

## Reality Invented: How Uniate Josaphat Kuntsevych Supposedly Contributed to the Conversion of Nikon, Patriarch of Moscow\*

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Rzeczywistość wymyślona: jak unita Josafat Kuncewicz niby przyczynił się do nawrócenia patriarchy moskiewskiego Nikona

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**Abstract.** The objective of the paper is to showcase the relationships between literature and non-literary events on the example of the figure of Josaphat Kuntsevych (1580–1623) – the first martyr of the Uniate Church in the Commonwealth of Both Nations – and the miracle attributed to him. The hagiographical works mention the miraculous conversion of Moscow’s patriarch – Nikon (1605–1681) – to Catholicism, which reportedly happened in Moscow due to a painting depicting Kuntsevych. As a result of this event, Nikon resigned from his office. The description of the miracle, written around 1672 evolved with time, complemented with more and more circumstances surrounding the unusual event, stemming out of rumours and myths, but also reflecting a certain historical reality. The paper analyses the latest version of this story (S.P. Ważyński, *Kazanie na uroczystość Bl. Jozafata Kuncewicza*, Vilnius, 1762), setting out the stages of shaping its individual parts (narrative construction of reality), as well as confronting historical reality with imaginary reality described in the miraculous event.

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**Abstrakt.** Celem artykułu jest pokazanie relacji między literaturą a wydarzeniami pozaliterackimi na przykładzie postaci Jozafata Kuncewicza (1580–1623) – pierwszego męczennika Kościoła unickiego w Rzeczypospolitej – i związanego z nim cudu. Utwory hagiograficzne zawierają opis cudownego nawrócenia i przejścia na katolicyzm patriarchy moskiewskiego Nikona (1605–1681), które miało dokonać się w Moskwie za przyczyną obrazka przedstawiającego Kuncewicza. Następstwem cudu była rezygnacja Nikona z patriarszego urzędu. Powstały około 1672 roku opis cudu z czasem obrastał w nowe, towarzyszące niezwykłemu wydarzeniu okoliczności; rodziły się one z pogłosek i mitów, ale także odzwierciedlały pewną realność historyczną. Artykuł analizuje najpóźniejszą wersję tej historii (S.P. Ważyński, *Kazanie na uroczystość Bł. Jozafata Kuncewicza*, Wilno 1762), ustalając etapy kształtowania się poszczególnych jej części (narracyjne konstruowanie rzeczywistości), a także konfrontując realność historyczną z opisaną w cudownym wydarzeniu rzeczywistością wyimaginowaną.

**Słowa kluczowe:** utwory hagiograficzne, hagiografia, Jozafat Kuncewicz, patriarcha moskiewski Nikon, przejście na katolicyzm, narracyjne konstruowanie rzeczywistości

Hagiographical works of the early modern period can be a very interesting historical source, narrating not only about the actual events that occurred, but also about how an individual hagiographer (or an entire hagiographical tradition) constructed the historical past, that is, offered their readers an imaginary reality. This constructed reality served not only moral and edifying purposes, but also the strengthening of a certain confessional identity: an appeal to the events of the recent past made the miracles of saints and ascetics even more convincing and real in the eyes of faithful people. Especially if the miracles narrated significant historical events.

One of these stories tells about the role that the first Martyr of the Uniate Church, Archbishop of Polotsk and Vitsebsk Josaphat Kuntsevych (1580–1623) played in the conversion to Catholicism of one of the most prominent representatives of the Church history in Russia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century – Patriarch Nikon of Moscow (1605–1681). The figure of Kuntsevych was one of the key figures for the formation of the confessional identity of Greek Catholics in the Polish-Lithuanian state, his cult was actively promoted not only by the Basilian monks, but also by the Jesuits. The description of this miracle is found in rare *Lives* of Kuntsevych of the last third of the 17<sup>th</sup>–mid-18<sup>th</sup> century; in 1762, it was used in an oral sermon of the Basilian Skarbek Porfiry Ważyński in the Cathedral of Polotsk (Ważyński, 1762), thus going beyond only the written narrative and becoming a fact of oral communication.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Basilian Porfiry Ważyński (1730–1804) was a translator, hagiographer, appointed in 1790 to the Uniate bishopric of Chełm, the author of the philosophical theses based on the life

The history that interests us from the moment of its formation to 1762 was expanded and acquired new historical details. First, we consider its content as it was presented in an oral order by the Basilian Ważyński.

In his sermon on the day of the blessed Josaphat Kuntsevych, the Basilian dwells on the description of the most significant miracles of the first Uniate Martyr, performed by him after his death. And one of these miracles is the conversion to Catholicism of the Patriarch Nikon of Moscow. After his enthronement, Nikon “a man taken in his opinion of piety” [“mąż u swoich dla mniemaney pobożności wzięty”], began to persuade Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich to make him “equal to Pope of Rome” [“Papieżem rownym Rzymskiemu”]. To achieve this goal, Nikon ordered the publication of a translation of the *Donation of Constantine* – a forged document by which the Emperor Constantine supposedly transferred authority over Rome to the Pope, with which the Patriarch wanted to justify the significant powers of the Church authority and its independence from secular power.<sup>2</sup> Nikon’s pretensions – as Ważyński narrates – aroused the indignation of the representatives of the Moscow nobility,<sup>3</sup> under whose pressure the Tsar “stopped thinking about the Papacy of Nikon” [“o Papiestwie Nikona myślić zaniechał”]; and Nikon himself “ashamed, left his bold thoughts, when he turned to Patriarch dignity” [“zawstydzony zuchwałych myśli swoich odstąpiwszy, gdy na Patryarszeńskiej godności przestawał”]. By his humility and rejection of his original plans to rise, Nikon later won a special grace from God, which was revealed to him through the mediation of Josaphat Kuntsevych. Once, while visiting Polish prisoners in prison, Nikon took away a brochure with the image of Kuntsevych from one of them and, throwing it on the ground in anger, trampled it underfoot, for which he was almost immediately struck by a serious illness from God. Later, “taken to the palace [...] ordered, to bring the picture he had criticized, and in front of it [...] sing Moleben with devotion, during which [...] he apologized to the Martyr, that took his health”

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of Kuntsevych *Beatissimo Martyri Josaphat Kuncevicio* (Wilno 1761) (Witkowska and Nastalska, 2007, vol. I, p. 257).

<sup>2</sup> In this case it was about including of *Donation of Constantine* into the collection of church and secular laws *Kormchaya kniga*, published in Moscow in the second edition in 1653 (*Kormčāā kniga*, 1653, k. 738–747v.).

<sup>3</sup> Ważyński even quoted a fragment of *Donation*, which, in his opinion, was the reason for the indignation of the secular nobility: “Where the supreme king of Heaven, his Vicar on earth and the Head of all Christianity, is appointed, there is no right for an earthly king to have power” [“Gdzie od najwyższego króla Niebieskiego, Namiestnik jego na ziemi i Głowa Chrześcijaństwa całego jest postanowiona, tam królowi ziemskiemu mieć władzy niegodzi się”] (Ważyński, 1762, k. D1v.–D2). In the Church Slavonic version of the Moscow *Kormchaya kniga*, however, there is no mention of the “vicar”; nor is there any mention of the “head of Christianity” – it refers to the head of “Christian piety” (*Kormčāā kniga*, 1653, k. 746).

[“zanieiony do pałacu [...] rozkazał zelżony od siebie przynieść obrazek i przed nim [...] z nabożeństwem śpiewać Moleben, podczas którego [...] przepraszał Męczennika, wnetże odebrał zdrowie”]. Rumors about the incident spread throughout Moscow, which were confirmed by the prisoners themselves – the Dominican Baltazar Suski and a native of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Bazyli Luskina. The last one, “being taken at the service of the Patriarch, he saw it with his own eyes” [“wzięty będąc do usług Patryarchy, sam swemi na to patrzył oczyma”]. After a miraculous recovery thanks to the intercession of Kuntsevych, Nikon moved to the monastery he founded and “living in it in the saint unity with the church of Rome, he did severe penance” [“w nim żyjąc w jedności świętej z kościołem Rzymskim ostrą czynił pokutę”]. And it was for his conversion to Catholicism – as Ważyński narrates – that the Patriarch was called a heretic and cursed at a Church Synod by the representatives of the Russian and Greek clergy.<sup>4</sup> At the same Synod, Nikon made a speech in which he openly admitted that only the Pope has power over him and has the right to judge him (“Only the Roman Pontiff, the Father of Fathers, of a holy and undefiled conscience, has power over me” [“Sam tylko Papież Rzymski Oyciec Oycow świętego i niezmazanego sumnienia ma nademną władzę”]) (Ważyński, 1762, k. D2–D2v.).

In the story retold by Ważyński, two main storylines can be distinguished: the ecclesiastical and political ambitions of Nikon, who wanted to rise as the Pope, and the miraculous conversion of the Patriarch of Moscow to Catholicism through Josaphat Kuntsevych. Analysis of earlier versions of this miracle of the first Uniate Martyr shows that these stories were formed independently of each other and were perceived by the Uniate hagiographical tradition from different sources. The earliest description of the miracle is found in the hagiographical monument: “A crown of gold over wounded head of m.b. Josaphat Kuntsevych [...] with precious miracle stones [...] is lined [...] from Latin by Polish explained” [“Korona złota nad głową zranioną b.m. Iozaphata Kunczewicza [...] drogiemi kamieniami cudow [...] sadzona [...] z łacińskiego ięzyka polskim objaśniona”] (Wilno 1673). The translation of this work from Latin is attributed to the Dominican Dominik Jacek Malinowski (died after 1678), and the Jesuit Stanisław Kosiński (ca. 1587–1657) is given as the author of the Latin edition (Witkowska and Nastalska, 2007, I, p. 122, 149; II, p. 78).<sup>5</sup> Dated September 1672 miracle no. 149 (*Korona złota*, 1673, k. K–Kv) describes only the story of the profanation by Nikon of the image of Josaphat

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the Great Moscow Synod convened in April 1666 in order to depose Patriarch Nikon.

<sup>5</sup> The statement about the authorship of Kosiński must be considered doubtful: the Jesuit died in 1657, and *Korona złota* presents the miracles of Kuntsevych, dated 1673 inclusive. If Kosiński was the author of this monument, Malinowski significantly expanded it during the process of trans-

Kuntsevych, which was followed by a serious illness and a miraculous healing of the Patriarch of Moscow after a moleben before the image of the Uniate Martyr. There is neither mention of Nikon's conversion to Catholicism, nor a hint of its Church-political ambitions. The witness who told about the incident under oath is called the Dominican Jan Baltazar Suski – “Promoter of the Rosary of the St. Minsk Monastery of the Russian province” [“promotor różańca s. klasztoru Mińskiego prowincji ruskiej”],<sup>6</sup> who, although spent about 14 years in a Moscow prison, was not an eyewitness to what happened (as it is emphasized in the Ważyński's version), but learned about the event from the words of “Bazył Luskin, a citizen of the Orsha powiat” [“Bazylego Luskiny obywatela powiatu Orszańskiego”] in the service of Nikon (*Korona złota*, 1673, k. K).

The interpretation of the miracle performed by Josaphat Kuntsevych as the main reason for the conversion of the Patriarch of Moscow to Catholicism, as well as the description of the papal ambitions of Nikon, appear for the first time in the monuments of the first third of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Basilian Ignacy Kulczyński (1707?–1747?) (Rechowicz, 1971, pp. 138–139) writes about this in his hagiographical history of the Ruthenian Church *Specimen Ecclesiae Ruthenicae* (Parisiis, 1733).<sup>7</sup> This story did not later appear in the materials of the canonization process of Josaphat Kuntsevych in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Welykyj, 1952–1967); then it was not possible to find (post 1762) the *Lives* of the first Uniate Martyr, in which this story was present. Thus, it is quite possible to assume that the miracle described above was relevant only within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

It is necessary to ask how this story could have originated at all and to what extent it reflected real historical events related to the figure of the Patriarch Nikon of Moscow. It can be assumed that the plot with the profanation or destruction of a certain brochure, in which there was an image of Kuntsevych or some other figure of the Uniate or Catholic Churches, really took place in reality: first, images of the first Uniate Martyr are already present in his early *Lives*, published in brochures shortly after his death (Kreuza, 1625), and, therefore, were widely available; second, Polish- and Latin-language books published in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were not uncommon in Moscow in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup>

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lation. I would like to express my gratitude to Gabinet Starych Druków BUW Ewa Kosmowska for providing the pages of *Korona złota* necessary for this research.

<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to note that the Dominican Jan Baltazar Suski is a real historical person (the information obtained from Fr. Ireneusz Wysokinski OP, from Archives of the Polish Dominican Province in Krakow). It was not possible to establish the details of his capture and stay in Moscow.

<sup>7</sup> Kulczyński tells the story about Nikon on pp. 133–135. Two small but significant details that distinguish the version by Kulczyński from the sermon by Ważyński will be discussed below.

century. Therefore, it is possible that if not the Patriarch of Moscow himself, then someone from his circle could actually have such a brochure in his book collection.

Naturally, the question arises as to how the information (or the rumours) about the profanation of the image of Kuntsevych could get into the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian state. In all versions of the description of the miracle, two people from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth who were in captivity in Moscow appear as eyewitnesses. It seems quite possible that the Patriarch of Moscow actually communicated with some of the captured Poles, even if he did not visit them personally in prison: it is known that Nikon was very friendly to foreigners, who were many even in his personal environment. So, the boyar Odojevski visited in 1663 at the behest of the Tsar the disgraced Patriarch in the Voskresensky (New Jerusalem) Monastery and reported that Nikon has many foreigners living there (Berh, 1831, pp. 224–225).

It is known that the prisoners were kept in Moscow in great strictness and theoretically could not come into contact with their fellow tribesmen. But it is also known that there were such contacts: when the official representatives of the Polish-Lithuanian state appealed to the Tsar to return prisoners, they were often better informed about which exactly citizens of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were in captivity than the corresponding Moscow authorities. Therefore, the captured Poles could easily inform their fellow tribesmen about what was happening in Moscow prisons.

The phrase, supposedly uttered by Nikon at the Church Synod, that only the Pope had power over him and had the right to judge him (which Ważyński considered as one of the confirmations of the transition of Nikon to Catholicism) could become known in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth through the members of the Polish Embassy Stanisław Kazimierz Bieniawski and Cyprjan Brostowski, who visited Moscow in 1667 on the occasion of the signing of the *Rozejm w Andruszowie* [*Truce of Andrusovo*]. The report of the envoys states that just before leaving Moscow, they met with some Greek Church hierarchs who came to Synod, and therefore were aware that the main reason for the convocation of the Synod was the deposition of Nikon (*Istoričeskij rasskaz...*, 1991, p. 339).<sup>8</sup> In any case, the historiography, up to the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, repeated the opinion that the information that the Patriarch Nikon allegedly converted to Catholicism came to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with the Polish Embassy in 1667 (Zyzykin, 1931, p. 164, 166).

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<sup>8</sup> In the Polish-language publications of the materials of the Embassy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this fact is not mentioned (*Relacya poselstwa...*, 1861, pp. 73–93).

The very phrase attributed to Nikon that only the Pope had power over him and had the right to judge him, goes back with a high degree of probability to the rumours which were spread long before the arrival of the Polish Embassy in Moscow, by the opponent of the Moscow Patriarch, Bishop of the Church of Jerusalem, Orthodox Metropolitan of Gaza Paisios Ligarides (ca. 1610–1678), who was appointed as the head of the Great Moscow Synod of 1666. Paisios, in his testimony, referred to a personal conversation with Nikon (Palmer, 1871, p. XXI). But Nikon himself could give rise to speculation about his desire to appeal to the court of the Pope. During the sessions of the Great Moscow Synod, the Patriarch, answering the questions from the boyar Simeon Streshnev, quoted canon III of the local synod of Sardica (343–344): “if a bishop have any cause with another bishop, let him not call in stranger bishops. But let the bishop of Rome judge” (Palmer, 1871, p. 3). By referring to this canon, Nikon, of course, did not want to say that he was going to demand that the Pope himself judges him – he just wanted to justify the illegality of the participation in the Great Moscow Synod of the representatives of other Orthodox churches who did not have canonical authority over him.

The foreign press of that era also wrote about the special favour of Nikon to the non-Orthodox – for example, the Riga newspaper dated 19 November 1670 reported that the Patriarch of Moscow was deposed for allowing Lutherans, Calvinists, and “Papists” to go to the Russian Church (Evgenij (Bolhovitinov), 1995, p. 245).

The evidence of Paisios Ligarides, the information in the European press, and rumours brought from Moscow by Polish diplomats – all this could have been a source for Basilian hagiographers of a later era. The story about Nikon’s alleged ambitions to become “equal to Pope of Rome” in Russia also grows out of a mix of various rumours and conjectures, as well as from a misinterpretation of some historical facts.

It is well known that Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich treated the Patriarch of Moscow with great sympathy. Nikon, even during the enthronement, obtained a promise from the Tsar not to interfere into the Church affairs, and since 1652, the title of the Patriarch of Moscow also included “great sovereign” [*великий государь*]. The Tsar’s frequent absences from Moscow in connection with military operations gave Nikon additional opportunities to strengthen his power. The boyars close to Aleksey Mikhailovich considered the Patriarch’s political ambitions excessive and saw them as a threat to the tsarist power. It is noteworthy that the Moscow nobility appealed to the publication of the Patriarch of *Donation of Constantine* in *Kormchaia Book*: they believed that with this document, Nikon wanted to show that just as Constantine the Great ceded Rome to the Pope Silvester I, so the Tsar should have ceded power in Moscow to him. As we remember, just the story appeared in the Polotsk Basilian sermon of 1762 as a confirmation of the papal ambitions of Nikon. As a side note, the text of *Donation*



in *Kormchaia Book* is immediately followed by a Chapter on the Roman apostasy from the Orthodox faith – which neither Ważyński nor his predecessor Kulczyński, of course, mentioned about. But this fact – whether it was known to the Basilians or the parishioners gathered in Polotsk Cathedral for a sermon on the occasion of the day of Josaphat Kuntsevych – would cast doubt on the authenticity of the story of Nikon’s conversion to Catholicism. It is quite possible that the imaginary story about the power ambitions of Nikon was later overlaid with real historical events related to the project of establishing the papal see in Moscow, similar to the Holy See in Rome.

For the first time, the Russian historian of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Vasilij Tatišev (1686–1750) wrote about the existence of such projects. Describing in his work about the reign of the son of Aleksey Mikhailovich – Fedor Alekseevich, Tatišev mentions the meeting of the latter in 1676 with a native of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth who settled in Moscow Simeon of Polack, who conceives the idea of setting up four patriarchs in Russia, and taking Nikon out of prison to be Pope over them all (Tatišev, 2014, p. 518).

For a long time, the statement of Tatišev was considered a fiction, until it was found the confirmation of his words in other sources of that era. Pavel Sedov believes that the project of establishing a papal see in Moscow could have been part of the grandiose Church reform of the 1680s, which, however, was not fully implemented, but laid the foundations for the later Church transformations of Peter the Great. The believability of the whole story is also given by the fact that the title “Pope” was not unusual for the Orthodox world at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century – a similar title was then used, for example, by the Patriarch of Alexandria (Sedov, 2006, p. 428, 432).

The statement of Tatišev, however, could not be a direct source for the Basilians – *Istoriya Rossijskaya [History of Russia]* was first published after the death of Tatišev in 1768. But at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> – first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the projects for the establishment of the papal see in Moscow are mentioned in a number of diplomatic sources. The Netherlands resident in Moscow, Johannes van Keller, wrote in his report of September 5, 1681, that only the death of Nikon prevented him from being proclaimed Pope. The Danish envoy Georg Grund (d. 1729) in his report to Frederick IV, king of Denmark (1671–1730), attributed the initiative of establishing the papacy in Russia to Nikon, and transferred all the action to the era of the reign of Aleksey Mikhailovich. Grund stated that Tsar Alksey Mikhailovich’s own sister (without calling, however, this sister by name) opened his eyes to Nikon’s claims (Sedov, 2006, pp. 427–428).

It is noteworthy that in the version of Kulczyński, the Tsar’s sister Irina (1627–1679) also appears as a whistle-blower of the ambitious plans of Nikon. While in the Basilian sermon of 1762, the representatives of the Moscow nobility told the Tsar



about the ambitious plans of Nikon. This discrepancy in details between Kulczyński and Ważyński may indicate that they drew this information from different sources.

Thus, the description of the Nikon's conversion to Catholicism, with the miraculous mediation of Josaphat Kuntsevych and all the circumstances surrounding this conversion, both real historical events and incorrect interpretation of individual statements of the Patriarch of Moscow itself, as well as various rumours and conjectures had intertwined. It is also necessary to ask the question of the purpose for which this miracle, performed by the first Uniate Martyr, is actualized in the Basilian literature of the first third – middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Researchers unanimously note that the cult of Josaphat Kuntsevych gradually faded during the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, despite significant efforts of the Uniate clergy: for example, the Metropolitan of Kiev and Galicia of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Kyprian Zochovskij (1635–1693) included the day of veneration of Kuntsevych (September 26) into the new *Служебник*<sup>9</sup> 1692, canonically extending it to the entire Uniate Church Metropolitanate. At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, some elements of the cult of the first Uniate Martyr were present mainly in the Basilian centres in area of Polack (Skočilâs, 2008, pp. 30–32). In the dioceses that joined the Union only at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the cult of Kuntsevych did not become widespread at the parish level (Balik, 1973, pp. 47–61).

Ważyński begins his sermon by complaining that even in Polack itself, Kuntsevych is almost forgotten: if earlier the Polochans loved and revered Josaphar, now “I see that piety has faded in their hearts towards this Martyr [...] also on the very day of his annual celebration (who would expect?) I see a small handful of gathered people” [“prawie wygasł w sercach ku temu Męczennikowi upatruję nabożeństwo [...] też w sam dzień roczney uroczystości jego (kto by się spodziewał?) małą nader zebranych ludzi upatruję garstkę”] (Ważyński, 1762, k. A2). The story about Nikon could be a reproach to the Polochans for the lack of religious zeal in honouring of Kuntsevych, who managed to convert even such a prominent schismatic hierarch to the true faith. This miracle could be one of the incentives to revive the cult of the first Uniate Martyr for the faith. Moreover, in the hagiographical tradition, the main part of the miracles performed by Kuntsevych after his violent death is connected with the conversion to the Union of both Orthodox and the representatives of other Christian denominations and even Jews. It is surprising that Ważyński does not refer to the history of the miraculous conversion of another Orthodox Hierarch, Meletius Smotrytsky (ca. 1578–1633), as an example. The fact that Meletius moved to the Union precisely because of the miraculous influence of Kuntsevych on him was written by the Uniate metropolitan of Kiev Joseph Velamin-Rutski (ca. 1574–1637)

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<sup>9</sup> *Sluzhebnik* – a liturgical book of Slavic Orthodox traditions intended for priests and deacons.

in 1627 in a letter to the secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith Francesco Ingoli (1578–1649). This miracle was later included in the acts of beatification of Kuntsevych of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Welykyj, 1952, p. 75). The person of Meletius seems to have been more appropriate as an edifying example, since he resided within the Metropolitanate of Kiev. The choice of the person of Nikon was probably made under the influence of the events of that era relevant to the residents of the Eastern borders of the Commonwealth: the destruction of Polotsk during the Northern war by the troops of Tsar Peter the Great and the ensuing economic decline of the city, as well as Russia's intervention on the eve of the First Partition of the Commonwealth in the decision of the dissident question formed a negative image of Russia even among the adherents of the Greek Catholic Church. That is why the story of the conversion to Catholicism of the Patriarch of Moscow, or the Hierarch of a hostile power and Church, made Josaphat Kuntsevych particularly miraculous in the eyes of the believers – their Saint.

*Translated into English: Margarita Sviridova*

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