

Islam and the wider world – The Ottomans and the Crusades

The Crusades



- The Seljuk Turks had become very powerful, capturing Baghdad in 1055 and had almost captured the city of Constantinople, the centre of the Christian Byzantine empire.
- The Pope, Urban II, appealed for a Crusade to re-capture the Holy Land and drive out the Muslims.
- The Holy Land (or Palestine), had been controlled by Muslims for 400 years and many mosques had been built. The language and culture of Islam had also been introduced, although many other religions were practised there, including Christianity and Judaism.
- The First Christian Crusade was successful and captured the holy city of Jerusalem in 1099. The Muslim and Jewish population of Jerusalem were massacred.
- One of the main reasons for the Christian success was that Islam was now divided between a number of different states,

some of which fought against each other. This meant the Muslims were not able to unite to beat the Crusaders.

- For over fifty years the Muslims remained divided until a leader named **Saladin** (above left) united them and re-captured the city of Jerusalem in 1187.

The Ottomans: 1 – the Fall of Constantinople

Teacher introduction:

Some historians believe that the fall of Christian Constantinople to the Ottoman Muslims in 1453 was a momentous event in world history. Overnight, the 1000-year capital of the Eastern Roman Empire had collapsed. But it is still something of a mystery as to why this triple walled city fell to the Ottoman Empire on May 29, 1453. Was it due to the might of the Turkish forces under Mohammed II, the weaknesses of the Christians, or were there psychological reasons – namely, the explosion of the volcano of Kuwae, with a violence two million times that of the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima?!

Activity:

- Students should do this as a running dictation exercise:
i.e. put them into groups, and give each person a number.

The number 1's have to come to the front and are given the first news feed; they return to the group and read it out. The rest of the group jot down important points.

After a brief period (keep the tempo up!) the teacher calls out for the number 2's, who return the first slip and are given the second. The process is then repeated until all of the slips have been used up (obviously, by the end of the exercise each person in the group will have read out several slips).

Task:

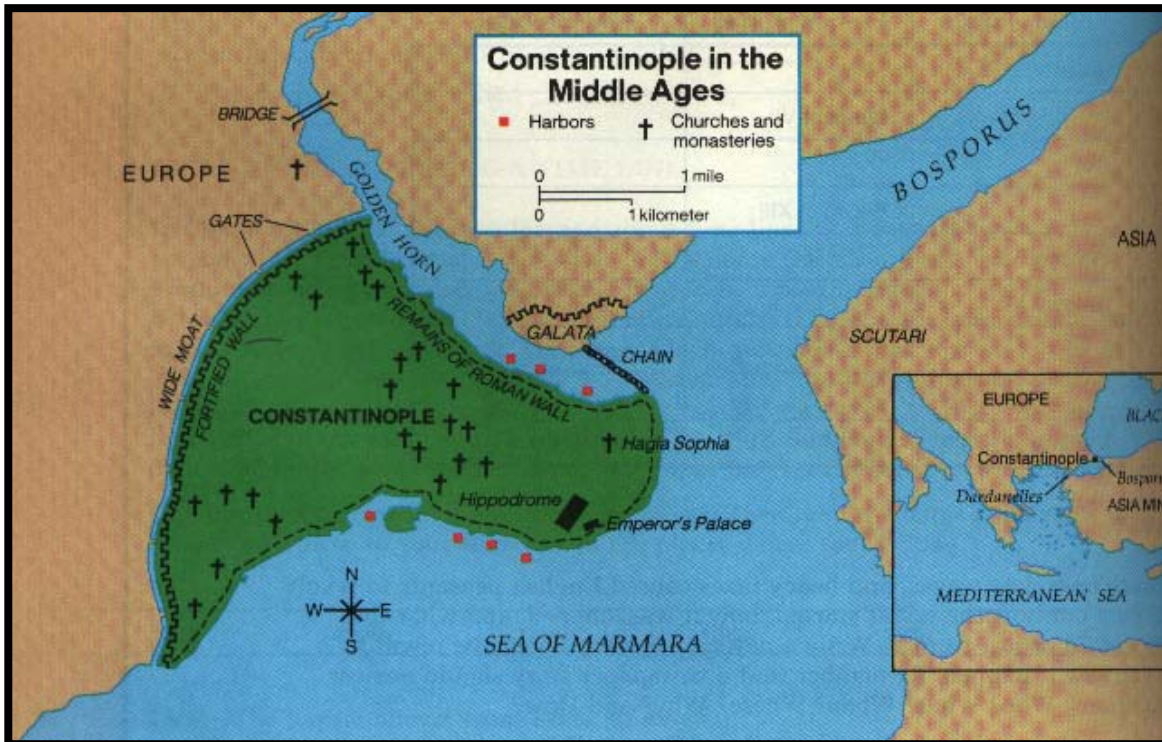
Students produce a biased newspaper report about the fall of Constantinople from either a Christian or a Muslim perspective.

January 1453

Rumours are spreading that Mehmet II, ruler of the Ottoman Empire, is planning to seize Constantinople from the decayed Byzantine Empire.

Mehmet, barely 21, has already been Sultan for 2 years. He is described as intelligent and inquisitive, an assiduous student of philosophy, science and politics.

The Byzantines, however, seem to underestimate the young sultan's talents and resolve. They have failed to grasp the seriousness of his commitment, to capture Constantinople and make that city the crowning jewel of the expanding Ottoman Empire.



February:

Mehmet has mustered a force in excess of 80,000 men, a siege train of 70 heavy cannon, and a fleet of 250 ships.

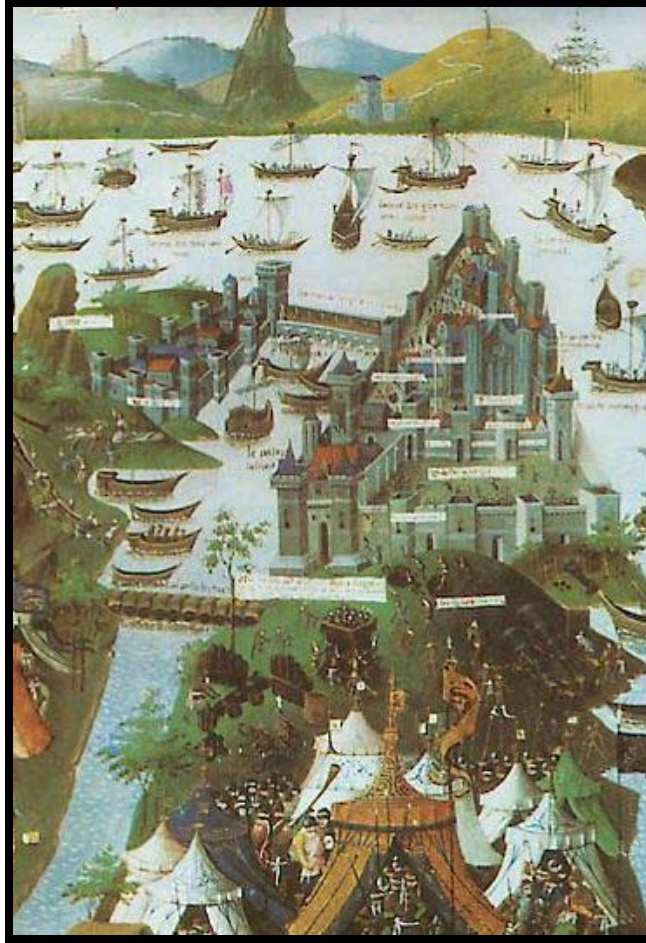
An incredible cannon, dragged by 700 men and thirty oxen, has been brought to the scene.

To defend the city, Emperor Constantine XI possesses less than 10,000 men, but has some of the most impressive fortifications in the entire world.

March:

The Turkish fleet has quickly dispersed the 26 Venetian ships defending the coastline and has proceeded to blockade the city.

We have received this impression of the scene:



April 7th:

The Ottoman forces, under the command of Mehmet himself, have set up camps outside the city's imposing triple defensive walls.

The Sultan demanded that Constantine immediately surrender the city, but he has refused, and the massive Turkish cannons have begun to bombard the western portion of the city, so loudly that women have been reported to have fainted with the shock!

April 17th:

The siege has now continued unabated for over a fortnight, but morale within the city remains high.

Although the walls have been pierced several times through mining and artillery fire, the defenders have constructed palisades and have driven off every Turkish assault.

The inhabitants remain hopeful that there will soon be an arrival of ships from Europe bringing supplies and troops.

May 15th:

Morale is now declining rapidly. Food is growing scarce within the city, and heavy rains and freakish hailstorms has added to the sense of foreboding.

There are increasing reports of people deserting the city under cover of darkness.

Nevertheless, the defenders are holding firm and concluding that the city will fall only when the moon gives a sign.



May 22nd:

The moon today phased into a long and dark eclipse.

An overwhelming sense of dread has overcome Constantinople's defenders as the moon turned a deep crimson color with a slim crescent - the image of the Turkish standard flying over Mehmed's camp! The Turkish army have viewed this as a sign of imminent victory and their morale has increased dramatically.

May 24th:

We have just received this first hand report of the eclipse from a Venetian surgeon, Nicolo Barbaro, who is residing in the city:

“At the first hour of the night, there appeared a wonderful sign in the sky, which was to tell Constantine the worthy, emperor of Constantinople, that his proud empire was to come to an end.... The moon rose, being at this time at the full...but it rose as if it were no more than a three-day moon, with only a little of it showing.... The moon stayed in this form for about four hours”.

May 25th:

Mehmet has ordered his troops to light fires and torches before every tent in the Ottoman encampment.

Of these illuminations, Barbaro has recorded that "the light from them is so strong that it seem as if it were day."

May 26th:

The Byzantines today sought divine favour with a religious procession through the city, but a tremendous thunderstorm checked their progress. Dangerous floods and pelting hail have brought a quick and demoralising end to the ceremony.!

The Greek chronicler Kritovoulos of Imbros states that:

"Such was the unheard-of and unprecedented violence of that storm and hail [that it] certainly foreshadowed the imminent loss of all, and...like a torrent of fiercest waters, it would carry away and annihilate everything."

May 27th (evening):

A dense fog enveloped the city today. This is extraordinary weather for late spring in temperate Constantinople.

By nightfall, the fog had lifted but the defenders have been horrified to see the windows and rooftops of the city flickering with ominous shades of eery red flame: even the enormous copper dome of the Hagia Sophia, the imposing cathedral of Constantinople, is affected.

May 29th: 3.00am

After using his heavy artillery to form a breach in the wall, the first attack was launched upon Constantinople 2 hours ago, led by the Bashi-bazouks.

The shout of the men could be heard miles away!

They knew they were outnumbered and outskilled, but fought with passion until the attack was called off a few moments ago.

May 29th: 6.00am

The second attack started 2 hours ago, led by the Anatolian Turks.

This army can easily be recognised by their specialized uniforms and is more organised than the first...they are using their cannons to blast through the walls of the city. By using trumpets and other noises they have been able to break the concentration of their opponents!

These troops managed to enter the city, but many were massacred, and the attack has now been called off.

May 29th: 7am

Before the army has been able to gain strength and order, another attack has fallen upon them.

Mehmet's favourite set of troops called the Janissaries have started to attack.

They are launching arrows, missiles, bullets, stones and javelins at the enemy.

They are maintaining perfect unity in this attack, unlike the other attempts. This battle, at the stockade, is proving to be a long and tiring one for all the troops.

May 29th: 8.00am:

While battles are being fought on land, the Turks have also tried to take control of the sea.

Many ships have been placed in the Golden Horn and off of the Marmora shore to help siege the city.

Many of the soldiers have flooded off of these ships to take down the harbor walls and start looting the city.



May 29th: 10.00am

The Turks have noticed that a port called the Kerkoporta has accidentally been left open by the Christians.

The Christian army have frequently used that gate to try to penetrate the flank of the Turkish army. The Turks have stormed the gate, attacking the defenders from the flank and rear.

The surrounded defenders of Constantinople, including Constantine XI, have refused to yield and fought on until they were overwhelmed.

Their refusal to surrender meant that the Ottoman army has been given 3 days and nights of unrestricted plunder, rape and arson.

The carnage has been so horrific that the streets are said to be running with blood.

1454:

Mehmed has renamed the city Istanbul.

To further glorify the city he is building mosques, palaces, monuments and a system of aqueducts.

The city has now been officially claimed for Islam.

New rules and regulations have come about for the conquered. The Greeks are to form communities within the empire called milets. The Christians are still allowed to practice their religion, but have to dress in distinguishing attire and cannot bare arms.

The Byzantine Empire is finished.