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The Fall of Constantinople

The battle for the city of Constantinople was a turning point. It was the final stand for medieval-style warfare. It was the final stand for the ancient Roman Empire as well. Once Constantinople had fallen, there was no doubt about it - the Middle Ages were over, and it was the time of the Renaissance.

Constantinople, once named Byzantium, was the capital of the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine Empire was the eastern part of the Roman Empire that had continued after the Roman Empire in Europe had fallen. Constantinople had been its capital for about 1,000 years, except for a short time after the 4th Crusade when it had been taken over by the Crusaders. For the rest of that 1,000 years, Constantinople had been the center of the kingdom that was the successor to the great Roman Empire.



Byzantium was an important kingdom for another reason too. It was located at a strategic point along the trade route between Europe and Asia.

Over the years, many other attempts had been made to capture Constantinople; however, they had not been successful. Other parts of the Byzantine Empire had been less fortunate. By the 1400s, the Byzantine Empire had shrunk from a once mighty empire to a small kingdom with Constantinople at its center. If Constantinople fell, it would mark the end of the empire as well.

The final assault on Constantinople was made in 1453 by the Ottoman Turks, under the leadership of Sultan Mehmet II.

Constantinople would not be an easy city to take. It was surrounded on three sides by water. On the fourth side, a series of high walls and deep ditches protected the city. However, the Byzantine forces were small, totaling less than 10,000 men.

The Ottoman forces, on the other hand, were huge. Estimates place the troop strength of the Ottomans at about 100,000. The Ottoman attack forces included not only foot soldiers, but also troops on horseback and troops on warships.

Sultan Mehmet had also hired a military engineer to build cannons. Cannons were still new and frightening weapons at the time, and Mehmet's cannons were huge. One cannon was 27 feet long. It fired a 1,200 pound cannonball with a range of up to one mile. This cannon was not very accurate, and it took about three hours to reload, but it was still a fearsome weapon.

Constantinople put up a good fight. For many days, Mehmet could not win, but he continued the assault. He led

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direct attacks on the city walls, and he led attempts to enter the city by water. The people of Constantinople, led by Constantine XI, resisted every attempt, but their defenses became weaker and weaker.

The final assault came on May 29, 1453. Mehmet's forces broke through the city walls. Constantine led his forces in person for their final stand. He died in battle with his troops as Mehmet's forces won the battle.

When Constantinople fell, the last of the Roman Empire disappeared. When Mehmet's cannons defeated the medieval fortifications of Constantinople, the Middle Ages ended as well.

The Ottoman Turks had succeeded in taking control of the great city of Constantinople. After the battle, days of looting followed. Many Byzantine residents of the city were taken into slavery. Then, Mehmet put an end to the looting and took over the city as his new capital.

The ancient city of Constantinople was renamed Istanbul and served as the new capital of the Ottoman Empire for many years.

Much later, after World War I, Istanbul became the capital of the new country of Turkey.

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Questions

- _____ 1. The fall of Constantinople occurred _____.
- A. in the year 1000
 - B. during World War I
 - C. in the year 1453
 - D. in the late Renaissance period
- _____ 2. The attack on Constantinople was led by _____.
- A. Istanbul
 - B. Byzantium
 - C. Mehmet II
 - D. Constantine XI
- _____ 3. The defense of Constantinople was led by _____.
- A. Mehmet II
 - B. Constantine XI
 - C. Istanbul
 - D. Byzantium
- _____ 4. Constantinople is located between the continents of _____.
- A. Asia and North America
 - B. Europe and Asia
 - C. Asia and Africa
 - D. Europe and Australia

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- _____ 5. The fall of Constantinople marked the end of the _____.
- A. Baroque Era
 - B. Colonial Period
 - C. Middle Ages
 - D. Renaissance
- _____ 6. The fall of Constantinople marked the end of the _____.
- A. Ottoman Empire
 - B. Turkish Empire
 - C. Eastern Roman Empire
 - D. British Empire
- _____ 7. The new weapon that helped Mehmet II win the battle of Constantinople was a _____.
- A. suit of armor
 - B. crossbow
 - C. warship
 - D. cannon
- _____ 8. After its defeat, Constantinople _____.
- A. was completely destroyed
 - B. once again became capital of the Byzantine Empire
 - C. became the capital of the Ottoman Empire
 - D. was divided into smaller cities

