

# Constantinople as Center and Crossroad

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# Byzantion, Zeuxippos, and Constantinople

*The emergence of an imperial city*\*

RAGNAR HEDLUND

Istanbul was Constantinople, and Constantinople was Byzantion. Not only is the city situated at the Straits between Europe and Asia, it also represents the very crossing-point in time between the Roman and Byzantine empires. Tradition has placed the transition in the age of Constantine the Great, making the city seem more or less as his invention. A famous anecdote from the early fifth-century historian Philostorgius tells us that Constantine, in the twenty-eighth year of his reign, marched around the location of his future city, marking its limits and claiming that divine powers led him.<sup>1</sup> His city, inaugurated with a ceremony at the Hippodrome on May 11th, 330 AD—as we are told—was to be the new Christian capital of the empire. Of course, this is the version related by the panegyrists of Constantine. In 1974, Gilbert Dagron published his now classic study on Constantinople aptly titled “Naissance d’une capitale.” In this, Dagron showed how this story is flawed. Research has since then more or less agreed that this is a “Christian creation myth” invented in order to demonstrate the unavoidable triumph of Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

More recent research has sought another view and points to the ways in which (what was to become) the city of Constantinople developed in stages, and that it did not emerge as the center of the Roman Empire until the last decades of the fourth century.<sup>3</sup> Still, this is only part of the story of the “birth of a capital.” It is one thing to point at construction projects of Constantine and other emperors by which the city was transformed into a cityscape worthy of functioning as a backdrop to imperial power. But the history of the city is more complex than just

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<sup>1</sup> Philostorgius, *Eccl. Hist.* 2.9

<sup>2</sup> G. Dagron, *Naissance d’une capitale. Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451* (Paris 1974), 19–25; for a discussion of the various foundation-stories of Byzantion, see most recently T. Russell, *Byzantium and the Bosphorus: A Historical Study, from the seventh century BC until the Foundation of Constantinople* (Oxford 2016), chap. 7.

<sup>3</sup> A topic most thoroughly explored by A. Berger, most recently in *Konstantinopel. Geschichte, Topographie, Religion* (Stuttgart 2011); see also the analysis of E. Mayer, *Rom ist dort wo der Kaiser ist. Untersuchungen zu den Staatsdenkmälern des dezentralisierten Reiches* (Bonn 2002).

a story of who built it and how. It is also the story of how the city was used, experienced and filled with meaning by its inhabitants—in this case, how Constantinople became imperial.

One approach to the development of the imperial city is to model how it develops through the interaction of actors, monuments, and buildings, following the directions of actor-network-theory (ANT).<sup>4</sup> This approach enables us to shift the view from the intentions and actions of one actor (i.e. the emperor) to the interplay of multiple actors moving around Constantinople. In so doing, we can unlock some of the mechanisms by which the city develops.

## The construction of an imperial cityscape

Byzantion, the city that was to be Constantinople, for a long time played a rather inauspicious role in the politics of the ancient Mediterranean. Towards the end of the second century AD the city was drawn into Roman politics. After the death of Emperor Commodus in 192, the city supported the claims to the purple of Pescennius Niger; as a punishment for his support of the rival, Septimius Severus destroyed the city, or at least its walls, in 196. He then recognized its strategic position, as a later Byzantine tradition claims, and started rebuilding Byzantion.<sup>5</sup> This would have been one of many major city development projects that were undertaken under the Severan dynasty, not least in Asia Minor.<sup>6</sup>

However, this testimony is now generally believed to be a literary construction. One problem is that Herodian claims to have seen Byzantion around 240 AD, and at this time the city walls were still in ruins. This does not necessarily imply that the whole city was in ruins.<sup>7</sup> But if the rebuilding of the city commenced already under Septimius Severus, it must have stopped for some time (or several times), as a number of building projects allegedly started under Septimius Severus are also asserted not to have been finished until the reign of Constantine. If this is correct, the city stood half-finished for almost a century. This is not necessarily a problem; prolonged and delayed construction projects were certainly no novelty in the ancient world, as a number of ambitious building projects from classical antiquity demonstrate, not least in Asia Minor and in this age.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, comparing the ancient texts and finding that they follow each other closely, Dagron effectively showed that the literary sources telling of a rebuilding of the city under Septimius Severus is also a literary reconstruction: as later Byzantine historians wanted to

<sup>4</sup> On this approach, see the introduction to this volume.

<sup>5</sup> Herodian, *Hist.* III,6; Malalas *Chronographia* 12.18–20; *Patria* 1.34–35; *Suda*, s.v. Severus; for an overview of sources, see R. Guillard, “Études sur la topographie de Byzance,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft* 15 (1966), 261–62.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of building activities in the Roman empire in the age of the Severans, see most recently R. B. Ulrich & C. Quenemoen (eds.), *A Companion to Roman Architecture* (Malden 2014), 90–105.

<sup>7</sup> Herodian, *Hist.* III, 1.7.

<sup>8</sup> Examples include the Olympieion of Athens (see J. Camp, *The Archaeology of Athens* [New Haven 2001], 200–1, and R. Tölle-Kastenbein, *Das Olympieion in Athen* [Weimar 1996]) and the temple of Apollo in Didyma (see W. Voigtländer *Der jüngste Apollontempel von Didyma: Geschichte seines Baudekors* [Tübingen 1975], 121–134 and more recently F. Rumscheid, *Untersuchungen zur kleinasiatischen Bauornamentik des Hellenismus* [Mainz 1996], 9–12).

present Constantine as the creator of the city of Constantinople, Septimius Severus was made his immediate progenitor.<sup>9</sup>

Leaving this chronological problem aside, some of the topography emerging in Byzantion in the third century are known. Even before the rule of Septimius Severus, the so-called strategion had been projected. This seems to have been an open place that functioned as a gathering ground for troops.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, a hippodrome was built: this would later become the most famous of all ancient hippodromes. Next to this, the monumental baths of Zeuxippos were laid out. Such baths, like the hippodromes, were important ‘stages’ for imperial power, not least in the later empire.<sup>11</sup> Written sources tell us of two other baths in imperial Byzantion: the Baths of Achilleus and the Baths of Kaminia. The latter were supposed to have been outside of the Severan-era city, probably to the west of the later forum of Constantine, and to have had impressive dimensions.<sup>12</sup>

Next to the baths of Zeuxippos there was a *tetrastoon*. As the name suggests, this must have been an open square, surrounded by four porticoes. The *tetrastoon* connected to the eastern end of the Mese, the main street of the city that led westwards. Under Septimius Severus, this street was supposed to have been furnished with porticoes—the so-called portico of Septimius Severus—that gave the city a new, monumental appearance. This monumental part of the street was later stretched out further west by Constantine, towards and past the forum that he named after himself.<sup>13</sup>

The Baths of Zeuxippos present one of the most interesting locations in early Constantinople, as its history gives an impression of how the Constantinopolitan cityscape functioned. Above all, the famous ekphrasis by the rhetor Christodoros of Koptos (around 500 AD) on the statues at the baths provides a first-hand impression of monumental space in the Byzantine age.<sup>14</sup> The development of the baths not only provides a compelling example of how monumental architectural spaces could be associated with power and authority, and become embedded in

<sup>9</sup> Dagron, *Naissance*, 13–19; most recently Berger, *Konstantinopel*, 4. S. Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (New York 2004), 48–49, accepts the ancient evidence.

<sup>10</sup> R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine: développement urbain et répertoire topographique* (Paris 1964, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 19–23.

<sup>11</sup> J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (Berkeley 1986), 579–638, provides a detailed survey of late Roman hippodromes; for a general analysis of the tetrarchic residences, see Mayer, *Rom its dort wo der Kaiser ist*, 28–68.

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of the baths in Constantinople, see F. Yegül, “Baths of Constantinople: An Urban Symbol in a Changing World,” in W. R. Caraher, L. J. Hall & R. S. Moore (eds.), *Archaeology and History in Roman, Medieval and Post-medieval Greece: Studies on Method and Meaning in Honor of Timothy E. Gregory* (Aldershot 2008), 180–83.

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the constructions attributed to Severus, see W. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls. Byzantion – Konstantinupolis – Istanbul bis zum Beginn des 17. Jahrhunderts*, (Tübingen 1977), 269; for a detailed analysis, see Bassett, *The Urban Image*, 18–22. For the most recent in depth-study of the topography of central Constantinople, see the PhD thesis of D. Chatzilazarou, *Η Βασιλείος Στοά και η σύνδεση του μνημειακού κέντρου της Κωνσταντινούπολης: τοπογραφία, λειτουργίες, συμβολισμοί* (in print).

<sup>14</sup> Two key works on Christodoros are R. Stupperich, “Das Statuenprogramm in den Zeuxippos-Thermen,” in *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 32 (1982), 210–35; S. G. Bassett, “*Historiae custos*: Sculpture and Tradition in the Baths of Zeuxippos,” in *American Journal of Archaeology* 100.3 (1996), 491–506; new perspectives were offered by H. Saradi, “Perceptions and Literary Interpretations of Statues and the Image of Constantinople,” in *Byzantiaka* 20 (2000), 30–77, and A. Kaldellis “Christodoros on the Statues of the Zeuxippos Baths: A New Reading of the Ekphrasis,” in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 47 (2007), 361–83. See also most recently S. Bär, “‘Museum of Words’: Christodorus, the Art of Ekphrasis and the Epyllic Genre,” in M. Baumbach & S. Bär (eds.), *Brill’s Companion to Greek and Latin Epyllion and Its Reception* (Leiden & Boston 2012), 447–71.

society; it also provides an illustration of the cityscape through which Byzantion was transformed into the imperial residence-city of Constantinople, thus connecting the city's Roman past with its Byzantine future.

## The Baths of Zeuxippos

The few traces that have survived through history indicate that the Baths of Zeuxippos, in terms of 'monumentality', would have stood a comparison with the extravagant fountain-houses dedicated to the emperors in several cities of Roman Asia Minor.<sup>15</sup> A number of excavations in the earlier decades of the twentieth century around the area of the hippodrome, among other remains, revealed structures that have usually been identified as parts of the baths.<sup>16</sup> The investigations revealed the remains of two structures. One of them (Building 1) was interpreted as a building with piers supporting a vault. Four main building phases were discerned, the earlier of which was vaguely classified as "early, very probably of Roman date." The building had then been destroyed and rebuilt at a later date. Water conduits and other sculptural finds fitting for a bath context were also found.<sup>17</sup> A second structure (Building 2) contained a courtyard, which featured an apse and a colonnade. Here, too, several building phases were identified: it was concluded that "the early work is Roman and that the later belongs to a Byzantine reconstruction on the same plan."<sup>18</sup>

This evidence alone suggested the identification as the Baths of Zeuxippos, which were claimed to have been destroyed during the Nika riots in 532 AD and then rebuilt under Justinian.<sup>19</sup> The most conclusive finds were three statue bases of which two were inscribed with the names Hecuba and Aischines, statues which are both mentioned by Christodoros of Koptos in his ekphrasis on the statues of the baths (Figs. 1–2). The bases of the statues were dated to 400–500 AD, but they had been used at least twice; one had then been re-used, perhaps as a pavement stone or step.<sup>20</sup> These finds, the location of the structures near the hippodrome, and the nature of the structures all support their identification as the Baths of Zeuxippos.<sup>21</sup> The chronology, however, remains vague.

<sup>15</sup> For an introduction, see B. Longfellow, *Roman Imperialism and Civic Patronage: Form, Meaning, and Ideology in Monumental Fountain Complexes* (Cambridge 2011) and "Roman Fountains in Greek Sanctuaries," in *American Journal of Archaeology* 116/1 (2012), 133–55.

<sup>16</sup> S. Casson et al., *Preliminary report upon the excavations carried out in the hippodrome of Constantinople in 1927 on behalf of the British Academy* (London 1928) and S. Casson & D. Talbot Rice, *Second report upon the excavations carried out in the hippodrome of Constantinople in 1928 on behalf of the British Academy* (London 1929); for an overview of these excavations, see most recently P. Stephenson & R. Hedlund, "Monumental Waterworks in Late Antique Constantinople," in B. Shilling and P. Stephenson (eds.), *Fountains and Water Culture in Byzantium* (Cambridge 2016), 49–51.

<sup>17</sup> Casson et al., *Preliminary report*, 20–23; Casson & Talbot Rice, *Second report*, 5–9.

<sup>18</sup> Casson & Talbot Rice, *Second report*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Prokopios, *On buildings* 1.10.3; Malalas, *Chron.* 18.71; Lydus, *Mag.* III.70; Theophanes, *Chron.* 184 [AM 6024]; Kedrenos, *Synopsis* I. 647; Zonaras, *Hist.* XIV.6. See Casson et al., *Preliminary report*, 22.

<sup>20</sup> *Anth. Pal.* 2; Casson & Talbot Rice, *Second report*, 18–21.

<sup>21</sup> Casson & Talbot Rice, *Second report*, 14–15.



Figs. 1–2. Statue bases presumed to come from the Baths of Zeuxippos. Photo by the author.

Looking closer at the evidence, we find that it sheds some light on the general appearance of the baths. Often, a symmetrical building is constructed around the bath, much like the imperial baths in the city of Rome, as in the area where Building 2 was found.<sup>22</sup> Such reconstructions seem to be without much afterthought. Bassett and Yegül both observe that the model for the Baths of Zeuxippos should be sought among baths in cities such as Miletus and Aphrodisias, where (non-symmetrical) bath complexes were combined with adjacent large rectangular exercise grounds. They therefore interpreted Building 1 as a part of the bath complex, occupying the trapezoidal space between the hippodrome and the Mese, and Building 2 as a part of a portico to the east of it.<sup>23</sup> This reconstruction clearly fits the evidence much better. Moreover, it also corresponds with somewhat neglected finds from excavations undertaken in 1952 further west, when outer walls and basins belonging to baths were found during construction works along the hippodrome. These were identified by Mamboury as parts of the same structure as that revealed by the excavations in the 1920s.<sup>24</sup>

Taken at first glance, there seems to be a rich documentation of the Baths of Zeuxippos in the literary sources. The name seems to have been something of a mystery, already in the Byzantine age. One tradition recorded in the *Patria Konstantinoupoleos* (*Patria* of Constantinople), a tenth-century compilation of texts on the history of Constantinople, associates the name with an altar for the deity Zeus Hippios in a location where Heracles tamed the horses of Diomedes and therefore called the place Zeuxippos.<sup>25</sup> Another explanation, presented by the sixth-century writer John Lydos, links the name to a king: the baths would have

<sup>22</sup> See the plans in Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbul*, 232 (reproduced in many works), or Berger, *Konstantinopel*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> Bassett, “Sculpture and tradition,” 494, referring to F. Yegül, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1992), 250–13; arguments repeated by Yegül, “Baths of Constantinople,” 176–79.

<sup>24</sup> E. Mamboury, “Appendix IV,” in C. Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople*, with an appendix by E. Mamboury (Copenhagen 1959), 186–88.

<sup>25</sup> *Patria* I. 35.



been built on the site of his palace.<sup>26</sup> A third explanation seems most interesting as it tells us something more explicit about the founding of the bath: the sixth-century chronicler and historian John Malalas explains that there was a tetrastoon on the location where the baths were built; within this tetrastoon there was a statue of Sol, and on the base of this statue, the name Zeus Hippios was inscribed, as this was the name for a deity venerated in this region.<sup>27</sup>

The interpretation of Bassett and Yegül also corresponds with evidence from the Byzantine sources.<sup>28</sup> First, the ekphrasis of Christodoros of Koptos actually refers to a *gymnasium* (that is, an open court) of Zeuxippos.<sup>29</sup> Second, a text from the *Codex Justinianus* mentions *officinae* in “the porticoes of Zeuxippos.”<sup>30</sup> Third, it allows us to identify the tetrastoon known from Byzantion in the third century AD (see above). Traditionally, the tetrastoon has been seen for instance as a predecessor of the Augusteion. However, as Malalas explicitly states, the tetrastoon where the statue of Zeus Hippios stood was included by Severus in the baths.<sup>31</sup> Under the pavement of Building 2, there was an earlier, similar pavement on which a silver coin struck for Emperor Hadrian was found.<sup>32</sup> This evidence may be read to support Malalas’ observation that the courtyard of Building 2 was the older tetrastoon incorporated into the baths as they were constructed.

Returning to the chronology, the written sources are less helpful. Several Byzantine sources, all drawing on the same tradition, attribute the construction of the Baths of Zeuxippos to Severus.<sup>33</sup> As the city was later enlarged under Constantine, the Baths of Zeuxippos were furnished with statues, columns, and other precious marbles, and inaugurated with the rest of the city in 330 AD.<sup>34</sup> However, as already stated, this evidence has been challenged. Thus the written sources tell us nothing trustworthy about the construction of the Baths of Zeuxippos. Still, the dating to the Severan age has usually been accepted in modern scholarship.<sup>35</sup>

However, comparative evidence gives some suggestions. A number of better known imperial baths are constructed in the third century AD. Under the Severan dynasty, the famous vast Baths of Caracalla were built in Rome; somewhat later, the baths constructed under Nero on the Campus Martius were renovated under Alexander Severus.<sup>36</sup> Later in the century, yet another set of baths equal to those

<sup>26</sup> Lydos, *Mag.* III. 70.

<sup>27</sup> Malalas, *Chron.* 12. 18–20.

<sup>28</sup> Even earlier, Guillard reached a similar interpretation, concluding from the evidence of the Byzantine sources that the baths of Zeuxippos must have been located on the northern side of the hippodrome, opposite the carceres; see Guillard, “Études sur la topographie,” 264.

<sup>29</sup> *Anth. Pal.* II, title line.

<sup>30</sup> *Cod. Iust.* VIII 12.19; see Guillard, “Études sur la topographie,” 263–64.

<sup>31</sup> Malalas 12.20; see A. Berger, “Die Altstadt von Byzanz in der vorjustinianischen Zeit,” in *Varia II* (Bonn 1987), 24–28, and F. A. Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike: Untersuchungen zur Ausstattung des öffentlichen Raums in den spätantiken Städten Rom, Konstantinopel und Ephesos* (Mainz am Rhein 1996), 149, for a discussion of this passage in Malalas.

<sup>32</sup> Casson & Talbot Rice, *Second report*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Malalas *Chron.* 12.18–20; *Chron. Pasch.* 494–95; Kedrenos, *Synopsis*. I. 648; Patria I. 35; Patria II. 33; Suda, s.v. Severos. For an overview, see Guillard, “Études sur la topographie,” 261–62.

<sup>34</sup> Malalas 13.8; *Chron. Pasch.* 529–30. For an overview of the buildings of Constantine, see Dagron, *Naissance d’une capitale*, 32–37 or more recently Berger, *Konstantinopel*, 7–12.

<sup>35</sup> See Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*, 222–23; Guillard, “Études sur la topographie,” 261; Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, 51; Bassett, *The Urban Image*, 51; C. Mango, *Le développement urbain de Constantinople (IVe–VIIe siècles)* (Paris 2004), 19 and 26.

<sup>36</sup> *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, a cura di Eva Margareta Steinby, vol. V (Rome 1999), 42–48 and 60–62.

of Caracalla were built under Diocletian.<sup>37</sup> The Baths of Zeuxippos must have been much smaller than at least the Baths of Caracalla and Diocletian; considering the sculptural display for which the Baths of Zeuxippos became famous—Kedrenos describes the place as a sort of museum<sup>38</sup>—a comparison with the smaller but luxurious Baths of Decius on the Aventine (constructed in the mid-third century AD) and of Constantine on the Quirinal (from the early fourth century) seems more appropriate.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the dimensions of the Baths of Zeuxippos seem to correspond to imperial bathing establishments in Trier and Milan. These were constructed during the last decades of the third century and the first of the fourth century, as new imperial residences were established in cities such as Trier, Milan, and Thessaloniki. These comparisons suggest an alternative dating of the Baths of Zeuxippos to the last decades of the third century.<sup>40</sup>

There is some other evidence suggesting imperial presence in Byzantion in the late third century, which may be read to support this hypothesis. A rescript in the Justinian code suggests that Aurelian spent the winter 272/273—the winter between his two campaigns against Palmyra—in the city.<sup>41</sup> A passage in the (admittedly unreliable) *Historia Augusta* mentions that Aurelian passed Byzantion on his way towards Palmyra.<sup>42</sup> The much later *Patria* of Constantinople repeatedly refers to Emperor Carus, one of Aurelian's successors who also campaigned in the east.<sup>43</sup> These mentions are probably legendary; still, it is curious that these obscure emperors have left traces in Byzantion.

Still, the presence of these later soldier emperors in the area is well-attested. In the second half of the third century AD, a number of imperial mints, corresponding to the movements of the emperors, were established in the Balkans and Asia Minor in cities such as Siscia, Serdica, and Cyzicus.<sup>44</sup> Robert Göbl even located a temporary field mint established under Aurelian at Byzantion, although this location has been disputed.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Lexicon Topographicum* V, 53–58.

<sup>38</sup> Kedrenos, *Synopsis*. I. 648.

<sup>39</sup> *Lexicon Topographicum* V, 49–53.

<sup>40</sup> Berger has argued that the archaeological record from the hippodrome, with the absence of finds from the third century, indicates a later date of the construction than that stated in the sources; other than that, as seen above, no evidence directly supports this dating. See A. Berger, "Regionen und Straßen im frühen Konstantinopel," in *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 47 (1997), 359 and 412–13; followed by Mayer, *Rom ist dort wo der Kaiser ist*, 31–47, and P. Stephenson, *Constantine: Unconquered Emperor, Christian Victor* (London 2009), 193.

<sup>41</sup> *Cod. Iust.* V 72, 2; see D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle. Grundzüge einer römischen Kaiserchronologie* (Darmstadt 2011, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.), 234.

<sup>42</sup> SHA Aurel., 22.3.

<sup>43</sup> There are two mentions of a statue of Carus, referred to as the "stepfather of Diocletian" at the Hagia Sophia (*Patria* I.49 and II.96); a "gate of Carus" near the Philadelphion is also mentioned (*Patria* II.48). For the chronology of Carus' campaigns in the east, see Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 258–60.

<sup>44</sup> See Hedlund, *...achieved nothing worthy of memory*, 151–59 for an overview. One source claims that Constantine resided in Serdica before establishing his residence in Byzantion; see Anon. Dion. Cont. fig. 15 (FHG IV, 199); Dagron, *Naissance d'un capitale*, 30.

<sup>45</sup> R. Göbl, *Die Münzprägung des Kaisers Aurelianus* (Wien 1993), 60–61; S. Estiot, *Catalogue des monnaies de l'Empire, 12:1. D' Aurélien à Florian 270–276 après J.-C* (Paris 2004), 95–96, was not convinced.



Fig. 3. *The Tetrachs, now at Venice.*  
Photo by the author.

At least one other landmark of early Constantinople could possibly be connected to this age as well. The so-called *Philadelphion* is described in the *Patria* of Constantinople as a crossroads where statues depicting the sons of Constantine embracing were put up.<sup>46</sup> This landmark is usually reconstructed as a group of columns bearing the statues of the first four tetrarchs, now in the Basilica of St Mark in Venice (Fig. 3). As a missing part of the statue-group was found in the area of Istanbul where the *Philadelphion* would have been located, the attribution of the statues is well-attested.<sup>47</sup> Several similar monuments are known to have been constructed for the emperors of the first and second tetrarchies; accordingly, the *Philadelphion* too was suggested by Emanuel Mayer to be a monument of the tetrarchs before Constantine.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the picture of a developing imperial residence before Constantine is starting to emerge. The question still remains to whom this residence should be attributed—Berger suggests Licinius, the enemy and rival of Constantine, who is known to have resided in Byzantium for some time shortly before being defeated by Constantine in 324.<sup>49</sup> To sum up, there are many indications that, although none might be individually compelling, when taken together suggest an increasing imperial presence in the city of Byzantium in the last decades of the third century AD. The archaeological record from the Baths of Zeuxippos is consistent with a bath partly reutilizing older structures in this period, transforming it into a monumental meeting point of this developing imperial cityscape.

## A network perspective

Even so, the construction history of early Constantinople does not tell us how the place or monument functioned, or were perceived, in their societies. In the absence of information concerning this, all studies of intentions must remain “unprovable assertions.”<sup>50</sup> Yet by addressing the question, we might at least understand the motives for the construction of monumental architecture in the later Roman Empire.

The use of network theory can further enable us to conceptualize how construction, monuments, and the like do not merely develop as the result of the

<sup>46</sup> *Patria* II.48.

<sup>47</sup> P. Niewöhner & U. Peschlow, “Neues zu den Tetrarchenfiguren in Venedig und ihrer Aufstellung in Konstantinopel,” *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 62 (2012), 341–43.

<sup>48</sup> Mayer, *Rom ist dort wo der Kaiser ist*, 165–68.

<sup>49</sup> Suggested by Berger, most recently in *Konstantinopel*, 4.

<sup>50</sup> A. Eastmond rev. of Sarah Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (Cambridge 2004), *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2006.01.43, <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2006/2006-01-43.html> (last visited 2018-10-01): “These intended meanings are plausibly argued ... but as they are often not mentioned by any Byzantine authors they must remain, ultimately, unprovable assertions – the fate of all studies of intentions.”

builders' intentions; but rather, by also analyzing different actors in society and their actions, we can shift the focus from the construction and original appearance of the object to its subsequent modifications and uses. In this respect, the Roman bath is a fitting case study; as Yegül expresses it, the baths provided "a kind of civic harbor or gathering place, an institutional place of linkage, where sacred and profane, exclusive and everyday, fact and symbol met and merged, in a way that could not happen in the official palace, basilica, or circus."<sup>51</sup>

In the evidence from the Baths of Zeuxippos, a number of actants—agents that are not necessarily human, but can just as well be objects—are discernible. The traces of actants contributing to the founding history of the baths have already been noted. The two structures found during the excavations, the coin struck under Hadrian and the statue bases with the inscriptions, to name a few, all contribute to our understanding of the place. Further, among the human actants, we have also encountered the emperors Septimius Severus (in an uncertain role), Aurelian, Carus, and Constantine. Even the other residences of the tetrarchs and the baths in those other cities, and the traces of possible imperial presence in Byzantion in the last decades of the third century, such as the Philadelphion and the rescript in the Justinian code, play their part in the network.

As for the continued use of the baths, several historical notices testify to various uses of the baths in Roman Imperial and early Byzantine culture. In many cases, emperors are involved. The fifth-century historians Sozomen and Socrates report that in 344 AD, the patriarch Paul was invited by the prefect Philippos to debate in the Baths of Zeuxippos, and then arrested.<sup>52</sup> In the reign of Leo I in the late 460s, a philosopher from Antioch by the name of Isokakios was accused of paganism and interrogated in the baths.<sup>53</sup> Theophanes the confessor (c. 760–818 AD) notes that some ten years afterwards, during the revolt of Marcian against Emperor Zeno, the brothers of Marcian, Romulos and Prokopios, were arrested in the baths.<sup>54</sup> In 681 AD the monk Polychronis who claimed to be able to raise the dead was summoned to demonstrate his powers in public in the Baths of Zeuxippos.<sup>55</sup> From the tenth-century *Book of Ceremonies* we know that the baths provided an important way-station on the emperor's ceremonial processions to the imperial palace; thus, the baths were linked with court ritual.<sup>56</sup> Such notes record a number of different human actants—the emperor himself, his court, the patriarch, city magistrates, monks—moving through the Baths of Zeuxippos, interacting with one another and with the building complex.

The most important body of evidence relates to the collection of statues for which the Baths of Zeuxippos would become famous. Christodoros of Koptos, who describes them in his ekphrasis, is the only author who has offered an account of his impressions of the place. Through his ekphrasis we can see how the Baths of Zeuxippos develop as an "imperial monument" and as an actor in its own right in Roman and Byzantine culture.

Christodoros of Koptos was an epic poet of Egyptian background active in the time of Emperor Anastasios (491–518 AD); the ekphrasis on the statues in the Baths of Zeuxippos, usually dated to around 500 AD, is his only major work to

<sup>51</sup> Yegül, "Baths of Constantinople," 190–91.

<sup>52</sup> Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 2.16; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* III. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Malalas, *Chron.* 14. 38; *Chron. Pasch.* 595–596; Theophanes, *Chron.* 115 [AM 5960].

<sup>54</sup> Theophanes, *Chron.* 127 [AM 5971].

<sup>55</sup> Du Cange, *CP Christiana* 1. 91; see Guillard, "Études sur la topographie," 262.

<sup>56</sup> *De ceremoniis* 1.17; see Guillard, "Études sur la topographie," 265–71.

survive.<sup>57</sup> Thus, as W. R. Paton observes in the preface to the Loeb edition of the text, the emphasis would have been written shortly before the original bath complex (later rebuilt under Justinian) was destroyed by fire.<sup>58</sup> Christodoros mentions a large number of statues, mostly representing mythological figures, although a number of gods and a smaller number of historical figures are also present. Of the latter, it could be noted that most are persons from classical Greek history, although Caesar, Pompey, and Virgil are also represented.<sup>59</sup> Through the statues in the baths of Zeuxippos, Christodoros envisions a multi-layered cultural history consisting of references to the Greek, Trojan, and Roman past, while also linking these pasts to present-day Constantinople.

The assembly of statues has been interpreted in different ways.<sup>60</sup> Any interpretation about a 'visual program' remains a problem since the ekphrasis may be incomplete;<sup>61</sup> we cannot be sure that all statues are accounted for or that all those described were correctly identified. There is even a possibility that the description of the statues could be merely a rhetorical invention.<sup>62</sup> At least the three statue bases that were found during the excavations in 1927–28 suggest that Christodoros identified the statues correctly, as two of the bases were inscribed with the names of Hecuba and Aischines, statues that are both described by Christodoros.<sup>63</sup> The third base is anonymous but identical to the one inscribed with the name of Hecuba and was thus assumed by the excavators to have carried a statue of Ulysses, who is described as paired with Hecuba.<sup>64</sup> When and why inscriptions were added to the statue bases is impossible to ascertain, and Christodoros sometimes does not accept the identifications they provide. Of one statue, he writes that the inscription on the base identifies it as the soothsayer Alkmaion, but Christodoros remarks that the statue did not feature the iconography typically associated with prophets: it did not feature the laurel crown, the attribute of soothsayers. Christodoros therefore instead identifies the statue as representing the poet Alkman.<sup>65</sup> Reconstructing a historical assembly of statues with the help of Christodoros, thus, is extremely difficult.

Similar problems of changing interpretations of statues can be found in later Byzantine texts. The *Patria* of Constantinople, as mentioned above, states that the

<sup>57</sup> Bär, "Christodoros," 448.

<sup>58</sup> *The Greek Anthology*, Books 1–6, tr. W. R. Paton (Cambridge, Mass. 1916).

<sup>59</sup> Lines 92–96 (Caesar); 398–406 (Pompey); 414–16 (Virgil).

<sup>60</sup> Stupperich ("Das Statuenprogramm," 232–35) saw a program focusing on the myth of Troy, envisioned by Constantine in order to present Constantinople as a New Troy; G. Bassett ("*Historiae custos*," 505–6 and *The urban image*, 54–58) instead interpreted the assembly as a broad illustration of the Roman past and as a part in Constantine's plan of 'Romanization' of Byzantium. Saradi ("Perceptions and Literary Interpretations," 42) points out that the interpretations are not mutually exclusive.

<sup>61</sup> See Saradi, "Perceptions and Literary Interpretations," 43; Kaldellis, "Christodoros on the Statues," 368.

<sup>62</sup> Kaldellis, "Christodoros on the statues," 363; See also Eastmond, rev. of Sarah Bassett, *The urban image*. On the *ekphrasis* as a genre, see H. Maguire, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, N.J. 1981); L. James & R. Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium," *Art History* 14/1 (1991), 1–17; or the reception of statues in Byzantium, see C. Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *DOP* 17 (1963), 55–75, and more recently A. Bravi, "*Ornamenta, Monumenta, Exempla*: Greek Images of Gods in the Public Spaces of Constantinople," in J. Mylonopoulos (ed.), *Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Leiden 2010), 289–301.

<sup>63</sup> Lines 13–16 and 175–88 respectively; Casson & Talbot Rice, *Second report*, 18–21.

<sup>64</sup> Lines 171–74; Casson & Talbot Rice, *Second report*, 19. This assumption is repeated by Bassett; see Bassett, *The Urban Image*, 166.

<sup>65</sup> Lines 388–92.

four statues of the Philadelphion depicted the four sons of Constantine meeting and embracing (hence the name); the event was commemorated at this very spot, although the actual meeting happened elsewhere.<sup>66</sup> Niketas Choniates' *De Signis* ("Concerning the statues"), an account of the destruction of statues in Constantinople during the plunders of the crusaders in 1204 tells of one of the statues destroyed, an equestrian statue from the Forum of Theodosius. Some, Niketas relates, identified the statue as Joshua, pointing with his hand towards the sinking sun, "commanding it to stand still upon Gabaon," while others maintained that the statue was one of Bellerophon, mounted on Pegasus.<sup>67</sup>

This point, that statues lived their own lives as it were, is important to our study. The inscriptions on the statue bases presents us with an additional problem, as they do not contain all that which inscriptions usually record, that is: who put up the statue, to whom it was donated, and why. On the other hand, the bases do record something to which we are not accustomed: the name of the person the statue represents. This action, inscribing the statue bases with names, may signify different things. The statue bases may have been inscribed to provide an identification that may have been impossible to make only from the statue itself, or an identification that had been forgotten. Christodoros' ekphrasis underlines this. However, quite different agendas may be at play here. Inscribing a name was a way of empowering images in Byzantine culture, and conversely the failure to name an image was a way of disarming them.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the inscribed names can be understood as a way of 'charging' this already symbolically laden space: through the act of the inscription, ideas or values were transformed into material form and made durable.<sup>69</sup> If this was the case, the 'naming' of the statues in some cases seems to have failed.

Ultimately, irrespectively of how the statues might be 'properly' identified, they remained open to various interpretations of the actants viewing them. Christodoros with his ekphrasis attempts to 'bring the statues to life', and describe the viewing experience for people who are not able to see them themselves.<sup>70</sup> The viewers, in their turn, construct new meanings out of the assembly of statues, thus providing meaning to the place.

Some further notes relating to statues in the Baths of Zeuxippos can be made. At least one additional statue was added in 467 AD, when the senate awarded a physician called Jacob with a statue in the baths.<sup>71</sup> It is impossible to know, however, how this statue related to the assembly described by Christodoros. After the Nika riots, the baths were rebuilt under Justinian and statues of Justinian and Theodora are claimed to have been placed outside the baths, most probably facing

<sup>66</sup> *Patria* II.48.

<sup>67</sup> Niketas Choniates, *History* 649, as tr. by H. J. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit 1984), 358. For a recent introduction to the *De Signis* and its relation to the *History* of Niketas Choniates, see T. Papmatorakis, "Interpreting *De signis* of Niketas Choniates", in A. Simpson and S. Efthymiadis (eds.), *Niketas Choniates: A Historian and a Writer* (Geneva 2009), 209–23.

<sup>68</sup> See H. Maguire, *The Icons of their Bodies: Saints and their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 144–45.

<sup>69</sup> This is another key concept in ANT, frequently referred to as "inscription", "transcription" or "encoding"; see B. Latour, "Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a few Mundane Artefacts," in W. E. Bijker & J. Law (eds.), *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge, Mass. 1992), 256.

<sup>70</sup> For this definition of the purpose of the ekphrasis, see James & Webb, "To Understand Ultimate Things," 6–8.

<sup>71</sup> Malalas, *Chron.* 14.38; *Chron. Pasch.* 595.

the Chalke.<sup>72</sup> And from the eighth century, a colored image in the baths depicting Emperor Philippikos is mentioned.<sup>73</sup>

All these observations can now be analyzed through the lens of ANT. First, an emperor builds a bath, such as that of Zeuxippos. This fact then prompts later emperors, or other actants not known to us, to honor imperial predecessors and other important persons with statues and inscriptions in that bath. This honor, in turn, prompts further actants to put up statues or inscriptions, or use the bath for various other purposes. In none of these cases can we be certain exactly which actions the different actants will take, or exactly how these will be interpreted. However, the various actions will add new layers of interpretation to the place. Out of these layers, the different actants moving through the bath will construct their own meanings: in ANT language, the bath is filled with mediations between the actants.

In this particular case, despite the meagre evidence, a number of actants leaving their imprints in the Baths of Zeuxippos can be discerned. First, the actual baths were constructed sometime in the third century AD, very likely in the latter half of that century. The construction would have incorporated an earlier portico, which suggests at least one 'action' pre-dating the genesis of the baths themselves. Second, these baths were renovated and furnished with decorations under Constantine. Third, at least one more statue was added in 467 AD. In the early sixth century, Justinian and the Nika Rioters intervene as powerful actants in the history of the baths, as these are destroyed by fire and the original assembly of statues described by Christodoros most likely came to an end. The statue bases may have been added after this event, perhaps representing repairs after the destruction of the baths during the Nika Riots, or were at least re-used at some point. Then, there are the inscriptions on the statue bases, which also point at yet another action, as someone 'charges' the statue symbolically through inscribing the bases. Perhaps, this also happened as the baths were reconstructed.

However, the network does not stop growing here. Later still, various other more uncertain actions also take place, some probably after the baths have ceased to function as such (in the early middle ages, parts of the baths may have been re-used as a prison, others as a silk factory).<sup>74</sup> Moreover, agency is not restricted to those physically contributing to the baths; all those persons known to have visited the baths—emperors, monks and poets—add meaning to the place. And of course, Christodoros, his ekphrasis with its manifold interpretations are most important among these (modern scholarly publications, even this one, continue to add to the network).

All these observations imply actions by various actants, unknown to us, at different point in the extensive history of the Baths of Zeuxippos. Together, all these actions provide an illustration of another phenomenon conceptualized by ANT which is called enrollment.<sup>75</sup> Once the Baths of Zeuxippos were furnished with statues (by Constantine and/or others) further actants and actions follow. Through mediating knowledge and interpretations the way Christodoros demonstrates, the statues themselves 'enroll' other actants. These act in a number of ways,

<sup>72</sup> *Parastaseis* 81; Guillard, "Études sur la topographie," 262.

<sup>73</sup> *Parastaseis* 82; *Patria* II.39.

<sup>74</sup> Guillard, "Études sur la topographie," 262.

<sup>75</sup> This concept is developed for instance by M. Callon, "Some Element of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay," in J. Law (ed.), *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* (London 1986), 211–14.

adding other statues to the assembly, adding new bases and (possibly) inscribing the bases with the names of the statues. But the enrollment also creates a flexible, multifunctional space, suitable for debates, interrogations, demonstrations of mystic powers, and the like. In a sense, the space starts living a life of its own, and becomes an actant in society in its own right.

Through such enrollment, a new space is gradually constructed. In ANT terminology, this space could be described as a hybrid, constructed out of the various interactions between different actants in Constantinopolitan society.<sup>76</sup> In the Baths of Zeuxippos, the actants putting up inscriptions, statues, et cetera act as participants in the creation of this hybrid. These baths, thus, functioned as a location where imperial authority could be demonstrated, but also negotiated and ultimately transformed. Thus, we can understand baths, monumental fountains, and similar waterworks not only as backdrops for the symbolic staging of power. When people met at such places, they could be engaged in the very construction of imperial culture and ideology.

## Towards a 'New Rome'

This ANT-analysis of the baths of Zeuxippos suggests a way of understanding how the city starts developing in the third century AD. The developments of the city under Constantine, of course, have left more tangible traces, most prominently the Mese which was extended over the circular Forum of Constantine, where the column of Constantine was the central piece. This column was surmounted by a statue of Constantine which stood there until the early twelfth century.<sup>77</sup> Later legends claim that the palladium, the wooden effigy of Athena taken to Troy by Aeneas, was buried in the base.<sup>78</sup> This link between Troy and Constantinople also linked the city to the Roman past; the myth of Aeneas and Troy as it was most famously developed by Virgil, provided a place and a pedigree for the Romans in classical culture, demonstrating that the Romans were part of Greek culture going back to Homer and yet unlike the Greeks.<sup>79</sup> Later legends claiming that Constantine considered making Troy his residence, before settling on Byzantion, further underlined the status of Constantinople as the new Rome.<sup>80</sup> Constantius also constructed a rotund mausoleum for himself, a building-type which underlines the continuity from Rome to Constantinople as several examples of the type are preserved from late antique Rome and other tetrarchic residences.<sup>81</sup>

Developments of the city continued under the sons of Constantine. Under Constantius, the senate of Constantinople was granted equal status to that of

<sup>76</sup> The idea of hybridity is discussed for instance in Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 227–28.

<sup>77</sup> Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, 255; Berger, *Konstantinopel*, 13–15.

<sup>78</sup> Malalas, *Chron.* 13.7

<sup>79</sup> E. S. Gruen *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome* (London 1993), 6–16.

<sup>80</sup> Berger, *Konstantinopel*, 7; Stupperich's interpretation of the assembly of statues in the baths of Zeuxippos as a "Trojan program" should also be understood from this perspective.

<sup>81</sup> Among the most well-known in Rome are the mausolea of Romulus and the tomb of Helena; see J. J. Rasch, *Das Maxentius-Mausoleum an der Via Appia in Rom* (Mainz am Rhein 1984) and J. J. Rasch & F. W. Deichmann, *Das Mausoleum der Kaiserin Helena in Rom und der "Tempio della Tosse" in Tivoli* (Mainz am Rhein 1998). The building type spread to the tetrarchic residences as well, as demonstrated by the so-called rotunda of Galerius in Thessaloniki, possibly intended as the mausoleum of Galerius; see H. Grégoire, "La rotonde de S. Georges à Thessalonique et le mausolée de Galère," *Byzantion* 14 (1939), 323–24, and S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent* (New Haven & London 2010), 53–54 and 69–71.



Rome. Furthermore, and more importantly, large church complexes, equal to those of Rome, were finished: first the ‘great church’, the precursor of Hagia Sophia, and then the Church of the Apostles that would serve as official burial church of the Byzantine emperors.<sup>82</sup> In the age of Theodosius, several other monumental buildings are added to the cityscape, these including the Forum of Theodosius with its column resembling those of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius in Rome, and a triumphal arch. Another notable addition to the cityscape from this age is the obelisk on the hippodrome with its relief base.<sup>83</sup> On the whole, it seems quite fitting that, in the acts of the church council of Theodosius in 381 AD, Constantinople is for the first time acclaimed as the ‘New Rome.’<sup>84</sup>

To conclude, then: Constantinople was not created as a new capital out of nothing. Byzantium developed gradually as an imperial residence, and this development continued well into the fourth century AD. Moreover, with the help of ANT we can attempt to unlock the mechanisms by which the inhabitants of Constantinople interact with the cityscape, creating a dense cityscape filled with meanings. We can model how people, objects, and places interact, and not least, assess the powers of the objects left for the archaeologists to find. In this case, we can understand how one building, the baths of Zeuxippos, developed not as the result of one individual emperor, but rather as the effect of several interactions.

This development illustrates how imperial residences outside of the city of Rome evolved towards the end of the third century AD. Considering this, we can also understand how the Roman provincial city of Byzantium was transformed from the regional city of Byzantium to an imperial residence and finally into the imperial capital of Constantinople, the ‘New Rome.’ This gradual genesis of Constantinople demonstrates how the Straits and the city commanding the Straits connect not only Europe and Asia but furthermore, chronologically, also connect the Roman Empire with the Byzantine and Medieval ages.

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<sup>82</sup> Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, 20.

<sup>83</sup> For the Forum of Theodosius, see Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, 258–66; for the hippodrome, see idem., 65, and Berger, *Konstantinopel*, 65–68. For a detailed survey of the monuments of Theodosian Constantinople, see Mayer, *Rom its dort wo der Kaiser ist*, 105–74. For the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, see A. Claridge, *Rome: An Oxford Archaeological Guide* (Oxford 2010, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 186–91 and 218–22 respectively.

<sup>84</sup> Acts of the Church Council in AD 381, canon 3.