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The Fall of Constantinople in 1453 and Late Medieval Greek Culture

The Experience of Defeat¹

In this article Frank R. Trombley discusses the Fall of Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire, seen as a turning point in history by both contemporaries and recent historians. Trombley focuses on the cultural, political and social consequences and reactions of the Greeks and Western Europeans on this major historic event.

Resistance Movements

The fall of Constantinople on 29 May 1453 was at the time seen as a culminating point in the cultural, economic and political life of the Mediterranean.² Most of these suppositions were illusions predicated on the 'tabloid press' *mentalité* of the second half of the 15th century - expressed by popular woodcut illustrators,³ but principally in the solicitude for the survival of Christendom found in Papal bulls and letters - which chose to see this event as a justification for repeated attempts to revive the crusading movement. Mehmet II the Conqueror (1449-81) went on to project the military power of the Ottoman Turks deep into the Balkan peninsula, bringing Bosnia and Herzegovina under his control, imposing a humiliating peace on Venice - financially exhausted by a protracted maritime war - and directing his raiding armies onto the Hungarian plain and into Carniola and Venezia. For all the pomp and circumstance of Papal summons to new

- 1 I regret that it has not always been possible to consult the Greek text of the demotic songs that are quoted in this article.
- 2 Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople 1453* (Cambridge 1965) 160-180; C. Amantos ed., *Le cinq-centième anniversaire de la prise de Constantinople L'Hellénisme Contemporain, 1453-1953* II (1953); R. Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk (1453-1517)* (Nieuwkoop 1967) 1-23.
- 3 Schwoebel, *Shadow of the Crescent*, *passim*.

crusades, the most active defenders of the frontiers of Christendom were indigenous Balkan fighters like John Hunyadi and George Kastriotis, the latter also known as Iskender Beđ or Scanderbeg who, aided by the Venetian Republic and financial contributions from the West, succeeded in holding the line against the Turkish advance in the Balkans for a long time. Christendom suffered territorial losses but imposed a number of serious military defeats on the Ottoman armies. On the whole, this policy of 'containment' proved successful till the death of Mehmet II, whose son Bayazit II (1481-1512) then shifted his gaze eastward.



Bellini's portrait of Mehmet II. Source: F. Babinger, *Mehmet the Conqueror* (Princeton 1978) xxiii.

The psychology of defeat that arose in the Greek nation (*ethnos*) in the Tourkokratia has been examined from a wide range of perspectives. The national school of thought has usually characterised the extinction of Greek political autonomy in the surviving fragments of the Byzantine state - Constantinople, the despotate of Mistra and the Peloponnese, and empire of Trapezos - as a species of enslavement, thanks in great part to the *devsirme*, the humiliating tax paid by handing over Christian children to the Ottoman court to become Muslims to be trained in the state administration and army. The received history of the period is one of tracing the survival of hard-pressed communities, upland migrations and the expansion of Greek diaspora communities in the parts of present-day Italy, Hungary and Romania.⁴

The Byzantine Greeks were a defeated nation, and a many-sided psychology grew up in village communities and the families of the political elite alike. There were many adaptations to the new situation, some of them not entirely flattering to the political and religious traditions of the Byzantine state, others reflecting heroic resolution and

4 See especially A.E. Vacalopoulos, *The Greek Nation, 1453-1669. The Cultural and Economic Background of Modern Greek Society* (New Brunswick 1976) 45-69, 263-70.

a determination to continue the military and cultural resistance of the fallen *ethnos* despite a sense of degradation following on political collapse and military defeat.⁵

After the fall of Constantinople there were many examples of great heroism in the face of almost certain defeat in the Peloponnesos.⁶ One such case was the defence of the *akropolis* of Salmenikon on the south coast of the Corinthian gulf at the time of Mehmed II's invasion in 1459. It was led by a certain Graitzas Palaiologos, whose lineage lay partly in the imperial family. After holding out for more than a year he and his men were permitted to march out with the honours of war and retired to the territory of Venice, which at that time enjoyed a commercial treaty with the Sultan. The grand vizier Mahmud Pasha contrasted his behaviour with that of his fellow Greeks: 'I saw many slavish souls in the Morea, but he was a man.'⁷

Then there was the case of Korkodeilos Kladas, whose personal name derives from *krokodilos*, that is, 'crocodile', perhaps a *nom de guerre*, and whose family had migrated from Epeiros to the Peloponnesos. After taking control of the fortress of St. George in the vicinity of Sparta, he was forced to submit to Mehmed II when the latter invaded the Peloponnesos in 1459-60 and acquired a *timar*, or Ottoman military fief, on the plain of Helos on the southern coast. In the fighting between Venice and the Turks in 1463-64, Kladas fought on the side of the Republic but soon thereafter retired to the Mani peninsula. The Venetians made him commander of the local Greek militia (*capo di stratiotti*). On 4 September 1479 the Venetians made a peace treaty with the Turks and ceded the so-called 'arm of the Mani' (*brazzo di Maina*), that is, the peninsula, to the Turks. Kladas decided to contest this; he is said to have assembled 16,000 fighters consisting of thieves and erstwhile rebels in the central Mani. With them he defeated a number of Turkish military commanders and brought the fortresses of Trigophylon and Oitylon under his control. After this he extended his campaigns further afield and captured a number of fortresses and towers such as Kastania in

5 See the remarks of D.A. Zakythinios, *The Making of Modern Greece. From Byzantium to Independence* (Oxford 1976) 150f., 161f., 187-90.

6 D.A. Zakythinios, *Le despotat grec de Morée II. Vie et institutions* (Athens 1953) 115.

7 Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton 1978) 176f. Babinger's source was the Greek historian Chalkokondyles. Cf. D. A. Zakythinios, *Le despotat de Morée I. Histoire politique* (Paris 1932) 271-273. See also S. Lambros, 'Kōnstantinos Palaiologos Graitzas, o amyntōr tou Salmenikou', *Neos Ellçnomnçmōn* 11 (1914) 260ff. (*non vidi*).

Great Mani on the slopes of the Taygetos mountain range.⁸

The Venetians then published a decree advising the Ottoman authorities in Constantinople and in the *sanjak* of the Peloponnesos, as well its fortress commanders, that Kladas had not taken up arms against the Turks at the encouragement of the Republic. Kladas attracted support from the pro-Venetian Greek militia of Nauplion, who were nominally under Venetian control, and whose Greek commander Theodore Bouas marched across the Peloponnesos to join Kladas. The Republic then put a bounty of 10,000 *hyperpyrai* from the mint of Methone on Kladas' head. The decree was sent to the Venetian fortress commanders at Methone, Korone, Nauplion, Naupaktos (Lepanto), Monemvasia and Crete.

The cynical collaboration of Venice with the Ottoman authorities was consistent with its commercial treaties with Mehmed II. Sultan Mehmed II then dispatched an expedition commanded by two very senior officers to punish Kladas. Consisting of 6000 infantry and cavalry, the Ottoman force was defeated near Oitylon, the eastern gateway to the Mani, losing 700 men.⁹ The Venetians then conveyed Kladas' family, who had taken refuge in Corfu, to Venice as hostages. The Ottoman army, reinforced with a detachment of Janissaries and taking the pass through the Maurobounion ('Black Mountain'), finally entered the Mani on 4 April 1480. They plundered the villages round the fortress of Kastania where Kladas had taken refuge, but failed to make an assault against it.

Not long after this three Neapolitan galleys put in at the headland (*akrotcrion*) of St. Angelos. Among the crew was Kladas' adopted or 'spiritual' brother (*adelphopoictos*) who sent word to him that king Ferdinand of Naples had given his *flotilla* orders to convey the rebel wherever he wanted to go. Kladas then broke through the Turkish leaguer outside the fortress and safely boarded the ships with fifty of his men on 13 April. After giving Kladas a splendid reception in Naples, king Ferdinand dispatched him on a series of expeditions in Albania in an effort to assist the popular resistance of George Kastriotis, the legendary Scanderbeg, against the Ottoman encroachment. He succeeded in capturing the fortress of

8 The details of Kladas' rebellion are known from an Italian manuscript in the British Museum, *Storia della Guerra dei Veneziani 1478-1482*, Manuscripts in the British Museum, Additional: No. 8586. Cf. K. Sathas, *Toukokratoumenç Hellas, Istorikon dokimon peri tôn pros apotinasin tou othömanikou zyghou epanastaseön tou hellçikou ethnou (1453-1821)* (Athens 1869) 37 note 1.

9 Sathas, *Toukokratoumenç Hellas*.

Cheimara and its environs, *castello chiamato Ctmera, principal fortezza di quella provincia*, shortly after the local military governor abandoned it on 31 August 1481. Kladas' resistance had thus outlasted all the aggressive schemes of Mehmed II Fatih, who died on 3 May 1481.¹⁰ The political will and military sagacity of this Korkodeilos Kladas and his fighters proved difficult to imitate elsewhere in the territories that Mehmed brought under Ottoman control.

Religious and Social Collaboration with the Ottoman Administration

A particularly important feature of the psychology of defeat was the acceptance of Islam. This was particularly characteristic of Greek landowners and military men who had much to lose if they failed to cooperate the new regime, and much to gain if they collaborated. Significantly different pictures of Greek society emerge, depending on which national school of history writing one consults. So, for example, a picture of ethnic enslavement of the lower economic classes emerges in some treatments of the post-conquest period, as in Apostolos Vacalopoulos' histories of the Greek nation (*ethnos*) under the era of Turkish rule (*Tourkokratia*).¹¹ Earlier treatments of the Greek national school like that of Konstantine Sathas paint a significant picture of cultural and ethnic struggle in the cultural and military spheres.¹² On the other hand, commentators on the documentary history of the reign of Mehmet II Fatih and the period immediately after the fall of Constantinople like Franz Babinger have found much evidence of Greek co-operation and, in fact, entry into the political and military life of the developing Ottoman state, sometimes as Christians, but more often as converts to the new political and religious dispensations.¹³ Large numbers of men with noble names like Komnenos, Palaiologos and Kantakouzenos turn up again and again in the Ottoman documents. Of the less notable, some were happy to take service with the new regime. Particularly important were the Byzantine military men who

- 10 For Korkodeilos Kladas' escapades, see Sathas, *Tourkokratoumenç Hellas*, 36-45, with extensive quotation from the documents.
- 11 A. E. Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation, The Byzantine Period 1204-1461*, trans. I. Moles (New Brunswick 1970).
- 12 Sathas, *Toukokratoumenç Hellas*.
- 13 Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror* (as in note 7 above).

had been holders of *pronoia* grants from the Greek government. Large numbers of these men continued their service as *sipahis*, that is, as holders of the *timar* grants which some historians regard as a system cognate to the *pronoia*, in both cases quasi-feudal land grants to mounted cavalrymen and their retainers.¹⁴ Sons serving the sultan sometimes inherited their fiefs from fathers who had served the last Byzantine emperors. Some Muslim *sipahis* are known to have had Greek ancestors, like a certain Mustafa son of Filatrino, perhaps tracing his ancestry back to a noble Byzantine family, the Philanthropenos.¹⁵

A list of Christian collaborators can be developed from Franz Babinger's study of the reign of Mehmed II. Babinger's work takes a more oecumenical view than the individual national schools of history because it is centred on the Ottoman political experience rather than that of individual subject nationalities. Examples abound. The Angeloi, a Byzantine family of Thessaly, had provided rulers to the breakaway regime of the despots of Epiros (ca. 1204-1318). A son of Manuel Angelos was taken captive with his Serbian mother, converted to Islam and made good friends with the future Mehmed II; the man eventually became governor of Rumeli, the European half of the Ottoman empire, and was eventually entrusted with the imperial seal. He was known as Mahmud Pasha Angelovic.¹⁶ Palaiologoi populated many sectors of the Sultan's retinue. The well informed Italian Angiolello - an expert on the supposed terrors of the Grand Turk - mentions an instance of this:

'After the Grand Turk had won his victory of Negropont, some of his lords reminded him of [one of his sisters], and she so cajoled him that he released her from prison and married her to one of his slaves called Esebeg [i.e. Isa Bey], who was a relative of the Palaiologoi, the emperors of Constantinople'.¹⁷

In his expedition to the Morea (the vernacular name of the Peloponnesos) in 1459 the Sultan employed a Greek secretary, the former Thomas Katavolcnos, who had become Yunus Bey after accepting Islam, and who helped negotiate the surrender of the Greek despot of Mistra, Demetrios Palaiologos.¹⁸ The

14 Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, 152-157.

15 S. Vryonis, 'The Byzantine legacy and Ottoman forms', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 23-24 (1969-70) 273; Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, 155.

16 Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror*, 115.

17 Ibidem, 285.

18 Ibidem, 173f.

latter's subsequent fate makes sad reading as the historian Kritovoulos of Imbros tells it. Mehmed II recognised the continuing legitimacy of Demetrios' imperial title and granted him a fief that included the revenues of the islands of Imbros and Lemnos, partial revenues from Thasos and Samothrace, that of the salt mines of Enez and three annual instalments from the coinage of the Edirne mint, all of which came to some 700,000 aspers. The Sultan later took back these holdings after levelling the charge of financial misappropriation by Demetrios. After further vicissitudes the ex-despot ended his days as a monk in Edirne in 1470.¹⁹ It must be remembered, however, that patriarch Gennadios was himself criticised for collaborating with the Sultan in order to preserve the interests of the Greek orthodox church, particularly by politicians, military men and members of the clergy who had supported union with the Papacy, and conversely by radical patriots, who may have plotted his assassination.²⁰ At the opposite end of the scale and more plausibly, the philosopher George Amiroutzes was subjected to harsh judgement by his fellow Greeks for devising arguments to suggest that the Christian scriptures and Qur'ân could be reconciled and the two religions be synthesised into a single faith.²¹

Greeks of noble and non-noble birth alike are many times mentioned as diplomats and envoys, not least because they possessed the necessary language skills in an international world where Greek was still one of the principal *linguae francae*.²² This explains why the earliest Ottoman treaties with Venice were written in demotic Greek.²³ Thus, the Sultan sent a certain Demetrios Sophianos, a Greek from a noble family of the island of Euboea, to the grandmaster of the Knights of St. John on Rhodes to negotiate a truce.²⁴ Practical men also joined the new regime. Among them was an architect supposedly named Christodoulos who was later known as the freedman (*atik*) Sinan who was responsible for the construction of the Mosque of the Conqueror which was built on the site of the Church of the Apostles, which had in earlier times served as the mausoleum of the Byzantine emperors, in an act pregnant with the architectural, political

19 Ibidem, 178.

20 Vacalopoulos, *The Greek Nation*, 109.

21 S. Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity* (Cambridge 1968) 183.

22 Zakythinis, *Making of Modern Greece*, 93f.

23 F. Babinger and F. Dölger, 'Mehmed's II. Frühster Staatsvertrag (1446)' in: F. Dölger ed., *Byzantinische Diplomatie* (Munich 1956) 262-291.

24 Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror*, 381f.

and religious symbolism of the new order.²⁵ The public face of the new regime in Constantinople was thus in various respects a Greek one.

In the west there were examples of 'religious treason' against the Greek *ethnos*, something quite opposed to the fanfare associated with Papal attempts to organise new crusades. It may well be that in 1479 the *Signoria* or Senate of Venice communicated to Mehmed II through their *bailo* in Istanbul that the Sultan was legally entitled to seize the Italian towns of Brindisi, Taranto and Otranto because they had been parts of the extinct Byzantine state and



Istanbul in the sixteenth century from a contemporary Turkish manuscript. Source: F. Babinger, *Mehmet the Conqueror* (Princeton 1978) xii.

were thus legally subject to the now dead Constantine XI. Whatever the legalities of the case, an Ottoman naval expedition set out for Apulia in the following year.²⁶

Demotic Song and Resistance to Turkish Occupation

One of the more vivid cultural manifestations of the Greek sense of defeat in Ottoman territory was the emergence of the *threnody*, that is, lamentations on the fall of Constantinople and the dispossessed circumstances of the *ethnos*. These works were mostly of vernacular origin, composed in demotic verse forms and frequently recited to instrumental accompaniment.²⁷ It is not always certain when particular pieces were compiled, and they certainly underwent a great deal of improvisational modification before finally being

25 Ibidem, 292.

26 Ibidem, 390.

27 Cf. L. Politis, *A History of Modern Greek Literature* (Oxford 1973) 83-97.

recorded by scholars from around the time of the Greek Revolution and after. Some of these pieces may well go back to the aftermath of the fall of the city. The *threnodic* tradition was an old one, for Kritovoulos, one of the historians who recorded these events, once lent himself to it in secular format:

‘As for the great city of Constantine, raised to a great height of glory, dominion and wealth in its own times, overshadowing to an infinite degree all the cities round it, renowned for its glory, wealth, authority, power and greatness, and all its other qualities, thus came to its end.’²⁸

The fall of Constantinople was naturally treated at greater length in the demotic song tradition. This is not surprising in view of the fact that forty-two of the minor Greek chronicles, in addition to the four Greek historians, Sphrantzes, Kritovoulos, Doukas and Chalkokondyles, all record the event in varying degrees of detail.²⁹ It was a world-historical event for Hellenes everywhere, regardless of the level of their literacy. A fairly typical entry runs:

‘In this year, alas, the capture of the same Constantinople took place at the hands of the godless sons of Agar and the city that is imperial before all other cities was taken by the spear. [Constantine the emperor] was slain... and one who did not want to surrender the imperial office to lawless men was adorned with the crown of a martyr, nor did he want to escape the peril of one who was great in power... So great was the ruin and destruction of the Christians living there that it became like the city of Jerusalem of old in the time of Nebuchadnezzar.’³⁰

The biblical emphasis of texts like this is tedious and uninformative except as to rather derivative ecclesiastical reflections on the event. In contrast, the demotic songs take us much deeper into the *Halôsis*, the Greek term for the fall of the city. Like the recent attacks in the World Trade Center in New York, the fall of Constantinople was a cultural event of international significance, whatever its meaning in military terms, and this can be seen in the responses of poets and demotic singers as much as in the retrospective

28 Kritovoulos, *History of the Mehmed the Conqueror*, trans. C. T. Riggs (Westport, Connecticut 1954).

29 Schreiner, *Byzantinischen Kleinchroniken II. Historischer Kommentar* (Vienna 1977) 481f.

30 Schreiner, *Byzantinischen Kleinchroniken I. Einleitung und Text* (Vienna 1975) 155 (No. 14).

statements of Western politicians and military leaders. That at least was the view of Nikolaos Politçs in his edition of one of these works:

‘God signifies, the earth signifies, the heavens signify,
And so too does Hagia Sophia, the great monastery
With its four hundred gongs (*sçmandra*) and its sixty-two bells
(*kampanais*),
Every bell and priest, every priest and deacon.
The emperor recites the psalmody on the left, the patriarch recites it on
the right,
And the columns are shaken by the great psalmody.
Let the emperor recite the *cheroubiko* hymn³¹ and let him come out.
Their shout comes from heaven and from the mouth of an archangel:
“Stop reciting the *cheroubiko* and bring down the holy (vessels).
Let the bishops take the sacred vessels, and may you extinguish your
candles,
Because it is the will of God that the City should fall to the Turks
(*tourkepsçi*).³²
Transmit my word to France to send three ships,
One to take the cross and the other to take the gospel book,
The third, the best, to take our holy altar
Lest [the Turks] take it as booty and make us convert to Islam’.
The Despoina was troubled and the icons wept, (saying):
“Be silent, lady Despoina, and do not weep too much,
It shall again be yours with the passing of years, with the passing of
time”³³.

Despoina, or ‘mistress,’ was of course one of the many titles of address used for the mother of Christ, along with *Theotokos* (‘mother of God’) and *Panaghia* (‘all-holy one’). This song implicitly reflects an early tradition that the final liturgy in Hagia Sophia was not completed, but interrupted as the Turks broke into the church.³⁴

31 The hymn was normally recited when the bishop performing the liturgy came through the main entrance of the church, in this case Hagia Sophia. D. Dçmçtrakos ed., *Mega lexicon tçs Hellçnikçs glössçs* 9 (Athens 2000) 7835.

32 Dçmçtrakos, *Mega Lexicon* 9, 7246f.

33 My translation of the Greek text. N. G. Politçs ed., *Dçmotika Tragoudia. Eklogai apo ta tragoudia tou hellçnikou laou* (Athens n.d.) 4f.

34 Other demotic songs about the fall of Constantinople are noted in L. Politçs, *Poiçtikç Anthologia II. Meta tçn Halösin 15os kai 16os aiönas* (Athens 1977) 15-17, 151f., with bibliography.

There were also demotic songs of provincial origin that reflect a spirit of futility in the face of the Turkish advance, as the small rural forts (*kastra*) held by the Greeks were destroyed one by one. Many of them come from the Pontos, where the folk memory of the Turks' destruction of the upland fortresses that held out after the capitulation of last Komneos of Trapezos in 1461 persisted for many generations:

'What have we done to you, O my God, that we are so drenched in blood?

It took forty years for the castle of my host to be built,

And is it now to be demolished with the heavy blow, with the sword?

There birds sing in a sad (?) voice.

In this place Hellenes died, a thousand brave men (*pallikaria*).³⁵

The plaintive cries of the birds are a regular feature of demotic songs. The cult of the brave man, or *pallikari*, was an important feature in the resistance of upland communities, who often consisted of migrants from the plains and river valleys, against conversion to Islam and the fiscal exactions of the Turkish administration:

'The evil Turk came and occupied the land

And overflowed the plains,

But the mountains - these were filled with

Brave and handsome men (*levantoi*).³⁶

This went hand in hand with the painful consciousness, mentioned above, of the fact that some Greeks, like some members of the imperial family, the Palaiologoi, were all too happy to accept terms in order to retain their *pronoia* holdings and become *timar* holders under the Turks. One song from the Pontos reflects the bitterness and hatred that this evoked:

'O fortress, my fortress, my Palaiokastron, so solid:

You were old and strong - then how were you surrendered?

You had a cunning guard, a cowardly master:

Marthas the dog was the traitor within your.³⁷

These demotic songs were evocation of a struggle for what ever could be got of local autonomy for the Greek communities. Some mountainous districts achieved this, becoming known by the Greek term *Agrapha* (literally 'un-

35 Cited with bibliography, Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, 356, note 95.

36 Quoted from Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, 230.

37 Adapted from *Ibidem*, 229.

written'), that is, regions that defied Ottoman control and had never been written up in the Ottoman tax registers. The parts near Loidoriki, Trikkala and Phanari in the southern Pindos mountains of Greece earned this designation. It is here that the quasi-independent fighters who controlled the district were recognised as *armatôloi*, that is, local militias officially recognised by the Ottoman authorities and paying practically no taxes, perhaps as early as the sultanate of Murad II.³⁸ Makriannis, one of the heroes of the Greek revolution, emerged from Loidoriki in the Agrapha in the 1820s. There is a demotic song from ca. 1725 on this. It runs in part:

“Come with me, my old man. Let us go where the Klephts are, so as not to pay poll-tax to the rascally Turk”. “I can’t my lad, for I am old; but take my elder son who knows the paths and all the mountains. For forty years he has not made his submission or paid poll-tax to the rascally Turk”.³⁹

The poll-tax, that is the *jizya*, was a capitation tax levied on all adult males of the empire’s non-Muslim population. The Klephts were armed men who might easily have enrolled among the recognised local militias or *armatôloi*, but who chose to live independently in places where the Ottoman administration had little or no control.⁴⁰ Fighting bands of this type must go back to the earliest days of the Ottoman occupation, the term *klephtçs* first being used in the double sense of brigand and resistance fighter in the treaty negotiated between Mehmed II and the Republic of Venice in July 1480.⁴¹ An earlier demotic song from ca. 1585 offers reasons why it could be dangerous to submit. Malamos had a dream in which his sword was broken and gun would not fire, an evil omen:

‘But I am going to the mountains and the old retreats, to live by the cold waters and camp under the trees. The Turks are faithless, they do not keep their word and they have taken the heads of all the Klephts who submitted’.⁴²

One of these vernacular lamentations may concern the fall of Edirne-Adrianopolis in Thrace to the Ottoman sultan Murad in 1361, or alternatively 1368/9, the song being first recorded in 1837 by an Englishman named Pashley in Crete:

38 Ibidem, 157f.

39 Zakythinis, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, 211.

40 Zakythinis, *Making of Modern Greece*, 78, note 17.

41 Ibidem, 76f.

42 Ibidem, 211f.



Turkish Raiders, depicted by Joerg von Nuremberg around 1500. Source: R. Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent* (Nieuwkoop 1967).

‘The nightingales of the east and the nightingales of the west
Weep slowly, weep quickly, weep at noon,
Weep for Adrianopoli, the much-battered (city)
Where there strike (the bells) for the three festivals of the year:
Those of Christmas for wax and those of Palm Sunday for palms
And those of Paschal Sunday for the Resurrection of Christ.’⁴³

In a pun on the Greek verb *krouô* (‘strike’), the ringing of the bells or beating on wooden logs at the great religious festivals is contrasted with the battering of siege engines against the walls of Adrianopolis (*polykrousemenç*). Memory of the loss of the city is thus subsumed under the round of religious festivals that gave the Greek communities of Anadolu and Rumeli, the eastern and western divisions of the Ottoman empire, their sense of corporate identity during the *Tourkokratia*. The song has deep historical roots at the literal level,

43 Politçs, *Dçmotika Tragoudia*, 3 and notes.

and offers Adrianopolis as a symbol for the many Greek cities that lost their populations to Ottoman sieges. It may be worth noting that Adrianopolis fell to the Bulgars on Easter Sunday in 1205, but the date of its capture in 1361 or 1368/9 is unknown.⁴⁴

The *devcirme*, the Ottoman tax in children or child-levy, has already been mentioned. It too was the object of demotic song in all parts of the occupied Greek world. One of these pieces from Epeiros ca. 1580 tells a story of self-destructive *resentiment* and sorrow:

‘A curse upon you, Sultan, and a threefold curse upon you for the evil you have done and the evil that you do. You send and summon the elders, the headmen, the priests, so that you may muster your child-levy, that you may make (them) Janisarries. Mothers weep for their children and sisters for their brothers. And I too weep and am consumed and while I live I shall weep. Last year they took my son, this year my brother.’⁴⁵

It should be borne in mind that the cultural parameters which lay behind the demotic songs were hardly communicable to the emerging nation states of the Latin West because of the phenomenon of *diaglossia*, that is, the existence of two languages, the high classical Greek of Byzantine expatriates like Cardinal Bessarion and the demotic form of the language which had centuries before become the basis of demotic song. The social misery of foreign occupation and restricted rights of religious expression of a defeated people were far from the minds of westerners, even the Popes, who had internalised the *Türkenfurcht* to the extent of promoting impracticable schemes for new crusades. As for Bessarion, he advocated schemes for the survival of the Greek state in the Peloponnesos using examples drawn from the classical past, and expressed these in a letter to Constantine XI dated ca. 1444, the year of the failed crusade of Varna.⁴⁶ The programme no doubt persisted after the fall of Constantinople. In some ways it resembles the futile programme for the military revival of the Italian city-states, and Florence in particular, based on the system practised in the late Roman Republic as propounded by Niccolò Machiavelli in theory, as expressed in the *Art of War*, and in practice with the levy of a citizen militia, which in fact won a

44 P. Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken II*, 297-99 (as in note 29 above); Cf. H. Inalcik, ‘The conquest of Erdirne (1361)’, *Archivum Ottomanicum* 3 (1971) 185-210, reprinted in *The Ottoman Empire: Conquest, Organization and Economy* (London 1978) no. III.

45 Quoted from Zakythinios, *Making of Modern Greece*, 210.

46 Noted in Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, 172-76.



Cardinal Bessarion kneeling before a reliquary of the Holy Cross. Source: A. Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation* (Thessalonike 1970).

victory over the army of Pisa in 1509.

It is hard to judge the realities of the *Türkenfurcht* in Western Europe that followed the fall of Constantinople. The regimes of Christian monarchs in the Balkans were on the front line, and bore the brunt of Ottoman expansion under Mehmet II. The Italian city-states, and Venice in particular, provided the intelligence that motivated Papal crusade policy. It must be borne in mind that western intelligence frequently came from Greeks. So, for example, Theodore Spandounes, scion of a family enjoying ties of kinship with the Palaiologoi and Kantakouzenoi that had settled as refugees in Venice after the fall of Constantinople, composed his history of the origin of the Ottoman emperors - a reflection of the fact that the

post-conquest historians Kritovoulos and Doukas (unknown in the West at this time), and most Greeks living in the East, referred to the Sultan with the Greek term for emperor, *basileus*, not least because he enjoyed the legal title to most of the former Byzantine territories. An Italian version of the work first appeared in 1509, to be followed by a French one in 1519.⁴⁷ It contains many first-hand observations and served the cause of the abortive Papal pleas for a new crusade. Interestingly enough, a document from the time

47 Theodore Spandounes, *On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors*, trans. D. M. Nicol (Cambridge 1997).

of Mehmed II and written in demotic Greek survives, giving a list of the principal military ranks, orders of march, and the numbers and pay of different army formations. It survives as Paris Gr. No. 1712, which includes the tenth century military history of Leo the Deacon and Psellos' *Chronographia*.⁴⁸ This is the sort of document that Western rulers will have sought to make the Ottoman military system more comprehensible, but the only place it could have been read usefully was Venice, whose first and subsequent treaties with Mehmed II were formulated in demotic Greek.⁴⁹

Another Greek manuscript, giving the Turkish names of the gates of Constantinople, also survives, oddly enough, at the Mt. Sinai monastery.⁵⁰ It was thus possible to frame a fairly complete picture of the regime of Mehmed II and the infrastructure of the Ottoman state - if one knew Greek or, failing that, Italian.

Information flowed to the West from other directions. For example, a gun-caster (*Büchsenmeister*) known as Jörg of Nuremberg published a history of the Turks (*Geschicht (sic) von der Türckey*) ca. 1482-83, based on his own experiences after being captured in Bosnia in 1460 and paid thereafter to cast cannon, whence he eventually escaped.⁵¹ Original and



Byzantine Constantinople circa 1422, from a manuscript of the Florentine traveler Cristoforo Buondelmonti. Source: F. Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror* (Princeton 1978) xiii.

48 S. Bastav ed., *Ordo Portae. Description grecque de la Porte et de l'armée du Sultan Mehmed II* (Budapest 1947).

49 F. Babinger and F. Dölger, 'Mehmed's II. Frühster Staatsvertrag (1446)' in: F. Dölger ed., *Byzantinische Diplomatiek* (Munich 1956) 262-291.

50 W. Beneschewitsch, 'Die türkischen Namen der Tore von Konstantinopel', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 23 (1920).

51 A.A. Vasiliev, 'Jörg of Nuremberg. A writer contemporary with the fall of Constantinople (1453)', *Byzantion* 10 (1935) 205-9.

first-hand intelligence about Mehmed II's armaments industry thus reached the west.

What did the West make of all this? The Papacy contrived endless schemes to launch new crusades, but the nations of the West were moving to a more pragmatic approach toward the Turks. At the level of recognition, the Ottoman empire certainly became part of the 'family' of European nations and a player in the balance of power through its alliance with France in 1526. This led to monstrous claims of sovereignty that included Venice, Poland, the lands of the Habsburg empire and France.⁵² But the military threat existed mainly on the periphery of Western Europe, particularly in Hungary and the Venezia. The main striking force of the Ottoman army *ca.* 1475 consisted of 3,000 *kapykulu* cavalry, 6,000 Janissaries (with firearms) and 22,000 sipahis in Rumelia and 17,000 in Anatolia, giving a total of about 48,000 men.⁵³ It is difficult to believe that these forces, although substantial, could have seriously menaced a united Europe west of the Hungarian plain. It was the political disunity of Europe that Süleymân the Magnificent sought to exploit in the following century, promising aid to the Protestants living under the Habsburg monarchy and evoking the term (evidently of Catholic usage) *Calvinoturcismus*.⁵⁴ The Catholic humanists of this time, including Erasmus and Sir Thomas More, were deeply concerned about Turkish military operations. As Erasmus remarked in 1530 'The Turk holds the greater part of the Hungarian plain and spares no one' (*Turcus tenet maximam Ungariae partem et parcit nemini*).⁵⁵ Whatever the speculations of the humanists, Western Europe was a very safe place for the Greek refugees escaping the fall of Constantinople. Not only Venice and Rome, but places farther afield accommodated them in the decades that followed.⁵⁶ The national political resurrection of the Greek *ethnos* was delayed until 1821, but the groundwork for this was laid through the development of Philhellenism as a pan-European phenomenon, a direct consequence of the humanists' work. By the same token, it is worth

52 H. Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age 1300-1600* (London 1973) 35, 107.

53 Inalcik, *Ottoman Empire*, 108.

54 Inalcik, *Ottoman Empire*, 37.

55 A. Brezianu, "'Quirinus narravit': Nicolaus Olahus and Sir Thomas More's background information on the Turkish question and Buda in the "Dialogue of Comfort", *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 18 (1980) 403.

56 H. Taparel, 'Notes sur quelques refugies byzantins en Bourgogne après la chute de Constantinople', *Balkan Studies* 28 (1987) 51-58.

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noting a bizarre phenomenon in the world of humanist literature, a Latin lamentation of Italian provenance on the death of Mehmed II Fatih, the conqueror of Constantinople.⁵⁷

57 F. Babinger, 'Eine lateinische Totenklage auf Mehmed II', *Studi Orientalistici in onore di Giorgio Levi Della Vida* 1 (Rome 1936) 15-31.