BYZANTINE CONSTANTINOPLE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SITE OF CONSTANTINOPLE—THE LIMITS OF BYZANTIUM.

WITHOUT attempting any elaborate description of the site occupied by Constantinople, such as we have in Gyllius' valuable work on the topography of the city, it is necessary to indicate to the reader, now invited to wander among the ruins of New Rome, the most salient features of the territory he is to explore.

The city is situated at the south-western end of the Bosporus, upon a promontory that shoots out from the European shore of the straits, with its apex up stream, as though to stem the waters that rush from the Black Sea into the Sea of Marmora. To the north, the narrow bay of the Golden Horn runs inland, between steep banks, for some six or seven miles, and forms one of the finest harbours in the world. The Sea of Marmora spreads southwards like a lake, its Asiatic coast bounded by hills and mountains, and fringed with islands. Upon the shore of Asia, facing the eastern side

[1] Petrus Gyllius, *De Topographia Constantinopoleos et De illius Antiquitatibus*, liber i. c. 4–18.

of the promontory, stand the historic towns of Chrysopolis (Scutari) and Chalcedon (Kadikeui). The mainland to the west is an undulating plain that soon meets the horizon. It offers little to attract the eye in the way of natural beauty, but in the palmy days of the city it, doubtless, presented a pleasing landscape of villas and gardens.

The promontory, though strictly speaking a trapezium, is commonly described as a triangle, on account of the comparative shortness of its eastern side. It is about four miles long, and from one to four miles wide, with a surface broken up into hills and plains. The higher ground, which reaches an elevation of some 250 feet, is massed in two divisions—a large isolated hill at the south-western corner of the promontory, and a long ridge, divided, more or less completely, by five cross valleys into six distinct eminences, overhanging the Golden Horn. Thus, New Rome boasted of being enthroned upon as many hills beside the Bosporus, as her elder sister beside the Tiber.

The two masses of elevated land just described are separated by a broad meadow, through which the stream of the Lycus flows athwart the promontory into the Sea of Marmora; and there is, moreover, a considerable extent of level land along the shores of the promontory, and in the valleys between the northern hills.

Few of the hills of Constantinople were known by special names, and accordingly, as a convenient mode of reference, they are usually distinguished by numerals.

The First Hill is the one nearest the promontory's apex, having upon it the Seraglio, St. Irene, St. Sophia, and the Hippodrome. The Second Hill, divided from the First by the valley descending from St. Sophia to the Golden Horn, bears upon its summit the porphyry Column of Constantine the

Great, popularly known as the Burnt Column and Tchemberli Tash. The Third Hill is separated from the preceding by the valley of the Grand Bazaar, and is marked by the War Office and adjacent Fire-Signal Tower the Mosque of Sultan Bajazet, and the Mosque of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. The Fourth Hill stands farther back from the water than the five other hills beside the Golden Horn, and is parted from the Third Hill by the valley which descends from the aqueduct of Valens to the harbour. It is surmounted by the Mosque of Sultan Mehemet the Conqueror. The Fifth Hill is really a long precipitous spur of the Fourth Hill, protruding almost to the shore of the Golden Horn in the quarter of the Phanar. Its summit is crowned by the Mosque of Sultan Selim. Between it and the Third Hill spreads a broad plain, bounded by the Fourth Hill on the south, and the Golden Horn on the north. The Sixth Hill is divided from the Fifth by the valley which ascends southwards from the Golden Horn at Balat Kapoussi to the large Byzantine reservoir (Tchoukour Bostan), on the ridge that runs from the Mosque of Sultan Mehemet to the Gate of Adrianople. It is distinguished by the ruins of the Palace of the Porphyrogenitus (Tekfour Serai) and the quarter of Egri Kapou. Nicetas Choniates styles it the Hill of Blachernae (*βουνὸς τῶν Βλαχερνῶν*),[1] and upon it stood the famous Imperial residence of that name. The Seventh Hill, occupying the south-western angle of the city, was known, on account of its arid soil, as the Xerolophos—the Dry Hill.[2] Upon it are found Avret Bazaar, the pedestal of the Column of Arcadius, and the quarters of Alti Mermer and Psamathia.

[1] Page 722. All references in this work to the Byzantine Authors, unless otherwise stated, are to the Bonn Edition of the *Corpus Scriptorum Historiæ Byzantinæ*.

[2] Anonymus, lib. i. p. 20, in Banduri's *Imperium Orientale*; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Cerimoniis Aulæ Byzantinæ*, p. 501.

Here, then, was a situation where men could build a noble city in the midst of some of the fairest scenery on earth.

But the history of Constantinople cannot be understood unless the extraordinary character of the geographical position of the place is present to the mind. No city owes so much to its site. The vitality and power of Constantinople are rooted in a unique location. Nowhere is the influence of geography upon history more strikingly marked. Here, to a degree that is marvellous, the possibilities of the freest and widest intercourse blend with the possibilities of complete isolation. No city can be more in the world and out of the world. It is the meeting-point of some of the most important highways on the globe, whether by sea or land; the centre around which diverse, vast, and wealthy countries lie within easy reach, inviting intimate commercial relations, and permitting extended political control. Here the peninsula of Asia Minor, stretching like a bridge across the seas that sunder Asia and Europe, narrows the waters between the two great continents to a stream only half a mile across. Hither the Mediterranean ascends, through the avenues of the Ægean and the Marmora, from the regions of the south; while the Euxine and the Azoff spread a pathway to the regions of the north. Here is a harbour within which the largest and richest fleets can find a perfect shelter.

But no less remarkable is the facility with which the great world, so near at hand, can be excluded. Access to this point by sea is possible only through the straits of the Hellespont on the one side, and through the straits of the Bosporus on the other —defiles which, when properly guarded, no hostile navy could penetrate. These channels, with the Sea of Marmora between them, formed, moreover, a natural moat which prevented an Asiatic foe from coming within striking distance of the city; while the narrow breadth of the promontory on which the city

stands allowed the erection of fortifications, along the west, which could be held against immense armies by a comparatively small force.

As Dean Stanley, alluding to the selection of this site for the new capital of the Empire, has observed: "Of all the events of Constantine's life, this choice is the most convincing and enduring proof of his real genius."

Although it does not fall within the scope of this work to discuss the topography of Byzantium before the time of Constantine, it will not be inappropriate to glance at the circuits of the fortifications which successively brought more and more of this historic promontory within their widening compass, until the stronghold of a small band of colonists from Megara became the most splendid city and the mightiest bulwark of the Roman world.

Four such circuits demand notice.

First came the fortifications which constituted the Acropolis of Byzantium.[1] They are represented by the walls, partly Byzantine and partly Turkish, which cling to the steep sides of the Seraglio plateau at the eastern extremity of the First Hill, and support the Imperial Museum, the Kiosk of Sultan Abdul Medjid, and the Imperial Kitchens.

That the Acropolis occupied this point may be inferred from the natural fitness of the rocky eminence at the head of the promontory to form the kind of stronghold around which ancient cities gathered as their nucleus. And this inference is confirmed by the allusions to the Acropolis in Xenophon's graphic account of the visit of the Ten Thousand to Byzantium, on their return from Persia. According to the historian, when those troops, after their expulsion from the city, forced their way back through the western gates, Anaxibius, the Spartan commander of the place, found himself obliged to seek refuge in the Acropolis from the

[1] Xenophon, *Anabasis*, vii. c. 1.

fury of the intruders. The soldiers of Xenophon had, however, cut off all access to the fortress from within the city, so that Anaxibius was compelled to reach it by taking a fishing-boat in the harbour, and rowing round the head of the promontory to the side of the city opposite Chalcedon. From that point also he sent to Chalcedon for reinforcements.[1] These movements imply that the Acropolis was near the eastern end of the promontory.

In further support of this conclusion, it may be added that during the excavations made in 1871 for the construction of the Roumelian railroad, an ancient wall was unearthed at a short distance south of Seraglio Point. It ran from east to west, and was built of blocks measuring, in some cases, 7 feet in length, 3 feet 9 inches in width, and over 2 feet in thickness.[2] Judging from its position and character, the wall formed part of the fortifications around the Acropolis.

The second circuit of walls around Byzantium is that described by the Anonymus of the eleventh century and his follower Codinus.[3] Starting from the Tower of the Acropolis at the apex of the promontory, the wall proceeded along the Golden Horn as far west as the Tower of Eugenius, which must have stood beside the gate of that name—the modern Yali Kiosk Kapoussi.[4] There the wall left the shore and made for the Strategion and

[1] *Anabasis*, vii. c. 1.

[2] Paspates, Βυζαντιναὶ Μελέται, p. 103. Mordtmann, *Esquisse Topographique de Constantinople*, p. 5. All references to these writers, unless otherwise stated, are to the works here mentioned.

[3] Lib. i. p. 2; Codinus, pp. 24, 25. Ἤρχετο δὲ τὸ τεῖχος, καθὰ καὶ νῦν, ἐπὶ τοῦ Βύζαντος ἀπὸ τοῦ πύργου τῆς Ἀκροπόλεως, καὶ διήρχετο εἰς τὸν τοῦ Εὐγενίου πύργον, καὶ ἀνέβαινε μέχρι τοῦ Στρατηγίου, καὶ ἤρχετο εἰς τὸ τοῦ Ἀχιλλέως λουτρόν. Ἡ δὲ ἐκεῖσε ἄψις, ἡ λεγομένη τοῦ Οὐρβικίου, πόρτα ἦν χερσαία τῶν Βυζαντίων: καὶ ἀνέβαινεν εἰς τὰ Χαλκοπρατεῖα τὸ τεῖχος ἕως τοῦ λεγομένου Μιλίου· ἦν δὲ κἀκεῖσε πόρτα τῶν Βυζαντίων χερσαία: καὶ διήρχετο εἰς τοὺς πλεκτοὺς κίονας τῶν Τζυκαλαρίων, καὶ κατέβαινεν εἰς Τόπους, καὶ ἀπέκαμπτε πάλιν διὰ τῶν Μαγγάνων καὶ Ἀρκαδιανῶν εἰς τὴν Ἀκρόπολιν.

[4] See below, p. 227.

the Thermæ of Achilles. The former was a level tract of ground devoted to military exercises—the *Champ de Mars* of Byzantium—and occupied a portion of the plain at the foot of the Second Hill, between Yali Kiosk Kapoussi and Sirkedji Iskelessi.[1] The Thermæ of Achilles stood near the Strategion; and there also was a gate of the city, known in later days as the Arch of Urbicius. The wall then ascended the slope of the hill to the Chalcoprateia, or Brass Market, which extended from the neighbourhood of the site now occupied by the Sublime Porte to the vicinity of Yeri Batan Serai, the ancient Cisterna Basilica.[2]

The ridge of the promontory was reached at the Milion, the milestone from which distances from Constantinople were measured. It stood to the south-west of St. Sophia, and marked the site of one of the gates of Byzantium. Thence the line of the fortifications proceeded to the twisted columns of the Tzycalarii, which, judging from the subsequent course of the wall, were on the plateau beside St. Irene. Then, the wall descended to the Sea of Marmora at Topi,[3] somewhere near the present Seraglio Lighthouse, and, turning northwards, ran along the shore to the apex of the promontory, past the sites occupied, subsequently, by the Thermae of Arcadius and the Mangana.

If we are to believe the Anonymus and Codinus, this was the circuit of Byzantium from the foundation of the city by

[1] The site of the Strategion may be determined thus: It was in the Fifth Region of the city (*Notitia, ad Reg. V.*); therefore, either on the northern slope or at the foot of the Second Hill. Its character as the ground for military exercises required it to be on the plain at the foot of the hill. In the Strategion were found the granaries beside the harbour of the Prosphorion (Constant. Porphyr., *De Cerim*, p. 699), near Sirkidji Iskelessi. At the same time, these granaries were near the Neorion (*Bagtchè Kapoussi*), for they were destroyed by a fire which started in the Neorion (*Paschal Chron.*, p. 582).

[2] The Chalcoprateia was near the Basilica, or Great Law Courts, the site of which is marked by the Cistern of Yeri Batan Serai (Cedrenus, vol. i. p. 616; cf. Gyllius, *De Top. CP.*, lib. ii. c. 20, 21). Zonaras, xiv. p. 1212 (Migne Edition), ἐν τῇ καλουμένῃ βασιλικῇ ἔγγιστα τῶν Χαλκοπρατείων.

[3] See below, p. 256.

Byzas to the time of Constantine the Great. On the latter point, however, these writers were certainly mistaken; for the circuit of Byzantium was much larger than the one just indicated, not only in the reign of that emperor, but as far back as the year 196 of our era, and even before that date.[1] The statements of the Anonymus and Codinus can therefore be correct only if they refer to the size of the city at a very early period.

One is, indeed, strongly tempted to reject the whole account of this wall as legendary, or as a conjecture based upon the idea that the Arch of Urbicius and the Arch of the Milion represented gates in an old line of bulwarks. But, on the other hand, it is more than probable that Byzantium was not as large, originally, as it became during its most flourishing days, and accordingly the two arches above mentioned may have marked the course of the first walls built beyond the bounds of the Acropolis.

We pass next to the third line of walls which guarded the city, the walls which made Byzantium one of the great fortresses of the ancient world. These fortifications described a circuit of thirty-five stadia,[2] which would bring within the compass of the city most of the territory occupied by the first two hills of the promontory. Along the Golden Horn, the line of the walls extended from the head of the promontory to the western side of the bay that fronts the valley between the Second and Third Hills, the valley of the Grand Bazaar. Three ports, more or less artificial,[3] were found in that bay for the accommodation of the shipping that frequented the busy mart of commerce, one of them being, unquestionably, at the Neorion.[4]

[1] See below, the size of city as given by Dionysius Byzantius.
[2] *Anaplus* of Dionysius Byzantius. Edition of C. Wescher, Paris, 1874.
[3] Dion Cassius, lxxiv. 14; Herodianus, iii. 6.
[4] Beside Bagtchè Kapoussi. See below, p. 220.

These bulwarks, renowned in antiquity for their strength, were faced with squared blocks of hard stone, bound together with metal clamps, and so closely fitted as to seem a wall of solid rock around the city. One tower was named the Tower of Hercules, on account of its superior size and strength, and seven towers were credited with the ability to echo the slightest sound made by the movements of an enemy, and thus secure the garrison against surprise. From the style of their construction, one would infer that these fortifications were built soon after Pausanias followed up his victory on the field of Platæa by the expulsion of the Persians from Byzantium.

These splendid ramparts were torn down in 196 by Septimius Severus to punish the city for its loyalty to the cause of his rival, Pescennius Niger. In their ruin they presented a scene that made Herodianus[1] hesitate whether to wonder more at the skill of their constructors, or the strength of their destroyers. But the blunder of leaving unguarded the water-way, along which barbarous tribes could descend from the shores of the Euxine to ravage some of the fairest provinces of the Empire, was too glaring not to be speedily recognized and repaired. Even the ruthless destroyer of the city perceived his mistake, and ere long, at the solicitation of his son Caracalla, ordered the reconstruction of the strategic stronghold.

It is with Byzantium as restored by Severus that we are specially concerned, for in that form the city was the immediate predecessor of Constantinople, and affected the character of the new capital to a considerable extent. According to Zosimus, the principal gate in the new walls of Severus stood at the extremity of a line of porticoes erected by that emperor for the embellishment of the city.[2] There Constantine subsequently

[1] I. 1.

[2] Page 96: Καὶ τὸ μὲν παλαιὸν εἶχε τὴν πύλην ἐν τῇ συμπληρώσει τῶν στοῶν ἃς Σεβῆρος ὁ βασιλεὺς ᾠκοδομήσατο.

placed the Forum known by his name, so that from the Forum one entered the porticoes in question, and passed beyond the limits of Byzantium.[1] Now, the site of the Forum of Constantine is one of the points in the topography of the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire concerning which there can be no difference of opinion. The porphyry column (Burnt Column) which surmounts the Second Hill was the principal ornament of that public place. Therefore the gate of Byzantium must have stood at a short distance from that column. According to the clearest statements on the subject, the gate was to the east of the column, the Forum standing immediately beyond the boundary of the old city.[2]

The language of Zosimus, taken alone, suggests, indeed, the idea that the gate of Byzantium had occupied a site to the west of the Forum; in other words, that the Forum was constructed to the east of the gate, within the line of the wall of Severus. For, according to the historian, one entered the porticoes of Severus and left the old town, after passing through the arches (δι' ὧν) which stood, respectively, at the eastern and western extremities of the Forum of Constantine. This was possible, however, only if these various structures, in proceeding from east to west, came in the following order: Forum of Constantine; porticoes of Severus; gate of Byzantium. On this view, the statement that the Forum was "at the place where the gate had stood" would be held to imply that the porticoes between the Forum and the gate were too short to be taken

[1] Zosimus, p. 96: Ἀγορὰν δὲ ἐν τῷ τόπῳ καθ' ὃν ἡ πύλη τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἦν οἰκοδομήσας, . . . ἀψίδας δύο μαρμάρου προικοννησίου μεγίστας ἀλλήλων ἀντίας ἀπέτυπωσε, δι' ὧν ἔνεστιν εἰσιέναι εἰς τὰς Σεβήρου στοὰς, καὶ τῆς πάλαι πόλεως ἐξιέναι.

[2] Theophanes, p. 42, speaking of the column, says it was set up ἀπὸ τοῦ τόπου οὗ ἤρξατο οἰκοδομεῖν τὴν πόλιν, ἐπὶ τὸ δυτικὸν μέρος τῆς ἐπὶ Ῥώμην ἐξιούσης πύλης.