



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 33, Constantinople

(Wikipedia)

Constantinople Greek: Κωνσταντινούπολις, Latin: Cōnstantīnopolis; was the capital city of the Roman Empire (330–395), the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire (395–1204 and 1261–1453), the brief Crusader state known as the Latin Empire (1204–1261), and the Ottoman Empire (1453–1923).

In 324, the ancient city of Byzantium became the new capital of the Roman Empire by Emperor Constantine the Great after whom it was renamed and dedicated on 11 May, 330. From the mid-5th century to the early 13th century, Constantinople was the largest and wealthiest city in Europe. The city became famous for its architectural masterpieces, such as Hagia Sophia, the cathedral of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which served as the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the sacred Imperial Palace where the Emperors lived, the Galata Tower, the Hippodrome and the Golden Gate of the Land Walls. The University of Constantinople was founded in the fifth century and contained numerous artistic and literary treasures before it was sacked in 1204 and 1453, including its vast Imperial Library which contained the remnants of the Library of Alexandria and had over 100,000 volumes of ancient texts. It was instrumental in the advancement of Christianity during Roman and Byzantine times as the home of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and as the guardian of Christendom's holiest relics such as the Crown of thorns and the True Cross.

Constantinople was famed for its massive and complex defences. The first wall of the city was erected by Constantine I and surrounded the city on both land and sea fronts. This formidable complex of defences was one of the most sophisticated of Antiquity. The city was built intentionally to rival Rome and it was claimed that several elevations within its walls matched the 'seven hills' of Rome. Because it was located between the Golden Horn and the Sea of Marmara the land area that needed defensive walls was reduced and this helped it to present an impregnable fortress enclosing magnificent palaces, domes and towers, the result of the prosperity it achieved from being the gateway between two continents (Europe and Asia) and two seas (the Mediterranean and the Black Sea). Although besieged on numerous occasions by various armies, the defences of Constantinople proved impregnable for nearly nine hundred years.

Byzantium took on the name of Kōnstantinoupolis ("city of Constantine", Constantinople) after its re-foundation in 324 under the Emperor Constantine I, who transferred the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium in 330 and designated his new capital officially as Nova Roma (Νέα Ρώμη) 'New Rome'.

Byzantium was settled in the early days of Greek colonial expansion, in around 657 BC, by colonists of the city-state of Megara. This is the first major settlement that would develop on the site of later Constantinople, but the first known settlements was that of Lygos, referred to in Pliny's Natural Histories.

Having restored the unity of the Empire, and, being in the course of major governmental reforms as well as of sponsoring the consolidation of the Christian church, Constantine was well aware that Rome was an unsatisfactory capital. Rome was too far from the frontiers, and hence from the armies and the imperial courts. Yet it had been the capital of the state for over a thousand years and it might have seemed unthinkable to suggest that the capital be moved to a different location. Nevertheless, Constantine identified the site of Byzantium as the right place: a place, readily defended, with easy access to the Danube or the Euphrates frontiers, his court supplied from the rich gardens and sophisticated workshops of Roman Asia, his treasuries filled by the wealthiest provinces of the Empire.

Constantinople was built over six years, and consecrated, as we have seen, on 11 May 330. He divided the expanded city, like Rome into 14 regions and ornamented it with public works worthy of an imperial metropolis. Yet, at first, Constantine's new Rome did not have all the dignities of old Rome. It possessed a proconsul, rather than an Urban Prefect. It had no Praetors, Tribunes, or Quaestors.

Although it did have Senators, they held the title *Clarus*, not *Clarissimus*, like those of Rome. It also lacked the panoply of other administrative offices regulating the food supply, police, statues, temples, sewers, aqueducts or other public works. The new programme of building was carried out in great haste: columns, marbles, doors, and tiles were taken wholesale from the temples of the Empire and moved to the new city.

In similar fashion, many of the greatest works of Greek and Roman art were soon to be seen in its squares and streets. The Emperor stimulated private building by promising householders gifts of land from the imperial estates in Asiana and Pontica and on 18 May 332 he announced that, as in Rome, free distributions of food would be made to the citizens. At the time, the amount is said to have been 80,000 rations a day, doled out from 117 distribution points around the city.

Constantine laid out a new square at the centre of old Byzantium, naming it the Augustaeum. The new senate-house (or Curia) was housed in a basilica on the east side. On the south side of the great square was erected the Great Palace of the Emperor with its imposing entrance, the Chalke (bronze doors) and its ceremonial suite known as the Palace of Daphne. Nearby was the vast Hippodrome for chariot races, seating over 80,000 spectators, and the famed Baths of Zeuxippus. At the western entrance to the Augustaeum was the Milion, a vaulted monument from which distances were measured across the Eastern Roman Empire.

From the Augustaeum led a great street, the Mese, lined with colonnades. As it descended the First Hill of the city and climbed the Second Hill, it passed on the left the Praetorium or law-court. Then it passed through the oval Forum of Constantine where there was a second Senate-house and a high column with a statue of Constantine himself in the guise of Helios, crowned with a halo of seven rays and looking toward the rising sun. From there, the Mese passed on and through the Forum Tauri and then the Forum Bovis and finally up the Seventh Hill (or Xerolophus) and through to the Golden Gate in the Constantinian Wall.

