

INTRODUCTION

Sarah Bassett

From its foundation in the fourth century, to its fall to the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth century, the name “Constantinople” not only identified a geographical location, but also summoned an idea. On the one hand, there was the fact of Constantinople, the city of brick, mortar, and marble that rose to preeminence as the capital of the Roman Empire on a hilly peninsula jutting into the waters at the confluence of the Sea of Marmora, the Golden Horn, and the Bosphoros. On the other hand, there was the city of the imagination. To pronounce the name Constantinople conjured a vision of wealth and splendor unrivalled by any of the great medieval cities, east or west. The commanding geographical location together with the city’s status as an imperial capital, the correspondingly monumental scale of its built environment, the richness of its sacred spaces, and the power of the rituals that enlivened them drove this idea, as its urban fortunes waxed and waned in the course of its millennial history. The devastations of earthquakes, fire, plague, and pillage notwithstanding, the idea of Constantinopolitan greatness prevailed. If there was one thing about which the diverse and often quarrelsome populations of the Middle Ages could agree, it was on Constantinople’s status as the “Queen of Cities.”

Although tempered by time, the conviction that Constantinople holds pride of place among medieval cities persists, as evidenced by the steady pace of scholarly production devoted to its understanding over the course of the last half century. As if taking its cue from medieval ideas about the city, two basic strands characterize this work. On the one hand, scholarship is archaeological in nature, focusing on the study of the physical place, its overall plan and infrastructure, and the shape and place of individual monuments within the whole. On the other hand, grounded in the evidence of texts, it looks to the written word to identify and understand the events and institutions associated with the city.

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Traditionally, both of these exercises in reconstruction have coalesced around the desire to uncover and describe the city as the stage on which the events of Byzantine history have played out, with the result that Constantinople has been conceived almost exclusively in terms of the luster of imperium. While this interest persists, recent work has begun to explore other aspects of urban living with an eye to understanding other sides of life in the capital. As well, there is a growing desire to approach Constantinople less as an isolated entity, and more within the larger context of ancient and medieval Mediterranean life. Thus, new approaches drawing on interest in the medieval Mediterranean together with theories of networking and globalization have combined with old methodologies and new archaeological discoveries to give Constantinopolitan studies a new slant. As a result, a much richer understanding is beginning to emerge, one picturing the city not simply as the blank canvas upon which to paint a description of Byzantine history, but also as a place with a dynamic population whose built environment represented a response to varieties of human experience.

This Constantinople, a multifaceted center built on interlocking tiers of human experience, is the focus of this volume. Its chapters address both the time-honored issues of infrastructure and the newly developed understandings of the city's people and their institutions. It examines the rapport between people and place, with the latter understood to encompass both the natural and the manmade environment. With the exception of Chapter 1, which sets the stage with a discussion of Constantinople's pre-fourth-century history, and Chapters 20 and 21, which conclude with the exploration of early modern antiquarian interest in the city and Ottoman approaches to the Constantinopolitan past, the volume focuses squarely on the period between the city's foundation by Constantine the Great (306–37) in 324 and its capture by the Ottoman Turks under the leadership of Mehmed II Fatih (1444–6/1451–81) in 1453.

As these chronological boundaries suggest, Constantinople began life as an ancient city, founded and built along the lines of late Roman urban tradition, and ended its Byzantine run as a fully medieval urban center. Part of this volume's mandate is to consider both the different ways in which this passage is manifest and the implications of this change. To this end, each chapter pursues its topic along chronological lines, noting aspects of continuity and disruption across the millennium of the city's history.

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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: ORGANIZING
THE NARRATIVE

History is a matter of storytelling, and all good stories need to organize their narratives. In the case of Constantinople, two dates define the city's history: its foundation by the emperor Constantine on the site of the old Greco-Roman town of Byzantium on November 8, 324, and its collapse in the face of the Ottoman siege on May 29, 1453. This history, derived largely from the testament of Greek literary sources and the sporadic input of archaeological investigation, exists within the larger context of Byzantine studies, and constructs the city's story on the armature of Byzantine history's modern periodization. This volume is no exception. Although period designations are nothing if not artificial, modern historiography's division of late Roman and Byzantine time offers a generally understood structure around which to build discussion of the Constantinopolitan past. The late antique or early Byzantine period (32–c.700), the Dark Age of the eighth and early ninth centuries, which also overlaps with the period of Iconoclasm in which religious images were banned, the Middle Byzantine period (843–1204), the Latin Interregnum (1204–61) in which western powers controlled the city, and the Late Byzantine or Palaiologan Period (1261–1453), named for the empire's last ruling dynasty, constitute its chronological units.

Thus, during the first of these phases, Constantinople became the center of Roman imperial court life and increased in population. The city's physical structure both shaped and responded to these developments. This period saw the establishment of the city limits and an effective infrastructure for feeding, watering, and defending the capital together with the creation of a monumental armature of streets and public spaces that would organize the rhythms of public and private life. When, in the sixth century, an outbreak of plague beset the capital, Constantinople experienced a decline, a Dark Age, which saw a decrease in population and economic, social, and cultural activity, and from which it emerged only in the middle period. From the second half of the ninth century, population growth and renewed economic prosperity led to the restoration of extant infrastructure and social institutions as well as to the construction of new facilities in both the public and private sectors. This resurgence came to a halt in 1204 with the capture of the city by the army of the Fourth Crusade and the establishment of western, Latin rule that not only wrested control of the city from the Byzantines, but also divided the empire. An initial sack

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destroyed large swaths of the urban building stock, and in the aftermath of the invasion a significant portion of the population fled, leaving the city and its institutions bereft of their customary guidance for the next several decades. Restoration of Greek rule in 1261 introduced the final phase of the capital's Byzantine history, a period that saw renewed, if modest, population growth and with it a concern to revive the institutions and traditions left to languish during the Latin interregnum. While the restoration of these institutions and the infrastructure that supported them came from the imperial house, financial constraints also meant that private initiative was crucial in steering the fortunes of the capital in these last centuries.

DISCOVERING AND WRITING CONSTANTINOPOLITAN HISTORY

Modern interest in reconstructing a Constantinopolitan past began within a hundred years of the Ottoman conquest. The initial concern, driven by the antiquarian traditions of Renaissance humanism, was to recover the city's monumental architectural past. Subsequent inquiry aimed to bind this building legacy to the larger subject of Byzantine history. These two strands of inquiry, the one rooted in the pursuit of the city's physical structure, the other in historicist thought, continue to shape the study of Constantinopolitan history.

The reconstruction of this history began in 1544, when the French humanist, Pierre Gilles (1490–1555), traveled to Ottoman Constantinople at the behest of his patron, Francis I Valois (r. 1515–47) with the mandate to purchase Greek and Latin manuscripts for French royal collections. Gilles remained in Constantinople for three years, until 1547, exploring the Ottoman city and the dwindling evidence for its Byzantine past in light of his reading in Greek and Latin sources. The enduring legacy of this enterprise, *De topographia Constantinopoleos et de illius antiquitatibus libri quattuor* (Lyon, 1561), represents the first attempt at a systematic description of Byzantine Constantinople.¹

The interest driving Gilles' study was the basic question of identification. Already in the sixteenth century the Byzantine city was fast disappearing. Only a handful of monuments survived as testament to the city's former status. His concern was therefore two-fold: to recover Constantinople's ancient topography and to identify individual monuments. To do so he used Byzantine sources as his guide, prime among

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them the document known as the *Notitia Urbis Constantinopoleos*.² Written in the fifth century, the *Notitia* offered a summary description of each of the capital's fourteen administrative regions. Walking the city, text in hand, Gilles established the lay of the land, marking the boundaries of each region and identifying the monuments within them. Although he inevitably made mistakes, the project was important because, for the first time, it gave Byzantine Constantinople, to this date known only through the written word, a physical shape and structure.

Gilles's antiquarian interests established the terms by which Constantinopolitan history would be explored over the course of the next several hundred years, most notably in the work of Charles Du Fresne Du Cange (1610–88). An indefatigable editor of Byzantine texts, Du Cange is probably best known for his medieval Greek and Latin dictionaries; however, his *Historia byzantina duplici commentario illustrata* (Paris, 1680) represents an important contribution to Constantinopolitan studies. Written in two parts, *Constantinopolis Christiana*, and *De familiis byzantinis*, the book is at once a topographical study of the city and a genealogical account of Byzantine aristocratic families. Unlike Gilles, Du Cange never visited Constantinople, and his own topographical study, produced in the haven of his own library, relies on that of his predecessor for content and organization. It also provided a model of how close textual analysis could expand upon Gilles' initial contribution, thus cementing the role of purely philological approaches to the city's topographical reconstruction.³

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the identification and description of the overall topography and individual buildings within remained the primary concern. In large measure these studies were noteworthy for persisting with a philological approach that located and identified buildings and other elements of the urban infrastructure on the basis of textual reference. This methodology was conducive to the nature of the surviving evidence. Throughout the city, survival of material evidence from the Byzantine period – everything from the great city walls of the fifth century to the ruined or repurposed churches of the early, middle, and late periods – invited above-ground survey and identification of the sort undertaken by Alexander van Millingen in two comprehensive studies, *Byzantine Constantinople, the Walls of the City and Adjoining Historical Sites* (1899) and *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople: Their History and Architecture* (1912). The goal in such ventures was, as Van Millingen saw it, to identify “the historical sites of Byzantine or Roman Constantinople with the view of making the events of which that city was the theater more intelligible and vivid.”⁴

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Eventually, archaeological excavation came to complement these early surveys. Sir Charles Newton undertook the first excavation, a three-day dig around the Serpent Column in the Hippodrome, in 1855,⁵ and there was sporadic discovery attendant upon construction projects throughout the later nineteenth century; however, it was only in the twentieth century that any large-scale systematic excavation took place. By and large the areas targeted were those identified with the monumental imperial core, among them the Hippodrome and the Great Palace. As a result a fair picture of the city's central district had emerged by the middle of the century, confirming Constantinople's status as an imperial capital. This, together with sustained interest in the identification and description of individual structures around the city, set the stage for production of a series of mid-century encyclopedic publications designed to offer the latest word on topographical issues: Raymond Janin's *Constantinople byzantine: développement urbain et repertoire* (Paris, 1964); Rodolphe Guilland's *Études de topographie de Constantinople byzantine* (Berlin/Amsterdam, 1969); and Wolfgang Müller-Wiener's *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls: Byzantion, Konstantinupolis, Istanbul bis zum Beginn d. 17. Jh.* (Tübingen, 1977).

Given that so much of the Byzantine city remains a cypher, the interest in topographical study first sparked by Gilles over 400 years ago continues, with the result that much of the most interesting and important work of recent years may be said to stand in a direct line of descent from his efforts. Among the most visible projects of the last two decades have been the excavations at the Great Palace⁶ and the archaeological rescue operations at the Theodosian harbor.⁷ No less interesting and important is recent work documenting the city's water supply and defense systems.⁸ Although less glamorous, the hard work of rescue archaeology has also borne fruit.⁹ Finally, above ground, major restoration projects associated with the city's churches, most notably Hagia Sophia, the Chora Monastery (Kariye Camii) and the Pantokrator Monastery (Zeyrek Camii), have shed light on the some of the more historically important and familiar Constantinopolitan monuments.¹⁰

Although the focus on topographical study became synonymous with the idea of Constantinopolitan history, the emphasis on individual places and buildings that characterized it brought with it an unintended consequence: the city's atomization. Because monuments were identified and described in isolation from any urban or historical context, the history of Constantinople seemed to be little more than a series of disconnected dots on the map. The challenge, then, was to integrate

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these dots and to consider the city in unified, historical terms, a task first undertaken by Hans-Georg Beck and Gilbert Dagron. Beck did so in an edited volume that included a series of individual essays addressing topics such as urban infrastructure, administration, and housing.¹¹ Dagron, by contrast, offered a systematic institutional history of the city in the first centuries of its formation.¹² His study cast a wide net, examining Constantinople as an imperial residence, the formation of its senate, and the office of the urban prefect together with issues such as the church, population, patterns of residence, and the food supply.

Together Beck and Dagron built a firm foundation for the historical study of the city in the early centuries of its development, one that pointed to the possibility of a more integrated approach to urban history. They did so, however, largely without recourse to archaeological materials, building their studies in time-honored tradition on philological foundations. A correlation of textual and archaeological evidence was thus in order. That project became the work of Cyril Mango.¹³ Without denying the continued importance of topographical or philological inquiry, Mango argued that the time was ripe to build a synthetic approach that would pull observations about individual monuments and places together to construct a history of the city's physical development. Drawing on the combined testimony of words and archaeology, he identified and tracked the growth of the built environment over the early centuries of the city's history, noting not only developmental sequences, but also the political, social, and economic forces that shaped them.

Mango's ability to step back and look for the big picture sparked a new fire in Constantinopolitan studies. Paul Magdalino picked up where Mango had left off to pursue a similar line of inquiry for the city in the middle period.¹⁴ Subsequently, two major conferences and their attendant publications expanded upon these initiatives: "Constantinople: The Fabric of the City," organized by Henry Maguire and Robert Ousterhout, the annual Spring Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks in 1998,¹⁵ and, in the following year, "Byzantine Constantinople," directed by Nevra Necipoğlu in conjunction with Boğaziçi University and the Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes in Istanbul.¹⁶ At both venues papers directed at specific questions related to urban life – streets, housing, commerce, and the like – worked to integrate topographical observation with historical discussion in an effort to see the nuts and bolts of physical evidence in terms of historical contexts.

Although initial studies considered Constantinople as the accumulation of monuments within its walls, the interest in developing a more integrated and historicized understanding of the capital also fostered a

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desire to see it in a larger context. This interest derives in no small measure from the urge to understand such practical aspects of urban living as the water supply and defense, two issues that not only bind the intramural city to its extramural hinterland, but also profit from the combined study of archaeological materials in their historical context. Mango and Dagron joined forces to spearhead the exploration of this relationship with the organization in 1993 of the Oxford Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, “Constantinople and its Hinterland.”¹⁷ Papers examined the relationship between intramural Constantinople and the surrounding territory in terms of food and water supply, administration, defense, communication, inhabitants, manufacture, export, and cultural relations. Some of the most interesting and important work on Constantinople in recent years comes as an outgrowth of this expanded view. Archaeological survey of the entwined structures of the Long Walls of Thrace and the infrastructure of the water supply has established a concrete basis on which to address both the mechanics of provision and defense, as well as the historical and administrative relationship between city and country.¹⁸

Scholarship on Constantinople has also profited from the interest in the more integrated approach to the medieval Mediterranean world that began to take shape in the 1990s. The result has been to refine the sense of Constantinople’s place within the larger orbit of the Mediterranean and territories beyond. For the Byzantine Empire and the Mediterranean world beyond, the investigation of networks of exchange has replaced a model that spoke in the binary terms of one-way interactions between center and periphery. Thus, the city’s monumental infrastructure has been studied in comparison to the design strategies of other late antique cities, with the result that it no longer stands as an isolated example of urban development.¹⁹ Individual buildings and institutions have also benefited from this approach. This is especially the case with the Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors, a complex whose architecture and court culture have been considered in the context of a larger Mediterranean orbit that includes the medieval west and Islam.²⁰ Other studies have considered the role of the Constantinopolitan church in the promotion of monasticism within the territories of the larger empire.²¹

TEXTUAL STUDY AND CONSTANTINOPOLITAN HISTORY

As Pierre Gilles well understood, one of the more profitable avenues into the study of Byzantine Constantinople was that of texts, and written sources have remained crucial to the city’s study. During

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Gilles's own lifetime, the process of identifying, transcribing, and producing editions of Byzantine historical texts had only just begun. The initial centers of this sixteenth-century editorial activity were at Augsburg in Germany and Leiden in the Netherlands, where interest in the Byzantine past was fueled by commercial trading interests with the Ottoman Empire. In the seventeenth century the interest in Byzantium and with it the editorial hat passed to the French, who, under the patronage of Louis XIV (1643–1715), began the production of the series known as the *Corpus Byzantinae Historiae*. Comprising twenty-eight volumes and as many as ten supplements, the Parisian corpus formed the basis of what was later to become the most comprehensive attempt to edit the texts of Byzantine history, the nineteenth-century series known as the *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (*CSHB*) or the Bonn Corpus, after its initial publication venue. The brainchild of the historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776–1831), the project was directed after his death by the philologist Immanuel Bekker (1785–1871) under the aegis of the Prussian Academy of Sciences. At fifty volumes, the *CSHB* represented the most substantial publication enterprise to date. That said, the editions produced after Niebuhr's death were flawed, many of them representing little more than a reprinting of the earlier Parisian texts. In an effort to remedy the situation the International Association of Byzantine Studies (Association Internationale des Études Byzantines), has, since 1966, been working to produce improved editions of materials from the Bonn Corpus together with new editions of unedited texts in a subsequent series, the *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*.²² In addition, new translations of important texts into modern languages on a range of subjects has opened many sources to a wider readership.²³

Because so much of the study of Constantinopolitan history relies on the evidence of written sources, these philological labors have provided a crucial foundation for the reconstruction of the city's history. Traditionally they have done so by offering the means to identify, locate, and describe monuments, people, and events. Thus, the sixth-century writings of Prokopios of Caesarea have allowed reconstruction of the rebellion that nearly brought down Justinian's reign together with documentation of the emperor's Constantinopolitan building activity in the aftermath of its quelling, while two tenth-century texts, the *Book of the Eparch* and the *Book of Ceremonies*, have been used to examine two poles of Constantinopolitan life: its commercial practices and court environment.²⁴

Recent scholarship makes it clear that these written materials can also be a source of information about contemporary mindsets and the

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attitudes they express toward the city, its monuments, and its history. For example, beyond documenting the nuts and bolts of construction activity, a text such as Procopius' *On Building* may also be understood as an encomium of imperial greatness, which in turn describes larger aspects of Byzantine mentalities.²⁵

This understanding of the capacity of texts to document intellectual ideas and attitudes occurred in tandem with the interest in developing a more historicized understanding of Constantinople. It was first manifest in the study of the cluster of texts known as the *Patria Konstantinopleos*, a set of commentaries on the city of Constantinople with dates ranging from the sixth century through the tenth. Renowned for their problematic language and curious commentary, and dismissed as the poor cousins of more orthodox historical texts, the *Patria* saw a reversal in fortune in the 1980s. A new publication of the eighth-century text known as the *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai*, together with synthetic studies of the larger collection of *Patria*, looked at these written documents as resources for understanding contemporary ideas and attitudes toward Constantinople and its monuments and through them larger ideas about Byzantine society and civilization.²⁶ Subsequent study of some Constantinople's more familiar literary resources has proceeded along similar lines to expand the understanding of the Byzantine's own view of their monuments and institutions, together with the use of their city.²⁷

As this necessarily superficial overview suggests, recent trends in Constantinopolitan scholarship have continued to build on traditional methods of inquiry while branching into new areas for discussion, with the result that there is much new material that can be brought to bear on the understanding of the city's history. Important advances have been made with respect to the study of the urban infrastructure. Perhaps even more compelling has been the groundswell of interest in the city's populations and institutions, a trend that has invigorated the study of Constantinopolitan history.

Given the ups and downs of the city's fortunes and the long and winding nature of its history, there are many subjects a companion volume might have addressed. Ultimately, the impulse guiding the selection of topics has been the desire to explore the ways in which urban structures and institutions entwined with human lives in this most evocative of late ancient and medieval cities. Cities are arguably one of the great expressions of human experience. They exist because of human beings: populations create their physical environments in response not only to the exigencies of survival, but also to the mandates of social structure, communal identity, and aesthetic vision. As such, the