

CHAPTER 17

DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL STYLES
OF MIDDLE BYZANTINE ARCHITECTURE

It is decidedly possible and not even difficult to characterize Middle Byzantine architecture as a stylistic entity. But the persistence of established architectural types among churches, palaces, and monastic buildings for over three hundred years makes the chronological presentation of Middle Byzantine architecture troublesome. External evidence for dating the monuments is scarce. Rarely will an inscription identify building or founder by name. Even then, remodelled or indeed rebuilt from the ground, the structure may bear an inscription bodily transferred or copied from its predecessor. Documentary evidence, if and when available, is equally confusing for the same reasons. Difficulties increase when, as in Constantinople and Salonica, churches are known only by the Turkish names they acquired at the time of their transformation into mosques; identification, then, depends at times on topographical indications, at times on information gleaned from local Greeks by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century travellers – one or two centuries after the buildings fell to the Muslims. In either case, the result is little more than guesswork.¹ Thus, the historian of Middle and Late Byzantine architecture must glean clues from the few reliably dated buildings by which to date the mass of undated structures. Such clues, to be sure, are provided by details of plan and design; the presence or absence of lateral porticoes or *parekklesia*, side chapels; the shape and construction of windows; the details of domes and drums; the hollowing of outer and inner walls by niches; the ornament of friezes, capitals, and wall surfaces. Equally revealing obviously are the features of the masonry. The alternating bands of brick and ashlar which prevail in Constantinople from at least the fourth century continue throughout

the tenth century, and the number of courses in each band often helps to establish a date.² The pure brickwork used more frequently by Middle Byzantine builders in Constantinople and Salonica can be dated by the number of bricks and mortar-beds per Byzantine foot, by the height of the mortar between the brick courses, or by the tooling of the mortar – grooved or slanting, either inward or outward; the tenth-century repairs on the H. Sophia in Constantinople offer a good example [172]. From the early eleventh or possibly the late tenth to the mid thirteenth century, Constantinople and her sphere of influence – including South Russia and southern Serbia – is marked by the ‘recessed brick’ technique: alternating brick courses, regardless of whether the masonry is faced with pure brick or with alternating bands of brick and ashlar, are recessed from the wall plane and covered over by mortar [306, 307]. As a result, the mortar-beds, appear to have a thickness two to three times that of the brick courses.³ From about 900 on in Greece, an equally characteristic, though different technique prevailed: the *cloisonné*. Small stone blocks were framed by horizontally and vertically placed bricks [335, 336]. The horizontal bricks were laid in single or double courses, rarely more; the vertical bricks formed either single or double courses, or geometric, christological, or ‘cufic’ designs. Occasionally a reticulate design was imitated. The profiling of the cornices may provide further clues, as does the shaping of dog-tooth friezes, single or double, and their location in the building: along the eaves line, as window frames, or as string courses. In some cases the chronology of such tell-tale marks has been established: a superb job has been done, for instance, regarding the architecture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries on the



306. Constantinople, Zeyrek Camii, twelfth century. Recessed brickwork



307. Antigoni (Burgas, Sea of Marmara), ruin, eleventh or twelfth century. Recessed brickwork

mainland of Greece.⁴ Elsewhere – and this includes Constantinople – research lags far behind, and scholarly opinion concerning the date of an individual building or a group of buildings often fluctuates from one to three hundred years, much as it did a century ago with regard to Romanesque architecture.

In any event, however, a chronology of Middle Byzantine architecture, based on clues of masonry technique, decoration, or even planning, is valid as

a rule only for one region or for one workshop. Indeed, once established, such elements are easily transformed into permanent features of a regional school. It is therefore not too difficult to distinguish between the various provinces of Middle Byzantine architecture: Constantinople; Salonica and vicinity; Central and Southern Greece; Serbia; South Russia; Central Asia Minor. It is even comparatively easy to differentiate between subordinate regions such as Attica, the Argolis, Epirus. But the historian has a hard time to trace in a more than tentative manner the development within the regional schools. And it seems at the moment nearly impossible to present a development of the whole of Middle Byzantine architecture during its life span of over three hundred years.

CONSTANTINOPLE

Middle Byzantine architecture in Constantinople apparently entered the scene in the last quarter of the ninth century with two churches, both built by Basil I within the Great Palace. One was the Nea, the New Church, completed in 880, and the other the sanctuary of St Mary at the Pharos, consecrated probably in 864. Both are gone, but contemporary and slightly later descriptions convey a sketchy idea of their plans as well as a glimpse of their decoration and furnishings.⁵ The Nea rose on a terrace, and was supported by a substructure. The five-domed naos was built on a quincunx or possibly a cross-domed plan. The open area of the atrium was set with two fountains, its walls revetted with marble plaques. Two porticoes – long, colonnaded, and barrel-vaulted – ran along the flanks of the church and extended beyond to enclose a long courtyard which reached to the polo-ground of the palace.⁶ Inside, the naos was sheathed with marble and decorated with mosaics. A templon on columns, surmounted by arcaded colonnettes, screened the raised chancel from the nave. Over the altar rose a canopy; a synthronon followed the curve of the apse. A pattern of red and white marble slabs formed the pavement, and silk hangings enriched the decora-

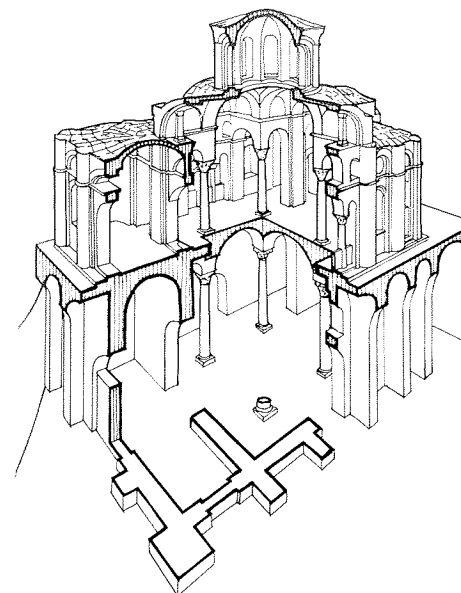
tion. Finally, openings in the floor communicated with the substructure, whence aromatic smoke would rise upon the entrance of the Emperor into the naos.⁷ The Pharos church resembled the Nea in its rich decoration. Of its plan, only one feature is known: the centre dome was of the pumpkin type and covered with mosaics – in the centre, the Pantokrator; in the sections, angels.

Much admired by Byzantine and foreign visitors alike, the Nea was bound to exert a steady influence on the architecture of the capital, of near-by Salonica, and on the neighbourhoods of both cities. In Constantinople, half a dozen churches seem to reflect the Nea. All are closely linked in plan, style, and details, and all date roughly from between 900 and 1200. But few can be identified beyond question with churches known from documents, and thus dated externally. But internal and external evidence assigns at least two to the first half of the tenth century. Both in ruins and recently restored, they can be identified: the north structure of the Fenari Isa as

the church of the monastery of Constantine Libs; the Bodrum Camii as that of the Myrelaion.

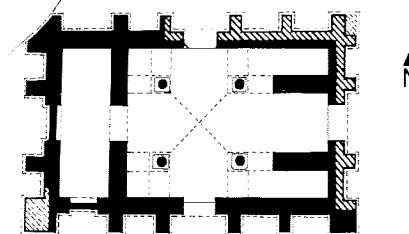
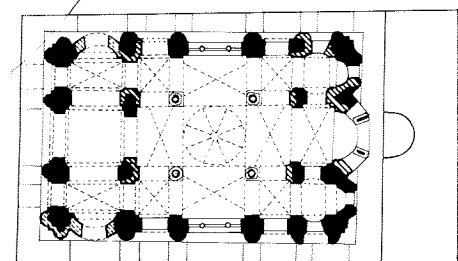
Both are small and steep, and both are quincunx churches. The Bodrum Camii is raised on a terrace [308–11].⁸ The supporting structure, also of quincunx plan, is heavy, originally perhaps just a basement shed, and built in a pattern of alternating bands: four brick courses followed by five courses of roughly hewn stones. For the upper church the builders shifted to pure brick. Over the centre bay rises a pumpkin dome; over the corner bays, groin-vaults. The cross arms are covered by barrel-vaults with interpenetrations so deep as to approximate oblong groin-vaults. The apses, all three polygonal on the outside, project strongly. Low walls rise over those on the sides and hide their half-domes. The main dome is set on a circular drum supported by eight triangular buttresses. Blind arches frame the windows of the drum, but are held down by a horizontal dog-tooth cornice slightly higher up. The main bay of the narthex and the forechoirs of the

308. Constantinople, Bodrum Camii (Myrelaion church), c. 920, as in 1938. From the south



309. Constantinople, Bodrum Camii (Myrelaion Church), c. 920. Reconstructed perspective section and plans of substructure and upper church

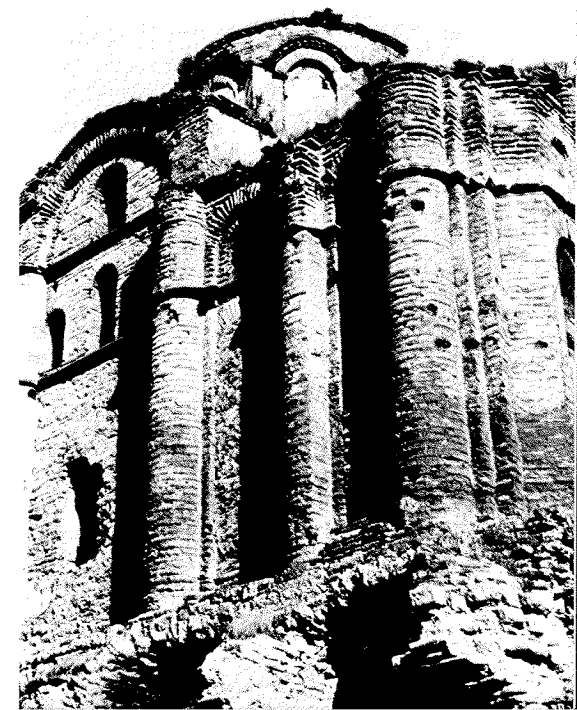
0 30 FT
0 10 M



■ ORIGINAL CONSTRUCTION PRESERVED
▨ ORIGINAL CONSTRUCTION MISSING BUT ATTESTED TO
▤ ORIGINAL CONSTRUCTION HYPOTHETICAL



310 and 311. Constantinople, Bodrum Camii, c. 920. Interior of dome (above) and exterior from the south-east (below)

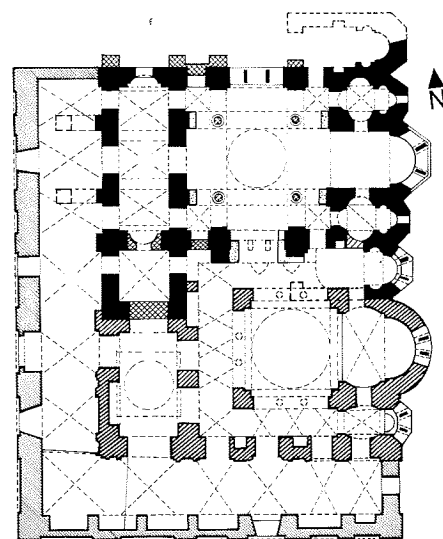


lateral apses are covered by pendentive domes; the corner bays and even the cross arms are groin-vaulted. The flanks of the naos – set with strong, yet elegant half-cylindrical buttresses – were pierced all over by openings [309, 311]: huge semicircular windows, presumably subdivided by mullions high up in the cross arms; oculi or large round-headed windows further down in the corner bays; three smaller windows in the cross arms; finally at ground level, arches in the corner bays, the lateral forechoir, and in the end walls of the esonarthex, and a triple arch in the cross arms. The contrast of massive buttresses and wide open flanks, of deep shadows and lit surfaces, of rising and horizontal forces marks the exterior. Within, shallow niches billow into the side walls of lateral forechoirs and esonarthex. The concave webs of the main dome curve subtly [310]. Traces of marble revetment on the walls, of mosaic in the vaulting zone, survive all over the interior. Simple cornices, sharply profiled, mark off the lower wall and window zones on the exterior. Dog-tooth friezes mark all eaves lines.

Three parts at present compose the ruin of the Fenari Isa Camii: along the entire front and extending south, an exonarthex and a parekklesion probably of early-fourteenth-century date; in the middle and slightly earlier, the Paleologue South Church; finally, the original Middle Byzantine North Church [312–14, 325].⁹ This original core is close to the Bodrum Camii in plan, style, and details; it also complements its missing parts: three bases remain of the four columns that carried the centre bay; a wealth of original ornament has survived on shafts, bases, and capitals of the window mullions and on the cornice of the centre dome, not counting the fifth-century pilaster capitals in second use; and marble sheathing can be traced not only inside, but on the outer walls as well. As in the Bodrum Camii, in the Fenari Isa too, the esonarthex terminates in shallow niches at either end; the apse and its barrel-vaulted forechoir are flanked by small lateral bays and tiny but tall absidioles, serving as pastophories, prothesis and diaconicon; the cross arms of the naos open in steep triple windows, their arches stilted,

surmounted by large semicircular windows, each tripartite. But throughout, plan and elevation in the Fenari Isa are richer than in the Bodrum Camii. Longish chapels, *parekklesia*, flanked the chancel – the one to the right now incorporated into the north aisle of the later South Church. Combined with the three steep apses of the naos, the lower apses of the *parekklesia* formed an impressive fivefold group of polygonal half-cylinders; terminating the original church, they opened alternately in rich triple and

- NORTH CHURCH PRESERVED
- ▨ NORTH CHURCH EXCAVATED
- NORTH CHURCH RECONSTRUCTED
- ▧ SOUTH CHURCH
- ▩ LATER BYZANTINE ADDITIONS
- TURKISH WORKS



312. Constantinople, Fenari Isa Camii. Plan

0 40 FT
0 15 M

plain single windows. A stair-tower south of the narthex ascended to a narthex gallery which at vault level opens in a triple arcade into the west arm of the naos. Four tiny chapels, their walls hollowed by



313. Constantinople, Fenari Isa Camii (Church of Constantine Libs), South Church, founded 1282/1304, and North Church, dedicated 907. From the south-east

shallow niches, rise over the four corners of the structure, domed and originally surmounted by drums high above roof level. Those to the west are placed over the end bays of the narthex gallery, those

to the east above the pastophories, sheltered eastward by parapet walls and reached presumably by outside catwalks. Shallow niches billow from the forechoirs of the lateral absidioles, and their triple



314. Constantinople, Fenari Isa Camii, North Church, dedicated 907. Interior facing east

accord is further strengthened by shaping the absidioles into tiny trefoils. As in the Bodrum Camii, the walls inside were sheathed with marble plaques, the vaulting zones covered with mosaic; ornamented glazed tiles supported the colouristic effect. Also the walling of the Fenari Isa is similar to that of the Bodrum Camii. Alternating bands of brick and roughly hewn stone, as they appear in the substructure of the Bodrum, form the walls of the Fenari Isa below the vaulting zone; the pure brickwork of the upper church of the Bodrum is duplicated by that found in the apses of the Fenari Isa [313].

The Bodrum Camii has been identified, since the sixteenth century, with the funerary church of

Romanos I Lekapenos (920–44), the Myrelaion, and dated rightly prior to 923. In the Fenari Isa, an inscription on the cornice between window and attic zones of the apses gives the name of the founder – Constantine: he is Constantine Libs, killed in action in 917 as admiral of the fleet, and the Fenari Isa is the church of the monastery he dedicated in 907 to the Mother of God. Construction techniques, indeed, favour a tenth-century date for both churches. The inward-downward slant of the broad mortar-beds in the brickwork of both not only coincides with the technique used in the tenth-century portions of the H. Sophia; together with the alternating bands of brick and roughly hewn stone

both in the Fenari Isa and the lower church of the Bodrum Camii, it still recalls ninth-century structures such as the ruin at Dere Ağzı. On the other hand, the ‘recessed brickwork’, that tell-tale eleventh- and twelfth-century device, is yet unknown.

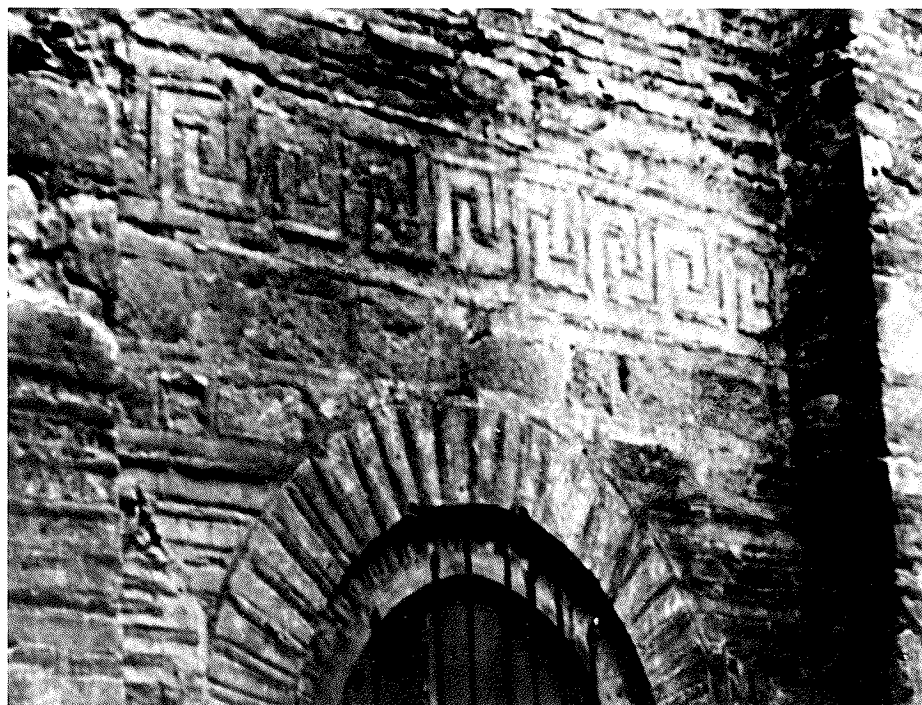
Both the Fenari Isa and the Bodrum Camii are thus representative of an early phase of Middle Byzantine church building in Constantinople. The structures are small. The naos measures but 10.50 by 8.80 m. (34 by 29 ft) in the Bodrum Camii; in the Fenari Isa it measures 13 by 9.50 m. (43 by 31 ft), and 21 by 16 m. (69 by 53 ft) including all appendices, narthex, parekklesia, and apses. The centre and the corner bays are extraordinarily steep; the space billows into shallow niches. All parts are tiny – corner bays, lateral forechoir, and apses, whether simple or triconch – and all communicate with each other through steep arches or through doors pierced into niches. The detailing is firm and simple, but subtle and varied – cornices are strong, niches and absidioles curve subtly, windows vary from oculi to single, double, or triple apertures. Smooth exterior walls are enlivened only by broad niches in the attic zone. The centre drum and drums over the corner

bays enlivened the outer silhouette. Almost all interior decoration is gone, but traces of a marble revetment have survived on the walls of the Fenari Isa, and traces of mosaic are still visible on the vaults of the Bodrum Camii.

Once established, the style continues in Constantinople, unchanged in many respects, throughout the eleventh century. As in the Fenari Isa, in the Eski Imaret Camii, the church of Christ Pantepotes, founded after 1081 and prior to 1087 [315], the narthex gallery opens into vaulted chambers placed above the western corner bays of the naos and originally surmounted by lower outer drums like those presumably planned in the Fenari Isa.¹⁰ As in the Bodrum Camii the drum of the main dome is strongly articulated, though by colonnettes rather than by triangular buttresses; dog-tooth friezes arched over the windows, originally, it seems, forming the eaves line in a striking rippling effect. The cross arms opened in triple arcades, their arches steeply stilted. Above, three windows were grouped, close together, yet separate, instead of the tripartite large semicircular window customary in Macedonian times. Whether or not the triple arcade was sheltered by a short flanking portico remains in

315. Constantinople, Eski Imaret Camii, founded between 1081 and 1087. Exterior from the south-east





316. Constantinople, Eski Imaret Camii, founded between 1081 and 1087. Detail of brickwork

doubt. Early Macedonian elements thus are blended with new features. 'Recessed brickwork' comes into use. The detailing grows richer, but the delicate subtlety of tenth-century design decreases. The contrast between clear profiles and plain wall surfaces, between half-cylindrical buttresses and wall openings, is lost. Instead, the outer walls are set with pilasters, backed up by two or three responds, with niches and blind arches. The clear segregation of window and attic zones on the outer walls of the apses has been abandoned; instead, the facets of the apse polygon are each articulated by a wall arch; the outer arches are blind, those in the centre frame a triple window. This lower zone of arches and windows is surmounted by a tier of low, broad niches in the attic zone. The elegant pumpkin dome of the Bodrum Camii gives way to a shallow bowled dome

with heavy ribs. Niches disappear from the inner side walls of forechoirs. Wall and vaulting zones are no longer marked off by firm, simple cornices, but by running friezes: palmettes, heart shapes, or tendrils, carved precisely but without harshness. Bricks form meander patterns on the flanks of the building, weaving patterns under blind arches, zigzag ornaments in the niche heads [316]. *Cloisonné* masonry, so characteristic for Middle Byzantine building in Greece, but unknown elsewhere in Constantinople, appears in the outer walls of the exonarthex and suggests as does the rippling eaves line of the drum – if it originally existed – that by the end of the eleventh century Greek custom exerted an impact on Constantinople.

Like the Eski Imaret, the Kilise Camii, whether or not the church of St Theodore, represents the style

of Comnene quincunx churches in Constantinople: 'recessed' brick masonry, with slanting mortarbeds; blind arches, triple window, and surmounting

tect, and craftsmen created one of the most beautiful structures of pure Constantinopolitan design and execution. An outer narthex, crowned by three



317. Constantinople, Kilise Camii, c. 1100. Exterior from the south; drawing by Texier, c. 1835

niches in the apse; brick ornament, including a meander; triple arcades in the cross arms, possibly an opening rather than a window, surmounted originally by semicircular tripartite windows. A date about 1100 or slightly later seems likely [317].¹¹

The Nea Moni on Chios shows this same blend of earlier and later features applied to a domed-octagon plan – a plan possibly of Early Macedonian origin, though so far unknown in Constantinopolitan architecture of the tenth century [296].¹² Founded by Constantine IX Monomachos, the church was built and decorated between 1042 and 1056 under the direction of 'the Imperial *surintendant des bâtiments*, sent from Constantinople together with a master builder and other artists in charge of the subordinate work', presumably masons and mosaic workers. Jointly, patron, archi-

domes and terminated right and left by an absidiole, leads into the esonarthex. From there, the naos opens, only 7.80 m. (26 ft – 25 Byzantine ft) square. The tripartite articulation of its walls was effected originally by superimposed pairs of projecting octagonal colonnettes replaced in an unfortunate modern restoration by clumsy half-piers [318, 319]. This counterplay was taken up by the intervening niches: rectangular niches below, both in the centre and in the corners, followed in the second tier by deep semicircular niches in the corners, and delicate shallow, curved niches in the middle. In the third zone, elliptical dome segments in the middle alternate with high stilted half-domes in the corners to form the octagonal base for pendentives, drum, and dome. This complex and eminently refined spatial design is supported by an equally subtle decoration.



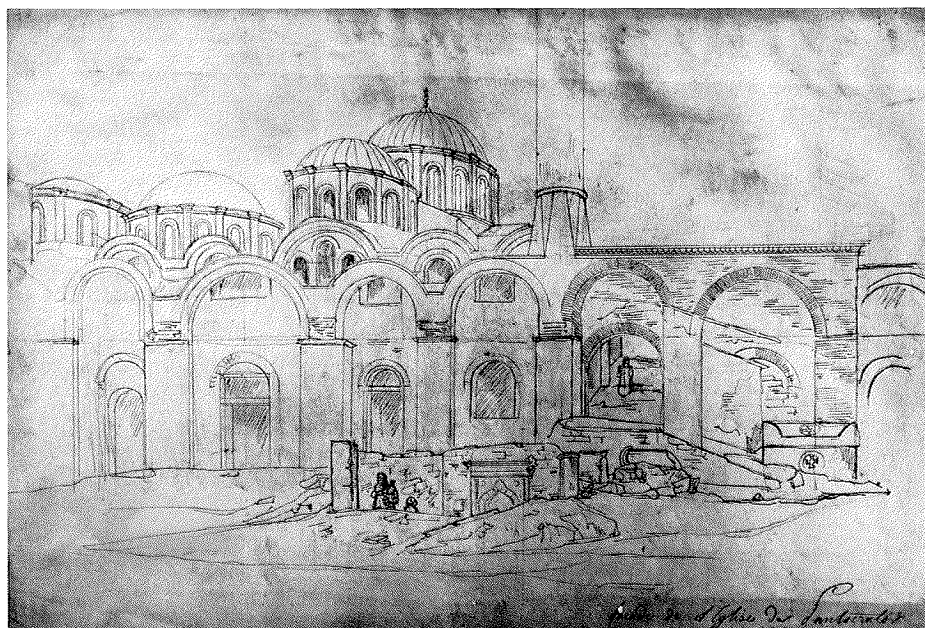
318 and 319. Nea Moni, Chios, 1042–56. Interior facing north-west (above) and interior facing south (below)

Marble slabs – also an Imperial gift – sheath the walls, framed by marble cornices *à billettes*. Quarter-domes, half-domes, and pendentives are covered with mosaics which rank among the best in Middle Byzantine design and workmanship; a similar decoration presumably covered the main dome as well. The floor was surfaced by interlaced *opus alexandrinum*. Viewed as a whole, the decoration conveys an idea of what the churches and palaces of Constantinople looked like before they fell into ruin. All this wealth and subtleness is encased in what seems a poorish shell. However, the rough masonry, enlivened by but a few blind arches, was originally clad in costly marbles. Two tiers of niches articulate the main apse: those below, steep and flanking a triple window; the upper ones squat and deep, much like those found on the apses of the Eski Imaret and the Kilise Camii.

Other church plans, whether newly invented, derived from models long obsolete, surviving or revived, come forcefully to the fore in Constantinople between 1050 and 1150. Both the Gül Camii and the Kalenderhane, the former around 1100, the latter half a century later, continue or revive the type of the cross-domed church, first known in the eighth century. Only details – the steep niches of the apses and the ‘recessed’ brickwork – reveal the true date of the Gül Camii; that of the Kalenderhane is given away only by finds made during excavations.¹³ The ambulatory plan, too, originates in that century. It seems to derive from the cross-domed type by omitting the gallery level. The first instance, indeed, so far known might well have been the Koimesis church in Nicaea (Iznik). A remodelling in 1065 would have removed the galleries, formerly surmounting the aisles, giving over their place to clerestory walls [253], each with three windows, one full-sized and round-topped in the middle, those on either side halved and closed by a half-arch: a grouping as telling for the time of construction as the articulation of the narthex façade by three multiple-stepped blind arches.¹⁴ At roughly the same time, as witness the Kariye Camii, churches are apt to be simplified in plan and shrunk. A single bay is topped

by a dome, but provided with a full-scale chancel – forechamber, main apse, flanking apsed pastophories – wider than the nave. The interior, remarkably steep, is sheathed all over with marble plaques and mosaics: a jewel, designed to impress the visitor by sophisticated preciousness. Outside, the structure is simpler: the dome articulated by colonnettes and blind arches, the apse by a triple tier of niches, the higher main tier grouped around a triple window [400]. Plan and elegance of design spread to the countryside near Constantinople: one example survives at Kurşunlu on the south coast of the Sea of Marmara. In the Toklu Dede Mescidi in Constantinople – its Byzantine name yet unknown – a nave, aisleless and barrel-vaulted, is pierced by a centre dome; the end bay, as the chancel, billows out in a trefoil plan, with shallow niches sideways and a terminating apse. The details – pilasters and responds on the flanks, outside niches on the apse – suggest an eleventh-century date. Tetraconchs, too, come to the fore in these same decades, their interior walls hollowed out by larger and smaller niches: a small sanctuary, the Panaghia Kamariotissa, at Heybeliada (Heybeli), on one of the islands in the Sea of Marmara, is the first example of the type known, near the capital and hence probably Constantinopolitan; in a complex form, moreover, in which tetraconch and Greek-cross octagon interpenetrate, and built in recessed brickwork.¹⁵ The counterplay of subtle interior effects with a comparatively plain exterior shows even in a timber-roofed basilica such as the H. Sophia at Nicaea (Iznik), built shortly after 1065. Prior to a Turkish remodelling, two triple arcades on columns, separated and linked by an extraordinarily long pier, carried the clerestory wall with its five windows – a complex overlapping rhythm enveloped by the plainest outer wall.¹⁶

The end phase of Middle Byzantine architecture in Constantinople differs from the eleventh-century phase only by richer, if less subtle decorative effects. The arcades of an apse window, always tripled, or the openings of a narthex gallery grow increasingly slender, their supports thinner. The number of ribs



in a dome increases. The dome over the naos finds its counterpart in a smaller dome, rising from the upper floor of the narthex. A chapel may be crowned by two domes, placed lengthwise over its aisleless nave. Apse often push out in seven, rather than five facets. The niches surmounting the window zone on the exterior apse wall become higher and deeper than in the eleventh century. Similarly, the niches which flank the triple apse window grow tall and steep. All this is exemplified in the three structures incorporated into the Zeyrek (Mollazeyrek) Camii [320]: the large south church [321], built by the Empress Irene between 1118 and 1124 and dedicated to Christ Pantokrator; the north church, dat-

ing but shortly after 1124; finally, the chapel in the middle, completed by 1136 as the Imperial mausoleum – *heroon* is the term used in the deed of foundation. Of the splendid decoration of the south church the pavement survives little damaged: an *opus sectile* design of coloured marbles, laid out in five-spot guilloche patterns enveloping roundels, with human and animal figures inlaid. Fragments of the marble revetment remain on the chancel walls. Finally, bits of stained glass show that the windows were filled with panes showing figures of saints.¹⁷ At times, the articulation of the apses is further heightened by a third tier of niches, added at the bottom below the steep niches of the window zone, and a cornice – composed of a dog-tooth frieze and pendant triangles – runs below the eaves line. Such detailing is found in the lateral apses of the Gül Camii [322], and, though without the terminating frieze, in the main apse of the Kariye Camii [400]. At the same time, the ornament of these Late Middle Byzantine churches appears to have changed its character. Indeed, the ornament of Comnene and

320 and 321. Constantinople, Zeyrek Camii, twelfth century. Exterior from the south-west; drawing by Texier, c. 1835 (*opposite*), and South Church, 1118–24, apses (*opposite, below*)

322 (*below*). Constantinople, Gül Camii, c. 1100(?). Exterior of apses



Late Macedonian churches in Constantinople seems quite different from earlier architectural decoration. A number of capitals and a base from the Fenari Isa Camii exemplify the earlier style of ornament [323–5]: leaves of foliage are scooped, and rounded at the tips; the lines of the half-wheel design on the base are wavy, the eagle on the capital is lively; the whole design is imaginative and rich. By the eleventh century, on the other hand, the ornament turns harder. The capitals of the Nea Moni on Chios carried on their faces an interlaced cross

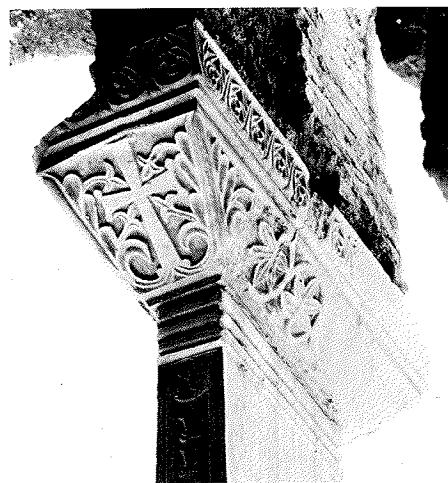


323 (above). Constantinople, Fenari Isa Camii, North Church, dedicated 907. Capital of window in main apse

324 (right, top). Constantinople, Fenari Isa Camii, South Church. Capital of a window from the North Church, dedicated 907, re-used

325 (right, centre). Constantinople, Fenari Isa Camii, North Church, dedicated 907. Capital in the window of the north arm

326 (right). Constantinople, St John in Trullo, twelfth century. Window capital



pattern with sharp corners. On the cornices in the north church of the Zeyrek Camii group, the palmettes have hardened, their leaves turned spiky. In the Eski Imaret Camii of c. 1080 the fluid forms of a Lesbian cyma have congealed into cold heart-and-arrow shapes. The clear-cut half-palmettes on a window capital in the small church of St John in Trullo end in sharply pointed leaves [326]. But so little ornament survives in Constantinople that any statement regarding the late eleventh or indeed the twelfth century is hazardous in the extreme.

NORTHERN GREECE AND THE BALKANS

Nowhere is Middle Byzantine architecture more closely linked to Constantinople than in northern Greece and the Balkan countries: in Macedonia, comprising the border provinces of Greece and Yugoslavia, and in Thrace, meaning present-day Bulgaria, European Turkey, and northern Greece east of Salonica.¹⁸

Before 1018

Despite continued wars, throughout the ninth century the buildings of the Bulgar czars – witness the throne hall at Pliska – had vied in plan and size, though not in style, with those of the emperors at Constantinople. With the early tenth century, the situation changed. A structure such as the Round Church at Preslav revived the plan of Roman mausolea, but fused into it features drawn from the contemporary architecture of Byzantium.¹⁹ However, the full impact of Middle Byzantine building is felt more directly in the many dozens of parish and monastery churches founded by Czars Simeon (893–927) and Peter (927–69) around their two residences: at Preslav, where alone some thirty-odd churches and monasteries have so far been excavated – all built before the destruction of the town in 971; and at Ohrid. The ruins of churches around Preslav, in particular, seem to mirror to perfection the contemporary architecture of Constantinople. Indeed, alongside church plans known

from Constantinople appear building types and schemes of decoration no longer preserved among her churches and palaces, but presumably once extant in the Byzantine capital as well as in its outposts.

The great majority of these churches were quincunx structures, much like those built by the Macedonian House. True, they are tiny and the methods of construction differ. The building material in Bulgaria is, with few exceptions, roughly hewn blocks of rubble; the supports are piers or columns, the shafts of the columns either crude, stumpy monoliths or a rough pile of low drums. But Constantinopolitan reminiscences abound in plan and detail. Sometimes the outer walls are set with half-cylindrical buttresses, recalling the Bodrum Camii. At times the apses are polygonal on the outside and preceded by clearly marked forechoirs [327A]. Occasionally the narthex is surmounted by an upper gallery. Also as in Constantinople, the flanks of the naos often open in triple windows (or are they arcades?) towards the outside.²⁰ The ornament may be crudely executed, but on the capitals Ionic volutes and impost blocks are unmistakable. At times, indeed, the decoration is planned – though not carried out – along extraordinarily refined lines. Pavements are laid out in large colourful panels; hexagonal brick tiles are sometimes framed by bits of white stone and green marble; white stone octagons with four concave sides appear set between pieces of green and red stone; or again, red, white, and green materials form a zigzag pattern and are framed by a band of red-brick tiles inset with white disks.

A few churches excavated around Preslav and Ohrid, however, seem to have departed from the commonplace quincunx plan. At Vunitsa (Vinitsa), about 950, the naos was formed by a domed square.²¹ Only four odd metres (13 ft) long and wide, it would seem to anticipate on a small scale the plan of the early-twelfth-century church incorporated into the Kariye Camii at Constantinople, and it may stand as an example of earlier buildings of this type no longer preserved in the