

# History or Fiction? The value of Pius II's Letter to Mehmed II (1461).

By Henrique De Quevedo Sagrillo, Email: henriquequevedo1@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** Pope Pius II's 1461 letter to Mehmed II offers a rich exploration of papal diplomacy, ideological shifts, and the European-Ottoman struggle for dominance. Scholars are divided on the letter's intent: some argue it was a sincere appeal for Mehmed's conversion to Christianity, reflecting Pius II's pragmatism amid European disunity and failed crusades. Others believe it was a calculated move to galvanize European powers against a common enemy by invoking the possibility of Mehmed's conversion. This debate contributes to a deeper understanding of the political and religious complexities of the era.

The value of Pius II's Letter to Mehmed II (1461) transcends its historical context, inviting a multifaceted exploration that delves into the intricacies of papal diplomacy, ideological evolution, and the perennial struggle for hegemony in Europe and the East. The sincerity of both the document and its author has been extensively debated. Each interpretation contains exclusive insights that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of Pius II's intentions and the broader geopolitical landscape of the time. Some scholars argue that the letter represents a genuine attempt at conversion, reflecting Pius II's pragmatism in seeking alternative solutions to the Ottoman threat amid European disunity and the failure of traditional crusading efforts. Others view it as a calculated diplomatic manoeuvre designed to rally Christian princes against the common enemy by exploiting the spectre of Mehmed II's potential conversion. The first section of this paper will explore the general significance of Pius II's missive, irrespective of its sincerity. Viewing the letter through a neutral perspective enables an exploration of the potential consequences of Mehmed's conversion, Pius' humanist interest in Islam, and the mysteries of the document's provenance.

The second section of this paper will consider the unlikely scenario that the letter represented a genuine attempt at conversion, as most scholars believe. If Pius' intentions were sincere, it would signal a shift in papal strategy, eschewing traditional crusading fervour in favour of a pragmatic pursuit of diplomatic solutions. Considering the recent Turkish conquests and the papacy's waning influence following the Council of Mantua, Pius II's overture to Mehmed II emerges as a calculated gambit to secure European hegemony through religious convergence. Finding this interpretation unconvincing, the paper's third section will consider the letter as a strategic ploy. This interpretation reveals insights into Pius II's diplomatic acumen and his mastery of political rhetoric through the guise of a fictional conversion. Pius II asserts his authority as the ultimate arbiter of Christendom, leveraging the spectre of Mehmed II's potential conversion to rally European powers against the encroaching Ottoman threat. The value of Pius II's Letter to Mehmed II lies in its content and the myriad interpretations it invites.

## I

What would have happened if Mehmed II converted? This question, posited by Gaeta, importantly helps to study the letter's value.<sup>1</sup> Pius considered the implications of Mehmed's conversion, assessing the risks of the Sultan being deserted or even killed. As the Pope claims, Mehmed would think of a way to implement Christianity, for "vile are the things purchased at a small price."<sup>2</sup> Pius views Mehmed's conversion as a

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<sup>1</sup> Franco Gaeta, 'Alcune osservazioni sulla prima redazione della "lettera a Maometto",' in *Enea Silvio Piccolomini papa Pio II. Atti del Convegno per il quinto centenario della morte*, ed. Domenico Maffei (Siena: Accademia Senese degli Intronati, 1968), 185.

<sup>2</sup> Aenea Silvii Piccolomini, *Epistola ad Mahometem II (Epistle to Mohammed II)*, ed. and trans. Albert Baca (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 23-24.

simplistic undertaking, only briefly considering its consequences. It is challenging to envision Mehmed being swayed to convert after Pius' overt criticism of Islam, despite the enticing rewards promised by the Pope. Nevertheless, contemplating the potential shifts in European politics and power dynamics if Mehmed's conversion had materialised according to Pius' vision is intriguing. The resurrection of the Eastern Empire and the consolidation of Europe under Mehmed's rule, all under the papacy's hegemony, present a tantalising scenario. While Pius is often remembered for his fervent crusading stance, he also held a broader vision of the empire as a universal institution with inherent papal centrality.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, crusading was deemed necessary only as long as the infidel threat persisted in the East, making Mehmed's conversion the key to realising Pius' vision. Thus, the question arises: How feasible was this dream?

Already "older and wiser", Pius attained a nuanced understanding of Islam, reinforcing his conviction that he could logically assert Christianity's superiority through cogent arguments.<sup>4</sup> Aligned with certain Renaissance humanistic attitudes toward the "Turkish question," Enea sought to comprehend Islam to expose its perceived doctrinal errors. This inclination towards understanding Islamic theology was notably influenced by Nicolas of Cusa (1401-1464), a German cardinal who dedicated his analysis of the Koran to Pius II. Cusa critiques Mohammed for what he perceives as 'idolatry' and falsehoods, directing his criticism towards the Islamic religion rather than its believers.<sup>5</sup> In Book II of *Cribratio Alkorani*, the Cardinal extensively criticises Mohammed and the

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<sup>3</sup> John Toews, "The View of Empire in Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II)." *Traditio* 24 (1968): 477-482.

<sup>4</sup> Rosamund Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara: Pope Pius II, 1458-1464* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1962), 154.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolas of Cusa, 'Cribratio Alkorani,' in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2001), 1060.

Koran, lamenting how “those wise and chaste and virtuous Arabs, Moors, Egyptians, Persians, Africans, and Turks who are said to be of this law esteem Muhammad as a prophet.”<sup>6</sup> While there are similarities in Pius and Cusa’s criticism of Islam and disbelief in Mohammed as the prophet, Cusa assigns more merits to Islam than Pius. Cusa’s less severe treatment of Islam is evident by his apologetic tone when describing Mohammed’s good intentions for propagating Islam and Muslim refusal to accept Christ’s crucifixion as such death unworthy of him.<sup>7</sup> The difference in approach can be attributed to the purpose of both works. While Cusa’s analysis was intended to offer a “balanced” assessment of Islam to teach Pius about the faith, the Pope’s letter, if interpreted as a conversion document, was intended to convince Mehmed of his faith’s immorality.

Rumours circulated across Europe regarding Mehmed’s purported sympathy toward Christianity, a notion historians generally dismiss. While acknowledging the fictional nature inherent in such hearsay, Pius’ letter provides valuable insights into how some Europeans interpreted these encouraging tidings. It was alleged that Mehmed could recite the “Our Father” due to the Christian heritage of his mother and that he had renounced Islam.<sup>8</sup> Amidst the relentless advance of the Ottoman Empire, such rumours would have been warmly welcomed in the West. Even Pius’ cardinals dissuaded him from launching a Crusade, citing the seemingly invincible strength of the Turks. Cardinal Scarampo dismissed the Pope’s strategies as “childish... thinking by his exhortations to draw kings into war and exterminate the Turks, whose strength

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<sup>6</sup> Cusa, *Alkorani*, 1046.

<sup>7</sup> Cusa, *Alkorani*, 1032, 1044.

<sup>8</sup> Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time*, trans. Ralph Manheim, ed. William Hickman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 199.

was unconquerable.”<sup>9</sup> Faced with opposition from within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, it is understandable that Enea would have reacted positively to reports of Mehmed’s alleged apostasy.

The letter remained unpublished during Pius’ lifetime, with no records indicating its reception at the Ottoman court. This lack of immediate dissemination suggests that Pius intended it to be a private work, allowing him to express his views without fear of repercussions. Interpreting Pius’ letter as a personal document justifies its deviation from other sources, enhancing its value in understanding the internal dynamics of the papacy and the Pope’s response to challenges. Contrary to Pius’ intentions, advocating for Crusades had the unintended effect of exposing his limitations and undermining his legitimacy as the Head of the Church, as argued by O’Brien.<sup>10</sup> For instance, rulers opposed Enea’s efforts to raise tithes, alleging that the Pope intended to finance Christian wars with the funds.<sup>11</sup> The letter implicitly addresses the demoralising challenges that hindered Pius from realising his dream of a Crusade. Chapters 1 to 3 focus exclusively on political topics, such as the divisions in Europe that Mehmed might exploit, the potential sovereignty the Sultan would attain if he converted, and the illustrious lineage of rulers who embraced Christianity. Regardless of Pius’ sincerity, these initial chapters of the letter illustrate how Mehmed could be assimilated into Christendom, eroding the Holy Roman Empire’s religious authority and duties.

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<sup>9</sup> Aenea Silvii Piccolomini, *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II*, trans. Florence Gragg, ed. Leona Gabel (New York: Capricorn Books, 1962), 120.

<sup>10</sup> Emily O’Brien, *The “Commentaries” of Pope Pius II (1458-1464) and the Crisis of the Fifteenth-Century Papacy* (University of Toronto Press, 2015), 86-112.

<sup>11</sup> Aenea Silvii Piccolomini, *Defensorium obedientiae apostolicae et alia documenta*, ed. and trans. Heiko Oberman, Daniel Zerfoss, William Courtnay (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1968), 22-23.

## II

If Pius II's letter to Mehmed II is taken at face value as a conversion attempt, it significantly illuminates a shift in orthodox papal ideology regarding the "Turkish question." In contrast with Pius II's orations, literary works, and public proclamations advocating for Crusades against the Ottomans, his letter to Mehmed II paradoxically adopts a tone of benevolence and friendship.<sup>12</sup> From the outset of the letter, Enea articulates his intentions clearly, expressing his desire for the Sultan's "salvation, glory, and mutual comfort and peace."<sup>13</sup> Throughout the document, Enea maintains a respectful demeanour toward Mehmed, frequently acknowledging the Sultan's intelligence and military prowess.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, just two years prior to composing the letter of conversion, Pius II declared at the Council of Mantua his intent to "wage war today against the impious nation of the Turks for the honour of God."<sup>15</sup> But why did Enea change his mind so suddenly and drastically?

Pius II's letter to Mehmed marks a transition in the papal treatment of infidels, shifting from crusading and extermination towards conversion and integration. Southern interprets Pius II's unconventional letter as a "moment of vision" filled with a sincere intention of converting Mehmed.<sup>16</sup> It is plausible that Pius was compelled to write the letter due to pressing circumstances. By 1461, the Council of Mantua's failure to organise a crusade was exacerbated by the Turkish conquests of Trebizond and Sinope. Faced with imminent danger to Europe, Pius II's letter can be interpreted as a

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Schwoebel, *The shadow of the crescent: the Renaissance image of the Turk 1453-1517* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1969), 65.

<sup>13</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 20, 38, 70.

<sup>15</sup> Aenea Silvii Piccolomini, *Opera quae extant omnia... His quoque accessit Gnomologia ex...* (Basil: Henrichum Petri, 1551), 905. "*Cum bellum hodie aduerfus impiam Turcorum gentem*"

<sup>16</sup> Richard Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 102.

sincere attempt to impede the Turkish advance. Supposing that desperation motivated Pius to craft this audacious proposal, Setton's assertion that Enea genuinely believed he could persuade Mehmed II to embrace Christianity gains credibility.<sup>17</sup> The palpable desperation and pressure felt by Pius II are evident in the letter, particularly when the Pope suggests that Mehmed would rise to a position "higher than other kings" if he converted.<sup>18</sup> Despite the parallels drawn by Pius between Mehmed II and pagan rulers who converted to Christianity, offering dominion over Europe to a converted Muslim remains not only unprecedented but also inconceivable during the mid-fifteenth century. The sincerity behind Pius' intentions is corroborated by the authors' conspicuous focus on religious discourse over political considerations, which occupy 15 out of its 19 chapters.

Pius had few options available to him. Coupled with the failure of the Council of Mantua to rally European princes to the crusading cause and the relentless advance of the Turkish war machine, Pius faced yet another significant challenge, as explicitly stated in the letter. The Pope acknowledges that "Christian disharmony" plagued Europe around 1461, recognising that an attack by Mehmed could paradoxically provide an opportunity for unity among rulers in the face of a common threat.<sup>19</sup> Despite the formalisation of Frederick III's appointment as the leader of the crusader army against the "impious Turkish nation" at the conclusion of the Council of Mantua, subsequent diplomatic efforts encountered resistance, with envoys refusing to recognise Mantua's resolutions as binding to their respective princes.<sup>20</sup> As Frederick III, as Holy Roman

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<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant: 1204-1571*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1978), 233.

<sup>18</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 13-14.

<sup>20</sup> Cesare Baronio, *Annales Ecclesiastici*, vol. 29 (Paris: Barri-Ducis, 1880), 226; Norman Housley, *Crusading and the Ottoman Threat, 1453-1505* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81.

Emperor and protector of Christendom, remained reluctant to heed papal appeals and declarations of war against the Turks, Pius II sought to address the impasse through a novel approach.

The letter significantly reveals implicit elements that Pius does not discuss in other documents, especially if the document is not interpreted as an act of desperation but rather as an attempt to address papal issues. What if the Pope was honestly offering Mehmed II the post of Holy Roman Emperor amidst Frederick III's failure to fulfil his duties? Pius believed that a proactive and powerful protector of Christendom would end European inter-fighting and solve the Turkish question.

As early as 1453, Pius II demanded initiative from Frederick III; nevertheless, he conceded that his request would not be fulfilled. In a letter to Leonardo de Benevolentibus, an envoy of Venice, Enea admits that he does not know to "what extent the voices of the Roman pontiffs are heard" but considering "the negligence of our princes and the private enmities of the people, I seem to foresee our destruction."<sup>21</sup> Again, in 1457, Enea implored Frederick III to lead the Crusade, stating, "For truly, there is nothing that is more befitting to your name and august authority than to take up arms and shield for the defence of the Catholic faith and the salvation of Christianity."<sup>22</sup> With no fruition from his appeals, Mehmed's conversion appeared to be the only means to restore "peace to the world."<sup>23</sup> Hankins envisions Enea's effort as a feasible undertaking, considering that the Ottomans had been Muslims for only a

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<sup>21</sup> Anton Weiss (ed.), *Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini als papst Pius II: sein Leben und Einfluss auf die literarische Cultur Deutschlands* (Graz: Moser's Buchhandlung, 1897), 181-182.

<sup>22</sup> Piccolomini, *Opera*, 780. "Nam profecto nihil est, quod nomini tuo auctoritatie augustali magis conveniat, quam pro defensione fidei catholicae et Christiana salute arma et scutum sumere."

<sup>23</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 19.



century, and Mehmed's interest in Christianity was well-publicised by 1461.<sup>24</sup> The letter is valuable in demonstrating the papal exhaustion with endless failed diplomatic endeavours to launch a crusade. Agreeably, it was easier for Pius II to act on rumours of Mehmed's sympathy towards Christianity than to address the endless European rivalries that thwarted his dream of a crusade.

However, contradictory elements within Pius' letter, coupled with the inherent absurdity of such an undertaking, suggest that the document was not intended to convert Mehmed. When Pius speaks about the potential reaction from Christendom if Mehmed were to invade continental Europe, the Pope comments that it is "difficult a thing" for Christian nations to come together.<sup>25</sup> This contradiction arises as Pius seems to discourage Mehmed from attacking European states due to the collective reaction it would provoke, while simultaneously claiming that it is unlikely Christendom would unite to expel the Turks. Interpreting the letter as a genuine overture to conversion inevitably entails accepting that Pius is inviting the same individual responsible for the destruction of cities and sacred buildings, the violation of virgins, and the defilement of matrons to become the protector of the people he carried out those barbarities against.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, while Babinger is correct for calling the letter a "fantastic" endeavour, the historian's assertion that Pius' intentions were sincere is not corroborated by the document's content.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> James Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 129.

<sup>25</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Franz Babinger, 'Pio II e l'Oriente maomettano,' in *Enea Silvio Piccolomini papa Pio II*, 10.

### III

Recently, with Bisaha's brilliant re-examination of the letter, a renewed scepticism over Pius' intentions and the document's purpose has emerged. If the letter is interpreted as a gimmick, it would significantly demonstrate Enea's continued commitment to his crusading ideology while shedding light on his political acumen as a statesman. Voigt viewed Pius's sincerity with great apprehension, asserting that Enea "could hardly resist entertaining strange thoughts" to appeal to Mehmed, possibly due to financial difficulties and his involvement in the Apulian War.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Pius' tone is comical when he claims that all Mehmed needs is "a little bit of water" to be the ruler of Christendom and have access to endless glories.<sup>29</sup> The satirical expression contradicts Pius' religiosity and his care for the holy sacraments. However, even if the Pope was compelled to write a fictional letter to Mehmed due to personal difficulties, Voigt does not discuss what the Pope attempted to achieve from the letter.

Cardini provides a more comprehensive assessment of Pius' intentions, arguing that Enea tended to manipulate European affairs to his hegemony.<sup>30</sup> The power Pius gifts to himself in the letter appears to validate Cardini's argument. In the letter, Pius is the intermediary of Mehmed's ultimate rulership over Christians. Enea offers to baptise Mehmed and discusses what the Sultan can expect if he becomes a Christian: "There will not be any leader in the world that can surpass you in glory or equal you in power."<sup>31</sup> Here, Pius asserts that his will determines who will be the Church's protector and only the papacy can save and provide glory to individuals.

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<sup>28</sup> Georg Voigt, *Enea Silvio De' Piccolomini Als Papst Pius Der Zweite, Und Sein Zeitalter*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1863), 658.

<sup>29</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Franco Cardini, "La repubblica di Firenze e la crociata di Pio II," *Rivista storica della chiesa in Italia* 33 (1979), 468-69.

<sup>31</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 17.

It is conceivable that Pius intended to convey a message to Christian princes, particularly Frederick III, urging them to unite against a common enemy. As noted by Pastor, the composition of the letter was spurred by the inaction of Christians and concerning reports from the East.<sup>32</sup> Through reaffirming his authority, Enea simultaneously delivers a tacit reminder that princes must fulfil their obligations.

The inertia of Christian princes was a pervasive issue extensively discussed among ecclesiastics. Bessarion, a Greek humanist theologian, delivered an oration advocating for unity to confront the Turkish threat. The humanist implored Italian states to unify in their response to the danger posed by Mehmed, emphasising that “Galicia, Britain, Germany, and other foreign nations” were distant from the danger and unlikely to aid their fellow Christians.<sup>33</sup> In his *Commentaries*, Pius records a conversation with a group of cardinals around the time the letter to Mehmed was drafted, in late 1461 or early 1462. The Pope lamented: “If we send envoys to ask aid of sovereigns, they are laughed at. If we impose tithes on the clergy, they appeal to a future council. If we issue indulgences and encourage the contribution of money by spiritual gifts, we are accused of avarice... No one believes what we say.”<sup>34</sup> In the opening section of the letter to the Sultan, Pius discusses the potential consequences if Mehmed were to attack continental Europe, specifically Italy.<sup>35</sup> By attributing to Mehmed the ambition to

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<sup>32</sup> Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, ed. Frederick Antrobus, vol. 3 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1900), 258.

<sup>33</sup> Bessarion, ‘Persuasio seu exhortatio III ex auctoritate Demosthenis’ in *Aulae Turcicae Othomannique imperii description*, ed. Antoine Gueffroy (Basel: Sebastianum Henricpetri, 1577), 325. “Galline, Britani, Germani, exterae nationes? At procul funt a periculo, non putant Italiam in medio periculo magna rerum perturbatione uerfantem.”

<sup>34</sup> Piccolomini, *Commentaries*, 237.

<sup>35</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 13-14.

conquer Europe, Pius manipulates the popular perception of the Turks to instil fear of an alleged imminent advance.

Enea was a realist who was keenly aware of the limitations of his role amidst the perpetual turmoil in Europe. Thus, it is implausible that the letter was intended for Mehmed or that it harboured any genuine desire to convert the Sultan. As noted in the *Commentaries*, Pius aspired to galvanise “Christians against the Turks and declare war upon them.”<sup>36</sup> However, by 1461, the prospect of war was remote due to Germany’s reluctance to cooperate with Pius, France’s entanglement in the Neapolitan War, and the Italian republics’ preoccupation with personal interests. There is a long silence about the Turks in the *Commentaries* between 1460 and 1463, which Bisaha interprets as a disbelief that a small crusade was worth launching.<sup>37</sup> Bisaha’s recognition of Pius’ modesty and realism led her to conclude that the letter to Mehmed is “too rude for a diplomat”, suggesting it was intended for a European audience.<sup>38</sup>

Despite Pius’ respectful treatment of Mehmed, the same courtesy is not extended to Islam. In critiquing Islamic notions of heaven, Pius dismisses the idea of pleasures such as mating and eating, which humans purportedly share with “pigs and asses”. Such pleasures, he contends, are incompatible with Christianity’s emphasis on the “joys of the mind and the delights of the spirit.”<sup>39</sup> Certainly, one cannot hope to persuade another by denigrating their beliefs, and Pius, a former imperial secretary and Cardinal, was undoubtedly cognisant of this fact.

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<sup>36</sup> Piccolomini, *Commentaries*, 91.

<sup>37</sup> Nancy Bisaha, ‘Pope Pius II and the Crusade,’ in *Crusading in the Fifteenth Century Message and Impact*, ed. Norman Housley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 45.

<sup>38</sup> Nancy Bisaha, “Pope Pius II’s Letter to Sultan Mehmed II: A Reexamination.” *Crusades* 1, no. 1 (2002):189, 198.

<sup>39</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 169.

More than a mere propagandistic tool, Pius's letter to Mehmed is a testament to his diplomatic ingenuity in finding alternative avenues to achieve his objectives. From the outset of his papacy, Pius recognised the widespread disinterest among European princes in embarking on crusades. In his work *Germania*, penned shortly after assuming the papal mantle, he lamented that "even if Cicero or Demosthenes were to plead *for a crusade*, they would not move their hardened hearts."<sup>40</sup> The papacy's disillusionment with Christian inaction finds expression in the letter to Mehmed, as Pius controversially posits that Mehmed's conversion to Christianity is the key to achieving peace.<sup>41</sup> This assertion may be perceived as a jest, given its departure from Pius's typical rhetoric regarding the Turks. Readers would likely find Pius's proposed solution absurd and implausible, mirroring his own scepticism regarding the likelihood of Christian unity. Pius's letter should not be interpreted at face value but as a subtle warning to Christian rulers that their kingdoms could be Mehmed's next target. Scholars must bear in mind that in 1453, following the fall of Constantinople, Pius wrote to Pope Nicholas V lamenting, "How many great men's names will now perish? This is the second death for Homer, the second demise for Plato."<sup>42</sup> It would be incongruous for Pius, as Pope, to entertain the notion of allowing a Turk to serve as the protector of Christianity after witnessing the "murder" of Eastern intellectualism by the Sultan.

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<sup>40</sup> Aenea Silvii Piccolomini, *Opera inedita: Descriptis ex codicibus Chisianis vulgavit*, ed. Josephus Cugnoni (Roma: Coi tipi del Salviucci, 1883), 103. "*Puto tamen etiam si Cicero aut Demostenes hanc causam agerent, dura haec pectora movere non possent.*"

<sup>41</sup> Piccolomini, *Epistola*, 20-21.

<sup>42</sup> Rudolf Wolk (ed.), 'Der Briefwechsel des Eneas Silvius Piccolomini,' in *Fontes Rerum Austriacarum*, vol. 68 (Vienna: Hof- und Universitäts-Buehhändler, 1918), 200. "*quot nunc magnorum nomina virorum peribunt? secunda mors ista Homero est, secundus Piatoni obitus.*"

#### IV

In conclusion, Pius' enigmatic letter to Mehmed II offers valuable insights into the papacy's diplomacy, ideological evolution, and the perpetual struggle for hegemony in Europe and the East. A speculative analysis of the letter prompts scholars to ponder the potential ramifications had Mehmed converted. Theoretically, had he followed Pius' instructions in the letter, Mehmed could have resolved many of the papacy's issues. With both the East and Europe under papal hegemony, the futile skirmishes in Europe and the incessant challenges to his authority would likely have dissipated. However, it seems improbable that the letter was sincerely intended to persuade Mehmed to convert. In addition to internal contradictions within the document, its contents also counter Pius' established ideology. With a fervent zeal for crusading and dreams of waging war against the Turks, Pius' letter is more aptly interpreted as a piece of propaganda designed to stir enthusiasm for a Crusade among European princes. Penned during a period of considerable difficulty for Pius, the letter represents the Pope's ardent wishes to unify Europe and condemn Islam. Although it is not known why Pius refrained from publishing the letter, the plethora of theories available will continue to add intrigue and value to the document.

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