

Emir Alışık

**MIRRORS FOR DESPOTS: ADVISORY LETTERS IN THE  
FIFTEENTH CENTURY BYZANTINE EMPIRE**

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization  
in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

May 2015

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by

Emir Alışık

(Turkey)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary  
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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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Thesis Supervisor

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Examiner

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External Reader

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External Supervisor

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Mirrors for Despots: Advisory Letters in the Fifteenth Century Byzantine Empire**

Emir Alışık (Turkey)

Thesis Supervisor(s): Niels H. Gaul

The present work assesses the political significance of six advisory letters, which were written by Symeon of Thessaloniki, Georgios Gemistos Plethon, and Cardinal Bessarion for for the despots Theodore II Palaiologos, Andronikos Palaiologos, Constantine Palaiologos, and Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos respectively, during the last fifty years of the Byzantine Empire's existence. Secondary literature has treated these letters separately or in varying compilations. This work brings these letters together because, firstly, they are of a similar genre, which can be named as princely mirrors, secondly, they were written by persons who had different political goals; however, they all desired a prosperous future for the Byzantine Empire in their own way. Thus, the present work expects a rich variety of reform programs from the pen of these authors in this period of crisis of the Byzantine Empire.

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# Introduction

This study brings together six advisory addresses of Georgios Gemistos Plethon, Bessarion and Symeon of Thessaloniki, who were scholars and government officials of the last century of the Byzantine Empire. In this study *Plethon's advisory letter to Despot Theodore on Peloponnese* (Πλήθωνος Συμβουλευτικός πρὸς τὸν δεσπότην Θεόδωρον περὶ τῆς Πελοποννήσου),<sup>1</sup> *From Georgios Gemistos to Manuel Palaiologos on the matters of Peloponnese* (Γεωργίου Γεμιστού εἰς Μανουὴλ Παλαιολόγον Πελοποννήσῳ πραγμάτων),<sup>2</sup> and *Plethon's advisory letter to Lord Demetrios, Porphyrogenitos Despot* (Πλήθωνος προσφώνημα πρὸς τὸν κύρ Δημήτριον δεσπότην τὸν Πορφυρογέννητον),<sup>3</sup> from Plethon; *To the Despot* (Τῷ Δεσπότη),<sup>4</sup> and *Consolatory and hortatory instructions to pious Despot Lord Andronikos Palaiologos on becoming a monk* (Διδασκαλία πρὸς τὸν εὐσεβὴ δεσπότην κύρ Ανδρόνικον Παλαιολόγον, γενόμενον μοναχόν, παραμυθητικὴ τε ἅμα καὶ παραινετικὴ)<sup>5</sup> from Symeon of Thessaloniki; *Cardinal Bessarion greets Constantine Palaiologos* (Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν)<sup>6</sup> from Bessarion were treated as political exhortations, which reflected understanding and aims of their authors. Advisory content is common among them, accordingly they can be considered as mirrors for princes. Kiousopoulou argued that the genres, which were considered to be products of classical

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<sup>1</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, 'Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso', in *Παλαιολογία Καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, ed. Sp. Lampros, vol. 4 (Athens, 1912), 113–35, 113.

<sup>2</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso', in *Παλαιολογία Καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, ed. Sp. Lampros, vol. 3 (Athens, 1912), 246–65, 246.

<sup>3</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, 'Prosphonematium Ad Demetrium Despotam Porphyrogennitum', in *Παλαιολογία Καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, ed. Sp. Lampros, vol. 4 (Athens, 1912), 207–10, 207.

<sup>4</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, 'Τῷ Δεσπότη', in *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429): Critical Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David Balfour (Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979), 77.

<sup>5</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, 'Διδασκαλία Πρὸς Τὸν Εὐσεβὴ Δεσπότην Κύρ Ανδρόνικον Παλαιολόγον, Γενόμενον Μοναχόν, Παραμυθητικὴ Τε ἅμα Καὶ Παραινετικὴ', in *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429): Critical Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David Balfour (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979), 78–82.

<sup>6</sup> Bessarion, 'Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν', in *Kardinal Bessarion Als Theologe, Humanist Und Staatsmann*, ed. Ludwig Mohler, vol. 3 (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1967), 439–49, 439.

revivalism of fifteenth century, were not simple literary exercises but politically loaded texts.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, with regard to contents and existence of political aims, Byzantine advisory letters have resemblance to western mirrors for princes genre.<sup>8</sup> Leonte observed that treatment of Byzantine advisory texts mainly divided into two; one is tracing the classical sources of the texts, and the other is to find the recurrent themes in such texts from Justinian's time to the fall of the empire.<sup>9</sup> Leonte noted that Hunger and Prinzing divided advisory letters into two categories, and this actually testified the loose conventions of the genre in Byzantine context. *Basilikos logos*, formulated by Menander, formed the base for mirrors for princes in the Palaiologan period.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, the Palaiologan texts that can be regarded as mirrors for princes do not totally fit to Menander's formulas. For instance, Symeon of Thessaloniki's instructions to Despot Andronikos was both didactic and consolatory. In other words, Symeon's address is closer to funerary oration, rather than to a *basilikos logos*. Or Plethon's address to Manuel concerning the matters in Morea seems to be a perfect example of *basilikos logos*, but it is loaded with a critique of the present situation of Morea, whereas Menander excluded all kind of negative notion from this type of writing.<sup>11</sup> Prinzing have also concluded that the mirrors for princes was not a strictly defined literary genre in Byzantium, therefore, in order to study this genre different kinds of writings that have advisory nature should be examined.<sup>12</sup> Hence the loose form of mirrors for princes can be traced in the scope of this study as well. Authors with different backgrounds resorted to advice literature in varying forms in order to convey a political message.

<sup>7</sup> Tonia Kiousopoulou, *Emperor or Manager. Power and Political Ideology in Byzantium before 1453*, trans. Paul Magdalino (Geneva: La Pomme d'or, 2011), 133.

<sup>8</sup> Leonte also noted that Odorico regards Byzantine mirrors for princes as an empty notion. see: Florin Leonte, 'Rhetoric in Purple: The Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos' (Doctoral Thesis, Central European University, 2012), 168-9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Jeffreys, John F Haldon, and Robin Cormack, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 832.

<sup>11</sup> see, *Basilikos logos* in: Menander, *Menander Rhetor*, trans. D. A Russell and N. G Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 78.

<sup>12</sup> Leonte, 'Rhetoric in Purple: The Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos', 171.

## Authors and Historical Background

Symeon and Plethon were of Constantinople origin, and all three authors spent some years of their careers in Constantinople, and all three functioned outside Constantinople during more mature ages of their careers. In the current study, I aim to present a scene of the hardships that these rulers faced and the reactions of both advisors and advisees in the context of these years of territorial fragmentation and political centrifugation.

The overall political scheme of the fifteenth century Byzantine Empire was dominated by Ottoman attacks. Raids on the territories and the sieges of the big cities of the Empire overwhelmingly cut out the political alternatives. And as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century, pessimism concerning the future of the Empire among the intellectuals was present.<sup>13</sup> The status of the Palaiologan emperor was effectively that of most senior among the various powerful dynasties; more like a *primus inter pares* than a monarch.<sup>14</sup> By the fifteenth century the Byzantine Emperor became a vassal of the Ottoman sultan, and paid tribute but could not prevent the raids on his territory. Politically speaking, the emperor's prestige was lost: At the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Patriarch of Constantinople had to warn Moscow that they needed to continue praising the Emperor in their liturgy regardless of the political hardships the empire was undergoing.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the emperor Manuel II and his successor John VIII had to personally visit various centers of Europe in order to make their pleas. They were received respectfully but not adequately for a Roman emperor who was in theory the sole ruler of whole Christendom. On the other hand, the Papal schism during which there emerged simultaneously two popes who resided in Avignon and Rome between 1378 and 1413 damaged the papal prestige deeply. The union of the Catholic and Orthodox

<sup>13</sup> Ihor Ševčenko, 'The Decline of Byzantium Seen Through the Eyes of Its Intellectuals', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1 January 1961): 167–86, doi:10.2307/1291179, 172.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261-1453*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 231.

<sup>15</sup> Ševčenko, 'The Decline of Byzantium Seen Through the Eyes of Its Intellectuals', 167.

Churches proclaimed at the Council of Lyons in 1274 had been short-lived. Since 1339 when Barlaam of Calabria, an Orthodox of Greek origin, advised the Pope to convoke another council dedicated to Christian Unity, a unionist council occasionally became a popular issue. 1438 witnessed the arrival in Italy of a large Byzantine delegation headed by the emperor John VIII Palaiologos himself, in answer to the Pope's call for Church Council. All in all, it was certainly a time of drastic change in the Byzantine territory, and not only in one direction but many different ideas about the formation of state and the position that it should take against the neighboring power magnates emerged in different central zones such as Mystras, Thessaloniki and Constantinople. Accordingly, there was an intense traffic of ideas and alliances and enmities within and among these zones, Italian city states, and the Ottoman court.

Considering Plethon, Bessarion and Symeon in this wider scene will help integrating their regional efforts into global currents. Therefore, biographic notes and some explanation on their works are in order.

A brief history of Byzantine Morea is relevant because Plethon established himself in Mystras which was the capital of Morea. Additionally, Bessarion spent two years in Mystras and he wrote his letter to the future emperor Constantine when Constantine was a despot in Mystras.

Mystras was founded by the Frankish princes of Morea in the middle of thirteenth century<sup>16</sup> and it was taken over by Michael VIII who was the emperor re-conquered Constantinople from the Latins.<sup>17</sup> After the downfall of John VI Kantakouzenos, while another Kantakouzenos Despot tried to be independent from Constantinople (Demetrius

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<sup>16</sup> Steven Runciman, *Lost Capital of Byzantium: The History of Mistra and the Peloponnese* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2009), 30.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 36.

1383-84), John V Palaiologos' son Theodore was sent to take over Morea, thus Theodore and Palaiologans started to be the Despots of Morea. This situation continued until the Ottoman conquest in 1463.

Georgios Gemistos Plethon, whose three letters are of concern here, was a multidimensional character of the last century of the Byzantine Empire. Having been born in Constantinople in 1360, Plethon led a scholarly career which in the last decade of the fourteenth-century brought him to the Ottoman court where he supposedly met a mystic who was influential in Plethon's neo-platonic philosophy. After his return to Constantinople, upon a disputation, Emperor Manuel II sent him to Mystras. Plethon settled in Mystras sometime between 1405 and 1410 and continued his scholarly pursuit as well as his political career. He started teaching philosophy and actively participated in the textual production of the era; his treatises vary from the Christological issues to platonic philosophy, from mirror to princes to legal issues. In 1438 he accompanied the Byzantine delegation to Unionist Council of Ferrara/Florence, which witnessed possibly one of the most important mobilizations of Byzantine laymen and clergy in the last two hundred years. The council aimed to unite Catholic and Orthodox Churches and provided a stage where Latin and Greek scholars encounter with each other. During his stay in Florence, Plethon continued giving lectures on Plato. Among the Byzantine delegation there were both students and future rivals of Plethon; and his lectures in Italy aroused interest towards Plato. Plethon had been appointed as governor of Argolis and Laconia (eastern and southern Morea) between 1428 and 1433,<sup>18</sup> and he had also been trusted with administrative tasks.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> C.M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 111.

<sup>19</sup> Teresa Shawcross, 'A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea', in *Viewing the Morea: Land and People in the Late Medieval Peloponnese*, ed. Sharon E. J Gerstel (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2013), 419–52, 421.

In 1416 Plethon wrote first of those aforementioned letters to Despot of Morea Theodore II Palaiologos who was the second son of the emperor Manuel II Palaiologos; second one was sent to the father Manuel II Palaiologos in 1418; third and the last one was sent to Despot of Morea Demetrios Palaiologos in 1451. First two letters especially resemble each other in terms of their contents which include ideas concerning land and administrative reforms. They were praising the addressees and advising them to carry out economical, militaristic and social-based reforms in order to raise the encumbered Hellene people. Third one is comparatively much shorter, and it concerns with the ongoing civil war in Morea between two brother despots Demetrios Palaiologos and Thomas Palaiologos. Having illustrated the difference between the war against an external foe and against an internal one, he praised Demetrios for having peace with his brother. When Plethon wrote his address to Theodore II, Manuel had recently visited Morea, installed grown-up Theodore II as the sole ruler in Morea, dealt with rebel *archontes*, and managed to repair the *Hexamilion*, the linear wall blocking the Isthmus of Corinth, which is the only point that link mainland and Morea. Ottoman sultan Mehmed I did not pose a serious threat, because he ascended to throne with the help of Manuel II. The atmosphere was right for Plethon to suggest bold actions; this time of relative ease could be used for reform. Plethon's address to Demetrios in 1451 was much shorter; a plan of reform was totally missing. Nonetheless, the grain of hope for recovery was still present. Avoidance of civil war, even though with the intervention of the Ottomans, was to be celebrated. Besides, when Morea was divided between Thomas and Demetrios, Ottoman sultan acknowledged the division. Accordingly, Plethon could advise Demetrios to get into alliance with his brother, and aim the foreign enemy.

Symeon of Thessaloniki was born in Constantinople in the second half of the fourteenth century, followed a clerical path and became a hieromonk possibly in Constantinople. This background is almost self-evident for his hesychastic affiliations due to



the ultimate victory of Hesychasm- which is originally a monastic movement- as part of the Orthodox doctrine in 1351 in Constantinople. More relevant part of his career to this thesis is his elevation as the archbishop of Thessaloniki in 1416. His role as archbishop continued until 1429 when he died. During this fifteen-year period he witnessed grave changes in Thessaloniki and reacted to them with his texts. In the scope of this thesis I am concerned with his advisory letters to despot Andronikos of Thessaloniki, who was the third son of the emperor Manuel II. The last hundred years of this city before the final Ottoman conquest in 1430 witnessed many riots and invasions: Zealots, who rioted against the Kantakouzenos rule in Constantinople, ruled between 1342 and 1349; a number of Ottoman attacks and short-lived occupations between 1383 and 1402 occurred; in 1423 the city was given away to Venice; and finally in 1430 Ottomans conquered the city. Symeon wrote two letters to Andronikos: first one was probably written in 1417 and it concerns the nature of the relation between the ruler and the Church, and Symeon advised young Andronikos to ally with the church and serve the church, and not to dominate it. This topic is totally relevant to the overall politics of the time, since the unionist tendencies with Catholic Church and the change in the power balance of court seem to diminish the influence of Church in the state matters. The second letter was written after 1423, when Andronikos abdicated from the rule in favor of Venetians. The letter suggests that Andronikos had to leave the city to Venetians, and tries to comfort him for his losses.

In 1399 Bessarion was born in Trebizond. We do not know about his family much (a family of craftsmen) and this ignorance implicated that it was an ordinary one. At an early age his education started in Trebizond. Later on, he came close to the capital where he studied under the archbishop of Selymbrios. During this period he firstly encountered with philosophy and rhetoric which were two major disciplines he was famous for apart from theology. Between 1423 and 1430 he was a member of Basilian monastic order. In 1431 he

went to Mystras where Plethon tutored him for 2 years. This period of his life was of great importance in terms of developing a faith in Morea where he believed that the hope of political revival would be resuscitated, and later in his career he thought that Morea would be the headquarter for defense against the Ottomans. He attended the Unionist Council of Ferrara/Florence in 1438/39 and actually played an important part so the pope rewarded him with cardinalship, thus upon returning to Constantinople he did not stay there long and went back to Italy as a cardinal in 1441. When he was born, Trebizond was not dependent on Constantinople anymore, and when he wrote his letter to future emperor despot of Morea Constantine, he was already a cardinal in Rome. Bessarion's letter to despot Constantine was probably written in 1444, when he repaired the long wall of Corinth and before the battle at Varna, where Ottoman forces defeated a joint army from the west. This seems like a suitable period to hope for recovery especially the preparations of an attack on the Ottomans by a united Christian force was at hand. Briefly, he invites young people to Italy for educational reasons, and he stresses the importance of philosophical learning and technical learning in the sense of military and craftwork.

## Literature Review

The sources of this study were treated in the secondary literature before. As I have quoted above, all the addresses were published as critical editions. Accordingly, they were treated in the secondary literature in various contexts.

Plethon's addresses to Theodore II and Manuel II were frequently used in different contexts. English translation of some passages can be found in Barker,<sup>20</sup> Peritore,<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ernest Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium: From Justinian I to the Last Palaeologus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957).

<sup>21</sup> N. Patrick Peritore, 'The Political Thought of Gemistos Plethon: A Renaissance Byzantine Reformer', *Polity* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1977): 168–91.

Bartusis,<sup>22</sup> Shawcross,<sup>23</sup> and in Baloglou.<sup>24</sup> Fully translated versions of both letters are also available, however they are a bit old and usage of some terms are a bit problematic.<sup>25</sup> Peritore understood these addresses as proto-nationalist texts by relying on the emphasis of Hellenic development and self-sufficient economic system. Bartusis was interested in Plethon's military reform. He thought the reform was not original but how Plethon described the present situation might be of importance. Shawcross dealt with reform program and the idea of historical continuity that is present in them. Baloglou exclusively focused on Plethon's inspiration from Ancient Sparta, which he acquired through Plutarch's *Lives*.<sup>26</sup> Woodhouse gave a brief summary of Plethon's all three addresses, which are in the scope of this study.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, Plethon's address to Demetrios is not available in English, to the best of my knowledge, there is no analysis of this address in the literature.

Symeon of Thessaloniki was commonly referred in doctrinal and ritual matters. Besides his reports on the last years of Byzantine rule in Thessaloniki is important. On the other hand, λόγος ιστορικός (θαύματα Αγίου Δημητρίου)<sup>28</sup> gives first hand observations to the Ottoman interest for Thessaloniki and especially to the Ottoman siege in 1422. Angelov extensively referred him on the topic of hierocracy.<sup>29</sup> Symeon's two addresses to Andronikos, except Balfour's commentaries to his critical edition, were not treated in their own rights.

<sup>22</sup> Mark C. Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army: Arms and Society, 1204-1453* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Shawcross, 'A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea'.

<sup>24</sup> Christos P. Baloglou, 'The Institutions of Ancient Sparta in the Work of Pletho', in *Proceedings of the International Congress on Plethon and His Time* (Athens, 2003), 311–26.

<sup>25</sup> Christos P. Baloglou, 'George Finlay and Georgios Gemistos Plethon. New Evidence from Finlay's Records', *Medioevo Greco: Rivista Di Storia E Filologia Bizantina* 3 (2003): 23–42.

<sup>26</sup> Plutarch, *Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. I (Harvard University Press, 1914).

<sup>27</sup> Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*.

<sup>28</sup> David Balfour, ed., *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429): Critical Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979), 39–70.

<sup>29</sup> Dimitar Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Lampros was the first one, who published a critical edition of Bessarion's address to Constantine.<sup>30</sup> As I have quoted above, I used Mohler's edition in this study. Although there is not a whole English translation of it, in Keller and Shawcross some passages can be found in English. In Lampros, this address was of importance for its reform ideas and urging Morea to attack Ottomans. Keller focused on the western advances in technology, and regarded this letter in terms of the knowledge it yields on the European history.<sup>31</sup> Shawcross regarded it as a follow up to Plethon addresses to Theodore I and Manuel II.<sup>32</sup>

## Methodology

These six addresses, which were authored by Symeon of Thessaloniki, Georgios Gemistos Plethon and Cardinal Bessarion, constitute the basis of this study. I have chosen these advisory addresses in consideration of the diversity of author's backgrounds, and the distinct span of time, which they covered. I looked through two different lenses in order to properly accommodate them. Firstly, I analyzed them according to the context that was narrated in the addresses. For instance, Symeon of Thessaloniki's consolatory instructions for Despot Andronikos Palaiologos guided my interpretation of Andronikos' possible role in the Venetian intervention in 1423. In other words, I took what Symeon said and implied at face value in order to present how he supported his argument. Secondly, I placed them in a larger political context, where their message fit. Besides, I paid special attention to the historical sources, which were referred in each of the addresses. Instead of treating these references as simple rhetorical ornaments, I examined biblical and ancient histories that are embedded in the addresses. This provided me with larger perspective on the core issues of each address. The authors' opinions on two subjects were especially fruitful for analyses, because while

<sup>30</sup> Sp. Lampros, ed., *Παλαιολογία Και Πελοποννησιακά*, 4 vols. (Athens, 1912).

<sup>31</sup> A. G. Keller, 'A Byzantine Admirer of "Western" Progress: Cardinal Bessarion', *Cambridge Historical Journal* 11, no. 3 (1955): 343–48, doi:10.2307/3021127.

<sup>32</sup> Shawcross, 'A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea'.

focusing on these subjects in their addresses, the authors constructed a sort of historical continuity. By drawing certain parallels, on the one hand, between the historical characters and the addressees, and on the other, between the historical spaces and the dominions of the addressees, the authors maintained the historical continuity. For instance, Symeon of Thessaloniki's biblical references aim to console deposed Despot Andronikos Palaiologos, and all his references bear resemblance to Andronikos' fate. In similar vein, Plethon and Bessarion have multiple references to Ancient Sparta, for the authors' proposals concern Morea. They posed historical characters as examples for Theodore II, Manuel II and Constantine. Therefore, whenever these authors' minds drifted deep into the past, they actually provided an explanation concerning the addressee or his dominion. To put it briefly, I attempted to show how the addresses' content and the larger political context mutually defined each other. Besides, I regarded the historical references of the texts as both explanatory for the present issues in the texts, and indicative for the agendas of the each author.

# Chapter 1 – Political Pleas at the Times of Hope

## 1.1. The Address to Theodore II

Plethon's address (*symbouleutikos*) to Theodore II Palaiologos, the second son of Manuel II Palaiologos, is a twenty-four page advisory letter for the young ruler of Morea, who was promoted to the rank after the death of his uncle, Theodore Palaiologos in 1408.<sup>33</sup> In this instance Plethon defined his letter as *symbouleutikos*. A *symbouleutikos Logos* is an advisory oration and, in contrast to a *Basilikos Logos*, it allows room for contradictory views. Menander<sup>34</sup> did not mention this writing category, but the meaning of the word and the contents of the letters demonstrate that it was an advisory address.

### 1.1.1. Summary of the Letter

The *prooimion*, where Plethon stated why this address needed to be written, makes room for the praise of monarchy in dire times such as the present and begs Theodore to listen and invites him not to ignore the advice offered.<sup>35</sup> Plethon continued by showing evidence of dangers and further reasons for the need for advice. Here he warned both against internal enemies who were their own countrymen, and against the neighboring barbarians who used to be called *Parapamisadae* in Alexander the Great's era.<sup>36</sup> He begged forgiveness for speaking of such bad things but he noted that doctors, when they see fit, suggest unpleasant things, too. Thus, by adopting the role of a doctor<sup>37</sup> for Morea, he first starts to encourage the patient to undergo treatment by illustrating historical examples of revivals.

<sup>33</sup> Plethon, 'Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso'.

<sup>34</sup> Menander, *Menander Rhetor*.

<sup>35</sup> Plethon, 'Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso', 113, line 6- 114, line 3. σαφέστατα γὰρ οὖν ἔν γε τοῖς τοιοῦτοις μάλιστα ὀρῶμεν ἐν οἷσπερ μέγιστοί τε καὶ ὀξύτατοι οἱ κίνδυνοι τὴν μοναρχίαν ἀσφαλεστάτην τε οὖσαν καὶ λυσιτελεστάτην.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 114, line 24-5. (...) οἱ Παραπαμισάδαι μὲν τὸ πάλαι ὄντες, ὑπὸ δὲ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Φιλίππου (...).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 115, line 13. τοὺς ἰατροὺς.

Having been defeated, some Trojans, led by Aeneas, went to Italy and colonized Rome with the help of Sabines, who, Plethon purported, were actually Spartans.<sup>38</sup> Although the Persian Empire was conquered by Alexander, later Persians successfully recovered up to a certain extent. The Roman conquest of the Macedonians gave way to Persian recovery; and these Persians came to be successful for a time over the Romans even though they were defeated many times by the Romans.<sup>39</sup>

He further explained that the city could prosper only through reform undertaken by a virtuous government.<sup>40</sup> This brought Plethon to examples of recovery through virtuous acts. The Greeks only prospered after Hercules had introduced laws and showed virtue. The glory of the Spartans was realized only when Lycurgus introduced new laws, and once they had abandoned these laws their glory was extinguished. The Thebans, who defeated the corrupted Spartans, acquired power with the rule of a well-educated king. Alexander could boast that his tutor was Aristotle and this made him the conqueror of Greece and the Persians. The Romans also founded a great empire by introducing virtuous laws and diminished only when those laws were corrupted. Even the Muslims, with reformation of laws and the government, extended their power greatly, although Plethon noted that their discipline served only to be successful in battle. The underlying theme of all of these examples -from peoples whom Plethon seriously admired, such as the Spartans, with whom he attempted to connect Palaiologan Morea, or from Muslims,<sup>41</sup> whose law only efficient for war- was the establishment and continuous enforcement of virtuous laws as a necessity in the success of a rule.

<sup>38</sup> Plethon, 'Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso', 115, line 27. Σαβίνοις, Λακεδαιμονίοις οὖσι (...).

<sup>39</sup> Plethon, 'Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso', 116, line 2-10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 116, line 16-18 Ἔστι δ' οὐκ ἄλλος τις τρόπος τοῦ ἐκ χειρόνων ἄμεινον πρᾶξαι πόλιν ἢ ἔθνος βεβαίως γούν καὶ ἀσφαλῶς ὅσα γε τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἢ τὴν πολιτείαν ἐπανορθωσαμένους.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 118, line 2-15.

Having concluded that perpetual virtuous laws were vital, Plethon started a discussion on the styles of governments in order to determine what kind of rule was the most proper for the current situation of Morea. Upon illustrating monarchy, oligarchy and democracy he proposed the monarchy as the best of all if based on good laws. Since Theodore was a monarch, Plethon did not want to change Theodore's position; instead, he wanted to determine how the monarch rules.<sup>42</sup> First of all the monarch must be judicious and gather around himself good counselors in order to establish good laws; finally good enforcers of these laws must be recruited. This was the general outline Plethon proposed and he continued with the details of this plan.

These laws must assign every member of the society to a proper task and enforce them to keep to their duties. Laborers consist of farmers and herders who deal with the land. Artisans and the merchants have the role of distributing the products within society. Finally there is the group of people who should rule and protect the people. The monarch rules them all and there are also other administrators. In order to enforce the laws both in peace time and war time alike there should be judges and soldiers. Once he had described the duties of people he emphasized that these occupational boundaries must be retained in order to prevent unjust gains and protect the order of society. He gave details especially about the soldiers of this new society and made suggestions on military organization.<sup>43</sup>

Taxation and avoiding luxury is another topic which Plethon addressed. In his opinion, taxation must be in accordance with the social layers, with how much each person earned, so as not to detach anyone from production and society. As Plethon admitted that law enforcement was a requirement, he acknowledged the need for punishment and also tried to

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<sup>42</sup> Plethon, 'Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso', 119, line 2-4. (...) παρὰ μὲν τοῖς τὰ βέλτιστα φρονοῦσι κράτιστον κέκριται πάντων μοναρχία, συμβούλοις τοῖς ἀρίστοις χρωμένη νόμοις τε σπουδαίοις καὶ τούτοις κυρίοις (...).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 121, line 14- 122, line 14.



regulate this issue it on the basis of the individual's capability to contribute to society. Accordingly, mutilation was barbaric and harmful both for the person who was afflicted and for the state.<sup>44</sup>

Plethon came back to the issue of luxury and the just distribution of wealth by making statements on the divinity's relation with the mundane. He first explains what kind of divinity exists, that it is superior to all things and also governs mundane things and, finally, it governs justly. The virtue of the person and the ruler come into play due to its relation with the divinity and since virtue puts the individual in harmony with the divinity who governs all; the virtuous can see the beauties of life, while those who fall prey to pleasure were inclined to commit crimes. Again Plethon turned to giving historical instances where the virtuous prevail over the vainglorious. He lists Hercules, Lycurgus, Alexander and Cyrus among the virtuous; Paris, Helena, Sardanapalus and Nero fall into the category of bad decision makers due to their vanity.<sup>45</sup>

Once he had dealt with the virtue of the monarch he returned to the topic of laws, this time by speaking about the counselors to the monarch and the enforcers of the law. The law must be established with the help of good counselors and must be enforced with an efficient army. For good counsel, he assumed the role for himself. For the army, he touched upon the ethnicity of the soldiers and how the land distribution must be in accordance with the soldiers and tax payers. Since this topic brought him to assigning duties to people, he insisted on the assigning of proper persons to fitting tasks. Plethon ended the discussion with reminding the reader again about danger and admitting the extremity of the measures he proposed.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Plethon, 'Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso', 124, line 20- 125, line 2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 127, line 19- 128, line 13.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 134, line 17- 135, line 11.

### 1.1.2. Analysis of the Letter

Plethon was a resident of Morea from the beginning of the fifteenth century. He may have been Judge-General (κριταὶ καθολικοί) of Morea when he penned this address<sup>47</sup> and he may have been assigned as an official tutor to young Despot Theodore II.<sup>48</sup> He wrote to Theodore II sometime between 1407 and 1416. This means that he wrote his address to Theodore II at a time when the Ottoman campaigns into Morea had temporarily ceased. The Ottoman campaigns into Morea had been frequent and efficient starting from 1387 but ended in 1402 with the destruction the Timurids brought upon the Ottomans in the battle of Ankara. The following interregnum of the Ottoman throne continued until the ascension of Mehmed in 1413.<sup>49</sup> He regarded Manuel II as if he was his father and this must have caused relief to some extent.<sup>50</sup>

When this letter was written, events unfolded in a way that Plethon was sufficiently convinced to regard the Ottomans as the enemy of Palaiologan rule in the Morea and also to detect an advantage against the Ottomans. The other kind of enemy that Plethon referred to was the one within. The solution against those enemies lay mainly in fiscal reform. He suggested ceasing the usage of foreign coins and the almost total ban of export and import in order to both weaken the relentless *archontes* and to prevent the trade dominance of the Italian maritime powers on the peninsula.

Peritore suggested that the use of Hellene in the address reflects defiance of a universalist Roman idea and adoption of particularism.<sup>51</sup> Kaldellis regarded Plethon's Hellenism as an attempt of Hellenic revival, so Plethon differed from earlier Hellenist

<sup>47</sup> Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*.

<sup>48</sup> Shawcross, 'A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea'.

<sup>49</sup> Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 15.

<sup>50</sup> Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*, trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975), 110-2.

<sup>51</sup> Peritore, 'The Political Thought of Gemistos Plethon: A Renaissance Byzantine Reformer'.

Byzantine scholars by being more explicit.<sup>52</sup> He shaped his political ideology on the basis of his Hellenism. Plethon's framework was set on Morea and the plan was made according to it. To a certain extent this framework works in the text, especially when explaining the reasons for proposals and their expected results. I will also discuss the long term results which Plethon expected.

As I showed in the summary of the text, Plethon's main concern was legal reform. I already related that Plethon described himself as a doctor who prescribed bitter medicine for the sake of the well-being of the patient, and once he related the details of his reform, he repeated that it would be easy for Theodore to find the appropriate persons to administer such a program.<sup>53</sup> Plethon mimicked Plutarch's description. Plutarch described Lycurgus' reform of the government as an act of "a wise physician", he gave medicines and changed the diet of the patient. Plethon did not describe all the details of the new laws here but he described the template; the law was to be under the protection of a judicious monarch and this monarch had to gather a moderate number of good counselors around him. These counselors must be learned men and must have moderate fortunes in order not to pursue more or to create wealth for themselves. Plethon explained that once the laws were constituted they must be enforced and guaranteed by the army. And last but not least, for the smooth functioning of these well-regulated laws and society, production must be efficient. Therefore, the maintenance of the law required a new distribution of wealth, land and social roles.

As I showed in the summary of the letter, society was divided into a number of categories. Farmers and herders who dealt with land and animals constituted the first category, that is, laborers, and their objective was to extract raw material from nature, to

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<sup>52</sup> Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 173.

<sup>53</sup> Plethon, 'Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso', 130, line 20-21. Εἰ δ' αὐτὸς μόνος ἐθελήσας καὶ τῇ γνώμῃ ταύτῃ τράποιο οὐ χαλεπῶς ἂν οὐδὲ τῶν συγκαταπραξόντων εὐπορήσας (...).

provide the people with necessities; artisans and merchants were an intermediary group whose task was to manufacture and distribute the goods within society. These two groups were responsible for paying taxes. The last group was constituted of the monarch, counselors, priests and soldiers, who were not required to pay taxes. Accordingly, people of this group were not allowed to engage in production and trade; they were solely responsible from the protection and the regulation of the society. Peritore observes that this stratification of society was not inspired by Plato, who was the likely candidate, but actually from Plutarch.<sup>54</sup> Plutarch's description of Spartan society shows that not engaging in trade or pursuing for money was useful for people's development in politics and clear judgment, in this way people could interact with each other while observing and discussing the functioning of society.<sup>55</sup>

The formation of the army got the same attention from Plethon as the society did. He proposed specific instructions concerning recruiting and the regiments the army needed. A main point of his treatment was concerned with the interconnection between the army recruitment and land distribution because he proposed a standing army bound to the land itself. This was supposed to have two benefits; first, the land would always be worked, and, second, it would make the soldiers relentless, for in this way they would fight for their own lands. Plethon suggested one other measure to secure the army's loyalty to the state and ambition to defend the people; the soldiers should be recruited from among the Hellenes. Paid loyalty could not be trusted, according to Plethon, well-trained soldiers of Morea would be much more efficient than the mercenaries who in the past had proved to be troublesome. As to what kind of troops the country needed, he advised that the state must focus either on the land or the maritime forces. However, land troops were the priority, and as long as it was not crucial to seize an overseas land, the state should not attempt to build a navy. This clear

<sup>54</sup> Peritore, 'The Political Thought of Gemistos Plethon: A Renaissance Byzantine Reformer', 180.

<sup>55</sup> Plutarch, *Lives*.

statement has been interpreted to mean that Plethon was against a state which would become a maritime power.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, it was thought that Plethon savored the idea of an isolated, self-sufficient Morea.<sup>57</sup> I think Plethon was not against becoming a maritime power and did not underestimate the captains and the crews, however, he did not differentiate between the sea captains and corrupt people.<sup>58</sup> On the contrary, he believed in the necessity of a navy in the long run and definitely the Morea he envisioned was an expanding one; he only compartmentalized the army formation and accordingly his goals concerning the future of Morea, as he himself clearly stated: “As we do not want at present at least anything else but salvation”<sup>59</sup> Quite realistically, he knew that the state could afford either land troops or a navy if it desired them to be strong. I have already noted that in the recent past Morea had been the target of Ottoman raids on land. He could not underestimate sea captains for in the beginning of this same letter he put an analogy between a sea captain and a monarch in order to legitimize the position of a monarch in dire times.<sup>60</sup> Apart from this rhetorical nuance, Plethon’s praise of the law reform in Sparta is a major signifier for his long-term desires. Plethon explained Sparta’s success in establishing colonies overseas by a reform of laws; in this respect, reform yields desirable results such as colonizing overseas lands. Apart from the example of Sparta, which was the major source of inspiration for Plethon, he also praised the expansion of Rome, which was, according to him, founded by Aeneas with the help of the Sabines.<sup>61</sup> In this instance, a leader like Aeneas and the good Sabine people achieved Rome,

<sup>56</sup> Shawcross, ‘A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea’, 429.

<sup>57</sup> Peritore, ‘The Political Thought of Gemistos Plethon: A Renaissance Byzantine Reformer’, 188.

<sup>58</sup> Plethon, ‘Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso’, 122, line 9-10. (...) ἀλλὰ μὴ ναυκλήρων τέχναις ἄλλων τε φαύλων ἀνθρώπων (...).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 129, line 12-13. Ἐπεὶ δ’ οὐδενὸς ἄλλου ἡμῖν ἐν γε τῷ παρόντι δεῖ ὡς σωτηρίας καὶ τοῦ σώζεσθαι (...).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 113, line 1-6; 114, line 1-3. Καὶ ἐν πλοίῳ κυβερνήτην νενόμισται μὲν ἅπαντα ἄγειν τὰ πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἐμπλεόντων σωτηρίαν ἢ ἂν δοκῇ αὐτῷ καὶ ἐν στρατοπέδῳ δὲ στρατηγὸν ὡσαύτως τὰ πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἐπομένων νίκην ἢ οὐκ ἂν οὔτε τοῖς πλέουσιν οὔτε τοῖς πολεμοῦσιν τε καὶ μαχομένοις σωθήσεσθαι οὐδ’ ὅσον οὖν χρόνον τὰ πράγματα μὴ οὐχ ὑφ’ ἐνὶ ἀνδρὶ ταττόμενα ἑκατέροις· σαφέστατα γὰρ οὖν ἐν γε τοῖς τοιοῦτοις μάλιστα ὁρῶμεν ἐν οἷσπερ μέγιστοί τε καὶ ὀξύτατοι οἱ κίνδυνοι τὴν μοναρχίαν ἀσφαλεστάτην τε οὔσαν καὶ λυσιτελεστάτην.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 115, line 23-29. Τρῶές τε γὰρ οἱ μετ’ Αἰνείου, ἐπειδὴ ἡ πατρίς σφίσιν ἦλθε ὑπὸ Ἀχαιῶν, ἐς Ἰταλίαν ἐκ Φρυγίας κατὰ συμφορὰν ἀπενεχθέντες, οὕτως εὐτυχῶς ἐχρήσαντο τοῖς μετὰ ταῦτα πράγμασιν, ὥστε ἐπειδὴ

which came to be a colonizing empire. Therefore, I think for Morea Plethon desired a future that he exemplified throughout his letter.

Luxury, taxation and punishment were, as was the case with every other aspect of the reform, intended to be beneficial for the smooth functioning of society and the law. Plethon's approach to the issue was the same as his approach to the ruling types and military power; he lists the types of taxation, which were forced labor, fixed imposition in kind or money and extraction of a determined proportion of the product. Once he explained the impracticality of the others he concluded that the most egalitarian method was to tax proportionately, that this method would bring the most relief for the laborers, who were vital for the continuity of production. The laborers produce, either using their own land and facilities or by working with an intermediary person's tools and animals. In the first case, the laborer must keep two-thirds of the products and in the latter case he could only keep a third.

From taxation, Plethon moved to consumption. Luxurious consumption could not be an acceptable conduct either for citizens or for the ruling strata. Luxury was to be avoided for one single reason: it was useless. As he was determining the military type on the grounds that the state needed most efficiency from least investment, he proposed avoiding luxury because whatever wealth could be gathered should be spent on military expenses. This is another strong indicative that he intended his propositions to yield immediate results. Although Shawcross dwelled on Plethon's familiarity with the northern Italian merchant city states, especially the republic of Florence, and with Bruni's description of Florence as a democratic and Athens-like formation, she admitted that Plethon's plan for Morea did not have anything to do with the developments in Italian city states.<sup>62</sup> Plethon benefitted from Plutarch's

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χρόνῳ ὕστερον Ῥώμην ἅμα Σαβίνοις, Λακεδαιμονίοις οὖσιν, ἐπὶ τοῖς ἴσοις καὶ ὁμοίοις κατῴκισαν, ἀπὸ ταύτης ὀρμώμενοι, μεγίστην τε ἅμα καὶ ἀρίστην τῶν ἐν μνήμῃ πασῶν ἔσχον τὴν ἡγεμονίαν.

<sup>62</sup> Shawcross, 'A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea', 427-8.

description of Sparta, though he ignored the elements that contradicted the Christian morals, in order to create an ever-working society that would have a function and a goal. I have already shown that the immediate goal was to shape an army to prevent breaches into Morea and subdue the Italian lords and self-seeking *archontes* in Morea. Plethon's knowledge of the emergence of Islam<sup>63</sup> and the contemporary Ottomans seems to have been influential,<sup>64</sup> too, when it came to the formation of the army. Plethon definitely refused luxury based on Italian goods, as he refused the presence of Italian lords and money in Morea and imports from Italian cities into Morea. He considered all of this luxury a basic problem; he first refused the export of raw material to foreigners with the warning that these foreigners sold back this Byzantine raw material once they had turned it into manufactured goods, in other words, more expensive goods. To sum up, luxury was bad in two ways; first, it was a waste of resources that should have been used for maintaining a strong army, and second, the waste of resources gave direct support to foreigners who proved to be harmful.

The last thing I will touch upon is the divinity and morals that Plethon adopted along with the historical examples he chose. Plethon was careful while choosing from Plutarch's description of Sparta, since in the Spartan society there were dramatic contradictions with Christian morals. As I mentioned above, he defined divinity as one omnipresent being which cares about worldly matters.<sup>65</sup> He did not use examples from the history of Christianity, however, except for one; all the success stories were from the pagan past with one exception, the Muslim expansion. As a matter of fact, all the bad examples were also extracted from the pagan past. What is striking is that once Plethon summarized his proposals concerning the regulation of society, the army and economy, he concluded that these were all "strict

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<sup>63</sup> Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*.

<sup>64</sup> Niketas Siniosoglou, 'Sect and Utopia in Shifting Empires: Plethon, Elissaios, Bedreddin', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 36, no. 1 (1 March 2012): 38–55, doi:10.1179/030701312X13238617305617, 40.

<sup>65</sup> Plethon, 'Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso', 125, line 6–12.

examinations” of God’s creed,<sup>66</sup> and he immediately continued with the nature of God and how being in accordance with his Nature causes justice. So he openly stated that all good things came from God while he was exemplifying good things from pre-Christian era. Before he exemplified the not-so-virtuous acts from the pre-Christian history, he defined wasting public wealth as an act which could only be done under the influence of the “first fruit”.<sup>67</sup>

Having given these explanations on this address I can safely conclude that this was a text which referred to very concrete trends in Byzantine politics and current threats that surrounded the Morea. The threats were: *archontes*, who were busy with trade and manipulated diplomacy according for their own benefit; Italian merchants who were armed with so many privileges that it harmed the Byzantine economy; a very privileged and established monasticism; and Ottoman raiders which could find collaborators among the Byzantine elite, which can easily be detected both in this address and in the late history of the Byzantines. Throughout the letter, Plethon proposed solutions to the current problems from the authors and histories which he thought most fitting both to the problems and to his capabilities.

<sup>66</sup> Plethon, ‘Consilium Ad Despotam Theodorum de Peloponneso’, 125, line 4-6. “...ὧν περ κεφάλαιον πάντων τὰ περὶ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δόξαν ἡκριβῶσθαι καὶ κοινῇ καὶ ἰδίᾳ, μάλιστα δ’ ἐκεῖνα τρία τε καὶ κυριώτατα,

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 125, line 18-22. (...) μήθ’ ὑπερβολαῖς δαπανῶν τοὺς τε ἰδίους οἴκους καὶ τὰ κοινὰ φθείροντας ὧς τι πλέον ποιήσοντας τῇ πολυτελείᾳ τῶν ἀπαρχῶν τε καὶ ἀναθημάτων, μηδ’ ἀπαρχομένων ἔτι, ἀλλ’ ὥς ὠνούμενων δόξαν παρεχομένους τῷ τρίτῳ εἶδει τῆς ἀσεβείας ἐνέχεσθαι (...).



## 1.2. Address to Manuel II

Plethon's *To Manuel Palaiologos on the Matters of the Peloponnese* seems to have been written after his *symboleutikos* to Theodore II, who was Manuel II's son and the ruling despot in Mystras. In one of the surviving manuscripts it was explicitly called a *symboleutikos*.<sup>68</sup> Besides the contents of this address resembles to *symboleutikos* that he had written for Theodore II. In this address Morea again emerged as an important political unit, and Plethon repeated his reform plans this time to a higher authority, emperor Manuel II. In this part, my aim is to analyze the contents of his reform in relation to the addressee, in other words, implications of addressing the emperor concerning the future of Morea. Therefore, after a summary of this letter, I examine what Plethon wanted to convey to Manuel II concerning Morea through his plans and historical sources. Thus my main concern here is how Plethon introduced problems, what was the focus in the solutions and how he handled the historical sources.

### 1.2.1. Summary of the Letter

Plethon used the victory over the Italian lords in Morea (πρὸς Ἰταλῶν τοὺς ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ)<sup>69</sup> as a starting point for his letter. By stating that this event confirmed the safety and glory of Morea, he warned the emperor that this safety might not continue for long if the reforms that he had proposed previously were not applied. In Plethon's opinion, Manuel should turn to Morea and pay attention to its affairs; and he continued to explain why Morea was important for the Byzantine Empire and worthy of imperial attention. First of all, Morea and the neighboring islands were historically Hellene in ethnicity, language, and level of

<sup>68</sup> Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso'. πλήθωνος πρὸς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐν πελοποννήσῳ ἐρυθρὰ, ἄνωθεν δὲ διὰ μέλανος συμβουλευτικός πρὸς κῦρ μανουήλ βασιλέα τὸν παλαιολόγον ὁ παρὼν λόγος.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 246, line 1.

civilization<sup>70</sup>. These people who had inherited a glorious history were the same people who had founded “the city on the Bosphorus” which came to be the imperial seat (πόλεως τῆς πρὸς Βοσπόρῳ, ἥπερ νῦν ὑμῖν βασίλειόν ἐστι),<sup>71</sup> Constantinople. Rome, the predecessor of Constantinople, was also founded by the Sabines, led by Aeneas; Sabines, as Plethon also stated in the address to Theodore II, were Moreote people. Morea’s other feature which should make it an important land in the eyes of the emperor, was its geopolitical advantages. Plethon first noted the natural beauty of the peninsula, “a very habitable land with mild seasons.”<sup>72</sup> He continued with its defensive advantage; since it was both an island (νῆσός) and a continent (ἥπειρος)<sup>73</sup> it was a safe-haven for Hellenic people. Moreover, the mountainous terrain provided natural citadels for the inhabitants in case of incursions into the peninsula, thus the inhabitants could always have the higher ground against any intruders. And it was not only that it was nice to inhabit Morea or that it was easy to defend, but Plethon suggested that it could be a proper headquarters for conquering neighboring lands around, once the threats were deflected.<sup>74</sup>

Plethon, once having safely concluded that Morea was important, delved into the preparations for this potential country to be a real machinery of Byzantine military power. Firstly, he identified where the problems lay; accordingly, he divided them into two main fields, issues concerning taxation and land,<sup>75</sup> and the issues concerning military

<sup>70</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, ‘Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso’, in *Παλαιολογία Και Πελοποννησιακά*, ed. Sp. Lampros, vol. 3 (Athens, 1912), 246–65, 247, line 10-15. Πρῶτον μὲν δὴ ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς τῆς χώρας, ὡς περὶ πλείστου ποιητέα ὑμῖν ἐστι, βραχέ’ ἅττα μοι εἰρήσεται, οὐχ ὅτι μὴ καὶ αὐτοὺς ὑμᾶς περὶ τὴν ταύτης ἐπιμέλειαν ἐσπουδακότας ὀρῶ, ἀλλ’ αὐτοῦ γέ τοι τοῦ λόγου ἔνεκα ὡς διὰ τῶν δεόντων δὴ χωροίη. Ἐσμέν γὰρ οὖν ὧν ἡγεῖσθέ τε καὶ βασιλεύετε Ἕλληνες τὸ γένος, ὡς ἡ τε φωνὴ καὶ ἡ πάτριος παιδεία μαρτυρεῖ.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 248, line 14-15.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 249, line 7-9.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 249, line 12.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 249, line 15-16. (...) ὥστε καὶ ἄλλης οὐκ ὀλίγης ἂν ῥαδίως πρὸς τῇδε κρατεῖν.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 251, line 5-8. Ἔστι τοίνυν πρῶτον ἰδεῖν τῇδε Πελοποννησίων τὸν πολὺν λεῶν γεωργοῦντάς τε ἢ καὶ νέμοντας ἐνίους καὶ ἀπὸ τούτων τάς τε πρὸς τὸν βίον ἀφορμὰς σφίσιν αὐτοῖς πορίζομένους εἰσφέροντάς τε τῷ κοινῷ καὶ στρατευομένους τοὺς αὐτούς (...).

organization.<sup>76</sup> Plethon explained these two main problematic categories in a way that they influenced each other and imprisoned the society in a vicious circle. Plethon pinpointed the problems in the taxation in exactly the same way as he did in his address to Theodore II; the taxpayers dealt with many tax collectors in a year and small sums of tax were collected frequently and in money.<sup>77</sup> In addition to these, these people were called to arms whenever necessary. Frequent calls to arms had a double setback. Firstly, because of the poverty of people, which was facilitated by improper taxation, they went to duty poorly armed and unskilled. And secondly, recruiting them interrupted production badly.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, these poorly armed and unskilled men were likely to die in combat, but even if they came back, they returned back to a land they could not tend properly. And the tax collectors were still likely to trouble them soon, regardless of such troubles, which did not allow them to produce food and other goods. He pointed, as he did a few times throughout the letter, to the *Hexamilion* and warned that such troops could not man it and all effort would be in vain. He added that mercenaries were not a solution because, in Plethon's opinion, it was not possible to find enough mercenaries without devastating Moreote people economically, who were already in bad shape.<sup>79</sup> He thought that even the presence of the divine prince (τοῦ θεοῦ ἡγεμόνος)<sup>80</sup> on the *Hexamilion* would not be much help without a strong army to support him. As Plethon did before, in his address to Theodore II, he drew a parallel between the

<sup>76</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso', in *Παλαιολογεια Και Πελοποννησιακα*, ed. Sp. Lampros, vol. 3 (Athens, 1912), 246–65, 252, line 6–8. Ἀπὸ δὴ τοιαύτης τῆς παρασκευῆς οὐθ' ὁ ἰσθμὸς οἷός τε ἱκανῶς φρουρεῖσθαι, οὐτ', ἂν ποτὲ τις κίνδυνος ἐπικρεμασθῇ, θαρρεῖν ὑπάρξει ὑπὲρ τοῦ σωθῆσεσθαι.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 251, line 8–10. (...) εἰσφέροντάς τε κατὰ σμικρὰ μὲν, συχνὰ δὲ καὶ ὑπὸ συχνῶν εἰσπραττόμενα καὶ νομίσματι τῶν πλείστων εἰσπράξεων, οὐ χρήμασι γιγνομένων.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 251, line 10–16. Ἐπειδὴν οὖν ἐς στρατείαν οὕτως ἔχοντες παραγγελῶσιν, ὀλίγοι τε ἐξίσιν ἐκ πολλῶν τῶν τε ἐξιόντων ἄοπλοι οἱ πλείστοι ἔρχονται, καταστάντες τε ἐπὶ στρατοπέδου οὐ πάνυ τοι ἐθέλουσι παραμένειν, τῶν ἔργων σφᾶς οἱκοι καλούντων, ἀφ' ὧν καὶ οἱκοι καὶ ἐπὶ στρατοπέδου δεήσει δαπανᾶν καὶ πρὸς γε ἔτι εἰσφέρειν, μὴ παραμενοῦσης δὲ στρατιᾶς ἣ καὶ ἀόπλου σμικρὸν που τὸ ὄφελος.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 252, line 14–20. Ἦν μὲν οὖν ἐφ' ἐκάστης ἐστίας ἔνιοι εἰσηγοῦνται εἰσφοράν, ὥστ' ἂν ξενοτροφεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ ἰσθμοῦ φρουρᾶς, καὶ μέγα τι καὶ σεμνὸν οἶονται ἐπινενοηκέναι ὥς μόνον ἂν ἐπαρκέσον τοῖς πράγμασι, λογιζόμενοι ὅσον ἀργυρολογήσουσι κυρωθείσης ἂν τῆς εἰσφορᾶς, γέλως ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ, εἰ διαφθείροντες τοὺς ἡμετέρους πολίτας μισθοῦμενοι ὑπὸ ξένων καὶ ἀλλοτρίων ἀνθρώπων οἰόμεθα σωθῆσεσθαι.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 253, line 7.

current situation of the state and a sick man (νοσοῦσιν),<sup>81</sup> whose diet was not changed but who sought to be healed by medicines (φαρμάκων)<sup>82</sup> and amulets (περίαπτον).<sup>83</sup>

Plethon did not stop at diagnosing the problems of the system, but continued with his detailed solutions. He did this by proposing some fundamental changes in society, land distribution, military organization, and taxation; that is to say, all the aspects he had mentioned in his address to Theodore II, too. He proposed that tax payers and soldiers must be strictly divided; anybody who contributed to production should be exempted from military service, and soldiers should not be expected to contribute to production nor to pay tax. Tax payers should pay their taxes not in money but in kind and only once a year. Tax had an important role in the society, because Plethon divided the society into three strata and divided the production process into three levels as well:<sup>84</sup> producers (εἰλωτας),<sup>85</sup> intermediaries, who provided the means of production, and those who safeguarded society (ἄρχοντες).<sup>86</sup> These categories were in his address to Theodore II as well and he explained how the wealth could be shared among them without any change.

Plethon proceeded to details of these principal applications. He forbade forced labor because in this society nobody should suffer any injustice. For every soldier there must be a *helot* to attend him; for instance, he suggested that the arrangement could be made as one *helot* for an infantryman and two *helots* for a cavalryman.<sup>87</sup> The numbers were open to discussion and it was the emperor who would decide; Plethon would see to it. Also high

<sup>81</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso', in Παλαιολογεια Και Πελοποννησιακα, ed. Sp. Lampros, vol. 3 (Athens, 1912), 246–65, 253, line 10.

<sup>82</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso', in Παλαιολογεια Και Πελοποννησιακα, ed. Sp. Lampros, vol. 3 (Athens, 1912), 246–65, 253, line 12.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 253, line 12.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. 254, line 12–15. Τοὺς γιγνομένους τῶν ἔργων ἐκάστων καρποὺς τρισὶ φημι προσήκειν κατὰ τὸ δίκαιον, ἐνὶ μὲν αὐτῷ τῷ τῶν ἔργων ἐργάτῃ, δευτέρῳ δὲ τῷ τὰ τέλη συνεκπορίζοντι τοῖς ἔργοις καὶ τρίτῳ τῷ τὴν ἀσφάλειαν τοῖς ὅλοις παρασκευάζοντι.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. 255, line 18.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 254, line 19.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 256, line 5–8. Τούτων δ' οὕτω διατεταγμένων τῶν στρατιωτῶν, ἐκάστῳ πεζῷ μὲν ἓνα φημι δεῖν νενεμῆσθαι τῶν εἰλωτῶν, ἵππεϊ δὲ δύο, ὥσθ' ἕκαστον τῶν στρατιωτῶν καρπούμενον μὲν τὰ αὐτοῦ ὅσα ἐργαζομένῳ μὴ ἐμποδῶν ἔσοιτο τῷ στρατεύεσθαι (...).

ranking priests were to be attended by helots. Plethon treated monks as a special category; they did not fit into any category of the society which he envisioned. They did not contribute to society in any way; they did not produce for the society; and they did not provide any service to the public. Thus, monks were excluded from a share of the public wealth and were to be isolated from the society.<sup>88</sup> All of these arrangements required one main undertaking: a re-distribution of the land. This was to be done on one basic parameter; every helot could claim a portion of land as long as he could work it.

It is easy to assume that Plethon feared that he could be accused of being extreme in these measures, because once he had explained this new distribution of land and organization of society he challenged a hypothetical group of opponents who would accuse him of having extreme and useless ideas. He tried to fend off criticism by ensuring that people who already had large landholdings could acquire even more land if they were willing to work it.<sup>89</sup> He also re-stated his promise that in this way Morea would have sufficient able soldiers to man every corner of it. There is no doubt that there was a party counter to Plethon, which is revealed in the preface of *De Isthmo*, a letter from Plethon to Manuel II on the Isthmus of Corinth, and the *Hexamillion*. Plethon entrusted the letter to Rhaxes<sup>90</sup> and ensured Manuel II that Rhaxes would tell him everything that Plethon thought Manuel should know.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso', in *Παλαιολογία Και Πελοποννησιακά*, ed. Sp. Lampros, vol. 3 (Athens, 1912), 246–65, 257, line 16–21. Φέρειν μὲν γὰρ καὶ νῦν τοὺς φέροντας τούτους ἄφέρουσι μισθὸν τοῖς κοινοῖς φύλαξι τῶν πόνων ὧν ὑπὲρ ἀσφαλείας τῆς κοινῆς τοὺς δὲ φιλοσοφεῖν ποιουμένους τούτους λειτουργεῖν μὲν τῷ κοινῷ μηδέν, ἀλλ' ἐτέρους εἶναι τοὺς τῷ κοινῷ ἱερωμένους, τούτους δ' ἀποστάντας, ὡς φασι, πάντων ἰδίᾳ θεοκλυτεῖν τε καὶ τῆς σφετέρως αὐτῶν ἐπιμελεῖσθαι ψυχῆς.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 261, line 1–4. Τοῖς μὲν γὰρ χωρίου του δόξουσιν ἂν στέρεσθαι ἱκανὸν παραμύθιον τὸ μὴ μᾶλλον ἂν χωρίου του δοκεῖν τούτους ἀφαιρεῖσθαι ἢ συμπάσης γῆς παρέχειν ἐξουσίαν ἐν τῷ κοινῷ, εἶγε μὴ ἄργεῖν βούλονται.

<sup>90</sup> see PLP 24090.

<sup>91</sup> Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*.

Woodhouse assumed that through the mouth of Rhaxes, Plethon named inconvenient bureaucrats who he mentioned both in the *Address to Manuel* and in *De Isthmo*.<sup>92</sup>

Plethon admitted that even the society which he envisioned would have problems of crime, and in order to compensate for this he attempted to regulate punishment as well. This time he himself reflected that he had touched upon this issue before (in the address to Theodore II). He first described the problem that crimes which require the death penalty either go unpunished or cause the mutilation of the committer. He did not approve of mutilation for it is barbaric (βαρβαρικόν),<sup>93</sup> a non-Hellene method, and a source of great shame for the empire. Justice must be realized, however, so not punishing such a criminal would injure the society. Plethon's solution was the claim that the state could both punish these people and also benefit from them at the same time. Therefore, he proposed that these people should be forced to work on repairing public buildings and the *Hexamilion*. Thus, the soldiers would be free of such burdensome tasks while engaged with the enemy, and the helots would not need to interrupt their production for these necessary but difficult tasks.<sup>94</sup>

Lastly, even though he had already given his advice on taxation and production, he returned to the topic of the economy with special attention to use of money, along with the issues of import and export. He frankly defined using money in trade as absurd (ἄτοπον),<sup>95</sup> especially when foreign and bad copper money was in wide circulation. This was harmful both for the economy and for the dignity of the state. Circulation of goods instead of money would serve two purposes; first, trade would be more to the point, and second, it would dramatically diminish unnecessary import rates.<sup>96</sup> Of course, Plethon defined unnecessary

<sup>92</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso', in *Παλαιολογία Και Πελοποννησιακά*, ed. Sp. Lampros, vol. 3 (Athens, 1912), 246–65.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 262, line 2.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 262, line 5-13.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 262, line 14.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 263, line 5. Σχεδὸν γὰρ ἥττον τι ἂν νομίσματος δέοι, πρὸς δὲ τὰς καθ' ἡμέραν ἀλλαγὰς ἐξαρκοῖ ἂν καὶ τὸ τυχὸν νομισθέν. Ἄλλως δὲ καὶ Πελοποννήσῳ οὐδενὸς πάνυ τοι τοιούτου δεῖν δοκεῖ νομίσματος ὃ τισιν

import; accordingly, he had two places and products in his sights, he waged war against clothing from beyond the Ionian Sea (ὕπερ δὲ τὸν Ἰόνιον)<sup>97</sup> and wool from the Atlantic (τοῦ Ἀτλαντικοῦ).<sup>98</sup> He believed that these were totally unnecessary and damaging for the domestic economy; he advised to have cotton (βαμβυκίνων)<sup>99</sup> manufactured by production in Morea in order to change the clothing habits of the people into wearing manufactured clothes of cotton.<sup>100</sup> Importing iron and weapons, however, was necessary but they could be imported in exchange for cotton. After highlighting the situation of these example products, he went on to explain how import and export should be regulated in principle. Import or export of a product could be encouraged or discouraged by taxation. Import of anything that was an actual need in the country (like iron) should be free of tax, because that product was already a necessity for the public and its flow into the country must be as easy as possible. In order to keep necessary goods in the country, however, the export of these items must be highly taxed, so that both potential sellers and the buyers would be discouraged; even if they insisted on the transaction, the benefit of people could still be ensured due to the high tax.

In closing his letter, Plethon repeated that these measures should be taken urgently because the dangers were real and the measures he was proposing were proper. He summarized that the current condition of the state could not manage to ensure its continuity because it was wretched and foul in a dangerous environment.<sup>101</sup> He insisted that his plan was easy to apply and advantageous to the people and to the state. Interestingly, even after finishing this concluding summary, he suddenly turned his attention to monasticism again,

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ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις ἔσται ἔντιμον. Σχεδὸν γὰρ οὐδ' ὅτουσιν τῶν ἔξωθεν εἰσαγωγίμων δοκεῖ δεῖσθαι ἢ χώρα, ὥστε τοῦ καὶ τοιοῦτου νομίσματος δεῖν, πλὴν σιδήρου καὶ ὀπλῶν.

<sup>97</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso', in *Παλαιολογία Καὶ Πελοποννησιακά*, ed. Sp. Lampros, vol. 3 (Athens, 1912), 246–65, 263, line 13.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 263, line 12.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 263, line 11.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 263, line 14–17. Ὡς πλέονι ἂν καλλίους τῷ ὄντι ἦμεν τοῖς ἐπιχωρίοις τούτοις χρώμενοι καὶ αὐτάρκως τὰ περὶ τὴν ἀμπεχόνην ἔχοντες ἢ ὅσῳ καλλίων ἂν δόξειεν ἴσως ἢ ξενικὴ αὕτη ἐσθῆς τῆς ἐπιχωρίως ἂν σκευασθῆσομένης.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 264, line 19–20. Πάντως δ' οὐ περιοπτεᾶ τῶν παρόντων οὐδαμῶς οὐδὲ ἀμελητέα οὐδὲ ἐατέα οὕτως ἔχειν ὥς ἔχει Πονηρῶς γὰρ ἔχει καὶ σφαλερῶς.

complained that it was burden on society and Manuel II could change its function in order no longer to suffer from it.

### 1.2.2. Analysis of the Letter

Plethon praised Manuel II's sons' (υιέσι)<sup>102</sup> victory over the prince of Achaia, Centurione II Zaccaria, and his Navarrese Company in 1417/8, for he was an ardent supporter of any act towards the consolidation of Morea under Palaiologan rule.<sup>103</sup> Plethon's previous letter, which was addressed to Theodore II, opened with a warning against the danger that the Ottomans posed, calling them by an ancient name, *Parapamisadae*. He had already warned Theodore II in the previous letter against internal enemies, rebellious *archontes* and the Latin principalities in Morea. In this respect, Plethon did not present a new enemy in this letter, but acknowledged Theodore's act as glorious since it was in line with his warnings. Therefore, either by praising a good action or by pointing out a danger, Plethon started his discussion by reminding the addressee of the threats that surrounded Morea.

Victory, which had only been achieved recently in Morea, was a good starting point for this first part of the letter which discussed the importance of Morea for Byzantium. In the first part of his letter, Plethon's hinted at his plan to preserve the Palaiologan rule in Morea, and, when the time was ripe, to expand the Hellenic rule beyond the peninsula through linking the glory of Sparta to recent victory. Plethon reminded the emperor in Constantinople that: the "city on the Bosphorus" was founded by Moreote people.<sup>104</sup> Therefore it was not only wise to support the victorious Palaiologan rule in Morea, but it could also be seen as an

<sup>102</sup> Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso'. 246, line 2.

<sup>103</sup> One of the "sons" was definitely Theodore II Palaiologos. To the best of my knowledge, the other son was not specified. On the other hand, Thomas Palaiologos, Manuel II's youngest son was sent to Morea in 1418, he might have attended Theodore II in his campaign. see: Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*, 102. And see: Thomas Palaiologos in ODB.

<sup>104</sup> Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso'. 248, line 16- 249, line 2. (...) τοῦτο μὲν ἐπειδὴ Βυζάντιον οἱ προενοικηκότες Ἑλλήνες τε καὶ Δωριεῖς, Δωριεῖς δὲ Πελοποννήσιοι περιφανῶς, τοῦτο δ' ἐπειδὴ καὶ οἱ μετὰ ταῦτα, τὴν λαμπρὰν ταύτην ἀπὸ τῆς ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ Ῥώμης ἀποικίαν στείλαμενοι καὶ Βυζάντιον οὕτω καλῇ καὶ μεγάλῃ ἐπιτυχικότες τῇ προσθήκῃ, Πελοποννησίων οὐκ ἀλλότριον (...).



act of gratitude to the land that had begotten Constantinople. Plethon attempted to link contemporary Morea to ancient Sparta immediately from the very beginning, and this may also be a reference to Manuel II's own reference and admiration of ancient Sparta in his funeral oration for his brother, the previous ruler in Mystras, Theodore I Palaiologos. Manuel II likened his brother to the ancient kings of Sparta.<sup>105</sup> Plethon was certainly aware of that oration and Manuel II's ideas, for he wrote the preface to the oration and mentioned ancient Sparta there.<sup>106</sup> Probably Plethon did not write all this to inform Manuel II on the ancient history of Morea. This letter, of course, had already stated that the city on the Bosphorus was founded by the Spartans. It may have been a good way for Plethon to share the idea and pride of Manuel II concerning Morea and his son Theodore II, however, before introducing his reform plan which emphasized the threats to Morea from both outside and within. Another reason for connecting ancient Sparta with Rome and Constantinople might have been an attempt to legitimize Morea even further as an imperial center. Plethon introduced Morea as a historically Hellenized land which had been responsible for the foundation of both Old and New Rome, and later attributed to it old and good laws for a powerful country in which everyone enjoyed equal freedom. The address has been interpreted as Plethon proposed Morea as a safe-haven for Hellenes.<sup>107</sup> And if this was true, what of Constantinople, the imperial seat, the city he called as the city on Bosphorus or Byzantion. Plethon did not revere Constantinople as an ever-present city; the only historical continuity he emphasized was of Morea and the Hellenic people who had lived there from the very beginning. Any future prospect and salvation were designed only for and through Morea in Plethon's address, however, on his tomb, which was sculpted after his remains was removed to Rimini, it was

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<sup>105</sup> Shawcross, 'A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea', p.444

<sup>106</sup> For an English translation of Plethon's preface, see appendix 12 in: Leonte, 'Rhetoric in Purple: The Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos'.

<sup>107</sup> Shawcross, 'A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea', 424.

written: *GEMISTII BIZANTII*.<sup>108</sup> While a Hellenic identity, which was comprised of ethnicity, language and culture according to Plethon, constituted an important part of Plethon's argument that the emperor must pay attention to Morea, at first sight Plethon seemed to be wrong. Both Herodotus' *History* and *Descent into Hades* of Mazaris<sup>109</sup> testified that both ancient and contemporary Morea were home to various ethnic groups. This might show the continuity of various ethnicities that resided in Morea. Plethon was perfectly aware of this fact, he knew that Mystras, where he resided, was founded by the Latins in the aftermath of the fourth Crusade in 1204, and he was not pointing only to the rebellious *archontes* when he was warning Theodore II or Manuel II against internal enemies. More importantly, he was not only aware of the ethnic diversity in Morea, but he also praised the steps that had been taken in this direction by Theodore I. In his preface to Manuel II's funeral oration for his brother, Despot Theodore I, he clearly stated that the transfer of an Illyrian population into Morea was the right decision, opposition notwithstanding.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, this idea of ethnic consolidation in Morea seems to be a rhetorical device in order to create a historical continuity and deny the Latin presence in the peninsula. There is not enough evidence but constructing such a glorious history by also addressing Manuel's understanding of history, along with Plethon's clear summoning of Manuel to pay attention to Morea, may hint at a more general call to bring Manuel from Constantinople to Morea.

Plethon explained the main problem in Morea. In his opinion, Morea was sick and its whole diet must be changed, so small scale regulations would not be effective, they would be like useless amulets or medicines, which were not helpful if the sick would continue to pursue the lifestyle that made him sick already. Abuse of the labor force was the main

<sup>108</sup> Shawcross, 'A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea', 420.

<sup>109</sup> see PLP 16117.

<sup>110</sup> See Appendix 12, in: Leonte, 'Rhetoric in Purple: The Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos'.

problem of the government but it was a problem in relation to the efficiency of production and of the military capabilities. Therefore, the state must regulate the roles of people in the society systematically, or else with more taxation and more mercenaries the real problem would only be deepened.

Plethon proposed solutions which aimed at the core of the problem; accordingly, the functioning of society and the roles of every person must be redistributed according to the will and capacity of every member of society. While addressing society's needs, which he defined, he was neither a revolutionary nor simply a copyist of old texts. Apart from being in his sixties, a veteran intellectual of Byzantium who had resided both in Constantinople and Mystras, Plethon was familiar with both Islamic<sup>111</sup> and Ancient Greek history. The core of his plan was probably constituted by his research on the Lycurgus chapter of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. He kept the praising tone of Plutarch when it came to Spartan society and Lycurgus, but what he opted to use is interesting, and reveals Plethon's bonds to the realities of his own society. First of all, as Shawcross presents,<sup>112</sup> Plethon followed Plutarch in not believing in the existence of *krypteia* which were hunting down and killing *helots* just for fun. At this point, Plethon agreed with Plutarch, who thought that it was a later invention after Lycurgus' reign, and he did not even mention this aspect of Spartan society. Plethon, in contrast, neglected family relations, publicity and the nudity of women, whereas Plutarch praised this aspect of Spartan society. Plethon's attitude indicates that he was benefitting from his material selectively. There are still more examples of Plethon's distinctive treatment of the text. Plutarch stated that "It was not, however, the chief design of Lycurgus then to leave his city in command over a great many others..."<sup>113</sup> As opposed to Plutarch on the address to

<sup>111</sup> F. Klein-Franke, 'Die Geschichte Des Frühen Islam in Einer Schrift Des Georgios Gemistos Pletho', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 65 (1972).

<sup>112</sup> Shawcross, 'A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea', 439.

<sup>113</sup> Plutarch, *Lives*.

Theodore II, above, I discussed Plethon's attitude towards expansionism, and I stated that considering the historical examples Plethon proposed, there was no reason to believe that Plethon did not desire expansion from Morea in the long run. Therefore I think Plethon was convinced by Plutarch's statement that a reform could be put into action on a small scale first, and the proper functioning of this small reformed unit would eventually achieve greater things. Plethon, however, carefully and selectively treated the matter of encircling the settlement with a defensive wall. Plutarch, however was doubtful of its authenticity, related that Lycurgus had once stated the importance of men rather than bricks when he was asked about the need to build a city wall.<sup>114</sup> Plethon praised walls on at least two occasions. First, when he was highlighting the defensive advantages of Morea's hilly geography;<sup>115</sup> and second, as Baloglou notes, when he attributed importance to the manning of the *Hexamilion*,<sup>116</sup> and drew attention to the significance and usefulness of walls. Plethon, however, seems to have drawn lessons from Lycurgus because he insisted on the need for well-trained men in his proposals concerning how to defend the *Hexamilion*.

It seems that the most important inspiration from ancient Sparta in Plethon's writing concerns reform in society, which was the stratification of society according to the roles in the production process. His usage of the term *helot* was an explicit attempt to link the contemporary workers to the Spartan people. One third of the people would be allocated to produce for the whole society and would produce on their own land, for their own needs, and for the general good of society. In return, their basic needs would be provided for and their production would be distributed by another third of society, and, finally, another third would manage the state and protect them all. This system aimed to create loyalty to the land and

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<sup>114</sup> Plutarch, *Lives*, 267.

<sup>115</sup> Plethon, 'Oratio Ad Manuelem Palaeologum de Rebus in Peloponneso'. Καὶ παρῆκα ὁρῶν ἐρυμνότητα, διὰ πάσης διηκόντων καὶ δίκην **ἀκροπόλεων ἀνεστηκότων** πανταχῇ, ὥστε, κὰν τῶν πεδίων κρατῆσαι πολεμίους συμβῇ ποτε, τῆς γε συμπάσης χώρας ἦττους εἶναι.

<sup>116</sup> Baloglou, 'The Institutions of Ancient Sparta in the Work of Pletho', 324,25.

people, a society in which people needed each other. Baloglou pointed out that Plethon deemed the reform in land ownership more important than other proposals.<sup>117</sup> Land redistribution was among Lycurgus' reforms, but Plethon did not imitate the Spartan reform, instead he proposed land redistribution which was based on the willingness to cultivate the land. The Spartan example, I assume, was not the sole source and motivation behind Plethon's proposals for land reform. Although, Plethon presented his land reform as the Spartan model, his description of the redistribution system suggests that he might have benefited from two other recent models for his reform plan.

Although Baloglou points out numerous references for the sources of Plethon's proposal,<sup>118</sup> there was already a contemporary land system which resembled Plethon's schema. As Baloglou also points out, Plethon admired the Ottoman system for its efficiency in his addresses.<sup>119</sup> Plethon seem to have regarded the Ottoman system, which corroborated the land distribution and the army, as useful, and it would not be going too far to think that Plethon might have used the idea of *timar* holders, who had land and a corresponding number of troops and peasants.<sup>120</sup> Plethon may have found the Spartan example solidified in the Ottoman land administration, for he praised both of them as efficient in maintaining the army. Naturally, this is not to say that the Ottoman system was the same as that of ancient Spartan. Plethon proposed a relationship between peasants and soldiers similar to the one in the Ottoman state. Bartusis found *timar*'s "fiscal nature", its "military and non-military use", and its documentation strikingly similar to that of *pronoia*.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, it is possible that Plethon have thought of *timar* a similar form of land administration to the Komnenian era *pronoia*.

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<sup>117</sup> Baloglou, 'The Institutions of Ancient Sparta in the Work of Pletho', 322.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Christos P. Baloglou, 'The Economic Thought of Ibn Khaldoun and Georgios Gemistos Plethon: Some Comparative Parallels and Links', *Medioevo Greco: Rivista Di Storia E Filologia Bizantina* 2 (2002): 1–20, 19.

<sup>120</sup> see: prebendal system, agriculture. Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, 1st ed. (Facts on File, 2008).

<sup>121</sup> Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army*.

Plethon's reform in land administration, I argue, had its sources in the shift of the land administration at the turn of the eleventh century in Byzantium, hence the growing number of imperial estates and a tendency to have taxes in kind.<sup>122</sup> Granting imperial estates to the *pronoiai* had been regarded as diminishing the central authority thus far, however, as Smyrlis argues in his recent un-published article, these grants were, at least in effect, not hereditary, and were given in exchange for the service of the holder, largely for military service.<sup>123</sup> A *pronoia* holder and his troops who have tax exemption, and safeguard a portion of land with peasants do not fall far away from such a land administration system, as Plethon proposed.

I have already stated that Plethon's main motivation behind even the reform in land administration, which he admitted was the most important reform, was to change the society and consolidate the people of Morea. Towards the end of his letter, Plethon made a last attempt to heal the society. He explained his plans for criminals who faced capital punishment and for monasticism. Plethon's suggestions on how to punish such criminals was a reconfirmation of his care for the balance of society. He found older practices like mutilation and capital punishment improper; the first being shameful and the latter a waste of precious manpower. Accordingly, he proposed using such criminals as chained workers where they were needed, so that hard work like construction and repairing of buildings and walls can be done while avoiding interrupting the daily routine of *helots* and soldiers. He specifically suggested having them work at the *Hexamilion*, where maintaining the wall was a crucial issue. He aimed to improve the capacity of soldiers at the wall by assigning these chained workers to logistic tasks. Plethon's aim here was clearly to avoid wasting the capacities of these people by mutilating and killing them, and finding a way to use them for

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<sup>122</sup> Kostis Smyrlis, 'The Myth of the Weak Emperor: Taxation and Sovereignty in Byzantium (11th-14th C.)' (Un-published Document, n.d.), 4,7.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 12.

the greater good of society. Additionally in this way, criminals could not escape punishment, and the feeling of justice could be maintained in the society.

Although Plethon tried hard to make even criminals useful in society, there was one group for which he proposed total isolation from society. These people were the monks. Even after he proposed lifting the fiscal privileges of the monasteries, and leaving them on their own since they did not contribute to society in any way, towards the end of his letter he once again complained about them and found it improper to feed these people amongst the difficulties society was already facing. There seem to be two reasons behind Plethon's dislike for monks. First of all, some priests and monks, especially the ones belonging to the Palamite vein, had diverted their path to salvation. As can be seen in Gennadios II, personal salvation was the only one that mattered, and salvation of the state was not a prerequisite for it.<sup>124</sup> Monasteries as institutions already started to cut their ties with the court, especially the ones outside Constantinople. Elias Kolovos, in his recent article, concluded that the monasteries played an important role in incorporating Byzantine land and the population by the Ottomans.<sup>125</sup> If Plethon was aware of these developments, his comments on monasticism were based on these developments.

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<sup>124</sup> C. J. G. Turner, 'Pages from Late Byzantine Philosophy of History', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 57, no. 2 (1964), doi:10.1515/byzs.1964.57.2.346, 369, 371.

<sup>125</sup> Elias Kolovos, 'The Monks and the Sultan Outside the Newly Conquered Ottoman Salonica in 1430', *Journal of Turkish Studies* 40 (December 2013): 271–79, 279.

### 1.3. Cardinal Bessarion Greets Constantine Palaiologos

This is the third letter Cardinal Bessarion wrote to Constantine Palaiologos on the matter of fortifying the Isthmus of Corinth,<sup>126</sup> but two earlier letters have not survived.<sup>127</sup> The letter has no date on it, but Mohler limited the possible range to between 1443 and 1446.<sup>128</sup> Keller is more to the point, saying it must be 1444, when the restoration of the *Hexamilion* was done and the Christian military alliance against the Ottomans was still an issue.<sup>129</sup> Bessarion at that time resided in Rome.<sup>130</sup> The title of the letter does not explicitly refer to the rhetorical type, yet, Bessarion mentioned that this address was his third letter on the same issue.<sup>131</sup> The absence of the name of the literary genre and the title of Constantine Palaiologos, whereas Bessarion states his cardinalship, may imply Bessarion's self-positioning outside of the Byzantine world, both in rhetoric and the hierarchical order.<sup>132</sup> Having been a cardinal of the papacy, he must have regarded himself as above the despots ruling Morea. Judging by the humiliating seating organized for the Byzantine delegation at the Council of Florence, I assume that Bessarion regarded himself either in an higher position or at least the equal of Constantine Palaiologos.<sup>133</sup> In Florence, the Papal throne was on the Latins' side but it was elevated more than anyone's. There were two imperial thrones; one for each side (for Latins and Greeks) and their height were equal, which demonstrates "western" emperor's equality to the "eastern" one.<sup>134</sup> This was a critical issue since Pope referred John XIII Palaiologos as the

<sup>126</sup> Bessarion, 'Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν'.

<sup>127</sup> see the footnote in: Ibid, 439.

<sup>128</sup> see the footnote in: Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Keller, 'A Byzantine Admirer of "Western" Progress'.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Bessarion, 'Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν', 439, line 1-2. " Τρίτην ταύτην ἐπιστέλλων σοι, κράτιστε δέσποτα, μετὰ τὸ τὸν ἰσθμὸν τειχισθῆναι (...).

<sup>132</sup> It should be noted that Bessarion closed his letter by saying that he could at least provide his reasoning and counsel to the despot: (...) οἷς ὁμως δύνανται λόγοις καὶ συμβουλαῖς (...). Ibid. 449, line 8-9.

<sup>133</sup> Joseph Gill, 'Greeks, Latins and the Filioque', in *Byzantium and the Papacy: 1198-1400* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 144

<sup>134</sup> The Imperial throne on the Latins' side was vacant due to the recent death of Emperor Sigismund, see, in: Deno John Geanakoplos, 'The Council of Florence (1438-1439) and the Problem of Union between the Greek and Latin Churches', *Church History* 24, no. 4 (December 1955): 324-46, doi:10.2307/3162003, 330.



emperor of Greeks.<sup>135</sup> Below them, there were the thrones of cardinals and of the Patriarch of Constantinople.<sup>136</sup> In short, If Constantine had attended the Council of Florence, he would have been seated on a lower position. When Bessarion directly referred to him, however, he employs the usual terminology for referring to a Byzantine ruler, which was in the superlative form (κράτιστε δέσποτα, βασιλικώτατε ἄνερ,<sup>137</sup> θειότατε δέσποτα,<sup>138</sup> ἡγεμονικώτατε ἄνερ,<sup>139</sup> ἄριστε δέσποτα<sup>140</sup>). Among all his terms of address with Constantine's name, the first one is striking. In the first line of his letter Bessarion calls Constantine the “mightiest despot” (κράτιστε δέσποτα). This usage could be disregarded, since the usual way of referring to a ruler is using superlative; however, considering the fact that there were two members of the *Palaiologoi* ruling as despots in Morea at the time, Constantine being the only addressee and “mightiest” may have been important. After all, Constantine had just recently moved to Mystras after having exchanged Selymbria with his elder brother, Theodore II, the former despot at Mystras. If it was not a purely rhetorical device, Bessarion might have intended to put more weight either on Constantine over Thomas, or on Mystras itself as a city which granted its ruler more authority in Morea or perhaps both were intended. To sum up, this term is in agreement with the contents of the letter, which in general shows the trust that Bessarion put in Constantine to act both in ruling Morea and show military prowess. If using mightiest in the first place had any significance that was surely thanks to his offensive actions against the Latin dominions in Morea,<sup>141</sup> and to his re-fortification of the *Hexamilion*.

<sup>135</sup> Gill, ‘Greeks, Latins and the Filioque’, 102.

<sup>136</sup> Geanakoplos, ‘The Council of Florence (1438-1439) and the Problem of Union between the Greek and Latin Churches’, 330.

<sup>137</sup> Bessarion, ‘Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνω Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν’, 441, line 1.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 443, line 37.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 446, line 1.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 448, line 24.

<sup>141</sup> Keller, ‘A Byzantine Admirer of “Western” Progress’, 344.

### 1.3.1. Summary of the Letter

Content-wise, Bessarion's letter is similar to Plethon's addresses to Despot Theodore II and Emperor Manuel II, especially to the latter, because both letters praised the restoration of the *Hexamilion*, which was a linear wall that cut the Morea off from mainland Greece at Corinth. Although Manuel II's restoration proved unfruitful, since the wall had been breached by the Ottomans in 1423, with this new restoration by Constantine the topic recurs in Bessarion's letter. Land reform and redistribution was also a recurring topic. Bessarion shared Plethon's thought that the land must be allocated to whoever was willing to work it. I have discussed before that the land reform and the reform in society was intertwined in Plethon's advice, and all of this was articulated by a proper law. Bessarion was also insisting on the necessity for a new law, invoking the names of lawgivers -- Solon, Lycurgus, and Numa Pompilius.<sup>142</sup> Lycurgus was the main Ancient Spartan figure, whom Plethon also referred to. Numa Pompilius was a Sabine and became the second ruler of Rome. It is important to note that he was treated in parallel with Lycurgus in Plutarch's *Lives*. Solon was believed to be the one who had sown the seeds of democracy in Athens.

Besides the main social issues such as land reform and the promulgation of a new law, Bessarion turned his attention to more practical proposals. These proposals are mainly concerned with instructions on how Morea can benefit from the technical progress on the Italian peninsula. Accordingly, Bessarion acted like a Byzantine traveler to the West who reports his amazement to the ruler back home. Therefore, it can be easily said that the amazement of the Late Antique Western traveler to Constantinople was now adopted by Bessarion, who was of Trebizond origin. Bessarion proposed teaching new skills in production in order to help the Moreotes to manufacture their own goods. His source for

<sup>142</sup> Bessarion, 'Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν', 445, line 5-6. οἶδας, οἷς Σόλων, οἷς ὁ Λυκοῦργος, οἷς ὁ Νουμᾶς νομοθετήμασί τε καὶ διατάγμασι τὴν φιλοχρηματίαν ἀνεῖλεν.

developing Morea was not only the Italian ways, but also ancient Greek teachings. In support, he points out that their people were once supreme in letters, which was where science was born. Even this ancient knowledge could be learned through the Italians, Bessarion advised, for Italians had a level of education far beyond the Byzantines'.<sup>143</sup> In short, he pleaded with Constantine to send people to learn letters and crafts, and he liberally extended a helping hand to those people who would be sent.<sup>144</sup> Among the skills and crafts that could be improved through Italian learning, Bessarion noted forestry, farming, mining, weapon forging, and ship building. He listed four more skills, secondary to these in importance, the production of glass, silk, wool, and dying cloth, although he proposed avoiding luxury.<sup>145</sup>

### 1.3.2. Analysis of the Letter

I will now dwell more on the importance of the date and the addressee of Bessarion's letter. In 1439, with the declaration of Union of Churches in Florence, a period began, on one hand, of hope for taking the military advantage away from the Ottomans, and, on the other, of suspicion towards Latins. This period died out with the Ottoman victory at Varna in 1444. Bessarion was clearly in the camp of the optimistic ones, if not the foremost among them. His letter to Despot Constantine Palaiologos was one sign of his optimism. In the secondary literature, it has already been noted that Bessarion's address to Constantine Palaiologos reflects influences from Plethon's addresses to Theodore II and Manuel II Palaiologos, the

<sup>143</sup> Bessarion, 'Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν', line 7-16. 'Ἐπὶ τούτοις καὶ τὸ χρῆμα τῶν λόγων, ᾧ μόνῳ τῶν θηρίων ἄνθρωπος διαφέρει καὶ τῶν βαρβάρων Ἕλληνας διακρίνονται, ἐν οἷς ποτε τὸ ἡμέτερον ἦκμακε γένος, κάξ ὧν πᾶσα ἐπιστήμη καὶ γνῶσις καὶ τέχνη ἐβλάστησέ τε καὶ ἤνθησεν, ἀποδώσεις αὐθις τῷ γένει, θεϊότατε δέσποτα, καὶ οὐκ ἀνέξῃ τοσαύτη ἀλογία συνέχεσθαι, ὡς ἀπαιδεύτους καὶ ἀμαθεῖς παρὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις νομίζεσθαι, καὶ ταῦτα τοῖς παρ' ἡμῶν πάντα παραλαβοῦσιν, καὶ διδασκάλων μὲν ἐκείνους οἶεσθαι χώραν, ἡμῶν δὲ μαθητῶν δεῖν ἐπέχειν, κάκεινους μὲν ἐκ τοῦ ὑπερέχοντος ὥσπερ νομοθετεῖν, ἡμᾶς δὲ αἷς ἀνδράποδα ἔπεσθαι, καὶ ταῦτα οὐκ ἀρχηγούς μόνον καὶ εὐρετάς, ἀλλ' ἤδη καὶ τελειωτάς πάσης σοφίας γεγεννημένους, μάρτυσιν αὐτοῖς τούτοις τοῖς νῦν κατεπαιρομένοις ἡμῶν.

<sup>144</sup> Bessarion, 'Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν'. 1-4. καλὸν ἂν εἴη καὶ τούτων ποιήσασθαι λόγον καὶ τινα ἐκλεξάμενον νέους εἰς Ἰταλίαν πέμψαι τῶν τεχνῶν μαθησομένους τὰς ἀναγκαίας. ἐπεὶ διὰ λόγου μὲν πρὸς ταῦτα ἐλθεῖν τῶν σπανιωτάτων τε καὶ μοναδικῶν, δι' αἰσθήσεως δὲ γε καὶ πράξεως ῥᾶστά τε καὶ οὐ πολλῶ χρόνῳ ἔστιν αὐτὰς διδασχθῆναι.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. 448, line 5-13.

first Constantine's elder brother, and the second his father.<sup>146</sup> When Plethon penned those addresses, he resided in Mystras, and was putting forward theses to develop Morea into a driving force in the Byzantine world. He authored his letters, firstly, to the ruling despot in Morea and, secondly, to the emperor, who was interested in Morean affairs. Bessarion's choices in writing this letter seem somewhat peculiar. The peculiarity comes from the choice of place and preference for addressee; In Mohler's edition, there is not an address from Bessarion to Emperor John VIII Palaiologos in Constantinople,<sup>147</sup> with whom he had sailed to Italy for the Unionist council a few years before, but he chose to address Despot Constantine Palaiologos, newly installed in Mystras and sharing the Byzantine land in the Morea with his brother, Thomas Palaiologos. This indicates that, at that time, the most striking events for Bessarion were the restoration of the *Hexamilion* and the new despot on the throne of the palace in Mystras. Constantine's active militaristic policy, combined with talk of gathering Christian forces in the Balkans with the goal of routing the Ottomans might have played a part in Bessarion's choice. Constantine's raids toward the Venetian possessions in Morea, however, even into mainland Greece and Athens, did not stop Bessarion -who was now a cardinal- writing this address to Constantine. Maybe more importantly, I claim that Bessarion shared Plethon's convictions on Morea and the fact that Bessarion was writing from a completely different environment hints that Plethon's ideas were not simply caused by his dependency to his own city, Mystras, because Bessarion took his plans for Morea seriously after more than twenty years. Bessarion could still propose them as a solution to the general wretchedness of the empire. On the other hand, it should be noted that Bessarion had studied as a pupil of Plethon in Mystras.

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<sup>146</sup> Shawcross, 'A New Lycurgus for a New Sparta: George Gemistos Plethon and the Despotate of the Morea'.

<sup>147</sup> Ludwig Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion Als Theologe, Humanist Und Staatsmann*, 3 vols. (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1967).

Bessarion was convinced that the basics of Plethon's more than twenty-year-old scheme could still be used effectively. This alone takes Plethon out of the field of utopianism, if it does not put Bessarion into the same field along with Plethon. The basics were the need for a new law which would both regulate the land and accordingly the society. And the Hexamilion again emerges as a very concrete border for defining the land where these reforms could be materialized.<sup>148</sup>

Ancient Sparta found a place in Bessarion's writing as it did in Plethon's letters. When Plethon hailed Lycurgus as a role model, Bessarion added two more names of lawgivers, Solon and Numa Pompilius. Additionally, Bessarion promised Constantine that he could be the new Agesilaus. In the first analysis, it is apparent that Bessarion also had Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* at hand, and he made use of it as Plethon did when he was writing his letters to Despot Theodore II and to Emperor Manuel II. Two differences strike the eye; firstly, Bessarion referred to more people who were directly or indirectly related to Ancient Sparta. Numa, although the second Roman king, was of Sabine origin, which actually meant Spartan, as Plethon repeatedly pointed out. Plutarch treated him in parallel with Lycurgus. The resemblance of these two figures with regard to their abilities as administrators, their moderation, discipline, and introduction of pious laws to their people were listed by Plutarch.<sup>149</sup> In this regard, Bessarion's addition of Numa seems emphatic only. Numa, however, was described by Plutarch as less "rigid" than Lycurgus,<sup>150</sup> that he allowed room for arts, learning, in short, other things as well things related to fighting. This nuance suits Bessarion's intentions well, which included the education of the Byzantine youth in letters and crafts. Numa did not restrict the endeavors through which wealth could be extracted,

<sup>148</sup> Bessarion, 'Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν', 441, line 1-3. Τειχίσας μὲν οὖν τὸν ἰσθμὸν, βασιλικώτατε ἄνερ, ἄριστα καὶ ἀξίως σπαντοῦ ἐβουλεύσω. μὴ μέχρι δὲ τούτου διανοηθεῖς στήναι, ἀλλὰ προσέτι καὶ πόλιν ἐκεῖσε ἰδρύσασθαι, ἔτι μᾶλλον ἄξια θαύματος ἐλογίσω.

<sup>149</sup> Plutarch, *Lives*.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. 389.

whereas Lycurgus did;<sup>151</sup> hence, Bessarion's gradual and partial allowance for luxurious goods.<sup>152</sup> In short, Bessarion placed Numa as a figure to be inspired from with regard to the re-organization of the state and its law. I believe, however, Bessarion introduced Agesilaus, for a different reason. This reason seems to elaborate and further support the idea that Plethon's plans were gradual; he aimed for the Moreotes to eventually expand their rule. Taking this into account, Bessarion's reference to Agesilaus shows that Bessarion had already put forward Plethon's steps and he expected Constantine not only to realize the reforms, but also to be a conqueror as Agesilaus was. If Constantine would be a new Agesilaus in Mystras, he would not be the first Palaiologos who became so, for Manuel II Palaiologos, in his funeral oration, had already presented his brother Despot Theodore I Palaiologos as a new Agesilaus. It is as if it was a rule to look like Agesilaus if one ruled in Morea, yet, it was still an indication that Bessarion hoped Constantine would be as fierce as Agesilaus was. The Florentine council and its results definitely had a positive influence on Bessarion, especially with a moving Christian army in the Balkans and Constantine in Mystra, who was pursuing an aggressive policy towards his Venetian and Ottoman neighbours. When the Balkan army fell upon the Ottomans, Constantine having secured the Isthmus of Corinth, seized Athens and Thebes. In the meantime, the Ottoman sultan, Murad II, was about to leave the throne to his son, Mehmed II, who was still a teenager. In other words, Constantine emerged as a promising ruler in this atmosphere. This tells us Bessarion analyzed the general framework efficiently and chose a fitting ruler to encourage reforms.

The second superficial difference in the attribution of ancient figures to the addressees lay between the roles Plethon and Bessarion assumed. Whereas Bessarion expected

<sup>151</sup> Plutarch, *Lives*, 385.

<sup>152</sup> Bessarion, 'Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν', 448, line 28-32. εἰσὶ μέντοι καὶ ἄλλαι τέτταρες ἀξίαι λόγου, ἡ τοῦ ὕλιου, ἡ τῶν σηρικῶν, ἡ τῶν ἐξ ἐρίου ποιήσις ἱματίων καὶ προσέτι ἡ τούτων ἀμφοτέρων βάρη, περὶ ὧν ὁμῶς, ὥς οὐ πρὸς ἀνάγκην, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τρυφὴν καὶ διαγωγὴν μᾶλλον ἀνθρώποις ἐξευρημένων, οὐ πολὺν λόγον ποιούμεαι πρὸ τοῦ τῶν ἀναγκαίων τυχεῖν.

Constantine to be like Numa and Agesilaus, Plethon seemed to assume the role of Lycurgus for himself. Plethon, as a resident of Mystras, wanted to be the chief counselor and the implementer of reform,<sup>153</sup> after all, the reform, was his own plan. Bessarion, however, was resident in Rome, and a cardinal; he could advise and support the pupils who would be sent to Italy, but the responsibility was on Constantine's shoulders.

Bessarion did not attempt to classicize the enemy. The Ottomans appear as Turks (Τούρκων,<sup>154</sup> Τούρκοι<sup>155</sup>). The asymmetry between calling the enemy by its modern name, the barbarian Turks, and putting up a new Agesilaus to conquer Asia is interesting. It gives the impression that he regarded the threat at face value and had no illusion of it; whereas creating a bond with a glorious past, supported with plans to materialize that bond, aimed to encourage and convince the addressee. On the other hand, Plethon called the Ottomans with an ancient name. While he was emphasizing historical continuity between Ancient Sparta and Morea of his day, he did the same to the enemy as well in order to remind the addressee that Morea had always faced enemies.

Bessarion observed that the Byzantines fell short of the Italians with regard to learning liberal arts. The same observation was made by Georgios Scholarios from Constantinople, in a letter to the same Constantine Palaiologos in 1433, when he was in Morea as a despot but not enthroned in Mystras. Scholarios elaborately described his learning activity in his letter to Constantine Palaiologos. This letter reveals the fact that Scholarios turned his gaze very much to the learning outside Byzantium, that is to say, to the Latin West and the Arabs through Latin translations.<sup>156</sup> The letter clearly testifies that there were layers of chronological distance, cultural difference, and quality in Gennadios' classification of his

<sup>153</sup> He even volunteered to regulate the army. see, in: Bartusis, *The Late Byzantine Army*.

<sup>154</sup> Bessarion, 'Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν', 443, line 33.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. 443, line 34.

<sup>156</sup> Gill, "Cost of the Council of Florence," 79-80.

encounters in search of knowledge. He read the neo-Platonists of Late Antiquity and continued his endeavor with Latin texts from what he called early, middle, and more recent periods. In Greek he went back to Late Antique philosophers; in other periods, he appreciated recent Latin writing the most. What makes the recent Latin works more rigorous and accurate were that they knew and used the Late Antique philosophers, whom he had also read, and they translated the works of the Arabs and Persians. Both the failure of the Byzantines and the triumph of the Latins in philosophy actually lay on the same ground: Understanding the old philosophers (i.e., Late Antique Greek-speaking neo-Platonists). But another passage, in which Scholarios defends himself against those who blame him for indulging too much in Latin learning, reveals another critical point of difference between the Latins and the Byzantines: The Latins benefitted from the Arabs as well as from Byzantium, having come to Byzantium to learn and get whatever they could from the old Greek texts.<sup>157</sup> Thus, Latin openness to other cultures, as Scholarios saw it, and the Byzantine negligence of even the ones they possessed led Scholarios to run his own school. Bessarion's advice is more important and meaningful in the light of Scholarios' complaints on Byzantine negligence and hailing of Latin openness.

All the technical aspects to be improved through tutoring in Italy and sending new masters back to Morea, which Bessarion planned, were related to the natural resources of Morea and increasing domestic wealth. Accordingly, the primary purpose for benefitting more from the iron ores and forests of Morea was to provide the army stationed there with better equipment. Contrary to Plethon, Bessarion does not refrain from advising for building a navy.<sup>158</sup> Bessarion's full-fledged military organization further supported the idea that he

<sup>157</sup> Gill, "Cost of the Council of Florence," 80-81.

<sup>158</sup> Bessarion, 'Βησσαρίων Καρδινάλιος Κωνσταντίνῳ Παλαιολόγῳ Χαίρειν', 448, line 20-23. Οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ναυπηγικὴν, ὅση τε περὶ τὰς μακρὰς καὶ τριήρεις, ὅση τε περὶ τὰς φορτηγούς καὶ στρογγύλους καταγίνεται νῆας, ὧν πλείστην ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ καὶ καλλίστην ἔχετε ὕλην, ὥς τὰ μέγιστα ὠφελήσουσαν, οὐκ ἀπεικότως περὶ πλείστου ἡγήσῃ.



was at a further stage than Plethon concerning the future of Morea and was almost excited for its potential to expand.

To sum up, redistribution of land, an effective usage of natural resources, and social reform surface among Bessarion's advises. The law of the Ancient Spartans should be revived and through law and education Constantine could start a Hellenic advance from Morea to mainland Greece and into Asia, against the Italian colonies and the barbarian Turks. Bessarion found himself in an optimistic environment in that year with the Christian army moving against the Ottomans and an energetic despot ruling in Morea, so he put his trust and wisdom in Constantine to hold the Ottoman threat at bay.

## Chapter 2 – Casual Instructions as a Last Resort

### 2.1. Symeon of Thessaloniki's To the Despot

“To the despot” is a short address that constitutes thirteen lines in two paragraphs in the critical edition. Balfour pointed out that the text does bear neither the name of the author nor the name of the addressee.<sup>159</sup> Balfour suggested that the handwriting, which is not analogous to Symeon's other autographs, among which this address was,<sup>160</sup> gives the impression of a draft or the work of a scribe, judging by the abundant abbreviations and small letter size.<sup>161</sup> Balfour argued that the text was authored in 1417 when the young Despot Andronikos Palaiologos<sup>162</sup> had started to rule in Thessaloniki on his own account after Demetrios Laskaris Leontares<sup>163</sup>, who had been the advisor to Andronikos and the *de facto* ruler of the city, left.<sup>164</sup> Balfour continues to argue that this note must have also been a reflection of Symeon's protest against Manuel forcing the Church to acknowledge the privileges of the emperor over the church in 1416.<sup>165</sup> The text is a political exhortation and the author did not adopt an illustrative method, but he highlights Christian Orthodox principles in a manner of his own choosing by employing imperatives and addressing the despot directly, as the title witnesses as well.<sup>166</sup> The author's tone sounds superior to the addressee and aims to subjugate the despot to what the author believes is right. For instance, while Balfour noted that Symeon generally referred to the Palaiologoi in superlatives,<sup>167</sup> in this one there is not one single

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<sup>159</sup> David Balfour, ed., *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429): Critical Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1979), 201.

<sup>160</sup> See PLP 27052.

<sup>161</sup> Balfour, *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429)*, 201.

<sup>162</sup> See PLP 21427.

<sup>163</sup> See PLP 14676.

<sup>164</sup> Balfour, *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon*, 201.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* 201-2.

<sup>166</sup> See, for instance, πληροῦτω in David Balfour, ed., ‘B17’, in *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica*, 77, line 8.

<sup>167</sup> Balfour, *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429)*, 117.

superlative reference to the despot.<sup>168</sup> In this condensed address almost no examples are given nor is there elaboration, contrary to Manuel II Palaiologos' address to his son, John VIII Palaiologos, and Gemistos Plethon's address to the young despot Theodore II Palaiologos, which were written around the same decade.<sup>169</sup> In the text general statements concerning the ruler's relationship with the church and the exclusion of any specific person from the title to the end of the text implies that the scope exceeds the Despot Andronikos Palaiologos; the text takes on the nature of a manifesto in its message.

Symeon focuses on Andronikos' relationship with the church. Obedience to the church emerges as a political maneuver which would both make Andronikos a just ruler and benefit his dominion. The piety of the despot is in the foreground and the advice that a despot must be pious was reminded by setting out the opposite scenario. Accordingly, deviating from piety is the characteristic of a tyrant.<sup>170</sup> Joining power with the church prevents this deviation and leads to imperial priesthood.<sup>171</sup> Therefore the Church had a key role in creating a legitimate rule. Thus, the piety of the despot could only be maintained through the intervention of the church. Menander proposed four virtues that were common in Byzantine panegyric, which were bravery, justice, prudence and intelligence.<sup>172</sup> Symeon's address suggests two forms of virtues which were analog with Menander's; justice and piety. Prudence in Menander, I propose, is similar to piety in Symeon, for Symeon implies that only through pious acts can there be balance. And in this schema of Symeon justice was not really separated from piety, for piety was a necessity for justice as it seems in Symeon's formulation. As a matter of fact, Theodore II Laskaris' revision of Menander's four cardinal

<sup>168</sup> For instance, while piety is attributed to the despot (εὐσεβῆς βασιλεία σου) in line 8, the canon is the most holy (τὰ τῶν ἱερωτάτων κανόνων) in line 11. Symeon of Thessaloniki, 'Τῷ Δεσπότη'.

<sup>169</sup> Leonte, 'Rhetoric in Purple: The Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos'.

<sup>170</sup> See τυραννίδος in: Symeon of Thessaloniki, 'Τῷ Δεσπότη' line 3.

<sup>171</sup> See "Λοιπὸν καὶ ἡ εὐσεβῆς, βασιλεία σου πληροῦται τὸ ταύτης ἔργον, καὶ μετὰ σπουδῆς ἡμῖν τοῖς ἱερεῦσι συνέργει, ὥς ἂν ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων, τῆς ἐκκλησίας λέγω καὶ βασιλείας, τὸ βασιλεῖον καταρτίζεται καλῶς ἱεράτευμα." in Ibid. line 8-10.

<sup>172</sup> Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330.*, 80.

virtues seems to fit Symeon's address better. Theodore proposes zeal, truthfulness, and mildness, and Symeon uses *ἱερωσύνη*,<sup>173</sup> *ἐνσέβεια*,<sup>174</sup> and the quality of being *συνεργός*.<sup>175</sup> Because the address is short and its message is direct, there is no advice to avoid luxury and unnecessary lavishness as was the case in Gemistos' address to the young despot Theodore II Palaiologos and Manuel's address to his son, John VIII Palaiologos. However, Andronikos was also young and was on the threshold of his sole sovereignty in Thessaloniki on the supposed date when this address was written.

### 2.1.1.To the Despot in the context of hierocracy in the Late Byzantine Empire

In the introduction I showed the two elements of princely mirrors in Byzantium concerning the prince's nature. In this regard, Symeon focused on Despot Andronikos Palaiologos' relationship with the church. Obedience to the church emerges as a political maneuver which would both make Andronikos a just ruler and his domain flourish. Angelov<sup>176</sup> and Leonte<sup>177</sup> regarded Symeon as a representative of the rising hierocratic theory in the late Byzantine period. In Byzantium, ever since Constantine the Great had held power over the church through privileges that were characteristic for priests and bishops, there was a power struggle between the church and emperors. Eusebius related that at a dinner where Constantine hosted bishops, he said: "You are bishops of those within the Church, but I am perhaps a bishop appointed by God over those outside." And Eusebius confirmed that his actions were parallel with his claim: "In accordance with this saying, he [Constantine] exercised a bishop's supervision over all his subjects, and pressed them all, as far as lay in his power, to lead the

<sup>173</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, 'Τῷ Δεσπότη'. line 1.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. line 5.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. line 2.

<sup>176</sup> Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330*, 415-6.

<sup>177</sup> Leonte, 'Rhetoric in Purple: The Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos'. 317.

godly life.”<sup>178</sup> In contrast to this situation, in the late Byzantine period especially when the state was dissolving after the Fourth Crusade and with the Arsenite schism during the rise of the house of the Palaiologoi, the notion of the holy emperor started to fade. The church tended to remain as a centralizing power, which, as Symeon also argued, improved the need for the court to join forces with the church. The church became the hollow limbs which held the state together. For instance, during Nicaean period, patriarch Germanos II could claim authority over a vast geography beyond the Nicaean Empire.<sup>179</sup> In the fifteenth century the church, with its hesychastic doctrine, was apparently efficient in the areas controlled by the empire and even in the territories that functioned autonomously.<sup>180</sup> The territories outside Constantinople were ruled either by the sons or brothers of the emperor, hence the relative unity of the empire against the post-1204 situation, where three Byzantine kingdoms emerged.

In 1312 the jurisdiction of Mt. Athos, which was the heart of hesychasm, came under the patriarchate; however taxation was still the right of the imperial office.<sup>181</sup> Later in the same century the independent negotiation of Mt. Athos with the Ottomans must have deepened the rift between the holy mountain and the imperial office while Mt. Athos’ relation with the patriarchate was still intact.<sup>182</sup> This was arguably the most important example of a Byzantine monastic unit’s life beyond the jurisdiction and territory of Byzantium itself. Monasticism, as an institution, had proved its capability to function without the imperial office. This argument re-emerged towards the mid-fifteenth century from the pen of

<sup>178</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, trans. Averil Cameron and Stuart George Hall (Clarendon Press, 1999), 161.

<sup>179</sup> Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330*, 353.

<sup>180</sup> After 1329, Andronikos III shared his authority with *κριταὶ καθολικοὶ* (the general judges of Romans), later they were appointed outside Constantinople as well, see *ibid.* 354.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.* 355.

<sup>182</sup> Inalcik relates from Nicolas Oikonomides that when the Ottomans attacked Thessaloniki and its neighboring lands in 1383, Mount Athos expanded its wealth and in fact acknowledged the Ottoman lordship before 1383. See Halil Inalcik, “The Status of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch under the Ottomans,” *Turcica* 23 (1991): 407–36, 409–10.

Gennadios Scholarios.<sup>183</sup> Gennadios had a very close apocalyptic date in mind so he argued that in order to get help against the enemy the Byzantines should not diverge from Orthodoxy but put all their trust piously in the Virgin Mary, the protectress of Constantinople, to save them.<sup>184</sup> Otherwise, the enemy would certainly prevail as a punishment from God, but the pious ones should not fear since individual salvation would still be possible as long as Orthodoxy was preserved. Gennadios Scholarios, by becoming Patriarch Gennadios II in 1454, had proven that the church was more universal and enduring than the state. Similarly, In 1427/8 Symeon authored a historical account of the relationship between Byzantium and the Ottomans since 1387 (B8) and here he advised having faith in St. Demetrios, the patron saint of Thessaloniki. He listed twenty-five miracles that St. Demetrios had recently performed, and argued that holding fast to Orthodoxy would be rewarded by the grace of God through his minister, the savior of the city, St. Demetrios. It is noteworthy that Symeon, like Gennadios Scholarios would be in 1444, was a stout opponent of the church union with the papacy. In his letter to Makarios Makres<sup>185</sup> in either late 1422 or the first half of 1423,<sup>186</sup> he defended his position with Makarios' help to diminish the critics against Symeon's anti-unionist writings, and he argued that such a union would bring disorder (ταραχή).<sup>187</sup> Clearly, Symeon stood for the idea that the Orthodox Church must remain an unspoiled institution, the fate of the empire notwithstanding.

Symeon of Thessaloniki can be considered as a link in the chain of hierocratic ideology which culminated in the person of Gennadios II in Byzantium. The tone of Symeon's address suggests that the intensity of hierocratic ideas had diminished since

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<sup>183</sup> See PLP 27304.

<sup>184</sup> On the different calculations of the end of the world and Scholarios' awareness of them, see Turner, 'Pages from Late Byzantine Philosophy of History'. 369-71.

<sup>185</sup> See PLP 16375.

<sup>186</sup> Balfour, *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429)*, B7, 94-99.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 223.

Photios' time. Photios was authoritative,<sup>188</sup> whereas Symeon suggests "joining forces with the church," which was not the exact supremacy of the church over the empire as much as I can extract from B17. The works *On the Sacred Ordination* and *On the Holy Temple*, however, which Angelov examined, show that Symeon too was keen on hierocracy, so one can compare the goals of Photios and Symeon. According to Photios, the patriarch is the living image of Christ and could dismiss an emperor. One must take into account that Photios lived in dire times during which there was a crisis between the Roman and Constantinopolitan churches. Symeon may well have been more aggressive if he had lived to see the union of Ferrara/Florence in 1438. As I already illustrated, in a letter to Makarios Makres in 1422/23 Symeon criticized the possibility of union with the papacy.

The Arsenite movement was a new wave of hierocratic ideology which accumulated after Patriarch Arsenios excommunicated Michael VIII Palaiologos for usurping the position of the young Laskarid prince, John IV. Two phenomena in the biography of Arsenios by an anonymous writer found places in Symeon's writings. First, they both discussed the anointing of the emperor during the coronation. The anointment had biblical references; there are kings in the bible who were called the Lord's anointed.<sup>189</sup> Both in Arsenios' biography and in Symeon this ritual, which was probably introduced into Byzantium after 1204 under Western influence,<sup>190</sup> was argued to be proof of the supremacy of the patriarch over the emperor. The Arsenite author argued that the church bestows the emperor's rule on him by the anointment by patriarch, and the emperor's anointing at his coronation makes him an associate and servant of the church, for "what anoints is greater than the anointed". In *On the Sacred Ordination* Symeon classified two types of anointment; material and spiritual. Material anointment is the anointment of the emperor during his coronation; this is done by the church

<sup>188</sup> Photios (d. after 893) had appropriated the power symbolism and the *christomimetic* image of the emperor for the patriarch, see: Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330*. 362.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. 388.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

and the emperor is bestowed with power as a consequence. Symeon proposed spiritual anointment as superior to the material one; this anointment is done by the Holy Spirit and creates the true *archontes*, who were the bishops, thus the patriarch is the true embodiment of a priest-king.<sup>191</sup> In *On the Holy Temple* Symeon described the emperor's anointment as an act of grace (χάρις) on the part of the patriarch, and only through this grace is the rule of an emperor legitimized.<sup>192</sup> Grace (χάρις) is a divine force which will encompass the ruler through being humbled by the church in "*To the Despot*".<sup>193</sup> The problem with this system was that the emperor played an important role in the elevation of a patriarch. Symeon solved this difficulty by explaining that in fact "the synod" "bestowed active power (ἐνεργεῖ)" on the newly chosen patriarch, whereas the emperor acted as the servant of the synod and handed the patriarchal staff to the patriarch.<sup>194</sup> What was overlooked in this solution was that the members of the synod, included lay members as well as clergy,<sup>195</sup> so the patriarch was not chosen solely by a group of anointed bishops. Symeon, in overlooking these lay members, revealed the nature of his hierocratic ideology. This is related to his critique of the *archontes* of Thessaloniki. During the dire times in Thessaloniki when the Ottomans posed a threat and damaged the trade on land, Symeon while advising trust in Orthodoxy and the patron saint of the city, St. Demetrios, harshly criticized the *archontes*, who were, according to Symeon, abusing the poor with unfair prices and regulations.<sup>196</sup> While Necipoğlu showed that these *archontes* were pretty much involved in trade, Kiousopoulou argued that the last one hundred years of Byzantium in general were marked by the rising merchant elite who were active in

<sup>191</sup> Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330*, 392.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> See "καὶ ἐκδικῶν ἔσο τὰ τῶν ἱερωτάτων κανόνων καί, ὅσα ἡμεῖς ταπεινοὶ ὑπὲρ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὑπομνήσκουμεν, ἵνα καὶ τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ εἴη ὑπερεκχυνόμενον ἔλεος τῇ θειοτάτῃ καὶ εὐσεβεῖ ψυχῇ σου, οὐ καὶ χάρις εἴη περικυκλοῦσα τὴν βασιλείαν σου" in Symeon of Thessaloniki, 'Τῷ Δεσπότη'. line 10-13.

<sup>194</sup> Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204-1330*, 386.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. 355-6.

<sup>196</sup> Nevra Necipoglu, *Byzantium Between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 77; 'Διδασκαλία πρὸς τὸν εὐσεβὲς δεσπότην κύρ Ανδρόνικον Παλαιολόγον, γενόμενον μοναχόν, παραμυθητικὴ τε ἅμα καὶ παραινετικὴ' in Balfour, 47, line 9-14.



politics.<sup>197</sup> To sum up, Symeon, while overlooking the secular elite in the decision-making process of the synod, was harshly attacking these same people because they behaved abusively towards the poor masses and managed the crisis badly. In 1393, Isidore Glabas<sup>198</sup> emphasized the importance of the *archontes* in Thessaloniki, for they were mediators between the enemy and the city, endured all the maltreatment of the enemy, and travelled dangerous routes for embassy missions.<sup>199</sup> Symeon's later critic was harsher. Necipoğlu argues that Isidore was trying to show the *archontes* the right path by emphasizing their good features, so it seems that there was no change in the nature of the *archontes* between Isidore's time and Symeon's. I believe Symeon had more reason to be harsher because Symeon's criticism overlooked another important reality of Thessalonian society. Necipoğlu's research shows that Thessalonians endowed their property, specifically extramural property, on monasteries in order to have them tended and with the hope of extracting some income.<sup>200</sup> Monasteries' different relationship with the Ottomans allowed monasteries to create an unexpected income generator through the insecurity of the citizens. In this regard, Symeon seems to have been a naturally biased actor in this power struggle between the monastic elite and the merchant *archontes* of the city.

*To the Despot* can be regarded as a draft for his later more systematic hierocratic statements and also it seems to be an attempt to win the despot over to monastic cause to have the upper hand against the merchant *archontes* in the power struggle. Secondly, the weakening of hierocratic ideology must have been a reality because Arsenios in the mid-thirteenth century was in direct confrontation with Michael VIII Palaiologos, but the anti-unionists in the fifteenth century did not even have a patriarch; however, they managed to cause the escape of the unionist patriarch. Manuel II's letter to his son John VIII Palaiologos,

<sup>197</sup> Kioussopoulou, *Emperor or Manager. Power and Political Ideology in Byzantium before 1453*. 36, 68-80.

<sup>198</sup> See PLP 4223.

<sup>199</sup> Necipoglu, *Byzantium Between the Ottomans and the Latins*, 78.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. 59.

in contrast, reflects how even the emperor himself came to adopt some hierocratic ideas and it shaped the education of his own son. Accordingly he gives similar advice to his son as Symeon gives to his other son, Andronikos.<sup>201</sup> And in fact, Manuel, among many attributions to the church, mentions a collaborator (συνεργός) just as Symeon did in B17.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Manuel writes: “Above everything you must honor the church. This is your mother, your nurse, your teacher, creator, anointer, road, and guide, and collaborator (συνεργός) and calling towards what is best and most stable.” Leonte, ‘Rhetoric in Purple: The Renewal of Imperial Ideology in the Texts of Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos,’ 377

<sup>202</sup> See Symeon of Thessaloniki, ‘Τῷ Δεσπότῃ’. line 2.

## 2.2. Symeon of Thessaloniki's Consolatory Instructions for Despot Andronikos Palaiologos

Symeon of Thessaloniki's consolatory speech (*paramythetikos*)<sup>203</sup> for the deposed despot Andronikos Palaiologos was written when Andronikos adopted the monastic habit after he was deposed from Thessaloniki when the city passed to Venetian rule in the fall of 1423 as a response to the Ottoman blockade. Symeon was a hieromonk, and hence, he was competent in writing instructions on monastic life. Besides he was an intimate of Andronikos,<sup>204</sup> so was a suitable person to pen this address. The address includes biblical references which suited Andronikos' desperate situation. Although Menander's rhetorical manual defines *paramythetikos logos* as a speech which is made to people who were related to a deceased person, Symeon soothed Andronikos because he was deprived of land, wealth, and friends. In other words, Thessaloniki was the object of lamentation in this address. In the current study, I illustrate that the address yielded two results of particular importance. Firstly, I present a supportive interpretation of Balfour's thesis that Symeon and Andronikos were innocent of handing the city over to the Venetians. Secondly, the address was not a lamentation exclusively; I argue that Symeon hinted at more.

In general, the address aimed to remind Andronikos of God's mercy and the vanity of earthly goods compared to being a pious servant of God, for only in Him one could attain salvation. Symeon focuses on Andronikos' god-loving personality and advises him not to despair about losing the city, and to cherish the fact that he followed Christ in being humble.<sup>205</sup> He then introduces the most emphatic biblical parallel in the letter, the prophet Job. Accordingly, as Job did, Andronikos had to endure the sufferings which befell him in

<sup>203</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, 'Διδασκαλία Προς Τον Ευσεβή Δεσπότην Κύρ Ανδρόνικον Παλαιολόγον, Γενόμενον Μοναχόν, Παραμυθητική Τε Άμα Και Παραινετική'.

<sup>204</sup> Balfour, *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429)*.

<sup>205</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, 'Διδασκαλία Προς Τον Ευσεβή Δεσπότην Κύρ Ανδρόνικον Παλαιολόγον, Γενόμενον Μοναχόν, Παραμυθητική Τε Άμα Και Παραινετική', 15. Σὺ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μιμητὴς τοῦ διὰ σὲ ταπεινοῦ.

order to be granted God's grace again.<sup>206</sup> As the devil intervened in Job's calamities, he would bother Andronikos as well, so the latter should reinforce his good act of adopting the monastic habit by resisting the devil's intervention, and listen to Symeon's advice. From then on, he should refrain from brooding on his losses and he should be disciplined.

Whatever happened before the letter was written is of concern, because the address strongly suggested that Andronikos was a victim in the process of Venetian take over. Sultan Murad II's ascension to the Ottoman throne in 1422 initiated a massive offensive against Byzantine territory.<sup>207</sup> Thessaloniki suffered a blockade, Morea was ravaged,<sup>208</sup> and Constantinople fell under siege for a short time. During this time of crisis a variety of solutions were current among the people and in the court of the despot. While some rioted in favor of surrendering the city to the Ottomans, who had ruled the city for a short term at the end of the fourteenth century, the elites were mostly in favor of Venetian rule. Symeon's and Andronikos' positions, however, were a matter for discussion. Symeon was blamed for convincing Andronikos to leave the city to the Venetians,<sup>209</sup> whereas Andronikos was charged with betraying the city to the Venetians for money.<sup>210</sup> Balfour concluded that Symeon supported the resistance against the Ottomans and the rule of Andronikos, and actually did not have much mobility during the blockade due to the public pressure on him.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, 'Διδασκαλία Προς Τον Ευσεβή Δεσπότην Κύρ Ανδρόνικον Παλαιολόγον, Γενόμενον Μοναχόν, Παραμυθητική Τε Άμα Και Παραινετική'; especially 78, line 27-8. (...) ἀνακαινίσαι σε και πλουτίσαι κατὰ τὸν θεῖον Ἰὼβ τὰ τοῦ Ἰὼβ τοῦ Ἰὼβ καθυποστάνατα προδήλως, ἀποβαλόντα μὲν τὰ ὑπάρχοντα κρίμασιν ἀγνώστοις Θεοῦ τῆς ἀρχῆς τε παρακινήθέντα και δόξης και ἐκβληθέντα μὲν τῆς σῆς οἰκίας ἔξωθεν, ἐπὶ κοπρίαν δὲ καθεσθέντα τῶν πειρασμῶν και τὴν ἄλλοδαπὴν γῆν και τῇ κατεσθιούσῃ μὲν περιπεσόντα ἀρρωστήα τὸ σῶμα, γυμνὸν δὲ ὡς πτωχὸν και ἡλκωμένον καθήμενον και οὐδὲ παρὰ τῶν φίλων παραμυθούμενον, βαλλόμενον δὲ ὀνειδισμοῖς και παρὰ τῶν γνησιωτάτων ἐμπικραινόμενον και παρ' ἀνθρώποις καταλιμπανόμενον ἀβοήθητον.

<sup>207</sup> Necipoglu, *Byzantium Between the Ottomans and the Latins.*, 35.

<sup>208</sup> Balfour, *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429)*, 160.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. 151.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. 164.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid 155.

Balfour is convinced that Andronikos did not sell the city<sup>212</sup> but was actually “conducted out” of it after a process in which he had no say.<sup>213</sup> As I will show presently, Biblical references in the letter suggests a scenario in which Andronikos had lost everything and Symeon was mourning along with him; accordingly, the letter seems to discharge Symeon’s and Andronikos’ responsibility for the loss of Thessaloniki. In fact, from the very beginning, the genre of the address gives the idea which Symeon attempted to spread. He wrote a consolatory speech not for a person but for a city, thus emphasizing that Thessaloniki was lost against Andronikos’ will. Menander’s formula of consolatory speech defined the speaker as one who also laments after the loss.<sup>214</sup> Therefore, Symeon’s speech justified him in the matter even at the stage of setting the genre.

Balfour is convinced that this *paramythetikos logos* supported the idea that Symeon was innocent in Venetian intervention. Symeon chose his Biblical references in order to support Andronikos with the idea that what seems to be lost may not be so, for God can restore what is lost. The most emphasized role model, the prophet Job, had once been a healthy man who had been surrounded with wealth and children and he had sacrificed every day in order to show his gratitude to God. To put it briefly, he was tested for whether he would still invoke the name of God with gratitude if all his joy were taken away. Having been deprived of his wealth, his children, and finally of his health, Job got depressed and uttered: “Let the stars of the Twilight thereof be dark, let it look for light, but have none, neither let it see the dawning of the day” (Job 3:9). Symeon did not quote this in the address, but he indeed referred to this part: “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall

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<sup>212</sup>It is a later allegation by pseudo-Sphrantzes, however Symeon depicted the situation as an unfortunate event for Andronikos, from whom the city was snatched away. Doukas confirmed Symeon (see the next footnote). Ibid, 164.

<sup>213</sup> Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*.

<sup>214</sup> Menander, *Menander Rhetor.*, 161.

be thy reward” (Isa 58:8) as a response to Job’s utterance and Andronikos’ ill health<sup>215</sup> and loss of rulership.<sup>216</sup> Symeon referred to other good tidings for Andronikos and anyone who left behind his house for the path of God:<sup>217</sup> “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” (Matt. 19:29). Elsewhere Symeon complained that during the Ottoman blockade and Venetian rule he suffered detention: “... and more especially when reviled by our very own household, being persecuted, we suffer it or we are even forcibly detained.”<sup>218</sup> Symeon was clearly soothing Andronikos for his loss. Symeon continued, putting St. Paul as another example of leaving earthly goods in the name of God by referring to Paul’s call to Phillipians: “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” (Phil. 3:8) With this reference Symeon starts to take heart and suggests the same for Andronikos, for whatever they have lost was insignificant compared to the divine gain.<sup>219</sup> He continued with a strong emphasis on infirmity and persecutions which Symeon thought Andronikos had suffered as well. Symeon again refers to St. Paul: “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). Therefore, Symeon advises Andronikos to embrace this change because he would become stronger as he has now truly consigned

<sup>215</sup> Balfour, *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429)*, 154

<sup>216</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, ‘Διδασκαλία Προς Τον Ευσεβή Δεσπότην Κύρ Ανδρόνικον Παλαιολόγον, Γενόμενον Μοναχόν, Παραμυθητική Τε Άμα Και Παραινετική’.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. 79, line 10-11. Τότε γάρ “ἀνατελεῖ” κατὰ τὸν Ἡσαΐαν “πρώϊμον τὸ φῶς σου” καὶ τὰ ἐκ Θεοῦ σοι “ἰάματα” (...).

<sup>218</sup> Balfour, *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1416/17 to 1429)*, 156.

<sup>219</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, ‘Διδασκαλία Προς Τον Ευσεβή Δεσπότην Κύρ Ανδρόνικον Παλαιολόγον, Γενόμενον Μοναχόν, Παραμυθητική Τε Άμα Και Παραινετική’, line 25-27. —Πέτρον φημι καὶ Παῦλον τοὺς χριστοφόρους, —ἀφῆκας πάντα καὶ ἠκολούθησας τῷ Χριστῷ καὶ ἠγήσω πάντα τὰ κάτω σκύβαλα εἶναι, ἵνα μόνον Χριστὸν κερδήσῃς.

himself to God by adopting the monastic habit.<sup>220</sup> Later, Symeon advises him to abandon the vanity of the mundane<sup>221</sup> by referring to Christ's words: "And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). And he praised a simple life<sup>222</sup> by referring to St. Paul's statement that: "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1Tim. 6:8). And finally Symeon shows, in the words of Christ, that one can find peace in him: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29).<sup>223</sup>

Symeon did not quote his biblical references exactly, but just hinted to some keywords, as Menander advised, for they were all thought to be well-known. His references to the bible reveal a narrative which was intertwined with Andronikos' case. Accordingly, Andronikos had lost a great deal: his seat, his house, his friends, and his health, but because he now walks on the path of God those losses are insignificant. Good tidings were heralded that Andronikos would be restored. Thus, the content of the address, without a doubt, proposed that Andronikos did not sell Thessaloniki but had lost it.

Symeon's biblical references, I believe, had one more major message to deliver. Certainly the content of the address promised spiritual salvation so that Andronikos should not despair but cherish the monastic life, and certainly he was a victim not the collaborator in the Venetian intervention. Especially reference to the Book of Job can give more insight into Symeon's motives. Although Job had lost his land, wealth, and children as a test of his piety,

<sup>220</sup> Symeon of Thessaloniki, 'Διδασκαλία Προς Τον Ευσεβή Δεσπότην Κύρ Ανδρόνικον Παλαιολόγον, Γενόμενον Μοναχόν, Παραμυθητική Τε Άμα Και Παραινετική', 79, line 27-28. (...) και εὐδοκεῖς ἐν ἀσθενείαις, ἐν θλίψεσι καὶ ἔγνωσ, ὡς τὸ πολίτευμα ἡμῶν ὑπάρχει ἐν οὐρανοῖς.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. 80, line 9-12. Ὅτι δὲ αἰφνιδίως τοῦτο συνέβη γενέσθαι σοι τοῦ καιροῦ σχεδιάσαντος, κάλλιστον μὲν καὶ οὕτως, ἵνα τῶν ἀκανθῶν ἐκσπασθῇς καὶ μὴ ἦς ὑπ' ἐκείνων κατακρατούμενος καὶ κεντούμενος, μηδὲ τὸν πολυφόρον στάχυν ἀτελεσφόρητον ἀφιεῖς.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. 81, line 7-8. "ἔχοντες" γάρ φησι "διατροφὰς καὶ σκεπάσματα, τούτοις ἀρκεσθῆσόμεθα".

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. 81, line 15-16. τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ "μάθετε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ" φησι.

he did not cease trusting in God. Job was an archetype of patience. This is what Symeon advised Andronikos to be. Having endured all those losses and this harsh test, God's grace was restored to Job, and along with it whatever he had lost before. Accordingly, I think Symeon was promising more than the spiritual salvation, but secretly hoping for the restoration of Byzantine rule in Thessaloniki.



### 2.3. Plethon's Prosphonematos to Despot Demetrios Porphyrogenitos as His Last Contribution to Byzantine Politics

The address (*prosphonematos*) to Demetrios was written by Georgios Gemistos Plethon for the despot Demetrios Palaiologos<sup>224</sup> in 1451.<sup>225</sup> A *prosphonematos*<sup>226</sup> is a kind of address, which appeals to a high official and sometimes to the emperor, and it informs the addressee on a specific topic rather than being encumbered with abstract qualities of the ruler.<sup>227</sup> Menander's template of the address (*prosphonetikos*) consists of five parts and Plethon, though being in full knowledge of the category of his writing, did not quite follow Menander's suggestions especially when it comes to the order of the text.<sup>228</sup> The most notable difference is on how historical role models were proposed. Menander advised to introduce historical exemplary persons in the context of the virtues, which the addressee embraced throughout his actions.<sup>229</sup> Plethon put a significant weight on the role models and the first half of his letter contains these historical examples. Although the ordering of his presentation of historical examples does not match with Menander's template, these examples are all related to the virtues, which Demetrios demonstrated on this specific occasion that the letter was written. The specific occasion was the war between the brothers Demetrios Palaiologos and Thomas Palaiologos<sup>230</sup>, who were the only co-rulers of the Morea since the ascension of Constantine XI Palaiologos to the throne in Constantinople in 1449. Both rulers

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<sup>224</sup> See PLP 21454.

<sup>225</sup> Plethon, 'Prosphonematium Ad Demetrium Despotam Porphyrogennitum'.

<sup>226</sup> the title of the address is Πληθωνος Προσφωνηματιον προς τον Κυρ Δημητριον Δεσποτην τον Πορφυρογεννητον, see: Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> See Prosphonetikos Logos in: A. P. Kazhdan, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>228</sup> Menander divides *prosphonetikos* into five parts: Prooemia (a show of humbleness concerning the literary skills in defining the greatness of the addressee, praise for the emperor, the praise for the addressee, comparison of the addressee with other rulers, and epilogue. see the address (*prosphonetikos*) in: Menander, *Menander Rhetor*. 164-171.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid. 167.

<sup>230</sup> See PLP 21470.

were engaged in alliances with differing local magnates in the Morea. While Thomas was relying on the alliance with the Latins, Demetrios sought both personal and state prosperity in the Ottoman state. The preferences of *archontes* to establish alliances either with the Latins or with the Ottomans added to the internal strife of local magnates, and their inconsistent allegiances with Demetrios and Thomas increased the tension between the brother despots. Thomas had been in Morea since 1430 and Demetrios had just arrived to share the rule in 1449. In this very year Thomas captured one of the Demetrios' holdings in Morea, upon which Demetrios sought help from Sultan Murad II by sending his trusted envoy and brother-in-law Matthew Asanes. Murad II sent Turahan beg, who was very much involved with the region since 1423, and finished the brothers' quarrel by forcing Thomas to give up some lands in compensation of what he captured from Demetrios.<sup>231</sup> Plethon, in this address, celebrated Demetrios' prowess in reconciling with his brother Thomas and refraining from more gain for peace.<sup>232</sup> The letter does not inform us about the background of the tension and the only other contemporary name it includes is Asanes without the first name.<sup>233</sup> After a long introduction, in which Plethon listed examples of civil war (πολέμων ἔν τοις ἐμφυλίοις),<sup>234</sup> he continued with the praise of how everybody had acted in a praiseworthy manner in the resolution of the conflict and how the emperor and the people in Constantinople also cherished the peaceful outcome.<sup>235</sup> It seems plausible that Plethon wrote an address only to Demetrios in this quarrel between brothers, for in the letter Plethon deemed Demetrios' attitude worthier, and there is evidence that Demetrios granted Plethon with land grants after

<sup>231</sup> Necipoglu, *Byzantium Between the Ottomans and the Latins*. p.279. For more on the brother despots' problematic relations, see: Ibid. 233, 277-284.

<sup>232</sup> Plethon, 'Prosphonematium Ad Demetrium Despotam Porphyrogenitum'. 209, line 5-9. Εἰκότως οὖν καὶ σύ, ὦ κράτιστε, ὑπὸ πάντων ἂν ἀνθρώπων ἐπαινοῖο ἐπὶ ταῖς ἄρτι πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸν καταλλαγαῖς, ὅτι μειονεκτῆσαι ἐπὶ τοῖς διαφόροις εἴλου ὑπὲρ τοῦ τῇ καλοκάγαθῃ πλεονεκτῆσαι, τὰ μείω σὺν εἰρήνῃ τοῦ σὺν ἐμφυλῖω αἵματι πλέονος προτιμήσας.

<sup>233</sup> See "ὁ καλὸς Ἀσάνης", in: Ibid. 209, line 20.

<sup>234</sup> See "πολέμων ἔν τοις ἐμφυλίοις", in: Ibid. 207, line 1-2.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. 209, line 27- 210, line 8.

the end of the quarrel between Demetrios and Thomas,<sup>236</sup> nevertheless one cannot wholly exclude the possibility of the existence of another letter addressed to Thomas Palaiologos.

Plethon, upon addressing Demetrios in the superlative,<sup>237</sup> immediately started his letter with stating that in war the attitude against kinsmen and against foreigners should be different.<sup>238</sup> Accordingly, Plethon gave examples from Ancient Persia, the Ancient Greek states, Macedonians and Rome. First he praised Cyrus, for even though he was right he did not burn Croesus on a pyre; it was the wisdom of Solon that saved Croesus; Croesus informed Cyrus of Solon's words that wheel of fortune might tremble down even the ones who are at top.<sup>239</sup> Plethon continued with describing Alexander the Great's mercy for the Asian dominions of Persia upon the victories against them.<sup>240</sup> Thirdly, Plethon stated that even the Romans were not totally unjust for they waged war for the third time against the Carthaginians, even though they were under truce at the time. Since the Carthaginians were foreigners, it was tolerable to attack on them.<sup>241</sup> Furthermore, even the Athenians were not

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<sup>236</sup> Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon*., 88.

<sup>237</sup> Plethon, 'Prosfonematum Ad Demetrium Despotam Porphyrogenitum'. 207, line 1. ὦ θειότατε.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. 207, line 1-3. Οὐκ ἦν παραπλήσια, ὦ θειότατε, τὰ τῶν πολέμων τέλη ἀποβῆ ἔν τε τοῖς ἐμφυλίοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς πρὸς τοὺς ἀλλοφύλους ὁμοίως καὶ ἐπαινεῖν χρή.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. 207, line 6-11. For how Cyrus change his decision see: "So the Persians took Sardis and made Croesus himself prisoner, (...) Cyrus had a great pyre built, on which he set Croesus, bound in chains, and twice seven Lydian boys beside him (...) but Croesus, as he stood on the pyre, remembered even in his evil plight how divinely inspired was that saying of Solon, that no living man was blest. When this came to his mind, having till now spoken no word, he sighed deeply and groaned, and thrice uttered the name of Solon. Cyrus heard it, and bade his interpreters ask Croesus who was this on whom he called (...) As they were instant, and troubled him [Croesus], he told them then how Solon, an Athenian, had first come, and how he had seen all his royal state and made light of it (saying thus and thus), and how all had happened to Croesus as Solon said, though he spoke with less regard to Croesus than to mankind in general and chiefly those who deemed themselves blest. (...) Then Cyrus when he heard from the interpreters what Croesus said, repented of his purpose. He bethought him that he, being also a man, was burning alive another man who had once been as fortunate as himself; moreover, he feared the retribution, and it came to his mind that there was no stability in human affairs; wherefore he gave command to quench the burning fire with all speed and bring Croesus and those with him down from the pyre." in: Herodotus, *Herodotus*, trans. A.D. Godley, vol. I, IV vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975). 109-113.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. 207, line 11- 208, line 1. For how Alexander celebrated the conquest of Asian domains from the Persians, see "This battle being thus over, seemed to put a period to the Persian empire; and Alexander, who was now proclaimed king of Asia, returned thanks to the gods in magnificent sacrifices, and rewarded his friends and followers with great sums of money, and places, and governments of provinces." in: Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. John Dryden (Chicago: William Benton, 1952). 557.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid. 208, line 8-14. For the total destruction that the Romans brought upon the Carthaginians, see: "Scipio, beholding this city, which had flourished 700 years from its foundation and had ruled over so many lands, islands, and seas, rich with arms and fleets, elephants and money, equal to the mightiest monarchies but far

blamed for massacring the Melians and Scioneans, however; last but not least, the Lacedaimonians (Spartans) were to be praised for being content with only dismantling the walls and the ships of the Athenians, despite the fact that the latter ones had slaughtered Spartan's relatives, Melians and Scioneans.<sup>242</sup> Plethon's order of giving examples is noteworthy, and informative on what he aims to teach. Until the last example, which is the case of Athenians and the Spartans, the events are in chronological order. Athenians' massacre and the Spartans' behavior towards the Athenians must be examined together; for Plethon proposed Spartan mercy towards fellow Hellenes in contrast to Athenians' violence against Spartans' relatives, who were again fellow Hellenes. I have two reasons to believe that among all the other examples Plethon considered Spartans' behavior by far the most honorable act; however it was not openly stated by him. It is significant that Plethon did not follow the chronological order and illustrated the Spartans' virtue at the very end and in comparison with the relentlessness of the Athenians. The other point is that only at this instance Plethon gave an example of showing mercy to fellow people (ἐμφύλιος), which is the occasion at which Plethon penned an address to Demetrios. On the other hand, it makes the utmost sense for Plethon to give his most fitting example from the Spartans, whom he praised at his addresses to Theodore II Palaiologos and Manuel II as well. Mystras, where

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surpassing them in bravery and high spirit (since without ships or arms, and in the face of famine, it had sustained continuous war for three years), now come to its end in total destruction" in: Appian, *Roman History*, trans. Horace White, vol. I (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002). p.631

<sup>242</sup> Plethon, 'Prosphonematium Ad Demetrium Despotam Porphyrogennitum', 208, line 15-25. For the Athenian attack on Melians, see: "The Melians, too, took the part of the Athenian wall over against the market-place by a night assault; then having slain some of the men and brought in grain and as many other necessities as they could, they withdrew and kept quiet. After that the Athenians maintained a better watch. So the summer ended. The following winter Lacedaemonians were on the point of invading Argive territory, but as the sacrifices for crossing the boundaries were not favourable they returned home. On account of this intention on the part of the Lacedaemonians, the Argives, suspecting certain men in their city, seized some of them, but the rest escaped. About the same time the Melians again at another point took a part of the Athenian encompassing wall, the garrison not being numerous. But later, in consequence of these occurrences, another force came from Athens, of which Philocrates son of Demeas was commander, and the Melians, being now closely besieged-some treachery, too, having made its appearance among them-capitulated to the Athenians on the condition that these should determine their fate. The Athenians thereupon slew all the adult males whom they had taken and made slaves of the children and women. But the place they then peopled with new settlers from Athens, sending thither at a later time five hundred colonists." in: Thucydides, *History of Peloponnesian War*, trans. Charles Forster Smith, vol. III, IV vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959). 177-179.

Plethon took up residence at the beginning of the century, was situated on the slopes of a hill overlooking Ancient Sparta. Ancient Sparta and its famous law-giver king Lycurgus had been a source for the works of Plethon, and his societal configuration. Another significance of Sparta for Plethon was that it was a kingdom located in Morea. I have discussed Plethon's regard for Morea; in his earlier letters, it had the role of encapsulating the Hellenes for their recovery and of founding the basis for a possible future breakthrough of Hellenes. Morea was where he envisioned the change to be realized. Naturally, the question remains: why did Plethon put weight on history, despite the fact that his last case was perfectly fitting to the occasion at hand? Firstly, except the cruel episode of the Roman history, other events propose both glorious and wise characters who, thanks to their wisdom, refrained from being cruel while being victorious. These examples are explanatory for Plethon's praise and counsel for Demetrios. On the other hand, Roman's transgression against the Carthaginians constitutes an exception.<sup>243</sup> The whole episode was about a relentless onslaught against foreign people for the greater good of the one's own state. My explanation for the presence of this misfit episode from history is that it is actually fitting to the context from another angle. This example works for delegitimizing the accommodation with the Ottomans and for encouraging Demetrios to team up with his brother against the foreign (ἄλλοφύλος)<sup>244</sup> enemy. Below, I elaborate this further for this explanation finds basis in the latter part of the letter as well.

### 2.3.1. Address to Demetrios' Consistency with Plethon's Earlier Addresses

What Plethon excluded from the contents of his address is noteworthy. Plethon, in his addresses to the young despot Theodore II Palaiologos and to the emperor Manuel II Palaiologos, insisted on socio-economic reforms in the Morea and defined the Morea as a

<sup>243</sup> Plethon, 'Prosphonematium Ad Demetrium Despotam Porphyrogenitum', 208, line 8-14.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. 207, line 2.

geo-politic entity from which he expected the recovery of the Hellenes. On the contrary, he does not propose any kind of reform concerning Morea in this address. This exclusion is reasonable in regard to the genre of the address, which is *prosphonetikos*, as Menander had called it. Accordingly, Plethon had only written on the specific occasion, which was the war between the brothers. On the other hand it is curious that Plethon did not repeat his plans for the future of Morea, especially when he was still working on the *Nomoi*, which seemed to be his masterwork on the functioning of the society he envisaged.<sup>245</sup> Further peculiarity is that the only copy of the *Nomoi* ended up in the hands of the wife of Demetrios Palaiologos (Theodora Asanina)<sup>246</sup> after Plethon died in 1452. Therefore I may suspect that Demetrios' family was aware of Plethon's plans; however Demetrios' wife was nervous with the contents of *Nomoi* and sent the work to Plethon's rival Gennadios Scholarios.<sup>247</sup>

I presume that Plethon chose this to-the-point kind of a writing style and adorned it with a very long list of historical examples, which was unmatched even in his much longer addresses to Theodore II and Manuel II, in order to convince Demetrios not to cooperate with the Ottomans. Demetrios Palaiologos had a long history of involvement with the Ottomans. As Necipoğlu related from Sphrantzes, in 1423 Demetrios attempted to go over to the Ottoman side, or travel to Hungarian kingdom.<sup>248</sup> In 1438, supposedly due to John VIII's mistrust, Demetrios had to accompany him to the Council of Ferrara/Florence, however Demetrios was an anti-unionist. More dramatically, he laid siege on Constantinople in collaboration with the Ottomans, for he was deprived of some lands and the chance to be the

<sup>245</sup> Georgios Gemistos Plethon, *Plethon: Traite Des Lois*, ed. R. Brague (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1982).

<sup>246</sup> See PLP 91379.

<sup>247</sup> Scholarios consigned the *nomoi* into flames between 1460 and 1465. see: Niketas Siniosoglou, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium: Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2011). 138,9.

<sup>248</sup> Necipoglu, *Byzantium Between the Ottomans and the Latins*. 278. Georgios Sphrantzes, *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire: A Chronicle by George Sphrantzes, 1401-1477*, trans. Marios Philippides (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980). 28.

future emperor by the current one, John VIII Palaiologos in 1442.<sup>249</sup> Keeping this personal history of Demetrios with the Ottomans in mind, note that, while Plethon praised friendship with the kinsmen, he counseled to fight against foreigners in collaboration with the kinsmen. This statement of Plethon explains the meaning and the role of the example from the Roman history, which I mentioned above. Furthermore, Plethon's harsh attitude towards foreigners and counsel for peace with kinsmen was in accordance with his envisioning of a close and self-sustaining state, which he described in his previous letters. This does not mean that Plethon closed his mind towards the developments around. For instance, as I discussed earlier, Plethon had acknowledged the efficiency of the Ottoman land system.<sup>250</sup> To sum all these up, Plethon directly praised Demetrios for finishing the rivalry with his brother in order to encourage him to fight against the foreigners in collaboration with his brother. In effect, he did not approve Demetrios' call for Ottoman intervention. This is so not because of Plethon's particular enmity towards Ottomans but more so because of his problem with the "intervention" itself; he desired Hellenes to gather all their might within Morea.

I conclude that Plethon held the opinion he had held in the second decade of the fifteenth century. Accordingly, peace within Morea was important for it had been foreseen (by Plethon himself) to be the ground for recovery of Hellenes. The independence of Morea was important, in other words, any kind of intervention from foreigners could not be approved. Therefore, power struggle among kinsmen was bad and such a struggle somehow shaped by foreigners was even worse. As a matter of fact, Plethon's anti-Ottoman position was caused by, first, possible intervention of the Ottomans in Hellenic politics, and second, by their threat to a plausible political unity of Morea.

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<sup>249</sup> Necipoglu, *Byzantium Between the Ottomans and the Latins*, 278.

<sup>250</sup> Baloglou, 'The Economic Thought of Ibn Khaldoun and Georgios Gemistos Plethon: Some Comparative Parallels and Links', 19.





# Conclusion

I have brought together these six addresses from three fifteenth century Byzantine authors in order to present the lively variety of prospects, historical sources, and literary types. Each of the authors had a different background and when they had written these addresses they were at different locations from each other; Symeon of Thessaloniki was in Thessaloniki, Plethon was in Mystras and Bessarion had already taken up residence in Rome as a cardinal. Besides, dates of these addresses stretches from 1416 to 1451. Although each of the addresses was a member of the Palaiologan Dynasty, they were four in total, one was emperor Manuel II Palaiologos, and the others were despots and sons of the emperor; Theodore II Palaiologos, Andronikos Palaiologos, Constantine Palaiologos, and Demetrios Palaiologos. This situation is a strong indication that these authors esteemed *Palaiologoi* as legitimate rulers, because whatever their proposal, they beseeched the Palaiologan rulers; however each of them could address different political magnates as I have shown throughout this study. On the other hand, it became clear that the Emperor ceased to be the only office for pleading, and Constantinople was not the political center for the plans concerning the future of the state anymore.

Plethon's two successive addresses to Theodore II and Manuel II, and in a similar vein Bessarion's address to Constantine treated Morea as the political center. Plethon presented his proposals concerning a general reform in Morea. He tended the issues of redistribution of land, social compartmentalization, taxation, military organization, regulation of punishment, and maintenance of the *Hexamilion*. In the end, he idealized a Morea with self sufficient, isolated economy, and a disciplined well guarded society. His plans for Morea seemed to be compartmentalized, that is to say that in a later stage he expected Morea to be the base for colonizing the neighbouring lands and defeating the Ottomans. Bessarion's

address was in accordance with Plethon's with regard to redistribution of land, trade, and the importance of Morea. Bessarion thought that it was already possible to turn Morea into a center of Hellenic expansion. He might have given more Importance to *Hexamilion*, and was sure that Constantine could start the expansion based on Morea.

*To the despot* of Symeon of Thessaloniki was concerned with the rulers' relation with the church. He attempted to influence the young Despot Andronikos, when Andronikos had just become the sole ruler of Thessaloniki. Therefore I treated this text in the context of the power struggle between the church and the emperor. Later, in his consolatory instruction to Andronikos, he was lamenting the loss of Thessaloniki. In Symeon's opinion, Andronikos did not sell Thessaloniki to Venetians, but he was deprived of the city. Biblical references were intense in this address, so Symeon attempted to link Andronikos' sufferings to that of biblical figures, especially of prophet Job. At first sight, Symeon consoled the deposed despot that he would attain salvation for he chose the monastic life. Further analysis of the biblical references suggests that Symeon might have hoped for regain of the worldly loses, particularly for recapture of Thessaloniki.

Plethon's address to Demetrios, praised despot Demetrios in his success to prevent a civil war with his brother despot Thomas in Morea. He presented many Ancient Greek examples in order to prove that civil war is to be despised, whereas fighting against foreign enemies would mean a just war. I concluded that, through his historical examples, Plethon attempted to urge Demetrios to ally with his brother and start an offensive against the Ottomans.

Each author had their own set of historical figures and examples in their addresses. Plethon almost exclusively referred to Ancient Greek history. Bessarion was quite a follower of Plethon in this regard, with the exception of his frequent references to God. While Plethon

did not refer to Athens, and focused on Sparta, Bessarion, though focused on Ancient Sparta, referred to Athens or Athenian characters as well. Symeon, on the other hand, left out Ancient Greek history, but embraced the Biblical one. I believe all of them had one thing in common: they all used their sources in order to be more explanatory for the issue they treat, and to hint an idealized future by drawing parallels with their sources.

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