

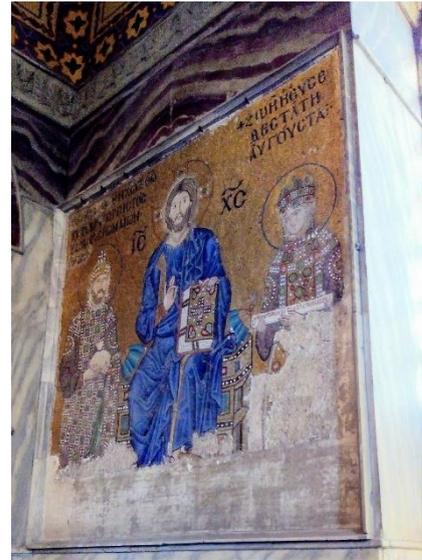
Arthur Felix Broomfield Travel Report

During the Easter Vacation, I undertook a ten-day travel period to Turkey: to Istanbul, and to Trabzon, on the Black Sea in the East near Georgia. Currently in my second year of a History and English degree, my purpose in making the journey was to attempt to engage with, to understand, and to attempt to 'experience' daily life in the Byzantine Empire; the predominantly Greek-speaking, Christian successor to the Roman Empire, in existence from c.330AD-to 1453 and centred around the capital city of Constantinople, Istanbul's predecessor. Having applied to undertake the 'Byzantium in The Age of Constantine Porphyrogenitus' Special Subject, and planning an undergraduate thesis on Medieval travel literature that includes Byzantine-English contact, I wished to bridge the distance of the page and the glass museum case. To see 'Constantinople' itself, and a Byzantine city on the periphery of Empire, making use of the extra-curricular Greek language classes I have undertaken this year to engage with their ruins and museum collections. I wished additionally through this experience to attempt to gauge an understanding of Byzantine contact with neighbouring peoples and 'aliens', and also the relationship of influence between Byzantium and both its predecessors – The Romans – and its successors – The Ottomans –. This undertaking was only made possible through the generous provision of the Arthur Felix Broomfield Travel Prize, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of those who have in any way made it possible.

Based in Turkey from 19th-28th March, I placed myself in the Istanbul suburb of Sultanahmet, within the walls of the original medieval city of Constantinople and close to a number of Istanbul's most significant sites. Between the 20th-22nd March, I based myself predominantly on the First Hill of Constantinople. Both Istanbul and its predecessor were built on a series of seven hills, identical to the layout of Rome, for which Constantinople was to be the 'new' version when Emperor Constantine I moved the Roman Capital there in 330AD, thus effectively starting the Byzantine Empire. Time here, given its previous place as centre of Byzantine public life, allowed me vivid comparison with the original Rome, something especially important to my thesis given its basis in 'Ye Solace for Pilgrims', a c.1450 description of Rome by King's Lynn-based scholar John Capgrave. I was able to observe that the Hippodrome – the 10,000-person capacity public games arena – was built upon this hill in a manner almost identical to Rome's. It was striking to compare their similarity for myself, even down to the series of obelisks and columns in the centre of the former track, including a perfectly preserved Egyptian example from the reign of Pharaoh Tuthmosis III, originally erected in c.1490AD and placed in the arena – perhaps thereby illustrating the Byzantine pseudo-synonymity between competition and war – by Emperor Theodosius I in 390AD. Making out the description on the obelisk, I was able to discern something especially important: 'I was under Patroclus' governorship raised to the skies above', illustrating a Byzantine pride in engineering for the sake of engineering, something that I had never before come across. In-situ also were minor remnants of the Great Palace, now built into public walls; of Constantine I's 'Serpent Column', a snake-like twist of bronze; and of a column known as the Column of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the namesake of my Special Subject, and so dubbed because he repaired it with a coating of now-missing bronze in the 10th Century AD. Especially striking was the extent to which the ground had elevated since the Byzantine era; by my estimation at least four metres.

While in this section of the city I was able to venture into the Hagia Sophia, the central cathedral of Byzantine Orthodox Christianity, completed in 537AD. Interestingly, this sat in a courtyard of the ruins of its predecessor church, built c.415AD. I was able to observe a clear difference between something that looked, as it were, 'textbook Roman' in the ruins, and something newer and more 'Greek' in the present structure, whilst at the same time retaining some similarities, such as in the columns' leaf ornamentation. That the cathedral, upon Ottoman conquest, had had four minarets

added to it as part of conversion into a Mosque, only drove home the notion that Constantinople is very much a city of cumulative build-up by successive civilisations. The inside was spellbinding, and quite unlike anything to which the central European experience of ecclesiastical architecture can truly relate. Inside this vast structure, the largest Cathedral in the world until the completion of Seville Cathedral in 1528, I was able, even roughly a millennium later, to compare to the descriptions of the chronicler Hesychios Illoustrious. His 'Patria', a compendium of descriptions of Byzantine Constantinople recently published in a Dumbarton Oaks edition edited by Albrecht Berger, accompanied me constantly throughout my trip. Of the Hagia Sophia, he beautifully noted that 'the floor too, was a wonder for those who entered, for by the great variety of its marbles it appeared like the sea or constantly flowing currents of a river', and he was correct, especially around the 'omphalion' ('navel of the earth'), where Emperors were crowned; illustrating the double-sanctity of a religious-political fusion. Elsewhere, I was in particular able to observe stunning mosaics, including those of the Empress Zoe (d. 1050AD) and her husband Constantine IX; especially interesting, because the mosaic figure was far younger than the Empress had been, and the head of the husband – her third, who had been married to her the day of his predecessor's death – was slightly askew, suggesting last-minute alteration.



The Mosaic of Empress Zoe (right), and her husband Constantine IX (left), flanking Christ.

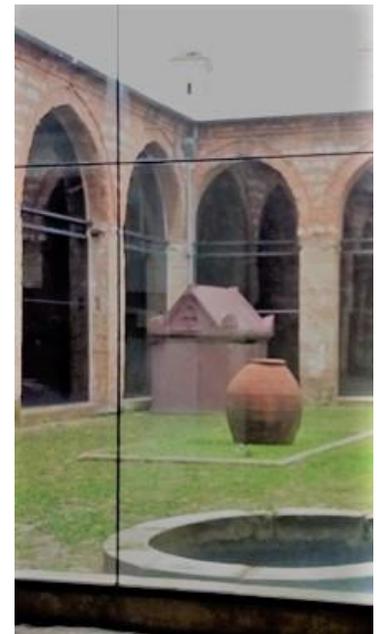
In this section of 'Constantinople' I was able to venture into the Church of St. Sergius and St. Bacchus, now the Küçük Aya Sofya Mosque, to further see the 'cumulative build' notion through deploying my language skills. Around the gallery was the clear Greek inscription 'our sceptred Justinian honours with splendid abode the servant of Christ, Creator of all things, Sergius'. Further, I was able to descend into the 'Yerebatonsaray', the 'Basilica Cistern', the largest and most elaborate of Constantinople's 150 covered water-supply cisterns, in order to observe civic infrastructure. Of particular note were the dripping 'Weeping Column' allegedly exuding dead slave-workers' tears, and two colossal stone heads of the gorgon Medusa, turned at angles to prevent paralysis.

The Blue Mosque unfortunately was closed for renovation, but I was able to make my way into its courtyard, and, in my opinion, to observe partial similarity to the typical layout of Roman and Byzantine basilicas. Fortunately instead, nearby were several Ottoman royal tombs. The coffin of Sultan Selim II (d.1574) was visible, though the sheer number of tiny, child-sized coffins were extremely unsettling, and drove home the ferocity of the competition for power, which included as standard strangulation of one's rivals whilst they were children. In the Great Palace Museum, I was able to observe the floor mosaics of the original royal residence, and was especially struck by the tension between the subjects: jumping boys frolicking with animals, and the dark intrigue that took place literally on top of them. In the Islamic Arts Museum, I was able to see artefacts from across the range of ever-changing civilisations of Anatolia, over a 5,000 year timespan. Especially of note were the Qur'ans of the Timurids – nomads from modern-day Uzbekistan – whose beauty completely undercut the boorish, 'slash and burn' stereotype usually associated with them.

Of final note on the First Hill were the Topkapi Palace – the principle Ottoman Royal residence – and the Istanbul Archaeological Museum. The former struck me in how Versailles-esque it seemed, and made me question the extent to which the later Ottomans drew their influence from the West, rather than the East. The latter included the iron chain used to block enemy ships from entering the

harbour of Constantinople, and metal spouts, affixed to ships to launch 'Greek Fire'; an unknown yet highly flammable chemical cocktail that burned more vigorously upon contact with water. The Museum notably also contained a statue of the war-waging King Shalmaneser III (d.823BC), of the Anatolian Assyrians, who spent 31 years of his 35-year reign at war with neighbours. At the centre of the exhibition was the 'Alexander Sarcophagus', a huge marble structure excavated at Sidon, Lebanon, in 1887; depicting on its side the efforts of Alexander the Great at the 333BC Battle of Issus against the Persians. It was clear to me that the region had almost always been involved in war, and that the civilisations inhabiting it had shared the common trait of bestowing special reverence to the martially successful.

In the grounds of the Topkapi was a blackened church seemingly overlooked by the tourist throngs: the Hagia Eirene, formerly the second largest church in Constantinople, and converted into an arms depot rather than a Mosque by the Ottomans. Here, I learned of the difference in artistic style that came with the 'Iconoclasm', the periods of Byzantine history in which icons were seen as sinful. The church had a rare example of a giant cross – dating from the reign of Constantine V (d.775AD) -, rather than a human mosaic, above its synthron, the staggered steps used as seating for high-ranking clergy. I resolved while here to explore as much of the church as I could, and was spellbound to find, hidden in its cloisters, a grubby window looking onto a courtyard now used for storage. Within the courtyard with its boxes, was an intact, almost pristine, Byzantine Imperial sarcophagus; c.8ft tall and made of purple porphyry stone. It was this stone that granted Constantine VII 'Porphyrogenitus' – the star of the Special Subject – his name: 'born in the purple', for he was born in a special royal chamber of the palace completely lined with the 'royal' stone. My particular interests in Byzantium centre around the production of 'Tyrian Purple', the purple cloth dye, derived from Murex seashells and human urine, used as part of this symbolism. To finally see a real-life example of this after so long was utterly exhilarating.



The royal porphyry sarcophagus in the hidden courtyard of the Hagia Eirene.

Between 23rd-24th I decided to undertake a rapid, early-rising, dense coverage of the wider city. Able to use the Diran Yolu, a central arterial route into West Istanbul that formed the route of Byzantine Imperial homecoming processions, I could easily deviate briefly to visit many sites. I observed the Cemberlitas, the 'Burnt Column' of royal porphyry stone, built by Constantine I and so-named for its damage during city fires. On top of the Second Hill, I was able to visit the Fatih Mosque, dedicated to Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II, who took Constantinople in 1453. This huge structure dominated the skyline in its district, and I was interested to imagine its Byzantine predecessor: the Church of the Holy Apostles. This was Emperor Constantine I's massive shrine to the Disciples, alleged to contain an advent-calendar like set of niches for all of their relics, including the skull of St. Andrew, which was levelled by the Ottomans in 1461. Clearly, both civilisations recognised the impact of building monuments in such a location.

In Western Istanbul, I was able to visit three churches: the Pammakaristos, the Chora, and the Church of St. Stephen. The former, now the Kariye Mosque, was the equivalent of a local parish church, and it was striking to find frescoes just as lavish here as in parts of the Hagia Sophia. The Chora Church, famous for its mosaics, was undergoing renovation, and as such its central nave was closed, but I was still able to see all other sections of the interior. The Church emphasised the

Byzantine love of artistic 'cycles', here depicting the entire story of Jesus' birth through a series of different panels. Especially striking was the mosaic of Christ around the closed door of the knave; to enter the main body of the Church, one would literally have to pass through 'Jesus' and into his body. The Bulgarian Church of St. Stephen, near the shoreline, was built by the Bulgarian minority in the 19th century, and was unique in its construction: entirely of iron panels. It was fascinating to note certain similarities in artistic style between this and the Byzantines, from whom Bulgaria's orthodoxy originated in 864AD.

Further West, I was able to reach the monumental city walls of Constantinople. These illustrated that it was no surprise that contemporaries often referred to Constantinople as the 'Basileuoussa', the 'Queen of Cities'. Medieval London was housed within a walled area of one square mile. Medieval Constantinople, I found, contained over one hundred and fifteen. The walls, with two sets of c.12m high fortifications, with a ditch in front and a pit in-between, to an average distance across of 15-20 metres, had 96 towers and were simply too extensive to examine completely. I made my way specifically to the Gate of St. Romanos, where the last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine XI, was killed; and to the Gate of Charisius, where the victorious Sultan Mehmed II first made his entry. It should be no surprise that it took the Ottomans, despite having over 70 cannons and a minimum of c.100,000 troops against a defending army of c.10,000, could not break into the city for 53 days. From one section of the wall, I was able to look down upon the remains of the Blachernae Palace, the favoured retreat residence of the later emperors, built just inside the city wall in the extreme West. This now lies in ruins, but it didn't help but feel almost funny that a pleasure-complex should be located literally connected to an austere military fortification.

Lastly in this section of the city, I visited a site on no tourist list: the Church of St. Mary of the Mongols in the suburb of Fener. This tiny, squat building is in fact the only Byzantine church, throughout the entire city, to never have been adapted for any other purpose than Christian worship with the Orthodox rite. It is the last religious vestige of Byzantine Constantinople. The church does not open, save for services, but I was content with approaching its exterior. The building was constructed in its present form in 1281 by Maria Palaiologina, illegitimate daughter of Emperor Michael VIII, after her return from marriage to the Mongol ruler Abaqa Khan following his death. Due to the damage of the 1453 Conquest, the ground plan is non-symmetrical, and juts out at a diagonal on one side. It is a moving site, because what the Church represents, and how it appears, are worlds apart. The last vestige of Byzantine metropolitan Christianity is an ignominious, crumbling little would-be ruin on the corner of a suburban street between two car parks full of rubbish bins. In a way, this makes the site that bit more special: it is representative of an idea and its endurance, and need not be grand nor sumptuous to have immense worth.

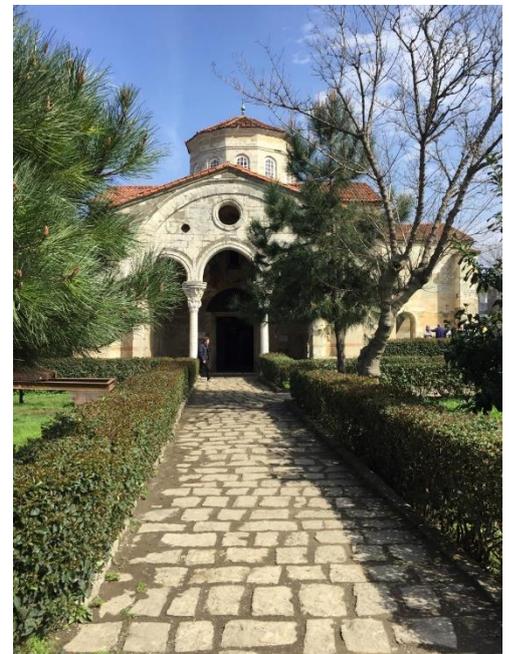
I finished this portion of the journey with a passing visit to Galata, the hilly suburb over the Golden Horn waterway to the North of Medieval Istanbul. This had been home to the Italian Merchant communities, and I was able to reach the base of the Galata Tower, a watch-post constructed under their sponsorship in 1348.

Between 25th -27th, I travelled to Trabzon, originally the capital of the theme (Byzantine administrative unit) of Chaldia. The city represented the perfect choice for examining daily life. Known to the Byzantines as Trebizond, it was always a significant urban centre yet perpetually on the periphery. Especially after the loss of Eastern Anatolia following 1071, Trebizond was always something of a borderland, and place of cross cultural exchange. It was neither Byzantine nor un-Byzantine: the city strongly remained 'Byzantine' in terms of its culture, eventually ruled by its own emperors – an off-shoot branch of the Byzantine Komnenoi dynasty -, and even falling to the Ottomans 8 years after Constantinople, in 1461. However, the city was also un-Byzantine enough to

achieve this autonomy, and paid effective tribute to its Islamic neighbours for far longer than Constantinople. It thus provided the opportunity for me to observe a more 'typical' example of Byzantine urban living, and to investigate life in the empire away from its capital.

The best British comparison I could draw for Trabzon would be York: a very distinct, small medieval core surrounded by modern development that was, originally, sprawling countryside. I took the time to explore its walls, and to note, as it were, a 'lower-budget' version of those of Constantinople: the same layout of towers and employment of deep ditches either side. Trabzon had a fortification advantage over Constantinople, in that the Pontic mountains that surround it on land are extremely treacherous, and contributed significantly to the city's retaining of a distinct identity for so long. While in Trabzon, I developed a better understanding of the construction of identity in a region of constant flux. The Turks refer to Greece as 'Yunan', a word deriving from the Old Persian for 'Ionian'. Interestingly, 'Rum', from the stem of 'Roman', is still used for Turks linked to Greece or the Orthodox Church, and it was fascinating to discover vestiges, albeit perhaps in name only, of Byzantine influence; that civilisation never referred to themselves as 'Byzantines', but rather always 'Romaioi' – 'Romans'.

The jewel of Trabzon, and indeed the ripest opportunity to observe cross-cultural fertilisation, was in the Hagia Sophia of Trabzon, a church constructed c.1250-60 over the ruins of a Roman basilica. The most salient feature of the church was its lack of stylistic hegemony. The angular dome was not Byzantine at all, but Georgian, perhaps due to Trabzon being a Georgian protectorate for a time under Queen Tamar of Georgia (d.1213). Interestingly however, the style on stones on the southern and western fronts was not even Christian, but Islamic. Their ornamentation – using 'mukranas', or tent-like points on columns – borrowed from the art of the Seljuks, the Turkish raiders who swept into Anatolia following the 1071 catastrophe at The Battle Manzikert, when the Byzantine army was crushed and the Emperor Romanos IV subsequently blinded with iron pins in a palace coup. They surrounded Trabzon on all sides save the Georgian, and it was fascinating to see their culture's seamless blending. From even further away however, on patterns of Grape vines in the frescoes next to them, was – I was informed - clearly influence from the Persian Sassanids. This all of course would not merit the suggestion that the church was un-Byzantine. In fact, this was unmistakably clear: the frescoes, in a cycle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, were dotted with Greek text, and their painting was highly evocative of that which I had seen in Istanbul's Pammakaristos and Chora. Yet, the settlement's isolation had allowed it to retain even a connection to the pre-Roman: moon decoration was clearly borrowed from the Mithra cults that had inhabited the region since before even the arrival of the Romans. Likewise, the double-headed eagles over certain doorways did draw connection to the Byzantine use of eagle symbolism for royal sponsorship, but the double-headed form especially evoked connection to carvings found at Bogazköy, once capital of the Hittite Empire 'Hattusa', a city abandoned by c. 1200BC. Evidently, Byzantine identity away from the capital was less homogenous, and constituted, even in its most sacred spaces, a distinct blend of old and new, and of Byzantine and non-Byzantine. That the church contained a bell tower built 1426-7, something utterly unique to a church in this



The Hagia Sophia of Trabzon, looking down into the main entrance.

region, showed that despite all of this the people of Trabzon were very much willing to develop their own cultural 'style', as well as to borrow and merge.

My travels in Turkey completed, I returned to the UK on March 28th, having flown via Istanbul back to Stansted. The trip for me constituted nothing short of incomparable: there is no other way in which I would have been so effectively able to attempt connection with the Byzantine 'experience'. It has left me with a number of questions, especially regarding Byzantine identity and self-definition, but I cannot deny the strengthening of my resolve, and of my interest, behind the Special Subject and behind the Thesis research. The remains of Byzantium were quite literally worlds away from the drizzling Leeds to which I am accustomed, but I feel genuinely enriched for having had the opportunity to 'find' it for myself. I would once again like to express my sincerest gratitude to all of those involved with my application to, and with the provision of, the Arthur Felix Broomfield award. None of my work would have been possible without every single one of them, and I will remain grateful for the opportunity for many years to come. I was able to travel over half a millennium and over 2,000 miles to come face to face with the Byzantine Empire, though I cannot deny now wondering, tongue-in-cheek, how much of a shame it was that it ever had to break up.