

## Primary Sources—Accounts of the Fall of Constantinople

In 1553 Mehmet II attacked the city of Constantinople. Although Constantinople was not as powerful and significant as it once was, this was still possibly the most dramatic feat in Ottoman history. Below are four primary documents from that time. Read and IDEA these documents.

### Source 1

Yet I think that this is not the time for negligence and tolerance. A situation like this demands that a thorough inquiry be made to determine who was responsible for this failure to execute orders and to make the necessary efforts. Then, after having clarified this matter, the situation requires severe punishments such as the removal from office of the guilty party and a serious reprimand. If this punishment is not executed now and quickly, right when the trenches must be filled and the final attack on the fortified city [Constantinople] shall be ordered, the troops shall fail to give one-hundred percent.

As you well know, the majority of our forces are, in any case, forced converts, and therefore the number of those who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the love of God is extremely low. But if they saw that they would be able to loot, they would be ready to run up against certain death. I therefore entreat you: Do everything in your power either with actions or orders so that this victory is assured. At a time like this, what is needed is to give the command to someone who is little influenced by his own personal sentiments, be they piety or a gentleness of spirit. He ought fervently to arouse the men to action, as is necessary; and there is also grounds in the laws for this.

Source: Letter of Sheik Aq Šems ed-Dîn to Mehmet II

### Source 2

First and foremost, we must recall how the great, noble, and most powerful imperial city located in Greek territory and called Constantinople was conquered and taken by the Turkish emperor. This is found written here, and it happened 28 May 1453, that is four days after the feast of St Urban; on the following day, the city of Pera, situated not far from Constantinople, was also seized by the Turks. May the grace of God be with us.

When the old Turkish emperor was on his deathbed, he ordered his son, the present Turkish emperor, not to wage war against the Greeks or against Constantinople, or else he would curse him. To which the son responded: *Even if you wish to curse me, father, I shall begin a war against the emperor of Constantinople the moment you have expired, since, if I defeat him, I will become master of the entire world.* Later on, he began to build a fortress about two German miles from the perimeter, near the city of Fimiän (Phoneus) in the outskirts of Constantinople, and he built it so that it was like a fork, as a challenge to the lordship of Constantinople, in a place where the emperors of Constantinople had their

hunting reserve. The citizens of Constantinople, however, were unaware of this and considered it as the building project of a neighbor. When Mehmet realized this, he awaited the beginning of the grain harvest and then killed as many of them as he could take. This was the beginning of the undeclared war.

Source: Account of the Taking of Constantinople Thomas the Eparch and Joshua Diplovatatzes (in Constantinople)

### Source 3

In the year 1453, on June 29, a Friday, there came from Constantinople three Cretan Caravels  $\frac{3}{4}$  those of Sgouros, Hyalina, and Philomatos. They said that on the 29th of May, the third day of Saint Theodosia, at the third hour of the morning [9 am], the Hagarenes, that is the troops of Mehmet Celebi, entered the city of Constantinople. They also said that they killed the emperor, the Lord Constantine Dragas and Palaiologos. Then there was great sorrow and much weeping on Crete because of the sad news that had arrived. Indeed nothing worse than this has ever happened or ever will happen. May the Lord God be merciful to us and free us from His fearful threats.

29 Candia 1453

Source: Annotation on Greek manuscript British Museum

### Source 4

To you who have been selected to rule, by the highest, the all-powerful and almighty hand of God, by Whose will all rulers on earth govern and Whom all great people praise and about Whom the powerful write the truth, I address these words to you, the illustrious sovereign, Grand Prince [of Muscovy], occupier of the high throne, the Orthodox Christian Tsar and lord of all, the administrator of all Holy Churches of God and of the Holy Universal and Apostolic Church and of the Church of the Holy Mother of God, that has made such honest and illustrious progress that it has been enabled to triumph over the Church of Rome as well as over the Church of Constantinople.

The Apollinarian heresy caused the downfall of old Rome. The Turks used their axes to shatter the doors of all churches of the Second Rome, the city of Constantinople. Now [in Moscow], the new Third Rome, the Holy Ecumenical Apostolic Church of your sovereign state shines brighter than the sun in the universal Orthodox Christian faith throughout the world. Pious Tsar! Let [people of] your state know that all states of the Orthodox faith have now merged into one, your state. You are the only true Christian ruler under the sky!..

Source: Letter of the monk Filofei to the Russian Tsar.