

Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time*, Bolingen Series XCVI, edited by William C. Hickman, translated by Ralph Manheim, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1978, 549 pp.

This English translation of Franz Babinger's 1953 German edition, with information added by the author since his 1954 French and 1957 Italian editions, surveys three of the most important decades in Balkan history, 1451-1481. The book explains the life and enterprises of Sultan Mehmed II, traces the political and social changes affecting Europe, the Balkans and Asia Minor, and analyses the Ottoman superimposition of Turkish culture and the Islamic religion on the peoples of southeast Europe.

Mehmed II's holy objective, Babinger points out, was to conquer in the name of Islam, to expand the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire throughout all Europe if possible. Although Mehmed's nickname in Turkish, *Fatih*, refers to the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, Babinger indicates how the fall of the great Greek capital actually stimulated, not culminated, the world-conquering aspirations of the Sultan. The immensity of the capture and the possession of the city at the junction of three continents controlled Mehmed's actions for the rest of his life. His struggles north on the Danube River, his sixteen year warfare with Venice, the taking of the Morea and the mid-Balkans, his battles with Uzun Hasan in Anatolia, and the invasion of Italy only a few months before his death in 1481, carried out his belief that he was destined, like Alexander the Great, to rule the world.

The Sultan's success in establishing control in the Empire came from his merciless eradication of all opposition. Whosoever worked against the Sultan was, when captured, a dead man. Mehmed never forgot nor showed mercy toward an adversary. He may have held grudging respect for a man like Skanderbeg, who died free of Ottoman shackles. On the other hand, the extraordinary bravery of the Greek leader Notaras and his three sons moved Mehmed not one bit. He put all four to death in cold blood though he had promised their freedom. Mehmed decided on policy purely in terms of *raison d'état*, used any excuse to gain an advantage, pledged his word with complete dissimulation, and reneged on his pledge when the circumstances required.

One must recognize, here, Babinger's quite opinionated, often anti-Turkish, sometimes erroneous views of the Sultan's life and times. A master of many languages, Babinger used every available European and Balkan source. He also used some published Ottoman sources, but as Professor Halil İnalcik points out in a penetrating criticism of the earlier German edition (*Speculum*, XXXV, 1960, pp. 408-27), Babinger used few of the important Ottoman chronicles and histories even then available to him, as attested by his own citations in *Geschichtsschreiber der Osmanen und ihre Werke* (Leipzig, 1927). The author did not, of course, have access to the documents increasingly available from various archives in Republican Turkey, many of which have been recently published by İnalcik and others.

Babinger underscores certain well-known aspects of Balkan history and intrigues with his interpretations. We recognize again how cleverly the Turks borrowed much of their success from their Christian enemies. They obtained their military technology, especially cannon, from the West. They filled the ranks of their celebrated Janissary infantry with the healthiest of the Christian boys, forced into Islam. Many of the outstanding Ottoman leaders in Mehmed's time came from Christian families. Babinger also emphasizes the role played by Europe's Christian sovereigns, who helped the Ottomans to gain Islamic ends while they fought among each other, thrusting weakness and disunity against the dedicated Turks. The Holy Roman Emperor fought the Hungarian King, the Pope undercut the Italian princes, and the Venetians were accused (probably justifiably) of supporting the Turkish invasion of

Italy at Otranto in order to gouge the Genoese. Even in Mehmed's time a unified Christian Europe might have successfully resisted the Ottoman take-over.

In addition to the Muslim military and cultural veneer, the Ottoman occupation of the Balkans brought fundamental economic and political changes. Europe in the east became agrarian as the Turks cut the Black Sea trade by tying off the Dardenelles trade. As a result, cities in southeast Europe failed to grow; serfdom proved the most reliable agricultural system. Babinger even suggests that, the closing of Black Sea trade impelled Venetians, Genoese, and others to search for new, substitute routes to India and Central Asia. He sees a turning point in Europe's political awareness when Venice made formal peace with the Ottomans in 1479, which marked the first time a Christian power allowed secular aims to rule in diplomacy with a Muslim power. Demands to mount a crusade against the infidel, stemming back three centuries, could no longer be taken seriously.

Regarding religion, Mehmed II apparently had little real concern for faith of any variety, even his own. As a highly intelligent ruler he wished to know his subjects' culture, so he inquired into the Christian faith, much as he inquired about European geography. The Sultan, says Babinger, was no Renaissance man, possessed no universal craving for the arts and sciences. He cared for religion only as it kept order and peace in his empire. He cared for art as it gratified his psyche, gardening as a relaxing avocation, his university as a place to enjoy intellectual dialogue. He despised fanaticism of any kind, especially that of the Muslim dervish orders, because they stirred up religious bigotry. Jews found the Muslim Empire of Mehmed II by far a safer place to live than Christian Europe, for the reason that protecting them from harm served the interest of the Turks. Jews were a valuable commodity, just like the Christian *reaya*, who paid their taxes and tended their farms and businesses, providing an essential economic substrata for the spread of Islam.

From the deceased Constantinople, Mehmed II created Istanbul, repopulated it, re-established its organizations to make it live under a new dispensation. He made Gennadius Patriarch after the conquest, not to keep the Greek Orthodox Church together by a liberal interpretation of Islamic law, but to insure repopulation of the city by Greeks. He forcibly brought prisoners, artisans, and craftsmen to Istanbul from all his victories, not only Christians from Wallachia, Greeks from the Morea, Bosnians, Serbians, and Albanians, but also Turks from Anatolia, after his victories over the Karamanids and Uzun Hasan. Istanbul grew from 40,000 at the conquest to 60,000 at Mehmed's death. He established institutions himself and encouraged others with wealth to build mosques, universities, public baths, soup kitchens, commercial buildings, many of which flourished long after his death. His tax system, though revised by a great-grandson, Suleiman the Magnificent, established certain principles which lasted for centuries. Unfortunately, in the short section at the end of the book, Babinger fails to explain the dimensions of the extraordinary bureaucratic organization, both military as well as scribal, which lasted as a supreme force in south-east Europe and Asia for two more centuries. For such explanation one must refer to more recent scholarship by İnalcik, N. Itzkowitz, S. J. Shaw, and others.

For more than a decade, until his death in 1967, Franz Babinger endured academic ridicule for not having published a promised second volume of source citations to the original German edition of this biography. The criticism was somewhat unjustified, for he had earlier written many detailed articles on the subject. The present English edition neutralizes much of this criticism by citing those articles, many of which have been collected in a volume by H. J. Kissling and A. Schmaus. Editor Hickman adds even more, giving contradictory opinions to Babinger, and references to recent American, European, and Turkish scholarship.

The English version becomes by far the most useful and authoritative of the three previous editions.

Princeton's publication at this time of an English translation of Babinger's important biography provides a standard life-story of one of the greatest rulers of the Middle East and Balkan history. Along with Babinger's scholarship, now more than two decades old, the editor has offered an excellent selection of pictures and maps, a useful index, a glossary of Turkish terms, and numerous references to the most recent scholarship on the subject. Undergirded by these scholarly aids, Babinger's story of Mehmed the Conqueror acquaints the reader with the Islamic foundations of Balkan history in the modern world.

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Baker, Derek (ed.), *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976, 336 p. / *Studies in Church History*, vol. 13/.

The twenty papers in this work are a selection from those read for two meetings of the Ecclesiastical History Society. The common thread, as the editor indicates, is the survival and the living continuity of the Orthodox tradition. Though the themes of the papers are all, at least tangentially, connected with the varied relationships between eastern and western Christianity, the papers are diverse both in their subjects and in their time frame. We see Orthodoxy not only in the Byzantine period but also in the twentieth century.

The Byzantines saw Orthodoxy and the Empire as being coterminous; a habit of thought which carried them through centuries of disorder and tribulation, particularly in the later stages of the Empire. However, the Orthodox church has persisted long after the fall of Constantinople. The myth of the union of Church and empire survived to the very end but was ultimately replaced in the fifteenth century when the Church was forced to learn to survive on its own. Approximately half of the papers explore the origins of this ability to survive; first in the Byzantine Orthodoxy's encounters with the West and second in the resistance of the Church during the XIIIth - XVth century to their emperors' efforts to secure western military aid by submitting to the claims of the papacy.

The problems of combining the teachings of Christ and with those of the Greek philosophers are examined by Dr. Amand de Mendieta who shows the differences between the official and private positions of Basil of Caesarea on the value of Greek philosophy and science to the Christians. This ambivalence was not unique to the Greeks and was in fact part of the Mediterranean Koine discussed by Peter Brown. Yet there were important differences. Professor Janet Nelson examines the distinctly divergent inauguration rituals in Byzantine and the West which emerged from the common framework of Christian theology. In saints, too, the western and eastern Christians had distinct tastes as Derek Baker shows in the life of Theodore of Sykeon. Theodore was an ascetic but no mystic. He was very much involved in the world and "epitomized the moral qualities so prized by the Byzantines in their saints as much as in their soldiers,...." The ecclesiastical and intellectual encounters with the West during the Byzantine period of the Orthodox Church served to sharpen the distinctions between the Latin and Greek branches of Christianity. However, as Professor Brown demonstrated there was a Mediterranean Koine, the common cultural background of East and West, which should cause us to hesitate in defining the early divergence between the west and east too starkly. Yet the difference existed and Professor Brown has brilliantly epitomized this in his study of the divergent attitudes in the two Churches toward the idea of the *holy*. The