



CONSTANTINOPOLE

or

"The Great Betrayal"

Theological tragedy in one scene

by Christian Lanciai.

The characters :

Three citizens, representing the community

cardinal Isidor

Megadux (grand duke) Lucas Notaras, imperial admiral

a herald

emperor Constantine XI

a servant

captain Trevisano, Venetian

Gennadios, fanatic monk

Frantzes, the emperor's childhood friend

an envoy

Captain Giovanni Giustiniani, Genoan imperial commander

a military captain

a janissary

an old man

three messengers

captain of the harbour

a fat monk

a young artisan

a musician

a beggar

three soldiers

Johann Brandt, German engineer

Two Genoan captains

a spy

a Venetian captain

an old librarian

a Venetian military captain

twelve rugged sailors

some Turks

Ismail Hamza, emir of Sinope

and the community

The action is in Constantinople, spring 1453

The stage is the central hall of worship in Hagia Sofia

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The author calls this solemn play in one single scene "a theological tragedy" about what preceded the fall of Constantinople in 1453. At the centre is the last Byzantine king as the only truly tragic figure, who has to carry the weight of the pettiness, smallness and betrayal of the whole world. The Greeks are represented by the grand duke Lucas Notaras, the Genoese by the naval commander Giustiniani, the Venetians by some opportunistic captains, also the papal cause is represented like the arguments of the Turks and Islam, and all these different mentalities collide in a mosaic of struggling wills which all must give way to destiny in the form of the king's tragedy, who has no choice but to defend the city until the end, which also becomes the tragedy of the victors, the Turks, in the form of eternal dishonour. How could this happen? you could keep asking forever without receiving any answer.

CONSTANTINOPLE

or

"The Great Betrayal"

A Greek tragedy in one scene

The action is inside the cathedral Hagia Sofia.

- Citizen 1 What news from Genoa and Venice?
- Citizen 2 Nothing. They let us down again as always.
- Citizen 3 They only want to get without giving anything.
- 2 They just want to suck is out until all the blood of our Greek nation is depleted.
- 3 And they buy us and cheat us to death by false promises.
- 1 Is it true that the king has accepted the pope's ultimatum?
- 2 It is feared that he in this way has prostituted himself.
- 3 He has probably sold his throne and kingdom for some help against the Turks
that never arrives.

2 He will arrive here any moment with the cardinal.

1 But look! There is the Cardinal!

3 Yes. Now we shall hear what has happened.

2 He seems pale and resigned.

3 He is more than that, he is petrified by dejection.

(Enter Cardinal Isidor with retinue and appearing on a podium.)

Isidor (with no enthusiasm) Rejoice, o sanctity of Christian churches! Now the Christian church is once more reunited into one single unity! All Christians of the world stand now united against the peril of all the destructive powers of Turks and barbarians, that now threatened our city for two hundred years! Never again do we have to fear to be massacred by the mahometans and watch our city being ruined by the Turkish Tartars!

Lucas Notaras And the price, Cardinal?

Isidor What do you mean by what price, my noble megadux and admiral?

Notaras What do we have to pay to get into the pope's procurement?

Isidor My noble megadux, we are at church facing all the community of Constantinople. There is no room for vulgar jokes here. Stick to the decorum, of decency!

Notaras Between your decency and truth I prefer the truth. I mean, like all Greeks, that our realm has been brought into the papal leash, like a dog. And therefore I ask you what we have paid to thus have earned this grace.

Isidor You are joking and jeer in vain at a cardinal. Put your questions to some politician.

Notaras There is none here. There is only you.

Isidor Our king is on his way.

A herald (announcing) Make way for the king, his majesty King Constantine the eleventh!

(Flourishj. The King's solemn entry in procession with retinue)

Citizen 1 Constantine the last.

Citizen 2 In the eleventh hour of history.

Constantine (tired) My friends, after long difficult negotiations we have reached support from Venice. Ten warships will come from there with relief for us in the dire straits of our present situation. It wasn't easy to persuade and convince the pope of such support, but necessity demanded it.

Notaras To the price, King Constantine, of our religion?

Constantine Each one has his own religion in inviolable conscience of his own. The orthodox church of the state has only sacrificed one paragraph.

Notaras Which one?

Constantine The pope wished one word of our creed to be altered.

Notaras So we shall have a new creed?

Constantine No, it's the same as the old but with one small difference.

Notaras Namely?

Constantine My cardinal, you could perhaps explain this theological hair-splitting and make it understandable to a religiously touchy admiral.

Isidor The alteration of the creed does not change the religion.

Notaras But it makes the church dependent on the pope.

Isidor The church is one single church all over the world.

Notaras Run by the papal harlotry.

(A murmur among the community. Notaras looks triumphant around.)

(louder) We have sold our sovereignty for a few ships from the pope on the condition that we renounce our orthodox church and become catholics. And when will the papal ships arrive?

Constantine Patience, my good megadux, and take it easy! The ten warships will come to our aid as soon as they have been fully furnished.

Notaras I beg everyone to observe, that when we last time were remade into catholics, our city with the homes of our fathers were burned. We were christened by force by the same ruthless Romans who made us slaves in the days of the Antiquity and who plundered Athens. Have we then managed to renounce the Latin yoke of usurpers just to fall under the papal one by sad prostitution?

Constantine My good megadux, this is about politics and survival, not religious pettiness.

Notaras To us Greeks it is about identity, integrity and sovereignty. The west always only brought us humiliation, oppression and foul degradation.

Constantine Would you prefer the Turks and their bloody cruelty with religious intolerance and fanaticism?

Notaras I am just saying, that anything is better than the deceit and rotten authority of an all-powerful pope. Such a monopoly of double standards of a world conscience is nothing for free Greeks. Rather freedom to death than any compromise with western deceitfulness.

Constantine My dear megadux, I respect your honesty, but it is not political.

Notaras Is it then politically more sensible to confide in western power which only failed, used, sucked and ravished us?

(leaves in anger with his armed contingent.)

Constantine Our megadux is angry.

Isidor It's not good to have a thunderstorm inside when the Turks are besieging our walls.

Constantine I would still prefer the Greek thunderstorm inside forever than a single Turk a single day at our walls.

Isidor Do you really think the pope could scare our Turks?

Constantine There is no other hope.

A servant My lord, a gentleman from Pera requests an improvised audience.

Constantine Here in church?

servant He is very angry.

Constantine Genoese or Venetian?

Servant Venetian.

Constantine I see. Show him up.

(Room is made for a Venetian captain.)

My good man, what is on your mind?

Captain Trevisano No goodness exactly, you sanctimonious fake players and pretending robbers and crooks!

Constantine My good man, I must beg you to behave in a church.

Trevisano And I must ask you to mind that I am a Venetian and merchant and no sanctimonious saint! I don't care where I behave as long as I may behave! Now it is enough!
(throws vehemently his cap on the floor)

Constantine (cautiously, to Isidor) Have you any idea of what has happened, Cardinal?

Isidor No idea.

Constantine My good man, if you have been subject to any injustice you have the right to appeal and bring you case to me.

Trevisano Yes, that's right! Appeal to the executioner! That's just your way, you Byzantine snails and reptiles, who only survive by insidious tricks!

Constantine Please come to the point.

Trevisano I will tell you, master monarch of this dump of a former capital, that if you don't return our ships at once, all Europe shall know about it so that they will gladly leave you to the Turk like a stinking rotten black radish!

Constantine You blame me for measures decided by all Europe. Go to Europe with your complaints.

Trevisano You were chairman of the international council!

Constantine My good captain, try to view the matter more objectively and less egoistically! It is our cause and our realm that matters. As things are, we are the extreme outpost of Christianity in the east, a lone and single oasis in a desert of mahometan fanaticism and barbaric intolerance. We are at war with this desert. Twenty-one international votes of the council votes against the one vote of Venice. You will be compensated for the ships needed for our defences, and the rent we pay is generous. There is no cause for any anger.

Trevisano You sell out your honour to make the pope send you ships while you steal our merchant navy!

Constantine Only the large galleys. Your merchant ships are free to return with your cargo.

Trevisano Still I have to report the crime to the western nations!

Constantine Do so, and then shut up.

Trevisano They will learn about every detail!

Constantine (to Isidor) Take him out.

Isidor Captain Trevisano, file your mundane trivialities outside church some other time.

Trevisano Mundane trivialities! Have I not the right to defend the justice of my home town against outrageous violations? (leaves in fury)

Constantine This western greed grates on my nerves. When shall people understand to only count the moments of happiness and beauty instead of spiritually worthless money, that only alienates the human soul from reality, transforming men into animals in captivity without their being aware of it, when they should be helping their fellow being instead who always is in urgent need?

Isidor Never, your imperial majesty.

Constantine My good cardinal, you are at least a realist.

A voice from the community Anathema!

Constantine Are there more crazy fools in church?

The voice Anathema! Anathema!

(A murmur passes through the community.)

A few voices It is the prophet.

Isidor (to the king) It is the holy monk Gennadios, your majesty. He has never before left his monastery.

Constantine The church is universal. Every sacred madman will have the right to freely express whatever he fancies in church.

Isidor Let the poor man through.

Gennadios (is let through, a shabby old man, rather revolting) King, you have disgracefully betrayed your city, your people, your realm and your religion!

Constantine And what do you know about that, who has been locked up all your life in the monastery?

Gennadios The whole world knows you have abominably sold your religion to the Vatican and its fornication for money!

Constantine Poor old man, what do you know in your pitiable senility about politics?

Gennadios You have prostituted Christ! Be damned by the sanctity of orthodox religion forever!

Constantine (to Isidor) Here Byzantine diplomacy is put to dire tests.

(to Gennadios) My good man, we made extreme diplomatic efforts to get support from the west against the Turks, and we have been successful. It cost us a parenthesis in our creed, but that loss gave peace for us and all Europe. Do you prefer the Turks?

Gennadios I prefer a religion to no religion. The religion of Rome is no religion. Mahomet at least believes in God.

Constantine So you would rather prostitute your nation, your church and your people to the circumcision of the mahometans than the west which still would give us air to breathe and a future for our freedom?

Gennadios Rome never gave us freedom. You have sold your soul to the devil, and the payment he promised you will never reach you.

Constantine How do you know that for sure? Did you negotiate yourself with the Venetians?

Gennadios I met the Venetian captain. He swore that Venice would never send one single ship of support for your accursed city, as long as he lived, and he would attend to it himself. Also admiral Notaras is mad at you for your religious pandering. You have sold our soul to Rome! We would then rather give it to the Turks!

Constantine If Venice won't help us, then Genoa would certainly stand us by.

Gennadios Do you really think so, you pimp! You insolent seller of indulgences! Every single Greek is cursing you! (to the entire church) May never any Christian have anything more to

do with this apostate! May even this church be accursed for the sake of that dastard and papal thrall! Never have anything more to do with him, Greeks, if you wish to live!

(leaves while, crying "Anathema! Anathema! Apostata!")

Isidor Don't mind a lonely mad hermit, your majesty.

Constantine What should I mind then if not this people of maniacs whose king I am?

Isidor A mad hermit, a proud and aggressive admiral and a stupid Venetian is not the whole people, my king.

Constantine No, not yet, but it starts to look bad. You will see, my good cardinal, that they will soon also bequeath you with names and epithets of scorn.

Isidor What does it matter, as long as we perform our duty?

Constantine Our duty becomes sadder each day. It is constantly being fagged out, and for each new day less of it will remain for us to perform.

Isidor If there is nothing else for us to do, we still can stand.

Constantine Yes, stand and fall. That has always been the course of the world. It is easy to stand if you can 't see your fall ahead, but if you are bound to fall, then it is heavy to stand until you fall. Come, my for the present unhappy colleague, let's go.

Frantzes Halt, your majesty.

Constantine I hear a voice out of the past. Are you still alive, my dear Frantzes?

Frantzes Yes, your majesty, I am alive, and I have returned.

Constantine Your voice is dear to me, and never was it dearer than now. You alone never brought me anything amiss.

Frantzes I wish to God my tidings were better than they are!

Constantine I can understand that you have things to tell. Have you happened to any adversity?

Frantzes Only that.

Constantine Even in Trapezunt? (to Isidor) This childhood friend of mine, my only faithful servant, went courting for me to Trapezunt. Let us hear how the journey went.

Frantzes As so often on journeys, there were difficulties only on the way back, when my task had already been performed.

Constantine So the lovely princess answered yes?

Frantzes Immediately and without hesitation.

Constantine (to Isidor) You will see, that my childlessness can still be cured.

Frantzes But the father is unfortunately already allied with the sultan.

Constantine Even he?

Frantzes Of necessity. He regretted that alliance deeply.

Constantine When love doesn't offer difficulties, you will find them in politics instead.

Frantzes Still the marriage would have been possible.

Constantine (to Isidor) Yes, there you are! Love can even still overcome politics!

Frantzes I was the last Greek who was able to freely pass through the Bosphorus.

Constantine How come?

Frantzes The sultan has built a fortress by the Bosphorus. No ship can pass any more without getting hijacked, gunned down by cannons, its sailors hanged and impaled on wood if not cut up for a warning to all Christians.

Constantine Thus this artery of life is closed forever? Nothing can reach us any more from the Black Sea?

Frantzes No, nothing. But that is not the worst of it.

Constantine Speak out, the most dire prophet of disasters on this disastrous day!

Frantzes The sultan has made the Serbs take a position as their allies against Constantinople.

Constantine Even the Serbs! And Hungarians are made to cast his cannons. All the ungovernable Balkans are made to march against us besides all Asia! And Venice ditches us from petty egoism, and the entire West gloats on the spectacle how Turkish barbarians at last will put an end to a thousand years of the Byzantine heroic and grievous saga! Are we then completely isolated as a cultural anchor in a world of only betrayal, treason and destruction?

Frantzes It doesn't look any better, your majesty.

Constantine And I am scolded by my own who willingly take sides with the enemy!

Isidor There is still hope.

Constantine Yes, there are still illusions, if that is what you mean. And what do we do then, when our last illusion has been ravished and crushed to pieces with ourselves?

Isidor We go on believing in life and resurrection.

Constantine By my soul, my cardinal, you are right! Even if all hope dies in the world, faith will never disappear. Our church is still standing with the highest most splendid cupola in the world! Are we not here to celebrate our holy service? – Cardinal, what about a well needed mass?

Isidor There is nothing to stop it.

Constantine Let's get started then and celebrate our God as long as the atrocities of war can't reach us and ruin our joy in Him!

(Cannon shots outside.)

Citizen 1 Good God! Is that the Turks coming?

citizen 2 No, they would have yelled and howled as well.

Citizen 3 It must be something of importance happening at the harbour.

Constantine Such a gunshot would mean some great good news. Find out what has happened.

(Enter a mission.)

envoy Your royal highness, there has been a happy surprise in our harbour. Two Genoese war ships have anchored in the Golden Horn and fired a salute of triumph to the joy of us all.

Constantine So there is still hope for the western world. They can still be good and be generous. Are they well armed?

envoy Nothing is missing, and they bring no less than seven hundred professional warriors.

Constantin May the whole world know, that when all the world let us down, Genoa didn't.

envoy The Genoese command is on its way to your majesty.

Constantine He is most welcome.

(Enter the Genoese. Their captain is Giovanni Giustiniani, a dashing and chivalrous, honest war veteran. His first act as he enters is to bend his knee to the floor, take off his hat and bow to the emperor.)

Giustiniani Glory to the emperor!

Constantine Glory to Genoa!

Giustiniani Have hope, your majesty! You can defend yourself!

Constantine We could even without you, but now we can do it better, if you have come to stay.

Giustiniani To stay, to die and to fight for you to our last man, if the capital of the east demands it.

Constantine You are sincerely welcome. We have no sons left of our own, for our sons are all too holy: we are a people of monks who stifle in celibacy. Therefore we suck in centuries of melancholia, sadly aware of the decimation of the people by virtue and chastity of exaggerated piety. What Constantinople needs most of all is stalwart manliness.

Giustiniani And that we can offer indeed if anything. But here everything is poorer and more deficient than any of us could imagine. Are there no more of you? Hasn't all Europe sent you reinforcements?

Constantin Only the pope has promised us help which never arrived.

Giustiniani Our two warships and seven hundred men is like a small colony of fleas against a wall of elephants.

Constantine Yes, I know. Just the janissaries, the Turkish elite, are twelve thousand men.

Giustiniani Seven hundred Genoese, no matter how much Genoese they may be, is not much against twelve thousand.

Constantin So have walls though that resisted the barbarians for eleven hundred years.

Giustiniani And therefore they are old and need repairs.

Constantine We are working day and night on the fortifications.

Giustiniani You don't have too many who actually work.

Constantine Everyone works who is able to, and if they aren't too many, they work the more day and night.

Giustiniani I hope there will be more reinforcements from Europe. Or else we are like hens defending a poor poultry-yard against huns.

Constantin At least say roosters.

Giustiniani The roosters aren't many, and most pious Greeks are like eunuchs.

Constantine We will all be eunuchs if Constantinople becomes a Turkish city and we have to survive to see it.

Giustiniani And what do you mean by that?

Constantine That if there will be no more support from the west, it is better then to resign, fight and die for the city than to survive.

Giustiniani Damn me, my king, you are damned right! That's what I call the right spirit! And here we are with two ships from Genoa as a proof that not all rotten egg crusaders didn't come here just to plunder Greeks! We are crusader idealists arrived to give islam hell, even if we are rather scarce and maybe even the last ones.

Constantine We were just about to celebrate a divine service here. Are you with us?

Giustiniani Orthodox or Catholic?

Constantine Ecumenical.

Giustiniani What does that mean?

Constantine A Christian service, neither orthodox nor catholic.

Giustiniani As long as it is Christian that should be all that matters.

Constantine You just expressed my own thought. (takes him around the shoulder) Welcome in our brave company, perhaps gradually the hardest tried in the world, our dear new chief commander! (embraces him. The community expresses general appreciation and admiration.)

Giustiniani (kneels) I am grateful for the honour.

Constantine Now for our Te Deum!

(Flourish and solemn preparations for a divine service.)

A voice Your majesty!

Constantine What is it now again? May we never be left in peace with God?

The voice (a captain appearing) Your majesty, we have caught a deserter.

Constantine In church?

Captain No, from the Turks.

Constantine Stop the music! What kind of a deserter? A spy? A lost soldier? An ordinary peasant?

Captain No, a janissary.

Constantine A janissary changing sides? Could that be possible?

Captain Judge for yourself. (enter a troop bringing a perfectly clear janissary, who prostrates himself on the floor in front of the emperor.)

Janissary My emperor! Have mercy upon me!

Constantine I would love to. Why have you escaped?

Captain He has a very remarkable story to tell.

Constantine How did you manage to run away?

Janissary Necessity has no law. We janissaries are the toughest, most clever and most able among the sultan's warriors. I just had to abandon the sultan forever.

Constantine Why?

Janissary He had a mistress, a Christian slave girl he had taken among the Greeks. He really loved her. For three days he just lay with her in his tent. No one was ever allowed to see him. Then we janissaries started scorning him. We mocked him for having forgot the art of war to the breasts of women and started throwing cakes of mud and dung on his tent. Then he came rushing out. "What do you want, you cockstrung dogs?" he brawled. "We want to see your mistress, for whom you have forgotten the world and Istanbul," we answered. "Have I forgotten Istanbul?" he said furious, went inside and fetched his mistress. In plain sight of all of us he tore off all her clothes above the navel, so that only her veil still covered her face. In

vain she tried to conceal her nakedness. He threw her down in front of himself on the ground and called to us: "Do you think you have lost your war leader to a Christian slave girl? Take her! I offer you all her graces!" And he raised her up and pushed her into our midst. Many of us could touch her and feel her. She was really very beautiful. We answered then: "O sultan, for her sake it is worth forgetting all about the war." "Is it?" he brawled again and grabbed her again. He forced her down on her knees, pulled his sabre and sliced her throat with one single cut, her fine, delicate, white, pure, Christian throat! And she was the most beautiful woman any of us had ever seen! Completely innocent! Then something turned inside my Muslim identity. Suddenly I felt that even I like all janissaries still had been born Christian once. We were all taken from Christian mothers just to be drilled into Muslim nightmare warriors, and we are the hardest and cruelest and most fanatical of all Muslims. And we may never associate with women. Therefore we scolded the sultan for three days for disappearing from our sight for the sake of a woman. We thought he was a coward. But what he did against this beautiful innocent Christian woman was worse than cowardice. It was against the Quran. My entire Muslim soul turned in rebellion against him...

Isidor Pardon me, your majesty, but is it proper to tell such stories in church?

Constantin The man is a Muslim.

Isidor And still.

Constantine Let's hear his story to the end.

Janissary It is finished now. I ran away, and here I am at the pious service of all Christians, for I have seen the mighty sultan, the greatest leader of Islam, disgrace Islam by a dishonourable act.

Isidor The man was born a Christian but is still a Muslim. He should not have been allowed into our church.

Constantin Is he then not at least a good Samaritan, my cardinal, when he alone of all Turks has pitied the pure blood of an innocent Christian female martyr? – Come into my arms, my good janissary! (embraces him) We are not many Christians here in the world, and we who defend the former capital of Christianity against your sultan's way of Islam are a small chosen society indeed. Be welcome in our midst as one of the few chosen ones for destruction by the betrayal and faithlessness of the western world against Christianity.

Janissary (rises) Then this is the first good thing I have done in my life.

Isidor A good start, my son.

Constantine Captain, give him the armour and cuirass of a Christian warrior, even if he remains a Muslim.

Captain It will be my pleasure.

Isidor What now about our divine service?

Constantine Before we at last embark on it, let us first make sure there will not be any more surprising disturbances. (A new cannon shot from afar, even more forceful than the first.)

Are there new navies approaching?

Isidor No, that shot sounded more hostile.

Constantine Have Turks already opened fire then?

(An old man appears.)

The old man I know from where the shot came.

Constantine Speak, man. Don't hide any secrets.

Old man It was the cannon of the Hungarian Orban, the greatest cannon ever cast. It was fired from Adrianople for a test.

Constantine You are joking, man. Cannons can't be heard all the way from Adrianople.

Old man Yes, this gun may.

Isidor It is true that the Hungarian Orban has taken service with the sultan with the task of casting a cannon for him that could grind our walls to cinders by just one shot. Let the old man tell us what he knows.

Constantine What more do you know, man?

Old man That cannon has now been cast and tested. It will now be transported here, and then our walls will fall.

Constantine My good man, then I will tell you that I know more than you. We know all about Orban's cannons. He is a megalomaniac. He may have cast the biggest cannon in the world, and it may fire a few dangerous shots to begin with, but that cannon is worthless. It will crack, and when it tries to fire one shot too much the entire cannon will explode and spread death and destruction among their own. We are not afraid of such monster cannons. We welcome them. (Giustiniani returns in anger.)

Yes, what is the matter, our dear new commander-in-chief?

Giustiniani I just learned that admiral Lucas Notaras has sailed off with a few ships in a raid against the Turks.

Constantine Yes, we can't afford to have the Hellespont closed up for us.

Giustiniani Why was I not informed?

Constantin Megadux Notaras was in a hurry.

Giustiniani Is he not under my command?

Constantine Certainly.

Giustiniani If he then acts on his own without my knowledge, he is not reliable.

Constantine We all know the reliability of Megadux Notaras.

Giustiniani We may never see him again.

Constantine That would maybe be the best for us.

Giustiniani Perhaps he has joined the enemy.

Constantine That is not impossible.

Giustiniani And you just stand there cool and calm and accept a possible high treason by your only admiral?

Constantine We might do better without that admiral especially if he is a traitor.

Giustiniani Perhaps the world would do better without Constantinople, especially if that city gets lost.

Constantine We appreciate your loyalty, dear Genoese. You are the only westerner we can have faith in. We know that the west would gladly give us up as lost, since we only cost money. If even you would eventually fail us, I beg you to convey a greeting for the west. Constantinople is the last lamp and hope of Christianity. If the west lets us down, the west will get lost in the night. What is the west without us, the ultimate Christian idealism? Flesh without spirit, church without soul, life without hope, the slavery of man, a slavery so comfortless that the slaves no longer will know they are slaves, prosperity without happiness, the dictatorship and hopeless oppression of materialism, affluence without joy and without ability to enjoy it, an almighty pope commanding his empire of superstition ruled by harlots and the definite death of the spirit. Tell that to the western world, its bankers and princes and leading monopoly owner the pope, if you survive Constantinople, which is so much more than just Constantinople. We know that the west with pleasure would allow us to get lost. They have themselves deliberately caused our destruction once before. We were hoping that at least some single westerner would not let us down, even if it would only be you.

Giustiniani (bows) I apologize, your majesty, and retract my complaint.

Constantine It was justified. We all are justified in complaining of this failing treacherous world of only selfishness and blindness to eternal universal values.

A messenger Your majesty! I come from Rome!

Constantine You are welcome, messenger from Rome. What news from the pope, our new sacred ally?

Messenger I come without having been sent by him just to inform you of what the whole world is thinking.

Constantine We know what the whole world is thinking about us. We are its bad conscience, and they have only had bad thoughts about us since they looted us in 1204. What could it possibly think about us that would be worse than all they have done against us so far?

Messenger The pope is appalled and shocked by our crimes against the Turks. Sultan Muhammed's propaganda has reached all the courts of Europe. He has published names of the old, the women and children that have perished by the raids of Megadux Notaras along the Dardanelles to keep our only link with the world open.

Constantine So the world thinks we no longer have any right to defend ourselves.

Messenger It's even worse. The pope has published his alarm and his indignation at the ruthless conquest warfare of the Greeks against the Turks. Constantinople is depicted as an aggressive imperialistic source of concern, inhumanity, cruelty and unchristian greed for power.

Constantine Then we surely must be deceitful traitors as well. That is usually included.

Messenger Yes, that is included in the pope's message.

Constantine There is our holy father for the world. He doesn't care about anything, and lets everything down except his own sanctimoniousness. If you return to Rome, messenger, inform the pope that we will defend Christianity in Constantinople to the last man. Perhaps he will believe us when we are all dead.

Messenger Perhaps, your majesty. At least the world will then remember the pope's condemnation of you.

Constantin That will then be poor comfort to us.

(Lucas Notaras returns.)

Well, Megadux, you have launched a successful raid against the Turks and thereby turned the whole world in wrath against us.

Notaras I have reopened the Hellespont to our ships. Did I do wrong?

Constantine It would have been better if you first had informed me and your chief commander about your plans.

Notaras Would that Genoese be my commander? Would that Latin upstart rule over one of the oldest and noblest Greek families?

Constantin Mind what you are saying, Megadux. Even a hereditary grand duke has to subordinate himself to his king.

Notaras I am not questioning my king. I am questioning a westerner whom you give power and possibility to once more betray the destiny of Constantinople to both Turks and harlot popes.

Giustiniani And I question the propriety of a haughty Greek to give the Turks reasons for propaganda that has to turn the world against the Greeks.

Notaras You are conceited, Genoese captain, and an Italian does not fit into Byzantine clothes and grand airs. Those clothes are too fine and wide for him.

Giustiniani And your licentiousness makes us suspect that you do this favour to the Turks on purpose by proving yourself more brutal than the Turks.

Notaras Only the pope and his gang could prove more brutal than the Turks.

Giustiniani Does the pope go slaughtering Turkish women, elderly people and children?

Notaras We have to keep the Hellespont open in order to survive.

Giustiniani And was it then Turkish women, elderly people and children who blocked the Hellespont?

Notaras It is impossible to evade some innocent casualties at a raid.

Giustiniani These few innocents the sultan has turned into the heaviest propaganda of his life to all Europe, which is horrified at the Greek bestiality!

Notaras And you keep brawling like a monkey. What will you do yourself when the Turks have been beaten down from our walls? Will you then content yourself with your duchy of Lemnos? Hasn't Genoa ordered you to provide Genoa with a monopoly of all trade around the Black Sea and make the emperor here your vassal?

Giustiniani (to Constantine) How can you trust this intriguing slanderer, your majesty?

Notaras (to Constantine) How can you trust this adventurer, pirate and huckster, your majesty?

Constantine Shut up, both of you!

Notaras Two hundred years ago our city and realm was given over to people of his sort, and we have never recovered! The Catholics are worse than Turks!

Giustiniani This Greek wants to abandon Constantinople to the Turks!

Constantine Quiet!

Notaras Not at all! But the Turks have a religion, while you are without!

Giustiniani Says you, greedy, materialistic, sly and crass fraudulent Greek!

Notaras You hear what kind of language the westerner abuses! Even verbally he reverts to unintelligent insults! If you want to quarrel, Genoese, present something better than just empty bad names!

Constantine Stop it, both of you!

(Cannon shots again.)

What now? More noise in the harbour? (to a servant) Find out what has happened.

(Enter harbour-master.)

Harbour-master My lord, it was warning shot from Pera.

Constantine Why?

Harbour-master Our Venetian captain has left the harbour with seven ships.

Constantine Which seven?

Harbour-master His own large one and six Cretan. They all carried full cargo. Everyone seems to have known about it except you. (glances at Notaras and Giustiniani.)

Constantin Why do you draw the conclusion that this treason was known before it was manifested?

Harbour-captain Megadux Notaras' daughter was on one of the ships.

Constantine (sighs) How great are our casualties? What more did they take with them?

Harbour-captain Twelve hundred boxes of soda, copper, wax, indigo, mastix and spices for Venice and the ship-owners of Crete plus hundreds of rich refugees who appear to have paid anything to follow on board. But that is not the worst of it.

Constantine What then is the worst of it?

Harbour-captain The escape and treason was executed in collusion with the Turks. Not one ship was stopped at Gallipoli. Even the Turks have been paid.

Constantine What more do you know?

Harbour-captain When the last of the seven ships had left the Dardanelles, the Turks notified the sultan of this, who let Pera know about it. That was the cause of the salute.

Constantine A warning shot to remind me that the Turks will show grace to everyone who deserts me. A confirmation of the constantly more extensive and universal betrayal of us by the world. Another nail in our coffin. – Megadux Notaras, whether you knew about this or not, I will not hold you accountable. Who can censure a mission of saving our women and children? The last walls and ruins of Constantinople are being transformed into a battleground, and a battleground is no place for women and children nor rich weaklings and vain merchants of luxuries! Let the weak and timid save themselves and survive, and let the men perish in their bravery! That's why the three hundred Spartans fell at Thermopylai and that's maybe why we all must die to show the world the true faces of the Turks and save Europe from the barbarity, which will transform this antique Constantinople with its beauty and culture into a Turkish harem of fornication and power abuse! If this is our destiny, it will be our honour! I know, o Greeks, that many of you, and maybe even you, Megadux Notaras, believe that the Turks if they win will treat you gently and let you maintain your religion, culture and freedom. I don't believe that Turks and Muslims could be that tolerant. That's my belief. If we lose, those who survive will see. But unfortunately I am so certain of my assumption that I in that case would prefer not to survive.

May anyone who wishes abandon the city! I will never abandon it!

all Hail, our king! Long live Constantinople!

A fat monk I will fight to my last drop of blood!

Constantine Can you swing a sword?

Monk I could always try.

Constantine Train him, Giustiniani.

Giustiniani He could at least throw some rocks at the Turks from the wall.

A young artisan I can fight!

Constantine That's good, but don't stumble on your mantle, and don't hack yourself in your leg.

Another I also wish to be trained as a warrior

Constantine Aren't you a musician and calligrapher? How could your fine white hands grab a coarse sword and give it force enough to strike through steel? And how could your delicate ears get used to the rumble of cannons? No, my son, stick to your peace here in the cathedral, and don't leave out the music. It will have better need of you than the war, for the war will pass, but after the war the need of pure music will be stronger than ever.

A beggar (appearing) My king, is really any Greek capable of defending your city against the Turks?

Constantine What do you mean, poor ragamuffin? Sing it out!

Beggar You find here all these fat and gentle monks, these fine well educated artisans, there unique poets and musicians and all these peaceful paupers – could any one of us defend the city against Turks?

Monk We have to defend Christianity against Mahomet by any means!

Beggar And why? For the sake of the vanity of Christianity?

Constantine What is your point?

Beggar We all know that the sultan's warriors are innumerable. His cannons could pulverize our walls by a single shot. All Greeks know that the emperor Constantine is an apostate, who has sold himself to the pope. Why? For the sake of his imperial vanity? We also know that the sultan is no threat to our faith. Greek priests are free to mind their own communities in his cities. Under the protection of the sultan our faith would be safe against the novelties and coercions of the Latins. The Turks don't harass ordinary people as long as you pay their taxes, which are much cheaper than those of the emperor. Why then should an entire people die and be enslaved for the sake of your imperial vanity and for the profit of the Latins? Only the rich and noble have any reason to fear the Turks. Ordinary people would rather have Turkish lords than the emperor, for they would rather have peace than war.

Constantine You poor naïve man, my heart is bleeding for you. What do you know about the Turks and their tolerance? You may know your likes, ordinary people and a credulous majority

of Greeks, but you don't know sultan Muhammed the Second, a twenty-two year old highflier without equal in megalomaniac ambitions. In his immaturity he will promise anything to gain anything, just to then have power to break all his promises. Do you think you would be allowed to live in peace and remain Greeks under the sultan? He would laugh himself to death if you really believed it. You know the sultan, Isidor, since you knew his father. Tell us about the new sultan, cardinal.

Isidor The father sultan Murad was a peaceful man who was forced to war against his will. His son Muhammed is as a youth his contrary – he has only wanted war but was forced to peace against his will. This has only caused the flames of his war madness to higher blaze. His undoubtable intention is to make Constantinople his capital and to an entirely Turkish city. He will convert every single Christian church into a mosque. In his Constantinople there will be no room for Greeks except as slaves. Therefore he has to uproot our Greek state from its foundations. Who doesn't bow to him will have to bow to the executioner's sword.

Constantine All the rich and noble have already left the city. Only poor honest people are remaining. Do you also wish to abandon Constantinople?

Beggar I don't want to live longer than Constantinople myself. But I am thinking of all the others. The sultan could not just execute a hundred thousand Greeks just for being Greeks. He is after all an educated man who speaks both Greek and Latin . This city is too great, too rich and too old to be altered, plundered or erased. It is much tougher than the Turk. When the Turks and we are gone, the city will still remain and live on as Constantinople. Anyone can understand that who is living here. We cannot all be sold as slaves. There is no need for that many slaves in the world. Also the Turks will need our help to be able to exist themselves and build up their state. They hardly understand anything themselves of mathematics and economy, since they have no order. The sultan is no Djenghis Khan or Tamerlane. If he wants to make Constantinople his capital he would have every interest in cooperating with the city and letting it live. And this city, that's us the Greeks, who you wish to sacrifice to the sultan's professional warriors and janissaries.

Constantine Should I then surrender? Is that what you want?

Notaras (comes forth, falls on his knees) Yes, your majesty, surrender and save the peace. Save your Greeks, and save Constantinople.

Giustiniani (angry and upset) But this is madness! Don't you see, my king, that your Megadux is a security risk and high treason liability!

Constantine (to the beggar) You have to advise me, my friend. Is it better to give up or to die?

Beggar (hesitating) For a king it is unthinkable to give up. He has to fight to the bitter end.

Constantine And what about you? Will you stand and fight with me or leave me?

Beggar (determined) We will not leave you. We will fight with you, my king, for we know what we have, we have a real king, but we don't know what we will get, for we don't know if the sultan will give us the damn or nor.

Constantine Well, Giustiniani, you win. Give Megadux Notaras his orders.

Giustiniani He can defend the inner walls along the harbour. An attack from the seaside is unthinkable anyway. He can do no harm there.

Notaras (rises) My king, you allow a Genoese to dishonour me!

Constantine He has the command over you, Notaras. He wants to fight and you don't, and we have to fight.

Notaras You are abusing the highest and noblest nobility of Constantinople!

Constantin A nobleman who can't take an affront is no nobleman. Accept the insult, if it is an insult, swallow it and make it your honour by doing your duty.

Notaras A scarecrow can fulfil such a duty as well as I!

Constantine So put up a scarecrow then. It will at least keep quiet and not protest, not yell and fall on his post.

Notaras (kneels again) Your majesty, I am at least better than a scarecrow.

Constantine So I believe, but you must also prove it.

Notaras (rises) I will show it to make that sanctimonious papist (indicates Giustiniani) change his mind about the noblest blood of Greece!

Constantine It sounds better and better.

Notaras For you, my king, I would accept anything and even the humiliations of a papistic upstart, even if I could never forgive him or forget them.

Constantine Take it easy, Notaras.

Notaras Honesty can never take it easy, for it can never be stopped. I maintain my statement that Turks would be preferred to such gentlemen and powers of greed represented by that Genoese.

Constantine For God's sake, keep at last your mouth shut, Megadux Notaras!

a messenger (panting) Your majesty, the Turks are coming! They are already visible all along the horizon!

Constantine So they are here at last. Is the new moat filled?

A soldier It is ready to be filled directly.

Constantine Good. Do so at once. Are the last bridges and drawbridges destroyed?

Another soldier We are just waiting for the return of the scouting patrol.

Constantine Good. Destroy them at once as soon as they are back. Is the blocking chain laid out across the Golden Horn?

A third soldier It is all laid out and no ship can any longer get in or get out. Not a navy could force it.

Constantine So it holds tight and is working?

soldier Well and perfectly.

Constantine Good. Then it's just to let the Turks come. Let the army of a million ants storm our Babylonian towers and battlements, walls and bottomless moats! Let the plebeians hammer themselves bloody against the immovable stones of our thousand-year old wall which has withstood so many coward Arab storms before! What does it matter if we are only ten thousand against a hundred thousand? The right is on our side. We have the right to defend ourselves! (raises his sword) We have the right to defend our thousand-year old empire and its cultural traditions and honour against the whole world, even if the whole world would unite to storm against us and we only make a weak remnant, a wasted village, a mere shadow of the great empire that we were once, before the Arab storms and crusader storms started raving. You are right, Notaras, the pope is a dastard bully and has always been so, but we are responsible to him for his church. Therefore we have to defend ourselves and make sure of his support, even if he would let us down in the moment of truth. Bring on the Turks! We shall try their patience to the extreme and never willingly let in a single uninvited guest into God's house of all these loud and ignorant plebeians, who only blaspheme by their new religion of violence. It is our most sacred duty to the world and to history to resist barbarity!

All You are right! Long live our king!

(A messenger with sad brows comes forth.)

Constantine (observes him) Well gloomy messenger, do you also bring bad news?

Messenger (on his knees) Your majesty, Selymbria has fallen.

Constantine That was to be expected. Was anyone saved?

Messenger For two days the sultan tried to storm our last hold in the Marmara sea. After two days he tired and burned the whole garrison. Everyone died. No one escaped. And the forty bodies have been impaled naked on forty poles.

Constantine (looks around) Well, all you who would rather serve the sultan than the pope, there is your sultan for you! Forty martyrs, burned and desecrated as corpses! And the world speaks about Turkish martyrs to the imperialism of the bloodthirsty Greeks in the lack of any other propaganda than the sultan's! There is your sultan for you! Watch the forty naked impaled desecrated bodies of your bravest and most innocent brothers! Thus shows the sultan mercy to the Greeks!

(A deafening cannon shot, worse than all the previous ones. Everything shakes and trembles, and plaster falls down in clouds of dust.)

What was that?

Isidor It sounds as if the Turks had got their cannon started.

Giustiniani Worse earthquakes are needed to damage the walls of Constantinople.

Notaras It was just a warning shot, but it could be followed by a thousand like it.

Constantine Call immediately for our German engineering expert Johann Brandt.

Brandt (a detached but impressive German) I am already here, your majesty.

Constantine Did you hear the cannon of the Turks?

Brandt I have heard it before, but now I have seen it in action.

Constantine Is it dangerous?

Brandt To people, yes, to Constantinople in the short run, no.

Constantine Explain what you mean.

Brandt The cannon has torn open a hole in the city wall as large as a kitchen. That is all. Many though in superstitious fear that Orban's gun would immediately make a break in the wall. That purpose has failed completely. Still it is the greatest gun ever cast, and it has proved to work. But it takes two hours to load it and to take aim with it, and it can't be fired without risking the lives of the gunners. Two of them died immediately after the first shot.

Constantine You say it is not dangerous in the short run. What about the long run?

Brandt It depends on how long it will last. If it doesn't break down and crack down, which it by all reasons should do, it will slowly but certainly grind down the walls of Constantinople to easily surmountable ruins.

Constantine How long would it take for the cannon to do that?

Brandt At least a month.

Constantine So we have one month left to live. We have one month to defend our lives, but much could happen during a month. The doomsday cannon might crack up, and there could be more warships from Genoa and Venice. Let's assume that we could survive this month. How great would then our chances be to ride out the storm?

Brandt The Turks have 300 ships laying siege to Constantinople from the sea of Marmara. Constantinople is a single island in a sea of Turks. Everything depends on any support we could get from the outside, but that support must in that case be massive. If we don't get any help, our only salvation could be the fact that many Christians fight under the sultan and that there is also a Turkish peace party fighting the sultan. If the Bulgarians, Serbs and Macedonians engaged by the Turks fail them, and if the opposition overcomes the sultan, we have a chance.

Constantine I thank you, Johann Brandt, for not giving up the cause.

Brandt It is lost anyway.

Constantine How so?

Brandt We must all die.

Constantine For certain, we shall all die with honour or without, and then it is better to die with than without.

Brandt That's why I am still in Constantinople.

Constantine Right you are, my faithful servant, carry on like that! We are grateful for your clear mind and mathematic genius.

Brandt (bows) I am at your service as long as I am needed.

Constantine Every man is invaluable, and you are one of us.

Gennadios (invisible, cries with a loud voice from somewhere behind) Then I am also invaluable!

Constantine (without hesitation, with equally loud voice) Yes, whoever you are!

Isidor Don't conjure the devil, your majesty.

Constantin There is no devil. There is only God.

Gennadios (appears in the open) That's what I say too.

Constantine Is it you, old croaker.

Gennadios Yes, but I am Greek and must have the same say as that German.

Constantine Just don't say anything stupid.

Gennadios God speaks through me!! I am holy! And truly, truly I say unto you, my king, that God has already delivered the city into the hands of the Turks. You have no right to defend it by force. Open the gates and let in the Turks! Every traitor is a benefactor!

Constantine Shut up, you dog!

Isidor He is demented. He doesn't know what he is saying.

Gennadios God knows what I am saying, for my thoughts are God's thoughts! God himself speaks through me! It pleases God to use any means to fight Satan's own papal power and the barbarity and imperialistic extortion power of the west! Give over Constantinople to the Turks, and you save the city! The harder and longer you defend it, the more severely God's punishment will strike you!

Constantine Now you stop your mouth, you distracted idiot!

Gennadios You called me dog, you papal fool of a puppet in the hands of paganism! If I am a dog, you are an ass!

Isidor Lese-majesty!

Constantine Hold it! The monk is mad and doesn't mean any harm. Not one hair will be touched on his head. May we consider that he is mad and leave him alone.

Giustiniani (cautiously) Your majesty, ships have been sighted on the sea of Marmara.

Constantine Of course. No wonder. The whole world is crowded with Turkish galleys.

Giustiniani My lords, these ships are western.

Constantine (looks at him astounded) Do you mean to say that help is on its way?

Notaras He is correct, my lord. There are four Genoese ships. They have obviously run the gauntlet through the Hellespont, for they are pursued by an armada of Turkish galleys.

Giustiniani But the ships are large and have a fair wind. The galleys have tried to hijack them in vain.

Constantine Four Genoese ships, you say?

Notaras Yes, fully armed.

Constantine Only four?

Notaras Yes, so far.

Constantine No larger navy?

Notaras No. (cautiously) But perhaps it will come.

Constantine We will know about that when the captains come ashore. May they for God's sake have seen some navy on the Aegean sea and bring good news from Italy!

Giustiniani Aren't you pleased by four new fully armed ships from Genoa, your majesty?

Constantine (tired) They arrive half a year too late. They only bring cargo that was paid for more than a year ago. I know what ships they are. They have only come to make money, and their cargo will surely make them rich, but their help isn't worth much.

Notaras I go out to receive their captains. (leaves)

Constantine Yes, do so, good Megadux Notaras. Take well care of them. They have after all come through alive after running a Turkish gauntlet.

Giustiniani I am sorry, your majesty, that this contribution didn't bring you any greater relief. But we hope it will just be the prelude to a greater fleet.

Constantine We will certainly hope for that, my brave commander.

(Notaras returns with two captains.)

Here is Megadux Notaras with two captains, gunsmoked and beaten up they come directly from the battle. Welcome, brave captains from Genoa! I hope your journey paid off.

Captain 1 We had to survive in order to make it pay off.

captain 2 Some bloodthirsty Turks you keep around here the Dardanelles! The sultan himself chewed bloody foam of fury when we got away.

Constantine You are most heartily welcome and will be well taken care of.

Giustiniani We assume that you are only the first of the brave expected supporting armada from Europe.

Captain 1 (to his colleague) What armada?

captain 2 (to his colleague) Have you seen any armada?

captain 1 No. Have you?

captain 1 (to Giustiniani) We have not seen any armada.

Giustiniani But you must have heard about it at least?

captain 1 (to his colleague) Have you heard about any armada?

captain 2 No. Have you?

captain 1 No Venetian galleys? No French?

captain 2 No. Have you?

captain 1 No. Neither have I.

captain 2 (to the king) We came alone.

captain 1 We have neither seen nor heard of any other ships from the west on our way.

captain 2 We thought your harbour would be crowded with militant ships.

captain 1 But we see only a few.

captain 2 That's not much of a defense for a city like Constantinople.

Constantine The pope has promised us assistance.

captain 1 The pope does a lot of talking.

captain 2 He promises everyone good support – if he gets money.

captain 1 If only he gets money that support will never show up.

captain 2 We are well acquainted with our pope.

Constantine You are at least honest as Genoese.

captain 2 Yes, we are!

captain 1 More honest than the pope.

Giustiniani Brave countrymen, you are welcome to help us defend our city.

captain 1 We are no men of war. We have come here to make money.

Giustiniani But you did fight the Turks?

captain 2 They attacked us. We only defended ourselves.

Giustiniani Then you could also help us defend our city?

captain 1 No, we only defend our ships, our money and our cargo.

captain 2 That's why we lie in Pera, which is neutral.

Constantine (to Giustiniani) There you are your Genoese.

Notaras There is your west, your papal support and your western civilisation, which you have pledged to defend without any help! (leaves in anger)

Constantin He is angry. Go and placate him.

Isidor Such wrath is hard to placate, for it is righteous.

captain 1 Well, do we get our money or not?

captain 2 Proud and touchy Greeks are not for us, if they will start arguing and make trouble. We will then rather be paid less by the Turks.

captain 1 They do at least not insult businessmen.

captain 2 And they are easy to handle, if you are not stupid enough to be at war with them.

Constantine Gentlemen, you are in Greece where the rule is hospitality without limits. Take for God's sake care of these visiting merchants from Genoa then! They could be our last guests before the city falls.

Giustiniani Your highness, a spy has returned from reconnoitering behind the lines.

Constantine What news, spy?

The spy (a ragamuffin, falls on his knees) New volunteers are daily coming to the sultan, and they are Christians from all the Balkans. They only come for the good prospects of loot, Jewish merchants make splendid business by delivering carts, beasts of burden, donkeys and camels for Turks and Christians which they plan to use for transporting goods, wealth and slaves all over Asia.

Constantine Daily reinforcements you say. And all we get is two fat Genoese merchants who want payment for a year's delayed delivery. Constantinople is still the centre of the world, but all the world comes here only to take. All the people of humanity gathered around Constantinople are just flocks of drivelling, waiting vultures.

spy But that is not the worst of it.

Constantine What's the worst of it?

Spy The sultan has succeeded in transporting galleys across the mountain to the inner parts of the Golden Horn.

Constantine What are you saying, man?

Spy He could then attack the entire harbour with galleys from the inside.

Constantine It must not be true. What do you say to that, Giustiniani?

Giustiniani Impossible. The ridge is too high.

Spy Impossible, you say. Have a look at it yourselves then!

Notaras (returns) He actually speaks the truth. The sultan has succeeded with what no one even tried before. Fifty galleys are already lying in wait behind the cape, prepared to attack Constantinople from behind.

Constantine Are then all the forces of the universe gathered against us? Is there nothing to check the universal injustice? Evil is a successful genius reaching its highest triumphing heights when it happily succeeds in outrageously ravishing goodness in heaven-storming baseness? Is God dead then?

Giustiniani My lord, there is no time for emotional outbursts in the middle of the crises of war. Adaptation and action is now what is urgently demanded.

Constantine (calms down) My faithful marshal, you are right. Tell me, what ships are now most in danger?

Notaras The Venetian.

Constantine We need men from their ships for improving our defence now when the harbour is under threat. Let's evacuate three of their ships. Then we will have two thousand extra men for the walls.

A captain I must protest on behalf of Venice.

Constantine Short-sightedness, don't be so damned simple.

Captain I must protest. All Venetians of Pera and Venice must protest.

Giustiniani Then protest, you opportunists, but do it quickly, for then you will have to take orders.

captain If we evacuate our ships and bring our goods ashore and the Turks then take over Constantinople, we can no longer save what we own.

Notaras You Venetians then take it for granted that Constantinople must fall?

Captain I take nothing for granted, but we Venetians take no risks.

Notaras This, my king, is the west, that promised to help us. You find again in a nutshell in a small roundish captain the western civilisation in its prime.

Constantine Get lost, Venetian! Evacuate the ships!

Notaras Yes, your majesty.

captain But...

Constantine Does it matter to you Venetian, if the Turks relieve of your goods directly, if the Turks destroy your ship and sink it and don't give a damn about your cargo, or if they sack the city and take your goods when you saved it all ashore?

(The captain is silent.)

Take away the poor, greedy, coward Venetian!

A librarian (a very dry old man) I must protest!

Constantine Against what, you old man?

Notaras Against our protests against the Venetians?

Librarian It is my sacred duty to protect the ancient book collections of Greece with my life, but the Venetians use them for fuel for their fires!

Constantine Venice, not the Turks, are the destiny of Greece and Constantinople.

A Venetian military captain It's not just us. To the same degree it is the Genoese.

Constantine Giustiniani, are you using our book collections for fuel?

Giustiniani We have no choice, your majesty. There is no other fuel while the siege lasts.

Constantine Then you Italians are no better than the Arabs.

Venetian It is true as the Genoese says. The Turks have themselves deforested all your shores and surroundings, and without fuel we can't defend the city.

Constantine (in despair) Then rather burn our city than our literature!

Isidor Take it easy, your majesty. There is fuel enough. The lousy Italians took manuscripts just for convenience. The books were easy to get at, and only an old man (indicates the librarian) could defend them. What librarian can defend books against violence?

Constantin We and our city are this old lonely librarian who has been left without help from the world to defend this defenseless library of ancient lineage against the world hell of barbarity, ignorance and evil of the Turks and Arabs. (tired) Could no one ever bring any better news for a change?

(Twelve manhandled sailors appear.)

Sailor 1 Yes, we.

Constantine (raises his eyes, surprised) You are back.

Sailor 1 Yes, all twelve of us.

Constantine We sent forth six Greeks and six Venetians to reconnoitre on the Aegean sea and search for the longed for supporting fleet of the west. And you have come back! We never thought we would see you any more.

Sailor Neither did we.

Constantine What happened?

Sailor We went around for weeks on the Aegean sea. Finally we thought we had been out too long. Then we almost thought time was already up for Constantinople. Then some of us wished to go on westwards rather than to be taken by the Turks on the way back. We could not reach an agreement.

Constantin But still you are all back here again.

Sailor Yes, we had a vote, and all twelve of us voted for returning. (smiles) We even made it through the Turkish ordeal of running the gauntlet.

Constantine And the navy?

Giustiniani Did you see any supporting fleet?

Notaras Any one single western ship?

Sailor (lowers his eyes) Nothing. No government in the world has put out one single oar to come to our assistance.

Constantine Still you have all twelve of you returned safely, Greeks and Venetians. This is especially an honour to you, Venetians. You have come back to die with us. We thank you for this one single piece of good news.

Sailor No compliments. We had to fulfil our mission and at least bring a report.

Giustiniani The Venetians be honoured! There you are, Greeks! Even Italians can sometimes be honourable men! We are not all rotten traitors and coward egoists of extortion! I will also stay and fight for you till I die!

all Italians in the church We too!

Various voices Long live Giustiniani!

Viva Italia!

Not the whole world will let Constantinople down!

There is still hope for humanity!

Constantinople shall survive!

To hell with the Turks!

Constantine I thank you, Italians. Surely Constantinople shall survive, even if we don't. Of course Constantinople shall survive even its own fall. We shall certainly do our utmost to her defense. Even if the whole world let us down no one will be able to say that we who were here failed her. And what an honour if we succeed in saving her! The greater honour for us Greeks, Venetians and Genoese in that case!

alla Hurray! Long live our emperor! Long live Constantinople!

Constantin What about our Te Deum, Cardinal?

Isidor The choir, the priest and musicians are just waiting to get started.

Constantine That's the sound of it! Let God's music be heard over all the bloodthirsty screams of the Turks and Mahometans! Let the pure music of peace drown the noise of screaming violence!

(enter some Turks.)

Isidor Your majesty, we have company.

Constantine So I see. They come almost like by invitation. Are you coming to join a Christian service, Turks? In that case you are welcome.

Ismail Hamza We come as special ambassadors of peace from the sultan.

Constantine Anyone bringing peace is always welcome. So far Turks never did that before.

Hamza You Christians please to misunderstand us Orientals. We Turks have always only brought peace.

Constantine You please to be joking, but we have difficulty in taking double standards for a joke. If you bring peace, why then don't you raise the siege, cease your extirpation war against us and go home to Asia?

Hamza That's exactly what we would most like to do. But we thought we would first give you a chance.

Constantine (to Isidor) He is pulling our legs. He has only come to insult us.

Isidor It will do no harm listening to him and then dismissing him.

Constantine No, the harm is already done. He has already espied the entire city and been able to assess our emergency situation. And he has immunity as a diplomat. We must let him return to his own.

Hamza My friends, you stand no chance. You might as well admit it. There is no food in the city, and your walls are already blown to pieces. You have nothing else to do but to surrender. But the great sultan in his heavenly grace wishes to give you chance of a free retreat. He would like to spare your innocent population a bloody storming and total sack of the city.

Constantine It's just for him to leave it.

Hamza What the sultan has started he must fulfil. Istanbul will fall into his hands. Nothing can any longer change that fact. You have got no support from the west and are completely defenseless. Nothing can help you. In his limitless grace the sultan therefore offers you, Constantine, free retreat to Morea as a vassal state under him, which he will fortify for you against the barbarians of the west. Thereby Greece will remain free and sovereign as a state, and in addition this old city of ancient lineage will be spared destruction. History shall not be able to say that the sultan did not give the Byzantines a chance.

Frantzes (treads forth) State the facts, ambassador. You haven't told us the whole truth. The sultan is not in the least interested in sparing Constantinople, and when he has got his hands on it he will loot it anyway and transform all its churches including this one into mosques. But he must make some condescending gesture for the sake of the Turkish peace party, which never wanted to partake in a siege of Constantinople at all and which always wished to overthrow the sultan. He is flirting with his own opposition in this manner. That's all. We mean nothing and will be sacrificed no matter how much we cringe to you. You say yourself that you Turks already consider us lost beyond hope.

Notaras Poor Turk, do you really think that we Greeks are so stupid that we would willingly place our heads on your blocks without resistance?

Giustiniani You say that Constantinople has received no help from the west. What are my Genoese and Venetians then? We are not many, but at least there is blood in us and no cowardice. You want to form a Greek state as a buffer for you Turks against western barbarians, you say. We are a few western barbarians here who defend this city against an Asian preponderance of a hundred thousand men, who have only come here to take the city and plunder it since they want it.

Hamza Haughty Latin, God has so decided. God has given Istanbul to Islam.

Constantine My friend, you are a people of barbarians without culture, without literature and without manners. You only live by your cruelty. We have two millennia of culture, literature and traditions behind, and this city we built with our own hands. It was founded by Greeks two thousand years ago, and it has always been Greek. If your God now comes to take our city away from us and give it over to you illiterate barbarians, then your God and the God of Islam and everything he represents is just an enormous injustice, blasphemy and fake.

Hamza Don't blaspheme the prophet and Allah!

Constantine (calmly) You speak as if you already owned this city. Let me remind you that you are a guest in a Christian house and even a Christian temple. Truly I say unto you, and you can tell it to your sultan and all Islam, that if you take this city away from us in the name of God, then God is morally dead. In that case there is no God, has never been one and never will be one. The word God is in that case just emptiness, fake and deceit with all religions built around it no matter how monotheistic they are.

Isidor Consider what you are saying, your majesty.

Constantine I have been doing that as long as the sultan Muhammed has desired to take our city by force for the sake of his own lust for power. Truly I say unto all of you, that in this sanctuary no Christian service will be celebrated as long as the Turks threaten our city believing that God gave it to them. If God allows a rape of Constantinople there is no God.

(All are somewhat confused and embarrassed.)

Hamza You speak as befits an unbelieving king of an unbelieving city. You are pagans and have always been so, and it's about time that we storm this nest of pagans and cleanse its

paganism forever, as truly as Allah is alive! (spits on the floor) That's what you are worth, you lousy Christians! Contempt and nothing else! (leaves with his Turks.)

Giustiniani (after a while) What about that?

Isidor (to the king) So there will be no divine service?

Constantine No, there will be no divine service, possibly when the Turks and islam let go of Constantinople, but when will that be?

Librarian Perhaps in a thousand years.

Constantine Yes, maybe.

Giustiniani Why in a thousand years, master librarian?

Librarian That's how long it usually takes for history to get over and learn anything from its mistakes and to correct them.

Constantine If it ever does.

Notaras You seem exhausted, your majesty.

Constantine No wonder, since God is dead.

(The cannons start to rumble outside. The community starts to break it up. The mood is general total resignation.)

(Gothenburg 5.12.1991,
translated around Easter 2024.)

Epilogue.

Constantinople, defended by 5000 Greeks and 5000 Italians against an army of maybe 250,000 Turks, Serbs and Bulgarians, was stormed and taken on May 29th 1453 after a siege of 53 days, but the deciding factor in the fall of Constantinople was the contribution of the Janissaries, the special elite soldiers trained by the Turks to the most fanatical Muslims from kidnapped and enslaved Christian children. The last Byzantine monarch Constantine XI fell at the assault dressed in the armour of an ordinary soldier, while the Genoese commander Giustiniani managed to escape badly wounded together with some Venetian captains on the ships that managed to leave the city after its fall without being harassed by the Turks. Megadux Lucas Notaras, though, the Greek admiral, survived the assault only to the following day together with all leading Greeks be publicly decapitated. The sack went on for three days, and sultan Muhammed II carried through a systematic extirpation of all the Greek aristocracy to then introduce the great age of the Turkish city of Istanbul and the Turkish empire, which showed tolerance not only to Jews, who in Turkey were granted full rights of citizenship, which occurred nowhere else in the world, but also to the Orthodox church, whose first leader under the Turkish regime was the monk Gennadios.

The End

A leaf out of the history book,

Sometimes you believe you are winning,
and then you are lost anyway.

There are no winners in history, only losers, they always lose all, and God is always silent about it, since it is not his fault, and no one can blame him for the eternal fallacy of man, who never learns anything.