

The Siege of Belgrade Through the Primary Sources of Latin, Middle English, and Turkish

Latince, Orta Çağ İngilizcesi ve Türkçe Birincil Kaynaklar Işığında Belgrad Kuşatması

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ABSTRACT

While some historians regard Constantinople as a stronghold of Christendom and a successor to New Rome (Nova Roma), its conquest is often considered the most significant political and religious event for both the Latin West and the Orthodox East. In contrast, the siege of Belgrade has received only limited attention in primary sources written in Latin and Ottoman Turkish, despite being seen as a symbol of Christian resilience, an assertion of Christian superiority, and a strategic setback for the Ottomans. This episode also illustrates how the crusading spirit of the Latin West appeared to revive in response to the fall of Constantinople, which had plunged Christendom into a state of despair and crisis. Western sources often portray the Ottomans as brutal invaders driven by expansionist ambitions, whereas Eastern narratives emphasize a unified Christian resistance. This paper explores how depictions of both brutality and virtue coexist in historical and literary accounts of the siege of Belgrade from Western and Eastern perspectives. In doing so, it draws attention to the failed campaign of Mehmed II—who styled himself as “the lord of the two lands and the two seas”—and reconsiders its significance for Turkish historiography. By challenging the notion of uninterrupted Ottoman expansion in the Balkans, the study also suggests a counter-narrative that underscores Ottoman adaptability and resilience. Employing the methodology of New Historicism, this paper argues that historical narratives are shaped by ideological positions and cannot remain neutral.

Keywords: Middle Ages, History, Literature, Belgrade, New Historicism

Öz

Konstantiniyye, bazı tarihçiler tarafından Hristiyan dünyasının savunma hattı ve Yeni Roma olarak değerlendirilmiş; fethi ise Latin Batı ve Ortodoks Doğu açısından genellikle en önemli siyasi ve dinî olaylardan biri olarak kabul edilmiştir. Buna karşılık, Latince ve Osmanlı Türkçesiyle kaleme alınmış temel eserlerde Belgrad Kuşatması, Hristiyan dünyası açısından Hristiyanlığın direniş sembolü ve meşru üstünlüğünün bir tezahürü olarak değerlendirilmesine, Türkler açısından ise stratejik bir geri çekilme olarak algılanmasına rağmen, daha sınırlı biçimde ele alınmıştır. Belgrad Kuşatması’nın, Latin Batı’da haçlı ruhunun yeniden canlandığı bir gelişme olarak yorumlanması, Konstantiniyye’nin fethinin Batı dünyasını sürüklediği umutsuzluk ve kin atmosferinin de bir göstergesi niteliğindedir. Batılı birincil kaynaklar, Osmanlıların Avrupa’da toprak kazanma uğruna sergilediği şiddet ve yıkıma odaklanırken; doğulu kaynaklar, bu süreci topyekûn bir Hristiyan direnişi şeklinde yansıtmaktadır. Bu çalışma, doğulu ve batılı tarihsel ve edebî anlatılarda Belgrad Kuşatması bağlamında vahşet ve erdem temsillerinin nasıl birlikte ele alındığını ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca, kendisini “iki kara ve iki denizin hükümdarı” olarak tanımlayan II. Mehmed’in başarısız Belgrad Kuşatması girişimini, Türkiye Türklerinin tarihsel hafızasında yeniden gündeme taşıması bakımından da dikkat çekicidir. Daha açık bir ifadeyle, Osmanlı’nın Avrupa’daki yayılımının ve Balkan coğrafyasındaki etkinliğinin kesintisiz bir ilerleyiş olmadığını ortaya konulması, Osmanlı Türklerinin direncine işaret etmektedir. Bu çalışma, Belgrad Kuşatması’nın yalnızca Batılı değil, aynı zamanda Doğulu bakış açısıyla da taşıdığı önemi incelemektedir. Bu çerçevede, tarihsel anlatıların tarafsız olamayacağı savından hareketle, söz konusu ikilikler Yeni Tarihselcilik yöntemiyle tartışmaya açılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Orta Çağ, Tarih, Edebiyat, Belgrad, Yeni Tarihselcilik

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INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the siege of Belgrade within the context of the perceptions and descriptions of Christian Europe and the Ottoman Turks through the eyes of various figures from Western and Eastern sources. It should be noted that the interaction between these two cultures goes back to the battle on 26 August 1071 in a town called Malazgirt, located in eastern Anatolia of Türkiye. Indeed, the Turks have been a part of Europe's social and cultural structure for almost a thousand years (Mazower, 2000, p.99). They did not happen to be an unknown entity to Europe, but appeared as a growing power in the East. After nearly four centuries, the presence and expansion of the Turks throughout Europe became a source of anxiety (Àgoston, 2005, p.12), which stems from the conquest of Constantinople, also known as the fall from the European part when Sultan Mehmed II of the Ottoman Empire seized the capital city of the Eastern Roman Empire. As a result of this drastic shift in the way Christendom and Islamdom- in the conceptualization of Marshall G. S. Hodgson in his seminal series of *The Venture of Islam*- perceived one another, the crusaders, as defenders of Christianity, were regarded as the ones fighting against Muslims who, according to Christians, follow an untrue faith (Tolan, 2002, p.171). This paper argues that sources the topic of which is related to the siege of Belgrade are of significance in terms of revealing these portrayals of the Turks and Christians. The siege of Belgrade played a significant role in defining how this fear settled and progressed in-depth, as well as creating space for avoiding the broad generalization of how Turks and Crusaders acted on the battlefield and what motivated both sides to launch attacks.

It is indubitable that the Turks' conquest of Constantinople was a significant military achievement, causing concerns across Europe about the Turkish expansion. However, whether the Turks' unsuccessful attempt to conquer Belgrade could be regarded as a complete failure or a strategic decision to retreat for further potential gains is open to debate. In this aspect, this paper challenges the commonly upheld belief, based on assertions created by Christian scholars and the clergy, that the Turks' expansion into Europe was solely driven by their desire to eradicate Christianity and gain material wealth. Instead, the siege of Belgrade should be examined from multiple perspectives, including those of Turkish Muslim thinkers and eyewitnesses, which would be enabled by New Historicism, introduced by Stephen Greenblatt in 1982, serving as a counterpoint to Historicism by emphasizing literature analysis through close reading and semantic details while treating texts as independent entities.

This methodology draws on concepts from prominent scholars such as Foucault, Bakhtin, Geertz, White, and Montrose. As Montrose articulates, it asserts, "the present is always already implicated in the past, and the past is always already implicated in the present" (Veaser, 1989, p. 383). In other words, socio-cultural and political circumstances around the author need to be considered when interpreting a text. History, or the past, cannot be approached without any references to events unfolding over the time a literary work is produced. The relationship between the work of literature and history is symbiotic rather than unconnected.

In this respect, as a component of cultural, social, and historical contexts, literary works reflect events that happened in history and illuminate the contexts surrounding the author. Hence, texts are referred to as history makers, which inherently suggests New Historicism goes beyond chronicling historical events. To this end, this methodology unearths social and cultural backdrops against which historical events are embedded, thereby arguing that history cannot be written objectively without referring to the author's subjectivity and circumstances around them.

To put it differently, a text is a product of all these contexts. In this aspect, appearing as two prominent genres coming from the medieval ages, chronicles and romances, should not be approached irrespective of the role of historians and authors in transforming them into constructed narratives. This paper utilizes New Historicism to demonstrate that references to the siege of Belgrade, which highlight alleged atrocities, brutality and barbarism by the Ottomans in specific Western sources, alongside Eastern narratives that attribute the Ottomans' expansion into Europe to divine rationale and the introduction of Islamic virtues, must be analyzed within the cultural, social, and political contexts influencing the creation of these sources and the perspectives of their authors and historians. Conversely, it does not inherently create a connection between disparate elements but rather obscures the distinctions between historical events and literary texts (Cantor, 1993, p. 23). Historicism, which has served as the voice for overarching narratives such as the West, white Europeans, and Christianity, is now contested by New Historicism, which aims to revitalize canonical texts (Kramer and Maza, 2006, p. 2). This vital aspect of New Historicism illustrates that narratives can be deliberately shaped to reflect the benefits of the sociocultural framework in which they are created. Theoreticians of New Historicism refer to this phenomenon as "methodological Kehre," highlighting the methodology's emphasis on rejecting textual isolation in favor of interdisciplinarity and contextualization of texts (Hohendahl, 1992, p. 87). Texts serve as artifacts that embody a multitude of other texts and perspectives. Consequently, reliance on unilateral narratives is untenable. This study analyzes the Latin, Turkish chronicles, and Middle English romance through the lens of New Historicism. The narratives concerning the siege of Belgrade in these works are explored through the authors' perspectives and the underlying social and cultural structures influencing their construction. Consequently, these narratives must be interpreted without bias or opinionated perspectives.

In other words, what makes the methodology of New Historicism original by comparison with Historicism within the context of the siege of Belgrade is that truth in historical events cannot be attained by solely approaching them in their context and emphasizing empirical proofs or objective facts, but instead competing narratives which are coming from eastern and western sources should be integrated with literary analysis so that instead of neutrality, subjectivity is argued to be remaining in the center of historical study.

The Siege of Belgrade

The fall of Constantinople had significant repercussions throughout Europe. Significant apprehension emerged regarding the possible expansion of the Ottoman Turks across Europe. Less than three years later, the successful defense of Nándorfehérvár/Belgrade rekindled hopes for reconquering the capital of the Orthodox East through "a new crusade" (Bonnie, 2002, p. 113). The conquest of Constantinople positioned the Turks advantageously, leading Bain to assert that they achieved "an abiding place among the powers of Europe" (Bain, 1892, p. 235). The rapid expansion of the Turkish conquest across Europe prompted efforts to reclaim Constantinople and remove the Turks from the continent. In response, Alfonso Borgia was elected Pope as Calixtus III, designating Hungary as the "shield and buckler of Christendom" (Bain, 1892, p. 237).

In the context of the Ottoman Empire, it is noted that "along with being on the way of important roads [of trade through Europe and Asia Minor], Belgrade serves as a door for Europe" (Özkan, 2021, p. 335). It also served a significant function in the defense of medieval Hungary. The conflict between the Ottomans and Hungarians is complex, characterized by the interplay of three critical influences: Islam (represented by the Ottomans), Eastern Orthodox Christianity, and the Latin West. Throughout Ottoman history, Belgrade was besieged by notable figures,

including Sultan Murad II, Evrenesoğlu Ali Bey, and Bayezid I. The victory gave Christians a psychological advantage following the surprising fall of Constantinople, demonstrating that the Ottoman Turks were "not invincible" (Housley, 1992, p. 104). On 4 July 1456, Mehmet II commanded an assault on Belgrade, which, according to the Ottoman chronicler Ibn Kemal, sought to "open the padlock of the abode of infidelity with the key to the jihad" (Ibn Kemal, 1954-1957, p. 121). Two key figures in the defense of Hungary were Janos Hunyadi, the captain-general and appointed governor of Belgrade, and Giovanni da Capistrano, the preacher and representative of the Pope. With the support of the Pope, Hunyadi enlisted Capistrano to aid in the defense by preaching to rally crusaders, resulting in the formation of approximately 60,000 crusaders. In *Capystranus*, a Middle English verse romance concerning the Siege of Belgrade, individuals are described as "Men of diverse countre" (Shepherd, 1995, II. 337-42), highlighting the involvement of many participants from various backgrounds. The group comprised "the papal legates and a contingent of approximately 600 Viennese university students" (Fodor, 2008, p. 48).

In conjunction with Karaca Pasha, the governor of Rumelia, the Ottoman sultan besieged the fortress of Belgrade, situated at the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers. According to an Ottoman chronicler, Said Eddin, the initial bombardment commenced with an event in which Turkish blood flowed abundantly. By 22 July, the Ottoman Turks suffered a considerable number of casualties, marking an unprecedented defeat that resulted in a significant divergence between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Following the failure, the Ottoman sultans pursued alternative routes to Europe by engaging in military actions against smaller Balkan states. The victory on 22 July, designated as a Memorial Day in Hungary, signified 70 years devoid of confrontations for Hungary until 1526 when Sultan Suleiman captured Hungary during the Battle of Mohács. The victory was viewed as a divine gift to Christians, representing a manifestation of God's blessing and approval (Housley, 1992, p. 104).

Middle English Romance *Capystranus*

The anonymous Middle English romance *Capystranus*, printed in London in 1515, has gained prominence over time. The romance has 579 lines divided into five sections. It begins with the tales of brave knights fighting for Christ and mentions how the Turks seized Constantinople in 1453. The text also talks about Capistrano, a friar who journeyed to Hungary to wage war against the Turks. The romance commemorates the historical Sultan Mehmet II, Janos Hunyadi, and Giovanni da Capistrano, as well as historical events like the fall of Constantinople and the siege of Belgrade. While anonymously put down into writing, the romance is a commendation of these historical figures:

*The Turkes and the paynymys bolde
He felled doune many a folde;
Durst none stande hym before.
Charles gan them so affraye
That the catyves myght curse the daye
And the tyme that they were borne!
Now Machamyte, that Turke untrue
To our Lorde Cryst Jhesu,
And to His lawe also*

Many Crysten man slayne hath he

(Shepherd, 1995, ll. 52-60)

Capistranus is crucial in justifying how the conquest of Constantinople and the siege of Belgrade affected Christian Europe, including those who lived far from the region, such as England. The romance incorporates descriptions of Christians and non-Christians, including Saracens and Turks. While this shift in the description of non-Christians is noteworthy, the tendency to use degrading remarks such as dogs remains even in new ethnic contexts, which appears in the source as follows:

Then the dogges that byleued on mahounde

The crysten people kylled to the grounde

No golde myght be theyr mede

The Crysten sawe that they sholde dye

And on theyr maysters layde hande quyclly

And faught a wele good spede

(Shepherd, 1995, ll. 106-111)

In this aspect, the primary source exposes that Muslims are referred to as the followers of a false religion with “dogges” and their prophet is labelled as an idol in a pejorative sense of meaning. Suzanne Conklin Akbari argues that “the embodiment of the prophet Muhammad in the image or ‘mahum’ encapsulates the range of deceitful qualities attributed to Islam by medieval Christians” (Akbari, 2009, p.224). In the above quotation, Machamytte refers to Mehmed II in the name of the Prophet Muhammad transforming into Mahound, which means the Spirit of Darkness (Schimmel, 1985, p.16). The siege of Belgrade by the Ottoman Turks in 1456 has been approached in various works by historical and literary sources, as in the case of *Capistranus*. Sources such as correspondence, chronicles, papal edicts, liturgies, and manuscripts have mentioned the events leading up to the siege and its consequences based on the observations of participants, eyewitnesses, and their contemporaries.

Capistranus implies that Friar Johan Capistranus and Janos Hunyadi were replaying the opening strains of the same theme of divinely aided Christian triumph over a rival faith and civilization by lifting the Turkish siege of Belgrade. The idea concurrent in crusading propaganda portrays non-Christian people, Muslim Ottoman Turks, as being hostile towards innocent Christians for religious reasons. Likewise, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini refers to the siege of Belgrade. Piccolomini notes how Christians played a crucial role in creating an army of Crusaders against the Turks and asserts that the Crusaders' armies were protected more by faith than by the sword. To support this, Piccolomini mentions that Calixtus III, who was on the papal throne, and Giovanni da Capistrano, who was evangelizing chapters from the Gospel to the Hungarians, summoned mainly poor people to join the Crusaders' armies since they were more pious than the rich and readily available to serve (Hopper, 1551, p. 915). This phenomenon illustrates that the Ottoman Emperor Sultan Mehmed II's motivation for attacking Belgrade was material wealth. At the same time, the Crusaders defended it as a way of doing penance for their sins. As a result, a dichotomy emerged between the godly motivations of the Crusaders and the worldly ones of the Turks. To thoroughly analyze the religious motivation behind Christians' perception of the Turks, examining the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks is crucial, as it marked the end of the Eastern Roman Empire. The impact of this event on Christendom has been

profound, leading Christian kingdoms to depend on Hungary to prevent any further westward expansion by the Turks (O'Callaghan et al., 2014, p. 114).

Latin Chronicles

In his papal letter concerning the crusade against the Turks, Calixtus III outlines a framework. The letter defines Islam as impiety and calls upon pious Christians to personally participate in the crusade by contributing financially or confessing their sins to the clergy. The Pope also grants forgiveness of sins to those who donated money to a crusade on behalf of the dead, allowing them to gain Paradise. This case shows that the motivation behind the crusades was religious, and that material wealth played a significant role. The crusade by Enrique IV explicitly appears from the following remarks regarding the preparations of the money raised by the indulgence for the living and the dead during the next four years, which was so enormous that, after paying expenses, the royal treasury netted more than 100,000,000 maravedies, but little was for the crusade. During Enrique IV's other crusades, Christian soldiers were brave fighters for their true holy Catholic faith, unlike the derogatory depiction of the Turks (O'Callaghan et al., 2014, p. 115).

In addition to its religious context, the siege of Belgrade was not just a fight between the Ottoman Turks and Hungarians. Europe, representing the Latin world, and Islam, representing the Ottoman world, had a significant final confrontation. It was also the last stronghold of resistance against Ottoman expansion that resulted in the unification of Christians against Islamic advances, as half of Eastern Roman Christianity had become part of Islam. The ruling system implemented by the Turks in Constantinople as an Islamo-Christian syncretism or symbiosis and the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks resulted in the formation of a diverse and mixed state (Fodor, 2008, p. 46).

It's worth noting that this situation doesn't necessarily contradict the idea of protecting all of Christendom from the Ottoman threat. The role of Hungary in this matter is significant as the Popes tried to portray it as the shield and bulwark of Christianity (Fodor, 2008, p.48). The defeat of the Turks in Belgrade was a significant event that changed the trajectory of history. Many attribute this accomplishment to János Hunyadi, Giovanni da Capistrano, and Juan Carvajal. Housley particularly credits Capistrano for the victory, as he led Hunyadi's soldiers, Belgrade's garrison and inhabitants, and crusaders recruited. There is still debate over whether Hunyadi or Capistrano played a decisive role in defeating the Ottomans. Various groups participated in the battle during the crusade of Belgrade's defense. These included commoners, the poor, priests, secular clerics, monks, and hermits. However, one group stood out: the 600 students from the University of Vienna who took the cross and fought (Housley, 2013, p. 99).

To better understand the passion with which the preacher delivered sermons on the protection of Belgrade, it seems crucial to consider the shockwaves felt three years after the fall of Constantinople. Pope Nicholas V is known for his dedication to the defense of Belgrade, which he expressed in correspondence. After the Pope's death, his successor, Calixtus III, worked closely with Capistrano to launch a preaching crusade campaign. The main goal of this religious endeavor was to raise crusaders who would take the holy cross against the Turks, who were considered enemies of Jesus. Housley describes Capistrano as having powerful charisma and seemingly superhuman stamina, which helped him to create a continuity of preaching and leadership and contributed to the achievement and fidelity of the Crusaders (2004, p. 102).

In preaching for recruiting individuals to participate in the battle in Belgrade, Capistrano does not differ from the laity in that the language he adopts to describe the Ottoman Turks is based on dehumanization and degradation. The undeniable rationale behind this situation appears to

be redemption. Their acts of disparaging the Muslim Turks have enabled them to recruit an increasing number of people who have incorporated themselves in all manner of crimes as crusaders who are granted a chance to gain eternal life. The symbol of the cross has come to represent redemption and salvation, which led to crusading becoming a crucial aspect of the fifteenth century. Crusading against the Ottoman Turks impacted the community during that period, resurrecting their Christian ancestors' deeds. To fully comprehend the primary motivation behind the idea of crusading against the Turkish crusading, it is crucial not to overlook the significant event that occurred on the part of Christians in the 15th century - the fall of Constantinople to Mehmet II in 1453. To delve deeper into this point, Housley highlights that the synchronicity between Constantinople's conquest and the invention of the printing press resulted in the rapid dissemination of news (2017, p. 22).

Based on the news in circulation, even though the representation of the Turks has taken the place of the Saracens in a pejorative context, because of sermons in which the clergy has preached about redemption and salvation, the military unification as a crusading response among Christians against the most significant threat to their faith has been established. The impact of Saracens is not limited to written sources. It is also evident in various visual art forms, such as paintings and sculptures. Along with depicting Saracens in terms of religious savagery and atrocity, the portrayal of Turks as ethnically barbaric people has added a new perspective to the current understanding of Saracens (Lapina et al., 2017, p. 219). In some illustrations, Mehmet II, the great sultan of the Turks and the conqueror of Constantinople, is depicted as a brutal dragon. However, images of Capistrano holding the cross and preaching sermons on the need to participate in crusading so that crusaders earn eternal life in paradise have decorated the visuals. Furthermore, Capistrano and Hunyadi are depicted on the walls of Belgrade, which justifies their decisive role in gaining victory against the Turks (Lapina et al., 2017, p. 230).

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While it is difficult to find consistency in drawings and written accounts of eyewitnesses, this does not undermine the wide range of resources available about the warfare in Belgrade. These resources can help individuals form their interpretations of the events. In other words, the lack of consistency between the visual record of the crusade and other materials can result in a highly subjective perspective on the events (Lapina et al., 2017, p. 7). Latin manuscripts and eyewitness accounts show that the 15th century was shaped by two main themes: the Crusades and Ottoman expansion struggles. Turks and Christians had one thing in common: their belief in the sanctity of their actions. They believed that their wars were holy, as they were motivated by their religious beliefs. It is important to note that the crusade did not lessen the significance of religion (Pilat, Cristea, 2018, p. 7).

Although religion was the motive behind crusading, it was not just about reclaiming the Holy Land. It was a more complicated phenomenon that has had a lasting impact on the history of Christian Europe. The way people approached the idea of crusading underwent a paradigm shift, with the defense of Christendom against Ottoman attacks taking precedence over recapturing Jerusalem. The siege of Belgrade by the Turks in 1456, which ended in their defeat, was a significant victory for the Crusaders against the Turks in the fifteenth century. Although the Turks conquered Hungary and Belgrade less than a century later, the role that the siege of Belgrade played in blocking Turkish expansion over Europe for nearly a century deserves to be understood and evaluated to grasp the significance of crusading.

The location of Hungary is vital in understanding the idea of crusading. Belgrade has unrivaled strategic significance due to its harbor, which shelters ships that can quickly move troops along the frontier. Hence, Hungary as a territory is essential in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean. Hungary has become the bulwark of Christendom, serving as a communication

and interaction route for the Turks and Christians. However, more importantly, it has gained symbolic significance, representing the defense of Christendom during the Crusades. After the fall of Constantinople, crusading became a way to remove the Turks from Christian Europe. Influential figures, such as the Franciscan friar Capistrano, Piccolomini, Janos Hunyadi, and Pope Calixtus III, played a vital role in achieving victory, and this demonstrates how the commitments of these figures served as inspirational examples of how the crusading method worked in the fifteenth century.

During the defense struggles of the kingdom, Hunyadi took charge when news of the Turks moving under Sultan Mehmed II began to disseminate. The Sultan Mehmed represents the second Mohammed in the Western sources, ranging from the Middle English Capystranus to the Latin chronicle of Piccolomini. Capystranus and Constantinopolitana provide a detailed account of the warfare in Belgrade and highlight the crucial role of Capistrano's Crusaders in securing the military victory. Additionally, these texts clarify Hunyadi's position as the commander of the Crusaders within the context of the overall leadership.

Angold draws an analogy between the roles of Pope Urban II and Peter the Hermit and that of Capistrano in the context of the First Crusade, and he highlights the role of spiritual inspiration in unifying people from different backgrounds towards a common crusading motivation (2014, p. 88). The spirit of crusading is still alive, even though papal attempts to protect and retake Constantinople failed. The conquest of Constantinople had devastating effects on Christian Europe, but also paved the way for Crusaders to unite under the banner of defending Christendom through both spiritual and material efforts by their leaders. To delve deeper into spirituality, one can draw an analogy between the medieval crusaders and those of the fifteenth century. Medieval crusaders referred to miles (soldiers) and peregrini (pilgrims). Similarly, the Crusaders considered their journey to Belgrade as a spiritual undertaking. They took the cross and aimed to defend their true faith against the followers of an untrue religion. They gathered because of sermons preached by ecclesiastics. Pope Urban II's sermons during the First Crusade in 1096, Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons during the Second Crusade in 1147, and Pope Innocent III's sermons during the Third Crusade in 1189 and the Fourth Crusade in 1202 exemplify this.

The siege of Belgrade had significant implications for the understanding of the relations between Christians and Muslims. However, a complete analysis of the siege of Belgrade is necessary to comprehend the situation. Bain pointed out that replacing the Christian cross with the Muslim crescent on the dome of St. Sophia marked a critical turning point (1892, p. 236). This event changed the situation from one where only a part of Christendom was under threat to one where the entire Christian world was in immediate danger. The so-called victory of the Hungarians, commonly referred to as such, must be analyzed in a broader context. One should also evaluate the efforts of historical figures within the context of Christian Europe and the dissemination of Islam through the Ottoman Turks.

Turkish Chronicles

Unlike the sources of the Latin West, Turkish Muslim chroniclers such as Âşıkpaşazade and Tursun Beg encourage readers to develop their interpretations without resorting to harmful stereotypes. They emphasize that sources are not just neutral accounts of facts, but representations shaped by cultural positioning, perspectives, experiences, and needs. Âşıkpaşazade provides readers with a unique opportunity to develop a better understanding of historical events regarding the Ottoman military movements into Christian territories in the Balkans. To avoid one-sided reporting of the siege of Belgrade, Âşıkpaşazade's analysis is crucial to understanding the siege of Belgrade. In his *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*, the story mentions Sultan

Mehmed Han Gazi. It describes how he gathered his Islamic troops and marched towards Belgrade to go to war. He even sailed ships to the Danube. When he conquered Konstantiniyye, he had balls cast from copper horses, screw crosses, and bells, which he brought to Belgrade. The balls set up and thrown marked the beginning of the war. Dayı Karaca, the Rumelia Beylerbeyi, suggested to the Sultan that he should go to the other side of the Danube and take his place opposite the fortress. However, the rulers of Rumelia were reluctant to accept this idea because they feared that if Belgrade were conquered, they would have no enemies elsewhere and nothing to do. They thought of cheating and did not make any effort to take Belgrade. One day, they suddenly saw many enemy soldiers on the other side of the Danube, where Karaca wanted to cross.

The Yanku arrived and landed with many ships, intensifying the war. One day, while Karaca Bey was preparing a ball near the fortress in Metris, a ball from the goal hit the Metris board where he was standing, causing it to fall on him and martyr him. There were also battles on the water, and many ships disappeared unexpectedly. Hunkar called for an attack, but the Rumelians betrayed and did not march. The unbelievers attacked the Sultan's servants, forcing them to retreat and causing many to suffer martyrdom. The Sultan acted and led a group of brave men to attack the infidels, taking back the fortress and killing many. Rumelia's betrayal prevented the fortress from being taken, causing the Sultan to migrate and return to his country with the state. The battle occurred in 1456-57, during which two great comets appeared, one from the west and one from the east (Saraç, 2007, Ch. 126). Aşıkpaşazâde chronicled events witnessed or heard about throughout his lifetime, and he is the first Ottoman historian to call himself a Turk in *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman*. He is also the first non-anonymous Ottoman historian who represented Muslim Anatolian and Turkic Ottoman historiography (Mengüç, 2014, p.57).

Likewise, a prominent administrator of the Ottomans who had served under Mehmet II wrote about the siege of Belgrade in his work entitled *Târih-i Ebü'l-Feth*. He describes the beginning of the battle in detail, stating that both sides' troops were ready to fight on the shores of the Danube River in front of the fortress of Belgrade. The enemy forces, which outnumbered the Turkish ones, had a more advantageous position to retain the fortress. This is a significant detail because it is a technical event related to the military context rather than a religious or spiritual one. Accounts of military struggles on the battlefield can carry different interpretations. Tursun Beg presented the siege as a virtual victory for the sultan. Tursun Beg explains why the Turks lost their advantage at the beginning of the battle (Tulum, 1977). He suggests that their desire for material wealth played a role in their actions.

This perspective acknowledges the various possibilities on a battlefield and highlights the presence of alternative interpretations. Tursun Beg also views the siege as a triumph, citing the Ottoman sultan's objective to eliminate his rival, the king of Hungary, Hunyadi, whom a Turkish soldier killed upon his return to the battlefield. As a result, the Turkish troops returned home after accomplishing their objective. The siege of Belgrade is an important event that has led to speculation about the participants' turnout and characteristics. According to Bain, it is unlikely that the number of fighters who participated in the war in Belgrade was less than 150,000, including twenty monsters that were twenty-seven feet long (1892, p. 240). This statement illustrates the influence of cultural and ideological factors on historical sources, rendering their accuracy questionable and demanding a skeptical approach. The Christian crusaders were men of low social status, such as beggars, day laborers, hermits, and mendicant friars (Bain, 1892, p. 243). Bain mentions Karaca Pasha, a Turkish general cited in some historical accounts who advised the Sultan to delay an attack, leading to various interpretations. Additionally, there is a reference to a religious aspect among the Turks during

the war. A Turkish fighter named Said Eddin shouted to his comrades about the objective of the war being to reach the arms of the houris of paradise (Bain, 1892, p. 249).

CONCLUSION

In this article, within the context of the siege of Belgrade, the perceptions of the Muslim Turks and Christians through the eyes of the Latin West and the Orthodox East have been analyzed via New Historicism. This article particularly thematizes this siege alongside some references to the capture of Constantinople because they provide valuable insights into the fifteenth century and have had a lasting impact on the way contemporary communities perceive Muslims and Christians. As opposed to mainstream arguments based on the preconception that the Turks aimed to expand for worldly gains across Europe in the 15th century and Christians resisted them in the name of God as his only true believers, it is argued that historical events should be approached as the analysis of competing narratives constructed by cultural discourse. In this aspect, any analysis based solely on archival documents and chronological examination would lead to isolation between historical events and literary works. Therefore, New Historicism posits the integration of scholarly study and the neutrality of historians. To put it differently, if the siege of Belgrade is only approached from the perspective of an empirical study of war-like military expeditions and casualties, it might miss out on the interpretations of chroniclers, the presence of indigenous traditions, and the level of religious knowledge, which all co-construct the narratives provided in sources. Additionally, it might contribute to sweeping generalizations like the Turks were after material earnings across Europe, and Christians were saving their religion. Indeed, even in the present age, mainstream arguments could be based on these broad generalizations. In this respect, *Capystranus* deals with the war only from the perspective of religious propaganda, which turns the war into a divine one between Christendom and the heathen. Framing the siege as a holy war enables any interpretations based on divine intervention to the benefit of Christians, the elevation of Christians to the level of God's picked warriors, and the demonization of the Turks. By isolating all these arguments from the deeds unfolding at the battlefield via new historicism, it can expose how medieval ecclesiastics weaponized religion to construct a one-sided narrative.

On the other hand, with the incorporation of Turkish chronicles, the motivation behind the Turkish emperor had nothing to do with the faith. Still, he aimed to counteract the resilience of Christendom. In short, from a new historicist analysis of the siege of Belgrade, this article exposed binary oppositions based on interpretations provided in the western and eastern sources, so that historical events cannot be isolated between social, cultural, and religious clashes between Christendom and Islamdom in the medieval ages.

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