

EXCAVATIONS AT SARAÇHANE IN ISTANBUL, 1968

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The fifth campaign at Saraçhane in Istanbul¹, under the auspices of Dumbarton Oaks and the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, again lasted for three months finishing on 23rd August 1968². The main objective has been to study the remains of the early 6th century church of St. Polyeuktos, and, although further soundings in the western part of the site will be necessary to resolve problems concerning the atrium, the major task of the excavation has been achieved.

The site has exceeded all expectations, not only adding a major metropolitan monument with many unique features to the story of Byzantine architecture before Justinian, but providing important evidence for occupation at Saraçhane from Roman times (even perhaps from Hellenistic)

¹ We again record our grateful thanks to the Directorate General of Antiquities at Ankara and to the Istanbul Municipal Authorities for the necessary permits, and to Mr. Necati Dolunay, Director of the Archaeological Museum at Istanbul, for his kindness and practical help. Our staff, drawn from Newcastle upon Tyne, Dublin and Istanbul University, consisted of the following: Mr. E. Akyıldız, Miss S. Barutcu, Mr. Eriz, Dr. M. V. Gill (small finds and marbles catalogues), Mrs. Harrison (photography), Dr. J. W. Hayes (pottery), Miss U. Izmiriligil (drawing), Mr. G. R. J. Lawson (surveying and drawing), Mr. S. Şişmanoğlu, Mr. J. Tait (excavation), Miss G. Ulug, and Mr. M. J. Vickers (excavation). We were greatly assisted by the Museum's technical staff, and special mention must be made of Mr. Mehmet Tunçdağ for expert repairs to pottery and marble. After the close of the campaign the human bones of all five seasons were studied by Mr. D. R. Brothwell of the British Museum.

² Preliminary reports on earlier seasons have appeared in this journal, in I. A. M. Y. 13-14 (1966), p. 131 f., and in *D.O.P.* 1965, p. 230 f.; 20 (1966), p.p. 222 f.; 21 (1967) p. 273 f.

through Early Turkish to the present day. The sixteenth and seventeenth century pottery will be a particularly striking contribution to the final publication.

Work this year was concentrated on the atrium, on the complex of structures lying north of the atrium, on the narthex, and on the construction of an underground depot within the substructures of the north aisle. The position in August 1968 can be seen in the plan (Fig. 1) and in two general views (Figs. 2 and 3).

The Atrium:

Whereas the atrium pavement is at ancient ground level, the floor of the church had been raised about 5 metres above ground level on massive substructures. A large central staircase (of which one step was found *in situ*) gave access from the atrium to the central door high in the west façade of the church. The atrium was narrow (26 metres wide), being bounded on the north side by a high unbroken wall, which was backed by a *cryptporticus* and which evidently supported a high-level gallery looking out over the atrium.

A thick occupation layer (ash, animal bones, crushed pottery), overlying the marble pavement and extending into the narthex and into the small room beneath the staircase, contained late tenth and early eleventh century material and implied that the church had already been abandoned at this period. Deep disturbances proved stone-robbing in this area in the first part of the twelfth century, and in the second part of the twelfth century the atrium was used as a graveyard; more than one hundred simple cist-graves were

excavated, the latest datable objects being coins of Isaac II (1185-95).

The western end of the atrium eluded our search; this part of the site was found to be badly disturbed by nineteenth century cellars or fire-shelters. The north wall, however, terminates abruptly with an oblique end in cc/18 (implying an oblique cross-wall?), and controlled soundings between the modern disturbances may be profitable in this area.

The Complex North of the Atrium:

The excavation of the complex of high-standing walls north of the atrium (Fig. 4) showed that these walls were of sixth-century masonry. They incorporate a substantial apsidal building with a central oblong chamber (Fig. 5). Whether this building was a baptistery or a martyrium or served some other purpose is not clear, but it is certain again that its walls are substructures.

The approach to the north door in the west facade of the church was not, as for the central door, by a staircase from below; it must have been at a high level, carried on the substructures round the apsidal building. This high-level approach raises the question whether the palace of Anicia Juliana, known to have been near the church, was in fact adjacent to it in this northern area.

During the twelfth century, by blocking of doorways and the application of waterproof plaster, these substructures were converted into a large cistern. What this cistern served we do not know, but that there was wealthy occupation nearby is indicated by a rich deposit of pottery evidently dumped into the cistern in the third quarter of the century; two of these vessels, a Byzantine and a Persian plate, are illustrated (Figs. 12 and 13).

The Narthex:

The narthex was cleared to its sixth-century plaster floor. This lay about one metre below that of the atrium, from which it was entered by four doorways

with marble steps. Successive fills had been cut by trenches for terracotta drainpipes in the 10th century, but some pockets of 7th century fill remained, particularly in the side niches.

Marble, Small Finds and Pottery:

The finds were again prolific, and only a small selection can be presented individually here. Of architectural elements the finest is a basket-capital of Proconnesian marble decorated with undercut lattice-work (ht. 0.59 m.; Fig. 6). It appears to be unique and is a masterpiece of sixth-century design and technical skill. From its find-spot it may perhaps be attributed to the building north of the atrium. The excavation of the narthex yielded fragments of three more figure panels of marble decorated with busts of the Apostles, and one of these (ht. 0.37; Fig. 7) is illustrated here³. The series should be dated in the late sixth or the seventh century.

Also found in the narthex and also of the late sixth or seventh century is a silver liturgical spoon of unusual shape (length 0.14 m.; Fig. 8); its handle is decorated in niello with a cross surrounded by a simple ivy rinceau, and the decoration is similar to that on stamped vessels of Heraclius and Constans II in the Hermitage at Leningrad⁴. From a late tenth or early eleventh century context came a small ivory plaque with the frontal bust of a nimbed bishop (ht. 0.38 m.; Fig. 9); there are traces of gold leaf on the nimbus and the book. Its use as a pendant, with a crude bronze piercing the frame, is secondary, and perhaps it was originally part of a tenth century ivory casket.

The pottery was studied by Dr. Hayes, who divided his time between the new material and the enormous seventh century deposit excavated at the end of the

³ Four panels, and a fragment of a fifth, with Apostles had been found in 1966, cf. *D.O.P.* 20 (1966), p. 235.

⁴ Cf. E. Cruickshank Dodd, *Byzantine Silver Stamps* (1961), nos. 67 and 76.

1967 campaign. This latter group, dating from about 650, is of considerable importance, containing the latest types of Late Roman red-slip wares together with the earliest examples of Byzantine glazed pottery. Representative of the range of pottery discovered in 1968 are (a) a colour-coated white-ware jug of the seventh century (ht. 0.20 m.; Fig. 10), (b) a tenth-century impressed-ware dish depicting a fisherman in fine classicizing style (preserved diam. 0.16; Fig. 11), ca twelfth-century graffito plate (0.39 m. diam.; Fig. 12), and (d) a twelfth-century Persian *lakabi*-ware dish (0.33 m. diam.; Fig. 13).

Human Skeletal Remains:

The skeletons recovered from the twelfth-century cemetery and the cistern were studied by Mr. D. R. Brothwell during a visit to Istanbul in September 1968. They represent more than 300 individuals, but many are incomplete or badly crushed. The data will be processed and a detailed report published in due course. The degree of incisor shovelling was remarkable, and cases of spinal tuberculosis and of scoliosis were recorded.

The Depot:

The construction of an underground depot, within the substructures of the north aisle, had been begun in 1967 and was this year completed. Its length is 40 metres, and it consists of twelve rooms, each of which is equipped with reinforced concrete shelving and electric light. In it have been installed the pottery, a typeseries of brickstamps, the glass, mosaic and painted plaster, animal bones and molluscs, and the multitudinous smaller pieces of architectural carving. The small finds, together with the more important items of pottery and marble sculpture, have been transferred to the Archaeological Museum, which retains the keys of the depot. The human bones have been lodged

with the Anthropological Institute at Ankara.

The Park:

In 1966 the preservation of St. Polyeuktos as an open site in an archaeological park was discussed with the Istanbul Municipal Authorities, who agreed to undertake the work as part of the development of Sarachane if professional landscape plans were provided by us. We were extremely fortunate to secure the services of Mr. R. E. Griswold, who was able to work at Saraçhane in 1967 and whose detailed study and plans were passed to the Municipal Authorities this year. The Planning and Gardens Departments have accepted the scheme and hope to begin preliminary work this winter. In its simplest terms the scheme provides for the church and atrium to be surrounded by a control fence with access at the west end of the atrium by a gate from the Horhor Caddesi, and for formal gardens (including a children's playground) to be laid out between the church and the Şehzadebaşı Caddesi with flower beds, paths and intersecting avenues of trees on the same alignment as that of the church. It is hoped that the site will become a considerable amenity both for local residents and for archaeological visitors.

Publication:

Preliminary reports are appearing regularly in *Türk Arkeoloji Dergisi*, *Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Yıllığı*, and *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, with shorter notes annually in *Anatolian Studies* and *American Journal of Archaeology* (*apud* M. J. Mellink). Work is beginning now on the full final publication, and for this several further visits will be necessary to complete the study of the material stored in the depot. As stated above, limited excavation in the western part of the atrium may be profitable.

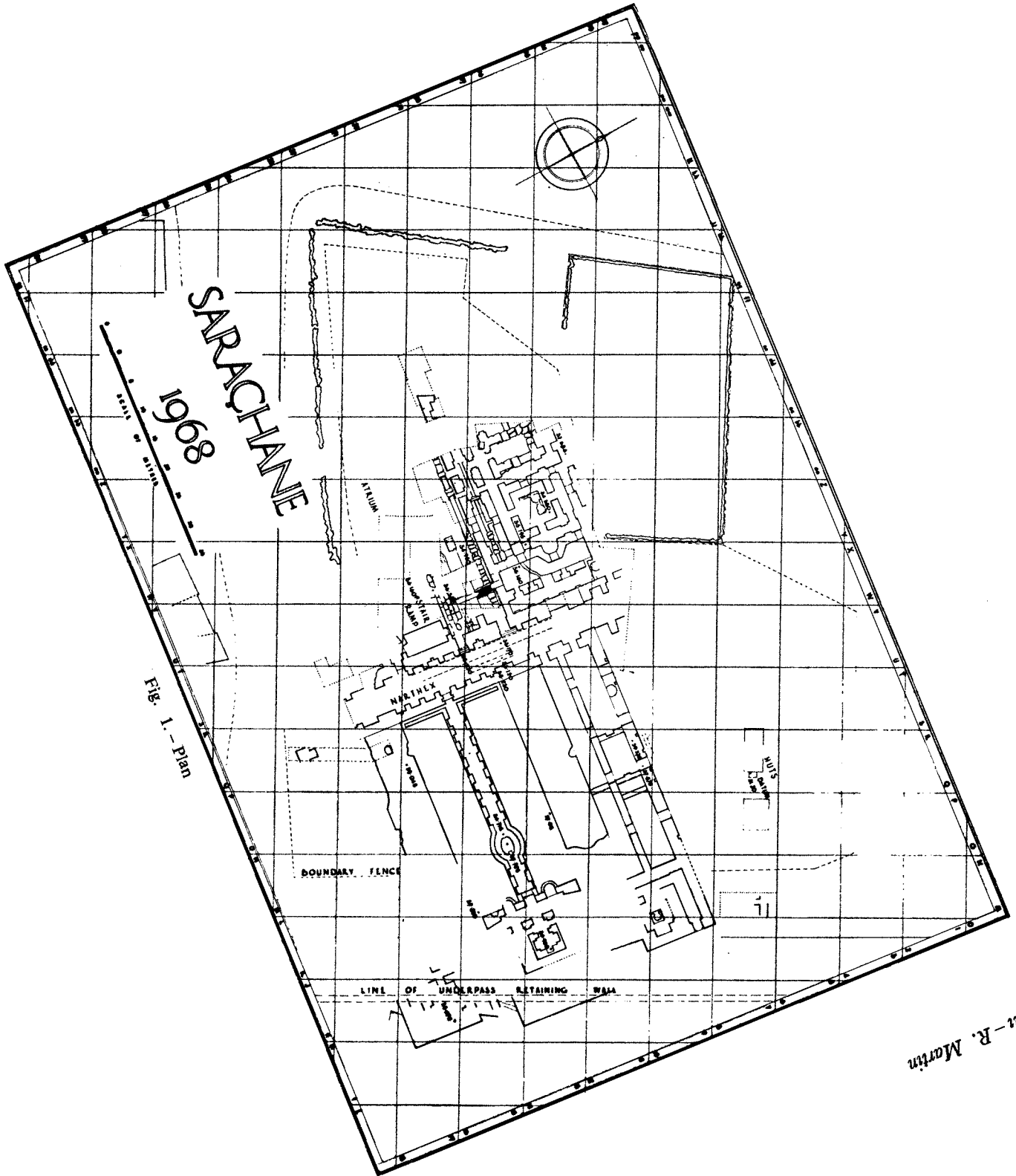


Fig. 1. - Plan

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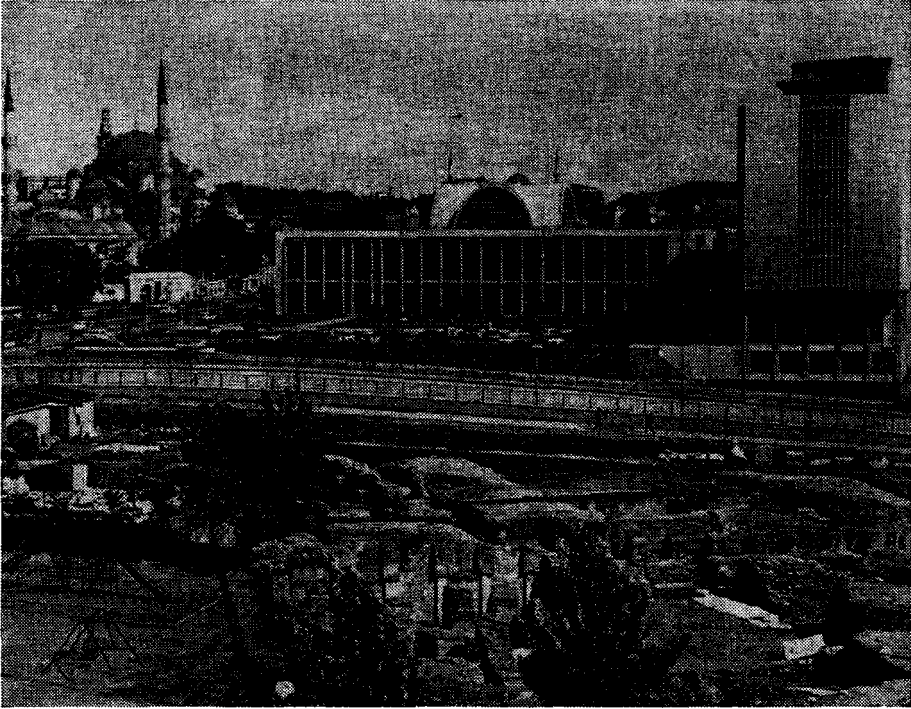


Fig. 2. - General view of excavation, looking East to City Hall.



Fig. 3. - General view of excavation, looking North-West from roof of City Hall.



Fig. 4. – Buildings North of Atrium, looking East.

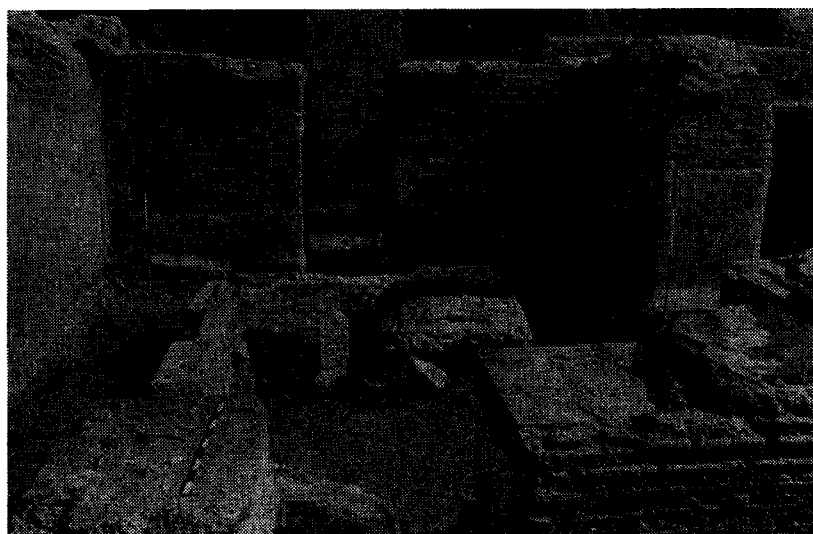


Fig. 5. – Central chamber of apsidal building, looking North.



Fig. 6. – Basket capital (ht. 0.59 m.)



Fig. 7. - Marble panel with Apostle (ht. 0.37 m.).



Fig. 8. - Silver spoon (length o. 14 m.)



Fig. 9. - Ivory panel with Bishop (ht. 0.38. m.)



Fig. 10. - Colour-coated white-ware jug (ht. 0.20 m.)



Fig. 11. - Impressed white-ware bowl with Fisherman,
yellow glaze (preserved diam. 0.16 m.)

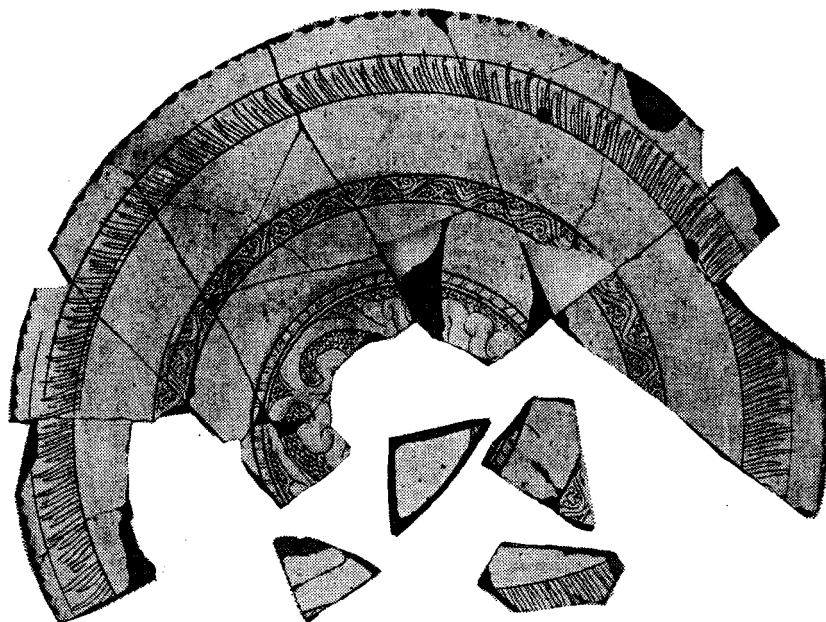


Fig. 12. – Fine graffito plate (diam. 0.39 m.)

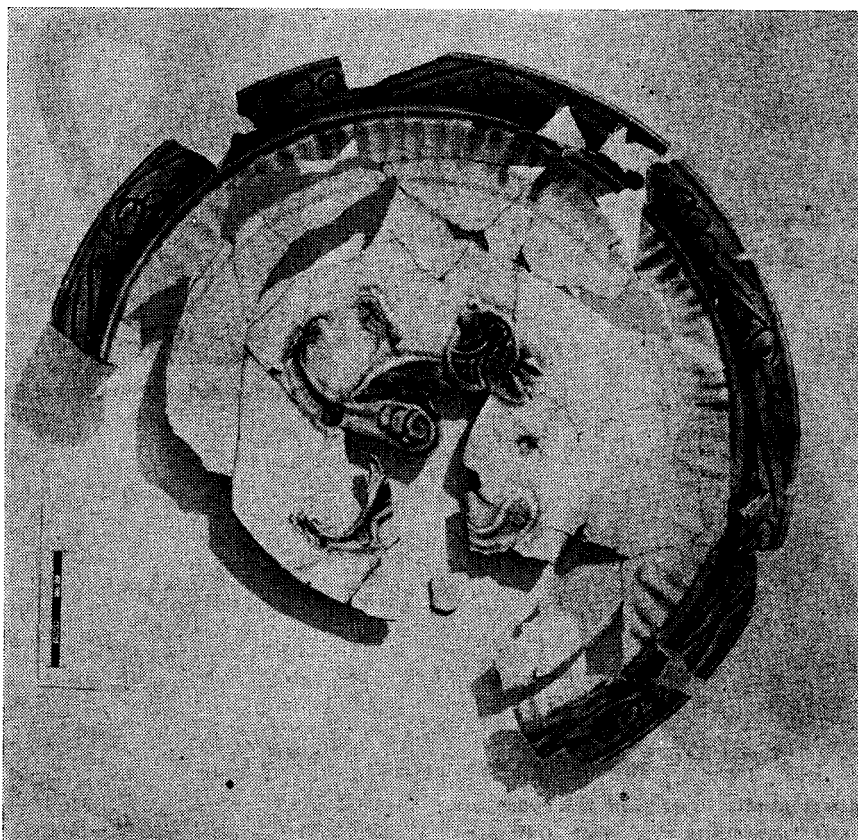


Fig. 13. – Persian *lakabi*-ware plate, impressed decoration, with turquoise and deep blue paint additions (diam. 0.33 m.).