

OBSERVATIONS ON THE OCTAGON AT THESSALONIKI

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(Plates XIII-XIV)

One of the most remarkable buildings to have been discovered in the area of the Tetrarchic palace at Thessaloniki is the Octagon. Although known since 1950, it has not really been granted the attention that it warrants. The following pages are an attempt to remedy this situation.

I. A DESCRIPTION OF THE REMAINS

First, a brief description of the surviving remains which were found on the site of the Akçe Mecidiye mosque about 50 m west of the Hippodrome. The mosque was demolished many years ago, but even when it was standing, part of the Octagon was visible: O. Tafrahi's plan of 1913 mentions 'ruines byzantines' on the site.¹ The following account is based on the reports of Ch. Makaronas, first excavator of the building,² and of those who subsequently cleared the site,³ as well as on personal observation.

Externally, the building is octagonal in plan (Pl. XIII, 1; Fig. 8), with its main entrance lying on the side facing the sea (some 250 m away to the SSW.). The octagonal form is also apparent inside, but seven of the eight walls have large niches in them. The internal dimensions are 24.95 m between opposite corners, and 29.50 m (or about 100 Roman feet^{3a}) between the back walls of opposing niches. There is no niche in the side where the main entrance is situated, but that in the wall opposite is somewhat larger than the others. The smaller niches are 5.20 m wide, and the large one 7.05 m. The lengths of the external walls are adjusted to take account of this variation: at the large niche the length of the wall is 11.40 m; the walls immediately adjacent measure 15.15 m, and the others, so far as can be judged, 13.45 m. The niches, incidentally, are slightly greater than semicircles, for the centres from which they were drawn lie on the imaginary circle which passes through the angles of the corners.

The masonry consists of alternating bands of green schist and bricks, five rows of bricks in the bands of the large niche and four in the others. Any corners are edged in brick. About 3.50 m up the wall of the main niche is an equal-armed cross in a circle with a stylized vegetal motif on each side, all done in brick (Fig. 9). The bricks of the Octagon are identical with those of the first phase of the Rotunda,⁴ measuring 0.30/0.31 m × 0.45 m × 0.035/0.05 m, and bearing simple marks made with fingers while the clay was still wet.⁵

The walls were covered with revetments of white marble and red and green porphyry, which were placed on a layer of plaster. This marble incrustation was attached by means of iron nails, some of which are still *in situ*, wedged in placed with slivers of stone. The revetment must have been articulated by means of pilasters of which four more or less complete capitals (incorporating representations of Jupiter, a Dioscurus, a Cabirus and Hygieia), as well as two fragments (of a city Tyche and a youth), were discovered when the destruction fill was being removed.

Two successive floors have been found, the earlier one of polychrome mosaic some 30 cm below the later floor of panels of small white marble and *verde antico* slabs. Set into this later floor, immediately inside the main entrance were four (of

¹O. Tafrahi, *Topographie de Thessalonique* (Paris, 1913), plan at end.

²Ch. Makaronas, *Τὸ ὀκτάγωνον τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης*, *Praktika* 1950, 303-321; idem, *Χρονικά Ἀρχαιολογικά Μακεδονία* ii (1954-52), 594-6.

³M. Karamanoli-Siganidou, 'Ἀνασκαφαὶ Πλατείας Νασαρίνου', *ArchDelt* xx (1965), *Chron.*, 408-9, Fig. 1, pls. 454, 456-8; Ph. Petsas, 'Ἀνακτορικὸν σύμπλεγμα Γαλερίου', *ArchDelt* xxi (1966), *Chron.*, 332, Fig. 1, 333, pl. 340 β and γ, 341; idem, *ArchDelt* xxii (1967), *Chron.*, 387-9, Figs. 7-9 (plans), 391 (plans

reproduced at 1:100 in Petsas, *Χρονικά Ἀρχαιολογικά, Μακεδονία* viii [1969], pls. 1-2 between pp. 152-3).

^{3a}cf. the dimensions of 100 × 200 Roman feet in the Basilica at Trier. A. Boethius and J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Etruscan and Roman Architecture* (1970), 518.

⁴E. Hébrard, 'Les travaux du Service Archéologique de l'Armée d'Orient à l'arc de triomphe "de Galère" et à l'église Saint-Georges de Salonique', *BCH* xlv (1920) 23, Fig. 9.

⁵Makaronas, *op. cit.* 309, Fig. 6.

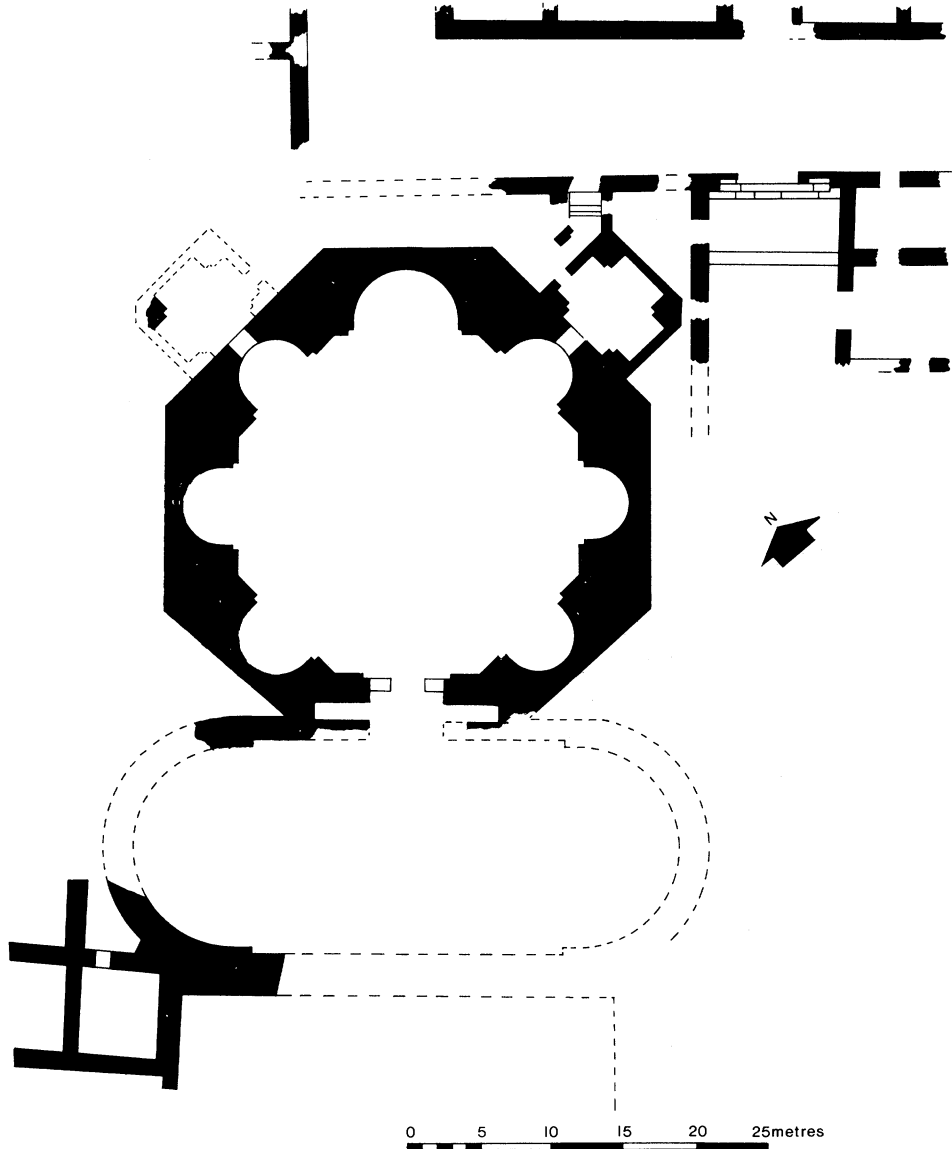


FIG. 8. THE OCTAGON AT THESSALONIKI: PLAN

which three are extant) *emblemata* of *opus sectile* (approx. 0.90 × 0.90 m) laid on a bed of coarse pottery.

When the excavations of another part of the palace, in Plateia Navarinou, were extended to link up with the Octagon, ante-chambers were found of cruciform plan, probably once domed and measuring approximately 7 × 5 m, leading to doorways set in the backs of the niches on either side of the principal niche. The ante-chamber to the east is well preserved, but that to the west was largely destroyed by the construction of Turkish-period ovens. Enough remains, however, to suggest that it was similar, if not identical with the other one. These ante-chambers have the same style of brickwork as the rest of the Octagon, but were built up against it rather than being bonded with it.

As already stated, the main entrance lay to the south. It was originally 4.90 m wide, but was subsequently narrowed by the addition of bricks placed up against the marble incrustation. This later doorway was 2.25 m wide. Outside, a considerable number of fragments of polychrome mosaic were reported by Makaronas. They were



1. THE OCTAGON AT THESSALONIKI: GENERAL VIEW FROM THE SOUTH-EAST (see p. 111 f.). 2. DETAIL OF ARCH OF GALERIUS, THESSALONIKI (see p. 116)

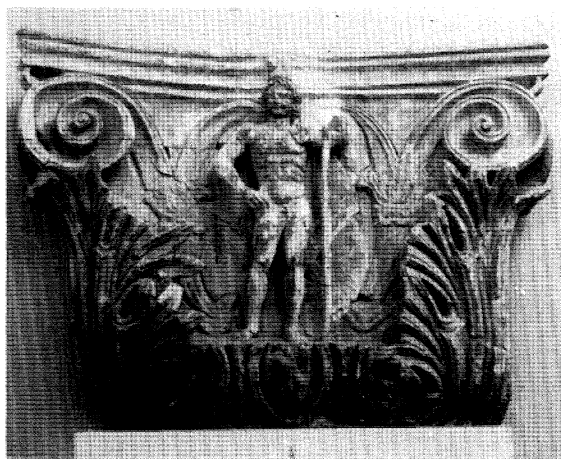
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1



2



3



4

PILASTER CAPITALS FROM THE OCTAGON AT THESSALONIKI (see p. 116), 1. JUPITER. 2. CABIRUS. 3. DIOSCURUS. 4. HYGIEA
Photographs by B. Brenk. Copyright reserved

decorated with guilloche and linear designs and consisted of white, grey, dark green, and red *tesserae* (a combination which frequently recurs in the mosaics of the palace). A capital was found some 40 m south-west of the Octagon and a column base 0.96 m in diameter on the south-east side, neither, however, *in situ*. In 1953, walls 1.20 m thick were found parallel to the entrance of the Octagon and at a distance of 25 m from it. Two monolithic columns were also found, as well as an architrave and two capitals.⁶ In 1955, part of a hemicycle 14.20 m in diameter was found to the south-west of the main entrance of the Octagon. It was apparently used as a cistern until the fourteenth century.⁷ In 1968, part of another similar hemicycle was found lying opposite, to the left of the main entrance of the Octagon.⁸ Between them, the two hemicycles form a vestibule to the Octagon of monumental proportions.

II. THE SIZE OF THE PALACE COMPLEX

The first point to be considered is the fact that the building faces southwards in the direction of the sea. The principal entrances of other parts of the palace also face in this direction. Thus, the entrance to the Rotunda is in the same position as that of the Octagon; in the excavated area in Plateia Navarinou the relative importance of the south side is emphasized by three wide steps leading up to the ambulatory, and there is evidence for a route leading into the southern end of the Hippodrome (which ran along the eastern edge of the palace).⁹

In addition, there are at least two cases of north-facing walls covered with painted frescoes imitating marble incrustation, in contrast with other walls which bear traces of real marble revetments.¹⁰ Apart from what they tell us about the financial corner-cutting practised by the builders of the palace, these facts point to the likelihood that the main routes through the palace area were from south to north. The initial impression for the visitor coming up from the south would be created by the marble revetments in front of him; he would tend not to notice the painted frescoes behind. If this were so, we have a case for arguing that the palace originally stretched as far as the sea shore, Antioch¹¹ and Split¹² provide useful parallels, for in those places the Tetrarchic palaces had porticoes over-looking the Orontes and the Adriatic respectively. Indeed, such an arrangement seems to have been common in other imperial residences of the period. Some commentators believe that Ausonius had the villa at Konz near Trier in mind when he wrote of 'innumeris super nitentia tecta columnis',¹³ and at Mogorjelo there was a façade with porticoes dominating the countryside.¹⁴ It seems that a façade open to the exterior was often preferred to an inward-looking peristyle in the case of residences built on a height, by a river, or by the sea,¹⁵ and something similar is called for at Thessaloniki.

⁶ BCH lxxviii (1954), 138.

⁷ BCH lxxx (1956), 318.

⁸ Ph. Petsas, Γαλεριανόν συγκρότημα, *Arch. Delt* 24 (1969) Chron., 295-7, Fig. 3, pl. 305 β.

⁹ M. Vickers, 'The Hippodrome at Thessaloniki', *JRS* lxii (1972), 25-32.

¹⁰ e.g. (1) On the north side of Plateia Navarinou, Ph. Papadopoulou, 'Ανασκαφαί πλατείας Ναυαρίνου Θεσσαλονίκης, *ArchDelt* xix (1964), Chron., 332, pl. 378 α and β; S. Pelekanides, 'Die Malerei der konstantinischen Zeit', *Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses für christliche Archäologie, Trier, 1965* (Vatican City/Berlin, 1969), 216-17, Figs. 1-3, pls. 111-12. (2) In the building discovered in 1968 on Odos Dimitriou Gounari, a plan of which is published in Ph. Petsas, Αίγαι - Πέλλα - Θεσσαλονίκη, *Symposium 'Ancient Macedonia'*, (Thessaloniki, 1969), plan Γ opposite p. 244.

¹¹ Libanius, *Antiochus* 204-7 (= *Or.* xi, 6 ed. R. Foerster [Leipzig, 1903] 507-8): τοῦ μέσου γὰρ, ὃν ὀμφαλὸν προσεῖληφεν, ἐφάπτεται καὶ πρὸς τὴν ἕξω τοῦ ποταμοῦ προβέβηκεν, ὥστε καὶ τὸ τεῖχος ἀντ' ἐπάλλξων κίονας δεξάμενον θέα βασιλεῖ πρέπουσα κατεσκεύασται τοῦ ποταμοῦ μὲν ὑπορρέοντος, τῶν προαστείων δὲ πανταχόθεν εὐαχούντων τὰς ὄψεις. Cf. G. Downey, 'The palace of Diocletian at

Antioch', *Annales Archéologiques de Syrie* iii (1953), 108 (hereafter, Downey, 1953); idem, *A History of Antioch in Syria* (1961), 319 (hereafter, Downey, 1961).

¹² The clearest impression is given by R. Adam, *Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalato in Dalmatia* (London, 1764), pl. 7. cf. E. Hébrard and J. Zeiller, *Spalato, le palais de Dioclétien* (Paris, 1912), 'Vue générale à vol d'oiseau' (frontispiece), and 48-52, plate: 'Façade sur la mer. état actuel' (between pp. 48 and 49).

¹³ E. Gose, 'Die kaiserliche Sommerresidenz in Konz, Landkreis Saarburg', *Germania* xxxix (1961), 204-6; W. Reusch (ed.), *Frühchristliche Zeugnisse im Einzugsgebiet von Rhein und Mosel* (1965), 150-2; E. M. Wightman, *Roman Trier and the Treviri* (1970), 165-8.

¹⁴ E. Dyggve and H. Vettters, 'Mogorjelo; ein spätantiker Herrensitz im römischen Dalmatien', *Schriften der Balkankommission, Antiquarische Abtg.* xiii (1966), 53-4, Figs. 24-5.

¹⁵ cf. the remarks of N. Duval 'La place de Split dans l'architecture antique du bas-empire', *Urbs* iv (Split, 1961-62), 93, and of K. M. Swoboda, *Römische und romanische Paläste*, 3rd edn. (1969), 133 ff., 288, n. 50.

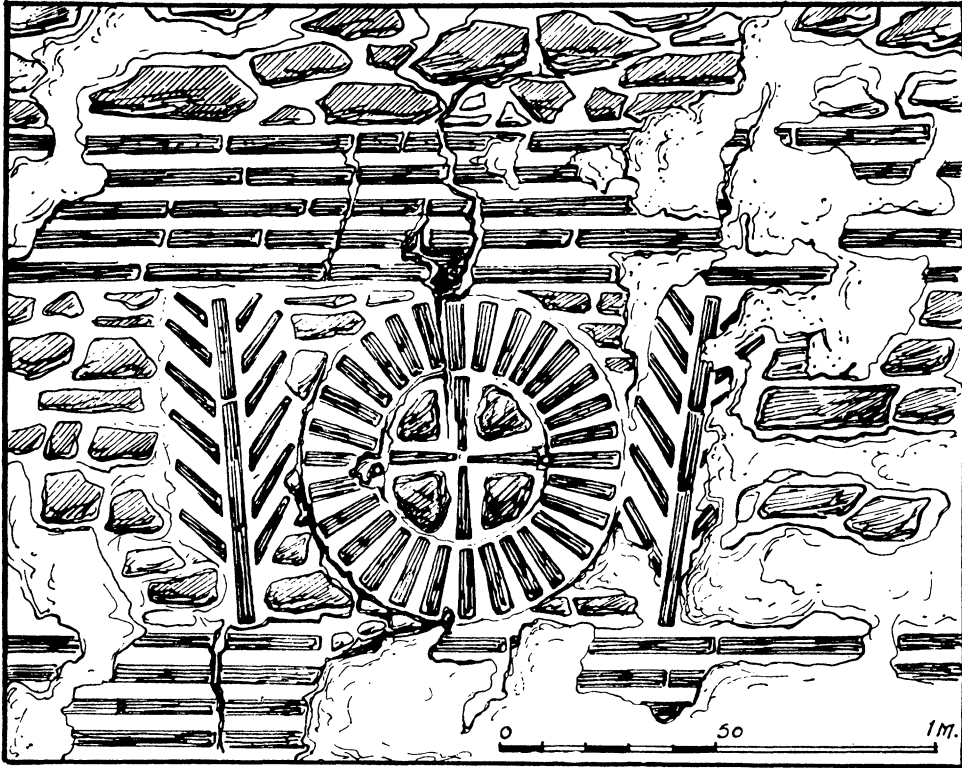


FIG. 9. THE OCTAGON AT THESSALONIKI: CROSS AND PALMS IN THE PRINCIPAL APSE

A palace stretching from the sea to the Rotunda would have been large (some 800×250 m), but such dimensions were not out of place on the context of Tetrarchic palaces. The schematic plan of the palace at Antioch published by the excavators suggests that two of its sides were over 500 m long,¹⁶ and at Trier the greatest dimension of the palace area (which stretched from the Kaiserthermen in the south to the Double Church in the north, and from these two in the west to the hippodrome in the east) exceeds 800 m.¹⁷ Split was somewhat smaller with overall dimensions of c. 210×180 m, but then it was in the view of some sources, at least, only a *villa* rather than a *palatium*.¹⁸ Lactantius' charge that Diocletian was possessed of an 'infinita quaedam cupiditas aedificandi'¹⁹ seems to have had a strong basis in fact, but even for a Tetrarch such large-scale operations must have taken *time*; this point will be taken up again later.

III. THE VICTORY OF THE CROSS?

The cross in the main apse of the Octagon requires an explanation, but any attempt to provide one is bound to be tentative. As already stated, the whole composition consists of an equilateral cross surrounded by rays, standing between two stylized plant ornaments. According to Makaronas, they belong to the first period of the building, having been inserted while the wall was being erected and not later. Almost immediately afterwards they were covered over with marble revetment, traces of the plaster for which can still be seen adhering to the face of the wall (Fig. 9).

¹⁶ Downey 1953, Pl. II, 1961, Fig. II.

¹⁷ F. Oelmann, 'Zur Deutung des römischen Kerns im Trierer Dom', *Bonner Jahrbücher* cxxvii (1922), 130-188; Wightman, *op. cit.*, 98, 121, Fig. 12; W. Reusch in *Rettet das römische Trier*, (*Denkschrift der Archäologischen Trier-Kommission* (1972)), 9-14, and plan.

¹⁸ cf. Eutropius, ix, 28: 'Diocletianus privatus in villa, quae haud procul a Salonis est . . .'; St. Jerome, *Chron.* a. 2332: 'Diocletianus haud procul a Salonis in villa sua Spalato moritur.' See Duval, *op. cit.* 70, for a detailed discussion of this question.

¹⁹ *De mort, pers* vii, 8.

Makaronas considered the motifs to be Christian and explained their presence by suggesting that Christian workmen inserted them surreptitiously.²⁰ This explanation was rejected by P. Lemerle, though he confessed himself unable to suggest another one,²¹ and B. Brenk doubts whether the decoration was Christian at all.²² R. Hoddinott saw in the equilateral cross surrounded by rays the symbol 'of the sun god and his fiery chariot' and suggested that the plants might be 'symbols of fertility, perhaps immense ears of corn such as those that sprang from the death wound of the bull slain by Mithras.'²³ An unlikely story.

Makaronas saw the plants as cypresses and Brenk as Trees of Life, but it seems much more likely that they are palm branches.²⁴ Trees would have been represented upright; these growths are askew. Palms were regarded by both pagan and Christian writers as signs of victory;²⁵ such being the case, what significance would palms together with a cross have?

It is tempting to see in the decoration of the apse of the Octagon a representation in iconographic terms of the vision of Constantine, the Cross and the palms signifying $\tau\acute{o}\upsilon\tau\omega\ \nu\acute{\iota}\kappa\alpha$. Much has been written concerning what Constantine saw, or rather, what he was generally supposed to have seen – whether he saw ✠ or ✡ . The argument seems to turn on the interpretation to be given to *transversa* in Lactantius' account of the vision.²⁶ If the Thessaloniki cross *is* relevant to the problem, then it would seem to point to ✠ , being the nearest approximation possible in brickwork. The story of Constantine's vision was possibly well known at an early date: the graffito HOC VIN[CE] is said to occur at Rome, on Wall G in St. Peter's, which was earlier than the construction of Constantine's monument in honour of St. Peter in 315.²⁷ Unfortunately, however, immediately next to HOC VIN[CE] is a chi-rho monogram, which must mean that the story which gained currency referred to ✡ ²⁸ rather than ✠ , which in turn makes it most unlikely that the latter was meant in the Octagon at Thessaloniki, and so another explanation must be sought.

Perhaps the symbols simply represent the Victory of the Cross, and there is a good historical context for this, namely, Galerius' Edict of Toleration which was issued from Serdica on April 30th, 311, only days before his death. The Edict was observed by both of his successors: Licinius in Europe and Maximinus in Asia Minor.²⁹ It is

²⁰ op. cit. (n. 2), 316.

²¹ *Revue des Études Byzantines* x (1952), 205.

²² 'Die Datierung der Reliefs am Hadrianstempel in Ephesos und das Problem der tetrarchischen Skulptur des Ostens', *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* xviii (1968), 248-9.

²³ *Early Byzantine Churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia* (London, 1963), 123-4. Hoddinott would have been on *slightly* surer ground had he identified the plants as cypresses, for such trees were sacred to Sol in Syria; see the Palmyrene altar to Sol in the Capitoline Museum which has cypresses on one side: H. Stuart Jones, *The Sculptures of the Museo Capitolino* (Oxford, 1912), pl. 9, II, 1c; F. Cumont, *Syria* ix (1928), 104-6, pl. 39, right; Comte du Mesnil du Buisson, *Les tessères et les monnaies de Palmyre* (Paris, 1962), 116, Fig. 70 (pp. 264-5, 438-9 and 558-9 in particular deal with Sol and cypresses). A cypress is visible on a relief on the Arch of Galerius, next to what H. P. Laubscher identifies as a Temple of Sol (see his forthcoming *Der Reliefschmuck des Galeriusbogens in Thessaloniki*, under panel B II 17 [whence the references above]); also Ch. Makaronas, 'Η καμάρα, τὸ θριαμβικὸ τόξο τοῦ Γαλερίου στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη', *Thessaloniki* 1969, Fig. 29).

²⁴ This possibility was first suggested, only to be dismissed, by Hoddinott, l.c.

²⁵ e.g. Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att.* iii, 6: 'Ideo in certaminibus palmam signum esse victoriae placuisse, quoniam ingenium eiusmodi ligni est, ut urgentibus opprimantibusque non cedat' (quoting Plutarch); St. Gregory the Great, *In Ez. hom.* xvii: 'Quid per palmam, nisi praemia victoriae, designatur?' Cf. the punning tombstone from Rome with a palm branch and the inscription ΒΙΚΤΩΡΙΑ +, F. van der Meer and

C. Mohrmann, *Atlas of the Early Christian World* (1958), 141, Fig. 463.

²⁶ The relevant texts are conveniently assembled in J. B. Aufhauser (ed.), *Konstantins Kreuzesvision* (Bonn, 1912). References to recent literature are to be found in M. Sordi, *Il cristianesimo e Roma* (1965), 452-3; and in A. Alföldi, *The Conversion of Constantine and Pagan Rome* (1948), viii.

²⁷ M. Guarducci, *I graffiti sotto la confessione di S. Pietro* ii (1958), 14 ff.; idem, *La Tomba di Pietro* (1959), 117-8; idem, *The Tomb of St. Peter* (1960), 123 ff. Accepted by P. Frazer, *JRS* lii (1962), 216-17, but not everyone would agree with Guarducci's reading, see reviews of *I graffiti* by, e.g., A. Ferrua, *RACrist* xxxv (1959), 245-6 (Guarducci's reply, *Archeologia Classica* xiii [1961], 230-1, Fig. 44), and J. M. C. Toynbee, *The Dublin Review*, No. 481 (1959), 241.

²⁸ The symbol appears on medallions of Constantine dated to 315, A. Alföldi, 'The initials of Christ on the helmet of Constantine,' *Studies in Roman Economic and Social History in honour of A. C. Johnson* (1957), 303-311; K. Kraft, 'Das Silbermedallion Konstantins mit dem Christusmonogram auf dem Helm,' *Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte* v-vi (1954-55), 151-178, pls. 11-12; and in 317 on the obverses of a few coins of Siscia, again on Constantine's helmet, *Roman Imperial Coinage* vii (1966), 417-18. Cf. J. M. C. Toynbee's observations in 'A new Roman mosaic pavement found in Dorset', *JRS* liv (1964), 10-11.

²⁹ J. R. Knipping, 'The Edict of Galerius reconsidered', *Revue Belge de Philologie* i (1922), 693; cf. A. Alföldi, op. cit. 9-10.

against this background that the insertion of cross and palms should probably be seen. They could hardly have been inserted surreptitiously earlier as Makaronas seems to suggest. Nor could they have been set in place very much later than 311, for the pilaster capitals, which come from much higher in the building, bear unmistakably pagan subjects. A scenario which would resolve most of the difficulties would run as follows. The palace, owing to its great size, had taken a long time to build; in May 311, the walls of the as yet unfinished Octagon were standing to a height of 3.50 m; news of the Edict of Toleration was received and the cross and palms were inserted; building then continued according to the design—including pagan motifs—which had been approved by Galerius long before.

IV. THE SCULPTURAL DECORATION

Four more or less complete pilaster capitals, as well as fragments of a further two were found in the destruction fill of the Octagon. They conform to a type of capital which had been known since the early second century A.D., but which was still in vogue in Tetrarchic times. Such capitals are characterized by a row of ovolos along the lower edge, with acanthus leaves on either side. Above, there are usually a pair of volutes and an abacus. There is very often some kind of central motif extending from the ovolos to the abacus. At its most elaborate, this can be a mythological figure, as in the case of the Thessaloniki examples, and at its simplest, a vegetal ornament. The type seems to have been most prevalent in the eastern part of the Empire; and most of those found at Rome have been attributed to eastern workshops.³⁰ Some of the earliest examples in the east are on the Arch of Hadrian at Athens,³¹ and several other second-century examples in Greece and Asia Minor, notably, in and around Athens, at Pergamum, and at Aizanoi, have been listed by E. Weigand and W. D. Heilmeyer.³² W. Hoepfner has recently published an interesting group of late Severan pilaster- and anta-capitals from Heraclea Pontica, many of which have full length mythological figures on them.³³

Simplified versions of this type of pilaster capital appear on the top panels of the south pier of the Arch of Galerius at Thessaloniki (Pl. XIII, 2). There is but a single ovolo with a pair of stylized acanthi on either side. In the middle, between the volutes, is a simple vegetal ornament the top of which touches the lower edge of the abacus. All the ingredients of the Octagon capitals are here.

The complete capitals from the Octagon have as their central motifs figures of Jupiter (Pl. XIV, 1),³⁴ a Cabirus (ib. 2),³⁵ a Dioscurus (ib. 3),³⁶ and Hygieia (ib. 4).³⁷

³⁰ E. Weigand, 'Baalbek und Rom, die römische Reichskunst in ihrer Entwicklung und Differenzierung', *Jdl* xxix (1914), 89; W. D. Heilmeyer, *Korinthische Normalkapitelle*, (RM ErgH xvi, 1970), 169-170.

³¹ J. Stuart and N. Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens* iii (1794), pls. vi-viii; Heilmeyer, op. cit. 74, pl. 18, 1-2; J. Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* (1971), 254-7, Figs. 325-8.

³² Weigand, op. cit. 90; Heilmeyer, op. cit. 74-7; see also E. von Mercklin, *Antike Figuralkapitelle* (1962) *passim*.

³³ W. Hoepfner, 'Herakleia Pontike, Eine baugeschichtliche Untersuchung. Forschungen an der Nordküste Kleinasiens', *Osterr. Akad. d. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl., Denkschr.* lxxxix (1966). See too, the capitals from Ivajlovgrad, Bulgaria: J. Mladenova, 'La villa romaine d'Ivajlovgrad', *Actes du premier congrès international des études balkaniques et sud-est européennes* (Sofia, 1970), 527-34; ead., 'Chapiteaux de revêtement de la villa près d'Ivajlovgrad', *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Archéologie* xxxii (Belgrade, 1970), 129-147 (of second-century date).

³⁴ The right-hand volute is restored. Karamanoli-

Siganidou, *ArchDelt* cit. (n. 3), 409, pl. 458β; Petsas, *Makedonika* vii (1967), 297, pl. 10; Brenk, op. cit. (n. 22), 248-250, pl. 74, 2; *BCH* xcii (1968), 904, Fig. 6. All the capitals are now in the Thessaloniki Archaeological Museum, and, when complete, they are all approximately 0.61 m high, and 0.82 m wide above, and 0.61 m below.

³⁵ Karamanoli-Siganidou, op. cit. (n. 3), 409, pl. 458γ; Petsas, *Makedonika* cit. (n. 3), 297, pl. 11α; *JHS Archaeological Reports 1967-68*, 16, Fig. 22; Brenk, op. cit. (n. 21), 248-250, pl. 83, 1, incorrectly identified as Hermes. That the figure is a Cabirus is clear from the drinking horn held in his right hand, and the traces of the attribute held in his left hand, above his left shoulder.

³⁶ The right-hand volute is restored, Karamanoli-Siganidou *ArchDelt* cit. (n. 3), 409, pl. 458α; Petsas, *Makedonika* cit. (n. 34), 297, pl. 10β; Brenk, op. cit. (n. 21), 284-250, pl. 80, 2.

³⁷ Karamanoli-Siganidou *ArchDelt* cit. (n. 3), 409, pl. 458δ; Petsas, *Makedonika* cit. (n. 34) 297, pl. 11β; Brenk, op. cit. (n. 21), 248-250, pl. 81, 1; *BCH* xcii (1968), 904, Fig. 7.

Only one of the fragments can be identified—as the Tyche of Thessaloniki³⁸—while the other is part of a male torso.³⁹ The capitals are carved by four separate hands in two distinct styles. The deities represented on them are all known to have had local cults in their honour, and one of these, Jupiter, had a particular relevance to the philosophy underlying the Tetrarchic régime: in 286 Diocletian had taken the title Iovius and Maximian that of Herculus. Diocletian was to create policy and Maximian to carry it out.⁴⁰ Galerius was a member of the Jovian house, and a nude Jupiter, like the one on the Octagon capital, leaning on a sceptre with an eagle at his feet, is a common motif on the Tetrarchic coinage of Thessaloniki and elsewhere.⁴¹ But the cult of Zeus had long been known locally: he appears on the pseudo-autonomous coinage of Thessaloniki in the Augustan and Julio-Claudian periods,⁴² and an inscription has been found in the city referring to the cult of Zeus Eleutherios and Rome.⁴³

Evidence for the cult of a single Cabirus at Thessaloniki has been assembled by C. F. Edson.⁴⁴ There is very little epigraphic evidence (one inscription from the city refers to the πατρ[ί]ου θεοῦ Καβείρ[ου]—‘the ancestral god Cabirus’),⁴⁵ but representations are very common on coins (rather similar, in fact, to the Cabirus on the Octagon capital),⁴⁶ and there is a very pertinent passage in Firmicus Maternus (fl. A.D. 343-350): ‘Hunc eundem Macedonum colit stulta persuasio. Hic est Cabirus cui Thessalonicenses quondam cruento cruentis manibus supplicabant.’⁴⁷ From the Flavian period at the latest Cabirus was the tutelary deity of Thessaloniki. The cult of the Dioscuri, judging by the reliefs of idealized horsemen on either side of the Golden Gate (now destroyed),⁴⁸ and the presence of a single Dioscurus in high relief on the Incantadas (now in the Louvre),⁴⁹ was also popular. Edson claimed that the cults of Cabirus and the Dioscuri were conflated in Roman Thessaloniki,⁵⁰ but P. Hemberg has argued to the contrary, maintaining that these cults were never fused in Macedonia.⁵¹ The discovery of these representations of Cabirus and a Dioscurus is clearly relevant to the argument, but it is difficult to know what, precisely, they signify. It could, on the one hand, be evidence for them having retained separate identities with different attributes right down to the end of paganism, or alternatively, the fact that they were found in close proximity might be evidence for the conflation of the cults. On balance, though, the former explanation seems preferable, especially as two Dioscuri appear together in the background of one of the panels on the Arch of Galerius.⁵²

Hygiea occurs on an unpublished inscription in the Thessaloniki Archaeological Museum which records that a certain Sosias, son of Sosipolis, set up a monument to Asclepius, Hygiea and the Morrylioi (whoever they were).⁵³ The Tyche of Thessaloniki appears again on another piece of Tetrarchic sculpture from the city—on the small marble arch found in 1957 some 40 m south of the Octagon, which bears, on the right,

³⁸ Karamanoli-Siganidou, *ArchDelt* cit., 409: Μικρὸν τεμάχιον ἐκ τοῦ προσώπου ἀγαλματίου ὁμοίου πρὸς τὰ ἀνωτέρω, ἀλλὰ ὀλίγον μεγαλύτερου, τύχης πόλεως (τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης) μαρτυρεῖ τὴν ὑπαρξίν ἐτέρων ὁμοίων γλυπτῶν.

³⁹ Makaronas, *Praktika*, 1950, 312, Fig. 10.

⁴⁰ W. Seston, *Diocletien et la Tétrarchie* i (Paris, 1946), 217.

⁴¹ *RIC* vi, 710. See too, the panel on the Arch of Galerius where Zeus and Heracles are represented in relief on the altar in which Diocletian and Galerius are sacrificing: see H. P. Laubscher's forthcoming monograph (n. 22, above), under panel B II 17; Makaronas, ‘Ἡ Καμάρα’, Fig. 43; the clearest published photograph is A. Grabar, *The Beginnings of Christian Art* (1967), 148, Fig. 152. Zeus also appears in the background of Laubscher's panel B II 21; and Makaronas, op. cit. Fig. 34.

⁴² H. Gaebler, *Die antiken Münzen von Makedonia und Paionia*, 2. Abtg. (Berlin, 1935), 122, no. 25, pl. 23, 14.

⁴³ C. F. Edson, ‘Macedonica II, State Cults of Thessalonica’, *Harv. St. Class. Philol.* li (1940), 129-135. Now = *JG* x, 1, 2, no. 32. Cf. *ibid.* nos. 62, 259, 275 and 276.

⁴⁴ ‘Cults of Thessalonica (Macedonica III)’, *Harv. Theol. Rev.*, xli (1948), 188-204.

⁴⁵ Edson, op. cit. 192-4. Now = *JG* x, 1, 2, no. 199.

⁴⁶ e.g. Gaebler, op. cit. (n. 42), 127 no. 52, pl. 24, 12.

⁴⁷ *De errore profanarum religionum* 11 (ed. Ziegler, Munich, 1953), 54.

⁴⁸ L. Heuzey and M. Daumet, *Mission archéologique de Macédoine* (Paris, 1876), pl. 22 bis.

⁴⁹ L. Guerrini, ‘*Las Incantadas di Salonicco*’, *Archeologia Classica* xiii (1961), 55-8, pl. 21, 1.

⁵⁰ op. cit. (n. 43), 197-9.

⁵¹ *Die Kabiren* (1950), 210.

⁵² Laubscher's panel B II 21 (= Makaronas, ‘Ἡ Καμάρα’ (cit. n. 24) Fig. 34). First recognized as Dioscuri by S. Reinach, *Répertoire de reliefs grecs et romains* i (1909), 390.

⁵³ Referred to by D. Kanatsoulis, *Μακεδονική Προσωπογραφία*, supplement (Thessaloniki, 1967), 31, no. 1767. It now appears that Μόρρυλος was a city in nearby Paionia; cf. E. Mastrokostas, ‘Άγνωστοί πόλεις τῆς Παιονίας’, *Second International Symposium on Ancient Macedonia*, Thessaloniki 1973 (forthcoming).

a portrait presumably of Galerius, and on the left, a head of Tyche.⁵⁴ Finally, a recently published inscription from the Serapeum refers to the Tyche of Thessaloniki.⁵⁵

V. THE SECOND PERIOD OF THE OCTAGON

At some unknown date, the floor of the Octagon was renewed. The original mosaic floor was covered with about 0.30 m of packing for a new floor consisting of small marble slabs, many pieces of which were re-used from earlier buildings. That the new floor cannot have been laid so very long after the construction of the Octagon is indicated by the presence of the four *emblemata* done in *opus sectile* just inside the main entrance. They measured 0.90 × 0.90 m (or 3 × 3 ft.). Three have survived and are now in the Thessaloniki Archaeological Museum.⁵⁶

Emblemata such as these are fairly common in third- and fourth-century contexts, although few are quite so elaborate. The floor of a room in the House of Jason Magnus at Cyrene, which was probably destroyed in 262, was paved with them.⁵⁷ In the Villa of Dar Buc Ammera at Zliten in Tripolitania, *emblemata* alternate with fish mosaics. S. Aurigemma dates them to A.D. 70,⁵⁸ but K. Parlasca has plausibly argued for a date at the end of the third century.⁵⁹ A total of seventy-one panels of *opus sectile* are preserved in the floor of a large peristyle house at Carthage. There, too, they alternate with panels of mosaic. J. W. Salomonson dates them, on stylistic grounds, to around 300.⁶⁰ There are several *emblemata* at Ostia; the one from Domus Reg. V, Is. X, 1 is dated by G. Becatti to between the end of the third century and the early fourth,⁶¹ that in the House of Amor and Psyche to between the end of the third century and the middle of the fourth,⁶² and those in the House of the Nymphaeum to the fourth century.⁶³ None of these *emblemata*, in fact, are to be dated later than this, and it seems that a similar date for those of the Octagon is called for. It is likely that the narrowing of the main entrance took place at the same time as the laying of the new floor—at some time in the fourth century.

VI. THE FUNCTION OF THE OCTAGON

Since such a comparatively small area of the Tetrarchic palace at Thessaloniki is known in any detail, it is impossible to know for certain the precise function of the Octagon in the overall plan. All one can do with any confidence is to indicate what it

⁵⁴ The arch, complete: *BCH* lxxxii (1958), 757, Fig. 4; *JHS Arch. Reports 1956-57*, 13; Hoddimott, op. cit. pl. 9, b; L. Vlad Borelli, 'Salonico' *EAA* vi (1965), 1084, Fig. 1196; G. M. A. Hanfmann, *Classical Sculpture* (1967), 339, Fig. 313; A. Grabar, *Cahiers archéologiques* xvii (1967), 78, Fig. 19; N. Papahadjis, *Monuments of Thessalonike*, 3rd edn. (Thessaloniki, 1968), 12; R. Bianchi Bandinelli, *Rome, the Late Empire* (1971), 305-6, Fig. 283. Galerius: A. Rüschi, 'Das kaiserzeitliche Porträt in Makedonien', *JdI* lxxxiv (1969), 194-5, Fig. 109; Makaronas, op. cit. Fig. 48. Tyche: *BCH* lxxxii (1958), 757, Fig. 5; A. N. Letsas, 'ιστορία τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης' (Thessaloniki, 1961), frontispiece; Makaronas, op. cit. pl. 47.

⁵⁵ *IG* x, 1, 2, no. 257.

⁵⁶ Karamanoli-Siganidou, *ArchDelt* xx (1965), Chron., 409, pl. 457. They appear on the plans of the Octagon in *Arch. Delt.* xxii (1967), 388-9, Figs. 8-9, and in *Makedonika* ix (1969), pls. 1 and 2, between pp. 152 and 153.

⁵⁷ P. Mingazzini, *L'Insula di Giasone Magno a Cirene* (1966), 139-143, pls. 19, 4, 20-1. For the date of the house's destruction see R. G. Goodchild's review of Mingazzini, *Libya antiqua* iv-v (1966-67), 259, and idem, *Kyrene und Apollonia* (1971), 85, pl. 21.

⁵⁸ S. Aurigemma, *I mosaici di Tripolitania* (1960), 56 Figs. 136-9, 177, followed by L. Foucher, 'Sur les

mosaïques de Zliten', *Libya antiqua* i (1964), 9-20.

⁵⁹ *Gnomon* xxiv (1954), 111. This date is also preferred by Salomonson (see note 60).

⁶⁰ J. W. Salomonson, *La mosaïque aux chevaux de l'antiquarium de Carthage* (1965).

⁶¹ G. Becatti, 'Mosaici e pavimenti marmorei', *Scavi di Ostia* iv (1961), 230-1 pl. 209, no. 429.

⁶² *ibid.*, 27-9, pls. 209 and 219, no. 49. This panel and those from the House of the Nymphaeum are closest in style to those of the Octagon.

⁶³ *ibid.*, 103-4, pl. 207, no. 189. The fine, but roughly laid, panels in the chancel of the sixth-century West Church at Apollonia in Cyrenaica are assumed by the excavators to have been robbed from an earlier structure; see W. M. Widrig and R. G. Goodchild, *PBSR* xxviii (1960), 78, pls. 27a and 32e. The same is presumably true in the case of the even more untidy *opus sectile* in the contemporary church at Ras el-Hilal; see R. M. Harrison, 'A sixth-century church at Ras el-Hilal, Cyrenaica', *PBSR* xxxii (1964), 5, 14, pl. 8b, c. In view of this, it would not be surprising if the *opus sectile* panels that formerly adorned the walls of the nave of the basilica of St. Demetrius in Thessaloniki (G. and M. Soteriou, 'Ἡ Βασιλικὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης', Athens, 1952, pls. 1b and 2a) were *spolia* from an earlier building. According to the scale drawings now preserved in the Courtauld Institute, they too measured 0.90 × 0.90 m.

was *not* used for: it was neither a mausoleum⁶⁴ nor a church.⁶⁵ Both suggestions have been made, and though neither has gained wide currency, it might be as well to nip them in the bud.

The reason why the Octagon, despite some superficial resemblances to a mausoleum, cannot have been built as one, is that the niches, being every one semicircular, are an unsuitable shape. Since mausolea in the early fourth century were meant to house sarcophagi, at least some of their niches had to be rectangular. The regular pattern, in fact, in contemporary circular or octagonal mausolea was to have alternating rectangular and semicircular niches, with the rectangular ones in the more important positions: always opposite the entrance and usually in the centre of the walls to each side. Such was the case, for example in the Mausoleum at Split,⁶⁶ and in several mausolea in the environs of Rome: the so-called Mausoleum of Romulus on the Via Appia (early fourth century),⁶⁷ the Tor de' Schiavi (early fourth century),⁶⁸ the Mausoleum of Helen (Torre Pignattara, first quarter of the fourth century),⁶⁹ and the Mausoleum of Constantina (S. Costanza, second quarter of the fourth century).⁷⁰ The eight rectangular niches in the Rotunda at Thessaloniki are a strong argument for its having been built as a Mausoleum,⁷¹ even though it was never in fact used for Galerius.⁷² The Octagon, however, can never have been intended as such.

The suggestion that the Octagon might have been at some time a church was first made seriously when part of the right-hand hemicycle of the vestibule to the south of the Octagon was discovered.⁷³ It was assumed that it belonged to a baptistery built when the Octagon became a church. As is clear from Figure 8, however, this explanation simply is impossible.

When the Rotunda became a Christian place of worship, the canonical Christian orientation was adopted, and an apse was added to the east. But there is no evidence for a change in the orientation of the Octagon. If the chronology proposed above is correct, the first floor, of mosaic, would have been laid *c.* 311, and the second floor of marble some time later in the fourth century. The pattern of the marble floor runs distinctly from north to south and there is no hint that any central importance was attached to any of the eastern niches. All this time the original revetment capitals with their pagan figure decorations were still *in situ*; and even though the heads of Hygeia and Zeus were damaged at some time, possibly wilfully in the case of Hygeia, the Cabirus and the Dioscurus kept their heads until the final destruction of the building, as is shown by the fact that the capitals were found in the destruction fill, about 1 m above the level of the marble floor. If the Octagon had ever been a church, the

⁶⁴ N. Papahadjis, *op. cit.* (above, n. 54), 12.

⁶⁵ Makaronas, *Praktika* 1950, 313-4 (a very tentative suggestion); *BCH* lxxx (1956), 318; Hoddinott, *op. cit.* (n. 24), 124; Papahadjis, *l.c.* See now W. E. Kleinbauer, 'The original name and function of Hagios Georgios at Thessaloniki', *Cahiers archéologiques* xxii (1972), 56, who thinks that the Octagon may have served as the cathedral of Thessaloniki during the early Christian period, basing this notion on the 'baptistery' supposed to have been found outside it (on which see n. 73 below).

⁶⁶ See e.g. 'plan restauré' in E. Hébrard-F. Zeiller, *Spalato, le Palais de Dioclétien* (1912), 70.

⁶⁷ Plan in G. T. Rivoira, *Roman Architecture* (1925), 218, Fig. 266 (after C. Bianconi. *Descrizione dei Circhi* [Rome, 1789] pl. 1). A. Frazer has proposed that the Mausoleum was built by Maxentius for himself, even though his son was buried in it: 'The iconography of the emperor Maxentius' building in Via Appia', *Art Bulletin* xlvi (1966), 385-392.

⁶⁸ T. Ashby, 'Classical Topography of the Roman Campagna' *PBSR* i (1902), 156-161; G. Lugli, 'La villa dei Gordiani e i monumenti al III miglio della Via Prenestina' *Bull. Com.* xliii (1916), 160-163; A. Boethius and J. B. Ward-Perkins, *Etruscan and Roman Architecture* (1970), 503-4, Fig. 191 and note p. 579.

⁶⁹ F. W. Deichmann and A. Tschira, 'Das

Mausoleum der Kaiserin Helena und die Basilika der Heiligen Marcellinus und Petrus an der Via Labicana vor Rom', *JdI* lxxii (1957), 49, Fig. 5. cf. Deichmann, *Studien zur Architektur Konstantinopels im 5. und 6. Jahrhundert nach Christus* (1956), 99.

⁷⁰ M. Stettler, 'Zur Rekonstruktion von S. Costanza', *RM* lviii (1943), Beil. 1-3.

⁷¹ e.g. the plan in Hébrard, *BCH* xlv (1920), 19, Fig. 8. See A. Grégoire, 'La rotonde de S. Georges à Thessalonique est le mausolée de Galère', *Byzantion* xiv (1939), 323-4, and F. W. Deichmann, *Ravenna, Geschichte und Monumente* (Wiesbaden, 1969), 215.

⁷² He died and was buried at Serdica (J. Moreau, *Lactance, De la mort de persecuteurs* [1954] 396, for references). Perhaps it was considered that the body of Galerius (who had been 'horrenda tabe consumptus' Lactantius, *De mort. pers.* 35) would not travel well! It would, of course, have been impossible to move Galerius' body to Thessaloniki after Licinius' victory over Maximinus at the Campus Egenus in 313; Licinius, indeed, put Galerius' widow to death at Thessaloniki in 314; Grégoire, *l.c.* and *Byzantion* xiii (1938), 565.

⁷³ *BCH* lxxx (1956), 318. Hoddinott suggests on the strength of this 'baptistery,' that the Octagon may have been the church of the Asomati, attested in late Byzantine sources, but this is impossible.

figures of a Cabirus and a Dioscurus, whose cults, as has been noted above, were very popular locally, would have been the first to be destroyed. The fact that they were not, and remained in position until the Octagon went out of use, strongly implies that the building can never have been put to Christian use.

An early Christian ambo fragment was found in the 1950 excavations, but it is not related to the earlier period of the Octagon; it was found high up in the destruction fill, 4 m above the level of the marble floor. This, and the fact that it had traces of plaster adhering to it, suggests that it was used as building-material in the Akçe Mecidiye mosque and was probably brought from elsewhere.⁷⁴

The Octagon, then, was a secular building until its destruction. It was clearly an important building within the palace, perhaps even a throne room⁷⁵—the monumental proportions suggest as much, and the large vestibule is reminiscent of that in front of the Basilica at Trier⁷⁶—but in view of our ignorance of most of the palace enclave, it would be premature to come to a definite conclusion.

Finally, how long did the Octagon continue in use? There is some, albeit indirect, evidence to support Makaronas' observation that it had a fairly short life.⁷⁷ The Byzantine palace was built around the mid-fifth century more than a kilometre distant from the Tetrarchic one,⁷⁸ and although this does not necessarily mean that the latter had gone out of use by then, it does suggest that such was the case, especially when it is taken into account that the mid-fifth-century walls were built over the eastern side of the hippodrome (an integral part of the Tetrarchic palace complex) and that the marble seats were used in the walls' foundations elsewhere.⁷⁹ It would appear likely, therefore, that the Octagon was destroyed some time before c. 450, but exactly when, or how, remains a mystery.⁸⁰

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

⁷⁴ Makaronas, *Praktika* 1950, 313-5, Figs. 11-13.

⁷⁵ As suggested by K. M. Swoboda, *Römische und romanische Paläste* (3rd edn. 1969), 303, n. 86.

⁷⁶ e.g. Wightman, *op. cit.* 106, plan.

⁷⁷ *op. cit.* 304.

⁷⁸ M. Vickers, 'A note on the Byzantine palace at Thessaloniki', *BSA* lxiv (1971), 369-71.

⁷⁹ M. Vickers, 'The date of the walls of Thessalonica', *Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Yıllığı* xv-xvi (1969), 313-14; *idem*, 'The Hippodrome at Thessaloniki', *BSA* lxvi (1971), 369-371; *idem*, 'The late Roman walls of Thessalonica', *Transactions of the 8th International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies, Cardiff/Birmingham, 1969* (forthcoming).

⁸⁰ The nature of the destruction fill—large fragments of rubble lying immediately above the marble pavement—perhaps points to an earthquake, and there are several potential candidates: (1) Ammianus Marcellinus xxiii, 1, refers to earthquakes in late 362 and early 363, but only mentions Nicomedia and Constantinople; V. Coronelli, however, in his *Epitome cosmografica* (Cologne, 1693), 298, says: 'nel 362 insorsero più robusti che mai in Costantinopoli e nello stesso tempo voltarono in Italia, passando per Tessalonica, che restò desolata'. (2) The 'universal' earthquake of 365, which caused destruction in places as far apart as North Africa, Palestine, Nicæa, Sicily, and 'all the cities of Greece, except one', Ammianus xxvi, 10; Libanius, *Or.* xviii, 291-3 (fully discussed by R. G. Goodchild, 'A coin-hoard from Balagrae, [El-Beida], and the earth-

quake of A.D. 365', *Libya antiqua* iii-iv [1966-7], 203-11). (3) and (4) Cedrenus recorded 'universal' earthquakes in 368 (ed. Bonn i [1838] 543-4), and at an uncertain date in the reign of Gratian, i.e. between 375 and 385 (*ibid.* 550-1). The latter is said to have destroyed a large part of Crete, Achaëa, Boeotia, Epirus, and Sicily. (5) Marcellinus Comes, ed. Th. Mommsen (Berlin, 1894) 64, mentions an earthquake in the European provinces of Byzantium in November 394, and perhaps Thessaloniki was affected then. (6) *Chron. Pasch.* (ed. Bonn 1832), 574, mentions an earthquake which was felt at Constantinople on Good Friday 417; could it be the same as the one which Coronelli, *op. cit.* 299, says 'nel 416 fece strage in Tessalonica'?

I must express my thanks to Dr. N. N. Ambraseys, of the Department of Engineering Seismology at Imperial College, London, for many of these references.

Acknowledgements. In writing this article I have benefited from discussion with Dr. W. H. Plommer, Professor D. E. Strong, and Professor J. M. C. Toynbee, and from being able to read in manuscript Dr. H. P. Laubscher's forthcoming monograph on the Arch of Galerius. Any mistakes are my own. Dr. J. Christern kindly supplied Plate I, and Dr. B. Brenk Plates III, IV, V and VI, and Plate II was obtained from the German Archaeological Institute in Athens through the good offices of Dr. Laubscher. I must also acknowledge the assistance given to me in Thessaloniki by Dr. Ph. Petsas and Professor Ch. Bouras.