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From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities provides twenty-five articles addressing the concept of centres and peripheries in the late antique and Byzantine worlds, focusing specifically on urban aspects of this paradigm. Spanning the fourth to thirteenth centuries, and ranging from the later Roman empires to the early Caliphate and medieval New Rome, the chapters reveal the range of factors involved in the dialectic between City, cities, and frontier.

Including contributions on political, social, literary, and artistic history, and covering geographical areas throughout the central and eastern Mediterranean, this volume provides a kaleidoscopic view of how human actions and relationships worked with, within, and between urban spaces and the periphery, and how these spaces and relationships were themselves ideologically constructed and understood.

Contributors are *Walter F. Beers, Lorenzo M. Bondioli, Christopher Bonura, Lynton Boshoff, Averil Cameron, Jeremiah Coogan, Robson Della Torre, Pavla Drapelova, Nicholas Evans, David Gyllenhaal, Franka Horvat, Theofili Kampianaki, Maximilian Lau, Valeria Flavia Lovato, Byron MacDougall, Nicholas S.M. Matheou, Daniel Neary, Jonas Nilsson, Cecilia Palombo, Maria Alessia Rossi, Roman Shliakhtin, Sarah C. Simmons, Andrew M. Small, Jakub Sypiański, Vincent Tremblay* and *Philipp Winterhager*.

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The City and the Cities

Edited by
Nicholas S.M. Matheou,
Theofili Kampianaki
and Lorenzo M. Bondioli

With an introduction by
Averil Cameron

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Preface

This volume originated in a conference that took place in Oxford, February 2014, under the title *The City and the Cities: From Constantinople to the Frontier*. The present editors were then the executive committee of the Oxford University Byzantine Society, and the conference was the society's sixteenth international graduate conference. The OUBS is a student-run organisation, and has for a number of years been at the centre of Oxford's Late Antique and Byzantine studies community, helping to integrate new students, organising events and research trips, and sending weekly mailing lists on happenings at the university and worldwide.

Nevertheless, despite an ever-expanding annual remit, the society's key *raison d'être* remains the international graduate conference. This event has grown year on year – now entering its eighteenth – and has blossomed into the world's largest forum for the presentation of pre-doctoral and doctoral research into all facets of the Late Antique and Byzantine worlds. The conference's success is not, of course, a testament solely to the strength of Late Antique and Byzantine studies in Oxford, or even the United Kingdom, but to its strength worldwide. In 2014 there were forty-eight speakers from twenty-four different global institutions, including North and South America, Europe, Russia and East Asia. With such geographic spread Late Antique and Byzantine studies is a truly 'cosmopolitan' discipline – and indeed the sheer breadth of topics coming under that banner belies the restrictive term 'discipline'. The questions asked by scholars of late antique and Byzantine states and societies provide unique insights and methodologies relevant not only to the study of the later Roman empires, but also to Mediterranean, Near Eastern, Classical, Islamic and Medieval studies more broadly. Selected papers were published for the first time from the 2013 conference,¹ an important milestone, and one which provided a significant opportunity in planning the immediately succeeding event.

Bearing this opportunity in mind we elected for a more focused theme than had previously been the case, so as to best exploit the opportunity presented to us, and to best demonstrate the dynamism and exciting potential of the discipline's pre-doctoral and doctoral scholars. Beginning with the concept of centres and peripheries, we focused specifically on the urban aspects of this paradigm. Thus we asked prospective delegates to address a number of key and persistent questions, questions such as what is the place of Constantinople in

¹ Maximilian Lau, Caterina Franchi and Morgan di Rodi eds, *Landscapes of Power* (Oxford, 2014).

the Byzantine world? What of the other urban centres – Antioch, Alexandria, Thessalonike, indeed the elder Rome itself – how do they interact with imperial centres, and what of the shifting frontiers? To take one exemplary problem, why do we talk of a ‘Byzantine Empire’ lasting from Constantine I to Konstantinos XI Palaiologos, when the Roman polity had a previous existence of more than half a millennium, and Trebizond survived as the final imperial city until 1461? The answer is inextricably tied with the lifespan of Christian Constantinople and a focus on that as the true centre, with Trebizond understood as mere periphery.

Among the papers eventually presented at the conference, a common concern was the interconnections which urban spaces create: between City and cities, city and country, and across the frontier. Rather than landscapes, physical structures, and civic development – the core themes of urban history proper – delegates discussed how human actions and relationships worked within and between these spaces, and how the spaces and relationships themselves were ideologically constructed and understood.

Such questions are relevant beyond the study of history, in our own contemporary world. It is an inescapable fact that the very term we use for complex human society, ‘civilisation’, is one fundamentally based in an ideal of urban life. Although the past must never be seen as a road map for the future, it is our belief that historians should discern where the concerns of their research intersect with those of the contemporary world. In 1850 the United Kingdom became the first non-city state in history to have a majority urban population. In 2010 the world’s urban population overtook its rural population, in completion of this momentous historical shift. The UK provides another obvious instance of intersection, London, a city variously described as single-handedly keeping the country on the global stage or as the single-worst drain on the state’s human and physical resources – a dichotomy not unlike scholarly debates on Constantinople’s role. With ongoing refugee and migrant crises, today as in the past the dialectic between heartland and frontier, City and cities, remains crucial.

The present volume reflects these themes and concerns. Dealing more with centre and periphery through an urban lens than with urbanism *per se*, the contributions are not comparative studies of cities in the late antique and medieval Roman empires. To recognise this we have reversed the conference’s title, hence *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities*. This dialectic between City, cities, and frontier is present throughout, and we have structured the volume so as to highlight comparative aspects between the chapters. In the introduction Averil Cameron masterfully draws together the themes of each individual contribution, so here we have limited ourselves

to a few words on the sections and volume as a whole, and the conceptualisation behind the arrangement.

The chapters of the first section directly grapple with the City itself, Constantinople, often viewed as the very definition of later Roman states and societies, a position clearly implied in the *terminus technicus* 'Byzantium'. However, rather than focus on the development of Constantinople as an urban centre or its structural socio-economic and administrative position, relatively well-researched topics, these contributions focus on the City's literary, ideological, and social construction from the fifth to the thirteenth centuries. They illustrate in common that a given space's prominence can never be taken for granted, and that its significance is always a matter of discursive negotiation among literary elites. Thus the City's ideological position was not a fixed objectivity, but was rather composed of a matrix of semiotic factors which allowed room for varying understandings and representations, differing perspectives inevitably informed by a given actor's relational position to the imperial centre.

In section two we turn to the *minutiae* of these relational positions and the networks of influence and patronage which they created. Focusing on particular actors from the fifth to eleventh centuries, these chapters provide three important case studies for the practices, methods, and routes by which important figures in the ecclesiastical and imperial administrations exploited their position to effect political action. Whether practicing as a 'middle man' between imperial blocs, using financial influence in religious controversies, or manipulating filial discourse to impact the province from the City, there are clear commonalities in the connectivity-based exercise of power.

Section three turns to an issue of paramount importance, the impact of Christianity on the social use and understanding of urban spaces, and the imperial centre's ability to influence attendant provincial developments. Focusing on the fourth to seventh centuries, the years in which Christianity rose to dominance, these papers analyse the interplay between the civic and the holy from a variety of approaches. Rather than concentrate solely on the rise of the bishop as a focus for urban organisation, the chapters elucidate the multifarious ways in which new Christian discourses and modes of power impacted the pre-existing socio-intellectual landscape. Moreover, they draw attention to the varying trends and strategies that emerged within this trajectory, whether the infusion of classical civic paradigms with Christian significance, or the development of a localised episcopal status able to exist independently of a bishop's personal charisma.

In section four the volume's scope opens up to take in the other cities of the Byzantine world writ large, spanning the fifth to thirteenth centuries, and approached from a variety of perspectives. Analysing the pragmatics of

economic material culture, utilising network theory to examine the movement of actors between centres, and studying the reception and re-use of metropolitan artistic forms, these papers illustrate the real variety of factors, strategies and spaces involved in the dialectic between City, city, and frontier.

Section five leads directly on from this theme, but to focus specifically on aspects of reception and response. As demonstrated for Constantinople in section one, the significance of any spatial relationship depends on social and literary negotiation, in essence the formation of narrative through the signification of particular instances of action and reaction. The three papers of this section thus provide three paradigmatic examples of this process, concentrating on the centuries of Islam's rise to regional dominance. They uncover the strategies by which actors in the former and remaining Roman world sought to understand this momentous shift, and to package events into a suitable framework for socio-political action.

Section six focuses our attention on literary material itself – our key point of scholarly access – and provides three illustrations of how centre and periphery are reflected in the study of such sources. Indeed, nowhere is the dialectic between spaces of more paramount importance than in the circulation of texts, and the ways in which they are integrated into social networks. These papers all deal with the so-called 'middle period', between the eighth and twelfth centuries, discussing various aspects of literary production and education in unconquered medieval New Rome. Dealing with the question of scribal activity itself, the use of earlier works in later productions, and the very conceptualisation of Constantinopolitan education, these papers remind us that we must be subtle in our handling of literary production, circulation, and education.

Finally, in section seven we are taken to the frontier, and the various approaches by which this can be deconstructed and understood. These chapters concentrate on the central medieval era, from the tenth to thirteenth centuries, and range from southern Italy through the Balkans to Anatolia and Caucasia. Their scope is remarkable, analysing urban growth on the 'periphery', the purposeful circulation and use of historical material between City and cities, the interconnectivity of artistic production in frontier zones, the literary construction of 'borderness', and the interplay of all these factors in imperial campaigns to establish control over new frontier lands. Importantly, all the papers in this section have significant bases for comparison with contributions of earlier sections, either in method or material. Illustrating clearly the value of a de-centred, multi-directional approach to the understanding of urban centres and peripheries, they provide a more than fitting conclusion to the volume.

There are a number of rationales by which to arrange a volume of collected papers, and our solutions will not be those favoured by others. We have prioritised a thematic and comparative arrangement over chronology or discipline, hoping thereby to illustrate that these divisions should not *a priori* dictate our research questions or perspectives. The sections are arranged so as to begin with the City, move to the cities, and end at the frontier, with thematic digressions providing a panorama of this journey. Ultimately the volume should not be seen as an attempt to give a ‘final word’ on urban centres and peripheries in the Late Antique and Byzantine worlds – far from it. Rather, we hope that the exciting arguments and material to be found in each chapter will inspire readers to ask similar questions of other regions, evidence, and periods.

The Editors

Oxford and Princeton, October 2015