Rethinking Roman Identity after the Fall (1453): Perceptions of ‘Romanitas’ by Doukas and Sphrantzes

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During the last few years the question of Byzantine identities has attracted the attention of many scholars. Despite their methodological differences, the various approaches to the subject share, more or less, a common starting point: The older literature on the topic, by focusing mainly on the relationship between antiquity, Byzantium and modern Greece, ended up by confirming or denying the presumed continuity of a certain “Hellenism” through the centuries. This approach was not only static but it was also founded on an essentialist understanding of identities, which were treated as –almost- immutable entities that existed outside any historical context. For example, in the past some historians cited later Byzantine claims of a certain Hellenic identity as proof of the empire’s underlying Hellenic “essence” throughout its history. In response to these approaches, current research focuses on the historicity and the fluidity of the ways in which the Byzantines defined themselves and others. Byzantine identities were shaped not in a vacuum but in the context of the dominant imperial and Christian discourses, the perceptions of a ‘classical’ Greek and Roman past,

1. For an early critical overview of older literature on the topic see S. Vryonis, Recent scholarship on continuity and discontinuity of culture: Classical Greeks, Byzantines, Modern Greeks, in: The ‘Past’ in Medieval and Modern Greek Culture, ed. S. Vryonis, Malibu 1978, 237-256. Later Vryonis supported the quite different view that there was actually a “Greek” identity in Byzantium “... as witnessed by the identification with the Greek language and Greek education on the formal cultural level”. Cf. IDEM, Greek identity in the Middle Ages, Études Balkaniques 6 (1999) (Byzance et l'hellénisme: L'identité grecque au Moyen-Âge), 19-36, especially 36.
the relations between different elements within society and the interaction with foreign cultures and peoples. Special emphasis has also been placed on the multiplicity of identities. Concepts such as religion, culture, gender, sexuality, social status, ethnicity and political commitment are often used by modern scholars, who seek to reconstruct the conceptual framework of the various Byzantine identities.

However, recent research has rather neglected the transformations of romanitas during the lifespan of the Byzantine state since the debates about the complex relations between classical antiquity, Byzantium and modern Greece have dominated the academic field. The traditional Byzantine concept of the term “Roman”, which defined their own God-protected empire and emphasized the Roman and Christian roots of the imperial ideology,


4. For the Byzantine imperial identity and its close link with Roman political tradition and Christianity see G. DAGRON, Empereur et prêtre. Étude sur le ‘césaropapisme’ byzantine,
underwent several changes through the centuries. Besides its strong political content, *romanitas* eventually came to encompass a vast body of different, changing and often overlapping meanings: it stressed the contrast between “civilized” Romans and “uncivilized” barbarians; it declared a political identification with the Roman state; and finally, it referred to an ethnic group of people who believed that they had a common origin, spoke the same Greek language and followed the Christian Orthodox religion⁵.

The fall of Constantinople in 1453 marked the historical end of the Byzantine Empire⁶ and the start of an “identity crisis”, where the old ways of understanding “Romans” and “others” no longer corresponded to contemporary experience. The memory of that “crucial event” structured the flow of time by dividing it into “what was before” and “what came after”. All certainties, categories and expectations of the Byzantine elite collapsed after 1453 and this radical change was experienced by some of its members as a traumatic situation, where reality was no longer perceived

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within the limits of the known and the familiar7. This rupture with the old conceptual framework created the need for new narratives that had to interpret the present situation and reconstruct a new sense of community for the Byzantine people after the loss of their capital.

The aim of this paper is to explore perceptions of Roman identity immediately after 1453 by focusing on the historical narratives of Doukas and Sphrantzes. The two authors deal with the memory of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in order to understand and interpret their present and to develop a perspective for the future. I argue that their religious and political stances, as Doukas is a firm supporter of the unionist policy while Sphrantzes is a moderate anti-unionist, influence their conceptions of romanitas. The debate about the Union of the Churches had created deep ideological ruptures inside the Byzantine society and the study of a unionist and an anti-unionist historical narrative of the era reveals the totally different views of the two ‘parties’ regarding the future of the Byzantine people after 14538. The two other Byzantine historians of the Fall will not be considered here since Chalkokondyles remains indifferent to the issue of the Union while his narrative is mainly addressed to circles of western renaissance humanists and Kritovoulos is a unique case in late Byzantine historiography as he projects all the traits of an “ideal” Byzantine emperor to the Turkish sultan9. However, their own perceptions of romanitas will be


8. For the Union of the Churches and the Council of Ferrara and Florence (1438/9) see J. Gill, The Council of Florence, Cambridge 1959. The social and political context of the conflict between unionists and anti-unionists will be discussed in detail infra.

discussed in a broader study of the Byzantine historical narratives dealing with the memory of 1453.

Doukas, wrote a chronicle from the creation of the world until the Ottoman conquest of Mytilene in 1462. His perception of Roman identity emphasizes the political aspect of *romanitas*. The author often refers to the Byzantine state with the traditional term, as the *βασιλεία* of the Romans, and he uses the title *βασιλεὺς* for the emperor. However, the Byzantine king is not the only one who bears the royal title in his history. Besides Inachus, the ancient ruler of Argos, and Saul, the first king of Israel, the contemporary leaders of Trebizond and Serbia are also mentioned as *βασιλεῖς*. Moreover, it seems that Doukas did not regard the king of Constantinople as the only heir to the Roman imperial legacy since he mentions the coronation in the west of the Hungarian ruler Sigismund as emperor of the Romans.

The author not only distances himself from central concepts of the imperial ideology but he also perceives the Byzantine state as a group of urban and rural settlements under the rule of Constantinople and its king. When he narrates the rise of Mohammed to the Ottoman throne, he observes that the new sultan made the false promise “to devote himself, all the days of his life, to the cause of amity and concord with the City and the despot..."
Constantine, as well as with all the towns and their environs under this rule". This concept of the Palaiologan dominion as almost a city-state is also apparent in his narration of the punishment of a traitor, named Theologos, by the Cretan soldiers of Constantinople. The author stresses the importance of allegiance to the king and of a “sacred zeal” for the religious monuments, the cult of relics and the rituals performed in the city with the following words: “-the Cretans were always very faithful and had a sacred zeal for the temples of the saints and their relics and the kingdom of the City- so they told him: O king, it is unjust for us to prefer the City over our birthplace and yearn to shed our blood for the queen of cities while the native-born people and those who owe their fame to her are traitors to the divine mysteries and to your royal authority”.

The close association between urban space and the material signs of royal authority and the Christian cult is also emphasized in his lamentation for the Fall. The author calls Constantinople “head of all cities”, “the centre of the four corners of the earth”, “new paradise planted in the West”. He wonders what will happen to the remains of the emperors and the saints in the city as “the streets, the courtyards, the crossroads, the fields, the enclosures of vineyards were all full of the remains of saints, noble and ordinary people, monks and nuns”. He recalls the beauty of the churches, the sacred books and “the gospels spoken by the mouth of God” in this “terrestrial heaven” and “celestial altar”. Finally he refers to several secular elements of its past power that complement the image of a Christian and Roman city par excellence. The author mourns for its polity, its people, and its military forces and for the material signs of its past glory such as the mansions, the palaces and the “sacred” walls.

15. Ibid., 289: …τοῦ στέργειν καὶ ἐμμένειν ἐν ἀγάπῃ καὶ ὁμονοίᾳ μετὰ τῆς Πόλεως καὶ τοῦ δεσπότου Κωνσταντίνου σὺν πάσι τοῖς περιχώροις καὶ πόλεσιν ἐπὶ τὴν αὐτὴν δεσποτείαν.

16. Ibid., 233: —ἦσαν γὰρ οἱ Κρῆται ἀεὶ πιστότατοι καὶ ζῆλον θείον ἔχοντες πρὸς τὰ τεμενή τῶν ἁγίων καὶ εἰς τὰ σφῶν λείψανα καὶ εἰς τὸ βασίλειον τῆς Πόλεως· —εἶπον οὖν αὐτῷ Ω βασίλευ, ἄδικον εἶναι προτιμᾶν τὴν ἐνεγκαμένην καὶ ποθεῖν τοῦ ἐκχέισθαι τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ τὴν ἐνεγκαμένην καὶ ποθεῖν τοῦ ἐκχέισθαι τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ τῆς βασιλευούσης, οἱ δ’ αὐτόχθονες καὶ οἱ τὸ εὐδοξεῖν ἐν ταύτῃς ἔχοντες εἶναι προδόται τῶν θείων μυστηρίων καὶ τῆς βασιλείας σον.

17. Ibid., 385.
18. Ibid., 387.
The political life of Constantinople is often described as a field of interaction between the plans of the emperor and the wills of its people. Doukas frequently uses the term “πολίται” to define the citizens, as in his view they are not simply the inhabitants of Constantinople but mainly an active civic political body. In several cases the emperor is presented as a ruler who has to convince the citizens of the necessity of his policy or even to persuade them to accept his authority. For example, Doukas presents John Kantakouzenos addressing a speech to the people of Constantinople in 1347. Kantakouzenos mentions his appointment as regent of the emperor, his noble origin and military skills in order to persuade them to open the city gates and welcome him as their ruler. He also promises to forgive those who are at fault, restore to their former state those who suffered unjust losses and finally bring a state of peace into the state of the Romans. The Constantinopolitans, however, gave no answer while the vulgar populace gathered upon the walls unleashed several insults against him and his family. Finally Kantakouzenos abandoned the negotiations and succeeded in entering the city with the aid of his followers who were situated inside the capital. The episode is surely linked with the special socio-political conditions of the so-called second civil war (1341-1347) but in Doukas’ account it also acquires a strong symbolic meaning. The citizens have been gathered on the city walls, the real and symbolic boundaries of the civic space, while Kantakouzenos remains outside since he has to gain the public consent before entering the city and establishing his power.

The narration of the conflict between Andronikos IV and his father John V (1376) also emphasizes the political identification of the Constantinopolitans with their own city. Doukas recounts the escape of Andronikos and his family from the tower where they had been imprisoned, with the assistance of the Latins of Galata. After that event “the Genoese welcomed Andronikos and using him as a pretext began to wage war against the citizens of Constantinople. Thus the struggle for the throne between

19. Ibid., 61.
20. Ibid., 63.
21. Ibid., 73: καὶ οἱ Γενούνται τοῦτον δεξάμενοι ἤρξαντο ἀντιμάχεσθαι τοῖς πολίταις, προσωπεῖον κεκτήμενοι τὸν Ἀνδρόνικον. The author sharply criticizes from a typical Christian point of view both rivals and he regards this war between father and son as “the consequence of the inhumanity of the Romans and their hatred of God as they violated the
different members of the imperial family is presented as a war between the citizens of two cities, the Constantinopolitans and the Genoese of Galata.

The blockade of the capital by the troops of Bayazid (1394-1402) also offers the author an opportunity to highlight the active role played by the citizens at that time. According to Doukas, while the emperor gave no answer to the Turkish ambassadors demanding the surrender of Constantinople, “the majority of the City, suffering from famine and deeply distressed, would have chosen to surrender the city. When the Constantinopolitans recalled, however, the acts committed by the Turks in Asia Minor, the destruction of cities, the devastation of temples, the temptations and the extortions compelling them to renounce their faith they changed their minds...” The city is perceived here as a political entity with a strong memory of Turkish aggression. The majority of its citizens, recalling the Turkish “atrocities” against the Christian faith, decided to continue the fight against Bayazid, while the emperor had no involvement in their final decision. The reaction of the sultan is also revealing of the author’s perception of the Byzantine state: “the more the tyrant (Bayazid) saw the Constantinopolitans resisting and not yielding to his wishes, the more he raged and became furious with the city”.

The same view of the citizens as representatives of a civic political body is apparent in several other passages of the work. The author presents the citizens praying with the emperor for the salvation of Constantinople, confronting the Turkish troops outside the walls, mourning for the death of their empress, suspecting the role of a Byzantine ambassador and calling...
upon the emperor to act accordingly\textsuperscript{27}, begging God for his mercy before the final siege\textsuperscript{28}. Furthermore, the uses of the term “πολίται” are not limited to the activities of the Constantinopolitans. Citizens of other cities are often presented as active political agents\textsuperscript{29}, thus stressing the importance of civic political life in Doukas’ view.

The dominion of the Palaiologoi in the 15th century not only resembled to a city-state as it consisted of little more than Constantinople and its surroundings, some Aegean islands and Peloponnese, but it seems that it was also conceived as such by a few intellectuals and some members of the byzantine elite. As has already been noted in recent literature on the topic, the two main features of the Palaiologan political program in Constantinople were the detachment from the policy of the Orthodox Church and a new perception of royal authority. The king was mainly viewed as a steward of public affairs who had to take into account the will of his city. The political context of the era was characterized by fluidity but many of the lords and the intellectuals who actively supported the ruling dynasty seem that they identified themselves with the city of Constantinople\textsuperscript{30}. Their wealth was the

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27. Ibid., 231.
28. Ibid., 327.
outcome of a close economic cooperation with the western merchants in Constantinople, while their social status was assured by their high position in the court of the emperor. The Union of the Churches strengthened the royal power over the Orthodox Patriarchate and also served the economic interests of Venice and Genoa in the Eastern Mediterranean. Doukas’ view is similar to the one held by many Byzantine āρχοντες in 15th-century Constantinople. Although he probably spent most of his life in Latin regions of the Aegean, it seems that he considered the city-state of Constantinople as his own “homeland”.

Besides political allegiance, ethnic criteria are sometimes used by Doukas in his chronicle to define romanitas. Ethnicity was usually expressed by Byzantine authors with the terms γένος and ἔθνος. Γένος was frequently used in the sense of family, but it could also denote a group of people who the author believed that they shared a common origin. On the other hand, the members of an ἔθνος did not need to be biologically related as the term was not usually associated with kinship but with common cultural traits such as language or religion. Of course, the connotations of these terms were fluid and sometimes even the same author attributed different meanings to them according to the context. Doukas often refers


32. There’s almost no reference in Doukas’ historical account to Lesvos where he lived for many years at the service of the Gattiluzio family. His silence probably indicates that he didn’t identify himself with either the island or its ruling family.

33. Page, Being Byzantine, 41-42.
to the Roman descent of a person or a group with the term γένος34; he also twice mentions an ἔθνος of the Romans, once in the context of religious juxtaposition with the Ottomans and Islam35 and on another occasion in associating the political misfortunes of Constantinople with those of the Romans36. However, Doukas has no particular interest in the historical roots of the Roman people or in the cultural features of romanitas. There is only one reference in his work to the (Greek) language of the Romans37 and another one to the Roman (Greek) script38. It seems that even the term γένος sometimes has political connotations in his narrative. In the case of the Turks, the allegiance to their ruling dynasty is considered by the author as the key factor in their definition39. The minor importance of ethnic origin in relation to political allegiance is also apparent from his mention of the Genovese Giovanni Giustiniani, the commander of the Byzantine forces during the siege of 1453, as a general of the Romans40.

Neither does the author link Roman identity to any “Hellenic” one. There are very few references to the ancient Greeks in the work and it is obvious that they were considered a foreign people, separated from the Byzantines by a gulf of time and religious difference41. Greek learning, however, is mentioned twice in the chronicle in a positive sense42. Two more references to “Greeks” are probably rhetorical topoi. The first one juxtaposes “Greek” and barbarian in the narration of the fate of the Byzantines held captive by the Turkish allies of John Kantakouzenos during the second civil war43. The second one refers to the anti-unionists, who are characterized as the “dregs of the race of the Greeks”44. Doukas even uses the term “Hellenic”

34. Ducas, 157, 235, 239, 315.
35. Ibid., 187.
36. Ibid., 85.
37. Ibid., 179.
38. Ibid., 235.
39. Ibid., 177: καὶ γὰρ δοσὺν τὸ κατ’ ἐμέ, πολὺ πλέον τιμητέοι τὸ γένος τοῦτο τὴν σήμερον ἀπὸ πορθμοῦ Καλλιουπόλεως ἀχρι τῆς Ἰστροῦ παρ’ δοσὺν ἐν τοῖς τῆς Ἀνατολῆς μέρει τὸ κατοικοῦν, λέγω τὸ ἐπήκοον τοῦ ἀρχηγοῦ τοῦ ἐκ τῶν Ὀθηνίων.
40. Ibid., 357.
41. Ibid., 31, 95.
42. Ibid., 135, 267.
43. Ibid., 57.
44. Ibid., 319: ἡ τρυγία τοῦ γένους τῶν Ἑλλήνων.
as synonymous with “pagan” when he mentions the stance of the anti-
unionists towards the church of Hagia Sophia, on the eve of the fall. He
critically observes that “the great church was viewed by them as a shelter
demons and as a Hellenic (pagan) altar”\textsuperscript{45}. Finally there is one use of
the term “Ἑλληνίδα” which rather refers to the language or to the place of
origin of the woman\textsuperscript{46}.

The term “Graikoi” is often used in the narration of the events in Italy
during the council for the Union of the Churches\textsuperscript{47}. In this context the author
uses the traditional name that Westerners attributed to the Byzantines or
to Greek-speaking people more generally. At this time the term referred
not only to the language but also to the Orthodox religion of hellenophone
Christians\textsuperscript{48}. A different meaning is attributed by Doukas to “Graikoi” in
the context of the debates that took place in Constantinople after the Union
of the Churches. Here the author refers to the unionist priests of the city by
the term “priests of the Graikoi”\textsuperscript{49}.

Doukas designates a Roman political identity that is not grounded
in any connection with a Greek past, culture or origin. Furthermore, his
conception of romanitas is defined in opposition to a stereotypical image
of the Turks, which represent in his narrative the contrasting Other of the
Romans. As has often been noted in the recent literature, identities are
representations of the “self” which are constructed through and not outside
difference. This means that it is only through the relation to the Other, to
what has been called its ‘constitutive outside’, that the ‘positive’ meaning
of any term –and thus its identity- can be constructed\textsuperscript{50}. Doukas’ discourse
about Turkish otherness aims to emphasize and strengthen certain features

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 323: Καὶ ἡ Μεγάλη Ἐκκλησία ὡς καταφύγιον δαιμόνων καὶ βωμὸς ἔλληνικὸς αὐτοῖς ἐλογίζετο.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 59. Cf. infra note 56.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 267, 269, 317, 319.
\textsuperscript{48} S. McKeever, Sailing from Byzantium: Byzantines and Greeks in the Venetian World, in: Identities and Allegiances, ed. Herrin - Saint Guillaume, 291-300, especially 293.
\textsuperscript{49} Ducas, 319.
of the Roman identity. The Turks and their rulers are often characterized as barbarians\(^\text{51}\) and believers in an impure and barbaric religion\(^\text{52}\). The author, recounting the early days of the Turks, observes that their success was due to their love of rapine and injustice both against their own people and even more so against the Christians\(^\text{53}\). He also provides a colourful image of the Turkish raids with the following words: “If they hear the herald’s voice summoning them to the attack – which in their language is called aqin – they descend like a flooding river, unorganised and uninvited, without money and food pouches and most of them without spears and swords. Countless others come running, increasing to tens of thousands the number of the troops, with the majority of them carrying nothing but a club in their hands. They rush against the Christians and seize them like sheep...”\(^\text{54}\).

The author seems to contrast this way of life with the civilized manners of the Constantinopolitans by using an old distinction between the “civilized” Romans and the “uncivilized” barbarians. This contrast between civic life and the barbarian customs of a rural world is also apparent in Doukas’ negative characterization of the elite Turkish troops, the janissaries, which are described as a group of former goatherds, shepherds, cowherds and swineherds, farmers’ children and horse-keepers\(^\text{55}\).

The Turks are equally presented as an immoral and lecherous people. The author highlights this stereotypical image with a colorful description of their sexual practices: “These people are unrestrained and lustful as no other people, incontinent beyond all races and insatiate in licentiousness. They are so inflamed by passion that they never cease unscrupulously and dissolutely from having intercourse by both natural and unnatural means

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51. See, for example, Ducas, 47, 57, 177, 217, 285, 307, 309 and 319.
52. Ibid., 283, 289, 319 and 375, where the author characterizes the Church of Saint Sophia after its conversion into a mosque as “altar of the barbarians and Mohamed’s home”.
53. Ibid., 175-177.
54. Ibid., 177: Καὶ εἰ μόνον τὴν τοῦ κήρυκος φωνὴν ἀκούσωσι ὡς πρὸς ἐπιδρομήν, ὃ καλεῖται κατὰ τὴν αὐτῶν γλῶτταν ἀκκήν, τότε πάντες χύδην καὶ ἄνευ βαλαντίου καὶ ἀκινακῶν αὐτόκλητοι, ἄνευ βαλαντίου καὶ πήρας, οἱ πλεῖστοι καὶ αἰχμῶν καὶ ἀκινακῶν, ἕτεροι πεζοὶ τὴν πορείαν μυριαρίθμους παραβάλλουσι στοιχῆσαντες τέθεισιν, οὐκ ἄλλοι οἱ πλέονες ἀλλ’ ἢ ὡς τούτοις ἐζώγρωον τοὺς ἑκάστος χερσί. Καὶ κατὰ τῶν χριστιανῶν ομοιότατα ὡς πράβατα τούτους ἐξωγρῶν...
55. Ibid., 179.
with females, males and dumb animals. The people of this shameless and inhuman race, moreover, do the following: If they seize a Greek or an Italian woman or a woman of another race or a captive or a deserter, they embrace her as an Aphrodite or Semele, but they detest a woman of the same descent and of their own language as though she were a bear or a hyena”56.

Doukas uses the same stereotypical image of the “lustful Turk” to depict the activities of the Ottoman rulers. The sultans are not only designated as corrupted tyrants, as they finally managed to usurp the imperial power, but they are also presented engaging in lascivious sexual practices. According to the author, Bayazid had gathered in his palace, against their will, many young boys and girls from several Christian states, “living idly and wantonly; he never ceased from lascivious sexual acts, indulging in licentious behaviour with men and women”57. It seems that these manners are considered characteristic of the Turkish rulers as there are several references to similar activities of other sultans or Ottoman princes in the work58. On the other hand, the author contrasts with this behaviour the habits of a typical Roman emperor such as Manuel II Palaiologos, who preferred to study the “divine words”, when he rested in Constantinople unperturbed by the affairs of state, after his resignation from the throne59.

The stereotypical image of the barbarian, infidel, uncivilized, lustful Turk strengthens the distinction between them and the Romans. The construction of identity always involves a symbolic marking of borders separating one particular group from the rest. This reference to the external “other” is essential for the construction of discourses about the superiority or the “normal” behaviour of a particular group in juxtaposition to the

56. Ibid., 59: ... καὶ γὰρ ἀκράτητον τὸ ἔθνος αὐτὸ καὶ οἰστρομανές ὡς σεῦδὲ ἐν τὸν πάντων γενόν, ἀκόλαστον ὑπὲρ πάσας φυλὰς καὶ ἀκόρεστον ἄσωτίαις, τοιούτον γὰρ πυροῦται, ὅτι καὶ κατὰ φύσιν καὶ παρὰ φύσιν ἐν θηλείαις, ἐν ἀφροποιηθέν, ἐν ἀλόγοις ζῴοις ἀδεῶς καὶ ἀκρατῶς μιγνύμενον οὐ παύεται· καὶ ταῦτα τὸ ἀναιδὲς καὶ ἀπάνθρωπον ἔθνος, εἰ Ἑλληνίδα ἢ Ἰταλὴν ἢ ἄλλην τινὰ ἐπαυείται ἢ ἀσελγαίνων καὶ θῆλεσιν. 57. Ibid., 87: αὐτὸς δὲ καθήμενος καὶ κατασπαταλῶν οὐκ ἐπαύετο ἀφροδιάζων, ἐν ἀῤῥένοις ἀσελγαίνων καὶ θῆλεσιν. 58. Ibid., 201, 212, 249. 59. Ibid., 229.
inferiority or the “abnormal” activities of others. The negative features attributed to the Turks contrast with several implied positive qualities that, according to the author, should characterize Roman people. Doukas implies that the Romans should be loyal to their own “pious kings”, their own religion and the city of Constantinople and not to “lustful tyrants”. The author emphasizes the ethnic and cultural boundaries between the two groups in order to strengthen the political identification of the Byzantine Romans with their city. He designates an ideal utopic image of romanitas closely linked with a civic way of life and a set of political and religious values which are also perceived in an urban context and in juxtaposition to the “abnormal” behaviour of the Turks. His discourse is also inherently defensive since it rises and gains its strength through the contrast with another group which is perceived as a threat to the survival of the Romans.

But how does Doukas interpret the Turkish victories over the Byzantines and their conquest of Constantinople, which marked the end of the Roman state? The author argues that Turkish aggression was a punishment from Divine Providence for the sins of the Christians. According to him, other conquered Christian peoples were punished for their continuous insurrections against the Romans, while the latter had to be chastened for their sinful behaviour when Michael VIII Palaiologos ascended the throne. At first they took oaths to defend John IV Laskaris and never to join Palaiologos in rebellion, but later they completely reversed their oaths by embracing Michael VIII as their king after blinding the former young emperor. This traditional Christian view of history as the work of Divine Providence is a recurrent theme in Doukas’ chronicle. Several events are interpreted through

60. Cf. Scott, Multiculturalism, 6.
62. Ducas, 49.
the intervention of a governing or chastening Providence63 or even as a manifestation of God’s wrath for human sins64. The way in which the Turks, according to Doukas, eventually managed to enter Constantinople through a small unguarded gate is also interpreted within the same conceptual framework. The author recounts the fierce Byzantine resistance on the city walls during the final Turkish assault and he comments that “(the Romans) were at fault, as God willed that the Turks would be brought in by another way”65.

The role played by Divine Providence in the narrative stresses the didactic character of his chronicle. However, there is no reference in his work to the traditional medieval conception of human history as a sequence of four empires or earthly kingdoms. Doukas seems to keep a distance from this linear and eschatological perception of history, which identified the fall of Constantinople with the end of the fourth empire and thus with the Apocalypse and the expected end of the world66. His scant interest in prophecies is evident from the very few references to portents in the work. The author recounts in detail a dream of Murad II foretelling his own death67 and he also refers to the appearance of a comet before the battle of Ankara (1402) – although he does not explicitly correlate it with the defeat of Bayazid68. Moreover, it has already been noted that his long lamentation on the fall of Constantinople forms a commentary on the event rather than an exposition of prophetic utterances69. On the other hand, Doukas sometimes criticizes the superstitions of the people of Constantinople and their beliefs

63. See, for example, ibid., 47, 87, 177, 283, 359.
64. Ibid., 271, 363, 365.
65. Ibid., 359: ἔλαθον, δι’ ἄλλης ὀδοῦ τούτους εἰσάξας ὁ θελήσας Θεός.
68. Ibid., 93-95.
69. Ibid., 385-391. Cf. TURNER, Pages, 358.
in prophecies about the expected end of their kingdom\textsuperscript{70}. It seems that in his view the end of human history is not predictable and that God’s plans for the future of the Roman people remain unknown.

Historical works reconstruct experiences through their narrative representation, elaborating in the process a relationship between the narrator, the past and a community of readers. Thus they become means of identifying a person or a group within a broader context, not only providing answers to questions of identity but also outlining plans for future actions\textsuperscript{71}. Doukas’ historical narrative deals with the memory of 1453 by insisting on a particular political identity which is closely associated with a perception of Constantinople as a Roman and Christian city-state. This discourse gains its strength through the contrast it makes with a stereotypical image of the Turks. Moreover, Doukas’ conception of history as the work of Divine Providence is not directly linked to an apocalyptic discourse that identified the fall of Constantinople with the expected end of the earthly world. His view is very close to that held by Thomas Palaiologos, the cardinals Isidore of Kiev and especially Bessarion who sought a Western crusade against the Turks in order to restore the Byzantine state. The fall of Constantinople was interpreted by them as a loss to the “infidels” of a Christian European city that had to be recaptured. This political program for the ‘Hellenic rescue’ remained alive for at least two decades after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople and circles of unionist intellectuals in Italy and in Latin Greece actively promoted it. Pope Pius II even declared an anti-Turkish crusade in 1458 but he eventually found no support from the Western monarchs, who were all divided by various disputes\textsuperscript{72}. It seems that Doukas’ historical narrative, which associated a version of romanitas with the Christian city-state of Constantinople, was addressed mainly to this circle of readers.

On the other hand, the historical work of George Sphrantzes was written

\textsuperscript{70} Ducas, 299, 365.


by a moderate anti-unionist, who opposed the Union of the Churches mainly
for political reasons as he believed that it had led to the Turkish reaction
and finally to the conquest of Constantinople. His chronicle, which covers
the period between 1413 and 1477, has been characterized as “memoirs”
since it is basically a record of his own experiences. The author narrates
his personal life and gives an account of his actions as a high-ranking
official in the service of Manuel and Constantine Palaiologos. After the fall
of Constantinople he served Thomas Palaiologos in the Peloponnese and
ended up in Corfu where in 1468 he became monk. In the 16th century, the
metropolitan of Monemvasia, Makarios Melissenos, compiled an extended
version of the work which is known as the Maius Chronicle.

In contrast to Doukas’ narrative, Sphrantzes makes no reference to
civic political life or to Constantinople as a Roman and Christian city-state.
A passage where the author mentions that the Palaiologos family ruled over
Constantinople for one hundred ninety-four years, ten months and four
days is perhaps the only exception. However with this wording Sphrantzes
could simply refer to the reign of the dynasty over the Byzantines since
the beginning of this period coincides with the coronation of Michael
VIII in 1258, three years before the recapture of Constantinople in 1261.
There’s also no negative image of the Turks in the chronicle and simply
the typical phrase “lord of the impious” is often used for the Ottoman
sultan. Moreover Sphrantzes avoids almost any use of the term “Roman”
or its derivatives, with the exception of two references in the context of

73. Georgii Sphrantzeae, Chronicon, ed. R. MAISANO, Rome 1990, 80 (hereafter:
Sphrantzes): ... η τῆς συνόδου δουλεία αἰτία μία καὶ πρώτη καὶ μεγάλη εἰς τὸ νὰ γένηται
η κατὰ τῆς Πόλεως τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἐξόδος καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτην πάλιν ἡ πολιορκία καὶ η
αἰχμαλωσία καὶ τοιαύτη καὶ τοιαύτη συμφορὰ ήμῶν. The author also uses a metaphor
to highlight his own view on the Union of the Churches. He declares his preference for the
old central street of Constantinople (Μέση ὁδὸς) which ends at the church of Hagia Sophia
instead of a new street discovered by others. Cf. Sphrantzes, 80.

74. On Sphrantzes see especially MAISANO, Chronicon, 1*-51*. M. HINTERBERGER,
Autobiographische Traditionen in Byzanz (WBS XXII), Vienna 1999, 331-43 and PHILIPPIDES
-HANAK, The Siege, 139-152 with detailed references to older literature.

75. Sphrantzes, 134: Ἦχον δὲ καὶ ἐβασίλευσεν ταύτην δὴ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν τὸ
τοιτοῦτο γένος τῶν Παλαιολόγων χρόνοις ἐνατὸν ἐνενήκοντα τέσσαρας καὶ μήνας δέκα
καὶ ἡμέρας δ’.

76. Ibid., 170, 176: ο τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἐξάρχων. Cf. ibid., 188, 192: ὁ τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἄρχων.

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conflicts in the Peloponnese. Here the author juxtaposes the “miserable” Romans to the “most evil and naïve race of the Albanians”\(^{77}\), recounting the ambiguous stance of the latter during the confrontation between Thomas and Demetrios Palaiologos, and he also mentions the cooperation of some Romans in Patras with the Venetians against the Turks in 1464\(^{78}\). There’s also no reference to Ἕλληνες or Γραικοὶ in the chronicle or to any event of the ancient Greek or Roman past.

Furthermore, Sphrantzes does not narrate the events of the siege of Constantinople or the last fierce battle on the walls before the final Turkish victory. He simply records the date and the hour of the fall of the city and the death of Constantine Palaiologos, remarking that at that time he was not himself present as the emperor had sent him to another area of Constantinople\(^{79}\). This silence is striking, especially if we take into account his role as an elder statesman and member of the Byzantine ruling elite.

His own high social status and his close links with the imperial family are often stressed in the chronicle. Sphrantzes emphasizes his personal connection with Constantine Palaiologos by using the typical phrase “my despot/king and my master” for the last emperor\(^{80}\). Besides his own king, the rulers of Trebizond also bear the royal title in his historical narrative, thus probably indicating the byzantine origin of their power\(^{81}\). The author often uses the first person plural (ἡμεῖς) when he mentions his own activities as an official implying that he acted as an agent of a ruling elite around

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\(^{77}\) Ibid., 154.

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 178.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 134: Καὶ τῇ καθημερινῇ μαίων, ἡμέρα γη, ὃς τῆς ἡμέρας ἄρχῃ, ἀπῆρε τὴν Πόλιν ὁ ἀμηρᾶς ἐν ἥ ὁ δήμος καὶ ἄλλοι τῆς Πόλεως καὶ ὁ μακαρίτης αὐθέντης μου κύριος Κωνσταντίνος βασιλεὺς ὁ Παλαιολόγος σκοτωθεὶς ἐπέθανεν, ἐμοὶ πλησίον αὐτοῦ ὥν ἐφερεθέντος τῇ ὥρᾳ ἑκείνη, ἀλλὰ προστάζει ἑκείνου εἰς ἑπισήμους δήθεν ὦλου μέρους τῆς Πόλεως. This absence of any reference to the military operations has led some scholars to the assumption that there may actually have been a separate lost diary written by Sphrantzes which was later used by Makarios Melissenos for the lengthy narration of the siege in the Maius chronicle. However, it now seems certain that the main source of Melissenos’ account was the letter sent to Pope Nicholas V by the bishop of Chios Leonardo Giustiniani. See on the subject Philippides - Hanak, The Siege, 144, 148-149 with references to older literature.

\(^{80}\) See, for example, Sphrantzes, 40, 42, 60, 62, 76, 106, 112, 132, 134, 138.

\(^{81}\) Ibid., 30, 108, 172.
the emperor. The lengthy narration of a debate between some lords and Constantine Palaiologos about court hierarchy is also revealing of his interest in occupying a higher position very close to the ruler. Sphrantzes presents himself to disagree with the appointment of two of Lucas Notaras’ sons in high offices as he was worried about his own status. This attitude was typical of the members of the Byzantine elite, who always sought ways to climb up in the court hierarchy and gain the imperial favour.

It seems that the Fall was experienced by him as a dramatic event that also caused the collapse of his own world. The big rupture between the present and the past was a traumatic situation that he could not easily handle. The events of the siege of Constantinople were the turning point in this transition and the absence of any reference to them in the chronicle could be interpreted as a conscious choice, wishing as he did to forget them. The Fall left an indelible mark on his life and made the years that he had spent as an elder statesman a lost “golden” age which was ended violently by the Turkish conquest of the Byzantine capital.

Sphrantzes deals with this traumatic situation by relying mainly on his strong Christian faith. He views himself as a faithful Christian who had to suffer patiently in his life and be chastened by God for his sins. The author begins his chronicle by stating that it would have been well for him if he had not been born or if he had died in his childhood and this statement is further clarified thereafter. Sphrantzes narrates several tragic incidents in his personal life, such as the loss of his five children, his capture by the Turks during the fall of Constantinople and the suffering from a serious illness in his last days. All these events are interpreted by him as divine punishments for his own sins. A strong interest in religious matters is further revealed by several scriptural references in the work and by a lengthy report of the life and miracles of his godmother, Saint Thomais. Sphrantzes also cites his own formal expression of faith when he became monk and retired to a

82. For example, ibid., 40, 170, 176.
83. Ibid., 124-130.
84. Ibid., 128.
85. Ibid., 4.
86. Ibid., 134.
87. Ibid., 182, 194.
88. Ibid., 46-52.
monastery in Corfu, where he finally ended his life. Finally the concluding remark of the work indicates the typical Christian mental horizons of the author: Sphrantzes wishes that he will not be deprived of God’s compassion in the Final Judgement since he has used all available means to purify his soul.

The absence of almost any reference to a romanitas also implies that the authority of the Romans was regarded as a temporary and earthly state of affairs and that Orthodox Christians should continue their lives until the expected end of the world and the coming of the heavenly kingdom. The older surviving manuscript of the work dates from the late sixteenth century but it seems that it already had a wide circulation at that time as it constituted the core of a Peloponnesian brief chronicle written in 1512. The compilation and the circulation of the so-called Maius Chronicle (1573-1576) further widened the influence of the narrative. Makarios Melissenos, the compiler of this long version, explicitly familiarized his audience with the succession of kingdoms in human history: “As the kingdom of the Assyrians was overthrown by the Babylonians and theirs by the Persians and the Persian kingdom by the Macedonians, and theirs by the Romans so the Roman kingdom was overthrown by the Ottomans. The end of the Ottomans or otherwise of the Muslims will come at an appropriate and predefined time as they will be overthrown by the blonde race.”

During the 15th century the Patriarchate clearly followed its own policy seeking ways to coexist with the Ottoman power thus ensuring its own influence over the Balkans and the eastern Europe. Several anti-unionist intellectuals expressed views similar to Sphrantzes’ outlook, dissociating the

89. Ibid., 184.
90. Ibid., 194.
91. MAISANO, Chronicon, 59*-67*.
93. Cf. KIOSSOPOULOU, Βασιλείας ἡ Οἰκουμής, 58-77.
future of the Orthodox Church from the fortunes of the Byzantine state. Joseph Bryennios, for example, distanced himself from the Roman imperial legacy and considered Constantinople as mainly a religious centre of the Orthodox world. Moreover, he perceived his contemporary city as almost a large complex of monasteries and churches with strict hierarchies under the rule of the patriarch, who cared for the souls of the faithful.94

The same view was held by the first patriarch of Constantinople after the Ottoman conquest. George Gennadios-Scholarios avoided any reference to Romans in his writings after 1453 thus disconnecting the present of the Orthodox community from the Byzantine imperial past. His main political goal was to designate a religious Oikoumene with Constantinople at the centre that unified the scattered Orthodox Greek-speaking communities. In this way the patriarchate could be incorporated in the Ottoman system of governance as the overseer of the Orthodox subjects of the sultan.95 Scholarios in a lament for the fall of Constantinople familiarizes his flock with the new political context by stating that the paradise should be considered as the “true” homeland of the Orthodox Christians while the sufferings of the earthly life should be viewed as just a temporary condition.96

Sphrantzes’ silence about romanitas is another example of the same Orthodox view that deviated from the Roman political tradition. It seems that the author of the so-called Minus chronicle relied on his strong Christian


faith in order to face the new situation that emerged after the Fall and the collapse of his own world. The comparison with the chronicle of Doukas reveals the deep rupture between the unionists and the anti-unionists regarding not only religious issues but also the future of the Byzantine people. While some of the former continued even after 1453 to view Constantinople as a Roman and Christian city that had to be recaptured, the latter disregarded the Roman political legacy and relied mainly on their Orthodox world view.
Το άρθρο πραγματεύεται βυζαντινές προσλήψεις της ρωμαϊκής ταυτότητας αμέσως μετά το 1453, εστιάζοντας στις ιστορικές αφηγήσεις του Δούκα και του Σφραντζή. Ο Δούκας προβάλλει συστηματικά μια πολιτική ρωμαϊκή ταυτότητα που συνδέεται με την Κωνσταντινούπολη και ορίζεται σε αντιπαράθεση προς μια στερεότυπη εικόνα των Τούρκων, οι οποίοι αποτελούν τον κατεξοχήν «Άλλος» στην αφήγησή του. Οι απόψεις του είναι παρόμοιες με εκείνες πολλών ενωτικών διανοούμενων που προωθούσαν μετά το 1453 ένα σταυροφορικό πολιτικό πρόγραμμα ανάκτησης της Κωνσταντινούπολης και επανίδρυσης του Βυζαντινού χράτους. Αντίθετα ο Σφραντζής αποφεύγει τις αναφορές στον όρο «Ρωμαίος» και στα παράγωγά του. Η άλωση της Κωνσταντινούπολης βιώθηκε από τον ίδιο ως μια τραυματική κατάσταση, ένα οριακό γεγονός που σηματοδότησε το ιστορικό τέλος του Ρωμαϊκού χράτους και σημάδεψε την πορεία της δικής του ζωής. Ο Σφραντζής αντιμετωπίζει τον εαυτό του ως ένα πιστό ορθόδοξο χριστιανό που τιμωρήθηκε από τον Θεό για τις αμαρτίες του. Οι αντιλήψεις του είναι τυπικά ορθόδοξες, καθώς ανθενοτικοί διανοούμενοι του 15ου αιώνα συχνά αποστασιοποιούνται από την ρωμαϊκή πολιτική κληρονομιά και αποσυνδέουν το μέλλον της κοινότητας των ορθοδόξων από τις τύχες του Βυζαντινού χράτους.