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Elena N. Boeck, *The Bronze Horseman of Justinian in Constantinople: The Cross-Cultural Biography of a Mediterranean Monument*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. 451 pages, 69 figures and maps, and 4 tables. ISBN: 9781107197275

The bronze horseman of Justinian, a colossal statue, once stood atop a column in Augoustaion Square, near Hagia Sophia. The height of the monument and its symbolism made it a landmark in the city's skyline. Elena Boeck, by making the statue the center of inquiry, explores cross-cultural intellectual exchange in the Mediterranean and multiple forms of engagement with the Byzantine legacy. Her challenging inter-disciplinary examination of the ideological and artistic life of the bronze horseman in the collective imagination opens new horizons of research in the areas of historiography and reception of Byzantium.

By exploring connections between history writing and imagination, *The Bronze Horseman of Justinian in Constantinople* takes an innovative look at the cultural biography of objects. In conducting her engaging inquiry, Boeck explores an extraordinary number and diversity of sources, both textual and visual, related to the monument. Her motivation is to reveal the underlying origins of images and their ideological underpinnings. In so doing, she presents a new reading of Byzantine history with the bronze horseman as its representative figure. The monument provides the perfect medium through which to explore the connections and roles of historical truth, subjectivity, and imagination in the story of Constantinople.

### Justinian's Constantinople

The first three chapters of Boeck's volume offer a vivid picture of Justinian's Constantinople, highlighting its evolution from Constantine's (r. 306–337) capital, with its luster of antiquity, to Justinian's (r. 527–565) holy city of churches and relics from the Holy Land. Erected next to Hagia Sophia (537), the column of Justinian (543) offered the emperor the means to redefine the urban topography and reshape imperial ideology by placing it within the aura of divinity. Its placement created a new processional space linking the Mese (today Divanyolu Caddesi) to the Golden Gate. The iconography of Justinian's lost gold medallion depicting the emperor with a *toupha* may perhaps help in furthering discussion around the message of victory conveyed by the linkage of the horseman and Hagia Sophia.<sup>1</sup>

A critical reading of Prokopios's *Buildings* reveals how he veered from straightforward description to imaginative narrative in his remarks about the monument. Attributing grandiose visions to Justinian and his horse's pose, Prokopios's approach marks the beginning of the transformation of the bronze monument into an animate statue. Boeck argues skepticism on Prokopios' part, evident in his veiled, critical interpretation of the monument.

### Post-Justinian: Shifting Identities, Internationalization, and Setbacks

After Justinian's death, the horseman became a barometer for contemporary views on the Byzantine Empire. Chapter 4 mentions the equestrian monument raised by the Abbasid caliph Al-Mansur (r. 754–775) in the newly founded Baghdad (July 30, 762). The monument stands as the first testament to the "secret" of the talismanic power of statues having slipped from the Byzantines' hands. The equestrian in Baghdad becomes a talismanic personification of the Abbasid dynasty, and indeed, its decline coincides with the destruction of the rider. Chapter 5 covers the reign of the iconoclast emperor Theophilus (r. 829–842), during which the statue loses its gilded plumed

headgear (*toupha*). To many, its fall foreshadowed the emperor's loss of his own crown. In the tenth century, addressed in chapter 6, the poem *On Constantinople*, by Constantine the Rhodian (ca. 870s/880s–after 931), presents the statue as the greatest wonder of the city, while by contrast, the legendary *Narrative on the Construction of Hagia Sophia* considers the sculpture a symbol of imperial hubris.<sup>2</sup> Chapter 7 introduces the only surviving Byzantine image of the horseman, intriguingly found in a manuscript of the Book of Job created around 1200 (Vat. gr. 751, fol. 26r). The column with the horseman atop it in a fortified city suggests the relationship between Job and Ausitis, his former city as described in the prologue to the Book of Job, though the city in the miniature is understood to be Constantinople. The bronze monument evokes the cosmic struggle between good and evil conveyed in Job's story.

Job's agony serves as a transition to the ravages perpetrated by the crusaders, in chapter 8. By 1261 the bronze revetments of Justinian's column had disappeared, but the horseman survived, a feat made possible thanks to a shift in identity. To the crusaders, the emperor atop the column became Herakleios, a hero of the crusader movement, the emperor who recaptured Jerusalem from the Sasanians circa 628 and retrieved the True Cross from the Persian king Chosroes. In chapter 9, with the Byzantines' return to Constantinople, starts the shaping of *Constantinople imaginaire*,<sup>3</sup> a sacred city in the mind of dispersed and traumatized people. For Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1261–1282) Constantinople becomes the city of "chosen people," accentuating the city's sacredness. Boeck draws attention to the revision made to the coronation ritual with the ceremony of the raising on a shield taking place on the Augoustaion. The elevation of the ruler is no longer the prerogative of the military, as in the early period, but becomes the task of the clergy. The steps of the bronze monument become the focal point since it is from there that the scattering of coins is performed as part of imperial generosity. In parallel, Michael VIII attempts to erect his own

222 triumphal column next to the Church of the Holy Apostles, topping it with the only known bronze statue group since late antiquity. Boeck rightly observes that Michael VIII's ambitious plan to rival the column of Justinian and cement his own legacy failed as his monument did not receive a comparable fame.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter 10 introduces George Pachymeres's (1242–ca. 1310) description of the monument, highlighting what had been drawn from Prokopios and what departs from him. The bronze globe topped by a cross that the horseman holds in his hand is identified by Prokopios as a pole (*polos*), but Pachymeres speaks of an apple (*melon*). The latter becomes the standard identification in the Palaiologan period. Pachymeres also mentions two feathers that had fallen from the horseman's headpiece and then preserved in the treasury of Hagia Sophia. Pachymeres' learned dialogue with Prokopios leads Boeck to designate him an early pioneer of "late antique studies."

The adventures of the bronze horseman continue under the reign of Andronikos II Palaiologos (r. 1282–1328) in chapter 11. According to the testimony of Nikephoros Gregoras, the orb fell to the ground in 1317, and Andronikos restored it. The author undertakes a discussion on the monument's state of conservation and on the corrosion of bronze in light of other parallels. Her focus then shifts towards foreign responses to the fall of the orb, thus offering glimpses into the cross-cultural concerns for the fate of Byzantium. Textual variations in Slavic and Western manuscripts as well as travelers' accounts—including Clavijo and Pero Tafur, Cristoforo Buondelmonti, Bertrand de la Broquière, Johann Schiltberger—are submitted to a lengthy discussion. A recurring theme involves the costly expenditures for the restoration of the monument; Tafur mentions the extraordinary amount of 8,000 ducats. One learns that the monument had been fastened as part of the restoration with metal chains at its base to prevent it from toppling. A new shift in identity occurs then, leading to identification with Constantine the

Great through his legendary symbolic conflation with Constantine XI (r. 1449–1453), the last Palaiologan emperor.

### The Monument Rediscovered: The Perspective of the Other in the Last Years of the Palaiologans

Beginning with chapter 12 and continuing to the end of the book, Boeck discusses the horseman as viewed from the perspective of the other: Renaissance antiquarians (chapter 12), Slavic rulers and Russian pilgrims (chapter 13), and Mehmed II the Conqueror (chapter 14).

Chapter 12 offers insight into the emergence of empiricism and the growing interest in accurate recordings of inscriptions and dimensions of antique monuments. From the humanist perspective of Manuel Chrysoloras, who left Constantinople for Florence to teach Greek (1397), the monument represents a shared legacy. Cyriac of Ancona's (1392–1452) firsthand testimony is of paramount importance for subsequent study of the monument. The polymath appears to have contributed to the dissemination of an inscription discovered on the monument that led to the identification of the equestrian as Theodosios. In parallel, the geographer Buondelmonti had been interested in map-making to accompany an erudite narrative in *Liber insularum archipelagi*, and the diffusion of Buondelmonti's maps—highlighting their discrepancies in the details—prompted discussion of imagined views of Constantinople as the alternative Rome.

The rider atop the tall column is a recurring presence in the imaginary views of Constantinople. A drawing in a codex presented in 1877 as a gift from Sultan Abdulhamid II to Budapest University Library (Cod. Ital. 3, fol. 144v) offers a close-up look at the horseman absent from the urban context. It is the first such precise representation of the horseman and his distinctive headgear that comports with Pachymeres's description. A prominent inscription in Latin around the horse references the Emperor Theodosios. Boeck theorizes that the drawing is the result of an

amalgamation of multiple sketches by Cyriac. She regards the inscription as commemorating the revelation of the bronze rider's "new" old identity. The transmission of Cyriac's inscriptions in conjunction with the story of the Budapest manuscript—while keeping in mind the process of interpolations and falsifications<sup>5</sup>—is a fascinating issue indeed and worthy of further investigation.

The Slavonic world reappropriated the bronze horseman in light of holding it sacred and integrated it into a timeless, idealized image of Constantinople. As Boeck demonstrates, the sacralization of the city served as a tool for Palaiologan Emperors to collect funds for their destitute treasury. Constantinople as an urban icon, with the horseman next to Hagia Sophia its distinctive feature, served, we learn, as an ideological model for the Bulgarian Tzar Ivan Alexander (r. 1331–1371). Reimagining his own version of history, Ivan Alexander places himself in a construct of eternity. Numerous translations of Byzantine histories were initiated around him during his time. Heightening the sacrality of Constantinople is also the intention of numerous Russian pilgrim accounts from the fifteenth century. Boeck concludes that the horseman and Hagia Sophia both come to epitomize Constantinople and an iconic vision of the Orthodox Empire.

After focusing on the Bulgarian Tzar, Boeck turns to the motivations behind Mehmed II's (r. 1444–1446, 1451–1481) initiative to remove the horseman (chapter 14). According to some historians' accounts, Mehmed II had the head of the last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine XI, affixed to the column. Whether this was in place of the bronze horseman is unknown. The discussion around the process of cultural appropriation of Hagia Sophia as a mosque highlights the visual proximity between its first minaret and Justinian's column as conflicting markers of the building's identity.

The Ottomans' understanding of the horseman in the aftermath of its removal is another interesting issue that one can approach through

translations of the *Narrative of the Construction of Hagia Sophia* (*Tarih-i bina-yı Aya Sofya*). In this text, the descriptions of the statue trace with the legend of the “red apple” and the idea of world dominion (chapter 14.3). Boeck, further documenting the after-life of the horseman in the artistic imagination, focused on three different categories of actors and cultural contexts: panel painting in Renaissance Italy (chapter 15), miniature painting in the Ottoman artistic imagination (chapter 16), and icon painting in Russia (chapter 17).

In the repertory of Renaissance artists, the motif of the equestrian was a popular element in imaginary city views. Boeck discusses its appearance in places ranging from painted wooden chests from Florence to Mantegna’s *Agony in the Garden* (1450–1455) in addition to the well-studied Buondelmonti maps. In these artistic endeavors, the features of the city often depend on the commissioner’s status and interest. In the case of Mantegna, an antiquarian humanist, the city is surrounded by high walls and thought to represent Jerusalem, though it has the character of Rome, and the bronze horseman is present. Here, a number of historical moments and geographies are included to convey the idea of eternity.

The illustration of the bronze horseman in two late sixteenth-century Ottoman manuscripts of Al-Bistami’s *Translation of the Key to the Compre-*

*hensive Prognostication* (*Tercüme-i Cifru’l-Cami*)—in the libraries of Istanbul University and Topkapı Palace—offers valuable insight into the Ottoman reception of the horseman. One may perhaps also argue that the horseman in the first composition served as a “bonding agent” between the Hippodrome monuments and Hagia Sophia as a mosque and a symbolic means to affirm the transmission of their talismanic power.

The horseman’s peregrinations in the artistic realm finally made into an icon type created in sixteenth-century Russia as a representation of the feast of the Intercession, commemorating the vision of St. Andrew the Fool at the Blachernai Church in Constantinople. The horseman, labeled “Tsar’ lusti[ni]an” and positioned atop a column, stands next to a multi-domed church in the upper register of the icon. The intricate composition in the other registers includes an image of Emperor Leo the Wise, who in the context of the end of the empire, is connected to the illustrations of the so-called *Oracles of Leo the Wise*. Leo’s alleged prophetic visions, also credited with the construction of tall columns, are thus also linked to the talismanic power of the column of Justinian.

The postscript gathers the major testimonies of the horseman’s appearance in print, from the late fifteenth century to the early eighteenth century.

Multiple new ideas and testimonies stand to flow from the rich content of Boeck’s book and its great number and variety of illustrations which include beautiful modern artistic representations of the bronze horseman by Rob Hassan. In closing, it should also be noted that the index offers an interesting variety of entries.

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1 *Byzance: L’art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1992), no. 113.

2 See Stephanos Efthymiadis, “*Diegesis* on Hagia Sophia from Late Antiquity to Tenth-Century Byzantium,” *Byzantinoslavica* 73 (2015): 7–21, which offers an interesting perspective on this issue.

3 French wording in tribute to Gilbert Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire: études sur le recueil des “Patria”* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984).

4 See Jannic Durand, “À propos du grand groupe en bronze de l’archange saint Michel et de l’empereur Michel VIII Paléologue à Constantinople,” in *La sculpture en Occident: études offertes à Jean-René Gaborit*, ed. Geneviève Bresc-Bautier, Françoise Baron, and Pierre-Yves Le Pogam (Paris: Éditions Fatou, 2007), 47–57.

5 See, for example, Gerard Gonzáles Germain, “The Epigraphical Legacy of Cyriac of Ancona: Felice Feliciano’s Trace in a Fake Inscription from Tarragona (CIL II 383\* = 112/14, 43\*),” *Faventia* 32–33 (2010–2011): 215–224.