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# Orthodoxy on Sale: the Last Byzantine, and the Lost Crusade

Silvia Ronchey  
University of Siena, Italy

## Thomas Palaiologos in the West

In July of 1460 a Venetian galley departed Porto Longo close to Pylos, and slowly tacked its way up the western coast of the Peloponnese. The galley had aboard the last remnants of the imperial Byzantine family. These included two young boys, a white faced adolescent, a teacher, a distinguished lady, visibly strained, not just from the voyage, but also from a feverish bout of malaria; and finally Thomas Palaiologos, the last son of Manuel II, the last despot of the Morea.

We can glean something of the appearance of Thomas Palaiologos from a marble statue of him, commissioned by Pius II. The statue was executed by the Pope's principal sculptor, Paolo Tacconi di Sezze, also known as Paolo di Mariano, but better known as Paolo Romano. The sculptor, active in Rome in the fifteenth century, hid the identity of his Greek guest under the features of Saint Paul [fig. 1].

The true identity of the statue is revealed by Feliciano Bussi in his *Cronaca Viterbese*, in which he refers to the despot of Morea: 'He died in Rome and since he was a handsome man, Pope Pius commissioned a marble sculpture of him and had it placed by the steps of Saint Peter's ...' ('Morio in Roma et papa Pio lo fe fare di marmo, cioè quello sancto Paulo a le scale di sancto Pietro in sua figura, che fu bellissimo omo ...'). The story would appear to be confirmed by Kenneth Setton in the second volume of his *Papacy and the Levant*, where, in a rather elusive footnote, he writes: 'Thomas Palaiologus [...] seems to have left behind him a curious memorial which still exists in fine conditions at the Vatican'. The statue of Thomas Palaiologos in the guise of Saint Paul can still be seen to this day, although actually not within the Vatican, but on the right hand side of the entrance to Ponte Sant'Angelo, located there by Clement VII after the Lanzichenecchi sack.

The refined, almost sorrowful beauty of Thomas Palaiologos appears to have enchanted his western hosts during his stay in Italy. 'Bellissimo omo', remarks Feliciano Bussi in his chronicle. The ambassadors of Francesco Sforza were equally impressed: 'As dignified as any man upon the earth could be', they exclaimed when they met him in Venice on 25 June, 1462, 'reasonably tall in stature and his face carries such a wonderfully grave and prudent expression, which is confirmed by the very way in which he speaks'. Bartolomeo Bonatto, confidant of Barbara Gonzaga and representative of the Marquises of Mantua was as equally gushing: 'He certainly is a handsome man and he possesses a beautifully dignified expression, he has good manners and is very refined' ('Di presentia al mondo non poria

esser più degno, di statura grande assay, et si mostra si maravigliosa gravita et prudencia in laspecto suo, il che se conferma oltra modo nel parlare suo'). On 2 January, 1463, in another letter to Barbara Gonzaga, Bartolomeo Marasca wrote that he had met the last sovereign of the Morea at a dinner party given by her son, the Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga: 'He is an impressive gentleman; he ate little during dinner and is sorely grieved' ('Certo è un bel homo e ha uno bello et grave aspecto et bon modi et molto signorili'). Pictures of Thomas crop up in a number of other 'concealed portraits', hidden as we shall see in the last artistic commissions of Enea Silvio Piccolomini and those of his descendants.

But let us return to the voyage of 1460. After the fall of Constantinople, seven years previously, Thomas the purple born had fought against the Turks in order to defend the last Byzantine fortresses in the Morea. In doing so, he had had to fight against his other surviving brother Demetrios. Now that the Peloponnese had capitulated in the face of superior Turkish forces and his brother had passed over to the Sultan's side, Thomas Palaiologos had asked Venice for help and had 'temporarily abandoned' his homeland and fled together with his wife and children. His offspring were named Andrew, Manuel and Zoe, seven, five and twelve years old respectively.

They probably had to change ship several times during the voyage. Navigation was hazardous. The Turkish menace, together with that of pirates, made the Eastern Mediterranean at this time one of the most hostile seas in the world. The secret services of the Venetian Republic probably obliged them to split the journey up and stay close to the coast. What is certain is that Thomas stopped off at Patras, whose garrison was still loyal but was already subject to Turkish influence, and that he did it for a very specific reason. The explanation can be found in several paintings commissioned more than a century later by Francesco Maria Piccolomini, the descendant of Pope Enea Silvio, from the Flemish artist Bernard Rantwyck and now housed in the Museum of Pienza. Each of the five paintings commemorate the various stages of the translation of the head of Saint Andrew, the legendary brother of Peter, the martyred apostle of the Peloponnese and patron saint of the Byzantine church. In the first painting, Thomas is depicted in the port of Patras. Having already retrieved the priceless relic, he takes it back to the ship on a white silk shawl. According to local tradition, the skull of Saint Andrew had been for centuries kept in its reliquary, which was in the form of a highly stylised and loosely sculpted bust, in accordance with the oldest and holiest of Byzantine traditions.

The idea of removing the reliquary from what had once been imperial soil most probably came from Bessarion himself. Only a few years his senior, Bessarion had served under Thomas's brother Theodore Palaiologos as a dignitary at Mistra. He was well aware that such a precious relic would have been an excellent bargaining tool for Thomas, procuring numerous offers of asylum, the most prominent of which would be from Pius II himself. Not only did the Pope share a passion for humanism with Bessarion: he was also a great admirer of the Greeks. As Pius II stated in his solemn acceptance speech in Saint Peter's on Holy Wednesday 1462, when he officially took possession of the reliquary and pronounced his gratitude to the dethroned sovereign who had brought the head of Saint Andrew to

Rome, ‘perhaps the time would come, with the will of God and the help of his brother’ – that is, of Saint Peter – ‘when the sovereign of the Morea would one day be returned to his throne’. The Pope went further and added that nothing was closer to his heart ‘than the defence of the entire Christian faith against the Turks. As such the defence of Greek Orthodoxy was equally paramount, since the Turks were enemies of them both’.

Even Bessarion appears in the Rantwyck cycle. In the four remaining canvases, the Greek dignitary clearly stands out amongst the other cardinals because of his costume. Dressed in black, surrounded by a procession of cloaked prelates, looking a little lost in their midst, he is painted in the foreground, at the port of Ancona, taking the reliquary from the hands of the sovereign. In the scene depicting the translation of the reliquary to the rock of Narni, of the three cardinals riding on horseback behind it under a leaden sky, Bessarion is the only one to be dressed in black. At the Milvian bridge, Bessarion’s black tunic stands out again against the purple gowns and the white robes of the Pope. Above him, the canopy erected to receive and display the apostle’s head flutters in the wind, while behind him lie the dark green fields, beyond which is the city of Rome.

If one enters into the basilica of Sant’Andrea della Valle and advances, almost up to the level of the altar, and then looks right up, one can just see in the fourth arch on the left the funerary monument of Pius II. In the bas-relief above the Latin epigraph, the elderly figure of Enea Silvio is shown solemnly depositing the relic of Saint Andrew in Saint Peter’s. Bessarion is on one side of him and on the other, on the extreme right, one can see the profile of a tall man, erect and dignified in bearing, with a neatly trimmed beard, curly hair reaching down around his neck and a perfect aquiline nose. Once again the sculptor is Paolo Romano and once again the subject is Thomas Palaiologos. In this instance, the despot is wearing the *skiadon*, the arched hat with the upturned brim and pointed visor of the Byzantine emperor [fig. 2].

If we move North and enter into the Duomo of Siena, crossing the black and white marble pavement, inlaid with the images of Hermes Trismegistus and of the antique Sibyls, and then take the small door leading from the left nave, we find ourselves in the large rectangular room of the Piccolomini Library. The room is illuminated by two large windows and in its centre there is a marble statue of the Three Graces, a Roman copy of a Hellenistic original, whose small naked figures look rather incongruous in such a sacred place. Upon the walls are the *Stories of the life of Enea Silvio Piccolomini* painted by Pintoricchio. In the last one, Pius II appears as a dying man in the port of Ancona. Sat, pale and exhausted in a sedan chair, the eyelids drooping below his white eyebrows, next to him there is a blonde bearded aristocrat, dressed in blue with blue wide opened eyes [fig. 3]. Yet again we are looking at the face of Thomas Palaiologos. In the four years that separate the two scenes, that is to say, the scene depicting the deposition of the relic of Saint Andrew in 1460 on the bas-relief by Paolo Romano, and that of the last journey of Pius II to Ancona in 1464 by Pintoricchio, Thomas had in effect never left the Pope’s side.

What attracted Thomas to Italy was not so much the guarantee of a stipend and a residence ‘in a palace of the Leonine city’, offered by Pius II through the intermediary of

Bessarion. It was more the precise desire of the Pope to reinstate him on the throne of a new 'Christian sovereignty': a Byzantine one, representing nevertheless a 'Christian power' that would be western in outlook and that would be under the aegis of Rome. Thomas Palaiologos was the linchpin in the plan, a plan which would be the 'Occident's rescue of Byzantium', and that not only had the direct backing of the Pope, but also of an important clan of Italian pro-Byzantine families who had been lobbying for such a project for the preceding three decades. Much of this had been made possible thanks to the remarkable abilities of Bessarion, the 'Oriental Cardinal' who had succeeded in winning over many important people both at the Papal court and in other seignories. Travelling the length and breadth of Italy in legations, he had also managed to establish a valuable network of allies along the way. Once the way had been paved, the last despot of the Morea was invited by Pius II and Bessarion 'into temporary exile' in 1460. For them, Thomas Palaiologos would be the first person to sit on the throne of the 'New Byzantium'.

Both public documents and private letters make it clear that the declared intent of Enea Silvio was that the revived *basileia* would have its spiritual heart in the Vatican and its strategic head in the Peloponnese. Such a plan suited not only the geo-political aims of all the concerned parties, but also the specific economic needs of the bankers of the Pope himself, the Venetians. The advantage of such a scheme was that it effectively side-lined the role of Constantinople, whose fall to the Turks was considered by some, albeit cynically, as rather advantageous, while the plan of the 'Occident's rescue of Byzantium' would have re-established the garrisons in the Morea. An expedition to re-conquer the Morea was hatched in the Conference of Mantua in 1459, consisting of a projected crusade against Islam.

The political formula of a modern Byzantium, so resolutely promoted by Enea Silvio Piccolomini and prefigured by the Byzantine intellectualism of its principal ambassador and advocate Bessarion, was intended to be very different from the Byzantium that had preceded it. The new model would have had more in common with the western types of state current at that time. Such a model not only would have drawn upon the antique concept of the Greek city state: it would have also drawn upon a number of western renaissance innovations. And it would have kept to the elaborations of the political writings of Gemistos Pletho and of the school of Mistra, in general classified as 'utopian'. But, as we shall see, such a classification is wrong.

In a sense, the Decree of Union promulgated at the Council of Ferrara–Florence in 1439 was a veritable act of *Realpolitik*: an act of political opportunism and theological infidelity – as was remarked both by anti-Unionist prelates and later on by lay historians – which ought to have provided a 'mixed' religious platform for a reduced but politically important Greco-Christian enclave in the Turkish dominion.

From the very beginning, the decisions of the council were greatly discussed but very little acted upon, and over time they became dead letters. But in retrospect the council succeeded in planting the seeds of a long and deep-rooted process that would remain *in fieri* for some time to come. It ought not to be forgotten that both Isidore of Kiev and Bessarion

continued to occupy the position of Latin Patriarch of Constantinople – the former up until his death and the latter from April 1463 onwards. The repudiation of the Union by the Greek clergy, now under Turkish control, was certainly taken into consideration. But if we look at the final compromise that Bessarion and the Pope wished to hammer out, we can see that such a repudiation did not constitute a significant obstacle. Their pact not only agreed to reunite the two churches, but also to merge two sovereignties whose antecedents went back as far as ancient Rome: two sovereignties that had been separated for over eleven centuries. The tiara of Peter was to be joined with the sceptre of Constantine. But before going any further we need to take a step back in order to explain how this was to be brought about.

### The Council of Florence

On 18 October 1438, Bessarion began his opening speech at the Council of Ferrara with the following words: ‘When one is enlightened with the truth, goodly deeds do not consist in just obtaining a victory, but also in *knowing how to lose in a goodly way, which all said and done is the same as winning*. If anything’, he added, ‘one might say that this is the greater good since it is better to receive a blessing than it is to give one. It is better to listen than to speak *and it is better to be liberated than to have to liberate others of their error*’.

Bessarion had immediately made an impression on the learned Latin prelates. ‘He is burning with intelligence’, wrote Ambrogio Traversari: ‘He is the youngest of all the Greek delegates; he is only thirty years old’. In effect, the *Pro pace* oration delivered by the youngest delegate of the council proved to be a masterpiece of eloquence and political thinking. But the phrases ‘goodly deeds’ and ‘knowing how to lose in a goodly way’ deserved particular attention. In those words were all the complexity, open-mindedness, diplomatic illusionism and political realism of Bessarion in the council. Although many church historians have wrongly considered his politics as unintelligible, to those at the council who knew better his intentions were already patently clear. His real sympathies and ecclesiastical position have for centuries been misrepresented, first by papal propaganda and later by catholic historiography. As a cultivated and aristocratic Byzantine, Bessarion could never really nurture any sympathy for the Latin theological tradition, nor intellectually tolerate the doctrine of the Filioque.

In order to fully understand Bessarion’s open-mindedness and all his political manoeuvrings, we have to take into consideration that the precocious Greek prelate, apart from being a Platonic philosopher and a student of Pletho, had always been an anti-Unionist, an anti-Thomist and a follower of Palamas. He was a typical representative of Byzantine intellectual thinking in the Palaiologan period, and thus a sworn enemy of the Latin church, something one can clearly perceive in his early theological writings, composed before coming to Italy.

Concerning the question of the Trinity, council after council had subtly debated the procession of the Holy Spirit, agreeing eventually that it proceeded from the Father through the Son (*per filium*). The absurd claim, that had emerged from the wilds of Spain, in some obscure period, and which was then defended by misguided Popes since the time of Charlemagne, that the Holy Spirit proceeded both from the Father and the Son (*Filioque*) was an uncouth interpolation of the creed which could not even be included in the numerous erroneous definitions of the Trinitarian theology that the Byzantines had unanimously rejected over a millennium before. When confronted with the fearful theological competence of the Greeks, the Latins were, and would always remain, mere amateurs.

But what Bessarion was basically trying to impart was this: we are not here for them! We are here for ourselves! However, he had great difficulty in conveying such a message to his highly contemptuous brethren, the Greek prelates that he rightly recognised as being his most insidious adversaries. For which reason he repeated: it is more important for us to be liberated (from the Turks) than to liberate the others (the Latins) of their (doctrinal) error.

Right from the very beginning, therefore, well before the so-called *Kehre* or 'about face', the young delegate was wholly focused on the pragmatic necessities of state. From the very outset, the much younger Greek prelate had been baiting the Latin clergy with the enticing prospect of a formal dogmatic capitulation of the Orthodox to Rome. In return for 'selling' them this, he demanded money, armies and logistics to wage a war of liberation against the Turks.

The crusade of Varna effectively set out in 1443, but within a year it had collapsed, ending in one of the bloodiest carnages in history. It was an atrocious paradox -- no one had been liberated and a whole generation of leaders had been lost. In one fell swoop, the most enlightened élite of Europe's ruling class, from Ladislas, the King of Poland and Hungary and commander in chief of the crusade, right down to Cardinal Cesarini, its promoter, had been wiped out, leaving precious little behind them. The disaster partly came about through the shortcomings of Venice, although it is impossible to say whether they were deliberate or not. The fleet of Pope Eugene IV, exponent of a large commercial Venetian dynasty, was commanded by his nephew, the Cardinal Francesco Condulmer, and it was effectively under the control of another Venetian, the expert sailor Alvise Loredan.

But none of this could have been foreseen five years before, when the cold political realism of the Byzantine *nomenklatura* used cultural transformism as a means of obtaining its goals as never before, resorting to such a sophisticated and hazardous weapon in theology, and more particularly in the Trinitarian dogma and the spiritual doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit.

### The *Titles* of Bekkos

Modern catholic historiography, which has been somewhat inclined to portray Bessarion as a Westernized humanist and a pro-Latin prelate, has dwelt little upon the dynamics of his transformation: how is it that Bessarion came to advocate and write exactly what any Byzantine intellectual of the time would have abhorred?

Here, philological tools and the recent research of Antonio Rigo are particularly useful. Both concur upon a crucial point. The conceptual structure and the punctual patristic references within the *Speech upon Union* which Bessarion pronounced at the end of the council, and with which he legitimised the Latin doctrine on the procession of the Holy Spirit, are all totally founded on a pre-existing source: the *Titles on the words of the Holy Fathers on the procession of the Holy Spirit* written by John Bekkos. Not only was the source well known, it was intensely disliked by the Byzantines, and almost cursed. Bekkos was Patriarch of Constantinople at the time of the ephemeral Union of Lyon in 1274, for which the poor *basileus* Michael VIII Palaiologos earned himself the rather injurious epithet of *latinophronos* and *azymites*: eater of the fake Latin holy bread.

Almost as soon as it was written Bekkos' work had been under almost constant scrutiny, and subsequently it has been widely accessible to modern scholars since the Abbé Migne incorporated it into the *Patrologia Graeca*. But until the recent study of Antonio Rigo no one had remarked, or had wanted to remark, just how closely Bessarion's own speech had borrowed from it. Bessarion's discourse is so literally dependant upon Bekkos' work and its content is so unexpected for an intellectual so sophisticated and well versed in theology, that it almost appears to be a coded message to the Constantinopolitan clergy. It almost comes across as an expression of passive resistance or ostentatious cynicism towards the Latin.

In his brief work, the pro-Unionist Patriarch John Bekkos was playing the Latin theologian's game, attempting to fix the cards regarding the question of the Filioque. His chief aim was to affirm that the Catholic formula concerning the procession of the Spirit of the Father *and of the Son* did not really diverge from that of the traditional Orthodox creed. Interestingly, the patristic florilegium Bekkos set up for this purpose contains exactly the same passages of the Greek Church Fathers, including the famous passage of Gregory of Nyssa, that Bessarion would later use to fight his corner in his speech at the Council of Florence in June 1439.

Bekkos attempts to demonstrate that the expressions *dia tou hyiou* ('through the Son') and *ek tou hyiou* ('from the Son'), which occurred in those passages, were equivalent in indicating the double procession of the Spirit. His treatise was organised into thirteen chapters, each one of which was preceded by a long doctrinal summary written by the patriarch himself. The work had been a theological best-seller during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and entered into the libraries of all the major theologians of the time. Nevertheless, after the Synod of Blachernae, which rejected the Union of Lyon out of hand, the *Titles* became the target of ferocious polemic, particularly on the part of Bessarion's



theological guide, the great Gregory Palamas. The latter had replied to Bekkos' *Titles (Epigraphai)* with his own *Counter-Titles (Antepigraphai)*. After reaffirming the traditional Byzantine position on the Filioque, Palamas had refuted Bekkos' writing, showing how his summaries were tendentious, to the point of distorting the very passages of the Fathers cited in his florilegium.

As Antonio Rigo reminds us, it was during the final phase of the Council of Florence that Bessarion composed in his turn a pamphlet *Against Palamas' refutation of Bekkos*, in which he effectively swaps sides and re-aligns himself with Bekkos. Hence his ostentatious tracing of Bekkos in his *Speech upon Union*, a declared and evident snub to Palamas, who, as we know, was the undisputed master of Orthodox theology.

It is said that immediately after Palamas' death a hesychast monk began to pray, compressing his breath day and night, until the spirit of the great theologian appeared to him one night in the vision he received in a dream. In the temple of Divine Wisdom, situated in the celestial Constantinople, a council was being held. Just as in the frescoes in the monastery on Athos in which the monk resided, all the great men of the Church were aligned: the great Athanasios, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzos, John Chrysostomos, Gregory of Nyssa and the wise Cyril, and next to them all the other saintly theologians of the world. Although they had been in discussion for an infinite amount of time, they were unable to come to a conclusion. At this point, the monk heard a voice thunder in his ear: 'All the people present cannot vote on their decisions if Gregory the Metropolitan of Thessalonica is not present'. But Gregory was not present, since he was in private discussions at the throne of the Emperor in the Sky.

In a way, what the obscure Athos monk dreamt about came to pass. At the last great council in the history of Byzantium, the last great Byzantine theologian was absent. It is indeed strange that at that council Bessarion, in his final speech, dramatically renounced the most influential theologian of his times. But one way of reconstructing the evolution in Bessarion's position is to consult the *Memoirs* of Sylvester Syropoulos: they take us straight into the debate within the Greek delegation, referring to the progressive and tendentious whittling down of the certitudes concerning the meaning of the expressions *dia tou hyiou* and *ek tou hyiou*, and the paradoxical insinuating of Bekkos' quotations into Bessarion's discourse.

Bessarion's *Speech upon Union* was presented to the public in mid June. In it he makes maximum use of Bekkos' *Epigraphai* almost to the point of copying the author word for word. The structure of the work, its chapter headings, even its patristic citations are plagiarised to such an extent that to those who were even slightly familiar with its discredited and contemptible source Bessarion's version of it was almost like a joke, and a very bad one at that. In such a way Bessarion successfully completed the first mission for which he had been enrolled – the first compromising step towards the sell-out of Orthodoxy. But he did without any particular loss of honour to himself: in making what appeared to be an ideological capitulation, he cunningly buried within in it an occult message of derision and rebellion.

### A Project that Had Little to Do with a Utopian Hellenic Re-conquest

But let us return to Thomas Palaiologos and to the political project that Bessarion had been nurturing in the twenty years following the Council of Florence, when the operation was first launched. The new ‘Christian sovereignty’ that was meant to have been established in the Morea in return for an ecclesiastical rendition ought to be in the hands of the youngest of the Palaiologoi brothers as ‘natural sovereign’ (*naturalis dominus*) of the Morea, as Thomas is explicitly defined by Bessarion in a letter to one of the latter’s most powerful Franciscan allies, Giacomo della Marca. But before we expound the contents of this letter, we need to take another step back, in order to identify the great Italian families who were pleading the cause of the ‘Occidental rescue of Byzantium’.

Even while Bessarion had been serving in the court of the Palaiologoi at Mistra, the Platonic academy had been busy refining a large number of precise political ideas. Greek nationalism had come round to agreeing to the setting up of a new form of Hellenic state. Theoretically, it was Platonic in structure, inspired by the utopian aristocratic communism and class partition of the *Republic*. But in actual fact, it was a revised and corrected version of the latter, based upon the study of more modern experiments in government current in the West. Its political make-up would have been a very far cry from the multi-ethnic and multi-national empire that had been gradually shrinking away into extinction over the previous centuries. The new political organism was intended to be a kind of city state, a half-way house between a Greek polis and an Italian renaissance seignior.

In reality, the projects elaborated in the political writings of Gemistos Pletho and then of Bessarion were not utopian. In the working documents sent to the Byzantine rulers, both proposed concrete reforms, some of which might even be considered as enlightened. An illustrious Russian historian, Vasiliev, even went so far as to compare the political reasoning of the school of Mistra to that of Rousseau or of Saint-Simon. In the school of Gemistos, where complicated treatises of Byzantine legislation outnumbered Platonic dialogues, every detail was scrupulously taken into consideration. The academy of Mistra was a veritable laboratory of political analysis, attracting the best philosophical and political brains Byzantium had to offer, which perhaps explains why Bessarion enrolled in it. After all, the empire was already heading in the direction of a subdivided state, a process that had begun under Emperor Manuel II. Though opposed by a great many statesmen, of whom the most outspoken was Sphrantzes, he had allotted by dynastic succession to his sons its piecemeal dominions.

The analysts at Mistra had lucidly pointed out all the weak points in the Byzantine system. In particular, they called for the drafting of an independent professional army, which would free the state from its dependency upon foreign fleets, especially that of Venice. They presented a detailed and precise reform of the entire fiscal system including a shake-up of the territorial administration of the Peloponnese. They posed the problem of the monetary economy and advocated the need for more equilibrium in the balance of trade. They called for the implementation of protectionist measures to impede the importation of

goods that could be made locally. They even recommended facilitating the importation of primary materials, necessary for industry and ironworking: up until then only imports for the military had been prioritised. They also pleaded for more modernisation in all aspects of internal production. Bessarion had conceived a reform for public education that would have added technology to the study of letters. Only in this way would the Morea be able to adapt itself to the progress already being made in North-Western Europe, and rekindle the prosperity and autonomy of Ancient Greece, albeit in a realistic and modernised form.

A similar 'personal program for Hellenic rescue' – to use Lusini's expression – was re-proposed and advocated by Bessarion in the letter he sent to the Franciscan Giacomo della Marca in May of 1459. The letter is rich in technical details. It not only lists all the major resources, low prices and logistical structures of the Morea, but it also describes all its geographic and strategic facilities. According to Bessarion's letter, the sum of all these elements would make the Morea 'a perfect bridge-head not only for Italy, Sicily, Crete and the other islands, but also for Asia, Illyricum, Macedonia and the other zones still in the hands of the Christian powers. The Morea's strategic importance is such that to reconquer it and return it to the Christian fold would inflict serious damage upon the Turks, guaranteeing the Christian powers an ideal military base, indispensable every time the great threat of the infidel becomes imminent'. Bessarion's letter was sent from Ferrara barely ten days before the inauguration of the most important summit (after that of Florence) for our history – the Conference of Mantua.

Bessarion's 'program for Hellenic rescue' was built up entirely around the figure of Thomas Palaiologos, and this was also the personal wish of the Pope himself – something he made clear in his encyclical address to the bishops, princes and Christian people in February of the same year:

*Moveat Vos saltem commiseratio istius principis, qui ex illustri et antiquissima Paleologorum Familia ortus, Imperatoris Filius, Imperatoris Frater, ipse aliquando per successionem Imperator futurus, vir catholicus, prudens, magnus ac fortis animi, omni Imperio, Regnis omnibus fuit, tali patria tot oppidis ac civitatibus spoliatus, profugus, natali solo nudus atque egens ad Vos confugit vestra implorat ...*

(Compassion at least for such a grand prince ought to move you, a prince who was born to the illustrious and ancient family of the Palaiologoi, the son of an emperor, the brother of an emperor, himself the first in line and so destined to become an emperor by dynastic succession, a man always favourable to the Union of the Churches, wise, magnanimous and full of courage, a man who has been robbed of his empire, of his every kingdom, of such an ancient country full of so many fortresses and cities, a man who is now an immigrant, naked, robbed of everything except his lineage, so poor and so needy, this man has taken refuge with you and he implores your help ...)

### The Pro-Western Option within the Palaiologoi and Pro-Byzantine Sentiment in the Italian Courts

Thomas, the last Palaiologos to be born into the purple, was in effect the only heir to be actively liked by the Occidental rulers. Although his pro-Latin stance was not one shared by his brother, Demetrios, and the two had soon begun to fight for control of the Morea, the pro-Western option in the Palaiologan court had been part and parcel of the politics of their father Manuel II. The strategic compromise brokered between the last Byzantine court and the Occident and the improving of the relations between Byzantine and Italian aristocracies had their roots in a double religious-matrimonial pact sealed between Pope Martin V and Manuel II after the Council of Costanza.

In 1422 Thomas' elder brother Theodore had married the Pope's young cousin Cleopa Malatesta. Her untimely and somewhat obscure death in 1433 probably impeded the birth of a much hoped for male heir, an heir who would have linked the Roman Curia to the imperial blood-line. But the link to the Byzantine throne had not been entirely cut. The Italian aristocracy now had a valuable place in the Palaiologan genealogy. Cleopa and her unfortunate brother Pandolfo, the hunchbacked bishop of Patras, appeared *aeque principaliter* in the family trees of some of the most important Italian dynasties. For those rich and influential families in the mid-fifteenth century such a tie could prove useful: with it they could stake a joint interest to the usurped throne of Constantine, now in the hands of the infidel.

Such reasoning may also explain how a lifelong enemy of the Pope such as Sigismund Malatesta was ready to bite his lip and make amends so as to become commander in chief of the land forces sent from Rimini to the Morea in the ill-fated expedition of 1464. Sigismund was first cousin to Cleopa, and her adopted brother: out of all the great Italian families, he was the most directly interested party in the dynastic succession of the Morea.

The idea of a restoration of the *basileia* of Constantine, albeit only in the area of direct western influence, combined religious co-existence with political bargaining in an attempt to bring the important Italian families together with the imperial Greek one. It was promoted both by the Pope and by his Curia. Upon the latter sat two eminent Byzantine cardinals, Isidore of Kiev, who was actually born in the Peloponnese, and more outstandingly Bessarion. The two Cardinals helped build up a bona fide pro-Byzantine clan, the chief exponents of which were just as interested in the Eastern question as they were steeped in Greek culture.

First and foremost were the Este. Nicholas III, who had housed in Ferrara the first Council in 1438, had consolidated his dominant position in matters pertaining to the Eastern question through a series of strategic matrimonial alliances. The marriage of his daughter Guinevere to Sigismund Malatesta effectively made him an indirect relative of Thomas Palaiologos. Through a network of personal, cultural, religious and political connections the Este-Malatesta clan was linked to Bessarion, and if this was not enough, the marriage of Borso d'Este to Margaret Gonzaga joined the Este to Ludovico Gonzaga.

The latter, the grand seignor of Mantua, the leading figure in the 1459 conference for the crusade against the Turks proclaimed by Pius II, was also linked to the Malatesta, and like the Malatesta he was very interested in events concerning the Palaiologoi.

On top of these three principal dynastic links – with the Malatesta, the Este and the Gonzaga – Thomas Palaiologos also benefited from a number of other influential family ties. The most important were the Sforza, to whom Cleopa was related by her father, and which had assumed a crucial role in the organisation of the crusade of Pius II. Another influential family was that of the Montefeltro, who were related in their own right to the Sforza thanks to a marriage between Frederick and Battista. Like the Sforza, the Montefeltro were culturally philhellenic and politically pro-Byzantine.

The profound implications of what was the last serious attempt to save Byzantium in the mid-fifteenth century has never really received the proper attention it deserves, neither by western medievalists, nor by Byzantinists. Two reasons can be ascribed to this lacuna. Firstly, the events occur largely in the historical blind spot of both disciplines. Secondly, the circumstances hinge chronologically between the Middle Ages and modern times. Of course, it is far from being a historiographical no-man's land. But, in this particular instance, the result of the attempt of an 'Occident's rescue of Byzantium' was an abject failure. And, lest we forget, history is more often written by the victors than by the losers.

### **Constantine's Title**

In the years in which the constitution of the new *basileia* was considered almost a fait accompli, the Pope had even higher ambitions. His aim was to overcome in a single master stroke two of the greatest problems to blight medieval politics: who out of all the Occidental sovereigns should inherit the Roman Empire, and how the temporal power of the popes ought to be based. The Pope's goal was to solve both by re-uniting the sovereignty of the First and Second Rome in a single entity.

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 had left behind much more than just the fragile throne of a micro-Asiatic-Balkan kingdom, worn out by centuries of Turkish attrition. For those in the Occident, the fall of Constantinople had thrown into the ring nothing less than the title of the Roman Emperor himself: now that Constantinople had fallen, the title that had been transferred from Rome eleven centuries before by Constantine could now be retrieved, giving the Pope the legitimacy he needed for his own temporal dominion – an issue that was hotly debated at that very time and with which Valla had dealt in his *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione*.

Bessarion was such a political realist that in theological matters at least his open-mindedness came close to verging on pure cynicism. As we have seen, the words of the *Pro pace* oration suggest that right from the start of the Council of Ferrara–Florence the repudiation of the Union by the anti-Latin clergy and by Bessarion's own teacher Pletho had been carefully thought out. But the predictable dissent of the Byzantine prelates who,

to use a saying from the times, would have ‘preferred the Turkish turban to the Latin tiara’, was no longer relevant to the real objective of the compromise sanctioned in Florence: to furnish the restored *basileia* with an ideological platform, a religious formula not only ‘mixed’ but also syncretistic, inspired from Platonism and the doctrinal thinking of the academy of Mistra.

The Council of Florence of 1439 thus set a precedent by establishing a dogmatic framework for future Papal geopolitical planning, the principal lines of which would be laid down twenty years later at Mantua. The much discussed and precarious Union actually helped, reinforced and legitimised the congress convened for the crusade in 1459.

This is the sense of a fresco, executed in 1459 by Benozzo Gozzoli in the Cappella of the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, and commissioned by Piero de’ Medici: a re-evocation of the Council of Florence linked to the occurrence of the political event that dominated the diplomatic scene at that time – precisely the Conference of Mantua. No sooner had Silvio Piccolomini become Pope than he threw his weight behind the main project of the congress, namely a crusade of the principal Christians against Islam. Even external observers could not help but be impressed by such a momentous event. That being said, as Byzantium slowly began to fade from the historical and cultural memory of the West, so did its political agenda, giving rise to a great many doubts and debates. In effect, however, the painting of Benozzo is a giant allegory of cultural and political pro-Byzantine support within the Italian elite of the time, an allegorical representation of the ‘West Passage’ of the Byzantine flame. Not only does it feature Gemistos besides the painter’s self portrait and signature and Bessarion, but also numerous other Byzantine faces and costumes, such as those of John Argyropoulos, Theodore Gaza, Isidore of Kiev, in the cortege of the three Magi symbolizing respectively the Patriarch Joseph II, the *basileus* John VIII Palaiologos and his younger brother Demetrios.

There was another painting executed in the year of 1458, and this too comes close to being a political manifesto, connected with the same influential group we have already indicated within Italian society, that under the influence and spur of Bessarion was pressing for the re-unification of what little remained of Byzantium, the second Rome, with the first Rome of the Popes, and for the juridical re-absorption of a gigantic dynasty – that of the empire of the Caesars that had been transferred to Constantinople by Constantine, the city’s founder and first emperor. This painting is the Flagellation of Piero della Francesca. Here too, as in Benozzo’s cortege, the council for the Union held twenty years prior is re-evoked in order to promote the crusade that would be proclaimed at the Conference of Mantua. The Union Council is represented here not in its second Florentine phase, but in its initial phase at Ferrara. The work carries portraits not only of Bessarion [Fig. 4], depicted here in the clothes he would have worn for the Council of Ferrara, where Ambrogio Traversari saw him ‘burning with genius’, but also the host of the council, Nicholas III of Este, as well as Thomas Palaiologos himself.

As we have already shown in a recent study, a misinterpreted testimony of Sphrantzes proves that he too attended the council, and in this painting he is depicted as he would have

appeared at the time. A third, indubitably Byzantine personage, appears in the background – John VIII Palaiologos, depicted in the clothes of Pontius Pilate, which marks him out as the legitimate representative of imperial Roman power, holder, in fact, of the title of Constantine.

Under the features of Constantine John VIII is placed also in the centre of one of the first frescoes recounting the ‘Legend of the True Cross’ in the cycle that Piero painted in Arezzo – the Battle of Constantine and Maxentius. The battle-hardened and visionary face of Byzantium’s founder, transfused into that of a fifteenth-century *basileus*, is painted prominently in profile in the centre of a group of people that might best be described as both Byzantine and ‘crusader’. The formation he leads is given two ‘labels’. The first is a Byzantine banner, consisting of black eagle on a yellow background. The second is the emblem of the cross, which flutters close to the legend of the emperor himself, Constantine. The latter is depicted defeating his adversary, the banner of which is the ‘demonic’ dragon, the symbol of the Turk. As he does so, Constantine holds aloft his talisman, a miniature holy cross.

If the events of the Council of Ferrara–Florence had acquired a precise meaning in the light of the planned reunification of the first and second Rome, the resolutions of Mantua and the launching of the crusade under Pius II were in effect its first act. Once the Peloponnese had been re-conquered, Thomas Palaiologos could then be re-installed as the legitimate sovereign of what remained of the second Rome. The agreements reached on Union at the Council of Florence would assure an irrefutable religious base for the newly conquered oriental outpost, territorially reduced, but strategically important in what was now becoming a Turkish dominated Mediterranean Sea.

It ought to be underlined once more that Isidore of Kiev, and then after his death Bessarion, continued to occupy the position of ‘shadow’ patriarch of Constantinople. The fact that the anti-Latin Greek clergy in the former Byzantine territories would contest and denounce the Union had already been foreseen, but for the ‘Occident’s rescue of Byzantium’ such a reaction had little if any relevance. Let us recall once again the words of Bessarion on 8 October 1438: ‘When one is enlightened with the truth, goodly deeds do not consist in just obtaining a victory, but also in knowing how to lose in a goodly way, which is the same as winning. One might say that this is the greater good, since it is better [...] *to be liberated than to liberate*’.

If we consider the outcome of the Council of Florence with the eyes of a politician of the time, the main objective of that ‘effigy of a Union’ was abundantly clear. The project was much more than just the reunification of two churches: it was the reunification of two sovereignties, the joining in one juridical entity of the first and second Rome, reuniting the chair of Peter with the throne of Constantine.

## The Conference of Mantua

According to Platina the idea for the conference came from Bessarion himself. The cardinal was now in his fifties and was more powerful than ever, especially as it came to influencing the decision making of Enea Silvio. The two were the same age, they both liked the same books, they both had enjoyed similar careers and they both suffered from the same illnesses. The oriental Cardinal and the humanist Pope were a formidable and inseparable couple, as they would appear a few years later in the twin portraits that Just of Gand and Pedro Berruguete would be commissioned to paint of them, designed to be placed one beside the other: the Byzantine with the greying beard, the thin face emerging out of a black gown [Fig. 5], the Sieneese crowned in his tiara, his wide neck buried in the papal mantle, each with a book in his hands.

Whether he was influenced or not, it was Pius II himself who gave the idea for a crusade renewed impetus and he proclaimed it immediately after his coronation. The convocation to the international summit, organised on behalf of the crusade, was formalised by the *Vocavit nos* Papal bull on 13 October 1458. The choice of Mantua, the birthplace of the poet Virgil, much loved by the Pope, was actually decided upon a few days later, a fact testified by the notice Pius II sent to Ludovico Gonzaga on 22 October.

The conference of Mantua got under way on 1 June 1459 with a verbose and doleful inaugural speech, delivered by the Peloponnesian bishop of Corone, concerning the Turkish threat to Christianity. However, when bored onlookers began getting up to leave, Pius II raised his hand and demanded silence. Then, with ‘torment in his eyes’, to use the words of Lodrisio Crivelli, the papal secretary and chronicler of the conference, the Pope began to speak. His intervention was both direct and polemical. The Pope not only denounced the reluctance of the Italian governments and the Europeans to intervene against the Turks, he also attacked the lukewarm participation of the cardinals present.

It is all too easy to forget just how much the personality of the humanist pope mattered in the bid to save Byzantium. At every turn, his tenacity proved to be as extraordinary as his political scepticism. His rationale and disenchanting realism, carefully set aside ‘so as not to upset Bessarion’, was just as pungent and limpid as ever. His cold detachment did not just come from his own pessimistic vision of life and the world, but from a thoroughly grounded knowledge of military strengths and international affairs. His evaluation of the of situation, almost ruthless in its lucidity, is expressed in a celebrated passage of the *Commentarii*, that begins with ‘Christianity is a body without a head’, and finishes with: ‘If too few soldiers participate in this holy war, then they will be overcome by the infidels; if too many depart, they will be overcome by their own weight and confusion’.

But the Pope did not allow the Pessimism of Reason to cloud the Optimism of Will. It did not stop him from focusing all his energies on the organisation of the anti-Turkish expedition, to the extent of even offering to stand shoulder to shoulder with the crusaders on the battlefield. The gesture was made during a long discourse delivered during the sole plenary session of the Conference of Mantua, on 26 September 1459. In analysing the



Pope's fervent desire to save Byzantium, however, one has constantly to bear in mind the vital role played by Cardinal Bessarion and by the world his personality represented. It is the personal relation between the two that explains, taking things all round, the liking the Pope had for the last surviving sovereign of the Byzantine imperial family – Thomas Palaiologos. On his side, despite having spent twenty years of his life in the Occident, Bessarion had remained faithful to the despot. Since Bessarion was Thomas's most trusted councillor, Thomas had become for Enea Silvio the 'great pugilist' sent down from heaven to combat all the iniquity of the times.

Even in the darkest moments of the Conference of Mantua, Pius II contained his scepticism in respect for Bessarion. When, in reply to the appeal of Thomas Palaiologos for more troops, the contribution of Bianca Maria Visconti, the wife of Francesco Sforza, was found to contain only a risible expeditionary corps, the Pope kept his calm. 'I did not want to sadden Bessarion', he confessed, writing in the third person in the *Commentarii*: 'Noluit Bissarionem contristari'.

Conversely, when, half way through the conference, during negotiations to drum up more aid, the Pope's disdain for the fighting capacities of the Italian soldiers and their commanders had become evident (with perhaps the exception of his enemy Sigismund Malatesta), it was Bessarion who helped Enea Silvio put aside his reserve and encouraged him to keep going with unstinting energy.

Pius II, Bessarion and their allies fought tooth and nail to prevent the Conference of Mantua from collapsing before it had even begun. In the end they obtained a respectable number of delegates. Besides the ambassadors of the German Emperor Frederick III, the old protector of Enea Silvio, they also received the representatives of the King of France and those of the Duke of Brittany, the Duke of Savoy, the King of Poland and the Archduke Albert of Austria. But the delegations of the Occidental powers arrived at the Conference of Mantua late and 'with studied reluctance'.

The political context was disastrous. The states of Central Europe, where both Pius II and Bessarion had travelled often and of which they were both extremely well informed, Bohemia, Austria, Poland and in particular the German principalities, were all divided in disputes of various kinds. The squabbles involved Hungary and menaced the sovereignty of Matthias Corvinus, weakening the other eastern European countries exposed to Turkish attack, such as Carniola, Carinthia and Stiria. Nevertheless, after nearly two months of negotiations, between the end of October and the second half of December, the delegates of the Emperor and of the German principalities all agreed to contribute 32,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry to the crusade.

The delegates representing the king of France, Charles VII, gave nothing. The struggle between the house of Anjou and the heirs to the house of Aragon, now supported by the new Pope, made it impossible for the French to support the crusade. Pius II had only just accorded to Ferrante, illegitimate son of Alphonse V of Aragon, the crown of Naples. In Spain, the internal war against Granada left little to hope for from this quarter. In England too, the War of the Roses was still raging.

Nevertheless, six months after the inauguration of the conference, in a feat of diplomatic virtuosity that proved particularly useful in the checkerboard of German politics, the Pope and Bessarion succeeded in reaching a common accord that fulfilled at least some of their expectations. The Papal bull *Ecclesiam Christi* of 14 January 1460 announced a three-year crusade against the Turks and decreed a full indulgence for all those who participated in it personally or who supported it financially. A tithe was imposed on all revenues belonging to monasteries and convents. The same went for the remaining ecclesiastical subjects and all dependants of the Pontifical State. In addition, a thirtieth was levied on the lay community and a twentieth on the Jews.

Just how much Pius II took the organisation of the crusade to heart can be seen in his funeral monument, undertaken by Paolo Romano. According to the seventeenth-century epitaph upon it, the operation launched at Mantua was the summit of his pontificate.

Pius II pontifex maximus, natione Tuscus, patria Senensis, gente Piccolominea, sedit anno VI augusto pontificatu gloria. Conventum Christianorum Mantuae tum pro fide habuit.

(Here lies Pius II, Pontifex Maximus, of Tuscan race, of Sienese descent, of the Piccolomini family, gloriously departed in the VI year of his august Pontificate. He organised the Conference of Mantua to defend the Christian faith.)

It is true that Pius II considered the anti-Turkish crusade an extremely difficult, if not desperate, undertaking. And it is also true that his obstinacy in his desire to organise it, if not command the whole operation, grew, as he occasionally let slip, from a desire not to let Bessarion down. Nevertheless, the Conference of Mantua was without doubt the overriding priority in the politics of his pontificate and he was convinced of its importance for the history of Christianity. Pius II had a stubborn faith, if not in the crusade's success, then in the importance for Christian Church of a unitary effort of European powers against the Turks. Such an attitude comes out in numerous passages of his official autobiography, the *Commentarii*, the tenor of which is corroborated not only by his epitaphs but also from what other contemporaries wrote about him.

When the Conference of Mantua opened, everyone was led to believe that the mission to save Byzantium would be a glorious success. Indeed, at the end of the conference, when Thomas Palaiologos, the last despot of the Morea, was called to Rome, none of the observers could have ever believed that the resolutions of Mantua, inspired by the political will of the Pope and guided by the iron diplomacy of Bessarion, could have been so lightly disposed of. The fact that Thomas would never be restored to his throne in the New Byzantium and that the Morea would not be retaken was unthinkable.

After Mantua it had become clear to everybody that the project launched by Pius II was much more than just a military mission in aid of a Christian population oppressed by the Turks. It went one step further, since, as we have seen, it was intended to open the way towards recovering the imperial title of Constantine. The plan of an 'Occident's rescue of Byzantium' had been finally unveiled at the international summit, where it was presented

in an explicit and definitive way by the Pope and his political supporters. The objective was to uproot the juridical succession of the Caesars from Constantinople and relocate it in a territorially reduced location that was closer to home and firmly under their control. Administered and defended by the Occidental powers, the restructured and remodelled state would serve their political, dynastic, economic and religious interests. The Morea would be a military bastion against further Turkish expansion to the West. The role of Morea in the guardianship of Mediterranean interests would have been comparable, though in a broader scale, to the one played in fact by Cyprus later on, and eventually by Malta.

### **The Death of Pius II**

‘Our most holy father the Pope has faith in the resourcefulness of the Christian Byzantines of the Morea and it is his intention to help them in any way he can and he will do so in a relatively short space of time, I hope’, wrote Bessarion to Giacomo della Marca, ten days before the inauguration of the Conference of Mantua. Sadly, Bessarion’s appraisal of the time needed to launch an attack was over-optimistic. Despite having sent an embassy to Mantua, the Venetian senate had little intention of allowing the Pope to compromise its affairs by upsetting the delicate equilibrium of Mediterranean commerce. It was not until after the conference was over that they were seriously prepared to sit down and negotiate the participation of their fleet in an expedition. Notwithstanding the diplomatic ducking and diving of Pasquale Malipiero, the fascinating and unscrupulous doge, the fact remained that Venice was decidedly contrary to any involvement in the crusade for fear of damaging its relations with the Turks.

Enea Silvio had predicted it as early as January. In a personal note discovered in the State Archives of Milan, he remarks: ‘When they are sure that an expedition of kings and princes, by land and by water, is ready, they too will join us with a valid fleet’. He ends his note with: ‘and they will not be the last of the Christians’, which then appears to have been crossed out and substituted with a second more perceptive reflection: ‘But now they seem to be preparing rather slowly and perhaps they will in fact be the last!’

Perhaps it was exasperation or provocation with the Venetians or perhaps just both that prompted Pius II to officially communicate the following disconcerting decision ‘to the six cardinals of the Sacred College, whom he deemed to be the most trustworthy’. In March 1462, he declared: ‘Even if our body is old and ailing, we still have the spirit to personally declare war on the Turks in defence of the Catholic faith and depart ourselves in such an expedition’. The Pope was now ready to place himself at the head of the ninth crusade. What at Mantua had just been an allusion – the Pope as the ‘imitator of Godfrey of Bouillon’ – now risked becoming a reality.

‘We have passed many sleepless nights reflecting’, he explained, ‘and tossing and turning in our beds we were in despair’. The Conference of Mantua was a waste of time, he admitted. ‘If we send ambassadors to the kings asking for their help, they are laughed at, if we impose

the tithe upon the clergy, they rebel and ask for another council, and if we promulgate indulgences to finance the crusade, they accuse us of cupidity. We are without credit. What can we do in such a weary situation? Are we to throw ourselves into certain danger and face the enemy alone? Are we to venture into an undertaking that will almost certainly make us ridiculous? To commit ourselves uselessly, obtaining nothing but humiliation after so much hard work, would be the height of folly. Our mind has been perplexed and profoundly anguished for some time now and our soul repudiates all consolation since we see the situation worsening by the day, and yet there is not even the slightest hope of success.'

It was in such a way, explained Enea Silvio to the cardinals, that he came up with that idea, an idea which even he admitted was rather extravagant: 'Whether it is just a flight of fancy or divine inspiration is for you to decide'. Whatever the case, it was always going to be useful propaganda. Indeed, as soon as it was announced, and was known to be fact, that the Roman pontiff, in accordance with the Holy Senate, was now fully 'disposed not only to sacrifice his own money but even his own body', he said, 'it would be like a peal of thunder waking everyone from a deep slumber'.

'Audivere cardinales non sine stupore singulari Pontificis verba'. The six cardinals, Enea Silvio informs us, were struck dumb. Enea Silvio never went back on his decision and the announcement given to the six chosen cardinals stood. As Bessarion had written to Giacomo della Marca, the crusade in the Morea was an absolute priority for him.

Once the Conference of Mantua was finally over, two years of tortuous bargaining between the various allied powers began. These included Bourgoigne, Hungary, Venice, France, Germany, Saxony, Castile, Portugal, the Albanian militia of Skanderbeg, Francesco Sforza, Borso d'Este, Ludovico Gonzaga, Cosimo de' Medici, Bologna, Modena, Siena, Lucca, Pisa and Genoa. Controversial promises of help were secured along with the mobilisation of a multitude of heterogeneous crusaders of the most diverse origins and even more diverse extractions. Many of them came from the low to middle classes. More often than not they were pilgrims, who arrived in the papal territories ill-equipped and with little or no means of sustenance.

Defections from the allied camp occurred along the way, one after the other. Then, in June of 1464, Nicola Cusano, the humanist who had found himself aboard one of the first ships of the Byzantine delegation at Ferrara, the Platonic philosopher who had always supported the utopian vision of a universal religion together with that of a New Occidental Byzantium, was sent to meet five thousand volunteers who were marching over the Alps. Cusano departed, but the difficulties of the mission cost him his life and he died on 11 August in Todi.

Notwithstanding the almost unanimous remonstrations and innumerable attempts to dissuade him, the Pope departed Rome on 18 June. He was so ill that for the first part of the journey he had to sail up the Tiber in a barge, where he remained the entire time, unable to descend, not even for the night. In the meantime, defections amidst the crusaders had already begun. During the second leg of the journey, the papal convoy had to battle its way through an exodus of deserters, who, through lack of organisation and equipment, were

trudging home. Cardinal Ammannati relates how they were forced to pull down the curtain of the Pontiff's litter each and every time a group of fugitives passed by, in order to spare him the heart-rending sight.

At the end of a slow and arduous journey, Pius II finally reached Ancona on 19 July 1464. The heat that summer was insupportable and the city was already beginning to experience a shortage of water. The Pope took up quarters in the old episcopal palace that stood on a rise: 'It seems that even here the air of Greece blows and the sun blazes in the splendour of the Orient'. Tortured by his ninth kidney stone, exhausted by fever and unable to sleep, Enea Silvio, although bedridden, was still grimly determined to set sail just as soon as the Venetian ships arrived.

The fleet, accompanied by the old doge Cristoforo Moro, was expected within a fifteen-day period. However, Moro had revealed nothing of his plans to anyone and his hostility to the crusade was well known. In effect, the Venetian senate was now consumed by an on-going internal struggle between the interventionists of Vettore Capello, who were in the minority, and those who were opposed, led by the doge. In the circumstances, Cristoforo Moro decided to employ a well known Venetian strategy, the one that had more or less deliberately contributed to the disaster of Varna and Constantinople – he played for time.

According to the documents in our possession, one part at least of the senate was just as exasperated by the prevarication of the doge as was the papal court. But it must also be said that not one of the political observers in the Italian camp had ever really believed that Venice would honour its agreement. The only doubt, as Francesco Sforza records in one of his letters, seemed to be whether Cristoforo Moro would refuse to enter the harbour at all, or whether he would bring his ships into port just long enough to allow them to dock before pulling them straight out again. In the end, the latter occurred.

The ships did not arrive in Ancona, but in the meantime something much more horrible did – the plague. The number of crusaders, equipped and ready for embarkation was dwindling by the day. When, on 12 August, the Venetian ships finally appeared on the horizon, there were no longer enough crusaders to fill them. Giovanni Antonio Campano tells us that that day the servants raised up the fragile body of Enea Silvio and carried him to the window so that he could see the twelve ships sailing into the port. Upon seeing them, the Pope, according to an eye-witness, 'was stuck by a profound sadness'. He was still lucid, even if his doctors had diagnosed his condition as critical. During the night, between 14 and 15 August, Pius II died in his sleep.

As expected, Cristoforo Moro set sail for home, passing via Istria along the way, and taking with him the 40,000 ducats collected for the expedition. In Venice, the order was immediately given to disarm the twelve ships, the same that were painted by Pintoricchio in the Piccolomini Library in the Cathedral of Siena, in the background of the last of the *Stories of the life of Enea Silvio Piccolomini*, behind the portrait of the white-faced Pope, reclining in his sedan chair looking out to sea. On his right, there is a handsome gentleman with blond hair, a long beard and a blue hat. The eyes of the gentleman are pure blue, they are opened wide, and staring out into nothingness.

## **The Eclipse of Byzantium**

Ernst Gombrich was accustomed to relating the following anecdote to his students. A drunk loses his house keys in the middle of the night at Piccadilly Circus. He loses them in the darkest part of the street. A policeman on his beat, seeing a man crawling around on his hands and knees beneath the light of a lamp-post, approaches him and asks him what he is up to. 'I have lost the keys to my house', replies the drunk, still searching the pavement. 'But where about did you lose them, sir?', asks the alert policeman. At this point, the wobbling drunk points into the darkness towards the opposite side of Piccadilly. 'So why on earth are you looking here?' demands the policeman. To which the drunk replies: 'Because there's more light here'.

There is little point in conjecturing how the history of the Mediterranean might have been altered if all the principal western supporters of the project of an 'Occident's rescue of Byzantium' had not died, one after the other, in such a short space of time. Nor is there any way of knowing what would have happened to the checkerboard of eastern European and Mediterranean politics, if the great Morea expedition planned in Mantua had actually gone ahead and succeeded. All we can say is that, as interest in Byzantium gradually faded in the West, its civilisation moved on, following a third, elliptical way. After the attempt at the dynastic and religious translation of Constantine's crown to the Occident proved to be a failure, Byzantine descent was perpetuated through the nascent Russia, which re-absorbed it in the Orthodox church. From that moment on, in Europe the whole cultural hemisphere of Byzantium was obliterated. Its administrative and religious traditions grew and prospered in the Slav East, who went on to become the custodian of both autocracy and orthodoxy. This is probably the cause of the double-standards, the censorship and the misunderstandings, whether conscious or unconscious, that in the centuries to come would dim any western memory of Byzantium.

What ever the case may be, it is incumbent upon the historian to shed more light on all that history has left obscure. All the more so, if factual synthesis helps us to give us a better grasp of the power politics at a crucial moment in history, as is the case here, that is to say, during the passage from the Middle Ages to modern times; and to seek out the penumbra and shed light upon what today seems inscrutable perhaps only because it is not the victor's side of the story, but that of the loser.

For some historians the modern era begins in 1453, the date marking the fall of Constantinople to the Turks. For others, it begins in 1492, when the discovery of America smashes Genoese and Venetian trade routes and catapults maritime commerce out of Braudel's 'Méditerranée Elargie', that is, out of what had once been the orbit of the Roman and Byzantine Empire. For others, the modern era commences in 1517, when Luther posted his 95 theses on the church door of Wittenberg Castle. Naturally, all three events are closely linked.

But we might also legitimately propose a fourth date, 1472, the year in which Zoe, the daughter of Thomas Palaiologos, was given in marriage to Ivan III, Grand Prince of

Moscow. The date is important since it marks the definitive eclipse of Byzantium from modern history. In this year, the projected religious and dynastic reunification between the first and second Rome, which in the two decades preceding the fall of Byzantium had been pursued by an enlightened western representative of political, religious and cultural power, was definitively sunk.

The experiment of Pope Martin V and Emperor Manuel II in forging dynastic alliances through 'mixed' religious marriages, attempted with Cleopa Malatesta and Theodore II Palaiologos, had furnished the first fundamental premise for the political and religious undertaking of the pro-Byzantine alliance of which the Flagellation of Piero della Francesca is the manifesto. But the historic attempt, initiated with the marriage of Cleopa, cannot really be considered complete until the second marriage of 1472, which is symmetrical but inverted. It was symmetrical because the marriage was initially and formally based upon the same political and religious premises of the former wedding. It was inverted in the sense that it marks the final chapter in the project of religious and dynastic unification between the two Romes, the transmission to the Grand Prince of Moscow of the ideological heritage of Byzantium, its full re-absorption into Orthodoxy and thus its progressive distancing from the interests and from the memory of the Occident.

After the wedding, the Great Prince adopted as his symbol the two-headed eagle. Then, in his capacity of sovereign of all Russia, he claimed the juridical succession, the ideological heritage and the geopolitical role of the by now extinct *basileus*. Even before the wedding, he had already assumed the title of Caesar, *Csar*. He even added the the epithet *groznyj* to this, 'terrible', a reverential denomination, common in Byzantine autocracy, where the sovereign was considered to be the earthly image of God, and as such empowered with all his sacred and juridical powers. Later, the epithet, adopted by his nephew Ivan IV, would be erroneously interpreted by the westerners to describe his own sanguinary personality.

The marriage between Zoe-Sofja and Ivan III was significant in that the affair had slipped out of the hands of the Catholic Church – although not out of those of Bessarion – creating as a result a sort of iron curtain between the Occident and the East, which isolated Byzantine state traditions from their European equivalents, confining them to the East and bringing them into opposition with papal ideology and European political development. It could be said that the Third Rome was the product of the botched reunification of the first two. For fifty years, starting with the Council of Ferrara, Orthodoxy had been put up for sale in return for a crusade of re-conquest. If Constantinople was beyond the reach of the Occidental rescue plan, then the Morea would do and as such it would constitute a new type of Byzantine state. After each one of the Pope's crusades failed, first at Varna and then at Ancona – always one might add with an accusatory finger pointing at Venice – Orthodoxy was taken off the European market and ceded, after rapid negotiations, to Russia. The genetic code of the imperial Palaiologan family had not been lost after all; the dynastic Byzantine heritage had been passed down and onto a new royal generation.

During a whole lifetime of open-minded and unprejudiced political plotting, Bessarion's vision had always been global, rather like the armillary sphere that hung in front of his

writing desk in Carpaccio's Saint Augustine [fig. 6]. But like any grandmaster, Bessarion had saved his best move for last. In an unexpected knight's gambit on the chessboard of international politics, the entire juridical and institutional heritage of the Caesars was suddenly robbed from the Popes. And so it was that the successful evasion of Zoe from papal control, perpetrated with the help of emissaries and adventurers such as the mysterious 'Greek Jurij' and the endearing Della Volpe, once again reopened Byzantium's geopolitical game. With Zoe went the quasi totality of the 'funds for the Holy War against the Turks' siphoned away by Bessarion. The Byzantine political and ecclesiastical bequest, together with its very way of life, that Bessarion instructed to be transmitted to the children of Thomas Palaiologos, were allowed to flourish in the hands of the fastest growing power of the times – the Russian empire of the new Caesars, the Csars, to whom Byzantium passed on its etiquette and its costume, its sanctity and its autocracy, but most all its Orthodoxy.



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## The Council of Florence

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### The Titles of Bekkos

The *Titles* of Bekkos are in PG 141, 613–724. On Bessarion's pamphlet against Palamas and on its relation with Bekkos see A. Rigo, *La refutazione di Bessarione delle 'Antepigraphai' di Gregorio Palamas*, in M. Cortesi and C. Leonardi, eds., *Tradizioni patristiche dell'Umanesimo* (SISMEL–Edizioni del Galluzzo; Firenze 2000), 283–94. On how Bekkos' book came to be introduced in the discussion among the members of the Greek delegation, at the end of April, by Isidore of Kiev, cf. *Les 'Mémoires' du Grand Ecclésiarque de l'Eglise de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le concile de Florence (1438–1439)*, ed. V. Laurent (Roma 1961), VIII, 37, 47. The anecdote of the hesychast's dream is found in Philotheos Kokkinos' *Life of Palamas*. The most recent edition of Bessarion's *Henotikos Logos* is in Bessarione di Nicea, *Orazione dogmatica sull'Unione dei Greci e dei Latini*, prefazione di G. Pugliese Carratelli, introd., transl., and notes by G. Lusini, with an essay of A. Rigo (Napoli 2001), 125–95.

### A Project that Had Little to Do with a Utopian Hellenic Re-conquest

The definition of Thomas Palaiologos as 'natural sovereign' (*naturalis dominus*) of Morea is found in Bessarion's letter to Giacomo della Marca, first published in S. Lampros, *Palaiologeia kai Peloponnesiaka*, I–IV (Athenai 1926–1930), IV, 255–8, and then republished in L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsman*, III, (Paderborn 1923; repr. Aalen 1967), 490–93; the passage is 491, 35–7; see also 491, 23–7. On the working documents sent by Gemistos Pletho and then by Bessarion to the Byzantine rulers see D.A. Zakythinos, *Le déspotat grec de Morée*, I. *Histoire politique*, éd. revue et augmentée par C. Maltézou (London 1975), 175–180, and A. Pertusi, 'In margine alla questione dell'umanesimo bizantino: il pensiero politico del cardinal Bessarione e i suoi rapporti con il pensiero di Giorgio Gemisto Pletone', *RSTN*, n.s. 5 (1968), 95–101, especially 101–4; cf. also A.G. Keller, 'A Byzantine admirer of "Western" Progress: Cardinal Bessarion', *Cambridge Historical Journal* 11 (1955), 343–348.

The definition of Bessarion's letter to Giacomo della Marca as a 'personal program for Hellenic rescue' is in G. Lusini, *Introduzione*, in Bessarione di Nicea, *Orazione dogmatica*, 95. The complete text of the encyclical address to the bishops, princes and Christian people issued by Pius II in February 1459 is published in O. Raynaldi *Annales ecclesiastici ab anno MCXCVIII ubi desinit Cardinalius Baronius [...]*, X (Lucae 1753), 341, ann. 1462, XXXVII.

### The Pro-Western Option within the Palaiologoi and Pro-Byzantine Sentiment in the Italian Courts

Information about Cleopa's unfortunate life in Mistra is found in the corpus of letters recently discovered in the Archivio di Stato di Mantova (on which see P. Torelli, ed., *L'archivio Gonzaga di Mantova*, I [Ostiglia 1920], 181, n. 1) and published in A. Falcioni, 'Cleofe Malatesti moglie di Teodoro II Paleologo', in *Le Donne di Casa Malatesti, Rimini* (Banca Popolare dell'Emilia Romagna 2004), 603–610. See especially the letter of Battista Malatesta di Montefeltro to her sister-in-law Paola Gonzaga, sent from Pesaro on 12 February 1427 (ASMn, AG, E.XXVII, 2, Affari in Rimini, busta 1081, n. 54), and entirely printed (doc. 3) in Falcioni's *Appendice documentaria*, 607–608; and the letter of Cleopa's sister Paola Gonzaga to Pope Martin V, dated 22 January 1427 (ASMn, AG, F.II/8, Mantova e Paesi, busta 2390, carta 37 recto), printed as doc. 2 in Falcioni's *Appendice documentaria*, 607.

For a deeper insight see also the two letters sent by Martin V to Cleopa and her husband the despot Theodore II Palaiologos, in I.G. Hofmann, ed., 'Epistulae Pontificiae ad Concilium Florentinum spectantes', in *Concilium Florentinum. Documenta et Scriptores* (Roma 1940), 15–17, nr. 20 and nr. 21; and the letter sent to the Pope by Battista Malatesta di Montefeltro, undated, published in N. Iorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des Croisades au XVème siècle*, I–IV (Paris 1899–1916), I, 197.

The sources concerning Sigismund Malatesta's expedition in Morea are enumerated and partially published in L. Tonini, *Storia civile e sacra riminese*, II–VI (Rimini 1856–1888; repr. Rimini 1971), V/2, 301 ff.; G. Soranzo, 'Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta in Morea e le vicende del suo dominio', *Atti e Memorie della Regia Deputazione di Storia Patria per la Provincia di Romagna*, serie IV, 8 (1917–1918), 26 ff.; A.G. Momperratos, *Sigismoundos Pandolphos Malatestas. Polemos Eneton kai Tourkon en Peloponneso kata ta ete 1463–1466* (Athenai 1914); cf. also the important witness of D. Malipiero, *Annali veneti*, in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, VII/1, (Firenze, 1843), 12. On Sigismund's candidature, put forward by Bessarion, cf. the letter sent to the Duke of Milan by Ottone del Carretto, the Milanese ambassador and old friend of Pope Piccolomini, dated 8 February 1464 (Archivio Ducale Visconteo-Sforzesco, cartella 57, Potenze Estere, Roma). Sigismund went to Venice 'a pigliare el bastone de capitanato con grande Honore' according to Gaspare Broglio, as we read in the autograph of the latter's *Cronaca universale* preserved at the Biblioteca Gambalunga of Rimini (c. 250r = 277).

On the death of Cleopa Malatesta Palaiologoina see the short notice given by Sphrantzes, *Chronicon minus*, ed. R. Maisano (Roma 1990), 72, 11–13. An even shorter notice is in the *Chronicon venetus-moraeotus* 36, published in P. Schreiner, ed., *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, I (Wien 1975), 292 e 303. A complete list of the funerary orations composed for the death of Cleopa by the members of the Academy of Mistra is in S. Ronchey, *Bessarione poeta e l'ultima corte di Bisanzio*, in G. Fiaccadori, ed., *Bessarione e*

*l'umanesimo. Catalogo della mostra*. Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, 27 aprile–31 maggio 1994 (Napoli 1994), 57.

### Constantine's Title

The presence of Pletho in the retinue of Demetrios Palaiologos is mentioned in Syropoulos, IX 25, 460 Laurent. For the identifications of the figures portrayed in both Benozzo's *Cortege* and Piero's *Flagellation*, as well as in the latter's *Battle of Constantine and Maxentius*, see S. Ronchey, *L'enigma di Piero* (Milano, Rizzoli, 2006).

The misinterpreted passage of Sphrantzes, proving that Thomas Palaiologos too attended the council, is in *Chronicon minus*, XXIII 11, 60, 30–35 Maisano; cf. also R. Maisano, 'Su alcune discendenze moderne dei Paleologi di Bisanzio', *Rassegna Storica Salernitana* 10 (1988), 87–88. The circumstance is confirmed by P. Tafur, *Travels and Adventures 1435–1439*, ed. and transl. by M. Letts (New York – London 1926), 124–5.

### The Conference of Mantua

Platina's statement is found in *Platinae Panegyricus in laudem amplissimi patris d. Bessarionis*, PG 161, 110. On the conference of Mantua, besides the abundant information contained in Piccolomini, *Commentarii*, cf. G.A. Campano, *Vita Pii II*, ed. G. C. Zimolo, *RISS* III–3 (Bologna, 1964), 28, 36–40 and 52, as well as *Platynae historici Liber Vitae Pontificum*, ed. G. Gaida, in Muratori, *RIS*, 3/1 (Città di Castello 1913–1932), 106–7 and 109. For the papal bulls and the other ecclesiastical documents concerning the conference, and for their editions, cf. K.M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204–1571)*. II. *The Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia 1978), 200–201, n. 13. Another precious source on Pius II and the crusade is L. Crivelli, *De expeditione Pii P. II in Turcas*, in Muratori, *RISS* XXIII (Milano 1733), 25–80 = ed. G.C. Zimolo, *RISS* XXIII, part 5 (Bologna 1950); for the description of Enea Silvio's torment ('Ubi vero is [i.e. the bishop of Corone] finem dicendi fecit, Pius pontifex, miserabilibus oculis cum patres atque omnem multitudinem perlustrasset, hunc in modum locutus est') see 77=101. The text of the Pope's opening speech is in Piccolomini, *Commentarii*, III 1, 424 Totaro. The sentence of Bessarion is in his letter to Giacomo della Marca: Mohler III, 492, 4–7. The passage beginning 'Christianity is a body without a head' is cited in Gibbon.

On the negotiations with Philip of Burgundy, besides the many passages in the third book of Piccolomini's *Commentarii*, see e.g. the optimistic letter sent him by the Pope from Florence on 3 May 1459 (Brevia, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Arm. XXXIX, tom. 9, foll. 35 recto–36 recto). As to the Hungarian question, sources in Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, II, 205. On Francesco Sforza see especially the third book of Piccolomini's *Commentarii*.

The sentence of Pius II ('Noluit Bissarionem contristari') may be read in Piccolomini, *Commentarii*, 434 Totaro. For his evaluation of the military skill of Italian generals cf. 582 Totaro. The complete Latin text of the speech given on 26 September 1459 is in *Pii II Orationes politicae et ecclesiasticae*, ed. G.D. Mansi, I–III (Lucae 1755–59), II, 9 ff. The bull *Ecclesiam Christi* is in Raynaldi *Annales Ecclesiastici* ..., XIX, ad ann. 1460, numbers 5–7 and 18–20, 41–42, 44–45. The Pope's final speech may be read in Mansi, *Concilia*, XXXV, 113–116; see also Piccolomini, *Commentarii*, III 47, 634–9.

On the seventeenth-century epitaph of Pius II composed by Cardinal Peretti of Montalto, following the original inscription by Cardinal Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini, cf. V. Forcella, *Iscrizioni delle chiese e d'altri edifici di Roma dal secolo XI fino ai giorni nostri*, VIII (Roma 1876), 262 n. 660; see also Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, II, 230, n. 103, and R.U. Montini, *Le tombe dei papi* (Roma 1957), 285–9.

### The Death of Pius II

The note written by Enea Silvio on the Venetians, lucidly expounding their position, may be read in *Aeneae Silvii Piccolomini Senensis qui postea fuit Pius II Pont. Max. Opera inedita* descripsit ex Codicibus Chisianis vulgavit notisque illustravit Josephus Cugnoni (Romae 1883), 512–13; see also G.B. Picotti, *La dieta di Mantova e la politica de' Veneziani* (Venezia 1912; repr. Trento 1996). The final line ('nec postremi Christianorum erunt') is substituted, perhaps by a second hand, with the following: 'Quam interim satis lente preparare videntur, et forsitan inter postremos erunt!' (Archivio di Stato di Milano, Arch. Visconteo-Sforzesco, Potenze Estere, Cart. 48 [Roma]).

The decision communicated by Pius II to the six cardinals of the Sacred College is in Piccolomini, *Commentarii*, VII, 16, 1480 ff. On the voyage of Enea Silvio to Ancona see the long letters sent to Francesco Piccolomini by Cardinal Ammannati, who was the eyewitness of both of its first part and of the Pope's last days in Ancona: references in L. Pastor, *Storia dei Papi dalla fine del Medioevo*, II (Roma 1942), 256, n. 2, and 260–261, n. 5. The decrees of the Venetian Senate and of the Maggior Consiglio, dated respectively 8 and 9 November 1463, where the personal participation of doge Cristoforo Moro to the crusade was announced, are published in L. von Pastor, *Acta inedita ad historiam Pontificum Romanorum*, I (Freiburg 1904), nr. 167 and nr. 168. A motion of censure of Moro's behaviour was presented to the Venetian Senate on 1 August 1464: translation of its text and complete references in Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, II, 269 and n. 135. The actual date of the Venetian fleet's departure is August 18; discussion and complete chronographical sources in Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, II, 270, n. 138; on the immediate order to disarm the twelve ships see Pastor, II, 274, nn. 2 and 4, with references to the cautious letter that Cristoforo Moro sent to Francesco Sforza from Venice on 25 August 1464.

## The Eclipse of Byzantium

The first fundamental premise for the ‘mixed’ religious marriage of Zoe Palaiologina and Ivan III of Moscow was furnished by the letter of Martin V dated Constance, 6 April 1418, and published in O. Raynaldi *Annales ecclesiastici ab anno MCXCVIII ubi desinit Cardinalius Baronius* [...], VIII (Lucae 1752), 492, ann. 1418, XVII (as remarked also by P. Pierling, ‘Le mariage d’un Tsar au Vatican. Ivan III et Zoé Paléologue’, *Revue des Questions Historiques* [1887], 371), in which he authorised the weddings of Manuel Palaiologos’ sons with Italian princesses, and specifically that of his cousin Cleopa Malatesta with Theodore II Palaiologos, despot of Mistra.

On the title of Caesar, *Csar*, assumed by Ivan III cf. P. Pierling, *La Russie et l’Orient. Mariage d’un Tsar au Vatican. Ivan III et Sophie Paléologue* (Paris 1891), 141; on the epithet *groznyj*, see 79. On the meaning of *groza* cf. A.M. Pančenko and B.A. Uspenskij, ‘Ivan Groznyj i Petr Velikij: koncepcii pervogo monarcha’, in *Trudy Otdela Drevnerusskoj Literatury* (Leningrad 1983), 54–77. On the influence of Zoe in the Moscovite court cf. especially P. Catalano, ‘Fin de l’Empire romain? Un problème juridico-religieux’, in P. Catalano and P. Siniscalco, eds, *Da Roma alla Terza Roma. Studi I. Roma Costantinopoli Mosca* (Napoli 1983), 584 ff., nn. 24 and 27, with bibliography; objections in T. Wolinska, *Bysl* 62 (2004), 320–21. For the transmission to the Grand Prince of Moscow of the Byzantine doctrine of universal autocracy cf. G. Maniscalco Basile, *La sovranità ecumenica del Gran Principe di Mosca. Genesi di una dottrina (fine XV–inizio XVI secolo)* (Milano 1983) with sources and bibliography. On the claimed ‘Roman’ genealogy of the Grand Prince of Moscow see M. Capaldo, ‘L’idea di Roma in area slavo-ortodossa nei secoli IX–XVI’, in P. Catalano and V.T. Pasuto, ed., *L’idea di Roma a Mosca. Secoli XV–XVI. Fonti per la storia del pensiero sociale russo*, in P. Catalano and P. Siniscalco, eds, *Da Roma alla Terza Roma. Documenti*, I (Roma 1993), xxix–xxxiv. The ‘translatio ad Russiam’ of Byzantine ideology is openly claimed in the two letters of Filofej of Pskov: texts in Catalano and Pašuto, eds, *L’idea di Roma a Mosca. Secoli XV–XVI. Fonti per la storia del pensiero sociale russo*, 135–61 and 346–73. Russian text of the letters of Ivan IV Groznyj to Andrej Kurbskij in the same volume, 60–64.

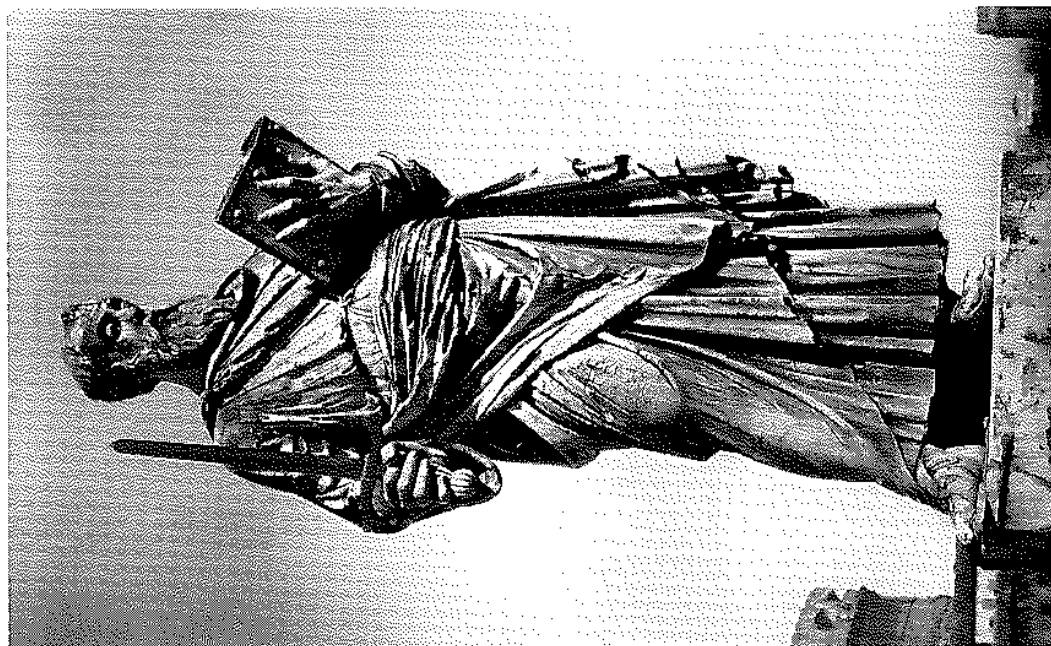
As to the Russian wedding of Zoe Palaiologina, see the *Chronicle of Nikon* in *Polnoe sobranie russkich letopisej XXVII* (Moskva–Leningrad 1962), 126, and the *Chronicle of Kiril Belozeskij*, XXVI, 225, where Bessarion’s manoeuvring behind the scenes clearly appears. On his instructions to Della Volpe cf. P. Pierling, ‘Le mariage d’un Tsar au Vatican. Ivan III et Zoé Paléologue’, *Revue des Questions Historiques* (1887), 367; P. Pierling, *La Russie et l’Orient. Mariage d’un Tsar au Vatican. Ivan III et Sophie Paléologue* (Paris 1891), 37; P. Pierling, *La Russie et le Saint-Siège. Etudes diplomatiques*, I, 2a ed. (Paris 1906), 141. On Della Volpe’s clumsy negotiations and on the ambiguous position of Pope Sixtus IV see the detailed report of the so-called *Diario concistoriale del cardinale Ammannati* (E. Carusi, ed., *Il Diario Romano di Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra. Appendice I. Diario concistoriale del cardinale Ammannati attribuito dal Muratori a Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra*, in *RISS*,

XXIII/3 [Città di Castello 1904]), 141–2, and the letter of the Milanese ambassadors to Galeazzo Sforza of 25 May 1472 (Milano, Archivio di Stato, Fondo Sforzesco, Potenze estere, cartella 70, Roma 1472).

The Catholic wedding in Saint Peter's was described in a letter of Theodore Gaza to Francesco Filelfo, now lost; Filelfo's reply, sent from Milan on 1 July 1472, is published in E. Legrand, ed., *Cent-dix lettres grecques de François Filelfe* (Paris 1892), 163–4, nr. 94. The only other description of the ceremony is in the so-called *Diario concistoriale del cardinale Ammannati*, 143–4.

The order of payment of 6,000 ducats as Zoe's dowry, dated 20 June 1472, is preserved in Rome, Archivio generale dello Stato. Archivio Camerale, Liber S. Cruciate Comm. Gen., ann. 1468–1472, 110 v.; the cash payment of the whole amount on the following 27 June is confirmed by the certificate preserved at the Archivio Camerale, Liber depositarii sancte crociate, ann. 1464–1475, 188.

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1 Paolo Romano, Monument of St Paul/Thomas Palaiologos (Rome, ponte Milvio, marble statue). Sovraintendenza BB.CC del Comune di Roma, Monumenti Medievali e Moderni. Reproduced by permission.



2 Paolo Romano, Funerary monument of Pius II (Rome, Sant' Andrea della Valle), detail: profile of Thomas Palaiologos wearing the imperial *skiaodon*. Copyright by the Fondo Edifici di Culto, administered by the Direzione Centrale del Ministero dell'Interno. Photograph reproduced by permission.



3 Pintoricchio, Thomas Palaiologos, detail from the Stories of the life of Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Cathedral of Siena, Piccolomini Library, fresco). Photograph Opera della Metropolitana – Siena - aut. n°433/06. Reproduced by permission.



Fig. 4 Piero dell Francesca,  
Flagellation (Urbino, Palazzo  
Ducale), detail: Bessarion.  
Photograph by Permission of  
the Ministero per i Beni e le  
Attività Culturali.

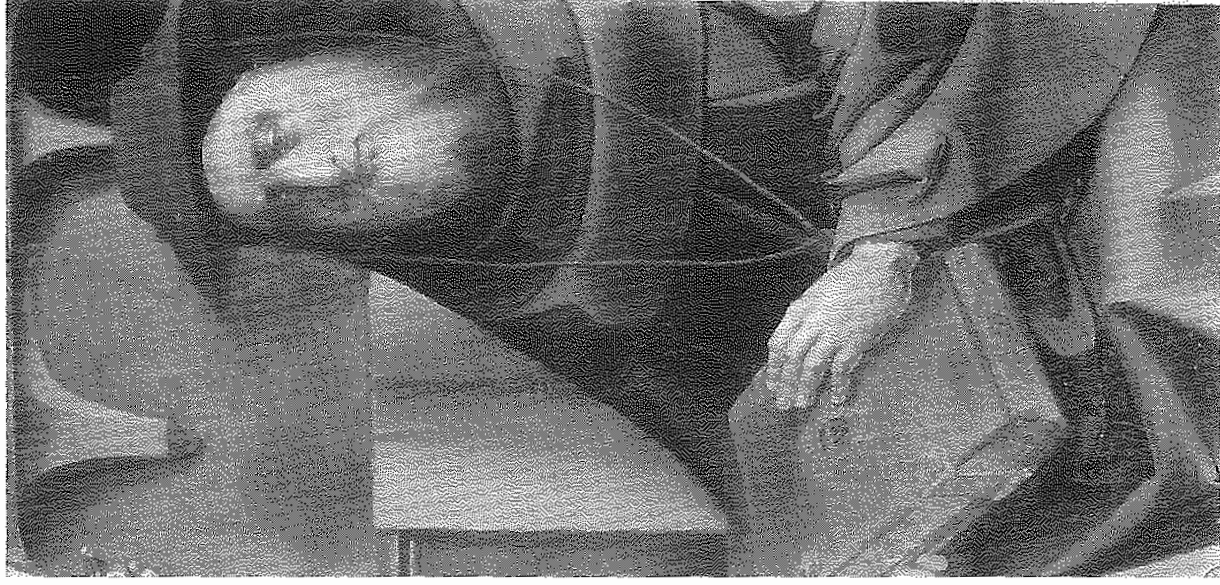


Fig. 5 Pedro Berruete, in  
the drawing of Joos van Gent  
(Paris, Louvre): portrait of  
Cardinal Bessarion.  
Photo by the author.

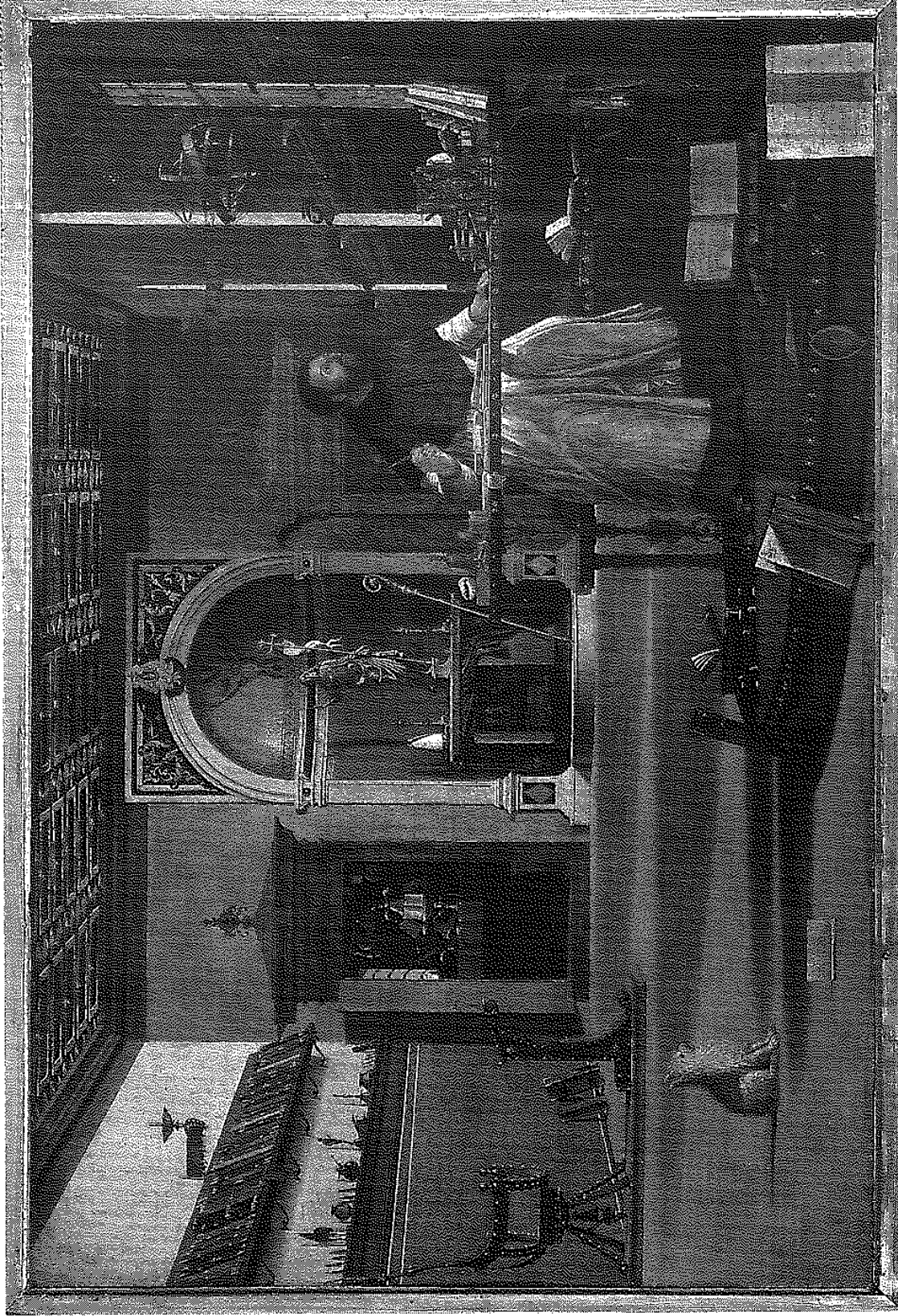


Fig. 6 Carpaccio, St Augustine in his study (Bessarion), Venice, Scuola di SS. Giorgio e Trifone. Reproduced by permission of the Cura Patriarcale di Venezia.