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# ARCHIVIO VENETO



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*The Byzantine-Ottoman Transition in Venetian Chronicles*, edd. Sebastian Kolditz, Markus Koller, Roma-Venezia, Viella-Centro Tedesco di Studi Venezia, 2018, pp. 324.

This collection does not quite match its title in its entirety, as some of its papers have little or nothing to do with the Byzantine-Ottoman transition, while others do not pertain to Venetian chronicles. Nonetheless, the reader with interest in Venetian-Byzantine-Ottoman relations, especially in the fifteenth century, will learn a great deal from the book. When one adds in the erudition and thought-provoking use of sources in many papers, its virtues far exceed any small omissions.

The introductory essay by the co-editors Kolditz and Koller helps us to understand the context of the book's creation, but is less strong on the thematic commonalities or larger historiographic questions that link these papers together. Recognizing that it is difficult to create an accurate title for a collection of such varied materials, the particular virtues of each paper can be enjoyed, and specialists will be able to enlist the material in each to their own research needs or interests.

Peter Schreiner's scholarly versatility is once again on display with a chronologically sweeping chapter on the presentation of Byzantine emperors in Venetian chronicles. The use of *imperator Constantinopolitanum* as the title of Byzantine emperors far more often than *imperator Romeorum* in the *Venetiarum Historia* of between 1355 and 1360 is revealing; and more generally, Schreiner's insistence on the importance of diction in analyzing how the Venetians thought about Byzantium, offers us one of the avenues of approach, a linguistic avenue, that may permit us to trace a timeline for an emerging sense of Venetian independence from Byzantium.

Thierry Ganchou's fascinating paper explicates the retirement of the daughters of John V, with the assurance born of his previous studies of many such episodes in the history of the Byzantine imperial court and factional and dynastic politics, while at the same time doing spadework to explain what he thinks are the likeliest family relationships among several imperial women of the households of John V and John VI.

Georg Christ indicates an interesting lacuna in the network of news that circulated in Venice and her territories, in the fifteenth century: the Aegean Sea. He argues that there is a discernible hierarchy in such news, and that the political importance of the Aegean was regarded as low, though the Battle of Gallipoli in 1415 was important enough for it to become prominent in Antonio Morosini's chronicle written shortly afterwards.

The contribution of Șerban V. Marin, for example, concerns the manuscript families into which the Venetian crusading chronicles have been divided. Its discussion of historiography is lucid, as is his discussion of Antonio Carile's work and his industrious attempt at a taxonomy of the thousands of

chronicles written between ca. 1204 and 1500. Marin also provides a valuable warning against the frequency with which Andrea Dandolo's chronicle has been relied on as an authority of choice, even when sources far closer in time to the events described exist. A more meticulous editing of the English might have aided the readability of the Marin piece. The sentence «As a result, judging the Venetian chronicles' nonentity is something that must report strictly to the reconstruction of the events...» (p. 87) could have been better expressed, and this phrase is far from the only such weak one.

Colin Imber's contribution is valuable in that it illustrates how it was not only during times of war that Venetians wrote down their wishful thinking about sudden lightning-bolts bringing down the Ottoman state (as Kenneth Setton, Hans-Joachim Kissling and others have shown), but also during other tumultuous political events, in this case a Syrian revolt by the former governor, al-Ghazali, from 1520 to 1522, of which several Venetian reports vastly exaggerated the scope, suggesting that the governor of Egypt (who actually remained loyal to the Ottomans), as well as the Shah of Persia, were on the verge of allying themselves with the rebels.

Giorgio Vespignani deals with the fascinating subject of the knowledge of Russia in fifteenth-century Venice, but switches gears quite early on to a narrative of the events in southeastern Europe after the fall of Byzantium, where a tighter focus on the Venetian grasp of events in the region would have helped clarity. In treating this subject, there was also a missed opportunity to go further into the specific Orthodox interests that linked Russia and *Rascia* (Serbia) – did Venetian writers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries recognize the connection between Serbian and Russian Christianity? That Giovanni Tiepolo's *Cronaca* of the early seventeenth century should have conflated Rascia and Russia certainly suggests there was a perceived link, but more detail would have helped here.

Dorit Raines' essay does not concern the Byzantine-Ottoman transition in Venetian chronicles. But it is a sharp and useful paper, nonetheless. She begins by making a distinction between chronicles and histories, a distinction that certainly sharpens thinking, but because she phrases her definition in the present tense, that spurs us to ask: did medieval and early modern Venetians consciously make this genre distinction? Did they commit themselves in writing to this distinction – and if so, she might have given us an example or two – or did they simply observe it unselfconsciously, as a matter of course? I raise this point in part because other recent discussions of the annals-chronicles-history distinction are also missing any reference to what sources *at the time* had to say, if anything, on this subject<sup>1</sup>. Citations of the work of Clanchy, Burgess

<sup>1</sup> E.g. J.W. BURROW, *Annals, Chronicles, and History*, in *History of Histories: Epics, Chronicles, Romances and Inquiries from Herodotus and Thucydides to the Twentieth Century*, New York 2008, pp. 217-243.

and others cannot equal the effect that quotation from the chronicle-writers would have had.

Raines' assertion that the *Annales Venetici Breves* is a particularly good example of Venetian chronicles should have been buttressed by argument. This reviewer was not quite sure what the logic behind her assertion was – that is, why these chronicles should be regarded as more typical than any others. Raines then discerns a rather rigid pattern to chronicle structures – and it would be interesting to know how far earlier medieval chronicles match her breakdown of Venetian chronicles from about 1200 on – that allowed for easy continuation and editing. She also indicates a change after 1400, in that chronicles as physical objects became more lavishly illustrated and produced. At times in Raines' piece, which is written with so much mathematical schematization that she employs graphs to illustrate 'narration flow charts' – a slightly confusing name for them, since 'flow chart' is itself a technical term, but she uses 'flow' in a different sense – one could be forgiven for thinking that it is written independently of its precise chronicle subject matter. I learned a great deal, but her extremely systematic approach to the Venetian chronicle – which she conceives largely in terms of what it could do for a writer, as if chroniclers all made a conscious choice to employ that genre, rather than sometimes allowing the hand of tradition and inertia to govern them – is not quite convincing, given the enormous amount of material she is trying to fit into a system.

Maria Pia Pedani, in a piece that is among the last published during her lifetime, persuasively argues that chronicles and documents, both Ottoman and Italian, should be combined and integrated to yield the most complete understanding both of landmark transitions in Ottoman history, such as the date of the Ottoman conquest of Edirne, and the date when the heirs of Osman assumed the title of *sultan*, superseding the earlier *emir*, of Venetian-Ottoman relations, using examples such as the false *çavuş* Mustafa, and his false report of the Venetian origin of Nur Banu Sultana, the wife of Selim II.

Carlo Campana has supplied us with a substantial and exceptionally informative contribution on the chronicles held in the Marciana Library connected with *Romania*, both Venetian and Ottoman territories formerly held by the Byzantine Empire. Campana even delves into the contents of the most significant treaties and atlases, as well. There are all sorts of choice morsels to be had here, including the final passage quoted, which shows how entire realms such as Egypt, Rumelia and Hungary could be referred to as *contrade* in the Venetian Italian of the time. The foregrounding of some basic features of the Marciana collections with patient and meticulous explication make this chapter easy to follow, and extremely informative.

In a chapter, finally, that is consonant with Pedani's approach, in the sense of combining Ottoman and Italian sources, it is a pleasure to see Hans-Georg Majer still active, and his paper on Franz Babinger and his use of Italian sources for writing Ottoman history offers more golden nuggets than Sutter's Mill.

Majer is one of a distinguished group of Munich Ottomanists, and was a young scholar when Babinger died in 1967, so that we benefit from his insider's view. As a parallel to this reconstruction of a scholar's working methods and view of his own field, Majer's contribution might profitably be read alongside the recent paper of Charles Burnett on Hellmut Ritter and the publication saga involving the medieval *Picatrix*<sup>2</sup>. A particular delight is the bibliographic help that Majer provides in his footnotes, providing complete citations for all of Babinger's major works, including collected works published in three volumes posthumously. Majer brings us also an insider's point of view, through his early acquaintance with Babinger, as well the stories Majer is able to relate from another Munich Ottomanist, Hans-Joachim Kissling.

It may be churlish, but this reviewer feels he must express regret that Majer does not give more attention to the political assumptions that guided Babinger in his work. Majer tells us that Babinger was proud of the subtitle to the original German edition of his masterwork *Mehmet der Eroberer und seine Zeit, Weltstürmer der Zeitenwende* or, more or less, *World-stormer of an Era*, but never offers an explanation. W.E.D. Allen (for his book *Problems of Turkish Power in the Sixteenth Century*) and Ernst Werner (for *Die Geburt einer Grossmacht*) are both examples of midcentury scholars who were preoccupied with the power politics of Ottoman growth and expansion, and it is at least plausible that their scholarship was colored by political preoccupations (Allen, a Conservative and sometime Ulster Unionist M.P., was in the 1930s the author of the generally pro-Mosleyite book *Fascism in Relation to British History and Character*, while Werner's approach to history was placed in its East German context by, among others, Andreas Dorpalen). The examples of Allen and Werner suggest that preoccupation with the power politics in Ottoman history was not confined to Germany, nor to the period before 1945<sup>3</sup>. While this is part of the story, Majer's own piece brings out how significant was the reign of Mehmed II beyond the conquest of Constantinople, and Ciriaco d'Ancona and his humanist activity is a good inclusion in this light. Majer also admirably brings his reader up-to-date on work that has been done on these Italian sources since Babinger's death in 1967. He might also have referred to Raby (1980) on Ciriaco and specifically the interest at Mehmet's court in at least Greek, if not Roman, history<sup>4</sup>. The extent to which some Ottomans were in-

<sup>2</sup> C. BURNETT, *Le Picatrix à l'Institut Warburg: Histoire d'une recherche et d'une publication*, in *Images et magie. Picatrix entre Orient et Occident*, a cura di Jean-Patrice Boudet, Anna Caiozzo, Nicolas Weill-Parot, Paris 2011, pp. 25-40.

<sup>3</sup> Dorpalen writes about East-German Marxist-Leninist history in general, and cites Werner, a medievalist, in some of his footnotes: see A. DORPALEN, *German History in Marxist perspective: The East German Approach*, Detroit 1985, especially pp. 74-76, 91-92.

<sup>4</sup> J. RABY, *Cyriacus of Ancona and the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II*, «Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes», 43 (1980), pp. 42-46.

terested in pre-Islamic antiquity is an important question, worthy of attention in a collection of papers devoted largely to Byzantium and Venice.

Rather than refer us to a discussion by Colin Heywood of a half-century's reception of *Mehmed der Eroberer*, as well as a related article by Grimm<sup>5</sup>, and the dissertation by Ellinger on German Oriental Studies during the National Socialist period<sup>6</sup>, Majer, with the insider's point of view that so usefully informs his contribution, might have given us his own insights and opinions on Babinger's underlying ideas. That political ideas affect how history is written surely is not a notion that needs much defense, and this reviewer was left wanting more.

One corrigendum: *Kritika Chronica*, p. 292, is actually the journal *Kretika Chronica*, one devoted in large part, though not exclusively, to research on the history of Crete.

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