

A City of Palaces: Imperial Residences and Urban Development in Constantinople, Fifth to Sixth Centuries

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The last section in the early fifth-century catalogue of Constantinople's major buildings, the *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae*, is a summary count by type of all structures previously listed by region. The compiler sorts the buildings in part by their relative significance. Palaces (*palatia*) come first, but the document makes no differentiation between the Great Palace and other palaces, all in possession of imperial women. Churches (*ecclesia*) are the second item in the list. Next appear the divine residences of the Augustae (*domus divinae Augustarum*), trailed by the mansions of the women with the rank of *nobilissima*. Baths are item five in the sequence, followed by basilicas, public squares (*fora*), senate houses (*senatus*), warehouses (*horrea*), etc. The implicit hierarchy of the summary prompts three questions. First, why did the rank-conscious compiler group the Augustae's residences with the Great Palace? Second, why did the compiler classify palaces higher than churches? Third, did this hierarchy hold as the empire embraced more completely a Christian framework?

To answer these questions, this presentation will analyze and compare the position and adjacent buildings of three imperial residences mentioned in the *Notitia* and three more from the sixth century. All of these belonged to imperial women (Arcadia, Marina, Pulcheria, Anicia Juliana, Theodora, and Sophia). With the scholarly focus on the empresses' pious foundations, palaces associated with the women of the imperial family have for the most part escaped the attention they deserve. I propose that more than individual displays of piety, churches belonged to a pattern of imperial building that had a very practical logic, a logic that began with palaces. Thus I argue for a spatial as well as ideological association between imperial mansions, churches, and baths. The residences of imperial women became centers of new neighborhoods, which included auxiliary structures such as churches, baths, and/or water reservoirs, and must also have been outfitted with new roads. These neighborhoods inevitably shaped the urban development of Constantinople, becoming, much like the area around the Great Palace, nuclei of urban growth. The building activities of imperial women in the capital should be seen as manifestations of their imperial authority, already delineated in images as a partnership. Gender imposed various restraints on this imperial partnership, effectively excluding the empresses from the battlefield or acts of law-giving. But in the early Byzantine period, the customary imperial care for the capital was one area of public life to which the Christian empresses made important contributions.

In conclusion, the presentation will consider why, although in the sixth century churches continued to be built close to palaces, the evidence suggests that imperial churches displaced palaces as more powerful symbols of imperial power. I propose that this shift should in part be understood as a response to early sixth-century crises in imperial power.