The Bronze Horseman of Justinian in Constantinople

Justinian’s triumphal column was the tallest freestanding column of the premodern world and was crowned with arguably the largest metal equestrian sculpture created anywhere in the world before 1699. The Byzantine empire’s bronze horseman towered over the heart of Constantinople, assumed new identities, spawned conflicting narratives, and acquired widespread international acclaim. Because all traces of Justinian’s column were erased from the urban fabric of Istanbul in the sixteenth century, scholars have undervalued its astonishing agency and remarkable longevity. Its impact in visual and verbal culture was arguably among the most extensive of any Mediterranean monument. This book analyzes Byzantine, Islamic, Slavic, Crusader, and Renaissance historical accounts; medieval pilgrimages; geographic, apocalyptic, and apocryphal narratives; vernacular poetry; Byzantine, Bulgarian, Italian, French, Latin, and Ottoman illustrated manuscripts; Florentine wedding chests; Venetian paintings; and Russian icons to provide an engrossing and pioneering biography of a contested medieval monument during the millennium of its life.

ELENA N. BOECK is Professor of History of Art and Architecture at DePaul University. Her publications explore intellectual exchange in the Mediterranean and unconventional, fascinating forms of engagement with Byzantium’s legacy. She is the author of *Imagining the Byzantine Past: The Perception of History in the Illustrated Manuscripts of Skylitzes and Manasses* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). She held appointments as the Excellence Initiative Professor at Radboud University, and Director of Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks.
The Bronze Horseman of Justinian in Constantinople

The Cross-Cultural Biography of a Mediterranean Monument

ELENA N. BOECK
DePaul University, Chicago
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Acknowledgements

This book began as a small quest to answer a deceptively simple question: why is Justinian’s column represented in a fourteenth-century Bulgarian manuscript? The bronze horseman curiously appears in an illustration in the Vatican Manasses. While that text says a lot about Justinian, it never mentions the column. To answer that original question, I had to solve dozens of new puzzles. This project has been an extraordinarily enjoyable experience and a rewarding intellectual journey into many fields.

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Abbreviations

AB  Analecta Bollandiana
ActaAArtHist  Acta ad archaeologiam et atrium historiam pertinentia
ActaOrHung  Acta orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae
AI  Ars islamica
AJA  American Journal of Archaeology
AJP  American Journal of Philology
Al-Masaq Al-Masaq:  Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean
AnTard  Antiquité tardive
APB  Acta Patristica et Byzantina
ArtB  Art Bulletin
Bildlexicon  Bildlexicon zur Topographie Istanbuls, Wolfgang Müeller-Wiener (Verlag Ernst Wasmuth: Tübingen, 1977)
BMGS  Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies
Byzantion Byzantion:  Revue internationale des études byzantines
BZ  Byzantinische Zeitschrift
CahArch  Cahiers archéologiques
CLAnt  Classical Antiquity
CQ  Classical Quarterly
CRAI  Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres
Diēgēsis peri tēs Hagias Sophias  Narrative on the Construction of Hagia Sophia
DOP  Dumbarton Oaks Papers
GRBS  Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
HUS  Harvard Ukrainian Studies
IJMES  International Journal of Middle East Studies
**List of Abbreviations**

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>JAIC</td>
<td>Journal of the American Institute for Conservation</td>
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<tr>
<td>JEMS</td>
<td>Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JHS</td>
<td>Journal of Hellenic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JLA</td>
<td>Journal of Late Antiquity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JÖB</td>
<td>Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRA</td>
<td>Journal of Roman Archaeology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRAS</td>
<td>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRS</td>
<td>Journal of Roman Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSAH</td>
<td>Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JThS</td>
<td>Journal of Theological Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JWarb</td>
<td>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MÉFRA</td>
<td>Mélanges de l'école française de Rome. Antiquité</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLQ</td>
<td>Modern Language Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>The Numismatic Chronicle [and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBK</td>
<td>Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REArm</td>
<td>Revue des études arméniennes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REB</td>
<td>Revue des études byzantines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESEE</td>
<td>Revue des études sud-est européennes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHR</td>
<td>Revue de l'histoire des religions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSBN</td>
<td>Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici</td>
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<tr>
<td>RSBS</td>
<td>Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBN</td>
<td>Studi bizantini e neoellenici</td>
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<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>Studia Islamica</td>
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<tr>
<td>SymbOslo</td>
<td>Symbolae Osloenses</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAPhA</td>
<td>Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>TM</td>
<td>Travaux et Mémoires</td>
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List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>TODRL</td>
<td>Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury Institutu russkoj literatury Akademii nauk SSSR</td>
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<tr>
<td>VV</td>
<td>Vizantiiskii Vremennik</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZRVI</td>
<td>Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZKunstg</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZPE</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie</td>
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</table>
Transliteration is as much a pragmatic decision as it is an act of ideological valuation. Historical spelling conventions in English often Latinize names and places in Byzantium. I strove to create a balance between widely established conventions in English and fidelity to context. In this book I usually transliterate names and places from Greek rather than settle for their Latinized equivalents, hence Augoustaion rather than Augusteum, Prokopios rather than Procopius. In certain instances, Latinized spelling was deployed in order to reflect a specific cultural context or power relationship, such as the memory of Byzantine historical figures in the medieval Latin cultural imagination, hence Heraclius rather than Herakleios. The same applies to Greek names within a Russian cultural context, hence Epifanii not Epiphanios. For names which have a widely familiar or conventional English form, I consistently used that spelling, hence Constantinople, Constantine, Alexander. I have transliterated Greek and Cyrillic terms and phrases using conventions of what the Library of Congress ironically calls “romanization.”
Selected Timeline of the Triumphal Column of Justinian and Its International Reverberations

542/3 – An equestrian monument from the forum of Theodosios is moved to the Augoustaion and placed at the top of a colossal column, completing Justinian’s forum.

Ca. mid-550s – Prokopios creates the foundational description of the monument in the Buildings.

Ca. 762 – Abbasid caliph Abu Ja’far al-Mansur places an equestrian statue at the tallest, most central point of his new capital Baghdad.

839/40 – The horseman’s grand headgear (toupha) falls, greatly distressing the emperor Theophilos. The toupha is acrobatically reinstalled.

Ca. 915–40 – The column is celebrated as the greatest, foremost wonder of Constantinople by Constantine of Rhodes.

Ca. 1170s. – The triumphal column is commemorated in the French romance Eracle by Gautier d’Arras as the funerary monument of the emperor Heraclius.

Ca. 1200s – The horseman is illustrated in a Byzantine Book of Job as the centerpiece of Job’s beloved city during the time of Job’s greatest agony.

1204 – A member of the Fourth Crusade, Robert de Clari identifies the horseman as Heraclius.
Timeline of the Triumphal Column of Justinian

1204–61 – The monument is preserved in the Latin empire of Constantinople, but all bronze cladding is removed from the column.

Ca. 1280s – First Palaiologan description of the monument. George Pachymeres responds to Prokopios. Two bronze “feathers” fall from the touphα. They are placed in the treasury of Hagia Sophia.

1317 – Emergency restoration of the monument by Andronikos II after the cross fell off the orb. The horseman is secured, new supports created, and the touphα and the orb are regilded.

Ca. 1345 – The horseman is represented for Ivan Alexander of Bulgaria.

After 1360s – Emendations and variant readings in manuscripts of The Travels of Sir John Mandeville focus on futile attempts to secure the orb in the horseman’s hand.

Late fourteenth century – An illustration of the horseman and of Hagia Sophia is commissioned by Epifanii the Wise in Moscow.

Before 1403 – The equestrian sculpture is fastened to its base with chains.

Ca. 1420s – Cristoforo Buondelmonti represents the column in his image of Constantinople.

1420s – The orb falls again.

Ca. 1420s–40s – Cyriac of Ancona reports the Theodosian inscription on the monument. Some Buondelmonti manuscripts are corrected to account for this discovery.

Ca. 1430–5 – The orb is once again placed in the rider’s hand.
### Timeline of the Triumphal Column of Justinian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1453</td>
<td>A report claims that the head of Constantine XI is nailed to the column of Justinian by the Ottomans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1453–5</td>
<td>Mehmed the Conqueror has the equestrian monument removed from the column.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ca. 1450–1500</td>
<td>Artists in Italy reimagine the monument.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1490</td>
<td>Hartmann Schedel claims that the horseman perished in a foreboding meteorological event.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ca. 1520</td>
<td>The column is demolished by the Ottomans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ca. 1550</td>
<td>Pierre Gilles sees and measures remaining fragments of the sculpture before their destruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sixteenth–seventeenth centuries</td>
<td>Icon painters in Russian lands represent the column and the equestrian monument.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late sixteenth century</td>
<td>The equestrian monument is represented in apocalyptic manuscripts at the Ottoman court.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1860s</td>
<td>A Renaissance-period, composite drawing of the monument (now in Budapest) is rediscovered and published. Revival of interest in the visual appearance of the horseman ensues.</td>
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Map of Constantinople