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Studies

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL AND REPORTS

SEBASTOPOLIS EXCAVATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS ON THE BYZANTINE CHURCH

Abstract: The ancient city of Sebastopolis, located in Tokat's Sulusaray district, was unknown to researchers until the 19th century, when it came to surface in 1871 thanks to the finding of an inscription bearing the name of the city. In the process that started with the rescue excavations by the Tokat Museum in 1987, the city was excavated by different teams intermittently for 12 years. Although many finds were discovered during salvage excavations in the city, the excavations mostly focused on the "Roman Bath" and the "Byzantine Church". Because the excavation sites are situated within current habitation areas and owing to complications regarding the expropriation of structures, the excavation process has advanced at a notably slow pace, necessitating intermittent interruptions in the excavations. The excavations conducted within the city's Byzantine Church have led to the conclusion that the structure follows a 'Domed Basilica Plan'. This architectural layout showcases features commonly observed in Early Period Byzantine Churches: three naves and three apses, all extending in the east-west direction. The Sebastopolis Church is thought to have been built between the 7th and 9th centuries AD, based on the information collected and considering the architectural design, construction techniques, and materials of that time. Considering the large amount of Roman pottery unearthed during the excavations, the first phase of the structure can be dated back to earlier periods and it may have been built on a Roman structure. Accurate dating and a comprehensive understanding of its developmental stages will be achievable only after unearthing the narthex and atrium sections, if any, situated beneath the contemporary structures to the west of the church.

Keywords: Tokat, Sulusaray, Sebastopolis, Herakleopolis, Byzantine Church.

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Sebastopolis, an important Roman city in the Black Sea region, is positioned 69 km south of Tokat and 36 km west of the Tokat-Sivas highway.¹ It resides within the confines of the Sulusaray town, situated at the heart of an expansive alluvial plain with an altitude of 1000 m. This plain is surrounded by towering mountains, some of which reach elevations of up to 2000 m. Despite being a destination for various European travellers during the 18th and 19th centuries, it is evident that none of them made any mention of Sebastopolis.² After a visit in 1871 by Damon,³ a member of the Hellenic Philological Society, during which he read the name Sebastopolis⁴

¹ LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 97.

² AMANDRY/RÉMY 1998, 5-6.

³ AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 5; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 97-98.

⁴ The inscription with the name of Sebastopolis is exhibited today in the "Sulusaray Open Air Museum".

on an inscription dedicated to the honour of Hadrian and Caesar Lucius Aelius, the process of the city's resurgence began and further nurtured by research conducted by various travellers.⁵ The ancient city remained unmentioned for an extended period due, in part, to its location away from the primary routes.⁶ Nevertheless, a crucial factor stems from the fact that a significant portion of the city remained situated under a soil layer, sometimes as deep as 10 m, due to natural causes such as the floods caused by the Çekerek River (Skylax), where the Roman bridge⁷ continues to be in use to this day. During the progression initiated by Turkish control over the area and the foundation of a modest village upon the pre-existing remnants, the city all but vanished until the 1980s, when it resurfaced prominently in 1987 through salvage excavations conducted by the Tokat Museum.

1. THE HISTORY OF THE CITY

Examining the city's history briefly, its initial mention dates back to Plinius the Elder. In his discussion of the city, Plinius employs the expression, within the Kolopene Region, two smaller cities exist - Sebasteia and Sebastopolis - each possessing a significance comparable to that of the previously mentioned cities.⁸ Anderson (Fig. 1) is the first to use the term "Carana-Karana" to describe the city,⁹ citing from Strabo. Strabo, however, only included information regarding the city's geographic location in his work;¹⁰ he made no mention of the city's history.¹¹

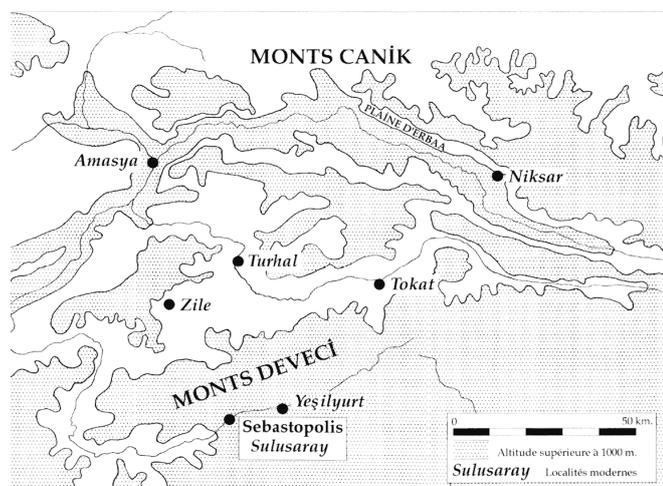


Fig. 1. The Location Map of Sebastopolis'in (after AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 4, Cart. 2).

In this regard, fresh archaeological discoveries need to be considered in order to reach a conclusion about the city, especially the epigraphic and numismatic discoveries.

⁵ AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 5-6; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 96-97; Ramsay cites the inscription on the Roman Bridge near the city as evidence that Sebastopolis was in Sulusaray. RAMSAY 1960, 361.

⁶ LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 97.

⁷ CUMONT/CUMONT 1906, 201.

⁸ PLINIUS, *Naturalis Historia*, 6, 3, 8.

⁹ ANDERSON 1903, 34; RAMSAY 1960, 349; MITFORD 1991, 182.

¹⁰ MITFORD 1991, 183; AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 7; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 99.

¹¹ STRABO, *Geographika*, 12, 3, 37.

Based on epigraphic and numismatic studies of the city,¹² it becomes evident that in ancient times, the city was situated in the Pontos Region known as Kolopene. After the demise of their king named Ateporix,¹³ it became a part of Galatia, encompassing Sebasteia and subsequently Komana. Historical records indicate that around 3-2 BC, it became integrated into the Pontus Galaticus Region¹⁴ of the Roman Empire¹⁵ and was christened Sebastopolis, in homage to Augustus, thereby signifying the city of Augustus.¹⁶ Sebastopolis is a Greek word that means "Great/Great City" and is derived from the words *sebasto* (great, lofty, majestic, and magnificent) and *polis* (city)¹⁷. In the subsequent era, the city came to be known as Herakleopolis, meaning the city of Heracles. While the exact origins are not definitively documented, the prevalence of coins minted during Emperor Hadrian's reign, particularly under Septimius Severus, suggests that the name Sebastopolis-Herakleopolis¹⁸ gained widespread usage as a dual denomination.¹⁹

The city commenced minting its inaugural coins during Trajan's rule and continued this practice until the conclusion of the Gallienus Period.²⁰ During the early Trajanian Period, its name was inscribed as "CEBACTOΠOΛΙΤΩΝ, CEBACTOΠOΛEΩC". Subsequent variations included "CEBACTO. HPAK., CEBACTOΠO. HPAKΛEΩΠO., CEBACTO. HPAKΛEΩΠ". Significantly, these coins prominently showcased depictions of Heracles and scenes depicting his legendary feats, including the Dodecathlos.²¹

2. RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN THE CITY

When examining the research conducted within the city, it becomes apparent that numerous travellers and researchers have provided observations, particularly regarding the city's architectural structures. One of them is Damon, who toured the city in the 1870s.²² Describing his observations, Damon paints a city embellished with the threads of history. Ancient and Byzantine ruins intertwine, steadfast fortified structures endure. To the southeast of the

¹² OLSHAUSEN/BILLER 1984, 96-97, 108.

¹³ While it is accepted by many historians that Sebastopolis was part of the principality attributed by Caesar or Antony to the Galatian dynasty of Ateporix, Magie claimed that the territory of Ateporix lay much further east and that the territory of Sebastopolis was attributed by Antony to the priest of the Temple of Zela. However, he was never able to substantiate this hypothesis. AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 7; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 99.

¹⁴ The geographer Ptolemy (Ptolemy - 2nd century AD) named Ameseia, Gazelonitis, Sebastopolis and Komana as a whole "Pontus Galaticus". RAMSAY 1960, 509; Galatia was the fourth province established by the Roman Empire in Anatolia and was made a province by Augustus. AKSAR 2019, 116.

¹⁵ WADDINGTON/BABELON/REINACH 1925, 141; RAMSAY 1960, 286, 501, 509; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 100.

¹⁶ ANDERSON 1903, 34; MAGIE 1950, 471-472; MITFORD 1991, 182-183; AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 7-9; KOHL/MATOĞLU/ALKAN 2012, 560; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 96-97; TEKIN/FUL 2021, 349.

¹⁷ OZCAN 1991, 264.

¹⁸ This name, which clearly reveals the city's devotion to Heracles, is also mentioned in Arrian's dedicatory inscription of AD 137. RAMSAY 1960, 361; MITFORD 1991, 183.

¹⁹ AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 7; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 100.

²⁰ HEAD 1911, 499; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 99.

²¹ HEAD 1911, 499; WADDINGTON/BABELON/REINACH 1925, 141-145, pl. XIV-XV; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 105; TAVUKCU/CEYLAN 2016, 70-76, nr. 45-52.

²² AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 10; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 102.

village, remnants of one of Asia Minor's grandest churches persist. A Byzantine bridge graces the village's eastern edge, while two thousand steps away, a Roman bridge, crafted from volcanic stones, connects Skylax's shores—a bridge still in use today. Majestic public structures adorn the landscape, and at its heart, an early Christian Church boasts a dome adorned with gold-hued mosaics.²³

He asserts the presence of an amphitheatre or stadium hosting gladiator contests, several coin-depicted temples, and identifies Roman and Early Christian Period ruins in Sulusaray and neighbouring villages as a testament to the dense population of the Ancient Era; furthermore, he underscores its pivotal location at a juncture linking the west-east road from Tavium in Galatia to Sebasteia²⁴ and extending to Armenia, crucially connecting Central Anatolia to the Black Sea port of Amisos (Samsun), thereby emphasizing its paramount importance for the city.²⁵

The Cumont brothers,²⁶ who also visited Sulusaray during their Black Sea tour in the early 1900s, state that the city started to mint coins during the Traianus Period, that after Hadrian's visit in 124 AD, the city continued to grow by building new buildings, and that a stadium, where gladiator fights were held, portico, gymnasium, temples and many other structures were built during this period.²⁷ Magie, who conducted research on the city in the 1950s,²⁸ 50 years after the Cumont brothers, states that Hadrian may have visited the city in 129 AD and that the Hadrianic Priesthood was established in the city and a portico was built in honour of the emperor.²⁹ In addition to the information provided by the travellers and researchers who visited the region, we undoubtedly learn the most detailed information about the religious life of the city from inscriptions and coins.

The significance of Heracles as the predominant deity in Sebastopolis is evident from the city's name and the prominent tetrastyle statue portraying him with a club in one hand and a lion's pelt in the other. This statue is positioned beneath the arch that connects two temples, as depicted on the coins minted during the reigns of Septimius Severus, Julia Domna, Caracalla, Geta, and Gallienus.³⁰ Additionally, the coins also feature representations of his twelve labours. These elements collectively suggest that Heracles held a preeminent position within Sebastopolis, being venerated in no less than two sanctuaries.³¹ The depictions on the coins further hint at the possibility of a dedicated temple and a monumental cult statue erected in honour of Heracles within the city. At the same time, the presence of altars dedicated

to Asclepius and Apollo for the healing waters in the city,³² as well as a votive inscription dedicated to Zeus Pylaios³³ (Zeus who listened to Pylon) indicate that there were cults belonging to these gods. Other than these deities, historical records confirm that Emperor Hadrian graced the city with his presence during his journeys through Anatolia,³⁴ leading to the establishment of an imperial cult in Sebastopolis dedicated to his honor.³⁵

It's evident that the city, deeply influenced by Greco-Roman culture,³⁶ hosted a crowded population enjoying prosperity and the city held a significant status, exemplified by the dispatch of a statue of Hadrian³⁷ by its ambassadors to pay tribute during the inauguration of the Olympics in Athens (131-132 AD). Notably, certain residents were granted Roman citizenship³⁸, further underscoring the city's eminence.

Inscriptions from the Byzantine Period show that there was a dense Christian population in the city even before AD 325.³⁹ Sebastopolis was included in Armenia Prima in Hiorecles' list in AD 458. Likewise, during the reign of Justinian (AD 536), the city was attached to the Sebasteia (Sivas) diocese and a bishop of the Metropolis of Sebasteia lived in the city, the city was referred to as one of the cities of Armenia II,⁴⁰ not much is known about the city after the 9th century, but we learn from an inscription dedicated to the Jewish deity that the Jewish population lived in the city along with Christians.⁴¹ As noted by the Cumont brothers,⁴² knowledge about the city's demographics comes from an inscription venerating the Jewish deity. This inscription reveals that the city accommodated a Jewish community alongside Christians and pagan cults.⁴³ Nonetheless, there remains a lack of information regarding the origin, timing, and specific origins of the Jewish population. In the Byzantine Period, the city flourished with a dense population; however, it endured assaults from Sassanid and Arab incursions. Following the Malazgirt Victory, it underwent a decline in significance as it fell under Turkish dominion. Evolving into a modest Turkish village, the city successively came under the rule of Danishmentli, Seljuk, and Ottoman sovereignty, respectively.

³² CUMONT/CUMONT 1906, 203-204; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 103.

³³ CUMONT/CUMONT 1906, 203-204; MITFORD 1966, 477-478; GUEN/REMY 2010, 103.

³⁴ CUMONT/CUMONT 1906, 203; MAGIE 1950, 621-622; MITFORD 1991, 184; AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 12-13; KAYA/TASDONER-OZCAN 2016, 498; AKSAR 2019a, 8; AKSAR 2019b, 103.

³⁵ ANDERSON 1903, 35; AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 13-14; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 106.

³⁶ ANDERSON 1903, 35.

³⁷ It is known that Hadrian's portrait from the Tokat Museum came from Sebastopolis.

³⁸ LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 103.

³⁹ AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 10.

⁴⁰ RAMSAY 1960, 360, 364.

⁴¹ A total of five Jewish tombstones have been found so far in Sebastopolis, and these inscriptions reveal that there was a common culture of life between communities of different religions in the 3rd-6th centuries AD. KOHL/MATOĞLU/ALKAN 2012, 563-564.

⁴² CUMONT/CUMONT 1906, 203; AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 12-13.

⁴³ It is known that the name "Heracleopolis" was not used by the city after the fall of paganism. MITFORD 1991, 183.

²³ During the excavations in the church, a large number of gilded, yellow, blue and green tesserae were found.

²⁴ Ramsay states that the Tavium-Sabastopolis-Sebasteia road was one of the most important roads. RAMSAY 1960, 288.

²⁵ CUMONT/CUMONT 1906, 202; MITFORD 1966, 484; MITFORD 1991, 183, AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 11; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 101.

²⁶ CUMONT/CUMONT 1906, 203.

²⁷ CUMONT/CUMONT 1906, 201-202.

²⁸ MAGIE 1950, 622.

²⁹ Mitford states that this visit took place in 131 AD during Hadrian's return to Trapezus (Trabzon). MITFORD 1991, 184.

³⁰ WADDINGTON/ BABELON/REINACH 1925, 141-144, pl. XIV-fig. 21-29, pl. XV-fig. 1-7.

³¹ AMANDRY/REMY 1998, 13; LE GUEN/REMY 2010, 105.

3. EXCAVATIONS IN THE CITY

Examining the research conducted within the city, it becomes evident that the initial excavations took place between 1987 and 1990, led by Museum Director B. Ozcan, through a collaborative effort of the Tokat Museum.⁴⁴ Researchers from the Istanbul Research Institute (Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennesin) also participated in the rescue excavations.⁴⁵ The 1987 excavations were carried out in the excavation areas labelled Nos. 1 and 2. Following the excavations carried out in 1988-1989, these areas were identified as bathhouse and church structure in the following excavations. Yet another noteworthy assemblage of finds emerged from the area labelled as excavation Site No. 4. This area, located in the southern and southwestern sectors of the district, yielded a substantial collection of Hittite⁴⁶ and Phrygian⁴⁷ ceramics during the excavations. These findings hold immense significance as they vividly demonstrate the unbroken habitation of the settlement from the 3rd millennium BC up to the present day.

Another site worked in the same year was Site No. 7, located within the borders of Ilıcak Village, about 2 km west of the ancient city. During the excavations carried out in the area damaged by treasure hunters, an apsidal space with a mosaic paved floor with floral and geometric patterns was found at a depth of 1.50 m. Further studies revealed that the building had a plan with a central nave with an apse and rooms on the sides.⁴⁸ Due to the proximity of a thermal spring near the structure, it is thought to have functioned as a health facility, and the discovered mosaic structure is dated to the Late Roman/Early Byzantine Period through comparisons with similar structures.⁴⁹ Following the excavations carried out by the Tokat Museum in 1987-1990, the excavations were suspended for 20 years and resumed in 2010 under the direction of the Tokat Museum with the scientific supervision of M. Kohl from the University of Lille. In this period of excavations, attention was primarily directed towards the already uncovered church and bath structures. Additionally, efforts were made to enhance the city's accessibility for visitors by establishing sightseeing routes and installing promotional signs.⁵⁰ After a three-year break, excavations were resumed in 2013 under the scientific supervision of S. D. Ful, continuing for a span of 6 years. Over this duration, the primary focus was on the excavation of the bath complexes. Simultaneously, efforts were dedicated to the cleaning and removal of fill soil from the church structure.

4. CHURCH EXCAVATIONS

Similar to other sectors within the city, progress on the church was significantly halted following the Tokat

Museum's efforts from 1987 to 1990. Subsequently, in 2010, the endeavour was rekindled, this time under the scientific supervision of M. Kohl. After a season of work, a subsequent pause ensued. However, in 2013, a fresh team led by S. D. Ful commenced a new phase of excavation, which persisted for three years. Following 2015, the focus shifted primarily to cleaning operations within the church (Fig. 2-3).



Fig. 2-3. Church before and after the 2021 excavations.

After a lapse of 6 years, excavations within the church recommenced in 2021, guided by the scientific supervision of A. Temür. Consequently, since 1987, excavations within the church have been led by four distinct teams. These comprehensive studies ultimately led to the determination that the church follows a basilica-style plan, featuring three naves extending in the east-west orientation. Due to contemporary structures flanking the west, north, and south facades of the church, the majority of research was concentrated on the 30 m long eastern section, where the apses were located. These apses had been concealed beneath soil accumulation for the past two decades. The excavation efforts successfully identified these apses as the main apse, north apse, and south apse.

The main apse is 10 m in width and presents a semicircular shape internally, while externally it boasts a five-sided structure (Fig. 4-5). The apse with a wall thickness of approximately 1.00 m has five facades and a few rows have been preserved. The exterior walls of the apse are constructed entirely from limestone blocks, whereas the interior half-

⁴⁴ OZCAN 1991, 261-307; OZCAN 1992, 167-201.

⁴⁵ OZCAN 1991, 262.

⁴⁶ The recovered ceramics are dated to the 3rd millennium BC. OZCAN 1991, 271, res. 22; OZCAN 1992, 168, res. 2

⁴⁷ OZCAN 1991, 270, res. 14-22, sek. 5-8.

⁴⁸ OZCAN 1991, 262.

⁴⁹ The marble throne (?) foot in the form of a lion's foot, dated to the 2nd century AD, is said to have been used here for the second time. OZCAN 1991, 273, res. 31.

⁵⁰ KOHL/MATOĞLU/ALKAN 2012, 559-567.



Fig. 4-5. Interior and Exterior View of the Main Apse of the Church.



Fig. 6-7. Synthronon Steps in the Main Apse

round portion displays a combination of conglomerate in certain areas and limestone blocks in others.⁵¹

The section situated between the interior and exterior walls of the apse, constructed using the crate wall technique, was packed with rubble stones secured with Horasan mortar. Within the primary apse, just behind the 1.25 m wide passageway encircling the back of the apse, lies a semicircular synthronon measuring 7.50 by 5.50 m. The cut stone pavements of the synthronon have been dismantled and only rubble stones belonging to its foundations can be seen (Fig. 6-7). Only a few of the blocks belonging to the seating rows of the synthronon are preserved in situ. A few fragments are scattered around the building.

During the excavations within the naos, an opus sectile flooring adorned with a geometric pattern, created using coloured marble (in shades of black, white, and brown) was uncovered in the middle nave. It was observed that the flooring had suffered collapses in certain areas, primarily due to water drainage from the modern buildings constructed around the church. As a consequence of this, fragments of the opus sectile were strewn throughout the building (Fig. 8-9). During the excavations in the previous season,



Fig. 8-9. Opus Sectile Tile in the Naos (Museum Archive).

⁵¹ During the field studies, it is thought that the limestone blocks used in the building may have been brought from the quarry within the borders of the Cıkrık Village of Yesilyurt District, 6 km northwest of Sulusaray, and the conglomerate stones may have been brought from the Karatas Mevkii of Elmali Village.

temporary protection measures were taken in this area and it was covered with geotextile.

In the area where the opus sectile pavement is located, there are fragments of bases belonging to the solea and ambo, and liturgical fragments belonging to the templon (Fig. 10-11). Since the floor of the bema was completely destroyed, it is not possible to say anything about the flooring. However, it is possible to see some of the limestone, rectangular, square legs of the altar table.

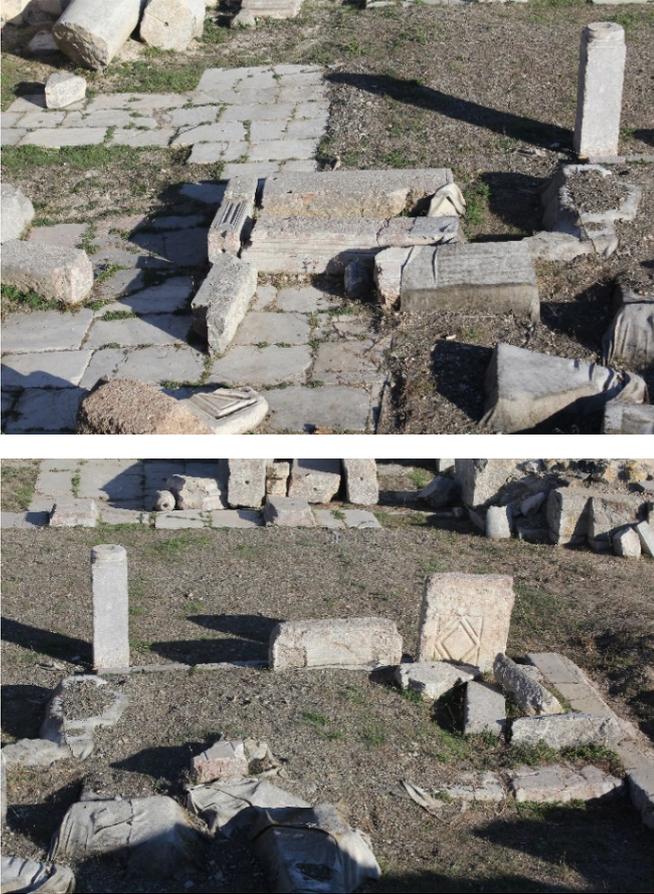


Fig. 10-11. Liturgical and Architectural Fragments from the Solea, Ambon and Templon in the Naos.

Within the naos, positioned to the north and south of the central nave, there are three pedestals measuring 0.50x0.80 m each, spaced approximately 2.00 to 2.20 m apart, supporting the superstructure. Some of the blocks adorned with cross symbols, integral to these pedestals crafted from light pink limestone, have evidently shifted towards the north nave, resulting in partial damage to the marble floor (refer to Fig. 12-13).

To the west of the central nave, in the same order as the pedestals, are the supporting piers on which the columns carrying the dome rest (Fig. 14-15). The highest preserved point is 2.25 m high and 2.70 m wide, with three rows of 0.40 m zigzag profiles.

The carriers made of limestone cut stone blocks were built in the cist wall technique as in the main apse and the interior of the walls were built with rubble stone masonry with horasan mortar. The pavements and mortise holes



Fig. 12-13. Pedestals on the North and South of the Middle Nave.



Fig. 14-15. Carriers on the North and South of the Middle Nave.

preserved up to 0.50 m in places on the carriages indicate that the carriers were covered with profiled marble slabs, just like the walls. It is observed that one of the columns placed on it fell just in front of the carrier and broke into two pieces. It is understood from the capitals of the church, which were also found in the excavations of the previous period, that the columns carrying the superstructure are of the Ionic cap type. Opposite the aforementioned carrier, there is a second carrier placed symmetrically. This carrier, a part of which remains in the unexcavated area, has the same dimensions and features as the other one. In front of the carrier, there is a 0.20-0.25 m thick floor pavement consisting of square and rectangular marble slabs that have been damaged in places. The western boundary of the central nave, which was reached by excavations, is this part where the carriage is located. The area to the west of the church, where the narthex and atrium (?) are located, could not be excavated due to the ongoing expropriation works on the area (Fig. 16-17).

On both sides of the main apse of the church there are pastophorium cells/spaces. The apse of the prothesis space in the north is 4.50 m in width and 10 m in length. The northern apse has a semi-circular interior and a three-sided exterior. Five rows of the outer wall made of cut stone blocks are preserved. As in the main apse, the interior wall is constructed from conglomerate and limestone cut stone blocks. A doorway measuring 1.50 m, located to the south of the prothesis, provides access to the bema area, while a larger 2.60 m opening to the west leads to the naos. Adjacent



Fig. 16-17. Carriers in the Extension of the Middle Nave and Modern Structures on it.

to the prothesis, there is an additional space measuring 4.50 by 2.50 m, which can be entered through a 2.80 m doorway.⁵²

During excavations of the previous seasons in the east of the northern apse, four graves were unearthed, situated at a depth of -1.35 cm in the east-west orientation. Among these graves, graves 1 and 2 are positioned adjacent to each other, with both individuals laid side by side, facing one another while resting on their backs. The skeletons are surrounded by vertically placed stone slabs and covered with stone slabs. The bones belonging to the skeletons in graves 3 and 4 are observed to be scattered.⁵³ The presence of these graves to the east of the church's apses indicates that this area served as a burial ground during the late period. In the 2021 excavation season, ongoing excavations took place in a trench measuring 7x11 m situated in front of the northern apse (see figure 18-19).



Fig. 18-19. The Interior and Exterior View of the North Nave.

During the excavations, a corner fragment measuring 0.50x0.40 m, part of which was recovered in previous years, fragments of an Ionic column cap and two fragments of a jar were found at a depth of -1.50 m. At a depth of -2.40 m, a burnt layer and a column base and a column fragment were

⁵² In earlier excavations conducted in the area north of this room, remnants of a pithos and a tandoor filled with ashes were discovered. This discovery led to the interpretation that this location may have served as a kitchen or similar function during the later period. FUL/TEKIN//HANOGLU/AKIN/SUSAM/YAPRAK 2014, 482, res. 8.

⁵³ FUL/TEKIN/AKIN/SUSAM/HANOGLU 2016, 384, res. 12.



Fig. 20-22. Glass Tesserae, Ceramic and Marble Coating Specimens.

found in the east of the trench. The most noteworthy find in this area is a 4.70x6.50 m room with a wall width of 0.65-0.70 m, built with rubble and spolia stones at a depth of -3 m, which has no connection with the church. It can be inferred from the stonework and masonry techniques used in the room with a burnt layer that it was constructed during a later period. During the excavations in this area, ceramics, fragments of roof tiles, marble slabs from both floors and walls, as well as opus sectile and tesserae from different periods were discovered scattered throughout the site (Fig. 20-22).

The apse of the diaconicon space, located south of the main apse of the church, is symmetrically positioned with the apse of the prothesis and has the same length and width dimensions (Fig. 23-24). As in the north apse, southern apse is semi-circular on the interior and features three facades on the exterior.



Fig. 23-24. Exterior and Interior Views of the South Nave.

The most striking find in this area is a fragment of a wall painting with a two-line inscription in “fresco” technique on the west-facing surface of the wall separating the central nave from the south nave at a depth of 1.60 m (Fig. 25-26). In order to protect it, the entire wall painting was not exposed, but was covered by experts to prevent it from being affected by natural conditions.

During the excavations carried out to the east of the southern apse; it was observed that there are two graves; one adjacent to the wall determining the southern border of the apse and the other in front of the outer wall of the apse. The first grave, which was buried directly into the ground, is -1.85 m. deep and was laid parallel to the wall. The skeleton was laid in the east-west direction with its hands overlapping under the chest. The second grave is a cist grave measuring 2.20x0.90 m, 0.35 m deep and surrounded by a row of cut



Fig. 25-26. Wall Painting on the West Facing Surface of the Wall Separating the Middle Nave from the South Nave (museum archive).

stones. It is observed that the grave extending in east-west direction has been largely damaged.⁵⁴

In the 2021 excavation season, excavation continued within a 9x13 m area east of the southern apse as part of the project to restore the eastern section of the church. During these excavations, the remains of a modern house's walls, which had been demolished after expropriation, were discovered to the west of the trench, resting upon the walls of the southern apse.

Just in front of this wall, at -2.10 m level, a marble slab floor measuring 1.30x2.40 m was unearthed. The remains of the wall in question indicate that the foundations of the modern buildings went up to the upper part of the church and that the church was destroyed during the construction of the modern buildings. During the excavations in front of the eastern wall of the southern apse, three graves with direct in-ground burials were found at a depth of -2.25 m (Fig. 27-28), designated as M-1, M-2 and M-3. Remains of modern buildings found at the level of the graves suggest that the graves may have been destroyed in the recent period.

During the excavations in front of the south apse, 4 m east of the exterior wall; a 7 m long and 0.70 m wide rubble stone wall with horasan mortar extending in the north-south direction parallel to the church at -3 m level was uncovered (Fig. 29-30). Adjacent to this wall, at the same level, a second row of walls was found parallel to the rubble masonry wall.



Fig. 27-28. Graves Uncovered in Front of the Outer Wall of the South Nave.

⁵⁴ FUL/TEKIN/ HANOGLU/AKIN/SUSAM/YAPRAK 2014, 481-482.

The wall built in a row consists of cut limestone stone blocks. Between this wall, which we think is contemporaneous with the church, and the rubble stone masonry wall, a sewage system consisting of stone-carved funnels with an average size of 0.35x0.40 m, which continues in the south direction, passing through the cut stone wall and curving towards the east, was unearthed. Next to this canal, a second canal system extending parallel to this canal was found. However, the eastern part of this canal was destroyed (Fig. 30). During the excavations in this area, the foundation level of the church was reached at a depth -3.20 m and the excavations in this area were terminated.



Fig. 29-30. Exposed Walls and Sewage System in Front of the Exterior Wall of the South Nave.

In the 2021 excavation season, another area that underwent study was the eastern-facing section of the main apse of the church. The excavations in this area took place within a 21x3 m trench. During these excavations, which aimed to identify the deteriorated eastern boundary of the church, seven limestone cut stone blocks were revealed at the same level. These blocks were positioned at intervals of 2.00-2.50 m and were aligned parallel to the walls of the church at a depth of -1.75 m, continuing along the entire eastern section. The dimensions of the stones vary between 1.24x0.65 m and their depths are between 0.20-0.30 m. The fact that no clamp slots were found on the stones leads us to believe that they were carrying wooden columns. As a result of the excavations in this area, a substantial portion of the eastern side of the main apse was uncovered, as evident in the images (Fig. 31-32) (Fig. 49).



Fig. 31-32. East section of the church after the excavation.



Fig. 33-36. Structural Elements Found in the South Nave.



Fig. 37-40. Structural Elements Found in the South Nave.



Fig. 41-42. Marble Floor Found in the South Nave.

In the 2022 season, the primary goal was to expose the outer walls of the north and south naves. For this purpose, excavations were started in two trenches designated as A1 and B1 in the north and south naves. Trench A1 was formed

in a 10x10 m area with defined boundaries to include the south nave. During the excavations, two fragments of a templon slab with stylized four-leafed flower and palmette motifs, a templon pillar with a fallen knob, fragments of

Ionic capitals, Attic column bases, opus sectile fragments, and numerous Byzantine pottery and brick sherds were recovered within 3 m of backfill soil (Fig. 33-40). As a result of the excavations conducted in this area, the marble floor, some of which was visible in the previous season at a depth of -3 m, was unearthed to a great extent (Fig. 41-42).

Trench B1 was opened in an area of 10x10 m, which was determined to include the north nave of the church (Fig. 43-44). During the excavations, it was observed that the remains of the foundations of modern buildings continued at the north-east corner of the trench at a depth of -0.50 m. At a depth of -0.70 m, roof tiles, along with pottery fragments including Roman Period red slipped sherds and Byzantine Period green slipped sherds, were discovered within the fill soil containing a significant amount of rubble stone. During the excavations, a bronze crucifix decorated with concentric circle motifs in the form of a Latin Cross dating to the 11th-12th centuries AD was found at a depth of -2.50 m.



Fig. 43-44. Trench B1 in the North Nave.

During the excavations in the east of the trench, the excavations continued in the area identified as a kitchen due to the tandoor and pithos found in the previous years and as a result of the excavations, it was concluded that the place identified as a pool in the previous excavation seasons was not a pool, but it could be a hearth due to the large amount of ash remains found inside (Fig. 45-46). When the marble flooring was reached at a depth of -3 m, it was observed that a flat pillar with soffit motif was used as a spolia on the floor (Fig. 45-48) and the excavations in this area were terminated (Fig. 50).



Fig. 45-46. Hearth and Tandoor Unearthed in Trench B1.



Fig. 47-48. Floor Made of Spolia Materials in Trench B1.

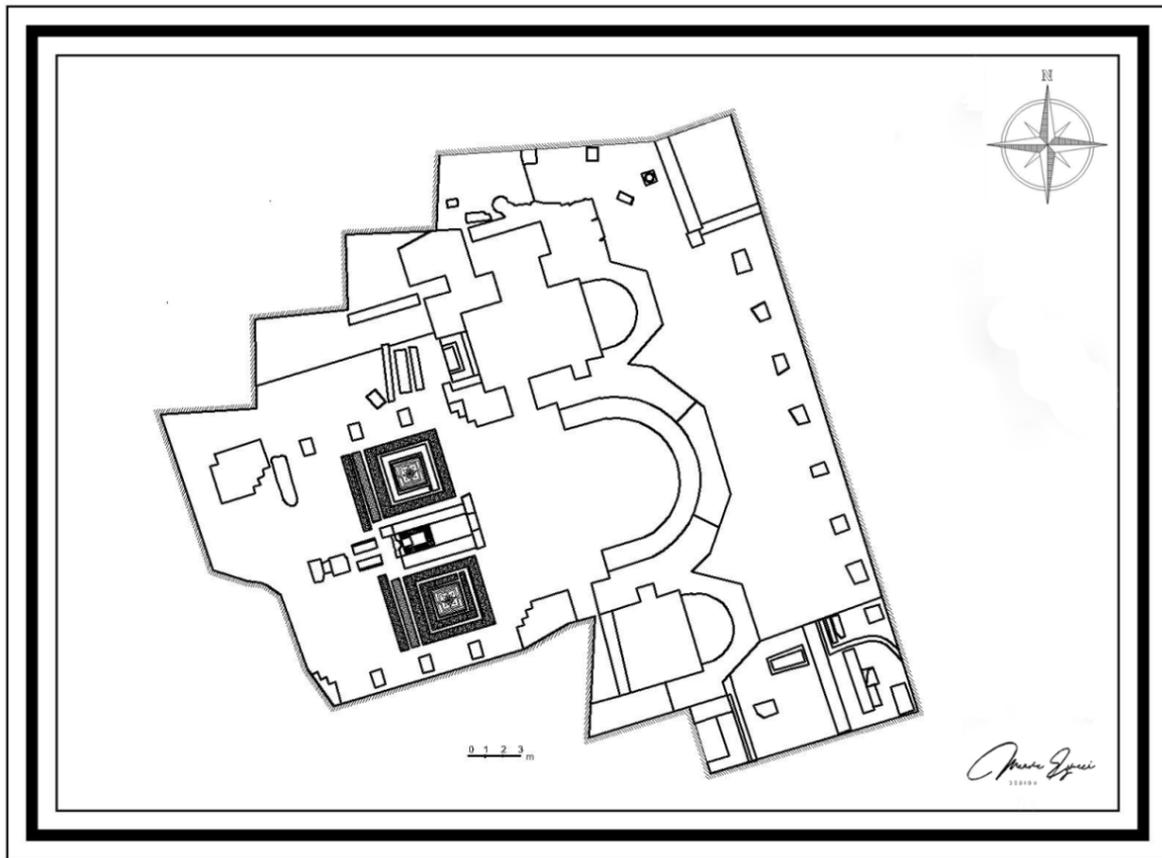


Fig. 49. Plan of the Church after Excavations.



Fig. 50. Aerial photo of the church

CONCLUSION

As a result of the excavations, it is understood that the church is a domed basilica with an east-west orientation as seen in Early Byzantine churches.⁵⁵ Since there are modern buildings to the west of the church that need to be demolished, it is not possible to say anything at this stage about the extent to which the western part is preserved and its dimensions. When we look at the dating of the Sebastopolis Church; the most important criterion is undoubtedly its plan. When examining the building's plan, it becomes evident that the four large piers in the central nave, interconnected by arches, form a monumental dome. The north and south naves are formed with pillars or colonnades between large carriers. Considering features such as the nearly square layout of the naos and the uniform width of the sections between the four substantial piers that divide the central nave and side naves, that the northern and southern side naves are demarcated by the piers situated between the piers, meanwhile, that the central nave takes on a cruciform shape, it becomes evident that its plan is a typical example of the "Domed Basilica with Cruciform Naos" architectural scheme, also referred to as "Transitional Period Buildings". This design bridges the monumental domed basilicas of the 6th century with the 'Closed Greek Cross' plan type that surfaced during the Middle Byzantine Period.

The cruciform plan is generally seen between the 7th and 9th centuries, corresponding to the Early and Middle Byzantine Period. This period coincides with the "Iconoclast Period", a turning point in Byzantine history and architecture. During this era, architectural and artistic programs of religious spaces adhered to rules established by the church. Notably, symbols played a prominent role in this period, with the cross-central to Christian faith-manifesting not only as a symbolic element but also as a structural motif within churches plans.

The comparable Anatolian examples of the architectural layout characterized by the domed basilica with cruciform naos can be found in structures like the Clement Church in Ankara,⁵⁶ the Koimesis Church in Iznik,⁵⁷ and the St. Nicholas Church in Demre.⁵⁸ An overseas counterpart is the Hagia Sophia Church in Thessaloniki.⁵⁹ Additionally, as an initial reference, the Hagia Irene Church in Istanbul⁶⁰ can also be included in this list, representing an example from the capital city. One of the comparable examples, the Church of Clement in Ankara,⁶¹ which has not survived to the present day, is a small-scale building with a cruciform naos and a dome supported by 4 large carriers. 4 large carriers are

connected to each other by arches and the transition to the dome is provided by pendants.

The divisions within the nave are shaped by piers and rows of columns positioned between them. The building's bema concludes with the main apse to the east, which features a semi-circular interior and is adorned with five facades on the exterior. The prothesis and diaconicon spaces on either side of the apse also end with an apse. The side apses are semi-circular on the interior and 3-faceted on the exterior.⁶² The diaconicon section was built as a separate chapel. The narthex in the west of the church has 3 sections. The church is generally dated between the 7th and 9th centuries AD.⁶³ The Church of St. Clement of Ankara and the Church of Sebastopolis show similar features in terms of architectural plan, central space arrangement, apses, bema, pastoforium cells, and transition to the side naves.

The Iznik Koimesis Church, believed to have been constructed in the 8th century AD,⁶⁴ stands as a significant exemplar of the architectural plan of the domed basilica with a cruciform naos. It reflects the characteristic features of the cruciform plan with its dome rising on 4 large carriers and openings of equal width in 4 directions. The divisions forming the side naves are formed by the pillars between the large carriers. There is a transversely rectangular bema section in the east of the church. The main apse, where the bema ends in the east, is semi-circular on the interior and has 3 facades on the exterior. The main apse has a synthronon with 7 steps. There are entrances to the pastoforium cells from the apse. Access to the pastoforium cells is also provided from the east of the side naves. Pastoforium cells end with apses in the east. As in the main apse, the side apses are semi-circular on the interior and have three facades on the exterior. As in the Church of Clement in Ankara, the side naves and narthex are not directly connected to the central nave in the Church of Koimesis in Iznik. They surround the central nave from three sides by forming a central space. To the west of the church, there is a rectangular narthex with 3 sections extending in the north-south direction.

The Koimesis Church of Iznik, like the Clement Church of Ankara,⁶⁵ is similar to the Sebastopolis Church in terms of plan type, central space arrangement, apses, bema, pastoforium cells, and the arrangement of transition to the side naves. Another example in terms of plan type and characteristics is the St. Nicholas Church in the Demre district of Antalya.

⁵⁵ KOCH 2007, 40; MUTLU 2007, 111-118.

⁵⁶ JERPHANION 1928, 113-143; SERIN 2014, 63-92.

⁵⁷ WULFF 1903; SCHMIT 1927; PESCHLOW 1972, 145-187; EYICE 1988; PESCHLOW 2004, 200-217; ERMIS 2009; KARACAN 2009.

⁵⁸ DEMIRIZ 1966; PESCHLOW 1975, 303-359; PESCHLOW 1990, 207-258; OTUKEN 1991, 853-856; OTUKEN 1997, 73-85; OTUKEN 1998a, 85-102; OTUKEN 1998b, 21-50; OTUKEN 2007; DOGAN 2014.

⁵⁹ KALLIGAS 1935; THEOCHARIDOU 1988; KOURKOUTIDOU/TOURTA 1997.

⁶⁰ GEORGE 1912; VAN MILLINGEN 1912; GROSSMANN 1965, 186-207; KRAUTHEIMER 1965; MATHEWS 1971; MATHEWS 1976; PESCHLOW 1977.

⁶¹ JERPHANION 1928, 113-143.

⁶² SERIN 2014, 63-92.

⁶³ There are different opinions about the construction date of the church: Jerphanion says that it was built in the second half of the 5th century, earlier than the Hagia Sophia Church in Istanbul. JERPHANION 1928, 143; Wulff dates the church to the 6th-7th century. WULFF 1903, 52-66; Mango dates the building to the 6th-7th century due to the small size of the building and the decorations showing 5th-6th century characteristics. MANGO 2006, 96; Buchwald dates the building to the 7th century. BUCHWALD 1969, 61; Krautheimer and Eyice date the building to the 9th century based on its stylistic features and construction technique. KRAUTHEIMER 1986, 289; EYICE 1991, 7.

⁶⁴ Peschlow dates the Church of Koimesis to the 8th century based on the apse and bema mosaics. PESCHLOW 1972, 145-187.

⁶⁵ SCHMIT 1927.

When these two churches are compared, significant resemblances become apparent. The St. Nicholas Church mirrors the cruciform layout, featuring a central square area capped by a dome, extending into rectangular spaces in four directions. The dome covering the square space in the centre rests on large pillars at the 4 corners and the transition to the dome is provided by pendants. The structure is dated by researchers to the 8th-9th centuries AD based on its plan characteristics, roofing and support system. Apart from the plan type, the two churches have similar arrangement of main and side apses, bemas, entrance openings to the pastoforium spaces and syntonons. The synthronon of the Church of St. Nicholas of Demre is vaulted and cloistered. Similarly, in the Hagia Irene Church in Istanbul, there is a 1 m. wide, vaulted passage between the walls of the main apse. The 1.25 m. wide gap in the interior of the main apse of the Sebastopolis Church suggests that the synthronon of the church was also vaulted and cloistered.

The Hagia Sophia Church of Thessaloniki, dated to the end of the 8th century AD,⁶⁶ is a monumental example of cruciform domed basilicas divided into three naves. It reflects the cruciform plan feature with the dome rising on 4 large pillars in the centre and the cross arms of different sizes extended to the 4 sides. The main space is surrounded by the side naves to the north and south and the narthex to the west. The central nave and the side naves are separated by arches supported by a series of small buttresses between the large pillars. The main apse is semi-circular on the interior and has 5 facades on the exterior. The apses of the pastoforium spaces are semicircular both internally and externally. Access to the pastoforium cells is provided from the east of the bema and side naves. The narthex is divided into 5 sections. The Hagia Sophia Church of Thessaloniki, like the other examples, bears similarities with the Sebastopolis Church in terms of plan type, central space arrangement, bema and pastoforium spaces.

The Church of Hagia Irene⁶⁷ is one of the most monumental examples of domed churches with cruciform naos. The construction of the building, which was started in AD 532 by Emperor Iustinianus I (AD 527-565), is believed to have been completed before the death of Empress Theodora (AD 548). The Hagia Irene Church demonstrates the distinctive attributes of the transition from the basilica plan type to the "Closed Greek Cross" plan. The central area is capped by a dome with a high pulley carried by four substantial pillars and showcases the cruciform plan aspect with cross arms extending in four directions. The western arm is longer and wider. Separation of the central nave and the side naves is provided by colonnades between large carriers. To the east of the bema is a semi-circular apse with 3 facades externally. Between the apse and the steps of the synthronon is a 1 m wide passage. There are pastophorium spaces on both sides of the apse. Access to the pastoforium spaces is provided from the bema and side naves. There is a 5-section narthex to the west, while the atrium section is close to the dimensions of a church.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ MANGO 2006.

⁶⁷ MULLER-WIENER 1988.

⁶⁸ The church is the only surviving Byzantine church with an atrium in

The opus sectile flooring within the middle nave of the church exhibits a pattern comprising five interconnected circles at its centre, encircled by diverse geometric shapes (such as quadrilaterals, squares, triangles, and hexagons). This flooring bears a resemblance, when compared to the examples we've reviewed, to the opus sectile floors in the Iznik Koimesis Church⁶⁹ and the St. Nicholas Church.⁷⁰ Apart from these examples, it can be seen in the floor pavement of the Early Byzantine building unearthed during the excavations in Sardis,⁷¹ in the Basilica of Studios in Istanbul⁷² and in the Pantokrator Monastery (Zeyrek Mosque).⁷³ The floor pavements of the mentioned examples and those in the Sebastopolis Church exhibit significant similarities both in terms of material and design. That the opus sectile flooring, a common feature during the Early and Middle Byzantine periods, was utilized in a wide time period poses challenges in determining a precise date.

Based on all these data, it is hypothesized that the Sebastopolis Church might have been constructed in the 7th-9th centuries AD, taking into account its existing plan, materials, and craftsmanship. Considering the large amount of Roman ceramics unearthed during the excavations, we can say that the first phase of the building dates back to earlier periods and that it may have been built on top of a Roman building. However, it will only be possible to give a precise date and to determine the exact phases it went through after the narthex and, if present, the atrium – both situated to the west of the church and currently obscured beneath the modern building – are revealed through excavation.

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⁶⁹ EYICE 1963, 373-383.

⁷⁰ DEMIRIZ 1966, 13-21, res. 16-18; OTUKEN 2001, 182-189; DOGAN, 2014, 55.

⁷¹ HANFMANN/DETWEILER 1966, 76, fig. 16.

⁷² KUDDE/AHUNBAY 2016, 36-61.

⁷³ SCHWEINFURTH 1953, 490-492.

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