



Περίληψη :

The middle Byzantine church, known in the bibliography as St Theodosia - Gül Camii is located near the coast of the Golden Horn, approximately 500 m. from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and near the Aya Kapou gate. A large imposing building, this church is of the domed cross-in-square type with galleries. The two most significant issues researchers are dealing with concerning this monument relate to the safe identification of the church through historical sources and the distinction between the Byzantine and the Ottoman phases of the building.

Χρονολόγηση

Beginning of 12th century

Γεωγραφικός εντοπισμός

Constantinople, Istanbul

Τοπογραφικός εντοπισμός

Near the coast of the Golden Horn, approximately 500 m. from the Ecumenical Patriarchate

1. Placing the monument in its spatial context

The monument, known in modern bibliography as Gül Camii, is a Byzantine church converted by the Ottomans into a mosque in the 16th century. It is located very close to the Byzantine wall of the coast of the Golden Horn, near the Byzantine gate known as Aya Kapou, approximately 500 m. from the Ecumenical Patriarch; in the Byzantine period this [quarter](#) was called 'ta Dexiokratous'. The quarter was part of the larger area of 'Petrion', located between Cibali and Fener in modern Istanbul.

2.1. Identification of the monument

The original dedication of Gül Camii has presented a significant problem for its researchers, who have not yet been able to provide a plausible answer. It has been identified with the monastery of St Theodosia¹ and with the *katholikon* of the monastery of Christ Euergetes;² both these identifications have been disputed, while there are also other more or less convincing suggestions.

The traveller Stephen Gerlach (1573-1578) was the first to connect Gül Camii to St Theodosia; amazed by its size, he assumed that the church was dedicated to St Theodosia, one of the most venerated saints in the area,³ who became a martyr in 729 because of her iconophile beliefs, during the reign on [Leo III the Isaurian](#) (717-741).⁴ Gerlach's assumption cannot be considered certain, since at the time of his visit, the building would have already been converted into a mosque.⁵ However, a group of scholars has accepted his suggestion, while another group has supported the identification of Gül Camii with the *katholikon* of the monastery of Christ Euergetes. J. Pargoire's suggestion that it is the church of St Euphemia *en tō Petriō*, dated in the reign of Basil I (867-886) has not been generally accepted.⁶

Through the study of modern bibliography, however, it becomes clear that the original church, where St Theodosia's memory was celebrated, must have been of a much smaller size; for this reason, after the restoration of the icons and due to the large number of pilgrims who wished to visit the remains of the saint, the building was attached to the complex of the monastery of Christ Euergetes. In his monograph on Gül Camii, H. Schäfer observes that, in order to identify this monument safely, scholars would need to conduct a comprehensive and thorough research in the archives of mosque administration and of Topkapi Sarayı, which could shed some light on the issue of the dedication of this monument.⁷ According to tradition, the church was renamed Gül Camii (church of the roses) upon its conversion to a mosque, because on the day of the [Fall of Constantinople](#) to the Ottomans (29 May 1453), also the day of commemoration of St Theodosia, the church was filled with roses. This tradition is not considered accurate,⁸ since the Byzantine church was not converted into a mosque immediately after the Fall, but during the reign of Sultan Selim II (1566-1574);⁹ during the first decades it appears to have been used as a storehouse of the Ottoman fleet.¹⁰ The traveller Evliya Efendi, when he visited the



mosque in the mid. 17th century, mentions that the people in the area did not know the name of the Byzantine church.¹¹

2.2. The founder of the church

An identification of Gül Camii with the *katholikon* of the monastery of Christ Euergetes provides us with substantial information on its donor. The Codex Marc. gr. 524 states that the second founder of the monastery was the *protosebastos* and *megas doux* John Komnenos, son of the *sebastokrator*, who built a church in the area of a house he had inherited from his father and restored the adjacent monastery of Christ Euergetes. The same document mentions that [John Komnenos](#) was married to Maria, with whom he had five children, and that he died as a monk named Ignatios. The John of this text can be identified as the eldest son of the *sebastokrator* Isaak and as the nephew of Emperor [Alexios I](#). During the period 1104-1118, John held the office of *megas doux*. If the Gül Camii can be placed chronologically around 1100, it further supports the argument that the *megas doux* John Komnenos was one of the founders mentioned in the manuscript of the Codex Marc. gr. 524.¹²

3.1. Architecture of the monument

Several interventions during the Byzantine and the Ottoman periods have greatly altered the original shape and form of the building. The distinction of the Byzantine architectural parts from the Ottoman additions is also a complex issue.¹³

The church has a *cross-in-square* plan with *dome* and *galleries*;¹⁴ several archaic characteristics place it among the *transitional domed basilicas*.¹⁵ Three *apses* on the eastern side date to the Byzantine period, even though the Ottomans appear to have made alterations in the central apse. The church is built on a vaulted basement with solid brickwork, which forms a *terrace* that raises the monument and accentuates its size. This underground construction, larger than the nave is size, pre-existed in the area and was used by the nearby Byzantine *dockyard* of the Golden Horn.¹⁶

The central area of the nave is covered by a large dome, based on a blind (without windows) octagonal drum, constructed during the Ottoman restorations of the church. The original Byzantine dome would have probably rested on a taller *drum* with windows. The dome is supported by four large pillars, while smaller piers create triple arcades that lead into the northern, western and southern spaces of the central square; thus the ground floor of the church gives the impression a *three-aisled basilica*. Above the side aisles and the narthex there were galleries, reached by staircases in the western corner chambers; they effectively created a second floor. The eastern chambers were *pastophoria* covered by *cross-vaults* in the lower level, while on the upper level they were small chapels surmounted by hemispherical domes. Small domes also covered the western chambers, which made the upper floor of the church with its arcades surrounding the main dome and its corner domes, appear as a five-domed cross-in-square church.¹⁷

3.2. The apses and the ceramoplastic decoration of the monument

Only the eastern side bears any ceramoplastic decoration, on the semi-circular vault and the blind arches of the main apse and the two side apses.¹⁸ G. Velenes has expressed the opinion that this eastern side clearly indicates an architect, who had completely absorbed the architectural tradition of the Komnenian period, as it evolved in the first decades of the 12th century.¹⁹ The impressive central apse with the seven sides is very much altered by later ottoman additions, but the two side apses can be dated to the beginning of the 12th century.²⁰

As far as the relation of Gül Camii with other Byzantine churches in Constantinople is concerned, the architect appeared to have been familiar with the main church in the [Chora monastery](#) and with the southern church of the [Pantokrator monastery](#).²¹

4. Chronology – Different phases of the monument

Some researchers detect two building phases in the Byzantine period of Gül Camii. They believe that the original church, dated on the 8th or 9th century was built in memory of St Theodosia, immediately after her death.²² The second church clearly belongs to the



[middle Byzantine period](#), at the beginning of the 12th century. However, there is not enough evidence to support the existence of an earlier building dated to the [Iconoclastic period](#). A typological study of the monument, despite the Ottoman interventions on it, safely leads to the conclusion that the existing Byzantine church was built at the beginning of the 12th century.

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Γλωσσάριο :

	apse
	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.
	cross- (groin-) vault
	A vault formed over square or rectangular spaces by the interpenetration of two barrel-vaults of equal height and diameter. The lines of the intersection form a diagonal cross.
	cross-in-square church
	Type of church in which four barrel-vaulted bays form a greek cross; the central square of their intersection is domed. The cross is inscribed into the square ground plan by means of four corner bays.
	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.
	donor
	Whoever subscribes, financially, to the erection of a certain structure (monument etc). In the case of the buildings, donors might lawfully relate to them via a special connection (usufruct or other).
	drum of dome
	Part of the church, semicircular or polygonal, on which rises an hemispheric dome
	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.
	megas doukas
	The commander of the Byzantine fleet (from 1092 onwards). In the Late Byzantine period, the title of the megas doukas was assigned to the highest officials of the imperial administration/army.
	pastophoria (parabemata)
	Rooms or places that as a rule surrounded the apse, next to to the Holy Bema, of the Paleochristian or Byzantine churches, namely the diakonikon and the prothesis.
	protosebastos
	High-ranking title usually bestowed upon close relatives of the emperor. The title was introduced by Alexios I Komnenos. In the 12th century it was awarded to close associates of the emperor and to members of aristocratic families, such as the Palaiologos, Tarchaneiotes, Raoul and Metochites families.
	sebastokrator
	Honorary title of the Byzantine court. The office was established in 1081 by Alexios I Komnenos for his elder brother Isaac, equivalent to the one of regent
	terrace, the



Level surface made through landfills on reclining ground (e.g. on the slopes of mountains or hills), supported with the aid of retaining constructions (e.g. walls and buttresses), aiming at the creation of space suitable for the erection of buildings.



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.



transitional domed basilica

A domed basilica, like the Justinianic churches; however, in these transitional basilicas, several openings are piercing the piers that carry the dome. Thus the massive piers begin to gradually dissolve into pillars and finally columns, while they leave space to the corner bays; from these alterations eventually emerges the cross-in-square type.