MAKARIOS MEISSOURGOS-MELISSENOS
(d. 1585)

LIFE
M.M. was a refugee, an adventurer, and an accomplished counterfeiter, who even forged Palaeologan documents to win a dispute about ecclesiastical authority in his territory in the Morea. Both he and one of his brothers, Theodoros, participated in a rebellion against the Ottoman authorities after the battle of Lepanto (1571) and were then compelled to emigrate to Italy.

Very few details about the activities of the Melissourgos brothers can be found before the battle of Lepanto (Ναύπακτος) (3 October 1571). M.M. was the bishop of Monemvasia (Μονέμβασιο) in 1570. It was in July of 1570 he enters into a dispute with the metropolitan of Christianoupolis (city in the Peloponnese; no longer exists), Sophronios, in regard to the jurisdiction of the see of Androusa (Ανδρούσσα). In 1571 M.M. becomes involved in rebellious activities against the Ottoman authorities by conspiring with Spanish agents, who were preparing the ground for intervention that led to the battle of Lepanto. After the battle, M.M. and his brothers continued their seditious activities on Ottoman territories from their base in the Mani peninsula (Μάνη), but with the departure of the western fleet from the Adriatic and the Ionian Seas the Melissourgos brothers fled from the Morea on board a Spanish ship to Italy. They settled in the Greek community of Naples, where M.M. produced his Chronicon Maius and died in 1585.

WORK
① Μέγα Χρονικών (usually cited by its Latin title: Chronicon Maius)

The chronicle that has been attributed to the pen of George Sphrantzes (d. 1477), attendant to Manuel II Palaeologus (r. 1391-1425), diplomat of John VIII Palaeologus (r. 1425-48), and intended Grand Chancellor of the last Greek emperor, Constantine XI Palaeologus (r. 1448-53), has come down to us in two forms: a short version, the Chronicon Minus and a much larger account, the Chronicon Maius, which incorporates the text of the Minus and inserts a great deal of additional material. The Minus is comprised mostly of relatively brief notices and seems to represent the notes that George Sphrantzes had amassed in his career until his death in 1477. It also contains a short notice on the conquest of Constantinople (May 29, 1453) that mentions the death of the emperor and the fact that Sphrantzes and other members of his family were taken prisoners during the sack. It was once believed that the Minus was either a later epitome of the Maius or that it represented the brief notes that Sphrantzes had collected during his life in the imperial entourage, which he then organized and expanded into the Maius in his old age.

Since 1934 scholarly efforts have demonstrated clearly that only the Minus is the authentic work of Sphrantzes. The Chronicon Maius is, in fact, an elaboration and
expansion of the *Minus*, composed more than a century after Sphrantzes’ death by M.M., the metropolitan of Monemvasia.

The *Chronicon Maius* is an ambitious work written during M.M.’s Naples years (ca. 1580)\(^3\) and offers a comprehensive history of the Palaeologan dynasty up to 1477 with extensive digressions on the history of the Ottomans and a heavy emphasis on religious events. It is comprised of a prologue and four books. The *Prologue* is derivative; its main theme is the usefulness of history but it has been elaborated from a prelude that opens the narrative of the thirteenth-century historian George Akropolites. Book I deals with the origins of the Palaeologan dynasty but also offers an extensive excursus into early Ottoman history.\(^4\) An awkward transition incorporates and expands the opening passages of the *Minus*. Although the authentic *Minus* covers the events of the years between 1401 and 1412 in summary fashion, M.M. treats them *in extenso* and in detail. Book I concludes with the death of Emperor Manuel II in 1425 (r. 1391-1425). Book II gives an account of the events of the reign of Emperor John VIII Palaeologus (r. 1425-48), presents elaborated versions of the information encountered in the *Minus*, and adds irrelevant digressions.

Book III has always been considered the jewel of this composition as it discusses the disastrous reign of the last Greek emperor, Constantine XI Palaeologus (r. 1448-53), and includes a detailed narrative of the operations during the siege of Constantinople by the Ottomans. By contrast, the authentic *Minus* fails to describe the siege and takes notice of the conquest in a single entry (25.8). Historians have valued this section of M.M.’s narrative, as it was supposedly composed by a member of the imperial administration and of the diplomatic corps, who had contacts with influential members of the sultan’s Porte. Scholarship, however, has demonstrated beyond doubt that this section is in fact a translation and a paraphrase into Greek of another account composed in Latin by an eyewitness, Bishop Leonardo Giustiniani (d. 1359) who wrote a summary of the observations he made during the siege. The authoritative Latin *epistula* by Bishop Leonardo Giustiniani which was completed and sent to Pope Nicholas V on August 16, 1453,\(^5\) still remains one of the most authoritative accounts of the defense of Constantinople in 1453. In his Greek paraphrase of the bishop’s letter M.M. added his own observations, changed a number of details, and improved on Leonardo’s topography of Istanbul (with which he was familiar, as he spent a year in the Patriarchate involved in litigation over ecclesiastical jurisdiction regarding his territories in the Morea).\(^6\)

Book IV relates the events surrounding the Ottoman conquest of the Morea. Numerous details presented here are not found in the *Minus*, especially in connection with Monemvasia, which was M.M.’s see. Numerous digressions have been added, including an essay on the origin of earthquakes. There is a great deal of material here, both derivative and original, which deserves a closer look by modern scholarship. Extremely valuable in this section is a narrative that deals with the early patriarchate under Mehmed II (r. 1444-46, 1451-81), the installment of the first patriarch under Ottoman rule, and the origin of the so-called privileges of the Patriarchate that were
supposedly bestowed on the first patriarch by the sultan himself. Some of the information here derives from the work of Damaskenos the Stoudite (d. 1577), with whose work M.M. must have been unquestionably familiar, and which, independently of M.M., also found its place in the monumental *Turcograecia* by Martinus Crusi-us (d. 1607).

M.M. also included a proper ending to the work. While Sphrantzes’ work, the authentic *Minus*, ends abruptly after an entry in the late summer of 1477, the *Maius* ends by informing its reader that the author (i.e., supposedly Sphrantzes) wrote his account upon the insistence of prominent citizens and that he was seriously ill. It further states that this account was completed on March 29, 1488.

Perhaps the ultimate motives for the elaboration of the *Minus* into the *Maius* had to do with the desire of the bishop to elevate his family into the Greek expatriate nobility, as he found himself at pains to enforce his own fabrication that his family (whose name he improved from “Melissourgos” with its humble origins to the more notable “Melissenos”) was related to Sphrantzes himself. In his efforts to glorify his family M.M. did not hesitate to invent personalities as defenders of Constantinople in 1453, who, he claims, died heroically, at the side of the emperor on the very day of the fall of the city.

M.M. has been generally viewed as a negative figure by modern scholarship, which has emphasized his activities as a member of a family that is notoriously known for its forging and counterfeiting activities. However, it is maybe more appropriate to think of him as a 16th-century literary figure rather than an outright plagiarist. His elaboration of the *Minus* is more than a mechanical expansion of this prototype. His “paraphrase” of the Bishop Leonardo’s letter demonstrates that he was not simply a mechanical translator, as M.M.’s Greek elaboration manages to raise his Latin prototype to a level that evokes pathos and improves the presentation encountered in the Latin original.

M.M.’s elaboration of Sphrantzes’ authentic work occupies a special position in the annals of Ottoman historiography as it provides a sixteenth-century bridge to the end of Byzantine historiography. Moreover, as it furnished a long narrative of the operations of the siege of Constantinople, it exercised immense influence on scholarship, as the events that it relates were purportedly written by Sphrantzes, an eyewitness who was a member of the imperial administration close to the emperor himself and had maintained personal contacts with officials at the Porte, until modern scholarship demonstrated the secondary nature of this document. The immense popularity of the *Chronicon Maius* in the Ottoman centuries attests to the high literary quality of the narrative.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

1 Μέγα Χρονικόν (Chronicon Maius)

Manuscripts: The work was very popular and numerous manuscripts (especially of the seventeenth century) survive throughout the Balkans. The earliest and most important (which have been utilized in modern printed editions) include:


A complete list of the 16th and 17th century manuscripts, with pertinent discussion, can be found in R. Maisano, “Il manoscritto Napoletano II E.25 e la storia della tradizione dello pseudo-Sfranze.” Παλαζέλληνικά: Rivista di cultura greco-moderna 2 (1989), 126-129.


General Bibliography

1 On the life of George Sphrantzes (1401-1477), cf. V. Grecu, “Georgios Sphrantzes: Leben und Werk - Makarios Melissenos und sein Werk - Die Ausgaben,” Byzantinoslavica 26 (1965), 62-73; V. Grecu, “Das Memoirenwerk des Georgios Sphrantzes,” in Actes du XIII Congrès international des études byzantines (Ohrid, 1961), 327-341; and Marios Philippides, The Fall of the Byzantine Empire: A Chronicle by George Sphrantzes, 1401-1477 (Amherst, 1980), esp. 17f. The controversy in regard to his name, which is sometimes cited as “Phrantzes” and sometimes as “Sphrantzes” is rather old. To Italians at least, this man was known as “Phrantzes” and not as “Phrantzes.” To differentiate this author from his elaborator, sometimes M.M. is referred to as “Pseudo-Sphrantzes” or as “Pseudo-Phrantzes.”

2 Suspicions on the authenticity of the Maius were first expressed by J.B. Falier-Papadopoulos, who showed that the section of Book III dealing with the siege of Constantinople depended heavily on the Latin epistulalaviso of August 16, 1453, by Bishop Leonardo Giustinianin in “Η περί Άλος της Κοινωνικονοπόλεως Ιστορία Λεονάρδου του Χίου.” His further research confirmed his initial suspicions. The identification of the elaborator/forger was established through the efforts of F. Dölger (“Ein literarischer und diplomatischer Fälscher des 16. Jahrhunderts: Metropolit Makarios von Mo-nembasii”) and R.-J. Loenertz (“La date de la terre θε de Manuel Paléologue” and “Autour du Chronicon Maius”). This widely accepted position was later questioned in a series of articles by M.G. Carroll (“Notes on the Authorship of the ‘Siege’ Section of the Chronicon Maius of Pseudo-Phrantzes, Book III”), who speculated that M.M. actually used a now lost version of the siege by Sphrantzes himself. In spite of the ingenious arguments (none of which were linguistic or textual), her speculative attempt to elevate the siege section of the Maius to respectability as a primary source proved unconvincing. The suggestion that M.M. may have expanded a different version of the Minus, lost to us, which dealt with the siege of 1453 and which was composed by Sphrantzes himself, lacks credibility and most arguments she offered are based on omissions in events in both the Minus and the Maius. Most importantly, this speculation fails to recognize the importance of Leonardo’s text in the composition of the siege section of the Maius. Modern research has thoroughly confirmed the elaboration/for-gery carried out by M.M. and demonstrated that Leonardo indeed the primary source of Pseudo-Sphrantzes, Languschi-Dolfin, Francesco Sansovino, and of the Greek Anonymous Barberini Chron-icle. Cf., among others, Marios Philippides, “The Fall of Constantinople: Bishop Leonard and the Greek Accounts,” “Σύγχρονος ἔρευνες στα Κείμενα τοῦ Σφραντζῆ,” “An ‘Unknown’ Source for Book III of the Chronicon Maius by Pseudo-Sphrantzes,” “The Fall of Constantinople 1453: Bishop Leonardo Giustinianin and his Italian Followers”; T. Ganchou, “Le Mésazon Démétrius Paléologue,” and “Sur quelques erreurs relatives aux dernier défenseurs gres de Constantinople en 1453;” and E.D. Dzhagatsapian, “Некоторые замечания по поводу Авторства Большой Хроники Псевдо-Сфран-дзин.”

3 It is perhaps no accident that the earliest surviving manuscripts of the Maius were copied in Naples, where M.M. had been very active. In addition, the copyists were known acquaintances and fellow forgers of M.M. The manuscripts in question include the Ambros. P 123 sup (gr. 641), which was copied by none other than John Santamaura (16th cen.), a well-known associate of M.M. A second manuscript of the work, the Taurin. B II 20 (gr. 102 bis), had been copied by the circle of Andreas Darmarios (16th cen.), another associate of M.M. Also, in 1578, Darmarios himself copied the Codex Ambros. P 24 (sup. gr. 613), which found its way, early on, to the library of the cardinal of Burgos and Toledo. Moreover, there is the Codex Monac. gr. 329 (olim 203), which has a certain Neapolitan origin, as well as the Codex Neapol. II E 25. All of these manuscripts, the earliest codices of the Maius, have a definite association with M.M. himself, with his close associates, or with the area where M.M. put the final touches on his elaboration. For M.M.’s associates (and perhaps contributors to the elaboration of the Minus into the Maius), cf. I.K. Khasiotes, “Ἐνα Ισότυπο Εἴκονογραφομένο Κείμενο τοῦ Ἡσυχίου Ἀγίου Νάντα (1758)?”; R. Maisano, “Il manoscritto Napoletano II E.25 e la storia della tradizione dello pseudo-Sfranze”; and, more exhaustively, Marios Philippides and Walter K.

It is clear that in his presentation of early Ottoman history M.M. had not availed himself of an admirable work on Ottoman ethnography that had been earlier produced by the brilliant linguist and Greco-Venetian diplomat who had often traveled to Istanbul, who was, in fact, the first western visitor after the conquest: Nikolaos Sekoundinos, who composed his *Nicolai Secundini de Familia Otthomanorum Epitome* for Pope Pius II (r. 1458-63). For a modern edition of the Latin text (with English translation and commentary), cf. Marios Philippides, *Mehmed II the Conqueror and the Fall of the Franco-Byzantine Levant to the Ottoman Turks: Some Western Views and Testimonies* (Tempe, 2007), 55-93.

Leonardo Giustiniani, *De Expugnatione Constantinopolis* (*Patrologiae Cursus Completus* 159, col. 944- Datum ex Chio 16 Augusti, MCDLIII.


Cf. the entry on Damaskenos the Stoudite in *Historians of the Ottoman Empire*.


Martinus Crusius, *Turcograecia libri Octo à Martino Crusio, in Academia Tybignesi Graeco & Latino Professore, vtraque lingua edita. Qvibus Graecorum status sub imperio Turcico, in Politia & Ecclesia, Oeconomia, & Scholis, iam inde ab amissa Constantinopoli, ad haec usque temporae, luculenter descriptur* (Basel, [1584]).


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November 2008