



Summary :

Village near the European coast of the Bosphorus, recreational resort for diplomats and the upper strata of Constantinople during the 19th century. Besides the Orthodox residents, there were also Muslims, Jews and Armenians. The village's Greek-Orthodox population diminished after WWI.

Other Names

Vathyrryax, Kalos Agros, Vroullogeni

Geographical Location

European Bosphorus

Historical Region

Bosphorus

1. Location – Name

On the European coast of the Bosphorus, after the [Therapeia](#) area, the coastline forms an angle creating a deep gulf. From the geographical morphology of the area, the village that was established here was named Büyükdere or Vathyrryax (“deep creek”). The Byzantines called the place Kalos Agros (“good field”). According to Gyllius, the gulf used to be called Saronikos, after the cape of the same name that bore the name of Saron from Megara, whose memory was in the past commemorated by a monument in the area. In addition, Gyllius mentions that the area was also known as Vroullogeni.¹ Until the middle of the 19th century, the gulf of Büyükdere was the main naval base of the Ottoman navy before it sailed to the Black Sea.²

Scarlatos Vyzantios mentions that there were vegetable gardens and fruit trees growing there for the capital's alimentation, as well as vineyards and forests.³

Théophile Gautier, who visited Büyükdere in 1852, refers to it as “one of the most enchanting resorts in the world. The coast deepens in this spot and forms an arch, where the waves come and fade away with soft splashes. Elegant buildings, among which the Russian Embassy's summer mansion distinguishes, tower over the beach, on the feet of the last hills that form the Bosphorus' bed, on a background of evergreen gardens. The wealthy merchants of [Constantinople](#), who keep summer houses here, are transported every day after work by the steam boat, and taken back next morning”.⁴

Gautier is not the only one impressed by the area. All visitors comment on the beauty of the area: “[...] behold myself on the marvelous pier, which reminds one of the most splendid European coasts and the celebrated Quay of [Smyrna](#), with a long row of elegant mansions, hotels and coffee-houses. But everything here is incontestably finer and prettier, with the superincumbent green highlands of Kapataş, the sweet-smelling bushes and trees of which lean over the mansions' rooftops”.⁵

2. The hamlets of the Büyükdere valley

2.1. Belgrade – Pyrgos

On the mainland of the Büyükdere valley is the Belgrade Forest (Belgrad Ormanı). The name of both the forest and the nearby hamlet comes from the farmers who were located in the area by Suleyman I the Magnificent after the conquest of the city of Belgrade in 1521. In 1898 the village got depopulated, when the authorities carried out a compulsory translocation for the inhabitants.⁶

Close to Büyükdere and the village Belgrade lies the village Pyrgos (“tower”) or Kemberburgaz. Its name comes from a tower built there by the Byzantine emperor Andronikos Komnenos as his summer palace.⁷



2.2. Büyükdere

2.1. Population

According to the traveller Evliya Çelebi, during the 17th century the village consisted of 1,000 houses. Büyükdere had one district inhabited by Muslims and seven quarters where Greek-Orthodox and Armenians resided. Most of the residents were gardeners, fishermen and boatmen. Evliya Çelebi also mentions that the area was a place of rest for the sultan Selim II.⁸

Before World War I, the Greek-Orthodox community of Büyükdere consisted of 4,300 people. The Muslims were 700, the [Jews](#) 300 and the Armenians about 200.⁹ The 1906 National Philanthropic Foundations Calendar mentions that the Büyükdere community included 500 families.¹⁰ According to data collected by Christidis, the Orthodox community of Büyükdere consisted of 121 families.¹¹

2.2.2. Religion

The Greek-Orthodox community of Büyükdere comes under the Diocese of Derkoi. The centre of the community was the church of St Paraskevi, which was constructed in 1830. The church, a [three-aisled](#) wooden-roofed basilica with an added [narthex](#), is located on the village's main road. In the basement under the narthex, lies the [agiasma](#) of St Paraskevi. Both the church and the water fountain were damaged during the anti-Greek [incidents](#) that took place on September 6 and 7, 1955.¹²

In Büyükdere also lived a quite large [Armenian community](#) and many of these Armenians were Catholics. In the village there is an Armenian – Catholic church (Surp Boğos), as well as a Gregorian one (Surp Hripsimants).¹³

Another important agiasma in the Büyükdere valley was the one of St Nikitas in the village of Kefeli or Kefeliköy. Vyzantios describes the village as follows: "Close to Büyükdere lays the hamlet Kefeli, named, according to Andréossy, by some Ottoman originating from Kaffa (Pantikapaïos) of [Crimea](#) residing here".¹⁴ The agiasma was nothing but a small shack before 1890, but later on a chapel was built. It celebrated on September 15th, gathering many believers from Constantinople. In the beginning of the 20th century, Kefeli was a settlement inhabited by poor families who had emigrated there after the dissolution of the Belgrade village. This hamlet operated a school, maintaining it with the incomings from the agiasma. The holy water source was destroyed in 1979 by the excavations for the widening of the coastal road.¹⁵

2.2.3. Education

Christidis mentions that the Greek-Orthodox community, besides the six-grade elementary school, also operated a school soup-kitchen and an educational association. In the beginning of the 20th century, the community of Büyükdere kept a secondary education school, an all-girls school and a kindergarten, being attended by a total of ca. 300 pupils. In the 1920s there were about 130 pupils, while their number had reduced to just 50 in the 1950s. Büyükdere's elementary school closed down in 1974.¹⁶

2.2.4. Transport

Until the middle of the 19th century, Constantinople was being connected to Büyükdere only via boat and coach. However, when the boat routes became more regular, it was properly connected to Constantinople. Consequently, the arrival of the steamboat and the introduction of regular routes meant that the area got incorporated in the urban plexus and was transformed into a suburb. Büyükdere, as well as the nearby area of Therapeia became summer escape resorts for diplomats, as well as upper-class Greeks, Armenians and [Levantine](#)s of [Pera](#), for whose needs expensive hotels and restaurants were built. In Büyükdere lay the summer mansions of the Spanish and Russian embassies. The Russian Embassy in particular, with the extensive gardens and the impressive building, resembled a palace.¹⁷



1. Gyllius, P., *İstanbul Boğazi* (İstanbul 2000), pp. 137-138.
2. Koçu, R.E., *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi 4* (İstanbul 1971), p. 3257.
3. Βυζάντιος, Σ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολις, ή περιγραφή τοπογραφική, αρχαιολογική και ιστορική* Β (Athens 1862), p. 157.
4. Γκωτιέ, Θ., *Κωνσταντινούπολη*, translation Μπομπολέση, Ε. (Athens 1998), p. 345.
5. Φραγκούδης, Γ.Σ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολις (Βυζάντιον-Σταμπούλ). Περιγραφή της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως λήγοντος του 19^{ου} αιώνα* (Athens 1901), p. 245.
6. Παπαστράτης, Θ., *Γειτονίες του Βοσπόρου* (Athens 2003), p. 152.
7. Παπαστράτης, Θ., *Γειτονίες του Βοσπόρου* (Athens 2003), p. 153.
8. Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Çelebi Seyahatnamesi* 1-2, Neşriyat, Ü. (ed.) (İstanbul 1975), pp. 318-319.
9. Koçu, R.E., *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi 4* (İstanbul 1971), p. 3242.
10. *Ημερολόγιον των Εθνικών Καταστημάτων του έτους 1906* (Constantinople 1905), pp. 148-149.
11. Χρηστίδης, Χ., *Τα Σεπτεμβριανά* (Athens 2000), p. 300.
12. Γκίνης, Ν. – Στράτος, Κ., *Εκκλησίες της Κωνσταντινούπολης* (Athens 1999), pp. 149-150; Παπαστράτης, Θ., *Γειτονίες του Βοσπόρου* (Athens 2003), pp. 156-158.
13. Παπαστράτης, Θ., *Γειτονίες του Βοσπόρου* (Athens 2003), p. 100; Belge, M., *İstanbul Gezi Rehberi* (İstanbul 2007), p. 323.
14. Βυζάντιος, Σ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολις, ή περιγραφή τοπογραφική, αρχαιολογική και ιστορική* Β (Athens 1862), p. 156.
15. Ατζέμογλου, Ν., *Τα αγίασματα της Πόλης* (Athens 1990), pp. 120-122.
16. Παπαστράτης, Θ., *Γειτονίες του Βοσπόρου* (Athens 2003), p. 158.
17. Φραγκούδης, Γ.Σ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολις (Βυζάντιον-Σταμπούλ). Περιγραφή της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως λήγοντος του 19ου αιώνα* (Athens 1901), p. 245.

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Glossary :

	agiasma The holy water (as well as the sacred place from where the water spurts), which the faithful drink, sprinkle or wash themselves in order to be healed.
	narthex A portico or a rectangular entrance-hall, parallel with the west end of an early Christian basilica or church.
	three-aisled basilica An oblong type of church internally divided into three aisles: the middle and the two side aisles. The middle aisle is often lighted by an elevated clerestory. In the Early Byzantine years this type of church had huge dimensions.

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