. Nunquam id mihi tamen persuaseris, huiusce professionis hominibus talem unquam ignominiam inustam, ut urbibus propulsandi (quem ad modum poetis olim tuis accidit) decernerentur.¹⁰

⁹ *Dialogus in defensionem poetices* 17,28–34.

¹⁰ *Dialogus in defensionem poetices* 20,21–28.

The *Dialogus* clearly refers to Plato's *Republic*. In order to understand why Socrates is so strict and critical of poets, we should study the relevant parts of the *Republic*. In its second and third books, Socrates makes critical remarks about poetry and music, or more precisely about the role that poetry and music play in religious and moral education. Socrates gives details of the types of stories guardians may listen to and the forms of poetry that may be permitted in the republic. He argues that future generations cannot get to know stories in which gods do dishonorable things; children and youths should not be told about gods fighting or committing crime against each other or harming humans. In other words, children should not be taught that gods might cause evil deeds. As god is good, he cannot possibly do harm to man. If humans suffer misfortune, they deserve it, it is due punishment for what they have done. Socrates believes that tales and stories should not spread false religious ideas. Thus, storytellers should be brought under control and stories should be filtered or explained so that they should not confuse children. Socrates makes critical comments that apply to both epic and dramatic poets (*Republic* II 378c–e, 380a–c; III 398a; X 595a–b).

C) The passage about the poet's and poetry's inspiration in the debate between Augustinus and Laelius immediately reminds us of Plato's *Ion*. This is what Augustinus says:

Augustinus: ... Volo siquidem ante omnia cum Musis meis in gratiam redeas, atque id genus hominum, qui praeclaro hoc munere afflantur, non secus ac oracula quaedam suspicias. Res enim (ut Plato ait) levis, volatilis atque sacra poeta est, neque poetica prius canere potest, quam deo plenus et extra se positus.

[...]

Augustinus: ... Quid enim (per deos immortales) admirabilius, quam mentes nostras tali quandoque vehementia exurgere, ita concitari, ita divino quodam furore corripi, ut dum calore isto inflammati vires proprias egredimur, nil aliud quam organa quaedam nos diis immortalibus praestemus? Ob hanc enim causam (ut idem inquit) Deus nobis mentem surripit, ut nobis tanquam ministris utatur, oraculorum nunciis et divinis vatibus.¹¹

¹¹ *Dialogus in defensionem poetices* 23,26–30; 24,11–16.

This is the reasoning in the relevant part of the Plato dialogue that served as a model. Socrates argues that it is not based on his technical skill (*technē*) that Ion the rhapsode can talk nicely about Homer; a divine force (*theia dynamis*) has an effect on Ion and moves him. Poets do not recite magnificent poetry due to their skills, but they are inspired, filled with God. The poet is able to be creative when his sobriety leaves him, when there is nothing rational in him any more, when he is engrossed in the divine (*entheos*). As poets do not work according to their skills (*technē*) but based on their divine share (*theia moira*), they can only create something professional when the muse inspires them to: one of them is good at writing epics, another one at the encomium, still another at the iambus, while in other fields their performance is weak. (If they had the skill to talk nicely about something, they would be able to apply the skill to talk about everything else in an equally nice way.) God however takes their sense, using poets as servants in the same way as fortunetellers and augurs. Listeners know that the wonderful thoughts do not originate from the fortunetellers but from God himself (*ho theos autos*), that he talks to them through fortunetellers (*Ion* 533d–534d).

In summary, we can say the following. Firstly, the fact that Cardinal Bessarion was a decisive 15th century European personality in Italy in the life of the church, politics, literature and scholarship, justifies the special interest in the Strasbourg print (1513) that contains two of his writings. The edition initiated by Augustinus has drawn attention to cultural relations in Central Europe, specifically in Hungary, at the turn of the 15th and 16th century. This paper has examined the reasons why Augustinus tried to have the two pieces published. In other words, the emphasis has been on showing Augustinus's readings, education and editorial intentions.

Secondly, in case of Augustinus's *Dialogus*, a close parallel with Plato's works is obvious. Augustinus used both the form (the genre) and the content of the Platonic dialogues. Augustinus's title (*Dialogus in defensionem poetices*) is in itself a reference to Plato's dialogues, and in his dedication letter the pedagogical value and use of the Platonic dialogues is unambiguously stressed. *Phaidrus* offered a model to follow primarily in the choice of the scene for the debate between Augustinus and Laelius. References to *Ion* and the *Republic* already form part of the ideas formulated in the *Dialogus*.

Clear references to Plato's works are found mainly in the first part of the *Dialogus*. When examining the entire *Dialogus*, we see that although Plato

is an essential author for Augustinus, basically, the structure of ideas in the *Dialogus* is not defined by quotations from and references to Plato. Modern scholarship dealing with the *Dialogus*, namely research by Karel Svoboda, and more recently and more significantly by Farkas Gábor Kiss has shown that the main sources for the *Dialogus* were works by Macrobius and Fulgentius.¹²

What Plato says about poets' divine inspiration, appears in Augustinus's work mainly as the topics of defending poetry and attacking medicine. Despite all this, it has been demonstrated that Plato is definitely the main Greek source for Augustinus's *Dialogus*.

¹² Kiss (n. 7) 91.