

## Μακεδονικά

Τόμ. 12 (1972)

Αφιερούται εις την μνήμην Γεωργίου Θεμελή, Χαραλάμπους Λέκα



Νεώτεροι παρατηρήσεις επί της χρονολογίας των τειχών της Θεσσαλονίκης

Michael Vickers

doi: [10.12681/makedonika.1006](https://doi.org/10.12681/makedonika.1006)

Copyright © 2015, Michael Vickers



Άδεια χρήσης [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

Vickers, M. (1972). Νεώτεροι παρατηρήσεις επί της χρονολογίας των τειχών της Θεσσαλονίκης. *Μακεδονικά*, 12, 228–233. <https://doi.org/10.12681/makedonika.1006>

## FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE WALLS OF THESSALONIKI

In a recent article<sup>1</sup>, G. Gounaris has challenged the present writer's re-dating (to the mid-fifth century) of the city walls<sup>2</sup>, and the second phase of the Rotunda at Thessaloniki<sup>3</sup>. He rightly corrects some elementary mistakes, but fails to give any convincing arguments for the retention of a late fourth century date for these monuments.

The crucial factor is the date to be given to the inscription<sup>4</sup> on a tower in the eastern wall which refers to a certain Hormisdas having fortified the city. Gounaris follows Tafrali's hypothesis<sup>5</sup> that the Hormisdas in question was the commander of Theodosius I's Egyptian troops who is known to have been in Thessaloniki in 380<sup>6</sup>, and that since this Hormisdas had been *Proconsul Asiae* under Procopius<sup>7</sup>, that he held a similar office under Theodosius. The arguments that were adduced against this view in 1969 still hold true; they bear repetition:

The appointment by Procopius is presented by Marcellinus as exceptional «...potestatem proconsulis detulit, et civilia more veterum et bella recturo». The point is that the terms of the appointment were deliberately archaic, «more veterum», in that they combined civilian and military functions. This was no longer true by the fourth century; proconsuls had exclusively civilian functions. Moreover, the proconsulship of Hormisdas is not defined by province, another archaic, republican touch. Thus to say that he held this post under Theodosius I is incorrect, apart from the fact that Procopius was a usurper. Secondly, whatever Hormisdas' position might have been in 380, he could not have been proconsul, since Zosimus distinctly says that he was there in a military capa-

---

1. Παρατηρήσεις τινές ἐπὶ τῆς χρονολογίας τῶν τειχῶν τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης, «Μακεδονικά» XI (1971), p.p. 311-323.

2. The date of the walls of Thessalonica, «Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Yilligi», XV - XVI (1969) p.p. 313-318.

3. The date of the mosaics of the Rotunda at Thessaloniki, PBSR n.s. XXV (1970), p.p. 183-187.

4. Inscriptiones Graecae X, ii, 1 (Berlin 1972) No. 43.

5. Topographie de Thessalonique, Paris 1913, p.p. 33-40.

6. Zosimus IV, 30.

7. Ammianus Marcellinus XXVI, 8, 12.

city. In either case, Tafrali's suggestion is invalid. Gounaris fails altogether to tackle this argument, preferring to concentrate on refuting the claims of the fifth century Hormisdas.

Gounaris is correct in criticising the suggestion that because this Hormisdas was *Praefectus Praetorio Orientis* he was therefore responsible for wall building, operations at Thessaloniki<sup>1</sup>; he would almost certainly have had to have held the post of PPo Illyrici if he was to be in a position to do this. A close examination of the relevant historical sources does, however, make it seem possible that he held the post of PPo Illyrici first, and that of PPo Orientis afterwards. The earliest reference to him as PPo, dated February 16th 448, does not specify the prefecture, being merely addressed to «Ὁρμισδᾶ ἐπάρχῳ πραιτωρίων»<sup>2</sup>, which leaves open the possibility that he was PPo Illyrici at the time. He is first specifically referred to as PPo Orientis in a law promulgated late in 449 or early in 450<sup>3</sup>. He is heard of a couple of times more in 450<sup>4</sup>, and was apparently replaced by Palladius after the accession of Marcian, after which nothing is known of him.

Merely to say that the presence of the inscription on the wall of Thessaloniki indicates that Hormisdas must have been PPo Illyrici is to come dangerously close to a circular argument. The brick stamps, to which Gounaris attaches so little importance, provide a way out.

It is the present writer's contention (following Koethe)<sup>5</sup> that since the stamps on the bricks (as well as the dimensions of the bricks themselves) of several monuments at Thessaloniki are so similar, the buildings to which they belong were in all likelihood built around the same time. Many of these buildings are undeniably of fifth century date: the Acheiropietos basilica, the large basilica underlying the present St. Sophia and the first phase of St. Demetrius (whence, no doubt, came the brick built into a nearby drain, of which Gounaris publishes a photograph<sup>6</sup>), while others are arguably so: the second

1. A suggestion first made by H. Koethe, Jdl XL (1933), p. 197.

2. CJ I, 1, 3.

3. CJ XL, 22, 1.

4. January 9th, CJ V, 14, 8 and 17, 8, and April 3rd, CJ VI, 52, 1.

5. Loc. cit.

6. Fig. 6, p. 322. The first church of St. Demetrius was badly damaged by fire at some time between 603 and 649, and was reconstructed soon afterwards (R. Cormack, BSA LXIV (1969), p.p. 42-45). This would have 'released' bricks bearing what I should call fifth century stamps for the drain. The brick found at the junction of Philippou and Venizelou can not be as early as Gounaris seems to suggest (pp. 320-321, fig. 5). There are three crosses on it, of an indisputable Christian character, which point to its having been made in post-Constantinian times. He overlooks, moreover, one significant piece of evidence for the date of

phase of the Rotunda, the Byzantine palace, and the walls. A detailed analysis by the present writer of all the published brick stamps from Thessaloniki is forthcoming elsewhere<sup>1</sup>; the two principal points that have emerged are: 1) The remarkable correlation between the stamps from different buildings, confirming, indeed emphasizing, the validity of the hypothesis based on just a few examples. 2) The large number of stamps bearing indiction marks<sup>2</sup>, mostly of a first indiction, but possibly including a second and a tenth. The preponderance of bricks dated to a first indiction is of some interest, especially as a first indiction fell between September 447 and August 448<sup>3</sup>—the year in which it is known that Hormisdas was PPO, possibly of Illyricum. But in the light of this evidence, can we not say, with a much greater degree of certainty (and much less circularity) that he *was* PPO of Illyrici and was responsible for building the walls of Thessaloniki, and consequently that the latter, with their inscription, should be dated to the mid-fifth century? More-over, the historical context is right for the fortification of Thessaloniki on such a grand scale. The seat of the prefect of Illyricum had been moved there from Sirmium in c. 441-2 in the face of the threat presented by the Huns<sup>4</sup>. It would have taken some years for the necessary finance to be raised and for the work to begin, hence the delay in building the walls. This explanation of the Hormisdas inscription takes account of both the archaeological and historical evidence; Gounaris' defence of Tafrali's hypothesis does neither.

Gounaris also maintains that the part of the western wall to the south of the Litaia Gate was built later than the rest of the city's defences. His reasons for saying this are that 1) the brickwork is in a different style from that of most of the rest of the walls, and that 2) since most of the reused seats from the Hippodrome are in the western wall on the far side of the city from the Hippodrome, rather than in the nearby eastern wall, then the eastern wall must have already

---

these brick stamps: they do not occur in buildings of the Tetrarchic period, where the branches are of a distinctive type but of a different size and with simple marks made with fingers when the clay was still wet (see Hébrard, BCH XLIV (1920), p.23, fig. 9 [Rotunda]; Makaronas, ΠΑΕ 1950, p. 309, fig. 6 [Octagon]). The Tetrarchic palace, incidentally, like the walls was a mammoth undertaking, and bricks seem to have been made in great quantities especially for it; something which Gounaris claims not to have been possible with the mechanical means available in the late Empire (p. 320).

1. BSA LXVIII (1973).

2. Cf. G. and M. Soteriou, 'Η Βασιλική τοῦ Ἀγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης, Athens 1952, p. 235.

3. V. Grumel, *Traité d'études byzantines I*, 'La chronologie', Paris 1959, p. 243.

4. Justinian, *Novella XI* (ed. Schoell-Kroll, 94) and Theodore, *Eccles-Hist.* v. 17, 1 (ed. Gaisford, 430) cited by P. Lemerle, *Philippe et la Macédoine orientale*, Paris 1945, pp. 82-3.

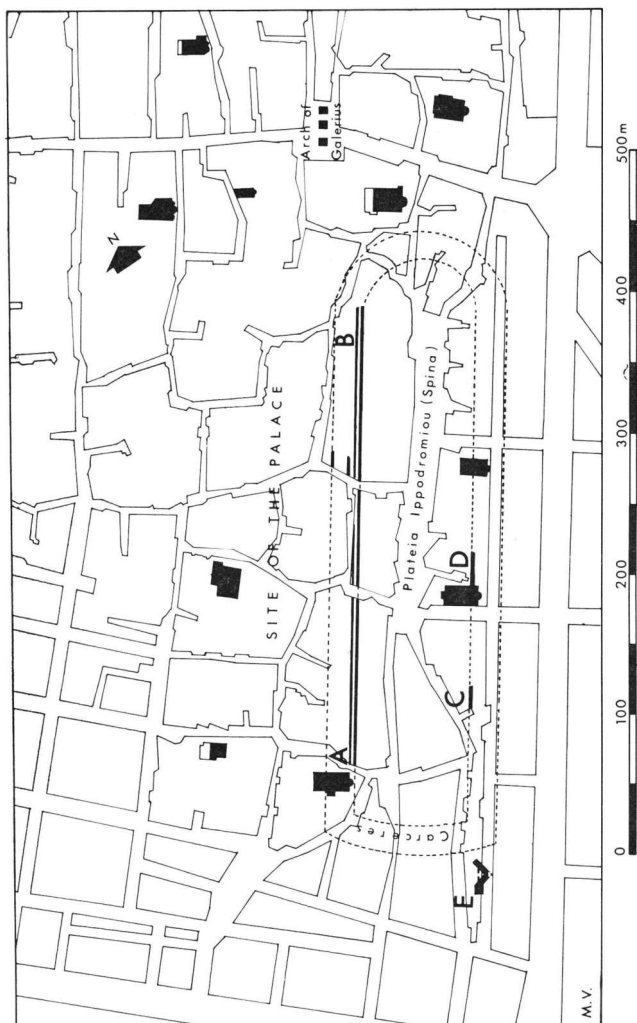


Fig. 1. Reconstructed plan of the Hippodrome

been built when the western wall was erected<sup>1</sup>. He plays down too much, however, the presence of Hippodrome seats in the eastern wall. He does not seem to give enough weight to Papageorgiou's statement that such blocks did occur there in apparently considerable numbers (Papageorgiou does not make any distinction between east and west)<sup>2</sup>, and appears to be arguing from the situation at the present day, when very little of the eastern wall is known, whereas, long stretches of the western wall are still extant. Nevertheless, he is probably right in his contention that there were more Hippodrome seats in the west than in the east (Papageorgiou cites more inscriptions from the west), but the reason is not one that he has considered.

The answer is to be found in figure 1, a reconstructed plan of the Hippodrome, drawn out against a plan of the area made around 1917. The letters represent parts of the Hippodrome that have been recorded at one time or another. A-B was a vault recorded on a military map made during the Great War<sup>3</sup>. C is part of the marble podium of the eastern side found in about 1963 at the corner of Odos Tsimiski and Odos Romanou<sup>4</sup>, and D a further section found in 1968<sup>5</sup>. The most interesting feature for present purposes, however, is the short stretch of city wall at E which was found in about 1963<sup>6</sup>. The broad outlines of the plan of the Hippodrome, which has close parallels elsewhere in the Roman world, are certain<sup>7</sup>. The long, narrow tail-like block which is visible to the south of it on the 1917 plan does not, however, owe its shape to the Hippodrome, but rather to the fact that the city wall underlies it, not merely at E, but also further north, where we know the Hippodrome to have been situated. The inference is clear: the eastern side of the Hippodrome was

1. *Op. cit.*, 315.

2. *AE* 1911, p.p. 168-70.

3. 'Plan of Salonica', 1: 10,000, prepared by the Service topographique des Armées alliées for the British Army, Cf. the 'file d'arceaux' mentioned by F. de Beaujour, *Tableau du commerce de la Grèce*, Paris 1800, p. 37, followed by E. D. Clarke, *Travels in various countries of Europe, Asia and Africa*, 4th ed., VII, London 1818, p. 454.

4. Ph. Drosoyanni, *Arch. Delt.* XVIII (1963) B2, p.p. 244-6, figs 4-6, pl. 276 a. Ph. Petsas, *ibid.*, XXIV (1969) B2, p.p. 295-6, fig. 2, pl. 305 c-d.

5. Petsas, *Arch. Delt.* XXIII (1968) B2, p.p. 332-4, fig. 6, pl. 279; *id.*, «Makedonika» VII (1969), p. 151, pls. 50-3.

6. Drosoyanni, *Arch. Delt.* XVIII (1963) B2, p.p. 243-6, figs 3 and 6, pl. 275. More stretches had been found further to the south in 1950 (BCH LXXV [1951] 116 and «Makedonika» II [1941-52] 597), 1951 (BCH LXVVI [1952] 227), and 1952 (BCH LXXVII [1953] 224), but were incorrectly attributed to Galerius.

7. For a more detailed discussion, see M. Vickers, *The Hippodrome at Thessaloniki*, *JRS* LXII (1972), p. 25 ff.

used as the foundation for part of the eastern walls. There was consequently not the same need to use marble Hippodrome seats in the east as there was in the west. This would explain their presence in greater numbers in the west; there is no need to have recourse to Gounaris' over-ingenious explanation.

MICHAEL VICKERS

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΙΣ

Michael Vickers, Νεώτεροι παρατηρήσεις ἐπὶ τῆς χρονολογίας τῶν τειχῶν τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης.

Ὁ Γ. Γούναρης ἔχει ἀμφισβητήσῃ τὴν νέαν χρονολόγησιν (εἰς τὰ μέσα τοῦ 5ου αἰ. μ.Χ.) τῶν τειχῶν τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης καὶ τῆς δευτέρας φάσεως τῆς Ροτόντας. Ἐχει διορθώσει λάθη τινὰ στοιχειώδη, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἐπέτυχε νὰ δώσῃ πειστικὰ ἐπιχειρήματα διὰ τὴν χρονολόγησιν τῶν μνημείων εἰς τὸ τέλος τοῦ 4ου αἰ. π.Χ.

Βασικὴ εἶναι ἡ χρονολόγησις τῆς ἐπιγραφῆς τοῦ Ὁρμίσδα. Ὁ Γ. Γούναρης δέχεται τὴν μὴ ἰσχύουσαν πλέον ὑπόθεσιν τοῦ Tafrafi περὶ Ὁρμίσδα καὶ χρονολογεῖ εἰς τὸ 380 μ.Χ. Ἐνας δεύτερος Ὁρμίσδας τοῦ 5ου αἰ. μ.Χ. ὑπῆρξεν Praefectus Praetorio τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ πρὶν γίνεσθαι τῆς Ἀνατολῆς. Ἱστορικὰ ὅσον καὶ ἀρχαιολογικὰ εἶναι τὰ ἐπιχειρήματα, εἰς τὰ ὅποια στηρίζεται ἡ χρονολόγησις τῆς ἐπιγραφῆς τοῦ Ὁρμίσδα καὶ τῶν τειχῶν τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης εἰς τὸν 5ον αἰ.

Ὁ Γ. Γούναρης ἐπίσης θεωρεῖ τὸ νοτίως τῆς Ληταίας Πύλης τμήμα τοῦ δυτικοῦ τείχους μεταγενέστερον τῶν ἄλλων ὀχυρώσεων, ἀλλὰ παραβλέπει ὅτι ἡ ἀνατολικὴ πλευρὰ τοῦ Ἱπποδρόμου χρησίμευσε καὶ ὡς μέρος τοῦ ἀνατολικοῦ σκέλους τῶν τειχῶν καὶ ὡς ἐκ τούτου δὲν ἐχρησιμοποιήθησαν καθίσματα τοῦ Ἱπποδρόμου ἐδῶ ὅσα εἰς τὸ δυτικὸν σκέλος.