

The life and afterlife of Constantine's Column

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For all of its importance to the foundation and history of Byzantine Constantinople, the Column of Constantine remains one of the city's most elusive monuments (fig. 1). The centerpiece of a grand circular forum, the column marked the point at which the new city of Constantine, as constructed in A.D. 324-330, joined the older city of Byzantium (figs. 2-3).¹ The 36-m-tall column, originally topped by a colossal gilded bronze statue of Constantine, would have been one of the most visible monuments in the city and one that served to identify the city with the emperor. Indeed, if we look for traces of Constantine in Istanbul today, this is just about all there is remaining. The column was, I would argue, the signature monument that established the city's identity; its forum was *the Forum par excellence*, the setting of civic rituals and religious liturgies. Many of the rites to inaugurate the new capital were held at the base of the column, and the anniversary of the founding was celebrated there annually.²

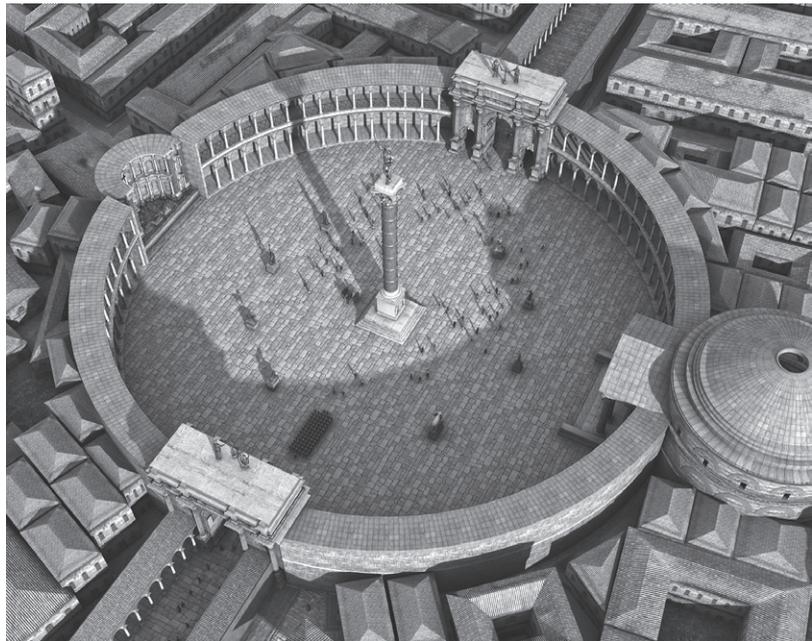


Fig. 3. Reconstructed aerial view of the Forum of Constantine (T. Öner).

- 1 R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine* (Paris 1950), 67-69 and 81-84; W. Müller Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (Tübingen 1977) 255-57, with prior bibliography; C. Mango, "Constantinopolitana," *JdI* 80 (1965) 305-13; id., "Constantine's Porphyry Column and the Chapel of St. Constantine," *Deltion tes Christianikes Archaialogikes Etaireias* 10 (1981) 103-10; id., "Constantine's Column," in id., *Studies on Constantinople* (Aldershot 1993) Study II; G. Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale: Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451* (Paris 1984) especially 37-42; M. Karamouzi, "Das Forum und die Säule Constantini in Konstantinopel: Gegebenheiten und Probleme," *Balkan Studies* 27 (1986) 219-36; F. A. Bauer, *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike* (Mainz 1996) 173-77; S. Bassett, *The urban image of late antique Constantinople* (Cambridge 2004) especially 192-204; J. Bardill, *Constantine: divine emperor of the Christian golden age* (Cambridge 2012) especially 28-63. Note also T. D. Barnes, *Constantine: dynasty, religion and power in the Later Roman Empire* (Chichester 2011) especially 107-43, whose radical revision of the prehistory of Constantinople is beyond the scope of this essay.
- 2 Dagron, *Naissance* (supra n.1) 39-40; J. Baldovin, *The urban character of Christian worship: the origins, development, and meaning of the Stational Liturgy* (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 228, 1987) 169.