

## Constantinople

**N**OW that the passing of Turkey is at hand and that the eyes of several powers are cast covetously on Constantinople, the ancient abode of Greek and Persian tyrant, Christian Emperor and Mauslem Csmauli, there is aroused more than passing interest in the queen city of the East. We should think that Constantinople in the natural course of events would fall to the lot of Bulgaria, yet we know Rrussia's long cherished ambition and that she will not give up her hopes without a struggle. The city is commercially and strategically the complete mistress of all traffic passing in and out of the Black Sea and thus the power that holds Constantinople holds Southern Russian trade almost completely at its mercy.

The history of Constantinople begins two thousand five hundred and eighty two years ago, when a handful of settlers amid toil and danger struggled against the current of the swift Hellespont, entered the broad Propontis and disembarked in the long crescent shaped creek known as the Golden Horn and by a few hastily constructed barriers established themselves against the savage natives.

The new settlers were Dorians of Megarian blood and the new site was one well chosen by that thrifty maritime people. Here they were at the gateway between the East and the Black Sea with its fabulous lands beyond, the Eldorado of the Ancients, the land of the Golden Fleece, where kings of untold wealth reigned over the tribes of Colchis ; here was the land of the Amazons the river Thermoden and the homes of the mysterious Hyperboreans. But these kingdoms they did not find, yet what they did discover was enough to name the coast Euxinos, (the hospitable.)

The Megarians had chosen well, and from the first their city was marked out for advancement. Situated on a land locked harbor at the junction of two continents, the culture and enterprise of the West behind it and the riches of the East before, its destiny was necessarily one of commercial greatness.

Strategically it was almost as well placed, being the greatest frontier post in Europe against the onslaught of the East. As fortresses went in the days of its founding it was well nigh impregnable.

The history of Byzantium as an independent state was a long and eventful one, and, except for a space of thirty years domination by the Persians, she enjoyed freedom for the first three hundred years. She heard the tramp of Xerxes' columns when he landed the myriads of the East on Greece. She saw Alexander of Macedon start on his career of conquest. She saw and helped the Roman in the pursuit of the flying legions of Antiochus the Great.

Of the internal history of Byzantium we know comparatively little, she was one of those cities that wisely made an early alliance with Rome and thus obtained easy terms. She was given the status "*civitas libera et foederata*" being allowed complete liberty in all save her foreign affairs. Vespasian long after the Republic had passed away stripped her of her privileges and threw her into Thrace henceforth to exist as a mere provisional town but she still continued to flourish under the Pax Romana of the Early Empire.

During the struggles of the military empires Byzantium suffered much and in 196 A.D., she very nearly met ruin at the hands of Severus and his victorious Illyrian legions. At a later period she was seized by an usurping emperor and he being captured and killed the city shared the fate of his adherents.

The strong Illyrian Emperors who staved off the impending ruin of the Empire gave the city time to regain her wealth and lost prosperity and the near residence of Diocletian gave her a semi-imperial aspect.

Licinius made Byzantium his chief fortress and it was here he made his last desperate stand in 323 A. D. against Constantine, Emperor of the West. For many months the war stood still beneath its walls. But at last the city surrendered; the cause of Licinius was lost Constantine was sole master of the Roman world.

Constantine saw the great need of a central city as Rome the capital was far in the West and his brilliant mind at once saw the qualifications of Byzantium for

the post. It was at once made his capital and christened New Rome—a name that comes down to us only in Poetry or Romance.

At the death of its founder, Constantinople, as the city was thenceforth called, was indisputably the first city in the Empire.

In 565 died Justin the Great. He had defeated the Huns in 558 and also suppressed the famous Nika riots, but his great fame rests on his compilation of Roman law hitherto a ponderous mass of detached fragments and precedents. Justinian had these codified into usable form and they thus became the basis of all modern Jurisprudence. Justinian left a depleted treasury and a broken army in the face of a threatening cloud of Avaric and Slavonic barbarians in the North East.

Heracilus who reigned in the early part of the seventh century subdued the Avars and Slavs, captured Cteisphon, Capital of Persia and ravaged the country. He celebrated the last and greatest triumph ever celebrated by a Roman Emperor. His conquests surpassed those of Trojan and Severus, and he had led his troops farther east than any Roman general had ever penetrated. His task too was the hardest ever imposed on any emperor—to start a war with his very capital beleagued and three fourths of his provinces in the hands of three powerful foes. Since Caesar no one had fought so incessantly or with such uniform success. “Vain pomp and glory of this world.” Even at the moment of his triumph his fate was at hand and the star of Mohomet was rising in the Eastern sky; the Saracen invasion was about to begin; the prophet was dispatching his famous circular letter to the princes of the world inviting them to embrace Islam; and eight centuries of rapine, murder, devastation and struggle between Mahometan and Greek was looming up on the horizon. Had Heraclius foreseen his end he would doubtless have wished that the day of his triumph might also be his last as Emperor of the East.

Mahomet the strange seer, fanatic and imposter had united the turbulent polytheists of Arabia into a compact band of fanatics, burning to carry throughout the world, by force of arms, the new war cry that God



was God and Mahomet his Prophet. With this force the Caliph hurled himself on the stricken Empire.

The Bulgars, a tribe of Finnish origin, whose interests are more or less bound up in those of Constantinople even to this day, appeared on the scene. They came from the region of the Pruth and Dneister and settled between the Danube and the Eastern Balkans and the date of 679 marks the first year of the reign of Isperish first King of the Bulgars. They were troublesome neighbors for a long time for the two people always had an antipathy for each other.

During the next three hundred years the war between Saracen and Greek went on with unabated vigor and the victories of Leo the Isaurian were the main features of the early part of that period.

Between 976-1025 Basil II, gained many victories—conquering the Bulgars and destroying their power for the next three hundred years. Armenia also fell before his hand but in this he only destroyed the barrier between himself and Persia. About this time the Buhanid princes put an end to the Caliphate and for a long time the Empire had no great centralized foe with which to contend in the east. But about 1048 the advance of the victorious Seljouks appeared in Armenia and in 1064 Ani capital of that country and the greatest Roman fortress in the East fell into their hands. Romanus Diogenes obtained several successes over them but in 1071 he was enticed into the desert as far as Manzikert and forced to fight with a weary and divided force. For a long day his horsemen rolled back the clouds of Turkish bowmen but in endeavoring to retreat to camp a gap was made in his army. Through this the hords of lancers flocked; all was lost and even the emperor was taken prisoner.

The next years were ones of rebellion and disaster and it was stated that at one time there were seven emperors living in Constantinople. The chief accomplishment of the emperors of the time seemed to be lying and treachery and many of them swore enough false oaths to startle some modern emperors.

The Crusades—the great migrations of Europeans towards the East—were being forshadowed by the raids

of a few bold Norman knights from the nearby Duchy of Apulia. By 1095 the Myriads of the West were mustered ; they rolled down through Thrace across the Hellespont, pushed back the Mahometan border two hundred miles and captured Jerusalem. The Seljouks were so hard hit that it was well nigh a century before they recovered. The next century was one of commercial and political decay for Constantinople. The city like a doomed ship was steadily sinking to her ruin. In 1204 the town was sacked by the Crusaders and a Latin Empire set up, Baldwin of Flanders being raised to the purple. This ill-starred line dragged out fifty seven years that were nothing other than a protracted death agony. In 1260 the Byzantine army won the last great victory it was ever to achieve and the next year the city fell once more into Eastern hands.

The period of 1281-1326 marks the rise of a new power in the East—the Ottoman Turks. These were the greatest and cruelest conquerors among the Turkish tribes and by 1329 all the Asiatic portions of the Empire with the sole exception of Chalcedon and the parts facing the Bosphorus were in the hands of the enemy. In 1254 Orkkan, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, made the first Turkish settlement of Europe on the plains of Gallipoli but it was not the last. Murad, his son and successor sustained his father's reputation by defeating the Romans at Adrianople, capturing all Thrace from sea to sea. The Empire was a mere head without a body and was so completely at the mercy of the Turk that the Emperor was compelled to march with Murad against Philadelphia the last Christian stronghold in Asia.

Indeed the Empire had sunk low when the heir of Constantine and Justinian was forced to take the field at the behest of an upstart Turkish Emir to crush the last vestiges of freedom from among his compatriots.

From 1370 the history of the city is a mere piece of local narrative. Had the city then fallen, only in two ways might European History have been modified. The Italian sea power might have been straitened before the appointed time and the Renaissance might have been

shorn of some of its brilliance by the dispersion of the Greeks before Italy was fitted to receive them.

The last years may be passed in silence as they were years of unending gloom.

In 1448 Constantine the last ruler to sit on the noble throne of his ancestors began to reign. Mohammed the greatest Sultan that ever ruled the Turk resolved on getting Constantinople and making that city the capital of his Empire. He readily picked a wolf and lamb quarrel with his vassel and in the autumn of 1452 he fell on the devoted city.

By spring he had seventy thousand men before the walls while the garrison consisted of only nine thousand men mostly mercenaries.

Constantine and his second in command Gustiniani the Genoese did all that brave and skilful men might in order to protract the siege—they led sorties and organized attacks on the Turkish fleet. But the end came May 29th., 1453. The Sultan had opened several large breaches especially at the gate of St. Romanus on the north. The storm was obviously at hand and the doomed emperor rode out to meet his fate. The assault commenced at dawn and the chief attack was launched against the position at St. Romanus. There stood Constantine and Gustiniani with their best men around them and reared a barrier of steel before the oncoming assailants. But the defenders were only human—their ranks grew thin and weary; Gustiniani was taken on board his gallery to die; then one last rush, the Emperor and his few companions were trodden under foot and the victorious Janissaries rushed into the desolate streets of the city seeking in vain for foes to fight.

Mohammed entered and his eyes beheld what many conquerors had wished in vain to see. At last he came to St. Sophia where the soldiery were dividing their spoils. He bade a Molloch ascend the pulpit and there the cry that God was God and Mohammed his prophet rang throughout the dome, proclaiming to the world that Constantinople had fallen.

All Christianity stood aghast as it saw the imperial standard fall and the end come to the longest lived Empire that the world had ever seen.



Since then the Queen city of the East has been under the grasp of the Sultan and very little of her story is known but even now the time seems ripe for her to own the sway of a new master. But to whom it shall fall is a matter of gave uncertainty.

That Constantinople deserves a place of high honor in the hall of nations no one can deny. For she was the real bulwark against the Saracen and when Charles Martel was slaughtering the Moorish hordes of Granada at Lours, Leo the Isaurian was beating off the Grand Army of the Cailiphate under the command of a royal prince. And although the Empire was gobbled up by the Turk yet the effort he had to make in so doing was so gigantic that it was the culmination of his real power.

And thus it often is that the nation that deserves the greatest honor and respect from us is the most neglected and ill-spoken of and such has been the case with Byzantium for even to this day the name is invariably linked with such epithets as cowardiy, frivolous or mean. Those who maintain those opinions are easily discerned as disciples of the Gibbon and Water class, and are not to be taken seriously, for the East Romans really had these vices in a much less degree than many of the modern Western nations. And perhaps when Constantinople comes to her own again due recognition will be accorded her for the noble part she played for a thousand years in European History.

J. J. R. H. F.

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You must not fight too often with one enemy, or you will teach him all your art of war.

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Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin ; Each victory will help you some other to win.

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Yet one thing secures us whatever betide. The Scripture assures us the Lord will provide.