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The fascination of the West and the ambivalence of the Byzantines towards it through the case of Demetrios Kydones

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the case of the politician and scholar Demetrios Kydones as typical of the fascination that the West exerted on the Byzantines, but also of the ambivalence towards it. First, there is a brief overview of the events of his life, which encouraged his contact with the Latins. A more detailed reference was made to his translation, writing, and teaching. In our view, his provocative positions were the reason he had not received the recognition he deserved to this day. His most important value lies in the fact that, in an age of hostility, he sought to bring Byzantium closer to the West by presenting logical and valid arguments beyond petty political pursuits and prejudices.

Keywords: Demetrios Kydones, unification of the Churches, *Apology*, anti-Hesychasts, anti-Palamist, Latins

Introduction

Demetrios Kydones (c. 1324-c. 1397/98) was one of the most important Byzantine scholars, with remarkable authorial and translation production. His family's close relations with the imperial court largely determined his "political" career as well as his personal development. However, his personal value was the reason he managed to emerge as one of the most important figures in the political and intellectual life of the late Byzantine years¹. In the history of philosophy, he does not seem to have found the recognition that he deserves. An overall view of his work allows us (A) to detect elements from Western culture (which fascinated the Byzantines), and (B) to understand how he conceived the possibility of opening up pathways for communication and dialogue between these two different worlds (Byzantium and the West).

The mediator (*toīs prágmasi mesázōn*)

The close and long-term relations of the family of Demetrios Kydones with the Court was the reason why, after the death of his father, he turned to Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos,² asking for protection and financial support for his family. Pursuing a career at the Palace was possible thanks to his previous humanitarian studies and knowledge in other scientific fields.³ One reason he quickly rose through the court

¹ Rigo, 2011, 245.

² He formally ascended the throne in 1347 as co-emperor of John V. Essentially, however, he had been on the throne as early as 1341, as the previous emperor, Andronikos III, had not formally nominated his minor son, John V as heir, and thus there was a political vacuum. In 1347 it was decided that the (still minor) John V Paleologos would be the first Emperor and John VI Kantakouzenos would be the co-emperor. Although this decision formally ended the civil strife, it actually ended when the latter abdicated in 1354 and was ordained a monk.

³ He also had considerable mathematical knowledge· characteristically, he wrote commentaries on the work of ancient Greek mathematicians, as can be seen from his correspondence. See Hunger, 1994, 60-61.

hierarchy was his training in rhetoric, his familiarity with classic texts, and his compliance with the rules of drafting documents (such as the principle of *variatio*, e.g., in grammatical choices, stylistic and stylistic formation).⁴ His ingenuity, erudition, and personal perspective convinced the emperor to accept him in his court. Thus, he became a "mediator" (representative of the court).⁵

The civil war (1341-1347) between Ioannis Kantakou-zenos and the former Empress, Anne of Savoy, which followed the death of Andronikos III, contributed to the loss of revenue and territories on behalf of the Byzantine Empire. Economic exhaustion led to widespread political unrest. During this period, Kydones served his benefactor steadily and faithfully. This implies, on the one hand, that he strengthened his position next to the Emperor; on the other, he quickly became a target of his rivalries. The supporters of Anna and of minor John V, the so-called Zealots, took over Thessaloniki and turned openly against the authority of Kantakouzenos, the nobles and all his supporters (1345).⁶ Kydones, an ardent Kantakouzenos supporter, was expelled from Constantinople and fled in Veroia, which was ruled by Kantakouzenos' son, Manuel, and afterwards in Thrace (1346). He attempted to avoid conflict and, simultaneously, to prevent standoff, which incurred royal displeasure. Nonetheless, with Kantakou-zenos' rise to power (1356), Kydones regained his previous position.

Kydones continued serving as a mediator even when John V Paleologos (reigned 1354-1391) ascended the throne. Despite efforts made by the latter to resist the ever-increasing threat from the East, Byzantine resistance was constantly retreating. On the face of it, Kydones withdrew from the Court (c. 1383). In less than a decade, the throne was taken over by his former student and close friend Manuel II Palaiologos (r. 1391-1425),

⁴ Hunger, 1997, 375.

⁵ This title is rather vague as to its exact scope of authority, but it seems to have implied a mediating role between the emperor and his subjects, something similar to the current position of a Prime Minister. Kydones himself through his work seems to avoid any reference to his title or duties.

⁶ Kydones wrote a lament for those who lost their lives in this encounter: *Demetri Cydoni Monodia Occisorum Thessalonicae*, in P.G., CIX, cols.639-652. See in the present below.

who restored Kydones in his position. Nonetheless, his service under the influence of Palaiologos (who supported the union of the Churches in order to repel the Ottoman threat), and his overall positive attitude towards the West, made an easy target of public discontent; he was accused of Catholicism. Moreover, within a climate of increasing hostility toward Latin Catholicism, Kydones was forced to resign (1396). He retired permanently to the island of Crete.

The contacts with the Western world

Thus, Kydones acted as a mediator not only between the Emperor and his followers, but also between the Byzantine state and the Western world. Indeed, he himself was one of the scholars who remained consistently open and positive towards the West. This did not arise from necessity, like that of John Palaiologos, or from blind submission to political authority, but from deeper and more substantial motives.

Kydones' first contact with Western civilization was when he first moved to Constantinople in 1340. There he began studying Latin by Latin priests, specifically by Dominican monks of the monastery of *Panagia tou Peran*. It is assumed that Ioannis Kantakouzinus maintained contacts with this monastery. During his presence at the Court he was surrounded by multitudes of Western mercenaries, ambassadors and merchants. In this context, he was looking for means of direct communication, without relying on interpreters, who (as he claimed) often make mistakes and do not convey the content of a discussion accurately.

Certainly, his motivation is not exclusively derived from his erudition and desire to serve his duties properly. We could consider the possibility that (to a great extent) in this decision he was prompted, or at least encouraged, by the Emperor himself, since at that time he was communicating with the Pope, identifying possible avenues of unification. Kydones remained an ardent supporter of the Union, notwithstanding the majority of the Byzantine clergy and people had already

expressed intense opposition for such a prospect.⁷ Before convening an ecumenical council, the Emperor demanded to be consulted and represented by someone who could trust; he preferred a reliable official who could participate in direct discussions with the Westerners, and who had knowledge of their positions as well as of their differences with the Orthodox Church, and who could encounter the rhetorical techniques they used. Thus, any additional knowledge of the views of Latins Westerners in general would be of utmost importance for the Emperor.

Kydones' apprenticeship at the Monastery of Peran went beyond some lessons in Latin. It was also extended to a deeper understanding of Western theology. Thus, a few years later, in 1354, he traveled to Italy to study the writings of the most important medieval theologians. These journeys will repeat and expand: overall, he visited Italy three times in the years 1369-71, 1389-91 and 1396-7. In the first of these three trips, he is believed to have received an invitation from the Pope himself to join his court (1369), but rejected it. The Pope expressed his respect for Kydones by honorably offering him the *officium* of being a member of the Roman Catholic clergy. Moreover, in 1391, he also received Venetian citizenship after a series of trips to the city. From the above, it is obvious that his contact with the West were direct, regular, and based on a mutual and sincere appreciation between him and the representatives of Western Christianity and the Western world in general⁸.

⁷ Ostrogorsky, 1978, 359.

⁸ For a brief overview of Kydonis' life and his first contacts with the West, see Hinterberger M., «Apó to orthódoxo Vizántio stin katholikí Dísi. Tésseri diaphoretikí drómi»: in: *To Vizántio Kai I Aparkhés Tis Evrópis*, Ethnikó Ídrima Erevnón, Athens, 2004, 20-23 and also Kianka, Fr., "The Apology of Demetrius Cydones: A Fourteenth-Century Autobiographical Source", *Byzantine Studies / Etudes Byzantines*, Vol. 7:1, 1980, 57-60 · Kóltsiou, A., *Dimítriou Kidóni metáphrasi tou psevdavgoustíniou Soliloqía*, Akadimía Athinón. Kéntron Erévnis tis Ellinikís kai Latinikís Grammatías, Athens, 2005, 4-7.

His translation, writing and teaching contribution

In the history of philosophy Kydones is mainly known as the first who understood the task to translate the works of Thomas Aquinas into Greek. This project was essentially offered to him while being taught Latin, since the Dominican monks – with the intention not only to improve his Latin by studying a well-written text, but also to drive him into a more direct contact with the works and the thought of great theologians of the West – suggested him to study and translate Aquinas' *Summa contra gentiles* (or *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium*)⁹. Written between the years 1259 – 1265, this work presents in four books the basic axioms of Catholic doctrine: the indisputability of monotheism, the attributes of the divine, the creation of the natural world and of human beings, the relationship of creations with their creator *et al.* Through this first translation attempt, Kydones immerses himself not only in Aquinas's language, but also in his way of elaborating, developing and proving his positions. He presented his translation in 1354 under the title of *Katá Ellénōn biblíou* (*Κατά Ελλήνων βιβλίου*) and with the approval of the emperor, he expanded his translation activity to Aquinas's other works, some of them of smaller importance, some of them of greater, such as the *Summa Theologiae*¹⁰.

In addition, he also translated the following treatises of one of the most important theologians of Latin patrology, Saint Augustine of Hippo (5th century): the *Epistolae*, the *Contra Iulianum*, the *Tractatus in Ioannis Euangelium*, the *Sententiae*,

⁹ Nicol, 2005, 404 · As he himself characterizes this work in the First Apology, 362.5-6: «τό βιβλίον τῶν ἐκείνου τό τελεώτατον καί τῆς σοφίας τόν ἀνδρός οἶον ἄνθος» ("τό biblíon tō-n ekeínou τό teleótaton kaí tēs sophías tón andrós oíon ánthos"). Later, however, in *Epistle* n.333 (37 - 45) he reflects on his translation, stating that he was not satisfied with the result because, when he proceeded with it, he did not yet have sufficient knowledge of Latin and, in addition, he did not have access to good manuscripts.

¹⁰ Kóltsiou, 2005, 29-30.

the *De fide ad Petrum* and the *Soliloquia animae ad deum*¹¹. Some of these have been confirmed by modern research to be genuine works of Augustine. The *Contra Iulianum* was translated into Greek under the title *Ho autós Aúgoustinos en tō̄ prós Ioulianón epískopon prōtō biblíō* ('Ο αὐτός Αύγουστίνος ἐν τῷ πρὸς Ἰουλιανόν ἐπίσκοπον πρῶτῳ βιβλίῳ'); it includes five short passages from a work addressed to Julian, the bishop of Aeclanum, located in central Italy. However, the passages Kydones selected do not seem to correspond to those we identify in versions of the original work. This leads us to the following conclusion: perhaps, he had in hand a text that has not survived.

The last three of the aforementioned works are today considered pseudo-Augustinian. The *Sententiae or Liber sententiarum ex operibus S. Augustini delibatarum*, a didactic anthology of opinions is attributed to Augustine. However, it has been written by Prospero of Aquitaine (modern France). It is translated under the title *Toũ makariou Augoustinou episkopou Hippōnos kephálaia ek tō̄n autoũ lógōn parekblēthénta, ermēneuthénta dé ek toũ latinikou par' emou Dēmētriou* (Τοῦ μακαρίου Αύγουστίνου ἐπισκόπου Ἰππωνος κεφάλαια ἐκ τῶν αὐτοῦ λόγων παρεκβληθέντα, ἐρμηνευθέντα δὲ ἐκ τοῦ λατινικοῦ παρ' ἐμοῦ Δημητρίου). Likewise, the *De fide ad Petrum*, a compendium of the theology of the patristic times written by Bishop Roispis Fulgentius (c. 523 - 532) is translated as *ως Toũ autoũ makariou prós Pétron perí pisteōs* (Τοῦ αὐτοῦ μακαρίου πρὸς Πέτρον περί πίστεως). Finally, the work *Soliloquia animae ad deum* was another pseudo-Augustinian text, written in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, which Kydones translates by referring to it as *Loyi* (Λόγοι) or *Monóloyi* (Μονόλογοι)¹².

Kydones found Augustine's works useful for his attempts to dispute the defenders of Palamas.¹³ The latter considered that there is nothing uncreated between God and creation. For

¹¹ As above, 21-32.

¹² For a detailed presentation of the work, see A. Koltsiou, *Dimítriou Kidóni metáphrasi tou psevdavgoustíniou Soliloqia*, *Akadimía Athinón. Kéntron Ereúnis tis Ellinikís kai Latinikís Grammatías*, Athens, 2005.

¹³ Polémis, 2014, 256-258.

Augustine, «[p]άσα οὐσία ἢ μί Θεός οὐσα κτίσμα ἐστίν, και ἡ μί κτίσμα οὐσα Θεός ἐστίν» («[π]ᾶσα γὰρ οὐσία ἢ μὴ Θεός οὐσα κτίσμα ἐστίν, και ἡ κτίσμα μὴ οὐσα Θεός ἐστίν», *De Trinitate* A', VI 9, 17-18); that is, the anti-Palamics, drawing on Thomas Aquinas and Augustine, equated divine knowledge or intellect with the essence of God. With the exception of Augustine, Kydones was not attracted by the theology of most early Christian Fathers. For this reason he did not translate their works into Greek, apart from the *Symbolum fidei de Trinitate* of Saint Hilary Pictavius / Hilary of Poitiers (c. 310 – 367). For Kydones', the concise nature of the work and its clear focus on the subject of the trinity seen from the prism of the Catholic Church, as well as the personality of the author (who had good knowledge not only of Latin, but also of Greek), could advance dialogue and communication between of Eastern and Western Christians.

When it comes to early Middle Ages texts, Kydones expressed interest in the *Homilies* of Pope Gregory I (540 - 604), also known as Saint Gregory the Great, or, to the Eastern Church, as Saint Gregory the Dialogue.¹⁴ More specifically, he received this cognomen from the four-volume *Book of Dialogues* (*Liber Dialogorum*, c. 593-594), which contains references to lives, miracles and prophecies of important saints, well known to the common people of the Catholic Church. Kydones' interest for Saint Gregory could be attributed to the latter's emphasis on maintaining a unifying attitude between the two Churches, accepting at the same time the conclusions of the Fifth Ecumenical Synod, which took place in Constantinople in 553, insisting on adhering to the decisions of the previous Synod (451), which had given the primacy among the Churches in Constantinople to the Confession of Faith. Therefore, in the eyes of Kydones, the Pope was a great theologian and person; he was a great leader of the Catholic Church; he should be considered a man of the spirit, and, simultaneously, an inspirational figure for the Byzantines.

Among other important personalities of the West, Kydones showed interest in the work of Anselm of Canterbury (1033 - 1109), who had already been recognised as one of the founders

¹⁴ Kydones translated the 26th speech from this work.

of Scholasticism. He translated his following works: *De processione Spiritus Sancti* (1102), and *Epistola de sacrificio azymi et fermentati* (1106–7). In the former, Anselm argued about the emanation of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, as developed in debates that took place during the Council of Bari (1098). This was an effort made by Western and Eastern Christians together, striving to end the Schism of 1054. In this particular work the arguments articulated by the Catholic church in favor of the *filioque* are discussed.¹⁵ Likewise, the epistle *De azymo et fermentato epistula ad Walerannum Newenburgensi episcopum*, refers to one of the main differences between the two Churches: the type of bread used in the Holy Eucharist. As opposed to the Orthodox, who use leavened bread, the Catholics chose unleavened bread, considering that in the Last Supper this was the choice of Jesus and his pupils. Thus, we could assume that Kydones presented to the Byzantines the *rationale* behind the two main differences between the Eastern and Western Church; he attempted to highlight viewpoints that contributed to this polarization. Kydones sought to attenuate divides, restoring dialogue, which (in his mind) would significantly contribute to the much-desired unity of the Christian world.

Much closer to Kydones' era was Petrus Pictaviensis of Poitiers (Pierre de Poitiers, 1130?-1205). From him he translated the *Genealogia Christi ab Adam*. This work presents Bible characters, from Adam to Christ, through genealogical tables. Posterior to Petrus was Riccoldo da Monte di Croce / Riccoldo Pennini da Montecroce (c. 1243–1320), a Dominican monk who was an apologist and served as a missionary in Eastern countries. In the East, Montecroce came into contact with the Christian communities of the Maronites, Nestorians, Monothelites and Jacobites and focused on their differences. Especially during his stay in Baghdad, he had studied the Qur'an closely; when he returned to Florence (1300–1301) Montecroce wrote the treatise *Improbatio Alcorani*¹⁶. This is

¹⁵ Kóltsiou, 2005, 30.

¹⁶ For more, see “RICCOLDO da Montecroce” in: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani S.p.A.

the work that attracted Kydones' interest and made it popular through his translation. Although it is certainly a polemic against Islam, at the same time it provides arguments that challenge prejudices shared by Christians against Muslims. Montecroce urges his readers to recognise the profound influences of Christianity on the foundations of the new religion. In the person of Montecroce Kydones saw a Christian brother, saddened by the divisions and hostilities between Christians. Like Montecroce, Kydones realised that individuals who strive to understand in depth the differences between Christians, or even between Christianity and other religions, must seek sincere acquaintance and dialogue between the opposite ends.

The last text Kydones translated into Greek was Bernardus Guidonis' (+1331) hagiological work on Thomas Aquinas *Legenda S. Thomae de Aquino, de orto, vita et obito ac gestis eius*. Bernardus Guidonis, or Bernard Gui, or Bernard Guion (c. 1261-1331), was a reputable and prolific theologian of the Catholic Church. Additionally, he was also Inquisitor (1307 – 1323) and bishop in Langtok (present-day Lodève). Obviously, this work interested Kydones in the wider context of the intention of familiarizing the Byzantine world with the spirit of Thomism.

Kydones' efforts demonstrate a steadfast will to remove obstacles created by the use of a certain discourse within the Christian world.¹⁷ In his view, the incomplete knowledge of Latin, and the lack of knowledge about the history and culture of the Western world in general on behalf of the Byzantines had erected walls that could be demolished only through open dialogue with the West. The Great Schism and the spread of heresies contributed to the weakening of Christianity; conversely strengthened its opponents. The end of the division between East and West and a re-approach was an urgent need; it should be based on an objective examination of the positions and their content, constituting irrelevant the discourse upon which this split was justified. While his views remained largely

https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/riccoldo-da-montecroce_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/

¹⁷ *Apologia* I, 382, 15-17.

popular, and (for this reason) Kydones' vision was not come to fruition, it should be made clear that with his translated works he managed to become an important transporter of Western theological thought (as well as of Scholasticism) in late Byzantium.¹⁸

Kydones was not merely a translator of Latin texts; he also produced a good deal of treatises. He is mainly known for his *Apology* (*Apologia pro vita sua*, 1360), his collection of *Epistles*, and his *Exhortations*. The former is his own public apology regarding his conversion to Catholicism.¹⁹ It begins with references to his youth, and to the education he received; he also mentions the first years in his service as a mediator. He sheds light on the reasons that brought him closer with Latin, as well as with Western culture; he recalls the days he began working for the Emperor, where he had to deal with emissaries of other states. This was the moment he realised that he should learn the official - international language of his time (the Latin language); he could not entirely rely on translators and he could also participate more easily in official governmental missions. Then, it became clear what a great contribution would be for the state if Byzantine officers had acquired profound knowledge concerning the way of thinking and the beliefs of the Latins. They could act as mediators on a cultural and religious basis, opening up pathways for dialogue and communication between the two opposite ends. Byzantines and Latins, he believed, should not be regarded as enemies; both were members of the same society and the same Church from the very beginning²⁰.

Kydones believed that (to a large extent) discord was the consequence of linguistic misinterpretations and stereotypes

¹⁸ Kóltsiou, 2005, 15.

¹⁹ The one he wrote in 1357, was the first Apology, which referred to his positive attitude towards the West and the Latin Church. As evidenced by the use of the third person possessive pronoun, the title was not given by the author himself, but by the scholars of the work, who had to briefly refer to the specific work. The second apology was written about a decade later (1371) and unlike the first, it is not of a public nature, but addressed to a friend, see Rigo, 2011, 247-260.

²⁰ Rigo, 2011, 255-260.

reproduced through propaganda.²¹ Just as the term *Greek* was used to refer to the pagans, likewise the term *Latin* was a connotation to heretic Christians, who sometimes were despised even more than the Muslims. Thus he argues in favor of redefining the terminology used on behalf of the Byzantines while addressing the Latins; he describes the various attacks he himself had received from Byzantines, accusations of “treason”, of allying with the West. On the other hand, he clearly depicts himself as a Byzantine patriot, declaring his profound faith in God. In conclusion, his *Apology* is a justification of the choices Kydones made; he eloquently explains the reasons he succeeded in becoming a mediator between two rival worlds²².

As an official of the Court and a person with contacts from the world of politics and intellect, Kydones had in his possession a collection of 450 Letters,²³ which he wrote - and revised - several times before sending them to recipients (mostly to important persons of his time; that is, to members of the Paleologian family, such as Manuel, Heleni,²⁴ Ioannis, Theodorus or Andronikos, as well as to other important scholars, such as Theodoros Metochitis and Ioannis Laskaris Kaloferos). These letters certainly constitute a valuable source of information concerning the history of Byzantium,²⁵ especially its relationship with the West. Ioannis Laskaris Kaloferos was one of those with whom Kydones was corresponding frequently.²⁶ In one of his letters Kydones describes his thoughts from his visit to Venice. Whenever he refers to Venice or of Rome, he talks with admiration for the architectural grandiosity of the city, the abundance of goods found in the market, the people’s love for arts, but also the

²¹ *Apology* I, 365, 84-85.

²² Hunger, 1991, 262-263 · Kianka, 1980, 61-71.

²³ For Kydonis’ correspondence, see Hatlie, P. “Life and artistry in the ‘publication’ of Demetrios Kydones letter collection”, in: *Greek roman and byzantine studies*, 37(1) 1996, 75-102.

²⁴ Kóltsiou – Nikíta, 2012, 176-179.

²⁵ For example, letter n. 88 constitutes a unique source for the Black Death in Constantinople, see Nicol, 2005, 343.

²⁶ Letters n. 167, 190, 223, 269, 325, 331, 345, 359, 371, 418 and 436 are addressed to him.

political and judicial system, which provides citizens with liberties and rights, but at the same time preserves the order and inspires a sense of safety. Kydones had to visit Italy for business purposes. He could not afford the luxury of time to come into contact with the educational and intellectual culture of the Italians. In letter n.328 addressed to Radinos, he likens his role to that of a merchant, who cannot acquire certain goods in his native land, and (for this reason) he is forced to look abroad.

Other letters are more philosophical. For example, in one of those addressed to Manuel Palaiologos (n.302), one of his closest friends,²⁷ he refers to the Epicurean philosophy and specifically to the way of dealing with pleasures and enjoyments. Herein, he endorses a worldview profoundly engraved within the Byzantine mindset; rejection of carnal pleasures. Instead, he praised spiritual pleasures. In his mind, renunciation of material pleasures is a necessary precondition for the enjoyment of real freedom.

Letters with a similar content prove the philosophical strength of Kydones. In fact, Kydones wrote philosophical essays, such as *De contemnenda morte* (*On the contempt of death*), or *Lógos hópōs álogon tò tou̓ thanátou déos apodeiknúōn* (*Λόγος ὅπως ἄλογον τὸ τοῦ θανάτου δέος ἀποδεικνύων*). Death was one of his major concerns. Kydones examined this phenomenon by acknowledging perspectives beyond those offered by established religions. In his view, death does not mark the end of existence, nor does it lead to the punishment of the soul, so long as the soul itself is of divine origin and immortal nature. The essence of the soul is cognition (*noesis*). In this respect, death cannot cause the annihilation of existence. This position reveals the strong Platonic foundations of his ontological approach.

²⁷ Letters n. 132, 136, 141, 192, 203, 212, 214, 218, 220, 231, 236, 137, 238, 239, 243, 244, 247, 249, 250, 253, 258, 259, 262, 271, 276, 277, 282, 283, 284, 294, 299, 302, 304, 306, 308, 309, 312, 315, 318, 320, 326, 327, 342, 348, 363, 365, 367, 368, 370, 372, 373, 374, 379, 380, 381, 383, 388, 391, 392, 393, 395, 396, 397, 398, 401, 410, 424, 429, 430, 431, 432 and 434 are addressed to him.

The most important of his theological works is perhaps the *Perí tēs ekporeúseōs ton 'Agíou Pneúmatos* (Περί της ἐκπορεύσεως του Ἁγίου Πνεύματος). In this treatise Kydones focuses on one of the most central issues that divided the Latin and Orthodox Churches.²⁸ Other theological issues are also developed in his *Discourses*. Moreover, in his *Advisory Speeches*, Kydones exhorts the Byzantines to join forces with the other Christians (especially the Latins) against the Ottoman onslaught.²⁹ In his thought, the Latins were the ideal allies; they shared with the Byzantines a common (*Roman*) origin, a common religion, a common political and military organization and other positive virtues, such as responsibility and wealth.³⁰ Another important work of Kydones is his six public speeches *Logoi* (Λόγοι).³¹ Two of them are concerned with politics, and refer to John VI Kantakouzenos and John V Paleologos; one is philosophical and theological at the same time; it defends Aquinas' positions and criticizes Nilos Kavasilas. In the *Oratio pro subsidio Latinorum* (1366) he highlights the similarities between Byzantines and Westerners. Herein Kydones emphasises their common (Roman) origin³². In addition, he wrote four prologues to the Chrysobula of John V Paleologus, and a *Monōdíá epí tois en Thessaloníkē pesousín* (Μονωδία ἐπί τοῖς ἐν Θεσσαλονίκη πεσοῦσι)³³, which describes the occupation of Thessaloniki by the Zealots.

Apart from his translations and original works, we should not avoid mentioning his teaching activities. In particular, at the beginning of the last decade of the fourteenth century, during his stay in Venice, Kydones offered courses in Greek language, culture and philosophy to Venetian and Florentine

²⁸ Niárkhos, 2007, 20.

²⁹ The Latins were, in his opinion, the ideal allies, not only because they had common religion, but also because they were sharing with the Byzantines a common cultural background and status, in contrast to other Christians, such as the Hungarians, whom he considered as savage people and the alliance with which as a movement of despair, Nicol, 2005, 414-415.

³⁰ Rigo, 2011, 254.

³¹ Ostrogorsky, 1978, 321 · Nicol, 2005, 329.

³² Rigo, 2011, 253.

³³ PG 109, 639-652.

students, contributing to a mutual ideological and cultural osmosis. Thus, he became an important contributor to the Italian Renaissance.

In the works of Demetrios Kydones certain viewpoints are constantly reappeared. The main ones call into question perceptions of cultural superiority shared by the Byzantines against the Westerners, considered “barbarians”. Although he acknowledges the Byzantines as descendants of the ancient Greeks, he rejects the perspective that they are the sole or exclusive inheritors of the ancient Greek philosophical legacy. On the contrary, their appreciation of that legacy is rather superficial and limited to the study of Plato and Aristotle – with emphasis mainly on the former, whose work was associated with the Hesychasts’ dominant tendency, which advocates rejection of rationalism. Kydones admires especially the way in which the Latins assimilated Aristotelianism and highlighted the value of reason and dialectic, with the clear formulation of positions and the safe transition from premises to conclusions, so that they could cope to a greater extent with logical contradiction. Moreover, he considers the progress they made in both intellectual and technological culture to be remarkable. For Kydones, the Byzantine intellectuals, especially, Byzantine philosophy and, in particular, Aristotelianism had to be revised in order to be renewed; the Byzantines, he assumed, had not sufficiently assimilated the content, the spirit and the methods of the great philosophers of antiquity. On the contrary, humanist education was more developed in the West (especially in the works of Aquinas, Augustine and other Westerners) than in the East.³⁴ The desired renewal, therefore, could be achieved through a dialogue of the Byzantines with Western philosophers, which requires abandonment of stereotypes regarding the philosophical, ideological and cultural superiority of the Byzantines themselves.

To recapitulate: we could argue that Kydones’ contributed to the spread of humanism (through his translations, individual works of philosophy and teaching activities) more

³⁴ Hunger, 1991, 67-68· Niárkhos, 2007, 121.

than politicians, theologians, and philologists.³⁵ His words and his deeds in general constituted a challenge to the ideological and philosophical firmament of the Byzantines, as he shook - and indeed from within - their most common beliefs. His challenging personality, ideas and work, and his appreciation of the West have apparently been the main reasons for not receiving till nowadays the recognition he deserves.³⁶ It was his life's purpose to bring Byzantium in a spiritual dialogue with the West, striving to eliminate religious polarization between the Latin and the Orthodox Church, avoiding threats from the East. Essentially, according to him, the dissociation was due to nothing but ignorance and prejudice; philosophical engagement, however, leads exclusively in the direction of mutual respect of opinions and the joint search for Truth.

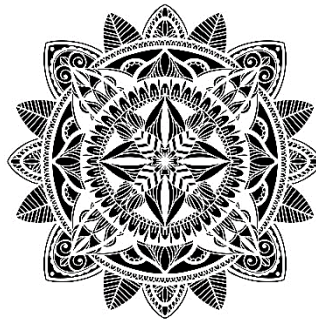
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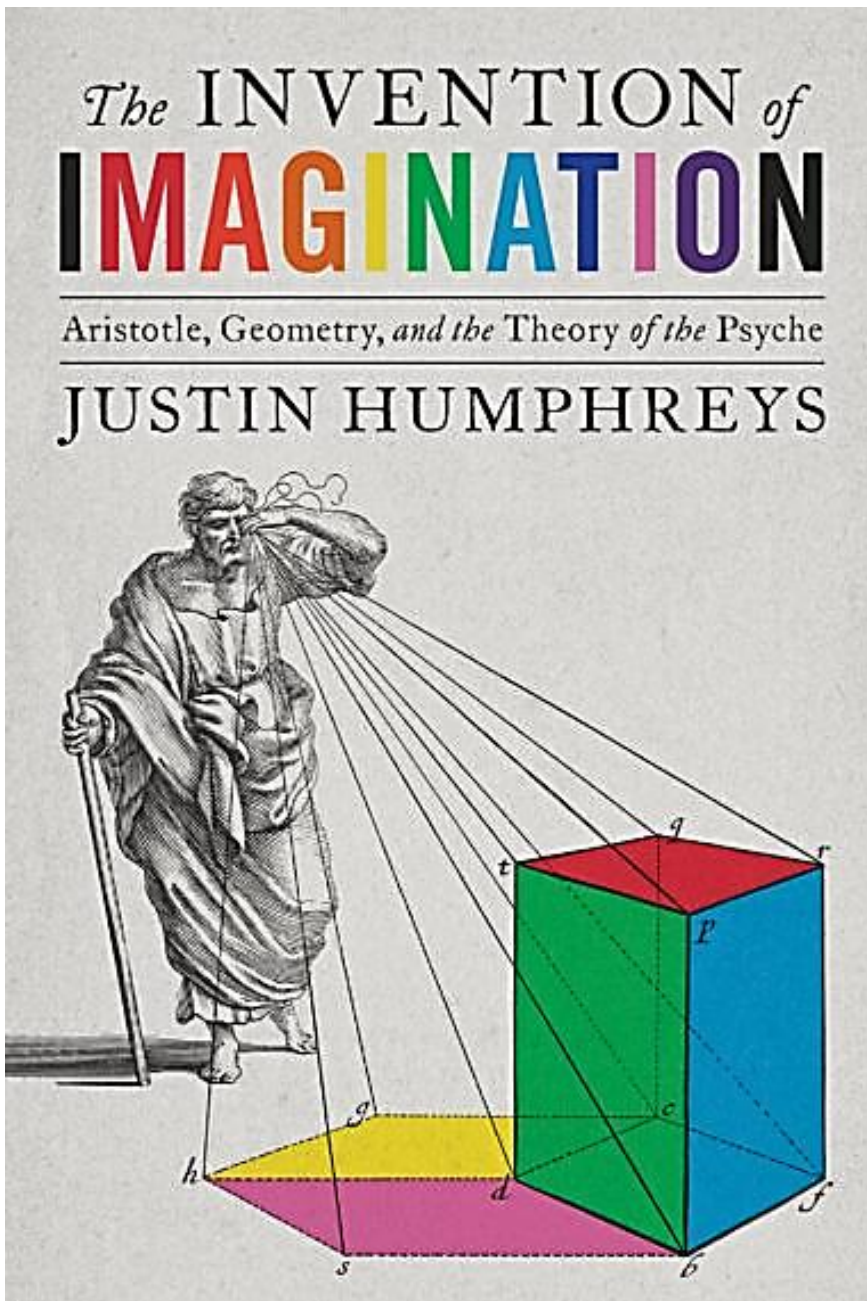
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³⁵ Tatákis, 1977, 249.

³⁶ Rigo, 2011, 243.

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