

University of London
London School of Economics and Political Science

***THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY
EUROPE THROUGH AN EAST-WEST ENCOUNTER: A RE-INTERPRETATION***

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John VIII Palaiologos, Emperor of the Romans (1392-1448)
The eldest of the six children of Manuel II Palaiologos and Helena Dragas
in
The Chapel of the Magi: Benozzo Gozzoli's Frescoes in the Palazzo Medici-Piccardi, Florence
Edited by Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Thames & Hudson, London and New York, 1994
The Procession of the Magi, The South Wall, represented as Magus Balthazar

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Interdisciplinary Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others.

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London, 30 September 2015

Abstract

My thesis works as an experiment, or rather a series of experiments, in methods of thinking about historical material. These methods come from anthropology and engage with myths and ritual, with the concept of “complementary others”, and the concept of “schismogenesis” as it has been developed by Gregory Bateson and advanced further by Marshall Sahlins. My overall goal is not to re-describe a well-researched historical event, but to explore how different ways of analysis, using different analytical frameworks, could lead to valuable explanations of the same political-cultural event.

The phenomenon I engage with is the last Oecumenical Council, a major religious event in the history of Councils within already schismatic societies. For this reason, I treat this Council in particular, as a ritual, unprecedented in scale and ambiguous in its inception. I am examining the structure and the return of this Event in History, and the controversies and tensions in the diachrony of East and West. I do this not only through the notion of schismo-genesis and ritual, but specifically the notion of sacrifice as developed by Maurice Bloch, in which the journey from Constantinople to Italy becomes a historical metaphor of mythical realities, regarding the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos. And finally, I explore the significance of Bessarion and complementary others within the notion of transformation and alterity.

What I establish through discussions of the historical material, which span eleven centuries of history, is first of all, that there is no event without a system; that means the journey can acquire the form of the ritual. I argue that the relation between the myth and the idea of unity is dialectical in nature; the Event of a Union, which could bring peace in the one Church of Christ, from this moment of realisation becomes a fabrication, a mystery to the witnesses, and all the other myths that will be developed on the way become even more imperative and melancholic, because they seek to express a negative and unavoidable truth. The Event doesn't portray reality any more, it exists despite it and becomes an extreme position, almost like a dream, and it justifies the vision one wished to be possible, only to show that it is untenable: the “what if it could be”; the possibility of all parts being aspirations to the whole, oecumenicity as a goal rather than unity. Overall, this thesis is about the presence of the past in the present, in relevance to the future.

For Zoe,
for the wonder and the marvel she is,

For Remi,
for the endless patience,
for the generosity of heart,

For my parents, Nazli and Kostas,
for the meaning of unconditional love,
for the meaning of hard work,

For my late grandmother Nike,
for her solid faith, for her perseverance,

For my supervisors,
Professors, Stephan Feuchtwang and Patrick Humphreys,
for teaching me so much,
for believing in me

Εὐγνώμων αἰεί.

Contents

<i>Timeline</i>	i
<i>Timeline of Meetings between Popes and Oecumenical Patriarchs</i>	ii
<i>Dramatis Personae</i>	iii
Chapter One: Introduction: Structure and the Return of the Event in History	1
I. Contribution Scope: Continuity as Change in Early Fifteenth-Century Europe	1
II. <i>La Longue Durée</i> ... And Its Myth	15
III. The Future	18
IV. “Great Men” and “Culture Heroes”	22
V. Reviewing	25
VI. The Notions of Ritual and Sacrifice: Their Relation	32
VII. The Event and Its Time	40
VIII. The Notion of Schismogenesis	46
IX. Epilogue	48
Chapter Two: Aims and Method	49
I. Why anthropology? Or how to make sense in the chaos: a reflection on why and how one knows	49
II. The “Return of The Event” in Fifteenth-Century Europe	63
III. Writing History: Something Not Set in Stone	65
IV. Data Corpus	70
V. History and Myth – The Intersections	74
Chapter Three: Controversies and Tensions in Diachrony, East and West; On the Notion of Schismo-Genesis and Ritual	80
I. Introduction: the Fundamentals and the Notion of Schismogenesis	80
II. The Case in the East	83
III. The Case with the West	89
IV. Crusades	91
V. Assessment	95
Chapter Four: On the Notion of Sacrifice; Sacred and Profane in Practice	97
I. Introduction	97
II. Sacrifice in Practice – The Journey as Sacrifice	99
Chapter Five: The Journey as Historical Metaphor of Mythical Realities, John VIII Palaiologos, the Emperor	116
I. Introduction: Reflect on the Future Consequences of Art beyond Immortalisation of the Event	116
II. The Journey as Historical Metaphor of Mythical Realities	119
III. Decline in the Last Centuries of the Byzantine Empire	123
IV. The Emperor and the Illusion of Unity: Structures in History	125

Chapter Six: Transformation and Alterity – The Significance of Bessarion and Complementary Others	132
I. Introduction	132
II. The Sweetness of Sadness	133
III. Re-making the Goal of Unity a Permanent Reality	135
IIIA. Bessarion: A Priest of the Byzantine Church and Later Cardinal of the Holy See in Quattrocento Italy	136
IV. Complementary Others to Bessarion and Byzantine Greeks	151
IVA. Scholarios and the Ottomans	152
VI. Assessment	157
Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Epilogue	160
I. Conclusions: How to Understand History as Culture and Vice Versa	160
II. Epilogue	178
Bibliography	182
Glossary	193
Appendix I	197
Appendix II	204
Appendix III	207
Appendix IV	210
Appendix V	222
Appendix VI	227

Timeline



325 **Nicea I** First Ecumenical Council

381 **Constantinople I** Second Ecumenical Council

431 **Council of Ephesus**

425 Foundation of a University at Constantinople by Theodosius II

451 **Chalcedon** Fourth Ecumenical Council

536 Visit of Pope Agepetus of Rome to Constantinople

547 Visit of Pope Vigilius of Rome

527 Accession of Justinian I

553 **Constantinople II**

Fifth Ecumenical Council

610 Accession of Heraclius

717 Accession of Leo III, the Isaurian

726-80 First Period of the Iconoclastic controversy

680-I **Constantinople III** Sixth Ecumenical Council

711 Visit of Pope Constantine of Rome to Constantinople

787 **Nicaea**

Seventh Ecumenical Council



815-43 Second Period of the Iconoclastic controversy

860 Dispute between the Patriarch Photias and Pope Nicholas I

867 Accession of Basil I
Beginning of the Macedonian Dynasty

886 Accession of Leo IV, the Wise

913 Accession of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus

1081 Accession of Alexius Comnenus
Beginning of the Comnenus Dynasty

879-80 **Constantinople** Eighth Council:
Considered Ecumenical only by the Orthodox Church

1096-1099 **First Crusade**

1143-1180 Reign of Manuel I Comnenus

1147-1149 **Second Crusade**

1189-1190 **Third Crusade**

1204 **Fourth Crusade:**
Latin domination of Constantinople until 1261

1261 Recovery of Constantinople by Michael VII Palaeogus

1274 **Union of Lyons**

1282-1328 Reign of Andronicus II: period of cultural activity

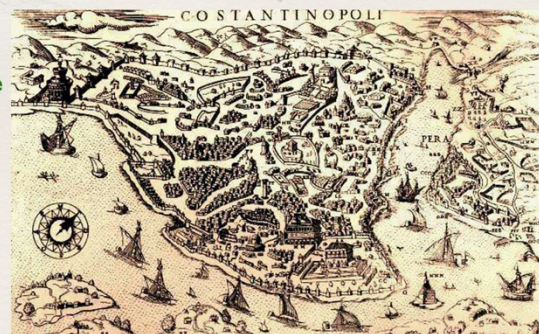
1341-55 John VI Cantacuzene; Pretender to the throne and afterwards Emperor

1391-1425 Manuel II Palaeologus Emperor

1425-48 John VIII Palaeogus Emperor

1438-1439 **Union of Ferrera-Florence**

1449-53 Constantine XI (XII) Emperor;
The last Palaeologus Emperor



1453 **Fall of Constantinople**

1463 Bessarion made Cardinal

Timeline

Produced by Professor Patrick Humphreys, Social Psychology, London School of Economics and Political Science.

TIMELINE OF MEETINGS BETWEEN POPES AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHS

The Visits of the Popes of Rome to Constantinople During the First Millennium

During the first millennium, there were no visits of the Primate of Constantinople to Rome because New Rome (Constantinople) had become the capital of the Empire.

536 The visit of Pope Agapetus of Rome to Constantinople

547 The visit of Pope Vigilius of Rome to Constantinople

711 The visit of Pope Constantine of Rome to Constantinople

The Efforts for Unification of the Two Churches After the Schism (1054)

1438–1439 The journey of Ecumenical Patriarch Joseph to Italy

The first contacts of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras with the Roman-Catholic Church



1964 (5–6 January) The Meeting of Pope Paul

VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in Jerusalem

1967 (25 July) The visit of Pope Paul VI to the Ecumenical Patriarchate



1967 (26–28 October) The visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras to the Church of Rome

1979 (29–30 November) The visit of Pope John Paul II to the Ecumenical Patriarchate



1987 (3–7 December) The visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios to the Church of Rome

1995 (27–30 June) The First Visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Church of Rome

2002 (23–25 January) The Second Visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Church of Rome



2004 (28 June–2 July) The Third Visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Church of Rome

2004 (26–27 November) The Fourth Visit of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Church of Rome

2005 (7–8 April) The Journey of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Church of Rome for the funeral service of Pope John Paul II

2006 (November 29–December 1) The Visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the Ecumenical Patriarchate



2007 (21 October) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew attends an Interfaith Peace Summit hosted by Pope Benedict XVI in Naples

2008 (6 March) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visits Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican

2008 (28–30 June) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visits Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican



2008 (18 October) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew participated in the XII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops at the Sistine Chapel

2011 (27 October) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew attends an

Interfaith Peace Summit hosted by Pope Benedict XVI in Assisi

2012 (10–11 October) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visits the Church of Rome on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Vatican Council II

2013 (19–20 March) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visits the Church of Rome for the inaugural mass of Pope Francis

2014 (25–26 May) Apostolic Pilgrimage of His Holiness Pope Francis and His All-Holiness Ecumenical



Patriarch Bartholomew to Jerusalem to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras

For a detailed version please visit: www.bclj/historic-meetings



Graphic courtesy of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic News Service, and Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. Photos courtesy of the Archives of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, St. Markinus, and Catholic News Service.

Timeline of Meetings between Popes and Oecumenical Patriarchs

Dramatis Personae

Emperors

John VIII Palaiologos: the central character in the story, Emperor of the Romans. According to J.W. Barker, we are better informed about the physical appearance of John VIII and his father than we are on that of almost any other Byzantine Emperor. According to the same author, John VIII was the leader of the “war faction”, whereas in actuality he was the one for peace. In this study, I posit this argument, underlying the stance that when lasting peace is unattainable, heritage-capital can still resurface and persist through different means.

Manuel II Palaiologos: the father of John VIII (see Appendix I, image 7, Palaiologan Dynasty: A Lineage Stemma). Adding to the narrative is a detail that connects Manuel II and John VIII’s policies in relation to their quests for western aid. In his monumental study from 1969, J.W. Barker, Manuel II biographer and evident admirer of him as statesman, discusses Manuel Chrysoloras’s career. Chrysoloras was, like Bessarion, a scholar-ambassador for the Byzantine Empire, and a great cultural figure, but not a priest. He was active in negotiations for the Church Council of Union. It has been argued that his conversion to Catholicism might actually have been encouraged and urged for by Emperor Manuel II in his effort to pursue the Pope’s position in a gesture of inter-Church understanding. Unfortunately, Chrysoloras died abruptly in April 1415. In hindsight, and after studying John VIII and Bessarion’s trajectories we can add value to this argument, although Barker seems to dismiss the commentator’s suggestions as “matters of pure conjecture”. For Barker, Manuel II had a “highly polished formal piety”, which didn’t stop him though from using relics as, what he calls, “practical instruments of policy”, in a “kind of reliquary diplomacy” in his appeals to western rulers for aid.

John V Palaiologos: the grandfather of John VIII, father of Manuel II.

Constantine Palaiologos: despot of Mystra until 1448, when his brother John VIII died. Subsequently the last Emperor of Byzantium. It is not clear if he was crowned Emperor, in which case John VIII was the last Emperor.

Justinian I: becomes the first Emperor depicted on the Byzantine hyperpyra, holding the earth with the cross on top. He died in 565. He upheld the Oecumenical ideal, as during his time the Empire became as big as at the time of Constantine I.

Heraklios: was considered the new Constantine because in 630 he brought the holy cross back to Jerusalem, which was thought an imperial triumph of Christianity. In his *De Ceremoniis*, Constantine Porphyrogenytos presents the Emperor as much as possible as the image of “Christ among the Apostles”, where the Apostles are the higher ranked officials of the Empire gathered around the Emperor.

Eusebius: Eusebius, the “Father of Church History” and the Father of the Byzantine political ideology. No one ever attempted to do Eusebius’s work over again: the later Greek Church historians all pick up the story where Eusebius left off. Most of it was written in 314/15, with its latest edition from 324/5. In *Eusebius: The History of the Church From Christ to Constantine*.

Most significant Entourage of John VIII Palaiologos

Mark of Ephesus: metropolitan of Ephesus who upheld Orthodoxy as a spokesperson of the Byzantines and did not sign the Decree.

George Gemistos Plethon (1360–1453): lay and intellectual – Hellenist.

George Scholarios Gennadios (c. 1400–1472/73): first Oecumenical Patriarch under the Ottomans, signed the Decree in Florence. Signed the Decree in Florence, but upon return to Constantinople self-censored himself, and he managed to draw the anti-unionist movement around him.

Bessarion (1403–1472): cardinal and priest, signed the Decree in Florence.

Silvester Syropoulos: *Megas Ecclesiarches* and deacon of the Great Church. This was a very high patriarchal office, fifth in the hierarchy after the *chartophylax*. It is likely that he was born around 1400 and died sometime after 1453. His parents and ancestors were also employed in the Church. There are records of Syropouloi in ecclesiastical offices in Constantinople from the eleventh century onwards. It is likely that Syropoulos received an excellent education in the patriarchal school but, somewhat surprisingly, he did not write his *Memoires* in a high literary style or presented the theological issues discussed at the Council in Florence-Ferrara in a very sophisticated way. He also served as *dikaiophylax*, a job that after the ninth century was conferred exclusively onto churchmen by imperial appointment. We can deduce from this that he was relatively close to

the Emperor, but definitely close to the Patriarch. The duties of *dikaiophylax* involved cases of an ecclesiastical nature, but required knowledge of both civil and canonical law, which was very important in the process of the Council. Apart from detailed descriptions of the human unofficial encounters, Syropoulos provided vivid descriptions of natural phenomena, or monuments seen on the journey to and from Italy. His views strike me as honest, whatever his personal motivations. He is an important mediator as far as the event and the readers – of then and now – are concerned. He made an unknown side of the event known and that is his work's paramount contribution.

A Whole is its Parts:

The delegation of the so-called eastern Christian Empire was comprised of representatives from all the key posts of eastern Christendom (either directly or via representatives):

- The four eastern patriarchates of Alexandria, Antiochia, Constantinople and Jerusalem;
- The Churches of Trebizond, Georgia, Moldovlachia (Roumania), Serbia, Russia with metropolite Isidore (who after this Council became a Cardinal and moved to Italy), and another Russian archimandrite;
- Also, there were nine ecclesiastical members, six of whom were metropolitans: Ephese, Trebizond, Heraclea, Cyzique, Monemvasia, Sardes;
- There were also the metropolitans: Bessarion of Nicaea, of Nicomedia, of Tirnovo, of Lakedemonia, of Amasea, of Mytilene, of Stavroupolis, of Rhodes, of Melenic, of Drama, of Ganos, of Drista, and of Anchialos;
- There were also three archontes of the church of Saint Sophia: the grand sakellarios, the grand chartophylax, and the author of the *Memoires*, our main text, Sylvester Syropoulos, the grand ecclesiarch;
- Finally, there were five senatorial persons: the Iagaris brothers, the Dishypatos brothers, and Emmanuel Boulotes.

Chapter One: Introduction: Structure and the Return of the Event in History

*After decades of White men, the Pomo Indian said to the anthropologist Aginsky (1940:44) You people are hard to understand. My brother lived with you people for twenty years, and he said he was used to you; but he cannot understand yet why you people act as you do. You are all the same in one way. We are all the same in another. What is wrong with you?*¹

History as Myth, Epic and Cosmic Travelogue

“The Middle Ages is the youth of today’s world, and along with youth... it was a time of natural authority... the greatness of an epoch or a cause depends on the proportion of those capable of sacrifice, on whatever side it may be. In this respect the Middle Ages pass muster rather well. Devotion! And not a guarantee of regular pay! Where does greatness begin? With devotion to a cause, whatever it may be, with complete extinction of personal vanity and above all ‘Greatness is the conjunction of a certain spirit with a certain will’.”²

I. Contribution Scope: Continuity as Change in Early Fifteenth-Century Europe

My intention in this thesis is to gain understanding in regards an old question in anthropology, which was initiated with Levi-Strauss’s work in *The Savage Mind*, about the relation of people and history. Marshall Sahlins later reworked this as a relationship between culture and history. I am interested in the value of culture in relation to event and history from an anthropological perspective, and what Sahlins has described as “the significance of its endurance among the

¹ Marshall Sahlins, “Two or Three Things I know About Culture”, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (September 1999), pp. 399–421, p. 412. I complement this pleasant conversation between the anthropologist and the Pomo Indian with an insight about right and wrong. “...The general effect of moral rules linked with the category distinction normal-abnormal is to provide us with a sense of social order. It establishes boundaries and compartments in an otherwise chaotic social living space. It provides us with a map. It tells us who we are and where we are. Whatever else we are – we are normal – we are the prototype of normality; *abnormality is the other.*”, in Edmund Leach, *Humanity and Animality*, 28 November 1972, 54th Conway Memorial Lecture, South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, Humanist Society, Introduction by Jonathan Miller, p. 13.

² Jacob Burckhardt, *Judgements on History and Historians*, trans. by Harry Zohn with introduction by H.R. Trevor-Roper (London: Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959) p. 50.

peoples...”³ In this project, the relationship between synchrony and diachrony is examined and explained in the context of long histories of highly complex civilisations. My use of anthropology with the emphasis on this broader cultural perspective is important, because I undertake a comparative endeavour of analysing different orders of knowledge, ritual and myth, schismogenesis and complementarity. I do this by looking at a very particular segment of time – the 1438–1439 Event, which unfolded in a time of crisis, and its connection to imperial history. By working my way through these different theoretical points of reference I intend to establish the importance of this Event in ‘other’ terms than historians have done so far. I read history from front to back; I started from the past of the Byzantines, working towards their present, as they are looking forward to their future. That is because of the historic challenges ahead, the unexpected, the contingency factor as the only certainty in history. In this manner, I observe the Byzantine Emperor acting, again, closer to the tradition of Constantine the First, as the Emperor of both East and West. He repositions Byzantium to show a larger society with a common future. In this case, people with a common past, which is always present and which permeates and ‘decorates’ all contexts, which allows for the common outlines to always be generated in the depths of time, came together under the header of a unity Council. So, the Byzantines can leave their precious books in Italy, the remains of a dead patriarch, the divine remains of saints but also the Emperor can have engraved his face on the medal and painted on wall-paintings of a western chapel as the one and forever Emperor of all Romans. The fact that we can see the sketch of the face of a Palaiologan member of the imperial family, the younger brother of John VIII, Thomas, in the marble statue of St. Paul on Ponte Milvio in Rome,⁴ provides us with an excellent example of this persistence in being a larger whole made of different parts. “He died in Rome and since he was a handsome man, Pope Pius commissioned a marble sculpture of him and had it placed by the steps of Saint Peter’s...”.⁵ Dr Ronchey writes that the sculptor, active in Rome in the fifteenth century, hid the identity of his Greek guest under the features of Saint Paul”.⁶ The Statue of Thomas Palaiologos in the guise of Saint Paul can still be seen to this day, not within the Vatican, but on the right hand side of the entrance of Ponte Sant’Angelo, located there by Pope Clement VII after the Lanzichenecchi sack”.⁷ She also describes another instance with the same subject and patron again Pope Pius.

“If one enters into the basilica of Sant’Andrea della Valle and advances, almost up to the level of the altar, and then looks right up, one can see in the fourth arch on the left the funerary monument of Pius II. In the bas-relief above the Latin epigraph, the elderly figure

³ Sahlins, p. 399.

⁴ See **Appendix VI**, image 15, in Silvia Ronchey’s article “Orthodoxy on sale: The Last Byzantine and the Lost Crusade”, *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London, 21–26 August (2006)*.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁷ *Ibdi*, p. 1.

of Enea Silvio is shown solemnly depositing the relic of Saint Andrew in Saint Peter's. Bessarion is on one side of him and on the other side, on the extreme right, one can see the profile of a tall man, erect and dignified in bearing, with a neatly trimmed beard, curly hair reaching down around his neck and a perfect aquiline nose. Once again the sculptor is Paolo Romano and once again the subject is Thomas Palaiologos. In this instance, the despot is wearing the *skiadion*, the arched hat with the upturned brim and pointed visor of the Byzantine emperor”⁸.

Bessarion, who was already successful and influential in the West, was the main culprit behind this move of Thomas and his family to Italy as ‘temporary’ refugees. Nevertheless, her ‘reading’ of the Council in Florence as a cynical adventure, “...a veritable act of *Realpolitik*: an act of political opportunism and theological infidelity...” is obvious, unprocessed functionalist reasoning, highly unengaged with cultural significance. Therefore, the question remains for us to discuss, what kind of dynamic runs the differentiation of similar structures among nearby peoples, as Levi-Strauss pointed out in his *Mythologiques*?

In my interpretation, in this “other” space, away from home, they managed to create a world after their own image, the so-called ‘concealed portraits’. This innuendo as a statement; this vision, the revival of the concept of “permanence”, which the Event brings up with nerve, are all central themes in my work. All the sturdiest elements of structures that roll in time and space without ever letting the past remain the past but carry it along as present and future through the eternal workshop of time.⁹

Then, in relation to the theme I have had to point to relevant parts of the motion to reveal aspects of the argument. In this respect, I am making a fresh, non-linear contribution to existing narratives by approaching history from an anthropological standpoint. My aim is to add a new dimension to old discussions of eventful history and its significance in conditions of intense dialectical cultural opposition within contesting groups of each single culture and between cultures themselves. In this scenario the structures are much more complex and multi-faceted than dual schemes of entities, Byzantines and Latins, or East and West. The dialectical relationship between individuals is also accentuated and discussed, especially in Chapter 6 and between Chapters 5 and 6. Consequently, this thesis may be read as a contribution to historical anthropology.

⁸ Ibid, p. 3, See **Appendix VI**, images **14a** and **14b**.

⁹ For the inspiration and mental guidance I'd like to thank Helene Ahrweiler who is not aware of this work. In Greek “A Great Greek: Helene Glykatzi-Ahrweiler; Discussions with Thanassis Lalas”, Athens, Armos, 2015.

My thesis is empowered by the contradictions the subject projects, which are like hidden messages: they are there but they are not obvious. These contradictions arose as a result of the impact of the profound final crisis in the long historical drama of the Byzantine Empire, the quintessential Church State. I go through the process of re-reading the sources, some primary and some secondary, and then writing about this highly popular Event so as to understand the qualities of its permanence, re-appearance and signification. To this end, I employ visual evidence as an integral part of the argument, as well as textual evidence. Putting them together contributes to the innovative character of the thesis and allows us to make better sense of the art that was produced at the time. My work highlights the schismo-genetic quality of the Event. I argue that it originates from a flaw in the whole structure of the cultural order of Christianity. I also highlight the role of the Emperor in this Event as a “great” man, as a sovereign who does not accumulate anything for himself. He operates outside the common political-cum-cosmological framework, being simultaneously a believer of the faith, Christianity, the permanent principle for his people throughout the centuries upon which the Byzantine Emperors expanded the “Lebensraum”, the vital space of their Empire.

It is worthwhile to point out here that Christianity in the early centuries in Italy started as an underground movement. It was, in a sense, a liberation movement. With Constantine the Great this situation turned on its head; he turned the underground Christianity, where eternity was alive, into the vital building base of his Empire. In this way, the underground became necessary and lived for ever since, in the minds and souls, expanding vital space, uniting earth and sky. To this day, Italy is the strongest ally of the Greek speaking part of the old Empire, in the most controversial European matters in the context of unity and community. Throughout my reading, I understand the Emperor’s concerns as most sincere. Contrary to Tonia Kioussopoulou’s conclusion that he was promoting a unionist agenda, and advancing a rapprochement with the West indicating the more general aim of the Palaiologoi dynasty towards political secularisation, I argue that struggling at this end point of the political idea and ideal of the Empire, Patriarch and Emperor had to work together. And they did, especially when the Church was significantly stronger than the State, and seemed more likely to be the vessel of persistence of a possible polity.

“As the enemy advanced lay Imperial officials necessarily withdrew. It was the bishop who remained to look after the Christian population. It was he who had to negotiate with the conquerors for the welfare of his flock. It was he who tried to preserve church buildings and church endowments, and who was considered responsible by the new masters for the good

behaviour of the Christians and their payment of the taxes. He became so to speak, the representative of the Emperor in *partibus infidelium* (*parts that fail*).”¹⁰

This was at a time when the Byzantine state was irrevocably heading to its destruction. On the other hand, the more property the Church was losing to conquests, both to the Latins and the Ottomans, the more significant it became, because the Church was the institution that supported the Christian populations socially, by educating and providing charitable services. This kind of organisation of all Christians was indispensable to Emperors. The loss of property had consequences for the Christian leadership, which had already started to shrink in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, “... when the Church in Asia Minor was losing properties and revenues as a result of the Turkish occupation.” It was more acute in the fourteenth century as the Latins acquired more land, following the Crusades, and the conquest and the Turkish occupation in the late thirteenth, early fourteenth century, was causing significant demographic changes. Historian George Pachymeres wrote of the late thirteenth century: “And thus in a short time the [Turks], attacking the land of the Rhomaioi, transformed it into another desert encompassing the length and width of the land from the Black Sea to the sea of Rhodes”¹¹

“The uninterrupted decline of the Christian community reflected in a synodal decision of 1397... by uniting metropolitan seats because of scarcity of the faithful and poverty of the ecclesiastical things”¹² under the watchful eye of the emperors. For these reasons, the importance of religion was even greater in the early fifteenth century, when the influence of the Byzantine state was diminishing ever further, its administration restricted to a few strips of land. As the one hierarchical structure decreases, the other is growing, thus in the twelfth century, “... What excuse shall we emperors and arch priests make on the day of judgement to God the demiurge and creator, if in receiving Christian people we hand them over to Satan?”¹³

At the same time, and to acknowledge the position Byzantium was holding between East and West, it will be useful to point to the significant exchange of services and culture between the Byzantines and the advancing Seljuk Turks during the process of conquest:

“John II Comnenus as a result of a quarrel with his uncle the Emperor Manuel, deserted to the Turks, turned Muslim, and married the daughter of the sultan... because of a

¹⁰ Steven Runciman, *The Byzantine Theocracy* (Cambridge, London: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p. 153.

¹¹ Speros Vryonis Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamisation from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1971) p. 255.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 294.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 208.

combination of circumstances a number of Greek¹⁴ Christians as well as Greek renegades appeared side by side with Turks, Arabs, and Persians in the Turkish court, administration and army... this group played an important role in bridging the gap between the conquerors and the conquered... initiating the conquerors into the customs and usages of Anatolian society... there was a Greek bureau in the sultan's chancellery given the importance of foreign and domestic relations with Greek-speaking elements... Greek scribes were maintained not only in the Seljuk administration but also among some of the emirates that succeeded to the Seljuk state... two Greek musicians functioned at the sultan's court for a while... rose to become advisors to the sultan... they had learned to read Arab letters... with the Mongol difficulties the two musicians returned to Greek lands and served under the emperor... Seljuk rulers frequently employed Christian troops... there was a body of 3,000 Franks and Greeks in the Sultan's army... at Gallipoli the classes of rowers, arbaletiers, and shipbuilders included many Greeks in the 15th c., but by 1519 they were all Muslims. Either these Greeks were removed or more probably they were converted... Greek architects were working side by side with Muslim architects building mosques, khans, turbes, walls... the first Turkish fleet that was built by Greek Smyrniotes in the 11th c., down to the establishment of the first Ottoman naval arsenal in Europe in the 14th c... Turks in Anatolia manifested a definite taste for Byzantine luxury textiles... In the reign of Alexius III Angelus the emir of Ankara demanded as part of the terms of the treaty with Alexius 40 silk garments of those prepared in the Theban workshops for the emperor himself...¹⁵

Greek doctors were feeling comfortable in Emir Orhan's court when they treated him for his liver, "but it would be inconceivable to come across an alien physician in the Byzantine court".¹⁶

Vryonis adds intermarriage between Greek Christian aristocracy and Seljuk Muslim royalty as an element of integration, as he calls it, between societies, which by the middle of fourteenth century was extended to all levels. We should note the marriage of Cantacuzenus IV's daughter to Orhan himself, but he wouldn't help his father-in-law when he needed him most, which was during the civil war.

On the one hand, the Turkish conquests of Anatolia, "reduced the church to extreme poverty...", but also

¹⁴ In this case, those who speak Greek.

¹⁵ Speros Vryonis Jr, 1971, p. 230, p. 231, p. 232, pp. 233-234 and footnote 542, p.238, p. 239 and footnote 573.

¹⁶ Georgiadis Arnakis, "Gregory Palamas among the Turks and Documents of his Captivity as Historical Sources", *Speculum*, Vol. 26, No. 1, January 1951, p. 113.

“... the structural heart of the church, survived in such a decimated state... by the 15th c. there survived only 17 metropolitanates, one archbishopric, and 3 bishoprics in an area that had at one time possessed over 50 metropolitanates and more than 400 bishoprics. The Episcopal structure had formerly constituted a vast ecclesiastical bureaucracy parallel to the Byzantine governmental bureaucracy, which like the latter was centered in Constantinople. Every metropolitan or bishop existence was ipso facto a potential political agent of the emperor in Constantinople, for the emperor was the head of the church as well as the principal foe of Islam.”¹⁷

Professor Runciman, in his work on *Byzantine Theocracy*, acknowledges this relationship between State and Church when after the civil war of 1341 that divided families and broke up friendships, which lasted six years, a Synod was organised in 1347. Cantacuzenos had summoned this Council as Emperor, and representatives of the other Orthodox Churches attended and acclaimed the doctrine of Hesychasm as truly Orthodox.¹⁸ In this event, Runciman underlines that despite the bitter conflicts in the middle of the fourteenth century, Church Councils were accepting imperial authority, while the final outcome of the Synod also corresponded with views of the greater part of the Church.¹⁹ I argue that the decision of the Council of the early fifteenth century was not one decision of a “desperate” Emperor, as Runciman claims, but a renewal of the constant reminder throughout the centuries of the “duty of the Christian emperor and priests to care for the souls of the Christians”²⁰ in space and time.

In his attempt to discuss the monophysite movement in the fifth and sixth centuries, Professor W.H.C. Frend gives us a vivid account of how theology was a natural part of everyday life for the residents of Constantinople, but also beyond, from Syria to the whole of the West:

“If in this city [Constantinople] one asks anyone for change, he will discuss with you whether the Son is begotten or unbegotten. If you ask about the quality of the bread you will receive the answer, ‘the father is greater, the Son is less’. If you suggest a bath is desirable, you will be told ‘there was nothing before the Son was created.’”²¹

In the lines above, we see a constant exchange throughout the centuries, a condition of “a kinship of tension” between State and Church. It is this culture, which, in the spirit of Sahlins, was a

¹⁷ Vryonis, pp. 348–349.

¹⁸ Runciman, p. 157.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 257.

²⁰ Vryonis, p. 209.

²¹ W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries*, (Cambridge, London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972) p. xii.

historically constructed system, all encompassing, coherent and non-individual, that John VIII inherits. Through his decision to make the Council happen, with its reference to history he “renewed” this contract between the Byzantine State and the Church, in the form of the old “ritual” of the Council of Union of Churches, and empowered the Orthodox Church as a force to continue to be with or without the State. This “ritual” was built on the foundations of the Empire in the fourth century under Constantine I, and remained as a mechanism in the minds of people throughout the ages, “that it is summarised and synthesised by a few highly abstract metaphysical principles...”,²² which, in the language of Maurice Bloch, are called “ritual”. According to Victor Turner’s work, symbolism is restricted in this case, very specific and not prone to open associations. Items are used with a certain meaning and no other. Any transgression can cause havoc in the lives of Christians, only Oecumenical Councils can decide and ratify laws on additions and/or excommunicate the heretic, the iconoclast, the schismatic. At this ritualistic instance, as I will explain in the following chapters through text and images, Emperor John VIII displays the “abstract ordering principles” that govern his world, which remain invisible to the naked eye at the Council of Union. Some ideas are picked up by artists, which makes me think that he may have had some involvement with them. Maybe they were commissioned by someone who had knowledge of the concrete but abstract meanings. Or simply by having them see him at the Council they were already depicting the “myth” of the Byzantine Emperor, who soon would no longer be in all his glory. In a sense, following Louis Dumont’s framework, the form and body of the Emperor can contain the conceptualisation of the Church and State together, in which case there is no need to ask who governs, and why or when the Church is in accord or in discord with them. I argue here that no matter the dual character of the imperial body as man and special viceroy of God on Earth, the *blessings* were all coming from the Church, and the priests of the institution. In that sense the Church was superior to the State and has survived after the collapse of the State to this day. It was, and is, literally powerful because for pious people it commands life and death. Therefore, Byzantine culture was transformed 14 years after the Event by disappearing as the “State of States”, but surviving in a different form of state affairs, even if it was clandestine for a while. John VIII’s efforts to realise the Event not only followed the old customary ways of solving problems, but brought together two neighbouring cultures that came to know each other, debated, argued, and disagreed, died and killed. Through this process the faith was actually strengthened, and also became known outside Constantinople as the myth par excellence for its endurance and relevance. Finally, and, very importantly, with the parade in Italy and all the above-mentioned activities it showed that it was not a static framework. That if necessary, depending on the circumstances in history, structures can change, hierarchies may disconnect, follow different paths, mingle and come out intact. The formation and re-formation of

²² Maurice Bloch, *Ritual, History and Power: Selected Papers in Anthropology*, London School of Economics, Monographs on Social Anthropology, No. 58 (London: The Athlone Press, 1989) p. 110.

culture shows that culture is not a finished product: the focus should be on the processes of the formation instead.²³

We cannot forget that this process was founded on the premise that “The emperors at Constantinople... felt themselves to have been elected ‘by divine providence’, and their interpretation of kingship was theological...”²⁴ Maurice Bloch reminds us, “as anthropologists are fond of saying, religion is embedded”.²⁵ For Constantine I and the Church, during the early days of Christianity, unity of faith and people was based on the premise that “...‘orthodoxy’ and the emperor were on the same side”.²⁶ Through the centuries the myth of the imperial semi-divine role, “who was recognised as ‘divine’ by the ceremonial of prostration and adoration, and who was, according the Hellenistic ideology adapted by Rome, God’s representative on earth, deriving his legitimacy directly from him.”²⁷

In this context, the Emperor mirrors kings from the Bible. Melchizedek, for instance, was granted with Victory in God who entrusted him with the guardianship of all human affairs.²⁸ In the early fifteenth century, while John VIII and his entourage were on their way to Italy, they stopped on the island of Corfu. In Syropoulos’s memoirs we have the following event, the orthodoxes of the island and those of Methone recognised in them: “... the 318 famous ‘theothores’ bishops... and those who shined after them in the other oecumenical councils.”²⁹ The relations of the cultural order keep being re-stated because of the interactions. They operate on a larger, wider plane, where the humiliation that they might encounter, works as the anti-structure to the original structure that John VIII means to bring over. I would go so far as to say that the Pope himself is revealed as the anti-structure to the Emperor. In the chapter on sacrifice, Chapter 3, I explore an event during which the Emperor felt humiliated by the Pope. The seating arrangements during this event were another instance of anti-structure at a time when the Byzantines were most vulnerable, away from their capital, in constant debt, and among those who were “*not-us*”.

²³ Ibid, p. 121.

²⁴ Frend, p. 51.

²⁵ Bloch, p. 122.

²⁶ Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 130. See also, Frances Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background, I-II* (Washington, DC: Harvard University, 1966).

²⁷ Ibid, p. 130.

²⁸ See in **Appendix I**, image 1, image of Melchizedek, “king and priest”, represented as a Byzantine Emperor by Cosmos Indicopleustes, ninth century. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Gr. 699, fol. 58r. In Jacket illustration, Dagron, *Emperor and Priest* book.

²⁹ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 211:13. In footnote 3, V. Laurent points to the symbolic number of 318, the number of the Fathers in the First Oecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325, and to the 318 servants of Abraham in Genesis 14:14 who found and rescued his relative Lot and his possessions. Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek, who was God’s priest Most High. All he wanted in the Bible story was to feed his men and to let them have the share that belongs to them. We also find the number 318 of the saint Fathers, in the Archbishop of Thessaloniki Symeon’s *Dialogues Against All Heresies*, in the fourteenth century, where, among many matters, he develops his thesis against the Latins and describes the First Oecumenical Council. He underlines that this synod happened under the aegis of the *First Christian King*. See here **Appendix III**, image 2.

During Manuel II's wedding to Helena Dragas, and their coronation in St Sophia in 1392, the Emperor seems to enter the holy altar at least twice. This is a place reserved for the "sacred". He enters once when the Patriarch is receiving the incense burner from him, a central element of the liturgy, and he is censuring the Emperor. Incense is used as an air purifier, as preparation for prayer, but, most importantly, it is symbolising Christ's humanity and the grace of the Holy Spirit. The second time, later in the ceremony, the cleric invites the Emperor into the holy altar, where the "sacrifice" is prepared, to receive the Holy Communion. As a matter of fact, he himself takes the Holy Communion on his own.³⁰ In the late fourteenth century, in line with the spirit set by Constantine I and Justinian in his Novels,

"royal and priestly office were derived from the same divine source; their exercise was different but complementary... the peace and prosperity of the church, its ministers united in their doctrine and discipline, were essential to the prosperity of the empire."³¹

In a Justinian Novel it is claimed that "religious orthodoxy was necessary for procuring 'prosperous cities, peace, public order, flourishing crops and even seafood'."³² The crowning of the Emperor was not only performed in a public service by the Patriarch himself in the most sacred of places at certain instances during the ceremony, but also showed how the so-called "powers of the cosmological outside were acquired by those who would rule inside".³³ Therefore, in line with Sahlins's theoretical discussion in the *Cosmo-logics of Power*, the Emperors of all dynasties throughout time could present

"tangible evidence that they themselves possess or command the unique qualities and ideas generally expected in persons who have ties with distant places of supernatural origins, and therefore, are themselves 'second creators'. Evidence of inalienable connections with places of cosmological origins thus conveys a certain sacrality which readily translates into political-ideological legitimacy and facilitates successful exercise of power..."³⁴

The Palaiologoi, and especially John VIII, who like previous members of the dynasty never converted to Catholicism, indicate his attachment to the ideal of oecumenicity, "one religion, one state" – one mind-set or cosmology – for all Romans. Professor Maltezou reminds us that "the Byzantines continued to refer to themselves as 'Romans' until their state ceased to exist, they

³⁰ P. Schreiner, "Hochzeit and Kronung Kaiser Manuel II im Jahre 1392", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, LX, 1967, 77, pp. 76-79.

³¹ Frend, p. 51.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52, and footnote 1.

³³ Marshall Sahlins, "Stranger Kings in General: The Cosmo-logics of Power", 2013. In Allen Abramson and Martin Holbraad, *Framing Cosmologies: The Anthropology of Worlds* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014) pp. 49-50.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

proved ever more willing to accept their Greek lineage as the Empire gradually fell into decline”.³⁵ To these observations I will add a third one from H.P. L’Orange who noted that, “The Arch of Constantine stands at an important turning point, from which prospects of the pagan as well as of the Christian world (stay) open”.³⁶ This monument presents to this day the significant link between two worlds. In a similar vein, by being the initiator and organiser of this last Union Council, John VIII did not advocate a secular state, but an open mind-set to what a next phase of the state could be. By going back to Italy, he makes the connections visible,

“New Rome was the seat of government and should have the same privileges as possessed by Old Rome. ‘The Fathers’, they said, ‘formerly gave the primacy to the see of Old Rome, because she was the imperial city, and gave like privileges to New Rome, rightly judging that the city which enjoyed like imperial privileges should also be honoured in matters ecclesiastical being next in rank’. Behind this reasoning was the idea that *Rome* was one, whether ‘old’ or ‘new’, and that each should possess the privileges of the other.”³⁷

Within this context of a long continuity of Emperors, by realising the interaction of all the parts of Christianity at this time of instability, John VIII brings stability in the long term, even if it looks like an internal rupture. Those who understood the connection between the past and their present best were the artists, and those who commissioned works and themes for the future.

To explore this point we need to move to early-Renaissance Italy for a little while. For during the years of his residence in Italy with his entourage, John VIII was the Emperor of all Romans. The Romans of the West paid attention and their artists included him in great imagery, in which the western and eastern parts of Christendom come together for the last time in the long imperial history. In the scenes of life of San Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444), in Pinacoteca Vannucci at Perugia, the Emperor and the Patriarch are witnesses of a miracle performed by the later canonised saint.³⁸ San Bernardino was a popular mass preacher of peace, the kind of middleman between elite

³⁵ Cryssa Maltezou, Venice, <http://www.europa-zentrum-wuerzburg.de/unterseiten/Band12-Maltezou.pdf>, in the Digital Archive for Medieval Europe.

³⁶ Johannes A. Straub, *Constantine as KOINOS EPISKOPOS, Tradition and Innovation in the Representation of the First Christian Emperor’s Majesty*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 21, 1967, p. 42, footnote 27, in H.P. L’Orange with the collaboration of A. v. Gerkan, *Der spaetantikeBildschmuck des Konstantinesbogens*, *StudienzurspaetantikenKunstgeschichte*, eds. H. Liezmann and G. Rodenwaldt, 10, Berlin, 1939, p. 179.

³⁷ Frend, p. 11.

³⁸In the late Middle Ages, preaching was one of the most effective ways to appeal to lay people, and popular preachers delivered sermons not only to the poor and illiterate but also to the prominent and powerful. In the fifteenth century, mendicant friars, travelling to towns and villages to preach and hear confessions, were able to attract large audiences by means of their oratorical skill, personal holiness, and thaumaturgic power. Sermons were delivered... sometimes as special events, in order to resolve civil disorders. Bernardino da Siena was the most celebrated preacher of the first half of the fifteenth century. Roberto Cobiانchi, “Fashioning the Imagery of a Franciscan Observant preacher: Early renaissance Portraiture of Bernardino da Siena in Northern Italy”, *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. 12, 2009, pp. 58–56. The University of Chicago Press on behalf of Villa I Tatti, The Harvard Centre for Italian Renaissance Studies.

and popular culture, bearer of a religion-based popular message, and he attended the Council.³⁹ But in this scene, who is the culture hero, the mediator between cultures? The new saint of the Franciscan Order was an impressive orator who focused on the name of Jesus, which was a great novelty and had a notable impact on his audience.⁴⁰ The target of these Franciscan preachers in its theological conception was to reform social and moral behaviour. What is of very important note here for this work, is that they were encouraging "... reforms in both the church and society at large, including the cultural sphere".⁴¹ How conveniently was he placed to perform his miracles in the presence of the Roman Emperor and the Patriarch from the East?

John VIII Palaiologos did not only have the aspiration to preside over a Council such as the first Oecumenical, although he recognised the limitations of his time, but the early Renaissance artists depicted him like "another Constantine". Christopher Walter, discussing the scenes of life of San Bernardine, gives an account of a miracle that happened between him and the Greeks, when he prayed for the gift of tongues so that he could communicate with them. He received the gift, which left the Greeks impressed with his eloquence, and as a result he managed to present to them the principles of Catholic faith.⁴² Walter suggests that although the miracle was not included explicitly in the San Bernardine cycle, we know that he was a preacher with the intent of didactic speech and so he connects this one with a panel representing the life of San Sylvester.

We know that San Sylvester is the saint who replaces Saint Efthymia in the political symbolism of the Popes. Saint Efthymia represented the Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and harmony in the relations between the eastern and western part of Christendom. She was a fourth-century martyr in Chalcedon, where a cathedral was built in her name. She became famous when Constantine V was fighting the worship of relics and threw hers in the sea. They were recovered "miraculously" on the island of Lemnos and in the eighth century, Constantine VI and Eirene brought the relics box to Constantinople. Whereas Saint Efthymia symbolised the link between the two, San Sylvester mirrors the independence of the western part of Christendom from its eastern counterpart. Saint Sylvester (314–335) was, according to the tradition, the Pope who baptised Constantine I in the fourth century, and in the eighth century this relation resurfaced as reflection of legitimacy of the primacy of the West, which stemmed from its connection to the first Emperor of Byzantium.⁴³

³⁹ Bob Scribner, "Popular Culture and Popular Protest in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe by Michael Mullett", review in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 1, March 1989, Cambridge University Press, p. 237.

⁴⁰ Cobiauchi, p. 56.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 55.

⁴² Walter, p. 202.

⁴³ Συμμεϊκτα, Eleonora Kountoura-Galanaki, *Saint Efthymia in the Relations Between Popes and Emperors* (Athens, National Hellenic Research Foundation, Centre of Byzantine Studies) Vol. 7, 1987, p. 74.

This Saint is shown in the three panels of *The Life of San Sylvester*, attributed to Pesellino, which shows him restoring life to a bull. San Sylvester is dressed like a fifteenth-century Pope, almost an “as if” Eugene IV, I would argue, wearing a tiara, while he kneels in prayer. “... in the background... empress Helena is enthroned to the right and the Emperor Constantine to the left. His headdress is that of the emperor John VIII.”⁴⁴ The head-dress has been used by a number of artists, including Filarete on his reliefs on the doors of Saint Peter’s in Rome (1445) where the Council is commemorated. The idea of relating Pope Sylvester, a fourth-century Pope, who on the one hand was related to the baptism of Constantine, and came to symbolise the independence of western Christianity, with John VIII and both their presence in the Council by way of Constantine, provides a picture of the political motives of the papacy in the early fifteenth century. John VIII’s inclusion, along with his Patriarch, in the San Bernardine panel, which depicts a Catholic miracle, involving again a bull, adds legitimacy to Eugene IV’s reign and his claims to primacy and to the strengths of the Catholic faith.⁴⁵ Because of discrepancies of the dates of execution of paintings and John’s VIII presence in Italy, Walter suggests “... the artist who painted San Bernardine’s miracle copied the picture of the work by San Sylvester”.⁴⁶ I would argue that it also suggests the association of saints with Popes, as both mediators of the supernatural, and therefore liminal and special. I find remarkable that Popes and Emperors could connect fourth-century saints and eight- century political reversals, with fifteenth-century work and expanded politics.

With all the claims and counter-claims of what the nature of unity between them could be, he and his entourage contribute to the development of the so-called “traditional”, rigid and doctrinary by allowing elaboration and expansion of its principles in their present. These principles translated into: “yes, we can continue to fight the struggle of freedom as East within the western structures”, and “we can exist as East in the Orient, until the end of time.” The idea is to continue ‘existingly’ in structures that are different. In other words: to keep continuity going elsewhere, where elsewhere is part of this, of a common past, to live continuity as change, or within change. Even in the hard-edged context of doctrine, the script of the “mysteries”, where this is differentiated from praxis, the rituals with which people live by their faith, the practices that make it “visible” and “different” from another “doxa”, among the monotheistic religions, with this Event John VIII showed that with action, interaction, and competition there can still be possibility that all parts are aspirations of the whole, especially in the context of moral responsibility. With skill, insight and tolerance it can be allowed some space for manoeuvre there, especially when that is considered necessary for the sake of sustained continuity in time and place. In this case of Byzantines and Latins, everything really

⁴⁴ Walter, p. 198. See *Appendix I*, image *2c*.

⁴⁵ Walter, p. 203. See *Appendix I*, image *2a* and *2b*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 201.

happens on the plane of beliefs and practices, since the two had organised their differences into that kind of a system. Deno Geanakoplos has made depictions of the elements of doctrine regarding the Holy Trinity in both contested cultures. But his depictions give us two slightly different positions: they are not antithetical or opposed.⁴⁷ In different parts of the Empire some Byzantines chose to be tolerant with practices and adhere to doctrine. Some thought the differences were not so important to sustain conflict and decided on a change of mind, a cultural crossover. In *People and Power* Constable and Kazhdan make a comment about the difference of a mere iota. Back in Constantinople, the Byzantines who returned from Italy after signing the Decree denounced it, and reaffirmed the traditional beliefs “of the old”. I argue that they also partook in the transformation of the cultural order by re-negotiating and re-establishing their strengths variably, and that can be visible only when we do not perceive everything through dichotomies: “... as if history was a zero-sum game so that for any such binary opposition as traditional/modern or stability/change, any increase of one necessarily means, or is evidence for, the decrease of the other.”⁴⁸

We should not forget that John VIII had a Latin education and close family members had decided to convert to Catholicism before him. But that was not a matter of piety, or rather a reversal of piety. Instead of emphasising the “position and resonance of particular meanings within totalities”,⁴⁹ I rather endeavour to explain the “processes provoked by cross-cultural contact and contest”.⁵⁰ In this sense, “The outside forces enter into local relationships and thus acquire local values, in terms of which they have specific historical effects”.⁵¹ This is where the interdependence of wise, neighbouring people, which Levi-Strauss discussed in his *Mythologiques*, comes into effect. In addition, in the same vein as the story of the native American Indians, who, after their exposure to Christian missionaries “... strenuously resisted Christianity...” By resisting their adherence to the Latin tradition the Byzantines also demonstrated that their traditions were dynamic intellectual systems, capable of change.⁵² The fact that most of them chose to retain their beliefs does not mean that Byzantine society could not change; the evaluation and reaffirmation of accepted belief constitute in themselves a kind of transformation.⁵³

⁴⁷ Walter. See *Appendix I*, images *2a*, *2b*, and *2c*.

⁴⁸ Marshall Sahlins, “The Economics of develop-man in the Pacific”, in *Local and Global Modernities in Melanesia*, p. 34.

⁴⁹ Marshall Sahlins, “Cery Cery Fuckabede”, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 20, No. 4, November 1993, p. 849. This idea, which Sahlins endorses, comes from Nicholas Thomas, in the “The Inversion of Tradition”, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 19, 1992, p. 215.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 215.

⁵¹ Marshall Sahlins, “Goodbye to Tristes Tropiques: Ethnography in the Context of Modern World History”, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 65, No. 1, March 1993.

⁵² Sahlins, “The Economics of develop-man in the Pacific”, p. 34.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 34.

II. La Longue Durée... And Its Myth

In the spirit of Walter Benjamin, I acknowledge the ways in which mythical beginnings are preserved in the histories of the Empires, which would have been lost to humanity if we didn't attempt to regain their meanings; "the poetic faculty to interpret the world in terms of human needs would falter".⁵⁴ This work attempts to practice what Habermas in relation to Benjamin called, "redemptive rather than corrective critical enquiry",⁵⁵ by looking into "the potential from which human beings draw and with which they invest the world with meaning, permitting it to be experienced... is deposited in myth to begin with and must be released from it – but it cannot be expanded, just continually transformed".⁵⁶ In this sense, the heroes of these stories in both their past and their present – which is still our past, although a tragic one because the events didn't turn out in their present as well as they would have wanted – were all active, and it is of primary importance that their "actions were more significant than words".⁵⁷

In the early fifteenth century these very actions were counteractive to the inevitability of the Fall of the eleven-centuries long-lasting Empire.⁵⁸ The notion of fate was very strong in Byzantine times. According to the philosophical interpretation by thinkers like Hegel, Nietzsche and Weber, we identify myth with the notion of "fate", and according to Benjamin

"myth was any state of affairs in which human beings perceived reality as governed by forces that were too immense and opaque for their comprehension... any law or institution that has made up and sustains the authority of tradition by mystification of its human, all too human origin"⁵⁹

In line with Benjamin I would argue that these actions of the Emperor and some distinctive actors in his entourage went even further in the unfolding of this historical drama. Although they were "the first signs of critical confrontation with mythic fatality, he also points out how this first attempt at self-assertion of human rights against divine laws is the beginning of liberation from myth".⁶⁰ Most Byzantine historians of John VIII's time were concerned with the imminent end. Sin was too gross, they didn't live Orthodoxy as dictated. But figures like John VIII, and after him Bessarion, cannot be considered desperate. There must be a way to go beyond "fate". John VIII's had an opportunity,

⁵⁴ Joseph Mali, *Mythistory: The Making of a Modern Historiography* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) p. 233.

⁵⁵ Jurgen Habermas, "Consciousness-Raising or Redemptive Criticism – The Contemporaneity of Walter Benjamin", trans. P. Brewster and C.H. Buchner, *New German Critique*, Vol. 17, 1979, p. 47.

⁵⁶ Mali, *Mythistory*: p. 232.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 237.

⁵⁸ The wording that historians use, the Fall of the Empire or the Fall of the City, is a direct allusion to the Fall of Humans as in the Sin of Sins.

⁵⁹ Mali, p. 236.

⁶⁰ Mali, p. 237.

a journey of Union, an event loaded with ancestral significance. He presents a proto-European, a mediator between the two parts of a cohabitation, a broader solution for a viable future. Would the sister neglect her sibling? This Emperor didn't need to convert to Catholicism because he needed Orthodoxy to survive through his decisions. He was a universal figure. A Roman Emperor for all Christians. A true visionary. Without him there wouldn't be Bessarion the way we know him. He took his entire entourage and went through an anti-structure dynamic, in a far-away land in the middle of winter, with anarchic events among his people in the debates and the arguments. With immense patience and without money. With humiliations imposed by the Pope, and sometimes the Latins in general. But the target of ending in a complementary opposition was not far. They were in a worse place before the Event. The presumed much anticipated "end of the world" collapsed with the end of the Empire. That was only because of the Event of 1438–1439, as it provided the last hook for hope for a future revitalisation of the people who had supported and lived by a certain culture for eleven centuries. This is a major re-location and preservation of foundational culture Event, a liberation tactic, and anti-fate movement, and not a colonisation of mind torture that some Byzantines thought in Italy. John VIII organised them and mobilised all parts of Christianity as a last resort in order to preserve its core, to fight against Ottoman domination and definite extinction. He showed with the return of the Event of a Church Union Council that this was a necessary struggle that takes its lead from culture which is essential to the historical process, because "... the struggle for liberation is above all an act of culture".⁶¹

In this "mythic scheme", in which unity of East and West is evidently unattainable, the Emperor still clings to an institution inaugurated by Constantine I as a means to attain "wholeness" of his Empire. Although in John VIII's times it has become highly irrelevant as an institution of unity, a re-union into a "Whole" could bear some kind of fruit. In my work I show how the "mythic" quality of the earlier event in the fourth century, and consequently the establishment of Oecumenical Councils as institutions, connect with the "mythic" quality of the event in the fifteenth century. In this context, John VIII makes himself into a myth, in which he is the sacrificial object, doomed as a hero. The crowd of Constantinople, to which he and his entourage returns, acts as a "Chorus" to the actors of the event. For the first time they face a moment of truth and have to take a stand, as objectively and reflectively as possible. This is an important time for decisions. This is why at this point some of the protagonists will renounce their signatures, while others will join the anti-unionist cause. One of them is the author of the main source for this thesis, Silvester Syropoulos. He will come to write the memoirs of the Event, leaving behind a legacy of micro-stories. Some others will not only honour it, but will also change course, sail into new waters, and perform a cultural

⁶¹ Marshall Sahlins, Goodbye to Tristes Tropiques: Ethnography in the Context of Modern World History, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 65, No. 1, March 1993, The University of Chicago Press, p. 18.

inversion. But they will continue to keep the cause of unity visible in their person and physical attire. That is why the Emperor's mission is accomplished once it arrives back. He seems to have no guilt, no doubts anymore. He is in mourning over his wife's death, but the way the future will turn out is no longer in the hands of supernatural authorities. And here is the cultural inversion the Emperor makes available: continuity as change and through change. Any punishment – be it the end of the Empire by way of the fall of Constantinople, an unthinkable event for the Byzantines – was not to be determined by external, supernatural forces, but a matter of internal decisions of conciliation and Oecumenism. There is no challenge for him anymore; that now falls on the shoulders of his entourage and the decisions they will make after being given the opportunity to participate in an Oecumenical Event. For those who could discern it, he showed them a way away from the “mythic” fatality of the end of the Empire, towards a freedom from fate. In this sense, he is on a par with Constantine I. And in this sense, he was acting as a manager, a manager *par excellence*.

Although Constantine I's situation in the fourth century, at the beginning of Christianity, is different, as John VIII acknowledges in the early fifteenth century, the challenge is as great. The “mythic” beginning was empowering, intensifying the aims of the Emperor; it was making his work necessary, inevitable.

As a consequence we have the depiction of the “mythic” in the endeavours of the artists of the time, with commissions from Popes, who in turn literally “objectify” Oecumenism in the relationship of the East with the West after the Event of the Unity Council. Not only by introducing the East in the West by employing eastern prelates in the papal curia, but also in depictions on doors of churches, statues, coins and medals. This continuous presence of the East in the West, and of the East in the Orient with Scholarios, is, in my view, triumph enough for John VIII, and for his adherence to the anti-unionist league and the upholding of Oecumenism for four centuries among the Ottomans. The existence of the oldest institution of the Oecumenical Patriarchate today has a lot to do with the Council in Florence-Ferrara. Would we have all this without the Council? I argue that we wouldn't. We wouldn't have the forum, the stage from which to draw results so far-reaching, so important for humanity. This insight brings us to the events of the future, and shows the endurance of the cultural symbolism and significance of the concept of unity in and through faith.

III. The Future

The prelates of the two Churches seem to acknowledge this. In this spirit of truthfulness, Oecumenical encounters continued and had a significant impact as they were touching upon those scissions, the most important one in 1965 and the last one in 2014.⁶² Of the important encounters discussed on the official website of the so-called “apostolic pilgrimage”, it is the Council of 1438–1439 that is the central focus of this thesis. It is the first one during which the Patriarch of Constantinople, and other representatives of the eastern Patriarchates, actually partake in an Oecumenical Council in the West. As the website states, there were no visits of the Patriarch of Constantinople to Rome during the first millennium because “... New Rome (Constantinople) had become the capital of the Empire”. Estrangement followed the 1054 official schism, and, of course, further distrust was based on the ruins the Crusades left behind, with the culmination of violence and pillage of Constantinople in 1204. Among the efforts for unification of the two churches after the schism, the first encounter is that of 1438–1439, a mission organised by John VIII Palaiologos, the Emperor of the Romans, a milestone at the end of medieval times. I will come back to the fifteenth-century event. What is of paramount importance here is that after the fifteenth century, we land in the twentieth century. There is no meaningful rapprochement in between. If John VIII hadn’t decided on this controversial visit, history would have been devoid of unity attempts entirely. The “darkness that the Christian world lived in for centuries” that Patriarch Athenagoras in 1964 condemned after he had exchanged the kiss of peace with Paul VI, would undoubtedly have been longer and maybe more violent. The May 2014 “pilgrimage” to the Holy Land of Pope Francis and the Oecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, marking the 50th anniversary of the 1964 visit, was now based on fraternal love of the sister churches, instead of the one being mother, and the other having to be the daughter, and therefore in a position of subordination. Now the reconciliation process was “on equal terms”, but there were no more Emperors or hostile Popes with universal claims to impede or accelerate the process. In the letters exchanged in 1964, Patriarch Athenagoras underlined as their main goal:

“to join that which is divided, with mutual ecclesiastical actions, wherever that might be possible, affirming the common points of faith and rule, directing thus the Theological Dialogue to the beginning of a wholesome community, in the most foundational of faith and of the devout and structural freedom of theological thought, that has been inspired by our

⁶² The website www.apostolicpilgrimage.org is a most important resource created to make the journey of unity in faith that the two parts of Christendom have taken in history visible. ***The Timeline of Meetings between Popes and Oecumenical Patriarchs I have created for this work is based on the timeline we see on this site and includes images, photos, and texts. It follows the contents pages.*** Please visit and consult the site for more material.

common Fathers, and of the variety of local traditions, as it has been pleasing to the Church from the very beginning.”⁶³

“Such a blessed encounter at that time captured the attention of the Christian world. It marked a dramatic turn from alienation to engagement. This was the first formal meeting of a Pope and Ecumenical Patriarch since 1438.”⁶⁴

A ground-breaking development took place in 1995, when patriarch Bartholomew visited Rome and Pope John Paul II for the first time. On 29 June, during the Feast Day of Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the Oecumenical Patriarch attended the festive Divine Liturgy in the Basilica of St Peter that was celebrated by the Pope with his entourage. This was a sign that an “as if” unity could be possible: after the biblical passages were read, the two Principals “recited the Creed in Greek without the addition of the Filioque”, a point of schism in the past. The declaration they signed following this unprecedented very public, symbolic gesture, something that was unthinkable for John VIII in the fifteenth century. He did request a joint Liturgy – that was not granted – in correspondence with the divine plan of the Undivided Church:

“They commended the initiatives of their Predecessors, of blessed memory, Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI, and their meetings in Jerusalem, and later on in the Phanar and in Rome for the lifting of the old anathemas, the peace of the Churches, and reconciliation; they also referred to the mutual visits of Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Demetrios for the encouragement of the Dialogue of love and truth, which was proven very fruitful. It was therefore possible for this dialogue to continue in an effective way and to proclaim that the two Churches recognize each other as Sisters, jointly responsible for the preservation of the One Church of God, in faith to the divine plan, especially in the matter of unity.”⁶⁵

Looking through the magnifying glass of the centuries, the reversal is strong. We see how the “darkness” in communication of the first millennium was hallmarked by John VIII’s initiative that resulted in a long stay, his mission in Italy, without *visible* success, which would have meant

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Following the historic meeting of the Pope Paul VI and Oecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church entered into a period of fruitful contacts and reconciling actions. 1) The limited Anathemas of 1054 were lifted by the Pope and the Oecumenical Patriarch and his Synod in 1965. 2) Led by the Archbishop Iakovos of America (+2005), the first bilateral Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Catholic Churches was established in the United States in the same year and has continued to this day. 3) This was followed by the inauguration of an International Theological Dialogue in 1979. The goal of these dialogues is the resolution of doctrinal differences and the restoration of full communion between the churches. 4) Since then, popes and patriarchs have met regularly. In addition, clergy and laity from the two churches have joined in prayer, in study and in pilgrimages designed to foster reconciliation and unity. All quotes from: <http://www.apostolicpilgrimage.org/impact-of-1964-meeting>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

military help to the East. But what if the *hidden* reason behind the pompous visit was already in his mind then, and in the minds of other individuals around him; the discovery of a different possibility of survival at a time of grave crisis? Indeed, it did remain in history as a visible pointer to an alternative kind of union, an “as if” one, which was to be revived in the twentieth century with remarkable “communicators” such as Athenagoras and Paul VI, and with visits between Constantinople, Rome and Jerusalem.

While Pope Paul IV was visiting the Eastern Orthodox Cathedral of St. George in Constantinople, in the neighbourhood of Fener (Light, Lamp) in July 1967, the exchange between the two Principals was profound and sincere. If John VIII would have been there he would definitely have cried: “other times, other customs”.

“... where the paint is flaking from the vaulted ceiling – to exchange vows of ecumenical unity and repeated ‘kisses of peace’ with 81 year old Patriarch Athenagoras... it was the first time that a Roman Catholic Pope had set foot in an Eastern Orthodox Church, the first time he had prayed in it and the first time he had sat on the right side of the ecumenical patriarch, in a place of honour. Speaking slowly but clearly in French, the Pope told Patriarch Athenagoras, ‘In the light of our love for Christ and our fraternal charity, we discover even more the deep identity of our faith, and point at which we diverge must not prevent us from perceiving this deep unity.’ Responding in resonant Greek, the white-bearded Patriarch said, ‘Against all human expectations, there is among us the Bishop of Rome, the first in honour among us.’ ‘And here we are, the two of us, facing our common and sacred responsibility toward the church, and toward the world’ ... they kissed each other again to the applause of the worshippers...”⁶⁶

The above serves as a light reminder of the Venetians applauding the Emperor when he visited the city in the fifteenth century on the occasion of the Council.

Later, in November 1979, when Pope John Paul II visited Patriarch Demetrius I in Istanbul, in a move described ambitiously in the *Birmingham News* of Alabama, as

“one more step towards unification of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches... the pope although he did not join in celebrating Mass, he hummed through the

⁶⁶ See on the apostolic pilgrimage website, the Press section of the history of encounters between the two Churches. The part above is a newspaper clipping of 30 July 1967. It is taken from a beautiful narration of this particular visit of Paul IV to Constantinople.

liturgy in a low voice and made the sign of cross from right to left in the Orthodox manner, and not from left to right as Roman Catholics usually do.”⁶⁷

Coming to 2014’s memorable meeting in Jerusalem of Oecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis, on the website dedicated to the Apostolic Pilgrimage to Jerusalem, under the header “The Brothers of Galilee: Peter and Andrew in the Holy Land, The Meeting of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis in the Holy City of Jerusalem”, we read:

“Subsequently, both leaders announced their intention to meet in Jerusalem to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the meeting of their predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras. That meeting, in 1964, was the first time an Ecumenical Patriarch and a Pope assembled in over five hundred years. The historic encounter led to the Lifting of the Anathemas (December 7, 1965) that had separated the two Churches since 1054.

His All-Holiness Bartholomew is the Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarch. He is the 269th successor to the First-Called Apostle Andrew, the founder of the 2,000-year old local Christian Church of Constantinople. The Ecumenical Patriarch is a living witness to the world of Orthodoxy's painful and redemptive struggle for religious freedom and to the innate dignity of humankind. As a citizen of Turkey, His All-Holiness' personal experience provides him a unique perspective on the continuing dialogue among the Christian, Islamic and Jewish worlds. He is known throughout the world as the "Green Patriarch" for his groundbreaking environmental initiatives and ecological theology. For his inspiring efforts on behalf of religious freedom and human rights, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was heralded as a Bridge Builder and Peacemaker and awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by the U.S. Congress in 1997.”⁶⁸

We recognise above the change in the mission towards unity and the kind of unity wished for. We can recognise how poignantly the event of the fifteenth century relates to the fourth as well as the twentieth centuries.

⁶⁷ See footnote 62.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

IV. “Great Men” and “Culture Heroes”

In connection to the notion of “great men” I refer to earlier in the text, I argue that “greatness appears when the funds run out”. This work is about one of them, John VIII Palaiologos, Emperor of the Romans. I borrow the term from Godelier, who described types of political leadership in Melanesian societies.⁶⁹ Yet, this story in the late Medieval times, when the ebb and flow of history pushes a leader from the East to attempt to re-establish a relationship with his western neighbours in geography, kinsmen in faith, and descendants of the same Empire, employs this “poetic wisdom”, his “truth” of things past. Or, as Vico explained: “a truth pertaining to certain ultimate questions of life and death, origins and ends, fate and character...”⁷⁰ All this points to the inevitability that the end of the world, the end of *oecumene*, in Byzantine terms, approaches. The relationship with the Latins was based on their differences more as a function of togetherness, of interdependence; and it had started formally eleven centuries earlier with the inauguration of Christendom.

At the time of John VIII the everlasting Empire was coming to an end, and that imminent “death” of the now acknowledged temporal Empire allowed him to consider all alternatives. The individuals concerned do not exist in this segment of time, only. No matter if they seem to have been *thrown* into a world not of their own making,⁷¹ in the spirit of Heidegger and Bourdieu, which does polarise them, and mediates and constrains their understanding of themselves in it, John VIII did choose to differ, to take the initiative to exist in the world, “existingly”. Through exploring his engagement with the things and with others in the world in a highly meaningful way,⁷² I underline his active and creative involvement with the world as opposed to John VIII’s father’s long writings about the Holy Spirit. Although his father was active in different ways, his texts rather focused on the massive transformative events of the first centuries of Christendom with Constantine I at the centre of action. He was his culture hero, in the spirit of Luc de Heusch, the founder of a new socio-political order. And through war he was the founder of a state, a leaders’ role model, a ritual master, and in the spirit of Maurice Godelier “a great man”. John VIII’s actions did carry the sense of possibility, “which can be defined practically as the ability to think of what could just as well be the case... not here this or that happened, will happen, or is bound to happen...”⁷³ but rather, “... here something could, might or should happen”.⁷⁴ I borrow from Michael Carrithers the following image that describes this best in my view:

⁶⁹ Maurice Godelier, *La production des grands homes: pouvoir et domination masculine chez les Baruya de Nouvelle-Guinee* (Paris: Fayard, 1982).

⁷⁰ Mali, p. 70.

⁷¹ James F. Weiner, *Tree Leaf Talk: A Heideggerian Anthropology* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001) p. 5

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁷³ Michael Carrithers, “Anthropology as a Moral Science of Possibilities”, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol., 46, No. 3, June 2005, p. 433.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 433.

“the contrast between perceived solidity and actual mutability... The train of time is a train that rolls out its tracks in front of itself. The river of time is a river that carries its own banks along with it. The traveller moves between firm walls, on firm ground; but imperceptibly, ground and walls are moved vigorously by the traveller...”⁷⁵

In this sense, John VIII is a “culture hero”,⁷⁶ in this case the founder of an *alternative* socio-political order. He senses that the strength of the function of war has passed to different trenches, and the gravity of the imminent collapse of the Empire urges him to foster a different approach to salvage and preserve. He also happens to manifest himself as a hunter of foreign origin while in Italy. Hunting is a ritualistic activity, and is in a way a replacement for the war he cannot win on his own anymore. He also acts as a moral agency, which is a very important element in the world of imperial Byzantium throughout time. The values and morals the Emperors act upon, the so-called “precepts” worked as guides, offering a rule for morals. However, John VIII added to this; through the re-enactment of the ritual of return to the origins of the Empire, to where Constantine I laid the foundations of Christendom, to what was considered the civilised cosmos at the time, he re-constituted the *oecumene* in a symbolic way. In actual terms the Empire was in tatters and about to eclipse, but I argue that the ritual of this journey shows it was not doomed in every way.

It is the realisation of this possibility of an alternative way of life, which some individuals in his entourage capitalised upon, through which they could retain the foundational elements of the Empire and continue. That is the quality of the “great man”, his greatness of becoming the means by which a possibility of continuity, through the changes that were to come, was realised. It is this greatness of that realisation that radiates an aesthetic appeal to the analyst. He resembles a leader who “... does not stay where the accident of birth has thrown him; or if he stays, he stays through insight, for good reason and choice of the better...”⁷⁷ Therefore, he does not just act only under the influence of that society and that culture, but he participates and creates the space for others to act as moral agencies, by exercising “... insight (or foolishness) and good (or bad) reason”.⁷⁸

John VIII and his entourage lived in Italy for two years, which makes the so-called diplomatic journey distinctive. This long stay turned the journey into a means of empowerment; however, this was neither an obvious, nor an instant one. It gave the opportunity to reflect upon this stay and its consequences. The cultural force of it turned culture into the agent for change. The past, with

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 434.

⁷⁶ Pierre de Maret, “An Interview with Luc de Heusch”, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1 June 1993, The University of Chicago Press on behalf of Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, p. 291.

⁷⁷ Carrithers, p. 440.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Constantine at its centre and the Oecumenical Council as the Event of unity within difference *par excellence*, enabled John VIII to become a history maker and allowed us to have a case in which we see how history makes the history makers. In this context it seems that John VIII had in some of his relationships with those he commanded the power to motivate them, and so followed what Sahlins called, “structural relays of the larger organisation of society to particular persons of authority”⁷⁹. We have Bessarion becoming a high dignitary of substantial influence in the cultural order of the West while retaining the fundamental elements of eastern Christianity. We also have Scholarios who was empowered by the cultural order in which he had taken part in Italy, to turn against his own approval of the Union and lead the anti-unionists, eventually becoming the first Patriarch of Constantinople within the Ottoman Empire. We do not know whether the results would have been the same if the Event of the Union of the Churches had never happened, but I argue that none of this would have been possible to this extent. I add here Sartre’s statement on the dialectics of structure and agency:

“We... must consider in each case the role of the individual in the historical event. For this role is not defined once and for all: it is the structure of the groups considered which determines it in each case... The group bestows its power and its efficacy upon the individuals whom it has made and who have made it in turn, whose irreducible particularity is one way of living universality... Or rather, this universality takes on the face, the body, and the voice of the leaders which it has given itself; thus the event itself, while a collective apparatus, is more or less marked with individual signs; persons are reflected in it to the same extent that the conditions of the conflict and the structures of the group have permitted them to be personalised.”⁸⁰

I analyse these two personalities in Chapter 6. In the rest of the thesis I primarily deal with the personality of the Emperor as empowered by the cultural order, in the Sahlinian sense of “structural transmissions of the macrocosm to the microcosm”.⁸¹ I explore how he was authorised by his historical powers, the powers inscribed in the office he held, which was hierarchically organised, in an enduring institutional order. This hierarchy went so high up that it reached God. Hence, the divine nature of the Emperor, who was not only the ultimate leader of the whole State of Christendom, but was also the protector of the Church, of the Orthodox belief. He was the chosen representative of God, following the archetypal leader’s Constantine I’s experience. What is important here is what the Byzantines themselves believed and not whether we find these beliefs

⁷⁹ Marshall Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004) p.156.

⁸⁰ Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides*, p. 157, from Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York, Vintage Books, 1968) p. 130.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

plausible or not today. The Byzantine Emperor's presence during the Council 1438–1439 in Italy mobilised the Venetians, and they almost “venerated” him as the only Emperor of the Christian Empire. The Pope considered his position as legitimised by his presence in the papal Council in Florence-Ferrara. There are certain elements in the art of the time that demonstrate that the extent of interdependence of the two parts of Christendom for prosperity was greater than ever. John VIII may be the Emperor in a relationship of complementarity in the schismogenetic environment of the New Rome with the Old Rome. However, even in the early fifteenth century when the Empire is a shadow of its old self, the power of the presence of the Eastern orthodox Emperor in its mythical dimension, that relies of the depth of centuries, is vital for the papal image and politics and striking for us as observers of this event. We should not forget that the Emperor finally decided to go to Italy following negotiations of almost two years and many invitations to attend the Basel Council.

According to the Heideggerian analysis “... historicity derives from temporality, from the essential being-toward-death and finitude of the individual *Dasein*.” For Hegel on the other hand “... the historicity of beings, is best manifested by those *objectivations* of Life that indeed are the product of the activity of living and self-conscious beings...”⁸² In this context, through his involvement John VIII Palaiologos had some anticipation, as Heidegger describes, which, I argue, was beyond obvious military ends. Building on the past, he was oriented towards the future. In the same line of thought,

“... this anticipation provides the circular ground of our hermeneutic understanding: we understand the past as a confirmation of our possible future, and we project on to that future our understanding of the world as we have interpreted it...”⁸³

V. Reviewing

Here I have to link words, understanding and facts to make clear that I strive to assess conditions in a way that is as objective as possible. Therefore, two factors are important: one is the participation of different and opposing groups of the same society in a single event, at a time of crisis. The second is the interaction of opposing groups of different cultures. I propose that the intermingling of these two forms of interaction is decisive for their comprehension. Hence, by re-interpreting the

⁸² Herbert Marcuse, *Hegel's ontology and the theory of Historicity*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought, (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press), 1987.

⁸³ Weiner, p. 4.

event, this work is an attempt to understand it historically and re-position its significance within a historical perspective, but one that encompasses the past as well as the future. In this context, I emphasise the use of mythologised past as an expanded form of history, not only of knowing this past as history, but also as a reality that has informed the present of the characters of the past. That situation can continue in the future, albeit following a different trajectory. The interdependence between the anthropological concepts of ritual, myth and schismo-genesis, which originate in culture, are re-thought in the interaction of an event with history. These areas of anthropological research, I argue, delve deeper than a lot of historical research, which has been taken for granted or which remains superficially understood. There are also areas where the reading of present politics is applied to the past. I would point to the terms “propaganda” or “identity-formation”,⁸⁴ which are often used as an explanation. In this work I am not concerned with the cultural construction of ethnicity. Neither am I concerned with the functional arguments that reduce imperial bishophood to an ideology of a complex society that is the terrain for struggle over political power between various groups. Political conflicts may well exist, but the history of imperial bishophood is a much more profound narrative that can rise above local conflicts and point in many directions. I certainly believe that John VIII was operating more subconsciously than consciously on these schemes, but on the basis of a political strategy. The living tradition of Oecumenical Councils has transcended history to be seen as a sign of renewal rather than decay. This I argue is my most basic difference with the historians whose information I have used. I do not consider culture the “dress” of social realities, as Edmund Leach professed, or the “abstraction” devalued in relation to social and political structures. Here, I bring structures and culture to a parallel analytical level as empirical realities in an endeavour to understand their connection. I make an exposition, and give an interpretation of what culture and history can do in tandem.

The functionalist model is not upheld as a productive way of thinking in this work. The reason is that in this model human ways of life are stripped of other meaning. The most important idea of divine emperorship – “... which was traceable to Roman and Hellenistic sources... and like

⁸⁴ Anthony Bryer, for example, in “Greeks and Turkmens: The Pontic Exception”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 29, 1975, p. 116, He argues that the Grand Comnenoi of Trebizond were representatives of local separatism and identity, where in modern terms one would say that “Nicaea was a Taiwan to Trebizond’s Bangladesh”. I think that the comparison is fruitless and although it eventually became a separate state, as Empire of Trebizond, it was always a member, another part of the whole Byzantine Empire. As Bryer himself informs us in the same article, the Comnenians tried to recover Constantinople, but the Seljuks, and the Lascarids who advanced first, put a practical end to it in 1214. On the other hand, Helene Ahrweiler, whom I admire for her erudition and critical mind, is I think *mistaken* when she argues that Constantinople is the only Capital that hasn’t been reconquered, as Athens is not the natural capital of modern Greece. But what does she mean? If it was the oecumenicity of Constantinople that was lost, then, being a capital of one nation may have been equally wrong. If it was the culture, via Christianity, that was lost, that was in my view equally well preserved during the long centuries of the Ottoman conquest. Hence, the forced exchanges of population in the early twentieth century were especially violent and widespread from Anatolia to Greece. It was exactly the strong cultural element of Christianity that the neo-Turks of Ataturk could not accept as a living force within one society, in which Muslim communities were the dominant part. The non-islamised Greeks were living safely and prosperously in the Ottoman lands up until then. Helene Ahrweiler presented this view in a conference and discussion she took part in in 2012 in Greece under the aegis of the Onassis Centre. In the mind of art historians most art and architecture is functional for purposes of propaganda. All these ideas have been presented to Thanassis Lalas in the form of interviews and have been published together in the book I quote in footnote 4.

everything else in Byzantium, it emerges here in a Christianised version...”⁸⁵ – all that is held sacred and valued, is understood as a power device, is reduced to an ideological scheme in which various ends struggle for means. Where George Ostrogorsky sees the idea of “emperorship”, I will stress the divine nature of this Emperor, as an underlying value throughout time – from the pagan Hellenistic, to Roman times, to Byzantium. The historian H. Hunger, believes that only “since the fourth century there had existed a multifarious ideological programme...”, as he called it “... according to which the emperor and his rule proceed from God. The idea of a Christian *oikoumene*, a community built on creed and culture organised as a state...”⁸⁶ On the other hand, Ostrogorsky emphasises the notion of continuity through change. Although the state did change from that of pagan Rome, to that of a New Rome, a Christian Empire, it is very important to remember that according to him the key principle was that a single Emperor was uniting all Christians.

In this thesis I do avoid the study of nationalism. John VII’s journey does not function as a self-evident politics device in this work. In her *Emperor or Manager: Power and political Ideology in Byzantium before 1453* Tonia Kiousopoulou has made a very valuable study of the political ideology of the Empire. In her work political power is discussed in different parts of the hierarchy. The relations of Church and State are examined in this respect as well. I do not adhere to nationalism or ethnic concerns in this period, as nations did not exist as such, although there were maybe some very early signs in western parts of Europe. My readings, and my understanding of them, have led me to believe that the late Eastern Romans were concerned with the coherence of “genos”, rather than any particular ethnic form of identity. Faith is certainly a central theme that underlies most activities, practical and cognitive. My argument is based on the anti-constructionist line of social analysis, an innovative analysis of the journey and its role as a masterfully choreographed “artwork”, an event that can be “a concealment and a revelation” at the same time.

On the contrary, I search for the fundamentals and the structures that envelop it. What transcends these local events, which of course are part of the long history, but on their own do not help us understand what it is that is central in these people’s minds is the question; what are their truths? I work around personalities, certain individuals and their deeds; they are my informants. I read their ethnography. I do not refer to the “Byzantines” as an anonymous mass, because I think that is distorting too. Myth is understood as “‘a hard-worked active force’, ‘a pragmatic charter of

⁸⁵ George Ostrogorsky, “The Byzantine Emperor and the Hierarchical World Order”, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 35, No. 84, December 1956, p. 1. Ostrogorsky wrote the whole history of Byzantium and it is considered one of the most authoritative accounts of the Byzantine State throughout its life.

⁸⁶ H. Hunger, “State and Society in Byzantium”, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature, Vol. 82C, 1982, p. 197. Very interestingly, he combines the past with oppressive states of his time and he stresses that “generations of scholars had no feeling for the inextricable connection between state and ideology that we find everywhere in Byzantium. Living in the twentieth century, we have seen the paramount importance of ideology in several examples of totalitarian states, not only in theory and from a distance, but by unhappy personal experience.”

primitive faith and moral wisdom’, that conveys ‘the practical rules for the guidance of man’” as Malinowski put it.⁸⁷ In the spirit of Leslie White,

“Words are cultural traits... Polygynous households are culture traits. But why call one husband and three wives an abstraction any more than one atomic nucleus and three electrons?... A wild horse is not an abstraction. Why call a domestic horse (a culture trait) one?”⁸⁸

Equally, I am not concerned with the stream of representation description that a lot of art historians use extensively as a way to describe similarities and differences between peoples. Marilyn Strathern describes the misconception of representation as an element of culture:

“Culture may be uncovered wherever people differentiate people. And if their representational strategies are understood as mobilising culture, culture is then in turn understood as representation. Representations do not explain similarities and difference – rather they give a descriptive purchase on the way similarities and differences are made apparent. Hence the synthetic quality of culture...”⁸⁹

But, as Sahlins pointed out in his book *Culture in Practice*, “rather than serving the differentiation of society by the differentiation of objects, every conceivable distinction of society [can be] put to the service of another declension of objects”.⁹⁰ Culture is of a different order to society, “Society projects a view of itself, in other words, that presupposes the (social) divisions it organises”, whereas, culture,

“cannot precipitate the same kind of analysis. Rather it shows itself as inevitably inclusive (in the extent to which certain values are shared), or as exclusive (in the extent to which they are not). There are layerings, conjunctions and juxtapositions; texts work off one another, ideas reproduce; there are hegemonic cosmologies and voices barely heard, and there are meanings simultaneously open and closed to any customer or consumer of them determining what is on the shelf. But culture ultimately projects a view of itself as a world-view”.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Sahlins, “Two or Three Things I know About Culture”, p. 403.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 401.

⁸⁹ Marilyn Strathern, “nice thing about culture is that everyone has it”, *Shifting Contexts: Transformations in Anthropological Knowledge*, edited by Marilyn Strathern (London and New York: Routledge, London and New York, 1995) p. 156.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 156.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 161.

Sahlins echoes Levi-Strauss powerfully on this matter, where he points to the extent to which commentators “underestimate the scope and systematicity of cultures... always universal in compass and thereby able to subsume alien objects and persons in logically coherent relationships. Every society known to history is a global society, every culture a cosmological order.”⁹²

To this end, Strathern alerts us to the way Sahlins “plays culture off against social relationships”. And she continues,

“whatever cultural differences there are between the voices of different persons, they belong to the same social universe of discourse. The notion of culture as permeable and less than bounded, Sahlins argues, mistakes culture’s powers of inclusion for the inability to maintain a boundary”⁹³

In this work, I aimed to delve deep into historical knowledge and concern myself with what can be unchanging and yet enduring across a stretch of centuries. These were times when there was a God and people lived by that notion. The Enlightenment had not yet arrived. In this effort of working with history critically, where history by its nature reminds us of all that is not visible to the eye, the reasons of things that “... having a where and when of their own, though the where cannot be here and the when cannot be now”.⁹⁴ We observe the concentration of a most distinguished eastern delegation of patriarchal and lay status, organised by the Emperor. We are given the anticipation of military help from the West to manage the Ottoman threat, which was approaching the capital city, in exchange of Union of the Churches as a reason for this mighty journey. John VIII has not given this as a possible reason explicitly himself, although all historians seem to think so. I set out to understand the motivation of the Emperor: what exactly did this Emperor conceive and want to bring about by such a long sojourn and tour of Italy, travelling by rented boats, in the winter, when he and other members of his delegation were of poor health or too old to accomplish such a journey successfully? Why did he choose this method of “diplomacy”, the most difficult one? Did he keep his silence on this point? How could he possibly tell us what it was all this about? What means did he use to what ends? Would the ends become the means for something else beyond the superficial reason of military help? But he chose something distinctively Byzantine, culturally and historically; the Oecumenical Councils, a microcosm of imperial and ecclesiastical integrity that eastern Christianity was familiar with and that was not unknown to the Latin West either. John VIII performed it expecting the highest forms of protocol to be observed towards him, as the symbol of

⁹² Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: Selected essays* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), p. 488 and p. 489.

⁹³ Marilyn Strathern, 1995, p. 172, note 14.

⁹⁴ R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of History And Other Writings in Philosophy of History*, edited with an introduction by W.H. Dray, and W.J. Van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 169.

the eternal Empire, but also in the procedures where an audience was involved. In the words of Sahlins: what has been making money literally in the form of coins here is Byzantine cosmology, which we see in the artistic forms that have been preserved and were produced during and after the event.

Therefore, my main contribution on the subject of the Council of Ferrara-Florence in the early fifteenth century comes from the angle with which I approach the subject of Union; exploring the nature of societies and histories through the lens of culture as an indispensable link for this conversation, a necessary tool of investigation. The springboard for the investigation remains the Council as the final catalyst Event. But, very importantly, through it is shown how everything before and after could revolve around it. That comes from the angle of a critical understanding of history via culture; through the value of the intervention of an Event, the synchrony, into the diachrony of Byzantine history, as the crossroads of contingency and conjuncture in history. I offer an alternative proposition, away from the notions of nationalism and the constructionist/functionalist approach of Hellenic identity building, which I consider irrelevant. I do not see what constitutes an intentional, conscious idea of making a state for Greek people at this time in history. Christianity, as a cultural constant, proves to be the foundational liberating force in this Event. Through the Event, with the contradictions, all the quarrels and discontents, John VIII devises cultural continuity. All traditional principles of existence persist after the journey and the signing of the Decree, but to many it looks like a treason, disloyalty to the traditions “of the old”, a traitors game. My contribution is an invigorating re-interpretation of an Event in the midst of a turbulent time. I also explore how relations of people and individual positions order and re-order by placing them against the themes of ritual, myth, sacrifice, complementarity, and schismogenesis.

To put it theoretically, in every chapter I turn the focus to the source of another sociality. The synthesising lens I summon to tell this story is one explicitly drawing upon and enriched by the anthropological insights and methods mentioned earlier, which I argue hasn't been done before. Some historians speak about “agents of change” or “cultural transformation”, but no one takes the trouble to talk theoretically about the terms they use. Where do they come from, how are they going to be used? Historians order facts, anthropologists re-order them pointing to these “invisible systems created by ritual”,⁹⁵ or by myth, as social structures. In my effort, concepts are elucidated, ideas and their comparative value are given. Then, through the stories I show how I understand them to work and how, in this way, they help me understand the time I am working in, and its connections to its past and possible continuities in the future.

⁹⁵ Maurice Bloch, “The Past and Present in the Present”, *Man, New Series*, Vol. 12, No. 2, August 1977, p. 287.

In these stories I show that convention and innovation run parallel. James Weiner – taking from Roy Wagner in the *Invention of Culture* (1981) – states in *Tree Leaf Talk* something I understand as fundamental to the continuous dialectic between “innovation and convention as emergent effects of a single temporally constituted process of human symbolic articulation...”⁹⁶ I do not adhere to the conviction that all things have to be judged as matters of power and interest, “judged in terms of their usefulness to human rational purposes”.⁹⁷ A discerning element in this thesis is that I think differently in this respect. Politics are not perceived in a linear, neatly stretched line of narrowly defined interests. The impact of the men who do not think and act within these parameters is noted by understanding the Emperor as a “great man” and I develop this concept in the next part.

In this work I discerned the presence of the past, of the deep history, that the Councils present us with in the present of the people I studied in the fifteenth century. I looked especially at the system that the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos apprehends as the best communication mechanism between hierarchies, hence his interest to pursue this trajectory at any cost. He challenges the timeless static past in the present, his present. He re-orders the *sacred history* of Councils, which have as their model Constantine I’s Nicaean Council. The first Christian Emperor conceived of this following the cosmogonic myth created by his dream and vision, which consequently led him to establish Christendom and the unification of the East and West under the single banner of faith. This route doesn’t seem to link up directly with the empirical experiences of John VIII’s father, the old *philosopher-emperor*, which raises barriers because he thinks that a Council should be avoided as it will create a worse schism and will leave them defenceless before the infidel.⁹⁸ But John VIII was in crisis mode, and he overcame these barriers and organised a most ambitious event. I have vigorously studied the journey and its motivations from a long and broad historical perspective, working through this other angle: “... world peopled by invisible entities”.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Weiner, p. xiv.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Charalambos Dendrinis, *Reflections on the Failure of the Union of Florence*, paper delivered at the International Colloquium *Motivi e strutture di divisioni ecclesiali*, organised by the Pontificio Comitato di Scienze Storiche at Corfu, 10-13 April 2007, p. 131.

⁹⁹ Bloch, “The Past and Present in the Present”, p. 287.

VI. The Notions of Ritual and Sacrifice: Their Relation

“from the beginning we were both citizens of, as it were, one city, the Church, and we lived under the same laws and customs, and we obeyed the same rulers. Later on – I don’t know what happened – we separated from one another.”¹⁰⁰

The whole of the thesis, the position and my argument, is a re-interpretation of the event as a ritual in different ways. One of these is the sacrifice. I wrote this work, framing it around the Event of 1438–1439, where my intention is to show how through an event the beauty of structural transformation as order resurfaces, even if it is not an order we all like in the same way. I show how although inimical relationships had developed throughout the centuries between the two territories of Christendom, with this contribution to his people and the culture into which he was born and was carrying proudly, he manages to invert that mind-set: not consciously, but with his actions. This is the case for at least some of his entourage. But most importantly I show that encompassing concepts like unity can be interpreted through different channels; less doctrinal but at the same time without disregarding the doctrine and the ritual it gives birth to by which groups live, impart life to one another, intermarry, compete, find a place where they believe all life’s obstacles, even death, can be dealt with. In short, do all things required for prosperity.

In this context, John VIII risked his life and the lives of many in his entourage, to undertake the journey as ritual in his very effort to foster life, for the quest of life. Through this journey he sacrifices his own security, his health, his body and the health of the older members of his entourage. In the Byzantine tradition the Emperor’s “two bodies” guarantee his nearness to God. He is chosen by Him, defender of Orthodoxy and guardian of the Church. These ideas dominate his mind and the minds of all Byzantines.¹⁰¹ In this role he is “... taking Christ as a model and emulating his example”.¹⁰² The end point of salvation passes from the sacrifice of God. In Hocart we read that all sacrifice is an act of creation.¹⁰³ Mauss added: “... in it all life resides”.¹⁰⁴ From his role we can deduce that John VIII’s body can be “the repository of all the nourishing and fertilising principles in nature.”¹⁰⁵ In his body all the re-creative forces are concentrated. The Empire of a thousand years is maybe coming to an end, but it is his role to defy the end and give a renewal a chance, even if this is somewhere else. For without the sacrifice of the original God, Christ the Son,

¹⁰⁰ Demetrios Kydones, an intellectual and very active diplomat who worked on behalf of the Byzantine Emperors in the fourteenth century, wrote this succinctly on the relations between Latins and eastern Romans. In Nevra Necipoglu, *Byzantium Between the Ottoman and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p. 12.

¹⁰¹ Ostrogorsky, p. 2.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁰³ A.M. Hocart, “Coronation and Marriage”, *Man*, Vol. 29, June 1929, p. 105.

¹⁰⁴ Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, trans. W.D. Halls (London: Cohen & West, 1964,) p. 92.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 92.

there would be no creation or salvation. As a sacrificial act, Emperor John VIII gives up his frail body, his marriage to his third beautiful wife Maria, and the continuation of the dynasty, in order to attain creation elsewhere; the “as if” creation of unity between the different territories of Christendom. The Empire was disintegrating, falling apart, and there was no way to turn the tide. Somebody had to take a bold initiative to safeguard the legacy, and the future of this legacy and the people for whom the Empire was their “habitus”. In their minds, through history and culture, and literally, for centuries. In this respect, his life becomes an interweaving of safeguarding and danger. Previously, in the texts we see that in cases where an individual was undertaking a dangerous journey on behalf of his people, or his city, the encomia written were comparing this life to Christ’s example. Nomophylax John Eugenikos, brother of Markos Eugenikos, in an encomium of Isidore Glabas, who was Metropolitan of Thessaloniki from 1380 to 1396, and undertook journeys to Asia Minor on behalf of captives taken by the Turks, wrote: “In following the good example of Christ, the first Shepherd, you have shown great care for your flock and undertaken long journeys on behalf of it”.¹⁰⁶ In this respect, John VIII’s life, I argue, could also mirror a saintly life with reference to the future. His efforts are heroic, out of the ordinary, the expected. He persists in supporting his heritage strongly and that is what I show. He is the sacrificer and the sacrificial object at the same time. He is “sacrificised”, humiliated in Italy, as another form of sacrifice, and his sacrifice creates a special form of guilt as he has to defend his actions back home. He is considered a traitor back in Constantinople. His body is denied the monastic habit. But sacrifice envelops both guilt and redemption of it. Hence, his calmness back in the City, his melancholic gaze towards the events to come, but at the same time of the potential that can be there, beyond his acts. This was the final act, and it was captured through this finality not as an end, but as a means to a new beginning; as a continuous event from the ancient model of his ancestors to his time. It is redemptive, as the Emperor substitutes the end of his culture and people for a while with a possible, with an “as if” future.¹⁰⁷ Continuity is preserved. Bessarion will continue this legacy later in Italy. As Mauss confirms, “Christian imagination has built upon ancient models”.¹⁰⁸

His greatness spills over as he goes through Italy and his status and presence captures the imagination of artists and Popes alike. The first medal in history was cast in his honour and in my view it was a Pope who commissioned and funded it. His invisible innovation was making space for the two cultures to co-exist, after having him taking part in it, and later with members of his entourage becoming also part of it, both in images and in their lives. This entire process was

¹⁰⁶ Speros Vryonis, Jr., “Isidore Glabas and the Turkish Devshirme”, *Speculum*, Vol. 31, No.3, July 1956, p. 438.

¹⁰⁷ Hubert and Mauss, p. 96.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 94.

motivated by this journey he initiated, by the beauty of the prospect of structural transformation as order.

John VIII's motivation stemmed partly from his anticipation that he had to deal with the crisis ahead of time, albeit in a "multidisciplinary" way. The unpredictability of the events and the cosmogonic changes ahead were threatening at a scale that would signal the end of the Empire, and, in a lot of Byzantines' minds, the end of the world. John VIII undertook the risky journey to the West as a preventive tool, a crisis response, involving a complex interfacing of seemingly opposite parts. It was a pre-empting mechanism of a definite cause and effect situation. In Italy, the state of affairs was by all means "hot", and consensus difficult to achieve, with a lot of unpredictable interactions taking place, and interests and priorities were blurred, and at times chaotic. Cross-cultural and inter-cultural communication was not easy: language was a barrier, central documents were missing or doubted for lack of integrity of translation. Interdisciplinarity was on the agenda for the plenary sessions, where knowledge specialists of religion and philosophy mixed and debated with the traditionalists of the Church of the East. Different mind-sets were thrown together to find the way to the "one truth". In that sense, the journey was a predetermined affair of John VIII's but came as an outcome of its largely responsive mode to the "cosmogonic" transformations that were about to come. Obviously, John VIII's mind was a Renaissance mind, not Byzantine, not Latin, but "renaissance" as of an individual who could understand the infinite possibility of potential that circumstances in which culture and history meet may conceal. The relationships were important to uncover, and to "... the values they put on relatedness through social and biological ties, and so forth..."¹⁰⁹ I would also add cultural ties; they were all there, but only able to re-surface when they came in contact. John VIII was in the pursuit of knowledge, finding out how to react to the crisis while in practice, as opposed to engaging in the 156 chapters on the procession of the Holy Spirit, like his father did, the so-called "philosopher-king". By adding new knowledge, John VIII was not eliminating uncertainty, but was adding, in a way, to the general sense of instability, which would point to new avenues of being a "Byzantine" in the new situation that would emerge with the advance of the Ottomans and the weakening of the Byzantine State. I think that this mind-set allowed John VIII to be the relaxed sovereign on the way back to Constantinople. The essential task, from his point of view, had been completed. In this context, it was irrelevant if there was continuation of division, and further fights between different factions of the people on arrival.

In the context of the excessively symbolic nature of the Eastern Christian tradition, the imperial and Church ceremony and ritual, the journey was a ritual communication between cultural structures

¹⁰⁹ Marilyn Strathern, *Commons and Borderlands, Working Papers on Interdisciplinarity, Accountability and the Flow of Knowledge*, (Wantage: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2004) p. 6.

and orders. In it, form and function were coming together to expose the meaning of the decisions of the commander of the Empire. Even in the dying years of the Empire, there was:

“... a profound unity and community between the *basileia* and the Church, and it is not possible to separate the one from the other... the emperor still received the same consecration on the part of the Church, the same rank and the same prayers; he is anointed with the prestigious *myron*, consecrated as *basileus* of the Romans, that is of all Christians, and his name is commemorated everywhere by all patriarchs, metropolitans and bishops, wherever people call themselves Christians, which is the privilege of no other local prince of sovereign.”¹¹⁰

This ideology, the political theology, was rooted in the theory that Eusebios conceived and was repeated all the way to the last days of the Empire:

“He devised a theological structure in which the supreme God was creator of the world, and where the Logos, His son, necessary mediator between divine unity and multiplicity of creation, introduced in to the world the principles of reason and order and saved from anarchy. In exact parallel, the emperor who had been converted to Christ’s doctrine was also an intermediary. Inspired by the true philosophy and mimesis, he modelled himself in the image of celestial kingship and was delegated by the Logos to govern humans, with a duty to save them from the proliferating cults by the eradication of paganism and from the discord of ethnic groups by uniting all the peoples of the world... he made the Logos of God... central to his speculations... he had constructed correspondence between a unique divine royalty and a unique human kingship, extended to the furthest limits of the earth... Constantine as the emperor chosen by God to reveal to the world the power of the cross, but within a ‘divine economy’ in which the empire was already the providential instrument of salvation...”¹¹¹

We observe that the above passages that constitute this long conversation are separated by ten centuries, during which the power of the tradition and symbolic, cultural structure remained very similar. If so, these structures “... turn out to be a system of classification of human beings linked to other ritual cognitive systems, such as the ritual notion of time”.¹¹² According to Maurice Bloch, in societies there is a double cognition of time. The one I described above, and that applies to my

¹¹⁰ Gilbert Dagron, *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) p. 312. See also Dvornik.

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 132.

¹¹² Bloch, “The Past and Present in the Present”, p. 286.

argument about the Event and the historical structure, denotes the presence of the past in the present as a component of the cultural specific cognition of time, which is characteristic of ritual communication.¹¹³

This is the world I call “the world of invisible entities”, borrowing from Bloch. In the event he organised, John VIII Palaiologos made this link that has resulted in the long conversation throughout the centuries. Most importantly, Bloch points out that,

“the timeless static past in the present is then challenged by the present... people may be extensively mystified by the static and organic imaginary models of their society which gain a shadowy phenomenological reality in ritual communication...”¹¹⁴

That brings us, Bloch stated, to the realisation of varying amounts of social structure in between cases.¹¹⁵ The Byzantines had created so much social and cultural structure that could keep the conversation going as long as they wanted. Therefore, ritual communication can have a varying role in different societies. I would say that the Byzantines had most of their social and cultural theory expressed in the language of ritual. The difference between societies is reflected in the respective concepts of time. The Byzantines “... in the ritual communication live in a timeless present, that is in a phenomenological representation of time where the present and the past are so fused that the present is a mere manifestation of the past...”¹¹⁶ As we saw earlier, the Byzantines have an instituted hierarchy with a lot of ritual communication or social structure, and it occupies a large part of their discourse. This theory explains the origins of this large part of ritual communication in “hidden origins”, a mystified “nature”, which is divorced from everyday experience, which then becomes stable by transforming into hierarchy.¹¹⁷ To establish this order, we need two cognitive systems at work simultaneously. We have the Emperor as a mortal man and an ally to God at the same time. These “hidden origins” can be seen in the past cognitive sphere of the long conversation the Byzantines had designed, which informs and enriches their everyday practical one. This opportunity was seized by the Emperor and he created a journey in 1438–1439 that is memorable to this day. In part III of this chapter called “The Future” I have already explained how the past becomes the present, which can then inform the future. Of course, the journey lies in the repetitive schema of Councils in the history of the Empire. In this sense, it is understood as a ritual communication and a cultural element that continues to re-organise history.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 287.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 287.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 288.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 288.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 289.

Although married three times, John VIII Palaiologos had never had any children. His father was arranging the marriages according to the negotiations that were active at the time. In 1411 there was secured as John's first wife the little daughter of the Grand Prince of Moscow, Vasilii I, named Anna. She was about eleven years old and John VIII was twenty years old. They got married in 1414 but the marriage was unfortunate. This child-bride died three years later during a plague in the city while John VIII was away in Morea¹¹⁸. In 1421 his second marriage to the Latin Princess Sophia of Montferrat took place. This was an important occasion, they married in "Great Church" of Saint Sophia but this was also his coronation as co-Basileus, he was formally elevated to his father's partner in the rule of the Empire. But John was repelled by her and neglected to a remote part of the palace. Eventually she did manage to return back to her parents and eventually to a nunnery¹¹⁹. Only after his father's death and his wife's flight managed to find love in his life. His last wife, Maria Comnene, of the Trapezundian Empire of Comnenians, was considered very beautiful by travellers and natives alike, but he nevertheless decided to leave her for two years, to move to Italy to discuss the much anticipated Union of the Churches. What is also necessary to remember is that from the late thirteenth century, when Michael VIII Palaiologos converted to Catholicism and was expected to turn his peoples' minds to the Latin faith, they were the

"anti-unionists, despairing of the heresy and misguidedness of their Emperor and fearful of the reign of terror in Constantinople, fled to Trebizond, and encouraged the grandson of the first Alexios Comnenos to proclaim himself the one true Orthodox Emperor."¹²⁰

So Maria, the only wife he loved, was also the one who came from a long line of a family with strong anti-unionist sentiments. On his way back he was confronted with the sad news of her death. He had barely lived with her. I am discussing John VIII's marital affairs and the fact that he remained childless to point to a repetitive pattern that leaves John VIII sexually an "undifferentiated" man, a kind of Adam. But while Adam in the process of Genesis becomes male, John VIII remains throughout his life a figure closer to Christ, or to a saint. In a sense, one doesn't know if he is a sinner or a saint. He slaughters animals incessantly in Italy, like another Saint George, the dragon slayer, while the Union of Churches is in sessions. It is interesting that Hocart's fundamental idea that a king cannot sacrifice without a wife, is based on the premise that "the act of procreation first gave rise to the act of creation, and all sacrifice is an act of creation". The only way I see John VIII Palaiologos fitting into this idea is by accepting that by being away and taking the

¹¹⁸ John W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaiologos (1391-1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship*, (New Brunswick, N.J.), 1969, p. 345, p. 347. See **Appendix IV**, image 12.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 349 and footnote 96.

¹²⁰ Donald M. Nicol, "The Greeks and the Union of the Churches the Report of Ogerius, Protonotairus of Michael VIII Palaiologos, in 1280", *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, Vol. 63, 1962-1964, p. 8.

health risks that involved, John VIII did sacrifice his marriage to another idea of creation: that of the potential he created for his compatriots to envisage a “would be” unity and the basis for a future people’s union. In the case of Bessarion, I think the potential he created was through his opposition to the Turks, which many centuries later became an underground resistance movement resulting in a successful revolution against them from the occupied people of the lands of the Ottoman Empire. In the case of Scholarios, who turned anti-unionist, he also turned up not long after the conquest, as an Oecumenical patriarch of the Christians in the Ottoman Empire, beyond which he also created the space for the survival of Orthodox eastern Christianity to this day. I discuss this idea in Chapter 5 in connection with his medal.

As a reaction to the historical change that was about to come, fourteen years later the magnificent Christian Empire of the East was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. John VIII was taking cultural responsibility for what was about to cause a radical change to his people’s lives and to the destiny of his state. Historians, from Thucydides to modern writers, usually proclaim that they write work “... not as an essay, which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession of time”.¹²¹ Similarly, John VIII’s decision to travel to Italy with his most honourable, large entourage at times of great instability for his Empire and the West, was not one for the fainthearted. But it was part of a scheme, which I approach as a ritual, and a visual manifestation of his Empire in procession in western Europe. To the question if it was a conscious scheme, following Humphrey and Laidlaw’s proposition in relation to ritualisation, I would suggest that “... actors both are and are not authors of their acts”.¹²² John VIII actively pursued re-engagement with the Latin West, although he would have preferred to be surrounded by more secular rulers than religious figures, as was the case. It was unfortunate that during the journey to Italy, the Holy Roman Emperor had died. However, John VIII had already been in negotiations for about two years with the West, with this extension of relationship, a relationship that was one of affinity and enmity, at the same time.

The opposition between affinity and enmity is demonstrated by the phrase of Demetrios Kydones I commenced this with: “...at the beginning we lived together, we had the same customs and rulers...” Later the two territories went their separate ways, and like the Pomo Indian in the introduction of this chapter, they cannot understand each other. Thus Kydones indicates what Sahlins and Levi-Strauss before him taught, about the differences between societies as being more the function of their relationship, and their separation as a serious attempt to maintain and create difference, even if they live in neighbouring areas. Sahlins instructs us, with the help of Hocart, that

¹²¹ Simon Hornblower and Charles Stewart, “No History without Culture”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1, Winter 2005, p. 269.

¹²² Mark S. Mosko and Frederick H. Damon, eds., *On the Order of Chaos: Social Anthropology and the Science of Chaos* (New York, Oxford: Bergham Books, 2005) p. xv, footnote 4.

this difference is not a simple process of differentiation, but a cultural intention, which is basic to the organisation of society as collation of complementary parts. This process of differentiation creates a relationship between them. I argue that in comparison between the two civilisations, the dying Empire had relations with the last centuries, with both the Ottomans and the Latins. Therefore it made much sense to return to a communion with those with whom they were originally together and had already shared a strong basis of relation, in faith, although it had been troubled throughout the centuries. This common start, like in a family tree, created a kinship bond that was stronger than the new relationships the Byzantines developed with the Ottomans.

On the Byzantine front there were already a number of individuals who were not fighting out of narcissism over marginal differences, and who could accommodate the possibility of a religious rapprochement with the West, in a more general frame. They had formulated a methodology that wouldn't offend the eastern tradition; as we saw nothing changed substantially after the signing of the Union Decree, although many of those who signed it renounced their agreement, I would say even legitimately. There was no opportunism there, but there was the space the Emperor gave them to think in the context of a "what if" unity. Taking from the Sahlinian paradigm, I interpret this collation of the two complementary parts of Christendom as another instance where they will rediscover their differences. They will get together and yet stay apart to maintain a certain separation and individuality. They are part of a group. They are not the same, but they can be part of one society in unity to compete but also to impart life onto each other. In that way, I argue, the journey can function as the mechanism to recreate difference as a value of solidarity. Therefore this is my fundamental interpretation and contribution to the study of this journey. This goes beyond the parameters of historical interpretations and ethnic identity formation arguments, which I oppose, because they impoverish the sense of movement¹²³. They also perpetuate relationships of control with the dominant society, in this case the Latin world in every respect – economical, military, even culturally, as the Byzantine intellectuals themselves observe with distress in their private discussions. This "taboo" journey happens as an aspect of difference, that is to maintain and create difference which is a fundamental condition of the solidarity of society, in this case, of neighbouring societies, which initially were One. In this case, they got together and then they became different, not the other way round.

¹²³ Sahlins, "Goodbye to *Tristes Tropes*", p. 4.

VII. The Event and Its Time

*The Authority of perpetual variation in contrast to the power or despotism of the invariant.*¹²⁴

This journey is highly significant¹²⁵. It lies between a mythical beginning and a melancholic end. As beginning I take the period I have introduced and developed in the earlier part of this chapter, where the foundations of the monarchical myth, as State, are created and need to be perpetuated. A series of Oecumenical Councils¹²⁶ followed this initial transformation as a consequence of the divine element of the One God was inserted in the history of the Empire. This gathering for Union was somewhat different. Sylvester Syropoulos¹²⁷ explained it by making a distinction between the form and the substance of this re-union:

“At the end, that we convened in an oecumenical Council nobody can contradict. But in the end the Council published a non-descript decision that nobody from those present could confirm... eventually, the majority declared ignorance of its content, as it had not been read: neither among the Greeks, nor amongst the Latins, either before or after its approval.”¹²⁸

His father had turned to the West 40 years earlier and his grandfather had done the same about 70 years before him¹²⁹. He arrived in Ferrara in the spring of 1438. This highly creative initiative of the Emperor – the bricoleur¹³⁰ - takes them for a journey westwards. They start in the middle of the winter, crossing half of the Roman lake to get to Venice,¹³¹ their middle stop, and then on to

¹²⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *One Less Manifesto*, in Timothy Murray, *Mimesis, Masochism and Mime: The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, The University of Michigan Press, 1997, pp. 239-258.

¹²⁵ See in **Appendix I**, image 6 the map shows us the journey intervals between Constantinople and Italy. Part of ‘Syropoulos’ project in Univ. of Birmingham.

¹²⁶ The Seven Oecumenical Councils were: I. Nicaea (325), II. Constantinople (381), III. Ephesos (431), IV. Chalcedon (451), V. Constantinople (553), VI. Constantinople (680–81), VII. Nicaea (787).

¹²⁷ He was *Megas Ecclesiarches* and deacon of the Great Church. This was a very high patriarchal office, fifth in the hierarchy after the *chartophylax*. It is likely that he was born around 1400 and died sometime after 1453. His parents and ancestors were also employed by the Church. There are records of Syropouloi in ecclesiastical offices in Constantinople from the eleventh century onwards. It is likely that Syropoulos received an excellent education in the patriarchal school, but, somewhat surprisingly, he did not write his memoirs in a high literary style or presented the theological issues discussed at the Council in Florence-Ferrara in a very sophisticated way. He also served as *dikaiophylax*, a job that after the ninth century was conferred exclusively on churchmen by imperial appointment. We can deduce from this that he was relatively close to the Emperor but definitely close to the Patriarch. The duties of *dikaiophylax* involved cases of an ecclesiastical nature, but required knowledge of both civil and canon law, which was very important in the process of the Council. Apart from detailed descriptions of the human unofficial encounters, Syropoulos provided, vivid descriptions of natural phenomena, or monuments seen on the journey to and from Italy. His views strike me with honesty, but nevertheless we get to know his personal motivations. He is an important mediator as far as the event and the readers – then and now – are concerned. He made an unknown side of the event known and that is his key contribution.

¹²⁸ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, pp. 517–519.

¹²⁹ See **Appendix I**, image 7, for the dynasty links.

¹³⁰ The handyman who is busy contriving culture from the junk of history and anything else that comes to hand. In Edmund Leach, “The Legitimacy of Solomon: Some Structural Aspects of Old Testament History”, in *Genesis as a Myth and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, London, 1969) p.25.

¹³¹ Judith Herrin in *The Formation of Christendom*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987, 464 p., she points out as a fundamental concept of Late Antiquity that “... what the Romans called *mare nostrum*, ‘our sea’, not merely joined all parts of the empire but also united them in some way... at the time when transport by sea and river was much cheaper than by land, and when the rocks and currents of the Mediterranean had been successfully mastered, this vast inland lake encouraged direct lines of communication between its different shores. For the

mainland Italy where they stayed for two long years. They were looking for inspiration from the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when all the bishops of the Church were represented in an Oecumenical Council to debate the definition of doctrine: only a Council could decide on doctrinal matters.

“The Roman Church was unilaterally making alterations and imposing additions to formulas of the doctrine sanctified in previous Oecumenical Councils and that shocked the East... the eastern tradition couldn’t accept the administrative and disciplinary authority of Rome, believing that such powers lay with the Pentarchy of Patriarchs,¹³² of which Rome was the senior but not the supreme member.”¹³³

Edmund Leach found striking the fact that “while the whole of Christendom shares a single corpus of mythology... the members of each particular Christian sect are able to convince themselves that they alone possess the secret of revealed truth.”¹³⁴ So they left a melancholic, dying city, as Steven Runciman calls the capital of the Empire in the early years of the fifteenth century. Its population had shrunk considerably, the land across the Bosphorus was Turkish and the area of Pera, across the Golden Horn, was colonised by the Genoese. It is interesting to follow a western traveller’s narration as a first-hand witness:

“Pero Tafur in 1437, remarked in the poverty stricken population... the last Latin Emperor in his extremity, after selling most of the city’s holy relics to Saint Louis... he had stripped the lead off all the roofs and disposed of them for cash... only a few of the churches were maintained within its grounds... nearby the Hippodrome was crumbling... only Saint Sophia was still splendid, its upkeep was a special charge on the state revenues.”¹³⁵

The beginning of the fifteenth century signals the decay and continuous deterioration of the Empire, which had been reduced to a shadow of its former oecumenical glory.¹³⁶ In Constantinople, the civil wars of the fourteenth century left the City of Cities in dire straits. Once the *hierophany* happened with receiver Constantine the Great,¹³⁷ it gave birth to the concept of the sacred space and was protected by the Mother of God. By this myth it was detached from its profane surroundings and

purposes of trade, this ease of access was tremendously important.” According to Herrin, political unity was not attained through this ease of commodity trading. Communities were far from united, either with each other or with Rome.

¹³² The growth of Christianity and the Pentarchy of Patriarchates showing the two maps, **Appendix I**, images **10** and **11**.

¹³³ Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 8.

¹³⁴ Leach, p. 9.

¹³⁵ Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures, (1435-1439)*, translated and edited with an introduction by Malcom Letts (New York, London: Harper & Brothers, 1926) p. 142.

¹³⁶ **Appendix I**, image **3**, map of Byzantium fourteenth / fifteenth century.

¹³⁷ Constantine attained the imperial dignity in 306. He made himself master of the entire Roman world in 324. As the cult of relics was growing, their “migration” became possible and the creation of martyrs’ churches allowed Constantinople, which at the time of its foundation had no Christian associations, to acquire the greatest collection of relics in all Christendom with the passage of time.

became special, unique for its inhabitants, “qualitatively different”.¹³⁸ This city was the “gateway to heaven” for the Byzantines, the cosmos. Its inhabitants were the guardians of this threshold between two continents, two geographical territories, and at the same time it was a bridge to the other side of earth. But also a landmark of two pieces of land that lie across the banks of Bosphorus to point to the unknown, the “foreign”, the hinterland, the chaos. Runciman concluded:

“If there is any meaning in the concept of decadence, there are few polities in history that better deserve it than the East Christian Empire, the once great Roman Empire, during the last two centuries of its own existence... the emperor himself was poorer and feebler than most of the princes whose domains surrounded him, and he was soon to become the vassal of an infidel master. The political history of Byzantium under the Emperors of the Palaelogan dynasty is a tale of folly and misery, until at last the coup de grace of 1453 comes almost as a relief.”¹³⁹

Manuel Chrysoloras, ambassador of Manuel II Palaiologos, friend and scholar, who was teaching Greek in Florence in the early fifteenth century, wrote Prince John VIII (later Emperor) a letter from Rome in 1411. In it he compared the Old Rome, where he resided, with New Rome. The Old Rome and the New Rome resemble each other as a mother resembles her daughter. But the latter is the more beautiful of the two: being an island and a shore at the same time, it occupies this unique position in between Europe and Asia. Being the point where the North and South seas meet so that they form a common place where “oecumene” stands in front of the gates of the “ethnoi”... around her a real crown and circle of the walls comparable to the walls of Babylon...¹⁴⁰ Some of her monuments are more beautiful and splendid. He goes on to remind him of

“the tomb of the Emperor who is the founder and guardian of the city... or the statue of the Emperor who made laws (Justinian)... what of the porphyry column which is at the east end of the same street and raises a cross high in the air – the one that Constantine the Great himself set up in the court of his palace, and what surpassed all other monuments and statues?”

¹³⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. from the French by William R. Trask (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) p. 26.

¹³⁹ Steven Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) p. 1. The Wiles Lectures given at the Queen’s University, Belfast, 1968. See Constantinople in **Appendix I**, image **12**.

¹⁴⁰ From a translation, “Manuel Chrysolora Letter to Prince John VIII, Comparison of the Old with New Rome”, *Epotheia Cultural Journal*, February 1993, p. 161. He continues the encomium of Constantinople with the walls, their length and being symbols of strength and future wisdom, the infrastructure of the city, the monuments, the public buildings, the colonnaded streets, the tombs of the emperors, St. Sophia and the churches with the icons and wall paintings, the holy relics, the port, the sights, the marbles, the suburbs.

The Old-New duality, as a mother-daughter comparison, comes up again during the negotiations as to where the Council will be held, as usually the Councils were held in the East. In 1424, after John VIII had returned to Constantinople without immediate success, from his personal diplomatic journey to Venice, Sienna, Milan, he went in Hungary where he met the Latin Emperor, Sigismund. He advised him "... bear the labour as best as you can, especially as the Roman Church is the mother and the Eastern the daughter, and the daughter should come to the mother."¹⁴¹

For a long time, Byzantine and Latins were in communication, exchanging words and sumptuous gifts, with the Byzantines being particularly generous and most of the time in some kind of need. Then there were long intervals, for over forty years at one time,¹⁴² when there would be no official contact between the churches of Rome and Constantinople. In the western eyes the Orient was a land of unfathomable calmness, danger and mystery, whereas the West was one of urgency, hope and pragmatism. Oriental ostentation, cruelty and despotism were opposed to Occidental nobility and freedom. Of course, some of these qualities contradict the destruction that the movement of the Crusades of the West inflicted on the East, and on Constantinople in particular, with the widespread pillaging of its tradition and destruction of its wealth. In spite of the open hostility, or violence I would argue, the Byzantines decided to become sociable again and on a large scale. "Out of Sin came Society",¹⁴³ "because sociability is the effect of want".¹⁴⁴

"Antagonism between Latin West and Byzantine East had been present from the ninth century... Rancor between the two great branches of Christendom had been exacerbated by the destructive passage of the First and Second crusades through Byzantium... the Fourth crusade of 1204 brought the Latin conquest of Constantinople and attempted to force Greek submission to the Roman Church."¹⁴⁵

In Cyprus the Greeks were not permitted during the fourteenth century to retain their "liturgical usages... the Greeks of southern Italy, in 1284, were enjoined by Pope Martin IV to chant the Creed with the *filioque* under pain of excommunication".¹⁴⁶ Barlaam of Calabria, in 1339, a century before this Council, was sent to the papal court at Avignon to plead the cause of Union. He said to the Pope:

¹⁴¹ Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) p. 39.

¹⁴² Donald M. Nicol, *The Crusades and the Unity of Christendom* (London: Friends of Dr. Williams's Library, 1986) p. 12.

¹⁴³ Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 534.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 533.

¹⁴⁵ Charles L. Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance* (State University of New York Press, 1977) p. 203.

¹⁴⁶ Deno Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in Middle Ages and Renaissance: Studies in Ecclesiastical and Cultural History* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1966) pp. 103-104. Where *filioque* means the Procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father AND the Son; whereas Basil writes "The Principle of all things is one which creates through the Son and perfects in the Spirit", in John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1983) p. 169.

“That which separates the Greeks from you is not so much a difference in dogma as the hatred of the Greeks for the Latins provoked by the wrongs they have suffered... there is only one effective means to bring about union: through the convocation of a general council to be held in the East...”¹⁴⁷

Then, the fear of Latinisation was strong, they could not erase from their memories the experiences of 57 years of Latin occupation in Constantinople and the continuing western domination of their islands and other Byzantine area. Testimony of the deep resentment towards the Latin conquerors is provided by a canon of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), according to which the Greeks were accustomed to “purifying their altars following each use by the Latins, and to re-baptise their children after performance of the Latin rite”.¹⁴⁸ In a poem, which came as an immediate reaction to the crusading armies around 1147, and addressed to the Emperor Manuel Comnenos as if from the City of Constantinople, we read that the City congratulates him “because the wild beasts, the Crusaders, have fled, terrified by her new teeth and revitalised appearance”.¹⁴⁹

In this context, John VIII Palaiologos attempted what seemed to be impossible. The Event of 1438–1439 is presented as a micro-history within a macro-history, the repeated struggle for the Union of Christendom,¹⁵⁰ and more specifically as “l’union des eglises romaine et grecque”.¹⁵¹ That is transformed into one of the most heroic chapters in the history of the Union of the Churches. I will discuss the heroic aspect of the story in a subsequent chapter, but for the moment it is noteworthy to mention the proclamation of Patriarch Joseph II; “we depart but we shall win and we shall return covered with trophies”.¹⁵² And while he was trying to convince and excite some metropolitans and other imperial administrators, who were even afraid for their lives, in their preparatory discussions he announced before they travelled to Italy:

“... we would be returning glorious after having preached, thanks to God’s blessing, with a vengeance the real doctrine, and after having fortified our Church without having in any way shaken its Truth. Would they have recourse to violence? We wouldn’t in any way deviate from our ancestral faith, even if they were torturing us... either we will die as

¹⁴⁷ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁸ Geanakoplos, pp. 103–104.

¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth Jeffreys and Michael Jeffreys, “The ‘Wild Beast from the West’: Immediate Literary Reactions in Byzantium to the Second Crusade”, in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001) p. 103.

¹⁵⁰ “La union de l’Eglise grec que vieux refrain qui dure depuis 300 ans et qui chaque annee recommence” told the senior cardinal, Cesarini, to the Pope, Eugene IV, just a few days before the Council of 1438 started; in Noel Valois, *Le Pape et le Concile*, I (Paris: Picard, 1909) p. 137.

¹⁵¹ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 13.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p. 187.

martyrs or we will become ones because we want it! Nothing could be better for me than to be like Saint George or Saint Demetrius.”¹⁵³

The Latin side wasn't prepared to give away much either; they were rather ready to demean and humiliate the Byzantine delegation. The whole concept of Union seemed to be doomed, a “non unio facta sed ficta”,¹⁵⁴ “une paix pour rire et une union de comedie”,¹⁵⁵ Another author on the event of the Council in Florence, wrote that it was a “vera historia unionis non verae...”¹⁵⁶ In vain, the signed agreement of 6 July 1439,¹⁵⁷ accentuated the civil strife at a time that unity was vital, turned Serbia and Russia against Byzantium, considering it a traitor state, and a deep hatred and division among the people followed. Although the eastern Byzantine Empire formed a protective virtual wall in the Aegean Sea for the well-spread Italian trade routes,¹⁵⁸ and created a bastion against encroaching Islam, the expected substantial support of the West never materialised. It is interesting to note that on the eve of the 29 May 1453, when Mohamet II conquered Constantinople, Byzantines and Latins held the last liturgy together in St. Sophia and fought next to each other to the end.

As a conclusion, it is necessary to underline the intensity: first of all of the dualistic antagonisms we find in the history of religious-philosophical ideas about the relationship of the spiritual with the human. This intensity also applies to the cultural structure or the configurations upon which the Christian tradition is founded. In part two, along with relevant theoretical notions, I will develop how these antagonisms reflect the conflicts and contradictions we find in other schemes of thought throughout Christian history, with the Oecumenical Councils as evidence of this impossibility; of the futility of the task, that the dual (nature of Christ) or even the trio (adding the Holy Spirit), can bring to the One (God). Is the archetypal hierarchical model that is provided in Genesis, that is embedded in the structure of the newly founded Christian Roman State, and eventually in the endless debates over the definition of the relations in God the One, an embodiment of the Dumontian notion of “encompassing of the contrary”? If so, what does this explain in the dialectic of encompassment – the figure of hierarchic diarchy? Is the whole project of *oecumenicity* after all really futile? It withers away in any case, as waves of conquests come near the Empire and new communities are formed. Is unity possible within the grand scheme of an Empire? And what can the last oecumenical gathering teach us about unity in disunity? How is the culture of this time

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 187.

¹⁵⁴ Lawrence of Chios about the Union of Florence, *De expugnatione Constantinopolis*, Patrologia Graeca (PG from now on), t. 159, c. 927 (Paris: Migne, since 1857). “This was not an act of union but on the contrary a fictitious case”. Translation from Latin here is mine.

¹⁵⁵ George Pachymeres, *De Michael Paleologus*, VI, 14-16, PG, t. 143, c. 914.

¹⁵⁶ R. Greyghton, *Vera historia unionis non verae*, Hagae Comitit, 1660. “A history of the union, speaking of the truth without being truthful”. Translation from Latin here is mine.

¹⁵⁷ **Appendix I**, image 4: the signed document from the Vatican library.

¹⁵⁸ **Appendix I**, image 5: Italian trade routes

embedded in a coherent whole? And where does the fission come from? In the next session, I engage with the element of fission.

VIII. The Notion of Schismogenesis

A very important note Louis Dumont made in an essay about the individual in the Christian tradition that shapes the core of my thesis is that

“the dogma of incarnation, developed since the fifth century... had rendered the divine visible in a human body. During the iconoclastic struggle this led to the further idea that a unity of the sacred and the material, of the otherworldly and the this-worldly, may also occur elsewhere, and particularly in the icon itself. On the basis of Aristotle’s distinction between matter and form Theodore Studites taught that in the authentic image (icon) we have the real Christ or a real Saint – only the matter is different.”¹⁵⁹

Dumont has ventured the idea that the core of Christianity itself lies in the assertion of an effective transition between the outwardly and the inwardly, in the incarnation of value.¹⁶⁰

The word schismo-genesis itself is a compound comprising two Greek words. The one denotes a rupture and the other the birth, coming out of this rupture. Very rightly, Sahlins points out that Bateson’s article entitled “Cultural Contact and Schismogenesis”, is a discussion of complementary differences, which presuppose intercultural relationships usually between people who live close to each other. They live close because they may compete, but they also exchange, according to the expertise they each have perfected. Usually oppositions do get reified and rigid, and hard to break through. The exchanges and complementarities are lost sight of and often all that is left to see are the dual oppositions.

What we have here is very important in understanding the impossibility of the Councils and the recurring augmentation of the differences, which resulted in more schisms. It is a fundamental flaw that the theological issues that lie behind the Oecumenical Councils presented all with a schismogenic dynamic at the core of the debate. Bateson discussed patterns of increased rivalry and the case of symmetrical, complementary schismogenesis or phenomena of increasing differentiation. He

¹⁵⁹ Andreas Buss, “The Individual in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition”, *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, No. 91, 1995, p. 60, footnote 18. This line comes from Adolf Von Harnack 1991, p. 275.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 60, footnote 18.

considered the processes in which these types of behaviours arise between groups and where each party reacts to the reactions of the other. We can advance towards more differentiation, or the inverse process, when change occurs and some outside factor is bound to precipitate the final collapse. Cultural encounters set the arena for action. The schismogenesis effect, which Bateson so efficiently explained, did work, but there were no two distinct structured cultures as such. The main question is: what kind of process realises a schism when the whole is present and can remain strong for centuries? Bateson provides us with different possibilities when it comes to culture contacts between groups. I would say that even within the same group we find symmetrical differentiations (where patterns of behaviours and aspirations are the same, but the orientation of these patterns are different). And, very useful for this study, relations of complementary differentiation occur, where behaviours and aspirations of the members of the two groups are fundamentally different.¹⁶¹ Sahlins developed this notion of fissions further, where the initial division (at the core of the structure) "... progressively transforms the disputing parties into 'structural antitypes', with each side polemically presenting itself as 'the inverse of the other',"¹⁶² "... transforming gradually the initial basic unity into a polarizing conflict".¹⁶³ The Oecumenical Councils turned from unity systems to a body that recognised "all forms of plurality by negating them". At the time of the early fifteenth century we see two parts of Christianity that are at the opposing poles of duality gather together. Emperor John VIII and the Patriarch Joseph make every effort to be considered opposite but equal to the Latins. There are the myths of the old that the Emperor draws from to lead the way. In this context, the Venetians can be considered complementary others to the Byzantines. I discuss this notion in Chapter 6. The Venetians and the Byzantines show a deep, complete contradiction between them. They interact as equal and opposite at the same time. But their history is determined by an aggression. The symbolic process of the journey, as a ritual process, at the point when they reach Venice, shows how "the ritual occasion can be an exhibition of values that relate the two communities as a whole, as a homogenous, unstructured unity that transcends its differentiations and contradictions".¹⁶⁴ The paradox in this dualism, between structure and communities realised as process, instead of a timeless entity, is striking.

¹⁶¹ Gregory Bateson, "Culture Contact and Schismogenesis", *Man*, Vol. 35. December 1935, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, pp. 178-183, p. 181.

¹⁶² Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides*, p. 69.

¹⁶³ Joseph Bryant, "Schism as Identity Transformation in Early Christianity: Sociological Observations on a Most Consequential Intra-Faith Rupture", University of Toronto, *Athens Dialogues*, E-journal, 2010, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick and London: Aldine Transaction, 2008) p. 92.

IX. Epilogue

As a final note to this introductory chapter, I turn the spotlight towards the dialectics between the interpretations in Chapters 5 and 6. I understand the transformations that I see in the art of the time as a tension through which beauty is visible. This is highly appealing to a researcher like me, because this beauty is revealed through structural transformation as order. The East and West parts become as a whole in the forms that are revealed in the aesthetics of the time. They display most strikingly the dialectics between a figure like Bessarion, who takes part in the transformations as an active member of “this world” and the Emperor whose “mythological existence” was celebrated then and reaches us today more meaningful than ever. This is the form we have inherited and these “relationalities” manifest themselves to this day. Through art things are revealed and concealed at the same time, which is why the research entailed a thorough exploration of the meaning and ideas encapsulated in the artworks.

Chapter Two: Aims and Method

*I ordered my servant to bring my horse from the stables. He did not understand me. I went out to the stables myself, saddled my horse and mounted it. Somewhere far away I heard a trumpet. I asked him what it meant. He knew nothing and had heard nothing. At the gate, he halted me and asked: "Where does the master ride to? – I don't know" I answered, "but out of here, only out of here. Out of here, nothing else, only thus can I reach my goal." "So you know your goal?" He asked. "Yes", I answered, "I have just told you. Out of here – that is my goal."*¹⁶⁵

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the Earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light", and there was light. God saw the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day", and the darkness he called "night". And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day. And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water" ... God called the expanse "sky" ...*¹⁶⁶

*You have to pick your place to stand, and work by the light of informed intellect, before you can judge whether social institutions or indeed whole societies are accreting meaning or leaking it away.*¹⁶⁷

I. Why anthropology? Or how to make sense in the chaos: a reflection on why and how one knows

In the previous chapter, I tried to build a structure, albeit an open-ended though not porous one. My aim was to solidly point out that my thinking is different than many others' about the same historical events, a vast intellectual heritage, and individuals that marked the crossroads of European civilisation. In my endeavour I interweave logical elements of all the relevant hierarchies,

¹⁶⁵ Franz Kafka, "Der Aufbruch (The Departure)", *Franz Kafka, Saemtlche Erzählungen* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Fischer, 1970 1922) p. 376.

¹⁶⁶ Genesis, 1:1 to 1:8, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version (Suffolk, Hodder & Stoughton, 1984) p. 3. Please pay attention here, this is the only book quoted anywhere without an Author, or an Editor, and this is considered perfectly acceptable. The *Economist* tends to sell articles without authorships and I always thought that is weird, especially among humans with names to account for their writings.

¹⁶⁷ Hilary Mantel, "Naipaul's Book of the World", *New York Review of Books*, October 2002, p. 10.

“each part crafted to sustain the whole”.¹⁶⁸ In dogmatic discussions everyone thinks they comprehend the right way, but it is actually the parts that make up the whole (of Christendom with all the different interpretations within it) and the understanding of their individual function that matters. In Syropoulos’s *Memoires*, John VIII Palaiologos is presented as the main protagonist of a drama that unfolds against a background based on the structures of centuries. In this sense, his reason is constituted, and relationships are revealed by the structures. He acted as a singularity. He was an Emperor after all, the Byzantine Emperor. However, as this thesis shows, the uniqueness of the Event that is our focus is the fact that it raised the potential for future moves among his retinue and beyond, which were unprecedented, unexpected even. Everything I look at – products of human activity, texts, and artefacts – comprises truly, as Victor Turner calls it, energies “at the moment of their exhaustion”.¹⁶⁹ But, in a sense, they creep into the next stage of European civilisation, where we see them in full activity and effect. This is a point in the life of the Empire when “death prevails over life; entropy increases and available energy diminishes”.¹⁷⁰ But then, “... this closed system the ‘universe’ of human culture”¹⁷¹ remains the only way forward and only way out. The Event works as a link – as a move of the past with the future. It generated intellectual activity in the form of writings and paintings and further action as for unity, for change, that no other Council had managed in the past. My work with images is not of a representational, metonymical nature; it is a voyage with the actors and an exploration of meaning and the ways meaning can be created in the process of the *longue durée* and the process of an Event. And that is one of the challenges that the Emperor created for himself and his people. No matter his authority, he could not exercise total control over the narratives, either written or pictorial ones, that were created during and after this journey. In this sense, he gave them a voice. In other words, the reality of the experience could be called “the end of innocence”, but as a process it started a long time in the past and as a human story it continued well after the event. This is the “openness” of the Event I mean. Its full effects can be researched and thought through and explained, but it will still be “exposed” to more resolutions, more considerations. Such is its richness for the anthropologist, and beyond. This is also the value of this extraordinary period, as the main actors negotiate their ways forward, sometimes in an agonising mode.

As a response, my mode of writing has throughout been interdisciplinary. The analysis of the Event required crossing disciplines to allow re-interpretation to occur, drawing on old findings and turning them to new exegesis. But the theories and method were tried after the material was known, and not before, to avoid directing the data. Research, in this context, meant “indirect” study, many times in

¹⁶⁸ Victor Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology As Experience* (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1985) p. 206.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 208. See the description of the dire straits of the Empire in Chapter 1.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 209.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 209.

areas seemingly unnecessary, but which in the course of writing became indispensable. I didn't build on existing foundations, the characters guided me; I went after them as they were directing me. Unorthodox as it may seem, I did not have a hypothesis to try and prove, but I rather worked on the collection and study of data before I understood how it was theoretically possible to combine and understand this data. With the Event, John VIII, the Emperor of the last dynasty in Byzantium, on the one hand allowed the reconnaissance of different civilisations. On the other hand, given the complexity of structures and the time scale I looked at, I brought in different minds from diverse arenas of thought or disciplines, as collaborators, which made the power that the Event generated shine through. The Emperor responded to a crisis of inter-culturality, which is much more important than the military help he allegedly went over to Italy to secure. The nature of events I studied was by no means linear. Many histories I read presented social and historical phenomena as linear. I would say Ostrogorsky's take is one like that, even though his is a remarkable take. I could see the thread, and I understood what the logic of continuity meant, but the causes and effects were as diverse and interrelated as one could get. I could see how the one civilisation of Christendom, that Constantine I created by inversion in the fourth century, broke into parts, while lingering, like a "resident" Byzantine in each other's life throughout time. This condition "of inhabiting each other's cultures",¹⁷² to borrow an expression from Marilyn Strathern, was made visible by John VIII's daring decision, in times of high uncertainty. In that way he opened up an already extremely "hot" situation to unforeseen effects, while the livelihood of this Empire at the beginning of fifteenth century was under threat. Living in a time of a "series of crises", even though the unpredictability of events was not a hindrance for the Emperor, whereas his father was afraid and warned against. The remnants of the Byzantine Empire were apparent and seemed sad in comparison to the old imperial times. But those residues were like fingerprints, like a DNA sample, at the same time demarcating the significance that it was necessary to survive at all costs when a catastrophe approached. They were the imprints of what was the Empire about throughout its existence, and in this geographically limited micro-empire, we can find the deposits of the whole civilisation. Which shows us that ideas and beliefs can be more important indicators of survival and continuation than physical remnants and soil. Christianity in Constantinople coexisted with the diversity that time had deposited in the city: the Latin quarters and the Muslim tombs; Hellenism in Mystra in the Peloponnese along with magnificent Byzantine churches that survive to this day; and the Empire of Trebizond, which, although an independent kingdom, fell to the Ottomans in 1468 while upholding Byzantinism. Which, in my view, was also very much about creating bridges between cultures, in this sense relations with the Oriental Georgians are recorded too.

¹⁷² Marilyn Strathern uses this expression discussing disciplines, rather than particular societies or groups in *Commons and Borderlands, Working Papers on Interdisciplinarity, Accountability and the Flow of Knowledge* (Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2004) p. 1.

In this process of revisiting in reinterpreting, the sources have been used as one sequence of writings. The so-called secondary one are on a par with the primary sources, because often they include very valuable primary source translations. Syropoulos presents us with an extended case history. He was an eye-witness of the Event but then he chose to write about it a few years after; “a chronicle of culturally-stressed past events”. In a sense, in this Event of 1438–1439 in the life of John VIII, the concrete structure (the facts of the past) are married with the genuine process of historical development (which is again part of the past, with the initiatives taken in response to it). What is different here is the interpretation of the meaning of this Event as a response and a possible solution for the future: the “as if” state. The important point is exactly that: not whether the Patriarch and the Emperor were increasingly more unionist in the negotiations before they left Constantinople, but the very fact that both accounts exist in the same writings, even in the same book. The most important accounts are found in the *Acta*¹⁷³ and the *Memoires*; the *Memoires* show that the author is more interested in the micro-histories of the big Event, rather than the minutiae of the deliberations, which are the main theme and interest in the *Acta*. Nevertheless, considering these deliberations it is important to note that the Emperor appeared to be interested in a wider unity, where both parts – unionists and anti-unionists – of his entourage, would agree, hopefully voluntarily.¹⁷⁴ We can discern this notion in *Memoires* as well. The crux of the matter is that, in order to understand this process, its people, and their activities, which are often contradictory and unbelievable, my approach has been to contextualise through a blend of anthropological analytical tools that have been most illuminating. In this chapter, I discuss my position to understand and complete this study.

A final point to make is that it is my understanding that texts are not sacred, but hold a lot of the information that is necessary to engage with when one looks so far back in time. To counter the seeming monopoly of texts, the views of those who “... write, authorise and legitimise history”¹⁷⁵ I do not settle for one interpretation. Instead I researched as many as I could have access to – eye-witness accounts as much as secondary historians’ material and artworks, both from the time and contemporary statements, both about the past and the now. I worked through juxtapositions and contradictions to provoke fresh analyses. While doing this study, I attended primarily and consciously to ambiguities, structural tensions, contradictions, and processes of transformation and inversion as a matter of approach. I would like to mention James Weiner’s idea of *historicity* here, which he differentiates from classical *historiography* or *historiality*, which according to him is “a

¹⁷³ See more about the *Acta* and the *Memoires* under the *Data Corpus* section further in this chapter.

¹⁷⁴ According to Gill, the *Acta* record that when the Emperor lost heart, the leading unionists threatened to unite without him, p. 145.

¹⁷⁵ James F. Weiner, “Anthropologists, Historians and the Secret of Social Knowledge”, *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 11, No. 5, October 1995, p. 5

western fetishizing of the document and documentary evidence”.¹⁷⁶ In the manner of *historicity*, he describes

“a dialectically related construction, ‘a re-construction I would say in this case’, which is related to all those forces and influences which escape our constructionist efforts but which nevertheless impinge upon our perception and motivation.”¹⁷⁷

It is this mental *trespassing*, between the “written” by many intelligent historians, contemporary to the Event and not, and the result of an intense dialectical relation of forces and connections that the events expose. I dare to bring this combination analysis in this work.

When I started the study of John VIII’s journey I realised that this was not a single event of this kind. In order to understand it I had to trace the story of the other Councils and find out what kind of journeys were involved and why they came to occur at all. I also understood that I had the unique privilege to compare and contrast, to identify frictions, differences and similarities, much easier through the centuries, than the early fifteenth-century personalities. I had access to much more knowledge recorded and revealed to me. I had the chance to discuss the whole concept of Councils in its entirety, its context, as a whole, with all the parts were spread out in front of me. The contemporaries to the Event in the early fifteenth century were in a much less privileged position while they were “suffering” history. The theory of Marshall Sahlins, “the whole is made of the parts”, resonated with what I was setting out to do. And even while working on the Event, as an author-researcher, I could pick up the pieces of cultural knowledge, the observations that each group and individual had made to come up with an analysis that went beyond the cultural moment of the Event of 1438–1439, and resonated with the past as well as with the future. I figured out that connection to the future as late as in the year of final submission. Therefore, the events of Councils that were concerned with the unity of Christendom, echoed through to the year 2014 with more unity re-unions between eastern and western Christianity, an event that in 2014 served as a symbol of long-term rupture, but continuous effort towards a unity of parts. In this sense, as Weiner underlined, “The question again, is thus not one of recentness or antiquity of a belief as a measure of its ‘authenticity’ or ‘truth content’, but of the political conditions and motivations for its evocation.”¹⁷⁸ Through this process we understand that no single part owns the total myth, the complete story, as the routes civilisations follow can divert along the way, so that when they meet

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 6.

again the parts can come up with different marks of the original story. An event, then, is a social affair, in which communication, interaction, even friction is inevitable.

“The point of social communication would then be to release the evidence of knowledge in a controlled and allusive way, to show the proof that it exists rather than the knowledge itself: that is, to demonstrate the social implications of the revealed disparities between sites and possessors of knowledge.”¹⁷⁹

As social communication continues, we see how in 2014 we have a revival of unity among the main parts of Christianity, in line with the method and philosophy of anthropological analysis, that in so far as we can “... concede that something as open-ended and ongoing as ‘social life’ is ever complete, or ever comes to an end, only admit that it does so in the form of the system or theory one devises to describe or model it.”¹⁸⁰ This idea, “of something not set in stone”, I develop further in this chapter in section IIC.

In this context, I argue that John VIII’s motivation for the political decision to undertake this journey was in essence advocacy for the possibility of continuation of a cultural life that related to a large extent to the religious belief inherited and practised for eleven centuries as the official state religion. At the same time, he was comfortable with the possibility of transformation, where and with the individuals that could make that possible. This double, innovative strategy of his, rested on the basic premise of the ongoing invention that is social, political and historical life. That means that, “from a strictly historical perspective all beliefs are ‘recent’ at one stage”.¹⁸¹ And I think that the following comment is very true in connection to this specific Event and its history:

“the enduring and stable in what we call culture and religion is always negotiated and made visible through the contingent and mutable conventions of the present; to the extent that there is never any perfect instauration of law or convention, then every conventional act or belief is, as Roy Wagner maintains, innovative, or ‘new’ or ‘fabricated’.”¹⁸²

John VIII’s decision to move to Italy for about two years, seemingly for the purposes of the Council, is very much like the hunter’s path in the forest, a path that John knew very well, having taken it many times as the keen hunter he was. John VIII Palaiologos was purposefully in search for

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 6

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 6

something, "... of *materiel* or sustenance".¹⁸³ He could very well be on the right track and find the prey he was looking for, or he could have been mistaken, he could have been on the wrong track, a *Holzweg* (a word with antithetical meanings, a fire break or the wrong track).¹⁸⁴ In line with this thought, John VIII realised the journey without having a final destination in mind; as in the forest, as a hunter, the result would have been obvious after the journey was completed. That is why there is no ground for an obvious reasoning behind the decision, "these are paths... for which such a destination can only be supplied after the journey is over... it was a way to demonstrate that a way to getting there, a way of asking questions, is as important as a plan for anticipating answers".¹⁸⁵ That is why it would be simplistic, superficial, too obvious, to assume that he was meant to search for military help in exchange for unity in faith. It was an "open" journey with multiple "entrances" and "exits". That is, the movement of himself and his entourage could have given out any combination of results that he wouldn't be able to anticipate. These new relationships could have been Heidegger's so-called "unintended consequences of intention".¹⁸⁶

On the one hand, studying different societies, even if these are far back in time, makes you "change your system of reference, and that involves somewhat painful mental gymnastics which can only be learnt from experience in the field".¹⁸⁷ My fieldwork was in history; being detached and objective, abandoning the references and values of the societies I have lived in, was a conscious part of my mental gymnastics. It was physically exhausting, as the research ranged across long stretches of time, but, there is certainly some sense in Levi-Strauss's suggestion for taking up anthropology by those with some "difficulty in adapting ourselves to the social milieu into which we were born".¹⁸⁸ That presumably gives us the reason for going away, even if this involves a mental flight back in time. In this effort, it is true also that one does shed the known system of references so that they themselves can be set next to the one under scrutiny. And that is an advantage when doing anthropology. I have to say that, in this quest, it was particularly attractive to look for and think about the similarities among people, as opposed to differences, as other disciplines do. The world is made up of similarities, although this is not immediately visible: from this point of view, opposition is complementary rather than a total division for life. I need to add here that I have always been interested in theory, in the abstractions, the metaphors, and intrigued by the contradictions of everyday life, in current affairs, even before conducting fieldwork.

¹⁸³ James F. Weiner, *Tree Leaf Talk: A Heideggerian Anthropology* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), p. xi. In the dictionary, *sustenance* is interpreted as 'means of maintenance', as 'livelihood'.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ G. Charbonnier, *Conversation with Claude Levi-Strauss*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) p. 18.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

I had read a lot on ethnography (related to history, and history of art in this case) even before I knew anthropology. When I was initiated in anthropology several years ago, I realised that its theories could eventually release meaning and communicate, in the richest possible way, the complexity that I was investigating. It could help bring to the fore the systems of relations between seemingly different cultures that were so widespread and familiar but that still seemed unintelligible. It was the real thing, moving between the abstractions and making sense of them. Of course, the scope and the range of the material changed along these new analytical lines. That is why the thesis you read here was essentially written in the last two and a half years. I am very happy with how anthropology made me think differently. I don't want to identify as an anthropologist now, but I hope my work contributes to the grand project of anthropology in offering a view from a field far back in time and vice versa, of course. I hope that the historians and art historians of art (being neither one myself by training either) can accept a project such as this, in which understanding comes from taking a social science point of view by using their authorities as secondary source data, in addition to the primary sources material. Differentiating between ethnography, ethnology and anthropology, what I tried to do as anthropology, as Philippe Descola said in 1992,

“... is a project more than a science – (it) takes up the old project of philosophical anthropology of making sense of general problems of social life such as cultural variability etc... Anthropology is rare. There are few people – and Levi-Strauss is one of them – who do real anthropology in that sense.”¹⁸⁹

I think this insight put things into perspective.

At another level, I thought to start this section with the notion of the archetypal determination of making sense from chaos. Anthropology again has an advantage here. Through an anthropological lens, God appears to be the quintessential “structuralist”. In Genesis, we have the most developed system of dualities, binary oppositions such as earth and heaven, light and darkness, day and night, water and land, man and woman, and so on. There was nothing before relations were built as logical connections to form The One Model. One could think that this can account “for the difference between specific sets of social relations in different societies”.¹⁹⁰ As we see in Genesis, from this starting point,¹⁹¹ springs to mind the following insight, which I find useful; the “number Two being

¹⁸⁹ John Knight and Laura Rival, “An Interview With Philippe Descola”, *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 8, No 2, April 1992, p. 9.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 11. I will have to mention here again Philippe Descola and connect his insight to the above: “The idea which was very strong in Marx, was that you can't study the genesis without studying beforehand the structure which is the result of the genesis.” In his view history must start from the present, this is the way according to him anthropologists conceive history.

itself representative of all forms of *plurality* as opposed to unity. Two represents the Many as opposed to the One, as derived from it, or as fused with it again”.¹⁹² In the symbolic idiom of the ritual of structuralist analysis, one can “emphasize the aspect of opposition and complementarity”.¹⁹³ This theoretical awareness I find particularly enlightening in the environment of cultures and how they are socialised. The only difference is that my story starts in the past, so I am looking at the present of fifteenth-century people and how they redefine their present in relation to the future by rewriting their past. So once I know where these people are, I go on to study the genesis of the structures they live within and with and their interrelations. In this sense, I do start from the past going forward. But the people lead the way, not me, because I realised that there was no other way to understand their structures in relation to the present. And they, the fifteenth-century participants of culture and societies, do that with a view to the future. Sometimes this is clearly visible and at other times more obscure. One had to tease the meanings out of the systems. In a way, you see these societies are isolated as well, like the ones in Amazonia. They have remained as far in the past with no one having access to them but through their texts and images. Their present is as “dusty” as the archives in the basement of the libraries. But the idea is not to collect data for the sake of it, but to contribute analytically by studying everything that could be meaningful in as open a way as possible. This is why in each of the four main chapters in this thesis I used a different approach from anthropology, because each one of them was able to illuminate a particular aspect of this civilisation. As described in the previous chapter, my guiding questions in the process were: What were these people about? Who set off for a journey in the middle of the winter to Italy? How did they understand transcendence, love, hate, respect? How did they express grief? And so on.

In this environment, the work of Marshall Sahlins constitutes an invaluable aid throughout. Sahlins brought history back to the heart of anthropology, and he appreciated the value of the event analytically. He underlined the validity and relationship between the “mythical” and the “factual”. His work was liberating. He criticised the shortcomings of many discourses and epistemologies on this matter, including the American anthropology of the early twentieth century. That is because, he explains, “the cultures they took to be singular and distinct were involved in relations of alterity as a condition of their internal consistency, their status as some sort of unity, and their identity.”¹⁹⁴ Then, he adds Levi-Strauss’s phrase from *Race and History*, for what he calls a seminal idea on the diversity of cultures which, “is less a function of the isolation of groups than the relationships which

¹⁹² Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 49.

¹⁹³ Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush*, pp. 49–50.

¹⁹⁴ Marshall Sahlins, “The Whole is a Part: Intercultural Politics of Order and Change”, in *Experiments in Holism: Theory and practice in Contemporary Anthropology*, ed. by Ton Otto and Nils Bubandt (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) p. 103.

unite them”.¹⁹⁵ The key idea that I want to focus on, was conceived and applied in structural studies by Levi-Strauss, while Sahlins has also worked with it. They both understood the meaning of “cultural contact”, not as a diffusion, nor domination or acculturation, not even as syncretism (hybridity), which is a favourite term of many Byzantinists. On the contrary, cultural contact

“is based on the principle that the cultural difference of interacting peoples, were dialectically related. Each would be itself by not being the other, that is, by exploiting the possibilities of opposing, transforming, and/or transcending the order presented by neighbouring peoples.”¹⁹⁶

“For Levi-Strauss, it is ‘dialectic’, a basic characteristic of the human mind which expresses itself in verbal classifications, in the structure of myth, in varieties of marriage regulation.”¹⁹⁷ This takes us to the deep meaning of cultural differences, which is so vividly illustrated as

“... analogous to the differences between the individual pieces in Bach’s 30 *Goldberg variations*: they are played in sequence one after another and there is a sense in which the last is an evolutionary development from the first, but the later variations are neither superior nor inferior to the earlier ones and the elimination of any one would reduce the merit of all.”¹⁹⁸

Not being a traditional historian myself, for me reading about history of the Middle Ages revealed itself from the beginning as chaos discernible. To decipher this, the complete determination needed seemed a little bit like magic.

“Scientists do tolerate uncertainty and frustration, because they must. The one thing that they do not and must not tolerate is disorder. The whole aim of theoretical science is to carry to the highest possible and conscious degree the perceptual reduction of chaos...”¹⁹⁹

God, a great “scientist” himself, with exquisite linguistic and artistic tools, “... formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a

¹⁹⁵ Sahlins, “The Whole is a Part: Intercultural Politics of Order and Change”, p. 103. It is worthwhile to add here Sahlins’s note on the difference of the young with the mature Levi-Strauss, “involving a move from the closed, synchronic, Saussurean-like system of a given culture, where *tout se tient*, to an open, transcultural, and dynamic sense of ‘structure’ as an indefinite set of transformations”, in footnote 2, p. 121.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 103.

¹⁹⁷ Edmund Leach, “Claude Levi-Strauss: Anthropologist and Philosopher”, *New Left Review*, No. 34 (1965), pp. 12–37, p. 18.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁹ Levi-Strauss, p. 9.

living being.”²⁰⁰ In this moment he externalised the “I”, and made himself known through the mirror of his six days’ work: “God blessed the seventh day and made it holy...”²⁰¹ Everything now was in its place, so the thinking goes, precision of thought, precision of place,

“All sacred things must have their place... being in their place makes them sacred for if they were taken out of their place, even in thought, the entire order of the universe would be destroyed. Sacred objects therefore contribute to the maintenance of order in the universe by occupying places allocated to them.”²⁰²

In this context the ritual might be seen to be an adjustment, in line with Levi-Strauss’s explication, or “the concern to assign every single creature, object or feature to a place within a class.”²⁰³ From then on arrangements are in place for the faithful Christian, and all socially relevant causes can emanate from them. In the case of history writing, there is a threshold at which a writer has to employ a criterion of what might be possible and what not; “... what could happen from what could not”.²⁰⁴ Where that threshold lies can vary from writer to writer.

In a chaotic situation, especially when supernatural abilities are not close at hand, one needs to turn to fresh solutions. Working with dynamic structural analysis or transformational analysis, methods anthropologists have used for many decades, helps as an approach to mapping rules. These methods shift empirical diversity to cognitive manageability.²⁰⁵ Absorbing empirical or historical data in the context of the Byzantine Empire was an overwhelming enterprise; micro-histories of the events – the synchrony – are interwoven with the macro-history of eleven centuries of a tightly hierarchical Empire based on the imperial order – the diachrony. In this context, critical reading of historical data was necessary. I worked through a mass of detail, where I had to exercise my own independent judgement on the basis of the needs of my work, and acquire a strict selective attitude towards the primary witnesses of what matters and what could be left aside. The same applied to secondary authorities, who in their turn “teased” the sources for translated accounts. This strategy made it possible to tackle a “hot” society that in the early fifteenth century was under extreme stress. My aim in all this is twofold: to show the depth of the mental processes at work in the construction of a ritual and mythology at the period I am engaging with, and to discuss transformations and culturally defined mediators in connection to cultural change as it happens to face the emergency. Would

²⁰⁰ Genesis, 2:7, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version (Suffolk: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984) p. 4.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 2:3. A fine example of “The rigorous precision of... ritual practices as an expression of the unconscious apprehension of the *truth of determinism*”.

²⁰² Levi-Strauss, p. 10.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 10.

²⁰⁴ R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of History And Other Writings in Philosophy of History*, edited with an introduction by W.H. Dray, and W. J. Van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 146.

²⁰⁵ Pierre Maranda, “Structuralism in Cultural Anthropology”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 1, 1972, pp. 329–348, p. 343.

these endeavours fail? There is no definite answer to this question, it seems. But in my view, it was a great conception that bears fruit in the context of this thesis.

“The very mobilisation of all the semantic resources also triggers all transformation processes available in the semantic repertoire, and the society in question lays bare its most fundamental mechanisms. Similarly, when the world is to be ordered, all resources are grouped and put at the disposal of a versatile hero.”²⁰⁶

I believe John VIII Palaiologos presents us with a model of versatility.

Contradictions sprung from the above. The distinction between schismatic versus unitary behaviours could only be understood fully through the prism of specific theories and analytical notions. These include Gregory Bateson’s “schismogenesis”, Victor Turner’s “duality”, and Marshall Sahlins’s “alterity”. Transformations do not have definite oppositions, but leave space for complementarities in individuals and even in larger movements. They couldn’t have been better understood than in the environment of anthropology.

Bearing all of the above in mind in the process of analysis, I want to emphasise that my main inspirational source, and to a great extent a guiding force in this intellectual endeavour – in addition to the philosophical nature of Levi-Strauss’s work – is Marshall Sahlins’s thinking. He is renowned for his boldness in synthesising, in a novel way, his anthropological background in structures with history, and for his belief in the role of agency in the making of history. Culture is a concept that Sahlins examines meticulously and through several disciplines.²⁰⁷ Philosophical ideas or the long span of social thoughts are not foreign to him. His analysis of structures has been influential and his insights are as provocative as they are enlightening. Other inspirational sources include Edmund Leach, who, from a different point of view has connected myths and histories. Levi-Strauss’s intellectual-theoretical itinerary takes us into philosophical questions: to the reasons why societies exist – their *raison d’être* – and change, why and how structures collapse and disappear and others take their place.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 342–343.

²⁰⁷ “Culture, or civilisation... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities of man as a member of society... because man must learn in order to survive he is more dependent upon his seniors than are creatures with a more elaborate instinctive apparatus; (but) this lack of dependence upon instinct provides man with an unparalleled adaptability to circumstance. But while man is dependent upon culture, culture is dependent upon man. Culture can survive only where one human generation can transmit its accumulated knowledge to the next”. In Edmund Leach, “Culture and Social Cohesion: An Anthropologist’s View”, *Daedalus*, Vol. 94, No. 1, Winter 1965, pp. 24–25. The definition of culture comes from Tylor in the opening paragraph of his *Primitive Culture* (1871).

An element that has to be underlined in the overall project is the use of theory, or rather theories, from anthropology as frameworks through which to understand, to delve deeper, to get a holistic view of different aspects of the same event and the characters involved in it. This creates a more complex interweaving of multiple histories. It seems like adding up elements while in fact it is more of a de-construction of the events. By considering the events layer by layer, the different meanings that the actors may have attributed to their world, and what they did with them in the context of their times, makes interpretation a fully meaningful exercise. Therefore, what happens in Chapter 3 with the sacrifice, then in Chapter 4 with the schisms, in Chapter 5 with the myths, and in Chapter 6 with the complementary others, all contributes to gaining access to a thought world that makes sense as a whole constituted out of the initial fragments. This is a method of working that I don't think has been employed in other historical writings about this period. What needs to be added is that, within its ebb and flow, this method continually remains "open" to interpretation. That is why I believe that, in this context, ambiguity is more a guide than a fuzzy designation. The Emperor may say in one instance "I am the mediator of peace in this Council" and later "do sign in because otherwise all will be blown up in the air." I would say ambiguities are essential, inherent and inevitable, in imperial times, in religion and Church, in theology and art, but also in all times when politics and culture collide but a deal between them still needs to be struck.²⁰⁸ Ambiguities are essential in creating space, in leaving gaps for the solution that is "not thought yet". They become where negotiation can carry on, at a different time and place, for a different position to be taken. They allow for different positions to be acknowledged, for different paths to be taken. In my view this is far from being a disaster, a victory instead.

In this respect, I think that John VIII Palaiologos like a great "bricoleur-cum-engineer" (to add to Levi-Strauss's foundational dictum) actually used all the tools at his disposal to turn the tide, or even to allow for continuing choice. And I think that amounts to something instructional, magnanimous and more provoking of thought and action than his father's (Manuel II Palaiologos') lengthy treatise on "The Procession of the Holy Spirit" ever was.²⁰⁹ The fact is that, to this day, unity in faith in Christendom is discussed, and movements, fragmented but nevertheless important, continue to be initiated for the reconciliation over sore moments of the past. This is really a success story rather than the "figment of imagination" historians have told us about. My interpretation is

²⁰⁸ "When one has to work on ambiguities 'of the old' then even efforts that have been characterised as the archetype of doctrinal compromise may fail to restore unity. The *Henotikon (Unified Whole-my translation)* of Zeno (482) was one of those attempts and was legally enforced in 518 and directed to pacify the Eastern Church, torn apart between the adherents and the opponents of the Council of Chalcedon... its essential ambiguity in interpretation failed to prevent the continuation in the East itself of the old struggle between Dyophysites and Monophysites. Its acceptance by the Empire led to irreconcilable opposition on the part of the Christian West, led by the Roman bishop." In John Meyendorff, "Justinian, The Empire and the Church", *Dumbarton Oaks, Papers*, Vol. 22, 1968, pp. 46-47. In the early fifteenth century, John VIII Palaiologos finds himself, again, in a similar position. But he followed a different path, the one of the Oecumenical Council itself with the interaction of people, who considered each other schismatic, in view of some future engagement between the major parts of Christianity.

²⁰⁹ Charalambos J. Dendrinos, *An annotated critical edition (edition princeps) of Emperor Manuel II Paleologus' treatise On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, Unpublished Thesis (London: Royal Holloway, University of London, 1996).

that the true greatness of John VIII is found exactly at the point where he became aware of the unavoidable limitations of his power in doctrinal matters, and also of the limitations of his entourage on doctrinal matters.²¹⁰ He tried, nevertheless, with whatever “aids” and resources he could employ, to push Christian thought forward, consequently benefiting Christian civilisation and unity in Christendom.²¹¹ As pointed out by Meyendorff, very rightly after his lengthy discussion of Justinian and the Chalcedonian Oecumenical Council (discussed in Chapter 1), regarding the emergent divisions over meaning and its interpretation(s),

“none of the existing terminological systems is fully adequate to express the mystery of the Incarnation of God becoming man, but the doctrinal positions of Cyril (of Alexandria as the criterion of Orthodoxy) and Chalcedon each exclude a wrong interpretation of this central issue of the Christian faith without excluding each other.”²¹²

Levi-Strauss gave his verdict on civilisation as a

“‘prodigiously complicated mechanism’ whose ‘true function’ is simply to increase the entropy of the Universe... As he moves forward within his environment, Man takes with him all the positions that he has occupied in the past, and all those he will occupy in the future.”²¹³

²¹⁰ “The Greeks as a whole were not professional theologians... Greek theological training and mentality were patristic... were out of their depth in the theology of the trinity...” Scholarios, who later became the first Patriarch under the Ottomans, in regards to Mark of Ephesus, whom he respected deeply, seems to declare “Our common teacher and master says all the arguments must rest on two or three texts and that the political law establishes it” Though the Latins bring forward the six greatest writers common to us both and expound and harmonise them with the scriptures, “nothing has been said by us to them, to which they have not clearly answered with wisdom, honesty and truth”. Bessarion said the same thing to the Greeks also during the Council: “And we have replied through our experts to what they have said, by complete silence on some points and by answers of no value at all on others.” All the above to be found in Joseph Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence and Other Essays* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964) pp. 156–157. However, this is not the whole picture, as we know about the anti-logical movement of the fourteenth century in Byzantium, and the concept of philosopher-king that Manuel II presented, and the fact that after the Council things also turned different “... in terms of quantity for instance we witness a significant rise in the number of philosophical treatises with the debate – primacy of Aristotle or Plato – which started in 1439.” It is interesting to note that “Scholarios was heavily indebted to Neoplatonists and employs their terminology”, p. 278. George Karamanolis, “Plethon and Scholarios on Aristotle”, in Katerina Ierodiakonou, *Byzantine Philosophy and its Ancient Sources* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 253. Ierodiakonou, in a list of Byzantine philosophers, starts with the Christian Fathers (fourth – eighth century) and from the Palaiologan period (thirteenth – fifteenth century), she lists, among others, George Gemistos Plethon (1360–1453), George Scholarios Gennadios (c. 1400–1472/73), and Bessarion (1403–1472), p. 6. Maybe the remark of the Emperor and Scholarios regarding the inadequacy of argumentation at the Council was a sign of a general values debasement of this period, part of the decay but not necessarily a statement for all as there were individuals who had sufficient contact and interest in further debating faith.

²¹¹ A similar view on Justinian is held by John Meyendorff, where he locates his greatness in the unavoidable limitations of his power in doctrinal matters after the efforts he exerted with edicts and ruthless dealings with popes, patriarchs, and bishops. In Meyendorff, p. 52.

²¹² Meyendorff, *Justinian, The Empire and the Church*, p. 57. See also **Appendix II**, image **2**. **Appendix II**, image **1**, the Creed of Constantinople, 381.

²¹³ Edmund Leach, “Claude Levi-Strauss: Anthropologist and Philosopher”, p. 18, in *Tristes Tropiques*, pp. 448–449; *World on the Wane*, p. 398 [397 in the first 1961 edition and p. 446: *World on the Wane*, p. 316 [319].

II. The “Return of The Event” in Fifteenth-Century Europe

“Thus [with cultural symbols and meanings] man built a new world in which to live... he drank of streams, slept beneath the stars and awoke to greet the sun. But it was not the same sun! Nothing was the same anymore. Everything was ‘bathed in celestial light’... water was not merely something to quench thirst; it could bestow life everlasting. Between man and nature hung the veil of culture, and he could see nothing save through this veil... permeating everything was the essence of words: the meanings and values that lay beyond the sense. And these meanings and values guided him – in addition to his senses – and often took precedence over them.”²¹⁴

I use this quote from Leslie White to show the ambivalence in relation to the Genesis text in the previous section of this chapter, and the discussion of meaning and interpretation that the Oecumenical Councils repeatedly tried to address in this area of ambivalence; a very difficult task indeed. Entering the symbolic perspective, White, according to Sahlins, presented “The incompleteness in the appropriation of the cultural object by meaning”.²¹⁵ In response to the questions I posited earlier in this chapter I realised that this became an ambitious task, some would say daunting. When reading about the Event I registered the unusual length of time that the Emperor was away from the Byzantine capital in these unpredictable, disorderly times for the Empire. I realised it must have been a matter of high and urgent interest for him, and that seemed to signal something more ambitious to me. This event was unlike any in the past. It felt as if time had frozen for these 700 people in the Emperor’s retinue around a single focus, while staying for two years in a neighbouring, but unknown land. The Event unfolds as a process, unlike any other in the past. There was no attempt by the participants to stop the flow of time, but time was “frozen” nevertheless, revealing the synchrony of an extraordinary affair: as a measure to reduce the internal chaos that existed in the first Christian Empire, as a device to cancel unpredictability, to transit from long-existing decay to cosmos again. In other words: “to nullify the complex and threatening future by re-absorption into the past”.²¹⁶ Historians of the Palaiologan times have taken from John VIII’s move that it aimed “... to reduce the randomness of history to a pattern... that of one’s own culture’s path”.²¹⁷ If “societies exist to perpetuate themselves”,²¹⁸ then the materialisation of this micro-history in the *longue durée* of the past is John VIII Palaiologos’s response. A response to the historical deterioration of his Empire that had been going on for quite some time, and this is the

²¹⁴ Leslie White in Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason*, p. 105.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 106.

²¹⁶ In Maranda, p. 339.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 330 and p. 339

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 331.

pivotal point where he turns the natural contingency into the cultural. The great dialogues of the present for unity and tolerance have their beginnings back in the fifteenth century, and even further back in the fourth and the sixth centuries, as I have shown in Chapter 1. From its inception, it seems that unity is a slippery concept. But also "... it implies a concept of dynamic permanence. What is the framework within which things can change without shattering the society that strives to perpetuate its identity despite the repeated blows of history?"²¹⁹ One could ask: was John VIII aware of this process? Was he aware of making culture through his active political life? In answer, I would probably say "perhaps". We cannot know directly, but I would confirm along with Fernand Braudel that

"... to transcend the event means transcending the short life span in which it is set... the brief moments of awareness whose traces give us such a vivid sense of the events and lives of the past... there is not an unconscious, or rather a more or less conscious, history which to a great extent escapes the awareness of the actors, whether victors or victims: they make history, but history bears them along."²²⁰

In a sense, this is an event that went against the grain and against all advice: it was part of the "constant struggle", a "repeated battle" between order and disorder.²²¹ I aim to reconcile "structures that are logical and durable with events that are emotional and ephemeral. The first belong in the order of the real and the efficacious, whereas the apparent potency of events is only illusory."²²²

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 331.

²²⁰ Fernand Braudel, *On History*, trans. by Sarah Matthews (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) p. 67.

²²¹ Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 298.

²²² Ibid, p. 295.

*III. Writing History: Something Not Set in Stone*²²³

“The path is finished, the journey begins. The circle is closed, we have reached the end, the immanent possibilities are exhausted, and, at the same point, everything is open”²²⁴

Sahlins recounts a vivid episode where, during the seminars of Levi-Strauss, he heard about the “archaeology of the living”: “The problem is that I learned my anthropology at the feet of Boas, Lowie, and Kroeber, and the ‘anthropology of the living’: talking to older people about the ways of life in time past ...”²²⁵ This is the kind of story narrated here. I look at the past as a “system of things known”,²²⁶ rather than only as a series of events that happened. An Oecumenical Council is the

“sort of story that one can have an expectation of a certain pattern, of a certain type of structure of events; and one can begin one’s observation of a span in time and space with such a criterion of selection in mind... the facts, in other words, are loose. On the contrary, if we analyse the matter sufficiently, we will find that the only structural attachment facts have is the one provided for them by a pattern of myth, that is by a story which is itself *not* based upon a simple observation of historical facts in a certain order.”²²⁷

I would call John VIII Palaiologos a myth-maker, although I cannot tell if he was a conscious or an unconscious one. “... he distilled the manifold material which had been historically observed into a single tale. In that tale only the essential and ever recurring outlines of the characters and events were incorporated.”²²⁸ This is where a definite interdependence between myth and history lives. This is, in my view, the expansion of myth into history.

²²³ **Appendix II, image 3** (Artist Georgia Kotretsos, Concrete Knowledge Series, H 35 x W 39 cm, 2013, Mixed media with cement on paper, with the artist’s consent (she sent me the images in a personal communication; but one can see them also under georgiakotretsos.com). When I saw the work I thought it as an excellent way to depict the ‘science of the concrete’, which both the historians and Levi-Strauss from a different point of view thought about. Then, this can be seen in the prism of the way I saw my study and its results and implications. I found very interesting that Georgia’s conception of the series have a completely different starting point; it seems to be more about the Materials used than any meaning behind it. I thought it also ties well with the caterpillars and the butterflies simile. Especially the caterpillars; I aspire to write as a butterfly. Also, this connects to the idea of my work being an interpretation, which brings together what others haven’t done before, but it is always open to other interpretations. What can be more indicative of this insight is having ‘cement on paper’, where cement is a binder, a substance that sets and hardens independently, that holds or draws other material together to form a cohesive whole. Paper though is a thin material that can decay very easily. Both Paper and Cement seem to have a very old history as material used by humans. See also footnote 57 in connection to the work caterpillars do, which is not what I do. I remain in the area in between the two although I do like to write like a butterfly.

²²⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel And The Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2013) p. 393.

²²⁵ Marshall Sahlins, “Infrastructuralism”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 36, No. 3, Spring 2010, p. 373.

²²⁶ Collingwood, p. 3.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 2.

²²⁸ Peter Munz, “History and Myth”, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 22, January 1956, p. 6.

Ihor Sevcenko, an eminent Byzantinist, wrote in 1969: “People who study the past and write on it are a motley crew.”²²⁹ I will start with the most celebrated one of the crew, Edward Gibbon, who wrote volumes on Roman and Byzantine history alike. Gibbon has been discussed widely, to this day, because he gained universal authority in the 1850s when he interpreted the eleven-centuries-old civilisation of the Eastern Romans as the “History of the Decline and Fall”. He accused Christianity of having destroyed ancient civilisation and traced the path by which it did so. He wrote hundreds of shrewd and witty pages, but he focused on the imperfections. In the end he gave us reason to wonder whether this long Byzantine civilisation was judged fairly.

“... it is generally recognised that the Byzantine civilisation far from being the ‘tedious and uniform tale of weakness and misery’ that Gibbon portrayed, was really the most vibrant, prosperous, multi-faceted urban centre of all Europe beside which the cities of Charlemagne and Alfred the Great would appear as barbarian villages in the mud.”²³⁰

Arnaldo Momigliano interestingly suggests that although Gibbon knew the sources extraordinarily well, he “never went beyond a superficial impression of the comparative value of his sources...”²³¹ Reading Momigliano’s critique is very instructive. He demystified Dumezil and his “trifunctionalism” connection to Roman civilisation,²³² and explained Gibbon and his inability to stay unbiased by “his faith in human reason, his vague deism, his hatred of superstition, intolerance, cruelty, are clearly reminiscent of Voltaire”.²³³ But “he knew how to describe, to measure effects, to draw a line between good and bad evidence... he had the knowledge and the imagination to put it together and call it to life.”²³⁴ His elegance in writing, his contemplation, has been envied by many. However, the problem was that when he gave his “explanation of the decline of Rome in the controversial chapters on Christianity... we [had to] accept his declaration as both correct and of consequence.”²³⁵ What is very important for this study is the realisation of both Gibbon and Momigliano that “there was something to be explained about the decline of Rome and thought that Christianity offered the main element of explanation.”²³⁶ From his part, “Gibbon followed Voltaire

²²⁹ Ihor Sevcenko, “Two Varieties of Historical Writing”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1969, p. 332.

²³⁰ Thomas M. Jones, “East African Influences Upon the Early Byzantine Empire”, *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 43, No. 1, January 1958, p. 51.

²³¹ Arnaldo Momigliano, “Gibbon’s Contribution to Historical Method”, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 2, H. 4, 1954, p. 451 and p. 450.

²³² Arnaldo Momigliano, “Georges Dumezil and The Trifunctional Approach to Roman Civilisation”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 23, No. 3, October 1984, p. 329.

²³³ Momigliano, “Gibbon’s Contribution to Historical Method”, p. 457.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 458.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 459. Worthwhile noting here is a book written in 1933 by Shelby T. McCloy, entitled *Gibbon’s Antagonism to Christianity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933).

²³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 458.

in boldly sweeping away every barrier between sacred and profane history”.²³⁷ Maybe something to complain about here:

“Gibbon was the last man to dismiss ‘airy beings’, once belief in them was woven into society in so solid and intricate a manner. Merciless on Christian metaphysical folly... for what was visible and concrete, even if it was superstitious, could be controlled and modified. It was the ‘folly’ that welled up from the isolated intellect that both disgusted and frightened him...”²³⁸

Ihor Sevcenko is of the view that although “in theory, all history is one, in practice there is no history, but histories”.²³⁹ He gives this simile of historians, which I thought was very imaginative, with caterpillars and butterflies;²⁴⁰ according to their method of working they could be vivid or technical workers, using reason or imagination, resolving “tensions between mastery of material and meaningful arrangement, between erudition and literary conception should be resolved in the mind of one person, the true historian.”²⁴¹

As the so-called “archetypal historian of the 20th century”,²⁴² with his work Braudel established the distinction between structure and conjuncture. Sahlins demystified it by demonstrating the interaction of the two aspects, system and event, “as a meaningful process”.²⁴³ My aim in this context is to indicate “such historical uses of structural theory” in early fifteenth-century Europe, “for the definition of ‘something-happened’ as an event, as well as its specific historical consequences, must depend on the structure in place”.²⁴⁴ And because there is no event without a system, what I had to do was to “... know the cognitive and symbolic system of this community”,²⁴⁵ expanding outwards to the communities that interacted with the main Christian community of Constantinople, and the seat of the Emperors and the Oecumenical Patriarch. This was especially the case throughout the last centuries of its existence in order to apprehend the kind of relationship, how it evolved, what kind of negotiations took place.

²³⁷ Ibid, p. 461.

²³⁸ Peter Brown, “Gibbon’s Views on Culture and Society in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries”, *Daedalus*, Vol. 105, No. 3, Summer 1976, p. 77. “Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire”

²³⁹ Sevcenko, p. 344.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 335. “The caterpillar is a most unspeculative animal. He relishes tangible things, like shards or coins; as for words, he likes to see them on stone, parchment, and paper, in that order... the vivid historian (butterfly) will by inclination or by dictates of narrative, spin the web of deduction...” In connection to this caterpillar, see footnote 42 also.

²⁴¹ Ibid, p. 345. Regarding the element of truth that is mentioned here, in p. 333, Ihor Sevcenko mentions Johnson’s opinion about “all who tell the truth must tell it alike”. This is very much what the Greeks and Latins in Florence agreed upon; it was considered an axiom that Saints, Fathers of the Church, that both Greeks and Latin believed in cannot contradict each other in matters of faith. Joseph Gill, *Personalities Of Council of Florence*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1964), p. 157.

²⁴² Randall Collins, “The Mega-Historians”, *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 1985, p. 118.

²⁴³ Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Islands* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981) p. 33.

²⁴⁴ Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 298.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 299.

“It is not a question of extreme relativism, according to which events would be purely ideal or symbolic, but rather of seriously taking the symbolic into account: one cannot separate something in the event that would be ‘what really, materially happened’ from something else that would be the meaning the actors and spectators attributed to it; the two are indissociable.”²⁴⁶

To analyse the significance of the Event, to determine what the stakes are, to be able to say why the passing of this era is important, why this journey is a triumph in this environment and not a failure (as it has been judged), to establish what its connection and meaning can be for the future of the people involved, I work through all of these themes through the “drama” itself. I go slowly going beyond it into theory, which offers me assistance and helps me eventually give a defined answer; an answer that is neither an overview of the events, nor a parochial, narrow-minded verdict.

The way I confronted research in history – which has been called “dry as dust”²⁴⁷ – is through a synthesis of ideas coming from diverse historians who were eyewitnesses, or who had included historians who were eyewitnesses of the past in their work. These historians were more erudite scholars than colourful writers. Nevertheless, their judgement was shrewd and most valuable. It was very important also to note the questions these historians tried to answer, their observations, and astute assessments of situations or people. To decide which one is more reliable and on what grounds, comparison between them helps. Knowing where they are coming from, one needs to have an eye for detail, and an intuition of where their materials “tie up”. I believe this is something one learns to identify while exploring the sources. My work is a philosophical kind of history, trying to understand the development of humans at a particular time in human affairs, taking into serious consideration “the archaeology” of these people (who in this case are all dead). While keeping the “learned experience accumulated over centuries of scholarship” on the one hand, I did realise that not everything can be interpreted as “realpolitik”, as Momigliano noted.

“an accumulation of facts does not make history, the components of civilisation, such as law, religion and trade, are more important than diplomatic treaties or battles. They finally overcame the one-sided view of history which confined it to political and military events. Every time we study history of population, religion, education, commerce, we are treading in the steps of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, Condorcet.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 299.

²⁴⁷ Collins, p. 115. “The glorified dirt of the archives has its counterpart in the phrase that historical work is “dry as dust” ...”

²⁴⁸ Momigliano, “Gibbon’s Contribution...” ,p. 453.

I want to stress here that during my research I “did not aim at a full recital of events”.²⁴⁹ What was important instead was that the materials I selected were used to try to answer a specific *problematique*, about specific people, at the crossroads of their civilisation. The main idea was that unlike Voltaire, who wrote in his “Essai sur les mœurs” “le christianisme ouvrait le ciel, mais il perdait l’empire”, I argue that Christianity actually made serious efforts in keeping the Empire together, most of the time, through its chief representatives.

A main idea, that I took as a starting point, was Braudel’s description of history as a complex scientific system where

“there is no *one* history, *one* profession of historian, but many professions, many kinds of history, a whole list of inquiries, points of view, possibilities, a list to which yet more lines of enquiry, points of view, possibilities, will be added tomorrow.”²⁵⁰

As a result two structural systems formed out of one core; its abstract make up, its “mystery”, being otherworldly and submitted to play a role at the same time in this world’s affairs, made meaning elusive, ambivalent. But at that precise point, the “mystery” was invaded, was emptied by its meaning, being “a mystery” and re-appropriated as a cosmic function. The rupture was there, the structure was already prone to break-ups. Therefore, this one event was born, and I studied it both in the context of its own time, but also in the context of the culture that gave birth to it. Then, the contradictions came up more dynamically; the thread of ideas interlaced pointed forwards and illuminated the contradictions visible in the fifteenth century. I worked through the sources, primary and secondary,²⁵¹ which in many cases included much primary material, discussing elements of the social history, cutting through the centuries and interweaving the material following a history of ideas in two different cultures. For part of the time the Event of the early fifteenth century, while remaining in the background, allows for other events to take to the stage in order only to come back to it at the end to reinforce it by explaining its contradictions.

Taking into consideration that no single historical perspective is satisfactory or all-sufficient, as Euan Cameron rightly discusses, one can still infer something useful about the past, by “exploring a

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 457.

²⁵⁰ Jones, p. 64.

²⁵¹ I have here to recall the sociologist’s exasperation with what he calls “the historians’ trade-union creed”, “There is a scorn of secondary sources – as if historians themselves were not the authors of these same secondary sources. There is the ritual glorification of the dirt of the archives: in short, an ideology of intellectual ‘manual labour’. It might be called the ‘trade-union’ ideology of the specialised historian, analogous to the Hollywood union rules that prohibit anyone but a carpenter from picking up a hammer on a movie set.” In Collins, p. 115.

multiplicity of diverse and even conflicting accounts of the same historical process found in different sources”.²⁵² In this context,

“beginning with the diplomatic preliminaries to the Council, Syropoulos describes in detail the dangerous journey... their day-by-day activities at the Council, their hopes, frustrations, and petty quarrels, and above all, their private discussion both among themselves and with the Latins. In short Syropoulos draws a remarkably complete picture of the Greek mentality, especially of the deep conflict between the unionist Latinophiles and the anti-unionist Orthodox during this critical period of Byzantium’s dying days.”²⁵³

IV. Data Corpus

In this work, both primary and secondary sources become one. I use a vast amount of material to back up the arguments I make. While I was working through the sources, I found that the standard of the secondary ones from scholars who had spent most of their lives examining these periods was so high, that using these texts, including the translations of parts from primary sources, offered a great wealth of knowledge. If we do not use each other’s translations, then what is the point in spending significant time on them? These are scholars of the periods examined in this thesis – medievalists, Byzantinists, scholars of early Christianity, or late Palaiologan time, scholars of the crusades, philologists whose work is mostly unpublished, historians of art of the time, from both east and west Christianity. That is enough as a basis. Then, Syropoulos, the so-called “cet homme de rien”,²⁵⁴ had written his memoirs, in 1444–1445, that is four to five years after the Event. This

²⁵² Euan Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History: The Challenge of the Churches’ Past* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) p. 9.

²⁵³ Deno J. Geanakoplos, “The Council of Florence (1438–1439) and the Problem of Union between the Greek and Latin Churches”, *Church History*, Vol. 24, No. 4, December 1955), p. 326.

²⁵⁴ In p. 3 of the introduction in the *Memoires*, Vitalien Laurent, the translator of the work, on the basis of seventeenth-century perceptions of third parties of different ecclesiastic denominations, mentions Sylvester Syropoulos via the characterisation above by these three words. Thankfully, he doesn’t share their prejudices, whereas they approach him with a remarkable misunderstanding. Laurent, in pages 5 to 7, paints a fine portrait of the family of Syropoulos as Greek, with excellent parents, teachers of the Church who were associated with worthy men of letters. He met these worthy men later when he was a student as his parents send him to an institution where contacts like these were usual. So he met Metropolitans and philosophers like John Chortasmenos, Manuel Chrysoloras, the future Patriarch Euthymios II, Joseph Bryennios, and he even developed a friendship with George Scholarios. In general, he could befriend the masters of all sciences divine and human who were ruling on the banks of Bosphorus, like Francesco Filelfo and Leonardo Bruni who were visiting Constantinople in the early fifteenth century. John Eugenikos, the brother of Markos Eugenikos, one of the main speakers of the Greeks in Florence-Ferrara, and anti-unionist, portrays Syropoulos’s ancestry as “priestly” and “sacerdotal”. His father Syropoulos had a brilliant career in the church of Saint-Sophia through various posts there, and in 1400 Sylvester was born from the marriage of John with a “certain” Maria. The choice of the name Sylvester was in accordance with the traditions of the family, Laurent explains, and their taste for rare, exotic names like Maximos, Methodios, Christophoros, Seraphin, and so on. I will only add here, which seems to be instructive, the fact that Sylvester was the name of the Pope who, according to tradition, baptised Constantine the Great (In *Symmeikta*, National Research Center, Centre of Byzantine Research, Vol. 7, Athens, 1987, p. 74). In this major *Memoires* narration theology is practically absent; the conciliar debates are very limited, their character schematic and somehow incoherent and the almost absent scriptural citations show, according to Laurent, that Syropoulos had no major competencies in this domain (p. 7). His writing was more literary and his competencies were recognised in the domain of patriarchal administration as a legal practitioner and magistrate, and judge. By the year 1430, we find him near the Patriarch, as a member of his council, and close confidant. He is given the title of the *great ecclesiarch* at the moment they embark on their journey to Italy in November 1437. This was a very high honour in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and one that was centuries old. Syropoulos kept this post until the fall of the Empire in 1453 (p. 8). He also acquired the civil role of *dikaiofylax*, the president of the imperial tribunal, which under the Palaiologoi was certainly

makes it, in my view, the main source and as valid an eyewitness account as any so-called secondary source that includes ample primary source translations. In this sense all the sources, those written before and after, become part of the Event. What kind of Event was that? What was happening for the group, for the individuals, as opposed to not happening, and what have we been able to make of the significance of that what we have received after it, in what form, and why this process of events? There are always ways to cross-reference and check what scholars think between themselves of each other's work. Baynes criticises Burckhardt, Dvornik is quite frank, Straub talks about Burckhardt's views, and Gibbon being the end of discussion for all, probably with a dose of envy. The important point is that as I am looking at such a long temporal account where "who was an eyewitness, of what", how long afterwards they write about it is not always clear. I inevitably use the sources together and this is part of the innovation. Gill tells us, for example, that Syropoulos paints a not-attractive picture of the Emperor; my verdict of the Emperor's decisions and spirit is one of greatness. I believe that is a sign of working scholarship from different ends.

Syropoulos provides the most valuable information of the actual deliberations of the characters involved in the Event, as I already mentioned in the previous part of this chapter. His *Memoires* are a bunch of stories within one big event-story. In addition to this primary source, letters of the main actors, poems, funeral orations and the histories of other contemporary historians illuminate and enrich the main source. These historians are Ducas, G. Phrantzes, and Gennadios Scholarios, which are all in translations I found. They wrote in medieval Greek, but they are either translated or I could read parts of interest. Joseph Gill is an expert in the Council of Florence-Ferrara and its personalities. He wrote exhaustively on the subject. Monfasani was an admirer of Bessarion, because he wrote endlessly about him. Father Vitalien Laurent, the translator of Syropoulos's *Memoires*, also wrote extensively on the events surrounding the main one. Scholars like Father Meyendorff, Norman Baynes, and Dvornik, are magnificent historians with a deep understanding of human nature. Pero Tafur, Clavinjo, and the Russians, with their travel diaries, illuminate aspects of the conditions of living in the early fifteenth century and give a picture of the Orient as eyewitnesses. They are all translated in English. The works of Manuel II Paliaologos, the father of John VIII, his letters, his funeral Oration to his brother, his discussion with his mother on marriage, his dialogue with the Persian, are another part of my corpus. The moral and ethical works dedicated

"clericalised" (p. 9). Once he embarked on the journey to Italy he returned to his more ecclesiastical occupation, tightly associated to the patriarch whom he loved. In this position, he had first-hand access to all news of the Council before the bishops, as he was so close to the head of the Byzantine Church (p.10). He was reducing collaboration as much as possible during the pro-unionists imperial efforts, and he was either resisting effectively or kept himself reserved in a calculated way. He was "l'agent de liaison", but as he was the confidant of the emperor and the patriarch, for whom he felt an unconcealed admiration, while all these coming and goings were giving him the opportunity to express his point of view on the negotiations, which even if was going unrecorded, it was still giving the "soothing" impression that he was fulfilling his duty to orthodoxy (p. 10) According to Laurent, it is very important to keep in mind that overall, because of his position near to the two heads, of the State and the Church, one couldn't expect a better annalist. In this way he benefitted in a way that the other two historians of the Council didn't. These are Andre da Santa Croce and Dorotheos of Mytilene (p.11). For a man who was "nothing", that seems to me good enough. Sylvester Syropoulos gave us a florid account of the past and he wrote it a few years after the event.

to John VIII are a repository of human culture (with a small c) and Civilisation (with capital C). Ludwig Mohler is a source of documents for Bessarion, and S. Lambros a source of Byzantine letters and homilies and poems of the time that I use from translations, where they are available.

Historians of art use artefacts and images of the time and I have examined these as the inventory of the invisible; they are widely consulted regarding both the eastern and western traditions. The actual locations for securing access to all the above have been the Main Library at Senate House, and the specialised Warburg Institute Library, with its wealth of material in medieval and Renaissance history and art history. The Institute of Classical Studies has been central to my research too. So has the Institute of Historical Research in Senate House, with its many primary sources and other material. Heythrop Library specialises in Theology and Philosophy and BLPES in methodology and theories of anthropology and beyond. The British Library has been a useful resource for unpublished theses, and material in the Greek language that I couldn't find elsewhere in London. The Royal Holloway Byzantine Institute and their historians have been a resource of inspiration, critical questioning and collaboration in sharing material, unpublished papers, or published ones that are difficult to find.

The subject of my thesis belongs strictly to the early fifteenth century. However, because of the particular notions I discuss in the thesis, it would have been impossible not to start working my way from the beginning of Christianity forward, keeping always in mind the fifteenth-century situation and vice versa. Therefore, the material I used comes initially from the fourth century and moves all the way to the fifteenth century. Syropoulos's work is written in medieval Greek with a French translation. The *Acta*, the other source of the Council, is divided in two parts, the *Discourses*, mainly the record of the deliberations, and the *Descriptions* of certain moments of the Council. But these are "so schematic where there is no room left for personal impressions, gossip, behind-the-scenes incidents, with public or semi-public conferences and incidents".²⁵⁵ They have also no official character like the *Discourses* do. The opposite applies to Syropoulos's work, where we have exactly all the accounts, at length, that the *Acta* miss or rather that they are not interested in. Gill who read both exhaustively, gives somehow contradictory views; on the one hand, he notes that

"the picture they convey of the situation is different. The *Acta* are in favour of the union and are conciliatory in tone to the Latins; the *Memoires* are opposed to the union and hostile to

²⁵⁵Joseph Gill, "Personalities of the Council of Florence", p. 145.

the Latins and the Greek ‘Latinisers’... the *Acta* author indulges in no adulation of the Latins nor in any back-biting of the Greeks.”²⁵⁶

“And there is no third source to act as a court of appeal... but they agree in substance... voices that had a right to be heard were not impeded.”²⁵⁷ For myself, interested as I am in the background of the official discussions, it made good sense to read Syropoulos’s work, although he was writing largely from memory, as the title of his work suggests. Gill remarks that memory can mislead, but the comparison he makes between the two sources is not remarkably different other than in tone. Syropoulos does put himself forward more often than not as uncompromising. In general, I believe they both have their weaknesses. But, for the purposes of this work Syropoulos’s *Memoires* were more valuable to gain an insight of “not what happened, but what was it happened”.²⁵⁸ This is my fieldwork, while John VIII’s fieldwork, with his large group, was the voyage to Italy. There, “the plural self-consciousness of men experiencing and thinking [come] together, as against the singular self-consciousness of a master craftsman of cognitive reflexivity. Plurality brings feeling and willing in the act.”²⁵⁹ They were made to walk their ways; they were given the choice to do so. The result of what is accomplished we can only see in its entirety from the distance we are. “It is only when the symbolic path from the unknown to the known is completed that we can look back and comprehend its final form.”²⁶⁰

John VIII Palaiologos traced his own trajectory: it had been a lonely and primarily a disappointing engagement. In his case, apart from certain instances, it had been more work than play. Throughout my research I kept asking myself: what is he doing in Italy, at that time, for that long? What has driven him and persuaded all this retinue to disregard the slavery of receiving a gift from the Pope? Is what I am doing providing added value to the existing scholarship about this epoch?

John VIII Palaiologos’s journey to Italy is newly interpreted by me, while it has been interpreted many times already by others. He has been, in my evaluation, the “neglected” Emperor, who tried to compromise on human needs and deal with structural cultural constraints. The constraints were not only of his time, his own limitations and those of his entourage, but being at the turning point of history, he had to have a plan for the future. Even if this journey was not meant consciously to provide him with devices for the times to come, unconsciously he did exactly that.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 144 and p. 146.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 161 and p. 162.

²⁵⁸ Marshall Sahlins, *Stranger Kings in General: The Cosmo-Logics of Power*, unpublished paper, presented on 4 and 5 June 2013, at the History and Anthropology Seminar Series, King’s College, Cambridge, p. 7.

²⁵⁹ Turner, *On the Edge of the Bush*, p. 163.

²⁶⁰ Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 20.

On the one hand this thesis investigates these unconscious demands in the temporal but dynamic process, the “engines” that this great Emperor put in motion again through his complexity, this *problematique* emerged that gave us the opportunity to research, to try and make sense of the individuals and their deeds. On the other hand, this study is open-ended because it leaves the questions, the labyrinth of contradictions, the material uncovered, and there is much more for which there was no space to include here. All this is available to be re-ordered differently and for another interpretation, another illumination to our understandings of these most decisive moments in human time with far-reaching consequences for the individuals involved, their motivations and their hopes. For this reason, this work keeps being empirical and not just theoretical.

V. History and Myth – The Intersections

“Without myth every culture loses the healthy natural power of its creativity: only a horizon defined by myths completes and unifies whole cultural movement... The images of myth have to be the unnoticed omnipresent demonic guardians, under whose care the young soul grows to maturity and whose signs help the man to interpret his life and struggles. Even the state knows no more powerful unwritten laws than the mythical foundation that guarantees its connection with religion and its growth from mythical notions.”²⁶¹

According to Mircea Eliade, the sacred is an element in the structure of consciousness, not a stage in the history of it. On the most archaic levels of culture, living as a human being is in itself a religious act, for food, sex, and work have a sacramental value. In other words, to be – or rather to become – a man means to be religious.²⁶² In a cycle of life where myth and history are so close together, mythology “can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the nature of things”,²⁶³ adding later that “the meaning *already* complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions.”²⁶⁴

Another scholar on history underlines how “Myth and history, in a very special sense, are interdependent. They fertilise each other; and it is doubtful whether the one could exist without the

²⁶¹ Mali, p. 15.

²⁶² Eliade, p. ii.

²⁶³ Leach, *Genesis As A Myth and Other Essays*, p. 110.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 117.

other.”²⁶⁵ I will use a 1956 quote to emphasise that the two phenomena that I maintain are interdependent, are conceived originally

“... as concrete stories are the distension of myth into history and the telescoping of history into myth. The first process can be described as ‘true myth issuing in significant history’; and the second as ‘true history issuing in significant myth’.”²⁶⁶

In this sense, it could be said that the historical account was a distended myth, which in turn “... yields a significant story, i.e., significant in a sense in which a mere record of the totality of *res gestae* is not significant”.²⁶⁷ If mythological thinking is thinking in concrete universals, the story of Constantine I, who worked his way around fact and myth for the sake of a universal Empire under one religious banner, an Empire that lasted eleven centuries, becomes a concrete story of universal fascination.²⁶⁸ In the early fifteenth century John VIII worked his way around the ritual of the Oecumenical Councils, which also in the depth of time were the repetition of an archetypal pattern of reconciliation and unity.²⁶⁹ Nevertheless, it had other consequences through time. It was a myth after all that the Councils can solve problems of schism, as we will see again in Chapter 4.

“There is a constant need for the revocation of a situation of which the myth is a description because the need for the myth is by its nature recurrent. Hence ‘the repetition of the ritual which deals with the situation and satisfies the need evoked by it’. In this view, myth and ritual are intimately connected, like the two sides of a single coin.”²⁷⁰

Therefore, as a “myth embodies a situation of profound emotional significance”,²⁷¹ I believe it was easier for the Emperor to convince such a diverse group of a lot of old people, without money, in the middle of winter, to travel to Italy on boats, for the request of military aid, a request I would say was impossible, as the Pope had never before sent considerable aid to the Emperor. On the contrary, he committed to the Crusades, which were an attack of Christians on Christians. Hence, as we will see in Chapter 3, the Patriarch, on the way out of Constantinople to Italy, evokes saints, martyrs, the faith and the faithful in a very emotional speech.

²⁶⁵ Munz, p. 1.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 2.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 3, the totality of events that ever happened as opposed to the narrative of events that happened, which is fragmentary and not as wide by definition- *historia rerum gestarum*.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

²⁶⁹ “For almost four hundred years prior to the Council of Florence, from the schism of Michael Cerularios, and Leo IX in 1054 to the convening of this Council in 1438, it had been (a primary) aim of popes and emperors to restore ecclesiastical communion. Negotiations with this object in view had, in fact been conducted on approximately thirty occasions.” In Geanakoplos, “The Council of Florence (1438–1439)...”, p. 324.

²⁷⁰ Munz, p. 16.

²⁷¹ Ibid, p. 16.

We find John VIII Palaiologos in the imperial office: he stands as the Emperor of a great civilising force that is withering away, a humiliated vassal of the Ottoman Turks. Constantinople was located on a stretch of land that linked Europe and Asia – the valley of Danube with that of Euphrates – an expression of the duality of land and sea. It was a decidedly strategic location, at the point where the major diagonal land trade route intersected with the Mediterranean/Black Sea marine trade axis.²⁷² These trade routes were now taken over by the great cities of the West: Venice, Genoa and Pisa. Indeed, as early as the tenth century, Emperor Nicephore Phocas was challenging East and West alike. He wrote to the Caliph of Bagdad: “I shall conquer your lands and I shall go as far as Mecca... I shall conquer all the Orient and the Occident and I shall spread everywhere the religion of the cross.”²⁷³ He declared to the ambassador of the German Emperor, Otto I,

“Do you want a greater scandal than that [Otto] should call himself emperor and claim for himself provinces belonging to our empire? Both these things are intolerable; and if both are unsupportable, that especially is not to be borne, nay, not be heard of that he calls himself emperor”.²⁷⁴

This cross and this land were haunting John VIII. The quest for a way to ensure unity viable beyond the concrete land but with the abstract cross was this destiny.²⁷⁵ He was reaching for the values that Levi-Strauss makes us think about

“...Values [which] cannot therefore be reduced to what people believe and say; *they arise from the constraints inherent in the instruments through which human beings think.*”²⁷⁶

²⁷² Anna Avramea, “Land and Sea Communications, Fourth-Fifteenth Centuries”, *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, edited by Angeliki Laiou (Washington, DC: Harvard University 2002) p. 57. The regulation of the urban economy was relaxed beginning with the last quarter of the eleventh century. Alexius Comnenus granted to the Venetians, in return for their alliance against the Normans of Sicily, various privileges among which the most important was that of trading freely, without the payment of any duty, in virtually all the cities of the empire, including the capital. These privileges were renewed by the emperors of the twelfth century, although not without reluctance, rendered the Venetians virtual masters of the commercial life of the empire. In the thirteenth century, in an effort to lessen the influence of the Venetians, similar privileges were granted to the Genoese (the Treaty of the Nymphaeum, 1261), but that was the substitution of the one exploiter for another. The Italian merchants, whether Genoese or Venetians, became so entrenched in Constantinople that they controlled the economy of that city and determined the price of even daily necessities. According to patriarch Athanasius (end of the thirteenth century), the fate of the Romans had completely passed into the hands of the Latins “who make fun of us and scorn us to the point that, full of overweening conceit, they take the wives of our compatriots as security for the wheat which they deliver to us”, he complained bitterly to the emperor Andronicus II. In Peter Charanis, “Economic Factors in the Decline of the Byzantine Empire”, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 13, No. 4, Autumn 1953, p. 422, footnote 25–26. In footnote 32 he underlines that the historian Gregoras in the middle of the fourteenth century (in *Byzantina Historia*, Bonn, Vol. II, p. 842), states that the annual state revenues of Constantinople had shrunk to about 30.000 nomismata when those of the Genoese colony of Galata went up to about 200.000 nomismata.

²⁷³ Charanis, p. 413.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 413.

²⁷⁵ In the Renaissance medal with John VIII, which I discuss in Chapter 3, where he is depicted on a horse and he is “interacting” in front of a cross, we could see invocations of the life of the saint, the life of the monk, the life of the pious, anywhere in the East or in the West, who believes in the cross; but who also, within the restriction of dogma, can worship, unusually, on a horse in front in a mountainous empty land – as the West would prefer. The signs are present. Faith is more encompassing in its absence, in the absence of precise representation.

²⁷⁶ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Anthropology And Myth: Lectures 1951-1982*, trans. Roy Willis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) p. 23. The emphasis is mine.

John VIII had to operate within these inherent constraints, which I began to describe in the previous part of this chapter. And only in this context can he be understood. That is why he emerges as a mytho-historical personality; because of his position in the time line, in history, and the sense of duty within the value system of his civilisation²⁷⁷ the consequences of his decisions were tremendous. “It is the people who make their history, in every sense of the term, and thereby their destiny.”²⁷⁸ The story of John VIII and his journey to Italy lies in the intersection of myth with history, the so-called “Constantinian” myths, where the Empire started from, along with all the skills and habits he learnt as a member of his civilisation. Of course, the fact that the Empire was facing its end gave him reasons and goals to pursue that were relevant to the time. I think all these give us enough reason to consider him a “mytho-bricoleur”. The founding narratives that were directing the Emperors throughout time, as the structural order is a temporal order, trace back to the “myths” of origin, laid down with a finality of conviction that makes any question of their historical truthfulness irrelevant.²⁷⁹ Edmund Leach admits “the non-rationality of myth is at its very essence; for religion requires a demonstration of faith by the suspension of critical doubt.”²⁸⁰ Levi-Strauss taught us that “myth” and “mystification” have a great deal in common. John VIII’s is a life drenched in “mystification”.²⁸¹

According to Marshall Sahlins

“the anthropologist knows that the people’s truth is not the historian’s... but what is archivally determined, is not anthropologically irrelevant. On the contrary, the differences between people’s account and the historian’s empirical record are critical as a measure of what actually happened is culturally construed... The critical question becomes, not what happened, but *what it is that happened*... for historians myths are more-or-less valuable means of determining the real historical events, provided their fantastic aspects are debunked and discarded. The object is to find the ‘kernel of truth’ in an otherwise unbelievable narrative, upon which the rest of it is best ignored. But for anthropologists, the real historical events become the means for determining the operative social principle of

²⁷⁷ The philosopher A.N. Whitehead wrote in his *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1933) p. 104, “The distinction separating the Byzantines and the Mahometans from the Romans is that the Romans were themselves deprived of the civilisation which they spread. In their hands it assumed a frozen form. Thought halted, and literature copied. The Byzantines and the Mahometans were themselves the civilisation. Thus, their culture retained its intrinsic energies, sustained by physical and spiritual adventure. They traded with the Far East; they expanded westward; they codified law; they developed new forms of art; they elaborated theologies; they transformed mathematics; they developed medicine. Finally, the Near East as a centre of civilisation was destroyed by the Tartars and the Turks. In Charanis, p. 412, footnote 1.

²⁷⁸ Sahlins, *Stranger Kings in General*, p. 7.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, pp. 6–7. See also the comment of Francis Dvornik in *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background*, Vol. 2, 1966, p. 634, regarding Norman Baynes’s deductions about Constantine I and truthfulness.

²⁸⁰ Edmund Leach, *Genesis As A Myth and Other Essays: The Legitimacy of Solomon* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) p. 7.

²⁸¹ G. Charbonnier, *Conversation with Claude Levi-Strauss*, trans. by John and Doreen Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) p. 55. He emphasises that myths depend on propositions that when we try to analyse them, force us to resort to symbolic logic.

historical action, insofar as these events can then be compared to the way they are presented in the people's traditions, thus culturally appropriated."²⁸²

We should not ignore that the Venetian doges – who in earlier centuries were Crusaders against Byzantium – repeatedly asked the Byzantines to consider Venice as their home and that the future Cardinal Bessarion recognised Byzantium in Venice, as Syropoulos reported in the *Memoires*. Or that Gemistos Plethon (1355–1452), who also attended the Council as a secular advisor, advised against the Council in the first place. In his *Treatise on the Laws*, he started with “We are Greeks... as is witnessed by our language and traditional education...”²⁸³ On his “historical antecedents other than the Platonic”, he “paralleled the revolutionary program of the Hellenistic Spartan Kings Agis (264–241 BC) and Kleomenes (263–219 BC)”,²⁸⁴ with his proposal. Plethon lived only a few miles from medieval Sparta and during his stay in the West,

“he lectured on Plato at the palace of Cosimo de’Medici and is thought to have been a prime influence on the foundation of the Florentine Academy... His reintroduction of Strabo’s geography to the West may have influenced Columbus’s voyage.”²⁸⁵

Peritone argues. Ignoring all these issues “would be to throw away critical evidence of the evolving cosmography of power that linked”²⁸⁶ the setting up of the Venetian state with the Byzantine imperial State, and the links that Plethon was making between the power and state construction of the ancient Greeks and the Byzantines of the fifteenth century.

I discuss the above examples in more detail, along with kinship relationships with the Ottomans, in Chapter 6. I have already discussed in some detail Constantine I and his conversion of Europe scheme in Chapter 1. Therefore, in this study, and very much in line with Sahlins’s analytical considerations, “I take such real-politics of the marvellous and the incredible, which is also to say such cosmo-logics of alterity, seriously, without apology for the seeming fantasy.”²⁸⁷ In the case of Latins and the Venetians, I argue that the so-called “dual kingship” was a highly developed phenomenon in order to reduce the alien to the familiar, since where there was no other choice: “the authority was founded in alterity and the internal aspect of leadership is subordinated to those

²⁸² Sahlins, *Stranger Kings in General*, p. 7.

²⁸³ N. Patrick Peritone, “The Political Thought of Gemistos Plethon: A Renaissance Byzantine reformer”, *Polity*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Winter 1977, p. 173.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 180.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 169.

²⁸⁶ Sahlins, *Stranger Kings in General*, p. 7.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 7.

aspects pointing toward the extrasocial.”²⁸⁸ This formation is unconscious, it is a mental process, these stories, “...take their place among well-marked and consistent structures of the human mind” and therefore, “... ‘truth is stranger than fiction’, so myth maybe more uniform than history”.²⁸⁹

To conclude this second chapter, “People can communicate in so far as they share common if subliminal cultural axioms of such intersections or disjunctions by which sects, political parties and nations are inwardly – by agreement – and outwardly – by opposition- united.”²⁹⁰ In this case here, I would add, and many other categories before nations and political parties as we know them today. As a final note, I cite M. Auge’s line at the end of his conversation with Levi-Strauss and Godelier: “Mais tout ne peut pas se dire, tout ne se dit pas”.²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 1. I worked in Chapter 6 on the aspect of alterity as it is manifested by the “alter, the outside other *in the world*.”

²⁸⁹ Pierre Maranda, ed., *Mythology: Selected Readings* (London: Penguin Education, 1973) p. 1.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p.10.

²⁹¹ Maurice Godelier, “Claude Levi-Strauss, Marc Auge, ‘Anthropologie, Histoire, Ideologie’”, *L’Homme*, Tome 15, Nos. 3–4, 1975, pp. 177–188, p. 188. Translation: “Not everything can be stated, not everything can be expressed”.

Chapter Three: Controversies and Tensions in Diachrony, East and West; On the Notion of Schismo-Genesis and Ritual

I. Introduction: the Fundamentals and the Notion of Schismogenesis

Throughout the macro-history of Byzantium, nearly all the dissent and controversy in the eleven centuries of the Empire “assumed the form of religious heresy”,²⁹² which I found perplexing. It was for me intriguing that an Oecumenical Council was set up to release the tensions, where debate on doctrine was essential, and whose decisions and canons, which took the form of laws, were then applied to the whole of the Empire. The dictum of Byzantine political thought was “One Church, one Emperor, one Religion”. That may sound like a solid plan, but over time and with many diverse populations under its power the Emperor(s) found it progressively difficult to harness, or rather understand that they had to be flexible in order to keep the so-called world order intact. The “monarchy in faith” proved to be a flaw in the structure, and heresies and schisms appeared. In the process, the Empire lost millions of loyal subjects solely on the basis of extreme doctrinal rigidity. The dualities in the face of the Emperor as a mortal person, who, at the same time according to the notion of Byzantine kingship, was “... God’s Viceroy charged with the maintenance of peace in the Christian world... with the preservation of law...”,²⁹³ was shown to be a barrier to expansion and continuity of peace in the Christian lands and a solidarity in faith among its populations. The theory of East Roman monarchy was endorsed by God,

“...a power rooted and grounded in God and protected by Christ and His Virgin Mother... this theory of divine election – is supported alike by Eusebius’s adaptation to Christian use of the Hellenistic philosophy of kingship, and probably even more influentially by Old Testament precedent in God’s choice of Saul and of David.”²⁹⁴

The problem, I argue, is located already in early Christian times; Romily Jenkins gives us the essence of the Empire. Embedded in its kernel is a major weakness, a limitation of “the *doctrines* of orthodox Christianity were the *motive power* of the magnificent Roman imperialism... and vice versa, the magnificence of Roman imperialism had been the main tradition by which its Byzantine

²⁹² Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of the New Rome* (London: Orion Books, 1998) p. 102.

²⁹³ Despite its splendour, (this concept) was so simple that it was bound to be understood by the last peasant in the most-out-of-the-way nook of the Empire and “even the lowliest soldier would be willing to shed his blood for its sake”. In Paul J. Alexander, “The Strength of the Empire and its Capital as Seen Through Byzantine Eyes”, *Speculum*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 1962, p. 348.

²⁹⁴ Norman Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: The Athlone Press, 1960) p. 32-33.

successor had lived...”²⁹⁵ It is significant in this sense, “... the semantic change of the word *kainotomew*, which in Classical Greek means ‘I innovate’ but in Byzantine Greek, ‘I injure’.”²⁹⁶ In footnote 343 of this Chapter, I explain the clever Byzantine notion of “*oikonomia*”. They had viewed potential cases where relaxing the rigidity might be beneficial. But they had put a limitation on this relaxation in canonical order. It could only apply to the canons, but never to doctrines. Jenkins underlines so-called *Byzantinism*, and this particularity of Byzantine thought, that the East knew no separation between Church and Empire from the fourth century onwards.

“The Church on earth provided the links, the channels of grace between this world and the other. The sacraments or ‘mysteries’ were the regular means of communication... other channels: tangible ones like icons or relics; living ones like monks or holy men. Society within the Empire was under the special protection of God...”²⁹⁷

The Church – which was the reflection of heaven on earth and consequently the medium and the space where “divinisation” of the laity took place – had an immense influence on the masses and their everyday lives. In the East, the mystical power of the Church was the driving force behind the State, unlike in the West where

“... once the Church of Rome divested itself of the last traces of Christian Hellenism, developed its own political system. This system restored to the Pope his special position in the Church and stressed the idea of universality, and gave rise to the idea of the superiority of spiritual power over the temporal – a thesis which the East was never able to understand.”²⁹⁸

Therefore, they were operating from opposite poles. They were complementary but opposite.

The process of this type of differentiation is, in Gregory Bateson’s terminology, called *schismo-genesis*. Bateson uses the term for both heresy and schism, which he describes as analogous to symmetrical and complementary *schismo-genesis*.²⁹⁹ According to this clarification, the case with the East and Byzantium can be seen to be a case of heresy and therefore symmetrical antagonism,

²⁹⁵ Romily Jenkins, *Byzantium and Byzantinism*, lectures delivered in memory of Louise Taft Semple, November 1962 (Cincinnati, OH: University of Cincinnati, 1963) p. 18. The emphasis is mine.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 5.

²⁹⁷ Donald Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p. 5.

²⁹⁸ Francis Dvornik, *Byzantium and the Roman Primacy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966) p. 19.

²⁹⁹The difference between *complementary* and symmetrical schismogenesis is closely analogous to that between *schism* and heresy, where heresy is the term used for the splitting of a religious sect, in which the divergent group have doctrines antagonistic to those of the parent group, while schism is the term used for the splitting of a sect in which two resulting groups have the same doctrine, but separate and competing politics. Gregory Bateson, *Naven: A Survey of the Problems suggested by a Composite Picture of the Culture of a New Guinea Tribe drawn from Three Points of View* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958) p. 177.

whereas the case with the West and Byzantium was a schism and therefore a complementary schismo-genesis. The other element that is of interest in this analysis, is that the Councils that were being called when a schismatic or heretical view was in place. In line with Bateson and Levi-Strauss I maintain that they functioned as ritual solutions, which were more or less symbolic without affecting any real changes. That was especially true with the 1438–1439 Council. But in general, these Councils were issuing condemnations and anathematisations, while real people could always espouse heresy if they felt strong about something.³⁰⁰ Some of the early Councils for example didn't issue any canons.³⁰¹ And if they were supplementing some at a later date, they could always be approached with the concept of "oikonomia" in mind.³⁰²

The Council of Florence in 1438–1439 was called on matters of doctrine and some other points of ritual; the precedence of the Pope was of major importance though, which shows through the ritual of the journey and the Council itself. He was very clear about wanting the submission of the Greeks before deciding on military help, which he was not able to provide anyway, due to financial difficulties of the Curia at the time. His political aspirations and earthly concerns took centre stage. Therefore, it could be that the schism with the West was one of heresy with an antagonistic doctrine, which set the stage for the schism in which the separate and competing political concerns were at play. Nothing of what was signed had any effect; it was totally rejected by the majority of people. I discuss these differentiations in more detail in relation to the Council of Florence and the Emperor in the last centuries in the next chapter.

Throughout the centuries, the Empire of Constantinople kept a kind of stabilising, steady relation of mutual dependency with the West. At certain times, this was destroyed by unilateral devastating acts such as the Crusades and the domination of Byzantine territories where *Latinisation* was in many cases enforced. Marriages between the two sides were taking place and trade was gradually a necessary privilege, especially for the Venetians and the Genoans, who had set up colonies in Constantinople that were growing progressively. On the other end of the scale, the East was in decline, both in terms of territory and economically. This relationship between the East and West proved to be one of both admiration and antagonism in terms of common interests, but also hatred according to the context and the actions the groups were taking vis-à-vis the other.

³⁰⁰ For example, "A man who was born a Monophysite remained a Monophysite except under duress; I know of no instance of a Catholic converting to Monophysitism as a gesture of hostility to the State... the Samaritans were forced by Justinian to embrace Christianity: 'Most of them, resentful of the fact that they were made to change their ancestral beliefs by law rather than their own free will, immediately inclined to the Manicheans and the so-called Polytheists'... A later attestation concerns the soldiers who were disbanded in 786 by the Empress Irene because of their support of Iconoclasm: they too joined the Manicheans, or Paulicians." In Mango, p. 104.

³⁰¹ See footnote 307.

³⁰² See footnote 347.

II. The Case in the East

To start off: what was the problematic of the journey? Repetitive and formal, the Councils had already laid the foundation for the social and cultural everyday life of the populations of the Roman Empire.³⁰³ That happened in the form of canonical law, that is ecclesiastical law, which at the time was all-pervasive.

The populations of the Empire, according to Cyril Mango, developed feelings of solidarity according to religious and local identities. “People identified themselves with their village, their city or their province, much more than they did with the Empire... religious identity was often more strongly felt than regional identity.”³⁰⁴ What I find very useful for my work is his overall judgement about “heretical groupings”, where he supposes that

*“Had the Church been less intolerant, it may well be that different religious groups could have lived peaceably side by side... within the Church, however, religion and regionalism overlapped to a considerable extent... for what seems to have motivated the Syrian or the Egyptian Monophysite was not so much his belief in some abstruse point of doctrine, but his loyalty to his own Church, his own bishop and the holy men of his neighbourhood. Whenever a Christian splinter group had a solidly established territorial base, all attempts to impose on it, a uniform, imperial orthodoxy ended in failure.”*³⁰⁵

It didn't occur to them to describe themselves as Romans; they were Christians, of such and such parents, and of Orthodox persuasion.³⁰⁶ On the contrary, I argue that at the 1438–1439 Council in Florence, signs of what could be possible if the Emperor and Patriarch were more tolerant began to prevail.

What is notable, and perfectly in line with Mango's view, is that in the overview of the Councils,³⁰⁷ we cannot but deduce how firmly negative their stance was regarding matters that they themselves

³⁰³ See footnote 307 below for details of the Councils. See also the timeline at the beginning of this thesis.

³⁰⁴ Cyril Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of the New Rome* (London: Orion Books, 1998).

³⁰⁵ Mango, p. 30. Emphasis is mine.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31. He describes an interesting incident about the strength of the emotive concept in relation to their Christian identity as opposed to the Roman. “When, in 922, Romanus I Lecapenus urged his army officers to put up a spirited defence against Symeon of Bulgaria, they vowed to die on behalf of the Christians, although the Bulgarians were by this time, at any rate nominally, Christian themselves. The corollary to regional solidarity was regional hostility; for example, the cunning Syrian with the thick accent, the Alexandrian who would be ridiculed in Constantinople, the Armenians were usually described in terms of abuse, and so on.”

³⁰⁷ There were seven Oecumenical Councils: **Nicaea I (in 325)**, which *condemned* the teachings of *Arius* regarding the nature of Christ by *endorsing* consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. In that Council we have the *formulation* of the first official and universal profession of Christian Faith or the *Symbol of Faith*, which I find very interesting as a name, because as a symbol, it can be ambiguous and their interpretations can be multiple. The Second Oecumenical Council of **Constantinople I (in 381)** contained more condemnations of various fragments of Christianity teaching, but they also proclaimed the *honorary precedence of the See of Constantinople over the Eastern Patriarchates, preserving, however, the first place of Rome*. The **Council of Ephesus (in 431)** chaired by *Cyril of Alexandria, condemned* the

were accepting of but were not able to understand perfectly. This included the nature of Christ, the relations between the three manifestations of God's will, and so on. On the agenda were condemnations, always two-way anathematisations, strong language by the participating units, and occasionally a reconciliatory tone. It is not by chance that in the last centuries of the Empire, especially after the Latin domination of Constantinople and the re-conquest by the Byzantines, a literary genre that proliferated in intellectual and imperial circles was based on the refutations of the errors of the Latins. Another aspect of the Councils that Mango commented on about the local and the religious; the decisions of the Oecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 caused a doctrinal conflict between the Churches of Alexandria and Antioch, which was reflected in the disputes of Patriarchs Cyril and John. The Councils of Ephesus and Constantinople did not issue any canons, which meant that none of their decisions became law and were therefore left open to interpretation for centuries to come. While Monophysitism was condemned at Chalcedon, it did issue 27 canons and one decree on the privileges of the See of Constantinople.

The guiding Event in the history of the eastern Christian Church, that set its future direction, was based on the principle of the preservation of the integrity of

“apostolic faith... the belief that the fullness of the revealed truth was contained in the ‘apostolic’ faith, and that later doctrinal statements, including those made by ecumenical councils, were clarifications made necessary by the appearance of false doctrines and heresies...”³⁰⁸

Meyendorff points out that “continuity was the official motivation of conciliar decisions”, [and] “after the revelation human history continued... [and this] is the meaning of what is called Christian Tradition.”³⁰⁹ Meyendorff tells us that, “the Byzantine mind, taken as a cultural vision, often tended

teachings of *Nestorius* by decreeing that the divinity and the humanity of Christ were united in one hypostatic union. Interestingly enough, this Council did not issue any canons. **In 451 in Chalcedon**, the Fourth Oecumenical Council condemned *Eutyches* and the teachings of *Monophysitism* defining that Christ has two perfect natures, one human and one divine, inseparably united without division, fusion or change, in the person of hypostasis of the World. In this Council we hear the protests of the papal legates and Pope Leo I (440–461) about the privileges of the See of Constantinople. The Fifth Oecumenical Council in **Constantinople II (in 553)** anathematised Nestorius and condemned Origen, Evagrius and Severus for holding heretical views on the pre-existence of souls, the resurrection of souls without bodies, thereby rejecting the physical resurrection. Very importantly, this Council did not issue any canons. In **Constantinople III (in 680–681)**, the Sixth Council resolved the controversy of Monothelism. The Council promulgated that in Christ, in correspondence to his two natures, there are two wills and two operations inseparably united to each other. The Council anathematised the late Patriarchs of Constantinople, Sergius I, Pyrus, Paul II and Peter, as well as Pope Honorius I. This Council did not issue any canons either. The Council in **Trullo (691–692)** issued disciplinary canons, which supplemented the doctrinal decrees of the Fifth and Sixth Oecumenical Councils. The author notes that the condemnation of several Latin liturgical and canonical practices by certain canons of this Council indicates that a different understanding of Church tradition and authority had already developed between the Greek and the Latin churches. The Seventh Oecumenical Council in **Nicaea (in 787)** restored the veneration of the Holy Icons. There is an Eight Council in **Constantinople (879–880)**, which is considered Oecumenical only by the Orthodox Church. In Ch. Triantafyllopoulos, *An annotated Critical Edition of the Treatise Against the Errors of the Latins* by Makarios, Metropolitan of Ankyra (1397–1405), 2 vols. Unpublished PhD Thesis (London: Royal Holloway, University of London, 2009) Vol. 2, pp. 405–407.

³⁰⁸ John Meyendorff, “Continuities and Discontinuities in Byzantine Religious Thought”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 47, 1993, p. 70. Further down this page Meyendorff explains that “revelation, is seen as an event happening “once and for all” with a manifestation, in Christ, of “the fullness of divinity in the flesh” as witnessed by a single group of people who “saw” and “touched” it, cannot be added to.”

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 70.

to see the historical process of change as an imperfect and fallen reflection of a permanent, immovable world of concepts and ideas.”³¹⁰ Therefore, historical “completeness” for the Byzantines had been a closed circle. From this perspective, the task of John VIII in the Council seemed like a dead end. But it wasn’t a dramatic impasse, because his journey-cum-ritual was more an attempt to strengthen the tense and ambiguous relationship with the Latins, and within the circles of his own people, rather than solve the contradictions that had been embedded in the structures of faith for centuries.

My understanding is that this constant, invariably rigid, situation – dogmatic relativism was not an option – that at regular intervals brought the whole of the Christian world to a standstill, with schisms and heretical movements seceding from the Empire, was undermining the historical “completeness” of the Christian revelation as embodied in the “one State, one Church” dictum. But, most critically, it was compromising the order on which the Byzantine mind, I believe, was set. According to Mary Douglas, holiness is the attribute of God, and from him emanates both the principle of power and danger. Having God’s blessing is the source of all good things and the opposite applies for all dangers. “God’s work through the blessing is essentially to create order, through which men’s affairs prosper.”³¹¹ To disregard the order, the world order, or the State in its order and harmony as a mimesis of the kingdom of Heaven,³¹² means that you are falling from God’s favour. That was the political philosophy of the Empire, and that was its ecclesiastical law, and one was a reflection in the other, or a mirror of the other. What is essential in this context though is the idea of Holy as fundamentally an expression of “completeness”, of “wholeness”. Being “holy” and “perfect” are two sides of the same coin. “The idea of holiness was given an external, physical expression in the wholeness of the body seen as a perfect container”.³¹³ Hybridity is abominable, but purity or oneness, is highly desirable and as “holy” as it can be. “Holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused. Holiness means keeping distinct the categories of creation. It therefore involves *correct definition, discrimination and order.*”³¹⁴

Already during the early times of the Christian Church³¹⁵, the theological issues that arose had to do with the basic understanding of the “deification” of Christ “as a key reality in conceiving salvation

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 70.

³¹¹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger, An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) p. 62.

³¹² Norman H. Baynes, “Eusebius and the Christian Empire”, in *Byzantine Studies and other Essays* (London: Athlone Press, 1955 p. 172.

³¹³ Baynes “Eusebius and the Christian Empire”.

³¹⁴ Douglas, p. 67.

³¹⁵ Meyendorff, “Continuities and Discontinuities in Byzantine Religious Thought”, p. 71. The entire Christological debate began with the controversy between Cyril and Nestorius in 428-431. It continued for a century and a half following Chalcedon. It was taking place between Greeks, using, on both sides, Greek philosophical terms and terminology. The opponents of the Council of Chalcedon were neither anti-Greek, nor disloyal to the Empire. They were rather attempting to bring about imperial policies, which would support their Christological position, that is, to gain the favour of the Empire. This is true of all anti-Chalcedonian archbishops of Alexandria, successors of Cyril, until the seventh

and spirituality”.³¹⁶ Especially if his deification implied absorption of his humanity, which was the essence of Monophysitism (one physis, nature) or if we basically talk about the two natures of Christ – the divine and the human – which though united, had to remain distinct. “The distinction, formulated in the Tome of Leo, which affirmed that the two natures of Christ always preserve their respective natures, expressed in respectively appropriate actions, was reaffirmed at Chalcedon: the distinction of natures in no way being abolished because of the Union, but rather the characteristic I would like to expand a bit on the differences of centre and periphery in the Roman East, because they ultimately point to people’s mind-sets, and their strengths and their weaknesses. Baynes reminds us that “Christianity took its rise in the cities of the Roman East... it was thus from the provincial capital that Christianity spread to the countryside.”³¹⁷ Precedence and schismatic behaviour from the eastern Patriarchs had already been a struggle in the imperial world from the very early times of Christianity. When the “humble Greek city of Byzantium”, as Baynes calls the new capital, was transformed into Constantinople, it became the seat of the imperial government and was given the honour of precedence among the eastern patriarchates. For Alexandria, whose Patriarch exercised extraordinary powers in the provinces of Egypt, this was a challenge.³¹⁸ In this context, the city of Constantine seemed like an intruder among the capitals of the Roman East. But what Baynes focuses our attention on is the Egyptian people. When Cyril of Alexandria

“suffered shipwreck at Chalcedon, there still remained the Egyptian people for whom a Monophysite faith stood as sign and symbol of their alienation from Rome and the Roman government: it was the massive resolution of the Egyptian people to remain loyal to the Monophysite faith that yet again defeated the king... that is the background of the valley folk but there is still the background of the desert, no longer a solitary place, peopled by anchorites and monks.”³¹⁹

century. The popular Coptic element took full control of the patriarchate only after the Arab conquest. Syrian and Coptic masses felt estranged by the refinement of theological debates between Greeks. For them, Greek philosophy was indeed, an alien medium. Once driven into schism and violently victimised for the support they gave to these leaders, Coptics and Syrians began gradually to interpret their religious tradition as a sort of stubborn fundamentalism, best expressed in their own languages and customs.

³¹⁶ Ibid, p. 73. In the theology of Cyril of Alexandria, Divinity and Humanity are not existentially incompatible: it is when humanity achieves communion with God that it becomes most authentically human; on the contrary, its separation from God is dehumanising.

³¹⁷ Norman H. Baynes, “Alexandria and Constantinople: A Study in Ecclesiastical Diplomacy”, *Byzantine Studies and other Essays* (London: Athlone Press, 1955) p. 98.

³¹⁸ Ibid, p. 101.

³¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 101–102. The Patriarch of Alexandria, Baynes comments, was the one who was fighting his country’s battles so his despotism was unchallenged. While he was persecuted by the Church of the Emperor, he brought back an alliance with the Church of Egypt, the “protestants” of the wilderness. Monasticism in general was not interested in speculative theology. The essential fact for Alexandrian piety was Christ, who was the object of worship, rather than the Christ of logical and metaphysical definition, and rather than the Christ who, as the Antiochians insisted, was also the man Jesus, and therefore conditioned by human development in time and space.

What was most important for the Alexandrians was that those who

“emphasised the dualism of nature in God-Man tended to dissipate that unity of the person worshipped, which was for the Egyptians a pre-requisite, if the analytic activity of the mind were to be stayed, and the heart freed for the untroubled repose of devotional contemplation.”³²⁰

In this context, as Baynes underlines, monks were easily aroused to opposition.

“As they were drawn from the people, they could appeal with irresistible force to the people... in the fifth century the voice of the monk served as headlines do in the press today: with their religious slogans the monks produced the same effect as modern newspapers with their political war cries.”³²¹

The monks remained a remarkable force in the administration of the Church and its politics all the way to the end of the empire and, I dare say, to the present day.

I went into some detail about this earlier controversy, because Monophysitism as a heresy was the greatest challenge to State Christianity in an Empire where the cornerstone of political thinking was “One God, one Empire, one Religion”.³²² I argue that this belief laid the foundations for the underlying conflicts of the religious experience that are discussed in this work, with all the political, cultural, and social complications as a result. Some Emperors like Zeno (482 AD) tried to mediate and solve the difference rejecting extremism on both sides. But others, like Heraclius (610–641 AD), would persecute and drive bishops into exile; congregations would be denied their churches and monasteries were broken up by armed force, placing the central government in the role of an alien bully.³²³ That would create a problem for the Emperors when they needed armies against the Arabs. The Monophysites, for example, hated the distant Emperor, and wouldn’t go enthusiastically into fight for the Empire. Intolerance of the State turned many potential loyal subjects into heretics, and because of its inherent *duality, its double “nature”, as “protector” of the One, the “monarchy in faith”* that didn’t allow the Church to instruct the heretics, it went and killed them. This duality proved to be the *ingrained flaw in the structure* of the Empire from the very early days of its conception, and brought about schisms that could have been avoided. That demonstrates that identities were established via religious adherence, which in turn needed the interference of the

³²⁰ Ibid, p.102.

³²¹ Ibid, p. 102.

³²² Mango, p. 88.

³²³ Ibid, p. 97.

State to be settled, because it was a fundamental principle of Byzantine political thinking, as mentioned above. Schismogenesis was the result of this rigidity about order as perceived by the Byzantines. However, in the case of sophisticated Monophysitism, where the difference regarding Christ's nature amounted to one letter (*ek* versus *en*) the Orthodox Church imposed itself from the outside.³²⁴ When the imperial presence was removed, it either shrank or disappeared. Mango attests that the Monophysite controversy facilitated the conquest of the eastern provinces: first by the Persians and then by the Arabs. So politically, they soon had to move territory anyhow. But now we have moved on from Mango's local and wider Christian identification discussed at the beginning of this section, to the more sophisticated, Constantinopolitan and Chalcedonian viewpoints as opposed to Monophysite Syrian, which was also now under Arabic control. As we saw, these differentiations took centuries to be accepted and established.

A small change in the so-called "Orthodox" doctrine of distance geographically, from Constantinople, Syria and Egypt, resulted mainly in an aggressive policy from the imperial centre, which could only function under the "One God, one Empire, one Religion" doctrine. This change of course would result in further changes in the everyday practices and lives of the populations who lived in these areas. The revaluation had started, and categories of the ecclesiastical order were redefined. The interests shifted both on the part of the Syrians, and of the eastern Roman Emperors, who were seeing the system as being altered. The transformation had started.

The second part of this process was that after every quarrel and rift – usually between the old and new orders, that is between the Empire as One and the Empire as many, or the people of the valley and the wilderness – in short, the State-sponsored clergy, a Council had to happen as a ritual practice to facilitate the encounter between the opposite orders. This then had to authorise passage from what was considered "natural" – for the Byzantines – to what was made "cultural", or vice versa. Patriarch Photius, one of the most influential Patriarchs in the history of Byzantium, after the controversy of Iconoclasm and naturally after the Photian Council of 879 –880 "loudly proclaimed that all heresies had been defeated once and for all... there was no doubt in his mind – and that came to prevail in the Orthodox Church – that religious doctrine had been defined with complete finality."³²⁵ Nothing could be added to it or taken away now, which consequently could only instigate another church empire elsewhere. I indicated above that Alexandria would be a keen

³²⁴ Ibid, p. 95. The Monophysites who had the overwhelming support in Egypt and Syria, opposed the Council of Chalcedon (451) for dividing the person of Christ into two natures and believed in the unity of the incarnate Christ, a unity that derived from (*ek*) the two natures, human and divine. It was *ek* for the Monophysites, while it was *en* (in) for the Catholics – hence one could say that the difference was constituted by this one letter.

³²⁵ Mango, p. 99.

candidate for this, and it was a harbinger of the way the Papacy wanted to become a “Church Empire” in later centuries.

Eventually both religious orders remained in a schismatic relationship and they were to reign in different territories and therefore the ambivalence could persist suspended – many personalities changed camps over the centuries – awaiting atonement, and some kind of “catharsis”. In late Palaiologan times – almost ten centuries on from earlier events, with the whole eastern Slavic world spiritually dependent on Constantinople and its policies, and monastic power being considerably powerful – the “hesychast”³²⁶ controversy came back to very similar concerns, or to the same contradiction: that of “preserving the idea that God and humanity could interpenetrate each other while remaining distinct”.³²⁷ This was now considered only a “development” of early definitions, and not an innovation, although some of the terminology used by Gregory Palamas, who initiated it, was not a repetition.³²⁸ In the Palamite Councils of the fourteenth Century – namely in 1341, 1347 and 1351 – doctrinal continuity was honoured. One observes the power of the monks in the depiction of these Councils in the arts.³²⁹ The concluding tone was that “The Christians of the East lived under the guidance of the seven Councils and there was no question as to the form of the Creed”.³³⁰ In this case, schisms were avoided. The Church was calm.

III. The Case with the West

On the other hand, the *Filioque* and the Latin adherence to it was not a new story either.³³¹ It started in Spain in the sixth century: “... before the year 700 there was at least one part of Western

³²⁶ The term *hesychast* used to designate a “hermit” or an anchorite from the very beginnings of monastic history. Together with *hesychia* it appears in the writings of Evagrius (fourth century), of St. Gregory of Nyssa, and in imperial legislation referring to monastic status. In the fourteenth century though, *hesychasm*, a permanent “prayer of the mind” – literally meaning “tranquillity”, “stillness”, “quietude” – a traditional designation for the contemplative solitary way of monastic life, with Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), a monk in Mount Athos, at its helm, turned into a debate on theological methods, spiritual practices, and then a movement that would involve the ecclesiastical, political and theological circles. The debate between Palamas and the Greek Italian Barlaam spread, and after a number of church synods in Constantinople in 1368 the theology of Palamas was endorsed and Palamas was proclaimed a saint. It is notable that emperors got involved and they started taking the monastic vows and names and then retired when they were near death. In John Meyendorff, “Introduction”, *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle (New York, Ramsey, Toronto: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 2 and pp. 5–6 and in Ivan Drpic, “Art, Hesychasm, and Visual Exegesis: Parisinus Graecus 1242 Revisited”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 62, 2008, p. 217.

³²⁷ Baynes, “Alexandria and Constantinople”, p. 78.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³²⁹ **Appendix III**, image 1. John VI Cantakouzenos depicted as he presided over a Council. It must have been one of the Palamite Councils. Note that he is surrounded by an excessive number of black veiled monks. Having the Emperors themselves turning into monks near their deaths is also a matter of the influence the monks exercised, but also of entering the order where they renounce earthly affairs and seek a pure afterlife. This threshold situation stands for their belief in purification from sins towards salvation. Salvation itself was a deification, and only God can “deify”. Further reading in John Meyendorff, “The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church”, Crestwood, NY., St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982, 268pp. **Appendix III**, image 2 depicts the First Ecumenical Council which Constantine presided over. This is in the Church of St Sophia in Trebizond.

³³⁰ Alexander Alexakis, “The Greek Patristic Testimonia Presented at the Council of Florence (1439) in support of the *Filioque* Reconsidered”, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, Tome 58, 2000, p. 152

³³¹ “We believe in the Holy Spirit...who proceeds from the Father, and the Son...” Emphasis is mine to note the addition.

Christendom where the *Filioque* had taken such firm root that its excision from the Creed would have seemed nothing less than an abandonment of the Faith.”³³² The addition was accepted “in Frankish areas by the 8th century and in Rome in the early 11th century”.³³³ Both sides were confident of the orthodoxy of their faith as in both cases, it was deeply rooted. Of course, in the Latin case, a change was made outside the conciliar avenue, a route that for the Byzantines was unthinkable. Alexander Alexakis notes that “this confidence had been bolstered by a long period during which anti-Latin and anti-Greek literature proliferated but no formal – on a synodal level – interchange of opinion had taken place between them.”³³⁴ That was before Florence.³³⁵ In the ninth century, legendary Patriarch Photius did

“... object to *Filioque*, albeit in an encyclical letter³³⁶ to the Eastern Patriarchs, and in his work *Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit*... these texts were not attacks on the whole Western church, but refutations of the teaching of Frankish missionaries in Bulgaria.”³³⁷

Yet what is mostly interesting here is that “the *Filioque* was not yet being chanted in Rome”.³³⁸ The so-called break of formal communion was widened

“... when in 1014 Pope Benedict VIII decided to include the credo in the liturgy of Rome and consequently in the Latin churches in Italy... this created a problem affecting the everyday liturgical life of the faithful, because the credo sung in the Churches contained now of course the filioque... that particularly in areas of mixed congregations, as in southern Italy, the individual believer had to commit himself to the *symbolum* and thereby hold the other tradition as heretical.”³³⁹

³³² Alexakis, p. 152

³³³ Tia M. Kolbaba, “Byzantine Perceptions of Latin Religious Errors: Themes and Changes from 850 to 1350”, in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, edited by Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington DC: Harvard University, 2001) p. 118, footnote 5.

³³⁴ Alexakis, pp. 152-153.

³³⁵ We should not forget that the Council of Florence was recognised as the only Oecumenical Council with the participation of the heads of both Churches, the Emperor and the delegations of the eastern Patriarchs and other members of the eastern bloc who for the Constantinopolitans were heretics.

³³⁶ He did explicitly state that the *Filioque* was a heresy and the weightiest issue outstanding between Constantinople and some Westerners: “Moreover, they have not only been discovered transgressing the law in all the above, but they have progressed to the crown of evils if there is such a thing... They have also tried, with spurious reasoning, interpolated argument, and an excess of impudence, to adulterate the divine and holy creed which has its impregnable strength from all the synodical and ecumenical decrees, for they have added new words, that the Holy Spirit proceeds not from the Father alone, but also from the Son.” In Tia M. Kolbaba, “Byzantine Perceptions of Latin Religious Errors: Themes and Changes from 850 to 1350”, pp. 120-121.

³³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 119.

³³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 119.

³³⁹ Evangelos Chrysos, “1054: Schism?, Cristianita d’Occidente e Cristianita d’Oriente (secoli VI-XI)”, 24-30 April 2003 (Spoleto: Presso la sede della Fondazione, 2004) p. 560.

Apart from South Italy, the conquests brought her back to the Empire and raised ritual everyday issues, which in the tenth century, along with the conquests of Syria and its capital Antioch, the Emperors encouraged Syrian Monophysites to repopulate imperial territories. In this case,

“the influx of foreign heretics was decried by Chalcedonian churchmen, and conflict ensued between those who advocated or at least practiced tolerance and coexistence and those who would not tolerate the “heretics”... in Antioch in the 1050s, there were some fearful fights, including the burning of Orthodox churches.”³⁴⁰

This brings us back to the issue of tolerance and co-existence among Christians that was discussed at the beginning of the section, and when they had decided they couldn't accept each other's presence on the pretext of doctrinal issues. The issue was re-animated only in the thirteenth century, when Michael VIII Palaiologos with the Council of Lyons in 1274 reinstated the issue of Union with the West, where unionists and anti-unionists took sides and remembered events that didn't carry as much significance when it happened, like the break in 1054. The other issue that according to both Chrysos and Tia Kolbaba was raised is the bread used for the Holy Eucharist.

“The Latin Church adopted the use of unleavened (azymon) bread while in the East leavened bread was given the validity of sacrosanct and only correct practice... the growing animosity between East and West in the middle of the 11th century tended to polarise feelings and furthered the trend of polarisation.”³⁴¹

This opposition increased with the aggressive events of the thirteenth century when the armies of the West turned against the eastern Christians in an unprecedented assault; the Crusades.

IV. Crusades³⁴²

Undeniably, the Crusades brought the two parts of Christianity into close contact, and what followed was ill conceived and turned two neighbouring people hostile to each other. As a result the

³⁴⁰ Kolbaba, p. 123.

³⁴¹ Chrysos, p. 560

³⁴² **First Crusade**, 1096–1099, **Second Crusade**, 1147–1149 (Louis VII, Conrad III), **Third Crusade** 1189–1190 (Frederic I), **Fourth Crusade**, 1190–1191 (Richard and Philip Augustus), **Fourth Crusade**, 1204, and Latin dominion of Constantinople until 1261. In Deno Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in Middle Ages and Renaissance, Studies in Ecclesiastical and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) p. 16. You can see the **Crusades** in an artistic graphic form **in the Timeline** at the beginning of this book.

gap grew bigger. It was initially a pilgrimage opportunity to the Holy Land that included passing through Constantinople. But the Queen of the Cities was too sumptuous and embellished and caught the eye of the Crusaders.

“Entire western armies passed through Constantinople, all being exposed to the richer and more cosmopolitan manner of living of the medieval Greeks. Inevitably, jealousies and antagonisms between the two peoples began to develop and with the passing of time to increase.”³⁴³

The First Crusade was the synthesis of ideas and practices as pilgrimage, holy war and indulgence, as embodied in the message of Pope Urban II in 1095. It was supposed to provide aid to eastern Christians. The view the Crusaders had of the eastern part of Christianity was summed up in the following declaration:

“The Greek capital, Constantinople... as a royal city and as an apostolic see... was equal to Rome, except that Rome [was] the seat of the popes and therefore the capital of Christendom. It was the greatest storehouse of relics in the Christian world and so was an important place of pilgrimage... Baldric was intensely concerned to stress the brotherhood of all Christians. The Greeks were, in fact, the full uterine brothers of the Latins, calling for their help.”³⁴⁴

Between 1095 and 1204, three more Crusades followed, with the Fourth Crusade the culmination of violence led by the Venetians. The Latin army sacked Constantinople on 12 April 1204, the barbaric pillaging lasting for three days. According to Father Gill, Pope III had not directed or encouraged the Crusade, but when faced with a *fait accompli*, he praised God for the miraculous work of handing over the Empire of Constantinople “from proud men to humble, from disobedient to devoted, from schismatics to Catholics, namely from Greeks to Latins”.³⁴⁵ Also, with the Latin domination of Constantinople and a Latin Patriarch in place, attention was turned to papal primacy, which became the dominant issue of difference. The azymes and the *Filioque* remained important debates. The more the papal legates were asking the Greek clergy to submit to the Pope, the stronger the resistance of Greek prelates to Latin norms. They wanted their own Orthodox Patriarch.

³⁴³ Ibid, p. 17.

³⁴⁴ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the idea of Crusading* (London: The Athlone Press, 1986) p. 145.

³⁴⁵ Tia M. Kolbaba, “Barlaam the Calabrian: Three Treatises on Papal Primacy”, introduced, edited, and translated, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, Tome 53, 1995, p. 44.

“In 1214 Patriarch Theodore Irenikos of Nicaea (1214–16) wrote to the people of Constantinople exhorting them to remain true to their faith and not to vow obedience to the Pope: ‘For how would your faith be preserved and safe-guarded, if you should agree to be one of the Pope’s faithful?’”³⁴⁶

The limits of the eastern Roman concept of *oikonomia* were debated during that time, but the main line of argument from Constantinople was not to compromise but to resist.³⁴⁷

Intensification of animosity was expected in such a traumatic event – clergymen, and, most of all, the leader of the Church the Pope, being involved in military activities horrified the Byzantines. It was a shocking, frightening experience for the people of Constantinople that humiliated them and fragmented their Empire, which has not returned to prosperity since.

The sophisticated Constantinopolitans came across the predators, the boorish, barbaric westerners; those whom the Empire could use at her service, who could never be equals before, alas, they became dominant. Constantinople,³⁴⁸ a city without equal in Europe, an impregnable city whose population in the twelfth century was about half a million people, where vast riches had been accumulated and was once the biggest international market of the known [Christian] world, now, alas, became impoverished, it was standing devastated, ravaged.³⁴⁹ The Crusaders found Constantinople ravishing; with walls as high and long that, along with the superb palaces and churches, made her the City of the Sovereign.³⁵⁰ =

However, another fundamental effect this event had was that this was at the time that, according to Ahrweiler, we see a rupture among the Constantinopolitans. More precisely as the historian Choniates called it, it delivered “*isopoliteia*”, which means literally judicial equality and common

³⁴⁶ Tia M. Kolbaba, “Byzantine Perceptions of Latin Religious Errors: Themes and Changes from 850 to 1350”, in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, edited by Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh (Washington DC: Harvard University, 2001), p. 129.

³⁴⁷ *Oikonomia* as “elasticity in the interest of the Christian community” or “as a way out of the anomaly created by and proceeding from the imposition of extreme severity and precision in observance of canonical order”. *Oikonomia* is the relaxing of disciplinary canons – regarding performance of the sacraments but not dogma – for the benefit possibly political of the community. In Geanakoplos, p. 74.

³⁴⁸ Constantinople was itself a gateway to Heaven, a separate cosmos for the eastern Romans, the centre of the World. Hagia Sophia with its shiny splendour and the mosaics of the monasteries and the churches, the imperial palaces, they were all creating the illusion of paradise and its perfection. After the dream and the vision of Constantine I that prompted him to move the capital of his Empire to the East, she became the sacred space par excellence in the East. Especially after the raids of the Arabs in the seventh century who conquered Jerusalem. The City had Mary the Mother of God, as her supernatural defender. She was surrounded by water, a formless existence; the image of a land suspended in between civilised Europe and civilised Asia; undecided, a connection and a fragmentation at the same time; a precarious present, an uncertain past, eternally insecure. The Empire only concluded when it was finally conquered in 1453. With her the Empire began, with her conquest, the eleven centuries reign of Byzantium ended. See for images *Appendix III*, images 3 and 4.

³⁴⁹ Nicolas Oikonomides, “Hommes D’ Affaires Grecs et Latins A Constantinople (XIIIe–XVe)”, Conference Albert-le-Grand, 1977, Institut d’Etudes Medievales, Librairie J. Vrin, Paris, 1979, pp. 23-24. This paragraph is a synthesis of his and my work. Translation from French is mine.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 24. That is very important to remember because I will discuss it further in connection to myths of Venice and the Venetians’ presence in the Event of 1438-1439. They were the Crusaders, the plunderers in 1204.

citizens' status.³⁵¹ The tragedy was total and the pillage and devastation demonstrated the weak links in the society of Constantinople. The rupture of solidarity was total, as was the tragedy. The resignation of the Constantinopolitans amazed even the Crusaders themselves. They didn't fight against the people they only had contempt for. The reason was that at the time the values system was in such decline that his greed had shown the Emperor in a shameful light, with him trying to run away, taking with him as much of the imperial treasure as possible. This image was reflected in the people as well. They were indifferent to the destruction and they were trying to profit from the confusion, taking part in the pillaging of the houses and palaces of the nobles. The nobles were agents of the institutions and were the biggest landowners in the Byzantine world. At this moment, the State failed its people and everything it stood for. Ever since that moment, accounts we have of many sources inside the Empire, as well as travellers, intellectuals and so on declare that the State of Byzantium was in continuous decline. It is sad to read that the people almost offered the City to the Crusaders, outshining them in trafficking of sacred objects, which were plundered from the churches by the Latins. "The soldiers of the west knew for [a] long time, Choniates told us, that the Romans were slave[s] to worthless and dishonourable morals."³⁵² The image the City was offering in their eyes was one of a city dominated by licence to disgracefulness and despicable luxury that the westerners had known about for a long time.³⁵³ The inversion of reality we witness at this most critical instance in the history of Constantinople and the Empire is absolute. The complete set of the conventional values that the Empire was admirable for, was reversed to contribute to its failure. The perceptions of the people in relation to their Emperor, the defender and protector of the proud but worn out citizens of Constantinople, were overturned and nobody was prepared to fill this void. The Constantinopolitans didn't lose their courage: they lost their patience, and were worn out. Cowardice appeared as a consequence, a catastrophic collision of "structures of the conjuncture" in line with Sahlins's theory. By experiencing culture in practice in this most agonising, dreadful confrontation, the effects gave significance to actors and actions that had not been traditionally envisaged. We witness a radical transformation of values, by any measure, at this most hazardous of times. The Empire never recovered from this setback.

The order of structures had taken a deviant turn. The people of Constantinople and the periphery were not opposing [they did not fight either] the infidel Turk, but rather the schismatic Latin. Nicetas Choniates, the historian of the period, wrote that they preferred to change "patrida", country/nation and chose to live with the barbarians in the cities where the Sultan was reigning to

³⁵¹ Helene Ahrweiler, *L'ideologie Politique de L'Empire Byzantine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975) pp. 96-100. Translation from French is mine.

³⁵² Nicolas Oikonomides, "Hommes D' Affaires Grecs et Latins A Constantinople (XIIIe-XVe)".

³⁵³ Ahrweiler, pp. 96-100.

run away from the injustice of their own country officials.³⁵⁴ Villehardouin, a western historian, wrote happily about the military operation of surrounding Constantinople in 1203, "... never so many had been besieged by so few".³⁵⁵ After the conquest he was impressed by the amount of dead and injured Byzantines as "there was no measure or end".³⁵⁶ According to a report by Gunther de Pairis, 2000 Greeks were killed but not a single Crusader.³⁵⁷

V. Assessment

In the pages above, I have attempted to show the stages and the ways in which the transformation gradually appeared and eventually was sealed between the eastern and western parts of the Empire. Although they were originally forming one Empire, the distance and the different geographical and political interests transformed the values to the point that the interactions from a certain moment onwards were alienating, rather than reconciliatory. Therefore, the structures changed in different ways in connection to the interests around them too, and consequently the cultures took different routes of development. There was an embedded rupture in State Orthodoxy; "we know", wrote the Emperor Justinian, "that nothing pleases merciful God as much as unanimity of belief on the part of all Christians in the matter of the true and stainless faith".³⁵⁸ This proclamation caused more differentiation and alienation in the Christian territories than necessary. As for the West, through the centuries there were intervals where the imperfect contacts between Rome and Constantinople kept each side partially ignorant of the precise course of events in the other side.³⁵⁹ That may have been a drawback in the relationship of the two biggest and neighbouring parts of Christianity. This "fission" divided both State and Orthodoxy, repeatedly, but at the same time it was inherent in Christianity. On the one hand, we had an Empire with a human Emperor as God's representative on earth who expresses the will of God and therefore translates the State and himself into a "holy" entity. On the other hand, we had a Trinitarian divine unity, which source is the One God, the Father, who was also revealed as human through his Son, with the energies of the Holy Spirit which also emanate from the Father. They nevertheless remained "close", and in some areas fusion was possible, and borrowing was extensive. This happened usually in cultural, intellectual and artistic

³⁵⁴ Ibid, pp. 96–100.

³⁵⁵ Nicolas Oikonomides, "Hommes D' Affaires Grecs et Latins A Constantinople (XIIIe–XVe)".

³⁵⁶ Ivan Djuric, "L'Habitat Constantinopolitain sous les Paleologues: les Palais et les baraques (quelques remarques)", in *The Everyday Life in Byzantium: Ruptures and Continuities in the Hellenic and Roman Tradition* (Athens: National Foundation of Byzantine Studies, 1989), p. 737, footnote 12.

³⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 737.

³⁵⁸ Mango, p. 104.

³⁵⁹ Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West*, p. 97.

expressions, as I believe here ambivalence can exist in a complementary form and cannot be condemned easily as it may not even be recognised. At the time, Latin sponsors could be from multiple areas of life, and in the Byzantine sphere artists wouldn't sign their work as it was considered a conservative tradition, where innovation wouldn't be admitted. Fissions happened nevertheless, more than anything, and this brings us to the myth of unity, the possibility and the dream of it. These matters I will discuss in the next two chapters.

Chapter Four: On the Notion of Sacrifice; Sacred and Profane in Practice

I. Introduction

In this chapter I consider the journey a last recourse; inevitable and necessary as a sacrifice, and a response to the grim events that were about to bring the end of the Empire a few years later. It may sound contradictory, but I read it as a protectionist move directed for the long-term health of the continuing patriarchates of the East. In all four of the principal cities of eastern Christendom – Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem – the populations wanted to stay Orthodox in view of the new situation that could arise, i.e. in the very probable case, as we have seen in the previous chapter, of the Ottomans ruling over the remains of the Byzantine³⁶⁰ Empire.³⁶¹ With the Latins ruling over their various possessions as a consequence of the Fourth Crusade and the Latin dominion of Constantinople from 1204 to 1261. This admittedly Oecumenical Council of 1438–1439, with all its pomp and grandeur, did re-affirm eventually the Orthodox inclination of the population³⁶² and the strength that this faith was “arming” its people with. We cannot know if the Emperor was consciously elaborating this scheme as a policy, but he definitely fought his way to the end, without essentially changing anything. Joseph Gill told us that he died loyal to the Union and the anti-unionists saw his tolerance as weakness or bad conscience.³⁶³ But on the other hand, he was equally firm with the unionist side in Italy and in Constantinople in many crucial instances. “He stood fast on Greek terms when urged by cardinals in the name of the Pope: “We do not write or say anything else, except that we will unite if you accept that we have given you; if not, we shall go home.”³⁶⁴ John VIII Palaiologos never imprisoned any anti-unionists leaders in the way that Michael VIII Palaiologos had done previously during the attempt at Union at the Council of Lyons. When asked if, in the conferences, they should speak “... with real contention and insistence or rather ‘with economy’ the Emperor replied: ‘declare with real contention all our rights’ but...

³⁶⁰ See term in Glossary.

³⁶¹ In the late Palaiologan period Byzantium was reduced, politically, administratively, and economically to the point that it had neither sufficient strength nor the means to resist the Ottomans on its own and consequently needed the assistance of foreign allies. On the one hand, the military pressure of the Ottomans and on the other the weak, decentralised Empire of the Palaiologoi faced the economic pressure of the Italian maritime states, which controlled much of its trade at this time. It became a tributary vassal of the Ottomans from the early 1370s. In Nevra Necipoglu, *Byzantium Between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Latin Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p. 5. See map in **Appendix IV**, image 1.

³⁶² Which is what Michael VIII Palaiologos did during the Union of Lyons in 1274, when he personally converted to Catholicism, he nevertheless requested that the Greek Church be permitted to recite the Creed before the schism and up to their time, as a matter of vital importance to what he was calling “... the immense multitude of our people”. In A. Edward Sicienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 137.

³⁶³ Joseph Gill, *Personalities of the Council* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1964) p. 123. This is a collection of articles.

³⁶⁴ See an instance like that in footnote 15 where he firmly and decisively addresses the Pope and his demands for obedience. In Gill, *Personalities*, p. 173 and p. 259, from the *Acta* originally, p. 420.

preserve an open mind on both the Greek and the Latin doctrines’... the opinion of the majority should prevail.”³⁶⁵ Cleverly enough, the Ottoman authorities did not “battle” this sentiment of the Christian faith when they finally reigned in the “Queen of Cities”. However the Latins, in many cases, did try to “Latinise” the populations under their dominions.³⁶⁶

The theme of the Union of the Churches was a favourite resort of the Byzantine Emperors to secure military assistance from the West. The Pope was considered so influential that the Emperors looked for his “blessing” as a route to gain the support of the western princes and Italian states through, for example “... an expedition that would free the city of Constantinople and the other parts of Greece from the incursions of the ‘abominable’ Turks”³⁶⁷ in the words of Pope Urban V, written in 1365 to the Byzantine Emperor John V Palaiologos. However, the age-old story of the schism, which I discussed in Chapter 3, was continuously presented as the main obstacle to unity, with the most pressing problem being the Pope’s jurisdiction over the Pentarchy (the church is founded on the principle of the five Patriarchates) and his position vis-à-vis the eastern Christian Emperor and the rest of the world. His insistence on a monarchical “reign” over the Church by the Roman papacy was an obstacle, when the Emperors and the patriarchs based their beliefs on the old-customs and canons, that is the laws of the previous seven Oecumenical Councils and favoured a collegial system, “... the patriarchs should come answering and being judged, where justice was given locally to the injured’...” and not by a Pope far removed from their problems acting like an ecclesiastical “monarch”,³⁶⁸ or a Synod of bishops interpreted as a “supreme authority”, a Church of the Councils.³⁶⁹ Also, the western secular hierarchy in the early fifteenth century were voting for Conciliarism. In Italy, the Emperor took a lot of the ecclesiastical administration duties over from the Patriarch Joseph II, because Joseph II was very ill most of the time and eventually died before the signing of the Decree of Florence. John VIII was the convener of the Council, the head of the Greeks in Italy. However, he never ventured into theology: that was the province of the Church.³⁷⁰

Recapitulating “... l’union des eglises romaine et grecque”³⁷¹ within the macro-history of the struggle for Union, the 1438–1439 Event presents a micro-history that is a transformation into a

³⁶⁵ Gill, *Personalities*, p. 119, from Syropoulos, *Memoires and Acta*.

³⁶⁶ In 1278 Pope Nicholas III, in the context of the Council of Lyons Union, demanded the personal submission of every cleric in the Empire and the adoption of the *filioque* throughout the East. At that point, the Greek Patriarch was asking for preservation “... without change of the customs which have flourished in our Church since its origins”. In Siecienski, p. 139.

³⁶⁷ Joseph Gill, “John V Palaeologus at the court of Louis I of Hungary”, in *Church Union: Rome and Byzantium (1204-1453)* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979) p. 31.

³⁶⁸ The quotation from Joseph Gill’s “The Primacy of the Pope” article, in the aforementioned book (see footnote 4), which is a collection of Gill’s articles. *Ibid*, p. 274.

³⁶⁹ “The Primacy of Peter”. See J. Meyendorff et al, *The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology* (London: The Free Press, 1963) p. 43.

³⁷⁰ Gill, *Personalities*, p. 119.

³⁷¹ Sylvester Syropoulos, *Les “Memoires” du Grand Ecclesiarque de l’Eglise de Constantinople Sylvester Syropoulos, sur le concile de Florence, (1438-1439)*, translation from medieval Greek into French, introduction and commentaries, by V. Laurent, *Concilium Florentinum Documenta et Scriptores*, Series B, Vol. IX (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1971) p. 13. Translations from this main source are mine, unless stated otherwise. Henceforth referenced as Syropoulos, *Memoires*.

most heroic story. I agree with Gill that this was the most oecumenical of all Oecumenical Councils in the history of the Church. The largest and fullest representation from the East, the Emperor John VIII, the Patriarch Joseph II, with some 20 metropolitans, and 700 Greeks met with the Pope Eugenius IV, and Latin bishops in Ferrara.

When John VIII died in October 1448, he was refused the usual religious commemorations like Michael VIII Palaiologos before him after his involvement in the Council of Union at Lyons in 1274.³⁷² In Italy, Gill maintained, while trying to give as balanced a view as possible, John VIII was unsympathetic and indifferent to Greek needs, which is in line with Syropoulos's narration in his *Memoires*. But Syropoulos wrote his memoirs a few years after the event, and so he could support anti-unionism openly to secure his exit from the signature he had put down. I believe a lot of the criticism by which Syropoulos portrays the Emperor is unfair and partisan, and I explain below why I think so. The Greek *Acta* is the other source of information for the Council, which was not as detailed as the *Memoires*, but still of value because it was written as a diary on a daily basis.³⁷³ It painted an image of firmness and confidence on the side of the Emperor in his decisions to the Pope, and to his own people whom he tried to encourage when they were downcast. To the Pope, he declared: "I am not the lord of the synod nor do I wish the union should be imposed by force, but our synod agreed of its own free will and sent this profession of faith."³⁷⁴ John VIII died disheartened, but his sacrifice wasn't in vain. "... he was buried in the venerable monastery of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ the Pantocrator, in the tomb of his wife. May God lay his soul with the holy emperors. Amen Amen. Amen."³⁷⁵

II. Sacrifice in Practice – The Journey as Sacrifice

The notion of sacrifice as I understand it in relation to the participants in this activity was very intense. It was an unprecedented myth-making affair, set on the international scene of Europe in the early fifteenth century. The Empire would expire 14 years later under the advance of the mighty Ottoman Empire, which was expanding consistently towards the West. While in the fourteenth century scholars affirmed that the fate of the Empire was being decided, in the fifteenth century this fate was sealed. Yet the Emperor still had to act as the paramount protector of his people: by

³⁷² This may possibly mean no more than that John was somehow prevented from assuming the monastic habit before he died, as the emperors usually did. See Gill, *Personalities* p. 106.

³⁷³ Please see the previous chapter for description of the sources of this work.

³⁷⁴ In Gill, *Personalities*, p. 173 from the *Acta*, p. 418, p. 421.

³⁷⁵ Gill, *Personalities*, p. 124, in Lambros, IV, pp. 90–91.

parading the myth of the Byzantine Emperor, the archetypal cultural ancestor, who initiated a true change in history and in religion, by uniting symbolically with him, and consequently with their God, through the ritual practice of the journey. In Italy, for the last time and with his retinue, he expected to re-emphasise the old religious sequence, to renew the order of symbolical reproduction. Death is welcomed as the conclusion of this enterprise: it is preferential to join the saints and crucified Christ.

They consumed vitality in order to be able to re-conquer it in the form of “the dream of unity”, which the Emperor hoped for, and wished to be possible. They failed to achieve what they set out to, but it wasn’t a total failure, as I shall argue in the course of this chapter. For this reason of possible re-conquest, I maintain that we have many prelates who were ambivalent in their judgement of which side to take. I found the Emperor’s sense of duty to his place in the world and towards his people profound. “He acknowledged the present Council to be ecumenical and therefore unerring, and ‘it is necessary that we should follow it and its decision and especially that I, decked by the grace of God in imperial robes, should support and defend it’.”³⁷⁶ Nevertheless, when in Florence and deciding for a delegation of Greeks to negotiate with the Latins, he chose both philo-unionists Bessarion and Isidore of Kiev, and fervent anti-unionists such as Mark of Ephesus, Dositheos of Monemvasia, and Anthony of Heraclea.³⁷⁷ After the signing of the Union Decree

“was proclaimed in the form of a papal bull: It began ‘Laetentur Caeli et exultet terra...’ (Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice...) on July 6 1439,³⁷⁸ and all the pomp and pageantry of the pontifical liturgy in the Duomo, Santa Maria del Fiore, the Emperor³⁷⁹ invited the Pope to celebrate the liturgy in Greek.”³⁸⁰

³⁷⁶ Gill, *Personalities*, p. 172, in Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 265.

³⁷⁷ Sicienski, p. 285, footnote 111.

³⁷⁸ “The date has been verified on examination of an astronomical fresco on the blue star-studded dome of the Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo in Florence... a heavenly space in a Christian Church... which may have financed by Cosimo who financed the Council and he intended to echo a play between word and image, the incipit of Eugenius’s bull *Laetentur caeli in the coelom* (roof, ceiling) of the church... Ambrogio Traversari, a Florentine monk and humanist friend of Cosimo’s, composed the Greek version of the Decree of Union.” It is important to underline, as Patricia Brown notices, how the Medici got involved in the project of the unity of Christendom through the Pope and a financial alliance. See Patricia Fortini Brown, “The Council of Florence and the Astronomical Fresco in the Old Sacristy”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 44, 1981, p. 177, p. 179 and footnote 32, and p. 180.

³⁷⁹ “the Emperor clad very richly in Greek style in a brocade of damask silk, with a hat in Greek style on the point of which was a beautiful jewel, a handsome man with a beard in Greek style... the Greeks with very rich vestments of silk after the Greek fashion and the style of the Greek vestments seemed very much more sober and more worthy than that of the Latins.” In Vespasiano da Bisticci, *The Vespasiano memoirs : lives of illustrious men of the XVth century*, trans. William George and Emily Waters ; intr. Myron P. Gilmore (Toronto: University of Toronto Press in association with the Renaissance Society of America, 1997), p. 25. See this in relation to descriptions in **Appendix IV**, images **11a** and **11b**.

³⁸⁰ Already in the preparations for that day the Emperor insisted that the eastern liturgy should be sang the same day as the Latin one so that the people can hear the “symbol of faith” also without the addition and that would have been an honour for the eastern Christian Church. See Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 487. The phrase taken from I Chronicles 16.31, it appeared in a hymn of thanks to the Lord by King David after the Ark of the Covenant had been returned to Jerusalem. The original copy was deposited with the civic authorities of Florence and is still on permanent display in the Laurentian Library. Vespasiano da Bisticci, *The Vespasiano memoirs : lives of illustrious men of the XVth century*, p. 179.

But the Pope pleaded ignorance of the rite, and asked that some of his representatives might first view the liturgy so that its suitability could be assessed. The Emperor, insulted at the suggestion that the eastern liturgy might somehow be found lacking or inappropriate, immediately withdrew the proposal.³⁸¹

John VIII Palaiologos was reigning over the smallest territory the Empire had seen in eleven centuries. By being in a complementary and opposite relationship to the Latins, many of his activities were taken to a large scale; he had to show grandeur, imperial skills, he didn't want to show anything less than the Latins were expecting. He didn't undertake a dangerous journey to Italy, putting in peril the lives of many, in order to uncover the largely known signs of decay, of an end. Plain submission was out of the question. He was fighting for the future, even if that was no longer in territorial terms, but in spiritual ones, and further cultural persistence and endurance.

“as emperor he had the right and duty to defend the canons and the doctrines of the Church... the emperor could and should intervene in ecclesiastical affairs when necessary to maintain peace in the Church, a policy the emperor maintained throughout his reign, facing strong reaction from the Church.”³⁸²

Once in Italy though, he wasn't able to escape some of the humiliation that he and his retinue suffered.³⁸³

In addition, the Emperor was living in an excessively weak body. Many times, in the narration of the journey, his inability to attend several meetings is mentioned, or even his inability to travel to places because of gout and severe arthritis.³⁸⁴ Pero Tafur makes a note of his poor health when in Ferrara in one of the Council conferences “The Emperor had the gout and could not walk, and he was carried in a chair by certain men.”³⁸⁵ Despite his “internal’ unstable state, he nevertheless kept riding a horse and continued hunting in a way that attracted the complaints of the Marquis of

³⁸¹ Siecienski, p. 287, footnote 139.

³⁸² Charalambos Dendrinis, “Manuel II Palaeologus in Paris (1400-1402): Theology, Diplomacy And Politics”, *Greeks, Latins, and Intellectual History 1204-1500*, Biblioteca 11, ed. by Martin Hinterberger and Chris Schabel (Leuven, Paris, Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011) pp. 406–409.

³⁸³ In the first dogmatic session in Ferrara, when the Emperor arrived from his residence in the country he was on horseback. This was a matter of proper Byzantine court procedure. He wanted to ride through the rooms leading to the chapel of the palace so as to dismount when close to his imperial throne as all the nearby rooms were thronged with people. The papal attendants, in spite of his insistence would not permit this, so he was forced to dismount or to wait – depending on the source one reads. But in both cases, the Emperor felt deeply humiliated. Finally, John VIII was half-assisted, half-carried across this distance until he was set on his throne. The second time he wouldn't go through this dishonour, so the Latins made an opening in the wall so that from that point he could be carried unobserved through a series of rooms to a small apartment with a door opening into the chapel in the corner near his throne. See Gill, *The Council of Florence*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) p. 142 and p. 146.

³⁸⁴ John VIII wrote on 25 February to the Fathers of Basel to acquaint them of his decision and to exhort them to join him in Ferrara. He had always, he said, refused to agree to Basel as the scene of the Council and now, even had he wished to go there, he could not, for his physical condition after the impact of the voyage was such that he could not mount a horse. E. Cecconi, *Studi storici sul Concilio di Firenze*, I, Firenze, 1869, doc. CLXXXVI, in Gill, *The Council of Florence*, p. 104.

³⁸⁵ Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures, 1435-1439*, translated and edited, with an introduction by Malcolm Letts (London: Routledge and Sons, 1926) p. 175.

Ferrara and the inhabitants of the area for wasting their fauna. Even Syropoulos, who is critical of him, says that

“Throughout, all this period of the council, the Emperor for all his hunting did not enjoy good health. He was ill in Venice when the decision Ferrara or Basel was to be made; ill at Ferrara, when the question of discussion of the *Filioque* was to be settled and at times away from the public sessions for reasons of health... he was so ill that he could not lift his head from the pillow, and he who was always ill and always insisting that he was well, then could say only: ‘I am ill and I don’t know if I can manage to express what I want to say.’”³⁸⁶

Upon departure from Constantinople, the Byzantine Patriarch Joseph II, proclaimed: “We depart but we shall win and we shall return covered with trophies.”³⁸⁷ And while he was trying to convince and excite some metropolitans and other imperial administrators, who were even fearful for their lives in their preparatory discussions, he announced, before they travelled to Italy:

“... we would be returning glorious after having preached, thanks to God’s blessing, with a vengeance the real doctrine, and after having fortified our Church without having in any way shaken its Truth. Would they have recourse to violence? We wouldn’t in any way deviate from our ancestral faith, even if they were torturing us... either we will die as martyrs or we will become ones because we want it! Nothing could be better for me than to be like Saint George or Saint Demetrius.”³⁸⁸

This same Patriarch balked at the idea of having the Pope covering their expenses, which would make the Greeks his “hireling slaves”.³⁸⁹ When close to death, this same prelate asked members of the delegation in private meetings to support the Union, “reminding them of their collective ignorance and of their debt to him personally”.³⁹⁰ The sacrifice was quite widespread and very uncomfortable for all. As for ignorance, the Patriarch was not always standing high in dignity but he was absent in most sessions due to ill health.

At the time they arrived back in Constantinople, in February 1440, their Union was rejected by the people of the endangered, impoverished City. The chronicler Doukas explained:

³⁸⁶ Gill, *Personalities*, p. 115-116. Also in Syropoulos, p. 86, 235, and *Acta*, p. 218.

³⁸⁷ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 187.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 187.

³⁸⁹ Siecienski, p. 149.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 286, footnote 128.

“As soon as the hierarchs came ashore, the Constantinopolitans... embraced them and asked, ‘How are you? What news do you bring from the synod? Have we gained the victory?’ They replied, ‘No we have betrayed our faith. We have exchanged piety for impiety. We have renounced the pure sacrifice and become azymites’.”³⁹¹

Here they connect the Eucharist, which mirrors the archetypal sacrifice and is central to the Christian rites, with the transgression they believed happened in Italy by the best representatives of eastern Christian empire. Purity is the enemy of change:³⁹² you don’t invest in it with ambivalence and then compromise it, because then you spoil and stain it.

The eastern Romans went on their journey to defend their Christian belief, “of the old”, and they became involved in seminars of Christian knowledge, which were far removed from the very early Christian Fathers’ teachings they were adhering to. But the fact that they had to encounter their complementary opposites and follow the path of danger, poverty, nostalgia, disease, even death, of ambiguity and compromise, exposed the sacrifice they were making and the relation of this earthly sacrifice transformed their journey into a sacred adventure, comparable with the quintessential Christ’s Sacrifice. As a group they step out of their formal structure, and they are exposed to power that is enough to break them or to make them as a group. As Mary Douglas notes, “the trumped up dangers express something important about marginality... during the rite they have no place in society...”³⁹³ We see the Emperor living outside the city of Ferrara, half an hour on horseback, and the prelates who have ongoing issues with subsistence. My point is that the undertaking of the journey, by voluntarily setting themselves apart and by getting close to death, they turn their sacrifice into a “holy” endeavour. They gain knowledge,³⁹⁴ they go towards the divine and those who think they betrayed actually gain power and strength to continue the endeavour in different ways.

This rhetoric before, during and after the Event, brings us to the crux of the theme of sacrifice, which so vividly preoccupied the Patriarch during their departure from Constantinople. During their stay in Florence,

“Syropoulos narrated further events of idleness, misery and want. They were all upset about ‘their misery, want and separation from families, for now they were four months in arrears

³⁹¹ Ibid, p. 171. In Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*, an annotated translation of *Historia Turco-Byzantina* by Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1975) p. 315.

³⁹² Mary Douglas, p. 200.

³⁹³ Ibid, p. 120.

³⁹⁴ Maurice Bloch, *Prey into Hunter, The Politics of Religious Experience* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992) pp. 26–28.

in respect of the money-grants...’ ‘Cristoforo saying on this, that nothing should be given to Ephesus as eating the bread of the Pope was like a Judas’.”³⁹⁵

Another source, John Eugenicus, brother of Mark of Ephesus, states: “with famine on top of plague... the very necessities were lacking, since for four months we had had to live on our resources.”³⁹⁶ The Event they are going to take part in with such big representation was one with major political, legal and military implications.

According to Maurice Bloch, there are two types of sacrifice, the one the Ancient Greeks employed and the biblical one. In the case of the Ancient Greeks, Bloch states that sacrifices had to be necessarily performed before any major act of government, exactly like the one I am discussing in this work. This, he claims, was because sacrifice gave the sacrificers power and wisdom, so the performance of the ritual was believed to be giving strength.³⁹⁷ Here, the characters of the Event are not performing direct sacrifices like the Ancient Greeks or Abraham did. The characteristics that they give to their speeches and their deeds before, during and after the Event indicate that their verbal exaggerations and excessive habits are indirectly exhibiting a “sacrificial” aspect. The proposition “I get into the hardship and difficulty, and I offer even my life, as a sacrifice, for my faith or for my country and its continuity” signifies that they embark on a boat not only for a long, “wet”, and dangerous journey traversing the Aegean and the Adriatic seas, but it points also to a “conceptual embarkment”. A mental journey of a “spatial aspect of this final, aggressive outward movement...”³⁹⁸ from which I may never come back, but where I will realise my “conceptual” myth “from the old”. From this point of view, the journey is realised as the ritual-mediator itself, where it enables the conceptual schemes of the characters to get exposed and act fully “... as entities, which are both empirical and intelligible”.³⁹⁹ By the ritual or the rites, long lives the myth, the story, his story.

Sacrifices and this journey are actions taken in times of trouble when people need strengthening, Bloch tells us. It may sound oxymoronic. How would such a difficult journey, that actually weakened a lot of the members of the retinue and left the Emperor in poorer health than his already ailing body could sustain, actually strengthen their cause? Nevertheless,

³⁹⁵ Ibid, *Memoires*, p. 251.

³⁹⁶ Gill, *Personalities*, p. 164. In Lambros, I, P. 275.

³⁹⁷ Bloch, *Prey into Hunter*, p. 26.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 27

³⁹⁹ Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason*, p. 105.

“after the sessions at Ferrara, the Greeks were set to return to Constantinople, and it was only the Emperor’s patience and persuasion that prevailed on them to remain. He won them over to discuss dogma and to go to Florence by urging that, having already overcome the dangers and labours of the long journey, they should not now yield to circumstances and return empty-handed.”⁴⁰⁰

But why does going on a journey, or hunting, excessively extend or manifest itself as a cure for people? In the exclamations of this Patriarch,⁴⁰¹ we “see” images and the prospect of a military expedition, rather than a peaceful encounter. And maybe this movement out of vitality – because of the hardship in order to survive, and back again, via the so-called “saintly martyrdom”, that these difficulties will take us to – provides the framework that Bloch discusses: “of Hubert and Mauss’s ‘communication’ theory of sacrifice”.⁴⁰² The Patriarch speaks about martyrdom on the models of saints, and through this communication with the divine, they make this sacrifice “... so that sins may be forgiven or other benefits obtained. Hubert and Mauss called these rites ‘rites of sacralisation’.”⁴⁰³ Therefore, this journey can be explained as a unique “rite of sacralisation”, because this is the first time it acquires this militant character, while the participants envisage and conceive it as an opportunity of communication with the supernatural, which will be a gift really for them because they want it as “the crossing of the barrier between the sacred and the profane”.⁴⁰⁴ Mauss and Hubert may have been criticised, as Bloch informs us, about trying to build a universal theory that doesn’t always work, but I believe that, in the case of the 1438–1439 journey, the feeling of “going beyond their strengths” was widespread among the eastern Romans. As things go from bad to worse, there is nothing to lose by immersing themselves in this adventure, as who knows, the benefits may be substantial, spiritual or material, or hopefully helpful for the Empire.

This journey-ritual could be considered as part of a wider interconnected ritual system, which also includes marriage rituals (consistent alliances between Latins and eastern Romans, although it has been argued that only low-rank Latin women would marry into Byzantium). This voyage, one in a series of movements to the West, could be seen as an ordering movement: cyclical and creative, that, when taking into account the Crusades and trade, came to involve all of society, and not only particular intellectual or wealthy circles. Since the rituals evoke a general image of the construction of the World in a controlled but dynamic form, some of the time they may not serve a specific

⁴⁰⁰ Gill, *Personalities*, p. 173, in *Acta*, p. 217, pp. 218–219, pp. 221–223, confirmed by Bessarion Ad Alex. Lasc.; P.G. 161, 422 CD.

⁴⁰¹ During the negotiations of the previous attempt for union at the second Council of Lyons in 1274, Patriarch Joseph I had taken a different approach to Latins: “while holding that the Latins were indeed heretics, nevertheless urged the anti-unionists to charity, writing: After all, they were formerly our brothers, reborn brothers of the same font of holy baptism; if they are sick, if they are eccentric, they nevertheless merit more pity than hate. We need to be merciful, to love them, to pray for them”. In Siecienski, pp. 135–136.

⁴⁰² Bloch, *Prey into Hunter*, p. 27.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

purpose at all. It is just a regeneration of the rapprochement, where reproduction of the renewal of promises of unity happens. The eastern Romans have to do this by their sacrifice, according to the Latins, in order to cure themselves from a disease, all for the unity of faith. And this unity is a unity of the opposed. Society would be re-ordered at the end of such a ritual activity, through which regeneration of a particular group in society will be accomplished. This group comprises the anti-unionists, the monks, the clergy, which are also the groups in society that kept the Orthodox strand of faith alive through the centuries. They are the ones who are associated with renunciation and asceticism. Let's not forget that every Emperor and Empress turned into a monk or a nun near the end of their lives, and remained in monasteries until their death. This conscious change of residence of the Emperors is taken as a preparation for death; it is a willed and organised act of renunciation, a renunciation of all temporal affairs.⁴⁰⁵ A monastery – the imperial monastery in these cases – was a ritually purified place. According to the general theory on “choosing your funeral ground”, the monastery stands for the final act of ascetic renunciation. It works as an offering of the body to God. In this sense, it can be said that this was an act of sacrifice, a sacrificial offering given by the near-to-death Emperor. Manuel II turned into the monk Matthew, and John VI Cantakouzenos became Josaph.

In an image shown in the appendix we see the Emperor and the monk side by side; his sacrificial image cannot be separated from his ascetic image.⁴⁰⁶ John VIII's activity around the faith Union prevented him from assuming the monastic habit before he died. However, during his sojourn in Ferrara on the one hand, he managed to enjoy the seclusion that the monastery offered by living in one, half an hour's distance on horseback. This particular Emperor had already sensed the possible consequences, and had thought of another way to facilitate his soul's re-entering into a vital world. At the end of the Council, on 27 July 1439, he managed to travel on a pilgrimage: he went for an outing, accompanied by about 50 gentlemen and attendants, to visit Pistoia and the Girdle of Our Lady at Prato.

The Emperors during the late Byzantine period, on the other hand, were a lot more likely to have philo-unionist sentiments, since they were descendants of Constantine I.⁴⁰⁷ He was their most venerable ancestor, who really re-created and re-structured the faith world as we know it today in every sense. Was this, in a way, a re-enactment of the creation of faith, which was the basis of all

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 52.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 50. **Appendix IV**, image 2.

⁴⁰⁷ Eusebius back in the fourth century already presents the Life of the first Emperor of the *united Christian Empire*, Constantine, in a way that “... the emperor assumes a role in the divine dispensation akin to Moses, if not to Christ himself. Eusebius even calls the Emperor a ‘pattern’.” By analogy “... his court will be the earthly counterpart of heaven and the gathering of bishops at his table after the Council of Nicaea an image of Christ's heavenly kingdom. In that way, a secular Emperor through the myth was transformed into an archetype, religious prototype for the future dynasties.” In Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991) p. 54. Emphases in this footnote is mine.

moral and spiritual life? Yes it was, with differences each time, but within the big, all-encompassing similarity of the Union of the faith council for the organisation of a crusade against the infidel. So the “rebounding of violence”, in the words of Maurice Bloch, that the Emperor undertakes through his hunting ritual – a re-conquest of vitality that is gained through the hunting activity – is part of a total system of concord between the two parts of Christianity. In each case, they re-enact what they have borrowed and what they have exchanged with each other through the centuries in a transformed way. According to Bloch, all rituals dissolve the specific into a general process, re-enacting the creation of a moral life.⁴⁰⁸

They came close to death on many occasions, and a couple of them indeed died. One succumbed to the plague in Ferrara (Dionysius, metropolitan of Sardis). Interestingly enough, he was buried just outside the little ancient parish church of S. Giuliano, near the wall by the church of S. Maria di Bocche, which traditionally had some sort of connection with the Greeks. The choice to bury him at a threshold near the wall that was seen as a boundary, indicates separation and gives an indication of the status of his formless, cold body. He had to be placed at the external boundaries of the church, as if his identity was still a threat. He belonged to a religious minority that lived in the middle of the larger society of Latins; but as nothing was agreed yet, he could only be given a place near the wall. The other one, the Patriarch, died of the hardships he endured, as he was of old age, but this was at the end of the Council, and he did, while still alive, eventually make an effort eventually for the Decree to be signed. He was buried inside S. Maria Novella, which was the Pope’s residence while in Florence. Thus, after all the disputes over seating arrangements in terms of order during the Council, the Constantinopolitan Patriarch was now under the Pope’s feet. In that sense, when people died the immediate cause was a disease, but the element of sacrifice was ever-present.

In his opening oration of the Council, as one of the two spokespeople for the Greeks, Bessarion underlined the elements of sacrifice:

“... an Emperor who has always from boyhood on desired the concord of the Churches, who grasped the occasion of achieving it when it was offered, who scorned danger, neglected comfort, put considerations of life, wealth and fatherland in second place, to co-operate with Christ and protect the peace of the Church. No less is the zeal of the Patriarch, who despite age and broken health yearns to assist in this great work, and the rest of the Greeks gathered

⁴⁰⁸Bloch, *Prey into Hunter*, p. 47.

here from most distant lands will support his good will... It is sometimes better to overcome for a good purpose than to overcome.”⁴⁰⁹

John VIII brings back with him a lion,⁴¹⁰ a Venetian gift, utterly symbolic. An abstract acknowledgement of his dignity, his majesty, the importance of his Empire, which served as a model, an archetype for building their own “empire”.

The Emperor had to leave his young, beautiful wife behind and his health was very poor, so the intense and forward-looking activity of bearing children was denied, “the abandonment of this form of vitality would be the abandonment of life itself for the whole community.”⁴¹¹ In this case, the love for hunting animals acts as a substitute for the children that he never had although he got married three times. He almost underwent a self-castration. This could mean that the vitality that the human being, a child, a descendant, would have given him, he abandoned, in order to fulfil the original promises to his “ancestors”, the Emperors before him, who because of their non-bodily nature, are simply satisfied with receiving as an honour the insubstantial aspect of the animal. In this case, my interpretation of the excess hunting activity, presents an allusion to sacrifice.

III. John VIII Palaiologos Commemorative Medal and the Vision of St Eustace – the Sacred and the Profane in Action

The Emperor had a special relationship with his horse, which is notable. He went everywhere on it. And it was his horse that was an essential element in his hunting ritual.⁴¹² The horse is an animal that is good to think with. He appears on it in the murals of the Medici chapel and the first commemorative medal made in history. The artists involved associated him with his horse and painted him with it. Even in front of the cross he is mounted on a horse; if we connect it to the life of St. Eustace, the details of their stories overlap. In public, the horse was between him and any other human being, which was there to express that as an Emperor, he had to have horses to go

⁴⁰⁹ Gill, *The Council of Florence*, p. 144. In *Acta Graeca* (A.G.), pp. 37–46. The last line is of interest as a guiding principle, if we read it carefully: it is sometimes better to be defeated for a good purpose, and consequently succeed in dealing with a difficulty, than to defeat an opponent.

⁴¹⁰ “A work called *Physiologus*, equally popular in the East and in the West, that served to disseminate the theological interpretation of alleged animal behaviour: the lion who sleeps with his eyes open typifies the crucified Christ whose divinity remains awake...” In Mango, p. 179.

⁴¹¹ Bloch, *Prey into Hunter*, p. 27.

⁴¹² In Pero Tafur’s travels through Constantinople, the Emperor sent him to go hunting as a way of entertainment: “... and we killed many hares, and partridges, and francolins, and pheasants, which are very plentiful there... and from that day onwards, when he or the Empress, his consort, desired to hunt, he sent horses for me, and I went with them...” Even when he arrived, “the next day he sent for me to ask me go hunting, and he sent horses for me and mine, and I went with him, and with the Empress, his consort, and that day he told me that he was acquainted with the matters about which I enquired...” Later he comments, “The Greeks are great hunters with falcons, goshawks, and dogs. The country is well stocked with game both for hawking and hunting, and there are quantities of pheasants, francolins and hares. The land is flat and good for riding.” In Pero Tafur, *Travels and Adventures, 1435-1439*, p. 124, p. 118, and p. 146.

hunting. Yet, most importantly, I argue that if we consider hunting to be a special ritual within the rituals the Emperors had to be trained in⁴¹³ – as military strategy, along with shooting. If we call this kind of emblematic symbol a “holy institution”, then horses, as a very important “tool” of that institution, in their very special relation to the huntsman – in this case John VIII Palaiologos or St. Eustace who was protector of huntsmen in the middle Ages – acquires almost the status of a “totem”, in the sense that it connects the huntsmen to the past, to Caesars and Emperors. In a sense the horse and the institution stand for the ancestors, not just the successors and Roman predecessors of Constantine, but also the *signori* of Italy, “not in order to express social differences but in order to create and strengthen these differences”.⁴¹⁴ Even between themselves, as Woods-Marsden tells us, the courts of Italy were highly competitive.⁴¹⁵ Making a medal about an Emperor, which they could own and circulate was another way to relate to the ancestors of the Romans, to boast about their ownership, like King Alfonso of Naples, a king *molto studioso* of classical Antiquity, who kept his imperial coins in an ivory casket as if they were relics.⁴¹⁶ At the same time, the myth of Rome and its Emperors, specifically with John VIII’s image on top of the medal and all the religious connotations engraved on the back, as a saint both in the Byzantine⁴¹⁷ and Latin traditions,⁴¹⁸ and protector of huntsmen, was moving in these circles and was disseminating the glory of the imperial institution and reminding everyone of their acquaintance with one of the true Roman Emperors, even though he didn’t even reside in Rome. They could identify with his persona and his “holy” status. John VIII Palaiologos, no matter at what stage his Empire was at any given moment, was a descendant of Constantine I, who triumphed in many battles to build an immense Empire. He also had a vision after which he was converted himself and the whole of his Empire. Maybe a remote allusion to that vision ties up with the vision of St. Eustace, who was Roman and converted after this miraculous event. It is not difficult to create links between ancestors and “...empathise with an Emperor, a Caesar, who had not only ruled the world’s largest empire, but was also one of the few pagans who have had a vision of the Christian truth.”⁴¹⁹

⁴¹³ Byzantine authors like Eustace of Thessaloniki in an Oratio to the emperor Manuel I wrote about how natural it was that “in times of profound peace, the strength and the courage was shown in races of horses, and hunting of wild animals...” John Kinnamos put the prowess shown at war and at hunting at the same level. In Andre Grabar, *L’Empereur Dans L’Art Byzantin* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1926) p.58.

⁴¹⁴ Dan Sperber, *Structuralism and Since: from Levi Strauss to Derrida*, edited by and with introduction by John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) p. 30.

⁴¹⁵ Woods-Marsden, p. 664.

⁴¹⁶ Woods-Marsden, p. 662.

⁴¹⁷ **Appendix IV**, images **3a** and **3b**.

⁴¹⁸ Erwin Panofsky, “Durer’s ‘St. Eustace’”, *Record of the Art Museum*, Princeton University Art Museum, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1950, pp. 2–5. In this article Panofsky presents from *Acta Sanctorum*, September 20 (September, VI, p. 106ff) the principal *vita* in Greek and Latin, the established story of St. Eustace’s life and how this saint was usurped from Hubert, Bishop of Liege, in the iconography of the patron saint of hunters. Obviously he took over his life story and was shown to the beholders as a hunter kneeling before a miraculous stag between whose antlers the image of the crucified Christ appears. This event, very importantly, suggested the legend of the conversion of St. Hubert. Then Panofsky informed us that Durer’s print represented a much earlier saint whose place – no one knows when, why, and how – was subsequently taken over by Hubert. What is critical in these narrations is that St. Eustace was venerated as Eustathios in the eastern, and as Eustachios in the western Church. Originally this saint was Roman, named Placidus and Placidas, after the vision of Christ he had while he was hunting, and, while hearing his voice from the antler’s mouth, he adopted the Christian faith. The story continues nevertheless to be enriched with more animals; he passes many hurdles where he refuses to sacrifice to Apollo and is thrown with his family to a lion, Androcles fashion, who refused to harm them and licked their hands. See **Appendix IV**, image **4**.

⁴¹⁹ Woods-Marsden, p. 662.

John VIII would have been enthusiastic about this unique communication opportunity: to be seen on a medal, being the sitter himself, and that could be replicated. He could be identified on the one hand with his renewed ancestor,

“the profile format of the male likeness, deriving from imperial coins, embodied connotations of rulership and empire for the culture; by assimilating the most famous rulers to the example of the most famous ruler in Byzantium, the medals affirmed their authority to rule.”⁴²⁰

On the other hand, the story of the vision was pointing back to Constantine again, and the notion of integrating both Byzantines and Italo-Byzantine traditions through religion, whose illuminators would use a similar storyline. Also, both Greek and Latin are united in the inscriptions on the medal, which is another indication of the kind of distribution and the chords this medal intended to strike as a valuable unifying object in a unity council. He already spoke about his desire to have an Oecumenical Council better than one of Constantine’s, as I discussed in the first chapter. John VIII would gain the eternal life Pisanello was known to give to his patrons.⁴²¹ This is the time when fantasies could come true via Pisanello’s so-called

“stock-in-trade of painted dreams, replete with warriors victorious in battle... horses, hunt and game, connoting the *signori*’s political aspirations... realisation of their central political objectives of military prowess, territorial gain, and dynastic legitimacy.”⁴²²

Being seen on a medal served John VIII’s plan of creating a myth of unity and about the similarities the two groups shared that would live through the centuries. Even if the medals mainly functioned at the higher levels of society, they could at the same time connect with all levels of society through the religious image at the back, which referenced a story that both the populations of East and West knew and revered. In this sense, very importantly for the main argument thread of this thesis, religion was used as an integrative force instead of divisive one. And John VIII proved the point of his decision against all the odds to undertake this journey-ritual to Italy for the Union of the Churches through the acquaintance with Pisanello’s artistry, the painter of dreams. If they wouldn’t have had this particular event on that scale, none of it would have been possible, or known to us through history and through art. This was a covert success, which no other General Council had

⁴²⁰ Ibid, p. 670.

⁴²¹ Ibid, p. 663.

⁴²² Ibid, p. 664.

managed before. John VIII did not have relics to offer,⁴²³ but the Latins this time were ready to gift the Emperor back: there is one more image that he Emperor has received.

The only triumph John VIII had on Italian soil was as a huntsman and this was highly symbolic and therefore meaningful. This is the one area where he turned from prey into hunter; where he transformed himself from the frequently ill, unable to attend some sessions because of poor health, an emperor of an impoverished state into a brilliant statesman and huntsman, equal and not inferior. There could be no argument there about positions, height of positions or ornaments of thrones. That is the reason I believe when he was hunting he was generous in inviting others, and among them young men, to share his pleasure. The activity had to be exaggerated and very public. He reached a point when he didn't want to have any more public session on the debate. They embarrassed and humiliated him. But his hunting had to be seen and felt. He hunted any sort almost of beast or bird and usually with horse and hounds. On one occasion,

“he sent to the legates of the Council of Basel during their stay in Constantinople in October 1437 at various times hares, partridges and half a deer complete with horns... S. Lambros has published two letters from Nicholas Notaras written to a friend in the entourage of the Emperor in Italy – there is nothing in either except talk of horses and hounds and beasts of chase... in the second of them the writer hopes for the Emperor's speedy return... ‘because besides the other high qualities that God has given him is his frequent exercising of young men in the chase by often going out for that purpose, which gives not only that pleasure and satisfaction, but is by its nature an introduction to almost all military training and soldiery experience... in Italy not satisfied by the horses offered by the Pope, he bought one from Goudeles, the envoy he had dispatched with Isidore of Kiev to persuade the Slav princes to send representatives to the Council...’⁴²⁴

⁴²³ John VIII's father, Manuel II, in his travels to the European courts, makes no mention in his treatise of a meeting with the Pope, and we know that he was against the encounter over an Oecumenical Council. While on international diplomacy trips, he or his ambassadors delivered reliquary gifts to the Queen of Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and as far as Portugal and Spain. These could be a particle of the garment of Christ that healed the woman of the issue of blood. Manuel II himself presented King Charles III of Navarre, the Duke of Berry and Visconti, with pieces of the True Cross. Charalambos Dendrinou comments that they were “symbols of Byzantine imperial ideology, stressing the special place Byzantium and its holy emperor held in the whole of Christendom, carrying a message of unity of the mystical limbs of Christ... when his ambassador Manuel Chrysoloras visited Paris in 1408, he presented the abbey of St. Denys, on behalf of the emperor with the well-known manuscript with the works of their patron Saint (the Dionysian corpus)... as personal royal tokens of appreciation and friendship, these two manuscripts and their content symbolise the common tradition and intellectual dialogue between Byzantium and the West.” He means the Greek manuscript containing the Dionysian corpus presented as diplomatic gifts by Michael II (820–829) to King Louis the Pious (814–140) almost six centuries earlier. In Dendrinou, “Manuel II Palaeologus in Paris (1400-1402)”, *Biblioteca 11, Greeks, Latins, and Intellectual History 1204-1500*, ed. by Martin Hinterberger and Chris Schabel (Leuven, Paris, Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011); p. 403 and pp. 421–22. Please see **Appendix IV**, images **5a** and **5b**, for the image in Manuel II's manuscript with John VIII and **Appendix IV**, image **6** for John VIII's image, an adult Emperor.

⁴²⁴ Gill, *Personalities*, p. 113.

“All the *signori* were passionately fond of the hunt... the hunt, justified in treatises as the best preparation for war, was certainly central to their lives in a way that governance was not.”⁴²⁵ And John VIII was appropriately “educated in the military arts of riding and shooting with various weapons”.⁴²⁶ In this respect his most valuable triumph was in the field of indirect cultural policy. At the point where his Empire was, it was indispensable for his people to see the benefits of connections between the two religions, rather than concentrate on the different wording of the doctrine that was splitting them apart. The humanist would present or dedicate his translation to the prince, so the artist could present his drawing to the lord as a *gift* (as was common in the next century), no doubt always in the hope of having the gift reciprocated with hard cash.⁴²⁷ The medal was made “from life”, when the Emperor was in Florence. It was cast in the summer of 1439. He had a good reason to share ideas on its making with the medallist, but he definitely didn’t have the hard cash. Here, according to the synthetic nature of the gift, the medal in this context is a notion of reciprocity. It could be regarded, in the area of encounters and religion between two complementary opposite groups, “as the most immediate form of integrating the opposition between the self and others... the agreed transfer of a valuable from one individual to another makes these individuals into partners, and adds a new quality to the valuable transferred”,⁴²⁸ and to the relationship in the long term.

Pisanello was a consistently unparalleled draughtsman of animals and birds, but particularly of horses. On the reverse of this medal, he blends the sacred with the profane in a discreet, yet profoundly striking way. The Byzantine Emperor is facing the sacred, on his profane horse, on return from his princely, secular sport of chase. The qualities of the medieval prince of purity, prowess, beauty and chastity were celebrated. How else can one be granted a “holy” vision if he is not close to divinity himself, with his life and actions. And from the Byzantine point of view, piety, humanity, justice, wisdom are the four virtues that a *basileus* had to display in affairs of the State, as “he was the father and a shepherd of his people, and he thought it the duty of a true king to be like the King of the Universe in loving-kindness to his subjects and forethought on their behalf.”⁴²⁹

Interestingly enough, the vision of St. Eustace in a painting by Pisanello is depicted on a horse in a very similar hunting place, in front of a cross, performing a prayer. Here my thesis on the mental vision of John VIII, of a “what if it could be” state of affairs between the two people that brought him and his people to Italy, relates indirectly to the metaphysical vision of St. Eustace. I maintain

⁴²⁵ Woods-Marsden, p. 667.

⁴²⁶ Ibid, 667.

⁴²⁷ Ibid, p. 668.

⁴²⁸ Ibid, p. 668.

⁴²⁹ Ernest Barker, “Social and Political Thought in Byzantium from Justinian I to the Last Palaeologus: Passages from Byzantine Writers and Documents”, translated with introduction and notes, in *Social Anonymous Address to an Unknown King*, p.222.

that Pisanello is a true painter of “dreams”: he shows us the saint experience a profound moment of encounter with the “holy” painted in a profane environment full of beautifully coloured animals, both dead and alive, engaging in an act of violence. He wears a blue turban and a magnificent princely outfit that could allude to this “ideal space”, which places the saint between the celestial and the terrestrial planes. This fusion of sacred and profane, the locus between earth and heaven, the irrational space in between, was translated best by this famous painter in Italian Renaissance times. In the same vein, it presented the Emperor who was going through highly precarious times, while he was returning from hunting, on his horse, like St. Eustace, with his hunting attire and his retinue on their horses. However, the real space in which his retinue is located seems to be completely cut off from the action in the foreground. The Emperor is shown in front of the cross, in a face-to-face encounter with the symbol of Passion, of sacrifice; a metaphysical vision of the triumph of “holy” over all enemies of faith. The medium was different; on the medal everything had to be done on a small, round, rough surface as opposed to the larger, colourful and rich surface of the painting, and that makes the “language” of the work be transmitted in a deconstructed way. The symbolism is less strong, but the similarities are striking. The naturalism of the horses and the rough, profane environment are opposed to the soft image of the small cross, almost suspended next to the word PICTORIS. The vision of St. Eustace looks more like a tapestry, which, considering that Pisanello was also selling drapes while travelling all around Italy, is not strange. On his travels, he must have met a lot of people who were wearing some of the perplexing items he depicted. St. Eustace’s vision had been painted before the medal was done, in the early 1430s, so it could well have served as an idea, inspiration and aspiration.⁴³⁰ We do not have facial similarities, only narrative ones.

According to Woods-Marsden, Pisanello virtually invented the bronze medal portrait,

“Medals were designed to be shared with the sitter’s peers in the most intimate of circumstances, by being passed from hand to hand. The novel technique of bronze casting made these *cosenuove* unique as a form of communication that, in the age before printing, could be replicated and as widely distributed as the sitter wished. The profile format of the male likeness, deriving from imperial coins embodied connotations of rulership and empire for the culture; by assimilating the rulers to their classical exemplars, the medals affirmed their authority to rule. The enthusiasm and alacrity with which Pisanello’s clients commissioned this *all’antica* artform in an *all’antica* medium reveals their enchantment with this badge of modernity... since the despotic state as body politic was largely subsumed into the identity of its ruler, his image had to be imbued with grace – the visual

⁴³⁰ Woods-Marsden, p. 667.

rhetoric of persuasion, as it were – as the pictorial alter ego had to testify to the state’s power as well as the sitter’s status. Thus Pisanello... was the earliest Renaissance artist to formulate the visual construction of seigniorial identity.”⁴³¹

Pisanello was modelling himself on Hellenistic Greek artists, who Alexander the Great held in high regard: Lysippus (objects cast in bronze) and a new Apelles (his consistent signature) “Pisano the painter”, and justified the humanists’ constant reference to these and other Greek artists in so many poems dedicated to him.⁴³² Later she states that a true prince should have had an equal mastery of letters and war.⁴³³ John VIII had all these qualities: “he received a careful literary education... an anonymous panegyrist makes John out to have been a prodigy of learning, educated in military strategy and naval tactics, in literature, rhetoric, theology and philosophy, consorting daily with Aristotle and Plato.”⁴³⁴

If the medal and the work of the artist,⁴³⁵ with his unsurpassed skill, was to give eternal life to his patrons, then the specific medal crafted for John VIII was a testimony to his legacy as an Emperor and *Basileus Romaion*. And the fact that he was God-elected and for this reason “holy” was depicted at the back of the medal in his vision of Christ’s Crucifixion as Man, the Passion which is associated with the theme of sacrifice and the subsequent Resurrection as Divine. The St. Eustace painting relates to this chivalric tradition and wears this strange blue turban as a novelty. I would add the collection of examples Panofsky presented in his paper on St. Eustace to the medal of Pisanello with the Emperor in front of the crucifixion. He observes that

“once established this High Gothic type developed according to the progress of perspective naturalism: the abstract environment came to be concretised into a rich landscape and the stag was removed to a ‘second plane’. In principle, however, the interpretation remained unaltered.”⁴³⁶

In the interpretation of this scene, I argue that in this instance John VIII takes the place of the saint and we see him instead of St. Eustace in the foreground. The artist abandons the rich landscape that he knows so well and he takes on an exercise of deconstruction; he returns to the abstraction with the mediator Emperor, who was now facing divine martyrdom. In hindsight, this could well be a perfect allusion to his “martyrdom” in Italy. Having the Emperor on the horse follows the Italo-

⁴³¹ Ibid, p. 673.

⁴³² Ibid, p. 673.

⁴³³ Ibid 673.

⁴³⁴ Gill, *Personalities*, p. 105.

⁴³⁵ See *Appendix IV*, images 7-8 and 9-10, and 11a and 11b.

⁴³⁶ Panofsky, p. 9.

Byzantine tradition, which changed of course as the medium changed, and the surface got smaller and spherical. The bust of Christ on the cross morphed into the apparition of the crucifix in the abstract form of the cross firmly stuck on the ground. This detail alludes to the firm faith of John VIII's to the divine, this time on Italian soil. In this case the fusion of the traditions came to us in its most concrete. Pisanello did emphasise the inward emotion rather than the outward action yet again with masterly discretion; this was in contrast to the Byzantine art, still classical in spirit, which tended to stress dramatic action rather than emotion.⁴³⁷

Woods-Mardsen tells us that the *signiori* of the Quattrocento, Popes Martin V and Eugene IV, and the Venetian government were patrons of artists like Pisanello. As described in the previous chapter, Eugene IV had already commissioned the bust of the Emperor to Filarete and the doors of St. Peter's in Rome. We also know that there is one more medal with Eugene IV holding the Decree and the Emperor along with the bishop of the Ethiopians kneeling under it. Following a different myth, we shall investigate in Chapter 4 the frescos that the Medici *signiori* as patrons commissioned from the artist Benozzo Gozzoli for the Medici Chapel in about 1460, much longer after the Event had concluded. The Medici *signiori* were the Emperor's hosts in Florence. Pisanello's John VIII medal was profoundly important, as it was the first commemorative medal cast in early Renaissance and was a portrait of the Roman Emperor who resided in the East. It had immense symbolic value as a gift; a special gift of reciprocity from western patrons. To whom though? The Emperor was long gone from Italy. He couldn't have commissioned it himself, because he had no funds. It therefore wasn't made for his eyes. The Empire was on its last legs following the futility of western promises. It couldn't have been commissioned by the Venetian government, because the activity took place in Florence.

In this chapter, I considered the area of sacrifice and the Holy with as main actors Emperor John VIII Palaiologos and his horses. His hunting habit has been reinterpreted with the help of anthropological theories to indicate how religion can have a unifying after-effect in unprecedented diplomatic situations. I have also reconsidered the journey, which has been read as a sacrificial rite in the context of the religious and political situations of the time. In Chapter 6 I will work on the subject of diversity in unity with a main actor, cardinal Bessarion, who arrived in Italy as a Byzantine priest with the delegation. I will discuss his transformation in relation to the Emperor's Union project and its future implications for the Byzantine state.

⁴³⁷ Ibid, p. 5

Chapter Five: The Journey as Historical Metaphor of Mythical Realities, John VIII Palaiologos, the Emperor

The time is upon us for a millennial shift
To mark the moment we offer this gift.
If it be more beginning or end
I cannot presume to suggest or pretend
But whether welcomed in or welcomed out
Tis a moment of time not soon forgot
Time is what binds us and tears us apart
But for every ending we can attempt a new
start.⁴³⁸

What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum
The Barbarians are due here today...
Why did our emperor get up so early,
and why is he sitting at the city's main gate
on his throne, in state, wearing a crown?
Because the barbarians are coming today...
he had prepared a scroll to give them,
replete with titles, with imposing names...⁴³⁹

I. Introduction: Reflect on the Future Consequences of Art beyond Immortalisation of the Event

This thesis offers a way of looking culturally at a certain history. I maintain that, on the one hand, this Event happened because of a need to confront centuries-old contradictions and conflicts. In doing that, it brought about an extreme position, a vision of “what if it could be”, an illusion of change, that, almost like a dream suggested that an alternative view was possible. This is a dynamic act of “cultural praxis”, a term used by Sahlins, where the dialectic of the material and the symbolic, the real and the perceived, the structure and the act carries the weight.⁴⁴⁰ Although the situation was highly polarised, practice strived to synthesise and transcend the associations with the respective poles,⁴⁴¹ and structure and history came face to face in Italy in the early fifteenth century. The Emperor John VIII Palaiologos, a historical-cum-mythical personality, led an unprecedented Event, and what I call the journey-ritual of 1438–1439, which is presented as the pinnacle of action in a chain of events that were already unfolding in the eastern Mediterranean and Europe. He was the agent who envisioned, embraced, and at the same time ventured to transcend the dichotomies, who wished to communicate, albeit not necessarily in a conscious way, and to navigate through the

⁴³⁸ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. x.

⁴³⁹ Constantinos P. Cavafys, *Waiting for the Barbarians, from the Canon, collected Poems*, trans. by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. G. Savvidis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) from the official website of the Cavafy Archive.

⁴⁴⁰ Bell, p. 76

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

historical process of oppositions with his grand entourage, with their truth being its “poetic logic”.⁴⁴² And they would do that with all their senses, where all practices come together, with their tastes and distastes, being obliged and being repulsed, being astounded and being proud.

What is then the so-called “lived system of meanings”, or the “unified moral order”? What is the “natural weave of constraint and possibility” that the Emperor, along with the members of his community, had to live by for the benefit of the wider community? I maintain that

“Practice sees the problem it is intended upon; it does not see what it itself produces in the very operation of practice... practice does not see what it does: its production of a new answer without a question, and simultaneously the production of a new latent question contained by default in this new answer... The effectiveness of practice is not the resolution of the problematic it addresses but a complete change in the terms of the problematic, a change it does not see itself make.”⁴⁴³

Therefore, practice is real and the Emperor and his retinue show us what could happen as the very act of “myth-making” unfolds when the entire terrain and horizon is about to be transformed after eleven centuries of the previous profound transformation that set the principles for this major act.⁴⁴⁴ In this ritual-act, conflicts-of-the-old are exhibited and exaggerated, as naturally, culture is allowed, tensions are released, vented and maybe “catharsis” was achieved. The journey was the medium, a form of communication; although it was a “wet” journey, and treacherous for the elderly and the sick, it still presented the firm ground where a large “family reunion” occurred, albeit as is natural for old and big families, not free from the escalation of tensions, struggles and hopefully some resolutions.

The focus is on the act as a practice. Within the framework of the four features that Catherine Bell has highlighted, this act is situational, which means that it can only be understood within the specific context in which it occurs and that furnishes the synchronic events to the journey.⁴⁴⁵ I elaborate on some of these “influences” (structures or sources) that exist within the act itself in the next section of this chapter. The second characteristic of human activity as ritual practice is “inherently strategic, manipulative, and expedient”.⁴⁴⁶ I interpret the journey of such a strategic

⁴⁴² Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, p. 10. In Sahlins the myth that is repeated is one of conquest and conversion, while here it is one of unity in division.

⁴⁴³ Bell, p. 87.

⁴⁴⁴ The Emperor believed that he could recreate this myth for himself and his people. But as Sahlins tells us, history the first time is a myth; from then on it is an event. In Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, p. 9.

⁴⁴⁵ Bell, p. 81.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

move through the main historical actor, John VIII, enriched with many elements of improvisation that happen on the way, and what Sahlins calls “structures of the conjuncture” – meaning the interaction between system and event – which together provide us with a meaningful social and cultural process. The Emperor’s will to act is remarkable, and integral to the context of action. He was over-determined and some members of his delegation, like Bessarion, who later became Cardinal, and Scholarios, who later became the first Patriarch under Ottoman rule, could, I believe, see the distinct virtue of his rule. He almost ruled the Event on horseback, and in a way he had his decisions legitimated through that ritual, as we shall see in the following chapter. He put his stamp on the Event, which is attested as a most significant historical eventuality today because of this Emperor. He was the historical actor who mediated the whole story. Syropoulos, who had signed the Decree of Union, wrote his memoirs about the Event four or five years later to record his distaste for the Emperor and all the differentiations in the group of Greeks. This provocation to react and memorise vivid details of the deliberations showed the conceptual wealth the journey had created and the solidarity that it invoked back home after the Event concluded. The difference in this cultural practice though lies in that it almost didn’t matter anymore what the official outcome of the votes was. With the impact of the supernatural onto the terrestrial, based on the structural ambivalence where one human can be both divine and of this world, it becomes possible, a human ruler and divinity to be united. In this sense, both thesis and antithesis appear as potential outcomes. And from the experience of Florence-Ferrara, we see that they can be combined in individuals such as Bessarion and Scholarios, and yet lead to a continuity at the level of those contradictions.

“The continuity lies at the level of the contradiction, rather than the cultural practice or of ‘mentalite’ which are notions that tend to freeze social action at the deep structural level, to embed it in concrete foundations. What mattered had already been achieved. The victory was elsewhere. The appeals were made, culture was dispersed on a grand scale, material for the re-creation of the original myths abundant and the Italian intellectuals, artists and statesmen, including the Pope, managed through this event to instil cultural and political values, and a Platonic Academy was set up in Florence, ‘converting beliefs about another world into facts about this one.’”⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 194.

II. The Journey as Historical Metaphor of Mythical Realities

I believe it is quite fundamental that the journey was immortalised on the doors of San Lorenzo. The encounter of East and West had a profound effect on the concepts and processes of understanding, on debate and reason. God and the unity of Christianity were engraved on the actual bronze doors of the Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo,⁴⁴⁸ in Florence, by Donatello.⁴⁴⁹ J. Paoletti put the dates of the execution of the decoration of the doors as most likely to be between 1434 and 1443, before the artist's departure to Padua, which is around the time the Council happened and implies that Donatello was present in some of the public sessions. The striking figures of the saints who, in the decoration, are holding books and talking to each other so vividly, allude to the Event's debates. I think that when Filarete, in his treatise on architecture named the figures "fencers", he wasn't far from the truth. The manner in which the arguments unfolded could prompt pictures of fencers and wrestlers, even in our minds. Their "fight" was a fight with words, but a battle nevertheless. Another element that needs to be underlined here is the fact that the doors in Italy that embellish the major entrances of cathedrals and churches were an imitation of Byzantine originals that began to be made in Italy from the second half of the eleventh century. These doors indicate "... doors of life", that lead the donors usually, "close to God... they are advisedly symbols of the doors to eternal life."⁴⁵⁰ Ghiberti, another Italian artist of the early Quattrocento, modelled and cast his *Gates of Paradise* at the same time as Donatello's doors for the Old Sacristy, and they were not put into place until 1452. Filarete's silver doors for the Old Saint Peter's, commissioned by Eugenius IV himself, were installed in 1445.⁴⁵¹ These were all made after the Events of the Unity Council in Florence. Both artists, Filarete and Donatello, "... conscientiously imitating a hieratic early Christian style for his own doors for the early Christian basilica of St. Peter's in Rome."⁴⁵² Paoletti reminds us that the Medici established their family fortune through their involvement with papal finances, a position that Cosimo continued to enjoy under Eugenius IV. Now the choice of the saints depicted on the doors, made the connection with the Council of Florence. "St. Andrew, the brother of St Peter, was believed to have ordained the first Bishop of Byzantium, thereby

⁴⁴⁸ The Old Sacristy was conceived as burial site for the Medici, Lorenzo and Cosimo, and their parents. When Lorenzo died in 1440 he was buried there, as well as Cosimo's legitimate sons and grandsons. This is the only commission among the "doors" projects that exists in a private context. Cosimo conceived of a specific sculptural project whose very medium was to make prominent civic monuments at the time he was gathering the political power of the republic under his private control. The bronze medium also set him apart from other individual patrons of his time, as bronze was used for corporate and civic projects and its use in the Old Sacristy transformed the space from a family to a quasi-civic structure. John T. Paoletti, "Donatello's Bronze Doors for the Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo", *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 11, No. 21, 1990, p. 53 and p. 59.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁵⁰ Margaret English Frazer, "Church Doors and the Gates of Paradise: Byzantine Bronze Doors in Italy", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 27, 1973, pp. 147-148. The Italian donors, following in the footsteps of Byzantine predecessors, made their doors surrogates for the doors of Paradise. They did so by presenting to all those who looked upon their doors for paths, supplementing the *via crucis*, by which they hoped the gates would be reached and opened: the intercession of the Virgin and Saints with Christ or the apostolic example and counsel or the guidance of an archangel or the rebirth in Christ through baptism... The effectiveness of the prayers of the Virgin and saints depended upon Christ's sacrifice on the cross, which opened the way for man's salvation.

⁴⁵¹ See **Appendix V**, images **1a** and **1b, 2**, and **3** and **3a**. For the doors of both Donatello and Filarete please see **Appendix V**.

⁴⁵² Paoletti, p. 60.

establishing the patriarchate which Joseph of Constantinople represented in Florence in 1439.”⁴⁵³ Most importantly though, “... Andrew represented the Byzantine desire to equate the Church of Constantinople with the Church of Rome, thus making the two brothers founders of two co-equal churches.”⁴⁵⁴ Paoletti then interprets this choice on the doors as St. Andrew, representing the first of the eastern churches to unite, if ever so briefly, with Rome in 1439. I would rather argue that St. Andrew may have represented the possibility for unity and equality between the two churches: something that the Roman church did not accept for centuries, even during the Council.

Through the fusion of the works of these artists that the Event brought about, we find symbols that can be integrative and therefore transformative of a long-term differentiated situation between the two opposite poles. There was no negotiation on the primacy clause in the Council discussions. Here we see how symbols can be interpreted in many ways, especially when it comes to the beholder and a project of unity. The “Donatello” doors were a Medici commission. At the time of the Council, the Pope needed the Medici more in order to finance with loans the Event with 700 guests, than the Medici probably needed the Council. In this respect, I argue, that the Council served as a mediating ritual between “the thought and action of those opposed forces”, namely the East and West, “whose interaction is seen to constitute culture in some form”.⁴⁵⁵ It served as a mechanism of synthesis, of dialectics between the differentiated entities, and also as “a mechanism for the fusion of opposing categories simultaneously both to differentiate and unite a set of terms.”⁴⁵⁶ Therefore, this debate, as we see it, effected many unity elements, and made it possible for symbols to be known and visible, and become available for interpretation by the elites and the people alike.

Ambiguities are necessary elements, because without them, negotiation of anything proves superfluous and redundant. Therefore,

“With regard to the ambiguity of symbols, V. Turner identified the symbol as the smallest unit of ritual, and, therefore, the smallest ‘mechanism’ of the transformation and integration effected in ritual... then, in regard to the transformative effect of ritual, he described an interchange between these poles by which one experiences the ideological as the real.”⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵³ Ibid, p. 61.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 61.

⁴⁵⁵ Bell, p. 23.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 23.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 184.

Was this journey-ritual transformative through the symbol-units that were operating as part of the ideological and cosmological programme of the Byzantines? I assert yes, because what else was the reception of the Venetians to the Emperor and his people at their advent in Italy in 1438?

These were the characteristics that marked the Council itself, the magnificence of the Byzantine court and the acerbic disputations. The debates in the sessions, the contentious disputes between the delegations of the Greek and Latin sides, the clashes over the seating arrangements between the Emperor and the Pope, and between the Patriarch and the Pope. A few examples below give a sense of the temperature of the times.

The Patriarch Joseph believed that his relationship with the Pope (which he always intended to be familial) would be determined by their age, not their respective rank within the pentarchy. While in Venice, he confided in one of Eugene's representatives: "If the pope is older than I am, I will consider him as my father; if I am equal in age, I will consider him as my brother, if younger, I will consider him my son."⁴⁵⁸ Then, Mark Eugenicus was the only one not afraid to say that "the Latins are not only schismatics, but heretics", while previous generations of Greeks had been silent about this. Eugenicus's intemperate language angered the unionists, especially the Bishops of Mitylene and Lacedaemon "who would barely restrain themselves from rushing upon him to tear him to pieces with their teeth and hands".⁴⁵⁹ When after a long, hazardous voyage of three months the Greeks reached Italy, they had a question of protocol. The papal representatives were demanding the Patriarch to kneel and kiss his foot. The Patriarch exclaimed indignantly to the papal legates:

"Whence has the pope that right? Which synod gave it to him? Show me from what source he derives this privilege and where it is written? The pope claims that he is the successor of St. Peter. But if he is the successor of St. Peter, then we are the successors of the rest of the Apostles. Did they kiss the foot of St. Peter?"⁴⁶⁰

As the Latins continued reliance upon Aristotle, it prompted one frustrated Byzantine to exclaim: "Why Aristotle, Aristotle? Aristotle is no good... What is good? St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Basil, Gregory the Theologian, Chrysostom – not Aristotle, Aristotle!"⁴⁶¹ At the end he states:

⁴⁵⁸ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 230. Joseph II was almost 80 at the time of the Council, while Eugene was only 55. In Sicienski, p. 278, footnote 5.

⁴⁵⁹ Gill, *Acta Greca*, p. 400, and Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 224.

⁴⁶⁰ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, pp. 92–95.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 464.

“We Greek[s] began to get irritated, not only the hierarchs, but also all the clerics, the nobles, and the whole assembly, saying: What are we doing speaking and listening to empty words. They will not persuade us, nor we them; for this reason we ought to turn back to our city.”⁴⁶²

The answer to these ritual controversies, some of them stemming from canonical order, some from historical precedence, and some from differences in traditions of the ways of debating, was the iconography on Donatello’s doors with the pairs of figures, the “fencers” as Filarete called them. “The intensity of the debate is echoed in the inscription on the wall next to the cathedral sacristy which records the presence of the Council and the Union of the Greek and Latin Churches, POST LONGAS DISPUTATIONES.”⁴⁶³ Paoletti brings to our attention the magnificently animated, almost photographic quality of “Luca della Robbia’s carved reliefs, identified by Pope-Hennessy as Philosophy and Arithmetic, for the Campanile which he was working on at the same time as Donatello was working on the doors of the Old Sacristy...”⁴⁶⁴ These allegories of disputation as a liberal art are connected with Cosimo Medici’s love and support for learning: “the specific iconography in the second register does suggest that Cosimo wished to recall his participation in the Council...”⁴⁶⁵ the same as Eugenius was doing in his own doors as we can see in the Appendix.

To illustrate the points about the animated poses, Ambrogio Traversari who was a friend of Cosimo’s and had worked for a successful Council,

“wrote from Ferrara about preparations for the discussions: Pray, Father (since you are no longer able to fight due to your age), that our Agonotheta is deemed worthy to be granted victory amidst the fighting, and that the only truth that prevails rests with us. Extend like Moses your hand to the hills; we will fight in the plains and the Lord will overcome. Already we have joined in minor battles and have stirred things up in turn, and we are confident they will be conquered using reason and mildness.”⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² Siecienski, p. 281, footnote 31, in Gill, *Acta Graeca*, p. 217.

⁴⁶³ Paoletti, p. 60. See Appendix V, image 4.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 67.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 67.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 67.

III. Decline in the Last Centuries of the Byzantine Empire

John VIII was successor in an Empire where the basis was an ordered hierarchical world. He acted as a carrier, a container of an ideology, which "... is best understood as a strategy of power, a process whereby certain social practices or institutions are depicted to be 'natural' and 'right'."⁴⁶⁷ He was the defender of both spiritual and political power as the Roman Emperor; only one, and only the Emperor based in Constantinople could be a Roman Emperor as a descendant of the emperors of Rome. He was the

"head of the oldest Christian empire and held the supreme position within the hierarchy of rulers and also stood as the father of all Christian peoples at the head of the family of kings... the superior rank of the ruler provided a correspondingly superior position for the country represented by him, the hierarchy of rulers was at the same time the hierarchy of states."⁴⁶⁸

Therefore, the Bulgarians were, for example, the spiritual sons of the Byzantines. The whole terrestrial world was ordered around this one Emperor. At the beginning only the Persian king was a brother of the Emperor. After the ninth century, when Charles the Great's imperial status was recognised, that was "the heaviest blow to the prestige of the Byzantine hierarchy of states".⁴⁶⁹ He then became a brother of the eastern Roman Emperor, along with all the German, French and Italian successors. Nevertheless, only the Roman Emperors had a claim to universality, while the western rulers had not. To the Byzantines, there was one world-Empire and one true Christian Church. But even when political independence and spiritual independence started to fragment, the original conception of the unity of the world was

"so great [that it] was the suggestive power of the Romano-Byzantine ideas that even rulers of independent countries recognised for a long time the ideal supremacy of the Byzantine emperor. They liked to have the Byzantine court titles, which they obtained from Constantinople... All agreements the Byzantine Emperor had with rulers and foreign powers were not partnerships but unilateral documents bestowing the emperor's grace... even when the empire had to pay tribute to some overpowering adversary, these payments were represented as gifts of the emperor to the 'peoples' concerned... the granting of titles and insignia is comprised within the same mode of thought. Just as the power of the emperor

⁴⁶⁷ Bell, p. 192.

⁴⁶⁸ Ostrogorsky, p. 12.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 6.

was the outcome of Divine Power, so any other authority on earth was the outcome of imperial authority.”⁴⁷⁰

Many centuries later, John VIII Palaiologos wrote to the Florentines after the Synod of 1438–1439 to thank them and confer privileges to them for their hospitality, and he repeatedly mentions Constantinople as the God-guarded City,⁴⁷¹ the God-protected “Basilida” (queen) City or the City of the Emperors.

John VIII was born in 1392 (he died in 1448 at the age of 56, while he was 45 at the time of the Council). He was the eldest son of six children of Manuel Palaiologos (who died in 1425) and Helena Dragas of Serbia. He was born into “a world of great difficulty, for Constantinople was in the beginnings of its death throes”.⁴⁷²

“The city was enclosed within a stout and lofty wall, defended by many strong, high towers... Though the circuit of its walls is thus very great and the area spacious, the city is not throughout very densely populated. There are within its compass many hills and valleys where cornfields and orchards are found and among the orchard lands there are hamlets and suburbs, which are all included within the city limits. Everywhere throughout the city there are many great palaces, churches and monasteries, but most of them are now in ruins.”⁴⁷³

However, a bit more perplexed are a traveller’s notes when he records “In spite of the poverty of his circumstances the Emperor did not abate anything of the pomp and ceremony surrounding the imperial throne.”⁴⁷⁴ Tafur, after describing the limitations of the royal palace proceeds: “The Emperor’s state is as splendid as ever, for nothing is omitted from the ancient ceremonies, but, properly regarded, he is like a bishop without a See. When he rides abroad, all the imperial rites are strictly observed.”⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 10.

⁴⁷¹ In the seventh century during the critical years of the Persian Wars, the poet George of Pisidia and his contemporaries represent God, Christ, the Virgin Mary, and other saints as fighting on the Byzantine side, in fact sometimes taking an active part in combat, as the Homeric Gods had done. In the tenth century, Leo the Deacon told how the Emperor John Tzimiskes placed upon the chariot’s throne of beaten gold an image of the Virgin captured in Bulgaria. In 1422, Cananus gave an account of the Muslim siege of Constantinople and how they escaped all peril with the support, “the ‘presveia’ of the Mother of God”. The Byzantine lived in a world where miracle could happen and did happen. The alliance of God and Virgin is a factor in East Roman thought one should not undermine.” In Norman Baynes, *The Supernatural Defenders of Constantinople, Byzantine Essays and Other Studies* (London: Athlone Press, 1960) p. 249.

⁴⁷² Gill, *Personalities*, p. 104.

⁴⁷³ Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane 1403-1406*, ed. Guy Le Strange (London: The Broadway, 1928) p. 46.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Tafur, p. 145.

This was a particularly melancholic note to call the Emperor of the Romans a bishop without a See. But it was not the first time that the concept of “oekoumene”⁴⁷⁶ was challenged. This concept was a synthesis of Church and State. But at least in these last centuries, the lands the State was administering were smaller than those the Church could command.

“In 1393 the Grand Duke of Moscow, Basil I, suggested that things reached such a sorry pass in Constantinople that, although the Church was seen to be surviving, there was no longer any very evident Emperor to lead society: We have a Church but not an Emperor.”⁴⁷⁷

In response to this insult, Patriarch Antonius IV defended the role of the Emperor in a letter of 1395, which can be characterised by its most important line, “My son, you are wrong in saying that we have a church, but not an emperor”.⁴⁷⁸ Similarly, the monks maybe persecuted by Michael VIII Palaiologos for their adherence to the Orthodox faith but they were convinced that despite their miseries, they could not live without an emperor any more than a body can live without a head.⁴⁷⁹ On the other hand, Syropoulos reports from the Council that the Patriarch confided to intimates his hope that papal co-operation would permit him to cast aside the Greek Church’s servitude to the emperor and “to recover the authority proper to me”.⁴⁸⁰

From other sources, we learn that Symeon of Thessaloniki, metropolitan of the city in the early fifteenth century, denounces the wealth of the *archontes*.⁴⁸¹ Joseph Bryennios complains that they build three-storey houses and they do not repair the city-walls.⁴⁸²

IV. The Emperor and the Illusion of Unity: Structures in History

In the midst of the image we are presented with, the journey as a ritual was in the service of an ideal situation. It was the last communication, in the form of a symbolic attempt of a rapprochement for a proud negotiation. Ultimately, what it achieved was in the service of an illusion, because no

⁴⁷⁶ Oikoumene means: all the inhabited world

⁴⁷⁷ Donald M. Nicol, *Church and Society in the Last Centuries of Byzantium*, p. 4.

⁴⁷⁸ Barker, p. 195. That is to say “we acknowledge that we belong to the Byzantine patriarchate, but we do not acknowledge or belong to the Byzantine empire.”

⁴⁷⁹ Nicol, p. 5,

⁴⁸⁰ Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West* p. 94, footnote 44. But the Patriarch was disillusioned when he heard of Eugenius’s demand that he kiss the Pope’s foot.

⁴⁸¹ Symeon of Thessaloniki, *Politico-Historical Works of Symeon, Archbishop of Thessaloniki (1416/17-1429)*, ed. D. Balfour (Vienna: Verlag der Osterreichischen Academie der Wissenschaften, 1979) p. 47. Archontes were the “noble” rich inhabitants of Constantinople or Mistra.

⁴⁸² Joseph Bryennios, “so that if just ten of you rich *archontes*, starting thirty years ago, had put so much care and expense into the city walls as into building themselves three-storey houses, no part of the city (perimeter) would not be renovated today”, p. 249, in ed. N. B. Tomadakis, *Joseph Bryennios and Crete around 1400*, Philological and Historical Study, Athens, 1947.

tangible political or organisational result came out of it. Those members of the delegation who accepted the Union renounced their signatures and the Pope never sent any substantial military help on time to save the last stronghold and the most symbolic one, the City of Constantinople. Conversely, with the realisation of this journey as a ritual, a transmission of culture was made possible and by their selections and emphases, the members of the eastern Christian delegation promoted a value system and a behaviour that only a Roman Emperor and his “holy” retinue could acquire and require. The formalities and honours that the Emperor expected and insisted upon encoded his position in the hierarchy of his contracted State, and the enlarged Christian Church with all the symbolic and cosmic relations that it entailed. The physical interaction of all these bodies coming from two different worlds in the public receptions and deliberations provoked a different understanding that the two parts didn’t have the opportunity to receive before. But of course, as a strategy, it couldn’t guarantee the maintenance of the eastern Christian societies in the forms desired. For all these reasons though, the journey was not a failure. I believe it was very important for the Emperor first to see the reaffirmation of the cultural order as originally embodied by this large group of individuals in the “rival” space, and second to manage to give an image of an alternative situation of unity to this same group of people. His disappointments were many, but that was also part of such a risky journey. I argue that he delivered a master-class of the dominant values from his position, embedded in the symbolic schemes of his belief, by keeping an open mind, and having a tolerant outlook towards what was possible. The whole Event on the one hand, did bring solidarity to the anti-unionist group and strengthened the position of the Church even further. On the other hand, it gave the chance to those who could be more tolerant and have compromising minds, like Bessarion, to work on the unity project, albeit from a different perspective. The experience of the journey was important, because only then could it be transformative for anyone, for any scheme of knowledge. The Emperor was the most committed, but many members in his retinue wouldn’t have been able to participate unless they had a belief of some achievement through it. “... by employing a limited pool of powerful symbols rituals are an important moulder of political beliefs”,⁴⁸³ and this reinforced the individuals’ attachment to their own group.

John VIII undertook the journey against his father’s advice:

“My son, the Emperor, seems to himself to be a suitable emperor – but not for the present day. For he has large views and ideas and such as the times demanded in the heyday of the

⁴⁸³ Bell, pp. 186–187.

prosperity of his ancestors. But nowadays, as things are going with us, our empire needs, not an emperor, but an administrator...⁴⁸⁴

For him the situation was twofold. First when he was addressing his retinue during the dogmatic debates in Florence,

“I did not start the question of union, he said, but I inherited it from my father who, as you all know, was an acute philosopher and a competent theologian. He, with the support of Patriarch Euthymius, set negotiations going and he would have brought them to a conclusion had he not been impeded. So it fell to me to complete the project and with your approval the patriarch and I embarked on it. Time is going by and we have achieved nothing worthwhile, and if that goes on what will be the fate of our race? A persecution worse than that of Diocletian and Maximilian. So we must give up discussions and find some other means towards Union. I will remind you of one thing. Fra Giovanni declared openly in the Council that the Latins confess one cause, The Father with the Son, of the Holy Spirit and anathematised those who assert two, and he has given me this, at my request, in writing...⁴⁸⁵

John VIII understood very well the continuity of traditions and the mythical past. He clearly refers to the First Oecumenical Council and Constantine I as a measure of what he wanted to achieve. He gave this speech to his entourage:

“... if, with the help of God, we deliver this Council, to a real union, as we hope, it will be a bigger success than the ones before. What we are dealing with now is more considerable than in the previous councils. Indeed, in the previous council, the opponent was Arius and a small number of heretics – thirty. At the time the whole church was orthodox. Constantine the Great, convoked an assembly of bishops who voted and condemned Arius and the small group of his disciples. The same happened in the other councils. The opponents were not many. In the one we are going to now, the difference is great and the difficulty substantial. The whole of the Church is divided. The Latins now acquire a crowd of bishops and theologians of considerable and many nations. We have all the way to India, orthodoxes, and from what I hear, an innumerable and powerful nation, to whom we should send ambassadors to talk about these matters. In this way, from both sides we are numerous and

⁴⁸⁴ Gill, *Personalities*, p. 105.

⁴⁸⁵ Gill, *The Council of Florence*, p. 212. Syropoulos refers to this speech (IX, 7, pp. 258-9) on some unspecified date towards the end of May 1439; *ibid*, footnote 2.

divided with a schism which is 500 years old. That is why on both sides the obstacle is considerable. If God wishes, and the right union is achieved, as we think and hope, it will be strong and what will be achieved, stronger and more important than what the previous oecumenical councils achieved all together and we will do a lot of good with the help of God. Here is what the German Emperor told me when I met him: ‘take care and realise the Union. If you manage it our Church will recover, you will correct it, because ours have violated a number of points of ecclesiastical order taking action as they pleased. Your Church, the Greek part, kept this (ecclesiastical) order. If you realise the Union you will correct also the numerous points where our Church needs to remedy.’ He told me many other things among which to your advantage also that if the union happens he will provide us with mighty help and he will pass down to me the succession of his empire.’⁴⁸⁶

The problems of precedence between Pope and Emperor and between Pope and Patriarch, continued to loom large, naturally enough, when the joint Council finally opened. And already before, when the seating plan was under discussion between the two sides. However, before engaging into the minutiae of protocol, we need to place them in a broader context: that of the tensions over primacy and authority that arose in late antiquity and have haunted the Christian Church ever since.⁴⁸⁷

Symeon of Thessalonica, writing (like Makarios) early in the fifteenth century, argued that the solemn anointing of an Emperor on his accession symbolised the priestly holiness not of the Emperor but of the Patriarch who anointed him.⁴⁸⁸ But even so, he did not deny that an anointed Emperor had a unique role within the Church.

“He has received this honour [communion within the sanctuary] through the anointing of kingship, as receiving the post of the [representative of the] Holy Church and the title of ‘defender’ of the Church, and as the one anointed by the Lord, and appointed to be the emperor of the people named after Christ and of the whole world. He is to bestow good order and peace on the Church, to lead and direct her, to subdue trouble-makers, and to make everyone obedient and submissive to her.”⁴⁸⁹

The question of precedence between Pope and Emperor came to the fore when, after the Pope’s formal reception of the Greeks, the seating plan for the Council was discussed. It was obvious that

⁴⁸⁶ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 585.

⁴⁸⁷ J. Price, Symeon of Thessalonica, *On sacred ordinations* 207, PG 155. 417B (unpublished paper presented at conference on the the Council of Florence-Ferrara at the University of Birmingham, 2010), cited by Dagron, p. 279.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 280. The Emperor’s title “Defender of the Church” in the following passage is also mentioned by Makarios, chapter 111, who deduces that the Emperor had a right to involve himself in all ecclesiastical affairs.

the Latins would sit on one side of the nave and the Greeks on the other, but who should preside? The Latins proposed that the Pope should sit on a throne between the two parties. Indeed, at any Council attended by the Pope in person, he would expect to preside and be seated in the middle, at the head of the assembly. But the Greeks rejected this. The Emperor John proposed instead that he himself should preside, and that he could appeal to precedent, since at the early Oecumenical Councils it had been standard practice for the Emperor to preside whenever he honoured the Council with his presence. A further proposal was that the Pope, the Emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople should share the presidency, seated in a row (presumably across the church, facing the bishops), with the Pope's throne in front of the Emperor's, and the Emperor's in front of the Patriarch. This proposal, Syropoulos tells us, was rejected as "ridiculous", since the Emperor and Patriarch "would find themselves speaking to the Pope's back".⁴⁹⁰

"The acts of the early ecumenical councils were duly consulted, and it was discovered that the central position of honour, immediately in front of the altar, had never been held by a living participant, but always by the enthroned book of the gospels, representing the presidency of Christ himself."⁴⁹¹

The *Description* gives the following account of how, on this occasion, this was carried out.

"In the middle of the church, between the two groups of clergy, and in front of the holy altar, they placed a throne, extremely beautiful, decorated, and hung with cloth of gold. Above it presided the great and just Judge, our Lord Jesus Christ, that is to say, the Holy gospel-book, and on either side of it were the heads of the holy apostles Peter and Paul with lamps burning in front of them."⁴⁹²

In Venice, the Byzantines were "at home abroad". The spoils of the Fourth Crusade were mostly carried to this small maritime city-state. Given the history of the Crusades and a long-established climate of "hatred" and suspicion, Byzantines and Italians in the first encounter as the convoy arrived in Venice in 1438 had a pleasant surprise. Things turned out probably to be unexpected,

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid, take, for example, the first session of Constantinople III (7 November 680), where the attendance list names Constantine IV in first place, as "presiding" the names of his officials who accompanied him – and themselves chaired the Council when he was absent – are given next, and only then come the names of the Pope's representatives and the patriarchs. *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, Ser. 2, Vol. II. 1, ed. Rudolf Riedinger (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992), pp. 14–16. And Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 242, lines 5–7.

⁴⁹¹ J. Price, p. 15. For the position of gospel book in the latter, see for example, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, p. 4, lines 6–7, on the first session of the First Council of Ephesus (AD 431): "with the holy gospel-book lying on the midmost throne to indicate that Christ himself was present with us."

⁴⁹² Ibid, p.17 from *Concilium Florentinum*, Ser. B, Vol. 5, p. 13, lines 21–29. See **Appendix V, 5a and 5b**, for exact seating positions of the Emperor, Patriarch and Pope.

surprising and encouraging for the Roman Emperor, who made the ultimate decision of embarking on this journey.

“Disembarking in Venice, the Romans were warmly welcomed by the inhabitants. They greeted the emperor almost as though he were their own monarch and acclaimed him as a provider for the salvation of their souls. The patriarch and bishops were treated in like manner. They were allowed the use of a church where they celebrated the bloodless sacrifice. All the men and women of the city assembled to see and hear the Divine and Sacred Liturgy celebrated in the tradition of the Eastern Church. And when they had witnessed it, *they wept*, and from the depths of their souls *they cried out*, ‘Lord, keep thy Church safe from the arrows of the evil one. Reunite her and remove the disagreements that divide us. *We had never seen Greeks nor their rites*, and *we had heard of them only by distant rumour and counted them as barbarians*. Now we know and are convinced that they are the first-born sons of the Church and that it is the Spirit of God Who speaks in them.’”⁴⁹³

That brings me to the ultimate point of this chapter. Vitalien Laurent, the translator of the memoirs of Syropoulos, raises in a footnote the bad omens from the West, at the time of the preliminary meetings, while the Romans of the eastern Empire, the Emperor, the Patriarch, their bishops and archontes, were deliberating the place of the synod.

“For many of the westerners the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, in a short period, was inevitable. Aurispa, who lived there, believed that even with a miracle, she wouldn’t survive. John of Ragusa, wrote that, in March 1436, at the Council of Basel, he stopped talking with the Byzantine Church and that he was not interested in the Union of the Churches, as the fall of the city wouldn’t be long to come afterwards.”⁴⁹⁴

From this point onwards, I argue that the relation between the myth and the idea is definite, and it is dialectical in nature. The Event of a Union, which could bring peace in one Church of Christ, from this moment of realisation, becomes a fabrication, a mystery to the witnesses. And all the other myths that will be developed along the way become even more imperative and melancholic, because they seek to express a negative and unavoidable truth. It doesn’t portray reality any more, it

⁴⁹³ Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*, an annotated translation of *Historia Turco-Byzantina* by Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975) p. 179.

⁴⁹⁴ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 144, footnote 4.

exists despite it and becomes an extreme position, almost like a dream, and it justifies the vision one wished to be possible, only to show that it is untenable: the “what if it could be”.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁵ The conception of the idea came from Claude Levi-Strauss's “La Geste d'Asdiwal”, Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études: sciences religieuses. Extr. *Annuaire 1958-1959*, 1958, pp. 30-31.

Chapter Six: Transformation and Alterity – The Significance of Bessarion and Complementary Others

I. Introduction

Through the effective action of John VIII Palaiologos, two other personalities, Bessarion and Gennadios Scholarios re-surfaced during and after the Council, as the ones “equipped” to continue the work of the Emperor. This started with his profoundly pragmatic and long-sighted decision to send this large body of prelates, representatives of eastern Christianity, on a risky, ritual-journey, for the last interaction of this kind with the West, in the late middle ages. At this overpowering point, each of the two understood the stakes common to them, equally, but because of their different positions they had to follow their own trajectory to pursue the same goals. In that way they seem like opposites, but in effect they complemented each other. Consequently they contributed most to their respective causes, both in the short and the long term. They were the ones who carried the torch of Oecumenicity, which is still alive today; in other words, they continued his legacy. Michael Angold commented on Bessarion without mentioning him by name, as the energetic and idealist “Greek convert to Rome, who saw in the Union of Churches not only a return to true faith, but also a path to regeneration.”⁴⁹⁶ Concerning his own question about the reasons that “many of the ablest and most attractive Byzantines” in the last two centuries of Byzantium’s life turned to the West, showed “growing appreciation” to Latin culture, while implying idealism as an incentive, he did not have one definite reply.

Bessarion did sign the Decree of Union, moved to the West and became the symbol himself of the possibilities there for the East to be in the West. Gennadios Scholarios did sign the Decree of Union in the West, but upon his return to Constantinople he denounced his agreement, became a fervent anti-unionist, and moved to become the first Patriarch under the Ottomans. He was the one who upheld the Oecumenical idea, and the ideal of One Christendom, after the Empire was gone and there wasn’t a state any more. There is a third person, Plethon Gemistos, who, although secular, was not approving an ecclesiastical Union with the Latins, even though he signed it. On his return to Morea, where he was based, he saw a continuation of the Emperor’s project in the renewal of the Hellenic spirit. From his side, he was a learned man concerning the ancients: in his letters to the last

⁴⁹⁶ Michael Angold, “Byzantium and the West 1204-1453”, in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. 5, “Eastern Christianity”, ed. by Michael Angold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 53.

Emperors he exemplifies that, in his view, reforming the state along the Hellenic ideals would be only beneficial. He is again in an opposite position to the other two, as his solution is secular and intellectual. Scholarios burnt Plethon's books. The two personalities are opposites but, indeed, ultimately complementary. As we see today, the nations that have evolved after this story, not because of this story, after the fall of Constantinople, and after the four centuries long Ottoman occupation, when the formation of nations was legitimate, they are deeply rooted both in Byzantine Christianity and Hellenic learning.

In this chapter I show the "laboratory of interactions" that the Event became for the individuals. Within the flexibility the Emperor allowed his "subjects-cum-collaborators" throughout these two years, they became allies in a wider project. They took part in transformations both in response to the tough realities but also in the mythical outcomes of it. From being part of this historical point of "anthropological demotion",⁴⁹⁷ some of the Byzantine Greeks took cultural responsibility for what was afflicting them. Bessarion understood that there is a "possibility of changing the way culture is thought".⁴⁹⁸ Through the journey he developed with unique authenticity his own trajectory, which could be then re-arranged, re-configured towards different ends. Unity became a myth because of its self-impossibility due to core schismogenic characteristics. Bessarion, through his transformations, showed that it was possible to transcend this and move on. In this chapter I take the reader along this path, and I will demonstrate how Bessarion worked his way through this schismogenic inevitability.

II. The Sweetness of Sadness

In the wake of new empires of trade and might, Bessarion could contemplate the sadness of the tropics (*tristes tropiques*), and so he does, a lot. "Jesus never laughed",⁴⁹⁹ but even for him "culture has proved to be the very foundation of the liberation movement. Only societies which organise themselves are able to mobilise and fight against foreign domination".⁵⁰⁰ That is Bessarion's significance, as he uses all available resources, real and mythical (idealistic), to achieve that. His whole cultural inversion is a remarkable act of culture. As a priest and cardinal he has access to the supernatural and can intercede for you, and therefore salvation is possible. As an ambassador he has

⁴⁹⁷ Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 474.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 474.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 569.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 492.

access to the kings and princes of Europe and their military powers, a crusade could work. As a bibliophile and significant collector of books he has access to western scholars' minds fascinated by his erudition, ready to converse and advance knowledge with him. Because of his theological and artistic interests he has access to immortality. Sadness, in his case, could never be sweeter.⁵⁰¹ Bessarion worked out the miseries in his life within the 'sweetness' that only the newly-found power could grant. But as Marshall Sahlins reports, "... pleasure hardly ever suffices to make it up for us."⁵⁰² Bessarion lived through his sad thoughts, the loss of the Empire, "... preoccupied by the moral arena in which sin and virtue are inseparable each finding its reality in the presence of the other..."⁵⁰³ He "consumed" the West with diplomatic voyages and letters, with unparalleled intellectual energy wrote poems and produced manuscripts, with adeptness built his funeral chapel, and created an unforgettable icon out of his presentation. He helped refugees from the old Empire survive in the West, and challenged the highest religious entity of the West, the Popes, for power. But after all the "soft drugs" he "spent" in his remarkable life it was "as if" this sweetened bitterness, after the whole demise and finish of an incomparable civilisation, "... could produce in the register of the senses the kind of moral change people wished for their earthly existence..."⁵⁰⁴ in the longest pilgrimage of his life, until the end of it.

And so below he maps out the scene: all the contradictions are open, seeking resolution or just a podium. In one of the important opening proceedings on behalf of the Greeks, on 8 October 1438:

"Bessarion rose and with a low bow towards the first thrones on either side began a long oration, encouraging and exhorting his hearers with thoughts like these. Of great enterprises the conclusion brings with it great joy; not less so their beginning. And now the beginning has been made to heal a breach that has lasted so long. The aim is, however to seek the truth, and the natural tendency of man to wish to prevail, even at the cost of truth, must be sternly suppressed. For this all must give of their best. Great is the beauty of harmony. May Christ Our Lord, Who died to restore harmony between man and God, grant it to the two Churches and join them together in mind and will, and not let them remain divided. May the Holy Spirit, Giver of all good gifts, the Spirit of truth, inspire us with the truth and, as in the Blessed trinity there are three Persons but only one substance and nature, yet the plurality does not destroy the identity, grant that we, though many and of diverse nations and, alas, from the machinations of the arch-enemy of beliefs and faiths, may rid ourselves of the

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, p. 527.

⁵⁰² Marshall Sahlins, "The Sadness of Sweetness: The Native Anthropology of Western Cosmology", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 37, No. 3, June 1996, p. 415.

⁵⁰³ Ibid, p. 415.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 415.

diversity and prove ourselves one in belief and faith in regard of You. It is because of the initiative, the zeal, the efforts of the Holy Father that this Synod has been convened. To him, therefore, all praise and congratulations are due... He will ever have the Emperor at his side seconding his efforts, an Emperor who has always from boyhood on desired the concord of the Churches, who grasped the occasion of achieving it when it offered, who scorned danger, neglected comfort, put considerations of life, wealth and fatherland in second place, to co-operate with Christ and protect the peace of the Church. No less is the zeal of the Patriarch, who despite age and broken health yearns to assist in this great work, and the rest of the Greeks gathered here from most distant lands will support his good will. May God prevent the enemy of mankind from hindering this work, against whom we must arm ourselves. It is sometimes better to be overcome for a good purpose than to overcome...⁵⁰⁵

III. Re-making the Goal of Unity a Permanent Reality

Byzantinist Cyril Mango discusses “Byzantinism and ‘romantic’ Hellenism fused into one”,⁵⁰⁶ where “The Parthenon and St. Sophia were seen as complementary expressions of the same national genius... to create a genuine Greek civilisation, they wished to return to the popular tradition; and this tradition led them back, inevitably to Byzantium.”⁵⁰⁷ Contrary to Mango, I argue that starting from far back in time, and going forward towards the fifteenth century, I do not see a fusion, but a rather distinct inheritance of two elements embedded in the history of one people. The complementarity was brought by the last Byzantines themselves, and at the time of the Event these were endeavours that carried with them extreme risk, given the anxieties the times were bringing. I argue that, with their example, these people have shown that although part of their people would believe in different degrees that “the fortunes of the empire were the particular concern of divine Providence”,⁵⁰⁸ and that sinful people do get punished by barbarians overruling them, but individuals like the four mentioned above did take specific explicit action to turn the fortunes of the Empire in different ways. They do understand that the unity of the Churches at this point may be unattainable, mythical maybe, but Oecumenicity could persist and recover. Unity could be shown through common action and so on. Scholarios could be described as “The last byzantine and the first hellene”,⁵⁰⁹ but according to Mango he was neither. In comparison, Bessarion’s protégé, the

⁵⁰⁵ Gill, *The Council of Florence*, pp. 143–144.

⁵⁰⁶ Cyril Mango, “Byzantinism and Romantic Hellenism”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 28, 1965, p. 42.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

scholar and scribe Michael Apostoles, considered the cardinal to be among the “last of the Greeks” and the “first of the Europeans”⁵¹⁰. I would add that these last Byzantines became the first Europeans in their outlook and vision. As for George Gemistos Plethon, according to Mango, nobody paid the slightest attention to him.⁵¹¹ But if nobody paid attention to him, why then did Scholarios burn his work? And even if nobody paid attention to him at this particular point, that didn’t really matter because they were busy thinking how they would manage the Turks who were outside the walls of Constantinople. The crux of the matter is the very fact that these events did happen, did register in the conscience of the people, and did form strategies of alterity and complementarity to face the harsh realities. And because of all this, what matters are the repercussions that their deeds had in the long term. It shows that unity was not extraneous, that the Byzantines were the first protagonists and that unity can be manifested in many ways.

IIIA. Bessarion: A Priest of the Byzantine Church and Later Cardinal of the Holy See in Quattrocento Italy

In this section I discuss the intriguing personality of Cardinal Bessarion, and his part in the effectiveness of the myth of unity that was created through the journey-ritual that the Emperor initiated. He stands for a version of unity as was desired, or as it could be, the “as if” of possibility. In this case transformation is effected as content; it is picked up in the experience of the journey, that is, through practice.

“The content picked up in the experience meant that the relationships between (the actors) would never again be the same. Returning from ship to shore, especially from (the Event) to [domestic reaction, both from lay and ecclesiastics, and future repercussions of it] in short from practice to structure – the effects become systemic. An alteration in the relationship between the given categories affects their possible relationships to other categories. The structure, as a set of relationships among relationships, is transformed.”⁵¹²

Bessarion later presented himself in a sober manner: “I was formerly Archbishop of Nicaea and now I am serving as Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church. My name is Bessarion. I come from

⁵¹⁰ *Lettres inédites de Michel Apostolis*, ed. H. Noiret, Paris 1889, p.76.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 33.

⁵¹² Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, p. 37.

Trebizond; I grew up and was educated in Constantinople”.⁵¹³ He had also presented himself as King Lear:

“Bessarion is raving, he is crazy, an old man, feeble, scared... there is no mercy between sheep and wolves. There is no right for friendship between heathen and Christians... this immense beast, always pursuing Christian blood... For he is snake... Dear God, do we not know sufficiently his stimulus, his villainy, his arrogance?”⁵¹⁴

While in Constantinople he was appointed head of the important monastery of St. Basil in 1436. We notice in his iconography that he wore the black robe of this order for the rest of his life. “Mark Eugenikos himself claimed that Bessarion had made himself a servant, paid off with papal gold and cardinal red.”⁵¹⁵ “Bessarion and Isidore of Kiev, the representative of the church of Moscow, were made cardinals in December 1439, which rendered them suspect in Greek eyes.”⁵¹⁶ He experienced “the hue and cry raised against him by those of his countrymen who were strongly opposed to the union.”⁵¹⁷ After the long and dark separation from all familiar places and faces, the so-called “latinisers” or unionates, were boycotted by the clergy of Saint Sophia and weren’t allowed in its offices. They were despised for their decision by the population of the City.

Bessarion, I maintain, had made a decision, to live on the line of fission. Unity now is located *in* him: he becomes the East within the West. According to Sahlins, he is the outside other *in this world*, “his authority is founded on alterity,”⁵¹⁸ not as a stranger king, *but*, as a priest and as a cardinal, operating in a diarchy of the divine, as the extrasocial, the otherworldly, and secular offices, as I apply in this narrative, that encompass together a certain duality of powers; that is, whereby the political and jural instruments of governance are complemented by offices that mediate and appropriate these cosmic forces for the benefit of society.⁵¹⁹ He is embedded affinely of an outside, but neighbouring, Empire that no longer has force of conquest. This position remains unaltered, stable, but he changes hierarchy. He takes up secular posts as a papal ambassador, so he is travelling very frequently, engaging with people most of the time. He is somebody who is

⁵¹³ H.D. Saffrey, “Recherches sur quelques autographes du Cardinal Bessarion et leur caractère autobiographique”, in *Melanges Eugene Tisserant*, Vol. III, “Studi et testi”, 233 (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1964) pp. 283–284.

⁵¹⁴ *The exhortation of the most reverend Cardinal of Nicaea, Bessarion, against the Turks, to the most illustrious and glorious princes in Italy, 1470*, translated from Latin. by J. Price. The collection of Bessarion’s letters and prefaces, his two orations, and the Demosthenes translation, printed in J.P. Minge, *Patrologia Graeca*, 161 Vols. (Paris, Garnier, 1857–1892), Vol. 161, pp. 647–676.

⁵¹⁵ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 446. Mark Eugenikos was his senior and fellow-orator at the Council of Florence. He was a modest monk for whom rhetoric was a pretension that he had long ago given up and had chosen to speak simply, as befitting a monk. In Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 269. Bessarion’s writing was scattered with rhetoric modes and read as an exaggeration of reality.

⁵¹⁶ Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571, Vol. II, The Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: The American Philosophical Society, 1978) p. 65

⁵¹⁷ Chryssa Maltezou, “Still more on the political views of Bessarion”, Venice, available online from: <http://www.europa-zentrum-wuerzburg.de/unterseiten/Band12-Maltezou.pdf>, as part of the Digital Archive for Medieval Europe.

⁵¹⁸ Marshall Sahlins, “Stranger Kings in General: The Cosmo-logics of Power”, in *Framing Cosmologies: The Anthropology of Worlds*, eds. A. Abramson & M. Holbraad (Manchester: Manchester University Press) pp. 321.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

dedicated to an idea, the continuity of his “fatherland”, as he calls it, but this is a very tough call. “His hope was that the Europeans would discharge their obligation to Christianity and rescue their Greek co-religionists from the coming onslaught of Islam.”⁵²⁰ Pope “Pius II appointed Bessarion protector of the Franciscans in 1458.”⁵²¹ For the purposes of a crusade, Bessarion described the Morea in Peloponnese to Jacopo della Marca, the Franciscan preacher, in great detail: “The location of the Morea⁵²² gave it easy access to Italy, Sicily and Crete... If Christians held it, they could concentrate troops there for attacks upon the Turks, to the obvious advantage of Christendom when the Turks were a threat.”⁵²³ In the case of an expedition, “Bessarion was to have the power of raising and organising armies, naming preachers for the crusade, and taking money deposited in churches.”⁵²⁴ To live with such an intensity as an advocate of Christianity as a whole, although being on the payroll of the curia, seemed to cause financial difficulties during this period. There had been many diets, all poorly attended, nothing had come of them except “bona verba et magniloquentia”.⁵²⁵

By re-positioning himself in a structure where the holy was central, Bessarion dared to bring a certain “confusion”.⁵²⁶ The new culture system of the West was only part of the whole of Christianity, yet in these systems the whole is paramount. He never left the previous structure completely and as clearly as he would have been expected. With the new means his new position gave him, from within the papal curia, as a cardinal, Bessarion was doing what was possible to keep what was dear to the universe he had inherited. By blurring the principles of holiness, of what is pure and whole, he was seeking a strategy that was infringing on the “keeping apart”, that the holy implies, the blessing and prosperity that it gives back as a reward for keeping the order intact. His

⁵²⁰ Setton, p. 208. Cardinal Bessarion was very active at the Congress of Mantua, at the height of his influence, employing all his eloquence and prestige to help launch the crusade against the Turks.

⁵²¹ Ibid, p. 209, footnote 36. “In August 1458, Cardinal Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini of Corsignano was elected Pope Pius II... the same month the Sacred College had written... of Cardinal Aeneas, who by his character, wisdom, religious life and other virtues, as well by his outstanding accomplishments in sacred and humane letters... seemed called by divine judgement to the governance of the Church”. Setton, p. 200. Bessarion was coordinating with the well-known Franciscan preacher Jacopo della Marca, papal nuncio in the March of Ancona, whom he had appointed to preach the crusade in that area. Setton, p. 208. “Jacopo della Marca who had preached for some 40 years in Italy and Hungary, in 1462, provoked a tremendous renewal of the dispute between the Franciscans and the Dominicans concerning the blood of Christ... although both the pope and the majority of the cardinals favoured the Dominican position it did not seem best to issue an official statement at the time for fear of offending the great body of the Minorites, whose preaching against the Turks was needed.” Setton, p. 208, footnote 33.

⁵²² “In 1422 a Venetian commission reported to the Signoria that the Morea contained more than 150 castles; was 700 miles in circumference; produced gold, silver, and lead; and was a source of silk, honey, wax, grain, poultry, and currants.”, Setton, p. 210, footnote 37.

⁵²³ Ibid, p. 209.

⁵²⁴ Ibid, p. 214. In his next mission to Germany, “Bessarion was then about sixty, his health was poor and he found the northern winter especially severe... the pope wrote... he was working day and night... in Nuremberg Bessarion made a plea for peace among Christian princes... in 1460 Bessarion arrived in Vienna for a council under the auspices of the emperor Frederik... Bessarion reminded the assembly of the promises they have made... The Turks continued to make progress. The summer had passed and the Greeks lost Morea; the sultan had subjected more than forty fortified towns; many Greeks had been killed, and 30,000 prisoners taken. Hungary had been devastated; more than 20,000 persons were carried off into captivity... soon it would be Germany’s turn. These months have been a great trial to Bessarion. He was tired and irritable, discouraged and ill. At one point in his discourse before the assembly he stated with much animation: ‘We need arms, arms I tell you, and strong men, not words; any army well supplied, not neat and polished oratory; we need the enduring strength of soldiers, not the bombast of fine speeches!’ Bessarion was back in Venice in December 1461, being made an honorary citizen...” Setton, p. 216, footnote 58, pp. 217–218, footnote 66.

⁵²⁵ Ibid, p. 218.

⁵²⁶ “To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind... holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused... hybrids and other confusions are abominated... contradictions and double-dealing as against holiness.” In Douglas, pp. 66–67.

integrity could have been compromised in the circles he was moving in, but in his letters he was acting⁵²⁷

“for the common good, for the Christian religion, and for the glory of Christ... seeing that there are such important reasons, so grave, so serious, so urgent... for the safety of all, for the honour of the Christians... the sanctuaries and shrines of saints have been defiled with curses, scourging, bloodshed, and all kinds of shameful acts. They have made camps of the churches of God, and have exposed the sacred things of God... a city which was so flourishing, with such a great empire... has been captured, despoiled, ravaged, and completely sacked by the most inhuman barbarians and the most savage enemies of the Christian faith, by the fiercest of the beasts... rise up to defend the Christian religion...”⁵²⁸

He is constantly referring back to the whole, making references to the parts, in between.

“After hearing the news of Negroponte’s fall, he wrote thoughtful, impassionate pieces which rehearse the details of the siege and sack of Negroponte before going on to a broader consideration of the dangers facing Christendom from the ottoman East and an appeal to the Christian princes the last he was to make before his death in 1472 – for a new crusade against the Turks.”⁵²⁹

This is how the main actor of this chapter lived his “illustrious” life in Italy, moving very quickly to his missionary lifelong work.⁵³⁰ His life itinerary started with his grammarian and religious studies in Trebizond on the Black Sea coast where he was born in 1403.⁵³¹ He arrived in Constantinople from the periphery of the Empire, the so-called Empire of Trebizond,⁵³² and in the capital of the Empire he did rhetorical and literature studies. Later in Mistra, in Peloponnese, he also completed philosophical and mathematical studies. He acquired very quickly a reputation as a Greek orator and author, writing the funeral oration for the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II at the age of 23. He wrote boastfully of himself that, “... his was a name known to all who understood the Greek

⁵²⁷ Letter of Cardinal Bessarion to Doge Francesco Foscari of Venice, 13 July 1453. He bemoans the fall of Constantinople to the Turkish infidels and exhorts the Doge to unite with other Christian princes in averting the possibility of an Ottoman invasion. These letters, although addressed to a single recipient, were intended to be widely read. This was an integral part of antiquity, for the letters of Horace and Cicero and even Petrarch well before the invention of printing, were composed for wide circulation. So tone and style were self-conscious for he knew that a wider court would share it. They are presenting a spontaneity, which allows light to be shed more easily upon not only the man in the Renaissance, but the phenomenon of the Renaissance itself, and to appreciate the extent of terror over Turkish expansionism. In the introduction of R.J. Clemens and Lorna Levant, eds., *Renaissance Letters: Revelations of a World Reborn*, with introductions, commentary and translations (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 301–302.

⁵²⁹ Margaret Meserve, “News from Negroponte: Politics, Popular opinion, and Information Exchange in the First Decade of the Italian Press”, *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 2, Summer 2006, p. 469.

⁵³⁰ For instance the *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 9, p. 692, (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960) contains an entry on ‘Bessarione’.

⁵³¹ See map in **Appendix I, 3.**

⁵³² One of the satellite empires created around Constantinople in the Black Sea.

tongue”.⁵³³ Throughout his whole life, Bessarion continued to compose his theoretical works first in Greek; drafting later even his Latin works first in Greek.⁵³⁴ It was more comfortable for him to think out and write down in his native tongue than his adopted.⁵³⁵ In terms of substance, according to E.J. Stormon, when he was writing obituary laments he was drawing from models of consolation “... alternatively from Christian revelation and pagan philosophy”.⁵³⁶ On the occasion of the death of their teacher, who is believed to be Ignatius Chortasmenos, professor of Rhetoric in Constantinople and later bishop of Selymbria, and an opponent of *Filioque*, Bessarion himself in one of his letters to other monks confesses that

“I carry around in my soul the model of this man’s moral comportment and of his bearing, venerable in itself. These were the things that, merely by being seen, caused him to be more admired than the sights of which men sing. I, too, stand in awe before the man.”⁵³⁷

In the Council of Florence in the course of defending Chortasmenos views on the Union of the Churches he wrote: “I knew also the bishop of Selymbria, who was a lettered man and a great teacher, and I know well that he too praised the Union (of the Latin and Greek Churches).”⁵³⁸

Consequently, we need to note here that Chortasmenos, who was also very close to the Emperor John VIII, was an opponent of *Filioque* on the one hand, but on the other hand, he himself also needed to believe that Union of the Churches was possible. Bessarion was appointed head of the important monastery of St. Basil in Constantinople, possibly in 1436. As his iconography demonstrates, he wore the black robe of this order for the rest of his life. In the images in Appendix VI we see him accompanying his friend, the French humanist scholar and university professor Guillaume Fichet, in 1471. He presents a copy of Bessarion’s *First Edition of the Orations against the Turks* to the King Frederick III. Bessarion is standing right behind him. In the second image, Fichet offers the same copy to Pope Sixtus IV, again in the presence of Bessarion.⁵³⁹ Through this scholarly medium, which is portable and easy to bring along while travelling, Bessarion hoped that his ideas about the future of Europe would travel along to the most influential minds of Europe at the time. This was Bessarion’s last crusading appeal to the kings and princes of Europe on a political and military matter that had troubled him ever since he left Constantinople back in 1440.

⁵³³ Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 161, Col. 461C for the Greek; see author’s note for explanation regarding Ancient Greek fonts.

⁵³⁴ John Monfasani, “Bessarion Latinus”, in *Rinascimento*, 2nd Series, Vol. 21, *Rivista dell’Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento*, 1981, p. 165.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁵³⁶ E.J. Stormon, “S.J. Bessarion before the Council Of Florence: A survey of his Earlier Writings (1432–1437)”, in *Byzantine Papers, Proceedings of the First Australian Byzantine Studies Conference*, ed. by Elizabeth, Michael Jeffreys and Ann Moffatt, (Canberra: Australian National University, 1981) p. 135.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁵³⁸ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 451.

⁵³⁹ **Appendix VI**, images **6a**, **6b**, and **6c**.

This book was one of the first manuscripts to be printed in Europe; these were called incunabula. In the 1460s and early 1470s, Bessarion understood that the Venetians had deserted Constantinople once again – the first time was during the 1204 crusade when they destroyed cultural and historical fabric of the city of Constantinople. Thessaloniki, which had been offered to the Venetians by Andronicus Palaiologos, the younger son of Manuel II, in 1423, was taken with the promise to “protect it” from the Ottomans.⁵⁴⁰ Nevertheless, he did write and translated for this purpose Demosthenes’s First Olynthiac Oration which he dedicated to Pope Paul II and send to Doge of Venice Cristoforo Moro with a letter in which he “... drew parallels he saw between Philip of Macedon’s menacing of ancient Athens and Sultan Mehmed’s designs on contemporary Europe.”⁵⁴¹

Bessarion never asked Fichet to print his orations, but

“... Fichet in late 1471 and early 1472 presented around 50 printed copies of Bessarion’s orations to an impressive array of political and ecclesiastical leaders across northern Europe. These included the kings of France and England; the Holy Roman Emperor; the dukes of Burgundy, Bavaria, Savoy and Nemours; the Margrave of Baden; Cardinal Jean Rolin; the bishops of Metz and Pamplona; the provincial generals of the Franciscan Dominican, Augustinian, Carmelite, Celestine, and Carthusian orders; and the abbots of Cluny and Citeaux.”⁵⁴²

Bessarion, as a cardinal, was already in a long time of “leading crusade advocates... he was also the leader of the Greek community in Italy, an influential curial figure”,⁵⁴³

“he had enjoyed a long association with printing in Rome... The humanist scholar Andrea Bussi, editor at the press of Sweynheym and Pannartz in Rome, had assisted them in publishing several of the Neoplatonic texts Bessarion had championed at the papal court, as well the first edition of the cardinal’s own *In calumniatorem Platonis*, an attack on the scholarly reputation of George of Trebizond, one of his bitterest academic rivals. But

⁵⁴⁰ “He offered the city to the Venetian Signoria, asking only that it should be governed according to its usages and statutes; that the Orthodox metropolitan of Thessaloniki be confirmed in his ecclesiastical charge; that the Greek inhabitants should retain their local rights of jurisdiction, be able to come and go as they chose, and have full disposition of their goods and properties; and finally that Venice should guarantee the proper defence of the city against the aggressors, including the Turks... the population was 25,000 to 40,000 persons beset by famine and terrified by the prospect of capture by the barbarians... the Venetians occupied Thessaloniki until 1430... when the city was stormed, after a three-day assault, under the watchful eyes of Sultan Murad himself... under the occupation of the Turks, the surviving inhabitants were allowed to rebuild their lives as best they could, and the Greek fugitives were allowed to return to their homes. Turkish rule lasted in Thessaloniki for almost five centuries, until October 1912.” Setton, pp. 19–20 and p. 30. The historians Lemerle and Mertzios do not support the notion of the sale of the city.

⁵⁴¹ Margaret Meserve, “Patronage and propaganda at the First Paris Press. Guillaume Fichet and the First Editions of Bessarion’s Orations Against the Turks”, offprint from *The Papers of Bibliographical Society of America*, Vol. 47, No. 4, December 2003, p. 524. Images above are taken from this article. In the first one we see Fichet and Bessarion and in the other one we see Fichet, Sixtus IV, and Bessarion.

⁵⁴² *Ibid*, p. 527.

⁵⁴³ Meserve, “News from Negroponte”, p. 468 and p. 462.

Bessarion never called on Sweynheym and Pannartz, nor any other printers in Rome, to print his orations against the Turks.⁵⁴⁴

According to Meserve, Bessarion was considered “the most respected living authority on the Turkish problem... his authority was such that he did not need to press to secure an audience for his text.”⁵⁴⁵ In his oration, he questioned “What do we have in common with the Greek, what with the Mysians, the Illyrians, the Pannonians? They shall die, they say, what it is to us? We shall be fine, the others shall die... How does this concern us?”⁵⁴⁶ Sanchez, a roman intellectual of Bessarion’s circle, in a letter also addressed to him, adds Pope Paul II “among the feckless princes whom he excoriates for piling up riches at the papal court when he could be outfitting a new fleet to fight the Turks.”⁵⁴⁷ From his part, “on 8 July he led a procession of cardinals and clergy in bare feet from the Vatican palace to St. Peter’s Basilica, where prayers were said and relics displayed.”⁵⁴⁸

“Venice⁵⁴⁹ supported by the papacy, tended to use the story of Negroponte’s fall to lobby for support for its war with Turkey, while the republic’s commercial and political rivals – chiefly Florence, Naples, and Milan – tried to downplay the event or cast the blame for the disaster on Venice itself.”⁵⁵⁰

However, it seems that they did attract some interest, “All Christendom *are* in the same boat”, Moro wrote to the Duke of Milan, “we all face the same peril; no coastline, no province, no part of Italy, no matter how remote and hidden it may seem, can be considered safer than the rest.”⁵⁵¹ Francesco Filelfo, also from the circle of intellectuals of Bessarion, a learned scholar, sometimes diplomat, and prolific commentator on Turkish affairs and an early enthusiast for the technology of print, wrote, “the Christian princes are watching this like a play”.⁵⁵²

During the Council in Florence, the two parts were coming from different traditions of thought:

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 469.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 469.

⁵⁴⁶ *The exhortation of the most reverend Cardinal of Nicaea, Bessarion, against the Turks, to the most illustrious and glorious princes in Italy*, 1470, from Latin translated by J. Price. The collection of Bessarion’s letters and prefaces, his two orations, and the Demosthenes translation, printed in *Patrologia Graeca*, pp. 647–676.

⁵⁴⁷ Meserve, “News from Negroponte”, p. 462.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 448.

⁵⁴⁹ During the preparatory negotiations of the Council in Florence-Ferrara, John VIII asked the Pope Martin V “an armed force to help defend his territories, and requested the promulgation of a bull of excommunication *generalis, terribilis et insolubilis* against Latins who collaborated with the Turks or who failed to help the Greeks defend themselves”; on the other hand, “the Republic had long observed the results in its possessions in Greece and the islands. If bishops (Latin) did not reside in their sees and make clear the error of schism and provide instruction in the Latin faith, the schism would soon embrace everyone in the Latin Levant (and the Venetian hold upon Coron, Modon, Negroponte, and the islands would become difficult to maintain). It often happened that, owing to the absence of bishops and other prelates, Catholics died and were buried with Greek rites. Others were baptised by Greek priests. His holiness must not allow the continuance of this tragic neglect, but must strive to see that Christianity increased rather than decreased in the lands overseas.” In Setton, p. 44.

⁵⁵⁰ Meserve, “News from Negroponte”, p. 446. “Still others blamed Venice’s main commercial rivals, Florence and Genoa, for contributing funds and logistical support to the Turkish fleet”, pp. 451–452.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid, p. 453.

⁵⁵² Ibid, p. 467 and p. 452.

“the Latins were using dialectic and quoting Aristotle, whereas the Greeks were remaining faithful to the patristic authorities and to plain statements against any addition to the creed, Bessarion insisted in condemning both a priori unionism or anti-unionism.”⁵⁵³

When Mohler suggested that Bessarion was unionist already before the Council, I think he rather meant Bessarion’s perception of the limitations of institutional Unity. In the circumstances of the time they were probably not his priority, as it was a more holistic scheme of unity of the parts, standing for the larger system, and thereby able to configure its destiny. In this spirit, I argue, he praised the unionist activity of the Pope, of the Emperor and of the Old Patriarch, not because he was an opportunist as some scholars suggested. His “actions appear structural rather than just hypocritical.”⁵⁵⁴ He had recognised their role as relays between the larger system and the action that they had to take at this point in time. He chose to mediate, reducing the system into action or *instantiation*,⁵⁵⁵ and in that way he became the embodiment of Unity at the end of the civilisation he sprang from. He supported eventually that “‘Proceeding from the Father and the Son’ does not mean two acts and two divine subjects, but a unique origin of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵⁶ This doctrine, after several controversies, was accepted in the union act.

Bessarion’s “transformation assumes the dual appearance of assimilation and differentiation”.⁵⁵⁷ Coming from the “early” dominant cultural order, he could retain it, albeit by taking his distance from it, “jiving to the world beat while making (his) own music”.⁵⁵⁸ Hence Michael Geyer’s argument “that similarity and difference develop together in modern world history”,⁵⁵⁹ can safely be applied in the late middle ages, as I notice the cultural dualism in Bessarion. He is externally a Cardinal and internally a Byzantine Greek, “by dignity a cardinal, by birth a Greek”⁵⁶⁰ in his own words. He worked on his own “cultural inversion”,⁵⁶¹ as a structural equilibrium, originally defined by Bateson as “complementary schismogenesis”.⁵⁶² He did that by elaborating on the contrastive features of the respective cultures, and that is why the images seem complex, ambivalent, for example, even disturbing to some. In the chronicles of the German towns that the Cardinal passed through during the unlucky legation of 1460–1461 and particularly in the *Chronicle of Norimberga*

⁵⁵³ Luca d’Ascia, *Bessarione at the Council of Florence: Humanism and Ecumenism*, in *Bessarione e l’Umanesimo, Catalogo della Mostra* (Naples: Vivarium, Napoli, 1994), translation from Italian by Gabriella Zuccolin, visiting scholar at the Warburg Institute.

⁵⁵⁴ Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 494.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁵⁵⁶ D’Ascia, *Bessarione at the Council of Florence: Humanism and Ecumenism*, in *Bessarione e l’Umanesimo, Catalogo della Mostra* (Naples: Vivarium, Napoli, 1994).

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 493.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 493.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 493.

⁵⁶⁰ See **Appendix VI**, image 11.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 493.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 494.

of 28 February 1461, which says: “today a Cardinal made his entrance in Norimberga, he was Greek, he had a beard, and he was from Constantinople.”⁵⁶³ The beard, a sign of his Byzantine past, was a point of mockery and insult throughout the years.

After the death of Pope Nicholas V a new Pope had to be elected.⁵⁶⁴

“The cardinals entered the conclave, as is the custom, and immediately split into several factions... After they have been polled twice, without result, a group of cardinals conferred outside the place of scrutiny and decided to elect Bessarion, the cardinal of Nicaea, because he seemed the man best suited for political leadership. A sufficient number were ready to agree on him and there seemed no doubt that at the next scrutiny he would be chosen pope by the two-thirds vote; indeed, petitions were already being addressed to him. However, when this became known to the opposing faction, Alain, the cardinal of Avignon, (Alain de Coetivy, one of the leaders of the French party in the Curia), began to go around the room, whispering first to one man and then to the next, ‘so we’ll give the Latin Church to a Greek pope, will we? We’ll put a neophyte at the head of the book? Bessarion hasn’t even shaved his beard, and he is going to be our head? How do we know his conversion is sincere? Only the other day he was attacking the faith of the Church of Rome but now, since he has had a change of heart, he can be our master, in command of Christian troops? Is the Latin church up that it can’t find a man fit to be pope without having to turn to the Greeks? Reverend fathers, go ahead and do as you like. But, I, and those who think with me, will never accept a Greek as pope.’ His words so influenced a number of cardinals that there remained not the slightest chance that two thirds of the college would agree on Bessarion. He who, that night, had been generally regarded as pope, found himself the next morning still a cardinal, and with less power than before.”⁵⁶⁵

But Bessarion had dear friends in Italy around this time of papal succession. One of them, Francesco Filelfo,⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶³ Lotte Labowsky, “Bessarion’s iconography”, in *Bessarione e l’Umanesimo, Catalogo della Mostra*, ed. Gianfranco Ficcardori et al (Napels: Vivarium, 1994) p. 247. Translation from Italian by Gabriella Zuccolin, visiting scholar at the Warburg Institute.

⁵⁶⁴ “Nicholas V sat on the throne of St. Peter about eight years... he canonised Bernardino of Siena, he crowned and anointed Emperor Frederick and Empress Leonora of Portugal at Rome in the church of St. Peter, the chief of the Apostles... he achieved success and fame but the fall of Constantinople was his greatest misfortune...”. In *The Commentaries of Pope Pius II, Pontifex Maximus in Thirteen Books, 1405-1464*, translation of Margaret Meserve and Marcello Simonetta (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) Vol. I, Books I-II, p. 139.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 141.

⁵⁶⁶ Francesco Filelfo, a scholar and teacher of classical literature, friend of Bessarion’s of forty years, since the days when he and Bessarion were fellow pupils at Chrysococces’ school in Constantinople. Filelfo’s principal patrons were two of the most powerful men in Europe, Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, who had been Filelfo’s protector since 1450 and Pope Pius II, who had promised Filelfo in writing an annual stipend of two hundred florins. In Diana Robin, “Unknown Greek Poems of Francesco Filelfo”, *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2, Summer 1984, p. 175 and p. 191.

“wrote an encomium addressed to Cardinal Bessarion, where he introduces himself in the manner of Horace’s *vates*, the divine poet-priest of *Odes*, a seer and a prophet; there he prophesies that Bessarion will bring light to the world in a time ‘when darkness covers the whole earth’, a phrase which Filelfo uses here to characterise the end of Pope Nicholas’ reign and the succession of Calixtus III to the papal throne.”⁵⁶⁷

Regarding his beard, the same thing that once had been reason of embarrassment and even insult, became a sign of wisdom and respect later in his life, Labowsky mentions even holiness.⁵⁶⁸ He always appears in his Basilian monk’s habit and the red hat of the cardinal is nearby; occasionally he is shown wearing it. Bessarion has been associated repeatedly with St. Jerome;⁵⁶⁹ there is an indication that he may have had an aspiration towards sainthood in the western domain. In the *Commentaries of pope Pius II*⁵⁷⁰ we read that “Bessarion was attacked at the conclave of cardinals as a recently naturalised member of the Catholic community and an unshaven foreigner”.⁵⁷¹

I believe the reason Bessarion left his library to the Venetians for the following reasons.⁵⁷²

He recognised in their deeds, although mainly aggressive and exploitative – see the Crusades, the plundering in 1204, the unequal trade relations⁵⁷³ in the Aegean and the Black Sea, the domination

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid, p.192.

⁵⁶⁸ “In May 16th 1472 during the Pentecost’s eve the Greek cardinal Bessarion from Nicaea, ambassador of Rome and of the Christian King of France, with might and power against the Turk prince, together with five bishops, notaries, abbots, prelates, and Doctors, both speaking Greek and Latin, all of them learned in sciences, and together with the nobility of Piacenza, entered the town and he was hosted in the Palace of Bishops. After having said a mass, and after having had a disputation on the concept of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the bishop’s room, as he were another Saint Jerome, that means with the beard, he left Piacenza.” In Labowsky, p. 247.

⁵⁶⁹ **Appendix VI**, Bessarion as St. Jerome, image 13.

⁵⁷⁰ *The Commentaries of Pius II*, trans. and comm. by F.A. Gragg and L. C. Gabel, Smith College Studies in History, XXII, 1937, p. 75.

⁵⁷¹ Ihor Sevcenko, “Intellectual Repercussions of the Council of Florence”, *Church History*, Vol. 42, No. 4, December 1955, p. 301.

⁵⁷² “In 1468 he donated to the Republic of Venice his library which contained 482 Greek manuscripts, a number of which were illuminated, of profane and sacred matters... Bessarion obtained his Greek manuscripts either by retaining scribes to copy new books for him in Italy and Crete or by purchasing older manuscripts through agents in various places. Niccolo Perotti sent him four books from Trebizond, including the four Gospels, the homilies of Gregory Nazianzenus, and two classical texts... the only rival in all of Europe to the collection of Greek manuscripts that Bessarion assembled in Rome and later dispatched to Venice was the library that Pope Nicholas V (1447–1455) and later Sixtus IV (1471–1484) created at the Vatican... collecting Greek manuscripts during this period became institutionalised and supported by resources, financial and others, that far exceeded those available even to wealthy aristocrats in Florence or to a well-connected Greek cardinal in Rome... trained as humanist and present during the debates of the Council of Florence, Nicholas, according to the account of the Florentine bookseller Vespasiano da Bisticci, had a lifetime interest in two things – buildings and books. While he was a pope, the Vatican’s holdings rose from little or nothing to 353 Greek manuscripts by the inventory of 1455... Nicholas’ concerted efforts to obtain Greek manuscripts and to commission translations of classical and religious texts from Greek into Latin made Rome the principal Italian centre for Hellenic studies at mid-century and in process enriched those Hellenists fortunate enough to be in Rome and to receive commissions for translations. The humanist Francesco Filelfo even proclaimed in a letter to Calixtus III that thanks to Nicholas V, Greece had not perished but had merely migrated to what was formerly called Magna Grecia, a claim that provides little solace to Byzantinists today... Bessarion had the admirable intention of gathering Greek literature together in one place so that future Greeks could preserve a heritage, which distinguished them from ‘barbarians and slaves.’” In Robert S. Nelson, “The Italian Appreciation and Appropriation of Byzantine Manuscripts 1200–1450”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 49, 1995, pp. 230–232 and p. 235.

⁵⁷³ Even before Andrea Dandolo’s reign as Doge (1343–1354), “the Byzantine Empire had reached the ‘status of a second rate power’. The mercantile republics of Genoa and Venice were the beneficiaries and fought their sea battles in Byzantine waters while the Emperor watched... at most Venice had adopted the role of ‘protector’ of Romania Alta, the Venetians’ term for the northern part of the reduced empire. The civil war ‘led to almost total destruction, reducing the great empire of the Romans to a feeble shadow of its former self.’” In Hans Belting, “Dandolo’s Dreams: Venetian State Art and Byzantium”, in *Byzantium: Faith and Power 1261–1570: Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, edited by Sarah T. Brooks (New Haven and London /New York: Yale University Press / The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006) p. 138. “Venice’s presence in the Mediterranean was justified in Dandolo’s eyes, by the singularity of her tradition, in which Byzantium played a leading part. To uphold such claims required vanquishing Genoa, the mortal enemy that presented a threat from within... the spirit that informed Dandolo’s artistic commissions: Byzantium in Venice means Venice’s unique history and also her claims to inherit Byzantium The city’s war with Genoa served the same goals.” Ibid., p. 147. The scriptorium under Dandolo’s control, the illuminations “have a

in the Mediterranean islands, their helping of the Turks in many cases, their reluctance in participating in a crusade against the Ottomans after the Fall of Constantinople – that “these oppositions between people in contact are balanced by resemblances as each strives to be good as and better than – thus the same and different from – the other.”⁵⁷⁴ Bessarion recognised in Venice, in his own words, “almost another Byzantium”.⁵⁷⁵ But, “this is the whole idea of how structures travel and are transformed in Levi-Strauss’s *Mythologiques*... everything happens ‘as if’, on the plane of beliefs and practices...”⁵⁷⁶ The Venetians had, like neighbouring tribes, stayed “far enough apart to be independent while remaining close enough together to be interdependent.”⁵⁷⁷

Hence the structural equilibrium mentioned above. Having witnessed the failure of Pius’s 1464 Crusade, Bessarion was painfully aware of how jealously the Italian states guarded their interests and how reluctant they were to confront the Turkish threat. He thought that their neglect of the problem was deliberate.⁵⁷⁸

On the other hand, in Syropoulos’s narrative, the entrance of the Emperor in Venice, in February 1438, is one of the most glorious moments of the whole journey. It is described vividly, with an impressive image of the amount of boats that covered the lagoon with the people that came to greet the Emperor, forming a spectacle of a moving Venice.⁵⁷⁹

“John VIII... was greeted with a splendid reception... accompanied by the bucintoro, the doge’s elaborate ceremonial barge, and, escorted by twelve ships and numerous smaller boats and vessels, the emperor’s galley sailed into Venice, where it was greeted with great fanfare, chants, acclamations, and church bells resounding from all parts of the city. The doge’s ostentatious display of Venice’s might and splendour did not fail to have its desired impact on the illustrious guests...”⁵⁸⁰

strong Byzantine bias and are in close touch with the living Byzantine tradition, despite the different source of iconography and despite the Latin text, which glorified the Trojans at the expense of the Greeks and renewed the tribal legend of the foundation of Rome.” Ibid., p. 144.

⁵⁷⁴ Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 494.

⁵⁷⁵ “The Venetians had re-contextualised the objects, the architecture and upgraded ‘the urban furniture of San Marco and its encircling piazza, the civic heart of Venice came to substitute for the salient topography of Hagia Sophia and its environs and became “almost another Byzantium” (“quasi alterum Bysantium”), as Cardinal Bessarion famously commented...’, consequently fulfilled by the ‘imperialisation’ of San Marco’s foreground, the great Piazza... Doge Ranieri Zeno (1253–1268) elaborated a ceremonial for the doge modelled on imperial rite; he converted a simple blessing of the waters into the ‘marriage with the sea’, thereby signifying the reach of Venetian authority over the lagoons and seas.” In Fabio Barry, “Disiecta membra: Ranieri Zeno, the Imitation of Constantinople, the Spolia Style, and Justice at San Marco”, in *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice*, eds. Henry Maguire and Robert S. Nelson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010), p. 10 and p. 8. The expansion of these thinking was towards “Christ’s directive to the apostles to set up a Christian empire becomes identical with Venice’s activity in setting up a Christian trading empire”, in Debra Pincus, “Venice and Its Doge in the Grand Design: Andrea Dandolo and the Fourteenth-Century Mosaics of the Baptistery”, in *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice*, p. 262. To this end Constantinople and the Aegean presented a solid base with view to the East.

⁵⁷⁶ Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 494.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 494.

⁵⁷⁸ Margaret Meserve, “Italian Humanists and the Problem of the Crusade”, in *Crusading in the Fifteenth Century: Message and Impact*, ed. N. Housley (London: Palgrave, 2004) p. 32.

⁵⁷⁹ Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 219.

⁵⁸⁰ Holger Klein, “Refashioning Byzantium in Venice, ca. 1200-1400”, in *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice*, eds. Henry Maguire and Robert S. Nelson (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010) p. 193.

Of course, the Byzantine guests' admiration was extended to the objects that they could recognise as possessions of the Byzantine empire that "were inserted into the fabric of Venetian churches and palaces, these *spolia* soon developed a life of their own, inspiring colourful legends of popes, sultans, and emperors, as well as moralising tales of greed, conspiracy and murder."⁵⁸¹ Of course the relics' translation to Venice was

"an act of divine providence working through the doge as its primary agent... since the ninth century the Venetians were blessed with the body of Saint Mark, whose body ensured the prosperity of the city and its citizens through history. Other prestigious relics joined the body of the evangelist during the following centuries as a result of imperial gifting, pious theft, and, as Sylvester Syropoulos called it, the law of booty, 'the creation of an appropriate stage for the display of these holy bodies.'⁵⁸²

After the Fourth Crusade of 1204 the Venetians were the arch-villains for the Byzantines, and the display of what they managed to plunder during the Crusade and during the years of the Latin empire was in the treasury of the ducal church of San Marco.⁵⁸³

"These were smaller items of loot, the spiritual spoils of a holy war... The Venetians had always been devoted collectors of holy relics. The capture of Constantinople enabled them to add some very substantial and particularly sacred and efficacious pieces to their collection... The doge Dandolo had chosen the four horses as his own. He also took a pick of the holiest relics. He and his officials from Venice had the advantage of being able to read the Greek inscriptions on reliquaries that they found in Byzantine churches... They were also more familiar with Byzantine saints and martyrologies. Dandolo chose for himself and his city a phial containing drops of the blood of the Saviour; the cross encased in gold which Constantine the Great had taken into battle with him; a part of the head of St John the Baptist; and an arm of St George. These he ordered to be placed in St Mark's. One of the nails from the Cross, taken from the monastery of Christ Pantepoptes, was also removed to St Mark's. The body of St Lucia was taken to the Monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore. The Church of Holy Apostles, was especially productive of treasures... the Venetians took from

⁵⁸¹ Ibid, p. 210

⁵⁸² Ibid, p. 225.

⁵⁸³ Anthony Cutler, "From Loot to Scholarship: Changing Modes in the Italian Response to Byzantine Artifacts, ca. 1200-1750", in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 49, p. 237.

it a fragment of the Flagellation of Christ, icons and statues and jewels for the Pala d'Oro, as well secular objects such as imperial crowns...⁵⁸⁴

Through this plunder, Venice had become like its booty, and from the 1440's Bessarion had already thought that Venice could be the most useful.⁵⁸⁵ The *reliquary* he inherited from Gregory the Patriarch of Constantinople he later donated to the confraternity of Scuola Grande di Santa Maria della Carita. And because it was a *reliquary* (a container of holy relics), or *staurotheke* (the name for the case in which a piece of the true cross was held), it was a "portable myth".⁵⁸⁶ It was competing with other holy relics that had reached the city from the East – only Byzantine provenance was recognised as authentic in the West.

Bessarion had acted many times in the past as an ambassador of the two Byzantine Emperors, the one in Constantinople and the other in Trebizond, who were discussing to unite their forces against the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth century. He was not the head of the missions but he composed the discourses to address Alexius IV of Trebizond. He was the one to ask for the hand of princess Maria for the Emperor John VIII, after his second wife left him to go back to her family in Italy. After the Council he returned to Constantinople with the Emperor.⁵⁸⁷ Their journey back was exceptionally long. It lasted three and a half months. There they discovered that Maria Comnene Palaiologina had died in December 1439.⁵⁸⁸ Also, Theodore II Palaiologos of Mistra was married to Cleope Malatesta, from the famous family of Rimini. She was one of the Latin princesses

⁵⁸⁴ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 184–185.

⁵⁸⁵ See, in **Appendix VI**, image **2a, 2b**, the Letter of Bessarion which was accompanying the deed of donation, from Latin, "The Origins of St Mark's Library: Cardinal Bessarion's Gift", 1468, in L. Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsman*, 3 Vols. (Paderborn, 1923–24), 1942, Vol. III, pp. 541–543.

⁵⁸⁶ See, in **Appendix VI**, images **1, 5, 8, 9a, 9b**, Cardinal Bessarion with the Staurotheke: "In 1463 Bessarione spent many months in Venice as Papal delegate in order to strengthen the Venetians in their purpose of declaring war against the Turks. For the whole period he had been hosted by the Brotherhood of the Great Charity School. As a sign of gratitude the Cardinal donated them the reliquary of the True Cross, the most famous Staurotheke of which he reserved the ownership until his death. In may 1472, passing through Bologna in the occasion of his delegation to France, he left the full ownership of the reliquary to the School, 'in consideration of the long distances he should have to do and the uncertainties of the human living'. So he sent the stauroteca to Venice under the care of three secretaries in charge of giving it to the Brotherhood. In the letter that he sent along with the gift, Bessarione noted down that he disposed, in the following years after the first donation, that the reliquary should be rimmed in silver and provided with a handle, so to be brought in procession." Regarding the ritual with the Staurotheke, "The *Custos* (keeper) of the Brotherhood, Andrea della Sega, in his thanking letter to Bessarione described the solemn ceremonies with which the members of the School thanks to the support of the Doge and of the Senate, received the gift. On the Trinity Sunday of the 1472 the reliquary was solemnly exposed to the veneration of the faithful people on the altar of Saint Marco. The reliquary paraded through Venice in the procession (in which many lay and religious men took part), then brought to the Great Charity School across a bridge built for this occasion on the Great Channel (Canal Grande) where it was placed on a stand inside a 'sanctum' (holy box) called 'Albergo'." In Labowsky, p. 247.

⁵⁸⁷ Before he left Florence, Eugene IV promised a pension of 300 florins and another 600 in writing if he would come back to live in Rome. Taken from notes in R. Loenertz article "Pour la biographie du cardinal Bessarion", in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, Vol. X, (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1944) p. 117

⁵⁸⁸ In 1418, Pope Martin V, had written to the six sons of the Emperor Manuel II, expressing the bitterness of heart which the devastation of the Greek world had caused him, and granting each of the princes the right of marrying (should any choose to do so) women of the Latin faith, provided the latter were allowed to remain in full possession of their faith and in obedience to the "sancta Romana et universalis Ecclesia". However, Setton tells us that "Maddalena de' Tocchi, daughter of Leonardo II of Zante, married Constantine Palaiologos in a Greek camp, amid preparations for a siege of the city, changing her name in Byzantine fashion to Theodora (she died some seventeen months later)." In Setton, p. 40 and p. 32.

authorised by Pope Martin V to marry into Greek Orthodox royal families. In most cases though the experiments were unsuccessful.⁵⁸⁹

Many scholars dedicated themselves to debate on his sincerity, others on him being a Byzantine reformer, or a mediator, being a Byzantine admirer of the “western” progress. Bessarion was seen as a poet; his endless book acquisitions and cultural patronage and the final donation of his books to the Republic of Venice “... can be read in psychological terms as an anxiety of rewarding, the re-acquisition, through the books, of what history stole from him”,⁵⁹⁰ and the speculation on his identity goes on. Scholars such as Monfasani, Labowsky, Gill, and Maltezou, still debate his motivations.

Bessarion’s writing is littered with rhetoric modes in contrast to his senior fellow-orator at the Council in Florence, Mark Eugenikos who had chosen to speak simply, as befitting a monk.⁵⁹¹ There is no doubt that his strong emotional lines do not explain anything, as they present consequences rather than the causes of his experiences. The tension between the modest monk Mark and Bessarion started becoming apparent as early as 1423 when in the *Encomium of St. Bessarion* he was writing as an “... already practised rhetorician, in full command of stylistic devices...”⁵⁹² I would argue that because of their apparent differences, at the time of the Council they were appointed by the Emperor as the two speakers of the Greek side during the debates of the Council. In that way, the divisions of modes of thinking and expressing theological premises were exposed from an early point in the deliberations with the Latins, who kept on stressing humanist scholastic traditions in their reasoning. So Bessarion’s view of theology lies in contrast with the Greek Father’s teaching, which Andrew Louth tells us “has an atmosphere of objectivity”. In oratory of the Father’s kind

“We do not hear about their own experiences, rather we have an interpretation of scripture and the light it sheds on the soul’s quest. It is not personal experience that convinces, but appeal to Sacred Revelation... his (Augustine’s) *Confessions* are unparalleled in the ancient world for introspective self-scrutiny. A whole new dimension is opened up of introversion and a searching, psychological self-probing.”⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁹ Stormon, p. 137.

⁵⁹⁰ Silvia Ronchey, “Bessarione as a Poet and the Last Byzantine Court”, in *Bessarione e l’Umanesimo, Catalogo della Mostra*, (Napels: Vivarium, 1994) p. 235.

⁵⁹¹ “... A quoi le metropolitte repondit qu’il avait renonce depuis longtemps a ces recherches du langage et qu’il preferait parler simplement comme un moine...” Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p.269.

⁵⁹² Stormon, p. 131.

⁵⁹³ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition, From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) p.133.

Yet again, Bessarion presents us with another contradiction. In his first composition in 1423 of the *Encomium on St Bessarion*, whose name he eventually adopted as his patron saint, Stormon informs us that the actual saint had scorned books. St. Bessarion was a desert wanderer in Egypt and only carried a Bible. But our Bessarion is obsessed with education and copying of manuscripts and constructing libraries, which he then dedicates to an Italian Republic. Eventually he omitted this attribute of the saint from his *Encomium*. Stormon continues saying that he also modified passages that he thought were too incredible or fantastic of his patron's life and he inserted

“... a number of typical humanistic artifices, such as an initial apologia to win the good-will of readers, a rhetorical eulogy of Egypt, a stylised description of desert mountains,... after St. Bessarion has glorified his heavenly Father by his good works, he enjoys a state of sufficiency with a view to acquiring virtue and contentment of soul.”⁵⁹⁴

Stormon comments on this as if it is “natural” for a young learned monk to write dismissively like that, and whose devotion cannot be doubted. It is “normal” to omit and add your own perception of your saint's life if you do not approve of it. On the other hand, that was an ideal way for Bessarion to start “making” his own myth. In a sense, this early preparation of Bessarion does point to a pre-configured path to sainthood, although it was maybe not conscious at this stage. The normality of merging scriptural and scholastic attitudes in writing is shaped in this period; later he extended this idea to his speeches and orations as well.

According to the famous humanist Lorenzo Valla, who was his contemporary in Rome, Bessarion “was in Rome the most Latin of the Greeks and in Constantinople the most Greek of the Latins” (*Latinorum graecissimus, Graecorum latinissimus*).⁵⁹⁵ On a manuscript, that was given to him by John Palaiologos VIII, containing various writings of his father, the Emperor Manuel Palaiologos II (1381–1425),⁵⁹⁶ Bessarion inscribed a Latin saying, *Bibliothecae Nicenae*; and another in Greek “this book is part of the sum of books of Bessarion, who was cardinal by *dignity* and Greek by *birth*”.⁵⁹⁷ On his tomb, the *lapide*,⁵⁹⁸ in Rome, in the Basilica of the St. Apostles – which he acquired through the Pope in 1440, and more specifically, in the chapel of St. Eugenia, St. Michael, and St. John the Baptist, which he asked for and acquired in 1443 – there are two more inscriptions. The Latin reads: “Bessarion, bishop Tusculano, Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, Patriarch of Constantinople, borne in noble Greece, laid [this stone] in the year 1467”. The Greek inscription

⁵⁹⁴ Stormon, “S.J., *Bessarion before the Council Of Florence*”, p. 132.

⁵⁹⁵ Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the “Sibling” Byzantine and Western Cultures*, p. 217.

⁵⁹⁶ Marco Petta, “L'eucologio e altri cimeli del Cardinale Bessarione Nell'Abbazia di Grottaferrata”, in *Bessarione e l'Umanesimo*, p. 368. We know that because the monogram of Palaiologoi was inscribed on it in Greek.

⁵⁹⁷ He left this manuscript to the monastery of Grottaferrata where he was an administrator. See **Appendix VI**, images **10a** and **10b**.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 378, and p. 383. The memorial stone, the headstone of the tomb, in **Appendix VI**, images **12a** and **12b**.

reads “ I, Bessarion, while alive, have built this tomb for my body – my soul will fly to God, immortal”.⁵⁹⁹ Noteworthy is that the church where tombs of the first Emperors of the Empire were kept in Constantinople was the church of Holy Apostles. He justified his interventions in the Basilica as an interest in the “intense and deep love for truth”, which echoes St. Augustine’s views in the Confessions.

“His soul is longing to return to God”, ‘... a longing that is experienced as restlessness, inability to settle and rest anywhere, a pressing sense that in all created things there lies something that calls us to God. This sense of not being at home in this world is fundamental to Augustine’s mystical thought... but is not new in Christianity. Plato had this longing to escape from the shadows of the cave to the pure light of the sun of the intelligible world. To an even greater degree we find it in Plotinus: a longing for the Fatherland, a longing for whence we have come – The Fatherland to us is there whence we have come and there is the Father.” (Ennead I. 6.8)⁶⁰⁰

IV. Complementary Others to Bessarion and Byzantine Greeks

The intellectuals of Byzantium were well aware of the Event and its time of the Empire’s political and cultural decay. Among those intellectuals were Cydones and Bessarion, who, along with Bessarion’s teacher, the neo-platonist Plethon, were among the most prominent in the history of Byzantine culture. However, even before the Union of the Churches, the future Patriarch Gennadius Scholarios, pointed at the deterioration of the level of the capital’s cultural elite, until there were only three or four people actually devoted to pursuing learning, and in some cases it was more about the appearances than the substance. Indicatively, Demetrius Cydones reminds them:

“You say, he asked the Byzantine traditionalists, that the Latins received culture from us? True, but in so doing, they mastered Aristotle and Plato – now their muse is more impressive than that of these two philosophers – while you neglected them to the point where you ignorantly assert that the method of dialectical proof is a Latin invention. You are

⁵⁹⁹ Antonio Coccia, “Il Cardinale Bessarione e la basilica dei SS. XII Apostoli in Roma”, in *Bessarione e l’Umanesimo*, p. 381. See the images in **Appendix VI**, images **12a** and **12b** with inscription in image **12a**. The given translation is from the inscription we see in image **12a**.

⁶⁰⁰ Louth, p. 133

proud of your long-winded Attic style? But the Latins offer the truth in concise language and are better equipped for logical disputation.”⁶⁰¹

Very interestingly, in 1371, Cydones asked the Emperor John V for permission to leave for Italy. In the past, he had benefited from Latin writings. Now he wanted to benefit from direct contacts with “people who are capable of improving those who associate with them.”⁶⁰² Earlier, in 1397, Manuel Chrysoloras came from Constantinople to teach Greek in Florence. Staying only three years, a brief interlude in a career primarily spent in the diplomatic service of Byzantium, this visiting Professor had a profound impact upon his students and upon the course of Italian humanism.⁶⁰³ “His Greek grammar, the *Erotemata*, was a standard handbook in western Europe well into the sixteenth century; he also inspired a handful of the Italians to make their way to Constantinople and study at the source.”⁶⁰⁴

IVA. Scholarios and the Ottomans

At the same time, Scholarios was providing structural balance to Bessarion. He not only signed the Decree, but on return to the City he denounced his agreement and gradually became the most fervent anti-unionist and first Patriarch under the Ottomans. Needless to say, the sincerity of both these high-ranking figures has been discussed at length. However, my contribution to this discussion is that first, it is not particularly relevant to determine the degree of their loyalty to the Greek doctrinal position. Rather, it is important to see them as the two individuals who undertook carrying the ideal of Unity further in different ways. The crux of the matter is that, considering the schismogenic nature of the problem they were debating in Florence, it is an issue of balancing purity with strategy to achieve a coherent whole from their respective, opposite but complementary positions. Bessarion as the East in the West and Scholarios as the East in the Orient. Both positions were highly ambitious and very risky, because they remained within the context of authorities other than them within this world, but they were holding offices that were semi-holy – as a cardinal and a Patriarch respectively. This duality of powers that they were endowed with allowed them to successfully mediate the goals they had assigned for themselves and the wider communities they were serving. Both Bessarion and Scholarios were moving within a hierarchy that had been

⁶⁰¹ Sevchenko, “The Decline of Byzantium Seen Through the Eyes of its Intellectuals”, p. 176.

⁶⁰² Ibid, p. 177.

⁶⁰³ Nelson, “The Italian Appreciation of Illuminated Byzantine Manuscripts”, p. 218.

⁶⁰⁴ Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist observers of painting in Italy and the discovery of pictorial composition, 1350-1450* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971) p. 79.

transformed from a “violent outsider to the source of social prosperity and order”,⁶⁰⁵ i.e., Venice and the Ottoman Empire. Although the groups they “joined” had diverged further and further for centuries, what was happening now was that the members of each group became more and more dependent upon the complementary behaviour of the members of the other group, “so that at some point in the progress of schismogenesis a balance will be reached when the forces of mutual dependence are equal to the schismogenic tendency.”⁶⁰⁶

That was the point in history that “outside” others, from within this world, were to take over and demonstrate that different ways and continuities can be tried and persevere.

“When Scholarios was asked in his return to Constantinople in the 1440’s ‘whether the Latins were heretics?’, he answered that ‘only God knows and that they (the Greeks) follow the tradition they have inherited (ta patria)’; he also said that ‘there will no help coming from the West and that they have to organise their own defence as there is no ethnos (people) that betrays their traditions of the old to avoid subjugation’. He worked his way so skilfully with the Sultan, that Mohamed asked him to teach psalms to Muslims with good voices and to insert the tone, melody of the ecclesiastical psalms system into the Turkish one. The biggest miracle was that it was allowed by the oppressor for the Patriarchate, the Church to carry on its work and protect the Christians in the Ottoman empire. The sultan respected deeply the Patriarch because he was a wise and pious man... he admired him for these qualities.”⁶⁰⁷

Georgios Scholarios Gennadios at the same time was well versed in philosophy. He wrote the *Defence of Aristotle* in response to Pletho’s *De differentiis*.⁶⁰⁸ In the investiture ceremonies of Scholarios as the first Patriarch approved by the Ottomans, “Bishop of Constantinople, the new Rome, and Patriarch of all the world”, Sultan Mehmet II said: “Be Patriarch, live with us in peace and enjoy all the privileges of thy predecessors”.⁶⁰⁹ He was directly responsible for the civil affairs of the Orthodox community in the Empire. Before he turned anti-unionist, shortly before the decisive Council of Florence, in his *Apology Against Accusations of Latinism*, in a *Letter to his Students*, he promoted “liberal teaching”, a “cosmopolitan attitude” pro-unionist, which got him

⁶⁰⁵ Sahlins, *Stranger Kings in General*.

⁶⁰⁶ Bateson, *Naven*, p. 196.

⁶⁰⁷ Theodoros Zeses, Gennadios II Scholarios: Life, Works and Teaching, *Analecta Vlatadon*, No. 30 (Thessaloniki: Patriarchal Institute of Church Studies, 1980) p. 282, p. 226, p. 202.

⁶⁰⁸ Robert Browning, “Review: Woodhouse, C. M. *George Gemistos Plethon: the Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986)”, *The Journal Of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 109, 1989, p. 277.

⁶⁰⁹ George N. Sfeir, “The Abolition of Confessional Jurisdiction in Egypt: The Non-Muslim Courts”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Summer 1956, p. 254.

into trouble and he had to suspend his teaching activity.⁶¹⁰; He “spoke of similarity in way of life and customs, communion, proximity, enjoying each other’s way of life, close ties in the domain of learning and letters, between Greek and Latin.⁶¹¹ The pro-unionists in general, “... insisted on reason... offered a plausible ‘terrestrial’ answer to the problem of saving Constantinople, but it seemed to traffic its ‘celestial’ aspect away... after all the end of the empire was approaching...”⁶¹² Scholarios though managed to leap to the anti-unionist group, and the “celestial” answer became evident again. In the popular mind Constantinople was eternal and it was not logical for them to live through its fall. “An appeal to God’s help... in the past, the Byzantines owed their assistance invoked in vain in moments of supreme danger... it was better to suffer anything than deny ancestral beliefs.”⁶¹³ We hear strongly Sahlins, echoing “...White’s central idea that the symbol is the origin and basis of human behaviour.”⁶¹⁴

In a previously unnoticed but detailed document from the fourteenth century, we read that Gregory Palamas, archbishop of Thessaloniki and the leader of the Hesychasts, was taken captive by the Osmanli Turks when they crossed the Dardanelles. He accounts for the Christian communities still existing in Orhan’s realm and of the impact of Islam in Christianity.⁶¹⁵ It should be underlined here that Orhan was the son-in-law of the eastern Roman Emperor, John VI Cantacuzenus.⁶¹⁶ On the other hand, this same Emperor was undermining “his anti-Muslim sentiments as he had allied more than once with the Ottoman Turks. This rather embarrassing aspect of his career threatened to tarnish the image of a pious Christian ruler that he was striving to project.”⁶¹⁷ He was doing that by

“composing four Apologies (defence) of Christianity directed against the Moslems. In his theological works, now in Paris (Paris gr. 1242) the ex-Emperor had himself represented holding a scroll with the inscription *Great is the God of Christians* which is the *Incipit* of his work against Islam.”⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁰ Ihor Sevcenko, “Intellectual Repercussions of the Council of Florence”, pp. 316–317

⁶¹¹ Ibid, p. 296.

⁶¹² Ibid, p. 296.

⁶¹³ Ibid, p. 297.

⁶¹⁴ Ton Otto and Nils Bubandt, eds., *Experiments in Holism: Theory and Practice in Contemporary Anthropology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) p. 99.

⁶¹⁵ G. Georgiades Arnakis, “Gregory Palamas among the Turks and documents of his Captivity as Historical Sources”, *Speculum*, Vol. 26, No. 1, January 1951, p. 104. “In Lapsacus, Pagae, Brusa, and Nicaea, all had their Christian inhabitants, men and women... in Brusa in 1326, there was 30,000 population, almost exclusively Greeks, they paid a total ransom of 30,000 pieces of gold and were allowed to leave the city. Some stayed, some kept their Christian faith. Gregory Palamas noticed that their vitality and Greek consciousness remained unaffected. They did not seem to be particularly afraid of the Turks. Here as elsewhere the attitude of the Turks was one of tolerance.” See pp. 115–116.

⁶¹⁶ E. Zachariadou discussed with me that his daughter Theodora was given bride to Orhan in the fourteenth century, and that he can only assume that the religious wedding could have possibly happened by an imam since the bride passed to the Asia Minor side, somewhere towards Brusa where the groom was waiting for her. In ed. F. Dolger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden, Corpus der griechischen Urkunden des ostromischen reiches von 565-1453*, 5, John Cantacuzenos VI (1341-1347), Bonn II, p. 587-589. She also pointed out that we have to separate the secular from the church marriage union. When the Turks, by chance of nature, an earthquake, conquered Gallipoli, Kantakouzenos gave him 10,000 ducats to return it. He refused and then the Emperor suggested meeting him at Nicomedia, which was Ottoman territory since 1337. Orhan failed to show up, alleging illness; the Greek Emperor’s pride must have been hurt, for he felt that he had been duped by his obnoxious son-in-law. Ibid., p. 112.

⁶¹⁷ Georgiades Arnakis, pp. 104–118.

⁶¹⁸ Meyendorff, “Byzantine Views of Islam”, p. 123. You can see this image in **Appendix IV**, image 2.

Already in the early fourteenth century the East was marrying the Orient. “In 1332, according to the Arab traveller Ibn Battuta, a daughter of the Byzantine Emperor who was the third wife of Ozbek, Mongol ruler of the Golden Horde 9r. (1314–1341), went to visit her father in Constantinople. She was wearing a mantle made of nakh, “also called nasidj, embroidered with jewels”, and “her horse was covered with a saddle-cloth of silk embroidered in gold”. Accompanying her were “mamluks [guards], slave girls, pages and attendants, about five hundred, wearing robes of silk embroidered with gold and jewels.”⁶¹⁹ It should be noted that the fate of the Byzantine religious commercial *panegyris* in Asia Minor and the Balkans in the later Byzantine period – at which time Byzantine political authority was being replaced by that of Muslim Turks in Anatolia and by that of the Orthodox South Slavs and Catholic Latins in the Balkans – was never exclusively limited to internal trade among the Byzantines. Astonishingly, the great *panegyris* of St. Eugenios in Trebizond and of St. Demetrios in Thessalonica were frequented by a variety of Muslim, Slavic, and western European peoples. Therefore the Byzantine neighbours knew of and participated in the *panegyris* both at the borders and in the hinterlands. There is an astonishing case of a Turkish emir who sent his wife to be cured at the shrine of St. Eugenios.⁶²⁰

A number of contradictions like that happened in the last centuries of the Empire. Manuel II adopted Suleyman Celebi after the Treaty of 1402–1403 between the Ottomans and the Byzantines. In Dukas, we have the exact words: “I am going to be your son, and you will be my father. There will be no more scandals, just name me despot of Thrace...”⁶²¹ In the same history we have Mahoumet, making a treaty of peace, saying when sending gifts again and giving land to the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II “like a son to the father...”⁶²² Later, the sultan Mohamed A’ (1413–1421) considered Manuel II father of his children.⁶²³ This same Emperor went to France and met with the European kings asking for military help against the Ottomans.

⁶¹⁹ In David Jacoby, *Late Byzantium between the Mediterranean and Asia: trade and material culture*, in symposia, *Byzantium and faith: perspectives on late byzantine art and culture*, ed. Sarah T. Brooks, p. 23. From Vryonis Speros, in “*The Panegyris of the Byzantine Saint*” in the “*Byzantine Saint*” book ed. by Sergei Hackel, see p. 214

⁶²⁰ Speros Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through to the Fifteenth century* (ACLS History E-Book 2008) p. 486.

⁶²¹ Doukas, p. 840, ebook, P. Migne.

⁶²² Doukas, p. 872, ebook, P. Migne.

⁶²³ Zachariadou made reference to this event.

The Byzantines were not only reaching out towards the Latins, but were also weaving very special relationships with the Ottomans. From their part, in principle, the early Ottoman rulers since the late fourteenth century, after the conquest of Macedonia, were impressed by the spiritual authority of the monks of Mount Athos, the only Holy Mountain that emerged and prospered after 1204 and that has kept its reputation for a pious way of life to this day. It is characteristic that, in this context, and as “... they were anxious to fulfil the responsibilities expected of pious Muslim rulers, they began to apply the koranic principle of religious tolerance, which presupposes respect for the institutions of the Christians and Jews.”⁶²⁴

We shouldn't forget that Manuel II acted as a vassal of the Ottomans in the weakened position of the empire in the fourteenth century, where one of the most profoundly desperate episodes was to participate in the military conquest by the Ottomans of Philadelphia, the last Byzantine city standing. In this context of conflict and adversity, of friendship, compassion and devastating sadness for an Empire that was a fading image of its past, Manuel had to respond to the dominating power of the Ottoman Sultan and follow him as a vassal to Anatolia, the regions of Pontos and in “Phrygia”, to take part in one of his campaigns in the second half of 1391.⁶²⁵ He endured a profound humiliation when

“in May 1391 [he] was summoned by the sultan to Anatolia to take part in yet another of his campaigns, this time to the Black Sea coast – a feudal obligation distasteful and considerably more... by the sadness and devastation of the country through which they marched... he wrote to his friend, Demetrios Cydones, a Byzantine of Venetian citizenship, ‘the plain is deserted... a slaughter that is inhuman and savage and inhuman and without any formality of justice. No one is spared-neither women, nor children, nor the sick, nor the aged... there are many cities in these regions but they... have no people, and when I speak the names of these cities, the answer is always ‘we have destroyed these places and time has destroyed their names’ ‘... what is indeed unbearable for me is that I am fighting beside these people when to add to their strength is to diminish my own’.”⁶²⁶

In further letters 36 to 63 he expresses his distress at serving in the army of his enemies, the Persians (i.e. The Turks), his consternation at the slaughter that he was witnessing fighting in the land of the “Scythians” (i.e. the Mongols), and his sorrow for being cut off from any contact with

⁶²⁴ Zachariadou, “Mount Athos and the Ottomans c. 1350–1550”, p. 155.

⁶²⁵ Elizabeth Zachariadou, “Manuel II Palaeologos on the strife between Bayezid I and Kadi Nurhan Al-Din Ahmad”, p. 471.

⁶²⁶ John Julius Norwich, *The Decline and Fall of Byzantium*, (London: Penguin), 1996, p. 350.

education or refinement. On his return to Constantinople in 1392, he married Helena Dragash, daughter of the Serbian Prince of Serres, and, like himself, a vassal of the Sultan...

“the ceremony was performed with the full Orthodox ritual and as much pomp and display as could be managed, would provide the best tonic to his subjects’ morale. It would also remind them of what Byzantium stood for: of that astonishing continuity with which Emperor had succeeded Emperor without a break – even though occasionally in exile – for... centuries; of the fact that, whatever dangers he might be facing, whatever indignities he might be called upon to suffer, he remained supreme among the princes of Christendom, equal of the Apostoles, God’s own anointed Viceroy on earth.”⁶²⁷

VI. Assessment

Bessarion proved to be part of the effectiveness of the vision of the Emperor, of the myth that was created through the Council, despite the grim realities. His transformation from a Byzantine priest with a neo-platonic education to a Roman Catholic cardinal, by the Pope’s invitation, with a safe pension in Italy and with two failed attempts to become a Pope himself, was profound. Bessarion’s conversion had an overwhelming impact on the tale of unity and perseverance of the myth of a renewed Byzantium. His was an active conversion; he was endlessly patronising culture and fighting for the preservation of the old. He was an intellectual crusader of the restoration of a memory and a dream. Through his life in Italy, his travels in Europe, along with his iconography and his coat of arms, he displayed a possibility of a version of unity that was implicitly there for all to take advantage of.

If we accept Bessarion’s awareness about the real cultural and political situation, the basis of his dreaming of re-conquest was an expression of the *renovatio* idea, which, as Sevcenko informs us “was not abandoned, if at all, until the very last years of the Byzantine Empire?”⁶²⁸ This was a re-conquest from the Venetians finally. He was writing to the Venetian Senate to organise the Crusade and re-take what they plundered in 1204 at the time of the Fourth Crusade. In the West, in the 1430s, the Milanese humanist Biglia believed in the action of a Crusade against the Turks, as a kind of reconstitution, and a rupture to Constantine’s move brought about when he moved the capital of

⁶²⁷ Ibid, p. 351.

⁶²⁸ Sevcenko, *The Decline*, p.170.

the Empire from the seat of the Church to the East. At that point both institutions were debased and thus Constantine opened the way for both barbarians and heretics, whether in the guise of Germans, Goths, Huns, or Arabs, to encroach.⁶²⁹ Mohler gives an account of how in late 1453, the Byzantine émigré scholar and diplomat Cardinal Bessarion described Constantinople's capture in such terms:

“A city which only recently was blessed with such an emperor, so many distinguished men, so many famous and ancient families and such an abundance of resources – the capital of all Greece, the splendour and glory of the East, the nursery and the most noble learning, the repository of all that is good – has been captured, stripped, plundered and pillaged by most inhuman barbarians, the most savage enemies of the Christian faith, the most ferocious wild beasts.”⁶³⁰

Bessarion finally left what was Byzantine, as a legacy to Venice, the “other Byzantium”, as he famously declared. All his efforts for a new Crusade against the Turks to recover the lost lands, his endless letter-writing and the visits and gifts – the first printed books in Europe, the incunabula – to all kings and dukes and princesses of Europe, were all proof to the conviction that through the “structure of the conjuncture” that the journey offered, the complexities of the exchanges between the Byzantines and the Latins were such that the content of some of the relationships changed to a new functional content. The values acquired in practice, in line with Sahlins's theory, return to the structure as new relationships between these categories.⁶³¹ Through internal conflict and contradiction, Bessarion managed to bring himself to the foreground of European courts as an erudite scholar and spiritual father of unity between the Christian Churches, as an “as if” version of unity.

Bessarion didn't sell out, because the Greek Church continued to be strong in the difficult times that followed. When the last Palaiologos, Thomas and his family, arrived from Peloponnese to Italy after the fall of Peloponnese to the Ottomans and with the *cara* (skull) of St. Andrew in hand as a gift to the Pope, Bessarion was pleased. In the statues that were created at the time as commissions from the Pope, the Apostle Peter with the keys to paradise in hand, looks surprisingly like Thomas Palaiologos.⁶³² One can ponder on how the relations had changed content, and how an Event can be

⁶²⁹ Meserve, *Italian Humanists and the Problem of the Crusade*, p. 19.

⁶³⁰ Bessarion, “Letter to Doge Francesco Foscari”, 13 July 1453, in Mohler, pp. 475–477. At p. 475: “Urbs, quae modo tali imperatore, tot illustrissimis viris, tot clarissimis antiquissimisque families, tanta rerum copia florebat, totius Graeciae caput, splendor et decus orientis, gymnasium optimarum atrium, bonorum omnium receptaculum, ab immanissimis barbaris, a saevissimis Christianae fidei hostibus, a truculentissimis feris capta, spoliata, direpta, exhausta est.”

⁶³¹ Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities*, p. 50.

⁶³² See in **Appendix VI**, images **14a**, **14b** and **15**, images to prove the point. In Setton, *Papacy and the Levant*, and in Ronchey, *Orthodoxy on Sale: The Last Byzantine, and the Lost Crusade*.

a mediator, after the repeated encounters for Unity and the contacts between Byzantines and Latins throughout time.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Epilogue

I. Conclusions: How to Understand History as Culture and Vice Versa

In this work, I am looking at the transition period between two Empires and two civilisations. Fourteen years after the contingent change in strategy from the Emperor of Constantinople, the last but one final sovereign, the Empire reaches its end point: its capture by the Ottoman Turks in May 1453. At the heart of the matter lies the fact that John VIII Palaiologos lived in a timeless present, and that is not because he was vain or helpless. John VIII was not an extreme fatalist, a common view about medieval Christians. He may have known the dimensions of the tragedy that was approaching, but he nevertheless made the effort to open up to different options for the sake of Christendom. He worked for the continuation of a culture, in a format he couldn't possibly know, but he definitely was not interested in any particular ethnic survival. His attempt was to reclaim the "poetic logic", the myth-history of his people, the long journey of the past of the Romans that would soon be hijacked by the ebb and flow of history. In the medal dedicated to him, with his profile on top, and the enigmatic Emperor praying on his horse, he is designated as "The Emperor and 'Basileus' of the Romans", of all the Romans that constituted the Empire throughout time. He was the bridge between the past and the future, actualising this in the present he was living. His ideal was not of the functionalist type, which lots of scholars have argued about. On the scale of symbolic temperature he was "very hot". His competition was not about hard power anymore, and we could say that that is where the transformation lies. It was time for "soft power" to take over. He would rather win in the symbolic domain: that would leave him as satisfied as he could have been. It was a competition for prestige, a generosity of signing of land and titles while in Italy, to thank the citizens of Florence for their hospitality. He was actually more sophisticated than many. He presents us with the quintessential model of ritual communication in history. He uses all knowledge of his repository of a unique history, of a social theory, which he presented in a risky but new way. He was to achieve results, very long-term ones, across the centuries, affecting his part of the world, his society, and its long established meanings, from within this society. He literally convinced and mobilised the elders of eastern Christendom, and many younger members of the Church of the East, to join him in a journey to Italy, which was made as formal as it could get: the ritualisation of the social relations between the two parts. In the late medieval, early Renaissance period, when the times were ripe for changes in the greater European landscape, the historical problem of kinship and estrangement of the two parts of Christendom – which are close geographical neighbours and never

left sight of each other in history – comes to the fore. The changes have to do with the imminent takeover of the eastern part from a powerful new Empire, which is also Muslim, and the future of Christendom, which under the circumstances seems uncertain and unsettling, as the oldest part of the whole may wither away for ever in this catastrophe. These social relations, of “kinship and estrangement” between the two parts of the whole of Christendom, I explore and re-interpret in this work.

The long stay abroad couldn't but put in motion, and test, the intercultural dynamics between the two parts of Christendom. The conventional reaction to John VIII (1425–1448), who hovers in history in the shadow of his father and his brother, the last Constantine, was that he wasted the opportunities created by his father and left his brother to deal with the consequences. According to Michael Angold, who wrote Constantine's biography and reviewed this period through his work, “... all that reading of history, (which) has turned Manuel II into the last great Byzantine emperor, John VIII into a bad thing, and Constantine XI into a doomed hero”.⁶³³ And he continues: “... Ivan Djuric provides the only discordant note in his biography of John VIII by forcing us to think again about this emperor: was he such a bad thing, after all?”⁶³⁴ John VIII is always in the background, like the superhero, undermined, hidden behind the imperial mask of the failed son as he had taken some badly judged initiatives. From my reading of this time through the research, I argue that, on the contrary, John VIII was the outstanding hero, and a truly great Emperor.

I have been influenced by Barney Cohn, Jean and John Comaroff, and Terry Turner's project of historical ethnography, “who consciously raised the point that an ethnography with time and transformation built into it is a distinct way of knowing the anthropological object, with possibility of changing the way culture is thought.”⁶³⁵ I examine complex past stories of this unique civilisation, which signalled the beginning of Christendom, as an all-Roman event, but which along the way starts to break into parts with mutually polarising roles, becoming Christian East and West. Through this investigation, my aim is to synthesise the experience of those individuals and groups that took part in the events of the time; to understand relationships, to explore questions like the one Kydones poses: what happened to people who lived together in the beginning, separated from one another, in the course of time? My interest focuses on the interpretation of those relationships and communications between people, groups of people, and the role of individuals in these relationships. The guide for my comparison and context is culture, the symbolically constituted

⁶³³ Michael Angold, “Review of *The End of Byzantium*”, *Reviews in History*, No. 1030, available online at <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1030>,

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ Marshall Sahlins, “Goodbye to Tristes Tropique: Ethnography in the Context of Modern World History”, *The Journal of Modern History*, No. 65, 1993, p. 1.

order, the symbolic capacity that is inherent in human relationships. Because without it there would be no patterns to follow, no mapping of ideas and ideals to understand each other. Culture can be empowering, it can be a catalyst for change. The springboard for this examination is a remarkable event that happened towards the end of the long life of the eastern Christian Empire and involved both parts of the original Christendom, along with representatives from the rest of the Churches of the East. In true Sahlinian spirit, this was an instance where the concentration of the parts, which made up the whole of Christianity, was made visible. Not only was it made visible, but the opposition in dogma that kept the groups apart underlies the hierarchies, in this case with each thinking itself superior to the other. Because of the event, the two hierarchies, the papal and imperial, came together, and were obliged to coexist for about two years as they kept separate in principle.

This journey tested the historical potential of survival of the eastern Christian faith under the pressures of the Latin Church and the Ottomans advances. It tested the limits of different cultural projects, the East and West, and it weighed and valued in different contexts conflicts and alliances. Through this method of historical ethnography one can recognise, can apprehend what Sahlins called "... principled description of cultural orders as systems of difference".⁶³⁶ To paraphrase Sahlins: the premise that through differences, different groups impart life to one another, because one has to find life somewhere when death is approaching, as we cannot control death, which means to compete, reproduce, exchange, do whatever is required to prosper, or survive.⁶³⁷ Through the journey and the various changes it brought to the life of certain personalities, as I discuss in Chapter 6 in the context of the notion of complementarity. This includes the Emperor, whose personalised journey and the narratives associated mainly with him, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. The journey is a display of relationships, as opposed to the relations of him being in command to those subjected to his command, that is, the arrangements in the sphere of cultural order. According to Sahlins, John VIII presents the characteristics of a *systemic agency* in a historical context that he received as descendant of the dynasty of Palaiologan Emperors in the long dynastical line of Roman Emperors; he was empowered by this eleven-centuries-long "mythical" background. In this, the Empire is seen as *oikoumene*, the Church as repository of traditions, laws, and beliefs, of the past, contested and challenged repeatedly in Councils. Everybody around John VIII was supposedly obliged to follow his orders, but whichever way he was going he would have influenced the course of history. The choice of which relationships to nurture, which way to go, was in my view again a matter of cultural order.

⁶³⁶ Sahlins, "Goodbye to Tristes Tropique", p. 25.

⁶³⁷ Sahlins, in talk on "The Culture of Material Value and the Cosmography of Difference". Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13vX9VbPbkA>, talk by Professor Sahlins at King's College, Cambridge, on 5 June 2013, organised by Alice Taylor and Anastasia Piliavsky for CRASSH and King's College, and filmed by Alan Macfarlane.

This thesis works on the general principle that the understanding of the cosmos within cultural systems structures social action. Instead of just describing and constructing more decline, instead of lamenting the decay of a once glorious Empire, as I have outlined in the first part of this chapter, and against Manuel II and the traditional historians' perceptions that John VIII's efforts were futile and "of another time", I argue that John VIII was rather of a different logic, and consequently he was implementing different strategies than his father. The Oecumenical Councils that were set up as an end, the post terminus, the point where the "Roman political and religious (cultural) tradition and Hellenist political theory"⁶³⁸ converged and were opposed at the same time,⁶³⁹ and the Councils became now means to another end. They replaced one thing by another thing of a metonymical order. Instead of being the solution, the effect after the disruption in the Empire, the Councils became the problem. More specifically, they became the cause of this problem.

The 1438–1439 Council was special. It changed into the means towards further discoveries rather than certainties "... an implicit inventory or conception of the total means available must be made in the case of mythical thought also, so that a result can be defined which will always be a compromise between the structure of the instrumental set and that of the project."⁶⁴⁰ They were transformed into language and perception games that the adversaries had to convince each other of, as they were actually working on philosophical concepts. For John VIII this inventory was rich, abundant with references to the past of which he was the product, and the present that he had to work through. I believe he also did this with a steady view to the future, in the case of grave calamities, of a core cultural inventory intact. In the fifteenth century the community of Christians was again divided. John VIII took his lead from Constantine I,⁶⁴¹ the advice from the German Emperor and King of Hungary,⁶⁴² but not his father, although he did acknowledge that the

⁶³⁸ Johannes A. Straub, "Constantine as KOINOS EPISKOPOS Tradition and Innovation in the Representation of the First Christian Emperor's Majesty", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 21, 1967, p. 40.

⁶³⁹ The man who opposed Constantine was Athanasius, and in that contest of wills Greek met Greek; for the opposition of Athanasius was inspired not by zeal for the true faith, but the pride of a hierarch in the authority of his patriarchate. In Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, p. 344. "On the political side, when the senate dedicated a triumphal arch to Constantine on the occasion of his decennalia (315)... put great stress on the appearance of Victoria bringing the laurel wreath to Constantine, of Sol, too rising in his chariot, and of his counterpart Luna. Thus, this intentional ambiguity is characteristic also of the way in which the senate reacted, by appealing to the – pagan – idea of cosmic kingship. It made a concession to Constantine by representing the gods in a quasi-allegorical or decorative fashion. On the other hand, it made the traditional claim that worship was owed to the gods; for this reason, several scenes of hunt sacrifices are included in the decoration; but the symbolic character of these sacrifices apparent in the medallions becomes clearly evident if we compare this type of scene of a really official sacrifice, such as that represented on the basis of the Vicennalia monument of the Tetrarchs." Straub, p. 42, footnote 24 and 25. Notes about the senate in H.P.L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic kingship in the Ancient World (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1953)* p. 139ff., 148f. This constant negotiation was characteristic of the time. The oecumenical Councils became part of this negotiation, usually ending with more schisms, perpetuating the quarrels.

⁶⁴⁰ Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, p. 21.

⁶⁴¹ In Chapter 4 I have cited part of his speech from Syropoulos (taken from *Memoires*), to his people while in Italy, where his belief in a real Union was highly desirable.

⁶⁴² Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 213, footnote 1. Sigismund died on 9 December 1437. Among the western sovereigns, he was the only one who, because of his proximity to the Byzantine Empire and the audience he was always granting, John VIII could count upon for his help against the Turks. The translator of Syropoulos, Vitalien Laurent, does not think that Syropoulos's remark about that if John VIII had known about Sigismund's death earlier, he would not have gone to Italy, is sincerely doubtful, as opposed to Gill. It is very interesting to note here that for many westerners, the Fall of Constantinople to the Turks was inevitable. In Syropoulos, *Memoires*, p. 147, footnote 4. Aurispa, who lived in the City, estimated that if not for a miracle, she could not be saved. Jean de Ragusa wrote in March 1436 to the Council of Basel, that if he stops trying to reach an agreement with the Byzantine Church, and he gets disinterested in the Union of the Churches, the Fall of the City will not be long (imminent). To which disaster Hungary will follow.

difficulties in the present were much more substantial and the difference was great. In February 313 Constantine met with Licinius at Milan: they agreed a policy of complete religious freedom in the corporation of the Christian Church – of each separate Christian Church – which was recognised as a legal person. This was the Edict of Milan. “Licinius left Milan to carry to the Christians of the East the message of toleration, recognition, and restitution framed by the senior Augustus.”⁶⁴³ We know that

“... categories [like lineages, nations, governments and so on] cannot be merely nominal, because even if there are only individuals they are conscious of themselves as “species beings... upon symbolic reifications rests all that we call ‘tradition’, ‘norm’, ‘morality’ – in brief, ‘a culture’.”⁶⁴⁴

In this *longue durée*, this past resides in the myth of John VIII.

This idea of “open” unity, even if in the case of John VIII it seemed an “as if” unity, John VIII envisaged this project through his very active life, and we can only know it through his acts. What drew John VIII to the so-called uniates, and why he does not have arguments with Bessarion is because he carries the cross of the “as if” unity. He does not persecute the anti-unionists, but he wants them to learn to see themselves, next to each other. John VIII sees himself as the “bishop of those outside”. Hence, I believe, his extreme disappointment when he asked the Pope, after the signing of the Union, to be present in the Byzantine liturgy and he was declined.

It could exist as a virtual system that could safeguard the continuities and take the most important to the next stage so that it wouldn’t disappear in adversity. It seemed that by quarrelling they were actually becoming more intense in safeguarding what was significant. Sahlins imports from de Saussure’s linguistic distinction between language and speech, between the conventional and the intentional, and places it in the area of culture. He expanded it to culture, which can have the same dual mode of existence.⁶⁴⁵

In this sense, John VIII kept the most valuable left to exist elsewhere as a “system” that can only be taken as real, as lived, in connection, in a form that depended on the co-presence of the others

⁶⁴³ Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*, p. 348.

⁶⁴⁴ Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 284.

⁶⁴⁵ Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 286.

especially when the structure, the State, wouldn't be there any more to support it. It had to remain and to be strong as a presence, as resistance, in order to continue to "be".⁶⁴⁶

"And so all [the Greeks], with the lord Patriarch of happy memory while he was still living and the whole synod, with the approval also of the Emperor for the step, received the Latins into our communion and union, preserving intact and inviolate our customs in the celebration of the Mass and in the sacred rites, the Creed and in other ecclesiastical customs; in the same way they preserve their customs, for we found that they were reasonable."⁶⁴⁷

Keep looking for life elsewhere, as is the main aim of the Christian on the way to salvation and eternal life.

Discontent with previous studies on the major event of the Council of Union of the Churches in the fifteenth century, which resulted in a prolonged cultural interaction between East and West, as I have explained in Chapter 1, caused me to embark on this study of the mental patterns that underpinned the attitudes and behaviour of the main individuals that participated in the Council. What were the expectations by making this Event happen? I also worked on my interpretation in the large scale of space and time to understand the initiatives, the motivations, and the consequences of this attempt. As I explained in the Literature Review, which is a survey rather than an exhaustive discussion of all histories, the Event has been researched and discussed extensively. However, the approaches have been narrow and detailed in relation to one aspect or other of the journey, without dwelling on the abyss of the past. Most specifically, nobody really tells us why John VIII in the middle of winter decided and realised the transfer of many ailing old bodies to the West via an unsafe sea journey, and on loan to their worst enemy, the Pope. Wouldn't he be in a competitive disadvantage the moment he would jump on these boats? Which were his hopes? Why would such an important actor – a descendant of the emperors of the first Christian Empire – decide to disobey his father, and by association the established look at the grave situation at this time. John VIII made up his own mind, made his own determined decisions and reminded us who the game maker was; not the Turks who were approaching from the East, nor the Latins who were encroaching from the West and always had been. But all these preparations, the anticipation, the hope, could not amount to a guarantee. There was always the potential for there to be a difference between how he wanted

⁶⁴⁶ John VIII Palaiologos, like his predecessor Constantine I and Justinian that I have discussed, is showing "The individual, as the Archimedean point of the cultural universe: for on the coordinates of his standpoint, hence of his interest, all of culture is transcendently laid out, and all meanings, which without him are merely virtual or possible, become actual, referential, and intentional." In Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 283. His actions are very real and seriously intentional, because only if you are intensely determined you would attempt organising and realising an Event like that. I remind the readers that John's health was particularly weak, frail, with such serious disability of his lower body that at times he had to be carried.

⁶⁴⁷ Letter of the monk Gregory, procurator of the See of Alexandria, to the Patriarch of Alexandria, in Georg Hofmann, ed., *Orientalium Documenta Minora* (Rome, 1953) p. 44.

things to be and how they were. But even this was not the point of his endeavour. Because of his attitude on the way back to Constantinople, my view is that despite the difficulties, the hardships of the journey, the humiliation that it involved, he was relaxed,

This event of the early fifteenth century was not only carefully thought out and orchestrated, but makes for the connecting link between the past and the future. One has to be careful, this remains an affair outside the world of nationalism. Both in the past and in its future, in our present that is, this sits strictly outside nationalist projects. It is an affair of civilisation. John VIII behaved like a master and not a vassal, in contrast to his father, who was an active vassal of the Ottomans. An extremely humiliating activity, for him and his people, as he had to go to war campaigns with the Ottomans and fight his own.

Very few studies highlight the role of the Emperor, if at all. What views there are, are broadly on the negative side. I argue for his efforts as decisive and crucial in a time of crisis, for him as agent of culture in history. I aim to make readers more self-conscious about the effects individuals, who are not the obvious choices, can have in the processes of history. And even fewer studies approach the subject of religious experience through the lenses of a wider scope: of how we think they think. I want to underline that I didn't try and I was well aware of the danger of anachronisms – Peter Brown has been criticised for doing that. Therefore, I did not try to impose on any of the matters I discuss. But I did take matters that were not observed as important, and individuals that were claimed to have been careless up for discussion. I threw light on them from anthropology's analytical point of view, making connections in chaotic situations, working on the whole and its parts.

This thesis works on the foundations of human organisation that consequently shape relations and eventually can be shaped by them. I comb through the fourth century and continue to research into the fifteenth century, which is a critical time; the last period of acute crisis for a civilisation that lived long enough to profoundly shape and re-shape relations and be shaped by them. This was a civilisation that created, across eleven centuries, penetrating shifts in populations and their relations in terms of scale and complexity in an unprecedented manner. “Whether relations made in fantasy or acted out in daily life, their source in people's interactions was made significant.”⁶⁴⁸ Evidence for regularity comes from kinship systems and faith systems that can again produce “kinship” relationships. The conciliar system, which bound the Churches together, was almost a “kinship” system that was organising everyday life through specific rules. There was a hierarchy to be

⁶⁴⁸ Marilyn Strathern, “The Relation: Issues in Complexity and Scale”, *Prickly Pear Pamphlet*, No. 6, Cambridge, 1995, p. 13.

observed, an internal ordering, and a larger model of respect. Very poignantly, in 1953 Meyer Fortes argued that “moral systems exist only as a part of man’s social life; and this is as real and material a part of nature as his body and brain... This makes it reasonable to suppose that human society exhibits regularities consistent with those found in the rest of nature.”⁶⁴⁹

My main argument in this work is that the Emperor through this journey-ritual was weaving relationships, albeit on a large scale and with considerable complexity. The journey itself brought the individuals together: probably the only time ever they had to be together, they interacted and thought together, they debated and disagreed, they even had to live together, and all that for a quite extended period of time. The eastern Romans were dependent for their daily subsistence on the Pope and his financiers, which can only be explained, in my view, within a carefully thought out scheme. In the Emperor’s thought world he was the one who was granting the favours, the titles, the gifts. He was the father surrounded by his sons, his brothers, and these were principles, not perceptions. They were principles that had not changed throughout eleven centuries. Principles do not change with time: on the contrary, they get accentuated if they are rooted in old traditions, in daily practices that lasted or were refined through the centuries. John VIII is interested in setting the record straight for the Italians and the Pope, and that is where his fascination with presenting himself as imperial as possible and preserving the imperial protocol comes into play. He goes to Italy to make interaction possible, while on a long-term stay, to relate himself and his entourage intellectually and socially with the Latins. They were almost like apprentices who gained knowledge in the course of interaction. Ultimately, this project is about having a choice, about being free to make a choice. John VIII provides the platform for this possibility, and his way of doing is so subtle that everybody thinks he is making the wrong judgements. In that way we see also what effect they can have on each other’s systems of organisation of faith, and how these parts can be united in some alternative form in the early fifteenth century. We are also shown that they, East and West, indeed form parts of the whole faith system of the known world, at this moment in time, and it would be redundant for the Pope to try to look superior in the hierarchy of this whole. John VIII shows that, although he is impoverished, he can still grant land and privileges to the continuously greedy Italians, because he is the one and only Emperor of the Romans.

Through this Event, that the late eastern Romans make happen, I argue that we get a last glimpse of how they thought of their past and of themselves within this past. At the same time, they had to seriously consider the future. Therefore, in the context of the end of a long-lived Empire this Event was anything but dark, and allowed this elusive space between the earth and the heavens, in the

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 12.

absence of the many gods and their tumultuous lives, to be replenished by the so-called “static” images of the many saints and their lives: of Christ and his closest, the Mother of God, his “godfather” John the Baptist. They are as before, human figures, who through their extraordinary lives become God, or rather show us that they can be God-sent, that they have a “special” mission in relation to humans. A mission explained and advocated by the Fathers of the early Church, which in turn gave to the poor as well as the rich, the excluded and the privileged, the inhabitants of the Empire as much courage and hope for eleven long centuries, and that was an irreplaceable cultural, social, and spiritual strength, a clear prescription for longevity, viability. I cannot find a good reason to accept the argument put forward based on some “... confidential communication sent by the Greeks at the Council of Florence to the Pope, in which they express willingness to accept papal supremacy provided the Byzantine ruler be recognised as the one and true Roman emperor...” According to the author, W. Ullman, that was “a terribly anachronistic view, revealing the unrealistic thinking persisting in certain quarters of the Greek East as late as the fifteenth century.”⁶⁵⁰ The Emperor could not have such simple expectations. That he had to get to Italy at all costs we can understand, because he accepted the total of expenses to be paid by the papal treasury and their secular financiers. And that was without actual guarantees, signed documents, anything tangible. It was a promise, an oath like the ones the Emperors were quite used to in their imperial dealings with foreign individuals, groups, or other powers.

My concern in this work was not to show links between the past of the culture of a nation and a present modern state in particular.⁶⁵¹ I rather investigate interculturality, the condition Marilyn Strathern describes, of our already inhabiting one another’s cultures.⁶⁵² The journey the Emperor undertakes, I argue, can be best understood with all its attention to formality, as a ritual seen in the light of a unique, original mind’s decision to go against established assumptions – such as his father’s – a creative statesman’s urge to make a unity of all past experience.⁶⁵³ It was in my view an attempt to overcome separations and damage done by past aggression and rigidity, an effort of reconciliation, based on a strong desire to reach redemption united instead of apart, at this last hour, as the Christian empire of the East was reaching its end. He goes against the grain by allowing the danger that a flow of ideas might cause through the interaction, opening up ways in the new environment. And so it happens: the Italians of the early Renaissance were enchanted by the Platonic ideas of Pletho and an Academy was born out of this enriching interaction. On the other

⁶⁵⁰ “Charanis Studies: Essays in Honour of Peter Charanis, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou-Thomadakis, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1980, p. 61”, in Deno Geanakoplos, *Important Recent Research in Byzantine-Western Relations: Intellectual and Artistic Aspects, 500–1500*.

⁶⁵¹ As Byzantium, being an Empire, can be part of the past of many nations today.

⁶⁵² Strathern, *Commons and Borderlands*, p.1.

⁶⁵³ Even of the disturbing, unfitting, uncomfortable facts that had been filtered out of the eastern Christian consciousness for centuries. These were the Crusades that humiliated...

hand, other members of John's entourage, like Bessarion and Isidore of Kiev – the latter of whom I do not discuss as he played a less prominent role in the Event – were allowed to reflect, and in the ambiguity that this social process engendered they found little advantage in distinguishing between dogmatic terms in their practical application and they revised their pre-received assumptions.

But it was primarily the Emperor's fearless attempt to relate form to function. He tried to positively re-order his environment, making it conform to an idea, his idea of unity in separation. Without excluding the explanations that pure historians have given to the event, I argue differently in this work. The Emperor's act is not a matter of recklessness or unsophistication as my historian friends argue. Through this journey, compelling at many instances, the dramatic confrontation of opposites comes to fore. This is not always a happy union, as both sides are preoccupied with form, which in turn gives us the enactment of the central cosmological oppositions by which the respective societies and their cultural environment exist. Subsequently, this Event is the one that had little to do with religion itself as a form of dogmatic observance. However, the Event embodies religion, as a form of collective consciousness, a commitment to a common set of values, a common background.⁶⁵⁴ Religion was the "meeting platform" for the two parts of Christendom in an attempt to behave as a whole. It provides the platform to an Event as a ritualised activity to return to the origins of the establishment of Christendom, where geographically and physically both parts were still united. Through re-enacting this act of foundation in this journey-ritual, he reconstituted the cosmos as it was known, and as his Empire needs to be remembered before it reached its end.

In my thesis I am trying to push further and work theory and history together. An Empire is a large, dynamical, complicated system, made up of a multiple of structures that are interwoven. It is unstable by nature, but when structures clash, they re-order. But an Empire strives for order. The Byzantine Empire was an empire that was based primarily on order, but the repetitions were never quite exact.

Important elements in the *modus operandi* were the ones of comparison and contextualisation. A complex exercise, and one different from the ways things were done before. I assembled walking through history with its words and images scattered along the way. I wove these parts into one story with a beginning, middle and end. I showed that such a story is possible. I built these relations for a number of stories, so in each chapter I deal with a different theory to recount the narrative of sacrifice, of schism and its genesis, the myth, and complementarity of characters. I worked in this

⁶⁵⁴ In the Durkheimian sense.

way to eliminate, or to minimise, chaos from the interminable detail in the events and lives of the characters involved.

In Chapter 3, the level of comparison in identifying the flaws in the structure needed extensive detail in time and space. I not only followed the Councils over time, but tried to identify the particularities that locally hindered the coherence and development of Christian communities in the East. I connected this to John's VIII aspiration to see unity in a world of disarray in the early fifteenth century, and the link he established between the situation then, (fourth century) and his now (early fifteenth century). I did that because the *oecumenicity* (the global aspiration of Byzantinism), seen through the common theme of the Councils (which meant to establish Unity), was not "a context or level independent of local usage".⁶⁵⁵ The bitter disagreements among the cities and their people, and the heads of the patriarchates at the time, as well factions and civil strifes that kept weak, fragmented and isolated the very small remaining Empire during the last dynasty of the Palaiologoi.

I approached the main Event, of a Council of rapprochement in early fifteenth-century Europe, in the fashion of anthropology, from a comparative perspective. Two cultures that sprang from the same civilisation came to the closest negotiations and contact since the last Oecumenical Council in the eight century. But this one was of an unconventional type. It was the most Oecumenical, with the actual presence of both Pope and Emperor, as well as the Constantinopolitan Patriarch. It was also a religious event that did not yield any cannon laws for the different parts to abide with. If the "whole is the parts", this whole remained intact as the parts continued being and doing as before. By reading the history of this civilisation from the back to the front – from the past to the present – I was able to establish the particularities of the people that made up the Empire, their values and their relationships, following Sahlins, so that we avoid the reductionism of actions into an amalgam of self-interest or opportunism.⁶⁵⁶ I received comments when discussing these personalities with distinguished Professors of History and Art. Bessarion was an opportunist in search of a future pension; the Emperor was well below his father, the erudite Emperor Manuel II; where did he say all this is about his vision regarding the future of the Empire? I have read a great number of secondary sources, and numerous translations – the French translation by Vitalien Laurent of Syropoulos's *Memoires* – and I did ask for many translations from other historians, proper ones. I used their commentaries and translations with great respect for their work, with great belief in their ability to stand as close as possible to the original Medieval Greek texts. As Sahlins has pointed out,

⁶⁵⁵ Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, "Planet M: The Intense Abstraction of Marilyn Strathern", *Anthropological Theory*, 2009, p. 377. In Marilyn Strathern's *Partial Connections* (Oxford: Altamira Press, 2004) p. 73.

⁶⁵⁶ I had to deal with this reasoning from distinguished historians and art historians of the time alike repeatedly. The use of the word "propaganda" is prominent in the historical analyses of the time by many historians.

lacking the nitty-gritty details of language should not deter a social scientist from using the translations and commentaries the philologists so meticulously produced.⁶⁵⁷ I would add that one also has little hope of being taken seriously if one does not come from the gut depths of any one discipline, but combines methods of a variety of them.

Nevertheless, with the tenacity of the interdisciplinarian, I observed with determination and in a detailed manner the facts, looking for intentions and energies. I examined and thought through not the big men, as undoubtedly Manuel II was, but the great men, as his son John VIII, I propose was. The significant choices the individuals made in a sea of contradictions defined a course of action for the future; their transformations re-emerged in the light of compromises between human needs and the constraints of their environment and historical heritage.⁶⁵⁸ The red hat of cardinal Bessarion, I conclude in Chapter 6, may be a sign of papal approval and power within the Catholic Church, but when it is worn on top of black monk's habit, by a fervent missionary of unity who comes from the eastern church tradition, it needs to be re-imagined as a tool, as a deliberate choice of display, of the possibility of unity in diversity. Bessarion occupied a place in history not of the vague ambiguity that art historians shroud him in, but he rather provided an emphatic, rare moral forwardness. He was in total accord with the Emperor's uncontested spirit in relation to the difficult times ahead. With this seemingly "opportunist" profile he showed to his contemporaries and to generations beyond, that dogmatising about one of the two traditions is maybe not the best way forward. He gave us a tremendous example of cultural inversion in history.

I need to underline here that the Emperor, as part of the structure, as he was seeing the ruins of history accumulate in front of him, only had one choice, which was to move forward, and, to his honour, that is what he did. He "opened up" the circumstances with the undertaking of this Event, so in his decision-making he was instrumental in pursuing the complementarity in communion of the two parts. However, having said that, he wouldn't have been able to know the consequences of his decision that were to materialise out of the journey. But by subjecting his entourage, and inevitably its culture, to a "self-promoting culture-journey", the new although in some aspects culturally familiar context of Italy, became a vehicle of re-contextualisation for his culture in this overwhelmingly challenging time. Within its terms, some of the personalities found or re-found reasons for changing the claims of their efforts, and so the Event took on new signification as the vessel of those new claims. The art that was produced during and after the event, the positions that Scholarios and Bessarion took in the course of it and afterwards, and the Platonian Academy that was formed in Florence, were all unintended consequences. A visionary administrator like John

⁶⁵⁷ Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides*, p. 2,

⁶⁵⁸ Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Scope of Anthropology", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 7, No. 2, April 1966.

VIII, as he proved to be, could make this possible, could play a determining role, but from then onwards all was opened up to contingency. The roles between Emperor and Pope were inverted, although that was, in my view, expected as the Pope was pursuing “religious hegemony” over the whole of Christendom, For John VIII it seemed to be a surprise, a melancholic outcome of the first encounter in many centuries of the two parts of Christianity. It wasn’t the military help that John VIII didn’t receive that saddened him, rather it was the reversal of the history-cum-myth of the Christian Empire that the Latins were presenting him with that struck him as unequivocal, a path of no return. He pursued the complementarity in communion of the two parts. The heart of the matter is not whether he was right or wrong to still believe in the imperial ideal, because we know that “the rhetoric of the Palaiologan period is the rhetoric of oecumenism.”⁶⁵⁹

The place of the most powerful Emperor who convenes the Councils is taken by the Pope, a very obvious example shows in the seating arrangements, in the context of the ritual of protocols, which are now different. If “the fundamental efficacy of ritual activity lies in its ability to have people embody assumptions about their place in a larger order of things”,⁶⁶⁰ then the eastern Roman Emperor, on the one hand, was greatly distressed by the outcome. But, on the other hand, he became part of a subtle system of metaphors in the visual spectrum enabled by the Council by its very happening. In the space that opened up, and that has remained as the visible legacy of the event to this day, the Emperor acquired a unique, central position in the new, more complex order of things. With his western costume and headdress on the walls of the Medici chapel he was transformed into the symbol of Unity of eastern and western Christendom. In the designs of Pisanello for the medal we should remember he was drawing from life. In the miniature found in Sinait. Gr. 2123, which is so much like Pisanello’s designs, he does not wear a crown anymore, which stands for this amalgam of western and eastern characteristics. Rather we find a point of reference in his *skiadion*, a western looking hat, which was more resembling a western mitre than any known Byzantine headdress, according to Spatharakis.⁶⁶¹

My attempt in this ideas-led history, which has become an anthropology of history, and revealed the paramount importance, which supports Sahlins’s theory that “the cultural schemes of the society (or societies) in which historical action unfold” is to show that re-evaluation of the subtleties of this situational and strategic industrious effort. It found the Event to be one as ritual, “as a form of privileged action”, which, according to Bell, can alter the preconceptions of a failed attempt where dichotomies between collectivities and individuals were shown and the gaps became even larger.

⁶⁵⁹ Angeliki E. Laiou, Italy and the Italians in the political geography of Byzantines (14th century), *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 49, Symposium on Byzantium and the Italians, 13th-15th Centuries, (1995), p. 80.

⁶⁶⁰ Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. xi.

⁶⁶¹ Iohannes Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976) p. 154.

This is not a tale of traitors and “saints”, it is a more complex case where faith acts as the centrepiece of human thought that falls like a cloak over persons and their culture. For the purposes of my work it is less important if ritual activity is a historical or cultural construction: it is more important to realise where this can take a collectivity and its individuals at a time of crisis.

An Event such as this Council, is in my analytical perspective always open to interpretations. The audacity of my work is based on this realisation and exposition. The difference that my thesis makes is that, in line with the distinction Collingwood defined in the *Idea of History* is about the inside of the event, not the outside.⁶⁶²

There are historians whose writing aspires to be “... a possession of all time”. This is not my aim. I turned to Sahlins for his insights about the Event in history, concerning the early European stage. Therefore, Sahlins was my distant collaborator in the synchrony as placed in diachrony. Then I turned to Bateson to trace the workings of a very important concept, the one of schism-genesis, within the form of the Councils, which sought to secure Unity amongst Christians and transform this unity into law, through the canon law and the operation of the everyday life of Christians. I looked into this phenomenon in diachrony from the foundation of Christianity to the end of the Empire. The idea was to understand and throw light from a different perspective. My parallels and delving into these authors and other distinguished anthropologists in my thesis is to push thinking further by exposing alternative or neglected dimensions of some very well-known stories and characters.

The design in this thesis was not to provide a cultural reserve for political constructions of further schismo-genetic conflicts, intended or unintended, that these events, concepts and ideas may have provided to nineteenth century-nationalists of any geographical denomination. It could be the subject of a future step. In this thesis, genealogy is important and I establish it by working in history from the distant past to more recent times. That is something I perceived already while I was working for some time on the Event structure. By comparing civilisations in their establishment one can understand how they then manage to break into parts, or what triggers their breaking up. How the ones in superior position – in this case the Byzantines, who over time became eastern Romans, and the ones who had initially provided the roots of Christianity, who made Christianity legal – came to change position and become inferior. They became the ones selling sacred relics and profane but valuable manuscripts, when their anti-types, the Latins, who had been in and inferior

⁶⁶² Baynes, Norman H., *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London: The Athlone Press, London, 1960), p. 24 and Collingwood, R.G., *The Idea of History*, revised edition with *Lectures 1926-1928*, ed. with introduction by Jas Van Der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005p. 213.

position for centuries, managed to compensate for this deficit. One of the reasons could very well be the fact that the Byzantines were so often overwhelmed by their internal wars, among themselves – which were very much present again in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries – that they would allow the Latins to overcome their inferiorities and turn them into strengths. They embraced so many aspects of the Byzantine ways as religious beings; they never referred to Constantine I as the founder of Christianity and the deliberate move of the seat of the Empire to the East. They went back further and were demanding primacy, referring to the Apostle Paul.

In this work, the importance of individual characters takes centre-stage as opposed to that of the groups. Also, I consider the cultural element as paramount in history. The Emperor and his decision to travel to Italy did celebrate the beginnings of the Byzantine Empire, in my interpretation. He did change the cultural weight of the Byzantines vis-à-vis the Latins with his boldness to embark on the Council journey. He did engage his people in a different “civil interaction”, which was not a war anymore like back at home, but rather a more creative thinking and engagement with the burning question of what the future held. In this sense, he added momentum to the existing crisis back home, intensified by challenging the traditional roles of individuals in his main entourage. Two of these characters, Bessarion and Scholarios act, eventually, as anti-types. The one continuing his multi-scholarly activities from the Latin West with his rhetoric for a Crusade against the Turks. The other returning to the East, becoming captivated by the Turks and eventually becoming the first Patriarch in the Ottoman Empire. Both positions, complementarily opposed, occupied by two Byzantine clerics who now operated on a knife’s edge, and who ended up there by chance, by the very specific “chance” that the Emperor created in the first place. John VIII Palaiologos was the agent par excellence, who made the other agents appear in history in a very subtle way. It is very subtle, yet it is great. He is not the “systematic agent” Sahlins discusses, like Napoleon, but in this one period he was crucial and he delivered the cultural eminence that was due to the old, now battered Empire. Contrary to the new Medicis and their banking supremacy, he managed to be on the private chapel’s murals for eternity, he managed to appear on the doors of Saint Peter in Rome at the request of the Pope, and he managed to be on the first European Renaissance commemorative medal where he was called “Emperor and Basileus of the Romans”. It is very likely, in my view, that it was made at the Pope’s expenses, handcrafted by Pisanello, one of the ablest and most well-known artists of this time. Bessarion and Scholarios could be the “conjunctural agencies” in the terminology Sahlins provides, as they are made by the situation.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶³ Simon Hornblower and Charles Steward, University College London, “No history without culture” Review of Marshall Sahlins, “Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa”, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004 in *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1, Winter 2005.

In the above paragraph cultural layers intersect, and one is supported by the other. The Medicis and the Pope are getting up close and personal with the most important Emperor in the history of Europe up to that point. And they already knew it, as they sought to be around him, eulogised by his eternal aura, and transformed this connection to more tangible gains in the sphere of religious Unity politics with the East and Far East. Therefore, in order to understand cultural differences, one needs to know and understand history. I haven't found the historians who have underlined, in the sense of clearly spelled out, this intersection of history, culture and politics. Armed with the culture and history of the past Emperors and Councils, John VIII gets the supremacy that he wants, even though the Pope tries to undermine it at every turn of the story. As far as I understand human nature, it is great to undertake such a risk, being an Emperor, and come out by displaying your story as clearly as you can, in the ritual-protocol of the Council, in the hunting micro-events, where history and culture become actors themselves. But it is not as simple as saying "it is like saying that the Pope is catholic". The point is how come he did, and it matters that the Pope is catholic as opposed to the Maronite Patriarch, who is not catholic the way Pope in Rome is, and not a Patriarch, the way the Constantinopolitan Patriarch is.⁶⁶⁴ All this in the context of the Maronite Church, which is called eastern Catholic (an eastern-rite Catholic church), and being Monophysites, as opposed to the Pope and the Constantinopolitan Patriarch, who are Chacedonians. In March 2013, Lebanese Maronites hoped that their Patriarch could be the next Pope.⁶⁶⁵ All three of them pray and they are members of the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, as the symbol of faith also underlines (see below).

John VIII Palaiologos, like his predecessors Constantine I and Justinian, which I have discussed, shows

"The individual, as the Archimedean point of the cultural universe: for on the coordinates of his standpoint, hence of his interest, all of culture is transcendently laid out, and all meanings, which without him are merely virtual or possible, become actual, referential, and intentional."⁶⁶⁶

His actions are very real and seriously intentional, because only if you are intensely determined you would attempt to organise and realising an Event like that, especially when suffering from bad health.

⁶⁶⁴ K. R. Howe, Review of Marshall Sahlins, "Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa", Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004, *International History Review*, Vol. 28. No. 1, March 2006, p. 133.

⁶⁶⁵ Al-Monitor: The Pulse of Middle East, 11 March, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/lebanon-maronites-new-pope.html>

⁶⁶⁶ Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice: Selected Essays*, New York: Zoe Books, 2001, p. 283.

As Sahlins reminds us, “there is no such thing as an immaculate perception”.⁶⁶⁷ If we didn’t have the encounters, we wouldn’t have the controversies, the unforgettable excommunications, the blasphemies, the anathematisations; we wouldn’t have the negotiations on the perceptions, “the particular conceptual scheme or ‘language game’ constitutes the possibilities of worldly reference for the people of a given society...”⁶⁶⁸ The principled relationships between categories do not follow directly from the world, but are values of the prevailing cultural scheme. Very interestingly, this very structured form, the State, which is like God Father and Son, becomes a synchronic event, and recurs throughout the long life of the Empire, in many different forms. The Emperors had determination, but the communities showed the State every time that the whole is a part. Christendom may be the whole, but it was lived in its parts. “God the Father is defined by God the Son, and vice versa, structure is a state; but action unfolds as a temporal process.”⁶⁶⁹ So on the one hand we have the structure, and on the other hand the way in which structure and project, as a symbolic process, interact. In the early fifteenth century this journey, this ritual, this symbolic process, was a particularly melancholic event. But at the same time, given the discussion above, it was a necessary one. In this context, the Oecumenical Councils as mechanism of interaction, as projects, were indispensable, as dialogues where positions reversed, constantly interpreting the belief further, although, each time they amplified the contradictions, the differences.⁶⁷⁰ The “system”, as Marshall Sahlins explains, is virtually absent, it is recognised as Structure but replayed and redesigned towards different ends, according to the company sitting around the table – the Donatists, the Alexandrians, the Arians, the Nestorians, the Latins – and so on. “The interchangeability of opposed standpoints is decisive for the development of all such objectified social entities that are likewise ubiquitous in their absence – ‘lineages’, ‘governments’, ‘nations’, ‘humanity’ – including their normative attributes...”⁶⁷¹

The Council as an Event gave the opportunity to the Byzantines to get acquainted with the fifteenth-century “cosmos” of Europe.⁶⁷² They came from chaos, a derelict city, abandoned by its citizens but previously glorious, to Venice, the so-called “almost another Byzantium”, and most of them they were out of their city for the first time. And even more importantly, they travelled from the East to the West for the first time. The myth of unity, as it was unfolding, became the device of

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 282.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 282.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 287.

⁶⁷⁰ “The practico-theoretical logics governing life and thought are shaped by the insistence on differentiation.” In Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* p. 75.

⁶⁷¹ Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 284.

⁶⁷² In 1439, while the Council of Florence was drawing to conclusion, the Feste di San Givanni were put on, one imagines, with special magnificence. One of the Greeks at the Council, astonished by the festivities, kept a record of what he saw: “... they do a great procession and celebration, at which the entire populace is present; and in it they do prodigious things and almost miracles... and they dress up some men as Magi, and by means of men they represent the nativity of Christ with the shepherds, the star, the animals, and the manger... And still other simulacra, partly without limits, partly sublime...” Rab Hatfield, “The Compagnia de’Magi”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 33, 1970, p. 113.

ameliorating disorder, nullifying the complex and threatening future by reabsorption into the past. In Chapters 4 and 5, the politics of culture as the process of structure were interpreted in this context.⁶⁷³ In Chapter 4 I discussed the notion of sacrifice in connection to the Emperor as a sacred and profane contradiction and the effect of that. In Chapter 5 I discussed the journey as a ritual, as a historical metaphor of a mythical reality.

What I established through these discussions of the historical material that span eleven centuries of history is, first of all, that there is no Event without a system. That is to say that the journey can acquire the form of the ritual because “it is at once produced and received by the community in which it happens and to understand its existence and modalities it is necessary to know the cognitive and symbolic system of this community...”⁶⁷⁴ Its repetitive power is fundamental, because it shows us how it is grounded in a system and “each is indissolubly joined in the kind of double indeterminacy... each is responsible for the existence of the other, yet neither can account for the characteristics of the other...”⁶⁷⁵ By examining “the higher-order relations...”⁶⁷⁶ that had already put in motion the conversion of Europe to Christianity, “were relayed into practice, in a way that...”⁶⁷⁷ allowed the personalities of our event, to represent the larger system, to interact, and from there to reconfigure, to reform, to be able to make change possible, and ultimately reposition the system’s destiny. In that way, by looking to the past from their present, and their current situation, they managed to mediate for the future – with all the significant cultural meanings that involved.

“I argue that the relation between the myth to the idea of unity is definite, and it is dialectical in nature; the event of a Union which could bring peace in the one Church of Christ, from this moment of realisation, becomes a fabrication, a mystery to the witnesses, and all the other myths that will be developed on the way, become even more imperative and melancholic, because they seek to express a negative and unavoidable truth. It doesn’t portray reality any more, it exists despite it and becomes an extreme position, almost like a dream, and it justifies the vision one wished to be possible, only to show that it is untenable: the ‘what if it could be’.”⁶⁷⁸

Then, from this standpoint I compared the different levels at which this “vision” of “what if it could be” was located, separately for Bessarion and for the Emperor. Bessarion tried to live out this vision through his own example – in his actions and personality – at the socio-historical level. But the

⁶⁷³ Sahlins, *Culture in Practice*, p. 494.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.320.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁶⁷⁸The conception of the idea came from Claude Levi-Strauss’s “La Geste d’Asdiwal”, pp. 30-31.

vision of “what if it could be” had to be schismo-genic. Thus, Bessarion’s actions, while having a high profile during his lifetime, were, taken as a whole, insufficient to secure his canonisation as a saint, and too contradictory for him to gain a majority of votes in the synod to be Pope. The continuing significance of how Bessarion tried act out his vision of “what if it could be” at the social and personal level was limited to his lifetime. After that, it was consigned to history, hence “Amen”. But the vision of the Emperor was focused at the level of a continuing schismo-genic mythical process, distributed consequently, inextinguishably through Christendom, rather than, living it out, to the end of its schismo-genic life, as Bessarion did. For the continuing significance of what the Emperor achieved in this way, there can be no “Amen”, and, showing this, is I think the major achievement of this thesis.

II. Epilogue

This thesis has not been just a study of the text of Syropoulos’s diary as such; I did not take the historian’s approach to use as much of the text as possible. It is rather a study on the Event in history as a cultural endeavour, and the Event also encompasses so much that happened before it and after it. That includes its causes, its meanings and its effects, preceded it and followed it. So I use primary and secondary sources alike to investigate the mytho-theological basis of the time. In answer to Sartre’s question in his “Preface to *Search for a Method*” (1968), “Do we have today the means to constitute a structural, historical anthropology?”,⁶⁷⁹ I am going along with Sahlins in saying, “Yes, I have tried to suggest here...” that it is possible to “explode the concept of history by the anthropological experience of culture”.⁶⁸⁰ The obscure, forgotten Syropoulos diary, the subtle, but grand in its conception and realisation, project of the neglected emperor John VIII Palaiologos – with its snapshot of the most intimate moments of interaction within the group and with other groups during the two-year journey – set off a contemplation of eastern Christianity’s past as Roman Empire. It caused me to consider the past in terms of ideas of what constitutes the whole and what are the parts in different times in history. This is then reinterpreted as a “‘history of civilisations’ for their own remarkable contributions to an historical understanding”.⁶⁸¹ In that way “we multiply our conceptions of history by the diversity of structures”.⁶⁸² Yes, I have tried to suggest that “there are all kinds of new things to consider”.⁶⁸³

⁶⁷⁹ Sahlins, *Islands of History*, p. 72.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 72.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 72.

⁶⁸² *Ibid*, p. 72.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 72.

This Synod, as a recurrent event in the long history of Byzantium, emanates from the highly sophisticated debates of some of the best theologians and fathers of the early Christian church. From the decrees of the first Oecumenical Councils, from the holy canons and from the endeavours of some of the most charismatic individuals of all historical times, like the Christian Roman Emperors of Byzantium, Constantine the Great, the first Christian Emperor or the Emperor Justinian. I have developed in the first and third chapters, in great detail, how the potential fissions worked through, and schismo-genetic ruptures appeared, and subsequently divisions followed, as soon as the formation of Christianity started. The “mysteries” of Christianity were already the source of the schisms and difficulties to reunify in the One. The contradiction between a Holy Emperor and a human God became apparent. Later, the Pope was the “successor of Peter”, the “true vicar of Christ”, the “head of the whole Church”, and possessed full power (*plena potestas*) in feeding and governing the universal church.⁶⁸⁴

Ultimately, the impetus to investigate this Event came as a reaction to analyses of it, which contemplated it mainly in a negative light, as an impossible failed attempt, a fictitious Union, a non-authentic encounter in which its protagonists were opportunists, vain, and so on. I argued in this thesis, that on the contrary, the “return of the Event”, of such an Event, of that magnitude and significance, maybe momentarily showed that Eugenius IV managed to establish the so-called “papal monarchy”, against the will of the conciliarists of the West and the traditionalists of the East. But how can Eugenius IV resurface sincerely triumphant from such a calamity? How can it be supported that “he was coming victorious from the anti-conciliarist struggle”?⁶⁸⁵ At this time, the West had all but abandoned the Pope; the papacy was practically unrepresented in the synod,

“with only few isolated and rather unrepresentative prelates from France, Spain, Ireland, Portugal and Poland, but none from the Empire, or England. Pope Eugenius was challenged by the Council of Basel, and was an exile even from Rome and the Papal states, where he was opposed by the Colonna family... even the papal legate Cesarini who upheld conciliarism at Basel had joined the papal side”.⁶⁸⁶

But is the isolation of Eugenius IV a model of triumph? When all the bishops around him were Italians? On the other hand, the Byzantines, did try to have

⁶⁸⁴ Giuseppe Alberigo, ed., *Christian Unity, The Council of Ferrara-Florence 1438/39 – 1989* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1991) p.163.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

“... a more inclusive representation. Not only the distant metropolitans of Trebizond and, particularly, Russia, were included, but also the metropolitan of Moldovlachia (Romania). The Balkan Slavic churches were already under Turkish rule, so nobody came from Serbia or Bulgaria... but significantly, the presence of delegates from the catholicos of Georgia was secured... and the delegation included in the person of Bessarion, an eminent ‘humanist’, in the tradition of Metochites and Gregoras, as well as a legitimate spokesman of palamite and monastic theology in the person of Mark of Ephesus. The traditional trend was also strengthened by the inclusion of Athonite monks, representing the monasteries of Great Lavra, Vatopedi, and St. Paul.”⁶⁸⁷

John VIII though knew the limitations in terms of intellectual differences as the centuries went by. He knew of works that were unknown in the East because they were untranslated, and so on. But from his side the interaction per se, as a communion of people in diversity and diverse conditions, was most important. The Byzantines were fervent supporters of conciliarism, but not of the “nations” model, the one that the Council in Basel was suggesting, with the Emperor, the kings and princes of Europe. The model of the early Church, the firm basis on which the whole project was built, was different, as has been discussed in Chapters 1 and 3. In this context, “even in the 14th and the 15th centuries, the ideal vision of the universal empire remained”, expressed particularly in the exclusive

“‘Roman’ legitimacy of the Byzantine emperor... the name of the emperor is commemorated wherever there are Christians... and that even the Latins, who have no communion whatsoever with our church, gave to him the same subordination, as they did in past times, when they were united with us.”⁶⁸⁸

It was not a pragmatic belief anymore, but this was a solid basis of discussion for the East, imperial and therefore oecumenical, and it was forming both sides of the same coin. That is firmly depicted on the commemorative medal of John VIII, where he is named as the Emperor of the Romans on the one side, and seen as the pious Christian Emperor of the whole of Christianity on the other side, where we see him praying in front of a cross, an acceptable sign of Christian belief in both parts. Therefore, the eastern Romans didn’t necessarily have to solve dogmatic differences in Florence-Ferrara; they went to discuss unity of Churches, a wider concord in faith. John VIII was interested in celebrating the mass of both traditions together with the Pope. He was interested in Eucharistic communion. Hence, his disappointment when the Pope declined on the basis of not being aware of

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 161-162.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 155.

the details of it. Thereafter, his interest in continuing the discussion back in Constantinople was non-existent. The task was completed. He asked Markos Eugenikos “not be afraid of the Pope”, when he was summoned for interrogation on his vote for the Union of Churches.

“Every day through the last years of his life John VIII had to raise his tired eyes above the theological strife and ecclesiastical slander that filled his capital, and watch the movement of Turkish troops beneath his very walls as well as on the more distant horizons...”⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁹ Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, p. 66.

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Glossary

Advent of the Byzantine Empire: either in 330 AD when it was inaugurated; or 312, when with the Edict of Milan Christianity could be practised freely; or in 325 when he convened and presided in the first Oecumenical Synod in Nicaea.

Byzantine: Byzantines are called the inhabitants of Constantinople. Byzantium was the name of the ancient Greek colony situated exactly where Constantinople was built. The Empire was based and reflected its power by its many territorial gains and the splendour of its capital, chosen by Constantine I, who was chosen in turn to make this profound transformation in the fourth century AD.

Byzantine period: fourth–sixth centuries: Christian Empire of the Roman East. During this time Constantinople became the centre of the Christianised Greco-Roman world. Therefore, Constantinople was the “New Rome”. Some Byzantine scholars consider that their period opens with the reign of Diocletian (284–305). A larger number would start with Constantine the Great (305–337). Others would take the reign of Theodosius the Great (379–395) or those of his sons Arcadius and Honorius (395–423) to be the beginning of the new epoch. The British Museum starts its catalogue of Byzantine coins with Anastasius I (491–518). Many students consider Justinian (527–565) the first Byzantine Emperor, while others hold that the Byzantine State properly so called is inaugurated with Heraclius (610–641). The fourth volume of the *Cambridge Medieval History*, which bears the title “The Eastern Roman Empire” (717–1453), follows the historian Finlay in drawing the dividing line at the accession of Leo III, the Isaurian (717–741). In most cases these divergent views are based on the fact that various political changes occurred at these different periods, which can be thought to have marked the end of the Roman Empire proper and the beginning of a new state. But what the diversity of opinions really means is that, regardless of the changes, there was an unbroken continuity, which was so evident that no one can say, in such a way that everyone will agree, that at one specific point there was the end of one state and the inauguration of another. Even when Greek had become the sole language of the Empire, the rulers of Byzantium continued to call themselves Roman Emperors, and the Byzantines spoke of themselves as the Roman people to the very end of the Empire, with the fall of Constantinople in 1453. While they might recognise changes that had come about as a result of external factors, *the Byzantines* were not aware of being a separate state and a separate people, and the last Emperor,

Constantine XI Palaeologus (1449–1453), would have looked upon himself not merely as the heir of Constantine the Great, but as the successor of Augustus.

Christian oikoumene: community built on creed and culture organised as a state, prevented the rise of nationalism. There was no clear concept of either caste or class, and an aristocracy based on descent as in the west was lacking in Byzantium. The organisation of Byzantine society was not static: revolts, usurpations, and the removal and liquidation of Emperors were not uncommon, resulting sometimes in surprising changes in status for the followers of an Emperor or of a powerful man. However, they were considered chaotic and needed to be managed.

Dyophysites or Chalcedonians (451): affirmation of “two natures” of Christ and the Blessed Virgin was Theotokos (God bearing).

Emperor: viceroy and representative of God on Earth- the living image of God on Earth

Emperor Theodosios I: Olympic Games stop; Delfi ceases; Mysteries of Eleusinia terminated; the pagan priests obliged to stop.

Filioque: doctrinal controversy – Holy Spirit proceeds from Father and Son.

Hesychasm: a practice of monastic prayer, a system of doctrinal concepts, put forward by monk Gregory Palamas, dealt with the theory of mysticism. A true mystic could in the end see God, not in His essence but in His energies, that is to say in His uncreated light.

Iconoclast: one opposed to the veneration of icons.

Metropolitan: bishop of a provincial capital, or metropolis, depending directly on the Patriarch and with authority over the suffragan bishops of the province.

Monophysitism: movement that was supported in Egypt (patriarchate of Alexandria and in Syria patriarchate of Antioch). Christ can be only of one reality or nature, namely the divine nature, in the incarnate Christ. He could be “out of two natures” but not “in two natures”. Monophysite tradition (anti-Chalcedonian) became the tradition of the Armenian, Jacobite, Coptic, Nubian and Ethiopian churches. In circa 600, the monophysite “empire” stretched almost unbroken from the Black Sea,

down Rome's eastern frontier with Persia, thence to Egypt and the Nile valley to Ethiopia, a vast territory, greater than that covered by the Latin and orthodox Christianity combined.

Oikonomia: a sort of management or compromise; to make an oikonomy was to relax the application of a rule in the light of circumstances and particular cases, or dispense with a rule for a greater good. From a theological point of view, the first of the oikonomies was the Incarnation of Christ, keystone of the divine plane of salvation.

Pentarchy of Patriarchs: ancient organisation of church into five patriarchates: those of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

The Photian Schism: After the death of Louis II (875), with whom the Byzantine Emperor found it impossible to cooperate, Basil I regained southern Italy against Muslim efforts and named it Longobardia, a Byzantine province in the region West of Bari. Sicily was conquered by the Muslims between 827 and 902. In 1060–1091 it was rewon by the Normans. The Pope made Otto Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in the ninth century.

Roman citizen: anyone, native or foreigner, European, African, Asian, who believes in Christianity as it was established by the Oecumenical synods of Nicaea (325) and of Constantinople (381). As long as he is Christian he can have any imperial administrative post, he can even become Emperor. In the fifth century Constantinople becomes the centre of the Empire because Rome subdues under the barbarian invasions from the north.

Separation of Rome and Constantinople Middle eighth century – 725–775 AD: Isaurian Emperors – iconoclasts and oppressors (Leo III the Isaurian and his son, Constantine V Copronymus) provoked by: 1) Roman opposition to iconoclasm, and 2) Papal alliance with the new Carolingian monarchy (the new Frankish kingdom of the Carolingians). They detached eastern Illyricum, Calabria, and Sicily from the jurisdiction of Rome and transferred them to that of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Then, the papacy itself – Pope Stephen II, 752–757 – removed Rome and Ravenna from the Byzantine Empire. The papacy was not only exercised over iconoclasm, but had to face the Lombard problem, to which the Byzantine navy offered no solution. It was the armies of Pepin I and Charlemagne that destroyed the Lombard power in northern Italy (754–774). The prestige of the Byzantine government was very low in the peninsula throughout the eighth century.

Theocratic State: according to Byzantine juridical thought the State had two poles: “the Emperor (*basileus*) and the Patriarch, the former exercising political power (*potestas*) and the latter ecclesiastical authority (*auctoritas*)”.