

MARGARET MULLETT – ROBERT G. OUSTERHOUT (eds.), *The Holy Apostles: A Lost Monument, a Forgotten Project, and the Presentness of the Past* (Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia). Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2020. IX, 448 pp. – ISBN: 978-0-88402-464-4 (\$ 65.00)

- VASILEIOS MARINIS, Yale University (vasileios.marinis@yale.edu)

This handsome volume collects papers from the 2015 Byzantine Studies Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks. The topic is rather unusual: The book is about the history and interpretation of the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople and the relevance of those investigations for today. The Holy Apostles was without doubt a major foundation in the capital, second perhaps only to Hagia Sophia. Though the building has entirely disappeared, there are copious texts about it, the most important of which are a short description by Prokopios in *On Buildings*, Constantine the Rhodian’s tenth-century poem, and the twelfth-century *ekphrasis* by Nicholas Mesarites. Nevertheless, decades of intense scholarly engagement with these texts has demonstrated that a consensus about important aspects of the building’s form and decoration is all but impossible. Much rests on the interpretation of literary descriptions and the translation of vague and inconsistent architectural terms. So why bother? The question is even more pertinent when we turn to the secondary focus of the Symposium and the volume: a collaborative project on the Holy Apostles initiated in the early days of Dumbarton Oaks. The project culminated in a symposium in 1948 but it subsequently petered out. The planned three-volume publication never materialized. Some years later in 1968, the Dumbarton Oaks Publications Committee characterized part of the project as “ninety-nine percent fantasy.”¹

The first section of the volume (“Dumbarton Oaks”) comprises two papers, by JAMES N. CARDER and ROBERT S. NELSON, that revolve around the project and the 1948 symposium. We learn about the protagonists of the original project: The initiator was ALBERT MATHIAS FRIEND, JR. (1894–1956), a medievalist art historian and professor at Princeton. He collaborated closely with the architect and architectural historian PAUL UN-

1. Quoted in p. 11.

DERWOOD (1902–1968) and the classicist GLANVILLE DOWNEY (1908–1991). For the symposium they were joined by the distinguished art historian SIRARPIE DER NERSESSIAN and the historians MILTON ANASTOS and FRANCIS DVORNIK. CARDER’s essay² explains the origins of such collaborative programs and discusses the changes that FRIEND brought about in Dumbarton Oaks after he became a member of the Board of Scholars in 1943. This glimpse into the inner workings of the institution at its infancy, carefully documented by archival material, is fascinating. NELSON, in his usual eloquence, discusses in detail FRIEND’s career, research, and publications (or the lack thereof).³ There is an interesting section at the end about the iconographic program of the Hagia Sophia Greek Orthodox church in Washington, D.C. Both authors attribute the failure of the grandiose publication plans mostly to FRIEND’s slowness in preparing his part of the project. FRIEND was to write a volume on the mosaics, Underwood one on architecture, and DOWNEY a third volume on the texts. The latter did publish his translation of Mesarites’s *ekphrasis*.⁴ His work, however, on John the Rhodian was considered lost. One of the happy outcomes of this volume is the rediscovery and publication of DOWNEY’s translation of the poem. This and UNDERWOOD’s fine drawings constitute the most interesting parts of the “Appendixes.” FRIEND’s work on the Holy Apostles, also published here for the first time in the “Appendixes,” will appeal only to the most fervent students of historiography. In his essay, NELSON discusses the issues with FRIEND’s methodology. It is indicative that reading NELSON on FRIEND is infinitely more fascinating than anything FRIEND himself has written.

The next section, titled “Memory,” is dedicated to issues pertaining to the Apostles in Byzantium. SCOTT JOHNSON surveys early Christian and early Byzantine apostolic literature, especially apocryphal texts.⁵ JOHNSON rightly concludes that, “Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles were used as ‘sites’ for writing and rewriting, sites for experimentation and creativity” (p. 56). GEORGE DEMACOPOULOS surveys the notion of apostolic succession in Byzantium.⁶ He argues that theologians did not directly engage

2. “The 1948 Holy Apostles Symposium and Collaborative Research at Dumbarton Oaks.”

3. “The Holy Apostles in Constantinople and Washington DC.”

4. GLANVILLE DOWNEY, Nikolaos Mesarites: Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople. *TAPhS*, New Series, 47, no. 6 (1957) pp. 855–924.

5. “Apostolic Patterns of Thought, From Early Christianity to Early Byzantium.”

6. “Apostolic Succession and Byzantine Theology.”

with it before Iconoclasm; the emphasis was on apostolic faith. In the centuries after Iconoclasm, however, this attitude changed. Neither of these papers engages directly with the church of the Holy Apostles but they both provide necessary and useful background information.

With the third section (“Foundations”) we enter the discussion of the buildings themselves. MARK JOHNSON offers a reappraisal of Constantine’s Apostoleion, the first structure on the site.⁷ Our most important source remains the short description in Eusebios’s *Vita Constantini*. JOHNSON rightly remarks that Constantine’s *intra muros* burial had imperial precedents in Rome. He agrees with CYRIL MANGO that the building was circular but suggests that it had three large niches, rather than seven as MANGO thought (compare figs. 6.12 and 6.15). As for the elevation, JOHNSON persuasively argues that a fenestrated drum rose from the center to support a dome, much like the Mausoleum of Constantina in Rome. JOHNSON offers a plausible explanation for the modifications brought about by Constantius II, the most important of which was the addition of a cruciform church. Constantius realized that his father built a monument only for himself. By relocating the cult of the Apostles to the cruciform basilica, “Constantius opened the door for the Apostoleion complex to become the burial place for all emperors in the East” (p. 95). NIKOLAOS KARYDIS was tasked with a most challenging job, a reconstruction proposal for Justinian’s church of the Holy Apostles.⁸ The amount of scholarship on the topic is staggering, as the literature review amply shows (pp. 105–111). Like others before, KARYDIS combines information from the written sources and existing “copies.” Unlike most others, however, he does not stretch the evidence to fit a preconceived idea. KARYDIS considers the church of Saint John in Ephesos, which survives in ruins, as the closest parallel to the Justinianic Apostoleion. He reconstructs the latter as having an elongated western arm, with a sanctuary at the crossing and no apse in the east. Further, he suggests that a shallow dome perforated with windows capped the central bay, while the cross arms were covered by pendentive domes. KARYDIS offers alternative solutions for aspects of the building that cannot be established with relative certainty, such as the relationship between the Justinianic church and the Constantinian mausoleum. One can quibble with KARYDIS’s reconstruction but this would be unproductive, considering the fragmentary nature of the evidence. His reconstruction, laid out with exceptional clarity

7. “Constantine’s Apostoleion: A Reappraisal.”

8. “Justinian’s Church of the Holy Apostles: A New Reconstruction Proposal.”

and sensibility to the sources, is the most convincing I have seen. PAUL MAGDALINO's "Around and about the Holy Apostles in Constantinople" shifts the focus "from the church to its annexes, neighboring structures, and the neighborhood in which the monument was embedded" (p. 131). MAGDALINO argues that Constantine's city did not have one center but several: "The structure of the new city was not syntactic but paratactic, consisting of a series of added-on units along the central axis" (p. 133). The Holy Apostles was one such center and, if one considers its annexes – "royal houses," baths – it seems that Constantine envisioned it as his "imperial-palace-cum-burial place" (p. 133). The area around the Apostoleion became a high-class residential neighborhood during the reign of Theodosios I (379–395). MAGDALINO also discusses the immediate annexes of the church: the atrium, the Horologion (likely a sundial clock), and the imperial palace mentioned in the *Book of Ceremonies*, which may have been the Theodosian *palatium Faccillianum*. He also discusses the baths and the school that occupied the atrium and the courtyard in the east of the church. Finally, MAGDALINO convincingly argues that the Holy Apostles "went from strength to strength as an imperial *lieu de mémoire*" (p. 140) but it never really developed as a cultic center for the Apostles.

The two middle Byzantine ekphraseis on the building constitute the focus of the next four papers. FLORIS BERNARD focuses on Constantine the Rhodian and investigates his poem's place in the author's literary output.⁹ BERNARD identifies Scribe J in the *Anthologia Palatina* with Constantine the Rhodian and discusses him as a polemicist (or, more appropriately, a libeler) with a talent for verbal abuse. BERNARD suggests that the animosity among intellectuals "should be interpreted as a contest to get the attention and the patronage of the new emperor Constantine VII" (p. 154). In a fine historiographical study, LIZ JAMES examines how the Dumbarton Oaks collaborative project recreated the mosaics of the Apostoleion and the influence of this methodology in the field.¹⁰ JAMES deconstructs FRIEND's assumptions about the mosaic program, which as she diplomatically puts it "lacked an element of vigor." FRIEND believed that patriarch Photios conceived the program as a visual refutation of Iconoclasm. JAMES, cautiously but rather convincingly, suggests that the mosaics probably belonged to different periods and that there was not a uniform program. Finally, she shows how the methodological framework of the Holy Apostles project "haunts

9. "Constantine the Rhodian's Ekphrasis in its Contemporary Milieu."

10. "Creating the Mosaics of the Holy Apostles."

the study of Byzantine and medieval mosaics, present above all in the writings of Demus and Kitzinger” (p. 172). The late RUTH MACRIDES discusses Mesarites as an author, rather than a “purveyor of facts” (p. 176).¹¹ She probes Mesarites’ writings, such as his account of the failed usurpation attempt of John Komnenos and his epitaphios for his brother John, for the characteristics of his style: a propensity for lists, an interest in psychological processes, in the body and its physiology, biographical interjections, and an effort to bring “people, events, and objects before the eyes of the listener or reader” (p. 184). MACRIDES rightly argues that treating Mesarites only as a source of information – about the Holy Apostles, the relics in the Pharos church, or the inconveniences of travel – might lead to superficial conclusions. HENRY MAGUIRE treats Mesarites’ ekphrasis “as an artifact in its own right, and as a product of the intellectual and artistic environment of its place and time” (p. 193).¹² MAGUIRE argues that Mesarites’ account is not just a walk in and around the church but a “diagram of salvation, with the church at its center” (p. 194). Mesarites is interested in the daily life that took place in and around the church. In this secular context, MAGUIRE notices, Mesarites uses many allusions to and quotations from unnamed classical authors and imbues the profane world with an “underlying current of fear, conflict, danger and violence” (p. 195). In contrast, the descriptions of the mosaics are devoid of classical quotations with very few exceptions, but Mesarites quotes, by name, many Church Fathers. The anxieties of profane existence are allayed by depictions of Christ’s miraculous interventions. The spiritual and the mundane are combined into a sophisticated vision. Finally, MAGUIRE discusses the relevance of the ekphrasis for developments in twelfth-century Byzantine art, as evidence “for trends in Byzantine culture that affected both literature and art at the moment of its composition” (p. 203) such as an interest in incorporating realistic details of daily life into the closed circle of traditional sacred iconography.

The last section of the volume concerns itself with “Legacies.” In an essay of exemplary clarity, ROBERT OUSTERHOUT discusses the place of the Holy Apostles in later Byzantine architecture.¹³ He begins with the usual suspects—San Marco in Venice and Saint John of Ephesos – noting that in both cases “the repetition of the design has symbolic resonance” (p. 216).

11. “The Logos of Nicholas Mesarites.”

12. “Inside and Outside the Holy Apostles with Nicholas Mesarites.”

13. “The Church of the Holy Apostles and its Place in Later Byzantine Architecture.”

OUSTERHOUT then considers multiple-domed buildings and their relationship to the Holy Apostles from a variety of locales, including Asia Minor, Cyprus, Apulia, and Aquitaine. Hagios Andreas in Peristera, outside Thessalonike, a ninth-century building, is perhaps the most important parallel, although here, as with many of the middle Byzantine examples, it is difficult to establish a direct link with Constantinople. OUSTERHOUT also considers the role of the Holy Apostles in later Byzantine imperial burials, especially Pantokrator in Constantinople. He concludes that the idea of the Holy Apostles was perhaps more important than its physical form. NEVRA NECIPOĞLU focuses on the career of Gennadios Scholarios (ca. 1405–1472), the first patriarch of Constantinople after the Ottoman conquest.¹⁴ NECIPOĞLU ably navigates both Greek and Ottoman sources to offer a competent image of Scholarios’s fraught years as a patriarch (1454–1456). She concludes that Mehmed the Conqueror wanted Scholarios out of the Holy Apostles because he, originally, did not understand the complex’s symbolic significance. It is also possible that Gennadios himself asked for the transfer, because the complex was too large and dilapidated. The related final essay by JULIAN RABY centers on Mehmed, the Holy Apostles, and the Fatih Camii.¹⁵ RABY argues that Mehmed granted Gennadios the church of the Holy Apostles as an act of political pragmatism. Mehmed had to repopulate the city and for that he needed the cooperation of the Greek community. The Holy Apostles was a price he paid. RABY claims that Mehmet’s concession of the Holy Apostles was a declaration that “the Greeks were to be partners, albeit minority partners, in the new polity he was creating” (p. 255). Yet, he argues that the Greeks abandoned the Holy Apostles because the building was impossible to maintain. If the Ottomans were so invested in this partnership, why did they not give money for the upkeep of the church? The rest of the essay deals with the question of whether Mehmet built Fatih on the site of the Holy Apostles or in its approximate neighborhood. RABY surveys the available evidence and concludes that Fatih does indeed rest on the site of the Holy Apostles. A lot, however, rests on suppositions.¹⁶

14. “Gennadios Scholarios and the Patriarchate.”

15. “From the Founder of Constantinople to the Founder of Istanbul: Mehmed the Conqueror, Fatih Camii, and the Church of the Holy Apostles.”

16. See, for example, p. 277: “Put briefly, if vestibule galleries were added some time before the middle of the eleventh century to the north and south sides of the western arm of the Holy Apostles, they would have altered the proportions of Justinian’s church, provided a model for San Marc and San Sabino, and created a western arm the outer walls of which would have run where today we can see the scarred remains of masonry that lie beneath

It is difficult to find faults in such a carefully conceived and executed project but there are some minor criticisms. I wish the authors were more consistent in citing Greek in their footnotes, especially when an argument rests on how the author translates a word or phrase from, let us say, Eusebios. In some cases, thankfully few, authors are unaware of what others in the volume have argued about the same topic. There are some repetitions evident only to those who read the book cover to cover – ALBERT FRIEND and his inability to publish seems to be a favorite topic. Finally, some chapters offer capable syntheses of earlier scholarship with some additional observations but nothing that is groundbreaking.

This takes me back to the question I posed at the beginning of this review: Considering the amount of existing scholarship on the Holy Apostles and the ambiguities of the surviving evidence, what does this volume add? Evidently, quite a lot. It offers an almost definitive reconstruction of the Justinianic building and a consideration of its legacy in Byzantium, the West, and in Ottoman Constantinople; a discussion of its annexes and surrounding neighborhood; serious reassessments of the texts by Constantine the Rhodian and Nicholas Mesarites; important background information about Apostolic apocryphal literature, the notion of apostolic succession, and the complex's short afterlife after the conquest; and significant historiographical lessons. Finally, in an era when even prestigious academic publishers opt for cheaply made paperbacks, I cannot stress enough how attractive this book is. From the font and layout to the faultless copyediting and the carefully calibrated photos that enable better analysis of the material and appreciation of the arguments, it is a joy to hold and to read.

For these reasons, I cannot help but agree with OUSTERHOUT that the contributors of the volume offer “a reassessment of how we read and how we see” (p. 287). This is certainly the case with the Holy Apostles but this volume's methodological model is applicable to other texts and other buildings, both existing and lost. Equally important are the lessons about the pitfalls and successes of collaborative projects, and about the institutions that support them. Looking at UNDERWOOD's drawings is a cause for melancholy – so much dedicated work that amounted to nothing. Still, this is not quite true.

the ashlar of Fatih's courtyard.”

The drawings were preserved at Dumbarton Oaks and inspired high-quality scholarship; the 2015 Symposium took place there; this collection of fine papers was prepared and published by it. One cannot – and should not – underestimate the power of such institutions, or take it for granted.

Keywords

Constantinople; church of the Apostles