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Article

A Fourth Sophistic Movement? *Mêtis*, Rhetoric, and Politics Between Byzantium and Italy in the Fourteenth Century

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Abstract: This article adopts the thesis formulated by Laurent Pernot, according to which sophists existed in every period of history. By comparing the rhetorical strategies developed by the Second Sophistic authors—in particular Aelius Aristides—with the works of the Late Byzantine politician and literatus Demetrius Kydones, striking similarities emerge, allowing an argument for the continuity of the Sophistic tradition. Authors of the Second Sophistic did not only contribute to the Byzantine politikòi stylistic models, but provided them with pragmatic approaches to navigating moments of crisis, even at the cost of negotiating and transforming traditional values. This emerges also in Kydones' attempt to bring together East and West in order to contain the Turkish threat. His efforts mirror those of Aelius Aristides and other members of the Second Sophistic who similarly tried to mediate with the Roman empire. Furthermore, Kydones' adoption of Greek paideia as a form of "soft power" in the West played a key role in the diffusion of the Sophistic tradition among Italian Humanists, like Leonardo Bruni. This phenomenon is closely linked with the "Sophistic Renaissance" explored by MacPhail and Katinis.

Keywords: rhetoric; second sophistic; byzantium; Italian humanism

1. Introduction

In his *A History of* Greek Philosophy (1971), W. K. C. Guthrie defines the sophistic era of the fifth century BCE as a kind of "Enlightenment". Although it is always dangerous to compare two different historical periods, Joshua Billings, in a recent contribution on the sophists, returns to the concept, acknowledging the usefulness of the term "enlightenment" for the analysis of the "intellectual historiography of the sophistic era" (Billings 2023, p. 125). In a similar vein, I shall compare the Greco-Roman Second Sophistic (50–250 CE) with the intellectual and political activity of Demetrius Kydones (1324–1397), the crucially important Byzantine politician, diplomat and rhetor of the fourteenth century. This comparative approach will complement a reception-based methodology, grounded in the argument that fourteenth-century Byzantine scholars not only engaged with Second Sophistic authors through reading and transcription but also strategically employed their works to further political aims, as discussed in Gaul's study on the 'late Byzantine sophistic' (Gaul 2011, pp. 371–83). While Gaul frames this phenomenon within the context of relations between Constantinople and Thessaloniki during the civil wars (1321–1328; 1341–1354), marked by a process of decentralization, this framework could also be extended to encompass Demetrius Kydones' activity. Such an extension would provide further insight into how classical rhetorical traditions were repurposed within the broader intellectual and political landscapes of the late Byzantine era.

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My primary aim is to demonstrate that the term "sophist" did not disappear in the sixth century CE, as George Kennedy claims, but instead changed into "*politikòs*", while retaining many of the same characteristics as the original term. The survival of the term "sophist" is connected with the continuity of the sophistic movement. This idea has been proposed by Laurent Pernot, who coined the term "Third Sophistic" to identify the Greek and pagan intellectuals who flourished after the "Second Sophistic" and encompassed the fourth century CE (Pernot 2000, 2019). Eugenio Amato extended the life of the Third Sophistic to the sixth century, in relation to the so-called School of Gaza (sometimes called the "Fourth Sophistic"...) (Milazzo 2002, p. 15), which is consistent with the disappearance of the term "sophist" after emperor Justinian (482–565 CE) (Kennedy 1983, p. 179; Amato 2010; Cribiore 2013). Although other scholars prefer to abandon the term Third Sophistic entirely and to look "at late antique literature through the lens of the Second Sophistic" (Van Hoof 2010, p. 214), both models point to the existence of a sophistic tradition that survives well beyond the 250 CE and connects Late Antiquity with Byzantium. Cyril Mango correctly included Christian and pagan authors of the fourth to sixth centuries in the reception of Byzantine rhetoric-based culture (Mango 2002, p. 103). Anthony Kaldellis, in turn, identified a Third Sophistic that persisted into the Komnenian period (1081–1185 CE) and in connection with Michael Psellos (Kaldellis 2007).

In 2017, Pernot returned to his thesis and advanced the possibility that sophists existed in every period, displaying common traits, especially "a combination of literature and politics under rhetoric's auspices".[1] In this essay, I shall follow Pernot's approach and focus on the continuity of the sophistic tradition from an intellectual and political perspective. The comparison between the Second Sophistic and Kydones' time can be fruitful in establishing a basic pattern common to most sophistic "movements".[2] It seems, in fact, that such movements flourish in periods characterized by profound transformations in Greek cultural identity: the First Sophistic emerged in parallel with the socio-cultural changes that affected Greek *poleis* during the late 5th century BCE; the Second Sophistic (first to third centuries CE) answered the Roman occupation of the Hellenic world; and what Pernot calls Third Sophistic (the fourth century CE) dealt with the challenges posed by "the rise of Christianity and the transition toward a Christian order".[3] Therefore, within the continuity of the sophistic tradition what changed were the challenges posed to Greek social and cultural identity. The approach developed in the article has been anticipated by Kaldellis, who defines the Third Sophistic in the Komnenian period as a "reconstitution of Greek identity".[4] Building on the similarities identified by Pernot and Kaldellis regarding the Third Sophistic, this article argues that these represent two phases of a unified Sophistic, separated only by the so-called "Byzantine Dark Ages".[5] Both periods were characterized by the interplay between Greek paideia and Christian religion. The Fourth Sophistic, emerging during the Palaiologan era, faced a different challenge: the preservation of Greek identity *vis-à-vis* Latins, civil wars and the rise of the Ottoman threat. Finally, it is argued that all Sophistic movements used rhetoric to propose expedient, realistic ways to navigate these social and political changes, allowing the Greek "classical" tradition to survive without losing its identity even if, in order to achieve this goal, they had to challenge, negotiate and even modify traditional values.[6] This approach is consistent with a particular form of intelligence studied by Detienne and Vernant, "at grips with objects which must be dominated by cunning if success is to be won in the most diverse field of action" (Detienne and Vernant [1974] 1978, p. 2). *Mêtis* is associated with the sophists, who include "flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, various skills and experience acquired over the years" among their qualities (Detienne and Vernant [1974] 1978, p. 3). *Mêtis* is functional to respond to situations which are transient, shifting, disconcerting and ambiguous. Facing a complex

socio-political situation, Kydones resorted to this intelligence to salvage what he believed was the core of the Greek identity. His attempt to achieve a *rapprochement* between the Greek East and the Latin West in order to contain the Turkish threat closely resembles the way in which authors who belonged to the Second Sophistic mediated with the Roman empire.[7] Furthermore, his relationship with Italian Humanists was highly influential in the diffusion of texts connected with the "Sophistic Renaissance" that have been studied by Eric MacPhail and Teodoro Katinis.[8]

2. The Second Sophistic and Its Relevance

During the Roman Empire, some renowned rhetors who belonged to the Second Sophistic (a term coined by Philostratus) and who were, at the same time, well-connected and influential politicians, created a dialogue with their fellow Greek citizens and the Romans. Although this dialogue did not prevent the existence of narratives of resistance towards the Empire, Pernot argues that, by using their education (*paideia*), these sophists provided the cultural coordinates according to which the Romans could have been understood by the Greeks.[9] The presentation of Roman domination as a phenomenon intelligible in Greek terms enabled the Greeks to accept this political situation. The Romans, on the other hand, had already been engaged in a cultural bilingualism with the Greeks since the late Republic. According to Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Roman culture, faced with the far more refined, complex, and prestigious Greek *paideia*, was afraid of losing its identity. Progressively, it is possible to witness a bilingual or, better, multilingual dialogue between the Romans and their subjects in the West and their Greek counterparts in the East. This multilingual dialogue was embodied by Quintus Ennius, the poet and dramatist who defined himself as a man with three hearts—one for each of these three languages: Oscan, Roman and Greek. This implies not a fusion but an addition of different linguistic and cultural layers in a continuous dialogue, which helped Romans to include the Greeks in their conceptual categories and, by doing so, to transform themselves and the Greeks in ways that could result in a better understanding of themselves and their "others". Therefore, Hellenization and Romanization were strictly interconnected in a process of continuous and reciprocal cultural transformation.[10] This process even included the discovery or fabrication of common roots, as when Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for example, strove to demonstrate in his *Roman Antiquities* that Rome is a Greek city. Pernot argues that this intercultural dialogue between Greeks and Romans was largely carried out by means of epideictic rhetoric, which provided a *trait d'union* between the two cultures and contributed "*à définir les rapports entre deux entités liées, tout en restant distinctes*" (Pernot 1998, p. 147). According to Pernot, epideictic rhetoric played a fundamental role in reinforcing "public adherence to accepted and recognized values": "Gods, cities, sovereigns, civic leaders, institutions: it praises what everyone already respects or is thought to respect. Its purpose is not to say the truth, but to reaffirm and re-create afresh the consensus around prevailing values. Epideictic rhetoric is the social order's rejuvenating bath. It instantiates a moment of communion, in which a community or a microcommunity presents itself with a show of its own unity" (Pernot 2016, p. 98). Epideictic rhetoric, especially in the genre of the encomium, therefore "performs a social role. It delineates images and beliefs common to the group; it defines and justifies accepted values; and sometimes it grants currency to new values". Here, Pernot introduces the idea that the values on which the identity of a people is based do not consist in a monolithic structure but are prone to change and transformation. Identity is simultaneously stable and flexible. And it is the orator who, as defender of a people's identity and a master in manipulating language and content for the persuasion of others, is called upon to provide a set of values aimed at maintaining the consensus. The solidification of the social order entails a recognition of socio-political changes that might cause fractures

in the community's identity and the need to act accordingly. Romans quickly recognized the political benefits of Greek epideictic rhetoric in legitimizing their imperial rule among conquered people and maintaining social order in subjugated territories; therefore, they did not hesitate to employ sophists in the local and central administration of the Empire, eventually granting them high offices, such as governors and consuls.[11]

This multilingualism, which is confirmed by the existence of Greek and Latin competitions in declamatory eloquence, was embodied by Favorinus of Arles, a Gaul who was a Roman citizen but was so well versed in both Latin and Greek that he became a prominent sophist. Favorinus was a pupil of Dio Chrysostom. Together with Aelius Aristides, Dio was pivotal in presenting himself as *trait d'union* between the Greek and Roman worlds by exerting a certain influence on the emperors and by becoming a peacekeeper among the Greek populace, with the aim of promoting peaceful coexistence of the East under Roman rule.[12] Animated by the staunch desire to preserve the relative autonomy of their home cities and of the Greek cultural system to which they belonged, Dio and Aelius were politicians, *literati*, and diplomats who understood perfectly that, in order to navigate the complex reality of their times and to preserve the Greek identity, it was necessary to resort to adaptability, realism, and a good dose of opportunism and compromise. This attitude can be characterized by the Greek concept of *mêtis*. Originally a goddess, and associated with the sophists of the fifth century BCE by Detienne and Vernant, *mêtis* is a cunning, flexible, and resourceful form of intelligence that enables its possessor to adapt speech and action to the ever-shifting circumstances of social and political life (Detienne and Vernant [1974] 1978, pp. 39, 42).

Perfectly representing the local *élite*, these sophists under the Roman Empire managed to appease the masses, avoiding revolts and riots, so as to prevent the intervention of the Roman governors. These aims were to be achieved through a bi-directional communication which had epideictic rhetoric at its core. Some speeches were directed to the inhabitants of the Greek cities, while others were panegyrics dedicated to Roman emperors.[13] Aristides even concocted a praise to Rome that, although not unique in its genre, remained highly authoritative.[14] A comparative analysis of this encomium *To Rome* with Aristides' *Panathenaic Oration*, which was performed in front of a Greek audience, clearly shows that Second Sophistic authors preferred to focus on the glorious past rather than cope with a depressing present.[15] Rome is praised by Aristides for its power and the peace it has enforced, but nothing is said about its monuments or about the culture of the Latins. These omissions and other veiled criticisms demonstrate that the Greeks never overcame their subjugation by Rome, while the Latin rhetors never refrained from describing the Greeks as effeminate and untrustworthy.[16] Anthony Spawforth and other scholars argue that the sophists focused on their ancient past precisely because it was the period of Greek history that the Romans wanted to hear about (Spawforth 2012). Antonino Milazzo argues that the *Panathenaic Oration* could have been destined for a mixed audience that included Roman elements and that its aim was to provide an "ecumenic message" (Milazzo 2002, p. 16). Whether this idealization of the past was directed to the Greeks, to the Romans, or to both is not relevant, since the sophists dictated the narrative and presented themselves as mediators between East and West. By using their culture as a form of "soft power", the sophists were highly successful in creating the impression that a "cosmopolitan unity of the Roman *oikoumene*" really existed (Richter 2017, p. 89). Philostratus' inclusion of Favorinus and other western rhetors (e.g., Aelianus of Rome and Aspasius of Ravenna) in his *Lives of the Sophists* confirms the success of a multilingual *paideia* common to the whole *élite* of the Roman world (Wright 1968, pp. 305–7, 311–13).

The gods, Favorinus says, have equipped him for the purpose of showing "the Greeks of Hellas that education can produce the same results as birth, to show the Romans, so

freighted with their own dignity, not to neglect its enhancement by education, and to show the Celts that not even barbarians need despair of Hellenic culture when they look at his example" (Gleason 1995, p. 16). Favorinus' multilingualism, therefore, represents the success of this bi-directional or even multi-directional communication strategy carried out by the Greek rhetors as they progressively created a Greco-Roman culture. The crafting of a *persona* able to move at ease between different linguistic and cultural codes so as to achieve its goal shared many similarities with sophistic *mêtis* and also inspired Christian authors. In her study of the ways in which authors connected with the Second Sophistic fashioned themselves to persuade their audiences, Gleason includes the apostle Paul. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he affirms that "[t]o the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those under the law, as under the law, that I might win those under the law; to those without law, as without law [. . .] that I might win those without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all, that I might by all means save some".[17] For Paul, the salvation of humankind was worth compromising his identity, transforming himself into something apparently different from what he really was. However, Gleason points out, this dissimulation or self-fashioning was temporary. Paul, in fact, "indulges in it only in order to become enough like others that he can transform them into what he, underneath all the transformations, really is".[18] This sophistic approach demonstrates how *mêtis*—the sophistic art of cunning and practical wisdom—contributed to the shaping of the cultural, social and political world of the Roman Empire.

3. The "Persian Scale" and the Sophistic Legacy in Byzantium

The best conceptualization of political *mêtis* developed during the Second Sophistic is provided in Aelius Aristides' oration titled *In Defense of the Four*. In defending four ancient Greek politicians from the accusations in Plato's dialogue, *Gorgias*, Aristides affirms—giving voice to the great statesmen and rhetors of Athens, Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades and Themistocles—that "you thereby concede both that our political management had everything that it ought to have had, and that the factors tending to enhance the glory of Athens outweighed any blame".[19] This *raison d'état ante litteram* does not appear only in this passage, but it is at the basis of the approach that informs Aristides' defense of politicians in general. In fact, he also refers to a "Persian practice" first reported by Herodotus. According to the historian, "[It is] said to be a custom of theirs [Persians], if one of them is accused of some kind of vile action, not to condemn him, even if he is found guilty, before they have conducted a comparative examination of the good and the bad that he has done and found the bad to predominate; and in cases where someone's good deeds preponderate, the custom prescribes that even the manifestly guilty should be let off".[20] The "Persian scale" proposes a relativist approach that establishes that a person should not be condemned on the basis of a single deed but on a balanced assessment of all the actions he or she committed, judged according to the three criteria of intentions, results, and fortune (Trapp 2021, p. 331). This also recurs in a section of the *Panathenaic Oration* in which Aristides defends Athens' reputation against the atrocities that the city committed, particularly at Melos and Scione, as reported by Thucydides. Aristides states that "villainy is only proven in a city or an individual when someone has only blameworthy actions on his record, or when someone can show the evil actions are more numerous or (be it added) more substantial than the good" (Trapp 2017, pp. 255–57).

Aristides, in this case, extends the concept of the Persian scale to an entire state, affirming that it is always necessary to weigh up the total amount of good and evil actions carefully before blaming or praising an entire community. Based on this principle, he fully absolves Athens. If the survival of Greek identity was the ultimate good, then the legitimization of Roman domination ought to be accepted. *Mêtis* works in connection

with *kairos*, the right moment, the timely opportunity to act or speak. In the first *Olynthiac* oration, for example, Demosthenes affirms that "in national affairs, those who fail to use their opportunities aright, fail also to acknowledge the good that the gods have given; for every advantage in the past is judged in the light of the final issue" (Vince 1930, p. 11). Only a person gifted in *mêtis* is able to properly take advantage of *kairos* (Detienne and Vernant [1974] 1978, pp. 7–8).

This practical and flexible approach to politics and rhetoric—a legacy of the ancient Greek sophists—was inherited by Byzantium's cultural and political *élite*.[21] In reality, in Byzantine tradition, the two aspects merged so much that one of the definitions of rhetoric was the "art (*techne*) concerned with the power of discourse in civic/political matters, whose aim is to speak persuasively according to what is possible" (Papaioannou 2017, p. 108). The members of the imperial entourage, upon whom the task of promoting and consolidating the Byzantine imperial idea was bestowed, were called *politikòi* by Psellos (who deeply esteemed both Aristides and Demosthenes). They were *literati* who at the same time held political positions in the imperial and patriarchal administration.[22] This group was cohesive and relied heavily upon the experiences of the past so as to face the challenges of the present: "While emperors came and went, both political aims and methods could be passed from generation to generation, preserving a remarkable continuity" (Harris 2014, p. 22; Bowie 1974, pp. 166–209). This continuity was provided by a *paideia* that included sophists like Dio and Aristides, whose political and ideological importance was further enhanced during the First Byzantine Humanism, the Komnenian Empire and the so-called Palaiologan Renaissance.[23] These rhetorical sources were praised not only for their style but also for their ability to deliver persuasive epideictic speeches, whose aim was the same as that of Second Sophistic authors: to create a set of values shared by the community, to define its cultural identity, and to solidify the internal consensus toward the ruler and the political *élite*.[24] The Byzantine rhetor John Sikeliotes, for example, defines rhetoric as "that part of politics which contributes most to social cohesion" (Papaioannou 2017, p. 109).

Furthermore, praise—both in prose and poetry—had a psychological effect on the addressee, who was persuaded to live up to the values that were attributed to him.[25] According to this hortatory aspect, the emperor was not only the formal incarnation of such values but was also continuously invited to adhere to them in practice, providing a model for the public to emulate. Finally, as demonstrated by Dimiter Angelov, the panegyrics allowed *politikòi* to suggest political ideas, further diplomatic agendas and even provide admonitions and veiled criticism (Angelov 2016).

The Byzantine *politikòi*, very much like some of the authors included by Philostratus in the Second Sophistic, were the ideologues and advisors of the emperors, able to create persuasive communication strategies whose aim was to confirm the consensus in an established dynasty or, should necessity require, to create support for usurpers by legitimizing their access to the throne of Byzantium. The aim of the *politikòi* was to obtain imperial patronage, but this was achieved by preserving the core identity of the empire: "First the security of Constantinople and the *oikoumene*, and secondly to secure recognition of the claim of their ruler to be the supreme Christian emperor" (Harris 2014, p. 36).

4. From "Sophist" to "Politikòs": The Contribution of Michael Psellos

In his previously mentioned book on Byzantine Hellenism, Kaldellis argues that, between 400 and 1040 AD "Hellenic identity went into abeyance" and only reemerged during the time of Michael Psellos (1018–1070s) (Kaldellis 2007, p. 173). According to him, the period of the First Byzantine Humanism (the ninth century CE), whose main protagonist was patriarch Photius, "with one exception this so-called Byzantine Humanism did not lead to any experiments in the fashioning of new Hellenic identities" (Kaldellis 2007, p. 181;

Lemerle 1971). Kaldellis, in fact, detects persisting tensions between Christian religion and Hellenistic *paideia*, which found a solution only with what he calls the Third Sophistic, whose initiator was Psellos. These tensions, however, did not include the sophistic tradition, as demonstrated by Corinne Jouanno, who pointed out the great admiration of Photius for Aelius Aristides (Jouanno 2009). It is not my intention to discuss whether the rebirth of Hellenism started in the ninth or in the eleventh century. What is interesting is that according to Kaldellis, Psellos aimed to reconstitute Greek identity by renegotiating certain spaces that belonged to Hellenism that had been occupied—or negated—by the Christian religion. It should be noticed that the "villain" Psellos was fighting was the rigid definition of the Christian religion proposed by monasticism. His attitude bears striking similarities with authors connected by Pernot to the Third Sophistic.[26] Is it therefore possible to affirm that Psellos was not the initiator of a new sophistic movement, but the successful inheritor of the previous one?

Furthermore, as Kaldellis shows, Psellos exercised the *mêtis* and sense of *kairos* acquired through his rhetorical and political formation. The *politikòs* was "a man educated enough to adorn the state with culture but discerning and morally flexible enough to do what times demanded" (Kaldellis 2007, p. 213). Psellos, in fact, managed to advertise his position in a hostile environment by means of dissimulation (Kaldellis 2007, pp. 205–6). Like St. Paul and Libanius, Psellos invented a *persona* that allowed him "to be all things to all people".[27] He and those who came after him managed to restore the balance in the triple identity of Byzantium: the Greek, the Roman, and the Christian. The Hellenism in the Komnenian period certainly benefitted from Psellos' endeavours, but it was also stimulated by the political communication of the new ruling dynasty, which was interested in establishing consensus within the Byzantine society.

The reassessment of Greek cultural identity was not only related to its relationship with aspects of the Orthodox religion but also with the "western descendants of Aeneas" (Kaldellis 2007, p. 300). The Latin aggression, which led to the loss of Constantinople in 1204, prompted Byzantines to accentuate their Greek heritage, since the Roman and Christian aspects of their identity were also shared by their enemies. The Greek component included the faculty of *mêtis* or cunning intelligence that Latins despised, since they considered Byzantines to be duplicitous liars. The legitimization of deceit as a means of preserving Byzantine identity has been recognized by Jonathan Harris as one of the major issues in the relations with Latins since the crusades (Harris 2014, pp. 36–37). In fact, the honor code and the moral compass of the Greeks and Latins were completely different. Anna Komnene praised her father Alexios I, for example, for achieving victory by means of deception instead of bloodshed and by seizing the opportune moment to act (Komnene 2009, pp. 437–38). However, she also reported examples of cunning intelligence performed by the crusaders.[28] Latins were as shrewd as the Byzantines, notwithstanding their attempts to portray their actions as pure and honourable. Be that as it may, the dire situation of what remained of Byzantium, scattered in small states fighting for their survival, made the recourse to a kind of sophistic practice of *mêtis* inevitable. Theodore II Laskaris, emperor of Nicaea, one of the states that, with Epirus and Trebizond, claimed Byzantine heritage, elevated classic *paideia* into a national quality and adopted *mêtis*, instilled by the same education, to face internal and external challenges in a time of crisis. He was so adept in this as to be described as a "Machiavelli before Machiavelli".[29]

Even when the Roman *politeia* was reconstituted with the recapture of Constantinople in 1261, *mêtis* shaped the political action of the new emperor, Michael VIII. Knowing that the only way to avoid a new crusade against Byzantium was to appease the pope, who wished to end the schism between the Catholic and the Orthodox church by forcing the emperor to acknowledge the spiritual and political superiority of Rome, Michael did not

hesitate to negotiate the Christian (i.e., Orthodox) component of his identity. He therefore accepted the Union of the two Churches in 1274. In this project he was aptly supported by his Gran Logothete, George Akropolites, who used his abilities to "convince the clergy to accept Michael VIII's policy, and later it was he who represented the emperor at the Council of Lyons and took the oath of Union on his behalf" (Constantinides 1993, p. 87). Notwithstanding the composition of two polemical works against the Latins, Akropolites must have realized that the situation required a certain degree of realism and flexibility, at least for the time being. In fact, as soon as the danger of a crusade was thwarted, Michael's successor, Andronikos II, quickly restored Orthodoxy, due to the fierce hostility that the Union sparked within Byzantine society: "Orthodoxy had become synonymous with a form of nationalism".[30] This produced a shift in the cultural identity of the empire. In the words of Eulogia, Michael VIII's sister, it was "better that my brother's empire should perish, than the purity of the Orthodox faith" (Harris 2014, p. 204).

5. Demetrius Kydones and the "Double Communication Strategy"

The Palaeologan era (1261–1453) corresponded to another moment in which the cultural identity of Byzantium was challenged and it is not a case that a "deuterosophistic revival" has been recognized in what Gaul calls the late Byzantine sophistic.[31] The persistence of the Latin threat was coupled with civil wars and the rise of the Turkish menace. This inevitably changed the situation. In fact, despite the tensions and conflicts that had characterized their relationship with the Byzantines, for some of them the Latins were nonetheless "a very familiar foreigner who might have been a brother" (Laiou 2012b, p. 80). After all, the relation with the West had a long history. Palaiologoi emperors used to marry into prominent Western families, and those brides came to Constantinople with numerous retinues, which facilitated the penetration of Latin values and customs into Byzantine culture. Frequent contacts were also provided by commercial and diplomatic exchanges and by the presence of Franciscans and Dominicans. Therefore, there was room for a dialogue. With the Turks, however, the situation was quite different.

Surrounded by enemies and exhausted by civil war, the Empire was in critical state. John VI Kantakouzenos had hopes "of coming to terms with the new Muslim world" and of winning "the trust and co-operation of western Christendom without compromising the Orthodoxy of his Christian faith and the special qualities of the culture into which he was born" (Nicol 2002, p. 11). Kantakouzenos failed and soon realized that Byzantium was no longer able to make autonomous decisions. Its survival depended on foreign powers (Laiou 2012b, p. 85). The only point of discussion was which power would allow the core identity of Byzantium to persist.[32]

Born in Thessaloniki, prime minister (*mesazon*) of two emperors (John Kantakouzenos, from 1349 until 1354, and John V Palaiologos, from 1355 until 1372) and mentor of a third (Manuel II Palaiologos), Demetrius Kydones was in the perfect position to understand the situation of Byzantium (Çelik 2021, pp. 42–47, 91–94). He harshly criticized the contemporary panegyrists who, in accordance with the epideictic tradition, strove to maintain the illusion of ever-lasting tenets of Byzantine greatness. Since the reality of the situation was quite different, drastic measures had to be taken. For these reasons, Kydones staunchly advocated an alliance with Rome and the West. Being himself a *politikòs*, and hence a counsellor and mentor of emperors, Kydones was an heir of the sophists, whose works he studied.[33] As such, he was well acquainted with the realistic, expedient methodology adopted by his predecessors. Once he concluded that it was necessary to shape a common cultural identity by adopting the same strategies as the sophists during the Roman empire, Kydones carefully crafted his *persona* to become the perfect mediator between East and West. He affirmed that he learned Latin to carry out his political and

diplomatic duties and had therefore requested the help of a Dominican friar at Pera, who taught him Latin through the reading and the translation of religious authors such as Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and Anselm of Canterbury (Kianka 1980; Ryder 2016). Adding the layer of the Latin language and culture to the Greek one, which gave him a multicultural and multilingual identity like the sophist Favorinus of Arles, he successfully managed to translate Latin works and disseminate them amongst the Byzantine *élite*.

Kydones' ends were primarily diplomatic and political, and were carried out through an extensive use of rhetoric. His *Apologiae*, orations, and letters were penned to advertise Kydones' public self-image and to convey the political message that Latins were not "barbarians"—quite the opposite, since they shared a Roman identity with the Byzantines. Both were "of one mind, being divided only by languages" (Kianka 1980, p. 65; Lamers 2015, p. 34; Mercati 1931, pp. 136–41). Kydones expresses his favor towards Latins by calling them "Romans"—a term that was used by the Byzantines to identify themselves—and by reminding his countrymen that Constantinople had been founded by people coming from Rome.[34] On the other hand, the Turks were depicted as the new Persians, bereft of *paideia* and propagators of "slavery and death". To enhance his position, he even translated into Greek the Latin treatise, *Contra legem Sarracenorum*, by Ricoldo da Monte Croce (Leonte 2020b, p. 164; Kianka 1982, p. 271; Kianka 1985, p. 186). Therefore, Kydones aimed at providing an image of the West as "motivated by concern for Byzantines and for Christendom, as altruistic and successful" (Ryder 2014, p. 104). He even used the ancient accusation of deceptiveness that the crusaders aimed at the Byzantines to demonstrate how the honor and justice of the Latins made them trustworthy allies. On the other hand, he did not fail to address the question of faith. He tried to convince his fellow countrymen that they were biased against Catholic doctrines and that, "if correctly understood, both Greek and Latin Fathers—the authoritative arbiters—could in fact be seen to be saying the same thing" (Ryder 2012, p. 352). Furthermore, he defended the doctrinal infallibility of the pope and affirmed that the pope's authority was superior to that of the Patriarch of Constantinople (Ryder 2010, pp. 107–8).

Although Kydones strove to persuade Byzantines to follow his advice peacefully, stressing the argument for unity of Christendom not on the basis of the "superiority of the Catholic church, but on shared identity and shared belief", he nonetheless bluntly expressed his thoughts (Ryder 2010, p. 219). In his oration entitled *De admittendo Latinorum* subsidio (1366), for example, Kydones affirmed that the Latins were the only possible ally against the Turks, and that if the Byzantines could not escape servitude, it would be better to be subjected to the Latins (Ryder 2014, p. 102). The set of circumstances required a practical and realistic response. Following this line of thought, he converted to Catholicism and supported the decision of Emperor John V to do the same, accompanying him in the voyage in Italy (1369–1371).[35] Kydones' position found other supporters in Byzantium. Two of his students, Maximos Chrysoberges and Manuel Kalekas, not only converted to Catholicism but even embraced monastic life. Kydones, however, never did the same, even if he may have wanted to do so. His *persona*, fashioned to make him appear as the perfect mediator between the secular and sacred worlds, had to be preserved.

To maintain good relations with other Orthodox members of the court and the clergy and to contradict the slanderous accusation of being a traitor to his country, Kydones resorted to strategies previously adopted by the sophists. He, in fact, combined "letters and political activity" and used his rhetoric to offer "practical, political models".[36] In a letter, he expressed the intention to give financial support to monasteries on Mount Athos, and he wrote several letters to the members of the Orthodox Church. Most importantly, however, he used *Apologiae* to demonstrate that he was not a traitor but, on the contrary, a patriot who tried to save his country by showing a practical way forward. This way

forward was the alliance with the West, which he embellished and exaggerated with all the resources of rhetoric. The pope is described as "the ruler of peace and wisdom for all" (Kianka 1980, p. 66), possibly referring to Aelius Aristides' *To Rome*, in which the Roman emperor is praised for having brought peace to Greece and for being the ruler of free men. Furthermore, by contrasting the prosperous, free and happy West, inhabited by the virtuous, law-abiding and courageous subjects of the pope, with the actual situation of the Byzantine empire on the verge of being conquered by the Ottoman Turks, Kydones tried to underline the necessity of finding an accord with the Latins based on the common good and the reciprocal usefulness of the relationship. Finally, to stress that not only Constantinople and other great cities of the empire were worthy of praise (Rhoby 2012, pp. 81–99; Bessarion 2019), Kydones defined Rome as a great city that offered, "a great abundance of learning and virtue and all the revered things" (Kianka 1995, p. 104; Polyakovskaya 2019, p. 67). New Rome had inherited much from the old one. In another letter, addressed to the future emperor Manuel Palaeologus between 1371 and 1374, Kydones included an encomium of Venice—the first praise of a western city ever written by a Byzantine author, and which bore important similarities with the *encomia* of the sophist Aristides.[37] In line with his bilingual and bicultural *persona*, Kydones' works aimed to avoid conflict among his Byzantine interlocutors and to create concord and consensus through persuasion (Leonte 2020b, p. 171). On the other hand, he managed to present himself as a credible interlocutor with the papacy and the West. Kydones strove to convince the westerners that coming to the aid of Byzantium was convenient for them since its fall would expose their countries to Ottoman expansionism (Polyakovskaya 2019, p. 67). In other words, Kydones deployed all the resources of eloquence to demonstrate that it was possible to recreate the "cosmopolitan unity of the Roman *oikoumene*" advertised by the Second Sophistic.[38]

Notwithstanding Kydones' efforts, the lack of support from the pope for the waging of a crusade forced John V to seek peace with the Ottomans, thus becoming a tribute-paying vassal. Kydones resigned from imperial service, although he continued to provide diplomatic services for the emperor. From this position he witnessed the decadence of the empire, weakened by internal strife, economic dependency, religious discussions, and the Turks' expansionism.

6. A Fourth Sophistic Movement?

In 1387, Thessaloniki was taken by the Turks. This was a profound shock for Kydones not only because it was his native city, but also because the Ottomans were very careful and intelligent administrators, who treated the inhabitants "in an unexpectedly kind and gentle manner".[39] People were granted religious freedom and the city enjoyed political and economic benefits and privileges. Kydones observed that many people in Constantinople "openly declared their preference for Ottoman rule" (Necipoğlu 2009, p. 146; Bryer 2019, pp. 858, 863; Polyakovskaya 2019, p. 141). Ecclesiastic and monastic circles expressed appreciation for the tolerant attitude of the Ottomans in religious matters, which was preferable to the intransigent demands of popes, who wished to impose the union of the two Churches on their own terms. If this position was somehow to be expected—it was contemporaneous with the rise of a mystic monastic movement called Hesychasm, which "rejected the idea of a religious or political rapprochement with the Latins"—it was less easy to anticipate the neutral attitude demonstrated by some aristocrats (Leonte 2020a, p. 20; Russell 2017; Plested 2017; Bryer 2019, p. 857). The conquests of the Turks had damaged them greatly. Not only did they lose vast landed estates, but also, due to the impoverished state of the treasury, they could not even expect to receive the usual patronage from the imperial court (Harris 2012, pp. 119–40). To compensate for the financial losses, many aristocrats became involved in trade with both Latins and Ottomans. According to Harris,

this situation was detrimental to the connections these aristocrats had with the court and even to their adherence to the imperial ideology. What was "good for the empire might not necessarily have been good for the personal financial interests of its leading nobles" (Harris 2012, p. 127; Laiou 2019, p. 830).

In a divided society, it was clear that Kydones could not easily overcome a long series of misunderstandings and conflict.[40] He therefore decided to return to Italy, where he stayed from 1390 to 1391. He resided in Venice and was granted Venetian citizenship, the final step in the acquisition of his double identity. In 1391, he returned to Constantinople. The coronation of his former pupil Manuel II possibly convinced Kydones that he could again dictate the imperial agenda. Meanwhile, another interesting development had occurred. In Italy, he was accompanied by his pupil Manuel Chrysoloras, who had also learned Latin in Constantinople (Rollo 2002, p. 35; Acerbi et al. 2021, p. 23). In 1390, Chrysoloras imparted Greek lessons to Roberto Rossi, later to become Cosimo de' Medici's teacher, who was a friend of Coluccio Salutati. This contact was followed in 1395 by the arrival in Constantinople of another of Salutati's acquaintances, Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia, who desired to study Greek with Chrysoloras (for which he was subsequently nicknamed "the Greek") (Arrighi 2012, p. 118). Direct contact between Kydones and Salutati had a long-standing impact on politics and the soft power of sophistry in Florence and beyond. Salutati was a Humanist, armed with a secular education rooted in rhetoric and classic culture, and connected with the political life of his time. His position of chancellor of Florence (1375–1406), his rhetorical skills, and the role he played in shaping the political communication of the Republic placed Salutati in a position that closely resembled the profile of a Byzantine *politikòs*.[41] Salutati, who played a fundamental role in creating "a new image of the city (largely based on the connection of Florentine's republican present to its ancient Roman heritage)" (Baldassarri 2014, p. IX), must have recognized the importance of the Greek tradition to further the diplomatic and politic agenda of Florence.[42] In a letter written in 1396, he expressed his satisfaction that one of his pupils had the chance of being exposed to it (Novati 1896, pp. 105–19).[43] Kydones, on the other hand, had realized that the Greek *paideia* could be a form of "soft power" to involve Humanists in his project to bring together East and West for the salvation of Byzantium.[44]

Just as Kydones had become a Venetian citizen and a Catholic convert, proficient in the Latin language and in Latin culture, it was possible for a new generation of Florentine scholars and politicians to acquire a new Greek identity in their pursuit of matching the greatness of the ancients and restoring Italy's lost Roman heritage. He must have hoped that Greek learning could persuade Chrysoloras' Italian pupils to use their political authority to build consensus in the chanceries of Rome and other Italian cities towards the salvation of Byzantium.[45] He may have had the sophist Aristides in mind, who described the situation of the Greeks under the Roman domination as follows: "You continually care for the Greeks as if they were your foster fathers, protecting them and, as it were, resurrecting them, giving freedom and self-rule to the best of them, who were old rulers, while guiding the others with moderation and with great consideration and care" (Behr 1981, p. 94). Kydones therefore favored the appointment of Manuel Chrysoloras to a teaching position in Greek language and literature at Florence, orchestrated by Salutati and Palla Strozzi.[46] Between 1397 and 1400, Chrysoloras taught several Greek authors, including Aristides, who was a major influence on Leonardo Bruni, a favorite disciple of Salutati and his successor as chancellor of Florence. In an attempt to rebuild the consensus around the civic government of Florence—shattered by the danger posed by Milan and thwarted only by the sudden death of Gian Galeazzo Visconti on 3 September 1402—Bruni composed the *Laudatio florentinae* urbis (1404), which was strongly indebted to Aristides' *Panathenaic Oration* and *To Rome*, but also to Menander Rhetor and Hermogenes.[47]

By that time, however, Kydones was already dead. He died in Crete in the winter of 1397 after accompanying Chrysoloras to Italy. Among the books he took with him to Crete, there were also the *History* of Herodotus and the *Works* of Aelius Aristides—the same books that contain the theory of the "Persian scale".[48] Although it cannot be proved, it would be interesting to know if Kydones also introduced into Italy the theoretical articulation of *mêtis* and *kairos*, those concepts so strongly embedded in the political tradition of sophistic rhetoric from the fifth century BCE onwards. After all, he himself understood that in a moment of crisis it was necessary to resort to the ancient wisdom of the Greeks. In one letter, he refers to Aesop's tale of the oak and the reed: "Although it [the reed] bends to the force of wind, it survives and stands upright after the storm passes" (Leonte 2020b, p. 171). The same flexibility and political realism that informed Kydones' life and actions were absorbed through *paideia*, wherein the sophists had a prominent position. Kydones' belief in a cultural, religious, and political *rapprochement* of the East with the West through multilingualism and multiculturalism has many analogies with the attitude of the Second Sophistic. The necessity for adapting aspects of the tripartite identity of Byzantium (Roman *politeia*, Christian orthodoxy, and Greek *paideia*) to survive was accepted by the Greek *politikòi* (Kydones, Chrysoloras, Bessarion, Isidore of Kiev, etc.) thanks to political realism embedded in their rhetorical tradition.[49] Like Kydones, they were prepared to sacrifice part of their identities for the survival of imperial authority and for the greater good of their country.[50] As *politikòi* with prominent roles in the Byzantine court, these "sophists" practiced cunning intelligence in manifold ways, including by embracing the Catholic religion to obtain positions of authority in the Church to compel the pope to launch a crusade in support of Constantinople.

If analyzed from this perspective, the questions about whether Isidore of Kiev and Bessarion became Catholic cardinals with purely religious intentions cease to be meaningful.[51] Like their predecessors, these sophists created *personae* to achieve their political and diplomatic goals and to foster their personal ambitions.[52] It was not a decision made lightly, but the alternative was much worse. The Turks, in fact, would have allowed the Byzantines to retain their faith, but at the risk of losing the Roman and part of the Greek components of their culture.[53] Even though the fear of the "Latinization of the Greeks" led exactly to this outcome, the attempts made by the Byzantine sophists to create a bi-directional political communication strategy to convince both Latins and Greeks of their common roots bore fruits that were enjoyed most of all by the Italian Humanists.[54] The latter were less conflicted, since they had just to add the Greek layer to their Latin and Catholic identity.[55] The acquisition of the Greek layer certainly enabled Humanists such as Salutati, Bruni, and Pier Paolo Vergerio (and others) to access primary sources and to translate them, thereby becoming acquainted with Greek philosophy and literature.[56] However, from a literary, political and rhetorical perspective, the relevance of the sophistic tradition should not be underestimated. It is no coincidence that Politian, whose imitation of sophistic models was recognized by Eugenio Garin, read and noted a codex of Aristides and knew Dio Chrysostom, Menander Rhetor and Pseudo-Dionysius.[57] The sophists, therefore, were not only praised by the Italian Humanists as masters of style but were also appreciated for the substance of their thought on judicial and political matters. In addition, epideictic rhetoric was fundamental in building persuasive political communication strategies during the Renaissance (as demonstrated by the example of Bruni), much as it was during the time of Psellos and Kydones. *Mêtis* and *kairos* formed a prominent part of the Greek realistic response to crises and were passed on to the Humanists through their rhetorical tradition, thus creating yet another epoch in the history of sophistic "movements".

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Notes

1 (Pernot 2017, p. 212). Tellingly, Pernot entitles the final paragraph of his contribution "First Sophistic, Second, Third. . .. How Many Sophistics?".

2 On the term "movement", see (Kerferd 1981).

3 (Quiroga 2007, p. 35). See also (Jarratt 2019, pp. 122–28; Billings 2023, pp. 125–26; Pernot 2017, pp. 205–16; Pernot 2021).

4 (Kaldellis 2007, p. 190). Also, Milazzo defines with "crisis of identity" the situation of Greece during the Second Sophistic. (Milazzo 2002, p. 26).

5 (Kazhdan [1968] 1995, pp. IX–X; Treadgold 1997, p. 402). "More than half a millennium after the Second Sophistic had revived Greek literature, the regular system of higher education had vanished from the Greek world, seemingly taking along with it philosophy and science, formal history and oratory, and secular poetry and epistolography" (Treadgold 1997, p. 399).

6 See, for instance, the analysis of the concept of usefulness in Protagoras (Bonazzi 2020, pp. 24–26, 48). On the impact of the sophists in Greek culture and politics, (Giorgini 2016; Balla 2023, pp. 233–34).

7 Pernot refers to the Second Sophistic as a "movement", albeit "not an organized social movement" (Pernot 2000, pp. 187, 253–54, translated in 2005). There are of course other positions which even criticize the term "Second Sophistic", whereas others highlight theoretical and philosophical aspects at the expense of its rhetorical and practical aspects. With these caveat noted, I accept the inclusive approach discussed by Pernot and accepted by Enos in another contribution published in this Special Issue.

8 (MacPhail 2011; Katinis 2019). See, in addition, their essays in this Special Issue.

9 (Pernot 1998, p. 142). Resistance towards Roman hegemony has been discussed by the subject of a vast bibliography. See, in particular, (Dench 2018, pp. 15, 74; Whitmarsh 2013; Jolowicz and Elsner 2023).

10 It "makes no sense to speak of 'hellenisation' and 'romanisation' as if they were separate phenomena. They are no more separate than the diastole and the systole phases of the cardiac cycle. Think of Rome as a great heart, at the centre of the arterial system of its empire. In the diastolic phase, the heart draws blood from the entire system, literally sucking blood, drawing to itself the wealth, the goods, the ideas, the crafts and technology of the Mediterranean. In the systolic phase it pumps the blood back out again, transformed by oxygenation into 'Roman' blood. The process is continuous" (Wallace-Hadrill 2008, p. 361).

11 "La rhétorique grecque se présente ainsi comme une pièce, et une pièce importante, dans le contrôle idéologique de l'Empire. Elle a fourni à Rome un appui, dont l'efficacité tenait à ce qu'il n'était pas donné sous la contrainte, mais offert et consenti" (Pernot 1998, p. 147). See also (Cassin 1997, p. 237; Swain 1996, pp. 135–408).

12 According to Swain, Dio Chrysostom, was a "communicator between different interest groups (emperors and subjects, governors and cities, elites and populace, Greeks and non-Greeks) broadcasting a message of co-operation and stability within the Greek world (see esp. *Orr*. 31–51) and between Greece and Rome (see esp. *Orr*. 1–4)" (Swain 2000, pp. 3–4). The guidelines of Dio's political attitude included "to settle problems and conflicts without recourse to force, and as far as possible keeping the Romans out of the affairs of the Greek cities" (Salmeri 2000, p. 64). On the relations between emperors and sophists, (Flinterman 2004).

13 See, for instance the orations XVI and XV written by Libanius. In the first one the sophist reproaches the population of Antioch for its disrespectful behaviour towards the emperor; in the second one he beseeches the emperor to forgive the city (Ventura da Silva 2018). On the risks connected to an excessive opposition to Roman power, (Dench 2018, pp. 105–33).

14 (Pernot 2016, pp. 26, 43–45). On the veiled criticism of the Roman domination, see (Pernot 2016, pp. 106–8).

15 (Harris and Holmes 2008), in particular the contributions of Estelle Oudot (31–49), Pernot (175–201) and Francesca Fontanella (203–216).

16 "*Facile est vincere timidos et imbelles, quales amoena Graeciae et docile Orientis educunt, vix leve pallium et sericos sinus vitando sole tolerantes et, si quando in periculo venerint, libertatis immemores, ut servire liceat orantes," Anonimus, "Panegyricus dictus Constantino Filio Constantii*" (24), in (Lassandro and Micunco 2013, p. 225).

17 1 Corinthians, 9:20.

18 (Gleason 1995, p. 17). On Paul as a sophist, see pp. 16–17.

19 (Trapp 2021, pp. 331–33). On the interpretation of Aristides' Platonic orations, see (Milazzo 2002).

20 (Trapp 2021, p. 379). The reference is to Herodotus, *Histories*, I, 137. On the connections between the *Platonic Discourses* and the *Panathenaic Oration*, see (Milazzo 2002, p. 159).

[21] Although Kaldellis later argues that between 400 and 1040 Hellenism, i.e., the "discursive construction of Greek identity," lay in limbo, this does not seem to apply to the classical *paideia*, in particular its political and rhetorical tradition. See (Kaldellis 2007, pp. 183–86).

[22] (Ronchey 2002b, p. 76). On the concept of the imperial idea, or *Kaiseridee*, see (Angelov 2006, p. 10).

[23] On the continuity of the study of the Second Sophistic rhetors throughout late antiquity and the Byzantine period, see (Kennedy 1983; Monfasani 1983, p. 177).

[24] (Kaldellis 2007, pp. 30–41; Whitby 2003, pp. 173–86). The epideictic rhetoric through panegyrics and histories became particularly handy when a usurper needed to reinforce his claim to the throne. This is apparent in the way the Komnenoi managed to establish and consolidate their power (see Stephenson 2010, p. 48). The importance of consensus for retaining the throne is stressed in (Kaldellis 2020, pp. 43–56).

[25] Erasmus, author of a panegyric to Prince Philip in 1503, affirms that "no other way of correcting a prince is as efficacious as offering the pattern of a truly good prince under the guise of flattery to them, for thus do you present virtues and disparage faults in such manner that you seem to urge them to the former while restraining them from the latter" (Born 1965, p. 6).

[26] "It comes as no surprise, then, that like the outspoken Hellenes of late antiquity such as Julian, Libanios, and Synesios, Psellos opposed monasticism" (Kaldellis 2007, p. 213).

[27] (Kaldellis 2007, pp. 207, 219). According to Eunapius, Libanius: "was so clever in adapting and assimilating himself to all sorts of men that he made the very polypus look foolish; and everyone who talked with him thought to behold in him a second self. At any rate those who had this experience used to declare that he was a sort of picture of wax impression of all the manifold and various characters of mankind. In a gathering of many men of various sort one could never have detected who it was that he preferred. Hence those who pursued modes of life directly opposed to one another would applaud in him qualities that were directly opposed, and everyone without exception was convinced that it was his views that Libanius admired; so multiform was he, so completely all thing to all men" (Wright 1968, p. 523). On the connections between the polypus and *mêtis*, (Detienne and Vernant [1974] 1978, pp. 27–55).

[28] To extricate himself from a dangerous situation, Bohemond pretended to be dead. Subsequently, he gave orders to prepare a wooden coffin and a bireme. He hid himself in the coffin and sailed from Antioch to Rome. In order that Bohemond's corpse "might appear to be in a state of rare putrefaction, they strangled or cut the throat of a cock and put that in the coffin with him. By the fourth or fifth day at most, the horrible stench was obvious to anyone who could smell". Anna affirms that Bohemond's plan, "while not very elegant, was amazingly crafty" (Komnene 2009, p. 329).

[29] (Angelov 2006, p. 234). Anna Komnene affirms that her father, Alexios Komnenos, was a good general because he achieved his objective: "The best objective is victory without danger. This can be achieved by battle or by stratagems; as long as the results are the same, the means are equally good" (Laiou 2012a, p. 161).

[30] (Nicol 2002, p. 11). On the progressive divide between pro-Latin emperors and some ecclesiastics throughout the XIV and the XV centuries, see (Leonte 2020a, pp. 19–57).

[31] (Gaul 2011, p. 373; Gaul 2016, p. 262). Gaul focuses on Thomas Magistros who was a *pepaideumenos* rather than a *politikòs*, since he refused to accept a career at the imperial court in order to maintain his position as "rhetor in his polis", Thessaloniki. For Gaul the late Byzantine sophistic represents "the specific form of late Byzantine civic humanism", stressing the mediating role played by Magistros between Thessaloniki and the Byzantine court. However, Magistros did not hesitate to exert his influence on the emperor through his own wiritings. What is more important, however, is Gaul's consideration that seminal "elements of the sophistic culture [. . .] can be shown to have constituted vital aspects of fourteenth-century political discourse" (Gaul 2011, p. 377).

[32] (Laiou 2019, p. 829). It is worth noting that Philostratus begins the Second Sophistic when the "whole government of Athens was divided into two parties, of which one was friendly to the Persian king, the other to the Macedonians. Now among those who favoured the Persian king, Demosthenes of the deme Paeania was the recognized leader, while Aeschines of the deme Kothokidai led those who looked to Philip" (Wright 1968, p. 57).

[33] (Ryder 2010, p. 205). On the "western gravitation" of Byzantium, see (Ronchey 2002a).

[34] "The Byzantines, rulers *and* ruled, are descended from Romans: they *are* Romans" (Ryder 2010, p. 72; see also Ryder 2012).

[35] Kydones was not only part of the delegation, but he also took care of translating the documents for the conversion of the emperor and for his own and their submission to the pope (Kianka 1995). Kydones "*fut ainsi le promoteur de la conversion au catholicisme de Jean V Palaiologos*" (Ganchou 2002, p. 436).

[36] (Swain 2006, p. 362). Gaul also demonstrated that the "textual history of various deuterosophistic authors is particularly vivid in the thriteenth and early fourteenth century" and he includes also the Aristides codex Urbinas graecus 123 "copied in the circle around Theodore Meochites (1270–1332), which was later among the possessions of Demetrius Kydones" (Gaul 2011, pp. 377–79).

[37] (Messis 2012, p. 150). The short encomium has been translated in (Dennis 2002, p. 499). The abundance of the merchandise found at Venice is also referred to by Aristides (Behr 1981, p. 75). Even more interesting is the reference to the harmony that dominates Venice, which resembles a musical composition. Aristides defines the Roman emperor as a chorus-leader prince (Behr 1981, p. 79) and the Roman army as an "eternal chorus" where "each man knows and keeps his place" (Behr 1981, p. 92).

[38] Chrysoloras, in his *Synkrisis* between the Old and the New Rome (1411), reprises and further develops the cultural affinity and common roots of Byzantines and Latins already stressed by Kydones.

[39] (Necipoğlu 2009, p. 84). "The first Turkish conquest of Thessaloniki lasted until 1403" (Laiou 2019, p. 829). The Ottomans retook the city in 1430 (Bryer 2019, p. 859).

[40] On the impossibility of reaching a theological agreement between East and West, see (Kolaba 2017).

[41] It is worth noting that Latin sources define Kydones' role in the Byzantine court as that of "chancellor" (*cancellarius*) (Kianka 1995, p. 105). See also (Mercati 1931, p. 146).

[42] Salutati had demonstrated interest in learning Greek language since his stay at Lucca (1370–1372) and requested that Jacopo Angeli purchase him some books while in Constantinople (Tori 2012, p. 81). It is no coincidence that Salutati was portrayed in a copy of his *De saeculo et religione* as a Greek scholar (Lazzi 2012, pp. 45–46). Finally, it has been argued that Salutati used the translations of Plutarch's *Life of Brutus* and Xenophon's *De tyranno*, commissioned by Jacopo Angeli and Leonardo Bruni, respectively, for the conceptualization of his treatise, *De tyranno* (Viti 2008, p. 166).

[43] *A Demetrio Cidonio*, XIII, 1396, in (Novati 1896, pp. 105–19).

[44] The "Renaissance fascination with Hellenism emerges [. . .] as an informed Byzantine diplomatic strategy: the imperial court recognized western desires for Greek texts and, taking advantage of that interest, fostered Hellenic studies through gifts of manuscripts and teachers" (Hilsdale 2014, p. 25).

[45] It is possible that Leonardo Bruni's *De bello italico adversus* Gothos (1441) was written for the political purpose of supporting the Greeks (Hankins 2002, p. 190). On the Gothic Wars as a precedent that bound the Italians to return the favor by defending the empire from the Turks, see Demetrius Chalcondylas (Lamers 2015, p. 118). In addition, Salutati was in favor of a crusade against the Turks (Bisaha 2004, pp. 22, 56–58).

[46] *A Manuele Crisolora*, XIIII, in (Novati 1896, pp. 119–25).

[47] (Fontanella 2013; Pradelle 2000; Rollo 2002; Hankins 2012). The adoption of Aristides as a source could have been facilitated by several positions he shared with Cicero, the main source of for civic humanism throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. On the similarities between Aristides and Cicero, see (Milazzo 2002, pp. 62–63).

[48] (Ganchou 2002). Kydones sent the *History* of Herodotus and the *Works* of Plato to Emperor Manuel II, whereas Aristides' and Libanius' *Works* were sent to Chrysoloras (Ganchou 2002, pp. 485–86). The paramount importance of the sophists in the strategy envisaged by Kydones for Florence was perfectly understood by Chrysoloras. The codex containing Aristides' works is probably the *Vaticanus Urbinas gr*. 123. It was left to Palla Strozzi by Chrysoloras in 1414 on his way to the Council of Costanza, where he died in 1415. On this codex and on the discussion regarding whether "Aristis" ought to be identified with Aristotle or, most likely, with Aristides, see (Zorzi 2002, pp. 118–22). On the copy of Libanius, which was probably left by Chrysoloras to Guarino, see *lettera* 53 (1426), (Sabbadini 1959, p. 111).

[49] Emperor Manuel II had to craft his *persona* in a more nuanced way. He could not alienate the Orthodox Church for financial reasons and without losing his internal consensus. Therefore, he tried to persuade the Roman Catholic Church and the western principalities to support Byzantium without compromising any aspect of its tripartite identity. At the same time, however, Manuel II acknowledged the diplomatic importance of Chrysoloras' teaching in Italy and therefore employed him for important diplomatic missions. Furthermore, Manuel did not hesitate to resort to *mêtis* and *kairos* when the occasion required these intellectual and practical virtues. See, for instance, (Leonte 2020a, p. 115; Çelik 2021, p. 315). It is worth noting the miscellaneus manuscript (Vat. Grec. 706) composed by Isidore of Kiev wherein is included Kydones' translation of the *Contra legem Sarracenorum* (Mercati 1931, p. 161).

[50] Bisaha argues that it is "questionable whether Salutati would have held Cydones in such high esteem had Cydones not been a Catholic. Chrysoloras, who later taught in Florence, converted to Catholicism in the first decade of the fifteenth century. In light of Salutati's religious prejudices against the Greek Orthodox community, it seems doubtful that he would have used his influence to help a non-Catholic obtain his teaching position", (Bisaha 2004, p. 123).

[51] The "metic" attitude has been recently studied in relation to Isidore of Kiev, although the authors referred to it as "*Realpolitik*" (Philippides and Hanak 2018, pp. 337–39).

[52] This is the thesis proposed by Thompson (1966) and discussed by Hankins. This thesis can be synthesized by asserting that "Chrysoloras's pedagogical mission in Italy was essentially a piece of cultural politics" (Hankins 2002, p. 176). On the use of the Byzantine *politikòi* of the same strategies applied by the Second Sophist, see (Webb 2012). On the ability of Bessarion to craft his identity according to the cultural and political necessities, and to the audience see (Lamers 2015, pp. 92–132).

[53] Gennadios Scholarios, future patriarch of Constantinople under the Turks, and the strongest opponent of the Union with the Catholic church achieved after the council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438–39, criticized the attempts to create a unified identity between the Latins and the Greeks and called Thomas Aquinas and Kydones heretics. (Doukas 1975, p. 210). On the survival and reconstruction of the Orthodox patriarchate under Ottoman rule, (Kitromilides 2017).

[54] (Leonte 2020a, pp. 48–57). Orthodox churchmen managed to dissociate "the figure of the emperor from the idea of Byzantine identity" and to place it in a secondary position" (Leonte 2020a, p. 57).

[55] Leonardo Bruni wrote a work in Greek entitled *On the Constitution of the Florentines* dedicated to members of the Byzantine delegation at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1439) and in 1418 Guarino of Verona was requested to translate from the Greek into Latin the *Funeral Oration* written by emperor Manuel II. Both translations were to convey political messages.

[56] The rediscovery of Platonic philosophy further enhanced the knowledge on the sophists, (Katinis 2013).

[57] (Garin 1961, p. 128; Harsting 2002). Aelius Aristides, in particular, is considered by Cambiano "one of the most conspicuous presences, although little studied, of the Humanistic culture of Quattrocento". (Cambiano 2007, p. 55; Robuschi 2022). See, for instance, the use made by George Trapezuntius of the Aristides' Platonic Discourses in (Lamers 2015, pp. 149–50).

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