

1480 OTTOMAN INVASION OF ITALY

The bombardment of Otranto, Italy, followed the capture of Constantinople in 1453 by twenty-seven years. Using the same weaponry, the Ottomans pulled into Otranto harbor with a fleet of 120 ships, 28 galleys, and 20,000 infantry. The troops landed beneath the walls of Otranto.

No one else had gunpowder at the time. It was impossible for the *Otrantini* to seek continual safe shelter behind the walls of a 100-year old castle. Cannonballs rained from the sky for 15 days. The city strongly resisted the Ottoman assaults, but the castle garrison was unable to resist the bombardment for long

The bombards, cast from bronze, could hurl huge stone balls, weighing up to 1,500 pounds, several miles. After one shot, the barrel had to be cooled in oil before being fired again. The cooling process took from four hours to a half-a-day and was frustratingly slow.

The occupation lasted a year. According to a traditional account, after capture more than 800 of Otranto's inhabitants were beheaded. The Martyrs of Otranto are still celebrated in Italy. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI issued a decree recognizing that townsfolk were killed "out of hatred for their faith."