

# The Ottomans in the Mediterranean in the Later Fifteenth Century: the Strategy of Mehmed II

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Under the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II (1444-1446, 1451-1481), the Ottoman empire greatly expanded its territories eastwards across Anatolia, north across the Black Sea and westwards across the Balkans. Part of this expansion was into the eastern Mediterranean, a zone dominated by the Italian city states of Venice and Genoa which had commercial interests and territorial holdings there. Two major calculations lay behind Mehmed's policy in the Mediterranean: strategic requirement and economic interest. From a strategic point of view, Mehmed needed to protect his territories, Ottoman commercial shipping and military transportation at sea as well as to secure his advance westwards. From an economic point of view, he wanted to control maritime trade routes and to take over commercial interests and economic assets. His strategy of conquest consisted of a combination of direct conquest, temporary tributary arrangements and more long-term alliances, and his success was due in particular to the cautious speed of conquest, the internal divisions of the region and his ability to manipulate and benefit from them.

## **Strategic requirements**

When Mehmed came to the throne his state was in effect divided in two, the Asian and European territories separated by the Straits which ran between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and which were both dominated by Constantinople and allowed the city to survive. The significance to the Latins of control of this waterway was recognised by Giovan Maria Angiolello, captured by the Ottomans at Negroponte

(Euboea) in 1470, who regarded their inability to stop the Ottomans passing from Anatolia to Europe as a major reason for Christian failure during the crusade of Varna.<sup>1</sup> Well aware of the “great difficulties” which Latin ships in the Straits had caused his father Murad II, Mehmed was determined to remove this threat.<sup>2</sup> One of his first actions, therefore, after taking the throne was to erect a fortification, Rumeli Hisarı, on the European shore opposite Anadolu Hisarı on the Asian side, equipping it with cannon whose immense cannon balls sped along the surface of the sea “as if they were swimming”.<sup>3</sup> Built “in order to deny passage to all vessels, big and small, sailing from the Black Sea toward our [i.e. the Byzantine] harbour and to provide easy passage from Asia Minor to Thrace for his [Mehmed’s] troops”,<sup>4</sup> this fortification secured Ottoman control of the waterway.

Mehmed’s next target was Constantinople which he described in the words attributed to him by Kritoboulos, who wrote a biography of Mehmed and whom Mehmed appointed governor of Imbros (Imvros, modern Gökçeada), as “always fighting against us, lying in wait for our goods and battering on our misfortunes and injuring us as much as possible”.<sup>5</sup> For Kritoboulos, Mehmed “thought, as was true, that if he could succeed in capturing it and becoming master of it, there was nothing to hinder him from sallying forth from it in a short time, as from a stronghold for all the environs, and overrunning all and subduing them to himself”.<sup>6</sup> Constantinople fell in May 1453.

With the Straits now under his control and Constantinople in his hands, Mehmed was able to turn his attention to the Aegean. The islands there posed a strategic threat. Those close to the entrance to the Dardanelles, Imbros and Limnos (Lemnos),<sup>7</sup> threatened his movement in and out of the Straits. The islands of Cyprus and Crete provided major bases for Venetian naval activity and Chios, close up to the Anatolian coast opposite İzmir, posed a potential threat as a base for hostile activity against Ottoman territory. Rhodes was a very well located base for Hospitaller operations against the Ottomans, dominating the north-south sea route and being close to the Ottoman mainland. All these islands in Venetian, Genoese or Hospitaller hands represented further danger as bases for pirates and

corsairs who could operate from them with impunity. Corsairs, “noted for energy and courage”, who “cut the roads and caused every kind of damage to the traders and captured the travellers”<sup>8</sup> in the estimation of Mustafa Celalzade, were supplied by the islanders of Naxos<sup>9</sup> and by the Gattilusio of Lesbos.<sup>10</sup> Catalan pirate attacks from Rhodes against Ottoman territory were one of the reasons for the Ottoman expedition into the Aegean under Yunus in 1455.<sup>11</sup> The islands also provided accessible locations for runaway slaves, a problem of economic significance in a world in which slave labour played such a major role.

Mehmed needed therefore either to conquer or to neutralise these islands. In 1455 he despatched two expeditions into the Aegean. That under Hamza attacked Chios and Kos, and that under Yunus sailed against Naxos and the islands near Rhodes,<sup>12</sup> attacking Kos but failing to take the fortress and retreating “leaving behind many Turks, some slain by the fortress’s garrison” and some victims of “intestinal disease”,<sup>13</sup> and taking the Genoese settlements of Old and New Phokaea on the Anatolian mainland near İzmir. Limnos fell in 1456 as did Enez (Ainos) on the north Aegean coast south of Edirne which was taken “before the explosion of cannon had even had time to deafen the ears of the effete infidels”.<sup>14</sup> Although his actions resulted in the arrival of a papal fleet in 1456, the expedition was largely ineffective and sailed away again, leaving very little disruption in its wake. Lesbos was captured by the Ottomans in 1462 and its ruler, Domenico Gattilusio, “drawn into the chain of subjection”.<sup>15</sup>

From early on in his reign Mehmed began to expand his territories westwards across the Balkans, conquering the Peloponnese (Morea, Mora) and moving through Serbia, Bosnia and into Albania. Ottoman forces even raided Friuli, appearing within sight of Venice itself. In 1480 an Ottoman fleet under Gedik Ahmed Paşa, described by Angiolello, who was later to serve with him, as a much loved and brave man,<sup>16</sup> took Zakynthos (Zante), Cephalonia, where the population, having lost faith in the administration, sued for peace,<sup>17</sup> and, defeating all in his path, Venetian, Genoese, French or Spanish,<sup>18</sup> Lefkas (Lefkada, Santa Maura, Ayamavra), from where he sent the population to Istanbul.<sup>19</sup>

Mehmed had Italian ambitions. In 1472, after the fall of Negroponte, Venice noted “the threatening advance” of the Ottomans towards Italy.<sup>20</sup> As early as 1463, Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga had written from Rome to his father Lorenzo II, saying that Mehmed had conquered Bosnia and “many hold that, unless the Turk is strongly opposed, in less than a year and a half he will take a great part of Italy”.<sup>21</sup> Slightly later than Gonzaga had predicted, Gedik Ahmed Paşa sailed across the Adriatic in 1480 and captured Otranto, “the key to Italy”.<sup>22</sup> Sigismondo de’Conti noted the suspicion that the hand of Venice lay behind this attack, a suspicion he could not himself, however, confirm.<sup>23</sup> That Venice was in fact implicated in some way is supported by Setton who has noted that “If they [the Venetians] did not in fact encourage the sultan to attack southern Italy, they certainly kept his secret”.<sup>24</sup> Having taken Otranto, the Ottoman forces quickly rebuilt it, strengthening its defences with walls and a double ditch<sup>25</sup> before conducting raids against Brindisi, Lecce and Taranto. For contemporaries, the war for Italy had now begun<sup>26</sup> and many feared for the fate of the peninsula.<sup>27</sup>

The Peloponnese, with its abundance of provisions and its location, was an essential base for Mehmed in his advance westwards and its conquest was “of the first importance, because of the war against the Italians he was planning for the near future”.<sup>28</sup> But the Peloponnese was also an essential part of Venice’s trade set up in the eastern Mediterranean and Venice held Negroponte and Modon (Methoni) and Koron (Koroni), “the right eye of Venice”,<sup>29</sup> on the southern tip of the Peloponnese. These locations, together with Crete and Cyprus, gave Venice naval dominance in the Aegean. Venice had major commercial interests in the region and these bases were essential for their protection. From the Ottoman point of view Venetian dominance in the eastern Mediterranean was not acceptable while Ottoman advance there and in the Peloponnese greatly threatened Venetian trade. The result was a war between Venice and Mehmed which broke out in 1463. According to Sphrantzes, the Venetians planned the war against the sultan “in order to take over the Morea by all possible means”.<sup>30</sup> In a letter dated May 1459 to the Franciscan preacher, Jacopo della Marca, papal nuncio in the March of Ancona, Bessarion wrote from Ferrara about the situation

in the Peloponnese, and described the great wealth of the region, noting that “that country can support fifty thousand horsemen without having to seek food from any other source”,<sup>31</sup> the importance of provisioning troops being stressed also by Bartolomeo Minio, *provveditor* and *capitano* at Napoli di Romania (Nauplia, Nafplio) in a report to the Senate in which he stated that the Ottomans were determined to seize territory in order to prevent soldiers from surviving there.<sup>32</sup>

The war was ultimately concluded, most unsatisfactorily from a Venetian point of view, in 1479 when, “showing inferiority and shame”, the Venetians “threw themselves on the mercy of the sultan”, as the Ottoman grand *vezir* Karamanlı Nişancı Mehmed Paşa put it.<sup>33</sup> The war cost Venice heavily both in terms of territory, the Serenissima loosing Limnos, Shkodër in Albania and lands in the Peloponnese, and money, the financial settlement imposed being a substantial one for Venice but “less than a simple, salty drop in the great sweet water oceans”<sup>34</sup> for the Ottomans according to Mehmed Paşa, but one which the Ottoman ruler nevertheless accepted “graciously and with great pleasure”,<sup>35</sup> symbolising, as it did, a humiliating defeat for the foremost Mediterranean naval power of the period.

Venice had lost Negroponte in 1470 when Mehmed had despatched 100 ships, “the smallest [of which] resembled a mountain”<sup>36</sup> to the “country of the evil one”<sup>37</sup> and when fighting had been so intense that combatants were “hair to hair, beard to beard”,<sup>38</sup> but retained control of Crete (until 1669), Cyprus (until 1571) and Modon and Koron (until 1500). From a strategic point of view, Mehmed in fact had no need to conquer these places, an undertaking which would in any case have been extremely difficult to pull off. Venice was sufficiently weakened by defeat in the war and had no interest in provoking further hostility. It needed its commerce and was already having to pay heavily to maintain and protect it,<sup>39</sup> and thus a peaceful *modus vivendi* with Mehmed was its only option.

For the Ottomans reaching such a *modus vivendi* was easier to organise with the Genoese and was implemented much earlier and without

resorting to any major military operations. Mehmed's relationship with the Genoese was less confrontational, partly due to the greater accommodation which Genoa, or more precisely the Genoese colonies, had traditionally pursued with the Ottomans and also due to the smaller level of Genoese activity in this period. Chios was put under pressure early on in Mehmed's reign when in 1455 Hamza demanded payment by the Chiotese of 40,000 ducats owed to Francesco de Draperis, a major Genoese alum merchant who held the concessions for alum mines in Ottoman territory<sup>40</sup> and who was described in the instructions given by the Venetian Senate to Lorenzo Moro, envoy to Mehmed II in 1451, as "Genoese and a subject of the emperor of the Turks". Moro was instructed, among other things, to get Mehmed or Ottoman officials to force Francesco to pay a Venetian, Giovanni de Mercato Novo, who had conducted business with Francesco through a factor called Domenico de Magistris, the considerable sum of money he owed him.<sup>41</sup> Anxious to ensure a peaceful co-existence with the Ottomans, the Genoese decided on a tributary arrangement and Chios, "the right eye of Genoa",<sup>42</sup> thus remained in their hands until finally falling to the Ottomans in 1566. Genoese compliance, and payment of a considerable annual sum, was in many ways far more satisfactory for Mehmed than being forced to launch a full-scale attack on the island, in the process possibly (though probably not) provoking a response from Genoa and being left with the need to invest resources in retaining the island. For the success of his strategy in the eastern Mediterranean Mehmed did not need to occupy the island but compliance from those who did.

Relations with the Hospitallers were a different issue. The Hospitallers were a hostile presence close to Ottoman mainland territory. Rhodes, a magnet for "disruptive" Franks from Genoa, Venice and other places and a "source of evil and sedition and a gathering point for the people of immorality",<sup>43</sup> was the stronghold of the Hospitallers who "wander night and day and pillage on the face of the sea".<sup>44</sup> The island was, as Caoursin noted, a most suitable naval base and an excellent location from which to attack the Ottomans.<sup>45</sup> From here the Hospitallers preyed on Ottoman shipping and seized Muslim pilgrims.<sup>46</sup> Tansel argues that its location between Istanbul and Egypt rendered its capture essential

for the conquest of Egypt,<sup>47</sup> which actually fell to the Ottomans in 1517, three years before Rhodes. There is evidence that at the end of his reign, Mehmed was contemplating an attack on the Mamluks,<sup>48</sup> which, if so, would have made capture of Rhodes of importance not just for his Aegean policy but also for any land campaign to the south. In any case, the location of Rhodes and the presence of the Hospitallers meant that, as Kemalpaşazade remarked, it had “become necessary to eradicate this base of sedition”.<sup>49</sup> A large force of ships and 30,000 men, according to Oruç,<sup>50</sup> were despatched to Rhodes in May 1480<sup>51</sup> under the command of Mesih Paşa, whom Spandounes noted “was of the house of Palaiologos” and his relative, having been captured together with his two brothers at the fall of Constantinople.<sup>52</sup> Mesih Paşa’s expedition was, however, unsuccessful, a failure for which contemporaries held him responsible,<sup>53</sup> and he was forced to withdraw in “defeat and shame”<sup>54</sup> after a siege lasting 89 days.

### **Economic motivation**

Mehmed’s conquests in the Mediterranean were not motivated solely by strategic concerns, for Ottoman conquest was, as it had been from the early days of the state, also driven by the desire to take over economic assets. As the state grew and the apparatus of rule expanded, so, too, did its need for financial reserves, giving a further impetus to conquest. Control of the Straits was not just about the safe passage between the east and west sections of Ottoman territory, but also about the ability to levy tax on all shipping passing along it to and from Constantinople, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.<sup>55</sup> The capture of Constantinople itself was also economically motivated.<sup>56</sup>

Possession of the Aegean region offered considerable economic advantages. It was a major trading zone for both east-west trade across the Mediterranean, north-south trade between Istanbul and Alexandria and the North African coast, and trade to and from the Black Sea. Its ports were lucrative sources of customs and revenue, and it was also productive in natural resources such as salt and alum. The prosperity

of the region impressed Ottoman writers. Lesbos, unfortunately, as Tursun Bey sourly remarked, “in the hands of infidels and sinners”,<sup>57</sup> was “a prosperous place” with “many blessings”, so productive that, in the estimation of Kemalpaşazade, it “resembled the rose gardens of paradise”.<sup>58</sup> The Peloponnese, too, was “full of blessings”, its sheep lamed twice a year, its rivers were the equivalent of the Nile and the Euphrates, and it was unequalled in productivity.<sup>59</sup> The commercial dynamism of the markets and ports was also noted. Rhodes was a “great business house of the wealth of the Franks”<sup>60</sup> and Negroponte “a market place of the great merchants of Frengristan [i.e. the land of the Franks]...full of valuable goods and merchandise and money”,<sup>61</sup> a view supported by Kemalpaşazade who spoke of “an ancient market town...brimming over with silver and gold, every corner was full of provisions, every nook full of treasure and riches”.<sup>62</sup> Conquest in the Aegean therefore offered control of trade routes and access to lucrative sources of income.

The significance of control over economic assets in the region is highlighted by the trade in alum, a fixer in dying cloth, which was produced in Anatolia and was a major export item westwards.<sup>63</sup> This trade was now in Ottoman hands and represented a highly lucrative source of income. Just how lucrative this trade was for the Ottomans is made clear in a letter written to the pope Pius II by Giovanni da Castro who discovered alum at Tolfa, near Civitavecchia, in 1461.

Today I bring you victory over the Turk. Every year he wrings from the Christians more than 300,000 ducats for the alum with which we dye wool various colours. For this is not found among the Latins except a very small quantity...But I have found seven mountains so rich in this material that they could supply seven worlds. If you will give orders to engage workmen, build furnaces, and smelt the ore, you will provide all Europe with alum and the Turk will lose all his profits. They will accrue to you and thus he will suffer a double loss. There is an abundance of wood and water there. You have a harbor nearby in Civitavecchia where ships may be loaded to sail to the west. Now you may equip a war



against the Turks. These mines will supply you with the sinews of war, i.e., money, and take them from the Turks.<sup>64</sup>

The Ottoman sinews of war, which Giovanni da Castro argued would be snapped by his discovery of alum at Tolfa, were also supplied by other Aegean sources of income. The “inviting morsel”<sup>65</sup> of Enez, conquered by the Ottomans in 1456, was an obvious target. A major trading centre, it was known for “its great productivity, its favourable situation, its rich soil, and many other things”.<sup>66</sup> Profiting “abundantly from commerce” with the nearby islands including Imbros and Limnos,<sup>67</sup> the river Maritza (Meriç, Evros) allowed trade with the interior, as well as producing “many fish of every sort, large and small and fat”.<sup>68</sup> Enez’s greatest asset, however, was its salt, “the greatest resource and the one in which it overwhelmingly excels nearly all its neighbours both in wealth and in revenue is the salt that is produced there, more and better than anywhere else. By distributing and selling it through all Thrace and Macedonia, the city amasses an immense quantity of gold and silver, as it were in a steady stream”.<sup>69</sup> Its harbour and rich salt mines were the major motivation for Ottoman attack, although the anger of the Ottomans over the harbouring of runaway slaves there also played a part.<sup>70</sup>

Mehmed’s interest was not merely to conquer but also to maintain and develop the economic assets of the region. Having taken Constantinople, he set out to re-invigorate it and to recreate a thriving commercial centre, forcibly transferring population to the city from other parts of his empire. He showed equal concern to boost the economy of the islands, offering tax exemptions to those who wanted to go and settle on Bozcaada (Tenedos), and building a castle there to protect Ottoman commercial vessels,<sup>71</sup> a policy which quickly saw an improvement in the conditions of the island.<sup>72</sup> Samos (Sisam), taken by Mehmed in 1453, had been deserted by its population which had suffered badly from corsair attacks. Mehmed ordered the settlement of population on the island, but without great success. He therefore offered an incentive promising those who settled there exemption from taxes (*avarız-ı divaniye*), resulting in a movement of people to the island from both Rumeli and Anatolia.<sup>73</sup>

## The reasons for success

Mehmed thus had strategic and economic reasons for a campaign of conquest in the eastern Mediterranean. But why was he successful? Although not traditionally regarded as a naval power, Colin Imber remarking that “the Ottoman Empire was never a first rate sea power”,<sup>74</sup> the Ottomans had taken to the sea early on in the existence of the state,<sup>75</sup> and Mehmed had a population to hand which included experienced mariners as well as Latins who moved into Ottoman employment.<sup>76</sup> The pragmatic course of conquest which he adopted in the region further facilitated his advance. Outright conquest was not always the first, or indeed initially feasible, option. Control through tribute was a common arrangement, particularly in the early stages of Mehmed’s reign, and one which had its attraction both for the Ottomans and the Latins. Dorino Gattilusio, for example, held Enez under an arrangement with the Ottomans whereby he paid a percentage of the production of salt per annum plus other annual taxes<sup>77</sup> and Chios “purchased a tolerable relationship” with Mehmed by means of an annual tribute.<sup>78</sup>

A major factor in Ottoman success was the political nature of the region which prevented any unified opposition to Mehmed’s advance. In this world, the Ottomans represented less an infidel and implacable enemy and more a power centre like any other. Indeed, the outlook of many of the local Latin lords was not so much couched in terms of the grand scheme of the Hospitallers waging war against the infidel or the great game of the Papacy driving forward a crusading Christendom, but in more basic terms of daily survival and retention of their island domains, and in consequence many of them appeared before Mehmed after the fall of Constantinople and offered submission. Good relations with Mehmed could ensure survival, the widow of Nerio Acciaiolò, ruler of Athens, being able to keep her position “because she had sent many gifts to the sultan in order to remain in power”.<sup>79</sup>

Many turned to the Ottoman ruler in their internal power struggles, much as the Byzantines had in the previous century. Thus when Palamedes, lord of Imbroz, died, leaving Enez to his son Dorino Gattilusio II and Helena

Notaras, the widow of his other son, Giorgio, together with her children as co-heirs, the widow appealed through her uncle to Mehmed against Dorino who was unwilling to share his inheritance. She informed the sultan that Dorino was plotting against him, and was in communication with the Italians, collecting arms and hiring mercenaries and planning to place garrisons on Enez and the islands.<sup>80</sup> Thierry Gancou argues that Kritoboulos's account of these events is not convincing and that it was in fact highly unlikely that Dorino was conspiring with the Italian maritime powers or planning to overthrow his alliance with Mehmed, something he would not have been in a position to contemplate. However, given her very weak position, Ganchou argues, this was Helena Notaras's "only card" to play when approaching the sultan for support.<sup>81</sup> Helena Notaras was the daughter of Loukas Notaras, the Megas Doux who was executed together with two of his sons by Mehmed after the fall of the Constantinople.<sup>82</sup> Whether or not Dorino was acting as Kritoboulos describes, this event thus highlights the extent to which Istanbul was perceived as a centre to which Latin factions could turn in internal feuds and clearly illustrates the fluidity of politics in which any religious or ethnic consideration played a far less significant role than pragmatic calculations of survival.

Infighting in the Peloponnese was most useful for the Ottomans, and most irritating for the Venetians who did not want to see the area fall to Mehmed. In 1454 the Senate despatched Vettore Capello with instructions to investigate the situation there. The Doge Francesco Foscari instructed Vettore Capello that he was to "insist upon concord and agreement with respect to all existing differences" between the despots Thomas and Demetrios and the Albanians "and to contrive a sound peace and harmony between them".<sup>83</sup> In fact, such harmony and peace would have suited the Ottomans at this point too, and it was urged on them by Turahan after his successful military incursion into the region in 1454. Infighting continued, however, for the various local lords "did not realize that they resembled fish caught in the middle of the net, unaware that they are all gradually being pulled toward dry land, but which persist until that moment to pursue and devour each other, so that the little fish are eaten by the big".<sup>84</sup> Thomas Palaeologos

the despot of the Morea, transferred lands to Mehmed “as if he were handing cabbages from a garden”,<sup>85</sup> Corinth, “the head of the body of the Morea”,<sup>86</sup> fell and “pitiable Morea became a sheep in the jaws of a wolf”.<sup>87</sup>

Mehmed was well aware of the divided nature of politics in the Latin world, both in the Aegean and even on the Italian mainland, knowing, according to Benedetto Dei, “how everything in Italy was fractured and in a state of open war”.<sup>88</sup> He thus sought to play one power off against another, balancing Venice with support for Florence, for example. Apart from political allegiance, the eastern Mediterranean was also affected by religious antagonism between Greek Orthodoxy and Latin Catholicism, a further division which Mehmed understood and attempted to manipulate. In the siege of Rhodes, Mesih Paşa expected to find an island divided and “an unfaithful population, ready to rebel, terrorized by fear and easily corruptible with promises”.<sup>89</sup> An appeal to such a division appears to have been part of his tactics, for, in reply to the Ottoman ambassador’s call for surrender, the Grand Master’s envoy replied that the Hospitallers were unafraid of Ottoman threats, adding “there is no discord between the Greeks and the Latins. We adore Christ with a single faith and sound spirit”.<sup>90</sup> From an Ottoman point of view, such a religious divide continued to be perceived as a potential weapon. In 1503 Abu Bakir Darani, a captive in Rhodes, wrote to Bayezid II’s son Korkud claiming that Hospitaller “tyranny” over the Orthodox population meant that the island could easily be taken.<sup>91</sup> One of the reasons for the fall of Chios to the Ottomans in 1566 was, according to Stephan Gerlach, the dislike the local population felt for the Genoese.<sup>92</sup>

Apart from such divisions, and perhaps precisely because of them, the region was a very fluid zone with constant movement from one power centre to another. Latins, such as the corsair Zuan Monaco Corsaro<sup>93</sup> and the Venetian master mariner Georgio de Tragurio<sup>94</sup> could move over to the Ottomans while Ottoman subjects could cross to Venetian service, as two “Turks”, described as experts in military matters, did in July 1466.<sup>95</sup> Mehmed received information about Rhodes from Antonio Meligato, a Rhodian, and Demetrio Sofian from Negroponte, both of

whom had moved over to the Ottomans and knew the secrets of the city,<sup>96</sup> and from Boezio, an expert in munitions and “a man of astute and sharp intelligence”, who had gone over to the Ottomans a long time before and lived in Istanbul where he had a wife and children.<sup>97</sup> A German, he was a man of “tall stature, elegant of aspect, eloquent and of great shrewdness”,<sup>98</sup> and was much favoured by the sultan.<sup>99</sup> Boezio was later deployed in Rhodes as an Ottoman agent, popping up “unexpectedly” from an entrenchment and greeting all “as friends” and requesting to be allowed to enter the city.<sup>100</sup>

Such fluidity meant constantly shifting loyalties, such lack of constancy being exemplified by Doxa, the lord of Kalavryta in the Peloponnese, who, according to Sphrantzes, was “loyal neither to the sultan nor to the despots; not even, I believe, to God”.<sup>101</sup> Alliances were not regarded as binding, either by the Latins or by the Ottomans, but as arrangements to be disposed of by the Ottomans when they felt either sufficiently strong to move to complete conquest or regarded it as expedient to do so, and to be thrown off by the Latins when they felt sure of strong external support. Local rulers could appeal, depending on circumstances, to Venice or Genoa, to the Papal forces which appeared in the waters of the Aegean under the command of Ludovico Trevisan in 1456 or to Istanbul. They could slip and slide from one side to another in an attempt to maintain a precarious hold on power as the Gattilusi did before finally losing Lesbos in 1462 when the island was “counted among the countries of Islam”, a *sancak beyi*, *kadı*, *dizdar*, *subaşı* and *sipahis* were appointed, and “the clanging and echoing of bells was replaced by the call to prayer”.<sup>102</sup>

Along with the internal divisions of the region, the Ottoman pragmatic approach of progressive conquest and a clear understanding of and manipulation of the constantly shifting web of loyalties, one might argue that a further factor in Ottoman success was the policy of implementing soft rather than hard rule. Mehmed certainly had no interest in provoking unnecessary hostility among his very large Orthodox population and the policy of leaving much administration to be run locally or of incorporating the Patriarch into the Ottoman governmental system

deflected potential clashes. Philippides has noted that when Mehmed took Athens, “the Orthodox clergy...gained numerous privileges under the sultan, in contrast to the conditions under Latin rule”.<sup>103</sup> The Ottomans thus, as Molly Greene notes, “presided lightly over the Mediterranean world”,<sup>104</sup> in part perhaps because Ottoman pragmatism and flexibility, quintessential characteristics of the early empire, were reflected in the fluidity of the eastern Mediterranean zone, a world into which Ottoman control thus fitted well.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Angioiello, Giovan Maria [Da Lezze, D], *Historia Turchesca (1300-1514)* (Bucharest, 1909), p. 13.
- <sup>2</sup> Kritoboulos, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror. By Kritovoulos, C.T. Riggs* (trans.) (Westport, CT, 1954), pp. 17-18.
- <sup>3</sup> Kritoboulos, *History*, p. 21.
- <sup>4</sup> Melissenos [Melissourgos], Makarios, "The chronicle of the siege of Constantinople April 2 to May 29 1453", in *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire. A Chronicle by George Sphrantzes 1401-1477*, Marios Philippides (trans.) (Amherst, 1980), p. 99.
- <sup>5</sup> Kritoboulos, *History*, p. 27.
- <sup>6</sup> Kritoboulos, *History*, p. 22.
- <sup>7</sup> For the strategic importance of the island's location, see Bellomo, Elena, "Islands as strongholds for the defence of Christendom: the Hospital of Saint Mary of Bethlehem on Limnos (1459)", in Buttigieg, Emanuel and Simon Phillips (eds.), *Islands and Military Orders, c.1291–c.1798* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 29-38.
- <sup>8</sup> Mustafa Celalzade in Rossi, Ettore, *Assedio e conquista de Rodi nel 1522, secondo le relazioni edite ed inedite dei Turchi* (Rome, 1927), p. 26, Ottoman text p. 23.
- <sup>9</sup> Kritoboulos, *History*, p. 96.
- <sup>10</sup> Kritoboulos, *History*, pp. 137-8, 180.
- <sup>11</sup> Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*, Harry J. Magoulias (trans. and ed.) (Detroit, 1975), p. 252; Kritoboulos, *History*, p. 96.
- <sup>12</sup> Kritoboulos, *History*, p. 96.
- <sup>13</sup> Doukas, *Decline and Fall*, p. 248.
- <sup>14</sup> Tursun Bey, *Tursun Bey Tarih-i Ebül-Feth*, ed. Mertol Tulum (Istanbul, 1977), p. 77.
- <sup>15</sup> Kemalpaşazade (İbn Kemal), *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman VII. Defter*, Şerafettin Turan (ed.) (Ankara, 1991), VII, p. 222.
- <sup>16</sup> Angioiello, *Historia Turchesca*, pp. 108, 178.
- <sup>17</sup> Kemalpaşazade, *Tevârih*, VII, p. 472.
- <sup>18</sup> Kemalpaşazade, *Tevârih*, VII, p. 472.
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