



Summary :

The church was dedicated to Virgin Mary and was also known under many names, such as Panagia of the Mongols, Panagia of Mouchliou etc. It is situated on the quarter of Phanar, near the Orthodox Patriarchate and the Holy Sepulchre's Metochion. The existence of a temple in that region is recorded already since the 7th century. The present monument, that suffered major alterations during the works of extension in the 18th century, preserves parts of the 11th-century Byzantine church and parts of the Palaiologan renovation, by Maria Palaiologina. The church is distinguished for two reasons: from an architectural viewpoint, since it is a unique variation of the tetraconch church at Constantinople; and from a historical viewpoint, since it is the only Byzantine church of Constantinople that remained in use by the Orthodox community.

Date

11th c. - until today

Geographical Location

Constantinople, Istanbul

Names

Panagia of the Mouchli/ of Mouchlion/ of the Mongols/ Magouliotissa/ of Mougoulion/ of Magoulion, Theotokos Panagiotissa, Kanlı Kilise

Topographical Location

5th hill of Constantinople, in the quarter of Phanar, between the Great School of the Nation and the Ioakeimeion Girl's School, Istanbul

1. Introduction

The church of Panagia Mouchliotissa is also known under the names Theotokos Panagiotissa, Panagia of Magoulion, Panagia of the Mongols, Panagia of Mouchliou, Panagia Mouchliotissa, and in Turkish as Kanlı Kilise (the bloody church). According to a theory the epithet Mouchliotissa derives from the medieval town Mouchlion of Arcadia, the inhabitants of which were settled in the quarter of [Phanar](#) 1242.¹ According to the most possible theory it is the attribution of the Slavic word Mogyla (Mongolia) in Greek.² The attribute "bloody" that the Turkish name adds is due either to the external red color of the church ([fig. 3](#)) or to the "bloody" story of Maria Palaiologina, sister or daughter of [Michael VIII](#) (1261 -1282), responsible for its restoration.³ The church was situated on the fifth hill of [Constantinople](#), in the quarter of Phanar of modern Istanbul, near the Orthodox Patriarchate and the metochion of the Holy Sepulchre, between the [Great School of the Nation](#) and [Ioakeimeion girl's school](#).

The fact that the monument functions until nowadays as a Christian church neither prevented any alterations due to extensions or renovations, nor made easier the study of its architecture. The church's first exhaustive reconstruction was made in 1995, by the architect Apostolos Porides, while the drawings were not published until 2005, in Ch. Bouras' article on the architecture of the church.⁴

2. History

In the same area the existence of a nunnery is reported, already since the 7th century, that of Sainte Eustolia, founded by emperor [Maurice's](#) (582- 602) daughters Sopatra and Eustolia. In the 11th century the existence of a male monastery of the Hyperhagia (Most Holy) Virgin Mary of Panagiou is recorded. A lead seal of this monastery has been preserved, while we know that its **typikon** was the prototype for the typikon that Gregory Pakourianos composed in 1085, for the monastery of Petritzos he had founded near Bačkovo. The monastery was restored in 1261 by the father-in-law of [George Akropolites](#) and uncle of Michael VIII Isaac Doukas or, according to other scholars, by Akropolites himself.⁵

Later on, between the years 1282 and 1285, Maria Palaiologina⁶ renovated anew the existing church, added a narthex and re-



founded the monastery, this time as a nunnery. In 1265, Maria had gone to Persia to get married with the great **khan** of the **Mongols**, Hulagu, thus confirming her father's pact, Michael's VIII, with the Mongols. Since he died before Maria had reached there, she finally married his son Abaga. She stayed there for 15 years, and it was due to her that her husband was converted to Christianity, just as many of the officials of his court. That is the reason why she is also known as Lady or Mistress of the Mongols. After Abaga's assassination in 1281, Maria returned to Constantinople. During her widowhood, she bought by Maria Doukaina Akropolitissa a large land estate in Phanar, in the region of 'fa Panagiu', of the preexisting monastery, which included vineyards, gardens, various buildings and the church of Theotokos Panagiotissa. Palaiologina financially reinforced the monastery she founded, by gifting sacred objects, precious vessels, manuscripts, as well as estates at Constantinople and Phaidestos, thus spending all of her fortune.⁷ In the monastery 33 nuns were living, and she retired to it herself at the end of her life.

After the **Fall of 1453**, the monastery of the Mouchli was most probably destroyed. The church, however, was preserved and, along with some houses and surrounding lands, was given according to the tradition to the architect Christodoulos by **Mehmed II**, as a reward for erecting the mosque of Fatih Camii on the site of the **Holy Apostles** church, in 1471. Thus, the church, functioning ever since as a parish church and not as a monastic one, was the only Byzantine church of the city that remained in Christian use. Mehmed's II firman, as well as those of other sultans confirming and the special status of Mouchliotissa's property, had been depicted inside the church in the modern era. In the 18th century the church was extended and suffered major alterations on its southern and the western part, while a fire on the church in 1784 has been reported, the consequences of which for the monument are uncertain.⁸

3. Architecture and decoration

3.1. The Byzantine church

In its present condition, Mouchliotissa has an irregular ground-plan (**fig. 1**), because of the 18th-century extensions. The original church was a domed tetraconch church, with three smaller niches opened in the thickness of each **apse's** wall. The corners of the central, domed square core of the church were defined by columns, *ca.* of 3 meters height, crowned by Corinthian capitals of the 5th century, in second use. From the original Byzantine church have been preserved the main domed **nave** of the church (**fig. 6**), two of the original apses and the two thirds of the tripartite **narthex**. The southern apse and the lower part of the western one do not exist. The conchs are externally five-sided.

A ribbed, canted, horizontal decorative **cornice** located 5 meters above floor level defines the point of curvature of the semi-domes of the apses. A second one, 9 meters above floor level, marks the transition from the **pendentives** to the **drum** of the dome.

The **dome** is internally eight-sided, ribbed, with eight, initially single-lobed windows and a height of 13,60 meters. Between the front's arches and the pendentives intervene arches or imperfect vaults. Among these arches, the south one has been destroyed. Externally, the drum of the dome was cylindrical and its roofing conical. The external façade of the drum was formed by eight lightly projecting arches, framing the windows and alternating with eight smaller blind arches. It is possible that the arches were carried on double colonettes of marble that have not been preserved (**fig. 3**).⁹ In modern years, the arches were covered with a thick layer of coating, whereas the dome has still not suffered any changes in its structure. Based on some of the morphological elements of the dome, as well as on the analogies with the **katholika** of a triconch plan on the Mount Athos, Ch. Bouras suggested a dating of the original Byzantine church to the first twenty years of the 11th century.¹⁰

The tripartite narthex must have been annexed during the 13th century, possibly during the period of the re-founding of the monastery by Maria Palaiologina. Besides, the addition of narthexes, chapels and **ambulatories** was a usual practice in the **Palaiologan church architecture**. The narthex, rectangular, must have communicated with the main church only through an entrance, from its central area towards the central niche of the western apse; however, we can not exclude that there may have been more than one openings towards the outside area (**fig. 2**).¹¹



The architectural type of Mouchliotissa is very interesting, on the one side because it is rare in the region of the capital (the only other example is the church of Kamariotissa on the island of [Chalke](#)), on the other hand because it presents the unique variation with niches and columns around the central domed nave. However, and in spite of their rarity in the region of Constantinople, tetraconch churches constitute one of the earliest (already since the 6th century) and most long-lasting types of the Byzantine church architecture.

Its absolute symmetry regarding the length- and the width-axis, as well as the tall proportions of the dome, gave a sense of balance in the internal space of the church and a strong impression of lifting up. The nices by which each apse was enlarged, fulfilled a rather esthetic than functional purpose, something that rends Mouchliotissa a unique example of its kind. However, the synthesis of a space that in its lower level is composed of twelve apses and niches, is elevated as a tetraconch and is crowned by a geometrically simple structure, reminds of the katholikon of Nea Moni (New Monastery) on the island of [Chios](#), which is also marked out for its originality.¹²

3.2. Latest additions

The entire southern side of the Byzantine church was replaced by a six-partite hypostyle hall with two pillars, pointed arches and pointed **cross-vaults**, indicating the influence of the Ottoman architecture. The western side of the church had also been altered. Two strong wall-piers were built in the place of the western apse's low part, while the apse conch was pierced in order to create an attic-window. In the place of the original south conch of the church a wide arch, with a span of around 7 meters, was constructed, carried to the west by the southern-most wall-pier.

The middle vault and the semi-dome of the narthex of the Byzantine church have been preserved. The space between the narthex and the northern apse was initially open-air, while today it has been closed and roofed with a pointed dome. The two southernmost parts of the modern addition were two-storied, in order to form a closed gallery. To the west an **exonarthex** was formed, with pillars on its façade, and covered with vault. The last of its lateral compartments to the west is independent and functioned as ante-chamber and as a staircase towards the gallery.¹³ Inside the church, the edges between the niches have been lightly cut, aiming to widen the central area. The surfaces have been covered with thick coating ([fig. 5](#)), something that hindered the study of the church. The windows have been shut, except of 5 windows of the drum of the dome. At the roof endings concave cornices were formed. The bell-tower belongs to the most recent additions.

3.3. Inner decoration of the church

The church was reportedly decorated with religious wall-paintings at the end of the 13th century by Modestos.¹⁴ The only traces of mural paintings that are still preserved today, from a Last Judgment scene on the eastern wall of the extension, is a work of a post-Byzantine painter. Until 1899 these wall-paintings were preserved underneath the coating; but soon later they were destroyed because of repairing-works of the first half of the 20th century. The mosaic icon of Panagia Mouchliotissa (end of 13th – beginnings of 14th century, [fig. 7](#)) was also preserved, as were four icons of post-Byzantine date: St Paraskevi, St Euphemia, the Three Church Fathers and Hagioi Theodoroi. The **templon**, the episcopal throne to the south and the **ambo** to the northeast are wooden-cut and ornated with curved floral motives. The icons of the lower register of the templon screen are silver-coated and dated to the year 1884.

1. Κουγέας, Σ., «Ο Γεώργιος Ακροπολίτης, κτήτωρ του Παρισινού κώδικος του Σουίδα (cod. paris. graec. 2625)», *Βυζαντινά-Μεταβυζαντινά* 1:2 (1949), pp. 61-74.

2. Janin, R., *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin I: Le Siège de Constantinople et le Patriarcat Oecuménique 3: les églises et les monastères* (Paris 1969), p. 204.



3. Alan, A. (ed.), *Churches in Turkey* (Istanbul 2007), p. 88.
4. Μπούρας, Χ., «Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη», *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, per. IV 26 (2005), p. 35.
5. Until recently, the church of Mouchliotissa was believed to have been built right after the recapture of Constantinople, in 1266-1267, by George Akropolites, who was the *mezas logothetes* in the time of the recapture of the city, in spite of the fact that there were reservations concerning such a late dating of the church. Nevertheless, the source on which this dating was based, a detail note on a Greek codex of Suda, was proved to refer to another, unknown church, dedicated to St. Marina, see Μπούρας, Χ., «Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη», *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* IV 26 (2005), pp. 37-8, where the sources for the earlier monastery of Panagiotissa.
6. It is the nun Melane, which is portrayed, along with Isaac Komnenos, on the wall mosaic of the Deesis at the Chora Monastery, on the eastern wall of the exonarthex (1316-1320).
7. The information is gathered from a synodical document of 1351, according to which the Ecumenical Patriarchate returned to the monastery all the property that had been expropriated by Maria's brother-in-law, Isaac Palaiologos Asen, whom she herself appointed with a chrysobul as manager of the monastic property, after her death. The foundation of the monastery is recorded in the cod. Par. Gr. 2625 (Miklosich, Fr. - Muller, J., *Acta et diplomata Graeca medii aevi sacra et profana* 1 [Wien 1851], no. 136, pp. 312-317).
8. Μπούρας, Χ., «Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη», *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* IV 26 (2005), p. 38.
9. It is a particularity of which parallels are found only in two churches of the Vatopaidi monastery on the Mount Athos, the *katholikon* and the chapel of St Nikolaos. See Μπούρας, Χ., «Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη», *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* IV 26 (2005), p. 43 and note 45-6.
10. Μπούρας, Χ., «Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη», *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* IV 26 (2005), p. 49.
11. For a systematic analysis of the architecture of Panagia Mouchliotissa and for the reproduction of the internal space of the Byzantine church based on its fuller architectural reconstruction by A. Porides, see Μπούρας, Χ., «Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη», *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* IV 26 (2005), pp. 39-44 and figs. 8-9.
12. Μπούρας, Χ., «Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη», *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* IV 26 (2005), p. 48.
13. Μπούρας, Χ., «Η αρχιτεκτονική της Παναγίας του Μουχλίου στην Κωνσταντινούπολη», *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* IV 26 (2005), p. 39.
14. Commentary on the manuscript of the lexikon of Suda, 10th c., Cod.Par.gr. 2625.

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Glossary :

	ambo The elevated pulpit used for preaching in the church nave.
	ambulatory (byz. arch.) A continuous passage that envelops the <i>naos</i> or the centrally planned core of a structure. In a cross-domed church, where the dome is supported on four masonry piers and between each pair of piers two columns are inserted, the ambulatory is formed by the lateral aisles and western part of the church. Later on, an ambulatory could also envelop a cross-in-square core. During the Palaeologan period, ambulatories, usually serving as funerary chambers, were added to many middle-Byzantine churches of Constantinople.
	apse An arched structure or a semi-circular end of a wall. In byzantine architecture it means the semicircular, usually barrel-vaulted, niche at the east end of a basilica. The side aisles of a basilica may also end in an apse, but it is always in the central apse where the altar is placed. It was separated from the main church by a barrier, the templon, or the iconostasis. Its ground plan on the external side could be semicircular, rectangular or polygonal.
	cornice Decorative architectural element projecting from the wall. It is used both on the internal and the external face of the church walls, in order to mark the division between the vertical wall and the spring of the vaults. It is usually made of marble and bears painted or sculptural decoration of vegetal or



geometric motifs.

cross- (groin-) vault

A vault formed over square or rectangular spaces by the interpenetration of two barrel-vaults of equal height and diameter. The lines of the intersection form a diagonal cross.

dome

A characteristic element of Byzantine architecture. The dome is a hemispherical vault on a circular wall (drum) usually pierced by windows. The domed church emerges in the Early Byzantine years and its various types gradually prevail, while they are expanded in the Balkans and in Russia.

drum of dome

Part of the church, semicircular or polygonal, on which rises an hemispheric dome

exonarthex (outer narthex)

The transverse vestibule or portico preceding the narthex of the church.

katholikon

The main church in a monastic complex, heart of the monastic activity.

khan (Ilkhan), khagan

This title was used in Turkic and Mongolian languages to designate the supreme ruler. The Byzantines used it to refer to the rulers of the Avars, Khazars, Turks and Bulgarians.

naos (nave)

The main part of the temple, between the *narthex* and the *bema*. It was the place where the congregation took part in the liturgy.

narthex

A portico or a rectangular entrance-hall, parallel with the west end of an early Christian basilica or church.

pendentive

Triangular surface used for the transition from the square base of the church to the hemispheric dome.

templon or iconostasis

A structure separating the sanctuary from the main church. At first, it simply divided the nave from the presbytery, but later it became higher, with small columns and an epistyle. From the 11th century onwards, icons were placed between the templon columns and, somewhat later, icons were also placed above the epistyle, thus forming the iconostasis. The templon were originally from marble. Wooden iconostases appeared from the 13th century.

typikon

Foundation document of a monastery compiling the rules regarding its administrative organization and liturgic rituals, as well as the comportment inside a cenobitic monastery.

The monastic typika could also include the biography (*vita*) of the monastery founder along with a catalogue of the movable or immovable property of the monastery. They constitute an important source for the study of the monastic life, while at the same time they shed light on many aspects of the Byzantine society.

The liturgical typika were calendars with instructions for each day's services, liturgical books with rules arranging the celebration rituals.

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Quotations

Purchase and foundation of the monastery by Maria Palaiologina, sister of Michael VIII

6860 [1351] octobri ind. V

Δικαίωσις τῶν μοναζουσῶν τῆς τῶν Μουγουλίων μονῆς



Φθάνει ή ύψηλοτάτη δέσποινα τών Μουγουλιών, ή περιπόθητος δηλονότι αὐταδέλφη τοῦ αἰοίδιμου καί μακαρίτου βασιλέως, τοῦ πάππου τοῦ κρατίστου καί ἀγίου μου αὐτοκράτορος, κυρά Μαρία ή Παλαιολογίνα ἐκείνη, ἐξωνησαμένη... τὰ προσόντα τούτοις οἰκήματα μετὰ τῶν περικλειομένων αὐτοῖς ἐτέρων μικρῶν ὀσπητίων, ὅσα δῆτα καί ἦσαν, πρὸ πολλῶν ἤδη χρόνων περὶ τὴν τοποθεσίαν τοῦ Φανάρι διακείμενα, τὴν οὕτω πωρς τηνικαῦτα ἐπιλεγομένην, τὰ Παναγίου, μετὰ πάσης τῆς περιοχῆς καί νομῆς αὐτῶν... ἐπὶ τιμήματι ὑπερπύρων εὐστάθμων τετρακισχιλίων, ἐφ' ᾧ κατὰ τῶν Μουγουλιών μεταποιῆσαι ταῦτα καί ἱερὰν θεῶ μονὴν ἀναδείμασθαι καί λιμένα ψυχῶν κατὰ θεὸν προθεμένων βιοῦν... καί ταῖς παρ' ἑαυτῆς ἐπιμελείαις καί κόποις καί πλείστοις δὴ τισιν ἀναλώμασι τὴν ῥηθεῖσαν μεταποίησιν ἐποιήσατο, καί πρὸ παντὸς ἤδρασε καί ἐστήριξε περιποιησαμένη τὸν ἐκεῖ θεῖον ναὸν τῆς πανυπεράγνου δεσποίνης καί θεομήτορος τῆς Παναγιωτίσσης...

Miklosich, Fr. - Muller, J., *Acta et diplomata Graeca medii aevi sacra et profana* 1 (Wien 1851), no. 136, pp. 312-3.

Chronological Table

7th c.: Monastery of St Eustolia

10th / 11th c.: Monastery of Theotokos Panagiotissa

1261: restoration by George Akropolites

1266: decoration of the church by Modestos

1282-1285: restoration of the church and foundation of a monastery by Maria Palaiologina

Until today: functions as an Orthodox church