

RENAISSANCE HUMANISM
AND CRETE

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Greek studies and printing in the Humanist era. Contribution of the Cretans

Historical setting

Two historical events seem to constitute landmarks of the humanist movement in Crete: first the Saint Titus Revolt of 1363-1365, when Venetian feudatories and Cretan landowners sought to become independent from Venice and to found their own Republic under the patronship of Saint Titus, first bishop of the island; second, the earthquake of 1508, which razed Candia to the ground and brought death to the inhabitants of the city and surrounding area. The Revolt was smothered by the “Lombard and German” mercenaries of the *condottiero* Luchino dal Verme who was sent by Venice to combat the Cretan Revolt. However, the uprising drew the communities of the Venetians of Crete and the Cretans closer together, speeded up the mutual cultural influences and eventually led to the emergence of the Venetian-Cretan identity, which formed through a series of events and circumstances, not always easy to deal with. The earthquake of 1508, a hundred and fifty years later, played a similar part: after the destruction of the medieval town of Candia, with its tall walls, towers and scarce public buildings, the new face of the city emerged: Renaissance Candia, with heart-shaped bastions, the Arsenal, squares and main streets, imposing buildings and noble mansions which reminded European travellers of their home countries.

Crete between East and West. In the same period, Crete gained in geopolitical importance due to major events in the larger area of the Eastern Mediterranean, which placed it at the centre of international developments; after a long period of fierce competition and open conflict Venice achieved to push the Italian maritime cities aside from the commercial routes of the former Byzantine empire and establish a dense network of possessions in these territories. Crete was its main domain, and Venice established an administrative system modelled on Venice's system of rule.

At the same time, the *Serenissima* became the major rival of the Ottomans, who from 1351 to 1460 took over Asia Minor, Greece, and the Southern Balkans, conquered Constantinople and made no secret of their designs to expand further west. In this era, which was crucial to the survival of modern Greek identity, a series of major political, social, economic and demographic changes took place; also, the effort to adapt ideologically and culturally to the new circumstances decisively determined further developments.

First humanist stirs. These were the same years when humanism gained strength in Italy. Interest in classical literature had functioned as a regenerative force in every stage of the history of the Byzantine empire, and more so in the late Palaiologan era, when the study of classical letters flourished. In Italy, the recovery of the Latin tradition began only in the late 13th century, among the circles of educated monks, scholars, and the members of the affluent class who served as secretaries, law scholars, notaries and teachers of grammar and rhetorics at the towns of the Venetian inland such as Verona and Vicenza, and the uni-

versity centres of Padua and Bologna and Avignon, where the papal court had moved (1309-1377). From the 14th century, the tendency to read the Latin authors and imitate their style became widespread and evolved into a veritable school, which surpassed local political and cultural differences as well as antagonism between city-states, and led to the creation of a “Republic of letters” (*res publica litteraria*). Both Petrarch (1304-1374) and Boccaccio (1314-1375), the major Renaissance humanist poets, achieved to learn Greek. Boccaccio’s teacher was Leontius Pilatus of Calabria (d. 1367), who at some time had travelled to Crete in order to enhance his knowledge of ancient Greek literature. In 1361, aided by his famous pupil, Leontius taught Greek at the Studium of Florence and, following Boccaccio’s invitation, produced a Latin translation of Homer in verse. Pilatus’s teaching was brief and left no im-



1. Petrarch, wood engraving from: N. Reusner, *Icones sive Imagines viuae, literis Cl. Virorum...*, Basel 1599.

portant legacy. However, soon Renaissance humanists wished to read the texts of the Greek classical tradition and called on the Greek scholars from Byzantium to teach them Greek in a systematic fashion. This brought about a radical renewal of cultural life in the Italian peninsula. At the time, a quest of knowledge meant faraway voyages in Western and Northern Europe, in order to discover long-lost manuscripts. Diplomatic missions and church councils such as those of Constantia, Ferrara and Flo-

rence, summoned in order to settle crucial political and ecclesiastical questions, offered the scholars opportunities to travel in search of manuscripts. Renaissance humanists sought with ever increasing intensity to acquire manuscripts with original texts, produce new translations into Latin and enhance the existing ones in order to make them more exact, philologically correct



2. Miniature drawing of Giovanni Boccaccio from the codex titled "Eclogue" (Florence 1379, Bibliotheca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms Plut. 34.39).



3. C. Salutati, miniature from Florentine codex (Florence, Bibliotheca Medicea Laurenziana, Ms Strozzii, 174, f.3v).

and worthy of their original. Crete was among the places most visited in the East, as it was nearest to Italy and served as an intermediary station for travellers to and from Constantinople.

The establishment of Greek studies in Italy. An event which determined the Italian scholars' turn to Greek studies was the initiative on the part of Colluccio Salutati, Chancellor of Florence, to invite Manuel Chrysoloras (1350-1414) in 1396

to teach Greek language and literature at the Studium for a decade. Salutati was convinced of the importance of studying Greek in order to boost the intellectual life of the city that later came to be called the “New Athens”. Chrysoloras’s teaching, which lasted four years, was not only received with great enthusiasm by its large audience but also led several young men eager for knowledge, such as Jacopo d’Angelo della Scarpentia (ci. 1360-1410) and Guarino Veronese (1374-1460) to move to Constantinople in order to continue their studies under their teacher, after the he had left Florence. Ninety years later, the death of Lorenzo dei Medici seems to close a very fertile period during which Crete was called upon to lay a leading role in the recovery, collection and transmission of



4. Manuel Chrysoloras, from N. Reusner, *Icones sive Imagines viuae, literis...*

Greek texts, from the Byzantine East to the Latin West. It is not strange that two exponents of the contact between the two worlds are connected to Crete and Candia: In 1400, Demetrios Kydonis, the much-travelled friend of Chrysoloras and Salutati, passed away at Candia, on his return trip to Constantinople; in April of 1492, on his way back to Florence from Constantinople Janus Lascaris received from physician Niccolò da Siena at Candia 44 codices and a statue, of a total value of 950 ducates, to enrich the collection of Greek manuscripts of his commissioner. Two young Cretans, tempted by the prospects of

working in such a promising environment,¹ accompanied him to the city of Florence, and in their turn became distinguished among the Greek scholars of the Italian Renaissance: Aristobou-



5. Janus Lascaris, wood engraving from P. Giovio, *Elogia Virorum litteris illustrium*, Basel 1577.

los Apostolis (1467-1535) and his pupil Marcus Musurus (c. 1470-1517). The interval between the two events is the time when Crete evolves from a temporary station of scholars of Greek and copyists on their way to Italy, into a significant centre of copying and rescuing the treasure of manuscripts of the Classical and the Byzantine traditions, and a stable centre of teaching ancient Greek language and literature.

Schools and teachers of Greek

In Crete, Greek was taught in an organized fashion in private schools and monasteries of the city by Cretan and Byzantine scholars. A youth among them, Ioannis Argyropoulos, agreed with

1. In 1519, Aristoboulos Apostolis, who had become bishop of Monemvasia under the name of Arsenios, wrote to Pope Leo X of the Medici: “That friend of the Greeks, the most intelligent Lorenzo, the most eminent senator of Florence, brought me then to Florence by the mediation of the most wise Lascaris, and there I met your Eminence; when was that? When in your luxurious house, you prepared with all the riches of Aristophanes, a brilliant masquerade, as if we were in Athens.”

notary Konstantinos Mavrikas in October 1453 to teach the latter's son Greek for the price of 14 perpera; at the same time he actively participated in the intellectual events of the era. For example, he developed his opinion on the differences between the two doctrines in a public debate (*disputa*) between himself and George of Trebizond. The bad ending of this exchange brought about the disruption of their friendship. His interlocutor had been born and raised in Crete and had just returned from Italy. George of Trebizond had travelled to Venice in 1416 in order to copy manuscripts on the invitation of Francesco Barbaro (1390-1454), and to study Latin and Rhetorics under Guarino Veronese. He also lived in Padua, where, at Barbaro's recommendation he taught Greek to the bishop Pietro Marcello (1376-1428). He taught Greek and Latin at Candia until he finally returned to Italy (he travelled to Vicenza in 1426 and settled in Venice in 1427), full of ambition and dreams.

Italian students in Crete. Conversely, several Italians travelled to Crete in order to learn Greek, so that they could study classical authors in the original text, and to seek manuscripts of hitherto unknown or partly preserved texts; they equally searched for statues, coins and other antiquities to carry off to their home countries. This activity was shared by several Venetian nobles and clergymen who served on the island in several positions: Zaccaria Trevista (1370-1414) who was *capitano* (military commander) of Crete in 1403-1404, and Marco Lipomano (1390-1446), duke of Candia in 1435-1437. Also, Ludovico or Alvise Foscari (1409-1480), rector of Rethymno in 1437-1439, Pietro Donato (1380-1447), archbishop of Crete in 1415-1425, Fantino Vallaresso (1392-1446), Maffeo Vallaresso (1415-1496) who was

serving as canon of the Archdiocese of Crete in 1445 etc. Others settled on the island after years of living in Venice, such as Lauro (Dafnis) Quirini, who moved to Crete in 1452 and stayed there for the rest of his life. Some of them put together their collection with much money and effort while others resold their collections, thus earning money from their activity. Giovanni Corner (1370-1452) travelled extensively to the Greek East and Crete, where his father Federico (Ferrante) possessed land, and he bought manuscripts which earned the admiration of Ambrosio Traversari for their beauty.

The physician Pietro Tomasi, a scholar of Greek and important exponent of Venetian humanism was also in Candia from 1414 to 1418. Among his friends and correspondents were Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481), Leonardo Giustiniani (1388-1446), Ludovico or Alvise Foscarini, Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) and Francesco Barbaro. Tomasi sent Guarino Veronese a manuscript of Plutarch's *Lives* from Crete, and kept other findings for his own collection, which numbered 130 volumes in 1460.

The cultivation of Greek letters was boosted by other factors, such as the presence on the island of educated monks and priests, who had been sent by or were related to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the longest stay being that of Iosif Vryennios (1381-1401). Above all however, it was stimulated by the intense theological debates on the union of the Churches (1438-1439) which aimed at criticizing, or finding dogmatic justifications for an essentially political choice. A circle of scholars formed around Ioannis Symeonakis, the Orthodox *protopapas* of Candia (d. 1452). Its members included George of Trebizond, Ioannis Kakos (Cauco), Konstantinos Mylaios, Manuel Savios, Michail

Lygizos, Ioannis Syrigos, Ioannis, Benedictos and the physician Emmanuel Semitecolo. These former pupils of Symeonakis, laymen, monks, clergymen, teachers, codex copyists and students of ancient Greek, wrote poetry in ancient metres, corresponded in Greek and composed rhetorical and philosophical speeches in that same language. Some of these texts have survived, and show the high level of knowledge of ancient Greek and the influence of these scholars on the cultural life of the island. They were at the epicentre of local events and formed part of a network of contacts inside and outside Crete. They corresponded with select members of the Venetian-Cretan aristocracy to whom they addressed letters, and for whom they composed laudatory and obituary speeches, or monodies. To this period belong the writings of Petros Lambardos (“obituary of the monk Neilos”, letters to the hieromonks Kallistos and Anthimos and “to the most beloved of God and wisest man, *protopapas* Ioannis Symeonakis”) as well as those of Manuel Savios (c. 1408-1449) a musician, hymnographer and *protopsaltes* of Candia; he composed a “Panegyric and joyful canon for the much-desired union” to salute the positive outcome of the Councils of Ferrara and Florence, a dialogue “Against the Jews” and an obituary (“Prayer and consolation to the grieving”), for Alexios Kalliergis, a young member of the only Cretan Orthodox family which also belonged to Venetian nobility. The orator clearly states his dependence on the father of the deceased, and shares his grief.²

2. “If only it were possible, noble and eminent sirs, to see the son of your friend and my patron, master Alexios of that virtuous family of the Kalliergis, rise from his bed of pain and to rejoice with him and his father”.

Symeonakis was the teacher of several young Italians who later became brilliant scholars of Greek in the main centres of Renaissance Humanism (Rome, Bologna, Florence, Milan, Naples and Venice) and never forgot him: Rinuccio Aretino (1395-1450), secretary to pope Nicholas V and teacher of Greek to Lorenzo Valla, calls Symeonakis “a most learned” man and expresses his gratitude to him for his teaching in a letter of 1415, before Aretino travelled to Constantinople.³ Symeonakis seems to have had codices copied for a select, well-chosen public: he addressed the manuscripts to eminent personalities of the Venetian society, such as Francesco Barbaro, to whom he sent a manuscript of Lucian’s works (Vaticanus Palatinus gr. 73) and duke Marco Lipomano, whom he also provided with works by Lucian, the *Mechanics* falsely attributed to Aristotle and *De operatione demonum* by Michael Psellos.

Travellers to Crete – Early archaeology. The early 15th century sees the first attempts by locals and visitors to Crete to trace

3. According to what he wrote to Bonacursio: ‘Verum si quid tua gravitas dignum per nos eluxerit, gratia erit habenda Johanni Simonaco prothopapae, viro nostrae aetatis litteratissimo, e cuius industria opere et diligentia derivatum est quicquid graecarum litterarum ad nos effluxit’. In the dedication of his translation of Plato’s *Crito* to emperor Manuel Palaiologos, written around 1423, he highlights the impetus for knowledge, which set him apart from the pursuits of his contemporaries, and took him to Constantinople: “[...]alii Cereri messium culmos, alii Baccho maturos palmites, alii iam et Apollini hecatombas offerre solebant. Ego vero graecarum cognitione disciplinarum pellectus, patriam, parentes ec dulcem tepidumque nidum deserens, implumis praecepsque coelo, ut vides, volutavi remoto. Ex his itaque studiis quibus iam diu multis vifiliis insudavi et maxime in ea civitate [...]”.

the historical past of the island, combining the study of written sources with the search for material evidence. Cretan archaeology was inaugurated by the Florentine priest Cristoforo Buondelmonti (c. 1395-1430) who in his *Description of Crete* (*Descriptio Insulae Cretae*) relates his extensive tour of the island in 1415, and gives his impressions of the antiquities he discovered and the ancient ruins he visited, which he also sketched on the margins of his text. The Laurentianus Pluteus manuscript (29.42) includes six draughts (drawings and maps) by Buondelmonti, of which five show archaeological sites on the island (Pantomatrimon, Armyros, the mount of Zeus, Idaion Cave, Knossos, the Palace of king Minos, the church of Hagioi Deka, cells of monks, the Labyrinth and Mount Ida) while the sixth is the earliest extant depiction of Candia. This drawing in perspective renders the city (*civitas*) in meticulous detail: the Byzantine walls are interrupted by tall square towers, its suburbs are organized into parishes and spread in a southwestern orientation. The city is densely built and the state offices, the public buildings and the houses of the officials are laid out around the central square. The commercial life of the town flourished around the centre, where stood the glorious churches and religious institutions. The Jewish quarter was situated at the northwestern end of the town, inside the walls. Outside them stand the windmills of Maroulas and the lazaretto (quarantine station). *The rouga maistra* (main road) connected the port to the central square, the church of Saint Mark and, through the Great Gate, to the suburbs and southern countryside. Outside the walls were also several smaller markets and the slaughterhouses close to the church of Our Lady of the Angels (*Madonna dei Angeli*), at the

beginning of the wide road that led west. Thus the Byzantine walls separated the old city from the new (the *oxoporton*), where the poorer members of the population, including refugees from Tenedos island and other Byzantine territories ravaged by the Ottoman Turks, had settled. A surprise awaited Buondelmonti when he arrived at the village of Thrapsanos: he was received by the local patrician Niccolò Corner (son of Andrea), who sat reading Dante in a garden adorned with ancient sculptures ; in the course of their conversation he proved fully informed of the contemporary political events in Florence.

Schools and teachers of Latin on Crete. The study of Greek ran parallel to the cultivation of the Latin language; it was taught to young members of the aristocracy by private teachers, house teachers and monks of the Catholic orders who had settled in Crete from the early 13th century. Especially remarkable was the educational work of the Domenican friars at the convents of Saint Peter at Candia, Saint Nicholas at Chania and the Madonna at Rethymno. The monastery of Candia had a library looking onto the sea, where once the drone of the waves made reading difficult for traveller Felix Faber. The Franciscan monks had developed a similar activity; one of them was the Cretan Petros Filarges (Pietro di Candia), future antipope Alexander V (1409-1410). Latin, as well as bilingual (Greek and Latin) manuscripts were reproduced in several copies by local scribes who knew either or both languages. They copied from manuscripts of the private or the monastic collections of the island, some of which were especially rich: such was the case of the monastery of Saint Francis (San Francesco) at



6. Map of Crete from *Liber Insularum Archipelagi* [1420] by Cristoforo Buondelmonti (from: *Τόπος και Εικόνα, Χαρακτικά ξένων περιηγητών για την Ελλάδα...*, vol. I, Olkos, 1978).

Candia: in the early 15th century the monastery possessed 290 manuscripts, consisting of works of western theology and translations of texts of Greek literature and the Fathers of the Eastern Church into Latin. The wide range of the Catholic monks' activity among Cretan society and especially its influence on the lives of the noble families emerge from contemporary texts such as wills and testaments, and the works of vernacular literature (Bergades, *Apocopos*).

Venice ruled Crete by dispatching a number of functionaries (secretaries and accountants) who supported the authorities in their work and executed their orders. There is no doubt that, in spite of their merchant, non-aristocratic origin, they had trained at the Scuola Grande di San Marco, which had been founded to serve the needs of the Cancelleria. In order to aid their finances they also gave classes or even took up more demanding activities, as in the case of notary Lorenzo de Monacis (1388-1428). During his long stay in Candia he handled a number of cases *ex officio*, or contributed to their processing.

In the first years of his career, De Monacis met three supporters of the union of the churches, Maximos Chrysovergis, Demetrios Kydonis and Manuel Kalekas, and possibly followed the flaming theological debate (*disputa*) between Iosif Vryennios and the Dominican monk Manuel Kalekas (d. 1410) on the question of the procession of the Holy Spirit, which took place in one of the churches of the city. He might also have examined the lawsuit of the woman who demanded that the poet Leonardo Dellaporta (c.1330-1419/1420) acknowledge her child's paternity. He believed that in fact the Latin language was superior to the Greek and that little profit would come from translating

Greek works into Latin. In an extensive letter addressed to de Monacis in 1416, Francesco Barbaro, the most prominent exponent of Renaissance Humanism, refuted these views with convincing arguments. In any case, during his stay in Crete, de Monacis learned sufficient Greek to read Byzantine historians in the original, although not with the ease he wished for. After his return to Venice (1421) he dedicated himself to writing a chronicle titled *De gestis, moribus et nobilitate civitatis Venetiarum*, who made him known to a wider public: besides his main source, the *Chronicle (Chronica)* of Andrea Dandolo, he sourced precious material on the events in Crete and the Byzantine territories in the 13th century (with which he deals in books IX and X) from the works of Nikitas Choniates, Georgios Acropolititis and Georgios Pachymeres, using manuscripts then in circulation in Crete and the books (Registri) of the Ducal Cancellaria of Candia, to which he had easy access. It is fairly obvious that a systematic search of the surviving archives related to the functionaries of the Cancellaria (as well as those of Rethymno, Chania and Siteia) has a lot to teach us on the people who, alongside with the Catholic monks, the members of the Diocese and representatives of the Orthodox world, worked to slowly but steadily prepare the ground for the educational and ideological orientation of Cretan society in the two following centuries. Available information seems to indicate that Cretan students at the universities of Padua and Bologna followed a somewhat languid course in their studies as very few of them made it to their final exams and received their degree. However, for several reasons this picture does not reflect the general knowledge of Latin. The universal usage of this language in pub-

lic and notary documents is sufficient indication that Latin was widely used by the urban population, who needed it for everyday transactions in the public and private spheres. A 1501 petition to the Senate of Venice includes a request of the nobles of Candia, who asked that the person who taught Greek and Latin to the functionaries of the Cancelleria, Peritio de Sanctis, be entrusted with teaching their children as well, for two hours daily, so that they would not be left illiterate. This indicates the contemporary reality, that is, the urgent need for the dissemination of knowledge of both languages in the higher levels of society. In the following decades, equipped with this knowledge the nobles supported the Renaissance movement in Crete in a variety of ways, with the generous help of a vigorous merchant class.

On the eve of the Fall of Constantinople

The decision of the Byzantine emperor John VIII Palaiologos to accept the terms of the Union of the two Churches as established in the Councils of Ferrara and Florence (1438/9), in which Georgios Gemistos (Pletho), his pupil Bessarion and Mark of Ephesus became distinguished for the depth of their philosophical thought, widened the theological differences and the ideological gap between Greek-speaking populations in Byzantine and Latin-held territories. Consequences were harsh for the internal life of Crete, where, already from the late 14th century, dogmatic confrontations had been equally frequent and intense as those occurring in Constantinople. The policy of Venice was to adopt a mild stance towards ideological differ-

ences among the population. In the field of doctrine, Venice reinforced the institution of the *protopapas* (who represented the Greek Orthodox flock before the Venetian authorities). Furthermore, the Venetians assigned public posts, including those related to the Church, to officials who came from the ranks of the aristocracy, possessed a large experience in administration and had a solid humanist and theological education; these choices were made easier by the presence of Venetian popes such as Eugene IV, born Gabriele Condulmier (1431-1447). Fantino Valaresso, the Veronese pupil of Guarino (1392-1446) was capable of distinguishing a politically attainable goal from a chimera; as Latin archbishop he worked to combat scandals and saw to the attenuation of dogmatic differences and the promotion of the union, thus strengthening the Venetian presence in Crete. At the incitation of the noble poet Marinos Falieros, who composed poems in the vernacular and of Paolo de Dotis of Padua, Valaresso wrote a treatise on the decisions of the Council of Florence, in which he had participated, engaging in a systematic refutation of the arguments presented by the opponents of the union (*Libellus de ordine generalium conciliorum et unione Florentina*). A similar stance was adopted by Filippo Parura, his successor in the Diocese (1448-1458).

In the heroic days of the siege of Constantinople, Cretans fought by the side of Constantine Palaiologos and won their freedom from Mehmed the Conqueror thanks to their extraordinary bravery. Also Cretan were the ships which fled through the flames carrying the “sad news” to the Christian world,⁴ and

4. A codex of Agarathou monastery (today in London, BL, Additional

the island of Crete received not only those who escaped the city before it was besieged by Mehmed II, but also those who survived its fall. At the time, the cardinal Isidore of Kiev was living in Candia as manager of the fund of the Latin Patriarchate in the East. He had also conducted the official rite which celebrated the reunion of the churches at the baptistry of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. In the letters he sent from Crete to Pope Nicholas V, cardinals Bessarion and Capranica, Doge Francesco Foscari and to the Commune of Florence, Isidor lamented the unprecedented disaster, the vandalisms and the loss of the city's cultural and spiritual identity. The role of Crete in the new era was defined by Constantine himself shortly before he was felled by the infidels' sword. The anonymous poet, probably a Cretan and a scholar, of the *Anakalima*, the Lament of the Fall of Constantinople, described the events with great clarity (v. 30-42):

The wretched man looked left and right
the Cretans had gone and the Genovese as well
and the Venetians fled, he was left all alone.
He spoke through burned lips and said
“You leave to save yourselves

ms 34060, f. lv, reads “In 1453, on 29th June, on a Saturday, three Cretan ships, belonging to Sgouros, Yalinas and Filomatis sailed in from Constantinople, and we were told that on May 29th, the day of Saint Theodosia, a Tuesday, on the third hour, the Agarenes, the army of the Turk Celebi Mehmed, invaded Constantinople and they said that they slew the king Constantine Palaiologos And there was much sorrow and weeping in Crete for this sad message, because nothing worse has ever happened nor shall come to pass. And may the Lord our God have mercy on us and spare us this terrible threat”.

where do you leave me
You leave me to the dogs and mouth of the beast!
Christians cut off my head
and take it, Cretans, keep it in Crete
so that the Cretans see it and take pity on me,
beat upon their chests and weep black tears
and pray for my soul, as I loved them all;
so that the dogs won't have me”.

By this symbolic act, the last emperor transfers the symbols of his power as well as the cultural treasure of Constantinople, while the doctrinal preferences which led to the unavoidable destruction become of secondary importance. The conspiracy of Sifis Vlastos and his few fellows in Rethymno in 1454 ended almost before it had begun, because, like the one of 1460, it was based on unrealistic premises; the vision of reviving a Byzantine centre far away from its ancient cradle. It had by that time become clear, at least to the inhabitants of the Cretan cities, that adherence to Venice and assumption of a common Venetian Cretan sociopolitical reality constituted in fact the only way to the prosperity of their homeland.

The role of Bessarion in the intellectual and political scene of Europe. From the mid-15th century, the humanist movement in Crete is influenced by the endeavours of Cardinal Bessarion (c. 1403-1472), former metropolitan of Nicaea and an emblematic figure of modern Greek history, in favour of his nation. After the Fall of Constantinople Bessarion worked with unrelenting passion, as few others did, to organize a Crusade in order to reconquer Constantinople, and to rescue the texts of

Greek literature. Obviously, achieving the first of these goals was well beyond his capabilities in spite of his tireless efforts and his participation in several successive diplomatic missions, as a Crusade would suppose the cooperation of the local rulers of Italy and Western Europe, who would have to set aside their personal interests. He was more likely to succeed in his second goal, as



7. Cardinal Bessarion: N. Reusner, *Icones sive Imagines viuae...*



8. Francesco Filelfo: N. Reusner, *Icones sive Imagines viuae...*

this depended to a greater extent on his personal effort. He worked systematically to set up a dense network of agents in the Greek-speaking territories of the East and Southern Italy, in order to find and acquire Greek manuscripts, by buying them or having them copied. In Crete, as titular Latin Patriarch of Constantinople (from 1458), Bessarion disposed of funds and people devoted to the cause of the church reunion. Thus, he was aided by the Venetian noble Lauro Quirini (1420-1479) and the “king of the paupers” Michail Apostolis (1422-1480), who was by now a refugee from Constantinople.

Quirini had studied in Venice and Padua. In 1451 he married Pelegrina, daughter of Marinos Falieros, and settled in Candia, where he traded in textiles and manuscripts for the rest of his life. He was one of the best-known Venetian humanists of his generation, and wrote several books on philosophical and political issues. He corresponded with Francesco Barbaro (for whom he wrote a laudatory speech “Oratio in laudem Francisci Barbari”), Maffeo Valleresso, chronicler Pietro Dolfino (1427-1506), who had served as Counsellor at Candia in 1471-1473, Greek scholar and manuscript collector Jacopo Foscarini (1415-1457), and humanists Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457), Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481), Bernardo Bembo (1433-1519) and others. For twenty years, as administrator of Bessarion’s income in Crete, Quirini knew and



9. Pope Nicholas V, founder of the Vatican library. Copper engraving.

worked with the pro-unionists of Candia such as priest Ioannis Plousiadinou, Georgios Trivizios and others, and with the “pauper” Apostolis, who protested to their common patron that Quirini was late paying him his allowance. In a letter written in late 1464 he confronts Quirini himself without roundabouts: “My son came to you to request what is due to us and came back empty-handed, so I wish to know the reason for this, even more so since you know how poor we are. Or perhaps since your purse is full of gold coins, you believe that mine is as well, exactly

as those whose bellies are full do not believe those who are hungry and accuse them”. In his letters to popes Nicholas V (1447-1455) and Pius II (1458-1464), and cardinals Ludovico Trevisan and Paolo Morosini Quirini conveys the Cretans dismay before the growing Ottoman danger. At the same time, the search for manuscripts and antiquities in Crete boosted his reading and collecting activity and ensured him a network of contacts in Venice, Florence and Rome.

Michail Apostolis. After a long time wandering in Rome and the courts of the rulers of Italy, Apostolis developed a similar activity in Crete. He worked intensively from the region of Candia (Gortyn) to find and copy Greek manuscripts and asked for the help of the pro-unionists of the town. He faced a myriad of difficulties in his dealings with “the bad and foul owners of the books”, whom he describes in detail in his letters to Bessarion, and at the same time received the attacks and mockery of his Orthodox fellow citizens for his beliefs: “look, the devil has taken him too; behold the shame, behold the scum”.⁵ He also travelled to Cyprus and Constantinople to pursue the same goals. In his letters, he urged Bessarion to create an endowment which would secure a living to his fellow priests, as no Orthodox requested their services, and which would ensure him a paid position of teaching Greek; thus he would both be able to teach the language (“give the Greek speech to Crete or let the language re-

5. Plousiadinis also describes the intensity of inflamed passions: “In the taverns, in the streets, in the markets, by everyone and everywhere, the pro-unionist priests are reviled and their honour is slandered and defamed”.

main barbaric because of you” and put together a team of experienced scribes and “philologists” who would copy and publish critical editions of the texts. This plan went well beyond the needs of Apostolis’s maintenance and met with the ambitious project Bessarion was working on in Italy. This is why it did not take long for it to materialize (bule of 1466). Bessarion supported a similar circle of erudite Greek and Italian scholars in Rome, including well-known copyists, several of whom were Cretans devoted to the project of enriching Bessarion’s library. When Michail Apostolis was named a beneficiary of the endowment, he was able to start his school (which he called “museum”, “school” and “pandidacterion”, without it ever taking the form of a public school). Thus the pro-unionists of Crete improved their knowledge of Greek. Apostolis, together with his students (Michail Lygizos, Nikolaos Kavadatos, Emmanuel Adramytenos, his son Aristoboulos and others) and the other priests who aided him and also received the help of the endowment (Georgios Alexandrou, later bishop of Arcadia, Georgios Grigoropoulos, the multifaceted Ioannis Plousiadinis, later Joseph bishop of Methoni, Michail Souliardos, Kosmas Trapezuntius etc.), coordinated the copying of tenths of manuscripts, thus retrieving and reproducing whatever could be rescued from time their compatriots’ indifference and the onslaught of Ottoman expansion. The Ottoman-Venetian War (1463-1478) and especially the seizure of Chalcis by Mehmed the Conqueror in 1470 reminded the Christians of the Fall of Constantinople and pained the Italians even more than the Fall of Constantinople itself.

Apostolis dedicated a collection of 133 religious epigrams to one of his students, Adramytenos, who was preparing to leave

for Italy. In Mirandola, where he lived from 1482 to 1485, he taught Greek to Aldus Manutius and greatly influenced Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, whose close friend was the Jewish Elia del Medigo of Candia (1458-1493).

In 1467, a year after the foundation of the pro-unionist school, the Diocese of Crete founded a Seminar to teach Latin and Theology to the young students destined to become priests of that same Diocese.

After the death of Bessarion (18 November 1474), his successors, the titular Latin Patriarchs of Constantinople Pietro Riario (1472-1474) and Girolamo Lando (1474-1496) delayed the paying of the money established by the trust, as they questioned the sincerity of the beneficiaries' faith and the import of their contribution to the cause of the reunion of the churches. By 1480 several of the beneficiaries had died, including Apostolis, while others had left for other destinations. However, the success of their endeavour becomes obvious from the important production of Cretan manuscripts during that period, manuscripts which can be distinguished by the type of texts they include and their binding. In addition, the pupils of Apostolis and his son Aristoboulos, who aided his father in his teaching, formed a new generation of copyists, early printers and "philologists" with a solid knowledge of Greek.

These initiatives were supported by members of the Catholic church, while the teaching of Greek in Crete continued without obstacles during the second half of the 15th century. Schools continued to attract the interest of the locals as well as of several Italians, despite the fact that Greek studies had become popular in Italy and their level had improved. The example of Lorenzo

Camerti of Camerino is telling; nicknamed “the Cretan”, Camerti spent seven years studying Greek in Crete, before the Venetian Senate elected him in the chair of Greek literature in Padua, in 1503, choosing him over the other candidate, Marcus Musurus.

Cretan codex copyists in Venice

Several of the Cretans who moved to Venice, Rome, Milan and Florence and other cities of Italy and were involved in the spreading of Greek by copying codices and teaching, had in fact received their education in the circle of the pro-unionists of Candia or under its direct influence, while the youngest among them had studied Greek at the school created by the endowment’s beneficiaries.

Several Cretan scholars and codex writers ventured into Italy, starting their journey from the metropolis of Venice. Some of them had to cross the Alps in order to reach Paris, Alcalá de Henares or London in order to find commissioners and work opportunities. The field of their activities had impressively expanded in the meanwhile, thanks to the institutional and material infrastructures which had been established in Italy, the brilliant teaching and philological achievements of the Italian humanists and their teachers from the Orthodox and Latin East, and printing, the art of typography (*ars artificialiter scribendi*) which had dynamically entered the scene, offering the possibility of mechanical reproduction of hundreds of identical and affordable copies. In 1497, Georgios Grigoropoulos wrote to his son Ioannis, then living in Venice: “Dear son, if I am to gain any

profit from writing [copying] there as well, write to me so that I can participate, as noone here wants written texts”. He thus testifies to the shortage of commissions of texts of Greek and Christian (Pateric) literature, as Italy had become the epicentre of Greek books production. The surviving manuscripts of Late Byzantine and early Cretan vernacular literature as well as the correspondence of the family of priest Georgios Grigoropoulos show that manuscripts were intensively copied in those years (the availability of printed books remained limited in Crete). The usual commissioners were both priests and lay men and sometimes women (such as *kyra* Leni, mentioned in Marcianus gr. IX, 17 (1247)), who needed the texts to further their education, and for religious practices.

In the meanwhile, the first printed Greek book saw the light in Milan on 30 January 1476. The *Epitome of the Eight Parts of Speech...* was written by Constantine Lascaris and edited by Demetrios Damilas, pupil of Apostolis. Eight years later, in Florence, he printed the *Complete works of Homer (by the labour and skill of Demetrios the Cretan, of Milan,...)* and copied codices of great philological and artistic value for the patron of that town. Another pupil of Apostolis, Nikolaos Kavados, the *protothytes* of Chania, better known as Laonicus of Crete, and Alexander “from Candia of Crete, son of the wisest and most erudite master Georgios the priest, son of Alexandros”, founded the first Greek press in Venice and in 1486 printed Homer’s *Batrachomyomachia* (22 April) and the *Psalter* (15 November); *folio* 22V of the edition includes “heroic and political [decapentasyllabic] verses of the teacher master Michail Apostolis”.

These inaugural steps evolved into an impressive itinerary

ΕΠΙΤΟΜΗ ΤΩΝ ΟΚΤΩ ΤΟΥ ΛΟΓΟΥ
ΜΕΡΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΑΛΛΩΝ ΤΙΝΩΝ ΑΝΑΓΚΑΙ-
ΩΝ ΣΥΝΤΕΘΕΙΣΑ ΠΑΡΑ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙ-
ΝΟΥ ΛΑΣΚΑΡΕΩΣ ΤΟΥ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΟΥ.

Περὶ διαρίσεως τῶν γραμμάτων

βιβλίον πρῶτον.



Γράμμα ἐστὶ μέρος ελάχιστον φωνῆς ἀδι-
αίρετον. Ἔσσι δὲ γράμματα ἑκοστίεσσα-
ρα. Τούτων φωνήεντα μὲν ἑπτὰ. α ε
η ἰ ο μικρὸν υ φιλόν καὶ ω μέγα.

Σύμφωνα δὲ δεκάεπτὰ. β γ δ ζ.
θ κ λ μ ν ξ π ρ σ τ φ χ ψ. Τῶν
δὲ φωνήεντων μακρὰ μὲν δύο η καὶ ω μέγα.
Βραχέα δὲ δύο. ε φιλόν καὶ ο μικρὸν. Δίχρονα
δὲ τρία. α ἰ υ. Ἐξῶν δίφθογοι κυρίως μὲν ἑξ
γίνονται. αι αυ αι̅ α̅ ου̅. Καταχρηστικῶς
δὲ τέσσαρες. α η ω υ. Τῶν δὲ συμφώνων ἕ
μίφωνα μὲν ὀκτώ. ζ ξ ψ λ μ ν ρ σ. Ὡν
διπλᾶ μὲν τρία. ζ ξ ψ. Ἀμετάβολα δὲ τέσσα-
ρα. λ κ ν ρ. Ἄφωνα δὲ ἑννέα. β γ δ κ π
τ θ φ χ. Ὡν φιλὰ μὲν τρία. κ π τ. Δασεῖ
α δὲ τρία. θ φ χ. Μέσα δὲ τρία. β γ δ.
Ἐκτῶν διηρημένων δὲ τῶνδε γραμμάτων ἀσυ-
λλαβαὶ γίνονται. οἶον τε. ὄθεν αλέξας. οἶον πῆ-
τρος. ἐξῶν ὀλόγος οἶον ὄπῆτρος ἀμαγνώσκη.



10. Title page of the Epitome of the Eight Parts of Speech by Constantine Las-
caris, Milan, Demetrios Damilas for D. Paravisino, 1476.

which led to the flourishing of Greek studies at the end of the 15th century. Several chairs of Greek existed at the same time throughout Italy; more importantly a number of publishing houses focused mainly on the printing of ancient Greek and Latin authors. This was a very significant contribution to the intellectual activities of Europe in general, with Aldus Manutius as main exponent of that current. In the twenty years spanned by his editorial project (1495-1515) he produced tenths of Greek editions under his name and the emblem of his press, the anchor and the dolphin, most of which were the first printed versions of those works: Aristophanes, Demosthenes, Euripides, Herodotus, Hesychius, Theocritus, Thucydides, Plato, Sophocles, Philostratus and others. Manutius was of course a Renaissance humanist himself, and a teacher of classical languages in several rulers' courts in Italy. However, for his publications he chose to lean on renowned philologists, among which several Cretans stand out. Both in the first (1495-1505) and the second (1509-1515) period of the Aldine press, the heaviest weight of finding manuscripts, critically editing and designing the editions of Greek poets and authors fell on the shoulders of his closest collaborators, who undertook the task with zeal and brought it to term in the most admirable manner. All of them were from Crete, former pupils and friends of Aristoboulos Apostolis; Apostolis played the most important part in the preparation of *Galeomyomachia* by Theodore Prodromos and a collection of grammar treatises titled *Thesaurus Cornucopiae et horti Adonidis* (1496): the most valuable and cherished coworkers of Aldus were Ioannis Grigoropoulos and Marcus Musurus. Aldus gained great experience and knowledge on the casting and laying out

of Greek typeface by closely observing the printed production of the press of the Cretans Zacharias Kalliergis and Nikolaos Vlastos, with whom he maintained contact and a cordial commercial relationship. In addition, when the bank crisis caused by the Ottoman-Venetian War of 1499-1599 forced Kalliergis and Vlastos to close down their business, Aldus hired their specialized assistants. Everything indicates that the quality of the Aldine editions is closely linked to the high degree of maturity of Renaissance humanism in Crete in the second half of the 15th century.

Bessarion's donation

A century after Petrarch had expressed his intention of donating his manuscripts to the Commune Venetiarum, on 13 May 1468, the cardinal Bessarion gave his uniquely rich and valuable collection of Greek and Latin manuscripts to the Basilica of Saint Mark under the condition that they be kept in a specially designated space (a library) and at the disposal of all those who studied the Greek and Roman intellectual legacy. Thus, the precious fruit of the strenuous labour of Bessarion and his partners in Italy and the Greek and Roman East in order to rescue the works of Greek literature would be preserved in the safest manner.

Venice was a prosperous city with public and private schools and enviable libraries housed in monastic institutions such as San Giovanni e Paolo and San Giorgio Maggiore, in addition to the book collections established by nobles, functionaries of the administration, teachers and scholars. The new art of printing

had found the ideal circumstances to show its potential for the expansion of knowledge and the circulation of ideas. In addition, the Greek Orthodox presence was continually boosted by the arrival of new refugees fleeing the upheaval in the Eastern Mediterranean, thus creating new foundations and perspectives, such as the establishment of the brotherhood of Saint Nicholas in 1498. Thus the politically and ideologically charged act of Bessarion turned out to be ingenious. In the conscience of the thinker who was able to show the common ground and subtle similarities of the thinking of Plato and Aristotle to his contemporaries, the political, ideological and emotional bonds between the Greek-speaking world and Venice were so clear that he did not hesitate to fulfill what Petrarch finally had not. He was not motivated by the honours and distinctions he had received from the the Most Serene Republic. His thought was most influenced by an experienced truth: to the Greek refugees, Venice was a extension of their tortured homeland, a city that seemed another Byzantium, as he clearly states in the act of the donation of his manuscripts to Doge Cristoforo Moro.⁶ This was where several refugees from Byzantium had finally settled, after wandering about Italy, following the example of “the most fair and wise lady Anna, daughter of the most respectable and illustrious Loukas Notaras, formerly Megas Doux of Constantinople”. As

6. The extract reads thus: “Cum enim in civitatem ventram omnes fere totius orbis nationes maxime confluant, tum praecipue graeci, qui e suis provinciis navigo venientes Venetiis primum descendunt, es propterea vobiscum necessitudine devincti, ut ad vestram appulsi urbem, quasi alterum Byzantium introire videatur”.



11. Cardinal Bessarion's letter to Doge Cristoforo Moro and the Senate of Venice, by which he announces the donation of his library (Marcian Library, Cod. Lat. XIV, May 1468).

is well known, the *Etymologikon Mega kat'alphaviton* (Great Etymological Dictionary) was printed at the incitation of Anna Notara on 8 July 1499. This monumental edition, the most exquisite specimen of early Greek printing, was the fruit of the harmonious collaboration of several Cretans after a seven-year preparation, thanks to the financial means provided by Nikolaos Vlastos, the philological prowess of Marcus Musurus and Ioannis Grigoropoulos and the knowledge and skill of Zacharias Kalliergis and his fellow printers. This team immortalized its name in one of the most important creations of Greek books of the Renaissance. The introductory note, composed by Musurus in classical Greek, praises the contributors to the edition, who admirably overcame the technical difficulties of the project, and exalts the island of Crete, which by the force of its spirit and culture had been serving humanity from the time of god Zeus, who was born on that island. The secrets of the craft of designing and casting the typeface were taught to them by the goddess Athena, on the orders of her father. The lines of Musurus express his sincere satisfaction for the human potential generated by the land of Crete in the past and present. And indeed, as we have seen, in the previous decades Crete had become another garden of Eden, where Greek studies had found the conditions to flourish and the opportunity to spread to the West.

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