

= Chalke =

The Chalke Gate ( Greek : ????? ) , was the main ceremonial entrance ( vestibule ) to the Great Palace of Constantinople in the Byzantine period . The name , which means " the Bronze Gate " , was given to it either because of the bronze portals or from the gilded bronze tiles used in its roof . The interior was lavishly decorated with marble and mosaics , and the exterior façade featured a number of statues . Most prominent was an icon of Christ which became a major iconodule symbol during the Byzantine Iconoclasm , and a chapel dedicated to the Christ Chalkites was erected in the 10th century next to the gate . The gate itself seems to have been demolished in the 13th century , but the chapel survived until the early 19th century .

= = History = =

The gate lay on the southeastern corner of the Augustaion , the main ceremonial plaza of the city , with the Hagia Sophia cathedral on the northern side and the Baths of Zeuxippos and the Hippodrome of Constantinople on the southern and western sides .

The first structure in that location was erected by the architect Aetherius during the reign of Emperor Anastasius I ( r . 491 ? 518 ) to celebrate the victory in the Isaurian War ( 492 @-@ 497 ) . Like much of the city 's center , this structure burned down in the Nika riots of 532 , and was subsequently rebuilt by the Emperor Justinian I ( r . 527 ? 565 ) . This building was extensively described by the historian Procopius in his *De Aedificiis* . In the 7th and 8th centuries , the Chalke itself or its dependencies became a prison , until Emperor Basil I ( r . 867 ? 886 ) repaired it and converted it into a law court .

Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos ( r . 920 ? 944 ) attached a small chapel dedicated to Christ Chalkites ( ??????? ) , which was later rebuilt on a grander scale by Emperor John I Tzimiskes ( r . 969 ? 976 ) , who endowed it with relics and was himself buried there . This rebuilding was facilitated by the fact that his predecessor , Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas ( r . 963 ? 969 ) , had enclosed the palace precinct with a new wall of reduced girth , to which the Chalke was no longer attached . The main gatehouse , denuded of its bronze gates by Emperor Isaac II Angelos during his first reign ( 1185 ? 1195 ) , is not mentioned by Byzantine chroniclers after ca . 1200 . The chapel however survived long after : it is mentioned as being largely intact by Russian pilgrims in the 14th century , and in Ottoman times , the ruins of the chapel were known as Arslanhane and functioned as a menagerie . The remains of the chapel are depicted in 18th @-@ century drawings , until finally demolished in 1804 .

= = Description = =

Several literary descriptions of the gate survive . Procopius is the earliest and most prominent source , but accounts of the statues decorating the gatehouse 's façade also come from the later *Parastaseis syntomoi chronikai* .

Justinian 's Chalke was a rectangular building , with four engaged piers supporting a central dome on pendentives , which in turn rested on four barrel arches in the typical Byzantine fashion . The piers to the south and north were somewhat lower than those to the east and west . The central structure was adjoined by two smaller chambers on either side to the south and north , each again featuring a vaulted roof . The relation of the Church of Christ Chalkites with the gate is unclear ; Cyril Mango suggested that it was located to its left , but it has also been proposed that it was actually built atop the gatehouse itself . It is known that the chapel was placed atop an elevated platform , and 18th @-@ century depictions locate it some 100 m southeast of the Hagia Sophia .

The vestibule 's interior decoration is also described by Procopius : the walls were decorated with slabs of multi @-@ colored marble , while the ceilings were covered with mosaics , which depicted Justinian and his empress Theodora flanked by the Senate , as well as the victories of Belisarius in the Vandalic and Gothic wars and his triumphal return bearing spoils , defeated kings and kingdoms to his emperor .

The external decoration is comparatively unknown , but the Parastaseis syntomoi record the existence of various statues , probably placed in niches above the central doorway . These included Emperor Maurice ( r . 582 ? 602 ) and his wife and children , a pair of statues of philosophers taken from Athens , stretching their arms towards one another , statues of Emperor Zeno ( r . 474 ? 491 ) and Empress Ariadne , as well as four gorgon heads from the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus that " surround the Chalke with the sign of the cross above them " . The same text also records that statues of Emperor Maximian ( r . 285 ? 305 ) and the entire House of Theodosius were located " nearby " , while the exact location of a statue of Empress Pulcheria in relation to the building is unclear . Cyril Mango , who studied the problem of the statuary recorded in the Parastaseis , concluded that the references came from a text written in ca . 600 ? in great part because the images of Emperor Maurice and his family are unlikely to have survived their overthrow and murder by Phocas in 602 .

= = Icon of Christ Chalkites = =

Above the main entrance of the Chalke , there stood an icon of Christ , the so @-@ called Christ Chalkites ( " Christ of the Chalke " ) . The origins of the icon are obscure : based on its mention in the Parastaseis , it may have existed by ca . 600 , but it cannot be stated with any certainty . Its prominent display on the very entrance to the imperial palace made it one of the city 's major religious symbols . Consequently , its removal , in 726 or 730 , by Emperor Leo III the Isaurian ( r . 717 ? 741 ) , was both a major political statement and a spark for violent rioting in the city , and marked the beginning of the official prohibition of icons in the Empire . The icon was restored a first time by Empress Eirene in ca . 787 , until it was again removed by Leo V the Armenian ( r . 813 ? 820 ) and replaced by a simple cross . After the definitive restoration of the veneration of icons in 843 , a mosaic icon by the famed iconodule monk and artist Lazaros replaced it .

The exact appearance of the icon is unclear : although the early image has been interpreted as a bust of the Christ Pantocrator type , late Byzantine references , such as coins by John III Vatatzes ( r . 1221 ? 1254 ) and the Deesis mosaic in the Chora Church , use the term for depictions of a standing Christ on a pedestal .