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MEHMED II, “THE CONQUEROR”, IN BYZANTINE SHORT CHRONICLES AND OLD SERBIAN ANNALS, INSCRIPTIONS, AND GENEALOGIES*

This article analyzes how Byzantine Short Chronicles and Old Serbian Annals, Inscriptions, and Genealogies depicted sultan Mehmed II, “The Conqueror”. These sources are similar in character, as a genre belong to medieval popular literature, and reflect in its peculiar way the “public opinion” of the Byzantines and the Serbs, two of the conquered nations under the Ottoman rule. The sultan was in narrow focus of anonymous chronicle writers who, concisely and precisely, recorded important events of his life, above all his military successes. On rare occasions they dared enter next to his name negative qualifications, even outright rude insults. However, painfully aware in whose empire they all lived, they sometimes used the years of Mehmed’s rule to date personal events in their own lives.

The Ottoman sultan Mehmed II (1451–1481) was one of the most powerful and controversial rulers of the Late Middle Ages. His passion for war and thirst for conquest defined his character above anything else.¹ Mehmed was only 21 when, in 1453, he captured Constantinople and brought an end to the Byzantine Empire. He was known as “The Conqueror” ever since. A series of subsequent victories made him one of history’s greatest military commanders. Contemporary Greek writers had ambiguous attitude towards Mehmed. Some, like George Amiratzes, considered him a new “emperor of the Romans”, while others, like Doukas, viewed the sultan as a consummate *tyrannos* at best, and Antichrist at worst. On the other hand, Kritoboulos highly praised Mehmed for his personal

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¹ F. Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer und seine Zeit. Weltenstürmer einer Zeitenwende*, München 1953, 7–8; Istorija Osmanskog carstva, priredio R. Mantran, prev. E. Miljković-Bojanić, Beograd 2002, 93.

qualities (justice, generosity, courage) as well as for his patronage of trade, craftsmanship, and building activity.²

It will be interesting to see how Mehmed II was perceived among the populace of two Orthodox Christian nations which he had destroyed, Byzantium and Serbia. Historical sources at our disposal are the Byzantine Short Chronicles and Old Serbian Annals and Marginalia. They are similar in character and reflect, if we can say so, the “public opinion” of the conquered Christians under the Ottoman rule. As a source they are very different from contemporary historical works written by learned intellectuals. Byzantine Short Chronicles make a very peculiar type of sources, for the history of both Byzantium and surrounding Orthodox nations, and not only for the last two centuries of the Empire, but also for the post Byzantine period.³ They consist of mostly brief notes, written in vernacular Greek, which offer concise, even dry, information about important events. Around hundred and twenty chronicles have been preserved and they proved to be very useful for the process of quantification and statistical analysis. Short Chronicles as a genre belong to medieval popular literature. Almost without exception they were written in major monastic centers or in their vicinity, which indicates that they represented a *post festum* reasoning about the role of eastern and western Christians in defense of the Balkans and Byzantium against the Turks. They do not reflect only viewpoints of the church hierarchy, political, and intellectual elite, but also attitudes of wider social strata in the postbyzantine society, from which monks scribes were recruited. Geographically, the Short Chronicles were focused on Eastern Mediterranean, and were written in great monastic communities of Mount Athos and the island of Patmos, but also in Thessaloniki, Constantinople, and other centers of Orthodoxy in the former Byzantine oikoumene.⁴

The Short Chronicles first mentioned Mehmed II in 1451 when he ascended the Ottoman throne after the death of his father sultan Murat (1421–1451). This was noted in five chronicles.⁵ The writers of chronicles used several terms for Ottoman sultans — master (αὐθέντης), great master, great emir, egzarch, sultan. Moreover, Mehmed is occasionally called basileus, which was the title for centu-

² The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, ed. A. P. Kazhdan, II, New York — Oxford 1991, 1331 (S. W. Reinert)

³ Z. Samodurova, K voprosu o malyh vizantijskych hronikah, Vizantijskij vremennik 21 (1962) 127–147; P. Schreiner, Studien zu Βραχέα χρονικά, Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia 6, München 1967; Z. Samodurova, Grečeskie rukopisi, soderžaščie malye vizantijskie hroniki, Vizantijskij vremennik 36 (1974) 139–144; B. Ferjančič, Vesti Kratkih hronika o srpskoj srednjovekovnoj istoriji, Glas Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti 338, Odeljenje istorijskih nauka, knj. 3, Beograd 1983, 145–172; R. Radić, Vesti Kratkih hronika o istoriji naroda Jugoslavije u XVI veku, Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta 26 (1987) 217–236.

⁴ R. Radić, Τα Βραχέα χρονικά ως πηγή της ιστορίας του 16ου αιώνα. Γενικές παρατηρήσεις, Byzantinos Domos 5–6 (1991–1992) 13–24.

⁵ P. Schreiner, Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken, I, Wien 1975, 270, № 18; 382, № 21; 390, № 16; 539, № 66 (=Schreiner, Kleinchroniken); P. Schreiner, Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken, III (Teilübersetzungen, Addenda et Corrigenda, Indices), Wien 1979, 160, № 30 (=Schreiner, Kleinchroniken, III). Cf. P. Schreiner, Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken, II (Historischer Kommentar), Wien 1977, 478–479 (=Schreiner, Kommentar).

ries reserved exclusively for the rulers of Byzantium. Evidently, its exclusiveness had become superfluous in the fifteenth century. Besides, Mehmed II did rule over territories of the former empire. Five chronicles recorded under the same 1451 that the Ottomans undertook a military campaign against Karaman, but sultan Mehmed was not mentioned explicitly.⁶ Under year 1452 we find a notice about the construction of the Rumeli Hissar fortress in six chronicles.⁷ In one of them Mehmed II was called "impious son of Murat." The greatest military achievement of Mehmed II, the capture of Constantinople, was echoed in forty two Short Chronicles.⁸ Those are only short descriptions of the event, without any comments about the young sultan, sometimes even without mentioning his name.

Generally, Byzantine Short Chronicles mentioned Mehmed II the Conqueror very often, especially those known as the Chronicles of Turkish conquests, in fact so often that he might be considered as one of the Chronicles' heroes. However, almost without exception those entries did not amount to more than a dry listing of his great military campaigns and conquests. Such a narrative does not reveal any personal and emotional attitude of the Short Chronicles authors towards the sultan. In one Short Chronicle such a narrative comes under a specific title: "Campaigns which sultan Mehmed undertook" (Τὰ σεφέρια ὅποῦ ἔκαμεν ὁ σουλτάν Μεμετή).⁹

When analyzed and classified the entries about the military campaigns of Mehmed II make a long list where victories are a rule, while defeats, rare indeed, are an exception. If we read the Chronicles chronologically, under the following 1454, three manuscripts registered the Turkish attack against the Serbian capital of Smederevo.¹⁰ The fall of Enos in Thrace, in January of 1456, was mentioned in four chronicles,¹¹ the fall of Thebes in June of the same year in two.¹² Three manuscripts reported about one of Mehmed's rare unsuccessful campaigns — his defeat under the ramparts of Belgrade in 1456.¹³ Even those notices are very brief, without any trace of triumph because of the Ottoman defeat.

⁶ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 453, № 18; 474, № 6; 495, № 7; 535, № 41; 544, № 13. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 479.

⁷ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 100, № 53; 188, № 49; 252 № 52; 474, № 7; 535, № 42; 544, № 11. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 480.

⁸ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 100, № 54; 155, № 107; 188, № 50; 250, № 40, № 53; 270–271, № 20–21; 293, № 19; 299, № 7; 305, № 12; 314, № 4; 369, № 17; 370, № 4; 382, № 22; 390, № 17; 399, № 14; 407, № 1; 419, № 9; 436, № 1; 453, № 19; 459, № 8; 462, № 8; 474, № 8; 495, № 8; 502, № 3; 517, № 4; 521, № 3; 529, № 5; 545, № 14; 552, № 3; 568, № 3; 572, № 4; 575, № 2; 577, № 1; 625, № 5; 632, № 10; 640, № 11; 650, № 3; 654, № 6; 656, № 4; 664, № 2, n. 2; 684, № 1; *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, III, 160, № 31. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 481–482.

⁹ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 535.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 475, № 10; 535, № 44; *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, III, 160, № 32. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 483–484.

¹¹ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 474, № 9; 535, № 43; 545, № 15; 580, № 1. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 487–488.

¹² *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 545, № 17; 580, № 3. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 489–490.

¹³ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 475, № 11; 545, 19; *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, III, 161, № 35. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 490.

The campaign against Morea in 1458, when the Turks took the cities of Patras, Mouhlin and Corinth, was registered in sixteen Short Chronicles.¹⁴ Two manuscripts reported an unsuccessful attack against the city of Jajce in Bosnia in 1459.¹⁵ An exceptionally important event was the Ottoman capture of Peloponessos, which was recorded in twenty seven Chronicles under year 1460.¹⁶ That was followed by events of the fall of 1460 and spring of 1461, such as the capture of Amastris, Sinope, and Castamon,¹⁷ as well as campaign against Uzun Hasan in July of 1461.¹⁸ The fall of Trebizont in summer of 1461 was echoed by thirteen chronicles.¹⁹ Anonymous compilers of Short Chronicles dutifully registered sultan's campaign against Vlad Dracula in 1462.²⁰

Year after year Short Chronicles registered the Conqueror's military expeditions: the capture of Lesbos in 1462,²¹ found in ten manuscripts, conflict with Venice for the city of Argos in Peloponessos,²² the fall of Bosnia and the city of Jajce in 1463,²³ as well as the recapture of Hexamilion in November of 1463.²⁴ After those notices a campaign in Albania was registered under 1466,²⁵ followed by a military action against Karaman in 1468.²⁶ The capture of Eubea (Evripos, Negropont) in July 1470 was recorded in fourty three Short chronicles.²⁷

¹⁴ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 254, № 58; 273, № 23; 293–294, № 21–22; 314, № 6; 400, № 16; 407, № 5; 420, № 10; 453, № 22; 475, № 12; 530, № 13; 545, № 20; 547, № 32; 566, № 5; 580–581 № 8; 670, № 17; *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, III, 161, № 39. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 492–493.

¹⁵ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 476, № 15; 545, № 21. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 494–495.

¹⁶ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 188, № 51; 254, № 59; 274, № 25; 294, № 23; 299, № 8; 305, № 13; 383, № 23; 390, № 18; 400, № 19; 408, № 7; 420, № 13; 440, № 21; 453, № 23; 475, № 14; 495 № 9; 503, № 4; 513, № 4; 517 № 5; 521, № 4; 530, № 13; 536, № 45; 546, № 22; 566, № 6; 572 № 5; 575, № 3; 577, № 2; 581, № 9. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 496–497.

¹⁷ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 476, № 16; 536, № 46; 546, № 24, № 29; 577, № 3; 581, № 11–12. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 496–497.

¹⁸ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 476, № 17; 536, № 47; 546, № 23. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 499.

¹⁹ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 275, № 28; 400, № 20; 408, № 12; 421, № 14; 440, № 22; 453, № 24; 476, № 18; 531, № 14; 536, № 48; 546, № 24; 552, № 4; 566, № 7; 573, № 7; 577, № 3. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 499–500.

²⁰ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 476, № 19; 536, № 49; 546, № 25; 685, № 1. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 501.

²¹ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 305, № 14; 400, № 21; 408, № 8; 421, № 16; 476, № 20; 533, № 29; 536, № 50; 546, № 26; 566, № 8; 581, № 10; 685, № 2. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 502–503.

²² *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 254, № 60; 370, № 1; 421, № 15; 580, № 6; 684, № 2. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 503–504.

²³ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 453, № 25; 477, № 21; 536, № 51; 578, № 4. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 504–505.

²⁴ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 300, № 9; 304, № 11. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 507–508.

²⁵ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 477, № 22; 495, № 10; 531, № 18. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 509.

²⁶ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 477, № 23; 536, № 52; *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, III, 161, № 43. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 512.

²⁷ *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, 250, № 42; 255, № 65 (opet τζαλαπης); 277, № 33; 294, № 25; 300, № 11; 305, № 16; 315, № 9; 383, № 24; 390, № 19; 401, № 22; 407, № 4; 421, № 17; 436, № 2; 454, № 26; 459, № 9; 463, № 12; 477, № 24; 495, № 11; 503, № 5; 517, № 6; 521, № 5; 530, № 12; 538, № 64; 546, № 28; 552, № 5; 568, № 4; 569, № 3; 573, № 8; 576, № 5; 581–582, № 14; 656, № 8; 670, № 18; *Schreiner*, Kleinchroniken, III, 152, № 11; 162, № 44. Cf. *Schreiner*, Kommentar, 512–513.

During the third decade of his rule Mehmed II the Conqueror remained very active on the battlefield. He led a campaign against Uzun Hasan in 1472 and 1473.²⁸ The fall of Kafa in June of 1475 was registered in eighteen Short chronicles.²⁹ In 1476 he led his troops against Valachia and Hungary.³⁰ A peace treaty with Venice was signed in January of 1479.³¹ The Ionian isles of Leukada, Kephallonia, Zakynthos, and Ithaca were taken that same year.³² Turkish attack on the island of Rhodes in 1480 was not successful,³³ but the city of Otranto was captured that year.³⁴

Three Short chronicles contained a list of Ottoman sultans, with years of their rule. According to them Mehmed II the Conqueror ruled for thirty one years.³⁵ In one of those Chronicles it was noted that he took Constantinople from Constantine Palaeologos. The notice is followed by a lament, in a personal and depressing mood: "Woe and alas, because of lawlessness and broken oaths by masters and us all who defy Lord's patience."³⁶

Mehmed II the Conqueror died on May 3, 1481 — and the date of his death was registered in twenty one Short chronicles.³⁷ The notices are brief, offering the precise date and place of his death. There is only one exception: "In year 6989 (=1481) emir Mehmed died, a wild wolf and a cruel beast."³⁸ That particular Chronicle has only eight notes and is characterized by its monotone and subdued mood. It registered deaths of some Orthodox spiritual men, the destruction of Hexamilion, the fall of Nicea, the Turkish captures of Thessaloniki and Constantinople. It seems that in the brief notice about the death of Mehmed II the anonymous author vented out his powerless anger and suppressed rage against the Otto-

²⁸ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 477, № 25; 573, № 9; *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, III, 162, № 45. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 515–516.

²⁹ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 278, № 38; 300, № 12; 305, № 17; 383, № 25; 390, № 20; 401, № 25; 408, № 9; 421, № 18; 436, № 3; 454, № 28; 477, № 26; 495, № 12; 533, № 30; 546, № 29; 566, № 9; 570, № 2; 573, № 11; 581, № 13. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 517–518.

³⁰ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 478, № 27; 537, № 53; 547, № 30. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 518.

³¹ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 250, № 43, 256, № 69; 294, № 27; 315, № 10; 370, № 2; 401, № 24; 454, № 27; 503, № 6; 514, № 7; 518, № 7; 521, № 6; 556, № 9; 573, № 13; 582, № 15. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 519–520.

³² *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 315, № 11; 383, № 27; 390, № 22; 422, № 22; 514, № 8; 531, № 16; 547, № 33; 556, № 10; 576, № 6; *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, III, 152, № 12; 162, № 49. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 520–521.

³³ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 514, № 10; 518, № 9; 547, № 34. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 521–522.

³⁴ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 341, № 2; 514, № 9; 518, № 8; 547, № 36; 556, № 10; *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, III, 152, № 14. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 522.

³⁵ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 472, 494, 552.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 472.

³⁷ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 278, № 39; 315, № 12; 383, № 28; 390, № 23; 401, № 26; 421, № 19; 437, № 4; 463, № 13; 478, № 29; 503, № 7; 514, № 11; 518, № 10; 521, № 7; 533, № 34; 547, № 35; 556, № 11; 574, № 14; 582, № 16; *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, III, 152, № 15; 162, № 50. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 523.

³⁸ *Schreiner*, *Kleinchroniken*, 654, № 7. Cf. *Schreiner*, *Kommentar*, 523.

man sultan. Mehmed II conquered numerous Christian nations and cities and inflicted much harm and misery to Orthodox population. The anonymous author must have felt certain relief that the horrible sultan was finally dead. This notice, so different from tens of others about Mehmed II the Conqueror in the Short Chronicles, nevertheless, clearly reflects feelings of the Christian population towards the Ottoman empire and its rulers. Finally, one Short Chronicle registered the sultan's funeral.³⁹

Old Serbian Annals are the principal source for the history of Serbian encounters with the Ottoman Turks. The annals were a specific genre of medieval Serbian literature, in principle very similar to Byzantine Short Chronicles.⁴⁰ They were written in the middle of the fourteenth century, strongly influenced by the Chronicle of George Hamartolos. Among the Slavs, this historical work was first translated in Russia, and then in Bulgaria.⁴¹ Serbian translation was made in 1347/1348, on Mount Athos, where the Serbian emperor Stefan Dušan (1331–1355) ordered the Chronicle to be copied in a Serbian redaction.⁴² Annals are literary works in which notices are arranged chronologically, based on years after the creation of the world. The notices briefly describe rules of various rulers, important battles, foundation of monasteries, unusual natural phenomena or disasters. Authors of Serbian annals collected their information from saints lives, genealogies, and marginalia in old manuscripts, but they recorded contemporary events in Serbian history as eyewitnesses or as a contemporary hearsay. Although annals are mainly historical works, there are sections, especially in later manuscripts, which with their rich vocabulary and literary style testify to the artistic aspirations of their authors.⁴³ Based on the date of their compilation Serbian annals are divided in two groups: the older and the younger.⁴⁴ Notices about Mehmed II the Conqueror can be found in the younger annals, written in the sixteenth century.

On the other hand, Old Serbian Marginalia are short notices written in manuscripts — in margins, at book ends, on blank folios, or on the inner side of book binds.⁴⁵ Although the earliest can be dated to the second half of the twelfth century, a relatively small number of marginalia were written in medieval times. Their number gradually increased and there are many more preserved from post-

³⁹ Schreiner, *Kleinchroniken*, 464, № 15. Cf. Schreiner, *Kommentar*, 524.

⁴⁰ P. Schreiner, *Die byzantinischen Kleinchroniken und die Annalistik bei den Südslaven*, *Bulgarian Historical Review* VI-2 (1978) 45–53; S. Ćirković, *Srpski letopisi i vizantijske kratke hronike*, *Srpska književnost u doba despotovine*, Naučni skup: Despotovac 22–23. avgust 1997 (Dani srpskoga duhovnog preobraženja V), Despotovac 1998, 101–107.

⁴¹ Rečnik književnih termina, Beograd 1985, 395 (*D. Bogdanović*); *D. Trifunović*, *Azbučnik srpskih srednjovekovnih pojmova*, Beograd 1990², 143–146 (=Trifunović, *Azbučnik*)

⁴² *D. Bogdanović*, *Istorija stare srpske književnosti*, Beograd 1980, 210.

⁴³ *Trifunović*, *Azbučnik*, 143.

⁴⁴ *Lj. Stojanović*, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi*, *Sremski Karlovci* 1927, XXXIII sq. (=Stojanović, *Letopisi*)

⁴⁵ *Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka*, priredili S. Ćirković — R. Mihaljčić, Beograd 1999, 217–219 (*R. Mihaljčić*)

medieval times.⁴⁶ In the period when composing of Serbian hagiographies had siezed the writing of marginalia expressed a need and wish to write down notices about events and keep track of them for posterity lest they are not forgotten. Such notices became a very widely spread method of telling about events especailly after medieval Serbia fell under the Ottoman rule in the fifteenth century. The largest part of twenty thousand marginalia written between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries were recorded during the period of Turkish rule. We can say therefore, that Old Serbian marginalia are above all a genre in Serbian literature of the Turkish period.

Just like in Byzantine Short Chronicles Mehmed II started appearing in the Serbian annals and marginalia from the moment he had ascended the Ottoman throne. With some chronological imprecisions it was recorded there that he took over the Empire, that is, that he became an emperor.⁴⁷ The Karlowitz Genealogy offers a very interesting passage about how empress Mara regained her freedom after the death of sultan Murat, how she cared for the Athonite and other monasteries, and how she appealed to and visited emperor Mehmed who "had loved and honored her".⁴⁸ It was, of course, Mara Branković, daughter of Đurađ Branković and stepmother of Mehmed the Conqueror.⁴⁹ That was followed by notices under subsequent years of his rule: that he had a New city built above Carigrad, and that was Rumeli Hisar,⁵⁰ that he returned Toplica to despot Đurađ Branković,⁵¹ and that he released from captivity Grgur and Stefan, two blind sons of the Serbian despot.⁵²

The fall of Constantinople, naturally, was echoed in Serbian sources. One notice in the Annals briefly states that Mehmed took it, another one that he captured Conastantinople and that "there was tremenduos crying and weeping in the entire land."⁵³ In other notices about Constantinople it was recorded that Mehmed first took over the Emprie and then captured Carigrad.⁵⁴ One other note states that he "crushed" many saints relics.⁵⁵ The Fall of Constantinople was mentioned in the famous Branković Annal, which was translated into Latin.⁵⁶ One note in the old Serbian annals recorded the following: "(Mehmed) charged with many thou-

⁴⁶ Trifunović, Azbučnik, 78–91.

⁴⁷ Stojanović, Letopisi, 236, № 688; 294, № 1174.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 43, № 35.

⁴⁹ R. Ćuk, Carica Mara, Istorijski časopis 35–36 (1978–1979) 53–97; D. M. Nicol, The Byzantine Lady: Ten Portraits, 1250–1500, Cambridge 1994, 110–119

⁵⁰ Stojanović, Letopisi, 236, № 688; 294, № 1175.

⁵¹ Ibid. 236, № 689.

⁵² Ibid. 236, № 690.

⁵³ Lj. Stojanović, Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi, III, Beograd 1905 (reprint 1984), 85, № 5169; 87, № 5194 (=Stojanović, Zapisi, III)

⁵⁴ Stojanović, Letopisi, 116, № 218; 117, № 234; 119, № 252; 119, 261; 332, № 1523; Lj. Stojanović, Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi, VI, Sremski Karlovci 1926 (reprint: Beograd 1988), 86, № 9969 (=Stojanović, Zapisi, VI).

⁵⁵ Stojanović, Letopisi, 236–237, № 691.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 294, № 1176. R. Novaković, Brankovićev letopis, Beograd 1960, 55.

sands of soldiers and holy Carigrad was captured in the year 6961 (=1453), on May 29, on Tuesday. And there was a spill of Greek blood."⁵⁷

The Turkish conquest of Constantinople had become a kind of chronological point of reference for the subjugated Christians of the Ottoman empire. For example, an anonymous author of a notice in a manuscript of Gregorios the Theologian from the Athonite monastery of Xeropotamou, wrote that the manuscript was copied after the capture of Carigrad, when in July of 1454, Mehemed led his troops against the Serbian land.⁵⁸

A series of new events was recorded every year — Mehmed II was very active and organized military expeditions almost annually. Under 1454 the following events were recorded: recapturing of Toplica,⁵⁹ a campaign against Serbia which resulted in ravaging the entire land as far north as the capital Smederevo, as well as the capture of the Ostrovica fortress.⁶⁰ The following year, 1455, Turkish detachments took the city of Novo Brdo and several other cities, like Bihor and Prizren, and the entire region of Sitnica, having cut down many Christians.⁶¹ In 1456, however, sultan Mehmed suffered a major defeat under the ramparts of Belgrade,⁶² and was forced to sign a peace treaty with despot Lazar Branković (1456–1458) in January of 1457.⁶³ That same year, the annals noted, Grgur and Mara Branković, together with their uncle Thomas Kantakouzenos, escaped from the Serbian court and found refuge at the Sublime Porte.⁶⁴ In 1459 Mehmed captured Smederevo and overturned the Serbian kingdom.⁶⁵ The Turks captured Morea the following year.⁶⁶ In 1461 Trebizond was also taken,⁶⁷ and there was another campaign against the Vlachs and their voyvoda Vlad Drakula.⁶⁸ The kingdom of Bosnia was overrun in 1463,⁶⁹ but the sultan was defeated in the battle for the city of Jajce in 1464.⁷⁰

⁵⁷ Đ. Radojičić, *Razvojni luk stare srpske književnosti*, Novi Sad 1962, 150.

⁵⁸ Lj. Stojanović, *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi*, I, Beograd 1903 (reprint 1982), 94, № 307 (=Stojanović, *Zapisi*, I).

⁵⁹ Stojanović, *Letopisi*, 237, № 693.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 237, № 694; 294, № 1177.

⁶¹ Ibid. 122, № 307; 238, № 700; 294, № 1178; 294, № 1181.

⁶² Ibid. 122, № 310; 239, № 705; 294, № 1184.

⁶³ Ibid. 241, № 715.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 241, № 719; 294, № 1191.

⁶⁵ Stojanović, *Zapisi*, III, 87, № 5195; Stojanović, *Letopisi*, 117, № 235; 119, № 263; 244, № 735; 295, № 1200.

⁶⁶ Stojanović, *Zapisi*, III, 88, № 5198; 89, № 5221; Stojanović, *Letopisi*, 120, № 271; 242–243, № 726; 245–246, № 743.

⁶⁷ Stojanović, *Zapisi*, III, 88, № 5199; Stojanović, *Letopisi*, 245, № 739. Cf. R. Radić, *Serbian Sources on the Turkish Conquest of Trebizond in 1461*, *Archeion Pontou* 48 (1996–1997) 121–130.

⁶⁸ Stojanović, *Letopisi*, 245, № 740; 295, № 1202.

⁶⁹ Stojanović, *Zapisi*, III, 85, № 5170; 88, № 5196; Stojanović, *Letopisi*, 246, № 744; 295, № 1204; 332, № 1524.

⁷⁰ Stojanović, *Letopisi*, 120, № 274; 247, Nos 747–749; 295, № 120; Stojanović, *Zapisi*, III, 89, № 5222.

An exceptionally long notice recorded under 1466 that emperor Mehmed exiled to Carigrad the Archbishop of Ohrid Dorotheus, as well as city noblemen.⁷¹ That same year the sultan led a campaign against Skanderbeg, captured the city of Cidna and pillaged Albanians.⁷² The following year, according to notices in Annals, emperor Mehmed waged war against the Alabanians, chased away Skanderbeg, and moved fifteen Christian families from Skoplje to the newly founded city of Konjuh.⁷³ That same 1467 Mehmed led a campaign against Albanians.⁷⁴

For 1468 Serbian Annals recorded that Mehmed attacked Karaman in Asia Minor, and took Gavala and many cities.⁷⁵ A major military success of sultan Mehmed was recorded in 1470 — the capture of the island of Eubea, called Negropont and Egriboz by Serbian scribes.⁷⁶ Sultan's campaign against Uzun Hasan in 1473, was recorded in one marginalis as well as in several notices in Serbian Annals.⁷⁷ In 1474 Mehmed had Mahmud pasha strangled in Carigrad.⁷⁸ The following 1475 was not glorious for the Ottoman sultan — he led his troops in a campaign against the Vlachs and suffered a major defeat by Karabogdan (Bogdan) and had to retreat "in shame."⁷⁹ However, as the fortune of war had it, the following year Mehmed was victorious against Karabogdan.⁸⁰ In that same 1476 Mehmed led his troops to Zeta where he erected the city of Podgorica,⁸¹ and launched yet another campaign against Uzun Hasan.⁸²

One marginal note in the manuscript of Piva monastery psalter recorded a slaughter of Christian nobility, when Janja (John) Kantakouzenos, the master of Novo Brdo, his four sons, and twelve grandsons were executed by the order of tsar Mehmed.⁸³ A notice in Serbian annals described the same event: in 1477 in Constantinople Mehmed had some Kantakouzenoi executed, Janja (John), two brothers of his, and eight sons. Their bodies were taken to Galata and buried there.⁸⁴ That same year, 1477, Mehmed took possession of another important city, Skadar (Scutari). This time he gained control of a city without force — through a peace treaty with Venice, together with several other cities in Venetian Albania.⁸⁵

⁷¹ *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, I, 98–102, № 328–329.

⁷² *Stojanović*, *Letopisi*, 247, № 751; 295, № 1208.

⁷³ *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, I, 102, № 330–331.

⁷⁴ *Stojanović*, *Letopisi*, 248, № 754; 295, № 1209.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 248, № 756; 295, № 1210.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 248, № 759; *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, III, 88, № 5200.

⁷⁷ *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, III, 146, № 5573; *Stojanović*, *Letopisi*, 249, № 765.

⁷⁸ *Stojanović*, *Letopisi*, 249, № 766.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 249–250, № 768.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 250–251, № 772; 296, № 1220.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 251, № 775.

⁸² *Ibid.* 251, № 776.

⁸³ *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, I, 110, № 348.

⁸⁴ *Stojanović*, *Letopisi*, 251, № 778; 296, № 1227. Cf. *K. Jireček*, *Istorija Srba*, II, Beograd 19782, 373; *D. M. Nicol*, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100–1460. A Genealogical and Prosopographical Study*, Washington 1968, 227–228, № 99.

⁸⁵ *Stojanović*, *Letopisi*, 252, № 779; 296, Nos 1230–1231; *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, III, 88, № 5201.

Several marginalia in Serbian annals give lists of the Ottoman rulers, beginning with Osman I (1288–1326) and ending with Suleiman II “The Magnificent” (1520–1566), with the years of their reign. According to them, Mehmed II the Conqueror ruled thirty or thirty one years.⁸⁶ Finally, a great number of marginalia and notices in annals mentioned Mehmed’s death and gave its precise date by year, month, day and weekday.⁸⁷

There is one peculiarity that reveals much about the attitude toward Mehmed II the Conqueror held by Serbian men of letters who compiled annals and wrote marginalia, above all monks and other spiritual leaders. In several marginalia the described events were dated according to years of sultan’s Mehmed rule. In 1473 Vladislav Gramatik, a prominent Serbian intellectual, wrote a note in margins of a slavic manuscript of Orations of John Chrysostomos, recording that he copied the text in the monastery of Virgin Mary in Crna Gora near Skoplje. The method he used to date the compilation of the codex reveals the spirit of the times. Vladislav Gramatik noted that he accomplished the task in the twenty second year of the rule of Mehmed the Conqueror, the same year in which the sultan waged war against Uzun Hasan, and that was 1473.⁸⁸ Using the almost exact formula Vladislav Gramatik noted that he wrote several other books in 1469 and 1479 and dated his work quoting years eighteen and twenty eight of Mehmed’s rule.⁸⁹

Several marginalia which dated events in a similar fashion, using Mehmed’s rule as a chronological point of reference, nevertheless had a clearly negative attitude towards the Ottoman sultan. For example, in a marginal note in the monastery of Holy Trinity near Pljevlja a “sinful priest Stefan,” who in 6984 (=1476) copied Tetraevangelion noted that he completed his work “during the days of evil and ill-natured and insatiable Judas, Mehmed-bey emperor, who rose to Heavens, but will descend to Hell.”⁹⁰ In the year 1478 priest Gavriilo donated a book, in his memory, to the monastery of Saint John in Rila, while Theopahnes was heigoumenos, and in the days of the “ill-named” emperor emir Mehmed.⁹¹ Two other marginalia recorded that they were written during the rule of Mehmed II the Conqueror, one in 1466, the other in 1479. However, sultan’s name was mentioned without any negative epithets.⁹²

And, finally, a note from the annals written at the end of the fifteenth or at the beginning of the sixteenth century, summarized nicely what Mehmed’s Chris-

⁸⁶ *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, III., 83, № 5147; 84, № 5151; 84, № 5153; *Stojanović*, *Letopisi*, 305–307, Nos 1300–1302; 308, № 1306; 308, № 1308; 309, № 1314.

⁸⁷ *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, I, 111, № 350; *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, III, 89, № 5223; *Stojanović*, *Letopisi*, 120, № 275; 252–253, № 781; 296, № 1232.

⁸⁸ *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, III, 146 № 5572; *B. Hristova*, *Opis na rukopisite na Vladislav Gramatik, Veliko T’rnovo* 1996, 60–61. Cf. *R. Radić*, *Manastir Vatoped i Srbija u XV veku, Treća kazivanja o Svetoj Gori*, Beograd 2000, 94–96.

⁸⁹ *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, I, 107, № 335; *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, III, 147, № 5575.

⁹⁰ *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, I, 109, № 341.

⁹¹ *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, III, 146–147, № 5574.

⁹² *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, I, 110, № 346; *Stojanović*, *Zapisi*, III, 145, № 5571.

tian subjects thought of him: "In the year 6989 (=1481), on May 3, across the sea, Mehmed-bey ended his life. And they yelled at him for three days: pay your debts, pay you debts! And thus he spoiled his life. He, being the one of empty wisdom, fought many wars, captured many lands and killed many excellent men. He enslaved innumerable Christians, and made them food for swords. Many years would not suffice to tell it, nor it is possible for a human to do so, only God knows it all. And what can I tell you whether anyone among the ancients was similar to this wrathful one."⁹³

This analysis of testimonies about the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror found in numerous Byzantine Short Chronicles and Old Serbian Annals and marginalia enables us to draw a conclusion that Mehmed-bey attracted impressive attention among the authors of these sources. They all very regularly and precisely, but at the same time, befitting the genre, very concisely, recorded important events in sultan's life, above all those from almost incessant wars Mehmed waged during his thirty year rule. Most commonly it was a monotonous listing of Mehmed's military victories, with occasional defeat here and there. That would testify to a remarkable honesty and impartiality of their writers, primarily Greek and Serbian clergy. In rare instances they did vent out their intolerance and, to say the truth, open hatred for the ruler of the Turks, and showered him with various negative epithets and sometimes very rude insults. At the same time, however, those anonymous writers never forgot that they were subjects of the Empire whose supreme master was Mehmed II the Conqueror, and used the year of his rule to date some events from their personal lives which they recorded. They were all painfully aware that the civilization of their ancestors, both Byzantine and Serbian, seemed to be irreversibly submerged in the murky waters of history, and that the world they lived in was a drastically different one. Nostalgia and uncertain memories of bygone days, weaker with each year under the Turkish rule, which led them to glorify the past as a Golden age, together with the bitter awareness that nothing could be done to reverse history, were the signs of the times in which they were doomed to live their lives.⁹⁴

⁹³ Đ. Sp. *Radovićić*, *Antologija stare srpske književnosti (XI–XVIII veka)*, Beograd 1960, 224.

⁹⁴ This article was produced within the framework of "The Last Century of Byzantium and Serbia" (project № 147022), which is financed by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

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МЕХМЕД II ОСВАЈАЧ У ВИЗАНТИЈСКИМ КРАТКИМ
ХРОНИКАМА И СТАРИМ СРПСКИМ ЛЕТОПИСИМА,
ЗАПИСИМА И РОДОСЛОВИМА

У византијским Кратким хроникама и старим српским летописима, записима и родословима, као врстама народне књижевности, на својеврстан начин се одражавало „јавно мњење“ Византинаца и Срба, покорених народа у Османском царству. Велику пажњу обично непознатих састављача ових историјских извора привукао је султан Мехмед II Освајач. Они веома уредно и прецизно, али и сасвим сажето, у духу жанра којем припадају њихова литеарна остварења, наводе све важне догађаје из султановог живота, пре свега оне који су везани за његова многобројна ратовања која је имао током тридесетогодишње владавине. Најчешће је то монотono набрајање Мехмедових војничких успеха, уз навођење и понеког неуспеха, што казује о приличној објективности писаца, у првом реду грчких и српских духовних лица. У ретким случајевима они су склони да дају одушка својој нетрпељивости, нећемо се огрешити о истину ако кажемо и мржњи према владару Османлија, па га засипају низом негативних оцена и не ретко веома грубим увредама. Истовремено, анонимни писци не губе из вида да су поданици државе на чијем челу се налази управо Мехмед II Освајач, па, уважавајући такав поредак ствари, неке своје приватне догађаје датују тако што их означавају годинама султанове владавине. Они су били болно свесни да је цивилизација којој су припадали њихови преци, било да је реч о византијској или српској средини, чини се неповратно потонула у мутне воде историје и да се налазе у оквиру једног умногome другачијег цивилизацијског модела. Управо су носталгичне и несигурне успомене на некадашњу прошлост, које су временом морале да слабе и да задобијају патину лепих старих времена, као и свест да се ту ништа не може променити, одликовали време и средину у којој су проводили своје животе.