

# An Unknown Discourse of Chrysoloras addressed to Manuel II Palaeologus

C. G. Patrinelis

IT would be superfluous to dwell here at length on the importance of Manuel Chrysoloras' contribution to the cause of Humanism, and more especially to the revival of Greek studies in Italy during the early stage of the Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> Suffice it here to recall that some of the most prominent humanists of the early *Quattrocento* had been pupils of his: Leonardo Bruni, Palla Strozzi, Poggio Bracciolini, Guarino di Verona and many others. For all those humanists Chrysoloras was the "eruditissimus et suavissimus literarum Graecarum praeceptor"<sup>2</sup> or, according to Poggio, a heaven-sent messenger who had aroused the enthusiasm of the youth of Florence for the study of classical letters.<sup>3</sup>

Although these high praises seem to refer to Chrysoloras' activity as a teacher of Greek, still it is surprising that what we know of his literary production is rather meagre. Specifically, the following works of Chrysoloras have been known thus far:<sup>4</sup> 1. His repeatedly printed Greek Grammar, the so-called *Erotemata*. 2. A Latin translation of Plato's *Republic*. 3. A Greek translation of the Roman Liturgy. 4. Thirteen letters, including a longer one addressed to the co-emperor John Palaeologus in which Chrysoloras compares the Old and the New Rome, *i.e.* Constantinople. This letter is also known as *Syngrisis*, and it is recognized as his most significant work. 5. A theological work on the procession of the Holy Spirit, which, however, seems to be spurious.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On Chrysoloras' life and his literary activity see the excellent monograph of G. Cammelli, *I dotti bizantini e le origini dell'Umanesimo, I. Manuele Crisolora* (Florence 1941). Of the recent bibliography on Chrysoloras the following articles are particularly worth mentioning: M. Baxandall, "Guarino, Pisanello and Manuel Chrysoloras," *JWarb* 28 (1965) 183-204; J. Thomson, "Manuel Chrysoloras and the Early Italian Renaissance," *GRBS* 7 (1966) 63-82.

<sup>2</sup> According to Jacopo Scarperia, cited by Cammelli, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 180 n.1. Cf. *ibid.* 165-77, similar eulogies by several other pupils of Chrysoloras.

<sup>3</sup> Cited by J. E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*<sup>3</sup> II (New York 1964) 21.

<sup>4</sup> Listed and commented upon by Cammelli, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 177-85.

<sup>5</sup> Cammelli, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 178, does not doubt the genuineness of this work since it is

In conclusion, we may say that we have to do with a scanty crop of works which can hardly vindicate his widespread reputation as a scholar.

Today, however, we may partly reconsider this conclusion in the light of a new work of Chrysoloras, completely unknown so far, which is also the longest and probably the most important of his writings. It is a discourse addressed to emperor Manuel Palaeologus, in which Chrysoloras comments extensively on a funeral oration written by the emperor for his brother Theodore, who died as a despot of Morea in 1407. Chrysoloras' Discourse is preserved in codex 154 of the monastery of Metamorphosis at Meteora, but not in complete form. The text originally covered 75 folia, but the first one, which most likely gave the author's name and the title of the work, is now missing. This was the reason why N. Bees, who had prepared a catalogue of this manuscript collection, was not able to identify the author of the Discourse.<sup>6</sup> He discerned, however, that the text pertained to the last Palaeologoi of Mystra and wondered whether the author of the Discourse might be Pletho. Furthermore, Bees copied and cited in his catalogue several characteristic passages of the text in order to facilitate a future identification, but he never returned to the subject.

There are, however, in the text sufficient internal indications which may serve as a basis for the identification both of the author and the addressee of the Discourse:

(1) The Discourse is addressed to a Byzantine emperor who had travelled to Italy, France and the British Isles (fol.44<sup>v</sup>). It is clear that the emperor meant here is Manuel II Palaeologus (1391–1425), since no other emperor of Byzantium had ever taken such a trip.<sup>7</sup>

(2) The author of the Discourse was an ambassador of that em-

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attributed to Chrysoloras in at least six mss. This work, however, was proved to be almost identical with a treatise of the well known Byzantine theologian Neilos Kavasilas, who died as archbishop of Thessalonike in 1363. See Amalia Spourlakou, "Εἶναι ὁ Μανουὴλ Χρυσολωρᾶς ὁ συγγραφεὺς τοῦ ἔργου Κεφάλαια ὅτι καὶ ἐκ τοῦ Υἱοῦ τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα ἐκπορεύεται," *Thesaurismata* 2 (1963) 83–117.

<sup>6</sup> N. Bees, *Τὰ χειρόγραφα τῶν Μετεώρων* [Publications of the Research Center for Medieval and Modern Hellenism of the Academy of Athens] I (Athens 1967) 185–86. As a staff-member of this Research Center I have had the chance to study this ms and publish a brief note concerning the authorship of the text, *ibid.*, Appendix: Additions and Corrections p.651.

<sup>7</sup> G. Schlumberger, *Un empereur de Byzance à Paris et à Londres* (Paris 1927); M. A. Andreeva, "Zur Reise Manuels II Palaiologos nach Westeuropa," *BZ* 34 (1934) 37–47.

peror, *i.e.* Manuel II, and had spent several years in Florence and Rome (fols.3<sup>v</sup>, 71<sup>v</sup>). It is again obvious to anyone familiar with late Byzantine history that this royal ambassador could be no other than Manuel Chrysoloras, who is known to have served the emperor Manuel in that capacity and to have lived in the cities mentioned above.<sup>8</sup>

The identification of the author is further corroborated by several bits of internal secondary evidence which also throw light on the circumstances which gave birth to this Discourse.

Research into the various problems relating to this text proves to be doubly fruitful: not only is Chrysoloras the author of the Discourse but he is also the scribe of the text. Brief additions in the margins or *inter lineas* by the same hand and substitutions of some words by more accurate ones indicate that the text has undergone a subsequent revision by the author himself. Indeed, a comparison of the writing of the Meteora codex with the unique surviving specimen of Chrysoloras' handwriting (provided by a note in a Greek manuscript now in the Louvre) leaves no doubt that the text in question is written by Chrysoloras himself.<sup>9</sup> Thus we now have at our disposal the first known autograph codex of Chrysoloras.

Concerning the date and the place of composition of this Discourse there are sufficient indications in the text itself. Chrysoloras states (fol.71<sup>v</sup>) that he started writing it a considerable time after his departure from Rome, *i.e.* after the middle of 1413.<sup>10</sup> How much after this date we may infer from another passage (fol.72<sup>r</sup>), in which the author says that he must hurry to finish his Discourse before his nephew, John Chrysoloras, leaves for Byzantium. Since it is known that John Chrysoloras, having fulfilled his diplomatic mission to Italy and Germany, returned to Constantinople late in the summer of 1414,<sup>11</sup> we may surely conclude that Manuel Chrysoloras was writing his Discourse in the spring or early in the summer of 1414. At this

<sup>8</sup> Cammelli, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) *passim*.

<sup>9</sup> On Chrysoloras' note in the Louvre ms see Cammelli, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 146 n.2 and 183 n.2. I am greatly indebted to M. l'abbé Marcel Richard and to the Revd Fr J. Paramelle, who kindly carried out my request and compared a specimen which I sent them of Meteora codex 154 with Chrysoloras' autograph note in the Louvre ms. As they informed me, "il n'y a aucun doute que la note de Chrysoloras dans ce manuscrit est de la même main que votre manuscrit des Météores."

<sup>10</sup> Cammelli, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 158–59, 161.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* 192–93.

time, specifically from February to July 15, 1414, Manuel Chrysoloras lived in Bologna as ambassador of the Byzantine emperor to the papal Curia.<sup>12</sup>

The content and the character of Chrysoloras' Discourse have been already suggested. A fuller description, however, would be useful at this point. The largest part of the work (fols.2–59<sup>v</sup>) deals with the funeral oration which the emperor Manuel Palaeologus had written for his brother Theodore<sup>13</sup> and had forwarded to Chrysoloras through the latter's nephew, John Chrysoloras. In a letter which accompanied the oration the emperor asked Chrysoloras not to hesitate to make any corrections and changes in the oration that Chrysoloras thought necessary.<sup>14</sup> But nothing of the sort happened. Chrysoloras, as a good courtier, found the imperial work perfect and beyond any possibility of correction or change. He restricted himself, therefore, to extolling the various virtues of the deceased prince, to praising the literary qualities of the oration, and to speaking about funeral orations as a literary genre with frequent references to classical authors and to ancient Greek mythology and history. This part as a whole is indeed rather dull reading. We are compensated, however, when we reach the last part of the Discourse. It is an almost independent part divided into two sections which are entitled: "Exhortation on behalf of the nation" (*Παρακίνησις ὑπὲρ τοῦ Γένους*, fols.59<sup>v</sup>–67<sup>v</sup>), and "Apology" (fols.67<sup>v</sup>–75<sup>v</sup>).

Leaving aside the "Apology," not as lacking in interest but as con-

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* 163.

<sup>13</sup> Manuel Palaeologus' funeral oration to his brother has been edited by Sp. Lambros, *Παλαιολόγεια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά* 3 (Athens 1926) 11–119. On this text see D. Zakythinis, "Μανουὴλ Β' ὁ Παλαιολόγος καὶ ὁ καρδινάλιος Ἰσιδωρος ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ," *Mélanges Octave et Melpo Merlier* III (Athens 1957) 45ff. Another copy of the oration was sent by emperor Manuel to Guarino di Verona in 1417; see *ibid.* 47.

<sup>14</sup> Manuel's letter was published by E. Legrand, *Lettres de l'empereur Manuel Paléologue* (Paris 1893) 86–87. The letter bears no date. Cammelli, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 190–91, says that the funeral oration and the accompanying letter of Manuel Palaeologus to Manuel Chrysoloras were brought to Italy in February 1410 when John Chrysoloras arrived there as ambassador of the Byzantine emperor. It would be extremely improbable, however, to suppose that Manuel Chrysoloras took more than four years to respond to the royal letter. The question may be definitely settled now on the basis of a passage of Chrysoloras' Discourse. Chrysoloras states (fol.73<sup>v</sup>) that at the time he was writing the Discourse his nephew John had been already in Italy for one year. We infer, therefore, that John arrived in Italy in the spring or early in the summer of 1413. It was at this time, according to another passage (fol.72<sup>r</sup>), that John carried the letter and the oration destined for his uncle Manuel. On John Chrysoloras see Cammelli, 189ff.

taining information which has already been given above, let us examine the "Exhortation on behalf of the nation." In this section Chrysoloras tries to convince the emperor that the best memorial for his deceased brother would be the intensification of his efforts for the maintenance and salvation of the nation, which was running the immediate danger not simply of being enslaved but of perishing forever. Nobody, and above all the emperor, could bear the shame to witness such an inglorious end to a nation which boasts of its descent from the ancient Greeks as well as from the Romans, and which still keeps alive the political heritage of Alexander the Great. As to the means which would secure the survival of the nation, the emperor, being a philosopher-king, would be best qualified to choose them. Chrysoloras restricts himself to suggesting only one measure, which he finds all-important and efficacious, namely, the promotion of education in three main ways: establishment of schools, support to scholars, and revival of the study of the literary treasures of antiquity, both pagan and Christian. After all, Chrysoloras concludes, it is quite absurd for the Byzantines to neglect their own cultural inheritance while the Italians have started exhibiting so much zeal in studying the Greek language and literature.

These are the main lines of Chrysoloras' "Exhortation." Whether his specific suggestions would indeed have brought about the salvation of Byzantium at that critical time is doubtful. What is especially worth noting here, however, is the whole intellectual and political outlook of the author. Imbued with the spirit of the rising humanism Chrysoloras does not seek the salvation of the empire in the intervention of divine forces as a typical Byzantine would. The framework of his thinking is hardly theological. In his view, what would save and regenerate the empire was the revival of the Graeco-Roman heritage not only in the field of literature but in the cultural and political areas as well. For Chrysoloras' admiration for classical learning was not simply literary, but it derived from or went in parallel with a sense of racial kinship to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Indeed, several passages in his "Exhortation" reveal a keen consciousness both of cultural and national continuity running from ancient Greece through the Roman and the Hellenistic ages to Byzantium. It was an entirely new conception of the Graeco-Roman inheritance of Byzantium.

It is true that some decades earlier his friend, Demetrius Cydones,

used to refer to his countrymen as 'Hellenes' or 'Romaioi' indiscriminately, but Chrysoloras is the first Byzantine scholar who seems to have developed this racial identification of the Byzantines with the Greeks and Romans into a political theory.<sup>15</sup> He may be considered, therefore, to be the introducer of that peculiar nationalism which later inspired Pletho, Bessarion and other prominent scholars of the last Byzantine generation.<sup>16</sup>

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OF THE ACADEMY OF ATHENS

*June, 1972*

<sup>15</sup> The earliest known reference to the Byzantines as Hellenes in a racial sense occurs in a letter of Athanasius Lepenthrenus addressed to Nicephorus Gregoras about 1355; see S. Runciman, "Byzantine and Hellene in the Fourteenth Century," *Tomos K. Armenopoulou* (Thessalonike 1952) 27–31, and *idem*, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance* (Cambridge 1970) 18–23, where this letter is commented on in the framework of a broader discussion of the use and the meanings of the term 'Hellene' in the XIV and early XV centuries. A little later, however, Demetrius Cydones seems still to waver between the terms 'Hellenes' and 'Romaioi', though this wavering may indicate not an uncertainty about the racial identity of his contemporary Byzantines but quite the opposite, namely his firm conviction of their double cultural and racial origins. This latter conception is exactly the thesis which is developed by Chrysoloras in his *Syngrosis* and more thoroughly in the Discourse in question.

<sup>16</sup> The text of Chrysoloras' Discourse will be edited by me in a future issue of the *Epeteris* of the Research Center for Medieval and Modern Hellenism of the Academy of Athens. I will then have the chance to discuss in greater detail the various philological and historical problems relating to it.