

BYZANTINE

Ken Dark and Jan Kostenec, *Hagia Sophia in Context. An Archaeological Re-examination of the Cathedral of Byzantine Constantinople*. pp. 152, with ills. Oxford: Oxbow, 2019. ISBN 978-1-78925-030-5, hardcover £55.

Visitors to St Sophia at Istanbul have ever since Procopios in the sixth century up to Simon Jenkins in 2021 (in *Europe's 100 Best Cathedrals*) been ecstatic over the charismatic interior of the building. They have looked away from the exterior appearance. The publication of Dark and Kostenec focusses entirely on the structural details of the exterior which such enthusiasts have ignored. The book covers their observations made during fieldwork between 2004 and 2018 (before the annulment in July 2020 of the 1934 decree giving it the status of a museum and changing its status to that of an active mosque). It is important to note their caveat (pp. 8-9) about their limitations of access and study in recording the material evidence of the structures of St Sophia. Anyone who has worked in the building will sympathise with the restraints when working on the site. Even the extraordinary achievement of Robert Van Nice in measuring the architecture and producing detailed architectural plates (first instalment published in 1965) had its problems. He worked on his survey from 1937 to 1985, and his methods were so slow that his sponsors in Dumbarton Oaks at Washington forbade him to record any materials further than one metre from the main structure. They feared that if he moved his attention to the minarets, for example, the work would never be finished. Also, although he produced rubbings of the graffiti, mason's marks and other such information as well as many notebooks and photographs, Van Nice never seemed to ask questions about the purpose of what he observed. His whole life obsession was simply to record in minute detail what he could see. A proposed more interpretative collaboration with Rowland Mainstone never came to fruition. Over 70 boxes of his achievement are today stored for reference at Dumbarton Oaks.

My own experience in St Sophia also reflects some of the difficulties in working there. In 1973 I formally asked the then Director of Studies of the Center for Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks, William Loerke, for permission to work together with Ernest Hawkins on the mosaics in the rooms

over the southwest vestibule of St Sophia. That was agreed, with the proviso that it could not be an official Dumbarton Oaks project, owing to the fact that the Turkish government had denied any permits for work in Turkey for the institution, until it returned from its collection all the parts of the silver treasure known as the Sion Treasure which had been discovered at Kumluca in southern Turkey, but which had been illegally smuggled out of the country and sold to Dumbarton Oaks by the dealer George Zakos. In view of all this, in August 1973 we went to the office of the then Director of Ayasofya and asked if we might study, not the mosaics, but the collection of Russian icons which were stored in the rooms. These icons had been confiscated from refugees who arrived in Istanbul after 1917. We were given permission and a custodian who would supervise our work over the next two weeks. So, we spent this time (when and if the custodian was available) ostensibly looking at the icons, but in fact building a small scaffold so that we could observe and photograph the masonry and the mosaics from close to. Those icons were subsequently published in 1989 by our custodian, Şinasi Başeğmez. Despite these challenging conditions, we reckoned at the end of the two weeks that we had enough materials to publish an interpretation of the architecture and mosaics, and we sent our text to Dumbarton Oaks in April 1974. Loerke however decided it was not feasible for Dumbarton Oaks to publish, at that time, a record of field work in St Sophia. It was only thanks to a decision of his successor, Henry Maguire, that the paper appeared in print in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 31 (1977). Dark and Kostenec have, despite obstacles and frustrations, produced a substantial record (with many photographs and plans) and interpretation of some sections of the building which Van Nice could not reach, some revealed during recent archaeological probes. Also good news is that the scientific study of the complex has recently been intensified, as shown by papers in the *Proceedings of the International Hagia Sophia Symposium 24-25 September 2020* (Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf Üniversitesi, 2020).

Chapter One sets out the methodology and state of research. Chapter Two discusses the site before the building of the current church between 532 and 537, offering the scant evidence of the 4th century church which was burnt down in 404 and rebuilt between 404 and 415; this second church was in turn destroyed in the Nika riots of 532. Both seem to have been basilicas, but the archaeological remains and the evidence of primary texts (oddly here referenced through secondary sources), means speculation about them is still dominant. Too much weight is put on the hypothesis of a

funerary function for the first church, though the idea that the so-called *skeuophylakion* to the north of St Sophia might originally have been a mausoleum is of interest. They had productive access to this circular building, which they date (based on the size of bricks) as a 5th century rebuilding (with later alterations) of a 4th century structure.

More substantial is Chapter Three on Justinian's church, which covers the buttresses (which have many rebuilding and changes, the vestibules (all four argued to be original with the church), the access ramps (with new observations from the recent clearing of some of the walls), colour photographs of some uncovered fresco fragments and some mosaics in the south-west buttress, the suggestion that white marble cladding was extensive on the exterior of the church, important information on the Patriarchal palace and the structure at the south-west corner of the church, the Baptistery on the south side of the church (perhaps originally part of the Patriarchal palace, and later used as a Baptistery (though this interpretation requires more examination)), the proposed identification of a Great Baptistery to the north of the church, and information on courtyards around the church. The chapter concludes with useful remarks on the physical setting of the liturgy in the church.

Chapter Four discusses changes made to the structure after Justinian. This revisits all the structures mentioned in the previous chapters, but tracks changes made to them in the course of time, such as the Patriarchal palace and the buttresses. It also looks at the additional buttresses. The significant value of the changes described in the church is, as the authors convincingly argue, the provision of chapels and other more private devotional areas, adding all sorts of additional kinds of worship to the collective Sunday liturgy. The final chapter has observations on the historical significance of St Sophia in the city and its symbolic role in Orthodox identity.

In all, an important read for those who want as much information as possible about the whole complex of the church. Less essential for those who are interested in the interior and how it works, except for information about the windows and lighting. Despite the claims, the findings do not significantly change the interpretation of the interior architecture of St Sophia, but it does emphasise that the church is part of a larger surrounding set of structures, including the Patriarchal Palace. The text is discursive and not always easy to follow, and the plans and photographs could be explained more fully. It would have been helpful to have listed with greater clarity

the new information gained and what conclusions are solid rather than speculative. I am not sure how many will persevere to go through all the detail, with it being necessary to piece together the whole structural history from evidence scattered through the book. It is difficult to get a clear picture of their observations without referring at the same time to the systematic account of the challenges of building St Sophia given by the structural engineer Roland Mainstone in *Hagia Sophia. Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London, 1988). Some of his observations must be revised in view of the new information now available from the recent stripping of plaster. The message of Dark and Kostenec is that more of the structures in and around St Sophia belong to the original Justinianic period than some commentators have thought. This is a helpful comment for the southeast buttress staircase, which when I went down years ago with Ernest Hawkins, we assumed it was the route by which the emperor and others could descend or ascend between the ground floor and the south gallery, enabling them to use the high-level passageway between the palace and the door at the east end of the south gallery. Their new evidence for dating the staircase supports this assumption. This book is certainly an essential guide in understanding the amenities available to the clergy of St Sophia.

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Sharon E.J. Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium: Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography*. pp.xvi, 207, 124 ills, 3 maps. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-5218-5-1596, hardcover £95.

The purpose of a colloquium that took place in the Archaeological Institute of America (AIA) Annual Meetings in 2019 in San Diego, titled 'The Medieval Countryside: An Archaeological Perspective', was to examine various archaeological approaches to the medieval and post-medieval rural landscape, focusing predominantly on the contribution of regional archaeological surveys in mainland Greece and the Aegean region.¹ As Bintliff commented,

¹ The papers presented at this colloquium along with some added ones to broaden the geographical coverage were