

"Epigraphy, Liturgy, and Imperial Policy on the Justinianic Isthmus"

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Introduction

The earliest investigation of Late Antique period at Isthmia dates to Early Travelers who confused the Fortress at Isthmia with the peribolos of the ancient sanctuary to Poseidon.¹ It was not until R. J. H. Jenkins and H. Megaw excavated the site in the 1932 and 1933 that the remains were properly identified as post-Roman fortification.² Over the last half century fieldwork by O. Broneer, P. Clement, and most recently, T. E. Gregory, P. N. Kardulias, and J. Rife have expanded our understanding of imposing Late Roman fortress and the settlement of Byzantine date.³ In recent years, fieldwork all across the wider Late Roman Isthmus has complemented their efforts at Isthmia and enabled us to place the site in its much enhanced local archaeological and historical context. Work at Kenchreai, at the city of Corinth itself, and several intensive surveys in the Corinthian countryside has revealed the complexity of the Late Antique landscape, and produced an elaborate tapestry of varied land use, settlements, religious architecture, funerary sites, and military installations.⁴ This work presents the Isthmus as an active landscape throughout the 5th and 6th centuries, and has formed a sound foundation for recent synthetic studies of the period by Richard Rothaus and David Pettegrew.⁵

In contrast to this surge of scholarly interest in the Late Roman Isthmus, the epigraphy of the Eastern Corinthia has received little attention especially in comparison to the study of Late Roman inscriptions at Corinth.⁶ The texts from Kenchreai and Isthmia, in particular, require renewed consideration on account of our expanded understanding of both the archaeology and epigraphy of the Late Roman Greece.⁷ This article will begin this task by offering a new interpretation of the Justinianic inscription from Isthmia, and to a lesser extent the inscription of the same date typically associated with the walls of the city of Corinth, and

¹ *Isthmia* V, pp. 1-3; Leake 1883 [1967], vol. 3, pl. 3; Monceaux 1884.

² Jenkins and Megaw 1931/32.

³ *Isthmia* V, pp. 1-4; *Isthmia* IX; Kardulias 2005.

⁴ *Kenchreai* I; *Isthmia* V; Gregory 1985, 1993, 1995; Tartaron et al. 2006 ; Wiseman 1978; Sanders 1999, 2005; Sanders and Slane 2005.

⁵ Rothaus 2000; Pettegrew 2005.

⁶ Walbank and Walbank 2006.

⁷ Feissel and Philippidis-Braat 1985; Feissel 1983, 1987; Sironen 1997; Kiourtzian 2000; The Late Roman texts from Kenchreai are in the process of re-study by Joseph Rife.

will to reintegrate these two texts into recent work done in the Late Antique Corinthia. A new interpretation of these texts benefits from recent work on Late Roman and Byzantine inscriptions in Greece, and the growing theoretical interest in how we understand the social and cultural context of inscribed texts in general.⁸ These archaeological and theoretical developments will allow me to argue that, in the context of the Late Roman Isthmus, the Justinianic inscriptions from the Corinthia manifest a sophisticated imperial policy which sought to unify liturgical, military, and political authority in the person of the emperor. In doing so, these inscriptions represent a particularly clear example of the close integration of religious and secular authority that would come to characterize imperial politics during the middle and late decades of the 6th century.⁹ To reach these conclusions my paper will evaluate in turn the cultural, political, and archaeological context of these texts and show that the strategic significance of the Isthmus in the 6th century Mediterranean made it an especially appropriate location for imperial assertions of religious and political primacy.

The significance of the Isthmus in the wider world of the 6th century Mediterranean largely derived from its position as a geographic, religious, and political crossroads. Scholars have long recognized the importance of the Isthmus at the juncture of both north-south and east-west travel in the Mediterranean.¹⁰ The advantages of its geographic location were realized in antiquity as well.¹¹ Even before Roman rule unified the Mediterranean, the economic benefits of the Isthmus' location helped to enrich the city of Corinth and its subordinate settlements.¹² In Roman times the city served as a vital link between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean and the Adriatic and the Aegean worlds. As Roman rule disintegrated in the troubled centuries at the end of antiquity, the visible characteristics of the Isthmus's liminal character took on prominent positions in the landscape. The most visible of these was the Trans-Isthmian Hexamilion wall of the 5th-6th centuries which served to impede north-south movement. The fortress at Isthmia, situated near the Eastern port of Kenchreai not only buttressed this wall, but also stood near a major north-south route and was well-positioned to block east-west movement across the Isthmus as well.¹³ In light of the political history of this period, these fortifications reinforced the position of the Isthmus as a frontier zone between the relative stability of the Eastern Mediterranean, the unstable Danubian frontier, and the fragile peace in the reconquered West.

⁸ Day 1999; Tuerk 2002; Papalexandrou 2001, 2007; Moralee 2004.

⁹ Cameron 1980.

¹⁰ Pettegrew 2005, pp. 41-53; McCormick 2003, pp. 69-74, pp. 531-537; Fowden 1995.

¹¹ Pettegrew 2005, pp. 59-67.

¹² Salmon 1984; Engels 1990.

Adding significance to Justinian's involvement on the Isthmus is the overlap of ecclesiastical and political jurisdiction there. Despite the proximity of the province of Late Roman Achaia to the imperial capital, Greece remained part of the ecclesiastical province of Illyricum which was under the jurisdiction of the Papacy. Justinian's policies on the Isthmus sought not only to ensure the territorial unity of the empire, but also to establish the religious unity of his expanded state. To do so, it required that he articulate a religious policy that both accommodated and appropriated the religious authority vested in an increasingly autonomous Papacy. The vulnerable character of the Isthmus was, in this context, two fold, both military and religious. Justinian's effort to fortify this liminal and conflicted part of the empire supports arguments for specific policies designed to ensure the loyalty and stability of the militarily vulnerable border provinces throughout the empire.¹⁴

The Inscriptions

The Justinianic inscription from the Isthmus is familiar to most scholars of the Corinthia as it resided for years on the wall of the Corinth Museum courtyard. The text has been the object of numerous commentaries in the past.¹⁵ It reads as follows:

+Φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸς
ἀληθινὸς ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ,
φυλάξῃ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα
Ἰουστινιανὸν καὶ τὸν
πιστὸν αὐτοῦ δοῦλον
Βικτορίνον ἅμα τοῖς
οἰκούσῃν ἐν Ἑλλάδι τοὺς κ(α)τ(ὰ) Θεῶν
ζῶντας.+

Light of Light, True God of True God, guard the emperor Justinian and his faithful servant Viktorinos along with those who dwell in Greece living according to God.

This text was known as early as the 15th century from a Byzantine Short Chronicle which testified to the discovery of the stone during the reconstruction of the Hexamilion Wall in 1415 during the reign of Manuel II.¹⁶ P. Monceaux rediscovered the text in 1883 near the South Gate to the fortress in loose fill.¹⁷ The stone is a reused marble frieze block measuring

¹³ *Isthmia* V, pp. 129-131 does not mention this as a possible function.

¹⁴ Greatrex 2005, pp. 491-498; Fowden 1993, pp. 101-102; Curta 2001, pp. 120-189; Pringle 1981.

¹⁵ *IG* IV, 204; *Corinth* VIII.3. no. 508, pp. 168-169; *Isthmia* V, 12-13, no. 4.; Feissel 1985, no. 16, p. 279-280; Monceaux 1884, pp. 277-278; Skias, 1893, p. 123; Lambros 1905, pp. 268-269; Lampakis 1906, pp. 46-47; Groag 1949, p. 79; Bees 1941, no.1 pp. 1-5.

¹⁶ *Isthmia* V, no. 8 p. 15.

¹⁷ Monceaux 1884, pp. 277-278.

0.635 x 0.958. The letters, inscribed in a *tabula ansata* field, stand 0.045-0.051 in height for the first six lines and 0.021-0.024 for the final line. The size, content, and shape of the inscription suggests that it was probably built into a gate, perhaps above the arch, as was relatively common elsewhere in the Mediterranean during the Justinianic period.¹⁸

Alan Cameron referred to this text as an example of "unadorned and unimpeachably Christian prose."¹⁹ It follows a common pattern for Early Christian inscriptions throughout the Mediterranean world. Beginning with a short invocation, the inscription then asks the divine to protect, in order, the emperor Justinian, Viktorinos, and then those living in Greece. In doing so it uses the verb φυλάσσω in either the subjunctive (φυλάξῃ) or future indicative (φυλάξει). Typical of inscriptions of this period, the last phrase in the text displays some irregular grammar with a dative participle (τοῖς οἰκούσιν as a misspelled form of οἰκοῦσιν) and an accusative participle (ζῶντας) arranged in a parallel construction. There are other orthographic infelicities as well: Θεών for the accusative Θεόν. The best parallel for the language in this inscription is a very similar text typically associated with the city wall of Corinth,²⁰ and now in Verona.

The similarities between the Isthmia and the Corinth inscriptions, and the likely close proximity of their original provenance will make it useful to discuss the two texts together at times. Consequently, I will provide the text of the Corinth inscription here:²¹

+ Ἀγ(ία) Μαρία Θεοτόκε, φύλαξον
τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ
φιλοχρίστου Ἰουστινιανοῦ
καὶ τὸν γνησίως
δουλεύοντα αὐτῷ
Βικτωρίνον σὺν τοῖς
οἰκοῦσιν ἐν Κορίνθῳ κ(ατὰ) Θεῶν
ζῶντας. +

Holy Mary, Theotokos, safeguard the empire of the Christ-loving Justinian and his faithful servant Viktorinos, along with those who dwell in Corinth living according to God.

¹⁸ There are particularly close parallels from North Africa: Pringle 1981, no. 4 p. 319, no. 29, p. 327 and from Syria: *IGLS* I.145, 146, 147. See also an inscription of similar date originally in the city wall of Byllis in Albania, SEG 35: 530-533 naming Viktorinos and inscribed with similarly sized letters

¹⁹ Cameron 1967, p.134.

²⁰ *Isthmia* V, p. 14; Gregory 2000, p. 113.

²¹ *IG* IV, 205; Bees 1941, no. 2, pp.5-9; Feissel 1985, no. 18, pp. 281-282; Guarducci 1978, no. 2, pp. 327-330; *Isthmia* V, p. 14 no. 5.

There are obvious similarities between these two texts in content and form. Both texts number among a relatively small group of inscriptions from Southern and Central Greece that specifically mention the emperor Justinian.²² They refer to a certain Viktorinos, a figure known from inscriptions elsewhere in the Southern Balkans to have been active in the constructions of fortifications.²³ Their close association with fortifications provides independent evidence for some of the activities reported in Book Four of Procopius' *Buildings*.²⁴ Finally, the texts are clearly contemporary. The absence of Theodora's name in both texts recommends a date after her death in 548. If the texts are to be associated with the refortification of the Isthmus described by Procopius, then according to his work they should date to after the earthquakes of 551. Even if we are skeptical of the causal link between the earthquakes and the refortification, the inscriptions should date to before 560, the last known date in the *Buildings*.²⁵

Despite the clear similarities between the texts, there are significant differences as well. The most distinctive difference between the two texts is the invocation. The Isthmia inscription starts with an invocation of characteristically creedal language – most likely a quote from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed. To my knowledge, this is the only monumental inscription that employs this quote from the creed, suggesting that it may have had particular significance at this time and in the context of the Isthmus. In contrast, the Corinth text calls upon the Theotokos to protect those who dwell in the city of Corinth. In this regard the Corinth text is noteworthy as an especially early example of the Theotokos in her role of protector. This function of the Theotokos would become quite common in the 7th century. The two texts also differed in whom they intended to protect. The Corinth text asks the Theotokos to protect those living in Corinth, and this presumably accounts for why scholars have associated it with the walls of the city. The penultimate line of the Isthmia text asks God to protect Hellas which seemingly refers to Greece or the Late Roman province of Achaia. This text provides the best evidence for the use of this word to refer to southern and central Greece as several commentators have noted.²⁶

The similarities between these texts indicate that they derive from a common moment in Corinthian history. This realization, however, sheds little light on the individuals responsible for these inscriptions. While both texts mention Viktorinos, his identity remains

²² Feissel and Philippidis-Braat 1985, no. 15; Feissel 1983, no. 81 and no. 133.

²³ *SEG* 35.530-533

²⁴ Procop. *De Aed.* 4.2.27-28.

²⁵ Gregory 2000, p. 113; Cameron 1985, p. 3-18; Evans 1969, pp. 29-30.

problematic. Feissel argued that he was an architect for Justinian,²⁷ while other commentators on these texts, including Gregory, have proposed that he was more likely an imperial official, perhaps the Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum.²⁸ While arguments for Viktorinos' position as an architect are not necessarily persuasive (as it would be unprecedented), it seems equally unlikely that Viktorinos served as the Praetorian Prefect of the Illyricum Orientalis. First, it is not clear whether Achaia is part of Illyricum Orientalis at this time.²⁹ Moreover, in a contemporary inscription from Byllis in Epirus, Viktorinos claims to have constructed fortifications in Thrace, Moesia, and among the Scyths. By the middle of the 6th century these areas were no longer parts of the Praetorian Prefecture of Illyricum.³⁰ Despite the ambiguity regarding Viktorinos' identity, his links to fortification projects both in Achaia and in Epirus suggests that he was a prominent imperial official.³¹ What is perhaps more significant for our argument, however, is that the inscription lacks any mention of local officials. Many, if not most, Justinianic inscriptions from a similar context elsewhere in the East share credit with the local secular military, or ecclesiastical elite.³² The absence of local elite in the Isthmia and Corinth text clearly associates the role of protecting "those who dwell in Greece living according to God" with the divine, the emperor, and Viktorinos. The link between the individuals mentioned in the text, and its placement on fortifications confirms, thus, Procopius' assertion of imperial patronage which would be appropriate for a fortification program executed on a provincial scale.³³ Furthermore, the lack of any signs of local involvement allow us to assert imperial authorship – or at very least imperially directed authorship – for these inscriptions.

The Inscriptions in the Context of Late Roman Ritual

The absence of local patronage and the position of the inscriptions on fortification encourage us to read these texts as expressions of imperial power on the Isthmus. As such, the language of the texts provides an avenue for exploring *how* Justinian's administration sought to promulgate imperial authority at the periphery of the empire. The following analysis will focus largely on the inscription from Isthmia for the sake of focus and clarity,

²⁶ Bees 1941, no. 1, pp. 2-3. It was overlooked, however, during the rather extensive debate regarding the location of Hellas during the 6th century. See Charanis 1955, pp. 161-163 for a brief summary.

²⁷ Feissel 1988 [1990], pp. 139-141; Bowden 2003, pp. 178-180.

²⁸ *Isthmia* V, p. 13.

²⁹ Bon 1951, p. 8; Avramea 1997, pp. 35-37.

³⁰ Feissel 1988 [1990], p. 138.

³¹ Bowden 2003, pp. 178-180.

³² Croke and Crow 1983, pp. 147-148.

³³ Pringle 1981, pp. 89-91 for a discussion of the role of the emperor in the process of building fortifications.

but many of the points raised here will apply equally as well to the Corinth text. Before a detailed analysis of this text can proceed, however, it is necessary to make explicit my assumptions regarding the way that inscriptions functioned in their historical and cultural context.

It is now widely accepted that inscriptions are integrative texts that draw upon a wide variety of genres to communicate meaning. Public, monumental inscriptions expected the reader to understand the logic of the text and to recognize how the text itself created a distinct time, space, and even authorial voice by drawing together diverse allusions, genres, and references from outside the text itself. The generically heteroglot composition of inscriptions combined with their typically compact length to produce documents dense in meaning and interpretative potential.³⁴ Over the past three decades, scholars have emphasized the oral nature of inscriptions to explore not only the meaning of the text in social context, but also how they generated meaning. This emphasis has produced widely divergent understandings of the meaning of orality in an inscribed context. The orality of an inscribed text could mean, on the one hand, that the audience for these texts read them aloud and thus (re)performed a particular oral event.³⁵ On the other hand, the close link between oral and inscribed texts reflects the tendency for monumental inscriptions to draw upon to the well-known language of familiar rituals to communicate complex meanings.³⁶ This latter interpretation of the oral character of inscriptions allows us to side-step some of the more complex and controversial debates related to the anthropology of reading in the ancient world, and makes explicit the dependence of inscriptions on oral generic categories and syntax to convey meaning.³⁷ This interpretation assumes that readers could recognize references to common oral genres ranging from popular prayers, to ritual acclamations and the Christian liturgy. This approach is especially significant for the reign of Justinian which saw the growing confluence of a number of oral genres, such as acclamations and liturgical hymns and prayers, and written genres, like epigraphy and hagiography, in the production of a new, synthetic, deeply-Christianized public discourse.³⁸

The most simple, syntactical expression of the Isthmia inscription's debt to oral genres is that it employs what appears to be the subjunctive to make the texts itself call out. The verb *φυλόσσω* occurred regularly in the subjunctive, *φυλόξῃ* and the imperative

³⁴ Bakhtin 1981, 301-331 is the *locus classicus* for the idea of heteroglossia.

³⁵ Papalexandrou 2001, 249-260.

³⁶ In some cases these text could be the kind of performative utterances described by Austin 1962; Tambiah 1968 and studied in Late Antiquity by Tuerk 1999 and Day 1999.

³⁷ For a review of discussion regarding the sociology and anthropology of reading see: Johnson 2000.

(φύλαξον), as in the Corinth inscription, across a wide range of informal ritual texts ranging from prophylactic amulets, to Christian relic ampulae, to mosaic floors of Christian basilicas.³⁹ Such hortatory or imperative requests for protection are often read as inscribed prayers which grammatically simulate the call to God for help or protection.⁴⁰ This coincides well with the most common context for φυλάσσω on the lintels of houses, fortresses, and churches throughout the East. In these cases the text alludes to Psalm 120.8 (LXX): κύριος φυλάξει τὴν εἴσοδόν σου καὶ τὴν ἔξοδόν σου ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν καὶ ἕως τοῦ αἰῶνος (The Lord will guard your entrance and the your exit from now until eternity).⁴¹ In fact, it seems possible that the preference for the subjunctive over the imperative in the Isthmia text is its oral (and to a lesser extent syntactical) resonance with the future indicative "φυλάξει" in the Psalm.⁴² Similar alterations of this Psalm occur elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁴³ A single example exists from Roman Achaëa; in Attica a text clearly derived from Psalm 120 reads: [K](ύριος) φυλάξη τὴν εἴσοδον ταύ[την].⁴⁴ By using a word that could be either in the subjunctive or in the future indicative, the author of the text fused together two textual traditions that of Ps. 120.8 and that of imperative calls for protection. Both readings would be consistent with its probable location above a gate into the fortress at Isthmia.

The use of the word φυλάξει in combination with the name of the emperor and an imperial office may well have invoked ritual acclamations which had become particularly popular in Late Antiquity. Acclamations were chants, in some cases impromptu, that an assembled crowd spoke in one voice. During Late Antiquity, this genre became an important mode for communicating mass political attitudes toward sources of authority in both supportive and subversive ways. By the reign of Justinian such chants became a common feature at the hippodrome, at ecumenical councils, at the *adventus* of elite personages into cities, and at the dedication of important monuments.⁴⁵ The inscriptions from the Isthmus, in particular, invoked imperial acclamations that used the future indicative to state unequivocally that God *will* protect the emperor.⁴⁶ The crowds of Constantinople, for

³⁸ Cameron 1979; Harvey 1998; McCormick 1986, pp. 238-247; Nelson 1976; Brown 1973, pp. 5-9.

³⁹ For a discussion of phylakteria see Vikan 1984, pp. 76-80. For the use of the word in mosaic see the basilica at Klapsi in Eurytania: Chatzidakis 1958, p. 61.

⁴⁰ Day 1999 ; Kotansky 1991, pp. 119-121 ; Vikan 1984.

⁴¹ E.g. *IGLS* IV nos. 1456, 1466, 1467, 1468, 1567, 1571, 1680, 1695.

⁴² Tuerk 1999, pp. 32-35 for a similar observation.

⁴³ E.g. *IGLS* IV 1466, 1467, 1887,

⁴⁴ Sironen 1997, no.342, p. 345.

⁴⁵ Cameron 1980, pp. 5-11.

⁴⁶ MacCormack 1981, pp. 244-245.

example, used marked the accession of Anastasius with an acclamation: εὐσεβῆ βασιλέα Θεός φυλάξει. (The Lord will keep the blessed monarch)⁴⁷

Charlotte Roueché first has drawn attention to the close ties between acclamations as an oral genre and inscribed texts from Aphrodisias and Ephesus. Inscribed example of these metrical or rhythmic chants regularly included an initial statement of faith, a list of dignitaries in descending order of rank, and either an "acclamatory request" directed either to the individuals present or a prayer directed toward the divine or a heavenly personage to protect the emperor and residents of the city.⁴⁸ The hierarchical nature of acclamatory texts which often featured the names of dignitaries in order of rank, invoked parallels with Late Roman urban rituals, particular Late Roman processions which were organized strictly according to rank and status.⁴⁹ The oral nature of these texts and their hierarchical arrangement suggests that such texts could reproduce and commemorate real or even imagined urban rituals in which the procession would begin with the emperor, then pass to Viktorinos, and then to "all those who dwell in Greece."⁵⁰ This is a rather undeveloped hierarchy, but it finds more complete parallels in Justinianic texts elsewhere in the Mediterranean.⁵¹ In all of these texts, the location of the emperor between his officials and the invocation reinforces the proximity of the emperor to the divine as well as the place of his officials in relation to the ordinary residents of the provinces.⁵² Consequently, this text, like so many instances of Late Antique ritual, promoted imperial authority by reinforcing the hierarchical relationship of the emperor to Viktorinos to local society.

While the generic similarities to humble prayers, Biblical passages, and acclamations would have been clear to the Late Roman audience, it is likely that the most obvious reference in the Isthmia inscription was to the liturgy. To demonstrate this, however, it is necessary to provide some background on the liturgy in Greece. In general, our understanding of the liturgy in Late Roman Greece is poor. No text survives aside from various short inscriptions. Consequently the primary source for understanding the character of Christian ritual remains the numerous Early Christian basilicas excavated over the past century. Soteriou, Orlandos, Pallas and others endeavored to use the remains of these

⁴⁷ Const. Porphy. *De Cer.* 424; Cf. A similar chant at the accession of Leo, *De Cer.* 411-412; For a general discussion of these ceremonies see: MacCormack 1981, p. 245.

⁴⁸ Roueché 1984, pp. 183-186.

⁴⁹ Day 1999, pp. 249-250. For Late Roman ritual generally: MacCormack 1981, Baldwin 1987, McCormick 1986, Mathews 2003.

⁵⁰ Connerton 1989, pp. 41-71, provides the best brief summary of how ceremonies, like reenacting a public acclamation preserved in an inscribed text, serve to ensure continuity between present acts and past events.

⁵¹ Gregoire 1922, p. 67, no. 219.

buildings to propose a distinctive shape to the Greek liturgy with roots in the confluence of Western and Eastern influences.⁵³ While using architecture to reconstruct the various precise details of a complex ritual is ill-advised, a significant number of architectural characteristics distinct to Greek basilicas demonstrate that the liturgy in Greece had its own unique style. Moreover, it seems probable that the position of the Greek church at the confluence of the East and West in the Mediterranean ensured that the liturgy and its architectural arrangement relied upon Western and most probably even local models.

It is against this architectural backdrop that we can construct arguments for the influence of the liturgy of the Eastern Capital during the 6th century. It seems probably that the Constantinopolitan liturgy became increasingly prevalent in Greece from the second half of the 6th century to the detriment of local liturgical practices which presumably had closer ties to the practices of the Western church. The most spectacular example of Eastern influence on the Isthmus is the massive Lechaion basilica. D. I. Pallas used coins of Justin I (518-527) to provide a terminus post-quem for the latest phase of the building,⁵⁴ Slane and Sanders have recently suggest that the building may not have been begun until after 525 and continued standing throughout the 6th century.⁵⁵ A Justinianic date along with the generous use of Proconessian marble, the brilliant and costly *opus sectile* floors, and its imposing size, recommend this church as an imperial foundation.⁵⁶ While some features in this church reflect local practice, like the absence of an axial opening into the narthex, the high stylobates of the nave colonnade, and the tripartite transept, other elements provide strong evidence for Constantinopolitan influences.

The most obvious Constantinopolitan feature in the church is the centrally placed ambo linked to the chancel by an elevated *solea* with a low parapet screen.⁵⁷ This arrangement in the nave has strong parallels with the centrally placed ambos of Constantinople and is distinct from the arrangement of ambos elsewhere in Greece which tend, when there is solid evidence, to be offset to the north or south of the nave's central axis.⁵⁸ The centrally placed ambo and accompanying *solea* would have been functionally irrelevant according to the most common reconstruction of the Greek liturgy. Most scholars have plausibly suggested that the congregation stood in the aisles leaving the central nave,

⁵² MacCormack 1986, p. 245 for this structure and function in oral acclamations.

⁵³ Soteriou 1929; Orlandos 1957, Pallas 1979, 1979/1980, 1984; Mathews 1971, pp. 119-121.

⁵⁴ Pallas 1977, p. 171.

⁵⁵ Sanders and Slane 2005, pp. 291-292.

⁵⁶ Sanders 2005, p. 439.

⁵⁷ Jakobs 1987, pp. 255-256.

⁵⁸ Xydis 1947; Mathews 1971, p. 110; Sodini 1975; Jacobs 1987.

separated from the aisles by raised stylobates and intercolumnar parapet screens, open for clerical movement and processions.⁵⁹ In this reconstruction, there would be little need for the *solea* which functioned to protect the reader of the gospels from the press of the congregation in the nave as he made his way to the ambo for the readings.⁶⁰ The presence of this feature in the Lechaion basilica, then, suggests that the design of this church served either to evoke similar churches in Constantinople or to accommodate a liturgy that drew important characteristics from the practices of the capital.

Allusions to the Constantinopolitan liturgy appear in other Justinianic foundations in the West. The best known example, of course, come from the mosaics of San Vitale at Ravenna which date to little more than a half decade earlier than our inscriptions. While scholars continue to dispute the exact moment in the liturgy that the scenes in the mosaic depict, with von Simson arguing for the offertory procession,⁶¹ and Mathews advocating the First Entrance,⁶² few scholars dispute that the scene in these well-known mosaics can only be understood as an expression of the Constantinopolitan rite. In light of this, these mosaics represent an important statement of imperial primacy in the Western provinces. By depicting the imperial rite in an important city in the West, the emperor is made clear, despite being depicted as subordinate to the local bishop in the mosaic decoration, that the See of Constantinople can assert preeminence even amidst such influential Sees as Ravenna, Milan, and, indeed, Rome. This display at Ravenna is all the more striking when we consider that some two centuries earlier at Milan, such presumption on the part of the Emperor Theodosius earned an embarrassing reprimand at the hands of Milan's bishop, Ambrose.⁶³

There are reasons to suspect that the Isthmia inscription likewise referred to the liturgy of the Eastern capital. The first two lines of the text derive from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. During the 5th century and earlier, the Creed was primarily a literary text which did not receive broad circulation outside elite polemical, historical or theological tracts.⁶⁴ The Creed is absent from all known, 5th-century liturgies in the Mediterranean and seems to have appeared exclusively in the annual Baptismal rites in the Constantinople during the Good Friday Catechesis.⁶⁵ By the early 6th century, however, the

⁵⁹ Mathews 1971, pp. 119-120; Sanders 2005 pp. 440-441.

⁶⁰ Mathews 1971, pp. 124-125.

⁶¹ Von Simson 1947, p. 30.

⁶² Mathews 2003, p. 171.

⁶³ Theodoret, *EH*, 5.17.

⁶⁴ Kelly 1950, pp. 332-367 for the basic history of the Creed's promulgation.

⁶⁵ Taft 1975, pp. 398-402; Kelly 1950, pp. 348-349; Theodorus Lector, *EH*. 2, frag. 48 (P.G. 86, 208 f.) There has been some ambiguity regarding the exact text of the creed read in the church by the Patriarch Timothy, but

Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed had become a regular part of the Constantinopolitan liturgy. Installed in the liturgy by the compromise-oriented Patriarch Timothy (511-518) during the reign of Anastasius I (491-518), some sources suggest that it derived from the Antiochene liturgy of Peter the Fuller. By the reign of Justin I (518-527), Justinian's immediate predecessor, its place in the liturgy was regularized, and it appears to have persisted in the liturgy throughout Justinian's reign. Justinian's successor, Justin II (565-578), ordered the Creed to be sung in all the churches of the Empire at his accession to the throne as an indicator of his own Orthodoxy.⁶⁶ By this point, the Creed was sufficiently well-known to feature prominently in Corripus's panegyric composed for the occasion.⁶⁷ Considering the importance of the Creed in the reigns of Justin I and Justin II, it seems highly probable that the Creed was present in the liturgy of Justinian's reign.

In contrast to the Creed's celebrated presence in the Constantinopolitan liturgy, it does not appear in the Roman church until the 10th century.⁶⁸ In fact, the first known reference to the Creed at all by a Western Bishop comes in an encyclical letter issued by Pope Vigilius in 552 roughly contemporary to the Isthmia inscription.⁶⁹ A lack of Papal interest in a Creed issued by the council of Constantinople probably reflects the low estimation the Roman church held for the council which elevated the See of Constantinople to second only to the Papacy in rank. Elsewhere in the West, there is no evidence for the Creed in the liturgy prior to last decades of the 6th century. In fact, when the Spanish church introduced the Creed into their liturgy during the Council of Toledo in 589, they specifically stated that it derived from the liturgy of Constantinople.⁷⁰ In light of the oral character of the inscription from Isthmia and the seeming obscurity of the Creed in the public discourse of the empire, the short excerpt from the Creed in this inscription seems another example evidence for the influence of the Constantinopolitan liturgy in Greece.

A less pronounced echo of liturgical language, although perhaps every bit as significant is the final phrase of the text – ἅμα τοῖς οἰκούσειν ἐν Ἑλλάδι τοὺς κ(α)τ(ὰ) Θεῶν ζῶντας. Both Deissman and Feissel paralleled this phrase with the language of liturgical commemoration or the diptychs in the somewhat later Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.⁷¹ It

Taft and Kelly have argued persuasively that the creed was, in fact, the so-called Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed which was formalized as the Creed of the Council of Nicaea only at Chalcedon in 451.

⁶⁶ Joh. Biclár., a. 567

⁶⁷ Corripus *Iust.* 4.288-365; Cameron 1976a, pp. 54-55, 1976b, p. 206.

⁶⁸ Kelly 1950, pp. 356-357.

⁶⁹ Mansi, *ACO* 9.50-55; Kelly 1950, p. 346.

⁷⁰ Kelly 1950, pp. 351-357.

⁷¹ Feissel 1983, pp. 190-191; Deissman 1995, p. 455.

reads: "Μνήσθητι, Κύριε, τῆς πόλεως ἐν ἧ παροικοῦμεν καὶ πάσης πόλεως καὶ χώρας καὶ τῶν πίσει κατοικούντων ἐν αὐταῖς." (Remember, Lord, the city in which we live and all the cities and the countryside and those dwelling in faith in them).⁷² A much restored inscription from Neapolis Gate at Phillipi also seems to echo a version of this phrase: [...καὶ φύλαξον τοὺς ἐ]ν σοὶ κατο[ι]κούντας εἰς δόξα[ν σου].⁷³ This form of liturgical commemoration drew inspiration from acclamations. It was ordered hierarchically and a common place to express official sanction. From the mid 5th century on, removing the name of an emperor or patriarch from the diptychs was a form of official reproach. Finally, the link between the initial lines of the creed and the later text from the diptychs of the living forms a neat parallel with the structure of some known rites from Late Antiquity in which the Creed followed the diptychs at the conclusion of the pre-anaphoral rites.⁷⁴ While one should not make too much of this organization, it is nonetheless suggestive in light of the clear link between the Creed and the liturgy.

The importance of liturgy as a regular experience in Late Roman society undoubtedly accounted for the emerging use of known, liturgical texts across the whole range of Late Antique epigraphy.⁷⁵ The references to the liturgy were interwoven with allusions to simple prayers, acclamations, and dedicatory formula. The 6th-century melding together of simple prayers for protection, which have a long tradition in the Eastern Mediterranean, and liturgical language, however, demonstrates the liturgical influence on the religious discourse of the day.⁷⁶ This reading of the Isthmia text would be consistent with the growing "liturgification" of Late Antiquity more broadly.⁷⁷ Numerous sources attest to the growing spectacle of liturgical processions and gestures during the 6th century. Justinian, in particular, sought to ensure that the words of the liturgy play a key role in the ritual by legislating that the clergy should speak loud enough for the congregation to hear.⁷⁸ At a more popular level, there was growing acceptance that the use of liturgical language provided access to divine power even among the unsuspecting and unconsecrated. The best-known example of this comes from John Moschos' *Pratum Spiritualis* which described boy from Apamea who

⁷² Brightman 1896, 389.28-29.

⁷³ Feissel 1983, no. 223, pp. 190-192.

⁷⁴ Taft 1975, pp. 48-49, pp. 398-403; Taft 1991, pp. 58-59, 185.

⁷⁵ Day 1999; Prentice 1902. E.g. Feissel 1983, nos. 15, 35, 180, 208, 277, 281; Kiourtzian 2000, nos. 3, 11, 67, 92.

⁷⁶ Baumann 1999, pp. 292-295 has questioned the influence of the liturgy on simple texts from Late Antiquity suggesting rather that long standing pagan traditions played a greater role in shaping the epigraphic of Late Antiquity. Moralee 2004, pp. 89-90 for a more moderate view.

⁷⁷ Nelson 1976, pp. 101-105; Cameron 1980, pp. 15-17.

⁷⁸ Just. *Novel* 137.6; Tremblelas 1955, pp. 211-213; Meyendorf 1993, p. 76.

uttered the prayer of consecration while pretending to be priests celebrating the liturgy.⁷⁹ Upon doing this, a flame from heaven consumed the bread that their prayers had consecrated in order to prevent its defilement. Finally, under Justinian the liturgy begins to appear regularly in military practices which linked the liturgy clearly to victory.⁸⁰ Thus, the presence of a text invoking the Constantinopolitan liturgy would have quite plausibly resonated not only with the ritual life of the Corinthians, for whom the Lechaion basilica would also be a reminder, but also with the ritual life of soldiers stationed at the fortification at Isthmia.

The Inscriptions in the Political Context of Constantinople and Achaia

The significance of the Isthmia inscriptions in the context of the province of Achaia in particular depends upon our recognition of this place as both an important crossroads of the Mediterranean and also a place of particularly tangled lines of political and religious authority. By the middle years of the 6th century, Justinian recognized the challenges of this split authority in Illyricum and attempted to reorganize both the political and ecclesiastical structure of the prefecture of Illyricum Orientalis as well as the larger provincial administration of the empire.⁸¹ Despite these efforts, Achaia and its bishop at Corinth remained within the political jurisdiction of the emperor at Constantinople, but within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Papacy through the Bishop of Thessaloniki who served as the Papal vicar for the ecclesiastical province of Illyricum. These divergent lines of political and religious authority in the province had created difficulties for past emperors.⁸² During the 5th century, for example, a contested election of the bishop of Corinth led to the calling of a council under the authority of the bishop of Thessaloniki and the Pope. A group of clerics dissatisfied with the findings of the council appealed its decision to the emperor Theodosius II and bishop of Constantinople. In response, Theodosius issued a law placing Illyricum under the jurisdiction of Constantinople, but shortly thereafter conceded Papal authority as well.

In the late 5th and early 6th century, the Acacian Schism exacerbated the conflict between papal and imperial jurisdiction in the Southern Balkans. Throughout the 5th century, Greek bishops appealed to the Papacy to circumvent the authority of Constantinople, and Balkan bishops consistently appearing among those who sided with the strict

⁷⁹ John Moschos *Pratum Sp.*, 25.

⁸⁰ McCormick 1986, pp. 245-246.

⁸¹ Avramea 1997, 35-36; Haldon 2005, pp. 48-50; Markus 1979.

Chalcedonianism of the Pope against the emperor's persistent efforts to seek doctrinal unity across the Mediterranean basin. The Acacian Schism compounded the long standing jurisdictional conflict by adding a Christological aspect. The Emperors Zeno (474-491) and Anastasius sought reconciliation between orthodox and monophysite positions within the framework of the *Henotikon*.⁸³ Satisfying neither the opponents of Chalcedon nor its supporters in the West, this policy resulted in the Acacian schism and ultimately drove a wedge between Constantinople and the Pope in Rome.⁸⁴ The impact of this schism seems to have been particularly violent in Illyricum, which remained under the political jurisdiction of Constantinople, but the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Rome. The tension between political and religious authority manifest itself in the tendency of the papal representative in Illyricum Orientalis, the Bishop of Thessaloniki, to side with the proximate political power of Constantinople even when it placed them at odds with his ecclesiastical superior in Rome.⁸⁵ This divided allegiance during the Acacian Schism led 40 bishops of Illyricum Orientalis under the leadership of Alkison of Nikopolis to ask for admittance into direct communion with the Pope Hormisdas in 515 in order to avoid subordination to the bishop of Thessaloniki who was sympathetic to the *Henotikon*.⁸⁶ The clash between the two sides led ultimately to the death of Alkison of Nikopolis and remained unresolved until Justin renounced the *Henotikon* in 519.

The reconciliation between Justin and the Pope, however, was not rooted in mutual understanding. The Emperor saw this as a necessary step toward promoting secular and spiritual unity under an imperial authority, whereas the Pope recognized the reconciliation as a concession to Papal authority in spiritual matters.⁸⁷ Consequently tensions persisted in Illyricum. In the early years of Justinian's reign, when the Patriarch of Constantinople deposed the Bishop of Larissa, he appealed the decision to the Pope.⁸⁸ The emperor became involved on the side of the Patriarch, and this conflict, which took years to settle, underscored the continued problem of overlapping lines of authority throughout the southern Balkans.⁸⁹ The conflict arose again during the "Three Chapters Controversy" which was nearly

⁸² Sotinel 2005; Limberis 2005; Avramea 1997, pp. 37-38; Pietri 1984; Charanis 1974.

⁸³ Frend 1972, pp. 184-295; Charanis 1974.

⁸⁴ Frend 1976.

⁸⁵ Charanis 1974 for the best summary of this situation.

⁸⁶ Charanis 1974, pp. 103-104.

⁸⁷ Sotinel 2005, 277-281.

⁸⁸ Sotinel 2005, pp. 275-276.

⁸⁹ In Illyricum Occidentalis, this matter was further complicated by the conflict over the status of Justiniana Prima which was initially established as an autocephalous See and later, in 545, determine to be the Papal Vicar for the prefecture. Sotinel 2005; Markus 1979.

contemporary with the Isthmia and Corinth inscriptions. This theological dispute focused on the Origenist character of certain works of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Ibas of Edessa and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, and again made clear the incompatibility of imperial religious unity and the passionate Chalcedonianism of the Papacy. Justinian had hoped that his hand-picked Pope Vigilius could facilitate the melding of religious and political authority in Illyricum and the West, but Vigilius refused to conform to imperial expectations.⁹⁰ Even as Justinian condemned the so-called Three Chapters of Theodore, Ibas, and Theodoret and the Fifth Ecumenical Council was busy proclaiming its anathema on those very texts, Vigilius's issued the *Constitutum* endorsed by 16 western bishops 2 of whom were from Illyricum which rejected the imperial position and the conclusions of the council.⁹¹ In the end, the theological stakes of this conflict were low, but the political stakes were high. Scholars have seen this dispute has having less to do with the theological dispositions of the three works in question than the authority of the emperor over the entire church, including the Papacy.⁹² The fundamental issue was whether the emperor could find imperial unity in compromises regarding the divisive Christological conflicts and expect support from ecclesiastical leaders.

While the specific impact of these disputes in Achaia remains shadowy at best, it is clear that Justinian's policy of trying to root ecclesiastical unity in imperial authority had a direct impact in the province. By influencing liturgical practice, Justinian appears to have modified tactics familiar from elsewhere in the Mediterranean in which the liturgy was used as a divisive force in theological conflicts. During the Acacian Schism and the Three Chapters Controversy, for example, excluding the imperial, patriarchal, or Papal name from the diptychs of the living served to communicate anathema.⁹³ The language of certain liturgical prayers, like the trisagion had likewise become the battleground for conflicting theological perspectives.⁹⁴ The place of the Creed in the liturgy served Justinian's efforts at theological compromise. Initially the Monophysite Patriarch Timothy who served under the Emperor Anastasius, however, read the Creed during the liturgy as a way of displaying a commitment to the Christology of Nicaea as opposed to the formulation of Chalcedon.⁹⁵ After the death of Timothy and Anastasius in 519, the crowd the crowd in largely Chalcedonian Constantinople refused to allow the newly appointed Orthodox Patriarch John

⁹⁰ Sotinel 1992.

⁹¹ Sotinel 1992.

⁹² Sotinel 2005, p. 281; Sotinel 1992.

⁹³ Taft 1991, pp. 122-126.

⁹⁴ Shultz 1986, pp. 21-24; Day 1999.

⁹⁵ Kelly 1950, pp. 348-350; Taft 1975, pp. 398-402.

to leave the church until he had performed the liturgy and recited the Creed.⁹⁶ Some 50 years later, by the time of Justin II, the Creed could represent his Chalcedonian leanings, but perhaps be sufficiently palatable to the whole range of Christological perspectives to be read in the churches throughout the Empire. While the exact details of the ambivalent character of the creed remain opaque, it seems likely that its persistence in the liturgy performed by the Chalcedonian clergy reinforced its authority as an Orthodox text.⁹⁷ Its close association with the Council of Nicaea and the Council of Constantinople would, nevertheless, ensure that this text was inoffensive both to Anti-Chalcedonians and Chalcedonians alike.

The text's ambivalent character promoted readings that encouraged a kind of hybrid theological unity that could cross Christological divides. The text of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was among the increasingly limited number of theologically charged texts that be read as an affirmation of Orthodox beliefs by members of both the various Anti-Chalcedonian and Chalcedonian factions in the Empire. It is important to stress that this ambivalence did not derive from the position of the Creed outside of theological disputes, but rather from its centrality in the expression of Orthodoxy by a whole range of groups. Considering the political and ecclesiastical turmoil of the first half of the 6th century and the central role that Illyricum played in these disputes, it is, indeed, difficult to imagine the presence of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in our Isthmian inscription as anything less than a statement of imperial authority laden with this intentional historical subtext. While it is unlikely that there were many Monophysite adherents on the Isthmus, the presence of a text that was equally significant to Monophysites and Chalcedonians reflects Justinian's efforts to promote a unified imperial faith that transcended doctrinal or regional varieties. Thus this text corresponded with the introduction of the Constantinopolitan liturgy in Achaia and the construction of a massive Early Christian basilica to provide evidence for a systematic effort by the emperor to promote imperial and religious unit across the empire.

While there is not enough space here to explore completely the theological significance of the inscription from Corinth that called upon the Virgin to protect the emperor, Viktorinos, and all those living in the city, it is clear that the text ought to be read along similar lines. The role of the Theotokos as a protector of the emperor and, in particular, a city is regarded as a quintessentially 6th century phenomenon derived almost exclusively

⁹⁶ Mansi, *ACO* 7.1057-1065; Kelly 1950, pp. 349-250.

⁹⁷ Cameron 1976a, pp. 54-55.

from the East.⁹⁸ The Corinth text is an early example of the kind of Marian devotion that would become only more prominent the practices of later Byzantine emperors like Justin II.⁹⁹ Despite Justinian's particular devotion to the Virgin, Mary as Theotokos appears only rarely in monumental epigraphy of this period.¹⁰⁰ Garth Fowden suggested that the Theotokos' appearance in the Corinth inscription might have resonated in particular with the cult of Athena at Athens.¹⁰¹ While this argument may be compelling for Athens, there is no a priori reason to associate the Theotokos with the protection of Corinth. It is perhaps better to suggest that the appearance of Mary as the Theotokos in this text derived from her role as the protector of the City of Constantinople (and presumably the emperor) and from Justinian's particular devotion to the Theotokos as the defender of the capital and the empire. Procopius reports in Book 1 that the two churches of Mary outside of the walls at Constantinople protected the city.¹⁰² Book 6 lists numerous churches to the Theotokos built by Justinian in the newly reconquered, Western parts of the empire.¹⁰³ A church to the Virgin at Cadiz in Spain served to dedicate to the Theotokos: "οὗ δὲ καὶ νεῶν ἀξιόθεατον τῇ Θεοτόκῳ ἀνέθηκεν, ἀναψάμενος μὲν ἐπ' αὐτῆς τὰ τῆς πολιτείας προοίμια, παντὶ δὲ ἀνθρώπων τῷ γένει ταύτῃ ἄμαχον τὸ φρούριον τοῦτο ποιοῦμενος." (There too he consecrated to the Mother of God a noteworthy church, thus dedicating to her the threshold of the Empire, and making this fortress impregnable for the whole race of mankind).¹⁰⁴ There may well have been a link between the Theotokos and protection of the new reconquered parts of the Empire in the West. Moreover, it is also possible that the prominence of the Theotokos as protector may derive from the liturgical *Akathistos* hymn in which Mary is prominently depicted in this role.¹⁰⁵ This text also appears to be of Constantinopolitan origin.¹⁰⁶ In this context the reference to the Theotokos may well evoke sixth century liturgical parallels as well. Within this reading, the refortification of the Isthmus and the city of Corinth once again points toward increased imperial presence on the Isthmus of Corinth.

⁹⁸ Limberis 1994, p. 189; Cameron 1978, 1979 suggested that the emergence of the Theotokos as the protector of the city of Constantinople occurred after the reign Justinian, sometime between the beginning of the reign of Justin II and the Avar and Slav siege of 626.

⁹⁹ Cameron 1976a; Baynes 1955.

¹⁰⁰ She is mentioned in the other Viktorinos text from Byllis in Epirus: *SEG* 35.531 The first line of this metrical inscription used Classicizing language to invoke God and the Virgin: Θεοῦ προνοία καὶ Θεοτόκου παρθένου. The Classical style of this inscription, however, make them different from the Corinthian inscriptions. More importantly, the inscription from Byllis does not specifically call upon the Theotokos to protect the city.

¹⁰¹ Fowden 1995, 561-562 esp. n. 80.

¹⁰² Procop. *De Aed.* 1.3.6-10

¹⁰³ Procop. *De Aed.* 6.2.20 ; 6.4.4 ; 6.5.9

¹⁰⁴ Procop. *De Aed.* 6.7.15. (Loeb trans.)

¹⁰⁵ Baynes 1955.

¹⁰⁶ Limberis 1994, pp. 92-94.

While the appeal to the Theotokos marked the Corinth text as almost certainly a Constantinopolitan product, reading it alongside the inscription from the Isthmus may well have encouraged a more sophisticated interpretation of both texts particularly among individuals involved in the theological disputes of the day. The texts taken together evoke the important works of the 5th century theologian and bishop Cyril of Alexandria who by the 6th century had emerged as an important benchmark for Orthodoxy among both Anti-Chalcedonians and Chalcedonians alike. Cyril rose to prominence as the opponent of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus in 431, and his writing framed the Christological debates of later centuries through his efforts to define the nature of Christ. The statement that Christ is "true God from true God", which he asserted through both appeals both to Scripture and to the Creed as promulgated at the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, emerged prominently in his *Anathemas* against Nestorius.¹⁰⁷ In fact, in Cyrilian theology it was Christ's status as true God *from true God* that secured Mary's status as Theotokos, the bearer of God. Thus, the invocations from the texts at Isthmia and from Corinth represent a neat pair asserting both the divine nature of Christ and, consequently, the status of Mary as Theotokos. Further encouraging this interpretation is that Cyril's emphasis on the link between the indisputable divinity of Christ and the Virgin as the Theotokos played a central part in Justinian's theological writings many of which date to within a few years of these inscriptions.¹⁰⁸ Justinian, and a larger group of scholars sometimes referred to Neo-Chalcedonians, worked explicitly to promote a form of Chalcedonian theology compatible with Cyril's writing. By demonstrating the fundamental agreement between Cyril and the Council of Chalcedon they sought to defuse tensions which had, by the mid-6th century, splintered churches of his empire.¹⁰⁹

By Justinian's death in 565, the interplay between the Creed and Mary's special status was sufficiently well-known to emerge with particular prominence in Corripus's *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris* which dates to less than two decades after these two inscriptions. Cameron has suggested that the poem encapsulated many of the reforms that took place in the later years of Justinian's reign.¹¹⁰ In the poem, the Theotokos appears at the beginning of Book 1 acting as the mediator between heaven and humanity when she tells the heir to the

¹⁰⁷ Mansi, *ACO* 1.5.15-16.

¹⁰⁸ Gray 1979, pp. 154-164. See: Justinian, *On the Person of Christ: The Christology of Emperor Justinian*. Trans. K.P. Wesche, pp. 119-120 and throughout.

¹⁰⁹ Gray 1979, pp. 105-172.

¹¹⁰ Cameron 1978.

throne of Justinian's death.¹¹¹ Her place in the poem makes clear associated with the imperial office and both she and the emperor shared the role of mediating God's will to the human subjects. At the opposite end of the poem, Corripus offers a theological ekphrasis of Justinian's church of Hagia Sophia which employs the Creed as its basic heuristic. Cameron suggested that the choice of Creed as lens to understand the architecture of the church was to evoke Justin II's use of the Creed to demonstrate his own Orthodoxy.¹¹² The parallels between the Corinthia inscriptions and the poem of Corripus suggests that the Corinthian inscriptions drew upon a strong current in imperial ideology. Moreover, the rarity of the invocations to the Virgin and the Creed during the 6th century mark these two texts are particularly distinct expressions of imperial policy.

The Inscriptions in the Archaeological Context of the Corinthian Isthmus

The inscriptions associated with the Justinianic refortification of the Isthmus provide valuable insights into the larger transformation of the Late Roman landscape during the 6th century. The inscription's integration of imperial authority, military policy, and Christian liturgy allow ties together some of the most notable archaeological features in the region. Moreover, the clear expression of imperial, specifically Justinianic involvement on the Isthmus reminds us that some of the changes on the Isthmus were not evolutionary developments native to the Corinthian Isthmus but the interaction of the Braudelian *longue durée* and powerful external forces. The final section of this article will serve as a conclusion by returning our new interpretation of the Isthmia inscription to its place amidst the considerable body of archaeological evidence for the 5th and 6th centuries assembled by the archaeological fieldwork of the last half century.

Renewed activity along the Hexamilion wall and the fortress at Isthmia would have undoubtedly had a major impact on the Isthmian landscape.¹¹³ The magnitude of the initial construction demanded resources from the entire prefecture of Illyricum.¹¹⁴ By the 6th century, Procopius tells us that the Hexamilion was in disrepair. There is reason, however, for caution regarding such claims: not only is Procopius unreliable regarding the condition of fortifications that Justinian restored, but the archaeological evidence from the fortress itself

¹¹¹ Corripus *Iust.*, 1.1-65.

¹¹² Corripus *Iust.* 4.288-365; Cameron 1976b, p. 208

¹¹³ Dunn 2004 for an overview of the role of garrisons and fortification in transforming the Later Roman landscape.

¹¹⁴ *Isthmia* V, pp. 143-144; Fowden 1995, pp. 551-553; Avramea 1997, pp. 63-64.

suggests only limited repairs.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless considering the total size of the Hexamilion, even modest repairs and modifications along its entire course would have represented a significant investment in both manpower and money.¹¹⁶ According to Procopius, part of this project included the installation of a garrison at the Isthmian fort which would have ensured that the site of Isthmia represented an important concentration of activity, and probably habitation in the Eastern Corinthia, along side the port of Kenchreai and the crossroads settlement of Cromna.¹¹⁷ According to Procopius the garrisons established by Justinian replaced the the farmer-soldiers of previous periods who had settled in the area in conjunction with the 5th century fortifications.¹¹⁸ Thus, the new garrison would have presumably added population to the region.¹¹⁹ To feed these additional men, Procopius seems to suggest that the emperor established granaries in Greece, in general, and since it is likely that the fortress was fed from the local territory, the demands of a larger population may have contributed to the more intensive exploitation of the region.¹²⁰

The rather abrupt increase in population on the Isthmus would have coincided with the visible and contemporary upswing in construction across the entire Isthmian corridor as well. The massive Lechaion basilica, mentioned earlier, complemented a whole series of 6th century churches in and around Corinth. Good sized basilicas surrounded the city of Corinth: one at a place called Skoutella on the plain between the city and Lechaion, another church, perhaps dedicated to the Martyr Kodratos, right outside the city walls, and a church with Proconessian marble architectural sculpture stood amidst the tombs of ancient Kraneion.¹²¹ Closer to Isthmia, a church of 6th century date stood at the Roman port of Kenchreai as well.¹²² Sanders suggested that the building boom of the 6th century reflects the late Christianization of the Corinthia. This is certainly possible, but the building of basilicas appears to be part of a larger upswing in construction across the entire region. The city of Corinth, in particular, experienced a general boom in building during the mid 6th century. The most significant construction in the city during the 6th century would have likely been the Late Roman fortification wall, now plausibly dated to the Justinianic period by Sanders and

¹¹⁵ *Isthmia V*, pp. 80-83, 101-102.

¹¹⁶ Kardulias 1995.

¹¹⁷ Pettegrew 2005, pp. 248-327; Tartaron et al. 2006, pp 494-513.

¹¹⁸ Procop. *De Aed.* 4.2.25; Procop. *HA* 26.31 refers to the garrisons at Thermopylae which replaced farmers who had formerly maintained and defended the fortifications there.

¹¹⁹ Kardulias 2005, 95-99 used anthropological methods to derive an estimate of 1,200-2,000 men; *Isthmia V*, using more traditional historical and archaeological sources estimated 2000 men maximum.

¹²⁰ Procop. *De Aed.* 4.2.14. Haldon 1990, p. 11.

¹²¹ Pallas 1990, pp. 746-814; Sanders 2005, pp. 437-441.

¹²² Rothaus 2000, pp. 77-78 for a summary of the evidence.

Slane.¹²³ By the 6th century nearly all urban fortification projects were imperial initiatives funded with a combination of local and imperial resources.¹²⁴ Recent work within the city itself, however, has identified several monumental buildings of seemingly Justinianic date.¹²⁵ The entirety of the isthmus seems to have been awash in imperial initiatives funded, many presumably through imperial directives. If we associate even a few of these buildings with the work of Justinian, however, and the chronology and architecture of the buildings suggest that numerous buildings may have been built during his reign, then it may be that the 6th century construction boom was more closely related to Justinian's efforts to promote his imperial authority and reflected political changes on the Isthmus rather than religious.

The intensive construction campaign would have transformed the human landscape of the Corinthia. As Pettegrew has already noted, the construction on the Isthmus during the first half 6th century would have certainly required the expansion of the local economy.¹²⁶ Several surveys in the Eastern part of the Korinthia conducted over the last several decades demonstrate a vital and probably expanding regional economy which not only the fertile plains of the Eastern Isthmus but also extended into marginal lands, like the southern slopes of Mt. Oneion and the arid islands of the Saronic gulf.¹²⁷ The intensification of agriculture may well have been directed by the numerous Late Roman villas found across the Isthmus and reflected in the numerous transport amphorae found at both Isthmia and in the Eastern Korinthia Archaeological Survey which would provided sustenance for both the construction crews and garrison at the Isthmian fortification.¹²⁸ This would, in many ways, be consistent with the economic impact that scholars have observed for other fortified places in Greece.¹²⁹ The agricultural surplus of the Isthmus would have been redirected toward the short term needs of construction as well as the longer term needs of the fortress. These goods passing from the countryside into the fortress or Corinth town would have passed under the inscriptions which clearly linked the fortification on the Isthmus to imperial policy. Moreover by evoking liturgical language the inscribed text tied the emperor to the divine authority of the church in an expression of Orthodoxy. Thus, through a complex but clear web of associations, imperial authority became manifest in the military, economic, and religious activities of day to day life on the isthmus. Even if we share Pettegrew's skeptical

¹²³ Sanders and Slane 2005.

¹²⁴ Pringle 1981, pp. 89-91.

¹²⁵ Sanders 1999, 473-475; Sanders and Slane 2005, pp. 289-294.

¹²⁶ Pettegrew 2005, pp. 69-77..

¹²⁷ Kardulias, Gregory, Sawmiller 1995, p. 17.

¹²⁸ Pettegrew 2005, p. 244; Karagiorgou 2001, pp. 143-144; *Isthmia* V, p. 127.

¹²⁹ Dunn 2004.

interpretation of the boom in Late Roman ceramic evidence in the countryside, it seems likely that the very character of the Late Roman Isthmus underwent a transformation.¹³⁰

This study took as its point of departure the short, and rather overlooked Justinianic inscription from Isthmia. A careful reading of this text in both the historical and archaeological context of the over a half century of study on the Isthmus has offered a substantial outline of the close ties between imperial authority, ecclesiastical unity, military security, and even economic change on the Justinianic Isthmus. The imperial presence in the landscape showed signs of the kind "totalizing discourse" that connected the everyday life, movements, and economy of the Isthmus with the ritual life of the Capital.¹³¹ The Christian liturgy which had become particularly visible in the Corinthian landscape through the large-scale construction of churches during the 6th century, represented a unifying ritual that served to reinforce a common identity among the Empire's Christians.¹³² The establishment of a common set of beliefs as manifest in the liturgy was a crucial element to imperial policy at the margins of the empire. Greece, and the Isthmus in particular, with its divided loyalties between the western ecclesiastical center of Rome and the eastern political center of Constantinople fit awkwardly into Justinian's strategy for a unified imperial rule and provoked imperial policies that sought to unify political and religious authority. The continued military and political involvement in Italy and elsewhere in the west made securing the loyalty of the Isthmian crossroads an imperative.

¹³⁰ Pettegrew 2008.

¹³¹ Cameron 1991, 220-221

¹³² J. Nelson 1976, pp. 100-105.

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