

# The Skeuophylakion of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople: Events of the Fourth to Sixth Centuries CE

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L'edificio noto come Skeuophylakion (Tesoro) della Grande Chiesa di Costantinopoli si eleva con il suo corpo cilindrico – a pianta leggermente ellittica – presso l'angolo nordorientale del complesso della odierna Santa Sofia. Si tratta di una costruzione con ogni evidenza antecedente alle due fasi maggiori del grandioso progetto architettonico giustiniano (532-537 e 558-563). Seppur senza mai studiarlo approfonditamente dal punto di vista architettonico, la critica ne ha riconosciuto la notevole rilevanza. Ciò soprattutto al momento in cui si voglia mettere a fuoco il ruolo chiave che esso giocava nella complessa liturgia della chiesa già in epoca protobizantina. Per altri aspetti, non va trascurato il fatto che esso costituisce una sorta di "fossile guida", di grande utilità per chi desideri puntualizzare aspetti fondamentali dell'assai confuso quadro delle conoscenze sulla storia e architettura del complesso nei secoli IV e V. Il tentativo di precisare la relazione dello Skeuophylakion con alcuni degli eventi salienti della vicenda storica della primitiva chiesa episcopale si accompagna, in questa sede, ad alcune riflessioni sulla sua peculiare articolazione architettonica, nell'attesa di auspicabili studi sistematici.

Little is known of the story of the episcopal church (*Megalê Ekklêsia*) of Constantinople prior to the grandiose Justinian interventions that gave rise to the building we know today, as Hagia Sophia. Yet this 'prehistory' of the Hagia Sophia, occurring in several phases over almost two centuries, is inextricably linked with the genesis of the Constantinian and Theodosian city and with the episodic evolution of its ecclesiastical institutions. The foundational structure, a basilica erected at the order of Constantius II, in February 360, was short-lived. Its fate was sealed when the building was set alight during the civic turmoil of Easter 404. Reborn from its ashes in more grandiose forms, after a long construction phase under the emperor Arcadius, and inaugurated by the young heir Theodosius II in 415, the Great Church would again succumb to devastating fire in the Nika revolt of January 532.

Despite the radical grandiosity of the post-532 reconstruction, taking place on the same site, certain traces of the Theodosian building remained, as became evident from the limited but important archaeological investigations of the 1930s and 1940s, focused primarily on the area of the lost atrium of the Justinian church.

Having on other occasions prepared as complete an overview as possible of the fragments of reliable historical and archaeological information on these 'pre-existences' (Taddei 2017), it seems useful to focus in particular on the case of the Skeuophylakion: the only building of the ancient complex with the fortune of being incorporated and remodelled—but not demolished—in the project of Justinian construction.

The Skeuophylakion is an independent annex of cylindrical form, rising on three floors, or more precisely 'levels,' near the North-East corner of the Justinian building (Figs. 1-3). Over the centuries it served as a repository for the treasury of reliquaries and liturgical vessels of the Great Church, and it seems clear that its conception was simul-