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Thessaloniki played an important role as the second city of the Byzantine Empire and a major urban center of the Aimos' peninsula. In order to interpret the city's role during the 11th-12th centuries in the light of the excavation data and the evidence of the written sources, the social networks of the city and the trends of the urban society in the 12th century, the role of its port, the economic development and the administrative changes, the typology of the town and its structured space, its monasteries, churches, and the issue of the sponsorship of religious institutions in Thessaloniki will be presented.
Urban Monasteries and Ecclesiastical Institutions in the Middle Byzantine Thessaloniki

The subject matter of the paper examines the phenomenon of the development of the urban monasticism in the middle byzantine Thessaloniki, or the urbanization of the monasticism. The topic is mainly based on the results of a research program that has been led in the Department of History and Archaeology during the years 2013-2014 under the title “The documentation of the Middle Byzantine Thessaloniki and the understanding of the urban development based on the archaeological remains and on the archives’ information”. The responsible of the program is the undersigned author and the working team comprised the lecturer Anastasios Tantsis and three postgraduate students of our Department. The program has been divided in two sections:

a. the forming of an electronic data base comprising 244 registered archaeological sites linked to the middle byzantine period

b. the iconic representation of the urban development of the middle byzantine city through 9 electronic maps comprising all the categories of buildings, remains and any written information that concern this period.

Thus the data base and the maps provide information concerning the general urban planning of Thessaloniki with the streets, the markets, the fora, the sections, the regions and neighborhoods of the city, the fortifications, the ecclesiastical and monastic institutions, the workshops and marketplaces, the hydraulic installations, the private houses and the cemeteries within the walls.

The registrations and the map, on which we will focus, represent the category of the ecclesiastical and monastic buildings regarding the topic of their considerable growth and their location in the most prominent sites of the city.

For the needs of our research we have focused on specific paradigms known either from the previous research or based on the results of the numerous salvage excavations, re-examined and re-approached under a different point of view. Through the virtual reconstruction of the city a new proposal for the middle byzantine topography is attempted by examining the development of the neighborhoods and especially of the region of Katafygi, the most renowned of all, which seemed to concentrate a considerable number of monastic establishments.

The flourishing of the monasticism in this period is a consequence of the end of Iconoclasm. Especially for Thessaloniki, a main factor was the neighborhood with the Holy Mountain and the close interrelations between them and the city that caused the establishment of monastic dependencies. In addition to that, many citizens used to dedicate their properties to the monasteries of the city, regarding them as a safe destination of their means of living. This phenomenon was based on ideological and practical principles of the proto-byzantine period, when the monasticism was gradually augmented.

From 9th-10th centuries onwards we regard the phenomenon, according to which non residential sites of public or any secular use are transformed into monasteries. The most illustrious
evidence comes from Panagia ton Chalkeon, that has been erected "on a previous profane place". Especially, public spaces in the centre of the city around the main road, the 'Leofores', are occupied by important monastic buildings. Fifty-three churches and monastic establishments function, either as new-ones or as previous that had been innovated during the "macedonian renaissance". From those above-mentioned twenty-nine are conserved either integrated or in ruins as excavation results, though twenty-four are known only from the written sources.

Among them the most renowned, as the Monastery of Akapiou is, erected in the beginning of the 11th c. by Photios from Thessaly under the auspice of Basil the 2nd, hasn't been identified yet. The proposed identification supported by the late Papazotos with the Prophet Helija hasn't been proved satisfactory. Since most of the monastic property of Akapiou is cited in the centre of the city and due to the supported by the later research correlation to the Rotunda in the second millennium, I would rather stand for a central position of it. Moreover the illustrious monastery of Philokallou, linked to the Serbian family of Nemanja from the late 12th century, still remains unidentified. The written sources mention churches as "Nea Ekklesia" in the last decade of the 11th century, the church "tou Kyrtoi", or Saint Nicolaos Palaiofava among the mostly renowned.

From the abovementioned institutions only Saint Nicolaos Palaiofava could be identified with the place of its post byzantine transformation, the Saint Nicolaos "o Tranos", that has been destroyed by the great fire of 1917. Its place on the northeast corner of the previous Ancient Agora and near the road that led to the basilica of Saint Demetrios shows its prominent location.

From Ioannis Cameniatis, who describes his agonized pursuit by the Saracens in 904, we extract the unique registrations for a couple of monasteries and churches, as the nunnery of Akrouliou situated to the western part of the upper city and the church of Saint Andrews, situated close to the northwestern part of the city and nearby the walls. Its identification with a newly excavated cross in square middle byzantine monastic church with graves, in the upper town, seems uncertain.

In a most central part of the city has been estimated the location of the Prodromou monastery, mentioned in 946 from a chrysoboullion of the Iviron monastery. Its foundation is attributed to Constantinos Porfirogenitos. The archaeological evidence identifies the Prodromou monastery to the ruins of a church with a burial chapel and aneicnic mural decoration, the so-called "iconoclastic church" of Thessaloniki. Its central place nearby the Leofores caused the rapid conversion of the monastic cathedral to a mosque simultaneously with Panagia Acheiropoietos, namely in 1430. The contact of the Prodromou monastery to the everyday urban centre and life is testified not only by its location close to the Leofores but also by the owning and handling of profane properties nearby, as houses and taverns which were facing on the main public road, according to the Iviron ms. no 52 of 1104.

Another enigmatic and non-identified -though mostly studied- institution is the "Katafygi", which is mentioned in texts from 1100 onwards. The name is attributed to an ecclesiastical institution and thanks to its importance all the neighborhood has been named after as Katafygi and especially as "geitonia" or "regeona" according to the Constantinopolitan city division. As Katafryi occupied all the area of the ancient Agora and of the Christian Megalofores, it should be the most important region in the centre of the city nearby the "Leofores" or "Mesi odos". Otherwise, at least four ecclesiastic institutions have been erected all around.

From the same period there are written references for a 12th century monastery complex dedicated to the Mother of God and attributed to Ilarion Mastounis. The proposed identification of
its location with the site of the post byzantine church of Megali or Trani Panagia near the southeastern walls, seems plausible. The church functions until today under the name of Nea Panagia.

Two other central monasteries that were functioned from the ninth century onwards were Agios Lucas and the nunnery of Agia Theodora. The first is mentioned in the Life of Agia Theodora in 818 and was located next to the Kassandraeotiki Gate, eastwards and nearby the Leoforos and the "agora" «ό δή πλησίον τῆς ἁγορᾶς τῆς ἐπὶ τὴν Κασσανδρεωτικήν ιούσης πύλην διάκειται».

Concerning Agia Theodora the information is much richer and it is supported by the excavation data. Located on the same horizontal axis of the metropolitan church of Agia Sophia, the nunnery of Agios Stefanos already existed in the first decades of the 9th century during the iconoclastic period and was later renamed as Agia Theodora, honoring the first myrrha-spouted female saint of Thessaloniki. The small three-aisled middle byzantine basilica keeps the characteristics of a small catholicon with a synthonon and a south aisle destined for burial purposes. The incorporation of the monastery into the urban life of Thessaloniki is testified by its everyday functions. In this institution the newly appeared phenomenon of myrrha-spouting is inaugurated in Thessaloniki, thus transforming the location into a sanctified urban place of pilgrimage. Moreover, the everyday life of Saint Theodora informs us about her responsibilities for providing all the necessary for the nunnery from the marketplace: «ἐπὶ τὴν ἁγορὰν ἐξούσα … διὰ τὴν τῶν ἁωνίων εὐθυνίαν. Καὶ μέγα φορτίον ἐξόλων ὑ τινῶν ἁλλῶν ἐπὶ τοῖς ὠμοις φέρουσα διὰ τῆς ἁγορᾶς μέσον ἐβάδιζεν.»

A number of small monastic institutions have been excavated in the recent years. Among them we discern the anonymous church on Vyzantas street in the upper town, a small catholicon of the 11th century with a cross formed burial crypt.

For the most prominent of the church institution in Thessaloniki, the church of Panagia ton Chalkeon (1028) of the protospatharios and katepano Lagouvardias Christoforos, we support that it functioned as the catholicon of an urban monastery complex. It is located in the middle of the lower part of the Byzantine city, near the main road, very close to the ancient forum and the byzantine "Megalophoros" and integrated in the famous region of "Katafygi." The cross-in-square type with the condensed dimensions, the strong architectural similarities with renowned middle byzantine constantinopolitan monasteries and the private character of the building allude to relevant burial and monastic institutions in Constantinople, founded by supreme officials and used from their owners as private places for burial and monastic purposes, deprived of any public or parish use.

The Middle Byzantine church of Christophoros is the result of a substantial donation on behalf of an imperial official, who imitated the imperial dignitaries of Constantinople, during an epoch of prosperity. The stable status-quo lead to the realization of big public works in Thessaloniki, such as the renovation of the fortifications and the erection of private monasteries founded by illustrious donors. Panagia ton Chalkeon, as part of the so-called "Macedonian Renaissance," functioned without interruption for four centuries and enjoyed renovations that only a large independent monastery, in a predominant position in the city, could have had.

Consequently the middle byzantine urban scenery of the city gives a very dense covering with ecclesiastical establishments and monasteries incorporated to the urban life either in the low or in the upper city. Very revealing is the same picture that we gain from the medieval Constantinople as well, where new monastic establishments of the middle byzantine period occupy central sites.
correlated to the administrative and commercial life of the city. As a matter of fact the combination and the parallel development of the two big byzantine cities are obvious.

The abovementioned features constitute strong elements for the exaltation of the monastic activity within Thessaloniki, as it is otherwise proved by the texts of Kameniatis and Eustathios archbishop of Thessaloniki, and also by sporadic mentions in the saints Lifes of Theodoros Stouditis, Sainte Theodora and Saint Gregorios Dekapolitis, who reveal us the image of a city plentiful of monasteries in the most frequented and prominent locations parallel to the commercial urban life.