

Abstract

Scholarly perceptions of Byzantium at the Sforza court:

The migrant grammarian Constantine Lascaris versus his translator Bonino Mombrizio

In this paper, I will discuss 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, still fresh in his memory as he witnessed the events in 1453 himself. I will do so based on his written works and correspondence, especially from the years 1460–1485, including the well-known letter to his friend Juan Pardo. In this piece of writing, he complains about the fates of Greek migrants in Italy, while referring also to the situation in his native lands.¹ I will compare his conceptions with those of the Italian humanist Bonino Mombrizio (1424–?1478/82), also active at the Sforza court in the same period. 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 the savior of Greek migrants (see Raschieri 2011: esp. 746–747). Both Lascaris' and Mombrizio's versions of the Greek grammar were dedicated to Ippolita Sforza, the duke's teenage daughter, around the same time (see Van Rooy forthcoming, with further references). So they no doubt knew each other, and might even have discussed the fate of Byzantium at the Sforza court. In my paper, I will confront the perceptions of Byzantium of the migrant Lascaris and the local Mombrizio, highlighting similarities and 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 “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.

References

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¹ See Martínez Manzano (1994: 159–162) for a recent edition, with further references. Martínez Manzano (1998: 167–169) offers a Spanish translation and additional references.

Short biography – Raf Van Rooy

Raf Van Rooy (PhD KU Leuven, 2017) is Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow at the University of Oslo, working on the project “Between migration and linguistics: Greeks in Western Europe and the emergence of contrastive grammar in the Renaissance (c.1390–1600)” (2021–23) under the auspices of Han Lamers and Unn Falkeid. Van Rooy previously was PhD fellow (2013–17) and postdoctoral fellow (2017–21) of the Research Foundation—Flanders (FWO) at KU Leuven. Van Rooy holds degrees in Classics, General Linguistics, and Early Modern History from KU Leuven, UCLouvain, and Ghent University, and specializes in the premodern history of linguistics and Greek studies in the Neo-Latin world. In 2020, he became editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Language & History* and published two books: *Language or Dialect? The History of a Conceptual Pair* (Oxford University Press) and *Greece’s Labyrinth of Language: A Study in the Early Modern Discovery of Dialect Diversity* (Language Science Press). He is currently supervising the development of DaLeT, the *Database of the Leuven Trilingue*, and preparing a new volume for the series *Brill Research Perspectives in Latinity and Classical Reception in the Early Modern Period*, focusing on Neo-Latin and New Ancient Greek.