Introduction

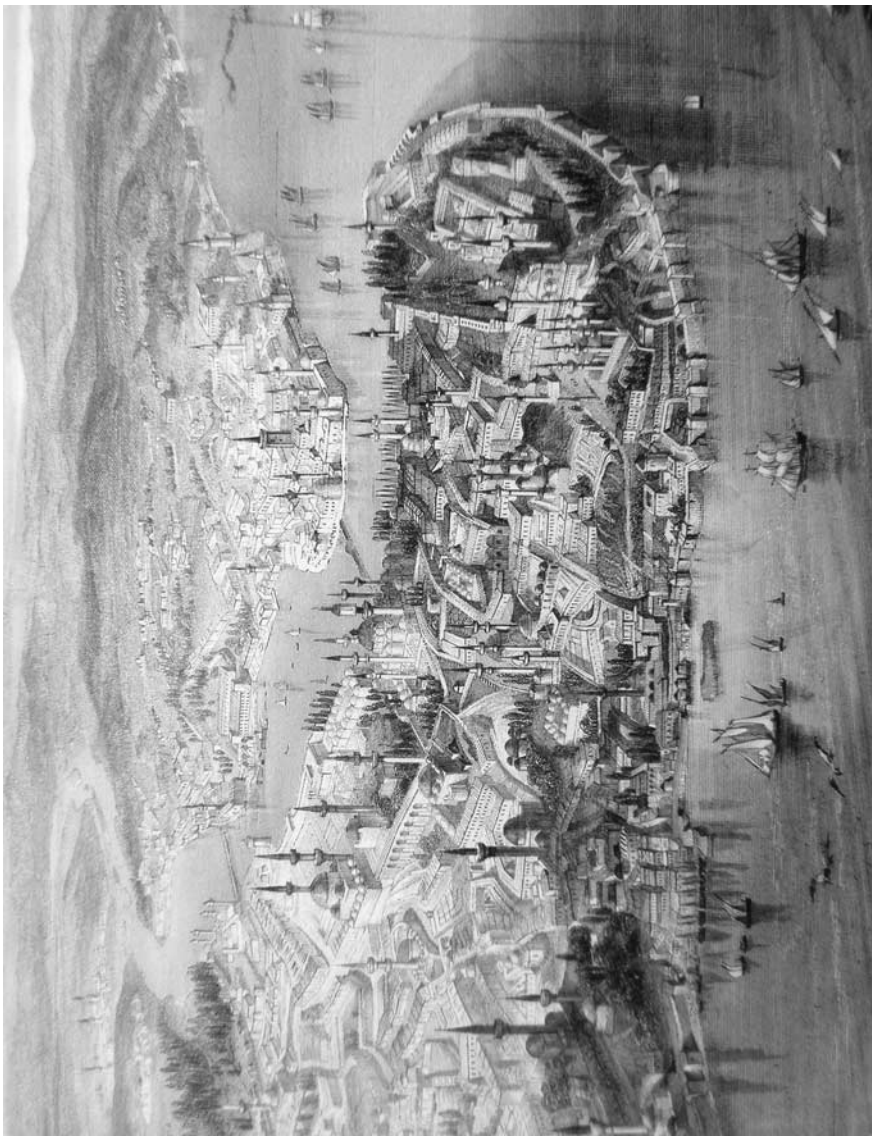
I looked at you yesterday from a hill, oh beloved Istanbul
I saw no place which I have not wandered through and loved
As long as I live, use my heart as it pleases you
Just to love one neighbourhood is worth a lifetime.

Many splendid cities exist in the world
But it is you who have created enchanted beauties
For those who have lived many years in you, died in you and lie buried in you
I say that they have lived in a beautiful and everlasting dream.[1]

For 470 years Istanbul was the capital of the Ottoman empire, which at its heyday stretched from Morocco to Ukraine, from the borders of Iran to Hungary. This was the artistic and intellectual centre of the Ottoman world, a commercial magnet for merchants from across the globe and the political piston of the empire. Its citizens lived surrounded by the pageantry of power and spectacle, caught up in the violence of the capital, and sustained by the enormous web of welfare that kept the city together. Our book offers a social portrait of this vibrant, violent, dynamic and cosmopolitan capital.

Captured in 1453 by Mehmed II (1444–46, 1451–81), known in Turkish as the conqueror, Istanbul became the capital of an ever-expanding empire as Mehmed II's successors, Bayezid II (1481–1512), Selim I (1512–20) and Süleyman I (1520–66) – the magnificent for the West, the lawgiver for the Ottomans – expanded the frontiers, conquering eastern Anatolia, parts of Iran, Syria, Egypt, the North African coast to Morocco, Rhodes, much of the Balkans, and reaching as far west as the gates of Vienna, which was besieged twice but not taken. Under succeeding sultans, the expansion was to slow, but territory did continue to fall to the Ottomans, with Süleyman I's successor Selim II (1566–74) taking

[1] Yahya Kemal, *Aziz İstanbul* (Istanbul, 1989), p. 4.



1. Constantinople, in Joseph Méry, *Constantinople et la Mer Noire* (Paris,1855), between pp. 316 and 317.

Cyprus in 1570. The last major territory in the West to be captured by the Ottomans was Crete in 1669.

Under Selim II's successors, Murad III (1574–95), Mehmed III (1595–1603) and Ahmed I (1603–17), the city was hit by economic problems as the empire struggled with the influx of silver from the New World and the difficulties of maintaining the value of its currency. This period also saw destructive wars with the Safavids in Iran and major upheavals in Anatolia, the Celali rebellions, which caused population movements into the city and disrupted its food supplies.

Economic difficulties continued during the reign of the following sultans: Mustafa I (1617–18, 1622–23), Osman II (1618–22), Murad IV (1623–40) and İbrahim (1640–48). The city was the setting for great political upheavals, with the accession to the throne of the mentally incapable Mustafa I and the deposition and murder of Osman II. This was the period known as the sultanate of the women, when the role of the women of the harem (private quarters) in politics was particularly influential. Kösem Sultan, the mother of Murad IV and İbrahim, was a key figure in the running of the state.

In the second half of the century, this influential role was to be taken over by the Köprülü family, which produced a series of grand vezirs. Militarily the period was dominated by wars with the Habsburgs. During this time, the sultans Mehmed IV (1648–87), Süleyman II (1687–91), Ahmed II (1691–95) and Mustafa II (1695–1703) spent an increasing amount of time away from the capital in the empire's second city, Edirne, until, by the reign of Mustafa II, Edirne had become their de facto residence. This was bitterly resented by Istanbul's population, which revolted, demanding the return of the sultan in what was known as the Edirne incident (1703).

Ahmed III (1703–30) therefore came to the throne in Istanbul. His reign was to usher in the Lale Devri (the Tulip Age), a period of extravagant display and cultural effervescence, which highlighted Istanbul's return to its central position as capital of the empire. Ahmed's reign came to an abrupt halt in 1730 with the Patrona Halil revolt, which saw the sultan deposed and the grand vezir murdered.

Under Ahmed III's successors, Mahmud I (1730–54), Osman III (1754–57), Mustafa III (1757–74) and Abdülhamid I (1774–89), the empire suffered a series of military defeats against the Russians, loss of territory and further economic difficulties. Istanbul was hit by great waves of immigration, which threatened the stability and internal order of the city. The coming to the throne of Selim III (1789–1807) marked the beginning of a major movement of reform, as the sultans grappled with military defeat and loss of central control over the provinces. Selim's

attempts to restructure the army eventually led to his overthrow in 1807 and his subsequent murder in 1808. He was very briefly followed by Mustafa IV (1807–08), in a period of political upheaval during which the capital witnessed great violence and a total lack of political authority as factions jostled for power. Removed from the throne in 1808, Mustafa was replaced by Mahmud II (1808–39), who, after bringing the violence in the city under control and after a long and careful process of preparing the ground, introduced a series of very firm and far-reaching changes, which ushered in immense reforms in the empire over the following decades. He was unable, however, to prevent further loss of territory. Serbia gained its full autonomy in 1829 and Greece became independent in 1830, due to the support of the Great Powers who were to interfere more and more in the internal affairs of the empire as the century wore on. Mahmud also lost de facto control of Egypt, invaded briefly by Napoleon in 1798, although it was technically to remain Ottoman territory until the First World War.

In 1839 the *Tanzimat* began. This was a period of reforms in which the direction of the state was largely in the hands of three bureaucrats, Mustafa Reşid Paşa (d.1858), Ali Paşa (d.1871) and Fuad Paşa (d.1869), and the sultans Abdülmecid (1839–61) and Abdülaziz (1861–76) were less politically significant. Economically the empire became more and more enmeshed in a series of loans, and more and more entangled in the tentacles of imperialism, until the state eventually went bankrupt in 1875. In 1881 the Public Debt Administration – a European body headed alternately by the British and the French – was set up to ensure repayment of the many loans the empire had taken out. By the beginning of the twentieth century, this body was to control a considerable section of the empire's economy, in effect reducing it to a semi-colony. The empire also suffered territorial loss, with much of its Balkan territory becoming independent or autonomous under the Treaty of Berlin in 1878. This triggered a wave of migration into the city, to be repeated after the Balkan Wars in 1912–13, when Istanbul received thousands of Muslim refugees fleeing the aggression of the Balkan states.

After the brief reign of Murad V, declared mad and removed a few months after his accession in 1876, Abdülhamid II (1876–1909) came to the throne and, despite the great vicissitudes of the period, the hostility of the Great Powers and the development of a very hostile opposition movement, the Young Turks, managed to stay there for over thirty years, being deposed only in 1909, to be succeeded by Mehmed V (Reşad) (1909–18), who was in turn followed by Mehmed VI (Vahdeddin) (1918–22). By this time, however, power was in the hands of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which had orchestrated the Young Turk Revolution in

1908 and which, under the triumvirate of Enver Paşa, Talat Paşa and Cemal Paşa, was to run the empire until its collapse after the First World War and the defeat of its ally Germany.

The nineteenth century saw many changes as the Ottomans engaged dynamically with Europe, importing much from the West and adapting or rejecting it. Much changed as new concepts of the role of the state, new political theories and ideas of identity were discussed. Fashions changed, the novel was introduced and the position of women was revolutionised. By the outbreak of the First World War the city was a very different one from that which had ushered in the previous century.

After the First World War the city was occupied by the victorious Allies and the British took control. The CUP leaders fled to Berlin, to be assassinated shortly afterwards – Talat Paşa in Germany in 1921, Cemal Paşa on his way to Moscow in 1922, and Enver Paşa dying the same year in Çeğen in Tajikistan, still dreaming of a comeback. The last sultan, Mehmed VI (Vahdeddin), was a mere cipher in the hands of the new British masters, agreeing unconditionally to whatever demands were made. Under the Treaty of Sèvres drawn up in 1920, the Allies carved up the Middle East between them, assigning a small, rump state to the Turks in the north-west of Anatolia, with Istanbul under Allied control and the Straits turned into a consortium-controlled waterway. Acceptable to the sultan – a puppet in the hands of the British, who had no interest in seeing a strong, independent Turkish state and who largely orchestrated the unsuccessful Greek invasion of Anatolia in 1919–22 – the treaty was rejected by the Turkish resistance movement which developed under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and which set itself up in Ankara in the heartland of central Anatolia. After a gruelling war with the Greeks, this movement successfully regained territory, expelled the foreign powers and forced a new treaty on the Allies, the Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923. The new Turkish Republic was established with its capital at Ankara, the only country to arise in the Middle East from the ashes of the First World War as an independent nation state.

1 Conquest

On 29 May 1453 Mehmed II wrenched out 'one of the two eyes of the church'.[1] The Christian West watched aghast as this 'new Caligula', this figure 'crueller than Nero' and 'more dangerous than a wild beast',[2] seized the city of Constantinople from the weakened and desperate hands of the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI, and plunged this once great seat of learning into ruin. The glorious capital which had reigned supreme for more than a thousand years was now lost to the Turks, 'the most despicable people ever, barbarous, lecherous and ignorant enemies of civilisation'.[3] This, needless to say, was the view of the Latins, for whom the fall of the city, a totally predictable event, but one they had done very little to prevent, was a catastrophe of immense proportions. Indeed it was of such magnitude that the hand of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II, trembled as he wrote of it.[4]

The fall shook the West, which reverberated with reports of Turkish atrocities performed in the fallen Byzantine capital. Latin accounts talked vociferously of the rivers of blood[5] which poured through the streets of the fallen city and flowed like rainwater in the gutters after a sudden storm.[6]

[1] Enea Silvio Piccolomini, 'Lettera al cardinale Nicola di Cuesi', in Agostino Pertusi (ed.), *La caduta di Costantinopoli* (Milan, 1999), II, p. 56.
[2] Niccolò Tignosi, 'Expugnatio Constantinopolitana', in Agostino Pertusi, *Testi inediti e poci noti sulla caduta di Costantinopoli*, posthumously ed. Antonio Carile (Bologna, 1983), p. 108; Theodore Spandounes, *On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors*, trans. and ed. Donald M. Nicol (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 53, 54; Fra Girolamo da Firenze, 'Lettere al cardinal Capranica', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 34; Jacopo Tedaldi, 'Informazioni sulla conquista di Costantinopoli', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, p. 186; Jacopo de Promontorio, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Genuesen Iacopo de Promontorio-de Campis über den Osmanenstaat um 1475*, ed. Franz Babinger (Munich, 1957), p. 92.
[3] Piccolomini, 'Lettera a Nicolò V', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 46; 'Lettera al cardinale Nicola di Cuesi', pp. 52, 54.
[4] Piccolomini, 'Lettera a Nicolò V', p. 44.
[5] Piccolomini, 'Lettera al cardinale Nicola di Cuesi', p. 52.
[6] Nicolò Barbaro, 'Giornale dell'assedio di Costantinopoli', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 35; Nicolò Barbaro, *The Diary of the Siege of Constantinople 1453*, trans. J. R. Jones (New York, 1969), p. 67.

Corpses floated out to sea like melons along a canal;[7] religious relics were plundered, tombs were pillaged and the bones of emperors and saints were thrown to the pigs and dogs.[8] Much-venerated religious images were shattered and trampled underfoot by the Turkish soldiers.[9] A distressed Bishop of Caffa, the Dominican Giacomo Campora, described the Turkish pillaging and the slaughter of the faithful. Bursting into the sacred places, the Turks

> dragged from the tombs and reliquaries the bodies of the saints who had slept in peace in their sepulchres and their caskets where they had been conserved with devotion and with their hands still dripping in blood ripped out and shamelessly possessed the jewels and gold ornamentation with which the holy reliquaries were adorned. The bones, stripped of their ornaments, were thrown away, some into the sea, some scattered over the squares and streets to be crushed underfoot.[10]

It was not only the religious relics but also books that were desecrated. For Latin contemporaries, the Turkish conquest spelt the destruction of a great seat of learning and the end of Greek letters,[11] one contemporary estimate placing the number of lost volumes at 120,000.[12] 'What can one say', wrote Piccolomini, 'of the books which were there in very large numbers and still not known to us Latins?',[13] a sentiment echoed by the noted intellectual and merchant Lauro Quirini, who felt himself 'destroyed by grief, and by pain and by sadness to such a point that, to use a Greek proverb, I have sweated blood':[14]

> Who could be so unpolished and so insensitive that he does not feel tears welling in his eyes? We have lost those works which gave splendour to the whole world, which created the sacred philosophy and all those other beautiful arts through which human existence was able to make progress.[15]

The fall, a second death for Homer, a second passing for Plato, brought at one and the same time the destruction of faith and of culture.[16] The Turks, about whom Piccolomini had nothing good to say, these enemies

[7] Barbaro, 'Giornale', p. 35; Barbaro, *Diary*, p. 67.
[8] Giacomo Campora, 'Orazione al re Ladislao d'Ungheria', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, I, p. 194; Piccolomini, 'Lettera a Leonardo Benvoglienti', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 62; Enrico di Soemmern, 'Come la città di Costantinopoli fu conquistata e saccheggiata dai turchi', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, pp. 82–6.
[9] Enrico di Soemmern, 'Città', pp. 82–6. [10] Campora, 'Orazione', pp. 192, 194.
[11] Piccolomini, 'Lettera al cardinale Nicola di Cuesi', p. 52.
[12] Lauro Quirini, 'Epistula ad beatissimum Nicolaum V pontificem maximum', in Pertusi, *Testi*, p. 74.
[13] Piccolomini, 'Lettera a Nicolò V', p. 46. [14] Quirini, 'Epistula', p. 66.
[15] Quirini, 'Epistula', p. 74.
[16] Piccolomini, 'Lettera a Nicolò V', p. 46; Piccolomini, 'Lettera al cardinale Nicola di Cuesi', p. 54.

of Greek and Latin letters, which they held in arrogant contempt, had now imposed their ignorance through destruction.[17] Not only had the Turks taken the imperial capital, devastated the churches and polluted what the Byzantines held sacred, but they had also conducted a massacre of the entire population and thus wiped out the very name of the Greeks.[18]

The Latins trembled not merely at the thought of all this barbarism, but also at the more immediate terror of the Turkish advance. Many feared that the Turks were on their way to the very heart of the Christian world and would speedily be riding into Rome itself,[19] for Mehmed was said to be boasting publicly that he would be in Rome, conquer Italy and destroy the Christian faith the following summer.[20] 'The air', as Piccolomini noted, 'was full of the fear of war'.[21] Contemporaries predicted that this 'horrible, cruel, mad and malignant Turk', as the Genoese merchant Jacopo de Promontorio called him,[22] would be in Italy within eighteen months and would exterminate the Christians,[23] for whom he was said by Enrico di Soemmern to have such a strong loathing that if he saw one he would immediately cleanse his eyes as if contaminated.[24] This was presumably something of an exaggeration, for he had several at his court, including Chiriaco di Ancona and another Italian who read to him daily from the works of Laertius, Herodotus and Livy,[25] as well as two very competent doctors – one Latin, one Greek – from whom he learnt ancient history and whom he treated with great friendliness.[26]

The Ottoman ruler certainly did have expansionist ambitions. This ferocious enemy considered himself much more powerful than Caesar or Alexander and aimed, in the estimation of several Latin contemporaries, at world domination,[27] an ambition to which he directed every thought and action.[28] The world had now changed, and in future advance would be

[17] Piccolomini, 'Lettera al cardinale Nicola di Cuesi', p. 54. [18] Quirini, 'Epistula', p. 74.
[19] Paolo Dotti, 'Missiva sull'espugnazione di Costantinopoli', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 14; Lampo Birago, 'Trattato di strategia contro i turchi', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 114; Leonardo Benvoglienti, 'Dispaccio da Venezia alla Signoria di Siena', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, p. 109; Franco Giustiniani, in Pertusi, *Testi*, p. 104; Piccolomini, 'Lettera al cardinale Nicola di Cuesi', p. 56, Enrico di Soemmern, 'Città', pp. 90, 96; Birago, 'Trattato', p. 124; 1453.vi.30, in Pertusi, *Testi*, pp. 20, 22.
[20] Enrico di Soemmern, 'Città', p. 92.
[21] Piccolomini, 'Lettera a Leonardo Benvoglienti', p. 66.
[22] Jacopo de Promontorio, *Aufzeichnungen*, p. 81. [23] Benvoglienti, 'Dispaccio', pp. 110–11.
[24] Enrico di Soemmern, 'Città', p. 92.
[25] Giacomo Languschi, 'Excidio e presa de Costantinopoli nell'anno 1453', in Pertusi, *Testi*, pp. 172–3.
[26] Nicola Sagundino, 'Orazione al re Alfonso V d'Aragona', in Pertusi, *Caduta*, II, pp. 130, 132.
[27] Benvoglienti, 'Dispaccio', p. 109; Tignosi, 'Expugnatio', p. 108.
[28] Sagundino, 'Orazione', p. 132.

from East to West and not from West to East, as before. The world would have one empire, one faith and one sovereign.[29] Although already master of a considerable realm, Mehmed was not satisfied with what he had.[30] Instead he spent his time planning conquests in emulation of the Alexanders, Pompeys and Caesars of history.[31] His eye was certainly on the West, as many Latins feared, for he spent much time studying the position of Italy and in learning the situation in Europe.[32]

Not only was Mehmed ambitious, but he also had a stratagem, for he was cunning and shrewd, and had been 'since before he was born, a wolf putting on sheep's clothing'.[33] His cunning was clear to Konstantin Mihailović, a Serb captured in battle who then served in the Ottoman army as a janissary between 1455 and 1463.

> The Emperor ordered a great rug to be brought as an example and to be spread out before them [the lords with him], and in the center he had an apple placed, and he gave them the following riddle, saying: 'Can any of you pick up that apple without stepping on the rug?' And they reckoned among themselves, thinking about how that could be, and none of them could get the trick until the Emperor himself, having stepped up to the rug took the rug in both hands and rolled it before him, proceeding behind it; and so he got the apple and put the rug back down as it had been before. And the Emperor said to the lords: 'It is better to torment the *kaury* [i.e. infidel] little by little than to invade their land all at once. For we are so insecure that if we had a small setback there, then all our lands that we have conquered from the *kaury* would be against us and rebel.' And one lord named Essebek Awranozowicz said: 'Fortunate Lord, they have long said of this Roman Pope that he means to march against us with all Christendom. If he were riding on a pig he would have been here long ago. Therefore, as you picked [the apple] up before you, do the same to the *kaury*. Pay no heed to the news.' And so they all praised his speech and the Emperor's example.[34]

Mehmed's troops did arrive in Italy, but not until 1480, when Ottoman forces landed at Otranto, only to evacuate the following year on the death of the sultan.

While Piccolomini's hand trembled as he wrote of the disastrous fall of the city and the Latins watched in dread from the precincts of Rome, the Byzantine historian Doukas was struck dumb by the calamity. 'My tongue', he wrote, 'is stuck fast in my larynx. I am unable to draw breath

[29] Languschi, 'Excidio', p. 174.
[30] Kritoboulos, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror. By Kritovoulos*, trans. C. T. Riggs (Westport, 1954), 22, pp. 13–14.
[31] Kritoboulos, *History*, 22, pp. 13–14. [32] Languschi, 'Excidio', p. 173.
[33] Doukas, *Historia Byzantina*, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1843), p. 231; Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*, trans. H. J. Magoulias (Detroit, 1975), p. 191.
[34] Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, trans. Benjamin Stolz (Ann Arbor, 1975), pp. 145, 147.

through my sealed mouth'.[35] However sharply Piccolomini and many other Latins may have felt the fall, their pain, experienced at a safe distance, was not as acute as that of the Byzantines, for whom Mehmed, Doukas's 'truly flesh-bearing demon',[36] spelt the end of their world. The sight of the massed Ottoman forces before the city struck terror into their hearts, leaving them as if 'half-dead, unable to breathe either in or out'.[37] The defenders fought hard, employing lead balls as small as Pontic walnuts which could kill several soldiers at one time, provided they were standing one behind the other.[38] Grimly the Byzantines hung on, but to no avail, for they were unable to prevent the collapse of the walls and the entry of the Turkish troops. Many were slaughtered, Turkish soldiers later complaining to Doukas that had they known there were so few Byzantine soldiers in the city they would not have killed them so liberally, but would have sold them all like sheep.[39]

The Turks poured into the city, rampaging through the streets, breathing fire, their hands bloodstained with murder.[40] The religious relics were pillaged and the remains of venerated men were torn apart and 'made the sport of the wind'.[41] The great church of Hagia Sophia fell, to become the Ayasofya mosque, and those who had taken refuge there were led out in chains.

> Who can recount the calamity of that time and place? Who can describe the wailing and the cries of the babes, the mothers' tearful screams and the fathers' lamentations?… The infinite chains of captives who like herds of kine and flocks of sheep poured out of the temple sanctuary made an extraordinary spectacle! They wept and wailed and there was none to show them mercy.[42]

The Turks triumphed and the city was left 'desolate, lying dead, naked, soundless, having neither form nor beauty'.[43] For the Byzantines, the destruction of their capital was absolute. The once beautiful city was

> emptied and deserted, despoiled and blackened as if by fire. One might easily disbelieve that it had ever had in it a human dwelling or the wealth or properties of a city or any furnishing or ornament of a household. And this was true although the city had been so magnificent and grand. There were left only ruined homes, so badly ruined as to cause great fear to all who saw them.[44]

[35] Doukas, *Historia*, p. 292; Doukas, *Decline*, p. 227.
[36] Doukas, *Historia*, p. 232; Doukas, *Decline*, p. 191.
[37] Doukas, *Historia*, p. 281; Doukas, *Decline*, p. 221.
[38] Doukas, *Historia*, pp. 226–7; Doukas, *Decline*, p. 212.
[39] Doukas, *Historia*, pp. 287–8; Doukas, *Decline*, pp. 224–5.
[40] Kritoboulos, *History*, 241, pp. 72–3. [41] Kritoboulos, *History*, 244, p. 73.
[42] Doukas, *Historia*, pp. 291–2; Doukas, *Decline*, p. 227.
[43] Doukas, *Historia*, p. 306; Doukas, *Decline*, p. 235. [44] Kritoboulos, *History*, 254, p. 76.