



**Teodoro Spandugino**

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## Teodoro Spandugino

Theodore Spandounes, Theodoro Spandugino Cantacuscino  
(Cantacuzeno)

DATE OF BIRTH Unknown; mid-15<sup>th</sup> century  
PLACE OF BIRTH Unknown; Italy  
DATE OF DEATH Unknown, but after 1538  
PLACE OF DEATH Unknown

### BIOGRAPHY

Theodoro Spandugino belonged to a Byzantine refugee family who had settled in Venice. What is known of his biography comes from his own work and from the studies by Sathas, Nicol and Villain-Gandossi.

On his mother's side, Spandugino was descended from the Byzantine imperial Cantacuzenus family that had produced emperors of Constantinople and princes in the Peloponnese. His mother had moved to Italy and married another Byzantine refugee, Matthew Spandounes or Spandugino, who may have been one of the Greek cavalrymen in the service of Venice known as the *stradioti*, and he may have also been awarded the titles of Count and Knight of the Holy Roman Empire. Spandugino's great grandfather had served Constantine Palaeologus, Despot of the Peloponnese, the last Byzantine emperor.

The year of Spandugino's birth is unknown, though he says that he was a child (*in età puerile*) in 1465 when he saw Christian captives in Gallipoli (Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, p. 43). He probably grew up in Venice, but he had relatives in Thessalonica and in eastern Macedonia, and family connections in Serbia and Bosnia. Nicol (*Theodore Spandounes*, pp. vii-xvii) gives his genealogy, and says that, as a young boy, he was sent to Macedonia to his great-aunt Maria-Mara, a Serbian princess who had married the Ottoman Sultan Murad II and had been appointed favoured stepmother by his son and successor, Mehmed II. She maintained a privileged and protected Christian enclave in the Muslim world, and held court in Macedonia. It was here that Spandugino learnt some Turkish and acquired an interest in the history and customs of the Ottoman people and their rulers (Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, p. x). This, however, is not mentioned by Spandugino himself and, together with

several other details of Spandugino's life and career, it cannot be proved (see Ganchou's fine and lucid review of Nicol's edition).

When the Turkish-Venetian war ended in 1503 after four years of conflict, he went to Constantinople to help his brother Alessandro, who had settled there, to regain his possessions, which had been lost to the Turks during the war. He found his brother dead and the family fortune lost for ever, and so, as he says in the prologue, he decided to write on Ottoman history and society. He returned to Venice in 1509, but shortly after this was forced into exile because of his friendship with the Byzantine humanist scholar Janus Lascaris, who as French ambassador in Venice was obliged to leave when the League of Cambrai was formed in 1508. Spandugino, suspected of being a Francophile, moved to France, which may well explain why the first printed version of his book was published in Paris in 1519.

Spandugino apparently finished his revised edition of the history in 1538, because, as he writes at the end of the first part, in that year he had to go to Rome, although the reasons for this are unknown. Spandugino did have important connections in Rome, serving as 'a confidant and adviser' to Popes Leo X, Clement VII and Paul III (Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, p. viii). He also served Pope Paul III's grandson, Alessandro Farnese (1520-89), who was made cardinal in 1534. This connection is documented by a letter from Spandugino to Farnese to which Bareggi has drawn attention (*Il mestiere di scrivere*, p. 117 n. 340).

Sathas believes that Spandugino wrote several reports about Turkish matters to Alessandro Farnese but, like many other statements in Sathas's study, this is a questionable claim. Sathas mentions in particular an anonymous work about the Turks written in 1533 by a Christian in Constantinople, and suggests that it is by Spandugino, calling it 'le mémoire anonyme de Spandounis' (Sathas, *Documents inédits*, p. xxvi). But it is hard to believe that this is by Spandugino because, while his treatise is characterised by a rather objective and informative approach, the tone here is far more aggressive and harsh towards the Turks, and furthermore even a quick reading shows that neither the vocabulary nor the spelling seem to match the language of Spandugino's history.

## MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

## Primary

*I diarii di Marino Sanuto (MCCCCXCVI-MDXXXIII) dall'autografo Marciano ital. cl. VII codd. CDXXIX-CDLXXVII*, Venezia: per cura di Rinaldo Fulin, Federico Stefani, Nicolò Barozzi, Guglielmo Berchet, Marco Allegri (Spandugino is mentioned a few times in Sanudo's diaries, vol. 21, quoted in Sathas, *Documents inédits*, pp. xxi-xxii, though the source is not a biography of Spandugino)

## Secondary

- T. Ganchou, review of D.M. Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes. On the origin of the Ottoman emperors*, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 56 (1998) 324-26
- D.M. Nicol (ed. and trans.), *Theodore Spandounes. On the origin of the Ottoman emperors*, Cambridge, 1997, pp. vii-xxv
- C. di Filippo Bareggi, *Il mestiere di scrivere. Lavoro intellettuale e mercato librario a Venezia nel Cinquecento*, Rome, 1988, p. 117, n. 340
- C. Villain-Gandossi, 'La cronaca italiana di Teodoro Spandugino', *Il Veltro. Rivista della Civiltà Italiana* 2-4 (1979) 151-71, p. 152 n. 8
- D.M. Nicol, *The Byzantine family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100-1460*, Washington DC, 1968, pp. 130-33
- G. Mazzatinti, A. Sorbelli, and L. Ferrari, *Inventari dei manoscritti delle biblioteche d'Italia*, vol. 77, Florence, 1950, p. 143
- C.N. Sathas, *Documents inédits relatifs à l'histoire de la Grèce au moyen âge*, Paris, 1880-90, vol. 9, pp. iii-1

## WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

*Delle historie et origine de principi de Turchi*, 'On the history and origins of the leaders of the Turks'

*De la origine deli imperatori Ottomani*, 'On the origin of the Ottoman emperors'

DATE 1519 (first printed version)

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: ITALIAN

## DESCRIPTION

Spandugino's *De la origine deli imperatori Ottomani, ordini de la corte, forma del guerreggiare loro, religione, rito, et costumi de la natione* is an account of the origins of the Turkish rulers and of their phenomenal rise to power. It is one of the earliest works of its kind, perhaps the first to be written in a vernacular and one of the first produced by an author of Byzantine Greek origin. It was indeed one of the most popular treatises on

the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was printed several times. Spandugino produced a number of versions of his treatise, revising, rewriting and adding new passages. The first version was written between 1513 and 1519 and, since Spandugino lived in exile from Venice in France from 1509, the first printed edition was a French translation of his manuscript, published in Paris in 1519: *La genealogie du Grant Turc a present regnant*.

According to C. Villain-Gandossi, who has transcribed the first part of the text ('La cronaca italiana', pp. 157-71), the first version of the Italian manuscript, which is found at the University of Montpellier, was dedicated to Pope Leo X (1513-21). According to D.M. Nicol, however, the first version of the manuscript was dedicated to King Louis XII of France (1498-1515) (Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, p. xvii; and repeated by Formica, *Lo specchio turco*, p. 44 n. 89). Nicol does not give such precise references as Villain-Gandossi, whose analysis appears more accurate and reliable, and he also gives slightly contradictory information about the different versions of the treatise (Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, pp. xii, xvii). The confusion must be due to the fact that there are at least three different versions of the Italian manuscript and several different translations into French of these first versions (Villain-Gandossi, 'La cronaca italiana', pp. 152-3). Spandugino himself dedicated them to different addressees, sending one to the pope, one to the French king, and another to papal secretary Giovanni Giberti (Villain-Gandossi, 'La cronaca italiana', p. 152).

The final – and amplified – version, finished in 1538, is dedicated to Henry of Valois, later King Henry II (1547-59). This version was first published in Lucca in 1550, then with many inaccuracies (according to Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, p. xviii) in Florence in 1551, and reproduced by Sansovino in his *Historia universale dell'origine et imperio de' Turchi* in 1565 (and many other editions to 1654). It is this version that the Greek scholar Sathas edited in 1890, and upon which the English translation by Nicol is based. Here, when treating the first two parts of Spandugino's treatise, the page numbers of Nicol's translation will be cited, and for the third part, which is not included in Nicol's edition, Sathas' edition will be cited.

The dedication expresses a plea to the pope and princes of Western Christendom to unite against the Turks who have inflicted 'ruin and total desolation' on the Christian world (p. 3). Spandugino wants to alert the Christians to the danger that threatens them from the east. His intention is to describe the origins and deeds of the Ottomans in order to

show 'how such people had ascended to such heights and grandeur' (p. 3). Among his primary sources, he mentions two friends belonging to the Ottoman nobility, and he distinguishes himself from Western historians by his use of Turkish sources, *annali turchi*, though there is no evidence that he actually read any of them. He also distinguishes himself from Turkish historians by not only writing a short history of the deeds of the Ottomans, but by exploring further in order to present an 'understanding of the ritual of the court, the dignitaries, ministers and officials of the Turks in times of war and peace, with a general account of their manners, fashions and customs and a commentary on my findings' (p. 4). Nicol observes that the only contemporary 'Italian' chronicler to whose work Spandugino makes direct reference is Marinus Barletius, who wrote, among other things, an account of Mehmed II's siege of Skodra in Albania in 1474, and a biography of the celebrated Albanian leader George Kastriotes Skanderbeg (Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, p. xxii; Barletius was Albanian, though he may have been born to an Italian family). Spandugino may also have had knowledge of Sagundino's work on the Turks, *De origine et rebus gestis Turcarum*, written in 1456, or of Angiolello's account, *Historia Turchesca* (covering the years 1300-1514), even though they were only circulating in manuscript form at the time. He may also have known Giovio's treatise on the Ottomans, printed in 1531-32 (Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, pp. xxi-xxii).

In 1519, when the first version of Spandugino's treatise appeared, an intense debate about the problem of war against the Turks had been going on for some years, and authors such as Erasmus had written to Pope Leo X about the matter (cf. Michelacci, 'Enmity and otherness in Renaissance culture. Italian writings on Turks', forthcoming). The pope, who was known to be philhellenic, made plans for a crusade against Constantinople with a truce to be proclaimed throughout Christendom, but the project was not implemented.

The occasion of Spandugino's revised edition of the treatise might have been the peace treaty between Charles V and Francis I in Nice in July 1538. In the dedicatory epistle to Henry of Valois, Spandugino expresses the hope that the sacred proposals of these leaders will be put into effect, and that the French king will be the first to use his sword against the Turks and 'excel all other Christian princes in taking up arms, as did your blessed predecessors' (p. 5). Spandugino hopes that the pope, together with the Christian princes and the Persians – the latter being 'considered as powerful counterweights to and enemies of the Turks'

(p. 5) – will fight the Turks. The army of the Persians 'conforms in every respect to Christian standards, being quite different from the style and usages of warfare among the Turks' (p. 6).

The work is divided into four parts: The first deals with the origins and deeds of the Ottoman sultans; the second with the Ottoman court, military and government, and the Turks' way of life; the third is an account of the two Persian rulers Ismail I and his son Tahmasp, and the fourth is a short epilogue. The chapters do not bear titles.

Spandugino recounts the history of Christian-Ottoman relations from the 13<sup>th</sup> century up until 1538, when he interrupts his work because, as he says, he has to leave for Rome. The events between 1509 and 1538, corresponding to the last quarter of the first part, were added in the 1538 edition (Sathas, *Documents inédits*, p. xviii; Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, p. 103 n. 128). The third part, about the two Persian rulers, was also added in 1538.

The first and longest part deals with the origins and deeds of the Ottoman sultans. The first pages relate legends about the origins of the Ottomans, building, Spandugino claims, on mostly Turkish sources (oral and written). Instead of tracing the origins of the Turks back to the mythical Scythians, like many humanist scholars before him, Spandugino argues that the Turks stem from the Oguz tribe, who were shepherds from Tartary.

In his account, Spandugino follows a chronological order beginning with the Fourth Crusade (1204) and its consequences for the Byzantine Empire, going on to tell of the capture of Bursa by the first sultan Osman in 1326, civil wars in Byzantium, Mehmed II's conquests of Constantinople and Negroponte, his attacks on Belgrade, Rhodes, Dalmatia and Friuli, the war between Venice and Bayezid II (1499-1503), and so forth. He tells of Selim's war with the shah of Persia and the sultan of Cairo, about Süleyman's capture of Rhodes, Cairo and Hungary, his campaigns in Persia and – which is rarer in accounts of this kind – preparations for an invasion of Naples in 1537. Spandugino appears to focus on conflicts with the Greeks, Venetians and Persians, and does not recount Charles V's reconquest of Tunis in 1535, for instance, which plays a central role in many other Christian chronicles and narratives. This choice might be interpreted as a signal of his loyalty to the French king, to whom he dedicates one of the first editions.

Nicol refers to the lack of factual accuracy in Spandugino's text, and observes that he was not a trained or well-organised historian (*Theodore Spandounes*, pp. xxiv, 80-81, and see further K. Fleet's review of Nicol).

Spandugino often uses anecdotes about his illustrious relatives to document his points; he refers to statements by sultans or other prominent personalities, and to dialogues he has heard himself or that have been reported to him. He refers to dynastic relations, though often without mentioning any specific historical sources, and, in contrast to Menavino, he more often inserts autobiographical episodes in order to enliven and legitimise the narrative: 'I myself saw 73,000 men at work in Constantinople' (p. 63); the son of a Bosnian Duke 'stayed at our house for a few days' (p. 44) at the time of Mehmed's invasion of Bosnia; also, when writing of Christian prisoners taken by the Turks, he says: 'when I was a lad in Gallipoli I saw some of these who, up to that time, had not been ransomed' (p. 43). Not surprisingly, Spandugino also merges Byzantine history into the account more often than other contemporary Italian historians such as Menavino, Giovio or Cambini.

When comparing Christian rulers with the Ottomans, Spandugino often highlights the values of the latter: 'they did something generous and memorable – something which the Christian princes of the time could not bring themselves to do for the promotion of their faith' (p. 15). Among them, Selim was 'partial' to the Christians and he often took their part when he was judging in personal disputes between Christians and Turks, while 'all Christians who had denied Christ and become Muslims against their will were encouraged to revert to their Christian faith' (p. 64). By respecting and praising the Ottomans, Spandugino conveys how dangerous they were far better than he would have by simply describing them as violent beasts. This way of turning the Turks into heroes was not uncommon as a rhetorical device in Christian writings on the Ottomans, and had the effect of a mirror to Christian readers.

However, according to Spandugino, the dominant reason for the Turks' victories is the internal division among the Christians: the power of the Ottomans increased as a consequence of the Great Schism of 1054 between Greek and Latin Christians, and thus this division between Christians is described as a major sin for which God is now punishing the Christians by sending the Turks against them. Occupying Greek territories, Spandugino says, was easy because of the dissension and thus weakness among the Christian princes, and he seems quite critical of the Orthodox Church in particular: he calls the disobedient attitude of

the patriarchs of Constantinople a 'plague' that became 'cancerous a few years before the Ottoman house came into being' (p. 12). In addition, internal fighting among the Greeks is also an explanation, beginning with the Byzantine Emperor Manuel, who did not manage to resolve the dissension between his seven sons, causing his own ruin and that of all Christendom (p. 25). The Ottomans always pray for division between the Christians, and in this respect their prayers appear to be sadly effective (p. 132).

The second part of the treatise has a different, more ethnographic character, and deals with the Ottoman court, their military and government, their way of life and 'the many ways in which they differ from the principalities of Christendom' (p. 109). Spandugino describes the Ottoman currency and the design of the coins, he describes the Seraglio and the many different kinds of servants of the sultan, explaining their numbers, functions and conditions. All of them, boys, eunuchs and women, are Christians or children of Christians brought as captives from Christian territories.

Spandugino describes the Ottoman government and its main officers. There are two heads of the Treasury, one in Europe and one in Asia, and 10,000 Janissaries in Constantinople, all sons of Christians recruited in the various provinces and brought up in the Turkish faith, customs and laws: 'Then they are toughened up by being made to carry stones and mortar on building projects', they learn the arts of war, and finally they are enrolled in the corps of the Janissaries (p. 117). Spandugino explains in great detail their pay, their way of life, their weapons and their clothes, especially their white caps 'similar to the headgear of the Jesuit friars' (p. 118).

He explains the function of the mufti, 'supreme doctor and expounder of (Islamic) law', and the *mütteferika*, the élite, consisting of 100 sons of noblemen, whose main duty is to follow the sultan when he goes to camp. He mentions the other functionaries: 'The total complement of the Sultan's court at present, on foot and on horse, is 35,000 salaried persons. The number of Christians: in the time of Bayezid it was found that they numbered 1,112,000 Christian vassals paying the *harac* or tribute' (p. 121). Spandugino is also very keen to give financial details about officials' pay, and devotes an entire chapter to 'the revenue of the sultan', including his taxes from 'the poor Christians' (pp. 121-22).

The last paragraphs of this second part deal with ethnographic aspects of the Ottomans' everyday life: their social customs and religious

observances (pp. 127-31), their religion (pp. 131-39), and their way of approaching marriage and funerals (pp. 139-41). Spandugino does not often criticise what he describes, and he gives praise where he thinks it is due: speaking about the sultan's justice towards his subjects, he comments: 'A good and commendable form of justice is available to a poor man who has been wronged', and then he explains how an injured man can put a message with a request on the end of a stick and wait for the sultan to pass by in the street. The sultan will then call the man and hear his complaint. 'Süleyman, for all that he is a harsh persecutor of the Christians, follows something of the example of his forebears in this furtherance of justice; for he wants no one in his empire to be tyrannised or unjustly treated' (p. 122).

Describing the Turkish court and audience chamber (pp. 122-25), he praises the 'splendid sight' of 'their decorated turbans and colourful clothes' (p. 123), and he cannot refrain from observing that the success of the army is due to the energetic, tireless, vigilant and simple life of its soldiers.

Spandugino seems to admire the possibility of social advancement in the Ottoman Empire (p. 129) and the fact that 'these Turks pay respect to a man according to his rank, dignity and condition' (p. 129). He also underscores their charitable character, being 'constantly engaged in such pious and charitable works – far more so than we Christians' (p. 134). Furthermore, they treat their servants 'better than we do' (p. 135). When it comes to the situation of the Christians in Turkey, he is somewhat ambiguous, claiming that 'it is a wonder that they manage to survive' because they have to pay so many taxes and duties on food (p. 124), but that the Turks 'rate Christianity to be the next best and truest faith after their own' (p. 133). Spandugino is keen to show the similarities between Islam and Christendom: the Turks too believe that Mary was a virgin, he says, and they have many Christian prophets, but they do not believe that Jesus was the son of God; instead they believe that he was 'made by God' (p. 133).

Spandugino's attention towards the positive aspects of the Turkish way of governing can be considered a form of indirect criticism of the Christians. This is clear when he affirms that the Turks pray much more than Christians do and that they do not drink wine and never get drunk, which is one of his first observations regarding their social customs. He adds that Christians drink 'often more than they should' (p. 127), and thus bear the shame of their drunkenness. It had been a recurrent theme

in 15<sup>th</sup>-century texts on the Turks to praise them in order to reinforce the attempt to rally the rulers of Christian states against the Ottomans. This strategy corresponds to a mirror play, in which the Other is useful as a *mise-en-scène* to show the limits and weaknesses of Christendom.

Spandugino also expresses a few negative judgments of the Ottomans. He claims that they are 'as much after money here as the Devil is after souls', and that you do not obtain anything without a present (p. 130), and he also claims that they are 'the most self-indulgent men in the world'. Finally, like Menavino, he observes an ambiguous attitude among them towards sodomy, which 'is openly practised even though it is forbidden'. But he does not speak of Islam as a sensual, lustful or demonic religion, and he does not oppose Christian civilisation and Muslim barbarity, as was the case in many writings of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century humanists. Rather, he tries to give reliable information (even though it is not always correct) based on empirical observations, personal experiences and acquaintances. Thanks to his family background and language skills, he had access to insider knowledge about the Ottomans.

Spandugino's way of discussing the subject of the Turks is first and foremost political, but at the same time he does not refrain from including medieval theological argument about the Turks as God's punishment for the Christians' sinful living: 'Almighty God allowed them to be humiliated because of our sins' (p. 12; and repeated for instance at p. 35). When he adds that Christian leaders have often invited the Turks themselves to help them fight other Christians, he introduces the theological argument again: 'The sins of the Christians blinded the eyes of their own leaders. Whenever they had a difference among themselves they called on one of the Ottomans for help against their rivals; and the poor wretches never saw that this was their own clear ruin. Thus have the Ottoman princes reached their dominating position in the present day, aided by the constant discord among the Christian princes' (p. 56). These statements must have been music to the ears of the leaders of the Church, who blamed the Christian princes for their sinful attitude and consequently made them pay financial tributes to the Church. However, the theological argument is only used to blame the Christians and not to judge the Turks. We do not find moral or religious judgments of the Turks in Spandugino's text, and thus it can be seen as an early example of the development of the discourse on the Turks at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when 'the comparisons with the Other are moving (...) from a cognitive and religious level to a political one' (L. Michelacci, 'Enmity and otherness'). M. Meserve (*Empires of Islam in Renaissance historical*

thought, Cambridge MA, 2008, p. 9) has pointed out that Machiavelli was the first to treat the Turks from a strictly political perspective without moral or religious judgments in his *Discourses on Livy* (1531) and *Dell'arte della guerra* (1521), and Michelacci ('Enmity and otherness') has shown that he also does this in *The prince* (1532). Michelacci shows how Machiavelli establishes a connection between Roman and Turkish virtue, quoting from his *Discourses* (Book 1, ch. 30) in which he claims that: 'To avoid the necessity of having to spend his life suspecting people and displaying ingratitude, a prince should go in person on any expedition, as in beginning the Roman emperors did, as in our day the Turk does, and as courageous princes both have done and still do' (Michelacci, 'Enmity and otherness'). Spandugino, too, can be considered an example of the same tendency, since he does not judge the Ottomans from either a religious or a moral viewpoint in his treatise, which was published in its first version in 1519.

The third part of the treatise, added by Spandugino in 1538, is an account of the customs and warfare of two Persian kings, Shah Ismail I (r. 1501-24) and his son Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-76). Nicol does not reproduce this text but summarises it very briefly, judging it a 'confused and confusing piece' (Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, p. 144). However, this part of Spandugino's text is interesting and does contain many correct or partially correct points of information on the empire of the Safavids and their founder Shah Ismail I. Spandugino's account of the Persians is apparently not well-known among modern scholars, who do not mention it when referring to Christian (or Italian) accounts of the Persian Empire (although they do refer to the accounts by Angiolello, Ramusio and Zeno), as is the case in the otherwise very thorough and detailed entry on Ismail (Savory and Karamustafa, 'Esmā'īl i Šafawī') in *Elr*. Spandugino's account confirms his (and thus his contemporaries') awareness of the potential political role of the Persian Empire in the conflicts between Ottoman and European powers: his intention is to make Christian leaders understand that the Persians are important allies against the Turks.

In his introductory dedication to Henry of Valois of this third part, Spandugino says that he is 'taking this work with me to Rome to show it to the pope' (p. 5). The existence of a letter, addressed not to the pope but to his grandson, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, It. VI. 365 [5957], cf. Mazzatinti, Sorbelli, and Ferrari, *Inventari dei manoscritti*, p. 143), confirms that Spandugino presented his 'operetta' on the Persian kings at the papal court. He mentions a task with which he

has been 'commissioned', and the text may initially have been the result of a request from Farnese (cf. Mazzatinti, Sorbelli, and Ferrari, *Inventari dei manoscritti*, p. 143).

Shah Ismail was the founder of the Safavid dynasty. He was crowned in 1501 at the age of 14, and Spandugino describes him in rather laudatory terms: honest, severe in matters of justice, and very generous: he did not accumulate treasures and riches, but preferred to spend and spill. He was adored by his people and praised as a prophet. Like his father and grandfather, Ismail headed the Safaviyya Sufi order. An invented genealogy claimed that Shaykh Safi (the founder of the order and Ismail's ancestor) was a lineal descendant of the Imam 'Alī. When Spandugino explains the origin of the Shī'a Muslims and some of the differences that distinguish them from the faith of the Ottomans, who are Sunnī Muslims, he follows this tradition and says that the Persians 'have 'Alī more in reverence than Muḥammad' (Sathas, *Documents inédits*, p. 252, my translation, also in the following; hereafter, page numbers refer to this edition of Spandugino's text). Spandugino praises Ismail's son, Shah Tahmasp (Thomas) even more than his father for being 'beloved and revered', generous, righteous and religious (p. 258).

In recounting some of the stages in the expansion of Safavid power in Persia, Spandugino often compares Persians and Christians (directly and indirectly), opposing both to the Ottomans: as when he informs his readers that Ismail drank wine and ate pork, 'and in this and in other things [they] were different from the Turks' (p. 253). According to Spandugino, who apparently passes on information from one of Ismail's own domestics, Ismail bred pigs and even named them after the Ottoman sultans (p. 253).

The Persians are more similar to the Christians in their way of government and warfare: their ruler 'commands an army that conforms in every respect to Christian standards, being quite different from the style and usages of warfare among the Turks', and they get paid 'just like the Christians' (p. 258). When he compares the society and the government of the Persians and the Ottomans, he often underscores how different the former are from the latter: 'their government and costumes are different, he governs his people in another way', and 'in Turkey nobody has a feud' while 'in Persia there is an endless number of lords that have feuds, called the Turcomani' (p. 259).

The noble Persians stand above all the others, Spandugino explains, while in Turkey the lowest, if virtuous, can be judged more worthy than

the most noble (p. 259). The Persians are more faithful and warlike than the Turks ('they fight and die more willingly for their religion than do the Turks', p. 259). He even claims that the Persians are more astute than the Turks in matters of war. Finally, although the Turkish ruler may be richer than the Persian, and own much more territory, the Persians are indeed 'gentlemen and noble' (p. 259); they are 'very much experts in war' and are more virtuous than the Turks.

The account concludes with a description of Süleyman's capture of Tabriz and Baghdad, and of the temporary Persian recovery of Tabriz. But at the moment of his writing (1538) the Persian Shah Thomas had established an alliance with the Tartars which, according to Spandugino, might mean that the Europeans would no longer have to fear the Turks.

After the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, in which Shah Ismail I lost territories to the invader Sultan Selim I, Ismail explored the possibility of alliance with European powers, with the object of attacking the Ottomans. He tried to establish contacts with both the king of Hungary and the king of Spain. Spandugino's account of the Persians seems to be part of a similar diplomatic strategy, reflecting his awareness of the same interest on behalf of the Papacy in the possibility of establishing a common alliance with Persia against the Ottomans. In an article on the knowledge of Iranian culture in Italy, Mario Casari observes that 'a new process of conscious political observation and of the cultural discovery of Persia emerged with the accession of Uzûn Hasan (r. 1457-78). The interest, particularly of the Republic of Venice and the Papacy, in the possibility of establishing a common alliance with Persia against the Ottomans, led to an active exchange of embassies' ('Italy', vii). The accession of Shah Ismail, the 'Sofi', was widely noticed in Italy, Casari observes, and he explains that this activity on the Italian side led to the publication of numerous accounts of Persia, mainly geopolitical in character: the travel diaries of Giosafat Barbaro (1413-94), Ambrogio Contarini (1429-99), Michele Membré (d. 1594) and Giovanni Maria Angioiello (1451-1525), whose chronicle, *Historia Turchesca*, which recounts the period between the rise of Uzûn Hasan and the death of Shah Ismail, might have influenced Spandugino in his short account of the Persian Empire.

In the fourth and concluding part of the treatise, which is a one-page chapter, Spandugino repeats that he has built on Turkish historians and that he has tried to give information that is as precise as possible – regarding the incomes of the Turks, for example.

Spandugino's treatise was meant to inform Christian princes and popes about Ottoman government, society, religion and customs, and to alert Christians to the danger that threatened them from the east. His Byzantine roots are visible in his narration, but 'to Spandounes the word Greece or Grecia meant Europe', in contrast to Sathas' patriotic reading, as is underscored by Nicol (*Theodore Spandounes*, p. xi). Spandugino was more interested in protecting Europe as a whole, including both the Roman and the Greek world, and not first and foremost the Greek. His religious persuasion may even have been closer to the Roman Church than to Byzantine Orthodoxy. He was a 'devout Christian' (Nicol, *Theodore Spandounes*, p. viii), he was delighted by Leo X's crusading efforts, and he expresses his disappointment in Pope Hadrian VI, who failed to support the Knights of St John in Rhodes. His loyalty towards the papal court is also reflected in his correspondence with Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and in his dedicatory prologues to the treatise.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

In spite of the claims expressed in the dedication about fighting the Turks, Spandugino's treatise cannot be considered as a part of the quantity of anti-Turkish propaganda writings that dominated humanist writings in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Spandugino's portrait of the Turks is remarkable because he describes Constantinople and Ottoman society quite positively, as a well-functioning and complex reality in which Christians and Jews, for example, could have a successful career and work without fear. His treatise is characterised by objectivity and a profound knowledge of the Ottoman Empire, its customs, military, government etc., and it was thus an important contribution to the knowledge in western Europe of the Ottomans at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Spandugino inaugurates and represents (together with Machiavelli, Giovio and Menavino, among others) a tendency in early-16<sup>th</sup>-century Italian literature to treat the Ottomans in a more objective way.

Thanks to the objective value of Spandugino's book, historians have not been the only ones to use it as a source of knowledge about the Ottoman empire, but philologists have also cited it in order to trace the first appearance of Ottoman words in Italian and thus French (Villain-Gandossi refers to various works; 'La cronaca italiana', p. 157 n. 32). R. Merriman mentions Spandugino's book as 'one of the best of the earlier accounts' on the early history of the Ottoman Turks (*Suleiman the Magnificent*, p. 305).



Spandugino's treatise confirms that the image of the Turk as depicted in Italian Renaissance literature is highly complex, and that it develops through the period from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, many humanists had moved their focus from a religious to a more secular approach when treating the Turks, but they still maintained some of the stereotypes about savage barbarians as opposed to civilised Christians (cf. the studies of Hankins, Bisaha, Meserve). At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it is impossible to persist with the idea of the Turks as simply barbarians. Their military success is clear and Europeans begin to observe, analyse and, at times, admire the political system behind it. Spandugino represents this desire for a better understanding of the history of the rise and expansion of the Ottomans, and thus, through knowledge of the enemy, to find a way to combat him. Instead of the fanciful prophecies and anti-Islamic propaganda of earlier centuries, we find a more pragmatic and factual approach to the Turks and a sense of obligation to inform European leaders about Ottoman society, their military, and way of life.

As is the case with similar travel reports from the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, however, while Spandugino's treatise is characterised on the one hand by its factual approach, on the other it is still embedded into the context of the idea of the Turkish menace, mostly indicated by the introductory remarks in the prologue. According to Höfert ("Europe" and "religion", p. 225), this contradiction seems to be a common trait of similar accounts from this period. However, he still sometimes uses the term *setta* ('sect').

Furthermore, even though Höfert does not mention Spandugino in her article, it seems that his treatise can very well be seen as a contribution to the very rise and development of the ethnographic genre she describes, a genre that emerges within travel reports on the Turks (and on America) in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Spandugino's work was contemporary with Menavino's, and we do find several similarities. Both men dedicated and presented a first draft of their treatises on the Ottomans to Pope Leo X in 1519. (Leo had imposed tithes for a war against the Turks in 1517, and planned a crusade.) Menavino's book on the Ottomans, *I cinque libri*, was written between 1514 and 1519, but only published in 1545 (in Venice by Valgrisi and Florence by Lorenzo Torrentino). Spandugino's treatise was already published in 1519, in France and in a French translation, and the success of the work in France might have inspired the Italian editors. One of the first Italian editions of Spandugino's work was published in Florence in

1551 by the same Lorenzo Torrentino who published Menavino's book. Spandugino treats the same arguments as Menavino, but in the reverse order: first the history of the Ottomans, then the different positions of retainers in the sultan's Seraglio, and finally a discussion of everyday life and Islam, which is less detailed than Menavino's. Spandugino has obtained his knowledge from contacts in the Seraglio and from Turkish historians. According to Dalzell, Spandugino's discussion of the boys in the Seraglio shows that a well-dispersed discussion of *icoglan*s and other similar Christian slaves was circulating around Europe (before Menavino's publication), while there was only limited knowledge of the religious principles behind Islam (Dalzell, 'First line of contact', pp. 75-76).

Compared with Menavino, Spandugino's book was clearly more popular, since it was reprinted several times and soon translated into several languages. Menavino, though, had built on personal experience and first-hand contact with the sultan and life in the Seraglio, and he presents more accurate information about these matters, while Spandugino had never been inside the sultan's palace, the Topkapisaray, himself. Spandugino's text thus gives a less accurate picture and fewer details, but since his work was probably more widely read, it better represents how much Europeans would have known about the Ottomans.

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Pia Schwarz Lausten

## Leo Africanus

Al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Wazzān al-Fāsī;  
Yuhannā l-Asad al-Gharnāṭī l-Fāsī; Johannes Leo  
Africanus; Johannes Leo Medici; Giovan Lioni Africano;  
Joan Lione Granatino

DATE OF BIRTH 1486-88 or 1494  
PLACE OF BIRTH Granada  
DATE OF DEATH Possibly 1534-35  
PLACE OF DEATH Possibly Tunis

### BIOGRAPHY

Al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad was born in Granada in 1494, according to Rauchenberger (*Johannes Leo der Afrikaner*), or 1486-88, according to Davis (*Trickster travels*, pp. 17, 279-80), though his family moved to Fez either before or after the fall of Granada (1492). The first wave of Muslim migrants left Granada for Morocco in 1496, including possibly part of his father Muḥammad al-Wazzān's family, who were hosted and employed at the Fez court. Al-Ḥasan's uncle served as a diplomat for Sultan Muḥammad al-Shaykh, founder of the Wattāsid dynasty. Al-Ḥasan began his education at a neighbourhood school, and then continued at a *madrasa* in Fez, where the curriculum included grammar, rhetoric, religious doctrine and *fiqh* according to the Mālīkī school of law. Upon completing his studies (1506/7), he became a *faqīh*, a scholar trained in law.

Al-Ḥasan was accustomed to travelling from an early age: to the family vineyards in the Rif Mountains, to the family's rented castle above Fez, and to saints' tombs in the Middle Atlas. On an official mission, he visited Safī (1507) on the Atlantic coast, and he also claims to have visited Persia, Babylonia, Armenia and the central Asian lands of the Tartars, though 'there is little sign of it in his existing writing' (Davis, *Trickster travels*, p. 23).

He accompanied his uncle on embassies for Muḥammad al-Burtughālī to the ruler of Timbuktu (possibly in 1510/11) and to Gao, where he returned some years later. He also travelled in other parts of North Africa, went to Cairo (probably three times, in 1513, 1517 and 1518), to central Maghreb and Istanbul (1515-16) and then to Medina and possibly Mecca.