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ΔΕΛΤΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗΣ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑΣ

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Robert Ousterhout

SOME NOTES ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTOS HO PANTEOPTES (ESKI IMARET CAMII) IN ISTANBUL

The church of Christos ho Pantepoptes (Christ the All-Seeing) is the only securely dated, eleventh-century church to survive from Byzantine Constantinople. Constructed sometime shortly before 1087 by Anna Dalassena, the mother of emperor Alexius I Comnenus, the building is relatively well preserved today. Now known as the Eski Imaret Camii, the Turkish name derives from its erstwhile function as a muslim refectory during the period of Mehmet the Conqueror¹. Its present function as a mosque in a conservative neighborhood has resulted in the virtual inaccessibility of the site to modern scholars. Beyond securing the foundation date, the written sources provide no additional information concerning the construction history of the building². Indeed, little has been added to our knowledge of the building since the pioneering works of Van Millingen and Ebersolt at the beginning of the century³.

One of the best preserved examples of the cross-in-square church type in the capital, the Pantepoptes was carefully laid out above barrel vaulted cisterns that form the substructure for the naos, narthex, and sanctuary (Figs. 1-2)⁴. The exonarthex, a later addition, apparently lacked such substructures. The spaces of the interior still reflect the original disposition, although the four columns of the naos have been replaced with octagonal piers, the tribelon of the south façade has been filled, and the forms of several windows have been altered. The building is long overdue from a thorough architectural analysis, and it would benefit from soundings beneath the plastered surfaces of the interior, as well as in the ground around the exterior. The Pantepoptes has never been systematically examined for the remains of its interior decoration. In addition, it is sometimes suggested that the building had lateral porticoes, the existence of which could be demonstrated by soundings⁵. As none of this appears likely to occur in the next decades, I offer the following observations, based on an examination of the masonry undertaken during the summer of 1990⁶.

As fate would have it, my visit corresponded with the completion of unauthorized repairs carried out by the

local congregation. Unfortunately, much archaeological evidence was irretrievably lost with the lowering of the ground level on the west, south, and east sides of the building. In an attempt to correct moisture problems in the interior, the exterior ground level was dropped almost a meter, so that it now corresponds roughly with the interior floor. Numerous fragments of decorative sculpture came to light in the "excavation", although the fate of these is not known (Figs. 3-4). We may presume that these are from the original building, but the patterns differ from any of the architectural sculpture still *in situ*. The "improvements" also included some replastering of the walls and vaults of the interior. All of the interior surfaces were subsequently covered — including all of the finely sculpted cornices — by a thick layer of yellow paint. Thus, any study of the sculpture must now refer to older photographs, such as those of Mathews⁷.

1. A. van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople*, London 1912, pp. 212-17; J. Ebersolt and A. Thiers, *Les églises de Constantinople*, Paris 1913, pp. 171-82. For additional bibliography, see W. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*, Tübingen 1977, 120-22.

2. R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin*, I.III, *Les églises et les monastères*, Paris 1969, pp. 513-15.

3. See also C. Mango, *Byzantine Architecture*, New York 1976, pp. 235-43; R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4th rev. ed., Harmondsworth 1986, pp. 361-62.

4. P. Forchheimer and J. Strzygowski, *Die byzantinischen Wasserbehälter von Konstantinopel*, Vienna 1893, pp. 106-07.

5. N. Brunov, *Über zwei byzantinische Baudenkmäler von Konstantinopel aus dem XI. Jahrhundert*, BNJ IX (1931-32), pp. 129-44, suggested lateral aisles with liturgical functions, but this theory is usually discounted; see Mathews (as in note 7), p. 59. On the other hand, porches of light construction should not be ruled out.

6. I am indebted to the Turkish Ministry of Culture for permission to photograph the building, and to the Fatih Müftülüğü for their kind assistance.

7. T. Mathews, *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul. A Photographic Survey*, University Park 1976, pp. 59-70. Additional photographs by Mathews are in the photographic archives at Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C.

One of the problems in the study of the Pantepoptes has been the difficulty of examining the exterior as a whole, as it is hemmed in by adjacent building on all sides. It is abutted by modern buildings along the north façade and along half of the west façade, so that these surfaces cannot be studied. A low wall surrounds much of the south and all of the east façades. However, the walls blocking the view of the south façade were partially removed this summer, so that it is now possible to get a somewhat better assessment of the exterior (Figs. 5-7). Before discussing the construction of the building, it will be useful to review its plan and spatial disposition (Fig. 1). In the plan, I have attempted to restore some original features of the building; some of the details, such as the mullions of the tripartite apse window, are hypothetical. Because the north façade is inaccessible and could not be examined, I have not attempted to restore any of its features. The naos of the Pantepoptes is squarish in plan, measuring 9.20 m. in length and 10.55 m. in width⁸. Pilasters emphasize the bay divisions, corresponding with the exterior articulation. The corner bays are topped by groin vaults, whereas the crossarms are barrel vaulted. The central dome is ribbed, raised on a windowed drum. The sanctuary is elongated, with the bema extending to the east 5.40 m. from the naos. The bema is also barrel vaulted. The flanking pastophoria are quatrefoil in plan, covered by groin vaults. The narthex is divided into three groin-vaulted bays, without pilasters on the walls. Shallow niches terminate each end. A gallery, unique in form, is positioned above the narthex and western corner bays of the naos. The central bay is covered by a domical vault and has a tribelon opening eastward into the naos. The flanking bays are groin vaulted, and the openings in both ends extend to floor level. Probably these once connected to adjoining buildings or external stairs. There are no pilasters, and the vaults rise above scroll brackets set into the walls. The lateral bays also include low doors to small chambers above the corner bays of the naos. These step up from the gallery floor level, and they include windows looking into the naos⁹. They were probably intended for private devotions — perhaps to be used by the founder — related to the monastic function of the church¹⁰.

South façade

Several problems are presented by the exterior façades of the building. The roofline had been altered and was restored in the late 1960s¹¹. The sloping roof above the diakonikon probably does not reflect the original, and

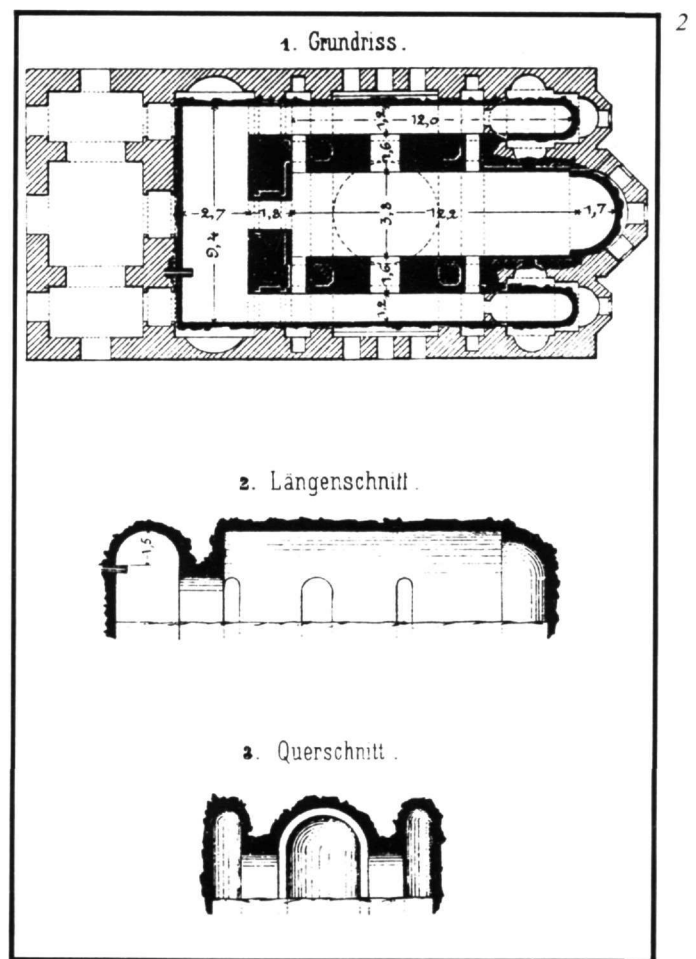
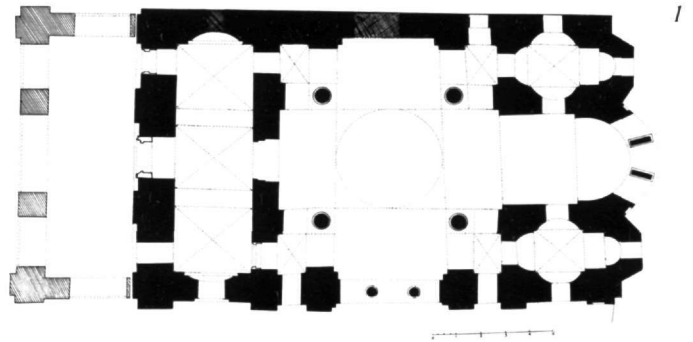


Fig. 1. Istanbul, *Christos ho Pantepoptes*. Restored plan (after Ebersolt and Thiers, with author's modifications).

Fig. 2. Istanbul, *Christos ho Pantepoptes*. Plan of substructures (after Forchheimer and Strzygowski).

Figs. 3-4. Istanbul, *Christos ho Pantepoptes*. Sculpture fragments, found in 1990.



the horizontal row of bricks above the gallery chamber appears a bit odd as well (Figs. 5-7). The exterior cornices were originally finely sculpted, and vestiges of the decoration survive. Those on the south façade project outward, well beyond the masonry surface, and this led Van Millingen to suggest that some of the external surfaces may have been revetted¹². This seems unlikely: there is no evidence for setting pins or cramps, but the possibility of a painted plaster surface like that at the church of the Virgin Eleousa at Veljusa, built *ca.* 1080, might be considered¹³. Several areas of fine white plaster can be observed on the remains of a stepped arch on the south façade of the exonarthex (Fig. 11). The context appears to be Byzantine and probably middle Byzantine, as will be discussed below. Unfortunately the surface is weathered, and it is unclear if it was painted.

Such plastering of façades was perhaps more common than we now realize: at least a portion of the Pantokrator church in Constantinople, from *ca.* 1136, was plastered and painted on the exterior¹⁴. In any event, the possibility of surface covering is at odds with the very careful construction and the numerous elements of brick decoration on the façades. Indeed, Van Millingen regarded the Pantepoptes as “the most carefully built” of the middle or late Byzantine churches of Constantinople¹⁵. On the south and east façades, almost every pier contains a decorative roundel or niche, and bands of meander and herringbone appear on several surfaces. Moreover, the mortar joints of the brick and stone courses were carefully etched¹⁶.

The Pantepoptes is often listed among the middle Byzantine examples of the so-called “recessed brick technique”, in which alternate courses of brick were set back from the surface and concealed within the mortar bed¹⁷. In the Pantepoptes, the mortar beds are slightly thicker than the brick courses, but the appearance of recessed brick is actually rather rare. In most of the wall area where the mortar has been broken away, no recessed brick courses are to be found. When recessed elements can be detected they are set deep into the mortar joints and consist of reused roofing tiles. Such concealed elements may have been used only sporadically. Perhaps they were added to reinforce the building at critical points, as was done at the Panagia ton Chalkeon in Thessaloniki. At the Pantepoptes the only clear evidence for this technique appears in areas of repair, not-

8. Measurements are taken from the plan of Ebersolt and Thiers (as in note 1), pl. XXXIX.

9. These are best understood with the aid of the drawings in Ebersolt and Thiers (as in note 1), figs. 84-86.

10. Janin (as in note 2), p. 513.

11. See Mathews (as in note 7), pp. 61-63. The original form of the roof above the naos corners and the pastophoria is far from clear.

12. Van Millingen (as in note 1), p. 216.

13. P. Miljković-Pepek, Veljusa, Skopje 1981, pp. 109-14, figs. 9-20.

14. For illustration, see R. Ousterhout, Observations on the “Recessed Brick” Technique during the Palaeologan Period, *ΑΔ* 39 (1984), Meletai, pl. 702.

15. Van Millingen (as in note 1), p. 216.

16. For this technique, see Y. Ötügen, Bizans Duvar Tekniğinde Tektonik ve Estetik Cözümler, *Vakıflar Dergisi XXI* (1990), pp. 395-410; also H. Schäfer, Architekturhistorische Beziehungen zwischen Byzanz und der Kiever Rus im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert, *IstMitt XXIII-XXIV* (1973-74), pp. 221-24.

17. C. Mango, The Date of the Narthex Mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea, *DOP XIII* (1959), p. 249, first included the Pantepoptes among the examples of recessed brick construction, and it has been cited by virtually every scholar who has discussed the technique since then.



Fig. 5. Istanbul, *Christos ho Pantepoptes*. South façade.

ably along the eastern portions of the south façade and in some arches (Figs. 6-7). In these areas, roofing tiles often are used as filler. The refaced pastophoria apses utilize the recessed brick technique, but here it clearly represents a modern addition that helped to secure the new facing to the existing surface (Fig. 7). In any event, the employment of the technique is certainly not uniform, and reference to the Pantepoptes in this context should be qualified.

On the other hand, wide mortar joints seem to have been popular in the eleventh century. Peschlow has shown that the Koimesis church at Nicaea did not utilize recessed brick in the eleventh-century additions, although the mortar beds were quite thick¹⁸. Similar broad mortar beds appear at Çanlı Kilise in Cappadocia as well¹⁹. The appearance of broad mortar beds in buildings without recessed brick suggests that the distinctive, striped appearance of the wall surface was desired in this period, an aspect of style, and that perhaps the outward appearance of the recessed brick technique was imitated.

Several aspects of the decorative articulation of the fa-

çade are intriguing. On the south façade, the arches are normally stilted and have triple setbacks (Figs. 5-6). However, the pilasters are simple, single-stepped, and they do not reflect the complexity of the arches. Most pilasters become narrower above the level of the cornice in order to accommodate the setback arches. In addition, on the narthex and on the diakonikon façades, the innermost arch of the triple setback springs from corbelled bricks. The combination of complex arches and simple pilasters may be seen in several twelfth-century buildings in the capital, such as the Pantokrator and the Gül Camii. This contrasts with the emphatically three-dimensional façade articulation of some earlier buildings of the eleventh century, such as the Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki, the narthex of the Koimesis in Nicaea

18. U. Peschlow, *Neue Beobachtungen zur Architektur und Ausstattung der Koimesis-Kirche in Iznik*, *IstMitt* XXII (1972), pp. 148-86.

19. Krautheimer (as in note 3), p. 339, notes the superficial similarity between the broad mortar joints and the recessed brick technique.

6



Fig. 6. Istanbul, Christos ho Pantepotes. South façade, eastern portion.

Fig. 7. Istanbul, Christos ho Pantepotes. View from south-east.

7



and the Eleousa at Veljusa. The corbelling of the inner arch is an unusual feature, but one finds the same in the south church at Side²⁰. Unfortunately, the church at Side has not been securely dated.

Some form of brick decoration appears on almost every pier of the Pantepotes. The three western piers of the naos include roundels or bullseye patterns, and these have been frequently noted²¹. In addition, the eastern most pier includes a tiny, round-headed niche (Fig. 6). Careful examination of its context indicates that this was an original feature, although most of the surrounding masonry has been replaced. The niche is positioned almost directly at the angled springing of the façade arcade. The niche head is filled with bricks forming a W-shaped chevron pattern²². Such a detail, seeming to negate the structural expression of the pier, is unusual in the architecture of the eleventh century, although certainly more common in the Palaeologan period²³.

East façade

A similar feature appears on the main apse as well. The three facets of the apse once opened with extremely tall windows, the outline of which can still be discerned around the stone fill (Figs. 7-8)²⁴. The pier to the south of the window contains a small niche in the original masonry, positioned flanking the lower portion of the window opening (Fig. 8). A symmetrical counterpart appears to the north, although it is covered with plaster. Like the niche at the southeast corner, the south apse niche has a chevron field in its conch. A fragment of a herringbone frieze is preserved at the upper level of the south faced as well.

Above the three large lights are three semicircular niches. Such features are common in the apses of the period, helping to relieve the mass of construction material between the conch of the apse on the interior and the rising wall of the exterior²⁵. Curiously, these are not aligned with the windows below: the window openings are clustered toward the center of the apse, whereas the niches are positioned centrally within each facet. A decorative niche containing a flat field is in a similar position on the lateral surface of the apse extension, above the level of the diakonikon. The flat surface of the niche is filled with a diaper pattern in brick and mortar. The apse niches are still covered with a layer of plaster, but one wonders whether they also may preserve some elements of brick decoration. The nineteenth-century drawing by Paspates, which was probably based on a photograph, shows a chevron or herringbone pattern in the niches²⁶.

Byzantine repairs and modifications

Although much of the alteration of the façades seems to have occurred during the Ottoman period, some renovations must have been effected already in the Byzantine period. On the south façade, the patterned lunette of the diakonikon niche may represent a later modification. The basketweave pattern is unusual in the Byzantine decorative repertory, and it is otherwise unknown in the middle Byzantine period (Fig. 6). Furthermore, the arch framing it is poorly resolved with the pilasters to either side. The low arch within the adjacent arcade, constructed in recessed brick, is also clearly a later addition (Fig. 9). The inner surface of this arch contains large areas of plaster coating, and the niche may have been intended as a *proskynitarion* on the exterior of the building — or perhaps set within a lateral porch. The filling of the central tribelon of the naos may have occurred already in Byzantine times, although it is generally assumed to be from a later period (Fig. 5). The construction technique is similar to the upper portions of the exonarthex, which will be discussed below. Unlike the transformed apse window, the inserted arch is round rather than pointed.

Exonarthex

The most important Byzantine modification to the Pantepotes was the addition of the exonarthex, but it has heretofore received little attention. Its form was discussed briefly by Ebersolt and Van Millingen, although neither notes that it was a separate construction²⁷. Mathews notes simply that it was an addition of the Palaeologan period²⁸. Clearly, it was not bonded to the main block of the building. The recent removal of the Turkish minaret and the lowering of the ground level have made it possible to comment on the form and construction of the exonarthex.

At least three periods of construction or modification can be discerned. In the earliest, the exonarthex seems to have been a portico, opened by large, low arcades, supported on piers (Fig. 1). The springings of the setback arches are now clearly visible on the south façade and on the south bay of the west façade (Fig. 11). It is still unclear whether the inner supports on the west façade were piers or columns: a loose column base appeared in the earth removal along the west façade of the building, but it is unclear where it came from. Nor is it clear whether the portico joined the narthex by means of pilasters or brackets. The masonry of this phase is similar to that of the church itself: mortar joints are etched,

and some attempt has been made to coordinate brick and stone courses. There is no evidence of recessed brick in the mortar beds, which are slightly wider than the brick courses. The mortar slopes downward, with additional pinkish pointing forming the outer surface.

At the western corner of the south façade, a large roundel enclosing a cross appears, executed in brick and curved tiles (Fig. 11). This had been hidden until recently by the base of the minaret. This area of wall surface had been covered since the late fifteenth century, preserving in pristine condition the colors and the details. Between the roundel and the arch is a curved chevron pattern: its asymmetrical form followed the lines of the roundel and the arch.

The cross-roundel is quite similar to examples at the Philanthropos Sea Wall, and at the church known as Fatih Camii in Enez (Ainos), both probably twelfth-century in date. Another example, from the north corridor of Agios Georgios ton Manganon, may be from the middle of the eleventh century²⁹. This example is not well known, appearing on what may have originally been an exterior wall of the substructure. Unlike the Philanthropos patterns, which are surrounded with a circle of dogtooth, the Mangana example is surrounded by short bricks placed radially with flat surfaces ex-

20. A. Mansel, *Side*, Ankara 1978, pp. 257-66.

21. A. Pasadaios, 'Ο κεραμοπλαστικός διάκοσμος τῶν βυζαντινῶν κτιρίων τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, Athens 1973, pls. 1, 16, 19, 21, 25.

22. Ebersolt and Thiers (as in note 1), fig. 90, include a tiny drawing of this detail, but do not give its location.

23. See for example the façades of the exonarthex of the Lips monastery or of the Pammakaristos parekklesion; Mathews (as in note 7), pp. 242-44, 350-51. The niches in the narthex façade of the Pammakaristos may be part of the twelfth-century building; see C. Mango and E. Hawkins, *Report on Field Work in Istanbul and Cyprus, 1962-1963*, DOP XVIII (1964), p. 322.

24. Ebersolt and Thiers (as in note 1), p. 178.

25. T. Mathews and E. Hawkins, *Notes on the Atik Mustafa Paşa Camii in Istanbul and its Frescoes*, DOP XXXIX (1985), pp. 126-28.

26. A. Paspates, *Βυζαντιναί μελέται*, Constantinople 1877, plate opposite p. 313.

27. Ebersolt and Thiers (as in note 1), pp. 171-72; Van Millingen (as in note 1), p. 215, but his plan, p. 217, shows the exonarthex as a separate phase.

28. Mathews (as in note 7), p. 59.

29. Pasadaios (as in note 21), pl. 24β; Mathews (as in note 7), pp. 202-04; R. Ousterhout, *The Byzantine Church at Enez: Problems in Twelfth-Century Architecture*, JÖB XXXV (1985), p. 264 and fig. 9. The Mangana detail is not well known; see N. V. Baranov, ed., *Vseobshchaia istoriia arkhitektury: v 12-ti tomakh*, v. 3, Leningrad-Moscow 1966, fig. 58; the last is barely visible in R. Demangel and E. Mamboury, *Le quartier des Manganes et la première région de Constantinople*, Paris 1939, fig. 23. I thank Prof. P. Miljković-Pepk for his assistance in locating this reference.



Fig. 8. Istanbul, *Christos ho Pantepoptes*. Main apse, detail of south facet.



Fig. 9. Istanbul, *Christos ho Pantepoptes*. South façade, detail of niche.

posed, and this corresponds with the Pantepoptes pattern. A similar cross-roundel, etched in painted plaster on the north façade of the episcopal church at Avdera-Polystylon, is dated after the tenth century, but undoubtedly comes from the middle Byzantine period as well³⁰.

The curved chevron pattern is asymmetrical, adjusted to differing heights of the roundel and the arch. Symmetrical examples of a curved chevron may be noted from both the middle and late Byzantine periods, but the asymmetrical motif is rare. The only comparable example known to me is on the Philanthropos façade, where it is used to connect arches of different heights³¹. I know of no late Byzantine examples of either motif from Constantinople or the vicinity.

It seems likely that the original Pantepoptes exonarthex dates from the middle Byzantine period. I would suggest a date in the early twelfth century, that is, shortly after the original construction of the church. It is possible that the portico was contemporaneous, but that it was neither bonded nor given massive foundations because

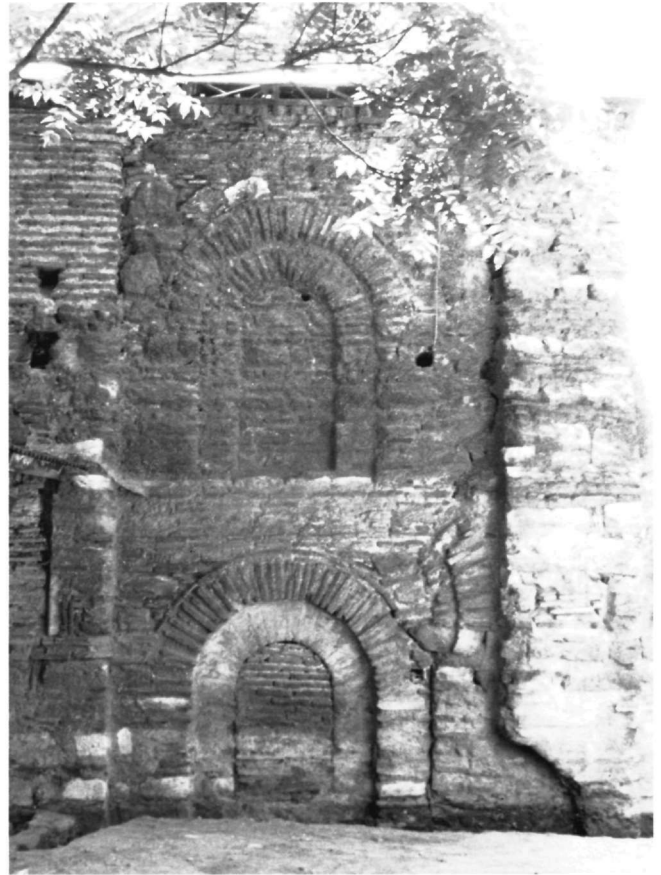


Fig. 10. Istanbul, *Christos ho Pantepoptes*. Exonarthex, west façade.

of its lighter form. Porticoed exonarthexes are known from the middle Byzantine period, although they were more popular later on, and our best preserved examples are from the Palaeologan period. The portico façade of the church now known as Fatih Camii at Enez (Ainos) should be noted in this context, and it is probably from the twelfth century as well³². In addition, the constructional similarities between the exonarthex and the naos of the Pantepoptes would suggest a chronological closeness. The brick decorations also find their best comparisons in the middle Byzantine period.

Certain structural problems seem to have affected the original exonarthex, and it was subsequently reconstructed, probably in the late Byzantine period. The portico lacked the secure foundations of the inner narthex, which rests on vaulted substructures, and it may be that the consequent settling of the western piers resulted in the collapse of the exonarthex. It is now evident that the westernmost pier on the south façade leans outward, presumably the result of the weight of the piers (or perhaps of the vaulting) on unstable foundations. In



Fig. 11. Istanbul, *Christos ho Pantepoptes*. Exonarthex, south façade.

the southwest corner of the interior, the angle of the remaining pier clearly differs from the vertical lines of the reconstructed exonarthex. Remains of the first period of construction are found only in the lower portion of the exonarthex, and I suspect that it had a lower form than the present structure. In its reconstructed form, the exonarthex is vaulted and taller than the inner narthex, resulting perhaps from the vaulting springing from above the level of the original wall. This may explain its rather dark form with low openings. Piers with slightly pointed reinforcing arches have been added in the interior, perhaps also in the late Byzantine period: these are similar to late Byzantine repairs at the Chora³³.

The exterior masonry of the rebuilt portion is normally an alternation of two courses of brick to one of rough stone (Figs. 10-11). The arches on the west façade are outlined in brick, and recessed tiles appear sporadically in the arches. Decorative niches appear in the west and south façades, although at different levels. In addition, the pier to the south of the main entrance seems to have included a decorative niche, plastered on its inner sur-

face. In all, the reconstruction of the exonarthex lacks the elegance of the middle Byzantine construction.

Conclusions

The middle Byzantine church of the Pantepoptes emerges in a somewhat different perspective from our analysis. First, although carefully constructed, the external surfaces may have been plastered and painted.

30. Ch. Bakirtzis and N. Zikos, 'Ανασκαφαι Πολυστύλου 'Αβδηρων, ΠΑΕ 1984, Α', pp. 12-17; for more information see ΑΔ 41 (1986), *Chronika*, p. 189-90, pl. 135α-γ.

31. Demangel and Mamboury (as in note 29), fig. 52.

32. Ousterhout (as in note 29), pp. 272-76, for a discussion of portico façades of the middle Byzantine period.

33. Van Millingen (as in note 1), p. 215, sees them as Turkish; but note a similar structural repair of the fourteenth century at the Chora: R. Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul*, Washington, D.C., 1987, pp. 76-77, fig. 116.

Moreover, recessed brick appears only rarely in the original building, although it is clearly evident in areas of Byzantine repair. It may have been employed in the modifications to the building in order to provide a cohesive bond between the new facing and the existing wall surface. In any event, construction techniques should be given greater attention in the analysis of Byzantine buildings, although this is frequently impossible without on-site study.

Second, the employment of certain decorative features appears as a progressive element in a rather conservative framework. The frequent lack of clear correspondence between the architectonic framework the decorative details heralds later developments, such as the Philanthropos Sea Wall from the late twelfth century, and free use of decoration in Palaeologan architecture. The motif of a niche set into a pier seems noteworthy in this context.

Third, the Pantepoptes can now provide an example of

a middle Byzantine, porticoed exonarthex in the capital, indicating that the building component so popular in the late Byzantine period had middle Byzantine antecedents. The examination of the Pantepoptes indicates a closeness between architectural forms and details from the middle and late Byzantine periods. There is a remarkable continuity in the architecture of the Byzantine capital, and the origin of many standard Palaeologan features may be found in the architectural heritage of the city.

Finally, it is worth remembering that buildings such as the Pantepoptes exist within an historical framework. Built, altered, and expanded over a period of time, they have a life of their own. Although few incidents have been recorded from the building's history — and none which may assist in determining the chronology of the modifications, an analysis of the fabric indicates the continued significance of the Pantepoptes in later Byzantine history.