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Paul Magdalino, *Roman Constantinople in Byzantine Perspective: The Memorial and Aesthetic Rediscovery of Constantine's Beautiful City, from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Brill Research Perspectives in Byzantine Studies. Leiden: Brill, 2024. 177 pages. ISBN: 9789004698895

Any city that by its size, location, and emanated glamor impresses inhabitants and visitors alike is prompt to generate its own legends and myths and its own literary works of praise. Constantinople, the city whose foundation marked the birth of the Christian Roman Empire, an empire which for eleven centuries was identified with the city, was no exception. One way or another and at different times, both the social elite and the public were preoccupied with such questions as what made Constantinople a unique megalopolis, which story lay behind the creation of this or that monument, and which figures were to be credited with the city's planning, construction, and development as a major urban center. As a result, the imperial city came to be extolled in numerous texts ranging from the patriographic to the rhetorical. Naturally enough, these works paid particular attention to the city's material treasures, a feature which is also typical of the reports and guides produced by foreign visitors, pilgrims, diplomats, and even captives.

The book under review aims to critically analyze the many Byzantine-era texts that focused on Constantinople's past and addressed, in one way or another, its wondrous historical pedigree. As Paul Magdalino states in his introduction, "the Late Antique and medieval literature on Constantinople represents the ongoing effort by literate Byzantines and foreigners to explain the origins and status, as well as to express the wonder and spectacle, of an extraordinary city that seemed to be *sui generis*, whose

very existence was a miracle" (p. 3). After outlining the main directions of current scholarship on Constantinople, Magdalino concludes his concise introduction by setting out the two modes through which accounts about the city operated: the memorial, focusing on the city's past; and the aesthetic, highlighting the city's unique beauty, its *kallos* (p. 6).

The book is divided into five chapters, with subchapters of varying lengths that pair discussions of more general interest with a presentation of particular authors and texts. The first chapter, "Historical Research on Constantinople, 330–600," gives an overview of the city's first three centuries from the contrasting viewpoints of Christian and pagan authors; it also discusses the first examples of patriographic literature and the work of two notable, but quite different, sixth-century writers who had researched the past of Roman Constantinople: the bureaucrat Ioannes Lydos and the chronicler Ioannes Malalas. Chapter 2, "Memorial Literature and Research Culture, 6th–10th Centuries," consists of three subchapters. The first two deal with such well-known texts as the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, a problematic source concerning the monuments of the Queen of Cities, and the *Patria of Constantinople*, an extensive four-book collection that pieces together stories and narratives about the city's monuments and founders. The third, brief subchapter concisely presents three extensive hagiographies of Constantinopolitan extraction devoted to saints who were not historical figures: Niphon, Andrew the Fool, and Basil the Younger.

Up to this point, authors and text are introduced and discussed in chronological order, a sequence that is not strictly observed in what follows. Chapter 3, "Cultural Heritage Tourist Disinformation 1000–1453: From Bureaucratic to Scientific Antiquarianism," treats the period between 1000 and 1453 from the perspective of the various transformations in the way literary authors looked at Constantinople. This is followed by a discussion of the panegyric liter-

ature produced from the tenth to the thirteenth century in chapter 4, "The Rhetorical Rediscovery of Constantinople, 10th–13th Centuries," before the author offers an analysis of Theodore Metochites's *Byzantios* and its reception among later authors in chapter 5, "The *Byzantios* of Theodore Metochites and Its Legacy." The conclusion rehearses various points made throughout the book and sets out some new lines of inquiry for future research into the multiple identities that Byzantine literature assigned to Constantinople as an urban space.

Thanks to his long-standing commitment to the study of the Queen of Cities, Paul Magdalino was no doubt the best-qualified scholar to undertake the task of analyzing and contextualizing the corpus of literary texts that promoted and spread the legacy of the Byzantine capital as a Roman city. The result is a valuable survey which brings into play much recent scholarly discussion on both the general and the more specific issues pertaining to Constantinople's monumental history. Judging from the secondary literature cited in the footnotes and bibliography, Magdalino is one of the few contemporary Byzantinists who constantly keeps up with and takes into account new publications, a fact that deserves special mention. Only a few recent titles have escaped his notice.<sup>1</sup>

The texts discussed in this volume span the whole Byzantine period (fourth to fifteenth century). In terms of their literary identity, they may be divided into three main categories: standalone collections of patriographic character (whether preserved anonymously or otherwise), sections of patriographic interest included in texts of a different overall character (e.g., histories, chronicles, or even hagiographies), and elaborate pieces of rhetoric by celebrated literati. Contrary to what one might think judging from the simple Greek of the *Patria of Constantinople*, distinctions between the three categories of texts did not necessarily extend to the level of their language or style. To take just one example, the patriographic collection of the Egyptian Christ-

180 odors of Koptos, in which Constantinople received considerable attention, was composed in twelve books of elegant hexameters. The loss of this work implicitly confirms the assumption that, compared to those circulating in late antiquity, only a limited number of patriographic collections has been preserved, not always intact. As Magdalino not unreasonably suggests, a similar problem of perishability may have affected compilations produced in later centuries and designed for the city's visitors, such as guidebooks piecing together information about what was worth seeing in Constantinople.

Notably, the only collection that has come down to us intact is the late tenth-century *Patria of Constantinople*, a work that has been systematically commented on from different angles by Gilbert Dagron in his *Constantinople imaginaire* and Albrecht Berger in his *Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinoupoleos*. In Magdalino's description and discussion of its main features, the collection is integrated into the scholarly activity of the tenth century and associated with the persistent infatuation with antiquarian research that characterized Constantinopolitan "encyclopedism." Its tendency to portray Constantine, the founder of the city, in bright, positive colors is duly highlighted, since it is in this compilation that he is credited, inter alia, with the foundation of Hagia Sophia (a personal achievement first bestowed on him in the *Chronicon Paschale*).<sup>2</sup> Constantine appears here as the figure who determined the fate of Constantinople, both at the beginning and purportedly as it would unfold until its last days. Magdalino recognizes in this perception the *Patria's* apocalyptic dimension, which marks a shift from the image of the city in earlier antiquarian narratives. He presents here his views, set out in earlier studies, on the *Patria's* chronological proximity to the completion of the middle of the seventh millennium and/or the year 1000 from the birth of Christ. Composed in 989/990, the collection likely echoed the effects of the violent earthquake that so alarmed Constantinopolitans in 989 and caused the

collapse of Hagia Sophia's dome. Not all will agree with this interpretation and the association of the *Patria* with the purported emergence of apocalyptic ideas in that particular period. Though worth re-addressing, the question of just how much we can glean about contemporary anxieties from such a collection is beyond the scope of this review.

Besides paying attention to the Byzantine capital's glorious past, the corpus of encomiastic literature Magdalino examines also offers fertile ground for exploring the Byzantine capital as an urban center universally admired for its imposing beauty. Antiquarianism runs through all these texts regardless of the period in which they were produced. Whether of patriographic or rhetorical character, each work was the product of precise historical circumstances and, as Magdalino shows, intersected with the city's cultural life and intellectual climate in specific periods. Thus, for instance, explicit or implicit comparisons and contrasts with other prominent cities are ubiquitous. Quite reasonably, the ones involving New and Old Rome became common in the early (fourth and fifth) centuries. Interestingly, however, despite Old Rome's subsequent eclipse, the competition between the two Roman capitals never ended. It would be rekindled in the very different context of the early fifteenth century, becoming central to the humanist Manuel Chrysoloras's *Comparison of the Old and the New Rome*, a piece of rhetoric in the form of a letter addressed to the emperor Manuel II Palaiologos. Magdalino provides a substantial analysis of this work in his chapter discussing the transition from bureaucratic to scientific antiquarianism that occurred between 1000 and 1453. There, he shows that Chrysoloras's revision of the past had much in common with the antiquarian views and interests of the Italian humanists, as reflected, a few years later, in the writings and sketches of Cristoforo Buondelmonti and Ciriaco di Ancona.

In the early fourteenth century, at the high point of the Palaiologan Renaissance, Constantinople saw the most erudite, extensive, and original

work ever composed in its praise: the *Byzantios* of Theodore Metochites. As mentioned above, this piece of convoluted rhetoric is discussed in the final chapter of Magdalino's book. In terms of inspiration, *Byzantios* harked back to the *Antiochikos* of Libanios, an oration containing sections comparing Antioch with other glorious cities. Magdalino sees in Metochites's composition a reason for recreating a pedigree which must have been prominent in the lost *Patria* of Christodoros of Koptos. He also spots similarities with the tenth-century *Patria*, such as the glorification of Constantine, the attention paid to spectacles and wonders, and, more significantly, the presentation of the city as a self-contained geographical entity distinct from the rest of the empire. Nonetheless, the cosmopolitan vision of Constantinople which Metochites expanded on was without precedent. In fact, the image of the city that he wanted to propagate was markedly detached from the traditional and conventional associations with imperial power (Constantine always being the exception), the protecting role of the Virgin Mary, and even the expectations of an imminent end to the city and the empire. Magdalino's enthusiastic pages on this remarkable text, which has long awaited a critical edition, must be read in conjunction or in dialogue with other recent serious attempts at grappling with this literary marvel and its maverick author.<sup>3</sup>

The volume presented here inaugurates a new Brill series which aims to provide introductory guides to and commentaries on the current state of the field in Byzantine studies. It ties in well with the growing interest in the beginnings of the study of Byzantium, differing only in that it exemplifies a retrospective view which comes from within—that is, it looks at how the Byzantines, the Christian Romans, reconstructed and evaluated their past as seen in the heart of their empire, Constantinople. Without aspiring to a comprehensive survey of the *laudes Constantinopolitanae*, as was the case with Erwin Fenster's coverage of the subject several decades ago, Paul Magdalino has offered new insights into the composition and the argu-

ment of a corpus of texts that elaborated on a city's connections with an idealized past, thereby reaffirming the city's outstanding position in its contemporary world.

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Grigor Boykov, *Ottoman Plovdiv: Space, Architecture, and Population (14th-17th Centuries)*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2024. 304 pages, 15 maps, 6 plans, and 32 figures. ISBN: 9783700193647

In the evolving field of Ottoman studies, the urban history of imperial cities remains a rich ground for scholarly exploration. Grigor Boykov's monograph, *Ottoman Plovdiv: Space, Architecture, and Population (14th-17th Centuries)*, makes a significant contribution to the vibrant academic discourse on the subject, offering a detailed examination of Plovdiv, a city that has historically oscillated between the margins and the center of Ottoman urban studies. Rather than focusing on perennial scholarly favorites like the historic cities of Bursa, Edirne, or Istanbul, the present volume centers on a provincial city. Located in modern-day Bulgaria, Plovdiv (historically known as Filibe) serves as an exemplary case study for understanding the complexities of urban life under Ottoman rule, a topic that, despite attracting considerable attention, yet remains underexplored in specific regional contexts.

In addition to the introduction and epilogue, the book contains five main chapters. Each contributes to a layered understanding of Ottoman Plovdiv, providing a critical examination of

1 For instance, Florin Leonte, "Visions of Empire: Gaze, Space, and Territory in Isidore's Encomium for John VIII Palaiologos," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 71 (2017): 249–272 (on Isidore of Kiev's oration in praise of emperors Manuel II and John VIII); and the edited volume by Sofia Kotzabassi, ed., *A Companion to Intellectual Life of the Palaeologan Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2022) (with studies on Metochites's *Byzantios* and Chrysoloras's *Comparison*).

2 See *Chronicon Paschale*, vol. 1, ed. B. G. Niebuhr, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* (Bonn, 1832), 544; *Chronicon Paschale 284-628 AD*. Vol. 7. Translated Texts for Historians, trans. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 35.

3 Cf. the most recent discussion of the same text by Ioannis Polemis, *Theodore Metochites: Patterns of Self-Representation in Fourteenth Century Byzantium* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2024), ch. 8.

how the interplay between architecture, population, and governance shaped the city across centuries. The first chapter, "Documentary Archaeology: Recreating Ottoman Plovdiv," discusses the sources and methods used to reconstruct the city's historical urban landscape. The author effectively utilizes cadastral maps, historical photographs, and archival documents to piece together Plovdiv's physical development. This methodological approach not only adds depth to our understanding of Ottoman urban planning but also showcases the potential of documentary archaeology in bridging gaps between historical narratives and physical evidence. The second chapter, "Regional Geography and Conquest," explores Plovdiv's geographical and strategic significance within the Ottoman Empire. The chapter details the Ottoman conquest and the initial phases of the city's administrative integration, emphasizing how geographic location influenced Plovdiv's role in the empire. This section is critical for understanding the external factors that shaped the city's early years as an Ottoman urban center, though it could benefit from a deeper analysis of pre-Ottoman influences to contrast with the changes introduced by Ottoman governance. The third chapter, "Urban Topography," compares the urban layout of Plovdiv during the Roman, medieval, and Ottoman periods. Boykov provides a detailed account of how the Ottomans reconfigured the city's structure to suit their administrative and military needs, while also incor-

porating Islamic cultural elements. The next chapter, "Ottoman Adaptations of the Urban Morphology," focuses on architectural innovations. This chapter critically assesses the introduction of new buildings and the transformation of existing ones. It examines how these changes not only reflected the Ottoman architectural aesthetic but also facilitated Plovdiv's integration into the economic and social structures of the empire. This critical engagement with architectural adaptation provides insights into the symbolic and practical roles of urban development projects. In the last chapter, "Population Geography: Dynamics, Spatial Distribution, and Density," Boykov analyzes demographic shifts and their implications for urban development. By linking population data to changes in urban density and spatial distribution, he illustrates the dynamic interplay between demographic trends and urban form. This chapter is particularly strong in demonstrating how migrations and policies affected the social and physical landscape, though more comparative data to provide additional context would have been welcome.

Boykov offers a comprehensive exploration of the urban development and demographic shifts in Plovdiv during the Ottoman era. The monograph extensively discusses how the city's spatial and architectural landscape evolved over the centuries, integrating a variety of historical data sources to provide a multifaceted view of urban life in an important