

Late Roman Achaëa: identity and defence

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TIMOTHY E. GREGORY, *ISTHMIA V: THE HEXAMILION AND THE FORTRESS* (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Princeton 1993). Pp. xx + 160, 30 figs., 46 pls. ISBN 0-87661-935-9.

PAAVO CASTRÉN (ed.), *POST-HERULIAN ATHENS: ASPECTS OF LIFE AND CULTURE IN ATHENS A.D. 267-529* (Papers and Monographs of the Finnish Institute at Athens, vol. I; Suomen Ateenan-instituutin säätiö, Helsinki 1994). Pp. xi + 192, 34 ill. ISBN 951-95295-2-7.

T. Gregory's long awaited and most welcome publication of the Isthmian Wall, or Hexamilion, and the slighter volume of historical, archaeological and epigraphical essays published by a group of Finnish scholars under the title *Post-Herulian Athens*, both attempt to place systematic archaeological description of particular monuments in a wider historical perspective. If that historical perspective turns out to be, in both cases, less than generous, that is not necessarily in itself legitimate grounds for criticism. Nonetheless, the present review aims to show how the materials presented in these two books could be made to work harder, if considered in the light of the evolving relationship at this period between questions of identity and defence which are implicit in both works. In practice, adoption of this particular perspective will also affect our estimate of some of the conclusions put forward by Gregory and the Finnish team.¹

Isthmia: Achaëa's last line of defence

As is well known, in the year 364 Valens and Valentinian banned nocturnal sacrifices (*C.Th.* IX.16.7), but were persuaded by the proconsul of Achaëa, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, to exempt Greece on the grounds that its inhabitants would have found life intolerable without their mystery cults, "which keep the human race from falling to pieces (τὰ συνέχοντα τὸ ἀνθρώπειον γένος)" (*Zos.* 4.3.2-3). It is likely that Praetextatus had particularly in mind Eleusis where, had one visited the sanctuary at this date, one would have crossed a stone-paved court and approached an austere mid 3rd-c. defensive wall pierced by a single massive doorway. This wall thoroughly obstructed one's view of the pompous, academic propylaea Hadrian had built and Marcus Aurelius restored, after the incursion by the Costoboci c.170-71. The whole shrine, in fact, was girt about by a wall and towers, which excluded extensive ancillary installations now, in practice, abandoned.² As a fortress of the mysteries, a battlemented *telesterion*, Eleusis no less than the Athenian acropolis illustrated how questions of identity and defence had always been intertwined: Eleusis was not just Athens' "ornament",³ but also its bulwark in case of attack from the north,⁴ just as neighbouring Megara, to the west, was an obstacle to whoever would invade the Peloponnese.

If neither of the books under review makes any reference to the paradigmatic account of the Eleusinian fortifications by D. G. Giraud (*Ζιρώ*), *Ἡ κυρία εἴσοδος τοῦ ἱεροῦ τῆς Ἐλευσίνος* (Athens 1991), that is merely one symptom of a wider failure to see Achaëa as a whole.⁵ Susan

1 For discussion and help of various sorts I am obliged to P. Asimakopoulou-Atzaka, J. Binder, A. Choremi, S. Ćurčić, E. Ivison, Y. Knithakis, A. Rizakis, S. Walker and J. J. Wilkes. Abbreviations follow the conventions of *L'année philologique*.

2 D. G. Ziro, *Ἡ κυρία εἴσοδος τοῦ ἱεροῦ τῆς Ἐλευσίνος* (Athens 1991) 277-90, esp. figs 137, 141; W. Scheidel, "Probleme der Datierung des Costoboceneinfalls im Balkanraum unter Marcus Aurelius," *Historia* 39 (1990) 493-98.

3 See the Isiac aretalogy from Maroneia published by Y. Grandjean, *Une nouvelle arétalogie d'Isis à Maronée* (Leiden 1975) 17-18.

4 Hdt. 9.7.

5 It should in fairness be noted that Gregory's book was published in 1993, having been submitted in