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THE GOLDEN OCTAGON OF ANTIOCH¹

The Oriental Constantinian Cathedral, as the monument seems to be lost without a trace, remains one of the most beautiful and attractive topics of the world of Late Antiquity. Although it was written much about it, little can be known with certainty and, in the light of analysis undertaken in recent years, sources proved to be less than first thought.²

Following the scientific adventure occasioned by the loss of this great sanctuary, revisiting primary sources and directions opened by the research so far, the present study proposes a double reconstruction, as an alternative investigation method: the reconstruction of the architectural programme and the reconstruction of the architectural form.

1. Golden Octagon's place in the study of Early Christian architecture

Antioch - Theopolis and "the third nation"

Capital of the Seleucid Empire, Antioch is part of the foundations of King Seleucus I Nicator, in 300 B.C., with Apamea, Seleucia Pieria and Laodicea.³ During the Roman era it was the capital of the province of Syria and the most important city in the Levant. At the end of the third century and during the fourth century it hosted the imperial residence several times and during the absence of the King it held the chair of the Prefect of the Orient. The title of apostolic see and, consequently, the title of patriarchal residence were added to all these titles. The city lost importance during the Arab domination since 638, but it regained part of its prestige during the Byzantine reconquest (969-1078) and the Crusades (from 1098 to 1268).

In the ecclesiastical tradition, Antioch-*Theopolis* underpins the Byzantine model, standing out in contrast to the "emperor city", *Constantinople*, and in contrast to Rome⁴ according to the tradition of the

two chairs of Saint Peter. Unfortunately, when its authority most needed, from the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 by the end of the fourth century, the Church of Antioch crossed the worst period of its time, being in full Christological schism, divided into two or even three factors. Additionally, at that time, the bishop did not enjoy the same status with the counterparts of Alexandria and Rome, his rights being not clearly defined at Nicaea. With all the more reason it surprises and requires recognition of its position as leader of the Eastern liturgical world. Antiochene theologians are the authors of the prayer that, as in Jerusalem, replete with poetic Hymnology (antiphonal Psalms) and symbolism, of the extensive anaphora of Hellenistic influence and especially of the unique explicit epiclesis. It is therefore fair to ask ourselves to what extent they were involved in the Christian mystagogical project, regarding the affiliation of architecture to the world of symbolic thinking centered on the Eucharistic liturgy. Both the Great Octagonal Church and the *martyrium* of Saint Babylas at Kaoussie date from the fourth century (381).

After the Church's detach from its birthplace, Jerusalem, during the destruction of the Temple, Antioch becomes the "capital" of its missionary expansion and Peter founds his first chair.⁵ Paul was many times here in his long expeditions. Episcopal organization was first formulated in Antioch, attested to its monarchical form in the letters of Saint Ignatius.

Here was probably written also the first of the Synoptic Gospels, *the Gospel of Matthew*, most "Jewish" of all. However, its great diffusion and acceptance was due to Antioch. It is also thought that the distinguishing feature of Early Christian Antioch is in the living and permanent contact with Judaism. Antiochene theologians and exegetes of Jewish orientation - Paul of Samosata, Lucian the Martyr, Diodorus, Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom - are followers of biblical literalism. Their homilies enjoy the central place in Church life - symbolically, as well as literally, because Paul of Samosata raises "a throne and a *bema*"⁶ in the middle of the old cathedral of Antioch, *Palatia*, and Saint John Chrysostom preaches from the central pulpit and not from the *kathedra* of the presbytery apse. As the first centrally-planned *martyria* of the Holy Land represented the place to confess the divinity of Christ, Antioch indicated in the center the Christ-Logos, the Word of Truth and the Wisdom of Solomon⁷ as "a catechetical city-school", "an agora-church" where everyone discussed theological issues. The Eucharistic Shrine remains "the Eastern Place" where the Holy Spirit descends during the climax of the liturgy of the faithful and "burns" the Gifts (according to the words of Saint John

Chrysostom), turning Them into visible manifestation of invisible bread of immortality (according to Theodore of Mopsuestia).⁸

The movement started in Judea and Galilee became a new conscious religion in Antioch and it received the name of Christianity. An apology from the early second century, probably written in Antioch, reads as follows:

This God worship ye, not after the manner of the Greeks, ... neither worship ye Him as do the Jews ... but worship God in a new way through Christ. ... For the ways of the Greeks and the Jews are old, but we are they who worship Him in a new way, as a third people, namely Christians.⁹

Capital of the Church and cultural metropolis of the Orient between the two cultural “old” worlds, Judaism and Hellenism, Antioch conferred the “new world” that was needed for achieving one of the first Christian architectural programmes. Jewish tradition of “holy places” faced Hellenistic and Roman traditions (sacred funeral and imperial architecture) from a fresh, Christian perspective that gave a new meaning to the local phenomena. Should it be sought herein the explanation about the first central cathedral, what seems mostly to be the Golden Octagon?

The Golden Octagon: complex status of uniqueness

The Golden Octagon ranges between imperial foundations designed by Constantine and Empress Helena as *martyria* of the new faith agreed by the empire, either funeral projects (exclusively “theophanic *martyria*”¹⁰ dedicated particularly to Christ in the Holy Land and Christian dynastic imperial mausoleums, like the mausoleum-*Apostoleion* of Constantinople) or cathedrals of major cities (*Basilica Salvatoris* in Rome, the cathedral of Nicomedia, the cathedral of Tyre). Among all these, the Golden Octagon awards its unique position according to the testimony of Eusebius,¹¹ being a gorgeous exceptional design, not only by size and beauty but also through its shape. The octagonal building had a circular colonnade inside and outside was surrounded by annexes, which formed an enclosure like a high walled *temenos*. David Woods indirectly disqualifies the uniqueness of the Octagon in a linguistic study dedicated to a remark in Libanius’ *Autobiography*. He finds no solid reason to believe that the Octagon impressed more than any other major architectural project of that time, palace or church of the imperial capitals, and he places its exceptional character on Eusebius’ encomiastic celebrative rhetoric.¹² The present

study does not support this view, on the contrary, it considers that the Octagon has been designed and built as an ideal classical specimen of architecture (in the precise sense of the Renaissance rediscovery), engaging harmony and symbolic geometry principles in full decline of Antiquity. The Octagon architecture must have been radically different from the current, social and functional architecture of the first Christian basilicas. We certainly are in another province of the "ideal" than the one that began to be standardized by the liturgical documents of that time, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, *Apostolic Constitutions* or *Testamentum Domini*. The fact that Eusebius and, after him, several literary sources refer to this building by its particular shape is a sufficient indication of that the Octagon is ideologically and functionally separated from the category of basilicas (formally unconditioned public spaces). From the battle against Maxentius (312) until year 326, Constantine resided more in the West, especially in Rome and Thessalonica. The foundations of the Antiochian Cathedral were put in 327. Was this one of the last reflections of Classical Roman architecture? Was it modeled on something that particularly impressed the emperor in Rome? What was the relationship of the Christian emperor with the "City of God"? All these are questions to which we return.

Deichmann predicts the privileged place of the Octagon in the history of the Christian architectural shapes and their symbolic significance. If we manage to prove with certainty that the sanctuary was not a palatine chapel or an imperial *heroon*, but the city cathedral, it is the first known example of central church for a normal liturgical community, he wrote in 1972.¹³ Krautheimer suspected the Octagon of being the ideological prototype of the cathedral, the main royal city church, the ancestor of several churches similar in shape, function and location, from those already discussed in the previous chapter, continuing with those of the Justinian's time (Saints Sergius and Bacchus, Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, San Vitale in Ravenna) and later (Aix-la-Chapelle of Charles the Great). He does not exclude a direct link to Justinian's Hagia Sophia.¹⁴

This study is a continuation of the challenge launched by Ćurčić when identifying a possible monotheistic iconographic model of the Late Antiquity and, in particular, of the fourth century, in the architectural design of the centrally-planned buildings located in the middle of open air precincts.¹⁵

2. History

History of the Octagon, as opposed to its location, is relatively well known. The sanctuary had a short life, less than 300 years, being knocked down by successive earthquakes. The works started in 327,¹⁶ two years after the Council of Nicaea, under the authority of Bishop Eustatius and were completed only after 14 years, under the authority of bishop Flaccillus. The consecration took place on January 6th 341, date associated with the Epiphany Day of our Savior by the Syrian chronicle *Liber Chaliforum* (or *Chronicle 724*, a compilation of the eighth century, deriving from an Arian source of the fourth century, therefore credible), in the presence of Emperor Constantius II and a council convened at Antioch, which took the name of the event, being known as the “Dedication Council” (*Encaenia*).¹⁷ The problem of accurate dating of the construction period, raised by the hesitation of sources, suggests possible delays and interruptions because of the preparation of Constantinople, the new capital of the empire, inaugurated in 330, while the Octagon is still under construction.

We know that Saint John Chrysostom¹⁸ preached in this cathedral of the cultural capital of Asia Minor before becoming bishop of Constantinople. In the first decades of the sixth century, the city was rocked by a series of natural disasters, severe earthquakes plus Persian invasion under Chosroes I in 540. The earthquake from 526 destroyed it almost completely, but patriarch Ephraim rebuilt and inaugurated it in 537, all in the presence of a council. This latest revival was due most to the prestige that the cathedral still enjoyed in the first half of the sixth century. Justinian started a wide campaign of reconstruction (which included the construction of the tetraconch church of Seleucia-Pieria) and he implemented an urban redefinition plan of the city.¹⁹ The island in the Orontes was excluded from the mural perimeter of the new project²⁰ and the Octagon ceased to be the representative Christian building of Antioch. Its role has been since that time played by the church dedicated to Virgin Mary - *Theotokos* – in the *Epiphania* district. The abandon of the great cathedral is called by some researchers directly related to the earthquake of 588, which would have given it the deathblow. According to another opinion, the Octagon was left behind, together with other public buildings on the island (the palace and the hippodrome), once Antioch ceased to be the occasional capital of the empire.²¹

3. Studies

3.1 Architectural programme: shape, function, relationship with the dedication and the site

3.1.1 Site

Virtually nothing is known about the location of the sanctuary but so far, research directions can be drawn from a common premise: the Octagon must be somewhere in the New Town, on the island in the Orontes.

The Octagon in the New Town. Sources: description of the island

“New Town” is the name of the island in the north of Antioch, arranged for the first time during the reign of Antiochus III the Great (223-187 B.C.), who installed his military veterans here, the majority coming from Aetolia, Crete and Euboea. It seems that the royal residence is also on the island since this period. In 67 B.C. the Roman governor of Cilicia, Q. Marcius Rex, rebuilt the palace and the hippodrome and, during the third century, the island in the Orontes was completely renovated under the reign of Diocletian: the Imperial Palace was fully restored and enhanced; the hippodrome was rehabilitated and bathrooms were built. It is possible for the meaning of the name to refer not only to the chronology of foundation of this district, but also to its quality to be restored, renewed, because during the era of these imperial interventions the island gets the name “New Town”. The Old Town, on the other side, on the left bank of the Orontes, is called *Palaia* in literary sources and the old cathedral which was here, *Palaia Ekklesia*.²² Both cities had their own system of fortifications. Although the island had all the qualities of a true fortress by its strategic location, testimonies of chroniclers say that it became the most vulnerable to strong and repeated earthquakes that, in addition to direct damage to the buildings, caused the suspension of water supply by destroying aqueducts.

High seismic activity in the region makes the reconstruction theme to be in the forefront in the prosaic, cultural and spiritual life of Antioch. For example, its allegorical representations are very numerous - *Ananeosis* – in the pavement mosaics. *Megalopsychia* composition of a sumptuous villa in Daphné, which will be analyzed below, might be closely related to all these.²³

Partial recovery of the topography of the island was made in parallel with the archaeological campaign of 1932-1935, based on literary

testimonies of Late Antiquity: centuries IV (Libanius 356-360), V (Theodoret of Cyrrhus²⁴) and VI (Evagrius Scholasticus²⁵ and Malalas). Libanius is providing descriptions of the real city. He acquaints us that the New Town is on the island, that “the island was round, its walls forming a crown”.²⁶ Four main streets cardinally oriented and bordered by porticos were intersecting at the center of the island, in a round market, and the place was marked by a *tetrapylon*. West, south and eastern arms had equal lengths, while the northern arm, shorter and more decorated, made *propylaea* of the Imperial Palace, occupying about a quarter of the island. Its main entrance was near the *tetrapylon* site. The palace had the north facade turned to the Orontes, the fortification wall was provided with a colonnade or gallery of the palace, overlooking the water and the periphery.²⁷ The palace consisted of several parts (*oikos*).²⁸ There were several bathrooms and a hippodrome in the New Town, whose entrance was marked by two towers and with porticoes along the palace. The island communicated with the city by five bridges. The streets running west, south and east led to three of these bridges. A sixth bridge was connected with the military gymnasium located in the north part.²⁹ Theophanes is mentioning a bridge, whose location is unknown to us, about the Gate where the way to the Taurus Mountains started.³⁰ Evagrius writes that the river was in the north side of the palace, while in the south side “there was a large two-level porch that reached the city walls, which had two high towers. A public road connected the city with the suburbs between the palace and the river.”

The Octagon near/ in the palace

In 1839 C.O. Müller drew the first plan of the island, strictly based on literary descriptions.³¹ Afterwards, J. Weulersse and J. Sauvaget³² made studies of topography consisting of analysis of aerial photos, cadastral plans and modern urban fabric and Princeton University finally led the first excavations. Archaeological explorations have found no traces of the imperial palace (which we know with certainty that it was in the New Town), nor of any cathedral, but brought to light the hippodrome and numerous bathrooms. Moreover, no major landmarks of the Old Town, as the *omphalos* or forum of Valens, were found. Linking all information collected has not yet led to a schematic separation of the possible location of the Octagon, if it were located on the island. Discovering the hippodrome was the only valid reference point for locating the New City.

During the earthquake in 115, Trajan, who was in the palace, managed to escape hurt and took refuge in the racecourse,³³ which may suggest a possible jointment between the two buildings.

Gregoire Poccardi's recent study³⁴ critically follows the chronology of the island plans and proposes an improvement of the variant that enjoyed the consensus of the scientific world, consisting of a redrawing of the major axis whose intersection was solemnly materialized in a *tetrapylon*, marking the geometric center of the New Town. His investigation also proposes a new interpretation of the perception of the cardinal setting, appropriate to the inhabitants of Antioch in Late Antiquity, which comes in agreement with literary descriptions but which does not correspond entirely to the standard system of cardinal axes. The "literary north", as shown in the descriptions of Libanius, corresponds to the northwest direction in our cardinal system; the Orontes marked the east-west axis of the city for Antiochian people of the fourth century. This mismatch may explain to some extent perpetuated errors in the attempts to restore the topography of the island.

The Octagon was seated for a long time, under a *communis opinio*, on the island of the New Town and appeared directly related to the Imperial Palace. While the literary sources keep silent, an important role played in this location the discovery of a mosaic in 1932 in Yakto (Daphné, the pleasures district near Antioch), entitled *Megalopsychia*, dating from around 470. Jean Lassus published it for the first time. Its border is "a documentary",³⁵ directing a descriptive route of surroundings in a "cinematographic"³⁶ manner that Lassus interpreted it in the meaning of topographic location of the Octagon in the New Town. The required height of the decorative band leads to a kind of "isocephaly"³⁷ characters-buildings that makes the task of interpreting the latter's identity more difficult. Thus, the cathedral would appear as a polyhedral building, with portico and white dome, flanked by an orant, irrefutable sign of religious identity of the building. Although all toponymic indications are missing from the mosaic, around the year 470 there was only one monument of its kind in Antioch. Near-by, the Imperial Palace could appear, recognizable by the water-oriented gallery and a definite intention of monumentalisation, by connecting volumes through continuous roofs on a length of more than one meter. The Octagon would be in the background of a vast space, bounded by additional buildings and that would open on the opposite side through a monumental gate. In the center of this area a column would raise, possibly having placed on it the heroic statue of an emperor.³⁸

“Byzantine” stadium and the so-called “bathroom C” on the Princeton excavations plan seem to correspond fully to the images commented by Jean Lassus. Additionally, Gregoire Poccardi recognizes the great central intersection within the white portion that emerges from the longitudinal axis of the street, despite the fact that the *tetrapylon* is not figured, as one would expect.³⁹ Doro Levi, as a mandatory research part, does not believe that the mosaic border would represent Daphné-Antioch route, but rather requires that all buildings that appear here were located in Daphne.⁴⁰ Moreover, neither he nor Glanville Downey finds any evidence in favor of the Palace in the mosaic, although the latter recognizes in the mosaic, also without evidence, Libanius’ *Praise of Antioch*.

Relationship Cathedral - Palace

The attempts to rebuild the Antiochian imperial palace have as models the homologous assemblies from Spalato and Thessalonica. Grabar takes Eltester’s hypothesis and amplifies it, assuming that the Octagon was no longer “next” but “in” the palace, which actually occupied the whole extent of the island, according to the model in Spalato as described by Libanius. The “quarter” he is talking about is narrowly associated to the private area, the imperial apartments. Moreover, Grabar believes that the two assemblies were made in the same period.⁴¹

The palatine complex at Spalato took the form of a military garrison, consisting of a rectangular chamber divided into four compartments by four porticated interior streets. A gallery was opened upstairs, on the seaward side. An octagonal monument, identified as a mausoleum, was inside the palace in front of the temple of Jupiter.

A monumental building of octagonal plan was inside the palace of Galerius in Thessaloniki as well - different from the rotunda that became the church of Saint George - which due to its outdoor location communicated with the palatine chamber through a large porticated street.⁴²

Lately, the Antiochian palace was rather akin to those in Nicomedia, Thessalonica, Milan or Constantinople, Spalato being a private imperial residence unlike Antioch, where public functions of the space cannot be neglected.⁴³ All these complexes have in common the vicinity of the *heroon*-like structure with the palace. Grabar built by analogy the possibility of a similar building in Antioch, believing that all palatine circular buildings served the imperial cult and they were dedicated to gods or heroes embodied by the emperors. Diocletian embodied

Jupiter, Galerius embodied Hercules and Constantine represented Christ. In Antioch, thus, we might talk about an imperial *heroon* eventually transformed into a church, a building rebuilt on circular foundations or an existing building adapted to Christian worship.

Removing a theory that made a career at the time, Noël Duval notes that we cannot speak about a palatine scheme of Late Antiquity, but rather about unique particular solutions that meet some particular conditions.⁴⁴ It is most likely the case of Antioch, although some ideological relations (such as temple – imperial *heroon* or mausoleum) can be retained. Instead, Poccardi postulates the existence of a distinct category of central monuments erected in relation to the imperial residences during the period 300-350 – of pagan nature during Tetrarchia and of Christian nature with the reign of Constantine - and the Golden Octagon's belonging to this last category.⁴⁵

The only clues of the Octagon's location are found in the writings of Malalas (which is not mentioned by Grabar, Krautheimer and Dynes) and in the writings of Anthony, the monk who recorded the life of Saint Simeon the Stylite. None of them makes any reference to the imperial palace. In the sixth century, taking information from another written source, Malalas recorded that the Octagon was built on the site of a ruined public bath of King Philip, demolished by Constantine. Philip was identified with either one of the two Seleucid rulers of the first century B.C.⁴⁶ or the emperor Philip the Arab (244-249), who passed in the consciousness of the historical chronicles as philo-Christian.

On his return, he (Constantine) came to Antioch the Great and built there the Great Church, a very large undertaking, after demolishing the public bath known as that of the emperor Philip, for the bath was old and ruined by time and unfit for bathing.⁴⁷

However, building a monument on the site of a bath does not limit the location possibilities, nor favors the New Town, where excavations have brought to light many such structures. But was the bathroom next to palace? Malalas says nothing about possible vicinity.

The monk-disciple Anthony refers to the Octagon with the expression *μετάνοια εις τὸν μῶσχο*⁴⁸ in the Greek Biography of Saint Simeon the Stylite, written in 459. After publication of Yakto mosaic, Eltester uses the popular name of the Octagon – “from calf” - to identify the statue that Lietzmann already alleged in the vicinity⁴⁹ with the bronze statue

dedicated to Antiochus IV Epiphanes (mocked by the Greeks, dubbing him “Epimanes” meaning “crazy” instead of “Theos Epiphanes” – “god that is shown king”), described by Libanius in the *Praise of Antioch* of 356.⁵⁰ The bullfighting statuary group celebrated the pacification made by the king among the tribes of the Taurus Mountains (allegorically transposed in bull) that was in the New Town on the island. Eltester believes that the gate next to the bridge over the Orontes river has borrowed its name from the statue – “Tauriana” - and he proposes in its restitution the interpretation of incomplete PIANA mosaic inscription as a particle of TAURIANA Latin word in Greek transcription.⁵¹ Downey associates this name to an entire district of the island.⁵² The mosaic garden and the discovered bath that Libanius speaks about determine Eltester to believe that the palace was close, based on the analogy with the structure of Constantinople. In conclusion, Constantine would have used the same scheme in Antioch and Constantinople: the main church near the palace, for which scheme, as already noted, one can find several examples of early Christian architecture. But, in addition, Eltester tried to translate this site ideologically favored, by the symbolic link between throne and altar, with wider consequences than those on the case of the Octagon.

An argument that makes weak the hypothesis of sanctuary location in the New Town is that, although describing the island thoroughly, nor Theodoret neither Libanius make any reference to the presence of the Constantinian foundation.

The Octagon was not necessarily located near the palace

The latest trend is to defuse the fixed scheme palace-cathedral-gate-statue-bridge for Antioch, simply because evidence situating the Octagon on the island, apart from having old bibliography, is in itself insufficient. Catherine Saliou notes that investigations involve so far only foundation of assumptions over other previous assumptions that are consequences of maintenance of scientific prejudices, partly already terminated (the case of the palatine complex of the Late Antiquity, Duval 1987).⁵³ The methodological route proposed by Saliou moves the statue of Antiochus Epiphanes in the centre of searches - instead of the Octagon - and it seeks “real details” officiating arguments of Eltester and Downey on the archaeological and literary commentary provided by Libanius in *Antiochikos*. The first thing to be demonstrated with linguistic arguments is that the adjective ταυριανός, associated with a gate of the city by

Theophanes, should not necessarily indicate a statue, but it can be as good - or better - a toponym related to the direction of Taurus Mountains or it can refer to a proper name. Therefore, the “taurian” bridge-gate and the bronze bullfighting, both attested in Antioch, are released from the forced relationship placed by Eltester. The interpretation of Eltester regarding the gate location on the left or right side of the Orontes River, in the New Town or the Old Town, hangs on a verbal particle as well. The only thing we can say for now is that an urban gate bearing the name “Taurus” that connected the island with the Old Town may be inappropriate for geographic reasons. As regards the connotative field of the key term ταύρεος (used by Libanius in a letter about a bridge), Saliou offers two different alternatives of the statue of Antiochus: an effigy of Seleucus I, where he is represented bearing the divine signs, the bull horns, and Poseidon, one of his epiclesis being ταύρεος. This episode is associated immediately with the god statue discovered during construction of the Octagon and *xenodochium* attached, from Malalas’ writings. The latter bridge ταύρεος, although it could be close to the Octagon, it is not necessarily need to coincide with Taurian Gate Bridge. The latest criticism focuses on the topographic border of the *Megalopsychia* mosaic. According to Saliou, the two bridges do not necessarily isolate the Orontes Island and the architectures schematically represented serve with plenty of indulgence palatine destinations that have been assigned by the predecessors. On the other hand, the Great Church was certainly not even in the mosaic of Yakto near the Taurian Gate if the rest of PIANA marked the end of another toponym, such as a district built by Valerian, which would give the Latin word VARIANA in Greek transcription.

We must take into account that the silence of the sources does not mean rejection of the classical hypothesis. In spite of the hypothetical constructions not using so far sufficient valid evidence, we should not rush to definitively evacuate the Octagon from the vicinity of the palace or from the island.

A new approach

What do we finally know about the site? The only valid location is that one given by the popular name “near the calf”, plus Philip’s reserved indication about the bath place (because Malalas, although a native of Antioch, is often imprecise in his chronicle). The Octagon’s vicinity to the palace has not been yet demonstrated. In terms of the urban report between

the palace and the island, I think that a first observation is required. As already noted, there are some common features to Antioch and Spalato which can hardly pass as accidental.⁵⁴ One of these is the quarter part of the island occupied by the palace. If the Spalato complex is a city in miniature, with fortified walls and facades and inner porticated streets, it makes sense for private apartments to represent the palace itself. On the contrary, imitation at the scale of a city (the island on the Orontes had the appearance and extent of a real town) after the model of a palace that has a city as a model makes no sense. In other words, the palace in Antioch could not occupy the entire island but literally a quarter of it. Furthermore, sources are explicit when they show that the imperial residence extends to the middle of the island close to the *Tetrapylon of the Elephants*. Grabar's thesis is thus unfounded. Therefore, nor even the presumption of the Octagon placed in the palace as a strictly imperial property has any support. Its status should have been another one. A temperate approach to presumptions made so far can at least suggest the urban setting of the site. To this end, the following remarks can be made.

1. The imperial ideological program - involving the series of buildings where the Octagon is part of - assumes a deferential relationship of the Christian sanctuary to the palace. The first half of the fourth century is a period when Christianity enjoys a legal status equal to that of other religions, plus additional quality of the "court" religion, but not yet the "official" religion. The hypothesis of the cathedral adjacency to the palace, its placement in a private but also sacred area of the imperial residence, a kind of "protective" beneficial area can be consolidated on this argument. One must also understand the similarity of the Antioch situation in the Late Antiquity with the situation of the Pagan Rome, how unwise it could have been for the emperor protecting the new religion to interfere by the amplitude of his constructive program right in the heart of the city. For an Antioch more Christian than Rome, the urban center - and generally the already defined urban center of any capital of the empire - oversaturated with temples and public buildings, may make other problems, not necessarily religious in nature, such as the lack of constructible land for a representative complex of wide scope or the legal status of the land. In such fabric the natural method of intervention would have been the conversion (and given the indication of Malalas, we are exactly in a position to have a bath replaced by a church). Besides the essentially pagan centre, which were the hot spots of Antioch?

2. We know that one of the favorite sites of Christian sanctuaries was near the city gates, in a first phase *extra muros*, then *intra muros* as well. Initially conditioned not so much by the status of Christianity as the Roman law and the cult of saints - a cult of the necropolis, this preferential site gets a powerful impact on the perception of the city. It is the case of the cimiterial basilicas around Rome and the sanctuary dedicated to Saint Babylas in the north of Antioch, beyond the island, highlighted in a recent article by Wendy Mayer.⁵⁵ This huge *martyrion* met his travelers as a different gate, in a different city and it could not be ignored by the emperor's eyes from the gallery overlooking the river. It could be otherwise the ideal location of the unknown Golden Octagon, if the sanctuary of Saint Babylas was not already settled here. However, the cathedral location near one of the city gates (why not the Tauriana?) should not be excluded on principle.

3. In the first years of *Pax Ecclesia*, during Constantine's reign, the *martyrium* and the cathedral arise in a sacred protected area – either of the necropolis (in the West) or the Imperial Palace (in the East). Later, the Episcopal palace becomes contiguous to the cathedral.

4. Referring to the palaces of Late Antiquity, but finding an alternative issue for discussion in their relationship with the city, Ćurčić tempers by arguments the systematic reluctance of Duval.⁵⁶ Without seeking a fixed scheme (as otherwise rarely exists within any other architecture or urban planning program,) Ćurčić rather suggests the acceptance of certain “dialogue zones” between the sacred area of the imperial residence and the city, usually along the major axes.

5. We do not know if the whole island on the Orontes River was occupied by the New Town, namely the fortified, intramural part. If they do not overlap perfectly, did Libanius have in mind in his descriptions the island as a geographical unit or the New Town as a fortified settlement?

In conclusion, putting together the above remarks, we can say that the Octagon was probably found in the New Town, in the adjacent area of the palace, in connection with the Old Town rather than the peripheries of the right bank of Orontes River, placed strategically at the same time near one of the gates. The Great Church would be in one of the four compartments that are formed along the axes in the map redrawn by Poccardi, who moves the axes of south-west to north-east of the island. Maybe facing the temple near the hippodrome, brought to light by archaeological excavations?

3.1.2 Function. Shape and function relationship

Architectural program: is there a direct link between shape and function or not?

Deichmann believed that both the longitudinal basilica (Lateran 313) and the central plan (Antioch 327) served the same purpose to Constantine: they were equally Episcopal and community churches. The emperor and his spiritual advisers did not believe that there was a special significance of the architectural shape or a special relationship with its function. Consequently, there would be no strict relationship between the architectural shape and the liturgical destination (community-church, *martyrium* or palatine chapel) in Early Christian architecture.⁵⁷ Accepting this thesis, we must ask, however, if things stayed the same for Christians. Did they perceive to the same extent the basilical space, the central space of the imperial cosmic dome, as well as the central area of the tombs of saints as *aulae* of the new Christocentric world? If Krautheimer notes that after the year 500 the Octagon passes from the *martyria* buildings area to the community-liturgical space, Deichmann corrects him showing that actually we cannot speak of a revolution around the year 500, but of a previous status in which the specialization of the liturgical space shape in liturgical and community spaces and *martyria* buildings is missing. The boundaries of architectural types would not have existed from the beginning and spatial shapes would have been independent variables, as generally in the Roman architecture of Late Antiquity, where shape and function were independent.

Grabar does not share the same view. He formulates the ideological significance of the Octagon by inspiration from the imperial cult, explaining the exceptional choice of the octagonal plan for the sanctuary in the capital of the East - a favorite shape of *martyria* buildings and baptisteries - through the theme of regaining the lost unity, for which the empire is the expression of the whole creation restored from sin. Constantine dedicates the sanctuary as a *heroon* to Christ the Hero. The relationship between the church raising and the victory against Licinius, equivalent to unification of the empire under one leader, is the same with the relationship between heavenly and earthly monarchy, expressed in the central plan inherent to this unique building of triumphal nature, image of both the emperor and Christ. The shape is then placed in direct connection with the dedication and the significance of the building. Grabar concludes that the choice of basilical or central shape of churches is not within the fantasy of manufacturer or builder, but the Octagon confirms

that the direct link between destination and shape of the building follows a tradition prior to Late Antiquity. Eltester's strong influence is felt throughout this plea, as he was capable to see, as we have already shown, a strong ideological alliance between throne and altar.

E.H. Kantorowicz confirms Grabar's thesis, focusing on the Byzantine wedding rings octagon-shaped, bearing *homonoia* inscription.⁵⁸

The Octagon's destination

Although the monumental monograph of Grabar described the Octagon as a *martyrium*,⁵⁹ no evidence was discovered so far that this sanctuary would have housed relics ever, except its occasional funeral function related to bringing the body of Saint Simeon Stylite in the city.

Palatine church and/ or cathedral of Antioch?

Researchers focus thereby on two possible interpretations of the building destination: palatine church and the cathedral of the city. Krautheimer, as we said, considers that the Octagon fulfills both functions.⁶⁰ The central palatine church appears as a new topic to house royal liturgy, which explains further options for the identity symbolic shape of Justinian's Saint Sophia and Aachen. Palatine churches were those privileged sanctuaries in which ceremonies were brought as dedications of the emperor to God. Therefore, it should not surprise us that the royal liturgy borrowed the reception rooms near the entry (*salutatoria*), the audience halls, the sacred throne rooms and the divine banquet salons (*coenatio Jovis - triclinia*) from the palatine architectural register. It is the central interior of the Roman palace, which implies the idea of heavenly dome, such as those from Spalato or Nero's Golden House in Rome. Between 310 and 320, the representative construction type is the so-called temple of Minerva Medica in Rome, in reality a rotunda of Licinius' gardens. The functions of these rooms were mixed, as the very nature of the emperor - both secular and divine. *Chrysotriklinos*, the golden *triclinium* of the Great Palace of Constantinople, was functioning as an audience hall and imperial chapel in the late sixth century.

In conclusion, based on the formal tradition of palatine rooms, Krautheimer considers that the Octagon acts as the prototype for the church in general and in particular for the church on Mount Gerizim and for Saints Sergius and Bacchus at Constantinople.

It was already noted that, usually, palatine churches are identified by the central plan. Particularly it seems that the Episcopal palaces are in the vicinity of tetraconch cathedrals, “double shell” structures that migrate from the baths and the imperial gardens of the second century to the ecclesiastical buildings of the fourth century. Numerous examples of Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages can be brought to support this observation: San Lorenzo in Milan or Bosra, Resafa and other Syrian churches of the Patriarchate of Antioch - as shown by Kleinbauer⁶¹ - are near the Episcopal palaces; Zvartnots in the seventh century is adjacent to the patriarchal palace. On octagonal layout, San Vitale and Saints Sergius and Bacchus belong to the imperial ambiance. The most elaborate structure of this family is Justinian’s Saint Sophia, in the same time the city’s cathedral and palatine church, as was the case most likely of the Antiochian Octagon. The main objection made at this point regards the fact that in Constantinople, Hagia Sophia and Saint Irene, although forming an ecclesiastical area close to the palace, operated autonomously, without depending on the palace; moreover, it was part of another territorial-administrative unit.⁶² An Episcopal residence was interposed between the two churches and the *Augusteion*’s porticated market was placed between the palace and Hagia Sophia. Had therefore the palace its own chapel? With the objection of later sources, the registration of a palatine chapel next to the Chalke gate, where coronations took place and a piece of the Cross was kept, dedicated by Constantine to Christ (*naos tou Kiriou*)⁶³ is of great interest. Furthermore, Saint Stephen’s Church, attributed to Constantine, but probably built by Pulcheria in 429, was a palatine *martyrion*, embedded in the body of the palace, where the hand of Saint Stephen was kept and coronations and marriages took place. The *Pharos* chapel dedicated to Our Lady (Θεοτόκος τοῦ Φάρου) was arranged inside the palace in the fifth century.

Before continuing, a brief *memento* is necessary. Although the “imperial church” formula is widely accepted, one should not forget that the relationship of Constantine with the church and his presence in the Eucharistic liturgy space were certainly conditioned by the personal baptism delay. Instead, this restriction seems to grow by compensation “churches” and “home”, private liturgies of the non-baptized emperor (the Sessorian chapel in Rome for example).⁶⁴

According to Dynes, octagonal plans of the churches of San Vitale in Ravenna and Saints Sergius and Bacchus of Constantinople, both palatine churches, are deliberate allusions to the Golden Octagon. The

first type of palatine church would be a conscious creation of the age of Justinian. Historically speaking, the foundation of Charlemagne in Aachen, Aix-la-Chapelle, represents the design of this constructive type for the first time north of the Alps.⁶⁵ In turn, Downey took the mechanical idea that the Octagon is a specimen of the palatine architecture, by the hypothesis of its location on the island, near the palace.

Cathedral of Antioch

In relation to the Imperial Palace or not, most investigations lead to the scenario that the Octagon was the cathedral of Antioch from the beginning. If the thesis is proven, we are once again in the presence of a prototype: the first major community liturgical space in a central plan.

Many fifth-century Greek sources called the Octagon *Megale Ekklesia*, the “Great Church”, expression to describe the cathedral dedicated to the city. To strengthen this status since the fourth century, a certain Latin source, the chronicle of Ammianus Marcellinus, an eyewitness of the events he describes, may be quoted.⁶⁶ In October 22nd 362 the temple of Apollo in Daphné is on fire and Christians are severely punished by Julian the Apostate by closing the Octagon – “*Maior Ecclesia* of Antioch” - and confiscation of liturgical vessels. It makes sense that the revenge of the pagan emperor considered the cathedral and not a palatine chapel. At 21 years of dedication, the Octagon is known by this name, attesting its cathedral status and between 341-360 is very unlikely to become a cathedral from a chapel: from the winter of 337-8, Constantius is repeatedly resident in Antioch and between 350-354 Gallus Caesar and Costanza were established here; fervent Christians, they would not alienate at any cost the church of the palace.⁶⁷ Malalas provides an additional argument, noting that the Octagon had a kitchen for the poor and a house for foreigners, unusual annexes for a palatine chapel. Personally, from the typological definition of the two architectural programs, primarily different in size and destination, I think it is impossible to convert the chapel into a cathedral.

Finally, the demonstration may include the reference to *Palaia Ekklesia*, the old cathedral and the Episcopal office, located in the old town. It was the Apostolic Church of Antioch, which according to tradition it was founded in the first century, representing the witness of the connection with the primitive Church for the local Christian community. Demolished during the reign of Diocletian, it was rebuilt in 313 by Bishop Vitalius. The name that is mentioned in chronicles implies the existence of a “New Church”,

confirmed by another appellation of the Octagon: *Nea Ekklesia*.⁶⁸ The two churches, with their opposable names, confirm the same function. From the fifth century *Palaia* is no longer mentioned. Saint John Chrysostom served in both churches, as a deacon in 381 and between 386-397 as a priest, with the same clergy attached.⁶⁹

We can ask ourselves whether this juxtaposition of two Episcopal churches is unusual for that time or it can be found elsewhere. In Constantinople, Constantine raised martyrs' memorials, above all the Church of the Apostles,⁷⁰ but there is no mention of the capital cathedral. It remains to ask whether the *Apostoleion* mausoleum was designed to incorporate the function of the cathedral as well in the ideal center of the city founded by the Emperor. Hagia Sophia was inaugurated on February 15th 360 by Constantius and started by the same emperor not earlier than 340. Saint Irene was called *Palaia Ekklesia* (or *Ecclesia Antigua* in the *Notitia Dignitatum*), the antinomy of *Nea Ekklesia* - Saint Sophia. Because it was small, Constantine rebuilt it and gave it the title of *Eirene*. In 337 there is anointed Bishop Paul the Confessor, which certifies its role as cathedral, taken also between 404 and 415, when the burned Saint Sophia was rebuilt. In conclusion, Antioch and Constantinople used the same scheme: two contemporary cathedrals, distinguished by the appellation "Old" and "New Church", of reversible status.⁷¹

3.1.3 *Tituli* of the Octagon

Tituli of the Great Church - *Domus Aurea*, *Dominicum Aureum*, *Mega Ekklesia*, *Ecclesia Maior*, *Nea Ekklesia*, μετάνοια εις τὸν ὀκτάγων or "the Octagon" - have provoked much discussion.⁷²

What periods and geographical areas are specific for the symbolic names of theological nature of churches? Are these churches in a special category? During the reign of Saint Augustine, the Episcopal church of Hippo was known as the *Basilica Pacis*. In the early fifth century the Donatist cathedral, *Theoprepia* and a Catholic Church, *Restituta* were also mentioned here. In the same century, *Irene* church, built probably at the end of the fourth century, was placed in Gaza of Bishop Porphyry, near the bishop's residence. In 431, the Council of Ephesus meets at "the Great Church of Holy Mary". Constantinople provides the richest file with well-known *Irene* churches (first Constantinian, the second post-Constantinian), *Sophia* church (founded by Constantius II), *Anastasia* (the main church of the Novatians during the reign of Julian and then

the Nicene, in the period of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus), *Homonoia* and probably *Dynamis*, predecessor of “Holy Dynamis” of the medieval Byzantine period. Two main themes can be identified: Peace (with the corollary Concordia and Blessing at Arsinoé), and Regeneration/ Rebirth (Illumination or *Fotine* and the Life-Giver of Hermopolis, *Metanoia* at Antioch, *Anastasia* or *Restituta*), plus avatars of the sovereignty (Wisdom, Power). It seems therefore that we are always near the cathedrals - the main “catholic” churches for general worship, “great churches” - in remote places of the empire,⁷³ from the fourth century and not exceeding the fifth century. No commemorative building (*martyrion* or Christian mausoleum, pilgrimage sanctuary) candidates for such an appellation. This can be an additional argument for establishing the position of cathedral of Antioch Octagon. Eponyms do not coincide with the dedication of the church, Christ Himself in general, but they are external names of popular nature, versions of old Hellenistic *signa* associated to buildings of profane nature in many cases. Nor they are always attributed to the sanctuary along with its dedication, but they occur over time, as is the case of *Hagia Sophia* in *Constantinople* and the Antiochian *Concordia-Metanoia*, which requires caution to avoid at any cost search for a possible symbolic kinship between the Octagonal plan and its theological appellations. The Octagon was known as the “Great Church” during its construction period.

3.1.4 The dedication of the Octagon: *metanoia* or *concordia-homonoia*?

Between the two terms used in literary sources on the dedication of the church, μετάνοια (repentance) and ἁμόνοια (concordia), Grabar prefers the latter because of its frequency in the symbols of imperial power. In addition, when the first is almost impossible to explain according to its founder’s vision, the other embodies the perfect monarch, superimposed image of the emperor and of Christ. In 327, when Constantine sets the foundations of the Octagon, just two years away from the Council of Nicaea, he defeats Licinius and manages to reunify the Roman Empire; Rome and the Orient are together again, for the first time of Christian nature.

During the life of Saint Simeon the Stylite, as already mentioned, Anthony says that the Octagon, when housing the body of the saint in 459, receives the name of μετάνοια εἰς τὸν μόσχον (“repentance from calf”). Although *homonoia-concordia* postulated by Grabar is recognized by Downey and Krautheimer, none of the nine Greek manuscripts on

the life of Saint Simeon the Stylite mentions the word *homonoia*, but the word *metanoia*, while there is no title in Latin translation. Another series of Latin manuscripts mention the variants *penitentia*, *penitentia* replaced by *concordia*, *Concordia poenitentiae*, *concordia poenitentialis* or just *concordia*. Therefore, Eltester believes that there was a “missing link”, a Greek variant with the title *homonoia*, which would give *concordia* in Latin manuscripts. In front of the incorrect collocation *concordia-poenitentia*, Grabar believes simply that there may be a mistake of the transcriber, who transforms from a hand movement the word *metanoia* in *homonoia*. Instead, Deichmann explains the hesitation of the Latin chroniclers by a cultural reality: *metanoia* did not exist in spirit in the West, it was an empty term, where the translation of the meaning: *metanoia-homonoia* = *concordia*. Therefore, it is possible that the Octagon may have never been dedicated to the Harmony and the *concordia* could have been an exclusively Western interpretation of the Oriental *metanoia*. Eltester wonders whether the dedication day of the Harmony-*homonoia* is somewhat prior to the “repentance from calf”, being received at the Joy Feast with the unification of Paulinus’ community with the Church, during the reign of Bishop Alexander in 415. The event was marked by a solemn urban procession - probably the only attested in Antioch, powerful evocation of the river of torches of Chrysostom in Constantinople of 398 – who crossed the entire city, in hymns and psalms and ended in the Golden Octagon that became place of peace and reunification of Christians: “a stream of thinking living beings like the Orontes in its course, coming from the western gate to the great church and filling the whole forum.”⁷⁴

A dedicatory inscription?

A dedicatory inscription chronicled by Malalas, analyzed and emended by Müller,⁷⁵ sometimes served as an argument to show that nor *homonoia* or *metanoia* – absent terms – belonged to the initial Constantinian dedication, and therefore listening to the imperial customary law of the great foundations, the Octagon was worshipped directly by Constantine to Christ.⁷⁶

Constantine [Constantius] consecrated a house to God, worthy to be praised,
shining as the heavenly dome.

Constantius made himself a servant of God,
Gorgonius *comes* accomplished the work of the servant.⁷⁷

A recent plausible study shows that Malalas does not have actually the dedicatory inscription of the Great Church of Antioch and, therefore, the text emendation is not necessary (“Constantine” instead of “Constantius” in the first line).⁷⁸ The text belongs to another era and another building and the three names mentioned by the chronicler would not refer to Constantine I, Constantius II and Gorgonius, charged with overseeing the work of the Octagon, but to Constantius II, Gallus (officially called Constantius) and the homonym Gorgonius, the “building supervisor” who was most likely familiar to the court of Caesar Gallus. The inscription, of great modesty, moreover, was not seen *in situ* by Malalas, but taken from another source and interpreted it with reference to the Octagon. Woods thinks it is a testimony of a secondary order – not even the inscription of any church - that could accompany a donation made eventually to the *martyrion* in Daphné built during the reign of Gallus to house relics of Saint Babylas.

3.2 Architectural shape. Reconstruction scenarios

“One has found no trace of the Octagon of Antioch. (...) discussions around this lost monument are endless and controversies increase rather than decrease, due to the more methodical research”, wrote Jean Lassus in 1966.⁷⁹ The situation has not changed significantly since then. Although in the absence of archaeological evidence, reconstruction studies may be criticized that they remain pure speculative exercises and they cannot be objectively evaluated, Deichmann does not consider them totally meaningless, but he believes that their dynamics is due to the advanced research, animated by the clear-cut distinction premise to Lateran.

If the Yakto mosaic can be interpreted with reservations in terms of recovery of the Octagon’s location, its use for formal reconstruction is almost impossible. First of all, the type of representation is proper to the schematic decorative language of mosaic. Secondly, the picture is incomplete and largely devoid of context.

The theoretical reconstruction proposed by Krautheimer says that the prototype Cathedral is a volume of eight facades, preceded by a *narthex* on two levels and has gilded roof. Inside, above the octagonal central core, stands a pyramidal roof or a wooden dome. The nucleus is surrounded by annexes, as described by Eusebius: *oikoi* - lateral aisles on two levels (ambulatory and gallery), separated by colonnades of the central area - and *exedrae* or niches. In formal terms, this scheme can evolve in two directions: 1. ambulatory and the gallery communicate directly with the core, while

the niches (*exedrae*) open to the outside (a vague resemblance to the plan of the *Theotokos* Church on Mount Gerizim, 484; the solution proposed by Birnbaum is an illustration of this choice⁸⁰); 2. the central core expands forming the niches - *exedrae* ("double shell" plan,⁸¹ which predicts the plan of Saints Sergius and Bacchus at Constantinople by 200 years and that of San Vitale in Ravenna; the variant is found in the solution proposed by Dynes⁸²). Krautheimer rejects instead the vision built by Kleinbauer as a complex historical demonstration, who concludes that the Octagon of Antioch was actually built on a tetraconch plan.⁸³ We will analyze below the main trends in the interpretation of the architectural shape.

A. Birnbaum, 1913 and B. Smith, 1950

The analysis proposed is essentially a linguistic one, a bend on the meaning of terms used by literary sources. Its product is a circular three-aisle basilica or, in other words, three octagonal concentric basilicas, under a wooden roof. Of all restaurateurs, A. Birnbaum and B. Smith have the merit - or the sin - to be the only designers. Concerned only about the issue of the dome symbolism, Smith overlooks the plan solving and criticizes conical or pyramidal wooden roofs, proposing a gilded wooden dome that must have served as a prototype to the Islamic sacred architecture of the formal family of the variant proposed by Professor Krencker for the hypothetical restoration of the Octagon from Qalat Seman a century later.⁸⁴ The Holy Sepulcher would have had also a similar timber dome from the beginning, as an alternative to a stone dome considered unlikely. Smith is the guardian of faith in a Syro-Palestinian tradition of wooden gilded domes, the solar domes loaded with ancestral symbolism evoked by the *Marneion* in Gaza (also in the variant of its own restitution as long as there is no historical witness) or the Syrian fire temples. All these would have become signs of an ideology of Early Christianity. Wooden domes did not need to obey the hemispheric section, the semicircular shape being a conquest of Greek mathematics and Roman mechanics and a result of Roman standardization of masonry domes. At this point, the scientific argumentation adequately enters the technological field, showing how the masonry domes are largely indistinguishable from the outside due to constructive reasons, according to the Roman tradition. In Late Antiquity, the masonry dome becomes a sign of imperial and divine power, mentality that will gradually affect the imperial Christian foundations and big churches in general. Justinian's Saint Sophia can be seen from the perspective of this demonstration as an

introverted “inner dome”. The Golden Octagon seems to have been both an inner and outer dome and implicitly the bearer of a complex ideology, according to the allusions of Saint John Chrysostom. So Smith believes that the wooden dome is the major distinguishing feature of the external physiognomy of the building, wherefrom the exaggeration of its convex or conical shape in Syria of the Early Christianity.⁸⁵ The main reason lies in that there is no masonry dome kept before the sixth century, except the tomb of Bizzos at Ruweha of the fifth century. In addition, Smith seems to distinguish an innovation in the Syriac hymn dedicated to the cathedral of Edessa rebuilt during the reign of Justinian: “there is no wood in its ceiling, made entirely of stone”.⁸⁶ The lack of the typical structural conditionality for the masonry dome makes indeed regardless of age that working with wood can produce specific calligraphy of ritual canopies, “flamboyant” figures of domes. These “double shell” structures in Bosra, Jerusalem and Damascus could be achieved through experience and sophisticated technology of the shipbuilders.⁸⁷ Why shouldn’t be possible for the symbolic shapes to evolve in monumental architectural shapes, by canceling the size and the constructive limitations of masonry? Was this vernacular tradition of the golden masonry dome that dictated the octagonal plan? This question finds two solutions in principle for the plan restitution: 1) the plan is a projection of the dome or 2) the plan is possibly designed as a symbolic key, irrespective of coverage. The vision of the Syrian domes, golden ships sailing in the sky, would only need the building material or according to the testimony of Procopius, there was wood at least in northern Syria, until the sixth century. However, the adverse reality is kept according to Saint Gregory of Nyssa letter to Amphilocheus, bishop of Iconium, written between 379 and 394. The Saint requires sending those builders who know how to build stone vaults without scaffolding, which he heard that they are stronger than those raised on wooden boarding. And he adds: “the lack of wood forces us to this choice to cover the whole area with stone, because the place does not provide any wood backup board for coverage.”⁸⁸ Besides the symbolic meaning argument, the intense and frequent earthquakes could be another strong reason for using the wooden dome in Syria.

In the absence of the archaeological evidence, no possible link can be verified between the solar dome and the first Constantinian theophanic *martyria* in the Holy Land. Theologically speaking, it remains to guess the movement of the golden dome - dome-dwelling (of the Latin word *doma* - house, dwelling, roof) from the Syro-Palestinian tradition to Early Christianity. *Domus Dei*, the new House of God, replaces fast enough the

temple in Jerusalem and passes across the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to the cathedral dome in the today West with all the opposition of the Christian apologists. The mystagogy of the seventh century is found in the germs of the Syrian theology of the fourth century: we are under the first cosmic domes identifying for the first time with God-Christ. The church circumscribes the comprehensible universe.

G. Rivoira, 1918

The major difference to the reconstruction of his predecessor, A. Birnbaum, lies in solving the core of the outer octagon not to resume the polyhedron theme, but as an alternation of rectangular and semicircular niches.⁸⁹ The Golden Octagon would be seeded in the chronological line of these structures. Analyzing the passage of Eusebius from *Vita Constantini* (3.50) and the diaries, including iconographic ones of the Marquis de Vogüé,⁹⁰ Rivoira has concluded that the Octagon had a flat roof.

E. Kleinbauer, 1973

Through a historical retrospective approach, where he makes use of the spatial typological analysis tools, Kleinbauer studies the tetraconch churches of Antioch Patriarchate from the late fourth to early sixth century. He aims to show that their complex affinities are possible to define a local family which requires a regional concept identified in the Constantinian cathedral of Antioch, the Golden Octagon. This hypothesis says that the so-called Octagon has actually a tetraconch plan, reconstruction scenario rejected by Krautheimer.

4 Another reconstruction attempt

4.1 Architectural program

In general, the architectural shape recovery begins with understanding the design theme. The intentions behind the whole design should be questioned before treating specific issues related to the construction size, spaces and their functions, the principles of the overall composition. Currently, in the absence of information to serve as a foothold, we chose to delimit the subject - or issues raised by it - through a series of interrogations starting from the hypothesis cathedral-Octagon. Literally, the cathedral

is the throne room (unlike the tomb room). It is tempting to believe that it has its own genealogy, a history parallel to the regular churches, that it has its sources and the privileged world of architectural shapes. Grabar's poetic idea, which makes the *martyrium* the saint "dwelling" borrowed to God on earth, as the believers make their house available in the position *domus ecclesiae* or *titulus*, inspires us to believe that the cathedral is simply "the emperor's dwelling" where he receives God. As some dwellings, holy graves and imperial halls become churches. The congregation (*ecclesia*) host is a good Christian, a saint or the emperor, who prepares the most beautiful room. Basilicas are a kind of imperial donation made to Christ.

What therefore represent the Octagon to Constantine and the court exegetes? And accordingly, what is the relation between the tradition, craftsmen and the materials needed to build the cathedral?

- An ideal church, after Roman classical tradition, possible built with craftsmen from Rome and local materials (probably *spoliae*)? In any case, one should not neglect the proximity of the Roman imperial model because, while the Octagon is under construction, is prepared the opening of Constantinople, the new capital inspired by the fascination of Rome. Did Constantine consider a structure in Rome that he wanted to rebuild as the cathedral of Antioch? What would have impressed him so much that he chose a particular shape of the Octagon for the main community liturgical building of the Eastern capital? In 326, when Constantine leaves Rome, begin the works on the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem and in following year on the Golden Octagon. Other Rotundas follow in chronological order: *Apostoleion* of Constantinople, the Nativity Octagon in Bethlehem and the Octagon of Ascension on the Mount of Olives. Only the memorial of Bethlehem was certainly able to recover the Constantinian plan. The impression that creates the chronological ordering of the Christian imperial foundations is that, after fourteen years impregnated with Roman fascination, the Emperor focuses on a different building campaign looking to the East - where he decided to move the capital - and where the octagonal plan option does not seem an accident. In Rome, the only octagon that it might be due to Constantine is the baptistery of the Lateran cathedral, *Basilica Salvatoris*. It would be natural for it to resume the theme of Roman *nymphaea* octagons.

- An "isapostolic" cathedral, heiress of Nero's dome figured as *kosmokrator*? Is the Great Church or the Royal Church the place where the religion-politics equality is visibly showed? If so, the cathedral would be seen as a *sacred throne* in a *naos*-city. What was Constantine's true

status and what did he think when he called himself the “bishop of those outside”?⁹¹ Did he consider himself the thirteenth apostle or the symbolism of the twelve columns of the Holy Sepulcher and of the *Apostoleion* cenotaphs was rather “an accident of architecture”, according to Woods,⁹² or was it a gesture deliberately ambiguous, typically Constantinian, Christian and pagan at the same time, suggesting the twelve signs with the Sun in the center? Does it make sense to look for the *omphalos*-hill in Antioch, as in Constantinople, or rather we must believe that the Octagon’s location was a new graft in an old urban fabric and the *temenos* was just a cut-built site under the pressure of the existing built area?

- An ecumenical cathedral, “Mother” of all churches according to the model of Zion, along with other mother churches, the Holy Sepulcher and the *Basilica Salvatoris* in Rome? Was it a central extraordinary structure to subordinate all the other “canonical” gathering spaces, considered churches by affiliation to it?

- A baptismal cathedral, because it was placed on the island in the midst of the “living” waters of baptism or for having a golden dome - variant of Enlightenment (another name of Baptism in Early Christianity)? Because, as epiclesis, Baptism meant the act of the Holy Spirit coming down, the same act of birth of the Church itself? Does the eagle above the Roman mausoleum become the pigeon above the baptistery? Does the choice of the Epiphany feast as consecration day belong to Constantius or is it part of Constantine’s project?

- (Another) *martyrium*-cathedral, similar to the five-aisled basilica next to the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem? If *martyria* were “necropolis cathedrals” or *dormitoria*-cathedrals, through the intervention of the imperial ideology the octagonal cathedral of Antioch could be the first *martyrium* dedicated to Christ, due not to sheltering relicts or commemorating facts, but to its exclusively symbolic shape. Christ, the new *Sol Invictus*, “the light of the world” is “confessed” by the golden dome. Justinian’s Saint Sophia was also inspired by the luminous experience of God’s vicinity, when being conceived as a huge concave mirror (Antemios was one of the renowned specialists in optics at that time) to capture and increase light by reflection, indefinitely. In Early Christianity, the luminous dome was the expression of Resurrection and eternal life, associated to myriads of *martyria*, “another heaven on earth”, described with the same fascination by all chroniclers, from Eusebius and Choricus during the fourth and fifth centuries, to Procopius and Arculf in sixth and seventh centuries. Was then the Golden Octagon the first conscious specimen of a mystagogical

architecture of concave mirrors, the first container of light designed for the entire liturgical community and not only for the saint, emperor or clergy marching on the “royal path”?

4.2. Architectural shape. Reconstruction

In this case, the intention is also to proceed from what we know to what we do not know. The method consists of an iconographic investigation - not univocally, mostly analyzing the pieces of architecture (plans, facades, axonometric views), hypothetical reconstructions as well – but as a critical approach of sources by hand drawing. The exercise assumes that the Octagon is an assembly of spaces and not an isolated building (although the sculptural free-standing building is closer to the classical sense of the monument).

The size of the Octagon

In determining the size of the building, a first impression can be created by placing it in context. We know that the palatine complex occupied a quarter of the island and the racecourse - one of the largest in the Roman world - had 500x70-75m.⁹³ Its capacity is estimated to 80,000 people. Bath C, the largest of those recovered, rebuilt and completely restored after its destruction in the earthquake of 115, fitted into a rectangle of 80X53m⁹⁴ in the fourth century. If we add the dimensions of the largest central sanctuaries of the Early Christianity to this information, including the Octagon at Hierapolis with the opening of the central nucleus of 20m and the angle of the whole assembly around 50m, we have an indication of the Octagon's size. One should take into account the perceptual factor of great importance for the laudatory descriptions of Eusebius, which express one of the virtues of the central shape. It owes its grandeur not so much to its top dimensions as to its specific shape, the proportions between the subassemblies and how is sitting in space: an isolated rotunda in the middle of a court.

Sources: linguistic and typological analysis

If history of the Octagon is relatively well documented, regarding the architectural shape, only two descriptions of Eusebius are kept. Until recently, Libanius provided another foothold about an imperial foundation, by the malicious comment to a panegyric of his opponent, Bemarchius -

the most famous teacher of rhetoric in Constantinople around 340-342. For a long time, it was considered that the subject of this mysterious *basilikos logos*, “as long as the Nile”,⁹⁵ is the Great Church of Antioch. Recent research studies, however, provide valid reasons (primarily the anachronism of the idea that just the most famous pagan rhetor is responsible for the propaganda of an imperial Christian building) that show that behind the concise description is not the Golden Octagon but the dynastic mausoleum built by Constantine in the center of the new capital of the Christian empire, which weakens even more the consistency of sources where the Octagon architecture can be contemplated.⁹⁶

Eusebius, *De laudibus Constantini* 9.8-14⁹⁷

A short passage of the court chronicler’s speech of the year 335 is dedicated to the Octagon, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of Constantine as emperor. 335 is also the year in which Theophanes places the initiation of works, hypothesis that if accepted, compels us to see the project in its first version and not the construction or the project execution plan. In the same year he proclaims his three sons emperors and he celebrates the consecration of the Holy Sepulcher.⁹⁸

Two locations in the East he singled out from all others – one in the Palestinian nation, inasmuch as in that place as from a fount gushed forth the life-bearing stream to all, the other in the Eastern metropolis which glorifies the name of Antiochus which it bears. In the latter, since it is the capital of the whole region, he dedicated a certain structure marvelous and unique for its size and beauty. **On the outside surrounding the whole temple (naos) with long walls, inside he raised the sanctuary (to anaktoron) to an extraordinary height and diversified it with an eight-walled plan. Encircling this (en kyklo) with numerous aisles (oikois) and niches (exedrai), he crowned it with a variety of decorations.**⁹⁹

Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 3.50¹⁰⁰

A parallel passage in which appear some additional details was preserved in the *Vita Constantini*, encomium biography attributed to Eusebius:

He also decorated the principal cities of the other provinces with sacred edifices of great beauty; as, for example, in the case of that metropolis of the East which derived its name from Antiochus, in which, as the head of that portion of the empire, he consecrated to the service of God a church of unparalleled size and beauty. **The entire building (neon) was encompassed by an enclosure (peribolos) of great extent, within which the church itself**

(eukterios oikos) rose to a vast elevation, being of an octagonal form, and surrounded on all sides (en kyklo) by many chambers (horemata), courts and upper (yperoon) and lower (katagheion) apartments; the whole richly adorned with a profusion of gold, brass and other materials of the most costly kind.¹⁰¹

If we refer to Eusebius speeches not as rhetorical mere descriptions of sacred architecture, but as true Christian theology treaties that make any presentation of an architectural object to end in the middle of the theological and Christological issues, they can be us helpful.¹⁰² What do we learn from Eusebius' speeches and may be useful in understanding the architectural program and imagine the Octagon's architecture? For specific architectural details, a thorough linguistic analysis out of the parameters of this study, would sit in the mirror the terms used by Eusebius in describing the Octagon with those used in other descriptions of him - for example, the description of the Holy Sepulcher - and descriptions of other authors of the same period – the letter of Saint Gregory of Nyssa to Amphilochius, archbishop of Iconium, or the *ekphrasis* dedicated to the octagonal *martyrium* at Nazianzus before 374.

1. The Octagon is one of the two private foundations built in the East, with the Holy Sepulcher. The text may suggest that in one case we have a spiritual theophanic theme (Jerusalem), while in the other case we have more of a political and cultural project ("the East metropolis", "the capital of the entire region"). Two capitals are located in the same rank: one major of the Christian world, the other one of the entire Eastern, with complex authority, crowned by the apostolic see.

2. The sanctuary fitted Antioch, "the head of all the peoples", μονογενές τί χρημα - unique, unparalleled - for its size and beauty. It is a great temptation to foresee here a copy - unique at that time - of classical architecture, called to compete with all other gifts with which Roman emperors adorned Antioch. Who (rather than "what") was Antioch when the Octagon's foundations were set down? Before being one of the apostolic capitals of the Church, it is one of Europe's cultural capitals of Late Antiquity, with Alexandria, Ephesus or Athens and one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Before receiving the name of *Theopolis*, it was called the "Golden City", "Pearl of the Orient", "Antioch the Beautiful", "Voluptuous Antioch", "Antioch of pleasure" or "Sensual Antioch". Caesar visited it in 47 B.C. Octavian, Tiberius, Trajan, Hadrian spent some time in it and have embellished it building monuments. Titus adorned the gate

of the south, connecting Daphné to Antioch, with seraphim of the temple in Jerusalem, brought as war booty.¹⁰³ Emperor Commodus wanted the Olympics to be held at Antioch (in fact in Daphné, where the Olympic stadium is). Herod, king of the Jews, made two porticoes and a marble paving as a gift to it. Diocletian rebuilt the palace on the island – according to the words of Libanius, so rich and great that it alone could give the status of a city to any settlement where could be found. All Antioch was a grand imperial memorial, where Constantine had to have his Christian effigy: the golden sanctuary in the city of gold. The Octagon was therefore part of an imposed value class by its “imperial gift” status – of the ideal world of ancient classicism, imbued with the sensuality of the East. The Christian ideological context is doubled by the cultural and political context. Unlike Antioch, Constantine builds “unprecedentedly” and acts promptly in the Holy Land, moving between the theophanic stations of an eminently Christian topography.

3. Long walls surrounded the whole *temple*; inside, the sanctuary raised to a great height and it was embellished by a wall in eight sides. Hence, the *temple* (the building complex) is different from the *sanctuary* according to the pagan tradition of the sacred *temenos*. The Octagon could be located in the center of an enclosure (presumably square-shaped) or on one short side of a rectangular enclosure, as the traditional model of Roman imperial *mausolea*. It is possible that the enclosure - *peribolos* - has been made of “high walls” or refer to a *quadriporticus*.

4. The sanctuary (“octagonal tower”) was surrounded by many niches and exedrae (*oikoi* and *exedrai*) and it was highly decorated. This passage appears to provide the internal organization key of the plan. *Oikoi* and *exedrai* are terms returning to *ekphrasis* typical of Early Christianity, with reference to distinct spaces between them, ranked and possibly alternated. *Exedrai* are the arms that start from the core of the sanctuary from Kaoussie, according to inscriptions found in the *in situ* mosaic. In general, they seem to refer to an amplification of a major space, communicating with along the entire length of an aperture. *Oikos* is an amorphous designation apparently subordinate, designating a “room”, a “chamber”, a bounded and autonomous space in which the access is usually through an opening with a strictly functional significance, a gate or a door. However, it is hard to imagine the concentric octagons plan proposed by Birnbaum in the wording of Eusebius. This expression construction sooner sends to the family of radial octagons, which recalls Kleinbauer’s thesis, the prototype of tetraconch Syrian liturgical space, so vehemently rejected by Krautheimer.

Is a wooden dome a paradox?

The wooden dome of the sixth century, rebuilt by the Patriarch Ephraim of Antioch was certainly not a paradox. But was it the faithful formal and structural answer of the original coating solution? Did the Antiochian people have a constructive tradition of the masonry dome, accustomed from the Romans? An affirmative answer is suggested by the very large number of baths of the sensual metropolis, of all types and all sizes (private, semi-public and public - *dêmosion*). If the *frigidarium* (otherwise the great hall of the *thermae*, with the largest openings) might be covered with wood framing, the *caldarium* requires a wall vaulting. So such a constructive variant was widespread, but most likely within some modest structural openings. Daphné mosaic border offers the drawing model of the bath of Ardabur, the prefect of the Orient (identified according to the preserved inscription: *pribaton Ardaburiu*), where two cupolas can be seen in the background.

Evagrius directly mentions the wooden dome built by Ephrem by his earthquake story of 588:

...most buildings fell down when their very foundations were churned up: as a result, everything around the most holy church was brought to the ground, with only the dome being preserved. (HE, 6.8) This had been fashioned by Ephrem out of timbers from Daphne, after it suffered in the earthquakes under Justin: as a result of the subsequent quakes this had tilted towards its northern part so that timbers were inserted to exert counterpressure, but these indeed fell down in this violent quake when the dome returned to its position and, as if under some law, reoccupied its proper place.¹⁰⁴

The Golden dome of the Octagon could remind the *Marneion* in Gaza, described by Mark Deacon in the *Life of Porphyry*. Burned in 402, the famous pagan sanctuary had in its center a dome with a svelte silhouette elevated to a great height.¹⁰⁵ Bishop Porphyry built and finished *Basilica Eudoxiana*, cruciform in plan, above the foundations of the *Marneion* in 407, together with Rufinus, an Antiochian architect, "a man of faith and a good professional",¹⁰⁶ who certainly knew well the Kaoussie *martyrion* (381). Perhaps a wooden dome was at the intersection of the cross' arms.

Strong elements that define the Octagon listed so far are found in a brief but revealing typological study of Slobodan Ćurčić, about the family of central buildings placed in the middle of certain enclosures.¹⁰⁷ Christians would have practiced this sacred enclosure model (common in paganism)

in the fourth century, thus before the fashion of converting the pagan temple into church, typical for the next century, because they have already had a prototype in the mausoleum of Constantine in Constantinople. Late Antiquity visual sources are given for understanding the significance of the central scheme, with reference to the heavenly Jerusalem: Wisdom sitting in the middle of a *cvadriporticus*, the legendary “portico of Solomon”, a large enclosure on the Holy Temple Mount.

The increasingly influence of the pre-Christian monotheism, as the sun cult of the Roman sacred architecture, could have been a key factor in the design of the mausoleum of Constantine. The Imperial Mausoleum of Constantinople, identified with a *martyrium*-church, is recently interpreted by Cyril Mango¹⁰⁸ as a domed Rotunda (“temple” according to Eusebius), autonomous volume “in the middle of a huge court, filled with pure air, with porticos on all four sides surrounding both the courtyard and the temple itself”.¹⁰⁹ The cruciform church dedicated to the Apostles would have been attached to the rotunda by Constantius and consecrated in 370, nine years after his death and the rotunda was to keep only the role of the mausoleum. Čurčić notes that it is a current spatial composition for the imperial mausoleums around 300. If the Rotunda in Thessalonica is an uncertain example because of insufficient archaeological evidence, the Mausoleum of Maxentius (also called Mausoleum of Romulus) on the Appian Way is very well preserved. Built between 307 and 312, it is distinguished by a great domed rotunda, modeled after the Pantheon, a vaulted annular crypt being developed in the central area. The spacious courtyard is enclosed on all four sides by porticoes of arcs on columns instead of architrave. No previous domed mausoleum is placed with such emphasis in the geometric center of a monumental courtyard and the only relevant precedent of Roman imperial architecture is the Temple of the Sun built by Aurelian in Rome. The Mausoleum of Diocletian in Spalato, built a few years earlier, was also a central domed octagon, peripter, temple-like structure, in a narrow and uncovered courtyard.

Placing the mausoleum-temple in the center of an uncovered courtyard is an innovation of Late Antiquity to the Roman customary law, where the temples (including the round ones), are axially placed on the short border of the rectangular enclosures that precede them.¹¹⁰ Instead, the Temple of the Sun built by Aurelian in Rome was a round building, peripter, in the middle of a large rectangular courtyard, enclosed by a wall with three *exedrae* on each side, with the exception of the short side of the access. The role of monotheism on arts and architecture in Late Antiquity in general

and particularly during the patronage of Constantine is also checked on the formal centrality of the column of Constantine-Helios in the center of the Forum of Constantinople (330).

The central scheme, although not widespread, deserves full attention of this study: the Golden Octagon in Antioch appears to be the prototype of churches that customize the fourth century monotheistic ideology. These include the octagon-*martyrium* of Nyssa (~380), an edition where the features of the Mausoleum of Constantine in the composite version of 370 can be recognized, when the cross is already superimposed over the initial rotunda. The first cathedral of Athens, a functional conversion of the fifth century, uses the tetraconch inside the Library of Hadrian. The Church of Mary *Theotokos* on Mount Gerizim (484), built by the Emperor Zeno on a sacred place both for the Samaritans and Christians, is in the center of a porticated enclosure, later fortified. Finally, the Octagon of Caesarea Maritima (525-550), which stands on the platform of Rome and Augustus temple built by Herod, is inscribed in a square frame made of rectangular rooms, probably of lower height, with unknown function. The most recent excavations suggest the existence of an extensive Christian remodeling in the fourth century.

The tradition of the central sanctuary in a monumental courtyard is abandoned in the sixth century and it will be punctually evoked later, as two exceptional buildings in the seventh century.¹¹¹ At Zvartnots near Ecimiatzin, between 645 and 660, the Catholic Pro-Greek Nerses II builds a tetraconch rotunda, isolated on a platform over-raised by a set of stairs, where the researchers saw a strong relationship with Syria-Palestine. The dome of the Rock, built in 691, is the first monumental building of Islamic worship in Jerusalem. It lies in the highest and central place of an irregular trapezoidal enclosure, bounded by a monumental scale, which is also inside the so-called platform of the temple in Jerusalem, called by Islamic people "the noble enclosure", *Haram- al-Sharif*, and *Templum Domini* by the Crusaders in the twelfth century.

Consequently, the central building located amidst an uncovered monumental courtyard is a monotheistic model, also shared by the Jews, the pagan Sun worshipers, Christians and Islamic people. It seems to be the best iconographic formula for conveying the idea of God's oneness and the absolute centrality of His place in the world, concept eventually made possible in the Holy Land, judging statistically by the examples raised. Constantine and his close advisers are the authors of the Christian version of the monotheistic central scheme in the case of the Golden Octagon

of Antioch. Advocating the doctrine of the uniqueness and centrality of God throughout the empire, the emperor strengthened his own status of unique vicar of God on earth.

The Christian monotheism had also the value of a political doctrine.

Conclusions

The Golden Dome

It seems that we have to choose between a dome of gilded wood, as in Smith's hypothesis and a masonry dome. Taking into account the speed with which sanctuaries were built during Constantine's reign, the temptation to choose the wooden structure is higher. We are also informed about the architects crisis facing Constantine, a very serious argument against a wall complex experiment, which would have required professional technique and knowledge, as the case of Pantheon or Basilica of Maxentius. Finally, we must not forget that the new Christian capital site of the empire had just been inaugurated, so that one can legitimately assume that all available resources arrived to Constantinople.

One possible model for the Octagon's Dome, as already said, could be the willowy dome of *Marneion* in Gaza, described by Mark the Deacon: a round building with two concentric colonnades and a central dome bulb-shaped (*kibèrion*), elevated at a great height.¹¹² Theophanes¹¹³ refers to it using the term *σφαιροειδής*, reviewed by Downey.¹¹⁴

Another shining dome was erected on the *Apostoleion's* hill of Constantinople, probably on a simultaneous site. If we believe as Mango¹¹⁵ that the dynastic mausoleum was a rotunda, we can detect a parallel to the Golden Octagon in Antioch in the encomium of Eusebius:

Trellised relief-work wrought in bronze and gold went right round the building...

And above, over this [ceiling], on the roof-top itself, bronze instead of tiles provided protection for the building, furnishing safety for the rains. And much gold lit this up so that it shot forth dazzling light, by means of the reflection of the sun's rays to those who beheld it from afar. And he encircled the little roof (domation instead of doma for the rest of the building) round about with pierced grilles, executed in gilded bronze.¹¹⁶

The portrait of the mysterious central building can be seen also with the description of the octagonal church of Nazianzus. The text is part of the funeral speech written by Saint Gregory of Nazianzus with his father's death in 374. The foundation falls chronologically within the pontificate of his father (328-374), but more likely in the final period.

It surrounds itself with eight regular equilaterals and it raised aloft by the beauty of the two stories of pillars and porticoes, while the statues placed upon them are true to life; its vault (οὐρανῶ) flashes down upon us from above and it dazzles our eyes with the abundant sources of light.¹¹⁷

The unified interior space

So far we have recovered a central domed tower, with its vertical support - columns or pilasters rather than masonry piles that would interrupt the continuity of the interior space. Speaking about this feature of the first Christian meeting places, we should make the following remark: there are two major schemes of the central *naos*, one radial and one circular. The radial variant is found mostly in the transformation process of the central funerary sanctuary in a large central space for meetings: pilgrimage sanctuaries and in general all those spaces that can accommodate multiple activities without the interior unit to suffer (Saint Babylas at Kaoussie or Saint Simeon Stylite at Qalat Seman). Sometimes, large aisles can be detached radially from the central core in a centrifugal movement. Conversely, the second category includes sanctuaries with a stronger centripetal trend and a greater internal coherence, where the central core expands outside. I think this is the best formula for a metropolitan cathedral, as is the case of the Golden Octagon in Antioch - a central space strongly polarized, literally and symbolically. The expression *en kyklo* used by Eusebius supports this hypothesis.

The compact plan seems to be more urban, more contiguous to the *peribolos* theme - a monumental building in the middle of the courtyard - while the radial plan is more common in *extra-muros* construction. The hypothesis of the central Eucharistic altar and/ or the equivalent perimeter entrances instead of the rhetoric of *narthex* on two levels proposed by Krautheimer, also should not be excluded.

NOTES

- ¹ The author of this paper was a NEC-UAR Fellow for the academic year 2010-11.
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- ³ FESTUGIÈRE, A.-J., *Antioche païenne et chrétienne*, Paris, 1959, p. 43 and next.
- ⁴ SHEPERD, M.H. Jr., "The formation and influence of the Antiochene liturgy", *DOP*, 15, 1961, p. 28.
- ⁵ For details on this tradition, idem, p. 30, n. 26.
- ⁶ LASSUS, J., *Sanctuaires chrétiens de Syrie: essai sur la genèse, la forme et l'usage liturgique des édifices du culte chrétien, en Syrie, du IIIe siècle à la conquête musulmane*, Geuthner, Paris, 1947, p. 201-212.
- ⁷ A recent paper dealing with homiletic view regarding the life of the Early Antiochian church: MAXWELL, J.L., *Christianization and Communication in Late Antiquity. John Chrisostom and his congregation in Antioch*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
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- ⁹ Idem, p. 43-4: CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Stromata*, VI. 5.
- ¹⁰ Expression enshrined by GRABAR, A., *op. cit.*
- ¹¹ EUSEBIUS, *Vita Constantini* 3.50 and *De laudibus Constantini* 9.8-14; we will return to these paragraphs in the following pages
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- ¹³ DEICHMANN, F.W., "Das Oktogon von Antiocheia: Heroon-Martyrion, Palastkirche oder Kathedrale?", *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, LXV, 1972, p. 40-57.
- ¹⁴ KRAUTHEIMER, R., ČURČIĆ, S., *Early Christian...*, p. 75-8.
- ¹⁵ ČURČIĆ, S., „From the Temple of the Sun to the Temple of the Lord: Monotheistic Contribution to Architectural Iconography in Late Antiquity”, C.L. Striker Publishing House, *Architectural Studies in Memory of Richard Krautheimer*, Mainz am Rhein, 1996, p. 55-60.
- ¹⁶ JEROME, *Chronicle*, Olymp. 276, 3, p. 231-2 Helm and Theophanes Publishing House, a. 5819, p. 28. 16-17 De Boor Publishing House; as well as Philostorgius, *HE*, Bidez Publishing House, Leipzig 1913, p. 212 and *Chronicon Miscellaneum ad Annum Domini 724 Pertinens*, publishing

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- 27 LIBANIUS, *Discours XI Antiochikos*, 206; THEODORET, *Histoire Philothée*, VIII, 8, 1-6 și *HE* 4.26.
- 28 EVAGRIUS, *HE* 2.12.
- 29 THEODORET, *Histoire Philothée*, II, 15, 11-20 și 19; VIII, 8, 1-6.
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