

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58510-1 - Theodore Spandounes: On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors

Edited by Donald M. Nicol

Excerpt

[More information](#)

*On the origin
of the
Ottoman
Emperors*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58510-1 - Theodore Spandounes: On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors

Edited by Donald M. Nicol

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Dedication

To the most serene and invincible prince and lord Henry, by the grace of God Dauphin of France, I beg your humble servant Theodore Spandugnino Cantacusino, patrician of Constantinople. 135

Most serene prince and my lord: All authors, ancient and modern, Greek as well as Latin, strive to treat of matters which are delightful, novel, beneficial and readable by everyone. This my present work, however, may cause the reader to sigh, weep and lament; for its subject is the ruin and total desolation that has for so long been inflicted on my own illustrious and excellent fatherland. Yet, bearing in mind how greatly the Christian religion would benefit if your Majesty would peruse and digest this treatise, I have gladly taken the trouble to record it. The last time that I went to Constantinople, my purpose was to meet again my dearest brother, Alexander. I spent quite a while in those parts, endeavouring to retrieve some of our property which had been sequestered by the Turkish Emperor Bayezid at the time of his war with the Venetian Senate. It was my misfortune to discover that my brother was dead and that our goods were iniquitously confiscated and lost. After some days of grief and mourning, I thought to alleviate my misery and transcend my obsession with the sad fate which had deprived me of all my worldly goods. I made myself investigate with all studiousness and care everything that I could learn about the origins and the deeds of the house of the Ottomans, to see how such people had ascended to such heights and grandeur. I felt qualified by the fact that I had long experience of the country and that I was able to consult two of the nobility who were on most intimate terms with the Emperor of the Turks; they were

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58510-1 - Theodore Spandounes: On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors

Edited by Donald M. Nicol

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Theodore Spandounes

among my closest friends and my relations, men of rare talent and great knowledge of these matters.¹ I was not content merely with a short history of the deeds of the Ottomans, such as one finds in the several annals written by the Turks. I wanted to explore further, giving the matter time and diligence, to present an understanding of the ritual of the court, the dignitaries, ministers and officials of the Turks in times of war and peace, with a general account of their manners, fashions and customs and a commentary on my findings. /

136 It seemed to me that such a study might be of no little value and advantage for those wishing to know more about a principality and empire which is far from humble; for it has indeed become a great power in peace and war, to be numbered among the greatest states and nations, including those of Christendom. I have presented a copy of this study in an abbreviated form to the Pontifex Maximus Leo X in Bologna, and also to the father of your Majesty, the most Christian King Francis ('Francesco').²

In the years since I made this dedication, the last two Emperors of the Turks, Selim and his son Suleiman, who now reigns, have substantially enlarged their dominions. They have subdued Cairo, Egypt and Syria ('Sora'), which belonged to the [Mamluk Sultan] 'Soldano'; part of Mesopotamia, which Selim took by force from 'Sophi', and the land of Anadolu ('Annadoula'); and the present Emperor Suleiman has acquired Belgrade and Rhodes and, like Selim, has added not only to his dominions but also to the numbers of his Janissaries and other troops.³ Wherefore I have now extended my study to include these events; and I have dedicated it to the Most Revd Joan Mattheo di Giberti, secretary of the Pontifex Maximus Clement VII, whom I have been advising in monitoring the progress of the Turks.⁴ Since that dedication, however, the reigning Emperor Suleiman has extended his empire still further. The unfortunate Louis ('Lodovico'), King of Hungary, has died; Suleiman has conquered Persia, taken Baghdad ('Bagdet') and other places and has multiplied

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58510-1 - Theodore Spandounes: On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors

Edited by Donald M. Nicol

Excerpt

[More information](#)*On the origin of the Ottoman Emperors: Dedication*

the ranks of his officials; and, after his recent war with the Signoria of Venice, he is preparing an innumerable force to make war upon the Christians by land and sea. Like a dragon with his gullet wide open, he has no other thought but to devour the Christians.⁵

Yet I note that at the present time the most merciful God has worked through the mediation of His Holiness Pope Paul III who, for all his advanced years, has spared no effort and no energy to do all in his power as a dutiful and zealous pastor of his Christian flock; and he has travelled in person to Nice ('Nizza') and, to his eternal praise and glory, has effected a full accord between the two principal and most exalted princes of Christendom.⁶ Thus has he demonstrated that the Apostolic See is the most holy, pious and divine institution that ever was; and we can now envisage and confidently predict a certain victory, the which Our Lord will promote and accomplish when their sacred proposals are put into effect.

In France and wherever else my aforementioned works are to be found, it is my intention to expand them and bring them to their conclusion once these proposals have been successfully achieved. I shall then send the completed treatise, dedicated and entitled to your Majesty – and a small gift to so great a prince; and in that work you will find faithfully recorded all that has occurred up to the present year 1538, fittingly presented to so deserving a prince in the hope that he will excel all other Christian princes in taking up arms, as did your blessed predecessors – and that you will deign to read it, written though it is in my rude and uncultured style, inasmuch as it is a true and faithful exposition of affairs. / And may God grant your Highness many happy years.

137

I have also composed a new 'operetta' which treats of the origins of the two Kings of Persia, 'Sach Ismael and his son Sach Thamas, commonly known as Sophi'.⁷ The Persians should be considered as powerful counterweights to and enemies of the Turks. I am taking this work with me to Rome to show it to the Pope [Paul III], the main

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58510-1 - Theodore Spandounes: On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors

Edited by Donald M. Nicol

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Notes and commentary to pp. 4–5*

benefactor of myself and of the Greek nation, which was once so outstanding and successful but is now more miserable and down-trodden than any other. It is my hope that the Pope together with the Christian princes will invite the same ‘Sophi’ to co-operate in the holy, pious and glorious campaign against the Turks. I shall append a manuscript copy of this to the end of my treatise on Turkish affairs and send it to your Highness; and you will be the first among Christian princes to read it, as you will also be the first to take up the sword against these people; and you will find that the ruler of the Persians at present called ‘Sophi’ commands an army that conforms in every respect to Christian standards, being quite different from the style and usages of warfare among the Turks. I hope that your Highness will accept the sincere best wishes of one who has your welfare constantly in his mind.

Notes and commentary

- 1 The friends and relations at the Ottoman court to whom Spandounes was indebted for information included Sinan (Ahmed) Pasha Herzegoglou, the brother of Ladislav, Duke (Herzog) of Bosnia. See below, text pp. 160, 170. The other might be Mesih Pasha (Palaiologos) to whom Spandounes claimed to be related through his grandmother. See below, text pp. 164, 176; and above, Introduction, p. xviii.
- 2 Leo X, of the family of Medici, Pope from 1513 to 1521; Francis I, King of France from 1515 to 1547.
- 3 ‘Sophi’ is Ismail I Safavi, Shah of Persia (see below, n. 7). ‘Annadoula’ here means not Anatolia, which Spandounes regularly calls ‘Natalia’, but Cilicia or Lesser Armenia, which Selim I captured from Ismail in 1514–15. See below, text p. 181. Angiolello, *Historia turchesca*, ed. I. Ursu (Bucharest, 1909), p. 153, names the country between Kayseri and Syria as ‘Anadular’.
- 4 Giovanni (Matteo) Giberti was Bishop of Verona from 1524 to 1543. He was sent to Venice as legate of Pope Clement VII (1523–34). K. M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 1976–84), III, pp. 223, 225, 356.
- 5 Louis II Jagiellon, son of Ladislav, King of Hungary, was killed at the battle of Mohacs in 1526. See below, text pp. 189–90.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58510-1 - Theodore Spandounes: On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors

Edited by Donald M. Nicol

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Notes and commentary to p. 5

- 6 Pope Paul III (1534–49) engineered a peace settlement between the Emperor Charles V and Francis I of France at Nice in July 1538. See below, text p. 201.
- 7 Ismail I Safavi was Shah of Persia from 1502 to 1524. His son Tahmasp ('Thamas' or 'Tomas') succeeded him in 1524. See below, text pp. 160 and n. 78, 177 and n. 129. Spandounes's 'operetta' on the Persian Kings is printed in Spandounes, ed. Sathas, pp. 252–61. See below, text part III.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58510-1 - Theodore Spandounes: On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors

Edited by Donald M. Nicol

Excerpt

[More information](#)

I

Having with the utmost diligence and care searched the historians of the Turks who treat of the origin of the mighty house of the Ottomans, I have found so far as I can see that they are descended from shepherds of Tartary of the race of one called Ogus. It is said that in the reign of the Sultan Aladin [Alaeddin Kayqobad], who was lord of various places and of Konya ('Cogno'), a district lying between Caramania and the land of the Persians, a number of families of Tartars came to live on his territory, among them that of Ottoman. This lord Aladin fought a great war with the Emperor of Constantinople Alexios Komnenos ('Alessio Comgnino'); and one of his warriors was a most valiant Greek knight who vanquished all that fought with him in single combat. Among those whom he defeated and killed was one most courageous man, a great favourite of the said Aladin. He, being much distressed, turned to his knights and said: 'Which of you will take on this Christian man who has already killed so many of my men and among them my favourite?' None could be found willing to do battle with this valiant Greek because of his proven prowess. But one of the descendants of the shepherd race of Ogus came forward, a man of peasant stock and of such lowly estate that none of the Turkish writers give him any other name but Pazzo, the fool. He in great excitement exclaimed: 'My lord, I will take revenge on this Christian for his murder of so many brave men.' The lord [Aladin] turned to his colleagues in arms and said: 'How strange it is that from so many warriors I can find no one but a rustic idiot prepared to go to his death to wreak my vengeance.' The peasant said: 'Let me do it, my lord, for I care little how many men he

138

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58510-1 - Theodore Spandounes: On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors

Edited by Donald M. Nicol

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Theodore Spandounes

has already sent to their death.’ With some difficulty he obtained permission, presented himself for battle and in single combat worsted and killed the Greek knight; and as a reward for his victory the lord Aladino gave him the place called Ottomanzich, from which his descendants took their family name of Ottomans.

139 His exploit brought this Turk much fame, so that most of those who were in Tartaria together with many others came to the said Ottomanzich to live. It was his wish that they should share everything in common, which made it easier for him to assemble crowds of people around him and greatly to enlarge his territory. In prophetic anticipation of the future ruin of the Christians / he and his small band of men used the opportunity of a period of truce to burn and plunder a number of the surrounding villages, among them one which was called in Greek ‘Dimbos’, which in Turkish means ‘breaking of faith’; and in truth his later successors gave substance to this presage.

When the lord Aladino heard of this, he sent one of his ministers to bring the man to his presence as a wrongdoer, because he had violated the prevailing truce. The minister could not find him because he had gone pirating again and captured a village called Sar. When he got back with his booty he learnt that the lord Aladino was much displeased about his pillage of Dimbos and had sent for him. So he decided to go with the booty which he had amassed in his house to present it to Aladino and make his voluntary submission. This he did, and the lord absolved him of the crime that he had committed and commanded him not to molest his neighbours any more. Agreement was reached between them and the lord let him keep the male children of the said village of Sar. It was from them that the name of Janissaries originated, which in Turkish means ‘the young men of Sar’. There is no further record of the achievements of this man. The common opinion of the Turkish historians is that he was poisoned by the lord Aladino. Of his house no other memorable deed is recorded in the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58510-1 - Theodore Spandounes: On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors

Edited by Donald M. Nicol

Excerpt

[More information](#)*On the origin of the Ottoman Emperors: I*

long period before the appearance of Ottomano as the first Emperor of the Turks.

The unconquered conqueror of Constantinople, Mehmed II ('Mahometh Ottomano'), would surely never have had people believe that his family were descended from shepherds who came from Tartary, as the Turkish historians say. He believed that they derived their origins from the Emperor of Constantinople, Komnenos ('Comnigno'). It was said that, during the wars between the Emperor and the lord Aladino, the Emperor was joined by a courageous knight from the west ('Ponente'). He fought so brilliantly in one feat of arms that the Emperor ordered one of his own nephews called Isaac to dismount from his horse and give it to the western lord ('Ponentino'). Isaac took great umbrage at this, went over to the Sultan Aladino, abjured his faith and became a Mahometan. Aladino gave him his daughter in marriage together with some estates and villages, among them that of Ottomanzich. The Sultan Mehmed believed that this Ottomano, of whom and of whose successors we shall speak later, was descended from Isaac. Yet others, Christian writers, have not clarified the matter by their various and diverse accounts of the origin of the Ottoman house. For my part, I incline to give credence to the Turkish historians who, as we have related, say that it was descended from that humble peasant among the shepherds of Tartary of the race of Ogus who slew the Greek knight. But that is enough about the beginnings of the house of the Ottomani.

The strength and power of the Ottomans increased largely as a consequence of the discord and disunity between the Greek and Latin Christians. For more than 700 years there was no disagreement between them in the church universal. But the influence of the Emperors in Constantinople began to decline; and they had always wanted to intervene in the election of the Popes. / The Supreme Pontiffs decreed that their election should be a matter for the clergy alone and quite properly drew up a constitution to that effect. Then

140

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-58510-1 - Theodore Spandounes: On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors

Edited by Donald M. Nicol

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Theodore Spandounes

they altered their rites and as a result neither side could comprehend the other and they took to speaking ill of each other. The Patriarchs of Constantinople refused any more to obey the Popes and encouraged their ignorant people to imitate their disobedience; and this plague became cancerous a few years before the Ottoman house came into being. The Council of Florence in the time of Pope Eugenius IV took place a mere fourteen years before the fall of Constantinople. The Christians had left it too late to defend their own cause against the vast and growing might of the Turks; and Almighty God allowed them to be humiliated because of our sins.

It is well known that the French, the Venetians, the Genoese and the Marquis of Montferrat embarked at Venice for the just and pious purpose of recovering the Holy Land. At Zara they found a son of the Emperor of Constantinople who had recently been deprived of his throne. This Alexios ('Alessio') had gone to the Emperor of Germany, who was his mother's brother, to seek his help. Since no help was forthcoming, he found himself in deep despair in the said city of Zara. When the above-mentioned armada reached there, he made an agreement with their leaders to pay them a certain sum of money if they would reinstate him in his palace. So it came about that the armada sailed on to lay siege to Constantinople, where they stayed for more than a year due to the great dissension that there was in the city.¹ Some were in favour of the Emperor within, others with those outside, while some were neutral; so that in the space of the year while the city was under siege, three Emperors were created inside it. The last of them was called 'Murzufolo' [Alexios V Mourtzouphlos], who held the throne for only forty days. Under him Constantinople was taken, for those outside gave battle and, acting on intelligence from within, assaulted the city. In the fighting the new Emperor Murzufolo was killed and also the young man for whom they had brought their armada to besiege and capture Constantinople. The city was sacked with great savagery and the victorious army appointed a