

# The Downfall of Byzantium at the Sforza Court (c. 1460-1565): The Migrant Lascaris Versus the Local Mombrizio

»The whole of Greece is smashed under the hostile Turk; the heavenly powers had given their assent to such a great defeat. Am I wrong or is it that the learned adorns the Latin lands? O and well-destroyed walls! O excellent crime, and offence that deserves our approval, as Troy once had succumbed to Greek fires!«<sup>1</sup>

The fall of Constantinople is hailed by the Italian scholar Bonino Mombrizio (1424–?1478/82) as a great opportunity for Milan to attract promising Greek scholars to the duchy, including Constantine Lascaris (1434-1501). In fact, Mombrizio made the above statement in his Latin verse adaptation of the Greek grammar Lascaris had dedicated to Ippolita Maria Sforza, the duke's daughter, around 1465. Obviously, Lascaris himself had not praised the misery of his people in terms similar to Mombrizio's but instead deplored their fate. This paper tackles the ways in which these two scholars perceived Byzantium as they were working in service of the Sforza court in Milan during the early 1460s – and for Lascaris also during his later life. I first sketch the historical context in which these scholars lived and worked. Next, I discuss how the Byzantine migrant Constantine Lascaris (1434-1501), who kept ties with the Sforza court in his later career, perceived the Byzantine empire and especially its downfall, still fresh in his memory as he witnessed the events in 1453 himself. I do so using his written works and correspondence, especially from the years 1460-1485, including a well-known letter to his Spanish friend and former student Juan Pardo.

I then put Lascaris' conceptions next to those of the Italian humanist Bonino Mombrizio. Mombrizio translated Lascaris' elementary Greek grammar into Latin verses, in which he also construed a picture of the fallen Byzantine empire, hailing the duke of Milan Francesco Sforza as headhunter of Greek migrants and benefactor of his city's culture. Both Lascaris' and

Mombrizio's versions of the Greek grammar were dedicated to Ippolita Maria Sforza, then the duke's teenage daughter, around the same time, circa 1463-1465<sup>2</sup>. The two scholars no doubt knew each other, and might even have discussed the fate of Byzantium at the Sforza court. I confront the perceptions of Byzantium of the migrant Lascaris and the local Mombrizio, highlighting similarities but especially their numerous differences. On the one hand, their perceptions were similar in as far as both of them deplored the downfall of Constantinople and, more broadly, the subjugation of former Byzantine lands to the so-called barbarous Turks. On the other, their perceptions also differed in that Mombrizio focused on the Sforzas' generous embrace of tormented Greek migrants, whereas Lascaris emphasized the precarious situation of Greek migrants in Italy, and the misery they experienced both in their native lands and in their new Italian homes.

## Lascaris and Mombrizio in Sforza Milan

To sketch the positions of Lascaris and Mombrizio in Sforza Milan, there is no better starting point than the dedicatee of their Greek grammars, Ippolita Maria Sforza (1445-1488). Her parents, duke Francesco I Sforza and Bianca Maria Visconti, made sure that their daughter could boast tremendous cultural capital by giving her a humanist education<sup>3</sup>. She started her studies in the early 1450s with Latin and rhetoric, under the supervision of local humanist Baldo Martorelli, who also taught her one-year-older brother Galeazzo Maria<sup>4</sup>. In fact, brother and sister were often in the same classroom for their initial education. Elsewhere, I have argued at length that in the early 1460s Ippolita Maria Sforza also studied Greek with Constantine Lascaris, probably again under Martorelli's

1 BA, Ambr. N 264 sup. fol. 5<sup>v</sup>. See below for a fuller quote, with the original text in footnote (n. 40). Research for this paper was funded by the Horizon 2020 program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 890397, MigraLing, hosted at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas at the University of Oslo. Additional support came from a BOFZAP research professorship at KU Leuven.

2 See Van Rooy, Ippolita Maria Sforza; Van Rooy, »Lend Me Your Apt Ears«, with further references.

3 The historical sketch is based on Van Rooy, Ippolita Maria Sforza; Van Rooy, »Lend Me Your Apt Ears«, where the reader can find more details and further references. In the footnotes below, I limit myself to citing the most important literature for this paper. For Milanese culture in this period, see Garin, *La cultura milanese*.

4 On Martorelli, see Cingolani, Baldo Martorello.

supervision, in a kind of didactic triangle<sup>5</sup>. She was renowned for combining her talent for languages and letters with dancing skills, French singing, lute playing, vernacular writing, and hunting. In addition, she gained a reputation for beauty and piety.

In token of her education, no less than three grammar manuscripts were dedicated to Sforza, one Latin (by Martorelli) and two Greek grammars (by Lascaris and Mombrizio), revealing that she was not only perceived as a student but also as a nascent patron of scholars and artists, embodying the cultural politics of her father. She indeed came to fulfill a patronage role once she moved to Naples in 1465 to marry Alfonso (1448-1495), then the duke of Calabria and heir to the Kingdom of Naples, after a ten-year-long engagement. Mombrizio's grammar alludes in interesting ways to this episode in Sforza's life<sup>6</sup>. In the south of Italy, however, her ambitions as a patron were thwarted as she became caught up as a political pawn in the power relations between the duchy of Milan and the kingdom of Naples.

Two of Sforza's teachers, Lascaris and Martorelli, traveled with her from Milan to Naples in 1465, Lascaris even being appointed professor of Greek and rhetoric by King Ferdinand of Naples, Alfonso's father. Lascaris' relationship with Ippolita Maria Sforza, her family, and her city is important for my analysis of representations of Byzantium; he built up this relationship during the almost seven years he spent in the city between late 1458 and mid-1465. Born in 1434, Constantine Lascaris studied with Johannes Argyropoulos in Constantinople<sup>7</sup>. During the siege of that city in the spring of 1453, Lascaris was taken hostage but managed to regain his freedom soon after. He ended up roaming across the eastern Mediterranean (including Rhodes and Santorini), before arriving in Milan, where he sustained himself by teaching Greek and writing grammar manuals<sup>8</sup>. In 1463, he won the public Greek chair thanks to the backing of more than forty Milanese notables, excluding, however, Francesco Filelfo, who supported another Greek migrant for the position: Demetrios Kastrenos, a collaborator of Lascaris. Kastrenos eventually returned to his Ottoman-occupied homeland, after unsuccessful attempts at obtaining a position in Italy, a move which even Lascaris considered in 1466, after an awful experience in Naples.

In the end, Lascaris settled in Messina, on the island of Sicily, having found a middle ground between hostile Italy and occupied Greece in the Hellenic cultural atmosphere of south-

ern Italy and Sicily, where he does seem to have felt lonely and isolated<sup>9</sup>. In Messina he took up a Greek (1466) and a Latin (1482) professorship. He stayed in that city until the end of his life, donating his library to a local monastery, from where it ended up in the Spanish national library in Madrid. There are indications that Lascaris enjoyed further patronage from the Sforza family in his later life. For instance, a lavishly decorated copy of his grammar was produced for the sixth duke of Milan Gian Galeazzo Maria Sforza sometime after 1476 (see **fig. 1**, with the Milanese coat-of-arms in the right-hand margin, in the middle of the folio). Moreover, duke Gian Galeazzo invited him to take up the Greek chair in Milan in 1488, which Lascaris refused in a brief letter he wrote in Latin<sup>10</sup>. Lascaris reflected on the fate of Byzantium and its migrants in two letters he wrote – one from the 1480s, the other undated – against the background of his experiences with the Sforzas and other people in power on the Italian peninsula<sup>11</sup>. Lascaris' fame rests on the many epitomes of major Greek works he composed and his grammatical manuals<sup>12</sup>. One of the earliest testimonies of his Greek grammar – if not the earliest – was dedicated to Ippolita Maria Sforza and probably also used for her instruction in that language (see **fig. 2**)<sup>13</sup>.

Not only the migrant Lascaris, but also the local humanist Bonino Mombrizio dedicated a Greek grammar to Ippolita Maria Sforza. To be more precise, Mombrizio adapted Lascaris' generic grammar to Sforza's personal situation, while converting Lascaris' dry Greek prose to Latin hexameters, which heighten the liveliness of the contents but sacrifice didactic clarity<sup>14</sup>. Born around 1424 in Milan, Bonino Mombrizio spent his youth in Ferrara, studying with Guarino Veronese and entertaining contacts with the Este family<sup>15</sup>. In 1458, notably the same year as Lascaris arrived there, he moved back to Milan, where he managed to get into the grace of the Sforzas. Mombrizio started this endeavor even before settling again in his native city, through the Estes, as in 1455 he composed an epithalamion for Tristano Sforza and Beatrice d'Este. For the same marriage, his later dedicatee Ippolita Maria Sforza also held an oration<sup>16</sup>. In 1476, Mombrizio authored a threnody for Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the fifth duke of Milan. To Galeazzo's second wife Bona of Savoy, the humanist dedicated his *Momidos libri XII*, a long poem on female vices. Such didactic-moral writings are typical of Mombrizio's oeuvre, which includes a Latin translation of Hesiod, an edition of

5 Van Rooy, Ippolita Maria Sforza, where I argue that an inexperienced Lascaris, a migrant with a limited knowledge of Latin, needed support and supervision from a local Latinist (Martorelli) in teaching Greek to Sforza, Latin being the language of instruction for Greek grammar and literature.

6 Van Rooy, *Lend Me Your Apt Ears*.

7 On Lascaris' life and works, see Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris; Martínez Manzano, Constantino Láscaris.

8 Lascaris' teacher, John Argyropoulos, also migrated to Italy, where he ended up in misery: see Section 3.

9 This is suggested by Lascaris' correspondence from that period (see notes 10-11 below).

10 The letter is edited in Gabotto, *Tre lettere* 15. See below for more details on the contents of this document.

11 In particular: (1) Lascaris' well-known letter to Juan Pardo, dating to c. 1481 (edited in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 160-162); (2) an undated philological letter to Giorgio Valla (edited in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 171-172). See Section 3 for discussion of these letters' contents.

12 See most notably Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris.

13 Van Rooy, Ippolita Maria Sforza.

14 Van Rooy, *Lend Me Your Apt Ears*. The verse grammar is preserved in one copy only, seemingly unfinished: see BA, Ambr. N 264 sup.

15 On Mombrizio, see Spanò Martinelli, Mombrizio, Bonino, the source of the biographical information mentioned in this paragraph.

16 For Sforza's three extant orations see Robin/Westwater, Ippolita Maria Sforza 171-196.



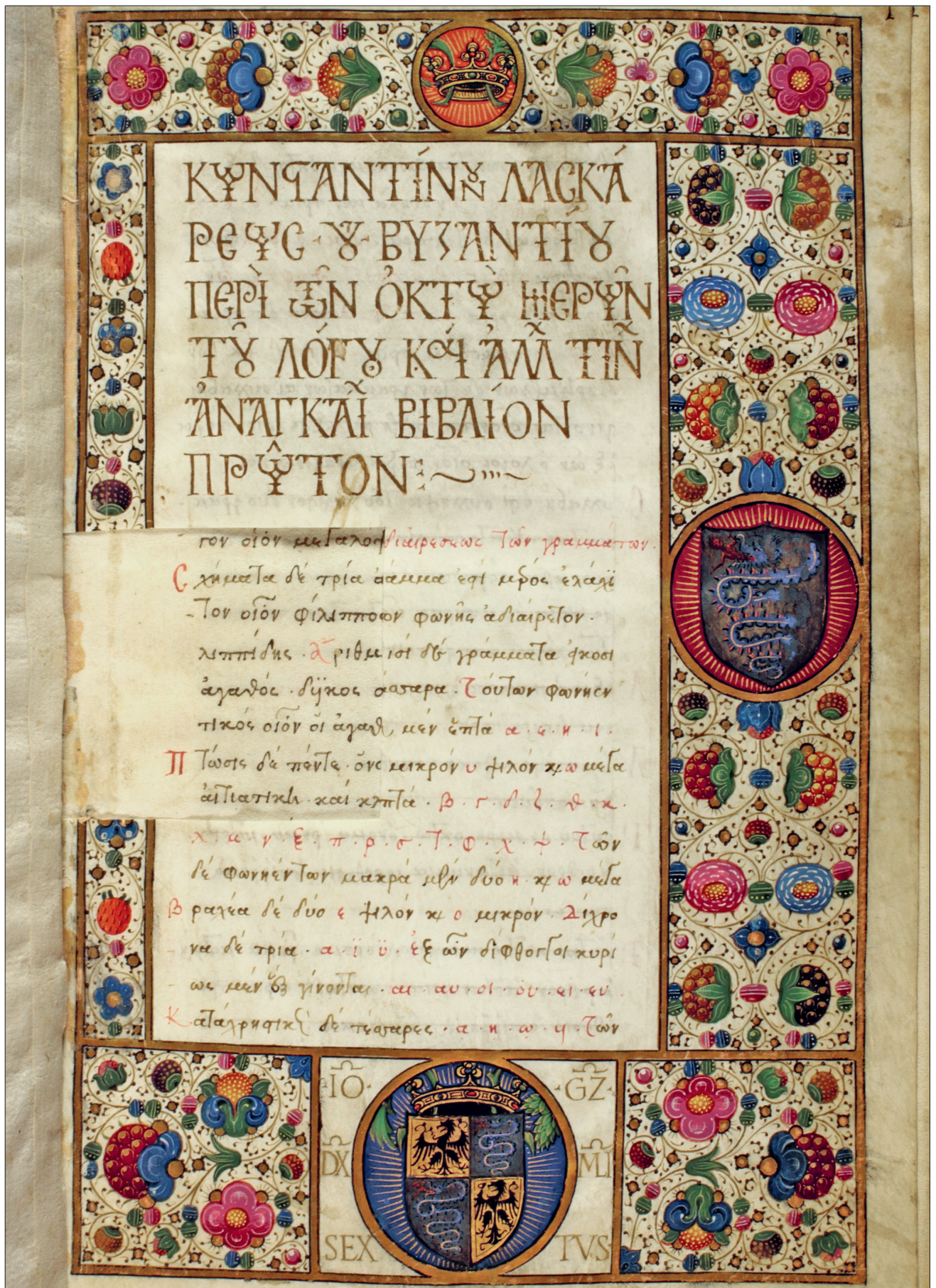


Fig. 1 ASC, MS Triv. 2147, fol. 1' (with Milanese coat-of-arms in the right-hand margin). – (Photo © Comune di Milano).



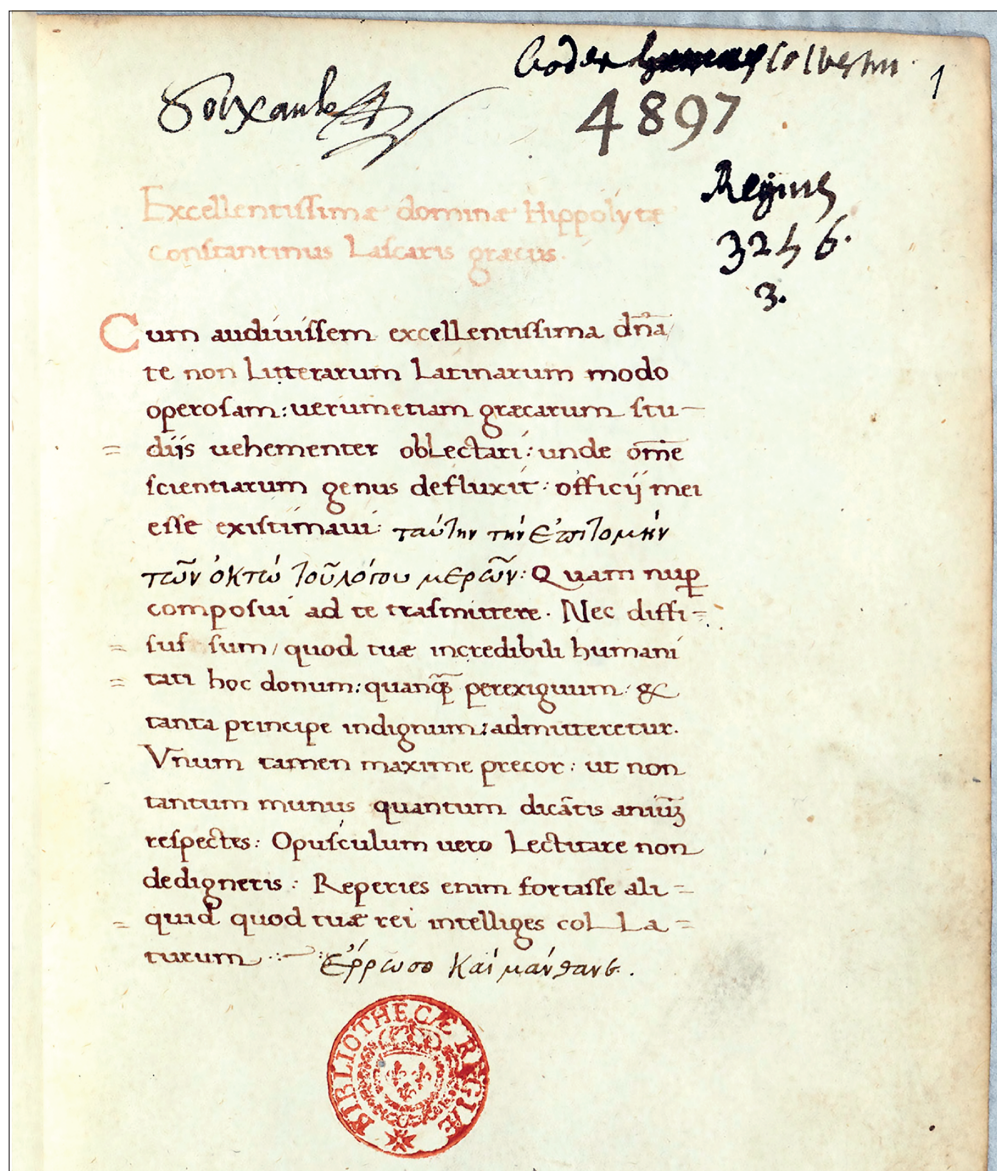


Fig. 2 BnF, grec 2590, fol. 1r. – (Photo Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris).

the Latin grammarian Priscian, and a substantial contribution to hagiography. Mombrizio also worked as professor at the public gymnasium in Milan, as successor to Francesco Filelfo, teaching both Latin and Greek, while also holding several public offices in Milanese administration. He furthermore financed early printing endeavors in the city and was as an investor implacable toward debtors, even sending them to prison when they did not pay their dues. In sum, Mombrizio formed part of Milanese state administration and fostered local culture, thus taking the interests of his native city to heart and keeping order in it. This patriotic attitude also emerges from his Greek verse grammar for Sforza princess Ippolita Maria and the image of Byzantium that he presented in this text (see below).

## Lascaris, a Displaced Greek Looking Back

As a Greek migrant working after 1453, Constantine Lascaris can be expected to have developed a nostalgic attitude toward the recently perished Byzantine empire, not destitute of psychological trauma. After his arrival on the Italian peninsula in 1458, Lascaris self-identified as ξένος («foreigner»), *Graecus* («Greek»), and Βυζάντιος. The last Greek label matches the Italian term *constantinopolitano* found in the 1463 petition of Milanese notables supporting Lascaris' candidacy for the Greek chair in the city<sup>17</sup>. Βυζάντιος should therefore be taken to mean «Constantinopolitan» rather than «Byzantine» in the modern sense, the latter referring to the empire rather than its capital. Lascaris nonetheless provides the perspective

17 For ξένος, see e.g. the letter to cardinal Bessarion in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 171: δι' ἐμοῦ γὰρ οὐχ οἶοντε ξένου ὄντος καὶ ἀδυνάτου. For *Graecus*, see e.g. Lascaris' dedication letter to Ippolita Maria Sforza in BnF, grec 2590, fol. 1r: *Excellentissimae dominae Hippolytae constantinus Lascaris graecus* (see also Van Rooy, Ippolita Maria Sforza n. 77 for information on the text). For Βυζάντιος, see e.g. the 1501 manuscript subscription in Mar-

tínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 24: Κωνσταντίνου Λασκάρεως τοῦ Βυζαντίου καὶ ὁ κόπος καὶ τὸ κτῆμα καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ συνιέντος. For *constantinopolitano*, see Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 105: [...] ritrovandosi in questa città Constantino constantinopolitano homo eccellente de doctrina et de costumi [...].

of a Greek displaced from the lost Byzantine empire and culture, which he notably does not call »Roman,« in keeping with the broader self-refashioning trend of Greek migrants in Renaissance Italy<sup>18</sup>. Lascaris' status as a displaced Greek is apparent not only from the first two self-labels (ξένος and *Graecus*) but also from various sources he created: his grammar book and the letters mentioned above (in Section 2), into which I delve now.

In the grammar book Lascaris dedicated to Ippolita Maria Sforza, he self-identified as *Graecus* (»Greek«), presenting a manual that had deep roots in Byzantine written culture and grammaticography. The handwriting is entirely in Byzantine tradition, preserving conventions with regard to ligatures and the use of capital letters. The manual moreover starts with Greek prayers (the Hail Mary and Lord's Prayer) and moral *sententiae*, showing the religious and ethic concerns of the society in which Lascaris was educated but at the same time chiming with the Italian humanists' concern over linguistic and moral integrity<sup>19</sup>. Lascaris moreover involved a fellow Byzantine Greek, Demetrios Kastrenos, in the production of the manuscript, who added some corrections and marginal notes<sup>20</sup>. At the same time, the grammarian engaged an Italian scribe to write the dedicatory letter to the Sforza princess, except for the two Greek phrases, which he inserted himself afterward (see fig. 2 above). In keeping with Byzantine tradition, Lascaris adopted a generic approach to grammar rather than offering a tailor-made handbook for his new Italian audience<sup>21</sup>. In sum, the grammar has features that seem to reflect Lascaris' being in between the lost Byzantine society and the flourishing Renaissance culture hosting him in Italy.

Lascaris' correspondence allows one to construe a variegated picture of the scholar as a displaced Greek in Renaissance Italy, one showing nostalgia for his homeland and aversion to Italy, its rulers, and its climate. In the 1488 Latin letter responding to the invitation of the Milanese duke Gian Galeazzo Sforza, Lascaris emphasized the climatological hardships he had had to endure and wanted to avoid in the future:

»By Hercules, I do not regret lightly that I am unable to satisfy this desire of yours. On the other hand, as my age is becoming burdensome, I am frequently distressed by

bad health and I cannot live in such cold areas. On account of these elements, I have left that place to go elsewhere, as is very well-known in Milan among the most learned Milanese men«<sup>22</sup>.

The vagueness with which Lascaris mentioned the »elsewhere« he went to evokes the idea of a roaming migrant scholar without a home, even though he had settled in Messina quite definitely two decades before he wrote this refusal letter. Modestly signing as the Sforza duke's *servulus*, »humble servant«, he pictured himself to be dependent on the good graces of Italy's rulers for his subsistence.

From his Greek correspondence more details can be gathered about his feelings and views of the lost Byzantine empire in relation to his status as a migrant in Italy. In the undated philological letter to the Italian humanist Giorgio Valla (1447-1500), a student of his in Milan from 1462 until circa 1465, Lascaris reflected on words borrowed from Latin into the Greek language and their meanings<sup>23</sup>. In this letter, Lascaris fashioned himself a patriotic and nostalgic philologist:

»*Offikion* [*< officium*] and *offikiálios* [*< officialis*] may be said among us, but they are Roman words, and we use them out of habit as our own, ever since the Romans obtained power over the Greeks and especially since the great Constantine built that wonderful fatherland. So it is by force of habit that we use also many other of those words in the common dialect [the *koine*], not because we lack our own words, for instance: *foûrnos* [*< furnus*], *ospítion* [*< hospitium*], *vígla* [*< villa*], *defendévo* [*< defendo*], *deféstor* [*< defensor*], and others«<sup>24</sup>.

Lascaris deplored the cultural-political and hence linguistic influence of the Romans on the Greeks and their tongue, while at the same time admiring the founding father of the Byzantine empire and its capital, Constantine the Great (died 337). Lascaris thus experienced mixed feelings with regard to the protohistory of his ancestral empire, which had emerged under the cultural dominance of the Romans. The remainder of the letter reflects on the meaning of the Greek word καθήκον, »duty«, which according to Lascaris involved

18 See Lamers, *Greece Reinvented* for an excellent account of this development, in particular p. 61, pp. 195-199, and p. 279 for C. Lascaris, whose views are compared to his namesake Janus Lascaris'. Lamers emphasizes that due to the loss of the empire »Constantine Lascaris dissociated the Greek tradition from its traditional heartland of Greece« (p. 279), »remov[ing] the heartland of Hellenism from Sparta and Athens to Calabria and Sicily« I argue below in this section that this decentralization of tradition went hand in hand with substantial psychological trauma and nostalgia vis-à-vis the lost Greek »heartland«.

19 See e.g. Nuti, *Longa est via*, for the development of Greek grammar from late Byzantium to the Renaissance.

20 Orlandi, *Sette nuovi manoscritti* 233-235.

21 One structural difference is, however, remarkable. Typically, late Byzantine handbooks were in a question-and-answer format called *Ἐρωτήματα* (*Erōtēmata*), recreating – somewhat artificially – the interaction between teacher and student in writing. See e.g. Ciccolella, *Donati Graeci*; Rollo, *Gli Erotemata*. As an eager epitomist, Lascaris opted to leave out this genre feature and brand his manual an *ἐπιτομή* (»epitome«).

22 Lascaris in Gabotto, *Tre lettere* 15: [...] *ego me hercule non mediocriter doleo quod huic desiderio tuo satisfacere non valeo; nam, etate iam ingravescente, adversa valetudine crebro angor ac vivere in frigidissimis [sic pro frigidissimis] regionibus nequeo, ob quae alias isthinc recessi, ut Mediolani viri doctissimi mediolanenses optime sciunt.*

23 On Valla, see Raschieri, Valla.

24 Lascaris in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 171: τὸ ὄφικιον καὶ ὁ ὄφικιᾶλιος, εἰ καὶ παρ' ἡμῖν λέγονται, ἀλλὰ Ῥωμαίων φωναὶ εἰσὶ καὶ χρώμεθα διὰ τὴν συνήθειαν ὡς οἰκείας, ἐξ οὗτο Ῥωμαῖοι ἐγκρατεῖς Ἑλλήνων ἐγένοντο καὶ μάλιστα ἐξ οὗτο Κωνσταντῖνος ἐκεῖνος τὴν θαυμαστὴν ἐκείνην ὠκοδόμησε πατρίδα. διὰ δὴ τὴν ἐπικρατοῦσαν συνήθειαν ἄλλαις τέ [sic] πολλαῖς τῶν λέξεων χρώμεθα ἐν τῇ κοινῇ διαλέκτῳ καὶ ταύταις, οὐχ ὡς ἀποροῦντες οἰκείων· ὅθεν φούρνος καὶ ὀσπίτιον καὶ βίγλα καὶ δεφε-ντέω καὶ δεφέστωρ καὶ ἄλλα. I have transcribed the Greek words in keeping with Lascaris' contemporary pronunciation. See also the analysis of Lamers, *Greece Reinvented* 61, where this quote is partly cited and discussed.

honoring and never abandoning one's ancestors, siblings, fatherland (πατρίς, the one founded by Constantine the Great), and friends<sup>25</sup>. Lascaris concluded his letter on a rather pessimistic note, betraying great nostalgia for his lost fatherland: »But due to bad luck we have cast off, together with other principles, also those concerning duties«<sup>26</sup>. The implications are grim: Lascaris no longer had a fatherland to serve and to honor. Hence, as a displaced Greek, he was unable to fulfil his duties and, by extension, to act ethically.

Lascaris' feelings of nostalgia and depression culminated dramatically in a letter he wrote to his Spanish friend Juan Pardo sometime in the 1480s, filled with classical references and thus leaving one wonder to what extent the piece of writing forms an instance of literary and rhetorical play rather than a sincere expression of emotions. It is, however, clear that Lascaris complained about the fates of Greek migrants in Italy, while assessing the situation in his native lands also in very negative terms<sup>27</sup>. Melancholically, he referred indirectly to Byzantium as a past state lost to the »barbarians« (i.e. the Ottomans), a consideration triggering suicidal thoughts:

»I sit here as earth's burden, fainting from pain, considering my time there slavery, and my move from there a new misfortune. For what could I do? Or where on earth would I leave for, the weak and unfortunate man I am, in such a terrible situation, in which my fatherland is slave to wretched barbarians, and the whole of Hellas. Neither a kingdom, nor a state is left for us. Everything is in servitude, full of both fear and danger. If I were alone, I would not hesitate to visit Herakles' columns«<sup>28</sup>.

Lascaris went on to point out the sandwich situation between Greece and Italy he found himself in – a situation aggravated by responsibilities toward family in Messina and leaving him to consider once more the option of a premature death:

»But as I now am a slave because of my relatives, I have to bear everything and cling to whomever I run into, like

they say the octopus does in winter time, and being at the borderland between two evils I need to pick the lesser evil. For when I consider the terrible circumstances of the present and the brutality here, I not only long for Milan and the cities in that direction, but even the British Isles and, if you like, the Isles of the Blessed«<sup>29</sup>.

But such a move from Messina to the north was out of the question for Lascaris, who explained his reluctance to leave Sicily by claiming that there was a general disinterest in the Greek heritage on the Italian peninsula:

»There is no care for Greek letters: Homer is driven away from everywhere, Demosthenes and Plato are despised, and everywhere there is an invisible tyranny and servitude much worse than Sisyphus', and they would do everything except paying a Greek. But if you don't believe me, let the crucial proof of the mortals persuade you: for the tyrants' thrift drove Theodore [Gaza], who had reached the top of all wisdom, away to Calabria, and forced him – ingloriously alas! – to die in Policastro. It drove Andronikos Kallistos to the British Isles, where he died without friends. As to Frangkoulis, a wise man, I don't know where in Italy he is, but I do know that Demetrios [Kastrenos?] returned to the fatherland to serve barbarians. And I leave unmentioned my wise teacher John Argyropoulos who lives in poverty in the center of Rome, selling his own books one by one. That great Rome does not exist anymore, nor do those admirable Roman citizens, who took an interest in both Latin and Greek letters. Naples is no longer a colony of the Chalcidians and Athenians, the school of Greek letters, to which the Romans came running. All is gone and changed«<sup>30</sup>.

This catalogue of misery ends with a reference to the city of Naples, where Lascaris had been his addressee's teacher in 1465-1466 during one of the most miserable periods in the migrant's lifetime. For Lascaris, the Greek heritage was

25 Lascaris in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 172.

26 Lascaris in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 172: ἡμεῖς δὲ κακῇ τύχῃ σὺν τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ τὰ περὶ τῶν καθηκόντων ἀπεβάλομεν.

27 See Lascaris in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 160-162 for a recent edition, with further references. Martínez Manzano, Constantino Lascaris 167-169, offers a Spanish translation and additional references. Martínez Manzano traces all the classical sources in both of her monographs on Lascaris: see the footnotes there.

28 Lascaris in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 160: κάθημαι ἄχθος ἀρούρης ἀπειπὼν τῷ ἄλγῃ τὴν ἐνταῦθα διατριβὴν δουλείαν ἡγούμενος καὶ τὴν ἐντεῦθεν μετέσταςιν καὶ νὴν δυστυχίαν. τί γὰρ ἂν ποιοίην ἢ ποῦ γῆς ἀπιοίμι ἀνὴρ ἀσθενὴς καὶ δυστυχὴς γεγονώς ἐν τοιοῦτῳ χαλεπωτάτῳ καιρῷ, ἐν ᾧ πατρίς μὲν δούλη αἰσχίστων βαρβάρων καὶ πᾶσα Ἑλλάς. οὕτε δὲ βασιλεία οὕτε πολιτεία ἡμῖν ὑπολείπεται. πάντα δὲ δούλα καὶ φόβου καὶ κινδύνου μεστά. εἰ μόνος μὲν ἦν, οὐκ ἂν ὤκνου καὶ τὰς στήλας τοῦ Ἡρακλέους ἰδεῖν.

29 Lascaris in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 160: νῦν δὲ δούλος διὰ τοὺς ἐμούς ἀνάγκη πάντα φέρειν καὶ τοῦ τυχόντος ἀντέχεσθαι ἢ φασὶ τὸν πολυπόδα ἐν χειμῶνος καιρῷ, καὶ ἐν μεταχίμῳ δυοῖν ὄντα κακοῖν τὸ μὴ χεῖρον αἰρεῖσθαι. ὅταν μὲν γὰρ τὰ παρόντα διανοοῦμαι δεινὰ καὶ τὴν

ἐνταῦθα θηριότητα, οὐ μόνον Μεδιόλανον καὶ τὰς ἐκείσε πόλεις ποθῶ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς βρεττανικὰς νήσους καὶ εἰ βούλει γε τὰς μακάρων [...].

30 Lascaris in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 161-162: λόγων δὲ ἑλληνικῶν λόγος οὐδεὶς, ἀλλ' ἀπελήλατο μὲν Ὀμηρος πανταχόθεν, καταπεφρόνητο δὲ Δημοσθένης καὶ Πλάτων, πανταχοῦ δὲ τυραννὶς ἀφαντος καὶ ἀνελευθερία πολλῶν πλείων τῆς τοῦ Σισύφου καὶ πάντ' ἂν δρῶνεν ἢ μισθώσαιντο Ἕλληνα. εἰ δ' ἀπιστεῖς, πειθέτω σε ἡ τῶν βροτῶν ἔλεγχος διάπειρα· ἡ μὲν γὰρ τῶν τυραννούντων φειδωλία Θεόδωρον ἐς ἄκρον πάσης σοφίας ἐηλάκοτα ἐς Καλαβρίαν ἀπήλασε καὶ ἐν Πολυκάστρῳ φεῦ ἀδόξως θανεῖν ἠνάγκασεν. Ἀνδρόνικον δὲ τὸν Κάλλιστον ἐς τὰς βρεττανικὰς νήσους, ὅπου φίλων ἔρημος τέθηκε. Φραγκοῦλιον δὲ ἄνδρα σοφὸν οὐκ οἶδα ποῦ τῆς Ἰταλίας. Δημήτριον δὲ ἐς τὴν πατρίδα ἐπανήκειν βαρβάρους δουλεύοντα. παραλείπω δὲ τὸν σοφὸν ἐμὸν καθηγητὴν Ἰωάννην τὸν Ἀργυρόπουλον ἐν μέσῃ Ῥώμῃ πενόμενον καὶ καθ' ἐκάστην τὰς ἑαυτοῦ βίβλους ἀποδιδόμενον. οὐκ ἔστι νῦν Ῥώμῃ ἐκείνη οὐδὲ οἱ θαυμαστοὶ ἐκεῖνοι πολῖται [sic in mss. pro πολῖται] Ῥωμαῖοι, οἷς ἅμα λατινικῶν λόγων καὶ ἑλληνικῶν ἔμελλεν. οὐκ ἔστι Νεάπολις ἀποικία Χαλκιδίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων, τὸ γυμνάσιον τῶν ἑλληνικῶν λόγων, εἰς ἣν Ῥωμαῖοι τρέχοντες ἤρχοντο. πάντα φροῦδα καὶ μεταμορφωμένα.



in the past, together with a state reuniting the Greeks, his people<sup>31</sup>. This realization took away Lascaris' lust for life, which he emphasized again several times at the end of his letter to Pardo: »what is scary for others, may that come as something sweet to me«<sup>32</sup>. And finally: »Farewell and don't wait around for me«<sup>33</sup>. There was no future for him, as the greatness of his people was in the past.

In the end, Lascaris concluded that his fatherland was enslaved to the barbarian Turks, while he himself was a *servulus* to the Italian courts, including the Milanese, and a δοῦλος of his duties in Messina. As his enslavement was least pressing and mostly metaphorical in Sicily, he remained there, idealizing the Byzantine empire as a lost fatherland (»that wonderful πατρίς«; see above).

## Mombrizio, Spokesman of Milanese Cultural Ideology

Diametrically opposed to the severe nostalgia and suicidal tendencies of a migrant caught between two worlds (one that is now versus one that no longer exists) is Bonino Mombrizio's Milanese perspective on Byzantium, developed in direct dialogue with Lascaris' Greek grammar. In his verse adaptation of Lascaris' manual, Mombrizio provided a handbook tailor-made for Ippolita Maria Sforza. This tailoring involved a Sforzafication on two levels. On the one hand, as a state official, Mombrizio expressed Milanese cultural ideology in the non-grammaticographical passages, mainly the *prologus*<sup>34</sup>. On the other, his grammar did not offer generic examples as Lascaris' did, but introduced a significant number of grammatical examples that featured and even praised members of the Sforza family, not least the dedicatee Ippolita Maria Sforza. For instance, when discussing Greek adverbs, Mombrizio alluded to the upcoming wedding ceremony of the princess with Alfonso II of Naples:

»And when asked whether you'd like to have Alfonso as your husband, you should (if you'd like to respond in Greek), say *nai*, for this seems to give great confirmation«<sup>35</sup>.

Or when outlining Greek prepositions, Mombrizio offered the following example for ὑπέρ (*hypér*): »For instance, the duke's snake excels every symbol«<sup>36</sup>. This is obviously a reference to the man-devouring snake in the Visconti-Sforza coat-of-arms<sup>37</sup>. The duke himself is praised in the section on the comparatives: »As they say, Francesco is better than all rulers«<sup>38</sup>. This patriotic attitude forms the backbone of Mombrizio's views on Byzantium. As a spokesperson of the Sforzas and their cultural ideology, the Milanese humanist and state official applauded in the *prologus* of his grammar the way in which the duke advanced culture by bringing Greeks from their occupied lands to his city. That way, Milanese youths did not have to undertake a risky trip abroad:

»For thanks to the goodness of your divine father [Francesco Sforza], no one is forced to go begging for literature from Roman [Italian] territories along the foreign shores of Greece [Hellas]. He is preparing the road for talents through the smell of some profit, and he is claiming the good arts for the city with the proposed gift«<sup>39</sup>.

Rather than saving them, Francesco Sforza headhunted the Greeks from their destroyed empire, Mombrizio continued in his prologue:

»And there's space to say how many excellent poets and orators our Caesar has brought into this city. The number itself defies belief. Who will recount the peace gifts by our duke? Who will not speak of the times as golden, or will say that these times are becoming even better than gold? Add to this that we also see Greek sophists and grammarians arrive here at once from their destroyed world. The whole of Greece is smashed under the hostile Turk; the heavenly powers had given their assent to such a great defeat. Am I wrong or is it that the learned race adorns the Latin lands? O race well cut down and well-destroyed walls! O excellent crime, and offence that deserves our approval, as Troy once had succumbed to Greek fires!«<sup>40</sup>

31 Lascaris' strong sense of belonging to the Greek people emerges in a very particular way in his epitome of the twelfth book of Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Post-homerica*, in which he describes an action by the Greeks in the first person plural. See for details Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 161, n. 18.

32 Lascaris in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 162: [...] ὁ τοῖς ἄλλοις φρικτόν, τοῦτο ἡμῖν ὡς ἡδὺ ἐπαγάγοι [...].

33 Lascaris in Martínez Manzano, Konstantinos Laskaris 162: ἔρρωσο καὶ ἡμᾶς μὴ περιμένε.

34 cf. Raschieri, Bonino Mombrizio 746, for a preliminary discussion of this aspect of Mombrizio's verse adaptation.

35 BA, Ambr. N 264 sup. fol. 37<sup>v</sup>: *Cumque rogata uirum uellesne Alphonson habere / Debebas (Graece si respondere uolebas) / Dicere vai. Nanque hoc longe affirmare uidetur*. Translation adopted from Van Rooy, »Lend Me Your Apt Ears«. The transcription of the Latin text has been normalized, whereas Mombrizio's Greek is rendered semi-diplomatically.

36 BA, Ambr. N 264 sup. fol. 35<sup>v</sup>: Ὃς ἄρχοντος ὄφεις σημεῖον πᾶν ὑπὲρ ἐστι.

37 cf. fig. 1 above and Rossetti, Sotto il segno della vipera.

38 BA, Ambr. N 264 sup. fol. 16<sup>v</sup>: Ὃς φασιν ἀρχόντων πάντων φραγκίσκος ἀμείνων.

39 BA, Ambr. N 264 sup. ff. 4<sup>v</sup>-5<sup>r</sup>: *Namque tui factum est diui bonitate parenti* [in margin: *Fr. Sphor.*] / *Helladis externas ne mendicare per oras* [in margin: *Hellas*] / *grammata Romanis quisquam cogatur ab aruis. / Ille uiam facit ingeniis nido lucelli, / propositaque bonas urbi stipe uendicat artes.*

40 BA, Ambr. N 264 sup. fol. 5<sup>r-v</sup>: *Nec uacat egregios uates nec dicere quantos / rhetoras hanc noster caesar conduxit in urbem*. [in margin: *Caesar Fr. Sphor.*] / *Ipse fidem numerus uincit. Quis munera pacis / a duce narrabit nostro? Quis saecula dicet / aurea uel non haec fieri meliora uel auro? / Adde quod et Graios huc aduentare sophistas / grammaticosque simul deleti ex orbe uidemus. / Tota sub aduerso contrita est Graecia Turco;* [in margin: *Graecia Turcus*] / *annuerant tantae caelestia numina cladi. / Fallor an ut terras ornet gens docta Latinas? / O bene succisam deletaque moenia gentem! / O scelus egregium, crimenque probabile nobis, / Troia quod ad Graios ignes subsiderat olim!* [in margin: *Troia*]



The Byzantine empire is pictured here as »a destroyed world« (*deletus orbis*), »smashed« (*contritus*) by the Turks in agreement with God's plan to promote culture in Milan. The fall of Constantinople was inevitable payback for the fall of Troy, which according to Roman beliefs had led to the foundation of their empire and in the Renaissance was given a wider application to other cities, including Venice and also the Milan of the Viscontis, and to a lesser extent the Sforzas<sup>41</sup>. This teleological take on Byzantine history, with the influx of Greek talent in Milan, not least that of Lascaris, also implied for Mombrizio that Milanese territories came to rival Attica, and hence the greatest Greek city of all time, Athens:

»Hence, while thinking by myself about the time past and the days lost, why, oh, most learned Lascaris, why have you been so slow to come to our city? Jupiter has ensured you would be our teacher, and become the leader of the new race, leading them to Greek books. With you as leader, [Jupiter] decided there to be an Academy in these lands, so that the Insubrian [Milanese] would cede in nothing to the Attic world«<sup>42</sup>.

Mombrizio implied that Lascaris would single-handedly make Milan, and by extension Italy, into a new Athens. What is more, Milan would supersede Athens as it cultivated both Greek and Latin, as Mombrizio did himself in his bilingual verse grammar for Ippolita Maria Sforza, which »was produced in both languages«<sup>43</sup>. This idealized picture starkly contrasts with Lascaris' letter to Juan Pardo, in which the migrant emphasized the decay of Greek learning in his host country, albeit some fifteen years after Mombrizio made his verse adaptation.

## Conclusion: Two Conflicting Perspectives on Byzantium

In conclusion, the fate of the Byzantine empire in the decades after the fall of Constantinople was appreciated rather differently by the migrant Lascaris and the local Mombrizio, both working in Sforza Milan in the years after 1458. Mombrizio's verse grammar modelled on Lascaris' manual voiced Sforza cultural politics, which was notably oriented toward the heritage of ancient Greece. As such, Mombrizio seems to have made explicit why the duke of Milan, Francesco I Sforza, encouraged and promoted Greek learning for his daughter: so that she would embody his broader cultural politics. In order to secure this cultural capital for his city, the duke headhunted Greek refugees, including Constantine Lascaris. For Lascaris, self-identifying as a Greek foreigner from Constantinople, such patriotic cultural ideology was meaningless, since he did not have a state to project his ideas onto. Lascaris obviously experienced the downfall of Byzantium as a deplorable loss and a personal trauma, leaving him between Scylla and Charybdis, a fatherland occupied by barbarians and an unwelcoming host country<sup>44</sup>. He felt caught up between east and west, past and present, resulting in great nostalgia. Mombrizio, on the other hand, adopted quite a different view, echoing Sforza cultural politics. A kind of sadistic opportunism embraced the influx of Greek migrants as common cultural benefit for Milanese citizens, with a taste of revenge for the fall of Troy in the distant past. Mombrizio and the Sforzas thus actively appropriated the Greek heritage, no doubt adding to the feeling of loss experienced by Lascaris. Their views on Byzantium and its downfall did have something in common in the end, despite their great differences: their joint aversion to the so-called barbarous Turks who had cruelly enslaved Greece and its inhabitants. Mombrizio mentioned them by name in his verse grammar, but the traumatized migrant Lascaris, who had personally experienced the capture of Constantinople by the Turks, generally avoided calling this people by name.

41 For Milan, see Rossetti, *Sotto il segno della vipera* 14. 17. For Venice, see Pincus, *Venice and the Two Romes* 105, with n. 14.

42 BA, Ambr. N 264 sup. fol. 6<sup>v</sup>: *Vnde ego praeteritum mecum dum cogito tempus / amissosque dies, quid io, doctissime, tantum*, [in margine: *Constantinus Lascaris*] / *Lascari, quid nostram tantum tardaris ad urbem? / Te dedit ut nobis praeceptor Iupiter esses* [in margine: *Iupiter*] / *duxque nouae fieres ad Graia uolumina gentis. / Te duce consuluit sit ut his Academia terris*, [in margine: *Academia*] / *ne foret Actaeo quo cederet Insuber orbi*. [in margine: *Latium*].

43 BA, Ambr. N 264 sup. fol. 6<sup>v</sup>: [...] *lingua tamen est confectus utraque*. On the adoption of both Roman and Greek-Byzantine heritage by Italian city-states in the Renaissance, cf. Pincus, *Venice and the Two Romes*.

44 Lascaris used the Scylla and Charybdis saying himself in his letter to Pardo. See Martínez Manzano, *Konstantinos Laskaris* 162.

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### **The Downfall of Byzantium at the Sforza court (c. 1460-1465): The migrant Lascaris versus the local Mombrizio**

This paper discusses how the Byzantine migrant Constantine Lascaris (1434-1501), who worked in service of the Sforza court in Milan around 1460-1465 and kept ties with it in his later career, perceived the Byzantine Empire and especially its downfall. This discussion is based on his written works and correspondence, especially from the years 1460-1485, including the well-known letter to his friend Juan Pardo. The paper also discusses how Lascaris perceived the Byzantine Empire in light of the events of 1453, which he witnessed himself. In his correspondence with Juan Pardo, the author articulated his concerns regarding the circumstances of Greek migrants residing in Italy, while also alluding to the prevailing conditions in his country of origin.

In this study, Lascaris' conceptions are compared with those of the Italian humanist Bonino Mombrizio (1424-1478/1482?), who was also active at the Sforza court in the same period. Mombrizio translated Lascaris' elementary Greek grammar into Latin verses, in which he also constructed a picture of the fallen Byzantine empire, hailing the Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza, as the saviour of Greek migrants. It is noteworthy that both Lascaris' and Mombrizio's versions of the Greek grammar were dedicated to Ippolita Sforza, the duke's teenage daughter, around the same time. It is reasonable to assume that they were acquainted with each other, and perhaps even engaged in discourse regarding the fate of Byzantium at the Sforza court.

This paper sets out to explore the perceptions of Byzantium held by the migrant Lascaris and the local Mombrizio, highlighting both the similarities and differences between them. On the one hand, both parties shared a similar perspective, expressing dismay at the fall of Constantinople and the broader subjugation of former Byzantine territories to the Turks. However, their respective analyses diverged in their focus on specific aspects of the Sforzas' reception of Greek migrants. While Mombrizio highlighted the Sforzas' benevolent acceptance of those facing hardship, Lascaris accentuated the vulnerable circumstances confronting Greek migrants in Italy, underscoring the challenges they faced both in their countries of origin and in their new Italian homes.

### **Der Untergang von Byzanz am Hofe der Sforza (ca. 1460-1465): Der Einwanderer Lascaris gegen den Einheimischen Mombrizio**

Dieser Beitrag untersucht, wie der byzantinische Emigrant Konstantin Lascaris (1434-1501), der um 1460-1465 im Dienst des Mailänder Hofes der Sforza stand und auch später mit diesem in Verbindung blieb, das Byzantinische Reich und insbesondere dessen Untergang wahrnahm. Ausgangspunkt sind seine Schriften und seine Korrespondenz, insbesondere aus den Jahren 1460-1485, darunter der bekannte Brief an

seinen Freund Juan Pardo. Der Beitrag untersucht auch, wie Lascaris das Byzantinische Reich vor dem Hintergrund der Ereignisse von 1453 wahrnahm, die er selbst miterlebt hatte. In seiner Korrespondenz mit Juan Pardo äußert der Autor seine Besorgnis über die Lebensumstände griechischer Migranten in Italien und spielt dabei auch auf die vorherrschenden Verhältnisse in seinem Heimatland an.

In dieser Studie werden die Vorstellungen von Lascaris mit denen des italienischen Humanisten Bonino Mombrizio (1424-1478/1482?) verglichen, der zur gleichen Zeit ebenfalls am Hofe der Sforza tätig war. Mombrizio übersetzte Lascaris' griechische Grammatik in lateinische Verse, in denen er auch ein Bild vom untergegangenen Byzantinischen Reich zeichnete und den Herzog von Mailand, Francesco Sforza, als Retter der griechischen Einwanderer pries. Bemerkenswert ist, dass sowohl Lascaris' als auch Mombrizios Version der griechischen Grammatik etwa zur gleichen Zeit Ippolita Sforza, der jugendlichen Tochter des Herzogs, gewidmet waren. Es ist anzunehmen, dass sie sich kannten und vielleicht sogar am Hofe der Sforza über das Schicksal von Byzanz diskutierten.

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Wahrnehmung von Byzanz durch den Migranten Lascaris und den Einheimischen Mombrizio und hebt dabei sowohl die Gemeinsamkeiten als auch die Unterschiede zwischen ihnen hervor. Einerseits teilten beide eine ähnliche Perspektive und äußerten sich bestürzt über den Fall Konstantinopels und die Unterwerfung der ehemaligen byzantinischen Gebiete unter die Türken. Ihre jeweiligen Analysen unterschieden sich jedoch in ihrer Fokussierung auf bestimmte Aspekte der Aufnahme griechischer Einwanderer durch die Sforzas. Während Mombrizio die wohlwollende Aufnahme der Notleidenden durch die Sforzas hervorhob, betonte Lascaris die prekäre Lage der griechischen Einwanderer in Italien und unterstrich die Herausforderungen, denen sie sowohl in ihren Herkunftsländern als auch in ihrer neuen italienischen Heimat gegenüberstanden.

### **La chute de Byzance à la cour des Sforza (vers 1460-1465): le migrant Lascaris contre le local Mombrizio**

Cet article examine comment Constantin Lascaris (1434-1501), migrant byzantin qui travailla à la cour des Sforza à Milan vers 1460-1465 et conserva des liens avec celle-ci tout au long de sa carrière, percevait l'Empire byzantin et en particulier sa chute. Cette analyse s'appuiera sur ses écrits et sa correspondance, en particulier ceux datant des années 1460-1485, notamment la célèbre lettre adressée à son ami Juan Pardo. L'article examinera également la perception que Lascaris avait de l'Empire byzantin à la lumière des événements de 1453, dont il fut lui-même témoin. Dans sa correspondance avec Juan Pardo, l'auteur exprimait ses préoccupations concernant la situation des migrants grecs résidant en Italie, tout en faisant allusion aux conditions qui prévalaient dans son pays d'origine.

Dans cette étude, les conceptions de Lascaris sont comparées à celles de l'humaniste italien Bonino Mombrio (1424-1478/1482?), qui était également actif à la cour des Sforza à la même époque. Mombrio a traduit la grammaire grecque élémentaire de Lascaris en vers latins, dans lesquels il a également brossé un tableau de l'empire byzantin déchu, saluant le duc de Milan, Francesco Sforza, comme le sauveur des migrants grecs. Il est intéressant de noter que les versions de la grammaire grecque de Lascaris et de Mombrio ont été dédiées à Ippolita Sforza, la fille adolescente du duc, à peu près à la même époque. Il est raisonnable de supposer qu'ils se connaissaient et qu'ils ont peut-être même discuté du sort de Byzance à la cour des Sforza.

Cet article vise à explorer les perceptions de Byzance qu'avaient le migrant Lascaris et le local Mombrio, en soulignant à la fois leurs similitudes et leurs différences. D'une part, les deux parties partageaient une perspective similaire, exprimant leur consternation face à la chute de Constantinople et à la soumission plus large des anciens territoires byzantins aux Turcs. Cependant, leurs analyses divergeaient dans leur focalisation sur des aspects spécifiques de l'accueil réservé par les Sforza aux migrants grecs. Alors que Mombrio soulignait l'accueil bienveillant réservé par les Sforza à ceux qui étaient en difficulté, Lascaris mettait l'accent sur la situation vulnérable des migrants grecs en Italie, soulignant les défis auxquels ils étaient confrontés tant dans leur pays d'origine que dans leur nouvelle patrie italienne.