

BYZANTINE

Sarah Bassett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Constantinople* (Cambridge Companion to the Ancient World). pp. 434, 30 ills. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. ISBN: 9781108632614, hardback £79.99; ISBN 9781108705578, paperback £26.99.

The city of Constantinople, which played a central role in the eastern Mediterranean as the capital of the Byzantine empire, has been the subject of very many scholarly studies from the sixteenth century onwards, and this has generated a vast number of books, papers and other contributions in many languages. Thus, compiling a synthesis of this massive body of work is a daunting task, but is here attempted by bringing together 20 historians, art historians and archaeologists to give a thematically structured overview of current knowledge.

The editor of the volume, Sarah Bassett, is a leading American art historian working on Byzantine Constantinople well known for her excellent book on the re-use of Classical sculpture in the city's public spaces and buildings. In this edited book she has achieved a major contribution to wider understanding of Byzantine Constantinople, providing the closest work currently in print to an undergraduate textbook giving an overview of current historical and art historical knowledge about it.

After an informative and considered editorial introduction, the contents of the book are wide-ranging, with chapters grouped into larger themes. To summarise by subject, the actual chapter titles often being slightly vague or somewhat lengthy: Part I on 'The Place and its People', consists of chapters on the ancient town of Byzantium, by Thomas Russell; urban development and decline by Albrecht Berger; and the population of Constantinople by Anthony Kaldellis. Part II on 'Practical Matters', includes a chapter the hydraulic infrastructure and water use by James Crow; food supply by Raymond Van Dam; building and maintenance by Enrico Zanini; and defences of the city by Eric McGeer. Part III concerns the 'Urban Experience', including chapters on the imperial dimension of Constantinople by Paul Magdalino; 'residential Constantinople' by Berger and Philipp Niewöhner; the commercial city by Koray Durak; churches and ecclesiastical practice by Vasileios Marini; monastic life by Dirk Krausmüller; and death and burial by Mark J. Johnson. Part IV 'Institutions and Activities' includes chapters

on administration, by Andreas Gkoutzioukostas; the city's philanthropic institutions by Timothy S. Miller; schools and learning by Niels Gaul; and entertainment by Marcus Rautman. Lastly, Part V, 'Encountering Constantinople', covers the reception of the Byzantine city, through chapters on medieval visitors by Nike Koutrakou; pilgrimage by Annemarie Weyl Carr; the early modern perception of the city by Sean Roberts; and finally, the legacy of Byzantine Constantinople in early modern Ottoman Istanbul by Çiğdem Kafescioğlu.

Most chapters are wholly, or very largely, based on written sources, which suits some themes far more than others. Many of chapters also provide excellent summaries of the state of present knowledge of the themes covered. But by no means all are equivalent in style, depth of coverage or originality of analysis. Furthermore, several chapters pay limited attention to what might be considered crucial subjects, while covering others in depth. The latter is, of course, to some extent inevitable in a book such as this, but sometimes is excessive.

The book is very well produced and the cover and illustrations of a high quality, but the first thing that will strike an archaeologist looking at this book is that there are only 30 illustrations. The lack of illustration commensurate to the scale and importance of the city's material, often literally monumental, betokens the overwhelmingly textual treatment of Constantinople here. Even within the limited scope of those illustrations provided, there is no general map of the principal buildings of the city, as found in most general works on Constantinople, except in so far as a few occur in very small scale on Figure 2.1, page 34, designed – in half a page – to show the administrative regions structuring urban space. Several of the other illustrations might have been better chosen, for example the plan of Hagia Sophia in the sixth century, Figure 11.4 on page 184, is out of date, subsequent discoveries having somewhat modified this.

Archaeological evidence only plays a major part in three of the twenty-one chapters, although material relevant to them all is readily available. The lack of bibliographical references to what might be thought key archaeological publications, including those in English, from both the endnotes and, especially, the Further Reading, is surprising. Consequently, *The Cambridge Companion to Constantinople* is a useful addition to the range of overviews of the Byzantine capital and a credit to its editor and publisher. But an overview of the archaeology of Byzantine Constantinople is needed to complement it.

KEN DARK
KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON
ken.dark@kcl.ac.uk