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The Atrium in Early Christian Church Architecture in east Illyricum and the Large Early Christian Basilica with an Atrium in Scupi¹

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Abstract: *During Early Christianity the construction of larger church buildings, especially in the large centres, was conditioned by the increased number of new Christians. The liturgy and its strict organisation required stricter separation of the different types of church buildings and the different parts of the buildings. The buildings foreseen for regular congregation of the followers had to be clearly separated from the sections intended for performing cult rites, and separated from the lateral buildings intended for baptisms and burials. The atrium, as a continuation of the narthex, not only provides the visual and spatial backdrop for the liturgical movement, but it also participates in its formation, by providing the worshipers of the Christian faith with both a physical and psychological experience. Examples of this architectonic type of a church can be seen in larger cities but also in the newly fortified cities throughout the Balkans. They have various atriums and not all of the churches have axial and monumental entrances to their basilicas. The arrangement of the space and the entrances provide certain conclusions regarding the level and the type of liturgy that was practiced in the churches.*

The Balkans is rich with examples of Early Christian churches with atriums and their research reveals important qualifications and characteristics resulting from the development of this architectonic type.

The recently discovered Large Early Christian Basilica with an atrium in the Antiquity city of Scupi is included in the numerous churches of this type, which offer a means for following the development of the Early Christian church in East Illyricum.

Key words: *Early Christianity, basilica, atrium, Scupi, East Illyricum.*

The architecture of the Early Christian churches on the territory of East Illyricum has been a subject of scientific research for a long time. In Late Antiquity, the churches in different parts of the Empire were built with varying architectonic bases, in order to satisfy both the liturgical needs of the Christian church rites and the needs for gathering more and more followers. The discovery of the Large Early Christian basilica with an

¹ The period of Early Christianity is one of the areas where Professor Elica Maneva PhD has dedicated long years of her research and scientific work. This text is a small contribution in my desire to express the respect and admiration that I have for Professor Maneva, both as an archaeologist and as a scientist with the highest moral qualities.

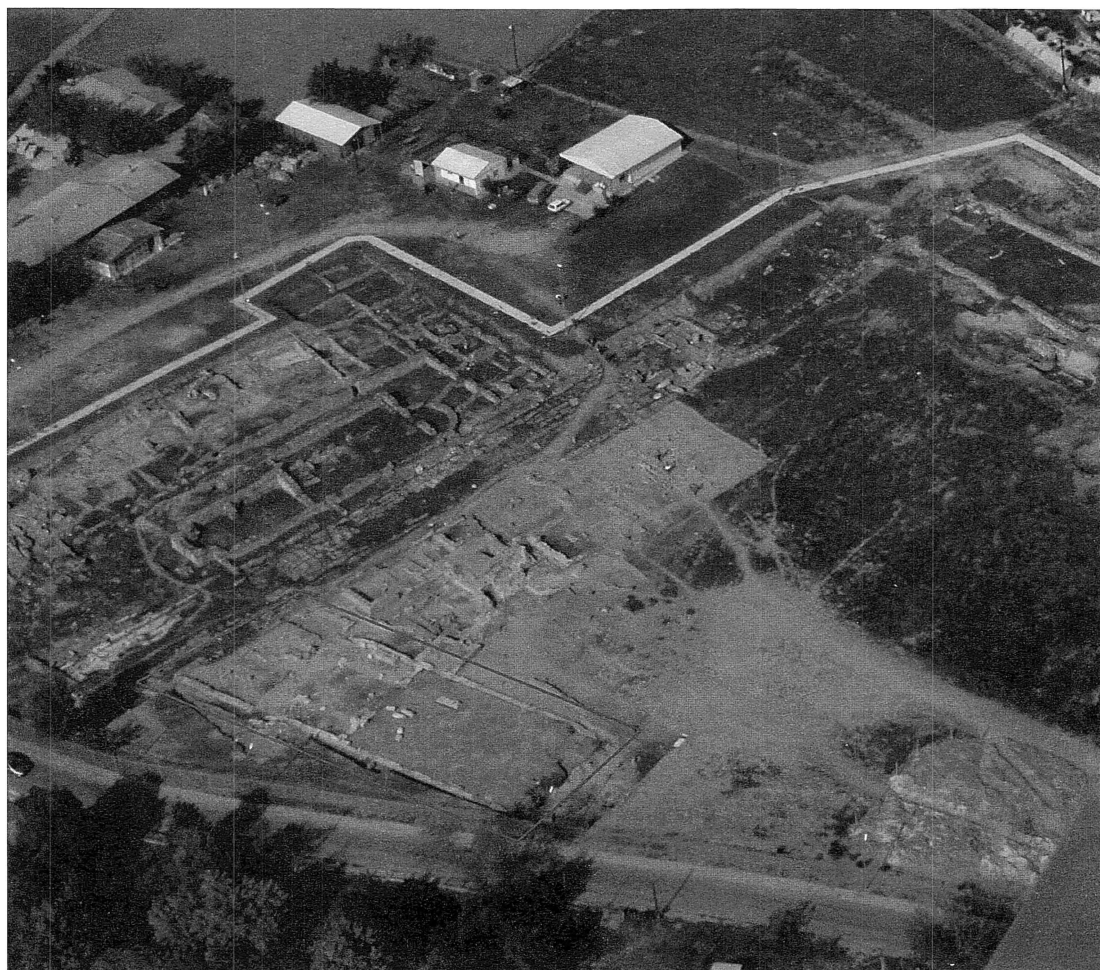


Fig. 1. Scupi - the city square with the Large basilica with atrium

atrium in Scupi imposed itself as a reason for researching this type of basilica on the territory of Macedonia and beyond, on the territory of East Illyricum². (fig.1) This newly discovered Scupi basilica has three naves, with a narthex and an atrium on the western end; the galleries were approached by stone stairways placed at the northern end of the atrium, and on its eastern end there are three apses, with the middle one being polygonal, and on the northern end of the narthex there is a small auxiliary room, while a large, partially researched room, that was built later than the church, lies on

² The research of the Large Early Christian Basilica with an atrium in Scupi in the period 2008 - 2011 and 2013 was performed by the City of Skopje Museum, under the management of M. Ončevska Todorovska.

M. Ončevska Todorovska, The Early Christianity and the New Early Christian Basilica in Scupi, Proceeding of the 22nd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Vol. III, Abstracts of free communications, Sofia 2011, 98-99; Eadem, Раното христијанство преку Големата ранохристијанска базилика во Скупи, Македонско Наследство 34-35, (зборник посветен на д-р Блага Алексова), Скопје 2009, 97-111; Eadem, Новата Голема ранохристијанска базилика во Скупи, Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica 20, Скопје 2011, 365-380.

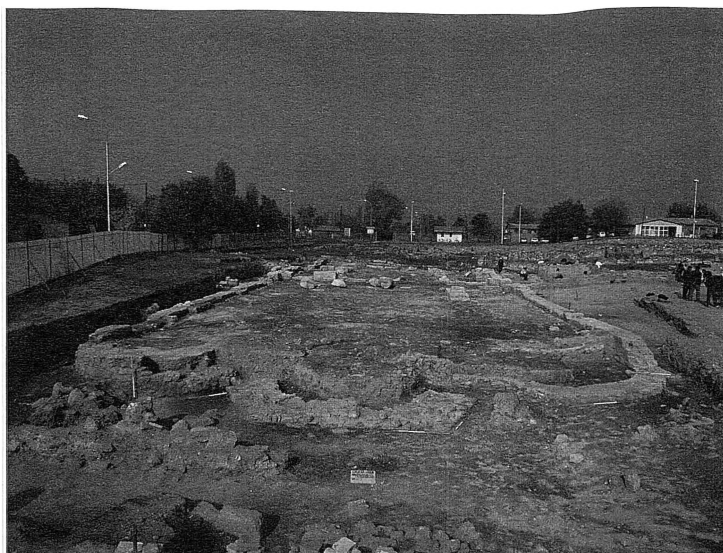


Fig. 2. Scupi - Large basilica with atrium



Fig. 3. Scupi - Large basilica – the atrium of the basilica

the southern end of the church. Spatially, and occupying the corner of one of the city blocks, the basilica is located in the central city area of Scupi and its entrance was from the *cardo maximus*.(fig. 2, 3).

The research of the new Scupi basilica, along with the following of the development of the Early Christian churches built on Macedonian soil and the development of the church buildings, which have varying appearances throughout the centuries, allow some suppositions regarding the influences of the neighbouring and farther regions of Macedonia and the region. The archaeological research in Macedonia reveals a continuous life and construction of a large number of basilicas during the Early Christianity period, especially in the Episcopal centres³. Most of the published plans of

³ Filipova S., The Influence of Eastern and Western Architectural Models on the Churches Built in the province Macedonia in the 5th – 6th C., Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, Vol. 2 No. 3,



Fig. 4. Basilica C in Amphipolis

Macedonian Early Christian churches reveal a dominance of the three-nave basilicas with dual pitched roof⁴. Many of the basilicas originating from the reign of Justinian I and from the second half of the century have three apses. They are mainly concentrated in the larger cities⁵, such as the Large Early Christian Basilica with an atrium in Scupi. The apses are mostly semicircular, and rarely trilateral or polygonal.

Architecturally speaking, the atrium is the first large room of the church buildings, which led to the other rooms on the path towards the basilica. It is the symbol of earthly life, and together with the propylaea, it is the first contact that the congregation made with the cult rites⁶. It is stipulated that it was introduced in the church architecture by Constantine⁷. By adapting the design of the previous structures this space acquired different alternatives, such as a square or a trapezoid atrium, or an atrium located on the southern or the northern end of the basilica. The atrium was a large quadrangular yard, with colonnades on three or four sides of the interior, located in the western end of the narthex, which connected it with the true entrance into the church, just as it is the case in Scupi. When this model had been applied in the design of the earlier churches,

MCSER Publishing, Rome-Italy, 2013, 425-430. Over 60 basilicas were recorded within the Episcopal cities and 250 out of them. Most of them have semicircular apses, rarely trilateral or quadrilateral, with only one example of a semicircular shape in the apse's interior, and flat on the outside. There are not many examples of churches with a trilateral central apse in Macedonia, such as the Large Early Christian Basilica with an atrium in Scupi.; about the political history of the Easter Illyricum churches in: Pietri Ch., *La géographie de l'Illyricum ecclésiastique et ses relations avec l'Eglise de Rome (Ve-Vie siècle)*, in: *Villes et peuplement dans l'Illyricum protobyzantin. Actes du colloque de Rome (12-14 mai 1982)*, Rome; Ecole Française de Rome, 1984, pp. 21-62. Publications de l'Ecole française de Rome, 77.

⁴ Ochal-Czarnowicz A., *Between East and West: Early Christian architecture in Macedonia in the social context*, in: *Studies in ancient art and civilization* 14, Krakow 2010, 189-206, 190.

⁵ Filipova S., *op.cit.*, 426: where she negates the influence of Dacia Mediterranea on the three-apse churches, and supports the opinion about the influence of Palestina, where they were more numerous and more frequent than in any other province. The idea is that they arrived in our region in the 5th century via Constantinople, and in the 6th century as a result of Justinian's construction activities.

⁶ Лилчиќ В., *Ранохристијанска црква, Скопје* 2003, 44 -51.

⁷ Ochal-Czarnowicz A., *op.cit.*, 191.



Fig. 5. Scupi - Large basilica - the north part of the atrium



Fig. 6. Scupi - Large basilica - the north entrance in the atrium

it resulted with a rectangular atrium, such as in the Episcopal basilica in Philippi, or an atrium located along the southern wall of the basilica, such as in Basilica C in Amphipolis. (fig.4).

The research of this architectonic segment of the Early Christian basilica is closely connected to the interpretation of the liturgies. The written sources mention two solutions regarding the opening part of the liturgy - with a solemn procession or without a group entering into the church building⁸. The atriums, intended for the

⁸ Ibid., 191-192: Eusebius, in his Church History describes the Tyre cathedral, where the atrium was a gathering place for the worshipers, who waited to enter the church together in specific groups. The Canon 56 by the Synod of Laodicea (between 321-381) stipulates that the priests should take their position more often along with the deacons than before them, which indicates a liturgy without a formed group at the entrance. The people took their specific places before the beginning of the ritual. In this case, the atrium is not necessary for performing the liturgy.

physical gathering of the worshipers, provided the visual backdrop for serving the liturgy and allowed both a physical and psychological experience during the liturgical movement. The atrium and the narthex are important parts of the architectonic plan of the Early Christian church, especially on the territory of the eastern part of the state. These two mutually connected spaces represent the relationship of the profane world outside the church with the sacral space of the Christian ritual. Not only did the atrium, as a continuation of the narthex, provide the visual and the spatial backdrop, it also shaped the liturgical movement. The construction and the organization of a certain architectonic type of church were under the influence of the church and state authorities and largely conditioned by the finances approved for constructing the building. The construction of the atrium is, above all, a realisation of the idea for gathering the people and preparing them for the experience provided by the church's iconography and the interconnection of the sacral and the profane. The exploitation of this space was influenced by the rites performed in them, which have often been unrecognised by the research of the Early Christian church⁹.

The analyses of the numerous atriums offer the possibility of making conclusions about the general opinions regarding the creation and the role of the liturgy in a specified region. In context of this opinion are the locations of the positions for the atrium's entrance doors, the doors leading to the church's narthex and then to the naos. The auxiliary doors, positioned on the lateral sides of the narthex, indicate the route determined by the liturgical rites. There are some unanswered questions as to how the clergy entered the church, i.e. what was the movement of the members of the clergy, and what was the movement of the congregation and the new initiates in the religion. An integral part of this problem is the opinion of the order of performing these activities within the church's rooms. At the entrances to the lateral aisles of the Scupi basilica, there are preserved stone thresholds, which are worn by long use and have openings for attaching wooden doors on their corners. (fig.5, 6).

The appearance of numerous atriums indicates some general conclusions regarding their design and role in the liturgy. Most usual are the atriums resembling large yards surrounded by colonnades on three sides, and are most often located in the western end of the narthex and church's main aisle. There are cases when it is flanked differently with additional rooms, which might have served the liturgical and other practical needs of the church clergy and the initiates in the faith. The atriums were also differently decorated - with marble slabs, floor mosaics and wall paintings. The atriums often had fountains or pools, where water was also used for performing rites. The atriums of the Macedonian churches are positioned on the western end, except in the case of Plaošnik's southern basilica, where it was annexed on the northern end¹⁰. (T.1, fig.2)

The clergy in the liturgy had the role of a mediator between divine authority and the community. These tactics were most effective in relation with the Christian

⁹ Caraher W., *Church, Society and the Sacred in Early Christian Greece*, dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2003, 94.

¹⁰ Filipova S., *op.cit.*, 426.

architecture in a broader Mediterranean context, providing the institution of the church with political power. Christianisation, as a cultural process, is closely connected to the idea and the practice of mediation. The church as an institute was provided with the status of an economical, political and cultural seat, while the aspects of the divine secrets of the Christian faith were made unavailable for the folk save for the mediation of the clergy. The role of the clergy was clearly set, as was the role of the believers and the potential believers, which created positions of the religious objects elements. From the first moment, the problem of the construction of the church is in correlation to the organisation of the Christian ritual. The ritual of separating the clergy and the folk is manifested as a separation in the space¹¹. The church's architecture and the liturgy are completely integrated in the transfer of the theological impulses in the Late Antiquity.

The priest, by performing the liturgy, became a priest of the church altar, just as Christ was a high priest of the heavenly altar. Hence, the position of a mediator between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of Earth gave great authority to the priest. With this positioning, the proximity to the divine turned into an important means for demonstrating their individual high rank during the rites. Only they were allowed a presence within the architectonically created barrier of the altar. The architecture functioned so that it provided the context where the liturgy could have effectively communicated its importance. The impulse for correct synchronisation of social relations, architecture, rituals and cosmology manifested itself during the Late Roman society. The researchers of the Late Antiquity period and the Early Christian basilicas recognise the highly ranked relationship between the ideas of order, ritual and architecture. The transformation of the Late Antiquity cities clarifies the role that the institutional changes played, especially the emergence of the Christian church, the basic structure of civil finances, and the monumental building in the Late Antiquity cities¹².

Christian ritual has built the identity both of the clergy and of the folk by arranging the architectonic space in respect to the liturgy¹³. The liturgy is a mediator between all the types of occasions for its performance and the ritual. Christian ritual manifests a tradition of a procession in order to demonstrate the hierarchy, and the relationship between the divine space within the church and the profane world. The architectonic barriers and the rites of passing through them indicate the clergy as the mediator between the people and the deity. With the demise of paganism at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century, many pagan processions slowly disappeared. The form of the Christian processions, disregarding whether they took to the streets of the Mediterranean cities or were constricted to the naos area of the churches, built the

¹¹ Carahar, op.cit, 81, the author lists an extensive overview of sources regarding the history of this problem.

¹² Caracher W., op.cit., 128-135. The transformation of the cities at the end of the Antiquity is undoubtedly one of the key elements contained in the construction of church buildings. The phenomenon of the spread of Christianity as a religion, by building more and more churches, is not isolated only to a simple change of the religious practices, but also to a change of the symbols and the principles that supported the social order.

¹³ Krauthajmer R. i Ćurčić S., *Ranohrišćanska i vizantijska arhitektura*, Beograd 2008, 39-42.

identity of the clergy, providing them with the status of an elite, which allowed them to become a strong factor in the sacral and the profane worlds. This, in fact, represents the emergence of a new position in creating social identity, which contributed to the reduction of godlessness among the people. The spread of Christian culture depended on the church architecture, which was the time and space mediator between the space intended for the people and the clergy at the moment of liturgy. The architecture takes over the role of a mediator. The architectonic form determines the relative consistency of the church building and the ritual practices performed within. The church interior with its divisions became a symbolic guide for the liturgical movements, thus determining the place of each member in the Christian ritual.

The architectonic space of the Early Christian church manifests a range of characteristics. The church is the sacred space for certain areas in that region. The rites were incorporated having in mind the idea of civil and social identity, with increased political and social authority, besieged by the clergy even for issues that did not concern the church. The church building succeeded in integrating the sacral and the profane. The clearly defined types of buildings became guidelines for the regular church service, for the cult of martyrs, for baptisms, and for different private and public events. The standard type of church had a main aisle, two lateral aisles and an apse. There are many variations, based on local traditions, which imposed varying architectonic forms. The innovations can be seen in preserved construction structures, as it is the atrium.

The regular service was performed in the standard types of basilicas, built both within the cities and the rural settlements. The diversity of the construction and the inclination towards segmentation of the basilica's architectonic base depending on the local traditions is reflected in the construction of the atriums as front yards; bordered with four porches with colonnades - quadriporticus; priprata, i.e. lobbies - exonarthex, galleries above the lateral aisles, additional lateral aisles; crypts and other. The orientation of the churches became a set rule. In the 6th century, after the construction practice had been established, construction of the churches with the W - E orientation shall not submit itself to the existing urbanistic city plan, but they change the layout of the city plan with their building. The large basilica with an atrium in Scupi is a confirmation for this. It was built in a central city block in Scupi on the remains of a large 2nd century thermal complex. The cardo and the decumanus streets intersect at the corner of the block, which assumed a trapezoid shape after the new basilica had been built with its correct orientation¹⁴.

The introduction of the atrium as an architectonic element on the territory of the East Illyricum prefecture is applied differently during different periods of Early Christianity¹⁵. The broader spread of the atrium throughout the provinces of the Illyricum prefecture is

¹⁴ Ončevska Todorovska M., The Great Early Cristian basilica in Scupi and Early Christianity, *Macedonian Heritage* 34-35, Skopje 2009, 97-111.

¹⁵ Krauthajmer R. i Ćurčić S., op.cit., 452, f.n. 24; Snively C., *Dacia Mediteranea and Macedonia Secunda in the sixth century: A Question of influence on church architecture*, Niš and Byzantium III, Niš 2005, 213-224.

perceived as an influence resulting from its primary appearance in the Palestina province in the 4th century, but also in Constantinople and Rome. During Justinian's reign the atriums were annexed to the older churches which lacked one¹⁶.

One example for the use of the atrium in Constantine's era is the large building dedicated to St. Peter in Rome, built around 400 AD. The large mass of people, both Romans and pilgrims, gathered to follow the clergy and participate in the service. This church was built with large dimensions and it was different from the remaining church buildings of Constantine. In the case of St. Peter in Rome, the church was entered through a triple entrance gate of the spacious atrium. The basis of Constantine's churches had not conformed to the prescribed norms, while the standard type of churches, as the common Early Christian basilica, developed in the second half of the 4th and during the 5th century. One of the most striking characteristics of the Christian architecture of this period is its diversity. In other words, there are: one-aisled basilicas, with or without lateral aisles, with an ambulatorium, with a transept, with or without an atrium, and all determined by the diversity of its function as a cathedral, as a martyrium basilica, or as a funerary church. The diversities of the basis can be seen even within the frames of a single category¹⁷. One characteristic of the churches in this epoch is the utter simplicity of the exterior, as opposed to the interior decoration.

In the last years of the 4th century the architecture and the patrons started to address problems of church architecture. The Constantine period, with its inventiveness and experimentation, opened a road for establishing rules, while different types of buildings have gradually developed from the different liturgical functions and soon became standardized. The individual provinces of each of the three large regions of the Empire preferred the local variants, which triggered an exchange of architectonic concepts between the provinces. This diversity began in the large centres around 380, and had its peak in the 5th century throughout the Empire, while in the provinces it is still present deep in the 6th century¹⁸.

According to the data provided by the Greek researcher Y. Varalis, approximately 160 Early Christian churches were recorded in the northern part of East Illyricum until the end of the 5th century, including the churches in the provinces Dacia Ripencis, Dacia Mediteranea, Daradania, Moesia Superior and Praevalis. The three-nave churches are most commonly found within the fortifications of the larger cities, and they are often situated away from the central city areal. In many of them, instead of an atrium, there are one or two narthexes, with a simple portico on the western end¹⁹.

¹⁶ Daskalov M., Goryanova S., Early Christian architectural complex in Sofia (Bulgaria), Niš i Vizantija.VII, Niš 2008, 151-162, the atrium was annexed later to the three-aisled from the 5th to 6th century; Snively C., The Episcopal basilica, the Via Sacra, and the Semicircular court at Stobi, R. Macedonia, Niš i Vizantija X, 185-200, the atrium with a triangular shape was constructed soon after the first phase of the basilica, late 5th century.

¹⁷ Krauthajmer R. i Ćurčić S., op.cit., 64, 65.

¹⁸ Ibid., 94.

¹⁹ Varalis Y., Observations on the Church Building of Diocese of Dacia (4 – 6 century), paper on the occasion of Niš and Byzantium VII International Conference. Niš and Byzantium VII, Niš 2008.

The style of the churches in the Aegean coastal region is probably close to that in Constantinople. The usual type of basilica here is the one with a basilical - elongated basis, but with galleries above the lateral aisles, and the basilica with a cruciform transept. The Acheiropoietos's three-aisled basilica in Thessalonica, 450-470, can be observed as typical for the architectonic style of the Aegean region²⁰. In the larger part of the Aegean coastal region the churches have an atrium ending with an exonarthex as a front of the church body, with additional rooms, baptismal font and diaconicon where worshipers left their offerings. Although the local traditions might have required a transept, or an elimination of the galleries, or because they might have had simplified decorations due to the financial limitations, the stylistic directions did not change much²¹.

For Krauthajmer and Ćurčić the types of church buildings in Constantinople are very similar to the churches built during the 5th century throughout the whole Aegean region, and beyond, from Meriamlik and Side, to Thessalonica and Ravenna²². In the Balkans, during the 5th century, these large churches were also built in smaller settlements, sometimes even several at the same time. Their basis distinguishes them as a special group, although connected with the eastern Mediterranean region, from Constantinople to Egypt and north Italy. For example, the Epidaurus basilica, which originates from around 400 AD, reveals western influences with the four lateral aisles, which indicate a Constantinian and post-Constantinian tradition, while one of the features of the Aegean style is the atrium separated by rooms and propylaea at its front. However, the most usual type of church from the 4th century until late in the 6th century is the simple basilica. Notwithstanding the small size and the poor decoration, the standard basilica has features common to the churches of the western coast of Asia Minor - the atrium and the priprata form the entrance, the main aisle has lateral aisles, the colonnades are raised on pedestals and have intercolumniation parapets, the apses tend to be semicircular both on the interior and the exterior, in opposition to the Constantinople tradition.

The atriums, as structures, are typical for the larger churches. Regarding this architectonic space, both types of churches are present throughout East Illyricum - those preceded by an atrium and those without. In the second type of church, this role was sometimes performed by the exonarthex, as it is in the case of the Suvodol and Radolišta basilicas on our territory. Much rarer are the cases with a double atrium, which were undoubtedly built for pilgrims. They are mostly known from Palestine²³ and Syria.

²⁰ Krauthajmer R. i Ćurčić S., *op.cit.*, 101-102. As opposed the western regions, where the liturgical rites stipulated that the clergy should be gathered in the apse and around the altar, at least in Constantine's period.

²¹ One of the most important works for the central and northern part of Greece are the works of Caraher, *op.cit.*, Varalis, *op.cit.*; Although the level of research of many of the churches in the Aegean region provinces has lately increased, it is still at its minimum, which hinders every conclusion and establishment of their characteristics.

²² Krauthajmer R. i Ćurčić S., *op.cit.*, 105.

²³ The basilica on the Mount of Olives, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

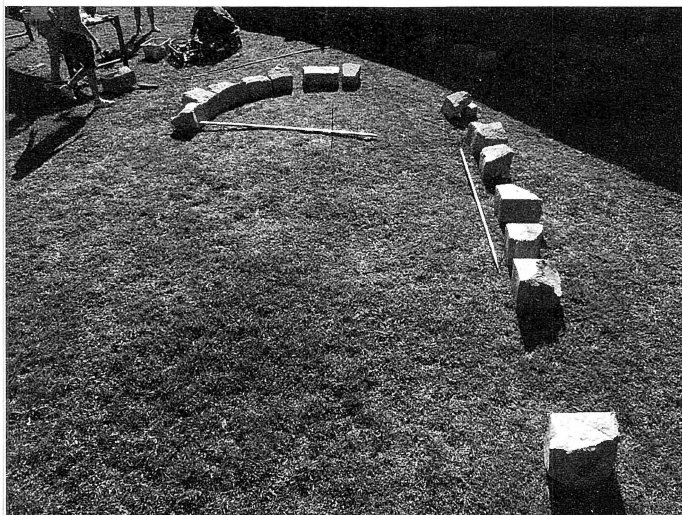


Fig. 7. Scupi - Large basilica - monumental entrance of the atrium, possible reconstruction

As the atrium served as a buffer zone between the sacral and the profane spheres, the presence of the monumental entrance is a continuation of a sophisticated portico or propylaea, as it is in the case of Basilica A in Philippi²⁴. The Large basilica with an atrium in Scupi has large entrance rooms in front of the atrium, which were accessed through a high stone arch, while the entrance floor was paved with large marble slabs (fig.7). Separating the sacral from the profane, the atrium was never considered to be a holy ground. However, the very existence of a monumental entrance in the atrium tells a lot about the monumentality of the event when the congregation entered the church. This also gives the atrium, as an architectonic space, a certain spiritual dimension, which was naturally not of an equal importance as that of the church.

In the atriums of some of the basilicas, such as the Basilica A in Amphipolis²⁵, remains of circular stone blocks were discovered, which might have formed the stand for the High Priest's seat, indicating that certain rites were performed in the atrium, which is not the case with the Macedonian basilicas.

The atrium and the narthex are often present in the churches on Macedonian territory. In Krauthajmer's opinion, they, just as the church architecture and furniture, are under the influence of the Greek liturgy, and that afterwards they simply followed Constantinople's examples. In addition to her other conclusions regarding the Macedonian churches, the Polish researcher A. Ochal-Czarnowicz notices that the interest for the cult of the martyr was very low in this region, and that there is a lack of processions. According to her, in the Macedonian churches, unlike in Constantinople, the congregation was gathered in the atrium, on the lateral aisles and on the galleries, instead of following the clergy in the main aisle. They were just observers of the procession going from the narthex, through the tribelon and the central nave to the altar. This separation is additionally emphasised by separate constructions - a high

²⁴ Touratsoglou I., *Macedonia - history, monuments, museums*, Athens 1996, 372-381.

²⁵ Ochal-Czarnowicz A., *op.cit.*, 192-193.

stylobate and marble slabs placed between the colonnades²⁶. There is a conceptual change that has spread throughout East Illyricum at the end of the 6th and the during the early 7th century, beginning the process of erecting monuments with a central concept, developed completely in the spirit of the Byzantine architecture, first in Constantinople, and afterwards throughout the whole state.

The Early Christian churches with atriums in the Balkans are numerous, and their analyses imply conclusions connected with different designs and roles in the liturgy. The atriums of the Greek churches are with large dimensions, usually with colonnades on three or four sides, and they are located to the west of the church's narthex and main nave, being positioned along the medial axes of the building. In some cases the approach was provided to different lateral rooms, which could have served both liturgical purposes and the simple practical needs of the clergy and the congregation. Here and there they were decorated with marble floors and painted walls, some had fountains and pools, probably for ritual communion of the followers gathered to enter the church. Carachar points to Pallas ("L'édifice culturel chrétien," 503-504) and the opinion that the atrium could have served the pilgrims, while he is sceptical regarding the opinion that it might have been a place for mass baptisms²⁷.

A relatively large number of Early Christian basilicas on the territory of today's Greece have atriums: the two Dion basilicas - the city basilica and the grave basilica - outside the city, the Basilica A in Philippi, the Lechaion basilica (St Leonidas) in Corinth, the Asclepieion church near Athens, the Kraneion church near Corinth, in Epidaurus in Argos - Aspis, Demetrias A in Thessaly, Nea Anchialos - basilicas A, B, D in Larisa, Nikopolis – and basilicas A, B, D - Epirus Vetus province. (T.2; T.4). The Kraneion basilica in Corinth has characteristic galleries leading to the aisles and they were accessed by stairways from outside the basilica, on the northern and southern end of the internal atrium²⁸.

The monumental entrances attracted great attention and they are found in many churches of the eastern Mediterranean²⁹. These entrances had essential meaning for the liturgical procession and the ritual, by marking the prayer position for the believer. In respect of this issue in the Greek churches, the Asclepieion Basilica in Athens has only narrow doors in the atrium. The atrium of the Demetrias A church only had entrances leading through a narrow corridor with the position of the entrance doors slightly deviating from the church axis. The Basilica B in Nea Anchialos, dated in the 5th century, had a small propylaea positioned along the southern end of the church and deviating from the axis of the small atrium. The large church in Lechaion, Corinth, the

²⁶ Ochal-Czarnowicz A., *op.cit.*, 204.

²⁷ Carachar, *op.cit.*, 95.

²⁸ Sanders G.D.R., *Archaeological Evidence for Early Christianity and the End of Hellenistic Religion in Corinth*, in: *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*. Ed.D.Schowalter and S.Friesen, *Harvard Theological Studies*, 53, pp 419-442.

²⁹ Such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the first Hagia Sofia in Istanbul, the Christian complex in Jerash, the Basilica A in Philippi.

Ahaia province, with its first phase being dated in 450-460, while the second phase in 518-527, seems to be missing a dominant entrance in the atrium, so instead, the southern end entrance to the narthex was used. The main entrance in the atrium of the five-nave basilica in Epidaurus has a correct position, located on the axial axis, while two other symmetrical entrances are located laterally. This basilica and the Basilica A in Nikopolis, dated in the second quarter of the 6th century, as well as the Basilica D in Nikopolis, from the end of the 5th - beginning of the 6th century, are one of the few where the atriums and their entrances have been built in harmony with the building's logic and symmetry. In Philippi, in Basilica A, a stairway was built to enter the atrium³⁰. In Dion, both Early Christian basilicas have atriums³¹. In the city basilica, dated in the 5th century, the position of the atrium shows great deviation in respect to the church itself, and it was entered through small rooms on the western end. The grave basilica in Dion, dated in the 5th century, reveals a great architectonic consistency regarding the organization of both the church and the atrium space, while the atrium was entered on its northern end.

The axial entrances are not usual throughout central and southern Greece. The accentuated entrances were not a priority in the decoration, even in the large churches. If the entrance in the atrium was not located axially, it would hinder the approach for the large processions, which in Late Antiquity took place on the main streets. There the wide colonnaded streets and the monumental entrances provided the sense of officiousness of entering. The lack of striking entrances in the Greek examples can probably indicate that the public procession there played a lesser role in the liturgy compared to other regions. Most atriums in the Greek churches communicated with the narthex through two doors on the eastern wall, harmonized with the northern and southern colonnade in the atrium. Not only did this hinder the direct movement through the atrium, the narthex and the central nave, but it also provided protection from the visual intrusion in the naos's interior. This is often a place for a tribelon, while in the case of Lechaion, there is a pentabelon.

The presence of an atrium is a usual occurrence in East Illyricum³². Among the six researched Early Christian basilicas in Parthicopolis³³, Sandanski, within the Roman province Macedonia Prima, the three-aisled Basilica 1 with a residence building, dated in the 4th to 5th century, has an atrium additionally annexed to the basilica. (T.3, fig.2). At the atrium's entrance there is a long colonnade along the whole side of the atrium at its western end, and it was directly accessed through entrances at the northern and southern corridor of the atrium. This atrium has a trilateral colonnade. The Basilica 4 /Episcopal Basilica, in Sandanski, from the 4th to 5th century has an atrium on the

³⁰ Touratsoglou I., op.cit.

³¹ Pandermalis D., Dion, the Archaeological Site and the Museum, Adam Editions – Pergamos, 1997.

³² Dimitrova-Milčeva A., Petkov V., Basilika Nr.4 (Bischofsbasilika) in der Stadt Sandanski (Sv. Vrač). Vorbericht, Folia Archaeologica Balkanica No. 1, Skopje 2006, 403-424.

³³ Petrova S., On Early Christianity and Early Christian Basilicas of Parthicopolis, in: Studi sull' Oriente Cristiano, Roma 2012, 93-139, Fig. 9; Dimitrova-Milčeva A., Petkov V., op.cit., fig. 3a.

southern end, built in the 5th century, and it has an arched construction on the inside. The atrium of this basilica is similar to basilica C in Amphipolis and Basilica 2 in Nicopolis ad Nestum.

In the Macedonia Secunda province, Stobi is the city that provides various information regarding a range of questions from the Early Christianity period. (T.1, fig.6, 7). In the case of the city's dominant Episcopal basilica, with its first phase in the first half of the 5th century, and second phase at the end of the 5th/beginning of the 6th century, the atrium is built in the available space with a triangular shape next to Via Sacra. Its atrium has an irregular shape as a result of the positioning of the church with an orientation E-S/E and because of the city's street grid. According to C. Snively, the construction of the atrium corresponds to the late 5th to 6th century phase³⁴. The positioning of the pillars, supporting the eastern portico along Via Sacra, create the entrance to the church. The atrium of the Central Basilica, dated at the end of the 4th - beginning of the 5th century, has smaller dimensions than the church itself and its interior is unsymmetrical with the northern and the southern colonnade of the naos.

In Lychnidus, in the Epirus Nova province, the Plaošnik Basilica (Southern Basilica) from the beginning of the 6th century has a large atrium on the northern end, with a quadrilateral colonnade constructed in its interior³⁵. On the plateau next to it, there is the rare construction of the Polyconch Church on Plaošnik (Imaret), which has an atrium on the western end. The Studenčišta Basilica³⁶ has an atrium consisting of two parts, where one of them is divided into two sections with pilasters, the second is rectangular with a small pool, while a low wall with pillars was raised between them. The interior is solved with brickwork cruciform pillars. The three-aisled basilica dedicated to St. Erasmus on the shore of the Ohrid Lake has a two-storey atrium to the west of the narthex³⁷. The number of Early Christian basilicas with atriums in Ohrid is large and they are all differently built. (T.1, fig. 2, 3, 4, 5).

In the Epirus Nova province, the atrium of the Arapai basilica near Dyrrachium, from the 5th to 6th century is in consistency with the church and its entrance is positioned axially. (T.3, fig.1). With dimensions of 65 x 28 meters it is the largest basilica in Albania. According to the researchers H. and S. Hidri, the style of this basilica has similarities with the Epirus Vetus basilicas, such as the ones in Dodona, Paramythie and Nicopolis, which are now all in the western part of Greece.

Caričin Grad in the Dacia Mediterranea province abounds with basilicas with atriums³⁸. (T.3, fig. 4, 5, 6). The Episcopal Basilica has three apses, with one of them

³⁴ Snively C., *The Episcopal basilica, the Via Sacra, and the Semicircular court at Stobi*, R. Macedonia, Niš i Vizantija X, Niš 2012, 185-200; I. Mikulcic, *Stobi an ancient city*, Skopje 2003, 118-132, plan of the Episcopal Basilica on page 120.

³⁵ Bitrakova Grozdanova V., *Lychnidos a lépoque Paleochretienne et son noyau urban*, Niš and Byzantium VII, Niš 2009, 23-36, Fig. 3. Plaošnik.

³⁶ Bitrakova Grozdanova V., *Monuments Paleochretines de la region d'Ohrid*, Ohrid 1975, 68-81, pl. VI.

³⁷ Миклучиќ И., *Антички градови во Македонија*, Скопје 1999, 361-362, сл. 236.

³⁸ Баван Б. и Иванишевиќ В., *Iustiniana Prima -Царичин Град*, Лесковац 2006.

being trilateral. The atrium of this 6th century basilica is in architectonic harmony with the church, while the construction was made by four cruciform brickwork pillars as parts of the colonnades in its interior and the interior of the church itself. The same manner of construction can be seen in the Large Early Christian Basilica with an atrium in Scupi. One more construction element is shared by the two churches. The Scupi basilica has two buttresses laterally at the narthex entrance in the eastern section of the atrium, and they are connected to the brickwork pillars of the atrium construction. The 6th century Basilica with a transept in Caričin Grad has a symmetrically positioned atrium, just as the 6th century Basilica with a crypt in the same city. The atriums of these basilicas are quadrilateral. Trilateral atriums can be found in the small Cruciform Church and the Triconch Church extra muros from the 6th century, where the rectangular atrium has larger dimensions than the church. The atriums in all the churches in Caričin Grad are constructed in architectonic harmony with the church itself, following the axial axis.

In the remaining prefectures of the state, several large churches with atriums, built in the 4th and 5th century, distinguish themselves in the provinces on the eastern Mediterranean coast and the inland³⁹. The construction of atriums in the Early Christian basilicas is widely spread throughout the Mediterranean region, which is undoubtedly in consistency with the liturgical rites.

The positioning of all of the above mentioned elements in the church building, their organisation and consequentiality in the space, talk about the manner and the type of performing the religious rites. Carachar points out that the position of the entrances can indicate the type of the liturgy performed and that the congregation in Constantinople probably entered the church simultaneously with the procession of clerics, which was facilitated by the numerous church doors, and the clergy performed the prayers in the narthex, while the folk filled the naos and witnessed the clergy procession. In the west, where the atriums are much rarer, the folk entered the church before the clergy did.

The architectonic plan of the Large basilica with an atrium in Scupi supports the opinion that in the Macedonian churches, unlike in Constantinople, the congregation gathered in the atrium on the lateral aisles and in the galleries, instead of following the clergy in the main aisle. Standing in the narthex, the lateral naves, and the galleries, they were just observers of the procession that went through the tribelon and the central nave to the altar. This separation is additionally emphasised by additional

³⁹ In the Oriens prefecture in the Palaestina Prima province, atriums can be found in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, 4th century, the Basilica Eleona in Jerusalem, the Basilica of Gethsemane, 380-390, where the atriums are with large dimensions. The atrium of the Basilica with atrium in El-Deir in the Syria province is twice as large as the church, and it is framed with additional rooms. In the Arabia Prima province, in Gerasa - Jarash, second half of the 4th century end of the 5th century, the grand Cathedral Complex has an atrium on the western end, slightly deviating from the axis of the church complex. The Cyprus province had basilicas with atriums from the 5th century. In the Asia province, the basilicas of St John the Baptist in Ephesus, near Selcuk, restored by Justinian I, and the Church of St. Mary, around 400 AD, have large atriums. There is also an atrium in the 6th century Eufasian basilica in Parentium - Poreč in the Italia prefecture of Venetia et Histira province. The large number of atriums is obvious not only in East Illyricum, especially in the costal regions of Asia Minor, where it had its beginnings.

construction - a high stylobate and marble slabs between the colonnades. The atriums became frequent in the churches from the larger cities in the central and the southern part of East Illyricum⁴⁰.

The Large Basilica with an atrium in Scupi, which is characterised by its relatively complex architectonic plan, is in complete opposition to the architectonic simplicity of the Early Christian basilica with a baptismal font in Scupi⁴¹. Its lavish appearance is contributed by the spacious atrium. The colonnades are supported from the inside by cruciform brickwork pillars on the corners, and at the entrance of the narthex, the cruciform brickwork pillars have buttresses. They accentuate the median entrance in the church, while the lateral entrances had doors. These types of atriums - where the interior is framed by four colonnades - can be seen in the Dion basilicas, the Central Basilica in Stobi, in Epidaurus (T.3, fig. 3), in Arapai near Dyrrachium, and the Episcopal Basilica in Caričin Grad. Several Early Christian basilicas with atriums are concentrated in Caričin Grad and in Ohrid, which clearly indicate the importance of these cities as centres for gathering believers and preserving the Christian religion. The spread of the Early Christian basilicas throughout the whole Illyricum region certainly suggests that the basic purpose of the construction of the atrium was directed towards acknowledging the congregation and performing the liturgy.

The atriums played an important role in respect of accepting the performance of the rites by the folk, and in attracting new followers, which was greatly aided by their position in the respect of the performance of the liturgical rites. The types of the churches, the architecture of the buildings, the influence in the introduction and the development of this architectonic space in the church played important roles in the Christian architecture in the period of the 5th and the 6th century. In the resolution of these questions it is important to publish the materials for the Early Christian churches from the territory of East Illyricum, the lack of which largely hinders the research of this problematic.

The transformation of the Late Antiquity city clarifies the role of the emergence of the institution of the church⁴². By mediating the religious transitions in the temples, Christianisation made the cult famous, with which the efficiency of the religious practices, present throughout the Mediterranean culture and introduced in everyday life, received an essential importance for city life and the city elite. The Early Christian church becomes a space for mediation of two different ideas, two different approaches - the human and the divine one, and ultimately, a manner of understanding Early Christian church architecture.

⁴⁰ Filipova S., op.cit., 428, and literature. The atriums that appeared in the 4th century in Palestina, Constantinople and Rome, during Justinian's age often became an additional part of the existing churches.

⁴¹ Гарашанин М.и Коракевиќ Д., Базилика II во Скупи, МAA 5, Прилеп 1979, 31-45.

⁴² Sodini J.-P, The Transformation of Cities in Late Antiquity within Provinces of Macedonia and Europe, in: Transition to Late Antiquity, On the Danube and Beyond, ed. by A.G.Poulter, Proceeding of the British Academy 141, 2007, 311-336.

Атриумот во црковната ранохристијанска архитектура во Источен Илирик и Големата ранохристијанска базилика со атриум во Скупи

Резимé

Изградбата на поголеми црковни градби во ранохристијанскиот период, особено во големите центри, била условена од зголемувањето на бројот на нови верници. Деловите од црковните објекти, предвидени за редовно собирање на верниците, морале да бидат јасно одвоени од деловите наменети за одвивање на ритуалот на култот и одделени од страничните градби наменети за крштевања и погребни. Атриумот, во продолжение со нартексот, освен пружањето на визуелна и просторна позадина, го оформува литургиското движење, овозможувајќи им физичко и психичко искуство на примателите на христијанската вера. Примерите од архитектонскиот тип ранохристијански базилики со атриум се среќаваат, претежно, во поголемите градови, но и во новите утврдени населени места низ Балканот. Атриумите кај нив се различни по форма и поставеност во однос на базиликата, и сите немаат осовински и монументални влезови. Распоредот на просторот и влезовите пружаат одредени сознанија за степенот и видот на литургијата што се обавувала во црквите.

На Балканот се бројни примерите на ранохристијански цркви со атриум, чии проучувања покажуваат значајни квалификации и особености произлезени од развојот на овој архитектонски тип. Неодамна откриената Големаранохристијанска базилика со атриум во античкиот град Скупи, кај Скопје, се вклучува во низата цркви од овој тип, преку кои се следи развојот на ранохристијанската црква во Источен Илирик.

Проучувањето на новата скупска базилика, заедно со следењето на развојот на ранохристијанските цркви градени на македонска почва и нивното менување низ вековите, овозможуваат да се постават одредени мислења за влијанијата од соседните и подалечните региони на Македонија.

Проучувањата на цркви од овој архитектонски план, меѓу кои е и Големата базилика со атриум во Скупи, одат во прилог на мислењето дека кај македонските цркви, за разлика од Константинопол, верниците се собирале во атриумот, на

страничните бродови и на галериите, наместо да го следат свештенството во главниот брод. Тие биле само набљудувачи на процесијата која се одвивала преку трибелонот и централниот кораб до светилиштето. Оваа поделба дополнително се истакнува преку посебни конструкции – висок стилобат и мермерни плочи меѓу колонадите.

Атриумите одиграле голема улога во однос на прифаќање на населението за изведување на ритуалот и за прибирање на нови верници, за што е важна нивната поставеност во однос на одвивање на литургискиот ритуал. Типот на црквите, на архитектурата на објектите, влијанието кон воведувањето и развојот и на овој архитектонски простор во црквата, одиграле главни улоги во христијанската архитектура во периодот на 6. и 7. век.

Во периодот на доцната антика, посредувајќи на верските транзиции на храмовите, христијанизацијата го прославила култот, со што ефикасноста на верските практикувања, присутни низ медитеранската култура и внесени во секојдневието, добиле суштинско значење за градскиот живот и граѓанската елита. Ранохристијанската црква станува простор за медијација меѓу две различни идеи, две различни природи – човечка и божествена, и во крајна линија, начин на разбирање на ранохристијанската црковна архитектура.

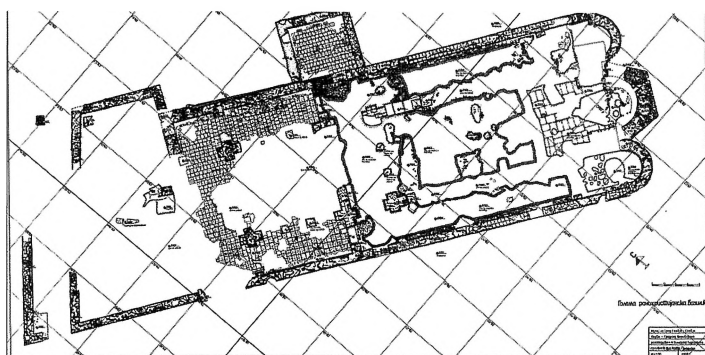


Fig.1. Scupi Large basilica with atrium

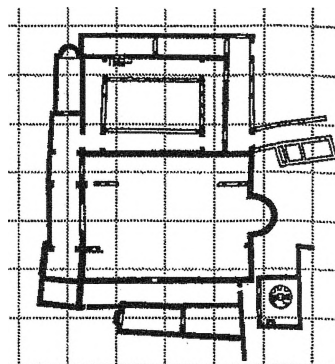


Fig.2. Lihnid Palosnik

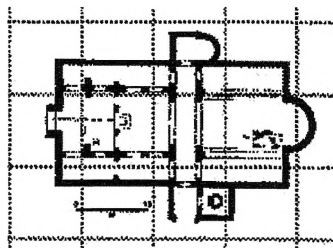


Fig.3. Lihnid Studencista

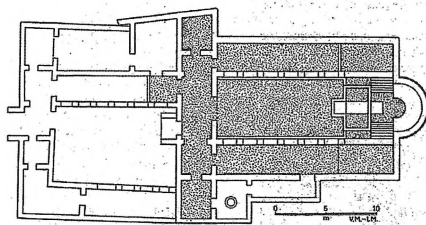


Fig.4. Lihnid St. Erazmo

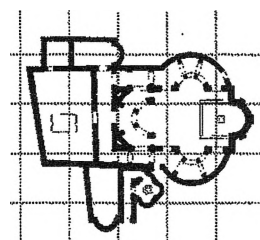


Fig.5. Lihnid Triconchos

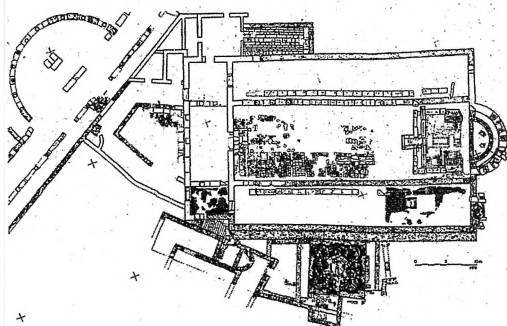


Fig.6. Stobi Episcopal basilica

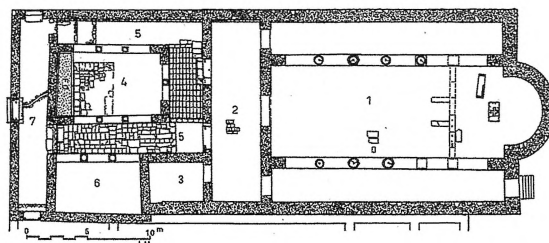


Fig.7. Stobi Central basilica

T.1. Plans of the Early Christian basilicas

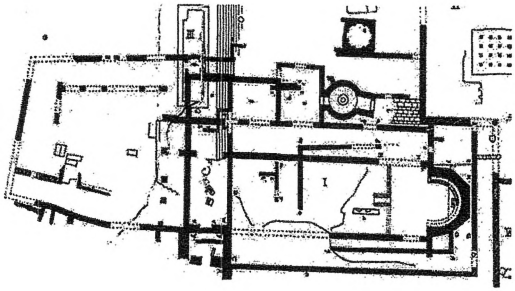


Fig.1. Argos

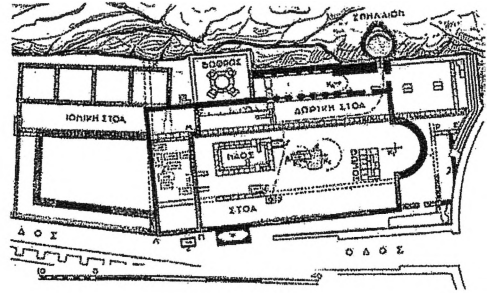


Fig.2. Asclepion Athina

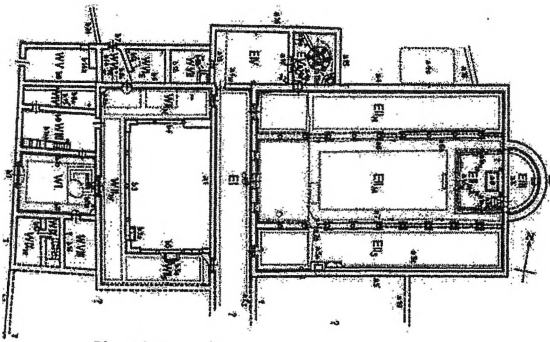


Fig.3. Demetrias A

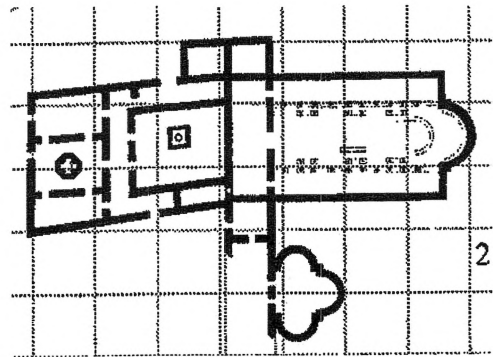


Fig.4. Dion - Basilica in the city

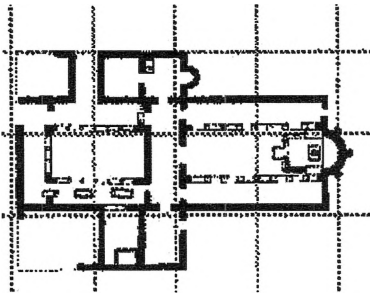


Fig.5. Dion - Basilica out of the city

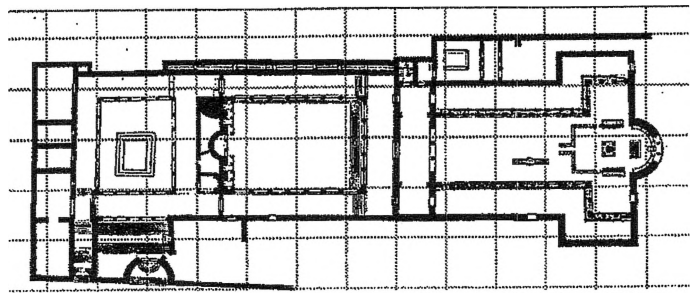


Fig.6 Philippi - Basilica A

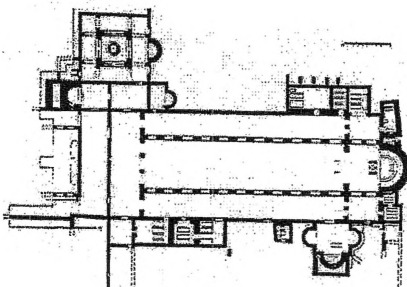


Fig.7. Kraneion Corinth

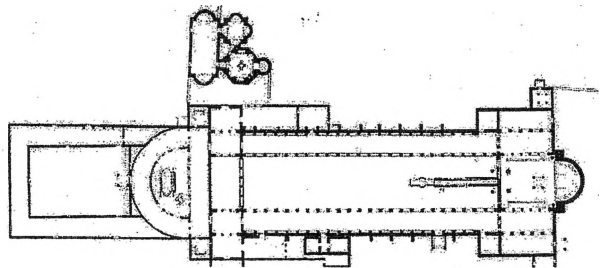


Fig.8. Lechaion Corinth

T.2. Plans of the Early Christian basilicas

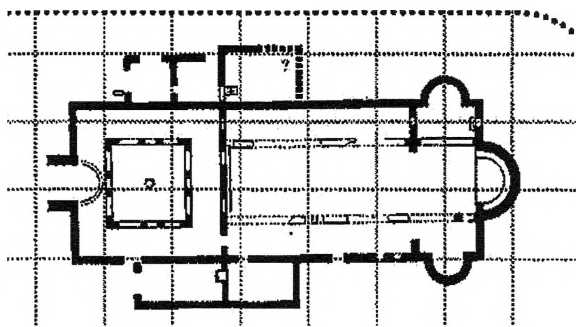


Fig.1. Arapaj Dyrrachium

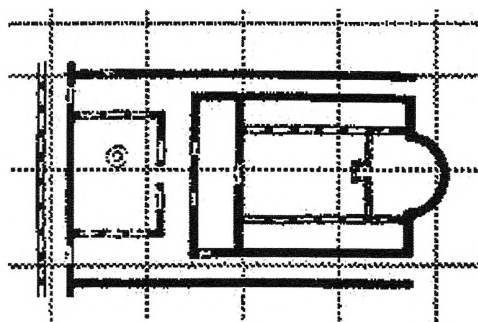


Fig.2. Sandanski Basilica 1

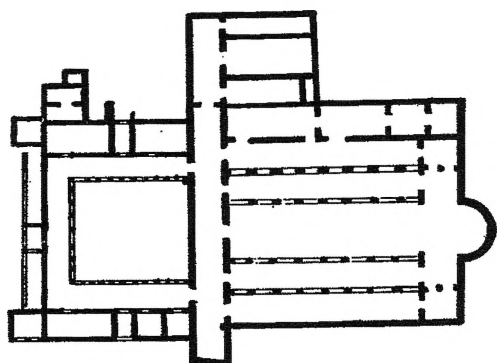


Fig.3. Epidaurus

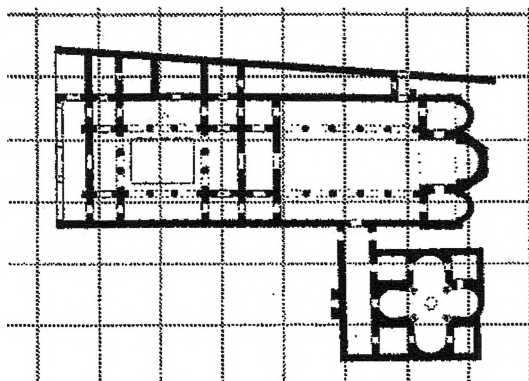


Fig.4. Caricin Grad Episcopal basilica

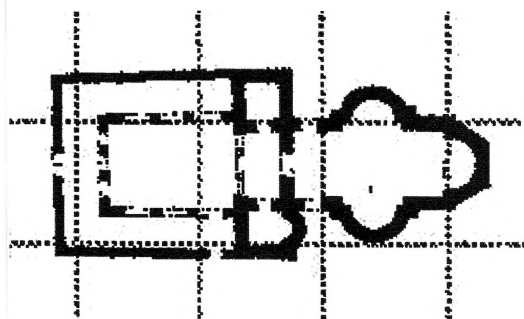


Fig.5 Caricin Grad Triconchos.

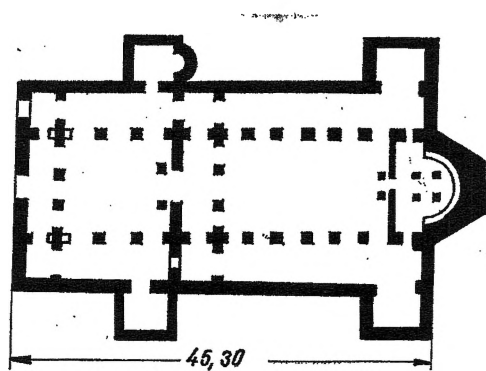


Fig.6. Caricin Grad Basilica with transept

T.3. Plans of the Early Christian basilicas

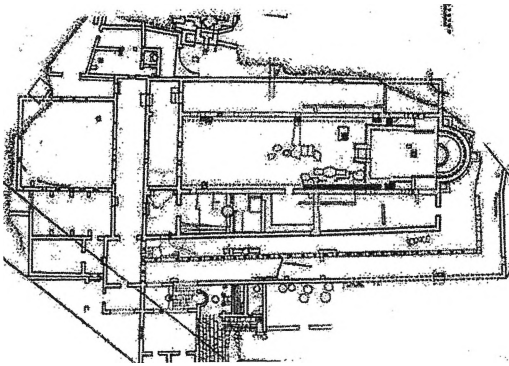


Fig.1. Nea Anhialos Basilica A

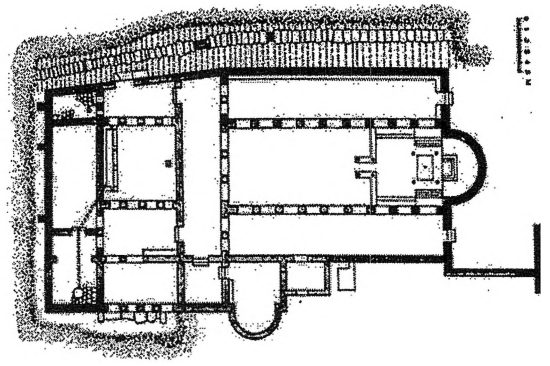


Fig.2. Nea Anhialos Basilica B

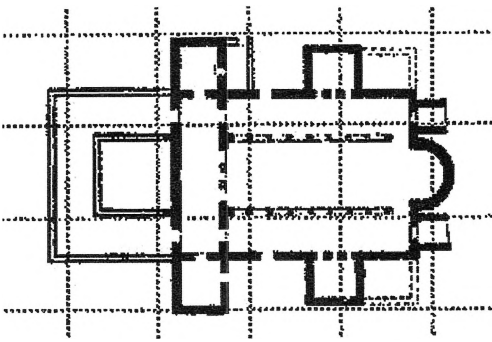


Fig.3. Nea Anhialos Basilica D

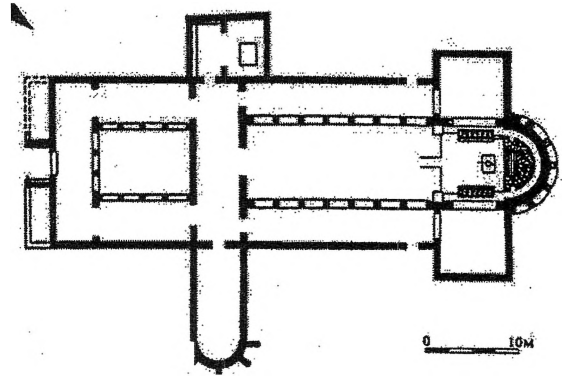


Fig.4. Nikopolis Basilica A

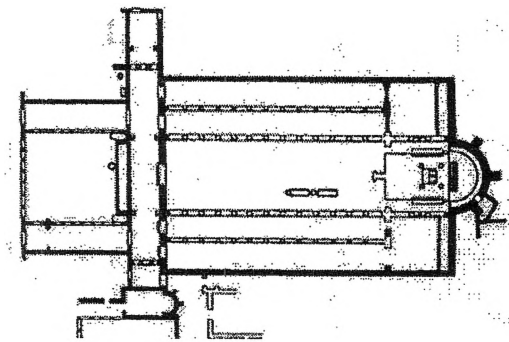


Fig.5. Nikopolis Basilica B

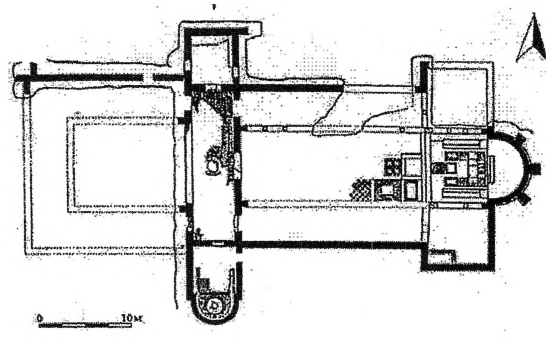


Fig.6. Nikopolis Basilica D

T.4. Plans of the Early Christian basilicas