

Chapter LXVIII: Reign Of Mahomet The Second, Extinction Of Eastern Empire.--Part I.

Reign And Character Of Mahomet The Second.--Siege, Assault, And Final Conquest, Of Constantinople By The Turks.--Death Of Constantine Palæologus.--Servitude Of The Greeks.--Extinction Of The Roman Empire In The East.--Consternation Of Europe.--Conquests And Death Of Mahomet The Second.

The siege of Constantinople by the Turks attracts our first attention to the person and character of the great destroyer. Mahomet the Second [1] was the son of the second Amurath; and though his mother has been decorated with the titles of Christian and princess, she is more probably confounded with the numerous concubines who peopled from every climate the harem of the sultan. His first education and sentiments were those of a devout Mussulman; and as often as he conversed with an infidel, he purified his hands and face by the legal rites of ablution. Age and empire appear to have relaxed this narrow bigotry: his aspiring genius disdained to acknowledge a power above his own; and in his looser hours he presumed (it is said) to brand the prophet of Mecca as a robber and impostor. Yet the sultan persevered in a decent reverence for the doctrine and discipline of the Koran: [2] his private indiscretion must have been sacred from the vulgar ear; and we should suspect the credulity of strangers and sectaries, so prone to believe that a mind which is hardened against truth must be armed with superior contempt for absurdity and error. Under the tuition of the most skilful masters,

Mahomet advanced with an early and rapid progress in the paths of knowledge; and besides his native tongue it is affirmed that he spoke or understood five languages, [3] the Arabic, the Persian, the Chaldæan or Hebrew, the Latin, and the Greek. The Persian might indeed contribute to his amusement, and the Arabic to his edification; and such studies are familiar to the Oriental youth. In the intercourse of the Greeks and Turks, a conqueror might wish to converse with the people over which he was ambitious to reign: his own praises in Latin poetry [4] or prose [5] might find a passage to the royal ear; but what use or merit could recommend to the statesman or the scholar the uncouth dialect of his Hebrew slaves? The history and geography of the world were familiar to his memory: the lives of the heroes of the East, perhaps of the West, [6] excited his emulation: his skill in astrology is excused by the folly of the times, and supposes some rudiments of mathematical science; and a profane taste for the arts is betrayed in his liberal invitation and reward of the painters of Italy. [7] But the influence of religion and learning were employed without effect on his savage and licentious nature. I will not transcribe, nor do I firmly believe, the stories of his fourteen pages, whose bellies were ripped open in search of a stolen melon; or of the beautiful slave, whose head he severed from her body, to convince the Janizaries that their master was not the votary of love. [701] His sobriety is attested by the silence of the Turkish annals, which accuse three, and three only, of the Ottoman line of the vice of drunkenness. [8] But it cannot be denied that his passions were at once furious and inexorable; that in the palace, as in the field, a torrent of blood was spilt on the slightest provocation; and that the noblest

of the captive youth were often dishonored by his unnatural lust. In the Albanian war he studied the lessons, and soon surpassed the example, of his father; and the conquest of two empires, twelve kingdoms, and two hundred cities, a vain and flattering account, is ascribed to his invincible sword. He was doubtless a soldier, and possibly a general; Constantinople has sealed his glory; but if we compare the means, the obstacles, and the achievements, Mahomet the Second must blush to sustain a parallel with Alexander or Timour. Under his command, the Ottoman forces were always more numerous than their enemies; yet their progress was bounded by the Euphrates and the Adriatic; and his arms were checked by Huniades and Scanderbeg, by the Rhodian knights and by the Persian king.

[Footnote 1: For the character of Mahomet II. it is dangerous to trust either the Turks or the Christians. The most moderate picture appears to be drawn by Phranza, (l. i. c. 33,) whose resentment had cooled in age and solitude; see likewise Spondanus, (A.D. 1451, No. 11,) and the continuator of Fleury, (tom. xxii. p. 552,) the Elogia of Paulus Jovius, (l. iii. p. 164--166,) and the Dictionnaire de Bayle, (tom. iii. p. 273--279.)]

[Footnote 2: Cantemir, (p. 115.) and the mosques which he founded, attest his public regard for religion. Mahomet freely disputed with the Gennadius on the two religions, (Spond. A.D. 1453, No. 22.)]

[Footnote 3: *Quinque linguas præter suam noverat, Græcam, Latinam,*

Chaldaicam, Persicam. The Latin translator of Phranza has dropped the Arabic, which the Koran must recommend to every Mussulman. *

Note: It appears in the original Greek text, p. 95, edit. Bonn.--M.]

[Footnote 4: Philelphus, by a Latin ode, requested and obtained the liberty of his wife's mother and sisters from the conqueror of Constantinople. It was delivered into the sultan's hands by the envoys of the duke of Milan. Philelphus himself was suspected of a design of retiring to Constantinople; yet the orator often sounded the trumpet of holy war, (see his Life by M. Lancelot, in the Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions, tom. x. p. 718, 724, &c.)]

[Footnote 5: Robert Valturio published at Verona, in 1483, his xii. books de Re Militari, in which he first mentions the use of bombs. By his patron Sigismund Malatesta, prince of Rimini, it had been addressed with a Latin epistle to Mahomet II.]

[Footnote 6: According to Phranza, he assiduously studied the lives and actions of Alexander, Augustus, Constantine, and Theodosius. I have read somewhere, that Plutarch's Lives were translated by his orders into the Turkish language. If the sultan himself understood Greek, it must have been for the benefit of his subjects. Yet these lives are a school of freedom as well as of valor. *

Note: Von Hammer disdainfully rejects this fable of Mahomet's knowledge of languages. Knolles adds, that he delighted in reading the history of Alexander the Great, and of Julius Cæsar. The former, no doubt, was the

Persian legend, which, it is remarkable, came back to Europe, and was popular throughout the middle ages as the "Romaunt of Alexander." The founder of the Imperial dynasty of Rome, according to M. Von Hammer, is altogether unknown in the East. Mahomet was a great patron of Turkish literature: the romantic poems of Persia were translated, or imitated, under his patronage. Von Hammer vol ii. p. 268.--M.]

[Footnote 7: The famous Gentile Bellino, whom he had invited from Venice, was dismissed with a chain and collar of gold, and a purse of 3000 ducats. With Voltaire I laugh at the foolish story of a slave purposely beheaded to instruct the painter in the action of the muscles.]

[Footnote 701: This story, the subject of Johnson's Irene, is rejected by M. Von Hammer, vol. ii. p. 208. The German historian's general estimate of Mahomet's character agrees in its more marked features with Gibbon's.--M.]

[Footnote 8: These Imperial drunkards were Soliman I., Selim II., and Amurath IV., (Cantemir, p. 61.) The sophis of Persia can produce a more regular succession; and in the last age, our European travellers were the witnesses and companions of their revels.]

In the reign of Amurath, he twice tasted of royalty, and twice descended from the throne: his tender age was incapable of opposing his father's restoration, but never could he forgive the viziers who had recommended

that salutary measure. His nuptials were celebrated with the daughter of a Turkman emir; and, after a festival of two months, he departed from Adrianople with his bride, to reside in the government of Magnesia. Before the end of six weeks, he was recalled by a sudden message from the divan, which announced the decease of Amurath, and the mutinous spirit of the Janizaries. His speed and vigor commanded their obedience: he passed the Hellespont with a chosen guard: and at the distance of a mile from Adrianople, the viziers and emirs, the imams and cadhis, the soldiers and the people, fell prostrate before the new sultan. They affected to weep, they affected to rejoice: he ascended the throne at the age of twenty-one years, and removed the cause of sedition by the death, the inevitable death, of his infant brothers. [9] [901] The ambassadors of Europe and Asia soon appeared to congratulate his accession and solicit his friendship; and to all he spoke the language of moderation and peace. The confidence of the Greek emperor was revived by the solemn oaths and fair assurances with which he sealed the ratification of the treaty: and a rich domain on the banks of the Strymon was assigned for the annual payment of three hundred thousand aspers, the pension of an Ottoman prince, who was detained at his request in the Byzantine court. Yet the neighbors of Mahomet might tremble at the severity with which a youthful monarch reformed the pomp of his father's household: the expenses of luxury were applied to those of ambition, and a useless train of seven thousand falconers was either dismissed from his service, or enlisted in his troops. [902] In the first summer of his reign, he visited with an army the Asiatic provinces; but after humbling the pride, Mahomet accepted the submission, of the

Caramanian, that he might not be diverted by the smallest obstacle from the execution of his great design. [10]

[Footnote 9: Calapin, one of these royal infants, was saved from his cruel brother, and baptized at Rome under the name of Callistus Othomannus. The emperor Frederic III. presented him with an estate in Austria, where he ended his life; and Cuspinian, who in his youth conversed with the aged prince at Vienna, applauds his piety and wisdom, (de Cæsaribus, p. 672, 673.)]

[Footnote 901: Ahmed, the son of a Greek princess, was the object of his especial jealousy. Von Hammer, p. 501.--M.]

[Footnote 902: The Janizaries obtained, for the first time, a gift on the accession of a new sovereign, p. 504.--M.]

[Footnote 10: See the accession of Mahomet II. in Ducas, (c. 33,) Phranza, (l. i. c. 33, l. iii. c. 2,) Chalcondyles, (l. vii. p. 199,) and Cantemir, (p. 96.)]

The Mahometan, and more especially the Turkish casuists, have pronounced that no promise can bind the faithful against the interest and duty of their religion; and that the sultan may abrogate his own treaties and those of his predecessors. The justice and magnanimity of Amurath had scorned this immoral privilege; but his son, though the proudest of men, could stoop from ambition to the basest arts of dissimulation

and deceit. Peace was on his lips, while war was in his heart: he incessantly sighed for the possession of Constantinople; and the Greeks, by their own indiscretion, afforded the first pretence of the fatal rupture. [11] Instead of laboring to be forgotten, their ambassadors pursued his camp, to demand the payment, and even the increase, of their annual stipend: the divan was importuned by their complaints, and the vizier, a secret friend of the Christians, was constrained to deliver the sense of his brethren. "Ye foolish and miserable Romans," said Calil, "we know your devices, and ye are ignorant of your own danger! The scrupulous Amurath is no more; his throne is occupied by a young conqueror, whom no laws can bind, and no obstacles can resist: and if you escape from his hands, give praise to the divine clemency, which yet delays the chastisement of your sins. Why do ye seek to affright us by vain and indirect menaces? Release the fugitive Orchan, crown him sultan of Romania; call the Hungarians from beyond the Danube; arm against us the nations of the West; and be assured, that you will only provoke and precipitate your ruin." But if the fears of the ambassadors were alarmed by the stern language of the vizier, they were soothed by the courteous audience and friendly speeches of the Ottoman prince; and Mahomet assured them that on his return to Adrianople he would redress the grievances, and consult the true interests, of the Greeks. No sooner had he repassed the Hellespont, than he issued a mandate to suppress their pension, and to expel their officers from the banks of the Strymon: in this measure he betrayed a hostile mind; and the second order announced, and in some degree commenced, the siege of Constantinople. In the narrow pass of the Bosphorus, an Asiatic fortress had formerly been raised by

his grandfather; in the opposite situation, on the European side, he resolved to erect a more formidable castle; and a thousand masons were commanded to assemble in the spring on a spot named Asomaton, about five miles from the Greek metropolis. [12] Persuasion is the resource of the feeble; and the feeble can seldom persuade: the ambassadors of the emperor attempted, without success, to divert Mahomet from the execution of his design. They represented, that his grandfather had solicited the permission of Manuel to build a castle on his own territories; but that this double fortification, which would command the strait, could only tend to violate the alliance of the nations; to intercept the Latins who traded in the Black Sea, and perhaps to annihilate the subsistence of the city. "I form the enterprise," replied the perfidious sultan, "against the city; but the empire of Constantinople is measured by her walls. Have you forgot the distress to which my father was reduced when you formed a league with the Hungarians; when they invaded our country by land, and the Hellespont was occupied by the French galleys? Amurath was compelled to force the passage of the Bosphorus; and your strength was not equal to your malevolence. I was then a child at Adrianople; the Moslems trembled; and, for a while, the Gabours [13] insulted our disgrace. But when my father had triumphed in the field of Warna, he vowed to erect a fort on the western shore, and that vow it is my duty to accomplish. Have ye the right, have ye the power, to control my actions on my own ground? For that ground is my own: as far as the shores of the Bosphorus, Asia is inhabited by the Turks, and Europe is deserted by the Romans. Return, and inform your king, that the present Ottoman is far different from his predecessors; that his resolutions

surpass their wishes; and that he performs more than they could resolve. Return in safety--but the next who delivers a similar message may expect to be flayed alive." After this declaration, Constantine, the first of the Greeks in spirit as in rank, [14] had determined to unsheathe the sword, and to resist the approach and establishment of the Turks on the Bosphorus. He was disarmed by the advice of his civil and ecclesiastical ministers, who recommended a system less generous, and even less prudent, than his own, to approve their patience and long-suffering, to brand the Ottoman with the name and guilt of an aggressor, and to depend on chance and time for their own safety, and the destruction of a fort which could not long be maintained in the neighborhood of a great and populous city. Amidst hope and fear, the fears of the wise, and the hopes of the credulous, the winter rolled away; the proper business of each man, and each hour, was postponed; and the Greeks shut their eyes against the impending danger, till the arrival of the spring and the sultan decide the assurance of their ruin.

[Footnote 11: Before I enter on the siege of Constantinople, I shall observe, that except the short hints of Cantemir and Leunclavius, I have not been able to obtain any Turkish account of this conquest; such an account as we possess of the siege of Rhodes by Soliman II., (*Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions*, tom. xxvi. p. 723--769.) I must therefore depend on the Greeks, whose prejudices, in some degree, are subdued by their distress. Our standard texts are those of Ducas, (c. 34--42,) Phranza, (l. iii. c. 7--20,) Chalcondyles, (l. viii. p. 201--214,) and Leonardus Chiensis, (*Historia C. P. a Turco expugnatae*.

Norimberghæ, 1544, in 4to., 20 leaves.) The last of these narratives is the earliest in date, since it was composed in the Isle of Chios, the 16th of August, 1453, only seventy-nine days after the loss of the city, and in the first confusion of ideas and passions. Some hints may be added from an epistle of Cardinal Isidore (in *Farragine Rerum Turcicarum, ad calcem Chalcondyl. Clauseri, Basil, 1556*) to Pope Nicholas V., and a tract of Theodosius Zygomala, which he addressed in the year 1581 to Martin Crucius, (*Turco-Græcia, l. i. p. 74--98, Basil, 1584.*) The various facts and materials are briefly, though critically, reviewed by Spondanus, (A.D. 1453, No. 1--27.) The hearsay relations of Monstrelet and the distant Latins I shall take leave to disregard. *

Note: M. Von Hammer has added little new information on the siege of Constantinople, and, by his general agreement, has borne an honorable testimony to the truth, and by his close imitation to the graphic spirit and boldness, of Gibbon.--M.]

[Footnote 12: The situation of the fortress, and the topography of the Bosphorus, are best learned from Peter Gyllius, (*de Bosphoro Thracio, l. ii. c. 13.*) Leunclavius, (*Pandect. p. 445.*) and Tournefort, (*Voyage dans le Levant, tom. ii. lettre xv. p. 443, 444;*) but I must regret the map or plan which Tournefort sent to the French minister of the marine. The reader may turn back to chap. xvii. of this History.]

[Footnote 13: The opprobrious name which the Turks bestow on the infidels, is expressed *Kabour* by Ducas, and *Giaour* by Leunclavius and the moderns. The former term is derived by Ducange (*Gloss. Græc tom.*

i. p. 530) from Kabouron, in vulgar Greek, a tortoise, as denoting a retrograde motion from the faith. But alas! Gabour is no more than Gheber, which was transferred from the Persian to the Turkish language, from the worshippers of fire to those of the crucifix, (D'Herbelot, *Bibliot. Orient.* p. 375.)]

[Footnote 14: Phranza does justice to his master's sense and courage. *Calliditatem hominis non ignorans Imperator prior arma movere constituit, and stigmatizes the folly of the cum sacri tum profani proceres, which he had heard, amentes spe vanâ pasci.* Ducas was not a privy-counsellor.]

Of a master who never forgives, the orders are seldom disobeyed. On the twenty-sixth of March, the appointed spot of Asomaton was covered with an active swarm of Turkish artificers; and the materials by sea and land were diligently transported from Europe and Asia. [15] The lime had been burnt in Cataphrygia; the timber was cut down in the woods of Heraclea and Nicomedia; and the stones were dug from the Anatolian quarries. Each of the thousand masons was assisted by two workmen; and a measure of two cubits was marked for their daily task. The fortress [16] was built in a triangular form; each angle was flanked by a strong and massy tower; one on the declivity of the hill, two along the sea-shore: a thickness of twenty-two feet was assigned for the walls, thirty for the towers; and the whole building was covered with a solid platform of lead. Mahomet himself pressed and directed the work with indefatigable ardor: his three viziers claimed the honor of finishing their respective towers;

the zeal of the cadhis emulated that of the Janizaries; the meanest labor was ennobled by the service of God and the sultan; and the diligence of the multitude was quickened by the eye of a despot, whose smile was the hope of fortune, and whose frown was the messenger of death. The Greek emperor beheld with terror the irresistible progress of the work; and vainly strove, by flattery and gifts, to assuage an implacable foe, who sought, and secretly fomented, the slightest occasion of a quarrel. Such occasions must soon and inevitably be found. The ruins of stately churches, and even the marble columns which had been consecrated to Saint Michael the archangel, were employed without scruple by the profane and rapacious Moslems; and some Christians, who presumed to oppose the removal, received from their hands the crown of martyrdom. Constantine had solicited a Turkish guard to protect the fields and harvests of his subjects: the guard was fixed; but their first order was to allow free pasture to the mules and horses of the camp, and to defend their brethren if they should be molested by the natives. The retinue of an Ottoman chief had left their horses to pass the night among the ripe corn; the damage was felt; the insult was resented; and several of both nations were slain in a tumultuous conflict. Mahomet listened with joy to the complaint; and a detachment was commanded to exterminate the guilty village: the guilty had fled; but forty innocent and unsuspecting reapers were massacred by the soldiers. Till this provocation, Constantinople had been opened to the visits of commerce and curiosity: on the first alarm, the gates were shut; but the emperor, still anxious for peace, released on the third day his Turkish captives; [17] and expressed, in a last message, the

firm resignation of a Christian and a soldier. "Since neither oaths, nor treaty, nor submission, can secure peace, pursue," said he to Mahomet, "your impious warfare. My trust is in God alone; if it should please him to mollify your heart, I shall rejoice in the happy change; if he delivers the city into your hands, I submit without a murmur to his holy will. But until the Judge of the earth shall pronounce between us, it is my duty to live and die in the defence of my people." The sultan's answer was hostile and decisive: his fortifications were completed; and before his departure for Adrianople, he stationed a vigilant Aga and four hundred Janizaries, to levy a tribute on the ships of every nation that should pass within the reach of their cannon. A Venetian vessel, refusing obedience to the new lords of the Bosphorus, was sunk with a single bullet. [171] The master and thirty sailors escaped in the boat; but they were dragged in chains to the Porte: the chief was impaled; his companions were beheaded; and the historian Ducas [18] beheld, at Demotica, their bodies exposed to the wild beasts. The siege of Constantinople was deferred till the ensuing spring; but an Ottoman army marched into the Morea to divert the force of the brothers of Constantine. At this æra of calamity, one of these princes, the despot Thomas, was blessed or afflicted with the birth of a son; "the last heir," says the plaintive Phranza, "of the last spark of the Roman empire." [19]

[Footnote 15: Instead of this clear and consistent account, the Turkish Annals (Cantemir, p. 97) revived the foolish tale of the ox's hide, and Dido's stratagem in the foundation of Carthage. These annals (unless we

are swayed by an anti-Christian prejudice) are far less valuable than the Greek historians.]

[Footnote 16: In the dimensions of this fortress, the old castle of Europe, Phranza does not exactly agree with Chalcondyles, whose description has been verified on the spot by his editor Leunclavius.]

[Footnote 17: Among these were some pages of Mahomet, so conscious of his inexorable rigor, that they begged to lose their heads in the city unless they could return before sunset.]

[Footnote 171: This was from a model cannon cast by Urban the Hungarian. See p. 291. Von Hammer. p. 510.--M.]

[Footnote 18: Ducas, c. 35. Phranza, (l. iii. c. 3,) who had sailed in his vessel, commemorates the Venetian pilot as a martyr.]

[Footnote 19: Auctum est Palæologorum genus, et Imperii successor, parvæque Romanorum scintillæ hæres natus, Andreas, &c., (Phranza, l. iii. c. 7.) The strong expression was inspired by his feelings.]

The Greeks and the Turks passed an anxious and sleepless winter: the former were kept awake by their fears, the latter by their hopes; both by the preparations of defence and attack; and the two emperors, who had the most to lose or to gain, were the most deeply affected by the national sentiment. In Mahomet, that sentiment was inflamed by the

ardor of his youth and temper: he amused his leisure with building at Adrianople [20] the lofty palace of Jehan Numa, (the watchtower of the world;) but his serious thoughts were irrevocably bent on the conquest of the city of Cæsar. At the dead of night, about the second watch, he started from his bed, and commanded the instant attendance of his prime vizier. The message, the hour, the prince, and his own situation, alarmed the guilty conscience of Calil Basha; who had possessed the confidence, and advised the restoration, of Amurath. On the accession of the son, the vizier was confirmed in his office and the appearances of favor; but the veteran statesman was not insensible that he trod on a thin and slippery ice, which might break under his footsteps, and plunge him in the abyss. His friendship for the Christians, which might be innocent under the late reign, had stigmatized him with the name of Gabour Ortachi, or foster-brother of the infidels; [21] and his avarice entertained a venal and treasonable correspondence, which was detected and punished after the conclusion of the war. On receiving the royal mandate, he embraced, perhaps for the last time, his wife and children; filled a cup with pieces of gold, hastened to the palace, adored the sultan, and offered, according to the Oriental custom, the slight tribute of his duty and gratitude. [22] "It is not my wish," said Mahomet, "to resume my gifts, but rather to heap and multiply them on thy head. In my turn, I ask a present far more valuable and important;--Constantinople." As soon as the vizier had recovered from his surprise, "The same God," said he, "who has already given thee so large a portion of the Roman empire, will not deny the remnant, and the capital. His providence, and thy power, assure thy success; and myself,

with the rest of thy faithful slaves, will sacrifice our lives and fortunes."--"Lala," [23] (or preceptor,) continued the sultan, "do you see this pillow? All the night, in my agitation, I have pulled it on one side and the other; I have risen from my bed, again have I lain down; yet sleep has not visited these weary eyes. Beware of the gold and silver of the Romans: in arms we are superior; and with the aid of God, and the prayers of the prophet, we shall speedily become masters of Constantinople." To sound the disposition of his soldiers, he often wandered through the streets alone, and in disguise; and it was fatal to discover the sultan, when he wished to escape from the vulgar eye. His hours were spent in delineating the plan of the hostile city; in debating with his generals and engineers, on what spot he should erect his batteries; on which side he should assault the walls; where he should spring his mines; to what place he should apply his scaling-ladders: and the exercises of the day repeated and proved the lucubrations of the night.

[Footnote 20: Cantemir, p. 97, 98. The sultan was either doubtful of his conquest, or ignorant of the superior merits of Constantinople. A city or a kingdom may sometimes be ruined by the Imperial fortune of their sovereign.]

[Footnote 21: SuntrojoV, by the president Cousin, is translated père nourricier, most correctly indeed from the Latin version; but in his haste he has overlooked the note by which Ishmael Boillaud (ad Ducam, c.

35) acknowledges and rectifies his own error.]

[Footnote 22: The Oriental custom of never appearing without gifts before a sovereign or a superior is of high antiquity, and seems analogous with the idea of sacrifice, still more ancient and universal. See the examples of such Persian gifts, Ælian, Hist. Var. 1. i. c. 31, 32, 33.]

[Footnote 23: The Lala of the Turks (Cantemir, p. 34) and the Tata of the Greeks (Ducas, c. 35) are derived from the natural language of children; and it may be observed, that all such primitive words which denote their parents, are the simple repetition of one syllable, composed of a labial or a dental consonant and an open vowel, (Des Brosses, Mécanisme des Langues, tom. i. p. 231--247.)]