PART I

Introduction and political setting

CHAPTER I

The topic and the sources

This book is a study of the political attitudes that emerged among different segments of Byzantine society in response to the Ottoman expansion. Its principal aims are, first, to categorize these attitudes with regard to specific groupings among the urban and rural populations of the Byzantine Empire (e.g. the aristocracy, merchants, lower classes, ecclesiastical and monastic circles) and, secondly, to explore the underlying social and economic factors, besides the more apparent political and religious ones, that played a role in the formation of political attitudes. In an atmosphere of extreme political and military instability marked by a number of civil wars and foreign invasions during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, people from different segments of Byzantine society in different regions of the empire sought by various means to secure their best interests in the face of the rapidly expanding Ottoman Empire. How they reacted to the Ottoman advance, the kinds of solutions they sought, the preferences they developed with respect to foreign alliances, and the local factors that played a role in regional variations are complex issues that merit careful investigation. In themselves, the options that were available as far as foreign political orientations are concerned were perhaps limited, consisting of either a cooperation with the Latin West against the Ottomans, or an accommodation with the Ottomans, or, in rejection of both, the maintenance of an opposition to the Ottomans by means of the empire's own resources and capacities.[1] What is, however, more complex and of greater interest for the purposes of

[1] During the first half of the fourteenth century, a cooperation with the Orthodox Balkan states against the Ottomans was another option that some Byzantines had tried, but it was no longer operative in the period covered by the present work. See D. A. Zakythinos, "Démétrius Cydonès et l'entente balkanique au XIVe siècle," in Zakythinos, *La Grèce et les Balkans* (Athens, 1947), pp. 44–56; J. W. Barker, "The question of ethnic antagonisms among Balkan states of the fourteenth century," in *Peace and War in Byzantium. Essays in Honor of George T. Dennis, S.J.*, ed. T. S. Miller and J. Nesbitt (Washington, DC, 1995), pp. 165–77; E. Malamut, "Les discours de Démétrius Cydonès comme témoignage de l'idéologie byzantine vis-à-vis des peuples de l'Europe orientale dans les années 1360–1372," in *Byzantium and East Central Europe*, ed. G. Prinzing and M. Salamon (= *Byzantina et Slavica Cracoviensia*, vol. III) (Cracow, 2001), pp. 203–19.

this study is the links that can be established between specific individuals or groups, their political dispositions, and their socioeconomic interests. Through a multilayered comparison of the views embraced by different groups within a given urban or rural environment and those embraced by members of the same group across different regions of the empire, the aim is to present political attitudes in all their complexity and ambivalence.

From what has been said above, it ought to be clear that this is not a study of late Byzantine politics as such. It has not been my intention to investigate the institutions and structures through which political choices were negotiated and implemented in the late Byzantine world. My main objective is to explore Byzantine attitudes towards the Ottomans and western Europeans, focusing on the political and religious views of individuals, families, and social groups, which previously have not been investigated adequately. Thus the reader should not be surprised to find that certain aspects of the political history of late Byzantium which seemed to have little relevance for an analysis of political attitudes have been overlooked in this book. It might have been worthwhile, for instance, to concentrate on the political process itself, which would have required an in-depth analysis of the role of the emperor, the imperial family, the aristocracy, the populace, and the clergy and monks in the politics of the late Byzantine Empire, as well as a discussion of the structure of the aristocratic family and how it affected Palaiologan imperial politics. But such themes would take us well beyond the parameters of the present study and constitute the subject matter of an entirely different book.

For the sake of convenience the attitudes corresponding to the three options enumerated above could be labeled as pro-Latin/anti-Ottoman, pro-Ottoman/anti-Latin, and anti-Latin/anti-Ottoman. But such labels, when used without qualification, conceal the nuances and variations involved in the formation of political attitudes. In the present work, the terms "pro-Ottoman," "pro-Latin," "anti-Ottoman," and "anti-Latin" are used most of the time to designate people who actively supported or opposed the Ottomans or the Latins. An effort is made to avoid these terms as much as possible in cases when the Byzantines showed an inclination to favor one or the other foreign group out of other considerations, such as in order to put an end to a siege or war, or so as to overcome hunger, famine, and/or poverty. It is preferable to speak in these cases of conciliatory attitudes or of attitudes of accommodation, and to try to outline the specific circumstances that led people to adopt particular political positions. Another term whose meaning and use require some explanation in advance is the word "Latin." In Byzantine texts the word appears both as

a collective designation for adherents to the Roman Catholic faith, and as a term describing people from specific political entities in the West, such as the Venetians, the Genoese, or the Navarrese. In this study the term is used in the latter sense primarily – that is, in reference to western European powers, and especially, but not exclusively, in reference to Italians, with whom many Byzantines had close economic and political contacts in the Palaiologan period. Following Byzantine practice, however, it is sometimes used in a predominantly religious sense as a synonym for "Catholic" as well. In either case, the context in which the term "Latin" appears reveals the sense in which it is being used if its specific meaning has not been pointed out.

Reduced politically, administratively, and economically, the Byzantine Empire in the late Palaiologan period had neither sufficient strength nor the means to resist the Ottomans on its own and consequently needed the assistance of foreign allies. In addition to the military pressure of the Ottomans, the weak and decentralized empire of the Palaiologoi faced the economic pressure of the Italian maritime states, which controlled much of its trade at this time. Furthermore, the appeals of the Byzantine state to the West for a joint military venture against the Ottomans were by necessity often addressed to the pope, who alone had sufficient influence and authority to unite and mobilize the diverse powers of Christian Europe towards such an enterprise. Yet on each occasion the Byzantines appealed to the papacy, they encountered the recurring response that the centuries-old schism that separated the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches had to be healed first, through the return of the latter to the former's fold. Such, then, was the dual challenge that Byzantium faced from the Ottoman and Latin worlds during the late Palaiologan period.

In terms of chronology, this study covers the pivotal period from the early 1370s, when Byzantium became a tributary vassal of the Ottomans, to 1460, the year in which Mistra and the so-called Despotate of the Morea fell to the forces of Mehmed the Conqueror. Geographically, it focuses on three major areas of the Byzantine Empire: Thessalonike, Constantinople, and the Morea.[2] Some general problems are addressed throughout the book with the purpose of establishing links between political attitudes and socioeconomic factors. These include, first, the impact of Byzantine–Ottoman military conflicts on economic and social life in the two cities mentioned above, and their influence on the political orientation of different segments of the urban population. Secondly, within the context of

[2] For the reasons underlying the exclusion of Trebizond from this work, see below, ch. 2, note 55.

rural areas encompassing the environs of Thessalonike and the province of Morea in the Peloponnese, the social and economic consequences of the loss of major productive Byzantine territories to the Ottomans are considered, with special emphasis on the political behavior of the landed aristocracy. The position of the members of ecclesiastical and monastic circles with regard to the Ottomans and the Latins constitutes another theme that is embedded in each individual treatment of the geographic regions named above.

These broad issues provide the framework for the specific questions which are explored in particular chapters. Chapter 2 is intended to set the historical background through a discussion of major political developments of the Palaiologan era, including some of the long-term consequences of the Fourth Crusade, the expansion of the Ottomans in Byzantine territories and their methods of conquest, as well as the official Byzantine policy towards the Ottomans, the western powers, and the papacy. In Part II, which is devoted to Thessalonike and its surrounding countryside, chapter 3 begins by presenting a general outline of the city's social structure, historical events, and the political attitudes of its inhabitants from 1382 to 1430. Chapters 4 and 5 supplement this overview with individual analyses of the social and economic conditions during three different administrations – Byzantine, Ottoman, and Venetian – under which the Thessalonians lived in the course of this period. With Part III we turn to Constantinople, the imperial capital. Chapter 6 examines the dissensions and rivalries within the Byzantine court, both among members of the ruling dynasty and among civil dignitaries, which opened the way for a considerable degree of Ottoman interference in the internal affairs of Byzantium during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Chapter 7 deals with the first Ottoman siege of Constantinople by Bayezid I, treating it as a case study for the specific economic adjustments, social tensions, and political responses to which a direct military threat from the Ottomans gave rise in the imperial city. In chapter 8 the dispositions of various individuals or social groups in Constantinople vis-à-vis the Ottomans, the Latins, and the question of Church union are set forth and analyzed within the context of the political, economic, and social developments of the last fifty years preceding the city's fall to the Ottomans in 1453. The final two chapters of the book, constituting Part IV, focus on the Despotate of the Morea. They pick up some of the themes addressed in connection with the countryside of Thessalonike and provide a comparative basis for highlighting the local factors that played a role in the attitudes embraced by the empire's rural populations within the realm of foreign politics.

This book is intended to close a gap in Byzantine studies, given that no comprehensive work has yet been undertaken on the political orientations of individuals or groups in Byzantine society during the period in question, even though several monographs are available on the political history of the late Byzantine Empire and its diplomatic relations with foreign states. There exist some specialized studies concerned with various aspects of the relations of Byzantium with the Ottomans and/or the Latins which take into account the political preferences of individuals or social groups, but the scope of these works is limited either chronologically, or geographically, or both. Such, for instance, is George T. Dennis' excellent monograph on the independent regime of Manuel II in Thessalonike from 1382 to 1387.[3] Klaus-Peter Matschke's inspiring book on the battle of Ankara and its aftermath, too, covers a relatively short period between 1402 and 1422. Moreover, within the general framework of Byzantine–Ottoman relations, this particular period which coincides with the Ottoman interregnum is quite unrepresentative, being marked by intense political instability and internal dissension unprecedented at any other point in Ottoman history.[4] Perhaps the study that comes closest to part of the subject matter of the present book is an article by Michel Balivet entitled "Le personnage du 'turcophile' dans les sources byzantines antérieures au Concile de Florence (1370–1430)," which, as its title indicates, is restricted to evidence from Byzantine sources, does not go beyond the Council of Florence, and is constrained in scope and range.[5] By contrast, the same author's more recent book on the contacts and exchanges between the Byzantine and Turkish worlds, which spans the eleventh to the nineteenth centuries, offers a global view yet lacks for obvious reasons a detailed and systematic treatment of the vast period under consideration.[6] As for Speros Vryonis' monumental book on the Turkification and Islamization of medieval Anatolia, this study focuses on a region that had by and large fallen out of the hands of the Byzantine Empire in the period treated by the present work.[7] Finally, much

[3] G. T. Dennis, *The Reign of Manuel II Palaeologus in Thessalonica, 1382–1387* (Rome, 1960).

[4] K.-P. Matschke, *Die Schlacht bei Ankara und das Schicksal von Byzanz; Studien zur spätbyzantinischen Geschichte zwischen 1402 und 1422* (Weimar, 1981). For Matschke's articles that are relevant to the present topic, see the Bibliography.

[5] *Travaux et Recherches en Turquie* 2 (1984), 111–29. This article and the same author's other essays on various aspects of Byzantine–Ottoman relations have been collected and reprinted in M. Balivet, *Byzantins et Ottomans: relations, interaction, succession* (Istanbul, 1999).

[6] M. Balivet, *Romanie byzantine et pays de Rûm turc: histoire d'un espace d'imbrication gréco-turque* (Istanbul, 1994).

[7] Sp. Vryonis, Jr., *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971). For Vryonis' articles that are of relevance to our subject matter, see the Bibliography.

relevant material on Byzantine–Ottoman relations can be found scattered throughout the voluminous works of Halil İnalcık, as illustrated by the abundance of references to his studies in my footnotes.[8]

Concerning Byzantine–Latin relations, on the other hand, research over the last few decades has made important strides, particularly with regard to the social and economic aspects of the topic. This book, in fact, owes a great deal to the pioneering works of Michel Balard, Nicolas Oikonomidès, and Angeliki E. Laiou which have laid the groundwork for demonstrating the commercial interests that linked part of the Byzantine aristocracy to the Italians in the Palaiologan period.[9]

In approaching a subject such as the present one, much depends on the kinds of primary sources used and their possible biases, and, in this particular case, on their position regarding the Ottomans and the Latins. It is, therefore, necessary to proceed with a discussion of the sources and the political attitudes they themselves stand for in order to be able to assess the reliability of the information they provide on the political attitudes of others. Among Byzantine sources, narrative histories ought to be mentioned first. For the period following 1370 there are the fifteenth-century histories of George Sphrantzes, Doukas, Laonikos Chalkokondyles, and Kritoboulos of Imbros, all written after the fall of Constantinople. Sphrantzes' work covers the period from 1401, the year of his birth, to 1477, and is written in the form of annalistic memoirs. Sphrantzes was a court official who served the last three emperors of Byzantium and held administrative functions both in the imperial capital and in the Despotate of the Morea. He went on several diplomatic missions and embassies to the Ottomans, the king of Georgia, Trebizond, the Morea, and Cyprus. He also lived through the Ottoman conquest, first, of Constantinople and, then, of the Morea, after which he fled to the Venetian island of Corfu. Hence, Sphrantzes was a well-informed historian as well as an active participant in the events about which he wrote.[10] During the conquest of Constantinople, Sphrantzes and

[8] See the Bibliography.

[9] See especially M. Balard, *La Romanie génoise (XIIe–début du XVe siècle)*, 2 vols. (Rome and Genoa, 1978); N. Oikonomidès, *Hommes d'affaires grecs et latins à Constantinople (XIIIe–XVe siècles)* (Montreal and Paris, 1979); A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis, "The Byzantine economy in the Mediterranean trade system, thirteenth–fifteenth centuries," *DOP* 34–5 (1982), 177–222; A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis, "The Greek merchant of the Palaeologan period: a collective portrait," *Πρακτικὰ τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν* 57 (1982), 96–132. For the current state of scholarship on this subject, see now K.-P. Matschke, "Commerce, trade, markets, and money: thirteenth–fifteenth centuries," in *EHB*, vol. II, pp. 771–806, esp. 789–99.

[10] On Sphrantzes, see R.-J. Loenertz, "Autour du Chronicon Maius attribué à Georges Phrantzès," in *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, vol. III (Vatican, 1946), pp. 273–311; G. Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica. Die byzantinischen Quellen der Geschichte der Türkvölker*, 2nd edn., vol. I (Berlin, 1958; repr. Leiden,

his family were taken captive by the Ottomans, but soon thereafter he was ransomed and a year later secured the ransom of his wife as well. Yet his children, whom Mehmed II bought for himself, remained under Ottoman domination. His son John, accused of plotting to assassinate the Sultan, was executed at the end of 1453, while his daughter Thamar died of an infectious disease in Mehmed II's harem in 1455.[11] The hardships Sphrantzes and his family suffered at the hands of the Ottomans, his flight, twice, from Ottoman-occupied places, and his eventual settlement in Venetian Corfu indicate that he had no sympathy at all for the Ottomans. In addition to signs of his pro-western inclinations, Sphrantzes is also known, just on the eve of the fall of Constantinople, to have favored the implementation of the Union of Florence and the appointment of Cardinal Isidore of Kiev as patriarch of Constantinople, "in the hope that various advantages would come from him."[12] Yet later, with the benefit of hindsight, he pointed to the Union of Florence as the major cause for the capture of the Byzantine capital and held this opinion at the time when he was composing his chronicle.[13]

Doukas, on the other hand, who lived most of his life in the service of the Genoese, first in New Phokaia, then on the island of Lesbos, not only fostered pro-Latin feelings but was also a staunch advocate of the union of Churches, which he viewed as the only policy capable of saving the Byzantine Empire. He, therefore, blamed the activities of the anti-unionists in Constantinople for the failure of the city before the Ottoman armies in 1453.[14] It is of interest to note that Doukas' grandfather, Michael Doukas, had been a partisan of John VI Kantakouzenos in the civil war of 1341–7 and, following his imprisonment by John VI's opponents, had fled from Constantinople and sought refuge in Ephesus with Isa Beg, the Turkish emir of Aydın. Doukas claims that his grandfather remained thereafter in the service of the Aydınoğlu dynasty, foreseeing that the Turks would soon take control over the European territories of the Byzantine Empire, just as they had conquered Asia Minor.[15] Yet, while the historian inherited his grandfather's dislike of the Palaiologos dynasty of Byzantium,[16] he chose a different course by orienting himself not towards the Turks but rather

1983), pp. 282–8; V. Grecu, "Georgios Sphrantzes. Leben und Werk. Makarios Melissenos und sein Werk," *BS* 26 (1965), 62–73.

[11] Sphrantzes–Grecu, pp. 98, 104, 106. [12] Ibid., p. 100. [13] Ibid., p. 58.

[14] Doukas–Grecu, pp. 315–19, 323–5, 327–9, 365. On Doukas, see W. Miller, "The historians Doukas and Phrantzes," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 46 (1926), 63–71; V. Grecu, "Pour une meilleure connaissance de l'historien Doukas," in *Mémorial Louis Petit* (Paris, 1948), pp. 128–41; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, vol. 1, pp. 247–51.

[15] Doukas–Grecu, pp. 41–7. [16] Ibid., pp. 49, 73.

towards the Latins, and entering the service of the Genoese in their eastern Mediterranean possessions. Despite his firm pro-Latin stance, Doukas tries to be objective in his narrative, which goes down to the year 1462, finding fault at times with the Genoese, at times with the Venetians, but particularly in his account of the union controversy he cannot conceal his partiality and biases.

While Sphrantzes and Doukas took as the theme of their histories the fall of the Byzantine Empire, the Athenian aristocrat Laonikos Chalkokondyles centered his work, covering the period 1298–1463, around the theme of the Ottomans and their rise to power. However, as far as Chalkokondyles' political preferences are concerned, he can be described as neither pro-Ottoman nor pro-Latin. When composing his history during the 1480s, he still cherished the hope that the day might come when the Byzantine people would be reunited within a state ruled by a Greek emperor.[17] Chalkokondyles, who spent the years 1435–60 at the court of the Despots in Mistra, provides a detailed firsthand account of events in the Peloponnese. For the rest, his narrative, though useful, is filled with chronological inaccuracies and requires the aid of other sources.

Kritoboulos of Imbros, another aristocratic author, differs from the three historians discussed above in terms of both his political standing and the scope of his work, which is a partial account of the reign of Mehmed II covering the years from 1451 to 1467. In 1453 Kritoboulos, through embassies to the Sultan and to Hamza Beg, the governor of Gallipoli (Gelibolu) and admiral of the Ottoman fleet, arranged for the peaceful surrender of the islands of Imbros, Lemnos, and Thasos in order to prevent their capture by force. Shortly thereafter, Kritoboulos' submission to the Sultan was rewarded by his assignment to Imbros as governor, a post he held until the island's capture by the Venetians in 1466.[18] He then fled to Ottoman Istanbul, where he wrote his history of Mehmed II, whom he regarded as "the supreme autocrat, emperor of emperors . . . lord of land and sea by the will of God."[19] In short, Kritoboulos was a representative of the group

[17] Chalkok.–Darkó, vol. 1, p. 2. On Chalkokondyles, see W. Miller, "The last Athenian historian: Laonikos Chalkokondyles," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 42 (1922), 36–49; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, vol. 1, pp. 391–7; A. Wifstrand, *Laonikos Chalkokondyles, der letzte Athener. Ein Vortrag* (Lund, 1972); N. Nicoloudis, *Laonikos Chalkokondyles, A Translation and Commentary of the "Demonstrations of Histories" (Books I–III)* (Athens, 1996), pp. 41–86; J. Harris, "Laonikos Chalkokondyles and the rise of the Ottoman Turks," *BMGS* 27 (2003), 153–70.

[18] Kritob.–Reinsch, pp. 85–6, 107. On Kritoboulos, see V. Grecu, "Kritobulos aus Imbros," *BS* 18 (1957), 1–17; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, vol. 1, pp. 432–5; G. Emrich, "Michael Kritobulos, der byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber Mehmeds II.," *Materialia Turcica* 1 (1975), 35–43.

[19] Kritob.–Reinsch, p. 3: "αὐτοκράτορι μεγίστῳ, βασιλεῖ βασιλέων Μεχεμέτει . . . κυρίῳ γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης θεοῦ θελήματι."

in Byzantium that opted for an accommodation and understanding with the Ottomans in the face of the political realities of the time, and that recognized Sultan Mehmed II as the legitimate successor of the Christian Byzantine emperors.

Besides the works of these four major historians, shorter works by Byzantine eyewitnesses to particular events have survived, such as an anonymous account of Bayezid I's blockade of Constantinople (1394–1402),[20] John Kananos' description of the siege of the capital by Murad II in 1422,[21] or John Anagnostes' account of the capture of Thessalonike by the same Sultan in 1430.[22] Since the last source is used extensively in the chapters on Thessalonike, its author merits a few words here. From what he writes, it appears that Anagnostes, a native Thessalonian, was not particularly fond of the Venetians who ruled his city during 1423–30 and seems to have shared the opinion of those who wished to surrender to Murad II's forces without resistance.[23] In the course of the city's conquest, Anagnostes fell captive to the Ottomans but soon afterwards regained his freedom along with many others by means of the money which the Serbian Despot George Branković offered for their ransom. The author then returned to the Ottoman-occupied city, even though he was to regret this later when, around 1432–3, Murad II began to institute a set of new policies, including the confiscation of religious and secular buildings, that hurt the interests of the Greek community in Thessalonike.[24] Finally, together with the more concise historical works used in this study, the Byzantine short chronicles ought to be mentioned as well, since one often finds in these brief and chronologically accurate notices invaluable information that is unattested elsewhere.[25]

Among the most important contemporary literary sources written by Byzantines are the works of Demetrios Kydones. The leading intellectual and statesman of his time, Kydones came from an aristocratic family of Thessalonike and started his political career as a partisan of John VI Kantakouzenos in the civil war of 1341–7. Following the latter's abdication in 1354, he entered the service of John V Palaiologos and held the post

[20] P. Gautier, "Un récit inédit sur le siège de Constantinople par les Turcs (1394–1402)," *REB* 23 (1965), 100–17.

[21] Giovanni Cananos, *L'assedio di Costantinopoli. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione, note e lessico*, ed. E. Pinto (Messina, 1977).

[22] Anagnostes–Tsaras. For an evaluation of this work, see Sp. Vryonis, Jr., "The Ottoman conquest of Thessaloniki in 1430," in *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society*, ed. A. Bryer and H. Lowry (Birmingham and Washington, DC, 1986), pp. 281–304.

[23] Anagnostes–Tsaras, pp. 6–8. [24] Ibid., pp. 56, 64–6.

[25] P. Schreiner (ed.), *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken*, 3 vols. (Vienna, 1975–9).