Enemy at the Gates: The Ottoman Peril in the Early Correspondence (1345-1373) of Demetrius Cydones

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Abstract: This article examines the Turkish threat to Byzantium in the mid-14th century, as seen through the eyes of a critical Byzantine intellectual and political figure of his time, Demetrios Cydones. Cydones was a consistent supporter of a resistance policy against the Ottoman Turks and strongly opposed any rapprochement. Having served three emperors from the 1340s to the 1380s, he sought a military alliance with western rulers through the Roman Catholic Church's mediation. Cydones' correspondence, which contains over 450 letters covering the years 1345-1391, is an essential source for the histories of Byzantium and the Ottoman Emirate in the second half of the 14th century. This article examines the Turkish threat to Byzantium through his letters. The letters contain accounts of Byzantine alliances with the Turks, the Ottoman conquest of Gallipoli, the first Turkish attacks on Constantinople and Thessaloniki, and the battle of Maritsa.

Keywords: Balkans, Byzantium, Ottoman Emirate, Anatolia, 14th Century

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Introduction

The Thessalonian scholar and statesman Demetrios Cydones was a consistent supporter of a resistance policy against the Ottoman Turks and vehemently opposed to any rapprochement with them. He sought a military alliance with western rulers through the mediation of the Roman Catholic Church, to whose faith he converted in 1357. Cydones' correspondence, which contains over 450 letters covering the years 1345-1391, is an important source for the history of Byzantium in the second half of the 14th century. This article examines the Turkish threat to Byzantium in his letters, which contain accounts of Byzantine alliances with the Turks, the Ottoman conquest of Gallipoli, the first Turkish attacks on Constantinople and Thessaloniki, and the battle of Maritsa.

Cydones served three emperors for an extraordinary length of time. First, as mesazon to John VI from 1347 to 1354. He then served John V, for some thirty years, uninterruptedly from about 1355 to 1372, and with some discontinuity through the 1370s and mid-1380s, extending into the reign of Manuel II (Kianka, 1995:101). As Kianka stated, his position is vital because of the dwindling empire's issues during his long years at the centre of Byzantine political and intellectual affairs. Politically, internal strife and economic dependency weakened Byzantium's ability to defend itself against the Ottoman Turks; intellectually, Byzantium was driven to opposed parties because of the two significant controversies of Cydones' age: the theology of Gregory Palamas, and the relations with the papacy and the Latin theology (Setton, 1956: 56; Kianka, 1995: 101-102). Concerning these problems, Cydones sided and acted as an anti-Turkish, anti-Palamite and pro-Latin politician and intellectual.

Demetrios Cydones had a vital role in the introduction of western scholastic methods into Byzantine theology. After the death of Barlaam and Acindynus, the opposition against Palamas, the defender of hesychasm, was taken up by Cydones, though he was a Cantacuzenist. The underlying issue was the long-standing distrust between intellectuals and mystics. When the Byzantine Church decided for the mystics, some scholars like Barlaam and Cydones concluded that it had no place for them and joined the western church. Defending the union with the western church would have merely antagonised the Turks and many of the eastern faithful. The unionist passion required Byzantine independence from the Turks, which was supposed to be preserve by securing a

crusade (Treadgold, 1997: 827).

When Cydones translated the *Improbatio Alcorani* (Refutation of the Koran) of the Florentine Dominican Riccoldo da Monte Croce into Greek between 1354 and 1360, he provided Byzantine polemicists with a new arsenal of details and arguments. The Apologies of John VI Cantacuzen against Islam, especially his four orations against Muhammed (*Contra Sectam Mahometicam*), were leaning upon the *Libellum contra Legem Sarracenorum* of Riccoldo, also translated from Latin to Greek by Cydones, who was a close friend and collaborator of Cantacuzen. Manuel II Palaeologos was partially influenced by Cantacuzen's treatise and thereby indirectly by Riccoldo (Todt, 1991: 283-305; Vryonis, 1971: 424).

Not only as a scholar but also as an influential politician, Cydones tried his best to stop the infidels, the Muslim Ottoman Turks. If one of the main motivations in his consistent unionist policy was his intellectual Thomism, the other was the Turkish peril. It is interesting to learn that his father, who held office for Cantacuzen, had undertaken a successful embassy in the first months of 1341 to the Golden Horde (*Kipçak*s) in the sub-Volga area. He succeeded in diverting the Mongols from Byzantine territory to the Bulgarian one (Kydones, 1981-82: 6; Todt, 1991: 285). Cydones' destiny seems to be bound to his father's; he was obliged to take measures against the overrunning Turks his whole life.

Cydones' correspondence, which contains over 450 letters covering the years 1345-1391, is an important source for the history of Byzantium in the second half of the 14th century. G. Camelli edited and translated fifty letters (*Démétrius Cydonés Correspondance*, Paris, 1930), before R.-J. Loenertz published all of them (*Démétrius Cydonés Correspondance* I-II, Vatican 1956-60). The last edition of the letters was published in German by Franz Tinnefeld, who translated 138 of these letters with a brilliant commentary in two volumes covering the years 1341-1373 (*Briefe*, Demetrius Kydones, Stuttgart 1982). In this article, I use the Tinnefeld edition chronologically to examine the Turkish threat to Byzantium in the mid-14th century, as seen through the eyes of an influential intellectual and political figure of his time.[1]

Political factions within Byzantium employed the Ottoman Turks as mercenaries in

1 As the source is still not translated into English, all citations from the letters of Cydones are my own translations from German. I would like to thank my dear professor Nevra Necipoğlu for her encouragement and corrections.

their struggles for imperial supremacy. In the 1340s, Cantacuzen's request for Ottoman assistance in a revolt against the emperor provided the excuse for an Ottoman invasion of Thrace on the northern frontier of the Byzantine Empire. The conquest of Thrace gave the Ottomans a foothold in Europe from where they could launch future campaigns into the Balkans and especially Greek territories, and make Adrianople the capital city in 1366. Over the next century, the Ottomans established an empire that encompassed Anatolia and increasingly more significant sections of Byzantine territories in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor. Ottoman expansion into Europe was well underway in the late fourteenth century. Gallipoli was conquered in 1354, and at the Battle of Nicopolis in 1394, the Ottomans crushed a vast crusading army, taking many Christian European noble commanders hostage.

Turkish alliances with John VI Cantacuzen

By early 1345, with the help of troops sent by the Ottoman Emir Orhan, John VI Cantacuzen succeeded in taking all the Thracian cities in the Black sea direction back from Stefan Dušan, who broke his treaty with him and declared war in 1343. In a letter written in the same year, Cydones praises Cantacuzen's cooperation with the Turks. The inhabitants of the Thracian cities are now sleeping in peace "*because their former enemies* [the Turks], *whom the emperor had tamed through armed force and smart diplomacy, are now the watchman of them.*" (Kydones, 1981: 132-133). This sentence chronologically constitutes his first comment on Turks in his letters.

Cydones, one year later, pictures in a non-addressed diary-like letter the terror of "barbars", meaning Turks, in a dramatical way. In a little town of Thrace, he "*saw a man without legs, escaping from hunger and asking him about the possibility of encountering the barbars on his way… A woman was scraping her cheeks, hitting her breast and smashing her head against walls. She was screaming to her man, whom the barbars abducted into slavery*" (Kydones, 1981: 152).

But his picture of the plague of 1347/48 in Constantinople is more affectible. It gives us precise knowledge of the City's conditions, of a time when Byzantium began to be threatened by Turkish attacks:

> The City is being emptied from day to day. The quantity of the graves demonstrates that the biggest City tense a small town. Every day we are occu-

> pied with carrying friends to the grave. And the most grievous thing is the people's avoiding one another to not come in contact with the illness. So even the fathers do not bury their children and grant them the last honour. The remaining physicians do not know anymore what to chatter after the dead; they veil themselves and write their own testaments. The good Georgios [Philosophos] departed without saying anything; it seems that he considers his medical art as a weak medicine (Kydones, 1981: 179).

After Cantacuzen had taken Adrianople back from John V in the summer of 1352, during the civil war, Cydones wrote*: "..so trambles the pride of the Barbar, who thinks that by his participating in the fight, he could transform cowardice* [of the adherents of John V] *to strength*" (Kydones, 1981: 205). The barbar here is Suleiman, son of Orhan and leader of the Turkish allies, whom John V let come from the fortress of Tzimpe to Thrace. They were left for the defence of Adrianople, when John V went to Cernomen and Didymoteichon to encounter Cantacuzen, but Cantacuzen overcame the indigenous garrison, they surrendered and went over to him (Kydones, 1981: 207).

In October 1352, Cydones praised another victory of the Turkish allies of Cantacuzen over the Bulgarian, Serbian and Latin troups of John V at Maritsa, near Didymoteichon: "*Who carried the Persian* [Suleiman] *against them to the battlefield?*" (Kydones, 1981: 224). Cydones does not doubt that it was God, who helped Cantacuzen. Naturally, Cydones was not able at that time to see the other side of the coin: the Turks acquired a permanent foothold in Europe after this battle of Maritsa. Here he describes the Turks in the Maritsa battle: "…*in the great battle, when a cloud of Persians overcast the Triballians…*". In the same letter, he criticises the leaders of the civil war parties and the inner discord of the Byzantines:

> The politically responsible men of us have the same effect of earthquakes and epidemics, and everyone wishes to see his neighbour's end. Treaties are made just with adversaries, constant wars are held against their own landsman, and every brave is ready to take up arms against his own relatives (Kydones, 1981: 228).

After the Fall of Gallipoli

Contrary to the peaceful policy of Cantacuzen against the Turks, John V and the younger councillors were determined to have recourse to arms, and in Dennis' words "the

war party carried the day" (Dennis, 1960: 30). Cydones recalls the disastrous consequence of the occupation of Gallipoli by the Turks in 1354 in his discourse De non reddenda Callipoli: "*When at the time of the general confusion caused by the earthquake in the Hellespont and the Propontis, that place fell into the power of the barbarians, they brought under subjection the entire Chersonese and seized cities in Thrace and a year had not gone when they imposed a tribute on us and put our suburbs to sack*." So, a year after the capture of Gallipoli, Constantinople was paying its first tribute to the Ottomans (Dennis, 1960: 30-31).

Cydones mentions a letter of Georgios Synadenos Astras, the governor of Ainos, to the emperor, demanding a horse as compensation for his horse, which he lent to a neighbour and afterwards lost both in a sudden attack of the Turks to Ainos (Kydones, 1981: 247).[2] Such shreds of evidence show the density of Turkish aggression in Thrace after the capture of Gallipoli.

In a letter written in spring 1358 to Konstantinos Asanes, who participated in the negotiations of John V with Orhan in Arkla (Kızkulesi) over the release of his son Halil, who had fallen into the hands of Greeks, he commends him to "*reconcile Asia with Europe through mutual exchange of gifts*." (Kydones, 1981: 267). Tinnefeld thinks that Cydones shows comprehension for the pro-Turkish policy of John V, who in this case did not differ from Cantacuzen (Kydones, 1981: 119).

First Turkish Attacks on Constantinople

According to Ševčenko, the Turks unexpectedly overran the region of Constantinople for the first time early in 1337. In 1343, because of Turkish attacks at harvest time and the interruption of the food supply from the Black sea coast, famine spread in Constantinople and Thracian cities, and in 1346 the fields were not tilled on account of raids by the enemies. Cities were deserted, economic life came to a standstill, the poor were unemployed, and sources of revenue thus dried up (Ševčenko, 1981: 174).

The first evidence of Cydones concerning Turkish attacks on the City comes just in 1359. "During the first Turkish incursions into Constantinople in 1359", as Tinnefeld

2 Astras, who governed after Ainos Lemnos and Thessaloniki and died in the summer of 1365 from plague, is praised by Cydones in another letter as *"the best man after the emperor"* and for his successful military undertakings against the Turks. See, Kydones, 1981: 251.

notes, Cydones wrote, in a letter to Astras, that the City is like a prison to him, his soul suffers pains, and he does not want to wait there for his enslavement:

> Do you demand from me to cry as you are laughing, and as you are protecting yourself from the barbars with so much water around you, that I wait for the time they enslave us?...Do not blame them, who decide to flee (Kydones, 1981: 270-271).

It seems that he is justifying his plans to leave the City and possibly travel to the West. But he himself blames the grand primikerios Phakrases, who fled from the City because of the Turkish threat. With a critical and cynical tone, he wishes him an enjoyable life, liberated from the Turks, a life that Cydones has refused for himself (Kydones, 1981: 430).

Even in the second half of the 14th century there were people maintaining that Constantinople, being the New Rome, was at the height of its development. Cydones, however, in Ševčenko›s words, puts this argument into the mouths of his adversaries. The City was in a state of decline. It was the Turks who ruled and collected revenue. The Byzantines were few, and their lower classes were exploited, Islam was making inroads into the Christian ranks. "*What is so good about our state"*, Cydones asked," *if in reality, our so-called subjects work for the Turk and our emperors serve him and live by his command?"* (Ševčenko, 1981: 172-73). According to another letter to Astras, the Turkish peril seems to sharpen from day to day because Cydones expresses his guess that many friends will flee from the barbars and choose the island of Lemnos, where Astras lives, as a second home (Kydones, 1981: 275).

In a letter to John Laskaris Kalopheros, Cydones mentions to have spoken to the emperor in favour of him: *"It is an arch-shame for the imperium and the state of the Romans, when senators are obliged to seek protection by barbars from being arrested, additionally by insignificant ones* [barbars], *for whom this would be a feast if we fail anyhow"* (Kydones, 1981: 332). Kalopheros was an ex-official of the emperor who took refuge presumably in one of the smaller Turkish emirates on the Anatolian coast. Kalopheros' failure, as Tinnefeld considers, might have been his marriage affair with Maria Cantacuzen, daughter of Matthaios, a serious adversary of John V, or his exaggerated wealth could have angered the emperor (Kydones, 1981: 334).

Turkish Attacks on Thessalonica in 1365

Tinnefeld comments on a letter written to Neilos Kabasilas, archbishop of Thessalonica between 1360-62, that after Neilos died, the newly ordained archbishop Antonios could not come from his contemporary seat in Caesareia and take his new seat in Thessalonica because of the constant hostile threat of the Turks (Kydones, 1981:260).

In the summer of 1365, the emperor John V was invited to Thessalonica for two reasons: the distressed condition of the city and the death of his mother Anna of Savoy. But the emperor was hindered from going there because he was undertaking a sea enterprise against the Turks who threatened Constantinople. Cydones advised the receiver of his letter in Thessalonica to think about the simultaneously distressed situation of the City's inhabitants and "not to take a big ship from the steersman and set him into a boat",

> because if the ship sinks, it's nonsense to sorrow for the other. As the big City is now under storms, even prayers for the impossible seem meaningless. The envoys will also report to you how the emperor could not even find time for honouring his mother with tears but buried his pain in his soul; he thought that it is the time for others to mourn, himself went to the board of his fleet and explained that the hour required just resoluteness and endurance. Might he do what he started so resolutely; might the barbars who drive everything forth, flee from him themselves; might the City receive his return with wreaths of victory... If God breaks the haughtiness of the barbars to pieces, the emperor will come himself also to you and hear the cry of the poor (Kydones, 1981: 369-70).

Cydones praises Demetrios Palailogos, the grand domestikos of Lemnos, for his presence in the threatened Thessalonica, which was an important moral help for the Despot Manuel in autumn 1371;

> in a time, when one needs men, who in insight and noble character fall not behind Themistokles, the legendary fighter against the Persians, and set themselves against the assault of the godless and their forces, whose increase in number because of our misfortune (Kydones, 1981: 474).

He further warns Demetrios about the citizens of his native town Thessalonica:

> Beware of the citizens of our city who are slaves born and bred in the house, who see their small Galikos more meaningful than Ister [Danube] and Tigris, and compare their wallring with the frontiers of Phasis and Gadeira, as if one can not glorify the native town without lying (Kydones, 1981: 474).

The battle of Černomen in 1371 widely opened the gates of Macedonia to the Ottomans, many towns like Serres fell into their hands. And Thessalonica was also menaced by Evrenos and Lala Şahin, the warlords of Černomen. John V ordered Phakrases to act as governor of Thessalonica, because Despot Manuel was in Venice. The city suffered under strained relations between the mighty and the poor. Cydones advised him in a letter, how to soften the spans:

> I heard about the host in front of the gates, about the leader of the barbars, about the booty [flocks and herds] which they carried off, and about them, who could just look upon from the walls crying. For we can not hope for an end of either the plunderings nor the impropriety inflicted upon us, to whom would it not be an occasion to cry, as if the city was already fallen? Add to this that the city not only suffers harm from the enemies, but expects the worse from her own citizens. Because everywhere, a siege has to meet an inner discord within the tow-rope, and the impotence to ward off the enemies lets the citizens fly at one another. In such times, you can not find any city seeming to save its reason (Kydones, 1981: 515).

Journey to Italy with John V

One year before, in the summer of 1364, Cydones had warned Simon Atumanus, and a Greek prelate of Catholic faith, then in the West, who was just appointed as Bishop of Cassano, that the City would fall if no western relief action was undertaken within a year. The facts spoke for themselves. After the fall of the City, the Golden Horde and the whole Asia Minor would be subdued by the Ottomans, and all these masses would move against Europe. If the Latins did not want to fight at Constantinople now, they would soon have to set up their defence lines in Italy and on the Rhine (Ševčenko, 1981: 186). Cydones' words were justified in the long run. Cydones had pleaded earlier for

negotiations with the pope, but even he himself became more and more doubtful as to whether this will lead to any success.

As Setton did mention, always in the correspondence of Cydones is the hope expressed that the papacy will aid the belaboured Byzantine against the Turks. France was the traditional home of the Crusade, and although the French intrigued him, Cydones despaired of getting help from them. If God and the papacy would only turn the resources now being squandered in the West to a useful purpose, the Greeks would be saved from impending doom in Turkish hands (Setton, 1956: 55).

From another letter to him, we learn that Simon Atumanos had advised the emperor to take as much money as possible with him to the trip to Italy; without money he could not get his desired aims. Cydones replied to Atumanos in the winter of 1367/68:

> Look not only how much they need to have, but also how much we could afford at all. Might they even not like to see sheared sheep; one should consider that the damned Turks have nothing left over from the wool and that they [sheared sheeps=Byzantines] earlier had to contribute their cognates.[3] But if they [Latins] want to take something from them who have nothing, then just commend us to beware of them and take their promises as a rumour. For, how should one believe in their promises if they do not want to leave us what we just possess, but take this too from us? (Kydones, 1981: 405).
>
> It is evident that, despite his pro-Latin feelings and his being a convert, Cydones is able to criticise the papacy's policy when considering Byzantine benefits.

In 1369, John V took Cydones in his convoy to Italy, in an attempt to obtain military aid and financial help from the western powers. Cydones had already become a convert to the Roman Church some time before 1357 (Todt, 1992: 859-862), and it was probably under his influence that John V made his personal submission to the Pope during his visit to Rome. The hope was that the imperial conversion would induce the Pope to organise an expedition against the menacing Turks, but nothing came out of it (Runciman, 1970: 10).

3 The Byzantines considered themselves even in the 14th century as cognates of the Romans.

Cydones reported in a letter written from Italy, in Autumn 1370, to his friend Konstantinos Asanes in Mistra the disagreeable occurrences in Ancona and Venice where he went with John V to hold debates on the Union and arrange help against the Turks: They are in destitution; the accompanying officials want their loans, and they want back home, they would take it as a gain to go into destruction with their own people, they are ready to ruin with their fatherland, to fall into the hands of the Turks, if they could just return home (Kydones, 1981: 420).

In his last letter written to his brother Prochorus, he complains that he could not get any profit from this journey:

> We have received nothing here for what we were appointed. The Romans reproach us with our erroneous views in theological matters and our innovations in the ecclesiastical field and religious praxis, and they call the wantonness of the barbars a punishment for it. This makes it difficult for me to stay and also bitter to return home (Kydones, 1981: 413).
>
> The emperor undersigned there a bilingual creed - the original Latin text was translated to Greek by the *cancellarius imperii* Cydones - accepting unconditionally in all main controversial points the Roman doctrine (Kydones, 1981: 423).

Cydones returned from Italy to Constantinople, whereas the emperor sailed to Lemnos, from where he came just at the end of October 1371. In the summer of 1371, he wrote a letter to the grand domestikos of Lemnos, Demetrios Palailogos, requesting his intercession that the emperor return immediately to the oppressed City. Cydones was disturbed because of the threatened position of the City and therefore wished the emperor's prompt return. He described the situation there and threatened the grand domestikos for being responsible if Constantinople would fall into Turkish hands: *"The big City is now just a name* [in contrast to reality], *and it is indifferent to the emperor's advisers if he has to perform slavery service.*" He continues with an impressive description of Constantinople:

> She is from ancient times on the seat of emperors, she preserved the people their name [b ʊ3xantiou], she is the most beautiful city of the cities under the sun and will be an ornament of her owner, if she would be obtained, but an everlasting shame for those who are not even ready to undergo perils

> for such a beautiful holding... The emperor should guide the City, which he adorns with his presence, but leaves her to the misery of widowhood behind his absence and whilst delivers her to transgressors (Kydones, 1981: 424).

After the Battle of Maritsa in 1371

After his return to the City, while John V was still in Lemnos, an influential group with the co-emperor Andronikos IV on their side, wanted to deliver Gallipoli, which Amadeo of Savoy had reconquered, to Murad I, in order to appease him. Cydones, with all his rhetorical power, tried to hinder such a political act in his "*Oratio de non reddenda Callipoli*", mentioned already above. But the city was delivered to the Turks just in June 1377 (Kydones, 1981: 27).

After the defeat on the Maritsa river near Adrianople in September 1371, the last resisting force to the Turks, the Serbs, became vassals of the Ottomans. Constantinople was now cut off from the rest of free Europe except by sea. The conditions in the City changed for the worse. Provisioning problems and hunger increased in the practically surrounded City.

> Since it would be madness to expect anything from statues, since the art of the beggar consists not in giving, but in taking, since the all-distressing hunger presses hard, since all our livelihood comes yet just from the area within the wall, and consequently the citizens are covetous of the properties of the other, who would not avoid the City like an abyss, where nothing could be gained anymore, but where someone loses his own property because of the conditions and is moreover expected to slander for things that he has not done to anyone, where one does not find rest every night after daily work but dreams nightmares of slavehood destiny and corresponding punishment? Because the power of the concourse barbars and fear of ourselves gives us occasion to such prophecies (Kydones, 1981: 484).

In another letter presumably written after the same Turkish victory over Ugljesa and Vukasin, and after his resignation from the imperial office, Cydones admonishes the negligence of writing of the unknown receiver, who is now in more dangerous town in Thrace, threatened by Turkish attacks:

> But if you believe that we deserve misfortune as punishment and want to take

> from us the consolation of the letter, although you see that we have lost everything, let you know, my dear, that we will grant you the first rank of misfortune in excess. While you got haughty for we became worse, where will you hide yourself not to hear the blame? Because the excellent Turks will chastise such arrogance and reprimand, who abandons his friends in misery. Or has Hebros[=Maritsa] not experienced you the same as by Skamander and was its shore not covered with more deads as it was in that time when Achilleus had driven the Troians hither? Moreover, we know the grief just by hearsay, but you see the enemy already before the sunrise. And the sea brings us its fruits if we stay, and on the other hand, it conducts us wherever we want, if we are going to flee. But for you, the walls are an invincible net, and who overcomes them could either die or become a slave… Now take what I have written you as a joke - certainly just when you are able to hear such things without tears (Kydones, 1981: 512).

Cydones remarks in a letter written in the winter of 1371 and 1372, that he disagrees with the appeasement policy of John V against the Turks after Černomen. Things are occurring, "*for one has to shame himself*" (Kydones, 1981: 519).

Cydones gives in another source a succinct account of the effects of Turkish conquests in Anatolia at the moment when the conquerors were embarking on their early European adventure:

> They took from us all the lands which we enjoyed from the Hellespont eastward to the mountains of Armenia. The cities they razed to the ground, pillaged the religious sanctuaries, broke open the graves, and filled all with blood and corpses. They outraged the souls of the inhabitants, forcing them to deny God and giving them their defiled mysteries. They abused their souls, alas, with wanton outrage. Denuding them of all property and freedom, they left them as weak images of slaves, exploiting the remaining strength of the wretched ones for their own prosperity. (Vryonis, 1971: 286)[4]

About 1372 or 1373, some members of John V's entourage advocated further taxation of the poor. Cydones opposed it, realising that the poor made up a considerable portion of Constantinople's inhabitants. Moreover, additional taxes conjured up a double

4 Quotation from *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca.* J.P: Mighe. Paris 1857.

danger. One was that the poor would join the Turks and fight against the Byzantines: "*It is to be feared, that they feel intolerable of the violence of the rulers and consequently take the enemies as more moderate masters, join them and attack us together with them*." The other danger was that, in self-defence, they would turn to social revolt (Ševčenko, 86 :1981). Ševčenko notes further that Cydones was the first author of the 14th century who expressly pointed to the decadence of literary and theological studies in the Byzantium of his day and who said that only the indigent and unlettered still looked to the empire for guidance (Ševčenko, 1981: 175).

In a letter written to an accompanist of the emperor John V who was following the army of the Ottoman sultan Murad I to Anatolia as his vassal, Cydones compares the unfortunate situation of the receiver and himself. With the allusion that the emperor follows with his companions the footsteps of the barbars, he mentions that they go hunting together, conquering towns, and make war in the enemy's land against the rulers of the smaller Turkish emirates of Asia Minor. Cydones begins his letter by describing the pain of the inhabitants of Constantinople when an unfortunate ship was captured by the Turks near or within the Bosphorus and its crew killed. Thereafter he thinks that, considering the shame, the receiver's situation must be inconvenient too,

> but this is not the same: only to stay with the barbars or to have to perceive the cruelty herein. You have accustomed yourself for the former long ago; you are already following the hint of the barbars and no more stir yourself up for the wantonness of them. But the fright surprised us unprepared. You have the chance to live as slaves at all, but we have it now just to be extinguished after the slavehood. Your pain is mixed with pleasings: we hear that you ride out with them, go hunting, assault and take cities, erect marks of triumphs in the midst of the enemies' lands, and do all other things which not only make joy but bring even honour for all. But concerning us, it is unknown if our shame will excel the sorrow or vice versa. Therefore we implore us in our shiftless situation already the death (Kydones, 1981: 546).

Cydones tries to describe the Constantinopolians' conditions as worse than theirs by comparison.

As John V forbade him at his first request to take a journey to Lesbos, Cydones criticised this prohibition by mentioning the freely taken trips of the emperor's opponents.

There were people in Byzantium who allied with the Turks against the emperor: "*…there are many, as we know, who betake themselves to the Turks, allied with them against you, took a meal with them and came back after having exchanged gifts openly. Nobody has hindered them from departure, nor blamed them after their return…*" (Kydones, 1981: 553).

Conclusion

Although Cydones preferred to pin his hopes upon an alliance with the Latin powers, he admitted later in his *Oratio pro subsidio Latinorum* that the Bulgarians and the Serbs "are people similar to us, devoted to God, who on many occasions have shared many things in common with us". He referred explicitly to the ties that united Byzantines to the Balkan Slavs (Obolensky, 1971: 257). But, in Obolensky's words, "the belated dreams of saving the Byzantine Commonwealth by a common effort of the Christian powers of South-Eastern Europe were soon dispelled by the Turkish victories in the Balkans." (Obolensky, 1971: 257). The Balkans' Orthodox Christian peoples failed to make a common cause against the Turks and block their conquest because of political antagonisms. Being Orthodox coreligionists was not sufficient to draw them together (Barker, 1995: 165-174).

Therefore, the main desire of Cydones was always to find help against the Turks through reconciliation of the two churches, to free his fatherland from the Turks through establishing a Christian league of Byzantines and westerners. Opposed to many of his compatriots, he saw the enemy as evil because they were the arch opponents of Christendom (Kydones, 1981: 55). He was so obsessed with this idea that he accepted to be marginalised after supporting John V's unaided religious policy, which ended with an inefficient Italian journey and his subjection to the papacy in October 1369. We do not know if his embassy for the emperor between summer 1379 and spring 1381, probably to the Germiyanide Sulaiman Shah in Ktyaion (Kütahya), has anything to do with an anti-Ottoman alliance policy (Kydones, 1981: 33).

In his later letters, foreign policy matters, especially political events concerning the Turks, hold more place, like the defeat of the Turks in Bileca in August 1388 or Kossovo Polje's battle in June 1389, in which Murad I died, and Serbia fell to the Turks. But his commentaries of these events are far from being optimistic: he gives his people no more chance even if all Turks were to be annihilated (Kydones, 1981: 42).

Nonetheless, in 1395, Cydones appears to have made another journey to Italy in company with Manuel Chrysoloras in that perennial quest of military aid against the Turk's now terrible menace. Bulgaria had been added to the Turkish dominion two years earlier. One year later, in 1396, Sultan Bayezid I began to keep Constantinople under constant siege, and Cydones seems to have found refuge in the Venetian island of Crete, where he died in 1398 (Setton, 1956: 56-57).

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