

Christian Slaves of the Ottoman Empire:  
An analysis of the fifteenth-century captive lives and writings of  
Konstantin Mihailović, Johan Schiltberger and Brother George of  
Mühlenbach

Patrick Smith (BA Honours)

Masters of Arts

Thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree

College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

La Trobe University  
Victoria, Australia

August 2020

## Contents

<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Statement of Authorship</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 1: The Sources and Genres of Konstantin Mihailović, Brother George and Johann Schiltberger</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>Konstantin Mihailović's Story:</i>	9
<i>Brother George's Story:</i>	36
<i>Johann Schiltberger's Story:</i>	58
<b>Chapter 2: Audience, Motives and Genres</b>	<b>77</b>
<i>Section 1: Target Audience and Success</i>	77
<i>Section 2: The Motive and Tone of our Authors</i>	84
<i>Section 3: Guilt and Irony</i>	97
<b>Chapter 3: The Ottomans at War</b>	<b>117</b>
<i>Section 1: Esprit de Corps</i>	117
<i>Section 2: Ottoman Expansion</i>	140
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>170</b>

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1.</b> Mid-fifteenth-century depiction (1555?) in the <i>Süleymannâme</i> (folio 31b) of <i>devşirme</i>	<b>5</b>
<b>Figure 2.</b> Milos Obilić	<b>7</b>
<b>Figure 3.</b> Church Fortresses in Transylvania: Map of Transylvania with isometric drawings of Saxon-built church-fortresses, fortified churches and peasant fortresses	<b>33</b>
<b>Figure 4.</b> Constantinople	<b>84</b>
<b>Figure 5.</b> Custom Map of Ostrvica and Novo Brdo	<b>85</b>
<b>Figure 6.</b> The Ottoman Empire before 1453	<b>106</b>
<b>Figure 7.</b> The Ottoman Empire in the 16 <sup>th</sup> Century	<b>160</b>

## **Abstract**

The Ottoman Empire was a once glorious empire, its territory spanning three continents and its Sultan the Caliph of the Islamic World. The most famous conquest of the empire is easily the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, a city today called Istanbul. What is often unknown to those who do not study Ottoman history is the empire's effective use of Christian slaves from Europe. These slaves varied in role, from a house servant, to serving as a legendary Janissary soldier. This study explores three fifteenth-century memoirs written or dictated by Christian slaves who had lived in the Ottoman empire and served in the Ottoman state.

This thesis will be focusing on three works produced by three Christian slaves. They are Konstantin Mihailović, Johann Schiltberger and Brother George of Mühlenbach. Their works are *Memoirs of a Janissary*, *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger: A Native of Bavaria in Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427* and *Treatise on the Customs, Affairs and Wickedness of the Turks* respectively.

All three young men came away with different opinions and feelings regarding their time in the Ottoman Empire. Mihailović understood the Ottoman Empire through the eyes of an elite soldier. George took a theological approach. Uniquely Schiltberger viewed his 'Ottoman life' as an adventure to be told.

The aim of this thesis is to compare and contrast how each author survived, served and viewed their capture and the Ottoman Empire which captured them. My thesis traces where, how and why each memoirist agreed or disagreed. Themes to be discussed in this thesis range from their motives for writing, to each authors individual guilt and ironies to their varied understandings of Ottoman expansion. The challenge becomes one of construing how differences in their plights and circumstances led to differences in their perception of the Ottoman Empire and its causes.



## **Statement of Authorship**

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

Patrick Smith, 30 August 2020.

## Introduction

The Ottoman Empire was perhaps most famous for its moniker as the ‘Sick Man of Europe’. For Australians, they were the men who fought against the men of ANZAC. However, the Ottoman Empire was a once glorious empire, its territory spanning three continents and its Sultan the Caliph of the Islamic World. The most famous conquest is easily the Fall of Constantinople, a city today called Istanbul. What is often unknown to those who do not study Ottoman history is the empire’s use of Christian slaves. These slaves varied in their Ottoman roles, from humble house servants, to serving as Janissaries (*Yeniçeriler*)—perhaps the most feared fighters of their era—even to taking on exalted roles at Court, such as Grand Vizier.

This thesis focusses on three works produced by three Christian slaves in the first half of the fifteenth century: Konstantin Mihailović, Johann Schiltberger and Brother George of Mühlenbach. Their works are respectively: *Memoirs of a Janissary*, *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger: A Native of Bavaria in Europe, Asia and Africa* and *Treatise on the Customs, Affairs and Wickedness of the Turks*.

The thesis opens with Chapter 1: The Stories of Mihailović, Schiltberger and Brother George. The story of each author is told, using their memoirs to reconstruct their lives amongst the Ottomans. Along the way, important themes to be discussed in later chapters are highlighted, and any fallacies or questionable claims made by the authors are challenged. At the end of each story, I explain what happened to each author after their time in the Ottoman Empire.

Chapter 2 deals with Authors and Identities. It examines the authors themselves. Specifically, I establish ethnic identities for each author, as for Mihailović and George debate surrounds this topic. I also assess the extent to which each author actually valued their ethnic identity; answers vary from author to author. The original language of their works is also assessed. This is particularly important for Mihailović, as unfortunately no one has his original memoir.

Chapter 3 traces Audiences, Purposes and Genres, perhaps the key chapter of this thesis. It first assesses the tone and purpose of the authors. What was their motive for writing? Which response from Christian Europe did they want to elicit? In what tone did they write, and why? I then discern the audiences for whom our authors wrote (or dictated). I also assess if their target audience (a) read their work and (b) performed the response the author wanted? Finally, I explore the authors' possible issues regarding guilt and irony. Did they feel guilty because they had survived, and sometime even prospered, when they had lived as Christian captives in the Ottoman Empire? Did guilt influence their memoirs? I detect ironies in some things they mentioned, and in others they things they chose not to mention.

The final chapter is Chapter 4: The 'Great' Ottoman Threat. This chapter explores the military standpoint of each author. I address debates on each author's role in the military, particularly Mihailović, whose position is the most contested. The focus is on the life each author would have led while in service, and the *esprit de corps* they lived under. I focus on Janissary *esprit de corps*. The Janissaries were unique in the Ottoman military. In the fifteenth-century era under study, Janissaries were exclusively Christian slaves originating from the Balkans. They were familiar to our authors. Examining what

each author says (and doesn't say) about the Janissaries reveals as much about Janissary *esprit de corps* as about each author. A final section then explores each author's views on Ottoman expansion. Did they see it as a product of military success, or a product of Islamic conversion? As Christians, how did they view the role of God in Ottoman successes (and failures)? As Christians, were they even concerned with Ottoman expansion? As Christians, the Ottoman Empire's growth "glues" these authors together. Each author played their part (albeit unwillingly) in aiding Ottoman expansion. Understanding how they understood this theme is also crucial to understanding them.

Secondary literature will be used throughout this thesis where applicable to help better understand each author, as well as the three key memoir primary sources. The secondary sources illuminate the three memoirs this thesis revolves around. All sources (primary and secondary) used are in English or in English translation.

## Chapter 1: The Sources and Genres of Konstantin Mihailović, Brother George and Johann Schiltberger

This chapter, and the following two, reconstruct the ‘stories’ of the actions and the life in Ottoman captivity of the author of each memoir. Each chapter highlights important themes, many of which are discussed in detail in the later chapters when the perspectives of the authors are contrasted and appraised.

### Konstantin Mihailović’s Story:

Konstantin Mihailović (late 1430s-early 1500s) wrote or dictated *Memoirs of a Janissary*. Mihailović discussed various campaigns in which he was present as a Janissary in the Ottoman Empire. Mihailović was pre-occupied with the Ottoman military and Ottoman expansion into Christian Europe.

Mihailović’s time in Ottoman captivity began in 1455 in the Serb fortress of Novo Brdo in Kosovo. He was there either as part of Novo Brdo’s defence against the Ottomans, or as an everyday civilian. His age is unknown, but he described himself as a youth.<sup>1</sup> He tells us that after the Ottomans captured Novo Brdo, the Sultan divided the boys and girls there: “*The females he distributed among the heathens, but he took the boys for himself into the Janissaries*”.<sup>2</sup> Mihailović tells us that he and his brothers were among the boys taken that day.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 50

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid



Mid-fifteenth-century depiction (1555?) in the *Süleymanname* (folio 31b) of *devşirme*, attributed to Painters A and E in the workshop (*nakkāshane*) of *Topkapı Sarayı*.

*Çelebi Arifi*'s text does not discuss this scene.<sup>4</sup>

Soon after capture, near Novo Brdo, Mihailović was one of nineteen attempting to escape their Ottoman captors. They fled Samokovo, a small Serb village just north of Kosovo.<sup>5</sup> To Mihailović's surprise, upon re-capture, he was not beaten to death, because

<sup>4</sup> Esin Atıl, *Süleymanname: The Illustrated History of Süleyman the Magnificent*, Washington DC: The National Gallery of Art, and New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1986, pp. 61-75, and Plate 2, pp. 94-95.

<sup>5</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 50

*“others vouched for us, and my two brothers, that we would not permit this anymore”.*<sup>6</sup>

Mihailović was then despatched to Ottoman heartlands.

Mihailović also witnessed a botched assassination attempt on *Fatih* Sultan Mehmed II (1<sup>st</sup> r. 1444-46, 2<sup>nd</sup> 1451-81) in Edirne, the old Ottoman capital. The Sultan’s assailants were eight captive boys. Mihailović recounted how the boys were tortured, then beheaded.<sup>7</sup> These rash boys probably emulated Miloš Obilić, a Serb captive and martyr, a subject of epic Serb ballads. Obilić assassinated *Hüdavendigâr* Sultan Murad I (r. 1362-89) after the Serbs had been decisively defeated in Kosovo in 1389, the Serb prince perishing.

The theme of Serbian legends and myth was a recurring theme for Mihailović. He prefaced his account of his own experiences by giving us his version of the history between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire, recounting tales such as Milos Obilić at the Battle of Kosovo.<sup>8</sup> The painting on the next page offers a heroic depiction of the legendary Serb himself.

---

<sup>6</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 50

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 51

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 25





<sup>9</sup> Nineteenth-century Romantic nationalist portrait of Milos Oblić by Aleksandar Dobrić

Mihailović also tells us that six other boys in his group of captives in 1455 became eunuchs, destined to serve in Mehmed II's private Third Court in Topkapı Palace. Only five of the six survived the severing of their genitals.<sup>10</sup>

These experiences were traumatic, on any reading. To witness the conquest of your home town and then to be forced to fight for the conquerors would be enough to traumatise anyone, let alone watching six boys having their genitals removed, one dying

---

<sup>9</sup> Aleksandar Dobrić, *Milos Oblić in the Battle of Kosovo*, 1861, National Museum in Belgrade

<sup>10</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 51



as a result. Yet Mihailović writes about it in a neutral tone. His prose pretends it did not bother him.

We see another example of this oddly neutral tone at the end of his Chapter 31. Participating in a successful Ottoman conquest of Trebizond in 1461 (more on this later), Mihailović witnessed another instance of *Devşirme* (the Ottoman term for the enslavement through which Mihailović had also been taken). Mihailović wrote or dictated thus: Sultan Mehmed “*rode back to Adrianople, having picked out boys and girls*”.<sup>11</sup> The outcome of the siege of Trebizond in 1461 resembled Novo Brdo in 1455. Mihailović watched the youth of Trebizond relive his trauma. Yet again, he wrote in a neutral tone. However, on page 99 he told the reader to wipe out all the Turks.<sup>12</sup> This was a high level of anger that one would have expected him to write in regarding his capture. His rage over his capture and enslavement seems instead to have been channelled through this message. Further on in this section, I add the conundrum that Mihailović (and at least one of his brothers) appeared to enjoy success as captives within the Ottoman Empire.

These traumas had a profound effect on these memoirs, helping frame its crusading goal, helping prompt its habit of cursing Turks, and yet also helping set its oddly neutral tone. These things that seems so inconsistent to us are discussed in the relevant chapters. Much of Mihailović’s tone and motive feature in chapters that don’t focus on himself,

---

<sup>11</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 61

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 99

such as when he discussed in his chapter 45 how Ottomans win sieges. These chapters will be used in Chapter 2 when discussing tones, motives, genres etc.

Mihailović only recounted his own capture in Chapter 27 of his memoir. Previous chapters had discussed Serb history and/or mythology, and some Ottoman history of previous Sultans. He even opened his memoir discussing Ottoman worship, Islam, courts and justice. Later chapters discussed Ottoman military strengths and weaknesses. These chapters are discussed later in my Chapter 3.

Only in Chapter 29 did Mihailović bring his own experiences back into his narrative. Mihailović belatedly disclosed he was an Ottoman participant in the Ottoman siege of Belgrade (4-to-22 July 1456), battling his fellow Serbs three years after Mehmed II had taken Constantinople. Mihailović had insight into Mehmed II's reasons for besieging Belgrade: "*Emperor Machomet, knowing the deed that happened to the Despot (of Serbia) at the hands of Janko (Hungarian mercenary), noted that such discord existed among the Christians*".<sup>13</sup> This fascinating claim implies Mihailović heard the Sultan, or someone close to him discuss this. Mihailović was astute. He or his master seems well-connected. He was always looking for the bigger picture.

Regarding this siege of Belgrade, Mihailović saw the Ottomans as having "*assaulted it*".<sup>14</sup> He tells us about mistakes made by the Ottomans, which he calls "sorrows". He suggests, for instance, that Mehmed camped in the wrong place when besieging Belgrade because

---

<sup>13</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 54

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

Mehmed worried a Hungarian army might intervene.<sup>15</sup> He quotes ‘certain men’ dissuading Mehmed, “*Fortunate Lord, that is unnecessary for you*”.<sup>16</sup> For Mihailović, this was the first “sorrow” of Mehmed: Hungarians encamped, along the Danube, reached Belgrade’s fortress and relieved the siege.

Mihailović told us of more “sorrows” the Ottomans experienced during the siege. Karadiabassa (Karaca Paşa, the Ottoman Governor of the Balkans [Rumelia]), “*highest lord after the Emperor*”,<sup>17</sup> was struck in the head by debris from cannon fire and died.<sup>18</sup> Mihailović then recounted how Mehmed II received bad advice from İsmail Ağa (his “Smagilaga”), whom Mihailović claimed commanded the Janissary Corps.<sup>19</sup> Mihailović reported İsmail dissuaded Mehmed from battering the wall for two more weeks, arguing his Janissaries could breach them immediately.<sup>20</sup> While the Janissaries were élite troops, Mihailović reported around 400 were injured there, a few were killed; they had to retreat after attack by the Hungarians.<sup>21</sup>

Mihailović added a fourth sorrow of the Ottomans. He told how someone burnt equipment required for cannon, rendering it useless.<sup>22</sup> Mihailović’s eyewitness account of the failed siege of Belgrade in 1456 emphasised how it did not go well for the Ottomans.

---

<sup>15</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 54

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

Mihailović's writing of the failed siege of Belgrade was a piece of military analysis. This relates to the purpose of his memoirs, to be discussed in my Chapter 2. The same chapter considers the guilt Mihailović may have been burdened with, given that he fought his own Serb people in Belgrade in 1456.

Mihailović's proximity to the Sultan stands out in his Memoir. The Janissaries were the Palace infantry. They had a close relationship with the Sultan. They were his "honourable slaves (*ghulâm*)". In Mihailović's Chapter 31 he reports Mehmed calling the Janissaries his sweet lambs.<sup>23</sup> My chapter 3 will explore this unique relationship. It was normal for Janissaries to be close to the Sultan, as they were solely loyal to him rather than the empire as a whole.<sup>24</sup> Mihailović disclosed a truth here.

Mihailović also showed Ottoman shortcomings at Belgrade in 1456 because he thought the Ottoman Empire was beatable. As will be explained in my Chapter 2, Mihailović was desperate for a crusade, and needed to convince Christendom that victory is plausible. He showed the Ottomans are stoppable, a theme also to be explored in my Chapter 3.

When Mihailović analysed the upshot of the siege of Belgrade in 1456, he noted how Mehmed tried to outsmart the Serbs and Hungarians. Mehmed ordered the Ottomans to feign to abandon their camp, leaving their tents behind, hoping the Serbs and

---

<sup>23</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 65

<sup>24</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Harvard, University of California Press, 1995), p. 139

Hungarians would come out to collect the tents.<sup>25</sup> (Ottoman battle tents were beautifully embroidered and caparisoned.) Mihailović tells us that the ruse worked; once the Serbs and Hungarians came to the tents, the Ottomans “*turned upon them swiftly with cavalry and here they beat them and killed them all the way to the earthworks*”.<sup>26</sup> But despite that brilliant feint, the Ottomans failed to capture Belgrade. Mihailović described it as Mehmed’s final “sorrow”.<sup>27</sup> In spite of his hostility, Mihailović wanted us to see that, even when under the pressure of defeat, the Ottomans could elicit military brilliance.

Siege warfare was not the only way in which Mihailović showed how the Ottomans conquered new territory. In Chapter 30 Mihailović moved on to narrate Mehmed’s conquest of the Greek Peloponnese or Morea. Mihailović described Morea as a prosperous land ruled by a despot called Dimitri [Palaeologus] who had a ten-year truce with Mehmed at the price of 20,000 ducats per year, and who was also the brother the fallen Byzantine Emperor, Constantine XI Palaeologus. After his conquests in Serbia, including the failed siege of Belgrade, Mihailović told us that Mehmed, once prepared, marched to conquer Morea.

From here Mehmed, according to Mihailović, went on a spree of victories in Morea. He begins by having the wall “*razed to the ground*”.<sup>28</sup> Mehmed and Mihailović then besieged “*a fortress not far from a mountain called Korffo*”.<sup>29</sup> The fortress was taken after four

---

<sup>25</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 54-55

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 55

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 55

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 56

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 56-57

siege cannons were deployed against the fortress.<sup>30</sup> They then march to Patras and Leontarion, where Despot Dimitri arrived, but was decisively defeated by Mehmed II.<sup>31</sup> Mihailović also recalled Mehmed taking other fortresses, but fails to name them, before Mehmed and he returned “home”.<sup>32</sup>

This passage is important. Mihailović was an eyewitness to events in the Peloponnese. He also wanted to show how the Ottomans were as capable at sea as on land. Mehmed breached a naval blockade, landed and occupied land. All the other campaigns Mihailović fought on were on land. Mihailović was issuing a warning. Being an island will not protect you from the Ottomans. This was proven in 1565, when the Ottoman Empire nearly captured Malta. Their expansion can happen on land and sea.

Mihailović continued by detailing his return to Morea with the Ottomans. Mihailović never provided specifics for this second invasion, instead concentrating on events detracting from Mehmed. *“Having arrived in Morea, assaulting fortresses, killing and also breaking bones, the mad Turkish dog perpetrated terrible things”*.<sup>33</sup> The ‘mad Turkish dog’ was Sultan Mehmed II. Mihailović’s angry tone is noticeable here. But was that how he always felt? Was this written or dictated out of anger? Guilt? Both? Chapter 2 will answer these questions.

---

<sup>30</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 56

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 57

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 57

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 57

The Ottomans were unable to conquer all of Morea in 1460. Mihailović told us they had to undertake a third campaign in Morea.<sup>34</sup> Venice had territories in the southern Peloponnese,<sup>35</sup> complicating matters for Mehmed. This third attempt defeated Despot Dimitri in the wild south of the Peloponnesus, the Ottomans “*besieged him in a city called Mistra*”.<sup>36</sup> The city of Corinth, however, remained unconquered by the Ottomans.<sup>37</sup> Mihailović’s shift in emphasis away from Ottoman sieges of great cities is important. The Ottomans were renowned for their capture of Constantinople in 1453, but Mihailović wanted his readers to know they were capable of so much more. I discuss the audience he was targeting in my Chapter 2.

His Chapter 33 displays another change in Ottoman expansion, focusing on a ‘run and gun’ approach. Mihailović told us about the campaign against Wallachia in 1462. He began by explaining the relationship between the Ottomans and Wallachia. He told how the Wallachian ruler (*hospodar*) Vlad II *Dracul* had two sons whom he gave to Mehmed as hostages to prove his loyalty.<sup>38</sup> Mihailović told us that after Vlad II died, Mehmed gave his older hostage son, Vlad III Țepeș [the Impaler] “*gifts of money, horses, robes and tents, as befit a lord, and dispatched him with great honour to the Wallachian land to rule in place of his father*”.<sup>39</sup> This relationship, as Mihailović went on to explain, fell apart, and was the cause of the Wallachian campaign in 1462. While Vlad II *Dracul* (or Dracula

---

<sup>34</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 57

<sup>35</sup> Davide Rodogno, *Fascism’s European Empire: Italian Occupation During the Second World War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 84

<sup>36</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 57

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 65

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

as Mihailović called him) initially visited the Sultan and paid tribute, this had stopped and nothing happened for several years.<sup>40</sup> This changed when Mehmed sent a lord called Hamzabeg (Hamza Bey) to Wallachia.<sup>41</sup> Hamza Bey arrived in Brailă, the Wallachian last settlement before the Danube Delta, a town Mihailović said belonged to ‘Dracula’. Vlad III the Impaler decided to capture Hamza Bey and his Ottoman companions.<sup>42</sup> Vlad III escalated the conflict. Gathering his troops, he crossed the Danube to a north-central Bulgarian land Mihailović said was “*below Nikopolis*”.<sup>43</sup> Mihailović then described the vicious attack conducted by Vlad the Impaler where “*the noses cut off all those living and dead, male and female. And he sent these noses to Hungary, boasting that as many Turks had been defeated and killed as there were noses*”.<sup>44</sup> Upon this victory, Vlad III the Impaler returned to Hamza Bey in Brailă, and had him impaled.<sup>45</sup>

So how did Mehmed, according to Mihailović, respond? He started by investing into the Ottoman ranks Vlad III’s brother, Radu the Handsome.<sup>46</sup> This ceremony appeared to have more pomp and circumstance than Vlad’s, as Mihailović the eyewitness described Radu being seated alongside Mehmed, and given a purple robe-of-honour (*hil’at*) of gold-embroidered cloth, a red banner, plus all the gifts that Vlad once received.<sup>47</sup> From here Mihailović marched with Sultan Mehmed to campaign against Vlad the Impaler in 1462.

---

<sup>40</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 65

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 66

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 66



We are next with Mihailović in Nicopolis, on the Bulgarian side of the Danube's bank, but Vlad III had fled over the river to Wallachia.<sup>48</sup> Well-placed and curious Mihailović then recounted a conversation between the Janissaries and the Sultan: *"My sweet lambs, what is mine are also yours, and especially my treasure. Give me advice, for it depends on you. How could I cross to the other side against my enemy? They answered the [Sultan]: Fortunate Lords, order the boats prepared or made ready and immediately in the night we will risk our necks and cross to the other side"*.<sup>49</sup> Mehmed took this advice, sailing over to the other side, and entrenching before sending the Janissaries to combat.

It did not go well. 250 Janissaries were killed.<sup>50</sup> Mehmed was distraught at *"seeing that so many of us were dying"*.<sup>51</sup> Mehmed and the rest of the army were able to respond effectively. Using their field artillery, they drove Vlad III's army from the battlefield and they fortified the territory gained, which was quickly followed by the *Azapi* (Ottoman footsoldiers) reinforcing the Janissaries and artillery.<sup>52</sup> Vlad then fled. The Ottomans pursued.

This pursuit was not easy. Mihailović described difficult nights faced by the Ottomans. *"Every night we surrounded ourselves with stakes. Despite thus we could not always protect ourselves, for striking us in the night they beat and killed men, horses and camels and cut down tents"*.<sup>53</sup> Mehmed took revenge in a style reminiscent of Vlad himself, *"the*

---

<sup>48</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 65

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 66

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p.66

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 67

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 67

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 67

*Turks brought in several hundred Wallachians, and the Emperor ordered them all cut in two*".<sup>54</sup> This tactic scared many Wallachians into abandoning Vlad III and joining Radu, in turn causing Vlad the Impaler to flee the Ottomans for Hungary, meaning Mehmed could leave Radu to rule Wallachia.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately for Vlad "*King Matyas (Matthias Corvinus) had put him in prison for the cruel deeds which he had committed*".<sup>56</sup>

What does this reveal about Mihailović and his memoirs? The purpose of this chapter is to recount to the reader Ottoman strategy, in particular against an unconventional opponent such as vicious 'Vlad the Impaler'. This campaign was not like the Belgrade campaign. Much of the fighting took place in the open and involved more ambushes and pillaging of innocents, rather than a siege. It is a completely different side to Ottoman expansion.

More importantly it again reveals the "our" as opposed to "them". Mihailović did not say they were attacked, he said we. When referring to the Janissaries dying, he said "us" not "them". He was clearly respected among Janissaries and saw himself as one. We also know he was respected amongst them as in Chapter 33 he reports his command of a garrison of Janissaries in Bosnia.<sup>57</sup> A sense of loyalty was riddled within Mihailović. Time and time again, his crusading loyalty to Christendom battled his mentions of past loyalty to the Ottomans, more specifically to his Janissary brothers. My Chapter 3 clarifies just how intricate and well-knit the Janissaries were as a unit.

---

<sup>54</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 67

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 71

Briefly coming back to his Chapter 30, Mihailović also told us that the Despot of Serbia, Đurađ Branković had died.<sup>58</sup> In regards to his successor, his son Lazar, Mihailović again quoted Sultan Mehmed II directly: *"I will not bother him (Lazar) as long as he lives"*.<sup>59</sup> This random insertion of a Serb political 'update' is just one example of Mihailović's sense of Serb nationalism. This is a theme explored in my chapters 2 and 3, as evidence both of his Serb ethnicity and as one of his greatest ironies.

Mihailović's memory seemed to wane here. As historian Svat Soucek pointed out, the Peloponnesian campaign took place two years after the siege of Belgrade, not immediately after.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Mihailović's claim that Mehmed II went on the third campaign was wrong. Mihailović was in the Morea in 1458 and 1460, but there was no 1459 campaign (Mihailović's erroneous second campaign).<sup>61</sup> Mihailović may have misremembered, due to the gap of time between his military career and writing his memoir.

This is not the only inaccuracy in Mihailović memoirs. Chapter 32 details the campaign against Uzun Hasan took place in 1473. This occurred ten years after Mihailović's escape in 1463. Mihailović could not have participated in that campaign, but he reports it nonetheless. Uzun Hasan was a steppe tribal chief from eastern Anatolia, western Iran and the Caucasus; Turcoman Khan of the "White Sheep (*Ak koyun*)"; Sultan Mehmed II's most pressing opponent in Turkdom. Yet Mihailović claimed he was present at Mehmed

---

<sup>58</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 58

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Svat Soucek, 'Notes' (New York, 2011), in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, (Late Fifteenth Century), p. 124

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p.125

Il's campaign against Uzun Hasan, writing or dictating that "*we continued to march after Uzun Hasan*".<sup>62</sup> Perhaps the 'we' is a slip up, yet the chapter still reads like a first person account. The 'we' seems intended. Svat Soucek also thought the account was not pure fabrication, but as discussed later in this section, it has inaccuracies nonetheless.<sup>63</sup> Mihailović may have thought the campaign was impressive and wanted the reader to think he was there. Since there is no evidence Mihailović was literate, he or a scribe could have added this chapter as a dictated 'update', thereby falsifying Mihailović's presence. I add another reason later in this chapter.

In Chapter 31 offers another indication of Mihailović's fellow feeling for the Janissary corps. Narrating his participation in the 1461 campaign against the last remnant of the Byzantine Empire at Trebizond, the south-eastern corner of the Black Sea, Mihailović maintained the journey was arduous: "*first, because of the distance; second, because of the harassment by the people; third, hunger; fourth, because of the high and great mountains, and, besides, wet and swampy places. And also rains fell everyday so that the road was churned up as high as the horses bellies everywhere.*"<sup>64</sup> Arriving at a mountain near Trebizond felled trees blocked their road, forcing Mehmed to order the wagons be destroyed, the freight loaded onto 800 camels he had brought, the horses given away to anyone who wanted one.<sup>65</sup> The Janissary Corps then starred in this chapter when Mihailović told us of an accident, stating that a camel with treasure fell off the road,

---

<sup>62</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 62

<sup>63</sup> Svat Soucek, 'Notes' (New York, 2011), in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, (Late Fifteenth Century), p. 125

<sup>64</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 59

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

spilling 60,000 gold pieces. Luckily for the Sultan, the Janissaries surrounded the treasure until he arrived, upon which the accident was cleaned up and the gold retrieved.<sup>66</sup> In this tough terrain, Mihailović said the Janissaries carried the Sultan in their arms.<sup>67</sup> Mihailović and the Janissaries later led the camels down in an all-night effort. The Janissaries then rested a day before the conquest began.<sup>68</sup> Mihailović told us that for the hardships endured the Janissaries received a pay rise this day, going from 1 gold piece every fourth day to one every second, as well as 50,000 gold pieces to divide amongst themselves.<sup>69</sup>

Mehmed began by sending 2000 raiders (*akıncılar*) to Trebizond, however “*these were all defeated and killed before Trebizond*”.<sup>70</sup> Undeterred, Mehmed besieged Trebizond, with the aid of the Janissaries and his navy: 150 ships according to Mihailović.<sup>71</sup> After six weeks of combat, Trebizond fell to the Ottomans, and the Emperor of Trebizond was captured.<sup>72</sup>

It is clear Mihailović was close to the Janissaries. As I will argue in Chapter 3, I believe Mihailović was himself a Janissary, given how he was repeatedly with the Janissaries regardless of the campaign he fought on, from Trebizond to Wallachia. If the siege of Belgrade in 1456 evidenced the bond between the Sultan and Janissaries, the Trebizond 1461 passage showed this relationship in action. They carried him. They guarded his gold. There is a strong sense of both discipline and loyalty here. It coincides with what was said

---

<sup>66</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 60

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 60

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 60

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 60

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 60

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 60

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 60

earlier regarding the Wallachian campaign, where Mehmed called the Janissaries “*his sweet lambs*”.<sup>73</sup> The Janissaries also proved to be more competent in combat than the ‘raiders’. The march to Trebizond was brutal, and yet the Janissaries appeared to handle it. This *esprit de corps* is further discussed in my Chapter 3, which adds the perspective of Brother George.

Another example of Mihailović’s emphasis on the Janissaries is his Chapter 32. It detailed a Mehmed II’s campaign against Uzun Hasan (Shah of the White Sheep Turkomans, r. 1453-78) then ruling Iraq, Iran and the Caucasus. Uzun Hasan had sent an assassin to kill the Ottoman Grand Vizier Mahmut *Paşa* Angelović. The assassin failed and was caught.<sup>74</sup> Mihailović witnessed the torture of this Tatar assassin.<sup>75</sup> Mihailović was well informed as an insider. How did he come by this detailed information? It is possible someone told him; however I argue Mihailović was there. He remembered the ways in which the torture was conducted, and how the Tatar reacted. It is even possible Mihailović was a torturer. Mihailović was a Janissary of good rank, often close to the Sultan. Perhaps he removed himself from the event because he did not want to harm his image, or perhaps it was yet another example of Mihailović neutralising his tone surrounding traumas. Regardless of the era, torturing another human will have an effect on you, and by removing himself from the situation, Mihailović was able to mask this trauma to the reader.

---

<sup>73</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 66

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62

Mihailović told us “*the [Sultan] took several very strong fortresses*”,<sup>76</sup> chasing Uzun Hasan to the Euphrates River, hoping Uzun Hasan would do battle.<sup>77</sup> He did not. Mehmed then used the same strategy he used at Belgrade. He feigned retreat, sending a messenger (Mihailović called him a buffoon) to Uzun Hasan, claiming Mehmed had fled due to Christian attacks on his land; now was a good time to strike.<sup>78</sup> Uzun then marched to Mehmed for battle. Uzun sent his son, whom Mihailović calls Mustafa the One-Eyed ahead.<sup>79</sup> Uzun would catch up and join the fight, which according to Mihailović lasted two days, until Uzun Hasan was defeated.<sup>80</sup>

Mihailović gave us some fascinating insight into the battle itself. As to how he knew this information, he must have had some other source. My theory at the end of this section as to Mihailović’s life post-slavery could answer how he got this information. He reported the Ottoman cavalry was ‘completely destroyed’<sup>81</sup> and even quoted Uzun Hasan saying to his men “*I did not know that the Turkish Emperor would be so weak against me in cavalry*”.<sup>82</sup> Mihailović credited the Janissaries with winning the battle for the Ottomans, going as far as saying “*had it not been for the Janissaries the Emperor himself would have been taken or killed*”.<sup>83</sup> He again quoted Uzun Hasan, “*In his (Mehmed’s) infantry he is my master*”.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 62

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 63

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 63

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 63

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 63

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 63

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 63

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, p. 63

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 63

Mihailović then claimed to have marched with Sultan Mehmed II to “*an island in the Black Sea below Synope*”.<sup>85</sup> He claimed that the city of Mistra, on this island, surrendered to the Ottomans.<sup>86</sup> From here the chapter ends with the Ottomans travelling to Ankara, then Bursa and finally Edirne.<sup>87</sup> This chapter is important, as Mihailović always highlighted the Janissary Corps. By claiming the battle would have been lost without them, he raised their stock as warriors to as high as it could go. This is important for Ottoman Expansion, discussed in my Chapter 3.

Besides discussing Trebizond on the south-eastern shore of the Black Sea, Mihailović’s Chapter 31 ended with Mihailović recounting a story set in the city of Niksar (northern Anatolia). Mihailović told how Mehmed received a message at Niksar from Ali Bey, the Sancak Bey (a key Ottoman overlord) of the great eastern Serb fortress of Smederevo on the Danube saying, “*with God’s help we have defeated the kaury [i.e., heathens] and we have taken Michael Szilagyi*”.<sup>88</sup> This former Regent of Hungary was sent to Constantinople/Istanbul, where Mehmed was also headed. The chapter concluded with Michael Szilagyi, a Magyar thorn in Mehmed’s side, being sawn in half and beheaded.

Again, Mihailović was clearly close to the Sultan, likely due to his Janissary status. He was so well informed he was able to directly quote what was said, not just say what happened. This again reflects the close relationship between the Sultan and his Janissaries. My Chapter 3 adds more to this theme.

---

<sup>85</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 64

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 64

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 64

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 61



Mihailović's inclusion of the death of Michael Szilagyi stands out in this chapter, as the travails of the Magyar magnate Szilagyi was unrelated to the Byzantine vestige at Trebizond. It shows Mihailović had a level of respect for Szilagyi, believing his death should be acknowledged. Furthermore, the Hungarians had been bitter rivals with the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans for some time. The Hungarians under Matthias Corvinus (r. 1464-90) and his brutal mercenary 'Black Army' wanted to expand their influence, already well established in Transylvania, but with aspirations for control over Galicia and Moldavia.<sup>89</sup> The Hungarians had also helped the Serbs at sieges such as Novo Brdo (1455) and Belgrade (1456), so it makes sense for Mihailović to respect them. These stories, as argued later in this chapter, suggest Mihailović may have served Hungary after his release in 1463.

After the Wallachian campaign in 1462, Mihailović found himself (in Chapter 30) aboard galleys off the island of Mytilene (Lesbos), trying to ambush its Byzantine ruler before he could raise his army.<sup>90</sup> Mihailović described the conflict; *"the Emperor besieged it and assaulted it with cannon and mortars at great expense until he took it-but, however, through a false oath. He had all the garrison who were there decapitated, and also the ruler himself"*.<sup>91</sup> Shortly after returning home to Edirne, Sultan Mehmed II obtained a truce with King Matthias.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary 895-1526*, (Budapest, I.B. Tauris, 2001), p. 309

<sup>90</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 67-68

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68

This is a curious example of Ottomans breaking an oath. Given his hatred for the Ottomans, it makes sense Mihailović would want to highlight Ottoman treachery. This contrasts with the loyalties demonstrated by his accounts of Janissaries, whom Mihailović never accused of treachery. This is another sign of his “us” mentality. The Janissaries were his brothers in arms, not Ottoman officials. The Janissaries were converts, a trait Mihailović might otherwise have calumniated them for. But he didn’t. They were once comrades. Mihailović’s account evidences the strength of the Janissary *esprit de corps*, further explained in my Chapter 3.

We next found Mihailović in the Ottoman treasury (*Hazine*). He claimed to have gotten access here due to his brother, who “*was entrusted with the treasury*”.<sup>93</sup> If Mihailović was an insider, then his brother was another level of insider. He must have earned trust and respect to be tasked with the treasury. There is a lot of irony to be explored surrounding his brother, who did not escape with Mihailović, but remained working for the Ottoman Empire. Again, the similarities with Mahmud Paša Angelović are striking and will be explored in Chapter 2. This may be Mihailović’s greatest irony.

In Mihailović’s account, he had to hide in the treasury (a place he had no permission to be in) when his brother spotted Ottoman officials approaching. Mihailović then proceeded to tell us about a remarkable conversation about strategy he eavesdropped between Sultan Mehmed’s famous Serb-born Grand Vizier Mahmud Paša Angelović, and İshak Paša, influential Ottomans who went on to become the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Grand Viziers respectively. The conversation was occasioned by the request of King Tomaš of Bosnia

---

<sup>93</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 69

(r. 1443-61) to obtain a 15-year truce.<sup>94</sup> Mihailović reported from his hiding place in the Treasury, Mahmud and İshak concluding their deliberations with *“let us grant him [Tomaš] a truce so that they can depart on Saturday and we [can go] after them on Wednesday”*.<sup>95</sup> Mahmud and İshak Paşas also explained why they needed to deceive: *“otherwise we would not be able to conquer Bosnia”*.<sup>96</sup> Mihailović also recalled warning Bosnian lords who were in Istanbul in 1463 to negotiate this truce that the Ottomans would betray the truce and invade Bosnia anyway. *“By my faith no truce...and we, God willing, after you on Wednesday all the way to Bosnia. This I tell you in truth”*.<sup>97</sup> He was dismissed, *“And they broke out laughing at this, and so I thereupon left”*.<sup>98</sup>

Mihailović clearly had sympathy for the Bosnian Serb King when the truce was broken, and the Ottomans arrived at his ‘doorstep’. The King had to scramble troops, which Mihailović describes: *“The poor Bosnian King Tomaš, working day and night to raise some troops quickly, came to a fortress called Ključ, wanting to rest there a little at midday”*.<sup>99</sup> When Grand Vizier Mahmud Paşa Angelović arrived at Ključ, a bribed informant disclosed King Tomaš was in the fortress. Mahmud Paşa attempted to get the King to surrender by maintaining *“nothing would happen to his neck”*.<sup>100</sup> Mihailović described Angelović as having made the promise on a bar of soap, which Svat Soucek explained meant Mihailović believed Angelović was not sincere in his promise.<sup>101</sup> Nonetheless, King Tomaš

---

<sup>94</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 69

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 70

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 70

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 70

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 70

<sup>101</sup> Svat Soucek, ‘Notes in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 131

surrendered and was captured by the Ottomans. Unfortunately for the Bosnian King, while Mahmud Paşa had promised him his life, Sultan Mehmed II had other plans, as Mihailović told us, *“The Emperor (Sultan Mehmed II) ordered the King and the other man (a friend of the King) beheaded”*.<sup>102</sup> Mihailović revealed the cynical strategic use of truces by Mehmed II to further Ottoman expansion. The validity of this will be tested in my last chapter on Ottoman expansion.

The conversation with the Bosnian Lords is striking, however. Why did Mihailović include it? Did this conversation actually happen? On the surface, this conversation portrays Christian-Bosnia in a poor light. My Chapter 2 elaborates on Mihailović’s brother in the Treasury located in the Third Court of *Topkapı Sarayı*, and the ironies surrounding their situations.

The end of Mihailović’s time in the Ottoman Empire was only recounted in his Chapter 33. Sultan Mehmed II left Bosnia for Edirne, but Mihailović remained.<sup>103</sup> Mihailović said Mehmed left him exposed *“at a fortress called Zvečaj [in Bosnia, near Banja Luka] nor far from Jajce [in Bosnia, 50 km to the west away], and he gave me fifty Janissaries for the garrisoning of the [Zvečaj] fortress. And he gave me a half-year’s wages for each of the Janissaries. And I also had in addition thirty other Turks for help”*.<sup>104</sup> Mihailović was not at peace for long; King Matthias immediately attacked Zvečaj and Jajce. Mihailović recalled how Bosnians who had previously surrendered to the Ottomans bravely took a

---

<sup>102</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 71

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

<sup>104</sup> Ibid

tower from them, spurring the Hungarians' advance to their tower. They had now entered Zvečaj, shutting Mihailović's Ottoman troops inside a keep with no escape.<sup>105</sup>

This is the strongest evidence we have of Mihailović's high status... and of his loyalty... then. He was trusted to command a garrison and distribute their pay. Mihailović had earned this rank, with what must have been a consistent showing of loyalty and excellence in battle. This is more proof of how Mihailović would still feel loyal to the Janissaries. He was responsible for them. He was respected amongst them. Mihailović was no ordinary soldier, he was a Janissary of high regard.

The siege of Jajce lasted eight weeks. In the meantime, Hungarians were assigned to besiege Zvečaj, where Mihailović was based.<sup>106</sup> Mihailović recalled having "*ceaselessly worked day and night repairing it (the fortress wall) again*".<sup>107</sup> Jajce was the first to fall. Mihailović and the Ottomans holed up in Zvečaj then had no choice but to surrender.<sup>108</sup> Most of the Turks captured did not go home to the Ottoman Empire, instead being kept by Matthias.<sup>109</sup> Mihailović reported he was elated, as he maintained he had finally gotten his wish of returning to Christian Lands, free of the Islamic-Ottoman 'heathens'. His time as a Janissary had ended.

*"And I thanked the Lord God that I had thus got back among the Christians with honour".*<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 71

<sup>106</sup> Ibid

<sup>107</sup> Ibid

<sup>108</sup> Ibid

<sup>109</sup> Ibid

<sup>110</sup> Ibid

Before discussing what next happened to Mihailović, I want to acknowledge the irony that bonds all these chapters. Mihailović (as will be discussed) wanted a crusade, but had also done his fair share in helping the Ottomans conquer European lands. This irony, and the possible guilt that it created will be discussed in Chapter 2, where Mihailović's tone, purpose, guilt and ironies will be assessed, not just individually (as here) but alongside the perspectives of the other memoirists.

Mihailović never revealed where he went or what he did after he was 'rescued'. The only hint of a time-marker we have is his reference to King "*Matyas of glorious memory*".<sup>111</sup> Matthias must have died before the memoir was written. He died in 1490. Mihailović was rescued in 1463. There was at least a 27-year gap between rescue and writing! The gap explains why he mis-remembered some events, such as the Peloponnesian campaign.

So, what did Mihailović do for 27 years or so? Svat Soucek suggested he went to Hungary.<sup>112</sup> I agree. Given the militaristic focus of his memoirs, and given that he spent much of his life as a soldier, it is possible Mihailović served in Hungary. Because Mihailović was neither a noble, nor a landowner, nor educated, Mihailović could have done little else with his life post-rescue. Given the Janissaries' reputation as élite soldiers, he also would have been extremely beneficial to the Hungarian Army as he had insight and advice on how to defeat the Ottomans in battle.

---

<sup>111</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 99

<sup>112</sup> Svat Soucek, 'Introduction' in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. xx

Since his memoirs were originally written in Serb Church Slavic, he may have spent time in the 'Serb Colony' in Hungary. As a Serb himself, the prospect of living amongst Serbs outside Ottoman control must have also been enticing. As for whether he set foot in Poland or not, the existence of 16<sup>th</sup> century Polish translations is potentially evidence that he made his way to Poland. The German historian of the Balkans, Machiel Kiel, once stated Mihailović settled in Poland.<sup>113</sup> I disagree. Mihailović made no reference to Poland in his memoirs and he seems to have had no incentive to go to Poland.

---

<sup>113</sup> Machiel Kiel, 'The incorporation of the Balkans into the Ottoman Empire, 1353-1453', *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume 1: Byzantium to Turkey, 1071-1453*, 1/1 (Cambridge University Press 2009), p. 163

### **Brother George's Story:**

We now come to the 'story' of Brother George of Mühlenbach. His story is much harder to piece together, because, unlike Mihailović or Schiltberger, his chapters are thematic, not sequential. He focused on topics and debates, such as the spread of Islam, why Christianity is the one true faith etc. But these themes were often based on his Ottoman experiences. This chapter offers an account of the direct experiences of George; his lines of argument are discussed in later chapters. Although he was always vague on dates (he was indifferent to chronological history), contexts in his text suggest he was a captive in the Ottoman empire for twenty years: 1438-58.

George told us about his capture in his prologue. In 1436, Sultan Murad II (b. 1404, r. 1421-44, 1446-51) had planned to conquer Hungary, but the Danube flooded, diverting him to a region George named 'Seven Fortresses [Siebenbürgen Transylvania]'.<sup>114</sup> Sixteen-year-old George left his home, an unnamed place somewhere in Transylvania, for Mühlenbach (one of the Seven Fortresses) in 1435,<sup>115</sup> to study at a Dominican school. He studied there for one year before the Ottomans arrived.

Ottoman forces were not alone when crossing the southwestern Carpathians from Wallachia into Transylvania in 1435. According to George, they had "Vlach (Wallachian-Romanian)" fighters with them.<sup>116</sup> George recalled a Vlach leader approaching

---

<sup>114</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 4

<sup>115</sup> Ibid

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. Following routes pioneered by and Cistercian monks from Italy and France, Transylvanian Saxons had migrated from the Rhineland in western Germany to Transylvania, both responding to invitations from Popes and from Hungarian Kings to settle the fertile lands of Transylvanian borders and to protect these wild eastern borderlands of the Hungarian kingdom from Tatar, Turkic, Mongol and Ottoman steppe invaders from the south and east.



Mühlenbach, his Siebenbürgen-Saxon town and abbey, then surrounded by Transylvanian-Romanian peasant communities. Indigenes of Wallachia and Transylvania both spoke Romanian. (Siebenbürgen-Saxons had settled in the region since the twelfth-century, however.)<sup>117</sup> George explained how the “Vlach” emissary from the Ottomans tried to convince Mühlenbach locals to surrender to the Turks.<sup>118</sup> In return, “*the Turk (Sultan Murad II) would lead the remaining crowd into his own land, without harm to anyone’s person or property. There he would give land to the citizens to possess; then they would be able to leave in due course or dwell there peacefully, as they chose. We saw all these things fulfilled, as he had promised.*”<sup>119</sup> The Vlach Leader was likely to have been Vlad II *Dracul* (r. 1436-1442, 1443-1447), the father of the more infamous ‘Impaler’, the Ottomans designated ruler of Wallachia. The Hungarians, his former overlords, had wanted him to protect Transylvania,<sup>120</sup> but instead he aligned with Murad II, now acting as his guide over the Carpathians in Transylvania.<sup>121</sup> This quote shows George’s fair-mindedness. George recognized the Ottomans offered a better deal than did the Hungarians to peasants and minor Lords in the *Țara Bârsei* (or Seven-Fortress) colonized region of Sibenbürgen-Saxon fort- and abbey-cities and of their Romanian-speaking rural hinterlands.

---

<sup>117</sup> Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary 895-1526*, (Budapest, I.B. Tauris, 2001), p. 114-115

<sup>118</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 4

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, p. 5

<sup>120</sup> John Jefferson, *The Holy Wars of King Wladislas and Sultan Murad: The Ottoman-Christian Conflict from 1438-1444*, (Wiesbaden, Brill, 2012), p. 160

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, p. 164



<sup>122</sup> Transylvanian Saxon fortresses

George noted, however, that one unnamed Transylvanian noble rallied some people, George amongst them, to resist and occupy a tower. While the Ottomans respected the terms of peace, they immediately counter-attacked those in the tower. George described the attack: *“The shout of the fighters, the crash of arms, the din of running was so great, that in that moment heaven and earth seemed to shake.”*<sup>123</sup> The Ottomans stacked wood near the [wooden?] tower and started a fire, killing nearly all those inside.<sup>124</sup> George was

<sup>122</sup> Mark Fabini, *Church Fortresses in Transylvania: Map of Transylvania with isometric drawings of Saxon-built church-fortresses, fortified churches and peasant fortresses* (1998) 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Sibiu, Romania: Geo Strategies SA with Monumenta Publishing House, 2015

<sup>123</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 5

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p. 6

dragged from the tower, however. He was sold to merchants and then marched with other captives to Edirne (Adrianople) in Thrace.<sup>125</sup>

Chapter 1 of George's memoir written in Latin became a history. He explained how the Ottomans conquered Anatolia. George was familiar with old-Anatolian (Selçuk) history of five rival Anatolian Turkish Princes/*Beyliks*, among whom "Othmanbeg" (Ottomans)" and "Karamanbeg (Karamans)".<sup>126</sup> George noted "*while I was still living there [i.e., after 1438], three times Karamanbeg came down and invaded Othmanbeg's land*".<sup>127</sup> This is impressive knowledge by a Transylvanian captive of Turkic affairs in Anatolia. At some stage during his time as a slave, George received some form of an education, formal or informal.

Chapters 2 and 3 of his memoirs were about Ottoman Islam. He never implicated himself in that narrative. These chapters will be discussed in my chapter 3, on George's theological understanding of Ottoman expansion. George offered an insight, however, into how he felt during his time: "*I died as many deaths as days I lived among the Turks*".<sup>128</sup> Unlike Schiltberger, up for any adventure anywhere, no questions asked, and unlike Mihailović, whose actions sometimes belied his crusading Turkish »mad dog« narrative, George was never comfortable with the Turks. George compared a Christian amongst Turks to a sheep amongst wolves.<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 6

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, p. 7

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p. 7

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p. 13

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 13

George's Chapter 4 then became about the persecution by the Turks of the soul. Belying his chapter 2 remark about Ottoman justice for peasants and minor lords, George now claimed Ottomans only have a "*pretence of virtue and sanctity*".<sup>130</sup> He then brought the message home, noting how one became infected by their "*plague of wickedness*".<sup>131</sup> George was wrestling with ethical confusion, perhaps even guilt. Accounting for Islam, for instance, George told all that he knew about Islam, but also admitted he was ashamed about how he knew this information.<sup>132</sup> He did, however, show compassion, maintaining not all Turks are condemned.<sup>133</sup> George also admired the silence of a mosque compared to the noise of a church.<sup>134</sup> Yet, he also claimed Ottoman clerics did not care for the soul; beyond preaching at the mosque, he noted how imams erred in thinking they were no different to anyone else.<sup>135</sup> This is important because, as a Dominican monk, George believed the priesthood had a direct connection to God through Christ.

George was well informed about Islam nonetheless. He devoted part of his chapter 20 to four types of religious figures in Ottoman Islam. The first group was the *Ulema*, [Sunni] clergy who believed in strict religious law, considering the [*Şeriat*] law was needed to achieve salvation.<sup>136</sup> The second group were Dervishes. George claimed they were renunciants who did not believe in law, who believed instead in the 'grace of God', preferring prodigies and signs over reason and authority.<sup>137</sup> The third group were Sufis.

---

<sup>130</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 15

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81

George claimed they focused on meditation, spiritual exercise and continuous prayer. Like the Dervishes, they did not believe in strict law, but claimed their opinions came from [Gnostic and Selçuk syncretisms of] antiquity.<sup>138</sup> The fourth group were heretics, who mistakenly believed their own law could save everyone, so long as they held their beliefs to be true.<sup>139</sup> None of these groups were able to ever fully dominate the other, Brother George believed.<sup>140</sup>

George's knowledge of these groups was strong, although he seemed to be a bit confused regarding Sufis and Dervishes. Not all Dervishes were renunciants. There was a link between the Janissaries and the Dervishes, and perhaps this was what caused George's confusion. To have this knowledge, George must have spent time with these groups. Surprisingly, he left it until the last chapter to tell us in what capacity he most likely interacted with these groups.

This final chapter dubbed 'The End' revealed a surprise. As an afterthought of sorts, George belatedly told his readers that he was "*thoroughly taught in their so foreign and perverse letters, to such an extent that one of their greater clerics bestowed on me an office of his mosque*".<sup>141</sup> George further explained he once taught Islam to renunciants and to Turks.<sup>142</sup> It is clear George became a learned man in Islam, interacting with the groups discussed above. His strong knowledge tells us that he actively held an interest

---

<sup>138</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 82

<sup>139</sup> Ibid

<sup>140</sup> Ibid

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p. 100

<sup>142</sup> Ibid

in the groups' various beliefs; his ears were flapping. This does not mesh well with his ardent Christian stance. This irony will be evaluated in Chapter 2.

Guilt probably prompted George to postpone this key information. He did not want the reader to begin the book with a bad impression of him. Leaving it until the last chapter was also strategic. By discussing traumatic events such as his capture, his cruel first master and the slave market, he built sympathy with his Christian readers before revealing his time as an Islamic teacher. By this stage, the reader would (George hoped) identify with George and see his past role at the mosque as an extension of his suffering, rather than an act of heresy.

George's chapters 5 and 6 concerned capture of slaves, their maintenance and sale: processes George endured. He claimed the Sultan (outside of the regular army) had a force of 20,000-30,000 men.<sup>143</sup> They appear to be an élite force, as George claimed: *"They know how to adapt and regulate their horses and their very own bodies with a determined zeal and discipline for this task, so that, even if it happens that they run day and night for an entire week, neither they nor their horses will suffer any trouble from the force of the march."*<sup>144</sup> George went as far to claim that they could cover the distance in one night that would usually take 3-4 days.<sup>145</sup> So great are these claims, that George reaffirmed to the reader that he too would not have believed it had he not witnessed it himself.<sup>146</sup> These élite warriors were Janissaries.

---

<sup>143</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 17

<sup>144</sup> Ibid

<sup>145</sup> Ibid

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p. 8

George also claimed to have witnessed how Ottomans capture people. He insisted they sneak up on their enemies to *“seize the people unawares without any bloodshed or death”*.<sup>147</sup> George gives us two reasons: while the Sultan preferred to have free subjects paying him tribute, he retained the prerogative of on-selling some war captives as slaves.<sup>148</sup> Halil İnalcık, a respected Ottoman historian, agrees with George; the Ottomans adopted a conciliatory tax policy towards Christians in order to increase Ottoman revenues.<sup>149</sup> He also witnessed how war spoils were split; the Sultan received a tenth and kept all youths under 20.<sup>150</sup>

George experienced all this. In Chapter 7, George accused the Turks of having an insatiable desire for slaves.<sup>151</sup> Merchants with permission to buy and sell slaves often *“come with chains onto the battlefield with the army, so that they can buy captives directly from the hands of the capturing soldiers”*.<sup>152</sup> He then described a slave market. His description is tragic and horrific. Here are a few select quotes:

*“There they are examined and stripped...the private parts of men and women are handled and openly shown before everyone. Naked, they are compelled to go before everyone, to run, walk, and jump, so that it may be plainly apparent whether they are sick or healthy,*

---

<sup>147</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 19

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p. 19

<sup>149</sup> Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, (Chicago, Phoenix Press, 1973) p.13

<sup>150</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 25

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 22

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p. 19

*male or female, old or young, virgin or corrupt*".<sup>153</sup> *"There the son is sold while the grieving mother looks on. There the mother is bought to the confusion and humiliation of the son. There the wife is mocked as a harlot and is handed over to another man, while her husband blushes. There is a little one snatched from the bosom of his mother while she is sold off, with every deep emotion shaken"*.<sup>154</sup> If a slave misbehaved, George recounted how he or she would *"undergo blows like donkeys"*.<sup>155</sup> George refused to go into any more details about his pain.<sup>156</sup> George claimed many slaves committed suicide; *"they lay their hands upon themselves, either strangling away their life with a noose or hurling themselves into a river"*.<sup>157</sup>

George was clearly a man haunted by his Ottoman past. His trauma was real, affecting how he and why he wrote about the Ottoman Empire. This will be explored in later chapters. While George explained that they often *"join slave and handmaid in marriage"*,<sup>158</sup> George chose not to tell if *he* was married to a handmaid. If he had married so, it would have undermined both his Dominican vow of celibacy.

Much later in his memoir, in Chapter 16, George recounted his time with his first master. He was eventually purchased in Bergama, the ancient city of Pergammon, in the olive grove hinterlands behind İzmir (Smyrna). His first master was a common villager, whose cruelty George reckoned strengthened George's Christianity. George made a first

---

<sup>153</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 20

<sup>154</sup> Ibid

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p. 21

<sup>156</sup> Ibid, p. 21

<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 21

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p. 22



attempt to flee and was caught, but he was not punished.<sup>159</sup> However, a failed second attempt led to a brutal punishment; “*without mercy he (the master) carried through everything he had threatened and everything that was possible short of killing me*”.<sup>160</sup> He was eventually able to escape this master in 1458 by going to fake merchants (smugglers).<sup>161</sup> Only in the final chapter of his memoir did George explain his escape. He struck up a great relationship with his last master. He convinced his master he needed to leave the household to further his studies.<sup>162</sup> George then used merchant-smugglers to draft him a phoney letter granting him freedom, enabling him to return home in 1458.<sup>163</sup>

From Bergama, George recounted how he was sold three times before landing at a remote location.<sup>164</sup> After five years and eight escape attempts had passed, George wrote he entered the house of his final master.<sup>165</sup> Here George’s faith in Christianity faltered; “*Truly, if that religion, which you have held thus far, had pleased God, he would certainly have not abandoned you in this way*”.<sup>166</sup> George admitted trading Christian prayers for Islamic ones.<sup>167</sup> He “*began to ruminate over the doctrines of the clerics more diligently*”.<sup>168</sup> However, he was quick to point out (in his memoir!) that he came back to

---

<sup>159</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 59

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 59-60

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 60

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, p. 100

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p. 100

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, p. 60

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, p. 60

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p. 60

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 60

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, p. 60

Christianity with a stronger faith, resuming Christian prayers and dismissing his Islamic interests as delusions of the Devil.<sup>169</sup>

This Chapter is one of the most important chapters for this thesis. Firstly, we belatedly obtain a basic timeline of George's time in the Ottoman Empire. His brutal treatment by his first master impacted how he wrote about the Ottomans. Given that it is only with the final master that George temporarily succumbed to Islam, George must have received his Islamic training with this master. George was also brave to admit his heresy. He shouldered guilt which will be explored in Chapter 2. His Islamic training, when combined with his Dominican education, affected his understanding of Ottoman expansion, matters discussed in Chapter 3.

George also discussed slave escapes. Slave desires to escape were as great as the Turks' desire for slaves, he maintained.<sup>170</sup> Many failed. Punishment was brutal. George listed a few ways; *"they are beaten, tortured and afflicted.... Some masters permit the slaves to die by denying them food, water or clothing, others attach a lump of iron to their feet.... Others rendered them deformed, conspicuous and useless by cutting away their ears and nose"*.<sup>171</sup> George then described how slaves could gain freedom through a pact of liberty made with their master and witnessed a judge.<sup>172</sup> No one, master or judge, *"is able to infringe upon in any way"*.<sup>173</sup> However, even a freed slave was not allowed to leave the

---

<sup>169</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 60-61

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, p. 22

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, p. 23

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p. 24

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p. 24

Ottoman Empire, and even if they could, most chose to stay as they now had connections in Turkey.<sup>174</sup>

In Chapter 8, George claimed that while Ottomans conquered in order to capture slaves,<sup>175</sup> many slaves voluntarily “*rush in great numbers to deny the faith*”.<sup>176</sup> Chapter 9 suggested reasons to do with the Sultan as being so powerful and victorious; he noted apostates wondering that if Turks prevail over their Christian truth, the Ottomans must hold the truth. He also noted doubts about why God allows Christians to convert. George was troubled by the high number of Christians converting to Islam. This will be evaluated in Chapter 2 where I discuss the purpose of George’s book.

These doubts are important. Chapter 20 reveals George asking these questions, as he notes his answer to these questions is not to question “*the incomprehensible works of God*”.<sup>177</sup> In the same way, if his chapters 9 and 10 were about what made the Turks appear so pious, his chapter 11’s goal was to show the reader why the Turks’ Islamic faith was still wrong. George warned Christians that the Turks used good and pious practices to deceive the Christian.<sup>178</sup> In Chapter 21, he speculated further on why Christians come back from Islam, emphasising Turks’ poor spiritual intelligence and their obstinacy.<sup>179</sup>

---

<sup>174</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 24

<sup>175</sup> Ibid

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p. 25

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, p. 29

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. 30

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p. 83

These observations reveal that George did not think high of the 'Turkish character'. But his obstinacy accusation was a flawed. To be obstinate is to refuse to change one's mind despite others attempting to persuade you. His Turks seemed obstinate because they refused to change from Islam to Christianity. While George's opinion is biased and simple, previous statements, such as where he doubted the Imams' connection to God, show he truly believed his observation. How could one be spiritually intelligent when (a) those religiously trained have no connection to their God and (b) are following the wrong faith? By using the word "obstinate", George didn't damn the Turks' spiritual intelligence forever; he believed their stubborn Islam cost them 'spiritual intelligence' and enlightenment that he believed came with being a pious Christian.

George tried to make sense of his own experience of capture in Chapter 20. Unlike Schiltberger and Mihailović, George was honest about his relationship with Islam in chapter 20 of his memoir. He told us of three types of Christian captives. The first group resisted Islam.<sup>180</sup> The third group abandoned Christianity.<sup>181</sup> The second group was tempted by Islam, studied it, but came back to Christianity.<sup>182</sup> George admitted he belonged to this group.<sup>183</sup>

This admission explains his knowledge of Islam throughout his work. He educated himself in Islam because he once wanted to learn about it. This also explains how he knew about

---

<sup>180</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 78

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p. 79

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p. 79

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p. 79

the various religious figures. He would have likely come into contact with them all throughout his Islamic education and/or time as a slave.

According to George, Turks were less frivolous than Christians.<sup>184</sup> In discussing, in chapter 12, the behaviour of Turkish women, for instance, his only point of note is to emphasise their piety. George clearly did not believe Christian women were pious enough. George evidenced this Ottoman sobriety by noting how they defecate: they squat modestly, with no nudity.<sup>185</sup> This sobriety also applied to the Sultan, as George claimed to have seen Murad II praying in a mosque in normal clothes, and with no pomp and circumstance.<sup>186</sup>

This amusing description of Ottoman defecation shows George spent time on an Ottoman military campaign. While it may have been while he was captured in 1438, it was more likely when he was soon separated from the Ottoman troops as a prisoner for sale. It seems unlikely he would have understood in 1438 how Ottoman garments protected their modesty. The implication is that George was a slave-servant or -auxiliary, serving a master called to arms.

George's account also appears to reveal he had some experience at a centre of power, the Ottoman court: "*the Turkish language is barely heard at the king's court*".<sup>187</sup> He notes courtiers speak a foreign language he does not name.<sup>188</sup> (Arabic and Persian was spoken at court, the former as the key language of Islam, the latter as key to culture: gardens,

---

<sup>184</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 31

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, p. 35

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, p. 31

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, p. 25

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, p. 25

poetry and history etc.). This evidence also implies George spoke fluent Turkish, a conclusion he confirmed only in his final chapter, when he added he forgot his mother tongue.<sup>189</sup>

George next gave us a detailed description of the Janissary Corps. He informed us that they are distributed amongst royal officials to be trained in “*customs, physical fitness and weapons of the land*”.<sup>190</sup> He lists them as 30,000-40,000 strong, wearing distinctive white caps, masters of archery all.<sup>191</sup> George never claimed to be a Janissary himself. I shall discuss the impact the Janissaries had on Ottoman Expansion in my Chapter 3 as well as more on the Janissaries themselves in my Chapter 3

George then explained the power structure of the Ottoman court and politics as a whole. The Sultan alone owns all the land; the others are more like executives and/or bureaucrats.<sup>192</sup> The Sultan’s power is unparalleled; “*no one dares to presume anything without the king’s (Sultan’s) authority*”.<sup>193</sup> This power influenced George’s understanding of Ottoman expansion, discussed in chapter 3.

But what was George doing in an Ottoman court, given that he was not a janissary and he was not a palace slave? He does not appear to have been in any private part of the Sultan’s palace at the capital (then) of Edirne. We know he lived in and outside Izmir,

---

<sup>189</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 99

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, p. 26

<sup>191</sup> Ibid

<sup>192</sup> Ibid

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, p. 27

whence he was sold upon capture. A captive earmarked to be a janissary or palace servant would have first been taken to the Ottoman capital, Edirne, by the Sultan.

Nonetheless George's knowledge of some aspects of the Court and Janissaries suggests he must have been there with one of his masters, and one with some prestige at some stage, given that he appears to have seen the Sultan a few times without ever working for him, having been at the king's court and seeing him travel from his palace to a mosque.<sup>194</sup> He may have also seen him on the campaign trail as an auxiliary.

George was also well informed about schools where civil law was taught. He explained how the people who went here were trained for "*judging and ruling the people*".<sup>195</sup> George's Chapter 10 also informs us he was once in the Aegean island of Chios (Sakız) with Ottoman diplomats. He recalled trying to persuade them that the images in the Church were good, but the diplomats saw it as idolatry.<sup>196</sup> This story suggests George must have been a slave to one of the Turkish diplomats, not to western ambassadors, given how he said he was with them, and given that he had a theological debate over idols with them.

Unfortunately, he never gave us a name, a year, or even which master this was. Given that this master was a diplomat, by giving his name George may have wound up incriminating himself, dashing his goal of becoming a Dominican. He might have found himself instead imprisoned or dead. It also explains how George has some idea of how

---

<sup>194</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 25, 31

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, p. 48

<sup>196</sup> Ibid, p. 34

the Ottoman court functioned. He was most likely there with his diplomat master. His background would have made him a valuable slave for a diplomat, being fluent in German and Hungarian, and having trained in Latin.

George was whip smart. His detailed step-by-step guide to Islamic prayer shows us he was a learned man in Islam. His sense of guilt at the end of the chapter only confirmed this. He also worked alongside imams. His idea of how Ottoman schools work indicated he might have been a student, or one of his masters could have been. His chapter 14 also shows George was familiar with the lives of apostates (converts). He explains how some tested their new faith by walking naked, by going mute, or by fasting.<sup>197</sup> George also claimed their dress indicated personality traits. For example, if they wore gold earrings, they were obedient; those with chains on necks or arms were violent.<sup>198</sup> Apostates lived by various means, George explained, from odd-jobbing, to begging, to hermitage, to guarding tombs.<sup>199</sup> They also had their own unique poems and festivals.<sup>200</sup>

George must have had extensive ties to renunciant communities. Recall how he also admitted to being tempted by Islam. The various people he described he must have interacted with. He admitted to teaching Islam to renunciants.<sup>201</sup> Yet Brother George never explicitly counted himself as one, possibly distancing himself so as not to incriminate himself.

---

<sup>197</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 49-50

<sup>198</sup> Ibid, p. 50-51

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, p. 51

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, p. 52

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. 100



This distancing mimics Mihailović's distancing from the Janissaries. Both had fascinating stories to tell. Neither wanted to get into trouble. Distancing themselves from their roles within the Ottoman Empire helped them retain their respective pious-Christian and Sufi-dervish personas. Seeing the renunciants' determination to prove their Islamic faith must have startled George, as previously stated he was scared by the number of Christians converting to Islam. Their numbers and zeal influenced George's tone and the purpose for his book, to be elaborated on in my Chapter 4.

George's Chapter 15 also discussed Turkish legends and heroes. While most are not of relevance to this thesis, one legend revealed George's Ottoman life. He told a story of how 'the mistress of the house' told him to invoke the 'guardian of flocks and animals' because wolves were attacking their flocks.<sup>202</sup> This mistress and master invoked this legend when concerned about the safety of their bulls.<sup>203</sup> George did not explain if he was the one who invoked this legend. If he had done so, he would have incriminated himself as a heretic. By discussing this legend in the context of his mistress and master, George was able to distance himself from the legend while simultaneously discussing his experience with Turkish legends and myths. The ability to do this in writing was likely due to his Dominican training.

The aside in George's chapter 15 that George worked on pasturage is interesting. A cruel farmer near İzmir, recall, was his first master. George was integrated into everyday Ottoman life on a more normal and personal level compared to Mihailović and

---

<sup>202</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 56

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, p. 56-57

Schiltberger. He understood everyday Ottomans better. Mihailović and Schiltberger better understood the Ottomans at war.

Brother George was also more troubled by issues of faith. In Chapter 17, George discussed the state of Islam and Christianity in the world and the future for both faiths. He opened by clarifying what made Christians more holy than Muslims. Christians say 'I believe' and Muslims say 'God is one' which, according to George, showed Christians possessed faith.<sup>204</sup> He further defended Christianity over Islam when he claimed Muslims were wrong because "*they attack God's real worship (that is, Christianity)*".<sup>205</sup> George's tone became sombre. He admitted Christian prayers no longer helped against the rise of Islam. As a result, the devil was free.<sup>206</sup> George again accused Muslims of "*the simulation of sanctity*".<sup>207</sup>

In Chapter 22, George told a story regarding Sultan Murad II that took place before George's capture. He wrote how the Sunni Orthodox *Ulema* and the heterodox Dervishes argued over who should receive alms, with the former looking to win Murad to their side.<sup>208</sup> At night, when Murad fell through the floor when going toilet, he was visited by the vision of a Dervish, who told him to help the Dervishes.<sup>209</sup> Murad did so, giving them money and leaving his position as Sultan to study with them, before being forced back in the throne [in 1446] after his son (Mehmed II) was seen as too young and brash.<sup>210</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 63

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, p. 64

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, p. 64

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, p. 66

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, p. 87

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, p. 89

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p. 89-90

George then briefly recounted how a 'Great Tatar' called Demirling sent men with hidden weapons to assassinate Mehmed II.<sup>211</sup> It did not work as "*they were killed by the king*".<sup>212</sup> These stories further affirm my belief that George spent time with a master in the Ottoman court, otherwise how would he know of an assassination attempt against Mehmed II? The first story comes off as a miracle of Islam, implicitly contradicting George's staunch Christianity. While George never said whether he believed the tale, the fact he included it implies he once believed, indicating George hadn't renounced every aspect of his Islamic inheritance as he claimed he had.

George proffered a monk's harrowing prediction, nonetheless, for the future of Christianity. While he believed some would achieve perfection in faith,<sup>213</sup> they will be few and far between: "*only a few will remain in hiding in grottos and caves*".<sup>214</sup> Many will suffer at the hands of the Muslims, but become martyrs.<sup>215</sup> Everyone else will wither, convert to Islam, or be killed, he maintained. Ultimately however, the universal Church will survive the apocalypse, despite the expansion of Islam. George's apocalyptic bias is displayed. To narrow Muslims and Christians down to one expression is an unfair assessment for both faiths. His logic that the Muslims were wrong because they disliked Christianity didn't offer any logical thoughts other than 'they're wrong because I'm right'.

This chapter would have been chilling for everyday 1400s Christians to read. While George was confident a pious few will survive to perfect Christianity, everyone else will

---

<sup>211</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics, p. 90-91

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, p. 91

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, pp. 67, 70

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, p. 67

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, p. 67

die. Unlike Mihailović's message of military resolve, George did not say it was possible to avoid this future. The Ottomans will conquer the Christian world, and kill most Christians. However, George must have known that this idea of Ottomans committing mass murder against Christians was flawed. He had survived. Surely, if that had been the Ottomans' goal, they would have killed George rather than enslave him. Scholarship also disputes his idea, and will be discussed in Chapter 3.

George's chapter 18 offered more predictions regarding the Ottoman Empire and Islam. Military victories of the Ottomans were only beginning: *"The victories of Alexander the Great or the Romans, who subjugated the entire world, will not be able to compare to these"*.<sup>216</sup> He berated Ottoman fervour for expanding Islam, destroying souls of Christians.<sup>217</sup> Mindful of apocalyptic parts of the *Book of Revelation*, George even told us that 'the celestial court' (Heaven) admired Ottoman dominance of the world.<sup>218</sup> George predicted *"they will cover the surface of the entire earth like locusts"*.<sup>219</sup>

George-the-prophet predicted what would happen when Satan in human form comes to Earth. He believed Satan was directly working with Islam and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>220</sup> To paraphrase George would not do justice to his exact prediction:

*"You will see the dead resurrected; all types of sickness cured; secrets of the heart revealed; locations of treasure concealed for centuries brought to light; and no crime will*

---

<sup>216</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 69

<sup>217</sup> Ibid

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, p. 70

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, p. 70

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p. 72

*remain that will not be accomplished at the whim of the reprobates. In addition, there will be such a display of simulated sanctity and religiosity that their sanctity will seem to exceed that of the holy fathers and the apostle's themselves".*<sup>221</sup>

This chapter clarified George's view on the future of Christianity. His statement that the Ottomans will exceed the conquests of Rome and Alexander was a bold claim. From the dead rising, to every crime being committed, George saw the world heading towards anarchy. The alignment of Satan and the Ottomans appeared to be a form of 'undivine intervention'. Divine/undivine intervention in Ottoman expansion is a recurring theme between our three authors. George's religious understanding of it is examined in my Chapter 3.

---

<sup>221</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 70

### Johann Schiltberger's Story:

The final 'story to tell is that of Johann Schiltberger, the author of *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger: A Native of Bavaria in Europe*. Schiltberger opened with this brief paragraph: "*I, Johann Schiltberger, left my home near the city of Munich, situated in Payren, at the time that King Sigmund of Hungary left for the land of the Infidels*".<sup>222</sup> He left with a lord called Leinhart Richartinger,<sup>223</sup> about whom we know little, as in my research he only appears when one searches for Schiltberger. He described his story as "*interesting and strange adventures*".<sup>224</sup> He was barely 16 years old when his life changed forever.

Schiltberger explained that the Ottomans had done great harm to Hungary. In 1394, they had called upon fellow Christians to help him.<sup>225</sup> Schiltberger joined a Christian crusade to reinforce Sigismund in 1396. Schiltberger marched with Richartinger to join Hungarian King Sigismund (r. 1387-1437) at the Iron Gates (a mighty gorge on the Danube), which, according to Schiltberger, "*separates Ungern (Hungary) from Pulgery (Bulgaria) and Walachy (Wallachia)*".<sup>226</sup> The force moved to north Bulgaria, entering Pudem (Vidin) and occupying it. "*Then came the ruler of the country and of the city, and gave himself up to the king (Sigismund); then the king took possession of the city with three hundred men,*

---

<sup>222</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 1

<sup>223</sup> Ibid

<sup>224</sup> Ibid

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, p. 1-2

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, p. 2

*good horse and foot soldiers.*<sup>227</sup> Schiltberger also stated Sigismund captured an unnamed town,<sup>228</sup> thought to be Orsova.<sup>229</sup>

Schiltberger then marched with Sigismund to besiege a city he called Schiltaw, but which the Ottomans (and Byzantines) called Nicopolis.<sup>230</sup> Schiltberger claimed Sultan *Yıldırım* Bayezid I (r. 1389-1402) appeared reinforcing the city with a sizeable army.<sup>231</sup> Schiltberger recounted a spat between the Duke of Wallachia (Mircea “*cel Bătrân* the Elder”, r. 1386-94) and the future Duke of Burgundy (Jean “*Sans Peur* or John the Fearless”, r. 1404-19). Mircea requested and was granted the right to the first attack on the Ottomans.<sup>232</sup> But “*when the Duke of Burgundy heard this, he refused to cede this honour to any other person, for the just reason that he had come a great distance with six thousand men, and had expended much money in the expedition, and he begged the king that he should be the first to attack*”.<sup>233</sup> When he was not granted his wish, he decided to attack first anyway. His Burgundians surrounded, many were killed.<sup>234</sup>

The Battle of Nicopolis, 25 September 1396, raged on nonetheless, as Schiltberger told us, with Sigismund defeated by 12,000 Ottoman foot soldiers. During this fight, Schiltberger told us Richartinger’s horse went down, but that he was able to rescue his

---

<sup>227</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 2

<sup>228</sup> Ibid

<sup>229</sup> Philip Brunn, ‘Notes’ in Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 107

<sup>230</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 2

<sup>231</sup> Ibid

<sup>232</sup> Ibid

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, p. 2-3

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, p. 3

lord.<sup>235</sup> According to Schiltberger, the battle had once seemed to be going well for the Crusaders. He explained that the Sultan considered a retreat until the Despot of Serbia, Stefan Lazarević—the son of the Serb monarch who perished at Kosovo in 1389, the monarch avenged by Miloš Obilić, the assassin of *Yıldırım* Bayezid's father, Murad I—arrived to aid the Ottomans with 15,000 men.<sup>236</sup> The arrival of Serb reinforcements, according to Schiltberger, convinced Sigismund the battle was lost. Sigismund fled via a galley for Constantinople.<sup>237</sup> The assistance from Serbia here is important, as Mihailović's earlier chapters concerning Serb history always cast Serbia as a victim. My chapter 2 explores this under the theme of irony.

Schiltberger's account of the Battle of Nicopolis is the only first-person account of the battle. His accuracy regarding names and actions shows Schiltberger as a punctilious observer. Even so, as elaborated in Chapter 2, Schiltberger also wanted to tell a great story in which he was a hero, perhaps the hero. His attention to these details added to his story. Schiltberger reported that his lord Leinhart Richartinger died in battle, while others, such as the Duke of Burgundy and two Lords of France were taken prisoner.<sup>238</sup> Schiltberger was also taken prisoner at Nicopolis, thus beginning his time in the Ottoman Empire. What stands out here is his casual attitude towards his capture and his master's death. These were traumatic events. The tone and tenor of Schiltberger's account did not change. It remained in storyteller tone.

---

<sup>235</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 3

<sup>236</sup> Ibid

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, p. 3-4

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, p. 4



Schiltberger's new Ottoman life was also riddled with trauma, and received the same treatment. Schiltberger's next chapter focused on the traumatic treatment of the prisoners taken from Nicopolis, including Schiltberger himself. Upon seeing the Ottoman dead, Schiltberger told us Bayezid demanded all prisoners, including Schiltberger be brought before him.<sup>239</sup> The first brought to Bayezid was the Duke of Burgundy, who was able to name men he wanted spared, but those named were ordered to execute their own other imprisoned men.<sup>240</sup> Next up were Schiltberger's companions from Bavaria.<sup>241</sup> They were beheaded. Schiltberger was then brought forward to the Sultan. He told us *"when it came to my turn, the [Sultan's] son saw me and ordered that I should be left alive, and I was taken to the other boys, because none under 20 years of age were killed, and I was scarcely sixteen years old"*.<sup>242</sup>

Next to be brought forward was a noble of Payern (Bavaria?), Hannsen Greiff, along with four companions. Greiff was defiant, telling his companions before they were all beheaded *"Stand firm.... when our blood this day is split for the Christian faith, and we by God's help shall become the children of heaven"*.<sup>243</sup> After this, Schiltberger told us the Sultan's counsellors convinced him to stop the executions and split the prisoners amongst themselves.<sup>244</sup> Schiltberger said *"I was amongst those the [Sultan] took as his share"*.<sup>245</sup>

---

<sup>239</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 4-5

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, p. 5

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, p. 5

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p. 5

<sup>243</sup> Ibid

<sup>244</sup> Ibid

<sup>245</sup> Ibid

Schiltberger left Bulgaria with the Ottomans, first to Edirne, then the Ottoman capital, and then to Gallipoli, where he remained for two months.<sup>246</sup> The chapter ends with Schiltberger recounting a brief 'encounter' with Sigismund on his way back to Windischy Land (Croatia or Slovenia). The Ottomans took all the prisoners out to the sea to mock and abuse Sigismund.<sup>247</sup>

This chapter must have been the scariest moment of Schiltberger's life to this point, watching beheadings while waiting his turn. His tone, however, did not reflect the frightening scenario. Spite was evident, not least when those spared had to execute comrades: venomous conflict between Ottomans and Crusaders. Schiltberger also confirms Schiltberger was not a regular slave; he belonged to Sultan Yıldırım Bayezid. Moreover, it is unclear if the captives at Gallipoli also mocked Sigismund when he sailed past. The Ottomans' option to mock him rather than attack shows they did not attack any Christian on sight; they honoured his safe passage, letting Sigismund sail through unharmed.

In his next chapter Schiltberger discussed Bayezid taking more land in the Balkans. He told us that Bayezid captured Mittrotz.<sup>248</sup> From there they marched into the Duchy of Petaw, took 16,000 men (along with their wives and children) and burnt its town.<sup>249</sup> Curiously, Schiltberger mentions that some prisoners were left in Greece.<sup>250</sup> They their force returned home to Bursa.

---

<sup>246</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 6

<sup>247</sup> Ibid

<sup>248</sup> Ibid

<sup>249</sup> Ibid

<sup>250</sup> Ibid

From here, Schiltberger described prisoners being sent to various rulers as offerings, including the Mameluq Sultan of Egypt, the Kings of Babylon, Persia, and Greater Armenia (Armenia proper) and (“White” [Sheep] *Ak Koyun*) Tatar (Turcoman) Khan.<sup>251</sup> Schiltberger told us he was originally supposed to be sent to Egypt, but “*I was severely wounded, having three wounds, so for fear I might die on the way I was left with the Turkish king*”.<sup>252</sup> Yet another trauma was written up here in a casual manner. Schiltberger could have been sent anywhere against his will, and his only saving grace was that his injuries were so severe travel might kill him. This lack of anger is purposeful and is discussed in Chapter 2.

Schiltberger’s traumas did not stop there. His Chapter 6 describes an attempt made by Schiltberger and 60 fellow Christian slaves to escape. “*And when Weyasit came to his capital, there were sixty of us Christians agreed that we should escape, and made a bond between ourselves and sworn to each other that we should die or succeed together*”.<sup>253</sup> The boys assigned themselves two leaders. After midnight they rode on horseback to a mountain where they allowed the horses to rest before recommencing.<sup>254</sup> Bayezid sent 500 horsemen after the runaways, whom they caught relatively quickly.<sup>255</sup> Schiltberger tells us that the situation quickly turned violent. “*They overtook us near a defile and called to us to give ourselves up. This we would not do, and we dismounted from our*

---

<sup>251</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 7

<sup>252</sup> Ibid, p. 7

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, p. 10-11

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, p. 11

<sup>255</sup> Ibid, p. 11

*horses and defended ourselves against them as well as we could*".<sup>256</sup> Luckily for Schiltberger, a one-hour truce was agreed on with an Ottoman commander to negotiate the runaways' surrender.<sup>257</sup> According to Schiltberger, the commander promised to spare their lives if they surrendered,<sup>258</sup> but Schiltberger and the other runaways responded with *"we knew that so soon as we were made prisoners, we should die so soon as we came before the king, and it would be better that we should die here, with arms in our hands, for the Christian faith"*.<sup>259</sup> The Ottoman commander countered with an offer Schiltberger accepted; if Bayezid desired to kill the runaways; the commander would die alongside them.<sup>260</sup>

Schiltberger was brought before Bayezid, *"who ordered that we should be killed immediately"*.<sup>261</sup> But, as promised, *"the commander went and knelt before the king, and said that he had trusted in his mercy and had promised us our lives"*.<sup>262</sup> Bayezid spared their lives, but imprisoned them for nine months. On release, Schiltberger explained Bayezid *"obliged [us] to promise him that we would never try to escape again, and he gave us back our horses and increased our pay"*.<sup>263</sup> Schiltberger re-entered regular service for Bayezid I.

---

<sup>256</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 11

<sup>257</sup> Ibid

<sup>258</sup> Ibid

<sup>259</sup> Ibid

<sup>260</sup> Ibid

<sup>261</sup> Ibid

<sup>262</sup> Ibid

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 12

Much like his Chapter 2, Schiltberger writes about another terrifying moment with his usual 'business as usual' vibe. He seemed to equate his failed escape and potential execution with everything else that happened. There was also no anger or contempt towards the Sultan who initially wanted to kill him. The Ottoman commander was portrayed as an honest man. My later contrast with Mihailović and George suggests Schiltberger's tone was no accident. Schiltberger soon participated in an Ottoman siege against the Black Sea city of Samsun. He ends the chapter by telling us what role he played in the Ottoman military; *"for six years I was obliged to run on my feet with the others, wherever [Bayezid I] went, it being the custom that the lords have people to run before them. After six years I deserved to be allowed to ride, and I rode six years with [Bayezid I]"*.<sup>264</sup> Schiltberger must have moved up in the Ottoman ranks, due to him earning the right to ride a horse, a right not given to just any soldier. In my chapter 3, I will argue that Schiltberger became a *Kapikulu Sipahi* (Slave Household Cavalryman).

In Chapter 4, Schiltberger talked about the conflict between the Ottoman and the rival Karaman Turks. He claimed their leader was called Karaman, a brother-in-law of Bayezid. The cause of the conflict, at least according to Schiltberger, was fairly simple; Karaman would not submit to Bayezid, who attacked with a huge army he exaggerated as amounting to 150,000 men.<sup>265</sup> Karaman was said to round up 70,000 to battle Bayezid on a plain near Konya.<sup>266</sup> After initial conflicts that went nowhere, Bayezid outsmarted Karaman by moving 30,000 men to the rear of the Karaman camp, attacking it from the

---

<sup>264</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 7

<sup>265</sup> Ibid

<sup>266</sup> Ibid

front and rear, causing Karaman to flee into Konya.<sup>267</sup> Schiltberger tells us *“Weyasit lay siege to the city for XI days without being able to take it; then the citizens sent word to Weyasit that they would surrender the city if he would secure to them their lives and property. To this he agreed”*.<sup>268</sup>

This enabled the Ottomans to enter the city, forcing Karaman into a last-ditch fight in the streets of Konya.<sup>269</sup> Karaman was captured and brought before Bayezid. Schiltberger re-told their interaction word for word: *“‘Why wilt thou not be subject to me?’ Karaman answered, ‘because I am as great a lord as thyself’*.<sup>270</sup>

Bayezid then demanded someone rid him of Karaman, to which someone responded by taking him aside and beheading him.<sup>271</sup> Bayezid responded by tearing up and having Karaman’s executioner also beheaded.<sup>272</sup> Schiltberger claimed this explanation; *“This was done because Weyasit thought that nobody should have killed so mighty a lord, but should have waited until his lord’s anger had passed away”*.<sup>273</sup> Bayezid put Karaman’s head on lance to march it around Karaman territory to encourage cities to surrender.<sup>274</sup>

The Ottomans then marched from Konya to Karanda, and demanded the locals surrender. Schiltberger then recounted an encounter between Bayezid and four citizens.

---

<sup>267</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 8

<sup>268</sup> Ibid

<sup>269</sup> Ibid

<sup>270</sup> Ibid

<sup>271</sup> Ibid

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, p. 8-9

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, p. 9

<sup>274</sup> Ibid, p. 9

*“Then the citizens sent out to him four of their most eminent [fellow citizens], to beg that he would ensure to them their lives and their property, but when he would have possession of the city, that he would appoint one of them to be their lord; and should he do so, they would surrender to him the city”.*<sup>275</sup> Bayezid was happy to spare lives and property, but refused to be told whom he should appoint to run the city. Negotiations broke down, and Bayezid besieged the city for five days.<sup>276</sup> Karaman’s sons and their mother gathered the citizens to address them, saying *“we cannot resist Weyasit, who is too powerful for us; we should be sorry if you died for our sakes, and we have agreed with our mother that we will trust to his mercy”.*<sup>277</sup> Bayezid accepted the surrender, and Bayezid assigned some of his lords to raise Karaman’s sons, and made another governor.<sup>278</sup>

This chapter is similar to the Uzun Hasan chapter in Mihailović’s memoirs. I doubt Schiltberger was on this campaign. The events described, such as the beheading of Karaman appear to match a conflict that took place in 1392,<sup>279</sup> before Schiltberger’s time with Bayezid. However, Bayezid also fought and defeated the Karamans in 1397, which was during Schiltberger’s time with Bayezid. He may have confused the two events, or he wanted us to believe he was there. Like Mihailović, this mishap could indicate that Schiltberger dictated his book. Bayezid’s recorded reaction to Karaman’s death is confusing. Supposedly devastated when Karaman was beheaded, he then paraded

---

<sup>275</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 9

<sup>276</sup> Ibid

<sup>277</sup> Ibid

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, p. 10

<sup>279</sup> Philip Brunn, ‘Notes’ in Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p.118

Karaman's head on a lance. Bayezid was probably making the best of a bad situation. He didn't want to behead Karaman, but once it happened, he used it to his advantage. Schiltberger didn't interpret this because it wasn't the point of his book.

In Chapter 5 Schiltberger rode with Bayezid to Lesser Armenia. Mirachamad (Mutaherten), who resided in a city called Marsüany, had called for aid from Bayezid.<sup>280</sup> His land was occupied by Kadi Burhan al-Din, but he was too weak to expel him. He offered to Bayezid his territory in exchange for some of his own.<sup>281</sup> Bayezid agreed, and sent his son Machamet [Mehmed I, r. 1413-1421] who expelled al-Din.<sup>282</sup> Both sides kept their word; *"Mirachamad bestowed upon Machamet the capital and all the territory.... then Weyasit (Bayezid) took Mirachamad with him to his own country and gave him another territory for his own"*.<sup>283</sup>

This chapter, while brief, is important. It displayed Bayezid and the Ottomans as a whole in an honourable light. He implicitly contradicted Mihailović and George, who only inadvertently sent such a message. When he could have omitted it, Schiltberger included this story. Schiltberger had no deep hatred for the Ottomans, seeing them in a more neutral light. My chapter 2 contrasts Schiltberger's, Mihailović's and George's opinions.

Chapter 9 discusses when Schiltberger came into conflict with Qara Osman. The chapter begins with the arrival of Qara Osman and his cattle into Lesser Armenia requesting

---

<sup>280</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 10

<sup>281</sup> Ibid

<sup>282</sup> Ibid

<sup>283</sup> Ibid



pasturage from Kadi Burhan al-Din, the ruler there, whom he would end up upsetting.<sup>284</sup>

Kadi Burhan al-Din then rode after Qara Osman in hopes to capture him alive, but backfired.<sup>285</sup> Kadi Burhan al-Din then attempted to flee but was captured by one of.<sup>286</sup>

While he wasn't there for this, Schiltberger informed us of a plea made by al-Din; "(al-Din) asked him to let him go, promising him a fine castle, and he wanted to give him the ring he had on his hand as a pledge".<sup>287</sup>

Qara continued to kill those who stood in his path; arriving at Tamast (Sivas), and demanded the locals surrender. They refused, even after al-Din begged them to, for they had his son, and he would be their lord.<sup>288</sup> The son of al-Din requested aid first from the White Tatars. However, confusion in which the White Tatar King believed he had been betrayed caused many White Tatars to be killed and fled home.<sup>289</sup> Qara Osman again demanded Tamast (Sivas) surrender, but the people yet again refused.<sup>290</sup>

The people then sent to Bayezid for help, who sent his eldest. Schiltberger told us "*I also was in this expedition*".<sup>291</sup> After sending 2,000 of his horsemen to find Qara Osman, conflict broke out, which escalated when Bayezid's son arrived with his remaining forces

---

<sup>284</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 14

<sup>285</sup> Ibid, p. 14

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, p. 15

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, p. 15

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, p. 15-16

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, p. 17

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, p. 17

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, p. 17

and fought for 3 hours.<sup>292</sup> The battle was fought in vain for Qara Osman, as he was forced to flee into the mountains.<sup>293</sup>

Schiltberger ended this chapter with Bayezid's arrival into Tamast (Sivas). *"He (Bayezid) came with one hundred and fifty thousand men, took the city and country, and gave them to his son Machmet (Sultan Mehmed I, r. 1413-1421), and not to him who had expelled Otman (Qara Osman) from being the king of the city and country".*<sup>294</sup>

Again, this chapter furthers the idea of the 'Honourable Ottomans', helping a foreign city defend themselves. Not only were the Ottomans kind enough to help, but the city begged them to stay. The people wanted to be ruled by the Ottomans. Not only does this makes the Ottoman Empire look like favourable rulers, but it tells us that Ottoman expansion was not all doom and gloom. Neither Mihailović nor George talked about cities/lands etc. asking to be incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman expansion will be further explored in Chapter 3.

Schiltberger displayed strong knowledge of the events leading up to Bayezid's intervention. Perhaps he was told what happened by a Tamast soldier/local. Curiously, Schiltberger does not name the eldest son, but names Mehmed I. Perhaps Schiltberger had never served alongside this son and didn't know his name, or he simply omitted his name, as he believed the eldest son to be irrelevant. Bayezid's eldest son was called Ertugrul Çelebi, perhaps Bayezid's least famous son. However, orientalist Edward

---

<sup>292</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 17

<sup>293</sup> Ibid

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, p. 18

Granville Browne says that it was Süleyman Çelebi, Bayezid's second eldest son.<sup>295</sup> Schiltberger probably misremembered which son was which, as Bayezid had eight sons between 5 wives. Why did Qara Osman do what he did? We know that he was aligned with Timur in his conflicts against the Ottomans,<sup>296</sup> so perhaps this was the result of pressure from Timur?

Chapter 11 furthers the theme of the 'honourable Ottomans'. It began with the passing of Mamluq Sultan Barkok, and the accession of his son Al-Nasir Faraj (or as Schiltberger calls him, Joseph).<sup>297</sup> However, Joseph faced immediate rebellion, reconciled with Bayezid and asked him for help.<sup>298</sup> Bayezid sent 20,000, amongst them was Schiltberger.<sup>299</sup> Joseph was successful in defeating his enemies, and had 500 of them "*taken to a plain, where they were all cut into two parts*".<sup>300</sup> Schiltberger returned to Bayezid upon victory in Egypt.

This brief chapter makes the Ottomans look good. They reconciled with an enemy and helped them in a time of need. This is a genuine act of friendship, or at the very least it is not an act one associates with evil. It is evident by now Schiltberger did not write with any malicious intent, and nay anger he have had has been hidden.

---

<sup>295</sup> Edward Granville Browne, *A History of Persian Literature Under Tatar Dominion*, (Charleston, Bibliolife, 2009), p. 404

<sup>296</sup> Ibid

<sup>297</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 19

<sup>298</sup> Ibid

<sup>299</sup> Ibid

<sup>300</sup> Ibid

Schiltberger did not tell us much about Egypt. Given his lack of familiarity with Eastern European and Mediterranean geography, perhaps he simply lacked any knowledge of Egypt other than the fact that it existed and was unable to name where he went and who he fought. It also inadvertently shows the fluidity of alliances, as the previous chapter is about conflict with the Ottomans and the Egyptians.

One chapter is titled Of Serpents and Vipers. It is by far the most unique chapter of Schiltberger's Ottoman story. It is about "*a great miracle is to be noted which took place near the said city of Samsun*".<sup>301</sup> He claimed "*there came around the city of such a lot of vipers and serpents, that they took up the space of a mile all round*".<sup>302</sup> Schiltberger claimed that half of the vipers came from a nearby wooded country called Teyenick, and the other half from the sea.<sup>303</sup> According to Schiltberger, the vipers remained for XI days before fighting each other. He tells us that the lord of the city gave orders to leave the vipers alone.<sup>304</sup> Eventually, the lord rode out on the tenth day and saw "*that the vipers from the sea had to succumb to those of the forests. And the next morning early, the lord again rode out of the city to see if the reptiles were still there; he found none but dead vipers, which he ordered to be collected and counted*".<sup>305</sup> This lord sent to Bayezid to tell him about the miracle.<sup>306</sup> Schiltberger appears to get confused here, as he tells us that Weyasit rejoiced because the sea vipers beat the forest vipers, and took this as a sign that he, as a sea-board ruler, was favoured by God.<sup>307</sup> As Weyasit rejoiced for the sea

---

<sup>301</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 12

<sup>302</sup> Ibid

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p. 12-13

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, p. 13

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, p. 13

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, p. 13

<sup>307</sup> Ibid, p. 13

vipers, I assume the previously stated victory of the forest vipers was a mistake. I will explain my thinking behind this mistake when I discuss the truth and falsehoods behind the author's stories.

Schiltberger ended the chapter by giving some context to Samson and its rulers. He claimed the city to be a city of two halves, one populated by the 'Infidels' whom run the country and the other half by Genoese Christians.<sup>308</sup> He also told us that the lord was called Schuffmanes (Alexander/Iskender Shishman), a Muslim convert who was the son of the conquered Duke of Middle Bulgaria (Ivan Shishman, Tsar of Bulgaria r. 1371-95).<sup>309</sup> He was granted Samson and its country in place of his conquered fatherland.

This is the most religious and 'out-there' chapter Schiltberger wrote. It is possible there were snakes in the area, but the likelihood that it was to the extent Schiltberger wrote is low. However, it is interesting that this miracle is not a Christian one, but an Islamic one, as it ultimately tells Bayezid he will defeat a city base for Genoese silk and slave traders. Perhaps Schiltberger did not mean miracle in a religious context, or perhaps he is a true believer of Islam? This miracle and religiosity will be discussed in greater detail in chapters 2 and 3. It does make for a fun read, which relates to Schiltberger's motive which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

---

<sup>308</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 13

<sup>309</sup> Ibid

Chapter 10 began with Bayezid making a demand from the Mamluk Sultan. He demanded that the Mamluk Sultan should *“surrender the city of Malathea (Malatya) and the territory, because he (Bayezid) had conquered the kingdom”*.<sup>310</sup> The Mamluk Sultan responded with *“he won the kingdom by the sword, and he who wished to have it must also win it by the sword”*.<sup>311</sup> Bayezid responded by successfully besieging the city with a 200,000 strong army for 2 months.<sup>312</sup>

After conquering Malatya, Bayezid had to respond quickly, as White Tatars attacked Angarus, a city he owned.<sup>313</sup> He sent his son with 32,000 men to defend the city, and whilst the son had to return for reinforcements, he was successful and brought the Tatar lord before Bayezid.<sup>314</sup> After this Bayezid swiftly conquered another Mamluk controlled city called Adalia (Adana).<sup>315</sup> Schiltberger described a gift from the citizens of Adana to Bayezid. *“After Bayezid took the city and the country, the country made him a present of ten thousand camels; and after he occupied the city and country, he took the camels into his own country”*.<sup>316</sup>

This time must have been fascinating as Schiltberger participated in a battle between two out of three big Islamic powers (the third being Timur). This chapter also confirms Schiltberger was typically close to the Sultan, as he witnessed the son coming back for reinforcements and the giving of the gift.

---

<sup>310</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 18

<sup>311</sup> Ibid

<sup>312</sup> Ibid

<sup>313</sup> Ibid

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, p. 18-19

<sup>315</sup> Ibid, p. 19

<sup>316</sup> Ibid, p. 19

The next chapter does not discuss events Schiltberger was present for. Nonetheless, it is important, as it is the beginning of direct conflict between Timur and Bayezid. The previously expelled Qara Osman fled to Timur to complain about the actions of Bayezid in Sebast (Sivas) and asked for help in reconquering the city.<sup>317</sup> Timur initially took the peaceful route, and *“said that he would send to Weyasit, to restore the country”*.<sup>318</sup> Bayezid refused, so Timur *“assembled ten hundred thousand men, and conducted them into the Kingdom of Sebast, and lay siege to the capital”*.<sup>319</sup> Timur was not kind to the defeated, as Schiltberger recalls that he had men buried alive, killed a further 3,000 men, abducted 9,000 virgins and levelled the city.<sup>320</sup> After the horrific conquest Timur returned home.

It was important that Schiltberger wrote this chapter in order to provide us with some context for the following chapter.

We now come to the final chapter of Schiltberger’s time with Bayezid. Bayezid would not let Timur keep Lesser Armenia; *“Scarcely has Tāmerlin (Timur) returned to his own country, than Weyasit assembled three hundred thousand men, and went into Lesser Ermenia (Armenia) and took it from Tāmerlin, and took the capital called Ersingen (Erzincan)”*.<sup>321</sup> Timur responded by marching with an army of ‘sixteen hundred thousand men’ and Bayezid responded in kind within army of ‘fourteen hundred thousand men’

---

<sup>317</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 20

<sup>318</sup> Ibid, p. 20

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, p. 20

<sup>320</sup> Ibid

<sup>321</sup> Ibid, p. 20-21

and collided near Ankara.<sup>322</sup> Schiltberger gives us specifics on certain units each leader had with them, telling us Bayezid had 30,000 White Tatars and Timur had 32 battle-trained elephants.<sup>323</sup> Bayezid was forced to flee with 1,000 horsemen (whom Schiltberger was among) into nearby mountains.<sup>324</sup> This flight was in vain, however, as Timur captured Bayezid, then *“remained eight months in the country, conquered more territory and occupied it, and then went to Weyasit’s capital and took him with him, and took his treasure”*.<sup>325</sup> Schiltberger informed us that Bayezid died as a prisoner en-route to Timur’s homeland.<sup>326</sup> The chapter ends with Timur taking Schiltberger into his service.

*“And so I became Tāmerlin’s prisoner, and was taken by him to his country. After this I rode after him. What I have described took place during the time I was with Weyasit”*.<sup>327</sup>

The Ottoman defeat at Ankara would have been Schiltberger’s final impression of Ottoman power. The impact this had on Schiltberger’s concern of future Ottoman expansion will be explained in Chapter 3, as he had seen the Ottoman Empire at its most embarrassing time. From this great defeat Schiltberger would fight for the Mongols, and travelled to the Caucasus, Central Asia and Siberia. He was able to escape and travelled through the Caucasus and Europe and home to Bavaria in 1427.

---

<sup>322</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 21

<sup>323</sup> Ibid

<sup>324</sup> Ibid

<sup>325</sup> Ibid

<sup>326</sup> Ibid

<sup>327</sup> Ibid



## Chapter 2: Audience, Motives and Genres

In this part I focus on the memoirs themselves, addressing why Mihailović, Schiltberger and Brother George decided to write. What is the purpose(s) behind each work? Who is the target audience for each author? In what tone did they write, and are there any ironies?

### Section 1: Target Audience and Success

Mihailović's triumphant-Christian prose reflected the audience he tried to reach. Mihailović was convinced Christian unity could defeat the Ottomans by Christians: "*Lord God Almighty, help faithful Christians against the ignoble heathens, to wipe them out. Amen.*"<sup>328</sup> He wanted another crusade, in spite of the Burgundian-led failure at Nicopolis in 1396 and the Hungarian-led failure at Kosovo field in 1448. Mihailović wanted Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians to combine to crusade. He censured Hungary and the Czechs for fighting each other, not the Ottomans.<sup>329</sup> Both were Catholic Kingdoms (then); Mihailović often praised their Matthias Corvinus (r. 1458-90) as being of glorious memory.<sup>330</sup> He even claimed to have tried to warn Bosnian Lords, who were also Catholic then, of an Ottoman invasion.<sup>331</sup>

Mihailović singled out Matthias because he was a continual enemy of the Ottoman Empire. Other nations, such as England and France, were quarrelling. While the Emperor

---

<sup>328</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 99

<sup>329</sup> Ibid

<sup>330</sup> Ibid

<sup>331</sup> Ibid, p. 70

Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire wanted Catholic unity against the Turks, issues such as nations quarrelling, the rise of pre-Protestant sects, such as the Hussites, and his own rivalry with the Papacy hindered any advance. Matthias was the most realistic option to lead any crusade against the Ottoman Empire.

Mihailović's desire for the Czechs to fight the Ottomans is interesting, as some Czechs had been proclaimed heretics due to their Hussite beliefs.<sup>332</sup> But Mihailović never mentioned anything concerning Czech beliefs, only acknowledging their conflict with Hungary. Perhaps he thought they were all Catholics, or perhaps he never saw them as heretics, given it was the Pope branded them heretics; Mihailović was most likely a Serb Orthodox Christian. Mihailović only ever referred to Christians as one group. He seems not to have had a care for variations on Christian beliefs, so long as they were Christian in some form. Hence it does not matter if Mihailović knew of the Hussites. They were Christians; that was all he cared about. When Mihailović wrote or dictated 'faithful Christians', he meant Orthodox Christians, Catholics and Hussites. This was unlike any other crusade Europe had seen at that time. This would also reflect his multicultural experience, having grown up in Orthodox Serbia, serving alongside many sects of Christianity in the Janissary Corps, and then having been stationed in Bosnia, which was at a crossroads between the Bosnian and Catholic Churches, having had two centuries of tensions with Catholic Hungary.<sup>333</sup> Living in Catholic Hungary post-rescue would have not only meant greater exposure to Catholicism, but potentially the Hussite Czechs as well.

---

<sup>332</sup> Rev. Dr. Craig Atwood, 'Czech Reformation and Hussite Revolution', *Oxford Bibliographies* [website], (28<sup>th</sup> August 2018) <<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0108.xml>>, accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2019.

<sup>333</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, (London, Pan Books, 2002), p. 16

When Mihailović offered advice on what not to do when fighting the Turks in his chapters 40 and 41, his description of how to win in battle also indicated how his intended audience was élite people with sway over armies. His title of Chapter 41 indicates this: *Concerning Organisation: Whoever wishes to fight with the Turks, in what manner he ought to manage his affairs; for organisation is the second strength and essence.*<sup>334</sup> He gave explicit advice to those “*preparing yourselves for war against the Turks*”.<sup>335</sup> His advice focused on military strategy. One example is “*you must avoid cumbersome armour and heavy cavalry lances and also large crossbows and ponderous catapults*”.<sup>336</sup>

This advice was intended for those with military capabilities and/or those who controlled armies: kings, princes, warlords, men of military rank and religious leaders from Christendom. His description of Ottoman military strategy makes sense in this case. This audience matches both his pro-Christian/anti-Ottoman tone and his militaristic agenda. These Memoirs were not just a diary of his Janissary experience; they reported on the systems (primarily military) of the Ottoman State.

Brother George’s target audience broader than military elites. To be sure, the religious class (monks, priests etc.) were likely the portion of his audience he esteemed the most, given their capacity to influence how their communities practiced their faith. However, he also told pious readers to teach their sons to hide in the forest<sup>337</sup>; monks/priests could not have children. George addressed the general Christian populace. Strategically, this

---

<sup>334</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 86

<sup>335</sup> Ibid

<sup>336</sup> Ibid

<sup>337</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 20

made sense. As we noted, George believed the majority of Christians would either die or convert to Islam in the face of the Ottoman menace, with only a few championing the faith. George's goal was therefore to inspire as many Christian stalwarts as he could. For global salvation to be achieved, George needed the ear of every Christian. He never called for direct action against the Ottomans, unlike Mihailović. He had already conceded military victory to the Ottomans. George wanted spiritual victory. To achieve this, he needed to convince Christians of Europe to follow his word.

While George's audience was broader than Mihailović's, Schiltberger outdid George in another way. Schiltberger's target audience was the broadest. While George wanted every faithful Christian to read his work, Schiltberger's book was neither overtly militant like Mihailović's, nor overtly religious like George's *Tractatus*. Schiltberger's readers just had to be able to read German.

Schiltberger had no specific moral to promote, or act to be carried out. He just wanted readers to relish his adventures. Schiltberger wrote for the average (vernacular) reader, not a specific one like Mihailović. Schiltberger never bothered to clarify his branch of Christianity. This was probably done as to appeal to the wider Christian audience, rather than just being inclusive of one e.g. Catholicism. His target audience is more akin to George's, however, given George's role as a Dominican monk, I doubt George was writing for anyone but Catholics, whereas George's book is suitable for all branches of Christianity.

Schiltberger's text recounting adventures and scrapes gives the impression that anyone, including non-Christians, was welcome to read him. There was no strong pro-Christian

message, with the exception of his account of being happy to return to Christian lands at his journey's end. When encountering Jews and Muslims, for instance, Schiltberger never insulted their faith. While he did call Muslims "infidels", he never used it disparagingly, only using it when referring to the Turks as a collective. Schiltberger took care to be inoffensive. This makes sense given his purpose, as discussed later in this chapter.

Writing a book is one thing but getting the target audience to read it is another. Did anyone read the works of these authors? A preface by J. Buchan Telfer disclosed Schiltberger was a popular author published in many fifteenth- and sixteenth- century editions.<sup>338</sup> Nonetheless, Schiltberger did not reach the status of legendary adventurer. Telfer discussed a comparison of Schiltberger and Marco Polo by the great Viennese Ottomanist Joseph von Hammer (1774-1856): "*Bavarians may be as justly proud as Venice is of her Marco Polo*",<sup>339</sup> albeit that Hammer pointed out that Schiltberger was not in the same league. This is not to discredit the success of Schiltberger's book, but for Schiltberger, unlike Polo, what mattered was the adventures, not the adventurer.

Concerning Mihailović's target audience, however, we have no real way of knowing if anyone read his memoirs. The earliest surviving manuscript, written in Czech, tells us that Mihailović visited French (Valois) and Holy Roman (Habsburg) monarchs, most likely Louis XI of France (r.1461-1483) and Frederick III (r.1452-1493).<sup>340</sup> However, no other

---

<sup>338</sup> Philip Brunn, 'Preface' in Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin, 1970), p. iii

<sup>339</sup> J. Buchan Telfer, 'Introduction' in Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin, 1970), p. xix

<sup>340</sup> Svat Soucek, 'Introduction' in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. xvii

manuscripts mention these meetings, and nor do any other (diplomatic or military) sources. This is not to say the meetings never took place; the silences probably indicate the meetings were not a success.

Mihailović's call for another crusade was only 'kind of' answered. In 1480, the Ottoman Empire captured the town of Otranto, located in southern-Italy. The della Rovere Pope, Paul IV (r. 1471-84) put out a call for aid. Only the Portuguese answered the call. Sultan Mehmed II's death in May 1481 soon caused the Ottomans to withdraw; no further conflict ensued. Even if this 'crusade' had taken place, it would neither have been the genocidal crusade Mihailović hoped for, nor would it have included all Christians. Mihailović's dream of a crusade to wipe out all Turks fell on deaf ears, making his work unsuccessful, especially when compared to the success of Schiltberger.

How did Brother George fare with his target audience? J.A.B. Palmer tells us that between 1480 and 1550, many Latin editions were printed.<sup>341</sup> George's book succeeded in finding its target religious audience, the numerous editions suggesting widespread success. Palmer also noted 1530-31, 1560 and 1596 German-language editions were published.<sup>342</sup> Palmer credited Brother George as an *"important source of European knowledge of the Ottoman Turk"*.<sup>343</sup> George's work outgrew its religious theme. It informed Europeans about Ottoman politics and about the mysterious Turks of Anatolia.

---

<sup>341</sup> J.A.B. Palmer, 'Fr. Georgius de Hungaria, O.P., and the *Tractatus de Moribus Conditionibus et Nequicia Turcorum*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 34/1 (1951), p. 44

<sup>342</sup> Ibid

<sup>343</sup> Ibid

Brother George would have been dismayed, however, by the fact that many of his warnings to Christians fell on deaf ears. Renaissance Europe continued to build magnificent buildings, flaunt its wealth, and live for the thrill of the moment, as opposed to his agenda of piety and lifelong service to God. Luckily for George, the world did not end, nor has it since, nor did the Ottoman Empire successfully conquer the world.

So why was Schiltberger the most successful? Beyond having the widest target audience, he was more successful, I believe, because he peddled no message or political agenda. Where George tasked people to change their lifestyles and their societies fundamentally, and where Mihailović asked the men of Christian-Europe to put their lives on the line to wipe out the Ottoman Empire, Schiltberger required zero action from his reader. His readers were asked to read an adventure book. People do not like change. Schiltberger was the only author not asking for change.

## Section 2: The Motive and Tone of our Authors

We will begin with Konstantin Mihailović and the *Memoirs of a Janissary*. Mihailović's purpose for his Memoirs is very easy to unravel. The clearest example of this was the final lines of his memoirs, in which he states in capitals "LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, HELP FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS AGAINST THE IGNOBLE HEATHENS, TO WIPE THEM OUT. AMEN".<sup>344</sup> Mihailović is asking for more than resistance against the Ottomans. Mihailović is calling for a crusade. There is perhaps a hidden motive, to Mihailović, but this is more appropriately discussed in Chapter 8: Guilt and Irony.

Calling for action was one step, but Mihailović took it step further. He did not just demand a crusade, he told us how to do it in various chapters. One example is titled 'Concerning Organisation: Whoever Wishes to Fight with the Turks'. The advice he gave wasn't generic either, recall his points about "cumbersome armour and... ponderous catapults".<sup>345</sup> Crusades Historian Christopher Tyerman agrees; plate armour often caused discomfort to crusading knights, often driving them to loosen their armour.<sup>346</sup> Mihailović provided legitimate advice to his potential crusading audience. This evidence shows Mihailović genuinely wanted this crusade. It wasn't just something he asked for to get his memoirs written and published. Mihailović was prepared to go the extra mile, so to speak, to guide Christianity to victory.

---

<sup>344</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 99

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, p. 86

<sup>346</sup> Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades*, (London, Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 21



Mihailović also detailed various aspects of the Ottoman army. While these chapters will be discussed in greater detail next chapter, I will use one example here. He told his audience that by defeating the Janissaries, the Sultan would be helpless and flee.<sup>347</sup>

Mihailović desired a ‘two-pronged’ approach to his crusade. He wanted Christian Europe to understand the strategic mistakes of before, and to better understand the Ottoman forces. This shows the determination and zeal that drove Mihailović to not only communicate his motive, but to ensure that Christian-Europe to succeed. Mihailović never asked for a crusade and left it to Europe to figure it out; he held Christianity by the hand and walked it step by step to victory.

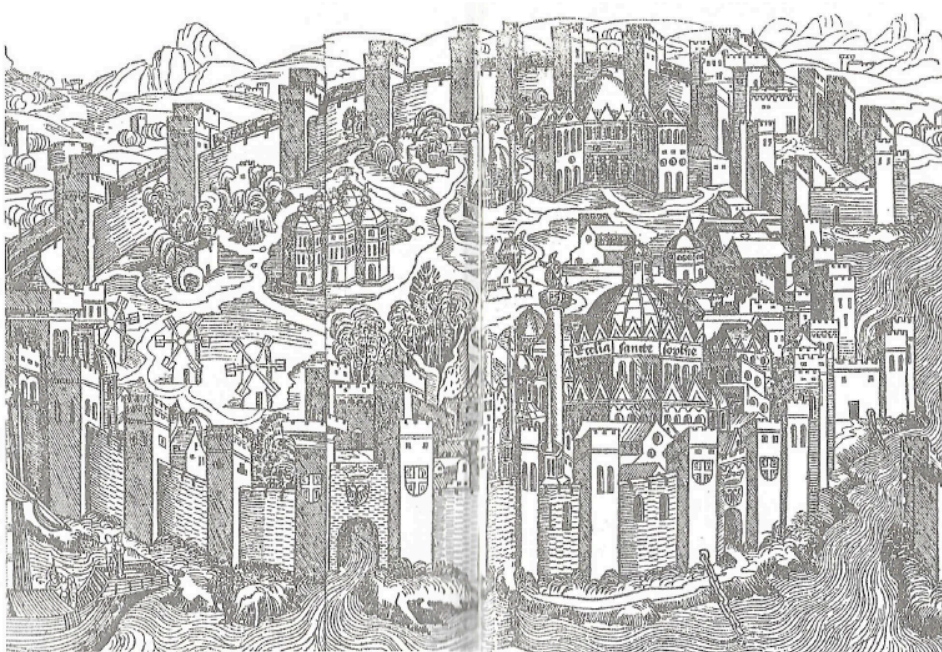
Mihailović also presented himself as a devout Orthodox Christian who was anti-Ottoman. This is important, as this pro-Christian/anti-Turk rhetoric is the tone he chooses to write his memoirs in, despite his long association with the Ottomans. The aforementioned line calling for a crusade is overwhelming evidence of this, but also gives his tone a sense of Christian-militancy.

It is not only in those final lines that that we clearly understand his tone. Fervent religiosity and piety were recurring themes in his memoirs, an important lens through which Mihailović viewed the Ottoman Empire. He made it very clear in Chapter 34, the chapter of his ‘rescue’, that he is very happy to have been saved by King Matthias and is even more happy to be back in Christian lands. *“And I thanked the lord God that I had thus got back among the Christians with honour”*.<sup>348</sup>

---

<sup>347</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 85

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, p. 71



<sup>349</sup> Figure 3.

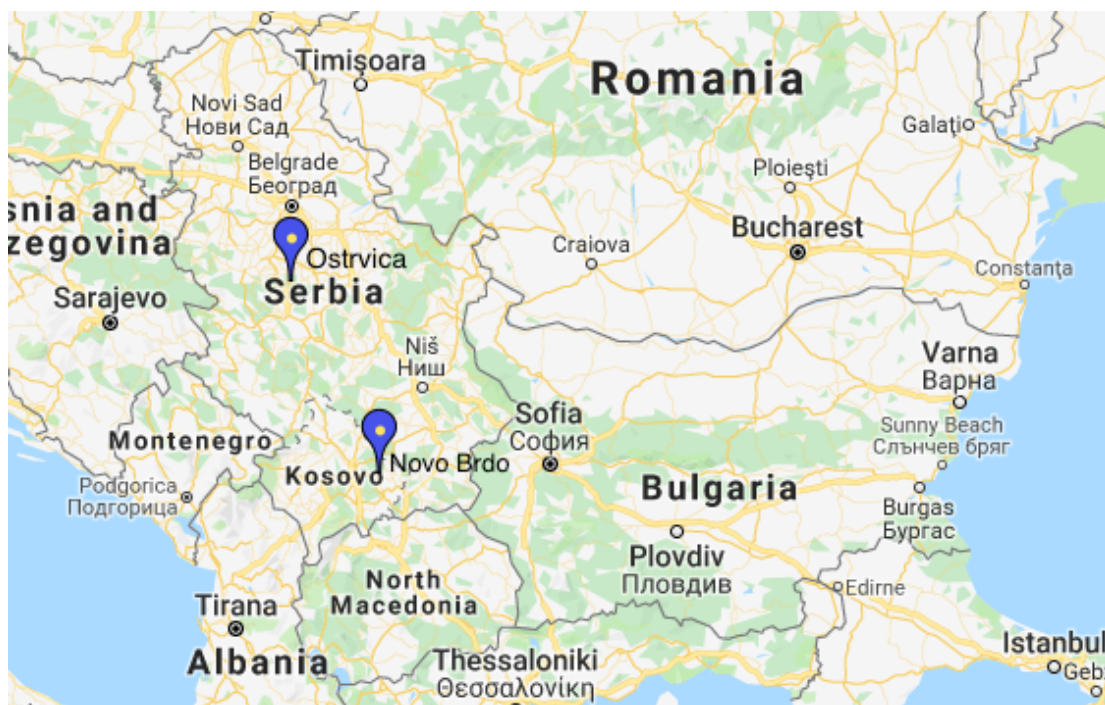
'Constantinople'. From Hartman Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum*, Nuremberg, 1493. The German engraver has some knowledge of the great city, emphasizing its mighty Theodosian walls, the great domed Church of Holy Wisdom (*Haghia Sophia*) and its Augustaion, but he has no knowledge either of the Castle of the Seven Towers (*Yediküle*), or of the Bucoleon, the adjacent Byzantine palace. An inaccurate version of the Blachernae Palace (*Tekfur Sarayı*) is shown adjacent to the Golden Horn. It is curious that Mihailović not once mentioned retaking Constantinople. I argue this choice is twofold: (a) He helped the Ottomans capture it as part of a Serb contingent and (b) Constantinople was not Serb, but Greek, and Mihailović cared more for Serbia.

Another potential source for Mihailović's hatred of the Ottomans relates to his potential hometowns Novo Brdo or Ostrvica. Ostrvica was sacked and razed by Murad II in 1451. Novo Brdo was captured in the previously mentioned siege of Novo Brdo in 1455. If either were his hometown, it would go a long way in explaining his disdain for the Ottomans. His brothers were also taken, and Mihailović makes no mention of them escaping with him. *"I was also taken in that city with my two brothers"*.<sup>350</sup> All of these reasons went beyond religion and ethnicity, becoming more personal. It was not

<sup>349</sup> Hartman Schedel, 'Constantinople', (1493), in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. ii-iii

<sup>350</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 50

uncommon for Christians, however, to disparage Muslims as infidels. Johann Schiltberger often referred to Ottoman territory as the “*land of the Infidels*”<sup>351</sup>.



<sup>352</sup> Custom Map showing Ostrvica and Novo Brdo, potential birthplaces and/or homes of Konstantin Mihailović

This personal level of hatred sets Mihailović apart from Schiltberger and Brother George. Neither of them were captured in their home towns; they never witnessed Ottoman ransack of the place they call home. Schiltberger’s homeland of Bavaria is simply too far away to be concerned with the possibility of an Ottoman invasion. The abbeys and towns in George’s Siebenbürgen-Saxon Transylvania were often raided by Tatars and Ottomans; hence their resort to extensive fortifications around their churches. But neither George nor Schiltberger make any mention of being captured alongside family members. This absence of family in the moment of capture for George and Schiltberger

<sup>351</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 1

<sup>352</sup> Scribble Maps, ‘Custom Map of Serbia’, *Scribble Maps* [website], (8<sup>th</sup> May 2019)

<<https://www.scribblemaps.com/>>, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019.

makes their capture come across as more clinical or standard routine. Mihailović's capture beside his brothers in his home town makes his capture more traumatic and personal. This may explain why Mihailović is the only one to call for the 'wiping out' of the Turkish people and/or the Ottoman Empire.

This level of personal trauma does, however, call into question Mihailović's dream of a crusade. His brother, as far as we understand, did not escape with Mihailović, meaning he was still an 'Ottoman'. This would make his brother an 'enemy' to be killed. Mihailović evidently thought of his brother during these memoirs, and never disparages him. That would lead me to believe he would like to see his brother rescued much like he was. The hypocrisy here is that all Janissaries at this time were once enslaved Christian boys, as well as many of the Sultan's household servants and the eunuchs staffing his Palace school and assisting in his chancery (*Enderun*). Yet Mihailović's sympathy for them goes out the window so to speak. The irony here only strengthens when one remembers Mihailović was himself a Janissary. He appeared to have no qualms in killing off enemies who were once his brothers-in-arms.

Brother George of Mühlenbach's religious fervour was even stronger. He became a Dominican Monk after his escape from the Ottoman Empire in 1463, and his desire for monasticism had started even before his time as an 'Ottoman'. He had attended a Dominican school in Mühlenbach, *"I had gone away from the place of my birth and had come into a certain stronghold or village by the name of Schebesh, according to the Hungarians, or in German, Muelenbag, in order to study"*.<sup>353</sup>

---

<sup>353</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 4

It would be impossible to read George's *Tractatus* and not pick up on George's zealous faith. His faith applied to everything. For a curious example, he cited how their military uniform enabling defecation without nudity evidenced Islamic Turks' greater piety.<sup>354</sup> His tone, however, goes much further than this curious point. He often discussed how the Turks are "*attracting Christians to their wickedness and turning them aside from the faith*".<sup>355</sup> George often became apocalyptic in his tone. He accused Islam as causing the end of the world. "*It is apparent in the image of the fourteenth chapter of Revelation that the beginning of this sect was such*".<sup>356</sup> If that tone did not scare the Christian reader, his revelatory tone then escalated, telling his reader that a beast with two lamb horns and the voice of a dragon will be the final persecution.<sup>357</sup>

There is, however, a less biblical element to George's tone. George was clearly angry in his tone. An example is how he talked about those who left Christianity for Islam, calling them wretches.<sup>358</sup> This anger makes sense; George truly believed the Ottomans were causing the world to end. George's genuine belief that the Ottomans will succeed in conquering and thus ending the world is revealed in this line that shocked me: "*the victories of Alexander the Great or the Romans, who subjugated the entire world, will not be able to be compared to these*".<sup>359</sup>

---

<sup>354</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 39

<sup>355</sup> Ibid, p. 9

<sup>356</sup> Ibid, p. 10

<sup>357</sup> Ibid, p. 10

<sup>358</sup> Ibid, p. 28

<sup>359</sup> Ibid, p. 69

This tone reveals George's purpose. George wrote to warn Christians of the impending doom of the world. He first tells us about this in Chapter 3; *"So many---no, nearly all--- happenings and occurrences of this time persuade us to be worried and taught us to fear the end of the world, especially since we are certain that it is we, upon whom the end of time has come"*.<sup>360</sup> This is a warning. George uses a lot of biblical imagery to explain the incoming Armageddon. He often compared the Ottoman Empire as a whole to a beast from Revelations; *"that cruel best---I mean the sect of the Turks"*.<sup>361</sup> He confirms they are the beast from Revelations by quoting Abbot Joachim explaining *Revelations* 13.<sup>362</sup>

The use of biblical imagery makes sense when George explained God's involvement in the end of the world. George compared the upcoming doom to the story of Noah and the Ark; *"I am of the firm opinion that just as in the time of Noah the waters of the flood suddenly overtook the unbelievers, so in these times the great vengeance and universal anger of God will do things unavoidable and eternal"*.<sup>363</sup> The latter part of that quote is also revealing. George believed God was angry with Christians and was going to punish the world for it. This explains why George often compared the piety of the Turks to the piety of Christian Europeans. One example would be the difference in what both groups did with their wealth. George claimed the Turks mocked Christians for building luxurious homes. George begrudgingly admired the Ottoman piety, despite his belief they are pious in the wrong faith.

---

<sup>360</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 11

<sup>361</sup> Ibid, p. 12

<sup>362</sup> Ibid, p. 12

<sup>363</sup> Ibid, p. 12

While both Mihailović and George were very concerned with Ottoman expansion, the key difference is their reaction to Ottoman actions. As previously discussed, Mihailović desired a crusade: a practical and feasible response. George believed that it was too late to reverse the damage done. Mihailović also never discussed Armageddon, making him more hopeful, compared to apocalyptic George. Schiltberger, however, seems to have been as far away from George's fears as possible. He never mentioned Armageddon. Nor did Schiltberger ever mention the possibility of Ottoman expansion. As he passed into and out of Ottoman capture, Schiltberger witnessed the Ottomans at moments bookended by their triumph (Nicopolis, 1396) and their seeming ruin (Ankara, 1402). Schiltberger's understandable lack of concern would have likely angered George and Mihailović, who bemoaned Christian complacency. But George did not write with a single purpose. He also wished to detail the experience of the captured Christian physically, mentally and theologically. It is important to remember that the approximately 50 year gap between Schiltberger and the other two explains his lack of concern for the Ottoman future. The Ottoman Empire he knew was in a state of peril compared to the Ottoman Empire Mihailović and George knew, which was in a state of expansion.

Let us begin with the physical. As is the story with slavery across the world, slaves were often physically abused by their masters. George compared the pain inflicted upon slaves to the bearing of the cross by Jesus himself.<sup>364</sup> George told that his first master nearly beat him to death.<sup>365</sup> A mental struggle, George described the experience as one that

---

<sup>364</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 21

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60

tortured the soul, driving the captive to desire death over life.<sup>366</sup> Damning evidence of the anguish of slaves came at the end of his page 21, with some slaves “*strangling away their life with a noose or hurling themselves into a river*”.<sup>367</sup> George wanted to warn all Christians what can happen to those who are captured, and to pity those who are. George was also genuinely concerned with the physical and mental health of his fellow slaves. The message of this purpose is harrowing but clear, avoid capture at all costs, or else you will suffer beatings, mental torture and may commit suicide.

We now leave the physical experience for the theological experience of the Christian slave in the Ottoman Empire. George’s biggest fear was the conversion of Christians. He could even classify types of Christian converts. George tells us as much on the first page “*internally the beast intends to kill the souls through its diabolical cunning by carrying away their faith*”.<sup>368</sup> As he explained in his Chapter 3, there were three groups of Christians, those who resisted conversion, those who entertained Islam and those who converted and never looked back.<sup>369</sup>

George admitted being a part of the second group; a massive admission. Remember, George was a Dominican monk. For the Christian reader to read how a monk nearly converted would have been terrifying, but eye-opening. This was what George wanted. This ties into his fear of Ottoman conversion. Regarding the Islamic population George said, “Infinite is their number”. He meant Islam was gaining a rapid and never-ending

---

<sup>366</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 21

<sup>367</sup> Ibid

<sup>368</sup> Ibid, p. 2

<sup>369</sup> Ibid, p. 78-79



stream of converts from Christianity. George actually believed “*their future number will seem to exceed the amount of atoms in the air, dust on the earth and even sand on the sea*”.<sup>370</sup>

The secondary literature, however, disagrees with George. Halil Inalcik, as already quoted, researched how Ottomans in fact did not enforce any policy of conversion upon its Christian subjects.<sup>371</sup>

All of this leads to George’s final purpose. He told the Christian world what to do in regard to rapid Islamic conversion and the coming end of the world. His future was bleak. George told Christians “*scarcely a few Christians will remain in grottos and caverns of the earth to celebrate and preserve the worship of the living God*”.<sup>372</sup> His orders to Christians was to learn how to dwell in the forests and to leave behind luxuries in order to carry on Christianity.<sup>373</sup> George’s warning was not heeded. The topic of conversion may have startled the religious class, but the very fabric of 1400s society did not change.

We now reach Johann Schiltberger. He is unique among our authors regarding purpose and tone. Where Mihailović wanted a crusade and George urged Christians to prepare spiritually for the end time, Schiltberger did not call for any direct action against the Ottomans. This is because the Ottomans shared his spotlight with the Tatar-Mongols of

---

<sup>370</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 70

<sup>371</sup> Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, (Chicago, Phoenix Press, 1973) p.13

<sup>372</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 70

<sup>373</sup> Ibid, p. 12

Timur (or Tamerlane, r. 1370-1405) in his *Travels*. Schiltberger's purpose was more simple, innocent and common. He simply wanted to tell us his extraordinary story stretching from Bavaria to Samarkand. He openly admits this on page 1 "*I here make known and publish many interesting and strange adventures, which are worth listening to*".<sup>374</sup> Not only did he wish to tell us about his adventures, but he told us they were worth the read.

While this may come across as arrogant, to be fair to Schiltberger, he was not wrong. The 1400s reader would have been blown away by Schiltberger's story of a Bavarian who served the Ottoman Turks and the Tatar-Mongols. Besides Samarkand and Constantinople, this captive also travelled to some other amazing places between Siberia to Arabia (Medina). Most people today don't see Siberia, Medina, Turkey, Central Asia and the Caucasus in a lifetime.

As a noble who had once worked with Albert III, Duke of Bavaria-Munich (r. 1438-1460) Schiltberger would have had an easier time of getting his book published. With access to such resources, it makes sense that Schiltberger would write to tell us about his amazing life amongst Muslims.

Before moving onto his tone, I must address an obvious question. Why didn't Schiltberger write with an anti-Ottoman and/or anti-Islamic purpose? To be sure, Schiltberger did refer to the Turks and Mongols as infidels, showing a measure of official disdain for them, but not to the extent of Mihailović (who wanted another crusade) and

---

<sup>374</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 1

George (who accused the Turks of being led by the Devil). Schiltberger's last moments among the Ottomans were a crushing defeat at Ankara in 1402, followed by Bayezid dying in Timur's captivity.<sup>375</sup> The secondary literature reinforces this humiliation. According to Colin Imber, the loss was so disastrous, Timur reinstated previously defeated Turkish emirs and Christian-Europe forced the Ottomans to concede territories like Thessaloniki.<sup>376</sup> Schiltberger offered no final remarks about the Ottomans, simply saying he was done with them.<sup>377</sup> He didn't even mention their recovery in his final chapters. While Schiltberger gives us insights to Ottoman expansion, which will be discussed in the next chapter, it is important to know that he did not fear them.

This lack of fear of the Ottomans affected his tone. Schiltberger did not write with any sense of anger. He mentioned in passing he was "*also made a prisoner*".<sup>378</sup> He wrote about his upcoming execution with no emotion, simply saying it was his turn, but his youth saved his life.<sup>379</sup> That's it. There is no 'evil Sultan' or cursing of the 'barbaric Turks'. It just happened like everything else, whereas Mihailović and George were appalled by their capture. If you were to read the three authors back to back, it seems like there were two Ottoman Empires, one in which Schiltberger served, and another in which Mihailović and George served. Schiltberger's choice of an adventurer tone precluded an angry tone as it would not match his 'storybook' theme. His detached and resourceful tone makes the book flow easily.

---

<sup>375</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 21

<sup>376</sup> Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (Manchester, Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p.17

<sup>377</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 21

<sup>378</sup> Ibid, p. 4

<sup>379</sup> Ibid, p. 5

Schiltberger was not captured alongside any family members unlike Mihailović. Not losing family to the Ottomans is an immediate relief that Schiltberger was afforded. Unlike Mihailović and George, Schiltberger was not captured in his home town nor his home country. While Mihailović saw his fellow Serbs killed and enslaved, and George his fellow Transylvanian-Saxons, Schiltberger never saw his fellow Bavarians get this treatment. On top of this, Bavaria was much farther away from the Ottoman borders than Serbia and Transylvania. This lack of personal trauma regarding his family and country hindered any sense of urgency he could have felt regarding the Ottoman Empire. While I am not suggesting his capture wasn't traumatic, I am simply pointing out that the fact it took place in a far flung land (for Schiltberger at least) with none of his family being captured could have only helped Schiltberger mentally, or at the very least provided him a less traumatic capture than Mihailović and George.

### **Section 3: Guilt and Irony**

Mihailović's presence at the siege of Constantinople in 1453 as part of a Serb contingent on the Ottoman side is a surprise when one recalls he was the author of an anti-Ottoman/anti-Muslim memoir. No Byzantine sources mention any Serbs helping them behind the walls. The Serb Despotate was, by this time, a vassal state of the Ottoman Empire<sup>380</sup> and often proved loyal to the Ottomans. Another example is the Battle of Ankara in 1402: janissary and Serb forces stayed with the Sultan; most Ottoman noble cavalry forces fled.<sup>381</sup> Historian Godfrey Godwin mentions the Serb Despot also sent miners from Novo Brdo who, as sappers, helped destroy the walls of Constantinople in 1453.<sup>382</sup> Hailing from Novo Brdo, it is probable that Mihailović was among these sappers.

So Mihailović actually fought for the 'heathens' about whom he was later so contemptuous. As a Janissary, Mihailović had had to convert to Islam. He had apostasised his Christianity, but he decried his once fellow Muslims upon rescue. Brother George reported apostasy amongst the Christian boys, admitting that they would frequent mosques and Islamic teachers.<sup>383</sup> This makes the fervent crusading religiosity in Mihailović's memoir appear ironic; he helped the Ottomans take one of the key city of his Orthodox faith. He fought for the Ottomans in 1453 prior to enslavement. Two years later, in 1455 he fought against them, defending Novo Brdo, because of the complex relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the Serb Despotate. Mihailović probably had little choice in either matter. Mihailović probably always remained a Christian. His

---

<sup>380</sup> Svat Soucek, 'Introduction' in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. xvi

<sup>381</sup> Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, (London, Saqi Books, 2006), p. 33

<sup>382</sup> Ibid, p. 114

<sup>383</sup> J.A.B. Palmer, 'Fr. Georgius de Hungaria, O.P., and the *Tractatus de Moribus Conditionibus et Nequicia Turcorum*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 34/1 (1951), p. 58

later “crusading” religiosity may have stemmed from feelings of anxiety, guilt and betrayal for having fought for ‘heathens’ who conquered the capital of the Orthodox World.

Mihailović’s description of an event offers an important first indication of these complex thoughts. If his description was true, it would prove his loyalty to Christianity. He recalled in 1463 warning Bosnian lords, who were in Istanbul to negotiate a truce, that the Ottomans intended to betray the truce and invade regardless. *“By my faith no truce...and we, God willing, after you on Wednesday all the way to Bosnia. This I tell you in truth”*.<sup>384</sup> He was dismissed, *“And they broke out laughing at this, and so I thereupon left”*.<sup>385</sup> Mihailović was loyal to his fellow Christians; if we believe the event to be real. However, there is no way of proving this story. If it were to be true, it then reflects poorly on the Bosnian lords, who were (then) fellow Christians.

I do not believe Mihailović made up this event. Given that his final message was for Christians to unite and wipe out the Turks, it would have been unwise to fake a conversation reflecting poorly on Bosnian Christians. While many Bosnians later converted *en masse* to Islam (a rare occurrence in the Balkans), conversions only began after the Ottoman occupation in 1463. Many Bosnians were still Christians, making them a potential participant in Mihailović’s desired crusade against the Ottomans. Hence, I conclude his story rings true. Mihailović’s strong faith not only affected his tone, but also his desire for a crusade. Nonetheless, this story is ironic; the same chapter narrating the

---

<sup>384</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 70

<sup>385</sup> Ibid

warning conversation of 1463 recounts Mihailović's participation in the invading Ottoman forces in 1453.

Mihailović also had sympathy for the Bosnian King when the truce was broken. The King had to scramble troops, which Mihailović describes: "*The poor Bosnian King Tomaš, working day and night to raise some troops quickly, came to a fortress called Ključ, wanting to rest there a little at midday*".<sup>386</sup> As we have seen, poor King Tomaš was beheaded after being promised by the *Fatih* Sultan Mehmed II's Serbian-born Grand Vizier, Mahmud Paša Angelović, "*nothing would happen to his neck*".<sup>387</sup> Svat Soucek disclosed Mahmud Paša was actually sincere in his promise, and that Mehmed II overruled Angelović, ordering his beheading.<sup>388</sup>

Either Mihailović purposefully withheld this information about Mahmud Paša or he simply did not know. I suspect the latter, because if he had known it would have grist to his crusading mill. Mihailović was trying to warn Christian kings that the Ottoman Sultan could not be trusted. He used the Bosnians as an example of what happens to a Christian King when he trusts the Ottoman Sultan. This all adds to Mihailović's anti-Infidel/Ottoman, rhetoric. He was simply warning the reader to never trust the Ottomans.

---

<sup>386</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 70

<sup>387</sup> Ibid

<sup>388</sup> Svat Soucek, 'Introduction' in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 131

Mihailović's love for Christianity racked his mind with guilt. Mihailović cannot have been proud of partaking not only in the Fall of Constantinople, but also in fighting the Wallachians, Vlad II and III Dracul, and participating in conquests of Serbia, Bosnia, Trebizond and the Peloponnese. While he may have pitied the Bosnians, Mihailović was also once a Janissary at war with Bosnia, and charged with defending a Bosnian fortress captured by the Ottomans in their 1463 conquests into Bosnia.

Mihailović's purpose and tone were, in part, driven by guilt. Regarding his tone, he was compensating for his Ottoman past. He knew he had once converted to Islam (albeit against his will). He would detach himself from Islam and attach himself to Christianity despite his Islamic past. One echo of his disquiet is his chapter title: 'Concerning God's punishment for our sins, which happened in the Serbian or Ražkan Kingdom'.<sup>389</sup> By adopting the tone of the Christian-Crusader, such as condemning Christians spilling Christian blood in the face of Ottoman expansion,<sup>390</sup> he was able to distance himself from his actions against Christianity. Regarding his purpose, his desire to wipe out all of the Turks should be taken literally. To quote him directly *"LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, HELP FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS AGAINST THE IGNOBLE HEATHENS, TO WIPE THEM OUT. AMEN"*.<sup>391</sup> Mihailović wanted every Turk wiped out because it would undo the damage he had done. If all the Turks were wiped out, Serbia and Bosnia etc. would be free and Constantinople would return to Christianity. As for the aforementioned lack of sympathy for his once fellow Janissaries, that was a sacrifice Mihailović was willing to make. To be sure, Mihailović did have genuine religious and political reasons for wanting a crusade,

---

<sup>389</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 21

<sup>390</sup> Ibid p. 99

<sup>391</sup> Ibid p. 99



but I also think his purpose sought to undo the damage he had done. A guilty Mihailović dreamed of a genocidal crusade as a way to reverse these crimes.

Consider, furthermore, similarities between one of Mihailović's brothers and Mahmud Paşa Angelović. Before elaborating on this irony, I must first deduce this brother's role. Recall that Mihailović was captured and enslaved along with his brothers. While Mihailović does not tell us their ages, he mentioned one was his youngest brother, implying the other was also younger. This means these brothers were 14 and 15 years old (at most) when captured. Mihailović did not mention the first younger brother; he only discusses his youngest brother. Mihailović told us in Chapter 34 that *"my youngest brother was entrusted with the treasury (in Istanbul)".*<sup>392</sup> Recall that he also recorded how his brother had then served two Ottoman officials at the time when these officials were debating what to do when invading Bosnia. *"And they, having arrived, my brother put down rugs for them and they sat one beside the other and began to discuss matters concerning the Bosnian King".*<sup>393</sup> The fact that the youngest brother worked in the Ottoman treasury (*Hazine*) implies that he had gone on to the top Palace Schools to receive further education. The treasury was crucial, only the trusted and the educated could take care of it. The brightest of the young boys taken via *Devşirme* would be *"selected for education in the sultan's palace as part of his household, and eventually trained to fill the highest administrative and military posts".*<sup>394</sup> This also means Mihailović's youngest brother was once a Janissary, but he was later selected for his

---

<sup>392</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 69

<sup>393</sup> Ibid

<sup>394</sup> Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapi Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, (Harvard, The MIT Press, 1991), p.111

intelligence and made to work in the palace. This helps explain why Mihailović's memoir only glimpsed this brother when they are captured, and when they meet in the palace. The brother lived and worked for the Sultan in his palace and did not serve him, Mihailović, in any other military capacity.

It is even possible that this brother became a Eunuch. Mihailović did mention that six boys had all their genitals cut off, and the five who survived "*are called in their language hadomlar, which means in our language eunuchs*".<sup>395</sup> It was possible his brother was amongst those five. White Eunuchs worked in the Palace School.<sup>396</sup> One role they played was the tutelage of young slave boys to become pages (*iç oğlanlar*), later to become some of the highest slave-officials of the empire.<sup>397</sup> The White Eunuchs also acted as a bridge between the *Birûn* and the *Enderûn*.<sup>398</sup> The *Birûn* is the outer courtyard of the Topkapı palace, associated with the 'Outer services', ranging from administrative to military to religious affairs. The *Birûn* or second courtyard was the domain of the Janissaries. The *Enderûn* refers to the inner or third courtyard, associated with the Sultan's private services. The school for Pages and Janissaries was within the *Enderûn*, as was the Treasury (*Hazine*). The *Enderûn* was only accessible to the Sultan, his family, the highest officials and their eunuchs and servants.

---

<sup>395</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 51

<sup>396</sup> John Freely, *Inside the Seraglio: Private Lives of the Sultans in Istanbul*, (New York, I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 40-41

<sup>397</sup> Gülru Necipoğlu, *Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapı Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, (Harvard, The MIT Press, 1991), p.111

<sup>398</sup> John Freely, *Inside the Seraglio: Private Lives of the Sultans in Istanbul*, (New York, I.B. Tauris, 2016), p. 40-41

With this association with Ottoman state affairs, and with Mihailović's brother being present for a meeting between two Ottoman officials, it was possible that he was a White Eunuch. It could also explain why Mihailović never mentioned his brother beyond the treasury and capture. If the brother was taken from Novo Brdo and castrated, his training differed from Mihailović's. However, Mihailović never states his brother was a Eunuch at any point in his memoirs. Another possibility may be that he mentioned his brother rarely because he was jealous that his brother was considered intelligent enough for the Palace School; Mihailović was not chosen for role. Either way, Mihailović does not give us nearly enough information on his brother to state definitively what he was.

When we compare the brother to Mahmud Paşa Angelović, however, the similarities are startling. Mahmud Paşa was the Grand Vizier from 1456-66 and then from 1472-74, and was present at many campaigns such as the siege of Constantinople. Mahmud Paşa was also a Serb, and according to Theoharis Stavrides, "*most modern historians accept the Serbian city of Novo Brdo as Mahmud Pasha's place of origin*".<sup>399</sup> Like the Mihailović's, Mahmud Paşa ended up with the Ottomans when he was captured as a young boy via *Devşirme*.<sup>400</sup> The Mihailović brothers and Mahmud Pasha were both young Serbs from Novo Brdo taken by the Ottomans. Unfortunately, nothing is known for sure about Mahmud Paşa's life post-capture and pre-1453. Stavrides theorizes he too must have studied as a page and he was presented to Sultan Murad II and later to Prince Mehmed II, enjoying their favour and entering their service.<sup>401</sup> Historians do not agree on which posts Mahmud worked at, but Stavrides mentions the account of an eighteenth-century

---

<sup>399</sup> Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453-1474)*, (Nicosia, 2001), p. 73

<sup>400</sup> Ibid

<sup>401</sup> Ibid, p. 110-111

Ottoman historian, Osmanzade Taib, linking Mahmud Paşa to the Imperial Treasury.<sup>402</sup>

If he were to have worked in the treasury, his path thus far would have been identical to Mihailović's youngest brother. If he worked elsewhere, the similarities between the two are still very evident. Much like Mihailović himself, Mahmud Paşa besieged Constantinople and was made Grand Vezir the following year.<sup>403</sup>

The reason the similarities are ironic is due to Mihailović's explicit disdain for Mahmud Paşa Angelović. Mihailović recounted that Mahmud Paşa negotiated with the King of Bosnia to come down from the fortress by "*swearing on books of soap*".<sup>404</sup> Svat Soucek explains this was a possible deliberate attempt to persuade his audience that 'infidels' cannot be trusted, including Mahmud Paşa. All of this is ironic, given that Mihailović's brother is on the same track, yet there was no explicit criticism of his brother for working in the palace. This is important, as it would go against his message of wiping out the infidels, especially given that his brother is... still an infidel. Mihailović's brother was, in a sense, becoming someone like Mahmud Paşa Angelović, a truly ironic result. The brother was enjoying similar early-career successes as Angelović. Working the treasury was a respectable job to hold, a job he had no chance of obtaining in Novo Brdo. Like Angelović, his captive brother had found greener pastures in the Ottoman Empire.

The irony grows when one remembers Mihailović fought in the conquest of Bosnia alongside Angelović. His actions, like Mahmud Paşa's, helped kill the King. His refusal to

---

<sup>402</sup> Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453-1474)*, (Nicosia, 2001), p. 111

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, p. 113

<sup>404</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 70

criticise himself or his brother and his lack of sympathy for his fellow enslaved Serb is a clear bias, despite the obvious similarities in their experiences. Mihailović also enjoyed success in the Ottoman Empire. Janissaries held a prestigious position in the Ottoman Empire. Mihailović would have received the education and training that went along with being a Janissary, and would have been paid regularly, not common among other fifteenth-century militias, mercenaries and militaries. Similarities between the captive careers of the two—Mihailović and Angelović—make Mihailović not only seem ironic, but also—at times—hypocritical. Mihailović's simple disdain for Angelović seems to be driven by guilt. Mihailović must have seen the similarities, yet he vilified him nonetheless. Mihailović did this as compensation. He could not change his past actions, and he could not change the trajectory his brother was on. He could however, to some extent, control the narrative. He did not want to be seen as a copy of Angelović; destroying his character separated himself from Angelović.

Despite his success among the Ottomans, Mihailović saw himself and his brother as victims. If he had given Angelović a fair, or even a neutral, character assessment, it could have opened up room for comparisons. His guilt drove him to differentiate instead. Mihailović never even called Angelović a Serb, his silence implying Angelović was a Turk. While we have the benefit of knowing Angelović's journey, many people in Mihailović's European target audience likely did not know of these similarities. This clever tactic helped clear Mihailović's name.

There was no such irony for George and Schiltberger. Neither mentioned any family member captured beside them, nor were there great Ottoman statesmen who were Siebenbürgen-Saxon or Bavarian in origin. For Schiltberger and George, once they left,

they were done with the Ottomans; for Mihailović, the presence of his brother amongst Ottoman officials meant his own flesh and blood would still be bound to Ottoman success, oddly mimicking Angelović. A brother of Angelović defended against Mahmud Paşa's siege of Belgrade in 1456. Mihailović also had a brother who was a near copy of Angelović. This irony stained his memoirs, no matter how much he tried to hide it.

A related irony relates to Mihailović's Serb nationalism and his portrayal of Serbia in comparison to Serbia's actions. Mihailović wanted us to view Serbia as a victim of the Ottomans "*fighting loyally for the Christian faith*".<sup>405</sup> Writing about the siege of Belgrade, he portrayed a weary and battle-hardened Christian Serbia under attack from the Islamic-Ottomans. The irony here was that Serbia, while it was a victim, it was also an enabler of the Ottoman Empire. It began in 1389, when the Battle of Kosovo took place, claiming the lives of both Prince Lazar of Serbia and Sultan Murad I, the latter killed, after the battle, by a captive Serb knight, Miloš Obilić. The Ottomans had been victorious, making the Orthodox principalities their vassal one after the other.<sup>406</sup> The youngest daughter of the slain Prince Lazar was even wed to Sultan Bayezid I.<sup>407</sup> Prince Lazar's successor, Stefan Lazarević (1377-1427), then became both a vassal and ally of Bayezid. According to historian, John Fine, Stefan was loyal to Bayezid, who apparently liked Stefan.<sup>408</sup> Evidence of Stefan's loyalty is provided by the participation of Stefan's Serb forces supporting the Ottomans at the battles of Rovine (1395) and Nikopolis (1396)

---

<sup>405</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 25

<sup>406</sup> John Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 411

<sup>407</sup> Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 26

<sup>408</sup> John Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 426

against the Burgundian Crusaders (the army in which Schiltberger participated), and again at Ankara (1402) against Timur.<sup>409</sup>

This is important. Mihailović wrote of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, and displayed strong knowledge of Serb history, yet he chose to omit all the other battles mentioned above at which Serbs supported Ottomans. Where was his acknowledgement of the Battle of Ankara, where many Turkish *sipahis* abandoned Sultan *Yıldırım* Bayezit I, but not the Serbs? Curiously, Schiltberger also fought with the Ottomans at this battle, and was captured by Timur, but never mentioned the Serbs. However, Schiltberger did not form opinions of any Balkan people group in his book. Whereas Mihailović ignored this battle to save face for Serbia, Schiltberger the Bavarian omitted them because he just did not care enough to mention them. Serbs had no bearing on his theme of adventure.

At this important moment in Balkan history, the old Orthodox kingdom of Serbia sided with the Ottomans. This relationship with the Ottomans damaged Serbia's relations with other Balkan Kingdoms, especially Hungary, then the Ottomans' key rival for Balkan dominance.<sup>410</sup> This relationship with the Ottomans helped keep Catholic Hungary from attacking Orthodox Serbia, securing Serbia from serious external threat, at least for the time being.<sup>411</sup> Mihailović never pointed out a Hungarians threat to Serbia, however, further evidence that he spent time in Hungary post-slavery.

---

<sup>409</sup> John Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 426

<sup>410</sup> Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453-1474)*, (Nicosia, Brill Publishers, 2001), p. 121

<sup>411</sup> John Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 426



<sup>412</sup> Figure 4. This map shows the political landscape of the Balkans just before 1453 and before Mihailović became a Janissary around 1455. Serbia was then already under Ottoman control, although it should be noted that while Serbia had become a vassal state since its defeat at Kosovo in 1389, Balkan regions varied as to their degrees of direct Ottoman control. Serbia only became an integrated Ottoman province in 1540. By contrast, Wallachia had been a vassal state since 1396, and Moldavia since 1456, but both avoided the direct Ottoman rule which submerged Serbia between 1540 and 1804/1835.

However, this does not mean that all was well between Serbia and the Ottomans. Vassals often disliked their ruler, and this was reflected in Serbia. When a peace treaty with the Ottomans expired in 1454, the Ottomans refused renewal.<sup>413</sup> In 1454 the Ottomans attacked Serbia, and John Fine argues Ostrvica—Mihailović's probable home town, a fortified town in Central Serbia—may have been captured then.<sup>414</sup> In 1455 the Ottomans launched a major campaign against Serbia. Mihailović tells us the siege of Novo Brdo (where he was captured) took place in 1455.<sup>415</sup> John Fine confirms that during this

<sup>412</sup> 'The Ottoman Empire before 1453', (1921), in H.G. Wells, *The Outline of History*, (New York, The MacMillan Company, 1921), p. 684

<sup>413</sup> John Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 568

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid*, p. 554

<sup>415</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), pg. 50



campaign “*Southern Serbia, the Kosovo region and the richest mine, Novo Brdo fell*”.<sup>416</sup>

Rump Serbia was left with territory north of the West Morava River.<sup>417</sup> Mihailović’s Novo Brdo was under direct Ottoman rule.

Ottoman control of Serbia remained contested and tenuous after Serbia again submitted to the Sultan in 1457. They could not defend themselves against Ottoman reprisal. Hungary had proven incapable of assisting rebels in Serbia.<sup>418</sup> This caused a migration of Serbs to Hungarian lands, particularly to a region north of the Danube, called the Vojvodina.<sup>419</sup> Vojvodina Serbs would play an important role in defending Hungarian borderlands.<sup>420</sup> Prince Lazar’s widow, Helen, was also a key player in seeking Hungarian influence in Serbia.<sup>421</sup> An example was the 1456 Ottoman siege of Belgrade, where Magyars and Serbs halted the Ottoman advance in a now legendary moment in Hungarian history. The Ottomans invaded Serbia again in 1458, in part due to Ottoman fears of Hungarian influence in Serbia.

Regardless, Mihailović still deceived his readers by picking and choosing the Serbian history he wanted remembered. His pride in Serbia’s stand against the Ottomans at Kosovo in 1389 is as ironic as it has been enduring in Serbia itself. Serbia had sided at other key moments with the Ottomans making Mihailović’s memoir ironic, especially when one remembers Mihailović himself was a Serb helping the Ottomans. Mihailović

---

<sup>416</sup> John Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 569

<sup>417</sup> Ibid

<sup>418</sup> Ibid, p. 570

<sup>419</sup> Ibid, p. 576

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, p. 576

<sup>421</sup> Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453-1474)*, (Nicosia, Brill Publishers, 2001), p. 121

was even a part of an Ottoman force attempting to occupy Belgrade! By contrast, George cared neither for ethnicity nor country; his master was Christ the Lord. Mihailović must have been aware of the Serbs' history of working with Ottomans, given his potted outline of Serb history, his presence at Constantinople in 1453 and his captive service as a Janissary between 1455 and 1463. His guilt drove him, nonetheless, to exclude Serbia's misdeeds against Christianity. Mihailović must have faced a difficult choice. Either omit Serbia's pro-Ottoman actions and create irony in his memoirs, or write honestly about Serbia and let his guilt shine. These are choices Schiltberger and George did not have to make, making Mihailović stand out amongst them. To summarize, the great irony here is that Mihailović's previous and 'victimised' homeland of Serbia was actually then the Ottoman Empire's closest ally in Europe, and that Mihailović was just yet another Serb to aid the Ottomans in their cause.

Likewise, George's entire book was ridden with guilt. On the surface level, George was a monk who flirted with Islam. This alone should have made George feel guilty, given his previously established religious fervour. However, scratch beneath the surface and George's guilt comes through even more obviously. Evidence emerged when he discussed the 'second group', outlined in my previous chapter, of slaves who flirted with Islam.<sup>422</sup> The motive George gave for this 'flirtation' is oddly specific for what would have been a large group of people. He claimed they do it to search for the Turks' secrets: to investigate and interpret Islam to enable better understanding so Christians can better defend themselves from conversion.<sup>423</sup> But did George himself accomplish this? Not

---

<sup>422</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 79

<sup>423</sup> Ibid

really. He maintained Christians had to become more pious and simpler, emulating the Turks, and that Christians had to prepare for Armageddon. He maintained Christians should not question God's actions, but give Him unwavering loyalty. His answer pointed to faith as the best way on to better secure oneself from conversion.

Either George uncovered little in his mission to investigate Islam or he lied about the second group. The latter is correct. His remorse for his temptation to (and education in) Islam<sup>424</sup> indicated genuine interest in investigating Islam in the name of Christianity. This went against his Christian essentialist belief, and really calls into question his commitment as a Dominican monk, harming his book in an ironic sense. It did however, show us George was a man of theological intrigue. While his 1400s comrades may not have appreciated his conversion, his redemptive path back to monkhood made George the unique source he is today.

George viewed his life through the biblical lens of the parable of the Prodigal Son. The parable tells that there was a father and two sons, the younger of whom asked for his inheritance. He proceeded to waste all this money in a land that became struck with famine. The younger son, remorseful for his mistakes, returned home and begged his father employ him as a servant, for he was not worthy of being a son.<sup>425</sup> However, the father again accepted him as a son and threw a celebration for his return, much to the dismay of the older son, who said *"All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with*

---

<sup>424</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 49

<sup>425</sup> Luke, 15:11-32, 'The Parable of the Lost Son', *Biblica: The International Bible Society*, [website], (2020) <<https://www.biblica.com/bible/?osis=niv:Luke.15:11%E2%80%9332>>, accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020

*my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!*"<sup>426</sup> The father replied, telling him his brother had been lost, but now he is found, and in a sense had returned from 'being dead'.<sup>427</sup>

This was how George viewed himself. He had been taken from Christianity, flirting with Islam and foreign culture in a land of heathens. This helps explain why he consistently reaffirmed his faith in Christianity. Much like the younger son, he wanted to prove he had learned from his mistakes, and was now asking for forgiveness. Except George did not ask for forgiveness. He simply wrote as though his re-conversion countered his Islamic past. He never asked his readers to forgive him. It is possible that when he returned to Europe, he had a 'coming home moment' much like the prodigal did, but if so, why not tell us? Perhaps he did not want to distract from the purpose of his book. He was accepted into the Dominican order, so clearly, he must have been forgiven.

Being a prodigal did not wipe irony from George, however. His Europe could not and would not forgive others who had converted. George made no appeal for their forgiveness. He berated renunciants, often linking them to Satan.<sup>428</sup> So, why did George deserve forgiveness? Remember, he admitted to teaching renunciants Islam.<sup>429</sup>

---

<sup>426</sup> Luke, 15:11-32, 'The Parable of the Lost Son', *Biblica: The International Bible Society*, [website], (2020) <<https://www.biblica.com/bible/?osis=niv:Luke.15:11%E2%80%9332>>, accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020

<sup>427</sup> Ibid

<sup>428</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 54

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, p. 100

This exception for himself was not only ironic, it was egotistical. The Prodigal Son did not return home and start telling his family they needed to be better Christians after living a life of sin. George certainly did. His self-importance was ironic, given that he wanted people to be less extravagant and self-indulgent.<sup>430</sup> Yet, he alone was worthy of forgiveness. All those other slaves still in the Ottoman Empire were sinners, save for the ones who were dead. If George cast himself as the Prodigal, he forgot the humility the Prodigal learned. All these mental contortions suggest that George did feel guilt.

The starkest difference between Schiltberger and the others was therefore Schiltberger's distinct lack of guilt. There are two main reasons for this. The first is that guilt was no match with his purpose and tone. A guilt-ridden book would not have made for an enjoyable read. The second reason is that Schiltberger never fought against Europeans when he was with the Ottomans. He primarily fought Turcoman Muslims to the east. And his last battle with the Ottomans was the embarrassing Battle of Ankara in 1402. He then left an Ottoman Empire defeated and embarrassed, unlike Mihailović and George. Simply put, the Ottomans did not do enough against Christianity to make him feel guilty.

Is this to say that Schiltberger never felt guilty? If he did, he simply did not show it in his writings, thus leaving us forever in the dark on his true feelings. I suspect Schiltberger must have felt a guilt concerning his actions. While he fought for Muslims, it was primarily against Muslims as well. Schiltberger, unlike Mihailović, never saw serious combat in the Balkans or Eastern Europe. There is, however, some irony that is not the fault of Schiltberger. This irony reflects his indifference to Ottoman expansion.

---

<sup>430</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 41, 49

Schiltberger lacked the urgency of Mihailović and George. The great irony of Schiltberger is that the Ottoman Empire did expand after his time there. By the time he returned home to Bavaria (in 1427) the Ottomans had re-established themselves. Yet Schiltberger had still no concern about the future of the Ottoman Empire in his book. Authors such as Mihailović and George proved Schiltberger wrong. The Ottoman Empire did expand, and quite rapidly too. The other irony here was that despite dedicating more of his book to Timur and the Mongols, their power quickly fell away after Timur's death.<sup>431</sup>

Schiltberger's one chapter that stood out to me as ironic was Chapter 8, in which he recounted a miracle involving serpents and vipers. Having already dissected this chapter in Chapter 1, I focus instead here on the irony of his account. While Schiltberger was not as overt Christian as Brother George and Mihailović, he still claimed to be a Christian at heart, saying he was happy to have "*returned home and to Christianity*".<sup>432</sup> However, the miracle he described was to the benefit of the Islamic Ottomans, and not Christians. Given Schiltberger called the event a miracle, he must have either believed his Christian God helped heretics, or he believed that Allah (God) enacted the miracle. Yet a belief in an Islamic miracle would spit in the face of the pious Christian like Brother George. So, was Schiltberger lying about being happy to return to Christianity? He never wrote in a pro-Christian manner, and he never criticised the Turks or the Tatars for their faith. Mihailović and George did. He simply claimed to be a Christian. Had he become *de jure* a Christian, but *de facto* a Muslim?

---

<sup>431</sup> H.R. Roemer, 'The Successors of Timur', *The Cambridge History of Iran Volume 6: The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, 6/1 (1986), p. 99

<sup>432</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 102

It is important to remember that Schiltberger did not go home upon leaving the Ottomans. He was enslaved by Timur in 1402, only returning home 25 years later in 1427. Combine this with his Ottoman service since 1396. Schiltberger lived in the Islamic world for 31 years, nearly double his 16 years of age at capture. Schiltberger may have embraced Islam. 31 years is a long time. It was probable Schiltberger saw Bavaria as a distant land, out of reach.

Schiltberger probably belonged to the third group of slaves discussed by George, those who 'succumbed' to Islam.<sup>433</sup> Schiltberger's identification as a Christian was more likely done as a means to an end. No one in Bavaria would have published his work if he professed to be a Muslim or at least hold Islamic beliefs. Many captured Europeans remained in the Islamic world and benefitted from doing so. I again refer back to Mahmud Paşa Angelović. A fellow captive of *Devşirme*,<sup>434</sup> Angelović was converted to Islam and rose through the ranks.<sup>435</sup> Likewise, Schiltberger did well, riding alongside both Bayezid and Timur, fighting in various important battles, and travelling a world unknown to the common man of the 1400s.

Schiltberger's cover up of a probable conversion might not indicate that he felt guilty about it, however. I argue this because of the absence of guilt when he writes about his actions for the Islamic World. Schiltberger fought to expand not one, but two, Islamic Empires. Doing this would have mentally destroyed a pious Christian and/or an individual

---

<sup>433</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p.79

<sup>434</sup> Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453-1474)*, (Nicosia, 2001), p. 73

<sup>435</sup> Ibid, p. 110-111

with a hatred for Islam. Yet, as already established, Schiltberger was proud and content. He left out his conversion for his safety. He would have been branded a heretic and may have faced death in Christian Europe.

But if Schiltberger was now a Muslim at heart, why did he escape home? I suspect he was also still Bavarian at heart. Schiltberger may have separated the idea of being Bavarian with being Christian. Mihailović could not. To Mihailović, Serb and Christian were synonyms.

There is also the possibility that the unique Janissary practice of Islam played a role, which was largely heterodox in nature.<sup>436</sup> This will be explored in the next chapter.



## Chapter 3: The Ottomans at War

### Section 1: Esprit de Corps

The effectiveness of armies depends in large part on soldier cohesion or *esprit de corps*. As a permanent professional military unit, the first in medieval Europe, Ottoman Janissaries (i.e., “new troops”, *Yeniçeriler* in Turkish) led unique lives when compared to other military units, such as the auxiliaries with whom Brother George probably served, or the cavalry (*Sipahi*) in which Schiltberger served.

Janissaries were unique. As professionals in an age in which troops were always part-time, they were also esteemed by the Sultans of our era: Bayezid I, Murad II and Mehmet II (r. 1389-1402, 1421-81). In this era, as “honourable slaves of Sultan (*ghulâm*)”, the janissaries were recruited from enslaved boys in the Balkans, making them unique, not just in the Ottoman empire, but in Christendom within and beyond. The rest of the Ottoman military was feudal and Turkish in character.

Most of the sources on the Janissaries were written either from the perspective of “native” Turks or from the point of view of Christians fighting them. This chapter examines the memoirs to explore the self-image of these Christian convert-warrior slave soldiers. Each memoir presents a different standpoint. Silences matter as much as what they tell us. Secondary sources help explain these silences.

We need first to consider the standpoints of our authors. I am satisfied, for reasons outlined below, that only Konstantin Mihailović was once a Janissary, though this is

debated. Theoharis Stavrides argues he was simply a soldier serving alongside.<sup>437</sup> To be sure, Mihailović never explicitly stated he was a Janissary, often referring to them separately from himself. But recall that he writing or dictating much later. His Chapter 33, however, offers evidence Stavrides overlooked: when the Janissaries are suffering many deaths, Mihailović wrote or dictated that the Sultan could not bear “*that so many of us were dying*”.<sup>438</sup> Mihailović then describes the reinforcements as the rest of the infantry. This implies Mihailović was fighting as a Janissary.

I did speculate that Mihailović was just a servant. Evidence from Mihailović’s chapter 34 suggests otherwise.<sup>439</sup> Recall that Mihailović reported he was in charge of a garrison in a fortress called Zvečaj, a castle guarding a river near Banja Luka in Bosnia. His garrison was fifty Janissaries and thirty Turks.<sup>440</sup> A servant would not have been allowed to command such a force. On top of all this, by his own account, Mihailović was simply everywhere the Janissaries were. If he was not a Janissary, he would have been in a unit attached to them as a sapper or auxiliary. But his placement in charge of an entire garrison of Janissaries rules out the idea he was part of a less prestigious unit. Lastly, he was taken amongst the other boys who became Janissaries, a traumatic experience he described in chapter 27. This evidence leads me to conclude that Mihailović was a Janissary, enhancing his value as a source.

---

<sup>437</sup> Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453-1474)*, (Nicosia, Brill Publishers, 2001), p. 10

<sup>438</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 67

<sup>439</sup> Svat Soucek, ‘Notes’ in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 131

<sup>440</sup> Ibid

While neither Brother George nor Johann Schiltberger served with the Janissaries, they were both captured in a similar fashion. All were Christian slaves, part of a 'renunciant' community. George knew the Janissaries. He appeared to have been with them on campaign or patrol,<sup>441</sup> whether as an auxiliary or as a captive. He attested to their physical prowess,<sup>442</sup> which I will expand on in the next section. He could describe their uniform in detail.<sup>443</sup> Later in this section I will expand upon the importance of the Janissary uniform. George left it until his last chapter to admit his presence among the Janissaries, however. His standpoint from which to observe the Janissaries was not military in nature, but religious. He taught many Christian boys Islam.<sup>444</sup> George clearly believed the Janissaries were important, given he felt the need to discuss their uniform and physical prowess. While George may have observed them from an auxiliary role, George's primary perspective derived from his position as a religious teacher.

Unlike Brother George, Schiltberger served in a military capacity full time. While Neumann considered Schiltberger served as a runner for the Sultan,<sup>445</sup> it is not clear under what capacity. We know he was captured at 16, entering into servitude for the Sultan. As a runner, he travelled primarily on horseback, perhaps as a *Sipahi*, or something similar.

---

<sup>441</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 17

<sup>442</sup> Ibid

<sup>443</sup> Ibid, p. 26

<sup>444</sup> Ibid, p. 100

<sup>445</sup> J. Buchan Telfer, 'Introduction' in Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. xxii

Sipahis can be split into two main groups: *Timarli Sipahilar* and *Kapikulu Sipahilar*. Both types were usually drawn from the ethnic Turkic population. There were differences, however. The Timarli Sipahis were Turkish or Turkic fief-holders. They were located in specific provinces and they were mustered by the Ottoman ruler or bey of that province (*sancak*). In return for their fiefs they provided security to their province, and if needs be, cavalry for the Ottoman state as a whole. The Timarli Sipahi was comparable to the European Knight in their reputation and level of power. The Kapikulu Sipahi, like the Janissary Corps, was a household corps for Palace. Janissaries were the palace infantrymen; Kapikulu Sipahis were palace cavalymen. Unlike the janissaries however, the Kapikulu Sipahis were not all slaves. As they directly served the Sultan and did not actively hold fiefs in a specific province, they tended to be the more loyal of the two types of Sipahi. This mattered in the example of the Battle of Ankara in 1402 when the timarlis largely deserted *Yıldırım* Bayezit when Timur appeared, but the kapikuls, Serbs and Janissaries stood fast with him.<sup>446</sup>

Schiltberger was ineligible to have been a *Timarli Sipahi*. Captives could not hold fiefs. He was neither Turkish nor Turkic. [Here we see how the Janissaries differed: on rations, paid, single, residing in barracks, and ineligible (in this era) to own land or run a business.] Schiltberger was likely to have become a *Kapikulu Sipahi*. The best evidence of this status is Schiltberger's reliance on his horsemanship. We can infer Schiltberger was a strong horseman because after Bayezid I's defeat at Ankara in 1402, Schiltberger was not only spared by Timur, but entered into Timur's service. From here he travelled all over the Caucasus and Central Asia with Timur and his sons from the Middle East through Armenia

---

<sup>446</sup> Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300*, (Chicago, Phoenix Press, 1973), p. 16

to Siberia. This length of honourable slave servitude as a runner shows Schiltberger was a strong horseman. This is an argument in favour of being a Sipahi, albeit not a definitive argument.

Another argument in favour of Schiltberger being a *Kapıkulu Sipahi* was his direct service to the Sultan in the palace cavalry. Others enjoying this privilege of proximity to power were *Kapıkulu Sipahi*.

While *Kapıkulu Sipahis* were often recruited from Turkic landowners in the times of Sultans, such as Mehmed II, it was not always this way. According to historian Stanford Shaw, from the time of Murad I—who preceded Bayezid I, and who was assassinated in 1389 by Miloš Obilić—the *Kapıkulu Sipahis* were recruited via *Devşirme*, just like the Janissaries.<sup>447</sup> When we take the relationship between *Devşirme* and early Sipahi recruitment, Schiltberger's capture, his presence in the palace cavalry, and his apparent skills for horsemanship and combat, serving both *Yıldırım* Bayezid and Timur the Lame, the key conclusion is that Schiltberger was a *Kapıkulu Sipahi* even if he chose not to disclose that fact.

This standpoint is important when it comes to Schiltberger observing the Janissary infantrymen. He never mentioned this much-feared infantry unit of Christian slave-converts! Yet, as I will explain later, Janissaries were always near the Sultan.<sup>448</sup>

---

<sup>447</sup> Stanford Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume 1: Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire 1208-1808*, (Los Angeles, Cambridge University Press, 1976) p. 26

<sup>448</sup> Theodore Spandounes, *On the Origins of the Ottoman Emperors*, translated by Donald M. Nicol, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.118

Schiltberger rode beside the Sultan; he had to have seen the Janissaries, for example at Ankara in 1402. Although he was captured at Ankara, Schiltberger did not mention that the Janissaries. Unlike most *timarlı sipahis*, they did not flee.

Why did Schiltberger overlook them? As an arrogant former Burgundian noble cavalryman, he may have been contemptuous of infantry. He may have seen them as just another palace military unit, merely auxiliary to *Sipahi*. Yet Brother George knew the significance of the Janissaries, and George was at best just an auxiliary. Schiltberger must have known more than he let on.

Like any military, different units have different rivalries with one another. As the two primary palace military units, one would assume some form of rivalry occurred. This is backed up when one looks at the reputation of the Janissary Corps within the Ottoman Empire, in particular its élites. *Sipahis* (whether *Timarlı* or *Kapıkulu*) were primarily Turkish; few foreigners were among *Kapıkulu Sipahi*. Some Turks of high standing, such as the *sipahi* and historian, Aşıkpaşazade (ca 1400-84), disliked the Janissaries for their Christian background.<sup>449</sup>

The Sipahi also held a sense of chivalry, seeing the Janissaries, particularly their use of firearms, as unbecoming of a chivalrous warrior.<sup>450</sup> While he was a non-Turk, Schiltberger was a Sipahi. His previous life was as a squire serving alongside a Bavarian crusading knight in Burgundian service at Nicopolis in 1396. Schiltberger grew up in a life morphed

---

<sup>449</sup> Lale Özdemir, *Ottoman History through the Eyes of Aşıkpaşazade*, İstanbul, The İsis Press, 2013, p. 134

<sup>450</sup> Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300*, (Chicago, Phoenix Press, 1973), p. 48

by chivalry and would have seen the Janissaries as un-becoming to his noble code of honour. Schiltberger also rode with Bayezid and Timur, two highly respected leaders of their kingdoms.

Compare Schiltberger to Mihailović, a non-noble who wound up in the Janissary Corps. One's class, even after capture, could affect the unit one served in. I am not saying the Janissary Corps were un-chivalrous or dishonourable; just that this is how *Sipahi* saw them. Godfrey Goodwin concurs, explaining how Janissaries responded: "the Janissaries were professional soldiers with the snobbery of the Sipahi knights".<sup>451</sup>

Another important aspect of the Janissary *esprit de corps* is the special relationship between the corps and the Sultan. Mihailović's chapter 33: 'Conquering the Wallachian Voivode Dracula who ruled Lower Moldavia', described interactions between Sultan Mehmed II and the Janissaries during the campaign (1459-62) against the Wallachian Prince Vlad III Tepeš, a member of an old Byzantine knightly order of the dragon (Dracul), or "Dracula" as he is better known today. While with the Sultan in Wallachia, Mihailović recalls Mehmed II addressing the Janissaries as "*My sweet lambs*",<sup>452</sup> an endearment also implying innocence and youth. They were also hardened warriors.

The Sultan Mehmed II's relationship with the Janissaries was intimate as well as professional. Mihailović disclosed as much when he discussed Janissaries dying in combat. He noted the Sultan was very sad watching them die. He was afraid they would

---

<sup>451</sup> Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, (London, Saqi Books, 1994), p. 69.

<sup>452</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 66

all die.<sup>453</sup> It seemed a father-son relationship to Mihailović. The Janissaries also accompanied the Sultan everywhere he went in Mihailović's memoir.

Brother George also confirmed the closeness of the Janissaries. He told us Janissaries "*walk directly in front of the king*"<sup>454</sup> to act as a protective wall.<sup>455</sup> The Janissaries weren't just the Sultan's soldiers; they were his bodyguards. This added to their personal relationship. Other sources confirm this. Theodore Spandounes, a Byzantine refugee, also told us the Janissaries "*act as the Sultan's personal bodyguards when he is out*".<sup>456</sup> Spandounes further informed us the Sultan had more faith in the Janissaries than anyone else.<sup>457</sup> Mihailović himself offered another example of this mutual respect and trust in his chapter 33. He noted how Mehmed II sought Janissary advice on military strategy, "*Give me advice, for it depends on you*".<sup>458</sup>

This relationship with the Sultan helped create an esprit de corps unlike any other Ottoman military unit. The Sultan was not nearly as close with other units, including the ancestral Ottoman feudal cavalry, the Sipahis. The late-fifteenth Ottoman sipahi and historian, Aşıkpaşazade, for instance, reported how Turkish tribal and sipahi leaders never understood why Mehmed II was so determined to seize Constantinople in 1453.<sup>459</sup>

---

<sup>453</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 66-67

<sup>454</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 26

<sup>455</sup> Ibid

<sup>456</sup> Theodore Spandounes, *On the Origins of the Ottoman Emperors*, translated by Donald M. Nicol, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.118

<sup>457</sup> Ibid

<sup>458</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 66

<sup>459</sup> Lale Özdemir, *Ottoman History through the Eyes of Aşıkpaşazade*, İstanbul, The İsis Press, 2013, p. 9



In fact, the Janissaries were founded so there would always be soldiers loyal to the Sultan and no one else.<sup>460</sup> This makes the Janissaries' relationship with the Sultan even more important; the Janissary Corps were isolated from other officials due to their (supposed) celibacy, slavery, professional pay, halls of residence and sheer proximity to the throne. Mihailović, for one, never mentioned Janissaries interacting with other units. Their attachment solely to the Sultan and his throne gave them a strong sense of importance despite official protest. It also evoked a haughty response from sipahis. The later years of the Janissary Corps, particularly after the reign of Sultan Süleyman "the Magnificent" also exhibit this characteristic as a corps apart; they become much more political, even demanding an obtaining an accession fee (*çölus*). It is clear the Janissary Corps had a strong relationship with the Sultan.

Logically, it was important for the Sultan to be on good terms with the Janissaries. It would be unwise to turn your own bodyguards against you. We know this to be true, due to future breakdowns in this relationship, with the Janissaries often murdering a Sultan they disliked. I shall use the example of Sultan Osman II 'the Young' (r. 1618-22), whose plot against the Janissaries incurred their wrath and resulted in his murder in 1622.<sup>461</sup> It was a personal and awful end, as the Janissaries are said to have crushed his testicles.<sup>462</sup>

Regalia offer another glimpse of *esprit de corps*. Most armies have flags/symbols that are used to represent a unit. The Janissary Corps was no different. Mihailović described four different flags he saw at battles. The first was all-white with gold letters. This flag is the

---

<sup>460</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 139

<sup>461</sup> Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300*, (Chicago, Phoenix Press, 1973), p. 61

<sup>462</sup> Mike Dash, 'The Ottoman Empire's Life or Death Race', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 22 March 2012.

most important, “for it signifies that all the emperor’s (Sultan’s) power is there”.<sup>463</sup> The second flag, all red, belonged to the cavalry. The third was red and green. He says no more on it. The fourth was the flag of the Janissaries: red and gold. He does not give us anything further on the flag.

But how loyal were the Janissaries to their flag and to the Sultan’s whom they served? Godfrey Goodwin expands on this, stating that the Janissaries showed almost equal devotion to these colours as they did to the colour green, the colour of the Prophet Mohammad.<sup>464</sup> This tells us that the Janissaries fervently revered their flag and its colours. The comparison by Goodwin suggests Janissary devotion the red and yellow flag had a religious character. Their flag was a sacred symbol, held in high esteem, second only to the Prophet’s green standard.

The significance of the Janissary flag only grows when we look at what was emblazoned upon it. Goodwin tells us that the Zülfikar/Zulfiqar blade was in the centre of the Janissary flag. A Zülfikar was a double-bladed sword wielded by Mohammad’s cousin Ali ibn Abi Talib, fourth Caliph. To emblazon the sword of a Caliph related to the Prophet added lustres of piety to the Janissary Flag. Ali was reputed a great warrior who fought in campaigns that consolidated Muslim rule in the Arabia. Tim Marshall explains the power that flags can have on people in his book, *Worth Dying For: The Power and Politics of Flags*. Flags “wield a great deal of power, communicating ideas quickly and strongly

---

<sup>463</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 83

<sup>464</sup> Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, (London, Saqi Books, 1994), p.71-72

*drawing on emotions*".<sup>465</sup> The religious connotations of the flag, coupled with military characteristics of this corps of converts shaped Janissary emotions and communicated the idea of the Janissary as a great Islamic Warrior.

Curiously, Mihailović overlooked another important symbol of the Janissary Corps: their uniform. He likely did so because their uniform wasn't relevant to him, but thankfully Brother George did tell us about it. They had insignia on their uniform. Their white headdress/cap was the most important.<sup>466</sup> The historian Godfrey Goodwin helps clarify the exclusive nature of these caps, informing us these caps were actually made in the Janissary barracks by sixty men across ten 'shops', limiting the odds on 'outsiders' obtaining this cap.<sup>467</sup> George claimed no one else dared to use the Janissary headwear, so sacred was it to the Janissaries themselves.<sup>468</sup> Godfrey Goodwin confirms, for example, the 'Keeper of the Hounds' strictly wore red boots, and he alone wore them.<sup>469</sup> This is just one of many of Goodwin's examples.

As a permanently standing corps, the Janissaries also had other roles outside of soldiering. These roles included policing, palace/fort garrisoning and firefighting.<sup>470</sup> In his Chapter 34, Mihailović reported being in charge of a Janissary garrison, serving alongside timarli sipahi Turks.<sup>471</sup> We know the Janissaries were going to be there for

---

<sup>465</sup> Tim Marshall, *Worth Dying For: The Power and Politics of Flags*, (London, Elliot and Thompson, 2016), p. 7

<sup>466</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 26

<sup>467</sup> Ibid

<sup>468</sup> Ibid

<sup>469</sup> Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, (London, Saqi Books, 1994), p. 69

<sup>470</sup> Ibid, p. 97

<sup>471</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 71

longer than a single campaign, as Mihailović was given *“a half-year’s wages for each of the Janissaries”*.<sup>472</sup> Half a year in a fortress alone is a long time to be together. This alone re-created the old training kinship of their slave barracks; Janissaries probably felt they only had each other for company. Policing duties went beyond the fortress to nearby settlements and patrolling roads.<sup>473</sup> Settlements and forts such as Mihailović’s at Zvečaj needed patrolling. Time spent in the line of duty could only bring the Janissaries closer together.

Another important peacetime activity for the Janissaries was their practice of Islam. For Mihailović, the place of Islam in Ottoman society was of great importance, and an even greater concern. Throughout his memoirs, he referred to Ottomans as heathens, and likewise, anything to do with their societal norms and structure. For example, his chapter pertaining to the Ottoman Justice system is named ‘Concerning Turkish and Heathen Justice’<sup>474</sup>. He was equated being Turkish with being a Heathen. Whilst Mihailović as a former Janissary is an excellent source on the life of actual Janissaries, his text never hides his hostility for Islam. He sums up his hatred for Islam in the last line in his memoirs, *“Lord God Almighty, help faithful Christians against the ignoble heathens, the wipe them out. Amen”*<sup>475</sup>. Likewise, Mihailović’s first chapter opens by acknowledging how Ottomans/Turks *“conduct themselves according to the accursed Koran”*.<sup>476</sup>

---

<sup>472</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 71

<sup>473</sup> Godfrey Goodwin, *The Janissaries*, (London, Saqi Books, 1994), p. 89

<sup>474</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 15

<sup>475</sup> Ibid

<sup>476</sup> Ibid, p. 2

But how did Islam shape Janissary *esprit de corps*? A theme that stands out in initial chapters is war and conflict for Islam. We see an example of this when Mihailović discusses small books called the Hama Hely, which he compares to the Holy Scripture<sup>477</sup>. He tells us that the Hama Hely are very significant for war, *“they always carry them with them under the arm, and especially at war... and they say that it is very helpful to them in wars”*.<sup>478</sup> This is the first example of Islam having a role in Janissary warfare. They carry these books so their faith will help them win wars. Mihailović also referred to an Islamic sermon he either attended or was told of, where the ‘heathen priest’ who leads the service enters with a sword in hand<sup>479</sup>, giving this sermon a warlike characteristic. This is only furthered by what the ‘heathen priest’ says: *“pray for all souls and those fighting the kaury”* and *“You will all have a part in that war”*.<sup>480</sup>

These words indicate to us, and presumably the people hearing the sermon, create a picture of a battle between Islam and the kaury (i.e., “lost or confused” people, usually describing non-Muslims). Combine this with the previous discussion about the Hama Hely and we can clearly see that Islam had a role in Ottoman and Janissary Warfare. It was used as a way to justify conflict against non-Muslims.

All this relates to a Gazi Thesis propounded by the historian, Paul Wittek. Wittek’s thesis suggested that Ottoman Expansion was primarily driven by a holy war against

---

<sup>477</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 5

<sup>478</sup> Ibid

<sup>479</sup> Ibid, p. 7

<sup>480</sup> Ibid, p. 7

Christians<sup>481</sup>. His thesis has since come under question, with evidence not matching the religious ardour. The first and most obvious example is the Janissaries. If we were to look at Mihailović as a single example, he was born a Christian in non-Muslim lands and was captured as a soldier in a Christian Army opposing the Ottoman-Muslim Army. Yet he was recruited into the Janissary Corps through *Devşirme*. At first glance, a state fighting a holy war against a rival religion would surely not recruit soldiers from the rival religion.

A strict adherence to the Gazi thesis would not have seen the recruitment of Christians, nor fought other Muslims (like their rivals, the *Türkmen* tribesmen and the Karamanids of Konya). Yet the Ottomans took such actions.<sup>482</sup> While Wittek's thesis has since been criticised by Cemal Kafadar<sup>483</sup>, other scholars like Hilmi Kaçar acknowledge, "*Witteks methodology was fundamentally not wrong*".<sup>484</sup> The late-15<sup>th</sup>-century Ottoman historian Asikpaşazade for example, still claimed to champion the Gazi ideology.<sup>485</sup> Cemal Kafadar describes it best, arguing that while holy war was not the primary reason for Ottoman growth, it was still one of the many reasons.<sup>486</sup> Kafadar argued that the term Gazi simply changed in meaning at different times,<sup>487</sup> and that one could still be a Gazi whilst

---

<sup>481</sup> Hilmi Kaçar, 'The Early Ottoman State Formation: Reconsidering Paul Witteks Gaza Thesis', *Academia* (2015)

<[https://www.academia.edu/4578856/The\\_Early\\_Ottoman\\_State\\_Formation.\\_Reconsidering\\_Paul\\_Witteks\\_ghaza-thesis](https://www.academia.edu/4578856/The_Early_Ottoman_State_Formation._Reconsidering_Paul_Witteks_ghaza-thesis)>, p. 4, accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019

<sup>482</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Harvard, University of California Press, 1995), p. 51

<sup>483</sup> Ibid p. xiii

<sup>484</sup> Hilmi Kaçar, 'The Early Ottoman State Formation: Reconsidering Paul Witteks Gaza Thesis', *Academia* (2015)

<[https://www.academia.edu/4578856/The\\_Early\\_Ottoman\\_State\\_Formation.\\_Reconsidering\\_Paul\\_Witteks\\_ghaza-thesis](https://www.academia.edu/4578856/The_Early_Ottoman_State_Formation._Reconsidering_Paul_Witteks_ghaza-thesis)>, p. 4, accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019

<sup>485</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Harvard, University of California Press, 1995), p. 145

<sup>486</sup> Ibid, p. 120

<sup>487</sup> Ibid, p. 91

cooperating with Christians.<sup>488</sup> We can also clearly see the idea of a holy war being discussed in Islamic places of worship and taking place on the battlefield as recorded through the eyes of Mihailović.

The Janissaries also had the commonality of being new converts to Islam. They began their new Islamic lives together; being taught how read the Qur'an or how to pray together. They would have been educated at the Topkapı Palace together. Much like how students at a school bond over learning together, the Janissaries would have experienced this bond as young captives being educated in Islam.

Brother George told us that he himself taught Islam to the renunciants at a mosque,<sup>489</sup> further proving that Islamic education was involved as part of building Janissary Esprit de Corps. George also told us that many slaves (including the Janissaries) wholeheartedly converted to Islam.<sup>490</sup> This informed us that Islam in the Janissary Corps was not a surface level commitment, but that many a Janissary flung themselves fully into their newfound faith.

However, the Islam practiced by the Janissaries was not necessarily strictly Orthodox Sunni Islam. This was due to the teachings of the Bektashi Order. This order was not strictly Sunni, often incorporating practices from other religions. Historian Albert Doja tells us that Bektashism incorporated elements of "*pre-Islamic and non-Islamic beliefs*

---

<sup>488</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Harvard, University of California Press, 1995), p. 75

<sup>489</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 100

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79

*and customs originating in shamanism, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Christianity and antique religions*".<sup>491</sup> This would mean an Ottoman Bektashi adherent would have only resembled the stereotypical Turkic or Arabic Muslim in part. Bektashism pushed the limits of what a Muslim could be. Strict Sunnis often saw them as heretics.<sup>492</sup>

This heterodox nature complicates our understanding of Mihailović, Brother George and Schiltberger. The Bektashi Order had a long-running connection to the Janissaries,<sup>493</sup> often teaching these new converts their way of Islam. This was made easier by the aforementioned Bektashi usage of Christianity in their beliefs. Mihailović was most likely exposed to Bektashi Islam, not orthodox Sunni Islam. His failure to differentiate the two makes sense, given he had no prior experience with Islam until his Janissary training.

George was therefore also likely to have been a Bektashi teacher, not a Sunni teacher. As previously mentioned, George discussed different types of Islamic teachers, including Dervishes, who adhered to heterodox Islamic orders, such as Bektashis. Unfortunately, George never identified if he was a dervish or not, only saying he taught Islam. However, he does recall being told stories about saints whose sainthood is more Christian in character than Islamic. This flexibility suggests George at least was aware and learned to some extent in Bektashism. Our only blindspot is Schiltberger. While he was happy to return to Christianity, he also referred to a supernatural event that aided the Ottomans as a miracle. Perhaps Schiltberger was no Muslim at heart, but a Bektashi. Unfortunately, his silence on how he saw Islam being practiced limits us.

---

<sup>491</sup> Albert Doja, 'A Political History of Bektashism from Ottoman Anatolia to Contemporary Turkey', *Journal of Church and State*, 2006, 48 (2), p. 424

<sup>492</sup> Ibid, p. 430-431, 443

<sup>493</sup> Ibid, p. 441



Returning to the Janissaries, having a unique version of Islam with an order strongly connected to them assisted the creation of a Janissary Esprit de Corps. Adopting a new faith together, while simultaneously retaining their own Christian beliefs would have made it easier to meld as a group while making themselves distinct from both their old Christian homelands and their new Sunni-Islamic home, creating a 'Janissary Faith' in the simplest terms.

All of this makes it easy to see how Islam could be used to indoctrinate the young Christian boys into fighting for an Islamic Empire as Janissaries. The boys were made convert to Islam; Mihailović clearly showed us he attended sermons himself, as did George by telling us he conducted such sermons. The sermons praising those fighting 'the kaury' told the new converts they were fighting on the right side. They were brought closer together as new convert soldier 'warriors of the right faith'. An Ottoman military identity applied to the Janissaries. These sermons combining war with Islam influenced the Janissary esprit de corps by giving them the identity of an Islamic Warrior, whilst the teachings of the Bektashi Order closely linked to the Janissaries enabled them to carry over their Christian beliefs, diluting 'their Islam' and creating a faith distinct from Sunni Islam.

Recruiting non-Turks also presented the problem of language. Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians etc. all speak different languages. If we were to take a look at examples of eyewitness writers of famous Janissary memoirs, for instance, Mihailović probably spoke a Serbo-Croat dialect and Johann Schiltberger a Bavarian dialect. This is where Turkish played an important role. We know the captive convert boys (*devşirme*) were taught Turkish

because Isidore Glabas, a late-14<sup>th</sup>-century Orthodox Bishop of Thessaloniki (who held an anti-Ottoman position like Mihailović, and anti-Catholic position unlike Mihailović)<sup>494</sup> said in a sermon (Speros Vryonis provides a translation) the boys were forced “to become a vessel of barbaric garb, speech, impiety”.<sup>495</sup> Mihailović never explicitly said he spoke Turkish, but he left us with evidence that tells us he can. In Chapter 7, titled ‘What the Heathens call in their language the Angels, the Prophets, Paradise, Hell, Judgment Day, Devils’, he says Ottoman Turkish for Archangel Gabriel is Diebrael.<sup>496</sup> Mihailović also understood the Sultan speaking to the Janissaries during the Wallachian Campaign.<sup>497</sup> It must also be said, however, that some Turkish words had already entered non-Turkish languages. Historian Rustam Shukurov gives the example of *zarchula*; an item of Ottoman costume had made its way into “*the vernacular languages of the local Greeks and west Europeans*”,<sup>498</sup> so it is possible many of the Janissaries had some exposure to the Turkish language before training.

But what would fluency in Turkish mean to the Janissaries? It gave them a common language to communicate in. Serbs, Bosnians, Greeks etc. could now communicate with each other. This made it easier for the Janissaries to bond. The Turkish language itself was not a symbol of *esprit de corps*, but it enabled it to be built.

---

<sup>494</sup> Nevra Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire*, (Istanbul, Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 14

<sup>495</sup> Isidore Glabas, ‘Sermon’ in Speros Vryonis Jr., ‘Isidore Glabas and the Turkish Devshirme’, *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* Vol 31, No. 3 (1956), p. 436

<sup>496</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 14

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid*, p. 66

<sup>498</sup> Rustam Shukurov, *The Byzantine Turks: 1204-1461*, (Leiden, Brill Publishers, 2016), p. 318

Turkish was not the only language they learned. They also learned Arabic as part of their conversion to Islam. Unfortunately, Mihailović never discussed Arabic, most likely because it was irrelevant to his goal for the memoirs. However, we do know it had a profound impact on the Janissaries. Kathryn Hain gives us an example; *“It was well known that the Janissaries carried the gospel of St. John in Greek and Arabic under their armpits as a protection device against evil”*.<sup>499</sup> The idea that these former Christians would translate their book into the ‘Language of Islam’ demonstrates how high was the esteem with which the Janissaries held Arabic, the language of the Holy Koran. While it did not preclude their continuing interest in a Christian gospel, their Arabic was definitely to the fore in their minds and it had a pious importance for them. The Janissaries were likely already accustomed to Christian practices as well as Muslim practices, in what Cemal Kafadar brilliantly describes as an *“institution of artificial kinship”*.<sup>500</sup> Having this common language of piety contributed to the role Islam played in creating a Janissary esprit de corps.

Another important aspect of esprit de corps for the Janissaries was the experience of the Devşirme. This was the collection or taking of young non-Turkish/Muslim boys (usually Balkan ethnicities) and their education as Janissaries. According to Pál Fodor *“one boy per forty households may have been the most typical (rate)”*.<sup>501</sup> Fodor references Mihailović, who refers to boys taken by the Ottomans as *çilik*, which means ‘one in forty

---

<sup>499</sup> Kathryn Hain, ‘Devşirme is a contested practice’, *Historia: The Alpha Rho Papers*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (2012), p. 173

<sup>500</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Harvard, University of California Press, 1995), p. 17

<sup>501</sup> Pál Fodor, ‘Ottoman Warfare, 1300-1453’, *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume 1: Byzantium to Turkey, 1071-1453*, 1/1 (2009), p. 206

in Persian (distorted)<sup>502</sup>. The Ottoman Court was heavily influenced by Persian literature, culture and concepts.

What did Mihailović tell us about devşirme? Mihailović described how the Ottomans sorted through the population in Novo Brdo to get the boys they wanted, *“the Emperor himself standing before the small gate sorted out the boys on one side and the females on the other, and the men along the ditch on one side and the women on the other side”*.<sup>503</sup> Any man of importance was decapitated, and everyone except for the taken children was released, their possessions unharmed.<sup>504</sup> Mihailović was even specific in terms of numbers taken: *“the boys were 320 in number and the females 74”*.<sup>505</sup> Mihailović also told us who took the children. He informed us that *“the females he (the Sultan) distributed among the heathens, but he took the boys for himself into the Janissaries”*.<sup>506</sup> Young girls were not recruited as Janissaries or Eunuchs, so they likely became household slaves in a similar fashion to George. This relates back to the relationship between the Sultan and the Janissary Corps. Mihailović specified that the Sultan personally took them. Many Islamic leaders, was entitled to roughly 20% of spoils of war or *Khum*, and this included slaves.<sup>507</sup> Kafadar gave us more Ottoman-specific information, saying the Janissaries were staffed through the Pençik (one-fifth) tax.<sup>508</sup>

---

<sup>502</sup> Pál Fodor, ‘Ottoman Warfare, 1300-1453’, *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume 1: Byzantium to Turkey, 1071-1453*, 1/1 (2009), p. 206-207

<sup>503</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 50

<sup>504</sup> Ibid

<sup>505</sup> Ibid

<sup>506</sup> Ibid

<sup>507</sup> Peter Scales, *The Fall of the Caliphate in Cordoba: Berbers and Andalus in Conflict* (London, Brill, 1993), p. 59-60

<sup>508</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Harvard, University of California Press, 1995), p. 145

While the Sultan was not often present at these collections, it was clear from Mihailović that the boys were seen as belonging to the Sultan. This shows us that the strong bond between Janissary and Sultan began at Devşirme.

Mihailović further explained a boy could be taken to be a Eunuch. He tells us *“He took six boys and had all their genital organs cut off to the very abdomen; and so, one died and five remained alive. They are called in their language hadomlar, which means in our language eunuchs. And these guard the Emperor’s wives”*.<sup>509</sup> Mihailović does not elaborate on the training the boys undertake once taken, only stating they become Janissaries or Eunuchs. Describing the intricacy of Janissary training would not have furthered his hopes of another crusade. He did however; emphasize the brilliance of the Janissaries in combat multiple times.

One obvious blank Mihailović left us with was Janissary training. Pál Fodor stated that the boys would receive education and military training, information he gleans from Brother George who *“relates that the ruler distributed the novices among the households of the magnates in his dominion where they were taught morals and the handling of weapons”*.<sup>510</sup> This means Mihailović was distributed to a Turkish household to be taught these morals and the handling of weapons.

We know the Janissary training was effective for Janissary fitness not from Mihailović, but from Brother George. While he did not explicitly name the Janissaries, he described

---

<sup>509</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 51

<sup>510</sup> Pál Fodor, ‘Ottoman Warfare, 1300-1453’, *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume 1: Byzantium to Turkey, 1071-1453*, 1/1 (2009), p. 192-226

a force of men beyond the regular army,<sup>511</sup> which was what the Janissaries were. George called these men “*the most clever*”,<sup>512</sup> corroborating with Fodor above. In terms of Janissary fitness, George claimed they could run for an entire week with great force and speed and nourished themselves to a low body fat count.<sup>513</sup> While the claim that they ran nonstop for a week was a clear exaggeration, it is indicative of the effectiveness of Janissary training. It clearly made a good impression on George given his praise for them. This would mean that Mihailović as a Janissary would have achieved this level of fitness. But rather than discuss his excellent training, he was silent, and we are left to rely on all our authors the monk to provide insight on this topic.

But why did Mihailović omit this from his own memoir? Bishop Isidore Glabas offered a clue. Glabas provides us with information as to what these ‘morals’ were in a sermon he gave in Thessaloniki in at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century. This sermon bemoaned *devşirme* and the training of the boys. Glabas stated that the boys are “forced to change over to alien customs and to become a vessel of barbaric garb, speech, impiety”<sup>514</sup>. Speros Vryonis clarified that Glabas was referring to the boys being taken to Turkish landowners and their estates to train in language, customs and Islam.<sup>515</sup> Perhaps that is why Mihailović failed to mention anything about Janissary training. If he talked about going to a Turkish home, learning their language, learning Islam and adapting their customs, it could have not only Mihailović’s capacity to get his memoirs produced, but may have

---

<sup>511</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 16

<sup>512</sup> Ibid

<sup>513</sup> Ibid, p. 17

<sup>514</sup> Isidore Glabas, ‘Sermon’, in Speros Vryonis, ‘Isidore Glabas and the Turkish Devshirme’, *Speculum* Vol. 31, No. 3 (1956), p. 436

<sup>515</sup> Speros Vryonis, ‘Isidore Glabas and the Turkish Devshirme’, *Speculum* Vol. 31, No. 3 (1956), p. 437

also harmed his reputation to the point of endangering his life. Glabas told us the common opinion was that by becoming a Muslim and learning Turkish customs you become a Turk.<sup>516</sup> Mihailović's Janissary training gave him credibility as an eyewitness, but was neither relevant to his cause nor helpful to his survival post-rescue, so it does not surprise me he chose to forgo detailing his training.

It is evident that a unique Janissary Esprit de Corps existed due to a variety of reasons. The common traumatic beginning with Devşirme, the training together that Mihailović unfortunately omitted, the creation of a personal relationship with the Sultan and the intertwining of Islam with war, alongside the common symbol in the Janissary Flag and a common language in Turkish, offer evidence that a unique and effective esprit de corps existed within the Janissary Corps. It is easy to comprehend how the Janissaries, due to elite training and a concrete Esprit de Corps, became a key point in the expansion of the Ottoman Empire against their former homelands.

---

<sup>516</sup> Isidore Glabas, 'Sermon', in Speros Vryonis Jr., 'Isidore Glabas and the Turkish Devshirme', *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* Vol 31, No. 3 (1956), p. 436-437

## **Section 2: Ottoman Expansion**

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis shall now focus on how Mihailović, Brother George and Schiltberger understood Ottoman and/or Tatar-Mongol expansion, whether westward and Ottoman for Mihailović and George and eastward and Ottoman-Tatar-Mongol for Schiltberger. The unique positions of our authors enslaved within the Ottoman Empire offer unique perspectives. A map of Ottoman military expansion sits at the end of this chapter.

This chapter focuses primarily on Mihailović, as Ottoman expansion was his primary concern. George just sought salvation, and Schiltberger fame. This topic is too important to ignore, as when one thinks of Ottoman expansion, we depend on secondary literature using sources by Ottoman and/or European officials of military/political rank. This chapter shows how Christian Slaves understood Ottoman expansion. Mihailović had the most to say, but George and Schiltberger's passing opinions still deserve to be heard. Their silences matter too, and will be examined where appropriate.

Mihailović said more concerning Ottoman Expansion because he was a Janissary, writing to organise a crusade. While Schiltberger was a Sipahi, he wrote what was essentially an adventure biography; his agenda was untroubled by reasoning over Ottoman expansion. As for George, he was not a military man. He explored religious thought on Ottoman expansion.

Mihailović wrote his Memoirs as a report for European-Christian rulers about the Ottoman State, its military and its imperial expansion. Mihailović wanted Christian rulers



to unite *“against the ignoble heathens, to wipe them out”*.<sup>517</sup> Perceiving Ottoman expansion as a great evil, Mihailović reported Ottoman military victories and defeats so Christians can achieve the aforementioned goal. His key chapter is his *Chapter 47: Concerning Turkish Expansion*. Mihailović’s opening line shows how he perceived Ottoman expansion. *“Turkish or heathen expansion is like the sea, which never increases nor decreases, and it is of such nature: it never has peace, but always rolls”*<sup>518</sup>. For Mihailović, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire never stops. If they aren’t invading one land, it is because they are fighting in another: *“they never have peace, but always carry on a struggle from year to year from some lands to others”*.<sup>519</sup> Schiltberger inadvertently corroborated Mihailović on this topic. Each chapter in his book showed Ottomans fighting a different foe. Whether they were fighting the Mongols, Karaman Turks or cities aligned to the Mamelukes, the Ottomans mimicked Mihailović’s description.

A perceived characteristic of Ottoman expansion for Mihailović was the conversion of Christians to Islam. As a devout Christian, it is to be expected Mihailović deplored the idea of Christians converting to Islam. He noted many Christians leaving their faith and *“extol the heathen faith”*<sup>520</sup>. He went on to explain that this *“adds to the expansion of the Turks”*.<sup>521</sup>

This is of great interest. Notice how Mihailović does not say it leads to the expansion of Islam, Muslims, heathens or the heathen faith. It leads to the expansion of the Turks. Did

---

<sup>517</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 99

<sup>518</sup> Ibid, p. 96

<sup>519</sup> Ibid, p. 96

<sup>520</sup> Ibid, p. 96

<sup>521</sup> Ibid, p. 96

he mean that converts help expand Turkish territory, or expand Turkish population? Perhaps both? While Isidore Glabas argued to become a Muslim is to become a Turk,<sup>522</sup> for Mihailović conversion operated simply to ensure Ottoman numbers never diminished. They were constantly bringing in new groups of converts.<sup>523</sup> Mihailović's belief that the conversion of Christians to Islam is a part of Ottoman expansion is important. It shows that his perception of Ottoman expansion is not just one of a military character, but also of an Islamic, or in his view, heathen character. His frame of reference was for a crusading holy war.

Mihailović was not the only author to argue this point, as so did Brother George. He often bemoaned "*the great fervour of the Turks for propagating and enlarging their sect*".<sup>524</sup> But George became more fanatical than Mihailović, claiming their "*future number will seem to exceed the amount of atoms in the air, dust on the earth, and even the sand on the sea; they will cover the surface of the entire earth like locusts*".<sup>525</sup> This outlandish claim was an echo of the fifth trumpet in verse 3, chapter 9 of the *Book of Revelation*, par for George. It demonstrated not only how George believed the Ottoman Empire was out to convert his locust-plagued world to Islam, but also how they would inevitably be defeated once the seventh trumpet he was sounding with his memoir had resounded.

---

<sup>522</sup> Isidore Glabas Sermon in Speros Vryonis Jr., 'Isidore Glabas and the Turkish Devshirme', *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* Vol 31, No. 3 (1956), p. 436-437

<sup>523</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 96

<sup>524</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 69

<sup>525</sup> Ibid

However, the key issue with this characteristic is that mass conversion was never an Ottoman policy. According to Halil İnalcık, the Ottomans saw forced conversion as disadvantageous. *“They knew that by pursuing a conciliatory policy towards Christians they could more easily extend their realms and increase their sources of revenue.”*<sup>526</sup> Daniel Goffman describes the Ottoman Empire as having *“religious flexibility”*.<sup>527</sup> The Ottomans saw that loyalty meant profit; drastic change achieved by forced conversion might harm revenue due to revolt. The Ottomans also had a policy of protecting the peasantry against exploitation from local authorities.<sup>528</sup>

This meant that for many Christians, living under the Ottomans was actually easier. Halil İnalcık gives an example when comparing Ottoman law to law under the most prominent of the rulers of the Serbian empire, Stepan Dušan (1346-55). *“Dušan’s code required the peasant to work for his lord two days a week; Ottoman regulations required the reâyâ to work only three days a year on the Sipahis land”*.<sup>529</sup> The Ottomans even officially recognised the Orthodox Church.<sup>530</sup> Soldiers from vassal states such as Serbia served in the Ottoman Army without accepting Islam.<sup>531</sup>

The theme of forced conversion does not appear in Johann Schiltberger’s writings at all. Schiltberger’s only mention of conversion was in his Chapter 8. Schiltberger discussed the Ottoman conquest of Tarnovo in Bulgaria in 1393. Here he tells us *“Weyasit (Bayezid)*

---

<sup>526</sup> Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, (Chicago, Phoenix Press, 1973) p.13

<sup>527</sup> Daniel Goffman, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 84

<sup>528</sup> Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, (Chicago, Phoenix Press, 1973) p.13

<sup>529</sup> Ibid

<sup>530</sup> Ibid

<sup>531</sup> Ibid

*who took the duke and his son*".<sup>532</sup> He then informed that, whilst the father died in prison, his son became a Muslim.<sup>533</sup> There is some unpacking to do here, as I believe Schiltberger was not fully informed about the Siege of Tarnovo. Bulgaria at that time was divided into three kingdoms, the central one ruled from Tarnovo by Ivan Shishman, Tsar of Bulgaria (r. 1371-95).<sup>534</sup> However, Ivan Shishman was absent from the Siege of Tarnovo, instead fighting the Turks at Nicopolis. The Patriarch of Bulgaria, Saint Euthymius of Tarnovo, led Tarnovo's defence, not a duke. Perhaps Schiltberger meant the Tsar was the Duke; claims regarding titles always depended on what outsiders were prepared to accept. This would make sense as the Tsar's son, Ivan Alexander, did convert to Islam so as to not be killed. He was later made Governor of Samsun. The death of Shishman is also surrounded in debate. Some claim he was killed in battle, other sources state he died in prison, as Schiltberger stated.

While this initially goes against the idea of Ottoman forced conversion, it reveals the role conversion could sometimes play in Ottoman expansion, a pattern repeated in Bosnia in the later-part of the fifteenth century. But Alexander did not convert willingly; he was coerced into doing so. This was their price to enable him to govern somewhere else far away: Samsun. This was a significant piece of strategy that Schiltberger merely mentioned in passing. The Ottomans did not seek to convert whole populations, but they would contemplate converting Christian royalty/nobility to turn them into governors, beys or some other form of ruler. This all goes against the crusading vision of Ottoman

---

<sup>532</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 14

<sup>533</sup> Ibid

<sup>534</sup> John Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest*, (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 367

expansion through conversion. With the exception of the Ottomans converting men of power where possible, it is abundantly clear that Ottoman expansion was assisted by its lack of forced *en masse* conversion of Christian populations. Ottoman rule was often desirable to indigenous peasant populations when compared to the exactions of their previous Latin, Greek, Serb or Bulgar rulers.

So why did George and Mihailović ignore this important information? Perhaps they did not know about Ottoman policy. However, given Mihailović witnessed so many conquests and given that his homeland was already a vassal of the Ottomans, it is likely he was not ignorant of Ottoman policy. He must have chosen to omit this information which undercut his view of the Ottomans. He desperately wanted a crusade. He needed the Ottomans to look as evil as possible. Stories of forced conversion resonated with his target elite audiences. This differed from George, who was not a full time soldier, nor did he play a role in the court. He was around many converts, and so most likely came to the conclusion that their conversion was the result of Ottoman policy. His claims were more likely the result of working with what little information he had, rather than from Mihailović's self-serving omission of evidence.

However, do not get the impression that the Ottoman Empire's policy around conversion was coercion free. While Ottomanists such as Inalcık have corrected the old Christian-European view that the Ottomans were *Gazis* out to convert everyone by any means (Mihailović and George serving as examples of this), I feel that the discussion around Ottoman policy has gone the other way, minimising Ottoman violence/cruelty towards conversion and Christians in general. Mihailović was forced to become a Muslim as per Janissary law. George himself was regularly beaten before converting. Schiltberger too

was likely made to convert as part of his *Sipahi* training. None of these men had any freedoms. We are reminded that while the Ottoman Empire was not the ever-converting machine it was originally made out to be, it, like all imperial states of its time, it was sometimes barbaric in their treatment of their conquered subjects. Christian life under the Ottoman Empire was not one of voluntary conversion and personal freedoms, but only of tolerance of Christian existence so long as they fell in line and never ‘rocked the boat’.

This leads us to a much broader perception of Ottoman expansion made by both Mihailović and George. Christianity is referred to consistently as good. For example, Christians didn’t simply forget their Christian faith; they forgot their good Christian faith.<sup>535</sup> With Christianity supposed as the only good faith, by default Islam became the supposed evil faith. This made Turks evil. George took this a step farther, claiming the father of the Muslims was Satan.<sup>536</sup>

Mihailović emphasised this point discussing Turkish use of truce. *“If they make a truce, it is better for them, and in other regions they perpetrate evil”*.<sup>537</sup> From this we learn two things. First, from Mihailović’s view, the Ottomans do not make truces unless it suits them and them alone. Second, they make a truce so they can ‘perpetrate evil’ elsewhere. The use of the word evil here is of course no accident. The Ottoman Empire is not just perpetrating war or death; they perpetrated evil. Mihailović then stressed *“this happens*

---

<sup>535</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 96

<sup>536</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 63

<sup>537</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 96

*many times every year*".<sup>538</sup> This explains why Mihailović could not and did not acknowledge Ottoman tolerance. An empire allowing Christians to be Christians, which arguably treats its Christian subjects better than the previous Christian rulers, did not make a good villain. Mihailović needed the Ottomans to be the heathen-villain to stir the hearts of potential Crusaders. Mihailović hid the good and emphasised what the Crusader would see as evil.

In what is becoming a trend, Schiltberger, by contrast, did not condemn the Turks as evil. As already discussed elsewhere, Schiltberger may still have harboured some Islamic beliefs post-escape, meaning he would not buy into the arguments of the other two. Also, given his book was one of "boys-own" adventure, it would look poor if he told the reader he fought for evil people for 31 years. That would only harm his image. Schiltberger desired adventuring fame, not infamy.

Another important chapter is Mihailović's *Chapter 45: Concerning the Organisation of a Turkish Assault*. Mihailović showed how the Turks planned to attack a city, and the attack itself. He discussed roles Janissaries played. Mihailović described the high degree of organisation when a town was attacked by the Ottomans: the assault begins with battering of city walls with cannons, until the Sultan is pleased.<sup>539</sup> Mihailović witnessed this form of assault first-hand at Constantinople in 1453. The Sultan then ordered livestock to be taken from pastures to the army. Mihailović does not explain the purpose for bringing the livestock, but I assume it was done to either feed the army and pull siege

---

<sup>538</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 96

<sup>539</sup> Ibid, p. 93

engines. He then described how soldiers with ladders approached the walls at night in silence. The Ottomans fired cannons at first sight of daylight to distract the defenders so the Janissaries could quickly scale the walls. Here we see an example of Janissary efficiency in combat. Mihailović also explained how the Janissary Corps was constantly able to re-supply itself, particularly its ammunition, *“And in addition the shot from bows comes very thick, for they continually bring and replenish their shots”*.<sup>540</sup>

Mihailović’s explicit emphasis was always on the Janissary Corps. This is because he thought a decisive victory over the Janissaries would cripple the Sultan permanently, *“if the imperial Janissaries were once decisively defeated and remained on that field, the Turkish emperor could never recover in order to stand against Christians anywhere”*.<sup>541</sup>

As a Janissary himself, Mihailović witnessed these characteristics first-hand. Mihailović gave an example in Chapter 32, where during a battle in the campaign against Uzun Hasan, Mihailović tell us *“had it not been for the Janissaries the Emperor himself would have been taken or killed.”*<sup>542</sup> However, the problem with this as Svat Soucek points out, this campaign took place ten years after Mihailović returned to Christendom.<sup>543</sup> Perhaps Mihailović was told of the battle and the heroics of the Janissaries.

Svat Soucek points out that Mihailović’s praise of the Janissaries is not pure fabrication.<sup>544</sup> I agree with Soucek. He did not need to make everything up later.

---

<sup>540</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 94

<sup>541</sup> Ibid, p. 84

<sup>542</sup> Ibid, p. 63

<sup>543</sup> Svat Soucek, ‘Notes’ (New York, 2011), in Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, (Late Fifteenth Century), p.127

<sup>544</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p.128



Throughout the memoir the Janissaries are depicted as excellent and reliable warriors. This is shown in Chapter 29, where the Ottomans were “*trusting in the Janissaries*”<sup>545</sup> alone to storm the mighty fortress in Belgrade in 1456. While they were defeated, Mihailović tells us not many of them were killed.<sup>546</sup> Nonetheless, it is clear that while Mihailović viewed the Ottoman military as an effective fighting force, he simultaneously stressed that they can be beaten, and their expansion stopped.

We see more evidence of Janissary effectiveness in Chapter 40 where Mihailović advised against “*rushing their Janissaries head on*”,<sup>547</sup> implying that a direct fight with the Janissaries will likely result in a Janissary victory. We also learn that war drums were also used to create “*a great tumult*”,<sup>548</sup> signalling battle actions and formations. As a result of this efficiency, Mihailović claims battle usually last between one and two hours.<sup>549</sup> This account of a generic Ottoman assault clarified how the Ottomans expanded territories using a well-organised war machine.

With George, by contrast, one line was more than enough to let the reader know how effective he believed the Ottomans were at war, “*the victories of Alexander the Great or the Romans, who subjugated the entire world, will not be able to be compared to these (Ottoman conquests)*”.<sup>550</sup> Both Rome and Alexander were infamous for their legendary capabilities at war, and George said they will be nothing compared to the Ottomans. This

---

<sup>545</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 54

<sup>546</sup> Ibid

<sup>547</sup> Ibid, p. 85

<sup>548</sup> Ibid, p. 94

<sup>549</sup> Ibid

<sup>550</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 69

alone shows George saw the Ottomans as the premier nation when it came to war in all of history.

But how does Mihailović's account hold up? According to the Magyar Ottoman historian, Pál Fodor, Mihailović's account is one of the best. He labelled it "evocative". He confirms for us that attacks began with the battering of the walls with cannons and siege engines.<sup>551</sup> Pál Fodor also believes Mihailović shows us the crucial roles of the Janissaries in battle.<sup>552</sup> Fodor goes as far to call them "*the most efficient offensive formation of the Ottoman army*".<sup>553</sup>

Mihailović only proves this further by stating a successful attack against the Ottomans included "*not rushing the Janissaries head on*".<sup>554</sup> An example he gave was the failed Crusader Battle of Varna in 1444, where Mihailović tells us "*the Janissaries beat them and killed them as they wished*",<sup>555</sup> them being Hungarians and Poles. King Władysław III of Poland (r. 1434-44) was captured alongside many of his nobles and was beheaded.<sup>556</sup> Historian Colin Imber's work backs up Mihailović's account of the Janissaries at the Battle of Varna. He tells us "*when a large part of the cavalry army had left the field, it was the Janissaries who stood firm around Murad II and, crucially, captured and killed the Hungarian King*".<sup>557</sup> In summary, the evidence from Mihailović makes it clear that the

---

<sup>551</sup> Pál Fodor, 'Ottoman Warfare, 1300-1453', *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume 1: Byzantium to Turkey, 1071-1453*, 1/1 (2009), p. 222

<sup>552</sup> Ibid, p.223

<sup>553</sup> Ibid, p.223

<sup>554</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 85

<sup>555</sup> Ibid, p. 40

<sup>556</sup> Ibid, p. 40

<sup>557</sup> Colin Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power*, (Manchester, Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), p. 257

Janissaries were the key to Ottoman victory. And rushing to fight them always seemed to result in Christian defeat, as with the Poles at Varna (1444), the Burgundians at Nicopolis (1396), but not so with Timur outside Ankara (1402) . It is clear that the Janissary Corps lived up to their reputation and played a crucial role in Ottoman expansion.

Yet is important to understand that Mihailović did stress in other chapters that the Ottoman Army was beatable. Ottoman expansion was stoppable. He points out that if the Christians manage to defeat the Ottomans, *“the Christians grow stronger”*.<sup>558</sup> He outlined a generic scenario of Christian victory over the Ottomans in Chapter 45. In Chapter 34, he dwelt on how King Matthias defeated the Ottomans in Bosnia in 1463 by taking Jajce and Zvečaj (the last of which he commanded).<sup>559</sup> Mihailović also made this victory look dominant by telling us *“in that fortress (Zvečaj) the wall was bad, for they had battered it with so much cannon, that we ceaselessly worked day and night repairing it again”*.<sup>560</sup>

This description is a far cry from the previous examples Mihailović gave us of Ottoman military superiority. Mihailović wanted to show his audience that while the Ottoman Army, particularly the Janissaries, were effective at waging battle, they were still beatable. This would make sense in line with Mihailović’s request for Christians to unite to defeat the Ottoman Empire. In Chapter 40 Mihailović advised whoever was fighting the Ottomans not to follow the plan of those previously defeated such as Władysław III

---

<sup>558</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 94

<sup>559</sup> Ibid, p. 71

<sup>560</sup> Ibid

at the Battle of Varna in 1444 or *Voivode* Janko (John Hunyadi) at the Second Battle of Kosovo in 1448.<sup>561</sup> Mihailović pointed out better strategic moves to use against the Ottoman military. These ranged from firing fire arrows at camels to start a stampede (a theory he claims to have tested on one camel), to not rushing into direct combat with the Janissaries, and to defeating the Ottoman feudal cavalry (though he failed to explain how to do the latter).<sup>562</sup>

According to Mihailović, good strategists such as King Matthias could defeat the Ottomans as opposed to a leader like *Voivode* Janko who “*wasted himself on the Plain of Kosovo*”.<sup>563</sup> Mihailović did not think highly of *Voivode* Janko; he never referred to him as ‘of glorious memory’. Władysław III, who also failed to defeat the Ottomans, is called “*King Vladislav of glorious memory*”.<sup>564</sup> Mihailović had a bias for canny leaders, not vainglorious ones.

It is interesting that Mihailović also criticised John Hunyadi (ca 1406-56), a Hungarian noble of Romanian origin. Hunyadi was actually a very successful military commander long term, most notably at the siege of Belgrade in 1456. After his defeat at Varna in 1444, he had struck a ten-year peace treaty with Sultan Murad II in 1444, although he broke it at Kosovo in 1448, suffering another defeat. Making peace with the ‘infidels’ was the opposite of Mihailović’s agenda. This peace of 1444 likely ruined John Hunyadi’s reputation for Mihailović, regardless of his other valiant and partially successful

---

<sup>561</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 84

<sup>562</sup> Ibid, p. 85

<sup>563</sup> Ibid, p. 84

<sup>564</sup> Ibid, p. 85

campaigns against the Ottomans. Mihailović was more of a zealot. He did not believe in any act of Christian peace with the Ottoman Empire, not even ones like Hunyadi's craftily enabling regrouping. Unlike Hunyadi, while Mihailović had witnessed some Ottoman defeats, most were minor in the grand scheme of things. By contrast, Brother George himself did not recount any tales of great Ottoman defeat. He had the least military experience.

Johann Schiltberger, however, fought in and witnessed one of the greatest and most humiliating defeats suffered by the Ottomans. Schiltberger was a combatant at the Battle of Ankara on 20 July 1402. It was fought between Sultan Bayezid I and Timur (Tamerlane), a Turco-Mongol warlord who founded the Timurid Empire. Both empires were powerful Islamic empires undergoing rapid expansions. It was only a matter of time before these two empires came into conflict; this conflict became a reality when the Ottomans invaded Lesser Armenia (i.e. northeast Anatolia). Schiltberger himself confirms this, however, he claimed it was done with the exaggerated number of 300,000 men.<sup>565</sup>

The tension had built between the two according to Schiltberger over Bayezid's actions towards a subject of Timur: Otman. Bayezid had "*expelled Otman from Tamast*".<sup>566</sup> This was after Otman had King Wurchanadin of Tamast beheaded and quartered.<sup>567</sup> To clarify who these individuals are, Otman is Qara Osman, a Turcoman who reigned (1378-1435) over the 'White Sheep Turkomans, also known as the *Ak Koyunlu*. He was an ally of Timur

---

<sup>565</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 20

<sup>566</sup> Ibid

<sup>567</sup> Ibid, p. 16

and fought for him in his campaign against Bayezid I.<sup>568</sup> Schiltberger's "Wurchanadin" is likely *Kadi* Burhan al-Din, ruler of the Turcoman Eretnid Beylik. After Qara Osman was ousted by the Ottomans, he fled to Timur, who "*as soon as Tamerlin (Timur) heard this, he assembled ten hundred thousand men, and conducted them into the Kingdom of Sebast and lay siege to the capital...then he levelled the city*".<sup>569</sup>

This feud ended at the Battle of Ankara in 1402. Schiltberger tells us that the battle was fought desperately with Timur even bringing thirty-two elephants.<sup>570</sup> Schiltberger claimed Bayezid led an Ottoman army of 'fourteen hundred thousand men' and Timur led in opposition his army of 'sixteen hundred thousand men.'<sup>571</sup> This merely shows us that Schiltberger saw both participating armies as amongst the largest he had ever witnessed. Timur won the day. Bayezid fled into the mountains, before being captured and taken prisoner by Timur.<sup>572</sup> Schiltberger's account avoided the kinds of details Mihailović relished, due to his adventure biography genre. However, Schiltberger's account is consistent with Mihailović's. Mihailović criticized Christian strategy; Schiltberger showed non-Christians defeating the Ottomans. The Mongols tended to avoid heavy armour, nor did they exhibit the vain culture pervading European knights of the 1400s.

---

<sup>568</sup> Jamie Stokes, Anthony Gorman and Andrew Newman, *Encyclopedia of the Peoples of Africa and the Middle East*, (New York, Infobase Publishing, 2009) p. 31

<sup>569</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 20

<sup>570</sup> Ibid, p. 21

<sup>571</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 20

<sup>572</sup> Ibid, p. 21; Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *The Histories*, two volumes, ed. & trans. Anthony Kaldellis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, 2014), book 3, ch. 59, vol. 1, pp. 258-59.

But given Schiltberger's taste for a tale of excitement and flair, was his account of the Battle of Ankara accurate? In one of his notes in Bruun's edition of Schiltberger, Karl Friedrich Neumann states "*Schiltberger's accounts agree perfectly with the statements* (Books 3, ch's 52-55)<sup>573</sup> *made by Byzantine and Eastern Historian*", whom he did not name, but who was Laonikos Chalkokondyles (ca 1430s- ca 1470s).<sup>574</sup> Following Schiltberger rather uncritically, military historian Spencer Tucker also states that Timur's Çağatay Tatar-Turkic-Mongol army stood at around 140,000 men.<sup>575</sup> However, he disagrees with Schiltberger regarding the Ottoman military, numbering Bayezid's forces roughly at 85,000.<sup>576</sup> Schiltberger claimed Bayezid commanded around 30,000 White Tatars,<sup>577</sup> and Tucker reproduces him, stating that around a quarter of Bayezid's 85,000-strong force were White Tatars.<sup>578</sup>

Schiltberger and Laonikos Chalkokondyles however, overlooked an important aspect of Ottoman defeat: the desertion of Ottoman *sipahi* troops. Bayezid's Ottoman army had consisted of Janissaries, Auxiliaries, Irregulars, Vassal Forces and Sipahis. Whilst battling in the mountains to which Bayezid had fled, two different groups both joined Timur, abandoning him. Apart from the sipahis, the other group was the Black Tatars.<sup>579</sup> Black Tatars had little loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. Originating from Central Asia in

---

<sup>573</sup> Laonikos Chalkokondyles, *The Histories*, two volumes, ed. & trans. Anthony Kaldellis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, 2014), book 3, ch 42-61, vol. 1, pp. 240.

<sup>574</sup> Karl Friedrich Neumann in Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 21

<sup>575</sup> Spencer C. Tucker, *Battles That Changed History: An Encyclopedia of World Conflict*, (Fort Worth, 2010), p. 140

<sup>576</sup> Ibid

<sup>577</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 21

<sup>578</sup> Spencer C. Tucker, *Battles That Changed History: An Encyclopedia of World Conflict*, (Fort Worth, 2010), p. 140

<sup>579</sup> Ibid, p. 141

Khorasan, a region comprising of North-eastern Iran, Central Asia and parts of Afghanistan, Black Tatars were culturally closer to Timur and his Turco-Mongol forces. Cemal Kafadar concurs, stating “the sultan was left only with his Janissaries, still a small force, and Balkan Christian vassals”.<sup>580</sup>

This shows us a potential weakness in the Ottoman military that Mihailović missed. The Ottomans often employed the services of non-Turkish troops in their battles. The White and Black Tatars in the Battle of Ankara are one example. Another is the use of Serb miners at the siege of Constantinople in 1453. This was a huge weakness of the Ottomans; they had to rely at times on the presence of their vassals’ militaries. It also shows that beyond the Janissaries, the Sultans own troops were not overtly loyal, and often willing to switch sides midst-battle.

This weakness did not persist, however, in the times of the other two authors of our memoirs. After the Battle of Ankara and the ensuing period of Ottoman Civil War, the Ottoman Empire recovered after a decade of civil strife, before re-bounding and reiterating its Balkan and Anatolian expansion. Schiltberger may have never mentioned the desertion of the Black Tatars, because he did not know it happened. As a runner/personal attendant for the Sultan, he was likely with the Sultan in hiding in the mountains. He does say that Bayezid took one thousand horsemen with him; Schiltberger was likely one such.

---

<sup>580</sup> Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Harvard, University of California Press, 1995), p. 18



The second group to abandon the Ottoman army was the previously explained Sipahis.<sup>581</sup> This represents another chink in the armour of Ottoman expansion. Not only was there the threat of foreign/vassal forces defecting, there was also the threat of the Ottomans' own feudal cavalry doing the same. As Spencer Tucker points out, the Sipahis (along with the Black Tatars) did not just abandon Bayezid, they defected to Timur and joined him. This was a crushing blow to the Ottomans, as the Sipahis made up a decent portion of the Ottoman cavalry. Losing any troops to the already bigger opponent in Timur was the final nail in the coffin for Bayezid. A question worth tackling is which of the two types of Sipahi defected, if not both? The *Timarli Sipahi* were the ones most likely to betray. They were not the palace cavalry, and were providing their service in return for getting to hold fiefs. It was a transaction-based service, not a service based on loyalty or Ottomanism. We know some horsemen remained with Bayezid until the very end, likely *Kapikulu Sipahi* of Schiltberger's kind.

Historian Suraiya Faruqi makes a very interesting statement considering early European authors, like Mihailović, saying, "*These European authors were unwilling to admit that Ottomans might be good at anything but warfare*".<sup>582</sup> Mihailović fits that bill. He is only able to admit the Ottoman Empire is effective at warfare, but was then unwilling to praise it in any other capacity. As has been previously established, he left out how the Ottomans had a tolerant policy towards Christians concerning religion and work.<sup>583</sup> He praised only the war effort, not the political-social effort. If a reader were to solely base

---

<sup>581</sup> Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, (Chicago, 1973) p.16

<sup>582</sup> Suraiya Faruqi, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources*, (Munich, 2000), p.131

<sup>583</sup> Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, (Chicago, 1973) p.13

their understanding on the Ottoman Empire and how they got their power from what Mihailović, they would have only come away with an understanding of Ottoman warfare.

The rest of the 'credit' for Ottoman rise in power, according to Mihailović, would not have been due to the Ottomans themselves, as Faroqhi has maintained. Instead, Mihailović blamed the rise of Ottoman power on Christian in-fighting. So strong is this belief that he reminds the reader of it on the last page, blaming specific rulers. One was the great Hungarian King, Matthias Corvinus also ruling in Czechia and Croatia. This is surprising, given Mihailović's admiration for him, often referring to him as "*King Matyas of glorious memory*",<sup>584</sup> even on the same page as the accusation. He accused "*King Matthias of glorious memory: paying no heed to the heathens, he made war with the Christians*"<sup>585</sup>, specifying the Hungarian war with the Czechs. Mihailović was most likely referring to the Bohemian-Hungarian War (1468-78), a war in which Matthias made peace with the Ottomans to focus on Bohemian enemies.

This move by Matthias ignored Mihailović's prioritising of a united European Crusade to wipe out the Ottomans.<sup>586</sup> Mihailović also seems to have been targeting Pope Paul II (r. 1464-71) and the first Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick III (r. 1452-93). Mihailović accused them of having "*induced King Matyas to make war with the Czechs*".<sup>587</sup> He claims they 'induced' him by branding the Czechs as heretics.<sup>588</sup> George of Poděbrady, who was a Hussite King, ruled Bohemia at the time. The Hussites were a

---

<sup>584</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 99

<sup>585</sup> Ibid

<sup>586</sup> Ibid

<sup>587</sup> Ibid

<sup>588</sup> Ibid

radical congregational Protestant faction separating from the Catholic Church.<sup>589</sup> This is what got them branded as heretics. Mihailović believed “*and thus Christendom was vexed and heathendom expanded everywhere*”.<sup>590</sup>

Mihailović was backed up by Schiltberger, who provided us with an account of Christian in-fighting before the Battle for Nicopolis. He told us the Dukes of Wallachia and Burgundy disagreed over who would lead the initial attack, resulting in the Burgundians going rogue and getting surrounded and defeated.<sup>591</sup> This example proves Mihailović had a point in his argument. Pride and honour got in the way of Christian unity, and ultimately helped lead to a battle of disaster for the crusaders. While Schiltberger never made the argument himself, he has yet again proved Mihailović to be correct. As previously discussed in Chapter One, Mihailović’s desired crusade would have hypothetically involved Orthodox Catholics and Hussites. Mihailović blamed Ottoman expansion on powerful Christian rulers who fought fellow Christians, preventing a pan-Christian Crusade.

The author’s own religiosity also shaped how they perceived Ottoman expansion. We start with Mihailović, who argued that a key theme of Ottoman expansion was divine intervention by God at important moments before, during or after conflict. Mihailović pointed to moments in time where he perceived the Christian God to have intervened in

---

<sup>589</sup> Rev. Dr. Craig Atwood, ‘Czech Reformation and Hussite Revolution’, *Oxford Bibliographies* [website], (28<sup>th</sup> August 2018) <<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0108.xml>>, accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2019.

<sup>590</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 99

<sup>591</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 3

Christian-Ottoman affairs, such as in his chapter 15: *Concerning Gods punishment for our sins, which happened in the Serbian or Raškan Kingdom*. In this chapter, Mihailović perceived the mid-fourteenth-century conquests of Thracian (i.e., Adrianople or Edirne) and of Bulgarian lands as punishment from God, rather than as a result of Ottoman military effectiveness. Mihailović showed us this by discussing a dream of the Serb King Stepan Uroš V (r. 1355-71): an angel came to him, took his sword and gave it to the Turks<sup>592</sup>, symbolising Turkish victory. This was further explained when Uroš visited an anchorite to confess his fear of the sins of his father (Stepan Dušan IV, r. 1346-55).<sup>593</sup> At least for Mihailović, God enforced the upcoming defeat of Stefan Uroš V as a punishment. Turkish victory, no matter how effectively or ineffectively the Turks fought, was divinely guaranteed. According to Mihailović, God had guaranteed Turkish victories in the Balkans because “*when Christian carries on a struggle against Christian, all of that is loathsome before God*”.<sup>594</sup> God was punishing the Serbs, Greeks and Bosnians etc. because they were fighting each other and not the ‘heathen’-Ottomans.

Another ‘example of divine intervention’ aiding Ottoman expansion continued in the same chapter. Mihailović reasoned Stepan Uroš V’s lack of strategy and inability to “*pay heed to the Emperor (i.e., Sultan) at all, but only to his own great might*”<sup>595</sup> was not Uroš’s fault, rather, “*for the sins of his father the Lord God took away his reason*”<sup>596</sup>. This is curious. Uroš V was regarded at that time as having a weak character and rule<sup>597</sup> (hence

---

<sup>592</sup> Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), p. 23

<sup>593</sup> Ibid

<sup>594</sup> Ibid, p. 53

<sup>595</sup> Ibid, p. 23

<sup>596</sup> Ibid, p. 22

<sup>597</sup> Rade Mihaljčić, *The Fall of the Serbian Empire*, (Belgrade, Srpska školska knjiga, 1975) p. 11-12

his future title, Uroš the Weak). His father, by comparison, had expanded Serb territory and is acknowledged by Serb nationalists today as their greatest medieval ruler.

Mihailović was essentially shifting the blame for defeat from Uroš's poor leadership and strategy to divine intervention by God. While this predated Mihailović's capture, Mihailović's unusual observation shows us how Mihailović preconceived Ottoman expansion. This perception did not change after his time as a Janissary, despite witnessing numerous Ottoman victories. It shows us how important God and divine intervention was to the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans in the eyes of Mihailović. This belief robbed the Ottomans of credit and re-assigned it to Europeans for essentially being bad Christians.

It is impossible to say whether Mihailović genuinely believed that God himself had a role to play in Ottoman expansion. One alternative suggestion is that Mihailović may not have wanted to malign any 'heroes of the past'. He may have seen blaming divine intervention, rather than Christian military failures, as a way out of having to make direct criticism. Perhaps he blamed divine intervention in order to make the Ottoman Empire look beatable. If he portrayed the Ottoman Empire as an unbeatable war-machine, this might have discouraged Christians from crusading against the Ottomans. By claiming God has punished the Christians with divine intervention, Mihailović not only encouraged Christians to repent and crusade, but also suggested the Ottomans had only expanded because God allowed it as a punishment. Therefore, they can be beaten. It was a combination of the two. Whatever the reason, Mihailović wanted his reader to believe God had punished Christians. The Ottoman Empire was the punishment.

On the converse, George seemed to believe the Ottoman Empire was not the result of divine intervention, but of un-divine intervention. Yes, he argued that Christians were poor at being Christians, but this did not incur Gods wrath, rather it enabled the Devil. The Devil's persistent presence in George's work isolates him from Mihailović and Schiltberger. As previously stated, George believed Satan and the Ottomans were working together. The Devil, according to George, was set free and was applying his skills to enable Ottoman victory over God.<sup>598</sup> For George, this battle exceeded the mortal world and was fought in the immortal world. George did however, tell us what would be the end result of this un-divine intervention. Faithfull as ever to the *Book of Revelation*, George claimed Satan would appear in human form, and all the dead resurrected, all secrets known, all crimes committed culminating in the growth of false worship until the eleventh hour/the sixth trumpet/ the fall of Babylon.<sup>599</sup>

While I question whether Mihailović genuinely believed divine intervention had taken place, because he was otherwise such a military analyst, I do not doubt George. His motive was true to him. He taught Christians to prepare for Armageddon. He had given up on Earth. Only Heaven and Hell mattered. While Mihailović maybe have used divine intervention to encourage Christians to repent and crusade against the beatable Ottomans, George used un-divine intervention to tell us it's over, and now you must prepare for what is to come.

---

<sup>598</sup> Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics), p. 64

<sup>599</sup> Ibid, p. 70

George also neglected to lay the blame for Christian defeat at the feet of Satanic intervention itself. He never mentioned a specific battle, unlike Mihailović. He took a wider approach, lambasting the Christian in every aspect of their life, and blaming all forms of shortcomings as having enabled the Devils involvement. Contrast this with Mihailović, who laid the blame of divine intervention specifically at a lack of Christian unity against the Ottomans.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Schiltberger did discuss divine intervention much like Mihailović, arguing divine intervention enabled the Ottomans to win at war.<sup>600</sup> As is the trend with Schiltberger, however, he saw divine intervention through a different lens. Mihailović saw divine intervention as the Christian God punishing Christians, and George saw it as the Christian Devil punishing Christians. They viewed through a Christian lens. Schiltberger saw it as the Muslim God, or Allah, aiding Muslims in their time of need. Specifically, Schiltberger recalled a miracle where Bayezid was told he and his successors would come to rule the land and the sea.<sup>601</sup>

Fascinatingly, either logic could be applied to any of their examples. Perhaps Allah had helped the Ottomans defeat the Serbs, or perhaps God had yet again punished the Christians in Anatolia. We can never answer this question, for neither faith can be proven nor disproven. What it does show is how one could read an example of divine intervention through two different lenses and explains how each author had the same theme but a different divine author. Overall, the theme of divine intervention was

---

<sup>600</sup> Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970), p. 13

<sup>601</sup> Ibid

common amongst all our authors, but they could not agree on who was doing the intervening, for Mihailović it was God, Schiltberger Allah and George Satan.





## Conclusion

It is evident that that Konstantin Mihailović, Johann Schiltberger and Brother George of Mühlenbach wrote fascinating sources concerning their lives in the Ottoman Empire. We can clearly see from Chapter 1 that each author had a unique experience of slavery, each having a different 'career': Mihailović as a Janissary, Schiltberger as a Sipahi, and George an Islamic teacher and household servant. Each author underwent traumas, especially in regards to their shared moment of capture, but differing in their individual experiences thereafter: such as when George was beaten by his rural master, or when Schiltberger witnessed the execution of his comrades.

On the surface, one would expect these works to be a continuous attack on the Ottoman Empire with themes such as anti-Turkism and heavy Christian criticism of Islam. However, scratch beneath the surface, and it is evident that our authors were instead complex characters wracked by their own demons of guilt. They all had to come to terms with their service to the 'infidel'.

Mihailović's open called to those in power for a Pan-Christian crusade against the Ottoman Empire had genocidal connotations. He wanted to free Europe of Islamic rule, particularly Serbia. His guilt clearly played a part in fueling this motive, despite the irony in that Mihailović greatly aided the Ottoman cause on the battlefield, and despite the fact this brother helped them in even more senior roles 'behind the scenes'. Mihailović's portrayal of Serbia as a staunch aide to Christianity was ironic, given that Serbia (much like Mihailović) had a complex on-off again relationship with the Ottoman Empire. By contrast, George was convinced he was living at the time of the end of the world. He felt

entitled to lecture Christians all across Europe on piety and Christian-hood, despite his heresy, which clearly haunted him. It is also clear that Schiltberger was the outlier. His only desire was for fame and glory from his book from his wide target audience. He had no overarching socio-political goal, nor was he wracked with guilt.

It was also evident that while our authors all served the same empire, they had varied theories on how they rose to power. This was evident in the theme of divine intervention, where all three agreed on how and why God intervened in the world, but disagreed on which divine: with Mihailović, Schiltberger and George arguing it was God, Allah and Satan respectively. Mihailović presented Ottoman expansion as a result of their brilliance on the battlefield. While Schiltberger did not care to interpret Ottoman expansion, his experiences often exemplified Mihailović's military lines of argument. Unlike the other two memoirists, the Battle of Ankara affected Schiltberger's understanding of Ottoman expansion, causing him to see them as no great threat. This thread also runs in conjunction with Schiltberger's secret Islamic faith. George clearly saw Ottoman Expansion as the expansion of Islam, and this inevitable expansion would be the catalyst for Armageddon.

When one peruses the major secondary sources and articles in this field, one notes that far too often these authors (particularly Mihailović) have just been mined selectively for references and quotes to back up an argument, theme etc. It pays, I think, to devote, closer attention to a source as a whole. Scholars need also to assess what the authors brought to the table for the historian to use. They are not just a source. They were persons too. Each of these three troubled men had a unique story of trauma and slavery. Each had differences in their opinions and perspectives about the Ottoman Empire.

When one wishes to research Christian slaves of the Ottoman Empire—whether the research is among the secondary or primary sources—the sources in Turkish have tended to have been prioritised over these proud accounts of enslaved men telling us exactly how they understood their time. For example, a glance at his bibliography shows none of our authors were used in Halil Inalcik *'The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age: 1300-1600'*.<sup>603</sup> While some what they said was inaccurate, false or simply 'out-there', these accounts are invaluable because they arose directly from the slaves themselves. They often told us how they thought felt, even when they didn't try to tell us much, hiding their anguish. These slave narratives have shown us how they understood themselves, the Ottoman Empire and the wider European world around them matters.

My challenge was to construe how differences in their plights and circumstances led to differences in their perception of the Ottoman Empire and its causes. But we need always to remember that historical outcomes are neither mono-causal nor single perspectival. The Christian slaves of the Ottoman Empire were neither united in their opinions, nor were their opinions simple.

In conclusion, the lives and writings of Konstantin Mihailović, Johann Schiltberger and Brother George of Mühlenbach reveal the varied roles and lives of the Christian slave in the Ottoman Empire as a whole. Their accounts show how varied were the responses and the opinions of "escaped" Christian slaves on various aspects of the Ottoman Empire. Each Christian slave had to deal with trauma in their own ways. Konstantin Mihailović,

---

<sup>603</sup> Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, (Chicago, 1973) p. 233-248

Johann Schiltberger and Brother George of Mühlenbach are three men with three fascinating stories, beliefs and goals, whose works deserve to be more than a footnote here and there in the field of Ottoman history. They needed to be taken seriously and examined in their own right.

## Bibliography

Atwood, Rev. Dr. Craig, 'Czech Reformation and Hussite Revolution', *Oxford*

*Bibliographies* [website], (28<sup>th</sup> August 2018)

<[https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-](https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0108.xml)

9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0108.xml>, accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2019.

Brother George of Hungary, *Treatise on the Customs, Living Conditions and Wickedness of the Turks*, tr. David Ryan Stevenson (Atlanta, Department of Classics).

Browne, Edward Granville, *A History of Persian Literature Under Tatar Dominion*, (Charleston, Bibliolife, 2009),

Bruun, Philip, 'Notes' in Schiltberger, Johann, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer, (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970).

Çetin, Sinan, 'The Ottoman Empire in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century', (2009), in Mihailović, Konstantin, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011).

Dash, Mike. 'The Ottoman Empire's Life or Death Race', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 22 March 2012.

Doja, Albert. 'A Political History of Bektashism from Ottoman Anatolia to Contemporary Turkey', *Journal of Church and State*, 2006, 48 (2), p. 423-450

Engel, Pál, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary 895-1526* (Budapest, I.B. Tauris, 2001).

Fabini, Mark, *Church Fortresses in Transylvania: Map of Transylvania with isometric drawings of Saxon-built church-fortresses, fortified churches and peasant fortresses* (1998) 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Sibiu, Romania: Geo Strategies SA with Monumenta Publishing House, 2015.

Faroghi, Suraiya, *Approaching Ottoman History: An Introduction to the Sources* (Munich, 2000).

Fine, John, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest* (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1994).

Fodor, Pál, 'Ottoman Warfare, 1300-1453', *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume 1: Byzantium to Turkey, 1071-1453*, 1/1 (2009), p. 192-226.

Freely, John, *Inside the Seraglio: Private Lives of the Sultans in Istanbul* (New York, I.B. Tauris, 2000).

Glabas, Isidore, 'Sermon' in Vryonis Jr., Speros, 'Isidore Glabas and the Turkish

Devshirme', *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* Vol 31, No. 3 (1956), p. 433-443.

Goffman, Daniel, *The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Goodwin, Godfrey, *The Janissaries* (London, Saqi Books, 2006).

Hain, Kathryn, 'Devshirme is a contested practice', *Historia: The Alpha Rho Papers*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (2012), p. 165-176

Imber, Colin, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300-1650: The Structure of Power* (Manchester, Palgrave MacMillan, 2002).

Inalcik, Halil, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600* (Chicago, Phoenix Press, 1973).

Kaçar, Hilmi, 'The Early Ottoman State Formation: Reconsidering Paul Witteks Gaza Thesis', *Academia* (2015)

<[https://www.academia.edu/4578856/The\\_Early\\_Ottoman\\_State\\_Formation.\\_Reconsidering\\_Paul\\_Witteks\\_ghaza-thesis](https://www.academia.edu/4578856/The_Early_Ottoman_State_Formation._Reconsidering_Paul_Witteks_ghaza-thesis)>, accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2019

Kafadar, Cemal, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (Harvard, University of California Press, 1995).



Kiel, Machiel, 'The Incorporation of the Balkans into the Ottoman Empire, 1353-1453',  
*The Cambridge History of Turkey: Volume 1: Byzantium to Turkey, 1071-1453*,  
1/1 (2009), p.138-191.

Luke, 15:11-32, 'The Parable of the Lost Son', *Biblica: The International Bible Society*,  
[website], (2020)  
<<https://www.biblica.com/bible/?osis=niv:Luke.15:11%E2%80%9315:32>>,  
accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

Malcolm, Noel, *Bosnia: A Short History* (London, Pan Books, 2002).

Marshall, Tim, *Worth Dying For: The Power and Politics of Flags* (London, Elliot and  
Thompson, 2016).

Mihailović, Konstantin, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus  
Wiener Publishers, 2011).

Mihaljčić, Rade, *The Fall of the Serbian Empire* (Belgrade, Srpska školska knjiga Beograd,  
1975).

Necipoğlu, Gülru, *Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapi Palace in the  
Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Harvard, The MIT Press, 1991).

Necipoğlu, Nevra, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire* (Istanbul, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Neumann, Karl Friedrich in Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970).

Palmer, J.A.B., 'Fr. Georgius de Hungaria, O.P., and the *Tractatus de Moribus Condicionibus et Nequicia Turcorum*', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 34/1 (1951), p. 44-68.

Quataert, Donald, *The Ottoman Empire 1700-1922* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Rodogno, Davide, *Fascism's European Empire: Italian Occupation During the Second World War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Roemer, H.R., 'The Successors of Timur', *The Cambridge History of Iran Volume 6: The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, 6/1 (1986), p. 98-146

Schedel, Hartman, 'Constantinople', (1493), in Mihailović, Konstantin, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011).

Schiltberger, Johann, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer, (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970).

Scribble Maps, 'Custom Map of Serbia', *Scribble Maps* [website], (8<sup>th</sup> May 2019)  
<<https://www.scribblemaps.com/>>, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019.

Shaw, Stanford, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Volume 1: Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire 1208-1808*, (Los Angeles, Cambridge University Press, 1976)

Shukurov, Rustam, *The Byzantine Turks: 1204-1461* (Leiden, Brill Publishers, 2016).

Soucek, Svat, 'Chapter Notes' in Mihailović, Konstantin, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011).

Soucek, Svat, 'Introduction' in Mihailović, Konstantin, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, tr. Benjamin Stolz (New York, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011).

Spandounes, Theodore, *On the Origins of the Ottoman Emperors*, translated by Donald M. Nicol, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Stavrides, Theoharis, *The Sultan of Vezirs: The Life and Times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453-1474)*, (Nicosia, Brill Publishers, 2001),

Telfer, Buchan, 'Introduction' in Schiltberger, Johann, *The Bondage and Travels of Johan Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, In Europe, Asia and Africa, 1396-1427*, tr. J Buchan Telfer, (New York, Burt Franklin Publisher, 1970).

Vryonis, Speros, 'Isidore Glabas and the Turkish Devshirme', *Speculum* Vol. 31, No. 3 (1956), p. 433-443.

Wells, H.G., *The Outline of History* (New York, The MacMillan Company, 1921).