

**STUDIES IN
OTTOMAN HISTORY
IN HONOUR OF
PROFESSOR
V. L. MÉNAGE**

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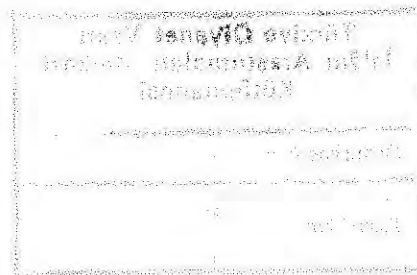
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FROM SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE TO GAZI WARRIORS: THE TZYMPE AFFAIR

The historian Kritoboulos of Imbros narrates the feats of Mehmed II in good Greek, using as a model Thucydides himself. In one instance he shows the sultan addressing his officers shortly before turning to the siege of Constantinople: this is a classical *demegoria*, in which he describes the main stages of Ottoman history. His audience is first reminded of how the Turks came from the East, how they conquered all Asia Minor and created a powerful state with Proussa as its capital; then he describes how they crossed to Europe. First they carried out short piratical raids. Then they occupied the top of a mountain situated before the Hellespontos and the neck of the Gallipoli peninsula. They took a fortress there, "either by force or by ruse", and used it as a base to raid, rob and plunder their neighbours. Their number increased, they took more fortresses, came down to the plain and started large scale operations which resulted in conquering important parts of the Balkan Peninsula¹. From this text one remains with the impression that the Turks acted all the way in the line of good gazis, who crossed the straights on their own. Of course one could hardly expect a different perception of their deeds on the part of a 15th century sultan — or on the part of a 15th century court historian whose opus was written for and dedicated to Mehmed II, not even twenty years after the capture of Constantinople.

We do not need to comment on the authenticity of the speech. What is clear is that we have here a stylised and quite imprecise version of the events, a version quite similar to the legend preserved in the early Ottoman chronicle of

¹ Critobuli Imbriotae, *De rebus per annos 1451-1467 a Mechemete II gestis*, ed. B. Grecu (Bucharest, 1963), 59; Critobuli Imbriotae, *Historiae*, ed. D.R. Reinsch (Berlin and New York, 1983), 26-27.

Ashikpashazade². Obviously this was the official version then prevailing in the Ottoman court. It ignored some very well attested facts, such as the Ottoman alliance with Kantakouzenos, and above all, the earthquake of 1354, which destroyed the houses and the walls of Gallipoli and other Thracian cities and allowed the Turks to occupy them, accomplishing thus their first sizeable conquest in Europe.³

All sources, Greek and Turkish, agree that before capturing Gallipoli, the Ottomans had occupied another fortress, called Tzympe (Çinbi). Its exact location is not known with certainty: some scholars openly or implicitly confess ignorance.⁴ Babinger proposed to identify this fortress with Çimenlik, in the neighborhood (5 km.) of Gallipoli,⁵ and this identification has been accepted by some scholars, such as Taeschner;⁶ Pitcher placed Tzympe to the south of Gallipoli.⁷ H. İnalcık placed it to the north, on the isthmus of the Gallipoli peninsula,⁸ as did Zachariadou, who proposes the neighbourhood of the modern Bolayır, where the Ottoman hero of the conquest of Europe, Süleyman Pasha, sultan Orchan's son, chose to be buried, because this was his first foothold on the Gallipoli peninsula.⁹

From a text of Gregoras (*infra*, note 20), it can be deduced that Tzympe was not far from the shore of the Hellespontos. But it is certain that it was not to the south of Gallipoli; it lay on the way leading there from Constantinople. In 1305, Theodore Choumnos, imperial ambassador, was on his way to meet Roger de Flor and the Catalans in Gallipoli, but, "before he reached Branchialion", he learned that his life and the presents that he was carrying might be in danger from the Catalans; so, being afraid that the Catalans might attack him, he returned safely to Constantinople.¹⁰

²Elizabeth Zachariadou, *Ιστορία και θρύλοι των παλαιών σουλτάνων* [1300-1400] (Athens 1991), 54-57.

³P. Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken* II (Wien, 1977), 283-284.

⁴C. Imber, *The Ottoman Empire* (Istanbul, 1990) 24; *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* 6. *Thrakien* (Thrake, Rodope und Haimimontus), by P. Soustal (Wien, 1991), 119, 437.

⁵F. Babinger, *Beiträge zur Frühgeschichte der Türkenherrschaft in Rumelien* (14.-15. Jahrhundert), (München, 1944), 39.

⁶*The Cambridge Medieval History* IV/1 (1966) 761.

⁷D.E. Pitcher, *An Historical Geography of the Ottoman Empire from the earliest times to the end of the sixteenth century* (Leiden, 1972), map. 8.

⁸H. İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: the Classical Age 1300-1600* (London, 1973) 9; in *The Cambridge History of Islam* I (Cambridge 1970), 274; and in *A History of the Crusades*, ed. By K. Setton VI (Univ. of Wisconsin, [1989]), 232-235.

⁹Zachariadou, *loc. cit.*, 98.

¹⁰Georgii Pachymeris, *De Michaelis et Andronico Palaeologis*, ed. Bekker, II (Bonn, 1835), 509. For the events and the date see F. Dölger, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches* IV (München, 1960), no. 2277 and A. Laiou, *Constantinople and the Latins. The Foreign Policy of Andronicus II, 1282-1328* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 144-145.

Here we have a second place-name the exact location of which is not known, Branchialion, the Brachiol of the Latin sources.¹¹ From two other texts of Pachymeres it can be shown clearly that Branchialion must be sought at the neck of the Gallipoli peninsula: this is the place where the Byzantine forces were waiting to stop the Almugavars if they attempted to come out of the peninsula,¹² and this appears to have been considered by the Catalans as the limit of their Gallipoli "state", beyond which was the land of the Byzantine emperor which they planned to raid, plunder and eventually conquer.¹³ Consequently Branchialion was not far from present day Bolayır, and possibly identical with it, as has already been proposed:¹⁴ it is true that there is some resemblance between these two names.

From the above texts it becomes clear that Tzympe was obviously very close to Branchialion, the main difference between them being that Tzympe is mentioned as being a fortress while Branchialion is not. Having been an imperial *episkepsis*, Branchialion must have been in the middle of fertile lands—and this is really the case of the neck of the peninsula. Both were not far from Gallipoli, but they were not very close to it either: they appear to be at a "safe distance". Would it be possible to hypothesize that Branchialion was the name of the town and Tzympe was the name of the fortress? The hypothesis of placing Tzympe (and Branchialion) at Bolayır (which, by the way, had an acropolis that was destroyed already in the 17th century, when people still remembered that it was a conquest of Süleyman Pasha¹⁵) gains in credibility.

Let us now come to the events. In general lines they are well known.¹⁶ All sources agree that the major figure of these operations was Süleyman Pasha, the son of sultan Orchan, who was among the first to cross in Thrace. But while Ashikpashazade describes the capture of this fortress as a daring coup performed by few braves (including Süleyman), the Byzantine sources, which are contemporary to the events, present the whole affair under a completely different light.

¹¹ Byzantine town, province and *episkepsis* (i.e. imperial domain): see D. Zakythinos, *Μελέται περὶ τῆς διοικητικῆς διαρρέσεως καὶ τῆς ἐπαρχιακῆς διοικήσεως ἐν τῷ Βυζαντινῷ κράτει*, *Epeteris Hetaireias Byzantinon Spoudon* 22 (1952) 173. See also A. Carile, *Partitio terrarum imperii Romaniae*, *Studi Veneziani* 7 (1965) 251.

¹² Georgii Pachymeris II, 543.

¹³ Georgii Pachymeris II, 600.

¹⁴ K. Spruner and Th. Menke, *Hand-Atlas für die Geschichte des Mittelalters und der neueren Zeit* (Gotha, 1880) 84, 86.

¹⁵ H. J. Kissling, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis Thrakiens im 17. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1956), 54.

¹⁶ The most recent accounts are to be found in the publications quoted in the preceding footnotes, to which one might add H. İnalcık, "The Conquest of Edirne", *Archivum Ottomanicum* 3 (1971) 185-210 (more detailed account), repr. in *Variorum*, no. III.

We are talking about the two main Byzantine historians of the time, John Kantakouzenos and Nikephoros Gregoras. The former occupied the Byzantine throne when these events occurred, while the latter was living in Constantinople and was his virulent political opponent. Both are well informed and usually provide accurate information; but their accounts may be suspected to contain purposeful nuances or omissions, as the one wanted to justify his own policies, while the other wanted to vilify them.

The middle of the 14th century in Byzantium was marked by long and destructive civil wars. From 1341 to 1347, John Kantakouzenos, supported by the landed aristocracy, had rebelled against the legitimate heir to the throne, the young John V Palaiologos, who had the support of the businessmen and of the lower social strata. Foreign powers were invited to participate in this civil war, especially the Aydinoglus and, later, the Ottomans, whose support gave the victory to the usurper. On 3 February 1347 Kantakouzenos, who had already given his second daughter Theodora as a wife to sultan Orchan, entered Constantinople and reigned as emperor John VI.

In an effort to heal the wounds and to legitimise his position in the eyes of all, the victor emperor gave his third daughter, Helen, as wife to the young Palaiologos, who thus became his "son" and had to accept a subordinate position. On the other hand, Kantakouzenos bestowed on his first son Matthew an imprecise dignity, inferior to the one of Emperor but higher than that of Despot, and installed him as lifelong governor of semi-independent principalities: the first extended between Christoupolis and Didymoteichon; then (end 1351/early 1352) this territory devolved to the Palaiologos together with the important city of Ainos, and Matthew received the principality of Adrianople. Considerable efforts had been made by John VI Kantakouzenos and his wife Eirene to establish peace and cooperation between their son and son-in-law: it was in vain. In 1352, civil war broke out once again between these two young quasi-independent lords.¹⁷

In the meantime, John VI was taking precautions to avert any direct attack by his son-in-law against himself. As the young emperor had (or could obtain) the support of the Serbian and Bulgarian rulers, both trying to take advantage of the Byzantine civil wars, Kantakouzenos turned to his traditional allies, the Turks, and invited them for the first time to settle in Europe.

¹⁷ These are well known events described in detail in standard handbooks of Byzantine history, such as the one by G. Ostrogorsky, *Histoire de l'état byzantin* (Paris, 1956) and, in more detail, in the biographies of the involved members of the Kantakouzenos family by D. Nicol, *The Byzantine family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100-1460* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1968).

This happened in 1352, two years before the earthquake that destroyed the walls of Gallipoli.¹⁸ The historian Gregoras informs us that Kantakouzenos always kept a Turkish guard corps in his palace, presumably made up of mercenaries, in spite of the fact that they led a shockingly debauched life and openly insulted the Christian religion. But we can presume that this was a very small corps, because these mercenaries had to be employed (and received their salaries) all year long: this made them very expensive. On the other hand Kantakouzenos could not any more rely upon the Asiatic Turks as he realized: (a) that they had stopped their frequent crossings to Europe, busy as they were with other matters, and (b) that they considered the trip across the straits difficult and dangerous, the sea being under the control of the Christians. So he decided to bring them over for good; he thought that they would constitute his best protection against the Palaiologos and his allies, the Serbs and the Bulgars. He hired selected soldiers from among them (*λογάδας... μισθώσασθαι*), brought them to Europe, together with their women and children, and installed them in some towns of the (Gallipoli) Peninsula (*τῶν ἐν Χερρονήσῳ πόλεων ἐνοικίξει τισίν*); "they had as permanent slaves the poor Greeks of the place, as this desire of theirs was now supported by the emperor's authorisation."¹⁹ In another passage referring to the same events, Gregoras says that Kantakouzenos had installed the Turks in one fortified town [presumably Tzympe], from where they managed to lay waste the whole countryside of the Peninsula. At a moment which is not indicated here, the son of Orchan himself, the famous Süleyman Pasha, joined them. When the earthquake of 1354 gave them the opportunity, they took the big cities, including Gallipoli, brought over many new immigrants from Asia Minor and extended their raids all over Thrace, up to the gates of Constantinople.²⁰

This is the story given by Nikephoros Gregoras. John Kantakouzenos does not say how the Turks came to Europe. But while narrating, in much more detail, the events of summer 1352, he tells us that John V Palaiologos moved against Matthew Kantakouzenos in Adrianople. For this operation he took as allies the Turks who had "then for the first time" occupied the fortress of Tzympe.²¹ This operation of the Palaiologos was very successful at the beginning: the people of the Thracian cities sided with him and Adrianople opened its doors. Matthew took refuge in the acropolis. John VI Kantakouzenos, abandoned by the Turks that he had brought to Tzympe, turned again to sultan Orchan; his Constantinopolitan army together with Ottoman reinforcements, allowed him to relieve his son. The Turks of Tzympe changed sides.²² The

¹⁸Nicephori Gregorae, *Historiae byzantinae libri postremi*, Bonn ed., III, 224.

¹⁹Ibid., 203.

²⁰Nicephori Gregorae, 224.

²¹Ioannis Cantacuzeni, *Historiarum libri IV*, Bonn ed., III, 242.

²²Ibid., 244.

victorious Kantakouzenos unleashed his allies to plunder the rebel Greek populations, while the Palaiologos was taking refuge in Tzernomianon (Çirmen) and then in Didymoteichon. New operations against Matthew, that he undertook with the support of the Serbs and the Bulgarians, ended in another catastrophe because of the massive intervention of the Ottomans, under the command of Süleyman Pasha, the son of Orchan. This was in late summer-early fall 1352.²³

When these operations ended, the Ottoman army plundered Bulgaria and then returned to Asia Minor. But Süleyman decided to move with the Turks of Tzympe.²⁴ John V had already tried to attract him to his side with gifts and promises, and Süleyman had adopted an ambiguous attitude, establishing friendly relations with the Palaiologos while keeping the Kantakouzenos informed about all this.²⁵ In this context of uncertainty, the latter decided to crown his own son Matthew as co-emperor (spring 1353) and started having second thoughts about the Turks of Tzympe: experience had shown that they were unreliable and could be openly disloyal.

Kantakouzenos declares that he felt unable to fight them away, because they were very powerful and the Byzantine army was weakened by the civil strife. We shall see below that the Turks could not have numbered more than a few hundreds of soldiers, but even such numbers might appear awesome in the eyes of a weak and disorganised Byzantine army. Moreover, the Turks could always bring reinforcements from Asia Minor. So, John VI asked for the intervention of the Ottoman sultan Orchan, who agreed to the principle of returning Tzympe but added that the fortress was held by his son Süleyman and that it would only be fair if he was given a compensation for abandoning it.²⁶ A deal was struck providing for the payment of 10,000 *hyperpyra*, that Kantakouzenos sent to Proussa; in response, the Ottomans sent over to Europe emissaries who were supposed to deliver Tzympe. By then Süleyman had already left and was in Asia Minor.

At that very moment, on the 1-2 March 1354, the famous earthquake occurred; Süleyman was in Pege, on the Asiatic side of the Hellespont. As soon as he was informed of the events, he "ignored his promise concerning Tzympe," organized a massive transfer of Turks with their families from Asia Minor to Europe and took firm hold of the destroyed and abandoned fortresses, which he

²³Nicephori Gregorae, 171.

²⁴Nicephori Gregorae, 203: the son of Orchan crossed the Hellespontos (to Europe) as if it were his colony or ancestral land, and decided to live with the Turks who had come there shortly before. It is important to stress here that Tzympe was given to (not conquered by) Turks other than the ones who campaigned with Süleyman Pasha in 1352 (as is assumed by some historians), and that Süleyman came and joined them *post factum*.

²⁵Ioannis Cantacuzeni, 250, 266.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 277.

repaired and provided with garrisons. To Kantakouzenos' protests, he answered that he did not take these cities by force but occupied them while they were deserted. New negotiations with Orchan, and a new offer of 40,000 gold coins resulted in an agreement that was never implemented, as Orchan temporised.²⁷ Then Kantakouzenos fell from power (November 1354). The agreement ceased to exist.

From that moment on, the Ottomans proceeded on their own to the conquest of Thrace: they raided the territory and exacted taxes from all cities, where they installed their own agents called *dekadarchoi* and *epitropoi*.²⁸ The archaic word *epitropos* means the "trustee", the "administrator": this was obviously the person in charge of collecting and forwarding the taxes.

The term *dekadarchos* is less common. It means the commander of ten, and I assume that this is the translation of the Turkish *onbaşı*, the head of a platoon of ten that was installed inside each city or fortress to maintain order—and, maybe, as a token military presence in the city. The term reappears only once again, as far as I know, in an Athonite document issued during the first Ottoman occupation of the monastic peninsula (1395). Among those present at the council of Karyes, there is a certain Michael *dekarchos* (*Μιχαήλ δέκαρχος*), a christian layman, who seems to wield a certain authority in the monastic community.²⁹ I now think, thanks to the passage of Gregoras, that he was at the head of a local police force, installed on Mount Athos with the Turkish conquest. The fact that he was a Christian should not surprise, as many Christians are attested in the 14th and 15th century Ottoman military—not to speak of the privileges that the Athonites had received from the Ottomans.³⁰

There are two phases that can be easily distinguished in this story. The first, 1352-1354, is of particular interest to us. The second starts with the occupation of Gallipoli in 1354.

The first phase, as described by Gregoras, brings to mind a contract of feudal character. It is obvious that the Turks who first came, invited by Kantakouzenos, were receiving a remuneration for staying on Byzantine territory at the disposal of the emperor, but this was not a salary in cash. As it is said that they had as "slaves" the Greek inhabitants of the region, and this with the emperor's approval, one has to understand that the Turks had come as a company of fortune, that drew its revenues from these inhabitants—in other words, that

²⁷Ioannis Cantacuzeni, 278-281.

²⁸Nicephori Gregorae, 224.

²⁹*Actes de Dionysiou*, ed. N. Oikonomides (Paris 1968), no. 8, l. 22, 28, and commentary, p. 75.

³⁰Cf. my "Monastères et moines lors de la conquête ottomane," *Südost-Forschungen* 35 (1976) 1-10.

they were similar to *pronoiai*oi, to whom *oikonomiai* had been granted collectively rather than individually. This practice is known in 14th century Byzantium: see for example the clear-cut case of the company (*συντροφία*, i. e. business association) of the Barbarenoi soldiers and several others which are less well known but which must have been very similar so far as the financial arrangements were concerned. It is conceivable—but cannot be proved—that Kantakouzenos may have granted to the Turks some rights over their booty and their prisoners.³¹

The existence of a feudal arrangement is confirmed by Orchan's reaction when Kantakouzenos demanded that Tzympe be returned to him. The sultan put forth that his son Süleyman, who had possession of Tzympe, was entitled to a compensation for leaving it—consequently, Süleyman and his men were not mercenaries but had revenues proceeding from the city and its inhabitants, and these revenues were officially recognised, since Kantakouzenos had granted them. Hence he proposed to "buy them back" by paying the 10,000 *hyperpyra*. This amount, which must presumably correspond to the regular revenue of the company for more than one year shows that the number of the Turks at Tzympe was not very big. We know of no 14th century Byzantine soldier that would be earning less than 10 *hyperpyra* a year—almost certainly they earned considerably more—and a regular *pronoia*ios earned 70-80 *hyp.* a year. Of course we do not know if this scale was also applied to the Turks. But anyway it provides an order of magnitude and allows us to conclude that the Tzympe Turks could hardly have numbered more than five hundred—most probably they were considerably less numerous.

In this first phase the Turks of Tzympe acted as soldiers of fortune, who, like so many others at that time, often behaved in the manner of brigands. N. Iorga compared them to the military colony of Saracens that Frederic II installed in Lucera.³² They raided their neighbourhood—not the lands given to them—according to their custom, and accepted jobs on the side, such as participating to John V's campaign against Matthew Kantakouzenos. In doing this, they were not, technically, breaking their contract with John Kantakouzenos, as they did not turn against him but against another quasi-independent lord (who happened to be his son). Being soldiers of fortune, they switched sides when things turned sour and when they saw in front of them their compatriots from Bithynia. But when things settled after 1352, Süleyman joined them. Their venture did not change character, only its ambitions increased. And Süleyman adopted the same attitude of limited loyalty to his employer, remaining open to other proposals,

³¹I have examined these various forms of hiring of soldiers in: "A propos des armées des premiers Paléologues et des compagnies de soldats", *Travaux et Mémoires* 8 (1981) [Hommage à M. Paul Lemerle] 353-371.

³²N. Iorga, *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches* I (Gotha, 1908) 194.

such as the ones of John Palaiologos. This caused the mistrust of Kantakouzenos and his desire to get rid of this cumbersome soldier of fortune.

The second phase, after March 1354, came with the capture of Gallipoli. Now the conditions changed completely. As there was no agreement at the beginning, Süleyman and his men considered themselves as beneficiaries of a windfall. Kantakouzenos' offer for these newly taken cities was much smaller than the offer for Tzympe (10,000 *hyp.* for one town, Tzympe, and 40,000 for the whole peninsula, including the major city and famous port of Gallipoli), obviously because he considered this as a pay-off, not as buying back an obligation of his. But especially after Kantakouzenos' fall, the scenery had completely changed. The real gaza had started in Europe, in the name of the Ottoman state. The time of the soldiers of fortune—or, at least, the time of the soldiers of fortune in the service of the Byzantines—was over. From this moment onwards the Turks were applying the classical Ottoman methods of conquest. This second phase was executed according to the rules and conformed with state ideology. Very naturally it expunged from the collective memory the not-so-proud beginnings of the Ottoman installation in Europe.

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