



Summary :

The Kuruçeşme district lies in the valley between cape Defterdar Burnu (Kleidion) and the Mega Revma (Arnavutköy) shore. In antiquity, this area was known as Bythias, due to the great depth of the waters there. In the 17th century, it was populated by Greek-Orthodox and Armenians, as well as many notable Jewish families. In 1804 the Greek Orthodox College (known in Greek as the “Megali tou Genous Scholi”) was moved to Kuruçeşme and housed at the residence of Alexandros Mavrokordatos.

Other Names

Bythias, Kalamos, Agios Dimitrios, Xirokrini

Geographical Location

Bosporus

Historical Region

Bosporus

Administrative Dependence

1. Location – Name

The Kuruçeşme district lies in the valley between cape Defterdar Burnu (Kleidion) and the [Mega Revma \(Arnavutköy\)](#) shore. It borders Megalo Revma to the North and [Ortaköy](#) to the South. In antiquity, the Kuruçeşme area was known as Bythias, due to the great depth of the waters there. It was also known as Kalamos, from the multitude of reeds (“kalamia” in Greek) growing at the mouth of a river that ran through the area.¹ Before the [Fall of Constantinople](#), the place was called Agios Dimitrios (St. Demetrius) Valley, from a local church of the same name.² The name, translating to Greek as Xirokrini (Dry Fountain), originates in the drought plaguing the village, especially during the summer months.³ According to a less probable version, the correct name was Kuru Kesme, meaning Dry Rock, from a steep rock towering over the area, or even Koru Çeşme, from *koru* (forest in Turkish), since dense forests covered the land.⁴

2. Population

According to Evliya Çelebi, there were three Greek-Orthodox quarters and a Turkish one in Kuruçeşme, as well as eleven Jewish households. He also mentions that the Greek-Orthodox operated two churches. According to the same writer, 200 shops were in business at the village and there were many gardens and vineyards.⁵ Eremya Çelebi Kömürçiyân chronicles that in the 17th century the village was populated by Greek-Orthodox, Armenians and notable Jewish families, but not by Muslims.⁶

According to data from the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Kuruçeşme Orthodox community comprised of 34 families in 1949.⁷ On the other hand, we are informed by Christophoros Christidis that in 1955 the Greek Orthodox community of Xirkokrini numbered 17 families and ran a charitable society.⁸

Kuruçeşme, along with Therapeia (Tarapyia), was frequented as a resort by [Phanariots](#). At the beginning of the 19th century “it was inhabited by the most notables of our own nation [*genos*], as archpriests, princes and potentates”.⁹ However, it appears from what we gather that the area begins to gradually degrade from the mid-19th century onwards. So, Scarlatus Byzantius records that Kuruçeşme “after having served, for almost a century, as a residential area for the former Greek princes of Dacia, as well as their relatives and descendants, it has been reduced today to a miserable and dismal residence for certain Jews and Armenians, and even fewer and more indigent Ottomans and Greeks”.¹⁰



3. The Orthodox community of Kuruçesme

3.1. Religion

The Orthodox community of Kuruçesme comes under the dependency of the [Ecumenical Patriarchy](#), meaning the Archdiocese of Constantinople. The contemporary St. Demetrius church was constructed upon the ruins of an ancient temple dedicated to Demeter or Isis.¹¹ The church dates back to the mid-15th century. However, the passing of time saw it falling to ruins and, according to legend, towards the end of the 18th century Sultan Selim III gave his permission for the church to be rebuilt, when one night he saw small lights moving in the dark and was informed that it was in fact a Christian procession around the dilapidated church.¹² Consequently, in 1798 or 1799 the church of St. Demetrius was built. Since then it has been reconstructed twice, in 1832 and 1875. In 1871 a chapel was added at the north, which was destroyed by fire in 1919 and was rebuilt in 1943.¹³

At the left wing of this chapel, under four marble columns, is located an *agiasma* with three fountains and a cistern. This specific holy water source, celebrated on October 26th, is considered one of the oldest in [Constantinople](#). Mothers used to wash their children with the holy water and hang a small piece of cloth from their clothes on the fountain. It is said that in front of St. Demetrius' icon hung iron rings, bitten by mute children in order to be able to speak. This specific holy water fountain was considered one of the most popular ones, not only among the Orthodox population, but Muslims as well. Other holy water springs of the area include the ones of Prophitis Elias (Prophet Elijah), Agia Paraskevi (St. Paraskevi), Theias Analipseos (Holy Assumption) and Agios Nikolaos (St. Nicholas).¹⁴

3.2. Cemetery

West of the St. Demetrius' church, on the slope of the hill, lies the cemetery of the Kuruçesme Orthodox community. The oldest graves date to the late 19th century. It is considered more possible, however, that the cemetery is older than that, since there are many records of people having been buried there earlier, people of importance in society. The cemetery was renovated and walled in 1950.¹⁵

3.3. Education

In 1804 the patriarchal Greek Orthodox College (known in Greek as the "Megali tou Genous Scholi"—meaning "[Great School of the Nation](#)"— and in Turkish as "Özel Fener Rum Lisesi") was moved to Kuruçesme and housed at the residency of Alexandros Mavrokordatos. This incident serves as a highlight in the history of the area. The school remained there until 1861, when it was permanently moved to the [Fener district](#).¹⁶ Even after its translocation, however, the school continues to play a significant part within the community of Kuruçesme. In 1871 the Society For the Great School of the Nation "Xirokrini" was founded, aiming to support the school.¹⁷

In 1884, the Xirokrini Orthodox community ran an boys' and a girls' school, where 82 students were enrolled.¹⁸ At the same period the local confraternity "Ieros Zilos" (Holy Zeal) was also operative.¹⁹

As almost all the districts of Constantinople, Kuruçesme also suffered from fires. The one of 1919 was especially disastrous according to Tsapakes, who in 1956 records: "this village was almost burned down into cinders in 1920 and gradually deteriorated to charcoal depository; and those beautiful palaces and mansions belonging to sultans and magnates from Sarayburnu by the Agios Ioannis (St. John) church to Defterdar Burnu became depositories and coal stores and it [the area] lost its former glory and the grandeur of its inhabitants".²⁰ In 1986 those depositories by the shore in the area were abolished.²¹



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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.

Sources

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