

The Ottoman expansion in South East Europe

The Ottoman expansion started around 1300 in north-western Asia Minor, and continued until the late 17th century, the last significant conquest being Podolia (at that time, a province of Poland-Lithuania, now part of the Ukraine) in 1672. Expansion turned a small chiefdom of semi-nomadic pastoralists into a bureaucratic world-empire extended over three continents.

Most of South East Europe was conquered in the 14th-15th centuries, but some regions were either conquered later (e.g. Slavonia, Banat, Cyprus and Crete), or remained free from Ottoman rule (e.g. Corfu, Slovenia, parts of Dalmatia, Croatia and Slovenia). For the people in the region, the Ottoman conquest was a major event. It shaped their lives both in the short-term and in the long run. Historians have expressed various and sometimes conflicting opinions on this issue. Most of them have taken a nation-centred perspective, although the people of the late Middle Ages rarely perceived the world along ethnic lines. These historians have presented these conquests as a series of heroic military accomplishments, with their people fighting valiantly against irreducible enemies. For them, the Ottoman conquest was either a catastrophe for their people and/or for European civilisation, or, on the contrary, a beneficial establishment of Ottoman peace. For other historians, the real nature of the conquest process was more complex. Ethnic, religious and ethical divides were often hazy. Major campaigns combined with petty warfare. At a local level, motivations and perceptions diverged extensively from the clear-cut divides conceived by modern historians. Securing collaborators was often as important as the actual fighting. Heroism and dedication to various ideals were part of life, as were also cruelty, suffering and cheating.

Please note that this chapter of our Workbook does not aim to document in detail the process of the Ottoman conquest and/or the resistance of various people against it. It simply provides pupils with a limited number of sources in order to enable them to get a better look at the complexity of this process and the ways the people of that time lived and perceived the events.

Ia. The first phases of the Ottoman State in Anatolia

I-1. Orhan's marriage to the daughter of the *tekvour*¹ of Yar Hisar

Part 13

This part tells us of the bride they took, who was the daughter of the *tekvour* of Yar Hisar; who they gave her to, and what became of her.

Osman Gazi² gave her to his son Orhan Gazi³.

1 Written also as *tekfur*; meaning a small Christian ruler in Asia Minor, whose territory was incorporated into the Ottoman domains.

2 Osman I – founder of the Ottoman State; ruled from about 1281 to about 1324.

3 Orhan – Ottoman ruler from 1324 to 1362.

Her name was Ülüler Hatun. And Orhan had by then become a young brave man. [...] And when they captured these four castles [Bilecik, Yar Hisar, İnegöl, Aya Nikola], they brought justice and equity to that province. And all [the people of its] villages returned and settled down where they belonged. They began to have a better life; it seems, than under the infidels. For, upon hearing of how well off these infidels now were, people from other provinces began to arrive. Well, Osman Gazi wanted to have a wedding in order to give Ülüler Hatun in marriage to his son Orhan Gazi. And so he did. Ülüler Hatun is that lady who has a *tekke* [dervish lodge] right by the citadel of Bursa, near the Kapluca [hot springs] gate. And she it was

who also built the bridge over Ülüfer creek. And it is that bridge that has given its name to the creek. And both Murad Khan Gazi⁴ and Süleyman Paşa⁵ are her sons. Both were fathered by Orhan Gazi. When the lady passed away, she was buried together with Orhan Gazi inside the citadel of Bursa.

Aşıkpaşa-zâde, p.102.



The chronicle of Aşıkpaşa-zâde is one of the first Ottoman dynastic chronicles, but was written in the 15th century, i.e. with more than a century's distance from the events it narrates.



Why did Orhan Gazi marry the tekvour's daughter? Why did his father make a decision about the marriage? Imagine yourself in Orhan's position.

According to Aşıkpaşa-zâde, what were the most important qualities for an Ottoman lady to have?

I-2. The capture of Karaca Hisar, and the first reading of the *hutbe* in Osman Gazi's name

Part 14

This part tells us how Osman Gazi came to have Friday prayers in his own name, and how it came to pass in the city.

When he captured Karaca Hisar, [many of] the houses in the city were left empty. And many people came from the Germiyan province and other provinces. They asked Osman Gazi to provide them with homes. So Osman Gazi gave homes to them. And it wasn't long before the city began to flourish. And they converted its numerous churches into mosques. And they even set up a market. And these people [*kavim*, also: tribe] agreed among themselves to perform Friday prayers, and to even ask for a *kadı*. There was a saintly man by the name of Dursun Fakı. And it was he who was serving as *imam* for the tribe. It was to him that they spoke their mind. Then he came

⁴ Murad I – Ottoman ruler (1362-1389).

⁵ Süleyman Paşa, oldest son of Orhan; led the Ottomans to their first raids in the Balkan Peninsula and conquered Gallipoli (1354); died in 1357.

forth. He spoke to Osman Gazi's father-in-law Ede Bali. But before he had finished, Osman Gazi came up. He asked. He understood what they wanted. Osman Gazi spoke up: "Whatever you have that needs to be done, do it," he said. Dursun Fakı spoke: "O my khan! We need the Sultan's permission⁶," he said. Osman Gazi spoke: "It was with my very own sword that I captured this city. What did the Sultan have to do with it, that I should have to ask his permission? The same Allah who granted him his Sultanate, has granted me my *gaza* and my khanate," he said. "And if it is for [the favour of] this banner that he would taunt me, well I myself have upheld my banner in fighting against the infidels," he said. "And if he should tell me that he is from the House of the Seljuks [*Âl-i Salçukvan*], I would say that I myself am the son of Gök Alp. And if he should claim to have arrived in these parts before us, it was my grandfather Süleymanşah who arrived before him," he said. And so it was that those people [or: that tribe] were persuaded. He gave the title of *kadı* and the right to preach to Dursun Fakı. The Friday *hutbe* was first read at Karaca Hisar. There it was that they performed their *bayram* prayers.

Aşıkpaşa-zâde, pp.102-103.



In Islamic political tradition, reading the Friday *hutbe* in the name of the ruler is a prerogative of sovereignty (independent rule). The 15th century chronicle distorts the historical reality of the early 14th century; in fact, the Seljuk Sultanate was ended by the Mongols in 1307, before any attempt by Osman to assert his sovereignty. Moreover, after 1307, Osman and later his son, Orhan, paid tribute to the Mongol Ilkhanate of *Persia* until its demise in the late 1330s.



What strategies did Osman use in order to enlarge his power base?

What information do the two texts provide about the ethnic and religious structure of north-western Anatolia on the verge of the Ottoman conquest?

⁶ The permission of the Seljuk Sultan of Konya (Iconion), who was formally the overlord of border warlords like Osman.

Ib. The first phases of the Ottoman conquest of the Balkan Peninsula

I-3. The contradictions between Christian states in the Balkans and their role in facilitating the Ottoman expansion

Only Amurat⁷ survived, who was young and unruly and strongly opposed the Bulgarians. He wanted the Greeks to let him through, but was stopped by numerous ships and boats, which Kantakuzin⁸ kept and supported very well in order to have the Gallipoli ford. Amurat, as we said, was forced to cross the sea. And when Kantakuzin saw that he could not feed the soldiers on the boats, because there was shortage of bread and pork and the treasury itself was getting emptier with every new day, ducats and silver becoming scarce, he sent envoys to Turnovo, to the Bulgarian Tsar Alexander⁹ asking for help to feed his navy so they could guard the ford. However, upon hearing this, the Bulgarians sneered and derided the Greeks by not only insulting them, but also insulting their wives and mothers using swear words, thus sending them back. On hearing this, Kantakuzin fell into a deep sorrow and sent envoys to the Serbian rulers: Urosh, despot Uglesha and King Vulkashin, to seek help for his naval army. They, too, on hearing this, sneered and derided the Greeks by not only insulting them, but by also insulting their wives and mothers using swear words, and sent them back empty-handed. On hearing this, Kantakuzin, not knowing what to do, fell into a deep sorrow. Kantakuzin then sent envoys to both the Bulgarian Tsars and the Serbian rulers telling them: "You did not wish to help us, and so you will regret this". However they did not heed his words and answered thus: "When the Turks get to us, we shall defend ourselves." Kantakuzin then made an agreement with Amurat; they exchanged vows and letters, which have been kept to this day, that the Turks shall never in any way harm

⁷ Bulgarian form for Murad I (1362-1389).

⁸ John VI Kantakuzenos, Byzantine Emperor 1341-1354; forced to abdicate, he became a monk and proved to be one of the most important late Byzantine scholars.

⁹ Ivan Alexander (1331-1371).

Greeks either in Romania¹⁰, or in Macedonia. The Turks vowed to keep their promise and Kantakuzin let the Turks pass Gallipoli.

Georgieva, Kitanov, pp.4-6.



The anonymous author of the 16th century Bulgarian Chronicle has only vague and inaccurate knowledge of the mid 14th century historical facts. In fact, John Kantakuzenos had called the Ottomans led by Süleyman, Orhan's son and Murad's older brother, in order to help him in the civil war against Emperor John V Paleologus (1341-1391). At that time, the Serbs were led by Stephan IV Dushan (1331-1355), who used the Byzantine civil war in order to conquer Byzantine territories for himself.



Do the factual inaccuracies of the anonymous Bulgarian Chronicle undermine the credibility of its general idea? Did the author make these factual inaccuracies on purpose in order to convey a 'message'?

I-4. Ferman of Murad I attributing the right to rule the territory of southern Macedonia to Evrenos Bey (1386)

The Sublime Imperial sign orders the following:

To His dignity, to the shelter of the domain, the foundation of the province, the pride among the noble conquerors, the commander of the warrior-soldiers of the faith and to the exterminator of the unfaithful ones and of the Pagans, to the Gazi Hadji Evrenos Bey – may his happiness last forever! – who passed through the province of Rumelia together with my brother and master, Gazi Suleyman, and conquered lands. For His services, I attribute to him: the town of Gjumurgina, then the town of Seres all the way to Bitola, Biglishte and Hrupishte, which could be considered one sanjak (with an income of ten times a hundred thousand akçe¹¹), all that he earned by his sword.

¹⁰ In the Middle Ages, this meant the territory of the Byzantine Empire, not present-day geographical Romania.

¹¹ Akçe (asper) – small silver Ottoman coin. It was the most

And I appointed you General Commander over these lands, over the fighters of the faith and the soldiers, and ordered you to be a true master. But make sure you are not tainted by vanity and say: "I opened up and conquered these parts of Rumelia", Remain conscious of the fact that the land is first owned by God, and then by the Prophet. And under the commandment of God almighty, the Prophet and his acceptor, it was given to you.

Odrani, vol. I, pp.187-189.



Evrenos was one of the first leaders of the *akinci* (irregular cavalry fighting for prey). The ferman of 1386 was part of Murad I's systematic effort to integrate the warlords, who often acted independently in the first phases of Ottoman expansion, into the state system.



How did Murad I try to secure the submission and loyalty of Evrenos Bey?

I-5. The role of local / native collaborators in the Ottoman expansion into the Balkans

According to accepted tradition [*rivayet iderler kî*], the climes held by Sosmanoz¹², son of Aleksenderos, fell on the Edirne side of the river Danube [Tuna]. On the outskirts of Wallachia [*Eflâk*], what lay on the far side of the Danube was Wallachia and what lay on this side was the land of Sosmanoz. And it was truly a fair and wealthy province. It supplied honey, butter and sheep to the whole world. With all kinds of produce and revenue, and compared with all the other provinces, it enjoyed everything in excess. And its strong castles numbered more than forty. [...]

This is the story of the arrival of Ali Paşa¹³ in the vicinity of the fortress of Provadiya [*Piravadi*]

commonly-used coin and money of account during the 14th-17th centuries.

¹² Ivan Shishman, Bulgarian ruler [*Tsar*] of Tîrnovo (1371-1395), son of Ivan Alexander (1331-1371).

¹³ Ali Paşa Çandarlızade, son of Halil Hayreddin Paşa, be-

It is told that, Ali Paşa having raised and gathered his soldiers, moved from Edirne to arrive at Aydos. The constable [*subaşı*] of Provadiya, a certain Hüseyin Beğ, who was actually an infidel, but was renowned for his generosity, met and welcomed the paşa and gave him his hospitality. The paşa then crossed Kamcı creek and arrived at Çeneke [Çenge] castle; where he rested for the day. The next day, he descended into the vicinity of Provadiya. He picked a thousand fighters to accompany Yahşi Beğ, son of Temur-taş, sending him off to Provadiya with the words: "Try and see if you can come up with some kind of trick to capture Provadiya, will you?" So Yahşi Beğ got on the move, and arrived outside Provadiya. They made as if to camp nearby. It was winter. It was snowing. Hüseyin Beğ taking pity on the horses which he wanted to shelter from the cold, and not knowing why they had come, placed them in Taş-hisar [i.e. Stone Keep]. Upon having entered Taş-hisar, they covertly broke into the castle's tower at night, thereby capturing the castle and sending a certain Murad to the paşa with the good news. The next day the paşa himself got on the move, arriving at Provadiya, entering the castle and garrisoning it, while the müezzins cried a call to prayers and led in worship. And the paşa, having armed and outfitted the castle, came and camped at Vençen [Vefçen, Wefdjen]. Watching his arrival, the people in the castle brought him the keys to the stronghold. Subsequently, the keys to Madara and Şumnu, too, were brought and surrendered. Then the paşa went and entered Şumnu castle, reinforcing the fortifications.

Neşrî, pp.245-247.



The Ottoman chronicle of the early 16th century tries to highlight the merits of the Ottoman conquerors, and avoids insisting on their bargaining with the local lords in eastern Bulgaria. Nevertheless, instances of their cooperation are easily found in the source.

came, like his father, a military judge, an army commander, and then Grand Vizier from 1389 to his death in 1407. He displayed remarkable administrative, diplomatic and military skills, serving three rulers successfully: Murad I, Bayezid I, and Süleyman Çelebi.



What happened to the Christian constable of Piravadi after the Ottoman conquest? What does the name “Hüseyin Beğ” suggest?

Was Hüseyin Beğ a traitor or a victim of a “trick”? Was he generous, corrupt or tender-hearted (having taken pity on the horses), or all of the above?

Compare the acts of Ali Paşa and those of Hüseyin Beğ. Who was more skilful as a politician-warrior? In what way do the personal characteristics (of the protagonists) lend colour to the historical events?

► **v1. Bayezid I coming to rescue the besieged Nicopolis on the night before the battle with the Crusaders (1396) – Ottoman miniature (c. 1584)**



Lewis, p.292.



Why have the Christians been painted, dressed in 16th century clothes? Find another item in the miniature, which was not used by the Ottomans in the 14th century.

How is the Sultan represented in relation to the other characters, e.g. the Christians? Why are the figures so large in relation to the landscape and the buildings?

I-6. 14th century explanations of the Ottoman success over the Christians

A. GREGORY PALAMAS (1354)

Some of them [Turks] have approached me, have begun the discussions and, in order to compensate for the weakness of their argumentation, presented [our] captivity as a sign of our religion’s lack of foundation.

Because these impious people, hated by God and infamous, boast about being victorious over the *Romaioi*¹⁴, because of their love of God; they do not know that this world below dwells in sin and that most of it belongs to those who oppress their neighbours with weapons. Therefore, until the time of Constantine, who truly ruled in the love of God, the idolaters had almost ruled the whole world. Even after him, for a very long time, others did not differ at all, or only very little, from them.

Phillipidis-Braat, pp.140-143.



Gregory Palamas (1296-1359; sanctified 1368) was one of the leading Orthodox theologians of the 14th century. He defended and theorised hesychasm, and also became archbishop of Thessaloniki. In 1354, he was captured by the Ottomans, and spent one year in captivity, before being ransomed by the Serbs. This passage originates from a letter written to his congregation in Thessaloniki, in which he recollects his fate during captivity.

¹⁴ ‘Romaioi’ was the name for their people and their Empire and they have been known in historiography as ‘Byzantines’ since the mid-sixteenth century.

B. HANS SCHILTBERGER (1396)

Unbelievers say that they have conquered the Christian lands neither because of their own might and wisdom, nor their own sacredness and humbleness, but due to the sinfulness, viciousness and haughtiness spread among the Christians. That is why God Almighty had preordained them to conquer Christian lands and to conquer more and more, because the Christians did not conform their legislation to the laws, both clerical and secular – and with their laws they only sought for profit and benefits, the rich oppressed the poor with their court manners, did not help the poor neither with property nor with giving them justice, and they also did not obey the rules of the religion which the Messiah had left them.

The misfortunes and calamities that happen to them, have all been preordained by God because of their injustice and viciousness.

Schiltberger, p.133.



Hans Schiltberger participated in the Crusade of 1396 and was captured in the battle of Nicopolis. His “travel notes” are one of the first Western sources on the Ottomans.



Compare the moral rationalisations of the Ottoman success in texts I–3 and I–6. What do you think of the logical-theological scheme described in these sources? Could it be relevant to our time?

I–7. Christian timar-holders in the province of Arvanid, Albania (1431/1432)

153 – Timar held by Petro, who appears to have been a relative by marriage of the scribe Yorgi, which is why he came to take a timar. Under our [deceased?] Sultan¹⁵ it was Ömer of Saruhan who [first?] used to eat it¹⁶. Under our Sultan¹⁷ it was given to the present holder, who holds a charter by our Sultan. Lagos

15 Mehmed I (1403-1421).

16 Here meaning “to benefit from it”.

17 Murad II (1421-1451).

village, 6 households, 1 widow. [Expected] revenue: 531 [akches].

İnalçık 1987, p.59.



In the early phases of their rule, the Ottomans tried to secure the cooperation of at least a part of the local nobility. Therefore, they integrated higher noblemen as vassals, sometimes demanding that they send their sons as hostages to the Sultan's court (as was the case of the famous Skanderbeg, known by the name Gjergj Kastrioti, son of Gjon Kastrioti, Lord of Middle Albania). At the same time, as documented in this register, they granted smaller timars to Christian members of the lesser nobility. The situation later changed, when Ottoman rule was stabilised, and timars were only granted to Muslims.



Notice the fact that the text documents a Christian replacing a Muslim as timar-holder. How can you explain this change? What other form of collaboration is documented in this source?

I–8. Serbian despot as Ottoman vassal (1432)

After the town of Kruševac, I crossed the Morava River on a ferry and entered the country of the despot of Rascia or Serbia. And what is situated on the other side of the river is the Turk's, and what is situated on this side of the river belongs to the said despot, who pays tax amounting to 50,000 gold coins [*ducats*] per year for it. [...]

I arrived at a town called Nicodem (Necudim), a town resembling a village, in a very nice and good countryside. And the said despot or Rascia¹⁸ lived in the said town because it was situated near very nice woods and rivers, suitable for game hunting and for hunting with falcons. We found the said ruler in the field, on the way to hunting with falcons on the river, together with his three sons and about fifty horsemen, as well as one Turk who came to ask, on behalf

18 Djurađ Branković, Serbian Despot 1427-1456. He built the fortress of Smederevo on the Danube as a new capital of Serbia and tried, under difficult circumstances, to keep the balance between two neighbouring powers, the Kingdom of Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.

of the Great Turk, to send him his son and his men to the army, as it was customary. In addition to the tax that he paid, he was obliged, upon the Turk's request, to send his second son together with 800 or 1000 horsemen. He also gave him one of his daughters as a wife¹⁹, yet, nevertheless, there remained the fear that the entire country would be taken away from him. I was told that some people mentioned this to the Turk, who responded that that way he received more horsemen than if the country had been in his hands, because then, had that been the case, he would have had to give it to his slave, and he would have had nothing.

De la Broquiere, pp.129, 131.



Bertrandon de la Broquiere was a nobleman from Burgundy who travelled extensively in Eastern Europe and in the Near East. Serbia was an Ottoman vassal-state during most of the period between 1389 and 1459.



How did the Ottomans secure the loyalty of their Serbian vassal? What were the advantages of this arrangement for each side?

I-9. The fall of Novo Brdo (1455)

From there, the Emperor²⁰ left in 1455 and besieged a city called Novo Brdo, i.e. Silver and Gold Mountain. He seized it with an agreement in which he promised the citizens that he would leave them on their homesteads and that he would not take away their young women and small children. And when the city surrendered, the Emperor ordered that all gates save one be closed. When the Turks entered the city, they ordered all the heads of the families to come out through the gate with their whole family, leaving all their possessions in the houses. They did so, one by one. And the Emperor, standing in front of the gate, made a selection, ordering male children to one side, female children to the other.

¹⁹ Djuradj's daughter Mara became one of the wives of Murad II (1421-1451).

²⁰ Mehmed II (1444-1446; 1451-1481).

The men were taken to the trench and the women to the fourth side. Then he ordered that all prominent people among them be slain. The others were free to return to the city and no one was prohibited from being on their estate. He selected a total of 320 young men and 704 women. He distributed all the women among the infidels, and took the young men for himself as Janissaries and sent them to Anatolia, across the sea where they were to be kept.

I, the person writing this, also lived in the city of Novo Brdo and was taken away along with my two brothers.

Mihailović, pp.132-133.



Konstantin Mihailović, born about 1435 near the city of Novo Brdo in Kosovo, was taken to Asia Minor as a prisoner together with other young Serbian boys. He served then in the Janissary corps and became an officer. Later on, he fled to Poland where he served in the King's court and died after 1501. His memoirs, written between 1497 and 1501, were published for the first time in Prague in 1565 under the title *The Turkish History or Chronicle*.



Assess the reliability of the agreement between Mehmed II and the people of Novo Brdo. Did the local population have a better option?

Consider the special fate of the narrator. What feelings does he express about the event he describes?

I-10. Turkish destruction in Slovenia – letter of the Habsburg governor of Carniola (1491)

In my entire life, I have never seen so much woe as I have seen in this country. As far as I can see, as far as I can send my attendants and still see them return, they are reporting that [the Turks] are all around above Šmarje: in Turjak, Čušperk, Dobropolje, Nadlišek, Karnek, Žužemberk, Suha krajina, Ribnica and Kočevje. In these districts they have burned everything and, there is no doubt, took the inhabitants and cattle. [...] poor people had barely gathered in the harvest and were just ready to start the threshing. Grain, hay and strewing, all is burned so that [...] they don't have anything to eat.

Concerning the other Turks, they are camping with main troops near Bela cerkev. By burning and robbing, they are doing such damage that it is sad to even write about it. Šentjernej in the field, Hmeljnik, Novo mesto, Prežek, Kostanjevica, Otočec and Mehovo, all these districts have been burned and devastated. [...] The whole country, from the districts to Ljubljana, is burnt and devastated. We are expecting them here any moment. Let God with his grace avert them!

Gestrin, Kos, Melik, pp.51-52.



What were the direct and the indirect consequences of the Ottoman raid in Slovenia? Assess which of them was more harmful to the local population.

► **v2. The Ottoman army winning the battle of Mohacs (1526) - Ottoman miniature (c. 1588)**



Lewis, p.285.



How are the Hungarians represented? Identify Süleyman I. Compare this representation of the Sultan with the image v1. How are the Janissary troops armed?

► **v3. Captured inhabitants of Belgrade (1521)**



Samardžić, pp.128-129.



Does the drawing reflect the feelings of the prisoners? Write a short description of the situation in response to the picture. Compare your own text with text I-11.

I-11. Christian prisoners in Bosnia (1530)

First of all, Lower Bosnia is very mountainous, with large forests all around and, apart from a small amount of land; it is poorly cultivated simply because the Croats and others often ravage it. While it was owned by Christians, the authorities didn't allow it to be cultivated. But since the Turks conquered it, the great part of Lower Bosnia has been cultivated. [...]

That very night, a few hours after us, the Turks came to the village of Kruscica [Middle Bosnia] where we were spending the night. They were leading about twenty poor and miserable Christian children, boys and girls, whom they had captured seven days earlier. During the night, before our departure,

they gave them to Usref-Bey, Pasha of Vrhbosna²¹ (as many as belonged to him). Oh, miserable slavery of Babylon! [...]

How many times have we been looking at them, standing in front of us with their hands crushed, their eyes glancing towards the sky, sighing, and not allowed to talk to us? When one of them found himself alone with us, he would say: "How we were looking forward to be freed by Christ's help! We would gladly move into your country, out of this tyranny. We have lost hope after seeing that even you bow to the Turkish Emperor and ask him for peace".

We replied with compassion and comforted them with the hope of a better fate. Please, God, make all those whose hearts can't be touched by Turkish violence, see it! Then they would really have

pity over those people whom we consider truthful Christians and who, in spite of indescribable misfortune and great violence, have remained loyal to their Christian faith.

Kuripesic, pp.17-23.



Benedikt Kuripesic travelled through Bosnia and other Ottoman provinces to Istanbul as the translator to a Habsburg embassy.



What were the economic effects of the Ottoman conquest in Lower Bosnia? Compare this situation with the devastation in Slovenia. Try to figure out the causes of these differences.

Ic. The fall of Constantinople/the conquest of Istanbul (1453)

I-12. A Byzantine perspective on the fall of Constantinople – George Sphrantzes

On April 4 of the same year [1453], the Sultan returned and laid siege to the City with all sorts of engines and stratagems by land and sea. He surrounded the entire 18 miles of the City with 400 small and large vessels from the sea and with 200,000 men on the land. In spite of the great size of our City, our defenders amounted to 4,773 Greeks, as well as about 200 foreigners.

[...] On Tuesday May 29 [1453], early in the day, the Sultan took possession of our City; at this time of capture my late master and Emperor, Lord Constantine²², was killed.

[...] I was taken prisoner and suffered the evils of wretched slavery. Finally I was ransomed on September 1, 6962 [1453], and left for Mistra²³. My wife and children had passed into the possession of some el-

derly Turks, who did not treat them badly. Then they were sold to the Sultan's *Mirahor*²⁴, who amassed a great fortune by selling many other beautiful noble ladies.

[...] Perhaps one would like to know of the Emperor's preparations before the siege, while the Sultan was gathering his forces, and of the aid that we received from the Christians abroad.

No aid whatsoever was dispatched by other Christians [...]

The Emperor consented to have the Pope's name commemorated in our services by necessity, as we hoped to receive some aid [...]. Six months later we had received as much aid from Rome as had been sent to us by the Sultan of Cairo.

Sphrantzes, pp.69-72.



Georgios Sphrantzes was a late Byzantine high dignitary, and was, for a time, Chancellor. After being ransomed, he became a monk and wrote a chronicle, which is one of the main sources on the fall of Constantinople. In his effort to justify the late Byzantine

²¹ Vrhbosna was a medieval city (*civitas Vrhbosna*) in the region of Sarajevo.

²² Constantine XI Paleologus, last Byzantine Emperor (1449-1453).

²³ Mistras was the capital of the Byzantine Principality of Morea, which was occupied by the Ottomans only in 1460.

²⁴ Ottoman dignitary, Master of the Imperial Stable.

policies, Sphrantzes blames the Catholics for not having helped Byzantium, omitting the fact that after the religious union of Florence (1439), the Pope had managed to organise several crusader expeditions against the Ottomans. However, it is true that after the crushing defeats of Varna (1444) and Kosovo (1448), the efforts to oust the Ottomans from Europe and to rescue Byzantium were discontinued, and in the moment of the final Ottoman assault, Constantinople received only very little help.



What was the fate of the Byzantine survivors after the fall of Constantinople? Did slavery eliminate the benefits of coming from a noble and rich family?

Do you think that another policy might have saved Constantinople from Ottoman conquest?

I–13. The repopulation of Istanbul under Mehmed II

The newly-arrived people were given houses. Istanbul began to prosper. Then they made these people liable to a *mukataa*²⁵. This was difficult for them to accept. They said “You exiled us from our place/property [*mülk*]. Did you bring us to pay rent for these houses of infidels?”. Some fled, leaving their wives and children. Sultan Mehmed had a slave named Kula Şahin, who he inherited from his father and who had once been a Vizier. He said “My majestic Sultan! Your ancestors have conquered so many places. They never installed a *mukataa*. It is becoming of you not to install one”. The Sultan heeded these words. He cancelled the *mukataa*. He issued an edict saying that whoever was given a house should keep it as his property. They gave documents to people to the effect that the houses were their property. The city began to prosper once more. People began to build mosques, complexes, and houses. The city began to develop. Then the Sultan had a Vizier who was an infidel’s son. He became very close to the Sultan. The old infidels of Istanbul were the friends

²⁵ Generally, *mukataa* means farm tax. In this particular case, it means that these colonists had to pay rent for the houses they had moved to.

of this Vizier’s father. They entered his presence saying “Hey! What are you doing? These Turks made this city prosperous once again. Where is your zeal? They captured the country which belonged to your father and us. They own and use it before our very eyes. Now, you are a companion of the Sultan. Do something to prevent these people from developing the city. The city should be in our hands as was the case before”. The Vizier said “let us institute the *mukataa* once more. These people should abstain from building properties. The city should remain in a ruined state. It should be in the hands of our people”. This Vizier influenced the Sultan’s heart. The *mukataa* was re-instituted. One of these conspiring infidels was given a pseudo-Muslim slave as companion. They kept the records in accordance with whatever this conspiring infidel said.

Question: Who is this Vizier?

Answer: He is Mehmed Paşa, the Greek²⁶. Later on, the Sultan had him strangled as if he were a dog.

Aşıkpaşa-zâde, p.193.



After conquering Constantinople in 1453, Mehmed II tried to rebuild it in order to have a capital city worthy of his empire. His urban development scheme included the Topkapı Palace, several mosques and various other public buildings. A major aspect was the repopulation of the city. In order to achieve this goal, he combined the forced colonisation of townspeople from the territories he conquered and the attraction of voluntary colonists from the whole empire. The chronicle of Aşıkpaşa-zâde describes some of the tensions generated by this policy and also reflects the resentment of the Turkish aristocracy against the rise of dignitaries selected from slaves (*ku*) of the Sultan, often Christians recently converted to Islam.

²⁶ Mehmed Paşa was Grand Vizier from 1467 to 1470. ‘Rum’ was the original Turkish work for ‘Greek’.

Id. Population and religion changes

I-14. Forced transfer of population [*sürgün*] from Asia Minor to the Balkans (late 14th century)

According to tradition, there were nomadic households [*göçer evler*] in the province of Saruhan²⁷, which were used to the winter in the plain of Menemen. A salt monopoly was in force in those climes. They did not abide by this monopoly. Word was sent to the Sultan. Bayezid Han²⁸ then sent word to his son Ertuğrul, telling him to bring all nomadic households in the plain of Menemen firmly under control and to have his servants [*kul, kullar*] escort all of them to the plain of Filibe [Plovdiv]. Ertuğrul, abiding strictly by his father's orders, sent without fail, all the nomadic households to the plain of Filibe. They brought them there and made them settle around Filibe. Today they inhabit most of the land around Filibe.

Neşrî, p.339.



Did the Turkish nomads from Menemen have any choice about moving to the Balkans?

What do you think were the consequences of the Ottoman conquest for the Turkish population of Anatolia?

I-15. Ottoman promises made for Bosnian peasants – letter of King Stjepan Tomasevic (1461-1463) to Pope Pius II

The Turks have built several fortresses in my kingdom and are very kind to the country folk. They promise freedom to every peasant who converts to Islam. The simple peasant mind cannot see through such shrewd cunning and believes that this freedom will last forever.

Andrić, p.15.

²⁷ Province in Western Asia Minor. In the 14th century it had been a separate Turkish principality incorporated by the Ottomans in 1390, at the beginning of Bayezid's rule.

²⁸ Bayezid I 'the Thunderbolt' (1389-1402).

I-16. Ioasaph, Orthodox bishop of Vidin, about enforced and voluntary Islamisation (15th century)

Oh, the shame! Many went over to the disgraceful faith of Mohammad: some taken by fear, others softened by flattery or won over by material gain and still others joined the enemies lured into their foolishness by letters and cunning.

Bulgarska, p. 206.

I-17. Kadi registration of the conversion to Islam of a young boy without a father (1636)

Zimmi Totodori, youth of about 10 years old, from Orta Koy village of Lefkoşa *kaza* [said]: Now I have left the false religion and have been honoured with Islam. He takes the name Mustafa.

Jennings 1993, p.139.



Generally, people were nominated in the registers with their given name and their father's name ("X son of Y"). The fact that, in the case of Totodori, there is no mention of his father indicates that he was probably an illegitimate child.

I-18. Petition of a young man wanting to convert to Islam (1712)

Your Majesty, my great and graceful Sultan! I wish you health!

I, Your slave, am a poor man from the region of Russe. In my native place I felt the wish in myself to become a Muslim and therefore I came to You. My plea is to be granted the honour, in Your personal presence, to accept the faith of Islam. Be so good as to give me a change of clothes and something to live by. I kindly ask for your order. The order is in the power of Your Majesty, my brilliant Sultan.

Your slave Abdullah.

Osmanski, p.160.



List the possible motives of Christians to convert to Islam in the Ottoman Empire. Look also at texts III-13 and IV-30.

Do you think the similarities between the two religions may have facilitated the conversions?

Connect this to the source of God's punishment

of the Christians. Could it be possible that the sense of guilt and God's punishment facilitated the conversions?

What were the overall effects of the Ottoman conquest on the ethnic and religious structure of South East Europe?