

The Presentation  
of the Muslim World of Asia Minor  
by Michael Kritovoulos

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The purpose of this paper is to present a part of the historical work of Michael Kritovoulos whose contradictory writings are a breeding ground for various interpretations. Kritovoulos, despite the exercise of power in Imbros under the auspices of the sultan and the service of Turkish interests, offers a historical work with vividness and objectivity.

The historian begins his story by calling himself a servant of Mehmet and the sultan himself the greatest emperor of the Persians, Romans and Greeks. Kritovoulos continues in the same pattern of praise of the sultan, talking about the actions of the latter that were greater and more glorious than those of Alexander the Great and would be rendered in Greek by the author himself. From the very first lines, the laudatory character of the *Ευγγραφή Ιστοριῶν* is seen, with the main protagonist being Mohammed II<sup>1</sup>. The *Ευγγραφή Ιστοριῶν*, despite its title that refers to Thucydides' influence, is written by a Byzantine who - at first sight - has fully harmonized with the new political regime, leaving behind his byzantine heritage. It is also known that the Muslim ruler was informed in writing of the purpose of the historian's writing. At the beginning of

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1. Kritovoulos, *Ευγγραφή Ιστοριῶν*, ed. R. D. Reinsch, *Critobuli Imbriote, Historiae*, [CFHB 22], Berlin 1983, pp. 3<sub>7-20</sub>, 4<sub>12-21</sub> (hereinafter referred to as: Kritovoulos, *Ευγγραφή Ιστοριῶν*); H. Hunger, *Βυζαντινὴ Λογοτεχνία. Ἡ λόγια κοσμικὴ γραμματεία τῶν Βυζαντινῶν*, vol. 2, Athens 1997, pp. 362-363.

his narrative, Kritovoulos deals with the events from the fortification of the fortress on the Bosphorus to the fall of Constantinople<sup>2</sup>.

He calls Murat II an excellent man in all respects, extremely capable general and ambitious, who had committed great and wonderful achievements and was a nobleman from the most glorious race of the Turks<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, according to Kritovoulos, in 1451, the year of the succession of Murat II, signs of nature had appeared that predicted the fate, glory and great deeds of the new king, namely Muhammad II. The above attitudes are of great importance for modern research, as for the first time a Byzantine writer elevates the ottoman race and considers intense natural phenomena as a sign of the emergence of a glorious leader and in fact infidel and foreign<sup>4</sup>.

The usual way of the raids and the robberies of the Turks against the Byzantines in the Hellespont, in Macedonia and Thrace are not omitted in the work of Kritovoulos. According to him, in Asia and Europe numerous races fought brilliantly and to the death for their freedom from the Turkish yoke. In his last comment, the historian expresses his admiration for the mindset and resistance of the byzantine side, which sought only prosperity, but in no case identifies with the Byzantines<sup>5</sup>.

2. P. Mastrodemetres, «Ἐσωτερικὲς ἐπιδράσεις τοῦ Θουκυδίδου ἐπὶ τοῦ Κριτοβούλου», *Ἀθηνᾶ* 65 (1961), pp. 158-168; Ap. Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοὶ ἱστορικοὶ καὶ χρονογράφοι*, vol. IV (13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.), Athens 2015, p. 318 (hereinafter referred to as: Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοὶ ἱστορικοὶ καὶ χρονογράφοι*); Maria Mavroudi, “Translations from Greek into Arabic at the court of Mehmed the Conqueror”, in: *The Byzantine Court: Source of Power and Culture. Papers from the Second International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium*, ed. Ayla Ödekan, Κωνσταντινούπολη 2013, pp. 195-207.

3. Kritovoulos, *Ἐυγγραφή Ἱστοριῶν*, 15<sup>21-22</sup>: «...τοῦ λαμπρωτάτου γένους ὧν Ἀτουμάνων ἔκτος αὐτὸς εὐγενὴς ἐξ εὐγενῶν»; I. Hasiotis, «Τάσεις συνεργασίας Ἑλλήνων καὶ Ὀθωμανῶν», *IEE* 10 (1974), pp. 246-249; N. Andriotis, «Κριτόβουλος ὁ Ἰμβριος καὶ τὸ ἱστορικὸ του ἔργο», *Ἑλληνικά* 2 (1929), pp. 167-200 (hereinafter referred to as: Andriotis, «Κριτόβουλος ὁ Ἰμβριος»).

4. S. Imellos, «Θεοσημεῖες πρὸ τῆς ἀλώσεως τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ὑπὸ τῶν Τούρκων κατὰ τὸν ἱστορικὸν Κριτόβουλον», *ΕΕΒΣ* 52 (2004-2006), pp. 447-478.

5. Aspasia Paulopoulou, «Ἡ ἀντιπαράθεση δύο κόσμων στὶς μαρτυρίες γιὰ τὴν ἄλωση», *Βυζαντιακά* 21 (2001), pp. 347-374 (hereinafter referred to as: Paulopoulou, «Ἡ ἀντιπαράθεση δύο κόσμων στὶς μαρτυρίες γιὰ τὴν ἄλωση»); Karpozilos, *Βυζαντινοὶ ἱστορικοὶ καὶ χρονογράφοι*, pp. 322-324.

In fact, in order to keep his distance from his subliminal identification with the byzantine side, the author adopts the Turkish tribal consciousness to describe the action of the Muslim rulers, writing characteristically that the Ottoman forefathers «καὶ πρὸς πόλεμον καὶ εἰρήνην αὐταρκεστάτην καὶ ἡμῖν παρέδωσαν» the capital of the Byzantine empire. The use of the pronoun «ἡμῖν» may intensify the author's will to associate with the conquerors, but on closer inspection his statement above is an indirect accusation of the leveling policy of Muhammad II to the detriment of the Byzantine Empire. This underlying accusation is made through the comparison between the most self-sufficient Constantinople handed over by the previous sultans and the ruined and damaged Constantinople during the reign of Muhammad II<sup>6</sup>.

In fact, there was no city left but its name. One of the most valuable information presented in the historical work of Kritovoulos is the oration of Mohammed II to his Muslim followers<sup>7</sup>. One of the first priorities of the new leader was to inform his associates about the wealth of the capital and the young, good looking, noble people of the Constantinople who would be at their disposal, including children. Commonly, wealth and extreme carnal pleasures would be a turning point for his kingdom. The sultan was constantly repeating the predatory motives of the conquest of Constantinople, because of its legendary wealth. The Turks' obsession with material goods and carnal pleasures verifies the byzantine stereotypes about them and removes the case of the religious motive, at least in the first place, for the conquest of Constantinople. This argument is strengthened by the -almost exclusive- use of the term: "Turk" mainly in the works of Kritovoulos and Doukas and the avoidance of a determination of a statement of the religious identity of the conquerors<sup>8</sup>.

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6. Kritovoulos, *Ξυγγραφή Ἱστοριῶν*, p. 29<sub>10-12</sub>: «καὶ πρὸς πόλεμον καὶ εἰρήνην αὐταρκεστάτην καὶ ἡμῖν παρέδωσαν. Ἦν μὴ φανῶμεν προδιδόντες τό γε ἡμῶν μέρος μηδὲ τὰς τῶν προγόνων ἀνδραγαθίας ἀφανίσωμεν...».

7. *Idem*, pp. 60<sub>19-20</sub>, 61<sub>11-12</sub>: «πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ πλοῦτός τέ ἐστι πολὺς καὶ παντοδαπὸς ἐν τῇδε τῇ πόλει [...] νῦν ὑμῖν ἐς διαρπαγὴν τε καὶ λείαν, πλοῦτον ἀφθονον, ἄνδρας, γυναῖκας, παῖδας...»; S. Vryonis, *The decline of medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*, Berkley-Los Angeles-London 1971, pp. 100-112.

8. G. Printzipas, «Οἱ ἱστορικοὶ τῆς Ἀλώσεως», in: *Ἡ ἄλωση τῆς Πόλης*, E. Chrysos

In his speech,<sup>9</sup> Muhammad II argued that Constantinople was continually hostile to the Turks and always plotted against them. Therefore, during the siege of Constantinople the Turks got rid of the enemy and lived peacefully. The sultan distorts historical reality by giving the empire the role of perpetrator, despite the fact that from the 13th to the middle of the 15th century the empire held a defensive position against Muslim expansionism, with the aim of preserving its remaining territories. In addition, the incitement of hatred for the presented as a defeated enemy of the Muslim hegemony, perhaps, is related to the objections of some members of the Turkish elite for the total war that the sultan declared to the Christians. He projected the Byzantine state as a potential catalyst for Turkish power, indirectly curbing any reactions to the overthrow of a weak empire - in the name of now - which had manifested all forms of submission and willingness to negotiate with the Muslim side<sup>10</sup>.

A second reading of the above discourse may understand, to some extent, his above-extreme view of the empire, given the parallel approaches of the West and the Turks by the Byzantine emperors. Of course, the unstable policies of the empire showed the insolvency of the Byzantines, but in no way were they evidence of realistic, sovereign aspirations against Muslim authority. In addition, the birth of many Muslim-Turk rulers and their descendants in byzantine lands gave the impression that they were rightfully theirs. Consequently, the Byzantines were their de facto enemies<sup>11</sup>.

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(ed.), Athens 1994, pp. 63-97 (hereinafter referred to as: Printzipas, «Οί Ιστορικοί τῆς Ἀλώσεως»).

9. Kritonoulos, *Ξυγγραφή Ἱστοριῶν*, p. 61<sup>21-26</sup>: «Τὸ δὲ δὴ μείζον πάντων, ὅτι πόλιν ἐχθρῶς ἔχουσιν ἡμῖν ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ ἀεὶ ἐπιφρομένην τοῖς ἡμετέροις κακοῖς καὶ πάντα τρόπον ἐπιβουλεύουσιν τὴν ἡμετέραν ἀρχὴν καθαιρήσομεν καὶ τοῦ λοιποῦ αὐτοὶ τε βέβαια ἔξομεν τὰ παρόντα ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἐν εἰρήνῃ βαθεῖα καὶ ἀσφαλεῖα διάξομεν ἀπαλλαγέντες ἐχθροῦ γειτονήματος καὶ πρὸς τὰ λοιπὰ θύραν ἀνοιξομεν».

10. Kritonoulos, *Ξυγγραφή Ἱστοριῶν*, p. 35<sup>1-13</sup>: «Ὁ μὲν δὴ τοιαῦτα εἰπὼν ἐπεψήφισεν ἤδη τὸν πόλεμον. τῶν δὲ παρόντων πάντες σχεδὸν ἐπεκρότησαν πρὸς τὰ παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως ῥηθέντα [...] οἷς δὲ μὴ κατὰ γνώμην ἐδόκει τὸ πρᾶγμα διὰ τέ τινος ἄλλας αἰτίας καὶ τὰς ἀναφρομένας δὴ τῷ πολέμῳ δυσχερείας [...] οὗτοι δὲ ἐβούλοντο μὲν εἰπεῖν τι πρὸς ἀποτροπὴν τοῦ πολέμου...».

11. Nikephoros Gregoras, *Ῥωμαϊκὴ Ἱστορία*, ed. L. Schopen, *Nicephorus Gregoras, Byz-*

The description of the siege and the fall of Constantinople is in fact an anthem to the resistance of the Byzantines against a superpower of the time. The Romans had a prosperous morale and fought brilliantly and bravely. The heroic attitude of the people of Constantinople remained intact until the moment of the betrayal of the “ungrateful” and “wicked” fortune. For a writer who expressed his devotion to the sultan, appropriating even the ancestors of the Turks, the statement of a “wicked” and “ungrateful” fortune on the evolution of the siege betrays a supporter of the suffering Byzantines, who - due to political change - expressed indirectly his sorrow for the fall of Constantinople<sup>12</sup>.

Murders and violence by janissaries and other soldiers prevailed during the hostilities inside the capital of the Byzantine empire. The Byzantines resorted to the sanctuaries to escape the rage and anger of the Turks.

*antina Historia*, [CSHB 26], Bonn 1855, p. 834<sup>14-19</sup>: «Τῷ δ' Ἀμοῦρ ἠθροικίτι πλεῖστον ὄμιλον πεζικῶν τε καὶ ἵππικῶν δυνάμεων, πρὶν ἔς Θράκην [...] διαβαίνειν [...] προῤῥίζον ἐξελεῖν τὸ ἐν τῇ Σμύρῃ φρούριον τῶν Λατίνων, ὡς μὴ ὄρφανὴν ἀπιόντος αὐτοῦ καταλελειμμένην τὴν πάτριον γῆν συχὰ κατατρέχοντες οὔτοι...»; Doukas, *Ἱστορία Τουρκο-βυζαντινῆ*, ed. B. Grecu, *Ducæ, Istoria Turcobyzantina (1341-1462)*, Bucuresti 1958, pp. 51<sup>11-13</sup>, 53<sup>22-26</sup>: «Τῶν τοῦ Ἀτῆν Τούρκου υἱὸς εἷς Ὀμοῦρ ἐπονομαζόμενος, ἀρχηγὸς τῶν ἐν τῇ Σμύρῃ πολιχνίων καὶ αὐτῆς Σμύρνης, κατὰ διαδοχὴν λαβόντος τὴν ἡγεμονίαν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ἀτῆν [...]. Ἐλθὼν δὲ ὁ Ὀμοῦρ ἐν τῇ Σμύρῃ καὶ ἰδὼν τὸ πολίχνιον ἤδη ὑπὸ τῶν φρερίων πεπληρωμένων, μεστὸν ἀνθρώπων πολεμικῶν [...] πλήρης κατεργασμένον καὶ μηδεμιᾶς ἄλλης δεούσης οἰκοδομῆς, ὠδυνήθη τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ἐπιμόνως καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἐβουλεύσατο ἢ τὸ φρούριον κατασχεῖν ἢ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀποβαλέσθαι»; *Idem*, p. 113<sup>12-16</sup>: «ἐγεγόνει [...] λιμὸς ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἐπαρχίαις, αἷς οἱ πόδες τῶν Σκυθῶν ἐπάτησαν, καὶ ἐμφύλιοι πόλεμοι... Ὁ Καρμιάν [...] ἔλαβε τὴν πατρικὴν αὐτοῦ ἐπαρχίαν, Ἀλυσὰρ ἐπονομαζόμενος. Ὁμοίως καὶ Σαρχὰν Λυδίαν τὴν πατρικὴν ἐπαρχίαν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐποίησατο. Ὁ Ὀρχὰν καὶ οἱ τοῦ Ἀτῆν δύο υἱοὶ [...] τὴν Ἰωνίαν πᾶσαν ἐκπληρώσατο»; Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *Ἀποδείξεις Ἱστοριῶν Δ'*, ed. E. Darkó, *Laonici Chalcocondylae, Demonstrationes Historiarum*, vol. 1, Budapest 1922-1923, p. 160<sup>8-9</sup>: «Μωσῆς μεμαθημένος καὶ ἀφεθείς ὑπὸ Τεμήρῳ βασιλέως ἐκομίζετο ἐπὶ πατρώαν χώραν...».

12. Kritovoulos, *Ἐνυγραφή Ἱστοριῶν*, pp. 67<sup>36-37</sup>, 68<sup>1-8</sup>, 69<sup>12-13</sup>: «Οἱ δὲ Ῥωμαῖοι [...] λαμπρῶς ἀμυνόμενοι τε γενναίως καὶ τῷ πολέμῳ καθυπερτερῶντες καὶ ἄνδρες ἀγαθοὶ γινόμενοι [...] οὐ τραύματα καὶ σφαγαὶ καὶ θάνατοι τῶν οἰκείων πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν ὀρώμενοι [...] ὥστε ἐνδοῦναί τι καὶ καθυφείναι τῆς πρόσθεν ὁρμῆς [...] ἕως ἢ πονηρὰ καὶ ἀγνώμων τύχη προῤῥωκε τούτους [...] ἔδει ποτὲ καὶ τοὺς ταλαιπώρους Ῥωμαίους τῷ τῆς δουλείας ὑπαχθῆναι ζυγῷ»; Paulopoulou, «Ἡ ἀντιπαράθεση δύο κόσμων στίς μαρτυρίες γιὰ τὴν ἄλωση», pp. 347-374; Dimitra Moniou, *Μνήμες Ἀλώσεως. Κωνσταντινούπολη 1453*, Athens 2010, pp. 127-130.

From the use of the words “wrath” and “anger”, it is concluded that the army of Muhammad II has embraced the arguments of his oration and practiced the sultan’s hate speech against the byzantine element, which was treated as a timeless enemy of the Muslims. Without the correlation of hate speech with the behavior of the Turkish warriors, it is difficult to justify such a move against a devastated and a sparsely populated city, without basic defense and foreign aid, which was a matter of time before it was overthrown by the Sultan’s incomparable military superiority<sup>13</sup>.

Kritovoulos through specific words and phrases boldly emphasizes that with their actions the Turks exceeded the limits, unjustifiably displaying extremely aggressive behaviors. Extensive torture of the entire byzantine population could not be understood, despite the fact that Constantinople did not surrender voluntarily<sup>14</sup>. Massacres and robberies in cities that did not surrender peacefully were expected, according to extensive descriptions of Turkish atrocities by Byzantine writers, but the ruthless, unreasonable torture of the entire population and the almost personal anger of the Turkish people were incomprehensible. The term “dishonorable”, used twice by the historian to describe the plunder of the sanctuaries, reveals, on the one hand, his disgust for the humiliation of the symbols of Orthodoxy and, on the other hand, the preservation of his Christian identity. The Byzantines who fought on the walls, seeing these images, surrendered to the opponents out of desperation. The

13. Kritovoulos, *Ευγγραφή Ἱστοριῶν*, p. 71<sup>4-12</sup>: «ἐνθα δὴ φόνος πολὺς τῶν προσ-  
τυχανόντων ἐγένετο [...] τῶν δὲ ἐν ταῖς οἰκίαις αὐταῖς ἐπεισιπτόντων βία τῶν  
γενητῆζάρων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων στρατιωτῶν σὺν οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ καὶ λογισμῶ, τῶν δὲ ἐς  
ἄλκην τρεπομένων, τῶν δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἱερεῖς καταπεφευγόντων τε καὶ τε ἰκετευόντων  
[...] πάντων ἀπλῶς μηδεμιᾶς οὔσης φειδοῦς. ὀργὴ γὰρ καὶ θυμῶ πολλῶ ἐχώρουν ἐπ’  
αὐτοὺς οἱ στρατιῶται...»; Printzipas, «Οἱ ἱστορικοὶ τῆς Ἀλώσεως», pp. 63-97.

14. Kritovoulos, *Ευγγραφή Ἱστοριῶν*, pp. 71<sup>25</sup>, 72<sup>5-21</sup>, 73<sup>26</sup>: «καὶ ἦν ἰδεῖν θέαμα δεινὸν  
καὶ ἔλσεινόν [...] ἀνδρες ξιφήρεις [...] θυμοῦ πνέοντες [...] ἀπηρυθριασμένοι πρὸς  
πάντα τὰ χεῖριστα [...] ὥσπερ θῆρες ἄγριοι καὶ ἀνήμεροι εἰσπηδῶντες εἰς τὰς οἰκίας  
καὶ σύροντες ὠμῶς, σπαράσσοντες, βιαζόμενοι, ἀπάγοντες αἰσχρῶς [...] καὶ τί κακὸν  
οὐχὶ ποιῶντες; [...] ἔτι δὲ γέροντας ἐντίμους ἐλκομένους τῆς πολιᾶς, τοὺς δὲ  
καὶ τυπτομένους ἀνηλεῶς [...] παρθένους μοναζούσας σεμνάς [...] τὰς μὲν τῶν  
δωματίων βιαίως ἐξαγομένας καὶ συρομένας, τὰς δὲ τῶν ἱερῶν ἀποσπωμένας, ἐν οἷς  
κατέφευγον, καὶ ἀπαγομένας σὺν ὕβρει καὶ ἀτιμία ξαινομένας τε τὰς παρειὰς σὺν  
οἰμωγῇ [...] κατεβάλλοντο μὲν ἀτίμως εἰς γῆν εἰκόνας...».

Turks are repeatedly called “opponents” by the author, who expresses his indignation at the facts and clearly separates his position from those of them<sup>15</sup>.

Upon entering the city, the sultan felt sorry for her and aimed to rebuild her. In fact, Kritovoulos quotes the sultan’s confession about the unprecedented atrocities of the Muslim army against Constantinople. According to the Ottoman ruler, no city had ever suffered such a magnitude of conquest. The indescribable barbarity, irrationality and immoral attitude of the Muslim warriors had surprised everyone, even themselves. Even for Muhammad it was difficult to see Constantinople so devastated. So, indeed, the foreign soldiers went beyond the limits and the author’s harsh criticism of what took place during the fall of Constantinople is fully understood<sup>16</sup>. Also, the quoted words of Mohammed II convince the researcher of their authenticity due to the fact that the author’s historical work was sent to the sultan himself and the obvious accuracy in capturing the words of the Turkish leader. Kritovoulos criticizes the negative aspects of the fall of Constantinople, taking care to attribute the crimes exclusively to the Muslim soldiers and not on the sultan without, however, absolving him of his responsibilities for the decision to level the empire<sup>17</sup>.

The impact of the collapse of the Byzantine Empire from the point of view of a Byzantine scholar of the time finds perhaps its most

15. Kritovoulos, *Ευγενική Ιστοριών*, p. 73<sup>15-25</sup>: «Οἱ [...] δυστυχεῖς Ῥωμαῖοι ὡς δὲ κατὰ νότου τε εἶδον τοὺς πολεμίους [...] οἱ δὲ ἀπογνῶντες τοῖς ὅλοις καὶ ὄπλα τῶν χειρῶν ἐκλυομένων ἤδη ἀπολύοντες παρεδίδουν αὐτοὺς τοῖς πολεμίοις...»; Andriotis, «Κριτόβουλος ὁ Ἰμβριος», pp. 167-200.

16. Kritovoulos, *Ευγενική Ιστοριών*, p. 76<sup>11-22</sup>: «Ὁ βασιλεὺς [...] ἐώρα [...] τὴν παντελῆ φθορὰν αὐτῆς [...] καὶ οἶκτος αὐτὸν εὐθὺς ἐσήει [...] ὁ βασιλεὺς ἔφη [...] καὶ γὰρ ὄντως πάθος μέγα τοῦτο γέγονεν ἐφ’ ἡμῶν ἐν μιᾷ δὴ ταύτῃ πόλει οἷον ἐν οὐδεμιᾷ τῶν πάλαι μνημονευμένων καὶ ἱστορουμένων μεγάλων πόλεων μεγέθει τε τῆς ἀλούσης πόλεως καὶ ὀξύτητι καὶ ἀποτομῆ ἔργου· οὐχ ἥμισυ δὲ πάντας ἐξέπληξε τοὺς τε ἄλλους καὶ αὐτοὺς δὴ τοὺς δράσαντας καὶ παθόντας τῶ τε παραλόγῳ καὶ ἀήθει τοῦ γεγονότος καὶ τῶ ὑπερβάλλοντι καὶ ξενίζοντι τοῦ δεινοῦ»; H. Inalcik, “The policy of Mehmed II toward the Greek Population of Istanbul and the Byzantine Buildings of the City”, *DOP* 23-24 (1969-1970), pp. 231-249.

17. D. R. Reinck, “Kritoboulos of Imbros. Learned historian, Ottoman raya and Byzantine patriot”, *ZRVI* 40 (2003), pp. 297-311.

complete expression in the work of Kritovoulos<sup>18</sup>. He compares the fall of Constantinople with other falls, e.g. with those of Troy and Babylon respectively. Even in these famous conquests, had not taken place the barbarities that took place in the capital of the Byzantine empire. The hardships experienced by the people of Constantinople were unprecedented even in relation to the most important - in world history - conquests of cities. The infidel invaders did not pay even the slightest respect for human dignity. Before narrating the colonization of Constantinople, Kritovoulos pays tribute to Constantine XI Palaiologos by writing a funeral oration. The funeral oration praises the wisdom of the deceased hero-emperor and presents the high ideals for which he sacrificed himself. The display of the emperor's virtues and the repetition of the presentation of the consequent materialistic policy pursued by the sultan after the fall of the capital of the Byzantine state automatically creates in the reader of his historical work the contrast between the completely different worldviews of the Byzantine-Christians and the Muslim-Turks<sup>19</sup>.

At the beginning of his narration, Kritovoulos is introduced as the mouthpiece of Turkish propaganda that he writes with the aim of praising the political actions of Mohammed II. Of course, the extensive analysis of the siege and fall of Constantinople that overlaps any other cited war event in the *Ξυγγραφή Ἱστοριῶν* suggests another basic – perhaps the most basic – purpose of Kritovoulos' storytelling: The most penetrating – of any author – imprint happened on the Muslim side. Perhaps the

18. Kritovoulos, *Ξυγγραφή Ἱστοριῶν*, p. 77<sup>3-13</sup>: «Ἐάλω Τροία [...] οἳ τε γὰρ Ἕλληνες φιλανθρωπότεροι τοῖς ἐαλωκόσι προσεφέροντο [...] ἐάλω ἢ Βαβυλῶν [...] ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὕβρει γυναικῶν ἐκδοθεῖσα καὶ παίδων...».

19. Kritovoulos, *Ξυγγραφή Ἱστοριῶν*, pp. 81<sup>8-21</sup>, 82<sup>12-17</sup>: «θνήσκει δὲ καὶ βασιλεὺς Κωνσταντῖνος αὐτὸς ἥπερ ἔφην, μαχόμενος, σώφρων μὲν καὶ μέτριος ἐν τῷ καθ' ἑαυτὸν βίῳ γενόμενος, φρονήσεως δὲ καὶ ἀρετῆς ἐς ἄκρον ἐπιμελελημένος [...] ὑπὲρ τε τῆς πατρίδος καὶ τῶν ἀρχομένων πάντα καὶ ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν αἰρούμενος [...] εἴλετο συναποθανεῖν τῇ πατρίδι τε καὶ τοῖς ἀρχομένοις [...] βασιλεὺς δὲ Μεχεμέτις [...] διατίθεται τὰ κατὰ τὴν λείαν. Καὶ πρῶτον μὲν λαμβάνει τὸν συνήθη δασμόν, αὐτῶ τῶν λαφύρων, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ ἀριστεῖα ἀπὸ πάντων ἐκλέγεται, παρθένους τε ὠραίας καὶ τῶν εὖ γεγονότων καὶ παιδας καλλίστους, ἔστιν ἃ δὲ τούτων καὶ ὠνούμενος παρὰ τῶν στρατιωτῶν». P. Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire: Studies in the History of Turkey, 13th-15th Centuries*, New York 2012, pp. 60-70.



excessive flattery of the Turkish leader and his war achievements, and even the historian's untrue statement about his common ancestors with him, were fundamental elements of his history, in order to divert the sultan's attention from the realistic description of the events and the full attribution of the responsibilities of the complete destruction of the empire from the Turkish army. These responsibilities were often performed using only two or three heavily charged words, sometimes avoiding extensive commentary. In no case, however, does the author directly blame the sultan for what is happening, in order to secure, first and foremost, his life and, secondarily, his place in the local political scene. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the description of the heinous action of the Turks worked indirectly for the benefit of the sultan, who through a literary work sent a message of power to those who dared to question the new status quo.

The *Ευγγραφή Ιστοριῶν* was gradually transformed from a politically committed work praising the sultan into a text-denouncement about the events during the siege and fall of Constantinople. The revelation of the brutalities of the Muslim warriors and their vile motives for the conquest of «Βασιλεύουσα», a fact which Muhammad II himself admits, deprived them of virtually all the desired glory and reduced them in the eyes of the scholars and kings of the time who would study the historical work of Kritovoulos. The Turks, because of their enormous military superiority and stripped of a rudimentary spiritual background, may have managed to destroy a thousand-year-old empire with difficulty, but inadvertently, they contributed to its apotheosis and the glorification of its inhabitants.

The earlier views of historians on the treacherous behavior of Kritovoulos are extreme, considering the accomplishment of the fall, the inability to offer any other solution to help the enslaved Byzantines and, obviously, the survival instinct of the historian, who was coming in direct contact with the Ottoman leader. This particular historian, through his writing, highlighted, in the best way, the indescribable toughness of the Turks towards the Byzantines and did not hesitate to attribute to them the responsibility for the deviations in Constantinople, which the world of his time had never seen before<sup>20</sup>.

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20. Chasiotis, «Τάσεις συνεργασίας Ἑλλήνων καὶ Ὀθωμανῶν», p. 248: "Kritovoulos is

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ἡ παρουσίαση  
 τοῦ μουσουλμανικοῦ κόσμου τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας  
 ἀπὸ τὸν Μιχαὴλ Κριτόβουλο

Εἰρήνης Πολίτη, ὑπ. διδάκτορος  
 Ἐθνικοῦ καὶ Καποδιστριακοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν

Τὸ ἔργο τοῦ Μιχαὴλ Κριτόβουλου ἔχει ὑπάρξει πεδίο ἀντιπαράθεσης γιὰ παλαιότερους καὶ σύγχρονους ἱστορικοὺς λόγω τῶν ἀμφίσημων νοημάτων ποὺ ἐμπεριέχει. Τὸ παρὸν ἄρθρο δὲν ἐστιάζει στὴν ἀνάδειξη καὶ ἀνάλυση τῆς φιλοτουρκικῆς στάσης τοῦ ἱστορικοῦ. Ἀντιθέτως, διενεργεῖται μία συστηματικὴ προσπάθεια ἀνάδειξης ἀφ' ἑνὸς τῆς βυζαντινῆς ταυτότητας τοῦ ἰδίου καὶ ἀφ' ἑτέρου τῆς κατακεραύνωσης, ἐντὸς τῆς *Ἐυγγραφῆς Ἱστοριῶν*, τῶν ἀποτρόπαιων πράξεων τῶν Τούρκων κατακτητῶν κατὰ τὴν πολιορκία καὶ τὴν ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Ἐπιπλέον, δίδεται βάση στὴν ὑποβόσκουσα ἀντιπαράθεση μεταξὺ τοῦ ἡρωικοῦ πνεύματος τῶν Βυζαντινῶν καὶ τῆς ξεγυμνωμένης –ἀπὸ ἀρετῆς καὶ ἠθικῆ– δράσης τῆς τουρκικῆς πλευρᾶς. Ἡ μελέτη τῆς Ἱστορίας τοῦ Κριτόβουλου, προβαλλόμενη μόνο ὡς ἓνα σύνολο κειμένων μὲ σκοπὸ τὴν ἱκανοποίηση τῆς ἀνώτατης τουρκικῆς ἡγεσίας, ὑποβαθμίζει τὸ βαθύτατο «κατηγορῶ» ἐνὸς γνήσιου Βυζαντινοῦ γιὰ τὸ ἄδοξο τέλος μιᾶς ὑπερχιλιετοῦς αὐτοκρατορίας.

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characterized as servile and opportunistic"; S. Runciman, *Ἡ ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως*, transl. N. Nikoloudis, Athens 2003, p. 280 and n. 300.