

# Constantinople as Center and Crossroad

Edited by

Olof Heilo and Ingela Nilsson



SWEDISH RESEARCH INSTITUTE IN ISTANBUL  
TRANSACTIONS, VOL. 23

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .....	7
OLOF HEILO & INGELA NILSSON WITH RAGNAR HEDLUND	
Constantinople as Crossroad: Some introductory remarks .....	9
RAGNAR HEDLUND	
Byzantium, Zeuxippos, and Constantinople: The emergence of an imperial city .....	20
GRIGORI SIMEONOV	
Crossing the Straits in the Search for a Cure: Travelling to Constantinople in the Miracles of its healer saints .....	34
FEDIR ANDROSHCHUK	
When and How Were Byzantine <i>Miliaresia</i> Brought to Scandinavia? Constantinople and the dissemination of silver coinage outside the empire .....	55
ANNALINDEN WELLER	
Mediating the Eastern Frontier: Classical models of warfare in the work of Nikephoros Ouranos.....	89
CLAUDIA RAPP	
A Medieval Cosmopolis: Constantinople and its foreigners .....	100
MABI ANGAR	
Disturbed Orders: Architectural representations in Saint Mary Peribleptos as seen by Ruy González de Clavijo.....	116
ISABEL KIMMELFIELD	
Argyropolis: A diachronic approach to the study of Constantinople's suburbs.....	142

MILOŠ PETROVIĆ Belgrade Toponyms along the Bosphorus: From the Belgrade Forest to the Belgrade Gate .....	158
FEDERICA GIGANTE ‘New and Rare Items Coming from India and Turkey’: Changing perceptions of Islamic artefacts in Early Modern Italy.....	173
LEE BEAUDOEN A Mediterraneanizing Approach: Constantinople as a nexus .....	182
Maps.....	195
Bibliography .....	197
Index.....	228

# A Mediterraneanizing Approach

## *Constantinople as a nexus*\*

LEE BEAUDOEN

In 1453, the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II captured the city of Constantinople and ended the Byzantine rule over the city. As part of his imperial bragging rights, he claimed dominion over two continents—Europe and Asia—and two seas: the Mediterranean or White Sea (Ak Deniz) and the Black Sea (Kara Deniz). Since antiquity, the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles not only linked these two seas but created an imagined geographical division between Europe and Asia. The start of a universal Islamic rule centered at Constantinople precipitated a cultural and ideological backlash that resonated through the Mediterranean world. Responses to this sudden transition from Byzantine to Ottoman and from Orthodox Christianity to Sunni Islam varied from the reluctant cooperation of Genoese Pera to the polemics of Pope Pius II. While one end of the spectrum represented the semi-cooperative response of Genoese Pera, the other encapsulated the visceral response of the papacy—best expressed in the so-called Renaissance Crusader literature.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars tend to divide the Mediterranean region along an East-West axis and so misread the 1453 capture of Constantinople and its fifteenth century context. This impoverished view obscures the reality that Constantinople and the cluster of cities, suburbs and settlements surrounding it acted as a cultural and economic nexus for a broader unified Mediterranean world. Equally important, Ottoman historiography has diminished the Mediterranean role of the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in favor of the sixteenth century. The Venetian Republic took part in eastern Mediterranean commerce and exchange. Constantinople engaged with the Papacy and the Western Mediterranean. Constantinople played a crucial role in the political and economic dynamics of the

---

\* I am grateful to the conference organizers, Olof Heilo, Tonje Sørensen and Ragnar Hedlund for organizing and hosting a truly unique conference experience at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul in November 2014. I am also grateful to Professor Peter Stacey of the University of California, Los Angeles for directing me to James Hankin's scholarship and to my adviser, Professor Michael Morony for his insight on an early version of this article.

<sup>1</sup> J. Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II," *DOP* 49 (1995) 111–207.

entire Mediterranean, a role that continued to evolve with the Ottoman dynasty and state in the fifteenth century.

In contrast to traditional, narrow, narratives of the city's urban history, this paper contextualizes the role of Constantinople in a larger Mediterranean world. It uses a political and cultural-historical reading of its urban history during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This Mediterraneanizing approach removes the baggage of Greek and Turkish imperial readings of the Eastern Mediterranean. It highlights the intricate dynamics of the evolving Mediterranean economic and geopolitical spheres in the fifteenth century. The term *nexus* is appropriate on three levels. First, it encapsulates the connected network of cities and settlements in and around Constantinople that make up modern Istanbul. Second, it invokes the extensive Mediterranean cultural networks, which converged on Constantinople. Third, the term refers to the geographic position of Constantinople as a fulcrum from which the Ottoman state could extend power over the Straits. Like two counterbalancing weights of a scale, the naval base at Gallipoli and the fortresses of Rumeli Hisari and Anadolu Hisari facilitated Ottoman control along the Straits and the extension of Ottoman power to the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

Four factors have impeded Ottoman scholarship's comprehension of Constantinople as a *nexus* for exchange. First, there is a tendency to retroject a unified urban history on the various settlements that make up the current city. Second, the Byzantine-Ottoman transition period still carries the narrative baggage inherited from Edward Gibbon's decline narrative. The narrative trajectories of the two empires traveled on opposing tracks. The Byzantine narrative assumed a fatalistic path of decline that contrasted with the meteoric rise of Ottoman rule. This perspective flattens the fluid nature of the geopolitical terrain of Anatolia and the Mediterranean region. It overlooks the literary and cultural vibrancy of the Byzantine state despite its receding territory in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Third, the opposing Turkish and Greek nationalist narratives have distorted fifteenth-century reality, obfuscating the roles of the Straits and urban centers as *nexi* of commerce. Fourth, there has been a disruption in the communication between the fields of Italian Renaissance, Byzantine, and Ottoman history, which jeopardizes the holistic understanding of these empires as participants in a dynamic Mediterranean world.

## The White Sea: issues of Mediterranean unity

The question of Mediterranean unity looms over its historiography. While a deep discussion of the issue lies beyond this paper's scope, we know that early attempts to answer this question such as Henri Pirenne's (1937), dated it to the Late Antique and early Medieval periods.<sup>2</sup> The mid-twentieth century historian Fernand Braudel (1949) defined the Mediterranean as a unified geographic space beyond the Mediterranean littoral.<sup>3</sup> Mediterranean scholarship inspired by Braudel's monumental work flourished in the 2000s. Building on Braudel's work, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell introduced the concepts of interconnectivity and micro-climes.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Western Mediterranean scholars such as David Abulafia created a new periodization that framed successive iterations of the

<sup>2</sup> H. Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne* (London 1974).

<sup>3</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II* (Berkeley, LA 1996).

<sup>4</sup> P. Horden & N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A study of Mediterranean History* (London 2000).

Mediterranean worlds, each with its own political, economic, and cultural dynamics.<sup>5</sup>

The deconstruction of the East-West axis is crucial to understanding the Straits network as a nexus. From the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries, a porous barrier separated the Mediterranean world yet facilitated political, economic, and cultural exchange. Long-term regional stakeholders, Venice and Genoa, penetrated this imagined Mediterranean boundary and established the Venetian settlement in Constantinople. The Genoese colony at Pera (Galata) established a bastion in the East. Thus, the Italian powers played a role in the developments of the Byzantine and Ottoman states.

Discussions of Mediterranean unity cannot and should not limit themselves to an East-West economic and cultural fusion. The fifteenth-century Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–39) provided a context for religious unity present in the minds of Ottoman-, Greek-, and Italian-speaking scholars, alike. The Orthodox and Catholic unification, proposed at Ferrara-Florence lingered as an idea for a unified Mediterranean Christian world.<sup>6</sup> This possibility of a unification vanished from the dreams of the Papacy when power transferred from the Byzantines to the Ottomans. James Hankins has identified a fifteenth-century literary genre as Renaissance Crusader literature, which encapsulated the Papacy's horrified response to an Ottoman Istanbul.<sup>7</sup> Later texts, which express a fascination with the dynastic history of the Ottoman family, provide a contrast with this inflammatory rhetoric. These histories built on a past mythology echoed in the conquest of the city of Constantinople and drew from the mythologized origins of the Ottoman Turks as descendants of the ancient Troy.

## Constantinople: the colorful nexus between black and white

The 250 years between the sacks of the city in 1204 and 1453 were tumultuous. The Ottoman conquest ended a sequence of sieges by different historical agents in 1235, 1261, 1395, and the 1440s.<sup>8</sup> A complex, broader framework characterized the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, thus creating a network of economic unity linking the Eastern and Western Mediterranean. The Republic of Venice possessed Negroponte, Crete, and the city of Thessaloniki. The Venetians maintained a sizable presence within Constantinople. Venice's chief rival, Genoa, held key possessions in the Black Sea at Kaffa and Tana. It had a significant presence in the vicinity of Constantinople itself, at Galata/Pera.<sup>9</sup> An extensive Frankish presence ruled the city from 1204 to 1261, entrenching itself in the Morea in the thirteenth century and providing a front of regional concern. In 1311, the Crown of Aragon promoted its own imperial ambitions, establishing the Duchy of Athens. The Catalan and the

<sup>5</sup> D. Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford 2013).

<sup>6</sup> J. Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge 1959); C. Frazee, *Catholics and Sultans: The Church and the Ottoman Empire: 1453–1923* (London & New York 1983); R. Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk: 1453–1517* (Niewkoop 1967).

<sup>7</sup> Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders."

<sup>8</sup> See O. Heilo, "When did Constantinople Fall?," in I. Nilsson & P. Stephenson (eds.), *Wanted: Byzantium – The Desire for a Lost Empire* (Uppsala 2014), 77–92.

<sup>9</sup> On the neighbourhood of Galata, see the contribution of Kimmelfield in this volume.

Navarrese companies offered the means to take part in Byzantine politics and the struggle for the Morea.

Until 1204, Constantinople had been the seat of Byzantine state power and center for exchange, giving local lords and regional Mediterranean powers a base for commerce in the Mediterranean and Black Sea. After 1204, the Byzantine aristocratic power diffused, and the state established temporary centers at Nicaea, Epirus, the Morea, and at Trabzon. New players entered the game. By the end of the thirteenth century, the emirates of Mentеше, Aydin, Germiyan, and Karaman held territory in central and western Anatolia. These *beyliks* (emirates) complicated the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical weft and weave, and both allied with and opposed Byzantine political and economic interests. The tantalising prize of the Straits network, however, and a centralized base from which to control Anatolia and Rumelia, remained tied up with the fate of Constantinople; merchant powers like Venice hesitated about which player they ought to throw in their lot.

In effect, Constantinople controlled two continents and two seas. In an act of *translatio imperii* (transition of power), the conquest of the city transferred the Romano-Byzantine legacy to the Ottoman state. It was the crowning achievement of Mehmet II's early reign, allowing domination of the Mediterranean Sea and revitalization of the city. The city's favorable position within the Straits network invited building the new capital of Konstantiniyye/Istanbul. As the city grew, it merged the former cluster of settlements into a single imperial center worthy of the inheritors of the Romano-Byzantine legacy.

## Revisiting the White Sea: unity and the Ottoman Mediterranean

The question of Mediterranean unity itself underlies a greater question: When did the Ottoman Mediterranean project begin? The traditional Ottoman narrative focuses on Mediterranean naval power in the sixteenth century. Mehmet II's conquest of the city required a small compact fleet, which he could transport overland to the Golden Horn and which could defeat the scant naval defenses in the Golden Horn.<sup>10</sup> After 1453, Ottoman naval power grew alongside its formidable land forces. By the end of Mehmet II's reign in 1481, it penetrated the western Mediterranean and captured Otranto under Gedik Ahmed Pasha. Mehmet II's son and successor, Beyazit II, expanded Ottoman naval might in the western Mediterranean through privateer forces. The Ottoman presence in the Mediterranean during the sixteenth century is well attested; the title of *Kaptan-i*

---

<sup>10</sup> Mehmet II's biographer, Kritovoulos of Imbros, notes that Baltaoğlu, the Ottoman Admiral of the Fleet attacked vessels at the mouth of the harbor at the chain which protected it; Kritovoulos of Imbros, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror* (Princeton 1954), 50; ed. D. R. Reinsch, *Critobuli Imbriotae Historiae* (Berlin 1983), 50–51. It is important to note that despite having economic stakes in the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea neither Venice nor Genoa had any naval ships in Constantinople and the time of the Capture of the city. However, Franz Babinger noted that the commander of all sea forces in the harbor was the Venetian Alvise Diedo, Captain of the Venetian Trading fleet at Tana on the Black Sea; F. Babinger, *Mehmed II and his Time*, tr. R. Mannheim (Princeton 1954), 87. Kritovoulos of Imbros recorded that the Pope (Nicholas V) sent relief supplies and had plans to send an additional thirty triremes and galleons to assist but these were delayed and did not arrive before the capture of the city; *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, 52; *Critobuli Imbriotae Historiae* (Reinsch), 52. According to Kritovoulos Baltaoğlu engaged these ships in the open sea; *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*, 53; *Critobuli Imbriotae Historiae* (Reinsch), 53.

*Derya* held pride of place in the Ottoman political-military apparatus. Under the command of men such as Kemal Reis, the Ottoman naval apparatus presented a significant threat to the western Mediterranean powers of Aragon, Venice and Genoa. Narrative histories such as the *Süleymanname* and portolan atlases and the *Kitab-i Bahriye* provided a textual and visual representation of the sixteenth-century Ottoman Mediterranean project. And yet, the Mediterranean was not the singular focus of Ottoman imperial power; the Indian Ocean project gained momentum after the 1517 conquest of Egypt.<sup>11</sup>

Earlier traditional narratives argue that Ottoman Mediterranean naval supremacy lasted until its defeat at Lepanto in 1571. However, such accounts overlook two fourteenth-century events crucial to understanding the Ottoman Mediterranean project: The Ottoman decision to intervene on behalf of the John VI Kantakeuzenos in the Byzantine civil wars of 1341-47, and the transformative marriage alliance between the Osmanoglu and the Kantakeuzenoi. These two events catapulted the Ottoman state from the isolation of Bithynia and linked it to the Mediterranean-Aegean systems of geopolitical power. So, it transmuted a smaller Anatolian emirate from an isolated Bithynian emirate to a regional power straddling the Bosphorus. This new Ottoman state engaged in regional politics in a manner equal to that of its Byzantine imperial predecessors. The Ottoman involvement in the Byzantine civil war started its naval control of the Aegean. Emir Süleyman captured Gallipoli after an earthquake in 1354. Then, Ottoman forces expanded into the Balkans and began the administrative tightrope act so familiar in the history of the Byzantine state. It negotiated the administrative needs of the western Rumelia and the eastern Anatolian parts of the Empire.

The capture of the key geographic position of Gallipoli coupled with intermittent unsuccessful attempts to reinvigorate a Byzantine naval fleet resulted in a Byzantine dependence on Italian mercenary naval power. As a result, the Byzantines resolved to keep a handful of ships at Constantinople. Mehmet's strategy in the capture of Constantinople cut off a key artery of the Bosphorus through the twin citadels of Rumeli Hisarı (Boğazkesen) and Anadolu Hisarı. He mounted a formidable naval threat when he secured a crushing defeat of the Byzantine and Genoese naval forces protecting the harbor of the Golden Horn. Thus, the Ottoman Mediterranean project was not *sui generis*, but originated in the Ottoman dynastic intervention into the internal matters of Byzantium.

## Narratives of empire and nation

Readings of these liminal centuries as the first and final respective chapters of the Byzantine and Ottoman contribution prevents an exact grasp of the late medieval and early modern Mediterranean world. Advocates of these outdated imperialist-driven models adhere to a diachronic view of Greek and Turkish nationalist narrative. Indeed, the residue of the romanticized Gibbonian reading of Roman history that favors the slow, inevitable decline of the Romano-Byzantine entity stamps much of these stock interpretations. The fifteenth century acted as a crucible in which the process of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* reshaped the conception of Mediterranean unity. By extension, as an heir to the Romano-

---

<sup>11</sup> See G. Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford 2011).



Byzantine legacy, the historiography of the Ottoman Empire has struggled against the undertow of a long decline narrative.

Recent scholarship discards these older narratives as irrelevant. Ottoman historians such as Cemal Kafadar have underscored the dynamic nature of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Anatolian frontier historical reality.<sup>12</sup> Viewing the urban center of Constantinople anew, as a prize of conquest empowering the Ottomans under the kingship (*padişahlık/sbahi*) of Mehmet II to engage in an act of *translatio imperii* that appropriated the 2,000-year legacy of Rome, is at the heart of this scholarly enterprise. As noted, Mehmet's seizure of Otranto and alleged plans for a full invasion of Italy may have been a political and military response to the ideological and religious unity attempted at Ferrara-Florence. By appropriating the Byzantine capital—already a nexus of Mediterranean trade and cultural interaction—Mehmet seized the chance to rebuild a weak city into a contemporary Ottoman-Islamic center from which to rule both the Anatolian and Rumelian possessions on either side of the Straits. This consolidation consumed much of the second half of the fifteenth century. Throughout the seventeenth century, the question of the Ottoman capital alternated between Constantinople and Edirne, with some Ottoman sultans eschewing Constantinople.<sup>13</sup> Arguments for Edirne ultimately relented in favor of the larger more interconnected nexus of Constantinople.

Çiğdem Kafescioğlu has underlined the re-use of urban space applied to the city after 1453. As part of his plan of urban revitalization, Mehmet II enforced a policy of re-population from distant parts of Ottoman territory and negotiated with the Genoese settlement of Pera.<sup>14</sup> The Ottoman seizure of Caffa (1471) and Tana (1475) ended Genoese colonial power in the Black Sea littoral. Wars with the Republic of Venice polarized Ottoman-Venetian relations through the fifteenth century. The Ottoman alliance with the French crown during the turbulence of the sixteenth-century Catholic-Protestant wars drew the Ottomans further into the European sphere.

Fewer Ottoman historians have explored the role of the settlements near Constantinople. Chalcedon (Kadiköy) and Scutari (Üsküdar) had long, distinctive histories stretching back to Greek antiquity, these narratives became conflated with that of the capital which incorporated them in the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries. Reading the city, Constantinople, as a nexus connecting the settlements along the Bosphorus offers opportunities to place it into a larger Mediterranean context. It refocuses understanding of the period beyond romanticized and nationalistic interpretations outside the confines of an Anatolian-Balkan geographic context to highlight a cultural-historical continuity.

<sup>12</sup> See C. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Berkeley 1995), 140. For a late-Byzantine perspective, see also N. Necipoğlu, "From Recovery to Subjugation: The Last fifty years of Byzantine Rule, Constantinople (1403–1453)," in *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Cambridge 2009), 184–232.

<sup>13</sup> Mehmed IV's reign (1648–87) provides one such example of the revitalization of Edirne as an Ottoman capital. See M. D. Baer, *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe* (Oxford 2011), 11.

<sup>14</sup> C. Kafescioğlu, *Constantinople/Istanbul: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital* (Pennsylvania 2009).

## Narratives of empire

I will now explore two works: Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Patrick Balfour Kinross' *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire*. These works were instrumental in shaping perceptions of the Ottoman imperial paradigm.

### *Gibbon's empire*

Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* gave eighteenth-century readers not only a romanticized view of the Roman Empire but a myopic one of Byzantium as decadent and blinded by religious fervor. Yet, even this distorted *longue durée* narrative resonated with one tenet of Byzantine political thought. Until the end, the Byzantine Emperor represented a link in the continuity of Roman imperial power. Although western Mediterranean states called him the "Emperor of the Greeks," Byzantium "romanized" the state into an unbroken continuity back to the origin of Rome. Byzantine political theory asserted the importance of the Byzantine emperor as head of the state and preserved his imperial authority as identical to that of the first princeps, Augustus. By capturing Constantinople, Mehmet II took part in an act of *translatio imperii*, whereby the Romano-Byzantine legacy transferred to the Ottoman Sultan. His adoption of the title *Kaiser-i Rum* crystallized this inter-dynastic link.

Yet, Gibbon did not emphasize the continuity from the Byzantine to the Ottoman Empires regarding the capture of the city. Instead, he portrayed it as a tragic, if predictable, event echoing the fall of Troy. He made Constantine XI the reincarnation of King Priam and recast the Achaeans as barbarous "Turks" who sacked the world's greatest city without mercy or remorse. On another level, Gibbon equates the acts of Mehmet's arm with the savagery of the Visigoths and Vandals. Mehmet II becomes a new Alaric or a new Genseric. To be sure, as a world conqueror Mehmet encapsulated Attila, Timur, and Genghis Khan and stuck a deathblow to Byzantium as the stewards of antiquity. However, Mehmet II. did not abandon antiquity altogether. Julian Raby attests to Mehmet II's personal acts of stewardship vis-à-vis Byzantine material culture.<sup>15</sup> His policy of collection and preservation of material objects shows an intellectual and cultural interest in protecting the past.

Gibbon's images and language allure. They conjure an archetypical fall of a demi-paradise and precious, fragile legacy. Even after the Ottomanization of Constantinople, rumors circulated among Italian and French Humanists that the 'Seraglio' preserved remnants of the Imperial library, and Pierre Gilles traveled to Constantinople to find Byzantine manuscripts for the court of Francis I.<sup>16</sup> Gilles' guide to the city, written at time of Süleyman I, provided an indispensable resource to Byzantine material culture after the conquest. Yet, in Gibbon's narrative, the conquest of the city is a permanent death for Rome and the Roman imperial

<sup>15</sup> J. Raby, "A Sultan of Paradox: Mehmed the Conqueror and Patron of the Arts," *Oxford Art Journal* 5/1 (1982), 3–8; J. Raby, *El Gran Turco: Mehmed the Conqueror as a Patron of the Arts of Christendom*. Diss. Oxford University, 1980. See also J. M. Rogers, "An Ottoman Palace Inventory of the Reign of Beyazit II," in J.-L. Bacqué & E. van Donzel (eds.), *Comité Internationale d'études pré-ottomanes et ottomanes, 6th Symposium Cambridge, 1-4<sup>th</sup> of July 1984: Proceedings* (Istanbul & Paris 1987), 39–53.

<sup>16</sup> K. Byrd, *Pierre Gilles' Constantinople: A Modern English Translation with Commentary* (New York 2008). For the lasting European lasting interest in the imperial library see J. Raby, "Mehmed the Conqueror's Greek Scriptorium," *DOP* 37 (1983), 15–34, here 15.

project. To be sure, Gibbon's words were so captivating that Kinross cast a parallel, romanticized narrative for the Ottoman Empire in his 1977 monograph.

Gibbon sought to write a romanticized but unmistakably final chapter for a 1,400-year-long epic. The conquest of the city is the point from which Byzantium as Rome cannot return. Fifteenth-century Italian humanists spilled considerable ink portraying Mehmet II as an invincible world conqueror. He threatened to impale the heart of Europe and defeat Christendom itself. The only remedy was the salvation of Constantinople. Pope Pius II called for a crusade to reclaim the city for the Christian cause. Ottoman rule over the city brought it back from the ashes and installed Konstantiniyye as a re-envisioned Ottoman nexus for the Ottoman Mediterranean project in the fifteenth century. In the sixteenth century, Ottoman Egypt provided a lens through which this field of influence extended to the Ottoman, Indian Ocean project.<sup>17</sup>

### *Kinross' empire*

In his orientalist narrative of the Ottoman Empire, Kinross imitates and echoes Gibbon. Constantine XI's fictionalized final speech to his council on the eve of the Ottoman assault on May 28th, 1453, is "the funeral oration of the Roman Empire."<sup>18</sup> In his description of Constantine XI's death again Kinross returns to Gibbon: "The Prudent despair of Constantine, cast away the purple; amidst the tumult he fell by an unknown hand and his body was buried under a mountain of the slain."<sup>19</sup>

Kinross's narrative of the Ottoman Empire carried the baggage of Gibbon's rich prose. It idealized the final moment of this millennial empire. In imitating Gibbon, Kinross reproduced this Roman legacy with an 'Oriental' accent. He cast Mehmet II as a new Constantine and founder of a new Ottoman Konstantiniyye: Istanbul. Kinross projected a parallel rise and fall onto the Ottoman imperial paradigm. He essentialized and orientalized the reality of the Ottoman presence in both the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Kinross exemplified Gibbon's hold on discussions of Empire in the Mediterranean world. On the one hand, it is easy to dismiss Kinross's account as romanticized, but his ornate prose brings the *longue durée* of the Roman legacy into focus. Baki Tezcan (2012) has offered a more nuanced reading of the Ottoman imperial project that runs against the grain of decline.<sup>20</sup>

## Narratives of nations

Just as imperial narratives have shaped the role of Constantinople in the fifteenth century, so to have the Greek and Turkish nationalist narratives left an imprint.

### *The Tourkokratia*

The image of Constantine XI's last stand against the Ottoman janissaries illustrated the final moments of the Roman Empire. In such a narrative, the Ottomans

<sup>17</sup> G. Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*.

<sup>18</sup> P. B. Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York 1977), 107.

<sup>19</sup> Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries*, 109.

<sup>20</sup> B. Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World* (New York 2012).

are the Trojans come for vengeance against the Greeks. The fall of Rome is recast: instead of Ostrogoths and Visigoths, Bazi-bazouks and janissaries scramble over the walls and unleash bedlam on the civilized Byzantine Greeks. The monumental statue of Justinian in the *Augusteion* took on new meaning. The *orbis mundi* in Justinian's outstretched hand was often mistaken as a golden apple by travelers to the city. Papal propaganda evoked images of barbarian hords set on plucking that 'apple' from Justinian's palm. After the conquest, the Ottomans eliminated any temptation of capturing such a golden apple, as the monumental statue of Justinian was removed from the Augusteion and melted down.<sup>21</sup> The real threat of Mediterranean conquest enhanced this political theater. It lent credence to the perceived Ottoman danger, since the Ottoman state had already incorporated diverse ethnic territories.

In the nineteenth century nationalism drew on this conquest-driven image for its own purposes. The movement for Greek independence in the 1820s baptized the period as the *Tourkokratia* (Turkish rule).<sup>22</sup> It cast the Greeks as unwilling subjects of the Ottoman sultan, whose forced conversions suppressed Hellenic values and Orthodox Christianity. Cemal Kafadar refers to this as a "lid model of nationalism."<sup>23</sup> It characterized the Ottoman Turks and the *Tourkokratia* as a period of constraint for Greek life. National and cultural characteristics could re-enter the flow of history only when they had unshackled themselves from Ottoman rule.

After its separation from the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s, Greece identified itself with classical Athens in its nationalist narrative. Thus, it short-circuited its Romano-Byzantine past in favor of the *longue durée* narrative of the Athenian Empire. It appropriated the discourse of continuity to achieve the narrative illusion that it had preceded the Ottoman imperial paradigm by 2,000 years. With its separation from the Ottoman Empire, "Greekness" was free to re-enter historical time and continue unimpeded from its ancient Athenian origins. This nationalist appropriation was fueled by the resurgent interest in philhellenism gripping Western European countries as they now could gain easy access to the archaeological resources of Greek antiquity.

Twentieth-century Greek and Turkish regional tensions delayed scholarly investigation of the fifteenth century. Foreign scholars such as Franz Babinger and Nikolai Iorga held the reins of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century research into the period. In the late twentieth century, the erudite observations of scholars such as Julian Raby, Gülrü Necipoğlu, Robert Ousterhout, and Cemal Kafadar

---

<sup>21</sup> See J. Raby, "Mehmed the Conqueror and the Equestrian Statue of the Augusteion," in *Illinois Classical Studies* 12/2 (1987) = *Byzantium and its Legacy*, 305–13. Raby discusses the Ottoman sources, Şemseddin and Aşıkpaşazade, the Italian sources, Gian Maria Angiolelli, and the sixteenth century travel accounts of Peter Gyllius (Pierre Gilles). The sources agree that the statue was removed from the *Augusteion* in the mid-late fifteenth century but the exact date is unclear. One narrative asserts that statue was melted down to be recast as a cannon, perhaps in the siege of Belgrade (1456). Other accounts claim that the statue disassembled and moved into the first courtyard of Topkapı (Yeni Saray). Or, perhaps it may have been held for a brief time at the first Ottoman imperial Palace (Eski Saray); Raby, "Mehmed the Conqueror and the Equestrian Statue," 309.

<sup>22</sup> A. Liako, "Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece: Time Language, Space," in K. Zacharia (ed.), *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity* (Aldershot 2008), 201–36.

<sup>23</sup> C. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds*, 20–21.

unpacked and reinvestigated 180 years of nationalist baggage reverberating in both Turkish and Greek historiography, on the early Ottoman State.<sup>24</sup>

*The Ottoman state: Ottoman historiography's role in the nexus*

What role has Ottoman historiography played in shaping the understanding of Constantinople as a nexus? Similar to the nationalizing aspects of the Greek historical narrative, Ottoman historiography has become another accretion that must be stripped away to understand Constantinople's fifteenth-century role in the Mediterranean world.

A brief overview of the key Ottoman scholarship on the Ottoman state may be helpful. The American historian Heath Lowry has analyzed the evolution in the historiography of the early Ottoman state.<sup>25</sup> Lowry observed that in the years before Paul Wittek's work on the early Ottoman Empire's tribal character, studies of the emerging Ottoman state centered on the impact of Byzantine institutions. For example, in 1916, Herbert Adams Gibbons argued that Ottomans constituted a new race of Slavic and Muslim converts that maintained Byzantine institutions and formed an Islamic-Byzantine hybrid.<sup>26</sup> In 1922, Köprülü took a Turkish nationalist stance rejecting Gibbons' insistence on the incorporation of Byzantine institutions. In 1932, the two American historians Langner and Blake offered the view that the Ottomans' geographical position next to a weakened Byzantine state represented a primary factor for their successful formation as a state, supporting Gibbons' assertion that the Ottomans appropriated much of the Byzantine administrative structure.<sup>27</sup> In 1934, Köprülü advanced the debate by arguing for the Selcuk-Ilkhanid origin of Ottoman institutions, and his 1939 work selectively acknowledged Byzantine influence in certain institutions.<sup>28</sup> Köprülü's reluctance to accept a Byzantine influence resonated with his insistence on the institutions' Seljuq-Ilkhanid origins and with his emphasis on genealogical origins—both showing his Turkish nationalist bias. So, at least up until Wittek's thesis, scholarship focused on whether the Ottoman state constituted an amalgam of Islamized Byzantine Greeks and pagan "Turks" who adopted Byzantine or were genealogical and administrative heirs of Mongol-Ilkhanid institutions.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the first phase of modern historiography examined Ottoman origins, cultural continuity, and ideological appropriation to identify elements that supported the Turkish nationalist *longue durée* narrative. Its theme of national character specified qualities inherent in the tribe, in early Anatolian frontier Islam, and in contemporary sources. That tribal nature was at first rigidly defined by consanguinity and genealogical relationships. Wittek's infusion of *gaza* into the discussion on tribal character expanded the debate on early Ottoman identity

<sup>24</sup> Raby, "Mehmed the Conqueror's Greek Scriptorium" and *El Gran Turco*; R. Ousterhout, "The East, the West, and the Appropriation of the Past in Early Ottoman Architecture," *Gesta* 43/2 (2004), 165–76; G. Necipoğlu, "Visual Cosmopolitanism and Creative Translation: Artistic Conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II's Constantinople," *Muqarnas* 29 (2012), 1–81; C. Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Early Ottoman State* (Berkeley, CA 1996).

<sup>25</sup> H. Lowry, *The Nature of the Ottoman State* (Binghamton 2003).

<sup>26</sup> H. A. Gibbons, *The Formation of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford 1916).

<sup>27</sup> W. Langner & R. Blake, "The Rise of the Ottoman Turks and Its Historical Background," *American Historical Review* 37/3 (1932), 468–505.

<sup>28</sup> M. F. Köprülü, "Anadolu'da İslamiyet: Türk İstilasından Sonra Anadolu Tarih-i Dinsine Bir Nazar ve Bu Tarihin," *Menbaları Darulfünun Edebiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 2 (1922).

<sup>29</sup> P. Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire: Studies on the History of Turkey, 13th–15th Centuries* (London 1937).

beyond the genealogical confines proposed by Köprülü. Yet, absent in these discussions was any discussion of a Mediterranean vision with Constantinople at its center. Instead, Ottoman scholarship has limited the historiographic focus to Anatolia and the Balkans.

## Beyond black and white: adding some color to a fifteenth-century Ottoman Mediterranean vision

The field of art history has addressed the interaction between the individual Italian cities and the fifteenth-century Ottoman sultanate. Much of this scholarship has focused on the Ottoman court's patronage of Italian artists and court functionaries in the years after the conquest of Constantinople. Julian Raby's work focusing on the paintings and other works of Gentile Bellini has received particular attention.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, this work expanded the understanding of such Ottoman patronage by including the role of portraiture medals struck at the behest of Mehmet II.<sup>31</sup>

Equally important, historians of the Italian Renaissance also helped to contextualize the fifteenth-century Ottoman Mediterranean project especially by exploring two fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century genres, Renaissance Crusader writings, and *De Originibus Turcarum* literature. James Hankins noted that Humanist Crusader literature becomes prominent around the 1453 fall of Constantinople.<sup>32</sup> This genre differed from earlier medieval Crusader literature in terms of its provenance, style, and intended audience. It was championed by the laity; it imitated known classical deliberative oratory such as Demosthenes' *Philippics* and epistles and orations (for example, Bessarion's *Orationes ad principes Christianos contra Turcos*, Lambugnino Birago's *Strategicon adversus Turcos*, and Biondo's treatises to the Venetians and King Alphonse of Naples). Perhaps most telling, the genre was directed pointedly against the Ottoman Empire and emphasized its immanent threat to western Mediterranean Christian powers. It focused on the recapture of the Christian holy city of Constantinople as opposed to Jerusalem. Bessarion's translation of Demosthenes' *Olynthiac Oration* drew a parallel between contemporary Turkish advances against Christendom and the threat to Greece in the time of Phillip of Macedon. Leonardo Bruni dedicated his *De Bello Italico adversus Gothos* to Giuliano Cesarini before Cesarini's encounter with Murad II at Varna. Hankins found extensive classicizing verse urging action against the "Turks," and estimated that Humanist Crusader literature comprised a massive body of over 400 literary pieces composed during the lifetime of Mehmet II.<sup>33</sup>

The field of art history has addressed the interaction between the individual Italian cities and the fifteenth-century Ottoman sultanate. Much of this scholarship has focused on the Ottoman court's patronage of Italian artists and court functionaries after the conquest of Constantinople. Julian Raby has focused on the paintings and work of Gentile Bellini received particular attention. This work

<sup>30</sup> See Raby, *El Gran Turco*; J. Raby, "Cyriacus of Ancona and the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II," *Journal of Courtauld and Warburg Institutes* 43 (1980), 242–46; "A Sultan of Paradox;" "Pride and Prejudice: Mehmed the Conqueror and the Italian Metal Tradition," *Studies in the History of Art* 21 (1987), 171–94; J. Raby & Z. Tanındı, *Turkish Bookbinding in the Fifteenth Century: The Foundation of an Ottoman Court* (London 1993).

<sup>31</sup> J. Raby, "A Sultan of Paradox."

<sup>32</sup> Hankins, *Renaissance Crusaders*, 112.

<sup>33</sup> Hankins, *Renaissance Crusaders*, 116–17.

clarified such Ottoman patronage by including the role of portraiture medals struck at the behest of Mehmet II.

Between 1450 and the end of the sixteenth century, a separate genre on the ethnographic origins of the Ottomans proliferated as well. Yet, these works were produced by an opposing school of Italian Renaissance thought: ‘philoturcs’ who tried to integrate the Ottomans into a Western paradigm of cultural tradition. The resulting *De orginibus Turcarum* literature thrived well into the sixteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Fusing the terms *teuceri* with *Troiani*, the genre suggested an ethnic link between Ottomans and Trojans. Other humanists contested this claim to such an elevated ethnic origin and propounded instead the Ottomans’ descent from a common German Turkic ancestor among the Macedonians, who had defeated the Greeks and shared a Saxon ancestry through Alexander the Great.<sup>35</sup> A Scythian origin for the Turks was also proposed—a scenario used in diplomatic overtures between the court of Matthias Corvinus and Mehmet II.

These developments in disciplines outside Ottoman scholarship contrast with those in the field proper, which stressed Anatolian and Balkan roots rather than situating the Ottomans in an Eastern Mediterranean Aegean context. Even historiography such as Cemal Kafadar’s *Between Two Worlds* which underscores conflictual readings of the sources have emphasized Ottoman material over the Greek and Anatolian texts over Mediterranean ones. This Ottoman bias distorts the historical reality of the fifteenth century. However, it is corrected in the art historical and Italian Renaissance historiography of Raby’s and Hankin’s work respectively. The scholarship on Otranto—published only in Italian—epitomizes this failure to place the Ottomans within the fifteenth-century Mediterranean context.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

Several issues prove crucial to our understanding of the passage from the Byzantine to the Ottoman Empire as a threshold in the *longue durée* of Mediterranean history. The first is accepting Mediterranean unity despite the traditional historiographical East-West axis of division. The second is to consider the Byzantine-Ottoman shared imperial space of Constantinople. Complicating the understanding of this is the allure of narratives of decline exemplified by Gibbon, whose eloquent romanticism has long stamped and stunted our grasp of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century cultural and political dynamics in the region. Kinross’s imitation of Gibbon transfers the Roman legacy from the Byzantine to the Ottoman. To be sure, this *translatio imperii* echoes deliberate acts of appropriation undertaken by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II, down to rebuilding Constantinople as an Ottoman imperial capital. Yet, even before this transference, the Ottoman Empire had become intertwined in the political and dynastic struggles of the contemporary eastern Mediterranean and had already laid the foundation for its own Mediterranean imperial project. Ottoman scholarship has focused on the apex of its power

<sup>34</sup> Hankins, *Renaissance Crusaders*, 136.

<sup>35</sup> Hankins, *Renaissance Crusaders*, 140.

<sup>36</sup> A. Bombaci, “Venezia e l’impresa Turca di Otranto,” *Rivista Storica Italiana* 66/2 (1954), 159–95; C. D. Fonseca (ed.), *Otranto 1480: Atti Convegno Internazionale di Studio Promosso in occasione del Centenario della Caduta di Otranto ad Opera Dei Turchi, Otranto 19–23, Maggio, 1980*, 2 vols. (Otranto 1986).

in the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries, ignoring its fourteenth-century beginnings in the Byzantine dynastic struggle between John V Paleologos and John VI Kantakeuzenos. It has overlooked the crucial role that Ottoman Constantinople played as a revitalized eastern Mediterranean nexus.

The final barrier to understanding the role of the Straits in this period is historiographical. The competing nationalist narratives have alienated the intertwined Greek and Turkish experiences from each other. The *Turkokratia* shackled the Greek national past to a grim Ottoman subjugation until its independence in the early twentieth centuries. Turkey's nationalist narratives of the early Ottoman state have also suppressed the extent to which Byzantine cultural and administrative institutions permeated the Ottoman state. In addition, a disjunction between Ottoman historiography, Italian Renaissance scholarship, and Art History has distorted the role of the Ottoman state as a stakeholder in Mediterranean geopolitics and, by extension, has obscured the role of Constantinople as a nexus for Mediterranean cultural and economic exchange in the late medieval and early modern periods. It is high time for that nexus, and the Straits that represent it physically, to be appreciated.