

MICHAEL PACIS, *Epistola responsiva* [Letter on the Turkish Threat to Christendom]

In Latin, manuscript on paper

Northern Italy (Veneto?), letter dated Padua 1 May 1472

23 folios, complete, in a single gathering of 23 (24-1, last leaf of quire likely cancelled), on paper (watermark close to Briquet, no. 2489: "Balance dans un cercle, à plateaux circulaires," Udine, 1467 and Milan, 1473), written in brown ink in a semi-humanistic cursive miniscule on about 20-22 long lines (justification 150 x 110 mm.), large initial on first page with simple ink-drawn foliage extending along upper and side margins. Bound in a later 19th-century reddish-brown morocco with blindstamped triple frame composed of triple fillets with rosettes, secondary ornamentation of overlapping blindstamped decor paneled in gilt with double fillet and ornamental cornerpieces, central gilt device of a liturgical monstrance placed in an oval surrounded by beaming rays, smooth spine with gilt fleurons, traces of ties, now lacking (Some dampstains, text always legible). Dimensions 208 x 144 mm.

Unpublished and unrecorded bellicose letter against the threat posed by the Ottoman Empire to the Italian peninsula, composed by a monk from Trieste and addressed to a jurist-rector at Padua. Belonging to a genre of letters for and against war with the Turks, this letter deserves further study within its greater historical and cultural context not only on the renewed Crusade but also for European attitudes toward the Turks (Muslims) in the centuries following Marco Polo.

PROVENANCE

1. Script and clear watermark all point to an Italian origin for this manuscript, most certainly Northern Italy, perhaps Friuli, based on the origin of the paper (Udine) or Venice/Padua, considering the emphasis placed on Venice as the sole hope of successfully defeating the Turks and the proximity of Venice to Padua, where the letter was composed and delivered. Further research would determine whether the present manuscript is a copy made for one of the parties concerned, either the addressor or addressee. Granted the paper and its date, the present manuscript--if it is a copy--is contemporary with the date of composition of the epistle, precisely dated Padua, 1 May 1472.

TEXT

First flyleaf, with inscription acting as title-page: *Epistola responsiva religiosissimi Dom Michaelis Pacis viri eloquentissimi ad Antonium Hyarottum Iustinopolitani Patavini gymnasii iuristarum rectorem* [Letter of response of Don Michael Pacis, most pious and eloquent, to Antonius Hyarottus of Capodistria, rector of the Academy of jurists in Padua];

ff. 1-23, heading, *Jesus. Michael Pacis tergestinus monachus suo Antonio Hyarotto Iustinopolitano nobilissimo: et in florentissimo patavino studio iuristarum rectori. S. P. D.*; incipit, "Non potuisses O Antoni rem profecto vel gratiorem mihi..."; explicit, "[...] etiam dum vivimus facile amittimus. Vale. Ex prataliensi zenobio .iiii. kl. Maias 1472."

Hitherto unrecorded and unpublished, this important letter warns of the constant threat the Ottoman Empire posed to Western Europe and urges a military expedition against the Turks. The author, Michael Pacis, describes himself as a monk from Trieste. His letter is a response to a letter, the location of which is unknown, from Antonio Hyarottus (or Hyarottis) of Capodistria (the Venetian colony on the Adriatic coast of Istria), who was then rector of the academy of jurists of Padua. Both Trieste and the Venetian colony of Capodistria were particularly vulnerable to invasion by the Ottoman Empire.

Before examining the content of the letter in greater detail, it is useful to situate it in the larger picture of the relationship between the expanding Ottoman Empire (the Turks or Muslims) and the Italians (especially, but not exclusively, the Venetians) during the Renaissance. Following the capture in 1453 by the Ottomans of Constantinople, the last outpost of the Roman Empire and spiritual center of Christianity, many Europeans imagined a renewed Crusade against the Muslims. Elected Pope in 1458, Pius II supported the idea of such a Crusade, which he actually launched in June 1464, but his death in August of the same year brought this initiative to an end. Europe had reason to fear the "Turkish Menace," for the Ottoman Sultan Selim I, born in 1465, was to more than double the size of the Ottoman Empire. Conflicts specifically between Venice and the Turks were not to be concluded until 1499 when Venice went to war and the Venetian fleet was defeated at Sapienza.

Dated 1 May 1472, the present letter was sent in response to that of Antonio Hyarottus, who evidently suggested that Italy deserved to fall to the Turks and that Christianity would thus be rightly punished for its crimes and sins. Hyarottus had called attention to new wars among foreign nations and suspicions of war among Italians, and the monstrous conduct of none other than the Christians themselves. In his reply, Pacis agrees with Hyarottus about the sinfulness of Christians, but he argues that punishment is solely God's responsibility. His letter develops along the lines of a sort of moral-philosophical treatise, discussing God and virtue, divine punishment and moral decay, offering a moral and legal justification for war, and concluding that a military expedition against the Turks must be undertaken. What would one do, Pacis asks rhetorically, if a great wild boar destroyed a well-planted vineyard? One would expel it, as the Turks also must be expelled. Pacis argues that if it were not for the Venetians and their resistance, Italy would already have been completely overturned. Thus the present letter is as much about the foul conduct of Christians and their sinful deeds as it is about the threat of Turkish invasion.

There are many references in Pacis's letter to classical antiquity, often citing classical and patristic authors such as Cicero, Sallust, Macrobius, Justinus, Augustine, Lactantius and Anselm. The author is alarmed by the laxity of his own times and the lack of modern heroes comparable to those of Antiquity such as Hercules, Achilles, Ulysses, or Hannibal.

The year 1472 saw the important Italian response to the Ottoman advances in the eastern Mediterranean, when under the papacy of Sixtus IV (Francesco della Rovere) the Venetian galleys attacked and burned Smyrna and Andania on the Turkish Coast. The peace treaty Venice finally sealed in 1479 obliged them to cede Negroponte and parts of Albania and represented victory for the Ottomans over the greatest Christian maritime power. Following the fall of Otranto in Apulia to the Turks in 1480, Pope Sixtus IV continued his appeal for a Crusade to recover Otranto: the city was recovered in 1481, coinciding with the death of the Sultan Mehmed II. The present letter can be compared to that of another famous proponent of a

desired crusade against the Turks, an invitation to war written by Cardinal Bessarion in 1470 (see Soykut, 2001, p. 50). After the fall of Constantinople, Bessarion devoted all his means to the formation of a crusade by the monarchs of the West against the Turks.

A flood of projects and exhortatory appeals began to appear and continued to be copied and printed throughout the sixteenth century, dwelling on the threat the Ottomans posed to western Christendom, starting with the Italian peninsula. As Cardinal Bessarion (died 1472), a leading exponent and propagandist of the Crusade, put it: "The Turk thinks that he can achieve nothing worthier, nothing which would add more glory to his name, than leading an army into Italy, and adding to his dominions a province accustomed to dominating" (quoted in Housley, 1992, p. 99). The arguments found in such bellicose letters and orations convey the classical image of the confrontational Turk, which was to endure well into the eighteenth century if not until modern times. It is interesting to note, however, that the Renaissance image of the Turks at the same time that it emphasized their brutality also expressed an almost admiring association between the heroes of Antiquity and the Ottoman Empire: in the present letter, the Turks are sometimes called "Teucric" or "Trojans," no doubt because Troy was situated in Turkey. These letters and orations are revealing of the conflicting sentiments of hatred-admiration for the Turks. The general ambivalence of the Italians vis-à-vis the Turks doubtless derived in part from the fact that the Turks represented important commercial partners.

The Archivio di Stato in Trent has an unpublished letter of Michael Pacis, dated Rome 1476, addressed to Raphael Zovencovius (see Kristeller, *Iter Italicum*, VI, 1992, p. 230a). Another set of documents of the addressee, Antonius Hyarottus, are recorded at Padua by Kristeller, *Iter italicum*, VI (1992), p. 130a: "Documents of Ant. Hyarottis." Further study of these documents, along with publication of the present letter, would constitute another step in the reconstruction of the history of the Crusade against the Ottomans (cf. below, Frazee and Housley). Such a project would also help us better understand the ambivalence of European attitudes toward Islam during the Renaissance, a project that is especially timely today (cf. below, esp. Greene, Schwoebel, and Soykut).

LITERATURE

Flee, K. "Italian Perceptions of the Turks in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 5 (1995), pp. 159-172.

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Housley, N. *The Later Crusades. From Lyons to Alcazar. 1274-1580*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

On Pope Sixtus IV

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