

---

Abdul Basit Mujahid\*  
Abdul Zahoor Khan\*\*

---

## Conquest of Constantinople May 29, 1453: Evolution of Islamic Civilization

### ABSTRACT

*Many empires and rulers had envisioned the conquest of Constantinople. Muslim empires such as Arabs and Ottomans had started series of campaigns to establish political power over the capital city of Eastern Roman Empire. Many historical accounts and travel logs have been written down about Constantinople throughout centuries in various parts of world. Ottomans historical literature provided extensive knowledge about causes and policies of Muslim Turks for the conquest of Constantinople. This Muslim dream of the conquest of Constantinople reached its climax with the growth of the Ottoman Turks, realized by Mehmed II (r.1444-1446/1451-1480) who was an extraordinary military man with expert skills. Sultan Mehmed II was the seventh ruler of Ottoman Empire, son of Sultan Murad II. He was born on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1432 in Edirne. He became sultan twice, first at the age of twelve for a short time (1444-1446) when his father abandoned the politics of court. After his father died he became the ruler in February 1451. On 29<sup>th</sup> May 1453, after fifty-three days of siege and warfare techniques, the Ottomans conquered Constantinople. Due to his success at the age of twenty-one in the conquest of Constantinople, he was known as Mehmed the Conqueror/ Mehmed al fatih. He fought many other wars and consolidated the Ottoman Empire. Sultan Mehmed II died on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1481 at the age of forty-nine. The conquest of Constantinople marked the end of the Middle Ages in Europe.*

**Keyword:** Eastern Roman Empire, Constantinople, Conquest, Mehmed II, Middle Ages, Consolidation

---

\* Assistant Professor, Department of History, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan

\*\* Assistant Professor, Department of History & Pakistan Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan

## Historiography of Ottoman Turks

The oldest narrative account of Turks had been written down in Anatolia around 1245, known as *Danismendname*. (Kafadar, 1995) But today it is not found in the original form. The Turks and especially the Ottomans followed the tradition of oral narrative to tell the stories, similar to the traditions of Arabs. Their traditions of knowledge changed with the establishment of Ottoman Empire. It was mainly divided into two major types, the hagiographic works and ideological and political history. Before the start of the fifteenth century writings of Ottomans consist of hagiographical and mystical literature such as poems of Yunus Emre, Dehani, Sultan Veled (son of Rumi) and Haci Bektas. (Kafadar, 1995) The origin of historical thoughts and writings was traced back to the ideological and political development of Bayezid I's time and his successor. For example, Ahmdi wrote versified chronical of the Ottomans. It was considered as the oldest record of early Ottomans. His brother also wrote a book, called Hamzavi, which was a collection of tales about Hazrat Hamza (R.A), uncle of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). (Kafadar, 1995)

The Bekhtasi order and Ottomans court historians separately wrote accounts about the victory of Islam and Ottoman State over Eastern Roman Empire. The most important event which influenced the historical narrative of Ottomans was the conquest of Constantinople. (Wheatcroft, 1993)

Tursan Bey was a court historian of Mehmed II. (Inalcik, January 1997) His works were translated into many languages in the last century. Halil Inalcik was a modern Turkish historian, who translated *Tarih-i Ebu'l-feth* into English. (Inalcik, January 1997) This book provided deep study about the life of Sultan Mehmed II. Tursun Bey was born in 1426. (Inalcik, January 1997) He was son of Hamza Bey, who was *abgelerbegi*. Therefore, Tursan also got the status of *bey* and was granted *Timaron* Ottomans rules. He got early education in madrasa and was called as Maulana in Bursa. He received education in Islamic law, politics and finance. He also gained skills to perform duties for example as *Munshi*, a secretary in imperial council and financial secretary in the provinces of Asia Minor. (Inalcik, January 1997) He served for forty years of his life at the highest official post of the Ottomans court. His work focused on the financial matters of State. He also served in the army of Mehmed II all through the building of Rumeli Hisar in 1452 as well as during the siege of Constantinople in 1453. (Inalcik, January 1997) (Crowley, 2005)

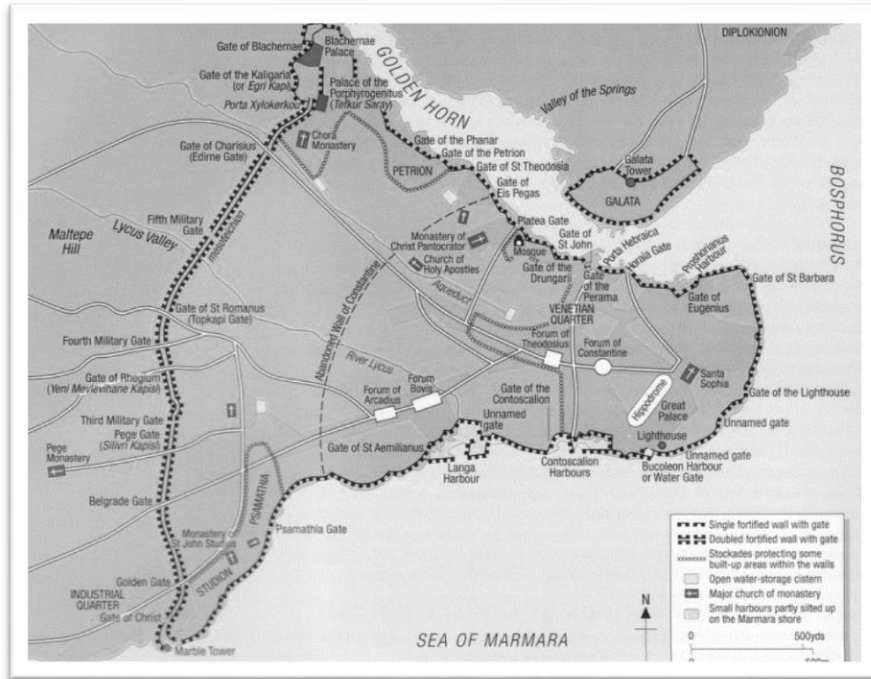
He did not write his work in the life of Mehmed II but composed it in Bursa shortly after his retirement in 1488. His historical profession affiliated him with governmental secretarial class called *Kuttub*. He had acquaintances with statesmen and policymakers of Ottomans.

The objectives of his work were to provide guidelines to rulers and statesmen for effective management of empire in the light of past experiences. His account was considered as recommendation for King or Sultan. He gave effective principles of rule to Sultans, such as “for the political stability of empire Sultan should promote justice and protection for subjects and for good administration the society should be bound to only one ruler”. (Inalcik, January 1997) Tursan Bey’s work and thoughts were influenced by his social context. He followed the historiographical method of pre-determinism for interpretation of historical events. (Inalcik, January 1997) He believed in the basic Islamic belief and considered the process of history predetermined by Allah’s predestination, the result of the action of ruler was a matter of predestination. (Inalcik, January 1997) *Tarikh-i-Ebu’l-fethwas* based on eyewitness records and on verified common public knowledge. It was considered as the important primary source to study the behaviours of ruling class, their power politics, character and content of their war council as well as society and culture of Ottomans. It is also most reliable Muslim source on the life of Sultan Mehmed II and on the personality of Mehmed Pasha. It was written in prose style and became one of the most important examples of historical writings of Ottomans in the fifteenth century. (Inalcik, January 1997)

Many other primary sources were written down on the life of Mehmed II and his conquest by Roman and Greek historians. In Constantinople, detailed accounts of the siege of Constantinople 1453 were found in the works of Dukas and George Sphrantaz. Micheal Kritovoulus was a Greek historian and governor of Ottoman’s Island of Imbros during the rule of Sultan Mehmed II. (Crowley, 2005) He personally did not witness the siege of Constantinople but composed his work based on Ottoman’s sources. To some extent, his work was more inclined towards Ottoman cause for the conquest of Constantinople as compared to Romans.

### **Fortification of Constantinople**

To understand the Sultan Mehmed II conquest of Constantinople, it is important to study the fortification of the city. The ancient site of Byzantium was transformed into a new capital city of Roman Empire in 324 A.D. and was called Constantinople after the name of its founder Emperor Constantine. It was founded on a promontory. To the south, it was connected with the southern end of Bosphorus which is a narrow strait connecting the Sea of Marmara from south to the Black Sea on north. The Sea of Marmara expands like a lake. Outside of the Sea of Marmara further to the west, the strait of Dardanelles is situated, which links the Aegean Sea to the Mediterranean.



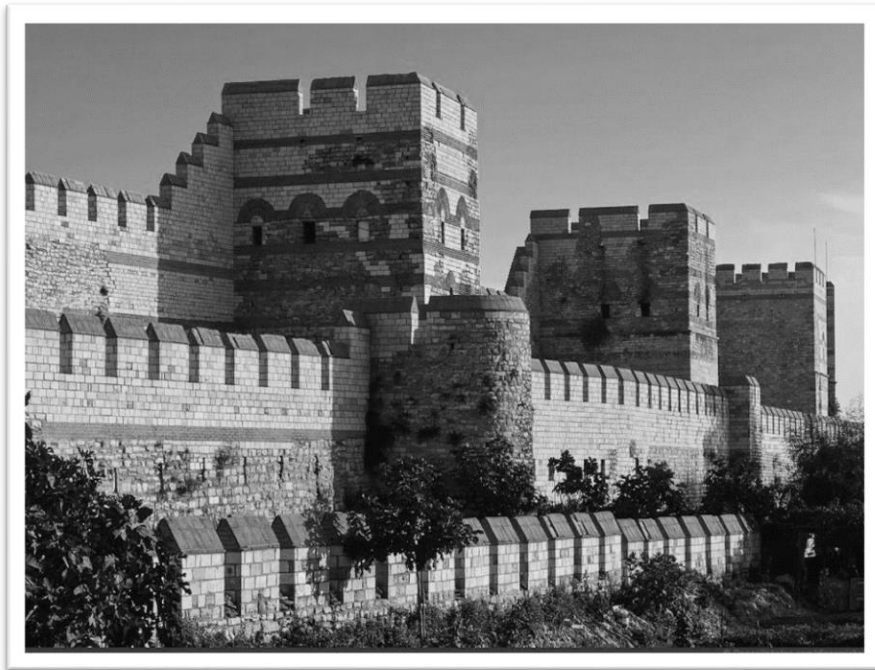
Source 1. Fortification of Constantinople. (Turnbull, 2004)

On the north of promontory, a narrow bay is situated called, Golden Horn. (David Nicolle, 2007) It was regarded as one of the best natural harbours which entered inland for seven miles. It was a most important natural asset for Constantinople. Bosphorus separated Europe from Asia. Constantinople is found on its western shores.

The location of the city had a symbolic value in literature such as a 'bridge between east and west or the crossroads of the universe'. (David Nicolle, 2007) Therefore it became the source of motivation for the rulers to conquer it and establish their rule on the both worlds. The strait of Bosphorus also provided the sea route for trade activities with the Black Sea, but generally, the Romans used southern trade route. (David Nicolle, 2007) The location of the city and its set up as capital needed more defence and security from all sides. On the north, there was only one harbour. The mountain ranges did not give a natural defence against the foreign attacks. Constantine I was experienced military man and first Christian Emperor of Rome. Immediately he planned to build a wall around the city for its defence. The first wall was built on the west of city from the Golden Horn to the Sea of Marmara (David Nicolle, 2007) but the natural disasters and foreign invasions

damaged the first fortification of city. Respectively in the fifth century, the Goths captured Rome, capital of Western Roman Empire and Huns also crossed the Danube, a fear spread out of their attacks on the city. (David Nicolle, 2007) Thereafter, in the reign of Emperor Theodosius II (408-450), new walls were built around the city. The Theodosius wall was planned by the skilled Anthemius. (Freely, 2009) This new wall was constructed one mile on the west from the original fortification. It provided safety, defence and protection to the city till its conquest by Ottomans and its remnants still exist in the city of Istanbul.

The construction of new walls was completed in 423 A.D with 57 towers, in 477 because of destruction by earthquake some extra walls were also constructed outside of Theodosius wall with a broad and deep moat in front of it. (David Nicolle, 2007) The wall of Constantinople was situated on the west of the landside from Sea of Marmara in the south to Golden Horn harbour on the north. It consisted of three layers of walls, known as the inner wall, outer wall and moat.



**Source 2. Old city Wall of Constantinople, (David Nicolle, 2007) (Turnbull, 2004)**

From the city to the outside, first inner wall came; it was separated from the outer wall with a narrow walkway. The wider outer wall ended with another

low wall of the inside of moat. The other side of trench was connected with the ground. (David Nicolle, 2007) The inner wall was the strongest part of fortification. The height of inner wall from ground level was about 30 feet and 6 inches and from the level of the city to 40 feet above. (David Nicolle, 2007) The width of wall varied from 15 feet 6 inches near the ground to 13 feet and 6 inches at the top and had 96 towers and each tower was divided into two parts by wooden floor, for the storage of equipment as well as guardhouse. (David Nicolle, 2007) Its gates provided access to the outer wall. The place between two walls was called *peribolos*, it was 50 to 60 feet wide. (David Nicolle, 2007) The outer wall was an important defence line for the city, its height varied from 10 feet to the level of *peribolos* to 27 feet and 6 inches and width from 2 feet to 6 feet and 6 inches. (David Nicolle, 2007) The lower part of the wall was solid while the upper consisted of arches and these were the chambers, where forces easily stayed and accommodated. (David Nicolle, 2007)

The moat was about 61 feet wide and 20 feet deep. Across it, a low wall was also built which divided it into many sections. (David Nicolle, 2007) The wall had ten main gates and several small gates. Main gates were divided into two types, the military and public gate. All gates were the double gate because of the three layers of wall. (David Nicolle, 2007) When fortification of city on the land was completed, Romans built the sea wall similar to the structure of land wall, but it had lesser importance because the seas were under the control of Roman emperor. Moreover, they also secured their northern shore of the city by stretching a chain across the narrow entrance to Golden Horn, the chain was passed between two towers and in water wooden floats supported it. (David Nicolle, 2007) Constantinople needed lots of human and economic resources and political strategies for upholding this strong defence system and fortification. Therefore, emperors of the city always tried to maintain diplomatic relations with enemies as well as with western Christian powers in order to secure their empire and to get aids from them. (David Nicolle, 2007) In this way, Constantinople remained secured from foreign attacks and sieges for years but circumstances had changed with the start of the fifteenth century, the wall of Constantinople no longer protected its inhabitants.

Sultan Mehmed II made a strategic plan to conquer Constantinople which at that time Romans had not imagined their fall and defeat by this young Sultan. The Sultan Mehmed II closed the whole chapters of history of Roman rule of Constantinople and opened a new chapter of Muslim rule over it. Therefore, his personality and his conquests have often become the focus of historical writing in the Modern Age.

## The Interest of Sultan Mehmed II

Mehmed II was the son of Sultan Murad II and the seventh ruler of Ottoman Empire. He was born on 30<sup>th</sup> March 1432 in Edirne. (Freely, 2009) Sultan Murad II tried his best to educate Mehmed II in all fields of knowledge, so he brought his teachers in different fields such as Islamic law or theology, languages, architecture to other sciences from all over world and eventually, he studied Islamic theology, foreign languages, geography and philosophy and Latin and Greek history. Mehmed II gained command over five languages apart from Turkish. (Imber, 2009) Murad II had other two sons who were murdered in early age and prince Mehmed II became the only heir of Ottomans. Therefore, Murad II put special focus on his military and administrative training. As part of training, Ottoman Sultans used to send their sons to each province of Ottoman State and assigned them the responsibility of whole province from administration to its defence. Similarly, Mehmed II was also sent to the province of Amasya/ Manisa, for training and to get experiences. During his early life, his father had been fighting on both fronts of Asia and Europe and also commanded the siege of Constantinople. Mehmed II was aware of the situation and context of Constantinople and its relations with Ottomans. Even his father had abdicated his rule for him from 1444 to 1446. (Halil, 2009) Mehmed II however, could not control the situation of internal and external power politics and he was removed by Chandrli Halil Pasa. Such images of a weak young Mehmed II had been in the minds of his opponents, when he became the Ottoman Sultan they considered him as ineffective young Sultan. On the other hand, when he became the Sultan after his father's death in 1451, he was a great administrator and expert military man, with lot of wisdom and knowledge.

When he became Sultan in 1451, Ottoman state was strongest in terms of economic development, trade activities as well as in human resources and without the threat of any civil war. (Halil, 2009) Moreover, Mehmed II educational background and past expertise enabled him to utilise these resources in executing his expansion policies. Like his forefathers, he also envisioned the conquest of Constantinople not only as a dream but also planned a strategic scheme for this purpose. (Finkel, 2007) According to historical records, the following were the main interests of Sultan Mehmed II for the conquest of Constantinople. (Halil, 2009)

- His prime motive was to revive the empire of his forefather Bayezid I and to fulfil his dream of the conquest of Constantinople.
- To set up direct control over the land from west of Euphrates in Asia to the south of Danube in Europe, under the central administration.
- He was interested in the conquest of Constantinople because of its geopolitical importance, economic development and strategic location.

- He was interested in its conquest to fulfil the prophecy of the Muhammad (ﷺ) on the conquest of Constantinople.
- The influence of Gaza beliefs also motivated him, so he was determined to portray his image as Ghazi in the Muslim World.
- Another main interest of him was that he wanted to create the Ottoman power as World Empire as well as to become the universal Sultan.



Source 3. Ottoman Empire and Constantinople in 1451 (Crowley, 2005)

To some extent, he believed that the conquest of the capital of Eastern Roman Empire will give him prestige and authority to establish an Ottoman realm. Consequently, he made lots of policies and plans for the conquest in order to consolidate his rule in Asia and Europe. Therefore, the historiographers portrayed him as a hero and soldier of Islam.

## Policies of Sultan Mehmed II

Sultan Murad II died on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1451, his grand vizier Chandarli Khalil Pasha kept this news in secret until Mehmed II arrived in Edirne from Manisa. (Freely, 2009) At the age of 21, Sultan Mehmed II became the Ottoman Sultan, this time his military and administration planning had worked in the best way. According to Halil Inalcik assessment that “when Mehmed II became Sultan, officials were divided into two groups of peace and war party. Therefore, the



whole matter of conquest of Constantinople became the issue of power politics. The peace party was commanded by the Chandarli Halil Pasha and war part was headed by the military leader, Shahabuddin Shahin, Tura Khan and Sultan's tutor Zarganos Pasha." (Inalcik, January 1997) As compared to the internal situation, the external European forces were uniting against the Ottomans and prepared for another crusade. The similar myths as Islamic apocalyptic traditions about the conquest of the of Constantinople also prevailed in the city Constantinople among Romans about the fall of city with reference to the end of time or doomsday. (Sahin, 2010)

Firstly, Mehmed II maintained diplomatic relations with external powers, secondly, he kept the former Vizier on his post despite the fact that he did not like him because Chandarli Halil Pasha had served under his father and had removed him from the throne with the help of Janissary's revolt in 1444, although he belonged to an influential family of Turks and was in favour of peace towards Constantinople against the war. Mehmed II kept him in this post because of his experience to maintain friendly relations with Eastern Roman Empire, further he did not want to create any internal revolts among Ottomans. Another historian has described that Chandarli Halil Pasha was also a theologian and knew the Islamic apocalyptic tradition about the conquest of Constantinople and that's why he opposed the scheme of Mehmed II. The war party wanted the conquest of Constantinople and supported the scheme of Sultan Mehmed II for the conquest of Constantinople. (Halil, 2009)

In the first year, Sultan Mehmed II kept diplomatic and peaceful relations with Europeans, because of that enemies did not get any clue of his offensive warfare motives and policies for the conquest of Constantinople. He renewed the agreements with the state of Venice, Genoa, Hungary, Rhodes and Serbia and status of Vassals in Wallachia and Ragusa were confirmed. (Skilliter, 1974) No major events were recorded in the first years of his rule by a historian but the next thirty year of his rule brought excessive news of fighting on several fronts at once. (Skilliter, 1974) Thereafter, he developed such diplomatic relations which kept foreign powers friendly towards Ottomans and without any disturbance he diverted his resources and manpower for the preparation of the conquest of Constantinople. Moreover, the changing situations of the internal and external world, for example, Constantinople once again instigated the Prince Orhan, grandson of Bayezid I for a civil war and internal power politics among officials, forced Mehmed II to conquer Constantinople as sooner. (Halil, 2009)

### **Strategic Policies**

The first practical step for the conquest of the city, that he took was the building of new fort called Rumeli Hisarion the western shore of Bosphorus. It was built right in front of the AnduloHisarifort, which was built by Bayezid I.

(Halil, 2009) When Mehmed II became the Sultan; Ibrahim Bey of Karaman started a revolt. Sultan went there and curbed the revolt. When he started his journey towards Edirne by southern sea route via the Dardanelles he found that the passage of Dardanelles was blocked by the Christian naval fleets, so he reached the capital via Bosphorus and during this voyage he realised the need for a new military fort at a strategic location on European shore where the width of the strait was so narrow that Ottoman's army could easily keep a check upon the movement towards Constantinople. (Sphrantze, 1980)

When he reached the capital, he appointed his own slave recruited officer in the command of Janissary units and took their control from Candarli Halil Pasha. Further, he issued an order to collect materials and craftsmen for the construction of a new fort on the western shore of Bosphorus. For the construction of new fort Ottomans also needed a powerful fleet to stop the intervention of foreign elements. For this purpose, a huge naval fleet was raised in Gallipoli which consisted of six war galleys, eighteen small galliots and sixteen supply ships. (David Nicolle, 2007) The work had begun in April 1452 on 88macross of land and about five hundred workers completed the construction by 31<sup>st</sup> August 1452. (David Nicolle, 2007) It was built in a triangular shape. After establishing the defences' structure, Mehmed II geared it up with all kinds of armaments such as javelins, bows, spears, helmets and shields and many more such arms. (David Nicolle, 2007) This new fort was called Rumeli Hisar or *Bogaz Kesen* which means the 'cutter of the Strait' or 'of the Throat'. (David Nicolle, 2007) It became garrisoned and four hundred Ottomans soldiers were appointed there under the command of Firuz Bey, who had the duty to impose a toll-tax on all passing ships and those which refused were to be fired and attacked by cannon.

As records have reported the biggest gun at Rumeli could fire a ball weighing 600lb (about 272 kg). (David Nicolle, 2007) When the news of the construction of a new fort reached Constantinople they started to ask for help from Venetian and western Christian empires. Meanwhile, Ottomans renewed their treaties with neighbours. Constantine XI also complained that Mehmed II did not take permission for building of new fort, but Mehmed II simply responded that Constantine XI owned nothing outside the wall of the city. (David Nicolle, 2007) There were also disputes among Ottoman workers and Christian farmers during the building of the fort. (David Nicolle, 2007) As George Sphrantaz, describes that "Emperor Constantine wanted to attack the new fort of Ottomans but citizens, senators and priests changed his mind. So, they made another policy of church unity." (Sphrantze, 1980) On 12<sup>th</sup> December 1452, their first meeting was held in Hagia Sophia under the leadership of the emperor which is an example of their unity against Ottomans. (Halil, 2009)

### **Warfare Weapons**

The fifteenth century saw a major change in warfare equipment and techniques. The invention of gunpowder changed the whole course of military history. Sultan Mehmed II was a skilled military soldier and leader. Therefore, he modified the warfare gears with modern technology. His policies remained accomplished because of rich resources of his state while Constantinople suffered from the financial crisis. Many Italian and other famous military experts came to Ottomans court to seek opportunities and favours from Sultan. One of them was the Urban, a Hungarian gun founder. (David Nicolle, 2007) He had previously served in Eastern Roman Empire and left the services because the emperor had not enough funds and materials to support his project. When he came to the court of Mehmed II Sultan asked him to make cannon which can break the walls of Constantinople. Urban accepted the Mehmed II plan and started his project in Rumeli Hisar. (David Nicolle, 2007) Mehmed II ordered that whatever Urban needed would be provided to him. It took almost two months to prepare a gun for the fort and later on its ranges were fixed. In November 1452, first time they opened fire on a Venetianship which came from the Black Sea and was going to Constantinople. Somehow, they managed to reach Constantinople. (David Nicolle, 2007) Further, when they set their ranges on 25<sup>th</sup> November they fired and sunk a Venetian ship. (David Nicolle, 2007) After receiving this news Mehmed II ordered Urban to make a new cannon twice as large in size from actual size and that can shoot a ball of 1000lbs (about 450 kg) weight. (David Nicolle, 2007) When it was built, they tested it outside of Mehmed II new palace firing it twice from a range of one mile. In September 1452, he went back to his capital city, secured his palace and checked the defensive positions. (Sphrantze, 1980)

While Mehmed II was busy in upgrading the military tools, the Emperor of Constantinople was busy in filling the food deposit of city with help of people from villages. (David Nicolle, 2007) In winter of 1452, Constantinople sent ships to the southern Christian powers in Aegean to buy food and military tools. One of their large ships got trapped in the sea winds and could not reach the city until siege had begun. (David Nicolle, 2007) In the city itself, they were improving the defence system and military troops started to get paid from the silver that the emperor had taken from churches and monasteries. (David Nicolle, 2007)

### **Warfare Methods/Techniques**

Wars are broadly divided into two major categories namely, defensive and offensive. The defensive warfare method includes such practices as guerrilla tactics without a major confrontation between field armies while the

offensive wars are waged against the enemies by aggressive or forceful motivations. In the conquest of Constantinople, Sultan Mehmed II used the offensive warfare techniques while Constantinople adopted the defensive strategies and at the same time tried best to instigate western powers against Ottomans. (David Nicolle, 2007) However, this time circumstances were in favour of Muslims cause for the conquest of Constantinople.

After completion of the fort Rulami Hisar, Ottomans gained complete control over southern sea route. Mehmed II turned his focus to control the foreign helping factor of Constantinople during its' siege. The capital city of Ottomans, Edirne was situated about 100 miles in the west of Constantinople and the real status of Emperor Constantine XI and his subordinate despots of Morea was not more than the vassal states. (David Nicolle, 2007) To the east, the Empire of Trebizond of Eastern Roman Empire was situated, it became a separate state and thus was ruled by the rival group. (David Nicolle, 2007) On the north, Eastern Rome had small principality of Mangoup in Crimea while Venice and Genoa controlled most of the island and coastal areas of the Black Sea as well as the Aegean Sea. All of the neighbouring powers of Constantinople were occupied in their own internal crises and most important that no one wanted to disturb their relations with Ottomans.

Sultan Mehmed II ordered Turhan and his two sons, Ahmed and Omer, to wage war on the despots of Constantine XI. They had the duties to prevent despots from helping their emperor and to keep Romans armies engaged in war throughout the winter of 1452-1453. (Crowley, 2005) Turhan took control of strategic positions and divided his army into two groups under the command of his son and asked them to march against Romans cities from two different sides. (Sphrantze, 1980)

By securing the land routes Mehmed II shifted attention on the seaside. He ordered to prepare a large naval fleet, so ships were prepared and assembled and started out from Gallipoli. This naval fleet approximately consisted of three hundred and fifty ships with other supporting boats. One of the eyewitnesses described the situation such as that when they left the Hellespont, they created the greatest astonishment and fear among all who saw them. Nowhere after a very long time, such huge preparations by sea had been made. He made Baltaoglu who was governor of Gallipoli as Admiral over them. (Freely, 2009) Thus Sultan Mehmed II controlled the foreign helping factor of Constantinople. After that, he summoned all officials as well as experts of all professions and gave a speech about the glory of Turks, achievement and sacrifices of his forefather, also highlighted the past relations and clashes with Constantinople. (Kritovoulos, 1954) Furthermore, he announced rewards for the participants in war against Constantinople and assured them of his help in all matters of war. Moreover, he ordered the officials to mould public opinion for the conquest of Constantinople.

## The Siege of Constantinople (1453)

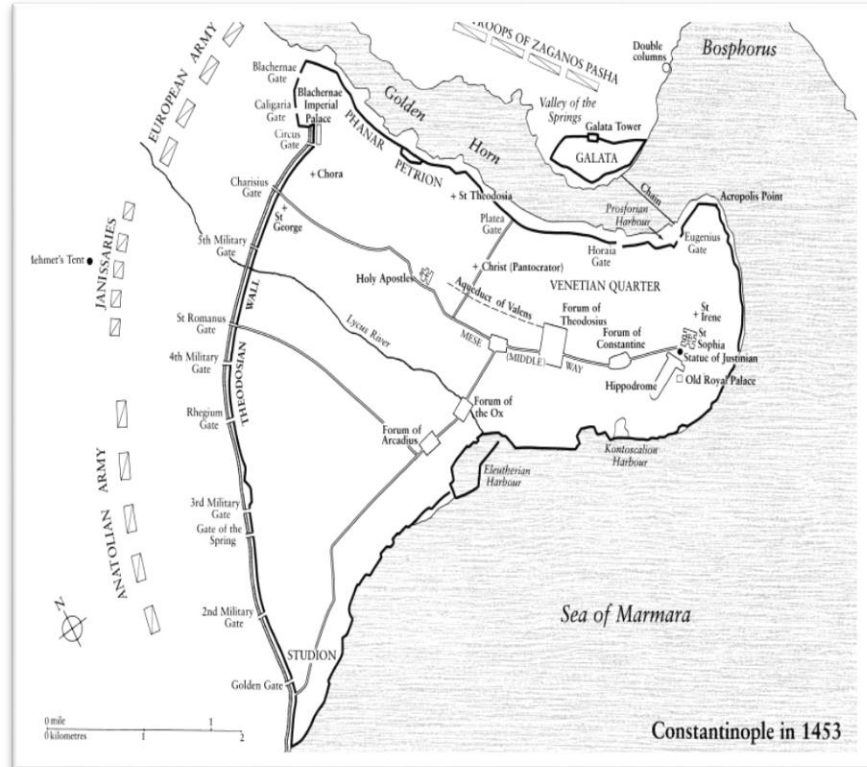
According to records of Ottomans and Romans, the siege had begun in the spring of 1453 and Sultan Mehmed II arrived at the location on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1453. (Sphrantze, 1980) George Sphrantze who was an active defender during the siege describes the event as

“The Sultan began the blockade of our city early in the spring. With his new built fleet, he shipped artillery, siege engines, and similar devices, which had been constructed earlier. The vanguard of his army under the command of Karaca Pasha arrived and began the blockade of the city. Before the Sultan arrived, Karaca besieged and captured the towers around the city, which were located in nearby farms and villages; the local inhabitants had sought shelter in those places, as the enemy had appeared suddenly in the area. Some of those places were enslaved, some surrendered because of hunger and general hardship, and numerous Christian were taken alive. Meanwhile, the siege engines, especially cannons, were being transported in large quantities. The size was enormous; a certain piece of artillery could not be moved by the combined effort of forty or fifty pairs of oxen and 2,000 men.” (Sphrantze, 1980)

He came along with the large numbers of cavalry and infantry forces. Ottomans military camped on the land in front of the western wall of Constantinople. (Sphrantze, 1980) Numbers of Ottoman army varies in historical records of Ottomans, Romans and Greeks. Such as George Sphrantzes, reported that “Mehmed II besieged the entire eighteen miles of the city with 400 large vessels from Sea and with 200000 men on the land side. He further describes as “it seemed to me that there were more than 500 adversaries for each of our defenders. Thus, we committed all our hopes to divine providence.” (Sphrantze, 1980) Kritovoulos reported in his work “*History of Mehmed the Conqueror*” that “the entire army was more than 300,000 soldiers without counting the other multitude of camp-followers”. (Kritovoulos, 1954) Moreover, Dukas describes in *History of Byzantium* that there were more than 400,000 soldiers. (Doukas, 1975)

The Ottomans sources did not describe the exact numbers of soldier in the army of Mehmed II during the siege. However, the Ottoman historian Ahmet Refik Pasha and Abdurrahman Bey claimed that about 200000 soldiers had participated in the siege. (Pasa, 1980) Overall the narrative account presented the idea about the army of Mehmed II being the most magnificent as compared to the previous ones that had besieged Constantinople.

Sultan Mehmed II divided the entire location of Constantinople into two parts, namely the land and sea walls, among the whole army and assigned different stations to the governors, cavalry commanders, generals of divisions and chiefs of battalions. So, all of them had clearly laid down duties to fight and provide direction to their forces according to the plans of war. Mehmed II and his army along with Zaganos and other commanders took hold of the main location for the siege of Galata and the region all around it including Golden Horn as well as whole of harbour to the wooden gate of the city. Sultan's camp was placed in front of Gate of Saint Romanos and was protected by the trenches and Janissary troops. (David Nicolle, 2007)



Source 4. Ottoman Siege of Constantinople 1453 (Crowley, 2005)

Ottomans army was divided into major sections of Anatolian, Rumelian or European. The camps of Anatolian army were set off from the right side of Sultan's camp towards the Golden Gate and shores. The European forces occupied the land from the left side of Mehmed II's camp to Wooden Gate and Golden Horn. Some of Ottomans troops under the command of Pasha

placed their camps in front of Galata. Naval fleet also arrived; Ottomans placed them on the shoreline of Constantinople. (David Nicolle, 2007) With full zest and zeal, Mehmed II started the siege of Constantinople on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1453. (Freely, 2009) (Crowley, 2005) Ottomans army covered about 18 miles of land around the city with all sorts of war equipment and siege engines.

Meanwhile, Constantinople took the defensive measures in order to secure the harbour. They blocked the entrance with the heavy boom of iron link and their ships stayed behind the chain. Their naval forces had three ships from Genoa, one from Spanish Castillead, one also from a French man and three ships from Crete. (Sphrantze, 1980) With small number of naval forces, they blocked the entrance of Ottomans naval fleet into their harbour.

Mehmed II formulated lots of different and unique strategies during the siege. First, they started the attack from the land side on the wall of Constantinople. For this purpose, he brought biggest artillery cannon whose opening measured as ninety inches in diameter and placed it in front of the city wall. (Sphrantze, 1980) Military and warfare weapons presented the image of marvellous sight on the mind of enemies. Finally, he ordered to start bombardment on the selected fourteen spots on the wall. The noise from the constant explosion put the city into a great confusion and fear. They reported that their walls and towers were shaking with vibration by the attacks. Moreover, the excessive use of cannons, catapults, crossbows and similar equipment caused heavy casualties on both sides. (Sphrantze, 1980) Sultan Mehmed II hoped for the quick victory over Constantinople, but his major artillery cannon exploded into many parts because of constant firing and impurity of its metal and Mehmed II ordered them to repair it and build another one which is more powerful than the damaged one. (Sphrantze, 1980)

On 15<sup>th</sup> April 1453, the rest of Ottomans army arrived at the location from the Black Sea, Nicomedia and Anatolia. (Sphrantze, 1980) New forces contained 300 Vessels, 18 triremes, 48 biremes, 320 longships and boats with large numbers of soldiers and archers. (Sphrantze, 1980) But still, they did not get the access to cross the harbour. Constantine XI appointed Giovanni Giustinanani as commander in charge of 300 men for the defence; he was a nobleman from Genoas family and had expertise on the command of ships. (Sphrantze, 1980)

On the side of Ottomans camps, they repaired their heavy cannon and once again started the bombardment on the walls throughout the day and night. This time they had not only attacked on the walls but were moving closer to the wall by filling the moat and trenches. (Sphrantze, 1980) They filled them with soil, branches and similar material in order to enter in city through the gaps in the damaged wall. Mehmed II brought heavy artillery very close to the moat which they had filled in the daytime. (Sphrantze, 1980) On the other hand, the forces of Constantinople cleared their moat and trenches

in the night and restored their original depth as well as repaired their damaged walls and towers with wooden vessels and with all sorts of timber. (Sphrantze, 1980)

The situation on both sides was getting more strained. On the side of Ottomans, a dispute occurred between Candaril and military of Mehmed on the destiny of siege. Mehmed II's grand vizier wanted to raise the siege immediately because it was not going to succeed. While Mehmed II and his army's future depended on its success. (Halil, 2009) He prepared another scheme against Constantinople. He ordered his men to measure the distance of sight and dig out the mine under the wall of Constantinople for entrance into the city from their camps. (Sphrantze, 1980) When Ottomans had started their work, emperor got this news and asked John, who was a military engineer from Germany and stayed there, was an expert in making liquid fire. He made a countermine and filled it with liquid fire. So, when the Ottomans army entered the mine, John set fire to the liquid fire of countermine which exploded and cause great damage to Ottomans. Only one of Ottoman's mines remained unnoticed by John. The Ottomans filled this mine with liquid fire and ignited it and its explosion damaged the wall and one of their old tower collapsed. (Sphrantze, 1980) However, inhabitants of the city quickly repaired the wall. Ottomans in spite of all these efforts still did not succeed in crossing the wall and entering the city.

At this stage, Mehmed II introduced another new war tactics and this time he invented a new war mechanism. The new weapon was built as broad tall tower built on a platform, mounted on thick wooden wheels. The inside and outside of tower was covered by the three layers of hides of buffalo and oxen. So inside soldiers remained secured from the attacks of archers. The base of the tower was connected with upper part by many staircases. It had three main gates which opened towards the direction of moat and these were also protected by the hides. (Sphrantze, 1980) They made lots of these towers and advanced them towards the wall of Constantinople by filling the moats and trenches, thus their attacks on the walls continued. Romans got astonished by these huge towers, although they had their own towers for purposes of placing machines, devices and to spew liquid fire. (Sphrantze, 1980) Finally, an army of Mehmed II managed to demolish the tower near the gate of Saint Romanos and attacked the defenders. A battle started which lasted throughout the day until dawn. During the fight, some Ottomans troops filled the moat and ditches with soil, timber and the material from the demolished tower. This time Romans attacked the Ottomans army with their burning arrows and Greek fire or liquid fire to push them back. Constantine XI himself came on the location along with his forces to help out Giovanni Giustiniani. (Sphrantze, 1980)



On the land side, the siege continued in the same manner but on the seaside Ottomans still did not get the access to the Romans harbour. A major fight held between three Genoese ships and the Ottoman naval forces. According to the work of George, that “three ships of Genoese full of food and war equipment waited in Chios for suitable winds, when they set sail towards the city an imperial vessel from Sicily also joined them to transport grain to Constantinople. They reached near the city during the night but were stopped by Mehmed II’s patrol boats in early hours of next morning. Both parties attacked each other’s ships with arrows, rocks and cannons and Romans also used Greek fire.” (Sphrantze, 1980) Mehmed II was riding along the shore and observing this situation in the bay. The conflict got bitterer by the attack from both sides and two of triremes of Ottomans were destroyed by fire. (Sphrantze, 1980) Mehmed II got infuriated by the admiral’s policies and he himself led his horse into the water and reached his fleet, which was near to the shore, janissaries and officers also followed him. (Sphrantze, 1980) He gave strict order to Admiral Baltaoglu to fight against the Romans ships. The main reason behind their failure was the sea wind and the position of Romans ships. In the afternoon the winds returned, and their ships pushed the small ottoman crafts to the side and entered the harbour. When this news reached Sultan Mehmed II he became angrier and called Admiral Baltaoglu in his place and removed him from his post and appointed Hamza Bey as the new Admiral. (David Nicolle, 2007)

Mehmed II got disturbed by the situations of the siege but remained determined to conquer Constantinople. He reviewed the latest position. The Ottomans army had reduced the size of the walls to twice low from actual size and trenches had almost been filled. (Sphrantze, 1980) Furthermore, he devised another method to transfer the ships from land into the harbour. “He focused his whole concentration on this and ordered to construct a road over the hill beyond Galata leading to the harbour and cover it with wooden planks.” (Sphrantze, 1980) Then he ordered them to spread a thick layer of oxen and ram fat over the wooden road and with the help of all sorts of devices and tactics they transported their triremes and biremes easily over the hill and launched them into the waters inside the harbour of Constantinople. (David Nicolle, 2007) On 22 April the construction of road was completed and seventy-two of the smaller crafts including 30 galleys were transferred to the Golden Horn while the larger ships remained in Bosphorus. (David Nicolle, 2007) All this was accomplished in a single night. When people of Constantinople in the next morning saw Ottoman's boats in their harbour they left their positions and houses out of fear and thus the defenders lost control of Golden Horn. (David Nicolle, 2007) MehmedII also ordered to build a bridge and it was most beautifully built and measured fifty feet wide and one hundred feet in length. The bridge provides access to the centre of the

harbour. All along the bridge cannons were placed which bombarded on the seawall of Constantinople. (Sphrantze, 1980)

Now Mehmed II tightened the siege around Constantinople and made more frequent cannon bombardment on the walls which not only damaged the walls but also lowered the morale of Romans because they lost hope of getting any more help from outside. Also, there was shortage of food for forces inside of city but still they were not willing to surrender. Emperor had divided inhabitants under their commanders in charge, who were from the families of nobles and assigned them different stations and duties. (Sphrantze, 1980)

Captain of Venetian triremes, Gabriele Trevisano was given the responsibility of defending the entrance to the harbour. He along with fifty soldiers remained face to face with the Turkish admiral. The soldiers challenged the Ottoman fleet with announcements and drum beat. There was exchange of artillery fire between the two opponents almost on daily basis, but no major battle was fought. (Sphrantze, 1980)

When the imperial treasuries of Constantinople were empty and there was no hope for foreign aid. They called a meeting of the war council. During this meeting, the war commanders took an oath to destroy on priority the naval ships of Ottomans present in the harbour. Venetian Giacomo Coco asked Constantine XI permission to perform this task and he started to attack the Ottoman's boats using Greek fire, but his plan failed as Ottomans ships opened artillery fire and his ships skunked into the water. (David Nicolle, 2007)

Meanwhile, Mehmed II was informed about the preparations of western fleets to help Constantinople. He became worried that if these fleets arrived then the siege would become more stiff and prolonged. Fortunately, they did not reach, in the meantime, the manufacturers of Ottomans largest cannon with longer range and higher power was completed. This could now expedite things using these new cannon; they opened fire on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1453 (David Nicolle, 2007) which caused huge destruction to parts of the wall. From 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> May they made new breaches near the Kaligaria and St Romonoas Gate (David Nicolle, 2007) which gave hope to Ottomans for the conquest. Now they started bombardment on the walls from all sides of the city.

At last when Ottomans had fully prepared themselves for final attack. Mehmed II sent the final delegation to Emperor Constantine XI under the command of Isfendir Varoglu Ismail Bey and the ruler of Kastamoun and Sinop. Ismail Bey presented Mehmed II's conditions to Constantine XI that the emperor must retire to Morea in southern Greece and hand over the city to the Ottoman Sultan. But Constantine XI refused to surrender the city to Ottomans, instead, he chose to fight until his death. (David Nicolle, 2007)

## **The Conquest of Constantinople**

Rumour spread in Constantinople on 24<sup>th</sup> May that Ottomans army were preparing for the final attack on the city. (David Nicolle, 2007) (Sphrantze, 1980) This caused panic in the city and people started rapidly to repair the damaged walls and improve defence strategies for the security of city. The pope and monks all came out on the locations and motivated their people.

On the side of Mehmed II's camps, he summoned a meeting of all military officials, that was held on 25<sup>th</sup> May and once again issue was raised by Candarli Halil Pasha, who was not in favour of war and emphasized the dangers of war and its consequences of confrontation with western world, while Zagonos Pasha emphasised the need to continue the war because at this time the western powers were not united against Ottomans. (Halil, 2009) After getting the opinion from the army and officials Sultan Mehmed II issued orders for the preparation of final attack on the city from both sides of land and sea and it was decided to do so on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1453. (Halil, 2009)

Till the midnight Ottomans army put their lights in their camps and people of Constantinople reported when they saw lot of torches, many of them considered that Turks were burning their camps But at midnight they stopped their work and put down the lights while Romans throughout night remained busy in repairing their damaged walls. (David Nicolle, 2007)

On the next day, Mehmed II once again organized the army and divided different location of city among his commanders and admirals. Hamza Bey was assigned the responsibility to attack on sea walls; Zagonos Pasha had the duties to send helping troops to Golden Horn for the assistance of ships and towards the Pantoon bridge for the help of Ottoman attack on the Blachernae. Karaca Pasha and Rumalian army had the duties to attack from the right side of Mehmed II place. Ishaq Pasha and Mehmed Pasha with Anatolian army would direct their attacks between the Gate of St Romanos and the Marmara shore. (David Nicolle, 2007) Sultan Mehmed II along with Candarli Halil Pasha, Saruja Pasha and janissaries had to direct the main attack in the Lycus valley. (David Nicolle, 2007) They brought all artillery close to the walls of city. The rain had started but Ottomans army continued their assigned duties until 1:30 am in the morning of 29<sup>th</sup> May. (David Nicolle, 2007)

In the morning their main attack focused on the gate of St Romanos. Meanwhile, they continued the bombardment on the walls of the city with the new large canon. Giustiniani came forward to the outer wall with three thousand soldiers. (David Nicolle, 2007) (Sphrantze, 1980) After two hours of decisive fight between Romans and Ottomans, Mehmed II ordered withdrawal of his army but their ships were already coming near to the scaling ladders but still could not gain triumph. (David Nicolle, 2007) Furthermore,

after another huge cannon attacks on the wall provided an opportunity to once again start the battle. At this Mehmed II gave the responsibility of main attack to *Timarli* troops, but other sources reported, that Baltaglou with the assistance of three thousand janissaries attacked on the main gap near to St Romanos Gate and advanced into the city and Mehmed II accompanied them. (David Nicolle, 2007) The third phase of the battle broke the outer wall and about fifty soldiers moved up the internal stairs and put up their flag on the battlements. (David Nicolle, 2007) Sultan sent another man named Hasan of Ulubad for their assistance. He was a very brave soldier. As he reached the top of breach he was hit by stone but stood firmer until other troops joined him. (David Nicolle, 2007) Now Janissaries took the internal wall of city near the St Romanos Gate which further alarmed the emperor and his defeating nation. Moreover, Ottoman navy also took hold over the sea walls and Ottomans military forces gradually crossed the internal wall of the city. Roman emperor died during the battle.

Mehmed II conquered Constantinople on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1453 after a prolonged siege of 53 days but he remained outside of the walls until the noon of 29<sup>th</sup> May and finally entered the city and went to the Hagia Sophia. (David Nicolle, 2007) (Halil, 2009) He converted it into a Mosque (*Cami/Masjid*) and offered afternoon prayers along with his forces. On 1<sup>st</sup> June Mehmed II ordered to stop all sorts of pillage and send his troops outside of the wall, executed Candarli Halil Pasha and appointed Zagonas Pasahas his new Grand Vizier. (David Nicolle, 2007) The reason for the execution of former vizier has remained unexplained in different sources.

Many Chronological accounts of Romans and Ottomans presented different images of Ottoman possession of city. Islamic traditions of war are that when a new city and district is conquered by Muslims, the conquering army is allowed three days of unrestricted pillage; and the former places of worship, with every other building, become the property of the conquering leader; he may dispose of them as he pleases. (Runciman, 1990) This became one of the motivational factors for the early Muslims conquests. Mehmed II also motivated his army for such rewards and gifts in his speech before the start of siege.

Kritovoulos description depicts “the Ottoman’s appearance in the city as a bloodbath, ‘terrible and pitiful beyond all tragedies.’” (Kritovoulos, 1954) While Sphrantzes’ *Fall of Byzantine Empire* does not describe any pillage of Constantinople, instead he described “that his wife and children who had passed into the possession of some elderly Turks were not treated badly.” (Sphrantze, 1980) The Ottomans narrative accounts also mention pillage of the city in detail but there is nothing in their chronologies demonstrating that the Ottomans army massacred the residents of Constantinople. Tursun Bey’s narration presents the image of Constantinople’s pillage in these words.

“A number of Greek, Frank, Russian, and Georgian boys and girls were taken captive. The prize goods captured from the palaces of Emperor and notables and from the houses of rich infidels were so abundant that precious

metals such as silver and ruby were sold at the given price. Gold and silver were bought at the price of copper and tin. In this way, a number of poor came to acquire wealth.” (Bey, 1985)

Overall the conquest of Constantinople is regarded as fortune for Ottoman as well for the city. Tursun Bey and Askipasazade wrote detailed account of how the city was reconstructed and repopulated. Sultan Mehmed II after his victory over East Rome was called as *Fatih Sultan Mehmed* and in other parts of Muslim world also called as Sultan Muhammad al Faith and in the west recognized as Mehmed the Conqueror. As a result of the conquest, Eastern Roman Empire was defeated gloomily by the best military and strategic policies of young Sultan Mehmed II who was just 21 years old. Moreover, he completed his forefathers’ dream and Islamic legacy of the conquest of Constantinople as well as established himself as ruler of Asia and Europe. The conquest of Constantinople changed the whole course of history for Muslims Ottomans as well as for Christian western powers.

## Conclusion

Mehmed II had great interest in the conquest of Constantinople because he had religious, economic and political motivation for this cause. He made a strategic plan for the conquest of Constantinople in favourable context. He had most effective and organized naval, military and janissaries’ troops and rich financial resources. The main motives of Mehmed II behind conquest of Constantinople was that he envisioned to become that blessed general of Muslim army as depicted in *Hadith* literature. He also wanted to fulfil the dream of his forefathers to make Ottoman Empire from east to west with centralized administration and it would only be possible with the conquest capital of Eastern Roman Empire. He used best of modern military artillery and strategic policies during the siege of Constantinople to demolish the multiple layers of its fortification. The excessive number of army and new war equipment created marvelous image on the thoughts of people of Constantinople and gradually and slowly after the prolong siege of 53 days Sultan Mehmed II and his army conquered Constantinople on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1453. (Crowley, 2005) He has been called a Muslim hero, *Fatih* and Conqueror in historical sources because he achieved the dream of Muslims at a very young age as compared to others Muslim commanders who wanted to conquer Constantinople. The major change that the conquest of Constantinople brought for Muslims, was the transformation of Ottoman state into Ottoman Empire and development of historical knowledge of Ottomans. The conquest of Constantinople is also called as fall of Constantinople by the western scholars, as they interpreted this event on oriental worldview. Therefore, the present study tries to present the possible objective image about the Muslim

conquest of Constantinople by looking into original sources of Muslims, Ottomans as well as the Christians of Constantinople.

## References

- Bey, T. (1985). *Fatih'in Tarihi: Tarih-i EbulFeth: History of the Conqueror*. Istanbul: TercumanYayinlari.
- Crowley, R. (2005). *1453: The Holy War for Constantinople and the Clash of Islam and the West*. New York: Hyperion.
- David Nicolle, J. H. (2007). *The Fall of Constantinople: the Ottoman Conquest of Byzantium*. London: Osprey Publishing.
- Doukas. (1975). *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks*. Translated by Harry J. Magoulias. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Finkel, C. (2007). *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923*. New York: Basic Books.
- Freely, J. (2009). *Grand Turk: Sultan Mehmed -II conqueror of Constantinople and Master of an Empire*. New York: The Overlook Press.
- Halil, I. (2009). *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*. Great Britain: Phoenix Press.
- Imber, C. (2009). *The Ottoman Empire 1300-1650: The Structure of Power*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Inalcik, H. (January 1997). The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire: Essays on Economy and Society. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 104-106.
- Kafadar, C. (1995). *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Kritovoulos. (1954). *History of Mehmed the Conqueror*. Translated by Charles T. Riggs. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Pasa, A. M. (1980). *Feth-i Celil-i Kostantiniyye: Istanbul'un Fethi*. Istanbul: BedirYayinlari.
- Runciman, S. (1990). *The Fall of Constantinople 1453*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Sahin, K. (2010). Constantinople and the End of time: The Ottoman Conquest as a Portent of the Las Hour. *Journal of Early Modern History* , 317-354.
- Skilliter, S. (1974). Donald Edgar Pitcher: An Historical Geography of the Ottoman Empire from earliest times to the end of the sixteenth century, with detailed maps to illustrate the expansion of the Sultanate. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* , 696-711.
- Sphrantze, G. (1980). *The Fall of Byzantine Empire: A Chronic by George Sphrantzes 1401-1477*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts.
- Turnbull, S. (2004). *The Walls of Constantinople AD 324-1453*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing.
- Wheatcroft, A. (1993). *The Ottomans Dissovolving Images*. London: Penguin Books.