

# City of Caesar, City of God



Constantinople and Jerusalem in Late Antiquity

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# Always in Second Place: Constantinople as an Imperial and Religious Center in Late Antiquity

Jerusalem and Istanbul are both metropolises of world standing. The former is of central importance for three world religions, and this is the principal reason why Jerusalem has played a key role in the Middle East conflict for many decades. Istanbul is less contested. The city in large part owes its fascination to the circumstance that not only is it one of the major urban centers of the Islamic world, but it also represents – now as in the past – a bridge to Europe. Neither of the two cities was originally intended to assume such a role. Even a millennium after their founding, and much longer in the case of Jerusalem, both cities were no more than regional centers. Despite its strategic location, Byzantium remained a polis of minor importance, while Jerusalem was the main urban center of a small nation that carried little weight in the conflicts of the Near Eastern world and paid the price for its intransigence towards the Romans with the eradication of this very center. It was late antiquity that made both cities great, more precisely Constantine the Great, who effectively became the (new) founder of both Constantinople and Jerusalem. Had he not expanded Byzantium and turned it into an imperial residence, Constantinople would never have become the seat of emperors and sultans. Jerusalem, on the other hand, presents a different case, as Constantine never set foot in it. Moreover, it was by no means inevitable, that a city which had played an important role in the formative years of Christianity should become relevant for Christians in the Late Roman present. It was primarily thanks to Constantine's intensive patronage that Jerusalem experienced such a rapid rise, and it was only because the city of Christ had become the object of pious longing that it was able to occupy an important place in the religious topography of Islam.

This article will focus on the city on the Bosphorus. My approach will not be chronological, as the city's history would all too easily become imperial history – from the late fourth century onward, metropolis and Empire indeed appear to have formed an indissoluble whole. But why was this so? To put it differently: why did Constantinople not remain a mere residence, with the ultimately trivial function of providing the emperor and his entourage with housing and a functioning infrastructure? Why did Constantine's foundation step out of the shadow of Rome like no other imperial residence of the third and fourth centuries had done before? Why did Constantinople, of all places, become the Christian city of Caesar?

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The first part of this article will try to answer these questions. In the following section, I shall attempt to sharpen the contours of Constantinople's sacred status, this being the precondition of its bond with Jerusalem. Finally, I will briefly address the question as to why Constantinople never attained paradigmatic status. Indeed, this capital never became a model, neither for Jerusalem nor for any other city.

## Second Rome: The Making of the New Capital

Constantine had turned the city named after him into a Second Rome.<sup>1</sup> The old Byzantium was enlarged to four times its original size and the center laid out on a monumental scale. To populate the new capital, inhabitants were drawn from the surroundings and further afield, while an administration was installed, for the city at least.<sup>2</sup> When Constantine died in 337, all this seemed to have been in vain. Although his successors paid reverence to the new center on the Bosporus – Constantius II (337–361) and Valens (364–378) in particular made every effort to promote the city's development<sup>3</sup> – they seldom resided in Constantinople.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, the emperors only passed through the city, coming from the West or the Danube,

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1 This section draws heavily on Pfeilschifter 2013.

2 Regarding Constantine and his new foundation, see Berger 2006, 441–450; Bassett 2004, 17–36; Dagron 1984, 19–47, 120–124; Mango 2004, 23–36; Millar 1992, 53–57; Bauer 1996, 257–261. Moser 2018, 57–72, now argues convincingly against the view that Constantine established even the nucleus of a second senate. For the further rise of Constantinople in the fourth century, see Dagron 1984, 48–72, 86–96, 124–137, 192–196, 519–522; Errington 2006, 142–168; Beck 1973b, 1–10; Mango 2004, 37–42.

3 For Constantius, see most recently Moser 2018, 131–168, 189–276. This emperor founded the Constantinopolitan senate in 350/51. For Valens, see Lenski 2002, 114, 278–280, 388, 399. Valens' commitment is all the more remarkable as he was not overly fond of the city that had supported the usurper Procopius (Socr. 4,38,5).

4 From 330 onward Constantine mostly resided in Constantinople. Constantius II came to the city following the death of his father; after 337, however, his presence in Constantinople is securely attested only for 342 (January), 346 (May to August), 349 (for an undetermined period of time), and 359/360 (late 359 to March 360). That he personally attended in 345 the ground-breaking of the baths named after him is, in my opinion, not at all implied by *Chron. Pasch.* p. 534 Dindorf. Julian was in Constantinople from December 361 to May 362. Valentinian I spent the first weeks of his reign there (March/April 364), elevating Valens to the co-emperorship at the Hebdomon in March. The latter resided in Constantinople from December 364 to July 365. In September of that year, Procopius was acclaimed emperor in Constantinople. After the suppression of the revolt in May 366, Valens probably spent the winter of 366/367 there (see Lenski 2002, 114 and n. 288), followed by a few days or weeks in December/January 370 (*Cod. Theod.* 5,1,2 with Mommsen's comment in the apparatus and Errington 2000, 902–904), several weeks in 370 (March/April), later six months (December to May 371), and less than two weeks in 378 (May/June). Omitting Procopius but calculating generously, this amounts to somewhere between three and a half to four years – from a total of 41 years. Here and in the following, all the details of imperial itineraries until 476 are based on Seck 1919. See also Dagron 1984, 78–84; Destephen 2016, 41–62, 355–371.

on their way to the Persian border or vice versa. The emperor's whereabouts were dictated by military needs, and Constantinople lay far to the rear of the combat zone. When in the East, Constantius II favored Antioch, as did Valens. Constantinople was largely left to itself, and mostly gained notoriety on account of its fierce Christian sectarian disputes.

Things began to change with Theodosius I (379–395). This emperor preferred Constantinople to Antioch, which he never visited. The metropolis on the Bosphorus became the customary residence of his family, and he himself resided in the city for more than half his reign.<sup>5</sup> Although personal preference was undoubtedly one of the reasons for this choice, the precarious political situation was certainly more important: the Danube border remained extremely vulnerable after Valens' catastrophe at Adrianople, and the political situation in the West was so unstable that Theodosius was in constant expectation of his presence being needed there (as did actually occur in two major military campaigns). Antioch, on the other hand, was too far on the periphery to allow for rapid interventions in the West, and relations with the Persian Empire were peaceful anyway.<sup>6</sup> Theodosius actively promoted the development of Constantinople, not only through building projects<sup>7</sup> but also in the field of church politics. He convened a council in Constantinople, brought relics into the city, confiscated the churches of the Homoeans, strengthened the small Nicaean congregation, and made their bishop one of the foremost of the Empire.<sup>8</sup>

Felix K. Maier, in a new study, convincingly demonstrates that during the fourth century non-military aspects of legitimation became ever more important in imperial (self-)representation. This was especially true for Theodosius I.<sup>9</sup> The development prepared the ground for the transition of 395. The unexpected death of Theodosius

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5 November 380 to July 381; September 381 to May 384; September 384 to August 386; October 386 to August 387; July to September 391; November 391 to April 394. This adds up to more than nine years, from a reign of 16 years. See – in addition to Seeck 1919 – Dagron 1984, 84–85; Croke 2010, 242; Des-Stephen 2016, 62–81, 371–382. In my opinion, Croke's postulated shift from military activity to a concentration on court and city, aimed at "protecting, improving, and promoting the lives of his imperial subjects" (244, 263–264, here 263), is not plausible for Theodosius I.

6 Van Dam 2010, 74, remarks: "The prominence of Constantinople had shifted the focus of the eastern emperors toward the northern frontiers". It was the other way around.

7 See Leppin 2003, 188–201; Ernesti 1998, 95–100, 143–154; Bauer 1996, 187–202; Isele 2010, 98–106; Matthews 1975, 118–121; Croke 2010, 257–262. Following Mango 2004, 43–45, Mayer 2002, 125–127, 136–137, places particular emphasis on the fact that Theodosius' building program – notably the Forum of Theodosius and the erection of an obelisk in the Hippodrome – was intended to create a visual similarity between Constantinople and Old Rome, and to establish it once and for all as the capital. That Theodosius wished to 'humiliate' (125) Rome, seems, however, rather exaggerated.

8 See Tiersch 2002, 111–124; Errington 1997, 33–43, 54–59, 61–62; Dagron 1984, 449–461; Liebeschuetz 1990, 157–165; Ritter 1965, 45–53, 92–96, 106–107, 112–115, 128–130, 233–235; Gómez-Villegas 2000, 119–131, 142–144, 153–165, 176–183; Ernesti 1998, 51–57, 60–63, 113; Leppin 2003, 58, 64–66, 73–79, 180.

9 Maier 2019, 339–450.

not only made Constantinople's status as new capital permanent, the year 395 actually represented a turning point for the political system. By this, I do not mean the division of the Empire into East and West, but the sudden withdrawal of Theodosius' sons and successors to their respective residences. This was at first only due to a coincidence: the two young emperors Arcadius and Honorius, while not incompetent, were by no means outstanding rulers. They both lacked the inclination and aptitude for military exploits and displayed a certain inertia. Honorius initially remained in Milan, before relocating to Ravenna in 402.<sup>10</sup> Very soon, however, the Western Empire proved unable to fend off its enemies. A turbulent political situation developed, leading to an increasingly desperate struggle for survival that did not allow for the long-term stabilization of stationary imperial rule.

In the East, Honorius' brother Arcadius and, to an even greater extent, the latter's son Theodosius II left their mark on an entire era. During the thirteen years of his reign, Arcadius only visited Asia Minor a few times on summertime retreats, in total probably spending no more than a year outside of Constantinople. Theodosius spent just one and a half years outside the city – in a reign of 42 years. Not a single week was spent on a military campaign. Yet, there would have been at least one urgent – and for earlier emperors, imperative – occasion for him to conduct a campaign. His uncle Honorius died childless in 423, leaving the whole Empire united under Theodosius' rule. At this point, his first priority should have been to travel to Italy and present himself to his new subjects. Instead, he remained in Constantinople and attempted to assert his authority over the West through a vice-regent of sorts: Honorius' last *magister militum*, Castinus. Barely four months later, however, a civil servant named John was acclaimed emperor in Rome. Even then, Theodosius showed no intention of leading his army to Italy. Instead, he simply relinquished his claim to sole rule and only sought to secure the West for his family. The emperor had a five-year-old cousin named Valentinian who was also Honorius' nephew and had even been born at the court in Ravenna, but had so far been ignored by Theodosius. Now he had Valentinian proclaimed emperor in Thessalonica (without going there himself), betrothed him to his daughter Eudoxia, and sent him with his mother Galla Placidia and a sizable army to Italy on a successful campaign against John.<sup>11</sup>

Was Theodosius too lethargic and a coward? It may be that he failed to recognize the needs of the people and the complexity of the practical requirements when he attempted to rule through a proxy. Since the third century, the Mediterranean world could barely be controlled from a single geographical point. Even sole rulers who hastened from one end of the Empire to the other had found it very difficult to do so, and with short-lived success. In any case, Theodosius would have had to revive

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<sup>10</sup> Only short visits to other, mostly nearby cities – never outside of northern Italy – interrupted Honorius' sojourn in Milan until 402. During the 21 years from 402 to his death in 423, Honorius probably spent only two and a half years away from Ravenna.

<sup>11</sup> Olymp. *fig.* 43,1 Blockley; Philost. *HE* 12,13; Socr. *HE* 7,23,1–10; Hyd. s. a. 424. For the events, see Stein <sup>2</sup>1959, 282–285; Bury 1923, 221–224; Oost 1968, 178–193; Stickler 2002, 27–35.

the tradition of the itinerant emperor that his grandfather had still adhered to. Yet, had he done so, the outcome would have been to once again strengthen the military as an ‘acceptance group’.

In order to explain this, we must briefly look back at the Principate of the first two centuries AD. In those days, a socio-political order which Egon Flaig has described as an ‘acceptance system’ had established itself in the city of Rome. This concept refers to a rule that owes its existence to the ‘losable’ support of certain social groups, in contrast to a legitimacy that is thought to be ‘un-losable’ or conferred by a supreme authority. The stability of such a monarch’s rule does not rest on lineage (dynastic principle) or on a transcendent legitimation (divine right) but on the support of the relevant socio-political groups. This support is not granted once and for all, but must be secured over and over again by the ruler. It can also be denied to him. Acceptance is a fleeting commodity. At any time, a challenger may rise and court the various socio-political groups: the ruler can be overthrown by a usurper.<sup>12</sup>

During the Principate, the key socio-political groups were the senatorial aristocracy, the *plebs urbana*, and the army. This bound the emperor to the city, especially since the primary military influence was long wielded by the Praetorians. Nevertheless, the emperor could allow himself to leave Rome for extended periods of time, even if the reason for the absence was not war – as in the case of Tiberius on Capri or of Hadrian’s travels throughout the Empire. This did not pose a threat to the emperor’s rule. During the course of the second century, the political situation on the Empire’s borders started to become precarious. Marcus Aurelius spent seven years away from Rome. Finally, the bond between emperor and city dissolved during the crisis of the third century: the ruler marched with his army from one trouble spot to the next, with the result that the legions assumed control of elevating and deposing emperors. They had taken the place of the Praetorian Guard, and even more importantly, they had become the *only* relevant acceptance group. The Senate and the people stayed in Rome, the geographical distance depriving them of any appreciable influence on the exercise of power. Rome remained the venerable center of the Empire, but the emperors were merely visitors in their own city. This situation continued beyond the renewed stabilization of the Empire by Diocletian and Constantine, and into the reign of Theodosius I.<sup>13</sup>

It was the emperor’s withdrawal to Constantinople that allowed him to shake off the domination of the soldiers and the demands of the generals. With the ruler now safely secluded in the city, his popularity among the army and the opinion of the troops were no longer crucial. The fact that the city on the Bosphorus became the capital was, initially, perhaps only due to the personal preference of Theodosius I. However, unlike the provincial town of Ravenna, Constantinople was suited to accommo-

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<sup>12</sup> Flaig 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Halfmann 1986 provides an itinerary until 284 and also analyses the choice of residences and the circumstances under which imperial journeys took place.

dating the emperor and his court on a permanent basis. There was a palace and a hippodrome, a senate and a municipal administration – and, above all, Constantinople was a metropolis. It was the most dynamic city in the world. The number of inhabitants had multiplied since its founding in 326, with an estimated 200,000 people living on the Bosphorus around the middle of the fifth century. The entire city was filled with the sounds of building, trading, manufacturing, and living, while the government did what it could to regulate these activities in order to retain some measure of control over the development of the metropolis. Although since the death of Constantine no emperor had resided on the Bosphorus for very long at a time, his city was better suited than any other in the eastern Mediterranean to assume the role of a capital, due to its infrastructure and its strategic location on the transport routes, but above all because of its population. There is nothing so effective at neutralizing military power as a large city with bustling life, countless people, and narrow streets.<sup>14</sup>

When Theodosius' grandson relinquished his claim to the Western Empire in 424, this was not a sign of lethargy but of political reason. Were he to spend too much time in Italy or Gaul to bring these provinces under his control, he would run the risk of losing the East in the meantime. The stability of his own, more modest realm was preferable to the high-risk gamble of attempting to exercise power over the entire Mediterranean by himself. Constantinople was the grandson's city of choice as well, probably again out of personal inclination but now also out of necessity.

That a system similar to the one in Rome soon developed in Constantinople had nothing to do with tradition or historical reminiscence. The continuity had been broken by more than 150 years of itinerant emperorship. However, since society had remained much the same, as had most aspects of imperial rule, and the conditions of the cities were nearly identical, in a similar context a comparable system evolved.

At first glance, such a continuity of similar conditions might appear unlikely given the already advanced Christianization of the Empire, the greater distance between the late-antique emperor and his subjects, and the dynastic principle. The Christian emperor's belief that he had been chosen by God was indeed somewhat at odds with the principles of the acceptance system. However, the resulting tension was offset by the fact that the emperor never succeeded in elevating his position into a transcendental realm. He had no monopoly on the interpretation of the divine will. God had conferred upon him the responsibility for the Empire. If the emperor failed to live up to this responsibility, every Christian subject was entitled to his own judgment – and the withdrawal of his support. The alleged seclusion of the late-antique emperor, which never allowed him to leave the palace and thus deprived him of any opportunity to meet his subjects, is a scholarly construct. Although the emperor was strongly elevated by representation and ceremony, he regularly moved about in Constantinople and interacted with the population. The dynastic idea also influenced

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<sup>14</sup> An excellent outline of Constantinople's development is given by Beck 1973b, 7–12. For population figures, see Jacoby 1961, 102–109.

late-antique emperors, as it does every monarchy. However, lineage or designation by the predecessor never shielded the emperor from usurpation: the manner in which power was wielded was more important than its source. The hereditary principle always remained restricted by the conditions of the acceptance system.

The relevant acceptance groups were, as in Rome, the soldiers, the elites, and the people. There was no army within the walls, and the guards and security forces were weak in numbers and strength. They could not control the city by force of arms. For the emperor, this was both an advantage and a disadvantage: the soldiers were not able to neutralize the other acceptance groups, but neither were they capable of striking down an insurrection. Furthermore, the bonds of loyalty that tied them to the emperor were particularly close. The acceptance of the military was thus relatively easy to obtain.

The elites, as an aristocracy of office, stood before the emperor as individuals. All decisions regarding their political and social advancement were made by him. For this reason, relations between aristocrats were determined by competition and not by solidarity. They never took a stand against the emperor. The most common form of acceptance withdrawal was not one of combined aristocratic opposition but of conspiracy. Furthermore, especially in the later fifth century, individual men of power attempted to dominate the emperor and to transfer the acceptance to a new position akin to that of a majordomo. These attempts failed sooner or later, as the loyalty of the socio-political groups remained oriented towards the emperorship.

Of greatest importance were the people. This acceptance group alone dared to voice open criticism of the emperor, articulating its concerns clearly and with astonishing unity. Since the individual disappeared in the crowd, he was protected by anonymity – the emperor could not hold large segments of the population accountable. The opposition to his rule expressed itself in words, but also in actions. Violence was the hallmark of popular expressions of will, especially in the absence of institutionalized mechanisms for the resolution of conflicts. Resistance not only emanated from the circus factions but from the people as a whole. It could be encountered in the Hippodrome or anywhere else in the city. The collective body of the people served as a permanent behavioral corrective, thus compelling the emperor to attend to the needs of the urban masses carefully.

The clergy naturally played an important role in a Christian empire. However, clerics did not constitute an acceptance group. The bishop of Constantinople was in some respects the most powerful churchman of the Empire – more on this below – but he never became the protector of his city as did so many bishops around the Mediterranean. The presence of emperor and court did not allow him to interfere in public administration, and in the face of many competing influences he was not even able to establish himself as the center of Christian social relations. The bishop was limited to his pastoral duties: spiritual succor, consolation, holding together his flock. Regarding monks, they were very often at odds with the bishop or with each other. Only rarely did they form a forceful lobby, and when they did, the government



successfully denounced them as troublemakers. Their resistance was not acknowledged as such and thus only elicited repressive responses. This was not a problem for the so-called holy men. The authority of these exceptional ascetics rested upon their proximity to God. But this implied a distance to the petty affairs of the world which could be reduced only at the cost of sacrificing an enormous amount of social capital. Therefore, only rarely could holy men bring their reputation to bear, and they were unable to apply continuous pressure on the emperor. Their opposition was so sporadic that it was of little significance for the functioning of the acceptance system.

In spite of the acceptance groups' considerable potential for exerting influence, notably by the people, the emperor's position was by no means weak. If his behavior was more or less in accordance with Christian norms, if he embraced orthodoxy, and if he cared for the welfare of his subjects, he could hold on to power. The acceptance system in Constantinople provided a strong societal order inasmuch as it was fairly tolerant of an emperor's failings, up to a point. To endanger his throne, the ruler had to commit a number of serious errors regarding status recognition and interaction. For this reason, the emperor was rarely overthrown in the fifth and sixth centuries. Only a handful of usurpers appeared on the scene and even fewer succeeded.

Compared with the city of Rome, this socio-political order was considerably more robust and almost exclusively focused on Constantinople. This is clearly demonstrated by the emperor's much stronger connection to the city: the successors of Theodosius followed his example by confining themselves to Constantinople and rarely leaving the city. The emperor Marcian (450–457) conducted a short campaign in the Balkans at the beginning of his reign, something no emperor would do for the next 140 years.<sup>15</sup> It was not until 590 or 592 that Maurice broke with tradition and personally led a campaign in the Balkans. In Constantinople, however, the emperor's departure met with strong opposition, which was mirrored in an extremely unfavorable depiction of the campaign in the sources. Not only was the operation a failure – the enemy was not seen once – it was also marred by a solar eclipse, a sea storm, a raging boar, the birth of a freakish child with the tail of a fish, and a treacherous murder. Maurice' obstinate war was seen as a violation of the divine order. And there was another problem: the arrival of a Persian delegation forced the emperor to return briefly not long after his departure, and further diplomatic business compelled him to abort the campaign altogether. Thus, functional reasons also prevented the emperor from leaving Constantinople. An authorized representative who might

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<sup>15</sup> ACO II 1,1 p. 27–30; 1,2 p. 16, 29; 3,1 p. 21, 23; Theod. Lect. *Epit.* 360. Having received news of a Hunnic invasion, Marcian set out for the western Balkans in the late summer of 451. Soon thereafter, he was able to report the successful conclusion of the campaign. How far the emperor came and whether he actually caught sight of the enemy remains uncertain.

have received the negotiators did not exist. The emperor could not delegate such matters but had to settle them personally – in the capital.<sup>16</sup>

After this experience, Maurice stayed at home for the rest of his reign. It was not until 612 that an emperor joined the troops again. Having arrived in Caesarea in eastern Asia Minor, however, Heraclius was told by the commanding general and *magister militum* Priscus: “An emperor is not permitted to leave the palace and to be with the armies far afield.” In the camp, Heraclius had no other choice but to endure the impertinence of his general – the soldiers apparently shared the opinion of their commander. The emperor did not meet the standard his subjects expected from his behavior. The full exercise of imperial power was dependent upon the degree of acceptance, and, being far from Constantinople, Heraclius could do very little – precisely because he was far from Constantinople. In Caesarea, he came to recognize that his authority did not count for much if the capital’s acceptance groups were not there to support it. It is very telling that he was able to remove Priscus from office only later, in Constantinople.<sup>17</sup> A further campaign in the following year ended with the loss of Syria to the Persians. Heraclius had suffered a great loss of prestige, thus rendering it impossible for him to assume command again.<sup>18</sup>

In the following decade, the Romans witnessed the worst catastrophes in living memory: the Persians also occupied Egypt and parts of Asia Minor, the Avars gained the upper hand in the Balkans, Constantinople was afflicted by hunger and epidemics, and the Empire was on the brink of collapse. Yet, when Heraclius made plans for an African expedition, Patriarch Sergius was said to have made him swear in church that he would not leave the city.<sup>19</sup> By the year 622, however, the situation had become so desperate that hardly any opposition arose when he set out on a military campaign to Asia Minor. At least his goal was not Africa, and the emperor returned after the end of the campaigning season. But two years later, he left Constantinople for five years of continuous warfare, not even returning to the city during the great siege of 626.<sup>20</sup> Thus the bond between the emperor and Constantinople dissolved after all. But it was only a situation of extreme emergency that allowed an emperor

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**16** Theophyl. Sim. *Hist.* 5,16,1–6,3,8; Theoph. AM 6083 (p. 268–269 de Boor). For context, see Whitby 1983, 331–332; Whitby 1988, 156–157.

**17** Niceph. *Brev.* 2: οὐκ ἐξὸν βασιλεῖ ἔφασκε καταλιμπάνειν βασιλεία καὶ ταῖς πόρρω ἐπιχωριάξεν δυνάμεσιν; *Vit. Theod. Syc.* 152–155; Seb. 33–34 (p. 112–113 Abgaryan); *Chron. Pasch.* p. 703 Dindorf. For historical context, see Kaegi 1973, 324–328; Viermann 2021, 153–156.

**18** Seb. 34 (p. 114f. Abgaryan); *Vit. Theod. Syc.* 166. See Kaegi 1973, 328–329; Stratos 1979, 67–73.

**19** Niceph. *Brev.* 8.

**20** For the year 622: Theoph. AM 6113 (p. 302–306 de Boor); Niceph. *Brev.* 12; Theod. *Sync. Obsid.* 12 (p. 302 Sternbach/Makk); 14 (p. 303); Seb. 38 (p. 124 Abgaryan) (with Howard-Johnston 1999, 213); Georg. *Pis. Exp. Pers.* 1,108–157; 2,8–3,340; *Bon.* 5–9; *Patr. Const.* 2,53. See Stratos 1968, 126–127; Kaegi 2003, 107–112; Oikonomidès 1975. Departure in 624: *Chron. Pasch.* p. 713–714 Dindorf; Theoph. AM 6114 (p. 306 de Boor); Seb. 38 (p. 123–124); Theod. *Sync. Obsid.* 11–12 (p. 302–303). See Gerland 1894, 331–337, 349–350; Stratos, 363–364; Whitby/Whitby 1989, 204–205; Howard-Johnston 1999, 213–214. For another interpretation of these years, see now Viermann 2021, 179–185.

to break with tradition, and thus also with the established system of rule. In the field, he indeed exposed himself once again to the determining influence of the army.

The emperor also rarely left the city on non-military business. Religious motives, for instance the fulfillment of a vow, were apparently deemed valid justification for absences, although the sources rarely speak of them.<sup>21</sup> Other than this, the emperor's presence is only attested in the city's immediate vicinity, in the suburban palaces in Europe or on the opposite shore of the Propontis. With very few exceptions, he was never more than a few hours away from the city. He could thus return at any moment and react to unexpected developments on the spot.<sup>22</sup> By this, I am referring not only to foreign envoys but also to conspiracies and uprisings, which nothing could quell as effectively as the emperor's personal intervention. When Tiberius II spent thirty days in a palace outside the city to attend the vintage, his opponents made plans for a coup. Tiberius had to hasten back with all speed to prevent the worst from happening.<sup>23</sup>

It was not just that Constantinople, like other capitals, benefited from its status as imperial residence and found its actual *raison d'être* therein. The emperor also was bound to the city. Constantinople was not simply the location of a palace. The exercise of imperial power, even the existence of emperorship itself, was only possible in the city. The fact that an acceptance system also emerged in Constantinople was certainly not a foregone conclusion, but it was not surprising in light of its similarity to Rome. What is surprising, however, is the concentration, the compression of this system within this one city, in a space of little more than fourteen square kilometers. The remainder of the vast Empire, the 'rest,' as one might say, did not belong to the political system.

The reason for this extreme separation of 'inside' and 'outside' was the city's geographical situation as well as its fortifications. The Bosphorus lay at the junction of the sea routes from the Black Sea to the Aegean and the Mediterranean and of the land route connecting northwestern Europe to Asia. In spite of this, the city had to some extent been isolated since the days of its foundation: it was separated from the cities of Asia Minor by the sea, while the European hinterland had not been settled by the Greeks. Furthermore, the hinterland was inhabited by Thracian tribes who were separated from Byzantium by cultural differences and ethnic background, as well as a lesser degree of urbanization. This only began to change when Thrace became a Roman province in the first century AD, followed by a sharp increase in

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<sup>21</sup> In 515, after his victory over Vitalian, Anastasius travelled to the Sosthenion on the middle Bosphorus, where the rebel had pitched his camp. Once there, he spent many days offering thanks in the Chapel of the Archangel Michael (Mal. 16,16; Ioann. Nic. 89,87). In 563, fulfilling a vow, Justinian visited a church in Germia in northern Galatia (Theoph. AM 6056 [p. 240 de Boor]). Cf. Destephen 2018.

<sup>22</sup> The imperial residences were either located within a ten kilometer radius of the city or could easily be reached by a short boat ride. A list of Constantinople's suburban palaces is provided by Janin 1964, 138–153.

<sup>23</sup> Greg. Tur. *Franc.* 5,30.

the importance of towns. However, Thrace never reached the levels of urbanization that characterized the core areas of the Mediterranean cultures, e.g., Greece, Italy, or even Africa. When Byzantium rose to become a metropolis in the reign of Constantine the Great and thereafter, a much sharper contrast developed between the capital and its surroundings compared to Rome and Latium.

In the nearly 900 years between its foundation by Constantine and the Fourth Crusade, not once the city was taken by force. This was not due to the idleness of its enemies – attempts were indeed made to conquer it – but to its strategic location and above all to the strength of its fortifications. The triangular area that roughly represents the layout of Constantinople was surrounded by the sea on two sides: by the Golden Horn to the north and by the Propontis to the south. The only thing that mattered here was to prevent the enemy from landing by boat. Particularly vulnerable sections of the coast were protected by fortifications, but as long as the Roman fleet controlled the sea and did not revolt, there was little to fear from this side. This was the situation throughout late antiquity for the most part, and remained so until the Islamic invaders deliberately attacked the long coastlines. The vulnerable side was the westward one, where the promontory on which the city lies suddenly widens to the north and west, to the hinterland and the European continent. This is where the fortification works were the strongest.

Between 405 and 413, massive walls roughly six and a half kilometers in length were erected between the Golden Horn and the Propontis.<sup>24</sup> In particularly vulnerable places, trenches up to 20 meters wide and 7 meters deep afforded additional protection. The walls themselves formed a continuous line of defense: behind the eight-meter-high outer wall with its 92 smaller towers stood, separated by a terrace, the main fortification, the inner wall. It was 11 meters high, nearly 5 meters wide, and fitted with 95 towers at intervals of 40 to 60 meters.<sup>25</sup>

After the completion of these Theodosian walls, the city could no longer be conquered if its inhabitants were united and at least halfway circumspect in defending themselves – a fact that has often been noted by scholars.<sup>26</sup> That being said, the key

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**24** Socr. *HE* 7,1,3; ILS 5339. After the publication of Speck's article 1973, 135–143, the broad consensus was that the wall was begun in 408 or soon thereafter and brought to completion in 413. This appeared to fit in well with the Hunnic incursion of Thrace in 408, which was a failure, but undoubtedly reminded Constantinopolitans that their city was not impregnable (*Cod. Theod.* 5,6,3; *Sozom. HE* 9,5; see Holum 1982, 88–89; Bayless 1977, 47–48). However, a subsequently discovered building inscription offers evidence for a construction period of nine years (Feissel 1995, 567). Since the year 413 is securely attested by *Cod. Theod.* 15,1,51, the only option is to push back the beginning of construction to 405. See Lebek 1995, 112–114, 117.

**25** On this topic, see Asutay-Effenberger's contribution to this volume as well as her authoritative reconstruction 2007, 1–5, 13–35, 61–106, 148–169. See also Janin 1964, 265–283; Müller-Wiener 1977, 286–269, 297, 301. The building description by Meyer-Plath/Schneider 1943, 22–95 is indispensable. An excellent overall impression of the construction is conveyed by the drawings of Krischen 1938.

**26** See e.g. Kaegi 1981, 19–20; Schreiner 2007, 31–37.

point has not yet been made. The impregnability of the city and, soon thereafter, the awareness of this circumstance shaped the socio-political system and the self-understanding of its inhabitants in a decisive manner. Due to the unconquerable walls, the acceptance system of late antiquity was much more focused on Constantinople than that of the Principate had been on Rome. As a consequence, in order to be emperor, one had to be present in the city and control it. At the same time, the ruler could not be overthrown or dislodged from the outside. This was the reason the field army and the other subjects of the Empire counted for little in comparison with the inhabitants of Constantinople. They alone could make or break the emperor. Constantinople was a political world unto itself. It only reacted to external disturbances to accommodate the wishes and needs of an acceptance group within the city.

## Second Jerusalem? The New Navel of the Earth

If Constantinople was the seat of the emperor and the secular center of the Eastern Roman Empire, why was the city then referred to as – of all things – the “Second Jerusalem” as early as the sixth century? Throughout late antiquity, not a single emperor (with the exception of Heraclius, very late in the period) visited Jerusalem, let alone resided there. Moreover, this city was of little importance for the military and imperial administration. Conversely, Jerusalem was of course politically relevant due to its religious significance, but in this respect Constantinople not only ranked behind Jerusalem, but behind all metropolises of the Empire. Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, even Ephesus and Carthage had played important roles in the history of early Christianity – which partly explains why they were able to retain their prosperity and status in late antiquity. Byzantium, on the other hand, had been a non-entity during the first three centuries after Christ.

But could not the city of Caesar also be the city of God? In fact, both went hand in hand: the emperors were determined to develop Constantinople into a Christian center. Precisely because of its exalted political status, it was unthinkable that the city should remain second-rate in terms of religious importance. A Christian ruler was supposed to demonstrate his faith. He could do so by erecting buildings in the Holy Land. However, in his immediate surroundings he could find better ways and many more opportunities to display his piety. The ambiguous or, better yet, self-styled Christianity that had characterized Constantine’s rule as well as his city had rapidly faded away with the progressing Christianization of the Empire.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Constantinople lacked a distinctly pagan (as in Rome) or Jewish character (as in Jerusalem), making it easier to infuse with Christian elements.

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<sup>27</sup> On Constantine’s Constantinople, see most recently Wallraff 2013, 80 – 90, but also Johannes Wienand’s contribution to this volume.

Because the city had been founded after the persecutions, relics of local saints and martyrs were in short supply. Obtaining them from elsewhere was difficult, as no one was willing to relinquish the religious and economic benefits that were associated with the possession of a reliquary shrine.<sup>28</sup> If anyone could break this resistance, it was the state. For this reason, the translation of relics constituted a perfect field of activity for the emperor, as it offered him an ideal opportunity to demonstrate his piety (in Constantinople, not in the provincial cities affected). This phenomenon began already with Constantius II: in the year 356, he had the mortal remains of the Pauline disciple Timothy transferred to the Church of the Holy Apostles, followed by those of Luke the Evangelist and of the Apostle Andrew in 357.<sup>29</sup> In February 360, the emperor personally attended the interment of the martyr Pamphilus and of two of his followers in the newly-consecrated Great Church.<sup>30</sup> Theodosius I used translations of relics to further his efforts to repress the Homoeans, but otherwise followed Constantius' lead. The relics of Saint Paul the Confessor, who had allegedly died as a Nicaean martyr, were brought into the city by order of Theodosius. He also single-handedly carried the Baptist's head, shrouded in the imperial purple cloak, to Constantinople – a particular demonstration of divine grace which God had denied his heretical predecessor Valens.<sup>31</sup> All later emperors followed this example, thus leading to the buildup of a collection of saints' relics that would remain without equal throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> The acquisition of relics usually went hand in hand with the construction of a martyrium to house them. Theodosius I, for example, had the Prodomos Church at the Hebdomon built for the Baptist's head. This leads to a second area in which an emperor could demonstrate his Christianity to the city: the building of churches, not just for relics, but also for purposes far beyond that. Justinian's

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**28** For the martyrs of Byzantium and Constantinople in the fourth century, see Delehaye 1933, 232–237. On the nascent phenomenon of the translation of relics in the fourth century, see e.g. Brown 1981, 86–105, and Hunt 1981.

**29** Philost. *HE* 3,2; 2a; *Chron. Pasch.* p. 542 Dindorf; *Consul. Constant.* s. a. 356–357. The chronology is disputed, Mango 1990a favors 336 for Luke and Andrew. For the dates adopted here, see Whitby/Whitby 1989, 33. For the *status quaestionis*, see KFHist E 7,2 p. 182–185, and G 1 p. 109–110.

**30** *Cedr.* p. 523 Bekker; *Synax. eccl. Const.* p. 467 Delehaye (in the apparatus). On the itinerary of Constantius, see Seeck 1919, 207.

**31** Socr. *HE* 5,9,1–2; Sozom. *HE* 7,10,4; 21,1–6.

**32** Maraval 1985, 93–101, gives the evidence for the numerous translations of relics in chronological order. I only add a few overlooked references. The martyr Phocas under Arcadius: Ioann. Chr. *Phoc. mart.* 1 (PG 50,699–700); the monastic father Isaac under Theodosius II: *Vita Isaacii* 18 (for the date, see Cameron/Long 1993, 72–75); Forty Martyrs under Justinian: *Proc. Aed.* 1,7,3–5; Theodore of Sycicon under Heraclius: Niceph. *Sceuoph. Enc. Theod.* 44–48. The true number, however, is much higher, as is clear by the vast number of churches with relics that were brought to Constantinople at an unknown date. For the situation in the Middle Byzantine period, see Mergiali-Sahas 2001, 44–60; Klein 2006, 89–96.

Hagia Sophia is only the most famous example of a prolific religious building activity that all emperors regarded as their duty.<sup>33</sup>

Constantinople's Christian identity, much like that of Jerusalem, also benefited from the elevation of the local bishop's status. But what the bishop of Jerusalem had to procure on his own, his colleague in Constantinople secured with the active support of the emperor. The First Council of Constantinople, which convened in 381 under the auspices of Theodosius I, assigned him prime position immediately behind the bishop of Rome – simply because Constantinople was the Second Rome, that is, for purely political reasons. This was a blow to Alexandria, which had traditionally been the seat of the foremost bishop of the East. This primacy admittedly was only bestowed for honorary purposes. Constantinople remained, at least formally, under the jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Heraclea while the bishop was not given any prerogatives in other church provinces.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the honorary primacy soon developed into a real one in Thrace and Asia Minor, less because of the ambitious aims of the bishops of Constantinople – although there was no lack of such<sup>35</sup> – but simply because of the gravitation of power: the government allotted resources and made important decisions, and no cleric stood closer to the court and the emperor than the bishop of the capital. This made him a suitable mediator and patron for other clerics,<sup>36</sup> but he was, of course, also a direct beneficiary.<sup>37</sup> When the Council of Chalcedon confirmed the bishop's primacy over Asia Minor and Thrace in 451, it adjusted canon law to the altered circumstances and made the position of the bishop

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**33** Maraval 1985, 401–410, gives a list of the martyria in the city, of which, however, a substantial number were financed by the elites outside the imperial family. See also Konstantin Klein's contribution to this volume. Additional money was spent on the maintenance of these churches and on endowments for poor people and strangers, which the emperor and the upper class regarded as a central norm of Christian charity. On this topic, see e.g. Diefenbach 1996, 53–55; Dagron 1989, 1074–1080.

**34** Canon. conc. I Const. 3 (CCO p. 47–48 = COD<sup>4</sup> p. 66); Socr. *HE* 5,8,13. See also Ritter 1965, 92–96; L'Huillier 1996, 119–125; Ubaldi 1903, 34–36; Errington 1997, 61–62; Dagron 1984, 455–461. A brief outline of the rise of Constantinople until the early seventh century is given by Dagron 2002, 24–32, and Elia 2002b, 97–105. The older literature can be found in Beck 1959, 30–32.

**35** For example, John Chrysostom's resolute intervention in the affairs of the bishops of Asia Minor in 402 (Tiersch 2002, 309–326; Kelly 1995, 163–166, 172–180). For a general overview of the activities of the bishops of Constantinople outside their diocese, see Dagron 1984, 461–463, 465–473; Karlin-Hayter 1988, 179–210.

**36** Providing access to court: *Vit. Porph.* 26–27; 37–40; 42–43; 45–46; 50–54; Cyr. Scyth. *Vit. Ioann.* 4; *Avell.* 116,25. In 546, Justinian even formalized the admission by decreeing that bishops had to be introduced by the patriarch (*Novell. Iust.* 123,9). Lobbying: Pall. *Dial.* 14 (p. 278 Malingrey). Opinion maker: Zach. *HE* 4,7–8.

**37** This became most obvious in formal regulations, such as the subordination of the Illyrian church provinces to Constantinople in 421 or that of Cyzicus between 406 and 425 (*Cod. Theod.* 16,2,45; Socr. *HE* 7,28,2). See Gaudemet 1989, 392–393, 406–407; Tiersch 2002, 320–321; Norton 2007, 86–87.

of Constantinople (who would soon call himself patriarch) unassailable.<sup>38</sup> The importance of Antioch, Jerusalem, and even Alexandria declined in the following decades. Justinian, in the end, only acknowledged the primacy of Rome over Constantinople.<sup>39</sup> Towards the end of the sixth century, with the emperor's support, the bishop of Constantinople even assumed the title of an ecumenical patriarch – much to the dismay of Gregory the Great, who, not entirely without reason, viewed this as the beginning of a primacy of Constantinople over the other patriarchates of the East.<sup>40</sup>

The main stimulus for Constantinople to become the city of God, however, was the fact that its inhabitants persistently and repeatedly constituted themselves as a Christian community. This happened, for one, when they attended mass. The Great Church or, as it soon came to be called, the Hagia Sophia was the center of liturgical life in the city. But even a church of this size could only accommodate a fraction of all the worshippers: the population of Constantinople rose to 375,000 in the early years of Justinian's reign. Even if the plague that broke out in 541 killed more than 20 to 30% of the population – the most plausible estimate – this still left hundreds of thousands.<sup>41</sup> Regular church attendance thus promoted identification of the individual with the whole city only to a limited degree. The Christians were distributed over many churches. There was no parochial system, so believers were not bound to a particular church. It is nevertheless probable that the broader strata of society usually went to the church that was closest to them. There, the individual would occasionally get to see the emperor or the elites, who tended to choose their house of worship on the basis of the festival calendar or with respect to the saint whose inter-

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**38** Canon. conc. Chalc. 9; 17; 28 (ACO II 1,2 p. 160–161; 1,3 p. 88–89 = COD<sup>4</sup> p. 142, 145, 150–151). See e. g. Frend 1972, 7–12; de Halleux 1989, 28–35; L'Huilier 1996, 231–236, 253–254, 267–296; Blaudeau 2006, 401–410; Herman 1973, 463–480 (clear analysis, albeit with a strong Catholic bias); Dagnon 1984, 473–487.

**39** Zeno's emphatic formulation of 477 is already quite remarkable: *sacrosanctam quoque huius religiosissimae civitatis ecclesiam matrem nostrae pietatis et Christianorum orthodoxae religionis omnium et eiusdem regiae urbis sanctissimam sedem* (Cod. Iust. 1,2,16,1). Justinian: *Novell. Iust.* 131,2 (545); *Cod. Iust.* 1,1,8,8–12 and 22 (533); see also *Novell. Iust.* 123,9 (546). See e. g. Chevailler/Chabanne 1984, 726–730, but also Dvornik 1966, 828–833.

**40** Greg. M. *Ep.* 5,37; 39; 41; 44–45; 7,24; 28; 30–31; 8,29; 13,41. The term is analyzed by Tuilier 1966, 417–424, though he tends to ignore the implications for church politics by distinguishing between jurisdictional and dogmatic/ideological significance. The explicit assertion of communion with the whole of orthodox Christianity certainly implied a claim to supremacy, which Gregory clearly recognized. The relevant texts are collected by Vailhé 1908b and 1908a. For the conflict, see Dagens 1975, 466–473; Saitta 2002, 246–251; Eich 2016, 133–136.

**41** The numbers are those of Jacoby 1961, who has dealt most thoroughly with the methodical difficulties confronting any reliable calculation. See also the remarks by Müller 1993, 17–20. On the number of victims claimed by the plague, see also Stathakopoulos 2004, 138–141 (20%); Leven 1987, 141, 146–148 (40%); Conrad 1996, 93 (“between one third and half of the entire population”).



cession they hoped to obtain.<sup>42</sup> This certainly strengthened the bond with the Empire and the existing social order, but it seems rather doubtful if such rare encounters did much to produce a specific identity of being part of a Christian Constantinople.

Processions were another matter. Open-air activities certainly could not accommodate an unlimited number of Christians, but they allowed a much larger crowd to participate. Moreover, the spatial limitations were less noticeable on the streets and squares, thus creating the subjective impression that many more people participated than was really the case. Processions were a common occurrence, for supplication and thanksgiving, celebration and mourning. While translations of relics were ultimately quite rare, there were many other occasions for processions, such as major church holidays, military victories, natural phenomena, catastrophes such as comets or fires – as well as the yearly remembrance of an induction of relics, particular earthquakes, an occurrence of ash rain, etc.<sup>43</sup> The annually recurring processions were thus supplemented by new ones that were themselves partly repeated in the following years. The frequency of processions was probably much higher than in Rome and Jerusalem, the two other cities of late antiquity whose liturgical landscapes are fairly well documented. A significant impulse in this direction was probably supplied by the tenacious struggle of the various Christian groups in the fourth century.<sup>44</sup> Public processions that ended in a church controlled by one's own denomination offered an almost ideal opportunity to both assert religious hegemony and invite the entire population to join in. The latter was the key to the popularity of the processions, even after the Nicaeans had gained the upper hand. Nowhere else could the feeling of be-

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**42** For the lack of a parochial system and the consequences thereof, see Dagron 1989, 1069–1074, 1083–1085; on the situation around 400, see Mayer 2000b, 79–80; Mayer 2000a, 56–62. For regular and public church attendance of the emperor, see McLynn 2004. Arcadius only occasionally frequented the services held by John Chrysostom, but this does not imply that he was not as consistent as his father in attending public services (thus McLynn 2004, 265–266); rather, he went to other churches in the city. There were of course also churches on the palace grounds: one, consecrated to the Archangel Michael, is attested for the sixth century. It was open to the wider public for worship (Theod. Lect. *Epit.* 483), and was thus not a palace chapel for the exclusive use of the court. The small Church of St Stephen, from the fifth century, only began to play a more important role in the religious life of the imperial family under Heraclius.

**43** Evidence for the processions in Constantinople: Baldovin 1987, 182–189; Maraval 1985, 93–101; Croke 1981, 125 n. 19.

**44** The best example is that of the night-time processions of the Homoeans around 400, which John Chrysostom countered with separate Nicaean ones. The result was stone-throwing and injuries, a sign how much was at stake when public space was occupied in this way (Socr. *HE* 6,8,1–9; see Tiersch 2002, 131–132). Baldovin 1987, 209–214, made the convincing case that the frequency of processions was not only higher than in Rome and Jerusalem, but also higher than in Constantinople of the tenth century. This may have to do with Baldovin's previous assumption that the Middle Byzantine emperors were less likely to take part in processions than those of late antiquity (202). This could be taken as an indication of how important the presence of the emperor was, but also as evidence for changes in public communication between the early seventh and the tenth century. However, there is no certainty in this matter.

longing to the city, to orthodoxy, and to the Empire be experienced in such a direct way.

The emperor frequently took part in the public processions and in the corresponding religious services. In pious community with his fellow Christians, the monarch could demonstrate his orthodoxy for all to see. Processions thus bridged the distance between the emperor and the urban population, and contributed significantly to the identification with the existing order and the integration into it. Sometimes the emperor even abstained from wearing his insignia and walked barefoot or clad like a common subject. In this way, the inhabitants of Constantinople found unity in the evocation of a joint Christianity.<sup>45</sup>

The form this might take is demonstrated by two anecdotes reported by the church historian Socrates. While Theodosius II was watching the chariot races, he was informed of his army's victory over the Western emperor John in 425. The emperor announced the news to the people and called on them to turn their attention from the entertainment and to thank God in unison. The audience quickly forgot about the games and formed a procession while still in the Hippodrome. Accompanied by song, it moved along with the emperor and arrived at a church where Theodosius and his subjects spent the rest of the day in prayer. The fact that the emperor spontaneously called for a joint procession and that the people complied without further ado indicates that such behavior was not uncommon, or rather, probably even the rule. On another occasion, the spectators who were gathered in the circus were surprised by a severe snowstorm. Theodosius again requested them to forget the games – which probably had been interrupted anyway – and to implore God for protection. The Constantinopolitans complied once again, while the emperor even intoned the pious hymns and marched, without his purple robe, among his people. The sky soon cleared, and the year was blessed with a good harvest. During processions, Socrates writes, “the whole city became a single church.”<sup>46</sup>

Patriarch, churches, relics, processions – all this defined Constantinople as a Christian city, as one of the Empire's religious centers. This alone, however, was by no means sufficient to establish a spiritual connection with Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> A few additional factors were required, and in the end even a crisis of global proportions.

Analogy with the Jerusalem of the past as it is described in the Old Testament held a certain importance, but in my opinion should not be overestimated. In the

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<sup>45</sup> On the emperor's participation, see Diefenbach 1996, 43–52; Diefenbach 2002, 24–31; Martin 1997, 54–55; Meier 2003, 489–502. A list of the processions in which the emperor participated can be found in Pfeilschifter 2013, 339 n. 89.

<sup>46</sup> Socr. *HE* 7,22,15–18; 23,11–12. Socrates comments both events with nearly identical words: ὅλη μὲν ἡ πόλις μία ἐκκλησία ἐγένετο / ἐγένετο (22,17; 23,12). There is a similar report about Maurice in 593: after news of a victory, the emperor spent the entire night praying in Hagia Sophia and led a supplicatory procession for further victories on the following day (Theophyl. *Sim. Hist.* 6,8,8; Theoph. *AM* 6080 [p. 262 de Boor]).

<sup>47</sup> Ousterhout 2006, 99–102, warns against such a premature conclusion, and rightly so.

sixth century, emperors such as Justinian and aristocrats such as Anicia Juliana erected churches that surpassed the Temple of Solomon and thus the old Jerusalem.<sup>48</sup> ‘Surpassing’ was in itself nothing unusual, and it is well known that Christians saw themselves as second to none – again and again and in many different fields. After all, it was they – and not the Jews – who were in possession of the revealed truth. At any rate, this demonstration of superiority over the kings of Jerusalem must have helped ensure that both cities could easily be associated with one another in the minds of the people of Constantinople. Of greater importance, however, were the relationships with the present, Christian Jerusalem as well as with the coming, prophesied Jerusalem.

Let us first turn to the present: several of the more precious relics that were brought to Constantinople came from Jerusalem. Initially poor in sacred objects, the imperial city was supplied from the best source and thus caught some of the glory that shone on the city of Christ.<sup>49</sup> The wife and the sister of Theodosius acquired relics of the protomartyr Stephen,<sup>50</sup> and later the garments and the girdle of the Virgin were deposited in Constantinople.<sup>51</sup> The most important relics, however, were the fragments of the True Cross, that is, of the cross on which Christ had been crucified. They reached the Bosphorus in the fifth century, while the inhabitants of Constantinople began to believe that they had already been brought there in the time of Constantine.<sup>52</sup>

Now to the coming Jerusalem. From about AD 500 onward, there arose an eschatological apprehension that became one of the defining social currents in the sixth century, the more so since it was confirmed by political catastrophes, earthquakes, climate changes, floods, and especially by the above-mentioned plague.<sup>53</sup> But there was an upside to the Christian conception of the End of Days: the apocalypse would lead to the Last Judgement, the ultimate goal of Christian history, and at its end, according to Chapter 21 of the *Book of Revelation*, a new Jerusalem would descend from Heaven. In his contribution to this volume, Paul Magdalino plausibly argues that in this eschatological context the New, Second Jerusalem was identified with Constantinople. This way, the scenario of doom was supplemented by a more optimistic vision that did not contradict the first. The Roman Empire was intimately

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**48** On this topic, see Nadine Viermann’s contribution to this volume.

**49** For the Theotokos/Diomedes Monastery (or Church) at the Golden Gate, also called Jerusalem, see Janin 1969, 95–97 (an additional reference is Theod. Sync. *Dep.* 3).

**50** Theoph. AM 5920 (p. 86–87 de Boor), with a depiction of the scene on the so-called Trier Ivory, see Holum/Vikan 1979, 120–127, 131–133 (a different interpretation in Wortley 1980); Marcell. *Chron.* 439,2. See also Konstantin Klein’s contribution to this volume.

**51** For the complexity of the sources, which nevertheless suggest a date still in the fifth century, see Shoemaker 2008.

**52** See Klein 2004b, 33–41; Frolow 1961, 73–74, no. 13, 16, 36, 38.

**53** Analysing eschatological beliefs has become a hot topic in the last decades. See e.g. Magdalino 1993, *passim*, esp. 3–19; Brandes 1997; Meier 2003, 64–94; Meier 2008, 46–50, 54–55; Magdalino 2008, 123–126.

linked to the history of salvation, even going so far as to imply that the latter was nearing completion.

Constantinople was first referred to as the Second Jerusalem around the year 500. The basis of comparison was the sacred topography. However, this identification remained extremely rare in the sixth century and does not appear outside of hagiographical sources.<sup>54</sup> For a breakthrough, an event was necessary that would threaten the very existence of Constantinople – one so great that it could only be addressed in apocalyptic terms. In 626, when the city against expectations withstood the siege by Avars and Persians while the emperor was fighting far away in the east, a priest at the Hagia Sophia, Theodore Syncellus, celebrated the saving of Constantinople in a sermon that couched the events in an imagery taken from the Old Testament: the emperor as the reborn David, the patriarch as the second Moses, and so forth. By the same token, the old Jerusalem and Constantinople are repeatedly equated and compared, of course to the latter's advantage.<sup>55</sup> The sermon culminates in an elaborate proof that in the siege of Constantinople the apocalyptic prophecy of *Ezekiel* 38 and 39 has been fulfilled. The onslaught of Gog and Magog, which also plays an important role in Chapter 20 of *Revelation*, has been repelled:

What place can be called navel of the earth other than the city in which God established the emperorship of the Christians, and which He, due to its location in the very middle, set up as the intermediary between East and West? Leaders and nations and peoples banded together against it, but the Lord has quashed their power. To Sion he spoke: "Be of good courage, Sion, let not your hands be slack. See, your God is in you, he has the might to save you." There assembled before it the hosts of the nations from the utmost north, the horses and riders in their armor, and with them the Persians. And this had been revealed word for word by the prophet. The bows in their left hands shattered the power of our Lord, and the arrows in their right hands smashed the Virgin. And they tumbled in the mountains of Israel, becoming carrion for beasts and birds. These things were prophesied by the divine Ezekiel with the following words: "In that day, says the Lord, the Lord, I will give to Gog a place of renown, a tomb in Israel, the burial-place for the attackers in the sea, and there they shall bury the whole nation of Gog."<sup>56</sup>

54 *Vit. Dan.* 10: [...] ἄπελθε εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον καὶ βλέπεις δευτέραν Ἱερουσαλήμ, τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν· ἀπολαύεις καὶ τῶν μαρτυριῶν καὶ μεγάλων εὐκτηριῶν [...]; *Eustr. Vit. Eutych.* 762; 2078–2079.

55 David: *Theod. Sync. Obsid.* 38 (p. 313 Sternbach/Makk); 52 (p. 320). Moses: 17–18 (p. 304–305). Jerusalem: 2–3 (p. 298–299); 8 (p. 301); 20 (p. 306); 27–31 (p. 309–310); 38 (p. 313); 50 (p. 319). See Viermann 2021, 221–225.

56 *Theod. Sync. Obsid.* 40–47 (p. 314–318 Sternbach/Makk): ὀμφαλὸν δὲ τῆς γῆς τίνα ἕτερον τόπον ὀνομάζεσθαι δίκαιον ἢ τὴν πόλιν, ἐν ἧ τὰ Χριστιανῶν Θεὸς βασιλεία ἵδρυσεν καὶ ἦν ὡς ἕκ τινος μεσαιτάτης περιωπῆς ἀνατολῆς τε καὶ δύσεως δι' αὐτῆς μεσιτεύειν ἐποίησε. κατὰ ταύτης ἄρχοντες καὶ λαοὶ καὶ ἔθνη συνήχθησαν, ὧν τὸ κράτος κατέβαλε κύριος ὁ εἰπὼν τὴν Σιών· 'θάρσει Σιών, μὴ παρείσθωσαν χεῖρές σου· ἰδοὺ ὁ Θεὸς σου ἐν σοί, δυνατὸς τοῦ σώζειν σε'. ἐν ταύτῃ τῶν ἐθνῶν τὸ ἄθροισμα ἐκ τῶν ἐσχάτων τοῦ βορρᾶ παραγένονεν, ἵπποι καὶ ἵππεῖς ἐνδεδυμένοι τοὺς θώρακας καὶ σὺν αὐτοῖς οἱ Πέρσαι· καὶ τοῦτο γὰρ ῥητῶς διὰ τοῦ προφήτου δεδήλωται· ὧν τὰ τόξα ἀπώλεσεν ἐκ τῆς ἀριστερᾶς χειρὸς ἢ ἰσχύς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ τὰ τοξεύματα ἐκ τῆς δεξιᾶς ἢ παρθένος συνέθλασεν· ἔπεσον τε ἐπὶ

At that time, however, another decisive event had already occurred: the fall of the real Jerusalem. In the year 614, the Persians had taken the city, and later, after an uprising, massacred the Christian population. The Holy Lance and the Holy Sponge were brought to safety in Constantinople.<sup>57</sup> This was all the more important since the True Cross had been lost. When Heraclius began his reconquista a few years later, he did so under the banner of religion, even if the recovery of the Cross was not the main goal. But after he had succeeded, the emperor personally brought the True Cross back to Jerusalem in 630. According to the long accepted reconstruction, the True Cross, or at least what was believed to be the Cross, was taken directly to Jerusalem after its surrender by the Persians and subsequently remained there.<sup>58</sup> However, the sources contain strong evidence that the Cross was brought to Constantinople either before or immediately after it was returned to Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup> Should these indications turn out to be correct, they would testify to the enhanced sacred status of the capital during the hitherto greatest crisis of the Roman Empire. And even if they should prove incorrect, they would still constitute a no less remarkable testimony for the expectations of those who lived only a few decades later: it was perfectly believable that the reclaimed Cross had been presented to the capital as well.

Possible errors in this respect are at any rate easily understandable and excusable. Only a few years later, the Romans lost Jerusalem a second time, this time for good. Having learned from earlier mistakes, Heraclius evacuated the True Cross in time and brought it to the only conceivable place of exile: Constantinople.<sup>60</sup>

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τὰ ὄρη τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ θηρίοις καὶ πετεινοῖς δοθέντες κατάβρωμα. τὰ δὲ οὕτως ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰεζεκιὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ προφητευόμενα· ἔν τῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ λέγει κύριος, κύριος, δώσω τῷ Γῶγ τόπον ὀνομαστὸν μνημεῖον ἐν Ἰσραὴλ, τὸ πολυάνδριον τῶν ἐπελθόντων ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ, καὶ κατορύξουσιν ἐκεῖ πάντα τὸν λαὸν τοῦ Γῶγ' (46 [p. 317–318]; quotations: Zeph. 3:16–17 and Ezek. 39:10–11). For the “navel of the earth”, see Alexander 1999.

**57** *Chron. Pasch.* p. 705 Dindorf. See Flusin 1992, 180–181; Viermann 2021, 177–178. A small dating error in the *Chronicon Paschale* and the unclear circumstances of the surrender of the Holy Lance do not, in my opinion, provide sufficient grounds for shifting the arrival of the relics to the year 629 (as postulated by Klein 2004a, 34–40, Speck 2000b, 167–172, and Zuckerman 2013, 198–201). The passage clearly implies that the Holy Lance had fallen into Persian hands only shortly before and that it had now, for whatever reasons, been turned over to the Romans.

**58** For this, see James Howard-Johnston's contribution to this volume and Flusin 1992, 293–312. For the spiritual meaning of the *restitutio crucis*, especially for the already dawning End of Days, see Flusin, 312–319; Drijvers 2002.

**59** Before the return: Seb. *frg.* 2 (p. 433 Abgaryan) (translation in Mahé 1984, 231–231); Theoph. AM 6120 (p. 328 de Boor). This possibility is advocated by Klein 2004a, 41–43, and Booth 2014, 157–158 and n. 74. After the return: Niceph. *Brev.* 18. Zuckerman 2013, 201–218, harmonizes the sources by assuming that there were two returns in 629 and 630, interrupted by the presentation of the Cross in Constantinople. But see Mango 1990b, 185, on the difficulties in sources and chronology associated with its presence in Constantinople.

**60** Seb. 41 (p. 131 Abgaryan); 42 (p. 136); Theoph. AM 6125 (p. 337 de Boor); Ps.-Šapuh p. 70–71 Darbinjan-Melikjan. Dating the conquest of Jerusalem is difficult. The city most probably fell between 635 and 637. See most recently Booth 2014, 242–243.

This did not mean that the sacred topography of Constantinople was henceforth configured in strict emulation of Jerusalem or even that the one city was considered a copy of the other.<sup>61</sup> The imperial traditions were too strong to permit this; furthermore, religious life, after three centuries, had acquired its own, distinct forms. But now, in the Middle Ages, at least the imperial capital was the place that came closest to the lost Jerusalem.<sup>62</sup>

## Second Constantinople – and why this did not work

Constantinople took more than it gave. It imported relics, eschatological meaning, and finally even the True Cross. Jerusalem received little in return. Above all, it did not become a political center for the Empire and its administration. This was of course not the fault of Constantinople: the two cities did not interact with each other, and despite a hyperactive bishop of Jerusalem,<sup>63</sup> they were not even political players that might have competed for the first place within the Empire. However, it is still worth noting that Constantinople assumed functions that originally or primarily belonged to Jerusalem, whereas the opposite did not occur: Jerusalem did not become a Second Constantinople.

For this to happen, the city would have needed an emperor within its walls. Both geography and the development of international affairs prevented this from happening. Jerusalem lay on the eastern periphery of the Empire, too far away from the West and from the critical Danube border. The only thing that might have forced the emperor to reside here permanently would have been a protracted Persian war, as in the fourth and sixth centuries. Up to AD 400 the decision in favor of Constantinople was probably still reversible and/or an additional emperor in Asia still imaginable, following the example of Constantine's sons. But in the fifth century the relations with the Persian Empire were mostly peaceful. The factors that allowed Constantinople to become the imperial city were, conversely, detrimental to Jerusalem.

But even if an emperor had taken up residence in the Levant, he probably would have opted for Antioch, as his predecessors in the fourth century had done: the old Seleucid capital was not only the administrative center of the entire region, it was also situated at a strategically more convenient distance from the Persian Empire than the comparatively remote Jerusalem, which presented the additional disadvant-

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**61** I follow the interpretation of Ousterhout 2006, 100–109: “more often than not, Jerusalem provided no more than a convenient metaphor for a sacred city, and not a typological model” (100).

**62** From then on, following the example of Theodore Syncellus, the comparison with Jerusalem started to become more popular. For the sources, see Fenster 1968, 109, 115, 121, 135, 139, 159–160, 177, 211, 214, 250, 280, 284.

**63** On this particular bishop, see Jan-Markus Kötter's contribution to this volume.

age of a landlocked location.<sup>64</sup> The latter city had never even been the seat of Roman governors: already in the early Empire, Iudaea or Palaestina had been ruled by a prefect residing in Caesarea Maritima, an arrangement that continued until the very end of antiquity.<sup>65</sup>

It is nevertheless tempting to envision for a moment what developments the permanent presence of an emperor might have triggered. What would such a Jerusalem have looked like? – Due to the settled presence of the court, the city is populated by several hundred thousand people. At least in the beginning, Latin plays a significant role. Over time its importance declines (as it did in Constantinople). Not only Greek, but also the Aramaic languages gain ground. The Romanness of the court and administration fades. The oriental Christianities exert great influence, while Western theology recedes into the background. The Jews soon come under pressure. They are exiled from Jerusalem and Iudaea, as the Christian emperor does not tolerate persons of the wrong faith in his city. In other respects, the emperor has far fewer possibilities to shape urban development. While Constantinople, as an almost untouched surface, was formed according to imperial needs, in Jerusalem the fact that its topography is intimately connected with the story of Christ sets narrow limits on any such endeavor.<sup>66</sup> The emperor is not only a Christian, he lives in one city with Christ. Therefore, the analogies between the heavenly and the earthly ruler are addressed more frequently and with greater intensity. The spiritual significance of emperorship is much more closely linked to Christianity than to its Roman, pagan roots. Whether this serves to strengthen it is a different question. It is of course conceivable that the emperor may be exalted to the point of becoming a Christ-like figure who cannot be overthrown under any circumstances. Conversely, the emperor's position may lose its worldly significance by no longer being autonomous from the religious sphere: the emperor becomes a mere symbol, while others make the decisions. Several shades of variation are possible, and even the extremes do not entirely exclude each other. However, one thing seems rather probable: in the shadow of Christ an acceptance system does not develop.<sup>67</sup>

These counterfactual reflections are meant to underline that the actual development of Late Roman emperorship represented only one of several historical possibilities. The option which was ultimately realized had much to do with the city of Caesar. The unique form which the emperorship assumed in the late-antique East would have been inconceivable anywhere but in Constantinople.

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<sup>64</sup> See Marlena Whiting's contribution to this volume.

<sup>65</sup> See Haensch 1997, 227–237, and most recently Isaac 2011, 21–32.

<sup>66</sup> On the omnipresence of the traces of Christ in the sacred topography of Jerusalem, see Konstantin Klein's contribution to this volume and, in comparison with Constantinople, Ousterhout 2006, 109.

<sup>67</sup> That the exercise of power from such a religiously charged place was fraught with difficulties is also suggested by the fact that Jerusalem did not become the capital of any of the various Islamic empires. Leaving the Crusader states aside, this would only happen in modern Israel, but on a Zionist, secular basis.

Jerusalem was not the only city on which Constantinople did not exert a powerful influence. In fact, it did not become a model for any other city. Not for Antioch or Alexandria, which cultivated their far older traditions. Not for the cities and towns of the Latin Middle Ages, which even early on were socially and culturally detached from Constantinople and, for precisely this reason, as alienated from it as they were dazzled by it.<sup>68</sup> Not even for Moscow, which was more eager to become the New Israel or the Third Rome than the Second Constantinople.<sup>69</sup> In this last case it is evident why the city on the Bosphorus could not serve as a paradigm: Constantinople was always a 'second', never a 'first'. In spite of all the importance and all the originality of its development, its political power was seen as having been transferred from Rome. Likewise, Constantinople's growing holiness and its importance for salvation only resulted in a Second, New Jerusalem. The originals may have faded at times, but they were never forgotten. For centuries, the lost Jerusalem inspired the Catholic nations to undertake great wars to win it back. The fall of Constantinople in 1453, on the other hand, only triggered weak efforts. Even when the Ottoman Empire was put on the defensive from the 18th century onward, the liberation of Constantinople remained a vague aspiration, even for Russia. It was never fulfilled.

In fact, it was the Turks who enabled Constantinople to continue under conditions that were quite similar to the ancient and Byzantine ones. Though stripped of most of its religious claims, Constantinople nevertheless retained its original, worldly function as capital of an empire: from the city of Caesar to the city of Sultan. The Ottomans were thus the only ones for whom Constantinople was something like a 'first'. However, the founding of modern Turkey not only deprived the city of its empire but also of its status as a capital. Today Istanbul's appeal beyond the borders of Turkey is more of a touristic nature, even for the non-Turkish Islamic world. The sacral aura of Jerusalem has proved more enduring. That city not only attracts visitors from all over the world, its spiritual importance is also manifest in its considerable political weight. Whether this holds the promise for a better future of its inhabitants remains to be seen.

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<sup>68</sup> See only, on the example of palaces, Luchterhandt 2006.

<sup>69</sup> Raba 1995; Rowland 1996. In this respect as well, Moscow stands at the end of a chain of tradition that begins with Kyiv; see Philipp 1956.



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# **Millennium-Studien**

zu Kultur und Geschichte  
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of the first millennium C.E.



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