

“Inter graecos latinissimus, inter latinos graecissimus”: Bessarion zwischen den Kulturen. Claudia Märkl, Christian Kaiser, and Thomas Ricklin, eds. Pluralisierung & Autorität 39. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013. xx + 478 pp. \$168.

Bessarion’s importance is generally associated with the pivotal role he played in the transmission of the cultural legacy of the Greek world, well exemplified by the highly symbolic donation of his own library to the Serenissima Republic of Venice — his new “homeland” and “second Byzantium,” as he named it. Also emphasized is his uninterrupted political and diplomatic activity, aimed at uniting Eastern and Western Christians and at promoting a Crusade against their common enemy, the Ottomans (“an overriding goal,” to quote John Monfasani [347]). Bessarion’s exceptionalism also lies in his capacity to integrate himself into the Western world to an extent unparalleled by other Byzantine émigrés. Nevertheless, “the most Latin among the Greeks,” according to the words of Lorenzo Valla quoted in the title, had to personally face the difficulties of being perceived as a foreigner, and it was possibly his ethnic difference that precluded his ascent to the pontifical throne. Therefore, Bessarion was aware of the need for working out original solutions in order to accelerate the process of integration between Latins and Greeks, for instance, by promoting mixed marriages and (scholarly) stays of young Byzantines in the West. This is made clear by Panagiotis Kourniakos, whose approach, to analyze Bessarion’s figure through patterns of identity and assimilation, testifies to the novelty of the collection of essays under review. While “biographical studies on Bessarion have thus far tended to focus on his intellectual and literary accomplishments” (79), the editors have managed to put together contributions on Bessarion’s ecclesiastical career, pastoral and diplomatic activity, network of collaborators, and more, thus providing a wider picture of his life and achievements.

The opening essay, by Brigitte Tambrun-Krasker, focuses on the role of Hellenism in Bessarion’s education, and on his relation with his former teacher George Gemisthos Pletho. Though they worked from the same cultural premises and were united by a profound friendship, Pletho and Bessarion took opposite paths: Pletho, a staunch opponent of Roman Catholicism, was of the opinion that the Greeks had to find their own way under Ottoman rule and preserve their own cultural tradition without seeking compromises with the Latins; on the contrary, for Bessarion any form of coexistence with the Turks was simply not conceivable, and the Byzantines should instead appeal to the Westerners for help. These two conflicting visions were spread among the members of the Greek delegation at the Union Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438–39 (“the deciding break” in the life of Bessarion [71]), an aspect investigated by Sebastian Kolditz in his well-documented contribution on Bessarion and the Byzantine episcopacy.

Closely connected with Kolditz’s essay is Duane Henderson’s study of Bessarion as a cardinal of the Roman Church, a title that he held for more than thirty years.

Henderson focuses on Bessarion's relations with popes and princes of his time and on the various tasks he was assigned; his list of the commendatory benefices accumulated by Bessarion during his career illustrates how Bessarion, one of the poorer cardinals at the time of his election, improved his financial position over the following decades, parallel to his growing importance as one of the leading figures in the college of cardinals. Further details on Bessarion's biography emerge in Claudia Märkl's essay on Bessarion's embassy in Germany of 1460–61, as well as from Concetta Bianca's sketch of Bessarion's *familia*, i.e., the circle of his personal collaborators that included many more Westerners (from Italy, Spain, Germany, France) than Greeks. Holger A. Klein offers a detailed study of Bessarion's precious cross reliquary, now at the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice. Bessarion as a book collector and copyist is the topic chosen by Brigitte Mondrain, who provides, among other things, a transcription of an unpublished note found in a manuscript (now in Krakow) copied in 1468–69 by Demetrios Trivolis on behalf of Bessarion. Here the latter is referred to as "he who presides over the College of Cardinals" (i.e., the dean of cardinals); this mention, encomiastic as it is and though not corresponding to any official designation, testifies to the high esteem Bessarion enjoyed.

A handful of essays are devoted to Bessarion's literary oeuvre. Thomas Ricklin focuses on Bessarion's *Antiturcica*, namely the pamphlet *Instructio ad Predicandam Crucem* (1463) and the two orations *Ad Principes Italiae contra Turcos* (1471). Ricklin demonstrates how Bessarion's attempt to fashion himself as a new Demosthenes, urging the Western principalities to fight the Turkish invaders, turned into a failure, and shows that these works are indeed quite conventional pieces of rhetoric. John Monfasani focuses on the pamphlet *Against Plato's Slanderer*, which Bessarion composed to defend Pletho, who George of Trebizond had accused of being a neopagan. As Monfasani argues, Bessarion's strategy of not mentioning George's allegations and instead concentrating on the confutation of George's own erroneous interpretation of Plato eventually paid off; in fact, Pletho continued being read in the following centuries as a respectable author of philosophy, even by Catholic theologians. This work may be considered "something of a communal affair, with various members of his *Academia* contributing in ways large and small" (358) to its long revision process, which continued also after the editio princeps of 1469. This section is concluded by Sergei Mariev's essay on the debate that emerged after the publication of Pletho's *De Differentiis* and the composition of Bessarion's *De Natura et Arte*, and by Christina Abenstein's study on the translations of Basil of Caesarea's *De Spiritu Sancto* and *Adversus Eunomium*, realized by Trapezuntius under commission of Bessarion in 1440 and then harshly criticized by the cardinal.

Other contributions are not primarily focused on Bessarion: e.g., Alexander Riehle's essay, in which Bessarion appears only insofar as he is the addressee of some of the letters of his protégé Michael Apostolis; Nikolaus Egel's study on the diffusion of Ptolemy's

Geography (there is no hint of Bessarion ever being interested in this particular work, nor having played any role in its transmission, although two important manuscripts of it are part of his collection now at the Marciana library); Bernhard Kölbl's article on the diffusion of ancient Greek treatises on music from the late fifteenth century onward (Kölbl admits that it is virtually impossible to ascertain whether or not Bessarion actually worked on or even thoroughly read the musical manuscripts of his own library); and Christian Kaiser's paper on the opinions of Bessarion and other humanists, including George of Trebizond and his son Andreas, on Plato's ideal of love and on the allegations of pederasty that were made against him since antiquity.

This carefully edited and handsomely produced volume represents a real advancement in Bessarion studies. Given the monographic nature of this collection and in light of the fact that this will become a reference tool for years to come, it would have been preferable to have a unique bibliography at the end instead of separate bibliographical appendixes to each essay. This leads to the repetition of several titles and references and gives the impression of inconsistency due to the different treatments of the bibliographical items in the various appendixes.

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