

Book Reviews

Tsangadas, Byron C. P., *The Fortifications and Defense of Constantinople*. East European Monographs, No. LXXI. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, pp. 327.

The successful defense of Constantinople against Avaric and Arabic attacks in the seventh and eighth centuries insured the later flowering of Byzantine culture and civilization. The great walls built by Anthemius in the reign of Theodosius II enabled Constantinople to withstand these repeated attacks. Though the walls and topography of Constantinople have been examined, and the sieges studied in detail, these topics have not been jointly investigated previously. The present work combines these subjects, and thus offers new solutions to old problems.

Part I, «The Fortifications of Constantinople», examines the walls themselves: their layout and structure, location of gates, repair, and building materials. Special attention is given to the identification of poorly known or disputed city gates, and to the complex of fortifications in the Blachernae district. The fortifications in the Blachernae are an especially difficult problem since walls of Heraclius, Leo V, and Manuel Comnenus have been detected here. T. argues that the Theodosian Walls joined a pre-existing fortification enclosing the Blachernae, which completed the city's defensive circuit (pp. 24-25). This area, however, proved vulnerable to attack; in 626 Avaric cavalry skirted the walls and attacked the city from the Golden Horn nearly destroying the Church of St. Mary of Blachernae. Heraclius' wall enclosed this Church and the surrounding area, and brought it within the walls. This discussion also identifies the so-called Pteron. Convincing arguments, drawn from evidence of the Avaric siege, show that this wall was a freestanding defensive structure, i.e. *proteichisma*, that blocked the northwestern approach to the walls at Blachernae. It was this fortification that the Avaric cavalry flanked in its attack on the city as the Chagan's forces withdrew.

Other discussions examine the sea walls along the Golden Horn and Sea of Marmara, the location of gates and harbors here, and periods of rebuilding. In this region, as elsewhere in the city, the term «Imperial», used to identify gates and palaces, sometimes leads to confusion since these are also known by names. T. notes (pp. 37-38) that during Constantinople's long history a number of imperial residences were built, and the identification of gates changed accordingly as the activities of imperial families gave new distinction to old places.

Maintenance of the walls was a constant imperial concern, but the Emperor Theophilus sponsored more work on the walls than any other emperor. Numerous dedicatory inscriptions show that «no emperor did more to strengthen and improve the existing walls» than Theophilus (p. 65). T. argues (p. 60) that the building and repair of the walls was a civic duty incumbent upon the whole population of Constantinople. Though sources attest this (e.g. *Codex. Theod.* 8.22), it might be debated how rigorously such laws were enforced as the rich and influential escaped this burden through privilege and corruption.

T. argues that the work of constructing the walls was «entrusted» to the factions, which later cooperated in the rebuilding of the walls after the earthquake of 447 (pp. 9, 60). It is unfortunate that T. did not discuss the views of A. Cameron, *Circus Factions* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 111-12, who rejects the idea that the factions would be entrusted with such work. Perhaps T. will address this point in his forthcoming work on the administration of defense in Constantinople.

Discussion of the topography of Constantinople, particularly the city walls and gates, is made difficult by the map of the city accompanying the text (Map I). This map is so reduced in size that it offers no guide at all (in contrast to Maps III-V which are useful). Though production costs surely led to the map's reduction, any responsible editor would have omitted the map rather than subject any reader to its minute print or so poorly serve his author.

Part II, «The Defense of Constantinople, A.D. 565-867», provides an extensive investigation and account of the great sieges of the seventh and eighth centuries. This section is of particular interest since T. introduces new arguments based upon his investigation of the fortifications, and treats related topics such as the development of Greek Fire.

Several such arguments are offered in the analysis of the Avaric-Slavic siege of July, 626, the first significant test of the Theodosian Walls. The Chagan of the Avars mounted an attack along the length of the land walls, but his goal was to breach the walls at the so-called Mesoteichion in the Lycus Valley where the terrain favored the attacker. Sources state that the Chagan massed engines «from Brachialion to Brachialion». This passage has troubled authorities, e.g. Barisic and Janin, but T. plausibly argues (pp. 92-93) that the term refers to the reinforced fortifications around the Gates of Polyandrion and Pempton, located in the Lycus Valley, and probably to each military gate along the walls (see p. 251, n. 82). T. correctly argues that the Chagan would seek to concentrate his attack, and his discussion here of the siege and walls is persuasive.

The first Arabic siege of Constantinople occurred in 674-678 when the Caliph Muawiya launched a massive attack on the city. Perhaps the single most important development during this siege was the employment of Callinicus' Greek Fire, which insured the Byzantine victory. Though the composition of Greek Fire has been extensively discussed, its ingredients remain uncertain. The most debated point focuses on the use of saltpeter, which some authorities, i.e. Partington, deny. T. argues for the use of saltpeter in Greek Fire, and the evidence, e.g. the *Russian Primary Chronicle Tactica Leonis XIX 51*, supports his argument. The Russians described Greek Fire as «lightning from heaven», which implies a flash made by an explosion. Saltpeter was known in antiquity and T.'s arguments for its use in Greek Fire are persuasive. T. also seems correct to note that such a weapon as Greek Fire would require development and experimentation, and his discussion of its refinement offers an attractive and plausible reconstruction. The first employment of the Callinicus-prepared Fire probably occurred at Cyzicus, the staging area used by the Arabs, and here the new weapon destroyed the Arab fleet, breaking the siege.

The last Arabic siege of Constantinople (717-718) ended in the victory of Leo III, and T.'s account of this siege focuses upon Leo and his dominant role in these events. Leo clearly outwitted and deceived the Arab generals Suleiman and Maslama in Asia and again when they surrounded Constantinople. Weather aided

Leo's schemes, but credit for the victory remains his. Destruction of the relief fleet from Egypt soon after its arrival contributed also to the Byzantine victory. T. argues (p. 298, n. 67) that the Egyptian Christian sailors who defected and reported the arrival of the Arab fleet did so because Leo's religious views were similar to their own. It is left unclear, however, how Leo's religious views, presumably his iconoclasm, would be known to these Egyptians, or why this would encourage them to defect.

In the ninth century the fortifications of Constantinople were assaulted three times: by the Bulgarians under Krum in 813-814, by Thomas the Slav in 821-823, and by the Russians in 860. The attacks of Krum and Thomas revealed deficiencies in the defensive circuit, and afterwards these were remedied. Leo V strengthened the fortifications in the Blachernae by building a wall parallel to the Pteron, which joined the wall of Heraclius (p. 155). Thomas' siege revealed the weaknesses of the walls along the Golden Horn. In the following years the Amorion emperors, especially Theophilus, rebuilt whole sections of walls and strengthened others. These measures enabled the city to withstand the Russian attack in 860 despite the emperor's absence with much of the imperial army (though it should not be construed that the city was defenseless; those troops manning the walls would not have accompanied the emperor). Against the refurbished walls of Theophilus the Russians could make no significant threat, and departed after raiding the city's suburbs.

This work provides a valuable contribution to the study of Byzantine Constantinople, its topography and fortifications, and the crucial sieges of the seventh and eighth centuries. Prospective readers, however, should be alert to the numerous errors in the Greek texts (and elsewhere in the work) that result from poor copy editing unexpected from this press.

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Gabriel Ștrempel, *Catalogul manuscriselor românești*, B.A.R. (Biblioteca Academiei României), 1-1600, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București 1978, p. 429.

La parution de ce volume consacré à la description des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque de l'Académie Roumaine (B.A.R.) se situe dans le cadre d'initiative prise par divers centres scientifiques roumains pour le rassemblement des manuscrits trouvés dans les pays roumains. Le livre de M. Ștrempel nous donne les premiers résultats de cette initiative et constitue un manuel de base contenant une bonne part des trésors de la tradition spirituelle roumaine. Dans ce catalogue sont décrits 1600 codes entrés à la Bibliothèque au cours des cent-dix ans de son existence. Les riches fonds de la Bibliothèque de l'Académie Roumaine sont constitués par des donations privées, par des achats, ou proviennent d'autres petites bibliothèques monastiques. La Bibliothèque s'enrichit aussi par l'entrée d'autres codes de provenances diverses. La description de M. Ștrempel ainsi que les autres qui vont suivre dans le proche avenir apportent des informations utiles sur l'importance de la tradition littéraire médiévale ou contemporaine de la Roumanie; ainsi