

Investigating the Ancient Urban Planning of Modern Istanbul

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Introduction:

Istanbul (previously Constantinople) has been almost consistently inhabited from 600BC to the modern day and has served as the bridge from Western Europe to the East. Therefore the city itself is the epitome of multi-culturalism both now and historically. In its near 3000 years of existence it has undergone many changes in its inhabitants, rulers, religion e.c.t all of which have had an effect on the urban layout and architecture of Istanbul.

Aims:

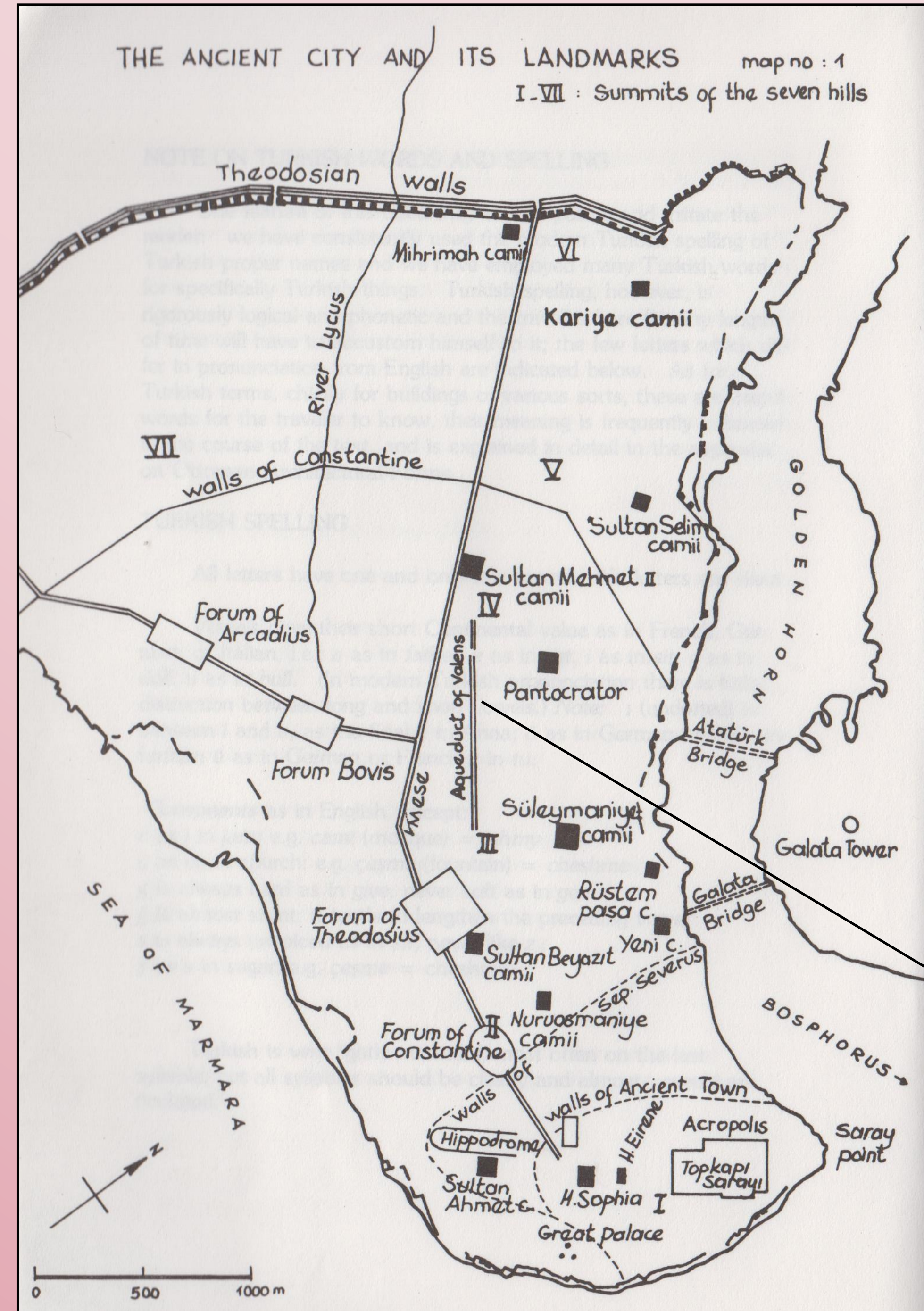
- To understand how Greco-Roman urban planning shaped modern Istanbul, focusing on the “Old City”
- To use the ancient cities of Asia minor to provide a comparison to Istanbul, as they are “snapshots” of ancient urban planning and architecture from a range of time periods.
- To consider why Islamic, Byzantine and Oriental urban planning designs have been overlooked and look at how they have impacted on the city.

Methods :

- I conducted source-based research. I read relevant documents to gain an understand of ancient urban planning and specific documents of the sites I would be visiting. I also familiarised myself with plans and maps of the cities I would visit.
- I then travelled to the coast of Asia Minor, where I visited Hierapolis, Aphrodisias, Laodicea, Ephesus, Miletus, Priene. All these sites are ruins, they allowed me to familiarize myself with the urban planning of specific periods and how these sites changed during their inhabitation.
- Lastly I visited Istanbul, while there I spent the majority of my time visiting the sites that dated to the Greco-Roman period. However, I also visited the important Byzantine, Islamic and Ottoman sites, which are merged within the “old city” and explored the ancient streets of the city.



Hierapolis' Frontinus Street. The main street in the Roman town, shows signs of changing urban development. Byzantine houses have encroached on to the main, open and once colonnaded street.



Above: A map of the “Ancient City” of Istanbul, showing its important landmarks, the hill summits and its position on the Golden Horn and Bosphorus, allowing access to the sea.
Below: Right: Aphrodisias’ temple destroyed by an earthquake. Centre: Miletus today due to the changing shorelines. Left: Priene’s Temple of Athena, destroyed by an earthquake



Conclusion and Results:

- 1.The urban planning and survival of Istanbul is almost solely reliant on the geography of the city. Other ancient coastal cities in Asia Minor flourished in antiquity but did not recover from earthquakes so readily and often did not continue as major centres through the Second Millennium AD. Istanbul by contrast is situated in the optimum position for trade and growth due to its position on the Bosphorus.
2. My fieldwork highlighted that the modern urban planning in Istanbul adapts itself to the city’s history. The city walls of Istanbul, which in parts have been preserved for tourism and historical protection, have in other parts been integrated into the fabric of the city. Where parts of the walls have fallen, residential or commercial buildings have sprung up to bridge the gap, adapting these walls to the modern city. In other parts the old gates of the walls or the arches of the Aqueduct have been adapted to allow traffic to pass through them. Therefore showing the ancient parts of the city becoming integral to the ever-changing modern city.
- 3.I have critically evaluated the tendency of archaeologists and planners to overlook the historic value and contemporary significance of Islamic, Byzantine, Ottoman influences in street networks. The winding backstreets and alleyways of Istanbul, synonymous with the later Byzantine and Ottoman periods, are a stark contrast to the large, straight, colonnaded streets of the Greco-Roman period. These large open streets are seen as more aesthetically pleasing and more sophisticated which is potentially why Byzantine and Ottoman periods are described more often as “declines”.



Figure 3: Istanbul’s aqueduct incorporated into the modern city.

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