



RADI DİKİCİ

Four
Istanbul



Remzi Kitabevi

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Four
Istanbul

*Byzantium, Augusta Antonina
Constantinople, Stanbul*

Translated by
Aysel Hacır



Remzi Kitabevi

FOUR ISTANBULS / Radi Dikici

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To my wife, Sevgi...

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Introduction and Acknowledgements

Beginning from 657 BC and narrating the following four eras of Istanbul, namely Byzantion or Byzantium, Augusta Antonina, New Rome (Nouva Roma)-Constantinople, and Istanbul in Ottoman time; this work is entirely different from all other books that have ever been penned on the subject. While many events changed the course of history throughout these four eras, there have been developments that also contributed to human culture.

I also should mention that Remzi Bookstore published a significant part of the chapter, Istanbul in Ottoman Time that appeared previously in my book *Bu Sehr-i Stanbul ki-Istanbul* Adventure of the Ottomans, in 2002. Nevertheless, this chapter has been significantly changed and expanded to include new research concerning the subject in the west during the last twelve years.

I also considered it suitable to include the conquest of Constantinople in this book, since the facts about this development, being one of the turning points in history, are a little bit different from what was first thought officially, and readers will probably be surprised to learn at least of the different details concerning the siege lasting 54 days by the Ottoman army of 100,000 men against the outnumbered Byzantine defenders of 7,700 men.

From 330 AD onward, either Constantinople or Istanbul suffered 12 sieges until 1453. As a first in its history, and as a consequence of the Fourth Crusade, the city has been ruled temporarily by the Latins for 57 years from 1204 onwards, but when it was conquered by Ottomans it after the last siege in 1453, the Roman-Byzantine Empire, with a 1123-year history from 330 AD onwards, vanished. It is worth mention-

ing that this great success was achieved by the genius of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror, the master architect of the conquest.

As will be noted in the bibliography, this book is written using western sources for the most part, with the aim of interpreting a different Istanbul as much as possible, with aspects unfamiliar to us.

Although history books suggest many details about the Theodosian Walls that survived to the present day, like its construction period, number of the gates, number of the towers, wall thickness and etcetera, the story of the Walls' construction will appear for the first time in this book.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to; Ahmet Akyürek, who has worked out the maps and family trees of the Byzantine emperial dynasty; Aysel Hacı, who has devoted all of her time to the translation of the book into English; Kate Lewis, has made a great contribution to the structural value of the book; Ömer Erduran who has made a significant contribution in preparing the book's cover; Öner Ciravoğlu, for his contributions; the painter Evren Oğuzbalaban, who has made drawings and paintings of the specified portraits of the emperor and the empresses; Hatice Taş, who is engaged in emendation with meticulous care and lent her help in preparing the index; and finally, my dear wife Sevgi Dikici, for her unflinching support and the sacrifices she made throughout the preparation of this book.

Radi Dikici

CHAPTER I

Byzas

The King of Megara, Byzas, was facing the most difficult days of his life. Having escaped oppression in Italy, his ancestors had come to Greece about hundred years prior, and founded a small city on the shore, named Salamis. This tiny city was open to external attacks, so they later migrated to an area more inland, about 30 km west of the city of Athens, building a city there as their capital, and naming it Megara. They lived there in peace, with the exception of some minor clashes, until 660 BC, and they prospered as time passed. The total population of both cities was about 25 thousand now.

Two weeks prior, ambassadors from the city of Athens came to visit Byzas wanting Megara to join the Athens City State within six months, to ensure unity in the region. Byzas knew very well that he had no chance of opposing Athens, since the Athens City State had become enriched, particularly in the last ten years, and had a powerful army.

Then Byzas convoked a council constituted of 30 primarily elders, in the tiny hall of the considerably modest palace, and presented the situation clearly before them. It was apparent however from his words that he could not stomach this demand. Nevertheless, at the end of the discussions, the majority of the members found the idea of living with Athens acceptable. Even the oldest member of the council, Ansius, said, *“Almighty king, we have no chance of standing up against the Athenians, as you expressed. According to the information we receive from our friends going to Athens from time to time, they live there in prosperity. If we unite with them, we could ensure the future of our children, sharing in the prosperity. As you know, many times we had to protect ourselves, suffering a good many losses and casualties throughout our history. If we become one with them and have a strong army by our side, we will live in safety and no*

one would dare to attack us. They've come up with something peaceful, and offered to join our hands together. Let us accept, I would say." Seeing that all the council members were nodding, Byzas closed the meeting.

Byzas suffered sleepless nights the whole week after the meeting. In the morning of another sleepless night, his wife Eirene said, *"My dear, you are sleepless at night, and wandering until morning. Would not you share your trouble with me?"*

"Oh dear, Athens wants us to join them, and I cannot stomach this at all. We have three grown sons, how can I look in their faces if I do something like that?"

"I understand that you are in a difficult situation... Well I will tell you something else. Why do not you go and tell this to the priest of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi? He is wise and a guiding spirit. Isn't he?"

Jumping up from his seat, Byzas hugged his wife and, *"Oh dear, I wonder what I'd do without you, you are just great!"* he said.

He completed the preparation of his ride to the temple on the very same day. He wore modest clothes and took the road with the ration bag his wife handed to him. The Temple of Apollo at Delphi was a three-day headway. The first two days would be easy, but the third day he would need to dismount his horse and climb the mountain on foot to where the temple was located.

It was twilight on the third day when he reached the temple. Climbing the stairs of the temple, the inscription over the building's entry section raised on the columns, caught his eyes: "Know Yourself" (GNOTHI SEAUTON - ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΕΑΥΤΟΝ). An officer met him at the door and asked him in. It was not long before that they offered him some food, and bedded him. Nobody ever asked who he was, or where he was coming from. The next morning he rose early, gave his name to the officer, and expressed his wish to see the chief priest. The officer went out. He was back half an hour later. *"Follow me,"* he said. They passed through a long corridor. The officer opened a door and motioned him to enter.

He was now in a large hall with where dim light filtered in from small windows. His eyes barely discerned the long white bearded priest, sitting in a chair atop a platform accessed by at least twenty stairs. He kneeled and greeted him.

A deep, booming voice responded saying, *"I am listening to you"*, and so he began to tell him what had happened.

"Come back tomorrow at the same hour," the priest said, then all went black suddenly, and Byzas couldn't see the priest. The officer opened the door and ushered him out of the hall.

The next morning Byzas returned to the priest's presence. *"You are destined by God to do something different,"* the priest said with a deep voice, *"you must fulfill it. Take your people and set out on a journey."* He stayed silent for some time, and Byzas thought that it was all what he would to say. Then the priest spoke again, this time his voice different from before, and sounded like he was sobbing; *"I see difficult times, very difficult times... But do not give up. Be brave. Trek towards north..."* *'Go north, do not forget... Enter into a strait. Then settle across the Land of the Blind... Remember, the Country of the Blind. There it's your world... That's where your residence is...'* Then a profound silence prevailed in the space of several seconds. Now the voice of the priest was back again, finishing, *"The world will commemorate you for thousands of years..."*

Byzas abandoned himself to the magic of the surrounding air, and could only collect himself when someone touched his arm. They stepped outside the hall.

Byzas would never forget what the priest said, but he could not comprehend the meaning of the priest's words or the place that he was told him to immigrate to. On his way back to Megara, he thought over what the priest said and tried to make sense but it was a useless effort. One point was clear, that if he went to the North it would be okay. But then, where was the country of the blind? Eventually, he consoled himself that he would probably encounter someone who might know the whereabouts of the country of the blind.

In Megara, he investigated to find someone who might know about this. His efforts were in vain, as not a single person had heard about it. But the priest had shown him the right direction and he would set out on the road towards the North within six months. So the next day he issued a decree, asking those families who are willing to participate in the move, to apply formally. Fifteen days later, the number of the participants from both Salamis and Megara turned out to be lower than expected: only 5 thousand people.



Then they embarked on a frantic activity. The existing available 500 ships were overhauled firstly, and then construction of some 50 new vessels began. They would leave half of the vessels to the abandoned country's use, and would carry food and drinks that would be needed along the way, and the animals as well, with the remaining vessels.

In June of the year 659, everything was ready. The loading process was carried out in one week's time. A certain portion of the treasury loaded onto the royal ship. Byzas left the administration to his second son, who chose to stay behind in the country, together with his wife.

Byzas and his subjects eventually took the road to the northern route on Thursday, June 6th, saying goodbye to those they left behind.

By the end of the first month, the vessels havened in the natural harbor of a larger island in the Aegean Sea to spend the winter; they got back en route the following year when spring approached.

Then they went North for nearly two years, and kept asking the whereabouts of the country of the blind in every place they stopped, without any direction. During the arduous sailing, they lost not only one third of their people, mainly children and women, but a portion of the ships sank in storms during the winter months. They provided food and water in exchange for gold at the places they rested. During their sailing, their main nutrient was fish.

When they rose one morning in May of the year 657 BC, they found themselves confronted by a strait. Byzas led his ship into the strait, and the other ships followed him. They were in Marmara Sea (Propontis) now: the weather had changed, and the sea was full of fish. A little later the sun rose and the fog lifted, and they noticed that everywhere the land was forest covered. The pleasant noise of the flowing waters and the sound of singing birds reached the ships. The beauty of the landscape was indescribable.

Byzas got excited when he saw it, verifying the priest's prediction. They were all shocked. It was obvious that the piece of land on the right was a residential area. As for the left side (starting from Seraglio), it was a peninsula in the fog and was untouched. Turning to his wife, Byzas said, *"Now I know what the priest said. You have to be blind to settle on the opposite shore instead of here, the most beautiful place of the world. That is the Land of the Blind (Chalcedon-Kadikoy), and we will settle across that land."*

They disembarked from their ships and set foot on the land, and so the first settlement began. Ten years after, they established a city to include today's Eminonu, Sirkeci, and the places where the Hagia Sophia and Topkapi would to be built hundreds of years later. This newly formed tiny city became known as Byzantium, inspired by the name Byzas. So the prediction of the priest proved to be right, and the name Byzas has survived to the present day.

This city-state lived in peace for a period of at least two centuries. It developed and prospered rapidly because of its strategic location.

In *Four Istanbul*, Radi Dikici narrates the story of 2600 years old Istanbul, the queen of all cities, from her founding by King Byzas in 657 BC until the fall of the Ottoman dynasty in 1924.

Dikici reveals the history of Istanbul in four different periods, namely Byzantion (Byzantium), Augusta Antonina, Constantinople (New Rome) and the Ottoman Istanbul, different in many ways yet similar in sharing a common legacy.



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Born in Samsun, Dikici studied political sciences in Ankara. He is married and lives in Istanbul. Dikici is an enthusiast of Byzantine history and he is the author of numerous books, reference or historical fiction, on this subject.

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