

Story #666 (1976, Tape #18)

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Fatih Mehmet's¹ Rug-Sized Bridgehead

Şerif Narın Bey,² the man who had been assigned to capture Istanbul³ from the Byzantines, had his headquarters in the Anatolian side of today's Turkey.

Fatih Mehmet Han,⁴ requested a small area in the European side of Istanbul from the Byzantine emperor, Constantine⁵. He asked for a piece of land only large enough to be encompassed by a prayer rug⁶. After some deliberation, the emperor gave his consent, and an agreement was drawn up giving the Ottoman Empire an area as large as a prayer rug would require on the European side of the great city. Fatih Mehmet Han then shredded a prayer rug into very narrow strips and with these strips made as long a rope as possible. On the basis of the Bargain - - deceptiva

¹ Mehmet II, Ottoman Sultan, captured Constantinople in 1453. He was known thereafter as Mehmet the Conqueror (Fatih Mehmet).

² We have not determined whether this name belongs to an historical figure or is, instead, a figure of the folk imagination.

³ At the time of the conquest, and for some time afterwards, the name of the city was Constantinople, but the narrator consistently gives it its modern Turkish name, Istanbul.

⁴ Han or Khan, meaning king or emperor was a remnant of Asian heritage. When applied to Ottoman sultans it was more an epithet of aggrandizement than an actual title. With Mongol rulers such as Genghiz Khan and Kublai Khan, the Khan is clearly a title.

⁵ The reference is to Constantine XI, Byzantine or Eastern Roman emperor at the time of the fall of Constantinople.

⁶ Most prayer rugs do not exceed 3 x 5 feet in size.

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agreement, he then claimed the land that the rope was stretched to encompass.

And that is how the first step of the great conquest was taken by the cunning Fatih Mehmet Han.⁷

⁷This is one of many legends about the siege of Constantinople and the assumption of authority by the Turks.