

## Account of the Taking of Constantinople Thomas the Eparch and Joshua Diplovatatzes (?)

Trans. William L. North from the Italian version in A. Pertusi (ed.), *La Caduta di Costantinopoli: Le Testimonianze dei Contemporanei*, Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, Milan: Mondadori Editore 1976, pp. 234-239.

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....and they shall expel from the land the impious people of the pagans and their allies and purify it; then shall there be a good union, and law and justice shall be reestablished in the old way. Amen. Praise, glory, and grace be to the Lord in all the world for ever and ever. Praise be to God the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

First and foremost, we must recall how the great, noble, and most powerful imperial city located in Greek territory and called Constantinople was conquered and taken by the Turkish emperor. This is found written here, and it happened 28 May 1452, that is four days after the feast of St Urban;<sup>1</sup> on the following day, the city of Pera, situated not far from Constantinople, was also seized by the Turks. May the grace of God be with us.

When the old Turkish emperor<sup>2</sup> was on his deathbed, he ordered his son, the present Turkish emperor,<sup>3</sup> not to wage war against the Greeks or against Constantinople, or else he would curse him. To which the son responded: *Even if you wish to curse me, father, I shall begin a war against the emperor of Constantinople the moment you have expired, since, if I defeat him, I will become master of the entire world.* Later on, he began to build a fortress about two German miles from the perimeter, near the city of Fimiän (Phoneus) in the outskirts of Constantinople,<sup>4</sup> and he built it so that it was like a fork, as a challenge to the lordship of Constantinople, in a place where the emperors of Constantinople had their hunting reserve. The citizens of Constantinople, however, were unaware of this and considered it as the building project of a neighbor. When Mehmet realized this, he awaited the beginning of the grain harvest and then killed as many of them as he could take. This was the beginning of the undeclared war. When news reached the emperor of Constantinople that his people had been killed by the Turk, he left the city, found five

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<sup>1</sup> The feast of St Urban (+19 May 233). The Latin church celebrated this feast day on 25 May.

<sup>2</sup> Murad II died in 1451.

<sup>3</sup> Mehmet II.

<sup>4</sup> The fortress of Boghaz-kesen.

hundred Turks and killed three hundred of them. Then, since a massacre had occurred on both sides, the emperor of Constantinople sent an embassy to the Turk to ask him why he had behaved in this way, since he knew that his father had established in writing friendly relations between them. The Turk, however, did not send a reply; he sang and awaited the grape harvest.<sup>5</sup> Then he advanced with fifty thousand men, killed people, uprooted the vines, and blockaded the city. He entrusted the blockade and the fifty thousand men to his feudatory named Czamakpegis and blockaded the city so that no one could enter or leave. Then the Turkish emperor arrived at his city of Adrianople after a march of four days, mobilized another [???) thousand men and returned to the siege. This occurred on the Friday after Easter.<sup>6</sup> The Turkish emperor encamped in front of the Gate called Sauroman (St Romanus) before which he placed his ??? cannons: the projectile of the first cannon had a circumference of twelve spans and those of the other cannons a circumference not much smaller; he deployed them at a distance of ??? steps from the gate. After they had come close to the city, during the night they brought up a war machine with ten thousand men and the cannons behind it; furthermore they made an agreement with the city's artillerymen, who were Genoese, and they slowed their fire. The war machine was square like a house and moved on wheels. The Turks hid inside and began to dig under ground up to the walls of the city; there they constructed a wooden shelter and retreat with openings on the sides through which they shot: scarcely could someone poke his head above the wall before they shot him dead. Later on the Turk moved in front of the Gate called Ventura and there built a wooden tower encased in leather and skins and covered by a net in such a way as to prevent the stones being thrown at them from harming it. Under this tower they began to dig a tunnel which passed under the walls and under the trench around the city until finally reaching the suburbs. After this, they built a kind of house in which they placed their cannon. This structure had a gate facing the city; when they wanted to fire the cannon, the gate was opened. This was how it was done: when the command was given, the gate was opened, and when the shot had been fired, the gate was closed again. In front of another gate called Saligaria (Caligaria), they deployed four cannons, three large ones and one small, and standing behind a tower, they dug five new tunnels in the direction of the city, reinforcing them with beams. But those inside the city had also begun a tunnel in order to get out, and it happened that the two tunnels met: the Turks had with them cannons and other materials, but those from the city started a fire and thus burned many Turks. Later, the Turk occupied the hills above Pera and had great ships brought over them, [two thousand] two hundred galleys and long boats (*fuste*), which were placed on rollers and pulled with oxen and mules followed by armed men. When they reached the top, they were allowed to slide down to the sea, into the water between

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<sup>5</sup> These events occurred between March and September 1452.

<sup>6</sup> These events actually occurred between August 1452 and 5-7 April 1453.

Pera and Constantinople in the middle of the fortified zone. When the Turk then drew near to Pera in the fortified zone, he seized all the boats he could find and bound them to each other so as to form a bridge which permitted the combatants to fight on the water just as they did on land. The Turks had with them thousands of ladders which they placed against the walls, right at the place which they had fired [their cannon] and breached the wall, just as they did at the cemetery of St Sebold. The Genoese handled this breach; they wanted to protect it with their ships because they had so many. In the army of the Turk the order had been given fifteen days before the attack that each soldier would carry a ladder, whether he was fighting on land or sea. There also arrived galleys full of armed men: it seemed that they were Genoese and that they had come to aid the besieged, but in fact they were Turks and they were slipping into the gates. When this was less worrisome and the city seemed secure, there arrived under the flag of the Genoese several ships which repelled the Turks with great losses. At dawn on Monday, 29 May, they began an attack that lasted all night until Tuesday evening (?) and they conquered the city. The commander of the Genoese, who was leading the defense of the breach, pretended to be wounded and abandoned his battle station, taking with him all his people. When the Turks realized this, they slipped in through the breach. When the emperor of the Greeks saw this, he exclaimed in a loud voice: *My God, I have been betrayed!* and he suddenly appeared with his people, exhorting the others to stand firm and defend themselves. But then the gate was opened and the crush of people became such that the emperor himself and his ninety [one thousand??] men were killed by the Turks and the traitors. Afterwards, the Turks ran to the Hagia Sophia, and all those whom they had imprisoned there, they killed in the first heat of rage. Those whom they found later, the bound with a cord around their neck and their hands tied behind their backs and led them out of the city. When the Turk learned that the emperor had been killed in Constantinople, he captured the Grand Duke who was governing in the emperor's stead and had the Grand Duke's son beheaded and then the Grand Duke himself. Then he seized one of the Grand Duke's daughters who was quite beautiful and made her lie on the great altar of Hagia Sophia with a crucifix under her head and then raped her. Then the most brutish of the Turks seized the finest noble women, virgins, and nuns of the city and violated them in the presence of the Greeks and in sacrilege of Christianity. Then they destroyed all the sacred objects and the bodies of the saints and burned everything they found, save for the cross, the nail, and the clothing of Christ: no one knows where these relics ended up, no one has found them. They also wanted to desecrate the image of the Virgin of St Luke by stabbing six hundred people in front of it, one after another, like madmen. Then they took prisoner those who fell into their hands, tied them with a rope around the neck and calculated the value of each one. Women had to redeem themselves with their own bodies, men by fornicating with their hands or some other means. Whoever was able to pay the assessed amount could remain in his faith and whoever refused had

to die. The Turk who had become governor of Constantinople, named Suleiman in German, occupied the temple of Hagia Sophia to practice his faith there. For three days the Turks sacked and pillaged the city, and each kept whatever he found, people and goods, and did with them whatever he wished. The division of the booty took place at Adrianople, four days' march from Constantinople. With Mehmet there was a prince, Helluss Pascha [=Halil Pasha] who had said that he would not succeed in conquering the city: to him the emperor of Turks had said: *If I conquer it, what should I do with you?* and the other replied: *You can cut off my head.* And so he did. The same thing happened to a third (!) Sagamispasschas [=Sagahanos Pasha?], the fourth Sargapaschas [=Sarugia Pasha?], Iberenpaschas [=Ja'qûb Pasha?], Lalapaschas, Beglerpeis, Kadiliischgeris, Jomispegis, Massarexis, Serisager, Gebterbasas, Durchambegis who destroyed some islands within [??] miles, Essebegis, Turagas, Seckirhamssa, Escherkamor, Hassachmat, Jsackwegis, Marthalosch, Afa, and many others.

As for Constantinople, it is so big that it is not possible to travel the circumference of its walls in a whole day, even on riding on horseback. It had [??] soldiers at its disposal, without counting women and children. It had a double wall: a towards the land, one towards the sea. The ring-shaped walls had 1100 gates and enclosed one hundred churches; twenty years ago, however, there will have been two thousand. The church of Hagia Sophia has a perimeter as big as the perimeter of a race course and 463 gates of honor and 6,000,600 and 66 [=6666?] columns that support it; it was built in the name of the wounds of our Lord.

All this was made known by Thomas the Eparch, a count of Constantinople, and Joshua Diplovatatzes. Thutros of Constantinople translated their Greek into "welisch" and Dumita Exswinnilwacz and Matheus Hack of Utrecht translated their welisch into German.