



Περίληψη :

Apart from few examples, the wall paintings of Justinian's cross-domed church have been lost. Traces of yellow, red, green and blue colour from the wall paintings are preserved in the interior of the nave of the church, while floral motifs, foliage scrolls and cross-like patterns are preserved only in the side aisles. Traces of frescoes are also preserved at the pre-Justinianean baptistery. The largest paintings have been found at the skeuophylakion, a complex built in post-Justinianean years. The apse of the eastern addition to the narthex has also wall paintings dating from the 10th and the 12th century and representing three full-length figures.

Χρονολόγηση

6th century

Γεωγραφικός εντοπισμός

Ephesus

1. Introduction

The [basilica of St. John](#) at [Ephesus](#), built by order of Emperor Justinian to replace an older building over the tomb of St. John the Evangelist, is one of the most characteristic examples of church building from the era of Justinian. This [church](#) on the Asia Minor coast was one of the most important places of cult in the eastern Mediterranean during the early Christian period. Andreas Thiel wrote in 2003 a monography on the building complex of the 6th century [cross-domed basilica](#) and its most important additions.¹ Apart from very few traces, nothing has been preserved from the internal wall paintings of the cross-domed Justinianean structure.²

On the contrary, a considerable number of architectural sculptures, such as capitals, column bases, cornices and door cases have been preserved, offering a graphic image of the decoration. The decoration also included marble revetments, which surrounded the [narthex](#) in the interior of the church, the internal sides of the [peristyle](#) walls on the ground floor, the pillars of the dome at the level of the ground floor and the galleries, as well as the [apse](#). The rear walls of the galleries were coated. The vaults of the additions were decorated with frescoes, while those in the central nave and the narthex were adorned with mosaics.³

2. Wall Paintings

2.1. Wall Paintings of the Main Church

Traces of painting have been preserved only in the side aisles of the interior of the main church. Wall paintings start at a height of 4.30 m above the marble revetments on the side aisles walls.⁴ Pallid traces of yellow, red, green and blue colour are preserved on a light background. A red oblong frame with floral motifs, foliage scroll and cross-like pattern has been preserved on the intrados of the passage arch. Small beam cases with red floral motifs are traced on the front of the arch.⁵ The overall rich decoration – the floor mosaics in the compartments, the coating on the walls and the paintings on the vaults – cannot be accurately dated because of their fragmentary state. The question about a single iconographic programme is also difficult to answer.⁶

2.2. Wall Paintings of the Baptistery

The pre-Justinianean church (5th c.) had a separate building used as a [baptistery](#). The [centered-plan structure](#) with the font, excavated between 1976 and 1979, was surrounded by a peripheral passage.⁷ Two large spaces were added as vestibules at the west and east side of this building complex. These two rooms are of north-south direction and lead to an apse. The wall of the apse in the east room was originally covered with wall paintings, while in a later period it was covered with marble revetment, as indicated by



the traces of plaster on the marble slabs found to the eastern part. The remaining walls of the room were decorated with frescoes, whose traces were found in specific positions.⁸ Both the apse and the walls of the west room probably had frescoes.⁹

The dome of the main church was possibly decorated with glass *tesserae*. Apart from this decoration, in several spaces of the building there are different layers of fragments of wall paintings executed in fresco.¹⁰ Some parts of the wall of the octagonal peripheral passage, which runs through the central building of the baptistery and is surrounded by 15 niches on its 7 sides, reveal up to three different layers of wall paintings at certain points. There are paintings on the walls with the niches as well. As indicated by the findings in some niches, there were frescoes on the walls. These paintings included a decorative **pattern imitating marble**, mainly in brown, green, beige and black colour.¹¹ The painted **imitation of marble slabs**, which must have been reminiscent of the revetment on the internal wall of the peripheral passage, possibly belongs to an earlier period. The later works, including medals with saints and probably compositions, were definitely made in the Middle Byzantine period along with the funerary facilities.¹² Four triangular chambers are formed along the diagonal axes of the point where the central square building contacts the inscribed octagonal centre.¹³ At least two layers of wall paintings are preserved in these rooms as well, while underneath there are larger yellow fragments imitating **opus sectile**.¹⁴

2.3. Wall Paintings of the Skeuophylakion

The last large construction is a closed building complex in the corner defined by the east wall of the baptistery and the north wall of the vertical axe of the cross. Its ground plan reveals a circular central room inscribed in an external rectangular building, with a narthex added to the south, as well as a smaller chamber to the southeast, which led to an apse eastwards. Already in 1978, the year this building and the baptistery were excavated, the building was identified with the **skeuophylakion** (treasure), which was verified by epigraphic evidence found later.¹⁵

The central room of the skeuophylakion was in the shape of a rotunda, while its walls was pierced by eight door cases between the pillars, leading to the respective eight chambers of different width. The surfaces of the rotunda and the chamber walls were covered with marble revetment, whose greatest part has been preserved. In the corner compartments the marble revetment was replaced with wall paintings. Their remains indicate that they imitated marble in yellow colour with red-and-brown veins. Traces of red and green colour of wall paintings were found in the west niches of the narthex.¹⁶

The eastern part of the narthex is connected with another room, which belongs to the complex of the skeuophylakion. On the eastern side of the room there is an apse with a small window on the keystone of the arch. The room is richly decorated: a colourful floor mosaic arranged in panels was revealed in the main rectangular space, while during the first phase of the church both the walls and the conch of the apse were reveted with marble. The apse and the walls were later remodelled because the revetment was removed and replaced with new wall paintings. The most important remains of this late period have been mainly preserved in the apse. There are three layers; the earliest of them is purely decorative and has been preserved mainly on the intrados of the apse. Therefore, it could date even to the earliest period of the building, since the apse began above the niveau of the revetment.

The latest painted layer of the **apse**, dated to the 10th and the 12th century, according to Andaloro, represents three full-length figures in small niches surrounded by columns and arches. The frescoes are in black, green, orange and olive colour. Despite the extensive **destruction**, Jesus Christ can be identified at the centre, with a **bishop** to his left and **John the Evangelist** to his right. At least the figure of John consists of different **layers**. Below the head and the breast of the extensively damaged figure an iconographically similar, though smaller, representation of the saint was revealed.¹⁷ Four figures shown in bust existed among other **figures** on the left side of the apse and on the north wall.¹⁸ Büyükkolancı and Thiel agree that the arched room was a vestibule intended for the ceremonial purification of the priests before they entered the skeuophylakion.¹⁹ The question as to whether the new decoration of the room, which includes the frescoes that replaced the opus sectile, is related to a possibly different use of the room as a chapel remains open.



1. Thiel, A., *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden 2005). It includes the full bibliography on St. John until 2003.
2. The interior of the church, with the marble revetments on the pillars and the walls as well as the mosaics in the upper parts of the walls and the dome, was magnificent. Remains of the marble decoration and the mosaics were found during excavations. Apart from a great number of detached tesserae, remains of wall paintings were also found. See Keil, J. – Hörmann, H. – Soteriou, G.A., *Die Johanneskirche* (FiE 4/3, Wien 1951), from p. 258 onward.
3. Thiel, A., *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden 2005), p. 49.
4. Thiel, A., *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden 2005), p. 30.
5. On the fragments of the wall paintings from the church of St. John and its additions, see Andaloro, M., 'La decorazione pittorica degli edifici cristiani di Efeso: La chiesa di Santa Maria e il complesso di San Giovanni', in Pillinger, R. – Kresten, O. – Krinzing, F. – Russo, E. (edit.), *Efeso paleocristiana e bizantina. Frühchristliches und byzantinisches Ephesos, Akten des Internationalen Kongresses, Rom 1996* (Wien 1999), pp. 54-70.
6. Thiel, A., *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden 2005), pp. 30, 49.
7. Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zwei neugefundene Bauten der Johannes-Kirche von Ephesos: Baptisterium und Skeuophylakion', *IstMit* 32 (1982), pp. 236-257.
8. Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zwei neugefundene Bauten der Johannes-Kirche von Ephesos: Baptisterium und Skeuophylakion', *IstMit* 32 (1982), p. 247.
9. Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zwei neugefundene Bauten der Johannes-Kirche von Ephesos: Baptisterium und Skeuophylakion', *IstMit* 32 (1982), p. 248.
10. Andaloro, M., 'La decorazione pittorica degli edifici cristiani di Efeso: La chiesa di Santa Maria e il complesso di San Giovanni', in Pillinger, R. – Kresten, O. – Krinzing, F. – Russo, E. (edit.), *Efeso paleocristiana e bizantina. Frühchristliches und byzantinisches Ephesos, Akten des Internationalen Kongresses, Rom 1996* (Wien 1999), from p. 62 onward.
11. Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zwei neugefundene Bauten der Johannes-Kirche von Ephesos: Baptisterium und Skeuophylakion', *IstMit* 32 (1982), pp. 236-257.
12. Thiel, A., *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden 2005), p. 73; Andaloro, M., 'La decorazione pittorica degli edifici cristiani di Efeso: La chiesa di Santa Maria e il complesso di San Giovanni', in Pillinger, R. – Kresten, O. – Krinzing, F. – Russo, E. (edit.), *Efeso paleocristiana e bizantina. Frühchristliches und byzantinisches Ephesos, Akten des Internationalen Kongresses, Rom 1996* (Wien 1999), from p. 62 onward.
13. Thiel, A., *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden 2005), p. 74.
14. Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zwei neugefundene Bauten der Johannes-Kirche von Ephesos: Baptisterium und Skeuophylakion', *IstMit* 32 (1982), p. 246; Andaloro, M., 'La decorazione pittorica degli edifici cristiani di Efeso: La chiesa di Santa Maria e il complesso di San Giovanni', in Pillinger, R. – Kresten, O. – Krinzing, F. – Russo, E. (edit.), *Efeso paleocristiana e bizantina. Frühchristliches und byzantinisches Ephesos, Akten des Internationalen Kongresses, Rom 1996* (Wien 1999), from p. 62 onward; Thiel, A., *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden 2005), p. 75.
15. Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zwei neugefundene Bauten der Johannes-Kirche von Ephesos: Baptisterium und Skeuophylakion', *IstMit* 32 (1982), p. 248; Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zum Skeuophylakion der Johanneskirche in Ephesos', in Pillinger, R. – Kresten, O. – Krinzing, F. – Russo, E. (edit.), *Efeso paleocristiana e bizantina. Frühchristliches und byzantinisches Ephesos, Akten des Internationalen Kongresses, Rom 1996* (Wien 1999), pp. 100-104; Thiel, A., *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden 2005), from p. 85 onward.
16. Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zum Skeuophylakion der Johanneskirche in Ephesos', in Pillinger, R. – Kresten, O. – Krinzing, F. – Russo, E. (edit.), *Efeso paleocristiana e bizantina. Frühchristliches und byzantinisches Ephesos, Akten des Internationalen Kongresses, Rom 1996* (Wien 1999), pp. 100-104; Andaloro, M., 'La decorazione pittorica degli edifici cristiani di Efeso: La chiesa di Santa Maria e il complesso di San Giovanni', in Pillinger, R. – Kresten, O. – Krinzing, F. – Russo, E. (edit.), *Efeso paleocristiana e bizantina. Frühchristliches und byzantinisches Ephesos, Akten des Internationalen Kongresses, Rom 1996* (Wien 1999), from p. 63 onward.
17. Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zwei neugefundene Bauten der Johannes-Kirche von Ephesos: Baptisterium und Skeuophylakion', *IstMit* 32 (1982), from p. 248



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18. Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zwei neugefundene Bauten der Johannes-Kirche von Ephesos: Baptisterium und Skeuophylakion', *IstMit* 32 (1982), pp. 254-255.

19. Büyükkolancı, M., 'Zwei neugefundene Bauten der Johannes-Kirche von Ephesos: Baptisterium und Skeuophylakion', *IstMit* 32 (1982), p. 257, note 90; Thiel, A., *Die Johanneskirche in Ephesos* (Wiesbaden 2005).

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	Ephesus during the Justinianic era http://www.fhw.gr/chronos/projects/justinian/en/journey/j2b.html

Γλωσσάριο :

	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.
	cross-domed basilica Type of domed basilica. A church plan, whose core, enveloped on three sides by aisles and galleries with a transept, forms a cross. The core is surmounted by a dome in the centre.
	narthex



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



[opus sectile, the](#)

Technique of floor or wall decoration. Thin pieces of polychrome marble are carved or joined so that a decorative motif could be depicted.



[peristyle](#)

A colonnade surrounding a building or a courtyard .



[skeuophylakion](#)

(‘Treasure house’ or sacristy) A particular area or room in the churches for keeping vestments and the church furnishings, sacred vessel. Usually take place in the diakonikon, south (at right) from the central apse with the altar.