SCANDINAVIAN JOURNAL
OF
BYZANTINE
AND
MODERN GREEK STUDIES

Instructions for contributors to

SCANDINAVIAN JOURNAL
OF
BYZANTINE
AND
MODERN GREEK STUDIES

SJBMGS encourages scholarly contributions within Byzantine and Modern Greek philology and history.

Manuscripts of articles to be considered for publication should be sent to Marianna.Smaragdi@klass.lu.se or Marianna Smaragdi, Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University, Box 201, 22100 Lund, Sweden.

Your article will be refereed. If it is accepted for publication, you will be asked to supply a final version on e-mail. Authors will receive five copies of the journal volume.

The SJBMGS is a nonprofit venture to be distributed on an exchange basis to scholars and libraries.

Copyright: The authors and the editor.

Defining Constantinople's Suburbs through Travel and Geography

Isabel Kimmelfield
Radboud University Nijmegen

Introduction

It is challenging to define the nature and limits of late antique suburbs. The words '*suburbanus*', 'προάστεια', and their variants appear throughout Latin and Greek texts of late antiquity, but it is not always clear how we should interpret these terms and the regions, settlements, and buildings to which they refer. Most broadly, suburbs can be defined as settlements located near enough to a city that they are closely connected to it (through trade and travel), but distant or separate enough that they cannot be considered extensions of the city proper. If this is an ambiguous definition, it reflects the fluid definitions suggested indirectly by sources from the Byzantine period. These sources indicate that the identification of certain regions as 'suburbs' should often be considered more the result of a 'state of mind' than of geographical conditions.[1] Dividing lines like walls can help to determine the point at which the city ended and the suburbs began (although they should not be taken as absolute limits), but outer limits are harder to determine. Scholars wishing to understand what role these regions played in the cities with which they were associated and in the minds of contemporary inhabitants must wrestle with these difficulties of definition and seek creative approaches to clarify the impressions left by late antique sources.

This paper considers these challenges as they relate to the suburbs

---

[1] Champlin 1982: 97. Champlin here quotes H.J. Dyos' 1961 study on the development of modern suburbs in the nineteenth century, but notes that this observation holds equally true for Roman suburbs, as, indeed, it does for Byzantine suburbs.

of Constantinople and, in doing so, it seeks to offer some reflections on the ways in which various conceptions of geography, space, and spatial practice can inform late antique suburban studies. This approach takes inspiration in part from Luke Lavan's work on the applications of theories of space and spatial practice to late antique archaeology, although it embraces also 'rhetorical descriptions of cities' and their symbolic implications in addition to the 'anecdotes' of 'everyday activities' that Lavan seeks to unpack.[2] These rhetorical descriptions offer important evidence of the conceptual role of Constantinople's suburban regions, indicating how they functioned in the urban, religious, and imperial images of the city.

The symbolic role of the suburbs is particularly crucial given that our knowledge of Constantinople's suburbs relies largely on textual sources alone, which provide little detailed information about the physical layout of these suburbs, their inhabitants, or infrastructure. Indeed, these sources often contain little elaboration beyond a brief reference to a named suburb or suburban site, resulting in speculative modern maps of names located in blank space, mostly located along the shores of the Bosporos and the Sea of Marmara (leaving us to speculate to what extent the inland regions were 'suburbanised'). Some of these sites were built up to a considerable degree, such as Sykai or Chalkedon (both of which enjoyed varying degrees of independence from Constantinople at different points in time), while others appear as sites of imperial palaces or religious foundations (such as Sophianai or the Michaelion). The Hebdomon and Hiereia on the European and Asian sides respectively were important stations in imperial processions and military campaigns, as well as imperial retreats. Taking the broadest possible definition of 'suburbs', I have counted over forty named sites, with some taking different names or defined in different manners at different times. Below I will explore some methods that can be used to clarify further our understanding of the roles and definitions of Constantinople's suburbs in an effort to create a more nuanced picture of how Byzantine Constantinople existed within its environs throughout its history.

---

[2] Lavan 2013:187.

Geography, Movement, and Lines of Sight

I will consider in particular three elements of the suburbs of Constantinople: the geography of the land in which they and the city proper lay, the mode and reasons for movement through suburban regions, and the lines of sight that connected the city and the suburbs across long distances. Line of sight is a concept that has been employed frequently in analyses of individual urban monuments in antiquity and late antiquity, as well as a commonly considered factor in modern urban and architectural design.[3] In this paper, I wish to apply it to Constantinople's city and suburbs on a large scale, considering long lines of sight and their impact on contemporary perceptions and conceptions of the urban and suburban landscape. Together these three factors, geography, movement, and lines of sight, influenced the degree to which the suburbs were familiar to Constantinopolitans, allowing these regions to play meaningful symbolic as well as practical roles in urban life.

These three factors are intertwined, with geography influencing the ease and mode of travel, while both geography and travel influence possible lines of sight. The geography of Constantinople had a tremendous impact on urban and suburban development over the centuries, providing both advantages and challenges to inhabitants within and around the city. Roughly triangular in shape, Constantinople was surrounded by water to the north, south, and east and maintained many connections to its environs by water travel – often a much faster mode of transport than those available by land. Thus, even as the water ringing the city separated Constantinople from its immediate surroundings, it also provided a fast route to access the numerous coastal settlements that existed along both shores of the Bosporos, the Golden Horn, and the northern shore of the Sea of Marmara.[4]

---

[3] See, for example, Bernard Frischer's recent work on the Horologium of Augustus and the Ara Pacis using 3D computer modelling to test lines of sight associated with meteorological and time conditions. Frischer, Filwalk 2013.

[4] Wendy Mayer has made a compelling argument for the integration of the surrounding waters into the urban landscape of Constantinople, in particular in relation to liturgical and processional practice. Mayer notes in particular the emphasis in homilies and orations describing transmarine processions on the visual impact of torch-lit pro-

At the same time, walls, towers, open stretches of water, and the hilly nature of the land around the city provided opportunities to view the city even from some distance away, and to view the suburbs from within the city. These views linked the city and its suburbs, as they drew the two regions closer to each other, making each aware of activities taking place in the other. Descriptions of or references to such views appear in such diverse texts as ekphrastic descriptions of the city and its monuments, chronicles of sieges, saints' lives, and descriptions of religious and imperial ceremonies. This suggests the degree to which the Constantinopolitans conceived of their city and its surroundings in terms of lines of sight rather than strict divisions of distance (a distant mountain is more familiar visually than a closer valley). Maps made today of Constantinople and its environs (often lacking in topographical indicators) can sometimes be a deceptive means of judging the degree to which a site should be considered 'suburban'. Taking into account lines of sight and relative ease of travel on the ground and by water can clarify the perspectives of the Byzantines themselves when they referred to the 'suburbs of the city'.

Approaches to Defining the Suburbs through Language and Distance

The word προάστεια is generally translated as 'suburbs' or 'suburban estates'. It refers literally to the area 'before the town', 'ἄστυ'. 'Ἄστυ' refers to the 'public' or 'lower' part of a city, that is, the region occupied by the majority of the town-dwellers, contrasted with the raised and highly fortified acropolis. The 'προαστία' or 'προάστεια' are thus the regions before or beyond this. Προάστειον (together with the form πρὸ ἄστεως) appears in Byzantine sources referring to diverse types of extra-urban settlement, ranging from imperial retreats and villa estates to a more general usage apparently indicating settlements outside of but close to the city. It sometimes also qualifies the location of a site like a

---

cessions over water at night – a sight which could be viewed both from the walls of Constantinople, and from the sides of hills. This again suggests the importance (and symbolic significance) to Constantinopolitans of 'lines of sight' across and beyond the city centre. Mayer 1998: 463.

monastery or a game park. At least once, the word προαστῖται appears, indicating the inhabitants of a suburb, suggesting year-round occupation rather than simply seasonal or pleasure retreats.[5] Indeed, in many ways, some suburbs would have appeared very urban as the largest suburban settlements around Constantinople were highly developed, especially in the early Byzantine period, and could contain churches, baths, and porticoes.

The problem therefore remains to determine where such settlements ceased to be considered suburban extensions of Constantinople's urban landscape and become independent urban regions. In part, this is an issue of proximity: at a certain distance from the city, usually about a day's journey away (on land 20-30km, by sea in good weather, much further), sites are no longer referred to by Byzantine writers as suburban, suggesting distance as one form of definition. This is seen, for instance, in Procopius' *Buildings*, in which Book 1 is explicitly described as treating Justinian's buildings in Constantinople and its suburbs (ἐπί τε Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ τῶν ἐκείνη προαστείων).[6] Procopius later returns to the wider neighbourhood of Constantinople in Thrace in Book 4, which is to say, the city's deeper hinterland rather than its suburban region. The dividing line between those sites that appear in Book 1 and those that appear in Book 4 is generally around 20km.[7] Indeed, at Constantinople, the distance beyond which sites apparently ceased to be considered suburban is even closer than an average day's journey for a single person on foot (between 24 and 32km).[8] Instead, it is closer to the

---

[5] *Vita S. Danielis*: 26.5, p. 27. This word also appears in Stephen of Byzantium's *Ethnica*, possibly dating from a similar period (late fifth, early sixth century) to the *Life* of St Daniel, but the word seems otherwise very rare. Stephen of Byzantium: 139-40.

[6] Procopius: II.i.1, p. 96.

[7] Interestingly, discussion of the coastal land route from the city to the west (the Via Egnatia) is placed in Book 4, despite the section of road repaired by Justinian lying closer to the city than many of the popular suburban retreats listed in Book 1 (most of which were accessed by water). This may suggest a reckoning that was skewed toward coastal sites with water-access – which constituted the majority of named Constantinopolitan suburbs.

[8] Leyerle 2000: 460-1.

distance an army on foot could march in a day (20-24km).[9] This may suggest a defensive attitude toward the area around Constantinople from its earliest years as a capital (from the fourth century the city already suffered attacking armies marching from Thrace as far as the suburbs). Such an interpretation is supported by numerous references in texts to the encampment of advancing attacking armies at one day's distance from the walls (where they would sometimes stay for a time, periodically conducting raids of the extramural regions of the city): in this interval before the actual attack on the city proper, inhabitants of the region had an opportunity to retreat within the defensive walls.[10]

Evidence of Frequency of Travel between Suburbs and City

Another important element that drew settlements firmly within the suburban sphere was the frequency of traffic between a suburb and the city. Some suburbs enjoyed regular traffic due to their location on a major route to the city, such as the Hebdomon or Hieriea. Other times, the suburb itself drew travellers from the city and beyond, often due to the presence of important religious sites or holy figures. Churches, shrines, and monasteries, some of them apparently independent of larger settlements, served as foci of pilgrimage and processions around Constantinople. Early examples include the Church of Sts Peter and Paul at Rouphianai, the Church of the Macabees in Elaia, and the Church of St Thomas at Drypia, as well as the Churches of St John the Evangelist and St John the Baptist at the Hebdomon.[11] Regular travel also took place in the opposite

---

[9] MacGeer 1995: 340-1.

[10] See, for example, the Avar encampment at Melantias, (exact site unknown, but estimated at some 20km from the city, north of Büyükçekmece), from which point the attackers made sallies 'as far as the walls' for some time before attacking the city proper. *Chronicon Paschale*: I, 717. Similarly, when Isaakios and Alexios Komnenos rebelled and rode on Constantinople, they camped at Schiza, about 19km from the city and not far from Melantias. Anna Komnene: II.6.10, p. 72.

[11] All of these appear as the endpoints of liturgical procession in the fourth and fifth centuries. The Church of St Michael the Archangel (the Michaelion) at Hestiai is also identified by Sozomen as a healing shrine he himself has visited. PG 67:940-1. In the *Life* of Daniel the Stylite Daniel's disciple, Sergios, seeks to make a pilgrimage to the monastery of the Akoimetoi, located at Eirenaion (see below, n.14). The develop-

direction: farmers bringing in crops to sell at daily markets in the city or residents of monasteries travelling into the city for a day on errands. The very brevity of such trips – most completed within a day – further emphasises the suburban rather than rural nature of the dwelling places of these extramural inhabitants. It suggests familiarity between the suburbs and the city: they were within each other's sphere of reference and played a regular part in each other's daily routines.

These types of daily connections to the city are less well-recorded in surviving sources than the more exceptional and decorous events that took place during religious or imperial ceremonial processions. Nonetheless, brief passages in sources indicate the routine nature of travel within and to and from the suburbs – and the infrastructure required to support such travel. The fifth-century *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae* explicitly states that the city was connected to its thirteenth region of Sykai, across the Golden Horn, by 'frequent ferries' (*navigiis frequentibus*).[12] Elsewhere we find references to regular ferries not only across the Golden Horn, but also connecting the city to points further up the Bosporos. In the late-twelfth- or early-thirteenth-century *Life* of Leontios of Strumitza, later Patriarch of Jerusalem, Leontios, then a young monk at a monastery on the Asian side of the Bosporos, travels into Constantinople for a day on an errand for his abbot. Delayed in the city, he finds upon reaching the waterfront that it is too late in the day and he is unable to find 'a boat that regularly sailed upstream towards these places' (πλοιαρίῳ συνήθως πρὸς τὰ ἐκεῖσε ἀνιόντι).[13] In the *Life* of Daniel the Stylite, the monk Sergios, travelling from Constantinople north up the Bosporos, boards a boat 'with many others, men and women' (μετὰ καὶ ἄλλων πολλῶν ἀνδρῶν τε καὶ γυναικῶν), again suggesting the presence of a Bosporos ferry (this time as early as the fifth century).[14]

---

ment of fourth-century extramural churches at Constantinople may to a degree have supported a type of processional (extra-)urban Christian worship that reflected that which had developed around Rome's largely extramural early Christian topography. Baldovin 1987: 180.

[12] Notitia: 95-6.

[13] Life of Leontios: 12.10, p. 46.

[14] *Vita S. Danielis*: 22.17-18, p. 23; Dawes, Baynes, trans. 1977: 19. Sozomen's description of the Michaelion's distance from the city also suggests the presence of a

There are even fewer references to regular travel made by farmers. But in accounts of sieges the degree to which the walled city relied on surrounding farms to feed it becomes clear, providing implicit evidence for the daily markets that must have existed in Constantinople – and the local trade that supplied them. During the Avar siege in 626, for example, the Avar vanguard made sallies as far as the walls of the city which 'prevented anyone from going out or collecting provisions for animals at all'. Later, after ten days had passed without sight of the enemy, a party escorted by soldiers was sent out 'ten miles distant' to harvest crops to feed the city.[15] If such dangerous missions were deemed necessary even under threat of attack after only ten days of the siege, it suggests that during peace time the city was supplied far more frequently – likely daily – from farms in its suburban belt. This inference is supported by Johannes Koder's work on the provisioning of the city, which posits the existence of market gardens occupying land immediately outside the Theodosian Walls and across the Bosporos. Koder's land area estimates are based on the distance that could be covered on foot to transport goods from fields to urban markets in two hours (6-7km), allowing farmers to travel there and back easily in one day.[16]

Views and Interactions between the Suburbs and the City

Familiarity would have been further reinforced through lines of sight. Procopius, praising the beauty of Constantinople in his encomium to Justinian's building projects, describes 'the woods and the lovely meadows and all the other details of the opposite shore which lie open to view from the city' (καὶ τὰ ἄλλα τῆς ἀντιπέρας ἠπείρου ἐνδεικνύμενος ὑποκείμενα τῇ τῆς πόλεως ὄψει).[17] In Procopius' text the view of the pleasant suburbs simply highlights the beauty of the city itself by providing it with an attractive background. But views of the suburbs could

---

fifth-century ferry given its reference to the distance (35 stadia) doubling if one makes a circuit between the two points (ἑβδομήκοντα δὲ καὶ πρὸς κύκλῳ περιοδεύοντι τὸν διὰ μέσου πορθμόν), with 'πορθμόν' possibly referring to a set ferry route. PG 67:940.

[15] *Chronicon Paschale*: I, 717; Whitby, Whitby, trans. 1989: 171.

[16] Koder 1995: 53.

[17] Procopius: I.v. 7, p. 59.

also play more active practical or symbolic roles. This is largely seen in a military or defensive context, as part of any late antique city's defences was the ability to see dangers from a distance.

At Constantinople, this defensive advantage was provided not only through direct views, but also in the middle Byzantine period through a long-range warning system of mountain-top beacons.[18] These stretched out in nine posts to the east across Anatolia, with the closest to Constantinople located on Mount Auxentios on the Asian side. A final beacon was located within the imperial palace complex at the Church of the Theotokos of the Pharos, but Mount Auxentios would have had the widest visibility in the area. Although this mountain, modern Kayışdağı, lies 16km from the city centre, it is 438 meters tall and readily visible from most points of the city and its nearest suburbs (including the important imperial suburb of the Hebdomon). Such a prominent location would have ensured that wherever the court was located, either in the city or in its immediate environs, they would be immediately alerted should the warning of an attack on the eastern frontier arrive. Indeed, Mount Auxentios would have been the most visible beacon even within parts of the city as Pharos was located on the southern end of the tip of the city, where the land slopes down toward the sea, making it difficult to view from inland.

The impact of the sight of the signal beacon being lit is suggested by a censorious story against Michael III related in several Byzantine chronicles as well as in the *De ceremoniis* of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos. According to this story, while participating in the chariot races at the hippodrome of St Mamas (modern Beşiktaş), Michael was disturbed by the lighting of the beacons. The *De ceremoniis* does not specify Michael's location, but the *Synopsis* of John Skylitzes specifies that the emperor was in the midst of a race when the Pharos beacon was lit, distracting his spectators.[19] Pharos, located on the opposite side of the acropolis from St Mamas, may not have been directly visible to Michael or his audience, but the beacon at Mount Auxentios would likely have been just visible on the horizon. In any event, concerned that this sight

---

[18] On this, see Pattenden 1983.
[19] Skylitzes: 108.

would cause the citizens to become 'distressed and not come out to the hippodrome to see [his] driving the horses', Michael ordered that the beacons were no longer to be lit.[20] Regardless of its accuracy, this story suggests that the meaning of the beacons was considered to be widely-known among the populace and would not only have signalled the defenders of the city to take action, but would also have affected the civilian inhabitants of the city – and its suburbs. Although the threat to the city indicated by so long-range a beacon would likely not have been imminent, nonetheless it would have warned those living outside the city walls that a retreat within the fortified city might soon be necessary.[21]

When the enemy was located much closer to the city, lines of sight became even more meaningful to a watchful populace behind the defensive walls. Attacking armies could also make use of lines of sight for strategic purposes. During the Avar siege, the Avars, located at Sykai, made contact with their Persian allies encamped at Chrysopolis through fire signals.[22] These signals must also have been visible to the Byzantines within the city, and would have had the double consequence of communicating with the Persians and serving as a terrifying reminder to the Byzantines of the closeness of the enemy to the walls, even through the night when no fighting was taking place. The impact of the sight of enemy fires was also employed strategically by Andronikos Komnenos during his usurpation of Alexios II: after he camped above Chalkedon, Choniates writes that Andronikos lit many fires through the night, more than were necessary for his troops, in order to give the appearance of a larger army, and in an effort to lure supporters to his side from Constantinople: 'In causing them to look out in the direction of the straits to see what was going on, Andronikos hoped to have them come down to the shore or ascend the hills so that even from afar he might signal

---

[20] *Book of Ceremonies*: 493.

[21] Skylitzes states that 'those who lived in the countryside' (οἱ τῶν χωρῶν κάτοικοι), upon learning of an attack (via the beacons) would retreat into walled fortresses. This likely refers to those who lived further afield than the suburbs of Constantinople, but nonetheless indicates the general knowledge of the meaning of the beacons. Skylitzes: 108.

[22] *Chronicon Paschale*: I, 717-8.

them and win them over.' (ὡς τὰ ἀνὰ χεῖρας προεμένους ἔργα εἰς τὴν περαίαν τείνειν τὸ ὄμμα ἀκταῖς τε καὶ γηλόφοις προσιόντας τῆς πόλεως καὶ πόρρωθεν ὄντα Ἀνδρόνικον ἐπισπᾶσθαι οἶον τοῖς νεύμασιν) His strategy proved successful: a testament as much to the power that could be gained by exploiting urban/suburban lines of sight as to Andronikos' personal popularity.[23]

Fire's advantage for exploiting lines of sight lies in its visibility even across long distances. Given that Constantinople was surrounded on three sides by water, such signalling was often the only way to communicate from outside the walls with those within – whether to offer warnings to defenders or to chip away at their morale. On the land-side of the city, however, a different type of interaction was possible. The land directly outside of the walls appears in many places to have consisted of open plains, likely interspersed with fields supplying the city with fresh vegetables. In the middle period, part of the land to the northwest of the city appears to have been designated the Exo-Philopation, an imperial game park, while to the south appears to have been located the Aretai park, an imperial game park and pleasure garden. Byzantine sources tend to mention only the plains or the pleasure grounds – not the crop fields. These are attested instead in texts by foreign visitors, such as the twelfth-century crusader Odo of Deuil, who, in addition to describing the extensive game parks outside the city, also noted that '[b]elow the walls lies open land, cultivated by plough and hoe, which contains gardens that furnish the citizens with all kinds of vegetables'.[24]

The Byzantine sources, meanwhile, tend to frame descriptions of this immediately extramural region within the context of its imperial or military significance. The open plain was a site on which attacking armies would appear – at times directly addressing defenders to call upon them to surrender. In the later middle Byzantine period in particular these interactions come to the fore – an unsurprising development given the shift in the late eleventh century of the main imperial residence from the Great Palace in the city centre to the Palace of Blachernai on the city walls. From this point on the walls, the land dips away to the south into

---

[23] Niketas Choniates: 246; Magoulias, trans. 1984: 138.
[24] Odo of Deuil: 65.

the Lykos river valley before rising again. Such a landscape provided an extensive view over the extramural plains – and an excellent stage for both visual and verbal engagements between the opposing armies.

This type of engagement is described at length in Michael Attaleiates' account of the revolt of Leo Tornikios against Constantine IX Monomachos in 1047 and again in Niketas Choniates' account of the revolt of Alexios Branas against Isaakios Angelos in 1187. In the later revolt, Branas is described explicitly as making use of the hills northwest of Blachernai on the Golden Horn by sending troops up on these hills (from where 'all the sections of the City facing north' were visible). Here the sun flashed on their armour and weaponry, striking the City's populace, gathered on the hills of the City, with awe.[25] In the earlier revolt, Leo brought his army up to the walls of Constantinople where, unlike other besieging armies (such as the Avars and the Arabs in the seventh century), 'he pitched his camp in full view of the defending army' (χάρακά τε βάλλεται καὶ στρατοπεδεύει λαμπρῶς).[26] Attaleiates emphasises the impact of the visual element of this attack, describing how Leo's advance presented a 'frightening and awesome sight' (φοβερά τις καὶ καταπληκτική) to those who fled to safety within the walls of the city as Leo's army pillaged the suburbs.[27] Constantine is described as sitting in the Blachernai palace, 'deploring the rabid madness that had seized his own domain and watching as it plunged into ultimate destruction' (ἤλγει τὴν οἰκείαν ἐπικράτειαν οὕτω λυττῶσαν καὶ μαινομένη νἔστι δ᾽οἷς καὶ τὰ ἔσχατα πάσχουσαν καθορῶν).[28] The destruction of the suburbs here acts as a microcosm of the larger upheaval caused by a revolt against the emperor. The emperor in his palace overlooking these suburbs is given a front-row seat to witness this chaos. Here he is shown penned in, unable to exercise control over or to protect even the areas just beyond the city walls – the suburbs that provided both pleasure and sustenance to the city and its inhabitants.[29]

---

[25] Niketas Choniates: 380.
[26] Michael Psellos: v. 2, VI.107, p. 20; Sewter, trans. 1953: 157.
[27] Michael Attaleiates: 6.3, p. 40.
[28] Michael Attaleiates: 6.4, p. 40.
[29] A very different response to the destruction of the suburbs took place thirty years

Constantine's helplessness in the situation is thus enhanced by this exchange between attackers and defenders at the border between intra- and extramural space and the familiar closeness of the immediately extramural suburbs heightens the seriousness of the threat to imperial authority posed by the attacking army. At the same time, we can see how perceptions of the suburbs of the cosmopolitan capital could differ depending on the context: in the throes of a siege, with the enemy at the gates, directly challenging the emperor's power, the suburbs are cut off from the defensive city, serving as reminders of how dire the situation is. But in peace-time, views and travel stretch further, and so the city's suburbs are expanded once again, and with them the urban and urbane influence of Constantinople.

Symbolically Viewing the Suburbs

A contrasting view of an emperor is presented when we find him at his ease in the suburbs, able to exercise his authority and demonstrate his military and physical skill and strength. Such a description is found in Nikolaos Mesarites' late twelfth-century ekphrasis of the Church of the Holy Apostles. Here Mesarites describes the view from the roof, the highest point of a church he locates in the 'heart' of the city. From here, he tells us, one can see out to the Philopation, so named for the delight men take in frequenting it (προσφιλῶς πατεῖσθαι προσωνυμουμένην). Rather than describing the landscape of this park in detail, Mesarites presents a tableau of the emperor in action in this region. First he directly enjoins readers to 'See, the ruler has gone out for the salvation of his people and he is staying in the Emperor's Tents, which are opposite the

---

later when Nikephoros Bryennios attempted to overthrow Michael VII. Bryennios' brother, sent to march on Constantinople, attempted to incur fear in the inhabitants by marching past the walls in formation (παρῆλθε συντεταγμένος ὡς τῷ βασιλεῖ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πολίταις ἐκ τοῦ προφανοῦς διοπτικώτερον φανησόμενος), but his subsequent burning of the suburbs across the Golden Horn so turned the populace against the revolt that he was forced to retreat. It was important for a would-be usurper to demonstrate his control of suburban space, but he could not be seen as wantonly destroying it. Michael Attaleiates: 31.10, p. 458.

palace [of Blachernai] and a little distance from it'.[30] Here, he explains, it is the custom for the Byzantine army to muster before going on campaign, 'as though coming from diverse springs in lands everywhere into one meeting of the waters, and when it has formed one river which will sweep aside everything that comes in its way'. He states that from the roof of the church, the whole army can be seen, but he then switches subject abruptly to the hunt, noting that the park is frequently used for such pursuits, the action of which is fully evident to the viewer atop the church – just as are the armies of the emperor. This juxtaposes the emperor's activities at war and in the hunt: he is a man able to tame both the barbarous people and the barbarous animals found beyond the walls of the civilised city. Viewers within the city, situated on the roof of one of its most important churches, may witness the proof of the emperor's power through demonstrations in the suburbs – a region close enough to the city to allow such views, but extramural and thus able to stand in as a representative for the greater world – and the borderlands of the empire itself.

This symbolism of the emperor as defender of the city through his actions outside its walls appears likewise in the tenth-century *De ceremoniis*. Here, Constantine VII instructs his son, Romanos, on the preparations to be made by an emperor going on campaign. One important action takes place just as the emperor is setting sail across the Sea of Marmara towards the port of Pylai on the Gulf of Nikaea.

'When he is at sufficient distance from the imperial harbour to look upon the City [καὶ ἀπὸ ἱκανοῦ διαστήματος τοῦ βασιλείου ὅρμου γενόμενος, ὥστε αὐτὸν ἐπισκοπεῖν τὴν πόλιν], he rises from his couch and stands facing east, raising his hands heavenwards and, having made the sign of the Cross three times with his hand over the City, he prays to God saying as follows: "Lord Jesus Christ, my God, in your hands I place this city of yours. Preserve it from all the adversities and difficulties befalling it, from civil strife, and foreign attack. Keep it impregnable and unassailed, for we place our hopes in you. You are lord of mercy and father of compassion and God of all consolation, and yours is the power

---

[30] Nikolaos Mesarites: 864.

of mercy and salvation and deliverance from temptations and dangers, now and forever. Amen.'[31]

Again, we find the visual emphasised here, made possible by the geography of the city and movement through this landscape: departing by sea, the emperor at a certain point is able to view the entirety of his city stretching across the horizon – the perfect point at which to bless the city and to entrust its safekeeping into the hands of God in the absence of its emperor.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to present some of the 'states of mind' that could influence both the identification of certain regions as 'suburban' by the Byzantines, as well as how closely connected contemporary inhabitants of both the city proper and its surroundings felt the two regions to be. The strict terms of distance undoubtedly played a role, albeit one that was significantly influenced by the nature of the geography of the land and water over which this distance spread. But the more elusive element of familiarity was also key, and this familiarity was not a constant: it was strengthened in times of peace and prosperity, but could be tested in times of war and rebellion. At times, the dividing lines of the walls and waterways could feel very deeply entrenched indeed, as suggested by the violence against the extramural inhabitants perpetrated by the city-dwellers after the former supported Branas' rebellion against Isaakios Angelos.[32] To understand these fluctuations it is important to read sources with a deeper awareness of the impact that both fixed elements like geography and variables like travel and warfare could have

---

[31] *Book of Ceremonies*: 475. Moffatt and Tall translate 'ἵσταται κατ᾽ ἀνατολὰς' as '[he] stands facing east', which would not make sense given the location of the boat as it sailed away to the east of the city: the city would lie to the west. The phrase may instead refer to the emperor's location in the 'east' end of the boat (its prow as it departed the city), or it may be an error in the text. A similar confusion of location is found in Michael Psellos' *Chronographia*, in which the Church of Ss Kosmas and Damianos is described as located 'before the walls of the City, towards the rising of the sun [i.e. to the east]' – an impossible location given the waters of the Bosporos to the east of the city. Michael Psellos, v. 1, IV.31, pp. 71-2.

[32] Nichetas Choniates: 391.

on contemporary Byzantines' perceptions of their urban and suburban spatial environment.

One fact that comes clearly through the sources, however, is that when looking at their city, the Byzantines did not limit their gaze to the confines of the walls. Although the city centre was unequivocally the heart of the city and home to its most important features, the suburbs were nonetheless a familiar part of life for Constantinopolitans. Either through views or through personal journeys made to these regions, inhabitants of the city proper were well acquainted with the surroundings of their city, and for the wealthier classes, these regions were often second homes, extensions of urban living. Even those who did not own property in the suburbs might have occasion to visit them on religious processions or personal pilgrimages. And for those who lived outside the city, the great capital so close by was a natural magnet as a mercantile, religious, and political centre, as well as a place of safety in war-time.

Studying the locations of the city's suburbs on a map, the region can at times appear to be a flat field, studded with approximated sites of buildings and settlements mentioned in sources. But it is important to take into account the varying geography and the constant movement and viewing that took place in this region: despite the distances and bodies of water separating these sites, they were not necessarily as isolated as the points on the map might suggest. At least a small network of roads must have connected many of them on land – and the waterways of the city served as the greatest highway of all. At the same time, points apparently close on a map might have been separated by mountains or valleys, making them more 'distant' for travellers. Bringing this active, visual element to bear on the sources offers an enriched appreciation of the degree to which the city's suburbs functioned as part of Constantinopolitan life, and the various symbolic roles the regions visible from the city could play in different contexts.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Annae Comnenae Alexias (Corpus Historiae Fontium Byzantinae, XL/1-2, Series Berolinensis). Diether Roderich Reinsch and A. Kambylis, eds. Berlin, 2001.

Chronicon Paschale. Vol. 1. Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae. L. Dindorf, ed. Bonn, 1832.

Chronicon Paschale 284-628 AD. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby, trans. Liverpool, 1989.

Constantine Porphyrogennetos, The Book of Ceremonies. 2 vols. Ann Moffatt and Maxene Tall, trans. Canberra, 2012.

Ioannis Scylitzae synopsis historianum. Hans Thurn, ed. CFHB 5; Berlin and New York, 1973.

The Life of Leontios, Patriarch of Jerusalem. Dimitris Tsougarakis, ed., trams. Leiden, 1993.

Michael Attaleiates. *The History.* Anthony Kaldellis and Dimitris Krallis, trans. Dumbarton Oaks, 2012.

Michael Psellos. *Chronographie ou Histoire d'un siècle de Byzance (976-1077)*. Émile Renauld, ed., trans. Paris, 1926-1928, repr. 1967.

Niketas Choniates. *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*. Aloysius van Dieten, ed. Berlin, 1975.

Niketas Choniates. *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*. Harry J. Magoulias, trans. Detroit, 1984.

Nikolaos Mesarites. 'Description of the Church of the Apostles at Constantinople'. Glanville Downey, ed., trans. *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 47.6 (Philadelphia, 1957): 855-924.

Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae. John Matthews, trans., in *Two Romes: Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity*. Lucy Grig and Gavin Kelly, eds. (New York, 2012): 81-115.

Odo of Deuil. *De profectione Ludovici VII in Orientem: The Journey of Louis VII to the East*. Virginia Ginerick Berry, ed., trans. New York, 1948.

Procopius of Caesarea. *Procopius*. 7 vols. H.B. Dewing, trans. Cambridge MA, 1914-1940.

Sozomen. *Historia Ecclesiastica*. PG 62:843-1630. Patrologia Graeca. J.-P. Migne, ed. 217 vols. Paris, 1844-1864.

Stephani Byzantii ethnicorum quae supersunt. Augustus Meineke, ed. Berlin, 1849.

Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies. Elizabeth Dawes and Norman Baynes, trans., ed. London, 1948, repr. 1977.

Vita S. Danielis Stylitae, in *Les saints stylites*. Hippolyte Delehaye, ed. Paris, 1923.

Secondary Literature

Baldovin, John F. *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development and Meaning of Stational Liturgy*. Rome, 1987.

Champlin, Edward. 'The *suburbium* of Rome'. *American Journal of Ancient History* 7 (1982): 97-117.

Frischer, Bernard and John Fillwalk. 'A computer simulation to test the Buchner thesis: The relationship of the Ara Pacis and the meridian in the Campus Martius, Rome'. *Digital Heritage International Congress (DigitalHeritage)*. (IEEE, 2013): 341-345.

Koder, Johannes. 'Fresh Vegetables for the Capital', in *Constantinople and its Hinterland: Papers from the Twenty-Seventh Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Oxford April 1993*, Cyril Mango and Gilbert Dagron, eds. (Aldershot, 1995): 49-56.

Lavan, Luke. 'Late Antique Urban Topography: From Architecture to Human Space', in *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology.* Luke Lavan and William Bowden, eds. (Leiden, 2003): 171-195.

Leyerle, Blake. 'Communication and Travel', in *The Early Christian World*, vol. 1, Philip F. Esler, ed. (London and New York, 2000): 452-474.

MacGeer, Eric. *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*. Dumbarton Oaks, 1995.

Mayer, Wendy. 'The Sea Made Holy: The Liturgical Function of the Waters Surrounding Constantinople'. *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 112 (1998): 459-468.

Pattenden, Philip. 'The Byzantine Early Warning System'. *Byzantion* 53 (1983): 258-299.