



Summary :

The name New (or Second) Rome was used for Constantinople in rhetoric speeches already from the end of the 4th century, as the political importance of Constantinople as a Roman capital increased. The name became more meaningful at the beginning of the 6th century; Rome had been occupied by the Ostrogoths, and now it was Constantinople that carried the symbolic weight of being the 'eternal city' and the ecumenical capital in Late Antiquity. This name also came to indicate the rebirth of the Roman Empire through Christianity. During the entire Byzantine period this Christianised Roman idea remained at the core of Byzantine ideology, the Byzantines considering themselves as the only genuine and legitimate heirs of the Roman imperium, continuously and throughout interruptions through time.

Date

4th-15th c.

Geographical Location

Constantinople

1. Constantinople as the Fortuna of Rome

An anonymous Latin text, possibly of the 4th century, mentions that: 'Constantine renamed the city of Byzantium Constantinople in order to commemorate his illustrious victory'.¹ Indeed, the year 324, when [Constantine](#) 'founded' Constantinople at the site of Byzantium by defining the limits of the new city, was also the year of his victory over [Licinius](#) and the beginning of his sole reign; with Constantine as sole emperor, a possible partition of the empire was also avoided.

It is possible that, already in Constantine's years, rhetoric was elaborating a link between the newly-founded Constantinople and the name of New Rome. The historian Socrates, continuing Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* in the first half of the 5th century, informs us that Constantine himself issued a law that established the name 'New Rome' for his city.² The accuracy of this source has been disputed. However, there is evidence showing that this source echoes a rhetoric link between Rome and Constantinople, appearing as early as the period 324-330 (year of the [founding of Constantinople](#)).³

It is certain that [Constantine's building plan](#) for his city intended to make it an exact replica of Rome. What is more, several institutions that were characteristic of Rome, such as the [Senate](#) or the [prefect of the city](#), were transferred in Constantinople; these enhance the opinion that Constantine indeed strived to create a New Rome, a capital for [his dynasty](#) and not just a city that bore his name, in the legacy of Alexander the Great which many Roman Emperors had followed. A century later, Sozomenos comments on the name 'New Rome', used to justify the primacy of the bishop of Constantinople over all the other bishops, except the bishop of Rome. He believes that it constitutes an old tradition and, in order to justify this tradition, he points out the Roman institutions still existing in Constantinople.⁴ The transfer of these institutions from Rome to Constantinople certainly singled it out from all the other Eastern cities that had been used as imperial seats in different points in time, such as [Nicomedia](#), during the reign of [Diocletian](#). Already in the 3rd century, Rome had ceased being the emperor's seat exclusively. However, before Constantine that seat had never been transferred in another city of the Empire.

Constantine did not desire to create antagonism between Constantinople and Rome in any sector, be it political, administrative or ideological. He had already rejected the political ideology of the Tetrarchy and had returned to the ideology of Augustus, which promoted Roman eternity and ecumenical domination of an empire free of the fear of division. Constantine, therefore, presented himself as the promoter of the authentic Roman ideology, the man who restored the unity of the imperium, and who set the return to Roman glory as a political priority.⁵ Besides, the faith in Rome's eternity, and its glory and power during the years of the Empire, had always been connected with the idea of unity in all levels: political, social and military.⁶ Following the same concept, Constantinople was dedicated, among others, to the [Tyche](#) of Rome, whose secret name – Flora – inspired the iconography of Constantinople bearing the horn of Amalthea. Consequently, Constantinople became the city of Roman eternal triumph, brought by Constantine with his victory over Licinius.⁷ Nevertheless, Rome remained the only 'queen' city, even though Constantinople was the city of the



emperor.⁸

2. The 'New Rome' of Constantine's successors

The rhetor Themistios, in a discourse dedicated to Constantine, delivered in Rome (357), says that Constantinople is 'part of the name and Rome's destiny'. However, his opinion appears slightly farther than the rhetoric of Constantine's age: now Constantinople is already – as is Rome – a queen city, and they both unify the Roman world together.⁹ Rome is still considered queen of all cities, on a slightly higher level than Constantinople, which is the second capital selected by the emperor himself.¹⁰ This hierarchy, however, does not question the dual form of the 'Roman capital' after Constantine; instead it just organises the relations within that duality.

This is especially evident in the iconography of the period, as depicted in coins. It was during the reign of Constantius II, on a solidus of 343 or 344 commemorating the twenty years of his reign and the ten years of Constans' reign¹¹ that a new iconography appeared: the personifications of Rome and Constantinople were seated on thrones in symmetrical positions in the same coin, each holding a sceptre and both holding the medal indicating the years of reign of the emperor. Rome was standing facing forward and on the left of the coin (that is on the right of Constantinople, the place of honour), while Constantinople was depicted in profile, turned toward Rome.

Iconography also shows that gradually the depiction of the 'New Rome' alone came to be sufficient in representing the Roman capital, without the depiction of Rome herself. Already before 350, Constantinople and Rome were depicted in medals in the exact same position and clothing, while Constantinople even held the emblem of Rome, a Nike (Victory) on a sphere. What is more, Constantinople is seated on a throne with a high back whereas Rome on a Roman *sella curulis*. The iconographic theme of the throne in Late Antique art was recently the topic of research, and most scholars accept that, generally speaking, the throne with the high back derives from the iconography of seated ancient gods, while the typical Roman imperial throne, and as a consequence the throne of imperial iconography is a seat without back. We cannot read too much into the fact that for Rome we have the throne of imperial rule, while for Constantinople the iconography points towards the divine throne, because the two iconographical themes are not always clearly distinguished; moreover, the use of thrones with back is not uncommon in the depiction of cities. However, we get the impression that Constantinople's position rose, with the use of different sizes of sceptres; Rome sometimes holds a lower sceptre. This iconographic elevation of Constantinople goes a step further: at the back side of medals from the second half of the 4th century, Constantinople appears alone, resting her feet on a stool shaped as the fore part of a ship, holding the emblem of Roman authority, the Nike on a sphere.¹²

Indeed, toward the end of the 4th century there is clear antagonism between the two capitals: the Roman court poet Claudius Claudianus (396) reproaches Constantinople, the adversary of the great Rome, in a poem that constituted an attack against Rufinus, *praetorian prefect* and official under Theodosius I and Arcadius.¹³ Even more crucial is the reference of the name 'New Rome' in the third decree of the *Second Ecumenical Council (381)*, which clearly states that the bishop of Constantinople is second only to the bishop of Rome, based on the fact that Constantinople is the New Rome. By the end of the 4th century, a name that up until that time was just a rhetorical type, has now become institutionalised and could justify a set of privileges for Constantinople. Even more, it became an official name of Constantinople, so much that the bishop – later called patriarch – of Constantinople bore the title of the bishop of Constantinople-New Rome.

3. The Byzantines' Roman ideology

Already from the 5th and 6th centuries, authors who recorded the history of Constantinople tended to make it appear more 'Roman'. They systematically ignored Byzantium's history before it was renamed Constantinople; the only exception was the period of Septimius Severus and his successor Caracallas, when the city of Byzantium became significant for Rome. Septimius Severus initially destroyed the city, as a punishment for its involvement in the civil war with Pescennius Niger (193-194 A.D.). However, shortly after, he acknowledged its geopolitical significance and began extensive building works there. *Caracalla* considered making Byzantium an advanced post of Rome in a possible division of the empire into eastern and western. Apart from that, a series of *anecdotal stories* and short narratives are based on the mythical history of Rome; this is particularly evident in the surviving sixth book of the history of



the Hesychios, called *Patria Constantinopoleos* and was included in a 10th century [compilation](#) with the same name. Rome becomes the true and undeniable metropolis of Constantinople.¹⁴

The founding of Constantinople by Constantine appears as a renewal, a rebirth of Rome, as the old Rome was succeeded by the New one. Constantine's founding of the city, shows the evolution of Constantinople into the capital of the Empire. At the same time, several myths and legends were used to indicate the legitimacy of the succession of the capitals: Constantine appeared to transfer from Rome the mythical Palladium, which was brought from Troy by Aeneas, and to place it at the foundation of the porphyrite column in his forum (according to John Malalas and the *Chronikon Paschale*).¹⁵

The reference to this relic holds a special meaning: The relationship between Rome and Troy was, from the period of Augustus, an inseparable part of the ideology concerning the eternal survival and power of Rome, as a city and as an empire, through a series of just victories.¹⁶ The transfer of this holy relic expresses in a mythical way the Byzantine belief - from 6th century onwards - that Rome passed on her 'throne', because of old age and decline. At the same time, however, the Palladium could only be moved to the New Rome, and not in any random city; that was the only way to legitimize and preserve the continuity of the Roman destiny.¹⁷ Several of Constantinople's names, all including the word Rome (Second Rome, *Alma Roma*, *Βυζαντιάς Ρώμη* [mean. Rome at Byzantium]¹⁸) signify how important an element Rome was for Constantinople's identity, at least in the eyes of Byzantines. This ideology was further encouraged when the Ostrogoths occupied the Italian peninsula. [Justinian I](#)'s efforts to regain these territories (535-553) were aiming to unify the empire; at the same time, they constitute a movement from East to West, from the New Rome the declined old Rome, whose preservation is only a matter of status and prestige.

New Rome was also very closely associated with the Christianisation of the empire. The declined old Rome became a synonym for paganism, while its renewal took place in the Christian New Rome. This act has also been attributed to Constantine, and it is believed to have taken place upon the time of the founding of Constantinople. However, the legend of the Palladium continued to survive, as it was mentioned by Zonaras¹⁹ in the 12th century. Constantinople as New Rome was a deeply established topos of perceiving the past: the Byzantine chronicles viewed it through the triumph of Christianity, sealed with Constantine's own conversion; therefore, this transfer of the capital to the New Rome was the beginning of the last period of the world's history. New Rome was required to transmit the Christian message to the far ends of the world and conquer heresy before the Second Coming of Christ, which, in Byzantine minds, was not so far in the future.²⁰

4. New Rome and imperial ideology

The name New Rome, given to the newly founded city of Constantine in the 4th century, linked Constantinople to Rome and gave her an advantage over all the other cities in the empire. From 6th century onwards this name included the symbolical weight of Rome as the carrier of the eternal and uninterrupted power. This power could be transferred, together with the name, to another city, without cancelling the destiny of eternal conquest. On the contrary, the transfer of the name to Constantinople ensured the continuity, since the destiny of the Eternal City follows her name, even when it leaves the city. New Rome, for the Byzantines, is not a rhetoric expression or a simple name, but a legacy which specified a clearly defined role for Constantinople.

Constantinople became the bearer of Roman ideology, which would be included not only in Byzantine [imperial ideology](#), but also that of the western Middle Ages.²¹ The Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204 radically changed the ideological direction of Late Byzantium. Until then, the title of the 'Emperor of the Romans' was a constant issue of political debate between Byzantium and the West; the Byzantine emperor considered the title rightfully and exclusively his and refused to acknowledge any western ruler, who wished to apply it to himself, whether he was Charlemagne or the kings of the Holy Roman Empire.²² Yet the imperial and spiritual connotations of the Roman idea in Constantinople survived the [fall](#) of the Empire to the Ottomans and the name of the «Third Rome» was claimed by the Russian Tsars, Russia being the most powerful Orthodox state remaining after the fall of Byzantium.

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2. Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I.16, Migne, J.P. (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca*, col. 116C.
3. Dagron, G., *Η γέννηση μιας πρωτεύουσας. Η Κωνσταντινούπολη και οι θεσμοί της, 330-451* (Αθήνα 2000), pp. 51-52.
4. Sozomenos, *Historia Ecclesiastica* VII.9.3, Migne, J.P. (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 67, col. 1436C.
5. Curran, J., *Pagan City and Christian Capital. Rome in the Fourth Century* (Oxford 2000), pp. 80, 114-115.
6. Pratt, K.J., "Rome as Eternal," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26.1 (1965), p. 27.
7. Similarly, the victory of Constantine over Maxentius, as depicted in the arch of Constantine in Rome, was considered to be part of the Roman destiny, through the effort of uniting the divided empire; see: Elsner, J., "Perspectives in Art," in Lenski, N. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (New York 2006), p. 260. On Constantinople as Fortuna of Rome see Dagron, G., *Η γέννηση μιας πρωτεύουσας. Η Κωνσταντινούπολη και οι θεσμοί της, 330-451* (Αθήνα 2000), pp. 29-30, 48-49.
8. Dagron, G., *Η γέννηση μιας πρωτεύουσας. Η Κωνσταντινούπολη και οι θεσμοί της, 330-451* (Αθήνα 2000), p. 60 and n. 20-23 for the sources. See Alföldi, A., "On the Foundation of Constantinople: a few notes," *Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947), p. 12.
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11. Toynbee, J.M.C., "Roma and Constantinople in late-Antique art from 312 to 365," *Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947), p. 138.
12. Toynbee, J.M.C., "Roma and Constantinople in late-Antique art from 312 to 365", *Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947), pp. 140-141 and pl. xi, 5-9; xii, 1-6. For the iconography of the throne see Mathews, T., *The clash of Gods. A reinterpretation of early Christian Art* (Princeton 1999), pp. 103-108, and Poilpré, A.O., *Maiestas Domini. Une image de l'Église en Occident, Ve-IXe siècle* (Paris 2005), pp. 46-49.
13. Claudian, *In Rufinum* II, ver. 54, Goold, G.P. (ed.), *Claudian I* (Loeb Classical Library 135, Cambridge Mass. – London 1922, ανατ. 1990), p. 60.
14. Dagron, G., *Η γέννηση μιας πρωτεύουσας. Η Κωνσταντινούπολη και οι θεσμοί της, 330-451* (Αθήνα 2000), pp. 17-22; Hesychios, *Patria Constantinopolensis* I-XXII, Preger, Th. (ed.), *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum* I (Lipsiae 1901; repr. New York 1975), pp. 1-18.
15. John Malalas, *Chronographia*, Dindorf, L. (ed.), *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia* (Bonn 1831), p. 320; *Chronicon Paschale*, Dindorf, L. (ed.), *Chronicon Paschale* I (Bonn 1832), p. 528.
16. Virgil's *Aeneid* is the most characteristic expression, in a poetic way, of this ideology; Harrison, S.J., "Survival and Supremacy of Rome: The Unity of the Shield of Aeneas," *Journal of Roman Studies* 87 (1997), pp. 70-71.
17. Alföldi, A., "On the Foundation of Constantinople: a few notes," *Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947), p. 12. See also Kelly, C., "Bureaucracy and Government," in Lenski, N. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (New York 2006), p. 192.
18. Georgakas, D.J., "The names of Constantinople," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 78 (1947), p. 354 and n. 51 for the sources.
19. John Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum* XIII.3.28, Pinder, M. – Büttner-Wobst, Th., *Ioannis Zonarae Epitomae historiarum libri xviii* 3 (Bonn 1897), p. 18.
20. Mango, C., *Βυζάντιο: Η Αυτοκρατορία της Νέας Ρώμης* (Αθήνα 1999), p. 235. Constantinople is also associated to this same concept as New



Jerusalem. This association was promoted during the reign of Heraclius (610-641), however it dates back to the age of Constantine and the transfer of the Holy Cross to Constantinople by Helena. See Dagron, G., *Constantinople imaginaire. Études sur le recueil des "Patria"* (Paris 1984), pp. 303f. Sherrard, P., *Constantinople: Iconography of a sacred City* (London 1965), believes that Constantinople's capacity as New Rome and New Jerusalem was appointed from the beginning and show a clear duality: the former had an exclusively secular and political character, while the latter a religious and spiritual one. As C. Mango points out in "Review of Constantinople: Iconography... by P. Sherrard," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 86 (1966), p. 307, the two ideologies do not contradict each other; historical approaches show that Constantinople became New Jerusalem because it was New Rome.

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Glossary :

praefectus urbi (prefect of the city)

(later referred to as the *eparch* of the city) Administrator and virtual governor of Constantinople in the Early/Middle Byzantine Era. He was responsible for the surveillance and the harmonious life of the Capital. One of his responsibilities was to control the commercial and manufacturing activities of Constantinople. After 1204, however, the office began to diminish, while from the 14th century, his responsibilities were assumed by two officers, the so-called *kephalatikeuontai of the capital*.

praetorian prefect (praefectus praetorio)

Commander of the emperor's bodyguard under the principate. During the reign of Constantine I the praetorian prefect becomes a dignitary responsible for the administrative unit called the prefecture, which was subdivided into dioceses. In 400 A.D. there were four such praetorian prefectures, of Oriens, of Illyricum, of Italia and Africa and of Gallia. The praetorian prefects were second only to the emperor. The praetorian prefect of Oriens was the mightiest among prefects. His office is for the last time mentioned in 680.

Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 381)

The Second Ecumenical Council assembled at Constantinople in 381 in order to discountenance the ideas of Macedonios, who challenged the divine nature of the holy spirit, and to condemn the heresy of apollinarism, which referred to the nature of Jesus Christ. This council appended the clauses pertaining to the holy spirit to the Nicene Creed.

sella curulis (lat.)

The throne of the Roman Emperor. Tradition attributes it to Romulus. It was a seat without a back, with crossed-S-shaped feet.

Tyche (Fortuna)

A symbol of wealth and prosperity, Tyche was considered a deity in the Graeco-roman world (its latin version being Fortuna) and it was often associated with certain cities, as an expression of their power and success. Its iconographic expression was a personification of the city in the form of a goddess of great importance for this particular city.

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Quotations

The third canon of the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople, 381)



Τὸν μέντοι Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐπίσκοπον ἔχειν τὰ πρεσβεῖα τῆς τιμῆς μετὰ τὸν τῆς Ῥώμης ἐπίσκοπον, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὴν νέαν Ῥώμην.

Hefele, C.J., *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux* II.1, trn. in french. Leclercq, D.H. (Paris 1907), p. 24.

The legend on the transfer of the palladium of Rome to Constantinople by Constantine I and the name of the Tyche of Constantinople:

καὶ ἔστησεν ἐν μέσῳ κίονα πορφυροῦν μέγαν λίθου Θηβαίου ἀξιοθαύμαστον, καὶ ὑπεράνω τοῦ αὐτοῦ κίονος ἔστησεν ἑαυτοῦ ἀνδριάντα μέγαν, ἔχοντα ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ αὐτοῦ ἀκτίνας, ὅπερ χαλκούργημα ἦγαγεν ἀπὸ τῆς Φρυγίας. ὁ δὲ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Κωνσταντῖνος ἀφελὼν κρυπτῶς ἀπὸ Ῥώμης τὸ λεγόμενον Παλλάδιον ἔθηκεν αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κτισθέντι φόρῳ ἀποκάτω τοῦ κίονος τῆς στήλης αὐτοῦ, ὡς τινες λέγουσι τῶν Βυζαντιῶν ἐκ διαδοχῆς ἀκούσαντες. τὴν δὲ τύχην τῆς πόλεως τῆς ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἀνανεωθεΐσης ποιήσας θυσίαν ἀναίμακτον ἐκάλεσεν Ἀνθοῦσαν.

Chronicon paschale, ed. L. Dindorf, vol. I (CSHB, Bonn 1832), p. 528.

The founding of Constantinople according to the Chronicle of Constantine Manasses (mid-12th c.)

[...] τὴν πανευδαίμονα πόλιν τῶν Βυζαντιῶν,
καὶ πόλιν ὀλβιόπολιν αὐτῇ προσανεγείρει,
Πόλιν τὴν μεγαλόπολιν, πόλιν τὴν νέαν Ῥώμην,
Ῥώμην αἰεὶ νεάζουσαν, αἰεὶ καινιζομένην,
Ῥώμην ἀφ' ἧς προσχέονται χαρίτων αἰ συρμάδες

Migne, J.P. (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* 127, col. 308.

Constantinopolitan aristocracy as descendants of the Roman senatorial class

[...] τοὺς ἀξιολόγους τῶν εὐπατριδῶν καὶ τιμίῳ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ νέᾳ Ῥώμῃ μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ παραλαβῶν [ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος] μετώκισέ τε καὶ συμπολίτας ἑαυτοῦ ἀπειργάσατο, λαμπρὰς οἰκίας τούτοις ἐπιδειμάμενος κατὰ τὴν ἐμφέρειαν τῶν ἐν τῇ παλαιᾷ Ῥώμῃ πολυτελῶς κατεσκευασμένων οἰκῶν. ἐκ τούτων οὖν, ὡς ὁ λόγος αἰρεῖ καὶ ἡ τοῦ γένους ἀναφορὰ περιέργει, οἱ Φωκᾶδες αὐτοὶ καταγόμενοι τὴν τε περιφάνειαν ἄνωθεν ἔσχον καὶ τὸ τῆς ἀνδρίας ἀλκιμώτατον καὶ ἀνύποιστον, ἐκ τῶν ὀνομαστῶν ἐκείνων Φαβίων, ὡς πού διὰ βίβλου τινὸς παλαιᾶς ἐχειραγωγῆθην ποτέ, τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ γένους ἐφέλκοντες.

Bekker, I. (ed.), *Michael Attaliotae, Historia* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1853), p. 218.

A representation of the Tyche of Constantinople in a 6th-C. mosaic designated as Rome:

The currency of the name Rome as a straightforward designation of Constantinople is nowhere more strikingly displayed than in the great mosaic at Madaba, Jordan, from the Room of Hippolytus that was excavated beneath the Church of the Virgin. A later 6th floor displays a scene of the Graces and Erotes in the upper register of an elaborate mosaic, with the myth of Hippolytus in the lower register. In the upper border sit three personifications, or *tychai*, of cities. They are identified as Rome, Gregoria and Madaba. Each has a headpiece. Rome's is a kind of Phrygian cap, whereas Gregoria and Madaba wear turreted crowns typical of city *tychai*. Under the misapprehension that Rome here was the Italian city, scholars have struggled without success to find some way to recognise Constantinople in Gregoria. Since Madaba is dearly present as the site of the mosaic, it had been assumed that the other two cities were presumably great ones - obviously Rome and the mysterious Gregoria. But there is no way that Constantinople could have been called Gregoria, and there is no need to look for such a name. Rome in this mosaic is Constantinople. Her headpiece matches precisely the one worn by the image of Constantinople in the Peutinger Table. As for Gregoria [...] Antioch nicely fills the bill. It was a city that we know tried to rid itself of its Seleukid name in the 6th C., when it enjoyed the stewardship of the eminent Bishop Gregorius.

Bowersock, G., «Old and New Rome in the Late Antique Near East», στο P. Rousseau - M. Papoutsakis (ed.), *Transformations of Late*



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Antiquity. Essays for Peter Brown (Ashgate 2009), p. 47.