About the Document
The Greek historian Kritovoulos was not present at the final siege of Constantinople in 1453. He entered the service of the Turkish sultan Mehmed the Conqueror shortly thereafter. The sultan appointed him governor of the island of Imbros.

Kritovoulos' clearly set forth his sense of his own cultural status in his introductory note to the sultan, in which he declared that, to be properly preserved for posterity, the sultan's tale had to be recorded in Greek. His account of the city's fall reflects his contradictory feelings about the event, in that he openly admired the sultan's military ability (which he called "in no way inferior to those of Alexander the Macedonian"), while lamenting the final disappearance of the Byzantine Empire.

This document relates the events of the fall of Constantinople, from Mehmed's speech to his troops on the eve of battle to the death of the Emperor Constantine and the sack of the city. Kritovoulos recognized that readers would question the accuracy of his account. He stressed: "I have already labored hard, for I was not a witness of the events, to know the exact truth about these things. In writing the history, I have at the same time inquired of those who knew, and have examined carefully into how it all happened."

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Second Address of the Sultan, calling upon all to fight bravely, and promising them that they would be rewarded with goods and many other fine things, if they fought well.

". . . And I also wish that you may know well how to carry on the struggle for the very highest rewards.

§ 190. "First, then, there is great wealth of all sorts in this city, some in the royal palaces and some in the houses of the mighty, some in the homes of the common people and still other, finer and more abundant, laid up in the churches as votive offerings and treasures of all sorts, constructed of gold and silver and precious stones and costly pearls. Also there is countless wealth of magnificent furniture, without reckoning all the other articles and furnishings of the houses. Of all these, you will be the masters!

§ 191. "Then too, there are very many noble and distinguished men, some of whom will be your slaves, and the rest will be put up for sale; also very many and very beautiful women, young and good-looking, and virgins lovely for marriage, noble, and of noble families, and even till now unseen by masculine eyes, some of them, evidently intended for the weddings of great men. Of these, some will be wives for you, while others will do for servants, and others you can sell. So you will gain in many ways, in enjoyment, and service, and wealth.

§ 192. "And you will have boys, too, very many and very beautiful and of noble families.

§ 193. ". . . A great and populous city, the capital of the ancient Romans, which has attained the very pinnacle of good fortune and luck and glory, being indeed the head of the whole inhabited globe -- I give it now to you for spoil and plunder -- unlimited wealth, men, women, children, all the other adornments and arrangements. . . .

§ 194. "And the greatest of all is this, that you will capture a city whose renown has gone out to all parts of the world. It is evident that to whatever extent the leadership and glory of this city has spread, to a like extent the renown of your valor and bravery will spread for having captured by assault a city such as this. But think: what deed more brilliant, what greater
enjoyment, or what inheritance of wealth better than that presented to you, along with honor and glory!

§ 195. "And, best of all, we shall demolish a city that has been hostile to us from the beginning and is constantly growing at our expense and in every way plotting against our rule. So for the future we shall be sure of guarding our present belongings and shall live in complete and assured peace, after getting rid of our neighboring enemies. We shall also open the way to further conquest.

[following the successful breaching of the walls, the 'taking of the city']

Great Rush, and Many Killed

§ 237. Then a great slaughter occurred of those who happened to be there: some of them were on the streets, for they had already left the houses and were running toward the tumult when they fell unexpectedly on the swords of the soldiers; others were in their own homes and fell victims to the violence of the Janissaries and other soldiers, without any rhyme or reason; others were resisting, relying on their own courage; still others were fleeing to the churches and making supplication -- men, women, and children, everyone, for there was no quarter given.

§ 238. The soldiers fell on them with anger and great wrath. For one thing, they were actuated by the hardships of the siege. For another, some foolish people had hurled taunts and curses at them from the battlements all through the siege. Now, in general they killed so as to frighten all the City, and to terrorize and enslave all by the slaughter.

Here, too, a Sad Tragedy

§ 240. There was a further sight, terrible and pitiful beyond all tragedies: young and chaste women of noble birth and well to do, accustomed to remain at home and who had hardly ever left their own premises, and handsome and lovely maidens of splendid and renowned families, till then unsullied by male eyes -- some of these were dragged by force from their chambers and hauled off pitilessly and dishonorably. . . .

§ 242. They say that many of the maidens, even at the mere unaccustomed sight and sound of these men, were terror-stricken and came near losing their very lives. And there were also honorable old men who were dragged by their white hair, and some of them beaten unmercifully. And well-born and beautiful young boys were carried off.

§ 243. There were priests who were driven along, and consecrated virgins who were honorable and wholly unsullied, devoted to God alone and living for Him to whom they had consecrated themselves . . . Tender children were snatched pitilessly from their mothers, young brides separated ruthlessly from their newly-married husbands. And ten thousand other terrible deeds were done.

Plundering and Robbing of the Churches

§ 244. And the desecrating and plundering and robbing of the churches -- how can one describe it in words? Some things they threw in dishonor on the ground -- ikons and reliquaries and other objects from the churches. The crowd snatched some of these, and some were given over to the fire while others were torn to shreds and scattered at the crossroads. The last resting-places of the blessed men of old were opened, and their remains were taken out and disgracefully torn to pieces, even to shreds, and made the sport of the wind while others were thrown on the streets. . . .
§ 246. And holy and divine books, and others mainly of profane literature and philosophy, were either given to the flames or dishonorably trampled under foot.