

Igor Stamenović

University of Niš

Faculty of Philosophy

Department of History

Center for Byzantine-Slavic Studies of the University of Niš

e – mail: igor.stamenovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

BETWEEN APOCALYPTICISM AND IMPERIAL LEGITIMACY: CONTEXTUALIZING PERSPECTIVES OF DEMETRIUS KANTAKOUZENOS ON OTTOMAN RULE IN THE VITA OF SAINT JOHN OF RILA*

Abstract: *This paper analyzes the political and theological perspectives of Demetrius Kantakouzenos, a fifteenth-century post-Byzantine and Slavic author, on Ottoman rule as presented in his Vita of Saint John of Rila. The study examines his views on divine punishment, Ottoman legitimacy, and draws parallels to Byzantine apocalypticism, with particular attention to his portrayal of Sultan Mehmed II (1444–1446, 1451–1481). Additionally, the research explores how Kantakouzenos incorporated Byzantine discourses into his regional literary context and considers the transmission and adaptation of his ideas through correspondence with contemporary writers.*

Keywords: *Demetrius Kantakouzenos, apocalypticism, fifteenth century, Ottoman Empire, Mehmed II*

1. Introduction

Byzantine cultural and political influences largely shaped the intellectual landscape of authors writing in the Serbian Despotate during the final decades of its existence. Although the political significance of Byzantine-Serbian relations diminished following the Ottoman conquests of Constantinople (1453) and the Serbian Despotate (1459), Byzantine cultural influences persisted beyond these political upheavals.¹ Demetrius Kantakouzenos was one of the representatives of this influence. There is little reliable biographical information about him. He came from the Greek Kantakouzenos family, whose presence in the town of Novo Brdo is confirmed in the mid-fifteenth century. This was most likely a branch of the Byzantine noble house of Kantakouzenos that had settled in Serbia after 1414, following the marriage of Irene Kantakouzenos to the Serbian Despot George Branković (1427–1456). Demetrius' father served as a customs officer during the period of Serbian rule over Novo Brdo.² It is presumed that Demetrius received solid education, both Byzantine and Serbian.³

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¹ For thorough analysis of Byzantine cultural influence in medieval Serbia, see Bikić 2016; Vojvodić and Popović 2016.

² Stavrides 2001, 90–91.

³ Grković-Mejdžor 1993, 11.

After the Ottoman conquest of Novo Brdo in 1455, the Kantakouzenos family managed to retain their positions in the Ottoman administration and successfully conduct business under the new rule. Demetrius' brother John (Janja or Yani) is recorded in 1461 and 1462 as "the lord of Novo Brdo" in the Ragusan sources. In the Ottoman records, together with his brother George (Yorgi), he is attested as a tax farmer and renter of various silver and gold mines in Serbia in 1468, 1474, and 1476.⁴ There are presumptions that the Kantakouzenos of Novo Brdo might have been related to the Grand Vizier Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1456–1466, 1472–1474). However, this hypothesis remains uncertain due to insufficient evidence in the sources.⁵

John Kantakouzenos, his brothers Alexios and George, four or eight sons, and twelve grandsons, were arrested in Novo Brdo and executed in Constantinople in 1477, for reasons undisclosed.⁶ Since the target was evidently the entire Kantakouzenos family, and Demetrius was not among the arrested, nor was he mentioned as being spared, it seems plausible that he passed away before 1477.⁷ Another assumption is that he died at the end of the fifteenth century, spending the rest of his life in Mesembria.⁸ The data provided regarding the Kantakouzenos family of Novo Brdo reveal typical characteristics of the development and economic survival of a Byzantine noble family under Ottoman rule in the second half of the fifteenth century.⁹

Demetrius' writings incorporated both Slavic and Byzantine Greek cultural influences. He authored one short secular treatise *On the Dacian Lands* and five religious writings, one of which is the *Vita* of Saint John of Rila.¹⁰ It has not been conclusively determined in which language Demetrius originally composed his works, with hypotheses ranging from Greek to Serbo-Slavonic, though with noticeable Greek influences.¹¹ The Byzantine Greek foundations of Kantakouzenos' writings are evident in the influence of church fathers and hymnographers, such as John Chrysostom, Andrew of Crete, Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, and Philotheos Kokkinos, as well as classical authors like Isocrates, Pindar, and Aeschylus.¹² The author's Byzantine Greek background is further demonstrated in his *Prayer to the Theotokos*, which belongs to the genre of penitential, catanyctic poetry – a form highly developed in Byzantine literature and atypical for Slavic writers of the fifteenth century.¹³ Demetrius Kantakouzenos' ethnic origin, political-economic position of his family, religious, intellectual, and political climate, as well as formative Byzantine cultural influences provide a basis for considering his thought within the intellectual endeavors of contemporary post-Byzantine scholars.

2. Intellectual Context: Ottoman Rule and Apocalypticism in the Perceptions of Fifteenth-Century Post-Byzantine Scholars

The Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453 left a profound impact on contemporaries in both the Christian East and West.¹⁴ Post-Byzantine intellectuals perceived the new authority in different ways. The majority of Byzantine Greek scholars who emigrated to the West

⁴ Stavrides 2001, 91; Inalcik 1999, 59, 210–211; Nicol 1968, 227–228, no. 99.

⁵ Stavrides 2001, 90–92.

⁶ Stavrides 2001, 92; Nicol 1968, 227–228; Trifunović 1963, 18–19.

⁷ Radojičić 1961, 366.

⁸ Nicol 1968, 226, no. 98; Grković-Mejdžor 1993, 13–14.

⁹ On the transformation of Byzantine families such as Paleologoi, Chalkokondyli, Rhali, etc. into successful economic factors in the Empire, see Inalcik 1999, 209–212.

¹⁰ Grković-Mejdžor 1993, 14–18.

¹¹ Ibid., 19–21.

¹² Ibid., 18–19; Bogdanović 1980, 227–228; Bojović 2007, 54–55.

¹³ Grković-Mejdžor 1993, 15. Further on catanyctic poetry, see Giannouli 2013; Cocola 2022.

¹⁴ Angold 2016, 62–170; Nikolić 2016.

viewed Ottoman authority as oppressive, considered it illegitimate, and hoped for its downfall in alliance with Roman Catholic powers.¹⁵ Cardinal Bessarion (1439–1472), a central figure among the Byzantine diaspora, was a key proponent of this idea.¹⁶ Opposition to the legitimacy of Ottoman rule was also expressed by other emigrant scholars and prelates such as Isidore of Kiev, Michael Apostolis, Janus Lascaris, Demetrius Chalcondyles, etc. Byzantine Greek emigrants utilized their intellectual influence, particularly in Italy, to spread anti-Ottoman propaganda.¹⁷

Scholars who remained within the territories of the former Byzantine Empire had somewhat different attitudes toward the Ottoman rule from those of the emigrants. The loss of the empire and the subsequent Turkish rule were interpreted as divine punishment for accumulated sins. Among the ecclesiastical figures, the most influential representative of this idea was Patriarch Gennadios II Scholarios (1454–1464).¹⁸ In his pastoral letter on the fall of Constantinople from 1455, Scholarios highlighted that the human actions are judged by the divine, and portrayed God as a compassionate father who urges sinners to repent. The cause of Constantinople's fall was attributed to various sins, such as distrust in God (i.e., reliance on Latin allies and the church union), church property confiscation, blasphemy, and polytheism. The emergence of new martyrs was seen as a sign of God's mercy and as a sign of the world's impending end.¹⁹

The Patriarch advocated the eschatological belief that the end of the world would occur 7000 years after its creation, corresponding to 1492 AD. This concept was widespread in the Christian East, and it was prompted in the fifteenth century by Symeon of Thessaloniki, Joseph Bryennios, and Scholarios himself.²⁰ According to Byzantine apocalyptic theology, the precise date of the end of time hinged on the moment when heaven would be filled with the necessary predetermined number of souls.²¹ Scholarios shared this belief in the mentioned epistle from 1455, noting that “these times are near.”²²

While it is certain that Scholarios called on his flock to submit to the new authorities and “joyfully” accept God's punishment,²³ the extent of his perception of the Sultan's rule as legitimate remains an open question. On one hand, scholars have observed that Scholarios, in his writings, does not refer to Mehmed as *basileus* – a title associated with the emperor in the Byzantine Empire, whose use in the post-Byzantine period indicated acceptance of the *translatio imperii* from the Byzantine to the Ottoman Empire.²⁴ On the other hand, Scholarios was the first Orthodox patriarch appointed by the sultan. The reestablishment of the Patriarchate in 1454 aimed at creating an image of Mehmed II as a new *basileus* and *autokrator* among the Orthodox. The idea originated from Mehmed himself, as well as his Greek Orthodox advisors.²⁵ By the

¹⁵ Moustakas 2019, 311.

¹⁶ Many of his positions are articulated in *Encyclica ad Graecos* and *Epistolae et Orationes contra Turcos*. See PG 161, 447–490; 641–767. Bessarion believed that the Ottomans, being “barbarians,” could not be legitimate rulers over the “virtuous” Greeks. In his efforts to promote a crusade against the Turks, the Cardinal hoped for the restoration of the Eastern Empire based on Hellenic identity. Lamers 2015, 111–115; Leaci 2014, 917–936.

¹⁷ Moustakas 2019, 311; Bisaha 2004, 104–117.

¹⁸ Moustakas 2011, 215–216.

¹⁹ Scholarios 2016, 898–899, 900–902, 905, 908–909; Moustakas 2019, 312.

²⁰ Brandes 2021, 50–52.

²¹ Such views had a long tradition in the Byzantine Empire, from Gregory of Nazianzus through Symeon the New Theologian to Joseph Bryennios and Scholarios. Magdalino 2008, 130.

²² Scholarios 2016, 905.

²³ *Ibid.*, 921.

²⁴ Moustakas 2019, 312–313. Further on titles of *autokrator* and *basileus*, see McCormick 1991; McCormick and Kazhdan 1991; Ostrogorski 1970, 282–303.

²⁵ Apostolopoulos 2021, 106–108; Fodor 2008, 47. On Scholarios' intronization, see Runciman 1968, 169–170.

time of Patriarch Symeon I (1466, 1471–1475, 1482–1486) the title *basileus* for the Ottoman ruler became definitely accepted by the Patriarchate.²⁶

Contemporary Byzantine Greek historian Kritoboulos of Imbros expressed the pro-Ottoman stance on *translatio imperii* in his work *History*. His use of the titles for Mehmed in the dedication of the *History* strongly echoes the titulature of the Byzantine emperors: “to the Supreme Emperor [«αὐτοκράτορι μεγίστῳ»], King of Kings [«βασιλεῖ βασιλέων»], Mehmed, the fortunate, the victor [...] Lord of land and sea, by the will of God.”²⁷ According to Kritoboulos, the general decline and incompetence of the Byzantine ruling class, contrasted with the opposite process on the Ottoman side, initiated the fall of the Empire. Ottoman rulers were portrayed as descendants “of the very oldest people,” the Achaemenids, to whom Greek origin was attributed. This non-barbaric lineage presented Ottoman rulers as suitable for governing Greeks.²⁸ Kritoboulos depicted Mehmed II through the philosopher-king topos, portraying him as interested in classical philosophy, destined by divine providence to “surpass all the sultans before him,” and militarily equal to the “Alexanders and Pompeys and Caesars.”²⁹

The other two secular Greek representatives of the pro-Ottoman *translatio imperii* concept were George Amiroutzes, a high official at the court of the last two emperors of Trebizond and an advisor to Mehmed II after 1461, and George of Trebizond, one of the few emigrants in Italy who wrote positively on Mehmed’s legitimacy.³⁰ They both reflected Ottoman imperial legitimacy through the use of terms such as *basileus* or *autokrator*, and both associated the imperial legitimacy with the possession of Constantinople as an imperial capital.³¹ George of Trebizond directly tied the rule over Constantinople to universal imperial authority in his letter to Mehmed II.³²

Mehmed’s conversion, his alleged lineage from biblical Abraham’s and Hagar’s son Ishmael, and rule over the universal empire are intertwined in George of Trebizond’s writing with general Byzantine interpretation of the pre-apocalyptic events.³³ His and his contemporaries’ apocalyptic thought was shaped by the earlier Byzantine apocalypses such as the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius, which predicted that the last emperor would be a descendant from Ishmael and would rule over the whole world.³⁴ Byzantine apocalyptic literature, including the Pseudo-Methodian prophecy, became known among the Southern and Eastern Slavs through translations from the Greek.³⁵ The fall of Constantinople strongly influenced the flourishing production of Greek manuscripts of the apocalyptic texts in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁶

²⁶ The term *basileus* for the Sultan appears in a synodal register of 1474. Çolak 2014, 8.

²⁷ Critobulus 1983, 3; Kritovoulos 2019, 3.

²⁸ Kritovoulos 2019, 11–13; Moustakas 2011, 223.

²⁹ Kritovoulos 2019, 13–14; Szill 2019, 85; Moustakas 2011, 223–224.

³⁰ For further insights into George Amiroutzes’ stance on Ottoman imperial legitimacy, see Moustakas 2011, 219–222. Regarding George of Trebizond’s acceptance of Ottoman legitimacy in the context of his idea of Mehmed II’s conversion, see Papayianni 2018. The use of the term *basileus* by Laonikos Chalkokondyles is regarded as “ideologically neutral,” making him an exception among post-Byzantine writers in this matter. Moustakas 2011, 224–225.

³¹ PG 161, 724–725; Moustakas 2011, 220–221.

³² George of Trebizond 1984, 493–495, no. 144. Constantinople have traditionally had a prominent place in Byzantine imperial rhetoric. See Šaranac Stamenković 2016.

³³ Detailed analysis of this question was made by Lobovikova 2010.

³⁴ Ibid., 357–360. Further on the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius and Daniel’s *Apocalypse* see: Reinink 1982; Reinink 2005; DiTommaso 2005. Further on the interpretations of the prophecies about the last emperor and the end of Byzantium, see Alexander 1985, 151–184; Pertusi 1988.

³⁵ Täpkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 1984; Brzozowska 2019; Thomson 1985; Istrin 1897.

³⁶ Brandes 2021, 49–50. For a detailed account of the Byzantine apocalypses associated with the fall of Constantinople, see Congourdeau 2016.

In parallel with Byzantine fifteenth-century apocalypticism, Ottoman Muslim prophecies about the end times circulated, simultaneously claiming that the conquest of Constantinople marked the beginning of the last days.³⁷ Although the apocalyptic thought of Demetrius Kantakouzenos was primarily shaped by the Byzantine literature, Ottoman apocalypticism illustrates the omnipresence of the last days impression in the Empire. Furthermore, recent historical research has shed light on the significant degree of cultural and religious exchange among the Ottomans and Christians after the fall of Byzantium, suggesting that Turkish and Christian cultural spheres should not necessarily be viewed as entirely separate.³⁸

3. Kantakouzenos' Portrayal of the Ottomans in the *Vita* of Saint John of Rila

Demetrius Kantakouzenos wrote the *Vita* between 1469 and 1479. He primarily focused on the translation of Saint John's relics in 1469, but he also incorporated descriptions of contemporary historical events and his reflections on them.³⁹ The Ottomans first appear in the Chapter XIV, which bridged the hagiographical narrative to contemporary events, notably the Turkish subjugation of Greek, Serbian, and Bulgarian lands.⁴⁰ Kantakouzenos linked Turkish descentance to Ishmael and provided further theological interpretation. The special historical role predetermined by God for Ishmael's descendants is underscored by using biblical references such as "Behold, I have blessed him, and will multiply him exceedingly" (Gen. 17:20), "Arise, lift up the lad [...] for I will make him a great nation" (Gen. 21:18), etc.⁴¹ The author disregards ethnic differences between Arabs and Ottomans, equating them based on religious affiliation.⁴² While referring to Turks as the "Ishmaelites" or "Hagarenes" was not unusual in Serbian late medieval literature, Kantakouzenos stands out for his consideration of God-predestined historical role of the Ottomans.⁴³ This positive portrayal of Hagar's son contrasts the negative image propagated in the anti-Arab writings in both the Christian East and West, which were also based on the biblical interpretations.⁴⁴

Following the biblical quotes, Kantakouzenos makes a direct reference to the last days: "In the [Book of] Revelation [...] John, referring to these [Ottomans, I.S.], briefly calls them 'the assembly of Satan' and said the hour when their attack on the whole world will occur."⁴⁵ Kantakouzenos' personal experience of the Ottoman conquests certainly influenced the apocalyptic imagery in his writing.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the author's highlighting of the end times can be traced to his general interest in eschatology and the pervasive apocalypticism in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷ His mention of Ishmael within the actualization of the Book of Revelation and the universal character of Ottoman conquests implies the possible influence of Pseudo-Methodius' *Apocalypse*, viewed in its fifteenth-century interpretational context. Situating Kantakouzenos'

³⁷ Şahin 2010; Pertusi 1988, 31–33.

³⁸ Şahin 2010, 352. with a reference to the further literature.

³⁹ Bogdanović 1980, 229; Grković-Mejdžor 1993, 17–18.

⁴⁰ Kantakuzin 1936, 95; Kantakuzin 1993, 91.

⁴¹ Kantakuzin 1936, 95; Kantakuzin 1993, 91.

⁴² A similar method was used by George of Trebizond. Lobovikova 2010, 358.

⁴³ For some examples of Ottoman identification with "Ishmaelites" and "Hagarenes," see Stojanović 1905, 57, no. 182; Ravaničanin I 1993, 123; Ravaničanin II 1993, 127; David 1993, 148.

⁴⁴ Tolan 2008, 142–143.

⁴⁵ Kantakuzin 1936, 95–96; Kantakuzin 1993, 91–92. It is presumed that the "assembly of Satan" refers to the biblical phrase "synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:8–9, 3:7–9), although Kantakouzenos uses it in a different context. See Kantakuzin 1993, 91, n. 23.

⁴⁶ Šuica 2021, 46–49; Bojović 2007, 57.

⁴⁷ Further on Kantakouzenos' eschatology, see Bojović 1995; Bojović 2007, 57–58.

text within this apocalyptic framework may help explain the somewhat contradictory emphasis on the God-given exceptional role of Ishmael's descendants, while simultaneously labeling them as the "assembly of Satan."

The Ottoman "attack on the whole world" has thus far been interpreted in scholarship as an indirect association with the horsemen of the apocalypse (Rev. 6:1–8).⁴⁸ Additionally, Kantakouzenos' text could be linked to two other passages from the Revelation (Rev. 9:7–9, 13–21) which are a part of the biblical narrative on the seven trumpets that announce the final phase of the Apocalypse. The trumpet motif is typical both for the Eastern Christian imagination of the Last Judgment and the Byzantine apocalypticism.⁴⁹ Beast-like horsemen are mentioned twice in the noted passages. The first mention relates to the sounding of the fifth trumpet and speaks of the temptations and torments inflicted on people by demon-like beings (Rev. 9:4–9). Kantakouzenos indeed speaks of the "temptation of those who dwell on the earth" as the purpose of the Ottoman universal attack.⁵⁰ The second passage concerns the sounding of the sixth trumpet and unleashing of beastly horsemen who kill a third of mankind, aiming to persuade the rest (though unsuccessfully) to repent for their sins (Rev. 9:20–21).

During the time of Kantakouzenos' writing of the *Vita*, several natural phenomena and disasters heightened the sense of the approaching end of time. The appearance of Halley's Comet in 1456 left a particularly strong impression on contemporaries.⁵¹ Serbian chroniclers noted the plague and high mortality, specifically in Novo Brdo, after the comet's appearance.⁵² In an apocalyptic context, the appearance of the burning star accompanied by mortality, is related to the sounding of the third trumpet (Rev. 8:10–11). Chronicles record another mortal scourge "in Novo Brdo and elsewhere" under the year 1468, while under 1470/71, they note the appearance of famine and drought. Additionally, in January 1473, they record the appearance of "a bright star with an earthquake."⁵³

Among the numerous, mostly short, solar eclipses in the second half of the fifteenth century, the year 1470 stands out with three eclipses, one of which (June 28, 1470) was total.⁵⁴ Lunar eclipses were also mostly short, but May 1472 stands out with a longer-lasting total eclipse (98 minutes).⁵⁵ Mortality, solar and lunar eclipses, and the reappearance of a blazing star are events that precede the sounding of the fifth trumpet in the Revelation (Rev. 8:11–13, 9:1–2). Although Kantakouzenos does not explicitly mention these natural phenomena in the *Vita*, he mentions them in his correspondences and attributes them to God's wrath.⁵⁶ Therefore, it is plausible that Kantakouzenos perceived the Ottoman invasion as a direct prelude to the specific final events from Book of Revelation. The author remained temporally indefinite in the *Vita* when writing about the duration of the pre-Apocalypse events,⁵⁷ though in his other writings he shared the belief that 1492 was the expecting apocalyptic year.⁵⁸

⁴⁸ Šuica 2021, 44–49.

⁴⁹ Kraft 2017, 78–80. For a thorough analysis of the Byzantine iconography of the Last Judgment and its impact, see Bhalla 2022.

⁵⁰ Kantakuzin 1936, 96; Kantakuzin 1993, 92.

⁵¹ Stoyan 2015, 45–47; Martínez and Marco 2016, 54–60.

⁵² Stojanović 1927, 239–240, no. 706–708.

⁵³ Stojanović 1927, 248, no. 761, 249, no. 764.

⁵⁴ Espenak and Meeus 2009, A-140. On the perception of comets from the second half of the fifteenth century in contemporary sources, see Martínez and Marco 2016.

⁵⁵ Espenak and Meeus 2009a, A-140.

⁵⁶ See the subsection 3.1. of this paper.

⁵⁷ "Although to us, who endure their trial, it may seem like long a century or many years [...], a thousand years are as yesterday before the eyes of the Lord." Kantakuzin 1936, 96; Kantakuzin 1993, 92.

⁵⁸ See the subsection 3.1. of this paper.

Kantakouzenos' stance on the cause of the Ottoman invasion is consistent with the views held by the majority of contemporary Greek scholars – namely, that the Ottomans were sent as God's punishment for the accumulated sins. Writing in a predominantly non-Greek environment, Kantakouzenos expands the scope of his reflections beyond Greeks to include Bulgarians and Serbs. All three peoples are criticized for the “fierce warfare among themselves.”⁵⁹ Specifically, Kantakouzenos reproaches the Bulgarians for their “cruelty and inhumanity” and their warfare against the Greeks, while the Greeks are criticized for their “arrogance, too high due to their pride.” Similarly, the Serbs are condemned for their rulers believing that they can “flourish” amidst the suffering of their neighbors, as well as for the “oathbreaking,” particularly the alleged killing of Emperor Stephen Uroš V (1355–1371) by the “King” and the “Despot.”⁶⁰

According to Demetrius Kantakouzenos, God's just punishment was inevitable, as the “accumulated multitude of wrath, gathered over a long period of time [...] is paid for with destinies.”⁶¹ The Ottoman devastation of Bulgarian and Serbian lands is depicted as severe, encompassing the motifs of bloodshed, slavery, forced prostitution (“shameless sales of women”), deprivation of Orthodoxy, church destruction and invincibility of the Ottomans.⁶² Kantakouzenos suggests that Turkish success was conditioned by divine permission and the unchangeableness of “God's judgment.”⁶³ Notably, the author selectively adapts the historical narrative to create an apocalyptic image of absolute devastation. He thus omits any mention of Ottoman defeats, such as the one at Belgrade in 1456, which he most likely knew about.⁶⁴

The strong anti-Latin stance is another link between Kantakouzenos and post-Byzantine Greek writers in the Ottoman Empire. Demetrius, unlike Scholarios, does not directly indicate the union as one of the causes of divine revenge. Nevertheless, describing the Greek troubles in resisting the Turks and Bulgarians,⁶⁵ Kantakouzenos, as the “third danger,” adds their war against the “Venetians with Western allies and those from Italy [...] who previously divided the Church due to the inappropriate supplementation of faith.”⁶⁶ He refers to Latins as “evil warriors against the Orthodox” and “culprits of all evils,” accusing them of capturing Constantinople (1204) and destroying its “church beauty.”⁶⁷ The negative portrayal of Westerners transcends the events of the thirteenth century. By highlighting Latin malice as a permanent trait, Kantakouzenos emphasized the irreconcilable division between the Orthodox East and the Latin West.

Although Kantakouzenos wrote about the events from the thirteenth century, his stance towards the Latins aligns with contemporary anti-Latin Orthodox literature in the aftermath of the Florentine union (1439).⁶⁸ In addition to the theological aspect, there may also be a political

⁵⁹ Kantakuzin 1936, 95; Kantakuzin 1993, 91; Bojović 2024.

⁶⁰ Kantakuzin 1936, 95, 96–97; Kantakuzin 1993, 91, 92–93. Following a living oral tradition, Kantakouzenos accuses King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa of murdering Emperor Uroš. Further on this tradition in hagiographic texts, see Stojković and Kostić Tmušić 2020. The mentioned passage from the *Vita* of Saint John of Rila indicates that this work should also be included in the list of hagiographies that incorporate the motif of Emperor Uroš's murder.

⁶¹ Kantakuzin 1936, 95; Kantakuzin 1993, 91.

⁶² Kantakuzin 1936, 97; Kantakuzin 1993, 92–93.

⁶³ Kantakuzin 1936, 97–98; Kantakuzin 1993, 93.

⁶⁴ Further on the battle and contemporary impressions, see Stojanović 1927, 239, no. 705–708; Mixson 2022, 87–268; Kalić 1967, 127–170; Pálosfalvi 2018, 174–187.

⁶⁵ Kantakouzenos does not distinguish between the Seljuk Turks and the Ottoman Turks, considering the Ottoman invasion to be an integral component of the earlier Turkish conquests.

⁶⁶ Kantakuzin 1936, 96; Kantakuzin 1993, 92.

⁶⁷ Kantakuzin 1936, 96; Kantakuzin 1993, 92.

⁶⁸ Dojčinović 2019, 577–578.

dimension in Kantakouzenos' stance. At the same time the *Vita* was written, the idea of launching an anti-Ottoman crusade was revived in the Christian West under the pontificate of Sixtus IV (1471–1484). The crusader strategy involved Christians on the border with the Ottomans, including the Orthodox, such as the Moldavian Voivode Stephen III (1457–1504). The church union was an integral part of this policy.⁶⁹ Sultan Mehmed II ideologically opposed these crusading actions, inciting antagonisms between the Orthodox and the Latins, and exploiting the favor of the clergy of Patriarchate in Constantinople.⁷⁰ Demetrius Kantakouzenos belonged to the extremely anti-Latin circle of Orthodox writers. He was the direct commissioner of the *Codex* compiled in 1469 by Vladislav the Grammarian, which contained over twenty Byzantine anti-Latin polemical works.⁷¹ While it appears unlikely that Kantakouzenos wrote under the orders of Ottoman authorities, his views aligned with those of generally pro-Ottoman Greek scholars, suggesting that his anti-Latin stance may have been influenced by the contemporary political and religious climate.

In the *Vita*, Kantakouzenos presented Sultan Mehmed II with notable admiration, writing that “he who reigns over us today, great and autocratic [*самодержавный*], surpasses with glory and grandeur all who ruled before him.”⁷² Kantakouzenos employs the established philosopher-king topos, pointing out to the Sultan's qualities such as sharp-mindedness, military skill, and wisdom, which resulted in Mehmed's formation of “splendid army and fearsome and beautiful military equipment.”⁷³ The Sultan's asceticism (“he did not indulge in food and drink, nor laziness, nor physical comfort”) sets Mehmed apart from “the majority of rulers.”⁷⁴ This description aligns with Mehmed's positive image found in both Greek and Latin writings, which developed alongside the barbaric portrayal that dominated Latin discourse.⁷⁵ Sultan's sagacity and ascetic rigor stand in utter contrast to Kantakouzenos' negative image of Serbian and Bulgarian stumbling elite.

Taking into account the Serbian, Bulgarian, and Byzantine cultural and political traditions that shaped the perceptions of Kantakouzenos and his audience, two possible sources for his use of the term *autocrat* for Mehmed II emerge. The medieval Serbian interpretation of the title *autocrat* (*самодержиць*) was based on the Byzantine concept of *autokrator*, but it was not strictly tied to the identification with the Emperor of the Romans. It was used to emphasize the ruler's independency, owing the legitimacy solely to the divine authority.⁷⁶ In the context of Kantakouzenos' use of the term, it is unlikely that there was a particular need to emphasize Mehmed's independency. It seems more probable that the term was used in its original Byzantine sense, as the literal Slavic translation of the term *autokrator*. This interpretation of the title was common in medieval Bulgaria.⁷⁷

Based on his approach to the imperial title, Demetrius Kantakouzenos could be situated within the group of post-Byzantine scholars who accepted Ottoman imperial legitimacy, and the Ottoman sultans as the new *autokrators*. Furthermore, it seems that Kantakouzenos employed a similar method of adapting pre-Ottoman Slavic political terminology to the Ottoman context. Consequently, in the *Vita* Mehmed emerges not only as a legitimate successor to the Byzantine

⁶⁹ Setton 1978, 314–345; Pilat and Cristea 2018, 136–190; Simon 2015.

⁷⁰ Simon 2007, 128.

⁷¹ Mošin 1955, 65–67; Dojčinović 2019, 579.

⁷² Kantakuzin 1936, 98; Kantakuzin 1993, 94.

⁷³ Kantakuzin 1936, 98; Kantakuzin 1993, 94.

⁷⁴ Kantakuzin 1936, 98; Kantakuzin 1993, 94.

⁷⁵ Akasoy 2013; Helmrath 2000, 111–115; Bisaha 2004, 90–92, 163–164.

⁷⁶ Miklosich 1865, 820; Maksimović 2013, 809; Maksimović 1998, 183–184; Ostrogorski 1970, 321–338; Stojkovski 2021, 298.

⁷⁷ Ostrogorski 1970, 318–321.

Empire but also to the Slavic Balkan states. Scholars have noticed that the Slavic referring to Mehmed and other sultans as *tsars* often carried connotation of legitimizing and domesticating Ottoman rule in the Balkans.⁷⁸ In Kantakouzenos' work, Mehmed is indeed commonly called a "tsar," and the sultanness Mara Branković, the former wife of Sultan Murad II (1421–1451), a "pious tsaritsa."⁷⁹

The section on Mehmed is rather brief, making it challenging to conclusively determine whether Kantakouzenos associated *translatio imperii* with the conquest of Constantinople. The capture of the "City of Constantine" and "establishment of the throne of the Empire in it" are highlighted in the text as key events of Mehmed's reign.⁸⁰ The Sultan's relocating of the capital ("establishment of the throne of the Empire") to Constantinople, along with adopting the title *Kayser-i Rum* (Caesar of Rome), could equally have influenced Kantakouzenos' report. The political-ideological effect of these actions aimed at continuity with the Byzantine Empire. The recent research of Mehmed's imperial propaganda indicated its multilayer, complex, and effective nature.⁸¹ Kantakouzenos' perception could serve as an indicator of Mehmed's propaganda effectiveness. In the *Vita*, the Sultan's aspiration to establish a world empire is portrayed through a narrative of his continued conquest of "fortified cities" and "realms and dominions, as well as the sea."⁸² The terms used somewhat resemble Mehmed's title "Sultan of the Two Continents and Emperor of the Two Seas," which was inscribed on the Imperial Gate of the Topkapı Palace and reflected Mehmed's universalist ambitions.⁸³

Kantakouzenos described the fall of Constantinople as "punishment for those who have sinned," aligning his stance with the prevailing post-Byzantine interpretation. Although the text mentions that Mehmed proved to be "doomful" in punishing the sinners, the typical depictions of Ottoman atrocities against the Christians in Constantinople are absent.⁸⁴ Reasons for this omission could be the brevity of Kantakouzenos' account, as well as his intention to portray Mehmed's rule as acceptable to Christians, at the very least.⁸⁵

Mehmed's benevolence towards Christians becomes further evident in the following chapter of the *Vita*, which recounts the translation of Saint John's relics in 1469 from Tarnovo to the Rila Monastery. Kantakouzenos notes that "even if his [Mehmed's, I.S.] time proved to be difficult [...] and burdensome," it was still a period of freedom for monks, allowing them to "enjoy rest, and no one dared to speak against them." The author even reproaches the monks of Rila for allowing their monastery to "fall into neglect" despite such favorable conditions.⁸⁶ Mehmed is also depicted as being caring towards the "tsaritsa" Mara, whom he "had as a mother" and whom he respected "more than anyone else in his empire." Her influence is presented as crucial in convincing the Sultan to approve the translation of Saint John's relics.⁸⁷

⁷⁸ Kołodziejczyk 2012, 184–185.

⁷⁹ Kantakuzin 1936, 98–99; Kantakuzin 1993, 94–95.

⁸⁰ Kantakuzin 1936, 98; Kantakuzin 1993, 94.

⁸¹ For further discussion on the geographic elements of Mehmed's imperial propaganda, see Beaudoen 2017, 157–159. For an analysis of the visual elements, which incorporated Byzantine concepts of physical resemblance, continuity with predecessors, and *family of rulers*, see Schroeder 2020.

⁸² Kantakuzin 1936, 98; Kantakuzin 1993, 94.

⁸³ Necipoğlu 1992, 13; Sizonenko 2022, 182.

⁸⁴ Regarding the Byzantine Greek and Western examples, see Nikolić 2016; Smith 1966.

⁸⁵ Kantakouzenos mentions the destruction of churches in the Balkans during the Ottoman conquests and unequivocally refers to the Latin plunder of Constantinople in 1204. Therefore, the omission of Ottoman atrocities in his account of the fall of Constantinople appears to be intentional. Kantakuzin 1936, 96, 98; Kantakuzin 1993, 92–93.

⁸⁶ Kantakuzin 1936, 98; Kantakuzin 1993, 94.

⁸⁷ Kantakuzin 1936, 99; Kantakuzin 1993, 95.

3.1. Demetrius Kantakouzenos' Political-Theological Perspectives in Relation: The Cases of the *Epistle* to Kir Isaiah and Writings of Vladislav the Grammarian

The correspondence of Kantakouzenos is largely not preserved, making it difficult to thoroughly establish how and with whom Demetrius exchanged his political-theological ideas. However, there are two exceptions, notably Kantakouzenos' communication with Isaiah the Serb and Vladislav the Grammarian. Kantakouzenos' letter to Isaiah (*Epistle to the honorable among the priests, and domestikos Kir Isaiah [from] a sinful Demetrius Kantakouzenos*) is part of the now-lost correspondence.⁸⁸ It is presumed that this "domestikos" (choirmaster) likely refers to Isaiah the Serb, a composer of liturgical music in Serbian and Greek, and a monk of the Mateič Monastery.⁸⁹ It has been suggested that Kantakouzenos' *Epistle* was not merely personal communication but was intended for public reading, which broadens its potential audience.⁹⁰ The letter's nature is primarily theological, with little direct reference to political realities. Nonetheless, two significant ideas relevant to the context of this research emerge: (1) the causality between Christian sins and Ottoman conquests; (2) the anticipation of the imminent end of time.

Unlike the *Vita* of Saint John of Rila the discourse of Ottoman tyranny is more prominent in the *Epistle*. Kantakouzenos pessimistically states that "Christian piety has disappeared and there is neither an emperor nor a prince [...] who adheres to piety nowadays."⁹¹ The disappearance of "pious" Christian rulers led to a political collapse. Therefore, Christians have been "despised by God and handed over to the hands of the lawless, defiled, and inhumane, detestable and shameful," i.e., the Ottomans.⁹² In a theological manner reminiscent of Gennadios Scholarios' pastoral letter from 1455, Kantakouzenos states that God's punishment came only after many admonitions.⁹³ These admonitions, largely apocalyptic in nature, consisted of "threats, wars, wounds, burnings, signs from heaven, from the air, from the earth."⁹⁴ Despite these warnings, sinning continued, prompting God to send "nations of whom our fathers once heard," with whom came the great destruction.⁹⁵ In addition to Christian rulers, Kantakouzenos highlights uneducated and immoral priests as bearers of sin, included the Patriarch of Constantinople himself, whom he accuses of simony, intrigues, and acceptance of a "shameful tax" to the new authorities.⁹⁶

Kantakouzenos' apocalypticism was more extensively elaborated upon in the *Epistle* compared to the *Vita*. This aspect not only complements but also elucidates the ideas presented there. Kantakouzenos highlights the "multiplication of evils" and "disappearance of the venerable and pious" as unmistakable signs indicating that "the end is near, the judgment is at the doors, and the non-setting day of the eighth eon is at hand."⁹⁷ Interpreting this belief, Kantakouzenos explicitly states that "divine [...] teachers teach us that with the seven thousandth year,

⁸⁸ Grković-Mejdžor 1993, 15–17; Trifunović 1963, 147.

⁸⁹ Grković-Mejdžor 1993, 16; Chalदाϊakis 2013; Peno 2014, 140–142.

⁹⁰ Bojović 2007, 61–62.

⁹¹ Kantakuzin 1993, 60.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Kantakuzin 1993, 59; Scholarios 2016, 897–902.

⁹⁴ Kantakuzin 1993, 59.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Kantakuzin 1993, 63–64; Bojović 2007, 60–61. It is presumed that Kantakouzenos' criticism is directed toward Patriarch Raphael I (1475–1476). Kantakuzin 1993, 63, n. 30. From his time onwards, patriarchs were required to pay an annual tax of 2,000 florins upon their election, a practice that began a decade earlier with the first election of Patriarch Symeon I in 1466. Raphael was of a Serbian origin, and he was particularly unpopular within the Greek community. Laurent 1968, 260; Runciman 1968, 194.

⁹⁷ Kantakuzin 1993, 77.

the transition from mortal life here to immortal [...] life will occur.”⁹⁸ This passage clearly shows Kantakouzenos’ adherence to the Byzantine apocalyptic belief designating the year 7000 from creation (1492 AD) as the year of the world’s end.

Initially, as in the *Vita*, Kantakouzenos maintains a degree of temporal reservation, stating that “if there is to be any multiplication of years, we cannot talk about it.” Such multiplication may occur either because of the prayers of the “chosen” or “to fill the broken angelic rank with the souls of the saints” – another notion held by the Byzantine apocalyptists that the end of the world will be preceded by the fulfillment of heaven by a predetermined number of souls.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, Kantakouzenos subsequently remarks that Christians should not have the illusion that such multiplication will carry essential significance or be perceptible, “nor that the eighth-thousand flaw of the years will not come to an end, for the signs testify that the end of this age is near.”¹⁰⁰

The communication and transmission of ideas with Vladislav the Grammarian reveal more politically centered attitudes. Vladislav was a scribe, theologian, and historian originally from Novo Brdo. He maintained contacts with Kantakouzenos, as evidenced by his letter to Demetrius found at the end of the aforementioned *Codex* from 1469. Little is known about Vladislav’s life. Judging by his extensive writing and compiling activity, as well as the use of a high style in his works, he appears to have been an educated author. It is assumed that he was a secular writer, although he spent the last period of his life at the Mateič Monastery, the same monastery in which Kir Isaiah was a monk.¹⁰¹

At the end of the epilogue of his *Codex*, in the letter to Kantakouzenos, Vladislav states: “This book was written [...] in the days of the great and autocratic Muslim Emperor [‘Tsar’] Amir Mehmed-beg, in the eighteenth year of his reign, in the year 6977 from the creation of the world.”¹⁰² Vladislav uses the same imperial title forms as Kantakouzenos (“great and autocratic,” “tsar”), whereby the “autocratic” is likely to be understood in the Byzantine and Bulgarian interpretation of the title *autokrator*.¹⁰³ The difference compared to Kantakouzenos’ writings lies in adding the prefix “Muslim” to the title, accompanied by the title “Amir,” as well as the Emperor’s name given in a form “Mehmed-beg.” It seems that Vladislav adopted the idea of Ottoman legitimacy, combining the Christian with the Muslim imperial traditions. The dating of the letter to the year of Mehmed’s reign confirms the acceptance of Ottoman legitimacy and reflects the Byzantine models.¹⁰⁴ In subsequent annotations at the end of the *Codices* from 1473 and 1479, Vladislav formulates Mehmed’s title almost identically, with the difference that the title of *amir* is omitted in the record from 1479.¹⁰⁵

The only original work of Vladislav the Grammarian, *Account of the translation of the relics of Saint John of Rila in Rila Monastery*, is an integral part of the *Codex* from 1479.¹⁰⁶ At the beginning of the *Account*, Vladislav provides a review of historical events, particularly the Ottoman conquests. Judging by its structure, sequence of exposition, and general narrative, it appears that he primarily relied on Kantakouzenos’ *Vita*. Similarities are evident in the idea that the “prevailing of sin” and “trespasses” of the Greeks, Serbs, and Bulgarians caused the God-

⁹⁸ Kantakuzin 1993, 77–78.

⁹⁹ Kantakuzin 1993, 78. For the Byzantine view see the section 2 of this paper.

¹⁰⁰ Kantakuzin 1993, 78.

¹⁰¹ Grković-Mejdžor 1993, 23, 26–27.

¹⁰² Gramatik 1993, 115.

¹⁰³ Vladislav’s positive attitude towards Mehmed was noticed in Kołodziejczyk 2012, 185.

¹⁰⁴ Neville 2018, 25–27.

¹⁰⁵ Gramatik 1993, 116.

¹⁰⁶ Gramatik 1936, 74–85; Grković-Mejdžor 1993, 25–26. For an English translation of this work, see Petkov 2008, 415–424.

sent Ottoman invasion.¹⁰⁷ In the *Account*, Murad II and Mehmed II are both titled as “Great Autocrat Amir,” and both are described with the qualities of successful rulers. Although the motive of Mehmed’s concern for the sultaness (“tsaritsa”) Mara is absent, her contribution to the transfer of Saint John’s relics is confirmed.¹⁰⁸

A notable contrast between Vladislav’s account and that of Kantakouzenos is the absence of apocalyptic references in Vladislav’s text and his attribution of Ottoman origin to the Persians, rather than to Ishmael.¹⁰⁹ The latter viewpoint was present among mid-fourteenth-century Byzantine writers such as Gregory Palamas, Philotheos Kokkinos, and Manuel II Palaiologos (1391–1425). In the fifteenth century, Kritoboulos, whose writings also lack apocalyptic connotations, expressed a similar perspective, which contributed to his conceptualization of the acceptance of Ottoman ruling legitimacy over the Greeks.¹¹⁰ Additionally, the Byzantine theory of Ottoman Persian origin appeared in Serbian late medieval literature.¹¹¹

4. Conclusion

Demetrius Kantakouzenos’ attitudes toward Ottoman rule reveal characteristics typical of contemporary post-Byzantine Greek scholars, particularly when compared with their apocalypticism and acceptance, or at least non-contestation, of Ottoman imperial legitimacy. Within the apocalyptic scheme, Ottomans, alleged descendants of biblical Ishmael, assumed an eschatological role, viewed as the initiating and final component in the realization of events predicted by the Book of Revelation and Byzantine apocalypses. Kantakouzenos contemporizes events from the Revelation, potentially alluding to the last pre-apocalyptic phase of the sounding of the seven trumpets, wherein the Ottomans emerge as active participants in the divinely sent calamities. This assumption seems plausible considering the Byzantine apocalyptic imagination and Kantakouzenos’ belief, typical of Byzantine apocalyptists, that the end of the world will occur in the year 1492.

Within the context of Ottoman imperial legitimization, prevailing common motifs between Kantakouzenos and post-Byzantine authors include accepting Ottoman conquest as God’s punishment for sins and portraying Mehmed II as a philosopher-king and an *autokrator*, i.e., successor to the Byzantine emperors. Mehmed’s benevolence towards the Orthodox monks is additionally emphasized in the *Vita*. What sets Kantakouzenos apart from other Byzantine Greek writers is the inclusion of Serbs and Bulgarians, alongside Greeks, in his political-theological interpretations of Turkish invasions. Furthermore, following a method similar to the legitimization strategies of pro-Ottoman Greek scholars, Kantakouzenos legitimized Ottoman rule among the Balkan Slavs by applying Slavic political terminology to the Ottoman imperial context. Kantakouzenos’ anti-Latinism indicates another connection with post-Byzantine intellectuals, particularly those within the Ottoman Empire and close to the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

It remains uncertain whether the laudatory portrayal of Mehmed was associated with the apocalyptic belief that he would be the last universal emperor. This hypothesis is implied by Kantakouzenos’ conviction regarding the imminent end of the world and widespread acceptance of other aspects of contemporary Byzantine apocalypticism. Nevertheless, without the explicit confirmation in Kantakouzenos’ writings, this question remains open.

¹⁰⁷ Gramatik 1936, 74–75; Gramatik 1993, 103–104; Petkov 2008, 415–416.

¹⁰⁸ Gramatik 1936, 78–79; Gramatik 1993, 106–107.

¹⁰⁹ Gramatik 1936, 74.

¹¹⁰ Shukurov 2024, 102–103; Szill 2019.

¹¹¹ Ravanićanin I 1993, 123, 124.

While similarities in political-theological patterns are evident, the current state of research does not offer sufficient grounds for drawing detailed conclusions regarding the circulation of ideas between Kantakouzenos and other intellectuals. The exception is the communication with two of his contemporaries – Isaiah the Serb and Vladislav the Grammarian. Both exchanges reveal a shared perspective viewing the Ottoman conquests as divine retribution for Christian sins. In his correspondence with Isaiah, Kantakouzenos also exhibits elements typical of Byzantine apocalyptic worldview, such as the belief in the year 7000 from creation as the year of the world's end and the notion of pre-apocalyptic filling of heaven with a predetermined number of souls. However, since a portion of Isaiah's correspondence is lost, it remains uncertain how Kantakouzenos' views were received.

While the correspondence from Kantakouzenos to Vladislav is not preserved, the transmission and adaptation of ideas between the two writers is evident. An analysis of Vladislav's letter to Demetrius, along with a comparison of Vladislav's text on Saint John of Rila with that of Kantakouzenos, reveals a common motif of God's punishment and the acceptance of Ottoman imperial legitimacy. Both authors refer to Mehmed as an *autocrat*, indicating the adoption of the idea of *translatio imperii* from the Byzantine to the Ottoman Empire. However, Vladislav diverges from Kantakouzenos in perceiving the end of Byzantium as the onset of apocalyptic events. Consequently, he refrains from linking the origin of the Ottomans to Ishmael and instead considers them descendants of the Persians. Overall, Vladislav's interpretation of Ottoman rule tends to be less theological and more politically oriented.

Despite the relative scarcity of sources, ideas of Demetrius Kantakouzenos demonstrate their connection to prevailing trends in political and theological thought in the Christian East during the second half of the fifteenth century. His views developed in parallel with those of his contemporaries such as Gennadios Scholarios, Kritoboulos of Imbros, George Amiroutzes, and others. This indicates that the periphery of the Ottoman Empire was not isolated from the circulation of ideas, highlighting the need for future research to uncover the specific directions of this intellectual exchange.

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**ИЗМЕЋУ АПОКАЛИПТИЦИЗМА И ЦАРСКОГ ЛЕГИТИМИТЕТА:
КОНТЕКСТУАЛИЗАЦИЈА ГЛЕДИШТА ДИМИТРИЈА КАНТАКУЗИНА
НА ОСМАНСКУ ВЛАСТ У ЖИТИЈУ СВЕТОГ ЈОВАНА РИЛСКОГ**

Османска освајања и слом ромејске, српске и бугарске средњовековне државе покренули су међу савременицима низ теолошких тумачења новонасталих околности. Димитрије Кантакузин је своје политичко-теолошке ставове обликовао стварајући на условној периферији Османског царства, као Грк у претежно словенској средини под веома снажним византијским културним утицајем. Истраживање ставова исказаних у последњим поглављима *Житија Св. Јована Рилског* показало је висок степен подударности са ставовима оног дела савремених поствизантијских грчких писаца који је прихватио или макар није оспоравао османски царски легитимитет.

Преовлађујући заједнички мотиви представљају прихватање османских освајања као Божје казне за хришћанске грехе и приказ султана Мехмеда II као легитимног *самодрица*. Мехмедово самодржавље се у Кантакузиновој интерпретацији темељи на изворном, византијском схватању појма, нераскидиво везаном за титулу цара, конкретно *цара Римљана*. Особеност Кантакузина у односу на поствизантијске грчке писце јесте укључивање Срба и Бугара, поред Грка, у политичко-теолошка тумачења савремених догађаја. Коришћењем средњовековне словенске политичке терминологије и њеним прилагођавањем османском владарском контексту, легитимизовала се турска власт и међу балканским Словенима. Мехмед је у *Житију* представљен као добротинитељ православних монаха. Описи османских злочина, типични за петнаестовековне хришћанске извештаје о паду Константинопоља (1453), нису присутни у Кантакузиновом извештају, што сугерише прилагођавање наратива начелно позитивној слици султана.

Текст *Житија* доноси теолошко тумачење разарања хришћанских земаља од стране Османлија. Апокалиптични наратив који преовладава у датом тумачењу показује одлике византијског апокалиптицизма. Изгледно је да се Кантакузин у *Житију* користио алузијама на седам труба апокалипсе, што је типичан мотив у источнохришћанској иконографији последњих времена, као и у византијском апокалиптицизму. У актуелизацији догађаја из *Откровења*, османска власт остваривала је своју Богом предодређену улогу на коју Кантакузин алудира користећи се библијским цитатима везаним за Исмаила, сина Авраама и робиње Агаре. Исмаилови потомци, међу којима и последњи васељенски цар, били су означени у популарној византијској Псеудо-Методијевој *Апокалитси* као они којима ће припасти одлучујућа улога у коначним догађајима краја времена. Кантакузинов негативан став према Латинима такође је сагласан са делом поствизантијских писаца, пре свега са кругом блиским Патријаршији у Константинопољу.

Иако је понављање политичко-теолошких образаца при тумачењу историјских догађаја јасно уочљиво, тренутно стање истражености не пружа основе за детаљније закључивање по питању евентуалне размене идеја између Димитрија Кантакузина и других грчких мислилаца. Извеснијом се чини циркулација идеја између Кантакузина и двојице његових учених словенских кореспондената – Исаије Србина и Владислава Граматика. Кантакузинова *Посланица кир Исаији* потврђује став о узрочно-последичним везама између хришћанских грехова и османске најезде као Божје казне за њих. Поред тога, доприноси стављању Кантакузинове мисли у контекст византијског апокалиптицизма, јер истиче за њега типичне елементе попут 7000. године (1492. године н.е.) као године краја времена, те веровање да ће до апокалипсе доћи онда када се небеса буду испунила предодређеним бројем душа светих.

Упоређивање Кантакузинових ставова са писањем Владислава Граматика, открива политичко-теоријске сличности, али и прилагођавање теолошких ставова. Обојица аутора истичу мотив казне за хришћанске грехе и прихватају легитимитет османске власти, ословљавајући Мехмеда II *самодрицем*. Међутим, крај Византије за Владислава није представљао почетак краја времена. Можда управо због тога Владислав у *Рилској новести*, која се великим делом ослоња на Кантакузиново *Житије*, одступа од Димитријевог везивања османског порекла за Исмаила, сматрајући Турке потомцима Персијанаца.

Уз сва ограничења услед оскудности извора, политичко-теолошку мисао Димитрија Кантакузина могуће је сагледати у контексту владајуће политичке филозофије на хришћанском Истоку у другој половини XV века. Кантакузинови ставови развијали су се готово упоредо са ставовима Генадија Схоларија, Кривовула, Георгија Амируцеса и других писаца, показујући са њима висок степен сличности, али и прилагодљивости негрчкој политичкој и културној средини.