



Summary :

The monument is located near the church of Hagia Sophia. It was one of the most important churches dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the early Byzantine Constantinople. Today it preserves only few architectural remains. It was built by Verina, the wife of Leo I, probably after 474. The church hosted the patriarchal see during 532-537 and was rebuilt in the years of Basil I. According to the tradition, the girdle of the Virgin Mary was kept there.

Date

second half of the 5th c.

Geographical Location

Constantinople, Istanbul

Topographical Location

To the north of the Patriarchate and in a small distance from Hagia Sophia

1. Location and origin of the name of the Theotokos in Chalkoprateia

The Theotokos (Mother of God) of Chalkoprateia was one of the most important churches of Constantinople dedicated to the Virgin Mary until the [church at Blachernai](#) overtook this place. It was located to the north of the [Patriarchate](#) and in a small distance from [Hagia Sophia](#).¹ The mid-16th century traveller P. Gilles notes that Chalkoprateia was not far from the [Milion](#).² According to a written source the name derives from the installation in the area of Jewish craftsmen who manufactured and traded bronze objects,³ already by the time of [Constantine the Great](#). The district was also known as the district of Chartoprateia (mean. of paper trade), because there were workshops of writing material.⁴

2. Literary sources

2.1. The construction of the Byzantine church

Byzantine writers provide us with a great number of information on the foundation of church. However they are often contradictory when we try to estimate its date of construction. The construction of the monument is attributed to the emperor [Theodosios II](#) (408-450) according to George the Monk,⁵ Michael Glykas⁶ and Pseudo-Kodinos.⁷ [Theophanes the Confessor](#) provides the exact date for the foundation of church, that is in the fortieth year of Theodosios' reign, that is, in 448.⁸ Different opinions have been brought forward by Kedrenos⁹ and Symeon Metaphrastes.¹⁰ They attribute its foundation to the empress Pulcheria, sister of Theodosios II. On the contrary, in the third [novella](#)¹¹ of [Justinian I](#) (527-565) the church is attributed to Verina, wife of [Leo I](#) (457-474). A 9th-c. hagiographic text mentions Emperor Zeno (476-491) as the founder of the church.¹² During the 6th century [Justin II](#) (565-578), before he ascended the throne, repaired the church which had suffered damages due to an earthquake.¹³ At the same time he built two chapels, the Hagia Soros, where the girdle and the [robe of Virgin Mary](#) were supposedly kept, and the chapel of Saint James Adelphotheos (James the Just, Jacob the Brother of the Lord).¹⁴

In the past, scholars generally accepted the attribution of the church to Pulcheria, without excluding the possibility of Verina's contribution in the completion of the work.¹⁵ However, according to C. Mango, the tradition of Pulcheria founding important churches of the Theotokos in Constantinople and seeing to the translation of important relics, such as the maphorion and the girdle of the Virgin, is subsequent and inaccurate.¹⁶ On the contrary, Verina, who had already built the [chapel of Soros](#) in the [Blachernai region](#) to host the maphorion, probably founded the basilica of Chalkoprateia too, in the first years of Zeno's reign and before 478, when she lost her authority in Constantinople.¹⁷ As for the tradition on the girdle allegedly kept in the church of the Chalkoprateia, it is post-8th-



century, when this relic is first reported as a complement of the maphorion and of the same origin with it.¹⁸ Justin II repaired the church after a destructing earthquake in the mid-6th century, and he completed its mosaic decoration.

2.2. The Byzantine church in the centre of historical developments

In the course of its history, the church became the scene of important historical events. In the years of Justinian I the church was used as the **patriarchal** seat for five years (532-537), from the destruction of the church of Hagia Sophia in the fires of the **Nika riot** until the completion of the Justinianic church.¹⁹ Also in the church of Chalkoprateia the **council** of 536 was convened, which condemned the **Monophysites** and the Monophysite ex-patriarch Anthimos I.²⁰ The acts of the council were confirmed in the *novella* of August 6, 536.²¹

Due to the significant economic crisis, Emperor **Alexios I Komnenos** (1081-1118) had to confiscate ecclesiastical furniture²² in order to face the Norman threat. The golden doors of the church of Chalkoprateia were removed at the time.²³ An annual compensation from the imperial treasury was arranged in return.²⁴ Finally, under **Latin rule** the church was used by the Latin clergy.²⁵

3. The architecture of the church

3.1. The history of research

Only a few parts of the the church have been preserved today. Private residences and enterprises were erected above the foundations of the Byzantine church, as well as a mosque (Acem Aga Mescidi), which today is dilapidated (**fig. 1**).²⁶ However, studies from the beginning of the 20th century helped in its reconstruction. In 1912 Mamboury recognized the ruins of the church,²⁷ and as few years later D. Lathoud - P. Pezaud published photographs and a concise plan of the site.²⁸ Firatli and Rollas brought to life the only surviving capital of the church during excavations;²⁹ W. Kleiss discovered a cruciform crypt in the sanctuary and a centrally-planned structure adjoined to the north wall of the church's **atrium**, which he has interpreted as a **baptistry**.³⁰ In 1971, T. Mathews clarified some uncertain points of the church's architecture,³¹ while W. Müller-Wiener mainly discusses the history of the monument.³²

3.2. The architectural type

The church belongs to the type of the **three-aisled basilica** with a three-sided **apse** and a **narthex** to the west. Further to the west it had a three-porticoed atrium, with dimensions similar to those of the atrium of the **Stoudios basilica** (**fig. 2**).³³ At the northwest corner there was a centrally-planned structure, which is generally considered as a baptistry.³⁴ A marble fountain, in the Museum of Constantinople since 1886, allegedly stood here.³⁵ C. Mango, however, considering the iconography of the fragmentary preserved mosaics, has suggested another view: that the octagon was the chapel of St. James Adelphotheos.³⁶

Until 1971, the **apse** of the **bema** of the church, its southeast corner and its north wall were preserved up to the half of their initial height.³⁷ It was an all-brick construction (**fig. 3**); and access was through doors on the east wall.³⁸ A cruciform crypt was discovered in front of the **apse** of the **bema** (**fig. 4**). The church was remodelled under **Basil I** (867-886), when it acquired a **dome** above the central aisle.³⁹

The sources attest the existence of a **solea** and of **galleries**;⁴⁰ they also report two chapels, of the Hagia Soros⁴¹ and of St James Adelphotheos. A single source speaks of the existence of a third chapel, dedicated to Christ, in which the miraculous icon of Christ Saviour was allegedly kept in the 12th century.⁴²

4. The internal decoration



The iconographic programme of the church has been lost. However, the sources inform us of a mosaic cycle from the life of Theotokos, beginning with the birth of the Virgin Mary and including the Nativity. This cycle went back to the building of the church. In the mid-6th century, when Justin II repaired the church, he completed the decoration with two more mosaics: the Adoration of the Magi, in some unspecified location, and the Annunciation in the conch of the apse. According to C. Mango it was an iconographic variation with few parallels, in which the Child appears in a medallion in front of Mary's bust, in order for the pre-incarnated Logos to be distinguished from his human mother. This mosaic was replaced by a cross in [Iconoclasm](#), under [Constantine V Kopronymos](#), while after the [Seventh Ecumenical Council](#), patriarch [Tarasios](#) saw to it being remade in the same location.⁴³

The sparse remains preserved were parts of the [sculptural](#) decoration of the church. A capital in the form of a basket, decorated with leaves and abacus ([fig. 5](#)) dates in the years of Emperor Basil I (867-886). Moreover the base of a column, that most probably belonged to a gallery colonnade, as well as two small columns of the [templon](#) have been found ([fig. 6](#)).⁴⁴ Finally, we know from the sources that, in Justin's repairs, the church was adorned with a gilded coffered ceiling and doors made of silver, electrum and gold.

5. The frescoes of the octagon structure

Fragments of two frescoes, today lost, were preserved until 1953 in the substructure of the octagon. The best preserved of those depicted two out of the three Magi, in ascene that probably made part of a cycle from Christ's infancy. The other fresco depicted the slain of Zacharias. The style of the frescoes as well as the letters of the inscriptions led to a dating in the Palaiologan period (late 13th - early 14th century). Considering those remains of the painted decoration in association with the written accounts, C. Mango concluded that this was the crypt of the chapel of St James Adelphotheos, in which the relics of the Prophet Zacharias and of the Holy Innocents were kept, according to the tradition.⁴⁵

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Glossary :

	apse
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An arched structure or a semi-circular end of a wall. In byzantine architecture it means the semicircular, usually barrel-vaulted, niche at the east end of a basilica. The side aisles of a basilica may also end in an apse, but it is always in the central apse where the altar is placed. It was separated from the main church by a barrier, the templon, or the iconostasis. Its ground plan on the external side could be semicircular, rectangular or polygonal.

atrium

1. Antiquity: The large, open space within a building, which is enveloped by colonnades.
2. Byzantium: The forecourt of a church in early Christian, Byzantine, and medieval architecture. It was usually surrounded by four porticoes (quadriporticus).

baptistery

The building or room used for Baptism. It had a font usually in the form of a cross. After the 6th c. the baptisteries constitute distinct constructions- octagonal, circular, cruciform- detached to the church or its courtyard.

bema

The area at east end of the naos in Byzantine churches, containing the altar, also referred to as the presbety or hierateion (sanctuary). In these area take place the Holy Eucharist.

dome

A characteristic element of Byzantine architecture. The dome is a hemispherical vault on a circular wall (drum) usually pierced by windows. The domed church emerges in the Early Byzantine years and its various types gradually prevail, while they are expanded in the Balkans and in Russia.

gallery

The upper level of a house where the women resided. In ecclesiastical architecture it is the corridor above the aisles and narthex of a church, from where women attended the Liturgy. Originally (in the Byzantine period) the gallery, having a special entrance, was used exclusively by the emperor and the members of the royal family.

maphorion

A women's garment covering the head and shoulders and sometimes reaching down to the feet. In Byzantium maphorion was the name of the Virgin's outer veil. According to the christian tradition it was preserved by apostle Thomas after the Dormition and 4-5 centuries afterwards it was transferred to Constantinople and deposited at the church of Blachernai. It was one of the most important relics gathered in Constantinople.

monophysitism

A Christian heresy which developed in the 5th cent. Contrary to the orthodox dogmas, it argued that Christ did not possess two natures, but only one – a human nature. This heresy became widespread in the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire (mainly in Egypt) and in Armenia.

narthex

A portico or a rectangular entrance-hall, parallel with the west end of an early Christian basilica or church.

novel (novella)

Term meaning ad verbum "new decree" and used since around the 4th century in order to denote the provisions of the emperors as separate from the organized codes. They were written mainly in Greek and used extensively in the Middle Byzantine Era. Since the days of Komnenoi and after, they were replaced by other more specialized terms and they are very rare in the Late Byzantine era

solea

A wide and oblong elevated passageway in front of the central opening of the chancel screen that reached until the ambo; there stood the deacons and the lectors during the Service.

templon or iconostasis

A structure separating the sanctuary from the main church. At first, it simply divided the nave from the presbytery, but later it became higher, with small columns and an epistyle. From the 11th century onwards, icons were placed between the templon columns and, somewhat later, icons were also placed above the epistyle, thus forming the iconostasis. The templon were originally from marble. Wooden iconostases appeared from the 13th century.

three-aisled basilica

An oblong type of church internally divided into three aisles: the middle and the two side aisles. The middle aisle is often lighted by an elevated clerestory. In the Early Byzantine years this type of church had huge dimensions.

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Schopen, L. (ed.), *Annae Comnenae, Alexias* I (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, Bonn 1839), p. 278.6-10.

Petrus Gyllius, *De topographia Constantinopoleos et de illius antiquatibus* (Lyon 1561), II.21.

Quotations

The building of the church and the first phase of its mosaic decoration under Zeno

Ναός ὑπάρχει ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει ὁ ἐπονομαζόμενος Χαλκοκρατεία πλησίον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ μεγάλης ἐκκλησίας τοῦ πατριαρχικοῦ θρόνου, εἰς Ἑβραίων συναγωγὴν ποτε χρηματίζων· τοῦτον τοῖνον τὸν ναὸν πρότερον μὲν Ζήνων ὁ βασιλεὺς εἰς κάλλος καὶ μέγεθος ἀνυψώσας καὶ περικαμαρώσας τε καὶ περιοροφώσας διὰ πευκίνων καὶ κυπαρισσίνων ξύλων κατεσκεύασέ τε <καὶ> οἶκον τῆς πανσέπτου θεομήτορος Μαρίας ἐπωνόμασε κλίτη τε δεξιὰ καὶ εὐώνυμα ἐν τῇ στοᾷ προσετίθει, ἃ εἰώθαμεν λέγειν κατηχούμενα, ἐν οἷς ἀπόκειται τῶν ἱερῶν σκευῶν ἀπαλλαγὴ. Ἐν δὲ τοῖς τῆς καμαρώσεως τοίχοις ἐκ χρυσῶν ψηφίδων πᾶσαν ἱστορίαν ἀπὸ τῆς γεννήσεως τῆς θεομήτορος προσανέθηκε καὶ τῆς δι' ἡμᾶς κατὰ σάρκα ἐνανθρωπήσεως τοῦ μονογενοῦς υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐξ αὐτῆς ἡμῖν γνωρισθέντος.

Lackner, W., (ed.), «Ein byzantinisches Marienmirakel», *Βυζαντινά* 13.2 (1985), p. 850.

The emperor in the Theotokos of Chalkoprateia on the Annunciation day

Τοῦ δὲ πατριάρχου τὴν εὐχὴν τελέσαντος, προσκυνεῖ ὁ βασιλεὺς τὸν τίμιον σταυρὸν καὶ τὸ ἄχραντον εὐαγγέλιον, καὶ κρατήσαντες ἀλλήλων τὰς χεῖρας, διέρχονται μέσον τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ εἰσέρχονται ἐν τῇ σωλαίᾳ, καὶ ἀπέρχονται μέχρι τῶν ἁγίων θυρῶν. ἅπτων δὲ κάκεισε κηρούς καὶ εὐξάμενος, ἐπιδίδωσιν αὐτοὺς τῷ πραιποσίτῳ, καὶ εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὸ θυσιαστήριον, καὶ προσκυνήσας τὴν ἁγίαν τράπεζαν καὶ λαβὼν ἀποκόμβιον παρὰ τοῦ πραιποσίτου, τίθισιν αὐτὸ ἐν τῇ ἁγίᾳ τραπέζῃ, καὶ διὰ τῆς πλαγίας τοῦ ἀριστεροῦ μέρους ἐξελεθῶν, εἰσέρχεται εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν σορὸν...

Reiske, J.J. (ed.), *Constantini Porphyrogeniti imperatoris De Cerimoniis aulae byzantinae* I (CSHB, Bonn 1829), p. 166.7-16.