



Istanbul: An Urban History: Byzantium, Constantinopolis, Istanbul

By Dogan Kuban

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Dogan Kuban

This is not a book on archaeology, nor, although it lays particular stress on the architecture, an architectural history of Istanbul. It is an attempt to present the urban history of a world-city called Istanbul, Constantinople, Byzantium in different periods of its history. It delineates historical circumstances, or sudden ruptures, but above all, it attempts to present this unique world-city as experienced by its citizens and visitors, and as imagined by the world at large. While recent researches on the topography, history and monuments of the city are integrated in the text, my intention is to present the essence of the historical image of Istanbul contextually within physical, social and cultural framework. I have no intention of breaking new ground on the topography of the city, but I wish to convey the terms of a unique human experience in one of the longest surviving cities of the world, built in a most beautiful and enchanting landscape. The great Byzantine scholar R Janin speaks of various "visages" of the city composed through the rhythms of life or caprices of the emperors. Most of this intricate relationships created in millennia between men, site, and artifact are gone and difficult to visualize. In writing this urban history, while I try to remain objective, I know that I create a literary model using as reference the least changed of the historical elements, the surviving monuments, the site with its basic shape and articulations, and contemporary accounts -not necessarily sources of hard facts, but as primary expressions, reactions and emotions. Thus trying to keep myself away, as far as possible, from speculation and methods of criminal fiction, I have delineated the history of this grandiose, dramatic and often cruel city of Istanbul.

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