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*Voltaire*

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*À la mémoire de José-Michel Moureaux*



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## LISTE DES SIGLES ET ABRÉVIATIONS

Bengesco	Georges Bengesco, <i>Voltaire. Bibliographie de ses œuvres</i> , Paris, Librairie académique Perrin, 1882-1890, 4 vol.
BnC	<i>Catalogue général des livres imprimés de la Bibliothèque nationale. Auteurs : t. 214 ; Voltaire</i> , éd. H. Frémont et autres, Paris, 1978, 2 vol.
BV	M. P. Alekseev et T. N. Kopreeva, <i>Bibliothèque de Voltaire : catalogue des livres</i> , Moscou, 1961.
CL	Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister et autres, <i>Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique</i> , éd. M. Tourneux, Paris, Garnier, 1877-1882, 16 vol.
CN	<i>Corpus des notes marginales de Voltaire</i> , Berlin/Oxford, Akademie-Verlag/Voltaire Foundation, 1979- [7 vol. parus].
D	Voltaire, <i>Correspondence and related documents</i> , éd. Th. Besterman, <i>OCV</i> , t. 85-135, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1968-1977.
<i>Dictionnaire général de Voltaire</i>	R. Trousson et J. Vercruyse (dir.), <i>Dictionnaire général de Voltaire</i> , Paris, Champion, 2003.
f. fr.	Manuscrits français (BnF).
<i>Inventaire Voltaire</i>	J. Goulemot, A. Magnan et D. Masseur (dir.), <i>Inventaire Voltaire</i> , Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Quarto », 1995.

- к84 *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, [Kehl,] Société littéraire typographique, 1784-1789, 70 vol. in-8°.
- M Voltaire, *Œuvres complètes*, éd. L. Moland, Paris, Garnier, 1877-1882, 52 vol.
- n.a.fr. Nouvelles acquisitions françaises (BnF).
- OCV *Les Œuvres complètes de Voltaire / The Complete Works of Voltaire*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation [édition en cours].
- OH Voltaire, *Œuvres historiques*, éd. R. Pomeau, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », 1957.
- 10 SVEC *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation.
- VST R. Pomeau, R. Vaillot, Ch. Mervaud et autres, *Voltaire en son temps*, 2<sup>e</sup> éd., Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1995, 2 vol.
- W75G Voltaire, *La Henriade, divers autres poèmes et toutes les pièces relatives à l'épopée*, Genève, [Cramer et Bardin,] 1775, 40 vol. in-8° [édition dite « encadrée »].

I

Voltaire historien



VOLTAIRE AND CONSTANTINOPLE  
IN THE *ESSAI SUR LES MŒURS*

*Janet Godden*  
Voltaire Foundation

Writing of Constantinople on the eve of the First Crusade, Voltaire refers to the imperial city as ‘respirant les délices’.<sup>1</sup> Several years later in various letters he pronounces the view of lac Léman from Lausanne to be as fine as that of the Bosphorus from Constantinople.<sup>2</sup> Was Voltaire like so many others seduced by the city to be described by Napoleon as ‘l’empire du monde’?

Constantinople both as city and as seat of an empire looms and fades in the *Essai sur les mœurs* as Voltaire’s lighthouse beam on the world rests on it and moves on. This short paper keeps the spotlight on it for a moment. How does Voltaire portray Constantinople in the *Essai*?<sup>3</sup> Does he convey a sense of place? Does he see the Sublime Porte as also the gateway between Christianity and Islam? Does he regard the City as symbolic in the way in which he talks of Rome, say, or Jerusalem?

The *Essai* is a fairly early text, but Voltaire’s interest in and knowledge of Constantinople predates it. In the *Histoire de Charles XII*, published in 1731, he deals at length with Charles’s self-imposed exile at Bender after the battle of Poltava (1709), and his negotiations with and plotting against the Sublime Porte, basing himself largely on eye-witness accounts.

Then in 1735 Voltaire’s English friend Sir Everard Fawkener, a merchant with strong trading interests in the Levant, was appointed English ambassador to the Sublime Porte, an appointment that he held for seven years. Voltaire was impressed by this evidence of British social mobility; he evidently kept up a correspondence of sorts with Fawkener from Cirey, hoping in 1740 to cross paths with him in Paris, where Mme du Châtelet’s house was, as he writes in English, ‘situated in a position worthy of Constantinople; for, it looks upon

1 *Essai sur les mœurs*, ch.53, *OCV*, vol.23 (2010), p.276.

2 For example, D7213, D7227, D7559.

3 Voltaire’s comments about Constantinople in his other writings are outside the scope of this paper.

the river; and a long tract of lands interspers'd with pretty houses is to be seen from every window. Upon my word I would [...] prefer the vista of the sea of Marmara<sup>4</sup> before that of the Seine, and I would pass some months at Constantinople with you, if I could live without that Lady.<sup>5</sup> Our first question is already answered in the affirmative. Voltaire returns constantly to the beauties of Constantinople as well as to the strategic advantages of its position.

The principal points at which the city of Constantinople features in the *Essai sur les mœurs* are at the transfer by Constantine of the seat of his empire in 330 AD, during the crusades and especially the sack of 1204, and, when the city fell to the Turks in 1453. His main sources are above all Fleury and Echard, adding Dupin<sup>6</sup> for the theological disputes. For the crusades he adds Maimbourg,<sup>7</sup> and the lives of the emperors by Byzantine historians such as Nicetas, translated by Cousin.<sup>8</sup> For the later period he brings in Ottoman histories. He also consults modern travel accounts,<sup>9</sup> but gives an impression of bringing in remembered facts or anecdotes rather than mixing historical and geographical sources as he writes. He is, after all, writing an 'Abrégé de l'histoire universelle', often covering several pages from an important source in a single paragraph.

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The founding of Constantinople is seen in the *Essai* from the viewpoint of Rome (chapter 10): Constantine moved the capital of his empire because of his own unpopularity in Rome; he named the city after himself, also dubbing it 'nouvelle Rome', and the consequences are seen as those of leaving Rome itself exposed to attacks from the East. There is no sense of a decision to rebuild the ruined Byzantium. The conjunction of East and West merges again in the early ninth century with the empress Irene, 'fameuse par son courage et par ses crimes' and her ultimately unsuccessful plan to marry the widowed Charlemagne and thereby re-unite the empires of east and west.<sup>10</sup> While the

4 Voltaire is presumably commenting on a letter of Fawkener's, now lost: in the *Essai sur les mœurs*, he consistently uses the Greek word Proponitide which he will have found in most of his sources.

5 D2175, 2 March 1740; see also D1020.

6 These works survive in Voltaire's library: C. Fleury, *Histoire ecclésiastique* (Paris, 1719-38; BV1350); L. Echard, *Histoire romaine* (Paris, 1728-42; BV1600-1601); L.-E. Dupin, *Histoire des controverses ecclésiastiques* (Paris, 1694-98; see BV1165).

7 L. Maimbourg, *Histoire des croisades pour la délivrance de la Terre Sainte* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn, Paris, 1684-85; BV2262).

8 L. Cousin, *Histoire de Constantinople depuis le règne de l'ancien Justin jusqu'à la fin de l'Empire, traduite sur les originaux grecs* (Paris, 1671-74; BV891).

9 The *Corpus des notes marginales de Voltaire* shows traces of his reading of G.-J. Grelot, *Relation nouvelle d'un voyage de Constantinople* (Amsterdam, 1681; BV1534) and J. Pitton de Tournefort, *Relation d'un voyage du Levant* (Lyon, 1727; BV3321).

10 *Essai*, ch.16, OCV, vol.22 (2009), pp.276-77.



empire of Charlemagne was disintegrating, the Eastern empire was contracting 'comme un grand arbre, vigoureux encore, mais déjà vieux, dépouillé de quelques racines, et assailli de tous côtés par la tempête'.<sup>11</sup>

During these early centuries the image of Constantinople presented by Voltaire is that of the seat of a succession of short-lived corrupt and violent emperors wielding absolute power, beside an inward-looking church with no secular jurisdiction and obsessed with theological and iconoclastic disputes. He notes the adoption by the Western Church of various ceremonial rites from the orthodox Church, including the practice of kissing the toe of the pope, which he particularly abhors.<sup>12</sup> He complains of his sources for this period that secular and religious matters are so intermingled that he cannot separate them as he would like,<sup>13</sup> and contrasts this picture of a complete separation of civil and ecclesiastical power with the position in the West, where an ambitious outward-looking papacy struggles for secular domination against emperors with very varying power bases.

The city itself is first described in a chapter on the vicissitudes of the empire in the eighth and ninth centuries:

Malgré tant de désastres, Constantinople fut encore longtemps la ville chrétienne la plus opulente, la plus peuplée, la plus recommandable par les arts. Sa situation seule, par laquelle elle domine sur deux mers, la rendait nécessairement commerçante. [...] Les arts mécaniques et les beaux-arts mêmes ne périssent point dans une vaste capitale qui est le séjour des riches.

Toutes ces révolutions subites du palais, les crimes de tant d'empereurs égorgés les uns par les autres, sont des orages qui ne tombent guère sur des hommes cachés, qui cultivent en paix des professions qu'on n'envie point.<sup>14</sup>

This image is pervasive, and multi-dimensional, a picture of a living city, and a picture more individual and vivid than those of most of its emperors or patriarchs. Rome, on the other hand, is more usually seen as an institution rather than as a place, or a place where the general populace has no more than a walk-on role; Jerusalem is portrayed as a miserable spot in a barren country.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, Voltaire adds at this point, although the Eastern empire had been 'plus riche, plus plein de ressources, plus puissant que celui d'Allemagne,

<sup>11</sup> *Essai*, ch.29, *OCV*, vol.22, p.418.

<sup>12</sup> *Essai*, ch.13, *OCV*, vol.22, pp.238-39.

<sup>13</sup> *Essai*, ch.29, *OCV*, vol.22, p.422.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.428. Trade and manufacture are also associated with Constantinople of the early medieval period in the 'Chapitre des arts' (*Essai sur les mœurs*, ed. R. Pomeau, 2 vols, Paris, Bordas, [1963] 1990, vol.2, pp.818-19).

<sup>15</sup> *Essai*, ch.53, *OCV*, vol.23, pp.278-79.

[...] il n'est plus, et l'empire d'Allemagne subsiste encore'.<sup>16</sup> Fast-forward a couple of centuries to the eve of the crusades. The empire itself is much reduced after many losses to eastern enemies, but this is almost seen as a strength:

Tous les riches chrétiens d'Asie, qui n'avaient pas voulu subir le joug mahométan, s'étaient retirés dans la ville impériale, qui par là même s'enrichit des dépouilles des provinces. Enfin malgré tant de pertes, malgré les crimes et les révolutions du palais, cette ville, à la vérité déchue, mais immense, peuplée, opulente et respirant les délices, se regardait comme la première du monde.<sup>17</sup>

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Given the perspective above on the Western church as ambitious and thrusting it is not surprising that Voltaire subscribes to the view that as early as the First Crusade Constantinople, and not Jerusalem, was the real goal of the papacy and it is clear which he thinks the greater prize. The First Crusade (1093-99) introduces a human dimension in the emperor Alexis Comnène the first of the fairly few figures in this story on whom Voltaire draws from various sources and imprints his own stamp, making use of the *Alexiade* written by the emperor's daughter Anna Comnène.

Voltaire sees the crusades from first to last as a series of emigrations from west to east, colliding with eastern forces coming the other way – 'On eût cru [...] que l'Europe, arrachée de ses fondements, allait tomber sur l'Asie'.<sup>18</sup> He sympathises with the dilemma faced by Alexis as to how to provision the tidal wave of crusaders washing over Constantinople. Alexis is reduced to offering presents of huge value as inducements to some of the leaders to go away. Cabinets of treasures and jewels are described in detail,<sup>19</sup> although interestingly Voltaire does not add that they are refused although this is recorded by Anna Comnène herself. He does, however, take issue with historians who accuse Alexis of betraying the crusaders by giving them false guides who were bribed to lead them into ambush.

Alexis, incidentally, is a prominent character in Voltaire's last play, *Irène*. This Irene was the wife of Alexis and the mother of Anna Comnène. Although written in 1776, Voltaire's *Irène* owes its origins to a play by François Tronchin – former owner of Les Délices – entitled *Les Comnènes*<sup>20</sup> and written as early as 1756-1757, that is, after Voltaire had written his own *Histoire des croisades*<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Essai*, ch.29, OCV, vol.22, p.429.

<sup>17</sup> *Essai*, ch.53, OCV, vol.23, p.276.

<sup>18</sup> *Essai*, ch.54, OCV, vol.23, pp.294-95.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.298.

<sup>20</sup> Printed in F. Tronchin, *Mes récréations dramatiques*, 5 vols (Geneva, 1779-84), vol.1, pp.73-146.

<sup>21</sup> First published in the *Mercure de France*, September 1750-February 1751; separately published in 1751.

but while he was still revising the *Essai* into which the history of the crusades was incorporated. Voltaire advised Tronchin on his play and did his best to secure a reading at the Comédie-Française.<sup>22</sup> Both plays have fictional plots, but both have as their context the coup of 1081 that gave the throne to Alexis. Both plays were set in the imperial palace in Constantinople, but no detailed local knowledge is evident or called for, apart from passing mentions of the Hippodrome and the Seven Towers. An addition of 1756 to chapter 53 of the *Essai* could testify to Voltaire's sustained interest in the First Crusade in 1756.<sup>23</sup>

Leaving havoc in its wake, the First Crusade did however pass on to Jerusalem. Forebodings for Constantinople were realised in 1204 when the Fourth Crusade was diverted by the Venetians to attack the imperial city itself (chapter 57). Voltaire's account of the sack of 1204 is flat, deliberately so, compared with his main source Maimbourg (book 8). Descriptions of the city itself, however, are almost non-existent apart from the repetition of standard accounts of sacrilegious behaviour in the church of Haghia Sophia. Voltaire dwells on the looting and the pre-arranged division of the treasures and money between the French and the Venetians. He seems pleased to foretell that the Franks will only hold the city for 61 years. The coronation ceremony of the first emperor, Baudouin I, is described in detail, and contrasted with the miseries fifty years later of the last Latin emperor, Baudouin II, reduced to selling holy relics of the crucifixion to the Venetians: 'Constantinople autrefois si riche, était devenue si pauvre, que Baudouin II (j'ai peine à le nommer empereur) mit en gage pour quelque argent entre les mains des Vénitiens la couronne d'épines de Jésus-Christ, ses langes, sa robe, sa serviette, son éponge, et beaucoup de morceaux de la vraie croix'.<sup>24</sup> The manuscript version contains a sceptical comment, later deleted: 'De savoir comment ces monuments singuliers avaient été transportés et conservés à Constantinople, c'est ce qui me paraît difficile'.<sup>25</sup>

Voltaire describes the fragmentation of the Byzantine empire, and the exile of the Comnènes to Trebizond. In parting from them we should note the tribute that he pays to the continuous succession of Byzantine historians down to the reign of Mehmed II, admiring as one practitioner of another both their devotion to their task and their readiness to escape from or embroider the truth when they felt they needed to.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See D6621, D6667, D6675, D6708, D6989.

<sup>23</sup> This addition emphasised the fact that internal divisions within the Eastern empire worked to the advantage of the First Crusade; see *Essai*, ch.53, *OCV*, vol.23, pp.272, 273-74.

<sup>24</sup> *Essai*, ch.59, *OCV*, vol.23, pp.394-95.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.394.

<sup>26</sup> *Essai*, ch.57, *OCV*, vol.23, pp.343-44.

At about this time Voltaire mentions two imperial mixed marriages between Greeks and Turks with the comment, not found in his sources: 'Il fallait alors qu'il y eût plus de correspondance et moins d'aversion qu'aujourd'hui entre les musulmans et les chrétiens'.<sup>27</sup> This is one of the few places where Voltaire gives a sense of the Sublime Porte as the practical meeting place of Christianity and Islam.

72 At about this point, also, two new sources come into the picture. Voltaire relies from now on increasingly on the histories of the Ottoman empire by the Greek historian Chalcondyle,<sup>28</sup> and the Turkish diplomat Cantemir, to whom he refers in the *Histoire de Charles XII*<sup>29</sup> and with whose son he corresponded during the latter's visit to Paris in 1739.<sup>30</sup> Voltaire always enjoys a personal connection, and he compares and contrasts the accounts of the Greek and Turkish annals on which these histories are based, usually to the advantage of the latter. He does not dwell on the exile of Baudouin II and the retaking of the city by the Greeks in 1261, but picks up the threads again when the Greek emperors themselves are threatened by the Turks under Bajazet in the 1380s, reprieved by Tamerlan and threatened once more by the Turks in the mid fifteenth century.

The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 is treated in much greater detail by Voltaire than is the fall of Jerusalem to the crusaders in 1099. Voltaire describes the siege of Jerusalem in a mere 60 lines ending with the almost laconic statement 'Jérusalem fut prise par les croisés le 5 juillet 1099' – and the very date is wrong, the accepted date of 15 July being given by Voltaire's main source, Maimbourg.<sup>31</sup>

1453 is different. Voltaire's own greater interest is evident. It is remarkable, he says, that after so many disasters the city has survived at all.<sup>32</sup> He deliberately re-creates the picture he has shown before: the emperor is anxious to unite the Greek and Latin churches in order to obtain help from the West but the church leaders remain deeply opposed to one another on theological grounds, and the

27 *Essai*, ch.89, *OCV*, vol.24 (2011), pp.380-81.

28 Laonicus Chalcondyle, *L'Histoire de la décadence de l'Empire grec et l'établissement de celui des Turcs* (Paris, 1620).

29 *Histoire de Charles XII*, book 5, *OCV*, vol.4 (1996), pp.404-406.

30 Dimitrie Cantemir, *Histoire de l'empire ottoman, où se voient les causes de son agrandissement et de sa décadence* (Paris, 1743). See D1935, 13 March 1739: 'Je lis actuellement', Voltaire writes, 'l'histoire ottomane de feu M<sup>r</sup> le prince Cantemir, votre père.' At this date Voltaire's reading would have been from general interest, fuelled by his correspondence with Fawkener. It is likely, too, that he read it in English since Cantemir's work was not yet widely available in French.

31 *Essai*, ch.54, *OCV*, vol.23, p.304; Maimbourg, *Histoires des croisades*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 2 vols (Paris, 1686), vol.1, p.204.

32 *Essai*, ch.91, *OCV*, vol.24, p.397.

enemy is at the gates. The difference is that in 1099 and 1204 the enemy was the crusaders; in 1453 it is the Turks. The arrival of the papal legate cardinal Isidore of Kiev, Voltaire is pleased to report, irritated the Greeks so much that they allegedly claimed that ‘nous aimons mieux [...] voir ici le turban qu’un chapeau de cardinal’.<sup>33</sup> Earlier chapters have shown Voltaire’s interest in warfare and here he describes how the Turks overcame the heavy chain across the Golden Horn by dragging their boats overland from the Bosphorus and relaunching them. He is incredulous on the one hand that the Greek defenders had no canons with which to repel the Turks; on the other hand he is equally incredulous that the Turks really did possess the ‘*canon monstrueux*’ reported by Greek historians: ‘*Les vaincus exagèrent tout*’, he claims.<sup>34</sup>

The important perspective of his own that Voltaire brings to his account is his assertion that the Turkish sultan Mehmed II (or Mohammed II as Voltaire gives it) proposed peace terms to the Greeks because he wanted to preserve the city intact. Non-Turkish sources see this as bribery or a deliberate manoeuvre by offering terms that Mehmed knew the Greeks could not accept. Given the weakened state of the Byzantine empire, and the lack of support from the West, it was inevitable, Voltaire says, that Constantinople would fall, but it did not have to fall the way it did.

Voltaire gives a neat comparison between 1204 and 1453. Despite many attempts, he tells us, the sack of 1204 was the first time that Constantinople had been successfully attacked ‘*et elle le fut par des chrétiens qui avaient fait vœu de ne combattre que les infidèles*’.<sup>35</sup> In 1453, he claims, apart from four Genoese boats, western Europe did not raise a finger to protect Constantinople from the infidel: ‘*Dans d’autres temps, presque tous les princes chrétiens, sous prétexte d’une guerre sainte, se liguèrent pour envahir cette métropole et ce rempart de la chrétienté; et quand les Turcs l’attaquèrent, aucun ne la défendit*’.<sup>36</sup>

33 *Ibid.*, p.405. These events are also described in the *Annales de l’Empire* (1754), where the perspective is similar: ‘*Il n’est pas étonnant que les puissances chrétiennes qui, dans ces anciennes croisades même, avaient ravi Constantinople à ses maîtres légitimes, la laissassent prendre enfin par les Ottomans. Les Vénitiens s’étaient dès longtemps emparés d’une partie de la Grèce. Les Turcs avaient tout le reste. Il ne restait de l’ancien empire que la seule ville impériale, assiégée par plus de deux cent mille hommes ; et dans cette ville on disputait encore sur la religion. On agitait s’il était permis de prier en latin ; si la lumière du Thabor était créée ou éternelle ; si l’on pouvait se servir de pain azyme. Le dernier empereur Constantin avait auprès de lui le cardinal Isidore, dont la seule présence irritait et décourageait les Grecs. “Nous aimons mieux, disaient-ils, voir ici le turban qu’un chapeau de cardinal”*’ (‘*Frédéric d’Autriche*’, M, vol.13, p.452).

34 *Essai*, ch.91, OCV, vol.24, p.404.

35 *Essai*, ch.57, OCV, vol.23, p.349.

36 *Essai*, ch.91, OCV, vol.24, p.405.

Voltaire does not under-estimate the long-term cultural significance of the fall of Constantinople: 'Cette conquête est une grande époque', he asserts, 'c'est là où commence véritablement l'empire turc au milieu des chrétiens d'Europe ; et c'est ce qui transporta parmi eux quelques arts des Grecs'.<sup>37</sup> He returns to the last point in chapter 105, mentioning that Cosimo de Medici welcomed the exiled Greeks to Florence.

Mehmed II himself is shown as an educated, cultivated, humanitarian sultan and his is the second sympathetic pen portrait. His offer to treat the Galata side of the city in the same way as the old section is praised, as his tolerance – while transforming Haghia Sophia into a mosque – in allowing the remaining Greeks to elect a new patriarch and retain their own church.<sup>38</sup> He built mosques and with them schools and hospitals; in the 'Chapitre des arts' he is described as an 'amateur des arts' and he himself encouraged Gentile Bellini to come to Constantinople and paint his portrait.<sup>39</sup> The stories of various atrocities laid at Mehmed's door are dismissed as fables.<sup>40</sup> Information, taken from Cantemir, about the rebuilding of Constantinople provides a sense of locality and immediacy. It is hard to imagine that Voltaire did not have a plan of the town at his disposal, but none of the sources consulted show anything sufficiently detailed:

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[L'Église] du patriarche grec subsiste encore dans Constantinople sur le canal de la mer Noire. Les Ottomans ont permis qu'on fondât dans ce quartier une académie, où les Grecs modernes enseignent l'ancien grec qu'on ne parle plus guère en Grèce, la philosophie d'Aristote, la théologie, la médecine ; et c'est de cette école que sont sortis Constantin Ducas, Mauro Cordato, et Cantemir, faits par les Turcs princes de Moldavie. J'avoue que Démétrius Cantemir a rapporté beaucoup de fables anciennes ; mais il ne peut s'être trompé sur les monuments modernes qu'il a vus de ses yeux, et sur l'académie où il a été élevé.<sup>41</sup>

37 *Ibid.*, p.407.

38 Voltaire refers again to this example of tolerance in a letter of 1767: 'Les Turcs permettent aux Grecs subjugués, de chanter alleluiah dans les rues de Constantinople, et les Français font ramer aux galères leurs frères qui ne chantent pas des psaumes en latin. Il faudra bien qu'un jour cette abominable absurdité finisse' (D14185).

39 *Essai sur les mœurs*, ed. R. Pomeau, vol.2, p.832.

40 In 1739, just after the meeting with Cantemir's son already mentioned, Voltaire writes to La Noue in connection with the latter's recent play, *Mahomet II*: 'J'ai lu entre autres depuis peu l'histoire ottomane du Prince Cantimir, Vaivode de Moldavie, écrite à Constantinople. Il ne daigne ni lui ni aucun auteur turc ou arabe, réfuter seulement la fable d'Irène. Il se contente de représenter Mahomet comme le plus sage prince de son temps, il fait voir que Mahomet ayant pris d'assaut par un malentendu la moitié de Constantinople et ayant reçu l'autre à composition, observa religieusement le traité, et conserva même la plupart des églises de cette autre partie de la ville, lesquelles subsistèrent trois générations après lui' (D1966).

41 *Essai*, ch.91, *OCV*, vol.24, pp.410-11.

The work of the Greek architect Christobule on the mosque built on the ruins of the church of the apostles is described, ‘et c’est pour prix de ce service que le sultan lui accorda la rue dont je parle, dont la possession demeura à sa famille. Ce n’est pas un fait digne de l’histoire, qu’un architecte ait eu la propriété d’une rue ; mais il est important de connaître que les Turcs ne traitent pas toujours les chrétiens aussi barbarement que nous nous le figurons.’<sup>42</sup>

Mehmed II moved his capital from Edirne to Constantinople, and used its Greek name Stamboul, a name used by ‘le vulgaire’ records Voltaire in the *Notebooks*, while ‘la Porte l’appelle Constantany’.<sup>43</sup> Mehmed’s ambitions towards the West are not disguised: ‘il se flattait de venir prendre Rome comme Constantinople ; et en entendant parler de la cérémonie dans laquelle le doge de Venise épouse la mer Adriatique, il disait: *qu’il l’enverrait bientôt au fond de cette mer consommer son mariage.*’<sup>44</sup> After Mehmed’s death Charles VIII of France nursed the opposite dream – that of chasing the Turks out of Constantinople (chapter 107).

Constantinople is used more rarely in the *Essai* as synonymous with the Ottoman empire than it was with the Byzantine empire and as Rome continued to be synonymous with the papacy. After the fall of Constantinople, trade that had formerly been in the hands of the Turks was increasingly run by Christians from the Italian ports.

After this point Constantinople, both as city and symbol of the East, recedes into the background. The Ottoman empire was expansionist and westward looking, into a Europe ‘aussi aguerri[e] et mieux discipliné[e] qu’eux’.<sup>45</sup> Its ambitions and threats towards Europe are considered from a European standpoint. The gateway between East and West is moving to Venice, and Voltaire is reaching the end of his self-allotted time-span for the *Essai* and showing a tendency to hurry that is familiar from other works. The reign of Soleiman the magnificent is not about Constantinople; Voltaire describes the domino effect of pressures across Europe: ‘tous les États tombaient les uns sur les autres, la Perse sur la Turquie, la Turquie sur l’Allemagne et sur l’Italie, l’Allemagne et l’Espagne sur la France’.<sup>46</sup> The chapter of European history that opened with the victory of the Turks in 1453 closes with their defeat at the battle of Lepanto in 1571 – ‘Venise signala cette victoire par des fêtes qu’elle

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.411-12.

<sup>43</sup> *Saint-Fargeau Notebook*, OCV, vol.81 (1968), p.164.

<sup>44</sup> *Essai*, ch.92, OCV, vol.24, pp.426-27.

<sup>45</sup> *Essai*, ch.161, ed. R. Pomeau, vol.2, p.427.

<sup>46</sup> *Essai*, ch.124, ed. R. Pomeau, vol.2, p.191. The *Essai* is the first text in which Voltaire mentions the Turkish mosque at Toulon during the 1540s, when ‘les fleurs de lis et le croissant sont devant Nice’ (ch.125, p.199).

seule savait alors donner'.<sup>47</sup> Voltaire returns to an earlier theme by asserting that the Turkish galleys were manned by Christian slaves and the Christian galleys by Turkish slaves 'qui tous servaient malgré eux contre leur patrie'.<sup>48</sup>

Although he later devotes considerable space to the government and administration of the Ottoman empire (chapter 191), Voltaire takes final stock of the Mediterranean at the end of the sixteenth century (chapter 161), and takes leave of Constantinople, turning its face firmly back towards the East:

Elle a l'Asie devant elle, l'Europe derrière. Son port, aussi sûr que vaste, ouvre et ferme l'entrée de la mer Noire à l'orient, et de la Méditerranée à l'occident. Rome, bien moins avantageusement située, dans un terrain ingrat, et dans un coin de l'Italie où la nature n'a fait aucun port commode, semblait bien moins propre à dominer sur les nations ; cependant elle devint la capitale d'un empire deux fois plus étendu que celui des Turcs.<sup>49</sup>

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The Turks still thought, however, that they had Asia behind them, and Europe before, leading to their need for allies in Europe, of which Voltaire talks in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* and *Précis du siècle de Louis XV*.

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<sup>47</sup> *Essai*, ch.160, ed. R. Pomeau, vol.2, p.424.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.423.

<sup>49</sup> *Essai*, ch.161, ed. R. Pomeau, vol.2, p.426-27.