



Summary :

Bessarion was born around 1400 in the city of Trebizond of the Pontos. He studied in Constantinople and Mystra. In 1437 he was consecrated metropolitan of Nicaea. Because he supported the idea of the Union of the Churches, in 1440 he was forced to leave Byzantium and settle in Italy, where he became a prominent scholar, a patron of classical learning and a hierarch with rich ecclesiastical and political activity. In 1463 he was elected Latin patriarch of Constantinople. He died on November 18th, 1472, in Ravenna.

Other Names

Basil

Date and Place of Birth

c.1400 – Trebizond, the Pontos

Date and Place of Death

18th November 1472 – Ravenna, Italy

Main Role

Scholar, hierarch

1. Birth - family

Bessarion was born in the city of [Trebizond](#), in the [Pontos](#), around 1400.¹ His baptismal name was Basil.² The only information available on his parents is that they came from the lower classes and had 14 children besides Bessarion.

2. Education - upbringing

Bessarion probably received his elementary education in his hometown of Trebizond, and it is possible that he was tutored by his patron Dositheos, the [metropolitan of Trebizond](#). While still very young (around 1415) he travelled to [Constantinople](#) to receive higher education, where he joined a monastery. There, under the supervision of Dositheos, Bessarion received a thorough education by an eminent scholar of that time, [George Chrysokokkes](#). During his apprenticeship with Chrysokokkes, he became acquainted with the Italian humanist scholar Francesco Filelfo. In 1423 he became a novice, and a few months later, in 1424, he was tonsured monk, taking the name Bessarion. Then, on the prompting of Dositheos, he became a student of the scholar John Chortasmenos, metropolitan of Silibria, who taught him mathematics and rhetoric and introduced him to the Aristotelian philosophy. In 1426 he was consecrated deacon. In 1431, when Dositheos was consecrated metropolitan of Monemvasia, Bessarion, who had by now become a hieromonk, followed his patron to the Peloponnese. There he continued his education in Mystra, where he studied astronomy, mathematics and the Platonic philosophy under the renowned philosopher Georgios Gemistos, also known as Pletho.

3. Activity

3.1. Bessarion in Byzantium

Already as a youngster, while still studying, Bessarion belonged to the circles of the imperial court. Around 1427 he



participated in a diplomatic mission to Trebizond, when the Byzantine emperor John VIII Palaiologos (1425-1448) tried to arrange the marriage of his daughter with the [emperor of Trebizond](#). In early 1436, John VIII, impressed by the erudition of Bessarion, recalled him to Constantinople and appointed him abbot and teacher in the monastery of St Basil. In that same year Bessarion participated in a diplomatic mission to [John IV](#) (1429-1459), emperor of Trebizond, aimed at creating an alliance against the [Türkmén](#). Apart from his teaching duties, Bessarion became an advisor to the emperor; he was convinced that the approach to the West was the only way out of the dire straits Byzantium was in. In 1437, shortly before the departure of the diplomatic mission which was to participate in a joint Council between the Eastern and Western Church, he became [metropolitan of Nicaea](#).

During the Council of Ferrara in Italy, and later in the Council of Florence (1437-1439), Bessarion initially supported the views of those who opposed the Union of the Churches. Gradually, his opinion was reversed and he became a supporter of the Union; as a result, he was confronted with many of the Orthodox hierarchs participating in the Byzantine delegation. Nonetheless, he managed to convince the emperor of the political soundness of the Union and, in July 6th 1439, he read out before the Council the text which he had composed whereby Byzantium accepted the reunion of the Eastern with the Latin Church. In October 1439, together with part of the Byzantine delegation, he left Venice sailing for Constantinople.

Thanks to his supportive attitude towards the Union of the two Churches, Bessarion won the favour of Pope Eugene IV. As a reward for his stance, in December 18th 1439, while Bessarion was still travelling, he was created cardinal of the Catholic Church, of the title of the Twelve Holy Apostles.

3.2. Bessarion in Italy

In contrast to the honours offered to him by the Papal Church, the reception he was given in Constantinople was utterly hostile. The Byzantine people had rejected the Union and had turned against all those who had supported it with their signature. The faction of the anti-unionists, headed by [Mark Eugenikos](#), [metropolitan of Ephesus](#), who had already clashed with Bessarion during the Council of Ferrara-Florence, accused the metropolitan of Nicaea of betraying the Orthodox faith. Bessarion found himself in a tight spot; seeing that the atmosphere in Constantinople was rather tense and wishing to avoid further confrontations, late in 1440 he left Byzantium for good and settled in Italy. In December the 10th of the same year, he received the regalia of his new office in Florence.

The activity of Bessarion as a cardinal of the Papal Church mainly revolved around the idiorrhythmic monasteries of Italy, and by 1446 he had compiled new regulatory statutes. His reforms were recognized by Pope Pius II, who in 1460 appointed him visiting overseer of the Greek Catholic monasteries of Italy, while for periods of time he served as abbot in some of them.

Thanks to his assiduous work and his astuteness, Bessarion rose through the ranks rapidly. In 1449 he was consecrated bishop of Tusculum, while in 1455, following the death of Nicolaus V, he was among the contenders for the Papal throne. However, the reaction of some Latin hierarchs on account of his Greek descent, as well as the political scheming of the French court, thwarted his election. Nevertheless, in recognition of his outstanding services, in May 1463 Pope Pius II bestowed on Bessarion the title of Catholic Patriarch of Constantinople ([titulary](#)).³ Showing his constant concern for the Greek areas and wishing to strengthen the efforts for the Union of the Churches, Bessarion had in the previous year managed to convince the Pope to institute an endowment, from the income of the



patriarchate, for certain Cretan unionist priests.⁴

3.3. Diplomatic activity

Apart from his ecclesiastical work, Bessarion proved an eminent and tireless politician and diplomat. By 1442-1444 he was already striving to convince the Pope to launch a crusade against the Turks. In 1449, acting as papal legate, he managed to reconcile the major powers of Northern Italy, Venice and Milan, while from 1450 until 1455 he was a papal legate (*protector ordinis minorum*) in Bologna, where he helped conciliate the feuding political factions and showed interest for the reconstitution of the city's university.

After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Bessarion redoubled his efforts to unite the forces of the West in a crusade against the Ottoman Turks, aimed at restoring the Byzantine Empire. He also saw to the release of many prisoners, paying the ransom himself. In 1459 he actively participated in the congress, convened by the pope in Mantua, for the purpose of creating an alliance between the Italian states and the European monarchies. Undeterred by the congress' failure, in the winter of 1459-1460 Bessarion travelled as a papal legate to various parts of Central Europe. In February of 1460 he visited Nuremberg, while in the next year he travelled to Vienna. Although he managed to end the feuding between the German rulers in Austria and Hungary, he failed to muster the troops for the crusade he was planning. He returned to Rome in January of 1462.

Bessarion's mission to Venice was more successful. A few days after his arrival there, in July 22, 1463, the Venetian state declared war against the Ottomans; Bessarion, having outfitted a warship on his own expenses, followed the Venetian fleet as far as Ancona. Unfortunately, the arrival of the fleet coincided with the death of Pope Pius II (on August the 15th, 1464) and Bessarion's attempt to organize a campaign for the liberation of the Greek regions proved fruitless.

Parallel to his activity in Italy, Bessarion maintained contacts with Byzantium, not forgetting his old patrons, the Palaiologoi. Since 1443-1444 he corresponded with the Byzantine commander of Peloponnese and future emperor Constantine Palaiologos, while in 1465 he took custody of the young children of Thomas Palaiologos, brother of Constantine. Later, on his own incitement, the daughter of Thomas, Zoe Palaiologina, married Ivan III, ruler of Russia.

3.4. Intellectual work

Bessarion's intellectual work in Italy may be deemed equally or perhaps more important than his political activity. A circle of scholars developed around the Greek cardinal (his contemporary called it the "Academy", likening it to Plato's school); this circle was constantly enlarged by new refugees arriving from the Byzantine lands, who in Bessarion sought and found a patron and a mentor. Bessarion's residence in Rome became a centre of important literary and theological activity, where Greeks (Theodoros Gazes, George of Trebizond, Michael Apostoles, Demetrios Chalkokondeles, Andronikos Kallistos) and Italian scholars (Lorenzo Valla, Poggio Bracciolini, Niccolò Perroto, Flavio Biondo) worked together. In the monastery of San Salvatore in Rome, Bessarion also created a school of the Greek language, while he also saw to the translation of many Greek classical texts into Latin; some were translated by him, like, for instance, the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon, the *First Olynthiac* of Demosthenes, a.o.

Bessarion's contribution was crucial for the preservation of the ancient Greek literature; after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 he conceived the idea of rescuing as many manuscripts as possible from the Greek regions under Ottoman and



Venetian rule. Through his main local associate Michael Apostoles, he managed to acquire or copy a number of manuscripts, many of which were unique. His collection, for which he had spent huge sums of money, numbered in the end 746 manuscripts, 482 of which were Greek. In 1468 he bequeathed his collection to the Venetian state, in the hope that in this way it would be more accessible to the Greeks who sought refuge in the West. Bessarion's collection of manuscripts became the core of the later renowned Biblioteca Marciana of Venice.⁵

In the same year (1468) Bessarion actively participated in the creation of the first printing press in Rome. Among the first works to be printed there in the following year was a book of his, the *In columniatorem Platonis*, in which Bessarion criticized the Aristotelian views of George of Trebizond and attempted to place Platonic philosophy in the service of Christian faith and dogma, much in the way Thomas Aquinas had done with the Aristotelian philosophy. This work, which was divided into four volumes, was his most significant contribution in the quarrel that had erupted in the mid-15th century between Platonic and Aristotelian philosophers, a quarrel in which Bessarion tried to maintain a middle-of-the-road stance. Among his works is a synopsis of Aristotle's *Physics* in six volumes. Apart from his philosophical texts, many of his epistles, speeches and other rhetorical pieces survive, like his inaugural speech in Ferrara, the *Oratio dogmatica de unione*, the *Epistula encyclica ad Graecos* a.o.⁶

4. Death

Following the capture of the previously under Venetian rule Euboea by the Ottomans (1470), once more there was an attempt by the new pope, Sixtus IV, to unite the forces of Christianity against the Ottoman threat. In this context, in the Christmas of 1471, the pope sent six cardinals on diplomatic missions to the various European royal courts. Among them was Bessarion, who in 1468 had been made bishop of Sabina, having once again been defeated in the conclave of 1471 which elected the new pope. Bessarion was sent to France, where he tried to convince the French monarch, the duke of Burgundy and the king of England to participate in the league. His attempts were abortive and the Greek cardinal embarked on his return journey in the fall of 1472. Worn down by the hardships of travelling and his advanced age, Bessarion passed away on November the 18th of the same year, in Ravenna, in northern Italy.⁷ His body was carried to Rome, and he was buried with solemnity in the temple of the Twelve Holy Apostles; his obituary was delivered by Michael Apostoles.

5. Assessment

Leaving aside the paltry criticism that had been aired by Bessarion's anti-unionist opponents following the Council of Ferrara-Florence, the opinion of his contemporaries on his person were more than positive. Bessarion enjoyed the admiration and respect of the scholars of the time, Greek and Italian alike, for his erudition and learning, while everyone recognized his efforts to preserve the great works of Classical Antiquity and make them available in the West. Lorenzo Valla's description aptly captures the way he was viewed by his Italian scholarly contemporaries: "The Greekest among the Latin, the Latinmost of the Greeks".

The views of modern scholars are similar. Bessarion is extolled for his efforts to revive Classical studies in Italy as well as for his ardour in salvaging, translating and copying numerous ancient Greek texts. The established view today is that Bessarion was one of the played a key role in the intellectual Renaissance in 15th-century Italy, contributing significantly to the rescue of the Ancient Greek legacy and its transmission to the West.



1. Vast, H., *Le Cardinal Bessarion* (Paris 1878), p. 2, dates Bessarion's birth to January 2nd of 1403, basing his argument on a comment found in the obituary delivered by Capranica; this comment is probably a subsequent addition and cannot be considered reliable evidence. Monfasani, J., "Platina, Capranica, and Perotti: Bessarion's Latin Eulogists and His Date of Birth", in Medioli Masotti, P. (ed.), *Bartolomeo Sacchi Il Platina (Piadena 1421 - Roma 1481): Atti del convegno internazionale di studi per il V centenario (Cremona, 14-15 Novembre 1981)* (Padua 1986), pp.12-124, disagrees with Vast's view and suggests 1408 as Bessarion's date of birth.
2. Alice-Mary Talbot, in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 1 (New York - Oxford 1991), pp. 285, see under "Bessarion", thinks that Bessarion's given name was John. This view is supported by a number of other scholars, and results from a misreading, by an 18th century scholar, of an annotation by Bessarion. Loenertz, J.R., "Pour le biographie du Cardinal Bessarion", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 10 (1944), pp. 116-149, was the first to examine the annotation and correct the mistake, adducing also evidence confirming the view that Bessarion's given name was Basil. It should be noted that, in Byzantine custom, when one was tonsured, the monastic name he received started with the same letter as his secular name.
3. Bessarion succeeded the late Cardinal Isidore as Latin Patriarch of Constantinople, former metropolitan of Kiev and well known for his pro-union stance in the Ferrara-Florence Council.
4. Τσιρπανλής, Ζ.Ν., *Το κληροδότημα του καρδινάλιου Βησσαρίωνος για τους φιλενωτικούς της Βενετοκρατούμενης Κρήτης (1439-17ος αι.)* (Θεσσαλονίκη 1967).
5. Labowsky, C., *Bessarion's Library and the Biblioteca Marciana* (Rome 1979).
6. For a concise presentation of Bessarion's works see Buchwald, W. – Howlweg, A. – Prinz, O., *Tusculum – Λεξικόν Ελλήνων και Λατίνων συγγραφέων της Αρχαιότητας και του Μεσαίωνα Α'*, (Αθήνα 1993), p. 101. Most of his works have been published in Migne, J.-P. (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 161 (Paris 1906). For a fuller picture on his works and the relevant publications see Καραγιαννόπουλος, Ι., *Πηγαί της Βυζαντινής Ιστορίας* (Θεσσαλονίκη 1987), p. 433.
7. Georgios Sphrantzes, Χρονικόν, in Maisano, R. (ed.), *Georgii Sphrantzae Chronicon* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 29, Roma 1990), 190, 12-16, erroneously dates Bessarion's death to November 15th.

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	Monfasani J. , <i>Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy: Cardinal Bessarion and other Emigrés</i> , Aldershot 1995
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■	Wilson N. , <i>From Byzantium to Italy. Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance</i> , London 1992
■	Buchwald W., Hohlweg A., Prinz O. , "Βησσαρίων", Φούρλας Α. – Λώλος Α. (επιμ.), <i>Tusculum – Λεξικόν Ελλήνων και Λατίνων συγγραφέων της Αρχαιότητας και του Μεσαίωνα, τόμ. Α'</i> , Αθήνα 1993, 100-102
■	Keller A. , "A Byzantine admirer of 'western' progress: Cardinal Bessarion", <i>Cambridge Historical Journal</i> , 11, 1953-1955, 343-348
■	Monfasani J. , "Platina, Capranica and Perotti: Bessarion's Latin Eulogists and His Date of Birth", P. Medioli Masotti , <i>Bartolomeo Sacchi Il Platina (Piadena 1421 - Roma 1481): Atti del convegno internazionale di studi per il V centenario (Cremona, 14-15 novembre 1981)</i> , Padua 1986, 97-136
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■	Stormon E. , "Bessarion before the Council of Florence: A Survey of His Early Writings (1423-1437)", Jeffreys E. – Jeffreys M. – Moffatt A. (επιμ.), <i>Byzantine Papers. Proceedings of the First Australian Byzantine Studies Conference</i> , Canberra 1981, Byzantina Australiensia 1, 128-156
■	Talbot A.M. , "Bessarion", Kazhdan A. (επιμ.), <i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium I</i> , New York - Oxford 1991, 285
■	Λαόνικος Χαλκοκονδύλης , <i>Αποδείξεις Ιστοριών δέκα</i> , Bekker, I. (ed.), <i>Laonici Chalcocondylae Athiniensis historiarum libri decem</i> , Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1834
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■	Μιχαήλ Αποστόλης , <i>Επιτάφιος θρήνος</i> , J.-P. Migne, <i>Patrologia Graeca 161</i> , Paris 1906
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Glossary :

	titulary
A prelate who bore as a distinction the title of the bishop or metropolitan of an inactive ecclesiastical province.	

Sources

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Γρηγόριος Τραπεζούντιος, *Επιστολαί*, in Migne, J.-P. (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 161 (Paris 1906).

Quotations

Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *De rebus Turcicis*, in Bekker, I. (ed.), *Laonici Chalcocondylae De rebus Turcicis* (Bonn 1834), 293.3 - 294.12:

έντευθεν ἐπιλεξάμενος ὁ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχιερεὺς ἄνδρῃ δύο τῶν Ἑλλήνων εὐδοκιμωτάτῳ ὤκειώσατο οἷ, ἀνακτώμενος τὰ μάλιστα ἀξίως τε τῆς παρ' ἑαυτῷ τιμῆς τῆς μεγίστης, καρδινάλεις τε ἀπέδειξεν, οἷα τῆς θρησκείας ἡγεμόνε. τούτους γὰρ δὴ ἔς τὴν παρ' ἑαυτῷ ἐγγυτάτῳ χώρῳ ἰδρυμένους, ἀμφὶ τοὺς τριάκοντα, ἑταίρους τε αὐτῷ ἐπάγεται καὶ συμβούλους, παρεχόμενος τε πρόσοδον ἰκανὴν καὶ χώρῳ ἀφ' ἧς ἂν αὐτοῖς προσίοι χρήματα, τῷ μὲν πλέῳ τῷ δ' ἐλάττω, ἀξιῶν ὡς ἔχει τε ἐκάστῳ καὶ χώρῳ. ἔς τούτους δὴ ἀπολεξάμενος ἄνδρα δύο τῶν Ἑλλήνων, Βησσαρίωνα τὸν ἀπὸ Τραπεζοῦντος, Νικαΐας ἀρχιερέα, καὶ Ἰσιδώρον τὸν Σαρματίας ἀρχιερέα, ὑπουργῶν τε ἔσχεν αὐτῷ καὶ συνεργῶν ἔς τὴν πρὸς τοὺς Ἑλληνας διάλυσιν τῆς διαφορᾶς. περὶ μὲν οὖν Βησσαρίωνος τοσόνδε ἐπιστάμενος μνήμην ποιήσομαι, ὡς ξυνέσει τε τῇ ἀπὸ φύσεως, πολλῶν δὴ τῶν ἔς τοῦτο εὐδοκιοῦντων Ἑλλήνων, μακρῶν γενόμενος, καὶ κρίνειν τε ἐφ' ὃ τι ἂν γένοιτο κράτιστος δοκῶν γενέσθαι, τὰ δὲ ἔς σοφίαν τὴν Ἑλλήνων τε καὶ Ῥωμαίων οὐδενὸς δευτέρου. τοῦτον δὲ ἀγασθέντα τὸν Ῥώμης ἀρχιερέα Νικόλεω τὸν μετὰ ταῦτα ἐπιτρέψαι τῆς Βονωνίας πόλιν εὐδαίμονα ἐπιτροπεύειν αὐτῷ ἐν ταύτῃ τε, τῆς πόλεως ἐν στάσει ὡς τὰ πολλὰ γενομένης καὶ τῶν στασιωτῶν ἐπὶ διαφορὰν σφίσις ἀφικνουμένων, δαιμόνιον τίνα τῶν ἐν τῇ πόλει ταύτῃ ἐπιφανῆσαι. ἐστὶ δ' ἡ πόλις αὕτη ἐν ταῖς κατὰ τὴν Ἰταλίαν πόλεσιν εὐδαίμων τε καὶ πλούτῳ καὶ τῆς ἄλλης εὐδαιμονίας οὐ πολλῶν τῶν πρώτων λειπομένη πόλεω, κεκόσμηται δὲ καὶ εἰς τὴν τῶν λόγων ἀσκησιν, ἔς τὰ πρῶτα ἀνήκουσα Ἰταλίας. τὸν δὲ Ἰσιδώρον ἐλλογίμον τε ὄντα καὶ φιλόπατριον, ἀλόντα τε ὕστερον ἐν Βυζαντίῳ ὑπὸ βαρβάρων, ἐπαμύνοντα τῇ πατρίδι. τούτῳ δὲ ὡς ἀξιώσει τε παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλησι δοκοῦντε προέχειν καὶ συμπράξειν αὐτῷ τὰ πρὸς τοὺς Ἑλληνας, ἐπιλεξάμενος ὁ τότε Εὐγένιος ἀρχιερεὺς ξυνέβη ἔς ταυτὸ τοῖς Ἑλλησι

Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *De rebus Turcicis*, in Bekker, I. (ed.), *Laonici Chalcocondylae De rebus Turcicis* (Bonn 1834), 430.1-5:

μετὰ δὲ ἐδόκει τοὺς Γερμανοὺς τοῖς Παιόσι διαλλάξαι, καὶ ἐπιπέμποντες ἄνδρα τῶν παρὰ σφίσις ἐλλογίμων τὰ πρῶτα φερόμενον, Βησσαρίωνα καρδινάλιον τὸν ἀπὸ Τραπεζοῦντος, ἐπρεσβεύοντο παρ' ἀμφοτέρους, ὥστε διαλλάξαι τούτους ἀλλήλοις καὶ τὰς διαφορὰς καταλύειν.

Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *De rebus Turcicis*, in Bekker, I. (ed.), *Laonici Chalcocondylae De rebus Turcicis* (Bonn 1834), 431.11-19:



Και Εϋσεβίω μὲν τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ ἕξ τόδε ἐτελεύτα ἡ παρασκευή· μετὰ δὲ Πίος ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς ὡς ἐπὶ τὴν ἡγεμονίαν ἀφίκετο, τὴν ἐν Μαντύῃ διαίταν ἐποιήσατο ἅτε δὴ κατάστασιν τε καὶ σύλλογον περὶ τῶν καθηκόντων αὐτῷ πραγμάτων ἕξ τὸν ἐπὶ βασιλέα Μεχμέτη πόλεμον. Βησσαρίων μὲν δὴ ἐπὶ Παίονας ἀφικόμενος καὶ ἕξ Γερμανοὺς τὰ τε ἄλλα διελέχθη, καὶ τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαφορὰν καταλύειν πειρώμενος, οὐχ οἷός τε ἐγένετο ἕξ ταυτὸ ἄμφω ξυναγαγῶν διαλλάξαι. ἀλλὰ ἄπρακτος μὲν ἀπεχώρει...

Doukas, *Historia*, στο Bekker, I. (ed.), *Ducae Michaelis nepotis Historia Byzantina* (Bonn 1834), 213.11-22:

ἀπάραντες οὖν ἐκ Βενετίας διὰ ξηρᾶς ἔλθασιν ἐν Φεραρίᾳ. κακεὶ ἀρξάμενοι τὰ τῆς συνόδου, κατέλαβε θανατηφόρος ἐν Φεραρίᾳ νόσος· κακεῖθεν ἀπάραντες ἦλθον ἐν Φλωρεντία. ἐν δὲ τῇ Φλωρεντία ἐπληρώθη ἡ σύνοδος. ἦν δὲ ἕξαρχος τοῦ μέρους τῶν Γραικῶν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρχιερέων ὁ Ἐφέσου Μᾶρκος, ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ μέρους τῶν Ἰταλῶν ὁ καθηκόντιος τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ Ἰουλιανός, μέγας ἐν τῇ ἕξω σοφία καὶ ἐν τοῖς δόγμασι τῆς τῶν Χριστιανῶν πίστεως. ὁ Ἐφέσου Μᾶρκος ἐν Ἑλληνικοῖς μαθήμασι καὶ ὁρίοις τῶν ἁγίων συνόδων κανῶν καὶ στάθμη ἀπαρέκβητος. ὁ Βησσαρίων Νικαίας καὶ ὁ Ῥωσίας Ἰσίδωρος. οὗτοι δὲ ἦσαν οἱ λογιώτεροι τῶν ἀρχιερέων...

Bessarion, *Epistulae*, in Mohler, L. (ed.), *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann 3: Aus Bessarions Gelehrtenkreis* (Paderborn 1942), 479.10-30:

ἐμοὶ δ' ἔτι τῶν τε θύραθεν τῶν τε καθ' ἡμᾶς διδασκάλων ἐλλείπει οὐκ ὀλίγα συγγράμματα. ἰσταμένης μὲν οὖν τῆς κοινῆς Ἑλλήνων καὶ μόνης ἐστίας οὐκ ἐφρόντιζον, πάντα εἰδῶς ἐκεῖ ἀποκείμενα. πεσοῦσης δέ, φεῦ, μεγάλη τις ἐγένετο ἐπιθυμία τῆς πάντων αὐτῶν κτήσεως, οὐκ ἐμοῦ γε ἕνεκα, ὅς γε τῆς ἰδίας ἕνεκα ὠφελείας ἀρκοῦντα κέκτημαι, ἀλλ' ὡς ἂν, εἰ ποῦ νῦν τέτινες λειψθεῖεν Ἑλληνες, εἰ τέ τι εἰς ἔπειτα βέλτιον πράξαιεν –πολλὰ δ' ἐν τῷ μακρῷ χρόνῳ γένοιτ' ἂν –, ἔχοιεν ὅπη τὴν αὐτῶν φωνὴν ἄπασαν, τὴν γε νῦν οὔσαν, ἐν τινὶ ὄμου ἀποκειμένην ἀσφαλεῖ τόπῳ εὔροιεν καὶ εὐρόντες πολλαπλασιάσαιεν καὶ μὴ πρὸς οἷς πολλοῖς τε καὶ καλοῖς τῶν θείων ἐκείνων ἀνδρῶν πάλαι ἀπολωλέκαμεν ὑπομνήμασι καὶ τὰ ὀλίγα ταῦτα νῦν ἀπολέσαντες ἄφωνοι τὸ πάμπαν μένοιεν καὶ βαρβάρων τε καὶ ἀνδραπόδων οὐδὲν διαφέροιεν. τὴν τούτων τοίνυν πέμπω σοι καταγραφὴν. πέμπω δὲ τὴν αὐτὴν καὶ τῷ Ἀθηνῶν Θεοφάνει. δέομαι δέ σου, ἴνα ἐμὴν τε χάριν τοῦ τε ὄν ἔχω σκοποῦ, οὐ καὶ σοὶ μέλειν εἰκός, πᾶσαν ποιήσῃ πρόνοιαν εὔρειν τε καὶ ὠνήσασθαι πάντα. ἐκ τε γὰρ Ἀνδριανουπόλεως ἐκ τε Ἀθηνῶν, Θεσσαλονίκης τε καὶ Αἰνῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων χωρῶν τε καὶ πόλεων τῶν παρακειμένων ὑμῖν αὐτῆς τε τῆς πάλαι ποτὲ ἡμετέρας πόλεως, ἧς καὶ κτήματα ἦσαν, ἔτι τε Καλλιουπόλεως πάντα ἀναζητήσας εὐρήσεις. ὅθεν δὲ ἕξεις τὰ πρὸς τοῦτο ἀναγκαῖα ἀναλώματα Ἰερώνυμος ὁ Βαλαρέζος φροντιεῖ. ὅπως δὲ εἶ τι τούτων ὁ Ἀθηνῶν ὠνήσεται, μὴ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ αὐτός, ἀλλ' ἄλλα ὠνήσῃ. ἀρκεῖ γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐν ἕξ ἐκάστου.

George Sphrantzes, *Chronikon*, in Maisano, R. (ed.), *Georgii Sphrantzae Chronicon* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 29, Roma 1990), 176.1-4:

Αὐτὰ δὲ ὀλίγον καιρὸν διαβιάσαντα εἰς τὸν Ἀγκῶνα, πέμπσας ὁ πάπας ἐπιμελεία καὶ σπουδῇ καὶ βοηθείᾳ τοῦ αἰδεσιμωτάτου καρδινάλιου καὶ πατριάρχου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Βησσαρίωνος, ἀπῆλθον εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην.

George Sphrantzes, *Chronikon*, in Maisano, R. (ed.), *Georgii Sphrantzae Chronicon* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 29, Roma 1990), 190.12-19:

Περὶ δὲ τὸ φθινόπωρον τοῦ πα^{ου} ἔτους, ἐπαναστρέφοντος ἀπὸ τὸν ῥήγα τῆς Φράντζας καὶ τὸν δούκα τῆς Μπεργώνιας, ὁ καρδινάλιος κυρ Βησσαρίων (ἀπεστάλη γὰρ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν πρὸς τὸ εἰρηνεῦσαι αὐτούς) καθ' ὁδὸν τῇ ἐ^η νοεμβρίου ἀπέθανε. καὶ φέροντες αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην μετὰ τιμῆς ὅτι πλείστης ἔθαψαν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν ναὸν τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων, ἐνθα δὴ καὶ προκατέμενε καὶ τὸν τάφον αὐτοῦ προητοίμασε πλησίον τοῦ τάφου τῆς ἁγίας ὀσιομάρτυρος Εὐγενίας.

Gregory of Trebizond, *Epistulae*, in Migne, J.-P. (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 161 (Paris 1906), 740, col. B-D:

Βουλὴν τοίνυν λελόγισται θαυμασίαν καὶ πολλῶν ἐπαίνων ἀξίαν, βιβλιοθήκην ποιῆσαι βιβλίοις παντοίοις ξυμβεβλημένην Ἑλληνικοῖς; ὁ δὴ καὶ ἐξήνυσσε τύχη ἀγαθῇ, ἐν τῇ τῶν πόλεων λαμπροτάτῃ τῆς Ἰταλίας ἕξαρχύσας αὐτήν, παρ' ἣν μᾶλλον θαυμάζουσιν Ἑλληνες μεθόριον οἷον οὔσαν Ἰταλίας καὶ Ἀσιάτιδος, μυρίους ὑποστὰς πόνους καὶ δαπάνην οὐδ' ἐστὶν εἰπεῖν ὀπόσην χρημάτων. Καὶ νῦν ἕξεστι τοῖς αἰρουμένοις καὶ δυναμένοις ἐντυγχάνειν αὐτοῖς τῆς ἐκεῖθεν ὠφελείας ἐπαπολαύειν, καὶ μετὰ ῥαστώνης τρυφᾶν καὶ ἀνεμιένως τὸν βίον διεξίεναι, τῆς ἀκηράτου θοίνης ἐκείνης ἐπαπολαύουσιν. ἄστυλον θησαυρὸν ὄντα,



κειμήλια ιερά, παράδεισον λογικὸν ἄνθεσι κομῶντα παντοίας σοφίας, τρυφήν χαρίτων, πηγὴν λαμυράν, φῶς ἐπέραστον, τήν τε κεκτημένην τὸν τοιοῦτον θησαυρὸν πόλιν κοσμοῦντα τῷ ὄντι καὶ πρὸ αὐτῆς τὸν αἴτιον τοῦ τοσοῦτου καὶ τοιοῦτου καλοῦ. Καὶ τῶρα ἐφ' ᾧ τὸν ἄνδρα ἐγῶγε μέγιστα ἐν θαύματι ποιεῖσθαι οὐδέποτε παύσομαι, καὶ χαρίτας αὐτῷ διαρρηθῆν ὁμολογεῖν τοσοῦτου καὶ τοιοῦτου καλοῦ γεγονότι προξένῳ. ὦν γένοιτο πότε καὶ παιδαγωγοὶ ἄξιοι, σοφίας ἐαλωκότες ἰμέρω, ἥς γε οὐθ' ἦκεν οὐθ' ἦξει ποτέ θεόθεν ἐς ἀνθρώπους θειώτερον χρῆμα.

Michael Apostoles, *Oratio funebris*, in Migne, J.-P. (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 161 (Paris 1906), cxxxii-cxxxiv:

Τούτῳ μὲν δὴ πατρὶς ἐτύγχανε οὐσα ἢ μετὰ τὴν βασιλίδα βασιλεὺς τῶν πόλεων Τραπεζοῦς, πόλις ἀρχαιοτάτη καὶ Ἑλληνὶς [...]. Πατέρες δέ, οὐ τῶν εὖ γεγονότων καὶ περιφανῶν τὰ ἐξ τύχην, ἀλλ' ἑαυτοῖς τὸν βίον ποιουμένων χειρωναξία [...] Παραγγείλанта δὲ εἰς παίδων καὶ κόμμα φαινόμενον ἀγαθὸν προσελάβετο μὲν παρὰ τῶν πατέρων αὐτὸν ὁ τῶν ἱεροφαντῶν μέγιστος Τραπεζοῦντος Δοσίθεος πάννυτοι πολλαῖς λιταῖς καὶ δεήσεσι λόγοις τε αὐτὸν ἐκπαιδεῖν καὶ ἅμα θέσθαι τὸν πατέρα κατὰ φύσιν ἐπικυδέστερον. ἐπεὶ δ' αὐτῷ κατὰ νοῦν ἐπήει παλινδρομήσειν ἐς τὸ Βυζάντιον, ξυνεπηγάγετο καὶ τὸν πατέρα τὴν ἀρετῆς τὸ κάλλος ἐπιφερόμενον, μετ' οὐ πολὺ δ' ἄγων ἐνεχείρισε διδασκάλῳ, τὸν μὲν βίον ἀδιαβλήτῳ, τὸν δὲ τρόπον ἀνεπιλήπτῳ, τὴν δ' ἐμπειρίαν δεξιωτάτῳ, εὖ μάλα εἰδώς, ὅτι τὰ μὲν ἄλλα τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις καλῶν φύσει τέ ἐστιν ἀβέβηαι καὶ ὀλιγοχρόνια, παιδεία δὲ μόνη τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν ἀθάνατόν τε καὶ ἀναφαίρετον. Οὐ δ' οὖν ἐπόθει μάλα τυχῶν, θάττον ἢ πᾶσι γε κατ' ἐλπίδα, μελέτη τε καὶ γνώσει καὶ εὐφύῖα συναγήοχε μὲν τὴν πρώτην τέχνην καὶ ἀναγκαίαν ταῖς μετ' αὐτήν, συναγήοχε δὲ ποιητικὴν [...]. Ῥητορικὴν δὲ γε τὴν πυρὸς μένος πνέουσαν, εἰ καὶ ἰλαρὸς αὐτὸς καὶ ἠθικὸς ἐτύγχανεν ὦν, πολὺ τῶν ἄλλων διέφερεν ἐν τε βουλαῖς ἐν τε δίκαις κἂν ἐπιδείξεισιν. Ἐπεὶ δ' αὐτῷ ταῦτα εἶχε καλῶς καὶ ἡπερ ἐβούλετο, λογικῆς τε ἡδὴ καὶ ἠθικῆς ἐπεθύμησε καὶ τοὺς περὶ φύσεως μετιέναι λόγους καὶ ἰδεῶν, καὶ τῆς ἐφέσεως ἐπημύοιρησεν οὐ πάννυτοι πολλῶ καὶ διὰ μακροῦ. Ἐτι τε αὐτὸ καὶ τῶν μαθηματικῶν τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστημῶν ἐν οὐ πολλῶ τίνι χρόνῳ, Πλήθωνα ἔχων καθηγεμόνα, τὰ κάλλιστα ξυναγήοχε. Τὰ δ' ἄλλα, ὡς περιττὰ τοῖς εὐσεβοῦσι καὶ ἄχρηστα, τοῖς βουλομένοις παρήκεν ἐπιζητεῖν. Οὕτω δὴ οὖν περὶ ταῦτα ἔχοντος τοῦ ἀνδρὸς καὶ δίχα μερίζοντος ἑαυτὸν τῇ μὲν πρὸς λόγους, ὦν ἄνευ τυφλὸς ὁ βίος, τῇ δὲ πρὸς ἄσκησιν πολιτείας θεοπρεποῦς, ἦκεν ἐκεῖνος ἐκεῖνος φθάσας ὁ χρόνος, ὁ τοῖν γενοῖν ἐκατέροις ἐπέραστος, ὅς τὰ διερωγότα γένη συνήψε καὶ τὴν παλαιὰν ἔχθραν ἐκεῖνην διέλυσεν. Ἐπηγάγετο δὲ τὴν εἰρήνην καὶ τὴν ὁμόνοιαν, τῶν ἐν βίῳ τὰ κάλλιστα γε καὶ συμφωρότατα. [...] Τότε δὴ οὖν εἰς ἄνδρα παραγγείλанта τὸν γενναῖον, ἀρχιερέα γενέσθαι τῆς πολυμνήτου Νικαίας, καὶ παρεκάλεσαν καὶ ἠνάγκασαν. Τὶ τὸ ἐντεῦθεν ἀπήρκεν ἐς Ἰταλίαν συνάμα τῷ γαληνοτάτῳ ἡμῶν βασιλεῖ καὶ τῷ τότε τὰς ἡνίας τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἰθύνοντι, καὶ ξυμπάση τῇ γερουσίᾳ τῆς ἀνατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας; Οἱ δὲ φθασάντων ἠβούλοντο παρ' ἐκατέροις ἐκατέροις τοῖν γενοῖν, τοὺς ἀρίστους ἑαυτῶν ξυνηγόρους ἐλόμενοι καὶ τοῦτον ἕνα τούτων προείλοντο. [...] Ὡ πόσοι σὲ τότε διὰ θαύματος ἦγον! πόσοι διὰ σὲ τὸ γένος ἐμακάρισαν τὸ ἡμέτερον! πόσοι τὸν εὐτεκνότατόν σου πατέρα καὶ εὐδαιμόνισαν καὶ ἐπήνεσαν! πόσοι Δοσιθέῳ τῷ θειοτάτῳ τῆς περὶ σὲ κηδεμονίας ἐνεκεν ἠξίουντο τὰ βελτίω! διὰ τοι ταῦτα καὶ ἐτι πλείω γε τούτων καὶ τῷ του καρδηνάλεος σὲ Ῥωμαῖοι τιμηκέσαν ἀξιώματι, καὶ ἐτι γε τῷ του πατριάρχου τῆς μικρῶ πρόσθεν, οἴμοι! βασιλευούσης τῶν πόλεων. Πρὸς δὲ γ' ἐπὶ τούτοις καὶ ἄξιος ἐκρίθης τῆς ἄκρας καὶ θείας τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἱεραρχίας, καὶ μέντοι καὶ γένοιο ἄν, εἰ μὴ τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν ἢ κακοπραγία ἐκάλυσε; μᾶλλον δ' ὁ του Θεοῦ πανδερκέστατος ὀφθαλμὸς ἄλλα ταμιευόμενος, ὦν γνώσις ἀνθρώπων αἰσθῆσθαι οὐ δύναται. Τοιοῦτον δὲ ὄντα καὶ τηλικούτον ἐκ τοῦδε τοῦ φθαροῦ βίου καὶ ἐπύκρον ἐς ἀκήρατον καὶ ἀφθαρτον μετέστησεν ὁ Θεὸς τῇ φύσει παραχωρήσαντα, ὡς οὐκ ἀξίων ὄντων ἡμῶν, τοσοῦτου κάλλους ἀπολαβεῖν μέχρι πολλοῦ.

Chronological Table

c. 1400: Bessarion is born in Trebizond of the Pontos

c. 1415: He moves to Constantinople for advanced studies

1420s: He studies under George Chrysokkokes and John Chortasmenos

1424: He is tonsured a monk and receives the monastic name Bessarion

1426: He becomes a deacon

c. 1427: Bessarion participates in a diplomatic mission to Trebizond

1431: He becomes a monk and follows his patron, Dositheos, to the Peloponnese



1431-1435: Bessarion studies in Mystra, under the philosopher George Gemistos-Pletho

1436: Bessarion is recalled to Constantinople. He is appointed abbot and teacher in the monastery of St. Basil. He participates in an another diplomatic mission to Trebizond

1437: Bessarion is made metropolitan of Nicaea. Departure for Italy as a member of a Byzantine delegation

1437-1439: Participation in the Council of Ferrara-Florence

1439: In July Bessarion signs the Act of Union. In October he sails for Constantinople. In December 18th he is elected a Cardinal of the Papal Church

late 1440: He leaves Byzantium forever and settles in Italy

1442-1444: Bessarion's first attempts to incite a Crusade against the Ottomans. He corresponds with Constantine Palaiologos

1446: Following Bessarion's initiative, reforms are carried out in the Greek Catholic monasteries of Italy

1449: He is made bishop of Tusculum. Diplomatic mission in Northern Italy

1450-1455: Bessarion is a papal legate in Bologna

1455: Bessarion is a candidate for the papal throne

1459: He actively participates in the congress of Mantua

fall 1459 - January 1462: Diplomatic mission in Central Europe

1462: Bessarion sets up an «endowment» for the unionist priests of Crete

1463: He is elected Catholic Patriarch of Constantinople

July 1463 – summer 1464: Diplomatic mission to Venice

1465: He undertakes the upbringing of Thomas Palaiologos' children

1468: Bessarion bequeaths his library to the Venetian state. He is elected bishop of Sabina

1468-1469: Creation of the first printing press in Rome. Bessarion played a leading role in this, and prints his essay against Plato's detractors, thus taking a position in the quarrel between the Platonists and the Aristotelians of his era

1471: Bessarion fails for the second time to become Pope

25th of December 1471- fall 1472: Diplomatic mission in France

November 18th 1472: Bessarion dies in Ravenna, in Northern Italy