

7.19: Explain the importance of Mehmed II the Conqueror, the fall of Constantinople, and the establishment of the Ottoman Empire

BIOGRAPHY OF MEHMED II

(1432–81). Mehmed II served as sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1444 to 1446 and from 1451 to 1481. A great military leader, he captured Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey), bringing about the complete destruction of the Byzantine Empire. Mehmed also conquered territories in Anatolia and the Balkans, gaining lands that made up the center of the Ottoman Empire for the next four centuries. Because of his military prowess he was known as Mehmed the Conqueror. Yet, he was also noted for such achievements as reorganizing the Ottoman administration, codifying laws, and opening colleges.

Mehmed was born on March 30, 1432, in Adrianople, Thrace, Ottoman Empire, the fourth son of Sultan Murad II. When Mehmed was 12, his father stepped down and made Mehmed sultan. However, fighting both within the empire and with foreign enemies caused Murad to return to the throne in 1446.

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When Murad died in 1451, Mehmed ascended the throne for the second time. One of his first decisions was to capture Constantinople. The siege of the city took place during April and May 1453. As commander in chief, Mehmed personally directed the operations. After successfully sacking the city, he went about restoring it. He encouraged the return of the Greek

and Genoese traders and brought in Muslim and Christian groups from Anatolia and the Balkans to repopulate the city. Mehmed restored or established the Greek Orthodox, Jewish, and Armenian orders in the city. He also founded a number of Muslim institutions and converted the Hagia Sophia, a Christian church, into a mosque.

Mehmed won great glory and prestige by capturing Constantinople. He became intent upon extending the Ottoman Empire to its widest historic limits. Mehmed's victory at the Battle of Bashkent (in present-day Turkey) in August 1473 sealed his domination over Anatolia and the Balkans. He undertook other campaigns or expeditions in Hungary, Walachia, Moldavia, the island of Rhodes, the Crimean Peninsula, and Otranto in southern Italy. Mehmed began a new campaign in Anatolia in the spring of 1481, but he died soon after on May 3 in Hunkârçayırı, near Constantinople. He may have been poisoned.

NAME: _____

THE OTTOMANS

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During the late 1200s, Turkish clans settled part of Asia Minor. They called themselves Ottoman Turks, after their leader named Osman. The Ottomans conquered much of the Byzantine Empire. In 1453, the Ottoman ruler Mehmed II, known as “the Conqueror,” stormed the Byzantine capital of Constantinople with more than 75,000 soldiers and new powerful cannons. The

Byzantines were outnumbered-- thousands were killed; thousands more were captured and shipped off as slaves. The historic fall of Constantinople marked the end of the

Byzantine Empire.

The Ottomans renamed the city Istanbul and made it their capital. They claimed control of the Bosphorus, the most important sea passage at the time. Constantinople had been the last defense against Muslim invasions into Christian Europe. Now, Istanbul became a launching point for the Ottomans into southeastern Europe, Southwest Asia, and North Africa. The Ottomans controlled much of the Mediterranean region until the late 1500s.

The Ottoman leader was called a sultan, like the leader of the Seljuks. The most famous Ottoman sultan was Suleiman I. He ruled during the 1500s. He was called “The Lawgiver” because he organized Ottoman laws. Suleiman also built many schools and mosques throughout the empire.

HOW DID THE OTTOMANS RULE?

Because their empire was so large, the Ottomans ruled many peoples who practiced many religions. Islam was the empire’s official religion, and Muslims enjoyed special privileges. The government passed different laws for non-Muslims. For example, non-Muslims had to pay a special tax. In return, they were free to practice their religion. Under Suleiman, the military strength and unity of the Ottoman Empire prevented European powers from colonizing or conquering lands under Turkish control. After Suleiman, the Ottoman Empire began to break down. It lost lands to the Europeans. The empire finally crumbled in the early 1900s.