

CONSTANTINOPLE - ISTANBUL

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The Roman heritage of Constantinople dates back to Third century AD when Emperor Septimius Severus (193-221) captured, destroyed, and rebuilt the city founded in 668 BC by Byzas of Megara. Within the new walls that enclosed approximately twice the area of Byzantium, Septimius laid the foundations of the Great Palace, the Hippodrome, and the city's water supply and storage network. In the Fourth century, the city came to be known as Constantinople after Emperor Constantine (306-337) who enlarged its size by constructing a new wall. Constantine also built the elliptical Forum Constantini, as well as the Megalo Ecclesia (Saint Sophia), Saint Eirene, and the Church of the Holy Apostles.

Constantine's successors continued to develop Constantinople. Constantius II (337-361) erected the library near the Basilica Cistern started by his father. Valens (364-378) completed the water supply and storage network. Theodosius I (379-395) built the Forum Bovis and the Forum Tauri. Arcadius (395-408) laid out the Forum Arcadi. Theodosius II (408-450) enlarged the city limits once again by pushing the land walls further out to their present location.

Constantinople reached its peak during the reign of Emperor Justinian (527-565). The Churches of SS. Sergius and Bacchus and SS. Peter and Paul (long since lost) were built by him. Justinian also rebuilt two churches -- Saint Eirene (537) and Saint Sophia (537)-- and restored the Great Palace which were destroyed during the fierce Nika Revolt in 532.

The Great Palace bordered by the Hippodrome on one side and Saint Sophia on the other formed the administrative, religious, and recreational core of the city. Residential areas lined the shores of the Sea of Marmara and the Golden Horn



with sparsely populated villages and monasteries separated by fields and orchards sprinkling the open land in between. hardly anything has survived of these settlements other than some few churches which the Ottomans converted into mosques. Most notable among these are Saint Theodosia (9th cent.), Christ Akateleptos (9th-10th cent.), Theotokos Pammakaristos (11th cent.), Christ Pantokrator (12th cent.), and Saint Savior in Chora (11th-14th cent.).

Following his entry into Constantinople on May 30, 1453 Mehmed the Conqueror (1451-1481) ordered, in keeping with Islamic convention, the conversion into a mosque of the city's cathedral, Saint Sophia. The venerable basilica became the great mosque of Ayasofya. Mehmed the Conqueror also ordered a palace for himself in the middle of the city, and selected the location of the Great Bazaar by building the Bedestan--which comprised the heart of an Ottoman commercial center-- a short distance from his palace.

A decade later, the Sultan began two more projects: a new palace and an educational complex. The New Palace--now known as the Topkapı palace--stood on the site of the ancient acropolis of Byzantium and was designed to function as the administrative and cultural center of the Ottoman Empire as well as a special school to train the highest ranking military executives of the state. The Fatih Complex, composed of eight residential colleges, a library, a dining hall, a guest house, and a hospital around a spacious quadrangle with a mosque in the center, on the other hand, was founded to educate the future religious, judiciary, and teaching cadres of the Ottoman Empire.

During the time of Mehmed the Conqueror and his immediate successors Istanbul regained its 6th century Roman splendor. The city's domical and minareted skyline took shape by such royal building complexes as Bayezid (1501-1506) , Şehzade Mehmed (1543-1548) , Süleymaniye (1550-1558), Mihrimah Sultan (1562?-1565?) , Sultan Ahmed (1609-1616) Yeni Cami (1597-1663) , Nuruosmaniye (1748-1755) , and Laleli (1759-1763). Their lead-covered domes rose above the red terra-cotta tiled roofs of the one or two storey houses to give Istanbul its particular Turkish identity and urban character.

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