

KONSTANTINOS VETOCHNIKOV

*Michael, Archbishop of Bethlehem, hierarch of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Ecumenical Patriarch's ambassador in Russian countries*

Michael, the archbishop of Bethlehem and diplomat, whose three missions in Russian countries are documented (1393 to Halych, Novgorod and Moscow; 1397 to Halych and Moldavia, to Moscow in 1400) was probably of Slavic origin. This is suggested by the statement found in a patriarchal document that “he speaks the Slavic language, which is his own.” The idea that he tried without success to take over his diocese is supported, however, by the very fact that he is the second hierarch of that see to be known by his name and that the see was later for some time attributed to the patriarchs of Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, Michael was often absent from his see, something not permitted by canon law. It can be surmised that no other see was vacated in his own patriarchate and that, for this reason, he went to Constantinople in search of a vacant diocese. This would have been impossible without a dismissory letter from his own primate. Michael’s linguistic skills played a role in his serving for both the patriarchal and the state Byzantine diplomatic service. Since a transfer was not allowed, Michael kept his earlier title. The extent of the responsibilities and rights that were attributed to Michael during his mission in Galicia suggests further that the patriarch of Constantinople intended to appoint him to the see of Halych, which was uncanonically occupied by John, the bishop of Loutsk. Michael’s episcopal duties during the journey included ordinations and consecrations of churches, normally reserved for local bishops. A delay in the replacement of a see is a breach of canon law. Being unable to reach an agreement with the king of Poland, the patriarch of Constantinople employed Michael more or less as a locum-tenens, probably with a view to an appointment to that see.