



Summary :

District between the sixth and the seventh hill of Constantinople with an important proportion of Greek orthodox population that diminished greatly after 1923; after 1955 Greeks gradually abandoned the area, heading towards bigger and more central communities.

Other Names

District of the Forum of the Gate of Edirne, Gate of Edirne

Geographical Location

Constantinople (Istanbul)

Historical Region

Constantinople (Istanbul)

Administrative Dependence

Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality

1. Location – name

The Edirne Kapu district is built on the highest point between the sixth and seventh hill of [Constantinople](#) (Istanbul) ¹ and was named after the gate of the same name, and second largest one, of the [Theodosian Walls](#). The gate, “second in line from the Golden Horn to the Propontis”, according to Skarlatos Vyzantios² was called Gate of Polyander or Gate of Myriander and Charisius’ Gate during the time of the Byzantine Empire.³ The first two names are explained by the fact that the gate was located in a heavily frequented area, on the middle of the street heading towards the city centre, ergo at a place where “myriads” of people went by daily. Vyzantios does not accept the similar explanation given by Codinus that the gate took its name during the time of the renovation of the city walls by Theodosius, by the crowd of the competing [Blues](#) and [Greens](#) gathering there trying, respectively, to set the gate under their patronage.⁴

The name Edirne Kapu was given to both the gate and the surrounding area after the [Fall of Constantinople](#), due to the fact that from there started the road leading to the city of Edirne (Adrianoupoli). This specific gate was of great meaning and importance to the Ottomans as well, because according to popular tradition, [Mehmed II the Conqueror](#) entered the city of Constantinople from there,⁵ while it is also said that there fell Ebû Eyub el-Ensârî, Prophet Muhammad’s comrade, during the [siege](#) of the city by the Arabs in 674.⁶ Probably commemorating those two incidents, the new sultans came through that gate during their crowning and the presentation of the sword of Ebû Eyub el-Ensârî.⁷ From this gate, considered the central and most official gate to the city, foreign ambassadors entered Constantinople, while from there passed the way leading to the Muslim holy site of Eyüp. Its importance is also indicated by the fact that a [Janissary](#) order was stationed in the area, charged with the gate’s security.

The area was one of the first districts with Muslim population after the Fall, fact verified by the multitude of religious places (mosques, [medrese](#), [tekke](#)). The most important of these was the mosque constructed during the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent in honor of his daughter Mihrimah, after whom the mosque is named.⁸ Skarlatos Vyzantios mentions that outside the gate Turkish stone-dressers kept shop “constantly busying themselves with the boasting of all-white funerary stelae that densify the cemeteries across, shadowed by a forest of cypresses” and adds that “from this gate most of the deathbeds come out, continuously transferring the inhabitants of Constantine’s great city to the incomparably more heavily populated necropolis. And the melancholy feelings [...] are hardly entertained by the view of the extended plains of Thrace”.⁹ Moreover, the Armenian traveller Eremya Kômürçian, while visiting the city in the end of the 17th century, mentions the cemeteries (Armenian and Greek) located across the gate, adding that around the area there were houses belonging to Turks and gardens – like the fruit garden of Bayram paşa, where there was a bridge for camels connecting the area to the opposite district of [Hasköy](#). On the outside of the walls and until the next gate, the traveller records coming



across old grand mansions, beautiful gardens, rose gardens and fruit gardens.¹⁰

2. Population

Christian population remained in the area even after the Fall. The district's proximity to [Fener \(Fanari\)](#) was the reason that the community of Edirne Kapu was until the 19th century one of the most important intra muros Christian communities.¹¹ After the Fall and according to a 1478 census by the qadi of Constantinople there were 3,151 Greek homes on the peninsula of Constantinople.¹² During the next century the population both of Muslims and non-Muslims increased.¹³ Regarding the Greek-Orthodox population, especially, according to the registers of 1540 and 1544 with reference to the income coming from Mehmed II the Conqueror's *wakf*, 1,547 Greek-Orthodox were recorded to have been living inside the city walls.¹⁴

Specifically, and according to the aforementioned registers, in Edirne Kapu – referred to in the records as “District of the Market of the Gate of Edirne” – 19 Greek-Orthodox families were residing. In the context of the effort to [re-people](#) Constantinople with both Christian and non-Christian population from newly-conquered areas, Mehmed II the Conqueror in 1475 located in the area part of Christians who came from Kaffa in [Crimea](#).¹⁵

3. The Greek-Orthodox community of Edirne Kapu

3.1. Church

The Christian quarter of the Gate of Edirne lay around the church of St George. The initial Byzantine church or monastery of St George had been demolished in 1555 in order for the mosque of Mihrimah to be built in its place. However, by imperial *firman* “Christians were granted permission and after twelve years built, not far from the site, the existing wooden-roofed church of St George, which they named *Monastery*, commemorating that first building from where the monks came to the new one”.¹⁶ According to one version of the popular story, the church was constructed on the location where earlier, during the [Latin conquest of the city in 1204](#), another church was built in order to “cast out” a ghost roaming the area.¹⁷

Among the hallmarks of this church, that later on became a parish church, were the 4 granite columns sustaining the dome, which were transferred from the church of St John the Forerunner that used to be in Machrychori, as well as an old manuscript Gospel of the 12th century that belonged to the church of [Hagia Sophia](#), the only one of the liturgical books of the Great Church that had been salvaged.¹⁸ The manuscript relic was presented to the Patriarchal ambry during the patriarchy of Photius (1929-1935), on the condition that each Patriarch should celebrate Mass in the church the first Sunday after the feast of St George.¹⁹ The building was renovated in 1726, then burned in the 1730²⁰ fire and reconstructed from scratch in 1836.²¹ In the southern part of the church, adjacent to the left nave, lies the domed holy water spring (*agiasma*) of St Basil, remnant of a Byzantine *cistern*.²²

According to information provided by [Manouil Gedeon](#), the church used to flourish because outside the gate and in close distance there were windmills belonging to Greek-Orthodox population, which meant that the flour-makers', the millers', the bakers', the bun-makers', the wheat merchants' etc. guilds kept the church under their patronage.²³ The same writer mentions that the female monastery of St John the Forerunner lay there until 1637, when it was transformed into a mosque.²⁴

The Greek-Orthodox community of Edirne Kapu numbered many members and used to span up to the adjacent parishes of Tekfur Sarayı and Arabacı Meydan, while in the west it neighbored St Dimitrios of the Sarmaşık parish. Its parish, in the beginning of the 20th century ranked in second the class of parishes according to the division by the Sacristans' Association of Constantinople “Taxiarch”, a rank obviously based on its importance and, consequently, its profit.²⁵

3.2. Education – associations



As early as 1764, as recorded in the patriarchal **sigillion** of Samuel Chantzeris, a school was operating within the community where Vasileios Photiadis taught in 1850. The old six-class school was located in a neoclassical building behind the church's **niche**.²⁶

The community also operated a **philanthropic** association, the 'Fellowship of Ladies 'St Barbara' ', founded in 1896 and intending to provide financial or material aid (mainly coal supply) towards the parish poor, and managed by a secretariat of five members and a male president, in contrast to the other members who were all female.²⁷ The philanthropic association was located in buildings next to the church.²⁸ Moreover, during the patriarchy of Ioakeim III (late 19th – early 20th century), a philanthropic association was founded in Fanari as well, aiming to aid the poor in the district and the neighboring areas, among which was the community of Edirne Kapu.²⁹

3.3. Community in decline

The passage to the Turkish Republic signaled the gradual decline of the community. In the patriarchal census of 1949, 49 families are recorded in the community, which provided 20 indigents from these 49 families with soup-kitchens every day.³⁰ According to data from the personal archive of Christophoros Christidis, in 1955 there were 45 families in the community, while a four-class elementary school, a philanthropic association, an educational association, a school soup-kitchen and a communal clinic were also operative.³¹ The **incidents of September 6th-7th 1955** created a wave of internal migration towards bigger and more central communities; as a result, most of the intra muros communities, including the one of Edirne Kapu, were gradually abandoned. The community school closed in 1974³² and, nowadays, no Greek-Orthodox resides in the area.

1. Belge, M., *Istanbul Gezi Rehberi* (İstanbul 2007), p. 76.
2. Βυζάντιος, Σ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολις. Ἡ Περιγραφή Τοπογραφική, Αρχαιολογική και Ιστορική* Α (Athens 1851), p. 348.
3. Μήλλας, Α., *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Athens 1996), p. 212.
4. Βυζάντιος, Σ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολις. Ἡ Περιγραφή Τοπογραφική, Αρχαιολογική και Ιστορική* Α (Athens 1851), p. 348.
5. Βυζάντιος, Σ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολις. Ἡ Περιγραφή Τοπογραφική, Αρχαιολογική και Ιστορική* Α (Athens 1851), p. 348.
6. *Büyük Lugat ve Ansiklopedisi* 4 (İstanbul 1972).
7. Φραγκούδης, Γ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολις (Βυζάντιον - Σταμπούλ). Περιγραφή της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως λίγοντος του 19ου αιώνας*, (Athens 1901), p. 86.
8. Βυζάντιος, Σ., *Κωνσταντινούπολις ή Περιγραφή Τοπογραφική, Αρχαιολογική και Ιστορική* Α (Athens 1851), p. 351.
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10. Κιομουτζιά ν, Ι.Τ., *Οδοιπορικό στην Πόλη του 1680* (Athens 1992), p. 62.
11. Σβολόπουλος, Κ., *Κωνσταντινούπολη 1856-1908. Η Ακμή του Ελληνισμού* (Athens 1995), p. 44.
12. Γεράσιμος, Σ., «Ελληνες της Κωνσταντινούπολης στα μέσα του ΙΣΤ' αιώνα», *Η Καθ' ημάς Ανατολή* 2 (1994), p. 118.
13. According to Turkish sources from the period between the years 1520-1535, the Christian population in Constantinople amounted to 25,252. Mantran, R., *Η Καθημερινή Ζωή στην Κωνσταντινούπολη τον αιώνα του Σουλειμάν του Μεγαλοπρεπούς* (Athens 1999), p. 79.



14. These numbers, however, probably only refer to the ones paying capital tax in that specific wakf. Γεράσιμος, Σ., «Έλληνες της Κωνσταντινούπολης στα μέσα του ΙΣΤ' αιώνα», *Η Καθ' ημάς Ανατολή* 2 (1994), pp. 118-119.
15. Γεράσιμος, Σ., «Έλληνες της Κωνσταντινούπολης στα μέσα του ΙΣΤ' αιώνα», *Η Καθ' ημάς Ανατολή* 2 (1994), p. 127.
16. Βυζάντιος, Σ., *Η Κωνσταντινούπολης. Η Περιγραφή Τοπογραφική, Αρχαιολογική και Ιστορική* Α (Athens 1851), p. 351.
17. Belge, M., *İstanbul Gezi Rehberi* (İstanbul 2007), p. 77.
18. Μήλλας, Α., *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Athens 1996), pp. 212-213.
19. Γεννάδιος Ηλιουπόλεως, «Ο Ναός του Αγίου Γεωργίου Εδирνέ Καπού», *Ορθοδοξία* (Constantinople 1951), p. 274.
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28. Παπαστράτης, Θ., *Επταλόφου Βοσπορίδος Οδοιοπορία, Έλληνες, Αρμένιοι, Τούρκοι, Εβραίοι* (Thessaloniki 1998), p. 28.
29. Μήλλας, Α., *Σφραγίδες Κωνσταντινουπόλεως* (Athens 1996), p. 101.
30. Σταματόπουλος, Κ.Μ., *Η Τελευταία Αναλαμπή* (Athens 1996), pp. 171, 290.
31. Χρηστίδης, Χ., *Τα Σεπτεμβριανά* (Athens 2000), p. 294.
32. Παπαστράτης, Θ., *Επταλόφου Βοσπορίδος Οδοιοπορία, Έλληνες, Αρμένιοι, Τούρκοι, Εβραίοι* (Thessaloniki 1998), p. 28.

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Glossary :

	agiasma The holy water (as well as the sacred place from where the water spurts), which the faithful drink, sprinkle or wash themselves in order to be healed.
	cistern A receptacle for holding rainwater, but also water transported from elsewhere, in order to keep it stored. The cisterns were either covered eiter open, and they could have more than one compartements.
	firman In the Ottoman Empire, an imperial edict or commission signed and sealed by the Sultan.
	Medrese The institution of medrese was the highest grade of the islamic education. The main courses which were taught to the young muslims were: reading, memorizing and interpreting the Koran, religious law, theology, philosophy etc.
	niche Semi-circular recess on the surface of the wall.



sigillion

Lat. sigillion – seal –

1. During the Byzantine Period the word sigillion refers to the official document bearing a seal issued by the imperial secretariat. The sigillia were divided into lead-seals and gold-seals (chrysobullon sigillion). The same name was used by state services for other documents. The imperial secretariat started to use the first sigillia in the mid 13th c. The Ecumenical Patriarchate replaced former documents known as “hypomnemata” with the sigillia.

2. During the Ottoman Period the sigillia were documents issued by the Patriarch usually for the confirmation of some privileges or the notification of some decision of the Synod.

tekke

Lodge for the members of a religious order (dervishes).

wakf (vakif)

A foundation, a grant of land or other source of income, including tax revenues, which was considered to be dedicated according to the sacred law (şeriat) and was used for religious and charitable purposes.

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