

THE  
HISTORY  
OF THE  
DECLINE AND FALL  
OF THE  
ROMAN EMPIRE.

By EDWARD GIBBON, Esq.

VOLUME THE THIRD.

A NEW EDITION.

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M D C C L X X V I I.



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THE  
H I S T O R Y  
OF THE  
DECLINE AND FALL  
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R O M A N E M P I R E.

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C H A P. XVII.

*Foundation of Constantinople. — Political System of  
Constantine and his Successors. — Military Discipline.  
— The Palace. — The Finances.*

THE unfortunate Licinius was the last rival who  
opposed the greatness, and the last captive who  
adorned the triumph, of Constantine. After a  
tranquil and prosperous reign, the Conqueror  
bequeathed to his family the inheritance of the  
Roman Empire; a new capital, a new policy,  
and a new religion; and the innovations which  
he established have been embraced and consecrated  
by succeeding generations. The age of the great  
Constantine and his sons is filled with important  
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CHAP.  
XVII.

## 2 THE DECLINE AND FALL

CHAP. events; but the historian must be oppressed by  
XVII. their number and variety, unless he diligently  
separates from each other the scenes which are  
connected only by the order of time. He will  
describe the political institutions that gave strength  
and stability to the empire, before he proceeds to  
relate the wars and revolutions which hastened its  
decline. He will adopt the division unknown to  
the ancients, of civil and ecclesiastical affairs: the  
victory of the Christians, and their intestine dis-  
cord, will supply copious and distinct materials  
both for edification and for scandal.

Design of  
a new ca-  
pital.  
A. D. 324.

After the defeat and abdication of Licinius, his  
victorious rival proceeded to lay the foundations  
of a city, destined to reign, in future times, the  
mistress of the East, and to survive the empire  
and religion of Constantine. The motives, whe-  
ther of pride or of policy, which first induced  
Diocletian to withdraw himself from the ancient seat  
of government, had acquired additional weight  
by the example of his successors, and the habits  
of forty years. Rome was insensibly confounded  
with the dependent kingdoms which had once  
acknowledged her supremacy; and the country of  
the Cæsars was viewed with cold indifference by  
a martial prince, born in the neighbourhood of  
the Danube, educated in the courts and armies of  
Asia, and invested with the purple by the legions  
of Britain. The Italians, who had received Con-  
stantine as their deliverer, submissively obeyed  
the edicts which he sometimes condescended to  
address to the senate and people of Rome; but

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they were feldom honoured with the prefence of their new fovereign. During the vigour of his age, Conftantine, according to the various exigencies of peace and war, moved with flow dignity, or with active diligence, along the frontiers of his extenfive dominions; and was always prepared to take the field either againft a foreign or a domeftic enemy. But as he gradually reached the fummit of profperity and the decline of life, he began to meditate the defign of fixing in a more permanent ftation the ftrength as well as majefty of the throne. In the choice of an advantageous fituation, he preferred the confines of Europe and Afia; to curb, with a powerful arm, the barbarians who dwelt between the Danube and the Tanais; to watch with an eye of jealoufy the conduct of the Perfian monarch, who indignantly fupported the yoke of an ignominious treaty. With thefe views, Diocletian had felectcd and embellifhed the refidence of Nicomedia: but the memory of Diocletian was juftly abhorred by the protector of the church; and Conftantine was not infenfible to the ambition of founding a city which might perpetuate the glory of his own name. During the late operations of the war againft Licinius, he had fufficient opportunity to contemplate, both as a foldier and as a ftatefman, the incomparable pofition of Byzantium; and to obferve how ftrongly it was guarded by nature againft an hoftile attack, whilft it was accelfible on every fide to the benefits of commercial intercourfe. Many ages before Conftantine, one of the moft judicious

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Situation  
of Byzantium.

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historians of antiquity <sup>1</sup> had described the advantages of a situation, from whence a feeble colony of Greeks derived the command of the sea, and the honours of a flourishing and independent republic <sup>2</sup>.

Deſcrip-  
tion of  
CON-  
STANTIN-  
OPLE.

If we ſurvey Byzantium in the extent which it acquired with the auguſt name of Conſtantinople, the figure of the imperial city may be repreſented under that of an unequal triangle. The obtuſe point, which advances towards the eaſt and the ſhores of Aſia, meets and repels the waves of the Thracian Bosphorus. The northern ſide of the city is bounded by the harbour; and the ſouthern is waſhed by the Propontis, or ſea of Marmara. The baſis of the triangle is oppoſed to the weſt, and terminates the continent of Europe. But the admirable form and diviſion of the circumjacent land and water cannot, without a more ample explanation, be clearly or ſufficiently underſtood.

The Boſ-  
phorus.

The winding channel through which the waters of the Euxine flow with a rapid and inceſſant courſe towards the Mediterranean, received the appellation of Bosphorus, a name not leſs celebrated in the hiſtory, than in the fables, of antiquity <sup>3</sup>. A crowd of temples and of votive altars, profuſely ſcattered along its ſteep and woody banks, attested the unſkilfulneſs, the terrors, and the devotion of the Grecian navigators, who, after the example of the Argonauts, explored the dangers of the inhospitable Euxine. On theſe banks tradition long preſerved the memory of the

palace of Phineus, infested by the obscene harpies <sup>4</sup>; and of the sylvan reign of Amycus, who defied the son of Leda to the combat of the Cestus <sup>5</sup>. The streights of the Bosphorus are terminated by the Cyanean rocks, which, according to the description of the poets, had once floated on the face of the waters; and were destined by the gods to protect the entrance of the Euxine against the eye of profane curiosity <sup>6</sup>. From the Cyanean rocks to the point and harbour of Byzantium, the winding length of the Bosphorus extends about sixteen miles <sup>7</sup>, and its most ordinary breadth may be computed at about one mile and a half. The *new* castles of Europe and Asia are constructed, on either continent, upon the foundations of two celebrated temples, of Seraphis and of Jupiter Urius. The *old* castles, a work of the Greek emperors, command the narrowest part of the channel, in a place where the opposite banks advance within five hundred paces of each other. These fortresses were restored and strengthened by Mahomet the Second, when he meditated the siege of Constantinople <sup>8</sup>: but the Turkish conqueror was most probably ignorant, that near two thousand years before his reign, Darius had chosen the same situation to connect the two continents by a bridge of boats <sup>9</sup>. At a small distance from the old castles we discover the little town of Chrysopolis, or Scutari, which may almost be considered as the Asiatic suburb of Constantinople. The Bosphorus, as it begins to open into the Propontis, passes between Byzantium and Chalcedon. The latter of

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those cities was built by the Greeks, a few years before the former; and the blindness of its founders, who overlooked the superior advantages of the opposite coast, has been stigmatized by a proverbial expression of contempt<sup>10</sup>.

The port.

The harbour of Constantinople, which may be considered as an arm of the Bosphorus, obtained, in a very remote period, the denomination of the *Golden Horn*. The curve which it describes might be compared to the horn of a stag, or, as it should seem, with more propriety, to that of an ox<sup>11</sup>. The epithet of *golden* was expressive of the riches which every wind wafted from the most distant countries into the secure and capacious port of Constantinople. The river Lycus, formed by the conflux of two little streams, pours into the harbour a perpetual supply of fresh water, which serves to cleanse the bottom, and to invite the periodical shoals of fish to seek their retreat in that convenient recess. As the vicissitudes of tides are scarcely felt in those seas, the constant depth of the harbour allows goods to be landed on the quays without the assistance of boats; and it has been observed, that in many places the largest vessels may rest their prows against the houses, while their sterns are floating in the water<sup>12</sup>. From the mouth of the Lycus to that of the harbour, this arm of the Bosphorus is more than seven miles in length. The entrance is about five hundred yards broad, and a strong chain could be occasionally drawn across it, to guard the port and city from the attack of an hostile navy<sup>13</sup>.

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Between the Bosphorus and the Hellespont, the shores of Europe and Asia receding on either side inclose the sea of Marmara, which was known to the ancients by the denomination of Propontis. The navigation from the issue of the Bosphorus to the entrance of the Hellespont is about one hundred and twenty miles. Those who steer their westward course through the middle of the Propontis, may at once descry the high lands of Thrace and Bithynia, and never lose sight of the lofty summit of Mount Olympus, covered with eternal snows <sup>14</sup>. They leave on the left a deep gulf, at the bottom of which Nicomedia was seated, the imperial residence of Diocletian; and they pass the small islands of Cyzicus and Proconnesus before they cast anchor at Gallipoli: where the sea, which separates Asia from Europe, is again contracted into a narrow channel.

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The Propontis.

The geographers who, with the most skilful accuracy, have surveyed the form and extent of the Hellespont, assign about sixty miles for the winding course, and about three miles for the ordinary breadth of those celebrated streights <sup>15</sup>. But the narrowest part of the channel is found to the northward of the old Turkish castles between the cities of Cestus and Abydus. It was here that the adventurous Leander braved the passage of the flood for the possession of his mistress <sup>16</sup>. It was here likewise, in a place where the distance between the opposite banks cannot exceed five hundred paces, that Xerxes imposed a stupendous bridge of boats, for the purpose of transporting

The Hellespont.