

## An Assessment of George Trapezountios's Proposal for Politico-Religious Greek-Turkish Unity in the Aftermath of 1453

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The fall of Constantinople to the Turks was a devastating blow in the history of the Greeks. Many Greek scholars who fled to the West just before or immediately after the fall pleaded with western rulers and the pope for a crusade to be organised against their conquerors. One Greek scholar who had fled to the West before the fall, George Trapezountios (1395/1396 to c. 1473), had a different approach to the new *status quo* in the region. Born in Crete but with roots in Trebizond,<sup>1</sup> a Greek who preferred to write in Latin,<sup>2</sup> a translator of Plato who launched a vitriolic attack on his philosophical ideas,<sup>3</sup> a fervent supporter of Aristotle, Trapezountios wrote the most important Rhetoric (*Rhetoricorum libri V*) of the fifteenth century, and his Logic (*Isagoge dialectica*) remained a bestseller into the mid-sixteenth century. He was a participant in the Ferrara-Florence Council in 1438-1439, a convert to Roman Catholicism, a humanist, a successful teacher in Italy (one of his students was Pietro Barbo, the future Pope Paul II (r. 1464-71)), Pope Eugenius IV's (r. 1431-1447) secretary, a translator of Greek works into Latin at Pope Nicholas V's (r. 1447-1455) request and a commentator on many philosophical and theological works. In 1458, he published *Comparatio Aristotelis et Platoni*, a forceful attack on Plato and the Byzantine philosopher George Plethon Gemistos (c. 1360-1452).<sup>4</sup> Eventually, the bitterness of his diatribes, against which the Greek expatriate scholar Cardinal Bessarion (c. 1399-1472) powerfully counter-argued, and his often hurried and inaccurate translations into Latin of

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1 John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond. A Biography and a Study of his Rhetoric and Logic*, Leiden 1976, pp. 4-5.

2 Lorenzo Valla claimed that Trapezountios was considered the most learned rhetorician of Italy in the Latin language: Deno John Geanakoplos, *Constantinople and the West. Essays on the Late Byzantine (Palaeologan) and Italian Renaissances and the Byzantine and Roman Churches*, Madison 1989, p. 18.

3 Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, p. ix.

4 Péter Ekler, 'George of Trebizond's Grammar on the Basis of Priscian's *Institutiones*. Comparative Analysis', *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 52 (2012), p. 46.

Plato, Aristotle and other classical Greek writers, almost ruined his reputation as a scholar. A very disagreeable man and argumentative - contemporaries called him 'resentful' and 'lastful'<sup>5</sup> - Trapezountios died in Italy in 1472 or 1473.<sup>6</sup>

In the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, Trapezountios's enslaved compatriots were faced with three options. They could: accept the new status quo; attempt to organise military resistance against the new ruler; or seek military aid from abroad in the form of a crusade against their new ruler. Trapezountios seems to have considered the first option as the most prudent.<sup>7</sup> To this end, he composed six works that he dedicated to Mehmed the Conqueror (r. 1444-1446, 1451-1481), in which he proposed political and religious concord between the Greeks and the Ottomans. In three introductions to scientific works (two to Ptolemy's *Almagest* and one to *Comparatio philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*) and three treatises (*On the Truth of the Faith of Christians, Eternal Glory* and *On the Divinity of Manuel Shortly to be King of the Whole World*), addressed to Mehmed, written in Greek (four of them) and Latin (the other two) between 1453 and 1467, he praised Mehmed, advocated politico-religious unity between the Turks and the Greeks, as well as Islam and Christianity in general, saw Ottoman rule as being continuous with the Byzantine Empire, forecast the conversion of the Ottoman sultan to Christianity and his subsequent global rule, and urged Mehmed to conquer Europe. For this last proposal, which was considered treacherous in the West, he was imprisoned in Rome for a few months. The aim of this article is not to analyse the philosophico-theological arguments in Trapezountios's works concerning Christianity and Islam, but to explore the political aspect of his proposals and views, assess his motives and aims, survey the contemporary facts and rumours surrounding Mehmed's attitude to Christianity and specifically to the Greeks, and review Christian-Muslim relations following the fall of Constantinople in order to assess the feasibility of his proposals.

The first of the works that he dedicated to Mehmed, written in Greek<sup>8</sup> in July

5 Angelo Mercati, 'Le due lettere di Giorgio da Trebisonda a Maometto II', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 9 (1943), p. 71.

6 Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, pp. 233-234.

7 For an overview of the different approaches to the new *status quo* in the area by contemporary Greeks before and after 1453 see Georgios Zoras, *Αί πρό και μετά την Άλωσιν διαμορφωθείσαι Θεολογικαί και Πολιτικά κατευθύνσεις*, Σπουδαστήριο Βυζαντινής και Νεοελληνικής Φιλολογίας του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών, Athens 1953.

8 Trapezountios also mentions a Latin translation of the treatise which, however, does not seem

1453,<sup>9</sup> is a treatise entitled *Περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας τῆς τῶν Χριστιανῶν Πίστεως· πρὸς τὸν ἀμυρᾶν, κατὰ τὸν χρόνον ἐν ᾧ ἔαλω παρ' αὐτοῦ ἡ Κωνσταντῖνον* (*On the Truth of the Faith of the Christians to the Emir when he Stormed Constantinople*).<sup>10</sup> In this work he tried to persuade Mehmed that there were no major religious or political differences between the Greeks and the Turks and that he should take the initiative to unite the two religions.<sup>11</sup> His main aim was to prove that the differences between the two were due to a language barrier<sup>12</sup> or to arrogance and prejudice against the other religion's beliefs<sup>13</sup> or an inability to comprehend the Holy Scriptures fully.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the Jews, whom he calls 'enemies of truth', were also to be blamed because they slandered the Christians when in dialogue with the Muslims.<sup>15</sup> The differences between the two religions were summarised by Trapezountios in this way: the Muslims' accusation that Christians believe in more than one god; Christians' belief that Christ is simultaneously the Son of God and God; and the Christian belief in the resurrection of Christ. In the treatise, Trapezountios examines the differences, which, he claimed, are not based on the religions' respective holy scriptures, but on human errors and inability to comprehend them fully, and refutes the accusations.<sup>16</sup> If Mehmed were to follow his proposal, Trapezountios predicted that he would become the greatest emperor of all time, greater than Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Constantine the Great. God would help him defeat all his enemies. In the end, not only does he urge Mehmed to consider the treatise but closes his lengthy work with a veiled threat that if Mehmed does not work towards unity between Christians and Muslims, he would

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to have survived: Georgios Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος καὶ αἱ πρὸς Ἑλληνοτουρκικὴν συνενόησιν προσπάθειαι αὐτοῦ* (*Ἡ «Περὶ τῆς τῶν Χριστιανῶν πίστεως ἀνέκδοτος πραγματεία»*), Athens 1954, p. 91.

9 Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, p. 165.

10 Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, pp. 93-165 (original text); Adel-Théodore Khoury, *Georges de Trébizonde. De la vérité de la foi des chrétiens, Corpus Islamo-Christianum*, Series Graeca 1, Altenberge 1987, pp. 68-225 (French translation).

11 In 1458, in his treatise entitled *Comparatio philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*, Trapezountios claimed that Islam was a Platonic sect: Han Lamers, *Greece Reinvented. Transformations of Byzantine Hellenism in Renaissance Italy*, Leiden, 2016, pp. 153-158.

12 Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, pp. 98, 107, 112, 113, 132, 134. Also *ibid.*, p. 113.

13 Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, pp. 97-98, 162.

14 Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, pp. 101-102, 114-115.

15 Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, p. 100. Trapezountios's anti-Semitism can be found throughout the text: see, e.g., pp. 107, 109, 136, 144, 145, 161.

16 Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, pp. 99-163.

rather anticipate ‘things which I [Trapezountios] do not wish to happen’.<sup>17</sup> This implied that Mehmed would lose the empire and another would bring to fruition Trapezountios’s proposal for religious and political union between the Greeks and Turks.

The next three works addressed to Mehmed were composed about thirteen years later. In 1465, Agostino de Rubeis, the Milanese ambassador to the court of Pope Paul II, reported that Trapezountios was sent by Pope Paul ‘into that part of Greece and Turkey and beyond in order to discover the condition of the people and of the country of the Turks’.<sup>18</sup> While in Constantinople, Trapezountios followed the diplomat, theologian and philosopher George Amiroutzes’s (c. 1400-c. 1470) advice to write for Mehmed in Greek a preface to the ‘Eisagoge’ (Introduction) he had written in Latin for Ptolemy’s *Almagest* (*Mathematike Syntaxis*)<sup>19</sup> and he also dedicated to Mehmed the preface to his Latin translation of the *Almagest*.<sup>20</sup> When he returned to Rome, he dedicated to Mehmed the preface to his *Comparatio philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*, too.<sup>21</sup>

Trapezountios intended to present the preface to the ‘Eisagoge’ to the *Almagest* to Mehmed in person when he was in Constantinople, but this he did not do.<sup>22</sup> In fact, he admitted more than once that he never had the opportunity to present his writings to Mehmed.<sup>23</sup> In the preface to the ‘Eisagoge’, Trapezountios calls

17 Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, p. 164.

18 Mercati, ‘Le due lettere’, p. 68; Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, pp. 184-185.

19 Mercati, ‘Le due lettere’, pp. 98-99. The text of the preface for the ‘Eisagoge’ is cited in John Monfasani (ed.), *Collectanea Trapezountiana. Texts, Documents, and Bibliographies of George of Trebizond*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies in Conjunction with the Renaissance Society of America, New York 1984, pp. 283-284 (Greek text), 281-282 (English translation). Also *ibid.*, pp. 679-687 (the text of the Latin Introduction to the *Almagest*, composed in Rome in 1452) and pp. 687-688 (description of the Greek version of the Introduction, written in Constantinople in 1465-66).

20 Mercati, ‘Le due lettere’, pp. 85, 91-92. The text of the preface for the translation of Ptolemy’s *Almagest* is cited *ibid.*, pp. 85-92. Also see Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, p. 285. It was Bessarion who commissioned Trapezountios to make a new translation of *Almagest* in Latin in the academy which he had formed in Rome in order to translate Greek texts into Latin: Geanakoplos, *Constantinople and the West*, p. 57.

21 Mercati, ‘Le due lettere’, pp. 92-99 (where the full text of the preface to *Comparatio philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*, written in Latin, is cited); Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 285-286.

22 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, p. 281; Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, pp. 187-188.

23 Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 187.

Mehmed 'the Autocrat imminent of the whole inhabited world' and 'best of kings and autocrat of autocrats', and he praises him for studying Aristotle, coming close to calling him a philosopher-king.<sup>24</sup> In his preface to the Latin translation of the *Almagest* he goes further and offers Mehmed information on the political situation in Western Europe and the conflicts there, urges him to advance on Italy and expresses his wish that Mehmed becomes lord of the world.<sup>25</sup>

It might seem odd that Trapezountios chose a work on astrology as a vehicle to approach Mehmed, but it was a clever move: given the well-known interest the Ottoman ruler had in astrology<sup>26</sup> - Trapezountios himself praises Mehmed's knowledge of astronomy - he seems to have thought that Mehmed would be interested to know what Ptolemaios's view of the planets and the future was.<sup>27</sup>

These two prefaces, written between February and June-September 1466,<sup>28</sup> resulted in his imprisonment shortly after he returned to Italy, when they fell into the hands of Cardinal Bessarion who had also read *On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat and his World-Dominion*,<sup>29</sup> another treatise addressed to Mehmed that Trapezountios composed when sailing back to Italy in April 1466.<sup>30</sup> It should be

24 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 283, 281. Calling Mehmed 'king of kings and autocrat of autocrats' appears in other works of his too: e.g., *ibid.*, pp. 528, 493.

25 Mercati, 'Le due lettere', pp. 86-87, 90-91. Also see Agostino de Rubéis' report, *ibid.*, p. 68.

26 Michael Shank, 'The *Almagest*, Politics and Apocalypticism in the Conflict between George Trebizond and Cardinal Bessarion', *Almagest: International Journal for the History of Scientific Ideas*, 8/2 (2017), pp. 60, 62.

27 Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, p. 188. Bessarion's protégé, Cardinal Nicolò Perotti, in his *Refutatio deliramentorum Georgii Trapezuntii cretensis*, accuses Trapezountios of having deceived Pope Nicholas V and Mehmed by dedicating to them his plagiarisms of Theon of Alexandria: Shank, 'The *Almagest*', p. 65; Michael Shank, 'Regiomontanus versus George of Trebizond on Planetary Order, Distances, and Orbs (*Almagest* 9.1)', in: David Juste, Benno van Dalen, Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Charles Burnett (eds.), *Ptolemy's Science of the Stars in the Middle Ages*, Turnhout 2020, p. 306, note 5.

28 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, p. 285; Cf. Mercati, 'Le due lettere', p. 73, n. 4, and p. 92. According to Monfasani, the date 1465 that appears on the manuscript of the preface to Mehmed for the translation of Ptolemy's *Almagest* 'is impossible'; he dates it to 25 February 1466: Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, p. 285.

29 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, p. 281; Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, pp. 189-193. See the letters Trapezountios exchanged with his jailer, Bishop Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo, in his effort to find out precisely why he was imprisoned in Castel Sant' Angelo in Rome, in Monfasani *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 325-329.

30 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, p. 492.

noted that in the preface to the ‘Eisagoge’ we read that Trapezountios had sent yet another work in praise of Mehmed, which seems not to have survived.<sup>31</sup>

In the third preface to a scientific work that he dedicated to Mehmed, after his return to Rome, the *Comparatio philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*, Trapezountios addressed the Ottoman sultan as ‘emperor of the Romans’;<sup>32</sup> repeated his views on the desirability of politico-religious union between the Greeks and the Turks under Mehmed’s rule,<sup>33</sup> and reminded Mehmed that Constantine the Great ruled over an empire that had one faith and one Church.<sup>34</sup> The reason why Trapezountios chose to dedicate the preface to his *Comparatio philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis* to Mehmed must have been the rumoured interest that Mehmed had in Greek philosophy: he was a ‘superlative Aristotelian’ who was ‘superior even to the professional philosophers’, in Trapezountios’s words.<sup>35</sup> The Greek scholar wrote in one of his treatises that he had heard that ‘every day you [Mehmed] philosophise and Aristotelianise as much as possible’.<sup>36</sup> Also, the fact that contemporary sources document Mehmed’s interest in history,<sup>37</sup> something

31 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 283, 282. According to Monfasani, this Latin work was sent from Rome: Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, p. 187. However, in the text (Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 283, 282), it is not absolutely clear whether the word ‘city’ refers to Rome or Constantinople. This lost piece of work could be identified with the work in Latin, treating the differences between Christianity and Islam, which Trapezountios mentions at the end of the preface to the *Comparatio philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis* that he had sent to Mehmed: Mercati, ‘Le due lettere’, p. 99.

32 Mercati, ‘Le due lettere’, p. 92. Also *ibid.*, p. 96: ‘No one doubts the fact that you are by right the emperor of the Romans’. Mehmed himself attached importance to being addressed by the title ‘Kayser-I Rum’ (Cesar of the Romans) by Christian European rulers: Johannes Koder, ‘Romaioi and Teukroi, Hellenes and Barbaroi, Europe and Asia. Mehmed the Conqueror – Kayser-i Rum and Sultān al-barrayn wa-l-bahrayn’, *The Athens Dialogues, Stories and Histories*, Athens, 2010, e-journal, p. 18.

33 Mercati, ‘Le due lettere’, p. 93: ‘unam ecclesiam congregare et unum gentium et tibi et tuis imperium constituere’.

34 Mercati, ‘Le due lettere’, p. 96.

35 Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, p. 187.

36 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 559, 525.

37 See, e.g., Diether R. Reinsch (ed.), *Critobuli Imbriotae Historiae*, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 22, Berlin 1983, p. 128; Eugenius Darkó (ed.), *Laonici Chalcocondylae historiarum demonstrationes*, 2 vols., Budapest, 1922-1923, 2:211; Anthony Kaldellis (transl.), *The Histories. Laonikos Chalkokondyles*, 2 vols., Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, Cambridge MA-London, 2014, 2:290 (Greek text), 291 (English translation); Agostino Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, 2 vols., Verona 1976, 2:130-132; Edward Bodnar, *Cyriacus of Ancona and Athens*, Collection Latomus 43, Brussels 1960, p. 66.

that undoubtedly Trapezountios had heard of, at least from his friend Amiroutzes, must have inspired him to compare the Ottoman sultan with historical figures. We know that Mehmed possessed a copy of the *Iliad*<sup>38</sup> and was a great admirer, among others, of Alexander the Great, whom he was searching to surpass.<sup>39</sup> It is not universally agreed whether Mehmed could read Greek fluently,<sup>40</sup> but we do know that he supported a scriptorium in Constantinople that produced Greek manuscripts for his libraries into the 1470s.<sup>41</sup> The Greek historian Michael Kritoboulos (c. 1410-c. 1470) even calls him 'φιλλέλην' (a 'philo-Hellene').<sup>42</sup> Thus Trapezountios must have believed that he was standing on firm ground when he compared Mehmed with figures from the Greek history.

In the second treatise that he wrote for Mehmed in Greek, entitled *On the Eternal Glory of the Autocrat and his World-Dominion*, Trapezountios reworked many of the themes found in *On the Truth of the Faith of the Christians* but with the interesting differences (among some others) that he softened both his polemic against the Jews - probably after learning that Mehmed had Jewish physicians - and his criticism of the Quran.<sup>43</sup> Again, he compared Mehmed with historical figures whom we know that Mehmed admired, namely Cyrus, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Constantine the Great, and concluded that God had granted him a greater opportunity of sole world dominion that He had done to them; that he hoped and prayed that his glory would outshine Constantine the Great's; and that his aim in writing the treatise was to inform Mehmed that God would grant him world dominion.<sup>44</sup> He attributed to Mehmed 'goodness, extraordinary virtue and greatness of soul',<sup>45</sup> and he pointed out: 'In your victory, God transferred the

- 38 Julian Raby, 'Mehmed the Conqueror's Greek Scriptorium', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 37 (1983), p. 29.
- 39 See, e.g., Vasile Grecu (ed.), *Georgius Sphrantzes: Memorii, 1400-1477*, in annex: *Pseudo-Phrantzes, Macarie Mellisenos, Cronica: 1258-1481*, Bucharest 1966, p. 232; Pertusi, *La caduta*, 2:109, 131-132; Marios Philippides, 'The Fall of Constantinople 1453: Classical Comparisons and the Circle of Cardinal Isidore', *Viator* 38 (2007), p. 359.
- 40 Christos Patrinelis, 'Mehmed II the Conqueror and his Presumed Knowledge of Greek and Latin', *Viator* 2 (1972), pp. 349-354.
- 41 Raby, 'Mehmed', p. 28.
- 42 Reinsch, *Critobuli*, p. 128.
- 43 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, p. 492. Original text *ibid.*, pp. 528-560 and English translation pp. 493-525.
- 44 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 528, 493.
- 45 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 529, 494.

kingdom to you in order to gather through you all the races into one faith and one Church, and to exalt you as the autocrat of the whole world and king not only of things perishable, but also of the very heavens. This, as best as I can deduce from past events and prophecies, is my understanding of the present situation in these matters'. He continued, referring to western prophecies, which were supported by Islamic ones, that whoever became ruler of Constantinople would also rule Rome, adding, however, that, after the conquest of Rome, God would bring an end to Islam.<sup>46</sup> The message was clear: if Mehmed wanted to gain world domination, he should convert to Christianity. Trapezountios then went on to examine the differences between the two religions<sup>47</sup> and concluded: 'it is obvious from so many clear indications that ... He [God] has granted you [Mehmed] prudence and the wisdom of Aristotle' and that 'when the wisdom of Aristotle is in harmony with the Scriptures, it demonstrates the truth that it was God who graced you with the city [Constantinople] ... and that in gracing you with it, He aroused you (in imitation of its founder Constantine) to the unification of the whole world and of the Church and of the faith'. He continued: 'in all other things Your Highness far surpasses Constantine: in birth, in wisdom, in strength of body, in manliness of soul'.<sup>48</sup> The treatise ends with a reminder that Constantine was also a convert who, 'if he had not become a Christian, would not have gained renown', and urges Mehmed to 'bring forth on earth one faith out of many, establish one Church, make one universal monarchy, and unite all things in this trinity'.<sup>49</sup> In November 1466, Agostino de Rubeis commented that Trapezountios 'still praises the Turk [Mehmed] greatly and insists in his proposition that he should become the universal ruler ["signore"] of the world'.<sup>50</sup>

In 1467, after being confined for four months in prison accused of treasonous involvement with Mehmed, Trapezountios composed his final work addressed to the Ottoman ruler,<sup>51</sup> namely, *On the Divinity of Manuel Shortly to be King of the Whole*

46 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 530, 495; also pp. 560, 525.

47 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 531-559, 496-524.

48 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 559, 524.

49 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 559-560, 525.

50 Mercati, 'Le due lettere', pp. 65-69 (quote on p. 69).

51 In the text, Trapezountios himself dates this work to 1467 (Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 571, 566) and later to 1469 (*ibid.*, pp. 573, 568; also see p. 569, note 34). Monfasani argues that this treatise was written in 1467: *ibid.*, p. 564; Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, pp. 223-224.

*World*, again written in Greek.<sup>52</sup> Here, Trapezountios calls Mehmed 'general of all generals and the king of kings and the most just of all autocrats who ever lived, now the ruler of the Turks, but within a short time the ruler of the whole world, who will receive the name Manuel'. He describes himself as 'a devotee of this [Mehmed] enemy of the clerics', which is why he and his family had suffered; he also explains why he calls Mehmed Manuel: because, according to the Holy Scriptures, God renames those whom he has chosen, keeping only the initial letter of their name. Mehmed should also change his name once he has received divine grace and be called Manuel.<sup>53</sup> If he converts to Christianity, Mehmed 'will be revealed as even greater than Alexander [the Great]'.<sup>54</sup> And Trapezoutios reveals the reason why he had written all the previous works addressed to Mehmed: his belief in Pseudo-Methodios's prediction that the world was entering its final 200 years and he, Trapezountios, was attempting to avert this. Indeed, the so-called Pseudo-Methodios had forecast that the son of Ismael, having destroyed the Greek empire, would go on to conquer Western Europe, establishing a reign of terror until the last true Christian emperor arose to scatter the Ishmaelites and herald a period of peace, which would precede the coming of Gog, Magog and the Anti-Christ. By persuading Mehmed to become a universal Christian emperor, Trapezountios was hoping to postpone the fulfilment of this dire prediction.<sup>55</sup> Trapezountios saw Mehmed as a providential figure with a mission to rule the entire world by means of a united politico-religious system based on a common faith: Christianity.

Trapezountios was not the first Greek to write on dialogue between Christianity and Islam in the years surrounding the fall of Constantinople. Previously, Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos (r. 1347-1354) had written an apologetic against the Muslims;<sup>56</sup> the theologian Gregory Palamas (c. 1296-1359) had recorded two of his three theological conversations with Muslims during his brief captivity by the Turks in Asia Minor (1354-55);<sup>57</sup> Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (r. 1391-1425)

52 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 570-573 (original text), 564-568 (English translation).

53 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 570, 564.

54 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 572, 567.

55 Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezountiana*, pp. 572-573, 567-568; Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, pp. 133-135.

56 John Kantakouzenos, 'Joannis Cantacuzeni, Pro Christiana Religione, Contra Sectam Mahometicam Apologiae IV', in: Jacques Paul Migne et al. (eds.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, 161 vols., Paris, 1857-1866, 154:371-692.

57 Christou Panagiotēs (ed., transl. and commentary), *Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ ἅπαντα τὰ ἔργα*, Ἑλληνες

had documented his *Dialogue with a Certain Persian, who Held the Office of Muterizes, in Ankara of Galatia*, a debate that took place in the winter of 1390-91 or late 1391 between Manuel and an Ottoman Islamic scholar;<sup>58</sup> the learned monk Joseph Bryennios (c. 1350-c. 1430/31) had also recorded his dialogue with a Muslim on Christianity;<sup>59</sup> and Gennadios Scholarios (r. 1454-1456, 1463, 1464-1465), the theologian and first Ecumenical Patriarch after the fall of Constantinople, had written dialogues based on discussions with Mehmed himself<sup>60</sup> and with Islamic scholars.<sup>61</sup> Nor was he the first Christian scholar to suggest politico-religious union between the Christians and Ottomans in the mid-fifteenth century. Before him, scholars in both the West and the East had expressed similar views, albeit motivated by and aspiring to different things.

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Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας 120, Thessalonica, 1994, pp. 160-209. The third conversation was recorded by an eyewitness physician: *ibid.*, pp. 210-225.

- 58 Adel-Théodore Khoury (ed., transl. and commentary), *Manuel II Paléologue. Entretiens avec un Musulman. 7<sup>e</sup> controverse*, Paris 1966; Erich Trapp, *Manuel II. Palaiologos, Dialoge mit einem 'Perser'*, Vienna, 1966; John Demetracopoulos, 'Pope Benedict XVI's Use of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos' *Dialogue with a Muslim Muterizes: The Scholarly Background*, *Archiv für mittelalterliche Philosophie und Kultur* 14 (2008), pp. 264-304. According to Balivet, the Islamic scholar was Haci Bayram Velî, a doctor of Islamic law, born in the region of Ankara in 1339/40 or 1352, died in Ankara in 1429: Michel Balivet, 'Le sufi et le basileus: Haci Bayram Veli et Manuel II Paléologue', *Medievo Greco* 4 (2004), pp. 19-30, esp. pp. 26-30.
- 59 Asterios Argyriou, 'Ἰωσήφ τοῦ Βρυεννίου μετὰ τινὸς Ἰσμηλιτοῦ Διάλεξις', *Ἐπετηρίς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 35 (1966-67), pp. 141-195 (text on pp. 158-195).
- 60 Louis Petit, X. A. Sideridès and Martin Jugie (eds.), *Oeuvres complètes de Gennade Scholarios*, 8 vols., Paris, 1928-1936, 3:434-458; Aristeides Papadakis, 'Gennadius II and Mehmed the Conqueror', *Byzantion* 42 (1972), pp. 88-106. Between 1467 and 1470 George Amiroutzes recorded a series of discussions he had had with Mehmed (probably between 1463 and 1465, during the military expeditions in which he had accompanied him) on the Christian Faith: Astérios Argyriou and George Lagarrigue, 'Georges Amiroutzès et son "dialogue sur la foi au Christ tenu avec le sultan des Turcs"', *Byzantinische Forschungen* 11 (1987), pp. 29-221; Astérios Argyriou, 'Mehmed II le conquérant de Constantinople et la foi chrétienne', *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 90/4 (2016), pp. 583-602; John Monfasani, 'The 'lost' final part of George Amiroutzes' *Dialogus de Fide in Christum* and Zanolis Acciaiuoli', in *Greek Scholars between East and West in the Fifteenth Century*, Variorum, Farnham, 2016, V, pp. 1-30 and 'addenda et corrigenda', p. 2; Angeliki Ziaka, 'Rearticulating a Christian-Muslim Understanding: Gennadios Scholarios and George Amiroutzes on Islam', in: Charlotte Methuen, Andrew Spicer and Jon Wolffe (eds.), *Christianity and Religious Plurality*, Ecclesiastical History Society, Studies in Church History 51, Woodbridge 2015, pp. 150-165.
- 61 Petit, Sideridès and Jugie, *Oeuvres complètes*, 3: 458-475. For a critical evaluation of Gennadios' dialogues with Mehmed and the Islamic scholars see Angeliki Ziaka, 'Γιὰ μιὰ θεολογία τῶν Ὁρησκείων. Γεννάδιος Σχολάριος καὶ ὁ συμφιλίωτικὸς τοῦ λόγου μετὰ τὸ Ἰσλάμ', *Theologia* 2 (2013), pp. 193-208.

In 1454, the Italian humanist, teacher and translator Franciscus Filelfo (1398-1481) had expressed his and the duke of Milan's, Francesco I's (r. 1450-1466), friendly disposition towards the Ottoman ruler and had also expressed a desire to see a politico-religious approach between the West and Mehmed.<sup>62</sup> Gennadios Scholarios attempted to attract Mehmed to Christianity and, according to Kritoboulos, Mehmed listened with much pleasure to Gennadios's account of Christianity<sup>63</sup> while, according to rumours, 'after he [Mehmed] was informed [by Gennadios] about the true faith of the Christians, he started doubting his own [faith]'.<sup>64</sup> Probably in 1461, Pope Pius II wrote to Mehmed inviting him to convert to Christianity and describing the benefits that would come from his conversion.<sup>65</sup> In the West, they hoped that by converting Mehmed they would have no reason to worry if the Ottomans advanced further into Christian-held lands; and in the East, they hoped that they would retain the right to religious freedom and to the preservation of their national identity. Whilst Pius's motives might have been fear of the mighty Ottoman army and Mehmed's military prowess, which posed a threat to Western Europe, when Gennadios attempted to attract Mehmed to Christianity, he must have hoped to gain more privileges for the Church and the conquered Greeks.

Trapezountios's motives seem to have been more complex: he must have been frustrated by the westerners' inactivity regarding a much discussed crusade against the Ottomans before or after the conquest of Constantinople; as by the mid-1460s

62 Émile Legrand (ed. and transl.), *Cent-dix lettres grecques de François Filelfe*, Paris 1892, pp. 63-64 (Greek text of Filelfo's 1454 letter to Mehmed) and 64-66 (French translation of the letter), 211-214 (Filelfo's poem dedicated to Mehmed); Vladimir Mirmiroglu, *Fatih Sultan Mehmed ve Francesco Filelfo*, Istanbul 1956, pp. 11-12 (Greek text), 13-15 (Turkish translation). Filelfo had an additional reason to flatter Mehmed: his mother-in-law and her daughters were captives of the Ottomans (Legrand, *ibid.*, p. 64; Mirmiroglu, *ibid.*, pp. 12, 14).

63 Reinsch, *Critobuli*, p. 90. According to *Historia Patriarchica Constantinopoleos*, Mehmed held Gennadios in high esteem because the latter was 'most wise and pious': Martinus Crusius, *Turcograeciae Libri Octo*, Basel, 1584, p. 108. In late 1455 or early 1456, Gennadios presented to Mehmed a treatise on the Christian faith, entitled 'Ὁμολογία Πίστεως (Confession of Faith), which he had composed at the Ottoman sultan's behest: Tibor Halasi-Kun, 'Gennadios' confession of faith', *Archivum Ottomanicum* 12 (1987-1992), pp. 5-104.

64 Immanuel Bekker (ed.), *Historia Politica et Patriarchica Constantinopoleos. Epiroica*, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae 28, Bonn 1849, p. 31; Nikolaos Tomadakes, "Ἡ ἐν τῷ Πατριακῷ Κώδικι 287 Μικρὰ Χρονογραφία", *Ἐπετηρίς Ἐταιρείας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 25 (1955), p. 37.

65 Albert Baca (ed. and transl.), *Epistola ad Mahometem II*, New York, 1989. Bisaha argues that the letter was composed by Pius but was never sent or translated in Greek or Turkish: Nancy Bisaha, 'Pope Pius II's Letter to Sultan Mehmed II: a Reexamination', *Crusades* 1 (2002), p. 196.

he had made enemies in Rome, he might have wished to damage the Roman Church;<sup>66</sup> since Pius's letter to Mehmed did not make reference to the interests of the enslaved Greeks or of the Orthodox Church, he might have wished to remedy that omission;<sup>67</sup> he must have heard rumours about Mehmed's interest in and admiration of the history of the Greeks, their culture and arts, and therefore might have wished to cultivate them further and also cast the Greeks in his empire in a flattering light;<sup>68</sup> or he might have interpreted Mehmed's privileges to the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a genuine indication of sympathy for Christianity,<sup>69</sup> especially after Patriarch Gennadios's claim that God had punished the Greeks through Mehmed for having deviated from the Orthodox faith but, at the same time, He had showed them mercy, again through Mehmed, by allowing the reestablishment of the patriarchate in January 1454, therefore providing for the survival of Orthodoxy through the 'beneficent' Ottoman ruler.<sup>70</sup>

Certainly, Trapezountios went further than the others: he offered Mehmed information about the situation in Western Europe, something the Ottoman ruler's Venetian doctor, Jacomo Langusto, stated that the sultan was eager to acquire even before he took Constantinople,<sup>71</sup> and he also urged the Ottoman ruler to conquer Western Europe, a plan that seems to have been in Mehmed's mind too.<sup>72</sup> Living in Italy, Trapezountios must have been well aware of reports

66 The dedications and treatises that Trapezountios had sent to Mehmed caused fury in Bessarion's circle. In his *Refutatio*, Niccolò Perotti uses vitriolic language when referring to those works and exhorts popes, emperors, men, women, slaves and freemen to chastise Trapezountios, including the suggestion that he be handed over to be killed through torture, dismembered and shredded down to the bones: Shank, 'The *Almagest*', pp. 64-65.

67 Pius focused on the Ottoman threat to Latin Europe: Baca, *Epistola*, pp. 11-21, 115-125 (especially pp. 18-19, 122-123).

68 On Mehmed's patronage of the arts, including Greek monuments, see Gülcü Necipoğlu, 'From Byzantine Constantinople to Ottoman Kostantiniyye: Creation of a Cosmopolitan Capital and Visual Culture under Sultan Mehmed II', in: *From Byzantium to Istanbul: 8000 Years of a Capital*, Istanbul 2010, pp. 262-305.

69 Apart from ecumenical patriarch, Mehmed showed respect and regularized relations also with the chief rabbi of the Jewish communities in the Ottoman empire, Mose Kapsali, and the Armenian Chovakim: Apostolos Vakalopoulos, *The Greek Nation, 1453-1669*, New Jersey 1976, p. 104.

70 Petit, Sideridis and Jugie, *Oeuvres complètes*, 4: 265-266. Trapezountios must have been aware of Gennadios's remarks, probably through Amiroutzes.

71 Bodnar, *Cyriacus of Ancona*, p. 66.

72 About Mehmed's plans of world dominion see Peter Thorau, 'Konstantinopel – al Qustantiniya. Das zweite Rom als Mittelpunkt und Sinnbild des Osmanischen Imperiums in der

and rumours about Mehmed: in his report to the pope on 15 July 1453, the Venetian humanist Lauro Querini (c. 1420-c. 1479) had recorded that, after Mehmed had entered Constantinople, he had pleaded with Allah to allow him to live long enough to conquer the Elder Rome (i.e., Rome) too;<sup>73</sup> in November 1453, the Sienese ambassador to Venice Leonardo Benvolienti had reported to the Signoria that Mehmed himself had claimed that God had given the order to him, the second Mohammed, to extend his law, which he wanted to be brought to all the Christians;<sup>74</sup> and a few months later, in January 1454, it was reported that the Ottoman ruler intended to re-establish the Byzantine 'ecumeny' by conquering the Elder Rome: 'he [Mehmed] directed all thoughts, all plans to this ... as he had taken the daughter [New Rome, i.e., Constantinople] by force, so could he also take the mother [Elder Rome]'.<sup>75</sup> One contemporary, Jacopo de'Languschi, set out the ideological framework of Mehmed's aim: 'he said that only one power, one faith, one monarchy in the world should exist'.<sup>76</sup> In the summer of 1462, Mehmed himself, after visiting the ruins of Ilion and ancient Troy,<sup>77</sup> where he praised the heroes of Antiquity, and imitating Alexander the Great who had expressed his envy of Achilles who 'had found a great herald in Homer', let his satisfaction be known at having avenged the destruction of these cities by the Greeks.<sup>78</sup> In his view, his role in history did not end with the capture of Constantinople and the lands of the former Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine historian Michael Kritoboulos claims that the sultan 'overran the whole world in his calculations and resolved to rule it in emulation of the Alexanders and Pompeys and Caesars and kings and

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Herrscherideologie Mehmeds des Eroberers', in: Klaus Martin Girardet (ed.), *Kaiser Konstantin der Große. Historische Leistung und Rezeption in Europa*, Bonn 2007, pp. 149–161 (especially pp.154–157).

73 Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, pp. 64-65; Kenneth Meyer Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204–1571*, vol. 2: *The Fifteenth Century*, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 127, Philadelphia 1978, p. 137.

74 Pertusi, *La caduta*, 2:109.

75 That was reported in an oration by the Greek humanist and diplomat from Negroponte Nicholas Sagundinus (1402-c. 1464): Pertusi, *La caduta*, 2:132.

76 Setton, *The Papacy*, pp. 257-258, n. 93.

77 Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time*, transl. Ralph Manheim, Princeton, NJ, 1978, pp. 209-210. For a discussion of where the places which the Byzantines believed Ilion and Troy were located see Koder, 'Romaioi and Teukroi', pp. 2-4, n. 7.

78 Reinsch, *Critobuli*, p. 170; Leo Sternbach (ed.), *Gnomologium Vaticanum e codice Vaticano Graeco 743*, Berlin 1963, p. 35, no. 78.

generals of their sort'.<sup>79</sup> Aware of all this, Trapezountios was urging Mehmed to do precisely that.

Certainly, one can hardly call him sincere in his views about the two religions or about his admiration and love for Mehmed. We know that his attitude to the Ottomans was different in the 1420s: from the reply to the letter he sent to Francisco Filelfo, most probably in 1428, it can be deduced that he was worried about the Ottoman expansion and was trying to garner support so that western rulers could be persuaded to act against it.<sup>80</sup> After May 1453, in his writings, it appears that he viewed the new *status quo* not as a fundamental change but as being in historical continuity with the Byzantine Empire. However, one can also sense his concern for the enslaved Greeks and therefore presumably the *causa principalis* for his proposals to Mehmed was his belief that the only way forward for the enslaved Greeks would have been an immediate approach to and cooperation with their conqueror. In order to achieve that, Mehmed had to be flattered and persuaded of the benefits of politico-religious cooperation. In Trapezountios's works, nothing negative is said about the Ottomans or the Muslims, like the accusations against the latter found in one of Manuel Palaiologos's letters, in which Muslims are described as 'barbaric and ignorant' who 'delight in bloodshed and massacre'.<sup>81</sup> His stance vis-a-vis Mehmed might appear to be servile but his aim was for the status of the Greeks to improve following politico-religious unity by gaining access to the administration of the Ottoman Empire, possibly with the ultimate goal of undermining it from within.<sup>82</sup> His was a peaceful plan, unlike the plans of other Greeks who had fled to the West where they were canvassing for a crusade against the Ottomans.

It is impossible to know whether Trapezountios truly believed that his proposals and predictions would influence Mehmed's political plans. What is certain is that he was devastated after the conquest, lamenting the annihilation of the Greeks.<sup>83</sup> In a letter to Pope Paul II, he excused his excessive praise of Mehmed

79 Reinsch, *Critobuli*, pp. 16-17.

80 Legrand, *Cent-dix lettres*, pp. 5-6.

81 George T. Dennis (ed.), *The Letters of Manuel II Palaiologos*, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 8, Washington, DC, 1977, p. 85.

82 We know that Mehmed had Greek advisors. Theodosios Zygomalas reports that Greek *archontes* were holding high posts in the Ottoman administration: Crusius, *Turcograecia*, pp. 14, 92; Bekker, *Historia Politica*, p. 26.

83 George Trapezountios, 'Περὶ τῆς ἐκπορεύσεως τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, καὶ περὶ τῆς Μίας, Ἁγίας,

in the *Eternal Glory* as a means to ingratiate himself with the potential convert.<sup>84</sup> Zoras claims that Trapezountios was a 'pure patriot', who aimed to improve the conditions of the enslaved Greeks, but 'he might have also been motivated by personal interest and personal ambition'.<sup>85</sup> Monfasari believes that his motives were (mainly) religious-eschatological.<sup>86</sup> On a similar note, Lamers argues that Trapezountios believed that if the Ottoman Sultan was converted to Christianity and ruled 'in the name of God instead of the Antichrist', he and Mehmed 'would achieve a *renovatio evangelica*'.<sup>87</sup> In either case, the ones who would benefit from Mehmed's proposed conversion to Christianity were the Greeks. In other words, Trapezountios was working for the benefit of his compatriots.

Was he naïve? Desperate? Overoptimistic? Utopian? Eccentric? Diplomatic? An irenic thinker? Weak? A traitor to his religion? Or was his approach to the newly established political situation in the lands of the former Byzantine Empire after 1453 flexible, that is to say, he was a religious patriot? If Pius II was a naïve man who had utopian ideas, so was Trapezountios. His intentions for the Greeks were good. But his eschatological ideas and proposal on how to avert the reign of the Ismaelites were those of a desperate Greek, and thus were unrealistic. His persistence after 1453 on politico-religious union between the Greeks and Turks is certainly perplexing but modern historians should try 'humanas actiones non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere' (not to laugh at, not to lament, not to curse human actions, but to understand them).<sup>88</sup>

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Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας', in: Jacques Paul Migne et al. (eds.), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*, 161 vols., Paris 1857-1866, 161:864.

<sup>84</sup> Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, pp. 357-358.

<sup>85</sup> Zoras, *Γεώργιος ὁ Τραπεζούντιος*, p. 15. Irmscher claims that Trapezountios used to use his Greek heritage in order to give greater weight to his ecclesiastical-political actions: Johannes Irmscher, 'Georgios von Trapezunt als griechischer Patriot', in: *Actes du XII<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d'Études Byzantines*, vol. II, Belgrade 1964, p. 362. On Trapezountios' sense of patriotism see Lamers, *Greece Reinvented*, pp. 133-164.

<sup>86</sup> Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, pp. 133-135.

<sup>87</sup> Lamers, *Greece Reinvented*, pp. 160-161.

<sup>88</sup> Carl Gebhardt (ed.), *Spinoza opera*, 4 vols., Heidelberg, 1972, 3:274 (Baruch Spinoza in *Tractatus Politicus*, ch. 1, §4).

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