TOPKAPI PALACE (The)

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When Sultan Mehmet II "the Conqueror" took Constantinople in 1453, he soon ordered the construction of a fortress on the headland to the southeast, overlooking the Bosphorus. The fortress developed into the palace later known as the Topkapi.

In 1467, Mehmet II established his court in the new place that became the principal residence of the Sultans of the Ottoman Empire. Each successive sovereign left his imprint, each of them adding a maze of new buildings, courtyards and gardens to the site, until it resembled a nomadic encampment of luxurious proportions: 700 000 m²!

The Topkapi came to be a town in itself : the palace kitchens prepared over 4000 meals a day; in its halls plots were woven, affairs of the state conducted... And, of course, the palace housed the Sultan's private apartments with its most mysterious and secretive part: the Harem.

Until 1924, the Topkapi had been jealously guarded, inaccessible to foreign visitors. Even today, with tourists coming from all over the world, a large part of the palace remains closed. Successive earthquakes and erosion as much as lack of funds for restoration work have made it impossible to open more than half of the monument to the public.

It is this "inaccessible" part that the "Keepers of the Dream" have opened for us: the women and men whose daily contribution keep the place alive and who offer their guidance and knowledge to help us discover the splendour of the Topkapi Palace.

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