A sixteenth-century Russian Vita of Girolamo Savonarola

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After the execution of Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), his followers were subjected to persecution. Banishments, heavy fines, and prison terms were all imposed on the most prominent among his disciples. Savonarola was best known for his severe criticism of clerical corruption, opposition to contemporary papacy and tyrannical regimes, and prophecies of an upcoming purified and reformed Church.¹ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that in Rome, his ideas were seen as a danger. In order to suppress the diffusion of Savonarola’s teachings, possession of his writings was declared a criminal offence.² Despite all the attempts of his most ardent followers, labelled as the Piagnoni (‘the Weepers’) to defend the memory of their teacher, the number of pro-Savonarolan texts in early sixteenth-century Italy was limited to the very minimum.³ However, for those who questioned the moral image of the papacy in the early sixteenth century and went on to oppose the dominant position of the Catholic Church, Savonarola’s case was of significant importance. In this context, a sixteenth-century Russian vita of Savonarola composed in Muscovy by one of his former followers, Maximus the Greek, is to be considered a

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¹ On Savonarola’s biography, see above all: Donald Weinstein, Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2011).
³ Among these texts, the most significant one seems to be Gianfrancesco Pico’s vita of Savonarola completed in 1550: Gianfrancesco Pico della Miranda, Vita Hieronymi Savonarolae, ed. E. Schisto (Florence: Olschki, 1999). In general, on the image of Savonarola promoted by his followers and his biographies composed in the early sixteenth century, see: Julia Benavent, ‘La cuestión de las biografías antiguas de fray Girolamo Savonarola,’ in La figura de Jerónimo Savonarola y su influencia en España y Europa, ed. D. Weinstein, J. Benavent and I. Rodríguez (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004), 161–8.

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unique document. Written in a country which contrasted itself to the Latin world and, after the fall of Constantinople, in 1453 pretended to be seen as a new leader of the Orthodox oikumene, it at the same time clearly illustrates the extent to which Savonarolan ideas spread across Europe after his trial.

Born in 1470 or 1475 in the town of Arta in Greece, Maximus – or more precisely Michael Trivolis, as his name was at the end of the fifteenth century, before he had become a monk – came to Italy in 1492. Over the period of twelve years, Michael had travelled to various Italian cities, where he met many prominent Italian scholars and familiarised himself with Italian Renaissance culture. After an initial period in the circle of the noted Greek Renaissance scholar Janus Lascaris (c.1445–1535), he spent some time in Florence. From his own writings, we know that in Florence he became a close follower of Savonarola. After Savonarola’s execution, Michael did not break the ties with the Ferrarese friar’s disciples: in 1498, he became the secretary of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1470–1533), himself an ardent follower of Savonarola, and lost his position only due to his patron’s exile. Michael also spent some time in Venice and worked with Aldus Manutius (1449/1452–1515). Some preserved letters, all in Greek, which are signed as being sent from Mirandola and ‘the house of dominus Aldus Venetianus’, shed new light on the place of Michael among Greek émigrés in late fifteenth-century Venice. Years later, when finally in Muscovy, he would compose a short text on Aldus Manutius and his typography.

After the short period in Venice, Michael returned to Florence to become a member of the Dominican order at San Marco, the monastery which owed

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4 Although over the last years, interest in Maximus’ oeuvre has grown, his engagement with contemporary European Renaissance culture still remains in the shadows of scholarly inquiry. The most valuable recent publications include two editions of Maximus’ works: Maximus the Greek, Созвинения, 2 vols., ed. N. Sinitsina (Moscow: Indrik, 2008–2014); Ludmila Zhurova, Авторский текст Максима Грека: рукописная и литературная традиция, 2 vols. (Novosibirsk: Izdatel’stvo Sibirskogo otdeleniya Akademii Nauk, 2008–2011). Some studies, including Sinitsina’s Максим Грек (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 2008), shed new light on Maximus’ stay in Italy, but usually picture him as a ‘Russian Erasmus of Rotterdam’ and a proponent of Renaissance humanism in Russian lands, which does not seem satisfactory. See also: Nina Sinitsina, ‘Обрушивался ли преподобный Максим Грек в Москве на итальянский гуманизм?’ in Сословия, институты и государственная власть в России. Средние века и раннее Новое время. Сборник статей памяти академика Л. В. Черепина (Moscow: Yazyki slavianskikh kul’tur, 2010), 15–34. This article questions the interpretation and, it is hoped, provides new perspectives on how Maximus responded to contemporary European knowledge and intellectual trends.

5 On the Italian period of Maximus’ biography, see: Nina Sinitsina, ‘Новые данные об итальянском периоде жизни преподобного Максима Грека,’ Вестник церковной истории, 1 (2006), 193–9; eadem, Максим Грек, 21–89.


8 First published in Denisoff’s Maxime le Grec et l’Occident (396–408), these letters were later reproduced in: Maximus the Greek, Созвинения, Vol. 1, ed. N. Sinitsina (Moscow: Indrik, 2008), 86–97.

9 Maximus the Greek, Созвинения, 345–7.
its success in fifteenth-century Florence to Savonarola’s presence.\textsuperscript{10} Although for a long time Michael was believed to have taken monastic vows at San Marco, some newly discovered evidence suggests that for almost ten months he lived at the monastery only as a novice and had, in fact, never become a monk.\textsuperscript{11} A brief overview of Michael’s activities reveals that his career was typical for a Greek émigré in Renaissance Italy: at different stages, he served as a scribe, secretary, and probably translator to different patrons, while simultaneously keeping strong links with the Greek diaspora. Even the fact that he almost joined the Dominican order corresponds to the ways through which Byzantine émigrés often assimilated into Italian society; examples of such conversions from Orthodoxy to Catholicism were not rare.\textsuperscript{12}

However, a couple of years later, Michael drastically changed his life’s path. In 1504 or 1505, he moved to Greece, to Mount Athos, where he took Orthodox monastic vows at the monastery of Vatopedi and had his name changed to Maximus.\textsuperscript{13} What induced him to leave Italy remains unclear. In any case, documents about the Athos period of his activities are scarce and limited to a few letters, brief poems, and a couple of inscriptions.\textsuperscript{14} The main source for reconstructing this stage of his career is Maximus’ own writings. Composed already in Muscovy, they contain a detailed description of daily life in the Orthodox monastic community of Mount Athos.\textsuperscript{15}

In 1516, he was invited to Muscovy by Grand Prince Vassily III (1505–1533) to translate Greek prayer books into Church Slavonic.\textsuperscript{16} However, at the time when Maximus finally settled in Moscow, he did not know the language and initially had to work in cooperation with his Russian associates. One of them, Dmitry Gerasimov (c.1465–1535/1536), who during his diplomatic mission to Rome in 1525 met Paolo Giovio (1483–1552) and served as the main source for the latter’s \textit{Moschovia}, one of the first ever descriptions of the Russian lands in European narrative,\textsuperscript{17} claimed that upon his arrival in Moscow, Maximus

\textsuperscript{10} Sinitsina, \textit{Максим Грек}, 76–82.
\textsuperscript{11} Eadem, ‘Новые данные’, 198.
\textsuperscript{12} In general on Greek émigrés and transformations of their identity in Renaissance Italy, see: Han Lamers, \textit{Greece Reinvented: Transformations of Byzantine Hellenism in Renaissance Italy} (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015).
\textsuperscript{15} Maximus the Greek, \textit{Сочинения}, 119–32, 341–2.
\textsuperscript{16} On the Muscovite period of Maximus’ biography, see in general: Nina Sinitsina, \textit{Максим Грек в России} (Moscow: Nauka, 1977).
\textsuperscript{17} Paolo Giovio, \textit{Libellus del legatione Basiliii Magnii Principis Moscoviae} (Rome: in aedibus F. Minitti Calvi, 1525); Oleg Kudryavtsev, \textit{Россия в первой половине XVI в.: взгляд из Европы} (Moscow: Russkiv Mir, 1997), 19–26, 217–27; Stéphane Mund, Orbis Russianum. \textit{Genèse et développement de la représentation du monde «russe» en Occident à la Renaissance} (Geneva: Droz, 2003), 197–8; 201–3.
began translating prayer books from Greek into Latin.\textsuperscript{18} After that, Gerasimov and his associates translated these texts from Latin into Church Slavonic. Gerasimov’s note is of particular importance considering that it is the only testimony of Maximus’ alleged knowledge of Latin: an analysis of his documented activities in Italy reveals that he was mostly engaged in copying Greek manuscripts.\textsuperscript{19} Although it is probable that he translated some Greek texts into Latin or Italian, we still do not have enough evidence to confirm it.

However, after finally learning the Russian language, Maximus did not need to cooperate with other scholars. He was quickly received at the court of Vassily III and, being recognised as one of the leading scholars of the time, was highly involved in cultural, confessional, and political debates within the Grand Prince’s inner circle. Although his primary duty was supposed to be translating Greek prayer books into Russian, he went beyond these limits – numerous texts, including those on politics, social life, and theology, are the result of his activities during the thirty years he spent in Muscovy. Most of them had a clear anti-Catholic bias and were directed against Catholic preachers and a pro-Latin camp at the court of Vassily III.\textsuperscript{20} Referring to his previous experience in Italy, without of course mentioning the fact he had been close to the Dominican order, Maximus insists that in order to maintain ‘true’ religious piety Muscovy should restrict any contacts with the ‘Latins’ and a Catholic Church embroiled in superstition, false faith, and heresies. Given that at the time, in the face of the Turkish danger, Rome and other European states were seeking to strengthen diplomatic contacts with the Muscovite court and convince the Grand Prince that a coordinated attack would cause significant harm to the Ottoman Empire, Maximus’ invective against the ‘Latins’ also had a clear political goal.\textsuperscript{21}

Maximus’ anti-Latinism is consonant with the writings of Philotheus of Pskov (c.1465–1542), who contributed significantly to the political and religious claims of the Muscovite Grand Princes to become the leaders of Eastern Europe and the Orthodox world in general.\textsuperscript{22} Although the famous concept

\textsuperscript{18} This note was published in: Alexander Gorskiy, ‘Максим Грек, святогорец’, Памятная к трудам святых Отцов, 18 (1859), 190–2.
\textsuperscript{19} On Maximus as a scribe of several Greek manuscripts, see: David Speranzi, ‘Massimo il Greco a San Marco. Un nuovo manoscritto’, in Mosty Mostite. Studi in onore di Marcello Garzaniti, ed. A. Alberti, M. C. Ferro and F. Romoli (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2016), 191–204.
\textsuperscript{21} Relevant diplomatic documents were published in: Переписка патриархов с русскими государствами в XVI веке, найденная между рукописями, в Римской Балфериевской библиотеке, trans. I. Grigorovich (Saint Petersburg: Imperatorskaya Akademiya Nauk, 1834).
\textsuperscript{22} On Philotheus and the context of his work, see above all: Vassily Malinin, Отец Евгений Монастырь Филофея и его послания. Историколитературное исследование (Киев: Киево-Печерская Лавра, 1901).
of ‘Moscow the Third Rome’ became extremely popular much later,\textsuperscript{23} it dates back to Philotheus’ anti-astrological letter in which, while opposing the Latins’ superstitious belief in astrology and divination, he puts forth an idea that the Muscovite grand duchy would succeed Rome and Constantinople as the third Christian major centre, after both cities had been destroyed because of their religious and moral corruption.\textsuperscript{24}

Interestingly, both Maximus’ and Philotheus’ works were directed against the same person, Nicholas Bülow (?–1548), also known as ‘Nemchin’ (‘A German’), an astrologer and physician at the court of Vassily III.\textsuperscript{25} On the invitation of Vassily’s ambassador to the Holy See, Nicholas arrived in Russia where he sought to popularise Western thought, including astrology. It is also important to note that Nicholas was a Catholic and, according to his opponents, tried to convince the Grand Prince and his milieu of the closeness of the Western and the Eastern branches of Christianity. Thus, one of the most severe antagonists of Nicholas was the ex-novice of the Dominican order, Maximus the Greek.

Having based his attack against the Latins on the Holy Scriptures and the works of the Greek Holy Fathers, Maximus tried to highlight the gap between the ‘real’ Christian religion and the Catholic Church stuck in superstitions. Maximus argued that the diffusion of superstitious beliefs among the Latins was caused by the religious crisis in Western Europe, which had preferred pagan philosophy, astrology, and magic instead of Christianity. Severely criticising the ‘Western mode of thinking’, he coined two terms for the diffusion of divination and paganism in Italian society: ‘Latin vice’ (\textit{latinskoe nechestie}) and ‘Hellenic charm’ (\textit{ellinskaya prelest}). In his opinion, the best proof of ‘de-Christianisation’ of the Latins was the legacy of three contemporary Italian thinkers – Niccolò Lelio Cosmico da Ferrara (c.1420–1500), Agostino Nifo (c.1483–1538), and Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494).\textsuperscript{26}

As we have seen, Maximus’ attitude towards the Latin West was highly critical. The only text in which Maximus acknowledged the positive impact Latins could have had on the Orthodox tradition, and thus positively represented Catholicism, seems to be \textit{The Dreadful and Memorable Novel}. A large part of this text is devoted specifically to the life and deeds of Savonarola.


\textsuperscript{24} The letter was published in: Malinin, \textit{Способ Евангелия монастыря Философ и его послания}, 37–47.

\textsuperscript{25} On Nicholas: Tatiana Chumakova, ‘Немецкие влияния в культуре допетровской Руси. Медицина’, in \textscar{\textit{Русско-немецкие связи в биагану и медицине}}, vol. 4 (Saint Petersburg: Borei Art, 2002), 5–14; Nicholas also translated Johannes Stöffler’s almanach about the astrologically predicted Deluge of 1524 into Russian. This aspect of his debates with Maximus was analysed in: Robert Collis, ‘Maxim the Greek, Astrology and the Great Conjunction of 1524’, \textit{The Slavonic and East European Review}, 88 (2010), 601–23.

\textsuperscript{26} Maximus the Greek, \textit{Сочинения}, 362–3.
The *Novel* consists of two parts not connected with each other either by content or style. In a shorter first part/novella, Maximus compares daily life within the Carthusian order to that of Orthodox monks and insists that contemporary Orthodox monasticism could benefit from some of the Catholic habits, mostly in what is concerned with moral purity. The second novella recalls the rise and death of Savonarola in a hagiographical manner. Some evidence suggests that the *Novella on Savonarola* was first composed as a separate text. However, in 1525, the local council of the Russian Orthodox Church accused Maximus of heresy, and during his trials in 1525 and later in 1531, he was blamed, among other things, for disseminating Catholicism among the Muscovites. To prove this, his prosecutors recalled Maximus’ life in Italy. In order to avoid the accusation of proselytism, Maximus combined the two texts into one *Novel*. A note at the end of the *Novel*, according to which his intention was ‘not to demonstrate that the Latin faith is pure, absolute, and true in its fullest, but to reveal to the Orthodox people that even the falsely educated Latins have diligence and care for the Gospel’s saving commandments and are eager for the faith in our Saviour Christ’, is clearly addressed to his accusers.

Thus, through some rearrangement of the text’s structure, Maximus intended to prove his innocence, and the idea was to show, for the sake of Orthodoxy, the positive examples of the Christian revelation among the infidels. Such manipulation with the text also demonstrates that the *Novella on Savonarola* was most probably written before or around 1525, that is before the first trial, and without a doubt before the second trial in 1531, during which he had to respond to the accusations about his alleged pro-Catholic position.

However, being a persistent critic of Catholicism, in the *Novella* Maximus recognises Savonarola as a true religious reformer whose teaching deals with

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27 Some extant manuscripts demonstrate that Maximus initially perceived the two novellas as independent texts and even separated them with the use of blank folios. However, in the wake of his trial, and in order to defend his position, Maximus decided to combine the two writings: Alexander Ivanov, *Literaturnoye nasledie Maksima Grkha*. Характеристика, атрибуция, библиография (Leningrad: Nauka, 1969), 156–7; Zhurova, *Аuthorский текст Максима Грека*, 454.

28 The early sixteenth century in Russia saw a heated debate on the problem of ecclesiastical land ownership. It went hand in hand with a more general issue concerning the relationship between state and church. The competing positions were represented by the “non-possessors” (or *nestyazhateli*), led by Nil Sorsky (1433–1508), and the followers of Joseph Volotsky (1439/1440–1515), who insisted that the Church should support the Grand Princes’ claims to become the leader of the Orthodox world. Maximus belonged to the non-possessors and continuously defended the position that the Church’s wealth had corrupted its moral purity, and that closer relations with the state had only bolstered its degradation. The non-possessors experienced a series of defeats, which, in turn, resulted in their persecutions. Maximus’ trial, therefore, had a clear political background.


30 Maximus the Greek, *Напечь страшна и допотопная*, и в съприкоснов синовьских жительства, РГБ, собр. Большаяков, №285, 71, ff.293v–94r.

31 On the debates about the text’s date, sec: Zhurova, *Аuthorский текст Максима Грека*, 452–3.
the genuine spirit of Christianity. Some scholars even suppose that Maximus’ writings resemble and rely on the argument and structure of some of Savonarola’s texts, including the *Triumph of the Cross*. Although we still do not have firm evidence to prove this assumption, Savonarola’s image in the *Novella* is that of a role model, of a pure Christian saint who in the name of God went through persecution, torture, and finally murder. The *Novella* reflects the standard structure of a hagiographical text and repeats some basic topoi typical for this genre. It provides the reader with several examples that are supposed to confirm the purity of Savonarola’s teaching. The case of a poor woman who returned five hundred coins after hearing Savonarola’s ardent sermon, and the image of Savonarola who did not stop preaching from the pulpit despite the fact that the bannisters on which he usually leant were smeared with human excrement by his enemies, are the most significant examples of Maximus’ descriptive strategy. Also, he claims that the execution of Savonarola was caused by his antagonism with the Pope, who is pictured in the *Novella* as pure evil. Thus, through the clear anti-papal narrative, Maximus addresses the question of a corrupt Catholic Church, which, as we have seen, could be put into a broader intellectual context of sixteenth-century Russia. Thus, all these features make the *Novella* a clear and significant apology for Savonarola, but with an extremely limited readership; there is no sign that it was known anywhere outside the Russian lands.

Many copies of the *Novella on Savonarola* have survived, either within the *Novel* or as a separate text. As Ludmila Zhurova has shown, all the copies date back to a version in the Khludov codex, the most complete *opera omnia* in Maximus’ lifetime, which consists of the texts that Maximus selected and edited himself. The English translation of the *Novella* was made from the *editio princeps*, the Khludov manuscript now kept in the Russian State Library in Moscow (РГБ, собр. Большакова, №285, 71, ff.271v–96r). Maximus’ vocabulary and style, as well as the grammatical structure of the text, reveal that it was composed by a fluent but non-native speaker of Russian. The translation, therefore, has the dual task of conveying the features of the original, while simultaneously making it readable for an Anglophone audience.

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32 As is well known, to his formal excommunication Savonarola responded with the *Triumph of Cross*, which opened with the confession of faith. After being accused of heresy so did Maximus in a corpus of his self-apologetic writings. This led some scholars to the conclusion that Maximus had reproduced the structure of Savonarola’s treatise: Boris Dunaev, ‘Сочинения Савонаролы и Максима Грека’, *Древности: труды славянской комиссии Московского археологического общества*, 4 (1907), 56–8; Nina Sinitsïna, ‘Максим Грек и Савонарола (К вопросу о первом рукописном собрании сочинений Максима Грека)’, in *Федальянная Россия во всемирно-историческом процессе* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), 149–56; Maximus the Greek, *Сочинения*, Vol. 2, ed. N. Sinitsïna (Moscow: Indrik, 2017), 25.

33 Maximus the Greek, *Повесть странствия и дополнения*, ff.288v–90r.

34 Zhurova, *Аutorsкий текст Максима Грека*, 454–68.
Novella on Savonarola

... Let us now listen to another story, which inspires the soul and deserves to be remembered and imitated if we truly want to please our God.

Florence is the most beautiful and excellent Italian city I have seen. In this city, there is a monastery, where the monks, in Latin called的原则izations, or God's preachers, are based. A church of this monastery is consecrated to the Apostle and Evangelist Mark, who is the protector and patron saint of the abbey. Its abbot was a certain monk called Jerome, Latin by birth and doctrine, full of every kind of wisdom, knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and of other knowledge that is philosophy. He also was a great ascetic, very much devoted to God. By deep understanding of the Holy Scriptures, and even more by his devotion to God, he realised that this city was mired in two deadly sins, namely shameless sodomy and godless covetousness accompanied by cruel extortion. Guided by his desire for good and divine service, and with his teaching based on the Holy Scriptures, he aimed at helping this city to eradicate these sins. After he had embarked on this path, he started with great wisdom explaining the books to numerous people who gathered at the Church of Saint Mark; many of them belonged to the nobility of Florence. The city consequently loved him and implored him to teach the word and law of God in the cathedral. He accepted their decision and desire, and diligently embarked upon this duty out of love for God. Every Sunday and on all feasts, and every day during the entire holy Great Lent, he was in the cathedral teaching people from the pulpit for two hours and even longer. His sermons had such an effect that the major part of the city followed his firm and redemptive words by dispensing with all anger and cunning, and converting from every fornication, lust and lechery to chastity and innocence. Sinners, oppressors, usurers, they all became righteous, gracious, and kind. With the help of their teacher, some of them voluntarily distributed to the poor the estates they had collected through evil and iniquity, much like Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector mentioned in the Gospels. In order not to annoy the reader of this story by enumerating all of his deeds, I shall just say that the majority of the city turned from followers of evil to the true example of virtue.

Повесть о Савонароле

... Ныне же и нам язычью услаженьем подобные душепохужу честь, достоинство памяти подражания, аще убо постыдения желаешь благоговети Господу нашему.

Флоренция — город есть прекраснейший и пренеприятен сущих в Италии городов, иже слыша всхъ. В том городъ маньстрой есть, множество отеченья, глаголемы по-латынски — предикаторовъ,35 еже есть божих проповедниковъ. Храм же священней сея обители святишца апостола и евангелиста Марка получивъ призрачата и представателя. В сие обители имуть бысть язычъ священны иною.

Иероним знаменитъ, латыньше и родом и учением преполовень всяких преуздностей, и разумъ богоудобовеньхъ Писаний, и вящийшаго наказаннта, язычъ философи, подвижникъ, претилень и божественно ревностю довольно украшаємъ. Сенъ, премногии разумом богоудобовеньыхъ Писаний и болин — божественно ревностно, уразумивъ граду ему дьялы богословъ грехъмъ злоихъ порабощену сущу, язычъ богословъ сомнитествъ беззакониемъ и безбожномъ лихомъ и бесселесовьмъ беззакониемъ, ревностю Божио радежасе, съяясь съявлевъ, добръ и богоугоденъ, язычъ учительнымъ словомъ еже отъ божественныхъ Писаний пособити граду ономъ и истребити от него в конце нечестия сия. И сие съявоватъ началя учини в царван людемъ Божи всегочиемъ преуздностей учение и изъясненемъ книжникамъ в храмъ святаго Марка-евангелиста съерзанимъ к нему часто многимъ слышатель благороднымъ и прымъ ржителемъ града того. И възыоблнъ бысть отъ всего града, помогалъ его в том самон съборновъ царевъ премедеди учини ихъ Божию слову и закону. И онъ, възыоблъ ихъ съяся и изволеніе, съ усреднемъ подать иже по Богъ сие подать, и по всѣ светиль, и всѣ варачіе праздники, и по всѣ дня всѣ святыхъ Четырехстянъ36 съерзазвся въ собранную церковъ, предлаченъ имъ учительное слово отъ высокого съдадица, и стоя на два часа, есть еже и множе, простирать поученіе.

И толико възыоблѣ слово его, яко больша часть града възыоблѣшви крѣпкая и спасительная учения его, отступивъ съъвращено коемуждо своей многовременной злобѣ и лукавства и възыоблѣвы бысть всѣхъ блуда, и студовзянія, и нечистоты плотской яко: идомѣ и чистоту, неправеднаго же, и лихомѣ, и рѣзыщица немилосердя ведала быкъ арѣ, праведдѣца, и милостива, и человѣколюбца быша. И язычами отъ сицъ подражающими Захѣ, начальника метары, иже въ Евангелии, иъ и неправеднѣ събра на быща имѣ имя имѣнисѧ, расточающими добрѣ сущимъ в нужах рукашит сумѣлія своего.37 И да не вся по руду исправленія его глагола, стужающ примѣщивающіеся сицъ: множе града того преобожающіе отъ всякихъ злобы ихъ въ всѣмъ образ добродѣтели достохваляны.

35 Here Maximus refers to the Latin title of the Dominican order, the ordo praedicatorum.
36 Maximus refers to Lent, which consists of forty days.
I shall just tell the lovers of virtue about a praiseworthy action by one poor woman, which reveals the power of this man’s God-inspired teaching. This poor widow’s son found a wallet made of damask that contained five hundred gold coins and brought it to his mother. However, she was not happy that by this discovery she had been given an opportunity to be free of poverty. On the contrary: rather than hide it, she took it immediately to the holy teacher of the city and said: “Reverend father and teacher, my son has found this wallet; take it and, as you are able to do so, find its owner and give it to them in order to save them from sorrows over their loss.” Marveling at the woman’s love for truth, the teacher blessed her and let her go. One day, during Mass, he announced at the end of the sermon: “If anyone has lost money, let them walk to the middle of the church, say the amount, describe the wallet, and mention the day it was lost, and they will have it returned.” A man who had lost some money came forward. He revealed the day he had lost it and the amount, and described the wallet. “Here is your money, young man; you should succour that poor woman who saved you from more sorrow than you had experienced [when you lost the money].” The man took one hundred gold coins out of his wallet and, truly grateful, gave it to the woman. How much more praise does this woman deserve than the one lauded in the Gospel for giving two mites as a gift to God? She manifested her piety by giving her own small amount of money, while this woman manifested her love for truth and kindness by renouncing the precious belongings of a stranger.

I would have been able to tell you more about some of the other notable results of this man’s godly teaching, but I shall voluntarily omit them in order not to exhaust your hearing by the length of this story; I shall now turn to the end of his five-year-long teaching. Thus, thanks to him and in accordance with God’s will, half of the city turned over a new leaf, while the second half did not follow him and resisted his divine teaching. They hated him so passionately that they used human excrement to smear the bannisters on which he usually leant while pouring out his sermons. Imitating our Saviour’s meekness and forbearance, he accepted everything with fortitude and hoped that the many would change. That is why he did not praise those who were in power in the Church, but fearlessly blamed them for not living by the apostolic rules and not duly taking care of their flock. He often said: “If we lived according to the Gospel of our Saviour Jesus Christ, observing our life that would be equal to that of the angels, all gentiles would doubtlessly turn to God. It would serve for our salvation and enjoyment of eternal gifts. Living in defiance of the Gospel commandments, however, we do not reform ourselves or do we seek to lead others to piety. What else do we expect to hear from the righteous Judge except this: ‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of Heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.’”

He had no hesitation in saying it, and he used even harsher words to accuse the pope, honoured among them [the Catholics] and the Cardinals who were in his service, as well as the other clergy. This made those who already hated his holy teaching despise him even more. They called him a heretic, blasphemer, and liar as he railed against their holy pope, all the clergy in his service, and the entire Roman Church. The rumours reached Rome and so disturbed the pope and his clergy that they prohibited him from teaching God’s people and thus they became as those who say in the Acts of the Apostles: “But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone of this name.” They added to this conciliar decision that, in case he did not refrain from acting in such a way, he would be cursed as a heretic. Not only did he disobey this unlawful decision, but, inspired with even more divine devotion, he proclaimed that the letter was unjust and displeasing to God, as it ordered him to refrain from teaching the people in church. He therefore condemned their iniquity more forcefully because, as I assume not without reason, he had decided to die piously and for the glory of God if necessary. For if the fire of devotion to God inflames someone’s heart, one starts to defy luxury, property, and earthly life itself. God himself testified to this by saying: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you.” He said that because He had decided to accept death as a human being for the glory of God the Father and for human salvation. Paul, the ardent disciple and adherent of Christ, said: “I desire to depart and be with Christ,” and “for to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

41 Acts 4:17.
43 Philippians 1:23.
44 Philippians 1:21.
Novella on Savonarola

The pope’s accomplices did not cease to threaten and tear him away from the cathedra; since he, in turn, continued to disobey and denounce them, they decided to put him to death, and they executed their plan as follows: to accomplish their sly decision, they selected a certain general called Joachim, who was eagerly devoted to his service, and sent him to Florence on the pope’s authority to deprive the preacher of his abbatial power. Joachim was supposed to interrogate and put him to death by burning him as the intractable enemy and calumniator of the Roman Apostolic Church. After coming to Florence and showing the papal letters to the city authorities, Joachim called the preacher to court and then subjected him to torture. Because he fearlessly responded to all the tricks of his investigator, a judge could not find him guilty. That is why the false witnesses among those sinners who did not accept his teaching came up against the righteous and innocent mentor of their city and threw the most terrible and unjust accusations at him. On the basis of these allegations the iniquitous judges sentenced him and his two pious disciples to a double death: after hanging them, they burned their bodies. The three venerable monks were thus rewarded for all they had done in the name of piety by their unworthy pope (who at that time was Pope Alexander VI, born Rodrigo Borgia, was Pope from 1492 until his death in 1503). They burnt their bodies. The three venerable monks to the ancient defenders of piety if they had not been Latins by faith, for in those monks as with the ancient martyrs I have seen a true devotion to the glory of Christ the Saviour and to the salvation and improvement of the faithful. I did not hear about them from anyone else but saw them myself and attended their sermons numerous times. Except for the devotion to piety, I have seen in them a true wisdom, intellect, and art in both sacred and profane scriptures; in them all, but mostly in Jerome who poured out his teaching to the audience while standing at his pulpit for two or more hours. During his sermons, he did not hold in his hands any book from which he could draw testimonies to prove his words, but rather referred to the treasury of his splendid memory where he kept all divine knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.

I completely disagree with the decision of those unjust judges. I would have gladly compared the executed monks to the ancient defenders of piety if they had not been Latins by faith, for in those monks as with the ancient martyrs I have seen a true devotion to the glory of Christ the Saviour and to the salvation and improvement of the faithful. I did not hear about them from anyone else but saw them myself and attended their sermons numerous times. Except for the devotion to piety, I have seen in them a true wisdom, intellect, and art in both sacred and profane scriptures; in them all, but mostly in Jerome who poured out his teaching to the audience while standing at his pulpit for two or more hours. During his sermons, he did not hold in his hands any book from which he could draw testimonies to prove his words, but rather referred to the treasury of his splendid memory where he kept all divine knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.

41 Gioacchino Torriani, the Master General of the Dominican order.
42 Here Maximus refers to the two Dominican monks, fra Silvestro Marulli and fra Domenico Buonvicini da Pescia, who were murdered together with Savonarola. Condemned as heretics, they were hanged, with their bodies subsequently burned to ashes, in Florence’s Piazza della Signoria on 23 May 1498.
43 Pope Alexander VI, born Rodrigo Borgia, was Pope from 1492 until his death in 1503.
Novella on Savonarola

I am writing this not to demonstrate that the Latin faith is pure, absolute, and true in its fullest – may I not be that mad! – but to reveal to the Orthodox faithful that even the falsely educated Latins have diligence and care for the Gospel’s saving commandments and are eager for faith in our Saviour Christ. However, they do not fully conceive this; as the divine Paul the Apostle spoke of the stubborn Jews: “For I can testify about them that they are devoted to God, but their devotion is not based on knowledge.” In the same way, the Latins were seduced and charmed by certain false and dubious doctrines founded on Hellenic sciences; but at the same time, they did not entirely renounce the faith, hope, and love in our Saviour Christ. For Him, the monks establish their monastic life in accord with His holy commandments, and it is worth imitating their conformity, brotherly love, unselfishness, quietness, serenity, and care for the salvation of many. We should do this in order not to be worse than them. With these words, I call on you to keep diligently all the Gospel’s commandments, for either keeping all the commandments of our Saviour with no rejection of all their heresies does not make them [the Latins] perfect, or the Orthodox faith does not make us perfect if we do not supplement it with the commandments. For the Lord Himself challenges those who contravene them: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say,” that is you offer Me your constant and long prayers but despise and do not follow the commandments that I have established. In a different passage, the Lord says: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man,” and so on. That was the reason why the five virgins were called foolish and did not enter the kingdom of Heaven. Those invited to the wedding banquet in non-wedding clothes, tied foot and hand, shall be excommunicated and plunged into impenetrable darkness. Also, those who boast that they perform numerous miracles in the name of God, prophesise, and cast out demons shall not be accepted by the righteous Lord and shall hear this: “Away from me, all you evildoers; and I will tell them plainly: I don’t know you or where you come from.” If they do prophesise in the name of God, cast demons out of people and perform numerous miracles, why does He not accept them, but rather drives them away and calls them the “evildoers”?  

47 Romans 10:2.  
49 Matthew 7:24.  
Here is the response to that question: even though they perform miracles due to an unknowable impulse of the power of God, they appear not to have the gift of true love. For God and neighbours, given only by God Himself and supplemented with another of God’s gifts, charity to those who need mercy and help. The blessed Apostle Paul testified to this by saying: “If I give my body to be burned, but don’t have love, it profits me nothing.” For if they do not obtain the love that originated in God and is supplemented with mercy, the gracious Lord does not accept them and drives them away saying: “Outside are the dogs, those who curse and drives away those who offend, hurt, and oppress the poor with constant claims to pay their annual debts. Along with the rich who hate the poor, they are to be sent to the fire of hell and burnt for eternity. May the glory, the kingdom, and the splendour be with our Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

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52 1 Corinthians 13:3.
53 Jacob 2:13.
54 Matthew 6:19.
55 Revelation 22:15.