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BYZANTINE CHURCHES OF NICAEA

Abstrach: This paper aims at shedding light on the new discoveries made in Iznik / Nicaea. New Byzantine churches were added to the already existing ones such as the ones within Lefke and Istanbul Gates. Infrastructural work contributed to our knowledge with another church next to the current museum building, most probably the monastery of Kerameon. A sunken church, claimed to be dedicated to Hagios Neophytos and a lintel with the name of the church of Virgin Mary and an hagiaσμα attached to that are the new additions to the list.

Keywords: Nicaea, Bithynia, Laskarids.

Foundation of Nicaea

Nicaea was founded by Antigonos Monophtalmos around 322-311 B.C.E. as Antigonía.¹ There is an opinion suggesting that there was a city at the same site with the name of Attaea since 500 B.C.E.² or Helikore since early 4th century B.C.E.³ both of them lack tangible evidence. Upon defeat of Antigonos by Lysimachos in 301 B.C.E. it was renamed as Nicaea probably to honour the wife of the latter.⁴ It was bequeathed by the last Bityhian king Nikomedes IV to Rome in 74 B.C.E.⁵ Although Nicaea, together with Nicomedia, was given the title of Neokoros in 29 B.C.E.⁶ she was stripped off of it at the end of 3rd century A.C.E.⁷

Not much from the Roman past of the city other than the theatre and archways, later turned into city gates, survived. Until the 1st Ecumenical Council

¹ Strabonos, *Geografikon*, tr. Horace Leonard Jones, London 1961, XII - 4. 6-7.

² W. C. Holt, *The walls of Nicaea*, The Celator, Vol. 24 no. 4 (April 2010), 6.

³ R. Merkelbach, *Nikaia in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Düsseldorf 1987, 10.

⁴ G. M. Cohen, *The marriage of Lysimachus and Nicaea*, Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte, Band 22 heft 2 (1973), 354-356.

⁵ Appianus, tr. Horace White, *The Roman history of Appian of Alexandria*, London 1899, I-XIII.

⁶ S. Mitchell, *Anatolia Land, men and gods in Asia Minor*, vol I, New York 1995, 212.

⁷ B. Burrell, *Neokoroi Greek cities and Roman emperors*, Boston 2004, 164-165.



Fig. 1 Marble slabs on the northern section of the city walls. Photo by Author

Сл. 1 Из личне
фотодокументације
аутора

meeting Nicaea was not a centre of attraction. Name of the city was mentioned due to earthquakes of 6th and 11th centuries in the sources. Its second Golden period was during the Laskarid dynasty of 13th century.

Nicaea has one of the best preserved city walls from the Medieval Age. On the city walls there are 4 major gates, each facing cardinal directions.

Ecumenical Councils and their meeting places

Constantine I the Great summoned clergy members to attend a church council, later to be known as the First Ecumenical Council in 325. Number of clergy members participated at the council vary. There is a suggestion of 250⁸ 300⁹. Traditionally this number is 318 which is based on the number of the servants of prophet Abraham.¹⁰ It is interesting to note, except for the representative of the Pope Hosius of Spain, all the participants were from the Eastern provinces.¹¹

Meeting took place during summer months of 325. The meeting site is also of importance. An 8th century English pilgrim, Willibaldus, mentions similarities between the church of Ascension in Mount of Olives and meeting place in Nicaea. Since the former was a round structure with a skylight in the middle it was thought the same is valid for Nicaea.¹²

⁸ A. Cameron-S. G. Hall, *Eusebius Life of Constantine*, Oxford 1999, III-8.

⁹ C. Mango, *The meeting place of the First ecumenical council and the church of the Holy Fathers*, Iznik throughout history, İstanbul 2003, 305.

¹⁰ M. Edwards, *The first Council of Nicaea*, The Cambridge History of Christianity origins to Constantine, eds. Margaret M. Mitchell ve Frances M. Young, Cambridge 2008, 558.

¹¹ P. Schaff, *The creeds of christianity with a history and critical notes*, New York 1919, vol. I, 40.

¹² C. Mango, *The Meeting Place of the First Ecumenical Council and the Church of the Holy Fathers at Nicaea*, Deltion tes Xhristianikes Arhaiologikes etaireias, 26 (2005), 28.

As Willibaldus compared two structures it is not clear whether he meant their architecture or paintings in them. Since his motives were different than ours, sometimes he omits to mention a very important information. For instance, he tells about the tombs of people of importance in Constantinople without mentioning in which building they were interred.¹³

The meeting place was mentioned as the innermost and the biggest structure of the palace by Eusebius, who attended the council himself.¹⁴ He also mentions that there were seats on both sides.¹⁵ “Both sides” maybe taken as an indication of an oblong building, namely a basilica. Information provided by the locals to Willibaldus approximately 400 years after the Ecumenical Council meeting could have been misleading. One of the main complaints of visitors to the cities such as Nicaea or Constantinople was exaggerated stories, or made up myths told by the locals.

Another problem arises concerning the site of the Palace. It is apparent that there must have been a palace since its foundations. Nicaea suffered in the earthquake of 362 and entirely levelled in 368¹⁶ as a result of which palace must have been destroyed, at least partially. Sections of the palace were destroyed in 6th century due to an earthquake and was restored by the order of Justinian I.¹⁷

As early as 2010 I pointed a possible location starting from the northern gate (Istanbul kapı) towards west, ending at the lake.¹⁸ The reason for this is, spolia used in this section of the city walls. It is apparent that there was a large luxurious building with marble revetments. (**fig. 1**) Those marble sheets were used on the repair works of the northern city walls. In particular around the tower 71, where Artabasdos inscription is located.

Marble used as spolia was observed by Charles Fellows in 19th century, according to whom, they must have come from a tremendous temple.¹⁹ Palaces of Diocletian facing sea were found in Nicomedia and Split. A later example is found in Constantinople, known as Bukoleon palace. Therefore it is not surprising to have a palace with the view of the lake in the western side of the city between Istanbul Gate and Lake Gate. It is important to note that despite the structures of the palace perished, same site was most probably used as residential ground for the Ottoman governor in 1830’s, known as Mutesellim Köşkü.²⁰ Underwater researches would shed light on the structures of the palace.

¹³ J. P. A. Van der Vin, *Travellers to Greece and Constantinople*, İstanbul 1980, 261.

¹⁴ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini - Life of Constantine*, çev. Averil Cameron ve Stuart G. Hall, Oxford 1998, III-10.

¹⁵ *ibidem*.

¹⁶ S. Şahin, *Antik kaynaklar ışığında tarihte Bithynia depremleri*, (Earthquakes in Bithynia from ancient sources) 1. Uluslararası İzmir / Nikaia sempozyumu bildirileri, İzmir 2000, 9.

¹⁷ Procopios Kaisareos, *Peri ktismaton-The buildings*, tr. Glanville Downey, London-Cambridge 1954, V. iii.

¹⁸ Editors Mustafa Şahin- İ. Hakan Mert, *Uluslararası İzmir 1. Konsil senato Sarayı’nın lokalizasyonu çalıştay bildirileri*, Bursa 2011, 14-18.

¹⁹ C. Fellows, *Travels and researches in Asia Minor more particularly in the province of Lycia*, London 1852, 82.

²⁰ C. Texier, *Description de L’Asie Mineure*, 1.partie, Paris 1839, Pl. VI.



Fig. 2 Hagia Sophia from the East as of 2019. Photo by author

Сл. 2 Из личне фотодокументације аутора



Fig. 3 Bema, altar table supports and synthronon. Photo by author.

Сл. 3 Из личне фотодокументације аутора

The Second Ecumenical Council was held at the church of 12 Apostles in Constantinople in 786 but upon increasing problems it was moved to Nicaea. Sessions were held in Hagia Sophia of Nicaea between 24 September and 13 October 787.²¹ Number of the participating clergy vary between 330 and 367.²² But most probably their number was 343.²³

Byzantine churches

1- Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia)

It is located at the intersection of cardo and decumanus in the middle of the city. Since the Ottoman conquest in 1331 it was used as a mosque at intervals. At present it functions as a mosque.

Because of the similarities with several buildings from the second half of 5th century it was suggested to be of the same date for the first phase of con-

²¹ G. Ostrogorsky, *Bizans devleti tarihi*, (History of the Byzantine State) tr. Fikret Işıltan, Ankara 2011, 7th print, 165-166.

²² A. Giakalis, *Images of the Divine*, Leiden-Boston 2005, 15-16.

²³ J. Darrouzès, *Listes épiscopales du concile de Nicée (787)*, *Revue des études byzantines* 33 (1975), 68.

struction.²⁴ It is clear that simply because of similarities in plan, a date cannot be suggested. Besides, same plan type of churches are still being built in the Orthodox world. Currently the building is a tripartite structure with two side aisles, naos and a narthex. It is in the form a basilica. **(Fig. 2)** In 1935 an excavation revealed the opus sectile floor mosaics in the bema and synthronon.²⁵ **(fig. 3)** It was suggested that there were wall mosaics which were visible in 1914.²⁶ During early 1940's it was informed that the floor mosaics were not limited to apse area.²⁷ With the discovery of synthronon, the first phase of the construction was safely suggested to be from the 5-6th centuries, since the use of synthronon in the form of multi layered steps only occur during these centuries.²⁸ Excavations held by the local museum in 1955 revealed two circular dedicatory inscriptions underneath one of the windowsills in the southern facade of the church. These inscriptions were dated to 6th century.²⁹ Large stone blocks on the lower parts of the walls of Ayasofya must have been taken from the ruined Roman buildings. Four construction phases of Ayasofya, with the earliest one in 5th-6th centuries was suggested.³⁰ After an earthquake in 6th century most of the monuments of the city were restored by the order of Justinian I. It is interesting to note that Procopius mentions this church as "constructed".³¹ Basing on this, either there was no predecessor of Ayasofya or if there was any, it was levelled entirely so that a new church was erected. In the following centuries the building underwent at least three major restorations. First one must have been after the earthquake of 1065. It is during the second half of 11th century Byzantine empire had dire times. In Nicaea the earthquake, followed by the Crusaders and finally Seldjuk Turks worsened their situation.

During these restorations a parekklesion to the south was added. Parekklesia are known to have existed as early as 4th-5th centuries.³² They have become widespread during the Middle Byzantine period,³³ especially because of the *Haristike* system. At the end of 11th century nearly all of the monasteries

²⁴ U. Peschlow, *Nicaea, The archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia*, ed. Philip Niewöhner, Oxford 2017, 209.

²⁵ A. M. Schneider, *Die römischen und byzantinischen Denkmäler von Iznik – Nicaea*, Berlin 1943, 15.

²⁶ H. Papadopoulou, H. Nikaia, *Ellenikos filologikos syllogos*, 1910-1911 issue (1914), 141-142.

²⁷ Anonim, *Iznik*, Bursa Halkevi yayını 11, İstanbul 1943, 21.

²⁸ A. M. Schneider, *op.cit.*, 14.

²⁹ K. Weitzmann, I. Ševčenko, *The Moses cross at Mount Sinai*, Dumbarton Oaks Papers 17(1963), 394.

³⁰ N. Brunov, *L'Église de Sainte Sophie a Nicée*, *Échos d'Orient* 24 (1925), 478-480.

³¹ Procopios Kaisareos, *Peri ktismaton-The buildings*, tr. Glanville Downey, London-Cambridge 1954, V. iii.

³² M. J. Johnson, *Parekklesion*, The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium vol. 2, eds. A. P. Kazhdan-A. Cutler- T. E. Gregory, N. P. Ševčenko, New York- Oxford 1991, 1587.

³³ H. Çetinkaya, *İstanbul'da Orta Bizans Dini Mimarisi*, (Middle Byzantine Era religious architecture in Istanbul) Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation at Istanbul University Institute of Social Sciences, Department of History of Art, İstanbul 2003, 245.



Fig. 4 Opus sectile pavement in the parekklesion. Photo by Ü. Melda Ermiş, (Evaluation of architectural activities in and around Iznik during Byzantine period) Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation at Istanbul University Institute of Social Sciences, Department of History of Art, Istanbul 2009.

Сл. 4 У. М. Ермиш,
Евалуација архитектонских
активности недалеко Никеје
током византијског периода)
необјављена докторска
дисертација Истанбул
Универзитета, Одељење
за историју уметности,
Истанбул 2009.

were part of this system.³⁴ Although parekklesion of Ayasofya was suggested to be from the 6th century³⁵ it is nearly impossible. 6th century was one of the strongest periods of the Byzantine empire, besides emperor Justinian I poured money to restore the city. As he was actively involved, it is not logical to seek for donors to provide funds for the restoration of Ayasofya in return for the privilege to be buried in the parekklesion built for the purpose. (**fig. 4**) On the other hand it makes more sense to have it dated to 11th century, when financial support was badly needed. Another suggestion for parekklesion is based on the opus sectile pavements of it. This technique was used as wall revetments first, later to be applied to the floor and widely used between 4th-6th centuries.³⁶ For their use in this parekklesion several dates have been suggested. According to the first one they were made in 5th-6th centuries and re-used after 1065 restorations.³⁷

According to another view, patterns used in opus sectile first appeared around 1000 and widely used between 11th-14th centuries.³⁸

One should bear in mind that not only in the parekklesion but also at the western entrance of the church there is opus sectile pavements. (**fig. 5**) These are not the only examples from Nicaea. There are several others in the church of Koimesis, church near Yenişehir Gate, church near Istanbul Gate and finally church behind the current museum building. This may indicate Laskarid involvement, hence a date of 13th century.

³⁴ J. P. Thomas, *Private religious foundations in the Byzantine empire*, Washington D.C. 1987, 157-167.

³⁵ S. Möllers, *Die Hagia Sophia in Iznik/Nikaia*, Alfter 1994, 62.

³⁶ R. E. Kolarik, *Opus sectile*, The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium vol. 2, eds. A. P. Kazhdan-A. Cutler- T. E. Gregory, N. P. Ševčenko, New York- Oxford 1991, 1529-1530.

³⁷ A. G. Guidobaldi, *L'opus sectile pavimentale in area bizantina*, Atti del colloquio dell'Associazione Italiana per lo studio e la conservazione del mosaico, I, Ravenna 1994, 650.

³⁸ S. Eyice, *Two mosaic pavements from Bithynia*, Dumbarton Oaks papers, 17 (1963), 382-383.

Fig. 5 Opus sectile pavement at the western entrance. Photo by author

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In a recent study, a date, convincingly, was suggested for the opus sectile at the western entrance of the naos. Most important part of this study was “fleur de lys”. This emblem was considered to be due to Western mercenaries in Laskarid army but it is apparently the trade mark of the Laskarids. Fleur de lys was not only used in opus sectile but on the coins minted as well. A date of first half of 14th century was suggested basing on the pattern.³⁹

Inside Ayasofya there are fragments of frescoes. These are limited to three areas: On the lateral apses or pastophoria, by the arches of windows on the northern and southern walls and half buried arcosolium type of burial in the northwestern wall. Among these, frescoes in the northeastern apse are damaged due to smoke and hardly visible, whereas southeastern ones can still be seen. Several dates for these frescoes such as between 1204-1263⁴⁰, second quarter of the 13th century⁴¹ and 13th-14th century⁴² were suggested.

During the restorations of 2007-2009 geometrical patterned frescoes were discovered by the arches of windows on northern and southern walls of Ayasofya. Basing on the geometrical patterns 740-787 dates were suggested for them.⁴³

At the northwestern wall of the church there is a half buried arcosolium type of a burial. Inside the arch is the depiction of a Deesis scene. On the side

³⁹ C. Pinatsi, *New observations on the pavement of the church of Hagia Sophia in Nicaea*, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 99/1 (2006), 126.

⁴⁰ S. Möllers, *Die Hagia Sophia in Iznik/Nikaia*, *Alfter* 1994, 42-46.

⁴¹ M. Restle, *Byzantine wall painting in Asia Minor*, Text I, Shannon 1969, 85.

⁴² M. Alpatoff, *Les fresques de Saint Sophie de Nicée*, *Échos d'Orient* 25 (1926), 42.

⁴³ Ü. M. Ermiş, *Iznik Ayasofyası'nın son restorasyon çalışmasında açığa çıkarılan freskoları*, (Frescoes uncovered during the recent restorations at Iznik Ayasofya) *Uluslararası katılımlı XV. Ortaçağ ve Türk dönemi kazıları ve Sanat Tarihi araştırmaları sempozyumu*, eds. Zeliha Demirel Gökalp - Nilgün Çöl - Zeynep Ertuğrul - Selda Alp - Hasan Yılmazba-şar, Eskişehir 2011, 353.



Fig. 6 Koimesis church in 1920's. Photo by Theodor Schmit

Сл. 6 Теодор Шмит, Црква Успења у Никеји, Берлин - Лапциг 1927.

walls of the arch are two men with haloes around their heads. Since there is no inscription and their faces are hardly visible they cannot be identified. A date of 13th century was suggested for this fresco group.⁴⁴

In 1081 Nicaea fell to Seldjuk Turks and it became the First Turkish capital in Anatolia.⁴⁵

There is no record indicating that Ayasofya was converted into a mosque during this period. In 1097 1st Crusaders laid siege on the city but it was Byzantine empire, through secret negotiations with Turks, captured it.⁴⁶ In 1331 when Nicaea was captured by the Ottomans, sultan Orhan converted Ayasofya into a mosque.⁴⁷

2- Koimesis monastery-The Dormition church

Together with Ayasofya it was one of the two longest lasting Byzantine churches standing. It was identified thanks to monograms and inscriptions used on the mosaics. For the first time its plan was published in 1676 by Covell.⁴⁸ There are several dates suggested for its construction varying between 6th to 9th centuries. Inscriptions from the building, mosaics or architectural details used for dating the structure.

⁴⁴ M. Restle, *Istanbul, Bursa, Edirne, Iznik: Baudenkmäler und Museen*, Stuttgart, 1976, 530.

⁴⁵ J. Laurent, *Rum (Anadolu) sultanlığının menşei ve Bizans*, çev. Yaşar Yücel, Belleten cilt LII sayı 202 (Nisan 1988), 226.

⁴⁶ P. Frankopan, *The First Crusade Call from the East*, Cambridge 2012, 140-142.

⁴⁷ K. Otto-Dorn, *Das Islamische Iznik*, Stuttgart 1941, 10.

⁴⁸ J. Covell, *Voyages en Turquie 1675-1677*, tr. Jean-Pierre Grégoire, Paris 1998, 300-302.

Existence of synthronon indicates a possible date of construction for 5th-6th centuries.⁴⁹ A pre-iconoclastic dated suggested⁵⁰ becomes void due to synthronon. Monograms and inscriptions from the building indicate that the founder was a certain monk named Hyakinthos and the complex was restored by Naukratios. Church was built in the form of atrophied Greek cross, this type of construction among Turkish Byzantinists is known as ciborium type. (**fig. 6**)

Pre-destruction photographs are the main source of information for construction technique and its decoration. Despite having numerous number of photographs of the wall mosaics there are none of the floor pavements. Opus sectile technique with interlocked patterns are visible from a rare drawing. Since this pattern only occur starting from 11th century,⁵¹ it may indicate a restoration after 1065 earthquake. On the other hand, since opus sectile with interlocked pattern was in use in the following centuries as well, a probable 13th century Laskarid restoration should also be taken into consideration.

Mosaics with the depiction of Angels, Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ indicate a post iconoclastic date. Mosaics of Virgin Mary in the conch of apse has three phases. Pre-iconoclastic, iconoclastic (traces of the cross are visible on the photos) and post-iconoclastic.⁵²

Several sarcophagi were reported within the building. Since one of them had the name of Komnenos it was thought to belong to that dynasty.⁵³ But, since founder of the Lascarids dynasty, namely Theodoros I Laskaris, was son-in-law of emperor Alexios Komnenos Angelos III, it was common to use a well reputed family name such as Komnenoi together with their own. An arcossolium type of burial in the southwestern part of the church was suggested to belong to a certain Nikephoros, who had the monastic complex restored after the earthquake of 1065.⁵⁴ According to tradition tomb of Hagios Neophytos was located in the northern part of the narthex.⁵⁵

Monastic complex was in ruins approximately for 200 years and repaired in 1833.⁵⁶

The church of the monastic complex was destroyed by the people of Iznik as a retaliation of destruction of mosques by the occupying Greek army in 1922. (**fig. 7**)

Approximately 50 metres away from the Dormition church is a circular structure known as Böcek Ayazma (Hagiasma with insects). (**fig. 8**) A 6th cen-

⁴⁹ T. Schmit, *Die Koimesis-kirche von Nikaia*, Berlin-Leipzig 1927, 9.

⁵⁰ U. Peschlow, *Neue Beobachtungen zur Architektur und Ausstattung der Koimesis-kirche in Iznik*, *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 22 (1972), 146.

⁵¹ S. Eyice, *Two mosaic pavements from Bithynia*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 17 (1963), 383.

⁵² P. A. Underwood, *The evidence of restorations in the Sanctuary mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicaea*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959), 240.

⁵³ J. Covel, *Voyages en Turquie 1675-1677*, tr. Jean-Pierre Grégoire, Paris 1998, 304.

⁵⁴ U. Peschlow, *The churches of Nicaea/Iznik*, *Iznik throughout history*, İstanbul 2003, 214.

⁵⁵ O. Wulff, *Die Koimesiskirche in Nicäa und ihre Mosaiken*, Strassburg, 1903, 181.

⁵⁶ А.Н. Муравьев (Andrey Nikolayevich Muravyev), *Письма с Востока в 1849-1850 годах* (*Letters from the East 1849-1850*), Sankt Peterburg 1851, 1, 108.



Fig. 7 Koimesis church ruins as of 2019. Photo by author

Сл. 7 Из личне фотодокументације аутора



Fig. 8 Location of Böcek ayazma and Koimesis church. Photo by Sedat Güngördü

Сл. 8 Из личне документације Седат Гундорду

ture date was suggested based on its shape and construction technique which is very similar to the Early christian martyria in Constantinople.⁵⁷ (fig 9) In 1745 it was mentioned to be in use by the Armenian community as a subterranean church.⁵⁸ In the middle of the building there is a source of water surrounded by spolia. On one side of a marble block there is menorah and a passage from the Old Testament. Because of this, a possible use of the building as mikveh pool should be taken into consideration. On the other side of the same marble piece there is the inscription mentioning the repair works of one of the towers on the city walls by Michael III. Menorah inscription is dated to 4th century whereas repair inscription of Michael III is dated to 858.⁵⁹ Another possibility of this building's use is baptistery. But since the main church of the city is Ayasofya,

⁵⁷ A. M. Schneider, *Die römischen und byzantinischen Denkmäler von Iznik - Nikaia*, Berlin 1943, 17.

⁵⁸ R. Pococke, *A description of the East and some other countries*, vol. II part II, London 1745, 122.

⁵⁹ Annie Pralong, *A propos d'un bloc de marbre d'Iznik*, Eupsuhia melanges offerts a Helene Ahrweiler, Paris 2016, 619.



Fig. 9 Böcek ayazma as of 2019. Photo by author

Сл. 9 Из личне фотодокументације аутора

it must have been near that building. Although there are very rare examples in cities such as Ravenna where there are more than one baptistery, the norm is to have the baptistery next to the main church of the city.

For its later use an apse to the east was added at an uncertain date. Other than the apse there are irregularly placed three niches, whose function is unclear.

I am in the opinion of a martyrium for its original function and an early date as suggested above.

3- Church near Yenişehir Kapı (Gate)

This church is located approximately 200 metres from the Yenişehir Kapı on the main street named Atatürk caddesi (street). Despite its partial discovery in 1930⁶⁰, it was unearthed during the excavations intending to discover Turkish kilns in 1964.⁶¹ (fig. 10) Approximate size of the building is 20 x 23 metres and it was suggested to have two building phases.⁶² It is in the same form as the Dormition church, namely atrophied Greek cross or ciborion plan. A date of the end of 11th and the beginning of the 13th century was suggested.⁶³

⁶⁰ A. M. Schneider, *Die römischen und byzantinischen Denkmäler von Iznik – Nikaia*, Berlin 1943, 18.

⁶¹ S. Eyice, *Die Byzantinische kirche in der Nahe des Yenişehir – Tores zu Iznik (=Nikaia) (Kirche C)*, Materialia Turcica Band 7/8 1981/1982, Bochum 1983, 153.

⁶² U. Peschlow, *Die Kirche am Yenişehir kapı in Iznik /Nikaia*, Bizans ve çevre kültürler Prof. Dr. S. Yıldız Ötügen'e Armağan, eds. Sema Doğan – Mine Kadiroğlu, İstanbul 2010, 270-273.

⁶³ S. Eyice, *op.cit.*, 161.



Fig. 10 Personal archive of H. Çetinkaya

Сл. 10 Из личне фотодокументације аутора

But a multi layered synthronon indicates an early date for its first construction. Two different mural techniques can be observed in the ruins of the church. One of them is suggested from the first half of the 13th century.⁶⁴ Most probably it was constructed in 5th-6th centuries and restored after the earthquake of 1065 and remodelled during the Laskarids in the 13th century. Dedication of the church is unknown. Two suggestions Hagios Tryphonos⁶⁵ and Hagios Antonios⁶⁶ were made. Since the former one is known to be in the vicinity of the palace this suggestion could be easily eliminated. The latter remains as a possibility.

4- Church near Istanbul Kapı (Gate)

This is one of the churches in the northwestern part of the city. Since its discovery in 1946 it was demolished each year. (**fig. 11**) Currently only one of the side aisles and its apse can be seen. (**fig. 12**) Basing on the photographs and plans made upon its discovery it is understood that this was a so called cross in square church. Basing on its plan a possible look of the church was suggested. (**draw. 1**) This term is clearly not appropriate of all of the buildings of the Middle Byzantine period since not all of them were square.

Upon its discovery a suggestion concerning dedication and the church was made. According to this long time omitted idea it was built in 1255/1256 and dedicated to Hagios Tryphonos.⁶⁷ It is known that Theodoros II Laskaris built a school and a church dedicated to Hagios Tryphonos near the palace.

⁶⁴ U. Peschlow, *Nicaea, The archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia*, ed. Philip Niewöhner, Oxford 2017, 214.

⁶⁵ S. Eyice, *Die Byzantinische kirche in der Nahe des Yenişehir – Tores zu Iznik (=Nikaia) (Kirche C)*, Materialia Turcica Band 7/8 1981/1982, Bochum 1983, 161-162.

⁶⁶ C. Foss, *Nicaea: A Byzantine capital and its praises*, Brookline 1996, 108-109.

⁶⁷ J. B. Papadopoulos, *O en Nikaia tes Bithynias naos tou Agiou Tryphonos*, Epeteris tes Hetareias Byzantinon Spoudon 1952, 111-113.

Fig. 11 Ruins of the church near Istanbul Gate as of 1946.

Photo by Ü. Melda ErmişСл. 11 У. М. Ермиш, нав. место



Fig. 12 Church ruins near Istanbul Gate as of 2019. Photo by author

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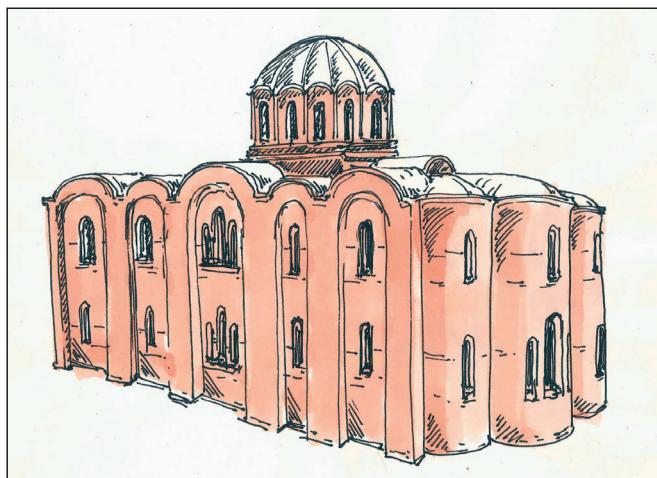


Since location of the palace, as I suggested, is starting from Istanbul gate this location fits for the church. Nearly 45 years after it was suggested, identity of the church was also found probable by another scholar.⁶⁸

Probably an earlier church was at the same location with uncertain dedication much damaged after the 1065 earthquake and was replaced by the current structure. It is interesting to note that a reliquary in Iznik museum is said to have come from the northern part of the city walls.⁶⁹ Clearly such a small piece cannot be used to fortify the city walls and must have come from one of the churches in the vicinity. This could have been the church of Hagios Tryphonos and reliquary could have houses relics of the saint. Upon its destruction parts of it might have been dispersed including the reliquary.

⁶⁸ C. Foss, *Nicaea: A Byzantine capital and its praises*, Brookline 1996, 108-109.

⁶⁹ A. Aydın, *Türkiye müzeleri 'ndeki Suriye tipi rölikerler*, (Syrian type reliquaries in Turkish museums) Sanat Tarihi Dergisi sayı XVIII/1 Nisan 2009, 11.



Draw. 1- Possible look of the church. Drawing by Derya Ülker

Цртеж. 1- Дерија Улкер

5- Church at Arabacı Sokak (alley)

It is another one of the churches in the northwestern part of the city. It is located on an empty lot and first excavations were made between 1981-1988.⁷⁰ A substructure with a chapel on top of it was unearthed. Substructure is twice as big as 8 x 10 metres chapel. Chapel has a single apse. On chapel and substructure 4 tombs underneath archivaults have been found. Due to its construction technique it is believed to have two construction phases. First phase is believed from the Early Byzantine period

whereas the second period, due to *cloisonne* technique on the walls is believed to be from the period of the Laskarids.⁷¹ There is no suggestion about its dedication.

6- Church within Istanbul Kapı (Gate)

This church was unearthed during the restoration and excavation works held in and around Istanbul Kapı in 2018. (**fig. 13**) It was discovered during the works with the aim of reaching Roman period road level, in the oval area between 2nd and 3rd gates. At first roof tile covered tombs and later a single apse was unearthed. Soon more tombs outside the tripartite basilical church in the west and south have been found. Alas walls of the church are very low to observe construction technique. It might have been built during the large scale reconstruction activities of the Laskarids in 13th century. On one of the towers of Istanbul Kapı a church dedicated to Saint Nicholas was reported in the last quarter of the 17th century.⁷² Dedication of this church is unknown but a possibility of Hagios Nikolaos should not be omitted.

Next to the church is the Roman archway with defensive system installed in the following centuries, namely, *portcullis*. (**fig. 14**) Together with the other major gates such as Lefke and Yenişehir all of them had this system, which was

⁷⁰ O. Aslanapa, *İznik çini fırınları kazısı 1991 yılı çalışmaları* (Iznik kilns excavations 1991 season works), 14. Kazı Sonuçları toplantısı, cilt 2, Ankara 1993, 478.

⁷¹ Ü. M. Ermiş, *İznik ve çevresi Bizans devri mimari faaliyetinin değerlendirilmesi*, (Evaluation of architectural activities in and around Iznik during Byzantine period) Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation at Istanbul University Institute of Social Sciences, Department of History of Art, Istanbul 2009, 157.

⁷² J. Covell, *Voyages en Turquie 1675-1677*, tr. Jean-Pierre Grégoire, Paris 1998, 276-278.

Fig. 13 Istanbul gate after the excavation of 2019. Photo by author

Сл. 13 Из личне фотодокументације аутора



Fig. 14 Location of the church within Istanbul Gate. Photo by author

Сл. 14 Из личне фотодокументације аутора



not used by the Byzantines. That brings into mind that due to Western mercenaries in the Laskarid army of 13th century this system was introduced. This is the first time it was recorded in any of the defensive systems from Turkey.

7- Church within Lefke Kapı (Gate)

During the works with the intention to reach the original level of the road in 2008 this church was discovered next to the tripartite archway. (**fig. 15**) A small apse and a second smaller one on its south were unearthed. This may indicate a small tripartite basilical church. Since walls are very low it is nearly impossible to suggest a date based on them. On the other hand as it was most probably the case in Istanbul Kapı, it was also built during the reign of the Laskarids in the 13th century.

On top of the side arches of this archway there are niches which used to have the statues of the patrons of the city. They perished by time only to be replaced by a fresco of a male with a sword in his hand inside one of the niches. This is probably Archangel Michael to protect the city. Due to this it may be safe



Fig. 15 Church within Lefke gate. Photo by Ü. Melda Ermiş

Сл. 15 У. М. Ермиш, нав. место

to suggest that this small church was dedicated to Archangel Michael.

8- Church substructure near the theatre

During the excavations of 1974 and 1975 this site, approximately 50 metres away from the theatre was excavated. In one of the chambers, traces of frescoes, like the ones found in the northern necropolis were discovered. Because of the similarities of frescoes and the construction techniques of the walls a 4th century date for the substructure was suggested.⁷³ Since there is no

entry to the archivaulted tombs, an entrance from the superstructure was offered. This church was believed to be a tripartite basilica. A different date, based on the existing walls suggest a period between 11th to 13th centuries for its construction.⁷⁴

9- Church in the middle of the seating rows of the theatre

During the excavations in 1986 a tripartite basilical formed church with a narthex was discovered. Dimensions of the church was 8 x 12 metres.⁷⁵ (**fig. 16**) Both inside and outside of it graves were discovered. Basing on the walls, as high as 1. 2 metres, a date of first half of the 13th century was suggested.⁷⁶ Theatre of Nicaea after loosing its original function was used as a source of construction material, whose parts can be observed on the city walls. At its later stage it became a burial ground. This church in the middle of the cemetery probably served as funeral chapel. There are several examples of churches within theatres. (**Plan 1**) One of the nicest examples is from Durres / Albania where there are two small churches with frescoes were built and surrounded by a cemetery.⁷⁷

⁷³ B. Yalman, *İznik'teki kilise alt yapı kazısı* (Excavation of a church substructure in Iznik), VIII. Türk Tarih Kongresi, cilt I, Ankara 1977, 466.

⁷⁴ U. Peschlow, *The churches of Nicaea/Iznik*, Iznik throughout history, İstanbul 2003, 213.

⁷⁵ B. Yalman, *İznik tiyatrosu kazısı 1986* (results of Iznik theater excavations of 1986), 9. Kazı sonuçları toplantısı, cilt 2, Ankara 1987, 304-318.

⁷⁶ U. Peschlow, *Nicaea*, The archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia, ed. Philip Niewöhner, Oxford 2017, 215.

⁷⁷ K. Bowes, J. Mitchell, *The main chapel of the Durres amphitheater*, Mélanges de

10- Church at the orchestra of the theatre

During the excavations of theatre in 2005 a passage with the traces of frescoes were found at orchestra level. Later more frescoes depicting Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus Christ, angels and part of a building were discovered. They were dated to the 6th century and it was suggested that the place where they were found was a private chapel.⁷⁸ Other than the frescoes a grafitto-like inscription on the wall was discovered.⁷⁹ It reads as *KYPIE BOHΘI QYAE... ONONIA* şeklindedir. Since frescoes and inscription were found on a very narrow tunnel it is not right to call it a chapel, instead a prayer niche or a chamber would be more appropriate. Similar examples such as Mermer kule and Blakhernai palace Tekfur Sarayı section in Istanbul exist. Most probably this place was in use of a benefactor family or a person.

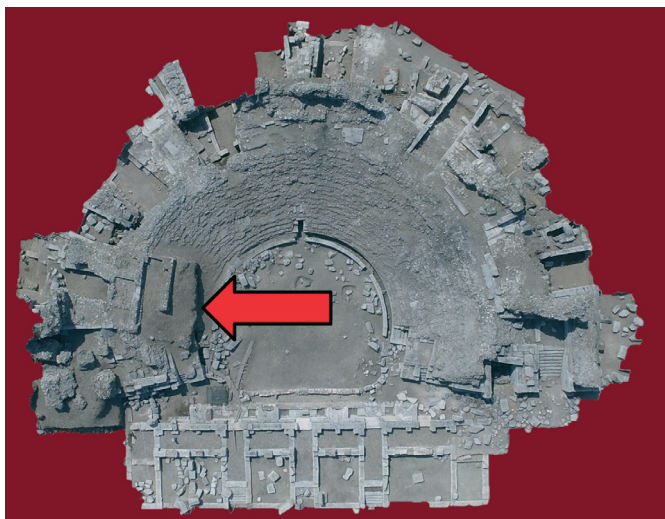


Fig. 16 Church in the middle of seating rows. Photo by <https://www.bursa.bel.tr/iznikin-tum-degerleribilimsel-calistayda-elealinacak/haber/17070>

Сл. 16 Црква у средини редова за седење у позоришту

11- Church and its substructure on the Şeyh Bedrettin sokak (alley)

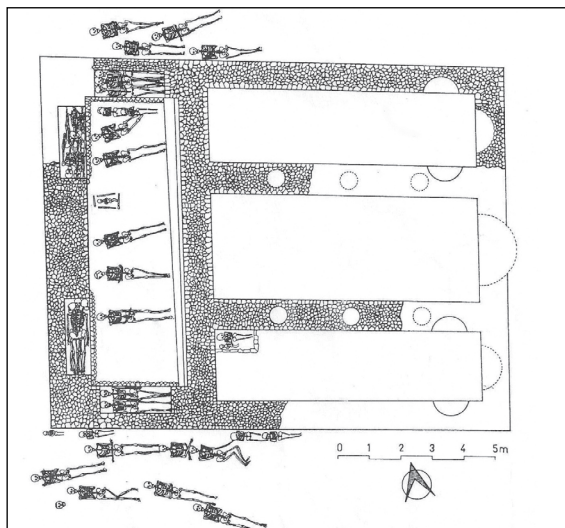
It is another church from the northwestern part of the city. Discovered in 1987⁸⁰ and excavated in later years. (fig 17) During the excavations held in 1992 outside the complex in the west and south tombs were discovered. Later same year superstructure was unearthed. Next to its apse on its northern and southern sides more tombs were unearthed. Finally more than 10 tombs were discovered below the narthex. The church substructure is in the dimensions of 12 x 20 metres a tripartite basilica. Due to budget cuts excavations discontinued and site was nearly entirely covered by vegetation. Despite noting that there were two phases of construction observed neither a date nor a dedica-

l'École française de Rome Antiquité 121/2 (2009), 572-573.

⁷⁸ U. Peschlow, *Nicaea*, The archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia, ed. Philip Niewöhner, Oxford 2017, 209.

⁷⁹ B. Yalman, *2005 yılı İznik tiyatrosu kazısı* (Theater excavation at Iznik 2005), 28. Kazı sonuçları toplantısı 2. Cilt, Ankara 2007, 392-393.

⁸⁰ O. Aslanapa, *İznik çini fırınları kazısı 1988 yılı çalışmaları*, 11. Kazı sonuçları toplantısı, cilt 2, Ankara 1990, 364-365.



Plans 1- Burials in and around the church

План 1- Сахране у цркви и око ње

tion was suggested.⁸¹ It may be safe to assume that this was a monastery where monks were buried below the narthex as it was case in Constantine Lips or Myrelaion in Istanbul or in Cappadocian rock cut churches.

12- Sunken church in Iznik lake

Due to drought in 2013 when water level of Iznik lake fell ruins of a structure, known by the locals for years, approximately 20 metres away from the shore became visible during the photo shoot of Bursa municipality by an airplane. (**fig. 18**) Soon after underwater excavations commenced and it became clear that it was a tripartite basilica with narthex and atrium. It was suggested by the excavators that this was the church dedicated to Hagios Neophytos and could

not have been later than 5th century.⁸²

Hagios Neophytos was martyred in Nicaea before official recognition of Christianity.⁸³ Before the discovery of this church it was mentioned that since the church of Hagios Neophytos is out of the city walls and defenseless it was destroyed and nothing was left of it.⁸⁴ The tomb of the saint is suggested to be in the church of the Dormition. If it was the case it might have been either the church dedicated to him was destroyed or not built yet. Alas it is impossible to determine neither of the ideas.

Ruins of the church are in the dimensions of 18 x 41 metres. 36 tombs in and around it were unearthed. A peculiarity concerning the eastern wall is observed. It seems that the apse remained within a wall which runs parallel to the east, hence very similar to architectural style observed both in the church of Cilicia, Silifke and Syria. It is the first time such a phenomenon is observed this far north.

Excavators's suggestion that this was the church where First Ecumenical council was held⁸⁵ is far from reality. Because, as mentioned above, the meeting

⁸¹ Ü. M. Ermiş, *Iznik ve çevresi Bizans devri mimari faaliyetinin değerlendirilmesi*, (Evaluation of architectural activities in and around Iznik during Byzantine period) Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation at Istanbul University Institute of Social Sciences, Department of History of Art, Istanbul 2009, 173-176.

⁸² M. Şahin – E. Tok – Ş. Kılıç, *Iznik gölü'ndeki batık kilise* (the sunken church inside Iznik lake), Deniz Magazin 39 (Mart-Haziran 2014), 44.

⁸³ R. P. Bernardin Methon, *Une terre de légendes L'Olympe de Bithynie*, Paris 1935, 22.

⁸⁴ R. Janin, *Les Églises et les monastères des grands centres Byzantins*, Paris 1975, 118.

⁸⁵ M. Şahin, A. Bilir, *Underwater survey in lake Iznik 2015*, North meets East 3 Aktuell forschungen zu antiken Häfen, Aachen 2016, 83.

Fig. 17 Church in Şeyh
Bedrettin sokak. Photo by
Ü. Melda Ermiş

Сл. 17 У. М. Ермиш,
нав. место



took place inside the palace.⁸⁶ It is not logical to have the palace built outside the city walls. Besides there is no record mentioning that the palace was outside the city walls. The only possibility left is that as a result of an earthquake entire western part of the city, including the palace, was devoured by the lake.

13- Church behind the Iznik museum – Monastery of Kerameon (Potters)

In 2012 in order to gain more space, the area behind the current Iznik museum (Imaret of Nilüfer Hatun) was dug. As a result, a network of water pipes, workshops, and a church with burials was discovered. Since part of the church ruins remain below the street it is difficult to suggest a plan type. Two possibilities arose. A tripartite basilical church, or a single naved funeral church. Whatever the plan of the church was it is clear that it was finely decorated as opus sectile mosaics in the eastern part of it can be observed. Repair marks can be observed on the floor. Although it is not possible to date the structure with certainty, it may be safe to assume at least two phases of construction.

There is a tomb made of roof tiles South of the apse. There are 4 more at the western part of the church. According to museum curators 27 tombs have been unearthed in the whole area. Tombs must have been from different periods since their level of discovery vary greatly in depth. It is clear one tomb belonged to an important person. It is located at the West and had a canopy on it. Upside down column capitals were used to support the columns of the canopy. (**fig. 19**)

Large pithoi, water pipes around the workshops indicate that this could have been an area of potters. It is interesting to note that in the sources there is a monastery within the city named as Kerameon-Potters.⁸⁷ The tomb might belong to the metropolit of Nikaia Petros who died on 11 September 826 and buried in this monastery. Because of the slow process and urgent need for a new

⁸⁶ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini - Life of Constantine*, tr. Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, Oxford 1998, III-10.

⁸⁷ R. Janin, *Les Églises et les monastères des grands centres Byzantins*, Paris 1975, 114.

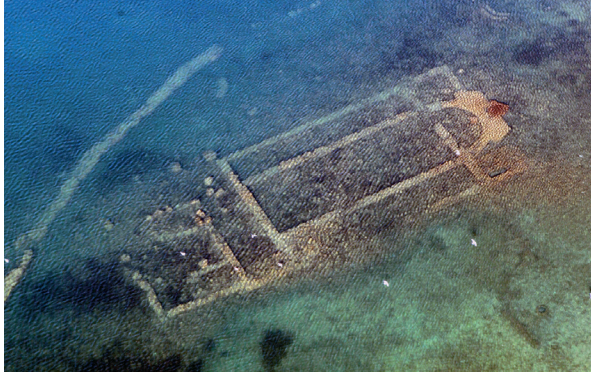


Fig. 18 Aerial view of the Sunken church. Photo by M. Şahin – E. Tok – Ş. Kılıç, “İznik gölü’ndeki batık kilise”, Deniz Magazin (39) Mart-Haziran 2014

Сл. 18 Потопљена црква

museum building this project was halted and the area excavated was filled in in 2019.

14- Church in Deniz Sokak (alley)

During an International Summer School a geophysical survey revealed ruins of a church in the northwestern part of the city below the surface.⁸⁸ Its approximate dimensions are estimated to be 10 x 15 metres. It is interesting to note that by simply judging from the probable plan type, namely so-called cross in square, it was dated to the Middle Byzantine period. To date a building below the surface is

impossible with the available technology at the moment. As it was mentioned above same plan type of churches are still being built. This could have been a 19th century church which was destroyed because of earthquakes. According to dendochronological analysis’ the oldest cross in square church is Fatih camii at Tirilye dated to 799.⁸⁹

15- Church of Virgin Mary and hagiaσμα identified from the inscription

During the works conducted by local Municipality of Elbeyli it was decided to include the ancient cemetery as well. Some of the material as a result were carried to the Merkez camii for safekeeping later to be moved to Iznik museum. (fig. 20) When some of these pieces were moved to the museum garden, a marbel lintel with two peacocks and an inscription was reported that it might belong to an unidentified church.⁹⁰ Later during my work in the museum garden in 2018 the inscription was read. It reads: “She founded this hagiaσμα of the church of the Theotokos in expectation of her sins to be forgiven”. Judging from the shapes of the letters in the inscription a 6th century date might be suggested. It is intriguing though to have a church and hagiaσμα in the necropolis. To have the rubbles of a ruined church dumped into an empty area such as the abandoned necropolis in the North of the city may be a possibility. In this case a church dedicated to the Theotokos, even the Dormition church mentioned above could be a possibility. Another possibility is there that a monastery

⁸⁸ W. Rabbel – E. Erkul – H. Stümpel – T. Wunderlich – R. Pašteka – J. Papco – P. Niewöhner – Ş. Barış – O. Çakın - E. Pekşen, *Discovery of a Byzantine church in Iznik/Nicaea, Turkey: An educational case history of Geophysical prospecting with combined methods in urban areas*, *Archaeological Prospection* 22 (2015), 18.

⁸⁹ P. I. Kuniholm, *Aegean dendrochronology Project: 1994-1995*, XI. Arkeometri sonuçları toplantısı, Ankara 1996, 195.

⁹⁰ Mustafa Şahin – Christof Berns, *Bursa ili yüzey araştırması 2012-İznik*, *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı* cilt 31/1, Ankara 2013, 50 ve resim 7.

made for the strangers and approximately 4 kilometres North of the city Agalmates.⁹¹ Not far from the necropolis there are quarries which have been in use for more than two millennia. At the entrance of one of them there is the high bas relief of Hercules, which could be taken as agalma (the statue). (fig. 21) If there was a monastery in the vicinity of Hercules, our inscription might have come from this area.

Conclusion

Basing on the historical sources and traveler's accounts number of the Byzantine churches in and in the vicinity of Nicaea was believed to be 26, of which 11 were within the city.⁹²

But recent years increased that number to 15 for the moment. (fig. 22)

In a city which was continuously inhabited more than 2300 years it is not easy to excavate and to learn more about the topography of the city. As long as construction projects continue more could be added to this number.



Fig. 19 View from the west of the Kerameon monastery church. Photo by author

Сл. 19 Из личне фотодокументације аутора

Халук Четинкаја

(Мимар Синан Универзитет, Истанбул)

ВИЗАНТИЈСКЕ ЦРКВЕ У НИКЕЈИ

Град Никеја основан је првобитно под називом Антигонија за време Антигона Монофталмоса око 320. године п. н. е. Назив је промењен за време Лизимаха, по његовој супрузи Никеји. Град је одувек био димензионо мањи у поређењу са Цариградом и неким другим градовима у којима се може пратити градитељска делатност. Успон је започет од 4. века, нарочито од времена Првог Васељенског сабора 325. године. Посебно је Први Васељенски сабор допринео чињеници да су град неретко посећивали ходочасници и путници. Град је неко време био под опсадом од стране Селџука те је тако постао и прва турска престоница у Малој Азији. Посебно битан период за Никеју представља период од 1204. до 1261. године. У граду су постојале и цркве које је могуће идентификовати захваљујући неким сачуваним изворима. Само једанаест цркава се налазило у граду. У овом тексту су идентификоване још четири цркве које су откривене у оквиру инфраструктурних радова и током личних опсервација на терену.

⁹¹ Dimiter Angelov, *The Byzantine Hellene - The life of emperor Theodore Laskaris and Byzantium in the Thirteenth century*, Cambridge 2019, 43.

⁹² R. Janin, *op.cit.*, 118-125



Fig. 20 architectural fragment with the inscription of the church. Photo by author

Сл. 20 Из личне фотодокументације аутора



Fig. 21 Hercules in front of a quarry

Сл. 21 Херкул у рељефу испред каменолома



Fig. 22 Location of the Byzantine churches

Сл. 22 Распоред византијских цркава