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Reinventing the ancient Greeks : the self-representation of Byzantine scholars in Renaissance Italy

Lamers, H.

Citation

Lamers, H. (2013, June 12). *Reinventing the ancient Greeks : the self-representation of Byzantine scholars in Renaissance Italy*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20957>

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Author: Lamers, Han

Title: Reinventing the ancient Greeks : the self-representation of Byzantine scholars in Renaissance Italy

Issue Date: 2013-06-12

Chapter 3

The Creation of Greek Commonality

Bessarion is perhaps one of the most fascinating figures of the Byzantine diaspora; he flourished between the twilight of Byzantium and the rising stars of the Italian Renaissance. Bessarion dwelled almost all his life among the most powerful people of the Greek-speaking world and the Italian peninsula; he spent his youth in Trebizond, Constantinople and Mistra, and travelled through Europe both before and after his permanent settlement in Rome in 1439. Many ruptures pervade his biography. He was reputedly born from modest parents in Trebizond between 1399 and 1408 and died as a wealthy and powerful person in Rome in 1472.³²⁷ He was educated by the most controversial neo-pagan thinker of Byzantium, Gemistos Plethon, yet he became a respected and most *papabile* cardinal at the Roman Curia.³²⁸ As a cardinal in Rome he remained in touch with the Greek-speaking world, especially with Plethon in Mistra and the imperial family.³²⁹ Besides George Trapezuntius of Crete he may count as the most prolific Greek scholar in Italy until Leo Allatius, the Chian keeper of the Vatican Library from 1661 until his death in 1669.³³⁰ Bessarion's wide-ranging oeuvre in both Greek and Latin (professional and personal letters, poetry, political pamphlets, diplomatic and epideictic speeches, philosophical and theological treatises) provides more insight in his

³²⁷ The idea that Bessarion stemmed from humble parents is in Apostoles, ed. Migne (1866) CXXXI.

³²⁸ For a very useful overview of the important dates of Bessarion's biography see Zorzi (1994) 1-8. For very short introductions to his life and works see also Harris (2000d) and Rapp (2010) with select bibliographies that are largely complementary. Monograph-length studies on Bessarion's life and works are Coluccia (2009), Monfasani (2009), Lusini, Rigo & Pugliese Carratelli (2001), Fiaccadori, Cuna & Ricci (1994), Mioni (1991), Parthenios (1957), Kyros (1947), Mohler (1923-1942), Rocholl (1904), Vast (1878a, 1878b), Goethe (1871). The bibliography on Bessarion is extensive; the most recent overview is Lusini, Rigo & Pugliese Carratelli (2001) 204-227.

³²⁹ Cf. Ronchey (2002). Bessarion's connections with the imperial family remained close also after the fall of the empire. So, for instance, in a letter to the community of Siena (1472), Bessarion wrote that it has always been his concern to look after the descendants of the Greek emperors ('principum Graeciae reliquiae'). See Mohler (1942) 564. Bessarion also advised the pedagogue of the children of Thomas Palaeologus after they had arrived in Rome; his letter to their educator (1465) is available in Mohler (1942) 531-536.

³³⁰ An overview of Allatius' works is Jacono (1962).

views on what it meant to be a Hellene than the extant works of any other Byzantine intellectual in Italy.

This chapter attempts to do two things. First of all, it fleshes out Bessarion's Hellenism on the basis of what he himself has to say about it, especially in his *Encomium to Trebizond*, but also in his memorandum for Constantine Palaeologus. Scholars have often emphasised the fact that in Rome the cardinal retained his Byzantine Greekness in his beard and austere Basilian dress.³³¹ Others, on the other hand, have denied a Greek identity to Bessarion because he left the Byzantine church.³³² Yet there has been insufficient attention to what Bessarion himself had to say about his Hellenism. As we shall see, he traced his own ancestry back to ancient Athens and generally thought of the Hellenes as a noble people with a shared ancestry, heritage and character that transcended contemporary political and religious boundaries. Bessarion's sense of contiguity with the ancient Hellenes also informed his understanding of his own role vis-à-vis fellow Hellenes. Although his *Encomium* was probably written shortly before he definitively settled in Rome, it prefigures themes that resurface in later works and give the cardinal's later efforts for the Hellenes in Italy an ideological coherence that has as yet remained unnoticed in the secondary literature.

In the second place, this chapter points at the tension between Bessarion's role as a Hellene in the Greek diaspora and as a Roman cardinal in Christendom. It zooms in on the cardinal's dissimulation of Greekness in the *Orationes contra Turcas*. The *Orationes* have been cited to indicate Bessarion's passionate Greek patriotism, and it seems that even the Parisian editor of the text Guillaume Fichet interpreted them this way.³³³ In an epigram he attached to the copy for Frederick III, Fichet expressed the hope that, via

³³¹ Harris (2000b) 39-40. For portraits of Bessarion see Lollini (1994) and Labowsky (1994) with ample illustrations.

³³² See, for instance, Zisis (1980) 215, 218 who denied the status of 'Hellene' to the Roman cardinal in his discussion of Bessarion's epitaph (for which see p. 117 with n. 401). See the Introduction, p. 17. Along the same lines, Tomadakis claimed that if Bessarion would have succeeded in his plan to recover Greece, 'we [i.e. the contemporary Greeks] would be Greeks nor orthodox Christians' (Tomadakis 1953b: 62). More such verdicts can be cited, e.g., Kalogeras (1893), evaluating Marcus Eugenicus and Bessarion as 'politische Führer des griechischen Volkes vor dem Richterstuhl der Geschichte zur Rechenschaft gezogen'.

³³³ See, for example, Coccia (1989) 226 ('Tanto lo animava la difesa della fede cristiana e la salvezza della Grecia, sua patria e patria spirituale di tutti, e dell'Europa cristiana'), Feld (1988) 28 ('[The] *Orationes*, proceeding from this premise of the central role of Greece in Christian spiritual and political life, exhorted the princes of Italy and western Europe to join together in a crusade for its reconquest'). See on the speeches in particular Meserve (2003) and Coccia (1989).

Bessarion, ‘Greece may admonish [the emperor]’.³³⁴ Yet if we look closely, the most eye-catching feature of the *Orationes* is the absence of a *Greek* Bessarion, arguing for the *Greek* case. In the second part of the chapter, I will discuss and try to explain Bessarion’s dissimulation of Greekness against the background of how other Byzantines addressed the issue of Greek liberation, focussing especially on Janus Lascaris’ speech to Charles V.

Ethnic roots and cultural imitation in Bessarion’s Encomium to Trebizond

The date of Bessarion’s *Encomium* is disputed, but it seems that it was written around the time he settled in Italy, most probably between 1436 and 1440.³³⁵ Bessarion addressed it to the citizens (‘ἄνδρας πολίτας’) of the city of Trebizond.³³⁶ As the speech revolves around the idea of freedom, one of its major aims might well have been to encourage the inhabitants of the city to maintain their independence in the face of the increasing Ottoman presence.³³⁷ The empire of Trebizond had been cut off from the dominions ruled from Constantinople shortly before the sack of the imperial city by the Latins in 1204. During the Latin empire (1204–1264), Trebizond existed side by side with the successor states of Epirus and Thessaloniki. While Thessaloniki and Epirus together with parts of the Peloponnesus eventually became part of the restored Roman empire of the Palaeologi, Trebizond remained independent under the Comnenian dynasty until as late as 1461, when it was incorporated into the Ottoman empire. Although the Comneni released their claim to the throne of Constantinople probably at the end of the thirteenth century, they clung to the title ‘emperor and *autokrator* of all the East, the Iberians, and the Transmarine Provinces’.³³⁸ Despite the imperial

³³⁴ ‘Quos citat in Turchos acri Bessario cornu, | Caesar et audentes sumite tela viri. | Graecia vos moneat dyro prostrata tyranno, | Excitet et Christi iam prope lapsa fides’ [*You whom Bessarion rouses with his sharp horn against the Turks, you, Caesar and all those men who dare, take up arms! May Greece, overthrown by a harsh tyrant, admonish you, and may Christ’s faith, now close to falling into decay, rouse you into arms*]. Cited in Legrand (1885) 260.

³³⁵ The dating of the work is disputed; its composition most probably falls between 1436 (Lampsides 1955) and 1440 (Akışık forthcoming). See on Bessarion’s eulogy in particular the series of articles by Lampsides (Lampsides 1984a, 1984b, 1982a, 1982b, 1970, 1955, 1935). On Bessarion’s usage of Libanios in the speech see Fatouros (1999) 198–204. The only more contextualising study of the text is Akışık (forthcoming). When I was writing this chapter, I was not aware of Akışık’s fine work on this text, and it is supportive to find in it some general correspondences with my own argument.

³³⁶ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 194 ll. 25–26 = Lampsides (1984a) 72 ll. 3–4.

³³⁷ Lampsides (1984a) 9.

³³⁸ Miller (1926) 29.

pretensions of its ruling house, however, Bessarion placed his native city in civic Greek rather than imperial Roman history, called its inhabitants Hellenes instead of Romans, and dissociated Trapezuntine history from both Rome and Constantinople. For this, the city's link with the ancient Greek past was crucial, and Bessarion went out of his way to prove that the city was an authentic *Hellenic* city.

Bessarion constructed a sense of contiguity with the remote past in two different but intertwined ways. He emphasised, first, that the contemporary Hellenes were ethnically related to the ancient Greeks and, secondly, that they had preserved original features through imitation or 'μίμησις' of their ancestors. Along these lines, he argued that the Trapezuntines descended from the Athenians. Echoing Pericles' *Funeral Oration* (Thuc. 2.41.1), he made the city boast that 'the Attic city of the Athenians is [Trebizond's] first beginning and metropolis, Athens, the rearer of the Greeks, the mother of literature, the teacher of this most beautiful language'.³³⁹ In addition, Bessarion made the point that the Trapezuntines had carefully conserved Athenian Hellenism even among the barbarians of Asia.

To prove his first claim, Bessarion relied on the traditional link of the Ionians with Athenians, marking them off from the Dorian Greeks.³⁴⁰ He found Greek historiography on his side to show that there existed a connection of kinship between the Trapezuntines and the Athenians. He argued that Trebizond was a colony of Sinope, which was a colony of Miletus, which was a colony of Athens. Maybe he scraped together bits of evidence for this argument from several ancient Greek authorities: Herodotus claimed that Miletus was founded by the son of the Attic king Codrus; Xenophon noted that Miletus established Sinope; and Eusebius finally remarked that the Sinopeans colonised Trebizond three years before the founding of Rome in 756

³³⁹ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 150 ll. 4-11 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 24 ll. 7-14: 'Αὐτὴ [i.e. Τραπεζοῦς] πρώτην τοῦ γένους ἀρχὴν καὶ μητρόπολιν, εἰ δεῖ τὰ πρεσβύτερα πρότερα λέγειν, ἀττικὴν καὶ τὴν Ἀθηναίων αὐχεῖ πόλιν, τὴν τροφὸν τῶν Ἑλλήνων, τὴν μητέρα τῶν λόγων, τῆς καλλίστης ταύτης φωνῆς τὴν διδάσκαλον. Ἀπώκισαν μὲν γὰρ αὐτὴν Σινωπεῖς, τοὺς δ' αὖ, οἰκισθέντες ὑπ' Ἀθηναίων, Μιλήσιοι, τὰ κράτιστα τῆς Ἀσίας, τὸ πρόσχημα τῶν Ἰώνων, οἱ τῆς παραλίου ταύτης Ἑλλάδος ἡγούμενοι, οὐκ ἄλκιμοι μόνον γεγενημένοι πάλαί ποτε, τοῦτο δὲ τὸ λεγόμενον, ἀλλὰ καὶ μεθ' ὑπερβολῆς ὅσης ἂν εἴποις' [If it is necessary to name the oldest things first, this city [Trebizond] boasts that the Attic city of the Athenians is her first beginning and metropolis, the rearer of the Greeks, the mother of literature, the teacher of this most beautiful language. The people of Sinope colonised it, whom the Milesians, colonised by the Athenians, had in turn colonised – the Milesians, the ornament of the Ionians, those who led this Hellas by the sea and did not only become powerful long ago, but, as they say, as extravagantly as you can say].

³⁴⁰ Powell (1988) 10, 44.

BC.³⁴¹ These testimonies ultimately converge in Bessarion's claim that Trebizond was connected with Athens via Sinope and Miletus.

An illustrious founding myth would be meaningless for the present without a form of continuity with the past that goes beyond shared origins. In order to demonstrate the continuity between Athens and Trebizond, Bessarion more than once stressed that the inhabitants of the Euxine city, in the same way as their ancestors, carefully preserved the culture of their ancestors. In this, opposition to the barbarians and the defence of freedom were crucial. Although these themes are obviously familiar from classical Greek literature, Bessarion worked them out in his own way.³⁴² Even though both the Sinopeans and the Trapezuntines lived among the barbarians in Asia, they ignored them and even ridiculed those who feared them.³⁴³ According to Bessarion, the Hellenic nature of the Trapezuntines and their ancestors most clearly appeared from their continuous resistance to barbarian tyranny and their assiduous propagation of freedom. In his appraisal of the Milesians in particular, he highlighted their defence of liberty, alluding to the Ionian Revolt (499 BC),³⁴⁴ and praising the Milesians' courage ('ἀνδρεία'), magnificence ('μεγαλοπρεπεία') together with their prudence and wisdom ('φρόνησις καὶ σοφία'), for which he called their city 'worthy of Athens'.³⁴⁵ Via the Milesian colony Sinope, Bessarion argued, Trebizond had taken over the 'Hellenic spirit' of Athens, and perfected it.³⁴⁶ After his description of the landscape of his native city, and the hilly uplands protecting it by way of natural defence, Bessarion claimed that in the city 'the Hellenic people lived alone among the barbarians, while they continued

³⁴¹ See Hdt. 9.97; Xen. *An.* 6.1.15 (cf. Strabo 12.3.11); Eus. *Chron.* 1.80e Schoene. It must be noted that for all towns different foundation myths circulated. Note also that Michael Psellos also voiced the idea that Trebizond was a Hellenic city, on which see Lampsides (1984a) 18 n. 1.

³⁴² On the evolution of the concept of freedom in ancient Greek literature see in particular the classic study of Raaflaub (2004), which is a revised English edition of Raaflaub (1984).

³⁴³ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 155 l. 4-5 ('... Ἕλληνας δὲ καὶ οἱ ἀπὸ Μιλήτου πεμφθέντες, Λυδῶν οὐκ ἐπιστροφόμενοι...'), 168 l. 12 ('... οὐδὲν δ' ἐπιστρεφομένους αὐτῶν [sc. βαρβάρων]...'), 170 ll. 1-13 ('... ταῦτ' οὖν παρ' οὐδὲν ἔπειθον τὴν βαρβαρικὴν ὠμότητα τίθεσθαι καὶ διαπτύειν τὰς ἀπειλὰς καὶ δεδιττομένων καταγελᾶν...') = ed. Lampsides (1984) 29 ll. 11-12, 42 ll. 21-22, 44 ll. 12-24.

³⁴⁴ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 151 ll. 11-16 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 25 ll. 16-18: "Ἕλληνας δὲ μόνοι καὶ μάλιστα Ἴωνες καὶ τούτων αὐθις τὰ κράτιστα, Μίλητος ἀπριξί τε τῆς ἐλευθερίας ἀντείχοντο καὶ οὐδὲν ὅπερ οὐκ ἄσμενοι ὑπὲρ ταύτης ἠροῦντο" [*Only the Hellenes and especially the Ionians and the flower of them, Miletus, tightly clung to freedom, and they would eagerly do anything to support it*].

³⁴⁵ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 152 ll. 13-24 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 26 ll. 19-29. Cf. Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 153 ll. 22 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 27 l. 31, where Bessarion stressed that Miletus was in no way inferior to Athens ('οὔσα καὶ σφόδρα τῶν Ἀθηνῶν ἐπαξία').

³⁴⁶ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 155 ll. 22-29 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 29 l. 30-30 l. 5.

to use the language of the Hellenes, honoured freedom, and sought after equality of rights ('ἰσονομία').³⁴⁷ At a time when the numerically superior Persians subdued all surrounding peoples in Asia, the Trapezuntine Hellenes remained upright. The best synopsis of the idea is in the following key passage from the eulogy:

Ἄρτι γοῦν συνωκισμένοι καὶ οἷα εἰκὸς τὸν τε ἀριθμὸν ὄντες οὐ πάνυ πολλοὶ καὶ τὴν ἰσχὺν ἀσθενεῖς, ὅμως εὐθὺς ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἔδειξαν Ἑλληνας ὄντες, γένος ἀδέσποτον καὶ ἀδούλωτον καὶ μόνον ἐλεύθερον τὴν τε ψυχὴν τὰ τε σώματα, Σινωπεῖς τε καὶ Μιλησίους καὶ ἔτι πρότερον Ἀθηναίους τοὺς σφῶν πατέρας μιμούμενοι, τοὺς μὲν οἷας ἴσμεν ἀποκρίσεις ἐπιόντων αὐτοῖς τῶν βαρβάρων ἀποκεκριμένους ἔργα τε διὰ πάντων ἐπιδειξαμένους τίνος οὐκ ἄξια, τοὺς δ' ἐν μέσοις μὲν τοῖς βαρβάροις οἰκοῦντας, οὐδὲν δ' ἐπιστρεφομένους αὐτῶν, ἀλλ' ἐς ὅσον ἐξῆν ὑπὲρ ἐλευθερίας τοῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης δεσπότηαι ἀνταίρωντας καὶ μετέχοντας ἰσοπολιτείας αὐτοῖς. οὐδὲν οὐ τοῦ φρονήματος, οὐ τοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐφείσαν ἐμβριθοῦς καὶ γενναίου, οὐδ' ἀνάξιον οὐδὲν τῶν προγόνων καὶ τῆς ἑλληνικῆς ἐπεδείξαντο δόξης, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ οὐ γῆς μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς ἐκείνων ἐκπεμφθέντες ἀρετῆς κληρονόμοι πρὸς αὐτοὺς τε διεπράττοντο πᾶν ἀναφέροντες κἀκείνους. καὶ τύπον ποιούμενοι καὶ παράδειγμα διεγίγοντο φύσει τοῖς βαρβάροις ὄντες πολέμιοι καὶ ἀσύμβατοι καὶ μεγίστοις αὐτῶν ὄροις φωνῇ τε καὶ ψυχῇ διαστάμενοι καὶ κοινὸν οὐδὲν αὐτοῖς ἔχοντες.³⁴⁸

Although they had only recently been living together with them [the barbarians], probably being not with very many in number, and also weak in power, they still showed immediately from the start that they were Hellenes, a people without master, unenslaved, and uniquely free both spiritually and physically; they imitated their forebears, the Sinopeans, the Milesians, and earlier still the Athenians. We know what answers they [i.e. the Athenians] gave when the barbarians attacked them and that they continuously exhibited invaluable works. Of the others [i.e. the Milesians and Sinopeans] we know that they lived among the very barbarians and neglected them. They on the contrary acted against the despots of the inhabited world in defence of freedom as far as possible and participated in the equality of rights common to them. They did not dismiss a bit of their dignified and noble character, nor did they exhibit anything unworthy of their ancestors and Hellenic honour. Instead, as if they had been sent out on their expedition as shareholders, not of their land, but rather of their virtue, they continued to refer to themselves and their ancestors as a standard in every respect. And setting themselves an example and model, they continued to be the natural enemies of the barbarians and irreconcilable with them, greatly differing in language and mind, and generally having nothing in common with them.

This passage shows in a nutshell that for Bessarion the history of the Trapezuntines was inextricably part of the Herodotean struggle between Hellenism and barbarism. Genealogical lineage and the imitation of illustrious ancestors in pursuit of freedom

³⁴⁷ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 167 ll. 35-36 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 42 ll. 9-11.

³⁴⁸ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 168 ll. 4-21 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 42 ll. 14-30.

together constituted the basic ingredients for his view on Hellenism here. In their insulated city, the Trapezuntines perpetuated the spirit of their Athenian ancestors through their continuous resistance to barbarian despots and their defence of Greek freedom, an ideological tenet of the classical Greek city-state rather than the Roman empire.

Whereas the barbarian Persians never subdued Greece, the Romans did incorporate the Greek state into their world-wide empire. This obviously posed a problem to Bessarion's narrative of resistance to foreign rule and preservation of freedom, which was at the heart of his idea of what it meant to be Greek. It is important to realise that – unlike Manuel Chrysoloras – Bessarion was not interested in claiming a Roman legacy for the Hellenes. Just as Theodore Gaza and Constantine Lascaris, he rather saw the advent of the Romans as a foreign intrusion in Greek affairs. Unlike them, however, Bessarion did not recognise the undesirable impact of Romanisation on the language or customs of the Trapezuntines. For him, the Roman episode on the contrary provided the background for another tale of how the Hellenes had defended and maintained their 'ἐλευθερία', this time even under foreign occupation.

In Bessarion's account of Greek history, the Romans first appeared with the Asian campaigns of Marius and Sulla and Pompey's definitive defeat of Mithridates VI of Pontus. According to him, Mithridates' defeat in 63 BC was welcomed by the Trapezuntines as their 'day of freedom' ('ἐλευθερίας ἡμέρα') so that the city willingly 'handed over herself and her own nurslings to the Romans'.³⁴⁹ Everything considered, Bessarion saw the arrival of the Romans and their rule as a positive development for the region,³⁵⁰ and we must not confound the Roman defeat of the Pontic kingdom with the complete subjugation of the Hellenes. Bessarion represented the Romans as an amicable people; they were philhellenes and knew the Greek language like no one else.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 174 l. 33 – 174 l. 175 l. 3 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 49 ll. 19-24: "Ἐντεῦθεν ἡ ἡμετέρα ἄσμενός τε ἦν ἐκ πολλοῦ ἐπίδοξον εἶχεν ἐλευθερίας εἶδεν ἡμέραν, καὶ τοῖς οἰκουμένης δεσπότηταις εὐθὺς προσχωρήσασα Ῥωμαίοις καὶ τῇ κείνων ἡγεμονίᾳ ἑαυτὴν τε καὶ τοὺς ἰδίους τροφίμους ἐνέδωκε φέρουσα..." [Therefore, our city finally saw the day of liberty which she had long anticipated and, after siding with the Romans, the rulers of the inhabited world, and presenting herself and her own nurslings to them, she handed these over to their authority ...]

³⁵⁰ Bessarion, ed. Lampsides (1984) 49-50 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 175-176.

³⁵¹ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 175-176 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 50. This also reminds one of Michael Apostoles who divided the world in Hellenes, Romans and those who respected their rule on the one hand, and a bunch of resistant peoples (among others the Germans and the Gauls) on the other (the "Ἑλληνικὸν γένος" versus the "βάρβαρον γένος" in Apostoles' words). See Apostoles, ed. Migne (1866) CXXIX.

‘Therefore’, he concluded in Horatian fashion, ‘the Hellenes ruled the Romans rather than being ruled by them, and for that reason they held the privileged position of a body of allies’.³⁵²

In Bessarion’s account, the Hellenic tradition, instigated by classical Athens, and carefully preserved in Trebizond, was pivotal to maintaining Roman power in Asia. When Rome fought out the Lazic War with Chosroes I (r. 531–579), only the combined forces of the Romans and Bessarion’s ancestors (‘ἡμετέρων πατέρων’) were capable of resisting the Sassanid armies.³⁵³ When the Romans were seriously threatened by the barbarians, ‘only our city ... guarded [their] power’ (‘μόνη δὲ ἡ ἡμετέρα ... ἐτήρει τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίαν’).³⁵⁴ While other parts of Anatolia, Egypt, and Persia conceded to barbarian invaders, the Hellenic city of Trebizond remained faithful to Roman rule. Apparently this fuelled Bessarion’s Trapezuntine chauvinism since he added that while Byzantium made an agreement with the barbarians and so accepted slavery (‘δουλεία’), Trebizond on the contrary continued its Hellenic resistance against barbarian mastery.³⁵⁵

The Romans continued to rule Trebizond until in Bessarion’s own day. He noted in passing that at the time of writing the Romans had ruled Trebizond uninterruptedly for 1,500 years.³⁵⁶ For Bessarion, the Comnenian dynasty was a Roman dynasty appointed

³⁵² Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 176 ll. 10-11 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 50 ll. 33-34: ‘Οὕτως ἦγον Ἕλληνας μᾶλλον τοὺς ἄγοντας ἢ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἦγοντο, καὶ τοιοῦτον αὐτοῖς ἦν τὸ σχῆμα τῆς συμμαχίας’. Cf. Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.156-157: ‘Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis | intulit agresti Latio’.

³⁵³ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 178 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 52-53. Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 178 ll. 16-21 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 52 ll. 6-10: ‘Οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲν πλέον δυνηθεὶς ὅτι μὴ Πέτραν ἐλεῖν ... εἶτα μετὰ πολλῆς ἐκεῖθεν ζημίας, πολλοὺς τε καὶ ἀγαθοὺς ἀποβαλόμενος τῶν Περσῶν, Ῥωμαίων τε καὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἀντικρουσάντων πατέρων καὶ τὴν σφοδρὰν αὐτῶν ῥύμην (Lambros reads *ρώμην*) ἐπισχόντων σφοδρότερον’ [*And capable of doing nothing more except for taking Petra ... he [Chosroes I] was expelled from there with great loss since he lost many good Persians, while the Romans and our ancestors had offered resistance and so restrained their excessive force with great zeal*]. Probably, Bessarion referred to the Roman victory of 542.

³⁵⁴ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 180 ll. 14-31 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 55 ll. 9-26.

³⁵⁵ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 177 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 51-52. Maybe Bessarion here refers to the agreement of John VIII with Murad II after his return to Constantinople. On the basis of this passage Akışık (forthcoming) suggested that the eulogy had been composed in 1439–1440. Anti-Constantinopolitan sentiment is probably also behind the fact that Bessarion in his *Encomium* generally glossed over the history of Byzantium, omitting references to the transferral of empire by Constantine I. See Bessarion, ed. Lampsides (1984) 51 l. 16-17 (‘μεταβάσης τῆς βασιλείας ἐς τὸ Βύζαντιον καὶ τὴν ἔψαν ἀπόμοιραν’).

³⁵⁶ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 176 ll. 18-19 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 51 ll. 7-8: ‘Ἐνιαντοὶ γὰρ ἤδη πρὸς τοῖς πεντακοσίοις παρωχῆκεσαν χίλιοι Ῥωμαίοις ὑποταγεῖσις...’. On the basis of this line Lampsides (1955) argued that the eulogy must have been written in 1436–1437.

by God to rule the Trapezuntines after the battle of Manzikert (1071).³⁵⁷ It is notable that Bessarion nowhere explicitly claimed the *imperium romanum* as such for the Hellenes. For him, it seems, the Hellenes did not *possess* the empire in the same way western sources and other Byzantines such as George Trapezuntius and Johannes Gemistus perceived of it. Some of them lived in an empire ruled by Romans and supported it, but as a people they were not in full control of the *imperium romanum*. In this sense, his representation of the Hellenes vis-à-vis their Roman government comes close to what modern sociologists have called state-framed ethnicity, or a sense of group-belonging embedded within existing political structures without resisting these for the sake of attaining political independence (as is the case in counter-state ethnicity).³⁵⁸

Panhellenism and cultural ownership in Bessarion's Letter to Constantine

Bessarion's Hellenism was not only a means of differentiating Trebizond among all the other Greek cities. The way he presented the Hellenes in the speech is emblematic for his belief that Hellenism could survive in different settings and contexts, even among barbarians. As the Hellenes were an imagined community of people sharing a common origin, a history and a distinctive culture of freedom, they typically transcended local, political or religious boundaries. Bessarion's letter to despot Constantine illustrates this very well. He sent it to the despot of the Morea from his new home in Rome in 1444, so between four and eight years after he had composed the *Encomium*.³⁵⁹ In it, Bessarion followed in the footsteps of Plethon and advised the despot of the Morea about affairs in the Peloponnesus,³⁶⁰ mostly rephrasing and restating his teacher's previous

³⁵⁷ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 182-183 (ll. 9-10 cited here: 'Ἄλλὰ θεὸς ... τοὺς τε Κομνηνιάδας ἡμῖν ἐβασίλευσε ...') = ed. Lampsides (1984) 56-58 (with ll. 3-5). Cf. Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 184 ll. 2-3 = Lampsides (1984) 59 ll. 1-2. In a letter to Bessarion written after 1461, his compatriot George Amiroutzes (who lived in the service of the Sultan after the sack of Trebizond) described the last Trapezuntine emperor David Megas Comnenus as 'the king of Hellenes and Romans' ('Ελλήνων τε καὶ Ῥωμαίων ... βασιλεύς'), so acknowledging that the empire of Trebizond was not an exclusively Roman, but also an Hellenic empire. See Amiroutzes, ed. Migne (1866) 724.

³⁵⁸ See on this Brubaker (2004) 145, 282.

³⁵⁹ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1930) 32-45. The letter has mainly been discussed from the point of view of political history. For discussions of it see esp. Harris (2006) 92-93, Maltezos (2006) 101-104, Pardos (1998) 546-558, Mavrommatis (1994), Zakythinis (1975) 356-358.

³⁶⁰ The letter is available in Mohler (1942) 439-449 and Lambros (1906) 32-45. In his edition of the text, Lambros argued that Bessarion's address must be written between 1443 and 1446. Cf. Mohler (1942) 440. Interpretations of the letter are Harris (2006), Maltezos (2006), Pardos

admonitions.³⁶¹ Although he considered himself to be an Atheno-Trapezuntine, he identified with the Peloponnesian subjects of the Palaeologan despot on account of their being Hellenes. So, he referred to the state of the Peloponnesus as ‘our affairs’³⁶² and regretted the Ottoman Turks ruling over ‘us, barbarians over Hellenes’.³⁶³

Importantly, Bessarion explicitly defined the Hellenes as a distinctive *genos* with a particular character; they were mild by nature, able to attain virtue, to imitate the good, naturally noble and ambitious, and eager to acquire all forms of learning.³⁶⁴ He also praised them for their unremitting love for freedom.³⁶⁵ The despot now ruled over the same people who had once defeated the Persians at Plataea, and had marched into Asia with Agesilaus.³⁶⁶ The general idea of the memorandum was that together with an army of well-trained Peloponnesians the despot would eventually liberate Europe and after that would march against Asia with his new Spartans to claim back the power (‘ἀρχή’) that belonged to him by right of inheritance.³⁶⁷ In other words, the Spartans fulfilled the same function as the Trapezuntines serving under the Comneni, namely to maintain Hellenic freedom, while at the same time supporting an amicable Roman power. That Bessarion indeed saw the Palaeologi as a Roman dynasty just as the Comneni appears

(1998), Mavrommatis (1994), Irmscher (1976), Zakythinis (1975) 2:356-358. That Bessarion knew the Peloponnesus well not only appears from his letter to Constantine Palaeologus, but also from a Latin letter he wrote to frater Jacobus Picens in order to convince the addressee of an anti-Ottoman campaign in support of the despot Thomas Palaeologus (1459). See Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942c) 490-493 (= ed. Lambros 1906: 31-34). See also his letter to Demetrius Palaeologus, despot of the Morea, in Mohler (1942b) 425-426.

³⁶¹ For a comparative reading of Plethon’s and Bessarion’s treatises see still Dräseke (1911) esp. 111-115.

³⁶² Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1906) 24.

³⁶³ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1906) 20 ll. 11-13.

³⁶⁴ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1906), 22 ll. 25-27: “Ἡμερον τὴν φύσιν τὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐστὶ γένος, ἐπιμελητικὸν ἀρετῆς, μιμητικὸν τοῦ καλοῦ, φύσει γενναῖόν τε καὶ φιλότιμον, πρὸς πᾶσαν παιδείαν ἔτοιμόν τε καὶ πρόχειρον’.

³⁶⁵ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 151 ll. 11-16; 168 ll. 4-9.

³⁶⁶ He also mentioned Xanthippus (against the Romans), Gylippus (against the Athenians), Brasidas (against the Chalkidians), Agesilaus (against the Egyptians), Lysander and his successor Callicratidas (against the Persians). Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942c) 443 ll. 2-16 (= ed. Lambros (1906) 19 ll. 6-23).

³⁶⁷ Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942c) 443 ll. 14-16 (= ed. Lambros 1906: 19 ll. 20-23): ‘Τοῦτου γεγενημένου ἄλλος Ἀγεσίλαος νέος μετὰ τῶν νέων Λακεδαιμονίων, οὓς αὐτὸς ἀναπλάσει, ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν διαβήσῃ, τὴν πατρικὴν ἀποληψόμενος πᾶσαν ἀρχήν’.

from the fact that in one of his manuscripts he traced their dynasty *linea recta* back to Romulus.³⁶⁸

Considering all this, it becomes clear that Bessarion's imaginary community of Hellenes was largely independent of dynastic or territorial boundaries. His sense of Panhellenism becomes evident in several other corners of his oeuvre as well. So, for example, in his *Encyclica ad Graecos* (1463) he claimed that as a young boy he was known 'by all who understood Greek' and that he was estimated even by those who did not know him, so suggesting a community of language transcending personal relations.³⁶⁹ In an address to the Venetian Doge he referred to '*reliqua Graecia* that is now subject to your imperium'.³⁷⁰ This shows that 'Graecia' embraced more than the territories inhabited by the Greek-speaking subjects of a Roman emperor, either Comnenian, or Palaeologan. The Hellenes, ruled by Palaeologi, Comneni, Venetians, or Ottoman Turks, living either in Europe or in Asia, together constitute a distinctive imaginary community sharing a particular character, a language, and probably also a certain lineage going back to the ancient Greek world.

As there were no official forms of Hellenism, we find a notable flexibility in the ways Bessarion saw the particularities of the Greek tradition in which he placed himself and his people. For example, in a letter to the despot of the Morea, Demetrius Palaeologus, dating from his stay in Mistra between ca. 1425 and 1433, he claimed that the Peloponnesian peninsula was superior to Constantinople in many respects, referring to the Peloponnesians in the first person plural.³⁷¹ In his memorandum to Constantine Palaeologus, he cited Sparta as surpassing all other parts of Hellas in 'εὐνομία' and 'δόξη' because of its strict regulation of conspicuous consumption.³⁷² Shortly after the fall of Constantinople, however, he made the eastern Roman capital above all other cities the centre of the Greek world, complaining that 'the capital of entire Greece, the splendour and ornament of the Orient, the college of the best arts, the reservoir of all good things, is taken, pillaged, plundered, ruined by the most inhuman barbarians, by the most

³⁶⁸ The autographic list (running from Romulus and Remus until Michael IX Palaeologus) is in BNM, Marc. gr. 407 and printed in Schreiner (2008) 418-424.

³⁶⁹ Bessarion, ed. Migne (1866) 461, 486. On the letter see Mohler (1923) 240-242.

³⁷⁰ Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942c) 476 ll. 29-30: '... reliqua Graecia, quae nunc imperio vestro subjecta est'.

³⁷¹ For the Greek text of the letter see Mohler (1942b) 425-426 (esp. p. 426 ll. 17-35).

³⁷² Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942b) 444-445 (esp. ll. 15-20) (= ed. Lambros 1906: 21-22, esp. ll. 12-17).

ardent enemies of the Christian faith, by the most savage beasts'.³⁷³ Changing circumstances apparently determined the differing accents and nuances in Bessarion's representation of Hellenism. Even so, such differences in emphasis did not encroach upon the unity of Bessarion's imaginary community of Hellenes.

Importantly, for Bessarion the Hellenes as a group not only shared a common descent and character, but also a claim to a literary heritage. Also in this respect, Bessarion's letter to Constantine Palaeologus is an important document. In his advice to the despot, he emphasised the importance of training: military, technical, and theoretical. In what is a blend of prophecy, eulogy, and advice Bessarion claimed that the despot 'will return to our people the possession of literature ('τὸ χρήμα τῶν λόγων')', the only thing that distinguishes men from beasts, and Hellenes from barbarians, and 'in which our people once flourished and from which all knowledge, understanding and art came forth and blossomed'.³⁷⁴ To achieve this, Bessarion proposed to send Hellenic boys ('οἱ ἡμέτεροι νέοι') to Italy in order to study and to take back home with them the required expertise to repair the Peloponnesus.³⁷⁵

These lines are important to understand Bessarion's views on the state of Hellenism in relation to western progress. In anticipation of his critics, the cardinal asserted that it was not shameful for a Greek to learn from a Latin. 'We will not take something alien', he argued, 'but we will take back from our debtors the things that belong to us: if someone demands to have it returned, they are obliged to give back what they did not justly *took back*, but *took away*' ('ἂ μὴ ἀπέλαβον, ἀλλὰ ἔλαβον').³⁷⁶ Therefore, he could refer to 'our wisdom' ('ἡ ἡμετέρα σοφία'), not only when referring to literature and theoretical knowledge, but also to practical skills such as shipbuilding. In his letter, Bessarion in fact inverted the western scheme of the *translatio studii*, or the idea that cultural leadership was transferred from one people to the other through history,

³⁷³ Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942c) 475 ll. 24-29: 'Urbs ... totius Graeciae caput, splendor et decus orientis, gymnasium optimarum artium, bonorum omnium receptaculum, ab immanissimis barbaris, a saevissimis christianae fidei hostibus, a truculentissimis feris capta, spoliata, direpta, exhausta est'.

³⁷⁴ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1906) 24 ll. 17-30: 'τὸ χρήμα τῶν λόγων, ᾧ μόνος τῶν θηρίων ἄνθρωπος διαφέρει καὶ τῶν βαρβάρων Ἕλληνες διακρίνονται, ἐν οἷς ποτε τὸ ἡμέτερον ἦκμακε γένος καὶ ὧν πᾶσα ἐπιστήμη καὶ γνῶσις καὶ τέχνη ἐβλάστησέ τε καὶ ἤνθησεν, ἀποδώσεις αὐθις τῷ γένει... '.

³⁷⁵ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1906) 25 ll. 3-20.

³⁷⁶ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1906), 25 ll. 17-20: 'Ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐδὲ ἀλλότριον τι ληψόμεθα, ἀλλὰ τὰ αὐτῶν παρὰ τῶν ὀφειλόντων ἀποληψόμεθα· ὀφείλουσι γὰρ ὄντος τοῦ ἀπαιτοῦντος ἀποδοῦναι ἂ μὴ ἀπέλαβον, ἀλλὰ ἔλαβον.

normally progressively westwards and ideally together with political power, but not necessarily so. Unlike Apostoles, who aggressively asserted Greek cultural superiority over the West (see chapter 2, pp. 91-92), Bessarion framed the relation between Hellenism and the Latin West in terms of solving debts. A similar idea was later instrumentalised by Bessarion's protégé Janus Lascaris, as we shall see in the penultimate section of this chapter and in our discussion of his *Florentine Oration* in chapter 5.

*Bessarion's idea of Hellenic freedom under Romans and Turks
in his Encomium and Encyclica*

As we have seen, Bessarion's Hellenism was inextricably bound up with the idea of freedom; both in his Trapezuntine eulogy and in his letter to the despot of the Morea the word 'ἐλευθερία' is ever-present. For Bessarion, freedom was a complex category. In classical Greek fashion it was categorically opposed to slavery ('δουλεία', 'δουλεύειν') in the metaphorical sense of being dominated by someone or something perceived as foreign or external. But Bessarion added to this dichotomy between freedom and slavery a differentiation of the concept of freedom itself that he derived from the Christian rather than the classical tradition. When he discussed the incorporation of Trebizond in the Roman empire, he distinguished between two kinds of freedom, namely freedom of thought or mind ('γνώμη', 'ψυχή') and freedom of body ('σῶμα'). According to Bessarion, the former was more important than the latter because it could exist independently, while physical liberty crumbled without the freedom of thought.³⁷⁷ Bessarion's idea of physical freedom referred to political self-government ('ὄντως πολιτεύειν' and 'τὰ καθ' αὐτοὺς διοικεῖν'). In the context of his discourse, it did not so much refer to the absence of internal tyranny as to the exemption from external political and military domination, especially Persian intervention.

Bessarion's idea of spiritual freedom is, on the other hand, less clear-cut, but seems to refer to the maintenance of the independence of one's way of thinking even if one is not free in terms of political action. As such it is connected to the preservation of language and customs and so to identity in the most literal sense of sameness over time in respects that are considered to be essential or constitutive. In Bessarion's discourse, the distinction between these two kinds of freedom is useful to demonstrate that the Trapezuntines had never really lost an essential form of freedom after their absorption

³⁷⁷ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 72 = ed. Lampsides (1984a) 46-47.

into foreign Roman political structures. As we have seen, in Bessarion's eyes, the Romans were a friendly people who admired Greek language and literature so that they allowed the Trapezuntines to preserve their freedom of thought even if they had politically subdued them. In this way, they remained essentially unsubdued and without master ('ἀδούλωτοι', 'ἀδέσποτοι') even under Roman rule. When the Roman regime changed, and the capital of the empire was eventually transferred to Byzantium, Trebizond remained the same ('ἡ αὐτή') after all.³⁷⁸

Bessarion's treatment of ancient urban freedom in the context of the Roman empire interestingly contrasts with the way in which contemporary Italians addressed a similar problem, most notably the Florentine humanist Leonardus Brunus, whom Bessarion probably met in Florence in 1439.³⁷⁹ In order to understand Bessarion's differentiated view of Hellenic freedom in the *Encomium*, it may be helpful to touch briefly on how it relates to Brunus' discussion of ancient Florentine freedom and the Roman empire.³⁸⁰ For both Brunus and Bessarion, the emergence of imperial Rome sat uneasily with their emphasis on the pre-Roman freedom of their respective cities. Brunus emphasised that the Roman empire had ended urban independence in Etruria. Unlike Bessarion, he saw the emergence of the Roman empire not only as the end of political freedom. According to Brunus, original Florentine *virtus* had also declined due to leisure and inaction under the Roman emperors. His distinctively negative interpretation of the Roman empire obviously suited his republican agenda in which imperial Rome stood for a misguided form of government. Brunus' view on imperial Rome became very influential and resurfaced, for example, in the work of Machiavelli.³⁸¹

Brunus' juxtaposition of Florentine liberty and imperial Rome sharply contrasts with Bessarion's treatment of Hellenic freedom. In Bessarion's account, freedom continued to exist in Trebizond also after his city had been incorporated in the same Roman empire that Brunus saw as the end of Florentine liberty and *virtus*. Against the

³⁷⁸ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 176 ll. 29-34 = Lampsides (1984a) 51 ll. 17-22 ('ἡ ἡμετέρα δ' ἐν πᾶσι τε τοῖς καιροῖς καὶ παντοίαις μεταβολαῖς ἡ αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτοῦς μένει...').

³⁷⁹ On the occasion of the Council of Florence Brunus wrote a *Polity of the Florentine* in Greek. The best manuscript of this treatise was owned by Plethon and shows his annotations. For the text of the treatise and an introduction see Moulakis (1986).

³⁸⁰ Brunus discussed Florentine freedom most notably in his famous *Laudatio Florentinae urbis*, his history of the Florentine people and in his funeral oration for Nanni Strozzi, but the topic resurfaces throughout his oeuvre. An overview of Brunus' views on freedom is in Baron (1955) 358-364. For a critical assessment of Baron in general see particularly Hankins (1995).

³⁸¹ Baron (1955) 368-371.

background of Brunus' position, it is possible to see Bessarion's differentiated view on Hellenic freedom as the result of an ideological tension that he had to solve in his *Encomium*. On the one hand, he praised Hellenic freedom of foreign rule and influence. On the other, he worked in a Roman context, the Comnenian empire of Trebizond. As Bessarion did not shape a republican ideology, he had to find a way to praise the persistent freedom of the Hellenes without denying the dignity of the Roman monarchy of which his profoundly Hellenic city was the proud capital. His solution was a more differentiated understanding of Hellenic freedom. While Brunus emphasised the principal interdependence of literary culture and political freedom,³⁸² Bessarion allowed forms of cultural and spiritual freedom to exist even without political autonomy. The different ideological positions of Brunus and Bessarion thus provoked different interpretations of freedom vis-à-vis imperial Rome, despite the superficial similarity of their positions.³⁸³

Although Bessarion could depict the Romans as a good-natured people in the context of his *Encomium*, hardly more than a decade later the Ottoman Turks posed a very different problem. Writing to the yoked Greeks a decade after the fall of Constantinople in his encyclical letter (*Encyclica*), Bessarion eventually had to conclude that they had now lost more than just their political power or monarchy ('μοναρχία'/ 'imperium') as they had under the Romans. Unlike the Trapezuntines under Roman rule, the Hellenes under Ottoman domination also lost the last vestiges of their practical wisdom ('σοφία'/ 'sapientia') and their theoretical knowledge ('ἐπιστήμη'/ 'disciplina'). The rationale behind the different treatment of Romans and Turks as masters must be sought not only in the different evaluation of Romans and Turks, but also in his views on good government. Unlike the Romans the Ottoman Turks were not a good-natured people. For Bessarion they were the ultimate barbarians, characterised by an innate inclination towards destruction. Bessarion expressed this extremely hostile image of the Turks in his Trapezuntine eulogy, but most articulately in his later *Orationes contra Turcas* that will be central to the next section. In addition, Bessarion saw an intimate relationship between the intellectual and moral status of the governing

³⁸² Baron (1955) 363.

³⁸³ Given the disputed composition date of the *Encomium*, it is difficult to say if Bessarion intended the text somehow to contribute to Italian discussions over the concept of freedom. However, it might well be worthwhile to explore this issue further with a wider scope in a separate study.

and that of the governed.³⁸⁴ After summing up the virtuous features of the Greek ‘γένος’ in his memorandum for the despot of the Morea, for instance, Bessarion added that the Hellenes needed a leader and a teacher (‘κορυφαῖος and διδάσκαλος’) to stimulate them to actualise their innate qualities.³⁸⁵

A barbarian ruler such as the Islamic Sultan could by definition not be a guide for his Greek subjects. Barbarians were stereotypically ignorant of and averse to Greek learning. If Greek wisdom and knowledge were stored in Greek literature, a barbarian ruler would consequently erase them together with Greek letters. In his *Encyclica*, however, the cardinal stressed that what remained for the Greeks even in their state of barbarian subordination was the ‘excellence (‘ἀρετή’) of their character making those who possess it perfect men’.³⁸⁶ This assertion complements and further refines Bessarion’s earlier distinction between physical and psychic or spiritual freedom. While the Hellenes under Ottoman domination lost much of their spiritual freedom due to a loss of Hellenic wisdom and knowledge, they maintained something of a natural character tending towards the good and noble. It suffices to recall Bessarion’s letter to Constantine Palaeologus, in which he claimed that the Hellenes were, among other things, mild by nature (‘τὴν φύσιν’) and naturally (‘φύσει’) noble and ambitious (see p. 106 with n. 364). Their natural propensity for excellence created room for the reawakening of what went lost with the arrival of the barbarian invaders.³⁸⁷ In this Hellenic reawakening, Bessarion saw a role for himself.

³⁸⁴ Compare Bessarion’s chapter on Plato’s views on monarchism in his *In calumniatorem Platonis* (Bessarion, ed. Mohler 1927: 581-589).

³⁸⁵ Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1906) 22 ll. 27-29. In the same vein, Bessarion said that the despot would march against Asia with the Spartans ‘whom you yourself will made’ (‘οὗς αὐτὸς ἀναπλάσει’).

³⁸⁶ Bessarion, ed. Migne (1866) 453, 481 (‘ἀρετὴ δὲ ὅσηπερ εἰς τὸ ἦθος τείνει, καὶ καλοὺς κάγαθοὺς ἀπεργάζεται τοὺς κεκτημένους’ / ‘virtus sola quae ad mores pertinet quaeque studiosos sui bonos effecit’).

³⁸⁷ A similar idea resurfaces in Musurus’ *Hymn to Plato*. When Plato prophesies the liberation of Byzantium, he claims that the ‘Greek people that is presently exhausted by slavery’ (‘λεῶς Γραικός ὁ δουλεία νῦν κατατρυχόμενος’) once liberated will remember its ‘ancient virtue’ (‘ἀρχαίης ἀρετῆς, ἵν’ ἐλεύθερον ἡμᾶρ ἴδῃται, μνήσεται’). See Musurus, ed. Siphakis (1954) 382 ll. 131-134. Siphakis’ edition is not often cited, but should perhaps replace the edition of Émile Legrand (Musurus, ed. Legrand 1885c). On Musurus see also Geanakoplos (1976a).

Bessarion as a defender of Hellenic freedom after 1453

Bessarion's ideas about Hellenic freedom are important because they illuminate the ideological gist of his activities to support Hellenism during his cardinalship in Rome. As such, they help us to understand better how he himself saw his role in the Byzantine diaspora. For example, the letter in which Bessarion explained what was behind his heaping up of Greek manuscripts echoes the main concerns of his *Encomium*. According to the cardinal, the manuscript collection was intended to save the Hellenes from remaining 'voiceless' ('ἄφωνοι') and being similar to 'barbarians' ('βάρβαροι') and 'slaves' ('ἀνδράποδα') (see chapter 2, pp. 80-81). As we have seen, according to Bessarion in the *Encomium*, the Hellenes had always resisted the barbarians ('βάρβαροι') and rejected slavery ('δουλεία'), while they had also preserved their language and customs even when they lived surrounded by barbarian tribes. Through his library project Bessarion helped to maintain the values that his Trapezuntine ancestors had equally promoted. By conserving Greek literature, he also preserved the Greeks' ancestral 'σοφία' and 'ἐπιστήμη' contained in it, and so at least a substantial part of their psychic freedom. In so doing, he continued the Athenian tradition of defending freedom and resisting barbarism and slavery. Also his support of individual Hellenes fits in with this. Just as his Trapezuntine ancestors had helped out 'suppliants of the same *genos* and the same language', so did Bessarion.³⁸⁸ It is well known that he helped many Byzantine scholars to come to the West and find employment there. He supported, among others, Constantine Lascaris in Messina, Demetrius Chalcondylas in Padua, and Andronicus Callistus in Florence.³⁸⁹ After the fall of Byzantium, Bessarion wrote that 'the prospective obliteration of our remaining Hellenes cause[d] [him] enormous grief'.³⁹⁰ In order to overcome this, he brought young Byzantines to the West to study and obtain positions, as he probably did with Janus Lascaris. In this way, Bessarion not only helped to conserve Greek learning, but also assisted Byzantines in making a living in the West.

Bessarion also exerted his influence to maintain Greek autonomy in a more properly political sense. The concept of physical freedom resurfaced, for example, in a curious

³⁸⁸ Bessarion praised the ancestors of the Trapezuntines, among other things, for the fact that they never disregarded or drove away suppliants of their own stock and language. See Bessarion, ed. Lambros (1916) 170 ll. 2-4 = ed. Lampsides (1984) 44 ll. 13-14 ('... τὸ μὴ πρὸς αὐτῶν εἶναι παριδεῖν τε καὶ ἀπώσασθαι ἰκέτας ἀνθρώπους ταῦτοῦ γένους καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς φωνῆς τε καὶ γλώττης...').

³⁸⁹ Cf. Bianca (1990) 10 n. 52-54.

³⁹⁰ Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942c) 480 ll. 11-12: ἄλυπεί δὲ με σφόδρα ἡ ὑμῶν τῶν ὑπολειπομένων Ἑλλήνων προσδοκουμένη φθόρα'. Cf. Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942c) 482 ll. 13-14 ('τὴν τε παντελεῖ Ἑλλήνων ἀπώλειαν').

speech he delivered on the occasion of the transferral of the head of Saint Andrew from Mistra to Rome in 1462.³⁹¹ The relic was a present of Thomas Palaeologus to pope Pius II. In the oration, recorded in the pope's memoirs, cardinal Bessarion addressed Pius II in the voice of the Saint. In the speech, Saint Andrew hoped that with the help of Pius II the Greeks would regain their ancient freedom. The Greeks, in the Saint's words, 'are now subject to an impious and most savage enemy and are not only deprived of their physical freedom (*libertas corporum*), but also in danger of losing the integrity of their faith (*fidei integritas*)'.³⁹² The Saint's differentiation between *libertas corporum* and *fidei integritas* is reminiscent of Bessarion's distinction between physical and psychic 'ἐλευθερία' in his *Encomium*. In this specifically religious context, the concept of psychic freedom is recast in the more normative terms of religious *integritas*. Through the *persona* of Saint Andrew, Bessarion urged the pope to liberate the Greeks from the Ottoman Turks and to restore both their physical freedom and their orthodoxy (read Roman Catholicism). While it is quite clear what the restitution of the *fidei integritas* means, it is less easy to see what the restoration of the *libertas corporum* of the Greeks would entail in Bessarion's view. Did the cardinal aim at the restoration of the eastern Roman empire? Did he envision a Greek kingdom in the manner of Chalkokondyles? An Italian protectorate? I shall come back to such questions in the last section of this chapter.³⁹³

It is well known that Bessarion exerted all his energies to organise a large-scale crusade to liberate the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Sultan.³⁹⁴ It is also well known that all these enterprises failed, most notably the crusade organised by Pius II, who died in Ancona before sailing off to Greece. Aware that concerted action in the West was impossible, Bessarion possibly sought other means to restore the *libertas corporum* of the Greeks. There is evidence that in the 1470s the cardinal was involved in the establishment of a semi-autonomous community for Greeks in the Maremma area in the

³⁹¹ See on this transferral in more detail Ronchey (2008b).

³⁹² Piccolomineus, ed. Totaro (1984) 1548.

³⁹³ In a similar vein, Musurus made Plato plead the Greek case before Leo X in the Greek hymn to Plato he attached to his edition of Plato (see Musurus, ed. Siphakis 1954 replacing Musurus, ed. Legrand 1885c). Here, it is not the religious but rather the cultural authority of the speaker that is made productive in favour of the Byzantine Greek case.

³⁹⁴ For a synoptic account of Bessarion's endeavours in favour of the crusade see Binner (1980) 23-110, but also Irmischer (1976), Schuhmann (1975), Manselli (1973), Mohler (1927), absent from Binner's bibliography.

neighbourhood of Siena.³⁹⁵ Anna Notaras – the affluent daughter of the last *megadux* of Byzantium – planned to invest in the area to found a Greek colony there.³⁹⁶ Although Bessarion did not live to see the outcome of the negotiations with Siena (ended in 1474), the report of the Sieneſe Consistory shows that the community would enjoy considerable sovereignty and was to be governed in accordance with the Justinian code together with the revisions by later emperors and the Orthodox Church.³⁹⁷ One modern historian spoke of a ‘surrogate Peloponnesus’.³⁹⁸ In any case, in such a polity both the physical and psychic freedom of the Greeks would be secured until they would eventually return to Greece. In this way, to view Bessarion’s activities in favour of the Greeks against the backdrop of the centrality of Hellenic freedom in his thought enables us to see a coherent ideological programme behind his Hellenism, mainly revolving around a set of two recurrent and interrelated concepts, namely Hellenism versus barbarism, and Hellenic freedom versus slavery.

³⁹⁵ Documents relating to the curious project are available in Calisse (1896) and Cecchina (1930). See also Harris (2006) esp. 95-97 and Maltezou (2006) esp. 104-105. It is not wholly clear to what degree Bessarion was involved in the plans as his part of the correspondence with the Consistory of Siena seems to be lost. On November 17, 1471 Battista Bellani reported to the Sieneſe Consistory that cardinal Bessarion had informed him that Greek families wanted to settle down in the Sieneſe territory (Cecchini 1930: 5). Together with large parts of the negotiations the letter of the notary public of the Sieneſe Consistory to the cardinal is preserved in the Sieneſe *Archivio di Stato* in which he explains the decision of the Consistory to allow a Greek settlement in the Maremma area (dated August 30, 1472, less than three months before Bessarion’s death, cf. Cecchini 1930: 29-30 = doc. 5).

³⁹⁶ On Anna Notaras see Nicol (1996) 96-109. The area was to be sold on the curious term that Anna’s successor could be neither ‘an unknown or suspect person of the Sieneſe community nor some lord in Italy who is an Italian by birth nor the son of a lord of Italian extraction’. See Cecchini (1930) 36: ‘In primis petit ipsa Anna pro se et successoribus suis heredibus universalibus, natura vel ex testamento, in perpetuum, castrum dictum Montis Acuti cum eius curia ad usum eorum, cum pactis et conventionibus [*sic*] et modificationibus infrascriptis et cum hoc quod talis subcessor non sit persona incognita vel suspecta communis Senarum et non sit aliquis dominus in Italia originalis italicus, nec filius domini de Italia originalis’.

³⁹⁷ Cecchini (1930) 38: ‘Item liceat dicte domine Anne et eius successoribus per tempora supervenientibus et eisdem hominibus habere et deputare officialem et officiales quos voluerint grecum, qui in civilibus et criminalibus et custodia castri gubernet et ministre<n>t iustitiam cuicumque secundum iustinianas leges et ecclesiasticas in spiritualibus et politicas in temporalibus et secundum eorum mores et consuetudines ac reformationes per grecorum imperatores et ecclesie editas seu per hos dominos seu per dictos habitatores edendas, dummodo non sint contra magnificum comune Senarum nec contra eius cives seu alios subditos suos ...’.

³⁹⁸ Harris (2006) 95.

Especially against the backdrop of Trapezuntius' *Encomium to Trebizond* Bessarion's activities in support of the Hellenes appear as the continuation of the Atheno-Trapezuntine tradition with which he associated. Just as his ancestors had maintained their freedom far from their metropolis in Attica, so Bessarion attempted to maintain the spiritual and physical freedom of his expatriate fellow Hellenes. Just as his Athenian, Milesian and Sinopean ancestors had battled the barbarians, so Bessarion attempted to avert barbarism for the Hellenes in the darkest moment of their history. The cardinal thus really embodied the values and customs of his Atheno-Trapezuntine ancestors.

The importance of this aspect of Bessarion's self-representation must not be underestimated, not only because it gives ideological coherence to his aspirations and efforts, but also because contemporaries signalled it out as a significant feature of the cardinal. At Bessarion's burial in the Church of the Holy Apostles in 1472, for example, cardinal Capranica delivered a funeral oration, in which he summarised the argument Bessarion had made in his *Encomium* circa thirty years earlier. 'His fatherland is Trapezus,' the cardinal proclaimed, 'a colony of the Sinopeans. As a matter of fact, the Milesians established Sinope, the Athenians Miletus. Inheriting the nobility of his parents, grandparents and ancestors, he tempered the opulence and intemperance of the Asian genius with Attic moderation'.³⁹⁹ This idea was also taken up by Michael Apostoles in his funeral oration for the cardinal as well as by Baptista Platina in his panegyric speech delivered when the cardinal was still alive and supposedly in his presence.⁴⁰⁰

Apart from a Hellene with a mission of freedom, however, Bessarion also was a cardinal with a mission for Rome and the ambition to become pope. While for a Greek audience, he presented himself as a Hellene, it is notable that for a Latin audience, he

³⁹⁹ Capranica, ed. Mohler (1942) 406 ll. 11-15: 'Bessario nobili et antiqua Graecia ortus oriundusque fuit. Siquidem eius patria est Trapezus, Sinopensium colonia. Sinopem vero condidere Milesii, Miletum Athenienses. Ex his parentibus, avis, abavis maioribusque nobilitatem referens ubertatem atque redundantiam Asiani ingenii Attica moderatione temperavit'). Capranica certainly knew Bessarion's Trapezuntine eulogy as well as his letter regarding affairs on the Peloponnesus (see Capranica, ed. Mohler 1942: 410 ll. 6-7, where he refers to 'laudationes scilicet duae patriae suae Trapezuntiae et Isthmi').

⁴⁰⁰ Apostoles, ed. Migne (1886) CXXXII: 'τούτω μὲν δὴ πατρὶς ἐτύγγανεν οὔσα μετὰ τὴν βασιλίδα βασιλὶς τῶν πόλεων Τραπεζοῦς, πόλις ἀρχαιοτάτη καὶ Ἑλληνίς...' and Platina, ed. Migne (1868) esp. CIV: 'Is enim ex vetere Graecia oriundus natusque in Asia, utrimque collegit generosi spiritus semina. Trapezuntius, Sinopensium colonia, ejus patria est; Sinopem condidere Milesii, Miletum Athenienses. Ex his, ut a parentibus, avis, proavis nobilitatem referens, redundantiam Asiani ingenii frugalitate Attica compescuit'.

not only highlighted his role as a cardinal of the Roman Church, but even played down and dissimulated his Greekness. This suggests that the Greek cardinal experienced constraints to his freedom of expression when he addressed a Latin audience.

Bessarion's dissimulation of Greekness

Bessarion's epitaph in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Rome included all his Roman ecclesiastical titles, but also stated that he was born in 'noble Greece' ('nobili Graecia ortus').⁴⁰¹ On one of the manuscripts he donated to the monastery of Grottaferrata we read that Bessarion was 'a cardinal by rank ('τὴν ἀξίαν') and a Hellene by descent ('τὸ γένος').'⁴⁰² Although the authenticity of his funerary inscription is disputed,⁴⁰³ such statements encapsulate one of the main tensions characterising Bessarion's concerns and preoccupations and consequently the way he presented himself. While in his role as protector of the Greeks he mainly addressed a Greek audience – either in Italy or in the Greek-speaking world at large –, in his role as cardinal he faced a chiefly Latin audience. The tension between his role as a Greek patriot and as a Roman cardinal is reflected in his oeuvre.

As we have seen in the previous sections, Bessarion thought of the Greeks as a coherent group with a specific character that should ideally be protected by a form of political organisation. He also emphasised the idea of Hellenic 'ἐλευθερία' and sought to promote Greek interests in the West where he could. The cardinal has therefore been praised as a real Greek patriot, and some even claimed that Bessarion's crusading

⁴⁰¹ The text of the epitaph is included in Forcella (1863) 226 n. 656. It reads 'BESSARIO EPISCOPVS THVSCVLANVS | SANCTAE ROMANAE ECCLESIAE CARDINALIS | PATRIARCHA CONSTANTINOPOLITANVS | NOBILI GRAECIA ORTVS ORIVNDVSQUE | SIBI VIVENS POSVIT | ANNO SALVTIS MCCCCLXVI || ΤΟΥΤ ΕΤΙ ΒΗΣΣΑΡΙΩΝ | ΖΩΝ ΑΝΥΣΑ ΣΩΜΑΤΙ | ΣΗΜΑ · | ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑ ΔΕ ΦΕΥΞΕΙΤΑΙ | ΠΡΟΣ ΘΕΟΝ ΑΘΑΝΑΤΟΝ [*Bessarion, Bishop of Tuscany, Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, Patriarch of Constantinople, born and descended from noble Greece, erected [this] for himself while still alive, in the Year of Redemption 1466. || I, Bessarion, erected, when I was still alive, this monument for my dead body: My spirit shall flee to God immortal*]. A Latin reworking of the Greek text by Theodore Gaza is preserved in BML, Plut. 34.24, fol. 1^r: 'Bessarion hanc uiuus fecerat ossibus urnam | Inmortalem adiit spiritus deum'. Cf. Bandini (1777) 96 and Bandini (1775) 153. It should be noted that the phrase 'Nobili Graecia ortus oriundusque' was not in the version foreseen in Bessarion's will. Cf. Migne (1866) 80, Mohler (1923) 21 n. 3. See also Richardson (2009) 220-233, 453-455 for a brief description of what the chapel and the tomb originally looked like. For a detailed study of the chapel's iconography or what is left of it see Tiberia (1992).

⁴⁰² Reference is to cod. Crypt. Z.δ.I of the Grottaferrata monastery. The line is '† ἐκ τῶν Βησσαρίωνος καρδινάλεως τὴν ἀξίαν, τὸ γένος ἑλληνοσ' (cited after Fiaccadori 1994: 385).

⁴⁰³ Petta (1974) 367-368, *contra* Bianca (1980c) 145 n. 169.

appeals remained without success because his patriotic zeal simply eclipsed his political deftness.⁴⁰⁴ Even so, Bessarion's crowning achievement in crusade literature, the *Orationes contra Turcas*, show him in his role as Roman cardinal rather than Greek patriot. Even though Hellenic freedom was central to his thought, Bessarion did not highlight Hellenic concerns when he most eagerly defended the liberation of the Greeks and other peoples from the Turkish yoke.

Bessarion composed his *Orationes contra Turcas* in 1470 on the occasion of the fall of Negroponte (Euboea) in that same year.⁴⁰⁵ In the speeches, Bessarion personally addressed the princes of Europe to join forces in a large-scale crusade against the Ottoman Turks. Although Venice was in fact the only power directly affected by the loss of Negroponte, Sultan Mehmet's successful invasion gave the Ottoman Turks both control over the sea and a strategic base to invade the Italian peninsula. Just as Bessarion's Trapezuntine eulogy, the speeches were not originally delivered in any sort of assembly.⁴⁰⁶ Together with his translation of Demosthenes' speech Bessarion initially sent them to the Venetian Doge Christoforo Moro in response to the latter's consolatory letter on the loss of Negroponte; he also included his letter to the abbot of Sanseverino in the package, omitting the most embarrassing passages about the pope.⁴⁰⁷ The *Orationes contra Turcas*, printed by Guillaume Fichet in the very year of Negroponte's fall, consist of three introductory letters, two speeches, and a Latin translation of Demosthenes' *First Olynthiac*.⁴⁰⁸ The two speeches are addressed to the Italians ('Itali'). The first speech is about the imminent dangers of Ottoman expansion for the Italian peninsula, while the second addresses the need to end discord and unite against the Ottomans.⁴⁰⁹ The Latin translation of Demosthenes' *First Olynthiac* is preceded by an introductory note and concluded by an epilogue.⁴¹⁰ Fichet's print was

⁴⁰⁴ Pfeiffer (1968) 57: 'Aber bei Bessarion war die Vaterlandsliebe größer als die politische Geschicklichkeit'.

⁴⁰⁵ Babinger (1978) 279-284; Setton (1978) 291-293, 298-313; Miller (1908) 170-179.

⁴⁰⁶ Meserve (2003) 524.

⁴⁰⁷ Meserve (2003) 542.

⁴⁰⁸ The first letter is an introductory letter to Fichet (fol. 3^r-3^v), the second is a letter to the princes of Italy, explaining the contents of the booklet (fols. 3^v-4^v), and the third one is addressed to Bessarion of Sanseverino (fols. 4^v-8^v).

⁴⁰⁹ The first speech is entitled 'Bessarionis Cardinalis ad Italos de periculis imminentibus Oratio' (fols. 8^v-19^r), the second 'Eiusdem de discordiis sedandis et bello in Turcum decernendo' (fols. 19^r-32^r).

⁴¹⁰ Introduction on fols. 31^v-32^r, translation on fols. 32^v-40^r, epilogue on fols. 40^r-41^r. For quotations, I have used the original 1470-edition of Guillaume Fichet. The only modern edition

disseminated among the Christian powers of Europe in exemplars that had often been personalised with pictorial decorations or poetical compositions.⁴¹¹

The absence of Greece in Bessarion's speeches is remarkable not only against the backdrop of his own preoccupation with Greece elsewhere, but also against the background of how other Byzantines dealt with the crusade in their works. Almost all of them somehow integrated the liberation of the Greeks into their crusade appeals. Manilius Cabacius Rallus, for instance, argued that the 'houses and hearths of the Greeks' must be restored, while Johannes Gemistus aimed at the restoration of a particular territory in which the Greeks naturally lived (on which see chapter 6).⁴¹² Moreover, Byzantine intellectuals often presented crusades and the resulting liberation of their homeland as a western obligation towards the Greeks. Demetrius Chalcondylas, for example, spoke of a *remuneratio*, a recompense.⁴¹³ He primarily referred to the sixth-century Gothic Wars, in which the Byzantines (the 'Graeci') had restored peace in Italy when it was trampled by the Goths. Since the Greeks had so liberally exerted their energies to rescue Italy – Chalcondylas argued – the Italians had now to recompense and liberate Greece from the Turks.⁴¹⁴ His reference to early Byzantine history is exceptional. Classical Greece was more frequently cited in this context, though both

of the text is Bessarion, ed. Migne (1866), but it is based on the 1537-edition of Antonius Bladius. The glosses to the Demosthenes-translation are not included; they are only included in the edition of Geuffraeus (1573) 240-253. Though I cite from Fichet's edition of 1470, I also refer to the edition of Migne as his edition is more readily available. Where necessary, I record variant readings. For earlier manuscript redactions of the *Orationes* see Monfasani (1981 = 1995, essay II) 179-181, 196-204; for a thorough analysis of the history of the text see Meserve (2003).

⁴¹¹ Bessarion's *Orationes contra Turcas* have been discussed in the context of their text history, and in the context of the argumentative strategies used by Bessarion to achieve his goals, yet they have not been critically examined with regard to their self-representational strategies. See Lentzen (2010) 293-204, Colliard (2004) 103-113, Meserve (2004) 31-38, Meserve (2003, 1981), Manseli (1973), Schoebel (1967) 157-160, Vast (1878) 386-392. A discussion of the *Orationes* is conspicuously absent in Coluccia (2009).

⁴¹² See Lamers (2012b).

⁴¹³ The text of Chalcondylas' speeches is in Geanakoplos (1976b) 296-304 (with English translation on 254-264 and discussion on 231-253). See also Geanakoplos (1974a).

⁴¹⁴ Chalcondylas, ed. Geanakoplos (1976) 300 (*ad fol. 6^v*). According to Bisaha (2004) 115, Chalcondylas here reminds the Latins 'of the unity that once existed between Greek East and Latin West – in this case back when the Italians still acknowledged the Byzantines as Romans'. Chalcondylas actually made no effort to stress a specifically *Roman* unity between Italians and Byzantines for he called Byzantium 'Graecia' and the Byzantines Greeks, which is in line with the way Italian humanists saw the Byzantines in history (see also chapter 2, pp. 57-65).

periods were probably seen as part of Greek antiquity.⁴¹⁵ The idea was that the European nations owed a cultural debt to the Greeks because their ancestors had significantly contributed to their civilisation, either by inventing its constitutive parts, or by perfecting what they had received from other even more ancient cultures.⁴¹⁶

The *argument of cultural debt* is worked out in clearest detail by Bessarion's most influential protégé Janus Lascaris in a speech for Charles V. Lascaris delivered the speech as a papal legate probably in Madrid almost fifty years after Bessarion's death in about 1525. He had the papal mandate to reconcile Charles with the king of France Francis I after the battle of Pavia in order to create a basis for crusade. However, Lascaris used the opportunity also to plead the Greek case, and he did so with the argument of cultural debt.⁴¹⁷ In compliance with crusade rhetoric Lascaris stressed both the necessity and utility of a crusade against the Turks,⁴¹⁸ and, as a papal legate, equally emphasised the need for unity among European Christians.⁴¹⁹ However, Lascaris mandate was twofold, as he explained himself to Charles as follows:

'Per questa causa et per questo effecto sono stato mandato qui, et tal cosa ho ad dire et dico ad vostra Serenità ad nome suo; nè solo lui è che mi manda, Syre, ma se ho ad dire cossa che non deve parere strana ad vostra Serenità, mi manda l'antiqua Grecia et le reliquie de la presente ad Supplicarvi, Syre, che li vogliate havere compassione; dico l'antiqua Grecia, quelli grandi homeni che lei ha producto, li quali hanno domesticato et ornato il mondo de ogni virtú et humanità...'⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁵ Ben-Tov (2010) makes the point that German humanists placed the end of Greek antiquity as late as 1453.

⁴¹⁶ On the role of the concepts of *inventio/heuresis* and *translatio/mimesis* as well as the idea of inventorship in cultural history from Greco-Roman antiquity to the Italian Renaissance see Atkinson (2007).

⁴¹⁷ If the speech was actually delivered, it was most probably in 1525 (see Whittakker 1980: 89-91; Binner 1981: 177-178). However, it is likely that the text in its present form is a reworking of the original speech (Whittakker 1980: 92). On the complicated text history in general see Whittakker (1977a) together with Whittakker (1980) and Nikas (1995) 349-353.

⁴¹⁸ Lascaris, ed. Nikas (1995) ll. 7-11 ll. 202-205 ll. 426-429.

⁴¹⁹ Lascaris, ed. Nikas (1995) ll. 338-339. Lascaris alludes to the fact that Charles V kept the French king as a captive; the orator advises the emperor to liberate him and to make his sister the captive's bride in order to secure peace and unity among the Christians (ll. 370-558).

⁴²⁰ Lascaris, ed. Nikas (1995) ll. 113-120. Cf. Lascaris (ed. Nikas 1995) ll. 168-170: 'Queste cose, Syre, io ho in commissione dal summo Pontifice, et de la patria mia, a Vostra Maestà circa il pregare et supplicare che voglia fare la impresa'.

For this reason and to this effect I am sent to you, and this I have to say and I say this to your Highness in the pope's name. But it is not only the pope who sends me, Sire. If I may say something which must not astound Your Highness: ancient Greece and what is left of present-day Greece send me in order to beg you, Sire, to have compassion on them. Ancient Greece, I say – how many excellent men she has produced, men who domesticated the world and ornated it with every virtue and civilisation...

The remainder of Janus Lascaris' argument accordingly revolved around the notion of cultural debt. According to him, the nations of Europe had an obligation to the Greek nation and 'must recognise Greece as their mother' and must commemorate its ancient heroes as their fathers and teachers.⁴²¹ In a long list he summed up the protagonists of Greek civilisation who must be recompensed for their contribution. These reveal an inclusive view on the Greek contribution to Europe, going far beyond the humanist curriculum, and also comprising, for instance, the arts and sciences of legislature, statecraft, medicine and theology.⁴²² According to Lascaris, the men of his small catalogue gave to the inhabitants of Europe their laws, religion and the customs appropriate to true humans.⁴²³ On their behalf, Lascaris beseeched Charles to 'liberate their fatherland (*patria*), now occupied by a foul and abominable people, so that their inventions and institutions would have their rightful place and domicile (*la propria sede et domicilio*)'.⁴²⁴ With a Vergilian line he made them beg the emperor to 'grant [them] an

⁴²¹ Lascaris, ed. Nikas (1995) ll. 136-140: 'Onde potete, Syre, considerare, essendo iusto estimatore, quanta obligatione hanno tute queste nationi alla natione Greca, che veramente doveriamo riconoscere la Grecia como loro Matre, et havere memoria deli prenominati homini, como de Patri loro, et Preceptori'.

⁴²² The protagonists fall into nine categories: heroes (ll. 120-121: Heracles, Theseus, Jason), legislators (ll. 122-123: Minos, Lycurgus, Solon), commanders and strategists (ll. 122-123: Themistocles, Aristides, Epaminondas), kings (ll. 123: Agesilaus, Philip, Alexander), poets and historians (ll. 123-126: Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Xenophon, Thucydides, Plutarch), philosophers (ll. 126-128: Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Theophrastus), geographers (ll. 128-129: Hipparchus, Strabo, Ptolemaeus), medical authors (l. 129: Hippocrates, Galen), and theologians (ll. 130-131: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom).

⁴²³ Lascaris, ed. Nikas (1995) ll. 135-136: 'questi hanno dato la lege, la Religione et li costumi da veri homini'.

⁴²⁴ Lascaris, ed. Nikas (1995) ll. 139-150: 'Nè pensate, Syre, che questo sia somnio mio o visione, ma vera coniectura che se tutti costoro havessero ad ridurse in un loco et deliberare insieme, facio certa coniectura che mandariano, essendo licito, a Vostra Maestà et fariano questa richiesta che li piacesse liberara la loro patria, occupata da gente fedà, et abominabile, affin che il loro inventi et instituti havessero la propria sede et domicilio, et como solevano vivi instruire li

enduring home, and to grant secure walls to [their] expelled band'.⁴²⁵ Throughout the speech Lascaris also emphatically identified himself with the Greeks and underscored his own Greekness. In the very first sentence of his speech he introduced himself as a 'Greek nobleman' ('gentilhomio greco'),⁴²⁶ and also presented himself as a representative and even ambassador of both 'ancient Greece and the remnants (*reliquie*) of present-day Greece'.⁴²⁷ In this way, then, Lascaris created the impression of a continuum from the hero Hercules and Homer through Chrysostom to the early modern *greci* and himself. This relationship between himself, the *greci* he represented, and the protagonists of ancient Greece, forms the core of Lascaris' claim of cultural debt.

The contrast with Bessarion's *Orationes contra Turcas* is striking. The cardinal did not single out Greece as a distinctive (ethnic, linguistic, or cultural) entity that must somehow be restored. He rather framed the crusading project primarily as a religious affair in defence of Christendom in general and the Italian peninsula in particular. Already in the opening lines of the letter to his namesake of Sanseverino, he deplored the misfortunes of the Christians rather than the Greeks.⁴²⁸ Similarly, at the end of his first speech to the Italian princes he urged them to expel the enemy so that the liberty of

homini, così per li loro precepti et exepti possino ancora farlo, et non si extingua la loro fama, floria e scientia, como già la é extincta in Grecia, et ne li altri paesi certa ombra sola è restata'.

⁴²⁵ Lascaris, ed. Nikas (1995) ll. 152-153: 'Da propriam, Rex Magne, domum, da menia pulsus'. The Vergilian subtext is curious since in the *Aeneid*, the line 'Da propriam, Thymbraeae, domum, da moenia fessis' (A. 3.85), expressed by Aeneas, continues as follows: 'Et genus et mansuram urbem; serua altera Troiae | Pergama, reliquias Danaum atque immitis Achilli'. The Vergilian reference to the Greeks as aggressors is a subtext which Lascaris cannot have intended. Possibly, he took the line from a notebook without checking its original context (e.g. one of his own notebooks with *loci communes* that are listed by Pontani 1992: 372-373, nrs. 1-4).

⁴²⁶ Lascaris, ed. Nikas (1995) 354 ll. 1-4: 'Sacra, Cesarea et Catholica Maestà, io presentai laltro giorno el breve de la santità dil Papa a vostra serenità et dissi sollo ad quella che ero un gentilhomio greco informato et instructo de le cosse di levante...'

⁴²⁷ Lascaris, ed. Nikas (1995) ll. 154-168. He explained that he was in contact with the Greeks under Ottoman rule via secret messages, and that they implored the emperor through 'us who are in this part of the world' ('per mezo de noi altri che semo in queste parte' ll. 161-162). Sathas' translation of 'le *reliquie* di costoro, et de l'antique Grecia' as οἱ ἀπόγονοι αὐτῶν καὶ τῆς ἀρχαίας Ἑλλάδος ('the descendants of these men and ancient Greece') instead of 'τὰ λείψανα αὐτῶν...' suppresses the ambivalent meaning of the Italian word 'reliquie' in this context (see Sathas 1869: 88, using the unreliable edition of Giovanni Battista Scandella, published in 1848, on which see Whittaker 1980).

⁴²⁸ Bessarion (1470) fol. 3^v (cf. Migne 1866: 647-648): 'Deploranti mihi nuper Christianorum hominum calamitates et acerbissimam Chalcidis Euboicae eursionem, litterae abs te redditae fuerunt...'

Italy ('libertatem Italiae') will be secured.⁴²⁹ Bessarion equally bemoaned the 'Christianorum fortunae, opes, imperia' brought under the Ottoman yoke after the fall of Constantinople. In this context, he mentioned the inhabitants of his native Trebizond, Synope, Lesbos, the Peloponnesus, Caria, Cilicia, Mysia, Lower Pannonia, Epirus, Illyria and Euboea, all once part of the Byzantine empire whose territoriality remains unmentioned. The Greeks ('Graeci') are only mentioned in one breath with the Mysians, the Illyrians and the Pannonians. From the perspective taken in the letter, the 'Graeci' are just one of the many Christian peoples that lost their liberty to the Ottomans. This is also reflected in Bessarion's use of the first person plural: 'we' consistently refers to *us Christians* instead of *us Greeks*.⁴³⁰ Stress is on the fact that *Christian* blood is fleeing,⁴³¹ and the main antithesis is between the addressees ('we') and the Ottomans ('they'), defined primarily on the religious level as an antithesis between Christians and Muslims, framed as a division between the faithful and the infidel.⁴³² Janus Lascaris, on the other hand, referred to the Greeks in the first person plural. When he recalled the rise of Ottoman power, for instance, he expressly referred to 'what [the Ottoman Turks] undertook against *us Greeks* both on the sea and on land, both in Asia and in Europe' ('quello facevano contra *noi Greci* per mar e per tera in Asia et in Europa', ll. 45-46, emphasis mine).

It is mainly in the context of Bessarion's digression on the rise of the Ottoman Turks that he referred to the Byzantine empire. In Latin fashion, he called it 'the empire of the Greeks' ('imperium Graecorum').⁴³³ All the same, even in this particular context, the

⁴²⁹ Bessarion (1470) fol. 19^r (cf. Migne 1866: 659).

⁴³⁰ Cf., e.g., Bessarion (1470) fol. 19^r (cf. Migne 1866: 660): 'in hostium nostrorum capita'; fol. 21^r (cf. Migne 1866: 661): 'hostium nostrorum rem'; fol. 25^v (cf. Migne 1866: 665): 'ceruicibus nostris imminetem'; fol. 25^v (cf. Migne 1866: 665): 'nostrorum sanguine'; fol. 25^v (cf. Migne 1866: 665): 'nomen nostrorum', fol. 26^r (cf. Migne 1866: 665): 'nostrorum cadauera'.

⁴³¹ Cf. Bessarion (1470) fol. 7^r (cf. Migne 1866: 650) and fols. 10^v-11^r (cf. Migne 1866: 653).

⁴³² Cf. Bessarion (1470) fol. 7^v (cf. Migne 1866: 650): 'Nulla inter oues et lupos gratia. Nullum inter prophanos homines et Christianos ius amicitiae est. Non donis, non muneribus pacatur hostis immanis, barbarus. Nulla foederis religione tenetur perfidus, non mouetur misericordia crudelissimus. Dominari, praeesse, imperare cupit; cruore et flamma cuncta delere uult. Subiugare sibi cunctos studet' [*There is no love between sheep and wolfs. There is no right of friendship between profane people and Christians. The inhuman, barbarian enemy is not pacified by presents nor by gifts. The perfidious man is not bound by the obligation of the covenant, the most cruel man is not moved by compassion. He rather desires to dominate, to rule, to command; he wants to destroy everything with bloodshed and blazing fire. He aims at subjugating all men to him*].

⁴³³ The Byzantine emperor was called 'imperator Graecorum' (cf. Bessarion, ed. Mohler 1942c: 564). In the second speech to the Italian princes, he refers to the cruelties suffered by the

cardinal did not openly identify himself with the Greeks of the empire, or what they suffered due to the Ottoman Turks. Rather to the contrary, he critically evaluated Greek history in a way not open to someone presenting himself as an ardent patriot. Bessarion even went so far as to assert that Mehmet was inspired by an example from Greek history, namely Alexander the Great, whose *gesta* the Sultan read thoroughly.⁴³⁴ He was not only critical of the role played by the Greeks in the westward expansion of the Ottomans into Europe, but he more explicitly presented Greece as a *negative* example to the West. In the second speech to the Italian princes, dealing with the necessity to unite the Christians against the Ottomans, he claimed that the dissolution of the Byzantine empire was ultimately due to the discord among the Greeks themselves. ‘Nothing but discord destroyed miserable Greece’, Bessarion claimed, ‘nothing but civil war annihilated this part of the world – and not only in our own memory, but also in ancient times’. To illustrate his point, he adduced the example of Philip of Macedon who was able to overturn Greece precisely because of the mutual hatred of Athenians, Spartans, Thebans, and the others.⁴³⁵ This idea is further spelled out in his Latin translation of Demosthenes’ *First Olynthiac*, originally composed to warn the Athenians to assist the Olynthians against Philip of Macedon so as to check his expansion.⁴³⁶ Bessarion not only translated the piece, but also made the parallels between past and present as explicit as

inhabitants of Constantinople (called ‘Bizantini’), for which see Bessarion (1470) fol. 26^r (cf. Migne 1866: 665).

⁴³⁴ Bessarion (1470) fol. 15^r-15^v (cf. Migne 1866: 657-658).

⁴³⁵ Bessarion (1470) fols. 21^v-22^r (cf. Migne 1866: 662): ‘Nihil aliud miseram extinxit Graeciam nisi discordia, nihil aliud eam orbis partem deleuit nisi bella ciuilia neque solum nostra memoria sed etiam priscis temporibus. Nam Philippus, Amyntae filius, Alexandri magni pater, per Atheniensium, Lacedaemoniorum, Thebanorum, aliorumque mutua odia Graeciam euertit’ [*Nothing else extinguished miserable Greece than discord, nothing else obliterated this part of the world than civil war, and not only in our own time, but also in the remote past. For Philip, the son of Amyntas, the father of Alexander the Great, destroyed Greece due to the mutual hatred of the Athenians, the Lacedaemonians, the Thebans and others*]. Note that in the next lines, Bessarion added a positive example from Greek history, where cooperation led to a victory over the aggressor, namely during the Peloponnesian war.

⁴³⁶ It seems that Bessarion’s translation was fairly literal. Here and there, he manipulated his rendering. For example, on fol. 30^r he rendered ‘ψηφίσασθαι ... τὴν βοήθειαν’ of Demosthenes 1.2.14 with ‘auxilia decernenda’, omitting the element of voting suggested by ‘ψηφίσασθαι’, but not covered by ‘decernenda’, while on fol. 31^r he rendered the Greek ‘τὴν πόλιν’ of Demosthenes 1.5.17 with the more emotive ‘patria’ as if the original had ‘πατρίς’. To see the significance of such choices, a study of Bessarion’s translation would be welcome. Marianne Pade is preparing a study of Bessarion’s translation techniques.

he could in the prologue 'ex auctoritate Demosthenis', the epilogue as well as in the marginal notes printed with the translation.⁴³⁷ In this way, he used the ancient Greeks as an *exemplum* in a way typical of a humanist rather than a Greek patriot.

Throughout the *Orationes* as well as in the marginal notes to his translation of Demosthenes, Bessarion laid particular emphasis on the idea of *libertas* that was also prominent in his Trapezuntine eulogy.⁴³⁸ Even so, the freedom Bessarion defended in his Turkish orations was not the freedom he had inherited from the ancient Greeks. In the context of his orations, *libertas* meant Italian or even Christian *libertas* in the sense of *fidei integritas*, the unity of all Christians threatened by Islam. This freedom was not an inheritance of the ancient Greeks, but it was threatened by a similar enemy as Hellenic 'ἐλευθερία', viz. by a barbarian enemy of the East. Bessarion reformulated the adamant dichotomy between Hellenes and barbarians of his *Encomium* as a dichotomy between Christians and barbarians in his *Orationes*. In this way, he contaminated the classical opposition of civilised Hellenes versus uncultured barbarians with the medieval opposition of Christians versus non-Christians.

This still leaves the question open *why* Bessarion left out all references to his Greekness. Part of an explanation resides in Bessarion's position as a Greek cardinal.⁴³⁹ As a high-placed member of the Church he had first and foremost to promote the Holy War against the infidel, not the liberation of his fatherland. He himself explicated this in a letter to the Venetian Doge that he wrote two months or so after the fall of Constantinople. In it, Bessarion repeatedly stated that he wanted to avoid the impression that he was preoccupied with his fatherland ('patria') rather than the

⁴³⁷ Cf., e.g., Bessarion (1470) fol. 30^r: 'Ita enim tum Graeciae Philippus imminebat, ut nunc Turcus Italiae. Substineat igitur Philippus Turci personam, Itali Atheniensium, nos Demosthenis. Iam facile intelliges totam orationem causae nostrae conuenire' [*In the same way as in those days Philip threatened all of Greece*], Bessarion wrote at the end of his prologue, 'so the Turk now threatens Italy. May Philip therefore take the role of the Turk, the Italians that of the Athenians, and we that of Demosthenes. You will easily understand that the whole speech fits our cause'.

⁴³⁸ Bessarion (1470) fols. 31^r, 34^v, 36^r.

⁴³⁹ The primary importance of Bessarion's ecclesiastical position also appears from his personal *curriculum vitae*, written on the first page of his *Horologion* (BNM, Marc. gr. 14, fol. 1^r), where Bessarion sums up the stages of his ecclesiastical career from his acceptance of the monastic habit in 1423 until his appointment to cardinal in 1440. The note is printed with a French translation by Saffrey (1965) 270-272. See also the prologue to BNM, Marc. gr. 533 which constitutes a collection of *iuvenilia*. In the prologue, he again stressed his ecclesiastical career. In the note he also stated that he was by both from Trebizond, while he was nourished and educated in Constantinople (Bessarion, ed. Saffrey 1964: 283: '... τοῦνομα βησσαρίωνι, τὸ γένος ἐκ τραπεζοῦντος, ἐν κωνσταντινουπόλει τραφέντι καὶ παιδευθέντι'). For more editions see Rigo (1994) 34.

Christian cause.⁴⁴⁰ Bessarion added to this that as a cardinal he was in the position 'to beg for help freely, not for the benefit of my fatherland, not for that of my city, but for the sake of all-round safety, for the honour of the Christians. From this position', Bessarion continued, 'I was able to explain to many men how great a danger threatens Italian interests, not to speak of the interests of others, if the advance of the most savage barbarians is not halted'.⁴⁴¹

The reasons why Bessarion wanted to avoid this impression can be gauged from a specific episode of Bessarion's ecclesiastical career which gave him good reason to dissimulate his Greekness in the *Orationes*. After the death of pope Nicholas V in 1455, Bessarion's papal election had failed, precisely because of his Greekness. If we follow the account of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomineus, the cardinal of Avignon had obstructed Bessarion's election with aggressive reference to the candidate's Greek background, concluding that he would never accept a Greek as pope.⁴⁴² After the attack, the Greek cardinal lost his majority of votes in the Curia and even found himself with less power than before. In other words, by the time Bessarion wrote his *Orationes*, he had good reasons to be very cautious in displaying his Greekness, and might well have felt the need to overcome the suspicion that he, as a Greek, was defending only particular group interests.

By the time Bessarion wrote his *Orationes*, he was still considered a serious candidate for the papacy in the near future. In this context, it is not a coincidence that Bessarion originally sent his *Orationes* to the Venetian Doge. In so doing, the cardinal communicated a very clear message of commitment to the Venetian case that made clear that, if he would ever be pope, he would use his influence to establish the *liga generalis* that the Venetians wanted. When Paul II died in July 1471, Venice indeed preferred cardinal Bessarion as his successor. The Venetian Senate wrote to its ambassador in Urbino that they assumed the assistance of the Duke in achieving the election of the Byzantine cardinal who was not only very well-disposed towards Venice

⁴⁴⁰ Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942c) 475 ll. 1-12, 476 ll. 12-17.

⁴⁴¹ Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942c) 476 ll. 12-17: 'Mihi vero data est facultas libere implorandi auxilium, non iam pro patria, non pro civitatis meae salute, sed pro tutela omnium, pro Christi gloria, pro christianae fidei conservatione, pro Christianorum honore. Quo in loco pluribus exponere poteram, quantum periculi immineat italicis rebus, ne de reliquis dicam, nisi truculentissimi barbari impetus comprimantur'.

⁴⁴² Piccolomineus, ed. Van Heck (1984) 1:43 (= Piccolomineus, ed. Totaro 1984: 1:154). For an English translation of the passage see Piccolomineus, ed. and trans. Meserve & Simonetta (2003) 141.

(considering her a 'second Byzantium' and his 'patria'),⁴⁴³ but was also the most ardent supporter of a crusade against the Ottomans in the Roman Curia.⁴⁴⁴

The *persona* Bessarion created for himself in the *Orationes* is in line with all this. He represented himself expressly, first, as a leader of the Roman Church, and secondly, as an unbiased observer of history. In the heading of his address to Fichet, for example, his ecclesiastical dignities feature prominently: 'Bessarion, Bishop of Sabinus, Cardinal, Patriarch of Constantinople, [Bishop] of Nicaea'.⁴⁴⁵ Moreover, in his introductory letter to Bessarion of Sanseverino, he called his namesake as a witness to the fact that he predicted the calamities of Christendom as soon as he had heard that Constantinople had fallen into Ottoman hands in 1453. In this context, Bessarion insisted that his foresight had not been not caused by his extraordinary sagacity or some sort of prophetic fury. The situation had rather been perfectly clear 'for all who were exempt from private concerns and affects'.⁴⁴⁶

All this shows that the idea that Bessarion's crusading appeals remained without success because his patriotic zeal eclipsed his political deftness is not entirely justified. If anything, the cardinal did his best to appeal to the general concerns of his audience instead of that of himself or the Greeks. Bessarion's dissimulation of Greekness here corresponds to the cultural sensitivity characterising his diplomatic *modus operandi* in

⁴⁴³ In a letter to the Doge Cristoforo Moro and the Senate (dated May 31, 1468), Bessarion explained why he chose to dedicate his precious library to Venice, stating: 'Cum enim in civitatem vestram omnes fere totius orbis nationes maxime confluent, tum praecipue Graeci, qui e suis provinciis navigio venientes Venetiis primum descendunt, ea praeterea vobiscum necessitudine devincti, ut ad vestram appulsi urbem quasi alterum Byzantium introire videantur. Post haec quomodo poterit hoc beneficium a nobis honestius locari, quam apud eos homines, quibus ego multis eorum in me beneficiis devinctus obstrictusque essem, et in ea civitate, quam mihi subiugata Graecia pro patria elegerissem, et in quam accitus a vobis atque honorificentissime receptus fuissem?' (Bessarion, ed. Mohler 1942c: 542).

⁴⁴⁴ Setton (1978) 312-313.

⁴⁴⁵ Bessarion (1470) fol. 3^r: 'Bessarion episcopus Sabiensis, cardinalis, patriarcha Constantinopolitanus Nicenus'.

⁴⁴⁶ Bessarion (1470) fol. 6^v (cf. Migne 1866: 649-650): 'Tu es mihi testis, quom Bononiae essemus (...) atque allatus esset infoelicissimus ille de urbis Bizantinae excidio nuntius, ea omnia, quae postea consecuta sunt, me futura praedixisse, non ea sane de causa, quod uel prudentia excellenti uel diuinationis furore aliquo despicerem quae alii non cernerent, sed quod omnibus qui priuatis studiis et affectibus uacui essent, ea omnia palam erant et in promptu' [*You are my witness that when we were in Bologna (...) and this most infelicitous message about the fall of Constantinople arrived, that I foretold all things that would happen next, not for the reason that I can observe things others cannot see through my extraordinary sagacity or some sort of prophetic fury, but because these things were clearly visible for all who were exempt from private concerns and affects*].

general. Bessarion's intentionality in this respect comes to the fore most clearly in a passage from his *Encyclica*, like most of his major works first written in Greek for a Greek audience, and then translated into Latin to enlarge its audience. The document shows that it was his audience that not only determined the language he used, but also the nuances of what he said. In the *Encyclica* he tried to present his own conversion to Roman Catholicism apologetically as an example for the Greeks in general. When he discussed the possible reasons for Greek misery under Ottoman rule, he explicitly rejected the idea that the Greeks had been divinely punished because of their sins. In morals and honesty in life, Bessarion wrote to the Greeks, 'our people is inferior to none and superior over some'. In the Latin text, we read exactly the same – except for that crucial 'ἔστι δ' ὧν καὶ βελτίους', a subtle but significant omission.⁴⁴⁷

The limits of freedom: Political Panhellenism?

Bessarion's preoccupation with Hellenic 'ἐλευθερία' and his endeavours in favour of a crusade prompt the question how the cardinal thought about the future of his liberated fatherland. Did he intend to unite the Greeks under a Greek king as did Laonikos Chalkokondyles? Or did he envision the liberated Greeks in a world dominated by the Latins? It has been suggested that Bessarion envisioned the political restoration of the eastern Roman empire ('Rhomäerreich').⁴⁴⁸ A similar argument has been made for Janus Lascaris. According to one modern historian, for instance, Lascaris was so appalled at the idea of a Latin empire that for him the restoration of the Greek empire was the only viable option.⁴⁴⁹ All the same, we must be very careful not to attach too much significance to the scant evidence we have for Bessarion's views on the political future of Greece. As we have seen, there is evidence that he wanted to restore some kind of political or physical freedom (*corporum libertas*) for the Greeks. He also defended

⁴⁴⁷ Compare 'siquidem et dictum est, et vere dictum est, ut arbitror, nostros in iis quae ad mores et vitae honestatem pertinent nullis esse inferiores' with 'εἴρηται γὰρ δὴ, καὶ ἀληθῶς εἴρηται, τὰ γ' ἐν τοῖς ἤθεσι τοῦς ἡμετέρους μηδένων εἶναι χείρους, ἔστι δ' ὧν καὶ βελτίους'. See Bessarion, ed. Migne (1866) 453, 482. See also Bessarion, ed. Migne (1866) 453, 482. In the Latin text, Bessarion says in the third person plural that 'the Greeks departed from the truth of the faith' ('Graeci ... ab intemerata fidei veritate secesserunt'), while in the Greek text he states that (among other things) 'the division from the Catholic Church was for us the mother of all these calamities' ('ἡ ἀπὸ τῆς καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας διαίρεσις τῶν συμφορῶν τούτων ἡμῖν ἐχρημάτισε μήτηρ').

⁴⁴⁸ Binner (1980) 4.

⁴⁴⁹ Binner (1980) 237: '...eine Lösung analog der von 1204 hätte er als persönliche Schmach empfunden und mußte schon von daher die Wiedererrichtung der griechischen Kaisermacht fordern'.

Palaeologan claims to Greek territories against Italian claims.⁴⁵⁰ But this does not tell us much about how exactly he envisioned a liberated Greece after a successful crusade. Things are complicated even further by the fact that Bessarion was sufficiently realistic to realise that the partition of regained lands would not allow for an easy re-establishment of some kind of Greek monarchy.⁴⁵¹

Several passages from Bessarion's oeuvre have been adduced to prove that he was preoccupied with achieving political autonomy for the Greeks, and really aimed at a political and not just a cultural restoration of the Greek empire.⁴⁵² In fact, these passages from Bessarion's oeuvre produce more questions than conclusive answers about what the cardinal really envisioned in terms of political restoration. In a letter to pope Pius II, written after his mission to Venice in 1463, Bessarion prophesied that the *pristina libertas* of his fatherland would be restored, a term he also put into the mouth of Saint Andrew in a speech delivered a year earlier (on which see above).⁴⁵³ In connection with this, Bessarion claimed that the 'natio Graeca' had lost its 'imperium' in his *Encyclica ad Graecos* (1463). This has been taken to imply that he wanted to restore the 'pristina libertas' and the 'imperium' of the 'natio Graeca'.⁴⁵⁴ But more questions emerge. What was this 'natio Graeca' that had apparently possessed one single 'imperium'? As Bessarion himself experienced, the Hellenes had been dispersed over many polities and territorial realms even before 1453. Furthermore, how did he conceptualise this 'imperium' geographically and politically? And what did *pristina libertas* mean for Bessarion? Did it refer to the Greeks under the Roman (read Byzantine) empire, or to the Greek world before it was conquered by the Macedonians and later the Romans? The previous sections demonstrated that Bessarion understood the Hellenes as an ethno-cultural community that could survive in different political contexts. Even if he

⁴⁵⁰ So, for instance, in 1462, Bessarion intervened with the pope in order to avoid that Thomas Palaeologus would lose Monemvasia to the benefit of an Italian governor (see Bessarion, ed. Mohler 1942c: 509).

⁴⁵¹ This appears, for example, from the fact that at the *Reichstag* in Vienna (1461) Bessarion stressed that it was too early to discuss the partition of reconquered lands and added that this would ultimately be in the hands of the emperor with the pope. Cf. Binner (1980) 233.

⁴⁵² Binner (1980) 235-236.

⁴⁵³ Bessarion, ed. Mohler (1942c) 526.

⁴⁵⁴ Bessarion, ed. Migne (1886) col. 481: 'Nunc vero (heu infelicem, et miseram patriae nostrae conditionem) non modo principatum, atque imperium orbis amisimus, verum etiam servitutem patimur'.

referred to the restoration of the Greek *corporum libertas* and *pristina libertas* he did nowhere imagine the ethno-cultural community of Hellenes in one single body politic.⁴⁵⁵

While the passages themselves do not tell us anything decisive about Bessarion's views on the future of his fatherland, there are objections to the idea that Bessarion really saw an independent and homogeneously Greek polity of some sort in the near future, and these also apply to Janus Lascaris. First, both Bessarion and Lascaris were diplomats who well knew the political aspirations of all those involved in a potential liberation of the Greeks. If only for this reason, it is inconceivable that they sincerely thought that a crusade would restore a Greek kingdom of the kind Chalkokondyles had in mind when he wrote his history. During Bessarion's stay in Venice in 1463–1464 (where he coordinated the Venetian-papal preparation for the crusade), the cardinal notably adopted the name 'Bessarion Venetus' instead of the more usual 'Bessarion Nicaenus'. As John Monfasani has argued, in so doing the cardinal 'showed that he accepted the consequences of that perception and had identified himself with any future Venetian hegemony. As patriarch of Constantinople, he would embody in his very person and name the new Greco-Venetian Greece promised by the new crusade'.⁴⁵⁶

In conjunction with this, there is another objection. Neither Bessarion nor Lascaris thought of the West as a real threat to the integrity of their 'γένος' or 'natio' in the manner the Byzantines of the thirteenth century had done. The religious hostilities that had characterised the interaction of Byzantines and Latins in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade were irrelevant to the Byzantine intelligentsia in Italy as they sympathised with the union of the churches and participated in the intellectual culture of Italian cultural centres. Moreover, if we look at Bessarion's explicit views on Greco-Roman relations and his ideas on Hellenic freedom, there is no reason to assume that he saw Latin domination as an impediment to Greek freedom at all. His *Encomium to Trebizond* rather provided arguments to legitimise such a situation. Just like their Roman ancestors the Italians were amicable to the Greek language and Greek literature. Especially the Venetians were hospitable to the Greeks so that Bessarion chose it as his 'second fatherland' and called it a second Byzantium. In other words, if Latin-Venetian rule in

⁴⁵⁵ Beck (1960) 88-89 convincingly rejected the idea that Bessarion favoured the idea of a national Greek state in his letter to Constantine Palaeologus. In the letter, he depicted the despot not as a national king of the Hellenes, but as an imperialist who would regain his rights on Asia and liberate Europe with the help of the Peloponnesians.

⁴⁵⁶ See Monfasani (1986) 132-136. On the relation between Bessarion and Venice see now Ronchey (2008a).

the Greek-speaking world would be the outcome of a crusade, the Greeks would be able to maintain at least their freedom of 'ψυχή' and 'γνώμη' just as the Trapezuntines had maintained theirs under Roman rule for over 1,500 years.

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In this chapter, I have shown that Bessarion created a strong sense of continuity with the ancient Greek past not only for the benefit of his personal genealogy or to bolster the prestige of his native city of Trebizond. His creation of continuity with ancient Greece in fact underpinned an ethno-cultural identification with the Greeks that resisted the political and dynastic fragmentation of the Greek world both shortly before and after the fall of Constantinople, the Morea and Trebizond. In addition to this, I demonstrated that his view on Hellenic freedom gives ideological coherence to his effort to conserve and disseminate Greek learning. Moreover, Bessarion's own contribution to the preservation of the Greek heritage placed him in a continuous Hellenic tradition so that he embodied the values of his Atheno-Trapezuntine ancestors. At the same time, however, his role as protector of the Greeks and perpetuator of the Greek heritage sat uneasily with his role as a Roman cardinal. Therefore, in his Latin works, written from the vantage point of a Roman cardinal, he often dissimulated his connection with the Greeks and their past. This is indicative of a certain degree of cultural unease with his own Greekness in Latin contexts even though in his Trapezuntine *Encomium* Bessarion regarded the Romans as a friendly people.

In the next chapter, I will examine the Hellenism of George Trapezuntius of Crete. While Bessarion's Hellenism has been highlighted even where it was most conspicuously absent (i.e. in his *Orationes contra Turcas*), Trapezuntius' Hellenism has been downplayed in spite of the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. A reexamination of his works will prove that ancient Greece was as central to his eccentric thought as it was to Bessarion's, even though they represented the role of the Hellenes in past and present in very different and sometimes even opposed ways.

