

## The Recovery of Constantinople from the Latins

In August 1261 what the Greeks had been dreaming of for 57 years became a reality. The government in exile in Nicaea was back in the imperial capital – and by an act of God, it seemed, rather than by force of arms. But what now? Despite devastating raids by ghazi warriors into Byzantine territory in Asia Minor, the Turks were not the most pressing problem. The Seljuks were powerless, having been defeated in 1243 by a Mongol army, and the Ottomans had not yet established their emirate in Bithynia. The Tatars of the Golden Horde presented a serious danger but were neutralised in the traditional Byzantine manner by gifts and a marriage alliance.<sup>1</sup> The main threat came from the west, first from Manfred, the Hohenstaufen king of Sicily, and then from his successor, Charles I of Anjou, brother of Louis IX of France. Charles was the more dangerous opponent because he enjoyed the support of the French popes, Urban IV and his successor, Clement IV. The latter was succeeded by an Italian, Gregory X (1271-76), who was much more amenable than his immediate predecessors to coming to an arrangement with the Greeks because of his zeal for a crusade to restore the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, which by that time was confined to its last bastion, the city of Acre. It was in this context that

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1. In 1272 Michael signed a treaty of friendship with the Tatar leader Nogai Khan and gave him his illegitimate daughter Euphrosyne in marriage.

Michael VIII came to formulate his policy of ecclesiastical union that was to divide the Byzantine Church for the rest of the Palaiologan era.

### ***The Unionist Policy of Michael VIII Palaiologos***

The council that both Gregory X and Michael VIII wanted (each for his own reasons) was held at Lyon in the early summer of 1274. The Greek delegation was a small one, consisting of the *megas logothetēs* (the head of the civil administration) George Akropolites, who was the emperor's personal envoy, the ex-patriarch Germanos III, representing the clergy, and Theophanes, metropolitan of Nicaea.<sup>2</sup> The delegation arrived in Lyon only a fortnight before the council was brought to a close on 6 July. There was no debate on the issues separating the eastern and western churches, simply a reading of documents, principally the emperor's Profession of Faith,<sup>3</sup> and the proclamation of union in the cathedral of St John,<sup>4</sup> followed by the chanting of the creed (with the *Filioque*) in Greek and Latin. The real business of the union was conducted in Constantinople both before and after the council.<sup>5</sup>

The work in Constantinople began when Pope Gregory X sent a personal representative, the Franciscan John Parastron, to inform Michael VIII about the Latin faith. Parastron was a good choice. A native Greek-speaker born in Constantinople, he won the emperor's confidence and seems to have been widely liked even by members of the Greek clergy (Geanakoplos 1976b: 186-87). Next, towards the end

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2. It was intended that the party, which travelled on two ships, should have been larger. However, one of the ships, carrying more than two hundred people, including the interpreter, George Berrhoiotes, went down in a storm as it rounded Cape Malea, the south-east tip of the Peloponnese (Pachymeres, *History* V, 21; Failler and Laurent 1984: 507).
  3. This had been drafted for Michael's signature by Clement IV in 1267 and was confirmed as what was required of him by Gregory X in 1272 (Papadakis 1983: 16).
  4. In a manner reminiscent of the preparation of a venue for the modern Olympic Games, the masons were working up to the last minute to complete the roof of the new cathedral in time for the council.
  5. Our informant on these is George Pachymeres, *History* V, 17 (Failler and Laurent 1984: 492-95) For good modern accounts, see Geanakoplos 1976b and, more briefly, Papadakis 1983: 15-18.

of 1272, a four-man legation arrived, all of them Franciscans, led by Jerome of Ascoli, the future Pope Nicholas IV, who also spoke some Greek.<sup>6</sup> During their fifteen-month stay in Constantinople they were able to convince Michael that, notwithstanding the confession of faith they had brought with them, what Rome required of him in practice would be minimal, namely, recognition of the orthodoxy of the *Filioque* and the *azyma* (the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist) together with acknowledgement of the papal primacy, including Rome's appellate jurisdiction. Michael in consequence issued a chrysobull in late December 1273 assuring the Byzantine Church that the three points he had agreed to as the terms of union, namely, the recognition of the primacy of the bishop of Rome (τὸ πρωτεῖον), the acknowledgement of the right of appeal to Rome (τὸ ἐγγλητον), and the commemoration of the pope's name in the diptychs (τὸ μνημόσυνον), did not entail any change in the church's traditional dogmas and customs.<sup>7</sup> Then in February 1274 he went on to sign the confession of faith prepared for him in Rome, despite its specification of the full range of Latin doctrines, adding to it a plea to the pope that the Greeks be allowed to keep their liturgical rites unchanged.<sup>8</sup> Securing the consent of the Greek clergy, however, to this risky strategy of still attempting to negotiate after appending his signature to the papal document, proved to be another matter.

Some months before his chrysobull of December 1273 the emperor had already issued a memorandum on the progress of his negotiations. This provoked a *Response* from the patriarch Joseph I expressing his objection to anything short of an ecumenical council, attended by representatives from all five patriarchates, in which the controverted doctrines would be fully discussed.<sup>9</sup> Joseph's *Response* was followed in June 1273 by a synodal opinion signed by about forty bishops which repeated the request for an ecumenical council following traditional

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6. At the pope's request, the members of the legation were chosen by Bonaventure, then the minister general of the Franciscans. The three other three legates were the friars Bonaventura da Mugello, Bonagratia, and Raymond Berengar (Geanakoplos 1976b: 187).

7. Papadakis 1983: 17 (with partial trans). Text in Darrouzès and Laurent 1976: 317-19.

8. Text in Roberg 1964: 235-39; trans. of Michael's addendum in Hussey 1986: 232.

9. Text and analysis in Darrouzès and Laurent 1976: 134-301.

criteria.<sup>10</sup> On 11 January 1274, about a fortnight after Michael's chrysobull, Joseph withdrew to the Peribleptos monastery on the understanding that he would only resume his patriarchal duties if union with the Latin Church was not achieved at Lyon. Despite Michael's best efforts both to satisfy the Latins and to ensure broad support from the Greeks, the prospects for union did not look good.

The three men selected by Michael to represent him at Lyon were not nonentities, even if none was highly regarded as a theologian. The leader of the delegation, the *megas logothetēs* George Akropolites (1217-82), was a very learned man who had taught Plato and Aristotle in Constantinople besides fulfilling his duties at court as the emperor's chief minister.<sup>11</sup> His primary virtue in Michael's eyes, to whom he was related by marriage, was his absolute personal loyalty. The second member of the delegation, Germanos III Markoutzas (patriarch 1265-66), was another loyalist, who had succeeded Arsenios on the patriarchal throne after his deposition in 1264 and had excommunicated him. The third member, Theophanes, was metropolitan of the former imperial capital, Nicaea. Germanos III (who was removed from patriarchal office for ineptitude after only a year) and the otherwise undistinguished Theophanes were the best that Michael could find among the pro-unionist ecclesiastics.<sup>12</sup>

The delegation did return to Constantinople with their mission accomplished and, consequently, the patriarch Joseph I did resign as he said he would. Michael VIII now needed a new patriarch, and his choice fell on John Bekkos. Bekkos had been *chartophylax* (archivist) of the Great Church but had been incarcerated in the Anemas prison near the Blachernai Palace because of his strong opposition to the emperor's project of union with the Latins. While in prison, he famously became a convert to unionism through reading the works of Nikephoros Blemmydes (George Akropolites' teacher of philosophy), which the emperor arranged to be sent to him. Even Pachymeres, not a historian who favoured unionism, believes that Bekkos' conversion was genuine. He was a truthful man, he said, who had the courage to

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10. Text in Darrouzès and Laurent 1976: 303-12.

11. He was described by Jerome of Ascoli as the emperor's first secretary (*primus secretarius imperatoris*) (Hussey 1986: 230).

12. The metropolitan of Philippi also agreed to go to Lyon but died before the delegation sailed from Constantinople on 11 March 1274 (Geanakoplos 1976b: 193, n. 43a).

confess his ignorance (Pachymeres, *History* V, 15; Failler and Laurent 1984: 489.4-5).

Bekkos was elected patriarch on 27 May 1275, becoming the eleventh bishop of Constantinople named John. The emperor had full confidence in his capabilities and did not himself interfere in the church's affairs. Yet, during the eight years of Bekkos' patriarchate – eight years of misplaced optimism, as Papadakis calls them (Papadakis 1983: 19) – nothing was achieved to make unionism acceptable to the Byzantine Church as a whole. Despite the patriarch's best efforts to convince his fellow Greeks of the equivalence of the prepositions 'from' (ἐκ) and 'through' (διά) in the phrases 'from the Father and the Son' (*ex Patre Filioque*), as the Latin creed stated (with regard to the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit), and 'from the Father through the Son' (*ex Patre per Filium*), which the Greeks accepted (but usually only with regard to the Spirit's temporal procession), hostility to unionism only became more deeply entrenched. An anonymous polemical tract (a *libellus*) of the period, which has been studied by Deno Geanakoplos, gives a good sense of the kind of opposition at all social levels that Michael VIII and John XI were up against (Geanakoplos 1976a: 156-70). The tract begins with a parody of the *officium stratoris* ridiculing the emperor, and then castigates the Latins not only for doctrinal error, such as the 'Judaizing' practice of using unleavened bread in the Eucharist, but also for hypocrisy, many supposedly celibate priests keeping concubines and absolving each other before saying Mass, and even for filthy habits such as attending to the call of nature while carrying the sacrament, and eating from the same plates as those which they use to feed their dogs. No amount of fine theological argument was going to make any headway against such attitudes.

Nor was the unionist cause helped by the Latins themselves. Pope Gregory X died at Arezzo in January 1276 on his way back to Rome from Lyon. After a succession of three pontificates of only a few months each (Innocent V, Hadrian V, and John XXI), Nicholas III, a scion of Rome's noble Orsini family, became pope in November 1277. Nicholas held Charles of Anjou in check but also took a stiff line against the Greeks, seeking the strict implementation of the terms of Lyon, and even wanting to maintain a permanent papal legate in Constantinople. Nicholas was succeeded in February 1281 by another French pope, Martin IV, who favoured his fellow countryman Charles of Anjou and supported his plan to reconquer Constantinople for the Latins. On 18 November, just nine months after his election,

Martin excommunicated Michael VIII despite all that Michael had done to satisfy papal demands. Michael died in Thrace a year later, on 11 December 1282, not only excommunicated by Rome but also refused communion by his own clergy. His son who succeeded him, Andronikos II, a pious Orthodox, immediately overturned his father's policy of rapprochement with Rome. John Bekkos was deposed a fortnight later, to be replaced by Joseph I, who had previously resigned over Michael's implementation of the stipulations of the Council of Lyon. For the time being at least, unionism was over, with the Byzantine Church in a commanding position.

### ***Orthodoxy Restored***

'After the restoration of Orthodoxy in 1282', Donald Nicol has written, with only slight exaggeration, 'a generation of Byzantines grew up with the comforting illusion that the church of Rome did not exist' (Nicol 1976: 160). The Sicilian Vespers had made further contact with the papacy unnecessary.<sup>13</sup> The priority now was to heal the damage to the church caused by Michael's increasingly desperate attempts to make the Union of Lyon work. The patriarch Joseph I, old and frail, died on 23 March 1283. He was succeeded on 28 March by Gregory II of Cyprus, who was the real architect of 'the restoration of Orthodoxy'. With Bekkos now exiled to Prousa (Bursa) in Bithynia, Theodora, Michael VIII's widow, giving assurances that she would not seek *mnemosyna* (commemorations) or church burial for her husband, and the young emperor Andronikos II (who was only 22) eager to express his devotion to Orthodoxy, all seemed set for the *hierosynē* (the priestly body) to re-assert its own authority against that of the *basileia* (the imperial power) on whatever terms the former deemed appropriate. Matters, however, were not that simple. Anti-unionism in itself was not enough to unite the different Orthodox factions. Besides the unrepentant unionists, these included the schismatic Arsenites,

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13. Michael's last, very valuable, service to the empire and the church was to remove the threat of attack by Charles of Anjou, not with papal support but by traditional Byzantine methods, namely, by encouraging a revolt in Sicily, which broke out at the end of March 1282 (the Sicilian Vespers), and by giving financial support to Peter III of Aragon for the equipment of a fleet enabling him to invade Sicily in August of the same year. Charles died in January 1285, still trying to recover Sicily.

implacably opposed to the Palaiologan dynasty as usurpers,<sup>14</sup> the Josephites, who held the patriarch Joseph I to be a saint, the clergy of Hagia Sophia, who were keen to assert their independence of the patriarchate, and John Bekkos, who from his exile in Prousa continued to protest his Orthodoxy.<sup>15</sup> It became apparent that a council was needed in order to clarify what Orthodoxy now stood for.

The council, which was summoned at the request of Bekkos himself, was held in the Triclinium of Alexios Komnenos at the Blachernai Palace in Constantinople. Known as the Second Council of Blachernai, it met in five sessions from February to August 1285, with the emperor presiding and Bekkos as the main defendant. The acts of the council have not survived but we have the *Tomos*, read out and signed in the Great Church of Hagia Sophia in August 1285, which summarises the council's decision.<sup>16</sup> The debate revolved around the correct interpretation of Trinitarian doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit.<sup>17</sup> Was Bekkos right in maintaining the equivalence of the expressions 'from the Father and the Son' and 'from the Father through the Son'? How are the different formulations in the Church Fathers to be reconciled with each other?

Until the thirteenth century Byzantine theologians had accepted various elements in the Orthodox tradition – (1) the apostolic testimony that the Spirit is the gift of Christ, (2) the patristic teaching that the Spirit is consubstantial with the Son and his eternal image, the Father being the Spirit's *probouleus* ('projector'), (3) the conciliar statement (by the patriarch Tarasios at Nicaea in 787) that the Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, and (4) Photius' insistence in the mid-ninth century that the Spirit proceeds from the Father alone – without correlating these in a coherent teaching on how the Son and the Spirit are related to each other and to the Father, not merely on the

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14. On the Arsenite opposition to Gregory of Cyprus, see Papadakis 1983: 51-55.

15. For details on Bekkos' role at this time, see Papadakis 1983: 55-57.

16. See Stavrou 2017: 66-93, for the critical text with a French trans. For an English trans., based on a single but good manuscript, see Papadakis 1983: 155-65. Papadakis describes the *Tomos* as 'possibly the single most important conciliar decision of the entire thirteenth century' (153).

17. The debate, as described by Pachymeres, was extremely lively. For a summary (based on Bekker 1835: II, 88-103), see Papadakis 1983: 62-73.