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## Review of Arja Karivieri (ed.), *The Early Christian Basilica of Arethousa in Macedonia. I: Production, Consumption and Trade*

### Abstract

This book is the first volume of a projected two-volume publication of the results of investigations in and around the basilica at the site of Paliambela near the modern village of Arethousa. It provides a great deal of valuable information about various aspects of the church and the settlement it served. The book is focused on production, consumption and trade, however, and says little about the architecture, mosaics, or liturgical implications of this intriguing church. [*excerpt*]

### Keywords

Late Antiquity, Macedonia, basilica, Arethousa

### Disciplines

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**Arja Karivieri (ed.), *The Early Christian Basilica of Arethousa in Macedonia. I: Production, Consumption and Trade. Papers and monographs of the Finnish Institute at Athens XXIII*. Helsinki: Foundation of the Finnish Institute at Athens, 2017. Pp. iii, 251. ISBN 9789526850023.**

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[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

This book is the first volume of a projected two-volume publication of the results of investigations in and around the basilica at the site of Paliambela near the modern village of Arethousa. It provides a great deal of valuable information about various aspects of the church and the settlement it served. The book is focused on production, consumption and trade, however, and says little about the architecture, mosaics, or liturgical implications of this intriguing church.

Arethousa is located in Northern Greece, ancient Macedonia, ca. 20 km west of Amphipolis and north of the Via Egnatia. The basilica at Paliambela, discovered by chance, was initially excavated in 1994-1995 by Polyxeni Adam-Veleni from the 16th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities. At that time, the apse, narthex, nave and the south aisle were mostly cleared to the floors, many of which consisted of mosaic or opus sectile. Under the auspices of the 9th Byzantine Ephorate, surveys, additional excavation to the north and west, and conservation of the mosaics were carried out between 1999 and 2004 by the Finnish Institute under the direction of Arja Karivieri. A baptistery was partly revealed north of the narthex and a winery and storage area appeared in the north "aisle". The church was probably constructed in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century or the early 6<sup>th</sup> and destroyed along with the settlement at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> or early 7<sup>th</sup> century.

Preliminary reports of the excavations were published regularly, and Karivieri notes in the preface that the mosaic and opus sectile floors and their conservation have been published elsewhere in detail.<sup>1</sup> She also states that many chapters in the book were written soon after the project ended; some were revised with additional bibliography.

The information provided falls into four unequal categories: 1) the sources for ancient Arethousa, 2) the settlement in which the basilica was located, 3) the 1994-1995 excavations, and 4) material from the Finnish excavations. Karivieri collects and considers the literary and epigraphical references to Arethousa from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC until Late Antiquity, with an emphasis on the Roman period. Perhaps established in the third quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the city apparently continued to exist until the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Whether the settlement at Paliambela can be identified with ancient Arethousa remains uncertain.

The area north of the east leg of the Chalkidike, or north of Rendina and Lake Volvi, was little known archaeologically until recent decades, as Adam-Veleni states. The Via Egnatia ran through the area as does the modern Ethniki or Egnatia Odos, and the investigations undertaken before construction of the national road revealed a region rich in archaeological remains from the Neolithic period onward. After discovery and initial excavation of the basilica at Paliambela, members of the Finnish team carried out intensive surveys in the area around the church in 1999

and 2000, and a geophysical survey was carried out in 2000. Pettersson and Karivieri present the results of those investigations.

The basilica and the area surveyed are located on a steep southwestern slope. The modern road between Arethousa and Vrasna and a forestry road run across the survey area. A total of 62 features, i.e., graves, walls, structures, groups of stones or tiles, burnt layers, etc., were documented. They were concentrated in two areas, in one of which the basilica was centrally located. Sections of a possible city wall were observed. The visible remains point to a substantial settlement, possibly a small city with a long chronological span.

The chapter by Adam-Veleni provides background about the region and the settlement at Paliambela and describes the discovery of the building, the brief investigation in 1994, and, in part because of the theft of a mosaic medallion, the campaign to identify and date the structure in 1995. The suspicion that it was a Christian basilica—despite the northwest-southeast orientation—was soon confirmed. At the west the narthex was strongly divided into a central room preceding the nave and two smaller rooms to north and south that gave entrance into the aisles. Well-preserved mosaics paved the floors of these spaces. In the south aisle stood two vaulted tombs, whose eastern entrances had been closed with marble slabs. The grave of a child, covered with tiles, was discovered in the southeast corner of the aisle. [2](#)

In the nave, white marble slabs created a border and a cross, thus dividing the space into four rectangles, each with its own decoration in a combination of opus sectile and mosaic. Fragments of perforated screen slabs and pillars from the chancel screen were found; pieces of a marble table and a marble bowl came to light within the choir or presbyterium, which was paved in a combination of stone slabs and opus sectile. Within the semicircular apse, a wide two-stepped *synthronon*, also paved in opus sectile, was constructed in a later phase.

The destruction deposit above the church varied between 0.30 and 0.90 m, given the slope of the terrain and the destruction caused by the road. The numerous coins included a hoard of coins of Anastasius and a hoard dated to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century.

The last nine chapters provide detailed descriptions of material excavated by the project of the Finnish Institute. These publications, mostly of small broken fragments of artifacts, with drawings and the occasional photograph, may seem dull, but in all of them an attempt is made to apply the conclusions to the economy and commercial connections of the site.

Hamari provides a detailed discussion of the brick and tile fragments; it includes typology, size, “signatures,” and some evidence of mortar being used to hold roof tiles in place. Two different types of tiles may point to roof repairs. The lengthy bibliography has been updated and is quite useful. Selkokari dates the glass fragments between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. She suggests that all of the vessels might have been imports from the eastern Mediterranean, a possibility that might now be questioned, given the recent discoveries of numerous glass factories and workshops in Macedonia. Karivieri divides the lamp fragments into Early Roman, Late Roman, Byzantine, and uncertain; they include imports from Athens, Asia Minor, and North Africa as well as local products.

The chapters on pottery are a bit confusing, since Forsell seems to be dealing with fine pottery and Tulkki with coarse wares. But the latter author includes Macedonian gray as a coarse ware fabric and has tableware as a sub-category of coarse fabric. On the other hand, she defines Macedonian gray, Slavic ware, and Sparkling ware clearly, with reference to historical and geographical influences. Grubby and rarely published but of interest are the stoppers chipped out of roof tiles or large vessels. The discussion of pithoi provides details about the arrangement of the winery in the north “aisle”. Silver’s article on the amphorae indicates that the two partly preserved examples from west of the narthex, as well as handles and fragments, were probably imports from the Aegean islands or the eastern Mediterranean. She provides a great deal of information about the stratigraphy, various finds, a fireplace, and a possible identification as a kitchen cellar of the space west of the church. Amphora fragments and stoppers were also found near the pithoi associated with treading floors for wine production in the north aisle.

Roumelis on bones and Pinto-Guillaume on molluscs form the final chapters. The faunal remains include the usual domesticated animals, cattle, sheep/goats, pigs, horses, and dogs, as well as some hunted ones. The fish bones found in and around the amphorae west of the basilica suggest that the vessels were used for processing or storing fish in a kitchen setting. The large percentage of mammal bones found in the north aisle points to food processing and consumption but not to butchering in that space. Marine molluscs, freshwater bivalves, and some snails, mostly found in or near the north aisle, were probably also used for food.

The book provides an overview of the site and the ancient testimonia as well as descriptions and discussions of artifacts that will be useful as comparanda for field archaeologists. The black-and-white photographs and the drawings are comprehensible and appear in the text at helpful places. A few color plates are found at the end of the book. Only one error was observed: on p. 166 the basilica of Arapaj is located in Albania, not “Arapajt in Romania.” Karivieri and the other authors are to be congratulated for this publication of their work.

The one criticism, certainly to be remedied in the second volume, is the need for additional description and discussion of the church, even as background for economy and trade. Not all readers of the book will have followed the preliminary reports or consulted the website <http://www.finninstitute.gr>.

The authors of several chapters respond to underlying but unstated questions, e.g., were there closed deposits within undisturbed stratigraphy in the north aisle and west of the narthex or not, how extensive was the reconstruction in the second phase of the basilica and what was the date of that second phase, do the winery, pithoi, storeroom, fireplaces, etc. belong to the first phase in the north aisle or do these features represent a second and very different use of that space, did a second story rise above the north aisle or the unidentified space west of the narthex, and others. Undoubtedly in the second volume Karivieri will also grapple with the larger and most intriguing question: what role in the community did this church play? It was richly decorated with wall paintings, mosaic and opus sectile floors, and architectural sculpture. Brief mentions of the *synthronon* in the apse, a probable marble altar table, and perforated slabs and pillars of the chancel screen indicate the usual liturgical arrangement and activities. The economic features in the north aisle, e.g., kitchen, storeroom, and winery, might be associated with an episcopal complex located within the settlement, but the built tombs and other burials occupying the south aisle point to a funereal function for that part of the basilica.

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## Notes:

1. Preliminary reports of the 1994-1995 excavations as well as of the work of the Finnish Institute project appeared in *BCH*, *Archaeological Reports*, and *AEMTh*. For mosaics, see A. Karivieri, “Floor mosaics in the Early Christian Basilica in Arethousa,” in *La mosaïque Greco-*

*romaine* IX, Rome 2005, 371-378; idem, "Mosaics and *sectilia pavimenta* in the Early Christian church of Paliambela at Arethousa in Northern Greece," *Musiva & Sectilia* 2/3 (2005-2006) [2008] 191-208; idem, "Patrons and viewers in Late Antique Greece—From houses and villas to Early Christian churches," in *Patrons and Viewers in Late Antiquity*, Aarhus, 2012, 217-235.  
2. Roumelis on p. 206 and 217-219 describes the discovery, in 2001 in the south aisle, of parts of three additional skeletons.

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