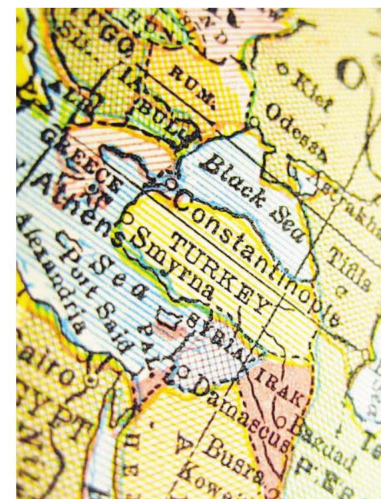


WHY IT'S ISTANBUL NOT CONSTANTINOPE

The change of name might be familiar, but not the long story behind it. By **PETER TRUDGILL**



I know for a fact that in the 1950s small boys thought it was very funny to try and trick other small boys by posing the question: 'Constantinople is a long word – how do you spell it?' The correct answer, of course, was *IT*. In those days, we still called the city in question by that long name – it was some while before Istanbul began to take over in general vernacular usage.

But Constantinople has borne very many different names over the centuries, and still does. The first recorded name of the city is Greek – Byzantium; Greeks colonised the area during the years after 700BC. This form of the name is still familiar to us from its Latin form, Byzantium, and from the Constantinople-based Byzantine empire. But we are not at all sure about the origin of this word, or what it meant, or even what language it comes from.

One scholarly guess is that this was its name in the Thracian language, one of the ancient and now extinct Indo-European languages of the Balkans. Thracian was spoken in the eastern Balkans, with Illyrian to the west of it and Dacian to the north. It has been extinct for probably 1,000 years, but was spoken in the area which is still known to us as Thrace (Thraki in Greek, Trakiya in Turkish and Bulgarian), and which is today divided up between Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey-in-Europe. One hypothesis is that the name of the city may perhaps have derived from the Thracian personal name *Byzas*.

In the 300sAD, the Roman Emperor Constantine (Constantine the Great) moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Byzantium, and because of this it was often known as *Nea Romi* 'New Rome'. But from 324 the city was being called *Konstantinoupolis* – a Greek compound formed from *Konstantinou* 'of Constantine' and *polis* 'city' – *poli* in Modern Greek. It was often pronounced without the first *n*, and the spelling *Kostantinoupoli* occurs early on: frequent visitors to Greece will surely have met men called *Kostas*, which is the everyday form of *Konstantinos*.

Greek speakers, however, were quite soon referring to the city simply as *i Polis* 'the City', though it is not known whether this was thought of as being an abbreviation for *Konstantinoupolis* or not. Modern Greeks certainly refer to it as *i Poli* – for them it is *the city*.

For several hundred years, Constantinople was the largest, richest and most famous city in Europe. In Icelandic it was called *Mikligarður* 'Great Court' – the English version of this was *Micklegarth*. In the South Slavic

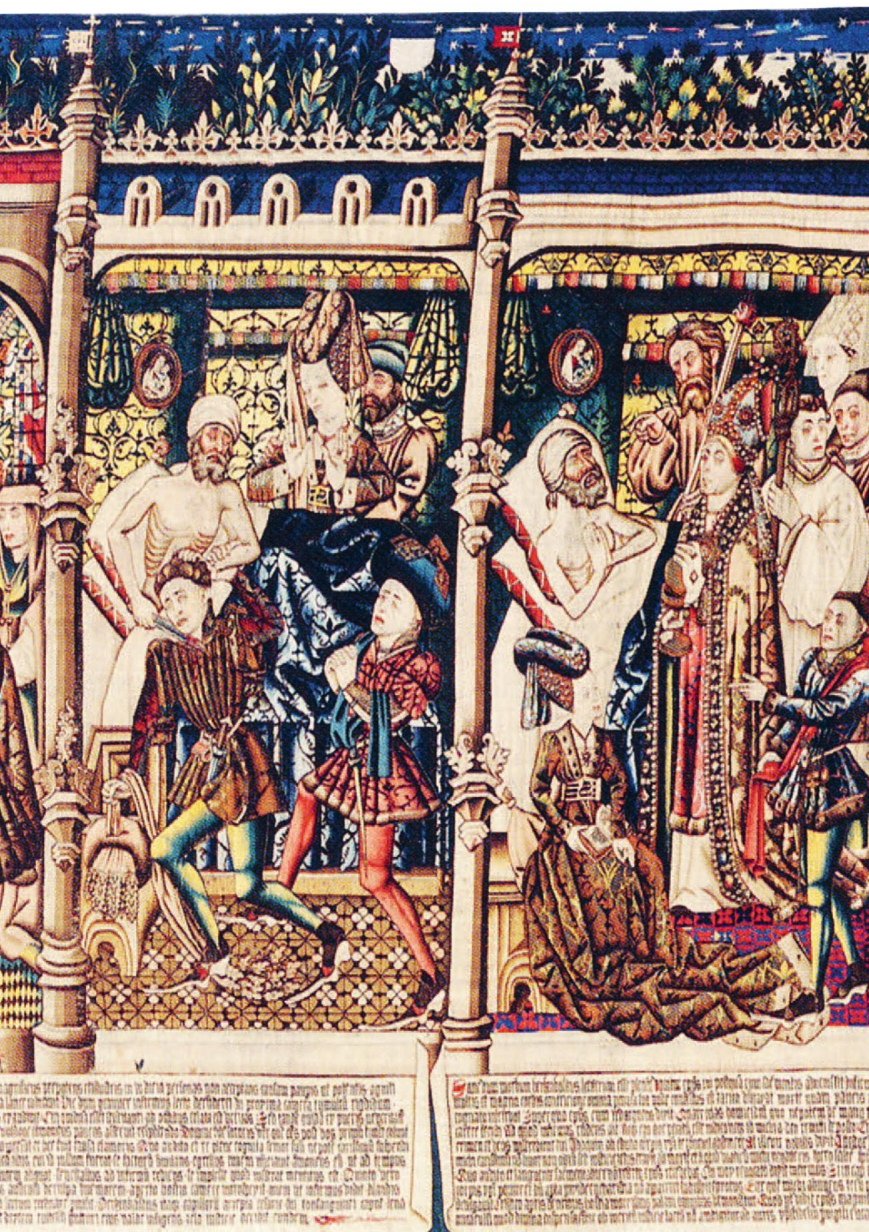
languages it went by the name of *Carigrad*, *cari* meaning 'tsar, emperor' and *grad* 'city'. The Arabic for it was *Kostantiniyye*.

From the 1400s onwards, however, another name for the city began to appear. English-speaking people are familiar with this name from the title of Graham Greene's 1932 novel *Stamboul Train*, which is set on the Orient Express as it travels from Ostend to Constantinople. *Stamboul* became a traditional English name for the city; and *Stambul* is still its official Polish name. Albanian has *Stamboll*. But where did that name come from?

The answer is that *Stamboul* has Greek origins. In the local Greek dialect of the region, *stan Póli*, pronounced 'stambóli', meant 'in the city' (Standard Modern Greek has *stin Póli*). Turkish speakers adopted this phrase as the name of the city; especially after its capture by the Ottoman Empire in 1453 (although the Arabic *Konstantiniyye* was often still used by the Ottomans in formal documents). However, they typically added an *i*-sound at the beginning of the word, giving *Istanbul*, to fit in with the norms of Turkish pronunciation: like Spanish, Turkish had no native words beginning with *st*-. The same thing can be seen in the Turkish word for 'station', *istasyon*. And the name of the Turkish city of Izmir, originally *Smyrni* in Greek, shows a similar process.

MICKLE

Mickle is an old English word meaning 'big, much', related to Icelandic *mikkil*. The word is no longer much used in southern Britain, but it survives in place-names, such as *Michelmersh* (Hampshire) 'large marsh', and *Mickfield* (Suffolk) 'large field'. *Mickleover* (Derbyshire) 'large place by a ridge' is next door to *Littleover*.



Above, Rogier van der Weyden's monumental panel paintings in Brussels Town Hall were celebrated in their time, but now they survive only through copies such as this tapestry

Credit: Bernisches Historisches Museum, Bern

Left, *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*, c.1597-1600, fresco, from the series *Loves of the Gods*; central panel, detail of the ceiling, Palazzo Farnese, Rome.

Credit: Scala, Florence

San Lorenzo in Palermo, Sicily, never to be seen again.

The theft has always been linked to the Mafia, its loss made all the more painful by the constant reminder of the empty frame.

With only a photograph to work from, Factum Arte set about rematerialising the painting, which was unveiled in November 2015.

While the replica can never fully make up for the loss of Caravaggio's painting, Factum Arte expressed at the time their hope that in its place was "a new work of art capable of producing an emotional and aesthetic response".

If nothing else, the time, effort and skill that went into producing it is testament to the intense feeling that surrounds works of art, and a reminder of the inherent fragility and vulnerability of our art treasures.

■ The Museum of Lost Art by Noah Charney is published by Phaidon (£19.95)

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