
Vassil Tenekedjiev
(Varna Regional Museum of History)

ANOTHER LOOK AT THE LARGE BASILICA IN MARCIANOPOLIS: THE PROBLEMS OF ITS CONSTRUCTION AND DATING

The largest Early Christian basilica in Marcianopolis (Devnya, Bulgaria) was excavated in the period 1956-1958 by Milko Mirchev and Goranka Toncheva of the Varna Archaeological Museum¹. Despite its importance the site has not yet been published, with the exception of a few brief references in research papers, overview books² and popular science editions³. The basilica is most comprehensively described by Vanya Popova in the corpus of the Late Antique and Early Christian mosaics in Bulgaria, published in Vienna⁴, but the text mostly focuses on the basilica's floor mosaics.

At this time, there are a number of barriers to studying the basilica. First, there are no records of the excavations, except for two items: a "field journal" and a photo album⁵. The field journal is a small coverless notebook containing

¹ Currently the Varna Archaeological Museum is a department at the Varna Regional Museum of History.

² Г. Тончева, *Одесос и Маркианопол в свете новых археологических исследований*, Советская археология, Москва 1968, №1, 235, рис. 7-8. В. Геров, *Marcianopolis im Lichte der historischen Angaben und der archäologischen, epigraphischen und numismatischen Materialien und Forschungen*, Studia Balcanica, 10, Sofia 1975, 56. А. Минчев, *Marcianopolis Cristiana*, Miscelanea bulgarica, 5, Wien 1987, 299-300. Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *Раннохристиянската архитектура в България (IV-VI в.)*, София 1999, 183, фиг. 9. А. Ангелов, *Марцианопол*, в: Римски и ранновизантийски градове в България, т. 1, София 2002, 113. М. Oppermann, *Das frühe Christentum an der Westküste des schwarzen Meeres und im anschließenden Binnenland*, Langenweißbach: Beier & Beran 2010, 109-110, Taf. 23/1.

³ Г. Тончева, *Марцианопол/Marcianopolis. Пътеводител*, София 1967, 14-15, фиг. на с. 11-13. А. Ангелов, *Марцианопол. История и Археология*, Варна, 1999, 46, фиг. на с. 47. А. Ангелов, *Християнството в Марцианопол*, in: Религиозният туризъм. Манастирите-носители на българската духовност, Варна 2008, 113.

⁴ R. Pillinger, A. Lirsch, V. Popova (Hg.), *Corpus der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Mosaiken Bulgariens*, Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften 2016, (Textband) 67-70, (Tafelband) Taf. 32-37; see there also the list of V. Popova's earlier publications of on the same topic.

⁵ It cannot be ruled out that more records of the excavation have been preserved. Much

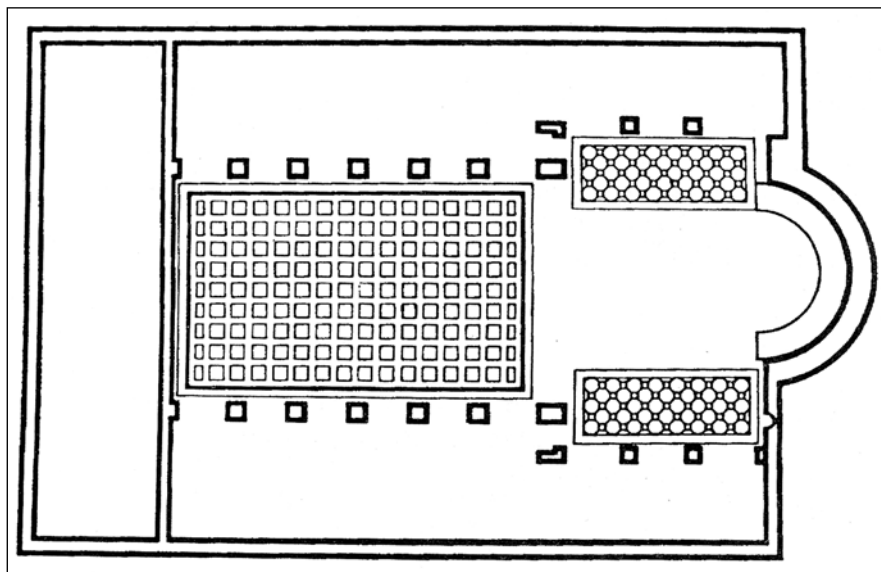


Fig. 1. Ground plan of the Large Basilica in Marcianopolis
(after N. Chaneva Dechevska)

Сл. 1. Основа Велике базилике у Марцианополису
(по: Н. Чаневој Дечевској)

disorganised scientific observations, sketches and drawings, as well as information on how the excavations were arranged. Even so, the journal is extremely valuable and, in many ways, the only source of information about the site.⁶

The album of photos taken during the excavations is kept in the archive of the Varna Archaeological Museum⁷, and contains strips of negatives (more than 80 pieces) and some captioned contact copies, as well as odd photos⁸.

The preserved photographic record is of paramount importance to studying the basilica, as it contains details of its architecture, floor mosaics and marble decorations. It should, however, be noted that the site was not photographed systematically during the study, and many important details were not captured

of G. Toncheva's scientific archive, for example, was not given to the Varna Archaeological Museum, nor, as far as I am aware, to the archives of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; rather, it is kept by her relatives at her home. Despite my efforts, as well as those of V. Popova, no other records of the excavations of the Great Basilica in Devnya have been found yet.

⁶ G. Toncheva gave the notebook to V. Popova, art historian and expert on Early Byzantine mosaics. She, in turn, provided a scanned copy to the Varna Archaeological Museum (Varna Regional Museum of History: Scientific Archives, *Goranka Toncheva Personal Archive*, Fond 5, Unit 90, Inv. list 4.), for which I give my most sincere thanks.

⁷ Varna Regional Museum of History: Scientific Archives, *Marcianopolis 1*, Fond 'Illustrative Material', Albums.

⁸ There are also individual processed photos in the album. G. Toncheva gave several other photographs to V. Pavlova, along with the journal. Interestingly, the negatives of some of those processed photos are missing from the album, so it can be assumed that some of the rolls of film are still in Toncheva's personal archive.

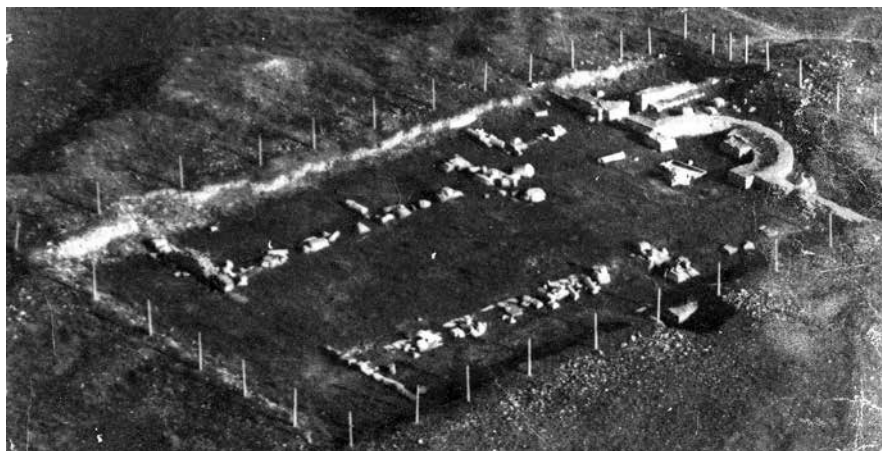


Fig. 2. The Large Basilica in Marcianopolis, general view
(Photo album, a processed photo without a number.)

Сл. 2. Велика базилика у Марцианополису, општи изглед (фото албум, без броја)

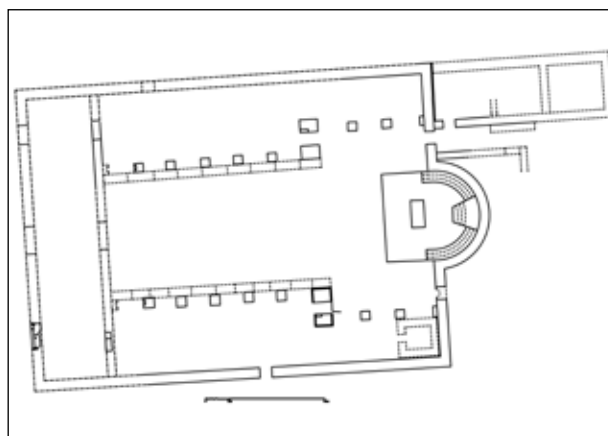


Fig. 3. Ground plan of
the Large Basilica in
Marcianopolis (Geodesic
survey: M. Valchev)

Fig. 3. Основа
Велике базилике у
Марцианополису (гео-
детско испитивање М.
Валчева)

at all. Most photos were taken after the building had been completely uncovered. They are mostly focused on the general plans and floor mosaics, but there are major omissions even there.

Here is an opportune place to mention that there is only one plan of the Great Basilica in the available scientific literature. It was published by Nely Chaneva-Dechevska and is based on information provided by G. Toncheva and V. Popova (Fig. 1)⁹. The plan only gives a general idea of the site and is inaccurate, incomplete and misleading in many respects.

The second major obstacle to the study and interpretation of the basilica concerns its present condition and the site conservation measures or, to be more precise, the lack thereof. For years after the excavations, the church

⁹ Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *Раннохристиянската архитектура в България (IV–VI в.)*, София 1999, фиг. 9.

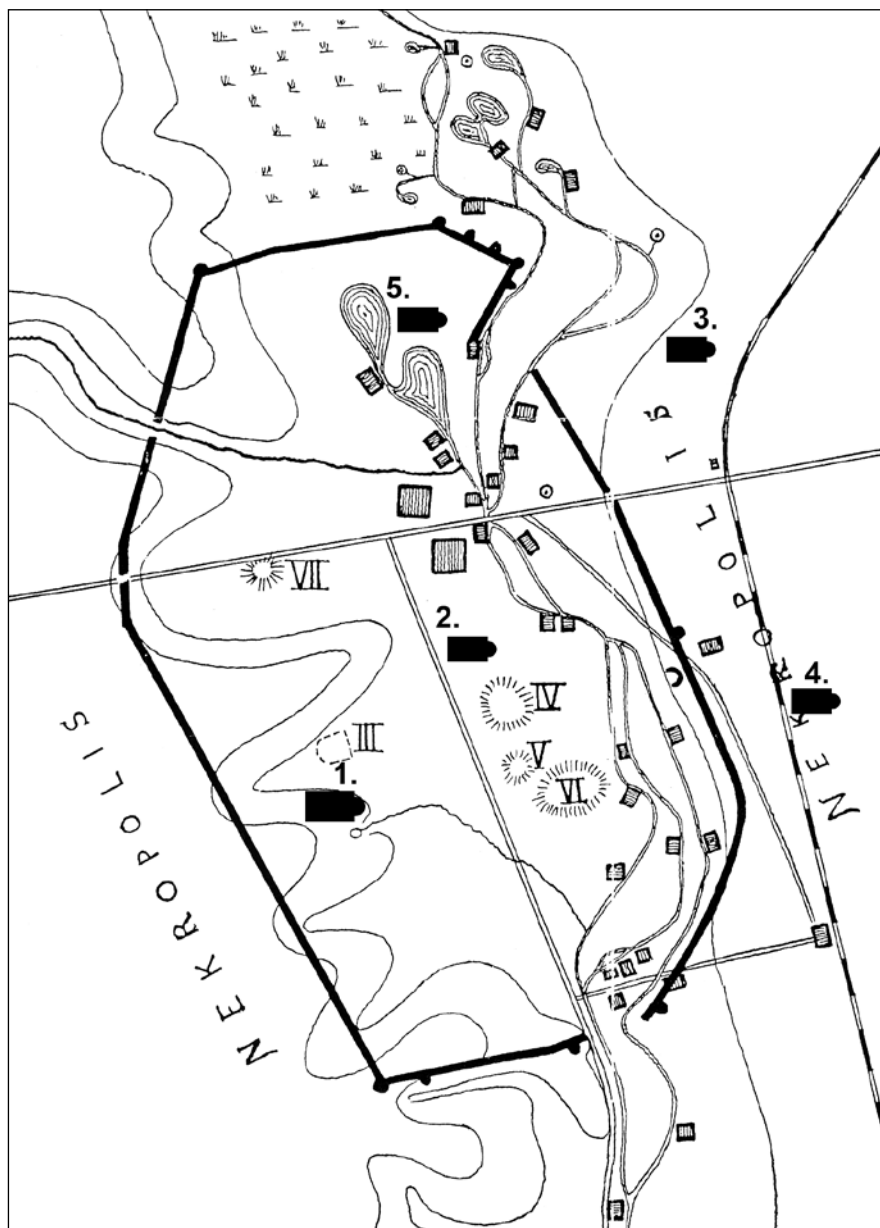


Fig. 4. Plan of Marcianopolis with the location of the Early Christian churches (after K. Škorpić, with additions by V. Tenekedjiev)

Сл. 4. План Марцианополиса са местом ранохришћанских цркава (по К. Шкорпил, са додацима В. Тенекеџиева)



Fig. 5. The narthex, general view from the south (Photo album, page 2, row 1, pic. 1)

Сл. 5. Нартекс, општи изглед са јужне стране (фото албум, страна 2, ред 1, сл.1)

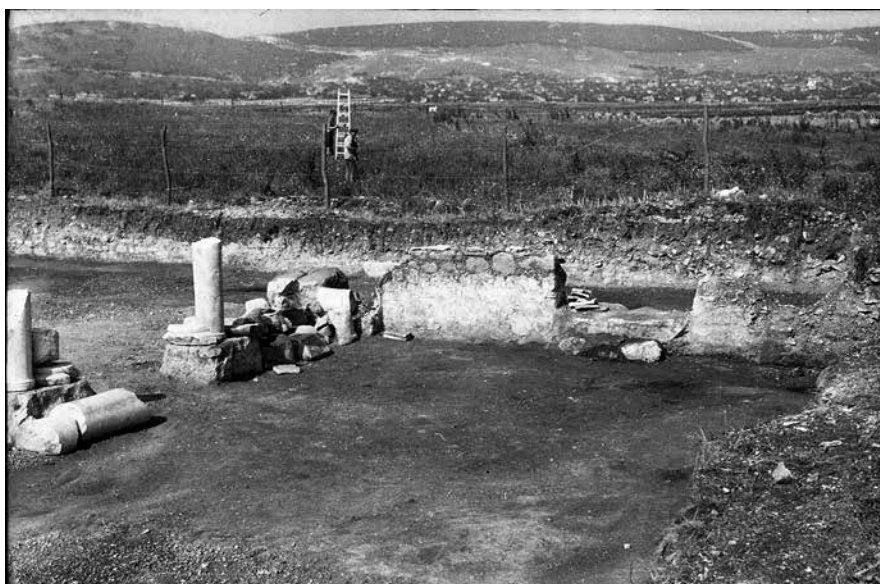


Fig. 6. The entrance from the narthex into the north aisle, view from the east (Photo album, page 1, row 2, pic. 1)

Сл. 6. Улаз из нартекса и поглед према северном броду, изглед са источне стране (фото албум, страна 1, ред 1, снимак 1)

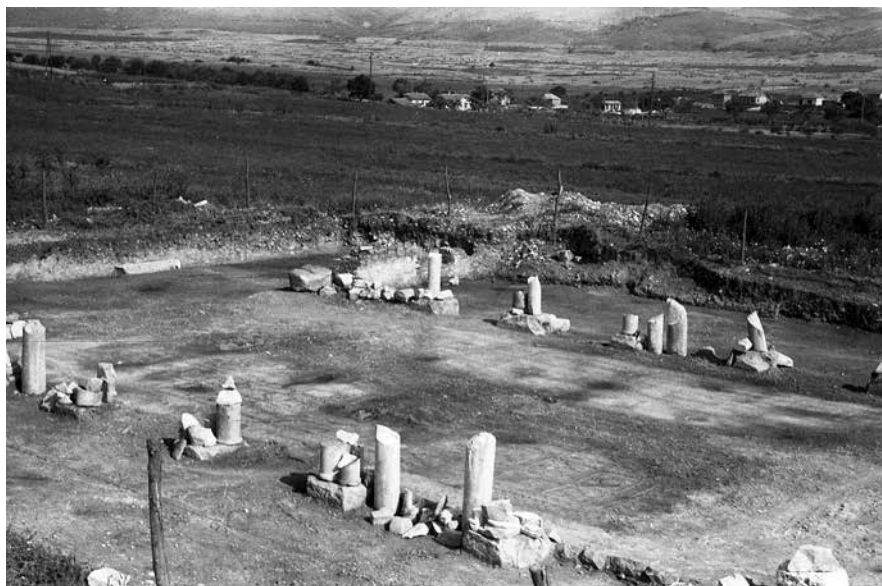


Fig. 7. Western half of the basilica's nave, general view from the southeast (Photo album, page 2, row 1, pic. 5)

Сл. 7. Западна половина наоса базилике, општи изглед са југоисточне стране (фото албум, страна 2, ред 1, снимак 5)

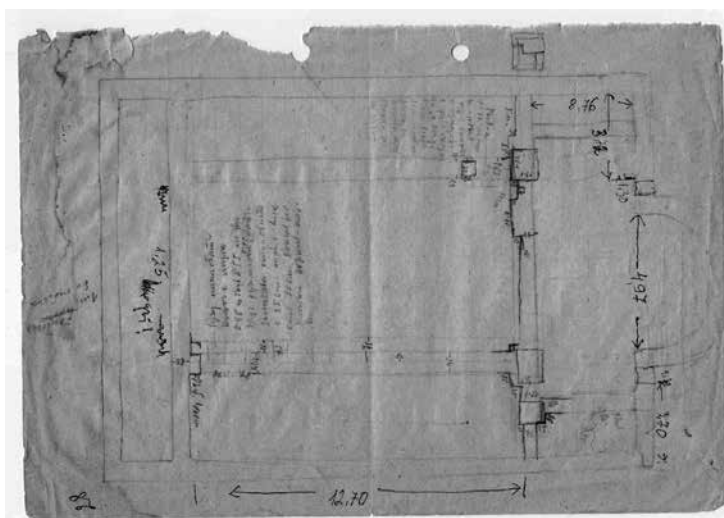


Fig. 8. The transept, view from the south (Photo album, page 11, row 4, pic. 4.)

Сл. 8. Трансепт, изглед са јужне стране (фото албум, страна 11, ред 4, сл. 4)

Fig. 9. Sketch from the *Journal* presenting the foundation walls under the colonnades (Journal, O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 28.)

Сл.9. Скица из *Journal* која приказује основе зидова изнад колонада (Journal, O.p.n.: година 1957 и 1958, 28.)



was left uncovered, exposed to the elements and accessible to visitors (Fig. 2). Therefore, parts of the mosaics were further damaged and some marble details were moved. There is no information as to whether any field conservation of the walls was carried out, but there are currently no traces of such work. It was later decided to protect the mosaics by burying them with soil, but the building walls were left uncovered¹⁰.

During the excavations, many marble details were discovered: mostly column bases, shafts and capitals. Most of them are roughly sketched and described in the journal, with some pictured in the album. The later fate of the marble pieces is unclear. A number of them were left in the basilica's ruins, even though they were backfilled. Another selection was transported and "exhibited" in front of the police building and the Museum of Mosaics in Devnya, and yet another was taken to the Varna Archaeological Museum. However, neither museum has properly inventoried those details, making their identification rather difficult.

Those facts explain why interpreting and writing a detailed paper on the basilica is now very difficult. For various reasons, it is not possible at this stage to carry out secondary excavations of the church, with the aim of obtaining more precise information about its plan, periodization and chronology. Therefore, an idea was conceived to collect, systematise and publish all information currently available about the site. This includes using the information in the researchers' journal and photo album, searching for the marble details and conducting another, more accurate geodetic survey of the building (in particular, its visible parts) (Fig. 3)¹¹. This, together with observations on the architecture and

¹⁰ The year in which the site was buried has not been established, but it is clear that it was sloppily done: instead of being spread out evenly, the soil was poured in heaps, still visible in the central nave and elsewhere in the basilica. Over the years, due to lack of maintenance, bushes and trees have grown, making the site almost inaccessible.

¹¹ The basilica's geodetic survey was carried out by Martin Valchev, and the contem-



Fig. 10. The raised curb along the southern colonnade in the naos (Photo album, page 2, row 4, pic. 6.)

Сл. 10. Уздигнути сокл дуж јужне колонаде у наосу (фото албум, страна 2, ред 4, сл. 6)



Fig. 11. The inner of the two northern pedestals, view from the southeast (Photo album, page 8, row 1, pic. 3.)

Сл. 11. Унутрашност две северне плинте, изглед са југоисточне стране (фото албум, страна 8, ред 1, слика 3)



Fig. 12. The outer of the two northern pedestals, current state, view from the south (Photographer: N. Dimitrov)

Сл. 12. Спољна страна две северне плинте, тренутно стање, фото: Н. Димитров

structure of the church and an interpretation of the existing archaeological data,

porary photography by Nedko Dimitrov in the spring of 2016. I am grateful to both for their invaluable help.

The ground plan on Fig. 3 had some additions based on the information in the journal and the available pictures. They are presented with dotted lines. Also the northernmost of the four column pedestals and the altar base were moved to their presumably original places.

Fig. 13. The two southern pedestals, current state, view from the west (Photographer: N. Dimitrov)

Сл. 13. Две јужне плинте, тренутно стање, изглед према западној страни, фото: Н. Димитров



would enable us to posit some comments on its dating and periodization, as well as propose hypotheses on its reconstruction¹². The current paper is exclusively focused on the architecture and interior arrangement of the basilica. The marble decorations will be a topic of a future publication by the author, and the issue of floor mosaics was deliberately left out, since V. Popova has devoted a separate article to it in this volume.

To date, five Early Christian churches have been discovered and studied to various extents in Marcianopolis and its surroundings (Fig. 4)¹³. Out of these churches, the basilica examined here is the largest and occupies a relatively central location within the city limits. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in the scientific literature, the site is most commonly referred to as the *Great Basilica*. Prior to its discovery in Marcianopolis, specifically in the northeast part outside the fortress walls, only one more basilica of the same era was known¹⁴. Due to its location, the site is also called the *Southern Basilica*. A third common name is the *Episcopal Basilica*. Considering the building's location, impressive size, interior structure and magnificent decorations, it is quite rightly assumed it was the city's cathedral and the seat of the local bishop (later archbishop) who also headed the church in the Moesia Secunda Province¹⁵.

¹² The basilica's graphic reconstructions are by Architect Ralitsa Demirova, to whom I give my most sincere thanks.

¹³ (1) The Great Basilica; (2) basilica with three apses on the northeast, beyond the city walls (3) and a small church in the south end of the city, on the right bank of the river – the latter two known from records in Karel Škorpil's archive at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences: Scientific Archives, *Karel Škorpil Personal Archive*, Fond 165 k, Unit 550) and published with brief information (Г. Тончева, *Марцианопол/Marcianopolis*, 15. А. Минчев, *op.cit.*, 300-301. Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *op.cit.*, 184. А. Ангелов, *Християнството*, 112, бел. 10. М. Oppermann, *op. cit.*, 110-111.); (4) basilica in the amphitheatre (Г. Тончева, *Одесос и Маркианопол*, 234, рис. 6. А. Минчев, *op.cit.*, 300. Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *op.cit.*, 184. М. Oppermann, *op. cit.*, 110.); and (5) basilica in Tabia (А. Ангелов, *Марцианопол. История*, 46-48, фиг. на с. 48-49; *Християнството*, 114-117. М. Oppermann, *op. cit.*, 111.).

¹⁴ See Note 13, (2).

¹⁵ For the story of the church in Marcianopolis in the 4th-6th century, see B. Gerov, *op.cit.*, 69-71. А. Минчев, *op.cit.*, 297-299. А. Ангелов, *Християнството*, 109-110.



Fig. 14. Marble column base (Photo album, page 8, row 1, pic. 2.)

Сл.14. Основа мраморног стуба (фото албум, страна 8, ред 1, сл. 2)

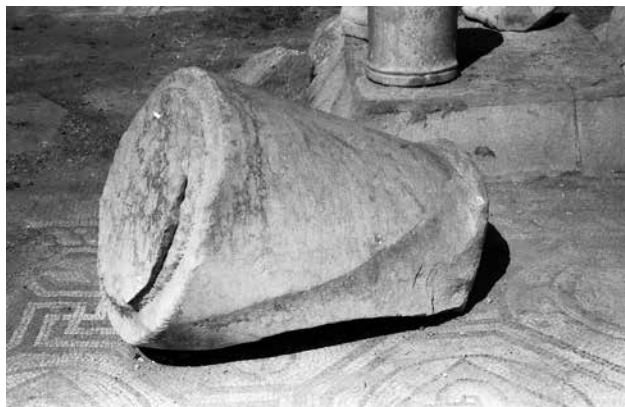


Fig. 15. Fragment of a marble column shaft (Photo album, page 8, row 4, pic. 2.)

Сл.15. Фрагмент мраморног стуба (фото албум, страна 8, ред 4, сл. 2)

The Great Basilica is located in the western half of Marcianopolis, on a low-lying flat terrace that starts at the western wall, a little south of its middle, and extends eastwards to the city's fortified territory. The slopes of the terrace, especially from the north and east, are somewhat steep but still accessible. The place is visible from all around and dominates the ancient city. From this perspective, building the local Episcopal church in this location was a well-considered decision.

The basilica is located near the northeast edge of the terrace and was definitely surrounded by other buildings. Several rooms, adjoining the church near its north-eastern corner, were partially excavated, with the topography of the ground suggesting there used to be more buildings in the wide flat area south of the basilica. It was probably an ancillary complex—perhaps an Episcopal palace (?).

The church is a three-aisled basilica with a semi-circular apse, a transept and a large narthex. On the outside¹⁶ it is

38.70 m long (including the narthex and apse) and 25.30 m wide. Its main axis points roughly east-west. The altar is on the east, with a deviation of about 3.4 degrees to the north.

The narthex is rectangular and 23.55 m wide (north-south) and 5.40 m long (east-west) on the inside (Fig. 5). It appears to have been made as a single piece because there are no remains of walls, pilasters or other types of supports that would have divided it into parts¹⁷. However, given how little of the wall

¹⁶ The dimensions are taken from the last geodetic survey and often diverge from the older measurements of the basilica. If older information is used in certain places in the text, this is explicitly indicated.

¹⁷ The only place that can be checked is on the eastern wall of the narthex, where the presence of a pilaster could be expected along the axis of the north colonnade of the basilica.

Fig. 16. Marble Roman-Corinthian capital with representation of an eagle (Photo album, page 10, row 1, pic. 4.)

Сл.16. Мраморни романокоинтски капител са представом орла (фото албум, страна 10, ред 1, снимак 4)



remains and the fact that the site is partially buried, the possibility of a tripartite narthex should not be completely dismissed. It cannot even be ruled out that the antechamber was separated by two arches along the axes of the basilica's colonnades, starting from the walls themselves, without pilasters. The journal notes that remnants of a collapsed "vault"¹⁸ were found in the narthex. It is unlikely that such thin walls could have borne a vault extending across the entire room, and it seems more like a part of an arch. However, it could also be part of an arched window, so the question remains open.

The narthex most likely had six entrances – three external on the west side and three to the naos' three bays. However, there are no archaeological data about all of them. The presence of entrances along the basilica's main axis makes sense, but no traces of them are left on the ground today. G. Toncheva notes that the entrance between the central nave and the narthex is 1.25 m wide¹⁹ – too little for a central entrance given the documented dimensions of the side entrances (see below). There is no information as to whether it used to be closed by a door or not.

A rough sketch in the journal shows the southern side of an entrance between the narthex and the northern aisle²⁰, but the image is not accompanied by a comment. Most probably that is what two of the photos in the album show (Fig. 6). There are no remnants of this entrance today, nor of the respective northern external entrance to the narthex.

The information on the two southern entrances is most comprehensive, and their thresholds are preserved. The one on the external entrance is raised above floor level²¹. It is a large limestone block with a length (north-south) of 2.11 m and a preserved width of 0.85 m. Its inner side is unevenly broken. The

¹⁸ Journal, entry for July 9th 1957. Original page numbering (o.p.n.): year 1957 and 1958, 7.

¹⁹ Journal, note on a hand-drawn plan of the church. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 28.

²⁰ Journal, entry for June 20th 1957. a hand-drawn plan. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 2.

²¹ As the narthex is covered with soil, it is not possible to say with certainty how high above the floor the threshold is.



Fig. 17. Entrance on the north side of the apse with part of the premises adjacent to the basilica's eastern façade, view from the east (Photo album, page 1, row 4, pic. 5.)

Сл. 17. Улаз на северној страни апсиде са додацима бочно од источне фасаде базилике, изглед са источне стране (фот албум, страна 1, ред 4, сл. 5)

outer (west) edge and the two side edges are raised. Two holes for door leaves, two holes for vertical latches and another two, probably for jambs, can be made out on the threshold.

The entrance between the narthex and the southern aisle had a stone threshold consisting of two blocks. Only the southern one, with a length (north-south) of 1.08 m and a width (east-west) of 0.50 m, remains today. It has a protruding edge on the western side (i.e. towards the narthex). On the northern side, where the threshold's original end remains, there is also a protruding -but narrower - edge. The entrance constituted of a two-wing door, with the round hole for the shaft of the south wing preserved until today. A rectangular hole for a latch is visible 0.66 m from it - only one for both wings. If we assume it was approximately in the middle of the entrance, the latter would have been about 1.56 m wide. Like the external entrance, there is a hole to mount a vertical frame in the preserved southwest corner of the block. The entrance is approximately in line with the middle of the southern aisle. However, it significantly diverges from the outer southern entrance, which is further to the north. It is also important to note that the threshold of the inner entrance is about 0.46 m higher than the outer one. No explanation for this has been found yet.

The naos is rectangular and 23.55 m wide and 27.16 m long on the inside. It is divided into three bays by two load-bearing colonnades (Fig. 7). At its eastern end, the rhythm of the colonnades is broken by a transverse nave, otherwise known as a transept (Fig. 8). This is the main architectural feature of the



Fig. 18. Entrance on the south side of the apse, sealed and transformed into a semicircular niche, view from the west (Photo album, page 6, row 4, pic. 6.)

Сл.18. Улаз на јужној страни апсиде, трансформисан у полукружну нишу, изглед са западне стране (фото албум, страна 6, ред 4, сл. 6)

building. The transept is contained within the rectangular plan of the basilica, i.e. its edges do not protrude beyond the southern and northern facades. It was built into the interior of the building by distancing the colonnades between the central nave and the aisles without interrupting their flow²². The central nave is 10.80 m wide, the south aisle – 5.50 m and the north – 5.80 m. The extension of the transept starts at 18.24/18.40 m from the naos' western wall and ends at its eastern wall. Accordingly, the transept's width (east-west) varies from 8.92 to 8.75 m. There is a 15.12 m (north-south) space between the far-apart colonnades. Behind them, i.e. to the north and south, there are two spaces that can be regarded as both the wings of the transept and the tapering ends of the southern and northern aisles. Their width (north-south) varies between 3.60 and 3.45 m.

A sketch in the journal shows foundation walls²³ under the vertical supports inside the building (Fig. 9). Two of them are beneath the colonnades be-

²² In the scientific literature, there are various attempts to classify the transepts, but there are differences of opinion between the authors. See on this matter R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4th edition revised by R. Krautheimer and S. Ćurčić, Yale University Press, Pelican History of Art 1965, 94, 110; *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval, and Renaissance Art*, New York Univ. Press 1969, 59 ff. According to the classification that Krautheimer proposes, the Great Basilica in Marcianopolis falls into the group of *reduced cruciform transepts*.

²³ In this case, we are talking about foundation walls, rather than stylobates in the classical sense of the word, as they were not visible above floor level (Cf. R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian*, 520).



Fig. 19. The altar table base (Photo album, page 8, row 4, pic. 1)

Сл.19. Плоча часне трпезе (фото албум, страна 8, ред 4, сл. 1)

tween the nave and the aisles; one crosses the entire naos from north to south along the line where the transept begins; two more start from this wall and extend eastwards under the lateral colonnades of the transverse nave. According to the discoverers, the foundation walls under the long colonnades are 0.95 m wide and 0.55 m deep. As far as it can be made out from the notes on the sketch, the transverse foundation wall is 0.70 m wide and those under the transept's colonnades – 0.90 m²⁴.

Despite the vague and fragmentary information, one particular feature in the naos' layout should be noted. The foundation wall of the southern long colonnade is partially covered by something like a raised curb²⁵ on the central nave side (Fig. 9 and 10). It is 0.75 m wide and built from a row of stones, with slabs placed on top. The curb has a 0.35 cm overlap with the foundation wall and probably touches the colonnade. It can be assumed that there also used to be a symmetrical curb at the northern colonnade, forming an original frame of the mosaic in the central nave.

Inside the basilica, there is a complex system of vertical supports. West of the transept, the naos is divided lengthwise by two colonnades with five columns each. Below each one, there is a rectangular block – roughly carved, with uneven edges. The blocks used to be visible above the floor. Their widths and lengths vary between 0.73 x 0.76 m and 0.87 x 0.82 m. Their heights cannot be measured for now because of the soil poured over them, but they are definitely more than 0.25 m (Fig. 6). The blocks are narrower than the foundation walls below them and are mounted on their respective external parts, i.e. closer to the lateral aisles. The distances between the blocks are not equal, varying between 1.90 and 2.20 m. Marble columns with capitals and imposts stood on top of them, indicating that the colonnades bore the weight of arcades.

At the western end, each of the two colonnades used to end with a masonry, rectangular pilaster measuring 0.75/0.80 x 0.35 m and flush with the wall towards the narthex. Accordingly, the western feet of the last arches stood on the pilasters, with marble pilaster capitals at the joint.

²⁴ Journal, hand-drawn plan of the church with notes. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 28.

²⁵ In the journal, the structure is described as a "wall". Journal, note on a hand-drawn plan of the church. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 28.

The colonnades in the transept are structured identically. On each side, there are two columns mounted on stone blocks lying, in turn, on an underground foundation wall. A rectangular pilaster touches the end of the colonnades, on the eastern wall of the naos. The distances between the blocks are the same as in the colonnades in the western half of the naos, apart from slight variations²⁶.

More peculiar is the appearance of the supports at the return, where the distance between the colonnades separating the central nave and the side aisles increases while entering into the transept. Since, from a structural point of view, these places are key to the building's stability, the supports there are significantly more solid. On the north-south foundation wall, which reinforces the western border of the transept, there are two large rectangular pedestals (three of them are in the original position, with the northernmost one partially preserved but apparently moved to the side). They consist of several blocks that have traces of grooves for metal fittings (Fig. 11 and 12). There is a passage between each pair of pedestals. The passage's original width of 1.02 m can be measured between the two southern ones (Fig. 13). It is interesting that the pedestals taper towards their tops because the three sides not facing the passageways are slanted. The pedestals have the following dimensions: the northernmost (top) 1.10 x 0.82 m, (bottom) 1.53 x 1.04 m, second from the north (top) 1.28 x 1.14 m, (bottom) 1.55 x 1.28 m; north of the southern pair (top) 1.27 x 1.12 (bottom) 1.61 m x 1.21 m; and southernmost (top) 1.12 x 0.86 m, (bottom) 1.58 x 0.98 m. The stones for the four pedestals, and most likely the blocks under the columns, were taken from older buildings. That is evident from the peculiar shape



Fig. 20. Marble Roman-Corinthian capital with a "medallion" (Photo album, page 10, row 1, pic. 2.)

Сл. 20. Мраморни романокоинтски капител са медаљоном (фото албум, страна 10, ред 1, снимак 2)



Fig. 21. Marble Roman-Doric capital (Photo album, page 10, row 2, pic. 1.)

Сл. 21. Мраморни романодорски капител (фото албум, страна 10, ред 2, снимак 1)

²⁶ The two endmost intercolumniations of each colonnade in the transept are slightly larger. The distance between the blocks there is about 2.40 m.



Fig. 22. Marble Roman-Corinthian pilaster capital (Photo album, page 6, row 4, pic. 3.)

Сл. 22. Мраморни романокоинтски пиластер (фото албум, страна 6, ред 4, сл. 3)

and the grooves for metal brackets. At the pedestals, the individual blocks are arranged as they were in the original building, with the grooves fitting together; however, at the blocks below the regular columns, there are only grooves in odd places, which serve no practical purpose in the basilica. The stones in the sloping pedestals, and probably the rest, were taken from the Roman amphitheatre of Marcianopolis²⁷.

Three peculiar column elements have been discovered among the ruins of the basilica – a fragmented base (Fig. 14), a shaft (Fig. 15)²⁸ and a Roman-Corinthian capital with an image of an eagle (Fig. 16). Their dimensions are much larger than those of the other columns found at the site²⁹. The capital, and probably the other fragments, are older and have also been reused³⁰. Their dimensions correspond to the large pedestals, so it can be assumed that four similar columns used to stand on them.

²⁷ In the ruins of the amphitheatre, at least one such stone detail remains today. The purpose of the slanted elements is not known for sure, but they probably served as feet of the vaults in the structure bearing the stands. For the amphitheatre see: Т. Петров, *Амфитеатърът на римския град Марцианопол*, Музеи и паметници на културата, VII, София 1967, №1, 7-9. G. Tončeva, *L'amphithéâtre de Marcianopolis*, in: Spartacus. Symposium rebus Spartaci gestis dedicatum 2050 A., Sofia 1981, 138-142. А. Ангелов, *Марцианопол*, 117-118. Л. Вагалински, *Кръв и зрелища. Спортни и гладиаторски игри елинистическа и римска Тракия*, София 2009, 72-73, fig. 140A, B.

²⁸ The column shaft was broken and repaired in the past. One end of the remaining fragment was worked in a way that enables its assembly with the rest of the shaft. It appears to have been a very large column in an ancient building, which was damaged and then repaired and reused in the construction of the basilica, along with a capital and base corresponding to its dimensions.

²⁹ The shaft has a diameter of 0.75 m and a remaining height of 0.90 m; The base has an upper diameter of 0.90 m and a plinth side of 1.15 m; The capital has a (preserved) height of 0.88 m and a lower diameter of 0.70 m.

³⁰ The capital dates back to the late 2nd – early 3rd century (З. Димитров, *Архите-*

Fig. 23. Marble impost with a cross and acanthus leaves (Photo album, page 9, row 3, pic. 3)

Сл. 23. Мраморни импост са мотивом крста и акантусом (фото албум, страна 9, ред 3, сл. 3)



The basilica has a large semi-circular apse on the east side. It has a 7.60 m wide and 4.10 m deep opening. The new geodetic survey made it clear that the building is not deformed at its eastern end, as shown in the old published plan (Fig. 1)³¹. In fact, the apse is in the middle of the eastern wall, which is straight and of equal thickness from north to south. On the same wall, 2.30 m from the northern end and 2.25 m from the southern end of the apse, there is one entrance each with a width of 1.05 m and 1.06 m, respectively. Both are located in the central part of the transept, on the inside of its colonnades. The northern entrance leads to the rooms adjoining the church on the east side (Fig. 17). They are partially excavated, with several severely damaged walls built on a joint to it, but nothing can be said about their purpose at this stage. The southern entrance was subsequently walled with bricks in the shape of a semi-circular niche (Fig. 18). This fact was revealed during the excavation, and so the old plan shows the recess. Today, as the additional masonry is heavily damaged, the jambs of the original entrance to this area are clearly visible.

In addition to those described so far, the naos of the basilica had at least one other entrance. It is 1 m wide and located on the southern wall, 14.15 m from the southeast corner. The northern wall of the naos is very heavily damaged and has no traces of a symmetrical entrance. A sketch in the journal, however, shows the presence of such an entrance on the same wall, near the northwest corner.³²

The basilica is in a very poor condition. Its walls are slightly better preserved in the southern half of the site, while in the northern half the superstructures are missing in many places. The remaining part of the masonry consists

ктура декорация в провинция Долна Мизия (I – III в. сл. Хр.), Национален археологически институт с музей на Българската академия на науките, Дисертации, том 2, София 2007, 460-461, Кат. № 220.)

³¹ See Note 9.

³² Journal, entry for June 20th 1957. a hand-drawn plan. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 2.

of broken limestone rocks that have only been worked carefully on the front, however the rows are uneven. The interior side of the walls consists of smaller stones. They are bonded by mortar, which is heavily eroded in many places. There is no evidence whether the stone structure was varied vertically with rows of bricks (i.e. *opus mixtum*). The thickness of the walls differ. The outer walls are about 0.85 m thick, the apse wall is 0.80 m, and the thickness of the wall between the naos and the narthex is 0.70 m. The depth of the building's foundations is not known. The relatively thin walls are a sign that the roof was beamed. The journal mentions fragments of brick vaults in the soil heaps in the southern aisle and the narthex. However, as mentioned in connection with the antechamber, they probably are from window or entrance arches. Many broken roof tiles and the odd window pane fragment were found in the heaps.

There is little left of the liturgical arrangement and furnishings of the church, but some features can still be noted. The altar space covered the apse and a rectangular area in the transept in front; dimensions: (north-south) 3.90 m and (east-west) 7.57m. Its boundaries are known because of the layout of the mosaics around. The altar space itself probably used to be covered with marble slabs that have not been preserved. There is no evidence that it used to be elevated above the level of the naos. Almost nothing remains from the altar screen (chancel) except a small fragment from a pillar³³. The column base which is sculptured on the upper broken end of the pillar, suggests that this was a vertical support for a chancel of the so-called 'high' type. It is, however, noteworthy that no other elements of the screen remain. This is odd given the large collection of architectural marble details in the church. It can be assumed that the chancel was made at least partly of another material – wood or even expensive metal (?).

There is a solid synthronon along the apse's inner wall (Fig. 2 and 8). It is about 0.90 m wide, with the ends projecting about 0.50 m in front of the altar conch. The width of the bottom step measures at about 0.32 m. Thus the synthronon could be reconstructed with three steps. Only the projecting ends of the structure were without steps. A trapezoidal platform was built in the middle of the synthronon for a bishop's throne hypothetically with three tapering steps in front. The front of the bottom one is 1.25 m. The upper part of the overall fixture is heavily damaged, and the heights cannot be measured accurately.

The base of the altar table³⁴ was discovered in the space in front of the apse. It was found broken into pieces (Fig. 19). It is not known whether it was in its original place during the excavations, but today it certainly is not. Some parts remain on the ground, others are in the Museum of Mosaics in Devnya, while others still are missing or buried. It is possible to assemble more than half of the base; dimensions – length: 2.29 m, reconstructed width: 1.10 m, thickness: 0.17/0.19 m. It is a rectangular marble slab with a decoratively shaped and ornamented ledge. Six shallow square holes show the places where the table legs used to be. In the middle of the slab, there is a slightly crude circle. It is not known what was mounted there, but perhaps it was another solid support.

³³ Preserved height: 0.39 m. The dimensions of the sides can be reconstructed to 0.37 x 0.42 m.

³⁴ Journal, sketch of the altar table base with notes. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 23.

Unfortunately, there is nothing left of the table legs and top. The altar table deserves attention mainly because of its size and the six columnar legs that bore its top. Such large tables are rare for churches in the Diocese of Thrace, to which Marcianopolis belongs³⁵. The scale, however, should not surprise us, as this was the centre of the church in the Moesia Secunda Province for a long time.

The journal mentions a small spiral column found in the eastern part of the basilica³⁶. However, it has not been preserved, and without the artefact itself or a detailed description, including its dimensions, it is too chancy to claim it was part of the table or of another particular part of the interior.

Nothing of the flooring around of the altar has survived (or has been documented). There is no solid evidence of a ciborium above the mensa sacra. However, its existence cannot be completely ruled out.

The journal mentions that test trenches were dug in front of the altar (perhaps to check if there is a crypt)³⁷. However, no such underground structure has been found or described.

No remnants of a pulpit (ambo) were found in the naos. There are also no marble or stone fragments that could be linked to such a fixture. If, however, there was an actual pulpit, one would expect its place to be marked on the mosaic floor of the central nave. Unfortunately, the records of the mosaics in this part of the church are not good enough to draw definite conclusions.

The basilica's decoration must have been magnificent, but not much has survived. The colonnades were made of marble, with spolia among the details. Most pieces are broken, and it is possible that some of the fragments belong



Fig. 24. The tomb in the southern aisle, its eastern part under the collapsed vault (Photo album, page 9, row 1, pic. 6.)

Сл. 24. Гробница у јужном броду, источни део под срушеним сводом (фото албум, страна 9, ред 1, снимак 6)

³⁵ Another very rare example from the Diocese of Thrace is a table base reused in the wall of the Hagia Sophia Mediaeval church in Bizye (Vize, Turkey) (Y. Ötügen, R. Ousterhout, *Notes on the Monuments of Turkish Thrace*, Anatolian Studies, Vol. 39 (1989), 140, Plate XXXIIIb.).

³⁶ Journal, entry for May 31st 1957. O.p.n.: year 1956, 9.

³⁷ Journal, entry for July 8th 1957. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 6.



Fig. 25. Hypothetical reconstruction No 1: with a gallery, interior (Architect R. Demirova)

Сл. 25. Хипотетичка реконструкција No 1: са галеријом, унутрашњост (арх. Р. Демирова)

to the same architectural details. More than ten marble bases have been discovered – both whole and fragmented. They have varied designs, with most of them taken from earlier buildings in the city. The upper diameters range from 0.35 to 0.40 m. The exception is the large base³⁸ already mentioned above. A number of columns shafts, some of which are ornamented with embossed Latin crosses³⁹, were also discovered. The improvised catalogue in the journal describes ten fragments. Their diameters range from 0.45 m to 0.30 m. There is only one fragment of the shafts of the supposed four large columns⁴⁰. Ten intact or broken column capitals were found. Judging by the sketches in the journal, the album photos and individual artefacts identified in the museums, most of them are of the same type: a late variance of Roman-Corinthian capitals with “medallions” typical for the workshops on the island of Proconnesus in the second half of the 5th and the early 6th century (Fig. 20)⁴¹. Two of the column capitals are definitely spolia from earlier buildings: the great Roman-Corinthian

³⁸ See note 29.

³⁹ Journal, sketches with notes. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 18 – 21.

⁴⁰ See notes 28 and 29.

⁴¹ C. Barsanti, *L'esportazione di marmi dal Proconneso nelle regioni pontiche durante il IV-VI secolo*, Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte, XII, 1989 (1990), 135-138, fig. 59-60 (right).

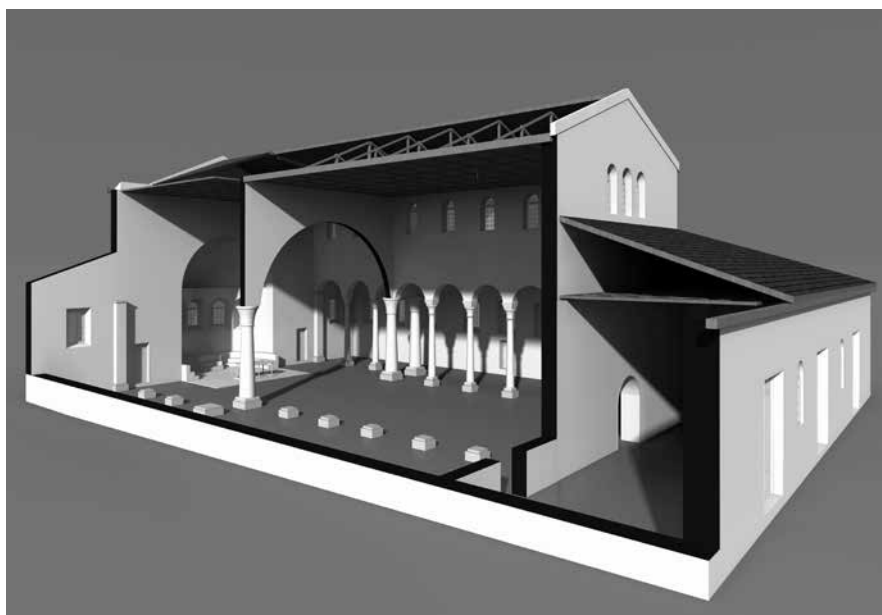


Fig. 26. Hypothetical reconstruction No 2: without a gallery, interior (Architect R. Demirova)

Сл. 26. Хипотетичка реконструкција No 2: без галерије, унутрашњост (арх. Р. Демирова)

capital with an eagle⁴² and a fragment of a Roman-Doric capital from the 2nd or early 3rd century (Fig. 21)⁴³. Only one pilaster capital, which is decorated with acanthus leaves, was discovered (Fig. 22). It can be dated back to the 2nd century and has therefore been reused in the church⁴⁴. Six imposts were also found in the basilica⁴⁵. Two of them are decorated with stylised acanthus leaves and crosses (Fig. 23), and the third with flutings. They can be dated back to the second half of the 5th⁴⁶. The rest of the preserved imposts are without decoration. In terms of size, the imposts vary, but can be successfully combined with the small Roman-Corinthian capitals⁴⁷.

⁴² See note 30.

⁴³ The capital is Roman-Doric, type II A after S. Petrova and closely resembles the Roman-Doric capitals from the Amphitheatre in Marcianopolis (See З. Димитров, *op.cit.*, 93, т. № 82-84.). The lower diameter cannot be measured, and the side of the abacus is 0.40 m.

⁴⁴ The capital is not published. The date was consulted with Zdravko Dimitrov to whom I express my gratitude.

⁴⁵ Journal, sketches with notes. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 11 – 14.

⁴⁶ Cf. Д. И. Димитров, *Кемпфери и йонийски кемпферови капители от ранно-византийската епоха във Варненския археологически музей*, Известия на археологическия институт, 30, София 1967, 43-45, № 2-3, обр. 3.

⁴⁷ Two of the best preserved imposts are decorated with acanthus leaves and crosses. Their lower dimensions are 0.34 x 0.38 m and 0.40 x 0.46 m, and their upper – 0.45 x 0.70 m and 0.55 x 0.76 m. Journal, sketches with notes. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 13 – 14.

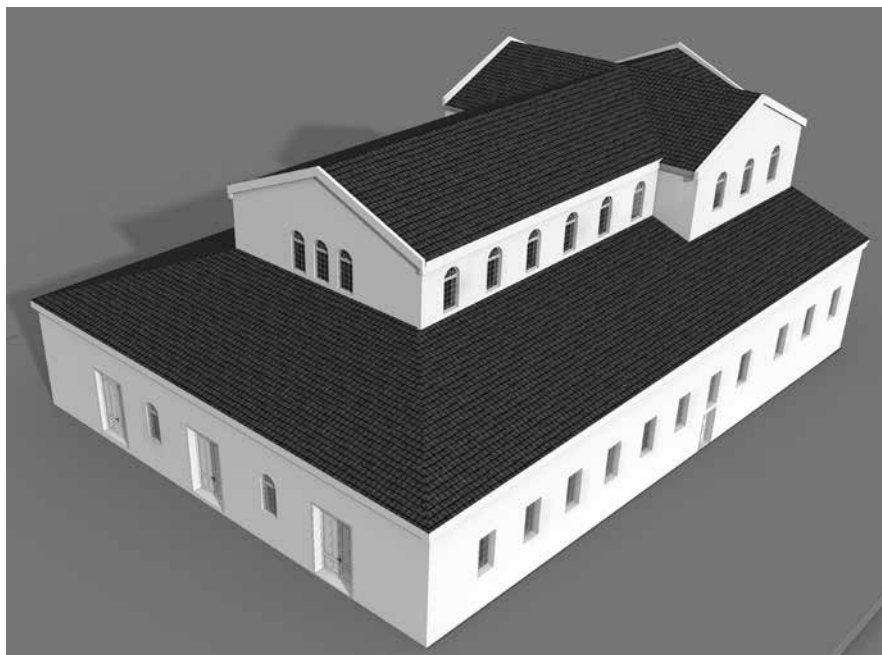


Fig. 27. Hypothetical reconstruction No 2: without a gallery, exterior (Architect R. Demirova)

Сл. 27. Хипотетичка реконструкција No 2: без галерије, спољашњост (арх. Р. Демирова)

An important part of the basilica's decoration is its floor mosaics. They used to cover the transept and the central nave⁴⁸. The journal also contains a brief, vague reference to parts of mosaics in the southern aisle⁴⁹ – it seems to concern fragments that have fallen into the mounds there. It also mentions that small tesserae were discovered in the rooms behind the altar, which may have come from wall mosaics in the church. There were frescoes in the basilica too. Fragments of red-coloured plaster were found in the “central part” (perhaps in the altar?)⁵⁰.

Under the basilica's floor, a rectangular tomb with a brick vault was built in the southeast corner (Fig. 24). It almost completely fills the space between the church's outer walls and the transept's southern colonnade. Its internal dimensions are: (north-south) 2.15 m and (east-west) 1.87 m. The height (perhaps external⁵¹) is 1.58 m. The entrance is on the western side, with an arch in the upper end, and is 0.65 m wide and 1 m tall. It was probably accessed through a

⁴⁸ See V. Popova's paper on mosaics in this volume.

⁴⁹ Journal, entry for June 26th 1957. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 4.

⁵⁰ Journal, entry for May 29th 1956. O.p.n.: year 1956, 8.

⁵¹ The dimensions given here are taken from a drawing in the journal. The room is currently buried in soil and cannot be measured. Journal, sketch with notes. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 27.

shaft in front of the entrance, west of the tomb. Despite the relatively detailed drawing in the journal, there is no mention of whether any archaeological materials were found inside. The tomb's location indicates that it was made for a very important deceased – perhaps an archbishop and/or a ktetor. It is not even out of the question that relics of a saint were kept there. However, this is unlikely because the tomb is not located at a sufficiently central and comfortable place for worship. Interestingly, at the same place in the southeast corner, a grave was built in the Episcopal basilica of the nearby city of Odessos (Varna)⁵². It cannot be ruled out that this was some sort of a regional tradition.

As can be seen from this summary, there is not much information about the Great Basilica in Marcianopolis, and there are many vague and disputable aspects. At this stage, before any new excavations are carried out, the interpretation of the data is quite relative and entails risks. However, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn in support of the site's future study.

An attempt to reconstruct the basilica was made on the basis of the new geodetic survey and the architectural details discovered. In many ways, it is completely hypothetical⁵³, but still a convenient basis for analysis and discussion. Here I will focus on some key issues. It seems at first sight that the marble columns, every last one of them fragmented, are of two sizes: diameter of about 0.40 m and about 0.30 m. In both cases, there are examples of ornamentation in the form of embossed crosses. The initial assumption was that the basilica had a gallery above the lateral aisles and that the narthex and smaller columns were there. But the question of the capitals remained unclear. Many of them are fragmented, but the better preserved ones are approximately the same size and can match both the larger and smaller shafts. A second important issue concerned the position of the imposts, which are also small. As seen in *Reconstruction I* (Fig. 25), the solution proposed for the first level has columns with capitals and architraves above, whereas the one for the gallery has columns with capitals and imposts and an arcade above. Although this reconstruction seems interesting, there is not enough archaeological evidence for it, and the architectural solutions are unnecessarily complicated. Particularly unconvincing is the link between the colonnades and the gallery with the four large columns at the beginning of the transept. Where the stairs to the second level used to be remains a completely open question.

The issue of the different columns may have another solution. In early Christian churches, marble details were rarely made specifically for the building, and were almost never of the same type and size. Therefore, some variation in size should not come as a surprise. In addition, the dimensional comparison was done between fragments of shafts, and it should not be forgotten that the columns probably tapered at the top. Thus, a variation of up to ten centimetres between fragments is not actually sufficient proof that there were two rows of

⁵² A. Minchev, *Early Christian Double Crypt with Reliquaries at Khan Krum Street in Varna (Ancient Odessos)*, in: AMV, IV: Раннохристиянски мъченици и реликви и тяхното почитане на изток и запад, Варна 2006, 229-258, fig. 1.

⁵³ The height of the building and its individual parts has been designated provisionally because there is no specific information available.

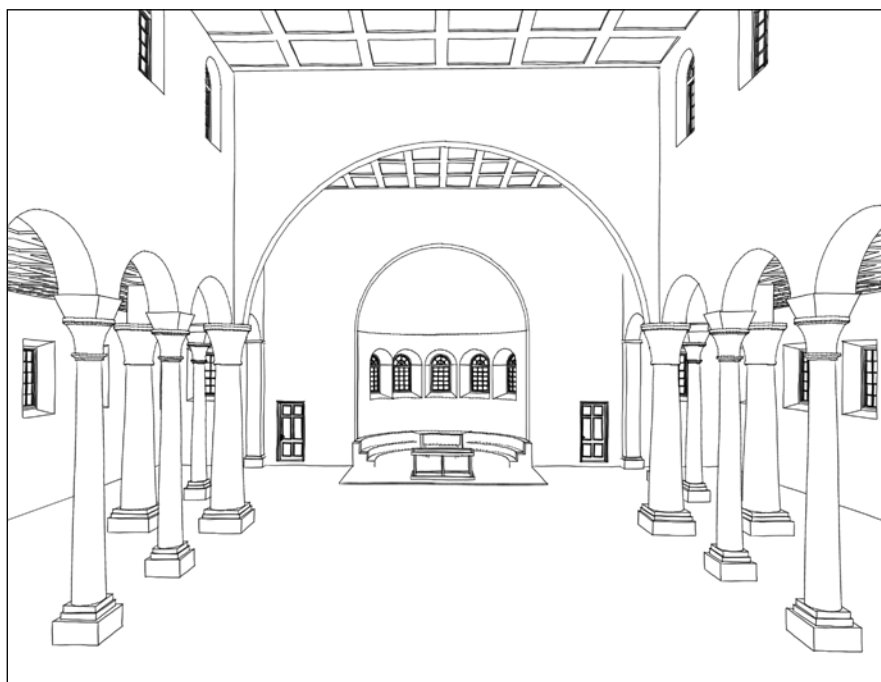


Fig. 28. Hypothetical reconstruction No 2: without a gallery, view from the interior (Architect R. Demirova)

Сл. 28. Хипотетичка реконструкција No 2: без галерије, унутрашњост (арх. Р. Демирова)

columns. *Reconstruction 2* reflects a more modest but more realistic architectural solution: with no gallery (Fig. 26 and 27). Accordingly, there are capitals and imposts above the columns and an arcade above them.

Another interesting question concerns the four large columns at the beginning of the transept, the existence of which, however, is not entirely certain. Of course, one capital and parts of a shaft and a base do remain. It seems logical that such large columns would have stood on top of the four stone pedestals. However would the two pairs of columns have been stable enough for such a key place in the building's structure? Should it not be assumed that there were masonry pillars above the pedestals instead? If this solution is accepted, the question of where the large marble details were used remains.

There are several interesting features in the transept's layout. It can be assumed that there was a large arch between it and the central nave, which stood on the two large inner columns (or pillars)⁵⁴. The pressure from the arch could have been successfully borne by the two pairs of supports, with the outer two also playing the role of peculiar buttresses (Fig. 28). The following observations

⁵⁴ There used to be such arches that separate the transverse nave in some of the famous Early Christian basilicas with a transept, such as St. Peter and St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, etc. (R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian*, 54-59, 87-89.).

can be made regarding the architectural design of the top of the transept; since the ends of the transverse nave are separated by columns, it makes sense to assume that only its middle part was at the height of the basilica's central nave. The ends, in turn, would have been at the level of the lateral aisles. However, whether these ends were under the same sloping roof as the aisles or had a different design is a question that cannot be answered with certainty for now.

At the end of this study, two very important issues should be considered: the construction periods and the dating of the Great Basilica in Marcianopolis. It must immediately be made clear that, without new excavations involving a careful study of the site and its stratigraphic layers, and the collection and analysis of coins, pottery and other materials, all observations and conclusions are only preliminary.

According to G. Toncheva, the church was built in three periods. In the first one, it had one nave, it then became a three-aisled basilica, and finally regressed to a one-nave structure. This statement is made in passing in a popular science brochure, without any substantiation⁵⁵. This opinion, albeit in a reduced and slightly modified form, has been co-opted into other authors' publications, which mention two construction periods: in the 4th and the 6th century respectively. In the third quarter of the 4th century, a one-nave church was built, which was extended to a three-aisled basilica during the reign of Justinian I⁵⁶. N. Chaneva-Dechevska introduces a new theory, according to which the building was a simple three-nave basilica during the first period in the 4th century, and later, during the 6th century, a transept and part of the mosaics were added. It should be noted that this opinion is also not supported by facts⁵⁷.

Interestingly, the journal contains no reliable information describing the remnants of an earlier one-nave church and its reconstructions. The single reference to an "earlier mosaic" is without a clear context, and given the numerous ambiguities in the notes, it should be left open to questioning⁵⁸. The building itself, as far as it can be judged on the basis of the new survey and the remaining records, seems to have been built in one period as a three-aisles basilica with a transept. If there were any modifications, they were minor (for example, the walling of one of the eastern entrances) or concerned the church's upper parts. According to V. Popova, the mosaic decoration of the central nave and the transept was also implemented as a single project and does not bear any signs of major reconstruction of the building⁵⁹. Keeping in mind the limited information

⁵⁵ Г. Тончева, *Марцианопол/Marcianopolis*, 14-15.

⁵⁶ A. Angelov states that according to the excavators, in the third quarter of the 4th century, a one-nave church was built, which was extended to a three-aisles basilica during the reign of Justinian I (A. Ангелов, *Марцианопол. История*, 46; *Християнството*, 113.). A. Minchev and V. Popova use the same periodization but without going into detail about the architectural transformation of the building (A. Minčev, *op.cit.*, 299-300. R. Pillinger, A. Lirsch, V. Popova (Hg.), *op.cit.* (Textband), 67.).

⁵⁷ Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *op.cit.*, 183-184.

⁵⁸ Journal, entry for June 31st 1957. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 5.

⁵⁹ This opinion was expressed in a private conversation during the preparation of the current paper.

about the site we have today, it should, however, not be ruled out that there are remnants of an earlier church under the basilica – perhaps discovered in the above mentioned test trenches⁶⁰ but not noted in the records.

At this stage, the Great Basilica's dating is a serious problem. The discoverers note the presence of some materials that point to a date. An Arcadius (395-408) coin was found at the western end of the northern aisle⁶¹. "15 m from the altar" and at a depth of 0.8m (probably from the then ground level), a Justinian I (527-565) coin was found.⁶² The altar space contained "Roman and Early Byzantine pottery"⁶³. Elsewhere, it is said that 6th century pottery was found in the same place and "Roman pottery" in the narthex⁶⁴. A pear-shaped ceramic lamp with radial embossed lines on the shoulders, which can be dated back to the 6th or early 7th century, was also found in the narthex⁶⁵. In the rooms adjoining the basilica's eastern wall, a large number of pottery items and other materials were found, but there are no detailed notes on them⁶⁶.

Another source for the dating is the marble details, in particular the already described Roman-Corinthian capitals with "medallions" and the imposts with acanthus leaves and crosses.⁶⁷

Unfortunately, no surviving parts of liturgical furniture can be dated with certainty, with one exception: the above mentioned pillar from the altar screen. The type of the high chancel is relatively late (late 5th and mostly 6th century) and typical for Constantinople and the regions under its influence⁶⁸. However, this can't help much for the dating of the church as the altar screen easily could be repaired years after the construction of the building. Another distinctive feature of the interior is the synthronon. It is not of the multistep Constantinopolitan type, so typical of the 6th century, but it is still a high structure with three steps and a platform for the cathedra, and it should rather be linked to that century or possibly the second half of the 5th century, but not earlier⁶⁹.

Dating according to the architectural plan carries too much risk. Basilicas with transepts appeared as early as the 4th century (for example, St. Peter and St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome), and although they did not spread equally through different parts of the Christian world, they continued to be built

⁶⁰ The journal mentions test trenches, but provides no further specific information. See Note 37.

⁶¹ Journal, entry for June 20th 1957: note on a plan of the basilica. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 2.

⁶² Journal, entry for June 18st 1957, 1; entry for June 20th 1957: note on a plan of the basilica. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 2.

⁶³ Journal, entry for June 31st 1957. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 5.

⁶⁴ Journal, entry for July 8th 1957. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 6; entry for July 16th 1957. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 9.

⁶⁵ Г. Кузманов, *Антични лампи*. София: Издателство на Българската академия на науките 1992, 43. The artifact is known only from a sketch in the journal (entry for July 10th 1957. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 8.) and therefore the interpretation is uncertain.

⁶⁶ Journal, entry for May 29th 1958. O.p.n.: year 1957 and 1958, 30.

⁶⁷ See above.

⁶⁸ J.-P. Sodini, *op.cit.*, 442, 472, 448.

⁶⁹ J.-P. Sodini, *op.cit.*, 442.

later too⁷⁰. The famous St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki, for example, is from the second half of the 5th century. This architectural type was not popular in Constantinople and the Diocese of Thrace⁷¹. The churches with a transept closest to Marcianopolis are the Great Basilica of Istria (late 5th – first half of the 6th century)⁷² and the basilica with a transept in Tropaeum Traiani (first half of the 6th century)⁷³. However, both have a reduced variant of the cross transept, but unlike Devnya, the transverse naves there extend beyond the northern and southern facades. There is a similar structural design in the Lyutibrod Basilica, which is outside but not far from the Diocese of Thrace. During the second construction period, the building was endowed with a transept whose structure is very similar to that in Devnya. There is an extension of the space between the colonnades in the transverse nave in the Lyutibrod Basilica, but its ends do not protrude beyond the boundary of the building. The construction period dates back to the 6th century. It should also be noted that there is a three-step synthronon in the church's apse⁷⁴. An interesting parallel can be found in the newly excavated basilica in Borovets area near Varna, dating back to the 6th century. There, the central nave's eastern end was expanded by narrowing the stylobates. This reconstruction is controversial, but it is probably an overly reduced variant of the transept type from Marcianopolis and Lyutibrod⁷⁵.

The information and parallels presented here are not enough for precise dating but point to a possible period of construction of the Great Basilica in Marcianopolis that is relatively later than those proposed so far: late 5th or early 6th century. Here is the place to go over the mosaics in the basilica once more. According to V. Popova⁷⁶, they date back to the second half of the 4th century, probably the third quarter, before the Gothic invasion of 367-368. However, this date is too early compared to all other available archaeological data about the building. This raises many further questions. For example, if the basilica with mosaics was built in the 4th century, how did it survive the Gothic invasion and later the Huns in the mid-5th century? There are no records of traces of fire,

⁷⁰ Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *op.cit.*, 90-94.

⁷¹ Ibid. *loc.cit.*

⁷² A. Suceveanu, *Histria, vol. XIII: La basilique épiscopale*, București 2007, 29-30.

⁷³ I. Barnea, *Christian Art in Romania, vol. 1: 3rd – 6th Centuries*, Bucharest 1979, 158. Virgil Lungu proposes a little bit earlier date: late 5th or 6th century (V. Lungu, *Creștinismul Scythia-Minor în contextual vest-pontic*, Sibiu-Constanța 2000, 73.).

⁷⁴ Г. Джингов, С. Машов, *Археологически проучвания край Лютиброд*, Врачански окръг, Известия на музеите в Северозападна България, 10, 1985, 43-63. Н. Чанева-Дечевска, *op.cit.*, 217-219, фиг. 42а.

⁷⁵ *Боровец край Варна (Одесос) (Предварително съобщение)*, в: The Basilica of St. Sophia during the transition from Paganism to Christianity, Serdica-Sredets-Sofia vol. VII, Sofia: Faber 2018, 130-154.

А. Минчев, В. Тенекеджиев, *Разкопки на раннохристиянската църква в м. Боровец край град Варна*, Археологически открития и разкопки през 2014 г., София 2015, 275-278.

⁷⁶ See R. Pillinger, A. Lirsch, V. Popova (Hg.), *op.cit.*, (Textband), 70; and the paper in this volume. V. Popova was followed by other authors like A. Minchev (A. Minchev, *op.cit.*, 300).

destruction or major architectural changes in the building. Of course, it can, for example, be assumed that the top of the basilica was renovated and some of the later marble pieces were added in the late 5th or early 6th century, without affecting the basic architectural design of the building. All conclusions made here are preliminary and subject to discussion and in general, the construction history of the Great Basilica and its dating are far from being definitively clarified.

Lastly, I should point out that this paper is not so much about providing answers and presenting conclusions than it is about outlining existing scientific problems and asking the right questions. In this regard, it reflects a preliminary stage in the study of the Great Basilica in Marcianopolis. An important part of this study is the publication for the first time of a significantly more precise plan of the building. The next logical step would be to organise systematic archaeological excavations at the site and the space around it – a complex and difficult issue that remains for the future.

Васил Тенекеџиев

(Регионални историјски музеј у Варни)

ЈОШ ЈЕДАН УВИД У ВЕЛИКУ БАЗИЛИКУ У МАРЦИАНОПОЛИСУ: ПРОБЛЕМИ
КОНСТРУКЦИЈЕ И ДАТОВАЊА

Велика базилика у Марцианополису (Девниа, Бугарска) истраживана је у периоду од 1956 – 1958.

Упркос својој недвосмисленој важности, изузев неколико бележака у научним радовима и популарним публикацијама, локалитет је остао такоређи непознат широј научној јавности. Једино је доступан генерални план локалитета који је у извесним сегментима недовољно прецизан. Недавно су нова испитивања спроведена, локалитет је фотографисан, а ангажован је и инжењер геодезије како би се одредиле тачне координате цркве и установио егзактан план.

Изузетно велики број података налази се у архиву фотографија локалитета. То представља извор првог реда за боље проучавање поменуте базилике. На основу свега наведеног могуће је донети неколико закључака у вези са архитектонским концептом. Студију подних мозаика спровела је Вања Попова у посебном раду у овом зборнику радова. Анализа мраморних фрагмената показала је да јереч о грађевини из 5. или 6. века. Ипак, то интригантно питање биће разрешено евентуално по обављеним детаљним археолошким рекогносцирањима овог локалитета.