Sources of Resiliency

Byzantium survived the onslaughts of outsiders by preserving its capital city, which was well protected by high, thick, and far-flung walls that embraced farmland and pasture as well as the city proper (see Map 4.1 on p. 116). Within, the emperor (still calling himself the Roman emperor) and his officials serenely continued to collect the traditional Roman land taxes from the provinces left to them. This allowed the state to pay regular salaries to its soldiers, sailors, and court officials. The navy, well supplied with ships, patrolled the Mediterranean Sea. It was proud of its prestigious weapon, Greek Fire—a mixture of crude oil and resin, heated and projected via a tube over the water, where it burned, engulfing enemy ships with its flames. The armies of the empire, formerly posted as frontier guards, were now pulled back and set up as regional units within the empire itself. These armies and their regions, both called “themes,” were led by strategoi (sing. strategos), generals who were gradually given responsibility for both military and civil matters. They countered enemy raids while remaining close to sources of supplies and new recruits. Each soldier was given land in his theme to help him purchase his uniform and arms. In this way, the themes maintained the traditions of the imperial Roman army: well trained and equipped, Byzantium’s troops served as reliable defenders of their newly compact state.