Islamic Legacy:

Narratives East, West, South, North of the Mediterranean (1350-1750).

A Thesaurus under Discussion.

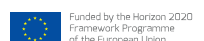**Position Papers debated at the Sarajevo IS-LE Meeting, September 7, 2021.**

From the times of the conquest (feth-i hakaniden berü/κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀλώσεως χρόνον): The vocabulary and the historiography of the Ottoman conquest in the Greek lands

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The Ottoman dynasty, the House of Osman, had humble origins in the frontier between the Byzantine Empire and the Turco-Muslim principalities of Anatolia. In the long run, however, they managed to create an empire upon successive conquests, especially after their mid-fourteenth century expansion across the Sea of Marmara to Thrace and the Balkan Peninsula[1] (coincidentally, or not, immediately after the outbreak of the Black Death pandemic in the Byzantine territories, 1347[2]). With the absence of legitimizing genealogies (which they started constructing only in retrospect),[3] the rule of the Ottoman dynasty was legitimized especially upon successful conquests. Thus, the concept of 'conquest' (Arabic fatḥ; Ottoman Turkish, feth) was crucial in legitimizing their rule. The Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II, after his capture of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, a dream and goal of numerous medieval Muslim polities, in 1453, became eponymous as the Conqueror (Fatih, or Abu'l-fatih, "the father of the conquest"). The Ottomans had a specific genre of written literary and historical narratives of battles and campaigns for their conquests (fetihnames); at the same time, a fetihname was "an official letter announcing a military victory, originally written immediately after the event, on the order of a sultan, to inform neighbouring rulers, potential allies, important vassals and/or senior officials within the state".[4] Conquests were also celebrated in the names of mosques, like in the cases of the Byzantine Pammakaristos church in Istanbul, renamed Fethiye to celebrate the 1590 Ottoman victory in the Caucasus, or the Fethiye mosque in Athens, Greece, surviving today, built immediately after the conquest of the island of Crete by the Ottomans in 1669.[5]

For the people the Ottomans conquered, the very same concept of 'conquest' had a negative connotation. For the Eastern Roman Orthodox, i.e., the Byzantines in modern vocabulary, the Ottoman conquest (feth) of Constantinople in 1453 was translated as 'ἅλωσις': the meaning however of the word was 'the Fall'. The fall of the Christian imperial capital to the hands of the Muslims was understood as an event of divine providence. A popular song in Greek after 1453 lamented: "it was the will of God for the City [i.e., Constantinople] to become Turkish [i.e., Muslim]". The fall of Constantinople was explained in theological terms as a

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[1] Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, Berkeley 1995.

[2] Ole J. Benedictow, The Black Death 1346-1353: The Complete History. Woodbridge 2004.

[3] Colin Imber, "The Ottoman Dynastic Myth", Turcica 19 (1987), pp. 7-27.

[4] Christine Woodhead, "Fetihname", in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, THREE, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 26 August 2021 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27035>

[5] Machiel Kiel, "The Quatrefoil Plan in Ottoman Architecture Reconsidered in Light of the 'Fethiye Mosque' of Athens", *Muqarnas Online*, 19/1 (2002), pp. 109-122. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/22118993_01901006

divine punishment for the Orthodox, and, at the same time, a necessary step towards salvation. On the other hand, the new Roman Orthodox Patriarch in Constantinople, Gennadius II, appointed by Mehmed II after 1453, wrote a letter explaining that "the fall" of Constantinople to the hands of the "infidels" was a punishment especially for those who sought the unification of the Eastern and Western Churches. However, Almighty God, according to Gennadius, had guided the Ottoman Sultan, Mehmed II, to preserve the "real [Orthodox] faith" in his Islamic empire and even be "charitable" towards the Patriarchate and Gennadius himself.[6] Under the new Muslim rulers, and in accordance with the guiding principles of the Islamic Law for the treatment of non-Muslims under Islamic rule (Arab. dhimma), the Roman Orthodox and their Great Church accommodated their survival, and even prosperity, albeit in an inferior status, for the following centuries.[7]

The concept of the 'conquest' remained present in the following centuries of Ottoman rule, sometimes centuries after the original conquests. In Ottoman judicial documents from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and the eighteenth centuries, we can locate frequently the expression "from the times of the conquest" (Ott. Turk. feth-i hakaniden berü), used in order to locate chronologically the status of a particular right, usually over land. We can locate the same expression in documents in Greek as well (κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἁλώσεως χρόνον). In these kind of documents, the concept of the 'conquest' had not any more the ideological connotations it had for both conquerors and conquered at the times of the conquest. It was, however, still there. In some cases, when the political circumstances of the wars between the Venetians and the Ottomans were in favor, some Orthodox prelates, like bishop Philotheos of Salona (mod. Amfissa) ca. 1700, were cooperating with the Catholic Venetians in order to "liberate our enslaved faith" from the Ottoman Muslims (λευθερόνοντας το σκλαβωμένο γένος μας).[8] These ideas and practices should not be interpreted according to a modern, national, spirit: the traditional understanding of the world according to the rules of divine providence allowed both ideas and practices sometimes in favor of an incorporation to the system of the Ottoman conquest and sometimes in favor of its demise. "The spirit of rebellion flares up or down, in an inverted image of the balance of the system".[9] On the other hand, these ideas and practices were present until, during, and even after the Greek Revolution against the Ottoman order in 1821, and the development of the modern Greek state and nationalism afterwards.

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[6] Paraskevas Konortas, "Από τον «Ιστορικό Συμβιβασμό» στην «Εγκάρδια Συνεννόηση» πολιτικές συγκλίσεις ανάμεσα στο Ορθόδοξο Πατριαρχείο Κωνσταντινουπόλεως και την οθωμανική διοίκηση (μέσα 15ου - τέλη 16ου αι.)". *Το Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο*, Athens 2016, pp. 76-78.

[7] Elizabeth A. Zachariadou, *Ten Turkish Documents Concerning the Great Church (1483-1567)* [in Greek], Athens 1996; Paraskevas Konortas, *Οθωμανικές θεωρήσεις για το Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο, 17ος – αρχές 20ού αιώνα*, Athens 1998.

[8] Reference from Petros Th. Pizanias, *Η ιστορία των Νέων Ελλήνων. Από το 1400c. έως το 1820*, Athens 2014, p. 317.

[9] Nikos Theotokas, ¨Η επανάσταση του έθνους και το ορθόδοξο γένος. Σχόλια για τις ιδεολογίες στο Εικοσιένα", in Nikos Theotokas and Nikos Kotaridis, *Η οικονομία της βίας. Παραδοσιακές και νεωτερικές εξουσίες στην Ελλάδα του 19ου αιώνα*, Athens 2006, p. 39.

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In this vein, the national Greek historiography developing during the nineteenth century standardized an image of the centuries of Ottoman imperial rule in the Greek lands as centuries under "Turkish yoke". According to this historiographical tradition, the Christian Orthodox under the Ottomans were ruled by a (both nationally and religiously) foreign hated sovereign, who deprived them of their independence and their participation in the evolution of Western Europe, and, finally, degraded them demographically, and culturally as well. This conventional image, still popular in Greek public history, has been criticized by academic historiography: it can be classified under the general umbrella of Orientalism (the Muslim, or more general Asiatic rule is tyrannical and against progress, vis-à-vis the Western European civilization), or, more specifically for the Greek case, under the history of the development of Greek religious nationalism. The main objection against this historiographical tradition is that it does not recognize the Ottoman rule as imperial rule, in a pre-modern society: we have already described how the Christian Orthodox under the Ottomans were eager to accept the conquest in theological terms, albeit, waiting for their salvation in religious terms.[10] For example, the Orthodox priest Synadinos from Serres, in the seventeenth century, lamented the death of the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV in 1640 with the following words: "We must cry, o brother, because the king (Gk. basileus) passed away... we will never find such a king in our lifetime...". The same author, however, described in the same Memoirs frequent conflicts in his native town between Muslims and Christians: the former had a general feeling of superiority towards the latter and even forced some of them to convert to Islam.[11]

On the other hand, contemporary, mostly Ottomanist, historiography has introduced the historiographical concept of a 'plural society' in order to describe how Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived under Ottoman rule, both together and separately, with minimum bloodshed, as opposed to the nation-states, which succeeded the empire.[12] The revision is very important; we should, on the other hand, be aware of the dangers of idealizing Ottoman rule. In his Introduction to the revised edition of Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire, in 2014, Benjamin Braude states that: "Decades of intermittent communal conflict in the former Yugoslavia, Libya, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Israel-Palestine—all territories formerly under Ottoman rule—have prompted a degree of nostalgia for the comparative stability that had prevailed during the centuries of that dynasty's dominion. Such nostalgia, however, is challenged by the charge that it was precisely the legacy of Ottoman policies that created those tensions." The same author summarized the history of the Ottoman Empire in the following paragraph: "Was the empire a melting-pot, a pressure cooker, or a macédoine? In the course of nearly seven centuries it was all three and more. Given its

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[10] Eleni Gara and Giorgos Tzedopoulos, *Χριστιανοί και μουσουλμάνοι στην Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία. Θεσμικό πλαίσιο και κοινωνικές δυναμικές*, Athens 2015, pp. 14-18.

[11] Paolo Odorico et alii, *Conseils et mémoires de Synadinos, prêtre de Serrès en Macédoine (XVIIe siècle)*, Paris 1996.

[12] Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (ed.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, New York 1982.

composition it could not avoid being a macédoine. It began as a melting pot but ended as a pressure cooker. In the process, far too many powerful European cooks spoiled its broth."[13]

Recent Greek historiography has revisited the concept of the 'conquest' for the Ottoman centuries, under the influence of the historiography of the European colonial empires, using the categories of 'conquerors' for the Muslims and 'conquered' for the Christian Orthodox.[14] On the other hand, the Greek Ottomanist Eleni Gara has rejected these categories, arguing that the Muslims of the Balkans were for the most part converts to Islam and not the original conquerors; moreover, in Ottoman Anatolia and the Arab lands, where Muslims were a majority, religion was not the critical factor for social distinctions.[15] In this short intervention, I have investigated how the ideology of the 'conquest' was continuously reproduced by the Ottoman elites, without, however, the force of the earlier centuries; in some parts of the Balkans, like Serres, the common Mulims had also a feeling of superiority over the Christians. On the other hand, as Eleni Gara and Giorgos Tzedopoulos have investigated,[16] there is also another range of concepts, despite 'conquest', we can utilize in our analysis of Ottoman society and the relations between Muslims, Christians and Jews: 'inequality', for example, describes maybe better the relations between Muslims and non- Muslims in Ottoman society. However, conversion to Islam did not meant in the Balkans that the new converts were immediately accepted as social elites.[17] In the final analysis, however, religion in the Balkans was one important node of social distinctions. In the same vein, the Ottomans have been be described as 'tolerant' in some cases: 'tolerance', however, did not meant a positive appreciation of the 'Other', quite the opposite (tolerance presupposes a non-equal relation, in which the powerful side dominates the weak side). As Karen Barkey has argued (using the word 'toleration' instead of 'tolerance'), "toleration as it developed was a way to qualify and maintain the diversity of the empire, to organize the different communities, to establish peace and order, and to ensure the loyalty of these communities, and had little to do with ideals or with a culture of toleration. Toleration is neither equality not a modern form of "multiculturalism" in the imperial setting. Rather, it is a means of rule, of extending, consolidating, and enforcing state power".[18]

Finally, in the societal level, Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire coexisted, together, but separately, as we have already noted. Recent historiography does not anymore use the concept of 'convivencia' as used and being criticized in the historiography of al-Andalus/the Iberian Peninsula. Eleni Gara kai Giorgos Tzedopoulos, in their

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[13] Benjamin Braude (ed.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Abridged Edition*, Boulder 2014, p. 1 and 48.

[14] Spyros I. Asdrachas et alii, *Greek economic history, 15th-19th centuries*, Athens 2007.

[15] Eleni Gara, «Χριστιανοί και μουσουλμάνοι στην Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία των πρώιμων νεότερων χρόνων: ιστοριογραφικές προσεγγίσεις», introduction to Molly Greene, *Κρήτη: ένας κοινός κόσμος. Χριστιανοί και Μουσουλμάνοι στη Μεσόγειο των Πρώιμων Νεότερων Χρόνων*, Athens 2005.

[16] Gara and Tzedopoulos, *Χριστιανοί και μουσουλμάνοι*, op.cit.

[17] Or not at all as Muslims, in the case of the Gypsies (Roma): Eyal Ginio, "Neither Muslims nor Zimmis: The Gypsies (Roma) in the Ottoman State" Romani Studies. 14 (2004). DOI:10.3828/rs.2004.5

[18] Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: the Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, New York 2008, p. 110.

aforementioned seminal work, continue to use the term, albeit with a neutral meaning: Muslims, Christians and Jews lived in common spaces (the towns, seldom in villages), and, at least some of them developed interactions with members of the other religious communities. Recently, Nicholas Doumanis has introduced the concept of 'intercommunality', in studying cultures of coexistence developed between religious or ethnic communities at the local level in late Ottoman Anatolia.[19] These informal relationships, according to Doumanis, were maintained throughout the Ottoman Empire for the purposes of social order and promoting moral environments based on common ethical values.

Contemporary historiography of the Ottoman centuries in the Middle East, and the Greek lands in particular, has to take into account all these concepts, in an effort to develop a non-simplistic methodology of studying the Ottoman conquests and centuries of imperial rule.

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[19] Nicholas Doumanis, *Before the Nation: Muslim-Christian Coexistence and its Destruction in Late-Ottoman Anatolia*, Oxford 2012.