

The Fall of Constantinople, 1453

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Scene from the battle defending Constantinople, Paris 1499

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When, at the age of twenty-one, Mehmed II (1451-1481) sat on the throne of the Ottoman Sultans his first thoughts turned to Constantinople. The capital was all that was left from the mighty Christian Roman Empire and its presence, in the midst of the dominions of the powerful new rulers of the lands of Romania, was pregnant with danger. The new Sultan demonstrated diplomatic abilities, during his early attempts to isolate politically the Byzantine capital, when he signed treaties with the Emperor's most important Western allies, the Hungarians and the Venetians. He knew, however, that these were temporary measures, which would provide him with freedom of movement for a limited time only. To give the final

blow on the half-dead body of the Byzantine Empire he had to move fast. He was so much preoccupied by his project of conquest that, according to the contemporary Greek Historian Michael Dukas, his mind was occupied by it day and night. A successful expedition against his enemy Ibrahim the Emir of Karamania, in central Asia Minor, postponed briefly his plans. He was back in his capital Hadrianople in May 1451, where he set in motion his great project. The first step was to isolate the Byzantine capital, both economically and militarily.

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