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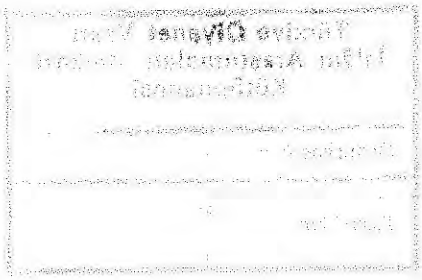
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A BYZANTINE SOURCE ON THE BATTLES OF BILEĆA (?) AND KOSOVO POLJE: KYDONES' LETTERS 396 AND 398 RECONSIDERED

When sultan Murād and knez Lazar clashed at Kosovo Polje, Demetrios Kydones was dwelling in Constantinople, occupied (so it would seem) with little more than his private literary pursuits. Now in his mid sixties, Kydones had served as a key advisor to two emperors, namely John VI Kantakouzenos (in 1347-54) and John V Palaiologos (in 1357-1372/73, 1374/75-1376, and 1379-1385/1386).[1] Throughout his long and troubled career Kydones counselled alignment with the Catholic west, disdaining the more viable alternative — subordination to the Ottomans. It was thus inevitable that tensions frequently arose between Kydones and the imperial circle following John V's submission to Murād in 1372 or 1373, shortly after the battle of Černomen. This friction so intensified in 1385/86 that Kydones opted to retire. His difficulties at that time doubtless stemmed from his affection and sympathy for Manuel II, John V's second son and his own former pupil. In late 1382 Manuel had assumed virtually autonomous rule in Thessaloniki, refusing thereafter to accommodate with the Turks, and thus provoking Murād, in 1383, to lay siege to Thessaloniki. Manuel's endeavors to preserve the city ultimately failed in spring 1387, when its citizens preferred surrender to starvation. Throughout Manuel's reign in Thessaloniki, Kydones remained in close contact with the renegade emperor.[2] Moreover, he continued to encourage and comfort Manuel during the

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[1] For a comprehensive survey of Kydones' life and writings see F. Tinnefeld, *Demetrios Kydones Briefe, Erster Teil, Erster Halbband (Einleitung und 47 Briefe)*, (Stuttgart, 1981), 4-87. Also useful are the biographical notes in F. Kianka's "Byzantine-Papal Diplomacy: The Role of Demetrius Kydones," *The International Review* 7 (1985): 174-213 (especially pp. 175-78, 205-11).

[2] On Manuel's reign in Thessaloniki, including his contacts with Kydones, George Dennis' *The Reign of Manuel II Palaeologus in Thessalonica, 1382-1387* (Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1960) remains unsurpassed.

bleak years which followed, when, in hopes of future political rehabilitation, Manuel submitted to John V's insistence that he relocate to the island of Lemnos.

Manuel's exile on Lemnos lasted two years (ca. fall 1387-late summer 1389), during which time Kydones wrote his imperial friend some twenty letters.[3] Two of these — letters 396 and 398 in R.-J. Loenertz's edition — are particularly important, since they contain allusions to battles fought between Christians and Turks. In an article published in 1970, Sima Ćirković argued that the pertinent passages in both letters relate to the battle of Kosovo, and hence constitute precious contemporary evidence regarding if not the actual outcome of that clash, then at least Kydones' evolving perceptions thereof.[4] While Kydones' remarks in letter 396 indubitably refer to the legendary battle, it is considerably more difficult to establish the same of Letter 398. I therefore propose to examine these passages afresh — assessing, on the one hand, the merits of Cirković's thesis, and explicating, on the other, dimensions of these letters which thus far have been ignored.

Although the allusions are brief, the topic is complex. To establish a background for discussion, I shall begin by summarizing what may be posited about Kosovo and its antecedents from sources external to Kydones. Thereafter I shall turn to the letters.

I

Historians to date have not fully established the causes, course, and results of the first battle of Kosovo Polje, and perhaps they never will. The central difficulty, of course, is the character of our sources. If any eye-witness accounts of the battle were written, none has survived. Otherwise, contemporary reports and notices are few, fragmentary and either laconic or dubious. Coherent, detailed narratives emerge from the 1430s through the end of the fifteenth century, most importantly in Serbian, Greek and Turkish. These accounts, however, are contradictory, and their sources and credibility are difficult to determine.

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[3]Regarding Kydones' correspondance with Manuel during the latter's exile on Lemnos, see R.-J. Loenertz, "L'exil de Manuel II Paléologue à Lemnos, 1387-1389," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 38 (1972): 116-40.

[4]"Dimitrije Kidon o Kosovskom Boju," *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 12 (1970): 213-219. Ćirković's views are widely cited in Yugoslavian scholarship, and have recently been circulated in English by T. Emmert, *Serbian Golgotha, Kosovo, 1389* (New York: East European Monographs, 1990), 48-49. An extensive revision of his 1973 dissertation, Emmert's *Serbian Golgotha* offers an excellent discussion of most of the primary sources bearing upon the battle, and concomitantly the evolution of the "Kosovo Legend" in its earliest phase. Moreover, he sketches the outlines of its development into the twentieth century.

Reconstructing the battle is thus an excercise in deciphering highly variable perceptions; the result is at best a shadowy outline. The following, then, is a sketch of what we may provisionally accept as plausible.[5]

Murād's invasion of Serbia in June 1389 was the culmination of an ambition which we may trace to at least 1386, when he conquered Niš, but then was barred at Pločnik from further encroachments into knez Lazar's domain.[6] The

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[5]Emmert's overview and analysis of the sources pertaining to Kosovo is the most complete to date (*Serbian Golgotha*, especially pp. 42-120), but still useful is M. Braun's *"Kosovo" Die Schlacht auf dem Amselfelde in geschichtlicher und epischer Überlieferung*, Slavisch-Baltische Quellen und Forschungen, 7 (Leipzig: Markert & Petters Verlag, 1937). The six hundredth anniversary of the battle evoked several conferences and commemorative enterprises, perhaps the most significant of which is the projected four volume collection entitled *Kosovske spomenice 1389-1989*, under the general editorship of V. Djurić et al. The third of these volumes will cover the battle and its background (ed. M. Pantić et al., *Kosovski boj u istorii*), and will assuredly include a full inventory and discussion of the sources. For the papers delivered at a conference held at Stanford University on June 2-3, 1989, see ed. W. Vucinich and T. Emmert, *Kosovo: Legacy of a Medieval Battle Between Cross and Crescent*, Minnesota Mediterranean and East European Monographs, 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

The post-Byzantine Greek sources were initially analyzed by N. Radojčić, "Grčki izvori za Kosovsku bitku," *Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva*, 7/9 (1930): 163-72, with an abbreviated German version entitled "Die griechischen Quellen zur Schlacht am Kosovo Polje," *Byzantion*, 6 (1931): 241-46. I have reassessed Chalkokondyles' narrative in "A Greek View on the Battle of Kosovo: Laonikos Chalkokondyles," in ed. W. Vucinch and T. Emmert, op. cit., 61-88. A. Olesnicki's "Turski izvori o kosovskom boju" (*Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva*, 14/7 [1934]: 59-98) remains the only competent overview of the Ottoman sources, even though the author's classification of versions (i.e. Uruj reflecting a "popular Edirne" account, and Aḥmedī and Šukrull–āh conveying a "clerical-court" redaction) has received little support (cf. Emmert, op. cit., 91-92). For the image of Kosovo in Serbian epic, see above all J. Redjep, *Priča o boju Kosovskom* (Zrenjanin: Ulaznica, 1976), and more concisely S. Koljević, *The Epic in the Making* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 159-73.

[6]C. Jireček, *Geschichte der Serben, Zweiter Band, Erste Hälfte (1371-1537)* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes Aktiengesellschaft, 1918), 118, which I cite for historiographic reasons. Earlier Jireček dated Pločnik to 1387, envisioning it as a triumph of the Bosnians and Serbs over Murād, and hence as "der letzte Sieg der südslawischen Conföderation über die asiatischen Eindringlinge." (*Geschichte der Bulgaren* [Prag: Verlag von F. Tempsky, 1876], pp. 340-341). This view derives essentially from Leunclavius' reworking of Nešrī, and proceeds on the dubious assumption that Murād had reduced Lazar to vassalage the previous year. It clashes with the more credible entries in the Serbian annals, of which Jireček was apprised by 1918. Unfortunately, Jireček's earlier view was decisive in shaping subsequent thought on the causality of Kosovo, particularly in Anglo-American circles, owing to its adoption by H. Gibbons in his *The Foundation of the Ottoman Empire, A History of the Osmanlis Up to the Death of Bayezid I* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1916, cf. p. 169, especially note 4). This conception was reinforced when Babinger, reverting to the less plausible Serbian annal entries, also located the battle of Pločnik in 1387, on which see his *Beiträge zur Frühgeschichte der Türkenherrschaft in Rumelien (14.-15. Jahrhundert)*, Südosteuropaische Arbeiten, 34 (Brünn-München-Wien: Rudolf M. Rohrer-George D. W. Callwey, 1944), p. 77, esp. n. 43. Serbian historians, in contrast, have by and large accepted Jireček's revised view on the date and significance of Pločnik, and hence of the course of events leading to Kosovo. Recently, for example, see R. Mihaljčić, "Kosovska Bitka," in ed. J. Kalić, *Istorija Srpskog Naroda, Druga Knjiga, Doba borbi za očuvanje i obnovu*

sultan's subsequent preoccupations first in Karaman, and then in Bulgaria, deterred him from renewed attempts. By the end of 1388, however, he was free to resume the offensive. Moreover, he had acquired an additional pretext for war. On August 27, 1388, the Bosnian commander Vlatko Vuković decimated a contingent of Ottomans led by Kavala Šahin in an encounter at Bileća. In reply, Murād resolved to attack Serbia in force the following spring, his objective being to subordinate the regional princes, in particular Lazar, or alternatively crush them and annex their lands. Murād typically preferred the former method, i.e. establishing the Christian princes as tributaries or vassals, as was the case with the Palaiologoi. Clearly, however, this was an option which Lazar was prepared to resist.[7]

The army Murād assembled in May or June 1389 included Ottoman forces from Rumili and Anatolia, and additional contingents from the begs of western and central Anatolia. Moreover, the sultan insisted that his sons, Yıldırım Bāyazīd and Ya'qūb, participate in the campaign. On the Slavic side, Knez Lazar took the initiative in organizing defenses, his allies being Vuk Branković, the lord of Kosovo and environs, and kralj Tvrtko of Bosnia. The latter did not personally participate, but dispatched troops under the seasoned command of Vlatko. Estimates of relative troop strength are utterly conjectural, but we may accept that both sides assembled a very significant fighting force.[8]

The action which took place once these armies met was a complex of military and political events, the exact sequence of which varies from source to source. It is impossible, therefore, to construct a credible outline of what transpired from beginning to end. Alternatively, we can summarize the key developments under four rubrics:[9]

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države (1371-1537) (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1982), 42, and again in his *Lazar Hrebeljanović. Istorija, Kult, Predanje* (Beograd: Nolit, 1984), 115. In both works, the relevant sequence of events is laid out correctly.

[7]For a reliable outline of the sequence from Pločnik through Kosovo, see Jireček, *Geschichte der Serben*, I, 118-122; Mihaljčić, "Kosovska Bitka," 43-44, and again *Lazar Hrebeljanović*, 115-124. İ. H. Uzunçarşılı, in comparison, tends to follow Nešrī rather uncritically (cf. *Osmanlı Tarihi, I. Cild, Anadolu Selçukluları ve Anadolu Beylikleri hakkında bir mukaddime ile Osmanlı Devletinin kuruluşundan İstanbul'un fethine kadar*, 3d ed., Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınlarından XIII. Seri, No. 16a2, [Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1972], 249-259).

[8]The most detailed discussion of the purely military aspects of the battle is still G. Škrivanić, *Kosovska Bitka (15 Juna 1389)* (Cetinje: Štamparsko preduzeće "Obod," 1956). Škrivanić calculates the Ottoman fighting force at roughly 25,000, with an additional 10,000 auxiliaries and supply units, and Lazar's total strength at 15-20,000, with at the very most 16,000 fighters (p. 59, and further pp. 93-94).

[9]For the events associated with the battle per se, and pertinent primary documentation, see Jireček, Škrivanić, and Mihaljčić, as above in note 7, as well as Uzunçarşılı (again following the later historians, especially Nešrī, but providing considerably more information on the Ottoman side). Perhaps the finest concise summary is that by S. Ćirković, in his notes to S. Novaković,

1. *The Battle Per Se*: On June 15, the feast of St. Vitus, the Slavs and the Ottomans fought a pitched battle in the course of which both sides suffered severe losses. When this struggle ended, the Ottomans still held the field; indeed, Murād's viscera were buried presumably on the spot where he was assassinated. It is plausible, therefore, that the fifteenth century sources are correct in stating that the Christian forces were ultimately compelled to withdraw. The Ottomans did not, however, pursue the retreating troops into upper Serbia and Bosnia.

2. *The Assassination of Murād*: At some stage in the action, Miloš Obilić, one of Lazar's commanders, feigned defection, secured access to the sultan, and then assassinated him. Thereafter he was himself killed. Miloš's motives remain a mystery, and it is unclear whether he accomplished his deed immediately before the fighting began, or while it was in progress. Likewise it is disputed whether Murād instantly died from his wounds, or lingered in agony until the end of the battle. In any event, his body was subsequently embalmed and sent to Bursa, while his viscera, as noted above, were buried on the battlefield.

3. *Bāyazīd's Accession and Ya'qūb's Execution*: At some point after Murād's assassination, the events associated with Bāyazīd's rise to power unfolded. First of all, those attending Murād (and this presumably included his vizier, Čandarlı 'Alī Pāšā) resolved to inform Bāyazīd, but not Ya'qūb, of what had befallen Murād. Whether they did so on their own volition, or in accordance with Murād's final wishes, is unclear. Then, when Bāyazīd arrived as summoned, and observed his father's condition, he ordered that Ya'qūb be captured and strangled. Obviously, the chronology of this sequence is relative to that of Murād's assassination. Hence it is conjectural whether Bāyazīd ascended the throne, and eliminated his brother, at the beginning, middle, or end of the battle. To the modern mind this may seem irrelevant. To those who wished to know whether Murād or Bāyazīd led the troops to victory, it was of course a matter of considerable interest.

4. *The Execution of Knez Lazar*: Sometime during the battle, knez Lazar and a number of his nobles were captured. When the fighting was finished, they were brought to Murād's tent and decapitated. Whether this occurred during the sultan's final moments, and prior to the summoning of Bāyazīd, or after Bāyazīd's accession, and hence at his command, is open to debate. Whatever the case, it would seem that Bāyazīd subsequently authorized the release of Lazar's remains, which were taken first to the church at Priština, and eventually interred in his monastery at Ravanica.

Srbi i Turci. Istorijske studije o prvim borbama s najezdom turskom pre i posle boja na Kosovu (Beograd: Kultura, 1960), 453-456.

Such, then, were the basic developments which occurred at Kosovo Polje on June 15, 1389 — a bloodbath, an assassination, an accession, fratricide, and retaliatory executions. From a strictly military perspective, the Ottomans achieved something of a victory, but at a considerable price. More importantly, it was not a success on which they could quickly capitalize. Within days of the battle, Bāyazīd set forth for Edirne to consolidate his regime and deal with the predictable crises accompanying a change of sultan. It is hardly surprising, then, that he terminated full scale operations in Serbia, instructing his udj begs, so it would seem, to conduct limited harrying raids until he was free to return.

In summary, Kosovo Polje was not a "brilliant Ottoman triumph" which led immediately to the subjection of Serbia.[10] Nonetheless, however one qualifies its outcome ("victory," "Pyrrhic victory," or "tie"), the consequences were undeniably more advantageous to the Ottomans than the Serbs. The former held the frontier established in 1386-1389, and were poised for further expansion under Murād's decisive and capable successor. Moreover, the battle casualties did not massively reduce the Ottomans' overall military capacity. The same was not true of the Serbs, and the passing of knez Lazar, who had progressed considerably in moulding a state from the wreckage of Stefan Dušan's empire, was an irreplaceable loss.

With this as background, let us now consider Kydones' allusions to contemporary political and military events.

II

Letter 396 (Vat. gr. 101, f. 46-46v)

There is no doubt that Kydones composed Letter 396 sometime after reports about the battle had reached Constantinople.[11] On the basis of common sense as well as Ignatius of Smolensk's itinerary, we may surmise that news of

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[10]Knez Lazar's widow, Milica, did not submit to Bāyazīd until 1390. She did so, moreover, largely to secure assistance in staving off Hungarian attacks on her territory. Vuk Branković apparently preserved his autonomy into early 1392 (cf. Emmert, *Serbian Golgotha*, 75-76). Bāyazīd himself did not return Rumili, i.e. the Danubian frontier in the area of Rascia, until late fall or winter 1392 (cf. E. Zachariadou, "Manuel II Palaeologos on the Strife Between Bāyezīd I and Ḳādi Burhān al-Dīn Aḥmad," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 18 [1980]: 480-81).

[11]Loenertz published this dating in 1947 (*Les recueils de lettres de Démétrius Cydonès*, Studi e testi, 131 [Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1947], 119, and cf. 35), reiterated in his 1960 edition (*Démétrius Cydonès Correspondance*, II, Studi e testi, 208 [Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1960], 350).

the battle must have arrived in Constantinople within at least ten days time.[12] Kydones does not indicate how soon after hearing the news he composed his letter, but the intensity of his sentiments implies that he was writing while the information was still fresh, or relatively so. His remarks, literally translated, are as follows:[13]

> That accursed one who has abused God and his heirs so very much, and who has behaved towards everyone with many indecencies, has died. He has fallen [at the hands of those] whom he thought would not even stand their ground once they received reports of what he was preparing against them, but would [instead] take flight to the Ocean, merely [because of] the rumours. But except [for the fact that this accursed one] has fallen, [even so] our situation has not improved. I think that even if all the Turks were to perish, not even then would the Rhomaioi fare better. Let those who wish search out the reason for this. I suppose, however, that we shall never end our search until we cease [blaming] others, and blame ourselves. For I say that the [fate] of the unclean spirit will befall us—[the unclean spirit] which is now wandering among [others]. I am convinced that it will soon return to the house whence it left, bringing [with it] other [spirits] worse than itself. What befalls us then shall be worse than anything previous. That this does not come to pass, now, will be the concern of God, and you emperors.

As the only indisputably contemporary Byzantine reflection on the battle of Kosovo Polje, this passage is at once disappointing and intriguing. It disappoints, of course, because it conveys such a minimum of factual information. Adhering to the conventions of highbrow epistolography, Kydones assumes a posture of cultivated remoteness — alluding to individuals, groups and events rather than describing them in concrete detail; intimating his feelings and

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[12] See below, note 17.

[13] ed. R.-J. Loenertz, *Démétrius Cydonès Correspondance*, II, Ep. 396.24-37, on pp. 350-351: "... *Ὁ δὲ κατάρατος ἐκεῖνος καὶ πολλὰ μὲν εἰς θεὸν καὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ κληρονομίαν ὑβρίσας πολλὴ δὲ πρὸς πάντας ἀσελγείᾳ χρησάμενος οἴχεται, καὶ πέπτωκεν ὑπ' ἐκείνων οὓς μηδ' ἂν τὴν φήμην ὧν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς παρεσκευάζετο μαθόντας ἐνόμιζεν ὑπομεῖναι, ἀλλ' ἀκούσαντας μόνον εἰς τὴν ἔξω θάλατταν φεύγειν. πλὴν κἀκείνου πεσόντος οὐδ' οὕτω τὰ πράγματ' ἡμῖν ἐν βελτίοσιν. οἶμαι δ' οὐδ' εἰ πάντες ἀποθάνοιεν Τοῦρκοι, μηδ' ἂν οὕτω 'Ρωμαίους κάλλιον πρᾶξαι. τούτου μὲν οὖν τὴν αἰτίαν ἐξέστω τοῖς βουλομένοις ζητεῖν. οἶμαι δ' ἡμᾶς ταύτην ζητοῦντας μηδέποτε παύσεσθαι, ἕως ἂν μὴ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀφέντες ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς αἰτιώμεθα. φημὶ δὲ ἡμῖν τὸ τοῦ ἀκαθάρτου συμβήσεσθαι πνεύματος. ὃ νῦν μὲν περιπλανώμενον πρὸς ἄλλοις ἐστίν. πείθομαι δ' αὐτὸ καὶ ἄλλα ἑαυτοῦ χείρονα παραλαβὸν πρὸς τὸν οἶκον ὅθεν ἀπεδήμησεν μετὰ μικρὸν ἐπανήξειν. καὶ τόθ' ἡμῖν χεῖρω καὶ τῶν προτέρων ἔσται τὰ ἔσχατα. τούτου μὲν οὖν ὅπως μὴ γένηται θεῷ καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς βασιλεῦσι μελήσει.*" Ćirković translated a part of this letter (i.e. 396.24-32), leaving out the metaphor of the unclean spirit ("Dimitrije Kidon," p. 215). Emmert likewise limited himself to this section (see *Serbian Golgotha*, p. 49). The volume of Tinnefeld's translations in which Letters 396 and 398 will appear has not yet been published.

reactions with symbols and oblique signals, rather than direct statement. The passage, consequently, answers few of the questions about Kosovo Polje which present-day historians regard as significant. Nonetheless, Kydones' view of the circumstances and import of Murād's death is intriguing, and his prophesy concerning the future of the Rhomaioi is a tantalizing puzzle.

Let us consider, first, Kydones' convoluted sentence pertaining to the events of Kosovo Polje. In essence it constitutes an epitaph for Murād, summarizing the character of his life and sketching its final act. In sculpting these remarks, Kydones' intent clearly was not to delineate for Manuel everything he had heard about the battle — as if Manuel had no independent corridors of information and knew nothing of what had happened. Kydones' objective, rather, was to comment on the developments he considered most salient, for himself and his correspondent, namely Murād's death and its consequent impact within the Byzantine sphere. It was doubtless for this reason that Kydones conveys so very little regarding Murād's adversaries, whose ethnicity he does not specify, and whose leader (much less his fate) he passes over in silence. It is difficult to suppose that Kydones was unaware of Lazar's death, or that he contemplated the experience of the Serbs with callous indifference. Rather, writing to Manuel Palaiologos, he carefully focused his reflection on the issue of immediate relevance — the significance of Murād's life and death vis-à-vis the Rhomaioi, in particular the Palaiologoi.

The words Kydones uses to characterize Murād's life are formulaic. They evoke a familiar biblical type, that of the heathen *βασιλεύς* who blasphemes God, oppresses the "people of God," and vainly exults in his own power and might. Outstanding exemplars of this type include the Egyptian pharaoh, the Assyrian Sennacherib, or the oppressor kings of the Psalms. It was characteristic of Byzantine writers to categorize hostile barbarian rulers according to this paradigm, and reciprocally to reaffirm their own identity as the new "people of God."[14] Kydones' explicit depiction of Murād in these terms, in this context, simply reveals the author summarizing, in ideological shorthand, his view of the sultan's role on the wider stage of Christian history.

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[14]Photius' Homily IV, composed following the Russian attack on Constantinople in 860, is a classic case in point (see Cyril Mango, *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 3 [Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1958], 95-110). Pertinent, here, is Mango's observation that elements from this homily, as well as homily III, were incorporated by Dorotheus of Mitylene in the address he gave in 1422, when Murād II was besieging Constantinople (p. 82). The latter's grandfather, Bāyazīd, who besieged Constantinople from 1399-1402, was likewise delineated on this model. See, for example, P. Gauter, "Action de grâces de Démétrius Chrysoloras à la Théotocos pour l'anniversaire de la bataille d'Ankara (28 juillet 1403)," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 19 (1961): 350.35-352.94.

Kydones' version of Murād's death amplifies this characterization, since it depicts the sultan's final episode as an expression par excellance of his vanity and arrogance — the egregious faults of the type he represents. The author sketches the episode in only two scenes — Murād boasting, prior to the battle, that his adversaries would not stand and fight; and Murād facing his enemies in battle, contrary to expectation, and suffering death at their hands. Let us consider first the action which Kydones represents, and then assess his view of its significance.

Kydones' depiction of Murād's arrogant self-confidence prior to the battle, and conversely his contempt for his adversaries, has no exact parallel in the contemporary accounts. As Ćirković remarks, Kydones' assertion at least implies a perception that Murād's forces were vast, outnumbering those of knez Lazar.[15] Still, we may question whether the behavior Kydones describes is genuine or fictitious. It is possible that envoys had carried reports of Murād's bragadoccio to Constantinople, and that Kydones, with his liaison to palace circles, picked up on those stories.[16] On the other hand, the action might well be fictive, the intent being to exhibit Murād acting according to type, and to flavor the circumstances of his death with an essential ingredient of good spectacles — a twist of irony. If so, one wonders whether Kydones himself contrived the image, or if popular rumors about "the downfall of the sultan" included this element.

Kydones' intimation that Murād simply fell in battle, killed by his enemies — in the plural — likewise raises intriguing questions. Was he aware that Murād had been assassinated, and, in writing to Manuel, did he dismiss this as a secondary or inelegant detail? On the other hand, does he mean what he implies — that Murād, in point of fact, fell in battle? Again, we are hardly in a position to resolve the matter. It is possible, however, that Kydones' assertion reflects the reports and rumors as they first arrived in Constantinople. According to Ignatii of Smolensk's memoir, the news which metropolitan Pimen and his party received on June 27 was similarly generalized, indicating that both Murād and knez Lazar simply perished in battle. This they learned at Astravikē, a port on the Pontic coast less than fifty miles from Constantinople.[17] To be sure,

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[15]"Dimitrije Kidon," p. 215.

[16]Even though Kydones had retired from office, he still met with members of the imperial family. Cf. Ep. 398.20-21, where it is evident that Kydones had read a letter which Manuel had recently sent to his mother, Helena.

[17]The Russians were en route to Constantinople, and had stopped at Astravikē (which Ignatii calls "Astravija") specifically to inquire for "news about Murād." They discovered that a battle between knez Lazar and Murād had taken place, and that both rulers had been killed. This was apparently fresh news, since when the travellers sailed from Pontēraklia on June 24, after a nine day stopover, they still had not heard about the battle. For the text and translation, see ed. G. Majeska, *Russian Travellers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 19 (Washington D.C., 1984), 88/90 (English), 89/91 (Slavic), with Majeska's comments pp. 403-404. Cf. Emmert, *Serbian Golgotha*, 43.

Ignatii's account does not necessarily corroborate Kydones, since Ignatii may likewise not have recorded everything he heard about the battle. If he did, however, this at least raises the possibility that the Greeks of Constantinople and environs initially presumed that Murād was killed in the fight, and not assassinated. In this regard, we may note that popular debate over the circumstances of Murād's death would continue for generations. In the 1460s, for example, Chalkokondyles transmits a "Turkish" version which also alleges that Murād fell in battle. Here, the sultan joined his troops in pursuit of the fleeing Serbs, but was speared by a foot soldier whom he attempted to overtake.[18]

Let us turn, now, to Kydones' sense of the importance of Murād's passing. Obviously, he contemplates Murād's fate — the way he died in relationship to his life — as fitting, as good riddance to bad rubbish. One senses here the satisfaction of a veteran Byzantine statesman who had experienced the sultan's reign from beginning to end, who mourned the Ottoman consolidation in Thrace, which Murād directed, and who personally despised the sultan. One is struck, however, by Kydones' reluctance to celebrate Murād's passing or the battle as a divinely authored victory. According to the standard script, the blaspheming tyrants ideally perish in a spectacle of divine wrath. God himself engineers their fall, directly or indirectly, simultaneously saving his people. Such is the thrust of the earliest Latin accounts of Murād's fall.[19] Kydones, as

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[18] *Laonici Chalcocandylae historiarium demonstrationes*, ed. E. Darkó, vol. I (Budapest: Societas Franklíniana, 1922), 54.6-10. Cf. also my article "A Greek View on the Battle of Kosovo: Laonikos Chalkokondyles"; see n. 5 above.

[19] On August 1, 1389, Tvrtko I signed a letter addressed to the senate of Trogir announcing that he had achieved a great victory over "the enemy of the Christian people," namely sultan Murād I. He identifies God as its agent, and leaves no doubt regarding the outcome: "God's right hand lent us its full help and support and we held the field in triumph. We fought them, defeated them, and streched them dead on the ground so that only a few of these infidels remained alive. And this, thank God, without a great number of losses on our own side." (For the text, see Braun, "*Kosovo,*" *Die Schlacht*, 9-10; quoted here is Emmert's translation, op. cit., 45). Tvrtko's letter was clearly propaganda for himself and Bosnia, and a month later he sent a similar letter to the Florentine senate. The text has vanished, but the Florentine reply, composed by none other than Coluccio Salutati, survives.

Writing in the cultivated humanist Latin for which he was now famed, the chancellor applauds Tvrtko for his glorious victory, obtained, he concurs, "by the ineffable mercy of the omnipotent and eternal divinity who cares for His flock." Thereafter Salutati recounts what the Florentines have independently heard about that celebrated battle, which he correctly dates to June 15, 1389, and situates at the Field of Blackbirds, i.e. Kosovo Polje. In essence, Salutati envisions the battle as a critical moment in the defense of Christendom against aggressive Islam. The Bosnians and their king are the "warriors and heroes of the true Christ," compelled by the "arrogantly mad and madly arrogant Muhammad-worshipper" to take up arms, since he had invaded Bosnia with a host of thousands, and generally aspired to obliterate Christianity from the earth. His battle, then, was a war with Christ; consequently, events proceeded as they did on June 15 because Christ elected to crush his enemies, including the sultan. Echoing Tvrtko, Salutati describes the engagement in no uncertain terms as a glorious triumph of Christians over infidels, who perished by the thousands. Moreover, Christ extended his right

we have seen, sets the stage for this interpretation in his characterization of Murād. But then he departs from the script, denying the heavenly actor his customary role, and only vaguely intimating that Murād's adversaries were Christians! Why so? Forming conclusions from an author's silence is of course a dangerous game. It is possible, however, that when Kydones wrote this letter, he was either despondent or, as Ćirković argues, simply uncertain about the general results of the battle.[20] The evidence, in other words, was insufficient to proclaim Kosovo Polje another episode in salvation history.

Kydones' view of the impact of Murād's passing on the Byzantines is more apparent. It is not, to be sure, transparent, since at this point he expresses himself with utmost caution, lapsing ultimately into metaphor. Once we decipher the metaphor, however, it becomes evident that Kydones' central concern is an impending political crisis at Constantinople. The dimensions of this so disturb him, moreover, that he regards the outstanding positive development at Kosovo Polje — the death of the sultan — a marginal blessing, of no direct consequence for what is about to befall the Rhomaioi. Let us consider, then, what he writes and what he actually means.

Following his epitaph on Murād, Kydones abruptly switches his focus to the Rhomaioi and their situation in the summer of 1389. He is distressed by their behavior, or rather a pattern of destructive behavior which he apparently regards as chronic, and believes would persist even if the Ottoman threat were to vanish — even if all the Turks, and not merely Murād, were to die. He emphasizes that this is an internal problem, and seemingly taunts his countrymen for blaming their woes on outsiders — presumably the Turkic invaders. Then, using words and phrases from Matthew 12:43-45, he prophesies potential disaster. In the biblical text, Christ depicts an unclean spirit departing from a man, returning to the house whence it came, departing again, collecting seven spirits worse than itself, and then returning to torment the wretched man more hideously than before. Applying this to present circumstances, Kydones equates the afflicted man with the Rhomaioi, and claims that an unclean spirit is presently sojourning elsewhere, but will return and wreak havoc like its scriptural counterpart.[21] He concludes, rather feebly, with a plea to God and the

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hand to Tvrtko's twelve nobles who made their way to Murād's tent, and above all to the nameless hero who managed to stab the sultan in his throat and belly, ending his life. Intimating that the twelve were immediately killed, "as victims to the dead leader over his ugly corpse," Salutati celebrates their death as martyrdom. His letter, in short, is not so much an expression of congratulations to Tvrtko, as an outpouring of praise to God for using the Bosnians, as worthy tools, to defend Christendom against Islam. (For the text, see again Braun, op. cit., 14-15, and Emmert's translation, from which I have quoted, op. cit., 45-47). It is important, however, as corroborating evidence that Murād was assassinated by a Slav who penetrated the Ottoman lines.

[20] "Dimitrije Kidon," 215-216.

[21] Kydones' use of the Matthaean text will be evident from the following comparison:

emperors — in the plural — that they concern themselves to avert this.[22] These lines, which Ćirković and others have only partially explored, evoke three questions. What is this "internal problem" to which Kydones alludes? What does he mean by prophesying the return of an unclean spirit? Finally, who are the emperors to whom he appeals, and what does he expect of them? These questions, in my opinion, can be answered if we consider certain political developments between 1373 and late June 1389, when Kydones plausibly wrote his letter.

Since the spring of 1373, the Palaiologan family had been rent by an internal feud which periodically destabilized the government in Constantinople, and enmeshed its various members in dependency relationships with the Italians and Turks. Between 1373 and 1385, the conflict consisted of a duel between John V and his eldest son, Andronikos. This struggle began in 1373, when Andronikos attempted a coup but failed. As punishment, he and his three year old son, the future John VII, were partially blinded and imprisoned in the tower of Anemas. Manuel was now crowned as his father's co-emperor, and the seeds of a

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(a) Kydones Ep. 396.32-36:

"φημὶ δὲ ἡμῖν τὸ τοῦ ἀκαθάρτου συμβήσεσθαι πνεύματος. ὃ νῦν μὲν περιπλανώμενον πρὸς ἄλλοις ἐστίν. πείθομαι δ' αὐτὸ καὶ ἄλλα ἑαυτοῦ χείρονα παραλαβὸν πρὸς τὸν οἶκον ὅθεν ἀπεδήμησεν μετὰ μικρὸν ἐπανήξειν. καὶ τόθ' ἡμῖν χείρω καὶ τῶν προτέρων ἔσται τὰ ἔσχατα."

In my translation:

"For I say that the [fate] of the unclean spirit will befall us—[the unclean spirit] which is now wandering among [others]. I am convinced that it will soon return to the house whence it left, bringing [with it] other [spirits] worse than itself. What befalls us then shall be worse than anything previous."

(b) Matthew 12:43-45:

"Οταν δὲ τὸ ἀκάθαρτον πνεῦμα ἐξέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, διέρχεται δι' ἀνύδρων τόπων ζητοῦν ἀνάπαυσιν, καὶ οὐχ εὑρίσκει. τότε λέγει, Εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου ἐπιστρέψω ὅθεν ἐξῆλθον. καὶ ἐλθὸν εὑρίσκει σχολάζοντα σεσαρωμένον καὶ κεκοσμημένον. τότε πορεύεται καὶ παραλαμβάνει μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ ἑπτὰ ἕτερα πνεύματα πονηρότερα ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ εἰσελθόντα κατοικεῖ ἐκεῖ. καὶ γίνεται τὰ ἔσχατα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκείνου χείρονα τῶν πρώτων. οὕτως ἔσται καὶ τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ τῇ πονηρᾷ.

In *The Jerusalem Bible* translation, ed. A. Jones (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Ltd., 1966):

"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man it wanders through waterless country looking for a place to rest, and cannot find one. Then it says, 'I will return to the home I came from.' But on arrival, finding it unoccupied, swept and tidied, it then goes off and collects seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and set up house there, so that the man ends up by being worse than he was before. That is what will happen to this evil generation."

Obviously Kydones has simplified elements of the original setting and action to render the metaphor applicable to present circumstances.

[22] It is significant, here, that the form Kydones uses is the simple dative plural, and not the dual. Consequently, he is not limiting his appeal to two emperors. I thank Professor George Dennis for this observation.

prolonged vendetta were sown. In July 1376, Andronikos and his son managed to escape. By mid-August they returned with Genoese and Turkish help, entered Constantinople and captured their kinsmen, who now suffered their turn in the tower. Meanwhile Andronikos established his regime, elevating his son as co-emperor.[23]

The story repeated itself in June 1379, when John V and company escaped, with Venetian help, and promptly journeyed to Bursa with offers Murād felt inclined to accept. By early July, John V and Manuel had re-established their regime. Their victory was only a partial one, however, since Andronikos managed to evade capture, and retreated with his family and hostages to Galata, where he fought on with Genoese support until 1381. At this juncture, the imperial family resolved to make peace and bind up its wounds as best they could. A treaty was concluded, the key clause of which defined the future order of succession. It was agreed that Andronikos would succeed John V, and that Andronikos would be followed by his son, John VII.[24]

This compact, however, failed to restore peace and harmony among the Palaiologoi. First of all, it necessarily excluded Manuel from the succession. Outraged, Manuel departed for Thessaloniki sometime in 1382, where, as previously mentioned, he ruled for the next five years pursuing an independent policy, to the annoyance of his father as well as Murād. By early 1385, moreover, Andronikos and John VII were embroiled in territorial disputes with John V. This conflict was prevented from escalating into yet another struggle over the capital by Andronikos' timely death, which occurred in late June of that year.[25]

The tensions within the Palaiologan clan were not buried with Andronikos. To the contrary, within two years they resurfaced, this time with John VII pitted against John V and Manuel. Following Andronikos' death, John VII regarded himself as his grandfather's heir apparent, basing his claims on the 1381 treaty. Whether or not John V concurred is unclear. In the spring of 1387, however, developments occurred which caused John VII to fear for his political future. After Manuel's rule in Thessaloniki came to an end (April 6), he desperately maneuvered throughout the following months to secure a reconciliation with his father. Eventually, in the autumn of that year, John permitted his son to return to the capital, at Murād's behest. Manuel's ambition

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[23]For the entire period from 1373-1387, see George Dennis' *Manuel II Palaeologus in Thessalonica*. For the phase of the feud from spring 1373 through Andronikos IV's coup, see pp. 26-40. In addition, cf. J. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 20-32.

[24]Dennis, op. cit., 41-51; Barker, op. cit., 32-42.

[25]Dennis, op. cit., 57-88, 108-112, 114-126, 133-141; Barker, op. cit., 43-52.

now was to recover his status as John V's co-emperor and designated successor, and he was willing to do whatever was necessary to attain that goal. His proposal, however, placed his father in a most delicate position. If he embraced Manuel as his imperial colleague and successor, he would instantly provoke John VII into open revolt. On the other hand, John V distrusted his grandson, and certainly realized from past experience that Manuel's aid might well be invaluable, if not essential, should John VII actually attempt a coup. The elder emperor solved his dilemma rather shrewdly by accepting Manuel's contrition, but leaving his official status, and the issue of succession, an item for future deliberation. Meanwhile, he instructed Manuel to take up residence on Lemnos, far from the capital. There he remained from approximately the autumn of 1387 through late summer or early fall 1389.[26]

John VII, it would seem, considered his uncle's departure from Thessaloniki a threat to his career, and began to manoeuver accordingly. Sometime in April or May of 1387, the Genoese of Pera accorded him the acclamations due an emperor, and on at least one occasion deliberately slighted John V.[27] The incidents, if nothing else, suggest the direction of John VII's plans. Apparently he was envisioning a coup d'état which would unseat his grandfather, and forestall Manuel's chances of attaining power. He would do so with the aid of the Genoese, and certainly the Turks as well. Thanks to Michel Balard's discoveries, we now know that at least a month before the battle of Kosovo, in May 1389, John VII was present in Genoa, doubtless maneuvering for political support. There he was acclaimed emperor, received loans, and remained until December 1389, or January 1390.[28] Meanwhile, John V and Manuel bided their time, wondering what would happen.

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[26]Dennis, op. cit., 142-159; Barker, op. cit., 59-69. On Kydones' contacts with Manuel during his exile on Lemnos, see R.-J. Loenertz, "L'exil de Manuel II Paléologue à Lemnos, 1387-1389," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 38/1 (1972): 116-140.

[27]For the document, see R.-J. Loenertz, "Fragment d'une lettre de Jean V Paléologue à la commune de Gênes, 1387-1391," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 51 (1958): 37-38, with Loenertz' commentary pp. 38-40.

[28]In 1962, John Barker established that John VII was probably in Genoa "before and up to his 1390 coup" (*Manuel II*, p. 235). Barker reached this conclusion after an exhaustive analysis of the later narratives (Doukas, Chalkokondyles, "Pseudo-Sphrantzes" [i.e. Makarios Melissenos], and the anonymous author of the Barberini Chronicle), compared with six Genoese and Venetian archival documents, all dating from 1390. In his conclusion, Barker cautioned that the evidence was circumstantial, and that the question could only be resolved following a "systematic search for and publication of any other surviving documents, especially Genoese, which would provide specific and undeniable testimony." ("John VII in Genoa: A problem in late Byzantine source confusion," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 28/1 [1962]: 213-238). In my opinion, Barker's study superbly illustrates the complexities of our sources for the later fourteenth century, and the difficulties of establishing something as simple yet fundamental as an emperor's itinerary. Barker himself, it would seem, did not hit upon the documents which eventually solved the puzzle. (His own research in the Genoese archives in 1974-1975, however, resulted in the discovery and publication of several fascinating documents from 1382, 1396, 1397, 1398, and

Such, in brief outline, is the feud which so debilitated the Palaiologoi between 1373 and 1389, and which plausibly underlies Kydones' comments on the Rhomaioi and their situation at the end of Letter 396. With this in mind, let us return to the questions previously posed.

It is likely, first of all, that the mysterious "inner fault" which Kydones attributes to the Rhomaioi is the recurring pattern of dynastic strife. Kydones characterizes this so obliquely, we may presume, because of his correspondent's identity — i.e., a member of the imperial family whose involvement in the chaos has been repeated.[29] Secondly, his parable of the return of the unclean spirit probably conveys his awareness that John VII was presently in Genoa agitating for help to foment a coup, and likewise his expectation that the young man would return shortly (*μετὰ μικρόν*) and prosecute that ambition. The "unclean spirit now wandering among others" does not, of course, designate John VII per se , but rather his seditious ambitions and plans, which he is entertaining with others (i.e. the Genoese), or which the latter are inciting. In the same vein, the "other [spirits] worse than itself" with whom this spirit will return likely alludes to the Ottomans, the predictable future allies of John VII and the Genoese. The house (*οἶκος*) whence this *ἀκάθαρτον πνεῦμα* came, and where it shall return, could refer symbolically to the Palaiologan household, or concretely to Silivri (where John VII was ruling as an Ottoman vassal), Constantinople, or in a wider sense the "empire of the Romans." Finally, Kydones' exhortation to "the emperors" must surely refer to John V, Manuel and

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1404. For these, see "Miscellaneous Genoese Documents on the Levantine World of the Late Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries," *Byzantine Studies/Études Byzantines* 6 [1979]: 49-82). A further clue to John VII's movements in Italy emerged in 1976, when E. Lappa-Zizicas edited and discussed an inscription in a gospel book owned by Pietro Filargis (the future pope Alexander V), and now in the Benaki collection. Composed by Filargis himself, the note records that the latter had received the book in 1392 as a gift from Maria, the mother of emperor John Palaiologos, when she came with her son to Ticino in Liguria ("Le voyage de Jean VII Paléologue en Italie," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 34 [1976], 139-142, with the text on pp. 140-141). While documenting John VII and Maria's journey to Italy, the inscription nonetheless compounded the problem by dating their visit to 1392, rather than sometime before spring 1390. In 1978, Balard at last identified documents attesting to John VII's presence in Italy precisely as Barker conjectured — "before and up to his 1390 coup." These indicated that he was in Genoa in May 1389, and suggested that he sailed east the following December or January (*La Romanie Génoise (XIIe - début du XVe siècle)*, I, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 235. [Rome: École française de Rome, 1978], p. 94, note 320). The confusion created by the Filargis inscription was subsequently clarified by P. Schreiner, who established in 1984 that Filargis probably penned the lines years after he received the book, and that it doubtless refers to late 1389. (See his "Una principessa bulgara a Genova," in ed. G. Pistarino, *Genova e la Bulgaria nel medioevo* [Genova, 1984], 229-232).

[29] Ćirković of course recognized this: "Verovatno je to aluzija na podeljenost i zavadjenost u vrxovima Carstva." ("Dimitrije Kidon," 215). In his essay "Contribution à l'histoire de la conquête turque en Thrace aux dernières décades du siècle," I. Dujčev simply narrates the content of this letter without deciphering its meaning (*Études Balkaniques* 9/2 [1973]: 91).

John VII collectively. Here, it seems to me, Kydones tacitly expresses his hope that they will find a diplomatic solution, and avoid yet another struggle for control of Constantinople.

Interpreting Letter 396 in this way, it is apparent that Kydones' frame of mind in late June 1389 was hardly optimistic. He was obsessed by fear that the imperial city would once again become a battleground, and that John VII would win the struggle. He contemplated whatever happened in that legendary battle in Serbia from this perspective of fear, and his responses were restrained and circumscribed. To sum it all up, when the news of Kosovo arrived, the ex-mesazōn felt gratified that the accursed Murād had perished. Returning his gaze to his homeland, however, he recognized that nothing much had changed and that the future was precarious, with or without Murād.

As events would show, Kydones' apprehensions were entirely justified. By early 1390, some seven months after Kosovo, John VII had returned to Rumili, intent on staging his coup. In April he laid siege to Constantinople, aided by the Genoese and the new sultan. After occupying the city the night of April 13/14, John VII ruled for three months. Then he lost his throne when Manuel recovered the city for his father, and himself.[30]

Letter 398 (Vat. gr. 101, f. 47-47v)

In contrast to Letter 396, Letter 398 is somewhat more celebratory in tone. Relevant here are the first twenty lines, which may be translated as follows:

> Was it necessary that you be away from us, now when the Savior has granted the community of Christians such a great favor, that you not join in celebrating with us, raising thank offerings to God for our common freedom, and deliberating so that the remants of the impious be utterly destroyed? Was it necessary that you sit unconcerned with the farmers on Lemnos, like some other useless burden to the earth, when you are such a one as none of the Rhomaioi, not only in war, but in everything else by which men are distinguished? I cannot believe that someone would say that anything stranger than this has ever happened. This is affirmed in the common opinion and rumor of all. From everyone it is heard: "If he were now with us, nothing would hinder [us] from driving the force of barbarians across the frontiers. But now we seem to enjoy good fortune only by half, for we are not contributing our [share] to what we have received from God." This, everyone prophesies, will render the divine gift

[30] Barker, *Manuel II*, 70-79.

useless to us. Thus your present absence overshadows our pleasure at the defeat of [our] enemies.

In the following lines, Kydones prays that God and the emperor, i.e. Manuel's father, John V, will secure Manuel's return, so that Manuel may join his father in attending to matters of war.[31]

Clearly Kydones wrote this letter after receiving word that the Ottomans had definitely suffered a defeat, an event which allegedly evoked great joy and hope amongst the Constantinopolitans. Moreover, he writes of it in terms approximating Salutati's interpretation of Kosovo — i.e., as a victory authored by God, who intervened to facilitate the freeing of his people, the community of Christians. Kydones does not, however, suggest that this development in fact liberated the Christian community, or at least the Rhomaioi. Rather, he believes it provides an opportunity for that process to begin, and affirms that the Rhomaioi must actively collaborate with God to achieve their freedom. In the core of the passage, Kydones delineates his vision of this collaboration, and likewise confesses his pessimism that it would ever come about. His vision, quite simply, is that Manuel's current political status will be reversed. At such a critical moment, Kydones intimates, Manuel's exile on Lemnos is as useless to the Rhomaioi as was Achilles' withdrawal to his tent.[32] He finds it preposterous that a man of Manuel's military and intellectual abilities should not be in

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[31] ed. R.-J. Loenertz, *Démétrius Cydonès Correspondance*, Ep. 398.1-20, on pp. 352-353: "*Σὲ δὲ ἐχρῆν νῦν ἡμῖν μὴ παρεῖναι, τηλικαύτης τῷ κοινῷ τῶν Χριστιανῶν χάριτος παρὰ τοῦ Σωτῆρος δοθείσης, καὶ μὴ συμπανηγυρίζειν μὲν ἡμῖν καὶ χαριστήρια Θεῷ τῆς κοινῆς ἐλευθερίας ἀνάπτειν, συμβουλεύειν δὲ καὶ ὅπως λοιπὸν μέχρι τέλους τὰ ἐγκαταλείμματα τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἐξολοθρευθήσεται, ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ Λήμνῳ μετὰ τῶν γεωργῶν ὥσπερ ἄλλο τι τῆς γῆς ἐτώσιον ἄχθος ἀμεληθέντα καθῆσθαι, τοῖον ἐόντα οἷον οὔ τις Ῥωμαίων, οὐκ ἐν πολέμῳ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅπηποτ' ἂν ἄνδρες ἀριπρεπέες τελέθουσιν; ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ οἶδ' εἴ τι τῶν πώποτε γενομένων τούτου παραδοξότερον εἶποι τις ἄν. τοῦτο δὲ καὶ τῇ κοινῇ πάντων γνώμῃ καὶ βοῇ βεβαιοῦται. πάντων γάρ ἐστιν ἀκούειν ὡς νῦν τοῦ δεῖνος παρόντος οὐδὲν ἂν ἐκώλυεν ὑπὲρ τοὺς ὅρους τὴν τῶν βαρβάρων δύναμιν ἐλαθῆναι. νῦν δ' ἐξ ἡμισείας δοκοῦμεν εὐτυχηκέναι, τοῖς παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ μὴ καὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων εἰσφερομένων. ὃ πάντες ἀνωφελῆ ποιήσειν ἡμῖν καὶ τὰ θεῖα δῶρα μαντεύονται. οὕτως ἡ σὴ νῦν ἀπουσία τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν πολεμίων ἥττης ἡδονὴν ἀμαυροῖ. ἀλλὰ ταύτην μὲν ἡμῖν ἀκεραίαν Θεός τε καὶ βασιλεὺς ἀποδοίεν, ἐπαναγαγόντες τὸν Θεῷ μὲν κοινῇ μετὰ πάντων τῶν γεγενημένων χάριν εἰσόμενον, βασιλεῖ δὲ συναγωνιούμενον πρὸς τὰ λοιπὰ τοῦ πολέμου.*"

[32] Kydones signals the simile when he describes Manuel sitting unconcerned, like a "useless burden to the earth" (*τῆς γῆς ἐτώσιον ἄχθος*, 398.8) and extols him as unique "in everything else by which men are distinguished" (*ὅπηποτ' ἂν ἄνδρες ἀριπρεπέες τελέθουσιν*, 398.10). The phrase "*ἐτώσιον ἄχθος*" echoes Achilles' description of himself to Thetis: "[I] sit here beside my ships, a useless weight on the good land" (Il. 18.104), just as "*ἄνδρες ἀριπρεπέες τελέθουσιν*" instantly recalls Phoinix's address to Achilles, reminding him of when he was a child, "who knew nothing yet of the joining of battle nor of debate where men are made pre-eminent" (Il. 9.440-441). (I have quoted here R. Lattimore's translation, in *The Iliad of Homer* [Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1951], p. 210, p. 378).

Constantinople — implicitly acknowledged as John V's heir, serving as his co-emperor, and devising with him an aggressive stance against the Turks. Thus he prays that this will change — in other words that John V will alter his whole policy, whatever the repercussions vis-à-vis John VII and the Ottomans. He affirms, moreover, that the populace at large shares his assessment, but that no one is optimistic that the opportunity at hand will be exploited. Implicitly this also includes Kydones, despite his earnest prayer that God will ordain the contrary.

These intriguing twenty lines raise two questions: what was the defeat to which Kydones refers, and to what extent is his depiction of the Constantinopolitans' reaction merely rhetorical exagerration, designed to flatter and comfort Manuel?

For those who persist in viewing Kosovo Polje as a "smashing Ottoman triumph," the answer to the first question is straightforward. Between autumn 1387, when John V exiled Manuel to Lemnos, and autumn 1389, when Manuel probably returned to Constantinople, the only known Ottoman defeat was the one which Kavala Šahin suffered at Bileća, on August 27, 1388. Consequently, Kydones' Letter 398 must have been written in response to that event. Such was Loenertz's deduction, which many have followed.[33] Ćirković, on the other hand, questioned whether the encounter at Kosovo in fact resulted in an "Ottoman triumph" and read Letter 398 rather differently. He insisted, first of all, that the arrangement of the letters in the manuscript is chronological, and that reversing the order (i.e. presuming that Letter 398 [Vat. Gr. 101, f. 47-47v] preceeds Letter 396 [Vat. Gr. 101, f. 101, f. 46-46v]) without compelling reason is arbitrary. Moreover, he argued that the battle of Bileća was little more than a local skirmish, documented only at Ragusa, the consequences of which Kydones and his compatriots would not have construed as a heaven-sent opportunity to "destroy the remnants of the impious," or "drive the barbarians across the frontiers." Thus Ćirković conluded that Kydones plausibly wrote Letter 398 with reference to Kosovo Polje. It reflects, in other words, a subsequent set of reports arriving in Constantinople — rumors which depicted whatever happened at the

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[33]Loenertz first dated this letter to the aftermath of Bileća in his "Manuel Paléologue et Démétrius Cydonès, Remarques sur leurs correspondances (Troisième série)," *Échos d'Orient* 37 (1938): 123 (referring then to the letter which Cammelli had numbered 166). Loenertz reiterated this view in 1947, in *Les recueils de lettres de Démétrius Cydonès* (p. 119); in his 1960 edition of the letter (p. 352); and in his 1972 study of Kydones' correspondance with Manuel during the latter's exile on Lemnos ("L'exil de Manuel II Paléologue à Lemnos," pp. 135-136). Barker accepted Loenertz's dating in his *Manuel II* (p. 66). Dujčev, on the other hand, apparently accepted Loenertz' placement of the letter to late 1388, but supposed, for reasons he did not explain, that it referred to the battle of Pločnik ("Contribution à l'histoire," p. 90). This is patently impossible, since Manuel was not dwelling on Lemnos in 1386, when Lazar scored his victory at Pločnik (see above, note 3).

battle as an unqualified defeat. Kydones' reaction in Letter 398 therefore anticipates or parallels Salutati, who, as we have seen, envisioned the battle in these terms in October 1389.[34]

Ćirković's view of this letter is fascinating because it transcends the stock assumptions which Loenertz and others have made concerning Kosovo, leading us to wonder if Kydones' Letter 398 documents insurrectionist sentiment brewing in Constantinople in late summer or autumn 1389. Before accepting Ćirković's thesis, however, we must establish that his reasons for placing the letter in the aftermath of Kosovo, rather than that of Bileća, are cogent. Unfortunately, this is difficult to do. The arrangment of the letters in the manuscript is slender proof, since many of Kydones' letters clearly are not in chronological order, particularly those for the 1380s.[35] Secondly, and this brings us to our second question, the content of Kydones' remarks hardly guarantees that Letter 398 transmits the reverberations of a "major battle" such as Kosovo, and not a "minor skirmish" such as Bileća. It is not impossible, first of all, that rumors of Kavala Šahīn's defeat circulated throughout the Balkans in highly exagerrated form, and that the absence of independent, contemporary attestations to this is purely a matter of chance. In this case, Kydones might indeed have written to Manuel as enthusiastically as he did, perhaps even reflecting popular opinion, in honest naivité. Alternatively, he might have exploited reports of a minor Turkish defeat in far-away Bosnia merely as a pretext for idealizing Manuel as the perfect rhētōr-warrior (which theme he elaborates in the last half of the letter), attributing to the populace appropriately flattering, but fictive, sentiments and reactions. In short, the internal clues in Letter 398 are so vague, and lend themselves to such variable interpretation, that we cannot exclude the possibility that Kydones wrote this letter as Loenertz supposed, following the battle of Bileća, in autumn 1388.

By the same token, however, there is no reason to dismiss Ćirković's views out of hand, since the themes of the passage are not inconsistent with the circumstances of late summer or autumn 1389. Within weeks of his accession, Bāyazīd faced a serious military and political crisis in Anatolia. Six of the most important rulers undertook a variety of anti-Ottoman actions, the overall aim of which was to dismantle the hegemony which Murād had built up in the western and central sectors of the peninsula. This was a critical challenge, and would drain Ottoman military resources from Rumili for six months to a year.[36] It

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[34]"Dimitrije Kidon," 216-219; regarding Salutati's letter, see above n. 19.

[35]Establishing the correct chronological order of any collection of Byzantine letters is a nightmarishly difficult task, and most "chronotaxeis" are open to continuous revision. In 1972, Loenertz concluded that the plausible order of Kydones' correspondance with Manuel from 1387-1389 was as follows: 370, 368 and 368*, 372, 373, 381, 374, 379, 382, 383, 385, 380, 387, 390, 388, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 402, 398, 403, 397, 404, 396, 401 and 401*, and finally 410 ("L'exil de Manuel II Paléologue à Lemnos," pp. 119-138).

[36]See appendix, below.

might be argued that these circumstances provided the Byzantines an opportunity to shake off their vassalage to the Ottomans, further complicating Bāyazīd's problems. Those so inclined, moreover, would very likely have looked to Manuel for leadership, given his determined and courageous resistance to Čandarlı Hayreddīn Paša in Thessaloniki. If Kydones wrote Letter 398 sometime after Letter 396, as Ćirković supposes, might his circumscribed optimism reflect his conviction that the bloodletting at Kosovo, the disorders accompanying Bāyazīd's accession, and the impending or subsequent transport of many remaining Rumilian troops to Anatolia provided a golden opportunity to attack the Ottomans? If so, was Kydones no longer obsessed by fears of John VII, or did he expect that particular threat to evaporate if John V and Manuel quickly allied, threw off Ottoman suzerainty, and recovered what territory they could?

Given the state of the evidence, it is impossible to resolve these questions, and prudent to imitate Laonikos Chalkokondyles, who left his comparison of the Greek and Turkish views of the battle of Kosovo Polje by advising his readers to choose whichever version they preferred — *ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ἴτω, ὅπῃ ἑκάστῳ προσφιλὲς ἡγεῖσθαι περὶ αὐτῶν.*[37] In Letter 396, Kydones was certainly reacting to the news of Kosovo, and his response apparently was clouded by his anxieties over John VII's anticipated coup d'état. That much we may accept. The context of Letter 398, on the other hand, is ambiguous and we cannot presently resolve whether Kydones was writing with reference to Bileća or Kosovo Polje. Nonetheless, whether we attribute it to 1388 or 1389, perhaps the most significant theme of this passage is the pessimism circumscribing Kydones' sense of opportunity — his conviction that in the end, John V most likely would preserve the status quo, implicitly for the classic reasons, even when presented with an allegedly golden opportunity for change. Here again events would justify Kydones' pessimism, since John V indeed retained his ties with the Ottomans in the aftermath not only of Bileća and Kosovo Polje, but also his restoration to the throne in September 1390.[38]

III

Our uncertainties regarding the meaning of these letters illustrates a fundamental characteristic of litterati such as Kydones and his royal friend. They wrote and even preserved texts such as these essentially for themselves, for their little world of fellow mandarins who knew all the codes, beginning with the Kunstsprache, and who esteemed these "icons of the soul" less as repositories of information than as conversations within their circle, the artful ties that bound them one to another. Since they did not write for outsiders, and no one alive

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[37] *Laonici Chalcocandylae historiarium demonstrationes*, 54.10-11.

[38] Cf. Barker, *Manuel II*, 78-9.

knows all the codes, we necessarily contemplate their polished gems through a wall of semi-opaque glass. Sometimes, to be sure, we can recognize what we see, discerning the dates and data we hope to find. But frequently we cannot, and thus can only smile at the cleverness of these mandarins who preserved their wall, kept their secrets, and consequently held future *βάρβαροι* at bey.

In conclusion, Professor Ćirković's interpretation of Kydones' letters 396 and 398 remains a significant hypothesis. Whatever its future fate, it reminds us, for the present, how remarkably little we know not only about the first battle of Kosovo, but likewise the opening months of Yıldırım Bāyazīd's rule — a time when the structure of Murād's empire was shattered in Anatolia, and may well have been weakened, if momentarily, in Rumili.

APPENDIX: DID YA'QŪB ČELEBI DIE AT KOSOVO POLJE?

According to C. Imber, the Anatolian crisis Bāyāzid experienced soon after his accession may have been compounded by dynastic strife, since, in his view, the date of Bāyazīd's surviving coins (i.e., A. H. 792, commencing 20 December 1389) might suggest that Bāyazīd did not attain power, or at least did not openly declare his sovereignty, until some six months after the battle (*The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1481* [Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1990], 37). Implicitly, therefore, Ya'qūb was not executed at Kosovo, but struggled with his younger brother during that interval. The argument is of course speculative, since the majority of our narrative sources posit a two-step succession drama (i.e. Ya'qūb's execution and Bāyazīd's accession) at Kosovo Polje.

In assessing Imber's thesis, the contemporary source of immediate interest is the Venetian Senate Deliberation record of July 23, 1389. (For the text, see ed. S. Ljubić, *Listine o odnašajih izmedju južnoga slavenstva i mletačke republike*, vol. 4, Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. 4 [Zagreb: Fr. Župan (Albrecht i Fiedler), 1874], #384, pp. 269-70. For a partial but not entirely accurate translation, see Emmert, *Serbian Golgotha*, 48). This document contains two important passages pertinent to the succession. In its opening lines, reference is made to the news the senators have received "of the death of Murād and of [his] son, and of the new lordship of [his] other son" ("nova, que habentur de morte Morati et filii, et de novo dominio alterius filii," ed. Ljubić, op. cit., 269). The remainder of the document records the instructions for Andrea Bembo, whom the senators are dispatching to Constantinople to oversee Venice's accommodation to the new state of affairs. His initial mandate was to order the vice-baiulò in Constantinople to assemble the communal council, which would deliberate the utility of sending an envoy, i.e. Bembo, to meet with Murād's successor. Again the document does not designate the latter by name, but merely as "that one who shall be in the imperial place of Murād" ("illius, qui erit in imperio loco Morati," ibid., 269). The *commissio* then outlines what Bembo should communicate to Murād's successor, in the event the commune deems such an embassy appropriate. First of all, the senators authorize Bembo to present letters of credence, but urge, as a precaution, that one set be prepared for one of Murād's sons, and a second for the other. Bembo then would offer the appropriate one once he arrived at court and knew who was ruling ("et si deliberabunt [i.e. the Constantinopolitan council], quod ire debeat [i.e. Bembo], tunc

in bona gratia vadat et se presentet cum nostris litteris credulitatis, que ad cautelam fiant in personam amborum filiorum Morati separate, ut presentet illam illi, qui dominabitur." Ibid., 269) Next the document records what Bembo should verbally convey to the new sultan. Relevant here are three of the authorized statements: (1) that prior to Bembo and company's departure from Venice, the Senate was apprised, although not clearly, of the war and the strange event (novitas) which had transpired between Murād and count Lazar, regarding which a variety of incredible things were being said ("dicere debeat, quod subtus partitam glaearum presentium de Venetiis ad audientiam dominationis nostre venerat, sed non clare, bellum et novitas, quod fuerat inter magnificum dominum Moratum, qua patrem suum et comitem Lazarum, de quo diversa dicebantur, quibus fides bene preberi non poterat." Ibid., 269); (2) that in any event the Senate had heard of Murād's death, which evoked its displeasure; ("Sed tamen dominatio nostra audiverat de morte ipsius domini Morati, de qua maximam displicentiam habuerat," ibid., 269); and (3) that the senators have likewise heard that the son of Murād, (i.e. the one whom Bembo finds enthroned), has succeeded to the power and lordship of his father, on which they extend congratulations ("Similiter audivimus de felici creatione sua ad imperium et dominium ipsius patris sui, de quo nos fueramus valde letati, ..." Ibid., 269). We may deduce from the foregoing that five weeks after the battle of Kosovo Polje, the Venetian authorities felt certain that Murād had engaged in a war with knez Lazar. They were perplexed, however, by the various stories they had heard about what transpired either in that context or its aftermath. They did believe that Murād and one of his sons had died, and that Murād's other son consequently had attained the throne. Moreover, they possibly had heard that Murād was assassinated, alluding to that event, in the deliberation record, as a "novitas." On the other hand, the senators clearly did *not* know which of Murād's sons had died, and conversely which had attained the throne. They further presumed, rather curiously, that their representatives in Constantinople were and might well remain similarly uninformed — i.e. until an envoy actually arrived at the Ottoman court and determined the identity of Murād's surviving son. Hence their insistance that two sets of letters of credence be prepared, one addressed to one son, another to the other. That much we may confidently extract from the document. Let us observe, conversely, that the notes do not intimate that the Venetians believed Murād's recently deceased son died during his father's war with Lazar, or that he was murdered in a succession dispute. Similarly, they do not suggest an awareness that Murād's surviving son was elevated to power in the context of the battle, i.e. immediately after Murād's death.

For present purposes, the key importance of the July 23 senate deliberation record is its indication that one of Murād's sons died in chronological proximity to his father, and that the other had established himself in power between June 15 and, at the latest, early July. (We presume here approximately a fortnight for a very rapid communication from the Balkans or points south to Venice). If this information is correct, the identification of the former with Ya'qūb and the latter with Bāyazīd is straightforward. (There is, after all, no credible evidence that Murād had additional surviving sons in 1389, and Bāyazīd assuredly was alive when the Venetians were deliberating on July 23). Thus, we could justifiably conclude that whatever the conflict which unfolded between Bāyazīd and his elder brother, it terminated quickly (at most within a few weeks) — if not at Kosovo Polje, then elsewhere. At this juncture we may ask, what other contemporary evidence might be adduced to corroborate or amplify the Venetian document?

Three western authors writing variously in 1389 and the 1390s affirmed that a son or sons of Murād were killed at Kosovo. In his letter to Tvrtko of Bosnia dated October 20, 1389, Coluccio Salutati claimed that two of Murād's sons were killed at

the Field of Blackbirds. (Emmert, *Serbian Golgotha*, 46, and see above, note 19). Also in 1389, in his *Songe du vieil Pelerin*, Philippe de Mézières asserted that Murad "and his son" died in the battle (see Emmert, op. cit., 176, n. 18, for the French text). Seven years later, in his *Epistre lamentable et consolatoire*, the same author emended his views slightly, stating that "Amourath and one or two of his sons died valliantly" (ibid., in Emmert's translation on p. 50, with the French on p. 176, n. 19). Finally, in what appears to be an account of Kosovo, curiously entered *sub anno* 1395, the monastic chronicler of Saint Denys reports that Murād died along with one of his sons (ibid., in Emmert's translation, p. 52). The value of these assertions is difficult to assess, since their underlying sources are not specified. (Salutati, however, may well have derived his information from Tvrtko's anterior letter.) In any event, we may at least observe that a few contemporary writers in Florence and Paris presumed that one or more of Murād's sons died with him at Kosovo, evidently in the battle.

The earliest extant text which posits the death of an Ottoman prince at Kosovo, and moreover identifies him by name, appears to be an anonymous Catalan romance entitled *Història de Jacob Xalabín* (most recently edited by A. Pacheco, Els nostres clàssics, Collecció A, vol. 93 [Barcelona: Editorial Barcino, 1964], with an important introductory essay pp. 5-48). The identity of the author is unknown; possibly he had served the Ottomans as a mercenary. He wrote, so it would seem, sometime in the first decade of the fourteenth century (ibid., p. 38). His objective was to celebrate Ya'qūb Čelebi's nobility and honor (besmirched by the lascivious desires of his stepmother, the Greek "Issa Xalabina"), and implicitly to lament his failure to succeed his father as sultan. The concluding sections (ibid., 139-149) recount Murād's conflict with knez Lazar, including the battle at Kosovo Polje, rather fancifully. Relevant here is the author's claim that at the conclusion of the battle, Bāyazīd not only dispatched the mortally wounded Murād, but then summoned and personally murdered Ya'qūb (ibid., 148). It is likely, of course, that the novelist ascribed these actions to Bāyazīd to villify him, doubly, as a parricide and fratricide. Even so, one wonders if this construction was arbitrary, or if it reflects the fact that Bāyazīd's succession was arranged by those who resolved to block Ya'qūb, and that Bāyazīd immediately ordered the entrapment and execution of his brother. In other words, does this version, distorted as it may be, corroborate the standard mid and late fifteenth century accounts?

Before attempting a judgement, let us consider the curious account in a Florentine chronicle more or less contemporary with the *Història de Jacob Xalabín* — the anonymous *Cronica volgare dal 1385 al 1409*. (Emmert, op. cit., has brought the text to light and translated it in full, pp. 180-184 [= note 33]). According to this author, who may have been Andrea di Niccolo Minerbetti, the events of Kosovo extended over seven days, and Murād was accompanied by four sons in all. Of these the author identifies only one by name, i.e. "Baisetto". The battle lasted two days, with frightful carnage on both sides, and it ended when the Serbs, including their leader, withdrew. On that same day two of Murād's sons were killed and buried in the vicinity. Two days later, in a plot to avenge his honor, Lazar returned and succeeded in stabbing Murād, who then suffered in agony for thee days. In his final hours the sultan enjoined his two surviving sons (his nameless eldest son and Bāyazīd) to care for all those surviving the battle, and ordered the beheading of Lazar and his companions. Perhaps the most intriguing part of the chronicler's narrative, at least for our purposes, is his version of the aftermath of Kosovo — in which time frame he situates the succession struggle. Following Murād's death, the eldest surviving son and Bāyazīd hastened to Turkey, where the former "was made signore of the land and was called the new Moratto. But he remained signore very shortly, for his brother killed him and took

over the rule of the land for himself. He was called Baisetto and afterward did great things." (Ibid., 183 [Emmert's translation]). Much of this narrative is patently, indeed entertainingly inventive. Considering, however, that the author might have encountered some solid information (emanating perhaps from a Genoese informant?), we cannot summarily discard it as nonsense. Consequently, is his assertion that Bāyazīd attained power by eliminating his brother fictive, or does it corroborate the Catalan novelist and subsequent Ottoman tradition? Similarly, is his setting for the succession struggle merely an aberration, or does it reflect (and hence document) the sequence of events Colin Imber has proposed?

In drawing our conclusions, we cannot of course simpy harmonize the evidence into a new amalgam, like medieval exegetes addressing the vagaries and contradictions of scripture. Our sources, albeit "contemporary," are far too intractible and elusive, and our mentality (let us hope) is somewhat different. Ultimately, and unfortunately, we must simply resort to calculations of plausibility. We can accept, to be sure, that Ya'qūb died in 1389, a casualty in Bāyazīd's rise to power. Moreover, I see no reason to discount the chronology embedded in the Venetian document of July 23, and therefore suppose that at least a fortnight or so prior Ya'qūb had met his end, and Bāyazīd was established as sultan. As regards the locale and character of this "succession drama," our assessment must turn not on the date of Bāyazīd's coins, which proves little, but rather the credibility of the two major versions at our disposal — that which situates the episode at Kosovo, with a quick entrapment and execution of Ya'qūb on the spot, and that which posits a brief period of direct conflict between the two brothers elsewhere, terminating in Bāyazīd's victory. The latter, to be sure, is chronologically feasible. Nonetheless, I am inclined to favor the former version because it is just possible that the Catalan romance, despite its absurdities and obvious bias, echoes a reality independently and (mirabile dictu) correctly transmitted in the later narratives, Greek as well as Turkish. Likewise the information which Salutati obtained, and the rumors circulating in Paris, may reflect, in a generalized way, the fact that Ya'qūb died at Kosovo. It is conceivable, therefore, that Bāyazīd indeed effected his brother's death, shortly after Murād expired, obviously with the collaboration of those who, for reasons still obscure, preferred that Ya'qūb not attain the throne. Let us admit, nonetheless, that the evidence is by no means decisive, and that the Florentine chronicler (and hence Dr. Imber) might be right. As with so many aspects of Bāyazīd's reign, we await better sources, and meanwhile must rest content with the ambiguous.

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