

## Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 24, No 1 (2014)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 24



### Constantinople as 'New Rome'

John Richard MELVILLE-JONES

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.1170](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.1170)

Copyright © 2015, John Richard Melville-Jones



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

#### To cite this article:

MELVILLE-JONES, J. R. (2015). Constantinople as 'New Rome'. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 24(1), 247–262. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.1170>

INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
SECTION OF BYZANTINE RESEARCH  
NATIONAL HELLENIC RESEARCH FOUNDATION



ΙΝΣΤΙΤΟΥΤΟ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΤΟΜΕΑΣ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΩΝ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ  
ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ



# BYZANTINA ΣΥΜΜΕΙΚΤΑ

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA

JOHN R. MELVILLE-JONES

CONSTANTINOPLE AS 'NEW ROME'

ΑΘΗΝΑ • 2014 • ATHENS

JOHN R. MELVILLE-JONES

CONSTANTINOPLE AS 'NEW ROME'

The reason for revisiting this question is that it needs to be defined more forcefully and exactly than has usually happened in the past, in order to reach a more definite conclusion than has been reached by many scholars, even in some of the latest studies that have addressed this topic<sup>1</sup>, and perhaps

---

1. S. CALDERONE, Costantinopoli, la 'seconda Roma', in A. MOMIGLIANO - A. SCHIAVONE (edd.), *Storia di Roma*, Turin 1993, 723-49 (providing an excellent overview of the subject, which is well documented, although less decisive than the present study), and L. GRIGG - G. KELLY (edd.), *Two Romes, Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 2012, 11-12 and 246-50 (which reaches different conclusions from those reached in this note without fully analysing the evidence). An earlier study by J. IRMSCHER, ["Neurom" oder "zweites Rom" - Renovatio oder Translatio, *Klio* 65.2 (1983), 431-439], addresses this aspect of the founding of Constantinople relatively briefly, but presents much of the evidence in a useful manner. The article by W. HAMMER, The New or Second Rome in the Middle Ages, *Speculum* 19.1 (1944), 50-62, is interesting, but begins by stating (p. 52) that 'The first literary reference to Constantinople as the 'New Rome' I have found <is> in the epic poem *In laudem Justinii* by Corippus ...' This ignores the earlier uses of this and similar phrases in Latin and Greek sources, focuses on literary rather than official documents, and avoids the question of whether either of these phrases was ever an official name for Constantinople. Statements relating to the name of the city are also made in passing in numerous other publications without any detailed discussion. As honourable exceptions among writers in English, we should note two recent articles by A. CAMERON, Old and New Rome: Roman Studies in Sixth-Century Constantinople and G. BOWERSOCK, Old and New Rome in the Late Antique Near East, on pp. 15-36 and 37-49 of the Festschrift *Transformations of Late Antiquity. Essays for Peter Brown*, edited by P. ROUSSEAU - M. PAPOUTSAKIS (Farnham 2009). These refer frequently to New Rome and Old Rome, but avoid implying that either phrase was an official title for Constantinople. The question should have been settled long ago after the study made by F. DÖLGER, Rom in der Gedankenwelt der Byzantiner, *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 56 (1937), 1-42 [= *Byzanz und die europäischer Staatenwelt*, Ettal 1953 and Darmstadt 1976, 70-115], where he describes the idea that Constantinople was officially named New Rome as 'a fiction'. Insufficient attention

to explain why incorrect opinions have survived for so long, particularly among writers whose first language is English.

As a starting point, it is necessary to make a distinction between the ecclesiastical use of 'New Rome' in the title of the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople (which follows the long-standing traditional form 'His Sublime All-Holiness, Archbishop of Constantinople New Rome and Oecumenical Patriarch'), and the supposed use of the name of 'New Rome' or 'Second Rome' as an official or formal title (as opposed to a laudatory description popular with orators), which is alleged to have been given by Constantine to the city that he founded on the site of Byzantium.

This title 'Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome' is of course more impressive than the simple original Greek title of Páppas, meaning 'Father', which is still used by the Orthodox bishop of Alexandria and (modified in English from the Latin 'Papa' to 'Pope' or, in old texts, 'Poope') by the bishop of Rome. This combination of Constantinople and 'New Rome' in the Patriarch's title must have begun at some time after the middle of the 4th century of the Christian era, although no surviving patriarchal document is as old as that. Its use in this context is, as will be shown, entirely legitimate, but this does not settle the question of whether 'New Rome' was ever used as an official or formal title for the city, rather than as a descriptive or laudatory expression.

How did the epithet 'New Rome' come to be attached to the name of Constantinople? Does the phrase in fact go back as far as the foundation of that city? Did Constantine intend from the first that his new foundation should be an eastern capital for the empire, or even that it should replace Rome? No contemporary evidence bears on this subject, except for one possible reference in a Latin poem, and there is nothing on Constantine's coinage that supports this suggestion. The supposed 'evidence' is provided by much later written sources. The statement that is preserved by two ancient writers, that Constantine considered Ilion/Troy (the home of Aeneas, the

---

does indeed seem to have been paid to this important study by writers who use the English language. By contrast, it should also be noted that the work by R- J. LILIE, *Byzanz. Das zweite Rom* (Berlin 2003) chooses *zweite* rather than *neue* for its title, and when *neue Rom* is used on p. 44, it appears only within quotation marks, which shows that the author does not consider it an official name for the city.

legendary ancestor of the Romans) as a possible site for his new foundation<sup>2</sup>, does indeed suggest that at an early stage he had decided to create something more than a city that would be simply another foundation named after an emperor, but does not support the idea that he might have decided to call it 'New Rome'.

As a starting point, it is perhaps wrong to assume that in 324, when he decided to found a new city on the site of Byzantium, Constantine already had a fully formed plan in his mind. It is true that during his reign he almost totally ignored Rome as a base for his operations. His last visit to the traditional capital was in 326, and this was only for the purpose of attending a repeat celebration of his twenty-year anniversary, or *vicennalia*, an event that he could hardly have avoided. At other times when he was in the west he stayed at Milan and Serdica (which he was reported to have called 'my Rome', indicating that where he was, there was the capital)<sup>3</sup>. But his neglect of Rome does not mean that in 324 he had already decided on replacing it with a new capital city, as opposed to another eastern administrative centre which would glorify his name, following the practice of many earlier emperors<sup>4</sup>. However, there is some evidence that suggests that the concept of an eastern city that would match Rome might have begun to be developed as early as the beginning of A.D. 326.

---

2. Sozomenos, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.3.2, ed. J. BIDEZ, Berlin 1960, 51: ... ἔγνωκεν οἰκίσαι πόλιν ὁμώνυμον ἑαυτῷ καὶ τῇ Ῥώμῃ ὁμότιμον (he decided to found a city which would be called by his own name, and would be equal in honour to Rome'), and Zosimos, *New History*, 2.30.1, ed. F. PASCHOUD, Paris 2003, 115: πόλιν ἀντίρροπον τῆς Ῥώμης ἐξίηται ('He was looking for a city that would be a counterbalance [ἀντίρροπον] to Rome'), in each case explaining that Constantine looked at the possibility of founding a city at or near the supposed site of Ilion before deciding on Byzantium.

3. The evidence for this statement is not of high quality. The claim that 'Constantine originally intended to transfer public administration to Serdica, because he loved the city and regularly said 'My Rome is Serdica' survives in a document which is now known as *Anonymus post Dionem*, a continuation of Cassius Dio's history up to the time of Constantine (C. MÜLLER, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* v. IV, Paris 1868, 199): Ὅτι Κωνσταντῖνος ἐβουλευσατο πρῶτον ἐν Σαρδικῇ μεταγαγεῖν τὰ δημόσια φιλῶν τε τὴν πόλιν ἐκεῖνην συνεχῶς ἔλεγεν «Ἡ ἐμὴ Ῥώμη Σαρδικὴ ἐστίν». The statement is not supported by any other evidence.

4. As examples from the earlier imperial period, we might choose Tiberiopolis, Claudiopolis, Flaviopolis, Traianopolis and Hadrianopolis.

This evidence, such as it is, is provided by a passage in a poem composed by the only piece of writing surviving from Constantine's lifetime that might suggest that 'a new Rome' (or, in this case, 'a second Rome') was beginning to be used to describe the new city. The poem (*Carmina* IV) was composed by a Roman, Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius, who had been exiled from Rome (one might uncharitably suggest that this was for his bad verses), and was written to celebrate a visit to the eastern empire made by Constantine's sons Crispus and Constantine Junior. In lines 5-6 he wrote<sup>5</sup>:

Let the Cirrhaean rock sing their praises, and let the nobility of Pontus,  
A second Rome (*altera Roma*), see these brilliant leaders.

In these lines 'Pontus' may have been the best equivalent that the poet could find for the much longer word 'Constantinople', or some other word that would indicate the area from which this eastern 'nobility' might come. If this is not what he meant, the lines are not immediately easy to understand. Grammatically, it is 'the nobility of Pontus', *Ponti nobilitas*, not the new city itself, that must be taken as constituting 'a second Rome'; so perhaps we should imagine the upper classes of the new city as forming this 'new Rome'. We must remember that we are dealing with a poet who, even with the greatest exercise of compassion, would never be placed higher than the second class, and was clearly struggling, perhaps with a deadline to meet. However we interpret the meaning of these lines, they suggest that even as early as this, it was felt that Constantinople would not be merely a grand new city named after the ruling emperor, but an eastern capital city that would match Rome in many respects. But this does not mean that it was intended that it should be officially named 'Second Rome.'

The only other relevant evidence that belongs to the reign of Constantine is provided by some minor issues of bronze and billon coins and medallions, produced at every mint in the empire at the end of his reign, which show representations of the goddess Roma and of Constantinopolis, the personification of the new city. It is important to note that their legends mention simply Rome and Constantinople, VRBS ROMA and CONSTANTINOPOLIS (the presence of 'urbs' in the former legend being

---

5. *Hos rupes Cirrhaea sonet videatque coruscus / Ponti nobilitas, altera Roma, duces.* For the date, see CALDERONE, *Costantinopoli*, 734 and note 49; Porphyrius also referred to Constantinople in another slightly later poem (*Carmina* XIX, line 33) as 'the adornment of the Pontus', *Ponti decus*.

perhaps designed to emphasise that the comparison was between the cities, not between the goddess Roma and the personification of the emperor's new city). No Roman coins, even those issued from eastern mints, ever referred to *Nova Roma* or *Altera Roma*, and since coins are important official documents, this is a point that should not be ignored<sup>6</sup>.

Another piece of evidence that needs to be considered is an edict issued by Constantine I on December 1, A.D. 334, exempting ship owners from various duties, which is preserved in the later Theodosian Code<sup>7</sup>. It begins by stating that the legislation has been created 'for the benefit of the city that We have endowed with an everlasting name (*aeterno nomine*)'<sup>8</sup>. Although Rome was often called 'the eternal city' by ancient writers, the use of the word *aeternus* in this context does not automatically imply that the 'everlasting name' is that of Rome, rather than of Constantine himself, so this phrase should not be used to provide support for the suggestion that Constantinople might have been officially named 'New Rome' or 'Second Rome' by Constantine. It should also be noted that in the collections of legal codes that were made after Constantine's time (beginning with the *Codex Theodosianus*), decrees that were promulgated from Constantinople are never said to have been issued at 'New Rome'.

6. These coins and medallions have been studied recently in two well written articles by L. RAMSKOLD, Coins and medallions struck for the inauguration of Constantinople, 11 May 330, in *Nis and Byzantium IX* (on-line open journal), 2011, 125-58 and (with N. LENSKI), Constantinople's dedication medallions and the maintenance of civic traditions, in *Numismatische Zeitschrift* 199 (2012), 31-58. The small bronze coins bearing the legend 'the Roman people', P(opulus) R(omanus), that were issued at the mint of Constantinople late in the reign of Constantine I cannot reasonably be considered to have any bearing on the name of the city. The silver medallions bearing the Greek letters P (for Πώμη) and K (for Κωνσταντινούπολις) also show that these were the two names that were officially used for the two cities. The Syriac translation of a document which refers to Alexandros, who was probably the second bishop of Constantinople, as 'bishop of New Rome', is rightly dismissed by G. DAGRON, (*Naissance d'une capitale: Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451*, Paris 1974, 46 note 1) and CALDERONE (*Costantinopoli, 734*, end of note 49) as an attempt at an explanatory addition by the translator, who would have been working at a time or in an environment in which the concept of Constantinople as 'New Rome' was important and established in an ecclesiastical context.

7. *Codex Theodosianus* 13.5.7 (*De naviculariis*): *Pro commoditate urbis quem aeterno nomine donavimus ...*

8. For a discussion of this point, see P. SPECK, *Urbs quam Deo donavimus. Konstantins des Großen Konzept für Konstantinopel*, *Boreas* 18 (1995), 143-173 at pp. 149-50.

Moving on in time, the next piece of literary evidence that must be considered is a passage in an oration, a *προεσβευτικὸς* or ambassador's speech, which was delivered by the orator Themistios for Constantius II at Rome in A.D. 357, when Themistios was visiting that city. Here<sup>9</sup> we find that a contrast is made between 'the new Rome and the old'. But the title of the oration states that it is a *προεσβευτικὸς* for Constantinople (not 'New Rome'). This shows clearly that at this time there was no official name for the city except Constantinople. Likewise when, in a later oration addressed to Valens, the same orator contrasts 'the eastern Rome with the western'<sup>10</sup>, this is only a rhetorical form of words, rather than an indication that 'Rome' was a part of the official name of the eastern capital. However, in each case it is clear that the imagery of a comparison between Rome and Constantinople had by now been established, particularly because it made the latter city different from other cities that had been founded in the eastern empire bearing the names of emperors, so it is not surprising that by the time of the Oecumenical Council of A.D. 381, the laudatory description 'New Rome' was becoming normal<sup>11</sup>.

At about the same time Julian, during his time as Caesar, when he composed an oration in honour of Constantius II, referred to 'the city on the Bosphoros that is named after the whole family of the Constantii', and wrote of the emperor's father that 'he founded a city that bore his own name.'<sup>12</sup> 'New Rome' and 'Second Rome' are not mentioned.

---

9. Themistios, *Orations* III, 51 (Προεσβευτικὸς ὑπὲρ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ῥηθὲς ἐν Ῥώμῃ): *Themistii Orationes*, v. I, ed. H. SCHENKL and G. DOWNEY, Leipzig 1965, 60: ... τῇ νέᾳ Ῥώμῃ πρὸς τὴν ἀρχαίαν. Note also the claim in a later oration by the same author that the emperor's city will truly deserve to be called 'a second Rome' (δευτέρα Ῥώμη), if its senators receive privileges that are in all respects equivalent to those of Roman senators (*Orations* XIV, *Themistii Orationes*, v. I, 265). This again suggests that 'second Rome' was only a laudatory description, rather than an official title.

10. *Themistii Orationes*, v. I, 125 ... τῆς ἑώας Ῥώμης καὶ τῆς ἑσπερίας.

11. As an example of the survival of writers using Latin in Constantinople in the sixth century, the poet Corippus referred several times to *antiqua Roma* and *nova Roma* in his lengthy poem *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris* (I, 288 and 341, III, 156 and 247, IV, 101 and 141), but this does not mean that either of these terms was an official name for either of these cities.

12. Julian, *Orations* 1.5, Ἡ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ Βοσπόρῳ πόλις, ὄλου τοῦ γένους τοῦ Κωνσταντίων ἐπόνυμος ...



It will by now be clear that the purpose of this communication is to combat the simple statement, occasionally found in modern books, that when Constantine founded Constantinople he did not merely decide that it should imitate the existing capital of the empire, but that he also ordered that it should be called 'New Rome'<sup>13</sup>. There are indeed two passages in later authors which might appear to support this theory, *obiter dicta* in the writings of the historians Sokrates of Constantinople (sometimes known as Sokrates Scholastikos), and Hermeias Sozomenos. But it should be noted that these histories were written in the early fifth century, not in the time of Constantine, and in addition, the authors had, as it were, an axe to grind. The statement of Sokrates reads as follows<sup>14</sup>:

13. This is particularly true of recent English-language publications, whose authors sometimes do not seem to have sufficiently considered the discussion of this subject by DAGRON, *Naissance*, 43-7, which is, as one would expect, well presented and accurate, and generally available, although it avoids as firm a conclusion as the present study offers (exceptions are provided by the brief analysis in English of the question by CAMERON, *Old and New Rome*, which does not go into great detail, and the study by BOWERSOCK, *Old and New Rome* (see Note 1 for information about these book chapters), which reviews the use of these terms over a wide area for a long time after the foundation of Constantinople, and on pp. 41-2 briskly disposes of the suggestion that 'New Rome' was ever an official title). It should be noted that in Chapter XVII of E. GIBBON'S great work *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, he wrote (cautiously, but in a way that suggested that he was not entirely convinced of the accuracy of the literary source that he was following), 'At the festival of the dedication, an edict, engraved on a column of marble, bestowed the title of SECOND or NEW ROME on the city of Constantine. But the name of Constantinople has prevailed over that honourable epithet, and after the revolution of fourteen centuries still perpetuates the fame of its author.' For extreme recent examples of the mistaken idea that 'New Rome' was the official name of the city, see W. TREADGOLD, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, Stanford 1997, 39: 'Not two months after Licinius's surrender, Constantine formally refounded the city of Byzantium, giving it the name of New Rome ... Constantine was doubtless pleased, and not surprised, that from the first most people called his city Constantinople ...' (the book consistently refers to the city afterwards as 'Constantinople'), and an inversion of the facts by T. GREGORY, *A History of Byzantium*, 2nd edition (Hoboken 2011), p. 147: 'The official name of the city was always Nea Rome (New Rome), although it was also called Constantinople, the city of Constantine'. This looks suspiciously like an incautious recycling of the words of Edward Gibbon.

14. *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.16 (ed. R. HUSSEY, Oxford 1853 [repr. Hildesheim-New York 1992], 102-103: 'Ἐποίει τε τοῦτο κατὰ τὰς ἄλλας πόλεις, καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ ἐπωνύμῳ, ἢν Βυζάντιον καλουμένην τὸ πρότερον ἠῤῥησε, τεῖχη μεγάλα περιβαλὼν καὶ διαφόροις κοσμήσας οἰκοδομήμασιν ἴσην τε τῆ βασιλευούσῃ Ῥώμῃ ἀποδείξας, καὶ Κωνσταντινούπολιν μετονομάσας, χρηματίζειν δευτέραν Ῥώμην νόμῳ ἐκύρωσεν ὃς νόμος ἐν λιθίνῃ γέγραπται στήλῃ καὶ δημοσίᾳ ἐν τῷ καλουμένῳ Στρατηγίῳ, πλησίον τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ ἐφίππου παρῆθηκε.

‘He also did this (built churches) in the other cities, and in the city that was named after him. And he enlarged the latter, which was previously called Byzantion, surrounding it with great walls and adorning it with a variety of buildings, making it equal to the capital Rome; and after changing its name to Konstantinoupolis, he established by law that it should be known as (χρηματίζειν) ‘(a) Second Rome’ (Δευτέρα Ῥώμη). This law has been written on a stone pillar, and he set it up in the building called the Strategion, near his equestrian statue.’<sup>15</sup>

Does this settle the question? Should we believe that an inscription of this kind was in fact set up in a central location in Constantinople at the time of the establishment of Constantine’s city, and that it decreed that ‘Second Rome’ should be its official name? The words of Sokrates might seem at first sight to be clear and unambiguous. But it is possible to view them with scepticism. Inscriptions of this kind are not known for any other Roman city. In addition, the word *χρηματίζειν*, here translated as ‘be known as’, implies something different from *ὀνομάζεσθαι*, the word that would most normally be used to describe a formal name in such a context, or *μετονομάζειν*, which is used in this passage to describe the change of the city’s name from Byzantion<sup>16</sup>. I am therefore not inclined to accept his statement at its face value, and I suspect that if it is not an outright invention by him, or by some slightly earlier writer, it is at best a conflation of facts: there may have been an inscription honouring Constantine on the occasion of the foundation of his new city, perhaps attached to his equestrian statue, the words ‘a second Rome’ may have been used by panegyricists and orators when praising the city, and these words may even have been included in the text of this inscription; but even if that was the case, it is hard to believe that the name ‘Second Rome’ was ever the subject of a formal law:

15. Kedrenos (I, 563) also mentions this statue (which has not survived) as being in the *Strategion*, adding the information that the mounted emperor was holding a cross. Perhaps by the eleventh century this Christian addition had in fact been made.

16. As an example of the way in which *χρηματίζειν* might be used to imply that something was an extra description rather than a primary name or title, cf. Plutarchos, *Antony* 54.6, where it is said that Kleopatra was ‘known as’ the new Isis, because of some ceremonies in which she appeared dressed as the goddess, (*νέα Ἴσις ἐχρημάτισε*). She was never officially known by this name.

Sokrates calls the city 'Second Rome', not 'New Rome'. The first of these two expressions would have come more easily to orators, particularly western ones, when describing the city at the time when it was first established. To call Constantinople 'New Rome' in Constantine's reign, when he still hoped for the full support of the Senate at Rome would have been less well accepted than to call it 'a second Rome'<sup>17</sup>. The situation is different from that which applied later in the Byzantine period, when after the fall of the western Empire the concept of the New Rome would have had a different nuance.

Hermeias Sozomenos, who wrote another *Ecclesiastical History* at about the same time, tells a similar story, but in different words<sup>18</sup>:

[Constantine] built churches to God, especially in the principal cities, as in Nicomedeia of the Bithynians, and Antiocheia on the river Orontes, and in the city of the Byzantines, which he established to be equal with Rome in power, and to share with it in ruling. For when everything was proceeding in accordance with his plans, and matters had been arranged successfully in relation to other nations through wars and treaties, he decided to build a city with the same name as his own, and equal to Rome in honour.

He continued by expanding the story told by Sokrates, adding the charming detail that Constantine had decided to build his new city on a site near Troy by the tomb of Aias, but was deterred by a vision. This new city was to be equal in *τιμῇ* (honour or rank) to Rome. In the same chapter of his work, he

17. The idea that 'a second Rome' was a normal rhetorical description of the city is also easier to accept if we think in Latin, the official language of Constantinople at its foundation, because there are two ways of saying 'second' in that language. A Latin speaker might have called Constantinople *altera Roma* or *Roma secunda*. There is a slight difference: *alter* (as opposed to *alius*) means either 'another' or 'the other' of two things (there is no exact equivalent of this in Greek), and is the word that is more likely to have been used. *Secundus* means literally 'following', as well as 'second', so it is less complimentary. The nuances of the phrases would therefore not have been the same. *Altera Roma* could have been used as a laudatory expression without diminishing the position of Old Rome, whereas 'Nova Roma' might imply that the new city was superior in some way.

18. Sozomenos, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.3, ed. BIDEZ, 51: ... *ναοὺς ἀνίστη τῷ Χριστῷ, διαφερόντως δὲ ἐν ταῖς μητροπόλεσιν, ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς Νικομηδέων τῆς Βιθυνῶν, καὶ Ἀντιοχείας τῆς παρὰ τὸν Ὀρῶντιν ποταμόν, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς Βυζαντιῶν πόλεως, ἣν ἴσα Ῥώμη κρατεῖν καὶ κοινωνεῖν αὐτῷ τῆς ἀρχῆς κατεστήσατο. Ἐπεὶ γὰρ κατὰ γνώμην αὐτῷ πάντα προὔχουσι, κατώρθωτο δὲ καὶ τὰ πρὸς τοὺς ἀλλοφύλους πολέμοις καὶ σπονδαῖς, ἔγγωνεν οἰκίσαι πόλιν ὁμώνυμον ἑαυτῷ, καὶ τῇ Ῥώμῃ ὁμότιμον.*

also tells us that Constantinople was provided with a Senate, adorned with buildings, fountains and porticoes and other works, and given control of the eastern part of the Roman Empire, including the Balkans and North Africa. These things did in fact happen, but not immediately.

Later in the same chapter, Sozomenos also tells us that Constantine named Constantinople ‘New Rome’<sup>19</sup>. This is the first surviving piece of historical writing, as opposed to poetry or rhetoric, that uses this exact expression, so automatically accepted by modern writers. I would remind you, however, that Sozomenos was writing in the early 5th century, after the Oecumenical Council of A.D. 381 which will be discussed below, and that like Sokrates he was an East Roman Christian, with the same point of view.

This form of words was repeated in the middle of the following century in an extract from a mostly lost historical work composed by Hesychios of Miletos (sometimes known as ‘Hesychios Illoustrios’), which appears as one of the items that were joined together by Th. Preger under the heading of *Patria Konstantinoupoleos*, and placed at the beginning of the first volume of his collection of texts relating to the early history of Constantinople<sup>20</sup>. Hesychios seems to have written simply that Constantine the son of Constantius ‘founded the new Rome, ordering it to be known as being equal (*χρηματίζειν*) to the first one.’ A text of such a late date, composed after the Council of Constantinople of 381, can hardly be considered to have any special significance, apart from showing that Constantinople was regularly thought of as (a or the) ‘New Rome’ or ‘Second Rome, even if that was not its official title.

Sokrates and Sozomenos and Hesychios were, as has already been stated, writing many years after the establishment of Constantinople. So we must ask: does any evidence survive which is contemporary with this event, apart from the poetry of Porphyrius, and the edict of Constantine preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus*, neither of which supports the proposition that ‘New Rome’ or ‘Second Rome’ was the official name of the city? There is none. The only two contemporary histories that deal with the period when Constantinople was founded are the Christian tract *De Mortibus Persecutorum* written by Lactantius and a *Life of Constantine*, attributed to Eusebios of Kaisareia.

19. ... νέαν Ῥώμην Κωνσταντινούπολιν ὠνόμασε (ed. BIDEZ, 52).

20. TH. PREGER, *Scriptores Originum Constantinopolitanarum*, Leipzig 1901, 1: ... τὴν νέαν ἀνίστησι Ῥώμην ἴσην αὐτὴν τῇ πρώτῃ χρηματίζειν προστάξας.

The former ends early in Constantine's reign, so it is not surprising that it contains no reference to the establishment of Constantinople. The latter work, a full biography, is curiously deficient in any detailed account of the founding of Constantinople and the emperor's plans for it, even though it was written to glorify him. In one short passage, Eusebios tells us that Constantine 'heaped honours upon the city that bore his name,' and then adds (untruthfully) that 'Because he was infused with the spirit of God, which he judged that the city that bore his own name should display, he thought it right to purge it of all worship of idols, so that nowhere in it could there be seen those images of the supposed gods which are worshipped in temples'<sup>21</sup>. I say 'untruthfully' because there is evidence for the continued display of pre-Christian works of art in the city during and after Constantine's time<sup>22</sup>, and for the continuance of pre-Christian religious practices and the maintenance of traditional temples. Apart from this short passage, the foundation of Constantinople is not mentioned, and if we accept that the work was finished by A.D. 339 (when Eusebios died), it again suggests that by that time, no other name than Constantinople was used in any official context or document for the city.

---

21. See *Eusebios von Caesarea de Vita Constantini*. Eingeleitet von B. BLECKMANN. Übersetzt und Kommentiert von H. SCHNEIDER [Fontes christiani 83], Turnhout 2007, 368, III, 48: Τὴν δὲ γ' ἐπώνυμον αὐτοῦ πόλιν ἐξόχω τιμῇ γεραίρων ... Ὅλος δ' ἐμπνέων θεοῦ σοφίας, ἦν τῆς ἐπηγορίας τῆς αὐτοῦ πόλιν ἐπώνυμον ἀποφῆναι ἔκρινε, καθαρθεύειν εἰδωλολατρίας ἀπάσης ἐδικαίου, ὡς μηδαμοῦ φαίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτῇ τῶν δὴ νομιζομένων θεῶν ἀγάλματα ἐν ἱεροῖς θρησκευόμενα. In five following paragraphs (§§54-58) Eusebios gives more specific examples of the removal of doors or statues, and reports the demolition of a temple of Aphrodite at Heliopolis and a temple of Asklepios at Aigai in Kilikia. There was certainly no general demolition of temples at this time, and there two might have been selected after pressure from the Christians to remove some excessively popular buildings, and, in the first case, because of the growing tide of asceticism. Eusebios then attempted to explain the survival of many pagan works of art in Constantinople as the result of a deliberate plan to expose them to public mockery.

22. This is clear from the description of the statues that existed in Constantinople at the time of the Fourth Crusade (see A. CUTLER, *The De Signis* of Niketas Choniates. A Reappraisal, in *American Journal of Archaeology* 72 (1968), 113-118 and, more recently, the study by T. PAPAMASTORAKIS, *Interpreting the De Signis* of Niketas Choniates, in A. SIMPSON and S. EFTHYMIADES (edd.), *Niketas Choniates, a Historian and a Writer*, Geneva 2009, 209-223). See also the notes on pp. 301-5 of the translation with commentary of the *Life of Constantine* by A. CAMERON and S. G. HALL (Oxford 1999), which discuss the question of the destruction of temples.

Is this absence of information in Eusebios's account significant? Historians and archaeologists know that an absence of material can be of as much significance as its presence when it comes to interpreting the record of the past. The absence of a detailed account of Constantine's actions and motives in founding his new city may lead us to suspect that as with the supposed official naming of the city, some of the motives and actions that were attributed to him by later writers are inventions of a later period.

How then should we interpret the statements of these later writers? This is where we must examine the ecclesiastical aspect of the question. We must remember that the later writers were Christians, They were not impartial – can any historian be truly impartial? – but were writing for Christian audiences, and any statement that they make should be examined to see whether it appears to have a purely factual basis, or whether it has a pro-Christian slant of some kind. The Christian version of the history of this period has triumphed. But other evidence suggests that the situation was not so simple. There is no better example of this than the much debated question of the extent to which Constantine might have been converted to the worship of the one and only god of the Christians after the battle of the Milvian Bridge, when he was said to have been victorious after he had the Christian symbol painted on the shields of his soldiers. The medallion that was issued at Rome to celebrate this victory continued to use the language of previous years, in which the emperor was associated with the Sun god Sol, and again we see him here side by side with Sol, without any introduction of Christian elements. Christian symbolism is in fact rare on Constantine's western coins at any time, and when it appears it is a minor part of the design. Even on his eastern coins it does not acquire force until his later years.

In addition, these writers were eastern Christians, and this is relevant and important. By the fourth century, Rome, Alexandria and Antiochia had become the principal organisational centres of Christianity, after Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 71. Jerusalem never regained the pre-eminence that it originally had. The bishops of the other three cities then took precedence over all others, and although the church of Rome did not have the largest number of Christians at first, it took to itself the position of highest status because it was the centre of administrative power. To reinforce this, there was the convenient tradition that Simon, the disciple whom Jesus had nicknamed 'Rock' or Kephá (hellenized to Κηφᾶς in

the New Testament), and who is now better known by the Greek translation of this word, Petros, had died in Rome. Since it was believed that the Gospels reported that Jesus had told Simon Kephás that he was the rock on which he would build his church, the church of Rome elevated Simon/Kephás/Peter to the position of its alleged first leader (dismissing the other and perhaps better claimant to this position, St Paul), and thus gave itself a further claim to pre-eminence<sup>23</sup>. But after the foundation of Constantinople, its rapid expansion and its establishment as the major administrative centre of the eastern part of the empire, Rome, Antioch and Alexandria had another competitor. It was then that the Second Oecumenical Council of the Christian Churches, held in A.D. 381 at Constantinople, and well attended by eastern bishops (a title which had by that time begun to be used) recognized that the new city of Constantine now deserved recognition as the second major centre of Christianity. The third Canon of that Council declared:

‘The bishop of Constantinople shall have the first place of honour after the bishop of Rome, because it (Constantinople) is a new Rome.’<sup>24</sup>

This may be the first recorded formal use of the title of ‘New Rome’ for Constantinople, more than half a century after the foundation of the city. However, it is an ecclesiastical document, which should be viewed only in an ecclesiastical context, and the Latin words *nova Roma* can be interpreted in two ways (as in the translation above).

The canon was, of course, a blow to the prestige of the Páppas or Pope of Alexandria and the bishop of Antiocheia. It was perhaps partly responsible for the bitterness with which later theological controversies were argued among the eastern Christian churches. It is also the reason why the Orthodox Oecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is completely justified for ecclesiastical purposes in calling himself the Patriarch of Constantinople,

---

23. It is possible to suspect that the last words of the longest version of this story (Matthew 16.13-20), particularly verses 18-19, are a later addition, inserted to support the claim of the church of Rome to primacy. The earliest and shortest version (Mark 8.27-9), which says no more than that when Jesus asked who the populace thought that he was, Peter said simply that he was the Christ (‘the anointed one’, meaning the Messiah), and attributes no further words to Jesus, probably preserves the original story more accurately.

24. Τὸν μὲν τοι Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἐπίσκοπον ἔχειν τὰ πρεσβεῖα τῆς τιμῆς μετὰ τὸν τῆς Ῥώμης ἐπίσκοπον, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτὴν νέαν Ῥώμην / (Constantinopolitanus episcopus habeat priores honores post Romanum episcopum, eo quod sit ipsa nova Roma).

New Rome<sup>25</sup>.

To recapitulate what I have said, and to state my conclusion, there is no evidence from Constantine's own time to show that he decided to call Constantinople 'New Rome'. The phrases 'second Rome' and 'new Rome' appear (with one possible exception) later, mostly in literary texts written by ecclesiastical writers who were writing in Greek and copied one another. For example, Theophanes, the ninth century chronicler, provides yet another example of this. He wrote:

In this year the pious Constantine, while founding Constantinople, decreed that it was to be styled '(a) New Rome', and ordained that it should have a Senate<sup>26</sup>.

Because of his late date he cannot be considered to be an exception to the general rule, since his work is to a great extent derivative, and he normally repeated what his sources said without alteration. This extract shows only that the myth of the 'New Rome' continued to be accepted in his time by the eastern Romans. It remained as an important theme in the propaganda of the eastern Roman empire, until Charlemagne stole the title of 'Roman Emperor' for western Europe in A.D. 800.

It is also relevant to this topic that in the collections of Roman laws that were made by Theodosios II and later emperors, when decrees are reported as having been made at Constantinople, never at 'New Rome'. This in itself is as good evidence as it is possible to find, to show that the official name of the city was never anything but Constantinople.

---

25. This Council was called Oecumenical, but was not truly so, because the western bishops were very poorly represented. And when the decisions of the Council were reported in the west, they were not universally accepted. So, not surprisingly, Constantinople is not called 'Nova Roma' in western sources, and this phrase appears in Latin literature only in the work of a sixth century African author who was resident in Constantinople (Corippus, *In laudem Iustini* I, 344, III, 156 and 247, IV, 101 and 141), who wrote in hexameters into which the name 'Constantinopolis' was more difficult to insert. For a good analysis of the way in which the theme of a New or Second Rome was developed by eastern writers after the Council of A.D. 381, see pp. 55-96 of E. FENSTER, *Laudes Constantinopolitanae*, Munich 1968, which focuses on the work of Gregorios Nazianzenos, Prokopios and Paulos Silentiaros.

26. Theophanes, *Chronicle*, A.M. 5821 (A.D. 328/9) [ed. C. de BOOR, 28]: *Τούτω τῷ ἔτει κτίζων Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ εὐσεβῆς τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν Ῥώμην νέαν χαρακτηρίζειν ταύτην ἐθέσπισε καὶ σύγκλητον ἔχειν ἐκέλευσεν.*



To summarise the conclusions of this essay, it is easy to believe that the expressions '(a) second Rome' or '(a) new Rome' might have been used to praise the new city at the time of its coming into existence and later, particularly when speeches or panegyrics were required on formal occasions. But the claim that either of these phrases was an officially given name for Constantinople, and might have been used in this way in official documents or public inscriptions, should be rejected. This false claim is a result of the emphasis placed on the phrase 'New Rome' in the decision of the Oecumenical Council of A.D. 381 that relates to the relative status of the major Christian churches, which led to the use of this phrase by later writers. There is, of course, no doubt that at an early stage in the planning of Constantinople it was decided to make it into a 'second Rome' in as many respects as possible, and over several generations this happened. An attempt was made to identify seven hills, and although the terrain is flatter than that of Rome, some were identified. The new city had a Senate modelled on that of Rome (and Roman senators were encouraged to emigrate to Constantinople by financial offers and the granting of various privileges). Constantinople had a Capitol, a *Praetorium*, a Sacred Way, several fora and a *miliarium* or milestone from which distances were measured. But this does not mean that an official title of 'New Rome' was ever given to it<sup>27</sup>. This is an expansion of the facts, partly inspired by the desire of the Church of Constantinople to increase its status in relation to the other major Christian churches.

---

27. In fact, there has only ever been one place that was formally called 'New Rome'. This was a small town in Ohio, which was dissolved in 2004 because of the behaviour of its police force.

## CONSTANTINOPLE AS 'NEW ROME'

In modern works it is often stated that Constantinople was called 'New Rome' (or 'Second Rome'), with the implication that this was an official title. This incorrect statement is particularly common in works written by scholars whose first, and perhaps only, language is English (which is why a thorough English-language study of the question, with the relevant evidence translated into English and analysed rather than simply accepted, is needed).

Some ancient authors (writing long after the foundation of the city) do in fact say or imply that Constantinople was formally named 'New Rome' or 'Second Rome', but this claim is, as Franz Dölger wrote a long time ago, 'auf einer Fiktion beruht'. These expressions belong to laudatory rhetoric and elevated historical prose and poetry, and are never found in official documents or on the coinage. Also, who could believe that Constantine I would ever have allowed any name other than his to be the official name of his new city?

The present study examines the relevant evidence in order to demonstrate that it is wrong to say that Constantine's city was ever officially called anything other than 'Constantinople'. On the other hand, it also shows that in an ecclesiastical context it has been correct to refer to 'New Rome', ever since the decision of the Oecumenical Council of A.D. 381, which was arranged by Theodosius I.

The question has often been discussed in the past, but this study of the evidence reaches a firmer conclusion than most previous discussions, explains why an incorrect opinion has flourished, analyses the evidence more closely and presents it in English.