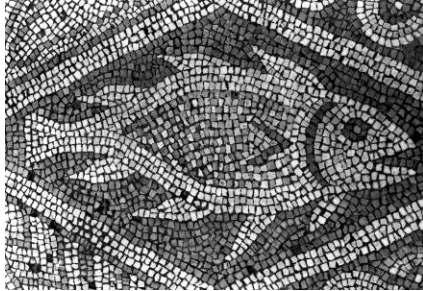


**From the Bosphoros to Oxford:
Unseen Photographs of Prof. Harrison's
Byzantine Excavations in Istanbul**

**Stelios Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies
Hilary Term 2011**

An exhibition organized by L A Schachner & G R Parpulov



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An Introduction, by Cyril Mango

Saraçhane means Saddlers' Building or, in this case, Saddlers' Market. Established on the pavement of a vast Byzantine cistern, the Saddlers' Market was one of the notable sights of early Ottoman Istanbul. It disappeared long ago, but left its name to a quarter of Istanbul not far from the Conqueror's mosque, Fatih Camii.

In the spring of 1960 several pieces of exuberantly carved architectural sculpture were discovered at Saraçhane in the course of grading operations preliminary to constructing a major traffic intersection. Two of the pieces carried bits of what was clearly a verse epigram carved in large letters in relief, promptly identified by my colleague the late Ihor Ševčenko (1922-2009) on consulting the Palatine Anthology (I, 10) as belonging to the enormously long dedicatory inscription (76 verses) set up by the Theodosian princess Anicia Juliana (d. 527/8) in the church of St. Polyeuktos that she had built. The following year Ihor and I published this discovery in Dumbarton Oaks Papers (1961).

A rescue excavation was clearly called for. A collaboration was arranged between the Istanbul Archaeological Museum (represented by Nezih Fıratlı) and Dumbarton Oaks, Centre for Byzantine Studies of Harvard University, which provided both the finance and the field director in the person of Martin Harrison, then a Professor at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. The excavation of the church of St. Polyeuktos lasted six seasons (1964-69) and, though conducted under some pressure, adhered strictly to the stratigraphic method, the first major excavation in Istanbul to have been carried out according to modern practice.

Prof. Harrison's notes and negatives are deposited at Oxford University's Institute of Archaeology. His Istanbul excavations are recorded in this booklet through photographs taken by Mrs Elizabeth Harrison and through personal reminiscences.

The booklet accompanies an exhibition mounted some fifty years after the discovery of the Church of St. Polyeuktos. It pays tribute to the Oxford scholars who have developed late Roman and Byzantine archaeology as an academic discipline.



“The place of discovery is now an open tract of ground, southwest of the intersection of Şehzadebaşı Caddesi and Atatürk Bulvarı, opposite the new Municipal Building (Belediye),” Mango and Ševčenko reported in 1961. Part of this open tract was to be transformed into an underpass. By the early summer of 1964, when this photograph was taken, construction was in full swing.



Martin Harrison in July of 1964, standing in the pit dug by a bulldozer. *“As work on the underpass had begun, the Turkish Department of Antiquities issued the permit for excavation of the site jointly by the Istanbul Archaeological Museum and Dumbarton Oaks,”* he recounted twenty-five years later.



The penultimate excavation campaign took place in the summer of 1968. The underpass had been completed in 1966 and was now open to traffic. Behind it are the sixteenth-century Şehzade Mosque and the modern Municipal Hall (Belediye).

“Every Saturday midday during the dig season”, John Hayes remembers, “work was stopped while the Turkish flag was ceremonially raised outside the City Hall just opposite the excavation to mark the beginning of the weekend. Our workmen were lined up by the foreman to salute the flag, and everyone on the street outside was supposed to do the same. The city firemen’s band played appropriate music, ending with the national anthem (the top note at the end was often fluffed). Meanwhile the top city officials were sneaking out of the back door to grab any available taxis – one rule for the bosses, another for the underlings!”



The sixth and last campaign in 1969 exposed the remains of a large square church whose altar lay right at the edge of the new road in the foreground of this photograph.

"The results", as summed up by Cyril Mango, "have been spectacular, the only disappointment being that nothing had remained of the church's superstructure. Built on a square podium 52 m to the side, St. Polyeuktos was probably the biggest and certainly the most elaborately decorated church of the city prior to the construction of Justinian's St. Sophia a few years later. Scholarly attention has since focused mainly on the architectural sculpture of partly Persian inspiration, which opened up a new chapter in the evolution of Byzantine decoration. Other important results relate to pottery finds (see p. 28) and the unexpectedly plentiful series of coins of the 8th century, contrary to their near total absence in excavated provincial cities. Finally, Saraçhane has provided evidence for the decay of what had been an exclusive quarter of the city well before the Latin occupation of 1204 when many of the church's carvings were removed to Venice."



In the background of this photograph taken in 1968 is the famous “Aqueduct of Valens”, a bridge that carried water for the Byzantine and Ottoman city. Behind the church’s excavated foundations are collected marble blocks that once decorated its interior. A high-voltage electricity cable runs across the site.



The second campaign in 1965. The underpass (in the foreground) is still under construction. Traffic follows a temporary road cutting through the site. The excavations are divided into quadrants, and the ground plan of the church is as yet difficult to discern. The small group of people in the foreground are exploring the foundations of its altar.

"A serious disadvantage was trying to dig out a building from underneath one of Istanbul's major traffic crossroads," remembers Elizabeth Harrison. "The roar of continuous traffic, the braying of horns, the screech of vehicles we became immune to, but when a slip road was diverted across the site we had real problems with safety as the constant vibration destabilised the trench walls which could collapse without warning. A modern health and safety inspector would have had apoplexy. Luckily the team were all young and spry then.

"There was also the occasion when Süleyman, an enthusiastic and rather uncontrollable workman, was mistakenly allowed a pick. On the instructions of a visiting museum official, he started a new trench in the Fatih side of the excavation. Süleyman dug like a cartoon character, his pick whirring and coming straight down. Deep holes were his specialty. (These were of course anathema to proper archaeologists.) I went to see what was happening and managed to stop him seconds before he hit the main cable carrying 90 000 Volts, the city's main electricity supply. No one ever seemed to know where these cables ran. The following winter, an unfortunate bulldozer driver was incinerated when he hit the same cable, and the city was blacked out for two days. The cables were very poorly protected and seemed to be wrapped in something that looked like insulating tape. We excavated for some years with the cable occasionally fizzing and spitting, draped across the site. Şerif, the foreman, used to hang his washing on it in the winter - he was convinced it dried more quickly this way."



"Because the site was totally exposed to view we came to be something of an entertainment for locals and tourists alike," Elizabeth Harrison recalls. "The dress code caused some excitements. One year our very properly brought up museum representative became very concerned when the Turkish equivalent of the News of the World published photographs with a caption roughly translated as "Page 3 Girls Go Digging" and featuring our latest non-Turkish volunteer student, a particularly gorgeous young lady, dressed in the trendy style of the times: mini skirt and lots of exposed flesh. When asked if she could wear trousers, the student obligingly appeared in gauzy see-through harem pants, which increased the crowds four-fold. Our very proper representative was getting seriously angry. When the representative insisted that the older ladies on the team should set an example, I thought I'd better follow instructions rather than provoke an international incident (the student was an ambassador's daughter). Upon a visit to a local emporium, we were outfitted in virtually bulletproof workmen's trousers and shirts that most nearly resembled burkas. Fortunately the student thought this immensely funny and kindly adopted similar garments."



"The Turkish workmen were a pleasure to work with," Michael Vickers recollects. "In the breaks between their labours in the trenches, they might perform folk-dances even more energetically. There was one summer when they chose to live inside a section of the Great Drain of Constantinople that had just been cleared, in preference to taking lodgings in the city. They came mostly from Tokat in eastern Turkey, and would return home at the end of the summer laden with sewing machines and the like."

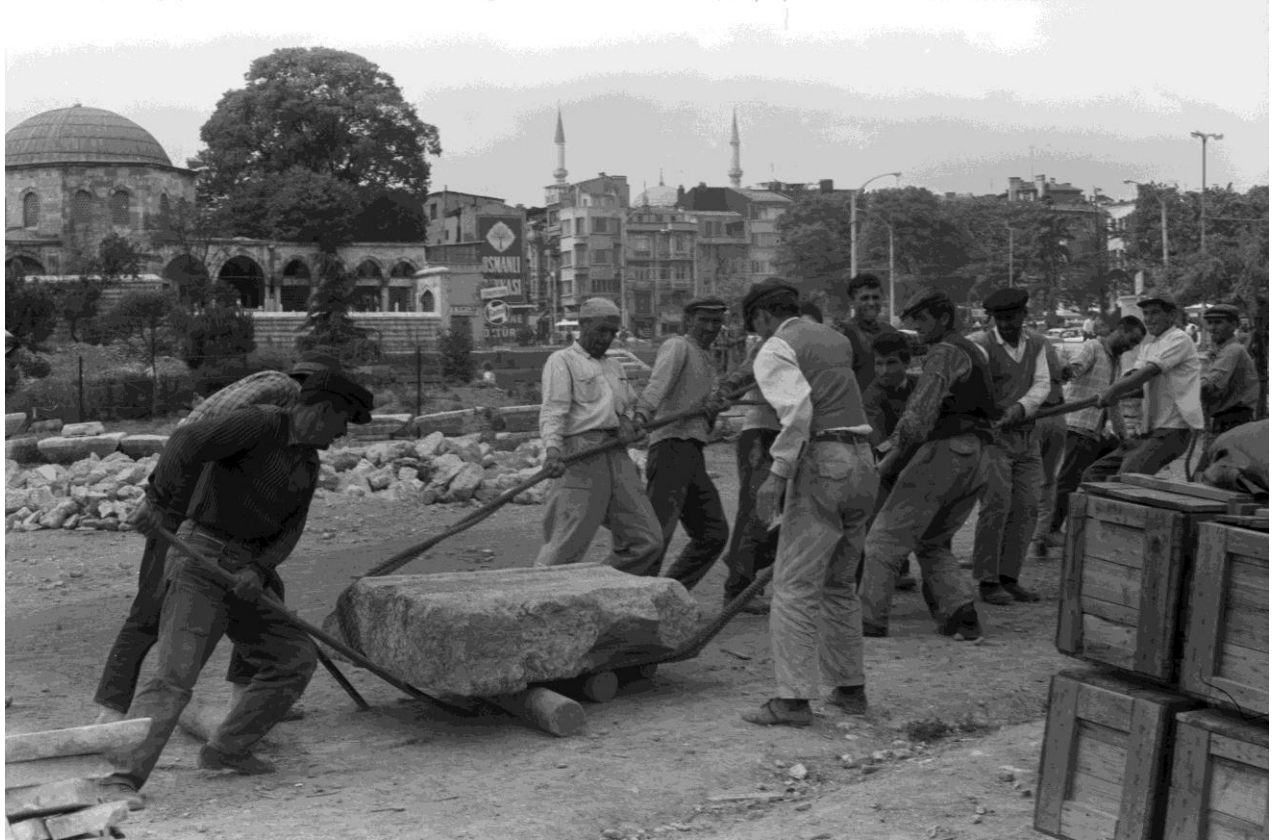
Elizabeth Harrison remembers how "at some point towards the end of the summer the workmen would suddenly appear, put Martin's hand to their forehead and leave to make the 800 km journey back to their village in Tokat. This was because the harvest was ready. On whatever date we arrived the next year, they always lined up ready and waiting."



"There were major problems in processing the negatives, because the water supply of Istanbul was often uncertain in the summer and when it was running, was too often hot. I usually did the developing at 4 in the morning, when the water was coolest, but it was difficult getting consistent quality. On site there were always problems getting the light right. Small or movable objects were not so difficult - I could organise shade or put things at the best angle to catch the light, but for the trenches or the large blocks it was often the case that the photograph had to be taken regardless of what the conditions were. And we had no automatic flash boosts then." (Elizabeth Harrison)



Marble blocks that had once graced the inside of the church building lay buried among its ruins.



Once unearthed, they had to be lifted and moved, sometimes with great effort. *"There was nothing the workers – Ali Eryigit (at the back with a lever) in particular - enjoyed more than the challenge of large stones."* (Elizabeth Harrison)



Mehmet Tunçdağ of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum painstakingly matching together some of the smaller marble pieces in 1967.



This large window frame was reconstructed from some seventy joining fragments.



In 1965, new snippets from the long verse inscription inside the church began to come out. The architect Gordon R. J. Lawson is contemplating one of them. It contains the beginning of the verse “you alone [Juliana] have built innumerable temples throughout the world” (Palatine Anthology I.10, verse 32).



“The inscribed face of this block is slightly concave, showing that it formed part of a huge exedra. There were two opposed peacocks under each arch,” Jonathan Bardill explains. The piece is inscribed with “many houses dedicated to God your [Juliana’s] hand has made” (Palatine Anthology I.10, verse 30). The sequence of the poem’s verses shows how the inscribed marble blocks within the church were ordered (see p. 25).



The exedras on either side of the nave were flanked by massive pillars surmounted with richly ornamented marble capitals, like the one here.



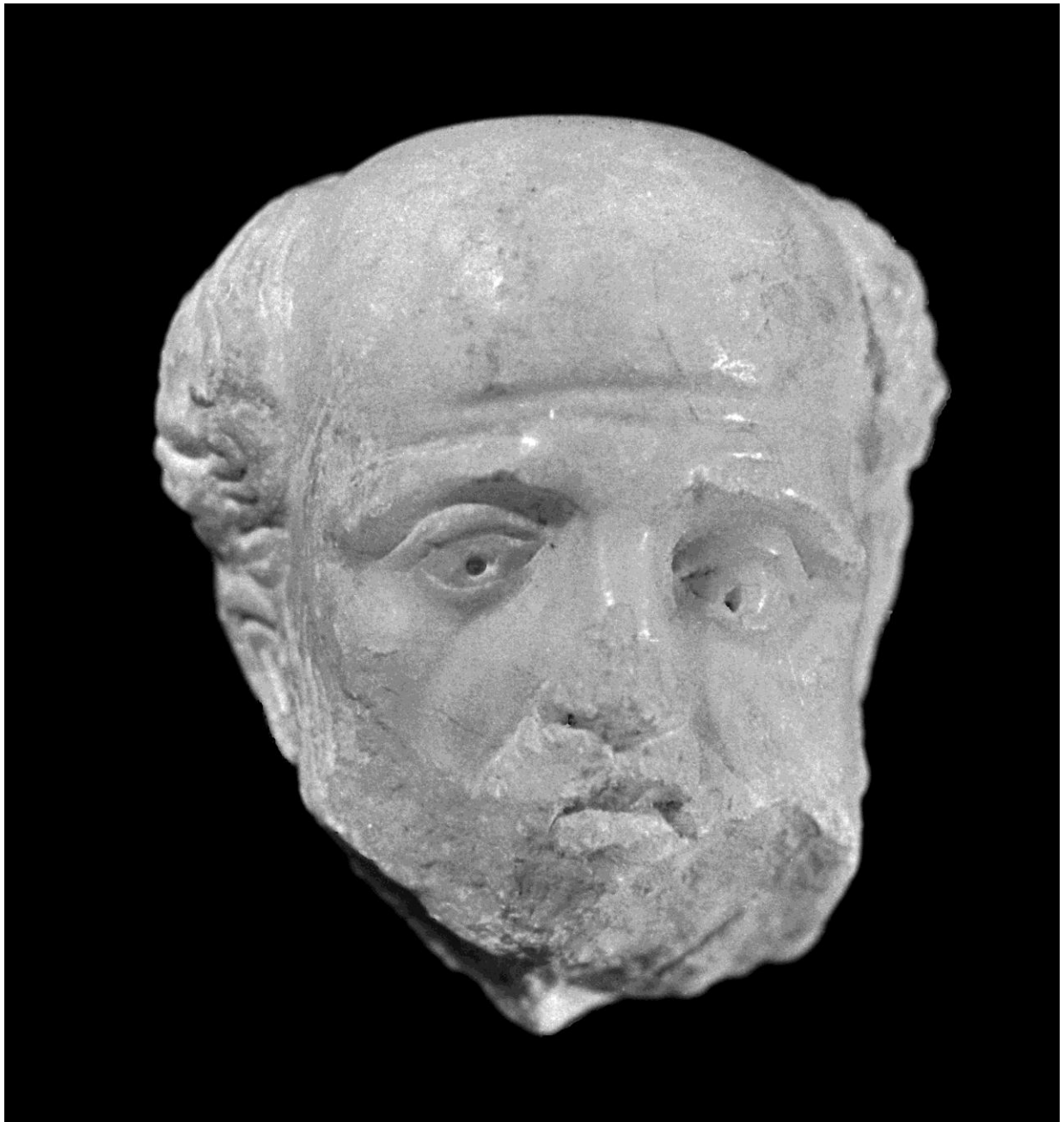
"Rows of columns and square marble piers divided the nave from the flanking aisles. This capital crowned one of the columns. Note the hole through which it was attached to the shaft." (Jonathan Bardill)



The altar stood under a canopy supported by four columns. Carved in a geometric pattern, their shafts were inlaid with glass paste of various colours.



West of the altar, amid the nave, lay the pulpit. It could be ascended from two sides. This was the parapet of one of its stairs.



One of the few pieces of figural sculpture found at Saraçhane seems to portray an Apostle. Its original placing inside the church is uncertain.



Pieces of fallen plaster preserve small parts of mosaic that probably once covered the church's vaults. *"Almost no mosaic was found in situ; tesserae were scattered through the rubble. Since the church had effectively been an abandoned ruin for six hundred years, this is perhaps not so surprising."* (Elizabeth Harrison)



The actual church has not survived and what remains, for the most, are the substructures that once supported its floor and walls. Their vaults covered underground corridors.



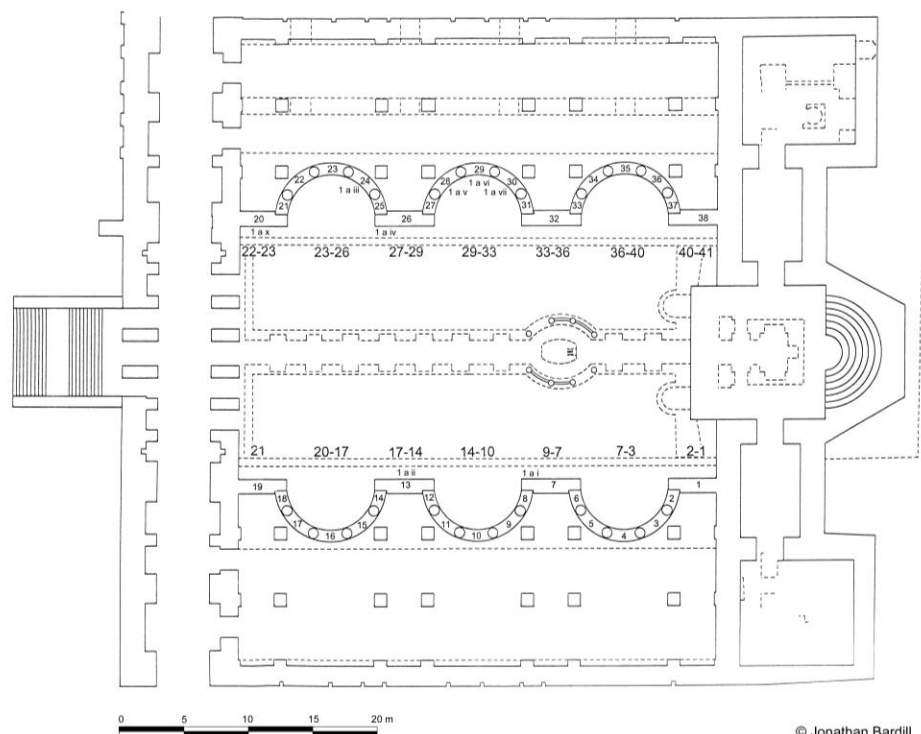
The substructure of the vestibule on the west side of the church, seen from the south. At the left is the vault of the staircase that led up to the top of the platform on which the building stood.

The latest attempt to reconstruct the building's original sixth-century appearance belongs to Jonathan Bardill: *"The entrance to the church was approached by a flight of steps leading to the top of a platform that raised the nave floor 4 m above the forecourt (atrium). Such a platform is unusual in Byzantine church construction and may have been created so that the appearance of the church conformed more closely to the descriptions of the Temple of Ezekiel in the Bible.*

"On either side of the nave are two 7-m-wide foundation walls. These walls supported the nave colonnades, which carried the inscribed blocks of the entablature. The findspots of the inscribed blocks show that the poetry was arranged clockwise around the nave, starting in the southeast corner. Verses 1-21 were inscribed on the southern entablature, and verses 22-41 on the northern side of the nave. The colonnades were not straight but incorporated three niches (exedras) on either side. The five curved entablature blocks that formed each niche were supported by four columns. Between the niches were straight sections of entablature formed by marble blocks 4.5 m long supported at either end by square marble piers similar to the two so-called Pilastri Acritani that today stand outside San Marco in Venice. It is likely that the arrangement of niches was repeated in the arcades of the gallery, where each niche would have been topped by a semi-dome.

"Usually in Byzantine churches, niches are arranged on the angles of a hexagon or octagon and serve to support a dome. The linear arrangement of niches in St. Polyeuktos is therefore highly unusual, and it strongly suggests that the nave was covered by a trussed wooden roof rather than a brick dome. Indeed, it is clear that the entablature on either side of the nave was supported by a system of columns and marble piers that was uninterrupted by the huge masonry piers that would have been necessary to support a dome. A story told by the sixth-century historian Gregory of Tours confirms this conclusion, since it describes the process of making a ceiling for the church by inserting gilded panels between the roof-beams."

The numbers on this plan correspond to verses in the Palatine Anthology I.10 poem (see pp. 15-16).



© Jonathan Bardill



"The date of the church's construction can be established more closely from evidence of many stamped bricks found during the excavations", Jonathan Bardill writes. "The bricks manufactured in Constantinople in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries often carry stamps giving the tax year in which they were made. These tax years, known as 'indications', are numbers between 1 and 15, which indicate a particular year in a fifteen-year cycle. The bricks used in the platform on which the church was built carried numbers 1-5, and the bricks from the church proper carried numbers 11-15. These numbers probably indicate that the bricks in the platform were made in 507/8-511/12 and that the bricks from the church were made in 517/8-521/2. Although bricks could be left in storage after they were made, the numbers on the bricks from the church probably indicate the date of its construction quite closely, i.e., 518-522.

"On 9 July 518, the monophysitical emperor Anastasius died and the pro-Chalcedonian Justin was elected to replace him. Although Juliana must have been disappointed that her own son, Olybrius, did not succeed Anastasius and restore the Theodosian dynasty to power, she would nevertheless have been delighted by the restoration of orthodoxy and the reconciliation achieved between the Churches of Rome and Constantinople. It seems likely that St. Polyeuktos' construction at this time commemorated these events."



Many objects discovered during the excavation had no connection with the church. This bone-carved figure of an archer (in reality 5.8 cm high) came to light in the eastern part of the building, in a layer that also contained eleventh-to-twelfth-century pottery. The figurine's original use is unclear.



"The pottery studied by John Hayes helped establish the introduction of a locally made unglazed white ware and documented an unbroken sequence of 69 types of transport amphoras extending from the Late Roman period to the 13th century", writes Cyril Mango. A lot of later, Ottoman material was also found, of which the bowl photographed here provides an example. In Hayes's own words, "it dates from just after AD 1500, and is typical of the rich pottery found filling a series of under-floor storage pits dug into the Byzantine layers (and sometimes hacked through the solid church walls). The vessel copies earlier Persian products, themselves based on Chinese originals. Floral motifs in dark blue are combined with fine scratched details. Though nicknamed 'Miletus ware', the series common in Istanbul was made nearer to hand at Iznik (Nicaea)."

A Memoir, by Michael Vickers

I worked with Martin Harrison at Saraçhane for three seasons, between 1967 and 1969. One would travel out by train and boat (in my case from Dublin); a long journey. We stayed in a Dumbarton Oaks residence near Taksim, and travelled across the Golden Horn each morning in a large taxi, to start at seven, when the roll call took place. Martin was an inspiring co-director (his collaborator was Dr Nezih Fıratlı, of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum), and gathered a devoted team around him.

The arrangements at Saraçhane were closely modelled on those at the Athenian Agora, down to the use of the same dig note-books. Excavating the ruins of what had been one of the most ornate buildings in Christendom was an exciting experience, for all that we only found the scraps that Venetians and others had failed to carry off after 1204. Tracing the Saraçhane diaspora was a task that Martin and Nezih Bey undertook with infectious enthusiasm; pieces turned up in neighbouring churches, in Venice, Barcelona and Vienna (and there may be a fragment immured in the Casa Ereš in Vid [Narona], Croatia). I like to think I made a contribution in noting the use of Salomonic cubits in both the façade of San Marco (where spolia from Saraçhane figure large) and St Polyeuktos.

Saraçhane was a place visited by the great and the good who passed through Istanbul, and one never knew who might drop in for a tour of inspection; it might be Richard Krautheimer, Tom Mathews, Brunhilde Ridgeway, or Machteld Mellink. I well recall my first ever meeting with Cyril Mango in a deep trench one hot afternoon in 1968.

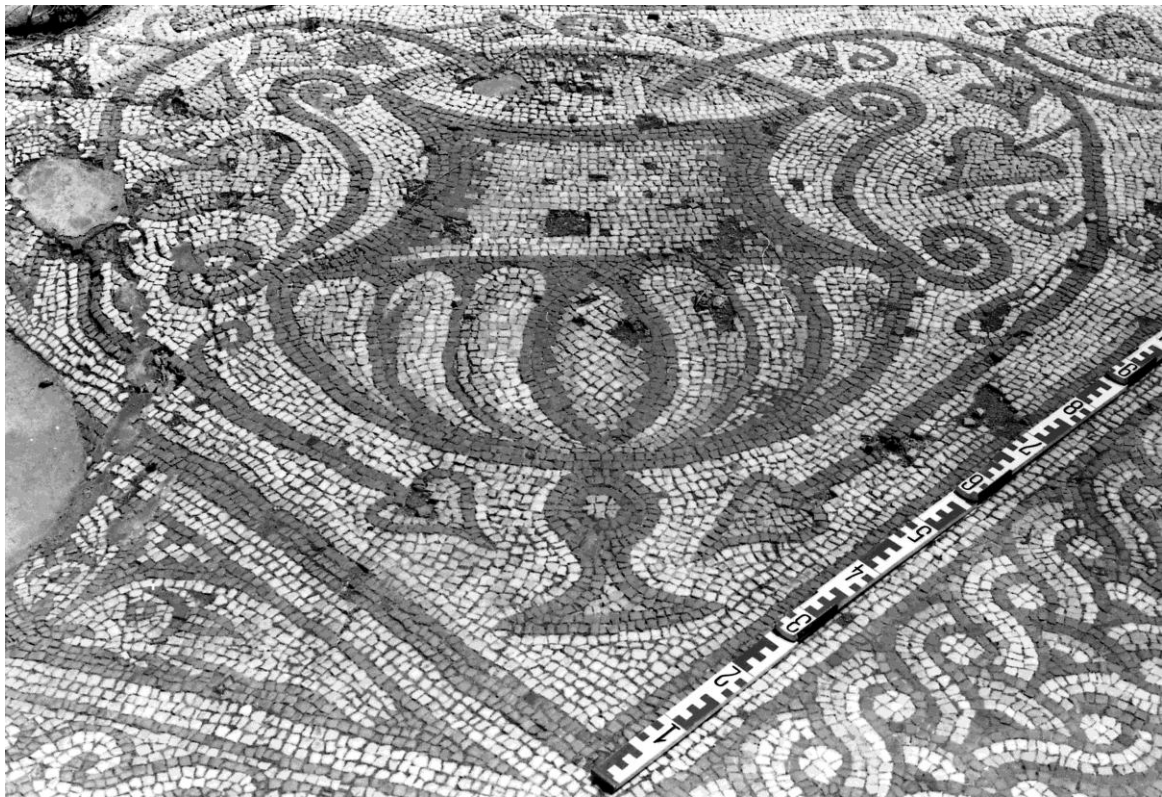
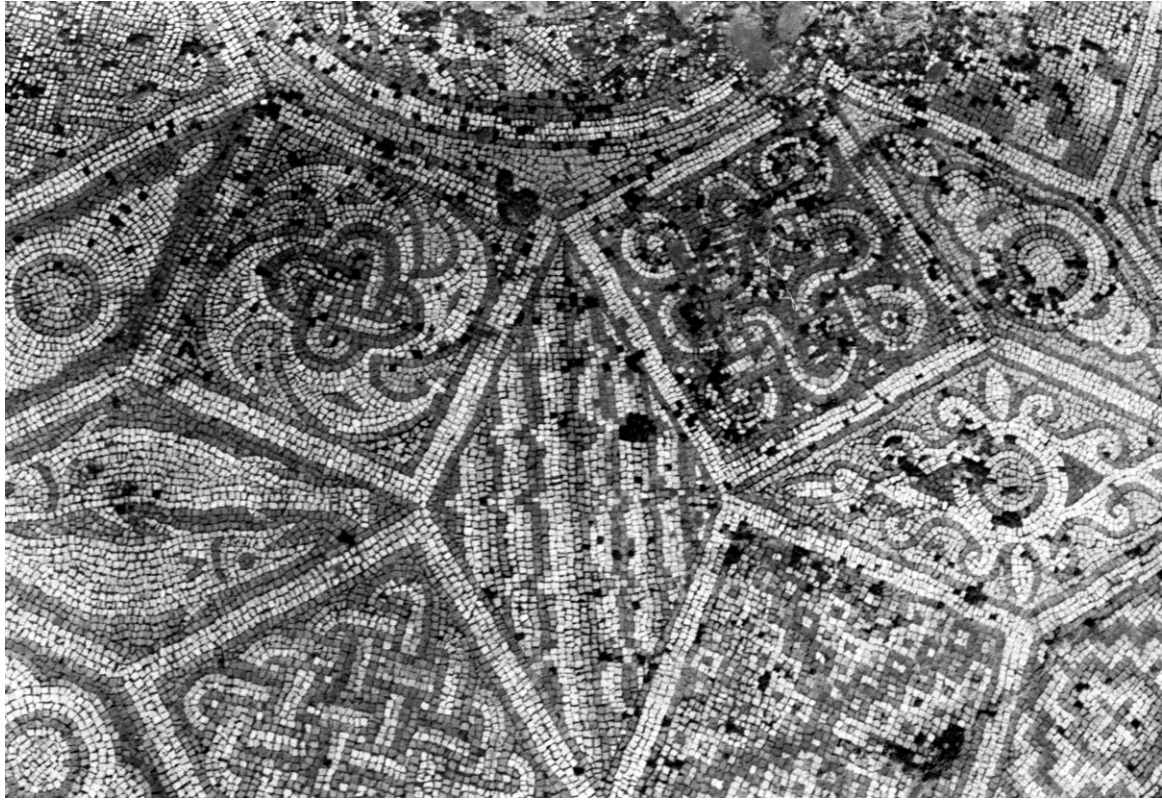
Nezih Fıratlı was an urbane presence. As a senior government employee, he was well aware of the traditions of the Ottoman civil service. On hearing that I was about to take up an appointment in Benghazi, he remarked "So you are off to the Fezzan are you? Whom have you offended?" For the Fezzan, in southern Libya, was where recalcitrant civil servants were posted in Ottoman days.

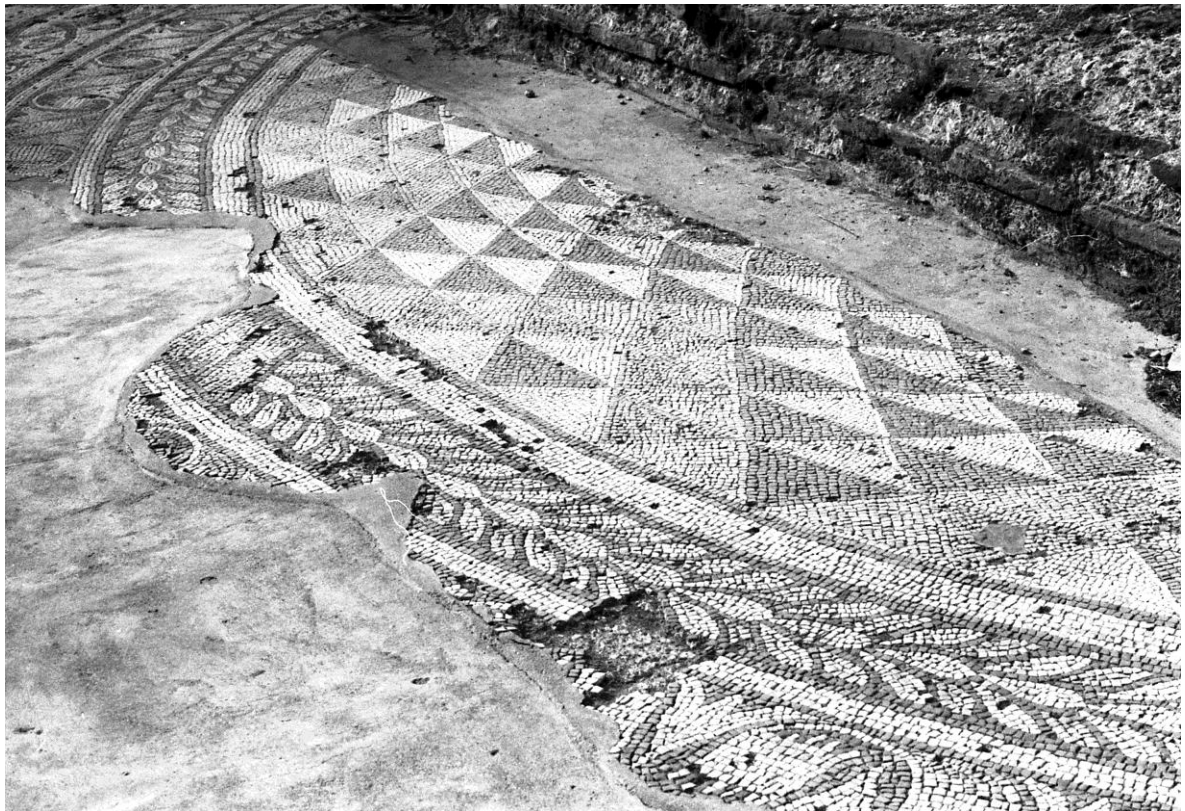
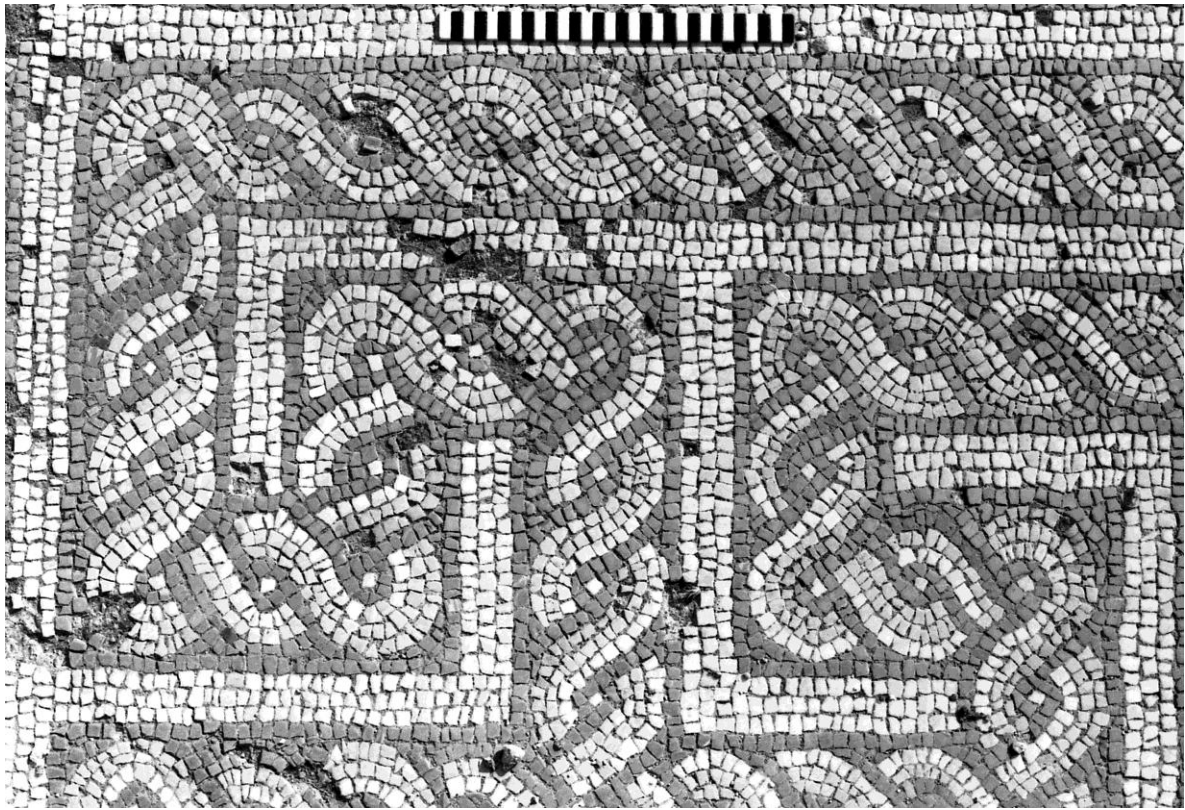
But it was Martin who held all this together. It was he who dealt with Dumbarton Oaks, our paymasters; it was he who selected a series of able British archaeologists (from whom I learned much); and it was he who brought the campaign to a successful completion, with the publication of two monographs, several articles, and a book. I shall be forever grateful to his memory.

* * *

In 1958, part of a large rectangular hall surrounded by a portico was unearthed near the so-called Vi-layet Building, to the southeastern part of Istanbul. The portico was paved with mosaic cubes. In 1966, it was decided to lift the floor and thus allow for widening the adjacent street. Martin Harrison was asked to document the building prior to this operation, and these photographs (projected on a screen in the exhibition room) are the last record of the mosaics before they were cut up and moved to the courtyard of the former church of St. Irene in Istanbul. Datable pottery fragments recovered by Prof. Harrison from the layer immediately underneath the floor point to a date in the mid-fifth century.









Martin Harrison (1935-1992) in his Oxford office

"In 1985 Harrison was appointed Professor of Roman Archaeology at Oxford, the first holder of that Chair to have had primary research interests in the early Byzantine period. His last venture in the field was the excavation of the city of Amorium in Asia Minor, which was intended to throw light on urban life in the following Byzantine Dark Age. Alas, he did not live long enough to achieve the desired results."
(Cyril Mango)

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In memoriam Martin Harrison (1935-1992)