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### Church Union and Balance of Powers in Late Byzantium: The Testimony of Georgios Sphrantzes

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# BYZANTINA ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ

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ΤΟΜΟΣ 31 VOLUME

DIMITRIOS TH. VACHAVIOLOS

CHURCH UNION AND BALANCE OF POWERS IN LATE BYZANTIUM:  
THE TESTIMONY OF GEORGE SPHRANTZES

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CHURCH UNION AND BALANCE OF POWERS IN LATE BYZANTIUM:  
THE TESTIMONY OF GEORGE SPHRANTZES\*

The Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439) is a momentous event in the ecclesiastical history of Late Byzantium, mainly because it was the last joint attempt to heal Christian division<sup>1</sup>. Apart from its importance as a historical ecclesiastical meeting, it is a major event with significant political, cultural, and social implications. For this reason, this Council not only preoccupied the ecclesiastical and secular writers of its time, with the latter focusing primarily on its importance with relation to the imminent Ottoman threat. Extensive or shorter references and comments on this council are found, among others, in the works of Doukas<sup>2</sup>, Laonicus Chalcocondyles<sup>3</sup> and

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1. For a comprehensive presentation of the literature on the Ferrara-Florence Council, see *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, eds. C.G. CONTICELLO – V. CONTICELLO, v. II, Turnhout 2002, 468-475. M.-H. BLANCHET – S. KOLDITZ, *Le concile de Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439): mise à jour bibliographique*, *Medioevo greco* 13 (2013), 315-321.

2. Ducas, *Istoria Turco-Byzantină (1341-1462)*, ed. V. GRECU [Scriptores Byzantini I], București 1958, XXXI, 9, 269-271; XXXVI, 4-6: 317-319 [hereafter: Ducas, *Istoria Turco-Byzantină*].

3. Laonicus Chalkokondyles, *Historiarum Demonstrationes*, ed. EUG. DARKO, v. I, Budapest 1922, I, 5-6, VI, 67-69. Cf. also *Laonikos Chalkokondyles, The Histories*, v. 1-2, transl. by A. KALDELLIS [Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library], Harvard University Press 2014. For this issue, see also N.G. NIKOLOUDIS, *Laonikos Chalkokondyles on the Council of Florence*, *Εκκλησιαστικός Φάρος* 74/2 (1992) n.s. 3, 132-134.

George Sphrantzes<sup>4</sup>. Their reports do not contain extensive descriptions of events during or beyond the scope of the works of the Council. Their significance lie mainly on the fact that they are valuable testimonies, which enable us to understand how the Council was received and assessed after the tragic event of the Fall of Constantinople and the dissolution of the Christian Roman Empire by contemporary writers who were not members of ecclesiastical circles. Thus, their reports are based rather on emotional and political criteria than on theological views and convictions, therefore offering a completely different view of the Council and consequently the unifying policy adopted by the emperor John the VIII Palaeologus (1422-1448) than that given by ecclesiastical writers<sup>5</sup>.

This paper focuses on George Sphrantzes' assessment of the Council in his *Chronicle*, which was written just a few decades after the Fall in Corfu, where he had taken refuge. George Sphrantzes, οἰκείος and secretary of the emperor Manuel II (1391-1425) and a close associate of the Despot and later Emperor Constantine XI Palaeologus (1449-1453), wrote a chronicle covering the period from 1413 to 1477<sup>6</sup>. The author records in his work,

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4. Giorgio Sfranze, *Cronaca*, ed. R. MAISANO [CFHB XXIX], Roma 1990, XXIII, 1-4: 80, 1-29 [hereafter: Sfranze, *Cronaca*].

5. A first overall approach to this issue was attempted by Dr. Theodora Papadopoulou in her unpublished paper: "The Council of Ferrara-Florence in the work of four of the main historiographers of the Fall" at the conference "The Union of Florence (1439-2009)" (Cluj-Napoca / Klausenburg / Kolozsvár, 22-24 October 2009), which was organized by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institut für Byzanzforschung (ÖAW), Wien and the Romanian Academy, Center of Transylvanian Studies. I am grateful to Dr. Papadopoulou for allowing me to consult her unpublished paper.

6. For Georgios Sphrantzes, his *Chronicle*, and related literature, see M. PHILIPPIDES – W. K. HANAK, *The Siege and the Fall of Constantinople in 1453: Historiography, Topography, and Military Studies*, Farnham – Burlington, VT 2011, 139-192 [hereafter: PHILIPPIDES – HANAK, *The Siege and the Fall*]; AP. KΑΡΡΟΖΙΛΟΣ, *Βυζαντινοί Ιστορικοί και Χρονογράφοι*, vol. IV: (13ος – 15ος αι.), Athens 2015, 571-592 [hereafter: KΑΡΡΟΖΙΛΟΣ, *Βυζαντινοί Ιστορικοί και Χρονογράφοι*]; V. DÉROCHE, "Sphrantzès, *Chronikon*: Introduction", in: *Constantinople 1453. Des Byzantins aux Ottomans*, eds V. DÉROCHE – N. VATIN, Toulouse 2016, 233-235; L. NEVILLE, *Guide to Byzantine Historical Writing*, Cambridge 2018, 302-307; AL. G. C. SAVVIDES, *Βυζαντινό Ιστοριογραφικό Ενδεκάπτυχο: Ζώσιμος – Προκόπιος – Θεοφάνης – Ιωάννης Σκυλίτζης και Συννεχιστής – Γεώργιος Κεδρηνός – Μιχαήλ Ψελλός – Άννα Κομνηνή – Ιωάννης Κίνναμος – Θεόδωρος Σκουταριώτης – Γεώργιος Σφραντζής. Συμβολή για τους ιστοριογράφους και την εποχή τους*, Athens <sup>3</sup>2019, 213-244.

based on diary notes that he seems to have kept for several years, events mainly related to his life, his service in the court and his advancement in the court hierarchy, which gives this work rather the form of memoir<sup>7</sup>. He does not omit, however, to recall important historical events, such as the Ottoman siege of Constantinople in 1422<sup>8</sup>, the Ottoman occupation of Thessaloniki (1430)<sup>9</sup> or the Battle of Varna (1444)<sup>10</sup>. It is surprising that the tragic event of the Fall is limited to a very short note, even though he witnessed it<sup>11</sup>. After the Fall he served the despot Thomas Palaeologus in the Peloponnese, before ending up in Corfu, where he was a refugee and homeless, becoming a monk at the Monastery of Saints Jason and Sosipater in August 1468<sup>12</sup>. He will remain in this monastery until his death sometime after 1477, when his chronicle ends<sup>13</sup>. During the 16th century, the Metropolitan of Monemvasia, Makarios Melissenos (? – 1585), edited and interpolated the original text, modifying and adding sections. The result was a completely different version of the original work known as *Chronicon Maius*<sup>14</sup>.

Sphrantzes participated in several diplomatic missions and held various government positions during the last three decades before the Fall. We would, therefore, expect that an experienced diplomat, such as he, would reveal enough information about the Council of Union in Italy, as it was the culmination of the established foreign policy of the last Palaeologan emperors. The author does not mention, however, nothing more on the Council beyond the date of departure and return of the Byzantine delegation and the death of Patriarch Joseph II (1416–1439) and of another Orthodox

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7. M. HINTERBERGER, *Autobiographische Traditionen in Byzanz* [WBS 22], Vienna 1999, 116-121, 331-343.

8. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, X, 1-2: 22.1-9.

9. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXI, 2: 68.25-26.

10. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXVI, 7: 94.20-21.

11. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXV, 9: 134.1-6.

12. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XLV, 3: 182.25-26. The choice of Sphrantzes to stay at this monastery resulted in all probability to the fact that his spiritual father, a monk named Dorotheos, fled there together with other Byzantine officials and aristocrats after the Fall (M. ANGOLD, *Memoirs, confessions and apologies: the last chapter of Byzantine autobiography*, *BMGS* 37:2 (2013), 212 [hereafter: ANGOLD, *Memoirs, confessions and apologies*]).

13. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XLVIII, 1-4: 194.1-196.4.

14. On the *Chronicon Maius* and related bibliography, see PHILIPPIDES – HANAK, *The Siege and the Fall*, 146-151; KARPOZILOS, *Βυζαντινοί Ιστορικοί και Χρονογράφοι*, 580-588.

hierarch in Italy<sup>15</sup>. This is understandable since Sphrantzes was then serving the despot, and later emperor Constantine Palaeologus when Byzantine and Latin diplomats were working to organize the Council of Union. For this reason, he played no part in the negotiations that led to its convening. It is also known that he was not included in the large Byzantine delegation that participated in the Council<sup>16</sup>. It is reasonable, therefore, to record nothing more on an issue in which he had no involvement, even indirect, limiting himself to the calendar entry of the departure and return of the Byzantine delegation from Italy<sup>17</sup>.

This, however, did not prevent him from expressing his sharp criticism against the policy adopted by Emperor John VIII towards the Union of the Churches<sup>18</sup>. This criticism unfolds in response to the objections he expressed towards the Council, which he characterizes as unnecessary<sup>19</sup>. Sphrantzes hastens, however, to clarify that he does not disagree with the convening of such a council on account of dogmatic criteria, his objections remaining on the fact that this council provoked Ottoman aggression<sup>20</sup>. The author's stance stems from the fact that he is unable to understand the significance and function of the dogmatic differences of the two Christian traditions.

15. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 1: 80. 1-5; XXIV, 4: 86.15-19.

16. Although Sphrantzes provides no autobiographical information for the time during which the Council convened beyond the birth of his eldest son (Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIV, 2: 86. 6-7), it is clear that he remained in Constantinople near Constantine Palaeologus, who had assumed the duties of regent until John VIII returned from Italy.

17. It should be noted, however, that the author of *Chronicon Maius* makes an extensive account of the arrival of the Byzantine delegation in Venice and then in Ferrara immediately after the recording of the departure of the Byzantine mission to Italy. (Pseudo-Phrantzes: Macarie Melissenos, *Chronica 1258-1481*, ed. V. GRECU, *Georgios Sphrantzes, Memorii 1401-1477* [Scriptores Byzantini V], București 1966, XIII, 13 – XVI, 5: 322.13 – 332.5). It is quite possible that the author used at this point an unknown but definitely related source to the Chronicle of Pseudo-Dorotheos [E. N. ΑΜΟΙΡΙΔΟΥ, *H editio princeps (1577) των Ελληνικών Πρακτικών της Συνόδου Φερράρας – Φλωρεντίας: Περιγραφή – Διάδοση – Επιβίωση*, Thessaloniki 2012, 94-95; ΚΑΡΡΟΖΙΛΟΣ, *Βυζαντινοί Ιστορικοί και Χρονογράφοι*, 584-586].

18. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII: 80, 4 – 86, 2.

19. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 1: 80.4-5: ...διὰ τὴν μελετηθεῖσαν (ὡς μὴ ὄφελε) σύνοδον.

20. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 2: 80.6: Καὶ οὐ λέγω τοῦτο διὰ τὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας δόγματα... See also n. 27 and 64 below.

Doctrinal differences are treated by him as specialized aspects of religious faith that can be judged only by clerics and expert theologians, who have the necessary training and knowledge<sup>21</sup>. What is important for the author is the fact that the Orthodox doctrine is an element of his own cultural heritage that he received from his forefathers and no one can deny either its antiquity or its good effect<sup>22</sup>. However, no one can dispute the similar character of the Latin doctrine<sup>23</sup>. The evidence of dogmatic heterogeneity of the two Christian traditions is nothing more than alternative ways of approaching the common Christian truth, as implied by the allegorical story of the alternative access roads to the Church of Hagia Sophia that follows in his historical narration<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, Sphrantzes points out that he chooses to remain faithful to the tradition he has received and is more familiar to him, without opposing anyone who chooses to join the Latin doctrine<sup>25</sup>. He also points out that he does not oppose the prospect of ecclesiastical union, for which he declares that he is ready to sacrifice even one of his eyes<sup>26</sup>.

Despite Sphrantzes is ready to sacrifice even one of his eyes for the sake of the union of the Churches, he completely disagrees with the decision of John VIII Palaeologus to participate in this specific council of Union. He believes that the Byzantine participation in such a council was a wrong political move, as it provoked Ottoman aggression and consequently the violent overthrow of the Empire<sup>27</sup>. The author, in other words, believes that

21. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 2: 80.6-7: ...ταῦτα γὰρ παρ' ἄλλοις ἐδόθησαν κρίνεσθαι .

22. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 2: 80.7-9: ... ἐμοὶ δ' ἀρκεῖ ἡ πατρικὴ μου διαδοχὴ τῆς πίστεως, καὶ ὅτι οὐδέποτε παρὰ τινος τῶν τοῦ μέρους ἐκείνου ἤκουσα ὅτι τὸ ἡμῶν κακόν, ἀλλὰ καλὸν καὶ ἀρχαῖον...

23. Sfranze, *Cronaca* XXIII, 2: 80.9-10: ... καὶ τὸ ἐκείνων οὐ κακόν, ἀλλὰ καλόν.

24. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 3: 80.11-23.

25. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 3: 80.19-23: ... μετ' εἰρήνης καὶ ἀγάπης ἀπέρχεσθε καλῶς εἰς τὴν Ἁγίαν Σοφίαν ὁπόθεν βούλεσθε· ἐγὼ δὲ πάλιν θέλω διέρχεσθαι διὰ τῆς ὁδοῦ, ἣν καὶ μεθ' ὑμῶν πολὺν τινα χρόνον διηρχόμην καὶ καλὴν αὐτὴν καὶ παρ' ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν προγόνων μου μαρτυρουμένην καὶ διερχομένην .

26. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 4: 80.26-27: ... ἤθελα γὰρ νὰ εἶχε γενεῖν καλῶς ἔνωσις τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ νὰ με ἔλειπεν ὁ εἷς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν μου ...

27. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 4: 80.26-29: ... ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ ὅτι ἦν καὶ αὕτη ἡ τῆς συνόδου δουλεία αἰτία μία καὶ πρώτη καὶ μεγάλη εἰς τὸ νὰ γένηται ἡ κατὰ τῆς Πόλεως τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἔφοδος καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτην πάλιν ἡ πολιορκία καὶ ἡ αἰχμαλωσία καὶ τοιαύτη καὶ τοσαύτη συμφορὰ ἡμῶν. See also notes 20 and 64.

the Ottomans took the proclaimed unity as an act of provocation that forced them to preemptively strike Constantinople, before the Holy See would urge the European powers to assist militarily the Byzantine authorities against them, after overcoming the issue of division between the two Churches. This view is justified by the relevant advice that Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus gave to his son and future successor on how to act on the issue of Church union.

The advice is presented by Sphrantzes through a discussion that the old emperor had with the then young co-emperor, John VIII Palaeologus, in the presence of the author<sup>28</sup>. It is not known whether this discussion is a literary invention of Sphrantzes, to capture his thoughts, or whether it is a discussion that actually took place at some point between the two men. If the two men had such a conversation, it took place at some point after the unfortunate attempt by young John to oppose the rise of Murad II (1421 – 1444 and 1446 – 1451) to the Ottoman throne (1421), despite his father's reservations<sup>29</sup>. Based on this evidence, it has been argued that this discussion took place during the autumn of 1422, when the papal envoy Antonio da Massa (?-1435) was in Constantinople promoting the unification negotiations<sup>30</sup>. Emperor

28. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 5-6: 82.1-15.

29. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 7: 82.25-27: ... προείδον γὰρ καὶ τὰς ἐνθυμήσεις αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ ἐδόξαζε κατορθῶσαι μὲ τὸν Μουσταφᾶν, καὶ εἶδον καὶ τὰ τέλη τῶν κατορθωμάτων εἰς τί κίνδυνον μᾶς ἔφερον. On this issue, see S. ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos (1350-1425). A Byzantine Emperor in a Time of Tumult*, New York 2021, 355 ff [hereafter: ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*].

30. J.W. BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425): A study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship*, New Brunswick – New Jersey 1969, 329-331 [hereafter: BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus*]; CH. DENDRINOS, Reflections on the failure of the Union of Florence, *Annuario Historiae Conciliorum* 39 (2007), 123; ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 361. On the mission of Antonio da Massa to Constantinople during the autumn of 1422, see V. LAURENT, Les préliminaires du concile de Florence: Les neuf articles du pape Martin V et la réponse du patriarche Joseph II (Octobre 1422), *REB* 20 (1962), 10-23 [hereafter: LAURENT, Les préliminaires]; J. GILL, *The Council of Florence*, Cambridge 1959, 33-36 [hereafter: GILL, *The Council of Florence*]; BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus*, 327-329; K.M. SETTON, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571)* [Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society 127], v. II: *The Fifteenth Century*, Philadelphia 1978, 42-44 [hereafter: SETTON, *The Papacy and the Levant*]; N.D. ΣΑΥΒΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *Ανατολή και Δύση στην τελευταία τους συνάντηση. Η σύγκληση της Συνόδου Φερράρας – Φλωρεντίας* [Βυζαντινή Γραμματεία 10], Athens 2009, 143-154 [hereafter: ΣΑΥΒΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *Ανατολή και Δύση*].



Manuel II, who was his main interlocutor, was confined to bed after a stroke that left him partly paralyzed just two weeks after the envoy's arrival<sup>31</sup>. Thus, the papal envoy met with John the VIII, who, together with Patriarch Joseph II, requested that the unification negotiations be postponed<sup>32</sup>. It seems, therefore, that the formation of the Byzantine authorities' response to Antonio da Massa was the reason for this discussion.

Manuel II advises John to raise the issue of an ecclesiastical union from time to time, especially when he needs to intimidate the Ottomans, as the latter believed that the Holy See would urge European forces to campaign against them in the event of a union of the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic<sup>33</sup>. At the same time, however, he advised him never to materialize this ecclesiastical union, as the Byzantine Churchmen would never accept to be united with the Latin Church as long as it refused to return to the pre-Schismatic state<sup>34</sup>. The denial of the Byzantine clergy to comply with the imposed imperial principles on Church unity would cause "worse division" (*χειρόν σχίσμα*) and conflict among his subjects at a critical moment for the survival of the Empire<sup>35</sup>. This advice displeased the future monarch, who silently left the room, prompting the rather interesting comment from the old emperor that his successor could not comprehend that the Empire was

31. *Memoirs of Sylvester Syropoulos*, ed. V. LAURENT, *Les "Memoires" du Grand Ecclésiarque de l'Église de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le concile de Florence (1438-1439)* [Concilium Florentinum Documenta et Scriptores, series B, vol. IX], Roma 1971, II, 11: 112. 17-19 [hereafter: *Syropoulos, Memoires*]: Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς περιπέπτωκε νοσήματι ἡμιπληξίας, ἔτι παρόντος ἐνταῦθα τοῦ Ἀντωνίου, καὶ ἔκειτο νοσῶν ἐπὶ τρεῖς ἔγγιστα ἑνιαυτοὺς καὶ ἐγένετο ἐγκρατῆς τῆς ἀρχῆς ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ βασιλεὺς κὺρ Ἰωάννης ὁ Παλαιολόγος... On Manuel's illness, see ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 359.

32. LAURENT, *Les préliminaires*, 10-23- GILL, *The Council of Florence*, 35; SETTON, *The Papacy and the Levant*, 42; ΣΑΥΒΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *Ανατολή και Δύση*, 152, 155.

33. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXII, 5: 82.4-8: ...νιέ μου, βεβαίως καὶ ἀληθῶς ἐπιστάμεθα ἐκ μέσης τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν διὰ τῶν ἀσεβῶν ὅτι πολλὰ τοὺς φοβεῖ, μὴ συμφωνήσωμεν καὶ ἐνωθῶμεν μὲ τοὺς Φράγκους ἔχουν το γὰρ ὅτι, ἂν τοῦτο γένηται, θέλει γενεῖν μέγα τι κακὸν εἰς αὐτοὺς παρὰ τῶν τῆς Δύσεως Χριστιανῶν δι' ἡμᾶς.

34. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXII, 6: 82.10-13: ... τὸ δὲ νὰ ποιήσης αὐτήν, μηδὲν ἐπιχειρισθῆς αὐτό, διότι οὐδὲν βλέπω τοὺς ἡμετέρους ὅτι εἰσὶν ἀρμόδιοι πρὸς τὸ εὐρεῖν τινα τρόπον ἐνώσεως καὶ εἰρήνης καὶ ὁμονοίας, ἀλλ' ὅτι νὰ τοὺς ἐπιστρέψουν εἰς τὸ νὰ ἔσμεν ὡς ἀρχῆθεν.

35. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXII, 6: 82.13-15: Τοῦτου δὲ ἀδύνατον ὄντος σχεδόν, φοβοῦμαι μὴ καὶ χειρόν σχίσμα γένηται, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἀπεσκεπάσθημεν εἰς τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς.

in such a state that it no longer needed an emperor (*βασιλεύς*) but a steward (*οικονόμος*)<sup>36</sup>.

Emperor Manuel II's advice to his young co-emperor on how to handle the issue of ecclesiastical union with the West essentially sums up the policy pursued by him on this issue. The pre-eminent objective of Manuel II's diplomacy does not differ essentially from that of his father, Emperor John V, which looked to western help for the survival of the Empire<sup>37</sup>. For this reason, Manuel II embarked on a long and arduous journey to the most important courts of Western Europe, personally soliciting for military assistance against the Ottoman threat<sup>38</sup>. The Emperor, however, avoided during the long tour in the western courtyards, to put the question for the union of the two Churches, something that had been unsuccessfully attempted by his predecessor<sup>39</sup>. This, of course, makes an impression, given that Manuel had previously been involved in such negotiations with the Holy See in an attempt to protect Thessaloniki from the Ottoman threat during its rule by him (1382-1387)<sup>40</sup>. Apparently, the unsuccessful development of

36. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXII, 7: 82.16-22: *Τοῦ δὲ βασιλέως, ὡς ἔδοξε, μὴ δεξαμένου τὸν λόγον τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, μηδὲν εἰπὼν, ἀναστὰς ἀπῆλθε. καὶ μικρὸν σύννους γεγωνὸς ὁ μακαρίτης καὶ ἀοιδίμος πατὴρ αὐτοῦ, ἐμβλέψας πρὸς ἐμὲ ὀρίζετ' « ὁ βασιλεὺς ὁ υἱός μου ἔνι μὲν ἀρμόδιος βασιλεὺς, οὐ τοῦ παρόντος δὲ καιροῦ. βλέπει γὰρ καὶ φρονεῖ μεγάλα καὶ τοιαῦτα, οἷα οἱ καιροὶ ἐχρηζοῦν τῆς εὐημερίας τῶν προγόνων ἡμῶν. ἀμὴ σήμερον, ὡς ἂν παρακολουθοῦσιν εἰς ἡμᾶς τὰ πράγματα, οὐ βασιλέα θέλει ἢ ἡμῶν ἀρχή, ἀλλ' οἰκονόμον... »*

37. On the aims and expectations of the policy adopted by John V Palaeologus on this issue, see V. VARMAZI - NERANTZI, *Το Βυζάντιο καὶ ἡ Δύση (1354-1369)*. Συμβολὴ στὴν ἱστορία τῶν πρώτων χρόνων τῆς μονοκρατορίας τοῦ Ἰωάννη Ε' Παλαιολόγου, Thessaloniki 1993; OSK. HALECKI, *Un empereur de Byzance à Rome: vingt ans de travail pour l'union des églises et pour la défense de l'Empire d'Orient, 1355-1375* [Travaux historiques de la Société des Sciences et des Lettres de Varsovie 3], Warszawa 1930; J. GILL, *Byzantium and the Papacy 1198-1400*, New Jersey 1979, 208-229. For the policy pursued by Manuel II Palaeologus on this issue, see BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus*, 123-385; J. HARRIS, *The End of Byzantium*, New Haven 2010, 46-102 [hereafter: HARRIS, *The End of Byzantium*]; FL. LEONTE, *Imperial Visions of Late Byzantium. Manuel II Palaiologos and Rhetoric in Purple*, Edinburgh 2020, 242-243 [hereafter: LEONTE, *Imperial Visions*]; ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 238 ff.

38. BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus*, 123-385; HARRIS, *The End of Byzantium*, 46-102; ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 238 ff.

39. BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus*, 330-331; ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 213 ff.

40. For the negotiations in which the Manuel had been involved as governor of

these negotiations forced the then young Manuel to realize the problems and weaknesses of such a policy<sup>41</sup>. He, moreover, possessed sound theological knowledge that enabled him to refute the Latin beliefs<sup>42</sup> as can be seen, *inter alios*, from the lengthy treatise on the procession of the Holy Spirit he wrote during his stay in the French capital in response to a Latin tract on the same subject presented to him by an anonymous Latin scholar<sup>43</sup>. Nevertheless, Manuel did not rule out the possibility of restoring ecclesiastical unity with the Latin tradition, when ecclesiastical and theological people in Paris asked him about this. Even then, however, he sets a precondition for the convening of a joint ecclesiastical council, where the disputed issues would be discussed in an atmosphere of sincerity and free theological dialogue<sup>44</sup>.

Later, however, he decided to raise again the issue of ecclesiastical union, with the obvious expectation that only in this way would he be able to secure the support of the Holy See for the organizing of a crusade against the Ottomans. This effort became more complicated by the Great Schism that had plagued the Latin Church since 1378<sup>45</sup>. The simultaneous presence of two elected popes, one in Rome and one in Avignon, were problematic since the western kingdoms were divided by the recognition of one of the two papal authorities<sup>46</sup>. Nevertheless, Emperor Manuel II did not hesitate to

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Thessaloniki, see G.T. DENNIS, *The Reign of Manuel II Palaeologus in Thessalonica, 1382-1387* [OCA 159], Roma 1960, 132-150; ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 107.

41. BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus*, 330; ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 107.

42. For a comprehensive presentation of the theological writing activity of Manuel II Palaeologus, see S. LAMPROU, *Ο αυτοκράτωρ Μανουήλ Β΄ Παλαιολόγος ως θεολόγος. Συμβολή στην Παλαιολόγεια Γραμματεία*, Thessaloniki 2011.

43. CH. DENDRINOS, *An annotated critical edition (editio princeps) of Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus' treatise 'On the Procession of the Holy Spirit'*, PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 1996. On this treatise of Emperor Manuel II, see ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 234 ff.

44. CH. DENDRINOS, Manuel II Palaeologus in Paris (1400-1402): Theology, Diplomacy, and Politics, in: *Greeks, Latins, and Intellectual History, 1204-1500*, eds M. HINTERBERGER - CH. SCHABEL [Bibliotheca 11], Leuven - Paris - Walpole, MA 2011, 409 ff; ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 240-242.

45. M.A. RYAN, Byzantium, Islam, and the Great Western Schism, in: *A Companion to the Great Western Schism (1378-1417)*, eds J. ROLLO-KOSTER & TH. M. IZBICKI [Brill's companions to the Christian tradition 17], Leiden - Boston 2009, 201 ff.

46. For the Great Schism that afflicted the Roman Catholic Church between the years

make this request initially to Pope Innocent VII (1404–1406)<sup>47</sup> and then at the Council of Constance (1414–1418)<sup>48</sup>. Even then, however, he did not show the slightest intention to accept the subjugation of the Byzantine Church to the Latin Church, as was persistently demanded by the Pope. Instead, Emperor Manuel II counter proposed that ecclesiastical union could only come from convening a joint Church council where controversial issues would be discussed in an honest climate and free theological dialogue<sup>49</sup>. In this way, the Emperor harmonized with the Byzantine ecclesiastical circles, which, united around the Patriarchate, persistently rejected, throughout the late Byzantine period, any plan of a union that would not be based on free and open Christian discourse on equal terms<sup>50</sup>. These circles were convinced that the Latins would undoubtedly be persuaded by the Orthodox teachings and interpretation of the Scriptural and Patristic evidence and would return to the state of the Church before the Schism<sup>51</sup>. Such a possibility, however, seemed quite unlikely since the Holy See persistently refused to discuss any point of its dogmatic position and ecclesiastical supremacy<sup>52</sup>. Thus, a possible ecclesiastical union could only take place under political pressure, which would inevitably provoke the reaction of most clergymen,

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1378-1417, see the studies included in the volume: *A Companion to the Great Western Schism (1378-1417)* [as in previous note].

47. G.T. DENNIS, *Official documents of Manuel II Palaeologus*, Byz. 41 (1971), no 23.

48. R.-J. LOENERTZ, *Les dominicains byzantins Théodore et André Chrysoberges et les négociations pour l'union des églises grecque et latine de 1415-1430*, *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 9 (1939), 23-29; J. GILL, *Byzantium and the Papacy, 1198-1400*, 20-21; SETTON, *The Papacy and the Levant*, 39-41.

49. J. BOOJAMRA, *The Byzantine notion of the "Ecumenical Council" in the Fourteenth Century*, *BZ* 80:1, 72 ff [hereafter: *The Byzantine notion*].

50. AR. PAPADAKIS – J. MEYENDORFF, *The Christian East and the rise of the Papacy. The Church 1071-1453 A.D.* [The Church in History IV], Crestwood, NY 1994, 385-386 [hereafter: PAPADAKIS – MEYENDORFF, *The Christian East*].

51. LEONTE, *Imperial Visions*, 42-45. It is remarkable what is written by the patriarch Neilos Kerameas (1380-1388) to Pope Urban VI (1378-1389), in September 1384, regarding this issue: ... *καὶ ἡμεῖς γὰρ λίαν ἀποδεχόμεθα τὴν εἰρήνην καὶ τὴν ἔνωσιν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, πλὴν ἵνα γένηται, καθὼς θέλει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ καθὼς ἦν καὶ πρὸ τοῦ σχίσματος...* (MM II, 87).

52. On the Papacy's denial of the Byzantine proposal to convene a general council to discuss the differences between the two Churches, see PAPADAKIS – MEYENDORFF, *The Christian East*, 385-389.

including monastics, who would vigorously oppose such an effort and call on the faithful to reject it at all costs. In this way, internal unity would be disrupted in such a critical moment, as it actually happened after the convening of the Ferrara-Florence Council<sup>53</sup>.

Nevertheless, John VIII persistently insisted on the necessity of a joint ecclesiastical council, as he knew that the prospect of the Union of the Churches terrified the Ottomans<sup>54</sup>. Although modern Ottoman sources make no mention of these negotiations and the dangers posed to their state, it is clear that the Ottomans realized that their successful outcome would lead to the organization of a crusade against them<sup>55</sup>. This is evident mainly from the relevant testimony of the anonymous author of an Ottoman chronicle describing the Hungarian-Turkish wars of 1443-1444<sup>56</sup>. The unknown author presents Emperor John VIII agreeing with the Pope to organize a crusade against the Ottomans at the Council of Ferrara - Florence, which according to him, was the cause of the Hungarian-Turkish wars that followed<sup>57</sup>. The observations of the Ottoman chronicler allow us to interpret the Ottoman reactions caused by the participation of the Byzantines in the Council. These reactions also handed down by Sylvestros Syropoulos, range from the Ottoman counter-proposals for financial support to the thought of a siege

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53. On the popular reactions in Constantinople to the signing of the Florentine decree by the Byzantine delegation, see G.E. DEMACOPOULOS, The popular reception of the Council of Florence in Constantinople 1439-1453, *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 43 (1999), 37-53.

54. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 5-6: 82.4-11: ...*υίέ μου, βεβαίως καὶ ἀληθῶς ἐπιστάμεθα ἐκ μέσης τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν διη τῶν ἀσεβῶν ὅτι πολλὰ τοὺς φοβεῖ, μὴ συμφωνήσωμεν καὶ ἐνωθῶμεν μὲ τοὺς Φράγκους ἔχουν το γὰρ ὅτι, ἂν τοῦτο γένηται, θέλει γενεῖν μέγα τι κακὸν εἰς αὐτοὺς παρὰ τῶν τῆς Δύσεως Χριστιανῶν δι' ἡμᾶς. Λοιπὸν τὸ περὶ τῆς συνόδου, μελέτα μὲν αὐτὸ καὶ ἀνακάτωνε, καὶ μάλισθ' ὅταν ἔχεις χρείαν τινὰ φοβῆσαι τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς.*

55. EL. A. ZACHARIADOU, The Ottomans, the Greek Orthodox Church and the perils of the Papacy, in: *Sylvester Syropoulos on Politics and Culture in the Fifteenth-Century Mediterranean. Themes and Problems in the Memoirs, Section IV*, eds F. KONDYLI - V. ANDRIOPOULOU - EIR. PANOU - M.B. CUNNINGHAM [Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies 16], Farnham - Burlington 2014, 23-29 [hereafter: ZACHARIADOU, The Ottomans, the Greek Orthodox Church and the perils].

56. For this chronicle, see *To Χρονικό των Ουγγροτουρκικών Πολέμων (1443-1444)*, Greek trans. G. AIVALI - EL. ZACHARIADOU - ANT. XANTHINAKIS, Herakleio 2005, 23 ff.

57. *Χρονικό των Ουγγροτουρκικών Πολέμων* [as in previous note], 88-91.

of Constantinople<sup>58</sup>. These reactions were intended, without succeeding, discourage and prevent the Byzantines from actively pursuing the success of the union at the Council<sup>59</sup>.

The advice of the elderly emperor displeased young John, who departed in deep thought and silence from this meeting. The future Emperor actively invested in the union of the Churches to secure military assistance from the Latin West. For this reason, his diplomatic activity focused almost exclusively on the issue of the union of the Churches, thus continuing the initiative that had been inaugurated by his father at the Council of Constance. According to Joseph Gill, who devoted much of his research in studying in detail the Council of Ferrara-Florence from a Roman Catholic perspective, the unifying efforts of John VIII, in contrast to those of his predecessor, are driven by a real zeal to bridge the gap between the two Christian traditions<sup>60</sup>. The growing Ottoman pressure, moreover, leave him no other option, especially after the disappointing expectation for military help from Venice and mainly from Hungary<sup>61</sup>. The particular conditions prevailing in the Latin Church after the Great Schism (1378-1417) particularly favored the emperor's unifying efforts, allowing him to negotiate for the first time on equal terms. This was based on discord that divided the Latin Church between defenders of papal supremacy and conciliarists in the 15th century. Both Pope Martin IV (1417-1431) and his successor, Eugene IV (1431-1447), in contrast to their predecessors, had been restricted in their jurisdiction and consequently the Byzantine plan for convening a general council to discuss the important problem of Christian division was no longer considered undesired or indeed unattainable<sup>62</sup>. The

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58. Syropoulos, *Memoires*, III, 21: 182, 14-16. Let us also note that Doukas gives relevant information with the difference, that the emperor John VIII sought, according to him, to reassure the Ottoman concerns just after returning from Italy, and thus he sent to the Sultan a delegation assuring him that the Emperor's trip to Italy was not aimed at organizing a crusade against them, but at resolving dogmatic differences with the Roman Catholics (Ducas, *Istoria Turco-Byzantină*, XXXI, 8: 269. 22-29).

59. ZACHARIADOU, *The Ottomans, the Greek Orthodox Church and the perils*, 24.

60. GILL, *The Council of Florence*, 88, n. 2.

61. D.M. NICOL, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261-1453*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 351 ff.

62. BOOJAMRA, *The Byzantine notion*, 72 ff.

persistent Byzantine demand for the convening of an ecumenical council was finally accepted, and Emperor John VIII took part in the works, playing an important role in persuading the Byzantine delegation to sign the Decree of Union, with the notable exception of Mark Eugenikos (ca 1392–1444), who refused to add his signature thus becoming the champion of the anti-unionist party, as well as George Scholarios (ca 1400 – ca 1472), Georgios Gemistos (ca 1355–1452) and Demetrius Palaeologus (1407–1470), who had left Florence soon after the death of Patriarch Joseph (10.VI.1439), in order to avoid signing the Decree<sup>63</sup>.

According to Sphrantzes, Emperor Manuel II believed that the successful completion of the negotiations on the Union of Churches would provoke Ottoman aggression because the Ottomans would take the union of the Churches as a provocative and disconcerting move, leading to a preemptive strike against Constantinople before the arrival of any sizable help from the West<sup>64</sup>. That is why Manuel II advises John VIII to raise the issue of union in case of danger, but never to proceed with the union negotiations<sup>65</sup>. Sphrantzes, in particular, insists on confirming the correctness of this advice, recording how Sultan Murad II reacted when he was informed that Emperor John VIII intended to proceed with the unification negotiations and to participate in a unification council in Italy. The author describes in some detail both the sultan's cunning counterproposal for financial aid towards the emperor, even in private affairs, provided that he canceled his participation in the council and as well as the Ottoman plans for the siege of Constantinople, for a forced return of the emperor from Italy<sup>66</sup>. Similar

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63. For the role played by Emperor John VIII Palaiologos in the Council, see J. GILL, John VIII Palaeologus. A Character Study, in: *Silloge byzantina in onore di Silvio Giuseppe Mercati* [SBN 9], Rome 1957, 152-170; S. KOLDITZ, *Johannes VIII. Palaiologos und das Konzil von Ferrara – Florenz (1438/39): das byzantinische Kaisertum im Dialog mit dem Westen* [Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 60], v. I, Stuttgart 2013, 286 ff; J. N.VAN SICKLE, Re-evaluating the Role of Emperor John VIII in the Failed Union of Florence, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*. 68:1 (2017), 49-54.

64. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 5: 82. 4-8 cited in n. 54 See also n. 20 and 27.

65. Sfranze, *Cronaca* XXIII, 6: 82. 9-11 cited in n. 54.

66. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 8: 82. 1-7: ... ὡς ἐστάθη, ἵνα ἀπέλθῃ εἰς τὴν σύνοδον, ἐστάλῃ εἰς τὸν ἀμυρᾶν ἀποκρισιάρχιος Ἀνδρόνικος ὁ Ἰαγρός δηλῶσαι τοῦτο πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ὡς τάχα φίλον καὶ ἀδελφόν. κἀκεῖνος ἀπελογήσατο, ὅτι «οὐδέν μοι φαίνεται καλὸν νὰ ὑπάγῃ νὰ κοπιᾷση τοσοῦτον καὶ νὰ ἐξοδιᾷσῃ καὶ τί νὰ κερδίσῃ; ἰδοὺ ἐγώ, καὶ ἐὰν ἔχη

information arises from the memoirs of Sylvester Syropoulos<sup>67</sup>. This evidence not only confirms the credibility of Sphrantzes but strongly supports the basis of his arguments, as it is very likely that he recorded events that were pretty much known mainly in the court officials who probably were the audience he had in mind when he wrote his chronicle.

The decision of Emperor John VIII to participate in a council of Union is interpreted by Sphrantzes as lack of political realism on his part. This interpretation is expressed through the rather interesting comment made by his father-Emperor after John departed from the discussion on how to handle the vital issue of the ecclesiastical union. Manuel II considers that his successor was unable to realize that the Empire is now in such a state that no longer –as already stated– needs an emperor (*βασιλεύς*) but a steward (*οικονόμος*)<sup>68</sup>. The difference between an emperor and a steward lies in the perception by the elderly emperor of the degree of independence they had, to implement their decisions<sup>69</sup>. The awareness of the limited possibilities that his successor had, in his opinion, is an example of political realism that characterized him, as his advice for a policy of fine diplomatic balances towards both the Ottomans and the West perceived as mutual deterrents. The Emperor Manuel II is presented as a wise monarch that embodies the standard of an Orthodox and pragmatic ruler who was convinced that the

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*χρείαν καὶ ἀσπρῶν δι' ἔξοδον καὶ εἰσόδημα καὶ ἄλλο τι πρὸς θεραπείαν αὐτοῦ, ἔτοιμός εἰμι νὰ τὸν θεραπεύσω.*

67. Syropoulos, *Memoires*, III, 21: 182. 11-16: *Τοῦ γὰρ Ἀσὸν κῦρ Παύλου πρέσβεως σταλέντος τότε πρὸς τὸν Ἀμυράν, εἶπον αὐτῷ οἱ βεζήριδες. Τί ἐνὶ τὸ κατεπεῖγον τὸν βασιλέα καὶ ἀπέρχεται πρὸς τοὺς Λατίνους; Εἰ ἔχει τινὰ ἀνάγκην, εἰπάτω ταύτην, καὶ ὁ αὐθέντης θεραπεύσει ταύτην κρείττονα θεραπείαν εὐρήσει ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐθέντου παρὰ ἀπὸ τῶν Λατίνων, καὶ πλέον συμφέρει τῷ βασιλεῖ ἢ φιλία τοῦ Ἀμυρά ἢπερ ἢ τῶν Λατίνων. Παραιτησάσθω οὖν τὴν πρὸς Λατίνους ἀποδημίαν καὶ εὐρήσει ὅπερ ἂν ζητήσῃ παρὰ τοῦ αὐθέντου.* Let it be noted, also, that Doucas notes a respective delegation to the Sultan but after the return of the emperor from Italy (Ducas, *Istoria Turco-Byzantinā*, XXXI, 8: 269.22-29).

68. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 7: 82 16-22 cited in n. 36.

69. T. ΚΙΟΥΣΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Βασιλεύς ἢ Οικονόμος. Πολιτική εξουσία καὶ ἰδεολογία πρὶν τὴν ἄλωση*, Αθήνα 2007, 187-188 [hereafter: ΚΙΟΥΣΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Βασιλεύς ἢ Οικονόμος*]. For a different interpretation of Manuel II's words on the basis of management of public finances, see K.-P. MATSCHKE, *Die Schlacht bei Ankara und das Schicksal von Byzanz. Studien zur spätbyzantinischen Geschichte zwischen 1402 und 1422*, Weimar 1981, 220 ff.



survival of the Empire can only be accomplished solely by maintaining the balance of power, both externally and internally. This required on one hand good knowledge of western politics and ecclesiastical power and priorities as well Ottoman plans and insecurities, and on the other hand the realities, divisions and prospects within Byzantine Church and society. He understood, therefore, that the repeated calls for the Ecumenical Council of Union were the only way to secure balance and valuable time in international politics. At the same time he was well aware that this issue, if it progressed, could become a major cause of discord among his subjects at a critical time for the survival of the Empire. For this reason, skillful diplomatic manoeuvres were required to secure or at least prolong the future of the Empire. These diplomatic manoeuvres could only be successfully carried out by a prudent and realistic statesman, such as Manuel II, but not by a monarch who would lack grasp the harsh realities and pursued an ambitious plan for the restoration of the former prestige of the Empire, such as John VIII.

The latter opted for this very reason to defy the advice of his experienced father-Emperor and proceed with the unifying negotiations. This option however overturned balances that had been achieved thanks to the intelligent and diplomatic manipulations of his predecessor, causing the violent fall of the Empire sixteen years later. The repeated appeals of Emperor Manuel II for the convening of a unifying council brought about the Ferrara – Florence Council only because his young and inexperienced son and successor avoided maintaining these balances. According to Sphrantzes, this is explained by the fact that Emperor John VIII was unable to realize the limited possibilities he had. The political choices, therefore, of Emperor John VIII are ultimately those that caused the Fall and not those of his predecessor. In this way, however, Sphrantzes dispenses Emperor Manuel II from any criticism he may have received on his unifying policy or from those Byzantine aristocrats and officials who had taken refuge in the West after the Fall<sup>70</sup>. The responsibility is now shifted to Emperor John VIII,

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70. ANGOLD, *Memoirs, confessions and apologies*, 213. It should also be noted that the author tries to clear the memory of Constantine XI Palaeologus from such accusations with quite a touching note which exaggerates the agonized efforts of the last emperor for the salvation of the besieged Constantinople and shifts the responsibility for the Fall to the European and Balkan forces who did not care to provide military assistance when was desperately needed [Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXVI, 1-14: 136.6-142.14].

who insisted that the unification negotiations proceed in a way that suited the old prestige of the imperial institution rather than the bitter reality<sup>71</sup>.

The union was finally proclaimed, with virtually no tangible results, apart from that campaign that ended in the defeat of Varna (1444)<sup>72</sup>. The declared union did not provide any substantial assistance to besieged Constantinople. Sphrantzes points out with particular rigor that the Christians of other countries did little to help Constantinople, ignoring even the dangers that lay ahead for them if Constantinople eventually fell to the Ottomans<sup>73</sup>. The first on his list is the Despot of Serbia, Djurdj Branković (1377-1456), who did not refuse to act as an intermediary in the peace agreement between the Hungarians and the Turks, although that would have at least delayed the attack on Constantinople<sup>74</sup>. The Serbian Despot did not realize that once the head is removed, the limbs perish too. Not even the Venetians helped, particularly due to Francesco Foscari (1373-1457), who had personal motives<sup>75</sup>. There was also no help from the Church of Rome, despite the fact that the Union had been officially proclaimed almost six months before the Fall<sup>76</sup>. But neither the Emperor of Trebizond nor the ruler of Georgia were willing to help the besieged Constantinople<sup>77</sup>. The Hungarians only seem to have intimidated the Ottomans but to no avail<sup>78</sup>. If someone really fought for the salvation of besieged Constantinople, it was none other than the Emperor Constantine XI Palaeologus who made every effort to secure military aid against the Ottomans<sup>79</sup>. Even parts of his territory were willing to cede to foreign rulers on the condition of providing aid against the Ottomans<sup>80</sup>. However God overheard due to human chariots

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71. ANGOLD, *Memoirs, confessions and apologies*, 213.

72. For the crusade of Varna, see M. CHASIN, *The Crusade of Varna*, in: *A History of the Crusades*, v. 6: *The Impact of the Crusades in Europe*, eds K.M. SETTON - H.W. HAZARD - N. P. ZACOUR, Wisconsin 1989, 276-310.

73. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXVI, 2-9: 136.9-140.19.

74. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXVI, 2: 136. 9-17.

75. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXVI, 3-4: 136. 18 - 138.10.

76. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXVI, 5-6: 138. 11-26.

77. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXVI, 8: 140.6-8.

78. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXVI, 9: 140.9-19.

79. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXVI, 10-14: 140.20 - 142.16.

80. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXVI, 11-12: 140.24 - 142.5.

unknown to him even the prayers of the priests paid by Emperor Constantine XI to make prayers and fasts, all in the hope of preventing the Christians from being enslaved by the Ottomans<sup>81</sup>. It is so obvious that the declared union not only provoked the Ottoman aggression but neither did it secure any substantial assistance to besieged Constantinople and for these reasons Sphrantzes evaluates the Council of Ferrara – Florence negatively<sup>82</sup>.

Sphrantzes' views, however, contrast with the deep religious sentiment that characterizes both the ethos and the course of his life, as it is evident from several parts of his work<sup>83</sup>. He appears as a deeply religious man who experienced during his life a series of painful traumas which he always interpreted as providential punishment for the sins he had committed<sup>84</sup>. His deep religious feeling is revealed moreover by the frequent biblical references to his work<sup>85</sup> and the extended narration of the Life and miracles of his godmother, which according to him, was a sanctified nun of some monastery in Constantinople<sup>86</sup>. He would retire to a monastery in Corfu, a few years before his death, submitting a confession of faith he recorded in his work and with which he condemned, among other things, the Latin doctrines as heresy<sup>87</sup>. He is also possessed by the typical Byzantine notion that human sins cause punishment from God who can even use the Ottomans as his executive body<sup>88</sup>. Even the final observations of his work confirm his typical Christian spiritual horizons, as he prays that the bodily pains he suffers will help towards the purification of his soul for his salvation<sup>89</sup>. It is no coincidence, therefore, that some scholars describe him as a moderate

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81. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXVI, 14: 142.9-14.

82. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 4: 80. 26-29, XXIII, 12: 86.1.

83. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, 17\*-20\*. For the possibility, however, that this religious sentiment is just superficial, see C.J.G. TURNER, Pages from late byzantine philosophy of History, *BZ* 57 (1964), 353-357.

84. See, for example, Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXV, 11: 134 (capture by the Ottomans during the Fall of Constantinople); XLVIII, 1, 3: 190-194 (serious illness in the last days of his life).

85. See the *Index Locorum* of the Maisano edition (Sfranze, *Cronaca*, 267).

86. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XVIII: 46-52.

87. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XLV, 4: 184.

88. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXIX, 11: 156. 13-21.

89. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XLVIII, 3: 194.

anti-unionist, focusing precisely on his deep religious sentiment<sup>90</sup>. It was this religious sentiment that was also blamed on the fact that Sphrantzes systematically avoided using the term “Roman” and its derivatives, which brings him even closer to the anti-unionist party that usually distances itself from Roman political legacy<sup>91</sup>.

We would expect, therefore, that such a devout Orthodox Christian would consider the Florentine Council as a betrayal of the traditional faith that God would punish with the victory of the Ottomans, unless byzantine people rejected the Decree of Union and remained faithful to the traditional doctrine, just as supported by the anti-unionist party. The anti-unionist party argued persistently that the church union declared in Florence was a grave sin that God would punish with the victory of the Ottomans and therefore with the destruction of the world<sup>92</sup>. This view dominates the writings of prominent anti-unionists even before the tragic event of the Fall, as is seen, for example, in the work of Gennadios Scholarios<sup>93</sup>. Scholarios, who became the undisputed leader of the anti-unity party after the death of Mark Eugenikos, considered the Florentine decree before the Fall as a product of unfair trade between Roman Catholics and Orthodox, with the latter exchanging without remorse their traditional doctrine in the hope of securing military aid from the West. This unfair transaction was expected to soon provoke the heavenly wrath that would punish the Orthodox for this betrayal of the traditional faith unless they rejected the Decree of Union and remained faithful to the traditional doctrine<sup>94</sup>. The

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90. See, for example, H. HUNGER, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, v. I, München 1978, 497.

91. D.R. REINSCH, Η θεώρηση της πολιτικής και πολιτιστικής φυσιογνωμίας των Ελλήνων στους ιστορικούς της Άλωσης, *Études Balkaniques (Cahiers Pierre Belon)* 6 (1999), 85-86; I. SMARNAKIS, Rethinking Roman Identity after the Fall (1453): Perceptions of ‘Romanitas’ by Doukas and Sphrantzes, *Βυζύμι* 25 (2015), 227-233; YAN. STOURAITIS, Reinventing Roman Ethnicity in High and Late Medieval Byzantium, *Medieval Worlds* 5 (2017), 88.

92. I.H. ŠEVČENKO, Intellectual Repercussions of the Council of Florence, *Church History* 24 (1955), 12-13 [hereafter: ŠEVČENKO, Intellectual Repercussions].

93. For Gennadios Scholarios, see M.- H. BLANCHET, *Georges – Gennadios Scholarios (vers 1400-vers 1472). Un intellectuel orthodoxe face à la disparition de l’empire byzantine* [Archives de l’Orient chretien 20], Paris 2008 [hereafter: BLANCHET, *Georges – Gennadios Scholarios*].

94. ATH. ANGELOU, Ο Γεννάδιος Σχολάριος και η Άλωση, in: *Η Άλωση της Πόλης*, ed.

pattern of divine punishment for betraying the faith is repeated in every text that Gennadios wrote after the Fall, that is when he became the first leader of the Ecumenical Patriarchate under the Ottoman rule<sup>95</sup>. However, this scheme is now combined with the parallel scheme of interpreting the Ottoman conquest as the ark of the salvation of the Orthodox people from the dangerous Latin domination<sup>96</sup>.

Despite his deep religious sentiment, Sphrantzes does not seem to share the anti-unionist concerns, since he appears as indifferent to dogmatic issues<sup>97</sup>. Sphrantzes looks forward to the peaceful coexistence of Christians of different dogmatic traditions, perhaps influenced by his stay in Latin-dominated Corfu where he wrote his *Chronicle*<sup>98</sup>. Nevertheless he hurries to clarify that he remains faithful to the orthodox doctrine but just because it is part of his cultural heritage<sup>99</sup>. This, however, will not prevent him, just on the eve of the Fall of Constantinople, to propose to Emperor Constantine XI the appointment of Cardinal Isidore of Kiev as patriarch of Constantinople<sup>100</sup>. Neither will Sphrantzes hesitate to call Bessarion, after the Fall, as cardinal and as patriarch, which means that he recognized the title of patriarch given to him by the Pope<sup>101</sup>. These in no way imply that Sphrantzes can be described as unionist, as for example suggested by Nevra

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E. CHRYSOS [ΑΙΠΙΟΣ 15], Athens 1999, 105-106; BLANCHET, *Georges – Gennadios Scholarios*, 124-128.

95. ANGELOU, *Σχολάριος και Άλωση*, 107 ff; BLANCHET, *Georges – Gennadios Scholarios*, 124-128; K. MOUSTAKAS, Ottoman Greek views of ottoman rule (15th-16th Centuries). The Perspective of the patriarchate associates, in: *Political Thought and Practice in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. M. SARIYANNIS, Rethymno 2019, 312-313.

96. For a detailed study of Scholarios' views on this subject, see ANGELOU, *Σχολάριος και Άλωση*, 99-132; BLANCHET, *Georges – Gennadios Scholarios*, 124-135.

97. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 2: 80. 6-7.

98. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 3: 80. 19-23 cited in n. 25.

99. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXIII, 2: 80. 7-9 cited in n. 22.

100. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XXXVI, 5: 138.11-14: *Εὐρεθέντος καὶ γὰρ τοῦ καρδινάλιου Ῥωσσίας εἰς τὴν Πόλιν, μέσος ἐγὼ παρ' αὐτοῦ γέγονα εἰς τὸν ἀοίδιμον καὶ μακαρίτην ἀθθέντην μου τὸν βασιλέα, ἵνα γένηται πατριάρχης καὶ τὰ γένωνται παρ' αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ τότε πάπα, ἧ κὰν ἐκ δευτέρου νὰ μνημονευθῆ ὁ πάπας.*

101. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XLII, 11: 176.2-3: *... τοῦ αἰδεσιμωτάτου καρδινάλιου τοῦ πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Βησσαρίωνος ...*

Necipoğlu<sup>102</sup>. Despite the fact that Sphrantzes is indifferent to dogmatic issues, he condemns latin doctrines as heretical in the confession of faith which he submits when he becomes a monk<sup>103</sup>. Neither does Sphrantzes accept the logic of historical causality adopted by pro-unionist authors, such as Doukas<sup>104</sup>, according to which the attitude of the warriors towards the ecclesiastical union contributed to the spiritual apostasy of the people from the true faith, thus provoking the divine anger and consequently the Fall<sup>105</sup>.

It is obvious that the religious dimension of the conflict between the unionists and the anti-unionists was not a criterion of Sphrantzes' political behavior, despite its deep religious sentiment<sup>106</sup>. Sphrantzes is just an imperial official who is willing to do whatever is necessary to prevent Ottoman conquest and consequently the overthrow of the Empire, even if this means the implementation of the Union of Florence<sup>107</sup>. It is reasonable to assume that Sphrantzes as a trusted courtier of the emperor Manuel II is a moderate member of the chain of those politicians who from the middle of the 14th century and in spite of the Ottoman threat turned to a new political direction, aimed at the secularization of the state<sup>108</sup>. The supporters of this new political direction had gained support in the court of emperor Manuel II Palaeologus, who shared the basic principles of this political movement, as shows his interest in bringing under state control the vast ecclesiastical and monastic property in order to find resources for the benefit of state defense<sup>109</sup>. Emperor Manuel II also managed to impose himself in the

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102. N. NECIPOĞLU, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins. Politics and Society in the Later Empire*, Cambridge 2009, 9.

103. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, XLV, 4: 184.

104. Ducas, *Istoria Turco-Byzantină*, XXXVII 9: 327.12 – 329.4. On the attitude of Doukas towards the ecclesiastical union, see S.K. KRASAVINA, Duka I Sfrandzi ob unii pravoslavnoj i katoličeskoj cerkve, *V.V.* 27 (1967), 142-147 [hereafter: KRASAVINA, Duka I Sfrandzi].

105. ŠEVČENKO, *Intellectual Repercussions*, 8-9.

106. On the attitude of Sphrantzes towards the ecclesiastical union, see KRASAVINA, Duka I Sfrandzi, 147-152.

107. Sfranze, *Cronaca*, 10\*-11\*.

108. On the chain of those politicians, see, among other, N.SINIOSSOGLU, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium. Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon*, Cambridge 2011, 359-376.

109. G. OSTROGORSKY, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine*, Bruxelles 1954, 161, 171-

Byzantine Church in 1416, forcing its representatives to recognize in writing the imperial right to administer ecclesiastical affairs<sup>110</sup>. In both cases, the purpose was to bring the Church authority under central control and limit its political role, as the salvation of the state was a priority<sup>111</sup>.

George Sphrantzes, in conclusion, attempts to approach the Ferrara-Florence Council while explaining the Fall with criteria that would suit a more experienced courtier and diplomat than a Christian believer of his time. Although he has typical Christian spiritual horizons, he approaches the events here solely applying diplomatic and political criteria. For this very reason, he goes back to the unifying policy that was adopted by Manuel II, the wise and realist Emperor, according to him, who succeeded in ensuring with intelligence and careful handling the balances necessary for the survival of the state, until they were overturned by the choice of his successor to proceed with the unification negotiations. The political choices of Emperor John VIII in turn instigated the Ottoman fears and precipitated the fall, which in the eyes of many Byzantines and Latins constitutes retaliation of some higher power for the spiritual apostasy of the Byzantines or the consequence of the subjects of the last Palaeologus refusing to accept the Florentine Decree of the Union of the Churches. However religious, George Sphrantzes, abstained from accepting one or the other reasoning, as his expressed indifference in doctrinal teachings made clear. In this way, he puts forward a more convincing case of historical causality and the Fall of Constantinople and the end of the Byzantine Empire; and this is a valuable historical and historiographical contribution.

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173; M. BARTUSIS, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: the Institution of Pronoia*, Cambridge 2012, 551-570; K. SMYRLIS, The State, the Land and Private Property: Confiscating Monastic and Church Properties in the Palaiologan Period, in: *Church and Society in Late Byzantium*, ed. D. ANGELOV, Kalamazoo 2009, 66-72.

110. B.K. ΣΤΕΦΑΝΙΔΗΣ, Ὁ ἀρχαῖος σταθμὸς τῆς ἐξελίξεως τῶν σχέσεων Ἐκκλησίας καὶ Πολιτείας τοῦ Βυζαντίου καὶ τὰ ἄμεσα ἀποτελέσματα αὐτοῦ (1416-1439), *ΕΕΒΣ* 23 (1953) 27-30; BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus*, 323; LEONTE, *Imperial Visions*, 24-31; ÇELİK, *Manuel II Palaiologos*, 299 ff.

111. BARKER, *Manuel II Palaeologus*, 395 ff; ΚΙΟΥΣΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Βασιλεύς ἢ Οἰκονόμος*, 212-214, 223-232; LEONTE, *Imperial Visions*, 31.

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑΣΤΙΚΗ ΕΝΩΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΙΣΟΡΡΟΠΙΑ ΔΥΝΑΜΕΩΝ ΣΤΟ ΎΣΤΕΡΟ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟ:  
Η ΜΑΡΤΥΡΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΓΕΩΡΓΙΟΥ ΣΦΡΑΝΤΖΗ

Η παρούσα εργασία εστιάζει στην αξιολόγηση της Συνόδου Φερράρας - Φλωρεντίας στην οποία προέβη ο Γεώργιος Σφραντζής στο ιστοριογραφικό του έργο, το οποίο γράφτηκε λίγες μόλις δεκαετίες ύστερα από την Άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης (1453). Η επιλογή να εστιάσουμε στον συγκεκριμένο συγγραφέα δεν είναι τυχαία. Η συμμετοχή του Σφραντζή σε πολλαπλές διπλωματικές αποστολές, αλλά και τα διάφορα κυβερνητικά αξιώματα που του ανατέθηκαν κατά καιρούς, τον καθιστούν άριστο γνώστη των θεμάτων της εξωτερικής πολιτικής της Αυτοκρατορίας αλλά και των λόγων που οδήγησαν κάθε φορά τον εκάστοτε αυτοκράτορα σε συγκεκριμένες πολιτικές αποφάσεις. Η ιστορική του αφήγηση, επί πλέον, δεν απηχεί ιδεολογικές συγκρούσεις ούτε θρησκευτικές διενέξεις. Έτσι, η μαρτυρία του συμβάλλει αποφασιστικά στην καλύτερη δυνατή κατανόηση των κριτηρίων βάσει των οποίων οι τελευταίοι υιοθέτησαν τη συγκεκριμένη πολιτική, ενώ παράλληλα μας επιτρέπει να κατανοήσουμε πώς αυτή αντιμετωπίστηκε από ένα τμήμα τουλάχιστον των κυβερνητικών αξιωματούχων της εποχής εκείνης.