The Russian Aid to Byzantium during the Turkish Siege of Constantinople, 1394–1402

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After their first successful conquest of Gallipoli in 1354 and more importantly of Karasi emirate in 1361, the Ottoman Turks took advantage of their position on frontiers between Christian and Muslim world and started conducting invasions on European soil, enjoying the instability of many Balkan states. Indeed, within just one lifetime the Ottomans became a force to be reckoned with, growing from vassalizing numerous local princes or outright taking their territory.[1] The Byzantine Empire, seriously weakened by reoccurring civil wars and Black Death outbreak in preceding decades, could not hope to sustain a viable defence. Bulgaria was split among several successor states and a similar fate struck the Serbian state after the death of Emperor Stefan Uroš Dušan IV in 1355. The death of Ottoman sultan Murad before the battle of Kosovo against remaining Serbian princes in 1389 proved inconsequential, as his son

1 In his brief yet excellent outline, Ibrahim Metin Kunt argues that the whole Ottoman expansion was not the so-called holy war, or *jihad*, as it is often portrayed in both current and classic historiography. It seems to be rather a series of semi-independent ventures conducted by local commanders in search of plunder, particularly those that Ottomans inherited after their conquest of Karasi dynasty. These people were already familiar with geographical features of eastern Balkans and particularly experienced in both military operations and raids for resources. As their incursions went further and further and they encountered limited resistance, the area of constant warfare moved to the west and was replaced by regular Ottoman administration, often aiming to establish itself not only in newly acquired lands but also in struggle with the semi-independent chieftains and commanders who were conducting the raids in the first place. Furthermore, as the sources of revenue of other Turkish beyliks and emirates in Anatolia dried out (i.e. the land that was pillaged was slowly incorporated into Turkish dominion), their power slowly waned while the Ottomans provided new opportunities for the able men whose fortunes were previously tied to the other Turkish statelets. In the light of this development, it is no wonder that the Ottoman power surged so quickly and allowed this dynasty to establish itself as the dominant power in the region. I. M. KUNT, *The Rise of the Ottomans*, in: M. JONES (Ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History: C. 1300 — c. 1415*, Vol. 6, Cambridge 2000, pp. 839–863. See further in M. F. KOPRÜLÜ, *The Origins of the Ottoman Empire*, London 1992; E. ZACHARIADOU, *The Emirate of Karasi and That of the Ottomans: Two Rival States*, in: E. ZACHARIADOU (Ed.), *The Ottoman Emirate*, Rethynion 1993.

Bayezid firmly took the reins of power, set to strengthen Ottoman presence even further. Following the battle of Kosovo, the Ottoman sultan coerced the Byzantine emperor John V Palaiologos to accept the position of Bayezid's vassal. The sultan then set out to conquer rivalling dynasties in Asia Minor, taking John's son Manuel with him both as his ally in war and a prisoner, forcing him to participate in the siege of Philadelphia, the last Byzantine stronghold in Asia Minor. With Manuel by his side, he then ordered John to raze part of Constantinople's newly reconstructed defences. The shock of having his son taken as a hostage, coupled with the aggressive demands of the Ottoman sultan, took toll on aging emperor's body and he died of stroke on the 16th February 1391.[2]

Hearing of his father's demise, Manuel did not waste time and after successful escape from Bayezid's camp, he appeared in Constantinople the following month. Facing almost no resistance, Manuel secured the rule against his rival John VII and restored patriarch Antonios in office.[3] Since Bayezid seemed to acknowledge Manuel's rights and with bonds of vassalage still in place, Manuel duly returned to Bayezid's side and continued campaigning with him in Asia Minor.[4] He finally returned from his journey in 1392, marrying Helena Dragaš, daughter of Serbian prince Konstantin Dragaš. However, the policy aimed at appeasing the Turks ultimately came to naught, for Bayezid was intent on implementing far stronger rule both inside and outside of Ottoman administration. In 1393, the Ottoman emir crushed Bulgarian uprising and incorporated much of Bulgaria under the direct Ottoman rule.[5] Subsequently, Bayezid invited his vassals to join him during the winter of 1393–1394. What is peculiar on this request is the fact that none of them knew that the other Ottoman vassals were invited as well. When all of them met, they all reached the conclusion that Bayezid was going to murder them. Whether or not such a thing was plausible is a matter of debate.[6] In the end, Bayezid did sooth his rage on his vassals' entourage, mutilating some of them, while giving gifts to the Balkan princes.[7]

From this point on, it seemed impossible to maintain any peaceful relationships with the Ottoman sultan. Therefore, Manuel decided to ignore his vassal obligations and prepared to face Turkish onslaught. And Bayezid did indeed come — mustering his army, he laid siege to Constantinople in 1394. An experienced and able military leader he was, the Ottoman sultan did not decide to order a direct assault on besieged

2 J. BARKER, *Manuel II Paleologus (1391–1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship*, New Brunswick 1969, p. 81.

3 Antonios has held this position before but was forced from the office during John VII's brief rule in 1390.

4 BARKER, pp. 84–87.

5 D. NICOL, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium*, Cambridge 1972, p. 300.

6 Manuel indeed thought so and historians do have different opinions on Bayezid's intentions. For example, while Nicol and Barker follow the narration of primary sources and speculate that Bayezid indeed tried to slaughter his vassals but in the end changed his mind, other authors such as Harris have different opinion — Bayezid simply tried to scare his subjects in order to coerce into following his orders. If so, the response was quite different from what Bayezid expected and led to the events described below. HARRIS, *The End of Byzantium*, New Haven/London 2010, p. 10; NICOL, p. 301; BARKER, pp. 114–120.

7 NICOL, pp. 300–301.

walls. Instead, the city was to suffer long months and years of blockade. This situation was not unfamiliar for the current emperor, since Manuel II gained painful experiences while trying to hold the second most important Byzantine city of Thessaloniki, which ultimately fell to the Ottomans in 1387.[8] The willingness of the people of Thessaloniki to turn their city to the Turks was truly a symbol of overall lack of confidence in the future of Byzantine rule. Lacking finances and manpower to even hope for yet another restoration, the Emperor made peace with John VII, established him as his regent and decided to travel west and seek help there. Throughout his journeys he ventured into England, France and Italy. However, the West was not the only place where the Byzantines focused their attention — naturally, there were Russian lands, tied to Byzantium through cultural and ecclesiastical bonds.

The purpose of this paper is to present an analysis of Russian-Byzantine relations towards the end of the 14th century and how they influenced the dealings between these two entities while Constantinople, the foremost city of the Orthodox world, laid under siege in the period of 1394–1402. While the succession of the embassies and mutual contacts is quite well documented, the historical research concerned itself only with a strict retelling of events that transpired. My main aim is not to analyse *what* affairs were conducted, but *how* were they conducted, by what means and for what specific purposes. In doing so, the negotiations between Byzantium and the lands of Rus' illuminate the complex situation, which appeared in the region of Eastern Europe in the last decades of the 14th century. Overshadowed by Manuel's embassy to Western Europe which brought so much attention of both primary sources and modern historians alike, the Russian aid to besieged Constantinople is often mentioned laconically or not at all.[9] The main historical work on this issue was done by Dmitri Obolensky in his article *A Byzantine Grand Embassy to Russia*, where he summarises available primary sources to reconstruct the events.[10] Another detailed work is an article *Путешествие византийского императора Мануила Палеолога по Западной Европе* by Alexander A. Vasiliev which still presents one of the most exhausting and detailed accounts of embassies conducted during the Manuel's diplomatic efforts to lift the siege of Constantinople.[11] The other major works on Russian-Byzantine relations that take into account the 14th century is the one by John Meyendorff and once again Dmitri Obolensky. Both are focused on the developments during decades and centuries and therefore their descriptions of embassies are also limited.[12]

Although primary sources are sparse as well, they offer enough material to reconstruct the basic outline of what happened in the studied historical period. The

8 BARKER, pp. 45–63.

9 HARRIS, p. 12.

10 D. OBOLENSKY, *A Byzantine Grand Embassy to Russia in 1400*, in: Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1978, pp. 123–132.

11 А. А. ВАСИЛЬЕВ, *Путешествие византийского императора Мануила Палеолога по Западной Европе*, in: Журнал Министерства Народного Просвещения, Т. 39, 1912, pp. 41–78, 260–304.

12 D. OBOLENSKY, *Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453*, New York 1971, pp. 260–261, 266; J. MEYENDORFF, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia: A Study of Byzantino-Russian Relations in the Fourteenth Century*, Crestwood 1981, p. 258.

Russian chronicles, mainly from the edition of *Полное собрание русскихъ летописей*, contain segments on who of the Russian princes agreed to send aid and who was tasked with delivering it to the Byzantine capital.[13] The intricacies of diplomacy are preserved in the editions of patriarchal correspondence, on whose behalf most of the negotiation was conducted.[14] Surprisingly, there is limited information in the Byzantine sources although that is not simply because the Byzantines deemed it not worthy of mentioning but rather that we do not have a full account of the siege, only limited descriptions.[15]

Let us therefore focus on the situation in Russia itself and the possibilities of Byzantine diplomacy in Eastern Europe. In contrast to the western embassies, the prestige and position of the Patriarch of Constantinople played a significant role. When first issuing a correspondence with the plead for help to Russia, patriarch Antonios IV addressed a letter to Vasily I Dmitriyevich, the Grand Prince of Moscow, together with Manuel II. The relationship between Russian lands and Byzantium in terms of ecclesiastical matters was quite dynamic. As the expansion of Lithuania soared in the 13th and especially 14th century, Byzantium was sucked into the power struggle between princes of Lithuania and Muscovy, another expanding power in the Russian region. It was the Patriarch of Constantinople whose responsibility was to institute a new Russian metropolitan. The patriarch could either respect the native wish and follow the choice made by domestic clergy or press his prerogative to institute a new metropolitan. The Byzantine diplomacy in this case was, as always, quite unscrupulous one. Hoping that the Lithuanian duke might convert to Orthodoxy one day, the Byzantines were not quite adamant to support Muscovy straightforwardly. Actually, the real cause of the decision to support one side or the other depended most of all on received threats (particularly in case of Lithuania) or in other cases, both Lithuanians and Muscovians effectively used another tool of diplomacy — bribes.[16]

The whole ecclesiastic problematic emerged at the begging of the 14th century with the move of metropolitan site from Kiev to Vladimir and subsequently to Moscow in 1328.[17] After that, as the Lithuanian rulers took control of more western Russian territory, their influence extended to Kiev. What followed was particularly nasty play from Byzantines, as they were succumbing either to Lithuanian or Muscovite pres-

13 *Софийская вторая летопись*, in: А. Ф. БЫЧКОВ (Ed.), *Полное собрание русскихъ летописей*, Т. 6, Санктпетербург 1853; *Продолжение летописи по Воскресенскому списку*, in: А. Ф. БЫЧКОВ (Ed.), *Полное собрание русскихъ летописей*, Т. 8, Санктпетербург 1859; *Летописный сборник, именуемый Патриаршею или Никоновскою летописью*, in: А. Ф. БЫЧКОВ (Ed.), *Полное собрание русскихъ летописей*, Т. 9, Санктпетербург 1862; М. Д. ПРИСЕЛКОВ (Ed.), *Троицкая летопись: реконструкция текста*, Санкт-Петербург 2002.

14 F. MIKLOSISCH — I. MÜLLER (Eds.), *Acta patriarchatus Constantinopolitani*, Vienna 1862.

15 As far as reconstruction of the siege itself is concerned, for example Barker did not rely on the work of John Doukas which was written at a later date and limited himself chiefly to accounts of Venetian senate and Manuel's correspondence. BARKER, pp. 123–199. The most modern work on this subject is D. BERNINCOLAS-HATZOPOULOS, *The First Siege of Constantinople by the Ottomans (1394–1402) and Its Repercussions on the Civilian Population of the City*, in: Byzantine Studies / Etudes Byzantines, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1983, pp. 39–51.

16 MEYENDORFF, pp. 270–274; OBOLENSKY, *Byzantine Commonwealth...*, pp. 260–264.

17 OBOLENSKY, *Byzantine Commonwealth...*, p. 262.

sure to vote their own metropolitan. Time and again, the Byzantine patriarch either supported one side or the other, thus at one point creating a vexing situation when there were two metropolitans of All Russia, one in Kiev and one in Moscow.[18] Furthermore, it is a detailed view on the Russian perspective of Byzantium that offers Vasily's correspondence with patriarch Anthony IV which shows that grand prince did not held the institution of Byzantine Emperor in high regard. The Grand Prince of Muscovy rather focused on the relationship between Greek and Russian churches, which he considered to be more legitimate than the semiprofane rule of Byzantine emperors.[19] In Russian environment, the one worthy of the title of Emperor (Tzar) was the Tatar khan of Geghisid decent, usually residing in Sarai, the capitol of Golden Horde. The matter was also more complicated since the moment when the Byzantine emperor accepted vassal relationship to the Ottoman sultan and it might have been one of the reasons why Vasily debunked patriarch's claims on the Byzantine hierarchy of world's princes.[20]

While Manuel was looking for the military aid in the west, the diplomatic mission sent to the lands of Rus' had different objective. Most of all, it was to raise the money needed to defend the capital. Since Byzantines had a wider array of contacts available thanks to the connections in Orthodox Church, they could ascertain the situation in Rus' more precisely than in western Europe. Even though during the battle of Kulikovo pole Vasily's father Dmitri Dolgoruky crushed Tatar army, the obedience of Muscovy to the Golden Horde was far from over. Byzantine aim was probably not to ask for a direct help but explore the situation further and learn what could have been done to assist the besieged city. This goal was indeed fulfilled — according to the compiled information from available in *Nikonovskaja*, *Voskreneskaja*, *Troickaja* and *Софийская вторая летопись* Vasily I, the Grand Prince of Moscow and rulers of Ryazan, Tver and Vitold of Lithuania agreed to join the effort to fund Constantinople's defence. The nature of the whole venture was not simply a gift made by the individual princes but rather funding by the whole society, laity and ecclesiastics.[21] We know of roughly three separate missions to the court of Vasily, two probably conducted in years 1398–1399 and another one in 1400–1401 which is the main topic of Obolensky's *A Grand Embassy to Russia*. The first two "missions" were simply a type

18 In 1354 John VI Kantakouzenos acceded to Muscovite requests and through patriarch instituted Alexios to be the new metropolitan. However, when the emperor was deposed, the newly proclaimed patriarch instituted a new metropolitan, this time one more inclined toward cooperation with Lithuania. Both could technically demand their jurisdiction over all of Russia. The whole situation changed once again two years later, when Muscovy coerced Byzantines into limiting Romanos' influence only over Lithuania and not the rest of the land of Rus'. In the end, Muscovy finally gained superiority in 1408, mostly because of formerly pagan Lithuanian prince's conversion to Catholicism. Ibidem, p. 263.

19 OBOLENSKY, *Byzantine Commonwealth...*, p. 264; NICOL, p. 299; BARKER, Footnote No. 31, pp. 105–110; MEYENDORFF, pp. 254–255.

20 The original problem laid in the fact that the name of an emperor was not included in the mass, as is assumed by Meyendorff. He also argues that this was actually an innovation of Cyprian and that was the main reason why Vasily was against it. MEYENDORFF, pp. 254–258.

21 *Софийская...*, p. 130; *Летописный...*, p. 168; *Продолжение...*, p. 71; *Троицкая...*, p. 448.

of letter, *pittakion*, carried by a trustworthy subject, *pittakoforon*.[22] The third one was a full-fledged embassy and according to sources studied by Obolensky these were led by Cyprianos' friend Michael, archbishop of Bethlehem accompanied by Manuel's kin, Constantine Rahles Palaiologos and Theodoros Palaiologos Kantakouzenos.[23]

It seems that the first plea for help certainly impressed the Russian population — throughout the land, "milostina" or the "gift of mercy" was collected by both princes and the common folk. Altogether, roughly 20 thousand of silver rubles were sent to Constantinople during the year of 1398.[24] The gift was amicably received in the city on Bosporus and its citizens repaid this act of kindness with icons, presents and saints' remains.[25] The interesting thing is that it was primarily conducted by patriarch and it was aimed at masses to fund the defence — in comparison with western Europe, where Manuel used his diplomatic skills to gain necessary aid by western states themselves, this can be explained by the fact that to get the military aid, Byzantium needed direct contact with those who could have provided it — and in case of gold, there was the wider public. What seems to be supporting this theory is the second letter by patriarch from 1399 where he wrote once again to Russian metropolitan Cyprian and argued that "[...] *giving for the sake of guarding the holy city is better than liturgies and alms to the poor and ransoming captives; that him who has raised up a church and a monastery or than him who is doing this will find a better reward before God than who has dedicated offerings to them. For, this same holy city is the pride, the bulwark, the sanctifying, and the glory of the Christians everywhere in the inhabited world*".[26]

Indeed, the image of the city still resonated powerfully in the minds of faithful Orthodox adherents, many of whom made pilgrimage there.[27] Furthermore, the position of the Byzantine emperor was certainly far weaker to that of the Patriarch, who claimed ecclesiastical and moral authority as the official leader of the Orthodox Church.[28] If such a mission was to receive success, the Byzantines were to utilise any advantage possible, and indeed stood true to their centuries-long diplomatic experience. It is difficult to ascertain which motivation took precedence. Was it the city itself, understood as the centre of Orthodox faith, as the New Jerusalem,[29] that attracted the hearts of Rus' inhabitants rather than the authority of the patriarch? The answer to this question might be as variable as the opinions of individual people. Suffice to say, it is safe to assume that together they concocted an image powerful enough

22 OBOLENSKY, *A Byzantine Grand Embassy...*, p. 127; N. OIKONOMIDES, *Byzantine Diplomacy, A.D. 1204–1453, Means and Ends*, in: N. OIKONOMIDES — E. ZACHARIADOU (Eds.), *Society, Culture and Politics in Byzantium*, Aldershot 2005, Footnote No. 15, p. 79.

23 OBOLENSKY, *A Byzantine Grand Embassy...*, pp. 127–128, 129–130.

24 ВАСИЛЬЕВ, p. 48.

25 *Софийская...*, p. 130; *Летописный...*, p. 168; *Продолжение...*, p. 71; OBOLENSKY, *Byzantine Commonwealth...*, pp. 261, 266; ВАСИЛЬЕВ, p. 48.

26 MIKLOSISCH — MÜLLER, p. 361; Translation according to BARKER, p. 203; See also OBOLENSKY, *Byzantine Commonwealth...*, p. 261.

27 OBOLENSKY, *Byzantine Commonwealth...*, p. 290.

28 OIKONOMIDES, pp. 74–75. Despite officially adhering to the concept of pentarchy, the lands of Rus' were under direct patriarch's jurisdiction, as opposed to the situation in Bulgaria or Serbia.

29 OBOLENSKY, *Byzantine Commonwealth...*, p. 290.

to help sustain the defence while the negotiations for help and for a possible church union were underway. Indeed, the question of the union periodically appeared and was mentioned in the correspondence between the Patriarch and Polish king Jagiełło as well as between the Patriarch and metropolitan Kyrrilos in Kiev.[30] Paradoxically, the Orthodox believers helped sustain the ecclesiastic institutions which they later rejected for establishing the union with Latin Catholic Church.

Clearly, the influence of the city or the patriarch were strong enough even in far-away lands of Rus' and could be effectively used to move common folk to action. The ties of the Byzantine commonwealth still remained — despite series of preceding events that significantly tarnished the ties between the ascendant state of Muscovy and Byzantium.[31] These were influenced by two important developments — the centuries old project of Russian church for independent organisation, which was time and again unsuccessful and the meddling of Byzantine diplomacy in the struggle between Muscovy and Lithuania. It was already mentioned that through the power to institute a new metropolitan of Rus' the Patriarch and by extension the Byzantine Emperor kept a certain degree of influence over political matters in the whole of Rus' lands.

While Muscovy soared in power during the rule of Ivan I Kalita and in 1328 it became the new seat of Russian metropolitan, the Gediminas dynasty in Lithuania seized the opportunity provided by power vacuum in western Russia and slowly through marriage or war incorporated much of the native Russian principalities. In 1307 Polotsk was taken, then Vitebsk in 1320, followed by Galicia and Volhynia. After signing agreement with Poland and therefore having safer western borders, Gediminids turned south-east, taking Kiev in 1363, then Pereyaslav, Chernigov and other additional territories.[32] The geopolitical image that appeared in the Eastern Europe was that of a struggle between Lithuania and Muscovy over the dominant position in Russian lands. Furthermore, Lithuanian dynasty remained pagan, although very tolerant one, and therefore the possibility of Gedeminids conversion to orthodoxy still remained. Hence the support of Constantinopolitan patriarchate varied, although the conduct of the Patriarchs was as much influenced by geopolitics as bribes and the political force that held power in Constantinople at the time. Against John V Palaiologos stood first John VI Kantakouzenos and then again the family feud between John V and John VII disturbed the stability of the ruling regime. The grand designs of patriarchs ultimately came to naught, since Lithuanian grand prince Jagiełło converted to Catholicism in order to win over the crown of Poland for himself in 1386. The intended union of Lithuania and Poland was not implemented however, as the Lithuanian throne was taken by Jagiełło's kin Vitold who proved to be the most potent of Lithuanian rulers. During his life, Lithuania stretched almost from the shores of the Baltic Sea to Dniepr's delta. After his brief involvement with Orthodoxy, Vitold nevertheless converted to Catholicism, reached an agreement with Jagiełło and tied the fate of his rule to the Western Christianity.

30 BARKER, pp. 150–153.

31 On this topic, see also C. HALPERIN, *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History*, Bloomington 1985; М. Н. ТИХОМИРОВ, *Средневековая Россия на международных путях (XIV–XV вв.)*, Москва 1966.

32 C. ROWELL, *Lithuania Ascending: A Pagan Empire within East-Central Europe, 1295–1345*, Cambridge 1994.

It is no wonder that Muscovites did not approach Byzantium with full respect, especially considering how humiliated the position of Byzantine emperor was after 1389 when it was forced to accept the bonds of vassalage to the Ottoman sultan.[33] Additionally, one must not forget that the position of Emperor was given to someone else, one who had more paramount standing in the geopolitical concepts of Russian primary sources. After submitting Russians to their rule in the 13th century, the Mongols were perceived as their lawful rulers and the members of Dzuci's dynasty ruling from Sarai were given title of Tzar, as the one who rules above everyone else.[34] The battle of Kulikovo in 1380 was not a resistance against the Mongol rule; it was a fight against illegitimate ruler Mamai, who was not Dzuci's descendant but only an emir who took reins of power in the Golden Horde. The conversation between Patriarch and Vasily sheds some more light on this position. It was Vasily himself who claimed around 1394 that *"we have one church, but not the emperor"*.[35] And it was the famous answer of the patriarch outlining the concepts of late-Byzantine cosmology in its fullness that might nevertheless did not reach Vasily's mind, used to a different constellation.[36] It is therefore interesting that despite all the obstructions from Byzantine state and despite the fact that the respect to imperial position of Byzantium was all but gone, the cultural and ecclesiastical ties still allowed Russian elites to perceive Constantinople as an important center of their world and they were willing not to let it fall to the hands of heathens. In spite of all the differences, the ties of Byzantine commonwealth remained, both among princes and common folk alike.

In this context, I would like to turn attention to one particular text preserved in Nikonovskaja letopis: *"The Patriarch and Tsar Manuil begged Russia for alms (milostina)* [...] *metropolitan Cyprian send to his sons, the grand princes of Russia, to Vasily Dmitrievich of Moscow, Michail Alexandrovich of Tver, Vitold Kestutich of Lithuania, Oleg Ivanovich of Ryazan and many others* [...] *and a great deal of alms was collected..."*[37] Apart from most of the other primary sources, Nikonovskaja letopis lists more than one or two princes.[38] Most of all, it mentions one specific ruler none of the other primary sources have. Both Alexander Vasiliev and Dmitri Obolensky, noticed the fact that the Grand Prince of Lithuania, Vitold, also probably participated in the collection of alms, although they did not comment this issue any further.[39] Why would Vitold do that since he clearly accepted Jagiełło's designs and furthermore Jagiełło maintained correspon-

33 BARKER, pp. 105, 110.

34 А. А. ГОРСКИЙ, *Рус: Од славянского Расселения до Московского царства, (Studia historica)*, Москва 2004, pp. 322–323; See further C. HALPERIN, *The Russian Land and the Russian Tsar: The Emergence of Muscovite Ideology, 1380–1408*, in: Forschungen zur osteuropëische Geschichte, Bd. 23, 1976, pp. 7–103; J. PELENSKI, *The Origins of the Official Muscovite Claim to the "Kievan Inheritance"*, in: Harvard Ukrainian Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1977, pp. 29–52; O. PRITSAK, *Moscow, the Golden Horde, and the Kazan Khanate from a Polycultural Point of View*, in: Slavic Review, Vol. 24, No. 4, 1967, pp. 576–583.

35 OBOLENSKY, *Byzantine Commonwealth...*, p. 264; NICOL, p. 299.

36 BARKER, Footnote No. 31, pp. 109–110.

37 *Летописный...*, p. 168.

38 *Софийская...*, p. 130; *Продолжение* , p. 71; *Троицкая...*, p. 448.

39 ВАСИЛЬЕВ, p. 48; OBOLENSKY, *A Byzantine Grand Embassy...*, p. 125.

dence with the patriarch regarding the Church union not long before that? Also, the contact was not direct and was conducted through metropolitan Cyprian, through his authority. The reasons are numerous — firstly, Vitold had certainly some kind of relationship to Orthodoxy, since he converted just a few years before these events occurred; secondly, the Lithuanians were quite used to the contacts with Byzantium from their diplomatic dealings regarding the patriarch and it is hard to ascertain whether Cyprian was perceived as a Byzantine agent. In my opinion, it was highly implausible, at least since the time he reached an agreement with Muscovy in 1390 and was acknowledged as a rightful metropolitan; thirdly, 90 % of Lithuanian population practised Orthodoxy and was still part of wider Russian cultural sphere, Vitold could hardly ignore such an important event as to provide assistance to the besieged metropolis and cultural centre to which his subjects culturally adhered to.

In the end, however, it was not the Russian material aid nor the military expedition organized by the West. While Bayezid was maintaining the blockade of Constantinople, he conducted several conquests in other areas — most notably in the Asia Minor where he attempted to subjugate remaining Turkish statelets. Unfortunately for him, these were under the protection of great prince of the East, Timur-i-lenk, in Europe known as Tamerlan. In 1401, Tamerlan conducted an expedition against Bayezid and in the next year the Turkish sultan was utterly defeated at the battle of Ankara. The years-long siege of Constantinople was over. Tamerlan also reconstituted several former Turkish states previously absorbed into Ottoman Empire and set back to his home in Samarkand, while Bayezid's sons ravaged their country in long civil war which finally gave Byzantines some respite and allowed them to regain a segment of their security.[40]

To summarise — in comparison to the embassy in the west, Manuel's diplomatic mission to Russia was much more mass- and finance-oriented. It was conducted mostly by the patriarch, as he could use his considerable influence over Rus' lands and he was actually present in Constantinople while Emperor was away. Another reason might be the fact that Vasily's opinion on Byzantine imperial status was known. If the patriarch had greater influence, the cunning Byzantine diplomacy was certainly willing to use it. Furthermore, then regent in Constantinople, John VII, was originally Manuel's rival and ally of Bayezid, therefore he could have been perceived as an unreliable figure.

As the Byzantine Empire faded, it still effectively used the art of diplomacy it had always excelled at. What this attempt showed is the diplomacy carefully crafted in order to get the most gain. Furthermore, it shows that even though Lithuania was by that time officially in Latin spectrum of European culture, it kept strong ties with the Orthodox world, as most of its population were still orthodox. Therefore, it was still somewhat recipient to needs of its population and it is quite understandable that Vitold chose to act this way. Or it might be the possibility that the plea for help was simply answered out of Christian common identity. It also suffices to show a glimpse of Russia's own opinion on the prospect of Emperor and Byzantine political standing in the realm of *oikumene* and of the lasting Lithuanian ties to the Byzantine realm.

40 NICOL, pp. 313–338.

THE RUSSIAN AID TO BYZANTIUM DURING THE TURKISH SIEGE OF CONSTANTINOPLE, 1394–1402

ABSTRACT

After securing their first fortress on European soil in 1352, the Ottomans rapidly expanded throughout the Eastern Balkans. Due to the unfavourable internal situation, the Christian Balkan states did not possess a sufficient force to defend themselves, and the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos had to rely on his diplomatic skills to and personally visited Western Europe in order to acquire an alliance against the Muslim enemy. However, The Emperor did not dispatch diplomatic missions only to the West but to the lands of Rus' as well. In contrast to the western embassies, the prestige and position of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople also played a significant role — the patriarch addressed a letter to Vasily I Dmitriyevich, the Grand Prince of Moscow, together with Manuel II. The purpose of this mission was probably not to sign a treaty of alliance but rather ask for a financial assistance. This goal was sufficiently fulfilled — the Grand Prince of Moscow and princes of Ryazan, Tver and Lithuania agreed to join the effort to fund Constantinople's defence. Altogether, roughly 20 thousand of silver rubles were raised by both clerics and laity and subsequently sent in Constantinople during the year of 1398. The gift was amicably received in the city on Bosporus and its citizens repaid this act of kindness with icons, presents and saints' remains. Further contacts followed, primarily through the efforts of the Ecumenical Patriarch. While Manuel was in Western Europe, the patriarch dispatched another mission to Russia to the Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia Cyprian who maintained correspondence with the patriarch. Based on the research of correspondence and Russian narrative sources, the present paper analyses the possibilities of Russian assistance to the declining Byzantine state and the results of the mission from the perspective of both the Russian principalities and the Byzantine Empire.

KEYWORDS

Siege of Constantinople 1394–1402; Byzantine-Russian Relations; Patriarchate of Constantinople; Byzantine Empire; Grand Princedom of Muscovy; Grand Princedom of Lithuania

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