

## RITUAL AND EARTHQUAKES IN CONSTANTINOPLE

Located on the North Anatolian Fault, Constantinople was frequently shaken by earthquakes over the course of its history. This book discusses religious responses to these events between the fourth and the tenth century AD. The church in Constantinople commemorated several earthquakes that struck the city, prescribing an elaborate liturgical rite celebrated annually for each occasion. These rituals were means by which city-dwellers created meaning from disaster and renegotiated their relationships with God and the land around them in the face of its most destabilizing ecological characteristic: seismicity. Mark Roosien argues that ritual and theological responses to earthquakes shaped Byzantine conceptions of God and the environment and transformed Constantinople's self-understanding as the capital of the *oikoumene* and center of divine action in history. The book enhances our understanding of Byzantine Christian religion and culture, and provides a new, interdisciplinary framework for understanding Byzantine views of the natural world.

MARK ROOSIEN is a lecturer in liturgical studies at the Yale University Institute of Sacred Music and Yale Divinity School. He has published in journals such as *Worship* and *Studia Patristica* and translated two award-winning books from Russian by the theologian Sergius Bulgakov (2021 and 2022).

# RITUAL AND EARTHQUAKES IN CONSTANTINOPLE

*Liturgy, Ecology, and Empire*

MARK ROOSIEN

*Yale University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-009-42728-9 — Ritual and Earthquakes in Constantinople  
Mark Roosien  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009427289](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009427289)

DOI: 10.1017/9781009427265

© Mark Roosien 2024

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place  
without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009427265

First published 2024

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

NAMES: Roosien, Mark, author.

TITLE: Ritual and earthquakes in Constantinople : liturgy, ecology, and empire / Mark Roosien,  
Yale University, Connecticut.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, [2024] | Outgrowth of the author's  
thesis (doctoral) – University of Notre Dame, 2018, under the title: The liturgical  
commemoration of earthquakes in late antique Constantinople : at the intersection of ritual,  
environment, and empire. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2024000824 | ISBN 9781009427289 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009427272  
(paperback) | ISBN 9781009427272 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Earthquakes – Religious aspects – Christianity. | Earthquakes – Byzantine  
Empire. | Ritual – Byzantine Empire.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC BT162.E2 R66 2024 | DDC 261.8/8–dc23/eng/20240224  
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024000824>

ISBN 978-1-009-42728-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or  
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will  
remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-009-42728-9 — Ritual and Earthquakes in Constantinople  
Mark Roosien  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

For Sofia Beth Roosien (+April 28, 2011)

Contents

<i>List of Figures and Maps</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	I
1 Earthquakes and Liturgy: Rituals of Sin, Repentance, and Restoration	21
2 Earthquakes and Emperors: Humility and Power	52
3 Beyond Divine Chastisement: Constantinople as a Site of Blessing	75
4 Earthquakes and the Saints: Heavenly Intercessors for Earthly Problems	108
5 Beyond Commemoration: New Approaches to Earthquakes in the Middle Ages	135
Conclusion	162
<i>Appendix A: Earthquake Commemorations from the Prophetologion and the Typikon of the Great Church</i>	170
<i>Appendix B: The Authenticity of the Homily De Terrae Motu Ascribed to John Chrysostom</i>	176
<i>Bibliography</i>	178
<i>Index</i>	201

*Figures and Maps*

**Figure**

- 5.1 Image for September 25 earthquake commemoration *page 153*  
in *Vat. gr. 1613, Menologion of Basil II*, 65. Reproduced  
with the permission of the Vatican Apostolic Library.

**Map**

- I.1 Map of Constantinople in the sixth century. Reproduced *26*  
by permission of Cambridge University Press.

## *Acknowledgments*

This book was conceived one evening in October over a decade ago during an evening vespers service at an Orthodox church in Chicago, in which a “hymn for the earthquake” was chanted. “Which earthquake?” I wondered. Knowing a little about the Byzantine Rite, I surmised that the hymn was probably for an earthquake that struck Constantinople, and which probably took place over a thousand years ago. (That surmise turned out to be correct.) But why? Why would someone at a church in Chicago be singing about an earthquake that happened over a thousand years ago in a place halfway around the world? What began as a bemused question turned into a paper, and that paper turned into a dissertation. Now my inquiry has reached its final form: this book.

I wrote the dissertation at the University of Notre Dame under the direction of Maxwell Johnson and Blake Leyerle. They were instrumental in helping to shape the original configuration of this work and have supported me at every stage of its development. I wish to thank them first and foremost, along with Kimberly Belcher and Robin Jensen, who read the dissertation and offered insights that made it better and helped it grow beyond its original scope.

I spent a year as a Fellow at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music (ISM) in 2019–20, where the project was dissected, reexamined, pieced back together, and more chapters were drafted. Although the COVID-19 pandemic cut short the full academic year of research, it was a wonderful and productive time, thanks to the hospitality of ISM Director Martin Jean, Eben Graves, and the rest of the staff and faculty. I want to single out Teresa Berger, Vasileios Marinis, and Bryan Spinks, as well as my resilient Fellows cohort, who provided good humor, conversation, and critical engagement along the way. My thanks to all of you for your encouragement and camaraderie throughout my time at the ISM.

There are many people from whose insights I have benefitted over the years in discussions about this project, and who deserve to be mentioned by

name: Fr. Stefanos Alexopoulos, Jesse Arlen, Cara Aspesi, Harald Buchinger, Nathan Chase, C. Michael Chin, Roberto De La Noval, David Fagerberg, Margot Fassler, Bishop Daniel Findikyan, Fr. Daniel Galadza, Fr. Peter Galadza, Nina Glibetić, Peter Jeffery, Derek Krueger, Rebecca Luft, Sophie Lunn-Rockcliffe, Andrew Mellas, Clair Mesick, Fr. Elijah Mueller, Fr. Damaskinos Olkinuora, Fr. Alexei Pavlov, Fr. Vitaly Permiakov, Gabriel Radle, Fr. Alexander Rentel, Paul Saieg, Vera Shevzov, Fr. Mark Therrien, Elena Velkova Velkovska, and Robin Darling Young. Special thanks are due to Sysse Engberg, who shared some of her research on the *Prophetologion* with me prior to publication, which proved to be crucial to the book. I am grateful to Michael Sharp and the team at Cambridge University Press for their great kindness and patience, and their determination to bring this book to fruition. Thanks also to the two anonymous readers. All mistakes and oversights are my own.

Finally, thank you to Claire, for everything—for your love, patience, companionship, and your sharp insights. Thanks also to Iva, Danny, and Isaac for bringing me joy, every day.

## Abbreviations

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
BZ	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca
CPG	Clavis Patrum Graecorum
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
FC	Fathers of the Church
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
NPNF	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> . From <i>A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> . Edited by P. Schaff and H. Wace. 28 Volumes in 2 series. Reprint ed. Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1894
OCA	Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 162 Volumes (Paris, 1857–86)
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 Volumes (Paris, 1844–64)
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians

The Greek text of the Old Testament used throughout is the Septuagint edited by A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta: Id est Vetus Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935). English translations of the Septuagint follow A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).