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THE CRUSADE OF NICOPOLIS AND ITS AFTERMATH: VIEWS FROM BYZANTINE, FRENCH AND OTTOMAN SOURCES

In memory of John W. Barker

The Crusade of Nicopolis (1396) was one of the last crusades directed against the Ottomans, led primarily by joint Franco-Burgundian and Hungarian forces. Albeit on the margins, the Byzantines and Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos were also involved in this crusading project as they hoped to relieve Constantinople from the Ottoman blockade it endured since 1394. The resounding defeat inflicted on the crusaders by the Ottomans was echoed in both Byzantine, French and Ottoman sources. This paper shall attempt to offer a comparative reading of Byzantine, French and Ottoman sources on some aspects of the Crusade of Nicopolis. The first part of this paper will seek to analyze the Byzantine sources, consisting of histories, letters and orations, investigating their literary, political, and religious perceptions of the event. The second part will deal with French and Ottoman sources, especially focusing on their depictions of the Byzantine involvement in the crusade, as well as the narrative links between Nicopolis, the blockade of Constantinople and the travels of Manuel II.

Keywords: Nicopolis, later crusades, Late Byzantium, literary representation, Byzantine-Ottoman contacts, historiography

On 25th September 1396, a massive battle unfolded near the banks of Danube. The Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I and his army inflicted a devastating defeat on a coalition of crusaders. Many were killed either in combat or drowned in the Danube while fleeing, and many others were captured.[1] The crusading army consisted

[1] In this article, Nicopolis will be referred to as both battle and crusade. Although now very dated, the monograph of Atiya on Nicopolis remains an important work; *Atiya*, Nicopolis. For the formation of the crusading project and the battle see also for instance *Barker*, Manuel II, 131–138,

of Hungarian, Wallachian, German and Franco-Burgundian soldiers, also accompanied by some Italian and Catalan mercenaries.[2] Some were motivated by crusading ideology, some by the thrill of war or the promise of pay, while others saw the expedition as an exciting adventure. They were led by King Sigismund of Hungary, and at the head of the Burgundian contingent was Jean de Nevers, son of Phillip the Bold, the powerful uncle of King Charles VI of France. The battlefield moreover boasted other famed European rulers and knights such as Mircea I of Wallachia, Phillibert de Naillac, the Grand Master of the Hospitallers of Rhodes, Jean le Maingre Boucicaut, Marshal of France, the constable of France, Phillip of Artois and Enguerrand de Coucy VII, a son in law of the King of England. These men and their retinues cut impressive figures in their richly embroidered, colorful clothes and banners of expensive cloth, adorned by precious stones. To these names, one must add that of Stefan Lazarević of Serbia – though he fought not alongside the crusaders, but as a vassal in the Ottoman army.[3]

While a joint crusading project was discussed between various European powers as early as 1392, the Crusade of Nicopolis had been conceived by Sigismund of Hungary mainly in 1394/1395 in the face of the Ottoman raids into the Balkans; he was also supported by Mircea of Wallachia in these plans.[4] On 3 June 1394, the pope had moreover issued indulgences for fighting against the Turks in Sigismund's territories.[5] Sigismund's embassies to France in 1394/95 met with enthusiastic responses, both thanks to his recent military successes and to the renewed crusader fervor at the French and Burgundian courts.[6] Finally, the Byzantines were also involved in the plans, albeit on the margins. As his capital Constantinople was blockaded by the Ottomans since 1394, Emperor Manuel II had turned to Sigismund of Hungary for help, in addition to petitioning other European powers. In 1396, an anti-Ottoman treaty was signed between the two, and the emperor wholeheartedly supported the

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Rosetti, Notes on Nicopolis, *Mureşan*, Avant Nicopolis and *idem*, Trois Empereurs, *De Vries*, Lack of a Military Response. Finally, an international colloquium in 1996 was dedicated to the Crusade of Nicopolis; Nicopolis 1396–1996, Actes du Colloque International, ed. *Paviot – Chauney Boulliot*.

[2] Despite the previous arguments of Atiya, it has now been widely accepted that no English contingent was present in Nicopolis and England did not participate in this crusade, although some English-speaking soldiers might have been present, see *Tipton*, The English at Nicopolis. In *Çelik*, Manuel II, 178–180, England is erroneously described as a participant in Nicopolis, following *Atiya*, Nicopolis and *Barker,* Manuel II, 133.

[3] For the omission of Lazarević's participation in the battle in the work of his biographer/hagiographer Konstantin the Philosopher and the motives behind it, see *Šuica*, The Battle of Nicopolis.

[4] Sigismund and Mircea had been involved in bilateral negotiations since 1392, but their efforts intensified in 1394/95 and an alliance was concluded in 1395. Around 1390–1392, the French and the English were engaged in discussions for a joint crusade, *Magee*, Crusading, 368–383; *Kintzinger*, Sigismond, 23–34. In 1392/93, Sigismund had retaken Nicopolis, a capture that was immediately followed by Ottoman raids, resulting in the recapture of the city *Mureşan*, Avant Nicopolis, 115–119.

[5] *Lutrell,* Popes and Crusades, 583; *Magee*, Crusading, 368–383; *Kintzinger*, Sigismond, 23–34.

[6] For the crusading spirit of the 1390s in France see for instance *Magee*, Crusading; *Kocabıyıkoğlu-Çeçen*, Praising the Turk and *eadem*, Knighthood; *Kilgour*, Chivalry and *Gaucher,* Deux regards.

idea of a crusade against the Ottomans that would save his own empire.[7] While he was in no position to contribute to the crusade with significant military or financial help, Manuel II also agreed to arm ten galleys – expenses to be covered by Sigismund – to be used in the Danube region for the upcoming battle.[8] As one of the last crusades, the Battle of Nicopolis had significant political and military impact. The Ottomans advanced into the Balkans with even more ease, Sigismund's ambitions were cut short, the French met with devastating losses and Byzantium's plight became further desperate.

The cultural echoes of Nicopolis extended beyond the immediate aftermath of the battle. Some of the captured knights were taken to various cities in Anatolia and other Islamic lands as far as Cairo. Consequently, the Ottomans and the French exchanged many embassies for the ransoming of these knights. While negotiations for the ransoms were intense, they were accompanied by an influx of gifts and objects on both sides. The Ottoman sultan Bayezid sent the French king Ottoman weapons to reinforce his military superiority, as well as asking not only for money, but also for a set of luxurious tapestries as a part of the ransom payment. Known as the Arras tapestries, these art artefacts depicted stories from the life of Alexander the Great. Bayezid's demand does not only reflect his interest in Alexander the Great, but also in French luxury objects.[9] This interest was not one sided either. The aftermath of Nicopolis saw a rise in the artistic interest in the 'East' among especially the French, partially thanks to the tales of the survivors who returned: Bayezid's likeness served as a model for Alexander the Great in the illuminations of a manuscript, while 'oriental' clothing and headgear such as those of the Byzantines, Ottomans and the Wallachians, became prominent in illuminations. The same penchant could moreover be observed in textual production. Besides the many French works dedicated to Nicopolis, even the poetry of Christine de Pizan betrayed traces of the battle.[10]

The Crusade of Nicopolis was featured in not only French literary and historical works, but also in Byzantine and Ottoman sources.[11] Recently, many studies have been dedicated to the depiction of Nicopolis in the French sources, focusing on issues such as the differences between the chroniclers, crusading ideology, and

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[7] *Barker*, Manuel II, 131–138; *Çelik*, Manuel II, 178–180; *Thiriet,* Régestes, I, 210, no.892. Although their efforts intensified after 1934, Manuel II, Sigismund and Mircea of Wallachia were already in discussion in 1392. This proposed alliance might have been a factor in Manuel's decision to break off with the Ottomans in 1394, thus inciting the blockade of Constantinople, *Mureşan*, Avant Nicopolis, 115–119.

[8] *Thiriet,* Régestes, I, 211, no.900; *Barker,* Manuel II, 132.

[9] It seems that one of these tapestries was later taken by Tamerlane upon his victory over Bayezid in 1402, *Necipoğlu,* Visual Cosmopolitanism, 3–4.

[10] See *Kubiski*, Orientalizing Costumes, 161–165.

[11] There are also Hungarian, German and Italian chronicles that refer to the battle, but they remain outside the scope of this paper. Furthermore, an eyewitness account of a Damascene author, Ibn al-Jazari, also exists, see *Binbaş*, A Damascene Eyewitness. I thank Prof Anthony Kaldellis for bringing this article to my attention.

notions of chivalry.[12] An article has also compared the French and Ottoman chronicles, arguing that while the Ottoman sources depicted the battle as an Islamic victory, the French chronicles focused on Christian values and criticism of failed chivalry.[13] Yet, the portrayal of the Byzantines in these French and Ottoman sources on Nicopolis has not received any attention. Moreover, despite figuring in some scholarly accounts of Nicopolis, the Byzantine sources that deal with this episode have not been sufficiently analyzed. In part, this undoubtedly partially stems from their lack of concrete information. However, an analysis of these Byzantine sources provides many insights into the Byzantines' perception of the crusade and offers a new perspective on the literary depictions of Nicopolis.

A letter written by the Byzantine emperor-author Manuel II Palaiologos features prominently among the Byzantine sources on Nicopolis and deserves close analysis not only for its contents, but also for its engaging literary features.[14] Written in October 1396, the letter is one of the longest in Manuel's collection and stands out from the rest by its somber and frustrated tone. Composed in the tradition of Byzantine epistolography, the letter's purpose was not to offer detailed information on the events. Instead, through its grave Biblical allusions and imagery of stormy seas, it is a literary composition that conveys Manuel's perception of Nicopolis. The emperor pours out his anguish to his mentor and friend Demetrios Kydones, who had left Constantinople for good shortly before the battle, as well as to a wider audience.[15] That Manuel took the defeat very personally is evident from the letter since the outcome of Nicopolis is depicted as a pinnacle of despair. For instance, life after this defeat, Manuel claims, would not be worth living and being struck with this blow, he felt more dead than alive. The letter also reveals that Manuel did not view the crusade as a general offensive against the Ottomans in the Balkans, chiefly aimed at protecting the interests of Sigismund. Instead, the letter hints that he envisioned the crusade as a project whose primary outcome would be lifting of the Ottoman blockade of Constantinople:

…To be in expectation of finding a release from the ills that have long oppressed our people (τὸ γένος), and of having those who have been enslaved for a long time enslaving the others, and to sum it up for those who understand, of having the whole battle line on the point of gaining back the advantage, and then all of a sudden to see exactly the opposite happen…what sort of adamantine soul could manage to stand firm and not be thoroughly cast down?[16]

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[12] See footnote 56.

[13] See *Kaçar – Dulmoney*, Nicopolis.

[14] This is Letter 31 in Manuel's letter collection; The Letters of Manuel II, ed. and trans. *Dennis*, 80–86.

[15] Kydones' reply to Manuel does not survive as his massive collection of around 450 letters doesn't extend until 1396.

[16] Letter 31, lines 37–43.

Manuel thus represents Nicopolis as a means of deliverance for Byzantium from the blockade, and not merely as a generic crusade against the infidels. It can be furthermore argued that his emphasis on the *genos* as opposed to Christians, reinforces this representation. The emperor's reference in other lines to the renewed talks with Sigismund in Constantinople as 'endeavors for the common good (τὰ πρὸς τὸ κοινῇ συμφέρον πεπραγμένα), strengthen this sense since in his works, Manuel solely uses this expression for the affairs of his own empire.[17] Still, while Manuel's strong association of Nicopolis and the lifting of the siege stemmed from his own hopes as the Byzantine emperor, it was also not unfounded. Although he had been fighting the Turks and planning for a crusade since 1392, the efforts of Sigismund had indeed intensified after 1394, when he had received indulgences from the pope and had sent embassies to the French court.[18] It can moreover be suggested that the blockade of Constantinople, which had also started in 1394, could have been an added impetus for the crusading project. Indeed, although Sigismund's main goal was to secure his own lands in the Balkans as opposed to liberating Constantinople, he, too, seems to have counted this as an important objective. A close reading of Sigismund's letter from Constantinople, in which the king laments how he had hoped to come to the city under very different circumstances, lends support to this interpretation.[19]

To further underline his despair, Manuel claims that now he is glad that Kydones is not in Constantinople to witness these events despite his sorrow over Kydones' abandonment of his fatherland. Yet, he also regretfully wishes that Kydones were there to meet with Sigismund, who had come to Constantinople after fleeing from the battlefield. This remark is noteworthy as a few lines before, Manuel points out that Kydones' speech, understanding and other qualities would have helped the emperor in his current endeavors for the common good, that is, for Byzantium.[20] Here, Manuel is clearly implying that Kydones would have helped in persuading the Hungarian king to renew the attack against the Ottomans.[21] Thus despite the sorrowful tone of the letter, the emperor still mingles despair with some small hope, that another crusade could be launched. This reading is supported by the fact that, soon after Nicopolis, Manuel

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17 Letter 31, lines 9–10.

18 *Lutrell,* Popes and Crusades, 583.

19 The full Latin text of the letter is given in *Barker*, Manuel II, 482–483. Despite the humiliating circumstances, Sigismund also boasts of how his presence in Constantinople and of those other crusaders were the only thing hindering the Ottomans from completely plundering the city. He adds that he assigned his own galleys to protect the city alongside those of the Byzantines, Venetians and the Genoese; 'Placuit Altissimo, ut ad urbem Constantinopolim licet alio quam sperabamus itinere veniremus. Quam circa obsessam invenimus et in statu positam valde gravi adeo, quod, si noster defuisset adventus, infra quam paucissimos dies Turchorum rapinis et spoliis patuisset…ad eius defensionem atque custodiam galeas nostras cum illis imperatoris, Venetorum, Ianuensiumque dimisimus…'.

20 Letter 31, lines 9–12.

21 Back in 1383, while defending Thessalonike against the Ottomans, in one of his letters, Manuel had requested Kydones to come to the city to persuade the Thessalonians to resist the enemy, claiming that Kydones' speech, logic and persuasion skills would help him immensely, *Çelik*, Manuel II, 94.

corresponded with various European rulers to raise another crusade and kept considering Sigismund as a potential leader.[22] Ultimately, Manuel's letter demonstrates that the emperor's efforts were renewed as soon as the Hungarian king had arrived in Constantinople straight after having escaped from the battlefield.

The literary features of the letter, such as its allusions and imagery of stormy seas, deserve analysis. Their purpose was not to merely embellish the composition, but to accentuate the somber tone of the letter, as well as adding layers of meaning. The letter has a strong religious undertone; the dominance of Biblical allusions is manifest especially when compared to Manuel's other letters. In many parts, the style and the tone of the letter become very close to that of a sermon. Apart from the lamentations for the defeat, the chief theme that pertains to Nicopolis is again religious. Manuel II portrays the disaster as a divine punishment given by God for the sins of the Christians and thus resorts to a widespread Christian theme.[23] The defeat is tellingly compared to the deluge of Noah. The emperor bemoans that although this second deluge has not engulfed the whole world, it bore away men more noble than the first time. As such, through this allusion, the emperor portrays Nicopolis as a worse divine punishment than the deluge of Noah; the knights who perished on the battlefield were nobler as they were devout Christians as opposed to the heathen who drowned in the first one. The example of Noah's deluge also fits in well with the literary framework of the letter which opens with Kydones' sailing away from Constantinople and the simultaneous arrival of Sigismund in the same port. Thus, the motif of water is introduced from the very start and throughout, the letter is laced with metaphors of sea, harbor and storms. These were not only common in Biblical sources and Byzantine authors, but also were among the favorites of Manuel.[24] All these sea imagery and metaphors lend vividness to the tumultous atmosphere of the letter and further serve to enhance the religious tone of the work.

Yet despite its somber tone of these literary features, the letter once more mingles despair with hope. As argued above, Manuel II indeed had hopes for another crusade and the subsequent deliverance of his empire. This is reflected again in the letter, where the emperor remarks on several occasions that God would heal the one he has wounded and that he would reduce the glory of the infidels, that is, the Ottomans. Manuel claims that even if he and the other present-day Christians may not witness it, God would surely reinstate the Christianity – and Byzantium – to its former glory sooner or later. This message is further strengthened by the numerous Psalms and the Biblical passages the emperor has chosen to allude to. All these allusions pertain to themes such as the imperishability of the true faith, the eventual victory of the chosen people of God, the chosen ruler of God ruling over

22 *Barker,* Manuel II, 151–153 and *idem*, Hospitallers.

23 Letter 31, lines 25–30, 44–50.

24 *Çelik*, Manuel II, 225–228 for a discussion of Manuel's sea imagery.

the nations with an iron scepter and the heavenly warrior smiting the impious with an iron rod.[25] Manuel here seems to associate the Byzantines, and the Christians in general, with the chosen people of Israel, and the Christian ruler who would defeat the Ottomans, with King David.[26] Thus, through these allusions, the emperor signals to Kydones and to his broader audience that not all hope is lost. As the head of the Byzantine Empire, Manuel thus represents himself as being confident in the eventual destruction of the Ottomans and the return of his empire to glory – whenever it might be. While Manuel had real hope for such an outcome, he also strives to portray himself as an exemplary Christian ruler who places his trust in God and toils for his people amid such adverse circumstances. Ultimately, this analysis of his letter on Nicopolis demonstrates that Manuel viewed Nicopolis from a Byzantine-oriented perspective; for him, its primary achievement would have been the deliverance of Constantinople. Moreover, in addition to Manuel's open exhortations, the letter also conveys many subtle political messages to its audience through it literary features.

A little-known Byzantine source on Nicopolis is a letter of Manuel Kalekas dated to fall 1396, addressed to Maximos Chrysoberges in Italy.[27] A theologian and author, Kalekas was a steadfast anti-Palamite and a convert to Catholicism. Indeed, for these reasons, he would be compelled to leave Constantinople for good.[28] Like Manuel II, Kalekas profoundly laments the defeat at Nicopolis and represents the crusade as a means of deliverance for the Byzantines. A close reading of the letter reveals that Kalekas also does not depict the crusade as a general offensive against the Ottomans in the Balkans, but focuses on its potential outcome that could have lifted the blockade from Constantinople. This sense is manifest in several lines where Kalekas writes that the Byzantines expected delivery from the ills that surrounded them (τῶν περισχόντων ἡμᾶς δεινῶν), and that they had hoped to recover their freedom and the possessions of the *genos* (κτήματα μὲν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὄντα τοῦ γένους ἡμῖν) through the bravery of the crusaders.[29] As in the case of Manuel II, Kalekas' use of the word *genos* underlines his strong association of Nicopolis with the deliverance of the Byzantines. They, Kalekas bemoans, sat praying that the crusaders should merely pass beyond the Danube and that all would be well. The ending passages of the letter makes even more concrete references to blockade. Kalekas laments that while the Byzantines had endured the ills of the siege (τῶν ἐκ τῆς πολιορκίας κακῶν) until that point, things would now get worse as unlike previously, the populace could be

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[25] See the footnotes in The Letters of Manuel II, ed. and trans. *Dennis*, 86–87 for the identifications of the emperor's allusions to the Psalms and the Bible.

[26] *Angelov*, Imperial Ideology, 79–92 for the uses of King David in panegyrics.

[27] This is Letter 13 in Kalekas's collection, Les Lettres de Calécas, ed. *Loenertz*, 184–186.

[28] Kalekas would first settle in Pera. As the move also took place in fall 1396, around the same time as the Battle of Nicopolis, it is unclear whether Kalekas wrote the letter from Constantinople or from Pera, Les Lettres de Calécas, ed. *Loenertz*, 184. See *idem*, 16–46, for his life.

[29] Letter 13, lines 1–4, 110–11, 15–17, 25–26, 30–32.

required to engage in close combat.[30] As in the letter of Manuel II, the Crusade of Nicopolis is thus not conceived as a clash between the Christians and the infidels, but as a means of solving the predicament of the Byzantines. Like the emperor, Kalekas also depicts the defeat conventionally as a divine punishment and ascribes the outcome to the sins of Christians. Similarly, while the defeat was a deluge that washed over the *oikoumene* in the letter of the emperor, for Kalekas it is an earthquake that shatters it. The emperor expresses relief that his correspondent Kydones is not in Constantinople to witness the events in person, and Kalekas displays a similar stance towards his own correspondent Chrysoberges.[31] As such, both letters revolve around similar themes. However, unlike Manuel II, Kalekas does not refer at all to the possibility of future deliverance. It can thus be argued that Kalekas' outlook on the future is much gloomier than that of Manuel II. As indicated by his letter and his subsequent political actions, the emperor had actual hope for the deliverance of his empire. Moreover, he also laced his letter with hope and faith in God's forgiveness and depicted himself as an emperor steadfast in face of adversity to instill hope in the audience. Kalekas' own stance on the future differs greatly.

The letter of Kalekas moreover differs from that of Manuel II by its approach to Catholicism and the crusading army. Both himself and his correspondent Chrysoberges were converts to Catholicism, and a close reading of the letter reveals Kalekas as being very favorable to Catholic nations. Unlike the emperor, he stresses the bravery of the crusaders, the might and the great number of the armies and the presence of many famed figures among them, lamenting that he believed that their mere appearance would be sufficient for a great victory.[32] Indeed, all these did correspond to the realities of Nicopolis. However, Kalekas underlines these points to give greater magnitude to his disappointment and arguably, also to extoll the might of the Catholics who were the overwhelming majority in Nicopolis. This favorable depiction of the Catholics is strengthened by Kalekas' remarks that these armies had often rushed with zeal to the help of the Byzantines from *Italy*.[33] Yet, there were very few Italian soldiers in Nicopolis; instead, the majority were Hungarians

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[30] Letter 13, lines 37–42. While speaking of his little experience of combat and the possibility that he might now be required to fight, Kalekas alludes to Homer's Iliad, Book 5, 530: 'ἀλλήλους αἰδεῖσθαι κατὰ κρατερὰς ὑσμίνας.' In addition to being a direct reference to fighting, this allusion could also possibly have another layer of meaning, especially as the syntax of the whole passage is blurry. In the following clauses, Kalekas speaks of recalling the events and the shame, adding that his correspondent Chrysoberges would learn more from the merchants who would arrive in Italy. The Homeric expression Kalekas uses is found in a context of critique of flight from battle; the argument is that all men should have shame of each other and stand firm in fighting, and that dying in combat is far more honorable than fleeing. As many crusaders attempted to flee the battlefield in Nicopolis, even drowning in Danube during their flight, one wonders if Kalekas could also be hinting at this aspect of the defeat.

[31] Letter 13, lines 11–12, 29–30.

[32] Letter 13, lines, 20–25.

[33] Letter 13, lines 21–22; '…οὓς δὴ συχνοὺς ἐπ' Ἰταλίας ὡς φῆς ἑώρας μετ' ἀξίου ζήλου τῶν ἡμετέρων κακῶν ἐξορμῶντας…'.

and Franco-Burgundians. In this instance, it can be argued that Kalekas' use of the term Italy does not refer to the Italian peninsula, but to Catholic nations in general. Kalekas displays a similar approach in the beginning of his letter, where he bemoans that he had had expected a victory which *all people named after Christ* would have celebrated it together. Here, Kalekas is clearly implying that despite their differences, the Orthodox and the Catholics are both Christians. His use of the verb *syneortazein* underlines this sense of unity projected in the letter.[34] Indeed, compelled to leave Constantinople on the account of their Catholic faith, this sentiment would have appealed both to Kalekas and to Chrysoberges.[35] Finally, a desire for unity between the Catholics and the Orthodox, that is the Byzantines, is also echoed in Kalekas' wishes for Chrysoberges at the end of the letter: that he should be an ornament through his words/writings to both Latin and Hellenic *genoi*.[36] Thus in the letter, besides approaching Nicopolis from a Byzantine oriented perspective, Kalekas moreover seizes the occasion to extoll Catholics, subtly endorsing his religious and political stance.

Although Manuel II's reign boasted a high number of panegyrics and orations with strong historical narratives, the Crusade of Nicopolis receives no mention.[37] Indeed, many of the orations addressed to the emperor at parts, almost read as narratives of his reign, chronicling many of its major events, such as the blockade of Constantinople, his travels, and the defeat of Bayezid I in 1402. One possible explanation the absence of Nicopolis is that it resulted in disaster and that as such, was tactfully passed over. Moreover, as the Byzantine involvement was indirect and no troops were present in the battle, it was not perceived as being particularly relevant to the narratives. Yet, in the 1410s, Manuel II still found the episode of Nicopolis significant enough to give it a lengthy mention in his *Funeral Oration on His Brother Theodore*. It has been noted that as well as being a funeral oration for Despot Theodore I of Morea, the work also functions as a 'mini history' of Manuel's reign; written by himself.[38] While it can be expected, to a degree, that the emperor would include the Crusade of Nicopolis in his work, a close reading reveals that he had literary and political motives in doing so. Indeed, an analysis of the relevant passages demonstrates that they function as an apology of Theodore's sale of Corinth to the Hospitallers in 1396.

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[34] Letter 13, lines 18–19; '…πάντας ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ καλουμένους συνεορτάσειν…'.

[35] Les Lettres de Calécas, ed. *Loenertz*, 23–31 and *Çelik*, Manuel II, 181–186, also citing the relevant bibliography, for the purges against the Catholics and anti-Palamites in the fall of 1396.

[36] Letter 13, lines 46–47; '…λόγοις μὲν κόσμος ἑκατέρῳ γένει Λατίνων τα καὶ Ἑλλήνων γίνῃ…' Both men had excellent command of Latin, as did many of the Byzantine intellectuals who had converted to Catholicism.

[37] *Çelik,* Manuel II, 346–352 for these orations addressed to Manuel and their analysis.

[38] Funeral Oration, ed. and trans. *Chrysostomides*, 192–195. Although the oration was delivered in 1409, manuscript evidence shows that it was revised until 1416; *Çelik*, Manuel II, 314–318 for an analysis of the work.

Throughout the *Funeral Oration*, Manuel regularly underlines Theodore's obedience to him in all things as the elder brother and the emperor.[39] Thus, Theodore's decisions are all, in a way, represented as being those of Manuel himself. In these passages that pertain to Nicopolis, Manuel defends his brother's sale of Corinth – and his own sanction of it – vigorously, highlighting at every chance the might of the Ottomans and the dire circumstances of the empire. All the Albanians, Serbs and Bulgarians were already conquered, the emperor points out, and even the great army had been just defeated in Nicopolis. Tellingly, Manuel hints at his involvement in the crusading project by referring to the participants in Nicopolis as Byzantium's allies (τῶν συμμαχούντων), lamenting that the mere name of these nations, the Hungarians, Germans, and the French, would have been sufficient to deter the enemy.[40] Once more, he represents Nicopolis as a project whose objective was to help Byzantium. Manuel then concludes that it seemed that all ills had reached to their peak and resumes to justify Theodore's decision to sell Corinth. As such, it can be argued that this reference to Nicopolis serves as another justification for Theodore's actions: the Byzantine affairs were in a truly dire state, and the Despot had no other option to turn to besides the Hospitallers as their other allies had been catastrophically defeated. In this regard, it is also worth noting that the emperor omits the Hospitaller presence in Nicopolis and the flight of their Grand Master Philibert de Nailliac from the battlefield alongside Sigismund.[41] Possibly, this omission stemmed from Manuel's care to not to reveal any weakness of the Hospitallers in the very passages where he attempted to justify their purchase of Corinth.

Apart from Manuel II's *Funeral Oration*, another possible vague reference to Nicopolis may also be traced in a panegyric of Ioannes Chortasmenos dated around 1406, including a narrative of the emperor's reign.[42] In a noteworthy instance, Chortasmenos extolls the resourcefulness of Manuel and points out that while sometimes the emperor rose the *Paionians* against his enemies – that is, the Ottomans – , on other occasions he incited the Persians against them. The latter is most likely a reference to the Byzantine diplomatic contacts with Tamerlane, undertaken by Manuel and his nephew John VII. The former one probably alludes to Manuel's alliance with the Hungarian King Sigismund and the Crusade of Nicopolis – whose failure is tactfully omitted. If this is indeed the case, one can suggest that Chortasmenos seized

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[39] Funeral Oration, ed. and trans. *Chrysostomides*, 100-101, 106-107, 162-163, 212-213, 218-219, for some examples.

[40] Funeral Oration, ed. and trans. *Chrysostomides*, 194–195. Manuel uses the terms Paionian, Celt and Galatians to refer to these nations; the translator has opted to translate Celts as Germans.

[41] *Barker*, Hospitallers, 51–52, for the involvement of the Hospitallers in Nicopolis.

[42] Chortasmenos, ed. *Hunger*, 217–224; 218. 'τῇ πολυχειρίᾳ δὲ τὸ εὐμήχανον ἐν παντί.... φοβεῖσθαι τοὺς τέως ἀλαζόνας περὶ ἑαυτῶν παρεσκεύαζες, νῦν μὲν Παίονας αὐτοῖς ἐπεγείρων, νῦν δὲ Πέρσας κινῶν κατ' αὐτῶν, ἄλλοτε ἄλλους ἐκείνοις ἐκπολεμῶν.' The adjective Persian could be denoting Tamerlane and his armies, as Chortasmenos uses the word 'Hagarene' to refer to Bayezid and the Ottomans in this oration.

Manuel's involvement in Nicopolis as an opportunity to extoll the craftiness and the diplomatic skill of the emperor in his dealings with the Ottomans, giving him prominent agency in the formation of the crusade.[43]

Two last Byzantine sources on Nicopolis that we will turn to are the histories of Doukas and Laonikos Chalkokondyles. Both were composed after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and thus are much more removed from the events of 1396. Their narratives contain accurate insights as well as numerous errors. For instance, while he is mistaken in asserting that Englishmen were present in the battlefield and that Sigismund possessed the title of the 'King of the Romans' in 1396, Doukas notes the presence of Christian vassals in Bayezid's army, a point often glossed over by other sources including the Ottoman chronicles.[44] He moreover narrates how Bayezid, hearing the news of the march of the crusaders, left the siege of Constantinople to lead his troops in person. Moreover, Doukas also accurately points out the rouse of the Ottomans in the final chapter of the battle, that a part of the Ottoman army had hidden nearby and suddenly attacked the Hungarians; this rouse is reported in both French and Ottoman sources. Witnessing their defeat, many Frenchmen fled in panic and drowned in the Danube. Finally, Doukas refers to the capture of several important French knights, their imprisonment in Bursa and the vast ransoms paid to free them.[45]

Doukas' account is particularly remarkable since it gives great agency to Manuel II in the formation of the Crusade of Nicopolis. Erroneously, Doukas claims that the blockade of Constantinople was triggered upon Manuel's accession by his refusal to install a *kadı*, Muslim judge, in the city. Not only does Doukas predate the blockade by three years, but a *kadı* was already present in the city 1391. Constantinople being under the blockade, Doukas narrates that the emperor wrote to the King of Hungary, the King of France and to the Pope, telling them that the city would fall to the enemies of Christ without their assistance.[46] According to Doukas, it was

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[43] An oration of Symeon of Thessalonike, dated to 1427/28 also narrates the Ottoman threat of the 1390s, the blockade and Manuel's travels to seek help in Europe. Symeon narrates that Bayezid attacked the heralds of Christ and the allies of the emperor like the Bulgarians, Serbians, and the Albanians. After their defeat, Bayezid I turned to Constantinople, which compelled Manuel to travel to Italy. While Symeon's narrative is probably referring Bayezid's conquests in the Balkans in 1393–1395 and the subsequent lack of help from there, it might perhaps also be a veiled mention of Nicopolis. The heralds of Christ might be a reference to the crusaders, and the battle had boasted many Balkan nations. It was also its failure in 1396 that had caused Bayezid to tighten the blockade and paved way for Manuel's departure from Constantinople in 1399. Yet, such an interpretation is very much open to conjecture. Symeon of Thessalonike, ed. *Balfour*, 39–69; for the reference see 45 and the dating of the oration, 101.

[44] Doukas, ed. *Grecu*, 81–6–86 also Doukas, trans. *Magoulias*, 83–88.

[45] Schiltberger, who was captured in Nicopolis narrates these in detail, as do many of the French chronicles, Schiltberger, ed. and trans *Telfer*, 2–4. Furthermore, Philip of Artois, Constable of France, died in captivity and was even buried in Pera, which was also noted by the Castilian envoy Clavijo, trans. *Le Strange*, 50–51. Despite his tomb being so close to Constantinople, no Byzantine source mentions this.

[46] Doukas, ed. *Grecu*, 81–86 also Doukas, trans. *Magoulias,* 83–88. *Kinloch*, Stories of Emperors, 196–213, argues that Doukas' narrative is shaped around emperors, sultans and rulers. He observes the same tendency in the account of Nicopolis, in which all the contingents are represented by their rulers, 210.

Manuel's message that had moved these rulers to pity and motivated them to assemble a crusade. The emperor is portrayed as the prime mover of Nicopolis, while the crusade is represented as a project aimed at liberating the Byzantines. Moreover, Manuel is depicted as an exemplary Christian emperor, often praying for his empire, and underlining their joint Christianity to Western Europeans vis-à-vis the Muslims. Correspondingly, the Ottomans are depicted as stereotypical infidels, and their ruler Bayezid is called a tyrant. Yet, while the blockade of Constantinople certainly gave added impetus and perhaps accelerated the plans, both the French and the Hungarians were already considering crusading prospects in the early 1390s.[47]As such, Doukas' account exaggerates Manuel's role in Nicopolis, depicting him as a pious, skillful ruler and a mover of Christianity against the Ottomans. Doukas probably represents the emperor in this manner to give greater agency to Manuel, whom he is clearly sympathetic towards throughout his history, often extolling his Christianity and wisdom. Finally, Doukas immediately ties the defeat at Nicopolis to Manuel's subsequent departure for Europe in 1399, as if three years have not passed between the two episodes. He narrates that Manuel did not merely depart in search for aid against the Ottomans to lift the blockade, but also since after his victory in Nicopolis, Bayezid was emboldened to compel Manuel to leave the city to his nephew John VII.[48] As in the case of the Nicopolis account, Doukas further laces his narrative with more references to Manuel's piety and exemplary conduct. Ultimately, apart from the actual chronological sequence of the blockade, Nicopolis and the emperor's travels, it can be proposed that Doukas also ties these episodes thematically.

The account of Chalkokondyles differs from Doukas on several accounts.[49] Both mistakenly refer to Sigismund as the King of the Romans in 1396, narrate the drowning of some crusaders in the Danube and the capture of many high-ranking knights. Yet, Chalkokondyles gives no role to Manuel II and the Byzantines in the formation

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[47] *Mureşan*, Avant Nicopolis, 115–119.

[48] In Doukas' narrative, once entering Constantinople, John promptly installs a *kadı*. As will be discussed below in the section on the Ottoman sources, Doukas' erroneous account regarding the *kadı* and Bayezid's ultimatum after Nicopolis, has some interesting similarities to the Ottoman chronicles. In these accounts, the blockade is ended soon after Nicopolis upon the emperor's acceptance of the installment of a *kadı* and the establishment of a Muslim neighborhood. However, it has been demonstrated that already in 1391, a *kadı* was present in Constantinople and that this demand could not be related to the blockade of 1394. In 1399, John VII could have only renewed an existing agreement upon becoming regent in Constantinople, *Jacoby*, Thessalonike, 121, ft 255. In the Ottoman chronicles, just like in Doukas, Bayezid also turns his attentions to Constantinople after his victory in Nicopolis and tells the Byzantine emperor to vacate the city. In Doukas, Bayezid wants the city to be handed over to John VII, whereas in Ottoman chronicles, Bayezid wants it turned over to the Ottomans. Finally, unlike the Ottoman chronicles, where the blockade is ended upon the acceptance of the terms, in Doukas' account, Bayezid sends a third message to Constantinople, this time to John VII, telling him to surrender the city even though he had installed a *kadı*. Doukas' sources are unclear, but it has been noted that Doukas displays a familiarity with Ottoman conquest practices, *Lowry*, The Ottoman State, 45. While in Lesbos, he had also taken part in the negotiations between the Genoese and the Ottomans. Overall, these similarities with the Ottoman chronicles are intriguing.

[49] Chalkokondyles, ed. and trans. *Kaldellis*, 110–123.

of Nicopolis; the crusade is depicted as a completely independent affair. The sultan also starts the blockade only after his victory in Nicopolis in 1396. He besieges the city as Manuel rejects his summons after their return from Serres, where a gathering of Bayezid and his vassals had taken place. However, this gathering and the subsequent start of the blockade date to 1394, two years before Nicopolis. Since the chronology of Chalkokondyles is confused, there is no causal link between the blockade of Constantinople, the Battle of Nicopolis or the travels of Manuel II in his account, nor any involvement of the Byzantines in the formation of the crusade. Chalkokondyles' reference to Sigismund's flight to the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople is only link in his narrative between the Crusade of Nicopolis and the Byzantines. The history of Chalkokondyles thus differs significantly from all other Byzantines sources on Nicopolis, as it does not associate the crusade with Byzantium at all.

Chalkokondyles' account of the Crusade of Nicopolis is much longer than that of Doukas and as befits a Herodotean author, it is filled with digressions on the various nations present in the battle.[50] The mixed crusading troops at Nicopolis present Chalkokondyles with a great narrative opportunity to engage in accounts of peoples such as the Germans, Hungarians and the Wallachians, and he is generally positive in his assessment.[51]As for the actual crusade, Chalkokondyles gives a more prominent role to the pope than his actual involvement, as in his account, he is the one who secures the Franco-Burgundian troops for Sigismund's planned crusade.[52] Unlike Doukas, who does not place the blame for the defat on a particular group, Chalkokondyles squarely points out the French as culprits. Due to their arrogance and impetuosity, the French attack the Ottomans on their own and are defeated, in turn, their defeat causes the Hungarians and the Germans to flee in disorder. In this regard, several French accounts of the battle also blame the French troops for their reckless behavior, claiming that it was their rash attack that led to the defeat.[53] Unlike other Byzantine sources, neither does Chalkokondyles side with the Christian crusaders nor express great sorrow for their defeat. In his account of Nicopolis and generally in his history, the Muslims are not evil figures, and their sultan Bayezid is no less a legitimate ruler than the Western European ones. Indeed, it has been noted that Chalkokondyles' work is equally a history of the early Ottomans as well as the Byzantines.[54] On the whole, a close reading demonstrates that Chalkokondyles is much more ambivalent in his assessment of the Battle of Nicopolis than other Byzantine sources and does not give any role to the Byzantines in the formation of the crusade.

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50 For a historical and literary study of Chalkokondyles, *Kaldellis*, A New Herodotus.

51 *Kaldellis*, A New Herodotus, 66–69.

52 Chalkokondyles, ed. and trans. *Kaldellis*, 118–119. In fact, Sigismund himself had sent several embassies himself to France and had convinced the French to participate.

53 In his brief account of the Hundred Years War, Chalkokondyles again points out the arrogance of the French as a rare negative trait, Chalkokondyles, ed. and trans. *Kaldellis*, 137–143.

54 *Kaldellis*, A New Herodotus, 77, 118–119, 126–127, 144–147.

Unlike the Byzantine sources, the defeat at Nicopolis elucidated an immediate and strong response by French authors; many poems, letters and dialogues were composed by authors such as Eustace Dechamps, Honoré Bonet and Philippe de Meziérès.[55] These authors perceive and present the crusade as a French affair in which the Franco-Burgundian knights are the principal heroes; even Sigismund of Hungary is reduced to an auxiliary role. Moreover, it has been convincingly demonstrated that the critique of the French chivalry features as a prominent theme in these works.[56] For instance, the Franco-Burgundians fail in Nicopolis as they have grown lazy and overly fond of luxury – Sultan Bayezid cannot distinguish between their ranks thanks to their sumptuous clothing. In contrast, the Muslim Ottomans are depicted as foils to the French: despite their 'infidel faith', they are resilient, live simply and are content with plain food. In stark contrast to Byzantine sources, these French works dealing with Nicopolis omit any connection to Byzantium. The Byzantines hardly figure in these texts; their support of the project and the blockade of Constantinople are totally omitted. However, albeit not included in the Nicopolis plans, the Byzantines appear in these works on some occasions as culprits for the expansion of the Ottomans. Their plight is depicted as an example for the 'good' Christians to avoid. For instance, in his dialogue, the collocutors of Honoré Bonet often dwell on the plight of the Greeks, that is, the Byzantines, and they bemoan that almost all of Greece had been subjugated by the Saracens. This is tied to their breaking off with Rome, which they argue, had placed all Christians in trouble and weakened Christianity.[57] Thus, while Byzantines are represented as deserving pity for their misfortunes, Bonet also implies that they have partially brought those troubles upon themselves by becoming 'schismatics'. As such, while they are still Christians and are depicted as being on the same side with the Catholics against the Saracens, the Byzantines are nevertheless represented as having qualities of 'otherness'.

In the *L'epistre lamentable et consolataire* of Philippe de Meziérès, while the Byzantines are again not involved in Nicopolis, the Orthodox Christians are once more represented as schismatics.[58] Throughout the work, Christians are squarely divided into Catholics and others. Moreover, Meziérès argues that one of the reasons for Sigismund's failure in Nicopolis was the presence of many ethnic groups among his troops, especially schismatics. For Meziérès, the schismatics, that is the

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[55] Poems of Eustace Dechamps are published in *Atiya*, Nicopolis, 128–132. Bonet, L'Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Meun, ed. *Arnold*; Philippe de Mézières, Une Epistre lamentable et consolatoire, ed. *Contamine – Paviot.*

[56] For several studies see *Kocabıyıkoğlu-Çeçen*, Knighthood; *eadem*, Saracen Opinion; *eadem*, Praising the Turk; *Kilgour*, Chivalry; *Brownlee*, Crusade; *Gaucher,* Deux Regards.

[57] Bonet, L'Apparicion Maistre Jehan de Mehun, ed. *Arnold*, 21, 45.

[58] For some analyses of this work, *Contamine*, La Consolation, 35–48, *Blumenfeld-Kosinski*, Philippe de Meziérès, 182–189 and *Çaylı*, Bir Haçlının Rüyası, 228–236.

Orthodox Christians of the Balkans, were better suited to being subjects of the Turks.[59] He plans to sail from Venice to Constantinople and then to cross to Anatolia but makes no reference to the blockade or the Byzantines. While Mézières speaks about arriving in Constantinople and then recovering the kingdoms of Trebizon and Armenia, he points out that the crusaders should do so by their exemplary conduct since they should not battle against other Christians, even though they are schismatics. However, it is clear that Mézières envisions a Catholic rule in these lands as an outcome of the crusade.[60] Finally, while the Byzantines or the Orthodox peoples of the Balkans do not appear in them, the verse laments of Eustace Dechamps for Nicopolis also hint at the poet's perception of these lands being as foreign.[61] Nicopolis is referred to as being in Turkey (en Turquie) and as the city of pagans (Nychopoly, cite des paiennes), whereas the city boasted a significant Christian population and had been only recently conquered by the Ottomans. Ultimately, the Christian 'East' is represented as being an 'outsider' of Western Christianity.

The French chronicles which deal with Nicopolis also depict the crusade primarily as a French affair. These are the chronicles of Michel Pintoin, Jean Juvenal Ursins and Jean Froissart, as well as the anonymous author of *Le Livre des Faits* – a panegyrical biography of Mareschal Boucicaut, a participant in Nicopolis and later, a defender of Constantinople.[62] The planning of the crusade, the actual battle and its aftermath all revolve around the Franco-Burgundians. Once more, Sigismund and his Hungarians occupy an auxiliary spot, and no role is given to the Byzantines. The liberation of Constantinople does not figure even as a minor goal of Nicopolis. On the whole, while Froissart and the author of *Le Livre des Faits* extoll the valiance of the French knights and represent the episode as heroic warfare, Michel Pintoin is far more critical in his own chronicle, as is Ursins whose account seems to be very closely based on Pintoin.[63] They blame the defeat on the rashness of the French knights who did not heed Sigismund's advice and attacked the enemy without sufficient backing. Both these accounts, as well that of Froissart, criticize the knights for falling short of chivalric values: they are insolent, dress far too richly and their table

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[59] Philippe de Mézières, Une Epistre lamentable et consolatoire, edd. *Contamine – Paviot*, 119–120. A similar sentiment is echoed in a Hungarian chronicle referred to by Atiya; Sigismund organizes the crusade for his own lands, and not to help the schismatics, that is the Byzantines. *Atiya*, Nicopolis, 35.

[60] Philippe de Mézières, Une Epistre lamentable et consolatoire, edd. *Contamine – Paviot*, 190–191.

[61] *Atiya*, Nicopolis, 128–132.

[62] All these works date to early fifteenth century, thus the Crusade of Nicopolis and the visit of Manuel II to France happened in their lifetime. The work of Michel Pintoin is known as Le Chronique Religieux de Saint Denis concernant le Règne de Charles VI de 1380 à 1422. Although Pintoin's authorship is accepted by many scholars, his chronicle is still cited by his title anonymously in scholarship. The chronicle of Ursins seems to be following Pintoin very closely, with some variations, as noted also by *Lewis*, Propaganda and Historiography, 10.

[63] Froissart, ed. *de Lettenhove*, vol.15, 216–317; Ursins, edd. *Michaud – Poujoulat*, 395–409; Le Chronique Religieux de Saint Denis, ed. and trans. *Bellaguet*, 482–496; Le livre des fais, ed. *Lalande*, 88–128.

is too sumptuous.[64] Displaying some parallels to the letters of Manuel II and Kalekas, Pintoin and Ursins both depict the defeat as a divine punishment. Thus, this widespread Christian notion emerges as a theme that unites these French narratives and the Byzantine letters. Finally, in contrast to the Byzantine sources that either omit or deal perfunctorily with the capture of Franco-Burgundian knights, the French accounts dwell extensively on the slaughtering of the Franco-Burgundian captives by Bayezid and the later ransom negotiations.[65] This certainly stems from their Franco-Burgundian centered perspective on the events.

While these accounts of Nicopolis are followed by narratives of Byzantine embassies and the subsequent visit of Manuel II, a textual analysis demonstrates that this is due to the chronological proximity of the events, with no links drawn between the episodes. The only exception is Froissart. He narrates how the French court receives a plea of help from the King of Hungary, also stating that Bayezid desired to conquer Christian territories as far as Rome. Bayezid, Froissart claims, would moreover bring the emperor of Constantinople and the barons of Greece with him, later allowing them to govern in his name as their overlord.[66] Froissart's account thus implicitly refers to the dire threat the Ottomans posed for the Byzantines, hinting that Bayezid intended to conquer what was left of their empire. Later in the narrative, Bayezid is mistakenly referred to as being away in Egypt and it is the emperor of Constantinople who conveys this news to the crusaders through a letter, suggesting that they set siege before Nicopolis.[67] Still, other French narratives on the subsequent Byzantine embassies and Manuel's visit to Paris, are noteworthy and deserve some discussion. For instance, the *Chronicle of Saint Denis* reproduces a letter sent by Manuel to Charles VI in 1397. The chronicler's claim to have seen it is not to be dismissed as a study has demonstrated that he indeed had access to French royal archives.[68] An analysis of the quoted letter also supports this argument. Moreover, the ambassador is correctly named as Theodore Kantakouzenos Palaiologos, the wording indeed fits in well with those of Manuel's other documents, and the letter is reported to have been written in two columns, with a signature in red ink. In the letter, Manuel remarks that Constantinople would fall without help and that its loss would be big blow to Christianity, adding that he is

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[64] *Gaucher,* Deux Regards; *Kocabıyıkoğlu-Çeçen,* Saracen Opinion and *Housely*, Boucicaut.

[65] Schiltberger, who was captured in Nicopolis narrates the massacres and the sufferings of the captives, too. Schiltberger, ed. and trans. *Telfer*, 2–4. The Castilian envoy and traveler Clavijo, trans. *Le Strange*, 50–51, claims that Philip of Artois, Constable of France, did not die of natural causes in captivity, but was poisoned with mushrooms by Bayezid even though his ransom had already been paid in full.

[66] Froissart, ed. *de Lettenhove*, vol.15, 216–217. Froissart's chronicle confuses the names of both Sigismund and Bayezid. The former is alternatively called Henry or Louis (a former king of Hungary), and the latter as Amourath-Baquin, likely a corruption of Murat Bey, the name of Bayezid's father. Manuel II's visit to Paris is also completely omitted. *Dölger*, Regesten, 84, no.3262 has noted this supposed letter, *Barker*, Manuel II, 133.

[67] Froissart, ed. *de Lettenhove*, vol.15, 264.

[68] See *Guenée*, Documents insérés, on this issue. Le Chronique Religieux de Saint Denis, ed. and trans. *Bellaguet*, 558–561. *Barker*, Manuel II, 155–156, provides an English translation of this letter reproduced in the chronicle.

certain that French would help since he had seen last year, how they had sent an army to Nicopolis in the name of Christianity and for *our* deliverance (pro liberacione nostra). This French account of Manuel's diplomatic letter thus also demonstrates that the emperor had personally considered Nicopolis as a crusading project whose primary outcome would be the lifting of the blockade of Constantinople, and not as a general Christian offensive in the Balkans. While the French do not link the peril of the Byzantines and Nicopolis, this quoted Byzantine letter clearly does.

These French narratives on the appeals of the Byzantines and Sigismund for French help display both similarities and divergences. For instance, in Ursins, when Sigismund appeals to the King of France to raise the Crusade of Nicopolis, he conveys that Hungary and its neighbors (Hongrie et ses voisins) need help against the Ottomans.[69] While there is a slight possibility that the Byzantines may be included in this statement, this probably should be interpreted as a reference to Eastern Christians in general. After the Battle of Nicopolis, when the Byzantine envoys arrive at the French court to seek help for their besieged capital, some advisors of the king object to lending assistance by reminding him of the recent losses suffered by the French in Nicopolis.[70] Pintoin, on whom Ursins' account is based upon, reports that King Charles did not wish to send his brother to help the Byzantines as the memories of Nicopolis were still too fresh.[71] Thus, even though no explicit link is drawn between the blockade of Constantinople and Nicopolis, it can be argued that both episodes are loosely fitted in the same category: sending military help to the East against the Ottomans. Moreover, both chronicles portray the Byzantine appeals as being more beseeching. For instance, in the *Chronicle of Saint Denis*, the Byzantines are portrayed as being far more desperate for help in comparison to Sigismund. All members of the French court feel sorry for the plight of Byzantium and Manuel sends yet another letter, urging the French to come lest he should lose the city. Similarly, while his narration of Sigismund's embassy is more neutral, Ursins emphasizes the humble tone (toute humilité) of the Byzantine ambassadors.[72] In the *Chronicle of Saint Denis*, when Sigismund appeals to the French king for help against the Ottomans, Charles VI and his knights are represented by being strongly motived by piety and their sense of Christian duty.[73] A few months later, it is narrated that Manuel II sends his own envoys to the French court and pleads for help against the Ottomans in a very similar manner.[74] Later on in the narrative, the Venetians also ask for help against the Ottomans concerning some islands. Through all these accounts, the French are ultimately represented as the champions of Christianity, the ones to whom all turn to for help against the infields.

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69 Ursins, edd. *Michaud – Poujoulat,* 395.

70 Ursins, edd. *Michaud – Poujoulat*, 412.

71 Le Chronique Religieux de Saint Denis, ed. and trans. *Bellaguet*, 562–563.

72 Ursins, edd. *Michaud – Poujoulat*, 412.

73 Le Chronique Religieux de Saint Denis, ed. and trans. *Bellaguet*, 425–426.

74 Le Chronique Religieux de Saint Denis, ed. and trans. *Bellaguet*, 555–557.

Yet, while both Sigismund and Manuel claim that they cannot resist the Ottomans without French help, Pintoin represents the Byzantine emperor's appeal as being more prestigious as well as being more supplicatory. For instance, while it is reported that Sigismund's envoys are well-received, the Byzantine ambassador is treated particularly lavishly. The chronicler elaborates on how he stays at court for several months, is hosted in a luxurious lodging and all his necessities are covered for. The Hungarian and Venetian envoys are merely said to have received gifts, yet in contrast, those given to the Byzantines are narrated meticulously; gold and precious vases of great craftsmanship.[75] Other sources confirm that King Charles VI had indeed sent funds to Constantinople,[76] but the detailed narration of these presents also serves to showcase the wealth and power of France vis-à-vis Byzantium. Moreover, the king and his nobles are depicted as being flattered that for the first time in many centuries, the ruler of such an ancient empire sent letters from remote parts of the world for help.[77] When compared to the appeal of Sigismund, the French are portrayed as being far more honored on the account of the remoteness and senectitude of Byzantium. Yet, this representation of the Byzantines also serves to emphasize their present humility, that is, how far they had fallen from their former glory. As noted previously, the French court is depicted as pitying the plight of the Byzantines. In contrast, the chronicler crafts an image of France as a more powerful and prestigious kingdom whom more ancient ones now petition for help.

Mareschal Boucicaut's sojourn in Constantinople and Manuel II's subsequent voyage to Paris also serve to underscore the humility of the Byzantines while extolling the might of the French. When Boucicaut is finally sent to Constantinople in 1399, he is represented by Pintoin as a savior for the Byzantines; he saves the city from famine and fights the Ottomans heroically. He was, the chronicler claims, received as an angel sent by God.[78] Boucicaut, in contrast, laments the sad state of Constantinople, which was such an ancient city and the seat of emperors. A similar tone is also present in the chronicle of Ursins, who furthermore adds that the French knights were compelled to return due to money issues – that they couldn't be properly funded in impoverished Constantinople. In all narratives, the Byzantines are reported as being very upset when Boucicaut and his men want to return. Consequently, the French are portrayed as heroes on whom the desperate Byzantines depend.[79] As can be excepted, the same theme

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[75] Le Chronique Religieux de Saint Denis, ed. and trans. *Bellaguet*, 562–563, 'Nuncio tamen honorifice excepto et collocato praecepit dapsiliter necessaria ministrari, quamdiu vellet manere in regno….Ideo multorum mensium exacto spacio, legatum auro, vasis sumptuosis, tam materia quam artifico admiracione dignis, olosericis quoque mire estimacionis cumulatum remisit ad propria…'.

[76] *Barker,* Manuel II, 156–157 *Çelik,* Manuel II, 208, citing the relevant French and Italian sources.

[77] Le Chronique Religieux de Saint Denis, ed. and trans. *Bellaguet,* 562–563, 'Imperatoriis perlectis litteris, rex cum suis illustribus miratus est, reputans a seculis Francigenarum inauditum antiquos tocius orbis moderatoeres alias a tam remotis partibus subsidiarios evocasse.'

[78] Le Chronique Religieux de Saint Denis, ed. and trans. *Bellaguet,* 690–693, '…tamquam angelus Domini receptus est.'

[79] Ursins, edd. *Michaud – Poujoulat*, 416.

is much more dominant in the glowing biography of Boucicaut, *Le Livre de Fais*.[80] Moreover, Boucicaut does not only convince Manuel II to visit Paris, but also reconciles Manuel with his nephew John VII. He is thus represented as having great agency in Byzantine affairs. John VII is also depicted as agreeing to be regent in Constantinople only if some French troops are left behind. While these accounts of Boucicaut's sojourn in Constantinople have many elements of truth, they are nevertheless exaggerated to further extoll the French. Finally, when Manuel finally arrives in Paris in person, this contrast between Byzantium's former glory and present state continues to be emphasized in both chronicles, as well as in *Le Livre de Fais*.[81] The emperor is admired for his dignified appearance and manners, but a close reading reveals that he is also subtly depicted as a supplicant. He is showered with gifts, entertained royally and it is emphasized that all his expenses are covered by the French king. Yet, while on the surface, the French are represented as honoring Manuel, this narration serves to showcase their own power and prestige. The ruler of an ancient empire has now been reduced to a supplicant, a peregrine forced to petition for help to save his capital and the French are the ones to whom he turns to in his plight.

In contrast with the French sources, Ottoman chronicles make a direct connection between Nicopolis and the blockade of Constantinople, moreover, assigning the Byzantines a rather prominent role in their narratives. The tradition of written Ottoman chronicles matured in the late fifteenth century in the reign of Bayezid II. The composition processes of these works remain hazy; many are inter-related and incorporate earlier accounts that have not survived.[82] For instance, Aşıkpaşazade's chronicle incorporates material by the now-lost earlier narrative of Yakhşi Fakih, while Neşri and others in turn, drew narratives from Aşıkpaşazade, as well as from other sources including eyewitness testimonies. As argued by many scholars, these chronicles exhibit influences of the *gaza* (Islamic holy war) ideology and an understanding of the Ottomans having built an empire. Thus, Islamic values are instrumental in the narratives. Furthermore, while they may share some common sources and may be inter-related, all chroniclers impart their own views and ideological backgrounds to their accounts. Chronicles of Oruç Bey, Aşıkpaşazade and Neşri dating to late fifteenth century, as well as the early sixteenth century works of Kemalpaşazade and Hoca Sadettin, all provide arresting and similar narratives on Nicopolis while still diverging on several accounts.[83]

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[80] Le livre des fais, ed. *Lalande*, 132–150.

[81] Ursins, edd. *Michaud – Poujoulat*, 419–420; Le Chronique Religieux de Saint Denis, ed. and trans. *Bellaguet,* 754–757; Le livre des fais, ed. *Lalande*, 155–156.

[82] On the problems and complexities of early Ottoman chronicles, as well as their ideological background, see *Kafadar*, Between Two Worlds, 206–236, and *İnalcık*, Aşıkpashazade, as well as the introductions of the editions of Aşıkpaşazade, Neşri and Oruç Bey.

[83] The few surviving early Ottoman sources such as the *İskendername* of Ahmedi, dating from the early fifteenth century, do not narrate the battle. Some later sources provide only very brief mentions, like Enveri and Şükrullah. *Binbaş*, A Damascene Eyewitness, 153–154 and *Kaçar – Dumolyn*, Nicopolis, 921–933. This second article argues that the account of Nicopolis by Şükrullah is very sketchy

Under the influence of the *gaza*, Islamic holy war discourse, these Ottoman chronicles primarily focus on Nicopolis as a conflict between the Islamic warriors and the 'infidel' Christians. The victory of the Ottomans is represented as the triumph of heroic Muslim fighters against scheming Christians – as can be expected, it is the Ottomans who occupy the central stage. This approach stands in stark contrast with the Byzantine and French accounts. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that in the fifteenth century, due to his subsequent defeat by Tamerlane in 1402, Bayezid I received a mixed reception in these chronicles. Consequently, he was sometimes depicted as an overly ambitious, volatile ruler who engaged in non-Islamic practices such as drinking.[84] Consequently, his reign and achievements could be associated with the mistakes of the Ottoman past. Finally, in mid and late fifteenth century, the Ottomans having become a great empire, the victory at Nicopolis faded in importance when compared to events such as the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 or Bayezid's defeat at Ankara.[85] As a result, the Crusade of Nicopolis is not represented as a particularly significant episode in these chronicles.

In his very brief account of Nicopolis, Oruç Bey is the only one reporting that the attack of the Ottomans was a surprise night-raid to the camp of the crusaders, who were all drunk – as would befit the 'infidels' – and thus were easily defeated.[86] This motif of a drunken enemy being ambushed at night, is a *topos* that appears in Ottoman chronicles.[87] Neşri gives a more prominent and daring role to Bayezid I, narrating that at the night before the battle, the sultan personally goes in front of the Nicopolis fortress and speaks boldly to the warden. Otherwise, chroniclers elaborate upon the ambush of the Ottomans, how Bayezid and a part of his army hid nearby and launched a surprise attack on the crusaders, who were then caught between the two wings of the Ottoman army. Many do not only narrate the crushing defeat of the crusaders, but also take note that many drowned in the Danube and that Sigismund managed to escape from the battlefield: all these points are also conveyed by Byzantine and French sources. Following the *gaza* discourse, the battle is represented as an opposition between the infidels (*küffar*) and the soldiers of Islam (*leşker-i İslam*), and the victory is extolled in Islamic vocabulary. The presence of Christian vassals in Bayezid's army, like Stefan Lazarević, is also completely omitted in the Ottoman sources as to not to undermine the *gaza* spirit. Significantly, the Ottoman chroniclers also treat the crusaders as a mass of indistinguishable infidels; the different

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and omits it in the discussions. I have not been able to consult Şükrullah's chronicle personally as I do not read Persian, in which the chronicler has written his work. Kemalpaşazade will also not receive further analysis in the following discussions as he merely reproduces the accounts of earlier chronicles.

84 See *Emecen*, Bayezid, 67–92.

85 *Kaçar – Dumolyn*, Nicopolis, 921–933.

86 Oruç Bey, ed. *Öztürk*, 32–33, Aşıkpaşazade, ed. *Öztürk*, 90–93, Neşri, edd. *Unat – Köymen*, 324–331, Kemalpaşazade, ed. *Imazawa*, 232–263, Hoca Sadettin Efendi, edd. *Parmaksızoğlu*, 216–233, *Kaçar – Dumolyn*, Nicopolis, 921–933, for discussions of these accounts.

87 For other examples, Aşıkpaşazade, 26, 148; Oruç Bey, 24–25, 43–44; Neşri, 141–143, 280–281,431, 483.

contingents of the crusading army, like the Franco-Burgundians, Hungarians, Wallachians or the Germans, are glossed over. The Christian army is either called Hungarians (*Ungurus leşkeri*); or is more often referred to as merely infidels (*küffar*). This treatment of the crusading army differs markedly from Byzantine and French accounts, in which not only are the crusaders the protagonists, but whose multi-ethnic ranks are often emphasized. Finally, another important divergence of the Ottoman accounts is the omission of the eventual ransoming of the knights. They instead claim that all in Rumeli and Anatolia had slaves thanks to the great number of the captives. As enslaving non-Muslim enemies upon defeat was an Islamic privilege given to Muslim warriors, this narration arguably also serves to imbue further the accounts with Islamic ideology. All these serve to further depict Nicopolis as a Muslim-infidel conflict and extoll the Islamic Ottoman state.

The Byzantines play a rather prominent role in these narratives. First of all, with the exception of Oruç Bey, while Bayezid is already contemplating a conquest of Constantinople and also an offensive against Hungary, what really sets his plans into motion is the interception of a letter by the Byzantine ruler to the Hungarian king. The letter warns the king of a planned attack on Hungary by the Ottomans.[88] Once Constantinople is besieged after this discovery, the Byzantine emperor, called *tekfur*, a governor or lord, writes again to the Hungarians and asks for help.[89] As such, the crusade is launched on the account of the blockade and with the initiative of the Byzantines. When the crusading army arrives at Nicopolis, Bayezid is compelled to leave his position in front of Constantinople – albeit leaving men and catapults behind – and hurries to meet the enemies. Ultimately, the Byzantine ruler, Manuel II, is given significant agency in the formation of the crusade and the Byzantines are very much a part of the narrative. Moreover, it can be argued that the portrayal of the *tekfur* also corresponds to the stance of Manuel II against the Ottomans. The *tekfur* in these narratives seems to be referring to him as John VII's regency and Manuel's travels in 1399–1402 are completely omitted since the blockade erroneously ends in 1396. Moreover, the actions of the *tekfur* strongly reflect those of Manuel, such as his dealings with the Hungarians, his diplomatic correspondence and later, his involvement in the Ottoman civil war between 1402–1413. Concerning the episode of Nicopolis, as previously discussed, the Byzantines and the Hungarians were already corresponding in the early 1390s with regards to an alliance against the Ottomans. The interception of a letter by the Byzantine ruler to Sigismund would fit well into this context. In the Ottoman chronicles, the blockade of Constantinople is spurred by the anti-Ottoman league between the Byzantines and the Hungarians, and the Crusade of Nicopolis in turn, materializes because the besieged Byzantine

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[88] Aşıkpaşazade, ed. *Öztürk*, 90–91, Neşri, edd. *Unat – Köymen*, 324–325, Kemalpaşazade, ed. *Imazawa*, 232–233, Hoca Sadettin Efendi, ed. *Parmaksızoğlu*, 216–217.

[89] The Byzantine emperors and governors of cities are all called *tekfur*/*tekvur*/*tekür*; thus the Byzantine rulers are depicted as having lower ranking than the Ottoman sultans, *Dumolyn-Kaçar*, Nicopolis, 927. In contrast, Sigismund is usually called *Unugurus kıralı*, the King of Hungarians.

emperor asks for help. While this motif of solidarity of the infidels against the Ottomans, can be encountered as a *topos* in these chronicles, it also partially reflects the historical circumstances.[90]

The *tekfur* is furthermore represented as an inciter who regularly seeks to rouse other Christian states against the Ottomans. For instance, in both Aşıkpaşazade and Neşri, the pashas of Bayezid call him *müsfid*, one who is a schemer and incites sedition.[91] Hoca Sadettin, whose account is particularly imbued with Islamic motifs and vocabulary, elaborates further on the schemes of the infidel *tekfur*.[92] He moreover dwells on his despair and helplessness, which undoubtedly serves the narrative purpose of to extoling the might of the Ottomans. In his letters to the Hungarian king, the emperor also frequently emphasizes their common Christianity and the importance of Constantinople for Christendom. Such depictions of the Byzantine emperor arguably serve to highlight the unison of the 'sly and scheming' Christians against the Muslim Ottomans and further extoll their success as the solitary and heroic Muslim state against these united infidels. Yet, while these features are a part of the literary *topoi*, they nevertheless also correspond to the historical reality. For instance, even while seemingly accepting his status as a vassal and obeying the sultan in the early 1390s, Manuel indeed sought allies against the Ottomans among the Balkan states and Italian city states. After breaking off with the Ottomans in 1394, he again actively sought military and financial aid against them. Not only was he indeed involved in the Nicopolis crusading project, but also turned to the Italians, French and the English after its failure, hoping to raise another crusade. As also demonstrated by the letter quoted in the *Chronicle of Saint Denis*, Manuel frequently did appeal to the Christianity of these rulers, emphasizing their common bonds as Christians and the importance of Constantinople for Christianity.[93] Even after the defeat of Bayezid and subsequent vanishing of the blockade, the emperor never ceased looking for allies against the Ottomans. After 1402, he indeed schemed against the Ottomans during the civil was by playing one prince against the other.[94] Ultimately, the portrayal of the *tekfur*, albeit partially shaped by *topoi*, is reminiscent of the actual stance and deeds of Manuel II.

The ending of the siege by Bayezid right after Nicopolis in those narratives also deserves a closer reading.[95] After his victory in Nicopolis, Bayezid sends a message to the Byzantine ruler and tells him to surrender the city lest he take it by force.

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90 Aşıkpaşazade, 156, 159,171–176; Oruç Bey, 64–65; Neşri, 260–261.

91 Aşıkpaşazade, ed. *Öztürk*, 90–91, Neşri, edd. *Unat – Köymen*, 324–325.

92 Hoca Sadettin Efendi, ed. *Parmaksızoğlu*, 216–217, 226–228.

93 Manuel's surviving letters to other European rulers, written during his time in Paris, are also centered around this theme, see *Dennis*, Two unknown documents, 397–404 for these letters.

94 *Barker*, Manuel II, 280–289, 318–321 and *Çelik*, Manuel II, 307–312, 354–357 for Manuel's stance against the Ottomans during the civil war and its aftermath.

95 Aşıkpaşazade, ed. *Öztürk*, 90–91, Neşri, edd. *Unat – Köymen*, 324–325, Hoca Sadettin Efendi, ed. *Parmaksızoğlu,* 226–228.

Thus, the outcome of Nicopolis is depicted as further emboldening and motivating Bayezid. The *tekfur* pleads, sends embassies and rich gifts, and agrees to the establishment of a Muslim neighborhood and the installment of a *kadı*, Muslim judge, in Constantinople. Bayezid is then persuaded to end the siege around 1396.[96] The travels of Manuel II, as can be expected, are completely omitted. The chroniclers ultimately represent the lifting off the siege as a voluntary and conscious decision of Bayezid. As such, the fact that the blockade unwillingly ended upon the defeat at Ankara and the following dissolution of a united Ottoman state, is glossed over. Bayezid is represented as deciding not to conquer Constantinople on that occasion, not as failing in his designs due to his defeat by Tamerlane. Moreover, the chronicles stress that it is not the abundant gold sent or the promised yearly tribute by the emperor that prompts the sultan to lift the siege; he only does so when the emperor accepts the installment of a *kadı* and a Muslim neighborhood in Constantinople. Thus, Bayezid's decision to withdraw from Constantinople is depicted as being motivated not by gold or a softness of the heart, but by the good of Islam. Even if he does not conquer Constantinople, he is nevertheless represented as establishing a strong Islamic presence in the city through the *kadı* and the Muslim neighborhood; Islam still emerges victorious. All chroniclers note with sorrow that after Bayezid's defeat by Tamerlane, the *tekfur* destroyed the neighborhood.

The narrative of Aşıkpaşazade deals with the gifts and embassies sent by the Byzantine emperor in a particularly arresting manner, with Hoca Sadettin following his account.[97] For Aşıkpaşazde and Hoca Sadettin, it is Ali Pasha, a vizier of dubious morality, who is instrumental in persuading Bayezid. While the sultan is ultimately persuaded by the concessions regarding a *kadı* and a Muslim neighborhood, Ali Pasha also pleads with the sultan as he has received rich gifts from the *tekfur* – in other words, he is bribed. Thus, while both chroniclers do focus on Bayezid's Islamic motives for ending the siege, they also lay blame on Ali Pasha for preventing the conquest of Constantinople and its complete submission to Islam. This sense is especially poignant in Hoca Sadettin, who opens the section on the blockade and Nicopolis with a depiction of Constantinople as a shy bride, slipping from the embraces of the Ottomans and Islam.[98] Moreover, in both accounts, the gifts sent to Ali Pasha are rather intriguing; the Byzantine ruler sends him fish, one hundred big ones whose bellies are filled with gold and silver. These gifts have the literary function of underlining the illicitness of Ali Pasha's acceptance of the *tekfur*'s gold, representing the money as a bribe as opposed to gifts or tribute. This manner of gift giving also serves to showcase the crafty and scheming nature of the infidel Byzantine emperor, who is

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[96] As argued previously, neither Doukas nor the Ottoman chroniclers are correct in associating the installment of a kadı with the blockade, a kadı was already present in Constantinople in 1391, years before the events, see footnote 48.

[97] Aşıkpaşazade, ed. *Öztürk*, 90–91, Hoca Sadettin Efendi, ed. *Parmaksızoğlu,* 226–228.

[98] The symbolic role given to Constantinople by Hoca Sadettin is also noted by *Kaçar – Dumolyn*, Nicopolis, 929.

careful to hide his bribing of the Ottoman vizier. Through these gifts, The Byzantine emperor's military weakness and lack of valor is further juxtaposed with the prowess of the Islamic warriors; he is terrified of facing them and instead can only resort to bribing them with worldly goods.[99] Finally, it can be suggested that the choice of fish by the Byzantine ruler is an apt and even symbolic one: in many Islamic texts, the Christians are strongly associated with fish and seashells, foods they regularly consumed for their Orthodox fasting.[100] Ultimately, it can be argued that these depictions of the gifts further accentuate the glories of the Ottomans and the weakness of the Byzantines, both militarily and morally.

In conclusion, a comparative reading of Byzantine, French and Ottoman sources offers insights into their different perspectives on the Crusade of Nicopolis and its aftermath, as well as revealing both parallels and divergences. Except for Chalkokondyles, Byzantine authors establish firm connections between the crusade and the blockade of Constantinople, and chiefly approach Nicopolis from a Byzantine point of view. For the Byzantines, Nicopolis almost comes across as a crusading project aimed at the deliverance of Byzantium from the Ottomans. In their letters on Nicopolis, Manuel II and Manuel Kalekas also seize the occasion to advertise their political and religious stance to their audience. As in the case of Byzantine sources, Ottoman chronicles give the Byzantines a prominent role in the affair and directly connect Nicopolis to be blockade. While these narratives do partially correspond to the historical events, arguably the depictions of the Byzantines in the Nicopolis episode also serve to further glorify the victories of the Muslim Ottomans against the scheming and wily infidels. In contrast, even though Manuel II travelled to Paris and stayed there for several years, French sources do not link the blockade of Constantinople with the Battle of Nicopolis, representing the crusade as chiefly a Franco-Burgundian affair. The Byzantines are given no role in its formation. Still, their accounts of the Byzantine pleas for French help, the adventures of Boucicaut in Constantinople and Manuel II's visit, reveal both noteworthy parallels and divergences with the narratives on Sigismund of Hungary. Long after Nicopolis, textual memories of one of the last great crusades thus still echoed in Byzantine, French and Ottoman sources, both in unison and discord.

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[99] This motif of coin-filled fish is also used for Mehmed II's vizier Halil Pasha in a similar context, Aşıkpaşazde, 191. Hoca Sadettin further associates the *tekfur* with worldly wealth; throughout his dealings with the Ottomans during the blockade and the later civil war, the emperor offers lavish sums of money to rulers whose support he desires. For instance, he is reported to have offered great sums to Sigismund to free Constantinople from the Ottoman blockade, even suggesting that he would pay for the entire army. Of course, let alone possessing immense wealth, Manuel II lacked funds to raise an army, even the galleys he sent to Danube were financed by Sigismund. However, Hoca Sadettin's narrative serves to depict the *tekfur* as a wealthy infidel who attempts to resist the Ottomans through money, that is, worldly goods.

[100] See *Bayrı-Kitapçı,* Taam, Şölen, Oruç, 517–528, for the association of sea food with Byzantines in Islamic texts.

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НИКОПОЉСКИ КРСТАШКИ РАТ И ЊЕГОВЕ ПОСЛЕДИЦЕ: ПОГЛЕДИ ИЗ ВИЗАНТИЈСКИХ, ФРАНЦУСКИХ И ТУРСКИХ ИЗВОРА

Никопољски крсташки рат (1396) био је један од последњих крсташких похода против Турака, а предводиле су га здружене француско-бургундијске и угарске снаге. Иако по страни, Византинци и цар Манојло II Палеолог такође су учествовали у том крсташком походу у нади да ће ослободити Цариград од османске блокаде под којом се налазио од 1394. године. Тежак пораз крсташа од Турака оставио је трага како у византијским тако и у француским и османским изворима. Овај рад доноси упоредно читање византијских, француских и османских извора о неким аспектима Никопољског крсташког рата. У првом делу чланка, анализираћемо византијске изворе, који обухватају

историографска дела, писма и говоре, испитујући како је тај догађај доживљен у књижевном, политичком и верском смислу. У другом делу бавићемо се француским и османским изворима, уз посебан осврт на начин на који је у њима представљена византијска улога у рату, као и на наративне везе између Никопоља, блокаде Цариграда и путовања Манојла II.

Упоредно читање византијских, француских и османских извора даје увид у њихове различите погледе на Никопољски крсташки рат и његове последице, откривајући и подударности и разлике. Иако су коришћени у неким научним освртима на Никопоље, византијски извори о овој епизоди нису у довољној мери истражени. Но, пажљиво читање извора могло би осветлити византијски доживљај ових догађаја. Изузев Халкокондила, византијски писци виде крсташки рат и блокаду Цариграда као уско повезане догађаје и углавном посматрају никопољски сукоб са византијске тачке гледишта, као крсташки поход који је требало да ослободи Византију од Турака. У писмима о Никопољу, Манојло II и Манојло Калека користе прилику да читаоцима предоче своје политичке и верске ставове. У непримећеној и успутној опасци о Никопољу у једном говору Јована Хортасмена, крсташки рат је повод за похвалу дипломатског умећа Манојла II. Исто тако, у османским хроникама Византинцима се приписује истакнута улога у целој ствари и непосредно се повезује никопољски поход са блокадом, уз истицање савеза са Угарском и дипломатских напора Манојла II. Премда те приповести делимично одговарају историјским догађајима, могло би се основано рећи да овакви прикази византијског владара служе и да дају на значају победама Турака, муслимана, над прорачунатим и препређеним неверницима. Насупрот томе, иако је Манојло II посетио Париз и тамо се задржао неколико година, у француским изворима се Византинци и блокада Цариграда не повезују са битком код Никопоља, већ се рат приказује као првенствено француско-бургундијски поход. У таквим приказима очитује се и снажан утицај француских витешких вредности. Ипак, француски извештаји о молбама Византинаца да им Французи притекну у помоћ, Бусикоове авантуре у Цариграду и посета Манојла II откривају значајне подударности и разилажења са приповестима о угарском краљу Жигмунду и дају нам увид у њихов доживљај Византије.

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