

# Greek heroes and legends

**Constantine XI Palaiologos** was the last Byzantine Emperor, whose heroic fight against the Ottomans marked the end not only of his dynasty, but of a whole era and the Byzantine Empire.

He became emperor while in Mystras in 1449, and returned to Constantinople, full of hope and fear for the future, as the Turkish threat turned its gaze towards the city. He reformed the army, and made fortifications. Constantine asked for help by the West, but he was met with indifference. On 28 May 1453, Mehmed commanded the final attack against Constantinople. The first wave of the attack was successfully defeated. However, the Turks broke the defenses and entered the city on 29 May.

Constantine XI fought valiantly among his soldiers and fell. Mehmed II ordered that he be buried according to the royal protocol, but the place of burial was not announced.

**MYTH** : As a result, a legend was created and Constantine became the "Marble King". According to the legend, when the king was surrounded by Turks, an angel took him, turned him into marble, and hid him in a cave. So, when the time comes, at the "fullness of time", the angel will return to give Constantine his life back, so he may yield his sword and drive the Turks out of Constantinople. Another legend has it that he will chase them to the "Red Apple Tree", a legendary place, where they will be killed; so, the Turks constantly search for the cave where the Marble King is hidden, but they cannot find it because the angel protects him.

Today, the Emperor is considered a national hero and has been used many times as the main theme in various Greek cultural activities.

---

**Frangokastello** is located in southern Crete, about 12 kilometers from Sfakia. It is a medieval castle built in the late 14th century by the Venetians to protect the area from pirates and the Venetians from the frequently revolted Sfakians. The Venetians built the castle by day, but at night the Sfakians, led by brothers Patsu, tore down what had been built.

**MYTH**: Many times anthropomorphic shadows have been seen, blackened, walking or galloping on horses, holding arms, from the Church of Agios Charalambos to Frangokastello and disappearing into the sea. The forms appear in the last days of May and early June, in the early morning hours, and walk behind each other for about 10 minutes, when apnea and high humidity prevail. According to the legend, the bodies of the Greek warriors were left untouched, until a strong wind carried sand from the beach of Corinth Sand and covered their bodies. Although thousands of people have seen the phenomenon, it has never been recorded, since in those hours the light is minimal.