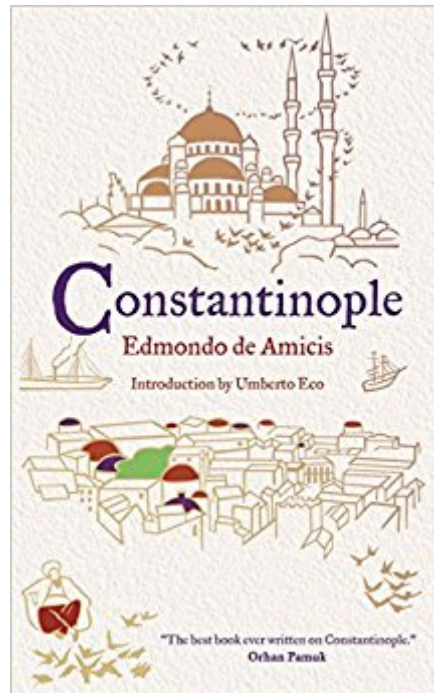




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Constantinople



Synopsis

A remarkable nineteenth-century account of Istanbul – which begins with a dazzling description of the city gradually appearing through the fog as the author's ship approaches the harbour – Constantinople expertly combines personal anecdote, breathtaking visual observation and entertaining historical information. An invaluable record of the metropolis as it used to be – a fascinating crossroads between Eastern and Western civilization and one of the most cosmopolitan cities of its time – as well as a vivid example of a European tourist's reaction to it – part delight, part incomprehension – this book will provide an enriching read for lovers of history or those planning to visit Istanbul themselves.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"De Amicis's account of this great, even "monstrous", city is wonderfully eloquent: as restless and busy as Constantinople itself, teeming with the sights, sounds and smells of one of the greatest and most diverse cities on Earth." - The Guardian "A long work like de Amicis' is more than an average guide: it is a cinematographic view of late 19th century Istanbul." - Time Out Istanbul "Stephen Parkin's translation is assured and lively, catching well the spirit of the original . . . Edmondo De Amicis's book conjures up the eternal harem of Western imaginings, of alluring Oriental d'fshabill'f and sensual decadence behind closed doors." - TLS "I had De Amicis's text ready when I came to Istanbul. For he had seen what I cannot see today." - Umberto Eco

The poet, novelist and travel writer Edmondo de Amicis (1846–1908) began his career as a soldier, before switching to journalism. He is now best remembered for his collection of children's stories *Heart of a Boy*.

Sometimes those who read too much and have a vivid imagination can conjure up something that smacks of the truth. I was swayed and tossed about by Edmondo's hyperbolic prose, but the awareness that this book represents a mere two or three weeks he spent in the city left me puzzled? Where did he get so many impressions? Where do all these stories come from? As you read the various references throughout this book to previous literature you realize that this book is as much about the literary phenomenon of Constantinople as it is the city he toured in for a couple weeks. Edmondo is a pastiche artist of genius (think Pinterest: his site would have been awesome!) The anthology of literary references (although the notes indicate these were sometimes wrongly quoted) are nevertheless germane). But there is no question that the mystique of Istanbul/Stamboul/Constantinople is as much about the mood that this city evokes, and above all the phantasmagoric silhouette against the crepuscular or dawn light as it is on any crisp diurnal reality. It's worth reading the book if only for the descriptive verbal symphony as he describes his initial entry into the misted city, and especially the climb up the mountain above Skutari, and watching the city once again manifest itself as a heavy fog lifts. The chapter late in the book where he summons up the history and intrigue of the Topkapi is at once horrendous and enormously alluring. This final set piece of the book that limns Constantinople's dark side in the Seraglio: A sort of Civic Mr. Hyde for the dazzling Doctor Jekyll of her sunlit face. I too have spent less than a few weeks in Constantinople, and it has haunted me all my life. I ought to give it five stars: it's a classic. But really he cribbed a tad too much. And made up more than a little I suspect. Nevertheless, I have no doubt I will re-read it before I return to The City the next time: perhaps even this summer!

A very well-written book. A classic for all those who love Istanbul-Constantinople. Many of the places described in the book are still there; however the cosmopolitan atmosphere, the different races living together and the way they lived and interrelated with one another during the second half of the XIXth century already belong to the past. It's better to read it after you have visited Istanbul and are familiar with it; if not you might miss something. My score for De Amicis's thorough lively account of XIXth century Constantinople is clearly 5 out of 5; I cannot think of a better book on this city, and you can feel that he adored Istanbul. However I finally scored four because the notes at the end are not always totally helpful and some of them are outright wrong. But the actual book is

amazing!

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