

Sajia Hanif, “The Marketplace of Death: The Crusade of Varna”

A crusade launched in November of 1444 against the Ottomans by the Hungarians, Poles, Venetians, Serbians, the Pope, and Byzantium, the Crusade of Varna plays a pivotal role in Ottoman history, specifically its impact on Ottoman expansion in the Balkans and in the consolidation of the empire itself. By focusing on Ottoman and European historical sources in addition to the political, religious, and ideological context the crusade emerged in, we can examine this small moment in history and its impact on a larger narrative. Would the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 been possible without Varna? What impact did the Crusade of Varna have for the Ottomans and the Ottoman sultan Murad II? In command of a two-front empire still subjected to the repercussions of the Ottoman Civil War (1402-1413), Murad II was in charge of an unstable empire in a time when a crusading force hoped to drive the Ottomans away from the Balkan Peninsula. Varna then, serves as a turning point for the creation and sustainability of the Empire itself. A bloody battle that took four days of body count to officially find a victor, the Crusade of Varna, an often overlooked moment in Ottoman history was not just a mere crusade of Christians versus Muslims, but a military campaign of secular interests that paved the way for the Ottoman Empire as we know it today.