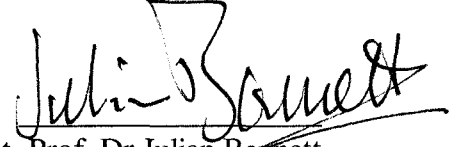


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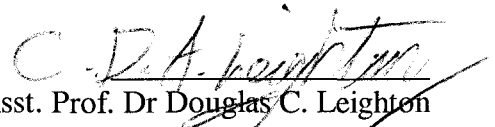
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ST. ERASMUS (LYCHNID) AND ST. THECLA (SELEUCIA): A
STUDY OF TWO EARLY CHRISTIAN CULTIC CENTERS

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The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences
of
Bilkent University

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ABSTRACT

ST. ERASMUS (LYCHNID) AND ST. THECLA (SELEUKIA): A STUDY OF TWO EARLY CHRISTIAN CULTIC CENTERS

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The main purpose of this paper is the study of two regional Early Christian cultic centers: of St. Erasmus, near the city of Lychnid in the province of Epirus Nova, and of St. Thecla, near Seleukia on the Calycadnos, in the province of Isauria. The methodology and the problems associated with this are considered in chapter I. The cult of martyrdom in Christianity is a complex religious, social and cultural phenomenon, and chapter II deals with the significance of martyr-saints in Christian theology, their place and role in the Late Antique culture of the Mediterranean, and the two principal types of artifacts through which we recognize the cults of martyrs, the hagiography and the sanctuary. This thesis then closely examines, in chapters III-VI, the establishment, development and the demise or the transformation of these two sanctuaries, and the related cultic traditions. This inevitably requires consideration of a large number of factors, starting with the broad historical conditions in these regions during Late Antiquity, the hagiographies of the venerated saints, and finally, the formal architectonic expression of the cultic tradition, the sanctuaries themselves.

Keywords: St. Erasmus, Lychnid, Ochrid, St. Thecla, Seleukia on the Calycadnos, Meryemlik, Early Christian Architecture, sanctuaries, martyria, centrally planned

churches, basilicas, reliquaries, relics, crypts, cult of martyrdom, hagiographies, ecclesiastic and political history, Late Antiquity.



ÖZET

ST. ERASMUS (LYCHNİD) VE ST. THECLA (SELEUKİA): İKİ ERKEN

HRİSTİYANLIK KÜLT MERKEZİNİ

Donev, Damjan

Master, Arkeoloji ve Sanat Tarihi Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Yar. Doç. Dr. Julian Bennett

Mayıs, 2004

Bu tezin esas konusu Erken Hristiyanlık dönemine ait bölgesel iki kült merkezini incelemektir. Bunlardan birincisi “Epius Nova” bölgesinde bulunan, “Lychnid” şehri yakınlarındaki St. Erasmus olup, ikincisi de antik “Isaura” bölgesindeki Göksu üzerindeki Silifke yakınlarında bulunan St. Thecla’dır. Hristiyanlıktaki şehadet mertebesi ve kültü karmaşık bir dini, sosyal ve kültürel olgudur. Tezin giriş kısmında Hristiyanlık teolojisindeki şehit-azizlerin Geç Antik Akdeniz kültüründeki yeri ve önemi; ayrıca şehit kültürü, azizlerin hayat hikayelerini (hagiografaları) ve mabetlerini tanımasını sağlayan iki konu ele alınmıştır. III– VI. bölümlerde tez, kült mabetlerinin kuruluşunu, gelişimini ve çöküşünü ya da değişimini ve kült adet ve geleneklerini incelemektedir. Bu, kaçınılmaz olarak, Geç Antik Dönemde bölge tarihi, kutsallaştırılmış azizlerin hayat hikayeleri (hagiografalarını) ve sonuç olarak kült geleneğinin ve mabetlerin mimari yansıması gibi birçok faktörün ele alınmasını gerektirmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: St. Erasmus, Lychnid, Ochrid, St. Thecla, Göksu, Silifke, Meryemlik, Erken Hristiyanlık mimarisi, mabetler, şehit abideleri, haçbiçimi planlı kiliseler, basilika, kriptâ, şehadet kültü, hagiografa, dini ve siyasi tarih, Geç Antik.



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The study of ancient cultic centers is a type of research that can hardly be assigned to a single scientific discipline. If we are to achieve a full understanding of their origins and development, and if we are to treat them as elements of society and culture in their own right, it is necessary to assume an interdisciplinary approach. Cultic centers in Christianity are first of all, expression of the practice of venerating saintly figures, but they are also fascinating architectonic complexes and important social institutions. This means that a study entirely devoted to the examination of specific cases of Early Christian sanctuaries, must consider other components of the cultic practices, the various traditions in Christian sacral architecture, and the historical conditions at certain localities. The aim of this introduction is to elaborate the way in which I attempted to organize and integraté this large amount of very diverse information.

The cult of martyrdom in Early Christianity is a complex religious, social and cultural phenomenon, but its components can essentially be classified into two principal categories. These are the literary tradition, (hagiographies, collections of miracles, laudatory sermons and so forth) and the architectonic and other arrangements that enshrine the sacred location, and provide the setting for the religious ceremonies. Both of these aspects were indispensable for the creation of sacred space in Early Christianity, and case studies on Early Christian sanctuaries are unthinkable without thorough consideration of the related hagiographic material. For instance, the analysis of the hagiographic traditions contributes to the interpretation of the sanctuary complexes, and often reveals peculiarities of the cultic tradition, not

visible in the archaeological record. However, hagiographies and sacred architecture in Christianity are studied by disciplines that employ different methodology and have different interests, and a simple combination of the two approaches would have hardly been successful. Chapter II is therefore, a general discussion on the literary genre we call hagiography, and the architectonic forms related to the cult of martyr-saints in Early Christianity, the *martyrium*. In other words, it is necessary to discuss the ways in which the scholarly fields that deal separately with these subjects contribute to the study of the cult of martyrdom in Early Christendom. This helps to define a methodological approach for the present study, and to clarify the ways in which hagiographies and architectonic forms will be analyzed.

Apart from dealing with the principal types of artifacts through which we recognize the cult of martyrs in Early Christianity, chapter II includes a brief prelude on the significance of martyr-saints in Christian theology, and their place and role in the Late Antique culture of the Mediterranean. Without these general observations, the practices that comprise the Early Christian cult, the hagiographies and the architectonic arrangements in the sanctuaries, cannot be properly understood.

The main body of this thesis, chapters III through VI, is basically comprised of two separate case studies: chapters III and IV deal with the cultic center of St. Erasmus near Lychnid, while chapters V and VI, with the sanctuary of St. Thecla, near Seleukia on the Calycadnos. Essentially, the same approach was adopted for both of the case studies. I start with an account of the political and the ecclesiastic situation in these regions during Late Antiquity. The broad historical conditions in the provinces of Isauria and Epirus Nova may initially appear of little relevance for a study of sanctuary complexes, but in my opinion, this is so because of our ignorance of the role of specific cultic centers in the regional economy and administration. To

simply ignore the socio-historical constellation in which the cultic centers were established and developed would certainly produce a very distorted image of the actual situation. A sanctuary complex is always something more than a reflection of religious beliefs or practices. Early Christian cultic centers were often attended by monastic communities that were an influential ecclesiastic and political factor. They were often great centers of pilgrimage, cultural and medical institutions, and important foci of local and, in some cases, international investments. More importantly, the consideration of the broader socio-historical conditions will provide a rough chronology of events, and may enable the location of the historical moment when certain cult was established or forgotten.

The importance of the hagiographic traditions for the present study was already emphasized, and I will stress it time and again, throughout the thesis. In general, hagiographies will be treated as determinants of the sacred location, as a guide through the archaeological remains on the site of the sanctuaries. Particular attention will be paid to the circumstances of the end of the saint's earthly life, the sacred relics, and the toponyms mentioned in the course of the narrative. These details are of greatest importance, for they reflect the actual arrangements in the sacred locations, and establish the sacred character of certain localities. Thus, in a way, hagiographies will be given an advantage over the archaeological remains as data sources. Such assumption is hardly surprising but, as will be shown, the relation between the hagiographic account and the sanctuary arrangements is much more complicated. For instance, in most of the cases, the earliest extant version of a hagiography postdates the establishment of the cultic center for several centuries. Hence, it becomes very difficult to determine the original character of a sacred location: it could have easily been attributed sanctity only at a later date or, given a

very different interpretation by the later hagiographers. Further, in most instances the life of a certain saint is treated by several distinct hagiographic traditions, whose accounts are often contradictory. It is certainly not accidental that the major discrepancies occur precisely over details such as the “death” of the saintly figure, her relics, and the places that she visited and where she lived during her earthly life. Thus, a great care is needed before one treats hagiographies as independent evidence. Too often, there is a “natural” tendency in this type of researches to mix the actual life of the saint and the accounts of his life.

The final sections of both case studies, chapters IV and VI, are basically archaeological studies of the sanctuaries of St. Erasmus and St. Thecla. They will involve discussion on the general layout of the sanctuaries, and their position with regards to the major settlements in the nearby vicinity, survey of the architectonic monuments on the sites, and elaboration of the stratigraphy in the sanctuaries. Naturally, the chief emphasis will be on the ways in which the sacred focus was defined and incorporated in the sanctuary monuments, and for this reason, I will frequently refer to the relevant details in the hagiographies: the place, and the circumstances of the death, and the type of sacred relic, testifying to the life and the activity of the venerated saint.

The formal architectonic arrangements enshrining the sacred focus in the sanctuaries of St. Erasmus and St. Thecla will also be compared with the standard types of sanctification in Eastern and Western Christianity, and I will try to examine their place within established regional traditions. This examination will nicely demonstrate the flexibility of Early Christian architecture: with regards to layout or construction, the sanctuaries of St. Thecla and St. Erasmus differ little from other contemporary churches in these regions. To be sure, there are features that convey

the sacred character of these monuments, and they give important information for the nature and the establishment of these two cultic traditions. The reliquary underneath the altar of St. Erasmus' *basilica* indicates that the cult of this saint was imported from elsewhere, and that the establishment of this tradition dates to a period when the distinction between the Sacred Throne and the martyr's tomb lost its significance. In the case of the sanctuary of St. Thecla, the exact location of the sacred focus, and its appearance are less certain. On the grounds of the information given in the hagiographies of this saint, and the archaeological remains on the site of her sanctuary, I argued that the core of the sanctuary should be looked for in the cave chapel, and more precisely in the north side-chamber. These arrangements point to the autochthonous character of the cult, and make this sanctuary complex a representative of the long tradition of revering natural features in the Christian East.

The structure of this thesis, comprised of two separate case studies, creates an expectation on the part of the reader that certain parallels will be drawn between the studied sanctuaries. The initial idea, however, was not to directly compare or contrast the two cultic centers, although one may also view them in this light as, for example, representatives of two distinct ecclesiastic traditions. We may also point to the similarities in the hagiographies of the two saints: both were itinerant missionaries and celebrated as *isapostoleis*, the both suffered non-violent death, and so forth. The differences, however, are much more significant, and a simple comparison between the two cultic tradition would make little sense. Comparative studies usually tend to emphasize the formal and invariable aspects of their subject matter, while disregarding the specific and the dynamic. I will attempt to demonstrate this tendency in the introductory chapter, through the example of the "formalist" approaches in the study of Early Christian architecture. This does not

mean that such kind of approach is erroneous or misleading in general, but for the present topic it simply cannot work. The aim of this study was, instead, to give a detailed interpretation of two specific instances of Early Christian sanctuaries in a diachronic perspective. I attempted to treat these cultic traditions, the sanctuaries and the hagiographic material, as cultural entities in their own right. Therefore, the emphasis was on the inner dynamics of the cults, the stratigraphy of the two sanctuaries, and the related changes in the literary traditions.

Finally a word is needed on why precisely these two cultic centers are chosen. The reasons are chiefly prosaic: namely, both sanctuaries are relatively well studied from an archaeological perspective, and the same applies to the hagiographies of the related saints. Moreover, both centers are still recognized and revered by the current Church as authentic sacred locations. Apart from the well-known international centers of pilgrimage in Rome or the Holy Land, such cases are rare indeed. Of course, there was also a personal interest in these two regions, in their history and culture during Late Antiquity, as well as in the details of the hagiographies of the two saints. Since neither of these cultic traditions is studied from the above-elaborated perspective, hopefully, this paper will make a modest contribution to the study of martyr's cults in Early Christianity, and to the study of Late Antique history and archaeology of the regions of Isauria and Epirus Nova.

CHAPTER II

ELEMENTS THAT COMPRISE THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CULTS OF MARTYRDOM

2. 1 The significance of saintly figures in Christianity; theological and social

The activities of saintly figures, preserved in written sources, in the oral tradition, and in material remains or local toponyms, were an important factor for the creation and the persistence of Early Christian communities. Christian martyrs carried the heavy burden of spiritual and fairly often, political leadership, indispensable for the survival of a small and, persecuted religious community. They were the material from which the new religion was writing its own worldly history, and by which it countered and replaced the old heroes of the Pagan epoch. But Christian saints were not only historical figures that promoted Christianity through sermons, miracles and sheer physical resistance, and theological debates and chastity. They were also seen as the media through which God's grace operated on earth, a link between the celestial and the earthly. According to St. Basil the Great, "he who touches the martyr's bones, participates in the saintliness and the grace which is there" (Basil the Great, *Sermo in Psalmum*, 110, 4, 112; after Pena, 1997: 132). Hence, Christian Saints are otherwise known as martyrs or witnesses; they provided testimony for the eternal presence of the Holy Spirit, even after the ascension of

Christ fulfilled the Revelation. Saints could be treated as smaller repositories of sanctity that miraculously emanate in various ways and thus, bear witness to the true God. Only through the concept of saints, does Christ become alpha and omega, the beginning and the end at the same time. In that way the Ascension did not sever the link between God and men, but on the contrary, opened the Gates of Heaven.

We can likewise take the word “martyr” in its more usual meaning, as one who suffers for Christ, for martyrdom was a crucial element of Christianity from its very beginnings. Whether through persecution or asceticism, ultimately martyrdom was the only true form of devotion to Christ, and hence, the only secure path to salvation. Christian martyrs in this sense were literally re-enacting the life of the Redeemer in every aspect: behaviour, teaching, miracles, and passionate death. “To follow in the Lord’s footsteps” not only implies elaboration of the religious ethics, but also active participation in the divine through the Sacrifice. Along with the angels, the prophets and the righteous of the Old Testament, the martyrs are therefore closest to God in the Christian cosmology. Their names and deeds reminded the pious of their all-powerful God, admonishing them, and at the same time providing models to follow, a chance to pursue purity (Shevchenko, 1990). But more importantly for the pious masses, they had close access to the divine (Dagron, 1978). As in most other monotheistic religions, the God of the Christians was often seen as far too remote to be addressed directly. This idea is evident in the various practices and traditions of popular piety: the faithful gain strength or recover their health by touching or possessing the saintly relics; help during hardships by invocation and prayer, by meditating in front of icons or over their dreams; and by seeking a burial spot near the martyr’s tombs. The donation scenes in the fresco programs of later Byzantine churches is perhaps the best expression of this belief: it depicts the donor offering a

small model of the church to the patron saint, who leads him with his family to the Savior.

Ultimately of course, the Christian God was being celebrated through the veneration of particular saints, but saintly figures are always recruited from ordinary human beings. Their characters, their origin, the details of their biographies are always local and specific (Delehay, 1998). Moreover, the Church recognises saints of various social provenience: ecclesiastics, soldiers, proselytes, ascetics, poets, doctors, men and women, rich and poor. Various regions and ethnicities, various social groups and professions, each revered their own favorite saints: Constantinople and the Theotokos, the Arabian nomads and St. Sergius, the soldiers and St. George or St. Theodore. This aspect of the Christian saints has considerable implications not only for the local cultic traditions – in the sense that each kind of saintly figure receives a particular form of worship – but also for the ecclesiastic history of a region. Christian saints often re-established the foundations of the local communities, and reconsolidated what was left of the urban culture in the Empire¹. In effect, the old centers were given a chance to redefine their importance within the new constellation; just as marginal regions and centers (Cappadocia, North Syria, Dalmatia, for instance) were able to achieve new prominence. By claiming that St. Erasmus, former bishop of Antioch, was the founder of the local Christian communities, the churches of Lychnid and Formia established a historical link with one of the leading Episcopal centers of the time (Vesely, 1988). Thus the veneration of a particular saintly figure was a token of the antiquity and the orthodoxy of the Christian community. They did not only provide a share of sanctity, but also gave a factual, historical testimony; as mentioned above, they comprise the basis of the new

¹ The case of St. Gregory Thaumaturgos and Pont for instance; Mitchell, 1993: 53-57.

ecclesiastical history. This process was sometimes accompanied by a fierce struggle between the regional and urban entities of the empire, struggles that in many aspects truly resembled the old competitive spirit of the Hellenic city-states. They often involved falsifications or partial distortions of the apocryphal traditions; thefts and smuggling of the sacred relics; translocation of the cult and its adaptation to the new environment².

Scholars have long noted the relations between the semi-divinities, the deified heroes of the Pagan religions, and the Christian saints. Several analogies can be drawn: Christian saints, like Pagan heroes, display superhuman genius and aptitude; in Paganism, heroes are bestowed special favors from the gods; in Christianity, it is the Holy Spirit that operates through the agency of saintly figures. Without the divine grace, both are just ordinary human beings, mortal and vulnerable, confined to certain geographical and temporal contexts. Upon their deaths, both Pagan heroes and Christian saints achieve status distinct from ordinary mortals: in Paganism, heroes ascend Mt. Olympus as semi-divinities, while in Christianity, saints are granted an exceptional place in the Heavenly Court. The subtle difference is that Christian saints are never treated as divine after their deaths, but in both instances they are celebrated because of their closeness to the divine. Finally, both concepts reflect the primordial strive of the religious mind: to partake in the divinity through perfection of the human nature. To a certain extent, these analogies are reflected in iconography and sacral architecture - the link between the Pagan *heroa* and the Christian *martyria* (Grabar, 1946, 1), and in the ecclesiastical discourse: the death of a saint is seen as his/her rebirth in Christ, which corresponds to the “marriage”

² Geary, 1990; studies these developments in Medieval Western Europe, they are nicely illustrated through the case of St. Erasmus.

between the mounted warlord and the goddess of the underworld in the myths of many Mediterranean cultures.

Theologically the cult of martyrs in early Christianity was of a great significance and so carefully defined and channeled by the Church, but the resemblance with the cults of Paganism was in many aspects apparent. Christian saints may justly be treated as successors of the Pagan heroes, not only in general terms, but also in specific instances. This perspective is often exploited in the studies of Early Christian cults of martyrdom: after all, early ecclesiastics were perfectly aware that it was easier to replace a local Pagan hero or divinity with a closely related Christian saint, than to eradicate him or her (Delehay, 1998: 164-169). Though very tentative, this approach should not be underestimated: it would be very interesting to follow the way in which Christian cults countered their predecessors in various geographical and social spheres. Thus, R. Hodinott in his study of Early Christianity on the Balkan Peninsula has postulated a genealogical relation between St. George, one of the most popular saints in the region, and the ancient cult of the Thracian Horseman³. We will see a very similar parallel between St. Thecla of Isaurian Seleukia and the local Athena Kanetis, or Sarpedon, the legendary hero of the Cilicians (Dagron, 1978: 81-90; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 441-442).

We must also not overlook the more prosaic aspects of the veneration of saintly figures in Christianity. Cultic centers as one of the element of this practice certainly had a great importance in providing continuity and congruity of the new faith. But after the Peace of the Church, pilgrimage to shrines and holy places were an important source of wealth and economic prosperity not only for the local church, but also for entire regions and cities (Pena, 1997: 129-150; Talbot-Rice, 2001: 153-

³ Hodinott, 1963: 49-65; also note the relation between the Dioscuri and St. Demetrius.

168). It was an enterprise, which we can feel free to compare with modern day tourism. It involved long and expensive trips, massive and sumptuous consumption and large-scale donations. There is plenty of literary evidence in which the feast for the memory of a particular saint in many aspects resembled the old Pagan festivities or later Medieval fairs (Pena, 1997: 136-141). This was yet another incentive for competition among the numerous cultic centers that dotted the Empire by the mid-fifth century.

Finally, the veneration of sacred figures and sacred locations in Christianity reveals an interesting attitude towards material culture in general: certain natural features or artifacts are attributed a special sacred significance, on the grounds of an alleged physical relation with saintly figures or biblical events. One notes the two essential elements that comprise the cultic traditions in Christianity: a literary, historical narration, which establishes the authentic character of the Saint or the venerated location; and the architectonic arrangements, enshrining the focus of worship and providing an adequate setting for the religious ceremonies. We shall make a detailed examination of this idea as reflected in the practice of sanctifying, illuminating a church by investing it with saintly relics, or associating it with a place or an object marked by Divine manifestation – the type of building we call a *martyrium*⁴. But before doing so, the type of literal testimonies that provides the “historical” ground for the development of these practices must be considered.

2. 2 The literal testimony, hagiographies and oral traditions

⁴ Grabar, 1946, vol. i, ii; though published six decades ago, this large book is still by far the most comprehensive and detailed study of the art and architecture of Christian *martyria*; a convenient

The ancient Pagan World produced a large body of popular, anonymous literature, which constituted or reflected a great deal of its cultural heritage. Much of our knowledge about pre-Christian religion, historiography, geography and even ethnography derives from Pagan myths and legends. Christian monotheism could not cohabitate with most of these elements of the Pagan world. As in so many other aspects, there was a need for a fresh start, a need to “purge the World from the old demons”. The promotion of saintly figures was, among other things, a way to create a new, and alternative history and geography.

Hagiography is a type of literature determined solely by the theme it covers, and this invariably, is the life and the deeds of a particular Christian saint during and after his /her life, and collections of posthumous miracles. As a later popular genre, the hagiographical tradition was probably derived from sources such as the Acts of the Martyrs, tomb inscriptions and the numerous traditions and legends that circulated the local Christian communities (Shevchenko, 1990). In their strictly literary form, later hagiographies closely resemble Pagan myths, legends or fairy tales; it is their subject matter that differentiates them from the former. Therefore they are commonly acknowledged as an exclusive contribution of Christianity. Not surprisingly, this type of literature achieved great popularity both in Late Antique and Medieval societies. Its promotion was not only in the interest of the Early Church, but (what is more significant) it was easily acceptable among the masses. What was once a form of commemoration, an expression of piety, or even a kind of propaganda turned in to a true literary genre (Delehay, 1998: 53-55).

From a theological point of view, the Church was naturally concerned with the orthodoxy of the elements that comprise a Saint's biography. Hagiographical

traditions were received, revised or rejected in order to fit the doctrines and the policies of the day, especially as excerpts from the hagiographies played an important role during sermons and daily liturgies, and in monastic circles – the readings for the Hours, for instance (1998: 12-13). As elsewhere, the tendency of the Church, as an established institution, was to standardize, to turn genuine practices and beliefs into formal liturgies. We may view the works of scholars, such as Father H. Delehaye or Aigrain, R., early in the last century, as an analogous reaction of the Catholic Church in the awake of modernity. To locate the core, the original elements of the hagiography, to isolate the Saint from his legend, his local tradition, such are the concerns of the great studies by Father Delehaye. The Eastern Orthodox Church, on the other hand seems to have remained more “conservative”, or, better, much more passive in respect to this: it abhors the ideas of rationalization, of “explaining away” matters (Popovich, 1972; Sandjakovski, 1998).

Since biographies of saintly figures comprise a good deal of the written sources referring to Christian societies, historians have also attempted to weigh their value as historical documents. The idea is that hagiographies “tell us more about the time they were produced than about the time they are referring to” (Delehaye, 1998: viii-ix)⁵. Historians have since devised very elaborate and sophisticated methodology in treating hagiographical records as historical documents. We have studies that separately treat Late Antique, Merovingian, or Renaissance hagiographical traditions. We have a similar differentiation in respect to geography, and studies on hagiographical traditions of various proveniences, Latin, Greek or Syriac. Like many other elements of the Christian cult, hagiographies reveal local traditions and particularities, the historical conditions at certain points of time. There may have

Krautheimer, 1986: 31-36; mostly repeats Grabar’s conclusions.

been one Saint called Pelagia, but there is more than a single “true” story about her life (1998: 150-4). Christian hagiographies were histories that had very different pretensions than the present ones.

In this present study, however, hagiographies will concern us in a different way. In general, we should stress their role in fostering, and even supplementing cultic practices in Early Christianity. For, as mentioned earlier, cultic centres and practices are meaningless, levelled to standard architectonic forms or solutions, and standard liturgies, if the actual literal memory of a particular saintly figure is lost. Hagiographies are above all histories of certain individuals, but in being so, they involve certain toponyms, local settings and particularities – the panegyrics of a saint gradually becomes an account of the local type of veneration. It will be these “ephemeral” elements that I will treat in more detail here, with a special focus on the accounts of the posthumous miracles. We shall take the right to treat them mainly as factors that influenced or were influenced (who could say exactly?) by certain cultic setting or norms. We shall leave the attempt to consider the core, the original form of a hagiographical tradition to the historian or the theologician; it will be of a little help and meaning for the present issue.

Further, we must acknowledge that it is never sufficient only to utter or write down the tradition, but it also has to be recorded in material forms, and these must correspond to, and conform to the literal tradition and vice versa. It is the way in which hagiographies become an important element of the early Christian cult, not just a literary genre. When talking about the theological aspect of veneration of saintly relics we noted this importance attributed to the material aspect of sanctity. We may add now that it is also the methodological premise on which Archaeology

⁵ See for instance, the analysis of the Passion of Sts. Sergius and Bachus by Woods, 1997: 335-367.

contributes to the broad field of early Christian studies. Not in the sense that it uses the written documents to fulfill the partial character of the archaeological record (as if the written documents are impartial; we need only recall the numerous instances of modifications or complete forgeries), but rather to attempt at delineating a curious interplay between literal and material traditions.

2. 3 The material testimony and archaeological perspectives. Sacred relics, sacred places and their architectonic articulation.

How do archaeological methods contribute to the recognition of local cultic practices in early Christendom? Traditionally, scholarship has viewed certain architectonic forms as unambiguous markers of the cultic location. The *martyrium* is usually treated as a separate category of sacred buildings in Early Christian architecture, distinct from the parish church both in designation and form. This has led to the familiar opposition of longitudinal and centrally planned churches (Hamilton, 1956; Krautheimer, 1986; MacDonald 1985; Hutter, 1988). The longitudinal type of churches, represented by the *basilica* was, according to this view, used for the ordinary, day-to-day liturgical ceremonies; its layout had the merits of simplicity, spaciousness and adaptability. The centrally planned buildings lacked such practical conformities, but their appearance was considered more elaborate, and hence more suitable for the commemoration of important members and events from the history of the Christian communities.

This division had its roots in the old Pagan tradition. In Roman society, the basilical form could be utilized for various secular activities, ranging from an informal public hall in the cities to an official auditorium in the imperial palaces

(Swift, 1951: 9-30; Ward-Perkins, 1954: 69-90; Krautheimer, 1986: 41-43). Unlike the temple, the *palaestra* or the theatre, the *basilica* was not necessarily associated with the Pagan cult, but by the second century AD, some of the Oriental sects adopted the basilical hall as a place for assembly and ritual (Swift 1951: 20-21; Gough, 1961: 130-34; Milburn, 1988: 83-85). It was, moreover, a convenient setting for official ceremonials, and as these were becoming ever more formalized and rigid, the basilical form appropriated a veneer of solemnity, and close connotations of legal and social authority. This aspect of the *basilica* grew stronger towards the end of the Principate, when the cult of the Emperor's divinity was transformed into a worship of the Emperor himself; the palace *basilica* with the Emperor seated on his throne, the *forum* and the drill *basilicae* with the imperial effigy set in the focus of the interior became in effect, religious buildings (Krautheimer, 1986: 42). To be sure, the Christian *basilica* was a new architectonic form, and it can hardly be shown as a direct descendant of some particular basilical type, but its practical and symbolic significance in the context of the late Pagan period certainly contributed to its massive adoption by the Early Christian communities⁶.

A similar, formalist approach has often been embraced in an attempt to locate the Pagan predecessors of the Christian *martyria* (Swift, 1951: 31-49; Gough, 1961: 145-163). The final word on this subject belongs to the eminent Art Historian and Byzantinologist, Andre Grabar (1946, 1, 2). As mentioned earlier, the chief assumption is that the *martyrium*, as a sacral building with a specific function, different from that of the ordinary congregational church, had also a specific

⁶ There is an immense volume of publications on the formal genealogy of the Early Christian basilica; Swift, 1951: 9-30; illustrates no less than seven distinct theories on this problem; this formalist approach was abandoned by subsequent researches, mostly thanks to the cited studies by R. Krautheimer, and J. B. Ward-Perkins; their conclusions on this issue are mostly accepted by modern investigators; White, 1990.

architectonic form consisting of a dominant central unit and a series of smaller units arranged concentrically around the core of the structure. After establishing a seven-fold classification of the archaic instances of Christian *martyria*, the great scholar attempted to trace their formal genealogy back to the architectonic forms of Classical funerary monuments, the *heroa* (1946: 77-194; reviewed in Ward-Perkins, 1993: 386-403). There was a good reason for this hypothesis: research in Italy, the Holy Land, North Africa, and on the Salona *necropoleis* in Dalmatia, in particular (Egger, and Dyggve, 1939; there is a relatively recent review by Marin, 1988), have clearly demonstrated that the Early Christian cult of the martyrs developed around the tombs of the prominent members of the community, in the open-air cemeteries of the Empire and the catacombs of Italy. There was also an apparent resemblance between the mausoleums of the Tetrarchs, the Constantines and the first Christian *martyria* in Palestine, where the most important locations of the Epiphany were hallowed with circular or polygonal architectonic forms. The idea was further enhanced by the obvious analogy between the old Pagan hero worship and the veneration of Christian saintly figures: even the ancient Church was aware of this parallel (Delehaye, 1998: 171-193)⁷. According to A. Grabar there were seven classes of Early Christian *martyria*: the square pavilion or the *tetrapylon* (1946: 77-87); the rectangular-longitudinal hall with one or two storeys (1946: 88-97); the isolated apse or the *exedra* (1946: 98-102); the *triconchos* (1946: 102-119); the transeptal hall (1946: 120-141); the circular and the polygonal form (1946: 141-152); and the cruciform, both free standing and inscribed crosses (1946: 152-194). All of these were assigned a predecessor among the numerous forms of classical funerary monuments, mostly coming from the territory of the old Hellenistic *Koine*.

⁷ Note also the parallel made by Theodoret of Cyrus, *A cure for Pagan Ills*, 8.915; after Milburn,

Like any other of its kind, this strictly formalist aspect of Grabar's study could not survive for long⁸. Grabar was himself aware of the ad-hoc nature of the funerary practices among early Christians (1946: 47-75), and later on he remarks (1946: 304):

...que les oeuvres chretiennes ne viennent pas necessairement prolonger une tradition d'architecture paienne, en la reprenant au point final de evolution de celle ci; mais que l'activite des architectes chretiens s'integre dans la ouvre de la basse antiquite et reprend pour le compte de la religion nouvelle les forms de plus variees de l'art contemporain.

Besides the *mausolea*, there were many other kinds of buildings in the Late Roman civilization that featured the central plan; we recall the bathhouses, the *gymnasia*, or the large circular and polygonal units of imperial palaces, and finally, the Pantheon or the temple of Vesta at Rome. Some of the types from Grabar's classification like the inscribed cruciform, are more at home in the Oriental architectonic tradition, rather than in Rome or Greece (Ward-Perkins, 1993: 386-403). Further, the evidence on which the author relied (what was actually available at the time) is far from representative. The sample was mostly comprised of examples coming from Rome, North Africa and especially Salona – thus Grabar's hypothesis lends itself to the same critic as the hypothesis of the *oikia eklesia*, which sees the Pompeian patrician house as the only precursor of the later Christian basilica (Swift, 1951: 9-28; White, 1990: 11-25); but even here some apparent, well known funerary forms have been omitted, such as the catacombs of Rome or Naples for instance.

Two important points should be singled out. Firstly, by the time of the Late Empire, funerary architecture is characterized by an immense diversity of forms, determined by a no lesser variety of factors (religious, social, geographical). In effect

1988: 89.

⁸ The critical review by Ward-Perkins, J. B. 1993, pp.386-403; is particularly useful: of the seven types of early Christian *martyria* only three – the free-standing apse or *exedra*; the two storeyed

it becomes impossible to clarify congruent architectonic traditions, which would have inspired the Early Christians. Secondly, (and much more importantly for the present discussion) by the period of the Late Empire the formal aspect of Roman architecture had lost its touch with the social significance it once carried (Ward-Perkins, 1993a: 364-368; 1993b: 390-91; Mango, 1978: 7-9)⁹. Until the time of the Tetrarchy, an architectonic form could easily be treated as an unambiguous sign of a certain social activity, but as the third century was drawing to an end, things were drastically changing. The Classical experience and forms were not abandoned, but they were utilized and interpreted very liberally; hence the eclectic character of Late Antique architecture. Actually we may trace the beginnings of this attitude much earlier; perhaps even back to the Hellenistic period when the Oriental, mystical and often illicit religions started to spread throughout the Hellenic world (White, 1990; Wharton, 1995). Many of these new religious movements, lacking a particular architectonic setting, simply adapted the standard profane structures, as in the well-known examples of Dura Europos. Were there no fresco paintings or graffiti on the walls of Dura's house-church or Lullingstone villa, and were there no later phases over the early Christian *tituli* in Rome, it would have been quite difficult to recognize these buildings as Christian shrines.

The same point applies to the example of St. Peter's memorial on the Vatican (Krautheimer, 1986: 32; Gough, 1961: 72-78). No less convenient means were used for the enshrinement of the locations where even the most eminent members of the Christian community were buried. The examples from Tipassa, Mauritania or Manastirine, near Salona consist of simple stone slabs-*mensae*, marked by religious

mausoleum, and the square pavilion – can be definitely traced to Pagan *mausolea*, the others have either too few or too dubious Pagan precedents.

symbols, and a hole for the purpose of libations (Grabar, 1946: 47-51; Egger, and Dyggve, 1939, 2; Milburn, 1988: 88-94). Wall enclosures made of simple masonry (as at Bonn) or apses prolonged into an open court (the case of Manastirine), would carry little religious significance, unless they were superimposed by later Christian structures. We may add to the cited cases, S Sebastiano on the Via Appia, where a plain open courtyard, terminated on one side by an open *triclinium*, was lined with a bench on the interior; as one author remarked, (Krautheimer, 1986: 33) “were there no invocations of the Apostles on its walls, this loggia could easily be the porch of an *osteria*”.

But the strictly formalist approach hardly ever works even after the Church established its own architecture in the time of Constantine (Mango, 1978: 7-8; Lynn, 1994: 26). This is true both in respect to the social and the cultic character of churches. For instance, in most parts of the Christian Ecumene it is impossible to tell the difference between a parish and a monastic church, solely on the grounds of architectonic form or interior arrangements and decoration. Most usually, elements like inscriptions, references in written sources, or eventually, the geographic setting and the adjacent buildings determine the character of the church. Such was the case for the numerous monasteries of North Syria (Tchalenko, 1953-1958; Pena, 1997: 105-128), the church of St Catherine at Mt. Sinai (Forsyth, 1968: 3-19), or Alahan monastery (Gough, 1985)¹⁰, but the initial designation of the Studios’ church in Constantinople remains unclear (Mango, 1978: 43). The same is true for the conventional opposition between centrally planed *martyria* and longitudinal congregational churches. That this distinction had little to do with the cultic character

⁹ The latter gives a rare attempt of recapitulating the theoretical approaches commonly assumed in the study of Early Christian architecture.

of the sanctuary is evident from any illustrated handbook of Early Christian architecture. We may just cite the examples of St Demetrius, Thessalonica, a transept *basilica* built, according to the legend, in 413 by Leontius, the praefect of Ilyricum (Soteriu, and Soteriu, 1952; Hoddinott, R. 1963: 125-137); of St Theodore of Gerassa, a plain *basilica* with an *atrium* built in the mid fifth century (Krautheimer, 1986: 159-60; Mango, 1978: 20); or of St. Sergius, Resafah, a sixth century *basilica* which hosted the relics of the patron of the Christian Arabs (Mango, 1978: 31-33). We can likewise take the case of Rome, where early in Constantine's reign, we find basilical *martyria* with funerary designation; S. Marcelino e Pietro; S Sebastiano; S. Lorenzo (Krautheimer, 1986: 44-5; Grabar, 1946: 305-309). Or, inversely we see centrally planned cathedrals at Resafah, at Seleukia Pieria, and in fact, in most of the *metropoleis* of the Antiochene Patriarchate ¹¹. Grabar himself pointed out that the tradition of centrally planned churches is tightly associated with a chiefly imperial tradition of erecting circular (Galerius – Thessalonica; Sta Constantina-Rome¹²), and polygonal (Diocletian – Spalatum) *mausolea*, and that it was hardly ever repeated on such a scale as in the massive projects of Constantine, in Palestine and Rome (Grabar, 1946: 309-313).

The difficulties of establishing a clear genealogical line between Early Christian *martyria* and building types of the Pagan era are most evident when we consider the scattered evidence for the practical problems of patronage, planning and execution in

¹⁰ Though see Mango, 1991, who questions if the complex had a monastic community from its beginnings.

¹¹ The cathedrals of Amida, Apamea, Aleppo, Bosra; Kleinbauer, 1973: 91-114; all of these quatrefoils are according to the author derived from a common source in Antioch, perhaps the *Megale Eklesia* built by Constantine. In fact the author proposed a hypothesis where all the cathedral churches in the Orient were tetraconchs.

¹² Mango, C. 1993, pp. 51-62, would add the predecessor of the later *Apostoleion* in Constantinople; according to this author the Holy Apostles in Constantinople were rededicated late in the reign of Constantius II, probably by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Up to that point the building was a

the architecture of this period (Mango, 1978: 9-19). A good deal of the building project, including layout, size, material and decoration depended on mundane factors such as availability of finances, of material and artisans. In many instances, it was the whim and wealth of the donors that decided the form of the church, and these rarely followed any fixed pattern.

There is another reason for why the centrally planned churches were associated with the *martyria*. It has often been surmised that the plans of the “centralized” churches, the circle, the quatrefoil, the octagon or the cruciform, contain profound religious symbolism, which seemed appropriate for buildings commemorating a sacred burial or the Christian “places of witness” (Swift, 1951: 31-47; Hoddinott, 1963: 33-45; also Pena, 1997: 69-73). For example, the octagon, often employed in baptisteries, and in one of the most important *martyria* in Christendom, the Church of Nativity, was interpreted as signifying the end of the old cycle, the seven days of Creation, the seven stages of life, and the beginning of a new one; the number eight symbolizing death and birth in the same time (Hoddinott, 1963: 35; after Male, 1950). This conjecture is in a neat accord with the cited examples: the rite of baptism was a symbolic death of the pagan, and his rebirth as a Christian (Khatchatrian, 1982: 13-15), while the Octagon of the Nativity was an adequate form enshrining the birthplace of the Savior, an event that announced the end of the World of the Old Testament and the beginning of a new epoch. The preserved remarks by Gregory of Nazianzen and Ambrose of Milan, about the cruciform churches of the later *Apostoleion* in Constantinople and earlier at Milan, confirm that the symbolic value of the cross-shaped plans was definitely recognized by the later fourth century (Swift, 1951: 32).

circular mausoleum of Constantine, only with translocation of the relics of Apostles Luce, Timothy,

The apparent problem with this last group of approaches is that there is simply no way of telling whether this symbolism in the plans of “centralized” churches was recognized and intentionally exploited by the earliest architects and donors; or whether it emerged retrospectively, after the Church developed a more elaborate iconography. This seems to be the case with the cross, a sign that was totally absent from the early catacomb paintings, but also with most other iconographic forms, since they were known and used by many pre-Christian cultures (1951: 31-32). In fact, aside for some very obvious cases (the cross, the circle, and perhaps, some of the polyconchal buildings), proof for this sort of interpretation is very scant. But more important is that these theories share the same difficulty that discredits the approaches, which assume a straightforward relation between form and designation: they both wither when faced with the ever-growing evidence for basilical *martyria*, or centrally planned parish churches.

Another line of investigation, attempts at bringing the forms of early Christian sacral architecture in connection with the liturgical developments (Babich, 1969; Milburn, 1988; Gough, 1961; Hoddinott, 1963; Lemerle, 1945). One may distinguish between those approaches that are mostly concerned with the designation of the various interior units of the basilical type of churches (the number of naves, the position of the altar, the *ambo*, the *exedra* in Syrian churches, and doors and annexes), and those that treat the early liturgy as a formative factor in the Early Christian sacral architecture (in particular Du Bourgeout, 1971: 32; Gough, 1961: 67-71; Hoddinott, 1963: 23-32; Ward-Perkins, 1993: 364-386)¹³. Essentially, however, the two approaches are related so closely that at some point their distinctiveness

and Andrew late in the 350's did it become cruciform.

¹³ The latter has particularly noted the potential influences of the imperial ceremonial on the early liturgy.

becomes rather meaningless. Both apply a similar, fairly straightforward method: the evidence for various arrangements in the interior of the church is set against the prevailing forms of the Eucharist ceremony, and the known hierarchical segregations in the Early Christian communities; laity from clergy, male from female, the flawless from the unbaptised. The chief obstacle for these efforts is the scarcity of evidence pertaining to the Early Christian rite: old service books are hardly ever preserved, and they are usually silent about the particularities in the celebration of the Eucharist¹⁴. There are, nonetheless, other valuable sources, among which, can be singled out the few testimonies of pilgrims in the Holy Land, and especially the diary of nun Egeria, 381-384 (Wilkinson, 1971). Further insights are obtained from the results of archaeological research, but also from the study of liturgies of later periods (Babich, 1969 for instance).

Studies like these have contributed greatly to the understanding of the organization of space for liturgical purposes in Early Christian *basilicae*, though many uncertainties remain. As mentioned earlier, one very notable characteristic of the basilical type of building is its flexibility, not only in regards to the potential for various adaptations of the interior, but also its compatibility with other architectonic forms (MacDonald, 1985: 11-15). Equally, the *basilica* enables great variety of inner divisions and tolerates almost any kind and number of additions, from simple annexes to independent structures. Consequently, the available space could be adapted for various purposes with very slight modifications. This is hardly a favorable condition for the study of the relations between sacred architecture and liturgy in Early Christianity; the large diversity of the extant basilical churches is quiet disconcerting.

¹⁴ Shepherd, 1961: 25-44, for the old Antiochene Liturgy; Hodinott, 1963: 23-33; Dix, 1945, is still a

In its general appearance, the basilical church, with its common inner partitions (nave and sanctuary, aisles and galleries) and annexes (*atrium*, *narthex*, baptisteries), is always related to the central rite of the Christian liturgy, the celebration of the Eucharist. This is apparent not only from the written sources or present-day experience, but also from the architectonic focus of the church, which is invariably the altar slab set in front of the apsidal space and hallowed by a *ciborium*. Other major rituals, like baptism and the commemoration of the dead are generally assumed to have different settings¹⁵. Such is indeed the case for the rite of baptism, and to a certain degree for commemorative ceremonies. The Graeco-Roman culture generally tended to separate the worlds of the living and the dead, and this attitude was to a certain extent transmitted to Christianity. Earlier we saw that Christian *martyria* could easily borrow from the large corpus of Pagan funerary architecture. Some elements of the Pagan funerary rites were also accepted: the observance of the third, the ninth and the fortieth day after the departure, funeral offerings, banquets and prayers in honor of the deceased (Milburn, 1988: 89). But these ceremonies do not require some particularly standard architectural settings. The chief aim of this type of architecture was simply to provide access to the venerated tomb for a large number of visitors. We may recall the unique type of funerary *basilicae* with *deambulatoria*, built outside the walls of ancient Rome (Krautheimer, 1986: 51-56; Armstrong, 1993: 9-11), the catacombs, or the simple arrangements around the open-air cemeteries in Bonn, Xanten or Tipasa (Grabar, 1946: 43-76). Evidence of *martyria* built both, after and before the reign of Constantine, shows that this conformity of access could be achieved in many various ways, mostly depending on the physical circumstances and the location of the burial.

very frequently cited study; also Duchesne, 1932.

Some authors have attempted to postulate a relation between the circular plans of the *martyria* and the processional character of the commemorative service¹⁶. From Egeria's description of the religious ceremonies in Jerusalem during the Great Week, we learn that the large *martyria* of the Holy Land were similarly utilized. Thus on Great Friday, the clergy led the faithful to a chapel near the Cavalry Rock, allegedly housing the Holy Cross. Blessings were delivered and psalms were sung, while the ceremony ended with each member of the procession kissing and bowing in front of the Cross (Wilkinson, 1971: 137). Similarly ordered were the processions in the Church of the Nativity, where the octagonal shape of the *martyrium* enabled free circumambulation by the faithful and the presbyters (1971: 48-49; Milburn, 1988: 100). Examples of other contemporary *martyria*, in Palestine (like the Church at Mambre or the Eleona church on the Mount of Olives) show that this convenience of the circular building was not an overwhelming factor. The open courtyard, or the *basilica* with its long corridors, could easily be adapted for peripatetic services, and in fact they were, in both the Nativity and the Golgotha churches. Furthermore, the *basilicae* of these two complexes were not bare corridors giving access to the sacred locations; regular masses were held here during the year, but some parts of the long ceremonies, held on important religious holidays were also held in the *basilicae*. Conversely, during Passion Week, mass was said in the rotunda (Wilkinson, 1971: 133-137). Note that in Egeria's words the entire precinct is called a *martyrium*, not solely the chapel of the Entombment (1971: 45).

The example of the great sanctuaries in Palestine nicely illustrates how the formal distinction between *martyria* and parish churches has little to do with the

¹⁵ This idea is accepted by most authors cited above.

differences in the religious ceremony. Ordinary mass could be held both in the basilical church and in the martyr's chapel. The same was true for the funerary *basilicae* of Rome, where Mass was held on the martyrs' graves on the day of their anniversary (Armstrong, 1993: 9). There may have been initially a distinction between the rite of the Eucharist and the commemorative ceremonies in honor of the martyrs, but this was probably due to the funerary context of the latter. The link between the tomb and the altar slab must have been apparent and meaningful for Christians since earliest times¹⁷, although evidence from St. Peter's church in Rome (Krautheimer, 1986: 56), or from the underground chapel of St. Alexander, on the Via Nomentiana¹⁸, show that during most of the fourth century, the distinction between these two elements was retained. But it could not have been for a very long: the essence of the Christian rite of the Eucharist is precisely the celebration and re-enactment of the Lord's Sacrifice, the central event in the synoptic gospels. The later identification of the altar slab with the sepulcher of Christ was inherent to the main element of the Christian liturgy and it was its natural outcome. We can also view this development in the light of the efforts of the ecclesiastic authorities to formalize the funerary rites that still carried certain connotations of the Pagan banquets, and constrain the zeal of the throngs of pilgrims, eager to touch or see the objects of veneration.

¹⁶ Grabar, 1946: 300-305 for the transept basilica; Hill, 1996, for the Cilician basilicas with eastern passages. Pena, 1997: 136-140, for Qal'at Sem'an, where according to tradition, pilgrims went round the column of the Saint seven times, before the pilgrimage ended.

¹⁷ It is interesting to find a very early reference to this idea in St. John's Revelation, 6.9; after Milburn, 1988: 89; where he "saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God".

¹⁸ Milburn, 1988: 90. This may not have been the case with the Salonitan *martyria* where according to the early researchers the altar was set directly above the martyr's grave, for instance in the mausoleum of St. Anastasius at Marusinac; Egger, and Dyggve, 1939, 3: 94-109; this has been criticized by Ward-Perkins, 1993: 386-403.

By the end of the fourth century, *martyria* cease to occur as independent building types in Christian sacral architecture. In the West, the sacred objects (mostly saintly relics) were regularly interred in reliquaries underneath the altar, or in the case of saintly tombs, they were incorporated in the fundamentals of the presbytery. In the East, *martyria* retained some architectural integrity, but they were regularly attached or included in the plan of the congregational church¹⁹. There was perhaps a particular reason for this divergence: in the East, *martyria* were often enshrining natural features, like trees, rocks or caves, objects that are evidently difficult to incorporate in the standard arrangements of the Christian sanctuary. Therefore they required separate architectonic frame and remained bound to a certain location (Grabar, 1946: 313). Even when they housed portable objects or relics, a piece of the *maphorion* of the Theotokos or the True Cross, the norm was to set them in separate chapels (Babich, 1969: 33-40). In the West, *martyria* were mostly built over the martyr's tombs, and since these were always situated in the *necropolis*, outside the city-walls, the *martyria* were detached from the congregational churches and often functioned as funerary chapels. Roman tradition in the West strongly opposed the violation of tombs, and apparently it prevented the dissemination of sacred relics, but not so in the East, where imperial precedent broke the taboo as early as 356²⁰. The symbolic correlation between the martyr's grave and the Eucharist table was nevertheless recognized: by the late fourth century we find the bishops of Milan, St. Ambrose, and his successor, St. Simplicianus, investing their ecclesiastic donations, the church of the Holy Apostles and the church of St. Mary and all the Virgins, with

¹⁹ Grabar, 1946: 313; in a genuine terminology these were the "*martyrium*-church" in the West, and the "*martyrium* in church", in the East.

²⁰ The dedication of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople; Mango, 1978: 44; in a later article this author attempted to locate the historical circumstances that introduced the practice of translocation of sacred relics; 1993. 51-62.

martyr's relics brought from elsewhere (Milburn, 1988: 112-113). But the final blow to the ancient Roman taboo came with the steady collapse of the Western Empire and the barbarian invasions of the fifth century (Grabar, 1946: 314-315). The invading Arian or Pagan tribes had little respect for the sacred geography of Christian Rome. The richly adorned extra-mural *martyria* of Italy, the Balkans, and the Rhine provinces were an easy target, and as the last remnants of the Roman civilization withdrew behind the city walls, they took along whatever could be saved from the sacred relics²¹. Thus the historical circumstances accelerated the ongoing process of transformation of extra-mural martyr's chapels into urban, congregational churches. But this situation did not diminish the importance of the cults of martyrs; it only enabled their diffusion throughout the Christian Ecumene. Even in the West, where the veneration of sacred relics was usually subsumed by the Eucharist rite, the memory that such-and-such a sacred relic rest under the church sanctuary was remarkably preserved. Hagiographies and oral legends played an important role, but the presence of the sacred object was further communicated through certain architectonic arrangements, crypts and reliquaries, or through representative arts, statues and icons (Grabar, 1946, 2 is still the principal study). With the passage of time these elements assumed a sanctity of their own, and often became independent foci of veneration.

It is treacherous to postulate any general conclusions about the Early Christian cult of martyrdom. That it takes more than a specific architectonic form to sanctify a spot is now clear to most scholars in this field. Early Christian *martyria*, like most

²¹ The case of St. Demetrius is a telling example; this military Saint was originally related to Sirmium, the see of the Illyrian prefecture, but the advance of the Huns in the mid fifth century rendered the position of the capitol unattainable. In 442 the prefecture was transferred to Thessalonica along with the cult of this popular Saint, and by the end of Antiquity new legend was created, according to which

other architectonic forms of the period grew out of the heritage of the Roman civilization; they were themselves part of that civilization. The Christian *martyria* had symbolic and formal relations with the Pagan mausoleum, but it was also related to the Imperial palaces and the Roman bathhouse. Moreover, we saw that the formal architectonic aspect had little to do with the cultic significance of the sacral building, both in respect to architectural tradition and liturgical considerations. These may have been important factors, but only on a regional level; in the sense that certain geographical or ethnic entities had their own recognizable ways of establishing cultic centers. The study of this subject, cultic centers and their architectonic articulation in various regions, is certainly needed. To date, research demonstrates that each cultic tradition has its own particularities, mostly depending on the nature of the venerated saintly figure, the hagiographies, the character of the sacred remains and a vast number of social, economical and cultural conditions.

St. Demetrius was originally martyred in Thessalonica, under Galerius; Vickers, 1974; Mango, 1978: 1978: 46.

CHAPTER III

THE CITY OF LYCHNID IN LATE ANTIQUITY, AND THE CULT OF ST. ERASMUS: THE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

3. 1 The City of Lychnid in Late Antiquity

The geography and the history of Lychnid during the period between the fourth, and the early sixth century, are factors with important implications for the ecclesiastical situation at the time, not only in the city and its immediate environs, but for the entire region of Eastern Illyricum. In deed, with regards to Late Antiquity, it is impossible to talk separately about the political conditions in any certain region without considering the specific issues of ecclesiastic history. The administrative organization of the Early Christian church, the theological debates of the period, the frictions between various church-centers over territories, all of these are deeply imbedded in the broader socio-historical conditions of the age (Jones, 1973; Ostrogorski, 1969; Treadgold, 1997). This is reflected in the correlation between the provincial and the eparchial borders, in the theological affiliation of the *augusti* of the West and the East, and finally in the coincidence between certain ecclesiastic centers and the ethnicities that comprise the Christian Ecumen.

But the economical and the political conditions of a certain locality in general, cannot be left out of discussion without defying the efforts for a rough estimate of the material conditions necessary for the normal development of a Christian community and its cultic practices. The central and the southern parts of the Balkan Peninsula experienced all the effects of the economical, ethnic and political crisis of Late Roman society: a drastic deterioration of economy and trade, accompanied by a decline in population, and a collapse of the old urban culture and its old life style. Historically, we witness the new conditions through the disappearance of old etnonyms and cities in the written sources, or in the administrative reorganization of the region (Papazoglu, 1957; Hoddinott, 1963: 49-88). Archaeologically, the new epoch is evident through changes in the settlement pattern, with new settlement types, appearing often very specialized with regards to the economy, and in the structural changes in the cities²².

Lychnid itself had at least a five centuries long tradition of urban life by Late Antiquity (Papazoglu, 1957: 224-230; Papazoglu, 1985: 90-120; Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1986; Malenko, 1988: 2-22; Lisichar, 1953: 245-261; Hammond, 1972, 1). The city survived the turbulent events at the end of this period, and continued to thrive throughout the Middle Age and into modern days, but under the name of Ochrid/Achrida. This remarkable continuity of urban settlement has eroded the remains of ancient Lychnid; at present, buildings from the Late Medieval period

²² Systematic studies of the settlement pattern in the region are yet to be undertaken; apart from the numerous reports on singular Late Antique sites; Mikulchik, 1996; Mikulchik, 1999; are the capital studies on the history and the poliogenesis of the city in Ancient Macedonia. The first of these has recently been published in German; Mikulchik, 2002. On the city of Lychnid the conclusions in Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1986: 249-265, may be outdated by the intensive excavations in the past few years. The transition from the Classical to the Late Antique city is certainly best documented in Stobi; Wiseman, (ed). 1973, 1975, 1981.

dominate its *acropolis*²³. Located on a twin-peaked hill, on the north shore of a lake with the same name, the city of Ochrid had access to a wide range of natural resources: an inexhaustible amount of fresh water and fish, fertile lands to the north-west, and to the north-east, a region relatively rich in minerals of various kinds (Papazoglu, 1985: 64-6). The number and the character of the archaeological finds in this region, dating back to the pre-classical period (short surveys are given in Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1985: 127-133, A. K. M. 1996: 238-79) further confirms the natural conformities of the region gravitating around the lake of Ochrid.

The city's geographical position also figures as an important factor for the socio-cultural development in the past (fig. 1, 2). Since the Neolithic period, the north coast of the Lake provided an easy access to the Adriatic Sea, thanks to the Crn Drim River that issues from the lake itself. In the period immediately after the Roman conquest, this connection became an important section of the *Via Egnatia*, linking the Adriatic ports of Dyrachion and Apollonia with Thessalonica and thence, to Thrace and Asia Minor (Papazoglu, 1985: 67-8; Hodinott, 1963: 5-23; Hamond, 1972, 1).

Lychnid is attested as a city stationed on the *Via Egnatia* in the *Itineraria Antoninioni*, the *Itineraria Burdigalensi*, and in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, and by a number of reliable ancient writers: Livy, in books XLIII; XXVII; Strabo, in book VII; and Procopius' *Historia Arcana* (Papazoglu, 1957: 223-230).

Situated on the main thoroughfare in this part of the Empire, Lychnid was open to the cultural influences coming from Rome, and particularly, Thessalonica

²³ The problems of identification of ancient Lychnid and Medieval Ochrid are treated in Papazoglu, 1957: 223-230; Papazoglu, 1985: 64-78; Arheoloshka Karta na Makedonija, 1996: 257-58; henceforth A.K.M, 1996; Lisichar, 1953, pp. 245-261 and elsewhere. It is worth noting that the intensive researches in the past decade-largely unpublished-have erased the slightest trace of doubt that ancient Lychnid is in fact modern Ochrid, Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1986.

(Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1975; Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1986: 249-265; Hoddinott, 1963: 228-29). The city and its surroundings could hardly ignore the developments in the larger centers of the Empire. It is important to note, however, that the character of the terrain, and the distances involved, meant that Lychnid and its environs had stronger links with the Adriatic than with the Aegean. It is not accidental that the old ethnic border that separated the Illyrian tribes to the West, from the Paionians and the Macedonians to the East, was just 13 Roman miles to the east of the city (Papazoglu, 1985: 121-3; Papazoglu, 1957: 66-67; Hammond, 1972. See also Hoddinott, 1963: 49-65). Essentially, this same line divided the provinces of Epirus Nova and Macedonia Prima in Late Antiquity (Papazoglu, 1957: 89-91). (fig. 2)

Like most of the cities of the Empire that retained some importance after the collapse of the Principate, in the 3rd century AD, Lychnid became an Episcopal see in the Early Christian period (Papazoglu, 1958: 223-230; Papazoglu, 1985: 114-120; Aleksova, 1995: 84,177-205; Aleksova, 1997: 85-102). It is further attested in the lists of the Episcopal sees that took part in the Ecumenical councils (Le Quien, 1740, 2: 241-257), and in the *Sinecdemos* of Hieroclius – a 6th century source – where the episcopo of Lychnid appears under the *metropolis* of Dyrachion in the province of Epirus Nova (Papazoglu, 1957: 23-5; Papazoglu, 1985: 114-5).

The episcopate was certainly organized prior to the council of Serdica, in 343, when we hear of Zosimus, the first historically attested bishop of Lychnid (Aleksova, 1995: 83-84; Panov, 1996: 66-7; Bratoz, 1990: 10-11). This is a relatively early date considering the slow progress of Christianity in the Balkan interior (Bratoz, 1990: 3-29; Hodinnott, 1963). Less than two decades earlier, at the general council at Nicaea, episcopates were a privilege of the larger cities of the Empire, usually the

provincial capitals, with its bishop being a sole representative for the entire province (Bratoz, 1990: 3-29; Honingmann, 1943: 20-89).

Two inscriptions from roughly the same period, the second quarter of the 4th century, also testify to the relative importance of the city under the Constantines (Papazoglu, 1985: 113-14). Both were erected by the *praeses provinciae* in honor of the members of the ruling dynasts: the first to the young Caesar Constans, the second to the Emperor Constantius II and the Caesar Constantius Gallus (Papazoglu, 1985: 113-4, 119)²⁴. It is of course difficult to draw any definite conclusions only on the basis of such evidence. The dedications could have been inspired by an occasional visit of important members of the imperial family, but the presence of the provincial governor might also indicate that the city was of a higher administrative status, than generally considered²⁵. More certain are the indications that the city suffered a heavy economic decline in the late third and early fourth century: these two dedications are inscribed on re-used slabs, a very meager heritage when compared to the dozens of private marble inscriptions dated to the earlier periods (1985: 101-112; Papazoglu, 1957: 223-230).

There is very little information about Lychnid after the demise of the Constantinian dynasty, but considering the socio-historical circumstances of the region (Ostrogorski, 1969), the chances for prosperity were scarce and very brief. The last decade of the fourth and the early years of the fifth century saw the settlement of the Visigoths in the region of Epirus. Pressed by continuous warfare and hunger, this Arianic tribe could have hardly had a friendly disposition towards

²⁴ The author provides transcriptions and bibliography.

²⁵ Papazoglu, 1985: 114, 119; the author mentions the possibility that Lychnid was an alternative seat of the provincial governor, after an earthquake struck Dyrachion in AD 314. We lack any further positive evidence for this case, but it is important to note that episcopus Zosimus of Lychnidus is numbered among the bishops of Macedonia not of Epirus.

the local inhabitants. Moreover, the Visigoths made full use of the fierce hostility between Rufinus and Stilicho, the regents of the East and the West, pillaging both Italy and the Western Balkans, allegedly at their rulers' own instigation. A somewhat longer period of peace was secured as Theodosius II took full control of the government (Ostrogorsky, 1969: 72-79; Treadgold, 1997: 79-103), but AD 447 saw the terrifying incursion of the Huns in the Balkans, followed by the no less hostile Ostrogoths in 457. There are no direct mentions of Lychnid amidst these events, but the fact that Dyrachion, the provincial capital, fell to the Goths in 459, indicates a chaotic situation (Papazoglu, 1985: 116; Ostrogorski, 1969: 81-82). Two decades later however, in 478/479, Malchus (frg, 18) informs us (Papazoglu, 1985: 117) that Theodoric the Great was unable to take the city because of its fortifications and the abundance of springs within the city walls. The surrounding area was nevertheless devastated. Ten years later, with the departure of the Ostrogoths, there followed another interval of relative peace and prosperity, but if we are to trust Procopius' *Historia Arcana*, the city of Lychnid did not benefit from the "Golden Age of Justinian". The last mention of Lychnid in the ancient literary sources is the news of its destruction in an earthquake during his reign (Papazoglu, 1985: 118; Papazoglu, 1957: 226). It is impossible to determine the date of the catastrophe, nor there are any hints that the city was rebuilt after the earthquake. The establishment of a precise stratigraphical sequence and the exact date of the numerous Early Christian churches in the area, would certainly be helpful with regards to this problem (Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1986; Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1985: 145-161; Malenko, 1988: 3-22).

Another aspect of Late Antique history were the struggles between the ecclesiastic centres of Empire. The Balkan provinces had been brought under the

political control of the eastern Roman Emperors by Diocletian, but in religious matters the Christian communities of Illyricum remained faithful to Rome throughout the fourth century (Panov, 1996: 61-74; Bratoz, 1990: 3-29; Pietri, 1982: 38-50). The growing ambitions of Orthodox Constantinople, coupled with the political dissensions between the Western and the Eastern emperors, naturally lead to ecclesiastical conflicts over the Balkan territories. It was the episcopates of Thessalonica and Heracleia Lyncestis, and later, Justiniana Prima that played the crucial role in a crisis that lasted for over two centuries (Pietri, 1982; Bratoz, 1990: 3-29; Panov, 1996: 61-74), but we also catch some glimpses of the episcopate of Lychnid, and its position in the clash between Constantinople and Rome. The episcopate gained a new prominence with the emergence of the Monophysite crisis. We hear of bishop Antonius attending both the Robber-synod of Ephesus in 449 and the council of Chalcedon in 451 (Papazoglu, 1985: 115; Aleksova, 1995: 84; Honningman, 1943: 29-80). Since his sign appears underneath the acts of the Chalcedon council, we may assume that the bishop continued to adhere to the theological position of Rome, while most of the episcopates of neighboring Macedonia were abandoning the Pope for the policies of Constantinople (Panov, 1996: 68-69; Bratoz, 1990: 16-17; Pietri, 1982: 37). This general alienation of the Macedonian episcopates from the Roman see became especially acute after the *Henotikon* of Zeno and Patriarch Acacius was issued in 482 (Bratoz, 1990: 16-17; Pietri, 1982: 37-42). The Popes of the period - Felix III (483-492), and Gelasius (492-496) - waged a letter campaign in an attempt to counter the pressure coming from Constantinople (Bratoz, 1990: 18-20). Among those addressed we discover the name of Laurentius, bishop of Lychnid, who appears to be one of the most active in agitating against the policy of the Patriarchate (Aleksova, 1995: 84; Papazoglu, 1985:

117; Bratoz, 1990: 17). During the revolt of Vitalian (513-516), in the reign of Emperor Anastasius (Ostrogorsky, 1969: 86-87), Laurentius was among the forty bishops that supported the rebels, and officially broke their alliance with Thessalonica (Papazoglu, 1985: 117-8; Bratoz, 1990: 19-20).

Marcelinus Comes (Chronicle, 516) noted the strong anti-Monophysitist feelings of the Lychnidian bishop (Papazoglu, 1985: 118, 120). After the suppression of the revolt in Thrace Laurentius of Lychnid was among the five bishops of Illyricum accused and called to Constantinople for a trial (Papazoglu, 1985: 118; also in Bratoz, 1990: 20). While kept in custody the old bishop was trying to persuade the Emperor – now, an overt Monophysite – of the erroneous character of the Monophysite doctrine. We also hear of Laurentius' successor, Theodoreus with regards to this controversy (Papazoglu, 1985: 118, 120; Bratoz, 1990: 20-21). The new bishop was quick to adjust to the changed relation between Constantinople and Rome under the fiercely Chalcedonian Emperor Justin (for Justin's ecclesiastic policy, see Vasiliev, 1950). Theodoreus, like his predecessor, was among the most fervent supporters of the policy of Pope Hormisdas. It was noted that he organized a ceremonial reception for the papal delegation and publicly read Hormisdas' proclamation, as suits a subordinate bishopric (Bratoz, 1990: 3-29).

Until the Slavic invasion and the collapse of the Early Byzantine control of the Balkans (Ostrogorsky, 1969; Ferjanich, 1982: 85-109), we hear of no other bishops of Lychnid. With Justinian's church reforms in Illyricum (Anastos, 1964: 1-11; Bratoz, 1990: 23-25), the Episcopate of Lychnid remained under the archbishopric of Thessalonica, despite its traditionally pro-Roman attitudes. We know little of the relations between the Epirote episcopates and the Archbishop of Thessalonica. In 545, pope Vigilius asserted its supremacy over the new Archbishopate of Justiniana

Prima, and Epirus Nova was left officially out of the Papal control. Whatever the consequences of these reforms, they were short-lived, for by the end of the sixth century all administrative aspects were wiped out of the Balkan Peninsula.

In short, two important aspects of late Roman history in general determined the historical conditions of Lychnid during this period. In a way, they correspond to the twofold nature of any larger city of the Late Empire. The Late Antique city as a socio-economic entity, as a continuation of the Greco-Roman *polis*, was of course greatly affected by the Barbarian invasions, the breakdown of the Roman frontiers, and the growing insecurity in the countryside (Wiseman, 1984: 289-314). The dramatic ethnic crisis of the fourth, fifth and the sixth centuries, was the chief factor that shaped the rhythm of urban prosperity and decline during Late Antiquity. We can define three periods of relative peace and prosperity in the case of ancient Lychnid: the decades under the Constantinian dynasty; the reign of Theodosius II; and the decades following the Ostrogothic invasion of Italy in 488. In general, the city might have experienced a considerable decline, when compared to the situation during the Principate, but these intervals of stability proved sufficient for the formation of a strong Episcopal see. The memory of the new Christian community of Lychnid is preserved not only in its active policy during and after the Acacian schism, but also in an intensive building campaign²⁶, which betrothed Medieval Ochrid with a strong architectural legacy (fig. 3). Not incidentally, the city would become one of the strongest centers of Byzantine culture in the Balkans during the Middle Age, a true successor of Justiniana Prima. Unfortunately we know very little about the urban development of Lychnid during the period of the Slavic invasions, although the transition from Antique Lychnid into Medieval Ochrid is crucial for the

understanding of the survival of some ancient traditions into the Middle Age. We will face this difficulty when we get to the problem of continuation of the cult of St. Erasmus after the Slavic invasion of the Balkans.

The Late Antique city was a basis for the new Christian community; the city was the center of the episcopate. We can best appreciate this aspect of the Late Antique city in those cases when the bishopric, with its administration, outlived the actual city for a century or more²⁷. More specifically, there would have been very little information about Late Antique Lychnid, if there were not such an active Christian community. Throughout its pre-Slavic history, the Lychnidian Episcopate remained one of the strongest bastions of the Roman Catholic Church in the Balkans, both in respect to its theological positions and its political interest in the struggle with Constantinople. There was a remarkable continuity of tradition: as late as the fourteenth century, the Pope had a catholic aspirant for the Archepiscopate of Ochrid (Grozdanov, 1980: 17). For our present aims, it will be of a particular interest to trace the implications of Lychnid's ecclesiastical orientation in the sacral monuments of the Early Christian period.

3. 2 St. Erasmus of Antioch; the hagiographic traditions

In the previous chapter, we explained the significance of hagiographies for the establishment of cultic traditions in Christianity. Their role as essential components of the Christian cult is nicely demonstrated through the examples of the cultic centers of St. Erasmus and St. Thecla. The archaeological remains of these sanctuaries can

²⁶ Seven early Christian churches have been discovered so far within the ancient city walls and as many in its surrounding; Malenko, 1988: 3-22; see also Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1986: 103-119.

never be understood properly without consideration of the hagiographic material; in fact, one could have hardly recognized them as sanctuary complexes in the first place. The examination of the different hagiographic traditions that treat the life of St. Erasmus will reveal not only the literary grounds on which the cultic tradition was based, but also a number of particularities not visible in the archaeological record. In the same time, it will be demonstrated that the hagiographies of this saint are very much reflective of the developments in the sanctuary complex, and the changes in the ecclesiastic situation in the region. The latter point is particularly important for the case of St. Erasmus, for we may freely treat this saint as a historical figure of a profound importance from the ecclesiastic past of the bishoprics that venerate his name. Namely, this legendary missionary was considered the founder of the *ecclesiae* of the ancient cities of Lychnid and Phrimo. His hagiographies are therefore, important components of the early ecclesiastic history of these two centers. This aspect of St. Erasmus' life needs to be recalled when discussing the numerous contradictions in the various hagiographic accounts.

When was the first Christian community of Lychnid formed? As already observed, the earliest historical source attesting to the existence of a Christian community at Lychnid dates to 343, the Council of Serdika (Bratoz, 1990: 3-29; Aleksova, 1995: 84). The historical sources make no mention of Lychnid as a Christian center prior to the age of Constantine, and in fact, apart from centers like Salona, Sirmium and Thessalonica, the entire Balkan Peninsula apparently played a minor role in the early history of the Christian Church (Hoddinott, 1963: 27-53; Krautheimer, 1986: 118-119). There is a passing reference in the Acts of the Apostles (*Acta Pauli*, XVI-XVII), but St. Paul's mission would have been naturally

²⁷ The case of Stobi in Macedonia Secunda with its bishops in Thessalonica for instance; Aleksova,

focused on the larger coastal cities and ultimately Italy, not the interior of the Balkans. The material evidence corroborates this situation²⁸. Examples of sacral Christian architecture prior to the fifth century mostly come from the provincial capitals, and even here the dominant phases belong to the fifth or the early sixth century. In Lychnid and its surroundings in particular, most of the surviving church architecture does not pre-date the second half of the fifth century (Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1975; Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1986: 119-120; Koco, 1961; Malenko, 1989: 3-11). When compared to other regions of the Empire - Italy, Syria, N. Africa, Asia Minor – Lychnid, along with most of continental Illyricum, was slow in adopting the developments associated with the New Faith. Architectonic monuments of any kind are, among other things, reflective of the strength of the local community with whom we associate them. In this respect, Lychnid has preserved little evidence of its fourth century Christian community.

Nevertheless, Lychnid was to become an ecclesiastic see of some importance in eastern Christendom during the Middle Age²⁹. Already by the end of the 9th century, ancient Lychnid was revived as an important monastic and Episcopal center, and by the beginning of the 11th century, its church was promoted to the rank of Archepiscopacy. This was the first autonomous Church of the Christianized Balkan Slavs, to be officially recognized by the Orthodox authorities. The historical importance of this institution for the Byzantine restoration policy in the Balkans was paramount. It is reflected in the fact that the choice of the candidates for the

1995; A. K. M. 1996: 239-41, for the Lychnid's Bishops in the seventh century.

²⁸ Apart from the cited sources, Sotteriu, 1929: 217-221, is still a good short survey for Greece; for Bulgaria: Mavrodinov, 1959.

²⁹ For medieval Ochrid: Panov, 1985: 175-205; the author has related the new name for Lychnid with the Greek word *achris*, meaning hill, mound, hence Achrida; there is also a remark in the *Alexiade* by Anna Comnen, where she notes how the lake once called Lychnid, was changed by the barbarians into Ochridas. For the rise of Ochrid early in the Medieval period, see Ostrogorsky, 1965: 3-18; Snegarov, 1924, 1.

archepiscopal throne was the sole prerogative of the Byzantine Emperors (Ostrogorsky, 1969: 296; Grozdanov, 1980: 9), and also in the extent of the diocese of the new Church, which roughly corresponded with the territory of the old prefecture of Illyricum. Administratively, the Archepiscopate of Ochrid was the successor of the old Church of Justiniana Prima, and its bishops were eager to emphasize this relation in their titles, until at least the fourteenth century (Grozdanov, 1980: 54). But the Medieval Church of Ochrid also dwelled on the legacies of ancient Lychnid. Its monasteries developed a strong literary tradition that naturally, sought to incorporate the pre-Slavic Christian history of the city into the foundations of the new *ecclesia*. It is in this light that we may best appreciate the legend of Lychnid's first saint, the Antiochene bishop Erasmus. His hagiography reveals, among other things, the history of the foundation of the ancient episcopate of Lychnid.

The life of St. Erasmus (Popovich, 1975, 6: 47-8; Glumac, 1979, 21: 83-4; Meloski, 1988: 69-80; Rahnen, 1959, 3: 955; E. C. 1952, 13: 509) is preserved in four distinct hagiographical traditions. Two, written in Latin (Bratoz, 1990: 3-6; Meloski, 1987: 69-80; Vesely, 1988: 53-67; Vesely, 1980: 681-690; Engels, 1956: 16-33), date to the 6th(?) and 11th century, while the other two were written in Greek (Bratoz, 1990: 3-6; Meloski, 1988: 69-80; Meloski, 1996; Halkin, 1983: 5-17), and are dated to the 9th and the 18th centuries. The memory of St. Erasmus is further preserved in the letters of Pope Gregorius the Great (Vesely, 1988: 53-67), and in the martyriologies of Rabanus and Addo (Meloski, 1988: 69-71; Bratoz, 1990: 6-7). Within a Medieval Slavic ambient, we find mention of St. Erasmus in an 11th century evangelic scripture and a 15th century sinaxiar (Meloski, 1996; Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 89-116), both related to the Archepiscopate of Ochrid and its literary

tradition. We cannot provide an in-depth analysis of the various hagiographical traditions that treat the life and deeds of St. Erasmus. A critical examination of the medieval literary traditions pertaining to his cult has yet to be undertaken, and such an effort would require a separate study (Vesely, 1988: 53-67; Vesely, 1980: 681-690; Meloski, 1996: 25-28). At present, we may only consider those details about St. Erasmus, which bear some relevance for the formation and the subsequent developments of the local cultic traditions of Lychnid. In other words, the principal interest in the hagiographic documents is as potential historical sources, containing references to certain geographical localities or to historical contexts. As we shall see, the information provided is often vague and contradictory, and for this reason it is particularly important to keep in mind the provenience of each of these sources.

Contradictions, especially with regards to toponyms, are of especial interest here, as the “core” of the legend will contribute little, because it is a narrative very much like the rest of this type of literature. In general however, the bi-partite structure of the legend apparent in all of the cited variations should be stressed (Bratoz, 1990: 6-7; Meloski, 1988: 69-71). The first half of the hagiography is located in Antioch, Syria, the native town and bishopric of St. Erasmus, while the second part is placed in the Balkans; the name of the exact locality involved varies, from one account to the other (Bratoz, 1990: 6-7, provides a brief summary).

All the accounts of St. Erasmus life agree that he was born and lived in Antioch, where he reluctantly accepted to lead the ancient Christian community during the reign of Diocletian. Doubtful of the strength of his faith at the onset of the Great Persecution, the young Erasmus retreated to Mount Lebanon, to celebrate Christ through solitude and *askesis*. Upon achieving perfection and full confidence in his faith, Erasmus was urged by the Holy Spirit to return to Antioch. The enlightened

bishop quickly captured the attention of his fellow citizens and the hostile authorities, and was seized, arrested, and brought to trial in front of the Emperor Diocletian in person. The details of the trial are a standard piece of hagiography: a long dialogue devised to derogate and mock the hostile authority in charge (Meloski, 1988: 69-71; Shevchenko, 1990) and a courageous persistence of the saint during a series of most hideous tortures. However, instead of the usual finale, where the Saint is simply executed, in the hagiographies of St. Erasmus, the main character is miraculously saved from Antioch prison, and transported to safety elsewhere. In three accounts, the place where he arrived is in the Balkans: Loukridon in the 9th century Greek version of the hagiography (Halkin, 1983, Meloski, 1988: 69-71; Meloski, 1996: 25-28); Ochrid, in the 11th century Latin version, written by Pope Gelasius II (Engels, 1956: 16-33; Vesely, 1980: 681-690; Vesely, 1988: 53-68); and the “great city of Lychnidos”, in an 18th century collection of hagiographies and liturgies in Greek (Meloski, 1996; Bratoz, 1990: 6-7). The sixth century Latin version (published in the *Acta Sanctorum*, June 3rd; Bratoz, 1990: 6), however, places the arrival of the Antiochene bishop to Italy, to a town called Sidugridum. If we accept the early dating of this anonymous Latin version, the omission of the episode in Ilyricum is certainly significant, for it could indicate that the three other hagiographies represent a later version of the tradition, specifically devised to enhance the saint’s status in the Balkan provinces.

It is important to note that all of the known versions stress the Antiochene origin of St. Erasmus, even the latest, the 18th century text, although it barely mentions the episode of Antioch in few lines (Meloski, 1988: 69-81; Meloski, 1996: 2-28). It was necessary for communities that celebrated St. Erasmus, a martyr “equal to the Apostles” (Vesely, 1988: 53-68; Meloski, 1996: 25-28) in deeds, the founder

of a new ecclesiastic see and their first bishop³⁰, to bestow their patron Saint with a sound provenience. It was appropriate for a saint, *isapostolis*, to have origins in a center like Antioch³¹. However, St. Erasmus' origins could also be a distant echo of the affiliation of early Christian communities in Illyricum with the old Antiochene tradition (Hoddinott, 1963: 18-20; Marin, 1988). The Antiochene episode is absolutely unnecessary for the logical continuation of the hagiographic narrative; it is rather more important as a background detail, as a "historical fact"; indeed, the episode is reduced in such a manner in the 18th century Greek edition. This observation draws further implications considering the formation of the literary traditions that celebrate St. Erasmus, and for the nature of his cult in general. It implies that the later hagiographies may have either been composed in a relatively long process of addition and modification through textual or visual re-enactment among the faithful communities; or more likely, they were a result of a deliberate merging of narratives that treated the lives of two different Saints (Meloski, 1988: 70-71). I believe the latter case is more likely, because the later Latin and Slavic redactions were created in monastic centers with a rich literary tradition, such as Monte Cassino (the hagiography by the later pope Gelasius II; Vesely, 1980: 681-690; Engels, 1956: 16-33), and Ochrid/Lychnid (Meloski, 1988: 69-71; Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 89-100). Pope Gelasius II (1118-1119), the author of the later Latin version, explicitly claimed that his efforts were to reconcile the numerous contradictory accounts given of the life of St. Erasmus (Vesely, 1980: 681-90, Vesely, 1988: 55).

³⁰ Vesely, 1988: 53-68, St. Erasmus was considered to be the first bishop of both Lychnid and Formia.

³¹ St. Peter himself, was allegedly the first bishop of Antioch, before coming to Rome; Honigmann, 1947.

The second part of the hagiographies is concerned with the apostolic mission of St. Erasmus. The charismatic bishop quickly achieved wide spread success and glory, through fervent preaching and miracles: all the legends mention the resurrection of the son of Anastasias, a local nobleman, which was immediately followed by a massive baptism of thousands of people. St. Erasmus became the founder of a new Christian community, but he was also destroying the old cults of Paganism. In most of the legends we find the episode where the saint was seized by the authorities (by Maximian, Diocletian's co-ruler) and forced to bow in front of a monumental statue of Heracles (in the older tradition) or Zeus (in the later Greek version). The outcome was spectacular: pierced by the angry eyes of the saint, the 12 cubit tall statue turned instantly into ashes and dust. A demon appeared instead, a frightening dragon murdering thousands of people. Maximian, scared and ashamed, fled, leaving the people to the mercy of the monster. Thus St. Erasmus was given an excellent opportunity to prove the power and the grace of the true God. Upon defeating the dragon, all of those who witnessed it became Christians, praising St. Erasmus and the Christian god. The old community died, and a new one was created. Such is the basis for the cult of St. Erasmus.

The local Pagan cults were destroyed, but in the time of the Great Persecution, in the medieval hagiographic tradition, the Pagan cults were just a personification of the Imperial cult, the true archenemy of St. Erasmus. Maximian, the worldly incarnation of Heracles, was really the defeated party. St. Erasmus was arrested, brought to a trial, and imprisoned after suffering the standard, unsuccessful series of tortures. But the literary traditions repeat the episode from the events in Antioch: the night before his execution, St. Erasmus was miraculously delivered by the Archangel Michael, and brought to Formia, Campania. Here, he successfully continued his

apostolic mission, but the old, and exhausted preacher died shortly after his arrival – on June the 2nd, 303/305 (Popovich, 1975: 47-8; Glumac, 1979: 83-4; Enciclopedia Catolica 1952: 509).

Thus in a way, the hagiographies “explain” the veneration of the same saintly figure in Italy (Phrimo, Formia) and the Balkans (Lychnid, Ochrid). The basis for Formia’s cult of St. Erasmus is the tradition that guarded and venerated his sacred tomb (Vesely, 1988: 53-68; Vesely, 1980: 681-690), while the cult in Medieval Ochrid was based on a belief that locates St. Erasmus’ missionary activity in the city of Lychnid (the *Passio* of pope Gelasius II, the late Greek edition...). Such a manner of “sharing” the same saintly figure has a nice parallel in the hagiographic traditions of St. Thecla (Dagron, 1978: 31-54), and the case of St. Demetrius (Hoddinott, 1963: 125-128; Vickers, 1974), or of the Fifteen Holy Martyrs of Tiberiopolis (Aleksova, 1995: 37-42), are further related examples. In all of these instances the hagiographies provided a sort of “historical” justification for the existent cultic traditions, relating certain locations with some of the known events from the life of the saint, or creating entirely new episodes³².

But when and where was St. Erasmus of Antioch actually active? If there were no present traces of the traditions that venerate St. Erasmus in modern Formia and Ochrid, it would have been very difficult to infer this solely from the known hagiographic traditions. Apart from the 18th century Greek edition (Meloski, 1996: 20-28, Bratoz, 1990: 7-8), all the versions locate St. Erasmus’ death in Formia, ancient Phrimo. The Orthodox Church however (Popovich, 1975: 47-48), accepted

³² Post-humus partitions of the saintly corps, thefts and smuggling of saintly relics, also played a prominent role in the implantation of martyr’s cults in Early Christianity. We recall the precedents of St. Babylas Kaoussie, The Holy Apostles of Constantinople, St. Symeon the Stylite, Grabar, 1946, Curiously, such incidents often became a constitutive element of the later hagiographical traditions Geary, 1990, gives numerous examples from 11-12th century Western Europe.

Hermeleia, as the place where the old missionary has retreated in a cave and passed away. Indeed, the 18th century version of the Life of St. Erasmus actually uses the toponym *Hermeleia*, as not only a place where St. Erasmus died, but also as a place where he conducted his apostolic mission³³. This place has not otherwise been attested in historical sources, but it is preserved in the popular tradition of Medieval Ochrid as a “suburb” of the ancient city (Glumac, 1979: 83-4; Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 89-99. It is interesting to note an oral legend recorded in the 19th century, which claims that, the forts of Medieval Lychnid were made of spoils from the deserted town of *Hermeleia* (Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 90, 99)³⁴.

Some 4-5 kilometers to the northwest of Ochrid, is the medieval monastic complex of St. Erasmus and the foundations of a Late Antique *basilica*. Salvage excavations (Malenko, 1976: 219-235; Malenko, 1977: 125-141) have revealed traces of a settlement, with phases dating back to the 4th century BC in the immediate environs of the medieval complex. Is this the *Hermeleia* of the late hagiographical tradition (Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 89-99)? Firm evidence for such identification is lacking, and it is far from likely that it will appear in the future. It would be more satisfactory to simply view this tradition as a later account, explaining the existence of the ancient settlement near the medieval city. Otherwise we would have to assume some lost, older sources that knew the toponym *Hermeleia*, for this name does not appear in the older versions of the Life of St. Erasmus. All the other sources agree that St. Erasmus died in Formia³⁵.

³³ “en te Hermelia tes Acridon”; Meloski, 1996: 19; presumably the same place is referred to in an earlier passage: “the city of Hermopulos, held by Maximian”, 1996: 19.

³⁴ The authors have related this event with some of the sieges of ancient Lychnid during the late fourth, fifth and the sixth century, and the subsequent transference of *Hermeleia*’s cults to Ochrid.

³⁵ The oldest document is a letter (592) from Pope Gregorius the Great, addressed to the bishop of Formia; Vesely, 1988: 54-55; Meloski, 1988: 70.

The occurrence of the city of Lychnid as the center where the mission of St. Erasmus was conducted is even less clear in the written sources (Bratoz, 1990: 7). Only Pope Gelasius' *Passio* (Engels, 1956: 16-33, Vesely, 1988: 53-67) and the 18th century Greek version (Meloski, 1996: 19-28; Meloski, 1988: 69-80), make an explicit mention of the city of Achrida or Lychnid. The earlier Greek version (Halkin, 1983: 5-17) uses the toponym Loukridon, instead of Lychnid. Most researchers see a distorted form of the name Lychnid in this toponym (Meloski, 1988: 70; following Papazoglu, 1985: 66-8), but there is also the possibility that it referred to a place called Lokrol, in south Italy, which actually seems equally plausible, as the older Greek hagiography was composed in this Hellenized part of the Italian peninsula (Halkin, 1983: 5-17; Bratoz, 1990: 7). As mentioned, the early Latin version (*Acta Sanctorum, Junii* 2nd) explicitly situates St. Erasmus' activity in Italy, in a place called *Sidugridum*, a toponym still not identified on the ground. But the very same tradition locates the trial under Maximian, and the episode in the temple of Zeus/Heracles, in "the city of *Sirmitanam*" (Bratoz, 1990: 7), a toponym most comfortably identified with Sirmium, the early see of the Illyrian prefecture (Vesely, 1988: 56-7)³⁶. The earlier Greek legend (Meloski, 1988: 77-8; Halkin, 1983: 13-14) uses a very similar toponym – *Sourmitana* – for this episode, and thus gives more weight to the traditions locating St Erasmus' mission in Illyricum. Later traditions have also placed these events of the hagiography in ancient Illyricum: the *Passio* by Pope Gelasius II (Vesely, 1980: 681-690; Vesely, 1988: 53-69; Engels, 1956: 143-44) locates these events *apud Sirme in finibus Dalmatinia*; in the 18th

³⁶ This is problematic since the author of the legend has located *Sirmitanam* four days away from Lychnid. In reality Sirmium is certainly much further. Papazoglu, 1957: 196-197, and Papazoglu, 1985: 86, sees a distorted form of a place, a station perhaps, called Sarnus near Lychnidus and on the Via Egnatia, in the toponym of *Sirmitanam*.

century Greek version (Meloski, 1996: 21-24; Bratoz, 1990), the trial under Maximian took place in the city of Lychnid.

Toponyms mentioned in the aftermath of the trial under Maximian also favor the Late Antique Balkans for the later events in the Life of St. Erasmus. Both the earlier Greek version (Halkin, 1983: 5-17; Meloski, 1988: 69-80), and the Passio of Pope Gelasius II (Engels, 1956: 142-3; Vesely, 1988: 53-67; Vesely, 1980: 681-690), report that the Archangel Michael delivered the saint to Dyrrhachion, the *metropolis* of Epirus Nova, from where he embarked for Campania. The older Latin version takes St. Erasmus first to the island of Curratium (modern Krk near the west coast of Greece), and then to Formia. It should be noted that all of these literary traditions mention St. Erasmus' travel by boat over the Adriatic on his way to Campania, a fact that became curiously absorbed by the later practices of veneration of this saintly figure. The anchor will become the attribute of St. Erasmus in the West: in coastal sites the saint was celebrated as a patron of the sailors, while inland, the anchor was seen as a symbol of the saintly intestines, and he was celebrated as a deliverer from abdominal pains, difficult pregnancies and epidemics (Meloski, 1996: 27-8, after Rahnen, 1959: 955)³⁷. The ruins of the Late Antique basilica of St. Erasmus near ancient Lychnid are also associated with this latter aspect of the saintly cult: the local popular tradition has attributed to St. Erasmus and the alleged site of his missionary activity, both healing and apotropaic proprieties.

It is certainly impossible and probably unimportant to retrieve all the "exact" locations through which the much-traveled saint passed, but it was necessary to demonstrate the literary grounds upon which the later cultic tradition near ancient Lychnid developed. We have seen that all but one of the medieval hagiographies

firmly established the rights of Formia to the tomb of St. Erasmus. This cultic tradition became widespread in the West towards the end of the 9th and the early 10th century. After a destructive inroad of the Saracens, the relics were removed, and some were deposited in the cathedral of Gaeta. Parts of the saint's body were being delivered to other monasteries that paid homage to St. Erasmus (Vesely, 1980: 681-690; E. C. 1952: 470-71, after the *Passio* of Pope Gelasius II). Yet, although the sacred relics were removed, the literary tradition, and the architectural settings, have preserved the memory of the saint's authentic tomb: at Formia, the site was invested with sanctity for ever, and the veneration of Erasmus' sacred relics was transformed into a veneration of his sacred place³⁸.

In a way, the cultic tradition of Medieval Ochrid faced a similar difficulty: a lack of "material evidence", and sacred relics, on which the pious practices of saintly veneration were normally focused. The foundations of the cult rested upon a vague memory of St. Erasmus' missionary activity in Lychnid, and its surrounding. Was this a memory that managed to survive the end of Antiquity and appear in the medieval hagiographical traditions, or a memory that was invented and/or imposed by the medieval ecclesiastic institutions? It is impossible to say. Hagiographies were, among other things, important elements of ecclesiastic historiography in the Middle Age, but we must not discount the possibility of some degree of ethnic and cultural continuity in Ancient Lychnid, from antiquity and throughout the Middle Age³⁹. St. Erasmus was celebrated as the founder of the first Christian community in ancient

³⁷ For St. Erasmus as the patron of sailors, Vesely, 1980: 681-690, where the author describes the celebration of the anniversary of the Saint's death in Formia.

³⁸ Grabar, 1946, I, was the first to make an explicit differentiation of these concepts.

³⁹ This conjecture is supported in Meloski, 1988: 69-80; Meloski, 1996: 25-28; Glumac, 1979: 83-4; Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 89-116; Vesely, 1980: 681-690; and elsewhere. As mentioned earlier, there is very little information about the centuries between the Slavic invasion and the formation of the first Slavic Christian community in Ochrid. We will face the same problem when dealing with the stratigraphy of the site near Ochrid.

Lychnid; the faithful and the local church successfully established a sacred place, a site that was venerated as the alleged place of St. Erasmus' life and deeds. But this was not sufficient, and the late medieval version of St. Erasmus' Life brought the old missionary back to Lychnid, to *Hermeleia*, where he spent the last days of his earthly life (Meloski, 1996: 24). It was an appropriate way to account for the small cave chapel, near the Late Antique basilica, where the local people have celebrated the saint for centuries. More to the point, ancient Lychnid /medieval and modern Ochrid, is the only center in the Balkans that has preserved the memory of the saint – in toponyms, in oral traditions, art and architecture. The following chapter will deal with the material testimonies for the formation and the development of this religious tradition in the region of Lychnid.

CHAPTER IV

THE CULTIC CENTER OF SAINT ERASMUS NEAR LYCHNID: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

In 1975, salvage excavations in the small plain to the northwest of modern Ochrid yielded the remains of a large Early Christian basilica, very close to a medieval monastic chapel dedicated to St. Erasmus. It featured well-preserved mosaic floors, and a fairly large cemetery with interments, both within and outside the perimeter of the building. The excavator was quick to assign the name of the medieval chapel to the newly discovered basilica (Malenko, 1976: 219-235), but only in a later study (Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 89-106) did he actually consider the possibility that this sacral monument might have been the spring of one of the oldest Christian cultic traditions in the region. Unfortunately, there have been no subsequent publications on this site, and in the excavation reports the author pays meager attention to elements that may have reflected the cultic significance of the church. In this chapter a detailed description of the monument will be provided, with a special emphasis on those architectonic and decorative features that may have conveyed its cultic character. At present, there is little to be seen on the site of the basilica, so I will have to rely on the original excavation reports, and compare the

architectonic details of this monument with the better studied examples of Early Christian sanctuaries from this region.

4.1 Geographical position

The architectonic setting that enshrines the place where St. Erasmus' missionary activity took place is situated five kilometers to the north-west of the citadel of Ancient Lychnid, and a mere kilometer and a half from the north shore of the Lake of Lychnid (fig. 3). It consists of a small, late medieval monastic complex, built over an earlier cave chapel, with the Early Christian *basilica*, some 200 meters to the southeast (for the cave church: Grozdanov, 1983: 138-145; for the early Christian *basilica*: Malenko, 1976: 219-235; Malenko, 1977: 125-141; Malenko, 1977: 45-61, a summary of the interim reports in French; Aleksova, 1995: 189-90; A.K.M. 1996: 247-8). The complex is set into the rocky, southern slope of a hill, which has appropriated the name of St. Erasmus, but is also known as "Gabavski Rid" (Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 89-116; Malenko, 1988: 3-22; and in A. K. M. 1996: 247-8, for local topography). Both the southern and the western slopes of the hill, sharply drop towards Lake Ochrid, while to the east, it gently descends to the plain of Lychnid. To the north, from its highest level, some 875 meters above the monastic complex, it continues to ascend into the neighboring mountain ranges. Thus the hill of St. Erasmus appears as a significant geographical barrier that separates the plain of Lychnid and its coast from the neighboring regions to the west and to the northwest. If we accept the identification of ancient Lychnid with modern and Medieval Ochrid (Papazoglu, 1957: 221-230; Papazoglu, 1985: 64-69, contra Lisichar, 1953: 241-263), than it is very likely that a section of the *Via Egnatia* passed just under the

southern slope of the hill, on the same route as the modern highway, leading north and west to the modern Albanian border: as already observed, there are problems regarding the identification of Ancient toponyms and stations along the Egnatian road. The strategic importance of this natural feature is attested by the presence of a Hellenistic stronghold near the summit of the hill (Unverzagt, 1954: 19-31; A.K.M. 1996: 247-248), and other archaeological traces in the narrow plain to the south and to the southeast of the hill (Malenko, 1976: 219-221; Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 89-99). None of these settlements have been systematically explored, and it is very probable that archaeological excavation would yield important information related not only to the problems of tracing the section of the Egnatian road, but also to the earliest history of the later monastic complex of St. Erasmus.

4.2 The Early Christian basilica of St. Erasmus

It is a common feature in the lands of the ancient prefecture of Illyricum to have medieval ecclesiastic complexes erected over, or in the near vicinity of Early Christian basilicas (Aleksova, 1995; Koco, 1961: 25-37; Korach, 1969: 209-224; Hodinott, 1963). Late Antique phases have been attested under the foundations of many churches built after the re-Christianization of the Balkans during the ninth and the early tenth century. This situation either indicates a certain degree of cultural continuity of Late Antique traditions into the period of the early Middle Age, or a strong awareness on the part of the new Christian communities for the sacral topography of their predecessors. The latter possibility emphasizes an important aspect of sacred architecture in Christian cultures: a church building is often located

at a place already infected with holiness. In the case of the Medieval Balkans, the centers of the newly baptized communities were often based on the foundations left by their Late Antique predecessors, and these in turn, have often sought to relate the formation of their community with significant events and figures from the pre-Constantinian history of the Church⁴⁰.

The monastic complex of St. Erasmus was no exception. Even before the salvage excavations took place in the mid 1970's, there were suggestions that the medieval church was located near an ancient church related to the cult of this saint (Glumac, 1979: 83-4; Malenko, 1976: 219-220). The campaigns of 1974-75 (Malenko, 1976: 219-235; Malenko, 1977: 125-141; Malenko, 1977: 45-51, for a summary in French) revealed the foundations of a large three-aisled early Christian *basilica*, some 200 meters to the southeast of the medieval chapel. Unfortunately, the results have only been published in a summarily fashion⁴¹.

In its layout, this *basilica* is a standard representative of the basilical form in the region of the Ochrid Lake, during the fifth century (Malenko, 1988: 3-22; Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1985: 145-160; Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1986: 116-119; Koco, 1961: 27-35) (fig.4); that is, a three aisled *basilica* with a rounded apse, and a tripartite *narthex* with a large irregular *atrium* on the west. When compared to other contemporary examples, however, the church has rather monumental dimensions: it measures approximately 54 meters in length (from the west wall of the atrium to the apex of the apse), and 24 meters at its widest point (the *narthex* with the annexes). Almost half of this length is taken up by the *atrium*. (Fig.4, 5) Roughly square in

⁴⁰ The extra muros *basilica* of Philippi built on the site where St. Paul delivers his first sermon in Europe for instance, Hoddinott, 1963: 99-106; Lemerle, 1945. In fact this continuity in the sacred topography of the Balkans was traced back to Pagan sanctuaries in a several instances – Krautheimer, 1986: 117-124.

form, it consists of a rectangular central court, with colonnaded porches to the north and south, and a series of three rectangular units, positioned on the west-east axis, attached to the northern porch (fig.6). These northern annexes are not repeated on the south, so that the arrangement is apparently asymmetrical. The impression is further strengthened by the fact that the entire *atrium* was positioned almost five meters to the south of the longitudinal axis of the church-proper, resulting in an asymmetrical arrangements of the entrances. The gross irregularities in the planning of the *atrium* probably resulted from the rough character of the terrain. This represents an interesting, and regionally recurrent insistence on possessing spacious and complex *atria*, regardless of the configuration of the terrain (Malenko, 1988: 6-7; Orlandos, 1952, 1: 94-110, tables: 100-101).

That said, during a careful examination of the architectonic remains of the site, traces were noted of a wall, some 2, 2.5 meters, north of the *atrium*, which is not mentioned in the interim excavation reports. These traces are in fact clearly visible on one of the few photographs from the excavation campaign, but the author has failed to provide a comment on them (Malenko, 1977: fig. 1). As this wall runs in a southeast direction for some 6.5 meters, disregarding the general layout of the *basilica*, it is safe to conclude that it was not an original element of the church building. It may indicate later, post-Antique architectonic adaptations, which are very frequent in the region at the end of Antiquity⁴².

The *atrium* has a single entrance in the west wall, from where one could proceed into the northern porch. The central entrance to the court of the atrium is about two meters to the south of the outer door. There are traces of walling, however, which

⁴¹ Except for the excavation reports cited above, the object is discussed in Malenko, 1988: 3-22; Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 89-116. Shonje, 1981: 265-76, analyses the mosaics.

runs continuously between the western perimeter of the *atrium* and the western limit of the court, and in effect, blocks access to the main entrance of the court. This is certainly the result of later modifications (Malenko, 1977: 125-129). Immediately to the left side of the outer door of the church, there are two super-imposed stone slabs, the remains of a stairway (fig.7). Where they could have led to is unclear, as it is impossible to reconstruct the super-structure of the west façade of the *atrium* on the basis of the present material⁴³. (Fig.8) There is, however, some evidence - the thickness of the wall, the large masonry - to claim at least one upper story over the northern annexes of the *atrium* (fig.6) (Malenko, 1977: 125). If this is correct, than the supposed stairway must have lead to the upper floors of the northern annexes of the *atrium*. In that case, the *basilica* of St. Erasmus would be a unique instance in this region of a church with multistoried annexes. These architectonic units may either indicate lodgings for pilgrims, or alternately monastic chambers, as they are often utilized in the modern monasteries of the region⁴⁴. At ground floor, the northern annexes are interlinked with elaborate entrances, and also communicate with the northern porch: when discussing the building phases of the church, the possibility will be considered that the two western annexes were added at a slightly later date. The two perpendicular walls that cut off the northeastern corner of the middle annex are definitely part of such later modifications.

The southern porch of the *atrium* initially corresponded to the arrangements in the north. A narrow doorway linked the L-shaped porch with the ill-defined space following the western entrance of the *atrium*. In position, it corresponds to the

⁴² Tzarichin Grad - Petkovich, and Kondich, 1977; and Stobi - Kitzinger, 1943: 81-163; Zisi-Mano, 1973: 185-225, are some well documented examples.

⁴³ Mikulchik, 1999: 324; has given an axiometric reconstruction of the object, but gives no explanation; as we shall see the remains are too few to conjecture anything about the upper parties of the church.

entrance of the westernmost annex to the north. The western half of this porch, however, is separated by a wall from the central court. Unlike the northern porch, where we have a continuous row of five piers, there are only three piers separating the eastern half of the south porch from the court. Furthermore, while the north porch communicates with the *narthex* of the church through an elaborate doorway, there are no traces of an entrance in the eastern wall of the south porch. These facts, along with the blocking of the access to the porch and the central entrance of the court, contribute to the awkward appearance of this unit. Functionally it became a “useless” blind corridor.

These later modifications of the *atrium* have also isolated the central court: its only entrance became inaccessible. Initially, however, it was through this court that one reached the main entrance of the *narthex*. A pair of large, *antae*-like buttresses (there were slight traces of a similar arrangements of the entrance of the *atrium*) flanks the triple flight of stairs that ascended to the threshold of the main entrance. Considering the more than two meters wide space between the buttresses, it is very likely that the *narthex* was originally entered through a two-winged door. Despite the fact that this monumental entrance was positioned in the northeast angle of the court, it remained off the main axis of the church. Finally, in the middle of the court there was a small circular well, barely a meter in diameter, built of roughly shaped stones, with some brick: parallels for such arrangements in the atrium are numerous in the surrounding region⁴⁵. *Atria* are of course, a standard element of Early Christian architecture throughout the Balkan Peninsula (Petrovich-Spremo, 1971; Hoddinott, 1963, Krautheimer, 1986: 114-129). Indeed, for closer formal parallels we do not

⁴⁴ Mango, 1978; Pena, 1997, have similarly reconstructed contemporary monasteries from Syria.

need to look any further than to Lychnid and its immediate environs (Malenko, 1988: 3-22; Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1986: 116-121; Koco, 1961: 27-35). The *narthex* is likewise very much a standard feature: a central narrow rectangular unit, with two square, lateral chambers that project beyond the perimeter of the church⁴⁶. The central rectangle gives the standard triple access to the *naos* with a doorway for each aisle, and entrances to the lateral chambers⁴⁷.

The floor of the *narthex* (including the lateral chambers) was covered with mosaics, which have attracted particular attention (Malenko, 1977: 125-141; Malenko, 1976: 219-231; Shonje, 1981: 265-276; for a stylistic and iconographical analysis). Close parallels with regards to motives and style are to be found in the basilicas of Stobi and Heraclea Lyncestis (Shonje, 1981: 268)⁴⁸ (fig.9). The recurring motif of the geometrical rosette has found close parallels among the few extant mosaics in secular buildings dated to the Late Republican and Augustan periods on the North Adriatic coast, at Parenzium – Poreč, Aquiljea, and in Spalatum, in the Diocletian palace (Shonje, 1981: 268-9)⁴⁹. The same motif appears frequently on the floors in the ecclesiastic complexes in these same provinces of the Illyrian prefecture, from the second half of the fifth century. Similar dates are given for the mosaics in Stobi (Kolarik, and Petrovski, 1976: 65-106), and Heraclea Lyncestis (Cvetkovich-Tomashevich, 1978: 39-46). Nevertheless many researchers seem to have accepted

⁴⁵ The polyconchal church on the acropolis of nearby Lychnid, or the basilica of Studencheshtie are some well-documented examples; Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1985: 146-162; also in Orlandos, 1952: 110-124.

⁴⁶ Hoddinott, 1963: 39-45; has related this three-partite arrangements in the *basilicae* of Illyricum with the narthexes of Anatolian churches! Plans of *narthexes* in some of the Early Christian monuments in Greece are given in Orlandos, 1952: 132-3.

⁴⁷ Numerous studies have treated the problem of the exact function of the latter Strichevich, 1958/9: 59-65; Babich, 1969; also in Dyggve, 1951: 33-4; Lemerle, 1945: 340-3. We cannot afford to repeat their arguments at this point

⁴⁸ Curiously the author does not compare them to the neighboring examples: the Polyconchal church in Lychnidos, the basilicas at Oktisi and Studencheshtie. The latter two are illustrated in Hoddinott, 1963: 228-234.

⁴⁹ Ultimately the author assigned eastern, Hellenistic provenience to this geometrical pattern.

the claim that this traditional motif first appeared on the mosaics of St. Erasmus' church near Lychnid (Malenko, 1988: 3-22; Aleksova, 1995: 189-190)!

This thesis is apparently ill founded. Its author dates the *narthex* mosaic in the late fourth/early fifth century, on the assumption that the main building phase of the church dates to this period. The only particular reason given for this dating is the dedication of the Church (Shonje, 1981: 268-9). Thus, the only firm, independent evidence for the date of the building is simply ignored. Further, even more erroneous implication is drawn that the motifs on the St. Erasmus mosaics have influenced mosaic decoration in Istria, Panonia and the Adriatic coast in general (1981: 274-275). We need only remark that this idea contradicts the evidence of more accurately dated mosaics in the secular buildings of this region (1981: 269-273). In addition, the date of the mosaic floors and the date of the foundation of the church need not be identical, if likely: the excavators admit that there was no probing underneath the floors of the building (Malenko, 1988: 6-7).

The confinement of mosaic pavement to the *narthex*, and its lateral chambers, and the central nave of the church proper, is a common feature in other monuments of the basilical form among the ecclesiastic places around modern Ochrid (Koco, 1961: 27-35; Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1985: 145-162; Hoddinott, 1963: 228-234). There was an interesting suggestion that the scheme of marking the central nave, and the *narthex* and its chambers with mosaic floors, while the lateral aisles were floored with diagonally arranged bricks, indicates the inferior status of the latter, related to their role in the Early Christian liturgy of the region (Koco, 1961: 31-35). D. Koco has suggested that these units of the church may have been reserved for a special category of catechumens called "*competentes*", who were not required to leave the

main hall during the celebration of the Eucharist⁵⁰. This suggestion is far from proved, as aisles with mosaic pavements have been observed in the churches of neighboring Macedonia Prima and Salutaris/Secunda, and in the case of St. Erasmus, the idea of social segregation reflected in the interior organization of the church is not confirmed by elements such as parapets between the columns flanking the nave, or galleries above the aisles. But, if we take the position of the mosaic decoration as signifying social stratification in the local Christian community, than logically (Mango, 1978: 41-3), we should exclude the possibility that St. Erasmus' *basilica* was a monastic church.

Attached to the east wall of the southern chamber and running along the south wall of the church, is a baptistery, square in plan and almost of the same size as the southern annex. The corridor through which the neophytes entered the church was also formed very expediently: the architect simply built a wall parallel to the southern perimeter of the church. This is a relatively modest solution when compared to some notable arrangements of baptismal complexes in the immediate surroundings: such as the polychonchal church of Lychnid, or that on the small peninsula of Lin, on Albanian territory (Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1985: 145-162; for a general typology of Early Christian baptisteries see Khatchatrian, 1982). They are also common for basilical churches in other centers of the same region (Malenko, 1988: 3-22; Koco, 1961: 27-35; Hoddinott, 1963: 228-234). The circle-in-square form of the baptistery proper is in fact noted in some of the oldest churches in ancient Illyricum: Epidaurus' 4th century *basilica* (Khatchatrian, 1982: 70), and in Tessalian Thebes (Bitrakova-Grozdanova, and Pupaleski, 1989: 30; after Sotteriu, 1929: 42). More surprising is the feature where the corridor leading from the

⁵⁰ Unfortunately no reference is given for these hierarchical concepts; *catechumens competentes*

baptistery enters the south nave at a relatively distant point, just before the line of the chancel screen. The appearance of the baptistery to the east of the southern chamber also indicates the function of the latter: it was the *catechumenum*, the place where candidates were given the last instructions before baptism⁵¹.

We have already mentioned some elements of the *naos* of the church while discussing the mosaic floors. As in many other aspects, the *basilica* of St. Erasmus features an organization of the interior common for its geographical and temporal provenience⁵². Seven pairs of piers, of brick and mortar, standing on a massive stylobate, divide the interior in a central nave and two lateral aisles: according to the excavator they carried arches built from local tuff (Malenko, 1977: 128). As noted above, the division is highlighted in the paving of the floors: mosaic fields in the nave, and bricks ordered in parallel lines in the aisles. The lower parts of the perimeter walls were plastered: traces of frescoes were noted on the north and the south wall, as well as in the *narthex* (Malenko, 1988: 7). There are no traces that would indicate the presence of galleries over the lateral aisles. This is not surprising considering the evidence of other contemporary monuments in the surroundings, but later surveys of the *basilica* have thrown some doubt over this assumption, for they yielded fragments of small quatrefoil Corinthian capitals in the area of the *atrium*. The initial reconstruction of the interior is also problematic, as the excavation reports fail to mention or illustrate the elements that comprised the nave arcades⁵³.

appear in "Egeria's Travels" as advanced candidates for baptism-Wilkinson, J. 1971.

⁵¹ The researchers: Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1985: 145-162; Malenko, 1988: 3-22; follow E. Dyggve thesis on this question, and the latter's is based on researches done in ancient Salona: Dyggve, 1951; Egger, and Dyggve, 1939.

⁵² We must note though, that the excavator: Malenko, 1976: 219-235; Malenko, 1977: 125-141; makes no efforts in reconstructing the upper parties of the church.

⁵³ Recently, Lilchik, 2002: 685; has suggested piers instead of built "columns"; in that case the fragments of the small Corinthian capitals could indeed come from a gallery level.

The north and the south stylobate have on their sides facing the nave, a thirty centimeter wide foundation, built of broken stones, bonded with limestone mortar (Malenko, 1976: 229-230). This element was not commented upon in the reports, but the walling is wide enough to have the base of a bench. Such a feature appears in funerary chapels in Salona's *necropoleis* (Marin, 1988; Dyggve, 1951). Among *basilicae* in Greece or the Balkans, benches usually appear along the perimeter wall or along the aisle side of the heavy stylobate; usually the northern side, as at Tassos or Philippi extra-muros (Hoddinott, 1963: 89-106), but such elements are rare in the nearer vicinity of Lychnid.

The eastern end of the northern aisle was clearly conceived of as a separate unit. Its floor was raised for two steps (c.a. 0.50 m.), which make for a wide and notable entrance. Due to our ignorance of how the chancel screen appeared, we have no clue to its relation with the presbytery, which would contribute very much to understanding the character of the liturgical practices and, indirectly, the dating of the church⁵⁴. It certainly communicated with the exterior, through a narrow exit in the eastern perimeter wall of the church, as in some nearby examples such as the polyconchal church of Lychnid (Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1985: 145-157) and *basilica* D in Heraclea Linkestis (Maneva, 1989: 51-63). P. Lemerle has interpreted this entrance in the eastern walls of the *basilicae* in Philippi as being reserved for the clergy during the conduct of the liturgy, while the one in the south aisle was for the steward of the sanctuary (1945: 371-374). Where could this doorway lead to in this case? From the northeast angle of the *basilica*, one can trace a straight wall running eastwards for almost two and a half meters. The masonry consists of roughly shaped

⁵⁴ This problem has been studied by Strichevich, 1958-9: 54-61; Hoddinott, 1963: 33-45; for the emergence of the tripartite sanctuary in Early Christian sanctuaries, see Lemerle, 1945 and Babich, 1969.

stones bonded with mud, which according to the researcher, belongs to the last building phase of the complex (Malenko, 1988: 6-7; Malenko, 1977: 45-51). (Fig. 4-5) It is contemporary with a pair of walls, which join just a few meters to the southeast of the apse, and to the later modifications in the interior of the church. These unrelated constructions do not reveal any articulate pattern, which could explain the role of the northeastern entrance. Churches with architectural units behind the eastern walls of the aisles are a foreign trait in the early Christian architecture of the Balkans or Greece⁵⁵. If we accept the proposed phasing of the building, it would be reasonable to treat this as a later intervention, just as with the unreported wall to the north of the atrium, mentioned above, and the modification of the *atrium* chambers. There is no evidence for a corresponding passage in the eastern wall of the south aisle, as was the case in the *basilicae* of Philippi (Lemerle, 1945: 372-3).

A particularly difficult problem is posed by the numerous interments mainly concentrated in the nave and the *narthex* (Malenko, 1977: 125-127)⁵⁶ (fig. 10). When was this *necropolis* formed and how did it relate to the *basilica*? The excavators were inconclusive, though the point was made (1976: 232-3; 1977: 125-6) that most of the graves are not properly oriented, and lack any substantial architectonic setting. Most of the graves cut the mosaic, and the inner foundation walls, parallel to the outer limits of the church, and were surrounded by a row of stones. Some skeletons were simply deposited on the church floor, or were buried in older tombs. Sufficient care was taken, however, not to disturb the central portion of the presbytery and the crypt,

⁵⁵ Aleksova, 1995: 123-4 gives a rare example in a *basilica* near Stobi. As we shall see eastern compartments play important role in the fifth century sacral architecture in southeast Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt

a sign that the sacred spot was remembered and deferred. The few finds that accompanied the burials - bronze *fibulae*, earrings and necklaces, and fragments of pottery – have not been properly studied (fig. 11). They were broadly dated to the “Early Middle Ages” or to “the period of the existence of the church”(1976: 234)⁵⁷. Thus, it remains uncertain whether they all date after the building had lost its initial function, or some were contemporary with the use of the church. There are close parallels for both these cases; of cemeteries formed around ancient *basilicae* in the decades following the end of Antiquity in the Balkans (Aleksova, 1989: 71-3), and for funerary *basilicae*, usually built outside the city walls (Snively, 1983: 118-121; Maneva, 1988: 51-59; Aleksova, 1995)⁵⁸.

Nothing remains of the frontal parts of the chancel screen. The barely traceable negative of its foundations, and the evidence from better-documented examples from the neighboring provinces⁵⁹, suggest that the sanctuary occupied almost a third of the length of the nave. It presumably had the standard layout, the form of the Greek letter “pi”(Sodini, 1984: 441-4), for the lateral foundations of the chancel screen continue to run eastwards on the same line as the stylobate in the nave, thus separating the altar space from the eastern ends of the aisles. The builders broke the line of the nave stylobate, just after the last pair of piers, to enable communication between the aisles and the nave. This is also the only way linking the altar with the northeastern chamber of the church.

⁵⁶ The author believed that the necropolis extends beyond the western perimeter of the basilica, no trenches were dug in this area, and the author failed to publish the material excavated from the graves; 1976: 232-234.

⁵⁷ Aleksova, 1995: 189-90 has attributed them to the period of the Barbarian invasions, more specifically to some of the invading populations that settled around the Ochrid basin.

⁵⁸ Outside Illyricum cemetery churches are common in Italy and North Africa; Krautheimer, 1986: 51-56.

⁵⁹ Aleksova, 1985: 43-61; Wiseman (ed), 1976, 1981, for Stobi; Hoddinott, 1963: 158-161, for Thessalonica; Maneva, 1989: 51-63, for Heraclea Lyncestis; also Sodini, 1984: 439-450, and Orlandos, 1954, 2: 509-538, for the shape of chancel screens in Illyricum, in general.

We are unfortunately deprived of the possibility to get a closer perspective on the arrangements in the chancel screen, its height and architectonic elements – parapets or columns – or the details of the *soleum*⁶⁰. This is a particular misfortune, as these elements obviously enclose the essential part of the Christian sanctuary, and may give important indications for the potential liturgical practices that utilized this unit of the interior, and possibly, liturgical details associated with the Early Christian cult. The excavation reports mention numerous decorative, architectural elements, such as window mullions, capitals, and parapet slabs decorated with relief (Malenko, 1976: 229-230; Malenko, 1988: 6-7) (fig.12), but their position is not indicated, and there are no detailed descriptions or photographs of these. Better-preserved examples from neighboring churches are usually comprised of carved screen slabs, with superimposed colonnettes carrying an architrave⁶¹. We should not necessarily adopt such a solution here, however, since these are usually known from the large city *basilicae*, often the Episcopal centers. Contemporary churches from the immediate surroundings of St. Erasmus display much humbler solutions (Bitrakova-Grozdanova, and Pupalevski, 1989: 31; Hoddinott, 1963: 183-185; Koco, 1961: 27-35).

To the east, the apse begins, some two meters from the point where the foundations of the altar screen reached the eastern limit of the aisles. It has the semi-circular form, typical of early Christian *basilicae* in the Balkan Peninsula and Greece, in contrast to the polygonal shape in Constantinople (Krautheimer, 1986: 117-129; Sotteriu, 1929: 217-221), during the late fourth and throughout the fifth

⁶⁰ Lilchik, 2002: 677-685, has made a catalogue of the documented architectonic plastics from the *basilica*; among these a small colonnette, with a spherical ending at the top is all that can be related with the arrangements of the chancel screen; 2002: fig. VII, 61-8.

⁶¹ Aleksova, 1975: 29-46, for Stobi's Episcopal basilica; Aleksova, 1989 for neighboring Bargala; Hoddinott, 1963: 155-58, gives examples from Thessalonica; Lemerle, 1945; for Philippi.

century. Two massive window mullions were found by the outer wall of the apse, indicating arched windows, probably three in all (Lilchik, 2002: 683). The floor of the apse is visibly raised in relation to the *presbyterium*. Once it strongly emphasized the place for the clergy, the *synthronon* (Malenko, 1977: 127-8; Malenko, 1988: 7). Its massive substructure was not contiguous with the inner face of the apse as is usual, but stood independent, one meter apart from the wall. Parallels exist for this arrangement in the cemetery *basilicae* in Stobi (Aleksova, 1995: 118-19; Snively, 1983: 119-121).

Besides traces of stairs and the large sub – structure of the *synthronos*, there are no other extant elements of the furniture of St. Erasmus *basilica*. Traces of an *ambo*, or *ciborium*, or liturgical vessels, were not reported. However, there is some information for a detail of a major interest regarding this study (Malenko, 1977: 136-139). In the eastern half of the presbytery, at the end of the marble pavement that led to the altar table, the excavators located a cruciform crypt, built of brick, and plastered on the interior. It was covered with a marble slab, on which the altar of the Eucharist rested (1977: 136, fig.8)⁶² (fig.13). The floors of the presbytery, on both sides of the raised area were paved with marble plaques, in *opus sectile* (1977: 139)⁶³, while the floor of the apse was covered with a large Eucharistic scene, representing a *cantharos* flanked by a pair of hinds, executed in fine mosaic. The field immediately to the east of the cruciform crypt was marked off with a simple geometric design, consisting of white, gray and green marble. Set between a pair of

⁶² Unfortunately there is no detailed plan of these arrangements in the excavation report; there aren't any visible traces at present.

⁶³ Similar paving of the presbytery was found in Stobi's Episcopal basilica and in the Episcopal church of one of its suffragans, Bargala; both are dated to the first half of the fifth century at earliest; Aleksova, 1981: 29-46.

massive substructures, the altar slab with the crypt beneath was apparently the central liturgical focus of the church (fig.14).

4.3 The establishment and the transformation of the cultic center

It is a standard feature of the Early Christian churches from the territory of ancient Illyricum to have reliquaries built in the presbytery, underneath the altar. To cite the examples coming from the neighboring regions would constitute a huge list (for brief surveys see: Snively, 1983: 119-201; Hoddinott, 1963; Orlandos, 1954: 466-468). From the immediate vicinity there is the polyconchal church in Lychnid (Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1985: 145-161), the *basilica* at Studenchishta, a few kilometers to the southwest of Lychnid (Hoddinott, 1963: 223-226; Aleksova, 1995: 200-1), and in the *necropolis* church, just outside of city walls of Lychnid (Malenko, 1988: 7-8). From Heraclea Linkestis, some sixty kilometers to the west of Lychnid, on the *Via Egnatia*, there is a nice parallel in a *basilica extra-muros* (Aleksova, 1995: 212-213; Maneva, 1989: 51-63), as also in the *necropolis* church at Stobi (Aleksova, 1995: 116-119), the *basilica* at “Tumba”, Thessalonica, and the cruciform church at Thassos (Hoddinott, 1963: 181-183). Similar examples come from Thebes in Thessaly, where the crypt was inserted in a later building phase (Sotteriu, 1929: 224-226).

In fact, it would be wrong to see this manner of investing an ecclesiastic building with holy relics as a trait peculiar to a certain region. This spatial link between the sacred relic and the altar was emphasized throughout the Early Christian

World⁶⁴. Written documents confirm that by the early fifth century - the 14th canon of the Third Council of Carthage, held in 401 (Geary, 1992: 18-19; Sotteriu, 1929: 236; Lemerle, 1945: 370-2) - the link between sacred relics or objects and the altar slab was theologically justified, and the practice was encouraged. The chief obstacle for such a development, the ancient Roman tradition that abhorred violation of the integrity of the tomb, was already broken by imperial precedent by the mid of the fourth century, with the rededication of the *Apostoleion* in Constantinople, by Constantius II (Grabar, 1946: 149-161; Krautheimer, 1986: 64-65; Mango, 1993: 51-62). Thus, the initial difference between churches built for the celebration of the Eucharist, and chapels reserved for the veneration of specific sacred figures or places in Ecclesiastic history, became (at least officially) meaningless at a very early date. The altar became a symbol of the Holy Sepulcher, the place where the Sacrifice was celebrated. It was a place very appropriate for the interment of a martyr's relics. To be sure, the appeal of allegedly authentic structures and locations continued to be a powerful factor in the formation and the persistence of cultic centers, but the measures brought at the Third Council of Carthage were certainly welcomed by communities that actually lacked authentic sacred places. As the borders of the Empire shrunk, and as life outside the city walls became more and more insecure, the transference of the sacred relics from extra-mural *martyria* to sanctuaries in the cities was a logical development (Grabar, 1946: 317-8).

One must examine the onset of the tradition that venerates St. Erasmus of ancient Lychnid in the light of these developments. The placing of a reliquary chamber under the altar of St. Erasmus implies that the distinction between the

⁶⁴ Grabar, 1946: 256-313, gives a number of fourth century examples from Italy, but also from Palestine where a separate chapel is usually taken as the norm; more recently the same conclusion was arrived at by Duval, 1999: 181-189, who studied examples from Jordan and Palestine.

Sacred Table and the martyr's gravestone was irrelevant by the time of the main building phase. Most of the elements that comprise the plan of St. Erasmus' *basilica* indicate that the church was used for the regular celebration of the Eucharist. The baptismal complex implies a rite common for parochial churches, and the annexes north of the *narthex* and the apse are considered as *pastophories*, elements indispensable for the proper conduct of the Eucharist rite⁶⁵. The basilical form itself implies a standard congregational church, but we know that this solution was found convenient since the foundation of the oldest and most distinguished cultic centers in the Christian World (Grabar, 1946; Krautheimer, 1986; Lynn, 1994).

The St. Erasmus *basilica* could have also been a cemetery church, if the interior cemetery was initially contemporary with the main building phase of the church. If so, this may be an important clue for the character of the church. Good examples of funerary *basilicae*, invested with sacred relics come from 4th century Rome and Dalmatia: St. Peter on the Vatican, St. Lawrence, St. Agnese, the Salona *necropolis* (Krautheimer, 1986: 59-63; Grabar, 1946: 291-298; Marin, 1988: 140-144). But, we also find some examples from Tcarichin Grad (Petkovich, and Kondovich, 1977: 86-91; Hoddinott, 1963: 218-219) and, the *basilica* over the *necropolis* of Lychnid, just few kilometers away (Malenko, 1988: 3-22). There was no formal distinction between regular parish churches and cemetery *basilicae* in the West, except for the fact that the latter are always *extra-muros*. The very same arrangements that segregated clergy from laity in regular congregational churches were used to distinguish between the tombs of the martyr and the bishops, from those

⁶⁵ Strichevich, 1958-9: 56-61; Hoddinott, 1963; Babich, 1969; Malenko, 1977, have all accepted this interpretation of the plan of St. Erasmus' church. The Great Entry would than commence either from the northern annex of the *narthex* – the *prothesis*?- or from the raised chamber at the eastern end of the northern aisle, a unit that would have been the *diakonikon* in the former case. Similar designation

of the ordinary people (Krautheimer, 1986: 58-9). In the case of St. Erasmus, this option is less likely, as unlike the extra-mural *martyria* of Rome, the *basilica* near Lychnid possessed a reliquary chamber, not an authentic tomb.

The presence of a reliquary chamber, means that the object of veneration was not an autochthonous feature, permanently incorporated in the sanctuary, but was rather something brought from elsewhere and interred in the reliquary for some particular occasion, commonly the very dedication of the church; the act of “eukainon” in Orthodox Christianity (Aleksova, 1995; Grabar, 1946: 316-24; Sotteriu, 1929: 236-37)⁶⁶. This fact does not exclude the possibility of an authentic source for the relic that has incited the veneration of St. Erasmus in Lychnid. It clearly suggests however, that an element essential for the development of the cultic center was imported from another place, which has either preserved the saintly corpse, or various objects related to the saint in the hagiographical traditions. This was in fact, observed by the excavator of the site (Malenکو, 1988: 7-8; Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 89-116), though he believes – following the current version of St. Erasmus’ life in the Eastern Orthodox Church (Meloski, 1988: 69-80; Bratoz, 1990: 5-7) - that the original tomb of the Saint was situated in the nearby vicinity of the present *basilica*.

When comparing the hagiographic material related to St. Erasmus, we saw that most of the sources situate the Saint’s tomb in Formia, in south Italy. Archaeological researches in the Formian cathedral of St. Erasmus (Vesely, 1988: 53-67; Vesely, 1972) have revealed a tomb, oriented and hallowed by an altar, and enshrined in a *hypogeum*, whose earliest traces are dated to the late 5th, early 6th century. It presents

were given for the annexes of the churches of Tcarichin Grad, dated in the first half of the sixth century; Petkovich, and Kondovich, 1977, Mango, 1978: 20-35.

⁶⁶ Wilkinson, 1971: 80-1, discusses the act of sanctification in Palestinian churches.

a rather humble structure (fig.15): a short rectangular unit, terminating with an apse to the north. Besides several “*ad-sanctos*” graves, there were some *graffiti* on the south wall, and traces of plaster throughout the interior. The relatively late dating of the *hypogeum* should be related to the onset of the veneration of the saintly tomb, not to the interment of the corpse. Absolute dates, for this structure are not provided, and the stratigraphy was certainly disturbed, for the excavator revealed elements of a finely shaped marble sarcophagus, built into the base of the later altar of the cathedral. The block was protected with a coating of clay. Hence it is concluded that it was not reused as a *spolia* (1988: 56), but was instead carefully inserted underneath the altar. Does this mean that the early Medieval cathedral was invested with sacred relics brought from elsewhere, just as in St. Erasmus *basilica* near ancient Lychnid? Most probably, but at a later date, perhaps after the Saracen invasion (1988: 59-60), when the memorial was transformed into a sanctuary for the regular celebration of the Eucharist. The earlier memorial was incorporated underneath the new presbytery as a crypt, accessible through an ambulatory corridor (1988: 60-1)⁶⁷. Thus the original sacred *locus*, the earlier memorial of the Saint was preserved; it continued to be a focus for pious veneration, side by side with the daily celebration of the Eucharist.

Accepting Vesely’s arguments for this being the original spot of St. Erasmus’ tomb implies that a portion of the sacred relics was carried in Lychnid, at some point after the establishment of the cultic tradition in Formia. When could this have happened? The stratigraphical situation at St. Erasmus’ *basilica* is far from being of any help. Its immediate surroundings were definitely settled since at least the

⁶⁷ The author mentions a similar development in St. Peter’ church on the Vatican towards the end of the sixth century.

Hellenistic, and through the Early Roman period⁶⁸, but it is not known if this settlement continued to exist during the last two centuries of Antiquity. It certainly did if we treat St. Erasmus' *basilica* as a cemetery church. Therefore we should resort to typology and the prevailing conditions in the region during Late Antiquity.

While surveying the architectonic and the decorative elements of St. Erasmus' *basilica*, its standard and rather archaic appearance was often noted. In plan and decoration, St. Erasmus near Lychnid is a typical example of a fifth century *basilica* in the Eastern Illyricum (Sotteriu, 1929: 217-221; Petrovich-Spremo, 1971; Hoddinott, 1963, Krautheimer, 1986: 117-124). That this is a pre-Justinianic building is also evident from the position of the *pastophories* and the shape of the apse (Strichevich, 1958/9: 56-61; Babich, 1969). The problem is how early in the fifth century can we date St. Erasmus' *basilica*? It could date from the late fourth century, as some have suggested, but knowing the gradual and slow progress of Christianity in the Balkans (Bratoz, 1990: 3-29; Hoddinott, 1963: 27-53), it would be safer to date it in the fifth century.

We should also recall the political situation in the late fourth and the early fifth century, and the Visigothic settlement in these provinces (Ostrogorsky, 1969: 77-8; Wolfram, 1988: 274-76). Knowing that in the vicinity of the *basilica* was a small, undefended and easily accessible settlement, it seems next to incredible to hope that the church survived the Gothic or the later Hunic raids. Evidence from Stobi (Mano-Zisi, 1973: 185-225) and Philippi (Lemerle, 1945; Hoddinott, 1963) show that churches were a regular choice for plunder, on the part of the Barbarian invaders; a natural target, as churches were the most monumental and most elaborately decorated structures in the Late Antique cities. Of course, in most of

⁶⁸ Dating based on the evidence from pottery fragments, coins and two inscribed blocks used as spoils

these cases the ruined churches were repaired or fully rebuilt, but this was not the case with St. Erasmus, if it was indeed devastated during the barbarian invasions. The excavator was confident that the church had one major building phase with some later additions of a minor scale (Malenko, 1977: 125-141; Malenko, 1977: 45-51). Furthermore the excavations yielded no traces of fire or elements of weaponry, common in instances of human destruction. Instead it was suggested, that the church went out of use as a consequence of a terrible earthquake that destroyed ancient Lychnid sometime in the early sixth century (1977: 134-5)⁶⁹.

One of the last mentions of Lychnid in the historical sources is Theodoric's campaign of 478/9 (Papazoglu, 1957: 221-229). As observed earlier, the city managed to repulse the attack, but in turn the furious Goths ravaged the surroundings. St. Erasmus and its adjacent settlement, situated on the main communication route in the region, very possibly a section of *Via Egnatia*, could not have passed unnoticed. Is this the *terminus ante que* for the St. Erasmus *basilica*? The decades following the last Gothic incursion saw a relatively long period of peace and stability in the Balkans. More importantly, during these decades, the relations between Rome and the episcopates in Illyricum, and Lychnid in particular (see above: Bratoz, 1990: 3-29; Panov, 1996), substantially developed. The episcopate of Lychnid was among the few sees of Illyricum, which supported the Pope during the Accacian schism. As evidence for this situation, we have noted the intensive communications between the Episcopate of Lychnid and the Pope; and the papal delegation sent to the small town in Epirus Nova. We might also add the possible transference of St. Erasmus' relics from Formia to his ancient church, in the

in the atrium of the church – Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 95-6; Malenko, 1977: 135-7.

⁶⁹ The event is mentioned in Procopius' "Arcane History".

immediate vicinity of Lychnid⁷⁰. There is simply no better moment in the ecclesiastical history of Lychnid for such an occasion. The Episcopate of Lychnid was certainly loyal to the Roman see prior to the schism of Accacius, but so were the Archbishopric of Thessalonica and other, much larger bishoprics than Lychnid (Bratoz, 1990: 3-29). Only in the late fifth century, when most of the Illyrian sees were turning to Constantinople, did the bishopric of Lychnid become so important for Rome. There could have hardly been a more appropriate present for a loyal bishop than the relics of the famous Antiochene missionary. The gesture possesses both symbolic and practical values: it confirms the ancient and catholic origins of the small see, as it provided a new focus, much needed after the devastating raids of the Ostrogoths, for the communities settled in the immediate surroundings. The possibility that the church was in fact built about this time, is now supported by architectural elements: an Ionic impost capital discovered in the western bay of the nave was dated to the later half of the fifth century, or the beginning of the sixth, at latest (fig.11b) (Lilchik, 2002: 683).

Two objections come to mind. Firstly, why would the bishop of Lychnid inter the saintly relics in a place, some distance away from the center of the see? Secondly, the archaeological investigations of the *basilica* have shown that the building was functioning for a fairly long period of time (Malenko, 1977: 128; Malenko, and Kuzman, 1988: 94-96), and there is evidence for later interventions, in the form of walls built of roughly shaped stone blocks and bonded with clay, in the *atrium* and behind the apse of the church (Malenko, 1977: fig.1)⁷¹. Their relation to the *basilica* is very vague, but apart from the southern porch of the *atrium*, they made little

⁷⁰ The suggestion was also briefly considered in Bratoz, 1990: 10.

⁷¹ The walls appearing on the upper corner of the photo belong to the Hellenistic phase of the site; fig. 5 in this study.

change to the initial layout of the building. The excavator has determined they belong to the last building phase of the site, while the *basilica* was still in existence. We should further add the possibility that two of the annexes north of the *atrium* were attached to the church in a later phase, but certainly prior to the alterations in the *atrium* and the space beyond the apse. This is indicated by the abrupt break of the north perimeter wall, just a meter beyond the point where the middle annex begins. The outer wall of the latter starts off anew, and is not tangential to the northern wall of the easternmost annex and the north wing of the narthex. The masonry is essentially the same as in the rest of the building.

There are other clues indicating the relative longevity of the *basilica*. The mosaic in the nave and the entrance of the *narthex* show traces of repair and erosion, while the stratigraphy of the *necropolis* in the church suggests use of this site as a cemetery for at least a couple of generations (Malenko, 1976: 134-5). If we date the construction of the building to the last decades of the fifth century, and if we trust Procopius' account for the catastrophic earthquake in the region during the reign of Justinian I, we are left with less than eight decades to squeeze in all the building phases of St. Erasmus *basilica*. Bearing in mind the character of these interventions, this is certainly not impossible. The only major obstacle is the rather thick stratigraphy of the cemetery that developed in and around the *basilica*, but since the initial researcher is more inclined to date it in the post-Antique period (Malenko, 1988: 11; Malenko, 1976: 233-5); i.e. in a period when the initial "character of the building was lost", we may comfortably accept the hypothesis. In that case the existence of a later cemetery centered on the earlier church might even prove to be important evidence for the continuation of the cult in the Middle Age. It is, however, absurd to presume anything for certain in that direction without a clear image of the

stratigraphic relation between the cemetery and the active phases of the church, and before the artifacts found among the graves are properly studied.

The problem of continuity in the cult of St. Erasmus provides a suitable conclusion for this discussion. This is an important point, because otherwise it becomes difficult to account for the Medieval “revival” of the cult on this particular spot? It was noted that a couple of Late Antique churches in Lychnid and its vicinity feature essentially the same type of sanctification; a shallow reliquary built underneath the altar, the sacred relics having become the basis for the Eucharist service. As a result, the feature appears regardless of the architectonic form of the monument and its broader setting; it is found in a tetraconch church in the middle of the ancient city, and in a late fifth century *basilica*, several kilometers from the *acropolis* (Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1985: 145-161; Bitrakova-Grozdanova, 1986: 116-119; Koco, 1961: 27-35).

Yet, the question must be asked, why did the Medieval Christian community of Lychnid choose this particular site to celebrate its ancient patron? To put it differently, why was such a relatively inferior architectonic monument erected on this sacred location? The *basilica* of St. Erasmus features humble architecture, even when compared to contemporary monuments, from its immediate vicinity.

In ecclesiastical terms, it has been shown that St. Erasmus was celebrated in Lychnid as the founder of the first Christian community in the region. This was a historical (hagiographical) fact that could have been easily preserved or introduced by the later Church. The Episcopate of Lychnid formally existed for a century after the collapse of the Late Antique civilization in Illyricum (A.K.M. 1996: 238-41), and its community certainly remembered its ancient patron, and the spot hallowed by the presence of his relics. Further, the newly formed Archbishopric of the Middle Age

eagerly dwelt on its ancient heritage: St Erasmus is remembered in some of the earliest sources in the literary tradition of the medieval church of Ochrid (Meloski, 1988: 69-80; Boshale, 1983: 17-30). Not surprisingly, the latter tradition was always careful to avoid emphasizing the connections between St. Erasmus and the tradition that venerated him in the Roman dioceses. We might recall that in the 18th century version of St. Erasmus' Life, the Antiochene bishop, returned to Ochrid, and specifically to Hermeleia, to spend the last days of his life (Meloski, 1996: 23-4). Once, St. Erasmus had been an important token for the "orthodoxy" of the ancient Lychnid Church, and its loyalty to Rome, but in the changed circumstances during the later Middle Age, this connection was no longer appropriate. It would have been a disgrace for the Archbishop at this time to promote the transfer of the sacred relics from Italy, along with the necessary Papal blessing.

But for the ordinary faithful, the *thaumaturgical* qualities of St. Erasmus were of a greater concern than his historical significance. Even today the local people attribute healing and protective powers to the old church of the Saint, and the nearby monastic complex (Meloski, 1996: 25-28)⁷². This fact is indicative for the nature and the strength of St. Erasmus' cultic tradition in the region. Supernatural properties are attributed to the specific place, to the location where the saint was celebrated. This was far more important than the historicity of the Saint, his deeds and his posthumous destiny.

In fact such a development is very unusual. Once the fading distinction between the martyr's tomb and the Sacred Throne became meaningless, the practices of saintly veneration assumed other forms⁷³. This is very finely reflected in the cult

⁷² A similar aspect of the Saint was venerated in the Western Church Vesely, 1980: 681-690.

⁷³ Grabar, 1946, 2, for the place of saintly figures, their portraits and hagiographies in the fresco-programs of Eastern Orthodox churches; their presentation in small-scale arts, icons and reliquaries

of St. Demetrius of Thessalonica (Hoddinott, 1963: 127-163), where the focus of the veneration has shifted from the alleged place of his sufferings, incorporated in the foundations of the presbytery, to an icon set under a *ciborium* in the nave of the church. In most places, the veneration of a saintly figure became detached from the original source of the cult, the sacred tomb or the reliquary chamber.

Not so in Lychnid where outside the actual sacred site, we have little evidence for the continuation of the cultic tradition of St. Erasmus. Aside from the literary sources, we should note the very few portraits of St. Erasmus which exist, for he is almost totally absent from the repertoires in the Medieval churches on the Balkans. That said, among this small group, we should especially stress the small cave chapel, at Lychnid near the Early Christian *basilica*, with its 13th century portrait of the Saint (Grozdanov, 1983: 139-143) (fig. 16a/b). It was certainly the epicenter of the medieval cultic tradition, quiet possibly a humble alternative for the ancient *basilica*. The exact location of the latter could have been forgotten by the Christianized Slavs, or it could simply be seen as inadequate, perhaps desecrated. Once a rather solemn monument, perhaps even a local pilgrim center, St. Erasmus became a secluded monastery, situated in a hostile and inaccessible terrain. The practices and beliefs attached to the cult were likewise, doubtlessly altered, but its geographical setting, its site remained the same.

It is futile to attempt at seeking a visual or articulate feature through which the site of St. Erasmus preserved its sacred character. Earlier, it was mentioned that continuity in sacred topography was very common among the ancient Balkan cultures. We do not find any reluctance to build a church over a Pagan sanctuary in these regions of the Christian World, as for example at Epidauros, one of the oldest

also in Vikan, 1982; Babich, 1969: 57-76 studies the veneration of sacred items in separate chapels,

churches in Eastern Illyricum (Krautheimer, 1986: 119-121)⁷⁴. Unfortunately the pre-Christian nature of the site of St. Erasmus remains obscure. Perhaps elements of the Late Antique complex remain to be found. These could very easily have been natural features, like a rock, a tree, a spring or a cave⁷⁵. But this is not very likely, for items or objects that had some significance in the cultic practices are often well recorded and preserved. It is equally possible that we are witnessing a curious re-interpretation of the site, sometime in the late ninth or in the early tenth century, the early periods of the newly baptized Slavic community. The jutting ruins of the early Christian basilica beneath the rocky-hill, the scattered remains of the ancient settlement that once spread in the neighboring plain, the numerous legends that have survived the passage of time, could have easily captured the pious imagination of inhabitants of this area in the Middle Ages.

It would have been impossible to recognize the cultic center of St. Erasmus near Lychnid, were there no extant traces of this tradition in the Middle Age. The Early Christian *basilica* presented in this study became associated with this saintly figure, mostly because of the nearby small monastic chapel dedicated to St. Erasmus sometimes during the Middle Age. With regards to architecture, St. Erasmus' basilica is a standard representative of Early Christian architecture in the Central Balkan provinces, and there are very few elements that reflect its cultic significance. One can only single out the reliquary crypt, and perhaps, the cemetery *in ecclesiam*, and the multistoried annexes along the north flank of the atrium. The former element clearly indicates that the sacred objects were brought from elsewhere, and it was

the "pareklesias" of later Byzantine churches.

⁷⁴ Hoddinott, 1963: 49-65, also stresses the impact of Pagan traditions in Early Christianity in the Balkans.

suggested that the most likely provenience for St. Erasmus relics was his cultic center in Formia. This is also in accord with all of his hagiographies, except for the 18th century Greek version whose author obviously sought to account for the small medieval monastery, with the cave chapel of the saint. The reliquary crypt also roughly indicates the period of establishment of the cultic center. Its position underneath the altar of the *basilica*, suggests that the church could not have been founded before the fifth century, and most other elements of the architecture also belong to this general period. It was further mentioned that this type of sanctification was the standard for the region of Western Illyricum, and for most of the Western Ecumen during Late Antiquity.

Unfortunately, no other elements reflecting the cultic significance of the *basilica* can be defined with any certainty. Cemeteries *in ecclesiam* were a normal feature of cultic centers in the Western Church, but in the case of St. Erasmus' basilica, the exact relation between the inhumations and the church has not been established. This *necropolis* could easily belong to some of the invading barbarian tribes, as is the case with many other church-cemeteries in the region. The multistoried annexes of the *atrium* on the other hand, can both be interpreted as pilgrim lodgings and monastic cells. In any instance, they are a practical feature that tells little about the cultic character of the church. We will witness a very similar situation when discussing the cultic center of St. Thecla near Seleukia: if there was no living tradition that preserved the memory of the sacred locations, these cultic centers would have never been recognized amidst the great number of very similar monuments in their surrounding.

⁷⁵ Wilkinson, 1971: 17-18, gives an interesting parallel for the Jebel Musa, where the monks from Mt. Sinai have created a very detailed sacral topography from elements provided by natural features and old ruins

The sanctuary of St. Erasmus near Lychnid apparently did not exist for a very long period of time. Archaeological research revealed that the church had a single building phase with minor alterations and repairs. It is difficult to determine the time when the sanctuary was abandoned, as it seems that the building continued to be utilized after it lost its original function. In this study, it was assumed that the cultic center ceased to exist with the collapse of Late Antique civilization in the Balkans. In the Middle Age, the “revived” cult appeared a short distance away from the Early Christian *basilica*, indicating that either the medieval inhabitants forgot and misinterpreted the sacred topography of their Late Antique predecessors, or that there are earlier phases in the cave chapel.



CHAPTER V

SELEUKIA ON THE CALYCADNOS IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE CULT OF ST. THECLA: TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

5.1 Seleukia on the Calycadnos in Late Antiquity

As with the case study on the sanctuary of St. Erasmus near Lychnid, we will begin by considering the historical conditions in the region of ancient Isauria during Late Antiquity. The sanctuary of St. Thecla was the principal religious and ecclesiastic center of this province; it was a base of a powerful and influential monastic community, and an important focus of investments. Its large funds were often the subject of fierce disputes between the nearby bishopric and the monastic community attending the sanctuary complex, and these certainly had strong impact on the development of the cultic center.

The province of Isauria featured very peculiar socio-political conditions during the period of the fourth and the fifth century. Throughout the fourth and the early decades of the fifth century, the Isaurian mountains were considered one of the most isolated and backwards regions in this part of the Empire. Its inhabitants were in a constant state of warfare not only with the provincial authorities at Seleukia, but also with most of the urban centers in the regions of Orient and Asia. Moreover, the Isaurians were overtly rejecting the culture and the identity of the Late Empire, and this attitude earned them the title of Barbarians. As will be demonstrated, the coastal

cities of the province of Isauria, including its capital and the nearby sanctuary, lived on the fringes of Roman civilization during most of this period. By the mid fifth century the warlike Isaurians were becoming an important political factor on the imperial court. This tendency culminated in 474 when an Isaurian warlord became the Emperor of the Eastern Empire. During his reign the entire province of Isauria experienced a grandiose building campaign that brought this region in the very foreground of Early Byzantine architecture. The sanctuary of St. Thecla, the principal religious center of the Emperor's home province was greatly enlarged, and embellished with one of the largest and most expensive monuments in this part of the Empire. However, during the last decade of the fifth century a long and destructive civil war brought this brief period of progress and prosperity to an abrupt end, and during the sixth century we hear of little building activities in the sanctuary complex, and in the cities of the province of Isauria in general. Thus, among other things, the Late Antique history of Isauria must be considered, so that the reader can understand the phases of architectonic development of the sanctuary of St. Thecla.

Seleukia on the Calycadnus, like most of the provincial cities of the Roman Empire lacks a coherent historical narrative. The ancient historians scarcely mention the city, and when they do, it is most usually in the context of political developments in the wider region. In Late Antiquity this was the province of Isauria, the Cilicia *Aspera* or *Tracheia* of earlier times (Mitchell, 1993, 2: 158-163; Jones, 1971: 191-214; and Syme, 1995: 131-147)⁷⁶, and Seleukia on the Calycadnos was the *metropolis* of the province in Late Antiquity. Its geographical situation in the Calycadnus Delta provided the city with agricultural potential and accessibility, both

⁷⁶ The latter has traced the confusing history of this vague geographical term.

exceptional for this region of the Taurus Mountains⁷⁷. The city was the channel for most of the communications between the mountainous interior, and the Cilician plain to the northeast. Seleukia was a regional crossroad where the roads coming from Iconium via Claudopolis, from Laranda via Diocaesarea, and from Germanicopolis through modern Gulnar, all joined the coastal highway of southern Asia Minor (Hellenkemper and Hild, 1990: 442). Through its ports at Holmoi and at Koraesion, a couple of kilometres to the northeast, Seleukia provided a direct link between the central Anatolian plateau, and Cyprus and Egypt. (fig. 18) On the other hand, the rough topography of its hinterland, with its unruly inhabitants, counterbalanced this advantageous geo-strategic position: compared to the passage of the Cilician Gates in the eastern Taurus, or the sea route along the western coast of Asia Minor, the roads that transverse Isauria were of secondary importance during Antiquity (Blanton, 2000: 7)⁷⁸. The relatively favourable physical setting has not suited the remains of ancient Seleukia. Today, the ancient *acropolis* situated on a hill at the apex of the Calycadnos Delta, is dominated by a medieval castle, while the territory of the Delta to the East and the South is occupied by the modern town of Silifke⁷⁹. Recent archaeological research has only yielded the remains of a Late Roman bath (reused in the Ottoman period), and a pagan temple, converted into a Christian *basilica* in the early fifth century (Feld, 1964: 89-93), along with numbers of inscriptions, architectonic elements and other finds. Otherwise, there are meagre traces of the

⁷⁷ Description of the local geography and the settlement pattern is given in Gough, 1954; Mitford, and Bean, 1970; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1986; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990; Blanton, 2000 – for an intensive survey of the western coastal region.

⁷⁸ A nice illustration is given in the Miracles of St. Thecla, in miracle 16, where an imperial messenger is forced to take a round trip to Constantinople, via the Cilician Gates because of the insecurity of the Isaurian mountain passages; Dagron, 1978: 113-114.

⁷⁹ Architectonic surveys in Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 402-407; Eyice, 1988; Keil, and Wilhelm, 1931: 3-22 and Dagron, and Feisel, 1987: 17-26, 231-255; study the inscriptions and portable artefacts. More recently, Hagel, and Tomashitz, 1998, have published a full repertory of the inscriptions from West Cilicia.

theatre and a colonnaded street, in the yard of the present *Ilkokulu*. Nothing has survived of Seleukia's agora, its stadium and its city-walls.

As a provincial capital, Seleukia was the headquarters of the civic governor and the chief military commander, the *Praeses* and the *Comes Isauriae*. The names of two provincial governors are preserved on dedicatory inscriptions dated to the early decades of the fourth century⁸⁰. Otherwise, very few of Seleucia's secular authorities have entered the historical records; the fifth century *Life and Miracles of St. Thecla* convey the impression that power and prestige in this provincial centre was chiefly vested in the ecclesiastic or the monastic authorities (Dagron, 1978: 125-6).

From the time of Diocletian, the *Comes* of Isauria was in command of three legions, two of which were local recruited – most likely, as *pseudo comitatenses* (Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 402-3; Hopwood, 1989: 191-201). They are mentioned in Ammianus' account of the Isaurian attack on Seleukia in 354, when the Roman armies were forced behind the city walls by a sudden charge by the Isaurian brigands⁸¹. In AD 359, the *Comes* Lauricius was held responsible for the safety of the participants in the Arian synod at Seleukia. Some twenty years later we hear of Flavius Saturninus, the *Comes rei Militaris et Praeses Isauriae*. As in earlier mentions of the office, the context is, a major Isaurian revolt, which this time led to the assassination of the vicar of Asia, Musonius⁸². The merging of the highest provincial civic and military powers in a single title for Saturninus signals a critical situation. He may have been assigned to this post during the stay of the Emperor Valens at Antioch, between 372 and 377, and he was given command over additional

⁸⁰ These are Lucilius Crispus, 306-308, later vicar of Pont and Aurelius Frontinus 308-324. The dedications were inscribed on pedestals of imperial statues; Dagron, and Feissel, 1987: 17-26.

⁸¹ Amm. XIV, 2, 14-18; a very similar episode is recorded for the year 359, XIX, 3, 1. Dagron, 1978: 115-116 attempts to locate this historical event in the *Miracles of St. Thecla*.

troops, as reinforcement for the Isaurian *comitatenses*. The clash had an indecisive conclusion: while the rebels were pushed back in to their mountain retreats, the superior Roman forces did not dare to storm their strongholds. Instead, the citizens of Germanicopolis (modern Ermenek on the Goksu) persuaded the insurgents to ask for peace, and offer hostages as a guarantee against future aggressions (Dagron, 1978: 117; Hopwood, 1999: 177-206).

Brigandage is indeed the dominant theme in the history of the province of Isauria during Late Antiquity. There are a number of references for revolts in the ancient sources. Besides the revolts of 353/4, 359 and 368 recorded by Ammianus Marcellin (XIV, 2-19; XIX, 13; XXVII, 9. 6-7), Zosimus (IV, 20, 1-2; V, 25) recorded an intervention by the Emperor Valens in the mid 370's⁸³, and also Isaurian incursions into Cilicia and Syria sometime in the years 403-406. The chronicle of Marcellinus *Comes* also reports Isaurian attacks on a large scale, affecting Lycia, Pamphylia, Cappadocia and even Armenia, in the year 405, and another rebellion for the year 441⁸⁴. Some allusions to similar incidents are also found in the Miracles of St. Thecla⁸⁵.

These were not always casual raids, but often an open contest with the Roman authority. The principal target of the Isaurian plunderers was the city, the seat of the local or the provincial government. There were also deliberate attacks on ecclesiastic

⁸² Amm. XXVII, 9, 6-7; a related incident is recorded by Zosimus IV 20, 1-2. The precise date of this rebellion is disputable: Rouge, 1966: 295-96; Dagron, 1978: 116-118 relates it with miracles 27 and 28.

⁸³ Note that the reference in Zosimus (IV 20, 1-2) may be a description of the same event recorded by Ammianus XXVII, 9, 6-7; see note 14.

⁸⁴ The same event is presumably recorded by Priscus fragment n.6.

⁸⁵ Mir, 13, 16, 19, 26, 27, 28 and 32; Dagron, 1978: 116-123, follows the chronology of Rouge, 1966: 282-315. Similar ordering of these events is given in Lenski, 2001: 417-21 and Hopwood, 1989: 191-201. If we trust the *Historia Augusta* – Rouge, 1966 – the beginnings of this state of chronicle instability can be traced back to the middle of the third century.

centres and communities⁸⁶, and even on high imperial authorities (Mir, 13 and 16). Admittedly, the Isaurian rebels were not capable of facing the Roman armies on the open field, but nor were the latter confident enough to pursue them in the Isaurian Mountains. During the turbulent decades of the later fourth century, these eruptions of guerrilla attacks were both troublesome locally, but also for the authorities at Constantinople⁸⁷.

In short, the province of Isauria and the neighbouring regions were in a more or less constant state of insecurity for almost two centuries. Modern scholarship has only recently started to show an interest in this peculiar problem, and K. Hopwood in particular has devoted a series of articles that attempt to disentangle the social and economic factors that generated this situation⁸⁸. Hopwood has recently identified three main parties in this historical context: the rebels, mostly recruited from the native peasantry and herdsmen; the local landowning aristocracy (according to Hopwood, the successor of the old curial elite), who controlled most of the labour force, owned the arable land and the pastures; and the central government, exerting its influence through the imperial legates. The first operated either as autonomous raiding bands, or as organised armed groups in the service of their patrons in the cities. The extent of these private armies is illustrated by the frequently cited example of Valentinus, a Pamphylian notable, who successfully led an army of

⁸⁶ The sack of the sanctuary of St. Thecla – Miracles, n. 28; or the raids in Lycaonia, c.a. 375, reported by Basil of Caesarea; Lenski, 2001: 420.

⁸⁷ Such were the conditions that brought about the settlement in 368, reported by Ammianus Marcellin; Hopwood, 1999: 177-179. Similar impressions emerge after reading the fifth century Life and Miracles of St. Thecla; Dagron, 1978: 113-123.

⁸⁸ Hopwood, 1983: 173-187; Hopwood, 1986: 343-356; Hopwood, 1989: 171-187; Hopwood, 1999: 177-206. Somewhat different conclusions are exposed by Lenski, 2001: 417-422, and in Shaw, 1990: 199-270.

diogmitae – lightly armed infantry recruited from the local citizenry – against an organised group of Gothic marauders⁸⁹.

The general deterioration of the old political institutions of the Hellenic city left plenty of vacancies and ambiguities in the local social hierarchies. This situation could have easily caused anxiety among the local aristocrats: they needed to reassert their social position, both in respect to each other, and to the increasingly centralizing aspirations of Constantinople⁹⁰.

While this social model should not be cast away as totally mistaken, it does require modification, as it does not account for a certain important details (Lenski, 2001: 417-422). First, the wide range of the Isaurian attacks: what kind of interest could have induced an Isaurian warlord to attack Syrian, or Cappadocian cities? “Local tensions” among the elites, or social unrest on the part of the lower classes, does not explain these distant expeditions. Second, we must question the generalisation that lumps the landowning elites into a single category of “urban” dwellers. Not all the cities in the province of Isauria shared the same role in these events. The ancient sources make it very clear that Isaurian attacks invariably came from the interior of the province, and were always directed against the cities of the Isaurian, Pamphylian and the Cilician coast, or against the urban centres on the plateau north of the Taurus. “The Life and the Miracles of St. Thecla”, for example, which covers the decades of the most acute brigandage, 350-440, mentions but a single attack on Dalisandos, an inland city situated above the steep valley of an eastern tributary of the Calicadnus (Mir, 27). Dalisandos was not the only city of the Isaurian interior: the region has yielded evidence for at least seven *poleis*, endowed

⁸⁹ Lenski, 2001: 421; Hopwood, 1983: 173-181 relates this local notables in command of small armed forces to the old city institution of the *eirenarch*.

with city councils and local mints, and at least two colonies at Claudiopolis and Isaura Nova⁹¹. Why did the Isaurian insurgents spare these places? It may be of relevance that Ammianus Marcellinus (XXVII 9, 6-7), records how the nobles of Germanicopolis (modern Ermenek) acted as intermediaries in negotiations between the Roman authorities and the rebels.

Hopwood's model ignores a latent and strong antagonism between town and "country", which is made very clear in the ancient sources, and has some importance for the present topic. "The Life and Miracles of St. Thecla" is particularly revealing on this issue, as it presents the Isaurian countryside from the viewpoint of a learned Hellene from Seleukia (Dagron, 1978: 4-28). In this narrative the cities of the Isaurian Mountains, such as Dalisadnos, are "a mere image of obscurity and anonymity" (Mir, 26); the citizens of Ieronopolis are "lecherous and prone to robbery" (Mir, 33-4). In fact the author rarely labels them by their ethnonym, one example being Bassiana, of the tribe Ketai, held hostage at Seleukia (Mir, n.19): the Isaurians are generally always called "the pillagers", or "the dangerous neighbours", or simply barbarians and even on occasion, animals. They are a foreign and a hostile element in the local civilisation; the Hellenic culture, and the Hellenic identity of Seleucia is not theirs (Dagron, 1978: 120; Lenski, 2001: 418-9). Likewise, very different sentiments emerge when the author speaks of the coastal city of Selinunt, or about Iconium, the birthplace of St. Thecla (Mir, 6; 27).

This exceptional ethnic division between the people from the coastal cities and the tribes of the interior might have been underlined along religious lines (Lenski,

⁹⁰ Hopwood, 1999: 192, speaks about the office of *defensor civitatis*, created by the late fourth century as an alternative for the old institution of the *eirenarch*.

⁹¹ Lenski, 2001: 417-422; Bean, and Mittford, 1970; Jones, 1971: 193-214, for the organisation of the Isaurian polis. The sixth century Synecdemos of Hierocles recorded 22 poleis in the province; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 403.

2001: 420). Previous scholars of the ancient cultures of the western Taurus have argued that the interior of Isauria was christianised at an early date⁹². To be certain on issues of this sort is always difficult, yet findings are tempered by a couple of incidents recorded by ancient authors. Basil of Caesarea, in one of his canonical epistles (Basil, Epis. n. 217; Lenski, 2001: 420), speaks of Isaurian raiders harassing the Christian communities of Lycaonia (Cappadocia in Trombley, 1994: 124), forcing them to offer sacrifice and swear oaths to Pagan gods. The Syrian author of the biography of St. Symeon the Stylite notes that the Isaurians who plundered what is today the city of Sis, early in the fifth century, were still Pagans⁹³. Moreover, at Bagdad Kiri, in the extreme northwest of the province, a dedication to a pagan god has been dated to the last quarter of the fifth century (Bean, and Mittford, 1970: no.148).

In the “Miracles of St. Thecla”, the attitude of the Isaurian towards Christianity is rather ambiguous (Dagron, 1978: 90-94): the rebels recognize the patron saint of Seleukia, the clerks and the hermits, and the citizens of Ieronopolis are even allowed to participate in the annual feast of the Saint, (Mir, 34), while St. Thecla pays miraculous visits to Dalisadnos each year (Mir, 26). Yet, the Isaurians do not refrain from attacking and plundering Christians (Mir, 28, for instance). In fact, by the middle of the fifth century Pagans were still prominent even in “civilised” Seleukia. These were, however, men of letters, “rhetors”, as the fifth century hagiographer calls them, (Mir, 39; 40); men who held on to the Pagan traditions of the ancient

⁹² Arguments based mostly on the evidence of funerary steles; Ramsay, 1904: 260-292; also in Ramsay, 1906: 3-22; Mitchell, 1993, 2 is the capitol study on the extent and the nature of Christianity in Late Antique Anatolia.

⁹³ Trombley, 1994: 127. This author rejects the ideas of Isaurian Christianity prior to the 450's on the grounds of the known historical conditions in the region, pp. 127-129.

urban aristocracy, and who denounced the miraculous powers of the Christian Saint⁹⁴.

This sharp ethnic, religious and cultural antagonism between the Hellenised/Christianised city dwellers of the Isaurian coast and the autochthonous tribes of the interior, coupled with the geography and the seafaring regime in the Eastern Mediterranean sea, has tied the former to the large Cilician and north Syrian ports, to Antioch rather than to Constantinople⁹⁵. In a way, the city of Seleukia and the sanctuary of its patron saint lived at the fringes of Early Christian civilisation, during most of Late Roman period.

Conditions would change, though only briefly, towards the middle decades of the fifth century, with the ascension of the Isaurian party in Constantinople (Ostrogorsky, 1969: 81-84; Threadgold, 1997: 156-164). During the reign of Leo I (457-474), an Isaurian chieftain, whose authentic name was Tarasikodisa (Tarasis, son of Kodisa?⁹⁶) of Rousoumblada, became commander of the imperial guard, the *excubitores*, and adopted a Greek name – Zeno – and then married Leo's daughter, Ariadne in AD 466⁹⁷. In AD 471, Zeno eliminated his rivals, the Alan general, Aspar and his son Ardabour, and in AD 474 became a regent for his son, the infant emperor Leo II. After his son died prematurely, Zeno became Emperor himself. The sentiments among the people of the capital were naturally hostile: a conspiracy early in 475, forced the new Emperor to seek refuge in the Isaurian mountains, a new Emperor Basiliscus was appointed, and the *coup d'état* itself was followed by a

⁹⁴ Parallels in Anatolia may be found in late fourth century Ancyra, Mitchell, 1993, 2: 84-88; or in Carian Aphrodisias, Trombley, 199: 20-29.

⁹⁵ The bishopric of Seleukia was under the Patriarch of Antioch until the Arab invasion – Honingman, 1947. Also in Mir, 28; where the anonymous author describes the city as situated at the western extremes of the Orient, Dagron, 1978: 110.

⁹⁶ Thus, Harrison, 1981, though see now Elton, 2002: 153-57.

⁹⁷ On Emperor Zeno; Harrison, 1981: 27-8; Gough, 1972: 199-212; Mango, 1966: 358-365.

massacre of all Isaurians in the capital (Lenski, 2001: 421), another sign that Isaurians were regarded as Barbarians.

Zeno had regained the throne by the autumn of 476, but his renewed authority did not go unchallenged. His reign saw the first schism between Rome and Constantinople, and a further deterioration in the relations between the Monophysite and the Orthodox party in the East (Treadgold, 1997: 156-164; Ostrogorsky, 1969: 83). Another Isaurian general, Illus, Zeno's former collaborator begun a revolt in 484, which was to last for four years. Like Zeno, several years earlier, Illus held the Isaurian Mountains as a stronghold against central government. The, when Zeno died in AD 491, there was another series of anti-Isaurian persecutions in Constantinople, immediately followed by another rebellion in Isauria.

Civil wars and conspiracies were not the sole features of Zeno's reign. As a Christian Emperor, Zeno was personally involved in the creation of the ecclesiastic policies of Constantinople⁹⁸. In association with this, the province of Isauria was to experience moments of considerable importance in the history of Early Christian architecture, for a series of large and elaborate building projects in Isauria have been attributed to the Emperor's affection for his home province⁹⁹. These include the churches of Dag Pazari, the east church at Alahan (Koja Kalesi)¹⁰⁰, the cathedral of Corycos, and finally, the Cupola Church at Meryemlik¹⁰¹. An anecdote preserved in Evagrius' Ecclesiastic History (III. 8) associates this last donation with Zeno's retreat

⁹⁸ The promulgation of the *Henotikon* in 482; Ostrogorsky, 1969: 83.

⁹⁹ Gough, 1972: 199-212; the author has specifically related this imperial initiative with the advertisement of Zeno's ecclesiastic policy in the Orient: "The vision of Isaiah", a recurring theme on roughly contemporary church mosaics from Cilicia is seen as a reflection of the moral behind the *Henotikon*. The hypothesis, though difficult to prove is generally accepted, Hellenkemper, 1986: 228-229; Hill, 1996: 7-9. Recently, however, Mr. H. Elton has questioned this theory, particularly with regards to Zeno's involvement at Alahan; Elton, 2002: 153-157.

¹⁰⁰ According to Elton, 2002, Alahan was but a small rural church, equal to monuments such as those at Okuzlu or Akoren.

in Sbide in Isauria during the short reign of Basliscus (475-76). We are told that the Emperor had a vision of St. Thecla announcing his future victory and the winning back of the crown. In gratitude, we are told, the Emperor built a most large and exceptional church, and made a number of other donations¹⁰².

Almost nothing is heard about the province of Isauria and its *metropolis* during the sixth century. After the fierce suppression of the Isaurian revolt against Anastasius I in 498 (Ostrogorsky, 1969: 84-85), references to Isaurian brigandage disappear from the ancient sources. Perhaps massive deportations in the aftermath of this rebellion depopulated the Isaurian interior, as throughout the sixth century we hear of bands of Isaurian stoneworkers working in Jerusalem, Syria, Constantinople and Cappadocia (Mango, 1966: 358-365; Hill, 1975: 151-164). Archaeological survey and excavation on the western coast of Isauria have shown that the cities there continued to exist until the seventh century (Rosenbaum, et al. 1967; Blanton, 2000). At Alahan however, in the interior, the evidence of coins suggests a decline after the reign of Anastasius I¹⁰³.

The end of Antiquity in the province of Isauria, as for the rest of Asia Minor, is related to the Persian invasion early in the seventh century, and the subsequent Arab occupation of the Cilician Plain and the seas of the eastern Mediterranean (Foss, 1975/1990: 721-747). Seleukia on the Calycadnos makes a brief, but important appearance in this historical context; when in 616-617, the city hosted an imperial mint. This indicates that the city and the province were still in Byzantine hands, and

¹⁰¹ Some of these monuments have been singled out by earlier authors; Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930; Forsyth, 1957; Krautheimer, 1986.

¹⁰² Dagron, 1978: 58-9 is inconclusive about the exact church that Zeno donated; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 441-443 and Hill, 1996: 211-212 agree with the earlier authors that the Cupola Church was the project sponsored by Zeno.

¹⁰³ Summarised by M. Harrison in ed. Gough, 1985: 21-34; the ongoing archaeological projects in the Goksu Valley, may throw a completely different light on the Isaurian interior during antiquity; see notes 38 and 44.

may have been the headquarters of Byzantine resistance in the area. The following year, however, the mint moved to Isaura, far in the hinterlands, indicating that the Byzantine government was forced to abandon the coast (Foss, 1975/1990: 729-730). Seleukia was re-conquered shortly after, however, but within two decades, the city found itself located in a radically different geopolitical situation. By the mid seventh century, the Arabs had taken control of the Cilician Plain, and also the island of Cyprus, thus eliminating Byzantine naval power in the east Mediterranean. In the meantime, Arabs armies had advanced north, into Cappadocia and Armenia (Ostrogorsky, 1969: 130-131). These dramatic events severed the traditional economic and cultural links between the Isaurian coast and the large centres of the Cilician Plain and Syria. Even if some incredible chance spared the Isaurian cities from Arab attacks, the quality of life must have sharply declined in this new marginal zone of the Empire. Indeed, archaeological research has shown that most of the coastal cities to the west of Selukia were been abandoned sometimes during the seventh century¹⁰⁴.

No similar information is available for conditions in Seleukia or the nearby sanctuary of St. Thecla (Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 403-407, 441-443), although is known that the city survived in the changed geo-political situation. During the 8th/9th centuries, for example, Seleukia is attested as a *kleisura*, and as the seat of the *drungarios Kybiriotes*, the fleet commander (Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 403). With Cilicia and the White Sea lost to the Arabs, Seleukia was primarily a military and a naval base, defending access to the Anatolian Plateau, and the sea passage

¹⁰⁴ Rosenbaum, 1967 for Anemurium, Antiocheia ad Cragus, Iotape and Selinunt; Blanton, 2000, for an intensive survey and analysis of roughly the same region; Karamut, and Russel, 1999: 354-371 for Nephelion; Bean, and Mitford, 1970, found no dedicatory inscriptions later than the last quarter of the fifth century in the interior.

through the Cyprus Straits. At the same time, ironically, the Isaurian hinterlands, once barbarous and feared, became Seleukia's only tie with the Christian Empire¹⁰⁵.

The ecclesiastical situation of Seleukia was analogous to the city's rank in the political administration of the Late Empire. The Church of Seleukia was a *metropolis* in the Patriarchate of Antioch, which comprised of 33 attested bishoprics¹⁰⁶. Little is known about the history of the *Metropolis* beyond the list of its chief priests. What its position was with regard to the dogmatic quarrels of the age, and how it dealt with local "heresies", lingering pagan traditions, or ecclesiastical pressure from Antioch, remains mostly unknown¹⁰⁷.

During the fourth century we hear of a bishop Agapios, representing the see at the Councils at Nicaea in 325, and at Antioch in 341 (See also Le Quien, 1740: 1009-1016). As mentioned earlier, the Arian synod of 359 was held in Seleukia on the Calycadnos, with bishop Neon as the home representative. At the second general Council at Constantinople, in 381, Seleukia was represented by Symposios, a bishop attested in the *Miracles of St. Thecla* as an Arian, sending a messenger to Constantinople (*Mir*, 10; 9). He was also one of the two bishops to be granted an interment in the *martyrium*, along with his successor Samos (*Mir*, 30; Dagron, 1978: 70-71). We do not know if Symposios or his successor, Samos, adhered to the Arian dogma after the Council of 381: it is notable that both are treated with highest respect by the author of the *Miracles*. Samos is listed among the bishops that participated at an anti-Messalian Council held in Antioch, sometime in the period 383-390 (Dagron,

¹⁰⁵ During the Middle Byzantine period the province of Isauria becomes the theme of Seleukia.

¹⁰⁶ 22 of these were listed as poleis in the *Synecdemus* of Hierocles in the sixth century. For the Antiochene Patriarchate, Honigmann, 1947: 135-161; the chief ancient source is the *Notitia Antiochena*. A brief chronology of the archbishops of the Metropolis is given in Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 402.

¹⁰⁷ "The Life and Miracles of St. Thecla"; Dagron, 1978, also gives the names of some Seleukian bishops, but the existence of heresies or the dogmatic inclinations of the official church are never

1978: 57, also in Le Quien, 1740: 1009-1016). The Miracles also mention archbishop Maximos, a contemporary of St. John Chrysostome (Mir, 30), and Dexianos, the Seleukian representative at the Third General Council in Ephesus (Mir, 7; 32, Dagron, 1978: 17). Dexianos himself was a monk of a superior rank at the sanctuary of St. Thecla, before he became the head of the Isaurian Archepiscopate¹⁰⁸, and it seems that the monastery of St. Thecla was an important base for the recruitment of Seleukia's ecclesiastical authorities¹⁰⁹.

Archbishop Basil, whom the medieval tradition erroneously considered to be the author of the fifth century "Life and Miracles" (Dagron, 1978: 3-9), was involved at the Robber Synod at Ephesus in 449, and at the Chalcedon Council in 451, and in 458, he addressed a letter to emperor Leo I in the name of the bishops of Isauria (Dagron, 1978: 413-415). During the sixth century, the see was occupied by a series of Monophysite bishops¹¹⁰, and it seems that the *metropolis* remained loyal to the Antiochene Patriarchate until the Arab invasions, although one can hardly be conclusive on its role and importance in the Monophysite crisis¹¹¹. In the 7th century, the Seleukian *Metropolis* appears in the *Notitia* of the Patriarchate of Constantinople¹¹², but the Byzantine re-conquest of Cilicia and north Syria in the 10th century brought the *Metropolis* under the authority of Antioch.

5.2 St. Thecla, the hagiographic traditions

openly discussed, 1978: 80-91 for the persisting Pagan traditions and the local clergy; 1978: 34, 40-44, for the existence of early heresies among the monastic community at H. Thecla.

¹⁰⁸ Dagron, 1978: 75, 126. Menodorus, an unknown bishop of Cilician Aigai was also a monk at H. Thecla.

¹⁰⁹ Dagron, 1978: 126, and the "Church of St. Thecla" as the Church of Seleukia.

¹¹⁰ Honigmann, 1951: 84-8 for Seleukia in particular; also listed in Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 402.

¹¹¹ The number of suffragans make the Metropolis of Isauria one of the larger Churches in the Patriarchate of Antioch; compared to the Metropolis of Resafah, for instance, with only five subordinate bishoprics; Honigmann, 1951: 102-3.

In this chapter the four principle versions of the life of St. Thecla will be presented. Three of these belong to the well-known apocryphal tradition of “The Acts of Paul and Thecla”, while the fourth version appeared under the name of “The Life and the Miracles of the Holy Protomartyr Thecla”, and unlike the former, remained of a local significance. All of these hagiographic traditions can roughly be arranged in a chronological order. The short version of the “Acts of Paul and Thecla” appeared first, and was followed by the so-called, “Roman” version, and the longer version of the “Acts of Paul and Thecla”. A close examination of these apocryphal traditions will show that with the passage of time the legend was becoming more and more elaborated, while details of dubious orthodoxy were being modified or purged. As with the case of St. Erasmus, the chief interest will be focused on those details of the narrative that are of relevance for the developments in the sanctuary complex, but we will also discuss some of the “heretical” implications in the earliest version of the hagiography, as these could have easily been absorbed in the local cultic practices.

The “Life and the Miracles of the Holy Protomartyr Thecla” deserved a separate treatment, not only because it presents a local Seleukian version of St. Thecla’ life, but also because it frequently mentions the architectonic arrangements in the sanctuary complex. This work was completed towards the middle of the fifth century, by an anonymous member of the monastic community at the sanctuary complex. Thus, it both provides invaluable insights into the early stages of the local cultic tradition near Seleukia, and it presents an important written source for the history of Late Antique Seleukia, the organization of the monastic communities at the sanctuary, and for the relations between the sanctuary and the *metropolis*.

¹¹² Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 402-3; interestingly under the name *Metropolis Pamphiliae*.

St. Thecla makes a very early appearance in the Christian literary tradition. This saintly figure is first heard of in the “Acts of Paul and Thecla”, an *apocrypha* written by the “presbyter of Asia”, towards the end of the second century AD¹¹³. Despite the controversy it caused among Early Christian authors, for example, Tertulian (De Baptismo, 17, 4.), the Acts of Paul and Thecla were granted a place in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles by later Byzantine and Latin Church. At present, St. Thecla is celebrated as the first martyr among women and a saint equal to the apostles, and her feast-day is on September 24th, October 7th¹¹⁴.

The actual provenience of this hagiographic account, its relation to the Acts of Paul or the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, and the numerous manuscript versions through which we presently know it, controversial issues (Kasser, 1960: 45-57; Dagron, 1978: 33-4; Davis, 2001: 16-32). At the end of the second century AD, Tertulian knew of the history of St. Thecla, regarding it as a forgery¹¹⁵. That this stern Father of the Church found this document so scandalous is no surprise: the Acts granted the rights of an apostolic mission, and the rights of preaching and baptism to a woman; and worse still, they did this through the mouth of the apostle Paul. It is surprising, however, how little impact this criticism made on the later Church. Thecla of was a recognized and a celebrated saint, of an undoubted historicity by the second

¹¹³ There still lacks a study exclusively devoted to this text. Some analysis is made in Dagron, 1978: 31-54; mostly following an ancient study by Lipsius, and Bonnet, 1891: xciv-cvi, 235-72 or Leclercq, H Dictionnaire, 15 col. 2224-5. Two relevant studies have been inaccessible so far: Ruth Albrecht's *Das Leben der Heiligen Makrina von dem Hintergrund der Thekla Traditionen*, 1986 and E Hennecke's and W, Schneemelcher's *Neutestamentliche Apochryphen II*, 1964. More recently Davis, 2001: 4-32, has attempted an analysis of the “society behind the Acts”. The problems of composition and provenience are exposed in Kasser, 1960: 45-57. The longer version of the Acts is most easily accessible in Woods, 1991: 1-15; this is version two in the classification of the manuscripts by Lipsius, and Bonnet, 1891: 269-272; repeated in Dagron, 1978: 47-50. It is the one that we will present here.

¹¹⁴ A short account is given in Kadzah, 1991: 2033-4, with more bibliography.

¹¹⁵ Translation of the passage is given in Dagron, 1978: 31-32; also discussed in Davis, 2001: 7-8.

half of the fourth century¹¹⁶. The details of the original narrative were nevertheless suppressed and modified by later editors.

It is not known who was meant by the designation “the presbyter of Asia”, who provided an account full of “heretical” implications to the authority of the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles (Kasser, 1960: 45-57)? Although we can only guess about the identity of the author, and the exact circumstances that produced this peculiar narrative, there is some useful evidence. To Tertulian, and some modern commentators, the Acts were a personal literary creation of a superstitious, or at best a “heretical” ecclesiast¹¹⁷, but it is equally possible that the “Asian presbyter” was the first in a long series of Christian authors who attempted to give a literary justification to an existing cultic tradition, but one that lacked a support among the New Testament scriptures¹¹⁸. As such the earliest literary traditions pertaining to this cult could have emerged spontaneously in the “heretical” environment of 2nd century Asia Minor, and were perhaps, only subsequently related to the Acts of apostle Paul, presumably in an attempt to secure their own legitimacy¹¹⁹. If so, it is ironic that in later periods, with the development of the first Christian theologies it would be precisely the pairing of these saints that produced the greatest of controversies surrounding the history of St. Thecla (Dagron, 1978: 39-40).

¹¹⁶ Favourable references were made by St. Gregory of Nysa in “The Life of Macrina”; Mitchell, 1993, 2: 112; in “Egeria’s Travels”; Wilkinson, 1971: 121-22; the homilies of pseudo-Chrysostom; Aubineau, 1975: 349-62.

¹¹⁷ Delehay, 1998: 148; the Acts as a piece of fiction, a romance; for St. Jerome the author of the acts was a contemporary to St. John the Evangelist.

¹¹⁸ As we shall see later, the hagiographical accounts of Thecla’s life and acts were particularly flexible with regards to developments in the other components of the cultic traditions; Dagron, 1978: 54.

¹¹⁹ For local, - Seleukian?- provenience of the narrative, Kasser, 1960: 52-7; Davis, 2001: 8-34 relates it to an old tradition of female story-telling attested throughout the Mediterranean; another potential source is the second century New Prophecy movement; Mitchell, 1993, 2: 96-107, for the heretical movements of second century Anatolia.

While there are certainly problems concerning the actual composition of the Acts of Paul and Thecla¹²⁰, it is not the direct aim of this study to discuss these at length, but the place and the time of the creation of the Acts of Paul and Thecla deserved an emphasis for two important and closely related reasons. First, the earliest versions of the Acts were the basis for all future hagiographical traditions; later versions can be distinguished as they have different endings to the original narrative. Otherwise, changes in the core of the hagiography are very slight, although not insignificant (Dagron, 1978: 34-54; after Lipsius, and Bonnet, 1891: 269-272). Secondly, ideas and practices of dubious orthodoxy are apparent in the earliest version of the history of St. Thecla. Some parts of the narrative have important implications on issues such as the administration of baptism and resurrection, and the roles and the forms of feminine piety. The bulk of these “heretical” implications (gnosticism, encratism) were purged by later editors of the text, but they are nevertheless recognizable and reflect the religious practices and beliefs centred around the Seleukian sanctuary (Davis, 2001: 36-7).

Researchers have distinguished three major versions of the “Acts of Paul and Thecla”, plus the fifth century “Life and Miracles”, a work that remained of local significance and made little impact on the later traditions (Dagron, 1978: 47-54/Lipsius, and Bonnet, 1891: 269-272). The shortest of these versions, and most likely the oldest one, establishes the essentials of the hagiography. As the other traditions vary little in their narrative until the point where Thecla meets Paul at Myra in Lycia, it is convenient to provide a short recapitulation.

During his stay at Iconium, St. Paul resided and preached the Word of God in the house of one Onesiphorus. His fervently ascetic sermons regarding the issues of

¹²⁰ Concerning the relation of this text to other hagiographical works, or to its later versions for

chastity and resurrection (Acts, I 12-22) made a powerful and lasting impact on Thecla, a young noblewoman who lived with her mother – Theocleia – in a house so close to Onesiphorus' home, that Thecla could listen to Paul's words through the window of her room. For the space of three days, she stayed by the window listening to Paul's discourses day and night, until she became so inspired by his ascetic doctrine that she broke off her marriage plans, and readily denounced her social position. This familial scandal soon turned in to a public affair: Thamyras, the offended groom of Thecla, successfully induced a persecution against Paul and his followers, grounded on the accusation that Paul was agitating against the laws of matrimony (Acts, IV 2). As this had no effect upon Thecla, her mother furiously demanded the governor that she be burned at the stake. Thecla, having broken the laws of matrimony of the city of Iconium (thus in the longer version, V. 7, IV. 2), was condemned by the entire community, headed by her own mother. Thus came the first martyrdom of Thecla. She was stripped naked in the theatre, in front of the whole city, and the boys and girls of her same age collected wood and straw for the pyre. Divine intervention, very much like the one that saved Paul in Ephesus (Kasser, 1960: 51), preserved Thecla from the flames: a great eruption from the earth swallowed the elements of the pyre, while rain and hail extinguished the fire (Acts, V 15-16).

Thecla, now an outlaw in Iconium, left the city and joined Paul and his followers, including Onesiphorus and his family, who were hiding in a cave somewhere on the road between Iconium and Daphne. At this point she openly declared her intention to follow Paul on his apostolic missions, and asked for baptism, but Paul gave a dilatory answer. Nevertheless, Onesiphorus and his family

returned to Iconium, while Paul and Thecla continued to Antioch in Syria¹²¹. As soon as they arrived in the Syrian capital, Alexander, a noble and a magistrate in the city, took notice of Thecla's beauty and wished to marry her. Since her companion, Paul, pretended not to know her, Alexander seized her in the street and tried to kiss her, and Thecla replied by tearing his coat and knocking off his wreath of office. The ashamed and offended magistrate took her to the governor, and she was tried and condemned to be thrown to the beasts in the theatre. In the meantime, she was kept in custody at the house of a rich widow called Trifina, the Acts indicating that she was a member of a royal family¹²². Unlike the case in Iconium, Thecla's second martyrdom was not unanimously supported by all the citizens of Antioch. She especially stirred the sympathies of the women of Antioch, and they, led by Trifina, formed a separate party among the spectators in the theatre.

Later Byzantine tradition, including the fifth century "Life of St. Thecla", tended to diminish this strikingly overt feministic flavour of the earlier version of the Acts: the lack of unanimity of the public at Antioch is either suppressed, or the correlation between the opposing parties and their sex, disappears. That sexual contest is indeed one of the central issues of the narrative becomes plain once we examine the details of Thecla's second martyrdom itself (Dagron, 1978: 37-8; Acts VIII-IX; Davis, 2001: 8-11). Feminine solidarity is stressed time and again; the female part of the audience cries out against the city laws and the injustice of the governor (Acts, VIII, 13-14); the women are shown trembling when Thecla is in immediate danger, and rejoicing, once the martyr is relieved (Acts, IX, 2 and 5); they

¹²¹ All the versions of the Life of Thecla, are concordant that the second martyrdom of Thecla happened at Syrian Antioch, and the fifth century Life in particular stresses the fact that the following episode happened in Syrian, not in Pisidian Antioch—Life, 15; Dagron, 1978: 45.

even dare to cast quantities of perfume and incense in the arena, to make the beasts asleep (Acts, IX, 10). At the same time, a lioness defends Thecla against a bear and Alexander's own lion; Alexander's embarrassment becomes even greater when his bulls also fail to kill Thecla (Acts, IX 12 and 13). The men, meanwhile, including St. Paul appear either passive or impotent throughout the story. Thecla had clashed with the local authorities, both in Iconium and Antioch, because of her refusal to submit to the traditional gender model of ancient society, and her steady persistence, when face to face with the wild beasts in the Antioch arena, was a great triumph for feminism, and a unique instance of an alliance between the Christian god and feminist justice.

Thecla's "baptism" in the course of her martyrdom at Antioch, was to prove another point of controversy for Tertulian and other writers. According to the Acts, Thecla performed her baptism by throwing herself in a water pit full of seals (Acts, IX 7-9). This was, in fact, the chief point towards which Tertulian directed his criticism: was this a true baptism? Later authors made some efforts at reconciling this incident with the orthodox rules concerning baptism (Dagron, 1978: 40-42). Photius, for example, a ninth century Patriarch of Constantinople, remarking as Thecla threw herself into the water pit on the order of the governor, her act of self-baptism was an understandable and justifiable reaction of a devout Christian facing immediate danger. A similar interpretation is given in the manuscripts of the fifth century "Life and Miracles" (Life, XX, 30-34), but more subtler were the commentaries made by Nicholas of Paphlagonia, who suggested that Thecla, having received from St. Paul the baptism of Spirit, was granted the right of self-baptism by water, which was therefore of secondary importance. If this was the case, then the Acts reveal an

¹²² Queen Tryphaena is a historical personage, who was the widow of king Cotys of Thrace and the mother of king Polemo II of Pontus also a great-niece of the emperor Claudius, it is not known how she was incorporated in the story, Dagron, 1978.

ancient peculiarity in the rite of initiation of the Antiochene Church: the baptism by Spirit, the *crismatio*, precedes baptism by water, the *immersio*¹²³. Despite interpretations by later Church authorities, the issue of St. Thecla's baptism remained at the very margins of Orthodoxy¹²⁴.

Thecla's martyrdom continued when on the advice of Alexander, the governor ordered that she be tied with a rope around her waist and her feet, and then bound to a pair of tormented bulls so that they may tore her in pieces, at which point, Trifina, Thecla's guardian, fainted and expired (Acts, IX 14). This caused great concern among the citizens, and especially the governor and Alexander, who, knowing that Trifina was of a "royal" family were afraid that Caesar might exact his revenge on the city's magistrates. The spectacle came to an abrupt end and Thecla was set free. Loud cries filled the theatre and shook the entire city: "There is but one God, who is the God of Thecla; the one God who has delivered Thecla" (Acts, IX, 22). So loud were their shouts that Trifina arose from the dead and joined in their exclamations. The women of Antioch were Thecla's first converts; the moment of her martyrdom was as usual, the best time to advertise the grace and the power of the Christian god. We might recall that the same was true for the much later legend of St. Erasmus: courage in face of persecution and miracles were the basic methods of conversion used by the early Christian missionaries.

Thus the women of Antioch formed the first convent of Thecla. The Acts tell us that they gathered at the house of Trifina, where Thecla taught the Word of God and converted "many young women" (Acts, IX, 24). But Thecla did not cease

¹²³ Dagron, 1978: 41; Shepherd, 1961: 26-44, is a useful survey of the problems of the old Antiochene liturgy.

¹²⁴ Dagron, 1978: 42-44, for instance sees an intimate relation between the themes of baptism-resurrection and procreation-death; these are among the central topics of the encratist heresy, very

longing for Paul. When she found out that he was at Myra, in Lycia, she gathered a group of followers, dressed in men's clothes, put on a girdle, and went to Myra where she found Paul preaching. She was now officially baptised, and had a group of followers of her own. The meeting of Paul at Thecla at Myra was short; Thecla related to Paul her martyrdom in Antioch and her baptism, and announced her intention to continue the apostolic mission in Iconium. Paul approved, replying: "Go and teach the word of the Lord (Acts, X 1-4). Thus her baptism and future acts became a constitutive part of the early apostolic tradition¹²⁵.

Quite how did St. Thecla become related with Seleukia on the Calycadnos is now clear. According to the shorter version of the Acts, while in Iconium, the saint first paid a visit to the house of Onesiphorus and at the very spot where Paul was preaching the Gospel, she delivered a thanksgiving prayer to God. In this account, her fiancé was now dead, but finding her mother still alive she attempted to convert her, we are not told with what success. Afterwards Thecla went to Seleukia where she converted many and died. We are not given the reason for why Thecla decided to settle in this city for the rest of her life, nor are there any references to her actual stay there. Seleukia is, in fact, obviously of secondary importance in this version of the hagiography, whether we see it as a simple and convenient end of the dramatic biography, or as a matter of actual fact.

The longer version of the Acts¹²⁶ closely follows the shorter version up to the point where Thecla attempts to convert her mother in Iconium. Having no success, she left the city and went to the cave on the road to Daphne, where she found Paul

popular in fourth century Isauria, Cilicia and north Syria; For the encratist heresy: Blondel, 1944:157-210.

¹²⁵ As mentioned earlier, the passage remains open to controversial interpretations; Dagron, 1978: 42 provides examples of how the later Byzantine editors tempered the extent of Thecla's apostolic activities.

and Onesiphorus after suffering her first martyrdom in Iconium. Then, a bright cloud miraculously conducted her to Seleukia (Acts, X 12). Interestingly, in this version, Thecla's travel to Seleukia is repeated in two consecutive passages: first the author repeats the text of the shorter version of the Acts, that Thecla went to Seleukia where she enlightened many in the knowledge of (Christ, X 11). Again, in the longer version, there is no particular reason given for Seleukia as her destination, but the account for Thecla's stay near the city is made much more elaborate (Acts, X 13-XI 15). Fearing that the Pagan inhabitants of the city might harm her, she went to "a mountain called Kalamon or Rodeon", where she dwelled in a cave, and successfully resisted the great and many temptations of the devil. Hearing of the holy virgin Thecla living in a cave close to the city, the gentlewomen of Seleukia became intrigued and often paid her visits. Many of them were converted and some left their everyday lives and joined her. Thecla also became celebrated for her miraculous healing powers, and soon the sick of Seleukia and the adjacent region were regularly sent to her abode: they were relieved of their illness as soon as they approached the entrance of Thecla's cave. This caused much envy and hatred among the physicians of Seleukia, for they were deprived of their sources of revenue. Inspired by the devil, they reasoned that she was a priestess of Artemis, and that she was granted divine assistance through her virginity. Therefore, they employed some ruffians, promising them a large sum of money if they raped her. The drunken villains entered the cave and grasped her, and were just about to commit the deed when God answered Thecla's prayers¹²⁷, and opened a fissure in the rock, large enough for a man to pass through. Thecla fled from the rapists and entered the rock through the crack, which

¹²⁶ Version II in Dagron, 1978: 48-49 – after Lipsius, and Bonnet, 1891: 271-72. The full text is available in Woods, 1991: 1-15.

¹²⁷ Note that God addresses St. Erasmus too, immediately before his death.

instantly closed, so that the attackers were left with only a piece of her veil. As the author of this longer narrative concludes, even this little incident was by God's permission, for confirmation of the faith of those who will later come to visit the venerable spot (Acts, XI 14)¹²⁸.

Thus we have in the longer version of the Acts another chapter in Thecla's biography, after the episodes in Iconium and Antioch. The brief mention of Thecla's sojourn in Seleukia in the shorter version of the hagiography is here developed at a considerable length. It provides an "explanation" for two essential elements of the cultic practices associated with her sanctuary near Seleukia (Davis, 2001: 36-41) Thecla is the founder of the first monastic community near Seleukia, and her example of life in chastity and complete seclusion from secular affairs became a model for female asceticism and piety in Late Antiquity¹²⁹. We know very little about the organization of monastic life in the sanctuary of St. Thecla (Wilkinson, 1971: 121-23), but if we take the St. Thecla of the early Acts to be a model for the later monastic community¹³⁰, it is possible that the hermits that lived around the shrine of St. Thecla cultivated the doctrine of *encratism*, a fourth century "heresy" very popular in the monastic circles of southern Anatolia and Syria¹³¹.

The longer version of the "Acts of Paul and Thecla", and the fifth century "Life of Thecla" in particular, stressed the healing powers of the saint. The fifth century "Miracles of St. Thecla" (Dagron, 1978: 286-412) is filled with references to ill and troubled people coming from Seleukia or other more distant places to visit the shrine

¹²⁸ In other manuscripts a piece of Thecla's cloth is caught by the closing rocks and petrified Dagron, 1978: 49.

¹²⁹ Davis, 2001, St. Gregory of Nysa, the author of the "Life of St. Macrina" accounts how his mother had a vision of St. Thecla while she was giving birth to his sister, Macrina; the latter was also a founder of a women's monastery, Mitchell, 1993: 112.

¹³⁰ The account of nun Egeria- Wilkinson, 1971: 122 – mentions prayers and readings of the Acts in the martyrium of the saint.

of the saint, hoping to obtain a cure for themselves and for their relatives. St. Thecla was particularly renowned for her miraculous ability to cure eye diseases, bone fractures, and diseases among domestic animals. Healing miracles were, after all, among the most popular aspects in Late Antique and Middle Age Christianity. They were an important source of revenue for the monastic communities around the shrines, and certainly played an important role in the local and the regional economies¹³².

Another important aspect of the longer version of the Acts is that it contains references to local toponyms and descriptions of actual sites. In addition, it also relates the circumstances that produced the saintly relic venerated at the Seleukian sanctuary: the piece of Thecla's veil torn off by the would-be rapists (Acts, XI 14)¹³³. In other words, the editor of the longer version must have known the cultic centre and something of the elements that comprised the cultic tradition near Seleukia. The importance of literary records in the formation and the establishment of early Christian cultic centres has been demonstrated through the example of St. Erasmus of Lychnid. The sanctuary of St. Thecla, like that near Lychnid, lacked any physical remains of the venerated saint, certainly the most appealing of all condition for the creation of sacred space in Early Christianity. Thus existing traditions, whether written or oral, were the most convenient way to compensate for such deficiencies in the material aspects of the cult.

This feature of the hagiographical genre is nicely illustrated by the third version of the Acts of Pual and Thecla¹³⁴. The text follows the previously described

¹³¹ Dagron, 1978: 42-44; for the heretical implications of early monastic practices in Anatolia: Mitchell, 1993, 2: 110-121; for *enkratism*: Blondel, 1944: 157-210.

¹³² A subject that still awaits serious studies; Talbot, 2002: 153-173.

¹³³ This would be the major argument for a later date of this version of the Acts; Dagron, 1978: 49.

¹³⁴ Or the "Roman" version; Dagron, 1978: 50; Lipsius, and Bonnet, 1891: 270-71.

version until the moment when Thecla is attacked by the rapists in her cave. Instead of entering the miraculously created fissure in the rock, the virgin disappears underneath the floor of the cave; and makes a subterranean journey to Rome where she sought Paul. Finding out that he was dead, the now old virgin passed away, and was buried three *stadia* from his tomb¹³⁵. The author of this manuscript has thus related the existence of the local Roman, tradition without contradicting the geography of the main narrative.

The fifth century “Life and Miracles of St. Thecla”¹³⁶ also provides, to a certain degree, a similar explanation for the absence of saintly relics in the Seleukian sanctuary. The last chapters of this manuscript (Life, 27; 28) ignore the longer version of the Acts (that is, version II). There is no reference to either the cave, or to the healing powers of the saint (though they are greatly exploited in the Miracles), or to the conspiracy of the Seleukian physicians. Thecla simply arrives at Seleukia, and immediately installs herself on a nearby hill, “in the manners of St. Elijah on Mt. Carmel, or the Baptist in the desert”. Her chief enemies are not the physicians of Seleukia, but the Pagan divinities, Athena on the Seleukian Acropolis, and Sarpedon on the promontory, south of the city. As in the shorter version of the Acts, Thecla’s mission is successful and she catechised and baptized many of the inhabitants of the city. However in the “Life and Miracles”, Thecla does not die; she simply disappears underneath the earth, and is still alive and performing miracles. There is no need to fix a saintly relic, because no one doubts her presence and activity. This collection of

¹³⁵ Relics of St. Thecla or more, likely some other saint carrying her name are mentioned in the *Notitia Ecclesiarum* of the city of Rome composed by Pope Honorius I in the early seventh century; Dagron, 1978: 50, n.1; Milan and later, Tarragona also claim to own relics of the saint; Tolfo, 2002.

¹³⁶ Dagron, 1978: 51-54; for the composition of this text and its author “Basil of Seleukia: Dagron, 1974: 5-11.

miracles, as compiled in the mid-fifth century, is a plain enough testimony; the life of St. Thecla is but an introduction to her miracles.

“The Life and Miracles of St. Thecla” does betray the powerful legacy of Pagan concepts (Dagron, 1978: 81-90). The saint is not only alive, but partial: just like the Pagan deities, Thecla has her favourite dwelling places (Mir, 23, 8-11), and she effects her miracles through specific media, such as water (Mir, 19), dreams and visions (Mir, 31). Thecla is a vengeful saint; she punishes the Isaurians who plunder her sanctuary (Mir, 28), and Marianos, the bishop of Tarsus, who forbade the people of his see to go to Seleukia to participate in her annual festivities (Mir, 29). She is also the patron saint of chastity and marriage (Mir, 20, 21), protector of men of letters (Mir, 38, 39), and of the cities that venerate her (Selinunt, Mir, 27) or are somehow related with her “earthly life” (Iconium, Mir, 6). One can hardly fail noticing the similarities between Thecla’s attributes and Athena, the honoured Virgin of Pagan times (Dagron, 1978:84-85); especially when we read that Thecla had a community of virgins living in her sanctuary (Mir 10, 34), and when Gregory Nazianzes compares her sanctuary with the Parthenon¹³⁷.

The first four miracles symbolically introduce the implantation of Christianity in Seleukia (Mir, 1-4) (Dagron, 1978: 81-90), and link the last chapters of the “Life” (27 and 28) and the first of the “Miracles”. Upon her arrival in Seleukia, Thecla’s first task is to silence the old, local Pagan deities: Sarpedon, whose tomb and temple are situated on a promontory, south of the city, and now replaced by a monastery (Mir, 1)¹³⁸; Athena Kanetis¹³⁹, who dwelled on the Seleukian acropolis; Aphrodite, whose temple was transformed in a church by Dexianos, bishop of Seleukia, early in

¹³⁷ *Carmen de Vita sua*; translation is given in Dagron 1978: 56.

¹³⁸ For the site Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1986: 44-47; for the legend of Sarpedonis and Isauria; Mutaſian, 1988: 79-83.

the fifth century; and Zeus, “the terrible daemon”, whose temple was converted into a church dedicated to the apostle Paul¹⁴⁰. The old sacred places are exorcised, but they are not abandoned. The old Pagan sacred topography was preserved, but it is now superimposed by the shrines and the sanctuaries of the new religion. Thus, the vestiges of Paganism are not only conceptual – St. Thecla appropriates the qualities of Athena Kanetis¹⁴¹ – but also physical: the temple of Zeus¹⁴² in Seleukia is replaced by a church to the apostle Paul; the tomb of Sarpedon is transformed into a monastery¹⁴³. The cases of Diocaesarea¹⁴⁴ and Elausea Sebaste, indicate that this was a common regional feature.

Thecla fought against the deities of Paganism by employing the means of her enemies: oracles and divinations, performance of healing miracles, nocturnal visions and dreams (Dagron, 1978: 102-3). Her fiercest rival is not Athena of the Seleukian acropolis, but Sarpedon, whose oracles, as the author of the *Miracles* admits, were still implored in his own days (*Mir*, 11, 18, 40)¹⁴⁵. In this aspect the “*Miracles*” make an important contribution to the image of popular religious life in the first half of the fifth century. The clash between the “soldiers of Christ” and the Pagan deities has little to do with issues of ethics and morality (as in *Mir*, 12; 3 and 20 in particular), and still less with religious concepts. The souls of the few remaining Pagans (Dagron, 1978: 91-94) were christianised thanks to the superiority of Thecla’s oracles and her healing powers (*Mir*, 17 and 40). Sarpedon is no less real than Thecla, but as the author of the *Miracles* rationalises in his prologue (*Mir*, prologue,

¹³⁹ The attribute is unintelligible, Dagron, 1978: 84.

¹⁴⁰ The remains are still visible; Feld, 1963/4: 89-93.

¹⁴¹ For Thecla as the Christian descendant of the ancient goddess of nature and the beasts; Davis, 2001, on the basis of pilgrim flasks depicting the saint in an orant pose, surrounded by wild animals.

¹⁴² Feld, 1964: 89-93.

¹⁴³ Of St. Theodore? Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1986: 43-47.

¹⁴⁴ The temple of Zeus Olbius, Keil, and Wilhelm, 1931: 47.

22-74), his healing powers are negligent and his oracles are false and dangerous. Sarpedon is impotent because he lacks access to the ultimate truth; he is the servant of the daemon, while Thecla is a servant of God. The same applies to the physicians of Seleukia¹⁴⁶. It is the living saint that provides the link with the Christian divinity; there is no need of intermediaries such as a saintly relic, or the clergy. The people apply directly to the saint, by praying at her sanctuary or in their homes. Often, the saint appears in dreams or visions, even if not summoned (Mir, 19; 31). We are still in an age of transition: the Christian concept of a distant and transcendent divinity has made little progress against the Hellenic idea of the immanent, choleric god.

Compared to other roughly contemporary accounts¹⁴⁷, “The Life and Miracles of St. Thecla” makes disappointingly few mentions concerning the form of the religious ceremonies of the time, and the place and the structure of the church liturgy. Some reference is made to the annual feast-day of the saint (Mir, 26; 33), but the author does not give a detailed description of the religious ceremonies (Dagron, 1978: 78-9). His main concern is to emphasize the grandeur and the importance of the feast-day, the myriads of people coming to Seleukia to render honour to the saint and to gain spiritual benefit (Mir, 29). The festivities, which apparently lasted for several days (Mir, 33, 1-2)¹⁴⁸, had as its main attraction (Mir, 26, 8-9): a pilgrimage to the summit of the “hill that is adjacent to the city”, and an all night vigil facing the north skies, hoping to spot the saint climbing a fire-chariot on her way to Dalisadnos¹⁴⁹. According to the “Miracles”, St. Thecla had a small sanctuary near

¹⁴⁵ There are other significant parallels: both were initially human beings and foreigners in Seleukia, the both had their tombs transformed into sanctuaries and so forth; Dagron, 1978: 86-88.

¹⁴⁶ According to Dagron, 1978: 93, 124; the latter were in fact mostly recruited from the local Jewish community; this tradition survived well into the Middle Ages; Goitein, 1964: 298-303.

¹⁴⁷ “Egeria’s Travels” for instance, composed originally in the years 381-384; Wilkinson, 1971.

¹⁴⁸ One week according to Dagron, 1978: 79.

¹⁴⁹ The site is situated some eighty miles as the crow flies to the northeast of Seleukia, very close to the monastic complex at Alahan; Bean, and Mittford, 1970.

Dalisadnos, equipped with spacious gardens, full of trees, flowers and cool springs, elements that also featured prominently at the sanctuary near Seleukia (Dagron, 1978: 67-73). The festivities terminated in a standard fashion: with the reading of a panegyric, the singing of Psalms, and the administration of the sacred mysteries, presumably in the *martyrium* (Mir, 33)¹⁵⁰.

Like most such occasions, the feast-day of St. Thecla was not an exclusively religious affair¹⁵¹. If we are to believe the author of the “Miracles”, the vast congregation included people of all social classes, peasants and city dwellers, and from various nations, people from the Isaurian Mountains (Mir, 33; 19), the Cilician Plain, and Cyprus (Mir, 29, 15). The successful organization of the festivities certainly reflected the reputation of the provincial capital, and its importance as a regional administrative and cultural centre¹⁵². One of the miracles (Mir, 41; Dagron, 1978: 78) concerns what appears to be a small contest in eloquence, orations praising the saint were delivered from a *rostrum*, outside of the church (apart from those delivered from the church ambo – Mir, 41, 20-21). These were another signal of the vitality of the Greco-Roman traditions in the new Christian ambient (Dagron, 1978: 129-130).

The “Miracles” do, however, provide some clues for the monastic institution at the Seleukian sanctuary (Dagron, 1978: 74-78; Davis, 2001: 34-76). Hagia Thecla was one of the earliest monastic complexes in Anatolia, the first unambiguous reference to it being given in Egeria’s account of her visit to the sanctuary in May, 384 (Wilkinson, 1971: 121-123). The Spanish pilgrim mentions cells for both men

¹⁵⁰ Compared to Egeria’s account of the ceremonies in Jerusalem during the last week of Easter, Wilkinson, 1971: 74-86.

¹⁵¹ See Pena, 1997: 132; for the example of the sixth century festivities at the sanctuary of St. Symeon the Stylite, at the Djebel Sem’an.

and women, plus a very unusual, if not unique ecclesiastical position for that time, a deaconess, Marthana, a superior of the Virgins¹⁵³. The “Miracles” confirm Egeria’s testimony. The Virgins seem to be a separate category of nuns who lived in quarters called *partenones*, situated in the immediate vicinity of the *martyrium*, i.e. within the confines of the *enceinte* (Mir, 10, 32). There is no reference to the living quarters of the male monks, who in addition, also bear curious designations. Dexianos, for example, before becoming bishop of Seleukia, was a *filax* and *paredros* at the sanctuary, a guardian and an assistant of the saint (Mir, 7, 3-6)¹⁵⁴. It is difficult to decide between a literal and a metaphorical interpretation of the terms. Evidently, the monks had a greater scope for social mobility than their female counterparts: they counted as official members of the clergy, and could even hope to be elected bishops of Seleukia.

The “Miracles” do not, however, mention the *apotactices* referred to in the brief account of the nun Egeria. These appear to be a separate category of permanent inhabitants of the sanctuary, but their exact status is hard to understand in the absence of any explicit testimony. G. Dagron would relate them to certain episodes and persons from the “Miracles” (Mir, 43; 46), for instance, the cases of two women who quit their worldly lives, and retreated to the sanctuary with all of their personal belongings¹⁵⁵. We should also note that this form of asceticism may be related to a deliberate will to follow in St. Thecla’s footsteps (Davis, 2001).

These confusing peculiarities in the monastic organization of the Seleukian sanctuary should not be a surprise. The monastic community of Hagia Thecla must

¹⁵² Dagron, 1978: 78-9, seems to suggest the existence of a regional fare for the occasion; such is the case for the pilgrim sites of Christian Syria, but their geographical situation is different than in Anatolia; Lassus, 1947; more recently, Pena, 1997.

¹⁵³ As mentioned earlier an allusion to the virgins of Thecla is made by Gregory Nazianzes, during his retreat at the sanctuary

have been founded at the same time (if not earlier) as the rules of coenobitic monasticism were being formulated¹⁵⁶. Further, we must bear in mind that Hagia Thecla was much more than a monastery; the Seleukian sanctuary was a large ecclesiastical complex that incorporated a series of activities, not necessarily all of religious nature. Its flowered gardens, trees and springs provided a convenient retreat for the people of the nearby *metropolis*; it was a place for walks and picnics (Mir, 24 for instance), where the sick could rest and the studious work and meditate, as with Gregory Nazianzes or Isokakios (Mir, 39). One would not be terribly wrong in envisaging the sanctuary of St. Thecla as expressing the ideals of St. John Chrysostom: the monastery and its physical setting as an image of a perfectly ordered life, a social and an urban alternative of the old Hellenic *polis* (Mitchell, 1993: 111).

In the hagiographical traditions of the West and of Byzantium, the figure of St. Thecla is invariably associated with the Acts of Paul and Thecla. We have seen that this composition not only provided the basis for Thecla's biography, but also introduced important controversies that dictated the future developments of the cult. The fifth century "Life and Miracles" composed in Seleukia, apparently made little impact: the living saint was abandoned in favour of a relic; the toponyms and the physical appearance of the site would change accordingly. The fifth century author could hardly have believed that his patron saint would soon become a patroness of the Emperor. According to a modern commentator (Dagron, 1978: 53-4), "The Life and the Miracles" are important as a unique testimony for the early stages of the development of this Early Christian cultic centre, linking the cult in its pristine – the short version of the Acts – and its fully developed form – the longer version and later

¹⁵⁴ A similar designation is attested in the "Miracles of Cosma and Damien", Dagron, 1978: 75.

¹⁵⁵ These acts would nicely correspond to the literal sense of the term, Dagron, 1978: 77.

¹⁵⁶ For early monastic movements in Asia Minor, Mitchell, 1993, 2: 110-121.

commentaries. The suggestion is appealing, although one must not exclude the possibility of contemporary but distinct traditions¹⁵⁷.



¹⁵⁷ For instance the legends about this fascinating saint in Christian Egypt, Davis, 2001; where Thecla

CHAPTER VI

THE CULTIC CENTER OF ST. THECLA NEAR SELEUKIA ON THE CALYCADNOS: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The archaeological site of Meryemlik (modern Aya Thecla) has been known to scholars in the field of Early Christian archaeology of Anatolia, since over a century ago. Its importance was already realized by one of the pioneers in this field, J. Strzigowski (Hill, 1996: 210), and archaeological excavations took place here as early as 1907, but due to the World War I, the publication of the results was delayed until 1930. Subsequent investigations by G. Forsyth in 1957, by J. Wilkinson in 1971, and by F. Hild and H. Hellenkemper, and S. Hill in the last two decades of the 20th century, basically consisted of surveys of the extant ruins on the site of the sanctuary, and revisions of the publication by the original excavators. Thanks to the efforts of these scholars, we now have a much more complete image of the cultic center of St. Thecla. Nevertheless, there is still a great number of problems that remain to be resolved. The exact stratigraphy in the core of the sanctuary complex is very much controversial. To begin with, neither the date of the establishment of the cultic center, nor the time of its demise are known for certain, and almost nothing is known about the pre-Christian phases on the site of the sanctuary complex. Only future excavations can give definite answers to these problems, but bearing in mind

is paired with St. Menas, not with St. Paul; or in Syria, Burris, and Rompay Van, 2002: 1-14, where

the amount of illicit digging and stone robbing on the site of the sanctuary complex during the last century, it is hard to believe that a new archaeological campaign will bring any definite conclusions. Further problems and controversies arise over the issues of the exact reconstruction of the numerous secular and sacral monuments, and their function in the sanctuary complex.

Except for the study of S. Hill (1996) and the brief accounts by J. Wilkinson (1971) and G. Dagron (1978), none of the researches devoted to this sanctuary were interested in the problems of locating its sacred focus, and the way in which its cultic significance was articulated through architectural and other arrangements. Having presented the historical conditions in this region during the period of Late Antiquity, and the chief hagiographic traditions concerning the life of St. Thecla, the following chapter will attempt to resolve this neglected aspect of the Seleukian sanctuary. Before doing so, a general description of the other monuments on the site of the sanctuary will be given, including a consideration of the date of their foundation and their relation to the central monument in the complex, the basilica of St. Thecla.

6.1 Geographical position and layout of the site

In its geographical situation, and its proximity and relationship to a larger urban centre, the case of the sanctuary of St. Thecla is to a certain degree analogous to the cultic centre of St. Erasmus near Lychnid. The chief centre for the cultic tradition that venerated St. Thecla during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages was situated 1.5 kilometres (1 *stadion*) to the south-west of Silifke, ancient Seleukia on the Calycadnos. (fig. 17; 18) A road leading north from the city-gates, and through

Thecla is related to Old Testament figures: Esther, Ruth, Judith, Susanna, or even Daniel.

the ancient *necropoleis* gave easy access to the sanctuary, located on the middle of a ridge that dominates very rugged, limestone terrain variously called *Kalameon* or *Rodion* or *Myrsineon* (Hellenkemper and Hild, 1990: 402; Dagron, 1978: 63-4), in the southwest corner of the Calycadnos Delta. Unlike the case of St. Erasmus of Lychnid, it is not necessary to divine on the nature of the social and economic links between the sanctuary and the city; the ancient literary sources, “The Life and Miracles of St. Thecla”, provide plenty of information (Dagron, 1978), regarding this. St. Thecla’s sanctuary was a large monastic and pilgrimage complex, equipped with various amenities (fortifications, aqueduct, baths) and occupying an area of nearly 30 ha. Yet, in many aspects it remained “organically” attached to the neighbouring city (Dagron, 1978: 63-4): the cultic centre and the city experienced the same political and economical conditions during Late Antiquity.

Collective memory has preserved the site of St. Thecla’s sanctuary under the name of “Meryemlik”, or St. Mary’s place¹⁵⁸. The name refers to an extensive complex of Late Antique ruins situated about two kilometres to the south of modern Silifke, in the north-eastern periphery of the modern village of Becili. This geographical location was easy of access, both from Seleukia and from the seaport of Holmoi, modern Tasucu, lying some five kilometres to the south. Situated on a main road that linked Seleukia with her main seaport, and with the coastline lying within the reach of the eye, Hagia Thecla by no means conformed to the monastic ideal of a distant and isolated setting¹⁵⁹. Indeed, accessibility was an important convenience for the establishment of a pilgrimage centre of international reputation. In modern times,

¹⁵⁸ Dagron, 1978: 55; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 441; this toponym is the heritage of the local Greek Orthodox community; in the last few decades the site was given its original designation – Aya Thecla

¹⁵⁹ Compared to the physical setting of the monastic complex at Alahan for instance; Gough, 1985: 3-17.

however, it invited intensive stone-robbing, with the result that by the time the first systematic excavations took place here (early in the last century), a great deal of its archaeological remains have been destroyed or obliterated¹⁶⁰.

Occupying a marginal point on the Taurus Range, facing the Sea and the alluvial plain of the Calycadnos Delta, rather than the mountainous interior, the sanctuary complex of St. Thecla conforms to the ancient settlement pattern on the coastland of Rough Cilicia (Blanton, 2000). The steep and barren ridges of the Taurus could easily be adapted into formidable strongholds, with a ready access to the scarce patches of fertile soils and nearby anchorage points. The soft yellowish limestone that comprises the bedrock of these mountains provides an abundance of easily worked material, providing regular, finely dressed building blocks, as well as simple limestone mortar used as stucco on the surface of the walls¹⁶¹. The porous quality of this material, along with the strong northerly winds and the fairly high level of annual precipitation, are the chief factors that determine the physiognomy of this land¹⁶². They account for the deep ravines covered with dense vegetation, the steep and barren hilltops and ridges, and, above all, numerous caves, with underground water pools and springs.

The written sources confirm that these elements of the Isaurian landscape played an important role in the overall outlook of the Seleukian sanctuary¹⁶³. Rocks

¹⁶⁰ Modern surveys of the Isaurian countryside are scarce: Bean, and Mitford, 1970; for an epigraphic survey, and more recently, Hagel, and Tomaschutz, 1998; Feld, 1964, covers the architectonic plastics; material housed in the Museum of Silifke is studied in Keil, and Wilhelm, 1931; Dagron, and Feisel, 1987. Hellenkemper, and Hild 1986; and particularly Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990; provide many good illustrations and references.

¹⁶¹ Hill, 1996: 11-12. Many of the cities on the coast of Rough Cilicia exploited quarries in their immediate vicinity or at the very site where they were built; Rosenbaum, Huber, Onurkan, 1967; it seems that this was also the case for Meryemlik; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 443.

¹⁶² Meiggs, 1982: 39-49: the author provides a convenient description of the environmental factors of the region of the Taurus Mountains.

¹⁶³ Dagron, 1978: 65; has related this physical setting with some of the “chthonic” aspects of the cult of St. Thecla: disappearance underneath the earth; mediation through underground waters.

and caves, subterranean spring and water wells, such were the features that comprised the local sacred geography. The hagiographical traditions pertaining to the cult of St. Thecla exploited these motifs, relating them to a certain event from her life, or to later miraculous occurrences. Archaeological studies, though often negligent about these aspects of cultic traditions, make an invaluable contribution, demonstrating the relationship between the architectural arrangements in the sacred precinct, and their natural and physical surroundings.

Although for decades exposed to intensive robbing campaigns, the ruins of the sacred precinct of St. Thecla are still the dominant feature of the local terrain. They could hardly escape the notice of the first modern explorers of the southern coast of Turkey¹⁶⁴, and the first systematic excavations took place here as early as 1907 (Herzfeld, and Güyer, 1930: 4-87), although were never repeated on such scale. Despite its deficiencies and incompleteness¹⁶⁵, this work by Herzfeld and Guyer, has remained the basis for all later research, mostly reanalyses of the original publication and architectonic surveys¹⁶⁶.

A visitor to Hagia Thecla from Seleukia, after crossing the Calycadnos River and headed south, in the direction of the ancient port of Holmoi. This road, certainly in existence by the early Roman period, leads through the *necropolis* of the city, and then significantly narrows, climbing the rocky limestone hills on its way to the sea. The remains of an 80 metre long section, cut in the rock, are still to be seen in the sanctuary area, and at present produces the impression of a monumental entrance to the precinct. (fig.19) All along the route lie the remains of sarcophagi and rock-cut

¹⁶⁴ A brief history of research is given in Hellenkemper, 1986; Hill, 1996.

¹⁶⁵ See Hill, 1996: 208-234; for a critical review.

¹⁶⁶ Forsyth, 1957; Feld, 1964: 88-107; Hellenkemper, 1986: 63-90; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 441-443; Hill, 1996; Hellenkemper, 1999: 208-234 gives an updated bibliography. Dagron, 1978: 55-

tombs, the earliest of which date to the early Imperial period (Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 442). It is difficult to define the exact limits of the sanctuary complex, for it emerges as a gradual, and unobtrusive prolongation of the *necropolis*. Traces of several Late Antique churches, numerous cisterns, sarcophagi and rock-tombs, and a bath and a number of unidentified foundations, are spread over the distance of about half a kilometre. To the south and to the east, the terrain drops sharply into the alluvial plain of the Calycadnos, while to the west is a small plain, hosting the modern village of Becili.

The sanctuary area can be described as an ill-defined plateau, measuring roughly 800 by 700 metres¹⁶⁷. (fig.20) The greatest concentration of recorded building structures occurs along the edge of a central cliff, running north-south, with the nucleus of the complex (henceforth called the *basilica* of St. Thecla) marked off as a fortified precinct at its southern edge. Hardly surprising, most archaeological research has focused on the monumental ecclesiastic structures: the location of the monastic cells and other subsidiary arrangements still await a detailed survey of the surroundings. Knowing the extent of erosion and the progressive deterioration of the site, such work may not be very rewarding, but even so the layout of this establishment might be loosely compared with the roughly contemporary monastic and pilgrimage centre at Alahan (Gough, (ed.) 1985: 3-17; 197-220). (fig. 21)

The major sacred buildings, the cisterns and the bath, are positioned along a central street, which terminates in the walled precinct, where the shrine of the venerated Saint was situated (compare Alahan, with its colonnaded street linking the Cave complex and the West Church with the East Church). This succession of

73; contrasts the results of archaeological research with references from the "Life and Miracles of St. Thecla".

¹⁶⁷ Measures according to Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 441-443.

church-buildings, culminating with the shrine of the Saint, nicely corresponds to the processional character of the liturgies held on the occasion of large religious festivals¹⁶⁸. Further parallels in the location pattern of the churches can be found in some Early Byzantine cities¹⁶⁹, in which, one passes ecclesiastical foci of differing importance and dedications before reaching the cathedral, either in the very centre of the city, as at Gerassa, or at the acropolis, as at Tcarichin Grad.

In order to avoid contact with curious pilgrims and other everyday visitors, the living quarters of the monks and allied facilities (dinning rooms, scriptoria) would have been stationed some distance away from the core of the sanctuary (at Alahan the barely accessible caves on the slopes of the surrounding hills, provided places far from the view of those frequenting the colonnaded walk way)¹⁷⁰. But purely practical considerations must not be given an exaggerated value. Something like the apparent arrangement seems to be implied in the brief account of nun Egeria, in May 384 (Wilkinson, 1971: 121-122), but the Spanish pilgrim also notes a monastery “*in medio murus ingens*”. As previously observed, Dagron has associated this remark with the curious institution of the “Holy Virgins” at Hagia Thecla, frequently mentioned in the fifth century Miracles (Dagron, 1978: 74). This document clearly demonstrates that the living quarters of the Virgins, the “*partenones*”, are to be sought within the most sacred area of the sanctuary, the walled precinct. The incidents recorded in some of the Miracles (Mir. 34; where one of the Virgins falls in the hands of the debauchers; or Mir. 43, where a Virgin fails to resist the temptation

¹⁶⁸ Gough, 1985: 218; also from Egeria’s description of the religious ceremonies in Jerusalem during Easter; Wilkinson, 1971: 74-78.

¹⁶⁹ Mango, 1978: 23-26; Gerassa and Tcarichin Grad in particular, are very good examples.

¹⁷⁰ Gough, 1985: 205, Mango, 1991: 298-300, and Hill, 1996, have questioned some of the generally accepted interpretations of this site.

to steal from the visitors of the shrine), provide a nice illustration for this odd arrangement.

Similar problems surround the location of the facilities that housed the everyday visitors of the sanctuary, especially the large influx of pilgrims during the annual feast-day of St. Thecla. The celebrations lasted for several days (Dagron, 1978: 79), and while visitors from Seleukia could return to their homes within half an hour, those coming from further away would have to spend the night at the sanctuary, as Egeria did. Another category of temporary residents in the sanctuary were the sick (Mir, 17; 23; 38). The “Miracles” give no explicit testimony for the practice of incubation, but it seems clear from the cited cases that the sick often stayed for several days at the sanctuary. We have no clue for the sorts of arrangements that accommodated these people, nor there are any parallels from Early Christian Anatolia to help¹⁷¹. It may not be entirely insignificant in this aspect, that in many cases, miraculous healing occurred near the holy shrine of Thecla, in the atrium of the *basilica* (Mir, 24), or near the cisterns to the east of the church (Mir, 19), and in general somewhere within the holy precinct.

6.2 Ancillary structures

One notable feature of the Seleukian sanctuary were its spacious and numerous cisterns (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 78-84, fig. 74-6; Forsyth, 1957: 224). At least seven appear on Herzfeld’s plans of the site (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 2), and recent surveys (Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 441-443) have revealed another three. They are mostly concentrated along the Roman road that leads into the walled

precinct, to the west of the fifth century “Cupola Church”, and there are at least three in the sacred precinct proper, beyond the apse, and to the west of St. Thecla’s *basilica*. This apparently excessive requirement of water has barely been commented on by the researchers of the site: the cisterns were given meagre attention, both in respect to their formal, architectonic features, and to their function in the sanctuary complex. With regards to their function, we need only turn to the fifth century catalogue of miracles (Dagron, 1978: 68-69; 106-108): water, whether in baths, or gushing from subterranean springs, is one of the chief media through which the Saint administered her healing miracles; animals recover from an epidemic by simply tasting water from a spring in the cave of the sanctuary (Mir, 36); the Saint uses the water from a bath within the walled precinct to combat a treacherous eye disease that affected the entire city of Seleukia, on which occasion, the entire sacred precinct was transformed into an improvised infirmary (Mir, 25, 19-20). It is, not totally unlikely to suggest that some of the numerous water amenities at Hagia Thecla were actually enshrined and transformed into *agiasmoi*. After all, the veneration of cavities with underground waters had long been a tradition in the region, as is shown by their in local pagan cults¹⁷².

Water was not only a crucial element for the therapeutic properties of the sanctuary, but an obvious necessity for a large monastic community, and most of the water supply system must have been established at an early date in the history of the sanctuary complex. Large square pillars, and patches of stone foundations, still

¹⁷¹ In Syria, researches have made a great progress in distinguishing the non-ecclesiastic elements of monastic complexes; such as pilgrim’s hostels or incubation cells; Pena, 1997: 146-148.

¹⁷² Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1986: 44-49, for Cape Sarpedon or Yap’lkaya near modern Tasucu. Dagron, 1978: 68-9; suggests that veneration of waters at the Seleukian sanctuary was a secondary development: certain springs or water pools were attributed sanctity upon the occurrence of miraculous events. This may have important implications for the understanding of the transformations in the venerable foci of the sanctuary. The little known cult of the *hagiasmos* is usually related with the cults of the Archangels in Christianity; Gabelich, 1991.

visible among the houses of the modern village of Becili, immediately to the west of the sanctuary complex, are the traces of the ancient aqueduct that fed the voluminous cisterns in the sanctuary. The building technique of the piers suggests that it was in use by the late fourth century (Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 442). This date, however, cannot apply to all the water amenities in the sanctuary complex. The mass of cisterns to the west of the “Cupola Church” can reasonably be related with the establishment of the baths, some metres to the west of the semi-circular court of the “Cupola Church”, both dated to the late fifth century, and according to the excavators, built together (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 72-4).

Architectonically the baths to the west of the “Cupola Church” are one of the most interesting structures in the sanctuary complex (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 84-7) (fig.22). The excavators revealed a large circular chamber, with an *opus sectile* floor, very similar to the one in the “Cupola Church”¹⁷³. The masonry of the two buildings was likewise identical: large, dry-stone ashlar blocks. On the interior, the walls of the bath were clad with marble, and had eight alternating rectangular and circular recesses. The relatively large number of stone voussoirs found on the floor of the excavated hall suggest that the building was probably covered by a masonry dome, providing perhaps, the only real evidence for a domical structure at Meryemlik¹⁷⁴.

A large cistern to the north of the choir of St. Thecla’s *basilica*, set within the confines of the walled precinct, was dated as late as the sixth century on the basis of construction technique and capital decoration (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 79-80, fig. 74-6; Forsyth, 1957: fig. 2 and 3). (fig. 23a/b) The interior was divided by two rows

¹⁷³ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 53-4; this is the chief argument for the dating of the structure.

¹⁷⁴ Hill, 1996: 226; without any substantial evidence, the bitter debate about the existence of masonry domes in Isauria in the late fifth century has become a question of probability.

of columns, and was covered by vaults made of large stone blocks, while brick was used for the substructure. This makes a curious inversion of the sixth century construction techniques in Constantinople and provides singular testimony for the skill of its builder. Its exact role in the water system, as with the at least two other cisterns, situated to the southeast of the axis of St. Thecla's *basilica* is elusive. They may all have supplied the baths in the *temenos* area reported in the "Miracles", but survey has failed to identify any remains of this structure¹⁷⁵.

6.3 Churches: the church north of the "Cupola Church", the "North Church", the Octagon, and the "Cupola Church"

Three of the extant sacral buildings at the sanctuary of St. Thecla were given close attention by the early excavators of the site. These are the fifth century "Cupola Church", and the *basilica* of St. Thecla, and the Cave Church (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 46-74; 3-38; 38-46). There were at least two other Early Christian churches in the immediate vicinity of the sanctuary, however. Forty meters to the northwest of the axis of the "Cupola Church", the Austrian team documented the remains of a building with a probable basilical plan, but this was not excavated (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 77). According to their general plan of the site (fig. 20), it was apsidal and roughly oriented some degrees to the north of the apex of the "Cupola Church" apse. There are now no visible remains, but the initial suggestion that these were the remains of a Late Antique church is generally accepted (Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 443; Hill, 1996: 234).

¹⁷⁵ Hill, 1996: 208-234; suggested a location in the stout southern chambers in the narthexes of both the Cupola and the basilical church; this can hardly explain the position of the cisterns in the wall

Much more substantial are the remains of the “North Church”, located roughly 50 metres to the north – northwest of the “Cupola Church”, and 75 metres to the east from the rock-cut section of the ancient road (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 74-77; fig. 2; Feld, 1964: 94; Hill, 1996: 234). (fig. 20) This was the first church to be seen by the visitor coming from Seleukia, and the well-preserved foundations indicate a three-aisled *basilica* with an orientation similar to the church immediately northwest of the “Cupola Church”. It was a building of substantial dimensions, measuring roughly 60 by 30 metres, and in this regard it also approaches the two contemporary structures to the south. To the west is a rectangular *atrium*, more than thirty metres wide, separated from the nave by a narrow *narthex*. Column cylinders and capital fragments found near the north wall of the *atrium* indicate that it was colonnaded, as was the case in the *atrium* of the “Cupola Church” (Feld, 1964: 94). The few other remains of sculptural decoration found among the ruins of the “North Church”¹⁷⁶ are similar to the architectonic plastics of the late fifth century “Cupola Church”.

In the western part of the sanctuary complex, where a path leading to the *basilica* of St. Thecla parts with the Roman road, recent surveys have brought to light the remains of what appears to be a very rare, if not unique, example of a centrally planned ecclesiastical structure in Early Christian Isauria¹⁷⁷. Erosion and stone robbing have spread the elements of the foundations and architectonic fragments over an area of 1 200 square metres, but elaborate Corinthian capitals, with a double zone of carved acanthus leaves, are reported in the collection in the

precinct, and the excavations yielded no more than a single wellhead near the south-western wall of the narthex of the fifth century basilica; Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 16.

¹⁷⁶ Acanthus capitals, fragment of an ambo, Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig.69-71.

¹⁷⁷ Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 443; unfortunately the authors have failed to provide a plan. Note that their description of the monument could easily apply to the baths west of the Cupola Church.

Silifke Museum¹⁷⁸. The researchers have interpreted the building as an oriented, centrally planed structure with three pairs of niches, south and north of the entrance. Its inner diameter was roughly 20 metres. To the west, there is a *narthex*, measuring 21 by 5 metres, and possibly an *atrium*. To the east there is a well-defined chancel bay, but nothing remains of the apse that once completed this curious octa-foil. The researchers date it broadly in the fifth century, and it has been surmised that the building deserves, along with the “Cupola Church” and the fifth century *basilica* of St. Thecla, might have been one of the donations of Emperor Zeno.¹⁷⁹

The “Cupola Church” is by far the most thoroughly excavated part in the sanctuary complex¹⁸⁰, but has also, inspired the greatest discussions (Hill, 1996: 226-233; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 443; Gough, 1972: 203-05; Forsyth, 1957: 224-25). (fig. 24) Two issues are at the heart of the debate: the question of whether the eastern bay of the nave was covered by a masonry dome or by a tower, capped with a wooden roof (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930; Hill, 1996; against Forsyth, 1996; Gough, 1972); and the somewhat related problem of identifying the donation of Emperor Zeno; whether it was the “Cupola Church”, with its eccentric layout, or the more standard *basilica* of St. Thecla (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930; Hellenkemper, 1986; Forsyth, 1957, Hill, 1996). Both of these problems have important implications for the formal developments of Early Christian architecture in general (more specifically, the transition from longitudinal to centrally planned, domical structures), as well as for the establishment of a more refined chronology for the Early Christian monuments in the region. Since none of these directly concerns the

¹⁷⁸ Sodini, J-P. in Dagron , and Feisel, 1987: 239-40; Pl. LVII, 1; the author refers to the Octagon at Meryemlik without further precisions: we recall that the bath near the “Cupola Church” can also be termed an Octagon.

¹⁷⁹ Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990; the problem of identifying Zeno’s donations is also discussed in Hellenkemper, 1986: 63-90.

present topic, only a brief outline is necessary here, especially given the large number of volumes, papers and commentaries on the debate.

The remains of the “Cupola Church” were uncovered 160 metres to the north of the *basilica* of St. Thecla, at the very eastern edge of the cliff that limits the sanctuary complex. Its close relationship with the baths and the complex of cisterns further to the west along the road is obvious, and early research had no difficulties in proving that the baths and the “Cupola Church” were contemporary structures (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 73-4; 87). As the excavations have yielded no traces of earlier building phases underneath the floor of the “Cupola Church”, it is reasonable to suppose that much of this extra-mural part of the sanctuary was a unified, late-fifth century foundation¹⁸⁰. Dimensions and layout of the church provide a sufficient testimony that this was a project on a grand scale¹⁸². The “Cupola Church” measures 78 metres length, including the *atrium* and the western semi-circular forecourt, the church proper occupying less than a half of this. It is preceded by a harmonious succession of spacious courtyards and colonnaded porticoes, the latter flanked with substantial, multi-storeyed chambers.

Semi-circular forecourts to the west of the *atrium* are rare in Early Christian Architecture, but the case of the “Cupola Church” at Meryemlik has a very close parallel in the contemporary arrangements of the “Domed Ambulatory Church” at Dag Pazari, some eighty kilometres to the north¹⁸³. Equally significant is the analogy with Roman palatial architecture, where the alternation of courtyards of a simple

¹⁸⁰ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 46-72; fig. 46-7; also published with revisions in Hellenkemper, 1986: 63-90.

¹⁸¹ Hellenkemper, 1986; also in Hill, 1996: 226 the author has anachronistically related these architectonic arrangements with the descriptions of the site made in the mid-fifth century “Life and Miracles of St. Thecla”. Most probably the sanctuary complex looked very differently in those days.

¹⁸² Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 45-6 give the excavation plan and a reconstruction of the west façade; the full plan of the church is shown in Forsyth, 1957; and more recently Hellenkemper, 1986.

geometrical design on a longitudinal axis is a commonly exploited motif¹⁸⁴. It is yet another indicator of imperial involvement at the sanctuary of St. Thecla.

Technically, the “Cupola Church” is a three-aisled basilica, with rather squat proportions (c.a. 33 by 25 metres), a polygonal apse at the eastern end¹⁸⁵ and a *narthex*, but a close examination of the arrangements of the individual units reveals significant deviations from the standard basilical plan. We may better describe the plan of the “Cupola Church” as simply a large rectangular box containing a smaller square, placed against its eastern side, near the apse (Forsyth, 1957: 225). Even if there was no masonry dome over the eastern bay¹⁸⁶, the “Cupola Church”, along with the contemporary “Domed Ambulatory Church” at Dag Pazari, the “Tomb Church” at Corycos, and the “East Church” at Alahan, introduces an important novelty in the organization of the interior space of Late Antique churches. The centrally planned, domical structures of the sixth century are just a step away from this development.

The original excavators paid little attention to elements of architectonic decoration, but they uncovered fragments of structural pieces invariably worked in Proconnesian marble, while the large amount of glass *tesserae* and the floors in *opus sectile*, indicate a very rich and luxurious interior. Some of the sculptural elements, for example, the Corinthian capitals with figures of birds at the corners¹⁸⁷, or the corbels with animal and bird protomes (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 63), are very similar in style and workmanship to those found in Alahan. (fig. 25) They are a

¹⁸³ The similarity in this and other elements between the two churches was first observed by Gough, 1972; more recently Hill, 1996 has added to these two the “Transept Church” at Okuzlu.

¹⁸⁴ That early ecclesiastic architecture greatly borrowed from Imperial architectonic tradition has been long since demonstrated; Ward-Perkins, 1954: 69-90.

¹⁸⁵ Note that these are features of the early basilicas in Constantinople, the monastery of John Studios for instance; Mango, 1978: 43-44.

¹⁸⁶ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 61-62; according to Hill, 1996: 231-32; the supposed dome would have rested on a low tambour supported by pendentives resting on squinch arches, similar to those found in the East Church at Alahan; Bakker, G. in Gough, (ed) 1985: 113-114.

further confirmation of the thesis that not only Meryemlik, but the entire region of Isauria witnessed a substantial and important building campaign during the latter decades of the fifth century.

Formal architectonic problems have completely preoccupied the focus of research on this monument, and almost nothing is known about the correlation between the spatial units of the church and liturgical practices. The excavators uncovered what seem to be fragments of an *ambo* near the western edge of the “domed” bay (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 68-70), thus confirming what appears obvious on the plan: the sanctuary of the church was placed in the eastern bay of the nave (Hill, 1996: 27). As for the complicated maze of small rectangular rooms in the southeast corner of the church, these most probably housed the baptistery. Surveys have reported a monolithic quatrefoil font of marble, positioned in a chamber at the very corner of this complex unit¹⁸⁸. Side-chambers, projecting beyond the apex of the main apse, are a common feature of the Early Christian churches in Cilicia, but it is difficult to tell their practical or liturgical purposes¹⁸⁹. We shall return to some of these problems in more details, when discussing the *basilicae* of St. Thecla.

6.4 The sacred precinct, the Martyrium of St. Thecla: late fifth century

The most sacred part of the Seleukian sanctuary, the *martyrium* of St. Thecla was situated in the walled precinct, at the southern edge of the sanctuary complex (Harzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 2). It is mentioned in the “Miracles of St. Thecla”,

¹⁸⁷ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 56-57; similar capitals of an unknown provenience were reported from the Silifke Museum collection; Dagron, and Feisel, 1987: 236-7.

¹⁸⁸ Feld, 1964: 93; Hill, 1996: 24; 232-33 points the Necropolis Church at Anemurium and the “Tomb Church” at Corycos as parallels.

as well as in Egeria's account of her pilgrimage in the Holy Land, almost one hundred years before the "Cupola Church" and the ancillary structures came into being. Parts of the *temenos* walls are still traceable, except for the south wall where erosion has removed the foundations (Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 442, fig.389-390; Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 88). (fig. 26) The principal entrance to the precinct was in the north wall, where surveys have revealed the remains of the main gate, positioned on the axis of the Roman road, and rectangular towers at the corners of the enclosure. On the basis of references made in the "Life and Miracles of St. Thecla", Dagron (1978: 65-66) has suggested a reconstruction very similar to the ramparts of Early Byzantine cities, with double gates at the main entrance, flanked by a pair of towers, or built in the ground floor of a single turret. There must have been at least one other gate; probably in the west wall of the precinct. The exact area enclosed by the walls is uncertain, but recent surveys have estimated an area of 2.1 hectares (Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 442).

Fortified sacred precincts are in general a foreign feature in Christian sacral architecture, although they appear in some Christian sanctuaries of Syria and Palestine. This practice was more at home in Pagan temples, which stood in a *temenos* enclosure, and it is rather incompatible with the concept of the Christian shrine. Most modern scholars have simply accepted Egeria's brief remark that the enclosure was built to protect the sanctuary from Isaurian attacks (Wilkinson, 1971:122). This seems unlikely; while the *temenos* wall of St. Thecla's sanctuary may have served a purely defensive role during the restless decades of the fourth century, there is no actual evidence to suggest that it was built either then or, for that particular reason. There are, in fact, other examples of Isaurian churches surrounded

¹⁸⁹ Hill, 1996: 23-26; the exact arrangements behind the apse of the Cupola Church have yet to be

by *temenos* walls: the “Necropolis Church” at Anemurium, the *basilica* at Canbazli, the “Domed Ambulatory Church” at Dag Pazari, and the converted temples at Cennet Cehennem and at Uzuncaburch¹⁹⁰. In none of these cases are the enclosures dated to the Late Antique period, and for the converted temples at Cennet Cehennem and Uzuncaburch, it is clear that they were inherited from the Pagan temple. It is quite possible that the same was true for the sanctuary of St. Thecla. The initial researchers were totally negligent about the pre-Christian history of this site, perhaps because any such phases were mainly eradicated by the Late Antique sanctuary, but their existence might be indicated by the numerous finds of *spolia* (the Roman Doric columns from the cave church, fragments of architraves and early Roman sarcophagi), some of which are dated in the early Imperial period¹⁹¹. The *temenos* walls may have been the only structure that survived the Christianisation of this site¹⁹².

The fortified precinct, was dominated by the massive late fifth century *basilica* of St. Thecla, reaching a length of 81 metres and a width of 43 metres, (fig. 27,a/b) as the excavators have noted (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 17, fig. 8); the whole of the S. Apollinare in Classe church can be fitted comfortably into the interior of this structure. With such grandiose dimensions, and occupying a central position in the sanctuary complex, the “Basilica of St. Thecla” has justly caused arguments over which church at Meryemlik was donated by Zeno (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930:31-2, 72-3; Hill, 1996: 213). Some scholars have given much credence to Evgarius’

revealed.

¹⁹⁰ Hill, 1996: 14-5; we may also add the latter monastery built over the remains of the nearby temple of Sarpedon; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1986: 44-47.

¹⁹¹ Thus, Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 442; the authors suggest a direct relation with the Athena cult, but we recall from the “Miracles” that the temple of this goddess was at the Seleukian Acropolis. It is equally possible that re-used material came from some other site.

¹⁹² Hill, 1996: 213-4; has further noted that the walls were built in a different masonry technique from the rest of the sanctuary buildings.

terminology in describing Emperor Zeno's foundations at Meryemlik. According to him, Zeno honoured the Saint, who promised to him return to the Byzantine throne in 476, by building a *megiston temenos* at the Seleukian sanctuary (Evgarius, Ecclesiastic History, III 8)¹⁹³. This has led many to assume that the church sponsored by the Isaurian Emperor was the large basilica, situated in the middle of the sacred precinct (Forsyth, 1957:224; Mango, 1966: 364; Dagron, 1978: 61).

Others, however, have instead relied on their interpretation of the archaeological remains, to conclude that the planning and the superstructure of the "Cupola Church" must have required the skills of an imperial architect (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 72-4; Hellenkemper, 1986: 63-90; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 441-443). As noted above, both arguments are relatively weak: Evgarius' *megistos temenos* may reasonably be given a general connotation, designating the entire sanctuary area, not only the enclosed precinct¹⁹⁴, while as for the "superior" construction of the "Cupola Church", we have already seen that little evidence is actually available to give a more precise reconstruction of its roofing.

More important is the observation that two churches of a very different plan were built side by side in the same sanctuary, and almost simultaneously. As such, the contemporary monastic centre at Alahan, which featured basically the same combination of a basilical and a centralised structure, is of relevance. At Alahan, the west, basilical church has been dated just slightly earlier than the other church with a central bay¹⁹⁵; which may be the case with the monuments at Meryemlik¹⁹⁶. According to the excavators of St. Thecla, the dramatic difference in layout of the

¹⁹³ The full text is given in Dagron, 1978: 58-59.

¹⁹⁴ Hill, 1996: 213, this author tends to see both churches as part of Zeno's donations.

¹⁹⁵ Gough, (ed) 1985: 148-149, the author contrasts the two monuments as representatives of two different epochs, but cannot escape the evidence that both churches were erected within the span of few decades.

“Cupola Church” and the basilical church, should be attributed to the different sponsors of the two buildings; the more “advanced” “Cupola Church” being the imperial foundation, while the large but standard basilica having been donated by the local community¹⁹⁷. Alternatively, the difference in layout might relate to specific liturgical functions, but the incomplete nature of the excavations, and our ignorance of how the various interior units of the Early Christian churches in the region were used, would make such a hypothesis even more difficult to prove¹⁹⁸.

The *basilica* of St. Thecla occupied the central part of the fortified precinct (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 4-36, fig.7; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 442; fig. 389-90; Hill, 1996: 220-225; fig.43). The church lacked an *atrium* and was approached by a short flight of steps at its west end. Two porphyry columns measuring about one metre in diameter were found a short distance west of the entrance, and induced the excavators to reconstruct a triple-arched portal, with the middle arch being three times wider than the lateral arches (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 29-30). There was apparently no sufficient evidence to reconstruct the upper parties of the west façade. However, as excavations yielded no traces of a staircase or fragments from arched windows to indicate an upper floor in the *narthex*, it was reconstructed as a shallow, single storey corridor covered by a lean-to roof (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 6,7). The *narthex* apparently communicated with the aisles by a pair of single-arched openings at the ends of the east wall; in the middle, three doorways into the vast nave.

¹⁹⁶ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 32; propose a date between 460 and 470 for the large basilica.

¹⁹⁷ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 32; it should be noted that the excavators thought that there was no earlier phase underneath the fifth century basilica; their interpretation has been criticised: Hill, 1996: 217-20.

¹⁹⁸ Such studies are still relatively scarce; an interesting example is Kleinbauer, 1973: 91-114; the author has convincingly argued that the aisled tetraconchs in some of the Metropoleis of the Antiochene Patriarchate – Seleukia Pieria; Aleppo, Amida, Resafah - were in fact, the cities’

Such arrangements for the *narthex* and the principal entrance to the church would appear rather humble in comparison to the nearby “Cupola Church” or the “Tomb Church” at Corycos (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 127-150; Forsyth. 1957: 225-228). The *narthexes* of these churches had an upper floor, linked with the galleries above the aisles, and accessed by a staircase in the northwest angle of the ground floor. Indeed, in a recent monograph on the Early Christian architecture of Isauria and Cilicia, Hill, has pointed that the reconstruction proposed by the original researchers of St. Thecla’s *basilica* greatly deviates from the two storey facades, which are characteristic of contemporary churches in the region. He fervently criticises the work done by the original excavators of the sanctuary, and suggests significant corrections are necessary to their excavation report (Hill, 1996: 217-225). Thus, Hill suggests that instead of a portal with three arches on the west façade of the *basilica*, there was an entrance with five arches of equal spacing and height, much like the façade of the “Cupola Church”. Such an arrangement would certainly fit more comfortably the 36 metres wide façade, than the awkward solution of a triple-arched portal, with central arch three times wider than the outer ones (Hill, 1996: 220). Hill also questioned the conclusion that the *narthex* had a single storey. The initial researchers believed that the *basilica* of St. Thecla did not have a gallery level (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 17-8), but two-storey *narthexes* and galleries seem to be a standard feature of Early Christian churches in the region¹⁹⁹, and seems very probable in the case of St. Thecla’s *basilica* (Hill, 1996: 221).

The interior of the church (55 by 36.8 metres) was divided by two rows of fifteen slender columns with Corinthian capitals carrying arches on impost blocks

cathedrals; the similarity in form is due to the fact that they all derive from a single prototype: the *Megale Ecclesia*, built by Constantine in Antioch, in 327.

(Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig.7). They delineated a nave, that was two times wider than the aisles, and according to the excavators, it terminated just before the mouth of the apse, where the arches sprang from the easternmost pair of columns to rest on a pair of consoles projecting from the corners of the apse (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 17), the south console being found *in situ*, 9.8 metres above ground level. As Hill has observed, if we accept the theory that there was no gallery level, this would have been a tremendous height even for building using columns in a Corinthian order²⁰⁰. Moreover, a further problem with the original reconstruction is the wider intercolumniation between the last pairs of columns (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 39), which mean that the last pair of arches of the nave arcades would be 20 centimetres higher than the rest (Hill, 1996: 221).

Part of the problem results from the secondary interventions in this building: at a later date, some of the columns were replaced or framed by large square piers and the excavators were able to find only very few of the column bases in their original position (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 33-4). But not all the piers were necessarily of a later date. Thus there is the possibility that the rectangular piers, which according to the excavators replaced the penultimate pair of columns on the east, were in fact part of the original, fifth century scheme²⁰¹. (fig. 27a) In that case it would be possible to reconstruct a triumphal arch at the end of the nave colonnades, the high position of the console projecting from the south corner of the apse, corresponding to the south pier of the triumphal arch. This would allow for a colonnade of normal proportions and sufficient space for gallery levels and a clerestory (Hill, 1996: 222-23).

¹⁹⁹ Both churches at Alahan; Bakker, G. in Gough, (ed). 1985; the “Cupola Church”; the churches at Corycos; Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930.

²⁰⁰ Hill, 1996: 222; the diameters of the columns measured about 58 centimetres.

²⁰¹ Hill, 1996: 222-23; the author has noted differences in size and shape between these supports and the rest of the piers.

More significantly, the triumphal arch would have divided off an area sufficiently large to house the chancel. The excavators of the *basilica* found no elements of a chancel bay, and in their reconstruction of the interior (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 7), there is not enough room for the altar. Hill's case for a triumphal arch, set eight metres to the west of the mouth of the apse, has the further merit of resolving this problem. The pair of columns set between the piers of the triumphal arch and the *antae* of the apse could have supported the high chancel screens, characteristic of early churches in Isauria²⁰². Indeed, analogous arrangements for a sanctuary bay of this type can be found in the West Church at Alahan (Gough, (ed.)1985: 94), and the Church of the Apostles at Anazarbus (Gough, 1952:116-118).

Thus, St. Thecla's shrine may not have been a simple and traditional *basilica* after all (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 8). In fact, the articulation of the chancel bay immediately to the west of the apse brings this church closer in form to its centrally-planned neighbour than appears on first sight. The eastern bay of the "Cupola Church" can justly be seen as a more developed form of the suggested sanctuary bay in the fifth century *basilica*, with the eastern bay expanded to the west, occupying half of the nave, while the aisles were becoming narrow, ambulatory passages²⁰³.

Hill has further suggested that the fifth century *basilica* of St. Thecla should be treated as a transept *basilica* (Hill, 1996: 35-7). However, while a triumphal arch at

²⁰² Hill, 1996: 223; 26-7; his idea that the sanctuary bay also housed the office of the prothesis is difficult to accept however, because such arrangements preclude space for the Great Entry; the procession where the Sacred Gifts were carried from the prothesis to the altar. Sodinni, J. P. in Dagron, and Feisel, 1987: 243-44; reports chancel screens with carved crosses or grills from Meryemlik, but without specifying their exact provenience.

²⁰³ Hill, 1996: 38-50 has boldly attempted to postulate a gradual development of the "domical" churches of Isauria, from the basilicas with a clearly articulated sanctuary in the eastern bay of the nave.

the end of the central nave clearly introduces a transverse element in the eastern part of the *basilica*, a fully defined transept would also require transverse arches at the end of the aisles. Further, the side-chambers flanking the apse of the *basilica* had their western walls on the same line as the mouth of the apse; they do not project in to the eastern ends of the aisles to create a tripartite, transept - sanctuary to the west of the apse as in the “Transept Church” in Corycos or Church 4 in Kanl’divane²⁰⁴. (fig. 28)

The emergence of a tripartite transept in the Early Christian churches of Isauria has been seen by Hill as a local phenomenon, “a sophisticated architectonic response to peculiar liturgical needs” (Hill, 1996: 43). Since the chambers flanking the apse were apparently given roles unrelated to the preparation of the Eucharist, the office of the *prothesis* had to be moved elsewhere, but still in the immediate vicinity of the altar. The tripartite transept-sanctuary, occupying the easternmost bays of the nave and the aisles, was a practical and convenient solution, as it they provided a space for the chief liturgical ceremonies without introducing further complications in the arrangements beyond the east perimeter of the *naos* (Hill, 1996: 42). This is certainly at odds with the extensively argued suggestion that in the case of St. Thecla’s *basilica*, the “transept” had a martyrial significance²⁰⁵.

Transepts are of course, well-attested elements of Early Christian *martyria* (Grabar, 1946: 120-141). We need only mention the precedent of St. Peter on the Vatican²⁰⁶, where the transept was not only a convenient mean of enshrining the focus of veneration, but also an architectural element easily compatible with the

²⁰⁴ Hill, 1996: 40; the author adds the Church of the Apostles in Anazarbus, but no traces of a tripartite transept are visible on the plan of this building, Gough, 1952: fig.7.

²⁰⁵ Hill, 1996: 35-37; to which he adds another eight of the transept basilicas in the region, p.40.

²⁰⁶ Krautheimer, 1986: 56-7; Hill, 1996: 35-37 has compared the case of St. Thecla with the martyrdom of St. Demetrius, Thessalonica.

longitudinal disposition of the basilica. Constantine's *basilicas* with transepts were an alternative to the first Palestinian *martyria*, for both types of structures were responding to the problem of combining a traditional centrally planned memorial structure with the basilical plan, indispensable for large congregations (Krautheimer, 1986: 55-62).

The case of St. Thecla's shrine, even if it had a transept was very different. This building belongs to a later period, and to a different architectural tradition, specific for its region. Admittedly it can be compared with the roughly contemporary *martyrium* of St. Demetrius in Thessalonica, but only on a single point (Sotteriou, and Sotteriou, 1952; Hoddinot, 1963: 125-137). (fig. 29) In both cases, the transept had a direct physical relation with the objective of veneration: the alleged crypt beneath the south wing of the transept of St. Demetrius, and the cave chapel at Meryemlik, whose most sacred part was precisely underneath the chancel bay of the fifth century *basilica* of Thecla. Direct access to the latter was provided by a large entrance in the east part of the south perimeter wall, at the site of the south wing of Hill's suggested transept in the *basilica* (Hill, 1996: 37; Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 29-30). Yet the formal differences between these two arrangements cannot be ignored. The transept of St. Demetrius in Thessalonica was clearly defined, if only because its wings project beyond the perimeter of the aisles, while the crypt was sealed in the foundations of the church, and its site was marked by a fountain fenced off by a low parapet in the south wing of the transept. Hill notes the parallel between the side-chambers of St. Thecla's shrine giving access to the ambulatory passage beyond the apse, and the compartments in the wings of the transept in St. Demetrius that communicated with the area to the east, through arched openings (Hill, 1996:

35). But the formal similarities should not be exaggerated, as the circumstances of the two martyrdoms were significantly different.

Finally, Hill's preference for a martyrial character of the "transept" in St. Thecla's *basilica* contradicts his own suggestion, that it was the eastern ambulatory passages that usually housed the martyr's chapels in Isaurian *basilicae*²⁰⁷. To be sure, the existence of two different veneration sites in the same building was not extraordinary, and as will be shown, this may have been the case for St. Thecla's shrine, as it surely was for St. Demetrius in Thessalonica²⁰⁸. The problem is that a fully defined tripartite transept at the east end of the *naos* would have blocked the access to whatever arrangements lie in the eastern compartments, and it is clear from the excavations of the north side-chamber that this was not an unimportant part of the building (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 12-17). The tripartite transept may have preserved the arrangements along the eastern passage, providing ample room for the celebration of the Eucharist, but its position would have effectively isolated the passage itself.

In conclusion it is doubtful that such a transept existed in the *basilica* of St. Thecla. The only piece of evidence available, the high console projecting from the south corner of the standing apse, and the rectangular pier at the end of the north colonnade, indicates nothing more than a possible chancel bay in front of the apse, defined by a triumphal arch and a pair of columns on its flanks. That it was positioned directly above the most sacred part of the grotto chapel was not accidental: by the late fifth century the relation between the altar slab and sacred

²⁰⁷ First established in Hill, 1985: 93-97; and confusingly again, just a couple of pages before suggesting a martyrial significance for the transept; Hill, 1996: 28-34.

²⁰⁸ Here besides the fountain in the south wing of the transept, there was a silver ciborium with the image of the Saint in the middle of the nave; Hoddinott, 1963: 129-30; also in Hill, 1996: 36.

objects in Christian shrines was becoming standardized²⁰⁹. The service of the Eucharist could not only be held side by side with the ceremonies commemorating a certain Saint, but it could also incorporate them. Consequently there is no need of insisting on some peculiar formal architectonic feature that would denote the memorial character of the church²¹⁰; the simple basilical design was often perfectly sufficient. This observation does not mean, of course, that there were no “special” arrangements in St. Thecla’s *basilica*.

During the clearance of the nave, the excavators revealed traces of narrow stylobates, running in an east-west direction, five metres inside the line of the main arcades (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 21-28). They were associated with a number of fragments of column shafts and small foliate capitals, (fig. 30) the proportions of which indicate a colonnade, standing about three metres high. The poorly preserved remains defied any attempt to establish the exact extent of this structure, but it seems to have occupied the middle parts of the nave, and it was floored with a mosaic pattern, different from the mosaic floors in the rest of the nave. The excavators interpreted these finds as indicating the remains of a *Schola Cantorum* situated in the middle of the nave, and defined by parallel rows of columns (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 26-7). Fragments of doorjambs and lintels suggest that there were doorways set in the intercolumnations. If it was a *Schola Cantorum*, it would be a unique feature, as no other Late Antique churches in the region have provided similar evidence²¹¹.

²⁰⁹ We recall the case of St. Erasmus, Lychnid where the crypt that housed the sacred relics was subsumed by the standard arrangements for the celebration of the Eucharist; Grabar, 1946: 2; is still by far the most comprehensive study of this process, both in the East and the West Churches.

²¹⁰ I allude to the remarks that it is strange to find a martyrion of such importance, being constructed in so simple design; Hill, 1996: 223; also Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 8.

²¹¹ The excavators have compared it with the basilica of Sts Sergius and Bacchus in Ressafah, Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930.

The only substantial remain of the fifth century *basilica* still visible above ground level is its apse²¹². (fig. 31) It was built throughout of well-dressed ashlars, strengthened with massive buttresses on its outer face, which still rise to a height of almost fifteen metres, beyond the line of the *simā* moulding, marking the springing point for the half-dome. It is not clear, however, why the buttresses were so high, for such a height was certainly not required to structural stability²¹³. The wall of the apse was pierced by a pair of arched, double windows on either side of the central buttress²¹⁴. Each window opening was divided by a small column with capitals decorated with acanthus leaves²¹⁵. On the interior, the walls were clad in white marble, but the excavators make no mention of the appearance of the *synthronon*, or of the floor arrangements. The dimensions of the apse are remarkable. It was 13.60 metres wide and 8.2 metres deep. The cornice marking the onset of the half-dome is set 12.80 metres above ground level, and indicates that the crown of the arch at the opening of the apse reached a height of almost 20 metres (Hill, 1996: 224).

On both sides of the apse there were side-chambers, and that to the north terminated with a horse-shoed shaped apse 3.5 metres east of the apex of the main apse (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 12-13). The researchers assumed that the same scheme was been repeated in its southern counterpart (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 12-17). Both of the side-chambers were accessed through doorways in the eastern walls of the aisles; apparently there was no direct communication with the apse. A door in the south wall of the north chamber led into an ill-defined area behind the apsidal wall. A few of metres to the east, at the line where the side-chambers

²¹² Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 8-11, fig.1, 10; only the southern half is preserved at present.

²¹³ This curiosity was observed by Hill, 1996: 224; the author also noted another pair of buttresses positioned on the outer corners of the apse.

²¹⁴ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig.14; at present one can barely see the frame of the south window.

²¹⁵ Hill, 1996: 224 has pointed to the almost identical solution in the Temple Church in Silifke.

terminated, the excavators recorded a straight wall running in a north-south direction (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 8). The space left between the side-chambers and the main apse was thus enclosed, and probably formed an irregular ambulatory passage linking the aisles of the *basilica* behind its main apse.

The northeast chamber measured 11.4 by 8.8 metres (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 13-17), (fig. 32) and had a richly decorated interior; apart from marble revetments, similar to those in the main apse, the excavations revealed traces of the mosaic floor, and loose glass *tesserae*, indicating that some parts of the wall were also covered with mosaic. Because of the thickness and the solid construction of the walls, the excavators believed that there was a second floor, approached by a wooden staircase²¹⁶, although there was no other positive evidence to support this suggestion²¹⁷.

Side-chambers linked with a passage behind the main apse are probably the most recognizable feature of early Isaurian church architecture²¹⁸. They appear regardless of the plan of the buildings and their context, and are found equally represented in funerary, parish and monastic churches²¹⁹. The form of these eastern compartments, however, is far from being standard: the side-chambers may appear with or without ambulatory corridors, and they may project west into the eastern ends of the aisles, to the line of the chancel screen²²⁰, or east, beyond the apex of the

²¹⁶ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 15, we recall that according to the excavators the fifth century basilica did not have galleries.

²¹⁷ Traces of upper storeys over the eastern compartments were discovered in the churches of nearby Corycos; Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 134-135 for the Tomb Church for instance; Hill, S. 1996, illustrates cases where there was a gallery level above the ambulatory passages, again in Corycos, and in Okuzlu.

²¹⁸ Krautheimer, 1986: 108-110; Forsyth, 1968: 16-18; Hill, 1996: 28-9, the latter has numbered no less than 37.

²¹⁹ The example of Yan'khan for instance, where both the cemetery and the parish church were provided with eastern passages; Hill, 1985: 93-97.

²²⁰ As in Alahan, west church; Gough, (ed.) 1985, fig.19.

apse (as in the Meryemlik, “Cupola Church”). In some cases²²¹, the side-chambers were transformed into irregular extensions of the eastern corridor, at others, as in St. Thecla’s *basilica*, the reverse is true; the eastern passage is simply the space left between the apse and the rectangular side-chambers. In many of the known examples, there was an upper storey, both for the side-chambers and over the eastern corridor (Hill, 1996: 30). It is impossible to infer any certain chronological developments from this great variety of forms, as they seem to be related with the particular physical conditions on the site or the financial means available²²².

The function of these complex arrangements, situated behind the architectural and liturgical focus of the church, has troubled researchers for almost a century. Parallels from Syria, where side-chambers flanking the apse are a common feature, come first to mind (Krautheimer, 1986: 108; for Early Christian churches in Syria: Krautheimer, 1986: 137-156; Lassus, 1947; Pena 1995). Isauria was after all part of the Antiochene Patriarchate, and if not architectural, certainly liturgical influences can be expected, but it is evident that this was hardly the case (Hill, 1996: 23-25). Research in Syria has demonstrated that the chambers flanking the apse had a relatively standardized purpose (Lassus, 1947: 163-175, Babich, 1969: 67-68). Thus, the south chamber was often transformed into a martyr’s chapel, housing a reliquary or a sarcophagus at its east end; it was lavishly decorated and communicated with the south aisle through an arched opening²²³. The north chamber, on the other hand was often very solid, and isolated from the nave and the aisles; this has led to the

²²¹ Yan’khan, Kanl’divane; Hill, 1996: 23-4.

²²² Hill, 1996: 24; seems to suggest that by the fifth century, side-chambers were losing their importance; though he admits that in some of the late fifth century churches – the churches at Meryemlik, the Tomb-Church in Corycos; Okuzlu, North Church – the side-chambers retained their integrity and importance.

²²³ Similar function has been attributed to the south side-chambers in Lycian churches Harrison, 1963: 117-151; here however, these are often elaborately planned, conchal chapels, not simple rectangular chambers.

suggestion that these chambers were the sacristies of early Syrian churches, the ancestor of the *diakonikon* of later Byzantine times.

There is nothing to suggest that these rigid spatial arrangements were accepted in Isaurian ecclesiastic architecture, although the state of preservation of ancient Isaurian churches is worse than in Syria, and much less research has been done on them. Furthermore, the eastern passages found in Isauria, are generally absent from Syrian churches, and in some cases they appear to be more significant than the side chambers. On the other hand in some instances, the south-side chambers in Isaurian churches were used as baptisteries (Hill, 1996: 24), as seems to be the case with the “Cupola Church” in St. Thecla’s sanctuary, where quatrefoil marble font was found in one of the pair of rooms in the southeast corner of the church²²⁴. In the *basilica* of St. Thecla, a limestone pinecone was found in the debris of the north side-chamber (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 16), and has been interpreted as either a piece of a fountain or an element from the corners of a balustrade. However, without any further evidence, it is obviously difficult to infer the function or the interior fittings of this unit²²⁵. After all, even if from a fountain, the provision of water does not necessarily indicate the existence of a baptistery: some of the north chambers in Syrian churches, which were clearly used as sacristies, had small fountains placed against the wall (Babich, 1969: 67).

An interesting hypothesis about the significance of the eastern compartments in Isaurian churches was proposed by S. Hill (1985: 93-97; 1996: 28-37). He has observed that the eastern passages were not necessarily of a secondary importance to

²²⁴ Hill, 1996: 233; Feld, 1964: 93; it is interesting to note the baptistery at Alahan, which is a separate building, but similarly consists of two rectangular and parallel rooms, one of which contains the baptismal font; Gough, (ed.) fig. 61-65.

the side-chambers, as in some instances the eastern ambulatory passage is found without the side-chambers as in Kanl'divane; Yan'khan, and the Church of the Apostles at Anazarbus. Hill has suggested that these corridors served the purpose of martyr's chapel, their position behind the apse being an ingenious solution to the problem of combining the regular service of the Eucharist with the ceremonies celebrating the memory of the venerated Saint. The south church at Yan'khan²²⁶ provides a firm basis for this theory. Here the eastern passage was entered directly from the aisles, and instead of side-chambers, there were two apsidioles in line with the aisles. (fig. 33) In the middle of the passage, immediately behind the main apse, was a small square chamber. Traces of its domical roof are still visible, and there is a well-preserved, rounded niche in the north wall, containing a sarcophagus (Hill, 1985: pl. 13). The funerary association of the eastern passages was further confirmed with the survey of the North Church at Yan'khan, where there was no separate chamber, but a quantity of *stelai* and sarcophagi fragments (Hill, 1985: 95). This was a funerary church situated in the cemetery precinct of the Late Roman village, while the South Church was in the occupied area, and was of a much larger size, and more elaborately planed. More interestingly, an inscription on a lintel over the main entrance of the South Church explicitly states that the building was the *martyrium* of Sts. George, Conon, and Christopher²²⁷, and gives the name of the donor, the *Comes Isauriae*, Matronianus, known from the *Codex Theodosianus* and an inscription from Anemurium. Thus, the South Church is securely dated to the later fourth century.

²²⁵ Hill, 1996: 225, has suggested that this chamber may have had a baptismal function; baptisteries flanking the apse on the north side were found in some churches in Lycia; Harrison, 1963: 132-33, the monastic church at Karabel, for instance.

²²⁶ Eight kilometres to the northwest of modern Limonlu; Hill, 1985: 93-97.

²²⁷ Hill, 1985: pl. 12; these were certainly local martyrs.

The martyrial character of the domed chamber behind the main apse of the South Church seems confirmed. True an alternative place for the sacred relics would have been a reliquary underneath the altar, but the South Church at Yan'khan belongs to an early period in church architecture and liturgy when the relation between the altar table and the martyr's tomb was not yet standard, and in addition, it belongs to a region where the tradition of having distinct chapels reserved for housing sacred objects was retained until late in the Middle Ages²²⁸. The South Church at Yan'khan was both a parish church and a *martyrium* (Hill, 1996: 29). Hence, it required two separate but integrated arrangements: a regular basilical interior for the daily celebration of the Eucharist, and a shrine hosting the sacred relic, easily accessible to enable normal conduct of commemorative ceremonies, but still occupying a position that would cause the least disturbance in the arrangements of the everyday liturgy.

This was the principal problem in the architecture of Early Christian memorials: putting together architectonic units that are designed to hold distinct but deeply related ceremonies, whether a cathedral and a Tomb, or a monastic church and a pilgrimage place. The architects of the first Christian monuments in Palestine were certainly well aware of this problem, and their solutions were to become models for the next few centuries (Grabar, 1946, 2: 309-313; Krautheimer, 1986: 51-67). The basilical plan with an eastern ambulatory passage in the churches of Yan'khan, and doubtlessly at many other Isaurian sites, was a distant descendant of this concept of planning "*martyria* in churches"²²⁹. In fact, as some has observed, the "logic" behind these architectonic arrangements can comfortably apply to St. Catherine's church, at

²²⁸ Grabar, 1946, 2: 313; for the *pareklesia* in later Byzantine churches; Babich, 1969: 34-40; note that as late as the ninth century Photius the Great, the Patriarch of Constantinople attacked the Catholic clergy for delivering two separate masses over the same altar, in a single day; Babich, 1969: 9.

Mt. Sinai. This church is planned almost on the same lines as St. Thecla, Merymlik, or the South Church, Yan'khan: it is a three aisled basilica with an eastern courtyard, flanked by projecting side-chambers, although built much later, under Justinianic²³⁰. (fig. 34)

On the occasion on the annual panegyrics in honour of the Saint, the people led by the clergy would form a procession that entered the church through one of the aisles, continued into the sacred area behind the main apse and returned to the *naos* through the other aisle. The arrangements in the nave, with the chancel bay at its end, precluded adequate space for such peripathetic service, but having aisles extending behind the altar place more comfortably suited this need (Forsyth, 1968: 7). In this way, a true “building in building” is created with the minimum effort. It is a thrifty and practical solution, but it is in the essence of Constantine's grand building projects in Palestine: basilical hall, with a centrally planned structure attached on its longitudinal axis and entered via the lateral aisles²³¹.

The fifth century *basilica* of St. Thecla belongs to this great heritage; but it is questionable whether this formal architectonic resemblance corresponds to the same liturgical needs²³². At Mt. Sinai, the space behind the apse housed the Burning Bush²³³; at Meryemlik, according to Hill (1996: 32), the eastern passage in the basilica of St. Thecla enshrined the place of Thecla's disappearance under the

²²⁹ Term borrowed of course from Grabar, 1946, 2; Hill, 1996: 34.

²³⁰ The observation was made by Forsyth, 1968, fig.2; illustrated in Hill, 1996: 33-34.

²³¹ Hill, 1996: 31-32; the same principle applies to a number of other martyrial churches, Forsyth, 1968: 17-18; for the course of the parapatetic services and the adaptation of the sacral structures in Jerusalem during the great annual festivities, a first-hand testimony is Egeria's diary; Wilkinson, 1971: 123-137.

²³² It is solely on the grounds of these formal parallels that S. Hill attributes a martyrial significance to the eastern passage in St. Thecla's basilica; Hill, 1996: 31-32.

²³³ In later times, a stone slab replaced the Bush and a small chapel enshrined the sacred spot, Forsyth, 1968: 3-19.

earth²³⁴. But what exactly were the people coming to worship in the fifth century basilica? Some visible objective, like the Bush in Mt. Sinai, or the domical chamber in Yan'khan must have existed.

Clues for the detailed appearance of an analogous sacred memento have been sought in the "Life and Miracles of St. Thecla" (Dagron, 1978: 72-74; Hill, 1996: 31). Mir. 17 for instance, mentions a circular bema covered with mosaics in geometrical and concentric design (Mir, 17 5-6; these were the work of a master from Antioch, called Leontios). Presumably the same structure is referred to in Mir, 7 as the "sacred bema", lit by the incessantly burning oil lamp (Mir, 7 25-26). In Mir, 18, a gentlewoman from Seleukia, called Aba, healed a bone fracture by simply applying the dirt from the screens that surrounded "the saintly chamber". These features were all related with Thecla's *thalamos* or *koitoniskos* (further referred to in Mir, 8, 40, 46), a place where the Saint loved to retire and where she made her miraculous appearances²³⁵. It was an architectonic feature through which the people communicated with the living Saint, a curious sort of medium in the absence of a saintly relic.

Where was this "tholos" situated? The "Life and Miracles" is of course a document describing the early fifth century arrangements of St. Thecla's sanctuary at the latest, but we may safely suppose, that the spot of the Holy of Holies of the Seleukian sanctuary was not forgotten by later architects. As it is, very similar description occurs at the end of the "Life of the protomartyr Thecla" (Life, 28, 9-11), this time applied to the arrangements of the chancel bay of the earlier church: the

²³⁴ The author is clearly following the "Life and Miracles" of St. Thecla, (chapter 28) where unlike the longer version of the Acts of Paul and Thecla, the Saint simply penetrates the earth; the mid-fifth century author mentions neither the cave, nor the episode with the debauchers (Acts, X; XI).

hagiographer specifies that the altar table was set in the middle of a circular, silver colonnade. Could it be that this luxurious setting was in the same “sacred chamber of St. Thecla” in the time of the “Miracles”? It is certainly possible, especially as we are told in the same passage that Thecla entered the earth at the same spot where the altar of her church stood²³⁶. We need to also recall the fact that the chancel bay of the late fifth-century basilica was positioned directly above the eastern compartments of the Cave Church. Confusingly enough however, the same words, *thalamos* and *koitoniskos*, as used to designate the circular, sacred chamber, were later applied to a chamber in the “grotto, situated to the west and in front of the temple” (Mir, 36 16-17). We shall return to these curious passages when discussing the location of the fourth century church, and the sacred significance of the Cave Chapel. For now, it is sufficient to acknowledge that the scant and contradictory references from the “Life and the Miracles” hardly support Hill’s thesis for a martyr’s chamber in the eastern passage of the fifth century *basilica*. In fact, it is difficult to understand why this author ignored the plain statement of the fifth century hagiographer, that the Saint penetrated the earth at the same spot where the “sacred table for the celebration of the liturgy” was placed (Life, 28, 10-11)²³⁷.

There have been no excavations in the area of the eastern passage. The original excavators seem to have concluded that besides the cave chapel, built underneath the southern half of the fifth century *basilica* (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 38-46), there was no room for another sacred focus in the late fifth century. This assumption need not be completely disregarded. Modern criticism of Herzfeld and Guyer’s work

²³⁵ Dagron, 1978: 72-73, the author has reconstructed a circular bema with the altar slab set beneath a silver ciborium.

²³⁶ Note that at the last day of the annual festivities, it is the living Saint, personally that delivers the sacred gifts; Mir, 26, 35-37.

basically relies on the analysis of the “Life and Miracles” and Hill’s comparative study of the contemporary sacral architecture in the region. Although the loose terminology of the “Miracles” does not allow for a very precise reconstruction of the most sacred parts of the fifth century basilica, even so it is more in accord with Herzfeld and Guyer’s assumption (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 45) than with the theories advanced by Dagron and Hill. Without further archaeological excavation, Hill’s lucid suggestion for the martyrial character of the eastern compartments in the fifth century *basilica* remains merely a hypothesis. It should further be noted that the greatest distance between the outer face of the main apse and the eastern wall of St. Thecla’s basilica is a bare seven metres (Hill, 1996: fig 43); no substantial structure could have been erected at this spot, and even a small monument would have rendered the ceremonial processions extremely cumbersome.

It seems that the colossal proportions of the fifth century memorial church meant it could not be properly maintained for a long period of time. At some point the mosaic pavement in the nave was re-laid (fig. 35) and the tall columns were partially replaced by massive square piers²³⁸. The latter also appear along the outer walls of the *naos*, against the walls of the side chamber, and in the intercolumniation of the nave arcades (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 16, 36). They clearly indicate that much of the original fifth century superstructure was repaired or replaced, perhaps after an earthquake. The restorers obviously lacked the means to re-create the luxurious interior of the fifth century church, but its tremendous size was retained.

²³⁷ Especially since he reproduces this same passage just three pages before arguing for a martyrial chamber in the eastern passage; Hill, 1996: 209, 212.

²³⁸ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 20-1, 33-4; Hill, 1996: 225 has I think justly related these two alterations, though this was nowhere mentioned in the excavation report.

It is impossible to date these extensive repairs. During the period of Late Antiquity, the standard type of support in the Isaurian churches was the column; massive stone piers were rarely employed, and their occurrence may often – as here – signal later repairs²³⁹. The Seleukian sanctuary continued to be a large centre for pilgrimage at least until the seventh century (Hellenkemper, and Hill 1990: 441; Davis, 2001), but if we are to accept the excavators' proposal, the large fifth century *basilica* was eventually replaced by a church of smaller dimensions during the period of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia²⁴⁰.

6.5 The Cave Church

The fifth century architects undertook considerable efforts in order to incorporate an older cave chapel into the heavy foundations of the new *basilica* (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 38-45; Wilkinson, 1971: 289-292; Dagron, 1978: 61-3; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 442, fig.385-88; Hill, 1996: 214-217). (fig. 36a/b) The excavations of 1907 did not clear the floors of this subterranean feature but its direct relationship with the fifth century *basilica* was evident. Along the south wall of the *basilica*, the excavators traced the foundations of a contemporary colonnade, which defined a passage five metres wide, leading to a large opening in the eastern half of the south nave (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 30-31; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: fig 386). Here a flight of steps descends into a narrow corridor defined by the natural rock on the left, and a short stretch of wall, followed by a pair of arches on the right. The latter formed the entrance into the *naos* of the Cave Church; covering

²³⁹ Hill, 1996: 20; the author tends to attribute them to Anatolian influences, rather than to a later period.

an area that measured 18 by 12 metres, and situated immediately beneath the eastern bays of the south aisle of the *basilica*²⁴⁰. The Cave Church was originally a three-aisled *basilica* terminating in a rock-cut apse on the east, directly beneath the penultimate bay of the south aisle of the later *basilica*, and a vestibule to the northwest, approached by an arched opening at the north end of its narthex (fig. 36b). The laying of the foundations for the fifth century *basilica*, and the progressive erosion of the limestone rock, has rendered the reconstruction of the original arrangements extremely difficult (Wilkinson, 1971: 288-289).

When the fifth century *basilica* was constructed, the eastern section of its south stylobate run directly over the north colonnade of the Cave Church. In order to counter the pressure of the massive foundations, the architects had to sacrifice the integrity of the earlier chapel. The three re-used Doric columns that formed the north colonnade of the Cave Church could not support the stylobate of the upper arcade and were therefore re-aligned. A solid wall was built against their north face, forming in effect a downward continuation of the *basilica*'s southern stylobate. (fig. 37) Thus, the north aisle of the Cave Church was cut off from the rest of the *naos* and transformed into a separate chapel (Wilkinson, 1971: 292). Since access from the nave was blocked, entry to this unit must have been from the northwest vestibule, now heavily disintegrated and inaccessible. The south wall of the Cave Church was similarly embedded in the substructure of the perimeter wall of the fifth century *basilica*, but beside the entrance with its stairways leading to the narthex of the Cave Church, another opening was pierced in the south wall, on a line just in front of the

²⁴⁰ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 36-38, though in the preface the author tends to date it at the very end of Antiquity; 1930: ix; this interpretation is confidently rejected in Hill, 1996: 217-220.

²⁴¹ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 39, a corrected plan of this underground *basilica* is given in Wilkinson, 1971: 291.

apse and the flanking chambers²⁴². Further interventions in the interior of the Cave Church are indicated by a twist in the east wall of the *naos* (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 40-1): the realignment of the north colonnade left the apse a short distance from the centre of the nave, and consequently its corner walls were altered.

These cumbersome measures could not bear the immense weight of the fifth century *basilica* for very long²⁴³. The wall built along the north colonnade of Cave Church was repaired in several places, with disregard to its mosaic decoration. Moreover, the upper parts of these walls contained *spolia* taken from the fifth century church, and Wilkinson has further mentioned retaining walls in the apse and the south side-chamber “built at a later date” (Wilkinson, 1971: 289). A similar strengthening of the interior walls of a chamber lying just a few metres to the north of the Cave Church and, according to the plan (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 39), entered from the northwest vestibule was assigned to a period following Zeno’s foundation (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 39). These casual repairs are certainly later than the adjustments made in response to the erection of the large *basilica*, and are perhaps related with the second building phase of the *basilica* (Hill, 1996: 217).

As in most other contemporary churches in the region, the fifth century Cave Church had a pair of side-chambers flanking the apse (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 43-44). The one on the south was rectangular and, like the apse, rock-cut and lined

²⁴² The plan of the initial investigators shows this opening as another doorway; Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 39.

²⁴³ The Church with a Crypt from Tzarichin Grad is a somewhat comparable instance of two superimposed chapels; Hoddinott, 1963: 204-211; in this case however, the subterranean chapel may have been a pure convenience, compensating for the drop of the terrain, its interior was organized by large piers that supported the foundations of the upper church, and was in effect a replica of the *naos* of the upper church. A much better parallel is the Eleona Church, on the Mount of Olives, where a cave was housed beneath the chancel bay of the upper church, or the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem; Mango, 1978: 42-43.

with masonry. It was entered through an opening pierced in the south wall of the apse, signalling that access was restricted to the clergy²⁴⁴.

The later clearings of the church floor revealed an improvised grave underneath rubble fallen from the walls of the south side-chamber²⁴⁵. This inhumation was loosely dated “to the end of Antiquity”²⁴⁶, while its location in the south side-chamber should indicate that it belonged to a person of some importance; its rough appearance is rather at odds with this idea²⁴⁷. We learn from the “Miracles of St. Thecla” that the right of interment in the interior of the martyrial church was only granted to exceptional members of the clergy, and had to be authorised by the bishop of Seleukia (Mir, 30.39-40)²⁴⁸. In fact the only known persons who were given such an honour were two late fourth century bishops, Samos and Symposios, although other unknown persons were also buried here (Mir, 30.42, “and couple of others equal to them”). One would expect to find a substantial setting for the Metropolitan bishop: the person buried in the south side-chamber of the Cave Church, effectively deposited on the floor, and covered with rubble, with no sarcophagus or lined grave, can hardly be identified with these dignitaries. As it is, Dagron, on the basis of the “Miracles” (Mir, 30.17)²⁴⁹ has suggested that tombs recorded in this source should be sought in the south aisle of the subterranean basilica, but no such finds have been

²⁴⁴ Hill, 1996: 216; has suggested a corresponding doorway in the north apsidal wall, though it does not appear on the plans.

²⁴⁵ Dagron, 1978: 61; the original publication by Ciner, 1964, “Ayatekla Kilisesinden Chikar’lan Iskeletin Tetkiki”, remained unavailable.

²⁴⁶ Presumably on the grounds of its stratigraphic position; Dagron, 1978: 61, n.5.

²⁴⁷ Funerary designation of the south side-chambers is attested in some Lycian churches, but in these cases the sepulchral arrangements were made much more elaborate; Harrison, 1963: 117-151.

²⁴⁸ The passage is a fascinating demonstration of the mid-fifth century sentiments about sepulchres *intra ecclesiam*: “there is nothing in common between Houses of Prayer and Tombs, except for a case of death which is not death but life in God” i.e. for sanctified persons; Dagron, 1978: 70-71.

²⁴⁹ Dagron, 1978: 61; this is somewhat contradictory to his conviction that the martyrium of the “Miracles” was not the Cave Church.

reported, and their absence has provoked considerable doubts about the martyrial character of Cave Church.

The form and the interior of the north side-chamber of the Cave Church remain conjectural. On the plans given by the early excavators of the church, it appears as an irregular natural expansion of the cave, extending underneath the south corner of the *basilica*'s apse (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 39). If this is correct, there should be some traces of architectonic adaptations in the interior to counter the pressure from the eastern end of the heavy stylobate in the upper church²⁵⁰. Communication with the rest of the church was restricted to a possible doorway in the north apsidal wall (Hill, 1996: 216), and a pair of windows pierced in the eastern wall of what was once the north aisle of the church (fig. 38). As the building of the later basilica had the effect of detaching this area from the nave of the subterranean church, henceforth it could be entered only from the adjacent vestibule.

This peculiar arrangement, however, may not be a simple side effect resulting from the construction of the upper church. The building of a solid wall along the north colonnade of the Cave Church gave a separate emphasis to the north aisle, and, inherently, to whatever was set on display in the side-chamber. It transformed the aisle and the chamber into a sort of a side chapel, with its own architectonic and liturgical focus, distinct from the apsidal space of the adjoining basilica. The fenestrated wall of the side-chamber could only be approached from the spacious vestibule to its west, which in turn gave access to the narthex of the basilica, and to a naturally created corridor that may have led to some point farther west, perhaps providing an alternative entrance for the underground sanctuary, now buried or disintegrated (Hill, 1996: 215). We may reasonably apply Hill's theory for the

liturgical significance of the eastern passages to the arrangements of the late fifth century Cave Church; a basilica with a “northern passage” that provided access to the Holy of Holies without encroaching the *naos* space.

The double window, by itself is a sure sign that the inside of the side-chamber was given a particular attention. There were, moreover, light wells in the floor of the upper church providing additional views in this part of the subterranean chapel (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 7). These recall the architectural solutions to a problem common for many *martyria*: to preserve the sacred objects or the sacred relics from deterioration, while providing some kind of access to them by the throng of pilgrims. This could be a direct visual contact as in our case, and the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, or “itemic”, through something that has been in contact with the sacred person; or through a visual representation of the saintly figure or her sepulchre, as at St. Lawrence and Sta. Agnese in Rome (Grabar, 1946: 305-309). Considering the limited size of the units that gave access to the focus of worship in the Cave Church, all three methods may have been used. Pilgrim flasks bearing the image of the Saint in an *orantes* pose seem to confirm the possibility of an icon (Davis, 2001: fig.81). The numerous traces of glass *tesserae* found on the floor in the nave, in the side chamber, and on the walls of the north aisle, testify to the rich adornment of the Cave Church, and its wall mosaics may have reminded the pious visitors of the life and the miracles of St. Thecla²⁵¹.

What exactly were these arrangements enshrined, is not known. There were no excavations in the north chamber, but the initial researchers nonetheless thought that

²⁵⁰ The excavators reported remains of a column, probably seen from the windows in the western wall of the chamber; Dagron, 1978: 45.

²⁵¹ Forsyth, 1968: 12-3, fig.13; observes the relation between the mosaics in the apse vault of St. Catherine church representing the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor, Moses and the Burning Bush, and

it was the cave where, according to the longer version of the Acts, Thecla disappeared in the rock, leaving behind a piece of veil as a testimony for her life and deeds (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 45). Perhaps it contained a peculiar looking rock, which the people believed to be the petrified veil, mentioned in one of the longer versions of the Acts of Paul and Thecla (Dagron, 1978: 49). It is equally possible that the north chamber of the Cave Church housed the circular “*bema-martyrium*”, the sacred chamber, or *thalamos* of the Saint mentioned in the “Miracles” (Dagron, 1978: 72-73). If the latter was the case, there must be some substantial remains behind the fenestella wall. Whatever the truth is, the initial researchers of this site believed that this subterranean structure was actually the primary *martyrium* of St. Thecla. The Doric columns that divided the *naos* of the Cave Chapel, led these authors to the conclusion that this was the oldest part of the sanctuary complex, and hence, its nucleus²⁵². As the cult gained in prominence and renown, the monastic complex was gradually elaborated, reaching its peak in the late fifth century, when the monumental basilicas were founded. This view has been accepted by a number of authorities (Grabar, 1946; Wilkinson, 1971; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990).

The later investigations of J. Wilkinson (1971: 288-89) discovered the earlier level of the Cave Church. The clearing of the floors revealed a small portion of a rough mosaic pavement, some 80 centimetres in front of the fenestella wall. It must have belonged to an earlier phase of the Chapel because it is interrupted by the wall that supported the south stylobate of the upper church. Evidently, this belonged to the

Moses receiving the Law, and the patron events of the monastic complex at Mt. Sinai; the capital study of the role of representative art in the Early Christian memorials is still, Grabar, 1946, vol.2.

²⁵² Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 40-1, the authors have suggested a third century date for the earliest phase of the Cave Church!

4th century when the three-aisled *basilica* Cave Church was originally created²⁵³. Wilkinson is silent on the issue of whether the original Cave Church may have been beneath a structure that was later replaced by the fifth century *basilica*. However, if we judge from his observation that the Cave Church would have been too small and inappropriate for an international centre of pilgrimage (Wilkinson, 1971:289), he seems to have favoured the possibility. Indeed, this is also implied in Egeria's account of the sanctuary complex: "in the middle of the walls there is a church in which there is a *martyrium*" (Wilkinson, 1971: 122; Dagron, 1978: 57-8). In other words, the Spanish pilgrim recognises some kind of architectonic independence for the *martyrium*, but she also states that it was an integral part of the fourth century church. But this passage is not as conclusive as it seems. Two readings are possible: Egeria is either describing an arrangement similar to the late-fifth century *basilica* over a grotto chapel, or her "*martyrium*" is a small shrine, detached from the ordinary basilical arrangements but still within the same perimeter (Dagron, 1978: 72).

Further doubts over Herzfeld and Guyer's assumption about the early stages of the sanctuary complex were cast with the later publication of the "Life and Miracles of the protomartyr Thecla". As we saw earlier, this mid-fifth century version of the hagiography makes no references to the cave where, according to the later Acts, the Saint spent her earthly life. The only certain mention of a cave in the sanctuary complex occurs in one of the miracles (Mir, 36), but the author plainly states that it was situated not beneath, but a short distance to the west, on the axis of the church (Mir, 36 17-18). Dagron (1978: 52-53) believes that this location is also referred to in another of the miracles – Mir, 23 – where it is designated as *Mursineon*, the Wood of

²⁵³ Wilkinson, 1971: 290-1; an early fourth century date was proposed for this level without any

Myrtle. This was, according to the mid-fifth century hagiographer, the place where the Saint loved to spend most of her time, and it was like the grotto in miracle 36, situated a short distance in front of the church (Mir, 23 8-11)²⁵⁴. The same toponym was used by the ninth century Patriarch of Constantinople, Photius, but to designate the place where the grotto itself was situated²⁵⁵.

Thus, it turns out that the cave revered both as the dwelling place and the tomb of the Saint in later times, was but a part of a pleasant location, “suitable for rest and prayers”, and architectonically unrelated with the martyrial church, until the middle of the fifth century (Dagron, 1978: 53). The implications are discomfoting: the subterranean chapel found underneath the large basilica was not the initial *martyrium*-church of Thecla, unless we assume that the Seleukian hagiographer referred to some other natural grotto situated a short distance away from the entrance of the central church. But even in such a case it is odd to otherwise find not a single mention of the cave that will become the most sacred part of the largest of the sanctuary churches in just a few decades.

Dagron (1978: 53-4, 69) has accepted this situation as a matter of fact: the grotto referred to in the “Miracles” is neither the original *martyrium* of St. Thecla, nor it was situated beneath the (assumed) fourth century predecessor of the latter²⁵⁶. Consequently, the first *martyrium*-church of St. Thecla should be sought some distance to the east of the Cave Church²⁵⁷. Such a conclusion is not totally unfounded; after all, neither Gregory of Nazianzes, nor Egeria made mention of a

elaboration.

²⁵⁴ G. Dagron explains the term *protemenisma* as a “simple arrangement in front of the church”.

²⁵⁵ Dagron, 1978: 51, note that the myrtle shrub was an attribute of both Aphrodite and Artemis.

²⁵⁶ As suggested by Hill, 1996: 208-212.

²⁵⁷ Dagron, 1978: 69, the author claims to have seen traces of foundation dozens of metres to the east of the large basilica; no description was provided, and as Hill has noted, this would take us out of the confines of the fortified precinct; Hill, 1996: 211.

Cave Chapel in their accounts on the sanctuary complex. Evidently, we have a serious discrepancy between the written and the archaeological record.

Dagron's solution (1978: 53-54) is, however, difficult to accept. He has suggested that the Cave Church was attributed sanctity only at a later date, perhaps due to a local belief that the grotto was a favourite location for the Saint (recall that for the author of the "Miracles", the Saint is still alive), or because it was associated with some extraordinary miracle²⁵⁸. But what sort of miracle could prompt the later donors to place their monumental project away from the spot of the original *martyrium*? Dagron's observation concerning the location of the primitive *martyrium* not only disregards the fact that there was an older phase in the Cave Church²⁵⁹, but it also implies that the original *martyrium* was either forgotten by the late fifth century builders (only two or three decades after the completion of the "Miracles"!) or, it was completely overshadowed by their extravagant monument to the saint. Such a scenario might comfort with the written evidence, but it hardly finds any parallel in the history of Christian sacred places. Cultic centres and hagiographical traditions were often multiplied almost infinitely, but there is I think not a single instance of a sacred place being forgotten and replaced in the same Christian milieu²⁶⁰.

Dagron's argument *ex silentio*, essentially disregards the results of archaeological research, and his theory for a sudden shift in the Holy of Holies of the Seleukian sanctuary is hardly paralleled. The Cave Church must have existed prior to the late fifth century, and it had certainly been attributed some sacred significance in

²⁵⁸ More specifically Mir, 36; where the saint successfully combats an epidemics of the livestock in Seleukia, by revealing a spring with healing potentials in the grotto near her shrine.

²⁵⁹ A fact of which the author is certainly aware of; Dagron, 1978: 62.

²⁶⁰ It is a possibility that during those few decades between the completion of the 'Miracles' and the building of the large basilica there happened a radical reinterpretation of the sacred topography of the

order to earn such prominence in the later tradition. The exact nature of its sacredness is a different matter, and we must not rush into accepting Herzfeld and Guyer's conclusion that either, the Cave Church, and the north side-chamber in particular, enshrined the spot of Thecla's disappearance in the rock from the very beginning of the sanctuary complex (Dagron, 1978: 45). This hagiographic detail belongs to a later period (i.e. the longer version of the Acts), and it may have been a simple reaction to the architectural settings in the sanctuary complex (Dagron, 1978: 54). Originally, the cave may have been reputed as the favourite dwelling place for the living Saint. This is indeed stated in Mir, 36 21-4: "whoever comes to the temple (i.e. the early *martyrium*) runs also to this grotto... where is a chamber in whose interior is the Saint". Only in later times, did the Orthodox authorities eradicate this curious Pagan particularity; transforming the chamber of the living Saint into the cave where she spent her earthly life²⁶¹. It must not be forgotten that the original investigators never attempted to see what was actually worshiped in the north side-chamber of the Cave Church.

6.6 The fourth century *martyrium*

It remains to consider one other possibility for the location and the form of the fourth century *martyrium* (Hill, 1996: 208-212, 217-220). According to the excavators of the site there were no earlier phases beneath the large *basilica* built over the grotto chapel. This is nowhere explicitly stated, but it is implied from their interpretation of the stratigraphy on the site of the large *basilica* (Herzfeld, and

sanctuary complex; even in such an extraordinary case it is difficult to believe that the old tradition was totally abandoned.

²⁶¹ See the comments of Nicholas of Paphlagonia on this issue, Dagron, 1978: 51.

and Guyer, 1930: 31-38). The logical conclusion is that the Cave Church was the only ecclesiastic building in the walled precinct prior to the construction of the large basilica in the second half of the fifth century²⁶². We have seen the problems with this suggestion from the point of view of the written sources, and more recently Hill has argued that S. Guyer²⁶³ simply misinterpreted the stratigraphy beneath the large, late fifth century basilica (Hill, 1996: 212). Evidently, the stratigraphy was confusing although early excavators did discover traces of a smaller basilical church, located in the southern half of the large basilica and directly above the Cave Church. (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 36-38, fig. 7, 38). (fig. 27a) They suggested that this building belongs to the period of the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia, because it contained re-used materials, and because of the “irregularities” in its plan (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 36-7) The truth is, so little survived of this structure that it was impossible even to tell its exact extent²⁶⁴. Its outer walls apparently coincided with the south wall and the north stylobate of the large basilica²⁶⁵, while its apse was positioned in the southern half of the late fifth century apse (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 7). The stylobates of this church cannot be traced with any certainty, but according to the plan of the excavators they had roughly the same alignment as the arcades of the Cave Church. Such an alignment would indeed create gross deviations from the ordinary basilical plan. Hill has further observed, that in this reconstruction, the stylobates of the “Armenian basilica” appear coterminous, the western end of its nave being one metre narrower than the eastern end! (Hill, 1996: 219). The *narthex* of the small church seems to have incorporated the later entrance in the Cave Church

²⁶² As mentioned above this was also accepted by Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 441-443.

²⁶³ S. Guyer was the writer of the text, while the plans were drawn by E. Herzfeld; Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: xiv-xv.

²⁶⁴ Hill, 1996: 218 on the basis of Herzfeld’s plan has given a measure of 33 by 26 metres.

²⁶⁵ Hill, 1996, p.219, the author claims to have seen parts of this wall cut by the piers that replaced the Corinthian columns in the later phase of the large basilica.

(Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 37), and it had a square tower-like projection on its south side, just adjacent to the later entrance in the Cave Church, and very similar to the one in the narthex of the “Cupola Church”. The excavators reported traces of a stairway in this chamber, which indicates that the narthex and the aisles of the small church had a gallery level (Hill, 1996: 220).

Hill's has argued strongly against the suggested date of the smaller basilica²⁶⁶. He notes that the few recognizable features of this church indicate that this was not a building from the period of the Armenian Kingdom. Admittedly, we know far too little of Armenian sacred architecture in southern Asia Minor²⁶⁷, but the basilical plan, the *narthex* with a tower on its short side, and the apse with a rounded outer face, are certainly more at home in the Early Christian period, than in the thirteenth or the fourteenth centuries. The excavator's argument for such a late dating rested only on the observation that its walls incorporated *spolia* from an earlier building, but they failed to demonstrate the provenience of these materials (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 7, 36) and we have seen that *spolia* were used even in the primary arrangements of the Cave Church²⁶⁸. Only future excavation will definitely settle this matter, but the possible existence of an earlier 4th century *basilica* over the Cave Church deserves to be considered.

Certainly, the position of the smaller *basilica* indicates that, like the fifth century *basilica*, it was closely related to the subterranean *basilica*. In fact, the apsidal space

²⁶⁵ Hill, 1996, p.219, the author claims to have seen parts of this wall cut by the piers that replaced the Corinthian columns in the later phase of the large basilica.

²⁶⁶ Relying on E. Herzfeld's trench plans – *ibid*, fig. 7, 16 - this author has concluded that whenever portions of the walls or the foundations of the smaller basilica were preserved, they appear cut by the massive, late fifth century construction, and consequently, must be earlier than the latter; Hill, 1996: 218-219.

²⁶⁷ A study by Edwards, 1987, is mostly focused on military architecture and on the region of the eastern Taurus.

of this church was situated just above the irregular, northeastern chamber of the Cave Church (Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: fig. 7). This physical correspondence between the focal points of the two buildings is a striking recollection of the concluding passages in the local version of Thecla's life (Life, 28): with God's grace the Saint penetrates alive under the surface of the Earth, "at the same spot where the divine and holy table for the liturgical celebrations is fixed"²⁶⁹. If this small *basilica* does in fact belong to the early, 4th century phase of the sanctuary, there can be no doubt about the original sacred nature of the cave: the architects of the large basilica would have simply repeated the pre-existing scheme on a much larger scale. Furthermore, such an architectonic setting in the early phase of the sanctuary creates fewer discrepancies between what we know from the written accounts and what remains on the site: a fourth century church over a grotto chapel nicely matches "the *martyrium* in church" seen by nun Egeria in the spring of 384. Even the troublesome passage in the "Miracles" (Mir, 36), where the grotto is located to the west of the entrance of the memorial church becomes somewhat reconcilable. This description is hardly valid after the construction of the large *basilica* of St. Thecla in the late fifth century, but it would make some sense in the days of the smaller church, (the excavator's "Armenian Church"), whose narthex could not extend much beyond the western perimeter of the Cave Church²⁷⁰.

Some information about the interior of this conjectured fourth century church is given in the "Miracles" (Mir, 13; 17; 18; 46) (Dagron, 1978: 69-73), and some of

²⁶⁸ Hill, 1996: 213, 219; has suggested the possibility that the Late Antique sanctuary was built over an earlier, pre-Christian site; traces of materials dating to the Early Imperial period were also reported by Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 442.

²⁶⁹ Dagron, 1978: 52; note also the fragment of a homily in honour of St. Thecla, delivered by Severus of Antioch.

²⁷⁰ Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 37; there is also a possibility that the grotto had an alternative entrance further to the west, *ibid*, fig. 7; in such case the description in the *Miracles* is in fact very accurate.

these have been mentioned while discussing the interior of the large *basilica*. The literary details do not contradict what is known about the general layout of the “Armenian Church”. The *martyrium* of the “Miracles” was a basilical church (Mir, 30; 33)²⁷¹, and one would in that case, better look for the bishops’ tombs in the south aisle of this smaller church, rather than in the subterranean *basilica*. There was apparently no atrium, but gardens, renowned for their collection of exotic birds, and as a cool and quiet retreat from the blistering sun during the summer season (Mir, 24;). This was the church adorned by general Saturninos upon his victory over the Isaurian raiders (Mir, 13)²⁷²; its mosaics with geometric designs were executed by Leontios of Antioch (Mir, 17, 12-14)²⁷³.

As for Hill’s suggestion, that the predecessor of the large *basilica* was one of the earliest monuments in the region to adapt the eastern passage, with its martyrial connotations, that must remain pure conjecture (Hill, 1996: 210). A memorial built behind the apse of the fourth century *basilica* would seemingly explain the almost complete absence of references to the Cave Church in the “Life and Miracles of the holy protomartyr Thecla”, but would be at odds with the subsequent developments on the site, and in the literary traditions. Hill has attempted to resolve this contradiction by claiming that the architectonic arrangements in the sacred precinct were actually commemorating two distinct but closely related events: the Cave Church would enshrine the place where the Saint spent her earthly life; the *martyrium* above, would mark the place of her disappearance in the bowels of the Earth (Hill, 1996: 211-212). We saw in the previous section that these two events belonged to different literary traditions, and Hill’s proposal erroneously merges the

²⁷¹ Interestingly the word *stoai* is used to designate its aisles; Dagron, 1978: 70.

²⁷² The later *Magister Militum per Orientem*; Dagron, 1978: 117-118.

mid-fifth century “Life and Miracles” (which makes absolutely no mention of a cave in the biography of the Saint) with the longer version of the Acts of Paul and Thecla (which was most probably written much later). Finally, we learned from the last chapter of the “Life of St. Thecla” (Life, 28) that at least until the mid fifth century, the spot of her disappearance was believed to be beneath the altar of the *martyrium*-church.

It would seem that there is no need to insist on some special architectonic arrangements with a martyrial designation at Meryemlik, other than the Cave Church itself. Such arrangements might have been introduced at a later date, but for purely practical reasons²⁷⁴, just as the *basilicae* built over the grotto would have provided the necessary space for both the pilgrims and the monastic communities. It would be certainly interesting to know if there were any such peculiarities reflecting the significance of the subterranean *martyrium*, but as in the case of St. Erasmus of Lychnid, we lack the necessary detailed information. However, the “Miracles” record the circular *bema*, surrounded by a silver colonnade, and designated as the “chamber of the Virgin”²⁷⁵. This interesting structure was doubtlessly the Holy of Holies of St. Thecla’s sanctuary by the mid fifth century, and two likely locations might be proposed for its location: the north side-chamber of the Cave Church, or the chancel bay of the upper *basilica*, which, as we saw, was situated immediately above the north-east section of the Cave Church. The latter suggestion is particularly attractive because it may explain the reasons for why the grotto was attributed sanctity. Thecla

²⁷³ Note that Leontios is hurt while working in the upper parties of the wall; this suggests that the old *martyrium* had wall mosaics.

²⁷⁴ We’ve mentioned the case of St. Agnese, Rome, where a model of the authentic sarcophagus of the Saint was displayed along with her icon, as a replacement for the original arrangements in the sacred sepulchre; Grabar, 1946: 307-8.

²⁷⁵ Dagron, 1978: 73; the author has actually arrived close to the following point, unfortunately however, he kept insisting on a ‘primitive *martyrium*’ situated to the east of the archaeologically attested arrangements.

went into the earth alive at the spot where the altar table of the later church was fixed; consequently, it was believed that the Saint continued to live in the Cave, underneath the chancel bay of the upper church. The construction of the late fifth-century *basilica* further accentuated the importance of the subterranean *basilica* and its north side-chamber in particular, but in later periods, the Orthodox authorities could hardly tolerate a tradition that was so reminiscent of the old Pagan ways; henceforth the temple of the living Saint was to become just a memorial, a testimony for the historical Saint.

To summarize; the Seleukian sanctuary of St. Thecla was certainly established as a monastic and a pilgrimage centre by 375/6. For this we have the testimony of Gregory of Nazianzes, who spent a few years at the monastery before becoming the head of the Nicean party in Constantinople, in 379²⁷⁶. In those days the sanctuary was most probably confined to the limits of the fortified precinct, surrounded by the first monastic cells. Shortly after, in May, 384, these were reported on by nun Egeria: in her journal, Holy Thecla is a large monastery, with cells for both men and women, and unique kinds of institutions, such as the “Virgins”, and the “Guardians” or the *apotactites* (Wilkinson, 1971: 121-122). Egeria’s mention of “a church in which is a martyrium” perhaps suggests that there was a martyrium-church built over the sacred grotto by that time²⁷⁷.

That the sanctuary of St. Thecla was a prominent ecclesiastic centre by the late fourth century, is confirmed in the “Life and Miracles” of the holy Protomartyr. This document is certainly the greatest source of details relating to the architectonic arrangements in the sanctuary during its early phase. At the same time however, it

²⁷⁶Dagron , 1978: 56, gives translation of this fragment from St. Gregory’s *Carmen de Vita sua*.

has provoked much of the controversies that trouble modern research. The settings presented in the “Miracles” have too often been directly related to features revealed by archaeological excavation, notwithstanding the fact that the latter belong to a different period of the sanctuary complex. Confusion is the natural result of this erroneous approach, but if considered separately, the “Life and Miracles of St. Thecla” becomes an important testimony for the Seleukian sanctuary in the period between Egeria’s visit and the grandiose building projects of the late fifth century (Dagron, 1978: 63).

There were apparently no structures worthy of mention outside of the *temenos* area as late as the middle of the fifth century, as was confirmed by the excavations on the site of the “Cupola Church”. The inside of the walled precinct was, however gradually becoming more elaborated, and the sanctuary, with its patroness, were earning a reputation of their own. We hear of its gardens filled with exotic birds, of its baths and springs mediating the miraculous healing powers of the Saint. She becomes the patroness of imperial legates, as with general Saturninos, or the Seleukian bishops, and in a way, of the entire province of Isauria. In turn, her sanctuary emerges as an important focus of investment; the splendid interior of the *martyrium*-church was adorned with wall mosaics and marble revetments, and the literature informs us about vast riches of the sanctuary, which included large amounts of gold and silver, in money or liturgical vessels and objects (Dagron, 1978: 66-67).

Archaeological research has yet to retrieve this earlier period of the Seleukian sanctuary, for it has revealed only the last phase of the Late Antique period of this cultic centre. This is hardly surprising, considering the fact that in the later decades

²⁷⁷ The date for the initial arrangements in the Cave Church remains to be established; the suggestion made by Herzfeld, and Guyer, 1930: 39-40; that they date back in the third century does not rest on firm ground.

of the fifth century, the grandiose foundations of Emperor Zeno diminished the remains of the old sanctuary complex. The old *martyrium* was replaced by one of the largest *basilicae* in this part of the Empire, a monumental structure, which practically erased all the traces of its predecessor, and interfered with the original layout of the Cave Church, but must have respected the original sacred locations. Copious building projects were realised outside the sacred precinct, including the “Cupola Church”, the luxurious bathhouse with a mass of cisterns, and at least one other monumental *basilica*.

The Seleukian sanctuary, like most other ecclesiastic sites in Isauria, will never again experience the prominence it achieved under Emperor Zeno. We hear nothing about the history of this pilgrimage centre during the last century of Late Antiquity. The casual repairs in the large *basilica* of St. Thecla surely indicate decline; the local initiative could barely sustain the exceptional heritage left by Emperor Zeno. This is nicely illustrated by the example of Alahan monastery, where parts of the elaborate complex were left incomplete and the site abandoned in the course of the sixth century²⁷⁸. In fact, very few churches in the region can be assigned to this period (Hill, 1996: 9). With the Arab invasion, the region of the western Taurus was transformed into a frontier zone, and apart from military fortifications, there were no monumental building projects. Indeed, the Late Antique ruins were still the most substantial architectonic structures in this part of Turkey, until just a couple of decades ago.

However, the important ecclesiastic centre near Seleukia was not forgotten. Written records show that the pilgrimage and monastic tradition continued at the sanctuary of St. Thecla at least until the seventh century (Hellenkemper, and Hild,

1990: 441-43). During the eleventh century, St. Thecla appears on the seals of the Seleukian archbishops, along with the warlike St. Theodore²⁷⁹, and as late as the early fourteenth century, King Jacob II of Aragon received a sacred relic from her sanctuary as a gift from the Armenian ruler (Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 441) of Cilicia. No building phases corresponding to this period were attested among the ruins of the sanctuary complex; even if existent, these were at most only modest adaptation of the gigantic structures from the previous epoch. Finally, it is quite possible that at some unknown date the sacred remnants, themselves along with the religious practices of the cult of St. Thecla were taken to Seleukia itself, and the sanctuary was replaced by a chapel, situated behind the walls of the medieval castle.

²⁷⁸ Bakker, in Gough, (ed.) 1985: 147-150; but see Elton, 2002: 153-157, where different development is suggested.

²⁷⁹ Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1990: 441; Dagron, 1978: 55 has suggested that after the Arab invasion, the popularity of St. Thecla was rivalled by St. Theodore, the military Saint; it is possible that his capital sanctuary was at the site of the old temple of Sarpedon, near ancient Holmoi; Hellenkemper, and Hild, 1986: 44-48.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The two Early Christian cultic centres, of St. Erasmus of Lychnid and St. Thecla of Seleukia, and the hagiographies of the two saints, have been discussed in detail, not so much for the sake of comparing or contrasting them, as they have almost nothing in common, but to illustrate “the process” of cult formation and development in Early Christianity, using the example of two distant and, in many aspects, different traditions. This required a full consideration of a series of relevant factors. While the focus may have been on the formal, architectonic aspects of the two cults, the hagiographic traditions, as well as the wider socio-historical conditions, are essential to a full understanding of the matter. Both sanctuaries have been primarily treated as building complexes; against the background of the developments in the architecture of Early Christian memorials, and with regard to established regional traditions. In general, early Christian *martyria* are associated with certain building types: the circle, the polygon, the polyconch, the square, or the freestanding apse. Neither of the cases presented here conform to this “rule”; they are simple basilicas, typical for the regions to which they belong; even the Cave Church at Meryemlik was transformed into a basilical interior. How, then was the martyrial character of these buildings communicated?

If we take the basilical form as a designation marker specific for a class of church, it follows that both of the sanctuaries were normal, congregational churches. It would not be terribly wrong to come to such a conclusion. Both sanctuaries are best known with regard to their later phases, i.e. the late fifth century. The worship of the Holy Christian martyrs had been transformed into a standard liturgy by that time, and ordinary mass was held in the *martyria*. In fact, after the fourth century, *martyria* can rarely be distinguished from parish churches on the grounds of formal architectonic features, alone. There are, however, other elements that reveal the cultic character of the church: the reliquary, the crypt, adjacent chapels, and mosaic or sculptural decoration. The actual purpose of these arrangements was multifold. Primarily, they enabled some kind of contact between the sacred objective and the worshipers, but they also marked the sacred spot and explained its sanctity: a martyrdom, a biblical event, a miracle. It is the chief contribution of archaeology to the study of cultic traditions in Early Christianity to help reveal the relations between the sacred focus and the material elements that it enshrined. It would be interesting to compare this type of sanctification to those applied in other religions, a general archaeology of the sacred.

One may attempt a regional classification of all the various types of sanctification found in Christianity. Some progress has been made in this direction by Grabar, who formulated two distinct practices. In the West, the norm was the reliquary or the crypt underneath the altar space; in the East it was the separate chapel, the *pareklesia* of the medieval Byzantine churches. We may consider St. Erasmus of Lychnid and St. Thecla of Seleukia as standard representatives of these two traditions: the former with the reliquary beneath the altar table, the latter with its grotto chapel. It is difficult to postulate any more specific regional classes,

particularly in the regions of the Western Empire, similar to St. Erasmus, where the reliquary under the altar was the principal. Some regions in the East displayed more recognizable forms of *martyria*: Syria, with the square pavilion or the south side-chamber, and perhaps also Lycia, where the south chambers often had a funerary designation. Recently, it was proposed that the eastern passages in the churches of Late Antique Isauria had a martyrial significance, but even in this general region there are exceptions and, not surprisingly, these were often the most prominent cultic centres in the region: St. Symeon the Stylite, at Qal'at Sim'an, St Sergius at Ressafah, and St. Thecla at Meryemlik. It was appropriate for these large centres of pilgrimage and monasticism to possess some extraordinary, and preferably, unique feature, like the column of Symeon or the cave of the Virgin Thecla. These demanded large, monumental structures to celebrate the relic that imposed special architectonic solutions. The dominant aim was to enshrine the sacred location, and the physical condition of the terrain or some other peculiarity were often stronger factors in the determining the form of the building, than the regards for symbolism or precedent.

But how were these, often very mundane and ordinary elements, transformed into objects of veneration? The Pagan statue becomes cultic by reproducing the image of the venerated deity, but what is it that gives sanctity to a tomb, a bush or a cave? Christianity was a religion based on allegedly real historical events; the Christian saints were historical figures, who lived and worked in specific places and at known dates. Christianity had its own sacred geography and sacred history, based on the writings of the gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the numerous hagiographic traditions that treat the life and the miracles of the saints. Without this

large body of testimonies, whether oral or written, the endurance of Christianity as a religion is difficult to imagine.

In this thesis the apocryphal records have been regarded as elements that established and promoted the cultic centres. There are several ways in which we can recognize their contributions. The main theme of the hagiographic genre is the life and the deeds of the Christian saint; hence, hagiographies inevitably contain concrete references - geographic locations, historical figures, and descriptions of sites or artefacts. In doing this, hagiographies reflect the basis from which the cultic traditions developed in specific places; they provide the historical dimension and assert the veracity of the sacred objects. Since cultic centres usually developed over the tomb of the saintly figure, special attention was given to the place and the circumstances of the death: the old Antiochene bishop, Erasmus, returns from Formia to Lychnid and passes away; St. Thecla disappears in the rock, fleeing from the rapists, or she makes a subterranean journey to Rome, only to be buried near the tomb of St. Paul. In the absence of saintly tombs, stories of the sacred relics, their division and thefts, and miraculous or other forms of transference were created. Alternatively, certain objects or locations were attributed sanctity, as with the veil of Thecla or the fountain of St. Demetrius. Without such kind of information, it would have been very difficult to interpret the arrangements in the Early Christian sanctuaries.

The other way in which apocryphal documents share in the promotion of the cultic centres is through the recollection of miracles related with some form of sacred relic, or, as in the case of St. Thecla, the entire sanctuary complex. Miracle working was an important aspect of the Early Christian cultic centres, and much of their popularity and renown rested upon this quality. Considering the growing number of

pilgrim sites in Late Antiquity, it must have been of utmost importance to preserve and bolster the reputation of those already in existence. Such was the purpose of the mid-fifth century collection of miracles of the Holy Proto-martyr Thecla; for one striking peculiarity of this document (Dagron has often compared it with the *Miracles of Sts. Cosmas and Damian*) was that the living saint, in person, performed the miracles. Hence, perhaps the almost complete absence of references to the arrangements that enshrine the sacred location. There was no need of mediators such as sacred relics: the saint appeared in dreams or nocturnal visions; she rode a chariot of fire over the skies and delivered sacred gifts from her circular shrine²⁸⁰. Elements like these must have had strong attraction for the pious masses, despite their “heretical” connotations. In later periods probably beginning of the sixth century or in the centuries after the Arabian invasion, the Orthodox Church reacted against this belief by modifying the end of Thecla’s life: the saint disappeared in the rock, but she is no longer alive; and since there were no any bodily remains, a piece of St. Thecla’s veil was introduced as a memento of her earthly life.

Hagiographies also inform us about the character of the saintly figure, and in some instances they also reveal the particularities of the cultic practices. These are rarely stated explicitly, but some details in the life of the saints may rightly be treated as pre-figurations of the actual cults. Thus Dagron has found a reflection of Thecla’s circular shrine at the Seleukian sanctuary in one of the scenes of her martyrdom in Iconium, where fire and smoke surrounded the young saint, hiding her nudity from the gaze of the malicious spectators (1978: 61). The longer version of the *Acts of Thecla* announces the peculiar monastic tradition that developed around the Seleukian sanctuary, and the therapeutic properties of the place. Similarly, St.

²⁸⁰ In particular see Dagron’s analysis of the nature of sanctity and miracle working in the *Miracles of*

Erasmus' travel by sea to Formia is perhaps reflected in a curious religious practice in south Italy: on the occasion of his annual feast-day, on the 2nd of June, a procession of boats sails from Formia to Gaeta, the bishopric where the saintly relics were deposited after the destruction of Formia in the ninth century; laurel wreaths and flowers are cast into the sea, and prayers are said for those who perished in storms. For these communities, St. Erasmus was the patron saint of the sailors and intercessor for the souls of those who met their deaths in the sea. The "seafaring" aspect of this saint became curiously transformed among the inland communities: here the chief attribute of St. Erasmus, the anchor, was interpreted as a symbol of the intestines, and St. Erasmus was revered as miraculous deliverer from abdominal pains.

Like any other type of social activity, the establishment and the development of cultic centres belongs to certain socio-historical circumstances. If hagiographies explained the reasons for why certain saints were venerated in certain places, the socio-historical circumstances reveal the wider environment in which these religious traditions existed. But it is right to admit, that one can barely guess at the impact of the "big" historical events on the development of the numerous ecclesiastic complexes in Late Antiquity. Isauria and most of the Balkan provinces were not the ideal places for the establishment of strong cultic centres; the political history of both regions featured chronic instability during most of Late Antiquity. Yet, in both regions we find large and important ecclesiastic centres. The major political factors were rarely reflected in the development of the sanctuaries, as has been shown in this thesis.

The chief reason for this omission may well be simply the absence of direct historical mentions, for these were sanctuaries of regional importance, and their own histories rarely exceeded the confines of local circumstances. There are, however, other possible reasons for this situation. One can trace the local consequences of major historical events only in exceptional instances, and detailed historical narrative coupled, with the appropriate archaeological evidence, is rarely available. Thus, we lack even the slightest idea of the impact of Isaurian raids on the prosperity of the Seleukian sanctuary, despite the fact that these raids were the most dominant theme in the history of this province in Late Antiquity. But the greatest obstacle to a study of these religious centres in the light of the wider socio-historical conditions, is our almost complete ignorance of their roles in the regional economy and settlement patterns. Nonetheless, it is possible to postulate some conditions that seemed at least potentially relevant.

For the sanctuary of St. Erasmus near Lychnid, apart from some vague allusions to toponyms, there is no real information prior at all to the later Middle Age. We know nothing about relations with the nearby episcopate, or about the exact ecclesiastical status of St. Erasmus sanctuary. The sanctuary most probably ceased to exist, along with the city of Lychnid, by the end of Antiquity, but exactly when it was established is unknown. It was suggested above that the beginning of the tradition regarding St. Erasmus, should be seen in the light of the ecclesiastical situation in the Balkans during the Late Antique period. More specifically, the strong alliance between the Pope and the Epirote bishops during the later fifth century, was the most appropriate historical moment for the creation of this cultic tradition. This catholic affiliation of the Lychnidian episcopate was also evident from the sacral architecture in the region and the very practice of sanctification. A similar

dating for the origins of the cult is implied to an extent, by the archaeological evidence, although in both cases, conclusive evidence is lacking. The demise, and the revival of the religious tradition in the later period, are also obscure. Both need to be related with the Slavic invasion of the Balkans in the late sixth century, and with their Christianisation by the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century, but the details of this transformation around Lychnid, as for the rest of the Balkan Peninsula, remain unknown.

In the case of the Seleukian sanctuary, the brief historical mentions at least provided some clues for the chronology of the complex. One can now clearly distinguish two major phases: the late fifth century complex, related to the grandiose investments of the Isaurian Emperor Zeno in his homeland, and more precisely, the triumph over the usurper Basiliscus in 476; and an earlier phase, occupying the period between the years when Gregory Nazianzen resided in the sanctuary and the second half of the fifth century, when Zeno rose to power at the imperial court. Thanks to the *'Life and the Miracles of St. Thecla'* we are much better informed about the earlier phase of this ecclesiastic centre. By the late fourth century, the sanctuary of St. Thecla was the location of a powerful monastic community that produced at least two metropolitan bishops, and must have exerted considerable influence on the ecclesiastic policies of Seleukia. At the end of the fifth century, one of St. Thecla's "servants" even assumed the patriarchal throne at Antioch (Hellenkemper and Hild, 1990: 442). Unfortunately we are given no further details about the role and the position of the monastery during the Arian or the Monophysite crisis; while despite its formal attachment to the see of Antioch, the province of Isauria remained independent in many ways, including ecclesiastic matters, and especially architecture.

The familiar opposition between the monastery and the parish clergy was presumably repeated in the case of the Seleukian sanctuary, and the reasons for this clash were more than purely ideological. The sanctuary of St. Thecla was a prominent centre of pilgrimage, and it must have been an important focus of local investment. This is, after all, evident from the writings of the mid-fifth century hagiographer; the sanctuary of St. Thecla attracted donations from the highest provincial authorities, and the contributions of the throngs of pilgrims must have been substantial. The author of the 5th century *apocrypha* did not conceal the fact that one of the central issues in the persisting tensions between the *metropolis* and the large monastery was the control of the sanctuary funds.

On the other hand, we know nothing about the beginnings of the Seleukian sanctuary, or its ultimate fate. Was the emergence of this cultic centre a spontaneous pre-Constantinian development, as the excavators of the site thought; or was it result of a conscious policy on the part of the later ecclesiastic authorities, as was probably the case for St. Erasmus, Lychnid? Only detailed and systematic archaeological research will settle this issue. The impact of the Arab invasion in the mid-seventh century is a different matter. In the absence of concrete written or archaeological evidence, the post-antique history of the Seleukian sanctuary may only be discussed with regards to the general historical conditions in the region. Research in the past few decades has shown that the Persian and the Arab intrusions brought about a sharp economic and demographic decline in the region of the Western Taurus. The old Hellenistic cities on the coast were abandoned, as were the large ecclesiastic centres in the interior. There was hardly any building activity in this region after the last decades of the fifth century. These are sure signals that life had deteriorated to the most rudimentary form. In such conditions, the once prestigious sanctuary could

hardly be sustained, and while the evidence from the later Middle Ages demonstrates that the memory of the saint survived, her grand sanctuary was definitely abandoned.

Apart from dealing with the hagiographic traditions and the formal architectonic features as the principal elements of Early Christian cultic practices, this paper attempted to treat the sanctuaries of St. Erasmus near Lychnid and St. Thecla near Seleucia as historical entities in their own right. In a way, this later aspect was inherent to the present study from the very beginning. It was inevitable to locate the historical moments of the formation, the development and the decline or the destruction of these religious traditions. In doing so, it has hopefully contributed to the historiography of an important social and cultural phenomenon in the period of Late Antiquity.

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FIGURES



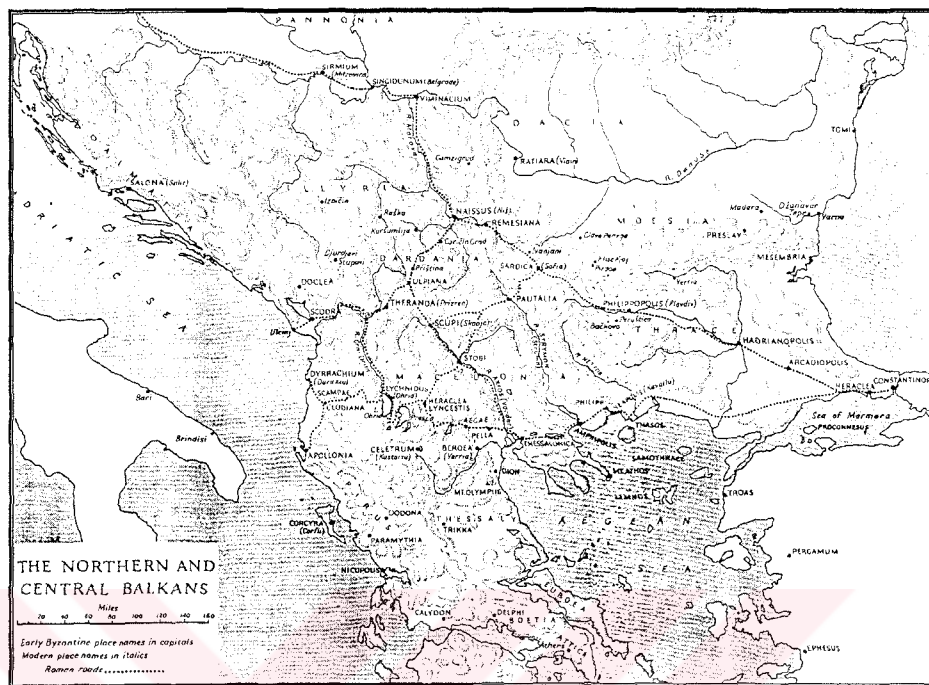


Fig. 1. Map of the Central and the Northern Balkans.

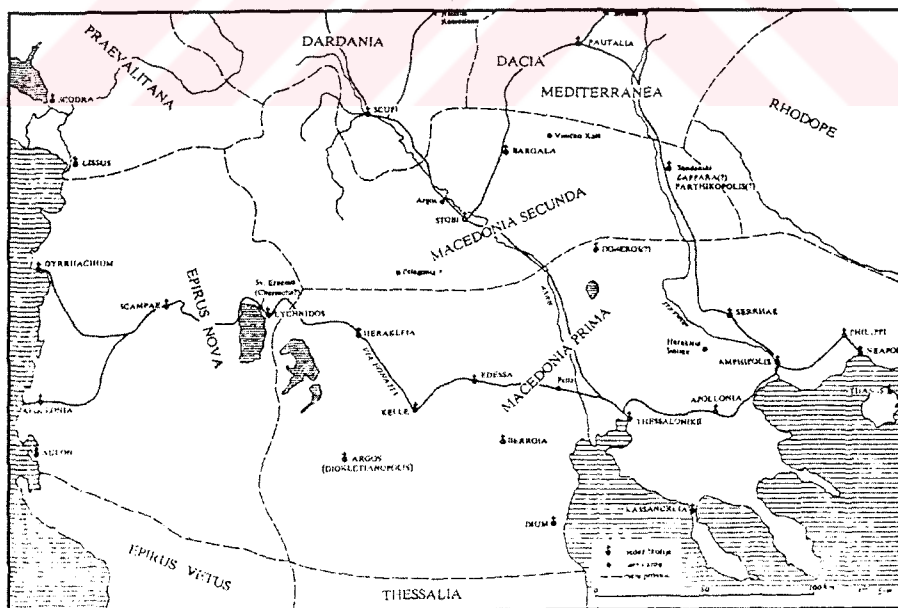


Fig. 2. The Central Balkan provinces in Late Antiquity.

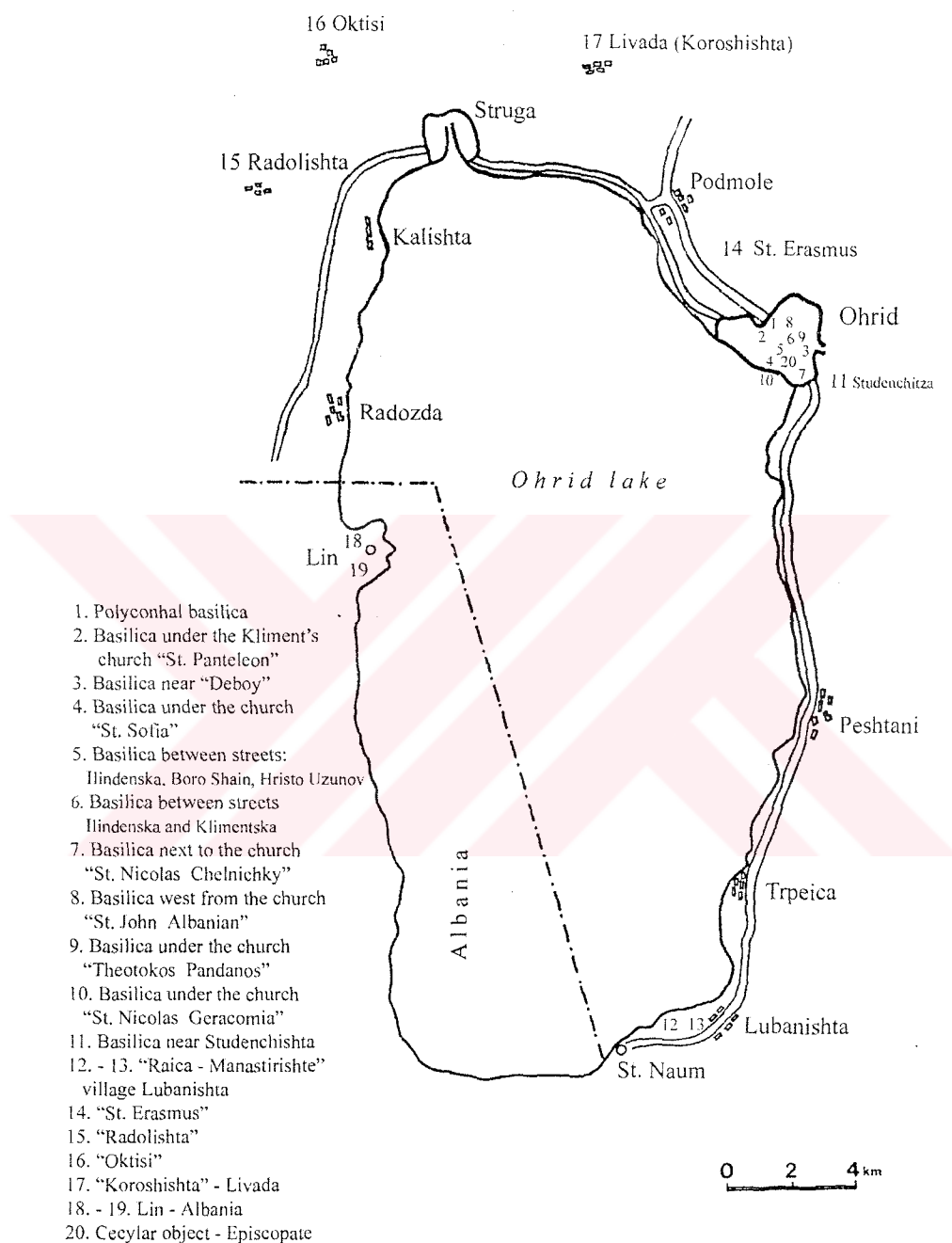


Fig. 3. Map of Early Christian monuments from the region of Ochrid.

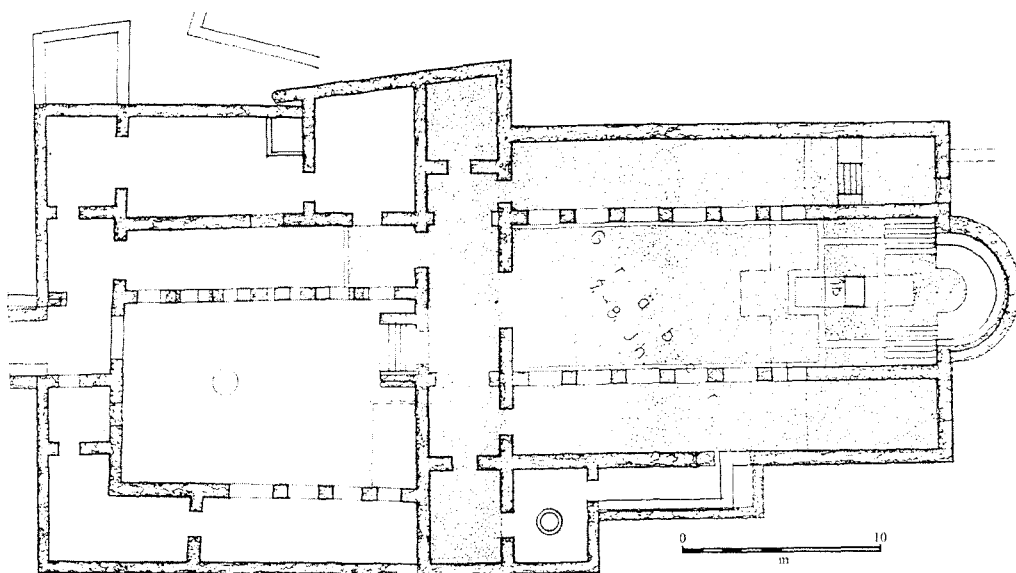


Fig. 4. Reconstructed plan of St. Erasmus' *basilica*.



Fig. 5. View at the *basilica* site during the second season of excavations.



Fig. 6. The northern annexes of the *atrium*, view from west.

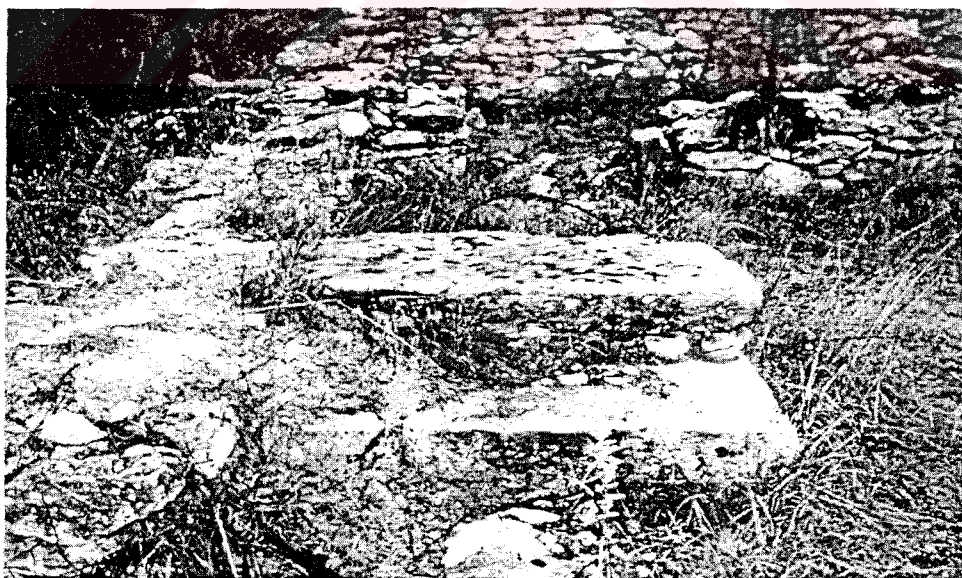


Fig. 7. Traces of the stairway, to the left of the main entrance in the church.

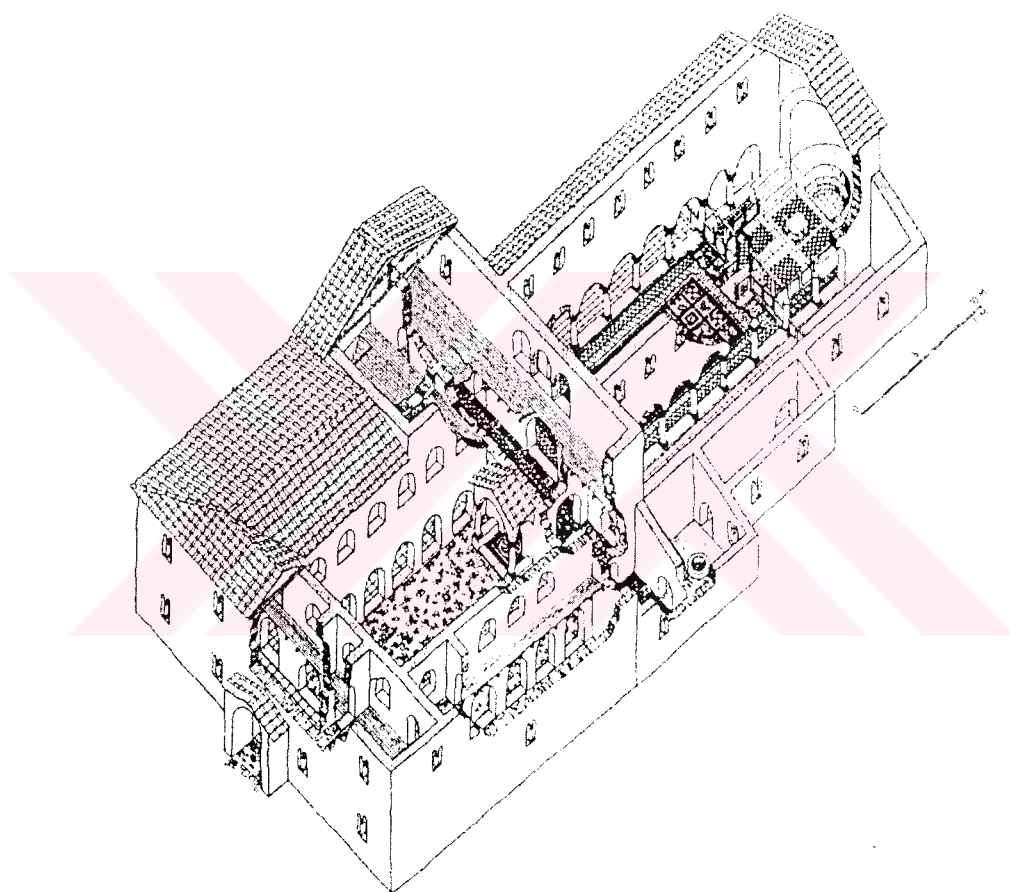


Fig. 8. Reconstruction drawing of St. Erasmus' church.

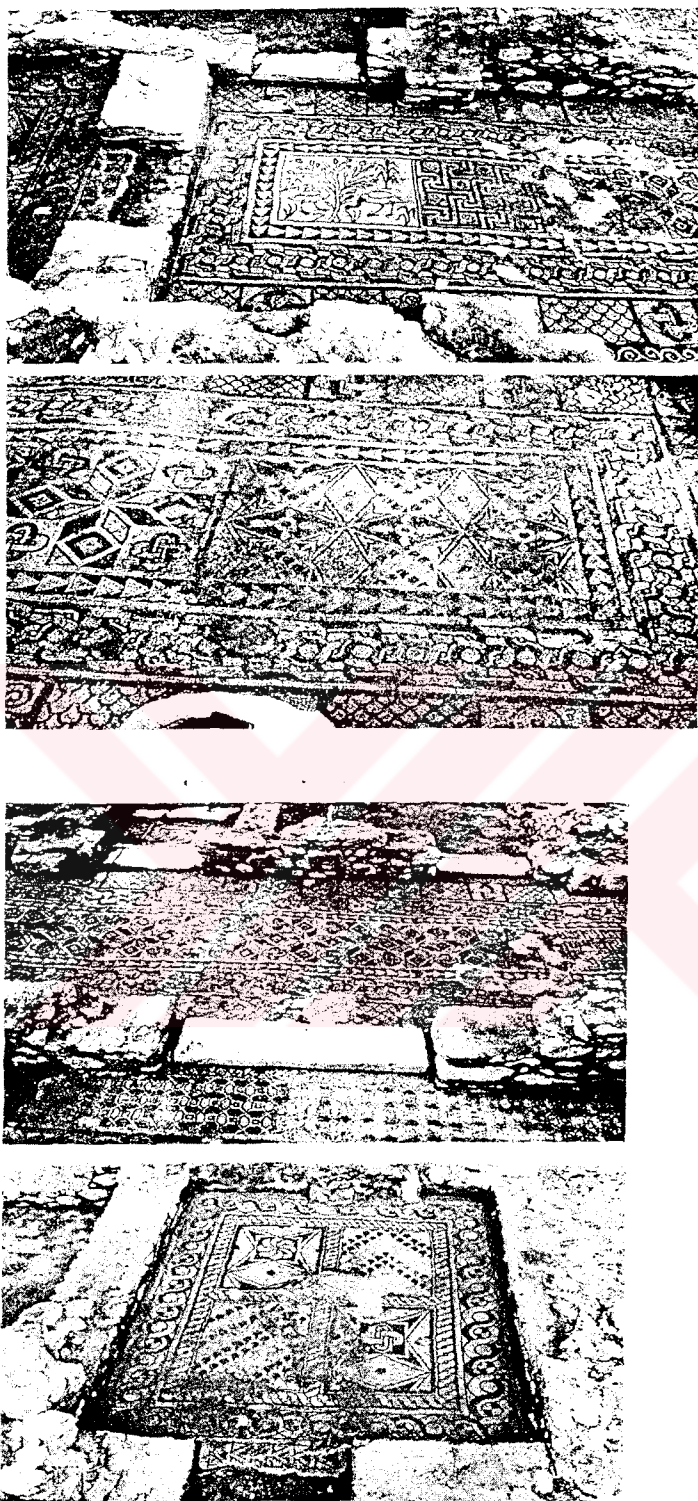


Fig. 9. Mosaic floors from the *narthex* and the south pastophory.

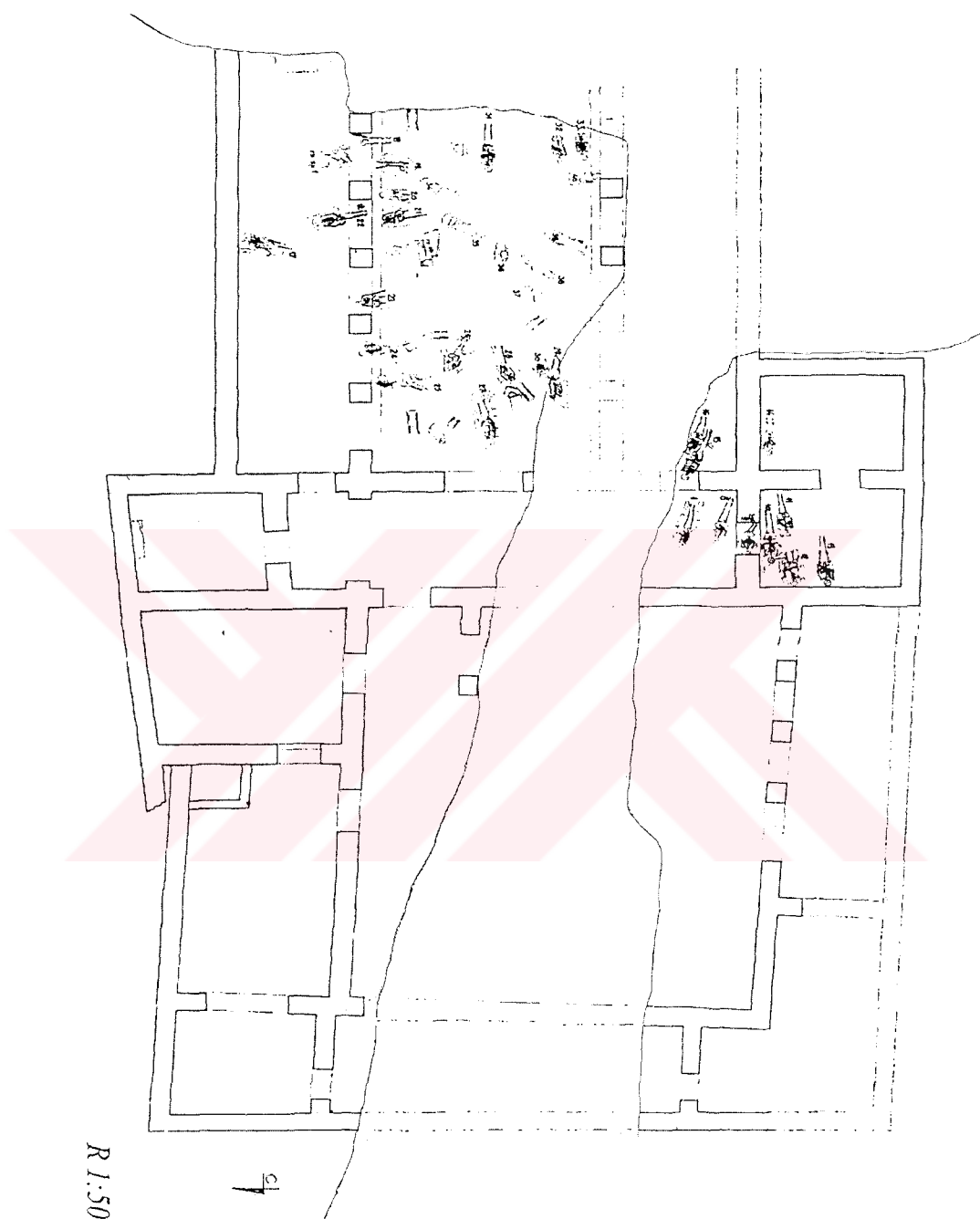


Fig. 10. Plan of the church cemetery.

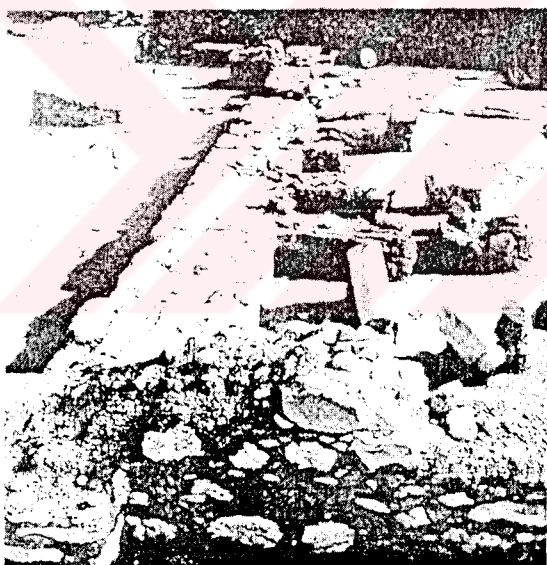


Fig. 12a. Architectonic elements from the nave of the *basilica*.

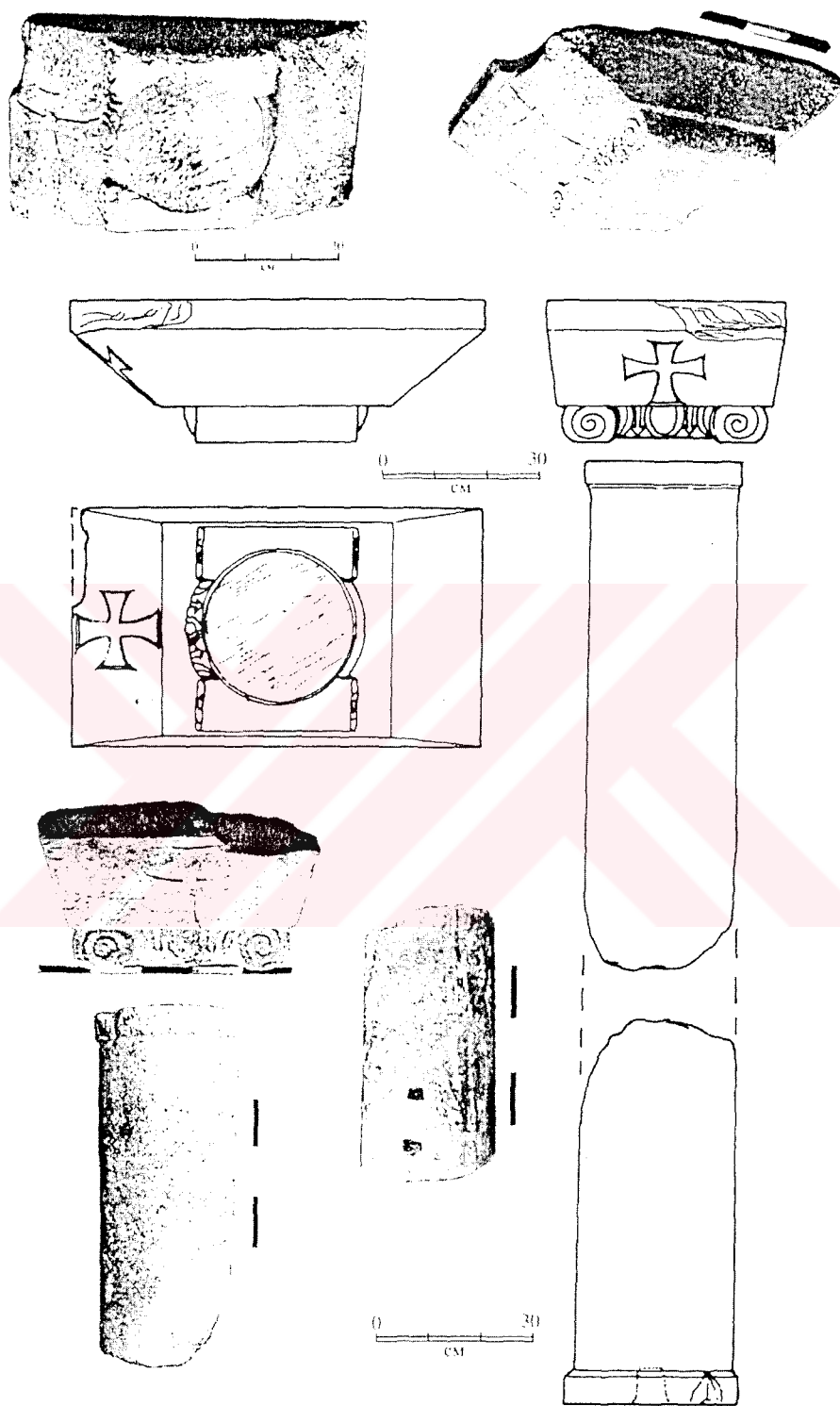


Fig. 12b. Reconstruction drawings and photos of an Ionic impost capital.

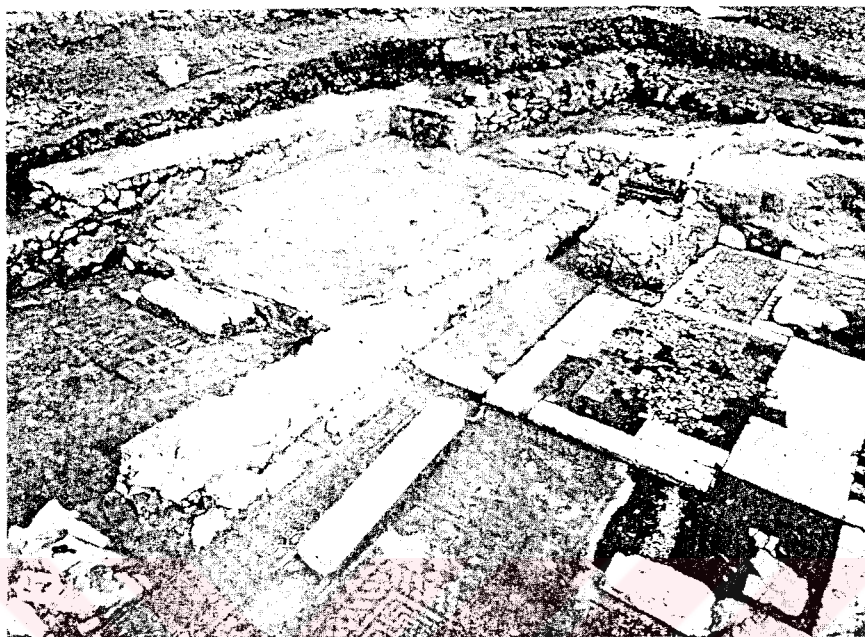


Fig. 13. View at the northeast chamber (up) and the presbytery of the church.

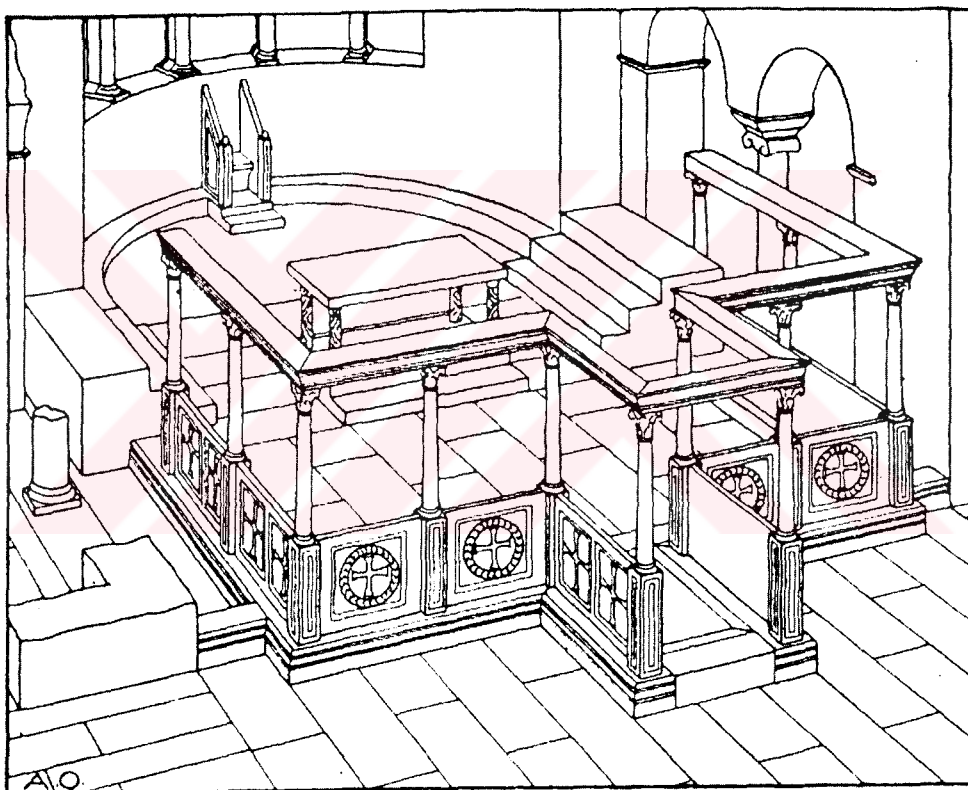


Fig. 14. Reconstruction drawing of the presbytery of Thassos' *basilica* gives an idea of the likely appearance of the arrangements in St. Erasmus' *basilica*.

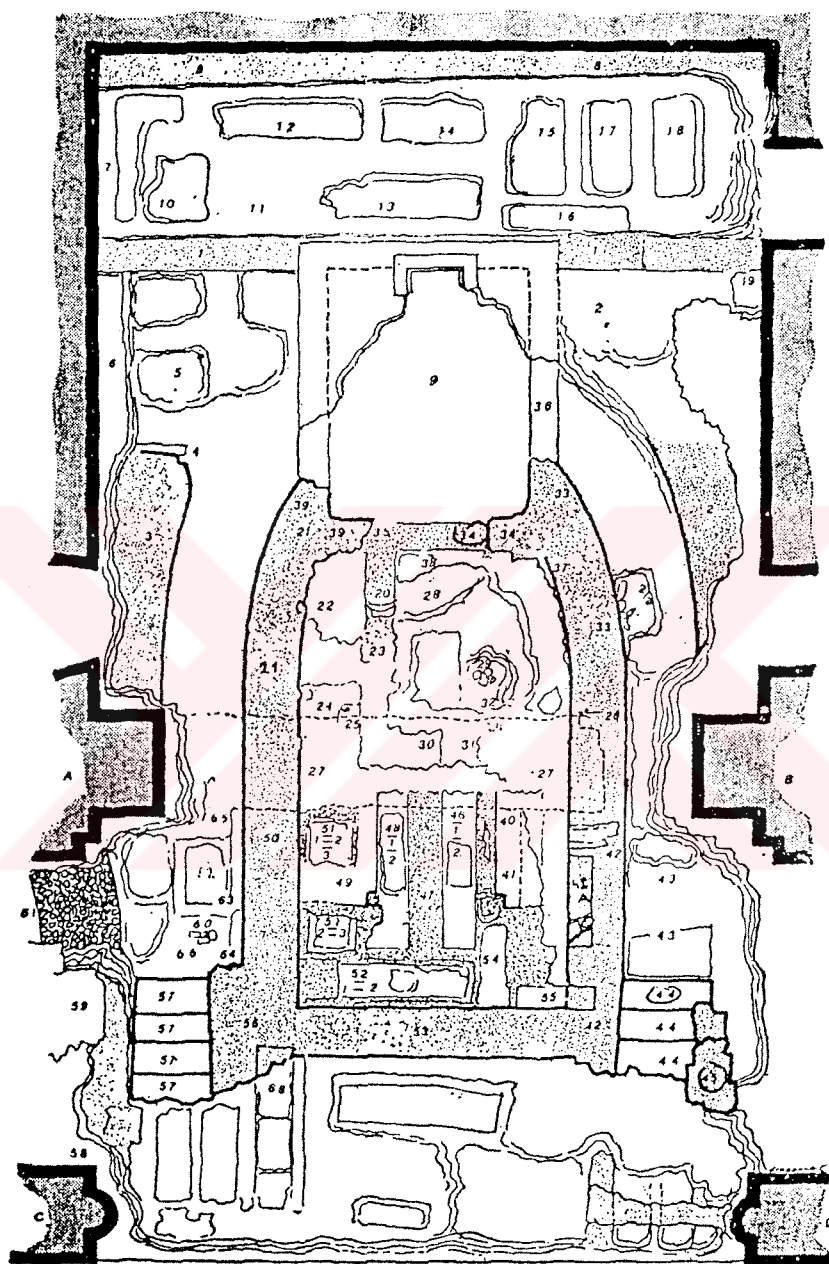


Fig. 15. Ground plan of the *hypogeum* under the presbytery of St. Erasmus' cathedral in Formia.



Fig. 16a. St. Erasmus and Emperor Andronicus II (?); reconstruction drawing of a fresco in the cave chapel of St. Erasmus, late 13th century.



Fig. 16b. St. Erasmus bishop of Antioch, late 13th century fresco, St. John Kaneo, Ochrid.

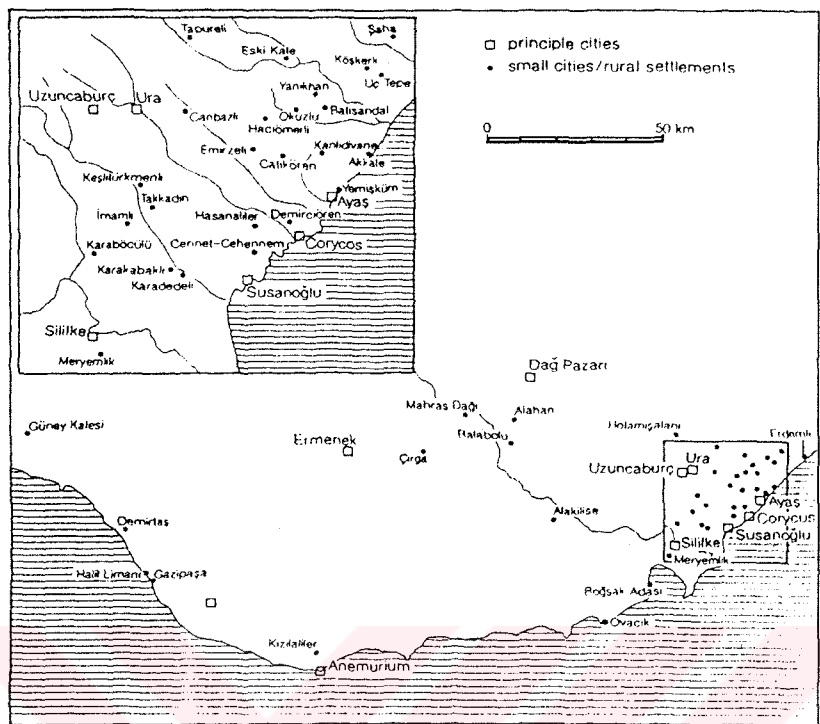


Fig. 17. Map of Early Christian sites in Isauria.

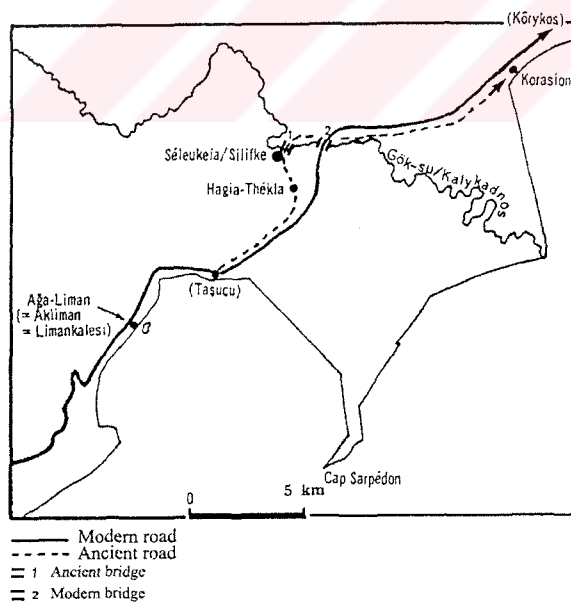


Fig. 18. Seleukia on the Calycadnos and the sanctuary of St. Thecla on the Roman coastal road of Asia Minor.

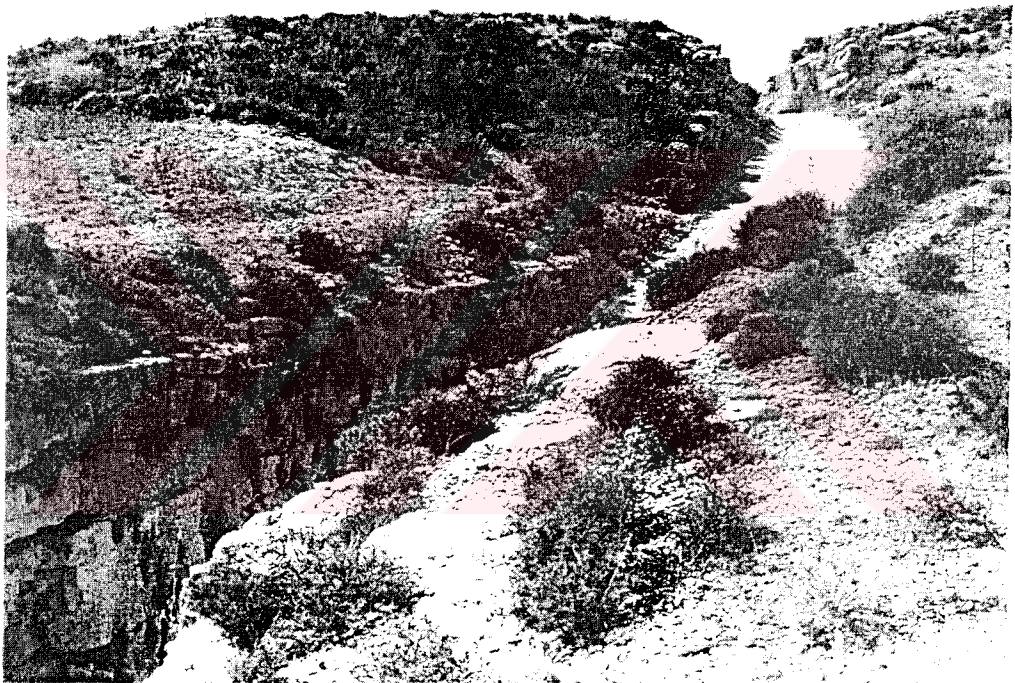


Fig. 19. The rock cut section of the Roman road leading from Seleukia to the sanctuary of St. Thecla.

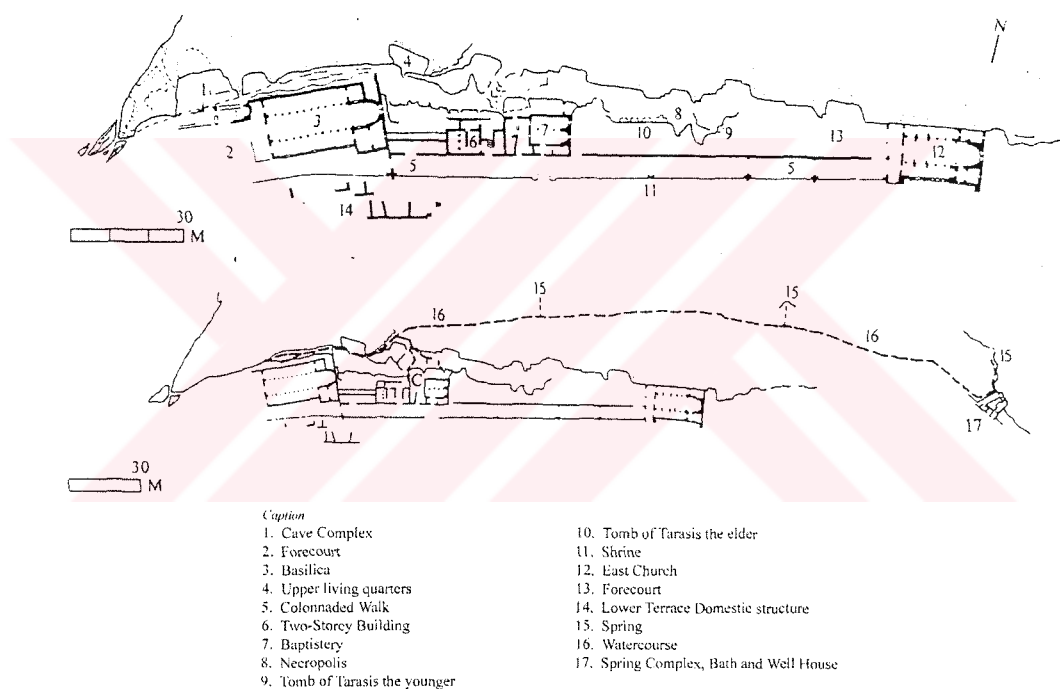


Fig. 21. General plan of Alahan monastery.

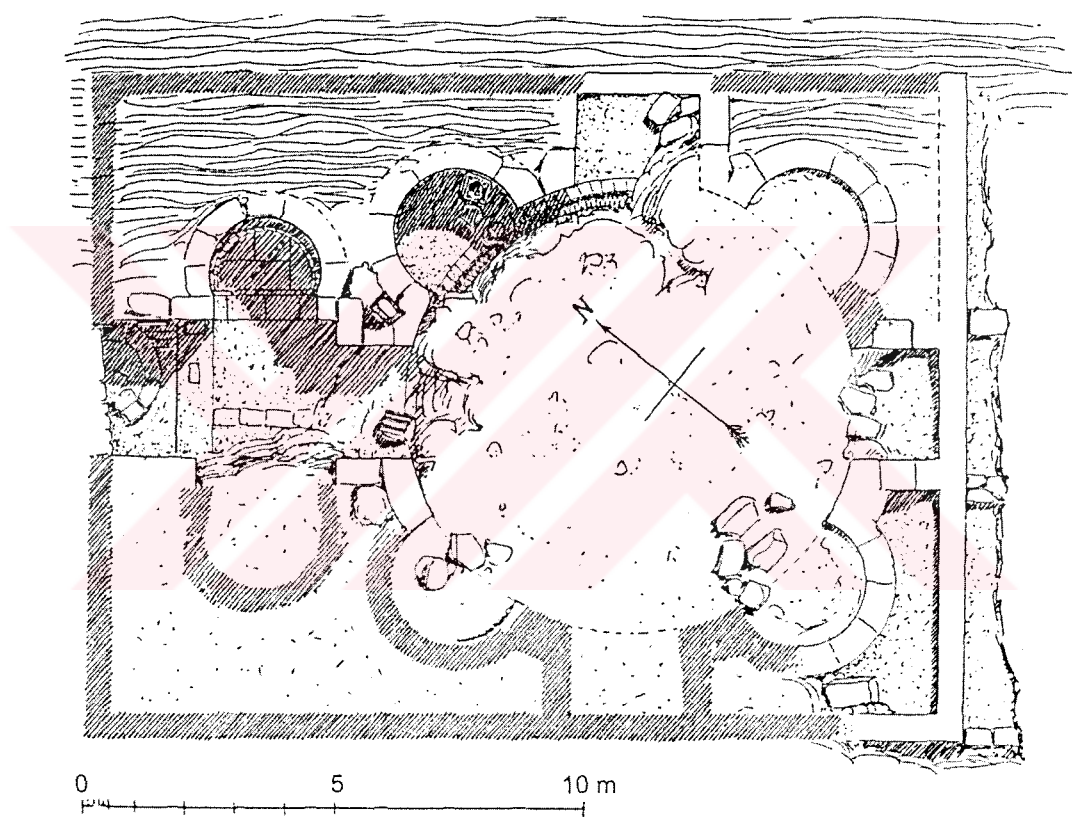


Fig. 22. Ground plan of the baths to the west of the “Cupola Church”.



Fig. 23a. Photos of the cistern to the north of St. Thecla's *basilica*.

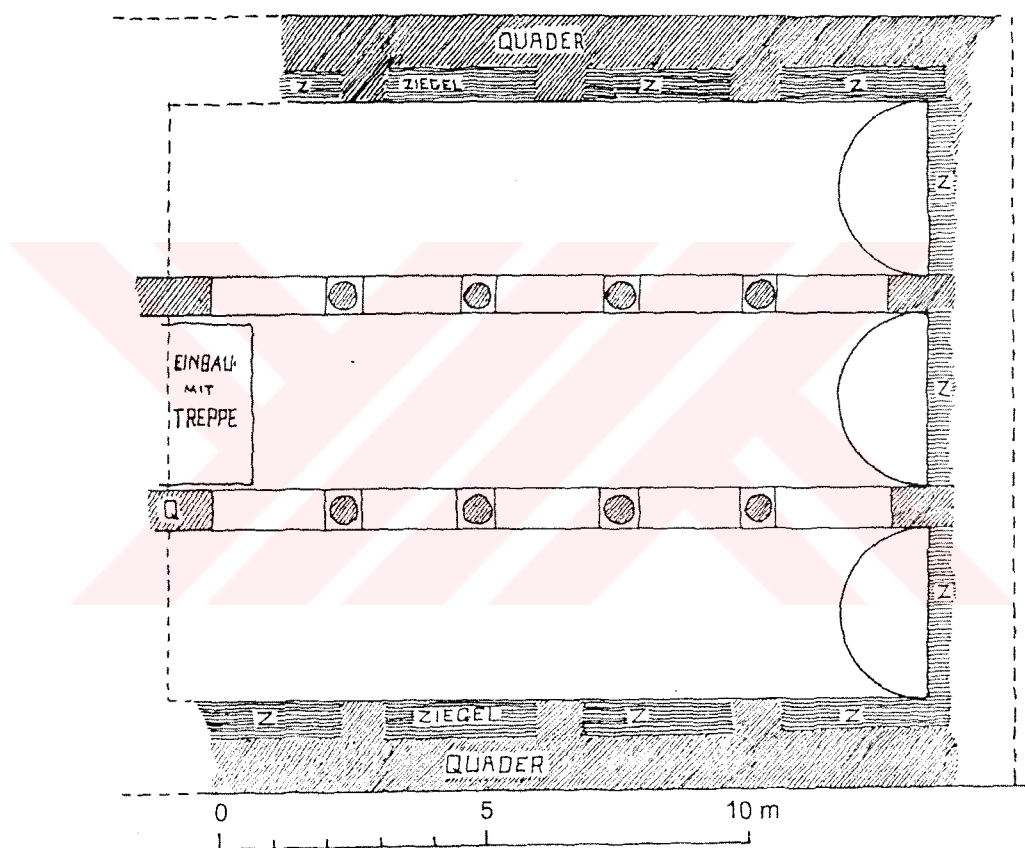


Fig. 23b. Ground plan of the cistern to the north of St. Thecla's *basilica*.

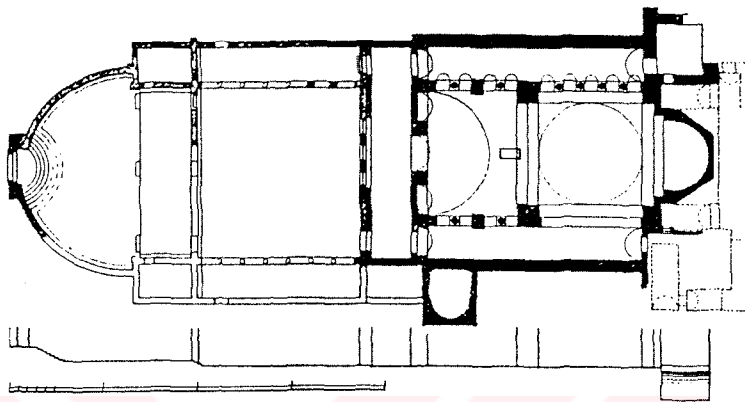


Fig. 24. Ground plan of the "Cupola Church".

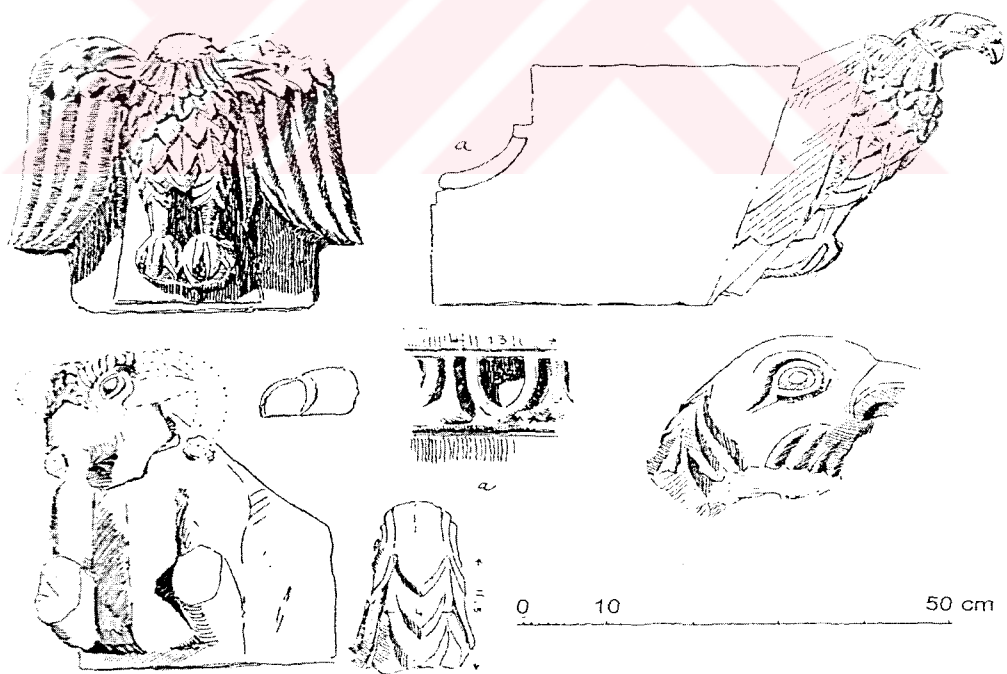


Fig. 25. Corbels with animal and bird protomes from the "Cupola Church".



Fig. 26. North face of the *temenos* wall.

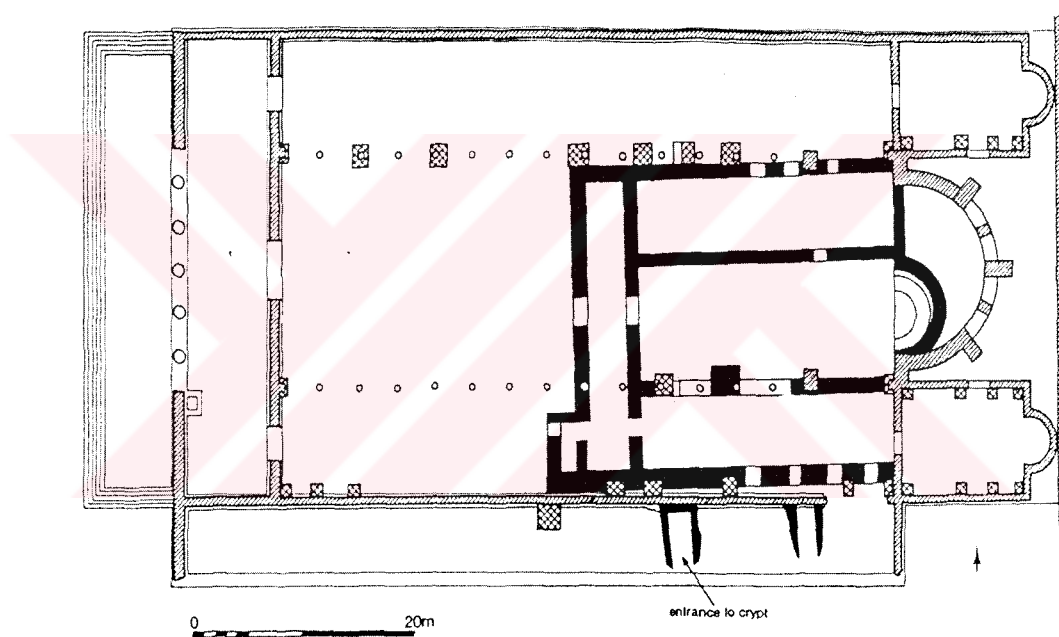


Fig. 27a. Plan of St. Thecla's *basilica*; late fifth and fourth (?) century phases.



Fig. 27b. Plan of the excavations at the site of St. Thecla's *basilica*.

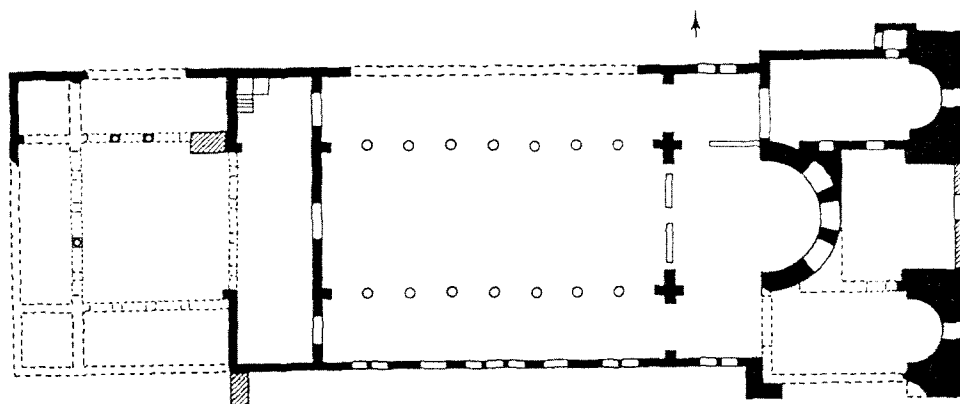


Fig. 28. Plan of the "Transept Church" at Corycos.

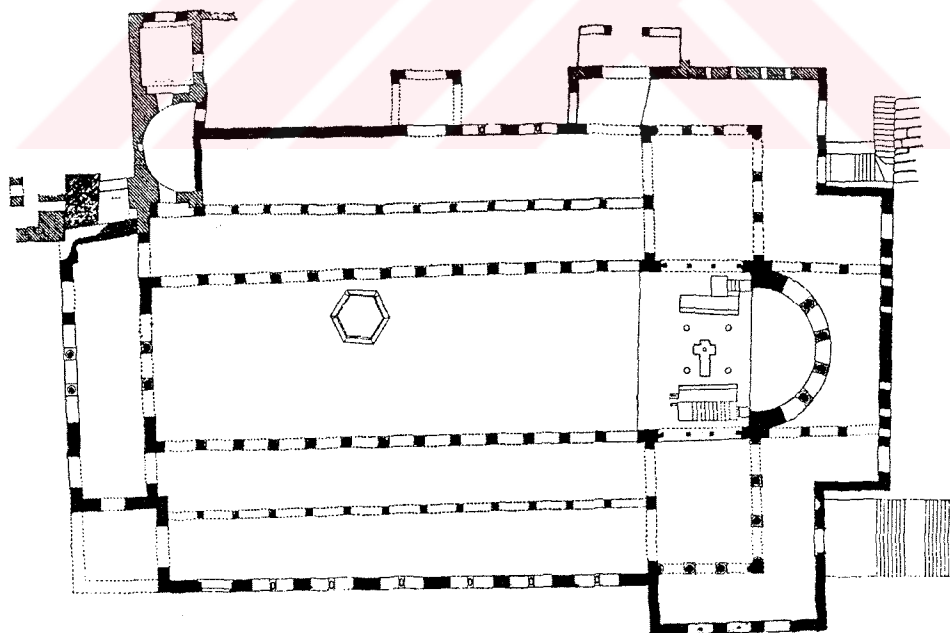


Fig. 29. Plan of St. Demetrius *basilica*, Thessalonica, late 5th century.



Fig. 30. Architectonic elements from the Schola Cantorum.



Fig. 31. The apse of St. Thecla's *basilica*.

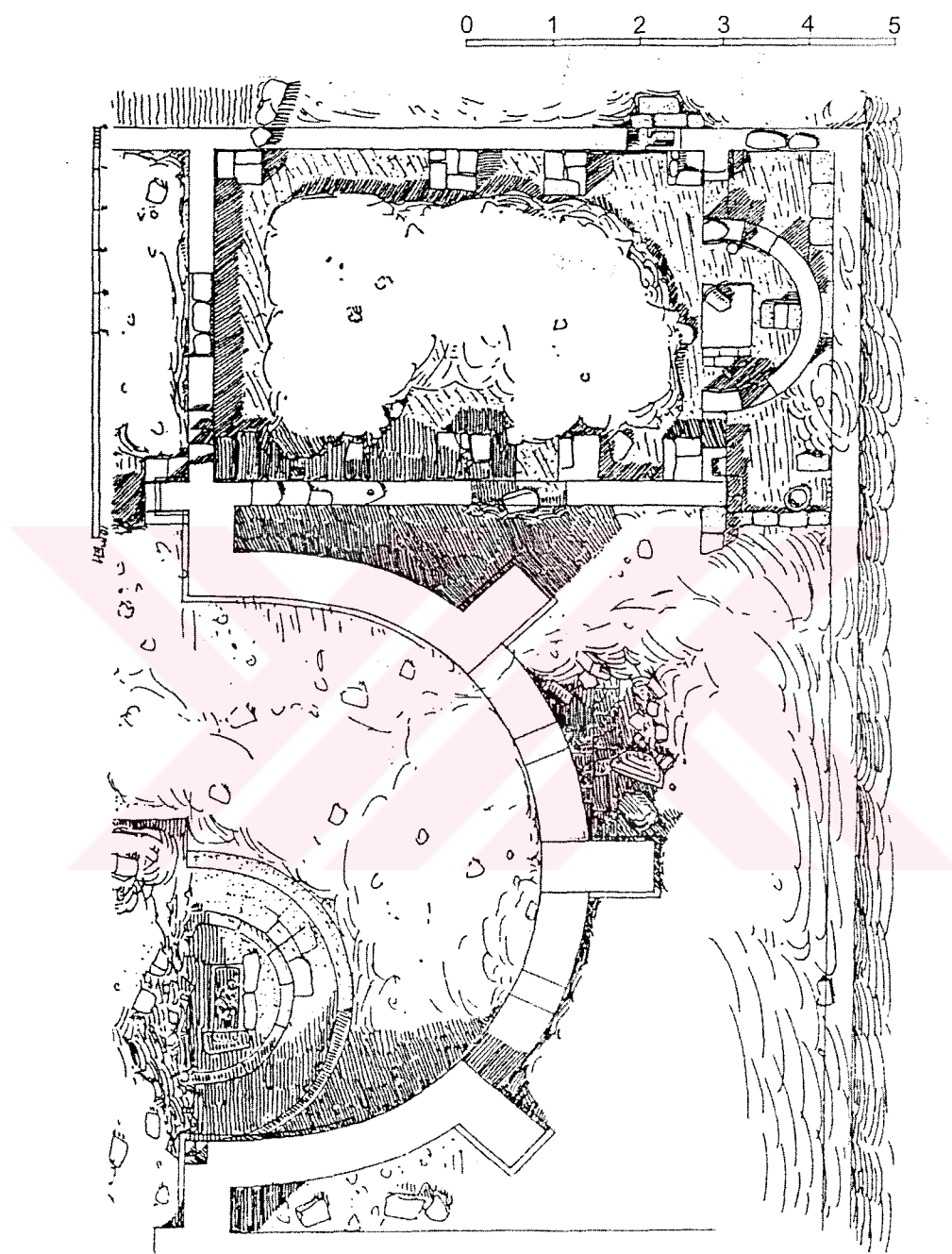


Fig. 32. Plan of the northeast chamber and the apse.

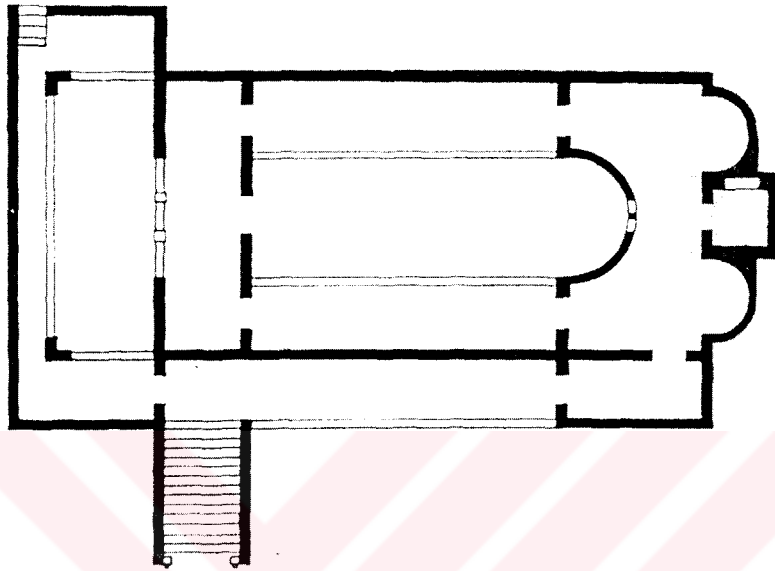


Fig. 33. Plan of Yan'khan's "South Church".

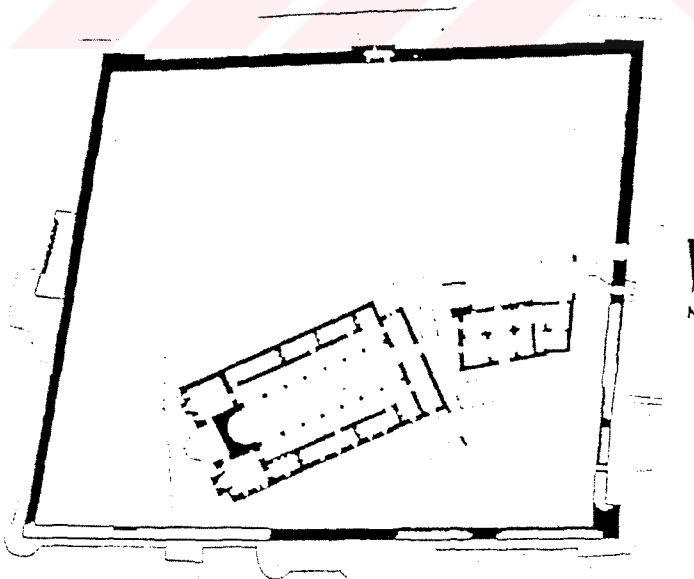


Fig. 34. Plan of St. Catherine church, Mt. Sinai.

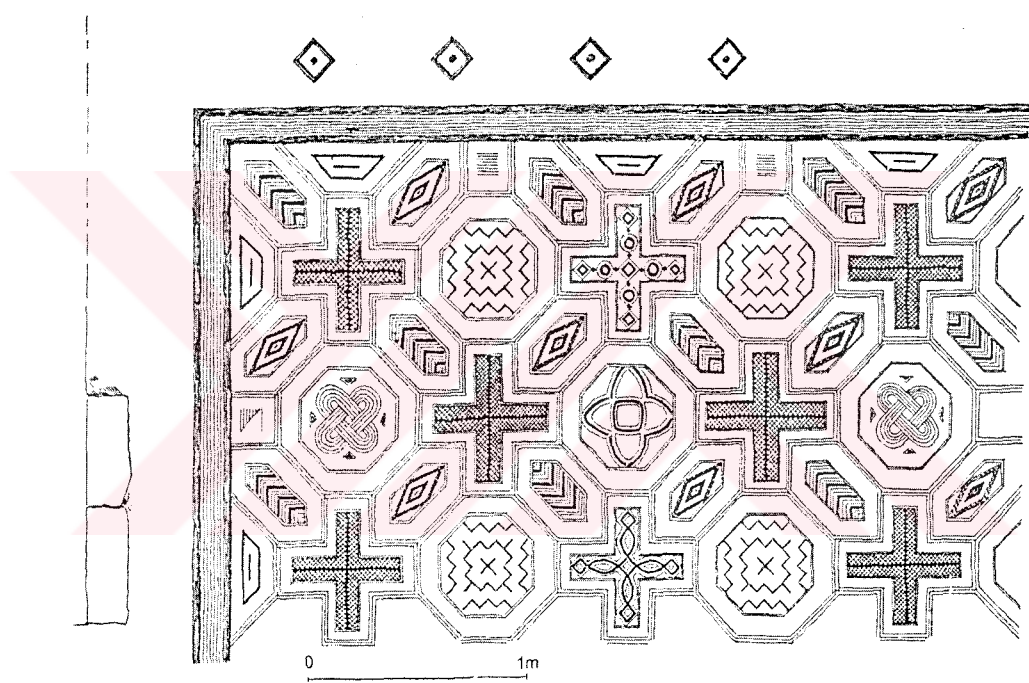


Fig. 35. Mosaic field from the Scola Cantorum, the “younger phase”.

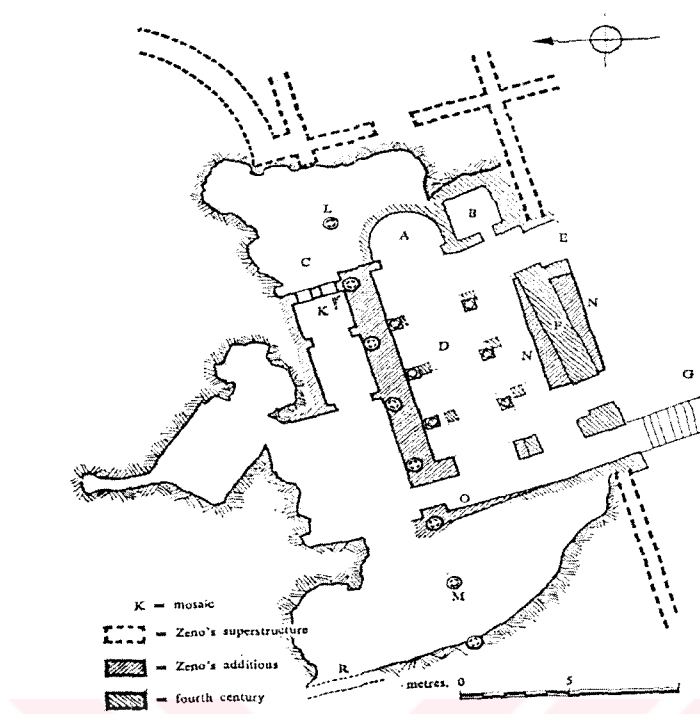


Fig. 36a. Plan of the Cave Church, late 5th century.

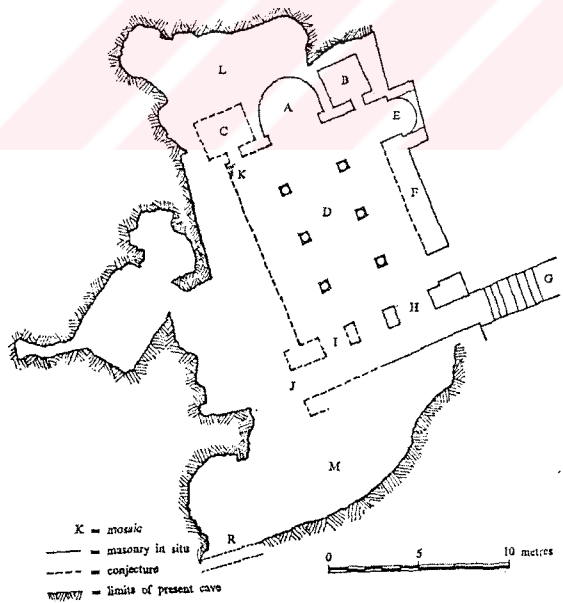


Fig. 36b. Reconstructed plan of the 4th century Cave Church.

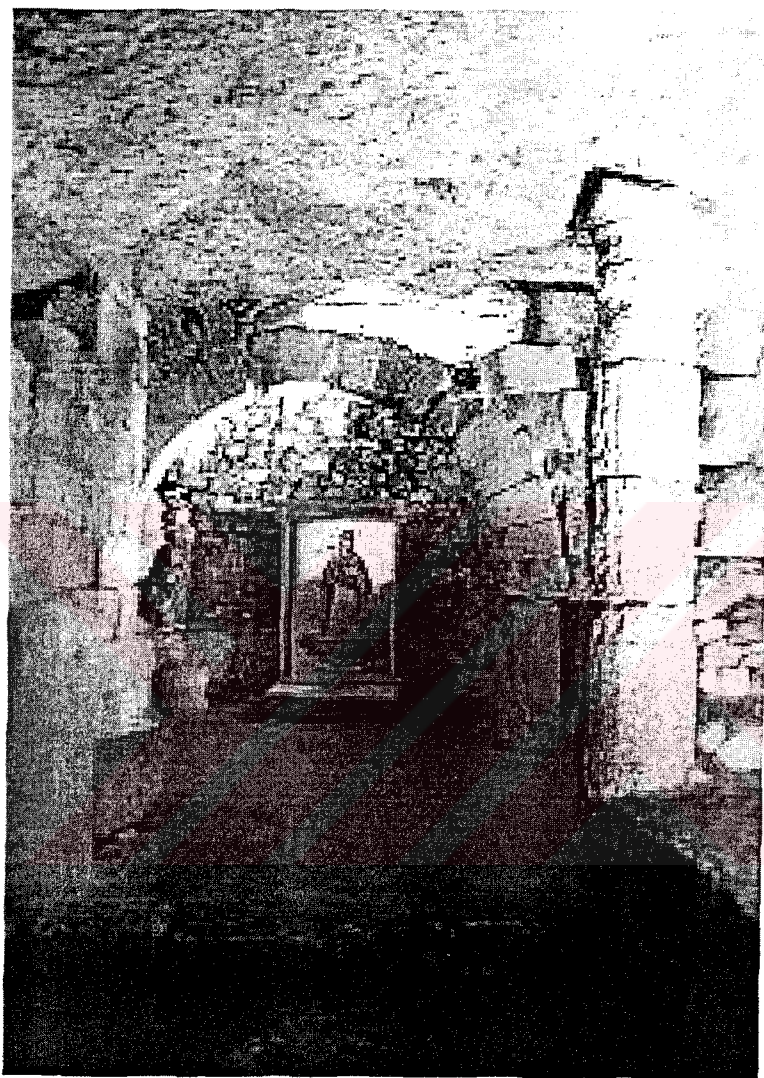


Fig. 37. View at the interior of the Cave Church, late 5th century.

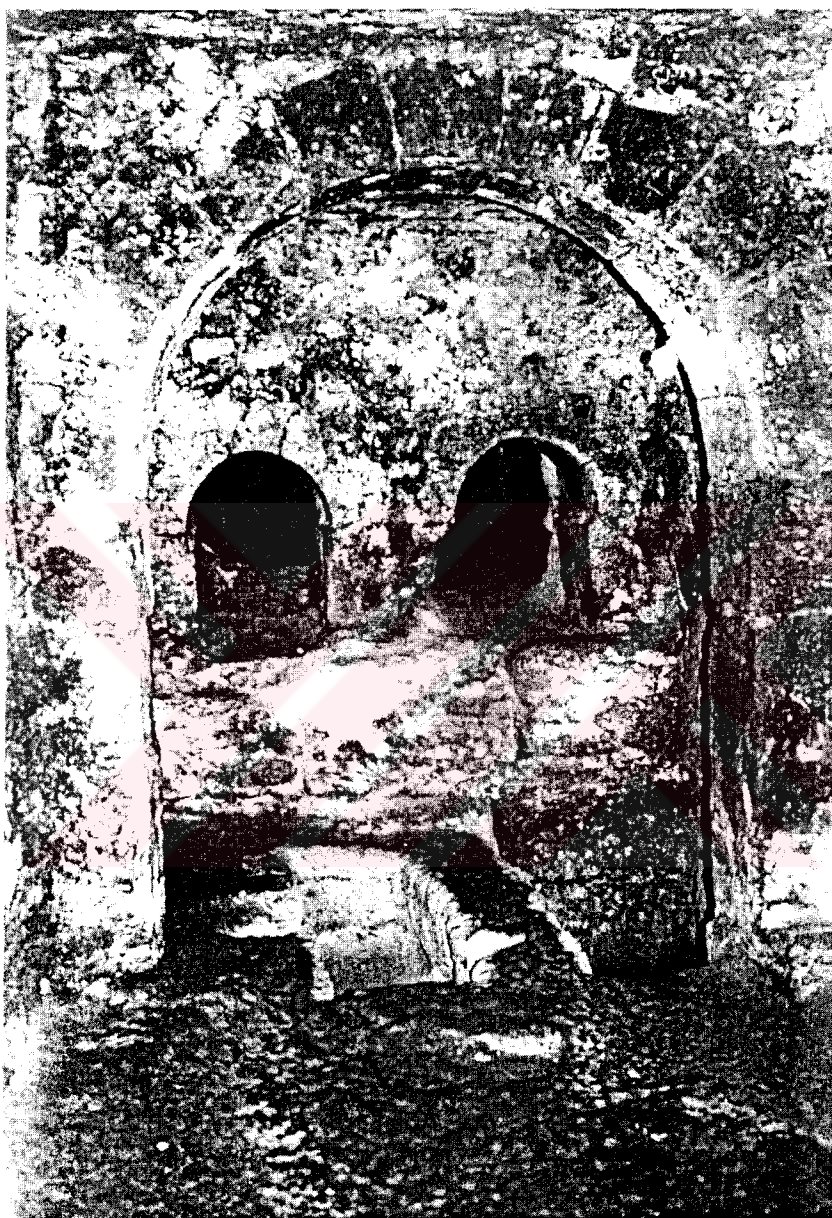


Fig. 38. The "fenestella" wall of the north side-chamber of the 5th century Cave Church.