

## Fall of Byzantium

The Byzantine Empire never recovered from the Battle of Manzikert in 1071. At this battle, the Muslim Seljuk Turks defeated Byzantine forces and captured Emperor Romanus IV, opening up Asia Minor to occupation by Muslims. Afterward, the Turks began settling in Asia Minor, ending Byzantine dominance in the region. The Byzantine Empire was restricted more or less to inside the walls of Constantinople, from which it would never again emerge. By the late fourteenth century, the Byzantine emperor and rulers of a number of the surrounding areas, including Serbia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Anatolia, were vassals of the Turks, who were then united under the Ottomans and who paid tributaries. During the late fourteenth and first half of the fifteenth century, the Ottomans began to expand their empire even more through conquest. When Mehemed II became sultan in 1451, he continued the program of expansion with his eye on Constantinople. Attacking in 1453, Mehemed II went against a much smaller Byzantine force inside the city and a fleet from Genoa. It took two months, but Ottoman canons finally breached Constantinople's walls, allowing Turkish forces to enter. The last Byzantine emperor, Constantine XI, was captured and killed, and the Ottomans declared triumph. Mehemed II converted churches—including the Hagia Sophia built by the emperor Justinian in the sixth century—into mosques, and Constantinople began to be referred to as “the city,” which in Turkish corresponds to the city's modern name: Istanbul. The sultans, or rulers, ruled as central monarchs from Constantinople, the new capital of the Ottoman Empire. They required military service, converting young men to Islam and providing training in arms. They fostered trade throughout their empire by building new roads, but expansion did not stop with the taking of Constantinople. In 1455, the Ottomans subdued Serbia. A few years later, they conquered the Peloponnese and then Bosnia.

The fall of Constantinople, and thus the end of the Byzantine Empire, was a crushing blow for Christendom. The first pope elected after the fall of Constantinople, Pope Pius II (r. 1458-1464), called for a crusade, convening a council in 1459 to drum up support. When the necessary support and enthusiasm did not flow in, he decided to proceed anyway. In 1464, on his way to the departure point in Ancona, Pope Pius II died. No one took up his cause in the aftermath. The culture of Byzantium nevertheless survived. Venice's long association with the Byzantine Empire showed its influence in its architecture and painting. There was also revived interest in the Greek language and Greek culture that accompanied a general revival of classical scholarship in Italy beginning in the mid-fourteenth century. In 1396, the city of Florence invited Manuel Chrysoloras, a scholar from Constantinople, to teach its most educated citizens Greek grammar and to lecture on Greek writers. Before and immediately in the wake of Constantinople's fall, Byzantine scholars fled for Italian shores, bringing with them ancient texts and knowledge that formed the backbone of Greek studies and Neo-Platonic thought and writings in the Renaissance.