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*The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*

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Medieval Constantinople: Built Environment and Urban Development

Paul Magdalino

In 600 Constantinople was a city of three hundred thousand to five hundred thousand people. Its built environment represented three cumulative phases of development from the foundation in 324–330. The first phase was the massive enlargement and upgrading, under Constantine I and his fourth-century successors, of the ancient city of Byzantion through the addition of traditional units of ancient urban planning: a new perimeter wall; a vast civic and administrative complex including the Hippodrome, the imperial Great Palace, and the urban prefecture; passing through and beyond this, an extensive network of fora, colonnades, and sculptured monuments laid out along and across the branching artery formed by the central avenue (Mese) that was the convergence and termination of the access roads from the west; public baths; an elaborate infrastructure of ports, granaries, an aqueduct, and fountains for the adduction and distribution of food and water; and the indispensable complement to all this public building, the grand residences and humble tenements of the various classes of immigrants who flocked to the new center of power. The churches that represented the triumph of the new state religion were, of course, new elements, but initially they went with the grain of the existing urban fabric. The cathedral churches of Hagia Eirene (Holy Peace), founded by Constantine, and Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom), added by Constantius II, formed part of the central civic complex. The church of the Holy Apostles owed its prominently eccentric position, on a hill near the Constantinian wall, to its origin as the founder’s mausoleum, and the earliest martyr shrines were either marginal to the built-up area or away from the main thoroughfares.

The second phase, from ca. 405, was mainly characterized by the adaptation of this program to the growing insecurity of the city’s European hinterland, which made not

only the land walls but also the long, exposed aqueduct vulnerable to invaders. The urgent need for water storage was met both by the incorporation of covered cisterns into major new building or rebuilding projects and by the sinking of large open-air reservoirs in the hills to the west of the Constantinian wall. It was mainly with a view to protecting these facilities that Theodosios II built a new set of land fortifications, thus creating a zone between the two walls “that was neither truly urban nor truly suburban.”

In the third phase of its development, from 450, the late antique city became an early Christian city. Although traditional urban building continued, it was outstripped by a proliferation of churches, which not only gave the urban landscape a new look but increasingly redrew the social and cultural map. Churches became the focal and defining points of urban neighborhoods; each new foundation enriched the liturgical calendar and therefore the ritual life of the community. Many churches were associated with old-age homes, hospitals, or poor-hostels, or formed the venues of pious confraternities that performed various liturgical and charitable services. No church was simply an isolated hall of worship but was invariably surrounded by a complex of courtyards, porticoes, and chambers that could serve a variety of purposes; it frequently included a bathhouse. The way was thus prepared for certain basic functions of urban life—baths, schools, and notaries’ offices—to move within church precincts.

Church building was if anything stimulated by the catastrophic acts of God that chroniclers recorded with increasing frequency in this period: fires, such as those of 465 and 532; earthquakes, such as those of 447 and 557; and even the bubonic plague, which hit Constantinople in 542 and remained endemic there for the next two hundred years. In the long term, the enhanced religiosity induced by the plague was probably of greater consequence than its demographic effects, for while the initial outbreak reportedly carried off two-thirds of the urban population, it was not long before the city was suffering from food and water shortages. The plague certainly did not put a stop to building activity, which picked up again in the 550s and remained at a high level for the rest of the century. Justinian’s rebuilding of Hagia Sophia in 532–537 is deservedly regarded as the culmination of early Christian architecture, but it was also one of the earliest in a series of sixth-century structures that were to be central to the life of the medieval city. These included the church of the Holy Apostles, rebuilt by Justinian, and the two great shrines of the Virgin, that of the Chalkoprateia, rebuilt by Justin II (565–578), and that of the Blachernae, a rebuilding started by Justin II and completed under his successors, Tiberius II (578–582) and Maurice (582–602). The period 565–602 also saw several other foundations that, though less important as cult centers, were no less important in later centuries as the locations of some of the capital’s main schools, notarial offices, and bathing establishments. In secular building, the additions that Justin II and Tiberius made to the Great Palace were to become the hub of imperial ceremonial and financial administration, and by renovating the Port of Julian on the Sea of Marmara, Justinian and Justin guaranteed its future as the main port facility of the next three centuries.

In the first half of the seventh century, Egypt was conquered temporarily by the Persians and then definitively by the Arabs, who thus deprived Constantinople of its main source of grain. In 626 the Avars cut the aqueduct. The empire's finances, diminished by devastation and loss of territory, were consumed by the life-and-death struggle with these and other enemies. Contemporary sources do not record the impact on urban life, but the government was undoubtedly obliged to reduce the urban population, at least until local agricultural production was stepped up and dietary habits changed to allow for greater consumption of meat and fish. Almost no major new building or restoration project is reliably attested between 610 and 760. The main area of settlement seems to have contracted around the old Constantinian civic center and the harbor of Julian, the only port of entry and exit mentioned in sources of the seventh to tenth centuries. It was probably in this period of depopulation that burials began to take place within the Constantinian wall and that the monumental spaces on the edge of the civic center—the amphitheater on the Acropolis, the Strategion near the Golden Horn, and some of the fora along the Mese—began to be used as places of execution and markets for livestock. The great baths, theaters, and sculptured monuments of the fourth and fifth centuries fell into decay and came to be regarded as objects of superstitious dread from a legendary and exotic past. Even the upkeep of churches strained the available resources, and Frankish ambassadors in the mid-to-late eighth century returned with reports of basilicas that lacked proper lighting or even roofing.³

But if the fourth to sixth centuries had built more than the seventh and eighth centuries could afford to maintain, enough was maintained to serve the basic needs of a population of seventy thousand or more. There is reason to believe that at least the major churches built or restored in the sixth century were kept in good working order, along with their ancillary services. The state sector is unlikely to have diminished, since Constantinople remained the capital of a state that continued to conduct war and diplomacy on a worldwide scale and was able to repel two massive Arab assaults on the city in 675–678 and 717. The fact that Emperor Justinian II (685–695, 705–711) made substantial additions to the Great Palace suggests that this great governmental complex was on the increase as it took on the functions of other public institutions. The wall that the same emperor built around the palace emphasized its growing role as a city within the city.⁴ This prompts the observation that although Constantinople declined as a great urban unit, it continued to flourish as a network of semi-urban nuclei of production and consumption, scattered throughout the urban area, between the walls, and throughout the suburban hinterland. At the consuming end were the urban and suburban “houses” (oikoi)—the churches, monasteries, charitable houses, and official residences; at the producing end were their domains (proasteia) and trading emporia clustered around the Bosphoros and the Sea of Marmara. “There are villas and estates lining both banks . . . and innumerable ships and vessels go back and forth, carrying

³ Libri Carolini, IV.3 in PL 98:1188.
all sorts of merchandise from these estates to the capital. The number of these ships cannot be estimated.”

This description by a tenth-century Arab writer relates to a seventh-century incident and throws interesting light on the provisioning of Constantinople at the time. It shows how the government-sponsored bulk shipments of Egyptian grain were replaced by less regular but more frequent short-distance deliveries in lighter ships that could moor and unload at landing stages (skalai) all along the coast. Thus the city’s ancient port system was in the process of being replaced by a less concentrated and planned infrastructure that would eventually prove capable of handling the same volume of traffic. Meanwhile, however, the waterfront of the Golden Horn, at least the lower part, was a depressed area. This was possibly because of associations with the bubonic plague and, in consequence, with the segregation of non-Christians and social outcasts: the Arab merchants in their compound (mitaton) at the “crossing” (Perama) of the Golden Horn; and the Jews, who lived “across” (Pera), at the foot of the hill occupied by the leper hospital. But the Arab mitaton, which must have been established in the late seventh century, created a basis for the commercial regeneration of the district, as did the simultaneous expansion of the imperial war fleet, which in 698 acquired a new base at the old harbor of the Neorion.

The early medieval decline of Constantinople reached a low point with a last devastating outbreak of plague in 746. Emperor Constantine V repopulated the city with people from mainland Greece and the Aegean islands. Some twenty years later he took similarly drastic action to remedy the effects of a severe drought, bringing in teams of workmen to repair the aqueduct, which had not functioned for 140 years. These measures marked the beginning of a revival that continued until 1204. Constantine V may have had a profound impact on the social and ideological identity of the medieval city. But it is unlikely that he significantly altered the look of the built environment that survived from the sixth century. The same impression is gained from the better-documented public building projects of his eighth- and ninth-century successors, Eirene, Theophilos, Basil I, and Leo VI. These projects were, for the most part, renovations, imitations, and conversions of existing structures; even the ambitious new complexes that Theophilos and Basil I added to the Great Palace continued a previous trend. Yet there were differences from the sixth century, whose cumulative effect would have been noticeable by 900. Less attention was now paid to the civic context of religious and palace buildings. Builders used spolia rather than freshly quarried or manufactured materials. Early Christian basilicas were restored with masonry roofs and

therefore, presumably, with domes. Most importantly, there was a steady accumulation of new and revived monastic foundations, comparable to the proliferation of churches in the fifth and sixth centuries.

To begin with, the main initiative came from churchmen and government officials, but from the reign of Romanos I (921–944), the contribution of emperors was decisive. Imperial foundations were large and richly endowed, and they usually comprised, in addition to the monastic community, institutions serving the laity. Monasteries, traditionally confined, with rare exceptions, to the suburbs and the zone between the walls, now became a conspicuous feature of the city center. But perhaps the most significant impact of the new foundations or refoundations was on the development of the areas at the corners of the urban triangle within the Theodosian wall: at the eastern end (monasteries of the Hodegoi and St. Lazaros, complexes of the Mangana and the Orphanotropheion), in the southwestern corner (notably the monasteries of Stoudios, St. Mamas, and the Peribleptos inside the walls and the suburban complex of the Hebdomon), and in the northwest (the Petron complex near the Golden Horn, a large cluster of monasteries in the hills near the cisterns of Actius and Aspar, and the large extramural complex of the Anargyroi or Kosmidion). This expansion of the monastic sector both followed and attracted new growths and shifts in lay society. A notable trend in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was the rise of the Blachernae Palace in the northwest as the favored residence of the imperial court. This was principally the work of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) and a concomitant of the new dynastic system he created, which distributed public resources widely among the members of the extended imperial family, enabling them to build, or redevelop, residences and monasteries on a princely scale.

The development of the extremities was accompanied by an expansion of the city center down to and along the Golden Horn, which began in the tenth century to reclaim its role as the city’s main maritime access. The commercial regeneration of the north coast may have been stimulated by a growing influx of Venetian and Amalfitan traders in association with the Arab mitation. Venice and Amalfi, followed by Pisa and Genoa, certainly responded to the business growth of the area by obtaining grants from the imperial government of wharfs, shops, churches, and houses for the use and profit of their citizens.

We can piece together something of the “feel” of the medieval city (Fig. 1) from a variety of written sources, both foreign and Byzantine, dating from the tenth to thirteenth centuries. Approaching travelers traversed, or sailed past, a broad suburban

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8 Vita Basilii, in Theophanes Continuatus, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn, 1838), 324.
10 In addition to the Byzantine sources cited in the following notes, the following well-known accounts by western visitors in the age of the crusades have been used: Benjamin of Tudela, in the translation by A. Sharf, Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade (London, 1971), 136; Fulcher of Chartres, Historia Hierosolymitana, 1095–1127, ed. H. Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg, 1913), 176–77; Odo of Deuil, De profectione Ludovici VII in orientem, ed. V. G. Berry (New York, 1948), 48–71; William
zone of parks and farmland, thickly dotted with monasteries, villas, and summer pal-

aces. They saw a skyline of “high walls and lofty towers . . . rich palaces and tall

churches,” with “columns looming like massive giants.”11 Inside the walls, they were
duly impressed by vast expanses of marble masonry and lead roofing, the ubiquitous

statuary, the innumerable churches and relics, the lavish public entertainments, the

glimpses and tales of fabulous wealth. The city center and the seashores were heavily

built up with three- or even five-story houses.12 Yet much of the space, even within the

Constantinian walls, was farmed.13 Country sounds and smells pervaded the built-up

area: priests kept pigs and farmers stored hay in apartment buildings;14 imperial offi-
cials operated donkey mills in the courtyards of their townhouses.15 The seamy side of

overcrowded preindustrial urban living inevitably attracted less comment in the

Middle Ages than it did from nineteenth-century European travelers to Istanbul, but

the problems were evidently similar: main streets and squares deep in mud;16 prostitu-
tion, violent crime, and homelessness in the arcades;17 stray dogs;18 the ever-present

risk of violent, uncontrollable fires.19 The contrasts and the different functions of the

urban scene were all to be found side by side within a single neighborhood. There was,

however, a clearly defined and long-established commercial district, centered on the

Mese from the Forum Tauri to the Augoustaion and extending northward and south-

ward to the seashores. Associated mainly with this area were the colonies of the many

foreign peoples who had business with Constantinople. Besides the Italians, the Arabs,
2. Late medieval Constantinople. Cristoforo Buondelmonti, Liber insularum archipelagi, ca. 1450. Private collection (reproduced courtesy of Kenneth Nebenzahl, copyright 1998)
and the Jews, already mentioned, Armenians, Syrians, and Russians had “ethnic neighborhoods,” and Georgians and Turks were numerous.20

The population of Constantinople, including merchants, litigants, and other transients, may have numbered as much as four hundred thousand in 1204 and occupied a built-up area corresponding very closely to that of the sixth-century city, with a dense concentration around the commercial district and tentacles of development along the seashores and the branches of the Mese leading to secondary nuclei in the northwest and southwest corners. The settlement used and reused the buildings of the late antique, early Christian, and earlier medieval phases in ways that ranged from careful conservation through structural conversion to outright quarrying. Whether the result was a pleasing blend or an incongruous jumble is impossible to say, but no part of the city was entirely a recent creation, and Constantinople was probably more closely, richly, and naturally in touch with its physical origins than any other city surviving from Greco-Roman antiquity.

All this changed drastically with the arrival of the Fourth Crusade in 1203.21 The presence of the crusading army not only culminated in a violent sack that dispersed and destroyed the accumulated wealth and culture of centuries; it was accompanied by three terrible fires that ravaged the whole northern and central sections of the city, and it resulted in the establishment of a Latin regime that set off a steady exodus of Constantinopolitans to the Greek centers of government in exile. Far from restoring the damage done in 1203–4, the impoverished Latin emperors melted down statues for coin and sold the lead from palace roofs, while the Venetians, who now controlled much of the city, exported their declining profits, along with choice relics and architectural spolia for their churches.

When Constantinople reverted to Greek rule in 1261, Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos spared no effort or expense to restore his capital, like his empire, to its twelfth-century greatness. But the resources of the Palaiologan empire were inadequate to both tasks. Michael could restore the basic shell of traditional authority and worship—the walls, the Blachernae Palace, parts of the Great Palace, Hagia Sophia, and a few other churches and monasteries—but even this was more than his successors could afford to keep in repair, let alone to fill with urban redevelopment. They were thwarted by the irreversible decline in their territorial base and by the development of the Genoese trading colony in the suburb of Pera into a separate fortified settlement, where

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immunity from imperial tolls drew business away from the old city. Constantinople became once more, as in the seventh and eighth centuries, a ruralized network of scattered nuclei, though with several important differences (Fig. 2). It was now the south coast that declined, as the Great Palace fell into decay, the Port of Julian became a military naval base, and the Jewish quarter, with its stinking tanneries, moved from Pera to Vlanga, near the former Port of Theodosios. The great open cisterns ran dry and served as kitchen gardens. The main foci of power and wealth were now at the corners of the urban triangle, particularly in the Blachernae quarter, and at the east end, where the patriarchal church of Hagia Sophia still remained the center of religious life, but as such looked more to the monasteries on and around the Acropolis than to the decaying civic center to the west.22 The shore of the Golden Horn, where the Venetians reestablished themselves, took over from the Mese as the main commercial axis. Finally, in a complete inversion of the early medieval situation, the state sector was weak and fragmented, but building continued, albeit on a modest scale. The Palaiologoi operated an even more devolved version of the Komnenian dynastic system and literally encouraged the imperial nobility to enrich themselves at the state’s expense; individuals accordingly built themselves sumptuous palaces and commissioned extensive additions or improvements to old monasteries.23 Such munificence became rarer from the mid-fourteenth century, when Constantinople was hit by the Black Death and progressively deprived of its agricultural hinterland. Yet profits were to be made in commerce, in spite of, but also in association with, the predominant Genoese and Venetian enterprises. Western visitors described a space “made up of villages, more empty than full,” a ghost city of crumbling tourist attractions that caught the eye of humanists and invited comparison with Rome.24 But imperial Constantinople, like papal Rome after the Great Schism, was untypical of the wider Mediterranean urban scene, with which it was inextricably involved. In the final decades before the fall, the population numbered seventy thousand, and along the Golden Horn, on the hills above the busy markets, the new three-story houses of a prosperous aristocratic bourgeoisie turned their back on the urban decay behind them, creating a built environment that had much in common with the bustling Genoese business center across the water.25


Select Bibliography


II

KONSTANTİNOPOLIS HIPPODROMU'NUN TARİHÇESİ

A HISTORY OF THE HIPPODROME OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Cyril Mango

The Hippodrome of Constantinople was built as a Roman circus for the performance of chariot races in the Roman style. It is necessary to begin with this qualification. In the Greek world, chariot racing was part of athletic festivals. It did not require an elaborate architectural setting and was performed by amateurs, usually young men of good family. The Romans turned it into a spectator sport performed by professionals for the amusement of a vast urban audience. The origins of Roman-style chariot racing are lost in the mists of time. According to legend, it dates to Romulus, founder of the Eternal City, or even further, to the enchantress Circe (hence the word "circus"). Like all ancient games, it had a strong religious element and evolved over the centuries to become the highly complex spectacle known from the later days of the republic and the early empire.

The model for all circuses was the Circus Maximus, situated in the valley between the Palatine and the Aventine hills. Shaped like a hairpin, it had a track 540 meters long and 80 meters wide. The course was divided by a low wall (spina) whose two ends, marked by conical columns, served as turning posts (metae). The starting gates (carceres), twelve in number, were at the short, open end. Released simultaneously, the chariots made the circuit of the spina seven times before crossing the finish line on the right side of the track. Multi-tiered spectator seating ran along the edges of the track, except for the short side containing the gates. Augustus placed an Egyptian obelisk at the center of the spina, and Constantius II added a second obelisk in 357.

The form of the circus was dictated by the character of the games, and so remained basically unchanged as long as new circuses continued to be built, in Rome and in the provinces. There were, however, a number of minor technical improvements, such as placing the spina at a slight angle so as to allow
Konstantinopolis Hippodromu'nun Tarıhçesi
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The eastern provinces were not as receptive to Roman-style racing as the western provinces. Only in major cities—Alexandria, Antioch, Berytus, Caesarea in Cilicia, Heraclea (Marmara Eregli), Laodicea, Nicomedia, Thessalonica, and Tyre—does one find circuses, most of which were built during the course of the third century, starting in the Severan age and peaking in the period of the Tetrarchy (293-324), the latter as a result of the multiplication of new imperial residences (see Map I). The peculiarity of Tetrarchic circuses is that they were to join palaces, as may be observed at Antioch, probably at Nicomedia, certainly at Constantinople, Thessalonica, Sirmium, and in the complex of the villa of Maxentius on the Via Appia outside Rome. The reason for this proximity, surprising to some, is that the circus had long become the one space where the emperor, in all his pomp, met his people, received their petitions, and expected to be acclaimed by them. Convenience as well as safety made it desirable to place the circus next to the palace.

It is usually said that the Hippodrome/circus of Constantinople was started by Septimius Severus and completed by Constantine in time for the ceremonial inauguration of his city on 11 May 330. The historical circumstances were, we are told, the following: In A.D. 193 a civil war broke out between Severus and Pescennius Niger, governor of Syria, both of whom claimed the imperial title. Niger's supporters occupied Byzantium, the only European outpost they managed to hold, while nearby Perinthos (Marmara Eregli) took the opposite side. Severus sent an army against his rival. Part of it laid siege to Byzantium, while another part crossed into Asia and proceeded to defeat Niger's forces. Thanks to its famously strong walls, Byzantium held out for more than two years, probably until autumn 195, finally surrendering because of famine. It remains unknown why its inhabitants put up such a dugged fight even after Niger had been killed and his cause had collapsed. Regardless, Byzantium suffered exemplary punishment: it was degraded to the status of a village subject to Perinthos; it's magistrates and fighting men were put to death; and its famed walls were demolished. Severus died in 211. His son and successor, Caracalla (cl. 217), restored to Byzantium its ancient rights.

The above events are reliably reported by contemporary his
torical sources, notably by Dio Cassius, a native of Nicaea, and Hes
dian. Both of them make it clear that at the time they were writing—Dio in 220-230, Herodian in the 240s—the walls of Byzantium had not been rebuilt even though the Balkans were dangerously exposed to attack by the Goths. The city must
değer olazırız kimin'ün yerli Ýóso Cassius ve Herodianus tara-
findan güvenilebilecek bir şekilde anlatılmıstır. Her itki de yaz-
dıkları dönemde (Dio 220–230, Herodianus 240’larda) Bal-
kanlardan tehlikeli bir şekilde Got saldırlarına açık olmasın
rowen Byzantium surlarını hâlâ yapılmayan olduğu nun aça-
ça belirtemiştir. Şehir tekrar 240’lıarda veya 250’linde güven-
dirilişi olmuştur. Bu tarzda aileden Byzantium ve geriye
Boğazlar, hem Gotlar üzerine hem de yeniden dördün İran’a
karşı yapılan imparatorluk seferlerinde artisans bir şekilde onem-
li rol oynar.

Severus hikayesinin devamının birkaç kaynaka söz edil-
mesi ancak M.S. 500 civarındadır. Denir ki, Severus
Byzantium’un cezalandırıktan sonra fikrini değiştirdiği fethetti-
ği bu şehir, aralarında Hippodromun, bitisinden biraz öncesi Zeusippo
hamamlarının ve birkaç başkanın da olduğu anısal yapılarla
güçlendirilmiştir. Kaynakların bazı versiyonları Severus’un
Hippodrom önşasının başlangıcını, ormanda şalarları ve portik-
olarla donatılmış, fakat önşası birbirini devreden ve yasakla
Idiaya göre bu alan, aralarla ilintili tarihi olan Dioskurtlar için
kursal sağlayan bir koruya dönüştüştü. Başka bir deyişle, önşası
Severus tarafından başlar olan Hippodrom, Constantinus bu
önşası bitirip savunmasına da başlayana kadar bir 100 yıl tekeşil-
mış bir bölgeye karşılaştı. Herhalakarda Konstantinopolis’de
324 yılına kadar kullanılmada olan hiçbir sirkus yoktu. Con-
tantinus Belgraf Kap'da yapılmasını olduğu alanın epeye uza-
ğında geçici olarak açılmış (bundan dolayı ismi
Xylokerkos’dur) bir tane yapılmıştır.

Hemen hemen bütün bilim adamları Severus hikayesini, ya
da Byzantium’un yeniden turkücü Severus elanı ve daha ko-
duca bu öyküyü kahlet etmişlerdir. Ben kendi adıma, şehrin
surlarının yüksek halinde olduğu bir zamanda böyle pahalı ba-
yındırık projectorine kalıplamasını pek ihtimal dahilinde bul-
muyorum. Burada, sadecce örne taşıtan dikilita kadar düz
olan arazinin bu durumuna da gør önde bulundu Ruddak gere-
kir. Bu noktadan itibaren arazinin denize doğru meylli bir
şekilde innesi, yaklaşık 200 metre uzunluğunda bir meseleye,
yani günümüzde 15 metre yüksekliğe kadar korunan gelmiş
olan ve yavaşa kayan ün (sphemone) konulan bir temel önşasını
yapılmasını gerektirmektedir. Henüz fazla yapılmış olan
maddi bir dönemde Severus bu ciddaya böyle bir önşas için
uygun, düz bir arazi bulamaz muydur? İnanın, Hippodrom’un
imparatorluk Sarayının yanında olması gerektiği için bulun-
düğü yerde olduğu izlenimi edinmesi kaçınılmaz gibi duru-
yor.

Bu sorunun açık olarak kavuşması yalnızca arkeolojik arapar-
ma sola mıktadır. Yayınlamış olan veriler, 1927 yılında ka-
zılın olan sphemone ve Yılanlar Sütun’un kârşına denk gelen
bati kanadının köşkü bir kusmaya, yine aynı batı kanadında
have been renotated in the 240s or 250s. From that time on-
ward, Byzantium and, more generally, the area of the straits play
an increasingly important part in imperial campaigns directed
against the Goths and a resurgent Persia.

It is only around A.D. 500 that one finds in several sources a
sequel to the Severus story. After fighting Byzantium, it is
said, Severus changed his mind and proceeded to beautify the
conquered city with a number of prestigious monuments,
among them the Hippodrome, the adjoining baths of Zeuxipp-
us, and several more. In some versions, Severus is reported to
have started the Hippodrome, which he equipped with benches
and porticoes, but did not finish it. The site, allegedly, had
been occupied by a grove sacred to the Dioscuri, divinities as-
sociated with horses. In other words, the Hippodrome, begun
by Severus, remained derelict for a good hundred years, until
Constantine finished it and joined it to his palace. There was,
in any case, no functioning circus at Constantinople in 324.
Constantine erected a temporary structure of wood, hence
called Xylokerkos (wooden circus), well outside the construc-
tion area at Belgraf Kap.

Nearly all scholars have accepted the sequel of the Severus
story, or what may be called the myth of Severus, restorer of
Byzantium. For my part, I find it unlikely that expensive civic
projects would have been undertaken at a time when, as noted
here, the city’s fortifications were down. One should also con-
sider the nature of the site, which was level only as far as the
mosaic obelisk. From that point onward, it sloped down to-
ward the sea, thus necessitating the building of a massive sub-
structure over nearly 200 meters, terminating in the curved
end (sphenone) that is still preserved, rising to a height of 15
meters. Could not Severus have found a more level stretch of
ground at a time when that part of town was not much built
up? One cannot avoid the impression that the Hippodrome is
where it is because it had to be next to the imperial palace.

A clarification of this problem can only come from archaeo-
logical exploration. Published evidence is limited to the sphen-
donc, to a small stretch of the west wing opposite the Serpent
Column excavated in 1927, and a longer stretch of 70 meters of
the same west wing, but farther north, opposite the palace of
Antiochus. The last, dug up in 1950, has been very poorly pub-
lished. All three appear to be contemporary, and I would be
inclined to attribute them to Constantine, though further con-
firmation would be welcome.

By 11 May, when the inauguration of the new city was
celebrated, the Hippodrome appears to have been virtually com-
plete, including the imperial box (kathisma), connected to the
city by means of a spiral staircase. The kathisma was built
into the east wing more or less opposite the Serpent Column,
fakat daha kuzyeye, Antiokhos sarayının karşışından, daha sonra 70 metredir yerel sınırları vardır. Bu son kısmın 1950’de kazılması olup, yapanı yetersizdir. Bu üç yer de aynı zamanda ait ve ben bunları Constantinius’ a maliyet üstünlüğünün biraz daha fazla olduğunu belirtmemiştir. 


Karanlık Çağlar’da (yedinci - sekizinci yüzyıllar) bütün taşır işlerinin terkedilmiştir. Yanıncı Kontantinopolis’deki kalıntıları, bu da belki politik nezaketleri kaynaklandırduğu süphе güçtür. Genç herden de Hippodrom, ancak Romanların imparatoru tarafından tertip edilelince bir seyir yeri olarak imparatorunun hâmetinin bir simgesi gibi görüldü oluştu. Hippodrom’un prestijine iki olay önemle verilir: Fars krallı I. Häsetv Antiakya’yı talan edip (540) Kosiphon yakalarkında kendi ‘yeni Antiakya’ını kurduğu zaman bunuda bir hamam ve hippodrom yapılmış iki Antiakya’dan araba yaşarları ve müziyenter getirilmiştir. İran’daki tek ve yegane hip-
dedirirler. Bu, bir daha sonra sona ermemiz gerektiği, Oyunun sonunun bu kurguya sahip olmadığı zevkin yetkili, yediği, 1932'de subaylar, balıkçılar, avcılardan oluşuyor. 1938'de subaylar, balıkçılar, avcılardan oluşuyorunu bir stata set içenler sabit bir hikaye, bir tür müsaadeleri ile birlikte, bir hareket, bir dini ve bir maddi savaşı içermektedir. Bu, 1932'de subaylar, balıkçılar, avcılardan oluşuyor.
bir özetir.

Kayda geçen son araba yarışları III. Alexios döneminde 1200 yılındadır. Bu tarıhten itibaren, Hippodrom'un batı kanağını silip sipiiren 1203 yılındaki Büyük Yangın'dan başlayarak Hippodrom tarihî yaşayış yasası geçti ve bu ihtiyaç onun descargarı yüzüyle son noktalarına geldi. Yıkılanın evreleri, seyahat ve anlamlarına ait olduğu için belirli bir öne- pencelere dayanılarak ancak kısmını bir şekilde belgelenebilimekteedir. En ayrıntılı resim 1600 yılına kadar eserler meraklı Onofrio Panvinio tarafından yayınlanmıştır. (Şek. 2.1). Şehrin Türkler tarafından fethedilşinden yüzüyle önce ait olduğu söylense de bu resimden aşağı yukarı 1480 yılına ait olduğu kabul edilmektedir. Resimler iki kanada da harap olarak gösterilebileceği de tarihi olarak geçiilen carrers hayrer edilecek şekilde sağlar. Splendone sında, otoruz yerlerinin en iştihini çevrediyecek şekilde bir revak bulunmaktadır, ayrıca revak Boundelmont'in no. 17). Panvinio shows the two obelisks—the masonry one greatly reduced in height—along the spina and an assortment of columns and pedestals, which are not entirely imaginary given that Gilles recorded seven columns here (including the Serpent Column), leaving six unaccounted for. One of them, made of "Arabian marble" (gray granite) had a circumference of 17 feet 8 inches and a height of nearly 12 meters. Ibrahim Paşa, Süleyman the Magnificent's grand vizier, erected upon it a bronze Hercules, a work of Renaissance (not antique) art that he had removed from Budapest in 1526, but this spoil of war was taken down after Ibrahim's execution in 1536. The charming bird's-eye view of Istanbul by Matrakç Nasuh (1537–1538) shows only two extra columns along the spina, neither one supporting a statue (see Fig. 8.6).

Two decades before Gilles's visit, Ibrahim Paşa had built his splendid palace (now housing the Museum of Islamic Art), ob-
aşağı yukarı 1420 yılına ait kubbe biçiminde üçerle ayni dozeme ait birkaç başka çizim de görülmektedir (bkz. Sek. 8.3, 13.1).

İstanbul'lu 1544-1551 yılları arasında ziyaret eden Pierre Gilles, o şehirde Korin nizamında onyedi sütun olarak kalınmış ve genişlikteki üçlerine ait olup, altı tanesi ünlü blok üzerine ayaklanmış. Bu durumdan 'Arap mermeri'inden (yani gri granit-ten) yapılmış olanın daire çevresi 17 ayak 8 inçlidir, yanı yüksekliğinin yaklaşık 12 metre olmasa gerektir. Kanuni Sultan Süleyman'ın sarayını olan İbrahim Paşa bu sütunun üstüne antik sanatı ait olmaya Rönesans ait ve 1526 yılında Budapest'de getirilmiş olan bronz bir Harekles heykeli diktiştir. Fakat bu savaş ganini, İbrahim Paşa'nın 1536'da katledilmesinin ardından kaldırmıştır. Matarıç Nasuh'un (1537-1538) kubbe biçiminde Sanatçı İstanbul'uapidaki, sütuna üzerinde iki sütun daha resmeder, ancak ikisinin de üzerinde heykel yoktur (bkz. Sek. 8.6)


O City, City, head of all cities! O City, City, the center of the four corners of the earth! O City, City, the boast of Christians and the ruin of barbarians! ... What tongue can express the calamity which befell the City and the terrible captivity, and the bitter migration she suffered ... Shudder, O Sun! And you too, O Earth, heave a heavy sigh at the utter abandonment by God, the Just Judge, of our generation because of our sins!

It was with these words that the Byzantine historian Doukas, writing from the island of Lesbos after 1453, lamented the fall of Constantinople (fig. 1). Doukas, who lived most of his life in the service of the Genoese, not only fostered pro-Latin sentiments but was also a staunch advocate of the Union of Churches, which he viewed as the only policy capable of saving the Byzantine Empire from the Ottoman threat. He, therefore, blamed the activities of the anti-unionists in Constantinople for the city’s failure against the forces of Sultan Mehmed II (r. 1444–1446, 1451–1481) in 1453. Thus when he attributed the fall of Constantinople to divine punishment for the sins of the Byzantines, the particular “sin” he had in mind was the refusal of the anti-unionists to comply with the Union with Rome which had been accepted at the Council of Florence in 1439 (cat. no. 278). Writing just on the eve of Mehmed II’s siege, Theodore Agallianos, an anti-unionist patriarchal official in Constantinople, likewise claimed that God had abandoned the Byzantines because of their sins. However, contrary to Doukas’ opinion, the major sin according to Agallianos was the Byzantines’ acceptance of the “evil” and “falsely named” Union of Florence.

The respective views on the Union of Churches expressed by Doukas and Agallianos were the source of much friction and controversy in Constantinople in the aftermath of the Council of Florence. During the critical fourteen years preceding the Byzantine capital’s conquest by the Ottomans, conflicts between the unionists and anti-unionists disrupted political and military unity in the city, which contributed to its growing weakness against the Ottomans. Although neither the numbers nor the relative proportion of the unionists and anti-unionists can be estimated due
to lack of statistical evidence, in general the upper classes, especially people grouped around the imperial court, were favorably disposed towards the Union, whereas opposition to it came primarily from the lower ranks of society, including monks and nuns, the lesser clergy, and lay folk.³

Religious tensions grew worse in Constantinople following the failure of the Crusade of Varna against the Ottomans in 1444. This expedition was the long-delayed prize for which Emperor John VIII Palaiologos (r. 1425–1448) had concluded the Union of Florence five years earlier (cat. no. 272). Its failure demonstrated the limits to the effectiveness of help from the West, thus weakening the position of the unionists who had placed high hopes on the Crusade. Some among the disillusioned unionists even joined the ranks of the anti-unionists, George-Gennadios Scholarios presumably being one of them.⁴ When John VIII died in 1448, he was buried without the customary ecclesiastical honors, which is indicative of the great influence exercised by the anti-unionists at this time.⁵

The unionist Patriarch Gregory Mammases, who had been elevated to the patriarchal throne in 1445, was so unpopular that John VIII’s successor Constantine XI Palaiologos (r. 1448–1453) (fig. 2 and detail) chose not to be crowned by him. Hence, he earned the distinction of being the sole Byzantine ruler who did not undergo an official coronation ceremony in the imperial city. In August 1451, Gregory Mammases fled to Rome as a result of intense opposition from the anti-unionists, and Constantinople remained without a patriarch until after the Ottoman conquest, when the anti-unionist leader Gennadios Scholarios assumed this position.⁶

Over a year after Mammases’ flight the Byzantine capital became the scene of a new series of agitations and riots on the part of the anti-unionists, when the papal legate Cardinal Isidore, the former bishop of Kiev, arrived in the city on a mission to confirm and re-enact the Union of Florence. Isidore had to wait for about a month and a half before he could proclaim the Union and celebrate the Latin liturgy in the church of Hagia Sophia. He later wrote to Pope Nicholas V that the entire
population of the city was present at the ceremony, which took place on 12 December 1452; yet it is questionable whether the participants included all the anti-unionists, despite the mood of terror and panic that had set in by this time due to the completion of Mehmed II’s siege preparations. When Mehmed’s forces appeared before the Byzantine capital about four months later, it is reported that a group of Constantinopolitans exclaimed, “Would that the City were delivered into the hands of the Latins, who call upon Christ and the Mother of God, and not be thrown into the clutches of the infidel,” while others contradicted them by declaring, “It would be better to fall into the hands of the Turks than into those of the Franks.” Under such circumstances, even Gennadios Scholarios, who was in the forefront of the conflicts between unionists and anti-unionists during the final years of Byzantine rule in Constantinople, could not help observing the detrimental effects of the increasing dissensions upon the security of the city. As early as 1449, he drew attention in a sermon to the internal divisions of the Byzantine capital which rendered it helpless before Ottoman attacks.

Throughout Mehmed II’s siege, which officially began on 6 April 1453, Constantinople continued to be plagued by other problems besides the political and religious dissensions discussed above. These problems included the isolation of the city that resulted from its having been cut off from the sea; scarcity of money, supplies and defenders; and absence of military or financial help from abroad (Cat. no. 289). According to a census that was ordered by Emperor Constantine XI and supervised by the court official and historian George Sphrantzes, the city’s entire fighting population, including laymen as well as clergy, consisted of 4,773 Byzantines and about 200 foreigners at the beginning of the siege.

Despite the city’s considerably reduced population, which on the basis of Sphrantzes’ testimony is estimated to have been 40,000–50,000 in 1453, food supplies were in critical condition all through the siege. Mehmed II evidently hoped to achieve the surrender of Constantinople by forcing its inhabitants into starvation, using the same strategy his great-grandfather Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402) had employed during his unsuccessful blockade of the Byzantine capital (1394–1402). Accordingly, in preparation for the anticipated siege, Emperor Constantine XI paid particular attention to supplying the city with provisions. After gathering the wheat reserves and other foodstuffs available within the city, he demanded additional provisions to be sent from the islands and from the Despotate of the Morea. In order to encourage the transport of further food supplies and armaments from abroad during the siege, the Emperor exempted Genoese merchants from customs duties on merchandise they were to bring into Constantinople.
The exemption was effective in inducing at least three large Genoese ships to sail to the besieged city in April 1453. This last measure marks a notable shift from the economic policy which Constantine XI had pursued towards foreign merchants only a few years prior to the siege. Needing funds for the depleted imperial treasury, in 1450 the Emperor had imposed new taxes on certain commodities that Venetian merchants imported into Constantinople. As late as June 1451 he still insisted on the new taxes, despite the threat of the displeased Venetians to move their colony from the Byzantine capital to the Ottoman port of Ereğli/Herakleia on the northern shore of the Sea of Marmara or to conduct their business in the Genoese colony of Galata/Pera (cat. no. 293). During the same year, Constantine also refused a request of the Republic of Ragusa regarding the complete exemption of Ragusan merchants from customs duties in Constantinople, and asserted the Byzantine government’s right to a 2% tax. Certainly, in 1453 the need for extra revenues to replenish the imperial treasury persisted, but the siege must have given rise to a more urgent need for food supplies, hence incurring the reversal in Constantine’s policy towards foreign merchants and merchandise. Nonetheless, the Emperor’s efforts were not all that successful since the Venetian surgeon Nicolò Barbaro, who was present in Constantinople during the siege and fall, noted in his diary on the first days of May 1453 the “growing lack of provisions, particularly of bread, wine and other things necessary to sustain life.” Some citizens, who are described as “drinkers of human blood” by Leonardo of Chios, the Latin archbishop of Mytilene and another eyewitness to the siege, made things worse by hiding part of the available food and driving food prices up. Furthermore, there is evidence that certain Italian merchants, such as the Genoese Barnaba Centurione, preferred to sell victuals to the Ottomans rather than to the famished Constantinopolitans. The situation was so severe that soldiers in charge of guarding the city walls frequently abandoned their posts to look after their starving family members. Consequently, an order was issued for the distribution of bread to the families of soldiers, “so that people should not have to fear starvation even more than the sword.”

Besides the shortage of food which compelled soldiers to shun their military duties, overwhelming poverty also inclined many of them to
refuse to fight unless they were paid and to desert their posts in search of alternative sources of income. Some looked for new employment, while others turned to the cultivation of fields and vineyards inside the city. When reproached for neglecting their military duties, they are reported to have replied, "Of what consequence is military service to us, when our families are in need?" In order to overcome the problem of desertion, Constantine XI, who did not have sufficient money in the imperial treasury to pay the soldiers, resorted to the use of Church treasures. He ordered the sacred vessels to be melted down, and with the coins that were struck from them he paid the guards as well as the sappers and construction workers who were responsible for repairing the damaged sections of the fortifications. A similar problem emerged on another occasion towards the end of the siege, when people were needed to carry to the walls newly built mantlets for the battlements. Since no one wanted to do this job without being paid and there was not adequate cash at hand, the mantlets remained unused. Likewise, the Hungarian engineer and cannon-maker Urban, who was in the employ of Constantine XI, abandoned Constantinople in the summer of 1452 and entered the service of Mehmed II because the Emperor had not been able to pay him a satisfactory salary, if any at all. Hence, lack of public funds, combined with the indigence of average citizens, served in more than one way as impediments to the proper protection of the Byzantine capital.

The advice that certain imperial officials offered Constantine XI at a point when he was contemplating instituting new taxes for defense purposes illustrates even better the overall poverty of the citizen body. The officials strongly urged the Emperor not to take this measure, arguing that it would be undesirable to overburden the already impoverished people by extra taxes. Indeed, it was in accordance with their suggestion that Constantine XI resorted to the use of Church treasures, as noted above. Gennadios Scholarios, too, in a lament which he composed after the city's fall, stated that the Byzantine capital was poverty-stricken during its last years, thus conveying, as do other sources, how pervasive indigence was throughout the city at that time.
To make matters even worse, some people engaged in acts of opportunism at the time of the siege. Leonardo of Chios reports that Manuel Iagaris ("Giagari"), whom Constantine XI charged with overseeing the restoration of the walls of Constantinople in 1453, embezzled approximately twenty thousand florins of the money that was entrusted to him and to another person for the repairs. The two men, adds Leonardo of Chios, "later left a treasure of seventy thousand hidden in a jar for the Turks."20 The name of Manuel Iagaris appears on a surviving inscription from the land walls, which confirms the truth at least of Leonardo of Chios' testimony regarding his assignment over the maintenance of the fortifications (Cat. no. 292).

While the theme of widespread and debilitating poverty recurs in most accounts of the fall of Constantinople, Latin eyewitnesses to the event also proclaim the existence of a wealthy minority in the city who refused to contribute financially to defense needs. The unwillingness of rich Byzantines to make financial sacrifices is underlined by Nicolò Barbaro in his description of the aforementioned incident concerning the transport of mantlets to the walls. According to Barbaro, when no one accepted carrying the mantlets without payment, the Venetians in Constantinople, who had been involved in their construction, decided to offer a sum of money for their transport, expecting the Byzantines who possessed the means to do likewise. However, this decision aroused the anger of wealthy Byzantines, and as they could not be persuaded to contribute part of the money, the project was altogether abandoned. In his letter addressed to Pope Nicholas V on 16 August 1453, Leonardo of Chios reports that the aristocrats of Constantinople, to whom Constantine XI appealed for financial assistance during the siege, told the Emperor that their resources had been exhausted because of the hardships of the time; yet Leonardo adds that the Ottomans later discovered large amounts of money and valuables in their possession. A note appended to the text of Barbaro's diary on 18 July 1453 repeats this information, providing the following additional details: that an unidentified aristocrat had 30,000 ducats with him at the time when the Ottoman army entered the city, that another unnamed aristocrat of high rank had his daughters deliver to Mehmed II two dishes filled with valuable coins, and that the latter's example was followed by several others who showered the Sultan with gifts of money in order to win his favor.21 Considering the generally hostile attitude displayed towards the Byzantines by both Barbaro and Leonardo of Chios, we may be rightly inclined to doubt the reliability of their pronouncements on this particular subject. However, the evidence they provide is corroborated by other contemporary sources. According to Doukas, for instance, Ottoman janissaries who broke into the the house of an unidentified protostrator on 29 May 1453 found
there “coffers full of treasures amassed long ago.” Likewise, the Ottoman historian Tursun Bey, who was presumably present at the siege, reports that the conquering soldiers discovered plenty of gold, silver, and jewels inside the houses of the rich and at the imperial palace, as well as on the corpses of certain members of the Emperor’s entourage. Several contemporary sources note also the abundance of hoarded coins, jewels, and other hidden treasures, both new and old, that came to light during the plundering of the city. A hoard, discovered in Istanbul some years ago and containing 158 late Palaiologan silver coins of which the majority belong to the reign of Constantine XI, must undoubtedly have been buried around the time of the siege. Finally, Italian archival documents make reference to numerous cases of money, jewels and other movable property entrusted by rich Byzantines to Venetian merchants and citizens of Constantinople, both before and after the city’s fall. Thus, all this additional evidence, derived from Ottoman and Byzantine literary sources and supported by Italian documents as well as by archaeological data, confirms the assertions of our hostile Latin authors with regard to the existence of a wealthy group of Constantinopolitans who feigned poverty in 1453, although it must be granted that the rich, too, had probably suffered a decline in their fortunes.

It would have been useful for our purposes if the authors in question had revealed the identities of some of these rich people, since our ultimate objective is to find out how the latter were able to maintain their wealth (or a relatively large portion of it at least) under the existing circumstances that pushed the majority of their fellow citizens into extreme poverty, rather than to blame or judge them as the contemporary writers do in their typically moralizing and biased manner. At any rate, the fact must not be overlooked that a wealthy aristocrat like Loukas Notaras, who is known to have kept part of his paternal fortunes in Italian bank accounts, did after all work hard to obtain loans for the protection of Constantinople in 1453, and he also put his life to risk by participating in the final battle against the Ottomans. Unfortunately, in recounting their stories about the feigned poverty of wealthy Constantinopolitans, the relevant sources speak of them collectively, without naming any individuals. Thus, in the absence of direct evidence, we have to rely on comparative data drawn from parallel contexts in order to determine the possible source of this group’s wealth. I have already shown elsewhere that, during the first Ottoman siege of Constantinople by Bayezid I, the small circle of people who were able to maintain an economically favorable position in the city were members of the Byzantine ruling class who had ties, generally of an economic nature, with Italy and Italians. A comparable situation existed in Thessalonike, too, in the course of the Ottoman attacks of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Within Constantinople, the majority of those who opted
for the policy of ecclesiastical union with the Latin Church belonged to the same circle as well; that is, they were members of the Constantinopolitan elite noted for their strong political and economic associations with Italy, which may be traced across several generations in some cases. Moreover, most survivors of 1453 who managed to flee to Italian-dominated territories were also from the same group of families. Five Palaiologoi, two Kantakouzenoi, two Notarades, and two Laskares are listed among others in a document which records the names of Byzantine aristocrats who escaped with their families on board a Genoese ship on the day of the city’s capture. Documents issued after 1453 which report the presence and activities of Byzantine refugees in Venetian territories also include such names as Kantakouzenos, Laskaris Kananos, Sgouros, Basilikos, Mamonas, Notaras, and Phrankopoulos that are familiar to us from the account book kept by the Venetian merchant Giacomo Badoer during his period of residence in Constantinople between 1436 and 1440. Finally, a number of Constantinopolitans mentioned in the letters of Francesco Filelfo as being in various parts of Italy between 1453 and 1473 bear once again the names of families whose long-standing economic relations with Italians are known, like Asanes, Gabras, Palaiologos, Sgouropoulos, Kananos, etc. It seems safe, therefore, to conclude that the anonymous group of rich Constantinopolitans to whom the literary sources of 1453 allude owed their continued wealth mainly to the connections they (or their former family members) had established with Italy and Italians. In concurrence with their material interests which were oriented towards Italian commercial markets, these people generally supported the policy of ecclesiastical union with the Latin Church and many of them chose to escape to Latin-dominated areas following their city’s fall.28

To recapitulate, what the sources of 1453 reflect in general with regard to the current social and economic situation of Constantinople is a clear picture of overall poverty, extending beyond the society itself to the Byzantine state as well, alongside with some cases of private wealth, which, to a large extent, could not be channeled towards the defense needs of the besieged city. These circumstances proved highly detrimental to the proper protection of Constantinople against the forces of Mehmed II and facilitated the city’s, and along with it the Byzantine Empire’s, collapse. Thus, on a final note, when we reconsider the political/military realities and religio-political controversies of the later Palaiologan period against the backdrop of the social and economic conditions highlighted in the preceding pages, we may, I hope, comprehend better why Constantinople could not resist the Ottomans in 1453 (cat. no. 297).
CONSTANTINOPLE ON THE EVE OF THE OTTOMAN CONQUEST


3 As with all generalizations, there were exceptions to the rule, for which see Doucas, ed. Grecu, 325 (anti-unioriist aristocrats) and Leonardo of Chios, “Historia Constantinopolitanae urbis a Mathumate II capitae per modum epistolae,” PG, 159 (Paris, 1866), col. 925b (unioriist monks). For a general treatment of the Union of Florence, see J. Gill, The Council of Florence (Cambridge, 1959; repr. with corrigeenda: New York, 1982). See also D. Dagon, “Orthodoxie byzantine et culture hellénique autour de 1453,” MelRome, Moyen Âge 113 (2001): 767-91.


A symbolic locus embodying and representing myriad meanings, the political center of the eastern Mediterranean, and one of the largest urban centers of the world, Constantinople/Istanbul has been the site of large-scale urban and architectural interventions several times in the course of its history. Changing visions, changing political, cultural, religious orientations of those who lived there and those who ruled from there, have been inscribed in its spaces, transforming it, lending it new meanings. This book is about such a period of change and remaking: the decades following the city's capture by the Ottomans in 1453, during which a grandiose urban project was implemented to reconstruct the capital of Eastern Rome as the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Through these decades, the construction of the city was fundamentally interlocked with the construction of empire. As the empire was built up around reorientations political and cultural, and the creation of a new concept of sovereignty and a new ruling elite, so the space and image of Constantinople, too, were constructed. The millennium-old center of the Eastern Roman Empire was not merely a setting for the profound changes that took place in the Ottoman realm in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Possession of the city was the primary catalyst in the transformation of the Ottoman polity into an empire; the city was the site that would accommodate, represent, and reproduce the new configuration of the Ottoman polity.

This study explores the dialectical relationship between the Ottoman urban project and the city's Byzantine layout and architecture, its historical legacy, and its inhabitants. It investigates the mechanisms and patterns of building, preserving, altering, and representing the urban environment during a formative period, and the meanings communicated through these acts. In short, this book attempts to explain the spatial and visual aspects of early Ottoman Istanbul as central components of a complex and fascinating urban process, that of the creation of a capital city through the interpretation and appropriation of another.

That creation was ultimately the product of the fall/conquest of the city, an event that led to the encounter of diverse cultural traditions on a site of immense significance and to profound transformations in the Ottoman political realm itself. The selective appropriation of the imperial legacy of Byzantine Constantinople