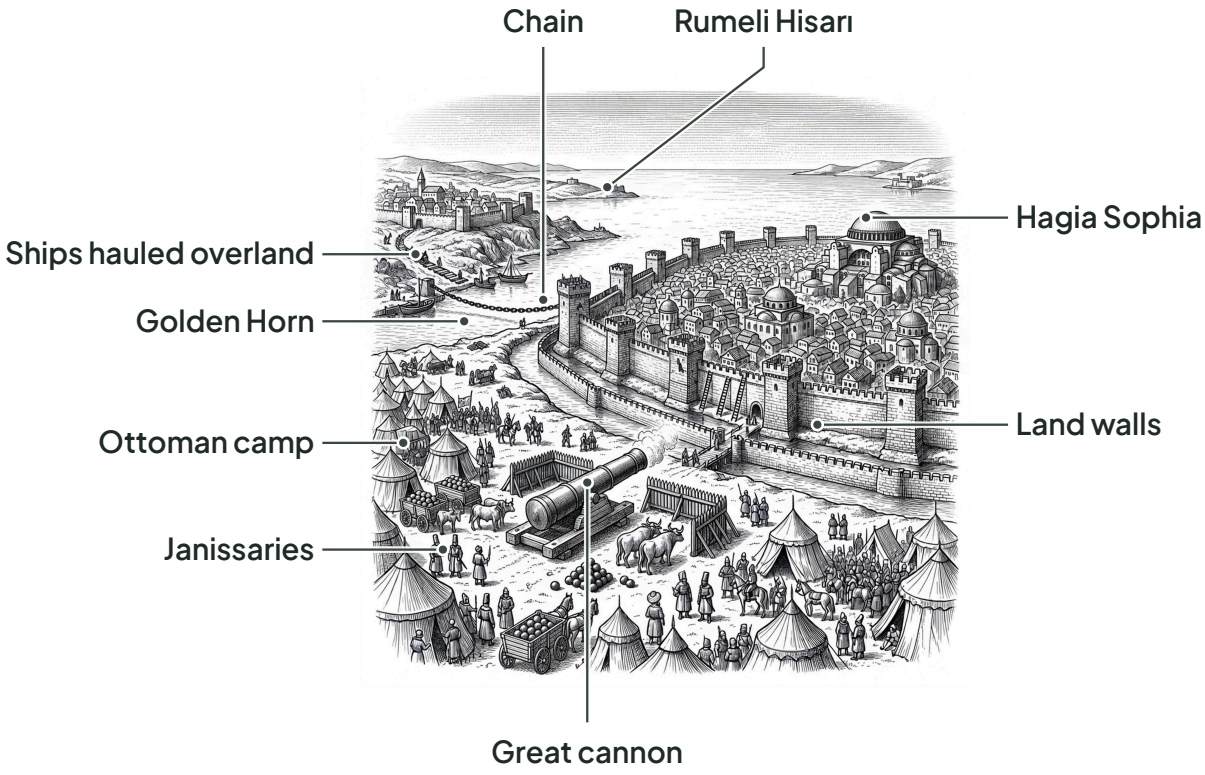
THE SIEGE OF CONSTANTINOPLE, 1453

In April 1453 Sultan Mehmed II, then 21 years old, surrounded Constantinople, almost all that was left of the Byzantine Empire. A year earlier he had built the fortress of Rumeli Hisarı on the Bosporus, where its guns could stop ships bringing help from the Black Sea. A gunsmith named Orban cast his great bronze cannon, which fired stone balls weighing hundreds of kilograms. This view looks east over the Ottoman camp and the land walls, a moat and two walls that had held for about 1,000 years.



◆ WHAT THE LABELS SHOW ◆

Land walls The Theodosian Walls, built in the 400s: a moat, a lower outer wall and a tall inner wall with towers. They had held for about 1,000 years.

Great cannon Orban's huge bronze bombard, about 8 meters long, on a wooden sledge. It fired stone balls weighing hundreds of kilograms, but it could fire only a few times a day.

Ottoman camp The tents of Mehmed II's army, perhaps 60,000 to 80,000 soldiers, spread in front of the land walls.

Janissaries The sultan's foot soldiers in tall white felt caps, many armed with guns.

Golden Horn The long, deep harbor on the city's north side, where the defenders' ships lay.

Chain A great chain on floating logs, stretched across the Golden Horn so enemy ships could not sail in.

Ships hauled overland Ottoman galleys dragged on greased logs over the hill behind Galata, from the Bosporus down into the Golden Horn.

Hagia Sophia The great church of Constantinople, finished in 537, here as it looked before the Ottomans took the city.

Rumeli Hisarı The "Fortress of Rumelia," built by Mehmed II on the European shore of the Bosporus in 1452. Its guns faced the strait.