ΙΔΡΥΜΑ ΜΕΙΖΟΝΟΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΥ

Συγγραφή : *Φιολιτάκη Πηνελόπη*
Μετάφραση : *Ανδριοπούλου Βέρα*
Για παραπομπή : *Φιολιτάκη Πηνελόπη , "St. Polyeuktos", Εγκυκλοπαίδεια Μείζονος Ελληνισμού, Κωνσταντινούπολη*
URL: <http://www.ehw.gr/l.aspx?id=11784>

Περίληψη :

The church of St Polyeuktos was commissioned by the noble woman Anicia Juliana, a political adversary of Justinian I, and was founded in 527. The building was large, possibly with dome, with a lavishly decorated interior, which reflected Anicia's political ambition. Almost certainly, Justinian built the church of St Sophia with the aim to overshadow the extravagant church of St Polyeuktos and its founder. The church of St Polyeuktos was destroyed in the 12th century, while the Crusaders, after 1204, transported some of its architectural parts to the West. The foundations and some remains of the decor, especially sculptural parts, came to light during the excavations, which began in the 60s in the area Saraçhane of modern Istanbul.

Χρονολόγηση

524 - late 12th c.

Γεωγραφικός εντοπισμός

Constantinople, Istanbul

Τοπογραφικός εντοπισμός

Area of Saraçhane

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1. Topography

Byzantine sources[1] place the church of St Polyeuktos in the Mese, the central road of Constantinople, near the church of the Holy Apostles. During the 1960s, excavations in the area Saraçhane of modern Istanbul brought to light some first architectural parts of the church, verifying the accounts of the sources. Cyril Mango and Ihor Ševčenko identified this monument as the St Polyeuktos church known from the sources, based on extracts of a donor's inscription on the first architectural parts found. This inscription has been identified as an epigram from the Palatine Anthology, part of which (41 out of 76 lines) is known to have been inscribed inside this church.[2] It also gave important information on the shape of the building as well as the founder of the church, Anicia Juliana, a noble woman and political adversary of Justinian I.

2. Architectural design

The excavations brought to light almost the entirety of the church's foundation. From the main building of the church not much survives, except some architectural parts and fragments of sculpture. The foundations' size and shape show that the building was very large, in the shape of a basilica with three aisles, with a protruding apse on the eastern side.

On the western side, there was an atrium, ca. 26 m. in width, almost half of the church's total size.[3] The level of the building was 5 m. higher than the atrium, based on massive foundations; a large staircase, 8 m. wide, connected the atrium with the narthex. The main part of the church, on the eastern side of the narthex, appeared to be square-shaped, each side being 52 m. long, and it was divided into a central and two side aisles. The inscription, which runs all the way round the architrave, informs us that the church had two levels of colonnades, as well as galleries. The excavation had not revealed much concerning the roofing of the church. However, the extremely strong foundations indicate a heavy construction; therefore, it is possible that the church was covered by a dome. The building itself must have been more than 30 m. high.

Underneath the main aisle, an underpass connected the space under the narthex with a crypt, situated under the altar. To the west of this crypt there was a transversal wall, possibly supporting a rectilinear chancel screen. A little further to the west, almost in the very centre of the building, there was an oval-shaped construction, in the middle of the passageway; it was there that the ambo must have stood. Two extremely strong walls within the foundation - each being 8 m. thick and 8 m. deep – supported most of the weight of the upper section of the building, as well as the colonnades that divided the three aisles. Underneath the aisles, two long underpasses s supported the floor. The excavations did not bring to light enough evidence concerning the altar, and its shape remains vague. It appears that a staircase connected the altar with the square-shaped crypt under it; it was probably situated on both sides of the altar,

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much like the two rooms at the north and south sides, where the stairs to the galleries were situated. North of the atrium, foundations found there indicate that this space could have belonged to the Baptistery of the church (see ground plan).[4]

We can only speculate on issues concerning the elevation of the church and the interior arrangement. The few architectural parts – their small number was probably due to the plunder of the monument after it was abandoned – and the fragmented decorations that have been brought to light offer some clues for a reconstruction of what the building could have looked like initially. Surviving parts of the architrave bear fragmented parts of the inscription (fig. 16), that must have ran all around it; we can therefore place them somewhat in order.

R.M. Harrison, the main excavator of the church, studied the architrave and came to the conclusion that the central square space of the nave, on either side of the altar, must have been surrounded by two sets of exedrae in the northern and southern side; the alcoves above the platforms were connected by a low arch. Four built-in heavy pillars, situated in the four corners of the square, probably defined its shape. Such an organisation of the interior of the church further strengthens the position that a dome covered the building. The western part of the nave, which would have been surrounded by two platforms in the north and south side, was probably covered by a large arch.[5]

Consequently, the church of St Polyeuktos must have presented many similarities to the church of Hagia Eirene, built by Justinian at a later date; in addition, the presence of the dome and the way the different alcoves were created in order to support this dome, presented the first example of the architectural type that would be perfected in Justinian's Hagia Sophia. However, not all scholars accept Harrison's reconstruction; many have doubted the existence of a dome, since excavations have not unearthed remains from the dome or the four pillars that supposedly supported it.[6]

3. Interior decoration

The excavators of the monument were greatly surprised when they discovered fragments of decoration; they appeared to have great variety but also good quality, surpassing in that respect any other church in early Byzantine Constantinople.[7] The inside walls of the building were reveted with polychrome marble, brought in from all around the Mediterranean. Inlaid material used in the lavish decorations also included ivory, amethyst, gold fragments and coloured glass. Many mosaic fragments suggest that the vaults of the building were covered in mosaic; a mosaic fragment from the altar probably is part of the face of a person and it constitutes a unique find for Constantinople before the period of Iconoclasm.

The architectural sculpture pieces, made in their majority of Proconnesian marble, are the most impressive find. The capitals of columns and of piers, the entablature and parts of the architrave that bears the inscription are decorated with a variety of floral, animal and geometrical ornaments, originating from different cultures - Greco-roman, Persian, Arabic; they appear to have been executed by the best craftsmen. Also extraordinary is the fact that the vertical parts of the elevation, i.e. the columns and piers, also had carved decorations. St Polyeuktos' sculptural decorations are quite innovative compared to the tradition of Late Antiquity; it appears to have influenced later monuments, such as St Vitale in Ravenna and the Euphrasian basilica in Parenzo. Finally, of great significance are ten relif plaques, depicting Christ, the Virgin Mary and the Apostles; due to their theme they are also a unique find in Constantinople for the period before the Iconoclasm.[8]

4. Masonry

The foundation walls are constructed with a series of squared, well-smoothed stones, alternated with a series of bricks. The same masonry must have been used for the church's walls, while at the upper section of the walls, at the beginning of the vaults, there was a narrow row of marble slabs with rounded corners. Only one pillar (fig. 8) survives from the elevation, constructed with approximately forty brick rows.

5. History of the monument

Anicia Juliana (fig. 22) was a member of the Constantinopolitan aristocracy, with links to the imperial throne from both her parents' sides.[9] She built an elaborate church attached to her own palace, in order to promote her royal background but also to express her own aspirations to the throne. The inscription and other written sources provide information that dates the monument during the period 524-527 A.D.; that is also the year of Justinian I's rise to the throne. Numismatic evidence and inscriptions on tiles used in the building confirm those dates.[10]

Despite Anicia Juliana's imperial descent, neither her husband Flavius Areobindus Dagalaifus, a German general, nor her son became emperors. Instead, the throne passed to an uneducated military man, Justin I; he was succeeded by his nephew Justinian I. The inscription in the interior of the church clearly illustrates the contempt Anicia felt towards her political adversaries, as well as her own noble background and ambition. By building St Polyeuktos, reads the inscription, Anicia attempted to surpass Solomon, the symbolic biblical king and the temple he erected. Archaeology has shown that this declaration was not without meaning; St Polyeuktos copied the dimensions as well as the decoration of the temple of Solomon, as they are mentioned in the Bible.[11]

Despite its elaborate construction, not much is known of St Polyeuktos in later years. The church was certainly still in use in the 10th century, as it was one of the landmarks visited by the emperor during his Easter procession.[12] Much of its valuable materials have been stolen, while pieces of architectural material have been used in the construction of other Constantinopolitan churches, such as the Pantokrator monastery.[13] The Crusaders, during the sack of Constantinople in 1204, stole some of these valuable pieces, transporting them as far as Venice, Barcelona and Vienna. After the Fall of 1453, houses and a mosque were built in the now completely flattened space of St Polyeuktos' church. This occupation of the location lasted until 1940, where the mosque was demolished. In 1960, during construction works in the area, some parts of the architecture of St Polyeuktos were unearthed.

Following that chance discovery, the Archaeological Museum of Constantinople led by Dr. Nezih Firatli and the Dumbarton Oaks Institute led by Professor R.M. Harrison conducted a systematic archaeological excavation. During six periods of research, the excavation expanded to the entirety of the grounds that the monument covered; it is one of the most significant excavations in Constantinople, both due to the wealth and variety of the findings, and the architectural type of the church discovered.

6. Evaluation

We cannot fully appreciate the significance of St Polyeuktos' church for Constantinopolitan architecture of the 6th century; the upper parts, which would be able to show whether or not domed edifices existed before Justinian's known buildings, do not survive. The surviving sculptural parts offer information on the different techniques and trends of the period in the capital, while we can detect their influence on later monuments. Most importantly, the architectural remains from St Polyeuktos help complete - to a certain degree and despite the many gaps – our knowledge on Constantinopolitan monuments, none of which have survived during the period from the construction of the Stoudios monastery in the mid 5th century until the buildings of Justinian.

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2. Mango, C. –Ševčenko, I., "Remains of the church of St. Polyeuktos at Constantinople", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961), pp. 243-244.

3. The description is based on the reconstruction suggested by Harrison, R.M. "The Church of St. Polyeuktos", in Harrison, R.M. (ed.), *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul, I: The excavations, structures, architectural decoration, small finds, coins, bones and molluscs* (Princeton 1985), pp. 406-11. See also Harrison, R.M., *A temple for Byzantium. The discovery and excavation of Anicia Juliana's palace-church in Istanbul* (London 1989), pp. 43-74,127-134.

4. Harrison, R.M., *A temple for Byzantium. The discovery and excavation of Anicia Juliana's palace-church in Istanbul* (London 1989), p. 64. Another opinion is that they could belong to the palace of Anicia Juliana: Mathews, T.F, *The early churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park, 1977), p. 52.

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5. Harrison, R.M., “The Church of St. Polyeuktos”, in Harrison, R.M. (ed.), *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul, I: The excavations, structures, architectural decoration, small finds, coins, bones and molluscs* (Princeton 1985), pp. 407-8.

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7. For the decoration of the monument see Harrison, R.M., *A temple for Byzantium. The discovery and excavation of Anicia Juliana’s palace-church in Istanbul* (London 1989), pp. 77-124.

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9. For Anicia Juliana see Capizzi, C., “Anicia Giuliana (462 ca-530 ca): Ricerche sulla sua famiglia e la sua vita”, *Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Neoellenici* 5, XV (1968), σελ. 191-226; Martindale, J.R., *The prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, II (Cambridge 1980), pp. 635-636, 1309.

10. Harrison, R.M., *A temple for Byzantium. The discovery and excavation of Anicia Juliana’s palace-church in Istanbul* (London 1989), p. 71.

11. Harrison, R.M., “The Church of St. Polyeuktos”, στο Harrison, R.M. (ed.), *Excavations at Saraçhane in Istanbul, I: The excavations, structures, architectural decoration, small finds, coins, bones and molluscs* (Princeton 1985), pp. 410-11. See also Alchermes, J.D., “Art and Architecture in the Age of Justinian”, in Maas, M., (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (New York 2005), pp. 364-5.

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- Hag. Polyeuktos

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Γλωσσάριο :

- aisle

The part of the naos of a church set off by the internal rows of piers or columns, namely by the structures supporting the roof.

- ambo

The elevated pulpit used for preaching in the church nave.

- apse

An arched srtucture 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.

- architrave or epistyle

The lowest part of an entablature resting on the columns capitals and supporting the frieze.

- atrium

1. Antiquity: The large, open space within a building, which is envelopped by colonnades.
2. Byzantium: The forecourt of a church in early Christian, Byzantine, and medieval arcitecture. It was usually surrounded by four porticoes (quadriporticus).

- basilica

In ancient Roman architecture a large oblong type building used as hall of justice and public meeting place. The roman basilica served as a model for early Christian churches.

- chancel screen of presbytery

A short barrier between the bema and the nave. It had originally the form of a parapet that was later made of stone or of marble. It is generally an element of early Christian religious architecture, and it appears on ground plans either as a linear structure or forming a Π. It consists of small columns or pillars in the interspace of which slabs are inserted. Crosses and floral patterns are usually used for the relief decoration of the screen.

- dedicatory inscription

Inscription referring to a donation towards a church or an establishment. It sometimes includes the name of the donor, the type of subsidy (construction, restoration, wall paintings and donation), the time the subsidy was granted and other information as well.

- 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.

- exedra, the

1. Large semicircular niche-like structure with stone seats ranged around the walls, often outdoors or with a hemidome over. An exedra may also be expressed by a curved break in a colonnade, perhaps with a semi-circular seat.
2. The rectangular hall of the palaestra, open to the courtyard with columns at the front. The exedrae in gymnasium and palaestra could have served many functions. Usually a hall of such type was the Ephebeum.

- gallery

The upper level of a house where the women resided. In ecclesiastical architecture it is the corridor above the aisles and narthex of a church, from where women attended the Liturgy. Originally (in the Byzantine period) the gallery, having a special entrance, was used exclusively by the emperor and the members of the royal family.

- marble revetment

The facing of a wall with slabs of marble

- narthex

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

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Παραθέματα

Excerpt from the donor's inscription of St. Polyeuktos included in *Anthologia Palatina*

Εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ ἁγίου μάρτυρος Πολυεύκτου

Εὐδοκίη μὲν ἄνασσα, Θεὸν σπεύδουσα γεραίρειν,
πρώτη νηὸν ἔτευξε θεοφραδέος Πολυεύκτου·
ἀλλ' οὐ τοῖον ἔτευξε καὶ οὐ τόσον· οὔ τινι φειδοῖ,
οὐ κτεάτων χατέουσα (τίνος βασίλεια χατίζει;)
ἀλλ' ὡς θυμὸν ἔχουσα θεοπρόπον, ὅττι γενέθλην
καλλείψει δεδαυῖαν ἀμείνονα κόσμον ὀπάζειν.
ἔνθεν Ἰουλιανή, ζαθέων ἀμάρυγμα τοκήων,
τέτρατον ἐκ κείνων βασιλήιον αἷμα λαχοῦσα,
ἐλπίδας οὐκ ἔψευσεν ἀριστώδινος ἀνάσσης,
ἀλλά μιν ἐκ βαιοῖο μέγαν καὶ τοῖον ἐγείρει,
κῦδος ἀεξήσασα πολυσκήπτρων γενετήρων·
πάντα γάρ, ὅσσα τέλεσσεν, ὑπέρτερα τεῦξε τοκήων,
ὀρθὴν πίστιν ἔχουσα φιλοχρίστοιο μενοινῆς.
τίς γὰρ Ἰουλιανὴν οὐκ ἔκλυεν, ὅττι καὶ αὐτοὺς
εὐκαμάτοις ἔργοισιν ἑοὺς φαίδρυνε τοκῆας,
εὐσεβίης ἀλέγουσα; μόνη δ' ἱδρῶτι δικαίῳ
ἄξιον οἶκον ἔτευξεν ἀειζώῳ Πολυεύκτῳ.

Beckby, H. (επιμ.), *Anthologia Graeca* I (Munich 1965), 10, vers. 1-17.

The imperial procession passes from St. Polyeuktos on Easter Mondey

Ὑποστροφὴ τῶν δεσποτῶν δείλης ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἁγίους Ἀποστόλους πρὸς τὸ παλάτιον.
Δοχὴ α', εἰς τοὺς Λέοντας...
Δοχὴ β', εἰς τὸν Ἅγιον Πολύευκτον. Δέχεται ἐκεῖσε ὁ δήμαρχος τῶν Βενέτων μετὰ τοῦ δήμου τοῦ Λευκοῦ, καὶ λέγουσιν οἱ κράκται· Καλῶς ἦλθεν ἡ ἔνθεος βασιλεία.

Reiske, J. (ed.), *Constantini Porphyrogeniti Imperatoris De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae* 1 (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1829), p. 50

On the location of St. Polyeuktos in Constantinople

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... καὶ ἀνελθὼν τὴν Μέσην, διέρχεται διά τε τῶν Ἀρτοπωλίων καὶ τοῦ Ταύρου. Καταλαβὼν τὸν ναὸν τῆς Παναγίας τῶν Διακονίσσης, ἐπιδίδωσιν ὁ βασιλεὺς τὸ λιτανίκιον, καὶ μέχρι τοῦ Φιλαδελφίου, διελθών, ἐκκλίνει τὸ δεξιὸν μέρος, καὶ ἔρχεται διὰ τε τῶν Ὀλυβρίου καὶ τῶν Κωνσταντινιανῶν μέχρι τοῦ Ἁγίου Πολυεύκτου.

Reiske, J. (ed.), *Constantini Porphyrogeniti Imperatoris De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae* 1 (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1829), pp. 75-6.