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Oration "Si essemus ipsi" of Pope Pius II (22 September 1463, Rome). Edited and translated by Michael von Cotta-Schönberg. 4th version. (Orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II; 74)

Michael Cotta-Schønberg

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(Orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II; 74)

Oration "*Si essemus ipsi*" of Pope Pius II (22 September 1463, Rome). Edited and translated by Michael von Cotta-Schönberg

4th version

2019

Abstract

In Summer 1463, an embassy from the Duke of Burgundy came to the pope to announce the duke's promise of an important contingent of soldiers and of his personal participation in the crusade against the Turks. In a public consistory on 19 September, to which the pope had summoned the Italian envoys, the Burgundian embassy made a public announcement of Burgundy's participation. The following day, the pope invited the Italian ambassadors to a meeting and asked for their contribution to the crusade. Except the Venetians, with whom the pope already had an understanding, the Italian envoys declined to make firm commitments to the great cause, not having received powers from their masters to do so. The pope then, naturally, praised the Venetians, requesting that the other Italian states fulfil the commitments made at Congress of Mantua in 1459. After the meeting, the Florentine ambassador asked for a private audience with the pope in which he advised the pope to desert the Venetians and to let them and Turks destroy each other, thus freeing Italy from the fear of both powers. In the speech, "*Si essemus*", the pope politely but firmly rejected the Florentine proposal both on moral, military, and political grounds.

Keywords

Enea Silvio Piccolomini; Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini; Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini; Pope Pius II; Papa Pio II; Crusades against the Turks; Wars against the Turks; Venice; Florence; Venezia; Firenze; Italia; Italy; Renaissance orations; Renaissance oratory; Renaissance rhetorics; 1463; 15th century; Ottone Niccoloni; Otto Niccolini

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Foreword

In 2007, I undertook a project of publishing the Latin texts with English translations of the orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II. Altogether 80¹ orations (including papal responses to ambassadorial addresses) are extant today, though more may still be held, unrecognized, in libraries and archives.

At a later stage the project was expanded to include ambassadors' orations to the pope, of which about 40 are presently known.

I do not, actually, plan to publish further versions of the present volume, but I do reserve the option in case I – during my future studies - come across other manuscripts containing interesting versions of the oration or if important new research data on the subject matter are published, making it appropriate to modify or expand the present text. It will therefore always be useful to check if a later version than the one the reader may have previously found via the Internet is available.

I shall much appreciate to be notified by readers who discover errors and problems in the text and translation or unrecognized quotations.

12 September 2019

MCS

¹ 81 orations, if the "*Cum animadverto*" is counted as a Piccolomini-oration, see oration "*Quam laetus*" [18], Appendix

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Context¹

In September 1463, Pope Pius achieved a remarkable success for his grand crusade project: an embassy had come to Rome to announce the Duke of Burgundy's promise of an important contingent of soldiers and of his personal participation. The formal announcement was made on 19 September during a public consistory at the Apostolic Palace, in the presence of embassies from the Italian states.² The following day, the pope invited the Italian ambassadors to a meeting and asked for their contribution to the crusade. Except the Venetians, with whom the pope already had an understanding,³ the Italian envoys declined to make firm commitments to the great cause, not having received powers from their masters to do so. The pope then, naturally, praised the Venetians, requesting that the other Italian states fulfil the commitments made at Congress of Mantua in 1459. After the meeting, the Florentine ambassador asked for a private audience with the pope in which he advised the pope to desert the Venetians and to let them and Turks destroy each other, thus freeing Italy from the fear of both powers. In the speech, "*Si essemus*", the pope politely but firmly rejected the Florentine proposal both on moral, military, and political grounds.

In his *Commentarii* the pope wrote about the event:

The following day the Pope summoned the Italian embassies and asked what they would finally offer in defense of the Catholic Faith now that they had heard Philip's promise and were aware of the necessity for war. When they answered that they all were waiting to learn what burden the Pope would impose on them and that no one would fail in so holy a work to do all in his power, the Pope said: "Why need We waste time with many words? We have the decree of Mantua. We will keep to that if you so please. In it burdens are apportioned according to strength: one tenth of their income for three years is imposed on the clergy, one thirtieth on the laity, one twentieth of all their property on the Jews. This was approved by all peoples, though afterwards its execution was delayed because Italy was in confusion with new internal wars. Now peace is almost restored. Now it will be possible to wage war with the Turks. The necessary money can be collected according to the decree. We can think of no easier method or fairer distribution." The envoys answered that as private individuals they approved the Pope's words but as envoys they were not empowered to answer them. They requested permission to to inform their masters and ask their consent. Only the Venetian said, "My prince is far from needing this urging. He is already at war. He has sent a large and strong fleet against the enemies of the Faith and has already wrested part of Peloponnese from the Turks. He has accepted the tax of tenth, twentieth, and thirtieth and on his own initiative, with the consent of the Senate, has imposed further burdens on his subjects. Everything is being done which is

¹ CO, XII, 29-30; Paparelli, p. 334; Pastor, II, pp. 224-226; Setton, II, p. 245-247; Voigt, IV, pp. 686-687

² See oration "*Expectatis*" [73]

³ See the oration "*Ecce ecce*" [77]

thought necessary for victory. Our republic will not fail you in any respect.” The Pope, after praising the Venetians for having undertaken the war in so courageous and noble a spirit, turned to the other ambassadors and said, “Go and tell your masters what we have said and add one thing more: that we do not ourselves want their money nor wish so much as to touch it. Let them themselves require of their subjects funds for soldiers and ships for us to use in war. Let them choose their own captains and raise their own standards on the ships. We should rather receive from them such aids to war than money.” His words were received with approval and nothing further was done that day.¹

The Florentine envoy,² upset because he “suspected everything that seemed to increase the prestige of the Venetians”³, then requested a private audience with the pope. At the audience he warned the pope against the real intentions of the Venetians and the danger that success for their Turkish enterprise would enhance their power greatly and pose a menace to the other Italians.⁴ The best result for all would be if the Venetians and the Turks would destroy each other.

The alliance with Milan directed against powerful Venice was by now traditional Florentine policy,⁵ and in the matter of the crusade many Italians would agree with the Florentines. And so indeed did King Louis XI of France: when in May 1464 the Milanese ambassador, Alberico Maletta, reported to him that *the Turk was preparing a new attack upon the Venetian empire*, Louis merely commented: *“Would it be a catastrophe if the Turks gave them a good beating?”*⁶

Florentine fears of Venetian dominance in Italy were probably quite justified. However, in the crusade matter, they were also motivated - just as the Venetians had previously been – by the desire to maintain and extend their commercial interests in the Orient and to protect their colony in Istanbul, and in consequence their need to maintain good relations with the Turks. Thus, the dominant political group in Florence was quite opposed to the crusade⁷ and to some extent collaborated with the sultan, even to the point of becoming his informants.⁸ Florentine opposition to the crusade had greatly contributed to the failure of the crusade projects of popes Nicolaus V and Calixtus III,⁹ and their relations with Pius II in the crusade matter were both ambiguous and

¹ CO, XII, 29 (Gragg, p. 812)

² Ottone Niccolini = Otto di Lapo: (1410-1480) Florentine nobleman and juriconsult, often used as ambassador by the Florentine Republic, made Count Palatine by Pope Nicolaus V

³ CO, XII, 29 (Gragg, pp. 812-813); Setton, pp. 245-246

⁴ The Florentines also feared the Venetians as commercial competitors in the Orient, see Pastor, II, p. 224. The address of the envoy is given in the Appendix

⁵ Cardini, p. 473

⁶ Kendall, p. 408

⁷ Cardini, p. 460

⁸ Cardini, p. 474-475

⁹ Cardini, p. 457

duplicitous, and after the Congress of Mantua the pope gradually developed a conviction that Florence, and not Venice, was the true enemy of his crusade project.¹

The pope's description in the *Commentarii* of his meeting² with the Florentine ambassador, Otto Niccolini, in September, is a much simplified and tendentious report on a complex diplomatic negotiation, and in the highly redacted text of his intervention, the "*Si essemus ipsi*" the pope's ire at the Florentine opposition to his crusade project transpires clearly.³

The pope actually had no illusions about Venetian motives and strength vis-a-vis the Turks and the rest of Italy. But in any case, he had high notions of clerical morality and the honour of the papacy – and he considered the Turkish peril as much greater for Italy than the Venetian and much more acute.

2. Themes

The main themes of the oration are as follows:

- As a man of the Church, the pope must generally be sincere and honest in all his actions.⁴ There can be absolutely no duplicity or dishonesty in his dealings with the Venetians, and no one must believe that the pope does not truly desire the crusade:

... if the Florentines allow Christianity to be destroyed and are indifferent to religion and Faith, God will hold them guilty of a grave sin, but they will keep their status among men. But if We show the slightest neglect in matters of Faith, We shall soon be condemned by all Christians. "Is it right for the Vicar of Christ," they say, "to neglect the defense of the Faith. We need a council to punish his negligence and elect a better pope." Even the smallest sin of the pope is considered to be enormous by the people. They want an angel [for pope], not a man. So hear from Us, Otto, words which may not be those of an angel, but do come from of a cleric raised above the common condition of men. [Sect. 1]

¹ Cardini, p. 467

² Or possibly at least two meetings, conflated into one in the *Commentarii*

³ Cardini, p. 481

⁴ See also Stolf, p. 187: *Dans les Commentarii, c'est l'image – mieux l'icône – du pape, la plus haute instance humaine de l'Église, que construit Piccolomini-Pie II, et qu'il entend laisser à l'appréciation de l'exigeante postérité*

- The Venetians may not fight the Turks for religious motives but for motives of power, but in that they resemble all other nations – including the Florentines themselves:

We acknowledge that the Venetians, like all men, desire to have more than they have and to attain lordship over Italy and that they are not far from daring to aspire to the lordship over the whole world. But if the power of the Florentines was as great as that of the Venetians, they would have the same desire for domination. This is a common vice: nobody is satisfied with his own lot, no city has enough territory. [Sect. 2]

- The Venetians have heeded the pope's own request to go to war against the Turks, and they must now be helped since they do not match Turkish power:

We went to Mantua. We urged all Christians to take weapons against the Turks and not allow the enemies of the Faith to advance further against the Christians. The Venetians spurned our exhortations as did almost everybody else – to the great detriment of the Christian religion. Now the Venetians have changed their minds. Heeding Our legate, they have declared war on the Turk, armed a great fleet, and thoroughly terrified the enemy. Now they are asking for Our aid since they have no doubt that they are weaker than the enemy. It is Us who urged the Venetians to wage war for the sake of religion. They complied. Should We now refuse the help they are asking for? Who hearing this would approve? God may give the enemies of the life-giving Cross the notion that they may abandon the supporters of their law in a war. But We may, for no reason whatsoever, refuse to help those who fight for the Holy Gospel. [Sect. 4]

- If the crusade is successful, Venetian power will indeed grow, and they will try to subjugate the rest of Italy. However, they will soon be involved in a war with their present ally, the Hungarians, over Dalmatia, and they will not be strong enough to become masters of Italy:

Having grown richer and larger, Hungary will demand to get Dalmatia back from the Venetians. This will be denied, and then they will start a war which, for a long period, will free Italy from Venetian tyranny. In the meantime other hopeful situations will arise. Right now there is an alliance between Hungary and Venice against the common enemy whom they fear more than each other, and there is silence concerning their conflict over Dalmatia. But when fear of the Turks is dispelled, that conflict will immediately start afresh. [Sect. 9]

- Joining the crusade is in the best interest of the Florentines themselves:

You resent Venetian growth in Greece, but by refusing an alliance of war, you leave your part of the future spoils of war to Venice, and thus you make them grow ever more. This is not being clever. It would profit your republic more to prepare such a fleet as you can, join Us, and seek

to share in the winnings from the East. In that way your republic will act both honestly and profitably. But if the Florentines remain peacefully at home, when the pope goes to war and all the rest of Italy rushes to arms, then their city will be infamous and rouse God to anger: nobody will blame the Venetians when they march against you, nor will they come to your assistance. You will feel the just judgment of God for having abandoned Christians in a dangerous war against the Turks, and when you yourselves are in danger, you will be deserted by all. [Sect. 11]

The pope's words show how much confidence he now had in the crusade project – but his belief that Florence would be an isolated power in Italy if she did not join the crusade would soon prove to be an illusion.

A minor theme is the concept of the 'reason of state' which is used in other writings of Piccolomini/Pius and appears not to have been "invented" by Macchiavelli:

Secular princes and governors of cities do not care how they defend their power, as long as they do defend it. Therefore they often violate the Law of Nations and disregard honest morals.
[Sect. 1]

3. Date, place, audience, and format

The Latin oration "*Si essemus*" was based on the pope's reply on 22 September 1463 to the Florentine ambassador, Ottone Niccoloni, during a private audience in the Apostolic Palace in the Vatican. Ambassador and pope presumably spoke in Italian.

4. Text¹

This oration was not included in the *Collected Orations of Pius II*, of which the first version had been completed in 1462, but only in his *Commentarii*,² book 12, chapter 30.

¹ For the textual transmission of Pius II's, see *Collected Orations of Pope Pius II*, vol. 1, ch. 5

² For orations included in Pius II's *Commentarii* (1463-1464), see *Collected Orations of Pope Pius II*, vol. 1, sect. 5.1.4.

4.1. Manuscripts

The two principal manuscripts containing the *Commentarii*, with the oration, are:

- **Roma / Biblioteca dell'Accademia dei Lincei**
Corsinianus 147, f. 409v-411v (S)
- **Roma / Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana**
Reg. lat. 1995, ff. 564v-567r (R)

Of these, the Reginensis represents the first edition and the Corsinianus the final edition, probably with a now lost intermediate edition, all produced under the supervision of the pope himself.

4.2. Editions

The oration was not included in Mansi's edition which does not comprise orations only published in the *Commentarii*,.

Some important editions and translations of the *Commentarii* are¹:

- *Pius II: Commentarii rerum memorabilium que suis temporibus contigerunt*. Ed. A van Heck. 2 vols. Città del Vaticano, 1984 (Studi e testi; 312-313) / II, p. 760-764
- Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Papa Pio II: *I Commentari*. 2 vols. Ed. Luigi Totaro. Milano, 1984 / II, pp. 2410-2422
[With an Italian translation]

An English translation of the *Commentarii* was published by Florence Gragg:

- *The Commentaries of Pius II*. Tr. By Florence Alden Gragg. Northampton, Mass.: 1937-1957 (Smith College Studies in History; 22, 25, 30, 35, 43) / pp. 814-817

¹ For other editions, see *Collected Orations of Pope Pius II*, vol. 1, ch. 11: General Bibliography

4.3. Present edition

For principles of edition (incl. orthography) and translation, see *Collected Orations Pope Pius II*, vol. 1, ch. 11.

Text:

Though the *Commentarii* have already been edited a number of times, the text of the oration has – as a matter of principle - been collated directly from the two principal manuscripts.

Pagination:

The pagination is from the lead manuscript.

5. Sources

In this oration, no direct and indirect quotations have been identified.

6. Bibliography

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¹ References to the *Annales* are given in this form: (e.g.) **Rainaldus, ad ann. 1459, nr. 67** (without reference to any specific edition)

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Voigt, Georg: *Enea Silvio de' Piccolomini als Papst Pius der Zweite und sein Zeitalter*. 3 vols. Berlin, 1856-63

7. Sigla and abbreviations

R = Roma / Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana / Reg. lat. 1995

S = Roma / Biblioteca dell'Accademia dei Lincei / Corsinianus 147

Abbreviations

CO = Pius II: *Commentarii rerum memorabilium quae suis temporibus contigerunt* [1464]

HA = Eneas Silvius Piccolomini: *Historia Austriasis*. Teil 1: Einleitung von Martin Wagendorfer. 1. Redaktion ed. von Julia Knödler. Teil 2: 2./3, ed. Martin Wagendorfer. 2 vols. Hannover, 2009. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum. Nova Series; 24)

HB = Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini: *Historia Bohemica*. Herausg. J. Hejnic & H. Rothe. 2 vols. Köln, 2005. (Bausteine zur slavischen Philologie und Kulturgeschichte. Neue Folge. Reihe B; 20)

MA = Pius II: *Orationes politicae et ecclesiasticae*. Ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi. 3 vols. Lucca: Benedini, 1755-1759

MPL = Migne, Jacques-Paul: *Patrologia latina*. 217 vols. 1841-1865

OO = Pius II: *Opera quae extant omnia*. Basel: Heinrich Petri, 1551 [2nd ed., 1571; Anastatic reprod. Frankfurt: Minerva 1967]

RTA = Deutsche Reichstagsakten

WO = *Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini*. Hrsg. von Rudolf Wolkan. 3 vols. Wien, 1909-1918

Decretum = *Decretum magistri Gratiani*. Ed. Lipsiensis secunda. Eds. A.L. Richter & A. Friedberg. 2 vols. Leipzig, 1879

Epistolarium = Enee Silvii Piccolominei *Epistolarium Seculare*. Ed. A. van Heck. Città del Vaticano, 2007

Rainaldus = *Annales ecclesiastici ab anno MCXCVIII ubi Card. Baronius desinit*. Auct. Odoricus Raynaldus. Tom. XVIII-XIX. Roma: Varesius, 1659-1663

Reject = *Reject Aeneas, accept Pius : Selected letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)*. Intr. and transl. by T.M. Izbicki et al. Washington, D.C., 2006

II. TEXT AND TRANSLATION

[1] {409v} Si essemus ipsi, quo tu es loco, nec sacris imbuti nec Jesu Christi vicariatu decorati, fortasse idem sentiremus, quod ipse sentis, fucatisque rationibus tuis succumberemus. Sed non est principis eadem quae privati hominis mens, nec viris ecclesiasticis idem animus qui saecularibus. Multa in populo tolerantur, quae in clero nemo audire potest. Quae sunt plebi venalia peccata, in sacerdote mortalia ducuntur. Principes saeculi et rectores urbium quocumque tandem modo sua tueantur imperia non curant, dum tueantur, atque idcirco saepe jus gentium violant et moribus adversantur honestis. Populus victorem laudat nec turpitudini ascribit per fraudes ac dolos vicisse, si modo laicus est, qui stravit hostem. At si sacerdos insidiis inimicum perdidit, immo etsi aperte insidiantem necavit, injurius habetur: adeo justiolem populus clericum vult esse quam laicum. Noli ergo mirari, Otto amantissime, si de rebus, quae modo gerendae sunt, alia est nostra quam tua vel Florentinorum sententia. Illi, si salva republica sua Christianam ire perditum sinunt, si religionem, si fidem negligunt, quamvis gravi scelere apud Deum obnoxii sunt, inter homines tamen suum retinent locum. At nos, si vel minima negligentia in his utimur, quae sunt fidei, mox omnium Christianorum vocibus laceramur. "En," inquit, "Christi vicarium sic sine defensionem fidei postponere decet? Concilio opus est, in quo negligentia puniatur et melior eligatur." Nulla in pontifice maximo tam parva culpa est, quam populi non ducant maximam. Angelum esse volunt, non hominem. Audi ergo ex nobis, Otto, verba etsi non angeli, at saltem clerici et hominis communem sortem excedentis.

1. Clergy must have higher morals than laymen

[1] If We were in your position and not in Holy Orders and distinguished with the office of Vicar of Jesus Christ, We should perhaps feel like you and yield to your specious reasoning. But the mind of a prince is not the same as the mind of a private person, and ecclesiastics do not have the same spirit as laymen. Many things are tolerated in the people which no one would accept in the clergy. A venial sin¹ in a layman is considered a mortal sin² in a priest. Secular princes and governors of cities do not care how they defend their power, as long as they do defend it. Therefore they often violate the Law of Nations³ and disregard honest morals.⁴ The people applauds the victor and does not consider it shameful to win by deceit and fraud, so long as it is a laymen who has vanquished the enemy. But if a priest destroys an enemy by guile and even if he kills someone who is plotting openly against him, he is considered to have done wrong. People want the cleric to act more justly than the layman. Therefore, my dear Otto,⁵ do not wonder if in the matter at hand Our viewpoint differs from yours and the Florentines'. Indeed, if the Florentines allow Christianity to be destroyed and are indifferent to religion and Faith as long as their own republic is saved, God will hold them guilty of a grave sin, but still they will keep their status among men. But if We show the slightest neglect in matters of Faith, We shall soon be condemned by all Christians. "Is it right for the Vicar of Christ," they say, "to neglect the defense of the Faith. We need a council⁶ to punish his negligence and elect a better [pope]."⁷ Even the smallest sin of the pope is considered to be enormous by the people. They want an angel [for pope], not a man. So hear from Us, Otto, words which may not be those of an angel, but do come from a cleric raised above the common condition of men.

¹ A lesser sin that does not result in a complete separation from God and eternal damnation in Hell as an unrepented mortal sin would

² Wrongful acts that condemn a person to Hell after death if unforgiven

³ "jus gentium"

⁴ A neat Renaissance statement of the Reason of State (*raison d'état*)

⁵ Otto di Lapo (Ottone Niccolini) (1410-1470): Florentine jurist and ambassador

⁶ An ecumenical council, which in certain matters is above the pope

⁷ A reference to conciliarism and the regrettable propensity of princes and others to call for a council whenever they disagreed with the pope

[2] Fatemur Venetos more hominum plura cupere quam habeant, atque Italiae dominatum quaerere nec procul esse quin ad orbis {410r} imperium aspirare audeant. Quod si Florentini pares Venetis potentia fuerint, par quoque imperandi desiderium gerant. Commune hoc vitium est: nemo sua sorte quiescit, nullius civitatis satis latus est ager. Victoria potiti adversus Turcos Veneti, Illyridis ac Graeciae possessores effecti, Italiam subigere conabuntur – non imus inficias – si modo barbarorum metu vacent et non externis bellis distineantur. Esto, subigat Italiam Venetus; quod factu difficillimum est.

[3] Quid ais? Venetis an Turcis parere mavis? Nemo Christianorum, qui vere Christianus sit, Turcorum praeferet imperium, sub quo pereant tandem ecclesiae sacramenta necesse est et alterius vitæ janua claudatur ab evangelio recessuris. Fateberis pessimum esse servire Turcis, optimum nec Turcis nec Venetis. Atque hoc te cupere futurumque id existimas, si Venetos Turcorum bello implicitos non adjuvemus. Consilium neque utile neque honestum praebes.

2. All states strive to extend their territory

[2] We acknowledge that the Venetians, like all men, desire to have more than they have and to attain lordship over Italy, and that they are not far from daring to aspire to the lordship over the whole world. But if the power of the Florentines was as great as that of the Venetians, they would have the same desire for domination. For this is a common vice: nobody is satisfied with his own lot, no city has enough territory. We do not deny that if the Venetians are victorious against the Turks and conquer Illyria and Greece, they will try to become masters of Italy, so long as they do not need to fear the barbarians and are not distracted by foreign wars. So, Venice will try to subjugate Italy – but it will be a very difficult thing to do.

3. Strategic dilemma: helping the Venetians against the Turks strengthens her position in Italy

[3] But what do you say? Whom would you rather submit to: the Venetians or the Turks? No true Christian will prefer Turkish rule, for under their rule the sacraments of the Church must disappear and the gate to the next life will be closed to those who desert the Gospel. You will say that the worst is to serve the Turks and the best is to serve neither the Turks nor the Venetians. This is what you wish to happen, and you think that it will, if We do not help the Venetians now engaged in war against the Turks. However your advice is neither expedient nor honest.¹

¹ The classical paired concept of "honestum et utile"

[4] Ivisimus Mantuam. Christianos omnes adhortati sumus in Turcos, ut arma caperent nec sinerent hostes fidei in Christianos ultra crassari. Spreverunt Veneti hortamenta nostra spreverunt et alii ferme omnes non sine maximo detrimento Christianae religionis. Nunc mutata est sententia Venetorum. Audito legato nostro apertum bellum indixere Turco et armata ingenti classe hostem perterruere. Suppetias a nobis petunt, ut qui se hoste inferiores esse non dubitant. Suasimus Venetis bellum pro religione capessero. Paruerunt. Nunc petentibus auxilium denegabimus? Quis haec audiens laudabit? Deus hanc mentem inimicis tribuat vivificae crucis, ut consortes suae legis in bello relinquunt. Nobis non licet pro sancto evangelio pugnantibus opem quovis pacto subtrahere. Dices in bellum Venetos non fidei defendendae causam, sed imperii cupiditatem adduxisse, Peloponnesum quaesivisse, non Jesum. Sit ita. Hoc satis est nobis, quoniam vincente Veneto Christus vincet¹. Turcorum victoria evangelii subversio est, quam totis conatibus tenemur avertere.

[5] Asseruisti Turcis atque Venetis contendentibus futurum, {410v} ut ambo corruant, tamquam non sint majores Turci quam Venetorum opes. Falleris. Multo est inferior Turco Venetus quamvis classe maritima superior habeatur. Insulas et quae sunt in littore maris oppida vexare potest: in mediterraneis minimum est, quod efficere queat. Quod si Turcorum duces terrestres copias in oras Dalmatiae deduxerint, quemadmodum consilium cepisse videntur, facultatem armandi classem Venetis tandem eripient, qui remiges navalesque socios omnes fere ex Dalmatia legunt. Non tam facile terrae imperium quam maris acquiritur. Memoriae traditum est Rhodios et alios plerosque imperitasse mari, quorum in terra admodum parva potestas fuit. At qui longe lateque in terra dominati sunt, his proxima maria plerumque patuerunt.

¹ vincit R; vincet *corr.* ex vincit S

4. Venice must be helped

4.1 Whatever their motives, Venice has heeded the pope's request to go to war

[4] We went to Mantua. We urged all Christians to take weapons against the Turks and not allow the enemies of the Faith to advance further against the Christians. The Venetians spurned our exhortations as did almost everybody else – to the great detriment of the Christian religion. Now the Venetians have changed their minds. Heeding Our legate¹ they have declared war on the Turk, armed a great fleet, and thoroughly terrified the enemy. Now they are asking for Our aid since they have no doubt that they are weaker than the enemy. It is Us who urged the Venetians to wage war for the sake of religion. They complied. Should We then now refuse the help they are asking for? Who hearing this would approve? God may give the enemies of the life-giving Cross the notion that they may abandon the supporters of their law in a war. But We may, for no reason whatsoever, refuse to help those who fight for the Holy Gospel. You will say that the Venetians are not waging war to defend the cause of the Faith, and that it is not Jesus, but their own greed for power that has made them try to take the Peloponnese. So be it. But this is enough for Us, for if the Venetian wins, Christ wins. The victory of the Turks means the fall of the Gospel – something which we must try to avoid by all means.

4.2. Venice's military capacity is insufficient

[5] You asserted that if the Turks and the Venetians fight each other, they will both perish, as if the Turks were not stronger than the Venetians. You are mistaken. The Venetians are much weaker than the Turks though they may have the stronger fleet. They can harass the islands and the coastal cities, but can do very little in the interior regions. And if the Turkish captains lead their land armies to the shores of Dalmatia, as they seem to be planning to, they will finally deprive the Venetians of the means to arm a fleet, since they get almost all their rowers and seamen² from Dalmatia. It is more difficult to achieve mastery over land than over sea. History tells us that the Rhodians and many others had great sea power, but little land power. And those whose ruled large land areas often also had direct access to the neighbouring seas.

¹ The pope had sent Cardinal Bessarion to Venice in 1463 to exhort the Venetians to go to war against the Turks

² "navales socios". Gragg translates as "naval allies"

[6] Non est igitur existimandum Turcorum principatum, qui est in Asia terra et Europa latissimus, a Venetis posse deleri quamvis mare pro sua voluntate procurrun, quando in terra pugnaturi castra conferre castris nequeunt, equitum peditumque turmis ac robore multo inferiores. Quod si a nobis et aliis Christifidelibus non fuerint adjuti, cum dedecore damnoque nostrae religionis cito deficient. Maximi sumptus est classem in Orienti magnam alere nec diu id fieri. At si recedit classis, quaecumque illic quaesita sunt necesse est ad hostes illico deficient, quorum praesto aderunt exercitus, nisi prorsus ab Europa migrare Turci cogantur. Perparum est, quod in Graecia obtineri a Venetis aut servari queat.

[7] Non est ergo salubre consilium tuum, quod nec Venetos servat nec Turcos delet. Quod si perierint Veneti, frustra de servanda Italia cogitabis. Bellum maximum et periculosissimum inierunt, in quo sine perniciae Christianae religionis succumbere non possunt. Ferenda sunt laborantibus auxilia, adjiciendae vires, supplementa militum ministranda, atque omni ope nitendum, ne cedere cogantur hosti. Commune bellum est. Quaerenda est omni studio victoria, et nos quidem cum Philippo, Burgundiae duce, Venetis non deerimus, classes classibus jungemus, atque omnes maritimas urbes infestas reddemus Turcis. {411r} Ex altera parte Matthias Hungariae rex superiorem Moesiam, Macedoniam vicinasque regiones terrestribus copiis agitabit. Difficile erit Mahumeto, cui non desunt potentes in Asia inimici, omnibus in locis resistere. Vincetur, ut nostra fert opinio, atque ab Europa prorsus eliminabitur, nisi justus et misericors Deus nostris offensus iniquitatibus aliud – quod absit – de suo populo censuerit.

[6] So, we should not believe that the Venetians can destroy the Turkish realm which covers a considerable part of Asia and Europe: the Venetians roam the seas at will, but when they fight on land they cannot match the Turkish armies, as the Venetian cavalry and infantry are quite inferior in numbers and strength to those of the Turks. If they do not get help from Us and the other Christians, they will soon fail – to the shame and detriment of our religion. It is extremely expensive to maintain a large fleet in the Orient and it cannot be done for long. But if the fleet sails back [to Venice], its conquests¹ must quickly fall to the Turkish enemies whose armies will arrive quickly unless they are forced to leave Europe. The Venetians can only take and hold very little in Greece.

4.3. Western nations must unite in the war against the Turks

[7] Thus your proposal² is not expedient: it neither saves the Venetians nor destroys the Turks. If the Venetians perish, it will be vain to think of how to save Italy. The Venetians have engaged in a great and dangerous war: if they lose, it will necessarily harm the Christian religion. [Therefore] We must send aid to those who are labouring, we must add our strength, we must send more soldiers, and we must by all means prevent that they be forced to submit to the enemy. This is our common war. Victory must be sought at all costs. We Ourselves and Duke Philippe of Burgundy³ shall not fail the Venetians: we shall join our fleets with theirs and make all the coastal cities unsafe for the Turks. In the other direction, King Matthias of Hungary⁴ will wage war with his land army in Upper Moesia, Macedonia, and the neighbouring regions. Mehmed⁵ has no lack of powerful enemies in Asia,⁶ and it will be difficult for him to resist on all fronts. We believe that he will be defeated and completely repelled from Europe, unless the just and merciful God in anger at our sins has other plans for his people – may that not happen.

¹ In Greece

² See the Appendix

³ Philippe III le Bon (1396-1467): Duke of Burgundy 1419 to his death

⁴ Matthias I Corvinus (1443-1490): King of Hungary and Croatia from 1458 to his death. After conducting several military campaigns, he was elected King of Bohemia in 1469 and adopted the title Duke of Austria in 1487

⁵ Mehmed II the Conqueror (1432-1481): Ottoman sultan who ruled first for a short time from August 1444 to September 1446, and later from February 1451 until his death. In 1453 he conquered Constantinople and brought an end to the Byzantine Empire

⁶ Asia Minor. Like their Turkish rivals, the Caramans

[8] Nec propterea Venetos Italiae jugum imposituros arbitramur, quando de Turcis triumphaverint. Non omnia, quae Turci occupant in Europa, Venetorum erunt. Peloponnesus illis cedit et fortasse Boeotia atque Attica et in Acarnania et in Epiro pleraque loca, quae mari cohaerent. In Macedonia Georgius Scanderbechius primas partes sibi vendicabit, in aliis Graeciae regionibus non deerunt Graeci nobiles, qui Turco ejecto tyrannidem occupent, quibus necesse erit libertatem relinquere. Reliqua, quae vergunt in Danubium, ut est Bulgaria, quae olim inferior Moesia dicta est, et Rascia quae superior, et Servia, et Bosna et ultra Danubium Valachia, quam prisci Daciam vocaverunt, in solo Sarmatico sive, ut quidam volunt Scythico usque ad Euxinum Pontum cuncta ad Hungaros pervenient, quorum aliquando fuere possessio.

[9] Nemo victis eliminatisque Turcis plus locupletabitur quam Hungarus: multo hic potentior erit quam Venetus. Ditatus atque auctus Dalmatiam a Venetiis repetet. Negabitur. Bellum deinde inter eos orietur, quod Italiam a Venetorum tyrannide longo tempore liberabit. Interea aliae atque aliae spes emergent. Nunc inter Hungaros ac Venetos adversus communem hostem, quem magis verentur, societas est et de lite Dalmatica silentium, quae Turcorum metu depulso e vestigio suscitabitur.

5. A victorious Venice will not pose a serious threat to Italy

5.1. Hungary will profit more than Venice from a victory against the Turks

[8] Moreover, We do not believe the Venetians capable of subjugating Italy if they win over the Turks. Not all Turkish possessions in Europe will fall to Venice. They will gain the Peloponnese and maybe Boeotia, Attica and some coastal areas in Acarnania and Epirus. But in Macedonia Georg Skanderbeg¹ will claim the chief parts, and in the other Greek regions there will be no lack of Greek nobles to seize power when the Turk is driven out, and it will be necessary to leave them in peace. The other territories bordering on the Danube are Bulgaria (which was formerly called Lower Moesia), and Rascia (which was called Upper Moesia), and Serbia, and Bosnia, and beyond the Danube there is Wallachia (which the old ones called Dacia), situated on Sarmatian – or as some say Scythian – soil, extending as far as the Black Sea.² All these territories will fall to the Hungarians to whom they once belonged.

5.2. Looming conflict over Dalmatia between Hungary and Venice

[9] No one will profit more from the defeat and expulsion of the Turks than Hungary which will become much more powerful than Venice. Having grown richer and larger, Hungary will demand to get Dalmatia back from the Venetians. This will be refused, and then they will start a war which will free Italy from Venetian tyranny for a long time. In the meantime other hopeful situations will arise. Right now there is an alliance between Hungary and Venice against the common enemy whom they fear more than each other, and there is silence concerning their conflict over Dalmatia. But when fear of the Turks is dispelled, that conflict will immediately start afresh.

¹ George Skanderbeg [Kastrioti] (1405-1468): Albanian nobleman

² "Euxinus Pontus"

[10] Non est, quod Italiae tantopere timeamus, nec Romanorum exempla vereri oportet. Longe distant a Romanis Venetorum mores. Multas licebit videre nives priusquam Veneti Italiam frenent. At nisi Turco potenter resistimus, cito et Hungari cedent et Veneti, nec mora fiet, quin nostra quoque libertas pereat. Occurrendum est praesenti periculo, quod a Turcis imminet. De Venetis suo tempore cogitabitur, {411v} si opus erit, nec deerunt valentia remedia.

[11] Providentes viros esse Florentinos ab ipsa pueritia didicimus, et res antequam fierent multo cernere. Atque hoc est, quod de imperio Veneto vaticinamini. Verum simile monstri est non videre propinqua eos, qui longinqua prospectant. Ardentibus aedificiis non affertis aquam: crematuris olim consulere properatis. Aegre fertis in Graecia crescere Venetos, atque ut magis magisque crescant operam datis, qui societatem belli declinantes, quae vestra futura erant spolia, Veneto relinquitis. Non est hoc sapere. Consultius agat vestra respublica, si pro suis viribus classem instruens nobis sese adjunxerit orientalisque praedae partem petierit. Hoc pacto honesti et utilis rationem habebit. Quod si otiosus domi Florentinus remanserit, cum papa in bellum ierit, et reliqua omnis Italia in arma prouerit, infame nomen urbis erit, et Deus illi succensebit, nec ducturos in eam Venetos quispiam arguet aut opem vobis afferet. Justum Dei iudicium illud experiemini, ut qui Christianos in bello contra Turcos periclitantes reliqueritis, in discrimine constituti et ipsi ab omnibus deseramini.

5.3. Problem of Venice must wait

[10] Thus, there is no reason why we should be so anxious concerning Italy or fear Roman precedents. The ways of the Venetians are very different from those of the Romans. We shall see many winters before Venice subjugates Italy. But if we do not resist the Turks forcefully now, both Hungary and Venice will soon succumb, and it will not take long before our freedom, too, disappears. It is the present danger that must be met, and that danger comes from the Turks. When time comes, we must think about Venice, if necessary, and then there will be no lack of powerful remedies.

6. Participation in the war is in Florence's own best interest

[11] From childhood We have learnt that the Florentines are clever men who see what will happen long before it does, and this is your prediction concerning Venetian dominion.¹ But when those who look afar cannot see what is right before them, they are [as blind] as brute animals.² You are not pouring water on the buildings that are on fire right now: no, you are hastening to save buildings that may burn in the future! You resent Venetian growth in Greece, but by refusing an alliance of war, you leave your part of the future spoils of war to Venice, and thus you make them grow ever more. This is not being clever. It would profit your republic more to prepare such a fleet as you can, join Us, and seek to share in the winnings from the East. In that way your republic will act both honestly and profitably. But if the Florentines remain peacefully at home when the pope goes to war and all the rest of Italy rushes to arms, then their city will be infamous and rouse God to anger: nobody will blame the Venetians when they march against you, nor will they come to your assistance. You will feel the just judgment of God for having abandoned Christians in a dangerous war against the Turks, and when you yourselves are in danger you will be deserted by all.

¹ I.e. that if Venice receives no help from the papacy and the other Christian nations in its war against the Turks, the Venetians and the Turks will destroy each other and free the rest of Italy from their domination. But if they receive help, they will defeat the Turks and gain dominion over the rest of Italy

² "monstra"

Appendix: Address of Ottone Niccolini¹ (22 September 1463, Rome)

Your holiness, what are you thinking off? Are you going to wage war on the Turks that you may force Italy to be subject to the Venetians? All that is won in Greece by driving out the Turks will become the property of the Venetians who, after Greece is subdued, will lay hands on the rest of Italy. You know the people's pride and insatiable greed for power. It is their continual boast that they are the successors of the Romans and that sovereignty belongs to them. They say that the successors of Trojan Aeneas ruled in their time, but that now the sovereignty belongs to the descendants of Antenor and they claim it for themselves. You are helping them in this by aligning your arms with theirs against the Turks and you do not see into what an abyss you are hurtling Italy. You are weaving a net of perpetual slavery for your contry. To say nothing of the losses to Italy, what will become of the Church of Rome? Do you think it will maintain its dignity? Will it not rather be the handmaid of the Venetians? The Venetians are not men to prefer divine to human things. They value worldly above ecclesiastical power. They hold the authority of the Pope less than that of the Doge. And do not think that the Office of Vicar of Jesus Christ will help you. 'This is our will', they will say. 'Thus the Senate has decreed.'² It will be useless to bring forward the sacred canons. Either the apostolic eminence will be destroyed entirely or the Venerians will arrogate it to themselves and unite it with the dogate, whether they choose to call it empire or kingdom. These are the dangers your wisdom must meet, not those lesser ones which we fear from the Turks. The Venetians are at war. They have dealt the Turks a heavy blow and have almost succeeded in taking from them the Peloponnese. There is no chance that the Turks and the Venetians can ever be reconciled. Undying hatred has been born between them. This is in my opinion what was most to be desired by us. Let them fight it out between them. Their strength is well matched. Turk will not utterly conquer Venetian nor Venetian Turk. The war will last a long time and at last Scripture will be fulfilled, 'When the strong meets the strong both shall fall.' And what results could be more desirable for us than that the strength of both the Turks and the Venetians should be so exhausted that at last they will let us have peace. Your purpose, as I understand it, is to free Italy and all Europe from fear of the Turk and to that end you are making a military alliance with Venice. I propose a more advantageous plan when I tell you that not only the Turks who are threatening the lives of Christians but the Venetians too must be thrown back and without expense or toil or danger and in perfect peace. You are wise enough, I think, not to despise or belittle the advice of the Florentines. This proposal I have brought you from the midst of the school of our wise men. We beg you to embrace a course which will be for the good of all Christendom.

¹ CO, XII, 30. Taken from Gragg, pp. 812-813

² The pope had said exactly the same to the Venetian ambassador in the oration *Senatu intercedente* [72], sect. 2, and may indeed have borrowed this passage for his written version of the Florentine ambassador's address