

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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[Χρονικὸν περὶ τῶν Τούρκων Σουλτάνων]
‘Chronicle of the Turkish Sultans’
(Early 17th Century)

EDITION HISTORY AND DATING OF THE MS.

S. de Ricci discovered this anonymous Greek codex containing the lives of Ottoman sultans in the Vatican Library in 1907. The manuscript of eighty-four folios belonged to the library of Cardinal Antonio Barberini (1607-1611), received the formal designation ‘Codex Barberinus Graecus 111’,¹ and was assigned the title *Historia Imperatorum Turcorum*. It was subsequently examined by Spyridon Lampros² and by Gyula Moravcsik,³ who immediately realized its importance. Its Greek text was finally published *in toto* in 1958 by G. T. Zoras with the title *Χρονικὸν περὶ τῶν Τούρκων Σουλτάνων*, a variation of de Ricci’s original title. To this day the Barberinus Graecus 111 remains the sole surviving copy of this work and it is both acephalous and incomplete. It further contains a considerable lacuna at the end of Murād II’s (1421-1444, 1446-1451) *vita*. In an accompanying note, the author/copyist addresses the reader in his only personal note where he states clearly that he is copying from a prototype: “There were some pages missing from the original at this point. I do not have the end of Sultan Murad’s life. He was the tenth ruler.” Absolutely nothing is known about its authorship, original title, and place of composition; inferences can only be made through internal evidence.

The editor of the Greek text proved beyond doubt that the anonymous author was familiar with some Italian and Latin literature. Eventually it became evident that the author had utilized Bishop Leonardo Giustiniani’s (d. 1459) eyewitness account of the siege and conquest of Constantinople in 1453 by Mehmed II (1444-1446, 1451-1481).⁴ It remains unclear, however, whether the author was familiar with the Latin text of Leonardo (d. 1459) or with one of its Italian paraphrases that came to light in the sixteenth century.⁵ Moreover, he was not aware of Pseudo-Sphrantzes (Makarios Melissourgos-Melissenos) who produced his influential *Chronicon Maius* ca. 1580. In addition, he was unaware of the monumental *Turcograecia* of Martinus Crusius (Martin Kraus; d. 1607), which appeared in 1584.⁶ Judging by his language, the author was not educated and he was not working through scholarly tradition and scholarly works to produce his *opus*. In his edition, Zoras attempted to establish a *terminus ante quem* for this composition and he chose the year 1532, as the incomplete text states that the janissaries occupied Korone in the Morea and hold it “to the present day.” (Andrea Doria, however, held Korone in 1532-1534). In 1966 Elizabeth Zachariadou convincingly demonstrated that the Greek text of this work was heavily dependent on the second edition of Francesco Sansovino’s (d. 1586) bestseller.⁷ The date proposed by Zoras had to be revised drastically, as the second edition of Sansovino appeared in 1573. In addition to Sansovino, Zachariadou demonstrated that the Chronicle had also utilized the popular work attributed to (Pseudo) Dorotheos. Zacha-

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riadou reasonably concluded that the text must have been produced sometime between 1573 and 1625.

Soon afterwards Monsignor P. Canard discovered three additional folios of the original text, which Zoras published in 1966 including one of the “new” passages describing the events that transpired from 1596 onwards during the reign of Mehmed III (1595-1603).⁸ Thus it was safely concluded that the text of this Chronicle reached into the seventeenth century but not beyond 1671, the year of Cardinal Antonio Barberini’s death.

THE MANUSCRIPT AND THE AUTHOR

The manuscript is full of grammatical mishaps and errors in spelling and accentuation, which were tacitly corrected in Zoras’ edition. The general style of the composition is vivid. This work does not entirely correspond to the historiographical schools prevalent in the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries. One tradition in the Patriarchate of Istanbul produced works with heavy ecclesiastical emphasis, more or less in the Byzantine school, utilizing a linguistic idiom from antiquity mixed with current, spoken features: Damaskenos the Stoudite, Makarios Melissourgos-Melissenos (=Pseudo-Sphrantzes), Theodosios Zygomalas,⁹ Hierax,¹⁰ the anonymous chronicle entitled *Ἐκθεσις Χρονική*,¹¹ and the Malaxos family.¹² The importance of this school can be gauged by the fact that some of its members, directly or indirectly, contributed to the composition of Crusius’ *Turcograecia*.¹³ A second scholarly “school” of historiography flourished in the west and is best represented by the work of Laonikos Khalkokondyles. This school composed its work in the ancient idiom solely. Our author, however, is not a scholar and had no evident connection with the humanistic environment of Italy or with the ecclesiastical school of Constantinople.¹⁴

The author seems to be a Greek (as attempts to make him an Italian with some Greek knowledge who spent time in the Levant,¹⁵ perhaps engaging in spy activities, have not found a wide appeal¹⁶). He has preserved, in his original passages, his own views castigating the social conditions of the late Byzantine society. Thus we encounter an unprecedented record of the views that he shared with other, “average,” Greeks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, quite apart from the transmitted scholarly accounts. Byzantine writers and intellectuals, like their predecessors in classical antiquity, belonged to the upper, landed classes; their literature, for the most part, was an aristocratic expression of the views of the nobility. The anonymous author of this *codex* has preserved for us the views of the majority. It is in fact in his account of the siege of Constantinople in 1453 that our author’s sharp observations and personal views are expressed.

THE CONTENT

The narrative presents a goldmine of information and detail for the history of southeastern Europe in the early Renaissance. It is not just a collection of random lives and biographies of Ottoman sultans and goes beyond personal history to treat

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the gradual advance of the Ottomans through digressions into the history of the Balkans and southeastern Europe. Numerous personalities are involved in this drama beyond its nucleus, the sultans, and they range from Timur-i lenk (“Tamburlaine”) the Mongol (d. 1405) to the Albanian George Scanderbeg (d. 1466), the Transylvanian John Corvinus Hunyadi (d. 1456), the Wallachian Vlad the Impaler (the prototype of our Dracula) (d. 1476), and the numerous Palaeologi.

The work has no title and begins with the rebellion of Sawdji (May 1373) during the reign of Murād I (1359-1389) and follows the reigns of the sultans to the early years of the reign of Selīm I (1512-1520). The most detailed account is that of the life of Meḥmed II and his conquest of Constantinople; the life of the Conqueror amounts to one third of the whole text. The author has a general knowledge of the Porte and a certain familiarity with the Ottoman military system, judging by the numerous Turkish terms and titles that he records in a Hellenized dress: *aga*, *akıncı*, *azab*, *beglerbeg*, *cellad*, *çelebi*, *divan*, *hünkâr*, etc. Yet, he was neither a scholar, nor an eyewitness to the events he relates. His narrative is a popular account digested from other sources and presents a popular view.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Manuscript: (1) Vatican, Vatican Library, Codex Barberinus Graecus 111; fols. 86-97. The script is legible and contains few deletions/corrections by the hand of the copyist. It is full of spelling errors. In the margin the name of each sultan is noted but in the case of Meḥmed II we have the following variation: “Mehmed who took the city.”

Editions: Georgios T. Zoras. *Χρονικὸν περὶ τῶν Τοῦ ρκων Σουλτᾶνων (κατὰ τὸν Βαρβ. Ἑλληνικὸν ἢ Κώδικα 111)* (Athens, 1958) [for a review of this edition, see: George G. Arnakis in *Speculum* 36 (1961), 709-712].

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¹ Seymour de Ricci, "Liste sommaire des manuscrits grecs de la Bibliotheca Barberina," *Revue des Bibliothèques* 42 (1907), 81-125.

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⁴ Marios Philippides, "The Fall of Constantinople 1453: Bishop Leonard and the Greek Accounts," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 22/3 (1981), 287-300; *ibidem*, "Σύγχρονες Ἐρευνες στὰ Κείμενα τοῦ Σφραντζή," *Παρανασσός* 25 (1983), 94-99; *ibidem*, "The Fall of Constantinople 1453: Bishop Leonardo Giustiniani and his Italian Followers," *Viator* 29 (1998), 189-227.

⁵ Marios Philippides, "The Fall of Constantinople 1453," 204 ff. This study raises the issue of the possibility that the anonymous author of the Barberini Chronicle utilized a version of Giacomo Languschi's text on the conquest of Constantinople (entitled *Excidio e presa di Constantinopoli nell'anno 1453* and embedded in Zorzi Dolfin's *Cronaca delle famiglie nobili di Venezia*). On Languschi-Dolfin, cf. Kenneth Meyer Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204-1571) 2: The Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1976), 122; Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago and London, 1981); Maria Zannoni, "Giorgio Dolfin cronista veneziano del sec. XV," *Atti Memorie della R. Accademia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti in Padova* 58 (1941-1942), 37-55; and Antonio Carile, *La cronachistica veneziana (secoli XIII-XVI) di fonte alla spartizione della Romania nel 1204* (Florence, 1968), 116 ff. The basic edition of the report on the conquest of Constantinople (in its colorful mixture of vernacular with Latin) remains that of G. Thomas, "Die Eroberung Constantinopels im Jahre 1453 aus einer venetianischen Chronik," *Sitzungsberichte der königl. Bayer. Akademie der Wissenschaften* 2 (Munich, 1868), 1-41. Among Languschi-Dolfin's sources is Bishop Leonardo Giustiniani and an official report by an unknown eyewitness author (*Ignotus*), probably Ludovico/Alvise /Aluvixe/Aloixe Diedo who had served as *capitano general del mar* in the Golden Horn during the siege of 1453. For an investigation and a stemma of related texts, cf. Philippides, "The Fall of Constantinople 1453," 208 ff.

⁶ Martinus Crusius, *Turcograecia libri Octo à Martino Crusio, in Academia Tybigensi Graeco & Latino Professore, vtraque lingua edita. Qvibus Graecorum status sub imperio Turcico, in Politia & Ecclesia, Oeconomia & Scholis, iam inde ab amissa Constantinopoli, ad haec usque tempora, luculenter describitur* (Basel, [1584]).

⁷ *Gl' Annali overo le vite de principi et signori della casa Ottomana ne quail si leggono di tempo tutte le guerre particolarmente fatte della natione de' Turchi in diverse provincie del mondo contra i Chris-*

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tiani (Venice, 1573). It is also conceivable that the author made use of Ottoman sources; cf. e.g. Şerif Baştav (“Grekçe anonim Osmanlı kaynakları,” *Belleten* 21 (1957), 149-160) suggests, but does not prove, that one such source was Aşırpaşazâde. For reservations expressed by Arnakis see his review in *Speculum* 36. In addition, cf. Şerif Baştav, “XVI. asırda yazılmış Grekçe anonim Osmanlı tarihine göre İstanbul’un muhasarası ve zabtı,” *Belleten* 21 (1954), 51-82.

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⁹ On Zygomalas, cf. the observations of Marios Philippides, “Patriarchal Chronicles of the Sixteenth Century,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 25/1 (1984), 87-94; and Giuseppe di Gregorio, “Studi su copisti greci del tardo Cinquecento: II: Ioannes Malaxos e Theodosios Zygomalas,” *Römische historische Mitteilungen* 38 (1966), 189-268.

¹⁰ On Hierax, cf. Dean Sakel, “A Note on the Value of Hierax as a Historical Source,” in Sümer Atasoy (ed.), *İstanbul Üniversitesi 550. Yıl Uluslararası Bizans ve Osmanlı Sempozyumu (XV. Yüzyıl)* (İstanbul, 2004), 15-19.

¹¹ For a new edition, discussion and English translation of the text with commentary, cf. Marios Philippides, *Emperors, Patriarchs, and Sultans of Constantinople: An Anonymous Greek Chronicle of the Sixteenth Century* (Brookline, 1990).

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¹⁴ For these schools, cf. M. Philippides, “Early Post-Byzantine Historiography,” in Aldo Bernardo and Saul Levin (eds.), *The Classics in the Middle Ages* (Binghamton, 1990), 253-263.

¹⁵ Based on the abundance of borrowed words from Italian and the inarticulate style of the text, both the German and the English translators of the work argued that the author must have had Italian connections.

¹⁶ Dean Sakel, “A Probable Solution to the Problem of the *Chronicle of the Turkish Sultans*,” in John Burke, et al., (eds.), *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honour of Roger Scott* (Melbourne, 2006), 204-220, especially p. 218: “Its author is a Greek, not a Greek-speaking Italian, and indeed not an Italian spy.”

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