

# The main chapel of the Durres amphitheater

## Decoration and chronology<sup>1</sup>

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The amphitheater at Durres in central Albania is one of the larger and better preserved amphitheatres of the Roman world, as well as one of the eastern-most examples of the amphitheater form. Nonetheless, it is not for its Roman architecture that the building is best known, but its later Christian decoration, specifically, a series of mosaics which adorn the walls of a small chapel inserted into the amphitheater's Roman fabric. First published by Vangel Toçi in 1971, these mosaics were introduced to a wider scholarly audience through their inclusion in Robin Cormack's groundbreaking 1985 volume *Writing in Gold*.<sup>2</sup> Despite the mosaics general renowned, however, they have been studied largely as *membra disjecta*, cut off from their surrounding context, both architectural and decorative.

In 2002 and 2003, the authors and a team of British and Albanian archeologists and art historians undertook a survey of the amphitheater and its Christian additions with the aim of providing a more detailed and rigorous picture of this extraordinary monument. In addition to an architectural survey of the Roman structure and a

series of limited excavations to clarify the building's post-Roman and Byzantine chronology, we completed an in-depth study of the mosaic chapel, its structure and decoration (fig. 1).

### ANCIENT DYRRACHIUM AND ITS AMPHITHEATER

Named Epidamnos by its Greek founders and Dyrrachium by the Romans, Durres was the principal city of Epirus Vetus and the land terminus of the Via Egnatia, the road that throughout late antiquity and the Byzantine period linked Rome to Constantinople.<sup>3</sup> Durres also sat on a major Adriatic trade route linking the northern Greek Islands to Dalmatia and northern Italy. Thus, like Marseilles or Thessaloniki, Durres was a place where road met sea and the cultural currents of east and west mingled.

The Roman amphitheater is one of the few standing remnants of Durres' cosmopolitan past. Its remarkable preservation is largely due to its complete loss from all historical knowledge for over five hundred years. Most Roman amphitheatres, particularly those in cities with

1. The field work upon which this study is based was undertaken in the summers of 2002 and 2003 by: K. Bowes, A. Hoti, J. Mitchell, W. Bowden, K. Francis, A. Gutteridge, B. Muka, P. Papadopoulou (coins), P. Reynolds (Roman ceramic) and J. Vroom (medieval ceramic). This project was undertaken with a grant from the Packard Humanities Institute (PHI), and in collaboration with the International Centre for Albanian Archaeology (ICAA), Tirana. Additional funding was provided by a Stavros Niarchos Faculty Research Grant from Yale University. Thanks also to R. Hodges, I. Pojani and all the others at the ICAA and the Institute of World Archaeology, University of East Anglia, and to R. Gega and to L. Miraj for their advice. Particular thanks are owed to S. Diehl, team photographer, D. Andrews, team architect, D. Shillingburg, P. Haipei, H. Dayton, I. Ghezzi, A. Stack and R. Das for

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2. V. Toçi, *Amfiteatri i Dyrrahit*, in *Monumentet*, 1971, p. 40-42; R. Cormack, *Writing in gold: Byzantine society and its icons*, London, 1985, p. 84-85.

3. On ancient and medieval Durres and its geography, see now the excellent surveys by S. Santoro, *Lo stato degli studi sull'urbanistica di Epidamnos-Dyrrachium*, in M. Buora and S. Santoro (ed.), *Progetto Durres. L'indagine sui beni culturali albanesi dell'Antichità e del Medioevo: tradizioni di studio a confronto*, Trieste, 2003, p. 140-208; J. Davis, *The Durrës Regional Archaeological Project: archaeological survey in the territory of Epidamnos/Dyrrachium in Albania*, in *Hesperia*, 72, 2003, p. 41-119; A. Gutteridge, *Cultural geographies and 'the ambition of Latin Europe': The city of Durres and its fortifications, c. 400-c. 1501*, in *Archeologia Medievale*, 30, 2003, p. 19-65.



Fig. 1 - View of Durres amphitheater from the southwest, with main chapel in foreground. (© S. Diehl, 2002).

continuous occupation, were typically utilized through modern times or excavated in the early modern period, at which time their post-Roman additions were ripped out. The Durres amphitheater made its last appearance in the historical record in the early sixteenth century, when it was mentioned by Marinus Barletius.<sup>4</sup> It then seemingly vanished from scholarly view, absent from both Albanian historical and archaeological accounts as well those of foreign expeditions; Arthur Evans walked around the city in 1877 armed with a copy of Barletius, but failed

to locate the amphitheater, while Leon Rey misidentified a section of the outer-most amphitheater wall as part of the city's fortification system.<sup>5</sup> The amphitheater's reemergence from obscurity came only in May of 1966, when the local archaeologist Vangel Toçi identified the monument and commenced excavations.<sup>6</sup> Toçi excavated the amphitheater for nearly two decades, removing over a dozen modern and Ottoman houses from in and around the monument, uncovering all of the extant *cavea* and most of the galleries on the amphitheater's west

4. M. Barletius, *The historie of George Castriot, surnamed Scanderbeg, king of Albanie*, trans. Z. I. Gentleman, London, 1596, p. 488.

5. A. Evans, *Illyrian Letters*, London, 1898, p. 136. The detailed surveys of Heuzey and Daumet, Praschniker and Schober, and Rey similarly made no mention of it. See L. Heuzey and M. Daumet, *Mission archéologique de Macédoine*, Paris, 1876;

C. Praschniker and A. Schober, *Archäologische Forschungen in Albanien und Montenegro*, Vienna, 1919; L. Rey, *Les remparts de Durazzo*, in *Albania. Revue d'archéologie, d'histoire, d'art et des sciences appliqués en Albanie et dans les Balkans*, 1, 1925, p. 33-48, esp. 39.

6. Toçi, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 37-42; Id., *Amfiteatri i Durrësit*, in *Monumentet*, 1975, p. 42-46.

side. Toçi also revealed the larger of the two Christian chapels with its mosaics and wall-paintings (hereafter termed the Main Chapel), as well as a large necropolis in the arena. Subsequent excavations from 1983 through 2000 were carried out by Lida Miraj.<sup>7</sup> These included the first exploration of the amphitheater's eastern galleries, which revealed the second Christian chapel (hereafter termed Chapel 2).<sup>8</sup> The authors' own work was undertaken in 2002 and 2003, and included the creation of the first complete plan of the amphitheater and its chapels, a study and conservation assessment of the Roman and Christian structural and artistic remains, and limited excavations.<sup>9</sup>

The amphitheater is located in the western sector of the modern city, enclosed on its west side by the late Roman city walls, and on its north side by a medieval cross-wall of either Venetian or Ottoman date.<sup>10</sup> While the location of the Roman city center is not known with certainty, it is assumed to lie to the northeast of the amphitheater, although the presence of Roman baths nearby and the recent discovery of early Roman walls near the harbor suggest an urban fabric extending around the amphitheater to the north and south.<sup>11</sup> Thus, while the Durres amphitheater lay at the city's western edge, its may have been somewhat more centrally located than many amphitheatres, which, for reasons of space and safety, were frequently located outside the walls or some distance from the city center.<sup>12</sup> This unusual location was clearly chosen to make most efficient use of the existing topography; nearly half of the amphitheater was placed directly against a hillside and supported by it,

while the southern half lay on lower ground and was supported through a system of piers and vaults. (fig. 2) The northern half, laid directly against the hill with only a single main entrance, has survived the ravages of time best, the imprints of the robbed seating still visible in an intact *opus caementicium* base. (see fig. 1) The southern side fared less well and while largely unexplored, lies beneath houses and layers of Ottoman-period occupation set atop its collapsed vaulting.

#### THE DURRES AMPHITHEATER IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Gladiatorial games or *munera* took a sharp downturn in the late Roman period, victims of both a struggling late Roman economy and imperial edicts against blood sport.<sup>13</sup> The shifting character of urban euergetism, combined with the burdensome expense of both gladiatorial schools and the importation of wild animals, seem to have adversely impacted *munera* as early as the later 3rd century. Imperial rescripts issued by Constantine and Valentinian prohibited condemned criminals from serving as gladiators, and Honorius is said to have banned gladiatorial combat altogether.<sup>14</sup> However, in each case, the imperial response seems directed towards local exigencies rather than universal reform, and the gradual disappearance of gladiatorial combat is more likely due to a combination of Christian distaste and financial expense than outright prohibition. In any case, since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century it was wild beast combats rather than the gladiatorial *munera* which were most popular with audiences, and these continued, although in tamer formats, through the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

7. L. Miraj, *Amfiteatri i Durrësit*, in *Iliria*, 1986, p. 151-169; Id., *Gërmime në amfiteatrin e Durrësit*, in *Iliria*, 1988, p. 264-265; Id., *Gërmime të vitit 1989 në amfiteater*, in *Iliria*, 1989, p. 286-287; Id., *Durrës (Amfiteatër e Terma)*, in *Iliria*, 1990, p. 258-258; Id., *Durazzo. Anfiteatro e città moderna*, in *Eutopia*, 1991-1992, p. 107-113. Thanks to Dr. Miraj to her generous help with our project. See also Z. Andrea, *Archaeology in Albania, 1984-1990*, in *Archaeological Reports*, 38, 1992, p. 76.

8. M. Zeqo, *Durrës – Amfiteatër*, in *Iliria*, 1987, p. 263-4.

9. An analysis of the Roman period structural remains may be found in K. Bowes and A. Hoti, *An amphitheatre and its afterlives: survey and excavation in the Durres amphitheatre*, in *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 16, 2003, p. 380-394.

10. C.f. M. Kiel, *Ottoman Architecture in Albania 1386-1912*, Istanbul, 1990, p. 95-99; Gutteridge, *Cultural geographies*, *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 47-53.

11. See Bowes and Hoti, *op. cit.*, n. 9, p. 382 and 387.

12. J.-C. Golvin, *L'amphithéâtre romain*, Paris, 1988, p. 408-412.

13. On the gladiatorial games in late antiquity, see G. Ville, *Les jeux de gladiateurs dans l'empire Chrétien*, in *MFRA*, 72, 1960, 273-335; R. Markus, *Religion et politique: comment ont pris fins les combats de gladiateurs*, in *Annales*, 34, 1979, p. 651-671; R. Lim, *Consensus and dissensus on public spectacles in early Byzantium*, in *Byzantinische Forschungen*, 24, 1997, p. 159-179.

14. For the edicts of Constantine and Valentinian, *CTH* 15.12.1; 9.40.8, respectively. On Honorius, Theodoret, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.26 and Ville, *op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 324-331.

15. The last recorded *venationes* took place in Rome in 523, presumably in the Colosseum, and in Constantinople in 537, presumably in the circus. See Cassiodorus, *Var.* 5.42; and *NJ* 105.1 (537), respectively. For a collection of the sources on the late antique activities in the Colosseum, see R. Rea, *Il Colosseo, teatro per gli spettacoli di caccia. La fonti i reperti*, in A. La Regina (ed.), *Sangue e arena*, Milan, 2001, p. 233-239.



Fig. 2 - Durres amphitheater, plan.

The impact of these changes on spectacle buildings would have varied significantly in the eastern and western empires. Amphitheaters were largely a phenomenon of the western empire, where the gladiatorial games for which they were originally designed were generally more popular. Declining civic euergetism in the West resulted in reduced maintenance for all types of monumental buildings and in this respect, the decay and reuse of amphitheaters, beginning in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, was a trend common to urban infrastructure more generally. While regrettably few excavations have recorded the details of amphitheaters' later phases, many seemed to have been quarried for their stone,<sup>16</sup> converted into defensive structures,<sup>17</sup> used for grave space,<sup>18</sup> and, in some few documented instances, converted for Christian use.<sup>19</sup>

Durres, however, enjoyed a more prosperous 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries than most western cities, and its amphitheater may have benefited from the city's fortune. Following age-old imperial custom, the emperor Anastasius (491-518 A.D.), a native of Durres, may have endowed his birth-city with great public-works projects, a 2.8km-long circuit of all-brick defensive walls and a jewel-like circular forum, which itself may have brought with it a large-scale re-arrangement of the city

grid.<sup>20</sup> Circumstantial evidence suggests that the amphitheater was also maintained and kept a place of honor in the city's new monumental face. The late antique walls adjacent to the building on its west side run very near, but do not abut the amphitheater. Thus, a narrow lane was left between the two structures, perhaps to permit continued access to the building's western side. Near the amphitheater's presumable main southern entrance is small postern gate (see fig. 2), built at an angle to the main fortification wall; the street it accommodated would have run at an oblique angle directly towards the amphitheater's entrance. Finally, our excavations in Chapel 2 produced clear abandonment and robbing layers dating to the first years of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, set over virtually clean floors.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it is entirely possible that spectacles continued at Durres during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, although these probably would have taken the form of animal fights, acrobatic or theatrical shows rather than gladiatorial contests. Durres' more characteristically eastern urban vitality, due principally to its central position on the Via Egnatia and its fortuitous tie to Anastasius, may have itself discouraged both spoliation and Christian appropriation of the space.

Indeed, even during the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Christian

16. On the quarrying of the Colosseum, see R. Rea and S. Orlandi, *Signs of continued use after antiquity*, in A. Gabucci (ed.), *The Colosseum*, Milan, 2000, p. 192-201.

17. A series of North African amphitheaters at Thevaste, Lepcis Magna and Sabratha, became small fortified centers, perhaps during the Byzantine period. See D. Bomgardner, *Story of the Roman amphitheatre*, London-New York, 2000, p. 222-223. Other examples include Pola (S. Mlakar, *Das Amphitheater in Pola*, Pola, 1980, p. 12); and Arles (J. Formigé, *L'amphithéâtre d'Arles*, in *Revue archéologique* 2, 1964, p. 37-39; P. Pinon, *Reutilisations anciennes et dégagements modernes des monuments antiques. Arles, Nîmes, Orange et Trèves*, Tours, 1979 (*Caesarodunum Supplément*, 31)), the fortification of which remains undated.

18. New excavations in the Colosseum have revealed the extent of late antique graves in and around that amphitheater, beginning in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. See Rea and Orlandi, *op. cit.*, n. 16, p. 192; R. Rea, *Il Colosseo nell'alto Medioevo*, in M. Arena, et al. (ed.), *Roma dall'Antichità al Medioevo. Archeologia e storia*, Milan, 2001, p. 612-614.

19. The best documented are the amphitheater churches in Tarragona, (C. Godoy Fernández, *Basilica de l'amfiteatre de Tarragona*, in *Del Romà al Romànic*, Barcelona, 1999, p. 177-179, with the extensive earlier bibliography); Salona (E. Dyggve, *Recherches à Salone*, vol. 2, Copenhagen, 1933, p. 108-110) and Metz (C. Heitz, *Église Saint-Pierre-aux-Arénes*,

in N. Duval (ed.), *Les premiers monuments chrétiens de la France*, Paris, 1998, p. 248-251, with the earlier bibliography). Churches of uncertain date were also inserted into the amphitheaters at Nîmes and Arles. Theaters, which in the East were also used for *munera* and *venationes*, were similarly objects of Christian conversion. See, for instance at Aphrodisias, R. Cormack, *The wall-painting of St. Michael in the theater*, in R. Smith and K. Erim (ed.), *Aphrodisias papers. II. The theatre, a sculptor's workshop, philosophers and coin-types*, Ann Arbor, 1991 (JRA Supplementary Series 2), p. 109-122. See also H. Saradi, *Aspects of early Byzantine urbanism in Albania*, in C. Gasparis (ed.), *The medieval Albanians*, Athens, 1998, p. 89.

20. For Anastasius in Durres, see now Gutteridge, *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 21-27; on the walls, see A. Gutteridge, A. Hoti and H. Hurst, *The walled town of Dyrrachium (Durres): Settlement and dynamics*, in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 14, 2001, p. 390-410; Gutteridge, *op. cit.*, n. 3, 21-31, with the earlier bibliography. On the forum, see A. Hoti, *Të dhëna arkeologjike për krishterimin e hershëm në Dyrrah (Shek. IV-VII)*, in *Iliria* 1996, p. 175-178; Andrea, *op. cit.*, n. 7, p. 77-78.

21. See Bowes and Hoti, *op. cit.*, n. 9, p. 388. Ceramics from robbing levels included amphorae (Keay 61A; late Gazan; LRA 1), fine wares (LRC 10A.2; ARS 61B) and some cooking pots related to Keisan 7<sup>th</sup>-century types.

presence in the amphitheater is hard to trace. The early excavations of Toçi and Miraj revealed hundreds of graves filling the arena and dotting most of the excavated galleries, particularly around the Main Chapel. (see fig. 16) They dated the earliest of these graves to the 7<sup>th</sup> century and with them the first Christian activity.<sup>22</sup> A Christian gravestone, which Toçi found reused as part of the altar in the Main Chapel, is dated on epigraphic grounds to the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, and is assumed to have come from the necropolis which grew up in the arena.<sup>23</sup> A number of graves found in both the arena and the galleries have also been assigned a 7<sup>th</sup>-century date on the basis of Komani-style grave-goods, although again, the dating of the corpus of this type of jewelry has recently been called into question, and thus these grave dates, too, must be accepted with caution.<sup>24</sup> Many of the graves Toçi excavated in the arena were set in front of the Main Chapel and were oriented east-west, thus pointing to not only Christian burials, but also a possible *terminus ante quem* for the Chapel. However, these graves were laid in several levels, reaching up to and over the windows of the chapel and thus were the products of centuries of burial. Without definitive stratigraphic locators or dates for these east-west graves they cannot be used to date the first appearance of Christian burial or Christian cult in the amphitheater. Only a tiny infant's grave, found in the new excavations in Chapel Two and dating sometime after the 7<sup>th</sup> century, provides unambiguous evidence that the amphitheater was used as a great intra-mural necropolis by the 7<sup>th</sup> century. This new funereal function would seemingly continue throughout the Middle Ages, and with the accretion of graves and the passage of time, would itself eventually prompt and shape Christian responses to the amphitheater as a whole.

#### THE CHRISTIAN CHAPELS

The first clear Christian intervention with the amphitheater took the form of two, and perhaps

three extant Christian chapels. These chapels are all located in the structurally transitional areas of the building, where the hillside drops off and the system of piers and vaults begins. (see fig. 2) The Main Chapel, containing the famed mosaics, was inserted on the amphitheater's west side directly on its east-west axis, while a second chapel (here termed Chapel 2) was placed on the structure's northeast side. A third possible chapel identified through fragmentary paint remains and an added apse was located to the north of Chapel 2.<sup>25</sup> These areas were well-preserved due to the presence of both the hillside bedrock and artificial supports. This fact may have inspired the decision to convert them to Christian use, which in turn led to the preferential maintenance of these areas over time. However, given the significant Christian presence in the amphitheater which, as will shown shortly, persisted for at least eight hundred years, the possibility of further chapels in the unexplored, poorly preserved southern area cannot be ruled out.

While the amphitheater's structure was one factor determining the placement of the chapels, water and water-born debris also played a role. The amphitheater's location at the base of a hill meant that it had always been susceptible to inundation by rainwater. The original Roman structure almost certainly included a drainage system to lead excess water away from the arena floor, but with the abandonment of the amphitheater as a space of spectacle in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, these drains would naturally have filled with debris and the site would have become, as it remains today, subject to periodic flooding. Those floodwaters would carry with them considerable quantities of dirt and other debris which, judging by both ancient and modern strata, accumulated rapidly over time. Debris itself thus became a structural entity, producing shifting floor levels and acting as support for walls and other structures. As debris eventually filled parts of the amphitheater and diminished the light that

22. Toçi, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 39-40; Miraj, *Gërmime në amfiteatrin e Durrësit...* cit., n. 7; Id., *The chapel in the amphitheater of Durrachium and its mosaics*, in M. Buora and S. Santoro (ed.), *Progetto Durrës. L'indagine sui beni culturali Albanesi dell'Antichità e del Medioevo: tradizioni di studio a confronto*, Trieste, 2003, p. 252-255.

23. F. Miraj, *Mbishkrime latine të Durrësit*, in *Monumentet*, 1991, p. 273-274.

24. On the dating of so-called Komani jewelry, see E. Nallbani, *La civilisation de «Komani» de l'Antiquité tardive au Haut Moyen Âge, VI<sup>me</sup>-IX<sup>me</sup> siècles*, PhD diss., Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2002.

25. This space had been identified as a Roman statue niche by its previous excavators but the traces of fresco and use of broken brick in its construction suggests a post-Roman project.

entered the galleries, whole sections of the building would have been lost. As we shall see, the constant fight against mounting levels of debris would play a major role in the Christian history of the monument.

#### THE MAIN CHAPEL

The Main Chapel is the best-known and best-studied of the amphitheater's chapels, largely because of its fine wall mosaics. These mosaics appear in several surveys of Byzantine art in which the chapel itself, its relationship with the surrounding amphitheater, and its other mural decoration, go largely unnoticed. Stylistic analysis of these mosaics has favored a 6<sup>th</sup> – or 7<sup>th</sup>-century date for mosaics and chapel alike, a date which thus seems to mark the transformation of the amphitheater to a site of Christian worship. Our study of the chapel as a whole, including its structural archaeology and its palimpsest of mural decoration, suggests a more complex story.

The Main Chapel was built into the amphitheater's inner-most main gallery, making use of the gallery itself and two opposing alcove spaces. (fig. 3) These alcoves served as substructures, supporting an entrance onto the seating (*vomitorium*) and one of the amphitheater's two main viewing boxes (*pulvinar*), the seating area for the representatives of imperial government and games-givers. The chapel was set directly beneath the viewing box on the amphitheater's minor, east-west axis, dominating the amphitheater space as seen from the exterior and laying claim to the arena as well as the surrounding galleries. (See fig. 2)

In its current form, the chapel consists of a single nave with an eastern apse, lit by a bifora window, and is entered through two side-arches that formed part of the gallery supports. (fig. 4) Its side-walls utilized the walls of the adjacent alcoves, and extended them upwards to form the nave. (fig. 5) The base of a masonry altar lies on the chord of the apse, while the chapel floor was

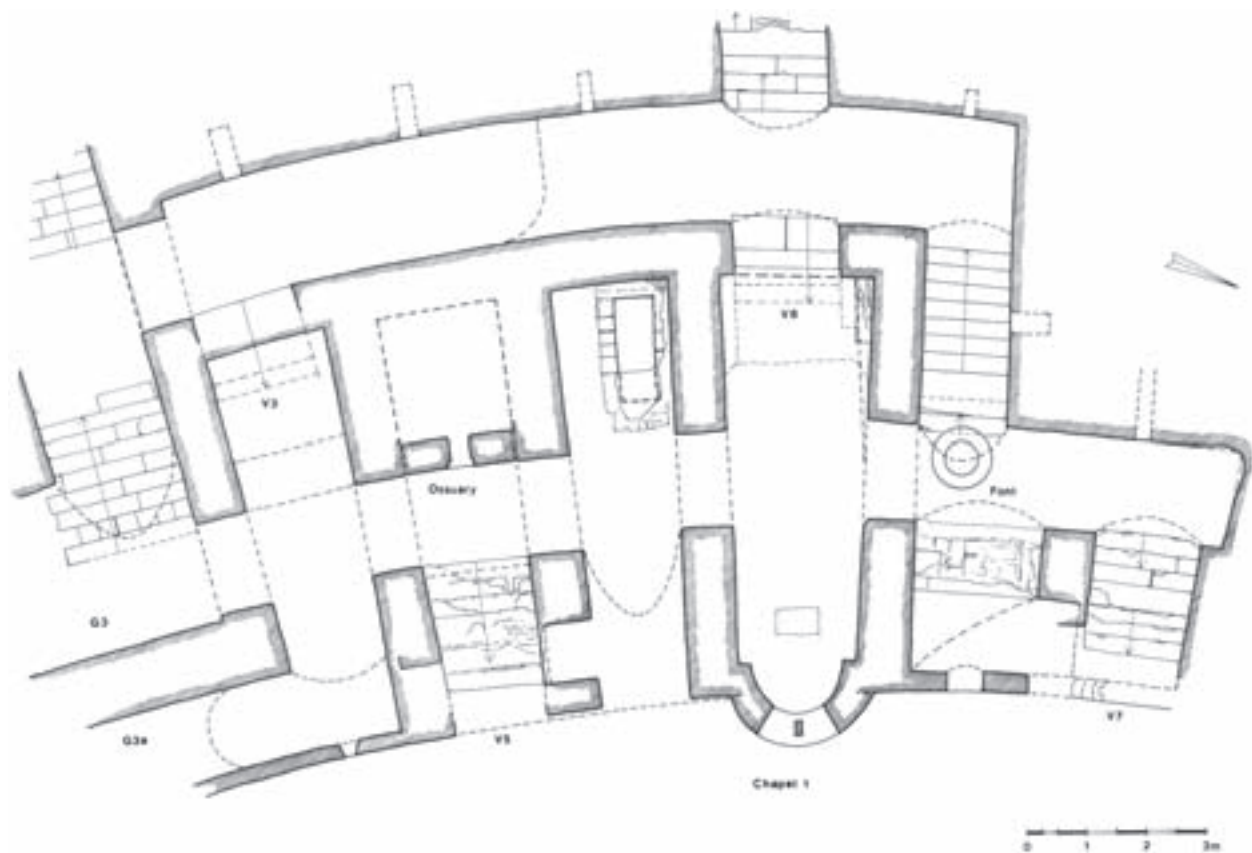


Fig. 3 – Main chapel area, plan (D. Andrews).



Fig. 4 - View of main chapel from the west (© S. Diehl, 2002).

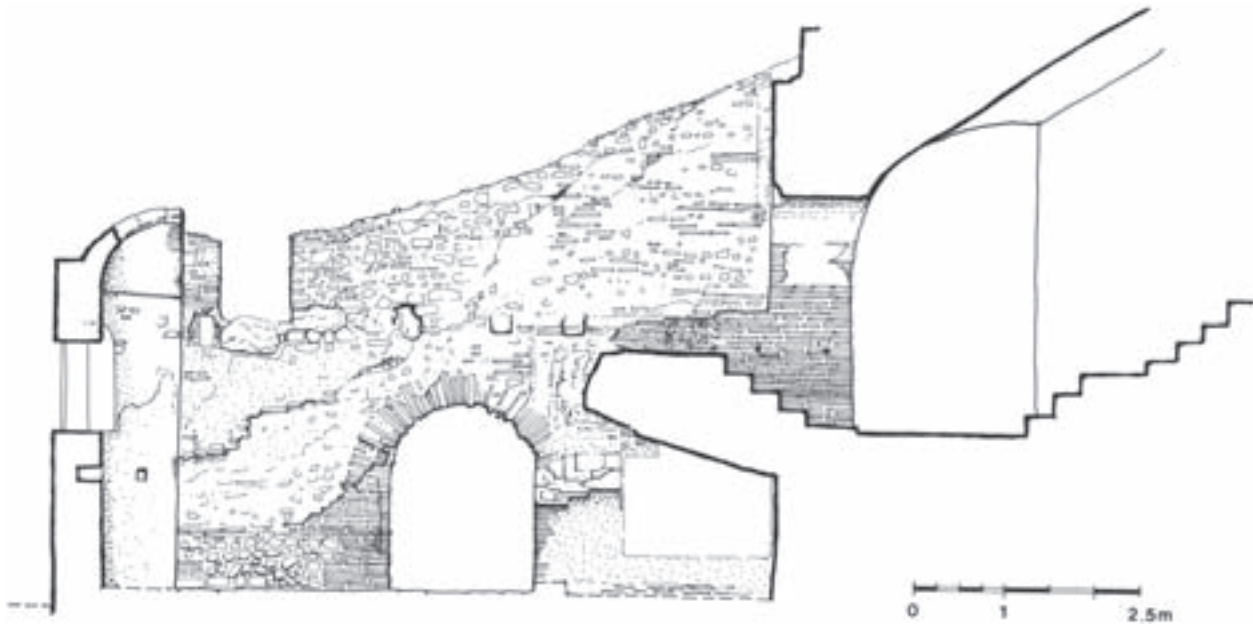


Fig. 5 - Chapel 1, elevation, south 'nave' wall (D. Andrews).

laid with a variety of materials, large tiles (*bipedales*) in the east and stones slabs in the west. In the western alcove, which forms the western chapel terminus, the floor is missing and all three walls and the ceiling were decorated with wall-

paintings; the southern and central walls of the alcove additionally received mosaic decoration. (fig. 6) Further traces of plaster and paint are visible on the side-walls and in the apse, where there are the remains of two standing saints.





Fig. 6 – Main chapel, view of western alcove from east (© S. Diehl, 2002).

Various features associated with the chapel are preserved in its immediate surrounds. In the adjacent alcove to the south lies a large, masonry tomb, excavated by Toçi. Further south, the next alcove was closed by a masonry wall pierced by a single small opening and containing a carved marble cross. The resultant enclosed space was filled with jumbled human skeletal material, leading to its identification as an ossuary (discussed below). To the north of the chapel, a small circular font with shallow basin is presumed to have served baptismal purposes.

Analysis of the various structural phases suggests that prior to its conversion for Christian use, the Main Chapel was a low-ceilinged, barrel-vaulted space with eastern and western alcoves, whose primary purpose was to support the

*pulvinar* above. Its floor lay some 45-50cm below its present level, and excavations have revealed no evidence for any stairs leading directly to the arena floor. Thus, unlike sub-*pulvinar* spaces in some other amphitheaters, it is unlikely that the space served as a pagan shrine.<sup>26</sup> The space was therefore chosen for conversion either as a result of its slightly north-of-east orientation, or for the associations of power and authority that had accrued to the *pulvinar* above.

The conversion of the space for Christian use involved only the most basic, indeed somewhat crude, transformations of the pre-existing space. The vaults of the eastern alcove, its eastern wall, and the viewing box above were removed. The space's side walls were extended through this now-open space to form the nave walls and an apse with a bifora window was tacked onto the eastern end, projecting into the arena. The *vomitorium* giving onto the viewing box, however, was left intact, creating a kind of western second-story gallery overlooking the chapel below. (see fig. 6) The resultant space was covered with a timber roof and a single window pierced the nave wall on the south side. The masonry used in these additions was composed of stone rubble and tile fragments and with the exception of two partial re-used limestone seats, (visible in fig. 1) contained little *spolia* from the surrounding amphitheater.

This first moment of Christian use is typically dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, a claim based principally on stylistic and iconographic analysis of the chapel's mosaics, which are assumed to be contemporary with the chapel's construction. The seemingly close iconographic and stylistic affinities with late antique wall mosaics, and the discovery of an allegedly Heraclian brick stamp in the now-missing western alcove floor, have been the principal props in this argument.<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that there is no extant archaeological evidence connecting the construction of the chapel to the laying of the mosaics, and thus, the dates of the two events must be considered separately.

The brick stamp is an unconvincing chronological indicator for the construction of the

26. See Golvin, *op. cit.*, n. 12, p. 337-340. A discussion of the evidence for the *pulvinar* and a reconstruction of the pre-Christian phase beneath it can be found in Bowes and Hoti,

*op. cit.*, n. 9.

27. On the brick stamp, see Hoti, *op. cit.*, n. 20, p. 178-179. For the mosaics, see below.

chapel; it fits poorly in the small and tenuous corpus of Heraclian stamps, and the brick in question came from a spoliated brick floor composed of bricks from the amphitheater itself. Other archaeological data is similarly meager. A 10<sup>th</sup>-century coin (969-976) was reportedly found in a tomb in the chapel.<sup>28</sup> More significant are a few fragments of recently discovered medieval ceramics, built into the exterior of the chapel's side walls and apse. These consisted of two body shards and a rim from cooking pots, roughly dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> – through 11<sup>th</sup>-centuries.<sup>29</sup> It is always possible that these ceramic shards were added during later repairs to the structure, although their deep positioning on the exterior walls makes this somewhat unlikely. Significant, too, may be the near total absence of amphitheater spolia in the chapel's masonry; only two seats or steps and two similar fragments are reused in the nave walls. Such spolia would have been abundant when the monument was robbed of its stone in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and its absence likewise points to a date after the amphitheater had been robbed of its carved steps and seats.

### The frescoes of the main chapel

As noted above, the majority of extant mural decoration is found in the chapel's western alcove. Here, painted wall-plaster can be seen on the ceiling and northern wall, as well as peeping out around the mosaics. Mosaic panels cover most of the southern and rear walls. This palimpsest of decoration will be the focus of the following discussion.

While most previous analyses of the Main Chapel have focused on the well-known mosaics, any consideration of the chapel's decoration must begin with the underlying painted program. Traces below, between, and behind the mosaics (visible in lacunae in the tesserae) indicate that the entire

alcove was once covered with frescoes whose principal extant remains are preserved on the ceiling, northern and western walls.<sup>30</sup> Careful examination of the joints of ceiling and walls, and the cross-section of fragmentary areas, indicate that the alcove space received only one layer of frescoes and that the painted decoration of the ceiling and the walls were part of a single phase. This single phase preceded the laying of the mosaics.

The painted surfaces are now nearly illegible. Visual inspection with the help of a hand-lens, assisted by the manipulation of contrast in digital photographs of the extant paintings, enabled our team to discern paint traces hardly visible to the naked eye. These findings were then verified by further inspection and recorded with a series of scale drawings.

All of the figures were seemingly rendered with simple lines and a limited palette of colors. Red paint was used to outline the features of the figures, and the rectangular borders were likewise edged in a wide red band. The images on the ceiling were found to depict a nimbate Pantocrator in bust form, with a sharp pointed beard, wearing a yellow chlamys and blue tunic, holding a large book in his left hand and making a two-fingered-blessing with his right, the whole framed by a blue aureole contoured in red. (fig. 7) The imagery outside the aureole was almost wholly destroyed; however, a set of curving horns against a blue background in the lower left-hand corner suggest a bull's head, typically the symbol of the evangelist Luke. It is thus possible that remainder of the scene depicted a Pantocrator flanked by the symbols of the evangelists, or less likely, the Ancient of Days.<sup>31</sup>

The painted program on the vertical walls was more difficult to decipher, owing to the disappearance of the upper-most layer of pigment, leaving only base layers and eroded outlines.

28. Toçi, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 40.

29. J. Vroom, *Durrës amphitheatre's afterlife : the medieval and post-medieval ceramics*, in L. Bejko and R. Hodges (ed.), *New directions in Albanian archaeology. Studies presented to Muzafer Korkuti*, Tirana, 2006, p. 306.

30. The paintings have been only briefly noted in the scholarly literature : D. Dharmo, *Konsiderata mbi zhvillimin e mozaikut paleokristian në Shqipëri*, in *Iliria*, 16, 1, 1986, p. 311-315; R. Gega, *La chapelle de l'amphithéâtre de Durrës*, in *XL Corso di*

*cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina*, Ravenna, 1993, p. 531-2, 534-5; H. and H. Buschhausen, *Durazzo und die Anfang des Christentums in Albanien*, in *Steine Sprechen*, 120.1, 2001, p. 7 and 11; reprinted in Albanian in *Monumentet*, 2004, p. 49-70.

31. The former possibility was suggested orally to H. Buschhausen by D. Dharmo. See Buschhausen and Buschhausen, *op. cit.*, n. 30, p. 7.



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Fig. 7 - Main chapel, western alcove, ceiling, photo with superimposed scaled line drawing of paintings (S. Diehl, P. Haipi, R. Das).

However, using the same techniques as were used on the ceiling, a standing, beardless, nimbate figure was isolated in the western corner of the north wall, wearing a knee-length cream tunic, cinched at the waist with a black belt, and a pale blue cloak wrapped over the left shoulder. (fig. 8) The figure holds a long, pole-like object in the right hand, while the left hand seemingly holds a red, oval object that rests against the right leg. The pole and the oval object are almost certainly a spear and shield, respectively, while the cloak similarly describes military dress, although there is no sign of a cuirass. These attributes fit two general figure types – images of the archangels in military garb, or military saints. No wings could be identified which might suggest an angel: the humped form to the right of the figure was initially considered as such, but close examination reveals the form to be part of the undulating green background. The remaining attributes – spear, shield and military dress, thus seem to suggest a

standing, beardless military saint, such as Demetrios, George, Procopios or Mercurios.<sup>32</sup>

The severe paint losses on the eastern section of this north wall make it impossible to tell whether there were any further figures. However, on the northern portion of the rear western wall, another standing figure could be discerned, placed against the same blue sky and rolling green background as the military saint. Only the torso and hand of the frontally-facing figure was preserved, clothed in a cream-colored pallium, as well as fragments of an inscription in black lettering which presumably identified the individual.<sup>33</sup> To the left of this figure were two bands of red and white, seemingly the frame of rectangular image that would have occupied the center of the rear wall, and which was subsequently replaced by the Sophia/Eirene mosaic of similar size (see below). On the south wall, traces of a painted inscription, running beneath the Stephen mosaic panel, included the

32. The Buschhausens recognized a standing figure on this wall, which they identified as Asteios, based upon their assumption that the chapel constituted a shrine to that martyr (Buschhausen and Buschhausen, *op. cit.*, n. 30, 11).

On Asteios, see below.

33. In the top line were the remains of two indecipherable initial letters, and below what appears to be a Γ followed by an S.



Fig. 8 – Main chapel, western alcove, north wall, photo with heightened contrast and superimposed scaled line drawing of paintings (S. Diehl, P. Haipi, R. Das).

letters CT, perhaps part of an inscription that read [ΑΓΙΟΣ] CT[ΕΦΑΝΟΣ] which accompanied a painted image of St. Stephen.

Thus, while the overall program remains unclear, it probably included a Pantocrator in theophany on the ceiling, a large axial rectangular composition on the rear wall, flanked by standing saints, and more standing saints on the north and south walls. All of these figures were identified by accompanying *tituli* in black letters; one was attired in a *pallium*, suggesting an apostle, saint or prophet, another wore military uniform, and a third may have represented the protomartyr, St. Stephen. The later mosaics may have reproduced

the format of some of these painted panels, and perhaps, as in the case of St. Stephen, even their subject matter.

The iconography of these tattered frescoes provides some tentative suggestions as to their date.<sup>34</sup> Prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, saints associated with the military, such as Theodore of Tiron or George of Lydda, were typically clad in long tunics and chlamys, dress associated with the imperial court.<sup>35</sup> Images of such saints clad in military costume and/or bearing weapons in this period are not terribly common. Examples include an image of George with a cuirass and sword at Bawit (6<sup>th</sup> century); another image of George on the so-

34. On the iconography of warrior saints, see C. Walter, *Theodore, archetype of the warrior saint*, in *Revue des études byzantines*, 57, 1999, p. 163-210; Id., *The warrior saints in Byzantine art and tradition*, Aldershot, 2003, p. 270-274 and *passim*.

35. Walter, *Warrior Saints...* cit., n. 34, p. 270. Some healing saints, such as Dimitrios, Sergius and Bacchus, were not revered for their military exploits until the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

called Schlumberger Cross in the Cabinet des Medailles holding a sword before a kneeling figure (6<sup>th</sup> century?); an 8<sup>th</sup>-century (?) terracotta plaque from Vinica depicting George with a shield.<sup>36</sup> After the 9<sup>th</sup> century, however, the type becomes quite common. In the earliest examples, longer cuirass or tunics are combined with the newer tradition of swords, spears and shields, similar to the aspect of the Durres saint.<sup>37</sup> A nearby example in the church of Saint Mercurios, on Corfu, dating to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, has a strikingly similar knee-length belted tunic and cloak and indicates that the mixed-tradition continued in local contexts.<sup>38</sup> The particular variant which holds the spear away from the body with the right hand and steadies an oval shield with the left, as seems to be the case at Durres, is likewise most common in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, the use of Christ as Pantocrator in bust form to decorate vaults and apses is more common after the 9<sup>th</sup> century, although its origins lay in late antiquity.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, if the Durres image depicts the more common theophanic vision rather than the Ancient of Days, the former was, in fact, more common in late-antique church decoration than it was in later Byzantine art. However, the scene remained

popular in the East immediately after Iconoclasm, and continued to be used through the twelfth century in certain areas of Greece.<sup>41</sup> Again, the closest comparanda are on Corfu, where the rural churches of Saint Mercurios and Saint Michael both have theophanies on their eastern walls in which the Pantocrator is shown in bust form.<sup>42</sup> The simple red outlines, coloration, sharp beard and fingers of the Merkourios Pantocrator are similar to the remains on the Durres ceiling.<sup>43</sup>

The iconography alone thus provides no clear chronological indicators. What can be gleaned of the fragmentary remains could comprise a somewhat eclectic program of late antique date, or a rather conservative program of the 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. Based on the iconography alone, the 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup>-century comparanda seem somewhat more convincing. While too damaged to permit any stylistic analysis that might sustain this assessment, both the standing military saint and the bust Pantocrator in theophany as ceiling device are types common in middle Byzantine church decoration, and less so in late antiquity. The close parallels in nearby Corfu might suggest that the Durres frescoes may belong to the wider school of painting which operated throughout the Adriatic, certainly in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and perhaps

36. Also, a pre-Iconoclast fresco from Küçük Tavşan Adas<sup>2</sup> with George holding a sword. For a full account, see Walter, *Warrior Saints...* cit., n. 34, p. 123-126.

37. For instance, in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>-century wall-paintings from Cappadocian churches Saint Theodore is depicted both in court dress and military costume. See Walter, *Warrior Saints...* cit., n. 34, p. 125. The mid-10<sup>th</sup> century Palazzo Venezia ivory triptych depicts a whole sequence of military saints, all clad in court costume, although some additionally bear swords, while on triptychs in the Museo Cristiano and in the Louvre of similar date they are clad in short cuirasses and holding spears. See A. Goldschmidt and K. Weitzmann, *Die Byzantinischen Elfenbeinskulpturen des X.-XIII. Jahrhunderts, II. Reliefs*, Berlin, 1934, p. 33-35, no. 31-33, and pl. x, xi and xii, respectively.

38. P. Vocotopoulos, *Fresques du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle a Corfou*, in *Cahiers archéologiques*, 121, 1971, p. 151-160.

39. 10<sup>th</sup> century examples include the Vatican triptych and the triptych of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in St. Petersburg. See A. Cutler, *The Hand of the master : craftsmanship, ivory and society in Byzantium (9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Centuries)*, Princeton, 1994, fig. 169, 28. For the chronology, *ibid*, 197-225. For 11<sup>th</sup>-century examples, Walter, *Warrior Saints...*cit., n. 34, fig. 2, 4 (Kastoria), 36 (Hosios Loukas), and 47 (copper plaque in Antwerp, Mayer van den Bergh Museum); V. Lazarev, *Storia della pittura bizantina*, Turin, 1967, fig. 288 (Kiev, St. Michael), fig. 207 (Lives of Saints and Homilies, Moscow,

Historical Museum); Cutler, *Hand of the Master*, fig. 44 (ivory in Venice, Museo Archeologico). An apparently isolated earlier instance of this type in the Carolingian west are the standing military saints on the so-called arch of Einhard of the early 9<sup>th</sup> century (Walter, *Warrior Saints...*cit., n. 34, fig. 70).

40. A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasm Byzantine*, Paris, 1957, 219-222, 234-248.

41. Grabar, *op. cit.*, n. 40, p. 234; J. Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Théophanies-visions auxquelles participent les prophètes dans l'art byzantin après la restauration des images*, in A. Grabar (ed.), *Synthronon. Art et Archéologie de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen*, Paris, 1968, p. 135-143; M. Panayotidi, *Le peinture monumentale en Grèce de la fin de l'Iconoclasm jusqu'à l'avènement des Comnènes (843-1081)*, in *Cahiers archéologiques*, 34, 1986, p. 89, 100-101; K. Skawran, *The development of middle Byzantine fresco painting in Greece*, Pretoria, 1982, p. 154-155.

42. Vocotopoulos, *op. cit.*, n. 38, p. 151-156; Id., *Byzantine mosaics and wall paintings*, in *Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art in Corfu*, Corfu, 1994, p. 61.

43. The mid-11<sup>th</sup>-century paintings at Saint Sophia in Ochrid, a city bound to Durres by trade and episcopal competition, display a similar archaic style, although no theophany is depicted. See V. Lazarev, *Painting in Macedonia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries*, in *Congrès international des études byzantines, Ochride*, Belgrade-Ochrid, 1961, p. 389-395.

earlier, although again, the fragmentary state of the remains make it impossible to determine if the Durres frescoes share the stylistic peculiarities of those works.<sup>44</sup> In short, it is impossible to determine with any certainty the date of the Durres frescoes, but based on an assessment of the likely iconographic program, a late antique date certainly presents some difficulties.

### The mosaics of the main chapel

These findings have further implications, both for the mosaics in the same space and for the understanding of Christian activity in the amphitheater as a whole. Most significantly, the frescos clearly preceded the mosaics that were laid on the south and rear walls. Careful examination of the junctures where paintings and mosaics abut reveals that the paintings were cut for the later insertion of the mosaics. The artists then attempted to cover the resultant plaster gaps with crudely-laid plaster and red paint. (fig. 9) Neither the north wall nor the ceiling were ever set with mosaics, so that, in its later phases, the alcove would have had a mixed scheme of mosaic and painted plaster.

All three mosaic panels are composed of both stone and glass tesserae; although the tesserae on the rear panel are somewhat larger on average than those on the side panels. The color schemes on all three panels are largely the same, with white, red/pink, blue, and green presiding. Glass tesserae of blue, red and lime green are used for the details of face and costume, while gold glass is used in halos and for costume details. The humid environment in the alcove has caused heavy salt crystallization and pulverization of many tesserae, and almost all of the gold-glass tesserae have shed their gold leaf.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, the similar materials and color schemes suggest that all three panels



Fig. 9 – Main chapel, western alcove, south wall, paintings beneath mosaics near Stephen panel (© Stephen Diehl, 2002).

were roughly contemporary. Examination of the borders and joins between the panels, however, indicates that the rear panel was laid first, followed by the large southern panel, and finally the Stephen panel. The rear panel was probably laid by a different workshop from the southern panels, as the workmanship is cruder, and the poorer surface preparation and larger tesserae may have resulted in this mosaic's relatively poorer condition.<sup>46</sup> The striking similarities in the two southern panels suggest they were laid in short succession by the same workshop.

44. On this school and its stylistic features, see M. Castelfranchi, *Pittura monumentale Bizantina in Puglia*, Milan, 1991, p. 72-81. For a later period, L. Safran, *Exploring artistic links between Epiros and Apulia in the thirteenth century: the problem of sculpture and wall painting*, in E. Chrysos (ed.), *The Despotate of Epirus*, Arta, 1992, p. 455-474.

45. Analysis of the mosaics' current state was undertaken by Dr. Roberto Nardi on behalf of the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) in July of 2002. All descriptions are

taken from his unpublished report, «Albania. Durres. Inspection of the Mosaics in the Byzantine Chapel in the Amphitheatre,» submitted to ICCROM. We are most grateful to Dr. Nardi for his advice and friendly cooperation.

46. As noted by Nardi, as well as Gega, *op. cit.*, n. 30, p. 529, this wall is a retaining wall and thus is set against the moisture-laden earth of the hillside. Gega's restorations in 1989 removed some of this fill in an attempt to ventilate the space and lessen the moisture levels in the chapel.

The mosaic on the rear wall is a single panel depicting a large central figure flanked by two angels, who are then further flanked by two female figures. (fig. 10) The upper portions of the central figure are almost wholly destroyed, and at least one scholar has assumed that the figure depicted Christ. However, the clear remains of a white-edged maphorion, descending in zig-zag folds on either side of the body, point to a female figure, most likely the Virgin. To the right of her head are the remains of a black titulus, including what seem to be the upper parts of an A and a P, presumably from the name ΜΑΡΙΑ – Maria. Two angels flank the Virgin, clad in white tunics and *pallia* and carrying carry red staffs. The further flanking figures are largely destroyed; the left figure wears a halo and is labeled E[IPH]NH; the right is inscribed COΦΙΑ, holds an orb in the left hand, wears a highly decorated garment and tiny red shoes, and is accompanied by a pyramidal-

shaped object rendered in blue and white stripes, terminating in a single white line. (fig. 11) While the inscription on the left figure is incomplete and the pyramidal object remains enigmatic, it seems that the two figures are images of Irene and Sophia. Whether these are meant to depict saintly individuals of that name or personifications of these virtues is unclear : fragmentary inscriptions to the left of the Sophia figure might provide the ΑΓΙΟC epithet, while the pairing of the two figures with the Virgin might suggest personifications of her own virtues.<sup>47</sup> On the Virgin's left a small female donor figure, whose green and red gown is just visible, reaches her covered hands towards the Virgin, perhaps holding an offering. The corresponding area to the Virgin's right where a second figure would stand has been totally destroyed. The background is rendered in large white, green and red tesserae and shows signs of ancient repairs.<sup>48</sup>



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Fig. 10 – Main chapel, western alcove, rear wall mosaics (© S. Diehl, 2002).

47. As argued by M. Andaloro, *I mosaici parietali di Durazzo o dell'origine Costantinopolitana del tema iconografico di Maria Regina*, in O. Feld and U. Peschlow (ed.), *Studien zur spätantiken und byzantinischen Kunst*, Bonn, 1986, vol. 3, p. 112; and I. Nikolajevic, *Images votives de Salone et de*

*Dyrrachium*, in *Zbornik Radova*, 19, 1980, p. 59-70.

48. Nails were found embedded in this mosaic, but the absence of a clear pattern, due in part to the large lacunae in the center, make any assessment of their function difficult.

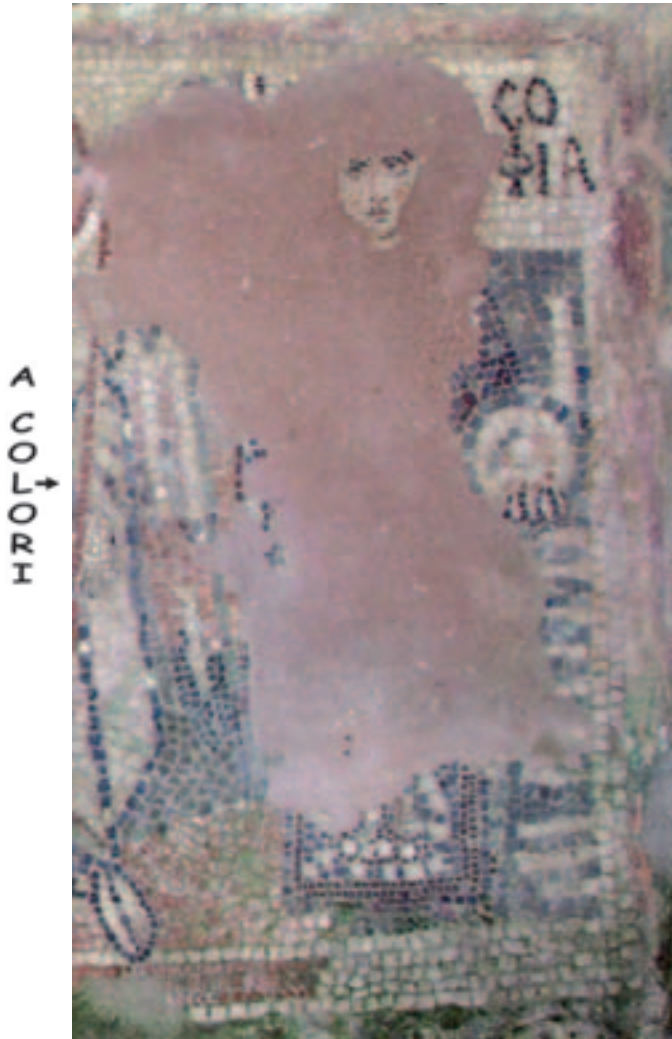


Fig. 11 - Main chapel, rear wall mosaics, detail (© S. Diehl, 2002).

The two mosaic panels on the south wall have received far more scholarly attention than their more damaged brethren on the rear wall. (fig. 12) These southern panels consist of one panel

depicting the protomartyr Stephen, and a second, larger panel dominated by an image of the Virgin flanked by angels and two, tiny figures, a male and a female. The first panel is inscribed † O ΑΓ[ι]οC CTEΦΑΝΟC, while the Virgin panel bears the prayer † K[υρι] Ε ΒΟΗΘΗCΟΝΤ ΤΟΥ ΔΟΥΛΟΥ COY ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ or «Lord preserve your servant Alexander».

The Virgin panel assumes the trapezoidal shape of the alcove. The Virgin at its center has frequently been mistaken for a male because of her heavy features, orb and the fact that the inscription is addressed to «Kyrie» rather than to the Theotokos.<sup>49</sup> (fig. 13) However, the tiny red-clad feet peeking from beneath the full-length tunic more convincingly suggest a female figure. While one scholar claimed that the triple-tiered crown with prependicularia, the jeweled *loros*, and the crowned orb could only represent an empress,<sup>50</sup> most have recognized that the donors, the flanking angels and the inscribed prayer point unambiguously to a heavenly figure, typically identified as a highly unusual variant of the Maria Regina, or Queen of Heaven.<sup>51</sup> Unlike other examples of the so-called type she neither holds the Christ child nor raises her hands in prayer, but instead holds a crowned orb in her left hand and a triple-traverse staff in her right. Indeed, although the inscription invokes Christ, he appears nowhere in the mosaic. However, Christ is present in the adjacent ceiling painting as the Pantocrator, an image which would have still been visible when the mosaics were laid.

The Virgin's halo is composed of gold-glass tesserae, widely spaced and laid at an angle to the mosaic's surface. Flanking her are two blonde angels, each bearing a staff with single traverse cross in their left hands. Each angel is clad in a

49. For instance, N. Thierry, *Une mosaïque à Dyrrachium*, in *Cahiers archéologiques*, 18, 1968, p. 227-229, and more recently, Miraj, *op. cit.*, n. 22. Toçi, *op. cit.*, n. 2; H. Nallbani, *Mozaiku i kishës*, in *Monumentet*, 7-8, 1974, p. 111-118; J. Castrillo, *L'enigme de la mosaïque de Durrës*, in *Archeologia*, 79, 1975, p. 82-3, all identify the figure as an emperor.

50. V. Pace, *Between East and West*, in M. Vasiliki (ed.), *Mother of god. Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine art*, Milan, 2001, p. 425, n. 3. The same author subsequently offered a more nuanced opinion: *Mosaici e pittura in Albania (VI-XVI secolo)*, in M. Buora and S. Santoro (ed.), *Progetto Durrës. L'indagine sui beni culturali Albanesi dell'antichità e del medioevo*:

*Tradizioni di studio a confronto*, Trieste, 2003, p. 106-109.

51. First argued by A. Cameron, *The Theotokos in sixth-century Constantinople*, *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 29, 1978, p. 85 n. 1 and followed by Andaloro, *op. cit.*, n. 47, p. 103-112; Cormack, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 84-85; J. Osborne, *Early medieval painting in San Clemente, Rome: the Madonna and Child in the niche*, in *Gesta*, 20, 1981, p. 306. J. Reynis-Jandot, *Le mosaïque murale dans la chapelle de l'amphitheatre de Dyrrachium*, in *Studia Albanica* 17.2, 1980, p. 177-181, additionally suggested that the figure represented a Virgin «Angeloktistos», a combination of an intercessory figure with the Queen of Heaven.





Fig. 12 - Main chapel, south wall mosaics (© S. Diehl, 2002).

white, knee-length fringed tunic, decorated with colored *segmenta*, and a blue and green chlamys swept over the left shoulder. Tied around their heads are ribbons and their halos are composed of half pink and half white stone tesserae. The small male figure on the Virgin's right, presumably the Alexander of the inscription, is tonsured and wears a simple beltless tunic, beneath which his hands are extended in prayer. The female on the Virgin's left, presumably Alexander's wife or other female relative, wears a red dress decorated with *orbiculi*, while a fringed maphorion covers her ornately-piled hair and extended hands. The style, colors and tesserae size and composition are in every way similar to the Stephen panel, the only

difference being the angled position of the tesserae on the Virgin's nimbus.

The Stephen panel depicts a figure clad in a white tunic with red *clavus*, over which is wrapped a white pallium with *gammadia* inscribed on the arms.<sup>52</sup> He is thus depicted as protomartyr, rather than deacon. His hands of gold tesserae are raised in prayer in front of his chest, and his head is tilted slightly to the left in a gesture which appears to be associated particularly with acts of intercessory invocation and prayer.<sup>53</sup> The background is composed of varying zones of white, yellow and green tesserae, many of which have lost their original color due to salt crystallization.

Remnants of small nails are found in both

52. See K. Wessel, *Gammadia*, in *Reallexicon zur Byzantinischen Kunst*, vol. 2, Stuttgart, 1971, p. 615-620.

53. Cormack, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 80; J. Mitchell, *The crypt reappraised*, in R. Hodges (ed.), *San Vincenzo al Volturno 1: The*

*1980-86 Excavations Part I*, London, 1993, p. 109; R. Hodges and J. Mitchell, *The basilica of Abbot Joshua at San Vincenzo al Volturno*, Monteroduni, Abbazia di Montecassino, 1996, p. 104-106.



Fig. 13 - Main chapel, south wall mosaics detail (© S. Diehl, 2002).

panels, sunk into the plaster while it was still malleable; these are set more or less at neck level on Stephen and on the two angels. (fig. 14) Too small to be part of the mosaics' structural makeup, the nails probably originally projected above the mosaics' surface.<sup>54</sup> These nails may have held cloth covering the images, or more likely given their position, hanging lamps which would have illuminated the figure's faces in the otherwise dark alcove space. No smoke residue was found on the mosaic's surface, although the earlier, largely undocumented restorations would necessarily have removed this. Lamps, of course, were hung

before icons, and their probable use here, along with the inscription on the Virgin panel, suggests these images were used in intercessory prayers.<sup>55</sup>

While it was impossible to discern a program in the paintings, the better-preserved mosaics present a united theme and perhaps point to the function of the space at the time they were laid. Both main panels included portraits, and one a prayer for intercession, elements common to funerary imagery. The probable presence of lamps hung before the images similarly describe their use as foci of intercessory prayer.

While the early excavation reports make no mention of graves unearthed in the alcove, a photograph taken of the area prior to the removal of its floor reveals a narrow stone wall laid around the alcove and reaching to the lower boarder of the rear mosaic. (fig. 15) The wall is too narrow for a bench and is most likely as the walls of a large, masonry tomb. Indeed, the presence of such an over-floor tomb would explain why the lower border of both mosaics lay so far above (some 50cm) the original pavement. The alcove space and its mosaics were thus designed as monumental burial chamber, possibly for one or more of the city's elite families.

The date of the Main Chapel mosaics has been hotly disputed, although most analyses have focused only on the better-preserved southern panels. With the exception of the few scholars who have claimed that the Alexander of the southern panel was the short-lived emperor Alexander (912-913), scholarly opinion has favored a 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>-century date.<sup>56</sup> The panels are similar in style, composition and function to the possibly early 7<sup>th</sup>-century mosaic panels at S. Demetrios in Thessaloniki. The crowned virgin wearing a *loros* is also favorably compared with a 6<sup>th</sup>-century Roman example in Santa Maria Antiqua.

As described above, all three panels of mosaics

54. Thanks to Roberto Nardi for sharing his observations on these nails and their function.

55. H. Belting, *Likeness and presence : The history of the image before the era of art*, trans. E. Jephcott, Chicago, 1994, p. 41, 80, 227-8.

56. For a 10<sup>th</sup>-century date, Toci, *op. cit.*, n. 2; A. Ducellier, *Dernières découvertes sur des sites albanais du moyen age*, in *Archeologia*, 78, 1975, p. 44; Nallbani, *op. cit.*, n. 49. R. Gega (*op. cit.*, n. 30), similarly favored a 10<sup>th</sup>-century date, but for archaeological reasons. Reynis-Jandot (*op. cit.*, n. 51, p. 179), placed the mosaics in the 8<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of

comparisons with Roman examples of the *Maria Regina*. For a 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup>-century date, see Thierry, *op. cit.*, n. 49; Castrillo, *op. cit.*, n. 49; Nikolajevic, *op. cit.*, n. 47; Cormack, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 84; Andaloro, *op. cit.*, n. 47, p. 109-110. This date has been widely accepted : R. Sörries, *Frühchristliche Denkmäler in Albania*, in *Antike Welt*, 14.4, 1983, p. 16; G. Koch, *Frühchristliche und frühbyzantinische Zeit (4.-8. Jh.)*, in *Albanien. Schätze aus dem Land der Skipetaren*, Mainz am Rhein, 1988, p. 136; Pace, *Mosaici e pittura...op. cit.*, n. 50, p. 108-109.



Fig. 14 - Main chapel, photo of south wall mosaics, showing location of nails (after R. Nardi, unpublished report).



Fig. 15 - Main chapel, photograph of western alcove prior to removal of floor (photo courtesy of A. Hoti).

overlay, and thus post-date frescos of possible 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup>-century date. A late antique date for these frescoes is, as suggested above, made somewhat problematic by their iconography, and thus a 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century date for the mosaics should also be approached with caution.

There is much in the mosaics themselves which should likewise give pause. Although they share certain features with the images in S. Demetrios, Thessaloniki, such as the presence of donors and the use of gold-tesserae for hands, the Durres panels display important incongruencies with their alleged closest cousins.<sup>57</sup>

57. On these mosaics, see E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine art in the period between Justinian and Iconoclasm*, in *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinistenkongress*, vol. 4.1, Munich, 1958, p. 1-50; R. Cormack, *The mosaic decoration of S. Demetrios, Thessaloniki. A re-examination in the light of the*

*drawings of W. S. George*, in *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 64, 1969, p. 17-52; Id., *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 50-94, esp. 78-94; Belting, *op. cit.*, n. 55, p. 82-88. On the stated connection between Durres and St. Demetrios, Cormack, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 84; Pace, *Mosaici e pittura...* cit., n. 50, 109.

Most significant are the radically different sizes and positions of the intercessory votive figures. In the nave pier panels in Thessaloniki, Demetrios is shown shoulder to shoulder with supplicants, embracing them as equals. While a greater size disparity is evident in the nave-arcade scenes, this is frequently the product of the awkward extradados space available to the artists, and the saint typically touches or embraces his charge as he presents him or her to the Virgin or Christ.<sup>58</sup> At Durres, on the other hand, the Virgin in each large panel is some two-and-a-half times the size of the tiny donors, no intermediary saint intercedes for them, and the Virgin stands aloof and untouchable. As Nicole Thierry has noted, these are more typically features of middle Byzantine funerary images.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time, certain features seem resolutely late antique, particularly on the Stephen mosaic. Stephen's pallium is marked with a gammadion, those enigmatic letters which appear on late antique images of saints and apostles, but not, seemingly, in Byzantine art.<sup>60</sup> His golden-tesserae hands likewise find their only parallel in the 7<sup>th</sup>-century images in Thessaloniki.

Stylistic analysis of the mosaics reveals some discrepancies with late antique examples, although certain affinities remain. Although the construction of facial features using light and dark flesh tones might be compared to the 6<sup>th</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup>-century mosaics at Saint Demetrios, Durres lacks the strong modeling affects achieved there by color juxtapositions and a stronger use of dark outlines.<sup>61</sup> Superficially the closest stylistic comparisons to Durres are the mid-6<sup>th</sup>-century

apse mosaics at the Euphrasian basilica at Poreč. However, new, detailed studies have enabled the real differences between the two sets of mosaics to become clear, particularly the heavier, more detailed facial features and drapery swags, and more expansive color palette at Poreč.<sup>62</sup> The flat faces of the Durres figures, outlined with green or grey, find their closest comparisons in John VII's oratory in Saint Peter's (705-707),<sup>63</sup> or in the apse images at Nicea (after 843) which may themselves look back to 8<sup>th</sup>-century models.<sup>64</sup>

A further rationale for a 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup>-century date has been the presence of the so-called Maria Regina on the southern panel, a type whose geographic and chronological origins are the subject of much debate. Durres is the eastern-most extant exemplar of the crowned virgin type, and scholars who argue that the iconography originated in Constantinople describe the Chapel mosaics as a lone survivor of an iconography developed in the imperial capital during late antiquity.<sup>65</sup> In this view, Durres must thus represent a relatively early example of a type which then marched west to be embraced by the Church of Rome, where the majority of examples occur. One recent theory further posits that the *loros*, worn by the crowned Virgin only in Durres and in the 6<sup>th</sup>-century wall-painting at Santa Maria Antiqua, was specifically tied to the Constantinopolitan court, and thus should be understood as a purposeful quotation from an exclusively eastern language of power.<sup>66</sup> Other scholars have located the invention, or at least complete realization of the type in Rome, and have seen the Maria Regina as a symbol of the

58. On the importance of touch in these images, Belting, *op. cit.*, n. 55, p. 85.

59. On size differential between small donors and the saint/Virgin as intercessor, N. Thierry, *Le portrait funéraire byzantine. Nouvelles données*, in E. Kypraiou (ed.), *Euphrosynon. Aphieroma ston Manole Chatzedake*, Athens, 1992, p. 585-586.

60. Gammadia occur rarely after the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and when they do they seem to be direct, if often misunderstood copies of earlier images. See Wessel, *op. cit.*, n. 52.

61. On St. Demetrios, see Cormack, *op. cit.*, n. 57). On Nicea, Grabar, *op. cit.*, n. 40, fig. 119.

62. See A. Terry and H. Maguire, *The wall mosaics at the cathedral of Eufrosius in Poreč: a preliminary report*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, 4, 1998, p. 199-219; Id., *The wall mosaics at the cathedral of Eufrosius in Poreč: second preliminary report*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 6, 2000, p. 159-181; Id., *The wall*

*mosaics of the cathedral of Eufrosius in Poreč: third preliminary report*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 7, 2001, p. 131-166.

63. See P. Nordhagen, *The mosaics of John VII (705-707 A.D.)*, in *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam*, 2, 1965, p. 121-166, reprinted in *Studies in Byzantine and Early Medieval Painting*, London, 1990, p. 58-130; M. Andaloro, *I mosaici dell'oratorio di Giovanni VII*, in M. Andaloro et al. (ed.), *Fragmenta Picta. Affreschi e mosaici staccati del Medioevo romano*, Rome, 1989, p. 169-177.

64. See R. Cormack, *Painting after Iconoclasm*, in A. Bryer and J. Herrin (ed.), *Iconoclasm, papers given at the 9<sup>th</sup> Spring Symposium of Byzantine studies (University of Birmingham, March 1975)*, Birmingham, 1977, p. 148. On Nicea, Grabar, *op. cit.*, n. 40, fig. 119.

65. Andaloro, *op. cit.*, n. 47

66. B. Pentcheva, *Icons and Power. The Mother of God in Byzantium*, University Park, PA, 2005, 21-26.

Church of Rome itself.<sup>67</sup> In these Rome-oriented arguments, Durres is either dismissed as a 7<sup>th</sup>-century imitation of a 6<sup>th</sup>-century Roman invention, or its liminal location is offered as the exception that proves the rule of its essentially Roman identity.<sup>68</sup>

These arguments give rise to any number of problems, not least the circular logic which argues date from geography in an attempt to substantiate geographic origins, as well as assuming an overly bifurcated model of Mediterranean geography. For while the Durres mosaic is indeed the easternmost extant example of the crowned Virgin type, Durres was never a purely «eastern» or a «western» city. Until the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century its bishop looked to the Pope in Rome, while its worldly affairs were generally ignored, as was much of Illyricum, by its political bosses in Constantinople.<sup>69</sup> Beginning in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Durres, like other major cities on the eastern Adriatic coast, was drawn more securely into the Byzantine political sphere; it was named an archonate, and despite periodic takeovers by Bulgars and Slavs, functioned increasingly as a center of Byzantine regional control throughout the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>70</sup> In the later 10<sup>th</sup> century its bishopric rose to power as a bulwark

against the Bulgarian kingdom, and maintained periodic control over churches on the Dalmatian coast on behalf of Constantinople, in the continuing ecclesiastical power-struggle between Rome and the eastern capital.<sup>71</sup> Its economic and social ties, however, remained firmly entrenched in an Adriatic koine, open to trends, people and ideas through the Via Egnatia and northern Adriatic shipping routes. Venetians and Normans maintained a strong presence here, and the city became, or remained, a multilingual melting pot of Greek, Latin and Slavic speakers.<sup>72</sup> Despite its position under Byzantine suzerainty, to describe Durres or its art as predominantly «eastern» or a «western» in orientation is to misunderstand its complex cultural geography. Thus, whatever its date, the Durres Maria Regina cannot be used to bolster either case for the iconography's geographic origins.<sup>73</sup>

Once freed from deterministic geographic dating, the Durres panel can be analyzed within the whole spectrum of examples of crowned Virgins. With the sole exception of Durres, the extant iconography is almost wholly centered in the city of Rome and in central and southern Italy, where it appears in 6<sup>th</sup>-century, and in 8<sup>th</sup> – through 12<sup>th</sup>-century contexts.<sup>74</sup> The iconographic

67. U. Nilgen, *Maria Regina – Ein politischer Kultbildtypus?*, in *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 19, 1981, p. 1-33; M. Stroll, *Maria regina: papal symbol*, in A. Duggan (ed.), *Queens and queenship in medieval Europe*, Woodbridge, 1997, p. 173-203; Pace, *Between East and West...* cit., n. 50, p. 425; J. Osborne, *Images of the mother of god in early medieval Rome*, in A. Eastmond and L. James (ed.), *Icon and word: the power of images in Byzantium*, Aldershot, 2003, p. 135-156.

68. Particularly Pace, *Between East and West...* cit., n. 50, p. 425; Id., *Mosaici e pittura in Albania...* n. 50, p. 106-110.

69. On Durres' episcopate, see R. Janin, *Dyrrachium*, in *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, IV, Paris, 1960, p. 1248-1252. On the late antique political situation, see Gutteridge, *op. cit.*, n. 3, p. 27-29; for the Adriatic more generally, I. Goldstein, *Byzantium on the Adriatic from 500-800*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, 4, 1998, p. 7-14.

70. See P. Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 67, 74-5, 121-125.

71. On the framework in which these struggles took place, see P. Chevalier, *La christianisation de l'Europe centrale et du nord-ouest des Balkans, à la 'frontière' de l'Occident haut-médiéval*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, 4, 1998, p. 25-30.

72. On the Italian presence by 1081, see the revealing, although heavily polemical passages in *Alexiad* 2.7; see also Stephenson, *op. cit.*, n. 70, 169; on the Bulgars; Skylitzes, 349; on Durres episcopal relationships with Latin Christians in Dalmatia, see F. Dvornik, *The Slavs: Their Early History and Civilization*, Boston, 1956, p. 165, 279-81. More generally, J. Ferluga, *Durazzo e la sua regione nella secondo metà del secolo*

*X e nella prima del secolo XI*, in *Byzantium on the Balkans: Studies on the Byzantine Administration and the Southern Slavs from the VII<sup>th</sup> to the XII<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Amsterdam, 1976, p. 225-244.

73. Similarly, the mosaics themselves use stylistic and technical features typically classified as «eastern» and «western». The use of stone *tesserae* for hands and faces is typically associated with east Roman production after the 5<sup>th</sup> century. See P. Nordhagen, *op. cit.*, n. 63. The tilting of the gold *tesserae* of the crowned Virgin's nimbus is more frequently, although not exclusively, used in eastern images of 6<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup> century date, particularly those in poorly lit or elevated areas. See P. Nordhagen, *Gli effetti prodotti dall'uso dell'oro, dell'argento e di altri materiali nell'arte musiva dell'alto medioevo*, in *Colloqui del Sodalizio*, ser. 2.4, 1974, p. 143-155, reprinted in *Studies in Byzantine and early medieval painting*, London, 1990, p. 131-149; Id., «Mosaico», in A. Romanini (ed.), *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, VIII, Rome, 1997, p. 563-578. However, the *tesserae* of Stephen's nimbus are laid flat, so even this technique is inconsistently applied in the Durres mosaics.

74. The corpus is collected in M. Lawrence, *Maria regina*, in *Art Bulletin*, 7, 1925, p. 150-161, with the earlier material now updated by Osborne, *op. cit.*, n. 67. A lost 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup>-century mosaic in La Durade at Toulouse has been claimed as a Maria Regina, but the evidence is problematic. See H. Woodruff, *The iconography and date of the mosaics of La Daurade*, in *Art Bulletin*, 13, 1931, p. 80-104.

variation in these images, even those produced within short time-periods, is so great as to suggest that the crowned Virgin does not represent a real iconographic 'type' of the Virgin, but rather an iconographic theme which enjoyed a long and diverse career.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, although the most prominent and well-studied images were produced for papal patrons (hence the frequent claim that the image served exclusively ecclesiastical-political functions),<sup>76</sup> new discoveries have found crowned Virgins in a variety of functional contexts, particularly sites of private and funereal devotion.<sup>77</sup> Viewed more generally, then, the Durres panel fits within a long, 6<sup>th</sup> – through 11<sup>th</sup>-century tradition of using the crowned Virgin as queenly intercessor for the deceased. Far from being a lone provincial

mouthpiece for imperial or papal power, the Durres panel, like so many of its sister examples, seems to have utilized a language of *imperium*, particularly current on the Adriatic, to call upon aid for the deceased.

The saintly personifications of Sophia and Irene that appear on the rear and earliest mosaic panel are the most enigmatic of the ensemble, and find few iconographic parallels. As the personification of wisdom, Sophia appears in the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Vienna Dioskorides (Cod. med. gr. I f. 6v)<sup>78</sup> and on 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup>-century episcopal seals,<sup>79</sup> but only in the Carolingian and later Macedonian period is the figure used with any frequency, often to describe an imperial attribute.<sup>80</sup> Irene as the personification of peace appears in western 9<sup>th</sup> – and 10<sup>th</sup>-century

75. Only one image, a painting from the atrium of Santa Maria Antiqua dedicated by Hadrian I, includes an inscription describing the central Virgin as «regina»; other inscriptions describe the virgin as queen, but these cannot be tied definitively to specific images. On the inscription, see J. Wilpert, *Römische Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten von IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1917, p. 195. Other inscriptional evidence for the Maria as «regina» include an inscription now in the narthex of Sta. Maria in Cosmedin set up by the mid-8<sup>th</sup>-century *dux* Eustathius, which addresses the Virgin as *praeclara virgo caelestis regina sancta superexaltata et gloriosa domina mea Dei genitrix Maria*, although this again cannot be definitively associated with an image of the crowned Virgin in this church. See Osborne, *op. cit.*, n. 67, p. 138. The iconographic variation in the rest of the corpus is enormous. For instance, the Durres example includes neither the Christ child, nor a throne. The examples from John VII's funerary chapel (Nordhagen, *op. cit.*, n. 63), and in the apse of San Sebastiano on the Palatine (L. Gigli, *S. Sebastiano al Palatino*, Rome, 1975, p. 36-37) are orants without the child, the S. Clemente niche image is an orant with child, while the Virgin from the atrium of Santa Maria Antiqua and the Sta. Maria di Clemenza from Sta. Maria di Trastevere (C. Bertelli, *La Madonna di S. Maria in Trastevere*, Rome, 1961) is enthroned and holds the child. The Virgin wears a *loros* at Durres, and possibly at San Sebastiano, but does not in other examples, while the form of the crown and presence or absence of additional attributes such as scepter or orb likewise varies from example to example. On the *loros*, see Pentcheva, *op. cit.*, n. 66, p. 21-26.

76. Images associated with papal patronage include the icon of the «Madonna della Clemenza» from Sta. Maria di Trastevere seemingly dedicated by John VII (705-707) (Bertelli, *op. cit.* n. 76). For attempts to date the icon earlier, M. Andaloro, *La datazione della tavola di S. Maria in Trastevere*, in *Rivista dell'Istituto nazionale d'archeologia e storia dell'arte*, 19-20, 1972-3, p. 139-173; the focal figure in the same pope's funerary oratory in Old Saint Peter's and Hadrian I's votive panel Santa Maria Antiqua (Wilpert, *op. cit.*, n. 75, pl. 195). Many more examples are attested in the twelfth century. For the interpretation of the image as a statement

of papal power or personification of the Roman church, see note 67 above.

77. Many of the crowned Virgins interpreted simply as papal propaganda were designed for funerary contexts. The crowned Virgin adored by Pope John VII in St. Peter's formed the focal image in the pope's funerary oratory (Andaloro, *op. cit.*, n. 63; Nordhagen, *op. cit.*, n. 63). The Virgin the chapel of SS. Quiricus and Julitta, in Sta. Maria Antiqua, seems to have been designed as a funerary oratory for Theodotus, the *defensor ecclesiae Romanae*, and his family. Whatever its obvious implications for Theodotus' allegiance to the Roman church, this must have also expressed the deceased's hopes for the afterlife (Wilpert, *op. cit.*, n. 76, pl. 179, and H. Belting, *Eine Privatkapelle im frühmittelalterlichen Rom*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 41, 1987, p. 57). On the funerary function of the chapel, see F. Bauer, *La frammentazione liturgica nella chiesa romana del primo Medioevo*, in *Rivista di archeologia cristiana*, 75.1-2, 1999, p. 410. Two further images of the crowned and imperially vested Virgin are found in the so-called Crypt of Epiphanius at San Vincenzo al Volturno, the funerary oratory of a member of the local lay elite (Mitchell, *op. cit.*, n. 53, p. 76, 77, 88, 100-102, pls. 7 :1, 2, figs. 7 :9, 10). Finally, a Maria Regina in the apse at San Sebastiano on the Palatine was dedicated by one *Petrus medicus* who directed his prayers to the *Virgo Redemptoris Genitrix et Splendida Mater Christi ut precibus capiat vestris coelestia regna*, in the hope and expectation of her intercession. See Gigli, *op. cit.*, n. 75, p. 36-37, 81-83. Osborne has also argued that in S. Clemente in Rome, the type was utilized along with other images of the Virgin with Child, for possible women's devotion (*op. cit.*, n. 51, p. 142). The general funerary associations of the crowned virgin are discussed by Mitchell, *op. cit.*, n. 53, p. 100-102.

78. O. Mazal, *Byzanz und das Abendland*, Vienna, 1981, cat. no. 376, 475-6.

79. V. Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*, V. 1, Paris 1963-81, nos. 49, 703, 931, 951, 956.

80. See A. Cutler and A. Kazhdan, *Sophia*, in *Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, III, Oxford, 1991, p. 1926-1927; L. MacCoull and A. Cutler, *Personification*, in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, III, Oxford, 1991, p. 1634-1635. The iconography of the Holy Wisdom (of Christ) tends to be distinct from the

manuscripts of Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, as well as in a twelfth-century Byzantine psalter; no late antique images survive.<sup>81</sup> As a saint, Sophia appears in both late antique and Byzantine art, but images of the many saints and martyrs named Irene are largely confined to the middle Byzantine period. Thus, the Sophia/Irene iconography would seem to sit most comfortably in a Middle Byzantine context. On the other hand, there are no extant iconographic pairings of Sophia and Irene either as saints or as personifications: Durres is a *unicum*. Indeed, the only extant pairing to our knowledge is an architectural one, namely the pair of churches dedicated to Holy Peace and Holy Wisdom in Constantinople. Sharing the same clergy and liturgies, these neighboring churches together comprised the Constantinopolitan patriarchate. The pairing of the two figures at Durres could thus be a reference to the Constantinopolitan church, under whose oversight Durres fell after the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>82</sup>

The archaeology of the chapel has, unfortunately, been largely lost through unrecorded sondages or rendered inaccessible through high groundwater levels. Thus, what information can be gleaned about the chapel and its decoration is, at this point, confined to the standing remains themselves. As has been discussed above, the evidence from mural stratigraphy, and iconography and style of the mural decoration is highly ambiguous. It is certainly possible that the late antique date assigned the chapel and/or its imagery is correct, and certainly the bulk of the examples of the Maria Regina image, Stephen's golden hands and other indicators would suggest this. However, the new data introduces some degree of doubt. The 9<sup>th</sup>

through 11<sup>th</sup>-century ceramic fragments built into the chapel walls strongly suggest a later date for the chapel building, while the military saint depicted in the frescoes, and the composition and iconography of the subsequent mosaics likewise introduce the possibility of a 9<sup>th</sup>-through 11<sup>th</sup>-century chronology. At this juncture, there is no archaeological evidence to join paintings, mosaics and structure; thus, one can thus only hypothesize that an original project comprised the chapel itself and the painted program, which was soon augmented by first one, then three funerary mosaic panels.

Our recent excavations have revealed the amphitheater of the Middle Byzantine period to be a dark, damp place, its galleries as much as one-third filled with the debris of two centuries.<sup>83</sup> Although still a looming monumental presence, the 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup>-century amphitheater would have had a catacomb-like appearance, as its debris-filled galleries wound through a now semi-subterranean environment. Thus far, we have found no clear evidence that the Main Chapel space was in Christian use during late antiquity. Assuming that the project was wholly a middle Byzantine venture, it seems likely that its builders had to excavate the space, removing layers of debris and possible earlier graves before use.<sup>84</sup>

The function of this chapel, and thus the ideology driving its construction, remain unclear. Attempts have been made to link the chapel with the cult of the only known Durres saint, Saint Asteios, largely owing to parallels between that saint's *passio* and that of Saint Asterius of Salona, who also seems to have been commemorated in a chapel in Salona's amphitheater.<sup>85</sup> Asteios' *passio*, parts of which find corroboration in an 8<sup>th</sup> – or 9<sup>th</sup>-

personification of Wisdom more generally, particularly in this instance as Wisdom is paired with Peace, altering the signification of both symbols. The Holy Wisdom is also largely a post-iconoclasm phenomenon, and was either a reference to the incarnation of the Word, or the church itself as the temple of wisdom. See J. Meyendorff, *Wisdom-Sophia: contrasting approaches to a complex theme*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 41, 1987, p. 391-401.

81. The latter is Vat. Gr. 1927, f. 156r. See E. De Wald, *Illustrations in the manuscripts of the Septuagint*, vol. 3.1, Princeton, 1941, p. 25-26.

82. Janin, *op. cit.*, n. 69, p. 1248. This use of personifications is not consistent with their most common function, namely to express literal or historical qualities. See E. Antonopoulos, *Contribution à l'étude des abstractions personnifiées dans l'art médiobyzantin (IV<sup>e</sup>-XII<sup>e</sup> s.)*, in *Annuaire de l'École pratique des*

*hautes études, V<sup>e</sup> Section (sciences religieuses)*, 93, 1984-5, p. 511-514.

83. See below on the stratigraphic evidence for debris accumulation.

84. The chapel may have been entered both via the upper galleries of the amphitheater itself, but also through the arena, whose own rising debris levels made access through the two flanking *vomitoria* possible. Early excavation photographs show signs of later construction around the edges of the southern *vomitium*, possibly some type of monumental entrance associated with the Christian phase.

85. A. Bryer, *Saint Asteios and the amphitheatre chapel in Dyrrhachion*, in *Thymiamata mnemotektonika Laskarinas Mpoura*, Athens, 1994, vol. 1, p. 41-45; H. and H. Buschhausen, *op. cit.*, n. 30, p. 9-12.

century menologion, does not include an amphitheater anywhere in its narrative, in which the protagonist is smeared with honey and stung to death by flies outside the city gates and his followers are killed and buried «in the sand».<sup>86</sup> The chapel provides no evidence for a martyr cult, and although further excavations may reveal a nearby *locus sanctus*, it is best identified simply as a private funerary chapel for a family or group of families.

Private funerary monuments bearing images of the deceased, usually in the form of painted arcosolium niches, are documented throughout late antiquity and the Byzantine period, but the closest iconographic comparanda are again from the Middle Byzantine period.<sup>87</sup> The iconography of an intercessory Virgin, invoked by flanking images of the deceased, is a common type in Cappadocia from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards and, as at Durrës, frequently includes military saints accompanying the central votive image. Such projects not only constituted a perpetual physical prayer for intercession as well as a focus for actual commemorative rites, but also continually reiterated the deceased's worldly status. Indeed, by laying claim to ancient space, and by particularly choosing that space which had served as the literal seat of Roman *imperium* to commemorate family and self, the amphitheater chapel was, at a most basic level, a blatant statement of status. The rising political and religious prominence of the city in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, as both a local power center and projection point for Byzantine authority, probably produced increasingly prominent and competitive elites. Such elites might have found the reclaiming of the amphitheater, and with it the city's past, a particularly potent vehicle for self-promotion during this time of change.

#### THE MAIN CHAPEL AND ITS ENVIRONS IN THE LATER AND POST-BYZANTINE PERIODS

Scholarly preoccupation with the chapel's mosaics, and limited publication of the early excavations, give the impression of a one-phase monument and a single moment of intervention in the amphitheater's fabric. In fact, our work has suggested that the chapel and its environs were a focus of Christian interventions, many possibly commemorative, up through the Ottoman period.

To the north of the chapel, a shallow (25cm), round baptismal font (see fig. 3) was built in the northern terminus of gallery accessing the chapel's north side. Built of mortar-bound brick fragments and lined with pink mortar, the font yielded no independent information as to its date as its surrounds had been thoroughly removed in earlier excavations. However, early excavation photos, confirmed by limited re-excavation, indicate that the font lay partially atop two steps of the adjacent stairway. Such an awkward arrangement can only have been conceivable when the steps were wholly covered by debris, that is, when the debris levels in the gallery had approximately reached modern floor levels. As the original floor level of the chapel, at least in the alcove, lay some 50cm below modern levels (serving as the base of the large tomb), it is possible that the font was added at some time after the tomb and its mosaics were built.

At some point in the Middle Byzantine period, the Main Chapel seems to have been temporarily abandoned. The eve of the Norman attack of 1081 was previously given as the date and occasion of abandonment, as a hoard of *tetartera* of Alexios I Komnenos was discovered just over the chapel's floor near the altar.<sup>88</sup> Recent re-examination of

86. AASS, Iul. 5, 6. See also Bryer, *op. cit.*, n. 85, p. 43. Bryer rightly suggests that «in the sand» probably does not refer to the sand of an arena.

87. Velmans' claim that such images were an invention of the Paleologian period has been generally dismissed: T. Velmans, *Le portraits dans l'art des Paléologes*, in *Art et société de Byzance sous les Paléologes*, Venice, 1971, p. 91-148. On 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> century funerary niches and funerary portraits, to which the Durrës alcove might be compared, see Thierry, *op. cit.*, n. 59; U. Weißbrod, 'Hier liegt der Knecht Gottes': *Gräber in byzantinischen Kirchen und ihr Dekor (11. bis 15. Jahrhundert). Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Höhlenkirchen Kappadokiens*, Wiesbaden, 2003, p. 79-151; S. Brooks, *Commemoration of the dead: late Byzantine tomb decoration (mid-thirteenth to mid-fifteenth centuries)*, PhD diss.,

Institute for the Fine Arts, New York University, 2002, p. 5-12. An 11<sup>th</sup>-century arcosolium painting at Ayı Kilisesi at Erdemli, depicting a couple flanking a Deisis, two archangels and two flanking military saints, provides a particularly apt comparison with the Durrës alcove. A new survey of late antique tomb imagery in the Balkans also exposes the profound differences between earlier imagery and the later examples at Durrës. See J. Valeva, *La peinture funéraire dans les provinces orientales de l'empire romain dans l'antiquité tardive*, in *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, 7, 2001, p. 167-208; see also Weißbrod, 'Hier liegt der Knecht Gottes....' *cit.*, n. 87, p. 152-169, on the formal differences between late antique and middle Byzantine funerary portraits.

88. A. Hoti, *Një thesar me monedha të Aleksit I Komnen nga Durrësi*, in *Iliria*, 1994, p. 250-268.



the hoard, however, has identified the probable composition of the hoard as imitations of Komnenian tetartera, probably dating sometime after 1204.<sup>89</sup> The hoard must thus have been deposited in the abandoned or soon-to-be abandoned chapel in the early years of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Why the chapel should have been abandoned is a mystery; the attack on the city by Michael I Komnenos-Ducas, despot of Epiros, in 1214, may have precipitated the abandonment and occasioned the deposition of the hoard, but the more banal problem of rising debris levels cannot be discounted.<sup>90</sup> A series of deep cuts in the Main Chapel's side-walls, running along the church's entire length at approximately the same level as the upper-story *vomitorium-cum-gallery*, attest to the insertion of a series of beams (see fig. 5-6). Too large for mere bracing attempts, these beams presumably supported a second-storey floor.<sup>91</sup> Although the absence of any stratigraphy or records from the early excavations make any conclusions necessarily hypothetical, it is possible that chapel activity was gradually pushed to this upper storey to escape the rising debris and water levels, eventually resulting in the abandonment of the lower chapel. A photograph of the chapel area during the Toçi excavations reveals that at some indeterminate date, this second-storey eventually received a monumental altar and stone slab floor, heavy furnishings which could only have been supported if the lower chapel were wholly filled with debris. (fig. 16) That is, later Christians seemed to have deliberately rebuilt the chapel, complete with similarly-placed altar, above its defunct predecessor. The chapel may have been given a new, higher roof, or it may have simply made use of the same roof in what was now a small, almost cramped space. Regardless, it would have stood as a low structure in an arena almost filled with graves and debris,

accessible now only through the upper level amphitheater stairs.

A similar impetus to care for, even reverse earlier Christian activity in the amphitheater is evident in an ossuary located in the third gallery, adjacent to the Main Chapel. (fig. 17) The ossuary was constructed by throwing a finely-built stone and brick wall across one of the flanking alcoves, leaving a small brick-built door which was later closed by a flat stone. This floor lay more than 1m above the original Roman gallery levels, again either the product of raised ground levels and/or a desire to keep the contents above fluctuating water levels. Over the door, a carved cross inscribed in a circle and flanked by ornamental brickwork identifies the ossuary as a Christian project and the burials inside as Christian remains.<sup>92</sup> The contents, excavated by L. Miraj, consisted of jumbled human remains, animal bones, ceramic, metal and coins, including some dating to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The construction of the ossuary was thus dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

However, our excavations beneath the sealed ossuary floor produced copious amounts of early 16<sup>th</sup>-century Ottoman ceramics, suggesting that the ossuary may have been constructed much later, possibly just after the conquest of the city by Mehmet the Conqueror in 1501.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, the ossuary's jumbled contents, which even contained some animal bones, do not seem to constitute in situ burials, but re-deposited remains from earlier burials.

The most likely original site of those earlier burials was the amphitheater itself, whose arena and galleries were by this time chock full with centuries of graves. The Christians of early 16<sup>th</sup>-century Durres thus may have re-enshrined the remains of the recently and long-ago deceased. Whether the ruins of the amphitheater itself or local legends of Astius and his comrades suggested these graves to be ancient Christian martyrs, or

89. The hoard was re-examined by P. Papadopoulou, *Tétarèra d'imitation du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : à propos du trésor de Durrës – Albanie*, in *Revue numismatique*, 161, 2005, 145-162. We are most grateful for her help. Dr. Papadopoulou discovered that the «hoard» as previously published contained coins of considerably earlier and later date, suggesting that at some point after Toçi's excavation, coins from other contexts were mixed with the original hoard.

90. On the 1214 attack as the *raison d'être* for the hoard, see Papadopoulou, *op. cit.*, n. 89.

91. As noted by Gega, *op. cit.*, n. 30, p. 532.

92. On the cross type, see R. Huber and H. Rieth, *Glossarium Artis 2. Kirchengeriäte – Objets liturgiques – Ecclesiastical utensils*, Munich-New York, 1992, p. 145.

93. Vroom, *op. cit.*, n. 29, p. 306.



Fig. 16 - Photograph of main chapel area during Toçi excavations (photo courtesy of A. Hoti).

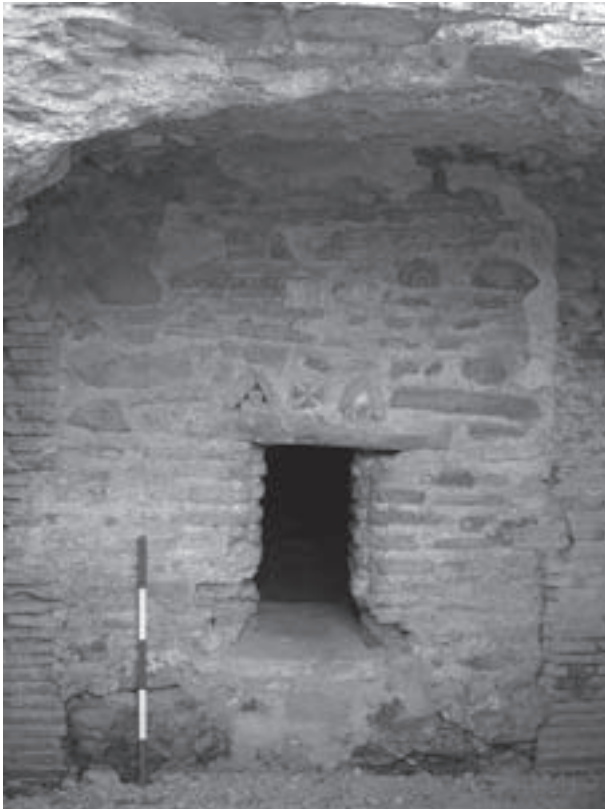


Fig. 17 - Ossuary near main chapel (K. Bowes).

whether other building activity necessitated the respectful relocation of earlier graves, the reasons for the construction of the ossuary can only be surmised. The fact that Marinus Barletius, who visited the city at approximately this time, could still identify the site as an amphitheater suggests that the ancient functions of the building had not been forgotten.<sup>94</sup>

Whatever the reason, at the moment the ossuary was constructed Durres' Christians had ample cause to contemplate their own past: the disappearance of Venetian Catholic over-lordship may have prompted, as it did in other cities, a revival of Durres' Orthodox church and renewed self-awareness of its history.<sup>95</sup> Additionally it would hardly have escaped Christians' notice that the victorious Ottoman armies were rewriting the religious topography of the present.<sup>96</sup> «Christianizing» activity now took the form of an incisive slice through the site's own Christian afterlife, localizing and enshrining it for veneration at a time when, like the real or imagined Christian martyrs of the past, Christianity was once again a marginal faith.

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John MITCHELL

94. Barletius, *op cit.* n. 4, p. 488.

95. See M. Keil, *op. cit.*, n. 10, p. 22; Id., *Art and society of Bulgaria in the Turkish period*, Maastricht, 1985, ch. 5.

96. Interestingly, the first systematic thinking about amphitheatres as spaces of Christian persecution appeared at

about this time, in the form of papal missives mandating the preservation of the Flavian amphitheater in Rome. See H. Delehaye, *L'amphithéâtre Flavien et ses environs dans les textes hagiographiques*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 16, 1897, p. 209-252.