

BATU BAYÜLGEN – TURGUT SANER, *Architectural Description of Byzantine Remains in Istanbul. Excavations and Surveys in the City within the Walls (1927–2021) (GABAM Studies 13)*. Istanbul: Koç University Press 2025. xxii + 696 pp. and 44 plans. – ISBN 978-625-943349-3

• PHILIPP NIEWÖHNER, Georg August-Universität Göttingen  
(PhilippNiewoehner@hotmail.com)

The historical topography of Istanbul needs to be redrawn from time to time to (a) keep pace with the constantly changing face of the modern city through which scholars must navigate in search of the Byzantine remains; (b) adapt the presentation to the current state of surveying technology; and (c) add newly discovered monuments. Replacing earlier maps by ALFONS MARIA SCHNEIDER (1936) and WOLFGANG MÜLLER-WIENER (1977),<sup>1</sup> BAYÜLGEN and SANER have drawn the definitive map of our time, which takes all three of the above points into account. Their new map is (a) based and superimposed on the 2006 photogrammetric cadastral map; they have (b) digitally re-drawn the plans of the Byzantine remains from hand-drawn originals; and they (c) include numerous remains that were missing from the earlier maps.

In addition, the new map comes as a set of forty-four plans that provide significantly more detail than their predecessors. Plan 1 shows the entire historical peninsula inside and including the walls at a scale of 1:10.000. Plans 2 to 7 divide the same area into six regions that are rendered at a scale of 1:2.000. Plans 8 to 44 each focus on a sub-region or single building complex at a scale of 1:1.000 to 1:200.

The plans are accompanied by a massive volume of text, black-and-white photographs, many from the archive of the German Archaeological Institute, and supplementary drawings. After introductory remarks on the history of research (pp. 3–57), the first half of the volume serves to explain and justify the digital re-drawings of hand-drawn building plans from previous publications (pp. 65–365), while the second half provides information on the remains mapped and published here for the first time (pp. 367–674).

1. ALFONS M. SCHNEIDER, *Byzanz: Vorarbeiten zur Topographie und Archäologie der Stadt*. Berlin 1936; WOLFGANG MÜLLER-WIENER, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*. Tübingen 1977.

As for the first half of the volume, the digitization of hand-drawn plans and their super-positioning on the photogrammetric cadastral map is problematic, especially at smaller scales. The original plans and their publications are typically less detailed and precise and contain inconsistencies that cannot easily be fixed. BAYÜLGEN and SANER had to do so anyway (p. xiii) because resurveys were out of the question (p. ix), and some of their ‘corrections’ are occasionally documented in footnotes (e.g. p. 65, note 1; p. 66, note 3; p. 70, note 6; etc.). They serve as a warning that the brilliant new renderings cannot be more precise, but may potentially be more flawed and misleading, than the hand-drawn building plans on which they are based.

A similar reservation concerns the content of the re-drawn plans that BAYÜLGEN and SANER had to extract from the original publications. These often contained multiple construction phases and various other information that was undesirable for the topographical map. BAYÜLGEN and SANER proceeded with extreme care, providing a new and detailed description for each building that they re-drew (pp. 65–365), thereby justifying virtually every line of their new plans. However, given the large number of complex monuments and the enormous volume of publications to be taken into account, errors were inevitable. The rotunda of the Myrelaion may serve as an example: BAYÜLGEN and SANER chose to reproduce the plan of the early Byzantine rotunda without middle Byzantine installations (Plan 26), but failed to delete a middle Byzantine wall east of the rotunda, while erasing a column of, and thus obscuring, an early Byzantine colonnade to the south.<sup>2</sup> These details hardly matter in the context of the overall topographical map, but when it comes to individual buildings, scholars must still refer to the original publications, and they will have to find the relevant literature themselves, since BAYÜLGEN and SANER make no attempt at providing a complete bibliography.

The second half of the volume (pp. 367–674) differs in that it is not based on previous publications, but primarily on the archive of the Archaeological Museum and, in the case of H. Sergius and Bacchus (pp. 667–674, Plan 44), on BAYÜLGEN’s own survey. The Archaeological Museum monitors Istanbul’s archaeological heritage, conducting ‘every year approximately 250–300 archaeological [rescue] excavations’ (p. vii), and its archive of excavation records was re-inventoried from 2010 to 2012 (p. ix).<sup>3</sup> This

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2. Cf. RUDOLF NAUMANN’s original plan with my commentary: PHILIPP NIEWÖHNER, *Der frühbyzantinische Rundbau beim Myrelaion in Konstantinopel*. *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 60 (2010) pp. 411–459.

3. See also, including additional illustrations, ZEYNEP KIZILTAN – TURGUT SANER,

provided BAYÜLGEN and SANER with the best available documentation and information, superior or at least equal to anything already published on the museum's excavations. The second half of the volume and the drawings described therein are therefore of primary importance and must always be consulted, including those monuments that have already been published elsewhere. For many, this is not the case, typically because they lack spectacular or datable features, which is why BAYÜLGEN and SANER refer to them as 'anonymous'. However, because the 'anonymous' monuments fill gaps in the topographical map, they too gain significance, and BAYÜLGEN and SANER are to be congratulated on having found a meaningful context for their publication.

Otherwise, the second half of the volume is similar to the first half in so far as it focuses exclusively on the requirements of the topographical map, while ignoring all other aspects of the monuments (p. x). Chronology, function, art history, etc., are generally not addressed and must be sought elsewhere, for example, in the publications by ÖRGÜ DALGIÇ, KEN DARK, and FERHAN ÖZGÜMÜŞ, which deal with some of the same monuments but are not listed in the bibliography.<sup>4</sup>

In this respect, BAYÜLGEN and SANER are more focused and less ambitious than MÜLLER-WIENER, who half a century ago could still attempt to summarize virtually everything then known about the architectural remains of Constantinople in a single volume. If not downright impossible, this would certainly be impractical today. However, the future might offer ways forward if the next generation of historical topography is one day made available online as an interactive map. Depending on the design, such a homepage could contain far more, and more diverse, categories of information without becoming unwieldy.

In the current edition, a user seeking information on a specific monument on the topographical map (Plan 1), for example, the structure south of Hagia Sophia, must somehow locate the same structure on the detailed plan of the 'Great Palace, Group A' (Plan 17), without there being any tool to guide the user to this particular plan. Only this plan is detailed enough to determine

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Istanbul'da Arkeoloji: Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Arşiv Belgeleri (1970–2010) (Istanbul Kentsel Mimarisi ve Arkeoloji 2 = Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları 357). Istanbul 2011.

4. Most importantly KEN DARK – FERHAN ÖZGÜMÜŞ, *Constantinople: Archaeology of a Byzantine Megalopolis*. Oxford 2013; ÖRGÜ DALGIÇ, *The Dionysos's Triumph in Constantinople: A Late Fifth-Century Mosaic in Context*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 69 (2015) pp. 15–47.

the inventory number of the structure in question, '74306'. The number can then be found in the 'index of museum excavations' at the end of the text volume (pp. 695–696), which in turn refers to pages 411–453 that provide a lengthy description of 'the building with the monumental wall', but no date, function, or bibliography. This, then, is the end of the road, unless one has also read, and remembers, the introductory section on the history of research (pp. 3–57), the last page of which mentions that 'the monumental doorway was identified as the Chalke gate'. How is a user supposed to find this passage, let alone to infer that 'the building with the monumental wall' must be the same as 'the monumental doorway' and may thus be identified with the Chalke gate? How much better if all this information and more would one day become available easily and foolproof at the click of a mouse on an interactive map! Might this be a future project for GABAM, the centre for Byzantine studies that has published the volume in hand and already maintains a [website](#) about the city walls of Constantinople?

For the time being, it is BAYÜLGEN and SANER who deserve thanks for the tremendous amount of work that will have been necessary to put the historical topography of Istanbul on a new base entirely, and to include a host of previously unknown or poorly documented monuments from the archive of the Archaeological Museum. The new map and plans set new standards and thus constitute a commitment and, at the same time, an indispensable tool for future research on the history and archaeology of Constantinople.

#### **Keywords**

Archaeological Museum Istanbul; Constantinople; historical topography; rescue excavations