

Istanbul Was Constantinople

Directions: Examine each of the documents below, annotate where possible, and answer the questions that follow.

DRIVEN TO CONQUER

“Attacking the infidels (disbelieving enemies) attracted many Turkish nomad horseman... but also attacking and capturing rich Byzantine towns meant more booty and spoil that were distributed among the warriors.”

Source: Gabor Agoston, Author of *Guns for the Sultan*

“Many of the early Ottomans were Christians. They joined Osman in a common endeavor, and that was an endeavor, I think in the very earliest stages, to enrich themselves largely by booty and slaves one got from warfare.”

Source: Heath Lowry, Princeton University

1. According to the two historians, what was the main motivation for Ottoman conquerors?
2. Considering the two sources together, how can we know that religion was not the main driving force behind the conquests?



DOCUMENT 7: THE PRIZE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

...Their [Ottoman] aim was not merely political and military. For centuries Constantinople was the largest metropolis in the known world, the impregnable [unconquerable] core of a great [Byzantine] empire, served by a deep-water port that gave access to the sea. Known as New Rome and the Queen City, it had been built to impress, its magnificent public monuments, decorated with statuary set in an elegant classical urban landscape. Its apparent invincibility and famous reputation made it a great prize. The city was also reputed to be hugely wealthy. While the [Ottoman] Turks had no interest in its famous collection of Christian relics, the fact that many were made of solid gold and silver, decorated with huge gems and ancient cameos, was of importance. Their existence added weight to the rumour that Constantinople contained vast stores of gold, a claim which cannot have been true by 1453. By the early fifteenth century the city had lost all its provinces to Turkish occupation and was totally isolated. The surviving Greek territories of Trebizond and the Morea were similarly surrounded and made no effort to assist the ancient capital....

Source: Judith Herrin, “The Fall of Constantinople,” *History Today*, June 2003

3. According to Judith Herrin, what was one reason the Ottoman were interested in conquering the Byzantine capital of Constantinople?

SPECIAL SOLDIER SELECTION

So if you are a King, one of your main problems is hereditary nobles, because they always want to replace you, and they don't want to give you your money, and they want their ugly sons to marry your gorgeous daughters... The Ottomans just bypassed the problem of hereditary nobles altogether by creating both an army and a bureaucracy from scratch so they would be loyal only to the Sultan. How? The devshirme, a program in which they kidnapped Christian boys, converted them to Islam, and raised them either to be members of an elite military fighting force called the Janissaries, or to be government bureaucrats.

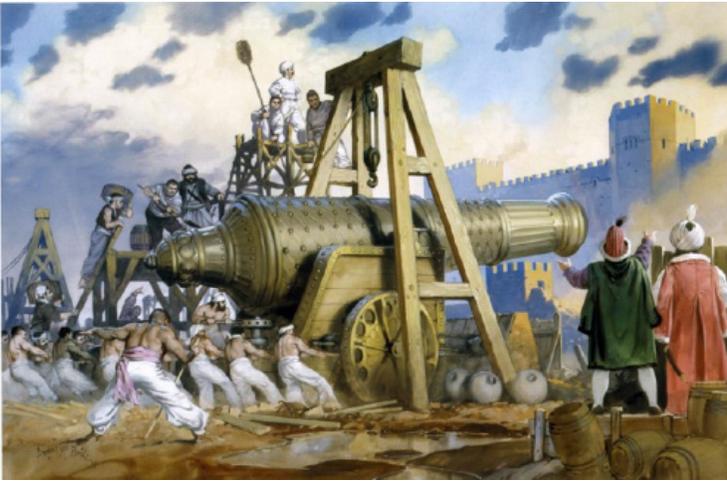
Source: John Green, "Venice and the Ottoman Empire," *Crash Course World History*

It was believed that a corps of highly trained slaves loyal only to the ruler and dependent entirely on his good will would serve the state more reliably and efficiently than a hereditary nobility, whose interests might compete with those of the ruler.

Source: Leslie P Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, 1993

4. What are hereditary nobles, and why would rulers be worried about them?
5. How did the creation of the Janissaries strengthen both the Sultan's army and the Sultan's political control?

CANNONS BIG AND SMALL



Ottoman armies won battle after battle, but there was a fishbone in the Turkish throat: Constantinople. This, the Second Rome, the Christian capital of the Byzantine Empire, lay in the center of the Ottomans' Muslim empire. The Ottomans began their siege and their bombardment of the city the Turks called Kizil Elma, the Red Apple, on April 6, 1453... [Sultan] Mehmed ordered... the most gigantic cannon... it was nearly 7 m long and, according to tradition, made a noise so great that women within hearing had miscarriages. Its stone ball was over four hundred kilograms in weight... The combatants, Turk and Greek, made use of all kinds of [weapons], but it

was cannon, Big and small, That dominated the battle... the Turks entered the city on May 29, 1453.

Source: Alfred W. Crosby, *Throwing Fire: Projectile Technology Through History*

6. What technological innovation allowed the Ottomans to successfully take over Constantinople?