

Michael ALTRIPP, Die Basilika in Byzanz. Gestalt, Ausstattung und Funktion sowie das Verhältnis zur Kreuzkuppelkirche. Millennium-Studien Bd. 42. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2013, IX + 216 S.

Our archetypal image for Byzantine architecture after the ninth century is the cross-in-square church – small, centralized and domed. It stands very much in contrast to the grand, longitudinal, wooden-roofed basilicas of earlier centuries. It is easy to forget that there were also centrally planned buildings in Late Antiquity and longitudinally planned building in later centuries. Michael Altripp's study, originally submitted as a *Habilitationschrift* in 2003, examines the persistence of the basilica as a building type through the later Byzantine centuries, and by doing so, emphasizes the versatility of Byzantine builders – a conclusion with which few specialists would disagree. He raises the question why a Byzantine patron or builder would choose a basilica over a domed building. Were there special functions or associations with the basilica as a building type? And how should we understand the Byzantine basilica vis-à-vis contemporaneous domed constructions?

The term 'basilica' is problematic, as Altripp emphasizes at the outset. Even Krautheimer had difficulty defining it ("An assembly room; in Christian parlance, a church; as a rule, longitudinal and composed of nave and aisles, the former lit by a clerestory"), and many of the examples in his handbook contradict his definition. Altripp has similar problems; as he notes, the term implies nothing specific about the building's form or function. Altripp therefore limits his definition to buildings with multiple (usually three) aisles. He thus excludes single-aisled buildings from his discussion, although among his examples are basilicas of all shapes and sizes, with and without vaulting, and with a variety of internal support systems – that is, all Byzantine churches excluding those single-aisled or domed.

Altripp catalogues 92 examples, primarily from Greece and the coastal regions of Turkey, dating between the seventh and fifteenth centuries. The list seems oddly incomplete, although a variety of other examples are brought in as comparanda (although these, frustratingly, appear neither in the catalogue nor the site index). Throughout, the discussion concentrates on the formal aspects of architecture. At first the book's organization appears systematic, but on closer inspection, it is puzzling. The section on large basilicas is arranged chronologically (early Byzantine, 9th-10th centuries, 11th-12th centuries), while the section on medium-size and small basilicas is organized according to the support systems in the nave arcade

(columns, piers, a combination of columns and piers; walls, etc.). This is followed by a short excursus on the continued functioning of Late Antique basilicas in later centuries, and a discussion of special types (the hall church, the triconch, the basilica with raised transept, the 'Protaton-type', the 'Mystra-type,' the Cappadocian rock-cut type, the Gothic-influenced type, the Gothic basilica, and other variations), and 'related' building types. Many of the examples mentioned in these sections challenge Altripp's strict definition of the basilica, and throughout the author seems more concerned with definitions – what constitutes a proper basilica and how to distinguish typological variations – than with the individual examples, which are given cursory treatment based on superficial examination.

The following section addresses new construction on older basilica sites and is of potentially great interest, although it deviates from the author's main theme. Indeed, this subject could have been developed in greater detail as a separate study. The reuse church sites raises questions that extend beyond the typological concerns of the author, however, and makes better sense when a site is contextualized in terms of its immediate setting and regional history. For example, the vicissitudes of urban settlements through the Transitional Period may be clarified by the maintenance, reconstruction, or abandonment of its ecclesiastical structures. Under what conditions were they destroyed or rebuilt? At Binbirkilise, for example, briefly mentioned in the text, Ramsay and Bell interpreted the reconstruction of the basilicas as repair of damage after the Arab incursions. In fact, on closer inspection, it appears to have been more of a remodeling than a repair, with vaulting added to older buildings – indicative of continuity and continued use rather than rupture.¹ There are also numerous examples of basilicas transformed into domed, centralized churches in the ninth and tenth centuries, as for example at Amorion, Kydna, and Selçikler in Anatolia, although these are not discussed.² As the author regularly returns to the theme of the interplay between longitudinal and centralized building types, these could have been a useful inclusion.

Throughout the book, typology seems to be the ultimate goal. Buildings are not presented in their totality – often a type is elaborated, while the relevant examples are simply listed or relegated to the footnotes. The 'catalogue' appears at the

¹ W.M. Ramsay and G.L. Bell, *The Thousand and One Churches* (London, 1909); reissued with an historiographic introduction by R. Ousterhout and M.P.C. Jackson (Philadelphia, 2008), esp. p. xxvi.

² See my *Master Builders of Byzantium* (Princeton, 1999), esp. pp. 86-92 (NB: not included in Altripp's bibliography).

end, although the references to individual buildings are dispersed among the different sections of the book. While these examples are indexed in the catalogue, the book lacks a general index – a serious omission – so that the many buildings introduced as comparanda are difficult to track down. With most of the examples discussed, the author has relied uncritically on the secondary literature for basic information; primary sources are not included. Moreover, many of the buildings are insecurely dated; several would have benefitted from more detailed analyses: for example, the basilicas at Sparta and Korone, are most certainly later in date and fit into a somewhat different cultural context than the author supposes, while Serres and Verroia are wholly Middle Byzantine, without Early Christian phases.

One wonders why the author insists on typology when the material is so disparate. Cyril Mango (whose name is misspelled in the introduction) once commented that with a typological approach, “buildings are labeled and pigeon-holed like biological specimens according to formal criteria: where a resemblance is found a connection is assumed even across a wide gulf in time and space.”³ Indeed, an emphasis on this approach may assume that typological analysis is the desired end-result rather than the necessary beginning of a study, or that typology is the primary criterion to determine dating. Typology may be best employed as a tool to facilitate the description and organization of buildings, but rarely can a typological analysis establish relationships beyond the superficial. When Altripp finally turns to issues of function and use, his conclusions are relatively brief and relate only in general terms to the analysis that precedes them: many of the larger basilicas served as episcopal churches – a fact already noted by other scholars. This conclusion could have been usefully expanded: for example, the cross-in-square church type seems to have been developed for the needs of small congregations, often as a private chapel; and the basic structural system, relying on four free-standing columns, grew increasingly unstable when the scale of the building was increased. The basilica type allows for larger constructions necessary for public rather than private use, particularly in areas where the grand, Late Antique basilicas did not exist or were no longer in use. For the smaller basilicas, however, there is no clear correspondence between plan type and use.

The author’s second conclusion is a general absence of a relationship between form and function – that is, between the liturgy and architectural form. Again, this conclusion comes as no surprise to the specialists, who have routinely dismissed functional formalism. Most recently, V. Marinis brings together archaeolo-

³ Cyril Mango, “Approaches to Byzantine Architecture,” *Muqarnas* (1991), pp. 40-44.

gical, hagiographic and historical sources, liturgical texts and commentaries, as well as monastic typika and testaments to argue against any sort of functional determinism.⁴ He concludes that the liturgy could expand or contract to fit the available space, and that a variety of other factors lay behind the planning and scale of each building. Compared to the wealth of data amassed by Marinis, Altripp's conclusions appear superficial at best.

Finally, any study of Byzantine architecture requires an intimate knowledge of the buildings. It is clear from the many photographs and observations that Altripp is familiar with the material under discussion. Unfortunately his familiarity is not manifest in the architectural drawings that accompany the text. The plans have been simplified and regularized to the point of incomprehensibility; informative details, such as stylobates, foundations, or vault lines are lacking; scale bars and north arrows do not appear consistently; elevations, sections, and other types of architectural drawings are completely absent. It is thus often difficult to coordinate the descriptions in the text with the plans – or to make sense of the drawings without additional explanation.

In sum, Altripp's study raises a variety of questions about approaches to later Byzantine architecture and charts directions for further research. It is unfortunate the book does not rise to the challenges it proposes. From such an important monographic series and such an esteemed publisher, one expects better.

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⁴ Vasileios Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual in the Churches of Constantinople, Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 2014).