

KEN DARK / READING – ANTONY LITTLEWOOD / LONDON, ONTARIO

NEW EVIDENCE FOR THE BYZANTINE PAVEMENT OF ST
JOHN STUDIUS IN ISTANBUL FROM PRESTON PARISH
CHURCH, RUTLAND, ENGLAND

With two plates

INTRODUCTION

This paper publishes in full for the first time two panels, today in the parish church of St Peter and St Paul at the village of Preston, Rutland, England. These panels come from the well-known *opus sectile* floor of the fifth-century monastic church of St John Studius in Istanbul. This is one of the best-preserved Middle Byzantine *opus sectile* floors to survive from Byzantine Constantinople and is an important example of this form of pavement in general. Stylistic comparison with the floor at the Pantocrator monastery, also in the former Byzantine capital, suggests that it dates from the eleventh or twelfth century.¹

The monastery of St John Studius is, of course, also of special note within the Byzantine world. It played a central role in Byzantine religious

¹ The best depiction of the *opus sectile* floor in St John Studius is in: A. OĞAN, Bizans Mimari Tarahinde İstanbul Kiliseleri Ve Mozaikler. *Güzel Sanatlar* 5 (1944) 103–15. On the Pantocrator floor, most recently: R. OUSTERHOUT, Architecture, Art and Komnenian ideology at the Pantokrator Monastery, in: N. NECİPOĞLU (ed.), Byzantine Constantinople. Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life. Leiden 2001, 133–52 (134–48); For *opus sectile* in Byzantine Constantinople in general, including at the Pantocrator and St John Studius: A. GUIGLIA GUIDOBALDI, L'opus sectile pavimentale in area bizantina. *Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico, Atti del 1° Colloquio Ravenna 1993*, 643–63; U. PESCHLOW, Zum byzantinischen opus sectile-Boden, in: R.M. BOEHMER and H. HAUPTMANN (eds.), Beiträge zur Altertumskunde Kleinasien, Festschrift für Kurt Bittel. Mainz 1983, 435–47; A.M. SCHNEIDER, Byzanz. Vorarbeiten zur Topographie und Archäologie der Stadt (= *Istanbul Forschungen* 8). Berlin 1936 (reprinted with identical pagination Amsterdam 1967), 94, no.15 and fig 49; N. ASGARİ, İstanbul Temel Kazılarında Haberler-1983 II. *Araştırma Sonuçları Toplantısı* 1984, 43–62 (45–6 and plates 12–19).

and political history and the building is, along with St Mary Chalco-prateia, one of the oldest standing Christian churches in Istanbul. It was almost certainly the main church of the monastery from its origins to its dissolution as a result of the Ottoman conquest. Excavations inside the church ruin by a Russian team and, later, by Urs Peschlow have not been published in more than summary form, but the site has nevertheless been the subject of extensive archaeological discussion. At the end of the last century, many new data were recorded in an archaeological survey of the building and its environs (co-directed by Ken Dark and Ferudun Özgümüş) following a serious fire in the north aisle. This latter work included detailed photographic recording of the *in situ* part of the *opus sectile* pavement, which was found to be at serious risk from casual removal and other illegal activities. Since then substantial restoration work has taken place at the site, a state-owned open-air museum.²

Although, understandably, the floor in Istanbul has attracted much discussion, this has not – to the knowledge of the authors – ever taken into account the panels described and discussed here. In fact, the panels have been previously published in only the very briefest form, by Arthur Mee in his book *Leicestershire and Rutland*. However, for obvious reasons, this is not a work widely consulted by archaeologists and art historians of the

² For the archaeology of St John Studius: A. VAN MILLINGEN, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople: Their History and Architecture*. London 1912, 35–61; G. MENDEL, *Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines et byzantines* (2 vols. Reprinted as 3 volumes Rome 1966), volume 2. Istanbul 453–8, 461–2; N. FIRATLI, Deux nouveaux reliefs funéraires d'Istanbul et les reliefs similaires. *CahArch* 11 (1960) 73–92; R. JANIN, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin* (3) Les églises et les monastères de Constantinople. 2nd ed. Paris 1969, 444–55; T.F. MATHEWS, *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul: A Photographic Survey*. University Park Pa. and London 1976, 143–58; W. MÜLLER-WIENER, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*. Tübingen 1977, 147–52; S. EYICE, Les Basiliques Byzantines d'Istanbul. *XXVI Corso di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina* 1979, 91–113 (103–13); U. PESCHLOW, Die Johanneskirche des Studios in Istanbul. *JÖB* 32.4 (1982) 429–33; C. MANGO, The date of the Studius Basilica at Istanbul. *BMGs* 4 (1978) 115–22; R. KRAUTHEIMER, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (Fourth edition, with S. ĆURČIĆ). New Haven and London 1986, 103–105; C. MANGO, *Byzantine Architecture*. London 1986 (2nd ed.), 35–9; T. ZOLT, Kapitellplastik Konstantinopels vom 4. bis 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr. Mit einem Beitrag zur Untersuchung des ionischen Kämpferkapitells (= *Asia Minor Studien* 14). Bonn 1994, 248–9; U. PESCHLOW, Ein paläologisches Reliefdenkmal in Konstantinopel. *Gesta* 33.2 (1994) 93–103; M. MUNDELL MANGO, Polychrome Tiles Found at Istanbul: Typology, Chronology and Function, in: S.E.J. GERSTEL and J.A. LAUFFENBERGER (eds), *A Lost Art Rediscovered. The Architectural Ceramics of Byzantium*. University Park PA 2001, 12–41 (27); E.S. ETTINGHAUSEN, Saint John Stoudios (Imrahor Camii), *ibid.* 2001, 203–5.

Byzantine Empire.³ Indeed, Mee's series of books on the English counties – although important in popularising Britain's heritage in the middle decades of the twentieth century – had a largely regional appeal within England and are seldom read today. Thus, proper publication of the panels in a more accessible context seems timely.⁴

The study that has produced this paper was begun when Antony Littlewood, who has known of the panels since his childhood in neighbouring Leicestershire, participated in a conference on Byzantine Constantinople at the Research Centre for Late Antique and Byzantine Studies at The University of Reading in October 2001, where he drew Ken Dark's attention to their existence, discovering to his surprise that they were unknown among archaeologists working on the Byzantine capital. This led to the suggestion that they visit the church to record and publish the panels.

With the kind assistance of Reverend Canon Philip Spence, the rector, and permission of the Church of England, the authors were able to spend an afternoon recording the panels in May 2003. This involved the precise drawing of the floor at 1:1 onto clear plastic film (by Dr Petra Dark) and both digital and conventional photography, the latter using a Canon A1 SLR camera, in a range of natural and artificial lighting and with the panels both dry and lightly cleaned with a wet cloth to remove dust and emphasise the colours of the constituent stone. Written records were also made and local information about the panels obtained from Canon Spence. Here they are illustrated both by two of those photographs, and scaled-down copies of the tracings of the panels *in situ*. (plates 1 and 2; figures a–b)

Two hitherto unpublished black and white photographs of the church of St John Studius in 1925 are also reproduced here. (figures c and d) These were taken shortly after the panels were removed (in 1923) and show the building with part of its, now lost, roof and gallery intact.

³ A. MEE, *Leicestershire and Rutland*. London 1937, 266–7. Mee charmingly comments 'Thrilling it is to see these stone fragments here, far from the great highway of the world to where they once belonged ... as we go through the churchyard we think of Christianity's earliest days in Palestine, for the yews here were brought from the Garden of Gethsemane'.

⁴ A preliminary report in English is provided in: K.R. DARK and F. ÖZGÜMÜŞ, *Istanbul Rescue Archaeological Survey 1998. The districts of Yedikule and Kocamustafa Paşa. First Preliminary Report*. London 1998. Final publication is underway as part of a wider project of rescue archaeology in the former Byzantine capital.

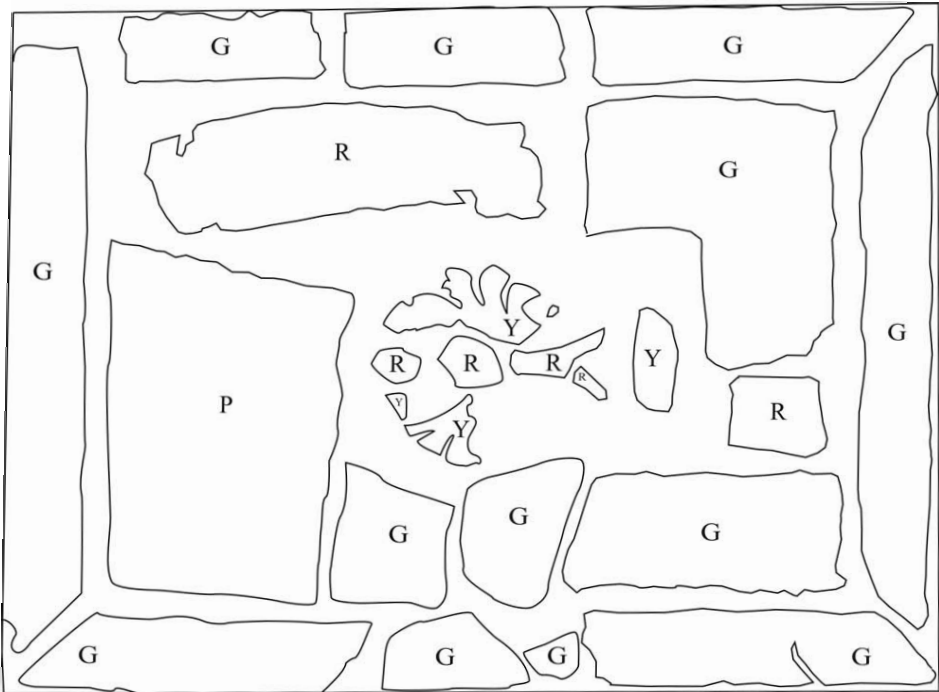


Fig. a: Drawing of Panel A. Key to colours: G = green; P = purple; R = red; Y = yellow.

THE TRANSLATION OF THE PANELS TO ENGLAND

The panels, and an alms-box believed to have dated from the late seventeenth century⁵, came into the possession of a resident of Preston, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir A.E. Codrington, during the allied occupation of Constantinople in 1923. They were given to the church by his son, John Codrington, and, after installation, dedicated by the rector, the Reverend O.L. Fowke, at Evensong on 23rd March 1924. His Grace Germanos, Archbishop of Thyateira and Exarch of Western and Central Europe, was informed and on St. George's day of the same year reiterated the rector's hope that they would soon return to St John Studius when that church was 'restored to the Christian faith'.⁶ Needless to say, they remain in Preston. Following a visit to the

⁵ Painted with images of the Virgin and Infant Christ, St George slaying the dragon and St Nicholas of Myra. It was said to have come from a church in Smyrna (Izmir) destroyed in 1922 but was bought in the bazaar in Istanbul by the Lieutenant-Colonel. Incidental damage in the 20th century led to its discard without detailed recording.

⁶ The full letter runs (in translation): 'Dear Sir, I thank you with all my heart for the documents which you have had the goodness to send me, as well as for the sympathy

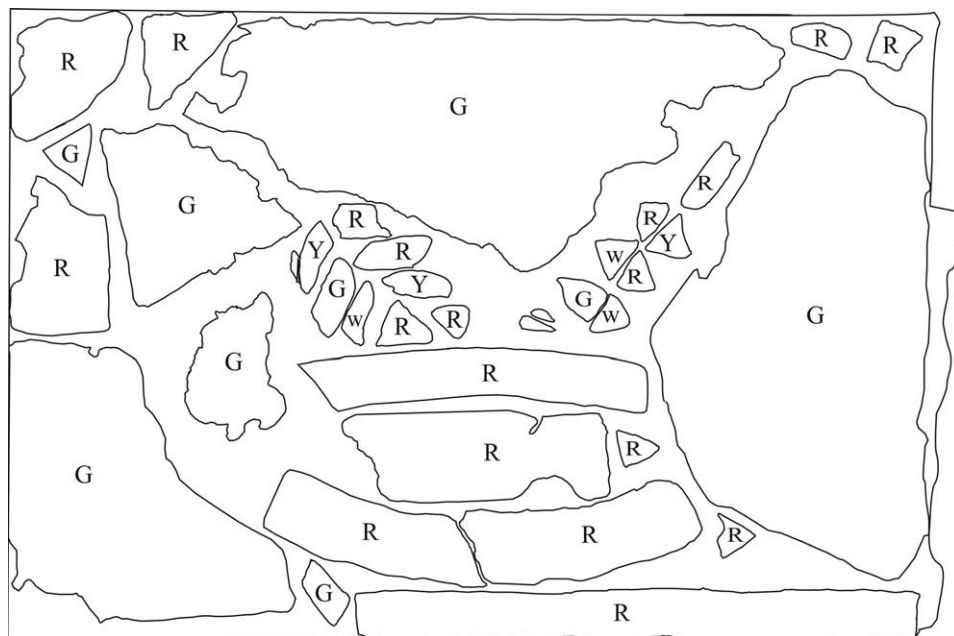


Fig b: Drawing of Panel B. Key to colours: G = green; P = purple p;
R = red; Y = yellow; W = white

Middle East in 1925, John Codrington gave as further gifts to his parish church, two post-Byzantine bronze candlesticks from Damascus⁷, three pendant lamps probably of nineteenth-century Middle Eastern Christian manufacture (still hanging in the choir) and, of greater interest to Byzantinists, a very small fragment of *verde antique* said to come from the pavement of the Byzantine church of Hagia Sophia in Nicaea (Iznik). The latter is now set in the centre of the chancel step, flanked by the panels from St John Studius.

expressed for the sufferings of our brothers in Jesus Christ in the East. The pious act of placing the pieces of marble removed from the church of St John-in-the Studion at CONSTANTINOPLE, in the church of St. Peter and St. Paul in the village of PRESTON, is so eloquent in itself that I need not add anything to enhance it. What moves me most is the resolve that these relics shall rest here until the day when the church in Studion is restored to the Christian faith. Let us hope that that day is not far off, and that not only the church, but all the apostolic churches in the East, with St. Sophia's at the head of them, will become places of pilgrimage for the benefit of all Christendom. I beg you accept my thanks and my Episcopal blessing. Germanos Thyateira.'

⁷ These were later replaced with candlesticks of cypress wood from one of the trees in the churchyard grown from seeds brought from the Garden of Gethsemane by John Codrington in 1925.



Fig. c: Photograph of the church of St John Studius in 1925.



Fig. d: Photograph of part of the *opus sectile* pavement of St John Studius in 1925.

THE OPUS SECTILE PANELS

In 2003 the panels were located either side of the chancel step in the eastern part of the mediaeval parish church. The visible bedding of both panels was a grey (probably twentieth-century) concrete, but this is probably just ‘pointing’ overlying any original bedding mortar in order to consolidate the pavement, which was cemented into place as part of the church fabric. It must be stressed that, like the well-known re-used Byzantine capitals at the modern parish church of Kingswood, Surrey, these panels currently form part of the functioning church interior and it would be inappropriate to remove them for display elsewhere.⁸

⁸ For the monastery: W. MÜLLER-WIENER, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls*. Tübingen 1977, 209–15; R. OUSTERHOUT, Z. AHUNBAY and M. AHUNBAY, *Study and restoration of the Zeyrek Camii in Istanbul: First Report, 1997–98. DOP 54 (2000) 265–70*; R. OUSTERHOUT, *Interpreting the construction history of the Zeyrek Camii in Istanbul*

Because of the importance attached to them by the clergy and congregation of the church, the panels have been lovingly preserved and kept clean without any evidence of serious abrasion. They are in no danger of damage or destruction, unlike those today still in the church of St John Studius in Istanbul. As such, these re-installed portions may well be the safest part of the Byzantine floor of that structure.

The panel on the south of the step (Panel A, plate 1 and fig. a) appears to be still complete, and closely resembles those at the ruinous church of St John Studius visible today. This shows a fish design within a border and employs marble, *verde antique* and porphyry. The design might be seen in a Christian symbolic context, as the well-known symbol (still widely used by Christians) indicative of Christ as Saviour. It currently is afforded this iconographical meaning in the church at Preston.⁹

Several similar fish designs are found in the Middle Byzantine *opus sectile* pavement of the Pantokrator monastery. These were located near the west wall of the south church at that complex, and executed in marble.¹⁰

The other panel (Panel B, plate 2 and fig. b) appears at first to have been remade from broken pieces. This may well be the case, although it is not completely certain that none of the original design remains visible. Parts of the framing strips have been laid side by side within the panel, apparently without regard for their original function. Pieces of green, red, white and yellow stone are distributed, seemingly randomly, across the panel.

The destruction and reworking of this panel could have occurred in the Byzantine period or later. Perhaps this was a result of damage in transit to England, although there is no evidence to support the latter possibility. Reworking and patching of the surviving floor in Istanbul is clearly visible and cannot be excluded here also.

However, there are what might be traces of an original design amid the confusion. Some of the triangular pieces sit edge to edge making a serrated design with a rectilinear strip at its end, like an animal's tail. Others

(Monastery of the Christ Pantokrator), in: G. ARUN and N. SEÇKIN (eds.), *Studies in Ancient Structures* (2 vols.). Istanbul 2001, vol. 1, 19–27. M. and Z. AHUNBAY, *Restoration work at Zeyrek Camii, 1997–1998*, in: N. NECİPOĞLU (ed.), *Byzantine Constantinople. Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life*. Leiden 2001, 117–32 (note 1) provides a useful current bibliography on the Pantokrator. For the column capitals from St John Studius at Kingswood, Surrey: D. BUCKTON (ed.), *Byzantium. Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*. London 1994, 56, no.42.

⁹ As stated on a printed notice in the church.

¹⁰ A.H.S. MEGAW, *Notes on Recent work of the Byzantine Institute in Istanbul*. *DOP* 16 (1963) 333–71 (Figure B, 1–12).

form a bulbous curvilinear shape like a body or eye. The design may, then, represent an animal form with a body and tail, but this is highly uncertain and the whole apparent design could be no more than the convenient rearrangement of the pieces of a fragmented panel regardless of any original design.

The panel with the fish originally came from a location ‘on the south side of the west door’ of St John Studius. This would place it on the south of the nave, as the aisles and narthex do not seem ever to have been furnished with *opus sectile* flooring. It cannot be more precisely located within the floor, as there are several removed sections suitable to have accommodated the Preston pieces.

CONCLUSION

The significance of these panels is that they represent portions of the floor that have escaped all previous archaeological or art historical discussions. While only Panel A is certainly intact, they add both to the surviving parts of the pavement and – in the case of Panel A – to what is known of its iconography. As such, these small panels in a rural English parish church have an enduring relevance to the archaeology and art history of the Byzantine capital.