BUILDING
Abstract

Eastern literary and epigraphic sources from the 5th and 6th centuries A.D. mention several architects/engineers in the service of the imperial court at Constantinople. They give us an idea of the scientific knowledge, technical expertise and social status of these men. A larger group of architects and master-builders are also attested. They operated mainly in a lower-key, local context, but they also moved abroad to answer the requests of patrons. A comparison between the written sources and archaeology allows us to reconstruct some examples of the mobility of people and ideas, and to advance some hypotheses about the development of building material culture in the late antique eastern Mediterranean world.

Sovereigns and Architects

The image of the sovereign in the literary and epigraphic sources of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium is often associated with the well-established classical idea of the ‘Great Builder’. The ruler was personally involved in devising, planning and directing restoration, building and re-building projects all over the empire, thus improving both the ‘beauty’ and functionality of its cities.

When, in A.D. 550–560, Procopius of Caesarea compiled De Aedificiis, the panegyric of Justinian, even the title testified to the tremendous significance of imperial building activity in defining the public

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1 Pernot (1993), 418; more generally on classical background of late antique panegyric, Whitby (1998).