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A LOST BYZANTINE MONASTERY AT PALATITZIA – VERGINA¹

Even before the spectacular find of a major Macedonian royal tomb in the 1970s, the name of Vergina was well known among students of ancient Greek art and civilization. The area first became a focus of archaeological attention in the 1850s and 60s, when the remains of

a large Hellenistic palace were brought to light² (Fig. 1). The palace is situated on a prominent plateau, overlooking the pastoral valley of the Aliakmon river, roughly at the half-point between Vergina and the nearby village of Palatitzia. Léon Heuzey, the French archaeo-

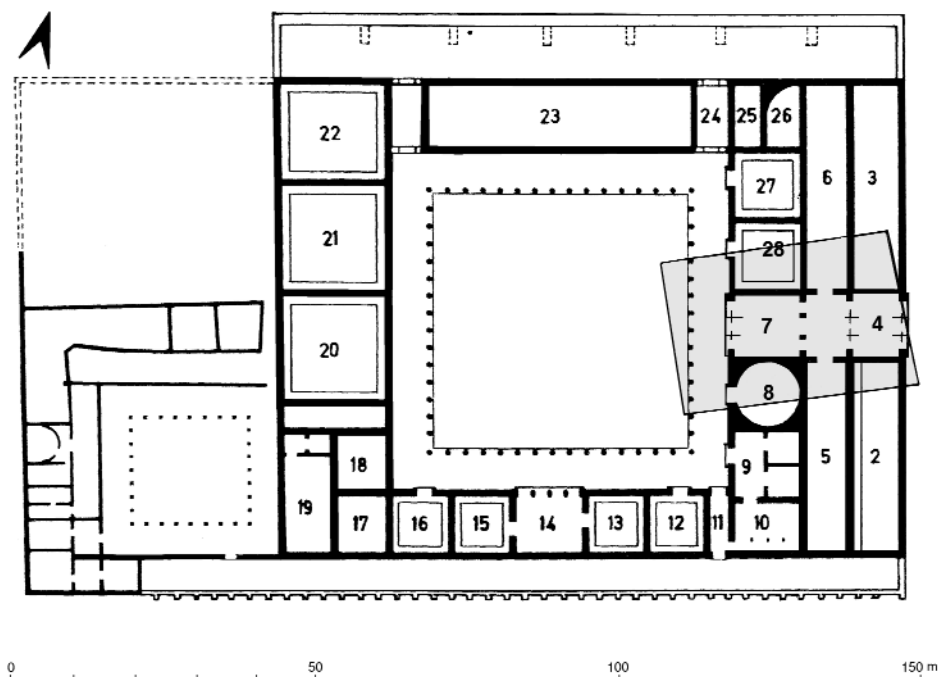


Fig. 1. Site Plan of Ancient Palace (after J. Travlos); Area of lost monastery shaded.

Εικ. 1. Κάτοψη του αρχαίου ανακτόρου (Ι. Τραυλός). Σκιασμένη η περιοχή της μονής.

logist who first visited the site in 1855, reported seeing there a “picturesque ruin” of a long-since abandoned Byzantine chapel³. The remains of the chapel, which he identified as Hagia Triada, were subsequently completely removed during the major excavations of the palace⁴. Thus it became one of a number of such modern cultural losses occasioned by the zeal of nineteenth and early twentieth-century classical archaeology. Its loss would have been complete were it not for the three engravings published by Heuzey and his collaborator Daumet⁵. The engravings in question — a site plan and two elevations— were made in September 1861, just before the final destruction of the chapel. Despite their intrinsic importance, these engravings, published in a volume that deals largely with Classical and

Hellenistic material, have completely escaped the attention of Byzantinists.

A closer inspection of the site plan published by Heuzey and Daumet reveals that the ‘picturesque ruin’ which he referred to, involved considerably more than a mere chapel. In fact, it involved an entire small monastic complex straddling the remains of the gate of the ancient palace (Fig. 2). Its roughly rectangular enclosure measured approximately 28 to 30m in width, by 38m in length. Notwithstanding the ruinous state of the monastic quarters, as depicted on the site plan, it is clear that a series of rooms of differing sizes and shapes lined the outer enclosure walls, leaving an open central courtyard, with the church in the middle. Although we are not in the position to discuss, the architectural character of

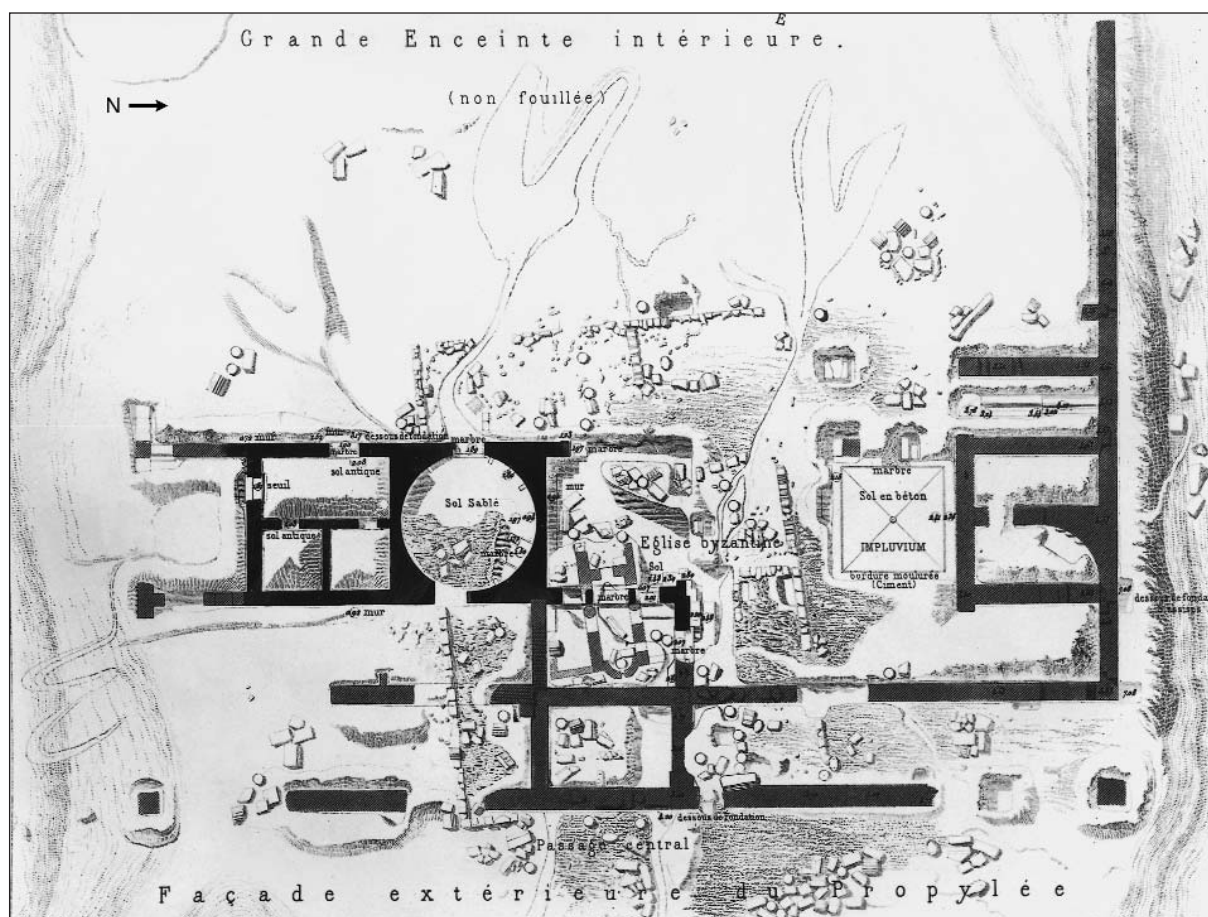


Fig. 2. Partially excavated NE corner of Ancient Palace with traces of Byzantine Monastery; plan (Heuzey and Daumet).

Εικ. 2. Μερική ανασκαφή της ΒΑ γωνίας του αρχαίου ανακτόρου με τα ίχνη της βυζαντινής μονής. Κάτοψη (Heuzey και Daumet).

this monastic compound, it is clear that the monastery and the church were planned and built simultaneously (Fig. 3). The entire layout is remarkably regular, and would seem to suggest that no major additions or alterations took place before the final demise of the small monastery. The planning principles employed are consistent with what we know about the planning of Byzantine monasteries, as illustrated by the plan of the eleventh-century monastery of Hosios Meletios on Mt. Hymettos near Athens⁶ (Fig. 4). What the plan of Hosios Meletios and the plan of our monastery have in common is the relative simplicity and regularity of the layout, rarely encountered among Byzantine monastic complexes. In most cases, regularity if employed at all, would have been characteristic of the initial layout,

but subsequent additions and modifications generally tended to alter the original appearance of a given complex⁷. Therefore, the general simplicity and regularity of the Palatitzia monastery plan would seem to suggest that the monastic community never grew beyond its original size and that the monastic compound itself was neither expanded nor altered before its ultimate demise. All factors point to the possibility that the actual life span of the monastery was relatively limited, possibly cut short by an event such as a natural catastrophe or an invasion. While this observation cannot serve as a dating criterion, it could imply a relatively late date of the monastery's foundation, whose life before the Ottoman conquest of these territories would have been too short for a significant growth and

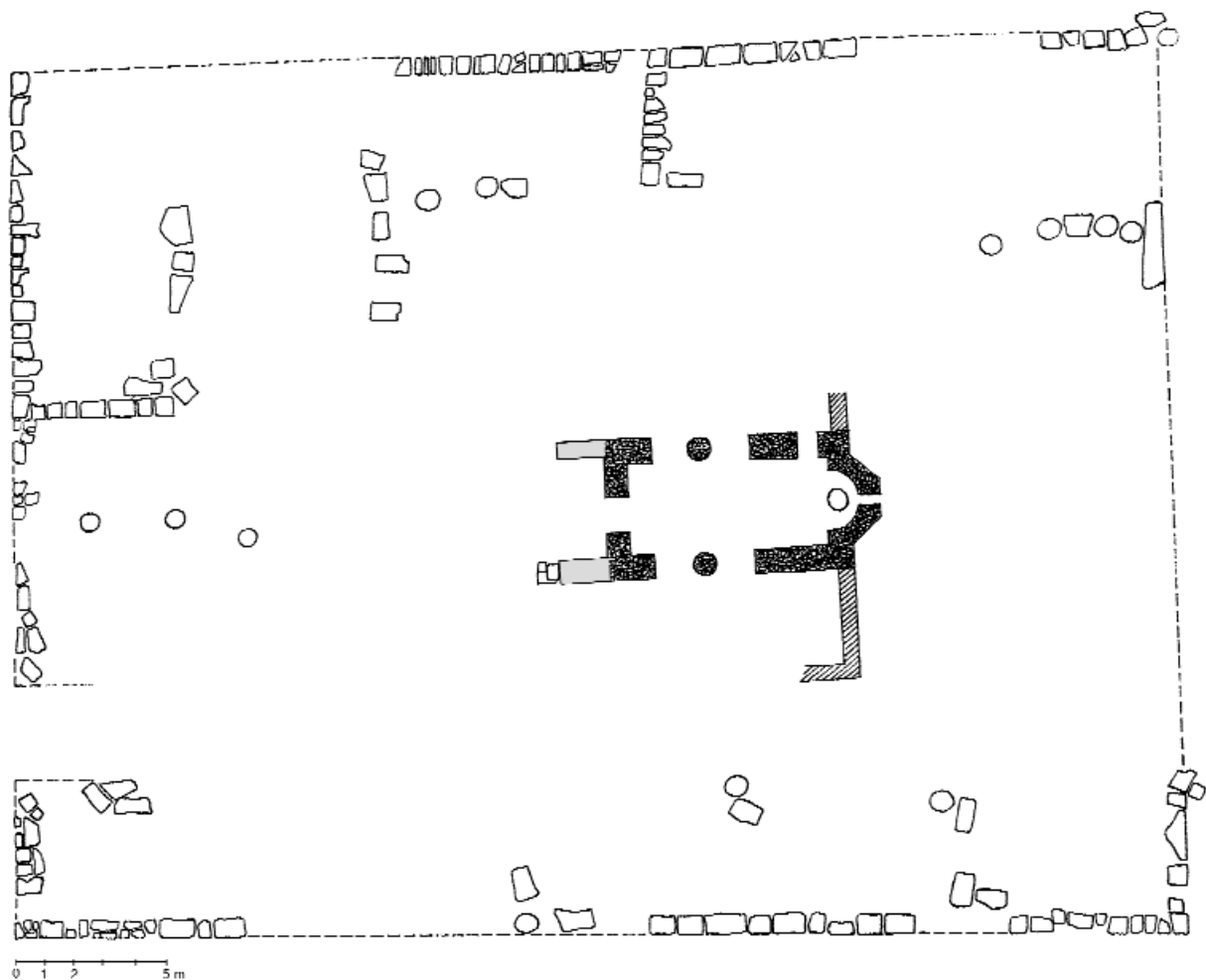


Fig. 3. Byzantine Monastery; plan (author).
Εικ. 3. Η βυζαντινή μονή (σχέδιο του γράφοντος).

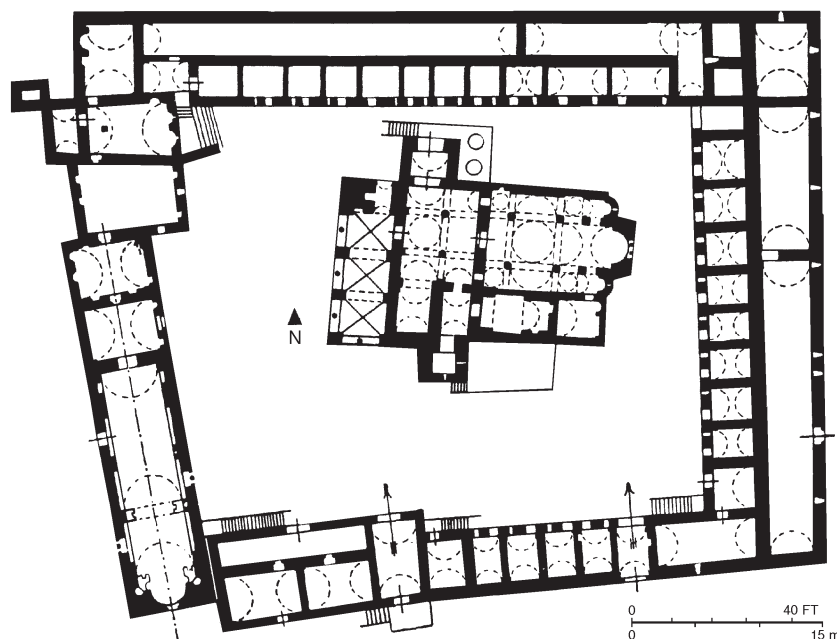


Fig. 4. Mt. Hymettos, Hosios Meletios Monastery; plan (Krautheimer).

Εικ. 4. Υμητός, Μονή Αγίου Μελετίου. Κάτοψη (Krautheimer).

changes to have occurred. We will return to the question of probable dating again below.

Turning to the architecture of the church itself, it should be noted that the drawings published by Heuzey and Daumet provide us with a number of helpful details. The church consisted of a single-aisled core (measuring ca. 4.75×9 m) and of what may be termed an outer, U-shaped envelope of subsidiary spaces (Fig. 5). My drawing, based on the published plan, suggests that joints between the building core and the outer envelope might be interpreted as evidence for the existence of two building phases. This, however, cannot be the case. The side walls of the naos were perforated by symmetrical pairs of double arcades each supported in the middle by a Doric column shaft pilfered from the ruins of the palace. The engraving of the ruined church showing it from the north, illustrates that the north wall had collapsed almost entirely, and that the south wall had undergone serious structural repairs in the form of blocking up of the two arched openings supported on a Doric column (Fig. 6). An interesting aspect of the placement of the two re-used ancient columns is that they practically coincided in space with the locations of two columnar ele-

ments of the original palace propylon. Heuzey and Daumet reconstructed these two columnar elements as Ionic piers with engaged semi-columns, but this interpretation has more recently met with critical re-evaluation of the problem⁸. For our purposes, the presence of Doric columns supporting double arched openings in the exterior walls of the naos simply implies that the arrangement could only have made sense in conjunction with an envelope enclosure. The elongated naos terminated in an apse, semicircular within and three-sided externally. Within the apse was an altar table evidently also supported on an ancient column drum.

An additional arched opening on the north side must have functioned as a passageway between the sanctuary and the prothesis, likewise presuming the existence of an enveloping space around the building core. No traces of an iconostasis screen were recorded, though one must have existed. Judging by the information gleaned from the elevations of the building ruin, the naos was never vaulted, but was covered with a wooden shed roof, as must have been the enveloping space.

Another feature identified in plan published by Heuzey and Daumet as an integral

Fig. 5. Monastery Church; plan, reconstruction (author).

Εικ. 5. Καθολικό της μονής. Κάτοψη-αναπαράσταση (του γράφοντος).

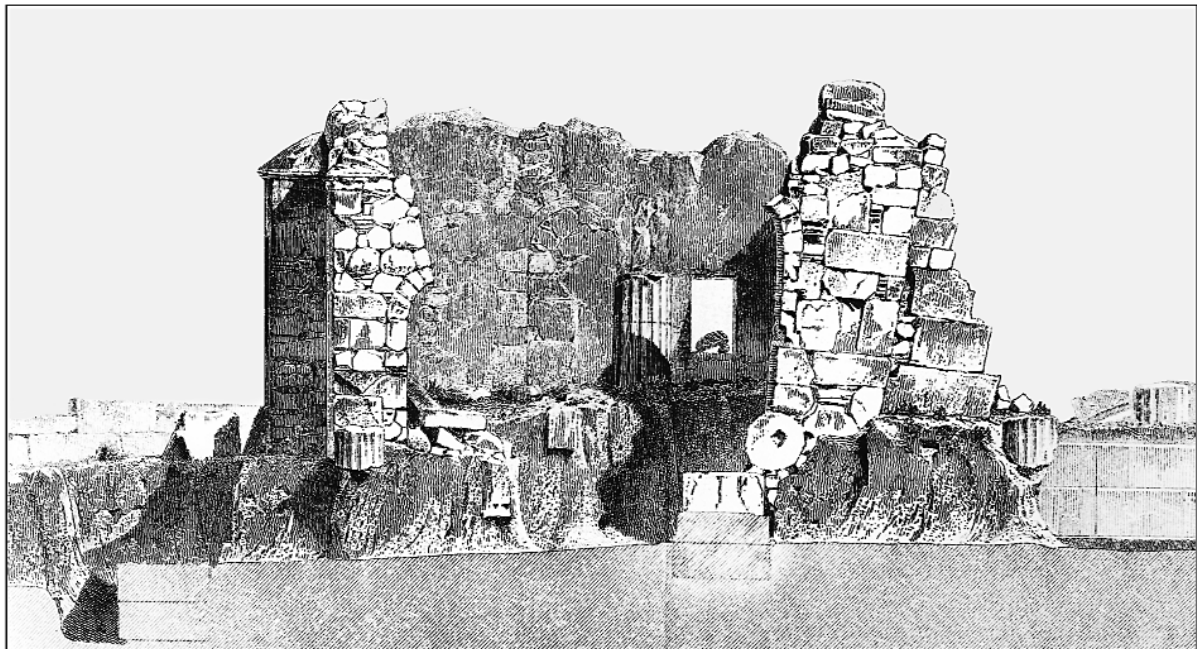
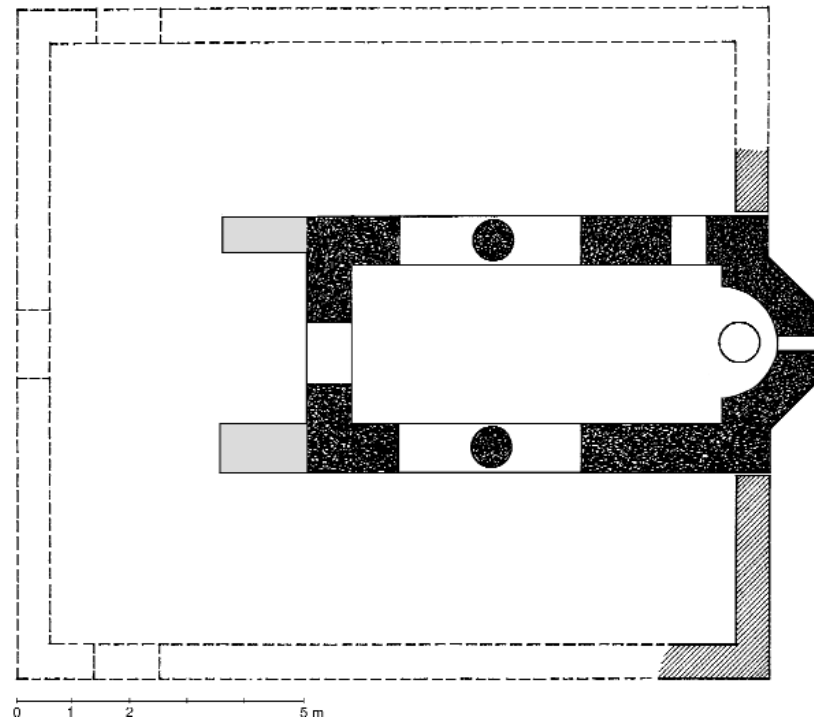


Fig. 6. View of church ruins from N; engraving (Heuzey and Daumet).

Εικ. 6. Αποψη των ερειπίων του ναού από Β. Χαρακτικό (Heuzey και Daumet).

part of the building core actually appears to be the result of a separate building phase. The feature in question is a pair of spur walls on the west side of the building core. Of uneven size in plan, they were nonetheless drawn as though they formed a type of a narthex-like space preceding the naos. The fact of the matter is that these were subsequently added wall buttresses. The side view of the building clearly shows a continuous joint between the remaining section of the north outer wall of the naos and the northwestern buttress mass (Fig. 6). Also built from re-used ancient building blocks, this buttress was probably added soon after the completion of the original construction. The need for buttressing apparently arose on account of improper founding of the building. The western part of the naos was built just outside the massive threshold of the ancient palace gate. Lacking a proper foundation of its own the western naos wall probably began sinking and leaning forward, as the engraving clearly shows. In order to prevent its imminent collapse the monks were compelled to call on a builder to repair the damage. How this intervention may have effected the arrangement of the enveloping space cannot be determined from the available evidence.

The choice of site — leveled ruins of an ancient palace — must have been a particular challenge and possibly an attraction for the monks responsible for the founding of this small monastery. Erecting monasteries and churches over ancient remains had long since been a challenge for monks everywhere in the Mediterranean world. In this case, the site was distinguished by the splendid view from its elevated plateau overlooking the plain with the Aliakmon River meandering in the distance. In addition to these, there must have also been strong practical considerations that would have influenced the choice of the site. Ready availability of large building block was certainly not a negligible matter. The church and the monastery complex, as is readily apparent from the Heuzey and Daumet engravings, were built of these spoils. Such practice was commonly resorted to in Byzantine building practice in relationship to buildings of all sizes⁹.

General architectural characteristics of our

church reveal a type common in the Late Byzantine period. Especially relevant in this context is a comparison with churches in the nearby town of Veroia (Verria), a prosperous center during the fourteenth century. A recent study of the churches at Veroia has revealed that verifiably at least twenty-two of these were already in existence during the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries¹⁰. Most of these churches display similarities of scale and general spatial articulation with the Palatitzia-Vergina church. Though majority of these appear to have been parish churches and not monastic in function, the same builders would in all likelihood have been responsible for building both. Two of these churches deserve particular attention on account of their typology and size. The first is the church of H. Georgios tou Archontos Grammatikou, a building displaying several building phases, the first of which belongs to the fourteenth century and displays strong similarities with the Palatitzia-Vergina church¹¹ (Fig. 7). Its core measuring ca. 5 × 10.5m, the entire church ca. 11.5 × 13.75m, it is also very close in actual measurements to the church at Palatitzia-Vergina. Even closer would have been the interior disposition — the naos separated from

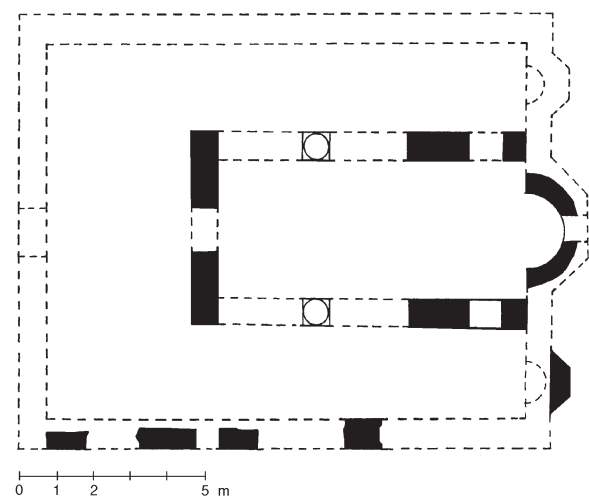


Fig. 7. Veroia, H. Georgios tou Archontos Grammatikou; plan, partial reconstruction (after Th. Papazotos).

Εικ. 7. Βέροια. Άγιος Γεώργιος του Αρχοντος Γραμματικού. Κάτοψη-μερική αναπαράσταση (Θ. Παπαζώτος).

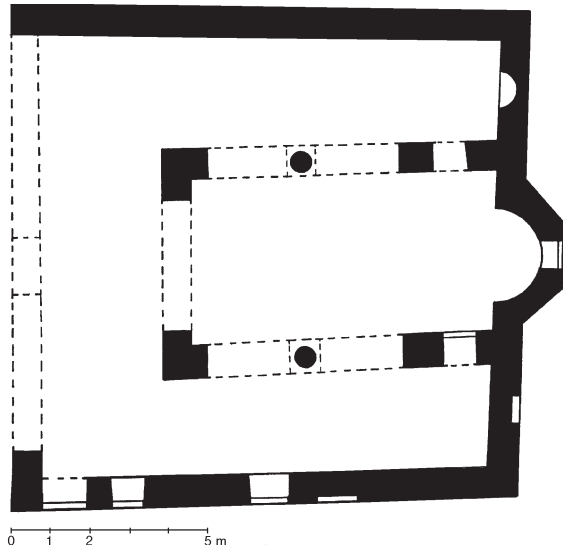


Fig. 8. Veroia, Panagia Perivleptos; plan, partial reconstruction (after Th. Papazotos).
Εικ. 8. Βέροια. Παναγία Περίβλεπτος. Κάτοψη-μερική αναπαράσταση (Θ. Παπαζώτος).

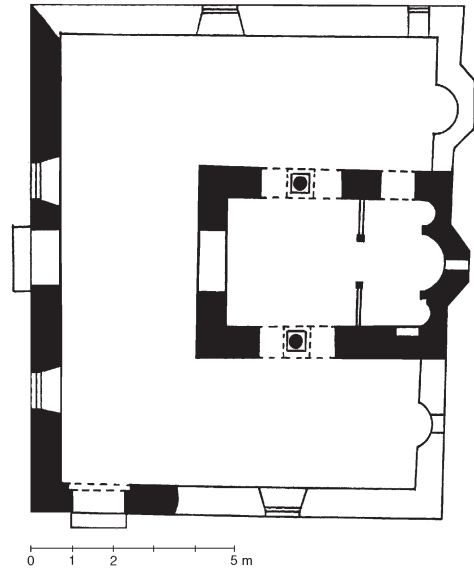


Fig. 9. Thessaloniki, Hagios Nikolaos Orphanos; plan (after A. Χυγγουπος; delineated by J. Bogdanovic); surviving original parts shown in black.
Εικ. 9. Θεσσαλονίκη. Άγιος Νικόλαος Ορφανός. Κάτοψη (Α. Ξυγγόπουλος ανασχ. J. Bogdanović).



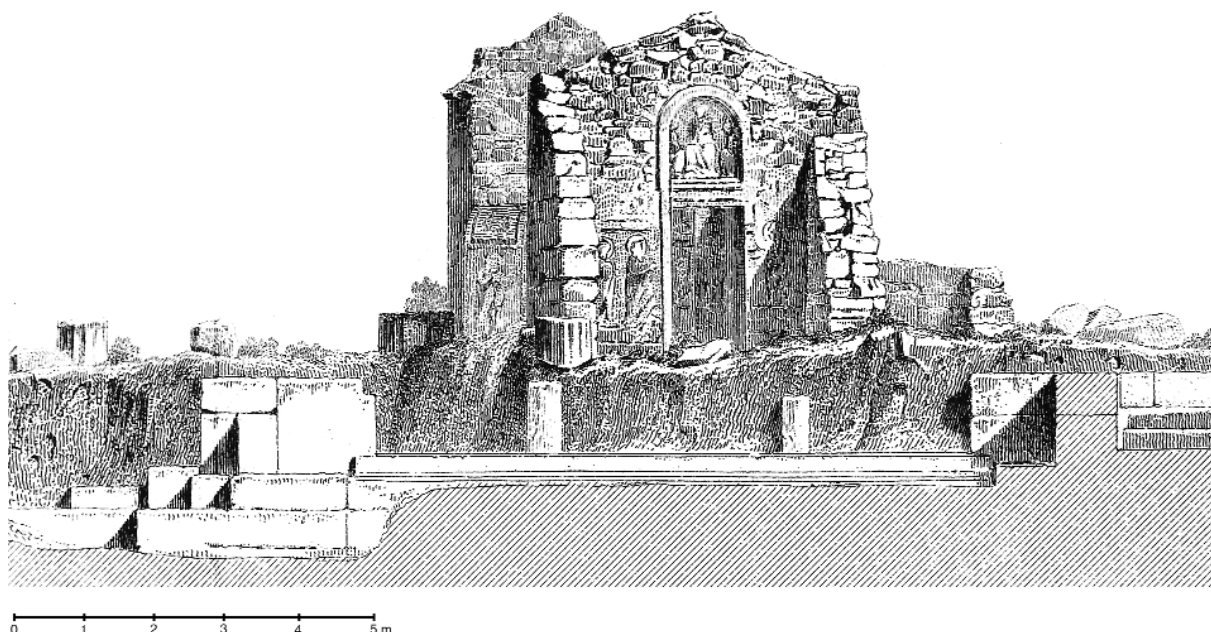
Fig. 10a. View of the eastern façade of Hagios Nikolaos Orphanos in Thessaloniki.
Εικ. 10α. Ανατολική όψη του Αγίου Νικολάου Ορφανού Θεσσαλονίκης.

the envelope spaces by double arcades supported on a single column, on the north and the south sides¹². The second church with similar characteristics is the Panagia Perivleptos, whose earliest phase may belong to the fifteenth century, possibly just after the Ottoman conquest of Veroia¹³ (Fig. 8). Here the building core measures ca. 5.5 × 9.5m and shares essentially identical layout with the church at Palatitzia-Vergina. Presence of these two churches in Veroia dating from the Late Byzantine period, strongly indicates that the Palatitzia church also ought to belong to the same period.

Another late Byzantine monument – the monastic church of Hagios Nikolaos Orphanos, in Thessaloniki – also displays a strikingly similar disposition of the plan (Fig. 9). Its well-preserved fresco program was painted sometime between 1310 and 1320 and, therefore, its architecture is thought to be from the same period¹⁴. The core of Hagios Nikolaos is somewhat smaller than the Palatitzia-Vergina church in its overall dimensions (merely ca. 4.5 × 6.5m). Yet, because of its unusually wide envelope spaces (ca. 4m including the exterior wall thickness), it comes close to matching the size of our church. Equally significant is the close relationship in the articulation of its

interior spaces and those of the Palatitzia-Vergina church. The lateral naos walls of Hagios Nikolaos open in two symmetrical pairs of double arcades supported in the middle on a re-used late-antique column. In addition, as in the Palatitzia-Vergina church, a single arched opening in the north wall leads from the sanctuary into the adjacent area that once must have functioned as the prothesis. Because of the openness of the central core, the ambulatory spaces of Hagios Nikolaos, as in our church, must have been part of the original design scheme. The joints between the core and the ‘envelope’, shown on the Heuzey-Daumet plan merely indicates separate stages of construction and do not necessarily imply two different phases in the life of the building.¹⁵ (Fig. 2). Thus, in terms of its overall architectural form and its dimensions the Palatitzia-Vergina church should be visualized as having been closely related to several Late Byzantine churches at Veroia and Thessaloniki.

The engravings of the Palatitzia-Vergina church reveal further useful information regarding its constructional and decorative aspects. One of the most telling constructional feature is the naos portal fully visible in the view of the church ruins shown from the west



*Fig. 10b. View of church ruins from W; engraving (Heuzey and Daumet).
Εικ. 10β. Άποψη ερειπίων του ναού από Δ. Χαρακτικό (Heuzey και Daumet).*

(Fig. 10). The dimensions of this portal can be reconstructed reasonably accurately. Given the size of its clear opening as it appears in the plan – ca. 1.25m – the total height of the portal, including the semicircular niche above its lintel, was around 4.5m, while the opening itself was around 2.5m high. The general effect is one of extreme elongation of proportions, resulting largely from the stiling of the niche above the main lintel. Such elongation of proportions is known, and first occurs in architecture of the central Balkans during the third and fourth decades of the fourteenth century. As a useful comparison we may cite the small church of St. Nicholas at Šiševo (Nir) on the outskirts of Skopje, probably built during the 1340s or early 1350s¹⁶ (Fig. 11). Portals featuring such stilted proportions appear on a number of buildings – ecclesiastical and secular – that are datable to the decades before and after the middle of the fourteenth century¹⁷.

The Heuzey and Daumet engraving also reveals that a fresco image was preserved within the arched niche above the church door. An image in this position normally would contain the depiction of a saint or a feast to which the church was dedicated. The



Fig. 11. Šiševo (Nir), Church of St. Nicholas; west façade (photo: author).

Εικ. 11. Σίσεβο (Nir). Ναός Αγίου Νικολάου. Δυτική όψη (φωτ. του γράφοντος).

somewhat blurred rendition of this image in the published engraving does not facilitate easy identification. It is only possible to recognize that three figures are represented. The central, larger figure seems to be seated, while the two smaller figures seem to be facing the central figure in a symmetrical arrangement, to the left and to the right. Such an arrangement of figures most closely resembles the iconography of an enthroned Theotokos flanked by two archangels, though other possible subjects should not be dismissed outright. If this interpretation were correct, the likely dedication of the church would have been to the Theotokos. In this context, it may be worthwhile to question where the dedication of the church to Hagia Triada (Holy Trinity), mentioned by Heuzey, may have come from. One assumes that the dedication was reported to him by the local peasants. Was the church really dedicated to Hagia Triada and was it remembered as such by the locals, or was Heuzey himself attempting to interpret the dedicatory image in the niche above the main portal? If the latter were the case, then we can rightly ask again – who were the three figures in the niche above the portal and how Heuzey may have interpreted them? Attempting to answer this question from our vantage point would be sheer speculation, however. As such, it would take us almost certainly too far astray without contributing constructively to our analysis.

The engravings published by Heuzey and Daumet show additional frescoes at the time still preserved on the walls of the ruined church. These include two standing figures flanking the portal on the north side of the west wall, and a single standing figure flanking the portal on the south side. All three figures have halos, but their identities cannot be easily discerned. The significant difference between the three is in the fact that the two on the north side of the portal are depicted much closer to the floor level of the church, whereas the one on the south side appears much more elevated. This arrangement is strange, because in Byzantine church interiors the dado zone generally has a uniform height throughout the building. An arrangement, as

seen here, could imply various reasons for the existence of such a discrepancy. One of them would be that what is shown here are remnants of two different layers of fresco paintings. Again, as interesting as contemplation of such speculative possibilities may be, it would bring us no closer to understanding the truth of the matter. The same elevation shows the remains of yet another area of the ruined church with preserved frescoes. These were situated on the east wall of the small passageway between the erstwhile sanctuary and the prothesis and on the eastern half of the fallen arch belonging to the same opening. On the eastern wall of the passageway is depicted a bearded standing figure with a halo. The figure appears to have its right hand raised and to be holding a book in his left. If the reading of what is shown is correct this could be the figure of St. John the Theologian displaying a text that signals the beginning of the Liturgical-Eucharistic cycle. The figure of St. John the Theologian matching the above description appears adjacent to the point of entry into the sanctuary enclosure of Hagios Nikolaos Orphanos in Thessaloniki¹⁸. The fresco on the underside of the broken arch appears to be a scene possibly depicting two figures seated at a round table, though details as shown in the engraving are too schematically rendered to allow for a clear reading. The scene is a composition in its own right, as may be gleaned from the fact that it is framed by a dark border characteristically used as a scene-framing device in Palaiologan fresco painting.

Yet another fresco fragment is recorded on the second engraving published by Heuzey and Daumet that depicts the ruin seen from the north (Fig. 6). This view shows clearly that the north wall of the naos had practically collapsed in its entirety, save for its extreme eastern and western parts. Through the gaping hole one sees the remains of the much better preserved south wall. Clearly discernible is the Doric column spoil as reused in the construction of the double-arched opening that originally led into the enveloping space of the church on the south side. The eastern of the two arches is fully discernible. One can detect the outline of the western of these two

arches only up to a point. A careful reading of what is depicted suggests that both arches appear to have been blocked up at some point, apparently after the partial collapse of the western arch. The intervention may have coincided with the construction of the two wall buttresses against the west façade of the naos that were discussed above. A rectangular door (window?) was apparently left open within the wall mass constructed under the collapsed western arch. All surfaces of the newly added masonry were evidently plastered, but not painted with frescoes. One can surmise that this was an intervention done not under optimal circumstances for the small monastery. In any case, pieces of the original fresco program seem to have survived the calamity and appear to have been left visible following the mentioned repair work. A scene that is readily visible appears on the spandrel area between the two arches and directly above the Doric shaft used without the capital. It involves two standing figures. The left figure is a bearded man striding decisively to the right, his right arm outstretched in a blessing gesture. There can be little doubt that this figure represents Christ, and that the subject is one of the Miracle scenes. Considering the location of the composition, inside the church naos, this could only be the Raising of Lazarus, the one Miracle scene normally included in the Dodecaorton, or the Twelve Great Feasts depicted prominently within the church naos. Compositions depicting the Raising of Lazarus abound in Late Byzantine art. In our analysis we will limit ourselves to two relevant examples. The first appears on the south wall of the naos of the church of Christ Savior at Veroia, whose well-preserved frescoes are dated 1314-15 (Fig. 12)¹⁹. An integral part of the cycle illustrating the Life and Passion of Christ, the Raising of Lazarus appears here approximately in the middle of the south wall of the church. The composition is relatively confined within a rectangular vertical frame. The chief protagonists —Christ and Lazarus— face each other. Christ is depicted moving from left to right with his right arm outstretched in a blessing gesture. The sarcophagus containing Lazarus' wrapped body is



Fig. 12. Veroia, *Christos Soter, Raising of Lazarus*, fresco (photo: after S. Pelekanides).

Εικ. 12. Βέροια. Χριστός Σωτήρας. Η Ανάσταση του Λαζάρου, τοιχογραφία (φωτ. Σ. Πελεκανίδη).

shown standing up, on account of the constrained space. Similar considerations appear to have been employed at the Palatitzia-Vergina church, where the available space would have been even tighter. However, the central location because of its own intrinsic importance in the organization of the interior, seems to have been the major determining factor for the placement of the scene. In this context, the location of the scene in the church of Hagios Nikolaos Orphanos in Thessaloniki is also of considerable interest (Fig. 13). Though appearing in a higher zone, the vertical alignment of the composition with the column of the double arcade below and, therefore, its relative position within the naos is identical to the position of the scene in the Palatitzia-Vergina church. The elevation of the scene into a higher zone in the Thessalonikan monument, it should be noted, is a function of the greater height of that building thus making the introduction of an entire additional zone of frescoes illustrating secondary scenes from the Life and Passion of Christ possible.

During my visit to the site in the summer

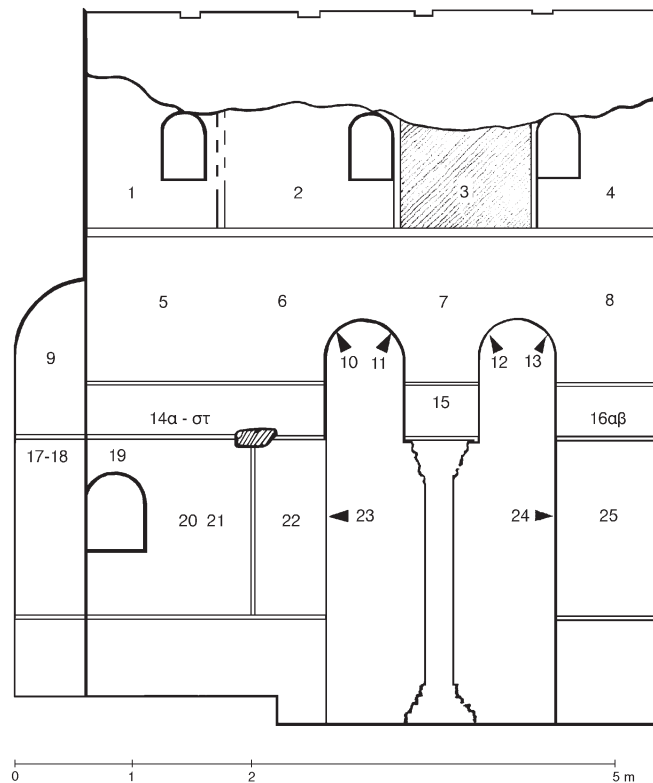


Fig. 13. Thessaloniki, *Hagios Nikolaos Orphanos*, south interior elevation of naos with schematic layout of fresco compositions; 3 - *Raising of Lazarus* (after A. Xyngopoulos).

Εικ. 13. Θεσσαλονίκη. Άγιος Νικόλαος Ορφανός. Νότια όψη εσωτερικού κυρίως ναού με σχηματικό περίγραμμα του προγράμματος των τοιχογραφιών. (Α. Ξυγγόπουλος).



Fig. 14. Various stone elements at the site (author).

Εικ. 14. Διάφορα λίθινα στοιχεία στον αρχαιολογικό χώρο (φωτ. του γράφοντος).

of 1982, I attempted to determine whether there were any visible remains of the Byzantine monastery. I could find no recognizable architectural components belonging to the Byzantine monument, simply because it had been built of ancient spoils from the palace. Once

removed from their secondary, Byzantine context and reunited with other ancient material, all of those elements lost their idiosyncratic characteristics as spoils. Among the stone components of the Hellenistic palace scattered about the site, I did find one piece that, in my

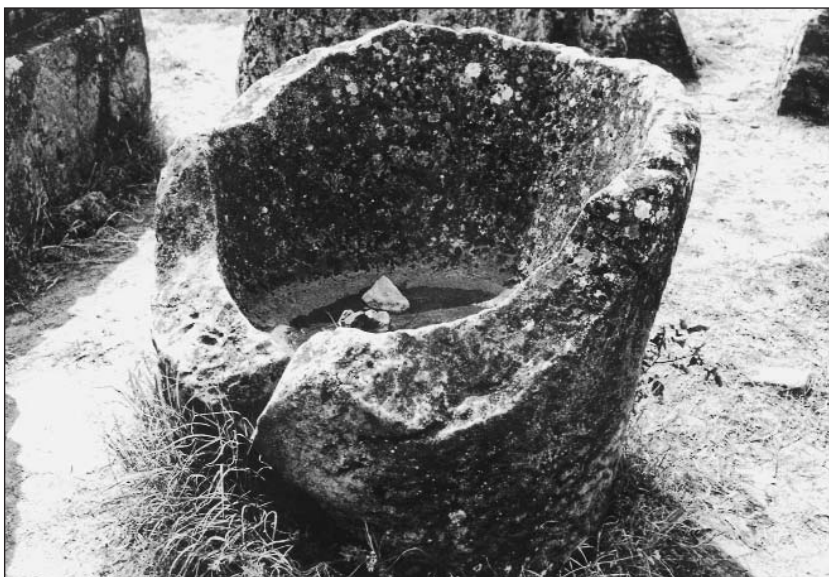


Fig. 15. Stone baptismal font, drawing (author).

Εικ. 15. Λίθινη κολυμβήθρα (φωτ. του γράφοντος).

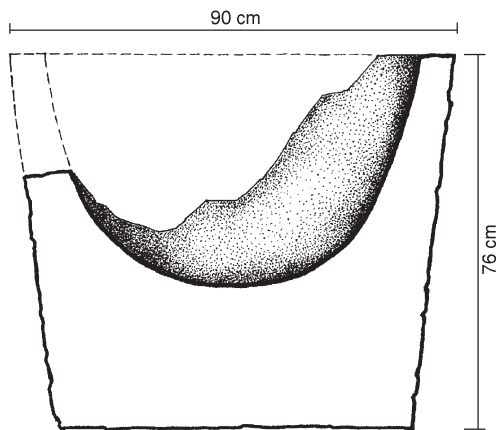


Fig. 16. *Stone baptismal font, drawing (author).*
Εικ. 16. *Λίθινη κολυμβήθρα (φωτ. του γράφοντος).*

opinion, may be associated with the lost Byzantine monastery. The piece in question is a broken stone vessel belonging either to a baptismal font, or to a monastic phiale (Figs. 14, 15 and 16). Measuring roughly 90cm in its maximum diameter and 76cm in height, slightly conical in shape, the vessel appears to have been re-cut from a Doric column drum. Its ex-

terior surface is quite rough, while its interior surface is relatively smooth. The basic shape, scale and even the manner of workmanship correspond closely to those of a group of Late Byzantine baptismal fonts. The closest example in the Greek context that is known to me is that from the inner narthex of the church at Kaisariani Monastery near Athens, but unfortunately of an unknown date (Fig. 17). Unpublished, and evidently unstudied, this piece belongs to a large body of material that Byzantine archaeologists and art historians are yet to take a proper notice of. In any case, the Kaisariani font most certainly post-dates the original 11th-century construction, and may well be related to one of the later architectural expansions of the church. We are on far safer grounds with a number of similar fonts from Serbia, several of which are still in situ and within securely dated contexts.²⁰ In some ways the closest example is the font of Gračanica Monastery (Fig. 18)²¹. No longer in its original position, this font once stood within the inner narthex of the church where it was probably installed



Fig. 17. *Kaisariani Monastery; baptismal font (photo: L. Bouras).*
Εικ. 17. *Μονή Καισαριανής, κολυμβήθρα (φωτ. Λ. Μπούρα).*



Fig. 18. Gračanica Monastery; original baptismal font (photo: author).

Εικ. 18. Μονή της Gračanica. Αρχική κολυμβήθρα (φωτ. του γράφοντος).

at the time of the completion of the fresco decoration, in 1321. The Gračanica font is considerably smaller than the one at Palatitzia-Vergina, measuring only 36cm in its maximum diameter. I have argued elsewhere that the size of this font was determined by the extremely narrow space – barely 2m wide – within which it was situated²². A slightly

later font of the same general type found in the spacious narthex of the monastery church of Dečani, for example, measures 80 cm in diameter (Fig. 19). We can only speculate that the font at Palatitsia-Vergina stood within the envelope space surrounding the naos, and most likely in the south-west corner where such fonts are commonly found. If our re-



Fig. 19. Dečani Monastery; baptismal font (photo: author).

Εικ. 19. Μονή της Dečani. κολυμβήθρα (φωτ. του γράφοντος).

construction of the church plan is correct, the corner area of the Palatitzia-Vergina church would have measured roughly 3 by 3m, leaving adequate room for peripheral circulation around a font measuring 90cm in diameter.

The foregoing investigation of the lost Byzantine monastery and its church at Palatitzia-Vergina provides us with strong indications that it was a creation of the Late Byzantine period. The plan and the architecture of the church were found to have their closest parallels in three late Byzantine churches of Veroia and Thessaloniki. Similarities with these monuments were noted in several distinctive areas, such as scale, disposition of the plan scheme using the simple building core with a lower envelope, and in the use of identical structural and formal elements. Even the choice and placement of individual fresco scenes and the manner of their integration into the decorative program as a whole reveal striking resemblance to those found in the churches of Veroia and Thessaloniki. Finally, the type of baptismal font finds its closest parallels among Serbian fonts of the third and fourth decades of the fourteenth century. On the basis of all of the above criteria, the monastery at Palatitsia-Vergina appears to have been a late Byzantine foundation dating from the first half of the fourteenth century.

Our present state of knowledge of documentary material offers no firm clues as to the identity of the monastery, its founder, or the occupants of this establishment. The tradition that the church was named Hagia Triada, as reported by Heuzey, may be old, but we have no way of confirming it. Notwithstanding the dearth of hard evidence, circumstantial historical evidence would seem to support the conclusions drawn from archaeological information as presented above. The town of

Veroia was an important provincial administrative center in Palaiologan times²³. The first document attesting to this dates from 1324, during the reign of Andronikos II Palaiologos²⁴. Two other documents, one dated 1325, and the other 1338, indicate that the Athonite monastery of Vatopedi owned some water mills at Palatitzia, near Veroia²⁵. According to another document from 1343, Manuel Kantakuzenos was entrusted by his father, John Kantakuzenos, with the administration of Veroia and its environs²⁶. He held this position until the Serbian conquest of Veroia in 1345 or 1346. There appears to have been a brief period of relative prosperity in the life of this region during the first half of the fourteenth century followed in the 1350s and later by a period of frequent sieges and political turmoil. These general historical observations seem to concur with our archaeological observations, and support our tentative dating of the Palatitzia-Vergina monastery to the third or fourth decade of the fourteenth century.

The foregoing investigation, notwithstanding all of its limitations, has enabled us to salvage from oblivion one of the many Byzantine vestiges lost under the spade of nineteenth and twentieth century archaeology. Our debt of gratitude must be extended to the two Frenchmen, Heuzey and Daumet, who had sufficient foresight to record vestiges of a small Byzantine church, actually a whole monastery, before their ultimate removal. This act, as uncommon as it may have been in 19th century archaeological practice ought to alert us at least to the possibility that other classical archaeologists may have acted equally responsibly and that their documentation may hold surprising information for those who concern themselves with the Byzantine past.



FOOTNOTES

1. Material in this article was first presented in an abridged form as lecture at the Tenth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference. S. Ćurčić, "A Lost Byzantine Monastery at Palatitsia-Vergina," *Tenth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference. Abstracts of Papers* (1984), p. 50.

2. The principal publication on the excavation of the Hellenistic palace is L. Heuzey and H. Daumet, *Mission archéologique de Macédoine* (Paris, 1876). For a brief assessment of the archaeological of the site see Ph. M. Petsas, "Verghina" *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites*, ed. By R. Stillwell, et al. (Princeton, 1976), 967-8. Most recently Ch. Saatsoglou-Paliadeli, "The Palace of Vergina-Aegae and Its Surroundings," *The Royal Palace Institution in the First Millennium B.C.*, ed. I. Nielsen, *Monographs of the Danish Institute in Athens* 4 (2001), 201-13.

3. Heuzey and Daumet, op. cit., 184

4. Petsas, op. cit., p. 967, mistakenly refers to the chapel as still standing and describes it as being "post-Byzantine".

5. Heuzey and Daumet, op. cit.

6. The standard, albeit outdated work of Byzantine monastic architecture is A. Orlandos, *Monasteriakē architektonikē*, (Athens, 1958). A useful compilation of Byzantine and post-Byzantine monastery plans (mostly in Greece) is K. Papaioannou, *Ta Hellēnika monasteria san architektonikes syntheseis* (Athens, 1977). S. Popović, *Krst u krugu. Arhitektura manastira u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji* (Cross in Circle. Architecture of Monasteries in Medieval Serbia) (Belgrade, 19-94), provides a methodologically completely new approach to the problems of Medieval monastic architectural tradition in the Balkans, albeit limited in this case, to the material of Medieval Serbia.

7. Research conducted on Mount Athos in recent years provides some insights into the process of monastic enclosures changing their form over time; cf. P.L. Theocharides, "Recent research into Athonite monastic architecture, tenth-sixteenth centuries," *Mount Athos and Byzantine Monasticism*, A. Bryer and M. Cunningham, eds. (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 205-21.

8. Saatsoglou-Paliadeli (as in f.n.2), pp. 204-5, who discusses the problem of reconstruction of the ancient propylon with references to up-to-date literature on the problem. The issue, clearly, is subject of a continuing scholarly debate.

9. C. Bouras, "L'église de la Théotokos de la citadelle d'Argos," *Bulletin de correspondance Hellénique* 111 (1987), 455-69, esp. 465-6, where the use of spoils as building material is discussed

10. Th. Papazotos, *Hē Veroia kai oi naoi tēs (11os-18os ai.)* (Athens, 1994), esp. pp. 161-220.

11. Ibid., 169-70.

12. The type is generally referred to as a small 'three-aisled basilica.' This term is inadequate and requires a more nuanced definition. For a detailed discussion of functional and terminological issues

see E. Hadjistryphonos, *To peristōo stēn ekklēsiastikē architektonikē tēs hopsimes periodou tēs Vyzantinēs Autokratōrias* (Peristoon in ecclesiastical architecture of the Late Byzantine Empire), Ph.D. Diss., Department of Architecture, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Thessaloniki, 2000), pp. 35-64. A book under the same title is currently in press. For a specific discussion of terminology related to the enveloping spaces in Byzantine church architecture see eadem, "Peristōon or Ambulatory in Byzantine Church Architecture. Concepts and Terms", *Saopštenja* XXXIV-2002, pp. 131-143.

13. Papazotos (as in f.n.10), pp. 196-7.

14. Despite a plethora of studies on the frescoes of H. Nikolaos Orphanos and various aspects of the building's murky history, the most extensive study of its architecture surprisingly still is A. Xyngopoulos, *Tessares mikroi naoi tēs Thessalonikēs ek ton chronōn Palaiologōn* (Thessaloniki, 1952), pp. 29-44. The problem of the peristoa in the church is discussed by Hadjistryphonos, *To peristōo*, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 103-6.

15. G.M. Velenis, *Mesovyzantinē naodomia stē Thessalonikē* (Athens, 2003), pp. 107-11, suggests that the building core of H. Nikolaos Orphanos may be substantially a remnant of an originally Middle Byzantine (late 12th first half of the 13th century) church built without ambulatories. For this hypothesis to become acceptable would require considerably more definitive archaeological verifications than Velenis is able to provide.

16. S. Ćurčić, "Architecture in the Byzantine Sphere of Influence Around the Middle of the Fourteenth Century," in *Dečani i vizantijska umetnost sredinom XIV veka*, V.J. Djurić, ed. (Belgrade, 1989), esp. pp. 60-62.

17. P. Theocharides, "Tower. Mariana, Greece," in *Secular Medieval Architecture in the Balkans, 1300-1500, and Its Preservation*, S. Ćurčić and E. Hadjistryphonos, eds. (Thessaloniki, 1997), pp. 220-221, fig. 3 (tower entrance door).

18. Ch. Bakirtzis, ed., *Ayios Nikolaos Orphanos. The Wall Paintings* (Nea Smirni, 2003), pl. 20, left.

19. S. Pelekanides, *Kalliergis, o tēs Thettalias aristos zōgraphos* (Athens, 1973).

20. O. Kandić, "Fonts for the Blessing of Waters in Serbian Medieval Churches," *Zograf* 27 (1998-99), 61-78.

21. S. Ćurčić, *Gračanica. King Milutin's Church and Its Place in Late Byzantine Architecture* (University Park and London, 1979), p. 35, and Fig. 79.

22. S. Ćurčić, "The Original Baptismal Font of Gračanica and its Iconographic Setting," *Zbornik Narodnog muzeja*, Beograd 9-10 (1979), 314-23.

23. For an overview Veroia history, see Papazotos, *Hē Veroia*, (as in f.n. 10), pp. 37-66.

24. Ibid., p. 55.

25. V. Kravari, *Villes et villages de Macédoine occidentale* (Paris, 1989), p. 85.

26. Papazotos, *Hē Veroia*, (as in f.n. 10), p. 57.

SLOBODAN ĆURČIĆ

ΕΝΑ ΧΑΜΕΝΟ ΒΥΖΑΝΤΙΝΟ ΜΟΝΑΣΤΗΡΙ ΣΤΑ ΠΑΛΑΤΙΤΖΙΑ - ΒΕΡΓΙΝΑ

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ακόμη και πριν την εντυπωσιακή ανακάλυψη ενός σημαντικού μακεδονικού βασιλικού τάφου στη δεκαετία του '70, το όνομα της Βεργίνας ήταν πολύ γνωστό στους φοιτητές της αρχαίας ελληνικής τέχνης και πολιτισμού. Η περιοχή συγκέντρωσε για πρώτη φορά το αρχαιολογικό ενδιαφέρον κατά τις δεκαετίες του 1850 και 1860, όταν ήλθαν στο φως τα απομεινάρια ενός μεγάλου ελληνιστικού ανακτόρου (Σχ. 1). Το ανάκτορο ήταν κτισμένο σε ύψωμα που δεσπόζει της κοιλάδας του Αλιάκμονα — η οποία αποτελεί βοσκοτόπο — και βρίσκεται στη μέση σχεδόν της απόστασης μεταξύ Βεργίνας και Παλατιτίων. Ο Léon Heuzey, ο Γάλλος αρχαιολόγος που επισκέφθηκε πρώτος την τοποθεσία το 1855, ανέφερε ότι εκεί υπήρχαν τα «γραφικά ερείπια» ενός βυζαντινού ναού που είχε εγκαταλειφθεί προ πολλού. Τα υπολείμματα αυτού του ναού, τον οποίο αναγνώρισε ως τον ναό της Αγίας Τριάδας, απομακρύνθηκαν στο σύνολό τους κατά τη διάρκεια των σημαντικών ανασκαφών του ανακτόρου. Κατ' αυτόν τον τρόπο, ο ναός υπήρξε ένα από τα πολλά σύγχρονα πολιτιστικά μνημεία που χάθηκαν λόγω του ζήλου της κλασικής αρχαιολογίας του δεκάτου ενάτου και των αρχών του εικοστού αιώνα. Η απώλειά του θα ήταν πλήρης εάν ο Heuzey και ο συνεργάτης του, H. Daumet, δεν είχαν δημοσιεύσει τα τρία σχέδια του ναού. Τα εν λόγω σχέδια —ένα τοπογραφικό σχέδιο και δύο πλάγιες όψεις— καταρτίστηκαν τον Σεπτέμβριο του 1861, λίγο πριν την οριστική καταστροφή του ναού. Παρά την ουσιαστική τους σημασία, τα σχέδια —τα οποία δημοσιεύθηκαν σε έναν τόμο που αφορούσε τα Κλασικά και Ελληνιστικά ευρήματα— διέφυγαν της

προσοχής των Βυζαντινολόγων.

Η λεπτομερής ανάλυση του τοπογραφικού σχεδίου που δημοσιεύθηκε από τους Heuzey και Daumet αποκαλύπτει ότι τα «γραφικά ερείπια» στα οποία αναφέρθηκαν ήταν κάτι περισσότερο από έναν απλό ναό. Στην πραγματικότητα, επρόκειτο για ένα ολόκληρο μοναστηριακό συγκρότημα μικρού μεγέθους το οποίο είχε χτιστεί επάνω στα απομεινάρια της πύλης του αρχαίου ανακτόρου (Σχ. 2). Η σχεδόν ορθογώνια εξωτερική επιφάνειά του είχε περίπου 28 - 30 μέτρα πλάτος και 38 μέτρα μήκος. Παρά την κατεστραμμένη όψη των μοναστικών καταλυμάτων, όπως απεικονίζονται στο χωροταξικό σχέδιο, είναι σαφές ότι μια σειρά δωματίων με διαφορετικά μεγέθη και σχήματα αποτελούσαν τους εξωτερικούς τοίχους, σχηματίζοντας ανοιχτή κεντρική αυλή, στο μέσον της οποίας υπήρχε η εκκλησία. Αν και δε γνωρίζουμε τον αρχιτεκτονικό χαρακτήρα του μοναστηριακού συγκροτήματος, είναι σαφές ότι το μοναστήρι και η εκκλησία είχαν σχεδιαστεί και κατασκευασθεί ταυτόχρονα (Σχ. 3). Η όλη διάταξη είναι ιδιαίτερα συμμετρική και φαίνεται ότι δεν επήλθαν σημαντικές προσθήκες ή μετατροπές πριν την οριστική εγκατάλειψη του μικρού αυτού μοναστηριού. Οι αρχές σχεδιασμού που χρησιμοποιήθηκαν είναι σύμφωνες με όσα γνωρίζουμε σχετικά με το σχεδιασμό των βυζαντινών μοναστηριών, όπως αυτός απεικονίζεται στο χωροταξικό σχέδιο της μονής του Οσίου Μελετίου, του ενδεκάτου αιώνα, στον Υμηττό, κοντά στην Αθήνα.

Η εκκλησία αποτελούνταν από έναν μονόκλιτο κεντρικό χώρο (διαστάσεων περίπου 4,75 × 9m) και από έναν εξωτερικό βοηθητικό χώρο

σχήματος U (Σχ. 5). Οι πλευρικοί τοίχοι του ναού διακοπτόταν από συμμετρικά ζεύγη διπλών αφίδων οι οποίες στηρίζονταν στο μέσον από κίονα δωρικού ρυθμού που προφανώς προερχόταν από τα ερείπια του ανακτόρου. Το σχέδιο που απεικονίζει την ερειπωμένη εκκλησία από τα βόρεια, δείχνει ότι ο βόρειος τοίχος είχε καταρρεύσει σχεδόν πλήρως και ότι στο νότιο τοίχο έγιναν εκτεταμένες επισκευές με τις οποίες έκλεισαν τα δύο τοξωτά ανοίγματα που στηρίζονταν στον δωρικό κίονα (Σχ. 6).

Τα γενικά αρχιτεκτονικά χαρακτηριστικά της εκκλησίας, αποκαλύπτουν έναν χαρακτηριστικό αρχιτεκτονικό τύπο της ύστερης Βυζαντινής περιόδου. Ιδιαίτερη σημασία, σε αυτό το σημείο, θα είχε μια σύγκριση με τις εκκλησίες της γειτονικής Βέροιας, ακμάζον αστικό κέντρο κατά το δέκατο τέταρτο αιώνα. Δύο από αυτές τις εκκλησίες χρήζουν ιδιαίτερης προσοχής λόγω της τυπολογίας και του μεγέθους τους. Η πρώτη είναι η εκκλησία του Οσίου Γεωργίου του άρχοντος Γραμματικού, ένα κτίριο με πολλές φάσεις κατασκευής, η πρώτη εκ των οποίων ανήκει στο δέκατο τέταρτο αιώνα και παρουσιάζει σημαντικές ομοιότητες με την εκκλησία των Παλατισίων στη Βεργίνα (Σχ. 7). Η δεύτερη εκκλησία με παρόμοια χαρακτηριστικά είναι η Παναγία Περίβλεπτος, της οποίας η πρώτη φάση κατασκευής ενδέχεται να ανήκει στο δέκατο τέταρτο αιώνα, πιθανόν ακριβώς μετά την κατάληψη της Βέροιας από τους Οθωμανούς (Σχ.8). Η παρουσία αυτών των δύο εκκλησιών στη Βέροια, οι οποίες χρονολογούνται από την ύστερη Βυζαντινή περίοδο, αποδεικνύει ότι η εκκλησία των Παλατισίων θα πρέπει να ανήκει στην ίδια ευρεία χρονική περίοδο. Η μοναστηριακή εκκλησία του Αγίου Νικολάου του Ορφανού στη Θεσσαλονίκη, επίσης παρουσιάζει μια εκπληκτικά παρόμοια διάταξη στην κάτοψη (Σχ. 9). Οι καλά διατηρημένες τοιχογραφίες της καλλιτεχνήθηκαν μεταξύ 1310 και 1320 και, συνεπώς, η αρχιτεκτονική του ναού θεωρείται ότι ανήκει στην ίδια χρονική περίοδο.

Κατά τη διάρκεια της επίσκεψής μου στον χώρο, το καλοκαίρι του 1982, κατάφερα να εντοπίσω ένα εύρημα το οποίο, κατά την άποψή μου, μπορεί να σχετίζεται με το χαμένο βυζαντινό μοναστήρι (Σχ. 14). Το εν λόγω εύρημα

είναι ένα κομματιασμένο πέτρινο δοχείο, το οποίο μπορεί να αποτελούσε μέρος είτε της κολυμπήθρας, είτε κάποιας φιάλης από το μοναστήρι (Σχ. 15 και 16). Ένα άλλο σχετικό εύρημα που εντοπίστηκε στον ελληνικό χώρο είναι αυτό του εσωτερικού νάρθηκα της εκκλησίας στο Μοναστήρι της Καισαριανής, κοντά στην Αθήνα, άγνωστης δυστυχώς χρονολογίας (Σχ. 17). Κατά κάποιον τρόπο το πιο σχετικό εύρημα είναι η κολυμπήθρα της Μονής Gračanica (Σχ. 18). Μία κολυμπήθρα παρόμοιας τεχνοτροπίας εντοπίζεται στον ευρύχωρο νάρθηκα της εκκλησίας της μονής Dečani (Σχ. 19).

Τα καταγεγραμμένα απομεινάρια του χαμένου βυζαντινού μοναστηριού και της εκκλησίας στα Παλατίσια της Βεργίνας αποτελούν σημαντικές ενδείξεις ότι επρόκειτο για μια κατασκευή της ύστερης βυζαντινής περιόδου. Φαίνεται ότι υπήρχε μια βραχεία περίοδος σχετικής ευημερίας στην περιοχή κατά τη διάρκεια του πρώτου μισού του δεκάτου τετάρτου αιώνα, αλλά και κατά τη δεκαετία του 1350, την οποία διαδέχθηκε μια περίοδος συχνών πολιορκιών και πολιτικών αναταραχών. Αυτές οι γενικές ιστορικές παρατηρήσεις φαίνεται ότι συμβαδίζουν με τις αρχαιολογικές παρατηρήσεις και υποστηρίζουν την άποψη που τοποθετεί την κατασκευή του μοναστηριού των Παλατισίων της Βεργίνας στην τρίτη ή στην τέταρτη δεκαετία του δεκάτου τετάρτου αιώνα.

Η έρευνά μας, παρά τους περιορισμούς, παρείχε τη δυνατότητα να διασώσουμε από τη λήθη ένα από τα πολλά βυζαντινά ίχνη που χάθηκαν κάτω από τη σκαπάνη της αρχαιολογίας του δεκάτου ενάτου και εικοστού αιώνα. Έχουμε χρέος να δείξουμε ευγνωμοσύνη στους δύο Γάλλους, τον Heuzey και τον Daumet, οι οποίοι είχαν την προνοητικότητα να καταγράψουν τα υπολείμματα της μικρής βυζαντινής εκκλησίας, ουσιαστικά ενός ολόκληρου μοναστηριού, πριν την οριστική απομάκρυνσή τους. Αυτή η πράξη, ασυνήθης για την αρχαιολογική πρακτική του δεκάτου ενάτου αιώνα, θα πρέπει να μας οδηγήσει στην υπόθεση ότι και άλλοι κλασικοί αρχαιολόγοι ενδέχεται να ενήργησαν εξίσου υπεύθυνα και να συμπεριέλαβαν στην τεκμηρίωσή τους πληροφορίες σημαντικές για τους ερευνητές της βυζαντινής περιόδου.