

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

**Judith Herrin: Byzantium**

is published by Princeton University Press and copyrighted, © 2008, by Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

Follow links for Class Use and other Permissions. For more information send email to: [permissions@pupress.princeton.edu](mailto:permissions@pupress.princeton.edu)

# I

## The City of Constantine

Constantine resolved to make the city a home fit for an emperor . . . He surrounded it with a wall . . . cutting off the whole isthmus from sea to sea. He built a palace scarcely inferior to the one in Rome. He decorated the Hippodrome most beautifully, incorporating the temple of the Dioscuri in it.

*Zosimus, New History, c. 501*

Byzantium–Constantinople–Istanbul is one of the most extraordinary natural sites. Like New York, Sydney and Hong Kong, it is a great metropolis with a deep-water harbour which brings the sea into the heart of the city. The proximity of water, the play of sunlight on the waves and views out towards the horizon create a very special quality of light. What attracted Constantine when he looked for a new capital for the Roman Empire in the early fourth century AD was a location from which he could control land and sea routes between Asia and Europe. He found a suitable site with a safe harbour on the Golden Horn, which could be sealed by a chain to keep out enemy ships and provide security from the dangerous currents of the Bosphoros. Where Leander of Greek myth is supposed to have swum the strait to woo his beloved Hero, Russian tankers now dominate, but even though modern Istanbul is a city of 12 million, the panorama of Constantinople on the Bosphoros remains magnificent. Until recently it was possible to rent a small boat and be rowed across to the historic wooden houses built with landing stages in Ottoman times. And although there are now two bridges joining Asia and Europe, passenger ferries continue to cross the Bosphoros, offering glasses of black















