

Ottoman conquest of Otranto

In the summer of 1480, the Ottoman Empire invaded southern Italy, and laid siege to Otranto, finally capturing it on 11 August. This was their first outpost in Italy.^[5] According to a traditional account, more than 800 inhabitants were beheaded after the city had been captured.^{[6][7]} The Martyrs of Otranto are still celebrated in Italy. A year later, the Ottoman garrison surrendered the city after a siege by Christian forces, bolstered by the intervention of papal forces that were led by Paolo Fregoso of Genoa, and amid uncertainty upon the death of sultan Mehmed II.

Background and motive

In 1479, the Ottomans proposed an alliance to Venice. The Signoria declined the request. However from Venetian sources, it can be inferred that the Signoria, through Battista Gritti, its new *bailo* in Istanbul, gave the sultan to understand that it would be his rights in seizing Brindisi, Taranto, and Otranto. While it is impossible to say what extent such declarations contributed to Mehmed's decision to carry out his long-standing plan for a landing in Italy, he acted quickly and resolutely.^[8]

Early in the summer of 1480, *kapudan-i derya* Gedik Ahmed Pasha received orders from Mehmed to cross the Strait of Otranto.^[8]

Siege and capture

On 28 July, an Ottoman fleet of 128 ships, including 28 galleys, arrived near the Neapolitan city of Otranto. Many of the troops had come from the 1480 Siege of Rhodes. The garrison and

Battle of Otranto

Part of the Ottoman wars in Europe
and Hungarian–Ottoman Wars



Castle of Otranto

Date	28 July 1480 – 10 September 1481
Location	<u>Otranto</u> , <u>Kingdom of Naples</u>
Result	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none">Ottoman forces conquer Otranto^{[1][2]}Christian forces recapture the city in September 1481</div>

Belligerents

<u>Ottoman Empire</u>	<u>Kingdom of Naples</u>
	<u>Papal States</u>
	<u>Crown of Aragon</u>
	<u>Kingdom of Sicily</u>
	<u>Hungary</u>

Commanders and leaders

<u>Gedik Ahmed Pasha</u>	<u>Paolo Fregoso</u>
	<u>Francesco Largo</u> †
	<u>Alfonso, Duke of Calabria</u>
	<u>Gaspare de Spes</u>
	<u>Balázs Magyar</u>

Strength

18,000 infantry	<u>Kingdom of Naples</u> :
700 cavalry	20,000 infantry ^[3]
128 ships	<u>Hungary</u> : 2,100 Hungarian heavy infantry ^[4]

the citizens of Otranto retreated to the city's castle. On 11 August, after a 15-day siege, Gedik Ahmed ordered the final assault. When the walls were breached, the Ottomans methodically passed to house to house and sacked, looted and set it on fire. Upon reaching the cathedral, "they found Archbishop Stefano Agricola, fully vested and crucifix in hand" to be awaiting them with Count Francesco Largo, the garrison commander, and Bishop Stefano Pendinelli, who distributed the Eucharist and sat with the women and children of Otranto while a Dominican friar led the faithful in prayer. A total of 12,000 were killed and 5,000 were enslaved, including victims from the territories of the Salentine Peninsula around the city, and the cathedral was turned into a mosque.^[9]

Casualties and losses

Garrisoned forces	12,000 killed in action
surrender, 300 captured ^[3]	5,000 enslaved



Relics of the Martyrs of Otranto inside Otranto Cathedral

Stalled advance

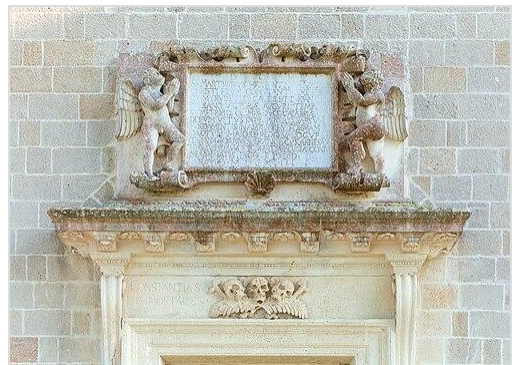
In August, 70 ships of the fleet attacked Vieste. On 12 September, the Monastero di San Nicholas di Casole, which had accommodated one of the richer libraries of Europe, was destroyed. By October, attacks had been conducted against the coastal cities of Lecce, Taranto and Brindisi.

However, the lack of supplies made the Ottoman commander, Gedik Ahmed Pasha, unable to consolidate his force's advance. Instead, he returned with most of his troops to Albania and left a garrison of 800 infantry and 500 sipahi behind to defend Otranto. It was assumed that he would return with his army after the winter.

Catholic response

Since only 27 years had passed since the Fall of Constantinople, there was some fear that Rome would suffer the same fate. Plans were made for the Pope and the citizens to evacuate the city. Pope Sixtus IV repeated his 1471 call for a crusade. Several Italian city-states, Hungary and France responded positively. The Republic of Venice did not do so, as it had signed an expensive peace treaty with the Ottomans in 1479.

In April 1481, Sixtus IV called for an Italian crusade to liberate the city, and Christian forces besieged Otranto in May. An army was raised by King Ferdinand I of Naples, to be led by his son Alfonso, Duke of Calabria. A contingent of troops was provided by King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary.



Plaque over the portal of *Santa Maria dei Martiri*, at the location where 800 inhabitants were supposedly beheaded.

Recapture

Between August and September, King Ferdinand of Naples, with the help of his cousin Ferdinand the Catholic and the Kingdom of Sicily, attempted to recapture Otranto.^[10] The Christian forces besieged the city on 1 May 1481. Mehmed II was preparing for a new campaign in Italy, but died on 3 May. The succession issues prevented the Ottomans from sending reinforcements to Otranto. After negotiation with the Christian forces, the Ottomans surrendered in August, leaving Otranto in September 1481.

Aftermath

The number of citizens, which is said to have been nearly 20,000, had decreased to 8,000 by the end of the century.^[11]

The Ottomans also briefly held Otranto once more after they conquered it in 1537.^{[12][13]}

See also

- History of Islam in southern Italy
- Martyrs of Otranto
- Da Vinci's Demons* (fictional work, part of which portrays the invasion)

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Monument to the heroes and martyrs of Otranto, in the city center.

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Further reading

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External links

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