

DAY OF SHAME

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By Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 24 May 2021

May 29 is a holiday in Turkey. It is celebrated with great pomp and ceremony, especially in Istanbul because it marks the anniversary of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople on that day in 1453. After a 53-day siege, the forces of Sultan Mehmet II were able to breach the walls of the city, following weeks of intense bombardment. Public prayers are held at the mausoleum of Sultan Mehmet II and ceremonies are conducted at three locations where the sultan's statues are located. A re-enactment of the final battle, a musical laser show, fireworks, dances, music, adulatory speeches and a parade by colorfully dressed Ottoman soldiers highlight the Istanbul celebrations. Meanwhile, bookstores do a roaring trade selling books, commemorative albums, and magazines about the Ottoman victory nearly six centuries ago.

Last May, President Erdogan described the Mehmet II's victory as "not only one of the greatest victories in history but also a turning point that ushered a new era." The man who has the integrity of a hyena and the style of a poison toad added that Mehmet the Conqueror and others had helped Turks "call these lands our home." A typically strange phrasing when Constantinople is 2,600 miles (as the crow flies) from the Turks' arid homeland in Central Asia. But then again, May 29th in Turkish-occupied Anatolia is a day full of hot air, chest thumping, racism, and nostalgia for the good old days when slaughtering Christians brought one closer to the 72 celestial hours.

A person who respects the truth and is honorable would think twice about celebrating the sham and shameful "victory" on May 29, 1453.

What kind of victory was it when the Byzantine defenders numbered 7,000 (about 2,000 were Italian) while the Ottoman forces had 80,000 fighters. According to various European sources, the Ottoman army numbered 300,000. In every category (ships, cannons, bombards, cavalry, horse transport, large rowing boats), the Ottomans vastly outnumbered the defenders who were led by Emperor Constantine XI Palaiologos. Despite their huge military advantage, it took the Turks almost two months to conquer the city.

What kind of victory was it when the Byzantium "Empire" was just the city of Constantinople and several villages? Turks boast they vanquished the Byzantium Empire but the "empire" they vanquished was a city of 50,000. It wasn't the empire of Emperor Basil I and II and General Narses or the empire that ruled over the lands from the Euphrates to the Gibraltar? It wasn't the empire whose capital was the most sophisticated in Europe and had a population of 400,000. A great city where women taught at the universities.

Byzantine Empire had fractured long before the Ottoman hordes showed up at the gates of Constantine the Great's city. Throughout its history, Byzantium had overcome close to 30 sieges but had been severely wounded by the sacking (1204) of Crusaders. In the previous decade it had also been ravaged by the Black Death (bubonic plague).

By 1450—a few years before the Turk turned up, the empire—actually city-state—was impoverished and exhausted. The Turks conquered a shrunken city and not an empire.

What kind of Turkish victory is it when mostly Spanish sailors manned the Turkish ships, the Ottoman sappers were Serbs and the Ottoman cavalry had a great many Serb mercenaries?

What kind of Turkish victory is it when single cannon, built by a Hungarian named Orban, played a decisive role in breaching the city walls? Orban's cannon was an unheard-of 27 ft long and could deliver 600 lb. stones over a mile.

What kind of glorious victory is it when just before the Ottoman attack the sultan beheaded the Byzantine ambassador sent to negotiate with him?

What kind of victory is it when “blood flowed through the streets like rainwater after a sudden storm, corpses floated out to the sea like melons along a canal,” according to Greek historian George Sphrantzes? The corpses were mostly those of Greek civilians. As one historian put it, they had become “food for the sword.”

What kind of victory is it when the winners' losses are far higher than that of the defeated? Because of their vast number, Turks could absorb the losses while the 7,000-Byzantium army couldn't.

What kind of victory is it when Turks raped teenage girls and good-looking teenage boys? It's documented that after the city was conquered, soldiers' tents were full of teenagers (girls and boys) waiting to be raped and sold as slaves. After three days of looting and desecrating churches, about 30,000 of the inhabitants were sold into slavery.

What kind of victory is it when old people and the infirm who had sought shelter in their churches were hacked to death?

What kind of victory is it when the winner occupies the main cathedral (Hagia Sophia) of the vanquished and converts it to a mosque? Didn't the Turks have the creativity, discipline, craft, and dedication to build a mosque for their God rather than steal a holy place Greeks had built for their God? Any thinking or honorable Turk would feel humiliated that one of its greatest leaders saw fit to steal his enemy's sacred ground. We are not talking about shameless Erdogan who recently converted the church to a mosque.

Emperor Constantine XI died while leading a final charge in defense of his city. Sultan Mehmet lived till the age of 48. By then, he was emaciated and looked twenty years older. In the Ottoman tradition of patricide and fratricide, he was killed by poisoning upon the orders of his son. Bayezid II paid his father's Persian doctor to poison the “conqueror” of the Byzantium “Empire”.

This year, too, “sultan” Erdogan will celebrate the shameful victory of Mehmet II and fill the air with his usual rancid proclamations and awkward braggadocio. Of course, the man who looks as if he has been weaned on pickle has no honor or sense of shame. Consistent with his style, he will probably

exaggerate the power of the Byzantium's defenders so as to inflate the reputation of Mehmet II and the horde of 300,000 which was preoccupied with raping infidel girls and boys and hacking to death defenceless old people in Hagia Sophia.

There are no comments yet.