



Stoudios Monastery (Imrahor Camii)

Summary :

The Stoudios monastery was founded in the 5th century by the consul Stoudios (lat.: Studius), in the Psamathia region of Constantinople. Of the monastic complex, only some substantial parts of the original three-aisled basilica survive. The monastery contributed significantly to the religious, political, and cultural life of Constantinople.

Date

ca. 450

Geographical Location

Constantinople, Istanbul

Topographical Location

Psamathia region

1. Introduction

The monastery of St. John the Forerunner “*tu Stoudiou*” or “*en tois Stoudiou*” (lit. “in the Stoudios estates”), was founded in the 5th century. It was located within the [Theodosian walls](#), in the Psamathia region of [Constantinople](#) (now Samatya, Istanbul), in the southwest corner of the city near the [Golden Gate](#). The **three-aisled basilica**, today missing its roof and in ruinous condition, is the oldest surviving church in the city and preserves a lot of its lavish original decoration. The monastery played a significant role in the religious and political life of Constantinople, especially during and after the [Iconoclastic](#) controversy. The most eminent member of the monastery was [Theodore of Stoudios](#) (759-826), who served as the abbot.

2. History

The Stoudios was founded sometime before 454 (maybe in 450) by a certain [consul](#) Stoudios (latin: Studius), of which little is known.¹ Very little is known of the first three hundred years of the monastery’s history.² Mango has suggested that the basilica was constructed in the hopes to house the head of St. John the Baptist, which was discovered in 453 in Emesa. The relic, however, was not acquired, so the church was turned over to the *Akoimeto*i (lit. “sleepless monks,” which celebrated liturgical services continuously) in ca. 460. The *Akoimeto*i served in the monastery until the 8th century.

The monastery acquired prominence under its most famous abbot, Theodore (759-826). In ca. 798 Theodore was invited by empress [Eirene](#) to [Constantinople](#) and he became the leader of the monastic community at Stoudios, which had fallen in decline. Theodore favored independent monasteries and objected imperial intervention. He opposed the court on the issues of the **Moechian controversy** and Iconoclasm and he was exiled twice. He died in Principos in 826 and his relics were transferred to Studios in 844. Theodore’s Testament³ and a **Typikon**⁴ for his monastery both proved extremely influential for Byzantine monasticism until the 12th century. The liturgical reforms initiated in the Stoudios resulted in the increased influence of the monastic over the cathedral rite of the [Great Church](#). This has been called the Studite synthesis.⁵

After the 10th century the monastery changed sides and supported the interests of the palace. After the [Latin conquest](#) in 1204 Stoudios was abandoned. The monastery was reinstated in 1293 by Constantine Palaiologos, brother of emperor [Andronikos II](#), and functioned until 1453. With the [Ottoman conquest](#) it was converted into a mosque.

3. Architecture

Despite the Stoudios’ importance for the history of [Early Byzantine architecture](#), there has not been a thorough study of the monument. The Russian Archaeological Institute surveyed the monument in 1907-09, during which the building was cleared, a crypt under the



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sanctuary was excavated, and a marble inlaid floor, probably of Middle Byzantine date, was uncovered, along with burials on the south aisle.⁶ Due to political complications the survey was never completed. Ebersolt,⁷ Van Millingen,⁸ Peschlow,⁹ and especially Mathews¹⁰ also studied the building, providing valuable observations and reconstructions. Throughout the 20th century the Stoudios basilica has been both neglected and overjealously restored. Access to the site today is restricted.

Of the original buildings in the Stoudios monastery only the main church survives along with a cistern located to the southeast of the building. Gourlay also reports the existence of a two-column chapel of Middle of Late Byzantine date nearby which has since disappeared.¹¹

The main church is an elegant three-aisled basilica, measuring ca. 27x26 m, preceded by a spacious atrium of similar proportions. Of the latter only the eastern colonnade remains, doubling as a narthex, along with portions of the north exterior wall. The atrium was square and, judging from the north wall, multiple doors on each side gave access to it. Sources indicate the existence of a font, which would have been probably located in the middle of the courtyard.

Five doors are located on the west wall of the basilica, three giving access to the nave and two to the side aisles. There are further doorways on all sides of the naos, including four on the east side. The interior of the naos is remarkable for its openness.¹² The naos was divided into nave and two aisles by means of two colonnades, of which only the north one survives, made up of seven exquisite columns of verde antique marble.

The basilica had originally a gallery that extended over the narthex and the side aisles. It was accessed via staircases located on the exterior of the building.¹³

The chancel of the presbutery followed the traditional π-shaped form, which projected into the nave. The apse was equipped with a synthronon, although its exact form is unknown.¹⁴ A cruciform crypt was located at the cord of the apse, accessed from the east through stairs. The altar was probably placed on top of the crypt, which would have contained one of the numerous relics that the monastery possessed.

4. Decoration

Much of the original lavish decoration of the church, described by medieval visitors, has been lost.¹⁵ Theodore of Stoudios dedicated a series of epigrams to images of saints, including John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzos, Euthymios, Dalmatios and others, which were located in the basilica.¹⁶ These were probably destroyed in the second period of Iconoclasm. The 10th-century poet John Geometres has left a lengthy ekphrasis of the building, in verse, where he described, in vague terms, the decoration of the apse.¹⁷ This included a *Majestas Domini* with Christ enthroned, flanked by the Mother of God and St. John the Baptist. Woodfin has convincingly argued that this was a Middle Byzantine composition.¹⁸ A fragmentary mosaic depicting the head of the Mother of God, now at the Benaki Museum in Athens, has been identified as coming from Stoudios.

The opus sectile floor is today in poor condition. It included scenes of classical inspiration, such as Orpheas, Bellerophon and Chimaera, as well as eagles and a gryphon. The floor has been dated to the 5th century¹⁹ and to the Palaiologan period.²⁰ Megaw has argued that this pavement is similar in terms of technique and iconography to the opus sectile floor in the south church of the [monastery of Pantokrator](#) in Constantinople (first half of the 12th century) and it was part of the redecoration of the building by Isaac Komnenos, which was carried out after 1059.²¹

The building preserves large parts of its original sculptural decoration, such as capitals, entablatures, marble revetments, door and window frames, which are of the finest quality.²²

5. Chapels and Relics



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Several chapels were located within the monastery.²³ The head of St. John the Baptist (acquired in the 10th century) was located in a parekklesion to the right of the main church. There is also mention of a chapel dedicated to the Mother of God, which was decorated with mosaics, and of one dedicated to St. George, where St. Blasios of Amorium was buried. Plato of [Sakkoudion](#), Theodore of Stoudios, his brother Joseph, Naukratios, who was Theodore's successor, and Nicholas of Studios were buried in the chapel of the Forty Martyrs, located to the right side of the basilica. In addition, the monastery possessed relics of Zacharias the prophet, St. Babylas, and others. It appears that some of the relics were lost after 1204.







1. Mango, C., "The date of the Studios Basilica at Istanbul," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 4 (1978), pp. 115-122. The date 450 was proposed by Peschlow, based on his examinations of brickstamps from the site, see Peschlow, U., "Die Johanneskirche des Studios in Istanbul," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32 (1982), pp. 429-434.
2. On the history of the monastery see Janin, R., *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin, I: Le siège Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique, 3: Les églises et les monastères* (Paris 1969), pp. 430-440; also "3. Theodore Studites: Testament of Theodore Studites for the Monastery of St. John Stoudios in Constantinople," in J. Thomas and A. Constantinides Hero (ed.), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents. A complete translation of the surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments* 1 (Washington D.C. 2000), pp. 67-70, with further bibliography.
3. *PG* 99, cols. 1813-1824; translated "3. Theodore Studites: Testament of Theodore Studites for the Monastery of St. John Stoudios in Constantinople," in J. Thomas and A. Constantinides Hero (ed.), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents. A complete translation of the surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments* 1 (Washington D.C. 2000), pp. 67-83.
4. Dmitrievsky, A., *Opisanie liturgicheskikh rykopisei, 1: Typika, pt. 1* (Kiev 1895), pp. 224-38 [Recension A]; Mai, A. and Cozza-Luzi, J., *Nova patrum bibliotheca* (Rome 1849), vol. 5, 111-25 [Recension B]; repr. in *PG* 99, cols. 1704-20; trans. "4. Stoudios: Rule of the Monastery of St. John Stoudios in Constantinople," in J. Thomas and A. Constantinides Hero (ed.), *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents. A complete translation of the surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments* 1 (Washington D.C. 2000), pp. 84-119.
5. During the late Byzantine period (1261-1453), the Studite rite was replaced by the Neo-Sabaitic rite (namely an adaptation of the Studite typika by Palestinian monastic communities following the rite of the Lavra of St. Sabas), in its Athonite reduction, see Taft, R., *The Byzantine Rite. A Short History*, (Collegeville 1992), pp. 52-66.
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7. Ebersolt, J. and Thiers, A., *Les églises de Constantinople* (Paris 1913), pp. 3-18.
8. Van Millingen, A., *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople* (London 1912), pp. 35-61.
9. Peschlow, U., "Die Johanneskirche des Studios in Istanbul," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32 (1982), pp. 429-434.
10. Mathews, T.F., *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy*, (University Pa. 1971), pp. 19-27.
11. Gourlay, C., "Minor Churches of Constantinople," *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 14 (1907), pp. 637-649.
12. The side aisles, however, might have been separated from the nave, see Peschlow, U., "Dividing Interior Space in Early Byzantine Churches: The Barriers between the Nave and Aisles," in Gerstel, S.E.J. (ed.), *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West* (Washington D.C. 2006), p. 55.
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14. Mathews, T.F., *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy*, (University Pa. 1971), pp. 23-27.



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21. Megaw, A.H.S., "Notes on Recent Work of the Byzantine Institute in Istanbul," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963), p. 399.
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	Theodore Studites: Testament of Theodore the Studite for the Monastery of St. John Stoudios in Constantinople http://www.doaks.org/publications/doaks_online_publications/typikaPDF/typ009.pdf


Glossary :

	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.
	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.
	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 architecture. It was usually surrounded by four porticoes (quadriporticus).
	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.
	entablature, the



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The upper part of the classical order, that rests on the columns, it consists of the architrave, frieze and cornice.

 [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

 [Moechian controversy](#)

The Moechian controversy was a dispute that arose in 795, when Constantine VI forced his wife to become a nun and married his mistress Theodote. Patriarch Tarasios did not oppose to this marriage, while the rigorist monastic clergy condemned the liaison as adulterous. The dispute was yet another manifestation of the disparity between the rigorist monastic clergy and the patriarchal and imperial authority, which was characteristic of Byzantine religious life after Iconoclasm.

 [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.

 [synthronon](#)

Rows of built benches, arranged in a semicircular tier like a theatre, in the apse of a church. On these benches the clergy sat during Divine Liturgy. The bishop sat on the cathedra at the top of the synthronon.

 [three-aisled basilica](#)

An oblong type of church internally divided into three aisles: the middle and the two side aisles. The middle aisle is often lighted by an elevated clerestory. In the Early Byzantine years this type of church had huge dimensions.

 [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

On Studius as the donor of the Stoudios basilica

(4.) Εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ Προδρομοῦ ἐν τοῖς Στουδίου
Τοῦτον Ἰωάννη, Χριστοῦ μεγάλῳ θεράποντι,
Στούδιος ἀγλαὸν οἶκον ἐδειμάτο· καρπαλίμως δὲ
τῶν κάμεν εὐρετο μισθόν, ἐλῶν ὑπατηίδα ῥάβδον.

Anthologia Palatina I. 4, ed. H. Beckby, *Anthologia Graeca*, 1 (Munich ²1965), p. 122

Στούδιος, δυνάστης· ὃς καὶ τὴν περιβόητον μονὴν ἔκτισε.
ὅτι ἡ τῶν Στουδιτῶν μονὴ πρότερον καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας, ὕστερον δὲ μετῆλθεν εἰς μονὴν.

Suda, Σ 1147, ed. A. Adler, vol. 4 (Leipzig 1935), p. 438

John Geometres' *Ekphrasis* (description) of the *Majestas Domini* mosaic in the apse of Stoudios basilica

Εἰ δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς οὐρανοῦ τοὺς ἀστέρας,
Ἦ σφαίραν αὐτὴν τοῦ πόλου ποθεῖς βλέπειν,
Τεῖνον σὸν ὄμμα· τμήμα δὲ σφαίρας βλέπε
Ἄνωθεν χρυσοῦν, φῶς ἀπαστρέπτον μέγα
Οὐ συνδραμοῦσα πᾶσα χροιά ψηφίδων,
Ἵς εἴπερ ἦν τὸ σύμπαν οὐρανοῦ πλάτος
Πάγχρους τις ἀστήρ εἰς ἔρωτα τῶν ἄνω,
Καὶ τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον ἐν τύπῳ βλέπε.
Χριστὸς μὲν οὗτος, οὐ θρόνος λαμπρὸς πόλος.
Αὕτη δὲ Μήτηρ, ἥς μόνης ἀγνῆς Τόκος.
Οὗτος δὲ Λύχνος, οὐ λόγος φῶς, καὶ τρόπος.
Οὗτοι δὲ φλόξ, νοῦς, πνεῦμα, φῶς, πῦρ
Ἐῷ Σεραφίμ τάγματα μυριομμάτων,
Ἐῷ Χερουβίμ ἄρμα τῶν φλογοτρόφων
Καὶ τᾶλλα φρικτὰ, καὶ λέγειν τε καὶ βλέπειν.

John Geometres, *In templum Studii in Carmina Varia*, ed. J.A. Cramer, *Anecdota graeca e codd. manuscriptis bibliothecae regiae parisiensis* IV (Oxford 1841; repr. Hildesheim 1977), p. 307