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Current Name

Thessaloniki

Ancient Name

Thessaloniki

Medieval Name

Thessaloniki

History of the name

The city was named after Alexander the Great's half sister, who married King Cassander, the founder of the city.

Place :

Geopolitical Unit

Macedonia

Administrative subdivision

Municipality of Thessaloniki

Location

It is located in the utmost recess of the Thermaikos Gulf.

Foudation Date

316/315 BC

Current condition

Thessaloniki is the second most important commercial, financial, industrial and cultural center of Greece, and the largest city, after Athens. Today, after the population census of 2011, the Thessaloniki Metropolitan Area has a population of 1,006,730.

History

During classical antiquity, several commercial settlements were established around the Thermaikos Gulf; their role became more significant after the destruction of the city of Olynthus in 348 by the army of King Philip II of Macedon. The new city was founded in 316 B.C. after an act of synoecism of all these settlements by King Cassander, after his marriage with Alexander's half sister.

The geographic position of Thessaloniki granted great development and growth to the city through the centuries. As it was the seaport of Pella, the capital of the Macedonian kingdom, it constituted the main commercial and a significant military navy base nearly from the beginning.

In 168 B.C., after the defeat of King Perseus of Macedon by Lucius Aemilius Paullus in the decisive battle of Pydna, Thessaloniki, like other Macedonian cities, went under the Roman command. In the second half of the 2nd century B.C., the city became the greatest commercial and military stop on the Via Egnatia and its harbor flourished, since it was the ending point of a natural road that connected the Danube frontier with the Aegean. So the city became the hub of the continental transportation network of the Balkans during the Roman Empire.

On the verge of the 3rd to the 4th century A.D., Thessaloniki met its greatest growth. On the contrary, the barbaric invasions of the end of the 6th century led to its downfall.

In 620/621 the city was hit by major earthquakes during which many of the public buildings collapsed. A new era of renovation began, during which its urban tissue has changed. In 904 the long period of serenity and peace was suddenly interrupted by the takeover from the Saracens. The city faced a new devastation in 1185, when the Normans took it over.

After the Fourth Crusade, Thessaloniki became the capital of a Frankish Kingdom until 1224. In the time span until 1246, Thessaloniki often changed hands amongst Greek rulers. From 1342 until 1349 the population of the city suffered by the hatred between the Hesychasts and the Zelots.

In 1387, Thessaloniki passed over to the Turks after four years of siege. In 1403 the emperor Manuel II liberated the city and granted it as a fief to members of the royal family. In 1412 and 1416 the city was besieged by Musa, an aspirant of the throne of Bayezid I. Under the fear of an upcoming takeover by the Turks, the governor Andronikos Palaiologos handed the city to the Republic of Venice (1423-1430), but the terms that were agreed upon were never followed.

In 1422, Murad II laid siege to the harbour of Thessaloniki; the sultan rejected all proposals for peace and demanded the Venetians to abandon the city. During this seven-year period of recession, the population highly declined, because of the naval blockade and the presence of the Turks outside the city-walls. Murad took over the city in 1430.

Under the early Turkish dominion, Thessaloniki decayed and its port nearly died. In this period, Murad and his successors encouraged populaces from other regions of the empire to move to Thessaloniki in order to gain back its livelihood. As a result, the city becomes a multinational center with strong Turkish and Jewish populace.

Gradually, from the end of the 15th century, its port and thus the whole city, flourished again. This peak lasted until the end of the 19th century with very few breaks. From the mid 18th century, Thessaloniki became a cargo port where the merchandise of almost all of the European part of the Ottoman Empire was stored and, thus, it evolved into the most important financial center of the Balkan Peninsula. In 1778 the Ottomans imposed taxes on export and goods' transportation by land from which Thessaloniki until then has been exempted. At the same time, the city ceased to be the only cargo port of the European part of the empire, since other cargo facilities have been created elsewhere.

With the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence in 1821, the commercial activity in Thessaloniki decreased gradually because of the political and social turmoil in the city as well as in the rest of the Greek peninsula. Later, though, by the mid-nineteenth century, Thessaloniki turned into the most cosmopolitan city of the Ottoman Empire. On October 26, 1912, the city was handed via protocol by Hasan Tahsin pasha, commander of the VIII Corps of the Ottoman army, to Constantine, the head of the Greek army and heir of the throne of Greece.

Description

During the Byzantine period, Thessaloniki maintained the basic urban tissue of the Roman times. Via Regia, in the axis of the modern Egnatia Street, remained the main road and it was known to the Byzantines as Mese (i.e. the 'Middle street') or Leoforos (literally 'the highway'). Many perpendicular streets leading to the sea have been found at many spots in the city. On the other hand, our knowledge of horizontal streets, especially in the southern part of the city near the sea, is limited. It seems that in that area, the plot pattern mainly followed the coastline and was not consistent with the arrangement of the streets in the north part of the city, where a rectangular street-system has been confirmed.

From the 1st up to the 4th century AD, the forum was the administrative center of the city. Excavations in the surrounding quarters have brought to light a great number of large buildings which served the political, social, financial and trading needs of the Thessalonians.

In the first years of the 4th century AD, intense building activity started in all parts of the city. Caesar Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximianus made Thessaloniki his official seat and erected his imperial palace near the eastern city-wall. Archaeological research in the historic center of the city has uncovered many Late Antique buildings, most of which are residential. The houses excavated in the north and east parts of the city belong to a well-known type of urban mansion: they have a spacious apsidal dining room (triclinium), and peristyles, gardens, cisterns, baths, storage rooms and many other rooms.

By the end of the 4th century, the Roman public buildings gradually collapsed and the forum was abandoned and turned into a looting area for building materials and clay extraction. In contrast, by the late-4th century, Thessaloniki became a renowned ecclesiastical center. The monumental churches which were built in the next two centuries changed the aspect of the city, since they assumed the role of the old public edifices. The most characteristic examples are those of the Saint Demetrios basilica, the Acheiropoietos church and the episcopal church under the present-day Saint Sophia, which were built atop of the ruins of large public baths.

The Late Antique cemeteries extended, as in the past, outside the east and west city-walls. From the 4th century on, Christians preferred to be buried near a site sanctified by the martyrdom or the grave of a martyr (burials "ad sanctos"). During the following centuries, the so-called 'dark ages', small cemeteries were developed inside the city as well, preferably in large open areas, like the old forum, in back yards or inside churches. Most of the Early Christian churches were severely damaged by successive earthquakes in the time span between 618 and 630. In the end of the 8th century, the new church of Saint Sophia was built, yet the church of Saint Demetrios remained the main pilgrimage center of the city.

According to archaeological evidence, houses were generally one-room or two-room constructions without any special decoration after the 9th century. The only community building that still stands is the bath found at Theotokopoulou Str., which dates back to the 11th century.

During the Late Byzantine period, a palace of the Palaiologi family, functioning also as the seat of the government, was erected inside the acropolis of Thessaloniki. In the rest of the city, the urban fabric remained roughly the same, but many streets started to get narrower, since various constructions encroached partially or wholly on road land. The image offered by the excavations in all parts of the city is that standalone walls were built amongst pre-existing ruins forming one-room houses which usually shared a common yard.

During this late period the lower parts of the city, where the Roman public buildings once stood, became abandoned areas with extensive ruins, where small workshops or cemeteries are installed.

Harbor

Thessaloniki owes its foundation to its harbor. The absence of confident archaeological data so far does not permit us to draw conclusions on the topography

of the coastline. That's why many theories have been put forth concerning the position and shape of the harbor along the history.

As far as the Hellenistic harbor is concerned, two theories have been proposed: the first, and more popular one, is that the harbor was situated on the west edge of the shore; the second places it near the White Tower, under the block lined by the modern Dimitriou Gounari – Pavlou Mela – Nikiforou Foka and Leoforos Nikis Streets. Some scholars suggest that the Hellenistic harbor was in use during the Roman period and remained in function until 620-630 as an ecclesiastical wharf (known as the "ekklesiastiki skala"). Recent research, though, has pointed out the possible existence of two early harbors, a commercial and a military one, on the eastern and the western part of the shore, respectively.

According to the historian Zosimos, Constantine the Great built an artificial harbor in Thessaloniki during the war against his co-ruler Gaius Valerius Licinius I. Very few remains are still preserved from this harbor, which was probably located under the modern quarter of Ladadika. Recent excavations in the nearby areas have brought to light warehouses as well as a building complex which may be identified with a shipshed.

Unfortunately, little information on the harbor is preserved in written sources from the Byzantine period. The Second Book of the Miracles of Saint Demetrios contains a description of the preparations by the Thessalonians for the reinforcement of the harbor defenses during the third Slavic siege in the 7th century AD. The same source mentions two other harbor sites: the ecclesiastical wharf (known as the 'Ekklisiastiki skala'), which might be the old harbor at the east end of the shore serving the needs of the local Church, as its name shows, as well as the Kellarion, possibly a haven, where the dugouts of the Slavs found shelter before the siege of the city.

After the Ottoman occupation of Thessaloniki, the harbor, as well as the rest of the city, went into a severe decline since it was cut out from Constantinople, but it found its former glory with the massive arrival of Hebrews who were persecuted from Spain by King Ferdinand in 1492. The close relations that the Hebrews maintained with the great commercial centers of the West, like Venice, Genoa and Amsterdam, ensured and invigorated the prosperity of the city.

Evliya Çelebi visited Thessaloniki and saved a description of the city in the second half of the 17th century. The harbor, fortified during the 16th century, is considered to be quite safe, since it disposed three powerful towers, two on either side of the sea walls and one at the entrance of the harbor.

The traffic in the harbor of Thessaloniki remained intense during the next century, as well. It showed great mobility in imports and exports, mainly with the islands of the Aegean, Crete, Constantinople, Egypt and other cities of the Ottoman Empire.

The Crimean War (1853-1856) and the American Civil War (1861-1865) favored a rise of the trade through the Thessaloniki harbor; the basic export products were grain and cotton. In the second half of the 19th century, the harbor's cargo handling was immense; practically all products of the European part of the Ottoman Empire were stored here for some time before their transport. Thus, the harbor converted Thessaloniki into the most important economic center of the Balkan Peninsula. On the other hand, though, according to Felix de Beaujour, the French Ambassador, the military effectiveness of the harbor was limited, because it was practically unfortified; hence he suggested the construction of a new fortress on a small cape, known today as Cape Karabournaki, in order to protect the Thermaikos Gulf in its entirety. Mehmed Emin pasha undertook this project in 1822 and installed a battery unit on the spot. In the 1870s the sea walls were torn down and a new waterfront was constructed along the coastline, 30-40 m wide. By the end of the century, through its connection with the European rail network, the harbor was linked with all the commercial and financial centers of the Balkan Peninsula.

Today, the harbor of Thessaloniki is fully equipped with modern facilities to welcome and handle any kind of cargo and it is connected with road and rail networks. It has six docks equipped with all the mechanical gear with a total length of 6,200 m and a maximum depth about 12 m.

Fortification

Thessaloniki was initially fortified by King Cassander; the city-walls, though, were already in bad condition in the times of Cicero (58 BC). Thus, great reconstruction works took place in order to fix the damaged parts by mid 1st century BC. Hellenistic and early Roman Thessaloniki was a small settlement; the south wall would probably be traced in the zone between the modern Kassandrou and Filippou Streets.

A new fortification project began in the middle of the 3rd century AD: the city was then extended towards the south and the east. The curtain walls, 1.65 m wide, were reinforced with square towers roughly every 50 meters. Reconstructions and repairs of the city precinct took often place. An important reconstruction was probably led by Theodosius I, by the end of the 4th century: the fortification walls in the lowlands from the shore all the way up to modern Hagiou Dimitriou Str. were strengthened by an extremely solid coating, attached to the exterior of the older weak wall, and reinforced with triangular towers.

A strengthening of the city walls on the highest parts of the city, to the north of the modern Hagiou Dimitriou Str., is considered to be built in the 5th century AD by the high official Hormisdas, according to the brick inscription at the highest zone of the homonymous tower.

The partial rebuilding of the city-walls continued until the middle of the 7th century. The most characteristic example of such reconstruction is that of the north wall, which today separates the city from the later acropolis; the big brick crosses on the exterior face of the curtain walls are the hallmark of this reconstruction. A rebuilding of the sea walls, which run under the modern Mitropoleos Str., dates back to Late Antiquity. This is also true for the construction of the outwork which was built along the south parts of the precinct up to the modern Hagiou Dimitriou Str.

The acropolis most likely was a part of a 10th century fortification program; to the same period probably dates a second sea wall, traced only in excavations, to the south of the previous sea fortification wall. The new curtain walls were built on the mud and sand deposits outside the old wall just atop the edge of the sea, so that the city was accessible from the south exclusively by vessels.

Other partial repairs of the precinct are mentioned in inscriptions dating from the middle and late Byzantine periods. Some of them also took place under the Ottoman rule, like the Heptapyrgion (Yedi Kule) which served as the acropolis' refuge, the White Tower (Kanli Kule) at the south end of the east wall, which was used as a fort, garrison and prison, as well as the 'Top Hane' fortress in the modern Vardar district, which was erected in 1546, under Suleyman the Magnificent.

The main gates were situated at the ends of the two major parallel roads that crossed the city: the Cassandreotic gate (known also as the 'Kalamaria gate') and the New Golden gate on the east wall; the Golden gate and the Letaia gate on the west wall. There were some smaller gates as well, which led from the city to the suburbs, the harbor and the acropolis.

In 1830, after a major earthquake, parts of the fortification wall collapsed; the sea walls were mainly affected. In order to begin repair works, the Ottoman government imposed special taxes to the inhabitants of Central Macedonia. In 1866, the complete demolishing of the sea walls was decided upon, and it was concluded gradually in the 1870's. This decision was made to facilitate loading and unloading of merchantmen and assist cargo handling, as well as to ensure the renewing of the air in the heavily populated areas of the south districts of the city, in order to remove the risk of infectious diseases. A part of the harbor's fortification was torn down in 1875.

Medieval Sites

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

- Ancient Agora.
http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/2/gh251.jsp?obj_id=1424
- Palace of Galerius.
http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/3/gh352.jsp?obj_id=423

MUSEUMS

- Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.
www.amth.gr

- Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki.
<http://www.jmth.gr/>
- Ecclesiastical Museum of the Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki.

<http://www.imth.gr/default.aspx?lang=el-GR&loc=1&page=184>

- State Museum of Contemporary art.

<http://www.greekstatemuseum.com/kmst/index.html>
- Center of Contemporary art of Thessaloniki.

- <http://www.cact.gr/>
- White Tower.

<http://www.lpth.gr/>

- Folk life and Ethnological Museum of Macedonia – Thrace.

<http://www.lemmth.gr/>
- Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art.

- <http://www.mmca.org.gr/mmst/el/index.htm>
- Museum of Byzantine Culture.

<http://www.mbp.gr/html/gr/index.htm>

- Thessaloniki Cinema Museum.

<http://www.cinemuseum.gr/>
- Water Museum of Thessaloniki.

<http://www.eyath.gr/swift.jsp?CMCCode=1002&extLang=>

- Museum of Photography of Thessaloniki.

<http://www.thmphoto.gr/>
- Olympic Sports Museum of Thessaloniki.
<http://www.olympicsportsmuseum.org/>
- War Museum of Thessaloniki.

MONUMENTS:

- Byzantine Walls.
- Eptapyrgion.
- Rotunda.
- Church of Hagios Dimitrios.
- Church of Hagia Sofia.
- Church of the Acheiropoietos.
- Church of Panagia Chalkeon.
- Church of Hagios Panteleimon.
- Church of the Holy Apostles.
- Church of Hagios Nicolaos Orfanos.
- Church of Hagia Aikaterini.
- Church of Taxiarches.
- Church of Transfiguration of the Saviour.
- Latomou Monastery.
- Church of Prophet Elijah.
- Blatadon Monastery.
- Church of Nea Panagia.
- Church of Hagios Antonios.
- Church of Hagios Antonios.
- Church of the Panagia Lagoudiani or Laodigitria.
- Church of the Panagia Gorgoepikoos or Panagouda.

- Church of the Yrapandi.
- Hamza Bey Camii.
- Alaca Imaret.
- Bey Hamam.
- Pasa Hamam.
- Yahudi Hamam.
- Yeni Hamam.
- Bezesten.

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Links

http://www.saloniki.org/index_gr.htm

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<http://www.thessaloniki.gr/portal/page/portal/DimosThessalonikis>

http://www.anoiktomouseio.gr/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1

Visual Material

Writer / Date

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Multimedia



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