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Kaelin Jewell
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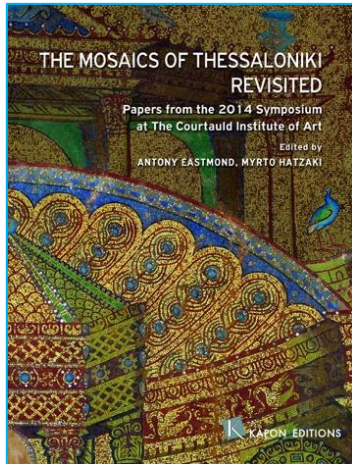
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PEREGRINATIONS

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Book Review: Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki (eds.), *The Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited: Papers from the 2014 Symposium at the Courtauld Institute of Art (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2017), 143 pages, 56 color, 13 black/white illustrations.*

KAELIN JEWELL
The Barnes Foundation

The book under review contains the published versions of nine papers delivered at “The Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited” symposium held at London’s Courtauld Institute of Art on May 30, 2014. Inspired by the massive and lavishly illustrated publication *The Mosaics of Thessaloniki 4th-14th century* (Kapon Editions, 2012), the symposium and subsequent publication *The Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited* (Kapon Editions, 2017) has brought together an interdisciplinary group of scholars who each focus on different aspects of Thessaloniki’s important collection of monumental mosaics that date to the early, middle, and late Byzantine periods.

The Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited, edited by Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki, opens with a forward by A.P. Leventis, Chairman of the A.G. Leventis Foundation, who sponsored the symposium and publication, and a note by Ioannis O.

Kanonidis, Director of Thessaloniki's Ephorate of Antiquities. Next, Antony Eastmond, the A.G. Leventis Professor of the History of Byzantine Art at the Courtauld in addition to his position as the Institute's Dean and Deputy Director, who provides a brief introduction that outlines the book's nine papers. According to Eastmond, the goal of the 2014 symposium and the 2017 proceedings was to celebrate the 2012 *Mosaics of Thessaloniki* publication as well as taking stock of the city's Byzantine monuments through detailed discussions of chronological developments, aspects of patronage, theological interpretations, and issues related to restoration efforts.¹ Following this front matter, the volume's nine papers are arranged somewhat chronologically. Six of the nine contributions address mosaics found in the early Byzantine monuments of St. Demetrios, the Rotunda of Thessaloniki, and Moni Latomou (also known as Hosios David). In the final three, authors discuss issues related to Iconoclasm, connections between Thessaloniki and Constantinople, and the impact of nineteenth and early twentieth century restorations on the city's Byzantine monuments.

In the first paper, Beat Brenk addresses the state of research for the mosaics found in Thessaloniki, emphasizing those from the church of St. Demetrios and the late-Roman building known as the Rotunda, though his discussion of St. Demetrios' mosaics is brief in comparison to his lengthy analysis of the Rotunda. Brenk is skeptical

¹ Anthony Eastmond, "Introduction," in *Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2017), 16.

of the early fifth-century CE date often cited in relation to the foundation of St. Demetrios nor is he convinced that the late-Roman Rotunda was converted into a church in the fourth century CE (he prefers a fifth-or-sixth-century date). Throughout, Brenk advocates for more detailed structural surveys, full archaeological investigations, and thorough photogrammetric recordings of both monuments. In his view, it is only after such studies have been completed and fully published that scholars can interpret these buildings with any sense of accuracy.²

In the second essay, Hjalmar Torp turns his attention to the chronological development of the Rotunda mosaics and argues against Beat Brenk's later dating, suggesting that the building was converted into a church sometime during the reign of Emperor Theodosius I (r. 379-395). It is important to note that both Brenk and Torp have worked on the monuments of Thessaloniki for decades, but Torp was able to base his observations from direct study of the Rotunda's mosaics *in situ* from scaffolding in 1953.³ It is from this close study that Torp is able to describe the stratigraphic layers of the dome mosaics from the brick foundation to the tesserae pushed into the mortar setting beds. Additionally, Torp analyzes the mosaics from a stylistic perspective and notes that they exhibit what he called "formal classicism," which could help to keep the date within the fourth century CE date. Of course, Torp is aware of such stylistic pitfalls

² Beat Brenk, "The Mosaics of Thessaloniki: The State of Research," in *Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2017), 31.

³ Hjalmar Torp, "Considerations on the Chronology of the Rotunda Mosaics," in *Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2017), 36-37.

and admits that the what he views as an apparent classicism does not necessarily have to point to an earlier date.⁴ Yet, he stands by his claim that the building, while initially constructed during the reign of Galerius, was converted into a church during the late fourth century CE based on what he refers to as “archeological and historical circumstances.”⁵

In the third contribution, Bente Küilerich provides a fascinating discussion of the ways in which mosaicists who worked at the Rotunda utilized optical blending to achieve the iridescent and scintillating effects of purple silk in the medium of glass and stone tesserae.⁶ Although the photographs throughout this edited volume are high-resolution, those included in Küilerich’s essay demonstrate exactly how the mosaicists at the Rotunda positioned deep blue and rich red glass tesserae within checkerboard patterns that, when viewed from a distance, would appear various shades of purple and violet.

Myrto Hatzaki, in the fourth chapter, also turns her attention to the Rotunda with an emphasis placed on the conceptions of beauty and variety (ποικιλία) as it applies to peacocks, rainbows, and the male form as seen in the building’s mosaic program. Hatzaki notes the multilayered notions of beauty and variety visible in the

⁴ Torp, “Considerations on the Chronology,” 42.

⁵ Torp, “Considerations on the Chronology,” 44-45. Torp discusses his argument for the Theodosian conversion of the Rotunda elsewhere, including a small guide co-written with Bente Küilerich, *The Rotunda in Thessaloniki and its Mosaics* (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2017); and his recent monograph, *La rotonde palatine à Thessalonique: architecture et mosaïques*, 2 vols. (Athens, Kapon Editions, 2018).

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of optical color blending, see Bente Küilerich, “Optical colour blending in the Rotunda mosaics at Thessaloniki,” *Musiva & Sectilia* 8 (2011): 163-192.

tails of peacocks that perch within the architectural facades, the rainbow-bordered medallion at the apex of the dome, and the wide-eyed and carefully coiffed male martyrs that gaze out at the viewers below. Although Hatzaki considers the theological sources that connect the beauty of Creation with what is found in the Rotunda's mosaics, something she never discusses is the audience for these images or how they might reveal something about the patron who commissioned them.⁷

In the fifth paper, Laura Nasrallah problematizes past interpretations of the early Byzantine apse mosaic found at the church of Hosios David (also known as Moni Latomou).⁸ Her main goal is to situate the enigmatic iconography within its wider theological context to reveal its connection to *both* early Christian *and* Jewish notions of representing God. Often identified as Christ given the image's connection to the New Testament Book of Revelation, Nasrallah points out that the inscription found on the open scroll held by the mosaic's central figure comes from Isaiah 40:9 and does not identify him as Christ; rather, it states in explicit terms, "Behold your God." (**Fig. 1**) Although the monument's construction history is not fully understood, Nasrallah suggests that the installation of such a theologically charged image of God represented

⁷ For more on the social implications of employing images of peacocks as emblems of beauty, display, and power within architectural ensembles, see the reviewer's recent dissertation, Kaelin Jewell, "Architectural Decorum and Aristocratic Power in Late Antique Rome, Constantinople, and Ravenna," (PhD Diss., Temple University, 2018), 13-23 and 78-94.

⁸ For an earlier essay on this mosaic by the same author, see Laura Nasrallah, "Early Christian Interpretation in Image and Word: Canon, Sacred Text, and the Mosaic of Moni Latomou," in *From Roman to Early Christian Thessalonikē*, eds. Laura Nasrallah, Charalambos Bakirtzis, and Steven J. Friesen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 361-398.

in human form, seated on a rainbow within an aureole of light supported by four winged creatures, which hovers above Earth,



Figure 1 Apse Mosaic of Hosios David (Moni Latomou), Thessaloniki, c. 5th century. Photo: B. Hostetler.

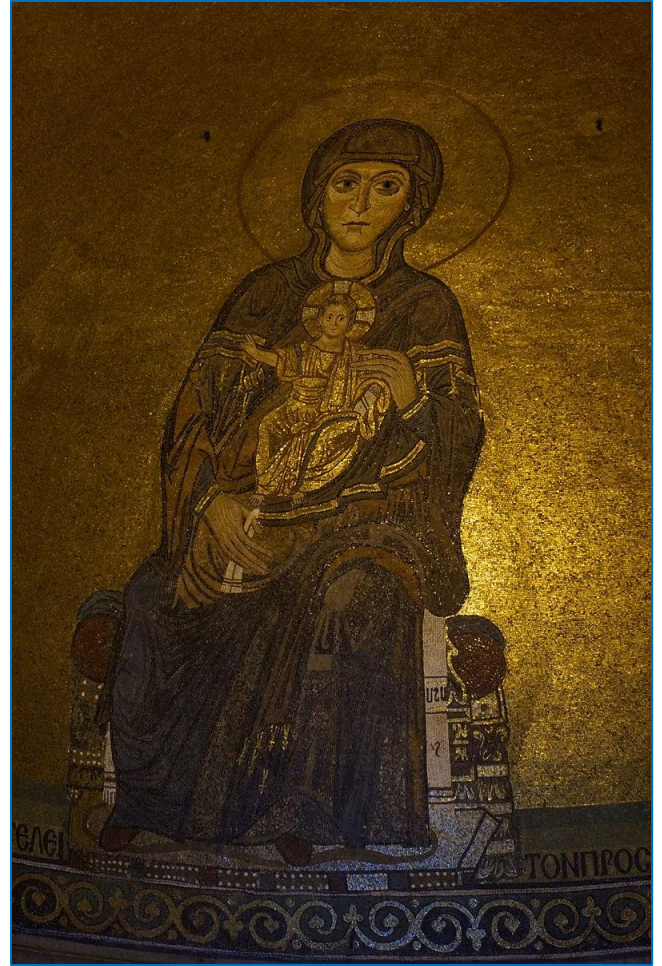
demonstrated a nuanced knowledge of the Vision of Ezekiel.⁹ According to Nasrallah, the patron (whomever it may have been) of this Christian mosaic positioned its viewers within this complex exegetical dialogue on Ezekiel 1, ultimately drawn from Rabbinic literature and liturgical practice.¹⁰

⁹ To be sure, the Vision of Ezekiel found in Ezekiel 1 is theologically connected to the description of God's Throne in Revelation 4:3 and 4:6-8.

¹⁰ Laura Nasrallah, "Ezekiel's Vision in Late Antiquity: The Case of the Mosaic of Moni Latomou, Thessaloniki," in *Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2017), 84.

Figure 2 Detail of Apse mosaic at St. Sophia, Thessaloniki, c. 9th century. Photo: G. Garitan, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

Charalambos Bakirtzis, the former Director of the Ephorate of Antiquities in Thessaloniki during the publication of the 2012 *Mosaics of Thessaloniki* volume, provides the sixth essay. Bakirtzis opens his paper admitting he wrote it more as a reflection than a scholarly essay before recounting his experience as the head of Thessaloniki's Ephorate and providing his own personalized descriptions of the mosaics



at St. Demetrios.¹¹ More nuanced discussions on the monument's architecture and its mosaics previously published by Bakirtzis are referenced in the notes for this essay.

The focus of the proceedings shifts to the middle Byzantine period in the seventh paper written by Robin Cormack. In it, Cormack draws upon his vast knowledge of Thessaloniki's church dedicated to St. Sophia, which he first studied as part of his 1968 doctoral dissertation.¹² Ultimately, Cormack is interested in revisiting St. Sophia's mosaics as they relate to the debates surrounding ninth-century CE Iconoclasm. (**Fig. 2**)

¹¹ Charalambos Bakirtzis, "The Mosaics of the Basilica of St. Demetrios," *Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2017), 91.

¹² Robin Cormack, "Ninth Century Monumental Painting and Mosaic," (PhD diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, 1968).

According to Cormack, the impact of the Iconoclastic Controversy on the mosaics of St. Sophia was not so much the destruction and re-dedication of new images within the church's interior; rather, it was what the ninth-century debates did to crystallize new forms of monumental church decoration. He points to later Byzantine churches in Thessaloniki, including the Holy Apostles (early fourteenth century CE), as evidence for how church interiors became more fixed in their decorative programs as a result of Iconoclasm's vigorous debates on the decorum of sacred images. In the end, he suggests that these late-Byzantine churches, in comparison to earlier, pre-Iconoclastic examples, are somewhat devoid of sacred character and that their monumental decoration became more like "expensive wallpaper" for wealthy patrons.¹³

In the eighth and penultimate paper, Liz James addresses the issues of chronology present in the mosaics of Thessaloniki's Church of the Holy Apostles. Built sometime in the early fourteenth century CE, the mosaics of the Holy Apostles have been tied, based on style, to similarly dated mosaics found at the Pammakaristos and Chora churches in Constantinople. Found within each of these mosaics are dedicatory inscriptions, which scholars have used as evidence for specific dates. Yet, in 1990, Peter Kuniholm and Cecil Striker undertook dendrochronological analysis of the wooden tie

¹³ Robin Cormack, "After Iconoclasm—Forwards or Backwards?" *Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2017), 115.

beams present at the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki that revealed a firm date of 1329 CE, approximately ten years later than the date given in the dedicatory inscription.¹⁴ (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3 Wooden tie beams, mosaics, and wall paintings, interior of Holy Apostles, Thessaloniki, c. early 14th century CE. Photo: B. Hostetler

What is remarkable about this essay, is that James uses this dendrochronological date as the impetus to revisit long-held art historical assumptions about how and why sacred architecture is commissioned in Thessaloniki and Constantinople in the late Byzantine period. Additionally, her discussion of the relationship between mosaics and

¹⁴ Liz James, “Mosaics of the Church of the Holy Apostles: Byzantine Mosaics in the Fourteenth Century,” *Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2017), 120. See also, Peter I. Kuniholm and Cecil L. Striker, “Dendrochronology and the Architectural History of the Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki,” *Architectura: Zeitschrift für Geschichte der Baukunst* 2 (1990): 1-26.

wall painting in terms of those artists who created them, is a welcome contribution to this volume.¹⁵

The publication ends with an essay by Dimitra Kotoula, who excavates archival sources on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century restorations conducted on the Byzantine monuments of Thessaloniki, with a focus on the churches of St. Sophia and St. Demetrios. Found within the Byzantine Research Fund archives held by the British School at Athens, Kotoula documents state and scholarly interest in the restoration of the two buildings as early as the 1880s, which increased exponentially after the devastating fire of 1890. Kotoula's paper reveals the complicated relationships between Ottoman officials and European architects and scholars during the politically unstable period beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁶

The papers collected in *The Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited* provide some of the most current scholarship on the Byzantine monuments of a city that was central to the Empire for over a millennium. The publication's sixty-nine images (fifty-six in full color) are all of high quality and are essential to the arguments presented. However, a map of the entire city would help the reader better visualize the topographic relationships between the monuments discussed. While reading through this volume, I felt it essential to consult *The Mosaics of Thessaloniki 4th-14th Century* (Kapon Editions,

¹⁵ James, "Mosaics of the Church of the Holy Apostles," 124-126.

¹⁶ Dimitra Kotoula, "The Byzantine Mosaics of Thessaloniki in the Nineteenth Century," *Mosaics of Thessaloniki Revisited*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Myrto Hatzaki (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2017), 133-134.

2012) for its excellent architectural plans, exterior and interior images, in addition to line drawings of the individual mosaic programs found throughout the city's Byzantine churches. Given the incredibly complex architectural histories of these monuments, even the specialist benefits from additional photographs, plans, and line drawings to help untangle these fascinating Byzantine architectural palimpsests. 🐼