

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

J. R. Jones (transl.), *Nicolò Barbaro, Diary of the Siege of Constantinople 1453*. New York, Exposition Press Inc., 1969. Pp. 78.

Nicolò Barbaro, a Venetian patrician and a surgeon by profession, was an eye-witness to the siege and capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453. Like some other prominent eye-witnesses, including Ducas, Cardinal Isidor of Kiev and Leonardo DaScio whose accounts of this tragic event in Christendom have survived, Barbaro left his account of it in the form of a diary written "day by day of all attacks made by the Turks on Constantinople up to the day it was captured." His *Giornale dell'Assedio di Constantinopoli* owes its survival to his fortunate escape on a Venetian galley which during the confusion of capture and sack of the City managed to get out of the harbor and flee to safety. The *Giornale* has had a number of editions, and the translation by Mr. J. K. Jones, a member of the Department of Classics and Ancient History, University of Western Australia, is from the edition of the text by Enrico Cornet, published in Vienna in 1856. It is the first translation of the text into any language. As is true of the accounts of the other writers, Barbaro's *Diary* has considerably influenced the modern historiography on the fall of Constantinople, especially the work of A. D. Mordtmann, *Belagerung und Eroberung Constantinopels durch die Türken im Jahre 1453. Nach Originalquellen bearbeitet* (Stuttgart, 1858), for which the author made extensive use of the same Cornet edition of the *Giornale*.

A Venetian patriot, Barbaro naturally favored his own countrymen. But his account of the contribution of the Venetians to the defense of the Byzantine capital has stood the test of time and has found corroboration in the works of modern historians. Although Jones believes that Barbaro "is not always fair to the Genoese and the Greeks," historians accept his criticism of them as valid. The support given by the Genoese of Pera to the Turks during the siege was rewarded by rather generous grants by Mehmed II in the capitulation treaty to the citizens of Pera at the time of the fall of Constantinople. As for Barbaro's criticism of the

Greeks, the testimony of Phrantzes more than supports its validity. According to the census taken by Phrantzes in the City at the request of Emperor Constantine (the results of which he was asked to keep secret), few able-bodied Greeks were willing to fight in defense of their City. Of the 9000 estimated defenders, some 3000 were foreigners of different nationality, but mainly Venetians and Genoese, and they were the most valorous fighters (Franz Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer und seine Zeit. Weltenstürmer einer Zeitenwende*. München, 1953, pp. 88-90). This has led N. Iorga to declare: "So weist denn die letzte christliche Verteidigung Konstantinopels eher einen ritterlich-lateinischen als ein schwärmerisch-griechischen Character auf" (*Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches. Nach den Quellen dargestellt*. Bd. II, p. 22). Babinger has concurred in this judgement (*op. cit.* p. 94).

And that the Greek nobles refused financial assistance to the Emperor "who was poor" to help defend the City is attested by the enormous booty of treasure carried off by the conquerors after the three day plunder of the capital.

However, Barbaro's attack on G. Giustiniani-Longo, "that Genoese of Genoa," is unjustified. Giustiniani who with his ships and numerous armed men came to the defense of the City and was appointed Protostator over all armed forces by the Emperor, did not "abandon his post and fled to his ship" when the siege was still going on. He was gravely wounded and went to his ship for aid. Nevertheless, this had a disastrous effect on the morale of the defenders. But it is interesting to observe that Barbaro does not accuse Megaduke Lukas Notaras of treason as some Catholic historians have done. Notaras opposed the Union of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, but so did the great majority of the Greeks! He was no traitor and helped defend the City to the end. Barbaro does not spare his own Venice for its tardiness in sending assistance to the dying capital, and is extremely critical of the Pope—not quite justly—and of the Western princes who failed to answer Emperor Constantine's pleas for help.

Mr. Jones deserves our gratitude for translating this important work and making it available to historians and students of the period.

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