



Summary :

The Augustaion was one of Constantinople's public squares with a long history. It was lying to the south of Hagia Sophia, at the heart of public life and of administration. It was formed by Constantine the Great and it was named this way in honor of his mother. In this area from time to time a lot of changes took place. Gradually it lost its public character and became the forecourt of Hagia Sophia. It served at the imperial ceremonies. The square was decorated with columns surmounted by statues. The most famous of them was the equestrian statue of Justinian.

Date

4th-13th c.

Geographical Location

Constantinople, Istanbul

Names

Αὐ γουσταῖ ον, Αὐ γουστῖον, Αὐ γουστέων, Αὐ γουστεῖ ον, Αὐ γουστεών

Topographical Location

In place of the square that is now between the Blue Mosque (Sultan Ahmed) and Hagia Sophia

1. Introduction

The Augustaion¹ was an open space that lay until today south of the church of [Hagia Sophia](#).² It was named this way in honor of the mother of [Constantine the Great](#), to whom the title of Augusta had been bestowed. In this area stood her statue rested on a column.³ It is not possible to determine with any accuracy its dimensions.⁴ It preserved its prestige throughout the centuries because of its vicinity with buildings related to the public life and to the administration. It carried a great ideological and symbolic meaning, while it connected the great church of Orthodoxy with the imperial ceremonial.

2. Function

The Augustaion initially functioned as a food market. When porticoes were added surrounding it, it started to lose the air of a public square. After the rebuilding of Thomaites in the 7th century its relation with Hagia Sophia became all the more closer. Only Procopius among the historians⁵ calls the area "ἄ γοράν" (forum). The rest of them think the Augustaion as a forecourt annexed to Hagia Sophia. The middle Byzantine and late Byzantine sources characterize it as "αὐ λήν", "αὐ λαία", "προαύλιον" (courtyard) etc.⁶ It was intended for imperial processions. The emperor crossed the Augustaion in order to enter into the church of Hagia Sophia. During the [coronation](#) of the emperors the people and the army were gathered there. The existence of gateways as well as the fact that the open area was enclosed with walls and [porticoes](#) attests that the access to the area was restricted.

3. History of the monument - Building phases

During its long history, the Augustaion had been undergone many changes, and various building phases have been discerned.

3.1. 2nd - 3rd centuries

[Septimius Severus](#) erected a square with four surrounding porticoes, the so-called Tetrastoon.⁷ It was a food market. Any information about the monument is limited. The Augustaion occupied a part of this square. At the center of the Tetrastoon there was the statue of god Helios upon a column.⁸



3.2. 4th century

Constantine the Great after the [transfer of the capital](#) of the empire to [Constantinople](#) in 330, founded public buildings and embellished older ones, so as the ancient city changed its appearance. At the end of one of the porticoes of the Tetrastoon the temples of Rhea and Tyche were erected. In the eastern part of the square the Augustaion was formed. At the southwest of the Augustaion there were the [baths of Zeuxippos](#),⁹ whereas at the east one of the two [Senates](#) built by the emperor. At the northwest the [Milion](#) extended, where all the distances starting from Constantinople were calculated, and the Basilica, an existing edifice. From Milion and Augustaion started a road flanked with porticoes, Regia or [Mese](#), which defined the south side of the square. In 360 the first Hagia Sophia was erected, which have been remained until today in this place beyond any changes.

3.3. 5th century

In 404 Hagia Sophia and the Senate were burnt down and were rebuilt in the same area. Near the Augustaion there were porticoes, shops, workshops, private residences, the Tribunal¹⁰ and a monastery. Between Hagia Sophia and the Augustaion the Patriarchate was built. On the eastern side of the square, next to the Senate was lying [Chalke Gate](#),¹¹ the monumental gateway to the Great Palace. In 459 under Leo I the [prefect](#) Theodosios¹² surrounded in all probability the Augustaion with porticoes.

3.4. 6th century

In 532 during the [Nika Riot](#), the Augustaion and the nearby buildings were burnt down to ashes.¹³ These buildings were restored by [Justinian](#).¹⁴ During this period the area took its final form.¹⁵ The square was still adjacent to many important buildings, such as new Hagia Sophia and the [Great Palace](#). The Augustaion was paved with marble paving-stones¹⁶ and the famous column of Justinian was placed. According to Procopius the square had porticoes on all four sides.¹⁷ Thus, the Augustaion was formed into a closed area with porticoes and walls. On its southern and its western sides were opened the Pinsos Gate and the Melete Gate that connected Mese with Augustaion.

3.5. 7th century

During the 7th century on the southeastern side of the Augustaion a big edifice was probably built by patriarch Thomas I (607-610), the so-called Thomaites. It remained in this place until the 16th century. This period of time the Senate was identified with [Magnaura](#). The «Thomaites» was a three-aisled, apsidal auditorium, associated with the Graet Palace complex.¹⁸ According to the sources, the hall was preserved until the 16th century.

3.6. 12th - 13th centuries

In 1182 during the revolt of caesar John Komnenos against the empress Mary of Antioch¹⁹ the rebellions occupied Augustaion, Milion²⁰ as well as the church that [Alexios I](#) had built in the 11th century at the west of the square. The imperial army demolished the gates of the Augustaion, in order to confront the enemies that had found shelter inside.²¹ After the end of the [Latin occupation](#), around 1268/ 71, the Augustaion and some other adjacent buildings appear to have belonged to the property of Hagia Sophia.²²

3.7. 15th - 16th centuries

According to Buondelmonti, in the early-15th century the Augustaion was in a state of ruins.²³ In the middle of the 16th century, according to Pierre Gilles, only the fragments of seven columns were still preserved from the square.²⁴

4. Decoration



The Augustaion was decorated with statues, often placed upon honorary columns. Constantine the Great erected a statue for his mother Augusta Helen surmounting a column of purple marble. On the square stood his own statue as well upon a column, the base of which was flanked by the statues of his three sons, of Licinius and later of Julian. It was replaced by the silver equestrian statue of [Theodosios the Great](#). In this case as well the column was surrounded by the statues of his sons. Among the most important monuments was the column of Justinian surmounted by his colossal equestrian statue.²⁵ It took the place of the statue of Theodosios the Great whose horse probably was reused. He held on his left hand an orb, while his right one was raised towards the East expressing his protection. In front of this monument the statues of three barbarian kings stood in a posture of submission. The base of the column of the silver statue of Eudoxia (wife of Arkadios) has been preserved, which stood in front of the Senate, south of Hagia Sophia.²⁶ The column with the statue of Leo I was also placed in the same area with the previous one.²⁷

1. This square is referred in the sources as Augoustion, Augousteus, Augousteon and Augousteion. This name appears for the first time in 425 at Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae. See Notitia Dignitatum accedunt Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae et Laterculi Provinciarum, ed. Seeck, O. (Berolin 1876), p. 232. It appears as well as Γουσταίον, John Lydos, *On Months*, ed. Wuensch, R., *Ioannis Laurentii Lydi, Liber de Mensibus* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Lipsiae 1898), p. 163.
2. See the examination of the sources on the location of the Augustaion and the formation of the area in Janin R., *Constantinople byzantine. Développement urbain et répertoire topographique* (Paris 1964), pp. 59-62.
3. Janin R., *Constantinople byzantine. Développement urbain et répertoire topographique* (Paris 1964), p. 73.
4. Guiland suppose that that the Augustaion was square in shape 85 m. long and around 60- 65 m. wide: Guiland R., "Περί την Βασιλειον Τάξιν Κωνσταντινου Ζ' του Πορφυρογέννητου. Η Χάλκη και τα περίξ αυτής", *Επετηρίς της Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 18 (1948), pp. 171-2.
5. Haury, J. (ed.), *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia, De Aedificiis* (Lipsiae 1964), p. 39.
6. Van Dieten, I.-A. (ed.), *Nicetae Choniatae, Historia* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae XI/1, Berlin - N. York 1972), p. 237; Pinder, M. (ed.), *Ioannis Zonarae Annales*, vol. III (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1841-1897), p. 157.
7. Bekker, I. (ed.), *Zosimus* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1837), p. 97; Thurn, I. (ed.), *Johanni Malalae Chronographia* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 35, Series Berolinensis, Berolini et Novi Eboraci 2000), p. 221.
8. For the Tetrastoon see Du Cange, *Constantinopolis Christiana* (Paris 1680) I, p. 70 ff; Bauer, F. A., *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike, Untersuchungen zur Ausstattung des öffentlichen Raums in den spätantiken Städten Rom, Konstantinopel und Ephesos* (Mainz 1996), pp. 149, 218 ff; Berger, A., «Die Altstadt von Byzanz in der vorjustinianischen Zeit», in *ΠΟΙΚΙΛΙΑ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΑ* 6, Varia II (Bonn 1987), p. 24 ff; Schneider, A. M., *Byzanz, Vorarbeiten zur Topographie und Archäologie der Stadt* (Berlin 1936), p. 24; Guiland R., *Études de Topographie de Constantinople Byzantine* (Amsterdam 1969), II p. 3; Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), pp. 42-47; Müller-Wiener, W., *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (Tübingen 1977), p. 248.
9. For the baths of Zeuxippos see Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), p.37 ff. For the Senates see Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), p. 56 ff. For Milion see Müller-Wiener, W., *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (Tübingen 1977), pp. 216-218. For the Basilica see Bauer, F. A., *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike, Untersuchungen zur Ausstattung des öffentlichen Raums in den spätantiken Städten Rom, Konstantinopel und Ephesos* (Mainz 1996), p. 218 ff; Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), p. 48 ff. For Mese see Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), pp. 79-81.
10. For the *tribunal purpureis gradibus exstructum* see Berger, A., "Die Altstadt von Byzanz in der vorjustinianischen Zeit", in *ΠΟΙΚΙΛΙΑ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΑ* 6, Varia II (Bonn 1987), p. 10 ff.
11. Berger, A., "Bemerkungen zur Chalke des Kaiserpalastes in Konstantinopel", in *17th Int. Byz. Congr., Abstracts of Papers*, (Washington 1986), p. 33; Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), pp. 22, 54 ff.



12. Dindorf, L. (ed.), *Chronicon paschale* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonnae 1832), p. 593.
13. Kedrenos reports that Hagia Sophia, the Senate, the Chalke and the Augustaion were among the buildings that were burnt down George Kedrenos, *Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. Bekker, I., *Georgius Cedrenus, Ioannis Scylitzae Opera*, vol. I (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonnae 1838), p. 647.
14. The baths of Zeuxippos were rebuilt and the Senate was renovated. The patriarchate was erected again under John III Scholastikos (565-577), Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), p. 52.
15. Before the times of Justinian the area can not be defined with any accuracy because of the lack of evidence.
16. They were brought to light through excavations, Mamboury, E., "Les Fouilles Byzantines à Istanbul", *Byzantion* 11 (1936), p. 230.
17. Haury, J. (ed.), *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia, De Aedificiis* (Lipsiae 1964), p. 39.
18. Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), p. 57 ff; Bauer, F. A., *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike, Untersuchungen zur Ausstattung des öffentlichen Raums in den spätantiken Städten Rom, Konstantinopel und Ephesos* (Mainz 1996), p. 157.
19. Mary of Antioch was regent of her under-aged son Alexios II Komnenos who succeeded his father Manuel Komnenos on the throne after his death.
20. Müller-Wiener, W., *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (Tübingen 1977), p. 216.
21. Guiland, R., "Περί την Βασιλειον Τάξιν Κωνσταντίνου Ζ' του Πορφυρογέννητου. Η Χάλκη και τα περίξ αυτής", *Επετηρίς της Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών* 18 (1948), pp. 154, 164, 166- 167, 170; Müller-Wiener, W., *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (Tübingen 1977), p. 248; Bauer, F. A., *Stadt, Platz und Denkmal in der Spätantike, Untersuchungen zur Ausstattung des öffentlichen Raums in den spätantiken Städten Rom, Konstantinopel und Ephesos* (Mainz 1996), p. 157; Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), p. 92 ff.
22. Dölger, F., *Regesten der Kaiserkunden des Oströmischen Reiches von 565-1453* (München 1924-65), vol. III, no 1955 and 1956, of the years 1268-1271; Müller-Wiener, W., *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (Tübingen 1977), p. 218.
23. Buondelmonti, C., *Florentini Librum insularium archipelagi* (Lipsiae - Berolini 1884), p. 122.
24. Gilles, P., *The Antiquities of Constantinople*, trans. John Ball (New York 1988), pp. 104-5 and Gilles, P., *De Topographia Constantinopoleos: et de illius antiquitatibus. Libri quatuor* (Athens 1967), vol. II, p. 17; Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), p. 176 ff.
25. In a drawing of a Budapest manuscript that was made by a traveler of the 15th century an equestrian statue of Justinian or Theodosios is depicted.
26. According to the inscription it was erected under the eparch Simplicius.
27. Mango, C., *The Brazen House. A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Kopenhagen 1959), p. 59; Müller-Wiener, W., *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (Tübingen 1977), p. 52.

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Glossary :

	praefectus urbi (prefect of the city) (later referred to as the <i>eparch</i> of the city) Administrator and virtual governor of Constantinople in the Early/Middle Byzantine Era. He was responsible for the surveillance and the harmonious life of the Capital. One of his responsibilities was to control the commercial and manufacturing activities of Constantinople. After 1204, however, the office began to diminish, while from the 14th century, his responsibilities were assumed by two officers, the so-called <i>kephalatikeyontai of the capital</i> .
	stoa, portico, the A long building with a roof supported by one or two colonnades parallel to its back wall.

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Quotations

The Augustaion in the sources:

1. «...ἐχόρευον ἐν τῷ Γουστειῷ...τόν δε τοιοῦτον τόπον οἱ νῦν οἱ ἰδιῶται Αὐγουστειῶν καλοῦσιν»

John Lydos, *On Months*, Wuensch, R. (ed.), *Ioannis Laurentii Lydi, Liber de Mensibus* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Lipsiae 1898), p. 163.

2. «...ἔστι δέ τις ἀγορά πρὸ τῶν βασιλείων περίστυλος. Αὐγουσταῖον καλοῦσι τὴν ἀγορὰν οἱ Βυζάντιοι»

Haury, J. (ed.), *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia, De aedificiis* (Lipsiae 1964), p. 39.

3. «... καὶ τὴν ἀνλαίαν τοῦ Αὐγουστέωνος ὑπερβαίνοντες καὶ τοῖς βασιλικοῖς»

Van Dieten, I.-A. (ed.), *Nicetae Choniatae, Historia* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae XI/1, Berlin - N. York 1972), p. 237.

4. «... ἐν τῷ προαυλίῳ τοῦ μεγάλου ναοῦ...»

Pinder, M. (ed.), *Ioannis Zonarae Annales*, vol. III (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonnae 1841-1897), p. 157.

5. «... μεγίστη ἀγορὰ τετράστωος...»

Bekker, I. (ed.), *Zosimus* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonnae 1837), p. 97.

6. «ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς Σέβηρος τὸ Τετράστων οὐπὲρ ἐν μέσῳ ἵστατο ἢ στήλη τοῦ ἡλίου, προσέθηκε τὸ δημόσιον, ὃ ἔκτισεν αὐτός...»

Thurn, I. (ed.), *Johanni Malalae Chronographia* (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae 35, Series Berolinensis, Berolini et Novi Eboraci 2000), p. 221.

7. «... ἔκτισεν τὸ Αὐγουσταῖον ἐκ πλαγίων τῆς μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας...»

Dindorf, L. (ed.), *Chronicon paschale* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonnae 1832), p. 593.

11. «... ἐκαύθη... καὶ τὸ προσκήνιον τῆς βασιλικῆς καὶ τὸ Αὐγουσταῖον καὶ ἡ χαλκόστεγος τοῦ παλατίου...».

George Kedrenos, *Synopsis Historiarum*, Bekker, I. (ed.), *Georgius Cedrenus, Ioannis Scylitzae Opera*, I (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonnae 1838), p. 647.