Chapter 25

‘Ioannoupolis’: Lopadion as ‘City’ and Military Headquarters under Emperor Ioannes II Komnenos

Maximilian Lau

Lopadion is to be found on the banks of the river Ryndakos. It corresponds to the modern village of Uluabad on the Mustafakemalpaşa, and lies on the main road to the west of Bursa. It has not gone unnoticed by historians of the Komnenian era: John Haldon’s work on the Byzantine military and John Birkenmeier’s study on the development of the Komnenian Army interpret its role as being in the tradition of the aplekta, or supply camps mentioned in the military manuals of the tenth century.1 Angeliki Papageorgiou has agreed with this in her doctoral thesis on Ioannes II Komnenos, and takes it as an example of the emperor’s focus on a strong army in his reign.2 Through the eyes of Theodoros Prodromos and the court of Ioannes, and indeed studying its ruins in the modern day, it can however be interpreted as a site much more important than either a supply camp, or an expression of the emperor’s martial nature. The purpose of this paper is thus to understand what Lopadion represented and what functions it served to contemporaries: why such a fortification was built in that place and at that time, and how it was perceived in the rhetoric of political discourse, in the light of both the textual and the archaeological evidence that have not been included in previous interpretations.

Ferdinand Chalandon’s Les Comnènes first associated Lopadion with Ioannes II Komnenos, correlating Mikail the Syrian’s mention that Ioannes built a “town on the coast” in 1130, with Ioannes Kinnamos’ note that Lopadion was “newly constructed” during his reign.3 This interpretation presents an


immediate historiographical problem however – Lopadion has a far longer settlement history than that of a site founded by Ioannes. The first part of this paper will therefore track this history, and then with that knowledge put forward a solution to this problem.

Lopadion is first mentioned in textual sources in the early-ninth century letters of Theodoros Stoudites as the site of a xenodocheion (hostel), which was built next to a strategic bridge over the River Ryndakos. This bridge was built sometime after 258, when the Scythians found the river impossible to cross when swollen with rain, and so had to go all around Lake Uluabat, classically known as Lake Apolloniatis; thus we can establish a terminus post and ante quem for the site’s foundation between these two dates. The remains of this bridge are still extant, and show signs of repair with a diagonal line in the masonry, possibly caused by an earthquake (Figs. 25.1 and 25.2). Whether this damage was caused by an unknown earlier earthquake, or was due to the 1327 earthquake that caused the walls to weaken and facilitated the Ottomans conquest of Lopadion, this repair shows the strategic importance of the site. In addition to merely crossing the Ryndakos here, the river itself connected Lopadion to the Sea of Marmara and thence to Constantinople and the wider world. The tenth-century Arab geographer Al-Mas’udi mentioned it as one of the main places for Muslims to pass on the way to Constantinople in earlier centuries, and the eighteenth-century Italian traveller Domenico Sestini mentions how it was navigable to this point in his day, as boats regularly went from there to Constantinople and back. Thus throughout the site’s history it had enviable connectivity with the wider world by both sea and land.

The sigillographic evidence provided by five seals suggest that this was a settlement that grew slowly over the centuries, and though these seals represent serendipitous finds that may distort any analysis, their existence at the very least once again refutes the possibility of Lopadion being a new


