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*This essay analyzes Giorgione's Three Philosophers not by means of the prevailing typological approach but from an historical perspective. The conclusion reached is that the composition depicts the meeting between Sultan Mehmed II and Patriarch Gennadios Scholarios in Constantinople. This thesis is supported by Gentile Bellini's drawing of a Turkish man which served Giorgione as a model, by an hitherto unknown early sixteenth-century etching of this historical meeting, and by an equally unknown, more elaborate early seventeenth-century painting of the event. Later renderings of the encounter which also go back to the original etching confirm the proposed interpretation. Attention is paid to the involvement of Taddeo Contarini's and of his relatives in the affairs of Constantinople, both before and after the Turkish conquest, which may have provided the impetus for the commission of the painting.*

In 1525 the art connoisseur Marcantonio Michiel described one of the paintings he saw at the home of Taddeo Contarini in Venice as follows: «A painting in oil of three philosophers in a landscape, two standing, and one seated who contemplates the rays of the sun, with an admirably rendered rock, begun by Zorzi [Giorgione] of Castelfranco and finished by Sebastiano Veneziano»<sup>1</sup>. This characterization of the three men was taken over in at least three early inventory lists prepared by subsequent owners, and what may have been not more than a conjecture on the part of Michiel became the accepted name of the picture. Soon it became clear, however, that it was by no means incontrovertible that the three figures were philosophers, and they turned into mathematicians, geometers and astronomers<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently the *Three Philosophers* may easily be considered to have become one of the most frequently interpreted pictures in Western art (fig. 1). The explications can be roughly divided into three main categories, though there are a number of approaches which fall outside of these groups.

One frequently recurring attempt to understand the subject of the composition goes back to a one-sentence catalogue entry by Christian von Mechel in 1783 who identified the three men pictured as the three Magi<sup>3</sup>. In more recent times, this view was taken over by, among others, Louis Hourticq<sup>4</sup> and Johannes Wilde who in 1931 had x-ray pictures made of the painting in which the person in the centre appeared to be dark-skinned, like traditionally one of the Magi<sup>5</sup>. Friederike Klauner, Michael Auner, Gustav Künstler, and especially Salvatore Settis further refined this interpretation<sup>6</sup>. The same explication of the painting was once more elucidated by Mino Gabriele in the catalogue of the 2004 Giorgione exhibition in Vienna<sup>7</sup>.

A second strain of interpretations may be called the symbolic approach. Rudolf Schrey, for example, sees the three men as representing the three ages of

man<sup>8</sup>. Hubert Janitschek believes they stand for the Ancient World, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance<sup>9</sup>. Ludwig Justi, on the other hand, considers them to symbolize geometry, arithmetic, and astronomy<sup>10</sup>. Gabriele Helke interprets the painting in terms of the *paragone* argument in which the two elder men typify astronomy and philosophy, both of which are surpassed by painting, symbolized by the young man<sup>11</sup>. Reinhard Brandt believes that the three men represent the reconciliation between religious belief and science<sup>12</sup>. Neil K. MacLennan and Ross S. Kilpatrick are convinced that the men are Solomon, King Hiram of Tyre, and Hiram Abi, the builders of the Temple of Solomon<sup>13</sup>. Recently, Josef Machynka argued that the three protagonists symbolize Christianity, Islam, and Judaism<sup>14</sup>. More specifically, Augusto Gentili identified the three figures as Moses, Mohammed, and, surprisingly, the Anti-Christ<sup>15</sup>.

These last triumvirates lead to the third category of interpretations, the attempts to identify the three men individually. Only a few examples will suffice to illustrate the wide variety. Ludwig Baldass interprets them as Archimedes, Ptolemy, and Pythagoras; Alessandro Parronchi as St. Luke, David, and St. Jerome; Domenico Parducci as Aristotle, Averoes, and Vergil; Bruno Nardi as Ptolemy, al-Battani, and Copernicus; Heinrich Brauer as Noah's sons, Sem, Han, and Japheth; Michael Barry as Aristotle, Averroes, and Moses; and Christian Hornig as Giovanni Bellini, Vittore Carpaccio, and Giorgione himself<sup>16</sup>.

The most recent attempt of this kind was made by Karin Zeleny who in fact believes she has solved the "mystery" of the composition once and for all<sup>17</sup>. An abridged version of her argument appeared in the catalogue of the 2009 exhibition *Vom Mythos der Antike* at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna where it was given the official stamp of approval by the former director of the museum who claimed that the "code of the painting" had finally been cracked<sup>18</sup>. In Zeleny's view the composition represents Pythagoras on the left and standing next to him his two Greek teachers Pherecydes, disguised as a Moslem, and Thales, disguised as a Jew. Zeleny's interpretation is even summarized on the recently installed railing in front of the painting at the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Yet only a year after Zeleny's article had appeared, Peter Daniel Moser in a somewhat out-of-the-way publication uncovered numerous flaws, contradictions, and logical inconsistencies in the argument, thus invalidating its conclusions<sup>19</sup>.

In view of the fact that virtually all of the proposed interpretations are more or less typological or hermeneutic, it appears that the time has come to explore the painting by means of an entirely different approach. I believe that this can best be done by taking into account actual outside historical and personal facts related to the creation of Giorgione's composition. As far as I can tell, in the 250-year history

of interpretations of the painting this has never been endeavoured.

A promising place to start is the figure in Oriental costume. Giorgione is not the first Renaissance painter to have represented a person from the East. For example in Vittore Carpaccio's *Sermon of Saint Stephen* (c. 1514) in the Louvre, there are a number of turban-wearing listeners, but their headgear remains the only identifying item and the Saint is the focus of the composition (fig. 2). Similarly, in the fresco *The Disputation of St. Catherine* by Pinturicchio in the Borgia Apartment (Room of Saints) in the Pontifical Palace at the Vatican, which was decorated between 1492 and 1494, several Oriental figures are in attendance, but they stay marginal (fig. 3). In contrast, in Giorgione's picture the Ottoman individual is placed prominently in the middle.

Of course Venice had relations with Byzantium for centuries and thus necessarily came into continuous contact with the Ottoman Empire<sup>20</sup>. In 330 CE Constantine the Great had transferred the capital of his realm from Italy to Byzantium, renaming it Constantinople. As result of this move, Constantine and his successors became the titular rulers of Venice as well. Thus, when from the eleventh century on Venice developed into the major maritime power in the Eastern Mediterranean, repeated skirmishes with the Ottoman Empire ensued. In 1204 Venice took advantage of a crusade, diverting it from the road to the Holy Land to conquer and plunder the city<sup>21</sup>. The *quadriga* on St. Mark's (now a copy) to this day is the most conspicuous remaining part of the bounty. Gradually major conflicts with the Ottoman Empire, which in the fourteenth century had expanded ever more into the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean, became inevitable. In the fifteenth century Venice lost several of its outposts to the Turks, but in 1430 was finally able to conclude a peace treaty with Sultan Murad II, granting it free trade in the Ottoman Empire. This treaty was confirmed by Mehmed II in a further treaty in 1446.

But soon thereafter, in 1453, Mehmed besieged and conquered Constantinople which sent shock waves through Europe. A deeply negative image of the Turks was indelibly imprinted on the consciousness of Europe for generations to come. Because of Venice's long history of dealing with Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire, the fall of Constantinople had a greater and longer-lasting impact there than almost anywhere else, an impact which had abated but little during Giorgione's lifetime. Moreover, the painter was in a position to acquire first hand knowledge about the siege through one of his patrons.

One of the most important of Giorgione's patrons was Taddeo Contarini who is considered to have commissioned the *Three Philosophers*<sup>22</sup>. The Contarini clan, consisting of numerous ramifications, was one of the largest in Venice and members of the family were involved with Byzantium in many ways. It is difficult to



ascertain how much contact the various Contarini branches had with each other, but in the tightly structured society of Venice it can be assumed that those members of the family who reached high and influential positions and were in one way or another involved with Constantinople were acquainted with each other.

In Marco Barbaro's famous collection of family trees of Venetian aristocratic families, in which the Contarini pedigrees alone take up 16 folios, the genealogical tables are generally ordered in such a way that folios showing siblings and their descendants appear in sequence. Thus it can be determined that Giovanni Contarini, who had been the Latin Patriarch of Constantinople and who died in 1452, is related to Taddeo in that Giovanni Contarini's great-grandfather and Taddeo's great-grandfather were brothers<sup>23</sup>.

A Catarino Contarini appears on folios 89v and 90r, just before Taddeo's family tree on folio 93r. This Catarino Contarini had been a long-time resident of Constantinople and was one of the first scholars to carry out archaeological excavations there, employing more than one hundred workers. During the siege, he was given crucial responsibilities in the defence of the city, having been put in charge of the Studion Quarter and the Fortress of Seven Towers; he was one of the few non-Greek commanders entrusted with a key to the gates of the city<sup>24</sup>. Additional members of the Contarini family, also not too distantly related to Taddeo, played an equally important part in the battle: Filippo Contarini was in charge of the section from the Pagae Gate to the Golden Gate, and Jacobo Contarini was assigned to the sea walls at Studion. After the fall of Constantinople, yet another Contarini, Ambrogio, who, like Taddeo Contarini, appears on folio 93r, was named ambassador to Constantinople, where he served from 1473 to 1477.

After Mehmed II had conquered Constantinople on 29 May 1453, he allowed his soldiers the customary three days of looting which led to an orgy of rape and massacre, so much so that the Sultan himself is reported to have had tears in his eyes when he entered the city. Forty Venetian noblemen and over 500 additional Venetian citizens died during the siege and its aftermath; only a relatively small number of twenty-nine Venetian aristocrats were captured, among them Catarino Contarini. All of these were ransomed for amounts between 1,000 and 2,000 gold coins, except for Catarino Contarini who was worth as much as 7,000 gold coins<sup>25</sup>. These events, which had occurred a mere fifty years before Giorgione's adulthood, no doubt were still present in the consciousness of Venetians at that time, especially in families that had been intimately involved in the Constantinople tragedy, none more so than the Contarini family. There can be no doubt that Giorgione was keenly aware of the significant role members of the Contarini family had played in the siege of Constantinople.

The Venetian preoccupation with the Ottoman Empire did not end in 1453. It continued to haunt Venice for more than a century thereafter, covering Giorgione's entire life span and beyond. In 1454 Mehmed II once more confirmed the earlier treaties and guaranteed the Venetian settlements in return for a 2% tax on articles traded. Nevertheless, conflicts and skirmishes arose all over the Mediterranean, and only nine years later, in 1463, Venice formally declared war on the Ottoman Empire. It lasted for sixteen years and was ended with yet another peace treaty in 1479, one year before Giorgione was born. By this new treaty, Venice lost Skutari and the islands Lesbos and Euboea (Negroponte) among other areas and had to pay 100,000 ducats immediately plus 10,000 per year thereafter<sup>26</sup>.

Mehmed II was not only a successful warlord, but also well-educated in the arts, the sciences, theology, and philosophy. He took lessons on Roman and European history and philosophy from the Italian humanist Ciriaco d'Ancona, and had Georgios Amirutzes, a Greek scholar from Trabzon, translate Ptolemy into Arabic. It is reported that in addition to Turkish, he spoke Greek, Latin, Arabic, Persian, and Hebrew. It is therefore not surprising that the conditions of the above-mentioned peace treaty included a requirement associated with Mehmed's wide-ranging liberal-arts education, which directly relates to Giorgione: the Sultan sent a separate envoy to Venice demanding that the Venetians send him a "good painter". The Signoria's choice fell on Gentile Bellini who at that time was restoring the paintings in the Hall of the Great Council at the Doge's palace. Gentile's brother Giovanni took over from him, and Gentile set sail for Istanbul on 3 September 1479<sup>27</sup>.

The Bellini family, consisting of Jacopo, Giovanni, and Gentile, ran what was reportedly the largest painters workshop in Venice. Nevertheless, Oskar Brätschmann in his exhaustive study of the Bellinis concludes that much remains unknown about the organization of these workshops, including uncertainty concerning the birth dates of the Bellini family members<sup>28</sup>. Even the assumption that Giovanni and Gentile were both Jacopo's sons has recently been questioned<sup>29</sup>.

Agreement appears to exist, however, that Giovanni left the common Bellini household by 1459, establishing his own *bottega*, whereas Gentile remained in Jacopo's workshop which he inherited in 1470/71. However, throughout the years Giovanni continued to have close ties with Jacopo and Gentile<sup>30</sup>. For instance, in 1460 the three Bellinis together produced and signed a painting in the Basilica di Sant'Antonio in Padua<sup>31</sup>.

It is generally accepted that Giorgione was an apprentice at Giovanni's workshop, although even on this point there has been dissent. Annalisa Perrisa Torrini flatly denies that he was: «It is impossible to know who taught him: not Bellini»<sup>32</sup>. But at the symposium following the 2004 exhibition in Vienna, Mauro

Lucco demonstrated that the manner of Giorgione's underpaintings was identical to Giovanni Bellini's method and could only have been acquired at the Bellini workshop<sup>33</sup>. Given the continuing relations between Giovanni and Gentile, Giorgione must have intimately known not only Giovanni but Gentile as well. He will of course have known of Gentile's assignment in Constantinople, especially since his teacher Giovanni took over Gentile's assignment at the Doge's palace.

Bellini spent more than sixteen months in Constantinople and left the city on 15 January 1481. His sojourn surely was a life-changing experience for him about which he must have spoken for years after his return home. During his time there he painted the famous portrait of the Sultan, now in London (fig. 4)<sup>34</sup>. It is said that he also decorated Mehmed's private quarter with lascivious scenes, soon destroyed by the latter's son. Other than the portrait, a medal, some drawings, and, as will be discussed below, possibly one engraving, none of whatever Bellini may have produced in Constantinople has survived.

One of the few surviving drawings which Bellini made in Constantinople shows a Turkish man, now in the Louvre (fig. 5). The costume of this man is strikingly similar to that of the Oriental figure in the *Three Philosophers*. Both Moors are wearing a similar sash which they both clasp with their right hand, and the caftan in both cases does not reach down all the way to their feet, which would be the more customary length. Above all, the upright posture of both figures is nearly identical. There can be little doubt that Bellini's drawing served as the model for the Ottoman figure in Giorgione's painting.

In fact, Giorgione was not the only artist who used Gentile's Turk as a model. Pinturicchio's *The Disputation of St. Catherine* (fig. 3) contains an exact replica of Bellini's Moor. Moreover, the very same duplicate reappears in his fresco *Pope Pius II arrives in Ancona* (1502-1508) in the Piccolomini Library inside the Cathedral in Siena (fig.6). In both instances the Moor is not really integrated into the composition and it almost seems as if Pinturicchio applied a decal of Gentile's Ottoman to vouchsafe the Oriental authenticity of the setting.

The fact that Pinturicchio twice felt it necessary to fall back on Gentile's figure leads to the conclusion that in spite of Venice's long-lasting dealings with the Ottoman Empire, the knowledge of what Turks actually looked like still was extremely limited at the time when Giorgione undertook to paint the *Three Philosophers*. It comes as no surprise therefore that he, too, would have taken Gentile's *Standing Ottoman* as his model.

But whereas Pinturicchio produced exact copies of Gentile's Turk, Giorgione took more liberties with his model. The Moor's right hand is still holding on to his girdle in exactly the same way, but his face is turned slightly to the viewer's right

and unlike the perfect turbans of Gentile's figure and of Pinturicchio's replicas, the turban of Giorgione's Turk has become loose, causing him to look more mobile and alive.

Giorgione made yet another, even more crucial change in Gentile's model which also serves to make his Muslim appear more vivid. Whereas Gentile's and Pinturicchio's Turks stand firmly planted on both legs, Giorgione's Moor is pictured *contrapposto*. In fact, almost all of Giorgione's standing figure are shown in this position, a Classical mode which had but recently been revived by Donatello and Leonardo. A fine example of Giorgione's use of *contrapposto* is the figure of the shepherd in the *Tempesta* (fig. 7). Because of the Turk's relatively long garment, the typical characteristics of the *contrapposto*, in which shoulders and arms twist off-axis from the hips and legs, are less obvious than in the shepherd, but a comparison with Pinturicchio's Moors shows how much more dynamic Giorgione's figure is.

Having identified the carefully poised *contrapposto* of the Ottoman, one becomes aware of the fact that in the very lower right-hand corner of the painting the feet of the Moor's companion equally are in *contrapposto* position. The figure confronting the Turk also stands in well-balanced *contrapposto*, again not immediately recognizable because of the voluminous garment. Whereas it is the Ottoman's right foot which identifies the free leg, in the case of his companion it is his left leg. The two men are in perfect counter-pose to one another, almost like two frozen ballet dancers.

Giorgione's use of Gentile's model is nearly incontrovertible evidence that the middle figure in the *Three Philosophers* is in fact a Turk and not Aristotle, David, Ptolemy, Pythagoras, or any of the many non-Turkish identifications that have been proposed. Additional evidence could be the fact that on the hem-line of the caftan of Giorgione's Moor one can discern some letters and other symbols which decidedly do not constitute an Italian, Latin, or Greek text. They may be the attempt on the part of Giorgione to adumbrate Arabic letters.

The question arises whether the Ottoman figure represents just a generic Turk or whether he can be identified as a specific historical figure. This question can be answered confidently only after at least one other figure in the composition is identified, but since the Turkish man appears to have been inspired by Gentile Bellini, the most likely assumption at this point would be that the figure represents Bellini's patron in Constantinople, namely Sultan Mehmed II himself.

Giorgione's Turk does not look very much like Bellini's portrait of Mehmed II, but that is hardly surprising. The Sultan was well known for his unpredictable cruel temper, and many had paid with the loss of their life for displeasing him. In

spite of the fact that Bellini seems to have stood in the Sultan's favour, he surely would not have taken the risk of arousing Mehmed's wrath and would have tried to make his portrait as flattering as possible<sup>35</sup>. Moreover, the portrait was later overpainted, and so far it has not been possible to determine what Bellini's composition originally looked like. In any event, it is unlikely that Giorgione was familiar with the portrait, even though he may have asked Gentile for an oral description of the Sultan. Several other renderings of Mehmed II exist and all show a completely different man<sup>36</sup>. For instance, in the miniature attributed to Shiblizade Ahmed in Istanbul, he appears to be almost feminine, sniffing a rose (fig. 8)<sup>37</sup>.

But Gentile Bellini also created a medal on which the Sultan equally appears in profile and it is quite likely that Giorgione may have seen it. The medal was produced in Venice and multiple copies of it existed. The face on the medal shows little likeness with either Gentile's own portrait or with the miniature (fig. 9). However, both Bellini's painting and his medal represent the Sultan with a characteristic hooked nose. In Giorgione's composition, Mehmed's face is turned towards the viewer, and the exact shape of the nose is difficult to determine, but its size would seem to suggest a similar hawk-like shape. Moreover the nose is depicted in a much lighter colour than the rest of the face, thereby making it appear disproportionately large.

Giorgione's Ottoman seems to be much younger than the rendering on the medal. However, it should be remembered that both Bellini's painting and his medal show Mehmed at age forty-eight, shortly before his death, whereas, as will be argued below, the scene in Giorgione's painting occurred when the Sultan was only twenty-one. In fact, it looks as if the young Moor's beard is just beginning to sprout. Giorgione may have consciously attempted to imagine what the facial features shown on the medal would have looked like twenty-seven years before the medal was made and implanted them on the face of the *Standing Ottoman*. He seems to have made an effort to redesign the rather straightforward face of Bellini's Turk to make it appear almost innocuous and less determined than in the painting and on the medal<sup>38</sup>. Back in Venice, Giorgione had absolutely no cause to represent the Great Eagle, the enemy of Christian Europe, in a particularly attractive or heroic manner.

Mehmed's nearly expressionless face contrasts markedly with the piercing gaze of his companion. As mentioned above, this second individual has variously been identified as Pythagoras, Thales, Aristotle, Plato, one of Noah's sons, Moses, and many others. In all of these attempts hardly any attention has been paid to the figure's clothing, yet there can be no doubt that the man is wearing a cleric's cloak. And it so happens that at the very same time that Giorgione created the

*Three Philosophers*, Lorenzo Lotto was working on the altarpiece in the Church of Santa Cristina al Tiverone in Treviso, a mere twenty-five kilometres from Giorgione's home in Castelfranco. Lotto's painting contains a representation of Saint Jerome which closely resembles Giorgione's cleric (fig. 10). The similarity is so striking that it can be assumed that Giorgione's figure is in fact a priest, inspired by Lotto's Church Father.

Accepting for the moment that the identification of the Turkish man is correct and that the scene is therefore most likely located in Constantinople, the man on the right side would be a Greek Orthodox cleric. Of course one could not expect Giorgione to be fully familiar with the dress code of the Orthodox and he could easily have taken the picture of a prince of the church of his own tradition as a model. Nevertheless his priest looks vaguely like an Orthodox churchman, especially since Giorgione added a veil (a *maphorion*) worn by the Orthodox, though in Constantinople it would more likely have been black.

On the x-radiograph of the *Three Philosophers* originally made by Johannes Wilde in 1931, published in 1932, and again in 2004 in the catalogue for the exhibition *Giorgione: Myth and Enigma* in Vienna, a strange bundle of rays or a diadem of feathers appears around the top of the priest's head (fig. 11)<sup>39</sup>. This decoration is difficult to interpret, and most critics have simply ignored it. To support his interpretation of the three figures as the three Magi, Settis compares it to what appears to be a similar diadem on a tiny figure representing one of the three Kings in the back of Vittore Carpaccio's *Adoration*<sup>40</sup>. Gentili, who identifies the «old man» as «not just any old Jew» but as Moses, sees «a remarkable priestly tiara, a translation of the rays of celestial illumination into a real object»<sup>41</sup>. Others who also identify the figure as Moses<sup>42</sup> have interpreted these rays in terms of the iconographic tradition as representing the light emanating from Moses' head when descending from Mount Sinai. And the 2006 catalogue for the exhibition *Bellini-Giorgione-Titian* in Washington speaks of «an amazing solar headdress»<sup>43</sup>. Based on the argument presented here, a more convincing explanation seems possible.

In the Ottoman Empire a great variety of honorific distinctions for public officials existed, including robes, turbans, and others. One of these decorations, called a *chelengk*, consisted of a spray of feathers affixed to the turban with a gem. In 1808 Sultan Selim III commissioned the British artist John Young to execute engravings of his predecessors and himself on the basis of miniatures kept in Constantinople<sup>44</sup>. Selim III died before the project was completed, but the pictures were published in 1815. Twenty-one of the twenty-seven engravings show sultans with a *chelengk*, for instance Sultan Abdülhamid I, who ruled from 1774

to 1789 (fig. 12). Also included in the collection is a picture of Mehmed II in which he appears once more totally different from the other representations and hardly awe-inspiring. He also wears a chelengk, one that is a bit smaller than that of the others (fig. 13). Since Young's engravings are based on miniatures contemporary with the sultans portrayed, chelengks must have existed at the time of Mehmed's rule, and possibly their size increased over time.

In one way or another, Giorgione must have received quite an exact and detailed description of what a chelengk looked like, most likely from Bellini, and by attaching this honorific decoration to the ecclesiastical figure, he originally may have intended to identify the cleric as an Orthodox churchman. He then would have become aware of the fact that a non-Moslem would never be awarded this distinction and hence overpainted it. Nevertheless, the fact that Giorgione originally affixed the decoration to the priest's head indicates that he wished to represent a cleric of high esteem and function and it above all confirms the Oriental setting of the composition. Who then could this person be? He surely must be a churchman of outstanding importance if he would be pictured in the company of the Sultan himself. In the context of the interpretation proposed above that the Ottoman figure is a representation of Mehmed II, there is only one answer to this question: the person next to him is the monk Georgios Scholarios Gennadios, the Patriarch of Constantinople. As further evidence will show, the juxtaposition of these two men corroborates the identity of both.

Georgios Scholarios was a theologian and distinguished philosopher, but above all he was an important person in the Orthodox Church, not only in Constantinople but also in the Church as a whole. He had been one of the Orthodox delegates at the 1438-39 Council in Ferrara and Florence, during which an attempt was made to heal the Great Schism in the Christian Church. At this Council a declaration reuniting the Western and the Eastern Churches was finally signed by several though not all of the delegates. Georgios Scholarios was one of those who signed, but soon after his return to Constantinople he began to have second thoughts and eventually was one of the most prominent leaders of the movement against the Union<sup>45</sup>.

Scholarios's opposition to the Union became one of the contributing factors to the fall of Constantinople. Emperor Constantine XI Paleaologos, desperate for help from the Western Church against Mehmed's advance, agreed to have a declaration of Union read out, of all places, in the Hagia Sophia on 12 December 1452. In protest Scholarios retired to his cell at the Pantocrator Monastery on the Fourth Hill, took the monastic name Gennadios, and issued a flaming manifesto invoking God's punishment upon those accepting the Union. Fanatic monks carrying the

manifesto led protest marches through the city, thus undermining the morale of the besieged. When Constantinople fell, Scholarius was taken prisoner, sold into slavery, and taken to Edirne.

Mehmed's acumen and diplomatic skill is shown by the fact that he ordered Gennadios to be brought back to Constantinople, and used his authority to have him elected to be the new Patriarch, thereby creating a religious bulwark against Western Christianity. Before the investiture, Mehmed invited Gennadios to a meal, presented him with a silver sceptre and an official decree (a *firman*), stating «You shall be the Patriarch with all the privileges of your predecessors». Thereupon he even escorted Gennadios part of the way to the Church of the Holy Apostles where the investiture took place.

At an auction in 1859, Lord Lindsay, the 25th Earl of Crawford, purchased a painting which was listed as «The Patriarch Gennadios and Mahomed II outside Constantinople», attributed to Gentile Bellini, on which this event is represented (fig. 14). Eventually it became clear that the painting could not be a Bellini; it is now dated at around 1600 and attributed to an unidentified Flemish artist<sup>46</sup>. However, the attribution to Bellini was not out of the blue and serves as an important pointer. It turns out that the origin of the motif of the painting is a very simple sixteenth-century engraving, thus far totally unknown, of the encounter of these two dignitaries, found in the Greek Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (fig. 15)<sup>47</sup>. The encyclopedia gives as its source the Greek Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul; unfortunately, the original engraving could not be located at the Patriarchate anymore and detailed information about it was unavailable. Nevertheless, it stands to reason that the image directly or indirectly can be traced back to Gentile Bellini who was the only artist from Western Europe at the Sultan's court so soon after the event represented. As early as 1843 the art historian Anna Jameson concluded that «All of the early engravings of the grim Turkish conqueror which now exist are from the portraits painted by Bellini»<sup>48</sup>. Not only the painting still owned by the Lindsay family and Giorgione's composition were directly or indirectly inspired by this early engraving but also numerous other renderings derived from them as well.

Thus the elaborate painting depicting the Sultan and Gennadios bought by Lord Lindsay appeared on the market as a lithograph at the end of the eighteenth century with added explanations in Greek, French, and Arabic (fig. 16). Today small prints of this image are available at postcard stands in Istanbul. In the internet the most commonly reproduced artwork of the encounter is the mosaic in the entrance hall of the Ecumenical Patriarchate itself (fig. 17), no doubt directly inspired by the original engraving kept there. The continued popularity of the



motif which has endured for more than 500 years is witnessed by the fact that small contemporary representations of the encounter painted or printed on old Ottoman paper, pretending to be antique, are still sold in Istanbul (fig. 18). Even though not conclusively verified, it is reported in Istanbul that the distribution of these small pictures, similar in popularity to the small holy cards especially common in the Roman Catholic Church, is a tradition which has subsisted for centuries and which serves to reinforce the belief in the survival of the Orthodox faith in the city<sup>49</sup>. It may also be noted in passing that the Turkish post office in 1953 issued a stamp showing a modern rendering of the meeting, reduced to stylized heads of the two protagonists; no inscription was included since at the time it was still common knowledge as to who was being portrayed (fig. 19).

Unlike St. Jerome in Lorenzo Lotto's altarpiece, who clutches the Bible against his breast, in Giorgione's painting, Gennadios, if thus he may now be called, is holding two tablets or parchments on which numbers and astronomic figures can be made out. In the centre one can identify an image of the earth and the crescent of the moon. Gentili and others have convincingly interpreted this drawing as depicting a lunar eclipse<sup>50</sup>. From two corners of the parchment to the opposite corners there are two straight lines which cross near the middle. These lines would appear to be a schematic representation of the paths of the moon and the earth as they cross each other at the time of a lunar eclipse. Both the 2004 Vienna catalogue and the catalogue for the exhibition *Bellini-Giorgione-Titian* in 2006 suggest that the spoked disk bearing the digits from one to seven on the bottom of the parchment may be a lunar *volvella*, «a rotating disk made from parchment or wood that was used to calculate the occurrence of a lunar eclipse»<sup>51</sup>. In addition, the word «eclisi» can be made out above these figures, even though «celus», «celum» and 1505 have been proposed as well.

In this context, it is important to realize that the conquest of Constantinople was accompanied by numerous events which were considered by the Christian inhabitants to be prophecies or bad omens, several of which were related to celestial occurrences. Donald M. Nicol has summarized the omens recorded by Gennadios which were thought to predict the fate of the city: the first Christian Emperor, whose mother's name was Helena, was called Constantine, as was the last Emperor whose mother's name was Helena as well; the first Patriarch of Constantinople was named Metrophanes, as was the last one before the siege; and both the founding and the fall of the city occurred in May<sup>52</sup>. Gennadios considered prophecies based on astronomy especially significant. Thus it was believed that Constantinople could not be conquered during a waxing moon. On 24 May 1453, five days before the Ottoman conquest, the waxing moon had turned into

a full moon, which, moreover, was eclipsed for about three hours. A worse omen could not have occurred<sup>53</sup>.

After the fall of Constantinople two legends in particular became widespread. One of these relates that at the moment when the Turkish troops entered the Hagia Sophia, the celebrant disappeared into the wall of the sanctuary. When Istanbul would become a Christian city again, this wall would open up and the service would continue where it was interrupted. As at the time of the fall of the city, this event would again be preceded by a lunar eclipse<sup>54</sup>. Just as the inscriptions on the hem of the Moor's caftan may be intended to identify him as being a Turkish man, so do the astronomical symbols on the tablet held by Gennadios help to identify him as the cleric who conscientiously recorded the celestial events related to the fall and anticipated reconquest of Constantinople.

A further legend, which has a direct bearing on Giorgione's painting, claims that Emperor Constantine, whose corpse was never found, had not died in the battle but was turned into marble by an angel who had descended from heaven and was sleeping in a cavern near the Golden Gate. One day an angel would awaken the Marble King who would ride through Saint Romanos Gate and drive the Turks out of the city. To this day, the legend of the Marble King is widely known in the Greek community.

The left half of Giorgione's painting is indeed dominated by a cave. This part of the composition used to be much larger; 17.5 cm on the left were cut away from the canvas in the course of time, probably to make the painting fit on a wall not large enough to accommodate the entire picture. Of course this reduction in size diminishes the importance and impact of the cave. Still, it remains a most important element in the composition. This grotto has been interpreted in various ways, generally to conform to the various identifications of the three figures in the composition: Plato's cave in the cave metaphor; Saturn's cave; the cave where Adam buried the treasure which he wished to be offered to the Redeemer<sup>55</sup>; the cave of the nativity<sup>56</sup>; and the cave of the oracle of Apollo<sup>57</sup>. However, in the context of the siege and fall of Constantinople, this site assumes a very specific significance. In conjunction with the figures of Mehmed II and Gennadios, the dominant cavern would represent the location where according to the legend Constantine is awaiting his resurrection to reconquer Constantinople.

It remains therefore to explore whether the third figure in the painting who expectantly stares at the cave is in any way connected to the legend of the Marble King. Almost all of the previous commentators of the picture have had difficulty integrating this very young person into their interpretations. Despite the title of the painting, he is simply too young to be considered a philosopher, whether

Ptolemy, Aristotle, or any of the other learned men proposed. And he is equally too young to be one of the Magi. Nor is there any indication in his clothing or his attributes that would lead to the conclusion that he is intended to be a representation of Christianity alongside the two older figures if they are thought to represent Islam and Judaism, nor Christ in the company of Mohammed and Moses. Unlike the other two, he is seated, and has his back turned to them. The older men seem not even to be aware of his presence. In fact, there is no reason to assume a priori that the three figures constitute an interconnected threesome at all. In age, posture, facial expression, colour, and dress Giorgione appears to emphasize precisely the unrelatedness between the youngster and the other two. And if the Ottoman figure is rightly identified as Mehmed II at age twenty-one, he must be even younger than that; no trace of a beard is yet visible.

Who then might this young man be? Could it be that he represents the angel who, according to the legend, descended from heaven, rescued Emperor Constantine during the siege, transformed him into marble, and entombed him in a cave near the Golden Gate, or, more likely the angel who is waiting to awaken the Marble King to reconquer the city? As will be shown below, this legend was widely known not only in Greece and the Greek community in Constantinople but in among the Greek diaspora in Venice as well.

So far no one seems to have paid attention to the youngster's white robe with the golden embroidery on his back which recalls the richly decorated garments in which angels are usually pictured. His curly hair also is a recurring feature in the rendering of angels, as is, of course, the absence of facial hair. But could an angel be represented as a young man without wings? At first sight that is unusual, but in fact there is a significant iconographic tradition of young wingless male angels which has subsisted parallel to the more common winged narrative. All four Gospels describe the angels at Jesus' empty tomb as young men in white garments without wings; for instance: «Now Mary stood outside by the the tomb weeping, and as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angles in white, sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain» (John 20.11-12); «And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed» (Mark 16.5).

Accordingly, in early Christian representations, as on the 359 CE panel showing Isaac's sacrifice on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, now in the treasury at St. Peter's, the angel behind Isaac is a young boy without wings (fig. 20). Piero della Francesca in his *Nativity* (1470-75) in London (fig. 21) depicts a choir of young curly-haired male and female singers and instrumentalists, all without wings. And

the famous angel in Verrocchio's *Baptism of Christ* (c. 1470), which Vasari reports to have been added by Leonardo (fig. 22), is equally a wingless, curly-headed boy. Almost exactly contemporary with Giorgione's painting is the fresco *Three Angels before Abraham* (1516-1518), executed by Raphael's pupil Giovanni Francesco Penni, in loggia 15, second story, in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican, for which a drawing by the master served as the *modello*<sup>58</sup>. Once again, the three angels are depicted without wings (fig. 23).

Of all the wingless male angels listed here, only Leonardo's is depicted with a halo. Assuming that the youth in the *Three Philosophers* is indeed an angel, Giorgione seems to have been unsure whether to bestow him with a gloriole or not. In the X-Ray of the painting described above (fig. 11), one can discern part of a disk around the young man's head which appears to be a halo which was later overpainted.

Giorgione's angel holds a compass and a set square in his hands. From antiquity to the present these two instruments have symbolized masonry and construction. Today they are still the emblem of the Freemasons. Angels are frequently depicted with religious attributes. They may hold a trumpet or a censer, palm leaves or lilies, but also various articles related to the passion of Jesus, such as a cross, a spear, a sponge, or a skull. In addition, the objects held by angels can be related to a worldly sovereign. Thus a potentate may be depicted together with an angel holding a sword or a sceptre, a crown above his head or displaying the ruler's coat of arms<sup>59</sup>. Giorgione's angel seems to be in the process of using his instruments to make a design or construct a drawing. However, close inspection reveals that he holds neither paper nor a tablet on which he is executing any project. Like the crown, the sceptre, or the coat of arms symbolizing monarchs in other contemporary renderings of angels, these draughtperson's tools therefore might signify an earthly dynasty, in the present context the Palaeologos Dynasty, and in this case in particular a reference to Emperor Constantine XI Palaeologos.

For the Palaeologos Dynasty these builder's emblems are especially appropriate. The Palaeologos Emperors rebuilt Constantinople almost in its entirety after Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos had reconquered the city from the Latins in 1261<sup>60</sup>. In fact, the sympilema around the double-headed eagle in the Palaeologos coat of arms appears to be composed of a draughtperson's tools, including a set square, a T-square, a triangle, and a compass. In this connection, it is also significant that Michael VIII had a large stone column erected which supported an over life-size bronze group consisting of the Emperor on his knees before the Archangel Michael, offering him a model of Constantinople as it was to be rebuilt. Gentile Bellini could not have missed seeing this gigantic tribute to Michael VIII

and the following Palaeologos Emperors, and in view of Giorgione's commission, would in all likelihood have acquainted him with the role angels played in the legends connected with the fate of Constantinople<sup>61</sup>.

In addition to Giorgione's association with Gentile Bellini, there is an additional important source of the artist's familiarity with events in Constantinople and specifically the legends related to the Marble King and the role angels played in them. Because of the centuries-long dealings with Byzantium and in spite of the repeated hostilities between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, or possibly even because of these, a fair amount of knowledge about Constantinople was present in Venice all along. Moreover, Venice during Giorgione's lifetime sheltered a prominent resident who more than anyone else contributed to spreading the knowledge about the fate and the legends surrounding Emperor Constantine. This was Anna Notaras, the daughter of Grand Duke Loukas Notaras who was the Chief Minister and titular commander of the Byzantine navy under several emperors, and especially under Constantine XI<sup>62</sup>. Loukas Notaras had been Constantinople's ambassador to Genoa and Venice, had numerous friends and contacts in Italy, had entrusted considerable funds to Italian bankers, and had even become a citizen of Genoa and Venice. Within five days of conquering Constantinople, Mehmed II ordered his execution. However, fearing the worst, Notaras had sent his daughters to Italy in exile shortly before the siege.

Soon after having arrived in Venice in 1474, Anna Notaras became the patroness of the Byzantine Orthodox community which eventually numbered between 4,000 and 5,000 exiles. In order to obtain privileges for the Greek Orthodox refugees in the city, she exerted considerable influence on the governing bodies in Venice, no doubt helped by her wealth and name which in full was Anna Notaras Palaeolina. She had inherited the last part of her name from her mother who was a member of the Palaeologos Dynasty. Not altogether unwillingly, Anna allowed it to be believed that she had secretly been betrothed to Constantine XI shortly before the siege. These rumours seemed to be confirmed by the detailed knowledge she divulged about Constantine's court, life, and death, as well as the legends associated with the latter. Even though she had left Constantinople before the siege, her pivotal function in the Greek Orthodox community in Venice made her into the recipient and disseminator of all tidings about events in Istanbul which subsequent waves of refugees brought with them. Thus it became known quickly that Mehmed II had installed Gennadios as Patriarch, which was a matter of primary interest to the exiles. No doubt representations of this important event made their way to Venice as well. Anna Notaras died at very old age in 1507, merely three years before Giorgione's own death, who thus hardly could have

been unaware of her presence in Venice and of the hagiography associated with Emperor Constantine.

The question arises why Taddeo Contarini would have commissioned a picture illustrating this pivotal religious occasion in the history of Constantinople. The participation of various members of the Contarini family in the defence of Constantinople has been outlined above, and all of these may have contributed to Taddeo's interest in the affairs of the city. In addition, however, there is one important historical event involving yet another member of the Contarini family, which occurred just before the time when Giorgione painted the *Three Philosophers* and which therefore could not have failed to have been an additional impetus for Taddeo Contarini's decision to commission the composition.

In 1499 the Ottoman forces under Sultan Beyazit attacked Lepanto (The First Battle of Lepanto), an important Venetian fortress at the north-west end of the Gulf of Corinth, leading to the Second Ottoman-Venetian War. The garrison at the fortress was able to resist for two weeks only, and the fall of Lepanto was a severe shock to the Venetians. This defeat was followed by the Ottoman conquest of Methoni in August of 1500 and by the loss of Koroni, Navarisso, and Durazzo soon thereafter. Beyazit was now able to dictate the terms of a peace treaty which was finally concluded in December of 1502 and which from then on was remembered in Venice as the beginning of the end of its maritime empire<sup>63</sup>.

The defeat at Lepanto and the loss of the other Venetian possessions led Venice to make a plea to Pope Alexander VI to proclaim a new crusade against the Turks<sup>64</sup>. The Pope, who had other worries, was reluctant, but as a first step nevertheless imposed a tithe on all ecclesiastical benefices to support the proposed crusade and granted advance indulgences to those who would participate in it<sup>65</sup>. The Habsburg Emperor Maximilian I, who had become the most powerful ruler in Western Europe, was the obvious choice to take command of this endeavour which in addition to Venice was to include the Sforza of Milan and the Spanish sovereigns.

On 17 August 1501, Venice appointed Zaccaria Contarini ambassador to Maximilian's court to plead the case for the crusade<sup>66</sup>. For seventeen months Zaccaria Contarini followed Maximilian around, from one hunting party to the other, always waiting for an opportunity to be received by the Emperor. Zaccaria travelled from Levico to Matrei, on to Trient, from there to Bozen, to Brixen, to Bruneck, to Innsbruck, and to Mindelheim, regularly dispatching reports to Venice. On 27 August 1501 Contarini received news from Venice that the Turks had conquered Durazzo and were becoming even more of a major threat. But not until 7 September was Contarini able to transmit this message to Maximilian, in the course of a

hunting and fishing party. On 6 March 1502 the Pope ruled that in addition to the clerical tithes, funds collected through the sale of Jubilee indulgences were to be used to finance the proposed crusade<sup>67</sup>. Maximilian now favoured the project, but other potentates tried to drive a wedge between the Emperor and Contarini, spreading the not totally unfounded rumour that Venice was secretly negotiating with the Turks. Contarini vigorously denied this but the Emperor's suspicion had been aroused, and on 3 February 1503 Contarini had to return to Venice, his mission unaccomplished<sup>68</sup>.

In the years 1501 to 1503 there were a number of men in Venice by the name of Zaccaria Contarini. Some were too young, others too old to be appointed ambassador to Maximilian's Imperial Court, and the most likely one would appear to have been the Zaccaria Contarini who was born in 1463. In Marco Barbaro's genealogical tables he is found on folio 92r, right before folio 93r, on which Taddeo Contarini appears. Tracing Taddeo and Zaccaria back in Barbaro's family tree reveals that they were cousins. Surely Taddeo would have been aware of his cousin's mission and this could have been a further reason which caused him to commission a composition dealing with Christian-Muslim relations.

But the Second Ottoman-Venetian War had yet another, even more immediate impact on Taddeo Contarini. He himself became a victim of the Turkish expansion. Settis has uncovered that Taddeo's wealth was founded on the shipping trade between Venice and the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>69</sup>. As detailed above, Venice had lost all of its outposts in Greece in this Second Ottoman-Venetian War. This war not only marked the beginning of end of Venice as a maritime power in general, but for Taddeo Contarini specifically, 1503 meant the virtual end of his trading empire which could be resuscitated only by a crusade which would return the Peloponnesian peninsula to Venetian dominance.

The Vienna Giorgione catalogue lists various years which have been proposed in dating the *Three Philosophers*. These range from 1500 to 1508<sup>70</sup>. The observations made in this essay would point to the year 1503, at least as being the year in which Giorgione received his commission. The humiliation Venice endured in 1503 would have been a forceful motive for Taddeo to propose a painting in response to the disillusioning events of that year. The crusade for which Zaccaria Contarini had been lobbying failed to come about and may have led to the desire for a painting which suggests that this failure by no means should lead to the belief that Constantinople was lost to the Turks forever. The expectation that Istanbul might yet revert to Christian rule persisted, and if the small holy-card-like pictures of the encounter between Mehmed II and Patriarch Gennadios still sold in Istanbul today do indeed serve to reinforce the belief in the survival

of the Byzantine Orthodox faith, then the *Three Philosophers* may well be seen as an early manifestation of the spiritual sustenance provided by depicting this encounter. And the year 1503 was particularly appropriate for commemorating this event for yet another reason. 1503 not only marked the end of the Second Ottoman-Venetian War, the return home of Zaccaria Contarini, and the collapse of Taddeo Contarini's trading empire, but also the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of Constantinople. Just as in the present the end of the 1939-45 war is commemorated at its fiftieth, sixtieth, and seventieth anniversaries, so, too, in Venice in 1503 the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of Constantinople could not have gone by unheeded. The Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul still exists, but neither the crusade nor the resurrection of the Marble King have come about and Istanbul was never restored to Christian rule, but one lasting result of the hope for a reconversion may well be Giorgione's magnificent composition.

- 1 «La tela a oglio delli tre Filosofi nel paese, dui ritti, e uno sentado che contempla li raggi solari, con quel sasso finto cusì mirabilmente, fu incominciata da Zorzi da Castelfranco, e finita da Sebastiano Veneziano». Anonimo Morelliano [M. Michiel], *Notizia d'opere di Disegno nella prima metà del secolo XVI: esistenti in Padova, Cremona, Milano, Pavia, Bergamo, Crema e Venezia, Scritta da un anonimo di quel tempo*, Bassano, 1800, p. 64. In publications on the *Three Philosophers* Michiel's remark that the painting was «finished by Sebastiano Veneziano» has consistently been ignored until in 2016 Charles Hope in his review of the exhibition *In the Age of Giorgione* at the Royal Academy of Arts wrote: «Unexpectedly, Michiel said that it had been begun by Giorgione, but finished by Sebastiano del Piombo. Modern writers on Giorgione almost always say that the painting looks like the work of only one artist, and that although the heads of two of the figures are very similar to those in paintings that are certainly by Sebastiano, *The Three Philosophers* must be almost entirely by Giorgione. It would be more consistent with the evidence to suppose that the picture was designed by Giorgione and largely painted by Sebastiano, perhaps after Giogione's death; but this possibility has never been seriously discussed». C. Hope, *At the Royal Academy: Giorgione*, in «London Review of Books», 38, 2016, 7, p. 18. In an analysis of the painting these remarks cannot lightly be dismissed. However, with some modifications in the wording of the text, the conclusions reached in this essay would still remain valid even if Giorgione's contribution was limited to the design of the composition. Pending further discussion about this question, this essay, for the sake of readability, is still written as if the painting is in fact by Giorgione.
- 2 See F. Klauner, V. Oberhammer, G. Heinz, *Katalog der Gemäldegalerie, I, Italiener, Spanier, Franzosen, Engländer/Führer durch das Kunsthistorische Museum*, 3, Wien, 1960, pp. 62-63.
- 3 C. von Mechel, *Verzeichniß der Gemälde der Kaiserlichen Königlich Bilder Galerie in Wien, verfaßt von Christian von Mechel der Kaiserl. Königl. und anderer Akademien Mitglied nach der von ihm auf Allerhöchsten Befehl im Jahre 1781 gemachten neuen Einrichtung*, Wien, 1783, p.135.
- 4 L. Hourticq, *Le problème de Giorgione*, Paris, 1930, p. 61.



- 5 J. Wilde, *Röntgenaufnahmen der "Drei Philosophen" Giorgiones und der "Zigeunermadonna" Tizians*, in «Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien», 6, 1932, pp. 141-154.
- 6 F. Klauner, *Zur Symbolik von Giorgiones "Drei Philosophen"*, in «Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien», 51, 1955, pp. 145-168; M. Auner, *Randbemerkungen zu zwei Bildern Giorgiones und zum Broccardo-Porträt in Budapest*, *ibidem*, 54, 1958, pp. 151-172; G. Künstler, *Landschaftsdarstellungen und religiöses Weltbild in der Tafelmalerei der Übergangsepoche um 1500*, *ibidem*, 62, 1966, pp. 103-156; S. Settis, *Giorgione's Tempest: Interpreting the Hidden Subject*, trans. by E. Bianchini, Chicago, 1990, pp. 15-47.
- 7 M. Gabriele, *"The Three Philosophers", the Magi and the Nocturnal*, in *Giorgione: Myth and Enigma*, exhibition catalogue (Wien 2004), ed. by S. Ferino Pagden, G. Nepi Scirè, Wien, 2004, pp. 79-83.
- 8 R. Schrey, *Tizians Gemälde Jupiter und Kallisto, bekannt als die himmlische und irdische Liebe*, in «Kunstchronik», 50, 1915, pp. 567-574.
- 9 H. Janischek, Letter to Carl von Lützwow, in *Die Kaiserlich-Königliche Gemälde-Galerie in Wien*, Wien, 1886, p. 15.
- 10 L. Justi, *Giorgione*, 1, Berlin, 1926<sup>2</sup>, p. 13.
- 11 G. Helke, *Giorgione: Maler des Paragone*, in *Jahrbuch des Kunsthistorischen Museums*, 1, Wien, 1999, pp. 11-79; on the *Three Philosophers*, pp. 35-62.
- 12 R. Brandt, *Philosophie in Bildern: Von Giorgione bis Magritte*, Köln, 2000, pp. 82-90.
- 13 N.K. MacLennan, R.S. Kilpatrick, *King Solomon and the Temple Builders: A Biblical Reading of Giorgione's Painting "The Three Philosophers"*, in «Heredom», 9, 2001, pp. 111-134.
- 14 J. Machynka, *Die drei Philosophen: Giorgiones rätselhaftes Renaissancegemälde*, in «Abenteuer Philosophie», 100, 2005, pp. 8-12.
- 15 A. Gentili, *Traces of Giorgione: Jewish Culture and Astrological Science*, in *Giorgione: Myth*, pp. 57-69.
- 16 L. Baldass, *Giorgiones Drei Philosophen*, Wien, 1922, pp. 9-12; A. Parronchi, *Chi sono I tre Filosofi?*, in «Arte Lombarda», 10, 1956, 9 (Supplemento, Studi in onore di G. Nicco Fasola), pp. 91-98; D. Parducci, *I "Tre Filosofi" di Giorgione*, in «Emporium», 13, 1935, pp. 235-256; B. Nardi, *I "Tre Filosofi" di Giongione*, in *Saggi sulla cultura veneta del Quattro e Cinquecento*, Padova, 1971 (Medioevo e Umanesimo, 12), pp. 5-41; H. Brauer, *Die Söhne des Noah bei Brizio und Giorgione*, in *Berliner Museen*, 6, 1956-57, pp. 31-33; M. Barry, *Renaissance Venice and her "Moors"*, in *Venice and the Islamic World. 828-1797*, ed. by S. Carboni, New York-New Haven, 2007, pp. 150-173; C. Hornig, *Una nuova proposta per i "Tre Filosofi"*, in *Giorgione: Atti del Convegno internazionale di studio per il V centenario della nascita, 29-31 maggio 1978*, Castelfranco, 1979, pp. 47-51.
- 17 K. Zeleny, *Giorgiones drei Philosophen: Eine philologische Identifizierung*, in *Museums at the Crossroads*, ed. by S. Ferino-Pagden, Turnhout, 2008, pp. 91-198.
- 18 *Vom Mythos der Antike*, exhibition catalogue (Wien 2008), ed. by W. Seipel, Wien, 2008, pp. 74-76.
- 19 P. D. Moser, *Nochmals zu den Drei Philosophen: Ist der "Giorgione-Code" im Kunsthistorischen Museum wirklich geknackt worden?*, in *Was aus Fehlern zu lernen ist in Alltag, Wissenschaft und Kunst*, ed. by O. Neumaier, Wien, 2010, pp. 157-192.
- 20 D. M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*, Cambridge, 1988, *passim*.

- 21 *Ibidem*, pp. 124-147.
- 22 Settis, *Giorgione's Tempest*, p.155.
- 23 M. Barbaro, [*Arbori dei Patritii Veneti*, Venice, no date], Wien, Austrian National Library, ms. 6155, folio 86r-104v: 93r.
- 24 Several historians write that it was Giacomo Contarini who received the keys to the gates and was in charge of the defence of this section. This mistake appears to go back to George Sphrantzes, Emperor Constantine's Greek secretary, who wrote a day by day account of the siege which serves as the basis of most historical accounts: G. Sphrantzes, *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire*, trans. by M. Philippides, Amherst, 1980. For a discussion of Sphrantzes' *Lesser and Greater Chronicle* see R. Cowly, *The Last Great Siege*, London, 2005, p. 264.
- 25 On the one hand, Franz Babinger writes that it was Giacomo Contarini who was ransomed for 7,000 gold coins (F. Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer*, Munich, 1987, p. 105) and on the other hand Steven Runciman states that Catarino Contarini was executed (S. Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453*, Cambridge, 1965, p. 150). However, recent research has established that Catarino Contarini reached Venice on 16 August 1453 after having been ransomed for 7,000 gold coins (M. Philippides, W. K. Harnak, *The Siege and Fall of Constantinople in 1453. Historiography, Topography and Military Studies*, Farnham, 2011, p. 247).
- 26 Babinger, *Mehmed*, cit., pp. 243-406.
- 27 For a detailed account of Bellini's sojourn in Istanbul see A.Chong, *Gentile Bellini in Istanbul. Myths and Misunderstandings*, in *Bellini and the East*, ed. by C. Campbell, A. Chong, London, 2005, pp. 106-135.
- 28 O. Brätschmann, *Giovanni Bellini*, trans. by Ian Pepper, London, 2008.
- 29 D.W. Maze, *Giovanni Bellini: Birth, Parentage and Independence*, in «Renaissance Quarterly», 66, 2013, 3, pp. 783-823.
- 30 Maze, *Giovanni Bellini*, pp. 814-815.
- 31 N. Huse, *Studien zu Giovanni Bellini*, Berlin, 1972, p. 11.
- 32 A.P.Torrini, *Documents and Sources*, in *Giorgione: Myth*, pp. 21-30.
- 33 M. Koos, in Conference report of Giorgione Colloquium (Kunsthistorisches Museum, July 11, 2004), in ArtHist.net, 27 July 2004: <<https://arthist.net/reviews/445>> [last accessed 28 October 2018].
- 34 M.P. Pedani Fabris, *The Portrait of Mehmed II: Gentile Bellini, the Making of an Imperial Image*, in *Turkish Art*, Conference Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Turkish Art (Genève, 1999), ed. by F. Déroche et al., Genève, 1999, pp. 555-558.
- 35 E. Rodini, *The Sultan's True Face? Gentile Bellini, Mehmed II, and the values of verisimilitude*, in *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye, 1450-1750. Visual Imagery before Orientalism (Transculturalism 1400-1700)*, ed. by J.G. Harper, Burlington, 2011, pp. 21-40.
- 36 B. Gray, *Two Portraits of Mehmed II*, in «The Burlington Magazine», 61, 1932, 352, pp. 4-6.
- 37 Until recently this miniature was attributed to Nakkaş Sinan Bey. See S. Bagçi, Z. Tanidî, *The Art of the Ottoman Court, in Turks: A Journey of a Thousand Years, 600-1600*, ed. by D. J. Roxburgh, London, 2005, pp. 265-275 and 433-70.
- 38 It would be intriguing to apply current enhancing techniques to the face of Giorgione's Turk in order to approximate what he would have looked like twenty-seven years on, and to compare the result with the face on the medal.

- 39 Wilde, *Röntgenaufnahmen*, pp.141-154.
- 40 Settis, *Giorgione's Tempesta*, p. 20. Wilde's belief that one of the figures, like one of the Magi, was black, also adduced by Settis, has meanwhile been disproved.
- 41 Gentili, *Traces of Giorgione*, pp. 57-69.
- 42 E.g. S. Cohen, *A new Perspective on Giorgione's Three Philosophers*, in «Gazette des Beaux Arts», 126, 1995, pp. 53-64.
- 43 *Bellini-Giorgione-Titian and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting*, exhibition catalogue (Washington-Wien 2006-2007), ed. by D. A. Brown, S. Ferino-Pagden, New Haven-Wien, 2006, p. 164.
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Fig. 1: Giorgione, *Three Philosophers*, oil on canvas, ca. 1504, 123 x 144 cm. Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum. (photograph: wikipedia; in the public domain.)

Fig. 2: Vittore Carpaccio, *Sermon of St. Stephen*, oil on canvas, 1514, 148 x 194 cm. Paris: Musée du Louvre. (photograph: wikipedia; in the public domain.)





Fig. 3: Pinturicchio, *The Disputation of St. Catherine*, fresco with gold leaf, 1492-1494, 1.056 x 510 cm. Vatican: Borgia Apt. (Room of Saints). (photograph: wikipedia; in the public domain.)

Fig. 4: Gentile Bellini, *Mehmed II*, oil on canvas, 1480, 69.9 x 52.1 cm. London: The National Gallery. (photograph: wikipedia; in the public domain.)



Fig. 5: Gentile Bellini, *Standing Ottoman*, pen and ink on paper, c. 1489, 21.4 x 17.6 cm. Paris: Musée du Louvre. (photograph: Open University, © RMN/Micèle Bellot.)

Fig. 6: Pinturicchio, *Pope Pius II Arrives in Ancona*, fresco, 1502-1508, 900 x 1,154 cm. Siena: Piccolomini Library, Duomo. (photograph: Wikimedia Commons; in the public domain.)



Fig. 7: Giorgione, *Tempesta* (detail), oil on canvas, 1505-1508, 82 x 73 cm. Venice: Gallerie dell'Accademia. (photograph: Wikimedia Commons; in the public domain.)





Fig. 8: Shibilzade Ahmed (attributed), *Mehmed II*, opaque pigmentation on paper, c. 1480, 39 x 27 cm. Istanbul: Topkapi Museum. (photograph: Wikimedia Commons; in the public domain.)

Fig. 9: Gentile Bellini, *Sultan Mehmed II*, bronze, 1480, diameter 9.4 cm. London: Victoria and Albert Museum. © Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 10: Lorenzo Lotto, *St. Jerome* (detail of the *Pala di Santa Christina*), oil on canvas, 1504-1506, 276 x 179 cm. Travisio: Church of Santa Christina di Tiverone. (photo: wikipedia; in the public domain.)

Fig. 11: Johannes Wilde, X-radiograph of the *Three Philosophers*. (photograph: Johannes Wilde, *Röntgenaufnahmen der "Drei Philosophen" Giorgiones und der "Zigeunermadonna" Tizians*, in «*Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*», 6, Vienna, 1932, p.143.)



Fig. 12: John Young, *Abdülhamid I*, hand-coloured mezzotint with brush on paper, 1815, 3.75 x 2.53 cm. (photograph: Wikimedia Commons; in the public domain.)

Fig. 13: John Young, *Mehmed II*, hand-coloured mezzotint with brush on paper, 1815, 3.75 x 2.53 cm. (photograph: Wikimedia Commons; in the public domain.)



Fig. 14: Anonymus Flemish Artist, *The Meeting of Patriarch Gennadios and Mahomed II*, 1453, oil on canvas, c. 1600, 16 x 28 cm. London: Privately owned, Lindsay Family. (photograph: E. Enderson.)

Fig. 15: Anonymus Artist, *Gennadios Scholarios and Mohamed Devastator*, engraving, 16th century, c. 10 x 16 cm. Istanbul: Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (currently not locatable). (photograph: *Greek Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Athens, 1964, vol. 4, p. 279.)





Fig. 16: Anonymus Artist, *The Meeting of Patriarch Gennadius and Sultan Mohamed II outside Constantinople*, engraving, c. 1600, 47 x 35 cm. Istanbul: Ladopoulos printshop. (photograph: wikimedia; in the public domain.)

Fig. 17: Sotirios Varvoglis, *Patriarch Gennadius and Sultan Mehmed II*, mosaic, 1989, 170 x 220 cm. Istanbul: Entrance Hall, Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. (photograph: wikimedia; in the public domain.)



Fig. 18: Anonymus Artist, *Patriarch Gennadios and Sultan Mehmed II*, oil on antique Ottoman paper, 20th century, 9 x 14 cm. Istanbul: sold on the street.

Fig. 19: Turkish postage stamp, 1953. Patriarch Gennadios and Sultan Mehmed II.



Fig. 20: *Sacrifice of Isaac*, detail of the *Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*, marble, 259 CE, 244 x 118 cm. Vatican: Treasury at St. Peter's. (photograph: Wikimedia Commons; in the public domain.)

Fig. 21: Piero Della Francesca, *The Nativity*, oil on poplar, 1470-1475, 124.4 x 122.6 cm. London: The National Gallery (photograph: Wikimedia Commons; in the public domain.)



Fig. 22: Andrea del Verrocchio and Leonard da Vinci, *Baptism of Christ* (detail), oil on wood, 1472-1475, 177 x 151 cm. Florence: Palazzo degli Uffizi. (photograph: wikipedia; in the public domain.)

Fig. 23: Giovan Francesco Penni, after RAPHAEL, *Three Angels visiting Abraham*, fresco, 1516-1518, 109 x 39.5 cm. Vatican: Loggia 15, second story, Apostolic Palace (photograph: Wikimedia Commons; in the public domain.)