

## FOREWORD

THIS FRAGMENTED DIARY OF KONSTANTIN MIHAILOVIC – A MINER TURNED JANISSARY – CHRONICLES THE FALL OF CONSTANTINOPLE (1453) AND THE FALL OF NOVO BRDO (1455). HENCE, THIS TEXT EXPLORES THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, SPECIFICALLY UNDER THE RULE OF MEHMED THE CONQUEROR, IN CLOSER DETAIL THROUGH THE LENS OF MILITARY CAMPAIGNS. MIHAILOVIC WAS AN EYEWITNESS TO MAJOR 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY EVENTS IN OTTOMAN HISTORY; HOWEVER, AS WITH ALL EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS, MIHAILOVIC'S DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENTS IS INCONSISTENT WITH OTHER HISTORICAL SOURCES. AS SUCH, I HAVE TAKEN THE LIBERTY OF COMMENTING ON SECTIONS OF THE DIARY WHICH ARE UNCLEAR OR FACTUALLY INCORRECT.

FOLLOWING THE TURKISH ONSLAUGHT ON NOVO BRDO (1455), MIHAILOVIC WAS KIDNAPPED AND TRAINED AS A JANISSARY. ALTHOUGH HE CLAIMED TO HAVE WITNESSED MANY IMPORTANT EVENTS, INCLUDING MEHMED THE CONQUEROR'S 1462 WALLACHIAN CAMPAIGN AGAINST VLAD III DRAKUL 'THE IMPALER', AFTER BEING CONVERTED INTO A JANISSARY, THESE DETAILS ARE ABSENT FROM THE FOLLOWING TEXT DUE TO CONCERNS ABOUT CREDIBILITY. EVERYTHING WE KNOW ABOUT KONSTANTIN MIHAILOVIC ORIGINATES FROM HIS OWN WRITING, BUT THERE IS NO WAY TO CORROBORATE MANY DETAILS. IN FACT, THERE IS MUCH SCHOLARLY DEBATE ABOUT WHETHER MIHAILOVIC WAS ACTUALLY A JANISSARY. THEREFORE, THIS DIARY ENDS ABRUPTLY WITH AN EMPTY ENTRY AFTER THE FALL OF NOVO BRDO.

THE DIARY IS SUPPLEMENTED BY AN ASSORTMENT OF ARTISTIC PIECES TO HELP PLACE THE NARRATIVE IN CONTEXT.

NAGA RUDRAPATNA

23<sup>rd</sup> March 1453

Last night, the Despot announced I would be accompanying the cavalry heading towards the Beylik of Karaman. I suppose we must journey to Ibrahim Bey's dominion in accordance with that agreement the Despot formed with the Sultan -- at the Turkish Emperor's command, the Despot must send him fifteen hundred horses. I quickly packed enough supplies for the twelve-day journey and bid farewell to my two brothers. Our party left Novo Brdo at sunrise. This morning, as we rode, a curious thought came to mind. How might I, being a miner, be of use to the Turkish Emperor? Might he demand that I take up arms against his foes as well?

26<sup>th</sup> March 1453

Today, our party received word that the Turkish Emperor has surrounded Stamboul [Constantinople]. It appears the Sultan deceived our Despot; we are not headed to the Beylik of Karaman after all. I suppose this dishonorable heathen ruler deceived our Christian brethren in Stamboul as well. How I wish I could return home to Novo Brdo with my dear friend Stefan! But the older men have already informed us of our fate if we choose to return home – certain death at the hands of the Turks. Is there nowhere to hide from these heathens? I can sense growing discontent in the party. My companions are reluctant to help those ignoble heathens as well, but they fear greatly for their safety. Unfortunately, it seems our course has permanently altered: we must ride until we reach Rumeli Hisari, the Turkish Emperor's new fortress. But, how can we willingly participate in such treachery? Assisting the Turks attack our Christian brethren in Stamboul cannot be what the Lord God, creator of heaven and earth, would want!



(Schedel, Wolgemut & Pleydenwurff)

30<sup>th</sup> March 1453

We finally arrived at Rumeli Hisari this evening. As we approached the Turkish fortress, I caught a glimpse of the majestic walls of Stamboul. For a brief moment, I forgot the unsavory reason for my visit and simply marveled at the limestone-and-brick twelve-foot tall walls. Stefan and I overheard members of the Turkish cavalry talking as they exited their red tent. According to Stefan [Konstantin, the author of this diary, is not fluent in Ottoman Turkish, but his friend Stefan who had served the Ottoman Sultan previously can understand some of the language], they were discussing how the Sultan had been anxiously awaiting our arrival. As a matter of fact, as soon as the Turkish Emperor learned of our arrival, he greeted us in person and showed us to our positions near Adrianople Gate. Interestingly, it seems the Turkish Emperor keeps a close watch on his elite infantry for as soon as he had shown us Adrianople Gate, he returned to his red-and-gold tent from which the Janissaries were in plain view. I wonder what the Janissaries are like. Stefan tells me they were originally Christian, but after being kidnapped by the Turks, they were forcibly converted to Islam. How cruel – to snatch away one’s faith? I hope Novo Brdo is never besieged by these heathens so I may never suffer a similar fate!

1<sup>st</sup> April 1453

It was astounding. The Turkish Emperor, riding gallantly on his majestic white steed, was closely followed by a swarm of around four hundred Turkish soldiers, along with at least sixty oxen. I cannot be sure, but it appeared as if the oxen were pulling a massive cannon [presumably, Konstantin witnessed the painstaking transportation of Hungarian engineer Orban’s twenty-four-foot-long “Basilic” cannon, which despite its poor aim launched cannonballs weighing more than a thousand pounds] in the direction of Stamboul. Stefan overheard the Turkish cavalry talking about a two hundred forty-kilometer journey! What resiliency! I wonder why the Lord God, creator of heaven and earth, has blessed these heathens with such powerful weaponry. I seldom see bombards near Novo Brdo, but the Sultan seems to prioritize production of these cannons. In fact, Stefan had trouble counting the number of bombards visible from our tent!



(Zonaro)

5<sup>th</sup> April 1453

It's been almost a week since Stefan and I arrived at the Sultan's new fortress. Each day, we have taken our respective positions near Adrianople Gate alongside the Turkish cavalry. Fortunately, the Sultan has not yet announced an attack against our Christian brethren in Stamboul. However, the Turks are preparing for a major event – the army has been tirelessly digging trenches across Galata at the behest of their supreme ruler. Furthermore, the Turks have started to build roads of heavily greased planks over these trenches. Stefan says nobody knows what the Sultan is plotting! But whatever the Turkish Emperor is planning will surely be revealed rather soon considering the growing restlessness amongst his soldiers.

16<sup>th</sup> April 1453

It immediately struck me as odd that the Turkish Emperor was ordering the construction of roads across Galata. Today, I may have happened upon the reason – or rather Stefan shared what he discovered. He heard a rumor from one of our fellow companions from Novo Brdo: apparently, our Christian brethren resourcefully stretched a chain across the entrance to the Golden Horn [major waterway and primary inlet of the Strait of Istanbul]! Maybe the Turkish Emperor has a plan to outwit his counterpart in Stamboul? Yet, the general consensus among our peers is that Stamboul is proving to be quite the challenge for the Sultan, but I wonder how long our brethren can keep it up?

22<sup>th</sup> April 1453

It was a magnificent spectacle. The thunderous firing of cannons along with the intense beating of drums shook me to the core: Stefan and I were left awestruck by the Sultan's actions. Stefan had heard whispers that the Turkish Emperor had commanded his best shipbuilders to build seventy vessels in a nearby forest. When I first heard of this, I burst into laughter, believing the Sultan to be an ignoble fool. Somehow, the Sultan has proven to be ingenious. But even after witnessing his brilliance, I can hardly believe that the Sultan would pursue such an audacious maneuver. I concede this heathen ruler must be very courageous to attempt such a daring endeavor – transporting the ships to the Golden Horn over-land, on the planks prepared by the army. What fortune to transport vessels in this manner with no consequences! [the ships were supposedly unscathed]. Nevertheless, I cannot help but feel ashamed with my reaction to this spectacle. I am a Christian first and foremost and my brethren entrapped within the old walls of Stamboul will now suffer on two fronts – land and sea. I pray our Savior will safeguard the true believers.





(Zonaro)

29<sup>th</sup> April 1453

Late last night, our brave brethren attempted to decimate the Sultan's fleet in the Golden Horn. It seems they even used fire ships -- quite the formidable weapon. However, their efforts were in vain. Once more, the heathens defied the Lord God's judgment and killed true believers. This morning, while marching to my post near Adrianople Gate, I encountered a ghastly sight -- Italian corpses impaled on stakes! Suddenly, I was overcome with uneasiness in my chest and fell to the ground. Stefan saw me collapse from a distance and rushed over to check on me. When he arrived beside me, all I could do was point towards the motionless bodies. Stefan turned to see what I was pointing towards and his facial expression changed completely. Concern for my wellbeing was instantly replaced by a strong feeling of dread! He mumbled for a time and eventually groaned, "Why must we serve these barbarians who disrespect and desecrate our Christian brethren?" I had no response.

9<sup>th</sup> May 1453

It's been a little more than a week since Stefan and I encountered that horrid sight. We are starting to feel better as there has been little talk of our Christian brethren among the Turks. Nonetheless, every few nights I experience a terribly uncomfortable nightmare and remember the Italians' lifeless faces.

14<sup>th</sup> May 1453

All of the miners from Novo Brdo were given new responsibilities today. The Turkish Emperor has decided that digging tunnels underneath the walls of Stamboul may be a fruitful endeavor. I suppose he wants to engage in tunnel warfare against our Christian brethren. It's been almost six weeks since the Sultan ordered the first firing of cannons at the walls. I wonder how much more damage Stamboul's antique walls can absorb. But perhaps we should still rejoice -- the men in charge of maintaining Stamboul's walls have regularly repaired the barrier at the slightest hint of a breach.

15<sup>th</sup> May 1453

Today was the toughest day so far in the company of the Turks. Our commander, Zaganos Pasa, is very strict and seems to ignore our suffering. I would dare say mining underneath the walls of Stamboul is the hardest job I have ever undertaken! My fellow sappers and I were thoroughly exhausted by the evening. Nonetheless, our resolve is strong and thankfully our progress thus far is satisfying our ruthless commander's demands.

16<sup>th</sup> May 1453

Stefan heard from some of the others that our Christian brethren have begun to construct tunnels of their own. Earlier tonight, they intercepted one of our tunnels and opened fire on my companions from Novo Brdo! Our morale has declined significantly, and we do not wish to continue digging. But the tyrannical *Zaganos Pasa* threatened to kill us himself if we did not report to work tomorrow.

21<sup>st</sup> May 1453

At many points during the day, it seemed I would no longer inhabit this earth. Death was beckoning for me in the tunnels. We reported to the tunnels as usual and began working promptly at sunrise. At midday, Commander Zaganos Pasa was pleased with our progress and granted us the opportunity to pause for lunch. Of course, as Christian miners, our rations were meager and insufficient. After thirty minutes, the Commander compelled us to return to the tunnels. At first, it was calm and work proceeded as usual. However, as nightfall approached, we began hearing noises from afar. Soon, I heard an eerie screech followed by a shrilling scream and then I could guess what was occurring. Our tunnel had been discovered by the Christians as had the tunnel from five nights ago. Immediately, I gestured towards the exit and tried to silently warn my fellow miners. Unfortunately, many misunderstood my intentions and ignored my pleas. I raced out just as the tunnel – along with my companions from Novo Brdo – was set ablaze with Greek fire [incendiary, flame-throwing weapon].

24<sup>th</sup> May 1453

Today, I lost my job and in turn regained hope. As usual, I was standing near the tunnels at sunrise, waiting for the Commander Zaganos Pasa. But he never arrived. Neither did any of the remaining miners. I returned to my tent and spotted Stefan with my peripheral vision. Stefan heard from the Turkish cavalry – the Christians had captured two unfortunate Turkish soldiers last night. After torture, the soldiers dishonorably revealed the locations of all of the unperturbed tunnels. Immediately, Stamboul sent its best miners and soldiers to each of the Commander's tunnels and destroyed them! Apparently, when the Sultan heard the news, he was furious with Commander Zaganos Pasa. Starting tomorrow, I will no longer report the tunnels and Stamboul may yet survive this most difficult challenge.

27<sup>th</sup> May 1453

Has Stamboul's luck finally run out? The prevailing rumor among the Turkish soldiers is that the Sultan and his most trusted advisors [Candarli Halil Pasa the Younger and Zaganos Pasa] are

finalizing plans to launch an all-out offensive against the walls! I have started seeing the janissaries more often. It's almost as if the elite infantry is preparing for its first serious battle.

28<sup>th</sup> May 1453

Sadly, my suspicions were accurate. The Turkish Emperor announced that a massive attack will be launched tomorrow. It seems the heathens always provide the army with a day's notice before launching a major offensive [for prayer and rest]. Less than a minute after the groundbreaking proclamation, the soldiers had returned to their respective tents. I spent the day reflecting about my time thus far in the company of the Sultan, from the impressive spectacle of transporting the vessels across roads (without damaging the precious ships) to the disturbing sight of impaled Italian corpses. If I am to believe these heathens, tomorrow could very well be the last day of Christian rule in majestic Stamboul.

29<sup>th</sup> May 1453

My Christian brethren were slaughtered and desecrated this night. I will forever have etched in my memory the sight of disgraceful heathen soldiers seizing the women of Stamboul for their pleasure. At first, I was confident the antique walls of Stamboul would stand tall. But eventually the Turks overpowered a section of walls and janissaries quickly penetrated. Stefan told me a Genoese general [Giovanni Giustiniani] was severely wounded as the janissaries broke through. Unfortunately, this was a significant blow to Stamboul's confidence – one they sadly never recovered from! Amidst great suffering on the part of my brethren, I caught a glimpse of the heroic Hasan of Ulubat who led the janissary corps into battle and entered Stamboul through an open gate [Kerkopoporta]. It would have been inspirational had he been fighting against the heathens rather my Christian brethren! The Emperor of Stamboul fell today. Stefan heard the Turkish soldiers relishing the Emperor's cowardice – apparently, he took his own life once his once-wonderous city was infiltrated. Maybe the only consolation is that the Turkish Emperor safeguarded the Church of the Holy Apostles from his greedy, belligerent men [isn't it ironic that the Turkish Emperor, or *Mehmed the Conqueror* as he is known today, eventually endorsed the demolition of this church to make space for the Fatih Mosque?].



(Aubert)

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28<sup>th</sup> May 1455

We are in grave danger. Novo Brdo has been facing heavy artillery from the heathens. It's been almost six weeks since the Turks began attacking. What have we done to incite such rage in the Turkish Emperor? I want to fight alongside the men of our town, but the men have forbidden the participation of boys [Konstantin at this point is around seventeen years old] of my age. I fear we will suffer the same fate as our Christian brethren in Stamboul. Oh for the Lord God's sake, please keep the Turks out of our town!

29<sup>th</sup> May 1455

The situation has become even more dire. The majority of our forces have been slaughtered and I know it's only a matter of time before the heathens seize our town as well. These days, I try to shield my brothers from the raging battle and we all quietly sit in our small abode. My brother asked me a question earlier this afternoon: "what will happen if the heathens capture us?" I knew there was only one fate for kidnapped Christian boys, but I reassured him anyway.

1<sup>st</sup> June 1455

The heathens penetrated into Novo Brdo today. Our forces had to surrender due to the heavy casualties and seemingly never-ending artillery fire. But we were deceived just like Christian brethren in Stamboul. The Sultan promised us we would not be harmed as long as we surrendered. However, as soon as we fell victim to his ploy, the Turkish Emperor rounded up all the inhabitants, including my brothers and I, and divided us by gender. I covered my brothers' eyes as the soldiers decapitated the distinguished men in our community under the vicious Sultan's orders. Next, the heathens distributed the girls and women amongst themselves and led the young boys (including myself) out of the town. As we were escorted by the heathens, I desperately wished to escape along with my brothers. But there was no opportunity and fighting with our captors would spell certain death for not only me, but also for my brothers. I constantly thought to myself, Lord God, creator of heaven and earth, won't you rescue your children? Of course, my confidence in the Creator was repaid in full: in the cover of night, I ran away with nineteen other boys in Samokovo. It was short-lived freedom, however. The Turks enlisted the assistance of everyone in the town and eventually recaptured us. The punishment which befell my brothers and I was so severe that I could hardly stand upright when the violent heathens finally eased up!

1<sup>st</sup> July 1455

Today could have been a day of liberation. But one among us was treacherous. Some of my companions from Novo Brdo were planning to finally take revenge for our fallen families – the Turkish Emperor was to die tonight. The heathen ruler had unwisely taken eight of us as his chamberlains. He never made the same mistake again. After the traitor [Dmitar Tomasic] warned the Turkish Emperor of the assassination plot, my brethren were brutally punished. And I continued to be a prisoner at the mercy of the Sultan who devastated Stamboul.



15<sup>th</sup> July 1455

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