

## TREBIZOND, A LOST EMPIRE.

BY JOHN T. BRAMHALL.

IF the empire of Trebizond was the creation of accident, as Dr. Finlay would have it, its history was, by another curious accident, made known to the world by the chance discovery by Professor Fallmerayer, the distinguished traveler and archeologist, of the Chronicle of Michael Panaretos in the remains of the library of Cardinal Bessarion at Venice. For prior to this discovery the history of this medieval empire was buried in the dust and ruins of the Dark Ages.

And how came the soldier and Bavarian liberal, Fallmerayer, to be interested in Venetian manuscripts?

Jacob Philipp Fallmerayer was the son of a peasant at Tschötsch, in the Tyrol, and was born at the close of 1790. Placed in the cathedral choir at Brixen he ran away, studied theology at Salzburg and entered the abbey of Kremsmünster. Some red tape however stood between him and holy orders, and after further studies we find him in the army fighting Napoleon. Battles and garrison life over, he is at Lindau, studying Greek and Oriental languages. Then he traveled in the East, delving into the musty manuscripts of the monasteries at Venice and Mount Athos. From the parchments of Cardinal Bessarion, with the aid of such information as he could find in the published histories of the period, he wrote his *Geschichte des Kaiserthums von Trapezunt* (Munich, 1827). After visiting Trebizond in 1840 Fallmerayer published the results of his personal researches at Trebizond and Mount Athos in the Transactions of the history class of the Royal Academy of Munich. His *Geschichte* won for him the gold medal of Copenhagen, but his political activities as an opposition member of the "rump" parliament of Stuttgart caused him to lose his professorship in the university of Munich and to become an exile in Switzerland, and again a traveler in the East. He saw the Russian bear crouching in the Caucasus, and

knew the impending danger to the weak defenses of the sultan. He maintained with great vigor and pertinacity the theory that the capture of Constantinople by Russia was inevitable and would lead to the absorption of the whole of the Balkan and Grecian peninsula by the Russian empire, a consummation which would be a standing menace to the western Germanic nations. For the Greeks he had little love, regarding them as a degenerate mixture of Slav and Albanian rather than true Hellenes.

Cardinal Bessarion (1395-1472), patriarch of Constantinople and archbishop of Nicaea, was not only one of the most learned scholars of his time, but he was a man of a temper uncommon at that period, who loved the whole Christian church and labored to unite those of the East and the West. After visiting Rome, Paris and other capitals as a prince of the church, he so loved his own city on the shore of the Euxine and the eastern gate of Christendom that he left a eulogium of it in his own hand, "The Praise of Trebizond," which, after the capture of the city by Mahomet II, was deposited with his other manuscripts, valued at 30,000 crowns, in the library of St. Mark in Venice. By another accident Trebizond missed the honor of furnishing a pope to the church in the person of Bessarion, who was given a cardinal's hat by Pope Eugenius IV. The occasion, as related by Moreri, was as follows: "Several popes chose him for their legate but the legation of France cost him his life; for Sixtus IV having ordered him at the same time to visit the duke of Burgundy, the cardinal paid his first visit to the duke, which King Louis XI took so ill that as he presented himself to the audience, he put his hand upon his great beard and said unto him: *Barbara Græca genus retinent quod habere solebant*, and commanded him to dispatch his business. The resentment of this grieved him so that a little while after, returning to Rome, he died, and was interred in a chapel of the Church of St. Peter."

But the record that throws the strongest light upon the history of the lost empire of Trebizond is not the *Eugenikos* of Bessarion nor the Chronicle of Panaretos, but a later discovered work of one Critobulus, who styles himself "The Islander." His life of Mahomet II, who took the city and "empire" in 1461, was brought to light by Dr. Dethier some fifty years ago in the Seraglio library at Constantinople, and was translated by him. Herr Karl Müller also translated it and published it in 1883 (preface dated 1869). Nothing is known of Critobulus except what is contained in his life of Mahomet, and that is little. After the capture of Constantinople, when the archons of Imbros, Lemnos and Thrasos feared that

the Turkish admiral would shortly approach to annex these islands, messengers were sent to the admiral, and by offering a voluntary submission and paying him a large bribe succeeded in avoiding the general pillage which usually followed a Turkish conquest. Shortly afterwards Critobulus took service under the sultan and was made archon of Imbros, in which capacity he received the submission of Lemnos and other places. His history covers the first seventeen years of Mahomet's reign. It is dedicated to the sultan and is followed by an apology to his fellow Greeks for having written it. He wrote only a few years after the great siege of Constantinople, and the work, says Edwin Pears, bears evidence of great care and a desire to know the truth of what he relates. He writes as a Greek but also as a servant of the sultan. He expresses sympathy with his own people, extols their courage and laments their misfortunes. In places his life of the sultan reads like the report of an able and courageous official, and Edwin Pears uses it as the nucleus of his *Destruction of the Greek Empire*.

The late Dr. Dethier, who devoted much time and study to the topography and archeology of Constantinople, compiled four volumes of documents relating to the siege, including the Critobulus, many of which were previously unknown.

Mahomet followed his conquest of the Byzantine capital with that of the ports of the Euxine eastward to Trebizond. The so-called empire of Trebizond, stretching along the southern shore of the Euxine, of varying length but in the time of its glory reaching from near to Batum on the east to a point within sight of the Bosphorus and including a large portion of the old kingdom of Armenia, might have played an important part in the history of the Greek empire and of Christendom, of which it was the eastern outpost in Asia, but for the supine and unmanly character of its people as evidenced by the conduct of its rulers. We read that when the Latin invaders were on the point of capturing Constantinople two young Greek princes, grandsons of the unspeakable tyrant Andronicus Comnenus, escaped to Trebizond and defeated the Byzantine governor, while one of them, Alexis, being acclaimed emperor, took the high-sounding title of "Grand Comnenus and Emperor of the Faithful Romans." It seemed for a short while as if he, instead of the valorous Theodore of Nicæa, might take the lead of the Grecian peoples, and indeed Theodore had to arrange with the sultan of Konia (or, as he called himself, of Rum, that is, of the Romans) to prevent Alexis from extending his empire westward to Nicæa.

But the power of the Trebizond empire did not increase, although the city from which it took its name became wealthy and populous. Not by arms but by tribute did they maintain peace with the Seljuk sultans for the greater part of the thirteenth century. A series of more or less incompetent emperors continued to hold a semi-independent position amid alternate intrigues and struggles with Turkoman and Turkish tribes on land and the Genoese who attacked by sea, until the advent of Timur, who reduced the boasted "empire" to a state of vassalage. The emperor Andronicus, indeed, made a brave and successful defense against the Seljuks, under the son of the sultan Ala-ad-din, but after the capture of Constantinople by Mahomet II Emperor John consented to become his vassal, at once entering into negotiations with the Christian kings of Georgia and the lesser Armenia. He died however before he could profit by their aid, and when Mahomet returned from his triumph in the Morea and offered the new emperor David the alternative of unconditional surrender or massacre he chose the former. A large part of the population was sent to repopulate Constantinople. And so ended the empire of Trebizond, famous for its wealth and the luxury that wealth engenders, and for the beauty of its women, whose princesses were sought as brides by the Byzantine emperors, by western nobles, and by Mahomedan sultans.

The city of Trebizond, says Finlay, wants only a secure port to be one of the richest jewels of the globe. It is admirably situated to form the capital of an independent state. The southern shores of the Black sea offer every advantage for maintaining a numerous population, and the configuration of the country supplies its inhabitants with excellent natural barriers to defend them. There are few spots on the earth richer in pictorial beauty or abounding in more luxuriant vegetation than the southeastern shores of the inhospitable Euxine. The magnificent country that extends from the mouth of the Halys to the snowy range of the Caucasus is formed of a singular union of rich plains, verdant hills, bold rocks, wooded mountains, primeval forests and rapid streams. In this fertile and majestic region Trebizond has been for more than six centuries the noblest and fairest city. The original Greek society had embraced a social organization that enabled the people to nourish a rapidly augmenting population in territories where mankind had previously barely succeeded in gleaning a scanty supply of the necessaries of life for a few families. Many cities on the shores of the Euxine which received Greek colonists several centuries before the Christian era have since retained a body of Greek inhabitants, and Trebizond is

the most notable example of this ethnological peculiarity, having stood for centuries as a Greek outpost in the land of the Turk. The Chronicle of Eusebius places the foundation of Trebizond at 756 B. C., and while this chronology may not be more accurate than the date given by Livy for the foundation of Rome, we have the record of Xenophon, who visited it in one of the most famous tours of history, that it was then a Greek city, and a colony of the Sinopians. Xenophon's address to his army on that occasion, when they saw the Colchians drawn up to dispute their passage, could not have been improved upon by the gentle Sir Nigel Loring: "Gentlemen, the enemy you see before you are now the sole remaining obstacle that hinders us from being already in the place whither we are so long hastening. These, if we can, we ought even to eat alive."

To turn the pages of history back some twelve centuries before the conquest by Mahomet II, we find the Goths creeping up in their flat-bottomed houseboats along the southern coast of the storied Euxine (*arenus*, "unfriendly"), after devastating the little faction-torn kingdom of Bosphorus, toward the country of the Colchis, famed for the expedition of the Argonauts and the rich trading city of Trebizond. This Tyrus of the Euxine derived its wealth from the munificence of Emperor Hadrian, who had constructed an artificial port on a coast left destitute by nature, as Xenophon describes it, of secure harbors. The city was large and populous, a double enclosure of walls seemed to defy the fury of the Goths, and the usual garrison had been strengthened by a reinforcement of ten thousand men. But, as Gibbon points out, there are not any advantages capable of supplying the absence of discipline and vigilance. The numerous garrison, dissolved in riot and luxury, disdained to guard their impregnable fortifications, and the Goths, discovering the supine negligence of the besieged, erected a lofty pile of fascines, ascended the walls in the silence of the night and put the inhabitants to the sword, while the cowardly garrison escaped through the opposite gates of the city. The most holy temples, the most splendid edifices, were involved in the common destruction. The booty that fell into the hands of the Goths was immense since the wealth of the adjacent countries had been deposited in Trebizond as a secure place of refuge. The number of captives, as described by Gregory Thaumaturgus, was incredible, as the victorious barbarians ranged without opposition through the extensive provinces of Pontus. The rich spoils of Trebizond filled a great fleet of ships that had been found in the port; the robust youth of the sea coast were chained

to the oar; and the Goths, satisfied with the results of their first naval expedition, returned in triumph to their new establishments in the kingdom of Bosphorus.

The strategic advantages of Trebizond to the Russians cannot be great, although the moral advantage of the capture of this important commercial city which has been in the hands of the Turks for nearly five centuries, must be a notable one. Russia gained a port on the Black Sea, but nothing more, for the city has no connection with the country behind the Taurus except by a difficult mountain trail which only by euphony can be called a road. If it be the intent of the grand duke to move westward from Erzerum along the old caravan route to Angora, he must consider a march of some five hundred miles through a hostile country. But if his forces are sufficient for such a movement, he would find at Angora (the ancient Ancyra) the key to the Turkish capital, for this is the rail-head of the Anatolian railway, only about three hundred miles from Constantinople, and while the capital has been strongly fortified against Europe it lies unprotected from the east, and with Erzerum fallen the gates are open. The Turks have not forgotten how Ibrahim Pasha, the son of Mehemet Ali, the rebellious pasha of Egypt, conquered all Syria and Konia, took Angora and Nezib in 1832, and would doubtless have made himself master of the Turkish empire had it not been for the intervention of England and Austria. It may be that the fate of the Turkish empire, both in Europe and Asia, was sealed when the Russian army took the outposts of Erzerum and Trebizond, as indicated by Germany's peasant scholar, Fallmerayer, nearly a hundred years ago.