

**A Teacher's Guide to**

**The Fall of Byzantium:  
May 29, 1453**

**TIMELINE**

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## **The TIMELINE Video Series**

**TIMELINE Executive Producer/Director** Leo Eaton has worked in British and American television for more than 21 years. The author of two children's books, he currently is Senior Vice President of National/International Production at Maryland Public Television.

**TIMELINE Historical Advisor** Janet Meisel, a Ph.D. in Medieval History, is working on two books on the topic. Dr. Meisel currently serves as Associate Professor of History for the University of Texas at Austin.

**TIMELINE Production Designer** Peter Wooley's credits include *Blazing Saddles*, *High Anxiety*, and *The Day After*.

Steve Bell, former news anchor for ABC's "World News This Morning" and "Good Morning America," takes on a similar role for each TIMELINE episode. Reporting "live" from the TIMELINE newsroom, Bell calls on action reports from field correspondents on location, such as Siboletto of Zimbabwe (played by Fran Dorn).

The TIMELINE video series is a production of Maryland Public Television in association with KLRU and the Newscast Co., Leo Eaton, Executive Producer.

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# TIMELINE

## Introduction

TIMELINE offers an exciting way to experience history, and even, perhaps, to alter forever the way your students perceive the world.

This teaching guide, dedicated to one 30-minute video in the series, identifies *learning objectives* and includes a brief *summary of video highlights* to assist you in previewing the material.

Other features of the guide are a *background summary of events* preceding the day of the newscast event and *pre-viewing discussion questions*. These also will help set the stage for viewing. The *post-viewing discussion questions and activities* are designed to help students critically analyze issues and events and to further enrich the program by suggesting thought-provoking and creative exercises. A *chronology* of significant incidents during this period and a *map* to reflect the geography of the time help place the program in perspective. Finally, you'll find here a list of *recommended source materials* to enhance research exercises. Most are readily available in libraries and bookstores; some are available from Social Studies School Service.

These materials may be reproduced for individualized instruction.

# TIMELINE

## The Fall of Byzantium\*: May 29, 1453

### OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- Give reasons for the difference in the attitudes of the conquered people of Byzantium toward the Turks and the attitude of the Ottoman Turks toward the citizens of Byzantium;
- Identify major historical figures in the battles that led to the Fall of Byzantium to the Ottomans;
- Recount the history of the Ottoman Empire and describe the legacy left by the Ottoman leader, Osman;
- Describe the schism between the Latin Christian Church (Rome) with the Greek Orthodox Church of Constantinople;
- Interpret the impact of the Ottoman Empire on Constantinople and its people;
- Identify the technological and cultural discoveries and developments of the early fifteenth century.

\*Also called *Constantinople*.

## SUMMARY OF VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS

- This telecast was filmed in Turkey, on the island of Bazcaada.
- Constantinople, the seat of the Roman Empire of Byzantium, has fallen to Ottoman troops. Under the leadership of the 21-year old sultan Mehmet II, Moslem Ottomans have taken the Christian capital. The Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI, is presumed dead.
- Reporting "live," the TV anchor describes the Ottoman's search for Constantine's body. The emperor had fought alongside his soldiers. Ottoman forces do not want to risk the escape of this "last Caesar," should he have survived in battle. Constantine stood as a symbol of Imperial Roman power. His survival could threaten the security of the Ottoman conquest.
- In film flashback and voice-over from a field correspondent, the battle of the previous two months is related: seven thousand Greek and Latin soldiers had defended the city. Victory came to the Sultan's army when it succeeded in breaching the inner walls of this formerly impenetrable fortress. Meanwhile, scenes from the streets of Constantinople show Moslems in joyous celebration of victory. Marching bands play. In the course of this celebration, the Ottoman army has coined a new name for the Sultan—Fatih.
- Rumor has it, reports a correspondent, that the Sultan will make Constantinople the new capital of the Ottoman Empire because of its strategic position at the gateway between two continents. Even in decline during the past one hundred years, Constantinople symbolized the civilization from which modern Europe developed.
- Zaganos Pasha, one of the Sultan's chief counselors and a leader of the elite Janissary regiments in the previous night's attack, is interviewed on-site. Pasha, who looks more European than Turkish, despite his Turkish clothes, is one who traded allegiance. Born a Greek Christian, he believes that the Ottoman Empire is the rightful successor to Byzantium. He says that many of the Ottomans are Greeks, and that a large proportion remain Christian.
- Urban of Pest, a Hungarian engineer, is interviewed. He developed the immense cannon that helped destroy the thick walls of Constantinople. "It's made fortified castles and walls out of date," says Urban, who sold his invention to the highest bidder. He speaks for the Sultan Mehmet—as well as for himself: "Christian, Moslem, makes no difference to him."
- Molla Gurani is interviewed. The elderly scholar says that this should not be seen as a religious war, with Moslem against Christian. He recounts why Constantinople is important to the security of the Ottoman Empire—but that the Sultan's goal, now, is peace.
- Mehmet II and a regiment of janissaries march through the city gates, triumphant. Mehmet kneels in the dirt, picks up a handful of earth, and scatters it over his head and turban in an ancient ritual of humility before Allah.
- Pera, a small enclave across the harbor from Constantinople, has become the home of refugees from the invaded city, and has maintained a careful neutrality during the battle so as to protect its lucrative Asian trade. Most of these refugees are merchants. The question is raised, through a field correspondent's news analysis: will Mehmet accept the neutrality of this Genoese colony so that it can continue to survive through merchant trade? Ambassadors from Pera have been refused an audience with Mehmet.

## Summary of Video Highlights, continued

- A field correspondent describes the decline, over centuries, of Byzantium and the parallel growth, in the last century, of the Ottoman Empire. Originally nomads, the Ottomans were a single warrior tribe from the Asian steppes. Under their first great sultan, Osman, they adopted Islam as their faith—and Constantinople as their goal. The Turkish Seljuk Empire weakened while the Ottomans (meaning “sons of Osman”) continued to absorb territory.
- Interior shots of the Hagia Sophia, the Church of Holy Wisdom, are shown. This famous Christian building will be rededicated to Allah as a mosque. Mehmet and his advisors enter, and the sultan prostrates himself in the direction of the covered icon: East, toward Mecca. Mehmet has fulfilled the dream of Osman.
- Anchor: “Could the fall of Constantinople be blamed partly on hostility between the Latin Church of Rome and the Greek Orthodox Church of Byzantium?” A background report, from Rome and from a Greek Orthodox church in Byzantium before the fall, describes the end of the Rome of the Caesars and the beginning of the Byzantium Empire under Constantine the Great. When Latin popes claimed supremacy over the Christian Church, Byzantium paid little attention. Greek scholars, speaking of the era, describe a Europe “in stygian darkness” while Constantinople was the center of civilization. But while Byzantium grew weak after centuries of warfare, Europe, under the spiritual leadership of Rome, grew strong. When the Emperor Constantine asked Rome for military help against the Turkish invaders, it did not arrive. And Constantine’s subjects did not want a Roman alliance.
- In film-clip flashback to 1203, Western crusaders are shown. Enroute to reconquer Palestine, they occupied and looted Constantinople instead. Byzantine citizens were slaughtered, Latin rule was imposed. It took a half-century for Greeks to regain their capital—with the help of Ottoman armies.
- A field correspondent reports from Pera: members of the City Council, anxious to secure their trade rights, have wasted no time in transferring their allegiance to Sultan Mehmet. Western ambassadors are lining up to make new alliances and treaties.
- Mehmet II makes his first official statement, calling for reconciliation and inviting refugees to return to their homes, to live in peace under Ottoman rule, to worship as they please.
- Two “commercial messages” are given: one is for holy medals to protect the wearer “during these dangerous times” of pestilence and robbery; the other is for the new, magnetic compass—for the sea-wise sailor who need never be lost again.

## **PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1) What images come to mind when you think of Constantinople? Which culture(s) did the ancient city represent? (Responses will vary.)
- 2) Why would the Ottoman Turks choose Constantinople as the capital for their own empire? (It had been the cultural center for more than one thousand years; specifically, the first Ottoman sultan, Osman, had a dream of territorial victory that pointed him toward Constantinople.)
- 3) What was the difference between the Latin Christian Church, centered in Rome, and the Greek Orthodox Church, headquartered in Constantinople? (Although both are Christian sects, they differ in ritual as well as philosophically.)
- 4) Imagine that you are a Greek Orthodox citizen of Constantinople. The date is May 29, 1453. Your city has been under siege for two months. You fled to Pera, a harbor city across just a few hundred yards of water from Constantinople. You are about to watch a telecast—an update on what is going on across the harbor. The events of this day could determine your future. What do you think you are about to see?

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Ottoman Empire was ruled by Sultan Mehmet II (Muhammad II) on the day of this telecast-from-the-past. Ottoman means “sons of Osman.” Osman, the first sultan, created an empire based on military power. Legend has it that when Osman, a convert to Islam, was a young man he dreamt that a tree grew from his loins to cover the world. The leaves of the tree became swords and the swords pointed toward Constantinople. When Osman died, he left a legacy to his successors: a sword and a saddle. The Ottoman mission was established. The most distinguished soldiers among the Osmani Turks, called janissaries, were Christian children converted to Islam and trained for battle in Ottoman schools. They were totally loyal to the Sultan and were given the special privileges of their rank.

The Ottoman state began in the thirteenth century as one of many small Turkish states to emerge in Asia Minor as the power of the Seljuk Turks declined. The Ottomans absorbed other states. By the early fourteenth century, their conquests included territory within the Byzantine Empire. Despite a setback in 1402, when the Mongol conqueror, Tamerlane (Timur) defeated the Ottomans and captured their sultan, Beyazid I, the Ottoman’s continuing conquests alerted Europe to an “Ottoman threat.” Under Mehmet (Muhammad II), Ottomans conquered Constantinople in 1453 and made it the capital of their empire. Although the pope encouraged, unsuccessfully, a new crusade to recapture Byzantium, the Ottoman empire would go on to become the largest modern state, extending into Europe, Asia, and Africa. Peace treaties that followed World War I brought an official end to the Empire.

Constantine XI was the emperor of Constantinople in 1453, and the last Byzantine emperor. To garner assistance against the encroaching Ottomans, he appealed to the Latin Christian pope and proclaimed the union of the eastern and western churches. Help from the west, however, was not forthcoming. Europeans were embroiled in their own problems, including peasant revolts and underpopulation as a result of recurring plague epidemics and losses suffered from the Hundred Years War (1338-1453). Constantine died in the battle that won, for the Sultan Mehmet (Muhammad II), a new capital for his Ottoman Empire.

## **EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY: TECHNOLOGICAL, CULTURAL INNOVATIONS**

- 1405 Konrad Kyeser writes *Bellifortis*, a book of military technology.
- 1407 Bethlehem Hospital in London, called "Bedlam," becomes an institution for the insane.
- 1410 Wire first devised by Rodolph of Nuremberg.
- 1413 Children of Nuremberg play with toy dolls with movable arms.
- 1416 Dutch first to use drift nets for fishing.
- 1415 Oil paints introduced in work by Jan and Hubert van Eyck, Belgium.
- 1425 Giant sextant (180 ft.) designed by Ulugh-Beg, a Persian prince and astronomer, for his observatory.
- 1430 The great cast-iron gun, called "Mad Marjorie," introduced.
- 1451-1453 In Mainz, Germany, Johannes Gutenberg creates a printing press; prints a German poem, a Mass book, a Bible.

Dates are approximate.

Sources:

*A Timetable of Inventions and Discoveries* by Kevin Desmond. 1986. M. Evans and Company. NY.

*The Timetables of History* by Bernard Grun. 1982. Simon & Schuster. NY.

## **POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1) The fifteenth century was an age of invention and discovery. Which technological advances helped the Ottoman Turks defeat Constantine's forces in a city that had held up against invasion for a thousand years? (The cannon, in particular: it made fortress walls "obsolete.")
- 2) Newscasts and news reports can reflect the bias of the reporters or the station/paper/network for which they work. Were you able to detect a slant in this story? That is, to which cause(s) was the report sympathetic? To which cause(s) was the analysis harsh?
- 3) Based on this telecast, in what kind of enterprise were the citizens of Pera engaged? Why was Pera neutral before the fall? What was the attitude of the citizens of Pera after the Ottoman victory? What motivated this attitude?
- 4) Fifteenth century France was a scene of unrest and divisiveness, having withstood the Hundred Years War. The population was severely reduced as a result of recurrent plague epidemics. Poverty was endemic, and the people were terrorized by mercenary armies. How could these frictions in France contribute to Constantine's loss to the Ottoman Turks?



### **Post-Viewing Discussion Questions, continued**

- 5) Refugees from Constantinople went to Pera and elsewhere in Europe when the Ottoman advance threatened their homeland. Throughout history, fear of an adversary, from natural disasters to persecution to invasions, has caused people to leave their homes. Which twentieth century events triggered mass emigrations that parallel that from Constantinople? (Armenian persecution in 1915, Jewish persecution under the Nazis, the move to California from the "dust bowl" states during drought/depression in the 1930s, the flight of ethnic Chinese and others, called "boat people," from Vietnam in 1979.) Although they left their homes behind, what did each refugee group bring to the place of asylum?

### **The Commercials**

- 1) For what reason would one of the commercials in this telecast advertise holy medals? Judging from the clothes and architecture, where would this commercial have been shot? What was the state of affairs in Europe in 1453?
- 2) The Venetian sailor was guided by a magnetic compass in one of the commercials. What significance would the compass have for sea explorers during the rest of the fifteenth century?

## **EXTENDED ACTIVITIES**

- 1) Create a classroom TIMELINE newscast featuring an event during the fifteenth century that was not reported in this program. Use a format similar to this telecast, with anchor, correspondents, and "field interviews." Research circumstances surrounding the event to make it as accurate as possible. Suggested events:
  - A report on Osman, the architect of the Ottoman Empire, whose dream directed him to conquer Constantinople. On his death, his legacy to his followers was a saddle and a sword. The report could focus on the day of his death.
  - A report from Italy, centering on an aspect of the Italian Renaissance. (Greek refugees from Byzantium influenced Italian art, architecture, and thinking.) Your report could be based on, for example, a development during the dynasty of Federigo da Montefeltro (1444-1482).
  - A report on the founding of one of the many universities built during the first half of the fifteenth century. Many of Constantinople's scholars fled to Europe. Their influence contributed to a period of intellectual enlightenment. Among the universities founded during this period: Louvain University (1426), Lincoln College in Oxford (1427), the Universities of Caen and Poitiers (1431), Eton College and King's College, Cambridge (1441), and Palermo University (1447).

## Extended Activities, continued

- 2) "Somewhere someone is enjoying pleasure, beauty, and fun, music and games, love and work," wrote Barbara Tuchman in her essay, "Hazards on the Way to the Middle Ages." In the midst of an age of angst, battles, and chaos, people did seek out entertainments. Prepare a sports and/or entertainment news telecast, in the manner of TIMELINE. Conduct research to find out what kinds of entertainments were enjoyed by the people of the fifteenth century. For example, feasting, especially during holy days and harvests, was a common pleasure as were dancing and singing—sometimes on dining tables after a feast. Wandering minstrels, acrobats, and acting performances, sometimes with a performing dog or bear, were other forms of entertainment. Some minstrels were the medieval equivalent of today's stand-up comic—raw stories included. Mummers—masked actors—sang, danced, and performed plays. Miracle plays, based on religious stories, were performed. Hunts for wild animals were a food source as well as a sport—and a way to train for war. People kept pets: dogs, cats, birds, and monkeys. Sports included archery (again, also a practice for warfare), a kind of football (played with the inflated bladder of a pig), a form of bat and ball, wrestling, and a type of handball. In *Medieval Amusements* by Mary Price (Longman, 1988), the author refers to a young woman in Paris in 1424. Margot played handball "with the palm and back of her hand better than any man in France." Other medieval enjoyments include jousting, swimming, fishing, chess, backgammon, dice, and card-playing.
- 3) Write an imaginary dialog between Constantine and Pope Nicholas V. It could be set at any time during the two month siege before the fall of Constantinople.
- 4) Hold a "tragic hero" session. Role play figures from the period after the fall of Byzantium. Each makes a statement about the tragic hero, Constantine. Each gives his/her point of view as to what went wrong for Constantine. Among figures to role play: Mehmet II, Zaganos Pasha (Mehmet's advisor), Pope Nicholas V, a refugee merchant from Pera, a surviving soldier from Constantine's army, a member of the French nobility who fought in the Hundred Years War.
- 5) Although Constantine asked the Western Latin Church for military support, help did not arrive. Using the recommended reading list for research materials, write an editorial in which you present a supported argument either for or against the West's refusal to intervene.
- 6) Refer to (5) above: identify a contemporary political circumstance in which the West—specifically, the United States—has refused to intervene. Write an editorial in which you present an argument either for or against U.S. policy.

## RECOMMENDED READINGS AND RESOURCES

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(\* indicates material available from Social Studies School Service)

*Medieval Technology and Social Change* by Lynn White, Jr. 1962.

\* *Kingdoms of Asia, the Middle East and Africa: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Ruling Monarchs from Ancient Times to the Present.* 1986.

*The Waning of the Middle Ages* by J. Huizinga. 1924.

*The Scientific Achievement of the Middle Ages* by R.C. Dales. 1973.

\* *The Illustrated Handbook of Invention and Discovery* by Struan Reud. Usborne. 1986.

*Medieval Amusements* by Mary Price. (Longman Then and There Series). 1988.

## **A TIMELINE CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS**

The events listed span those covered in the six-part TIMELINE series.

- 780 Viking Exploration Begins
- 1066 The Vikings Lose Battle of Stamford Bridge  
The Battle of Hastings
- 1095 Pope Urban Appeals for Crusades
- 1099 Jerusalem Falls to Crusaders
- 1187 Jerusalem Conquered by Saladin
- 1189 Third Crusade Begins
- 1206 Temujin Khan Declared Genghis (the Great)
- 1214 Genghis Khan's Forces Capture Peking
- 1227 Genghis Khan Dies
- 1240 Mongols Conquer Russia
- 1247 Mongols March under Kuyuk
- 1251 Kublai Khan Made Governor of China
- 1275 Marco Polo Visits Kublai Khan
- 1281 Kublai Defeated in Second Japanese Takeover Attempt
- 1284 Pied Piper Legend First Told
- 1348 First Outbreak of The Black Death
- 1358 The Jacquerie, French Peasant Revolt
- 1361 Second Outbreak of the Plague
- 1402 Tamerlane Defeats Ottomans
- 1453 The Fall of Constantinople to Ottomans
- 1492 Granada Recaptured by Spanish Christians  
Columbus Encounters New World

