

İBRAHİM TELLİOĞLU, *Trabzon Rum Devleti*, Serander, Trabzon 2009. 183 pages. ISBN 978-9944-374-23-1

## Introduction

İbrahim Telliöđlu, who is a professor at Ondokuz Mayıs University, Faculty of Letters, History Department, displays his knowledge and talent to address a highly debated issue: Trebizond Greek State<sup>1</sup> from a perspective unlike the common Western historiography in that he discusses it introducing several sources such as the Chronicle of Michael Paneretos the major source of the period of III. Aleksios (1349-1390), the most important source, regarding the relations of the Comnenos dynasty with the Turks and Venetians and Geneose in the neighbourhood, the Byzantine sources such as the the Chronicle of Georgios Acropolites, which enlightens the struggle of David Comneos with Theodore Laskaris, the Chronicle of Nikephoras Gregoras, Ioannes Kantakouzenus, and Laonikas Chalkokondyles and the Chronicles of Papadopoulos regarding Trebizond included at the end of the works of J. P. Falmerayer, G. Finlay, W. Miller, S. I. Karpov and F. I. Uspenski. Besides, he introduces the Venetian and Geneose sources related to the political situation of the Black Sea region and the Comnenos, especially from the last quarter of the 13th century onwards (p.xiii-xvi).

In addition, he uses the tavelogues of Clavijo, sent as a Spanish envoy to Tamerlane. He asserts that the travelogues of Clavijo are highly important in that they give detailed information about the period of Manuel related the sovereignty of the Comnenos in the Black Sea region. The other source he uses is the “Anonymous Georgian Chronicle” published by Brosset titled as “Historie de la Georgia” in 1849 and the Chronicle of Cardinal Bessarion. They are crucial sources owing to the fact that they not only enable us to understand the Georgian influence lying behind the capture of the Black Sea by Aleksisos and David but alsoto understand how the Turkish tribes having fled from the Mongols settled in the south of the Comnenos, Furthermore, these sources mention how the

<sup>1</sup> As a result of the IV. Crusade in 1204, before İstanbul was occupied by the Latin, the grandsons of Byzantine emperor I. Andronikos Comnenos (1183-1185) called Aleksios and David escaped from the capital with the help of Tamara and founded the Trebizond Greek State in 1204 by establishing sovereignty in the Eastern Black Sea. This Empire had managed to maintain its existence for 257 years until the conquest of Fatih Sultan Mehmed in 1461 However, even though it had been following the policy of extendig its territories towards the west, it had to give it up due to the strenghtening position of the state that Theodoros Laskaris established in Nicea (İznik) and the union of Anatolia was realized during the reign of I. Alâeddin Keykubad (1220-1237) see. İbrahim Telliöđlu, “Trabzon Rum Devleti’nin Kuruluşu Hakkındaki Tartışmalar”, *Erdem*, c.14, S. 41, Eylül 2004, p. 139-146; Murat Keçiř, “Trabzon Rum İmparatorluđunun Kuruluşunda Çevreyle Olan İliřkileri”, *Tarih Arařtırmaları Dergisi*, c. 28, S: 46, p. 143-162; İbrahim Telliöđlu, “Trabzon Rum Devleti’nin Hristiyan Dünüyasiyla İliřkileri (1214- 1458)”, *Uluslararası Karadeniz İncelemeleri Dergisi*, S.5, p. 33-53. Telliöđlu addresses issue of how these two brothers David and Aleksios escaped from Georgia with the help of Tamara discussing different views see. İbrahim Telliöđlu, “Trabzon Rum Devleti Tarihi’nin Taksimi Meselesi Üzerine”, *XI. Milli Türkoloji Kongresi (11- 13 Kasım 2014)*, İstanbul 2015, p. 245-257.

town was captured by the Ottomans and the condition of the Comnenos dynasty in the year of 1461 as well (p.xvi-xvii).

The author states that among the important sources about the existence of the Turks in the Black Sea are the sources of Seljuks such as “İbn Bibi Selçukname”, “Aksarayı”, “Müsaremetü'l Ahbar”, “Anonim Selçukname”, in which one can obtain information concerning the political situation of the Black Sea, especially the activities of Chepnis in the region, the Turkish groups and their relations with Trebizond and the advance of the Comnenos and the political situation in Anatolia (p.xvii-xviii). Moreover, he claims that another source written by Tihrani provides information concerning the relations of the Comnenos established with the Akkoyunlu and those relations can be followed from the other's point of view. Similarly, he points out that regarding the conquest of Trebizond by the Ottomans and their giving an end to the sovereignty of the Comnenos in the region what Tursun Bey and Mahmut Pasha had witnessed are highly important as well. He argues that the Chronicles of Tursun Bey and Mihailoviç are essential sources so as to understand the course of the campaign. Moreover, he asserts that the travelogues of William of Rubruck, an envoy sent to Mongols by Saint Louis, the French King, give considerable information as to the situation of the Comnenos in the year of 1253. More importantly, he emphasizes the fact that in these sources it comes to daylight that the Comnenos became subject to Mongols, contrary to some sources claiming that it was independent (xviii-xix).

After introducing the sources mentioned above, the author goes on to introduce the studies related to the history of Comnenos. First, he introduces the book of Fallmerayer published in 1827. He points out that the history of the Comnenos in the Black Sea region was not known until that book was published. However, he criticizes this study; for it became a model for the other studies made during that period. He argues that these studies generally tend to address the issue through this work. He thinks that the second outstanding researcher regarding the history of the Comnenos is G. Finlay, who published a book titled as “The History of Greece and of the Empire of Trebizond” in 1851. The author believes that he differs from Falmerayer in that he addresses the issue using the Byzantine sources. He also mentions the names of other researchers such as W. Miller, S. İ. Kaprov and Anthony Bryer, R. Shukurov, M. Bilgin, E. Gibbon, A. A. Vassiliev, A. Tournanof, and so on. (p.xix-xxviii). As is seen, unlike the other authors, he introduces the sources and the researches carried out in this field. Thus, he provides the reader with a wide range of primary and secondary sources. The book is made up of five chapters.

### **Foundation**

In the first chapter, the author gives some background information about the Pontic Greek State. First, he refers to the Georgian factor behind the brothers, Aleksios and David. The author points stresses the fact that Tamara, the Georgian queen helped those two brothers- the relatives of her- to capture the territories between Heraclia (Karadeniz

Ereğlisi) and Trebizond on April 1204 rather than locating a large army in the region that might negatively affect the protection of her own country. Thus, she thought that it would be much easier for her to make people accept her sovereignty owing to the higher prestige of the Comnenos in the region (p.22). The author also provides information about the way to the foundation focusing on two different views in the Byzantine sources such as how Aleksios and David escaped from İstanbul. More importantly, he puts forward the idea that they had been supported by the Scholars, the Byzantine notables and the family friends of the Comnenos. To him, if it were contrary, the existence of the Georgian group in the palace would be much clearer. He also claims that if they had been incorporated into Georgian culture and spoken Georgian it would have existed in the Georgian sources. On the contrary, they had a powerful Byzantine consciousness and they were highly ambitious to capture İstanbul again and revive the Byzantine Empire (p.25). Finally, the author gives information about the period of Aleksios (1204-1222), who considered the Angelos dynasty as the one which seized the sovereignty from their hands and considered himself as the ex-emperor of the Byzantine (p.27-29).

### **The Period of being subject**

In the second chapter, the author asserts that the sovereignty of the Comnenos in the Black Sea emerged under some extraordinary conditions when the Byzantine Empire passed in other hands. He also contends that if the crusaders had not occupied İstanbul it would not have been possible for Aleksios to declare his independence in Trebizond, the Chaldea state of Byzantine. Moreover, he points out that even though in the history most of the states developed after they were established, the Comnenos were able to maintain their existence through being subject to another political power. In this sense, he discusses how they became subject to Anatolian Seljuks, the siege of Trebizond by the Seljuks and the renewal of their being subject to Seljuks, their being subject to Mongols, the increase of the Turkish pressure over Trebizond and how the Comnenos gave up the idea of being the heir of the Byzantine, and so on. (p.41-64).

### **The Rise**

In the third chapter, the author writes about how the Comnenos carried out some activities to gain their independence during the period of Manuel. However, he argues that this should be discussed on the basis of the changes both in Türkiye and the Islamic world. He details his ideas through some examples. For instance, he states that during the reign of Ioannes the territories of the Comnenos sovereignty narrowed and they retreated from Cotyora (Ordu) when the Turks started to establish their domination. He underlines the fact that all these indicate that only to some extent, the Comnenos get involved in the things that take place around themselves. However, during the reign of II. Aleksios both

the policy towards the Turkish groups and the relations with the Catholic world through the Geneose and Venetian formed a basis for the foreign policy of Trebizond Greek State in the following years. He strongly thinks that this was closely related to Seljuks being under the sovereignty of the Mongols and similarly due to the fact that Georgia was divided by the Mongols and two different governments emerged in the east and the west. Thus, he considers this political atmosphere as a great luck for the Comnenos; for there was no possible danger or threat headed towards them (p.67-68).

The author gives information about the development of the relations with the Orthodox Kipchaks as well. He mentions the existence of the Kipchaks in the region referring to the Georgian source (Anonymous Georgian Chronicle) in which the emigration of Kipchaks to Georgia at the beginning of the 12th century, their contribution to putting an end to Georgians' being subject to the Seljuks and the Georgian kingdom having become a highly important power in the region, and so on are given in detail. He puts a greater emphasis on the fact that since the Byzantine intellectuals and the Comnenos researchers were not aware of this source, they described the wife of Aleksios as Goergian. However, she was a Turk, the daughter of Beka. Furthermore, he puts forward some evidence related to the existence of the Kipchaks in the Trebizond Greek State and he states that their existence in Trebizond and its vicinity starts with the reign of Aleksios (p.74-75).

The author focuses on the organisation of the relations with the Geneose and the Venetian. He thinks that during the reign of Aleksios the relations with the Geneose and the Venetian take an important place in the history of the Comnenos. Thus, he explains how the Geneose had been an important commercial power from 12th century onwards and the Venetians gained commercial power when İstanbul was occupied by the Latins in 1204. In addition, he mentions that following the end of the Latin Empire, the Genoese made some attempts to gain some commercial priviliges against the Venetians. Thus, the Nymphanion (Nif) was signed in 1261 (p.85-88).

### **Civil Wars and Decline**

In the fourth chapter, the author mentions the civil wars focusing on the fact that after the death of II. Aleksios and after the Andronikos had ascended to the throne, Trebizond became a place in which internal disorder prevailed and some groups were not hesitant to confiscate the goods of the inhabitants. Moreover, he refers to the fact that the murder in the Comnenos palace had become a very common thing and as a result after the death of Andronikos in 1332, everthing turned upside down and the power struggle among some groups increased in the palace (93-94).

In the following lines, the incursions of the Turkish tribes towards Trebizond have been discussed in detail. First, in 1332 the incursions of Bayram Bey, the leader of Hacı

Emiroğlu Beylic, the Turkish incursions (Timurtaş and his son, Şeyh Hasan) from the southern part towards the town, the reign of Irene, the wife of Basilios during which the Akkoyunlu entered the town in 1341 and caused the change of power and set the town to fire, and so on are mentioned in detail. Unlike some researchers, the author discusses how Anna Anakutlu Comnenos ascended to throne through the support of Mezokhaldias. He also focuses on how she was given a military support by the Khipcaks within a short time. In other words, on the contrary to Byzantine sources or the sources written in the 19th century, he relates the detrone of Irene and the ascent of Anna Comnena to the throne to the Khipcaks, but not to the support of Georgians or Laz (p.100-103).

The author gives information concerning the efforts to stop the decline during the reign of III. Aleksios (1349-1390). First, he mentions that after the domestic order had been established, Aleksios attempted to get in touch with the Akkoyunlu, which turned into a big threat in the south towards Trebizond from the year 1341 onwards. Thus, in order to develop relations between two parties he made some efforts to establish a kinship. Therefore, he married his sister to Kutlu Bey, the son of the leader of the Akkoyunlu, Turali bey. Likewise, in order to stop the incursions of the Turcoman Beylics, he married his sister, Theodora to the son of Hacı Emir. Another Turcoman Beylic he got into touch with through a political marriage is the Tacerddin Beylic. When the Comnenos had lost Ounea (Ünye) in 1379, he attempted to get in touch with them and Aleksios married his daughter, Eudokia to Taceddin. The author stresses the fact that even though Aleksios made some achievements through the political marriages with some Turcoman beylics towards Trebizond, the incursions of some of the Turcomans he had not got into contact with had been going on. (p.104-115). As is seen, the writer puts a greater emphasis on the fact that during the reign of III. Aleksios, due to the incursions of the Turcoman beylics headed towards Trebizond the Comnenos had been trying to maintain their sovereignty through the method of some political marriages for a while.

### **The Collapse**

In the last chapter, the author presents the events experienced during the reign of Manuel (1390-1417) after the death of Aleksios. In this sense, he points out that when he ascended to throne, some important events had been taking place around the Comnenos. To him, one of the most important one is the spread of the Ottoman Empire to the Eastern Black Sea. For instance, during the reign of I. Beyazid (1380- 1402), when the Muslim Samsun was taken in 1394, the Ottomans and Trebizond Greeks became close neighbours on the border of Ounea. The writer underlines the fact that upon that development, even though the Comnenos managed to maintain their existence through some political marriages in order to cope with the Canik beylics such as Hacı Emiroğulları and Taceddinoğulları, they became neighbours with a more powerful state which can not

be compared with these beylics. Then he gives detailed information as to the period before the collapse of Trebizond, the capture of Kerasus (Giresun) by Hacı Emiroğulları and then the inner turmoil in Trebizond, the reach of the Ottoman sovereignty to the walls of the Comnenos, the attempts to develop relations with the Catholic world, the campaign of Şeyh Cüneyd to Trebizond, the advance of Fatih towards Trebizond, the last attempts to prevent the collapse (relations with the Vatikan and the Akkoyunlu), the siege of Trebizond and the end of the Comnenos sovereignty in the region, and so on. (p.119-142).

### **Conclusion**

All in all, “Trebizond Greek State” written by İbrahim Telliöğlü is one of the first studies that focus on the issue of naming that state as an empire. Through making some criticisms about the works of some European researchers such as Miller and the others, who generally prefer to repeat the things in the work of J. P. Falmerayer which became a model for the other studies written under the influence of Hellenism in the 19th century, the author argues that contrary to the common belief in the western literature, it can not be called as an empire; for she managed to establish domination only in six towns, except for Samsun (Amisos) and Sinop

Second, as has been explained above, the study of Telliöğlü can be considered as the first one that addresses the issue of the history of Trebizond Greek State through some categorisations. Therefore, unlike some other studies carried out on Trebizond Greek State, it becomes easy to follow the history of the Comnenos sovereignty in Trebizond from 1204 to 1461 in a chronological order.

Third, the writer puts a greater emphasis on some problematic issues such as the issue of how David and Aleksios escaped from İstanbul and managed to establish a state at a place far away from the Byzantine Empire and the Georgian factor lying behind it, and the existence of the Kiphcaks in Trebizond and its vicinity not mentioned in the other sources, and so on. Thus, the writer tries to answer such sort of questions lying in the darkness and explain them from his own point of view by providing some scientific and objective evidence for the reader.

Fourth, unlike the other studies, the other thing that makes the study valuable and interesting is that the writer uses a wide range of sources ranging from the foreign sources to local ones and he scientifically discusses and addresses the issue from the eye of various sources. Therefore, it can be put forward that the book makes some valuable contributions both to the history and literature of the Comnenos.

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